



# **The Sword of Wisdom**

## **For Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality**

**BY MIPHAM RINPOCHE**

**COMMENTED BY KHENPO SODARGYE**

**2018 EDITION**

# THE SWORD OF WISDOM

FOR THOROUGHLY ASCERTAINING REALITY

Composed by Ju Mipham Rinpoche

Commented by Khenpo Sodargye

2018 Edition

Dedicated to

Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche in deep gratitude and love

*May your compassion and wisdom illuminate everywhere  
and enlighten every sentient being.*

  
**KHENPO**  
**SODARGYE**



# Contents

<b>Root Verses</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Commentary</b>	<b>37</b>
1 The Opening	38
The Explanation of the Title . . . . .	40
The Prostration and the Pledge . . . . .	43
2 The Two Truths and the Two Types of Valid Knowledge	49
The Two Truths to Be Ascertained . . . . .	49
The Two Types of Valid Knowledge That Can Ascertain the Two Truths . . . . .	52
The Manifestation of Dependent Arising . . . . .	56
The Principle of Function and the Principle of Dependence . . . . .	60
The Necessity of Understanding the Two Principles . .	68
The Principle of Nature on Conventional Level . . . . .	75
The Principle of Nature on Ultimate Level . . . . .	87
Summary of the Three Principles . . . . .	93
The Principle of Establishment by Proof . . . . .	96

3	Knowing through Direct Means—Direct Perception	102
	Overall Explanation of Direct Perception . . . . .	102
	Sensory Direct Perception . . . . .	110
	Mental Direct Perception . . . . .	113
	Yogic Direct Perception . . . . .	115
	Self-Knowing Direct Perception . . . . .	119
	Summary . . . . .	124
4	Knowing through Reasoning—Inference	128
	The Mind Being Used to Infer . . . . .	128
	The Reasons Being Used to Infer . . . . .	137
	The Modes Being Used to Infer . . . . .	143
	The Valid Knowledge of the Conventional . . . . .	153
	The Valid Knowledge of the Ultimate . . . . .	170
	Summary of the Two Valid Knowledges . . . . .	174
	Doubts: Is It Necessary to Establish Valid Knowledge? . . . . .	179
	Doubts: Can Valid Knowledge Be Established? . . . . .	185
	Doubts: Is It Necessary to Make Analysis on Valid Knowledge? . . . . .	191
	Question on the Valid Knowledge of the Conventional . . . . .	195
	Question on the Valid Knowledge of the Ultimate . . . . .	200
	Conclusion . . . . .	205
5	The Four Reliances	212
	General Explanation of the Four Reliances . . . . .	212
	Rely on the Teaching, Not the Individual . . . . .	228



Rely on the Meaning, Not the Words . . . . .	243
Rely on the Definitive Meaning, Not the Provisional Meaning . . . . .	256
Rely on Wisdom, Not the Conceptual Mind . . . . .	282
6 Attainment	315
The Eight Great Eloquences . . . . .	315
The Result of Understanding the Two Truths . . . . .	328
7 The Ending	335
The Manner of Composing This Treatise . . . . .	335
The Dedication of This Virtuous Deed . . . . .	341
The Perfection of Composing This Treatise . . . . .	344



# The Sword of Wisdom

## for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality

### (Root Text)

Composed by Ju Mipham Rinpoche





# Root Text

## A1. The Title

The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality

## A2. The Main Part

### B1. The Wholesome Beginning

#### C1. The Prostration

##### Verse 1

Your system is correct and free from all faults,  
Which can be verified through the three points that  
leave no doubt.

The treasure of sublime wisdom,  
Before you, glorious Manjushri, I prostrate myself.

#### C2. The Pledge

##### Verse 2

Profound, vast, and difficult to penetrate,  
Is the nectar-like teaching of the Buddha.  
Upon those who wish to savor it,  
I here bestow the light of wisdom.

## **B2. The Wholesome Middle**

### **C1. Two Truths to Be Ascertained: Conventional and Ultimate Truth**

#### **Verse 3**

The Dharma spoken by all buddhas,  
Depends in reality upon the two truths.  
The mundane is the conventional truth;  
The supramundane is the ultimate truth.

### **C2. The Two Types of Valid Knowledge That Can Ascertain the Two Truths**

#### **D1. The Concise Explanation of the Two Types of Valid Knowledge**

#### **Verse 4**

If one is to enter into the nature of the two truths,  
By means of unmistaken and certain wisdom,  
One must obtain the two flawless valid knowledges  
through practice,  
That is the supreme eye of wisdom.

### **D2. The Extensive Explanation of the Four Principles**

#### **E1. The Four Principles That Can Ascertain the Two Truths**

##### **F1. The First Three Principles**

## **G1. Overall Explanation of Dependently-Arising Appearance**

### **Verse 5**

All things appear in their rich variety,  
As a result of dependent Arising.  
Things that do not depend on anything else,  
Will not appear, like a lotus flower in empty sky.

## **G2. Specific Explanation of the Three Principles According to the Cause, Effect and Entity of Dependent Arising**

### **H1. The Principle of Function and the Principle of Dependence**

#### **I1. The Meaning of the Two Principles**

##### **Verse 6**

If causes and conditions are complete,  
They function to bring about an effect.  
All things with the nature of an effect,  
Depend on their individual causes.

#### **I2. The Necessity of Understanding the Two Principles**

##### **Verse 7**

Thus we know that, the principles of cause and effect,  
And their proper or improper relationships,

Are the foundation  
Of the judgment of whether or not to do something,

### **Verse 8**

And of the various doctrines, crafts, etc.  
Hence they have included,  
All worldly knowledge,  
And transcendental teachings.

## **H2. The Principle of Nature**

### **I1. From the Perspective of Appearance on Conventional Level**

#### **J1. The Explanation of the Principle of Nature**

### **Verse 9**

All things produced by dependent arising,  
Naturally possess their uncommon characteristics  
That abide in their own entities, such as solidity,  
dampness, heat, etc.  
This is the way things are on conventional level,  
which cannot be denied.

#### **J2. The Establishment of the Principle of Nature**

### **Verse 10**

For one single thing, from different aspects,

And by means of affirmation and negation,  
Countless attributes can be established,  
All of which abide in the thing itself.

### **Verse 11**

An object apprehended through direct perception,  
Is imputed with conceptual entities,  
That are seemingly separate and distinct,  
And are just distinguished by conceptual mind.

### **Verse 12**

Establishment of actual entities and of conceptual  
    entities,  
Are the two modes through which  
All objects of knowledge are apprehended,  
And from there the multitudes are established.

## **I2. From the Perspective of Emptiness on Ultimate Level**

### **Verse 13**

Regarding the ultimate truth of all things,  
Observe their causes, effects, and their own entities:  
That which is able to bring about arising cannot  
    be obtained,  
Nor is there anything that arises in dependence.

### **Verse 14**

Although each manifests its individual entity,  
Their nature is indeed emptiness.  
The realm of reality of the threefold liberation,  
Is the very nature of the ultimate.

## **G3. Summary of the Three Principles**

### **Verse 15**

The principles of function and that of dependence,  
Are the natural laws of all existing things;  
Both of them come down to the principle of nature,  
Where no more reasons can be found.

## **F2. The Principle of Establishment by Proof**

### **G1. Brief Explanation**

### **Verse 16**

The principle of nature covered by the two truths,  
Can be verified by following corresponding reasoning.  
It is in accordance with the natural state of things,  
Hence, named the principle of establishment by proof.

### **Verse 17**

For the manifest aspect and the real aspect of all things,

Either their own entities can be seen through direct  
perception,  
Or, based on what is seen through direct perception,  
What is not seen can undoubtedly be inferred.

## **G2. Extensive Explanation**

### **H1. The Principle of Establishment by Proof through Direct Perception**

#### **I1. Overall Explanation**

##### **Verse 18**

Valid direct perception is of four kinds:  
Unmistaken sensory direct perception, Mental direct  
perception,  
Self-knowing, and yogic direct perceptions, all of which  
are non-conceptual,  
Since they directly perceive the corresponding objects'  
own characteristics.

##### **Verse 19**

With no direct perception,  
There would be no evidence and hence no inference.  
The perception of all things, including their arising from  
the causes,  
And then their cessation, would become impossible.



### **Verse 20**

If so, as for their emptiness and such,  
What do we rely on to understand it?  
Without relying on the conventional truth,  
It is impossible to realize the ultimate truth.

## **I2. Specific Explanation**

### **J1. Sensory Direct Perception**

#### **Verse 21**

The consciousnesses produced relying on the five senses,  
Clearly perceive their own objects.  
Lacking these sensory direct perceptions,  
Just like a blind person, one would not know external  
things.

### **J2. Mental Direct Perception**

#### **Verse 22**

That which arises relying upon mental faculty,  
Clearly distinguishes both inner and outer objects.  
With no such mental direct perception,  
The consciousness that know all objects is missing.

### **J3. Yogic Direct Perception**

#### **Verse 23**

Having practiced adeptly according to the teachings,  
One ultimately clearly perceives objects by himself.  
Without yogic direct perception,  
One does not perceive the realm beyond the ordinary.

### **J4. Self-Knowing Direct Perception**

#### **Verse 24**

Just as direct perception that perceives forms  
Eliminates erroneous superimpositions in accordance  
    with reality.  
The mind has self-knowing direct perception, it  
    knows itself.  
Otherwise, it would need another mind, which  
    ends up endless.

#### **Verse 25**

Therefore, the mind possesses an entity of clarity  
    and knowing,  
And just as it knows its objects,  
Can clearly know itself without depending on  
    other conditions.  
Hence, it is called self-knowing.

### **Verse 26**

While perceiving by means of other direct perceptions,  
That which determines them as actual direct perception,  
Is only self-knowing, without which,  
Reliance upon other is of no avail.

## **I3. Summary**

### **Verse 27**

The root of inference is direct perception,  
And direct perception is determined by self-knowing.  
These all come down to unmistaken perception of mind,  
And there are no other ways of establishing them.

### **Verse 28**

Thus, it is based on non-conceptual,  
Unmistaken direct perceptions,  
That for anything that appears before one,  
All erroneous superimpositions can be eliminated.

## **H2. The Principle of Establishment by Proof through Inference**

### **I1. The Elements of Inference**

#### **J1. The Mind Being Used to Infer**

**Verse 29**

Perceiving objects' general characteristics,  
And associating them with names so as to know the  
    real objects,  
This is conceptual mind,  
With which one can perfectly utilize various names and  
    expressions.

**Verse 30**

To those who are not familiar with names and  
    expressions,  
The objects' general characteristics can still appear to  
    their minds.  
Depending on a mind that is capable of associating them  
    with names,  
They thus adopt or abandon such objects.

**Verse 31**

Without a conceptual mind,  
There could be no conventions for refutation or  
    establishment.  
Therefore, inference and principles,  
Could not be demonstrated to anyone.

### **Verse 32**

Conceptual mind can evaluate, determine, and look for,  
Non-evident things such as those yet to occur.  
Without this ability to infer things conceptually,  
One would become like newborn infants.

## **J2. The Reasons Being Used to Infer**

### **Verse 33**

Reasoning is to know something based on another.  
With an establishable position,  
And with both positive and negative logical pervasion,  
When these three prerequisites are complete, it is an  
unmistaken reasoning.

### **Verse 34**

From the reasons,  
Which are ascertained by direct perception,  
Specific hidden things can be inferred.  
Based on the relation between a reason and what is to  
be proved,

### **Verse 35**

There are reasoning by the effect, reasoning by the  
nature,

And reasoning concerning the nonexistent that  
negates something,  
Including reasoning of non-observation, and reasoning  
of the observation of the opposite.  
All reasonings belong to such three kinds.

### **J3. The Ways Being Used to Infer**

#### **K1. Division into Three or Six Types According to the Objects to Be Ascertained**

##### **Verse 36**

Because in the ultimate reality, all appearing things,  
Are of equality by nature,  
With a pure mind one sees the pure reality,  
Thus one abides in the nature of purity.

##### **Verse 37**

Real things arise depending on conditions,  
Unreal things depend on conceptual imputation.  
Therefore, both the real and the unreal,  
Are inherently empty in nature.

##### **Verse 38**

In ultimate reality, the basis of emptiness,  
And emptiness itself are inseparable.

Therefore, appearance and emptiness are the one that  
is inexpressible,  
But can be known through individual's self-aware  
wisdom.

## **K2. Division into Four Types According to the Modes of Establishment**

### **Verse 39**

All types of establishment,  
Summarize as proofs of existence and being.  
All types of negation,  
Condense into negation of existence and being.

## **K3. Division into Two Types According to the Manners of Application**

### **Verse 40**

Relying on valid knowledge,  
Having established reasonings of establishment  
and negation,  
One can also logically explain to others  
Such establishment and negation.

### **Verse 41**

To refute another's points, one then either employs



An autonomous syllogism with three referential modes,  
Or, uses what is accepted by the opponent,  
To disprove it with consequentialist arguments.

## **I2. The Classification of Inference**

### **J1. Classification**

#### **K1. The Valid Knowledge of the Conventional**

##### **Verse 42**

As for the conventional level, there are two types of  
valid knowledge,  
That in which reality and appearance are identical  
or different  
Based on pure vision,  
Or impure worldly vision.

##### **Verse 43**

These two types of conventional valid knowledge  
Are like seeing with divine and human eyes.  
The differences between these two,  
Lie in their entity, cause, effect, and function.

##### **Verse 44**

As a mind that is non-deceptive concerning worldly  
truths,

It arises from the perception of objects according to  
reality.

With respect to objects of worldly vision, it eliminates  
all misconceptions,

And perfectly apprehends the given object in  
corresponding context.

### **Verse 45**

The extensive and vast wisdom,

Arises from apprehending the nature of reality.

In respect to the objects that are beyond conception, it  
eliminates all misconceptions,

And has the wisdom that knows all phenomena  
as its result.

## **K2. The Valid Knowledge of the Ultimate**

### **Verse 46**

There are two types of ultimate truth,

Seemingly real and real ultimate truth.

As for the subject contemplating the ultimate truth,

Its valid knowledge also becomes twofold.

## **J2. Summary**

### **Verse 47**

Relying on the former, one reaches the latter.  
Like impaired vision that is healed and made pure,  
When the eye of valid knowledge is fully developed,  
One clearly sees the truths of purity and equality.

## **I3. Dispelling Doubts**

### **J1. Overall Explanation**

#### **K1. Is It Necessary to Establish Valid Knowledge?**

### **Verse 48**

Non-conceptual and conceptual minds,  
Sometimes perceiving two moons, dreaming, or taking  
a rope for a snake,  
Distinguish into mistaken and unmistaken,  
Thus becoming valid and invalid knowledge.

### **Verse 49**

Lacking valid and invalid knowledge,  
The mistaken as the deluded, and the unmistaken  
as the real  
Would never be distinguishable,  
Therefore, no doctrinal tradition would possibly exist.

## **K2. Can Valid Knowledge Be Established?**

### **Verse 50**

Having investigated the true reality,  
Regardless of direct perception, inference,  
Invalid knowledge, or any other means of establishment,  
All such kinds of conceptual elaborations,

### **Verse 51**

Turn out empty by their very nature.  
Hence, their being free from all conceptual elaborations,  
Just as heat is a property of fire,  
Is a feature of all conventional constructs.

### **Verse 52**

Therefore, appearance and emptiness,  
Are inseparable in everything,  
As skillful means and that which arise from skillful means.  
If one is negated, the other is not affirmed.

## **K3. Is It Necessary to Make Analysis on Valid Knowledge?**

### **Verse 53**

“Without analysis of valid and invalid knowledge,  
But relying only on that which is seen by an  
ordinary person,

One can enter into ultimate truth.” One may say.  
Although this is not to be refuted,

#### **Verse 54**

Seeing that this produces that result  
Is the direct perception of the world,  
And inference occurs in reliance upon it.  
They are not named, but their meaning is never  
abandoned.

### **J2. Specific Explanation**

#### **K1. Question on the Valid Knowledge of the Conventional**

#### **Verse 55**

If the valid knowledge of the conventional were not  
twofold,  
Pure vision would become false.  
Thus with worldly vision, as for the sea conch,  
It would not follow that white is its true color and yellow  
is false.

#### **K2. Question on the Valid Knowledge of the Ultimate**

#### **Verse 56**

If there were not two types of valid knowledge of  
the ultimate,

The inseparability of the two truths would not be known,  
And the ultimate would fall into conceptual extremes,  
Causing its very own destruction.

### **K3. Conclusion**

#### **Verse 57**

The conventional, that which is examined, is nonexistent;  
So too the examining mind and self-awareness.  
Upon analysis, they turn out nonexistent, like the moon  
    in water.  
Ultimately, this is the one single indivisible truth,

#### **Verse 58**

Which is also nirvana, and the true reality.  
Because it is the ultimate reality of all things,  
Once the subjects and their objects dissolve into an  
    inseparable single body,  
It gives rise to the enlightened wisdom that is beyond  
    the middle and the extremes.

### **E2. The Four Reliances: The Function of the Four Principles**

#### **F1. General Explanation**

#### **Verse 59**

Through these profound and vast teachings,

Once the eyes of wisdom have opened,  
One sees the noble path travelled by  
The bliss-gone buddhas and their heirs,

#### **Verse 60**

As well as those enlightened beings of great wisdom.  
This is the way of the sutra and tantra vehicles,  
So difficult to find. Whoever has obtained them,  
Should never let them pass in vain, fruitlessly.

#### **Verse 61**

Endowed with the four principles,  
Possessing the brilliance of sublime intelligence,  
And the wisdom of not being changed by others,  
The four reliances will definitely arise.

#### **Verse 62**

Without such intelligence,  
One is like a blind following another blind person  
Just relies on fame, mere words, and what is easy to  
understood,  
And goes against the logic of the four reliances.

## **F2. The Detailed Explanation**

### **G1. Rely on the Teaching, Not the Individual**



**Verse 63**

Therefore, do not rely on individuals,  
But rely on the genuine Dharma.  
It is through the path that can be established  
by reasoning,  
That liberation occurs, not through the person who  
teaches it.

**Verse 64**

As long as one delivers an excellent speech,  
It does not matter what the speaker looks like.  
For example, the Buddha, in order to teach someone,  
Manifested as a butcher and the like.

**Verse 65**

If the teachings contradict the doctrines of the Mahayana,  
However virtuous the speaker may seem,  
There will be no benefit,  
Like a demon in the guise of the Buddha.

**G2. Rely on the Meaning, Not the Words****Verse 66**

In listening to the teachings and engaging in reflection,  
Rely on the meaning rather than on words.

If the explained meaning is understood, it matters little  
How eloquently or not the words were spoken.

**Verse 67**

For meaning to be understood, with the intention to  
    express it,  
Names are given, and if one has already understood  
    the meaning,  
Yet engages in words and their conceptual elaborations,  
It is as if one has found the elephant but is still  
    looking for its footprints.

**Verse 68**

If one is attached to words, which become ever complicated,  
Delusive thoughts increase boundlessly.  
Hence one deviates from the true meaning,  
Like the fools who end up exhausted for no reason.

**Verse 69**

Even for a single phrase like "Fetch the tree!"  
The corresponding external objects are infinite.  
Yet one will know to what it refers,  
And the need for the words ends just there.

### **Verse 70**

When a finger points to the bright moon,  
The foolish children stare at the finger.  
For fools, who are attached to words only,  
It is difficult to understand even what they wish  
to understand.

## **G3. Rely on the Definitive Meaning, Not the Provisional Meaning**

### **Verse 71**

When entering into meaning,  
Understand definitive and provisional meanings.  
Do not rely on provisional meaning,  
But rely on definitive meaning.

### **Verse 72**

The omniscient Buddha, in all his wisdom,  
In accord with the lineages, capacities, and intentions of  
living beings,  
Expounded the teachings of various vehicles of different  
levels,  
Just like the rungs of a ladder.

**Verse 73**

With a certain purpose in mind, he dispensed some  
teachings,  
With eight kinds of implied and hidden intentions.  
If interpreted literally, they go against valid knowledge,  
But there are cases in which these teachings were  
necessary.

**Verse 74**

Therefore, from the four schools of Buddhist philosophy  
Through to the ultimate vajra vehicle,  
That which is not realized by those of the lower levels,  
Is ascertained by those of the higher levels.

**Verse 75**

This is established by scripture and by reasoning.  
Having seen this, the wise seizes definitive meanings,  
And like a swan drawing milk from water,  
Plays in the ocean of Buddhist teachings.

**Verse 76**

The immensely profound Vajrayana,  
Is sealed with six places and four levels of meaning,  
Associated with the essential instructions of the lineage,  
And established by stainless reasoning.

**Verse 77**

All things are originally in the inseparable union  
Of primordial purity and great equality,  
Which is ascertained  
By means of the two types of valid knowledge.

**Verse 78**

In the tradition of sutra and in the stage of generation,  
In the stage of completion and in the Great Perfection,  
Through the literal, general, hidden, and ultimate  
meanings respectively,  
One grasp their essential points without contradictions.

**Verse 79**

Having obtained the profound realization of the ultimate  
meaning,  
The heirs of the Buddha, endowed with supreme wisdom,  
Maintain the inexhaustible treasury of the Dharma,  
Like the victory banners of the Dharma of transmission  
and of realization.

**G4. Rely on Wisdom, Not the Conceptual Mind****Verse 80**

When practicing according to definitive meaning,

Do not rely on the mind that pursues terms and  
expressions,  
That discriminates conceptually, and that is dual, as  
perceiver and perceived,  
Rather, rely on the wisdom of non-duality.

**Verse 81**

As for the ordinary mind that operates with conceptual  
ideas,  
Whose nature is the duality of perceiver and perceived,  
The object it grasps, along with itself, is illusory,  
And it can never realize the actual nature of reality.

**Verse 82**

As for attachment, be it to the real or to the unreal,  
To both the real and the unreal, or to neither the real  
nor the unreal,  
All of them, along with the way of attachment,  
are grasping,  
And are within the domain of Mara,

**Verse 83**

As is stated in the sutras.  
On the basis of any kind of refutation or establishment,

It is impossible to destroy whatever is grasped.  
Having seen that there is nothing to refute or to establish,  
one is liberated.

**Verse 84**

Having done away with both perceiver and perceived,  
The primordial wisdom naturally reveals its luminosity.  
Having eliminated all four conceptual extremes,  
This is called supreme primordial wisdom.

**Verse 85**

Like sunshine appearing to a blind person,  
It is never seen by ordinary beings.  
Failing to know it, however much they think about it,  
Foolish beings generate fear.

**Verse 86**

However, relying on the true and noble teaching,  
On the reasoning of refuting all extremes,  
And on the power of the master's instructions,  
As if one's vision were restored, one will see that for oneself.

**Verse 87**

At that time one is able to savor,  
The nectar-like taste of the Buddhadharma.



With eyes filled for hundreds of times with faith and joy,  
One concentrates always on the Buddha's wisdom body.

**Verse 88**

In this, all things without exception  
Are seen in their ultimate state of equality  
Having attained the conviction that is beyond expression,  
One speaks the inexhaustible treasury of the Dharma.

**Verse 89**

Having mastered the principles of the two truths,  
And having seen the inseparable union of the two truths,  
One knows that, just like the husk is removed in order to  
    reveal the grain,  
All the various methods are expedient means leading to  
    this point.

**Verse 90**

Hence, the Buddha knows all expedient means,  
And expedient means are called the genuine path.  
With this in mind, in the teacher and his noble teaching,  
An irreversible confidence is generated.

**Verse 91**

By attaining the supreme non-abiding wisdom,

One is naturally liberated from the extremes of existence  
and of peace.

And one's great and effortless compassion,  
Pervades throughout boundless time and space.

### **E3. The Eight Great Eloquence: The Result of the Four Principles**

#### **Verse 92**

When contemplating the four principles,  
Relying upon which to ascertain the two truths,  
It brings the functions of the four reliances.  
From within these immaculate, supreme causes,

#### **Verse 93**

The fruit of profound wisdom arises,  
Perfectly illuminating everything.  
Thus, sealed in the nature of awareness,  
The eight treasures of eloquence are revealed.

#### **Verse 94**

The teachings that are heard and contemplated in the past,  
Are never forgotten—this is the treasure of right  
recollection.  
The various profound and vast meanings,

Are completely discerned—this is the treasure of  
intelligence.

**Verse 95**

All doctrines in the sutras and tantras,  
Are well understood—this is the treasure of realization.  
Once heard, all meanings, with no exception,  
Are never forgotten—this is the treasure of retention.

**Verse 96**

Satisfying sentient beings with excellent teachings—  
This is the treasure of eloquence.  
The great, precious treasury of the sublime Dharma,  
Is to be guarded in its entirety—this is the treasure of  
true Dharma.

**Verse 97**

Not severing the continuous lineage of the Three Jewels—  
This is the treasure of the aspiration to awakening.  
Gaining acceptance of the nature of equality and the  
nonproduction of all things—  
This is the treasure of accomplishment.

### **Verse 98**

Those who are freely endowed with the abundance of,  
and never separated from  
The eight great and inexhaustible treasures  
Will be praised by buddhas and bodhisattvas  
And become a lord of the three realms.

## **C3. The Result of Understanding the Two Truths**

### **Verse 99**

The valid teachings of the victorious Buddha  
Can be established by the valid knowledge.  
Therefore, through the valid path, one generates conviction,  
And sees the true fruition of the valid teachings.

## **B3. The Wholesome Ending**

### **C1. The Manner of Composing This Treatise**

### **Verse 100**

His vision is completely and utterly pure.  
His great compassion has reached perfection.  
The bliss-gone buddha has shown the path, and says,  
“I have tasted the flavor of the nectar I have discovered,

### **Verse 101**

And I wish that, by the four principles,

And the four reliances, you will taste it, too.”

Although this nectar has now been shared,

In such age of degeneration,

### **Verse 102**

Sentient beings tend to an opposite direction to the path,

Hence they can hardly taste it.

Having seen this, with pure intention,

And a mind of supreme devotion for the teachings,

I wrote this.

## **C2. The Dedication of This Virtuous Deed**

### **Verse 103**

By the merit of this concise explanation

Of the doctrines arising from immaculate wisdom

That is born of reflection,

May all beings attain the fruition of Manjushri.

## **A3. The Perfection of Composing This Treatise**

### **Verse 104**

Thanks to the sun of Manjushri’s speech,

The lotus of my mind blossoms with devotion.

As these honey drops of excellent explanation flows  
therefrom,  
May they bring joy to the bees of good fortune.

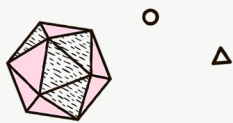
*I had meant to compose The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly  
Ascertaining Reality. Recently, upon the request made by the learned  
Lhagsam Tenpa Gyaltsen, I, Jamphel Gyepa (Mipham Rinpoche),  
wrote it in a single day on the twenty-ninth day of the third month  
of the Sakyong year (i.e. Wood Bird, 1885). May all be auspicious!  
There are one hundred and four stanzas. How excellent!*



# Commentary on *The Sword of Wisdom*

by Khenpo Sodargye





# Chapter One

## THE OPENING

COMMENTARY ON *THE SWORD OF WISDOM*



*The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality* is one of the most important of Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche's works. Despite its brevity, its content is quite extraordinary. It explains how to understand the conventional truth and the ultimate truth through the two types of valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate by means of referential reasoning. From the other treatises such as *Beacon of Certainty* and *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, we can deeply understand the importance of the valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate. If we understand the two types of valid knowledge, we will be able to understand the principles of the Middle Way, of the Buddhist Logic, and of the Mind-Only School.

Actually I had the intention to explain this treatise over ten years ago. It discusses the profound and vast teachings, especially the four principles and the two types of valid knowledge, by means of which we will generate in our mind a sincere faith in the Buddhadharma. Today most people lack right knowledge and right view. The certainty about the Dharma obtained by means of reasoning is indeed very precious and rare. So I planned to explain this treatise a long time ago. But the causes and conditions are rather subtle and they did not mature until today. Thanks to the

requests by some Dharma friends, we are now able to study this treatise together.

## THE EXPLANATION OF THE TITLE

### A1. The Title

#### **The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality**

*The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality* that shows the key points of understanding the Buddha's teaching by means of the wisdom of reflections has three parts: the title of this treatise, the main part of this treatise, and the perfection of composing this treatise.

We begin from the explanation of the title: *The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*. The title tells us what is to be expressed in this treatise by using a metaphor of sword. The word "ascertaining" means to understand, to realize through reflection. The term "reality" indicates that it is not the literal meanings of the Buddha's teachings, but the true reality of all things that the Buddha taught. The wisdom that is able to understand the true reality of all things taught by Buddha Shakyamuni is like a sword. A precious and sharp sword is capable of cutting instantly anything

it encounters. Likewise, the wisdom being described here is able to lead us to completely grasp the real meaning of all the Buddha's teachings, including both Mahayana and Vajrayana. When we generate such wisdom, we find no difficulty in understanding the meaning of sutras and tantras, or the meaning of the conventional and the ultimate truths.

In this world, innumerable sentient beings are in a pitiful condition as they are trapped in the net of ignorance and afflictions. In what manner can we destroy this net? Precisely with the sword of wisdom. Without the sword of wisdom, sentient beings remain in this net, and are never able to pull themselves out. Through the blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas, however, when one attains this sword of wisdom, which is mainly composed of the two types of valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate, one is able to effortlessly eradicate all wrong views. Therefore, as the title suggests, by studying this treatise, one can generate the supreme right view and certainty in the true reality of all things.

Among the treatises by Mipham Rinpoche, we find the *Five Swords* and the *Five Lotuses*, including *The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*. These treatises contain extraordinarily essential instructions that we need to tame our mind, especially in this degenerate age.

I will give a brief explanation of this treatise. The readers may use its commentary by Lhagsam Tenpa Gyaltzen as a reference book, titled *The Sun Illuminating the Buddha's Teaching: A Commentary on the Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*. The author is a direct disciple of Mipham Rinpoche, and the praises of Mipham Rinpoche are seen here and there in his words.

## THE PROSTRATION AND THE PLEDGE

### *A2. The Main Part*

#### *B1. The Wholesome Beginning*

##### *C1. The Prostration*

###### **Verse 1**

**Your system is correct and free from all faults,  
Which can be verified through the three points that leave  
no doubt.**

**The treasure of sublime wisdom,  
Before you, glorious Manjushri, I prostrate myself.**

“System” here means doctrinal tradition, or philosophy. Relying on scriptural authority and reasoning, some people do their best to study all phenomena. When their study is brought to the utmost point, they are said to have established a system, or a philosophy. Both non-Buddhists and Buddhists regard their own systems as valid knowledge of understanding this world. The fact is, among all doctrinal traditions, there are correct and mistaken systems. Generally speaking, the views of non-Buddhist systems can be

divided into the views of nihilism and the views of eternalism, all of which are mistaken views. In the Buddhist doctrinal traditions, there are many systems. From those of the common vehicle to those of the Mahayana vehicle, all of them are correct systems, and the highest ones are those of the Mahayana.

The systems of the Mahayana put forth the profound and the vast teachings that are completely free from confusion, afflictions and faults. By means of the three kinds of valid knowledge, that is, Buddhist scriptural authority, direct perception and inference, one is able to understand the vast and the profound meanings of the Buddhadharma without any doubt. Here the three points can also be referred to as the three modes of a valid inference, which are, establishable position, positive logical pervasion and negative logical pervasion.

Who possesses the treasure of wisdom that is free from all faults? It is Manjushri, the embodiment of the wisdom of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, first of all, Mipham Rinpoche prostrates himself before Manjushri, the ultimate source of the wisdom that knows all profound and vast teachings. There are different ways of paying homage, such as paying homage by abiding in the nature of the mind, or prostrating oneself with devotion through body, speech, and mind.

This verse also implies that, whoever studies this treatise, Manjushri himself will accept them as disciples and empower them. In the course of our study and practice, we must generate certainty in the profound and the vast teachings through the three kinds of valid knowledge, and eliminate all doubts, so that we can achieve supreme wisdom. In order to do so, each of us needs the powerful blessings from Manjushri.

## *C2. The Pledge*

### **Verse 2**

**Profound, vast, and difficult to penetrate,  
Is the nectar-like teaching of the Buddha.  
Upon those who wish to savor it,  
I here bestow the light of wisdom.**

The teachings of our fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni can be condensed into two kinds: the profound and the vast. Both of them are indeed very difficult to understand. The profound teachings were passed down and propagated mainly by Nagarjuna; the vast teachings were by Asanga. These two sages are like the sun and the moon in the world. The term “profound” indicates the wisdom of emptiness that transcends conceptual thought and is beyond all extremes and elaborations; whereas the term “vast” refers to the practices for the accumulation of all the other



merits through the five paths or the ten bodhisattva levels. In the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, one stanza says:

*Profound is emptiness,  
And vast are all the other qualities.  
By understanding the principles of the profound and the vast,  
You shall thus gain all these qualities.*

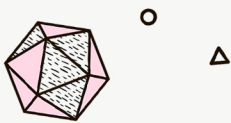
If we understand these teachings of the profound and the vast, then we attain the ability of understanding all phenomena. Therefore, such teachings are the true nectar of all the Buddha's teachings.

Having accumulated merits and wisdom from previous lives and possessing extraordinary connection with the Dharma, those who wish to gain certain understanding of the profound and the vast Dharma teachings, must first receive the blessings from buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the enlightened beings. Here, Mipham Rinpoche prays to Manjushri as well as all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great masters, that relying on their wisdom and assistance, he can bestow the light of wisdom upon his followers.

What is the light of wisdom? Mipham Rinpoche has presented us this treatise that bears his empowerment, enabling us to enjoy the nectar of the Buddha's teachings through learning this text, and helping us to really generate in our mind the wisdom to

understand the profound and the vast teachings. If this light of wisdom merges with our minds, we will have achieved the greatest of all achievements.

People often say, "Teacher, grant me your empowerment! Bless me, help me obtain wisdom!" But if you truly wish to obtain wisdom, you should learn treatises such as this. Only then will wisdom develop in your mind. If you do not study, but only seek immaterial empowerment, you may not obtain a result in the short term. Therefore, we should study excellent treatises such as this one. This will be very beneficial to us.



## Chapter Two

### THE TWO TRUTHS AND THE TWO TYPES OF VALID KNOWLEDGE

COMMENTARY ON *THE SWORD OF WISDOM*

## THE TWO TRUTHS TO BE ASCERTAINED

### *B2. The Wholesome Middle*

#### *C1. Two Truths to Be Ascertained: Conventional and Ultimate Truth*

##### **Verse 3**

**The Dharma spoken by all buddhas,  
Depends in reality upon the two truths.  
The mundane is the conventional truth;  
The supramundane is the ultimate truth.**

Buddha Shakyamuni spoke innumerable teachings in accordance with the different capacities of sentient beings. All such teachings can be included in conventional and ultimate truths. In *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is said:

*The Dharma that the Buddha teaches  
Is wholly founded on two truths:  
The “all-concealing” truth of mundane beings  
And the truth of ultimate reality.*

What is ultimate truth? The domain that goes beyond ordinary speech and conceptual thought, and cannot be conveyed through verbal expression, is named ultimate truth. Conventional truth refers to all those domains that ordinary people are able to comprehend with conceptual minds and to describe by means of verbal expressions.

It is as stated in the *Introduction to the Middle Way* that, ultimate truth and conventional truth are established from the real and illusory aspects of all things. They are the actual reality and the deluded appearance of all things, respectively. All things possess a reality and an appearance. If you realize the reality, you have realized the ultimate truth; if you realize the appearance, you have realized the conventional truth. In the *Nirvana Sutra*, it is also said that the world has two aspects: one is the ultimate truth, the other is the conventional truth.

Therefore, the myriads of things are all comprised of ultimate and conventional truths. The Buddha's teachings are also comprised of ultimate and conventional truths. The way in which the two truths are established and analyzed will not be discussed at length here. They are covered in many works, such as those on the Middle Way.

We must understand the principles concerning ultimate and conventional truths. If we do not understand the two truths, we are in no way different from a blind person in our world. Even now, among those who study the Buddhadharma, some know nothing concerning the two truths. This is really regretful.

## THE TWO TYPES OF VALID KNOWLEDGE THAT CAN ASCERTAIN THE TWO TRUTHS

*C2. The Two Types of Valid Knowledge That Can Ascertain  
the Two Truths*

*D1. The Concise Explanation of the Two Types of Valid  
Knowledge*

**Verse 4**

**If one is to enter into the nature of the two truths  
By means of unmistakable and certain wisdom,  
One must obtain the two flawless valid knowledges  
through practice,  
That is the supreme eye of wisdom.**

We can approach the nature of the two truths by means of the two types of valid knowledge: (1) the valid knowledge of the conventional, and (2) the valid knowledge of the ultimate. Once we have attained such wisdom of these two valid knowledges through gradual practice, we will have attained the supreme eye of wisdom. We will be able to understand this in the context of *The Ornament*

of the Middle Way, where Shantarakshita, in explaining the topic of merit accumulation, says the following:

*Those who ride the sublime chariot of the two truths,  
Holding the reins of reasoned thought firmly,  
Are called practitioners of the Mahayana,  
Bearing their names according with reality.*

This verse states that with a firm hold on the reins of the wisdom—valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate, those who ride the sublime chariot of conventional and ultimate truths are worthy of the name of Mahayana practitioner. Why does Shantarakshita say this? Because a true Mahayana practitioner should have a perfect understanding of the two truths. If we lack genuine understanding in the ultimate truth and the conventional truth, but claim “I am a Mahayana practitioner”, the claim can hardly withstand scrutiny on many aspects.

In his *Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way*, Mipham Rinpoche says:

*Through having gained the ultimate, the heart of sky-like peace,  
The glorious Moon in beauty sails above the triple world.  
Through seeing the conventional, like rainbow hues unmixed,  
The Dharma's Fame resounds throughout the earth.*



The conventional truth, which is just like a rainbow where the arched stripes do not mingle with each other, should be understood through the teachings of Dharmakirti; the truth of emptiness, which is like empty space free from all conceptual thoughts, should be comprehended based on the teachings of Chandrakirti. Through the instructions of these two masters, we will definitely realize the conventional and ultimate truth. Of course, we must rely on conventional truth at first, then the wisdom of the ultimate truth can be generated.

Also in his *Beacon of Certainty*, Mipham Rinpoche says:

*The fame of the Moon of the Amazing Dharma  
Arises along with the light of elegant speech  
In the vast sky of the Buddha's teaching,  
Vanquishing the heavy darkness of doubt.*

The excellent doctrines of the unrivaled Chandrakirti and Dharmakirti are like the sun and the moon. Their brilliance manifested at once in the vast empty space of the Buddha's teaching, destroying the heavy darkness of ignorance, confusion, and doubt about the profound and the vast Dharma teachings throughout the entire world. Hence, based on the instructions of Mipham Rinpoche, we can say that valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate are of great importance.

Therefore, the key point here for us is, I believe, to receive training in both Buddhist Logic and in the Middle Way. If we fail to do so, a mere discussion of the teachings about the karmic law of cause and effect or some worldly example will not help us truly solve our problems. Hence, when we study *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, together with other relatively simple instructions, we should also become familiar with more profound Dharma teachings. In terms of wisdom, everyone is on a different level. So we should all learn in different ways. In this manner, it will be easier to generate solid conviction in our mental continuums.

# THE MANIFESTATION OF DEPENDENT ARISING

*D2. The Extensive Explanation of the Four Principles*

*E1. The Four Principles That Can Ascertain the Two Truths*

*F1. The First Three Principles*

*G1. Overall Explanation of Dependently-Arising Appearance*

## Verse 5

All things appear in their rich variety,

As a result of dependent Arising.

Things that do not depend on anything else,

Will not appear, like a lotus flower in empty sky.

All kinds of internal and external things that appear to sentient beings come into existence because of dependent arising. Without anything to depend on, a thing will certainly never appear, just like a lotus flower that grows in empty sky.

It is well known that external things arise as a result of dependent arising. For example, depending on a seed, its sprouting, its blossoming, and its bearing, a fruit occurs. The same is true of internal things: from ignorance to mental formation and consciousness, up to birth and death, the wandering of beings in samsara owes its production to nothing but dependent arising.

Regrettably, worldly people have knowledge of dependent arising only in relation to external and material things. But they have no knowledge of dependent arising in relation with the inner twelve links that have held them captive in samsara since beginningless time. In most countries, textbooks teach students how to investigate external and material objects. However, they neglect to analyze the inner mind. Even when textbooks explain consciousness, their analysis is confined to present mental states, and they never touch upon past and future lives, or the mechanism of samsara. It is regrettable how the content of the mind is still an unexplored field.

All phenomena arise as a result of dependent arising. Yet, as Nagarjuna says, when we investigate dependent arising by means of rigorous reasoning on the ultimate level, we find that nothing is ever possibly produced. In *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is said:

*Things are not produced by themselves,  
They are not produced by others,  
Not by both, and not without a cause,  
Thus we know that they are not ever produced.*

In explaining this verse, Rendawa says that the meaning of “not ever produced” should be understood as dependent arising which calls “the fifth kind of production”. In his *Commentary on the Introduction to the Middle Way*, Mipham Rinpoche also says that “not produced” means dependent arising, i.e., production through dependent arising does exist on a conventional level. Nagarjuna also has the following instruction:

*There has never been one thing  
That did not arise from causes and conditions.  
Therefore, among all things,  
There is none that is not empty.*

Hence, the myriads of things that we can talk about are produced from causes and conditions. Furthermore, these things are of the nature of emptiness. The modes in which these things appear according to dependent arising are explained in detail in the *Precious Garland of the Middle Way*.

In sum, with regard to all things, we should understand that on conventional level a result must certainly be produced when all causes and conditions come together. Yet when we employ wisdom to analyze such production on ultimate level, we will see that none of these things have ever been substantially produced. Mipham Rinpoche also says in his *Commentary on the Introduction to the Middle Way*, “Because of the nature of emptiness, all appearing things originate from their dependent causes.” Hence, when we analyze dependent arising, we find that it is nothing but emptiness free from all conceptual elaborations. Certainly, everyone can use words to simply talk about this, but it is not so easy to develop a firm conviction in regard to the teachings of the Middle Way.

# THE PRINCIPLE OF FUNCTION AND THE PRINCIPLE OF DEPENDENCE

*G2. Specific Explanation of the Three Principles According to  
the Cause, Effect and Entity of Dependent Arising*

*H1. The Principle of Function and the Principle of Dependence*

*I1. The Meaning of the Two Principles*

**Verse 6**

**If causes and conditions are complete,**

**They function to bring about an effect.**

**All things with the nature of an effect,**

**Depend on their individual causes.**

In the *Sutra Unfurling the Real Meaning*, the Buddha discussed the four principles: (1) the principle of function, (2) the principle of dependence, (3) the principle of nature, and (4) the principle of establishment by proof. The four principles are explained in the form of pith instructions in treatises such as *The Ornament of the Middle Way* and in Rongzom pandita's *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*. The *Ornament of the Middle Way* says:

*Satisfactory if not examined,  
Based upon foregoing causes,  
Things arise as though they were  
The causes' subsequent effects.*

In explaining this verse, Mipham Rinpoche introduces these four principles. The principle of function and the principle of dependence are mainly established with regard to causes and effects respectively. The principle of nature, on the other hand, is established from the perspective of things themselves, whereas the principle of establishment by proof asserts that these doctrines can be established, and hence proved, by means of direct perception and inference. That is, the manifest is proved by means of direct perception, while the hidden is proved by means of inference. Ultimately, direct perception and inference are comprised in the principle of nature, since, in truth, all things are inseparable from their own nature. For example, no one can deny the heat nature of fire. Similarly, no one can argue about, or refute the principle of nature.

Through listening and contemplation, we will certainly understand these principles. An understanding of the four principles is of great importance to our study and practice. In his *Entering the Way of the*



*Great Vehicle*, Rongzom Pandita explained that, regarding causes, effects, the entity of things, and correct reasoning respectively, the principle of function, the principle of dependence, the principle of nature, and the principle of establishment by proof are introduced. Yet, what are the reasons for giving the teachings in this form? Because we have four kinds of doubts in our minds about causes, about effects, about the entity of things, and about the correct reasoning, and the four principles can eradicate these four doubts.

The principle of nature is introduced because we doubt the entity of things; for example, doubting that the nature of fire is heat, or doubting the fact that a pillar is impermanent. The principle of function is taught because of the doubt about the effect of a given cause, for example, the doubt about whether wholesome deeds can produce happiness. The principle of dependence is taught in regard to doubts about the cause of a given effect, for example, whether or not the suffering and happiness of sentient beings is the result of unwholesome and wholesome deeds performed in the past. The following thought: “Is there a correct theory that can explain such principles of cause and effect?” is then a doubt concerning reasoning or logic. Hence, the principle of establishment by proof is taught.

I learned *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle* from His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche a few decades ago. At that time, when I first learned these four principles, I had a deep understanding of the Buddha's teachings. We never forget those things that greatly arouse our interest, or those things that bring us great benefit, even as many years go by. For example, a few days ago I met by chance an old classmate of more than twenty years ago. At that time, another classmate of ours had a bag to hold tsampa (Tibetan barley flour). It was a cowhide bag of a special shape. Perhaps, because of the harsh living conditions in which we then lived, to the degree that we often felt hungry, any source of even a tiny bit of food left a deep impression on our minds. Although so many years have gone by, each classmate still retains a clear memory of the bag and of its shape; it is as if none of us can forget it. I asked many of them about it, and everyone said, "Yes, I know, that is what the bag looks like." Similarly, I was deeply impressed by the four principles, and held a great faith in them, so the memory of them is still fresh.

The four principles are truly meaningful to us. Especially in this complex age when there are these chaotic thoughts on a national and international level, east to west, we have fortunately found an actual truth, a truth which is like a good seed planted in the depths of our alaya consciousness, and will benefit us for the

present life and for all lives to come. I believe, if we understand the truth of the Buddha's teaching, and especially the teachings of Mipham Rinpoche, we will develop a very strong faith in our fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni. In order to develop such faith in our minds, we should understand these four principles thoroughly, observing everything in the world through them. In this manner, an uncommon conviction on the Buddha's teachings, as well as on the correct worldly principles, will arise in our mental continuums. This kind of conviction will not depend on some temporary condition or fleeting emotion. It will have arisen from the depths of our hearts, and will not be destroyed upon our meeting with unfavorable conditions.

Unlike the two treatises mentioned above where the four principles are explained in the form of pith instructions, here in this treatise, the theoretical explanations are clearly given. First, what is the meaning of the principle of function? If causes and conditions are complete, they will definitely produce an effect. This is the function of causes and conditions. In this world, it is impossible that when the causes and conditions are complete, their result is not to be produced.

If we understand the principle of function we will be very careful not performing unvirtuous deeds. Some people wonder: "Why should I be reborn in the hells in the future, if I kill animals today?"

The reason is actually quite simple. Suppose that we put together a fertilizer, some soil, and the seeds of highland barley. Then in the spring, when all conditions are present, will a result be produced? The answer is: yes, definitely. In Dharmakirti's *Pramanavarttika* it is said, "With no cause missing, how can the effect be absent?" If all causes and conditions are complete, then why should their effect be missing? It is impossible.

Likewise, if I were a bad person, and today I performed unvirtuous deeds such as killing beings, slandering the Three Jewels, and breaking the precepts, then, without proper confession, I would definitely be reborn in the hells. On the other hand, if I confess my unvirtuous deeds with a sincere mind, although these unvirtuous deeds are the primary cause of suffering, this cause is destroyed before it has the chance to produce any result.

For example, when all causes and conditions to grow highland barley, such as seeds, are present, but one takes the seeds, burns them, and places them back into the soil, the seeds will no longer bear a fruit. Likewise, if we do not confess and purify our past unvirtuous deeds, when all conditions come together we will certainly experience suffering as a result. But if we engage practices such as Vajrasattva purification so as to destroy the seeds of our unvirtuous deeds, these very seeds, despite their unwholesome nature, will not bear a bitter fruit. This is the principle of function.

Many people in the world do not understand this principle, and as a result, refuse to accept the law of cause and effect.

Second, from the perspective of things at present as the result of previous causes, we have the principle of dependence. All things with the nature of an effect depend on their individual causes. Take, for example, those beings who are impoverished or possess no wisdom. Their current situations are effects, and these effects certainly depend on previous causes which can trace back to sometime this life, to the last lifetime, and even to the lifetime before the last.

Take another example. I am often sick. My illness is apparently an effect of some causes. Therefore, I do not blame anyone or anything for my illness, nor do I expect to recover immediately after taking some medicine. I believe I must have killed many beings in some past lifetimes, so today I must be sick, I must suffer. Sometimes I feel terrible for the unwholesome deeds I performed in my past lives, but they are already there. In brief, an effect must certainly depend on its individual causes.

Mipham Rinpoche's pith instructions are extraordinary. We should always think the following: if we perform good deeds, such as practicing generosity or diligently studying and reflecting about the Dharma, we will certainly obtain the fruit of happiness; but if

we perform unwholesome deeds, there must be suffering as the result. There is absolutely no cheating about this. On the other hand, all present suffering and happiness arise from previous causes. To summarize, the principle of function is from the perspective of causes, and the principle of dependence is from the perspective of effects.

## THE NECESSITY OF UNDERSTANDING THE TWO PRINCIPLES

### *12. The Necessity of Understanding the Two Principles*

#### Verse 7

Thus we know that, the principles of cause and effect,  
And their proper or improper relationships,  
Are the foundation  
Of the judgment of whether or not to do something,

#### Verse 8

And of the various doctrines, crafts, etc.  
Hence they have included,  
All worldly knowledge,  
And transcendental teachings.

The verses illustrate the necessity of understanding the principle of dependence and the principle of function. In this world, all things involve the relationship of causes and effects, which could

be understood in two different ways, reasonable and unreasonable. In a reasonable way, the effect is produced depending on its own causes. This accords with reason. For example, if we perform wholesome deeds such as observing monastic precepts and practicing generosity, we will obtain results such as, respectively, rebirth in fortunate destinies and obtaining happiness and wealth. But if we perform deeds such as harming sentient beings or sexual misconduct, the retribution will be suffering, poverty, etc. These relationships are probable and reasonable, and that is why they are called “proper relationship”.

The unreasonable way, on the other hand, is like, when we perform wholesome deeds, unwholesome results are produced; or, when we perform unwholesome deeds, happiness is produced as a result. This type of relationship is called “improper relationship”, as it is improbable and unreasonable.

To understand this, consider the following simple analogy: rice seeds should produce rice, and barley seeds will produce barley. Such relationship between cause and effect is reasonable, hence it is called “proper” relationship. However, if wheat or rice is produced from barley seeds, this is an impossible and unreasonable outcome; it is thus called an “improper” relationship. In sum, what we have said here is that the relationship between causes and effects can



be either proper or improper, which means that it can be either possible or impossible.

If we deeply understand the proper relationships between cause and effect and are not confused by those improper relationships, it will be clear to us what we should and should not do. Peasants and workers, too, understand “proper” and “improper”. For example, a peasant knows that by sowing crop in the spring he will reap a harvest in the fall, so he is willing to do the work. A worker learns that he can make money in one place but he cannot make much money in another place, so he will choose the former. Furthermore, if a working activity not only does not bring any profit to him, but also endangers his life, he will absolutely refuse to engage in this activity.

Indeed, the understanding of proper and improper relationships in terms of causes and effects is the source of the wisdom of all knowable things in the world, such as medicine, craftsmanship, and doctrinal traditions. There are so many types of knowledge in this world, and all of them involve relationships of causes and effects. For example, in the world of crafts, when highly skilled artisans must complete a task, they know that they will only do what is useful, whereas they will not do what is not effective. A carpenter will only use his skills to build something if what he is doing is profitable.

The same is true for medical treatment. If I can recover from an illness through surgery, I am willing to have it done. But if the doctor is not skilled, or the surgery will not be beneficial, I would rather not have the surgery at all. This is also true for doctrinal traditions. If someone finds that Buddha Shakyamuni's doctrinal systems bring benefit not only to one's present life, but also to the next and to all future lives, then this person will want to learn those doctrinal systems. In contrast, if a doctrinal system is meaningless to both ourselves and to others, no one will feel encouraged to learn about it.

Therefore, all foundations of worldly knowledge such as craftsmanship, as well as those of the doctrinal traditions, are established depending on the principle of function and on the principle of dependence. Hence, we can say that these two principles cover all worldly types of knowledge.

The same is true for the transcendental aspect. If I can achieve enlightenment from the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, consisting of the three trainings in discipline, concentration, and wisdom, then I would practice concentration, observe discipline and cultivate wisdom. However, if all such activities turned out to be vain, I would not pursue them any further. In conclusion, we must learn all about the proper and improper relations of this world.

But before we do that, we must understand the two principles we explained above.

Unfortunately, many people are ignorant, and have no knowledge of the law of cause and effect whatsoever. In the teachings that the Buddha delivered on this topic, he said that wholesome deeds cannot produce unfavorable results, and that unwholesome deeds cannot produce favorable results. Still, people who hold onto particularly wrong views keep asking the following question: “Why should I experience the retribution of a short lifespan in the future, if I kill today? Is this not unreasonable?” Certainly, if you could overturn the laws of cause and effect, such as barley seeds producing barley, then you would have a point. But if you are unable to do so, you must understand that this is the relationship of cause and effect, and that no one can overturn it.

Still others, holding wrong views, might think, “It is said that wholesome actions, such as performing five-point prostrations and spinning prayer-wheels the entire day, generate merit. But why do such acts produce merit? The reason is not clear.” Indeed, there is no need to specify a reason. Why? In his *Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way*, Mipham Rinpoche says that these four principles ultimately resolve into the principle of nature, which does not need a reason to be explained.

Truly, this speech is adamant! His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche also often said that those who understand these principles hold no doubts about the Buddha's teachings. Even if doubts ever arise, they can be eliminated through learning and contemplation. As I talked to many people around the world, I sometimes felt sorry for them. However reasonable, when placed before such an ordinary truth, they simply would not accept it. Indeed, the Dharma that Buddha Shakyamuni taught possesses unparalleled qualities. It is the truth that no other scholar or sage in the world has fully discovered. When I teach the Buddhadharma to lay practitioners outside Larung Gar, I do have some confidence to answer whatever kind of questions they bring up to me.

Some time ago, during an assembly, I met a layman, who said, "I am the son of a peasant family. I am seventy years old now. I muddled away as the days went by, but today I have begun to develop faith in the Buddha's teachings. May I be your student?" I myself thought, "Well, in the mundane world, a seventy-year-old student and a forty-more-year-old teacher seem to go against common sense. But from the perspective of Buddhist knowledge, if you just took refuge this year, despite your age of sixty, seventy or eighty, you are not even a first grader in terms of your knowledge of the Buddhadharma. I developed a strong faith in the Buddha's teaching since childhood and I have studied this teaching for

a long time. In the course of learning, I gradually reached the conclusion that the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni are supreme and I gained tremendous benefit from them. So, I should have the capability to be his teacher.”

Because of the background and many other factors, many people lack understanding of the Buddha’s teaching. Although such great principles are available, their path to them has always been blocked by their own wrong views. Therefore, we must make sure we understand these principles through learning and contemplating the Buddhadharma. Having listened to and contemplated the Dharma for many years, we should become skilled in these most fundamental and crucial points.

# THE PRINCIPLE OF NATURE ON CONVENTIONAL LEVEL

## *H2. The Principle of Nature*

### *I1. From the Perspective of Appearance on Conventional Level*

#### *J1. The Explanation of the Principle of Nature*

##### **Verse 9**

**All things produced by dependent arising,  
Naturally possess their uncommon characteristics  
That abide in their own entities, such as solidity,  
dampness, heat, etc.**

**This is the way things are on conventional level, which  
cannot be denied.**

Everything in the world arises depending on its causes and conditions. For example, external things such as trees, flowers, and grass, take into birth depending on specific causes and conditions. Internal things such as thoughts, mental states, and cyclic existence of beings, are also depending on various causes and conditions. Hence, not a single thing in this world is produced, or come into

being, without depending on causes and conditions. Therefore, the kind and compassionate Buddha said in a sutra:

*All things arise from causes,  
Those causes have been taught by the Tathagata.  
And those things cease because of causes,  
This, too, has the Great Shramana explained.*

Nagarjuna also said, "There is not a single thing whose production does not depend on causes and conditions; thus there is not a single thing that exists without being emptiness." So all things arise from causes and conditions, such dependent arising produces the entity of a given thing, in which its own uncommon characteristics abide.

The *Pramanavarttika* says, "All existing things with their uncommon characteristics abide in their own entities." For example, the specific characteristic of earth is hardness, whereas that of fire is heat. The term "such as" in the verse also includes other examples, comprising the specific characteristic of wind, that is, movement, and the characteristic of empty space, which is the absence of obstruction. The specific characteristics of earth, water, fire, and wind, thus all abide in their own entities, and this indeed are natural laws or the way as things are on conventional level.

It should be clear to everyone, that all things have the way as they are on ultimate level as well as on conventional level. What does “the way things are” mean? It refers to the nature of reality, things’ own entities, or what we often refer to as the natural laws.

On a conventional level, all things follow their natural laws. These natural laws cannot be refuted. Moreover, these natural laws fall into two categories: simple natural laws and profound natural laws. Simple natural laws are such as those about the nature of earth, water, fire, and wind. These laws are known to all of us. However, the profound natural laws are unknown to those who have never received a Buddhist training. For example, the nature of wholesome deeds is that they always bring about happiness, and the nature of unwholesome deeds is that they bring about suffering. If someone’s heart is at all times filled with anger and craving, then his or her body, mind, or entire life, will be filled with pain. If we generate the aspiration of bodhichitta or develop a kind heart, then its nature, its function, and its effect, will be only to bring about happiness, fortune, and harmony, to sentient beings. Unfortunately, many people do not understand these hidden principles. Yet this is the principle of “the way things are”, and no one can go against it.



Some people in this world have learnt some knowledge that is just partly and relatively true, and they consider themselves knowledgeable. But they may not understand the principles explained above. A while ago, at a class reunion on the occasion of our twentieth anniversary from graduation, I spoke something about impermanence. In the course of twenty years, everyone in the classroom had a different life. If we had placed the pictures of everyone from twenty year ago on a slideshow, the differences of our appearances before and after the twenty years would have become more obvious. One of our classmates, now an official, had no knowledge of Buddhism previously. All he thought was that Buddhism was a superstitious belief, for he had a strong faith in materialist philosophy. Still, through our discussion about impermanence, his view changed drastically.

Later on, he asked someone to send me his words of appreciation that said, "I used to think that all talk about impermanence are merely some theory, but from what you said I have completely understood the impermanence of life. My own experience since elementary school can also prove this. Now I have gained a deep understanding of impermanence." While I have no intention to gain appreciation from others, I know that, at times, when the conditions ripen, even one sentence of the Buddha's teaching can

benefit others. But at other times, no matter how much one says, some people will not truly gain any benefit.

By all means, one cannot deny these principles. Take fire for example, if you say that heat is not the nature of fire, your point cannot be established at all, and you also incur in the fault of intentionally damaging the natural law. Likewise, by saying that unwholesome deeds do not result in the experience of suffering, one is also damaging the truth.

I think, the teachings, such as everything is impermanent, and the very cause of all suffering is the unwholesome deeds we performed in the past, are very precious. Unfortunately, many people in the world did not know these teachings. Scholars such as anthropologists or biologists have reached some level of truth through research, but really profound truth is reachable only through the authentic teachings of the Buddha. So, once again, I encourage everyone to spend enough time, and make enough effort, to study the Dharma. The truths of the Buddha's teaching can really bring us a lot of happiness. This is neither merely verbal praise, nor an advertisement, claiming how good a product is. That is not necessary at all. However, I gained the benefits from these teachings in my heart, so I feel compelled to share them with you.

## *J2. The Establishment of the Principle of Nature*

### **Verse 10**

**For one single thing, from different aspects,  
And by means of affirmation and negation,  
Countless attributes can be established,  
All of which abide in the thing itself.**

Now let us consider how the principle of nature is established. We have discussed above how all things abide in their own entities and possess their own characteristics. When we analyze or understand one thing, we should know what particular characteristics it possesses. Then many different aspects of one thing can be separated out as its attributes by means of affirmation and negation, as explained in Buddhist Logic. As for affirmation, for instance, we can examine a pillar from different aspects such as being compounded, being produced, being impermanent, being existing, etc. In terms of negation, for example, we may say that a pillar does not substantially exist, that its shape is not an independent entity, etc. In brief, any existing thing can have infinite attributes, and as long as our conceptual thoughts and examinations have not disappeared, these attributes will not disappear.

Then, do these attributes exist on the thing's own entity? They should, on a conventional level. Take, for example this pillar, it can

have numerous attributes from the perspective of both affirmation and negation. But all these attributes do abide in the thing's own entity, as it is stated in the above quotation from *Pramanavarttika*.

**Verse 11**

**An object apprehended through direct perception,  
Is imputed with conceptual entities,  
That are seemingly separate and distinct,  
And are just distinguished by conceptual mind.**

When we perceive something by means of direct perception, we are perceiving the thing's own aspect. For example, when I see a pillar with my eyes, I have a complete vision of the actual form of the pillar; different parts of the vision appear clearly separate instead of mixed, and they appear so simultaneously instead of sequentially. When I analyze this object with a conceptual mind, from the perspective of its being impermanent, I establish a conceptual entity of "impermanence"; from the perspective of its not being non-produced, I establish a conceptual entity of "being produced", etc. On this object's own entity, I can establish the myriads of conceptual entities that seem to be distinct and separate.

According to the notion of "negation of others" in Buddhist Logic, although the actual entity of the pillar is one, we can conceptualize many entities and impute them on it. This is only possible when

we use a conceptual mind to analyze the object. In contrast, when we perceive an object with a non-conceptual mind, the object is perceived simply as it appears before us, and nothing more than the object itself is perceived.

Therefore, we must understand that, with a conceptual mind, we can conceptualize many entities upon the actual entity of one thing. Summarize many as one, and divide one into many — this is the feature of “negation of others”. In addition, when a conceptual mind perceives an object, it associates the general characteristics, both in form of name and in form of meaning, with the thing’s own characteristics together. For those who do not know the name of something, they still have the potential to associate the name with the thing’s own characteristics in the future.

### **Verse 12**

**Establishment of actual entities and of conceptual entities,  
Are the two modes through which  
All objects of knowledge are apprehended,  
And from there the multitudes are established.**

With our conceptual minds, we apprehend all things in the world through two modes, that is, the mode of actual entities and the mode of conceptual entities. What is an “actual entity”? An actual entity manifests itself on its own, independent from other things.

For example, when we see a pillar, it simply appears to our eye consciousness, independent from other causes. This is called an “actual entity”. Then, what is a “conceptual entity”? A conceptual entity is conceptually imputed due to other factors, or depending on other conditions, and it cannot manifest itself on its own. This is called a “conceptual entity”, or an imputed entity.

All objects of knowledge can be apprehended through the mode of actual entities and the mode of conceptual entities. The objects of knowledge perceived through the mode of actual entities can be categorized from four different aspects. The first aspect is whether they are able to function; all actually existing things are able to function, for the particular characteristic of actually existing things is to function. The second aspect is whether they are able to be affirmed as actually existing through reasoning; all existing things in the world can be affirmed by reasoning. The third aspect is whether they have perdurable continuum; all that we can directly perceive throughout samsara, in both the material world and the world of sentient beings, have perdurable continuum due to our strong habitual tendencies, therefore we think they are real. The forth aspect is whether they are able to independently manifest their general characteristics; all those actually existing things can manifest their general characteristics.

The objects of knowledge apprehended through conceptual entities can be summarized into four types. The first type is imputed things that are actually part of something else. For example, what we refer to as stinginess actually is a kind of craving. The second type is imputed things that are actually a stage of something, such as the fourteen types of “conditioned forces dissociated from thought” explained in the *Abhidharmakosa*. The third type is imputed things that are actually misconceptions. For example, the self does not exist, but many of us wrongly take the self to really exist. While we are carefully examining, we know that neither the self of things nor the self of persons exist. However, a moment later, we begin to think, “What am I going to eat now, porridge or something else?” and then start cooking a delicious meal for this “self”. This is a misconception, mistakenly perceiving the non-existent to be existent. The fourth type is one thing imputed as another thing. For example, because of his flat nose, the son of a Brahman is nicknamed “big lion”. He is in no way a lion. It is only the shape of his nose that looks a little like that of a lion. In India, some like to nickname others; those with a big nose are often called “elephant,” whereas others with a small nose are often called “lion”; but these individuals are not at all elephants or lions.

In summary, through the two modes of actual entities and conceptually imputed entities, we can comprehend all knowledge. The

concepts of actual entities, conceptually imputed entities and their relationships, cover all the related concepts in Buddhist Logic that are explained in *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, such as name, defined object, defining characteristics, as well as interrelation and mutual contradiction, establishment and negation of others. Yet, Mipham Rinpoche did not explain these concepts in detail here. In addition, an understanding of “object” and “subject” is indispensable for the study of Buddhist Logic and of correct reasoning. The topic of “object” includes things’ general characteristics and things’ own characteristics; “subject” is covered by direct perception and inference. With the help of these concepts, we can understand all things.

In the *Sword of Wisdom*, the former two principles, the principle of function and the principle of dependence, are not discussed in detail. Nor is the principle of nature explained in much detail. The main content covers the principle of establishment by proof, especially direct perception and inference, as well as the four reliances. I believe you will benefit a lot from learning this treatise. As Mipham Rinpoche says, all four principles come down to the principle of the natural state of things, which actually equals to the principle of nature. This is the way of natural laws. Either among the worldly people or among the Buddhists, no wise person would deny the laws of nature. Some people engage in too much improper



thinking, from which wrong views arise from time to time. This might bring on them some unfavorable situation. However, if one's thoughts contradict proper reasoning and go against the natural law, one must abandon them. In all ways, the Buddha's teachings and training do not contradict any truth in the world. We need to believe this, without harboring a single doubt.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF NATURE ON ULTIMATE LEVEL

### *12. From the Perspective of Emptiness on Ultimate Level*

#### Verse 13

Regarding the ultimate truth of all things,  
Observe their causes, effects, and their own entities:  
That which is able to bring about arising cannot be  
obtained,  
Nor is there anything that arises in dependence.

#### Verse 14

Although each manifests its individual entity,  
Their nature is indeed emptiness.  
The realm of reality of the threefold liberation,  
Is the very nature of the ultimate.

We have observed that, on conventional level, there exists a relationship of cause and effect. Without a cause, an effect cannot be produced. In order to be produced, an effect must certainly

depend on a cause. Hence, the production of an effect from a cause is an objective and natural law that cannot be denied. But here, our level of analysis presents some differences, for we engage it from the perspective of the ultimate, that is, from the perspective of emptiness. Our analysis distinguishes the three aspects of causes, effects, and entities and examines their ultimate nature in the following way.

Let us begin from the analysis of causes. On conventional level, the function of a cause to produce an effect is truly existent. But if we analyze a cause through the reasoning of the vajra-splinter put forth in *Introduction to the Middle Way*, must we say that it is a matter of self-production, other-production, production from both self and other, or causeless production? Self-production is impossible, for if something produces itself, then production would become endless. In the case of other-production there would also be faults such as flames can be produced by darkness, and so on. We will not discuss the method of analysis here, for in order to study it in detail we can refer to other treatises on this topic. To summarize, we will find that, when examined by the four alternatives, the principle about a cause that produces an affect cannot be established at all.

Let us further analyze effects. As stated above, effects are produced in dependence upon causes. Yet, let us engage the reasoning explained in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, which refutes

production of the existent and of the non-existent. Hence, (1) if effects are already existent, they cannot be produced again, for they are already there; (2) if effects do not already exist, then because of their non-existence, they cannot be produced, even if millions of conditions come together; (3) since existence and non-existence are mutually contradictory, effects cannot be both existent and non-existent, therefore, they cannot be produced; (4) there is no other possibility than existence and non-existence. By means of such analysis, we can completely refute the principle about an effect that its production depends upon causes, leaving it no ground to stand on.

Thirdly, in order to analyze the actual entity of all things, that is, the actual entity of causes and effects, as well as the actual entity of a thing itself, such as the heat of fire, let us engage in another reasoning taken from *The Ornament of the Middle Way*: the reasoning of neither one nor many. Is such entity one or many? Because what we call “one” is merely imputed by a conceptual mind, therefore, it cannot be truly established. If “one” cannot be established, “many” also cannot be established. Through such mode of analysis we thus discover that the actual entity of all things cannot truly exist.

As a result, causes do not exist, effects do not exist, and the actual entities of all things also do not exist. There is nothing in the world aside from these three. On conventional level, we can clearly

perceive their existence. But as we infer through a valid knowledge of the ultimate, they are indeed like empty space free from all conceptual thoughts, and in no way can we find their substantial existence.

In the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, and in *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, we find such three main types of reasoning. At the time of listening and reflecting, if we observe things employing these three types of reasoning, the certainty and conviction about their emptiness will arise in our mind. Emptiness is the real nature of all things, and there is nothing solid aside from this. On conventional level, there are all kinds of phenomena manifest, however, their appearance does not possess any substantial existence, like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a reflection. Through analysis, all such phenomena disappear into the realm of reality, and can in no way be established.

The fact that causes, effects, and actual entities do not exist is corresponding to the threefold liberation. Causes do not exist, hence “causes lack characteristics”; effects do not exist, thus “no expectation for effects”; and entities also do not exist, therefore “entities are empty”. This is true for all things. Such is what we call the realm of reality, that is, the real nature of the ultimate.

All things are of the nature of emptiness, but emptiness cannot be separated from the great luminosity. The state that appearance and emptiness are indivisible and in a perfect union which is free from all conceptual thoughts, is the way all things are. It is not a kind of state into which things are just turned by someone with super ability. There are sublime instructions on this topic in both sutrayana and tantrayana teachings. In the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, it is said

*Whether Buddhas come or do not come*

*Into the world, all things*

*Are empty by their nature.*

*And this is well described as their transcendent quality.*

Regardless of whether buddhas come into the world or not, the actual entity of all things remains emptiness, which is inseparable from the own being of all things. This is the real nature of the ultimate. Yet, such nature can be perceived directly only by those enlightened beings who enter the concentration of fundamental wisdom.

When the perceiving subject and the perceived object have not yet dissolved into the realm of reality, things do appear to the deluded mind of ordinary beings, which actually are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a reflection. The past and future lives,

karma, causes and effects also appear to be unquestionably existing. However, this is not the ultimate truth. Regarding the ultimate truth, the causes, effects, and actual entities of all things are of the nature of emptiness that is beyond conceptual thought. Even if thousands of sages in this world were here, they would not be able to refute this truth, just as it is impossible to deny that the nature of fire is heat on conventional level. Only when we understand the ultimate truth that there is no distinction between appearances and emptiness, will we be able to attain the state of the enlightened noble ones.

Today, many people do not understand conventional truth, let alone ultimate truth. This also applies to many Buddhists, including eminent monks of some major monasteries. To lack understanding of the ultimate is not surprising. Yet, to lack understanding of the conventional is quite unfortunate. Therefore, we should study this treatise deeply. You had better memorize this treatise, and also constantly reflect about its content. If you lack time to listen and reflect, I believe, with a thorough understanding of *The Sword of Wisdom*, your faith in the Buddha's teaching will still become unshakeable. On the one hand, this contains Mipham Rinpoche's great blessings. On the other hand, these teachings themselves are indeed sublime, and can greatly benefit the followers for certain.

## SUMMARY OF THE THREE PRINCIPLES

### *G3. Summary of the Three Principles*

#### **Verse 15**

**The principles of function and that of dependence,  
Are the natural laws of all existing things;  
Both of them come down to the principle of nature,  
Where no more reasons can be found.**

The principle of function and the principle of dependence are the way all existing things are, or in other words, the fundamental nature of all existing things. On conventional level, causes have the function of producing effects, while effects are produced depending upon causes. These are exactly the natural laws or things' conventional nature. Therefore, the principle of function and the principle of dependence end with the principle of nature.

If the principle of nature is already reached through analysis, then there is no further principle to seek, and there is no need to seek. For example, some may ask: "Barley seeds produce barley sprouts, and barley sprouts are produced from barley seeds. But what are



the reasons for this?" It is a waste of time to ask this question. There is no further reason to ask about, for such relationship of cause and effect is the way as all things are.

Sometimes foolish people ask: "Why is it that wholesome deeds produce happiness, but unwholesome deeds produce suffering? I don't believe it." If you don't believe it and continue to do unwholesome deed, you will believe it someday. There are many such people in our world, who know little about the principle of nature. If you know the principle of nature, when asked, "Why is heat the nature of fire?" you can tell them that no one has the answer. Let alone common people, even Einstein and Newton, the greatly admired scientists, are helpless in this respect. If you ask, "Hello, Einstein! Why is heat the nature of fire?" He would perhaps only say that this is the way the nature works. Aside from this, he would not bother looking for its reason. If he did, in the end he would be very confused, for he would not possibly come up with a satisfactory conclusion.

In today's world, many people put aside areas that deserve studying, but try to analyze those principles of nature that they should rather not study: "Why does virtue bear a virtuous reward, while non-virtue bears a non-virtuous reward?" "Why do barley seeds produce barley sprouts?" Some people may spend their entire lifetime in forests observing trees: "How many leaves does this

tree have? How many branches does that one has?" Some others travel everywhere holding a camera and taking photos of animals. Throughout their lives, they spend their entire time in this manner. Indeed, this is not necessary, for only authentic truths are worth studying. No one will be able to reach beyond the principle of nature, therefore it is not necessary to search its reason.

# THE PRINCIPLE OF ESTABLISHMENT

## BY PROOF

### *F2. The Principle of Establishment by Proof*

#### *G1. Brief Explanation*

##### **Verse 16**

**The principle of nature covered by the two truths,  
Can be verified by following corresponding reasoning.  
It is in accordance with the natural state of things,  
Hence, named the principle of establishment by proof.**

We have discussed the principle of nature on both conventional and ultimate levels, which are covered by conventional and ultimate truth. Scientists, who diligently pursue research in many areas, have made contributions on a great deal of topics. Still, their findings are no more than conventional nature of reality, without touching upon the ultimate nature of reality.

The ultimate nature of reality that appears to an enlightened being who has entered the concentration of fundamental wisdom is

far more beyond ordinary being's apprehension. These knowledge exhibit the extraordinary quality of Buddhadharmā and the inconceivable wisdom of the Buddha.

As for conventional nature of reality, there are also two kinds, one is directly perceived by ordinary beings through their five sensory faculties, and another is directly perceived by enlightened beings in their pure vision. What scientists have mastered is merely what ordinary beings see with sensory faculties, that is, the part of reality that lays before the vision of worldly beings. As of the other part of conventional nature of reality that appears in the pure vision of enlightened ones, scientists have little knowledge.

When engaged through a correct reasoning of the conventional and of the ultimate which agrees with reality, the conventional and the ultimate nature of things can be both established in a manner that is in accordance with the natural state of things. In what we've discussed above, the correct reasoning of the conventional includes the principles of function, dependence, and nature; the correct reasoning of the ultimate includes the reasoning that analyzes causes, effects and actual entities, namely, the reasoning that refutes production of the existent and non-existent, the reasoning of neither one nor many, and so on.

The meaning of “in accordance with the natural state of things” is that, the principles fully agree with the reality when examined with correct reasoning, and no one can tell any truth in opposition to these principles. Consider, for example, ultimate truth. When we employ the five kinds of reasoning of the Middle Way, or the eight kinds drawn from Longchenpa’s *The Wishing Gem Treasury*, the actual entity of all things is exactly emptiness and free from all conceptual elaborations. Such conclusion is in accordance with the natural state of things, and no one is able to refute it. Likewise, on conventional level, the real character of the myriads of things is also established in accordance with the natural state of things, and no one is able to overturn it. This is what we call the principle of establishment by proof.

These teachings are very important. In the future, some of you will be spreading the Buddhadharma. Suppose that there is no chance to lecture on such works as *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, or perhaps the audience does not understand them, or you cannot explain well their meaning. In that case, you can enlighten others with *The Sword of Wisdom*. For those Buddhists being well trained by modern education, it is better to guide them by means of Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way.

### **Verse 17**

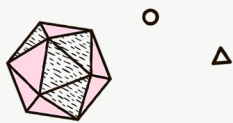
**For the manifest aspect and the real aspect of all things,  
Either their own entities can be seen through direct  
perception,  
Or, based on what is seen through direct perception,  
What is not seen can undoubtedly be inferred.**

The “manifest aspect” indicates appearances on the conventional level such as the heat of fire, while the “real aspect” is the nature of emptiness that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. The entities of the two can be both apprehended in two ways: direct perception and inference.

On conventional level, to see through direct perception is, for example, to see a red pillar with one’s own eyes. In contrast, to understand something through inference is, for example, to infer that there is fire on a mountain because smoke is seen directly, or to infer that the pillar is impermanent because it was produced. Therefore, on conventional level, there are two types of circumstances. Sometimes one can directly see the objects with their sensory faculties, that is, the conclusions can be reached by means of direct perception. Sometimes one cannot directly see the conclusion, but can reach it through inferential reasoning.

The ultimate nature of reality can also be established through direct perception and inference. Establishment by means of direct perception occurs when an enlightened being enters into the concentration of fundamental wisdom that is beyond all conceptual thoughts and is free from all grasping. The establishment of ultimate truth by means of inference is discussed in works such as the *Introduction to the Middle Way* and *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*. As one engages the common and uncommon types of reasoning of the Middle Way, one is able to thoroughly understand that all things are empty.

In this text, Mipham Rinpoche appears to have explained these principles in an extremely concise manner. However, many of us will actually be able to rely on these essential teachings to thoroughly understand these principles that were previously unclear to us. It is extremely important for us to understand these principles for both studying and practicing the Dharma. Otherwise, without understanding the basics of the teachings even after many years of study, it will be of no use no matter how well one can talk. If you truly understand these profound principles, you will not be deprived of the correct view in this lifetime. Even more, because you have planted durable habitual tendencies in your alaya consciousness, you will also never abandon your conviction in Mahayana Buddhism for lifetime after lifetime.



# Chapter Three

## KNOWING THROUGH DIRECT MEANS—DIRECT PERCEPTION

COMMENTARY ON *THE SWORD OF WISDOM*



# OVERALL EXPLANATION OF DIRECT PERCEPTION

## *G2. Extensive Explanation*

### *H1. The Principle of Establishment by Proof through Direct Perception*

#### *I1. Overall Explanation*

##### **Verse 18**

**Valid direct perception is of four kinds:**

**Unmistaken sensory direct perception, Mental direct  
perception,**

**Self-knowing, and yogic direct perceptions, all of which  
are non-conceptual,**

**Since they directly perceive the corresponding objects'  
own characteristics.**

The direct perception of the conventional and of the ultimate can be summarized into four kinds: (1) unmistaken sensory direct perception, (2) mental direct perception, (3) self-knowing direct perception, and (4) yogic direct perception.

The first kind is unmistakable sensory direct perception. It means, without being contaminated by any kind of delusive conditions, such as eye disease or the movement of a boat one is sitting on, one's sensory consciousnesses directly perceive the external object's own characteristics. For example, when I see a pillar with my own eyes, I have perfectly seen the real characteristics of the pillar on the conventional level without being influenced by any deluding condition. This is what we call unmistakable sensory direct perception.

The second kind is mental direct perception. With no conditions of mental illness affecting one's mind continuum, one is able to clearly discern the object directly perceived in the previous moment. This is what we call mental direct perception.

The third kind is self-knowing direct perception. Whether pervaded by a feeling of joy or pain, one is perfectly able to perceive this feeling itself, with no need to be told by others or to rely upon other conditions. This is what we call self-knowing direct perception.

The fourth kind of direct perception is yogic direct perception. When a practitioner, whether by means of meditation, or relying on the power of mantras, reaches a state that is beyond the sensory consciousness of ordinary beings, he or she will be able to know the

real reality of all things. This is what we call yogic direct perception, which may be further divided into many levels.

A conceptual consciousness takes as its object the object's general characteristics. In contrast, all kinds of direct perception take as their object only the object's own characteristics. Hence, all kinds of direct perception are completely free from conception. To be more precise, Buddhist Logic discusses three types of discrimination. (1) The first type is called intrinsic discrimination, which includes the minds and mental concomitants of all living beings. By this definition, sensory direct perception is included in intrinsic discrimination, for it does belong to minds and mental concomitants. (2) The second type of discrimination is the analytical discrimination. As discussed at length in the *Abhidharmakosa*, it includes the applied attention of coarse qualities and the analysis of detailed qualities. For example, to apply attention to a bottle means to know that this thing is a bottle, whereas to analyze it means to know the chips on the surface of the bottle as well as its fine patterns. (3) The third type is the discrimination that mixes names with what the names refer to. This is the discrimination that direct perception is free from. When direct perception perceives an object, it never mixes the object's own characteristics with its general characteristics. Indeed, direct perception clearly sees its own object the way as it is

without any discriminating thoughts. Or in other words, it is free from conception.

In the next two verses, we will discuss the faults of not having the four kinds of direct perception.

**Verse 19**

**With no direct perception,**

**There would be no evidence and hence no inference.**

**The perception of all things, including their arising from  
the causes,**

**And then their cessation, would become impossible.**

Here, the verse explains why the four kinds of direct perception are important. If there were no direct perception capable of clearly seeing an object's own characteristics, given the lack of evidence, there would also be no inference that draws its conclusions from it. In the *Commentary on Valid Knowledge* it is stated that the foundation of inference is direct perception. Without something that appears, there is no way to infer something hidden that is related with it. If we have not seen smoke on the mountain, we will be unable to rely upon smoke to infer the presence of the hidden fire. If the fact that the pillar is produced is not established, it will be impossible to rely upon this fact to infer its impermanence. Therefore, inference

must certainly contain a portion of direct perception, otherwise it is impossible to make conclusions about the hidden portion.

All in all, if there were no direct perception, the appearance of all things, such as sprouts being produced from seeds as their causes, and those sprouts' cessation in the very end, would be impossible. So any appearance and its corresponding cause-and-effect relationship must be based on direct perception. For this reason, we say that direct perception is crucial. Still, many do not grasp the concept of direct perception quite well, and so the conclusions they draw from inference are hardly satisfactory.

#### **Verse 20**

**If so, as for their emptiness and such,  
What do we rely on to understand it?  
Without relying on the conventional truth,  
It is impossible to realize the ultimate truth.**

From the perspective of the manifest aspect, or the valid knowledge of the conventional, we have illustrated how inference must rely upon direct perception. Without direct perception, the appearance of all things, as well as the conventional truth such that all phenomena are impermanence, cannot be established.

Likewise, if direct perception did not exist, it would also be impossible to know emptiness, for the knowing of emptiness actually

depends on appearances, and emptiness is the ultimate truth of appearance. In order to reach the ultimate truth through inference, we take those conventional things that we see as the objects. For example, although I can see this pillar with my own eyes, if I analyze it through the reasoning of Middle Way, it turns out to be non-existent, just like an illusion. Then I will know that the appearance of the pillar is emptiness, beyond all conceptual elaboration. Without appearance being perceived on conventional level, it will be impossible to attain a mere emptiness, because emptiness and appearance are inseparable. If all of the objects that we see and hear did not exist, then relying on nothing, it would become impossible to realize the ultimate truth of emptiness that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. Therefore, it must be relying upon direct perception that one can realize the ultimate truth through the conventional truth.

Say, for example, that I wish to point to someone the moon in the sky. If I don't use words or fingers to show him the moon, or, I have no hands or mouth but a mere intention, I have no way to show him anything. On the contrary, if I have a hand, then although my finger is not the moon in the sky, I will be able to point to him the moon with my finger and say, "Look! There is the moon in the sky." In such manner, this person will be able to see the moon, unless

he or she is someone of dull faculties, as Sakya Pandita once said, who does not look at the sky but only looks at the finger instead.

Hence, with no direct perception, it would be utterly impossible to introduce emptiness by any means. The realization of the ultimate truth entirely depends upon the conventional truth. If we have not realized the conventional truth, we will be absolutely unable to reach the ultimate truth that is beyond our conceptual thoughts. As Nagarjuna once said,

*Without recourse to the conventional,  
The ultimate cannot be shown.  
Without the realization of the ultimate,  
There is no gaining of nirvana.*

In his *Introduction to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti also stated,

*Conventional reality therefore becomes the means;  
And by this means, the ultimate is reached.  
Those who do not know how these two differ  
Err in thought and take mistaken paths.*

So one must take conventional truth as expedient means, through which ultimate truth will arise in one's mind. Otherwise, not knowing the distinction between the two truths, one takes the

wrong path following wrong thoughts. For example, some Vajrayana gurus make use of what a disciple directly see, such as a pillar or a bottle, to direct the disciple with a sort of expression, "This thing you are now seeing is. . ." With reliance upon such expedient means, the wisdom of ultimate truth arises in the mental continuum of the disciple.

Those who do not know how appearances are related to emptiness, and do not understand the two truths, will be in the very dangerous situation of having gone astray from the Buddhist path. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to understand the two truths and the relationship between direct perception and inference. Without this kind of understanding, it will be certainly difficult to grasp the essential meaning of emptiness.



## SENSORY DIRECT PERCEPTION

### *12. Specific Explanation*

#### *J1. Sensory Direct Perception*

##### **Verse 21**

**The consciousnesses produced relying on the five senses,  
Clearly perceive their own objects.**

**Lacking these sensory direct perceptions,**

**Just like a blind person, one would not know external  
things.**

The five consciousnesses, i.e., eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness and body consciousness, are produced through the five sensory faculties respectively, namely, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile faculty. These five consciousnesses clearly perceive their own objects. For example, depending on eye, colors such as white and red on a material object appear perfectly to an eye consciousness. This is what we call sensory direct perception.

Such sensory direct perception is necessary, otherwise everyone in the world would be just like the blind, or the deaf, for they would be utterly unable to know anything that exists in the world. Lacking the visual faculty, the blind are unable to see colors. Lacking the auditory faculty, the deaf are completely unable to hear outer sounds. Some people even lack bodily sensation, that is, their tactile faculty is damaged, such as the upper or lower part of a patient being paralyzed. Moreover, there are also people whose olfactory faculty or gustatory faculty is damaged, so they cannot smell or taste anything whatsoever.

Therefore, on conventional level, such sensory faculties and sensory direct perceptions are truly existent, and they are not merely imputed by language. If both visual faculty and eye consciousness did not exist and were merely imputed by language, then just like naming something, we could call a blind person with any beautiful words so that he or she could see external things. But this is not true.

By means of correct analysis, we can understand those things that we previously did not. It is as if something was kept inside a storehouse, and a person did not discover it until he lit a lamp. In the past, many people who did not receive a training in the doctrinal tenets did not know much about sensory direct perception and mental direct perception. But now, as we study Buddhist Logic we

know that on conventional level sensory direct perceptions do exist. In reliance upon sensory direct perception as well as inference, we will be able to know the fundamental nature of all things.

In our world, thanks to the blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas, we have obtained such authentic doctrines. At this time, we only have some understanding of the ultimate truth by means of inference. Yet, relying upon the instructions of the compassionate Buddha, if one engages in correct practice and follow in earnest with one's actions, everyone will be able to enjoy the unspeakable, sublime flavor of the ultimate truth. Everyone should place great confidence on this point. I believe that the more you listen and reflect, the more you will develop a trusting mind.

## MENTAL DIRECT PERCEPTION

### *J2. Mental Direct Perception*

#### **Verse 22**

**That which arises relying upon mental faculty,  
Clearly distinguishes both inner and outer objects.  
With no such mental direct perception,  
The consciousness that know all objects is missing.**

What we call mental direct perception refers to a mental consciousness that arises relying upon mental faculty, and that clearly knows both inner and outer objects. In the Tibetan language, the verb “distinguish” has the meaning of “know”, but it can also be explained as to judge or to decide. The mental direct perception perfectly knows all kinds of external material objects and internal objects. Those even bear no relation with the outer realm, such as dreams, can also be clearly known by mental direct perception. So capable of knowing both inner and outer objects, this kind of direct perception is called mental direct perception.

Without mental direct perception, one would still be able to perceive external objects such as color and sound through one's sensory faculty. However, one would be unable of knowing them in a comprehensive manner. This explains the necessity of the existence of mental direct perception.

All living beings do need the five sensory consciousnesses to know the external world, but moreover, they have to rely on mental direct perception to comprehend everything. We may compare mental direct perception with a household owner who is rather knowledgeable about the conditions of his own household, but who is also well aware of the outer conditions of his society and of his country. Or for another example, we could compare the five sensory consciousnesses with five professional workers who engage in different kinds of tasks. Each sensory consciousness only fits in its own tasks. For example, eye consciousness knows colors very well, yet it knows nothing about sound. In order to know everything about both inner and outer objects, one must rely on the "general manager" that is the mental direct perception.

## YOGIC DIRECT PERCEPTION

### *J3. Yogic Direct Perception*

#### **Verse 23**

**Having practiced adeptly according to the teachings,  
One ultimately clearly perceives objects by himself.  
Without yogic direct perception,  
One does not perceive the realm beyond the ordinary.**

Yogic direct perception arises when one practices in accordance with the instructions of the teacher and of the Buddha. First, one listens and reflects about the Dharma teachings. Then, one goes to a quiet place to meditate on the teaching by applying both samatha and vipassana. Finally, one attains a state that cannot be perceived by the ordinary eye or the ordinary conceptual mind. This state is what we call yogic direct perception. In this state, one is able to see all the appearances of external material objects, but not using the physical eyes. Meanwhile, one understands the minds of others, knowing all about their thoughts and mental condition, but it is

not by inference. This kind of state is unimaginable to us ordinary beings, for it transcends our level, but it does exist.

There are two kinds of yogic direct perception: (1) in-meditation and (2) post-meditation yogic direct perception. With in-meditation yogic direct perception, one unerringly knows the reality of emptiness of the person and of the phenomena. Post-meditation yogic direct perception means that, having emerged from meditation, a noble one is able to see the innumerable phenomena of the world. As the *Abhidharmakosa* puts it, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and buddhas, can see one million, one billion, and countless worlds respectively. In addition, yogic direct perception can be distinguished into categories in accordance with the ten stages of the bodhisattva path, or in accordance with the path of learning and the path of no-more-learning. For such distinct categories, one can refer to Sakya Pandita's *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*.

Yogic direct perception is totally beyond the ordinary world. The higher one's achievement of yogic direct perception is, the lower the realm of the world perceived by ordinary beings appear to him or her. In his *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*, Shantideva writes, "The views of ordinary beings are undermined by yogis." It means that the direct perceptions of the yogis can perfectly refute the realm of the ordinary world that is based on the sensations of eyes, ears,

nose, tongue and so on. So, without yogic direct perception, who is capable of knowing these realms beyond the ordinary?

In the *King of Samadhi Sutra*, the Buddha says, “If the senses could be relied upon, what need would there be for the path of the noble ones?” Supposing that sensory faculties were forms of valid knowledge, how would the noble path be useful? Our present eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, are not forms of valid knowledge. If they were, the noble path would be of no use. Hence, the existence of yogic direct perception becomes clear.

However, ordinary beings may not admit the existence of yogic direct perception. They believe only in the existence of what they can see with their own eyes. Hence, they reject categorically the existence of any realm that is subtle and profound. However, this is only the blind perspective of ordinary beings. As Chandrakirti says, what is seen by the eye consciousness of a person affected by cataracts cannot negate what is seen by the eye consciousness of a person who has no cataracts. Similarly, the realm of ordinary beings cannot damage the realm of yogins and sages. There is a great difference between the realm of an adept or a sage, and the realm of ordinary beings who are hindered by their strong negative karma and mental afflictions. For example, both an adept and an ordinary being meditate on impermanence. The ordinary being may just think about impermanence with a conceptual mind, while



the adept perfectly perceives the impermanent nature of all things. Thus, there is an essential difference between the two realms.

After listening and reflecting about these teachings, we should develop certainty about the sublime realm that is beyond ordinary beings' thoughts, and have no doubts about its existence.

## SELF-KNOWING DIRECT PERCEPTION

### *J4. Self-Knowing Direct Perception*

#### **Verse 24**

**Just as direct perception that perceives forms**

**Eliminates erroneous superimpositions in accordance  
with reality.**

**The mind has self-knowing direct perception, it knows itself.**

**Otherwise, it would need another mind, which ends up  
endless.**

When eye consciousness takes form as its object, it is able to know form in accordance with reality, and eliminate any erroneous superimposition about form. For example, relying upon healthy eyes, eye consciousness is perfectly capable of knowing that a conch is of white color, eliminating erroneous superimpositions such as the conch being yellow or of other colors. Likewise, relying upon the mind's own ability, with no need for any other conditions, we are perfectly capable of perceiving what there is in our minds, and eliminating erroneous superimpositions about our own minds

or about the thoughts that arise within our minds. This kind of perception is what we call self-knowing direct perception.

If the ability of self-knowing did not exist, then in order to know one's own mind, another mind is needed, there would occur the fault that an endless number of minds are needed. Why? With self-knowing, one is capable of perfectly knowing all about one's own mind. In contrast, without self-knowing, one needs another mind to know one's mind. In turn, this other mind will need another mind in order to be known. And so on, their number would become endless. As a result, knowing them would become impossible. Therefore, on conventional level, it is certainly necessary to posit self-knowing.

Mipham Rinpoche also said about self-knowing, "From the mere perspective of looking inward, self-knowing is self-clarity and self-awareness. It does not know itself by means of a perceiver and the perceived. Otherwise, it would be called other-knowing." Indeed, it is not difficult to understand self-knowing. In the ninth chapter of Sakya Pandita's *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, self-knowing direct perception is analyzed in some detail.

### **Verse 25**

**Therefore, the mind possesses an entity of clarity and  
knowing,**

**And just as it knows its objects,  
Can clearly know itself without depending on other  
conditions.  
Hence, it is called self-knowing.**

Mind greatly differs from external things such as vehicles, walls, pillars, and bottles in the way that external things are insentient, lacking an entity that is clear and knowing, but mind is capable of clearly knowing its own entity, without depending on any other condition. So mind possesses the basic character of clearly knowing itself. To be precise, what we call self-knowing is that, simply like an eye consciousness knows external form objects, mind clearly knows itself as it looks inward, without depending on anything. In his *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, Sakya Pandita says, "The consciousness that knows its own entity, is self-knowing direct perception, as the sages said."

In *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, it is also said,

*Consciousness arises as the contrary  
Of matter, gross, inanimate.  
By nature, mind is immaterial  
And it is self-aware.*

So excluding that which is the nature of the insentient, only there does consciousness arise, and that which is not of the nature of the insentient, is the self-knowing consciousness. In other words, consciousness can be established only to the exception of the nature of the insentient, which is the ability of self-knowing.

If the way of knowing requires a previous consciousness that knows a later one, or requires a later consciousness that knows a previous one, it would not be self-knowing, but other-knowing. Or else, suppose that one consciousness is the knowing subject, and that another consciousness is the known object. This, too, would not be self-knowing, but other-knowing. So the real self-knowing is an entity that is excluded from being insentient, and an entity that is clear and knowing.

When we employ the reasonings of the Middle Way to analyze the entity of self-knowing, by observing whether it happens simultaneously or not, on ultimate level self-knowing cannot be established at all. However, on conventional level, we have to admit its existence. As Mipham Rinpoche said, "If there were no self-knowing on conventional level, then seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing, would be damaged, therefore, one must certainly accept direct perception of self-knowing." To make a comparison, with no eye consciousness, all knowledge of forms would completely cease.

Similarly, with no self-knowing direct perception, the entity of clarity and knowing would also cease.

**Verse 26**

**While perceiving by means of other direct perceptions,  
That which determines them as actual direct perception,  
Is only self-knowing, without which,  
Reliance upon other is of no avail.**

While one perceives things relying upon the other three kinds of direct perceptions, it is only self-knowing direct perception that can determine these perceptions. If, without self-knowing, one relied on other means to know these perceptions, such as using eye consciousness or inference to know sensory direct perception, it would be impossible.

## SUMMARY

### *13. Summary*

#### **Verse 27**

**The root of inference is direct perception,  
And direct perception is determined by self-knowing.  
These all come down to unmistakable perception of mind,  
And there are no other ways of establishing them.**

The root of all kinds of inference, including inference by effect and inference by nature, is direct perception. In turn, direct perception is perceived through self-knowing. For example, when one infers the existence of fire by means of smoke, smoke must be established by means of direct perception, otherwise the existence of fire cannot be inferred. Furthermore, direct perception of smoke is determined by means of self-knowing. Therefore, the verses say, "These all come down to unmistakable perception of mind." Unmistakable perception of mind is exactly self-knowing. Aside from this, there is no other kinds of proofs or bases to establish direct perception or inference.

Therefore, any inferential reasoning must ultimately depend on one's direct perception, and direct perception ultimately comes down to self-knowing direct perception. With self-knowing, there's no need to search for other proofs. It is as if we saw and came into possession of an elephant. As a result, we would no longer need to track its footprints, and we would also no longer need to find out its characteristics, such as its color, from others.

### **Verse 28**

**Thus, it is based on non-conceptual,  
Unmistaken direct perceptions,  
That for anything that appears before one,  
All erroneous superimpositions can be eliminated.**

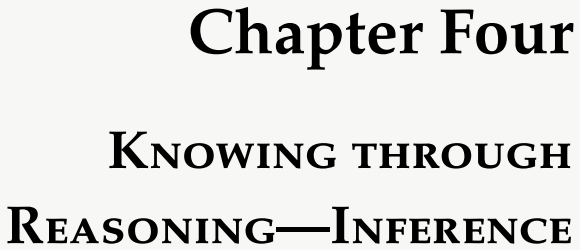
If one relies on unmistakable direct perceptions that are free from conceptual elaboration, that is, sensory direct perception, mental direct perception, yogic direct perception, and self-knowing direct perception, all doubts and erroneous superimpositions concerning an object appearing before one can be eliminated.

For example, we face a dilemma about the color of the utpala flower: is it white, or is it red? As soon as we see with our own eyes that the utpala flower is actually blue, we will have eliminated the erroneous superimposition of non-blueness by means of direct perception. To make another example, we suppose that someone is quite wealthy



based on the fact that he or she is wearing designer clothing. The fact that he or she is wearing designer clothing is seen by direct perception, whereas the hidden fact that he or she possesses a rich capital is known by means of inference, which dispels the erroneous superimposition of his or her lack of capital.

Not only are there hidden facts on conventional level, but the profound realm of the ultimate can also be known through inference. As it is said in the Middle Way, "All things lack self-nature, for they are free from being one or many." By means of direct perception and inference we know that both "one" and "many" are nonexistent. Therefore, we will reach a conclusion about the hidden part, that is, all things lack self-nature.



## COMMENTARY ON *THE SWORD OF WISDOM*

## THE MIND BEING USED TO INFER

### *H2. The Principle of Establishment by Proof through Inference*

#### *I1. The Elements of Inference*

##### *J1. The Mind Being Used to Infer*

###### **Verse 29**

**Perceiving objects' general characteristics,  
And associating them with names so as to know the  
    real objects,  
This is conceptual mind,  
With which one can perfectly utilize various names  
    and expressions.**

When we apprehend an object, we do so by associating the object's general characteristics with its own characteristics. For example, when we apprehend a pillar, we discern it by associating the mental image of the pillar in our mind, that is, the pillar's general characteristics, with the particular pillar outside that has its own characteristics. Here, the verses explain that we first grasp the general characteristics of an object with our mind, and then we

associate the name of this object such as “pillar” together with what the name expresses. Thus, we are able to know objects such as a pillar. This is how the conceptual mind works, it associates names and objects and identify them. Through this type of conceptual mind we can perfectly apply names and expressions in refuting or establishing things that actually exist.

The application of names and expressions goes along with “mind”, “name”, and “utilization”. For example, I have the mental image of a pillar in terms of its general characteristics: “Oh! This is a pillar.” This is what we call “mind”, that is, a conceptual mind. As the mental image of the pillar emerges from within my mind, I call it “pillar”, which is “name”. Once I have “mind” and “name”, I can then use them in practical activities, and this is called “utilization”. For example, a pillar has the function of supporting the roof beam, and we can “utilize” its function.

Relying on the conceptual mind that associates an object’s general characteristics with its own characteristics, people are able to analyze this object and determine its usage. This is a common way of refuting or establishing things, which is quite reasonable for worldly people. This part is very well explained in *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*.

### **Verse 30**

**To those who are not familiar with names and expressions,  
The objects' general characteristics can still appear to  
their minds.**

**Depending on a mind that is capable of associating them  
with names,**

**They thus adopt or abandon such objects.**

In our world, some sentient beings, such as babies and animals, are simply unfamiliar with names and expressions. Still, they possess a conceptual mind that is able to associate objects' own characteristics with general characteristics. For example, new babies might not know the name of "fire", yet once they know that fire burns, they are afraid of getting close to fire. When we bring them food, they might not know this is called "cookie" and that is called "milk", yet once they know that cookies and milk are edible things, they will gladly accept them.

Likewise, a yak does not know the name of "water", and yet, when thirsty, it will look for water to drink. Moreover, yaks will step back from dangerous places like mountain cliffs. Or when running into a car, a yak will never say, "A car has come my way, let's run, now!" It is unable to explain the meaning of the term "car". Yet it knows that this thing might bring harm and therefore will avoid the car.

Hence, a conceptual mind that associates an object's own characteristics with its general characteristics exists in the mental continuum of all sentient beings. Some sentient beings have no knowledge of an object's name, but their conceptual mind has the ability of associating a name with an object's general characteristics in the future. Relying on the conceptual mind, they pursue what they want, like a baby seeking milk, and avoid what they don't want, like a yak avoiding dangerous objects.

**Verse 31**

**Without a conceptual mind,**

**There could be no conventions for refutation**

**or establishment.**

**Therefore, inference and principles,**

**Could not be demonstrated to anyone.**

The conceptual mind is indispensable. Without it, "establishment", which includes inferring the existence of something in the world and proving what something is, would be impossible. "Negation", which is distinguished into affirming negation and non-affirming negation, would also be impossible. As a result, the inferential reasoning of Buddhist Logic, as well as the principles of grammar, medicine, and monastic precepts, would also be impossible to be established and be explained to others.

For example, when we study monastic precepts, and hear stories that explain the performance of unwholesome actions, we might begin to tremble with fear, and so we might think, "In the future, I must not perform unwholesome actions." When confronted with stories about performing wholesome actions, we might think: "This wholesome action brings about much merit, so I must certainly perform it." Indeed, these are all inferences achieved by means of a conceptual mind. Therefore, if the conceptual mind were utterly nonexistent, the entire world would fall into a pointless and confusing condition, for no principle could be established, no inference could be accomplished, and no hidden thing could be deduced.

The realm of the ultimate is beyond all conceptual thinking. But at the beginning we cannot completely do away with conceptual thinking, for we require it in order to understand those things that are hidden to us. Direct perception grasps its object of the current moment. The images and singularities of a perceived object appear in the exact way as they are, in a non-conceptual manner. While some things may be apprehended through direct perception, still other things must rely on inference.

Regarding the supramundane aspect, various teachings as well as practices in accordance with the principle of causality, must depend on conceptual thinking. This is also true regarding the mundane

aspect. For example, contemporary scientists engage in much reflection and research about future events such as earthquakes or other disasters. It would be impossible to carry out such research without conceptual thinking. Therefore, the conceptual mind is quite important regarding both the mundane and supramundane aspect.

### **Verse 32**

**Conceptual mind can evaluate, determine, and look for,  
Non-evident things such as those yet to occur.  
Without this ability to infer things conceptually,  
One would become like newborn infants.**

Having engaged in evaluation and inference by means of a conceptual mind, we can understand those things that are not evident. There are different kinds of conceptual minds. One particular kind is the conceptual mind of recollection, that is to say, memory. For example, I did something when I was a child, and now, with this kind of conceptual mind, I can recall these things. Some yogins endowed with superhuman powers can even recall their past lives. There are many stories in the Buddha casual stage that the Buddha knew hidden things from his many lives during previous cosmic ages.



I once had a visitor from abroad, who related some stories about his previous lives. At first, I wondered whether these stories were true. But later, I felt that he could genuinely recall his previous lives. On one occasion, he asked everyone around to step back. He would tell his stories to no one except to his master, a friend next to him, and myself. He said that about one thousand and two hundred years ago, he lived by the Qinghai Lake in a family of five. After his parents died, he took his two younger brothers with him to roam in the desert, where they led a rather hard life. At one point, they met a teacher who brought them to Lhasa, where they lived ever after. The man told his stories in a vivid, orderly manner, captivating my attention. He told stories about several lifetimes, and his memory of them seemed quite fresh. As I listened to his seemingly endless wanderings in samsara, at times I felt joy, while at other times I felt disgust.

Certainly, today many people claim to be able to recall previous lives. But it is hard to tell whether these stories are true or false, for some of these people have ulterior motives. Still, this man seemed genuinely able to remember his previous lives. He said that because of these very experiences he had no uncertainty about causality and samsara. In addition, he had offered the wealth he earned during an entire lifetime to charity and other funds. And so, in examining many of his ways of acting and speaking, I have

come to believe that what he told must be true. This, too, is an example of a conceptual mind of recollection.

Moreover, there exists one kind of conceptual mind that is characterized by pursuing, that is, the conceptual mind that pursues things in the future. For example, this mind wonders about future events such as what I will become in the future, how my business will develop in the future, what kind of position I will obtain in the future, what kind of friends I will have in the future.

There is another kind, namely the conceptual mind that explores and analyzes the truth of things. For example, we say: "The pillar is impermanent, because it is created." When we ask the question whether the pillar is permanent or impermanent, we are indeed using analysis with this kind of conceptual mind.

Furthermore, there are still other kinds of conceptual mind, such as correct conceptual minds and false conceptual minds. For example, a correct conceptual mind is a mind that sees a rope as a rope, whereas a false conceptual mind is a mind that sees a rope as a snake.

If without conceptual minds, inferences would be impossible, and then we would become like newborn infants, who do not have any knowledge about anything. One of my relatives, although he is over about fifty years old, looks in fact like a newborn. A while

ago, after his mother died, he knew nothing about what he had to do. “My mother died, what do I do now? Should I go myself to draw water or not?” On that occasion, many of my relatives wondered why he was so dull as if he was newborn while he was already a grown-up.

Today, many people do not have the slightest doubt about whether the past lives exist or not. They also have no single doubt about whether the future births and deaths in samsara exist or not. All they care for is the short span of a few decades in this very lifetime. If so, when it comes to answer crucial questions, these people will differ in no way from newly born infants. Therefore, as followers of the Buddha, it is very important to engage with our conceptual mind in reasoning and observation about the existence of past and future lives. People should not become like newborns when facing the most important things. This situation would not be ideal.

## THE REASONS BEING USED TO INFER

### *J2. The Reasons Being Used to Infer*

#### **Verse 33**

**Reasoning is to know something based on another.**

**With an establishable position,**

**And with both positive and negative logical pervasion,**

**When these three prerequisites are complete, it is an  
unmistaken reasoning.**

To understand something that is to be established by means of inference with a reason, is what we call reasoning of that which can be established. For example, with “smoke on a mountain” or the fact of “a pillar being produced” as the reason for inference, it is possible to reach the conclusion of the existence of fire on a mountain, or the reality of impermanence of the pillar.

When we engage inference, we must first verify whether the reason is true about the logical subject. If it is true, we say, “the position is establishable”, we then move to the second step in our verification, namely, asking whether there are positive and negative logical

pervasion. If the reason is not true about the logical subject, we say, “it is not establishable”, and consequently there is no need to observe positive and negative logical pervasion.

Take, for example, the following reasoning: “The pillar is impermanent, because it is produced.” First of all, the fact of being produced is true about the pillar. Therefore, the position is establishable. Secondly, if the pillar is produced, it must be impermanent, which means the positive logical pervasion exists. Thirdly, if the pillar is not impermanent, that is, the condition of being impermanent is reversed, the fact of being produced cannot be established. Therefore, there is negative logical pervasion. In this manner, when the establishable position along with positive and negative logical pervasion are complete, we say that the inference meets the three prerequisites. Hence, it is an unmistakable inference.

In the incipit of the first chapter of his *Commentary on Valid Knowledge*, Dharmakīrti says, “The establishable position and its pervasions, serve as an inference that includes three modes.” What this means is that the characteristics of a correct inference is that the three modes of establishable position, positive logical pervasion and negative logical pervasion are complete. In other words, inferential reasoning must rely on the existence of all these three

prerequisites. Hence, the reason and that which is to be proved have a relation of mutual existence and cessation.

**Verse 34**

**From the reasons,**

**Which are ascertained by direct perception,**

**Specific hidden things can be inferred.**

**Based on the relation between a reason and what is  
to be proved,**

As discussed above, inferential reasoning has its roots in direct perception. Based on the reasons that any of the four kinds of direct perception ascertains, we can know hidden things that we are unable to see through direct perception. For example, if you are well trained in Buddhist Logic, past and future lives, which are abstract and hidden things, can be ascertained when you engage analysis through scriptural proof and inference, and you will be fully convinced that people do have past and future lives, for this inference is entirely correct. It is unwise, for us and for others, not to agree with a valid inference of which three prerequisites are complete.

Clearly, many hidden things in the world require inference in order to be known. However, so many people in today's world simply

have no idea of what these principles of reasoning mean. For the objects that the six sensory consciousnesses, i.e., visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, along with mental consciousness, are unable to perceive, they treat them as mysterious phenomena, doubting and denying them, or believing that these things cannot be known. This is unreasonable.

There are also explorers who want to explore very profound things with conceptual minds and with measuring devices. However, this will not work in every case, and they will be disappointed. They spend large sums of money to improve the quality of their cameras. But even with a perfect camera, they cannot take pictures of things that are not objects of their cameras, such as previous and future lives. But if one is truly equipped with wisdom, through the valid reasoning one is able to know that, on the conventional level, previous and future lives exist, the inconceivable empowerment of the Three Jewels is not deceptive, and so on.

### **Verse 35**

**There are reasoning by the effect, reasoning by the nature,  
And reasoning concerning the nonexistent that negates  
something,**

**Including reasoning of non-observation, and reasoning of  
the observation of the opposite.**

**All reasonings belong to such three kinds.**

To prove something is true, inferential reasoning must depend on the relation between a reason and what is to be proved. In respect to establishment, there are two types of reasoning: reasoning by the effect and reasoning by the nature. Reasoning by the effect depends on a relation of cause and production. That is, it depends on the fact that one thing produces another that one can deduce a cause through its effect. For example, we say, "There is fire on the mountain, because there is smoke." Here, one infers the existence of fire, which is the cause, through the existence of smoke, which is the effect of fire. Reasoning by the nature, on the other hand, depends on a relation of the same entity. That is, one knows one thing through another thing because both of them abide in the same entity. We say, for example, "The pillar is impermanent, because it is produced." One thus infers the impermanence of the pillar through the reason of being produced. Both impermanence and the fact of being produced are of the same entity of the pillar.

Furthermore, in terms of refutation, reasoning can be of two types: reasoning by the non-observation of the entity, and reasoning by the observation of the opposite. Both of them belong to the reasoning concerning the nonexistent, which are employed in the negation of anything that is being refuted. As to the former, for something that must be visible as long as it exists, if it is not seen, then it cannot exist. For example, we take the following statement:



“There is not a bottle in front of me, because I have not directly seen one.” Here, the negation is performed through the reasoning of not seeing the entity. The other type of the negation of the existence of a phenomenon is performed through reasoning by the observation of its opposite. For example, we say: “I could not have a strong cold sensation, because of the presence of a strong heat sensation.”

In sum, all inferences are included in these three types of reasoning: reasoning by the nature, reasoning by the effect, and reasoning concerning the nonexistent. We can know hidden things thanks to these three kinds of reasoning.

## THE MODES BEING USED TO INFER

### *J2. The Reasons Being Used to Infer*

#### *K1. Division into Three or Six Types According to the Objects to Be Ascertained*

##### **Verse 36**

**Because in the ultimate reality, all appearing things,  
Are of equality by nature,  
With a pure mind one sees the pure reality,  
Thus one abides in the nature of purity.**

When we engage analysis by means of a valid knowledge of the ultimate, we will understand that, in the ultimate reality, all things are equal and pure by nature. Equality and purity are the real aspect of the ultimate and the real aspect of the conventional, respectively.

By means of the Middle Way's reasoning of vajra-splinter, or the reasoning of neither one nor many, or by means of certain reasonings of tantrayana, we will understand that, on the ultimate level, all things in samsara and in nirvana are indistinguishable

in the way that they are empty in nature, beyond all conceptual elaborations, free from the eight extremes, and cannot be grasped at all. This is what we call equality, or emptiness. The Buddha taught these principles concerning the ultimate reality in the second turning of the Dharma wheel.

Such equality has a real aspect on a conventional level, an aspect that is perceived by the pure mind of the enlightened beings. In particular, to a buddha's wisdom that knows the multiplicity of phenomena, or to a bodhisattva's wisdom emerging from meditation, the entities of all things take the real aspect of purity. Take an example of a bowl of water, the different beings of the six destinies do not see it exactly in the same way. A hell being sees it as burning molten iron which can burn skin and flesh. A hungry ghost sees a bowl of unbearably foul-smelling blood and pus. When human beings and the majority of animals see it, they regard it as real water that one can drink to assuage one's thirst. Because of their relatively light accumulation of unwholesome deeds, demigods and gods see it as the pure nectar. In the formless realm, some beings see it as mental consciousness, while others see it as empty space. A vidyadhara endowed with realization sees it as the Mother Buddha Mamaki. Finally, to a buddha's wisdom that knows the nature of all phenomena, there is nothing but the equality of the true reality that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. And to a

buddha's wisdom of multiplicities, it is the clarity of the pure realm of reality, yet such clarity is not something that one can grasp conceptually. From the perspective of true reality, the impure objects that we now see are indeed perfectly pure.

Today, in our degenerate times of the five impurities, the world that appears to us as impure is indeed a pure land to buddhas and bodhisattvas. In the *Essence of Clear Light* it is said: "Why is it pure? Because all buddhas and bodhisattvas see that which is pure." If someone maintained that the valid knowledge of buddhas and bodhisattvas is mistaken, but the valid knowledge of common beings is faultless, then, regardless of who spoke this statement, it would be inadmissible. A defiled consciousness cannot damage the undefiled wisdom of a noble one. Therefore, we should know that, on an ultimate level, all things are entirely empty and beyond all conceptual thoughts; and on a conventional level, what we deluded beings see is provisionally impure, while what the enlightened noble ones see is truly pure. It is just like that to someone who is affected by cataracts, a sea conch will always be yellow; whereas to someone whose vision is free from cataracts, the conch will be the white color. This is the real aspect of reality on a conventional level.

**Verse 37**

**Real things arise depending on conditions,  
Unreal things depend on conceptual imputation.  
Therefore, both the real and the unreal,  
Are inherently empty in nature.**

In our world, all external things such as pillars and bottles, together with things included in minds and mental concomitants, arise entirely depending on various causes and conditions. In contrast, uncompounded things such as empty space, or unreal things such as the son of a barren woman, are conceptually imputed by sentient beings. As stated in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, because real things arise entirely depending on causes and conditions, they are ultimately empty. And furthermore, conceptual things also do not truly exist because they are just imputed by conception. For example, the son of a barren woman does not essentially exist as a material substance. It is merely imputed by our conceptual minds through language. Hence, as one properly observes real things and unreal things in the world through wisdom, one will find out that in essence they are all empty.

However, many ordinary beings were never trained in Buddhist Logic or in the Middle Way, not to mention in the non-dual realm of purity and equality explained in the unsurpassed Tantrayana. These beings lack the understanding of the truth that all things

arising from causes and conditions are none other than emptiness. Therefore, they blindly pursue different things such as fames and wealth every day. Today, many people regard life, feelings, family, and work, as real things. Therefore, when issues arise concerning these things, they cannot let go of them, remaining obstinately trapped in delusion. The reason is, they do not understand that all things, compounded and uncompounded, real and unreal, are entirely empty and deceptive. Hence, people become continuously attached to things they regard as real, planting countless unwholesome seeds in their mental continuums, which, in turn, set them adrift in the endless ocean of samsara. Imagine, on the other hand, that these beings understood that things arise and cease depending on causes and conditions. They would then recognize these very things as unreliable, and so they would naturally no longer pursue them by all means.

Therefore, we must understand that from the perspective of ultimate reality, the entities of both real and unreal things are entirely empty.

### **Verse 38**

**In ultimate reality, the basis of emptiness,  
And emptiness itself are inseparable.**

**Therefore, appearance and emptiness are the one that  
is inexpressible,  
But can be known through individual's self-aware wisdom.**

As explained above, all things appearing to the five sensory consciousnesses such as pillars and bottles are entirely empty. In addition, nonexistent things that negate existing things such as no-pillar and no-bottle are also empty. Hence, emptiness and appearance are indeed inseparable. That is to say, on the ultimate level of the true reality, the basis of emptiness such as bottles and emptiness itself that negates the existence of bottles are the one and inseparable. When our eyes see these things, we regard them to be existent, but their real entities are indeed empty. Despite their emptiness, these things are inseparable from the natural luminosity of the realm of reality. This is the meaning of the statement that appearances and emptiness are the one and inseparable, which is also acclaimed in the *Heart Sutra*, where it says: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form; Form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form."

The limited and narrow conceptual minds of ordinary beings are indeed inadequate to conceive the true realm where appearance and emptiness are in perfect union. It is as if the dim light of a firefly is not comparable with the rays of the sun or the moon. In our present state, appearances are incompatible with emptiness, and

emptiness is incompatible with appearances. Therefore, the two cannot arise simultaneously. However, through one's faith in the teacher and in the Three Jewels, together with long and repeated cultivation, the non-dual wisdom perceiving the perfect union of emptiness and appearances will certainly arise in our mental continuum. Such is the specific state of the self-aware wisdom of the noble ones, as well as the inconceivable realm discussed in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*.

If our mental continuums always remain in an ordinary being's state, we will keep indulging in samsara with great pain and delusion. However, when wisdom and compassion that surpass our present situation arise through continuous efforts, we will understand how truly inconceivable the Buddhadharma is in power and in blessing. If we attain the realization through practice, no one will overturn our states, and we will also come to know that we have gone beyond the samsara of living and dying. I believe such achievement can happen in everyone's mental continuum.

## ***K2. Division into Four Types According to the Modes of Establishment***

### **Verse 39**

**All types of establishment,**

**Summarize as proofs of existence and being.**



## **All types of negation,**

### **Condense into negation of existence and being.**

As for the views concerning the knowable objects of the world, their establishment can be of two types: proof of something's "existence", and proof of something's "being". In contrast, the negation of all kinds of views can be summarized into "nonexistence" and "nonbeing".

First of all, when we establish a view, or affirm something, it must be either through its "being", namely through the phrase "it is", or through its "existence". Aside from these two, there is no other mode of affirmation or establishment. For example, we say, "There is fire on the mountain, because there is smoke." Accordingly, this reasoning by the effect establishes that "there is" fire, namely the "existence" of fire. On the other hand, we say, "The pillar is impermanent, because it is created." And this reasoning by the nature, in turn, establishes that the entity of the pillar "is" impermanent.

Secondly, all types of negation or refutation are performed by either "nonbeing", namely through the phrase "it is not", or by "nonexistence", namely by saying, "there is not". Likewise, there is no other mode of negation aside from these two. For example, we say, "There is no bottle before my eyes, because it was not

seen by my direct perception.” Or, we say, “A cow is not a bottle, because it does not possess the particular characteristics of a bottle.” Therefore, regardless of whether we engage negation through direct perception or through inference, negation has to be performed by positing “nonexistence” or “nonbeing”, and these two modes encompass all possible meanings of negation. To translate this into Buddhist terms, we call “negation of existence” all negations that take the phrase “there is not”, while we call “negation of being” all negations that take the phrase “it is not”.

### *K3. Division into Two Types According to the Manners of Application*

#### **Verse 40**

**Relying on valid knowledge,  
Having established reasonings of establishment and  
negation,  
One can also logically explain to others  
Such establishment and negation.**

#### **Verse 41**

**To refute another’s points, one then either employs  
An autonomous syllogism with three referential modes,  
Or, uses what is accepted by the opponent,  
To disprove it with consequentialist arguments.**

We must refute illogical reasoning or establish logical reasoning by means of unmistakable valid knowledge. In establishing or in refuting, we first correctly understand the subject that is under our observation by means of direct perception or inference. Only afterward do we establish our own logical views or negate the opponent's illogical views. This is what Sakya Pandita, in his *Treasure of Valid Knowledge and Reasoning*, discusses as inference for oneself and inference for another. A logical view is established in the mental continuum of oneself or another by means of autonomous syllogisms. On the other hand, in refuting the other's view, there are two methods of negation. The first method employs autonomous syllogisms with three inferential modes. With the second method, though the three elements are not complete, the opponent's assertions are taken as reasons to articulate the consequences.

In employing inference for another, at first, invalidate the opponent's wrong view, and then establish the correct view in his or her mind by means of an autonomous syllogism.

## THE VALID KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONVENTIONAL

### *I2. The Classification of Inference*

#### *J1. Classification*

##### *K1. The Valid Knowledge of the Conventional*

###### **Verse 42**

**As for the conventional level, there are two types of  
valid knowledge,  
That in which reality and appearance are identical or  
different  
Based on pure vision,  
Or impure worldly vision.**

###### **Verse 43**

**These two types of conventional valid knowledge  
Are like seeing with divine and human eyes.  
The differences between these two,  
Lie in their entity, cause, effect, and function.**

There are two types of conventional valid knowledge. In the first type, reality and appearance are not identical, where the appearance is what is seen by a valid knowledge of worldly vision, that is, by the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile direct perception of ordinary beings, or to what they know through inference. The second type is the more profound and purified aspect, where reality and appearance are identical. This is the true conventional reality which is not visible to ordinary beings, for it can only be known by means of an enlightened being's valid knowledge of pure vision. To return to the example of the sea conch, the yellow color is seen by the eyes of a person affected by a cataract, the white color, proper to the conch, can only be seen by someone whose eyes are not damaged. So in seeing the white color of the conch, reality and appearance are identical, while in seeing the yellow color, reality and appearance are different.

Therefore, the two types of conventional appearance are apprehended by means of an impure valid knowledge of worldly vision, and an unstained valid knowledge of pure vision. A valid knowledge of worldly vision includes both direct perception and inference. The objects seen by enlightened beings through their pure vision are entirely different from the objects that ordinary beings see.

These two types of valid knowledge resemble what is seen by humans and by gods. We have employed the example of the bowl of water, seen in many different ways by different beings such as humans and gods. Not only do gods see their own realm, but they also see the domain that is visible to humans. From this perspective, their vision is like a valid knowledge of pure vision. A noble one's valid knowledge of pure vision sees the illusory phenomena, such as a red pillar, that appear to us deluded beings. Meanwhile, a noble one's valid knowledge of pure vision also sees the purified domain of conventional reality. In contrast, human eyes only see their own domain, the ordinary things such as a pillar, but is utterly unable to see the subtle and pure realm of reality behind these things. So when we observed a bowl of water, as humans, we only see water but do not see divine nectar, let alone Mother Buddha Mamaki. Such is the disadvantage of the valid knowledge of worldly vision.

The message of this verse is extremely important. In general, treatises in Buddhist Logic such as the *Treasure of Valid Knowledge and Reasoning* and the *Commentary on Valid Knowledge* only discuss the valid knowledge of worldly vision, while they do not mention the valid knowledge of pure vision. Very few sutrayana works discuss this topic as clearly as *The Sword of Wisdom* does. Many

teachings from tantrayana are indeed included in the present treatise directly or indirectly.

In Samantabhadra's *King of Aspiration*, it is said, "In a single dust mote, there are worlds equal in number to dust motes." A noble one's valid knowledge of pure vision is perfectly able to see this. In contrast, an ordinary being's valid knowledge of worldly vision can only see the coarse but not the finest particles. Certainly, as taught in Buddhist Logic, a valid knowledge of worldly vision is still a type of valid knowledge for ordinary beings. Indeed, an ordinary being's valid knowledge is considered valid just because it is not deceptive for the ordinary phenomena. Yet, it does not count much when compared with a noble one's wisdom. In all events, for the time being, we can only consider it valid in this manner. For example, although a sea conch is white, until the eyes of a person affected by cataracts get better, all he sees is a yellow conch. Nevertheless, in so far as this person sees that conch, it does not mean that he has not seen a conch at all. It must be clear to us ordinary beings that the real conventional reality is not the way we now see things are. Until we reach a definite attainment, we will be unable to see it.

There are many instructions on this topic. For example, Mipham Rinpoche explained this topic clearly in his *Essence of Clear Light*. Once we have grasped the difference between the valid knowledge

of pure vision and the valid knowledge of worldly vision, we will be able to further understand the views of tantrayana teachings expounded in such works as the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*. Indeed, the views of the tantrayana teachings and the profound sections of the sutrayana teachings such as the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra* are mutually inclusive.

To most people, this topic may be difficult to grasp. Still, it would be good even if we only understand the valid knowledge of worldly vision. Without Buddhist Logic, most people do not get even the valid knowledge of worldly vision, and they have no idea about direct perception or inference. Hence, their ways of acting will be based entirely on their own individual conceptual minds. There are many of such deluded beings in our world.

In studying the present treatise, we will know the following. We are able to realize part of the reality through our own valid knowledge. As for the remaining part, although we are now unable to realize it, we will have reason to believe that there is certainly something purer behind what we see now. Suppose, then, that the person who is affected by cataracts is a wise person. No matter how he looks at the conch, all he sees is the yellow color. Yet, thanks to reasoning, he perfectly knows that, “When my eyes get better, I will then see the white conch.” Deep in his heart, he has such unshakeable confidence. Along the same line of reasoning, although we have



not yet attained the realization that everything is entirely pure, all we should do now is to continue untroubled in our efforts. Eventually, there will be one day when we, too, will be like a noble one. At that time, from the perspective of the real entity of things, we will realize all things are empty, while from the perspective of their appearance, we will clearly see the domain of their purity, which are the true aspect on the conventional level.

Next, we will discuss the differences between valid knowledge of worldly vision and valid knowledge of pure vision, distinguishing them from the four perspectives of entity, cause, effect, and function. First, we will analyze valid knowledge of worldly vision.

#### **Verse 44**

**As a mind that is non-deceptive concerning worldly truths,  
It arises from the perception of objects according to reality.  
With respect to objects of worldly vision, it eliminates  
all misconceptions,  
And perfectly apprehends the given object in  
corresponding context.**

A valid knowledge of worldly vision is a type of mind that is non-deceptive in the apprehension of worldly truths concerning knowable objects that are objects of direct perception and inference. Hence, the verse says, “a mind that is non-deceptive concerning

worldly truth.” It indicates that, compared to the objects of valid knowledge of pure vision or of valid knowledge of the ultimate, the objects of valid knowledge of worldly vision are relatively real, as they only appear in the ordinary world. So the entity of a valid knowledge of worldly vision is a type of mind that is non-deceptive with respect to the appearances of this ordinary world.

For example, from the perspective of direct perception, when I look at a blue cloth with my eyes, what I see is indeed correct. In respect to the blue cloth, my consciousness will not be a deceptive subject. Hence, it will be a valid knowledge of worldly vision. On the other hand, from the perspective of inference, when I engage the reasoning that the pillar is impermanent because of being produced, the entity of the pillar is indeed impermanent. Substantially, there is no deception on this point, and the analysis by my conceptual consciousness is correct. This type of subject is called inference. A consciousness of direct perception and an inferential consciousness are thus called valid knowledge of worldly vision. As it is said in Buddhist Logic, direct perception and inference are both types of non-deceptive consciousness.

What is the cause of a valid knowledge of worldly vision? Direct perception arises when the six unmistakable sensory faculties and their respective objects come together, and as a result, these objects’ own characteristics are perceived. In other words, the cause of direct

perception is the coming together of such causes and conditions as the sensory faculties and their respective objects. On the other hand, inference is a consciousness that arises when reasoning is endowed with all necessary conditions. For example, when we infer the existence of fire on a mountain through the presence of smoke, we call the knowing subject inference. Therefore, the cause of inference is unmistakable reasoning.

Further, what is the function of a valid knowledge of worldly vision? From the perspective of inference, its function is to eliminate misconceptions such as taking something for what it is not. For example, the pillar is indeed impermanent, but some people doubt that it is actually not impermanent. Then we help these people understand the impermanence of the pillar through a correct syllogism, so that their earlier misconception is eliminated. From the perspective of direct perception, for example, the object being perceived is indeed a white cloth. But, because of cataracts, we mistakenly regard it as a yellow cloth. If we eliminate the cataracts and perceive the white cloth, the eye consciousness will have thus eliminated the misconception that the cloth is yellow. Therefore, the function of the valid knowledge of worldly vision is to eliminate misconception concerning objects in this ordinary phenomenal world.

What is then the effect of a valid knowledge of worldly vision? It is to perfectly apprehends a given object in corresponding context without mistakenly taking it for other objects. If we understand what a valid knowledge of worldly vision is, we will avoid mistakes. For example, past and future lives are existent. Still we may regard them as nonexistent. Thanks to reasoning, we then come to believe in the existence of past and future lives, thus eliminate this wrong view. Hence, the view that matches the relative truth arises and we perfectly hold such view. This is the effect of a valid knowledge of worldly vision.

In general, all cognition and analysis in the world is possible thanks to the valid knowledge of worldly vision. Today, if scientists are able to reach correct conclusions by engaging analysis, it is thanks to the valid knowledge of worldly vision. Some conclusions, for example, on chemistry reactions or atomic structure, are reached through direct perception relying on scientific instruments. Some others are reached at a later time thanks to applied valid reasoning. Certainly, there exist two kinds of reasonings. As discussed above, the first kind is reasoning endowed with sufficient evidence and meeting the three prerequisites. The conclusions reached through this syllogism are one hundred percent correct. For example, although astronomers might be unable to see things for themselves, through reasoning and calculations they may predict the occurrence of some

events or some transformations in the future, which eventually become true.

On the other hand, the other kind of reasonings are the incorrect ones. For example, some diviners predict the occurrences of such future events as wars and earthquakes, creating a state of anxiety among people. Some of our Buddhist friends like to read these things. Once a Buddhist friend wrote me a letter. He claimed that a war would certainly break out after some years. He said many things, such as how I should escape the affected areas. In any event, most of it was the nonsense of some diviners, and simply provided groundless fears. Diviners do not possess an unerring valid knowledge of worldly vision. If they had it, they can reach absolutely precise conclusions about past and future without any mistake, just like what Dignaga and Dharmakirti did by inference. So as practitioners, we should not pay attention to such invalid reasoning. Having studied the philosophical doctrines, we should be able to make our own choices, and should not live in worry and fear every day.

Still today, many people in the world do not study what should be studied. On the contrary, they study what should not be studied. In many countries, people spend their entire lives on things that truly lack any purpose. They waste their lives, without giving them real meaning. We now have this precious human body, extremely

difficult to obtain. Therefore, we must work hard to listen, reflect, and meditate. And if we lack the capability to listen and reflect on big treatises, as Mipham Rinpoche once said, raising an important point, we should at least chant mantras and adamantine words that were handed down to us by the great masters of the past, and train our minds by applying the proper instructions. Apart from this, in our short human life, most conceptual thoughts of today's world have no true meaning to us.

In the foregoing, we have discussed the valid knowledge of worldly vision. We will now turn to the valid knowledge of pure vision. We will also explain its content from the perspective of the four aspects of entity, cause, effect, and function.

#### **Verse 45**

**The extensive and vast wisdom,**

**Arises from apprehending the nature of reality.**

**In respect to the objects that are beyond conception, it**

**eliminates all misconceptions,**

**And has the wisdom that knows all phenomena as its result.**

The valid knowledge of pure vision is essentially an “extensive and vast wisdom”. It is a wisdom that comprehends in an undeceiving manner the extensive and vast objects of knowledge. In their realized states buddhas and bodhisattvas possess a wisdom

that knows all phenomena. With such wisdom, they understand numerous things in the vast realm of knowable objects, which common beings are absolutely unable to grasp. This is similar to those endowed with knowledge of past lives who see many things from past lives; those endowed with divine vision who see things that common people are unable to see, such as the entire realms of demons and gods, or innumerable beings in the water that Purna, one of the Buddha's great disciples, clearly saw.

In addition, the Buddha directly perceives that in a single mote of dust there are innumerable worlds and tathagatas, and each single moment contains billions of eons of past and future. The inconceivable merit and wisdom of all buddhas such as these, as well as the profound truths of all things of the world, can all be known through the valid knowledge of pure vision. This type of wisdom indeed exists, but is beyond our conceptual minds.

What is the cause of the valid knowledge of pure vision? The main cause is the concentration of fundamental wisdom. First, a noble one absorbs into the concentration of fundamental wisdom, abiding in a state beyond all conceptual elaborations. Arising from meditation, he or she knows all the things of the world as if they were in the palm of his or her hand.

Certainly, it is very difficult for common beings to possess the valid knowledge of pure vision right at this moment. However, through listening, reflection, and meditation, it is possible to have a rough idea in the form of general characteristics about the purity of all things. Although their divine eye might not be open yet, those who listen, reflect, and meditate on the Middle Way or on Vajrayana, will know things that common people cannot grasp, such as the subtleties of the mind, or the emptiness and purity of all things in the world.

For example, ordinary people think that a pillar exists in a permanent way. But as we study the philosophical doctrines, we know well that a pillar is momentary and impermanent. In terms of this particular view, we are already beyond the common people of the world. Similarly, those who have studied genuine Buddhist works know, and therefore hold the views, that the entire structure of the human body is unclean and that samsara is suffering. In contrast, those who never studied the philosophical doctrines persist in thinking that the human body is clean and attractive and that samsara is delightful.

In several of his profound instruction works, Mipham Rinpoche emphasized that the valid knowledge of the conventional must be classified into these two types. If not so, the views of the valid knowledge of pure vision could not be subsumed under any type



of valid knowledge. It cannot be grasped by direct perception or inference of ordinary beings. Hence, it is unreasonable to subsume it under the valid knowledge of worldly vision. On the other hand, it is also unreasonable to subsume it under the valid knowledge of the ultimate, either the seemingly real or the real ultimate truth.

These precious instructions handed down by the lineage masters are indeed sublime, but some people do not clearly understand their profound meaning. If you grasped its profound meaning, it would truly be an invaluable and precious wish-fulfilling gem. However, without grasping the meaning and just resting on a mere literal level, it is not so helpful. It is like in the field of electronics. If you do not know theory, when the result of your measurement presents some variables, you will be at a loss as to what to do. But if you know theory, you will handle matters with ease regardless of variations or different kinds of environments. On a similar account, in the Buddhadharma, and especially in the Middle Way and Buddhist Logic, it is necessary to have a specialized knowledge. When you genuinely understand the valid knowledge of the ultimate and of the conventional, as well as the valid knowledge of pure vision and of worldly vision, regardless of your environment, you will not be mistaken in respect to the examination of any phenomenon. Once you have made these views relevant to yourself, whether you are in the West or in the East, you

will be able to enter into mutual contact with different cultures. In comparing their perspectives with your own Buddhist perspective, you will be able to point out which of their views are inadequate. In such a manner, your views, too, can adapt to different cultures and regions.

What is the function of the valid knowledge of pure vision? It is to eliminate all doubts and misconceptions in respect to the objects that are impossible to perceive for the valid knowledge of worldly vision. Today, scientists believe that things that we are completely unable to perceive with our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, do truly exist. For example, according to legend, somewhere in the United States there was a gathering of spirits. And these spirits were perceived by someone's direct perception. But when scientists tried to take photos of them they could find no spirit whatsoever. In turn, scholars in the medical and psychological sciences came to the conclusion that there was indeed something uncanny about this place. Still, human eyes saw nothing there, and cameras, together with experimental instruments, were also proved useless. Current scientific knowledge has found it impossible to provide an explanation. Indeed, with a valid knowledge of pure vision, the understanding of these events would have been as easy as falling off a log. In sum, the function of the valid knowledge of

pure vision is to ascertain by means of transcendental wisdom things that common beings are usually unable to see and hear.

In today's society, with no understanding of the valid knowledge of pure vision, many research problems will end up with a question mark, remaining unresolved mysteries. These worldly beings look truly in distress, for no matter how much effort they put into research, they only engage it with a conceptual mind, and no matter how long they seek to uncover a result, they are still unable to do so. It is as if one tries to pierce a rock with a wooden peg, but it is in vain even when the wooden peg gets damaged. In fact, even though you may have not achieved the valid knowledge of pure vision, once you have understood it, you will have a means to solve all sorts of problems.

The result of the valid knowledge of pure vision is to possess the wisdom that thoroughly knows the conventional truth of all things, namely, the wisdom that knows the multiplicity of phenomena that is attained at the time of the resulting state of buddhahood.

These teachings are quite crucial for our study and practice. When I relate stories or simple teachings about cause and effect many people look extremely interested. But if I teach slightly deeper aspects of doctrine they lose interest, and begin napping. Today,

people who have obtained degrees at higher institutions are burdened by conceptual thoughts. They regard themselves as very wise. But when they encounter the doctrines of Buddhist Logic or the Middle Way, they would feel as if their own wisdom fails to keep pace. On one occasion, someone even told me, "It would be good enough if you taught simple teachings on a daily basis. You should not teach the Middle Way or Buddhist Logic. These topics are too profound, and today no one discusses such deep teachings any longer." Indeed, we should not limit our study to the instructions for beginners. We should further our study with the profound instructions of the Middle Way and Buddhist Logic, and with the even more profound instructions of Vajrayana. The benefit that many people can gather from these instructions is truly inconceivable. In particular, a few stories about the retribution of cause and effect will not be enough to satisfy the aspirations of individuals who already possess a certain level of wisdom and a trusting mind. In examining such profound instructions, the attitude in one's mental continuum will certainly undergo a transformation. Therefore, we should all pay great attention to such profound teachings.

## THE VALID KNOWLEDGE OF THE ULTIMATE

### *K2. The Valid Knowledge of the Ultimate*

#### **Verse 46**

**There are two types of ultimate truth,**

**Seemingly real and real ultimate truth.**

**As for the subject contemplating the ultimate truth,**

**Its valid knowledge also becomes twofold.**

There are two types of valid knowledge of the ultimate: seemingly real and real ultimate truth. Seemingly real ultimate truth can be analyzed by the common beings of the world, for example, when we say that the pillar is nonexistent, that it is empty. What is meant here by the term empty is that something does not exist after being examined. In other words, it is mere emptiness that negates the extreme of existence. In this sense, it is called seemingly real ultimate truth, or simile ultimate truth.

From the worldly perspective, the seemingly real ultimate truth is necessary. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have regarded all the phenomena of the world as truly existent. Yet, having

engaged the reasonings of the Middle Way to examine them, we know well that all such things are nonexistent. For example, everyone believes that the “I” exists. But upon analysis we know that the “I” is utterly nonexistent. This is the no-self of persons taught in the common vehicle, the realization of which is already quite extraordinary. The level of “emptiness” where the “I”, or the bottle, simply do not exist, is called “mere emptiness”, which is also what we call seemingly real ultimate truth. Compared with the view that regards all things in the world as existent, seemingly real ultimate truth is supreme, for it destroys the clinging to the illusion that since beginningless time, regards “I”, and all things, as truly existent.

Real ultimate truth is ascertained in the same way as in Nagarjuna’s *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, where all things are free from the four extremes and the eight elaborations, and where there is absolutely no trace of conceptual elaboration — It is not existence, it is not nonexistence, it is neither existence nor nonexistence, it is also not not-existence neither not-nonexistence. In this ultimate true reality, all things are free from linguistic expression, conceptual elaboration, illusory thought, and attachment, and further, no single thing is existent, and yet no single thing is nonexistent, too. In reference to real ultimate truth, there is no other way for common beings to express it other than by the word “inconceivable”. It

is similar to a blind person's attempt to describe the shape of an elephant, which is impossible. This realm is what we call real ultimate truth.

Precisely because both seemingly real and real ultimate truth are present on the entity of things, the wisdom that apprehends it also divides into a valid knowledge of seemingly real ultimate truth and a valid knowledge of real ultimate truth. These two types of valid knowledge are very necessary. Without them, it would be impossible to know these two types of ultimate truth. In the *Ornament of the Middle Way*, it is said,

*Since with the ultimate this is attuned,*

*It is referred to as the ultimate.*

*And yet the actual ultimate is free*

*From constructs and elaborations.*

The former two lines explain seemingly real ultimate truth, while the latter two explain real ultimate truth. Because it accords with ultimate truth, it is called the ultimate truth. In ultimate reality, however, it is entirely free from conceptual elaborations, hence it is called real ultimate truth.

It is necessary to distinguish between seemingly real and real ultimate truth. Without this distinction, it would be impossible to

grasp the correct meaning. In the *Treasure of the Middle Way*, it is said, "If, in this regard, there were no staircase which is the real conventional truth, wishing to climb the palace of ultimate truth, would become illogical to the sage." What this means is that we must possess the staircase of the seemingly real ultimate truth. Without this staircase of mere emptiness, we will be utterly unable to climb the palace of real ultimate truth. From the perspective of the sage, it would be illogical. This is the reason why in the Middle Way one first analyzes mere emptiness, and only after that does one examine the emptiness of the real ultimate truth that is free from the four extremes and the eight elaborations. So, we must all understand how ultimate truth divides into these two types. In many of his works, Mipham Rinpoche proposes this type of analysis with skillful instructions.



## SUMMARY OF THE TWO VALID KNOWLEDGES

### *J2. Summary*

#### **Verse 47**

**Relying on the former, one reaches the latter.**

**Like impaired vision that is healed and made pure,**

**When the eye of valid knowledge is fully developed,**

**One clearly sees the truths of purity and equality.**

In the foregoing, we have discussed the valid knowledge of the conventional and the valid knowledge of the ultimate. We explained that the valid knowledge of the conventional divides into the valid knowledge of worldly vision and the valid knowledge of pure vision. As for the valid knowledge of the ultimate, we illustrated its division into valid knowledge of seemingly real ultimate truth and valid knowledge of real ultimate truth. How can these four types of valid knowledge be realized? As stated in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, it is in the manner of the production of a later effect from an earlier cause.

This can be compared to the situation of the people who have cataracts. Through such medical treatment as drugs, as the cataracts are gradually removed, external objects will become increasingly clearer. Once the illness of the eyes is completely healed, external forms can be seen with great clarity. Likewise, as beginners we should first gain a clear understanding of direct perception and inference, and these are the very basic knowledge in Buddhist Logic. Subsequently, with the aid of scriptural authority we should then develop certainty about the valid knowledge of pure vision. In this manner, we will have grasped both the valid knowledge of pure vision and the valid knowledge of worldly vision. Furthermore, as for the valid knowledge of the ultimate, we should first gain initial understanding of mere emptiness. In due course, we will move further to develop certainty, and to generate faith, about the ultimate meaning of emptiness that is beyond conceptual elaboration in the Middle Way. Finally, our mental continuum will merge with the wisdom of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, and reach the state that is undifferentiated from their wisdom.

Certainly, the attainment of this level does not come by as fast as we might think. We can compare this situation to the seeking of knowledge in the world. One first goes to the kindergarten. Then, climbing level after level, one goes to elementary, middle, and high school, and finally to college. Once in college, one may then engage

the following thought: “Oh! The knowledge I have accumulated at the kindergarten is indispensable for the things I have to study right now. Without such basic knowledge, my foundations would be unstable. Meanwhile, what I have learned at the kindergarten is already part of the wisdom I have obtained through college.” Along the same reasoning, once we reach the highest level, what we see through direct perception, or what we know through inference, including the seemingly real ultimate truth, is all part of our final wisdom.

There are two perspectives about seeing the ultimate truth of everything. One perspective is about clearly seeing the great purity lacking all stains, which is the original nature of both the world of sentient beings and the material world. This is through the valid knowledge of pure vision. Another perspective is about clearly seeing the great equality of the myriads of things through the valid knowledge of the ultimate. Mipham Rinpoche discussed the two perspectives of purity and equality in the context of *the Essence of Clear Light*. These views are of great importance.

As for the aspect of purity, the tantrayana teachings contain very clear instructions. In particular, the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* has superior teachings about the reason that all external objects and all subjects are pure. In the sutrayana teachings, such as the *Uttaratantra Shastra* and the *In Praise of Dharmadhatu*, also discuss at length the aspect

of purity of the tathagatagarbha. As for the aspect of equality, it is the great emptiness free from the four extremes and the eight elaborations. This emptiness is taught vastly in the *Prajnaparamita Sutras*, and Nagarjuna's *Collection of Middle Way Reasoning*, with emphasis on *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, also discusses it extensively. Therefore, regarding sutrayana practice, the second and the third turning of the Dharma wheel must be studied and practiced in combination. The main topic in the third turning is about the valid knowledge of pure vision, while the main topic in the second turning is about the valid knowledge of the ultimate.

In his *Essence of Clear Light*, Mipham Rinpoche explains equality and purity in a very clear manner. If you get a chance to study this work, you will gain a clear knowledge of the tantrayana teachings and, especially, of the valid knowledge of pure vision. In the present text the valid knowledge of pure vision is mentioned only briefly, but it is already quite clear compared to other sutrayana treatises. But when you engage analysis through the teachings of the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, the depth of your knowledge of this topic will be entirely different. You will understand that, on a conventional level, everything is of such great purity, and there is no single thing that is not pure.

On the topic of emptiness, if you have studied such works as of *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, the *Four Hundred Stanzas on the*

*Middle Way, the Introduction to the Middle Way, The Ornament of the Middle Way, the Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness, the Sixty Verses on Reasoning, The Precious Garland on the Middle Way*, you should have sufficient familiarity with the views of the Middle Way. It does not mean that you have realized the Middle Way, but that you must have some understanding and experience of it.

## DOUBTS: IS IT NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH VALID KNOWLEDGE?

### *13. Dispel Doubts*

#### *J1. Overall Explanation*

##### *K1. Is It Necessary to Establish Valid Knowledge?*

**Verse 48**

**Non-conceptual and conceptual minds,  
Sometimes perceiving two moons, dreaming, or  
taking a rope for a snake,  
Distinguish into mistaken and unmistaken,  
Thus becoming valid and invalid knowledge.**

It would be unreasonable for anyone to think that it is unnecessary to appreciate the division into valid and invalid knowledge. In Buddhist Logic, valid and invalid knowledge must be distinguished. If not so, it would be impossible to analyze any topics. The minds of worldly beings distinguish into the two types of conceptual and non-conceptual mind. In turn, each divides into the two types of mistaken and unmistaken.

What are the mistaken non-conceptual minds? One kind is mistaken sensory consciousness, while the other is mistaken mental consciousness. When the eye faculty becomes polluted, or when it becomes slightly compressed, two moons appear to the eye consciousness. This is a mistaken sensory consciousness. In fact, there cannot be two moons in the sky, yet they simply appear in this way when the eye faculty receives a stimulus. On the other hand, according to Buddhist Logic, dreams we have when we fall asleep are a kind of non-conceptual mistaken mental consciousness.

What kind of mistakes do conceptual minds make? For example, taking a mirage as water, or taking a colored rope as a venomous snake. People who are not very daring, and who particularly fear snakes, will believe that a rope is a snake. Even in seeing a snake portrayed in a photo, some might be so scared as to drop the photo on the floor.

What types of correct, unmistaken minds are there? To see one moon in the sky with one's eyes is a correct, non-conceptual sensory consciousness. Any sight outside that appears to your non-conceptual mental consciousness is a correct non-conceptual mental consciousness. In the case of taking a patterned rope for a patterned rope, this type of apprehension is a correct conceptual mental consciousness.

Therefore, mistaken and unmistaken cognitions can be called valid and invalid knowledge. As it is also said in *The Introduction to the Middle Way*,

*And everything the six undamaged senses grasp*

*Within the ordinary experience of the world*

*Is held as true, according to the world.*

*The rest, according to the world, is false.*

The objects perceived by the six undamaged sensory faculties, are what the beings of the world know, and are established as real, and the rest are established as distortions. In other words, what is perceived by any of the unimpaired six sensory faculties is an object of worldly valid knowledge. To the world, such object is established as real. If one knows about such a worldly object, he is considered to have a valid knowledge. But in all other circumstances, such as in the case of a damaged sensory consciousness, its object of knowledge would be called a distortion, hence a cognition occurring at this moment would be an invalid knowledge. In Chandrakirti's view, this is the way in which we should distinguish distortion and non-distortion. As it is said in a sutra, "All consciousnesses arisen from damaged sensory faculties are invalid knowledges, such as illusory hair and a double moon."



Therefore, on a conventional level, we should know that knowledge of the white color as the original color of the conch is a valid knowledge; yet, the belief that the color of the conch is yellow is an invalid knowledge. Also, seeing a single moon in the sky is a valid knowledge, whereas a double moon is an invalid knowledge. More importantly, the cognition of past and future lives is a valid knowledge, while to regard past and future lives as nonexistent is an invalid knowledge.

**Verse 49**

**Lacking valid and invalid knowledge,**

**The mistaken as the deluded, and the unmistaken**

**as the real**

**Would never be distinguishable,**

**Therefore, no doctrinal tradition would possibly exist.**

If there were no valid and invalid knowledge in the world, the categories of correct and incorrect would vanish entirely. Thus, distinctions such as taking the mistaken for deluded, and the unmistaken for real, would become entirely impossible in the world.

Today, some practitioners say, “As for valid and invalid knowledge, Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way, none of these is important. Just practice and you will be alright. Chant the name of Amitabha

Buddha every day and that will be enough.” However, to merely chant Amitabha’s name, confusing at the same time everything else as a chaotic jumble, you will not know whether you are even chanting in the right way. It is entirely illogical to think in this manner.

We must distinguish clearly what is correct and what is incorrect in the world. If not, there would be no knowledge in the world to distinguish that the non-Buddhist views such as Lokayata, positing the nonexistence of past and future lives, are mistaken, and that Buddhist viewpoints such as the Mind-only school, positing the recognition of everything as mind, are correct. With no valid knowledge, how will one choose the correct doctrinal tradition? We did not take refuge of the Three Jewels blindly. We pay homage and take refuge only because we truly regard the Three Jewels as the source of all merits and empowerment. We choose to follow a teacher only after we have observed through wisdom, and have reached the confidence that the teacher is truly endowed with religious qualities, and will help us transform our mental continuum with his or her compassionate aspiration to awakening. And, if he or she does not possess these qualities, we will then depart and find another teacher. Why? Because we have the wisdom that distinguishes between valid and invalid knowledge.

With no clear eyes that distinguish valid from invalid knowledge, all things in the world will then become confused one with the other, the entire world plunging into chaos. There is no logic in so doing. Therefore, we should not mix everything together. If we thought it were logical to do so, then a trash bin would be no different from your mug. Does this then mean that you have attained the non-conceptual domain of a noble person? Not at all, for you still have concepts. That being so, you must still conceptually make choices about every little thing in the world. In Buddhism, you must know exactly what you must and what must not do.

## DOUBTS: CAN VALID KNOWLEDGE BE ESTABLISHED?

### *K2. Can Valid Knowledge Be Established?*

#### **Verse 50**

**Having investigated the true reality,  
Regardless of direct perception, inference,  
Invalid knowledge, or any other means of establishment,  
All such kinds of conceptual elaborations,**

#### **Verse 51**

**Turn out empty by their very nature.  
Hence, their being free from all conceptual elaborations,  
Just as heat is a property of fire,  
Is a feature of all conventional constructs.**

Some may ask the following question: “In analyzing ultimate truth, direct perception and inference cannot be established. Thus, what is the use of this manner of establishing?” Certainly, when we investigate into the ultimate, direct perception and inference

are both empty by nature. There is absolutely no doubt about this point. However, on a conventional level these types of valid knowledge are indispensable. We must have them for sure. As Mipham Rinpoche once said, it is not easy to walk down the road if one has no eyes; similarly, with no understanding of Buddhist Logic and with no apprehension of valid knowledge, one is left destitute. Regardless of what one does, everything will become difficult.

In Buddhism, it is very difficult to accomplish any practice if one has no understanding of Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way, even though one really wishes to practice. Take, for example, the case of an illiterate person in our world. Despite the wish to engage in an enterprise or to open a business, it is impossible for him or her to carry on in practice due to lack of necessary knowledge. Likewise, we need the illuminating eyes of wisdom in the course of the study and practice of the Dharma.

Here, the verses say that, regarding the true reality, if we use thorough analysis, direct perception, inference, invalid knowledge, valid knowledge, subjects and objects of negation, and everything else that are established in the world, are all conceptual elaborations. However many things of establishment there are, there are equal number of conceptual elaborations, for all are conventional constructs. Therefore, valid knowledge is a conceptual elaboration,

invalid knowledge is also a conceptual elaboration, that which is correct is a conceptual elaboration, and that which is not correct is also a conceptual elaboration. The very nature of valid and invalid knowledge is sheer emptiness, and beyond the four extremes and the eight elaborations. And this very nature of emptiness is neither separate nor combined with all valid and invalid knowledges, wisdoms and wrong views. It is like heat, which must exist together with fire. The nature of all conceptual elaborations is empty and beyond elaboration, for there is nothing that goes beyond emptiness, nor has there ever been anything that went beyond it.

Therefore, when we inquire into the true reality, none of direct perception, inference, and the valid knowledge of pure vision, is beyond emptiness. However, while they are beyond discrimination on an ultimate level, are they also beyond discrimination on a conventional level? Not in the slightest. We must understand this point.

### **Verse 52**

**Therefore, appearance and emptiness,  
Are inseparable in everything,  
As skillful means and that which arise from skillful means.  
If one is negated, the other is not affirmed.**

As discussed in the foregoing, once appearances, including bottle and pillar that we see now, are placed under investigation, their entities are found to be absolutely not established. Appearances are neither separate from, nor combined with emptiness that is beyond conceptual elaboration. Such is the nature of all things.

Appearances are known as skillful means of the conventional level. Depending on such skillful means it is possible to bring about the ultimate truth. So, ultimate truth is known as that which is born from skillful means. Indeed, the ultimate and the conventional are mutually dependent. It does not follow that one realizes emptiness only when appearances are eliminated. Nor does it follow that one obtains appearances only when emptiness is eliminated. Emptiness and appearances are neither separate nor combined. As it is said in the *Heart Sutra*, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form, form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form."

Direct perception and inference have never gone beyond the state that is free from all conceptual elaborations. Their nature is none other than emptiness, but, in terms of appearance, direct perception and inference do exist, and so we can employ them as valid knowledge. There are two types of valid knowledge: one is valid knowledge of minds and the other is the knowledge of the valid person, who is referred to as our fundamental teacher Buddha

Shakyamuni, for he is the only incomparably correct and great person.

When examined with a valid knowledge of the ultimate, all things are entirely beyond conceptual elaboration, absolutely lacking any solid existence that can be attached to or cling to. However, sentient beings persistently attach themselves to appearances, therefore they incessantly wander in samsara. In the Chinese term “think” (*xiang*), the syllable is made of the radical portraying “mind” below, and the radical meaning “appearance” above. What this means is that the mind is constantly attached to appearance; due to this attachment, all thoughts, as well as doctrinal traditions, are then generated, and perpetually recurring. It thus becomes extremely difficult for sentient beings to attain liberation from samsara. Therefore, buddhas and bodhisattvas compassionately warn us: “It is necessary to understand all appearances on a conventional level, to discern deluded appearances from real appearances, without confusing one thing for the other.” Today, some people lack the slightest understanding of how to follow a Buddhist teacher, remaining in confusion all the time. When they eventually use up their money and energy, they are overcome with regrets. This is because they cannot clearly distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic Dharma.



On an ultimate level, the categories of true and false merge entirely into the realm of Dharmadhatu, just like hundreds of rivers ultimately converging into a single ocean. But in any event, we ordinary beings have not yet come to this realization, therefore we must clearly distinguish between true and false, and between valid and invalid knowledge.

## DOUBTS: IS IT NECESSARY TO MAKE ANALYSIS ON VALID KNOWLEDGE?

*K3. Is It Necessary to Make Analysis on Valid Knowledge?*

**Verse 53**

**“Without analysis of valid and invalid knowledge,  
But relying only on that which is seen by an ordinary person,  
One can enter into ultimate truth.” One may say.  
Although this is not to be refuted,**

**Verse 54**

**Seeing that this produces that result  
Is the direct perception of the world,  
And inference occurs in reliance upon it.  
They are not named, but their meaning is never abandoned.**

Some might think that it is not necessary to engage analysis of invalid knowledge, for example, perceiving two moons or yellow sea conch, and of valid knowledge, for example, perceiving a white conch or a single moon. Instead, it's better to behave like

the Consequentialists simply setting forth arguments in the same manner as the ordinary people do. As Chandrakirti said in his *Introduction to the Middle Way*, “We speak in harmony with worldly folk and grant that things exist, though they do not.” So one can enter ultimate truth just by relying on however the worldly people posit their arguments, and it is not necessary to make too many distinctions.

Some practitioners also engage the following thought: “What purpose is there in studying Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way? We only need to realize ultimate truth, and to attain awakening. There is not much knowledge one should feel compelled to acquire beyond this.”

Certainly, we do not completely disagree with this assertion. There were rare cases where someone directly entered ultimate truth without engaging in valid and invalid knowledge. Take, for example, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng in the Zen tradition, or a few accomplished masters in the Tibetan tradition. They never learned or reflected on the analysis of valid and invalid knowledge. And yet, after receiving sublime instructions from their teachers, they were suddenly awakened, thereby attaining the realization of the ultimate. On a similar account, some Consequentialists with uncommon faculties do not require long periods of reflection, and can

directly enter into the ultimate truth that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. We do have such cases.

While we do not refute such assertion, ordinary people also agree with direct perception and inference, as well as valid and invalid knowledge. When common people see the relation like “this produces this result; that produces that result”, they see by means of direct perception. Moreover, when they employ reasoning relying on direct perception to obtain a final conclusion, what they engage in is inference. Therefore, although they do not have the names of direct perception and inference, they never abandon the meanings of these terms.

For example, a farmer does not know what is called direct perception, or what is called inference. But he has seen with his own eyes that, if he plants barley seeds, barley shoots will sprout. We might then tell him that this is called direct perception. In spring, as he plants seeds, the farmer knows that if no special calamity takes place, when fall arrives he will certainly reap crops. We can then tell him that this is what we call inference. The farmer also knows that it is impossible to sow barley and then harvest wheat or rice. Again, we might tell him that this would be called an invalid reasoning. Therefore, our lesson in Buddhist Logic to the farmer is not that difficult.

Likewise, in the summer months, herdsmen are busy with milking cows and making ghee. They know that by fall they will have bags of milk curd and blocks of ghee. Moreover, the men who are now building the monastic hall for us are so determined that many of them even work at night, since they know, too, that after some time they will earn money from us.

Clearly, the people of the world such as farmers, herdsmen, and workers know what is logical and what is illogical, and, in regard to what is logical, they also know what they see with their own eyes, and what they conclude through inference. Although professors, scientists, or literary scholars might not know Buddhist technical terminology, in their essays and works they also have things they infer or see directly. Hence, there are different ways of calling direct perception and inference. Therefore, it is an unreasonable assertion that the analysis of valid and invalid knowledge is unnecessary.

## QUESTION ON THE VALID KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONVENTIONAL

### *J2. Specific Explanation*

#### *K1. Question on the Valid Knowledge of the Conventional*

##### **Verse 55**

**If the valid knowledge of the conventional were not  
twofold,**

**Pure vision would become false.**

**Thus with worldly vision, as for the sea conch,**

**It would not follow that white is its true color and yellow  
is false.**

If our opponent were to assert that the analysis of valid and invalid knowledge is acceptable, and yet, that the division of the valid knowledge of the conventional into that of pure vision and that of worldly vision is illogical and unnecessary. Let us negate the assertion as follows, illustrating that we would incur into a great fallacy if we do not divide valid knowledge of the conventional into these two kinds.

The first fallacy is that “pure vision would become false”. As mentioned above, after buddhas and bodhisattvas enter the concentration of fundamental wisdom, the valid knowledge of pure vision that they acquire clearly sees the myriads of knowable objects. As it is said in the *Abhidharmakosa*, with mental engagement, hearers see one million worlds, solitary buddhas see one billion worlds, and buddhas see countless worlds; without mental engagement, they respectively see one thousand, one million, and one billion worlds. The countless beings and worlds seen by hearers can all be perfectly seen by buddhas in a spot of the dimension of a single wheel. Of the pure appearances that tantric yogins see, the four elements are female buddhas. As human beings see a bowl of water, the gods see the nectar of immortality in the same bowl, so the higher the state one attains, the purer is what one sees. Common beings are unable to see a single valley, let alone thousands of worlds. People like me cannot even see all the people in a tiny monastery hall. I can only see the people sitting in the front, not knowing who are sitting in the back.

However, without a valid knowledge of pure vision, what is seen by a common being would be the same as what is seen by an enlightened being. But this is illogical. If what we see now were entirely correct, the path of the noble ones would become useless. Buddhist scriptures say this very clearly, “Eyes, ears,

nose, and tongue, are not valid types of knowledge. If they were valid, what would be the purpose of the path of the noble ones?" The implication is that, if sensory faculties were valid forms of knowledge, what we see would be entirely correct, therefore, what would be the advantage of the path of the noble persons? There would be absolutely no advantage.

The pure appearances seen by a noble person endowed with supernatural powers such as the Buddha are boundless and immeasurable. Once, the god Brahma Sikkhin came to Buddha Shakyamuni's world, and engaged in a debate with Shariputra. The god described the world of Buddha Shakyamuni as majestic and glorious, entirely pure, and absolutely not the rough and impure world seen by common beings. As the debate ensued, the Buddha said, "My world is fundamentally of just such majesty and purity, but other beings cannot see it the way it is."

Therefore, the real aspect of our world is entirely pure, but the eyes, ears, noses, and tongues of common beings are completely unable to see this pure aspect. Hence, with no valid knowledge of pure vision, what the noble ones see would entirely turn into falsity, just like the yellow conch seen by a person whose eyes are affected by cataracts.



The second fallacy is that an ordinary being's valid knowledge of worldly vision should not be analyzed as true and false. The white conch appearing to a person affected by cataracts as yellow is false. The white conch appearing to a person not affected by cataracts as white is true. Moreover, the single moon appearing in the sky to a person whose eyes are not damaged by illness, is true, while a double moon is a mistaken appearance. Furthermore, to see a patterned rope toward sunset, and regard it as a venomous snake, is false, while on the other hand to regard it as a rope is correct. If we do not distinguish valid knowledge between worldly vision and pure vision on a conventional level, then, in the confusion of valid knowledge of worldly vision, it becomes entirely impossible to distinguish between false and true. When we take water for water, on a conventional level this is correct, but when we take a mirage for water, this is incorrect. Similarly, when we go to the market to buy goods, some objects are fake, while some others are genuine. Therefore, we must understand that on a conventional level we need to apply this kind of analysis.

This is Mipham Rinpoche's special instruction. In Tibet, other Buddhist traditions do not engage analysis about the conventional truth in the same manner. If so, however, how to categorize the pure appearances seen by the noble ones? It does not belong to ultimate truth, neither does it belong to conventional truth because

conventional truth is entirely false. Some people ask the following question: "If conventional appearances are entirely false, and the ultimate is entirely emptiness, then how about a Pure Land? Is it also false?" We can respond in the following way: "From the perspective of a valid knowledge of the conventional, a Pure Land is a true aspect, for it is an object of the valid knowledge of pure vision."

Therefore, there must be a distinction, for without it, many would eventually become lost in regard to these questions. Today, in Tibetan Buddhism, some commentators do not make a distinction between valid knowledge of pure vision and of worldly vision. Therefore, when they come to establish the two truths, they become confused. In Buddhism of Han traditions, one must also understand that on a conventional level there exists this mode of analysis. In this way, it is quite simple to answer questions such as, on a conventional level, how to establish the Pure Land, how to establish the impure Saha world, and how to analyze them on an ultimate level. We must ponder these questions with great care.

## QUESTION ON THE VALID KNOWLEDGE OF THE ULTIMATE

### *K2. Question on the Valid Knowledge of the Ultimate*

#### **Verse 56**

**If there were not two types of valid knowledge of  
the ultimate,  
The inseparability of the two truths would not be known,  
And the ultimate would fall into conceptual extremes,  
Causing its very own destruction.**

Some individuals regard this twofold distinction of the conventional truth as barely plausible. Yet, after all, is not the ultimate truth the realm of reality, which is an inseparable single entity? So, how can the realm of reality split into two? Wouldn't it be better if the valid knowledge of the ultimate were not divided into two kinds? Indeed, such thought is illogical.

Like the valid knowledge of the conventional splitting into two kinds, the ultimate must also split into two kinds: the one is the

provisional mere emptiness, that is, the seemingly real ultimate; and the other is the ultimate reality that is beyond all conceptual elaborations, that is, the real ultimate. Thus the valid knowledge or the wisdom that observes the ultimate, also splits into two kinds. Lacking such twofold distinction, it would be impossible to know how ultimate and conventional truths are inseparably in a perfect union.

We know that all things are appearances, and that appearances are emptiness. In other words, appearances are ascertained to be so-called “emptiness”. Appearances and emptiness are non-dual and indivisible. Emptiness is appearances, and appearances are emptiness. This state is called the “indivisible union of appearances and emptiness”. The union of appearances and emptiness is not established in a conceptual mind or in language, but has completely gone beyond the realm of thought and language, and so is called “beyond conceptual elaborations”. The entities of all things, which are beyond conceptual elaboration, are non-dual and indivisible, and this is called “equality”. In this way, as one gradually moves further according to the four steps of the Middle Way, i.e., emptiness, union of appearances and emptiness, being beyond conceptual elaborations, and equality, one finally understands the real meaning of ultimate truth.

If what we call the ultimate truth were simply established on the level of mere emptiness, then how would mere emptiness merge with appearances? Supposing that the merging of the two became the union of appearances and emptiness, then, as Mipham Rinpoche once said, this kind of union could be comparable to two hemp ropes, one white and one black, twisted together. As a result, it would be absolutely impossible to establish the indivisibility of appearances and emptiness. Eventually, the ultimate truth would fall into either the extreme of eternalism or the extreme of nihilism, either the extreme of existence or the extreme of nonexistence. It can go nowhere other than these extremes. However, this is certainly not what all buddhas and bodhisattvas ultimately intended.

In *The Ornament of the Middle Way* it is said:

*Production and the rest have no reality,*

*Thus nonproduction and the rest are equally impossible.*

The implication is that, when analyzed through the reasoning of neither one nor many, there are absolutely no such things as production, abiding, and cessation. Since there is no production, its counterpart of non-production also does not exist, and the same is true for non-abiding and non-cessation. So, if production, abiding, and cessation do not exist, then the mere emptiness of production, abiding, and cessation, also does not exist. Hence, they must be

all beyond conceptual elaborations, apart from which, there is no other way of ascertaining them.

Therefore, if mere emptiness is the ultimate truth, its entity would be destroyed naturally. Put another way, if the entity of ultimate truth were in the domain of language or thought, such as mere emptiness, it would not be the real ultimate truth, for it only causes its own destruction. Hence, we should know that, just as what Mipham Rinpoche says, in order to grasp ultimate truth, we must accept a provisional view of mere emptiness, and furthermore, we must understand the great emptiness that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. In sum, we must assert these two types of emptiness.

In Tibet, a few masters believed that the emptiness taught by Buddha Shakyamuni was mere emptiness, such as the absence of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Some masters from different regions, both in the past and today, also put forth this kind of assertion. But, if such awakening were the genuine great awakening, awakening would be too easy. Even a kindergarten kid when looking at an empty bowl, immediately knows that the bowl is empty. The *Beacon of Certainty* also contains a detailed analysis of this topic. We must know that not seeing anything with our eyes is only a mere emptiness, and this type of emptiness is a provisional emptiness. The true and ultimate emptiness must be beyond all

elaborations, which is the emptiness ascertained by Nagarjuna in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*. When realizing this type of emptiness, all conceptual elaborations will entirely dissolve into the realm of reality. Therefore, we must posit these two levels of the ultimate.

## CONCLUSION

### *K3. Conclusion*

#### **Verse 57**

**The conventional, that which is examined, is nonexistent;  
So too the examining mind and self-awareness.**

**Upon analysis, they turn out nonexistent, like the moon  
in water.**

**Ultimately, this is the one single indivisible truth,**

#### **Verse 58**

**Which is also nirvana, and the true reality.**

**Because it is the ultimate reality of all things,**

**Once the subjects and their objects dissolve into an  
inseparable single body,**

**It gives rise to the enlightened wisdom that is beyond  
the middle and the extremes.**

When ascertained through reasoning concerning the ultimate, all things, regardless of whether they belong to conventional or ultimate truths, are absolutely nonexistent. If what is under



examination is nonexistent, then, the examining mind, including the seven consciousnesses together with self-awareness, is also nonexistent, just like the moon reflected onto the waters of a lake. *The King of Samadhi Sutra* contains an excellent metaphor: “The moon in an autumn night, appears on a pure and clear river. The moon in water is empty and nothing of it can be grasped; contemplate all things in the same way.” At night, the bright moon appears on the water. Although its appearance is there, nothing exists there of its substance. We should contemplate all things in a similar way.

In *The King of Samadhi Sutra*, there are many such descriptions of contemplating how all things do not possess a real nature, like the moon reflection. On a similar account, the *Treatise on Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind* also employs the metaphor of the moon reflection to illustrate how the entity of all things lacks a real and solid existence, and explains the conventional and the ultimate truths in a clear way.

When analyzed through the reasoning of the ultimate, all things are found to lack their own nature. Then in the end, ultimate and conventional truths, together with all objects and subjects, are non-dual and indivisible, and of a single entity. In the *Sixty Stanzas on Correct Reasoning*, Nagarjuna said, “Nirvana is the only one truth, as proclaimed by all buddhas.” It means that nirvana is the

only ultimate truth, and nothing exists other than the ultimate truth. Although, in terms of appearance, all buddhas taught many such truths as the two truths and the Four Noble Truths, in true reality there is only one truth, nirvana. In the *Jewel Heap Sutra*, the Buddha also said that ultimate truth is the only one truth, and that it is non-deceiving, and it is nirvana.

Here nirvana refers to the ultimate reality of all things. It does not mean that the Buddha's or the master's manifestation of nirvana is the ultimate truth. Here, the ultimate truth is called nirvana, and it can be also called the true reality, the great ultimate, the great emptiness, the great state beyond conceptual elaboration, the great perfection, the great Middle Way, etc.

Because it is the ultimate reality of all things, once we have reached the realm where the knowing subjects and the known objects are entirely non-dual and of a single taste, we will have reached the highest realm. The body in which subjects and objects are non-dual is the wisdom body, which transcends all speeches and distinctions such as the middle and the extremes.

Many individuals cling with strong habitual tendencies to conventional truth. Although they might be good at handling worldly matters, they are not at all familiar with ultimate truth. Indeed, in order to achieve Buddhahood, we must thoroughly understand

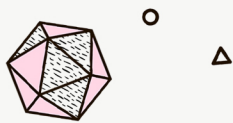
the perfection of wisdom and emptiness, which is the ultimate meaning of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings. In the *Prajnaparamita Sutra in One Hundred Thousand Verses*, it is said: "Just like all rivers merge into the Ganges River and then into the ocean, all five paramitas are led by *prajnaparamita*, and then one finally reaches the resultant state of the all-knowing wisdom." It points out the importance of the teachings of the perfection of wisdom.

Today, some people in the world believe that listening and reflection are not useful, and practice is sufficient. Many virtuous masters regard this as a type of harmful obstruction caused by Mara, for the Buddha's genuine teachings and realizations are all built on the very foundation of listening and reflection. We must thus observe pure precepts and study with diligence, making an effort to listen and reflect about the Buddha's teachings. In order to engage in listening and reflection, one must possess the three indispensable elements, which are confidence, renunciation, and bodhichitta. With these three elements, the Buddha's teaching will certainly merge into one's mind and lead one to enlightenment. With no confidence, renunciation and bodhicitta, even though one seemingly engages practices, spending the entire day absorbed in meditation, these practices will not become a genuine cause for liberation.

Sometimes I think that worldly things such as wealth and reputation are not enviable things. In contrast, I cherish from the depth of my heart a genuine admiration for true practitioners who are content with few desires and observe pure precepts. The teachings of the Kadampa, Sakya, and Nyingma traditions all hold that, only if a practitioner is not attached to the present life, and his or her actions are not for the sake of personal reputation and happiness, but for the sake of future lives and other sentient beings, he or she is a genuine practitioner.

Human life is truly short. Some individuals can live into their seventies or eighties. Others might live into their thirties or forties. The human body is like a fresh flower in the fall season. It is very hard to say when one will be hit by impermanence that arrives like a killing frost. Therefore, in this short human life, as long as we have years to live, we should make a good use of the teachings that we have learned. But how do we make use of them? At all times, quietly address prayers to buddhas and bodhisattvas, and get rid of the afflictions in our mental continuum to the best of our abilities. If we cannot do so, we should also suppress afflictions as much as we can. A genuine practitioner is someone who makes his or her efforts in this direction. In sum, everyone should cherish our meeting with the sublime sutrayana and tantrayana teachings, and put them into daily practice.

In the present age, some people rush around for fame, others for wealth, and others blindly waste their entire lives. Although I have not attained a particularly high realm of realization, as I went for refuge to my master, I always listened and reflected, and placed my entire time and energy into the Buddhadharma. Now, even if I died tomorrow, I would have no regrets, and I regard my human lifetime as a fortunate one, because in such hard times, I can still employ many years of my life in listening and reflection. So I sincerely believe my lifetime is worthwhile and meaningful.



# Chapter Five

## THE FOUR RELIANCES

## GENERAL EXPLANATION OF THE FOUR RELIANCES

*E2. The Four Reliances: The Function of the Four Principles*

*F1. General Explanation*

**Verse 59**

**Through these profound and vast teachings,  
Once the eyes of wisdom have opened,  
One sees the noble path travelled by  
The bliss-gone buddhas and their heirs,**

**Verse 60**

**As well as those enlightened beings of great wisdom.  
This is the way of the sutra and tantra vehicles,  
So difficult to find. Whoever has obtained them,  
Should never let them pass in vain, fruitlessly.**

In the history of Mahayana Buddhism, Nagarjuna and Asanga, as prophesied by Buddha Shakyamuni himself, founded respectively the Madhyamaka (profound) and the Yogacara (vast) traditions.

These two traditions encompassed the eighty-four thousand teachings imparted by Buddha Shakyamuni, and together represent the most supreme system in the Mahayana. Combining the Yogacara and Madhyamaka traditions will therefore further improve our listening, reflection, and meditation.

Without listening and reflection, Madhyamaka and Yogacara will remain a closed book. It is troubling that many people today who do not have any understanding of the Buddhadharma often deliberately slander and misinterpret it. It is therefore necessary to devote time to research, analyze, and explore the Buddha's most sublime teachings in order to understand them.

If we engage reflection on these profound and vast teachings, we will open our wisdom eyes and see the sublime path that buddhas and bodhisattvas have travelled. The noble Buddha Shakyamuni, leading the buddhas of the ten directions and the three realms, and Manjushri and Maitreya, leading the great bodhisattvas, as well as the six ornaments and the two great sublime ones of India, Nagarjuna and Asanga as foremost among them, provided the instructions that revealed the sublime path they traveled. This path is the vehicle of bliss and the entrance into bliss. In other words, both of its foundation and result are blissful, so it is a path of bliss, a path that no one should ever abandon.



This sublime path consists of the two traditions of the profound and of the vast in the sutra traditions, and of all the instructions contained in the inner and outer tantra traditions. The essence of the Buddha's teachings is solely encompassed by these two traditions. Therefore, we must have faith and diligently apply ourselves in learning these teachings. If not so, given our weakening human faculties and wisdom in the present age of degeneration, it will be near impossible for us to gain understanding and to become awakened.

It is extremely fortunate that we have the sublime, essential teachings of the sutras. Yet it is even more rare that we have the tantras, that we have been initiated by qualified masters, and that thanks to the essential instructions of our masters, we are able to get to know the nature of our minds. In particular, in the Great Perfection, we can receive the Precious Word Empowerment, in which one relies upon the master's figurative explanations to recognize the natural luminosity of one's mind. These too, are especially precious and rare instructions. Therefore, if you get the opportunity to obtain them, you must not neglect them and let them pass in vain, fruitlessly.

In my recent retreat, as I looked through such texts as the *Lama Yangtik*, *Seven Treasuries*, the *Extensive Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni*, and *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, a sincere and strong

gratitude for His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche rose deep in my heart. During those years, His Holiness bestowed upon us so many instructions, and each of these instructions was more sublime than the other. Today, although I have not yet assimilated most of these instructions, I believe the fact that I have encountered them is already quite extraordinary.

Not only have we met these essential Buddhadharma, which is like a wish-fulfilling gem and manifests as rarely as the udumbara flower, we have also met the sublime teacher, and we have placed our faith on him. Although some of us may possess the causes and conditions to become ordained while others may not possess the same, we can endeavor to listen, reflect, and meditate. In truth, if one has the opportunity to engage in these activities, it is because of one's excellent roots of virtue and also as a reward for having performed virtuous deeds in the past. Therefore one should feel greatly honored. On the contrary, if one has not accumulated virtuous deeds and has no roots of virtue, it will be extremely difficult to encounter the essential teachings.

Especially today, in this age of degeneration, and in an increasingly complex, confused, and ignorant environment, the erroneous views of the myriads of sentient beings pervade the entire world. Not only are the genuine doctrines of sutra and tantra, the traditional paths of China's Confucius and Mencius are also emphasized by

less and less people. Those who can learn these universal paths are increasingly rare. Instead, more and more are exposed to the trash cultures from the East and the West. These individuals, who lack the most basic human principles for living in this world, are becoming more numerous each day.

But we are extremely fortunate to have obtained the essential teachings of sutra and tantra. This is not something that has occurred for no reason, or with no difficulty. This kind of opportunity is truly rare. If one lets go of it, it may never return. Therefore, no one should let these teachings go by in vain. As Mipham Rinpoche has said above, “Whoever has obtained them, should never let them pass in vain, fruitlessly.” If none of us can enjoy the fine taste of the nectar of the Buddha’s teaching, and just randomly passes away this life, that would truly be a pity. Hence, once you have met the sublime dharma, you must never let it go. You must not squander your days and spend all of your time doing things that are not meaningful.

The mental dispositions for sentient beings are varied. The less fortunate beings are not inclined to learn what they should learn, such as the profound Buddhadharma. On the contrary, they show great zest for worldly things which they should not learn, such as much of the nonsense found on the Internet. This is indeed a manifestation of the power of previous deeds. In the past, Jigme

Lingpa vividly described the circumstances of practice of wicked individuals. In the first stage, these individuals would be akin to wild oxen for they are utterly unable to become inclined to the genuine teaching of the Buddha. In the second stage, they harbor negative feelings toward listening and reflection, show disinterest, are restless at all times, and run around in the pursuit of worldly things. At the end, these individuals come to lead a deviant lifestyle. Or they were once practitioners and later became non-practitioners. These individuals are like men lost in a forest who would later find themselves in very unfavorable situations.

Today, numerous people in the world hold erroneous views and knowledge. On the surface, they may appear to have a certain level of education, such as university students, and yet, they are particularly skilled in performing unwholesome deeds, with absolutely no interest in performing the slightest wholesome deed. These people are all around us and are very numerous. We absolutely must not become like them!

Sometimes I engage the following thought: "Since at present I have already taken refuge, and I have a genuine faith in the Buddhadharma, even if I died now I would have no regrets. But if on the other hand, I ultimately adopt a deviant lifestyle, wrong views, and if I ridicule the law of cause and effect. Then at the time of death I would have many regrets. So in the latter case, I

would rather die early.” Hence, when we meet with difficulties of different kinds, we must never forsake our wish-fulfilling gem of Buddhadharma. This is a pledge everyone should cherish in their innermost being. Indeed, the strength of such a pledge can be a very powerful tool to protect our spiritual practice.

As for our daily practice, we should join palms together before all buddhas and bodhisattvas, and wish for awakening. Often we may be among other people and there might be some distractions, however, when our minds have become quiet, either in the morning we rise or at night when we fall asleep, we should pray in silence: “Lifetime after lifetime, may I not become separate from the teacher and the Three Jewels. Lifetime after lifetime, may I not become separate from the mind of renunciation, from the aspiration of bodhichitta, and from the sublime realization of the unsurpassed Great Perfection.” If we generate these aspirations at all times, if we pray in this manner, our minds will gradually transform, for the mind stream can ultimately be conditioned. Although, at first, the mind might be stubborn and unreceptive, it will gradually become calm and disciplined. Eventually, new realizations will also be manifested to the mind. Everyone is capable of this kind of development.

**Verse 61**

**Endowed with the four principles,  
Possessing the brilliance of sublime intelligence,  
And the wisdom of not being changed by others,  
The four reliances will definitely arise.**

**Verse 62**

**Without such intelligence,  
One is like a blind following another blind person  
Just relies on fame, mere words, and what is easy  
to understood,  
And goes against the logic of the four reliances.**

The fine taste of the Buddhadharma is extremely rare. Without the certainty of principle and intelligence, it is perhaps impossible to enjoy this fine taste. For example, although the world may be full of riches, people with less merits may find it difficult to gain wealth. So, how does one genuinely enjoy the fine taste of the Buddhadharma? We must possess the aforementioned four principles: (1) the principle of function, (2) the principle of dependence, (3) the principle of nature, and (4) the principle of establishment by proof. When we engage analysis through these four principles, we will certainly achieve an understanding of the conventional and the ultimate truth. In other words, by way of these four principles we must augment our own continuum,

and become endowed with the brilliance of the intelligence that understands the conventional and the ultimate truth.

With insufficient intelligence, it would be difficult even to effectively engage in the practices concerning the rarity of human existence and the impermanence of life. Today, many people do not listen and reflect, and as a result, they do not understand the real meaning of the Buddha's teaching. All they do is to give offerings to the Buddha and perform prostrations before the Buddha in monasteries. Of course there is no doubt that these are meritorious and empowering activities, however, it is essential that one must generate from the depth of one's heart the certainty that "The Buddhadharma is truly amazing!" This, I am afraid, is still a rarely seen certainty in many people. Even more difficult to understand is the observation that among many who have already been ordained or have received the precepts of the layperson for years, there is still little understanding of the basic principles of the Buddhadharma, spending much of their days performing unwholesome deeds.

Through the application of the four principles, our mental continuum will be entirely guided by the wisdom of the Buddhadharma such that we can confront any external conditions without being affected. In Mipham Rinpoche's *Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way*, this condition is called "not being changed by others", which means in meeting with any adverse conditions, our wisdom

will be unshakeable. It is true that even if we listen and reflect for a long time, we may still not attain a high state such as the divine eye, but we will not be affected by ordinary adverse conditions or external circumstances.

In a trip home not long after I came to Larung Gar, one of my friends, who is a government official, engaged in a debate with me for an entire evening. He did not accept the Buddhadharma. He said, "Chairman Mao is right, Buddhism is false, faith does not exist, and the same is true for the law of cause and effect." Although, at that time, I did not spend much time on listening and reflection, I had become familiar with the principles of Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way, so I was entirely capable of debating with him. However, he became angry at me, and kept saying, "This is absolutely not so, it is absolutely false." Still, he could utter no logical statement beyond this. We used to be very good friends in middle school, yet our views had become completely different. After this debate, I thought, "If I hadn't studied Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way, I might have been convinced by him to change my attitude on Buddhism." On the one hand, because we were good friends, it would have been easier to agree with his statements. On the other hand, his tone was also resolute in advancing his specious arguments that appeared to be very convincing and impressive.



Therefore, once we possess the four principles, we also possess the wisdom of not being easily changed by others. As a result, we will develop the sublime certainty concerning the four reliances.

The first is to rely not on the individual but rely on the teaching. Nowadays, especially in large cities, while many people rely on others, few rely on the teaching. Imagine someone saying, "This is the so-and-so master, he's a rotund, handsome man!" "It sounds as if he is a religious king!" or "It sounds as if he is the abbot!" "He is amazing because he comes from such-and-such monastery." But this is only a question of fame. No one has checked whether this person concretely possesses the real qualities of a dharma teacher. If one relies on a master who has not attained a state that is encompassed in the genuine Buddhadharma, then this person does not rely on the teaching, but rely on this master himself.

Of all teachings, some focus on the linguistics while others are more focused on the meaning. We must not rely on the words, but rely on their meaning. In order to appeal to sentient beings, some teachings in the Buddhadharma have a poetic and dramatic nature. Yet it is not the words that are important, but their meaning. For example, when we take aspects such as the rarity of the human existence, the impermanence of life, renunciation, and bodhichitta, it is their meaning that matters the most.

In addition, meaning has two aspects: (1) definitive or ultimate meaning and (2) provisional meaning. Sentient beings have different predispositions. Therefore, the Buddha also provisionally taught teachings whose meaning is not ultimate and not final. But eventually we must choose the teachings of definitive meaning.

Among the teachings of definitive meaning, some belong to the domain of conceptual mind, while others belong to the domain of wisdom. The domain of conceptual mind, for example, pertains the certainty about the emptiness of all things that is obtained through learning and reflecting. The domain of wisdom however, is only the realm of buddhas and bodhisattvas, the non-dual reality of equality and purity that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. Given this two, we should rely on wisdom instead of the conceptual mind. After all, now we are still common beings, so we cannot avoid relying on conceptual mind. But eventually we must opt for the domain of wisdom.

Such are the four reliances. If taken from a positive and negative perspective, the four reliances can be said to have four types of non-reliance and four types of reliance, with eight types in total. We must clearly understand their sequence and avoid confusion.

Thus, we must now seek to develop the brilliance of wisdom in our mental continuum by means of the four principles so that it

will not be easily changed by others. At that time, we will also be able to gradually develop the four reliances. If we lack the wisdom to keep us from being easily changed by others, we will be in a dangerous situation. A blind person who has to rely on another blind person is very likely to fall off from a cliff. Sakya Pandita once said, "The wise observes by himself, while the fool follows the voice of others." The fool has no principle of his own, but blindly runs around by merely following the statements of other people. Hence, if we do not possess the aforementioned four principles, we may just end up following the crowd.

One time when I visited Guangzhou, a lay practitioner told me the following: "We are lost as to what we must do. Some say that a certain master is excellent, but three days after we take refuge with him, many people begin saying that he is not that good, and that another master is excellent; then after only four days with this other master, someone else shows up and says that he is not that good, and that another would be a better choice. Now, we have no idea as to how to make a choice. Please, give me some advice." Yet this kind of advice is difficult to give. If one had a little wisdom of one's own, one could make a choice according to the related Dharma teachings, regardless of the positive or negative judgment of others.

Today, some people take refuge based merely on a master's fame. This is an example of over-reliance on a person instead of the teaching. Some may like ornate statements, others may like to listen to fine and pleasant songs, all the while completely neglecting to practice. This is an example of over-reliance on words and not relying on meaning.

Regarding meaning, provisional meaning is linked to the domain of conceptual mind, which is easy to understand, while definitive meaning is linked to the domain of wisdom, which is difficult to understand. Many people prefer what is easy to understand but fail to utilize the domain of wisdom nor definitive meaning. This is illogical and to continue in this way inverts the four reliances.

Despite the brevity of this text, with only about one hundred stanzas, the instructions contained therein are quite profound. I used to think, "If everyone receives this teaching, one would certainly obtain an immeasurable benefit." Yet, simply put, the short explanations we give in class are certainly not sufficient. My hope is that you combine the textual outline, the verses, and the commentary together, and analyze the topics one by one: What are the ultimate truths? What are the conventional truths? How should the real and the false ultimate truths be analyzed? And how should the real and the false conventional truths be analyzed? What is the relation of one to the other? In so doing, step after step, our minds

will be gradually inspired through wisdom. In the end, neither the worldly demons, nor the very heights of scientific thinking, will be able to take over our faith and wisdom. In this manner, our faith and wisdom will be firm and solid. As we keep practicing with this foundation, we will have understood the profound meaning of the Buddhadharma. Alternatively, if we engage learning only on the surface, we will certainly not gain much insight. For this reason, everyone should diligently study this sublime treatise.

I have always believed that human life is indeed precious, and that we are extremely fortunate to have met this sublime and definitive teaching revealed by a genuine wisdom, and for being able to put it into practice. This is our greatest blessing. We should not miss this superb opportunity, and each of us should be ever mindful about it. We must conscientiously care for our present and future lives, and be conscious of the happiness and the suffering of all sentient beings. In this manner, we will succeed in our practice. Otherwise, although those who study are many, those who succeed are few. This is the reality in our age of degeneration.

Hence, we must always invoke the teacher and the Three Jewels, keeping their excellent teaching ever in our minds. The purpose of studying the teaching is to leave samsara and to benefit sentient beings. We must not depart from these two key objectives. In this way, our practice will acquire true meaning. No matter if you

remain in this world for one year, or even for a single day, your practice will certainly have value. Indeed, having your three daily meals should not be all you think about. You must think about how to benefit sentient beings, and how to accomplish your practice in this very lifetime. You should pray from the bottom of your hearts to obtain this!

# RELY ON THE TEACHING, NOT THE INDIVIDUAL

## *F2. The Detailed Explanation*

### *G1. Rely on the Teaching, Not the Individual*

#### **Verse 63**

**Therefore, do not rely on individuals,**

**But rely on the genuine Dharma.**

**It is through the path that can be established by reasoning,**

**That liberation occurs, not through the person who**

**teaches it.**

As Buddha Shakyamuni elucidated in many sutras, we should rely on the Dharma teaching but not rely on individuals. This is a point that we must put into practice, especially in this modern age. The consequences of not relying on the teaching are rather serious. Why? In this Saha world, Buddha Shakyamuni expounded all kinds of sublime teachings, and each of them can lead sentient beings to the sublime path for liberation. It would be impossible if one wishes to obtain liberation by solely relying on one's zeal, one's power, or

one's compassion without the teachings. Certainly, in the history of the Chan or Vajrayana tradition, very few individuals who are endowed with matured capacities and a sublime accumulation of merits from previous lives have attained awakening as a result of certain actions from their masters. But such expression was also an expedient teaching. Indeed, there is no other method to obtain liberation besides the Dharma teaching. Therefore, those who aspire to liberation must rely upon the authentic Dharma proclaimed by the Buddha, or the sublime teaching taught by lineage masters through the generations.

As the Buddha said, "I showed you the path of liberation, but in order to achieve liberation you must rely upon your own practice." It means that the Buddha can only teach us the sublime Dharma leading to liberation by turning the threefold wheel of the Dharma teachings, or by proclaiming the eighty-four thousand teachings, however, whether you will be able to attain liberation depends on yourself, and the Buddha has no other method aside from his teaching.

The Buddha also said,

*Sages do not wash away sins with water,*

*They do not clear away beings' suffering with their hands,*



*They do not transfer their own knowledge to others;  
They liberate others only by teaching the truth of reality.*

The implication here is that none of the buddhas of the three times would be able to wash away the karma of living beings with water. It is also impossible for buddhas to remove the suffering of living beings with their compassionate hands. Furthermore, although the Buddha possesses states of immeasurable realization, he remains unable to transfer directly such states to common beings. What then, is the single method by which the Buddha leads us to liberation? It is his proclamation of the Buddhadharma.

In Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, it is also said that no master can send a disciple to a pure land as if he were tossing a rock. The teacher shows his disciples the correct path by means of his compassionate mind. In turn, his disciples practice with diligence, and eventually will attain liberation. Therefore, it is said here that as we progress in our spiritual paths, we must not rely on someone only because of things such as his or her fame, property, and physical aspect.

In this age of degeneration, many individuals do not rely on the teaching but on the person. The consequences of such reliance is grave. These individuals never ponder whether someone can teach the Dharma. All they care about is who endorses this person, how

awesome this person is, and so on. Here the verse emphasizes that only the sublime Dharma, which does not contradict Buddhist scriptures and reasoning, is the staircase toward liberation and is the only method leading to freedom. We cannot attain liberation by solely depending on any person.

Buddha Shakyamuni never said, “Follow me every day, infuse tea and make food for me, and I will make sure you attain liberation.” The Buddha did not pronounce these words. Yet today, in Tibetan Buddhism, there are certain masters who do not pass a single word of teaching on to their disciples. At times, as their disciples learn the Dharma, these individuals even act against the interest of their disciples, occupying their days by making them perform tasks on their behalf. In the end, are these masters beneficial or harmful to their disciples? I feel great sadness in my depth of my heart when I witness this kind of actions.

Similar incidences also occurred to accomplished masters in the past, such as when Milarepa became the disciple of Marpa. Yet, Marpa proclaimed his unsurpassed, sublime teaching right after Milarepa cleared the obstructions of his past negative deeds, eventually helping Milarepa to obtain liberation. For all of us ordinary beings, it is extremely difficult to obtain liberation before our masters provide their teaching.

Yet, many lay practitioners who live in large cities, together with some practitioners in our own institution, are still unable to grasp this point. They believe that their master is an extraordinary individual, and that this belief alone would be sufficient to lead them to liberation. Certainly, it is a good thing to have faith and to revere one's master and this is repeatedly emphasized in the scriptures of sutrayana and tantrayana. But why should a teacher be revered in this way? It is because a teacher speaks the sublime Dharma for liberation. Hence, when we rely on a teacher our only goal must be to obtain good teachings.

In the scriptures on this topic, the Buddha also said, "In order to make pure gold, gold must go through sixteen steps of refinement, including cutting and burning. Hence before you accept my teachings, carefully observe my teaching in like manner. You must not respect me and receive all my teachings only because I am the Buddha." Clearly, the Buddha never said that we can succeed only by paying homage to the Buddha, let alone than by paying homage to ordinary beings.

Some masters may encounter obstacles due to language barriers. As a result, they might ask their disciples to perform the fire offering or other rituals on a daily basis. Certainly, the fire offering is acceptable as a virtuous activity through which we perform generosity to ghosts and spirits, and yet no one said that it is possible

to become accomplished by performing the fire offering only. If you spend your entire time practicing generosity, can you then obtain liberation? Indeed, the Buddha never pronounced these words. The single cause leading one to liberation is one's own understanding of the Dharma, and further recognizing the fundamental nature of the mind, only then will one attain liberation.

Our human existence is a rare privilege and we must make our short lives meaningful. Therefore, we should not err on solely relying on the teacher. We need to be cognizant in this regard.

#### **Verse 64**

**As long as one delivers an excellent speech,**

**It does not matter what the speaker looks like.**

**For example, the Buddha, in order to teach someone,**

**Manifested as a butcher and the like.**

If the teaching spoken by someone does not contradict the Buddha's true intention, if it does not contradict the way of "abandoning evil and practicing virtue" taught by the Buddha in the twelve classes of scriptures, and if it does not contradict the principles and the underlying intention of the Mahayana, according to which all actions are for the benefit of living beings, then such a teaching is called "an excellent speech". The language of the Buddha and of other great masters have the qualities of such excellent speech.

If someone can genuinely pronounce this excellent speech, his or her station in life is truly not important, whether he or she is a lay or an ordained person, or whether he or she is someone who have acted according to or against the law. To illustrate, in order to convert living beings, in some cases the Buddha had appeared as a butcher.

Jigme Lingpa once said that the Buddha appears to the beings of the six destinies with all different manifestations. For example, among birds he magically appears as a bird, and among water animals he also takes an aspect similar to theirs. As a result, we cannot fathom the countless aspects in which the Buddha manifests among beings. Manjushri also once manifested as the boar named “Daxi” in order to benefit living beings.

Mipham Rinpoche’s *Extensive Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni* contains many stories on this topic. For example, prior to awakening the Buddha was once born as King Brahmadata. At one time, King Brahmadata encountered a Pishacha, that is, a flesh-eating demon, who, manifesting in the sky, said to him: “In the presence of a past buddha, I once heard a Dharma teaching. If you are willing to listen, I can pass it on to you.” And so, Brahmadata happily agreed to listen. But the Pishacha said: “I cannot pass the Dharma to you unconditionally. If you truly wish to obtain the sublime Dharma, you must comply with my request. If you make of your body, as

well as the body of your wife and of your sons, a gift for me to eat, I will transmit the Dharma to you." At that time, Brahmadatta held a sincere faith in the Dharma, so he thought, "No matter what, my body will be torn and bones crushed, so I would rather receive the sublime Dharma," and responded accordingly. The Pishacha then spoke the following stanza in four verses:

*If you wish happiness for yourself and for others,  
Refrain from performing all non-virtuous deeds.  
The common and fool beings delight in non-virtue,  
Hence they will suffer in the present life and in all lifetimes to come.*

King Brahmadatta listened gladly to these verses, and prepared to give up his body with no regret. Perhaps, most people think of this stanza as an ordinary statement. Yet in earlier times, when His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche taught this biography, he said that prior to awakening the Buddha was willing to give up for this single stanza even his own blood and flesh, and he was prepared to sacrifice his own precious life for it. However, today in our age of degeneration, no one is willing to pay even a small price for even very profound Dharma. This is the dark aspect of our age.

Therefore, whoever listens to the Dharma must maintain a pure vision toward all dharma teachers who speak the Buddha's excellent teaching. This attitude is also very important in the context of Vajrayana.

In earlier times, among the great accomplished masters of India, there was an acharya named Buddhasrijnana. At one time, while on the road to Mount Wutai, he met a monk who had a household. This monk had a skirt tied to his waist, and a monk's robe wrapped around his head; he looked after an ugly wife; and he ploughed the soil in a field. After Buddhasrijnana witnessed the scene, he formed a negative impression of this monk. He came to believe that the monk's behavior was against the Dharma. But later, from the monk's bearing, and from his dialogue with his wife, Buddhasrijnana understood that the monk and his wife were engaging a particular behavior of Vajrayana. Buddhasrijnana then abandoned his negative impression and requested the monk to pass his teaching onto him. As the monk conferred the initiation upon Buddhasrijnana, the whole mandala of the deities appeared in front of him. Buddhasrijnana turned to the deities and expressed his wish to obtain the empowerment directly from them instead of the monk. But the deities turned into light and fused into the monk's body. Later, as Buddhasrijnana relied on the monk's teachings and initiations, he achieved a definite level of accomplishment.

Yet, due to his negative views at the outset of his encounter with the monk, along with the fact that he rejected the monk in front of the mandala, he was unable to attain the rainbow body in that very lifetime. But still, he obtained the transcendental accomplishment in his intermediate state.

The Mahasiddha Savaripa also used to take on the form of a hunter to benefit living beings. Some of his disciples attained the resultant state of Vajradhara in a single lifetime. And there was also Acharya Shantigupta, who once met six courtesans bathing by a river. As the women took shelter behind a wall while chatting, Shantigupta eavesdropped on their conversation. He thus found out that the women were exchanging secrets pertaining to the Vajrayana instructions. Only then did he know that the courtesans were magical transformations of dakinis. Later, he went into an inn, and the woman who sold wines and liquors there instantly transformed into Vajrayogini.

Many of the accomplished masters of India took on different appearances such the above. Some of them were butchers, while others were hunters. Therefore, if the Dharma spoken by someone perfectly agrees with the instructions taught by Buddha Shakyamuni, then it does not matter whether he or she is a layperson, or whether he or she is a butcher or a consort.



According to what is taught in the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels of Kshiti-garbha*, even individuals who have broken their vows are allowed to teach, provided that they do so in perfect accordance with the sublime Dharma. As long as their teachings are beneficial to all living beings, their aspects need not necessarily and completely conform to the teaching.

We have some students here who spend their entire day pointing out the faults of their teachers: “This teacher doesn’t look too great.” “That teacher is a little chubby.” While all teachers seem to have some faults, the conceptual minds of these students are misplaced. When they look at their teacher’s faults, it is as if they had one thousand eyes. But when they look at their own faults, they do not seem to possess even a single eye. Certainly, for common beings it is extremely difficult to completely avoid looking at the faults of others. Indeed, if a teacher is able to explain to you a single sentence of the Dharma, his or her kindness would be hard to repay in the present life and in all lifetimes to come. As for me, even if I was taught the true meaning of a single stanza of four lines, regardless of how it was read and passed on to me, or whether it was explained in detail or not, I would hold these teachers as if they were truly inseparable from my own root guru my whole life. I have done so earlier in my life and it is now and will be in the future. I have gained only benefits in this way.

Therefore, regardless of the teacher who explains the Dharma to you, you should not overthink how this person is or is not. In contrast, what you must ponder is whether or not the Dharma that is spoken is the sublime teaching that was transmitted from Buddha Shakyamuni. This, to me, is what counts as the most valuable aspect.

For example, it is not very important whether a salesperson is good-looking. What matters is only what we buy from him or her. Acharya Aryadeva had only one eye. But he could clearly see the three realms in their entirety. Buton Rinchen Drub, the great master in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, also did not have a handsome appearance and yet his knowledge of the Buddhist canon was perfect. Therefore, the way one looks in the world is not so important. The most important thing is the teachings uttered by someone out of his or her compassion and wisdom. As long as his or her statements comply with the principle of bringing benefit to living beings, we should gladly accept them. Certainly, as a teacher, one should also display before others the manners of a teacher. One's behavior must be in harmony with the teachings. If not, in this age of degeneration, one would have difficulties in guiding living beings.

### Verse 65

**If the teachings contradict the doctrines of the Mahayana,  
However virtuous the speaker may seem,  
There will be no benefit,  
Like a demon in the guise of the Buddha.**

As we know, Mahayana teachings encompass, from first to last, compassion and emptiness. In other words, the Mahayana practice, on an ultimate level, is to realize that all things are devoid of self-nature and are empty, and on a conventional level, is to engage in everything with the compassionate aspiration of Bodhichitta. If the teaching is completely incompatible with the mind of great compassion and with the ultimate truth of emptiness, even if a speaker appears to behave according to the teaching, to be virtuous and compassionate, we should not follow him or her. Again, suppose that a master were apparently engaging the twelve austerities, or that he or she appears to manifest the genuine aspect of a religious mentor, if what he or she says induces people to commit acts such as killing, stealing, lying or sexual misconduct, then he or she is someone we must avoid at all costs.

At times, the demon king Mara may take the aspect of the Buddha in order to preach his teaching. Yet, ultimately, as a demon, Mara is fundamentally unable to utter instructions on engaging the true Dharma. In *The Surangama Sutra*, it is said that a horde of

demons may take the aspect of virtuous friends, in order to lead living beings to perform unwholesome deeds, to break the vows, to generate such delusions as ignorance and anger, and to behave against the principles of doctrine. The Buddha also prophesied that, in the age of degeneration, numerous wicked teachers would appear in this world, assuming all kinds of aspects to speak their dharma. Some would lure others by dressing in glamorous clothes, while others would pretend to be yogins by dressing in rags, and so on. When Lord Atisha came to Tibet, he was received by a number of monks wearing all kinds of clothes. He said that the demons of Tibet had come to greet him.

Some individuals may at first glance appear to assume the aspect of religious mentors and their manners may seem to be in harmony with the teachings. However, on close analysis, their inner goal could be self-gratification and their teaching entirely against Buddhist scriptures, and their deeds would bring harm to living beings and to themselves. Hence, we must in no way believe in them or rely on them. If we do, we might find ourselves in great danger. In his *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, Jigme Lingpa brings forth the following metaphor. On a day when the weather is particularly hot, a venomous snake coils around the base of a tree. Then someone sits on the snake for the shade of the tree to cool off. As a result, the snake bites this person and he dies from the effects of poison.

On a similar level, someone might mistake someone else for a compassionate mentor, following him or her in every way, and even offering to this person one's entire property. As a result, it becomes impossible for this person to turn back from this wrong path.

Hence, what we must rely on is the Buddhadharma taught by our fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni. If someone possesses the precious Buddhadharma, we could then rely on him or her. The safest way is to not rely on any individual but instead rely on the teaching. If we rely instead on an individual, it is possible that under certain circumstances we may end up in a dangerous situation. We should therefore exercise care when faced with these issues.

## RELY ON THE MEANING, NOT THE WORDS

### *G2. Rely on the Meaning, Not the Words*

#### **Verse 66**

**In listening to the teachings and engaging in reflection,  
Rely on the meaning rather than on words.  
If the explained meaning is understood, it matters little  
How eloquently or not the words were spoken.**

As stated above, we must rely on the teaching. The teaching is consisted of the aspect of words and the aspect of meaning. Take the term “great compassion” for example. Its real meaning is the great compassion that arises in one’s mind towards all living beings. In English, the term consists of the two words “great compassion” while in Tibetan language there are also characters corresponding to this meaning. Some might think that the words themselves are the teaching and having heard the words, they become attached to them but do not seek to understand their real meaning. This is indeed unfortunate.

Therefore, after hearing such rare Buddhadharma from a dharma teacher, we should reflect deeply on its meaning. Regardless of how elegant the words might be, this is not crucial in terms of our liberation. As long as we can understand the expressed meaning, it matters little how eloquently or not the words were spoken. Any statement, more or less pleasing to the ear, is acceptable. Any expression, regardless of whether it is in Sichuanese, or Tibetan, or in Chinese languages, is entirely acceptable. If we are unable to grasp the meaning, then whether or not the sound of words is pleasant becomes irrelevant.

**Verse 67**

**For meaning to be understood, with the intention to  
express it,  
Names are given, and if one has already understood  
the meaning,  
Yet engages in words and their conceptual elaborations,  
It is as if one has found the elephant but is still looking for  
its footprints.**

In the beginning, people would give something a name because of their wish to make that object known to others and to convey their assessment of it. Later, people began to use this name to engaging in expressions and analysis. If, through such explanation, one can understand the real meaning of such an object, then it would not

be important at all whether the words sounded good or bad. In the fifth chapter of the *Treasury of Valid Knowledge and Reasoning*, entitled *That which explains and that which is explained*, Sakya Pandita explains this topic in detail.

In the non-Buddhist tradition of Mimamsa, it is believed that the use of names depends on material forces. If this were the case, a good name will follow a good material force, and a mediocre name will follow a mediocre material force. Or put in another way, a beautiful person will have a fine name, and an ugly person will have a bad sounding name. Yet in reality, this does not always obtain. Hence, there is really no relationship between a name and a person or a thing.

Therefore, if we have already understood the meaning of a certain thing by means of a certain word, then we should not be concerned any further about the conceptual elaboration connected with that word, for we have already obtained what we need. For example, when we say, “the perfect union of appearance and emptiness”, if we have grasped the meaning of this statement, then any way of expression should be acceptable. In another example, when we say “the compassionate aspiration of bodhichitta”, it does not matter how we express this statement if you have grasped its content.



The goal of Buddha Shakyamuni's turning of the Dharma wheel is to lead living beings to understand his real intention. For this reason, the Buddha must provisionally rely on the conceptual elaboration of words. If you have already understood the meaning, do you then still need the words? Not in the slightest. If you still engage in the conceptual elaborations of words, then you are like someone who has lost an elephant and after the elephant has been found, is still making an effort to look for its footprints everywhere. Clearly, this is a rather unwise behavior and that person is really doing an entirely meaningless act.

**Verse 68**

**If one is attached to words, which become ever  
complicated,**

**Delusive thoughts increase boundlessly.**

**Hence one deviates from the true meaning,**

**Like the fools who end up exhausted for no reason.**

If we constantly become attached to only words, and endlessly increase our delusive thoughts, we will completely deviate from the original meaning. Still, for no clear reason, the foolish beings of the world often emphasize the minutiae of wording, spending their entire lives pursuing the perfect words, and their entire day studying and discussing this topic.

I have had the opportunity to observe academics and concluded that some of them were truly destitute. For example, in discussing the aspiration of bodhichitta, a scholar would ask: “Is the aspiration to enlightenment recorded in the *Upanisads*?” “Is it recorded in the history of India?” “During the history of Tibetan Buddhism, in what year of the Current Era has it entered Tibet?” “How many viewpoints of different scholars existed at that time?” “What results have emerged from textual criticism?” “How is it accounted for from the perspective of historical materialism?” Although they keep accumulating conceptual elaborations, unfortunately they eventually lose direction in their own clouds of confusion.

Certainly, if there were no words, it would be especially difficult for one to know the expressed content. Thanks to words, it is possible to understand meaning. But there is no need to always get so tangled.

Why does the Chan tradition have the statement of “not establishing words”? It does have a very profound meaning. In the *Platform Sutra*, there is a story about a nun called Wujinzang who often chanted the *Nirvana Sutra*. As soon as Master Huineng listened to a portion of it, he understood the sublime meaning in the sutra, and then explained it to her. When the nun asked about a character in the scripture, the master said, “I do not know this character, but you may ask about its meaning.” Surprised, the nun said, “How

is it that you understand the meaning, if you do not even know the characters?" The master replied, "The sublime meaning of the Buddha has nothing to do with words." The sixth patriarch Huineng had already perfectly realized the unsurpassed principles explained by all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Words are no longer necessary to him.

Indeed, we also find the phrase "not establishing words" in the Great Perfection. The *Treasury of Word and Meaning* and the *Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, included in the *Seven Treasuries* by Longchen Rabjam, contain a concerted critique of the conceptual elaboration regarding texts, whereas his *Wish-fulfilling Treasury* discusses all kinds of cases concerning the increase of conceptual mind by means of doctrine, debate, text, and poetics.

Today, many people in the world pay attention only to the quality of style and diction, and to how words are arranged. But they hold no regard for the content that is discussed therein. Indeed, there is no limit to conceptual minds, so it is not necessary to increase them. Many people keep expanding the types of conceptual thoughts. However, this is no different from children building sand castles. Eventually, one will no longer know what direction one should take. Even with those who may have been spending many years as a monk, if one keeps gathering conceptual elaborations without concentrating one's effort on gaining meaning, one will not succeed

in one's practice. Some ordained persons not only eventually give up their robes and return to being a lay person, they also sometimes begin to espouse erroneous views. The reason for this is that they have not invested their time and energy on the level of meaning. If one reflects every day about the meaning of the teachings and instructions, a transformation of one's mind will eventually occur.

In sum, when we study the Buddhadharma, we must understand the following: (1) we should rely on the teaching instead of individuals, and (2) in the teaching, we should rely on the meaning instead of the words. The meaning to which buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great masters have awakened is as profound as the unfathomable realm of the inseparability of appearance and emptiness. But if we genuinely and slowly become familiar with the principles of impermanence and no-self in the common vehicle, and cultivate them in our minds, we will obtain great benefits. If we further connect these principles with our daily lives, much of our sufferings and afflictions will promptly vanish without trace.

#### **Verse 69**

**Even for a single phrase like "Fetch the tree!"**

**The corresponding external objects are infinite.**

**Yet one will know to what it refers,**

**And the need for the words ends just there.**

For instance, if someone says, “Bring me a tree!” Its actual meaning of this can be exceptionally broad. According to the analysis in Buddhist Logic, a “tree” could mean an eastern tree, a northern tree, a southern tree, or a western tree. Or it could mean a north-eastern tree or a southeastern tree. There are indeed many possible meanings even from the perspective of different directions. From the perspective of time, one may also ask if the “tree” is a future, a past, or a present tree. If it is a future tree, is the “tree” from next year or is it from the year after the next? There are indeed infinite answers if we are looking at the “tree” from the perspective of time. One may also ask what type of “tree” it is. Is it sandalwood tree, or an eaglewood tree? Is it a cypress tree, or a pine tree? If the tree were a sandalwood tree, is it white, red, or perhaps the green variety? Again, the answers could be limitless if we search in this manner, making it impossible to ever reach a conclusion. Therefore, if we have not started from the aspect of meaning, but have only sought answers from the textual aspect, we will meet with great difficulties.

Then why is it necessary to use names and expressions? Through names and expressions we will come to understand meaning which will be our eventual focus. This is also why previous generations began giving names to all things in the world. As it is explained in Buddhist Logic, when we use names we mix general characteristics

with own characteristics into a single entity. When someone hears such names, he or she would gain an understanding of their meanings. Once that happens, the need for names and expressions ends just there.

Therefore, whether in the Buddhadharma or elsewhere, when we engage debate and analysis, we must not blindly follow words, or else we would be unable to reach any actual conclusion. If one truly understands, or has come to a realization of the content, it does not matter how or what words are expressed. In oral exams, the facial expressions of students who perfectly understand the meaning would show through even if they are unable to express their understanding clearly with proper words. Yet others, who are particularly good at making speeches, to the extent that they sometimes employ idiomatic expressions, may give soaring speeches with little or no expression of the true meaning of the words.

Therefore, what we need urgently is to understand the meaning of any teaching. If something really make sense to us, we would receive benefits from the meaning. It is the same with recitations. If we have an understood the meaning of a verse, we will not easily forget it for decades. However, if we have not understood the content of a teaching, although we may be able to recite it as fast as reciting the mani mantra, we would also forget it

equally as fast. Therefore, I cannot overemphasize the importance of understanding the meaning.

**Verse 70**

**When a finger points to the bright moon,  
The foolish children stare at the finger.  
For fools, who are attached to words only,  
It is difficult to understand even what they wish to  
understand.**

It is not rational that we place such importance to words for words are only a means to express content. Let's use an example to illustrate this problem. A mother takes her beloved child atop a mountain. She then points her finger to the moon, and says, "Look at the round moon, how beautiful that is!" The mother keeps addressing her child in this way, but the silly child only looks at his mother's finger, without looking at the moon in the sky. Certainly the mother did not mean to say, "Look how beautiful my finger is!" However, the child formed the understanding that "My mother's finger is round, it is fine, it is white, it is beautiful, this, then, is the moon." He became attached to this meaning.

In Sakya Pandita's *Treasury of Valid Knowledge and Reasoning*, it is also said that when someone points to empty space with a finger,

the foolish being will always look at the finger, believing that empty space is the finger. This is certainly a rather foolish conclusion.

Similarly, with respect to the words of the Buddhadharma, foolish beings will fail to understand the meaning these words express, rather they will keep clinging to the words. Mipham Rinpoche once said that when hearing about emptiness, foolish beings will regard it as the mere emptiness that is similar to the absence of water in a bowl. When speaking of luminosity, they will regard it as something extremely bright. When discussing the union of appearance and emptiness, they will think about a black and a white rope tangled together. If one always cling to conceptual elaborations in this manner, one will never be able to understand the instructions of the great emptiness. Therefore, as we carry out our practice, we must always pay attention to grasping the meaning.

If we become too attached to words, it will be extremely difficult to gain the genuine meaning. For example, some of those who have studied poetics, or who are very good at style, when reading Buddhist scriptures, will pay too much attention to how the text is written, whether the words have been used properly, and whether the context is properly structured. While they keep thinking about such questions, they would neglect the content being expressed. In so doing, they are forsaking what matters the most.



Therefore, as we study Buddhist sutras or shastras, we must not concentrate on the quality of the wording alone since some of them were definitely not written with ease and grace. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche once said that some masters, such as Mipham Rinpoche and Longchen Rabjam, might have studied a large amount of teachings in their previous lives and in this life, and their texts read extremely smooth. In contrast, there are some great tertons who, on the surface, may seem rather unintelligent, and yet the content they express is the vajra speech that directly flows from the realm of enlightenment and possesses a profound meaning. Therefore, we must abandon our proud attitude and be happy to accept the instructions of the great masters of the past that speak volumes of truth and were endowed with abundant blessings that would help us attain awakening.

It is worthwhile for everyone to ponder carefully the four reliances that Mipham Rinpoche has discussed here. Given the limited time I have in this document, I am afraid I may not have touched on the most profound meaning. Indeed, everyone should reflect and elaborate on it. After all, as students and practitioners, it is natural for us to encounter many doubts and uncertainties in our journey. Such doubts and uncertainties can only be eliminated through listening and reflection. In order to do so, we must depend on the sublime and sharp principles in treatises such as Mipham

Rinpoche's. In this manner, we can overcome any affliction, doubt, and erroneous view in our mental continuum.

## RELY ON THE DEFINITIVE MEANING, NOT THE PROVISIONAL MEANING

### *G3. Rely on the Definitive Meaning, Not the Provisional Meaning*

#### **Verse 71**

**When entering into meaning,  
Understand definitive and provisional meanings.  
Do not rely on provisional meaning,  
But rely on definitive meaning.**

The eighty-four thousand teachings of the Buddha feature all kinds of meanings. Among these teachings, there exist teachings of provisional meaning, and teachings of definitive meaning. Therefore, as we approach meaning, we must first know which meanings are provisional, and which meanings are definitive.

In some of his works, Mipham Rinpoche explains that, there are two types of classification to distinguish provisional and definitive meanings. From the perspective of emptiness, the teachings on

emptiness concern definitive meaning, whereas the teachings on appearance concern provisional meaning. According to this classification, the first turning of the Dharma wheel is provisional and the second is definitive, and within the third turning, half of the teachings are definitive and half are provisional.

From the perspective of the third turning of the Dharma wheel, the teachings wherein the manifested aspect of things accords with the real aspect is considered definitive meaning, whereas the teachings where the two are not in mutual accord are considered provisional meaning. According to this classification, the teachings of the essential nature of tathagata is the highest among the teachings of definitive meaning, because its manifest aspect perfectly accords with its real aspect.

The perspective of emptiness as the definitive meaning, and of appearance as the provisional meaning, are well explained in many major scriptures and commentaries. In the *Praise of the Inconceivable Middle Way*, it is said, "The emptiness of all things is definitive meaning; their conventional aspect, such as production and cessation, as well as sentient beings and their life, is provisional meaning." It means that, the ultimate truth of emptiness is the definitive meaning that is beyond the four extremes and the eight conceptual elaborations; while the aspect of appearance such as

production, cessation, beings, and life, belongs to the conventional truth and is provisional meanings.

Therefore, we must gain knowledge of definitive and provisional meanings from the beginning. Having done so, we should not just rely on teachings of provisional meaning, but more on teachings of definitive meaning. Indeed, the Buddha explained teachings of provisional meaning only in order to lead beings endowed with a certain capacity to understand the teachings of definitive meaning. After we grasp this principle, we will no longer think of the adamant speech of the Buddha as having instances of contradictory or illogical elements.

Today, some dharma teachers, along with some lay practitioners, lack understanding of the distinction between definitive and provisional meanings. As they listen and reflect about the teachings, when they see that the Buddha here teaches that things exist, and there teaches that things do not exist, they wonder whether or not the omniscient Buddha might also be affected by contradiction. Hence, it is essential that we firmly grasp the distinction between definitive and provisional meanings through listening and reflection. This is a crucial point. In the eighth chapter of his *Treatise on Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind*, Venerable Longchenpa discusses this principle in detail, which is described as the key to opening the treasury of the hidden intentions of the

Buddha's teachings. This is simple view of a complex matter that deserves a more thorough discussion elsewhere.

**Verse 72**

**The omniscient Buddha, in all his wisdom,  
In accord with the lineages, capacities, and intentions of  
living beings,  
Expounded the teachings of various vehicles of different  
levels,  
Just like the rungs of a ladder.**

Through his wisdom that knows the multiplicity of phenomena and the wisdom that knows the nature of all phenomena, the Buddha thoroughly perceives all things in both ultimate and conventional aspects. He thus perfectly understands each and every distinct element such as the lineages of all living beings, their sharp or dull faculties, as well as their intentions. As the sole individual capable of knowing these information, the Buddha knows that it is impossible for him to help sentient beings by only giving one type of teaching. For this reason, in order to help all beings to progress toward enlightenment, the Buddha presents the vehicles to enlightenment of different levels in a certain order, just like the steps of a ladder. In other words, he first teaches the common vehicle of cause and effect to beings of lower capacities, and only then does he present the teachings of definitive meaning.

In general, we can say that the Buddha's teachings are classified into the two vehicles of the Hinayana and of the Mahayana. In the *Immaculate Sky Sutra*, it is said, "In harmony with the capacities of sentient beings, I say that there are two vehicles." So according to the different dispositions of living beings, the Buddha has proclaimed the two vehicles of Hinayana and Mahayana, and the latter includes Vajrayana. In the Nyingma tradition, the capacities of beings are distinguished into nine types. Hence the Dharma spoken by the Buddha also is distinguished into nine vehicles, or nine yantras.

But are these the only fixed categories of distinction? Indeed, it is not so. In *The Lankavatara Sutra*, it is said, "As long as the mind wanders, there is no limit of the vehicles of the teachings." So as long as living beings have not attained nirvana, the distinctions into lower and greater vehicles will be limitless. It is possible then to establish a single vehicle for each living being according to his or her different dispositions. Hence, the Buddhadharma in its entirety is spoken as a response to the mental capacities of all living beings. From the vehicle of hearers up to the unsurpassed Great Perfection, in the sutra and in the tantra traditions, all vehicles are indeed needed. Therefore, we must understand that, among the Buddhadharma's diverse instructions, some are simple and easy to understand, whereas others are extremely profound. To

the sentient beings for which a teaching was spoken, such teaching is then a sublime teaching.

If a single type of teaching were good enough to guide all sentient beings towards liberation, there would be no need for the Buddha to pass on the eighty-four thousand types of teachings. A single teaching of emptiness, or the chanting of Amitabha's name, may suffice for all. Certain Pure Land masters claim that all that the Buddha taught was for the practice of chanting Amitabha's name. But if it were so, the Buddha would have only spoken Amitabha's name, and it would not have been necessary for the Buddha to expound on other teachings. It is therefore clear why to some the Buddha taught the chanting of Amitabha's name, while to others he taught the common vehicles, and to others still, he taught them how to become accomplished through the Vajaryana practices.

### **Verse 73**

**With a certain purpose in mind, he dispensed some  
teachings,**

**With eight kinds of implied and hidden intentions.**

**If interpreted literally, they go against valid knowledge,**

**But there are cases in which these teachings were necessary.**

The Dharma spoken by the Buddha can be distinguished into provisional and definitive meanings. But how do we determine



which is which? We can do so from the perspective of implied or hidden intention for the teaching.

Provisional teachings are teachings that if interpreted directly as they are presented may not accord with reality and may not be consistent with valid knowledge. However, there is a clear intent behind these teachings and there is a clear need for their presentation. In other words, teachings that meet the three conditions of intent, necessity, and inconsistency with valid knowledge are called provisional teachings. On the contrary, teachings that do not present these three conditions are called definitive teachings.

Occasionally, when a teacher is unable to explain a scripture or accept a teaching, he or she may state the following: "Oh! This teaching has a provisional meaning, it should not be explained in this way." However, the fact is that it is not easy to differentiate between provisional and definitive meanings since there are different modes of distinction according to different viewpoints. In some ways, since everything we perceive is a deluded phenomenon that would not withstand analysis, any teaching about them is therefore provisional. As the Buddha said, "All appearances exist in an unreal fashion."

In understanding provisional and definitive meanings, we must know the four kinds of implied intentions and the four kinds of hidden intentions. The four types of implied intentions are (1) implied intention pertaining to entrance, (2) implied intention pertaining to the natures, (3) implied intention pertaining to antidotes, and (4) implied intention pertaining to translation.

First, implied intention pertaining to entrance means letting someone who does not accept a certain truth enter into that very truth by means of a certain method. For example, in some sutras, the Buddha discusses the existence of form in external objects, yet the implied intention of his statements is that forms exist only in a dream-like or an illusory way. If form truly exists in external objects, this would be inconsistent with valid knowledge, for when we observe atomic particles we would find that such existence does not withstand analysis. Similarly, in some sutras, the Buddha also claims the existence of a person. Why are these teachings necessary? Suppose that, from the outset, one tries to explain to non-Buddhists who do not yet have faith in the Buddha's teachings, or to individuals of the vehicle of hearers, that everything from form to omniscience is emptiness. These individuals will naturally become fearful and will be unable to accept these teachings due to their yet-to-be developed faculties. Therefore, prior to leading these people into the ultimate truth of emptiness, the Buddha in

some sutras says that external objects exist, and living beings exist. This is how we define implied intention pertaining to entrance.

Second, we have implied intention pertaining to the natures. For example, in some scriptures the Buddha says that one is the lord of one's own self. He also confirms the existence of the three natures elaborated by the Mind-Only school. On a relative level, these teachings are correct because everything is a transformation of the mind. By depending on the correct mindfulness and exercising vigilance, one can guard one's own thoughts and behaviors, like the lord of oneself. However, if we were to put forth the same assertion on an ultimate level, this would be untenable since the mind is nonexistent. The three natures, as well as oneself and lord, are also nonexistent and all of them possess a nature of emptiness. Therefore, such views would certainly be inconsistent with the reasoning of the Middle Way. Nevertheless, it is possible to lead certain beings adhering to the Mind-Only school to enter into the ultimate truth of emptiness in this manner, making this is a necessary and useful step toward their gradual entrance into the Middle Way. Therefore, implied intention pertaining to the natures may be defined as the existence of a hidden intention in respect to the nature that is being established.

Next, we turn to implied intention pertaining to antidotes. For example, some individuals think that, since Buddha Shakyamuni

appeared in this world stained by the five impurities, he was not as supreme as other buddhas, and he ranked as the lowest among all buddhas. And this would be the reason why, in many scriptures on this topic, the Buddha says: “I once manifested as Krakucchanda Buddha.” Thanks to this method, it is possible to counter the scornful minds of these individuals.

Some individuals might engage the following thought: “To encounter the Buddhadharma is not a difficult thing and that Buddhadharma is easy to obtain, right?” In order to counter this irreverent and incorrect attitude, the Buddha says: “I was once able to obtain the Buddhadharma only after engaging ascetic practices for cosmic ages equal to the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River.” This is how we define implied intention pertaining to antidotes.

The last one is implied intention pertaining to translation. If you try to interpret the content of some teachings literally, you will be unable to understand its real meaning because its real meaning is something else. For example, in the *Chapter on Causes and Conditions* we find instructions such as the following: “One should kill parents, along with the King and the *two purified ones*, and the objective family should be destroyed, then will such a person attain purity.” Here, the two purified ones originally refer to Brahmanas and Sramanas, while the *objective family* stands for the family members.

Hence, the literal meaning of this stanza is that parents, the King, Brahmanas and Sramanas, as well as the family members should all be killed. Only then would such individual be able to attain the fruition of purity.

But we cannot interpret this stanza according to its literal meaning. Indeed, according to the *Treatise on Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind*, the term “parents” here refers to craving and grasping, the “King” stands for the storehouse consciousness, the “two purified ones” are the view holding the existence of a permanent self and the view of holding mistaken rites and deeds as superior, while the “objective family” means the aggregation of the eight consciousness. So the accurate translation here is, if anyone completely destroys craving, grasping, his storehouse consciousness and the aggregation of the eight consciousness, then one would truly know one’s fundamental nature of mind and such a person would attain liberation.

Therefore, it is critical that we understand a statement’s implied intention. The languages of the world have meanings that go beyond the literal meanings of the words. In order to guide beings endowed with different dispositions, the Buddha makes meanings implicit. Within his teachings, there are various levels of meanings such as outer meaning, inner meaning, implied meaning, and secret meaning.

Besides the aforementioned four implied intentions, there are also four kinds of hidden intentions: (1) hidden intention directed toward equality, (2) hidden intention directed toward other meanings, (3) hidden intention directed toward other times, and (4) hidden intention directed toward other individuals.

Let us first examine hidden intention directed toward equality. The Buddha says: “During such cosmic age, I once manifested as Buddha Krakucchanda.” Yet indeed, Buddha Krakucchanda and the present Buddha Shakyamuni differ in certain ways. However, from the perspective of the equality of the realm of reality, not only there is no distinction between Buddha Shakyamuni and Krakucchanda, but the true nature of all sentient beings and that of all buddhas are non-dual. Such is what we define hidden intention directed toward equality.

Hidden intention directed toward other meanings is fundamentally the same thing as the foregoing implied intention pertaining to the natures.

For hidden intention directed toward other times, let’s use the example mentioned in certain scriptures that one could become a buddha upon chanting a mantra or a buddha’s name. In truth, this does not necessarily mean that one would become a buddha at the very moment the chanting occurs. Rather, it could mean that one

may become a buddha at a later time, or for those who are already endowed with adequate causes and conditions they would quickly become buddhas.

Go further on this this point, one might ask “Is reciting Amitabha’s name in order to take rebirth in Sukhavati also an intention directed to other times? Is it not a definitive teaching?” This thought process is incorrect. A long time ago, a Khenpo made a similar statement in front of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. His Holiness firmly admonished this Khenpo and on the next day, provided many reasons for his criticism. The former great masters such as Dzogchen Rinpoche and Mipham Rinpoche also had various instructions on this subject. I also provided various types of reasoning on this topic when giving teaching on *The Instructions on Sukhavati*. Therefore, we must not have this kind of doubt. It is illogical to engage reasoning about provisional meanings in any matter without any observation and it is critical that one uses the wisdom of discrimination.

The fourth is hidden intention directed toward other individuals. Some individuals regard worldly generosity as the most important, and have a particularly strong attachment to generosity. In respect to this, the Buddha says: “Generosity is inferior, holding vows is more important.” While others may believe that only holding vows is important and other types of virtuous deeds should be

considered as inferior. In these cases, the Buddha praises other practices such as endurance or generosity. This is what we call the provisional teaching that contains a hidden intention directed to other individuals.

Therefore, in studying Buddhist scriptures, and especially the classics of the sutra tradition, learning how to differentiate between definitive and provisional meanings is of great significance. Today, most people have no time to study the scriptures nor do they have any strong interest in them. While those who have the time and interest in studying the scriptures may sometimes end up in a state of confusion if they don't know how to differentiate these implied and hidden intentions. For this reason, I have repeatedly asked everyone to gain a clear understanding of the four reliances. If you do not have a genuine understanding, you could probably distort and misunderstand the Buddha's clear instruction.

#### **Verse 74**

**Therefore, from the four schools of Buddhist philosophy  
Through to the ultimate vajra vehicle,  
That which is not realized by those of the lower levels,  
Is ascertained by those of the higher levels.**

Hence, from the four doctrinal schools of the sutra traditions, namely the Vaibhasika and the Sautrantika for the Hinayana, as



well as the Cittamatra and the Madhyamaka for the Mahayana, and through the Kriya, Caryā, and Yoga classes of the outer tantras, and up to the Mahayoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga classes of the inner tantras, the unsurpassed vajra vehicle of the Great Perfection is the peak of the stages of all these vehicles. The realizations attained by the persons of the lower vehicles are not at all high, for the portion of the path which they have not realized has been already realized by those of the higher vehicles. This amounts to what is stated in the ninth chapter of wisdom in *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*, where the wisdom of the yogins of the higher levels surpasses by far the wisdom of those of the lower levels.

For example, the Cittamatra tradition is capable of completely refuting the partless particles posited by the Vaibhasika and the Sautrantika. And it is possible, by means of the reasonings of the Madhyamaka system, to completely refute the consciousness of self-awareness posited by the Cittamatra. Further, it is possible, by relying on the instructions of the Great Perfection, to completely abolish the final, subtle grasping posited by the Madhyamaka, and to clearly understand the obscure passages in the Madhyamaka concerning the luminous essence of the tathagata.

Perhaps, confidence alone placed by some individuals in the Great Perfection is not adequate. Indeed, this depends on the power of one's former actions. Yet one must not overlook this vehicle.

Through listening and reflection, one will realize that this supreme method is the only wish-fulfilling jewel among all teachings and instructions. In the sutra tradition, it is said that each sentient being is originally a buddha and possesses the Buddha nature. The scriptures of the most definitive meaning in the sutra traditions contain the descriptions on this topic. However, just as in the case of the twenty-ninth moon, these descriptions are not clear at all. On the other hand, the outer and inner tantras, especially the essential instructions in the Great Perfection, provide a thoroughly clear explanation of the essence of the tathagata. For those who lack knowledge of such essential instructions, they should not minimize the importance of this great teaching.

#### **Verse 75**

**This is established by scripture and by reasoning.**

**Having seen this, the wise seizes definitive meanings,**

**And like a swan drawing milk from water,**

**Plays in the ocean of Buddhist teachings.**

The superiority of the higher vehicles with respect to the lower vehicles can be thoroughly established not only through Buddhist scriptures but also through referential reasoning. In particular, once one has studied the Vajrayana principles such as explained in the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, one will certainly appreciate the supreme power of the Vajrayana methods, as well as their reliability and

rationality. Therefore, one should accept and maintain the teachings of definitive meaning, particularly those of the Vajrayana. Even though we have not discussed many of the essential Vajrayana instructions here, we must understand their superiority from a theoretical aspect.

For some who may not have had the guidance of a qualified teacher, or having been exposed since an early age to the teachings of the Hinayana, they may regard the teachings of the Hinayana as supreme. These individuals will neglect the definitive meanings of the sutra and tantra traditions. On the other hand, some masters in the tantra traditions could be quite the opposite. They would completely neglect the doctrinal principles of the sutra traditions, focusing only on specific principles of the Great Perfection, and believing that only they could reach the highest state.

In truth, we should learn in stages just as the Buddha suggested, for this only is the best way. From the depth of my heart, I am truly grateful to His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, for he taught us the most basic doctrinal principles such as the law of causality, and the suffering of samsara, as well as the principles of Buddhist Logic and of the Middle Way, and further, many profound teachings in the Great Perfection. This tradition is the reason why many believe that Tibet truly is the precious land of the Buddhadharma.

Yet there are also individual Tibetan masters who do not follow this tradition. For example, other than their understanding of some tantric practices, they could be completely ignorant of many principles in the sutra traditions, and do not understand the concept of provisional and definitive meanings. As a result, their conduct and deeds deviate from the teachings. More importantly, some of them do not even follow the principle of cause and effect. Some of them would say, "Everything is the nature of the mind, so there is nothing at all to be grasped." As such, they believe they could do whatever they please, committing many infractions of Buddhist traditions such as eating meat, killing, and carrying out sexual misconduct.

Therefore, we must first understand the stages of the Buddhadharmā. As we progress, we will see that within the sutra traditions the Middle Way is the most sublime, and that within the tantra traditions the Great Perfection is the most exalted. Furthermore, we must practice and maintain these exalted teachings of definitive meaning for the rest of our lives. Swans are capable of separating water mixed with milk in order to ingest the latter. In a similar fashion, the wise, thanks to his accumulation of wisdom and merits, together with the essential instructions of his teacher, will enjoy being in the ocean of the Buddha's teachings. In contrast, the foolish, as well as those who lack merit or sharp faculties, will

regrettably experience Buddhadharma only in a limited way. In summary, as we listen and reflect on these teachings, we must understand which are the genuinely essential teachings of the entire Buddhadharma, and then never abandon them.

**Verse 76**

**The immensely profound Vajrayana,  
Is sealed with six places and four levels of meaning,  
Associated with the essential instructions of the lineage,  
And established by stainless reasoning.**

Here we turn to the means by which we interpret the supreme Vajrayana teachings. Certainly, in the Vajrayana tradition there isn't any teaching with completely provisional meaning. Yet indeed, there are differences among the teachings that Vajradhara proclaimed for beings of different capacities. Through the exalted methods of the profound Vajrayana, disciples of advanced faculties can attain accomplishment in their present body, while those of lesser faculties may need seven to sixteen lifetimes.

Today, many followers of the sutra traditions do not regard the doctrine of becoming a buddha in the present lifetime as a viable doctrine. This is due to their mistaken view on principles such as the power of the Buddha's teaching. In fact, many individuals have attained awakening in their present lifetime by following not

only the tantra traditions, but also the sutra traditions. We have discussed these issues elsewhere, so we will not dwell on them here. In conclusion, the Vajrayana tradition is the peak of all vehicles. It is an exalted, profound teaching, a teaching that less advanced individuals of lower capacities are unable to comprehend.

As mentioned above, the sutra traditions are interpreted by means of the four hidden intentions and the four implied intentions, while the tantra traditions are interpreted by means of the six places and the four levels of meaning. Years ago, when His Holiness went to India, at the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute in the Namdroling Monastery, there was a tulku who made a Dharma offering to His Holiness by praising the various supreme instructions of Longchen Rabjam and Mipham Rinpoche. He said, “The magnificent teachings of the Nyingmapa are marked not only by the seal of the six places and the four levels of meaning, but also by the powerful blessings of the lineage masters.”

The six places include (1) definitive meaning, (2) provisional meaning, (3) intentional discourse, (4) unintentional discourse, (5) meanings that agree with words, (6) meanings that contradict words. Generally speaking, that which is proclaimed from the perspective of the stage of generation is said to be a teaching of provisional meaning, while that which is spoken from the stage of completion is said to be a teaching of definitive meaning. Intentional discourse

refers to teachings that may have several meanings, and therefore with some hidden meaning; unintentional discourse is a formulation that has no additional hidden meanings. Meanings that agree with words are formulations of words that are in harmony with worldly discourses, so there is a perfect agreement of meanings with words. Meanings that contradict words refer to certain formulations of words that are uncommon in both worldly discourse and other Buddhist commentaries. For example, an instance of an uncommon formulation occurs with the terms “union” and “wrath”. In listening and reflecting about the Vajrayana teachings it is necessary to gain a thorough understanding of these six places. Failing to do so would make it extremely difficult to grasp their real meaning. These topics will be discussed in more details in another article.

The four levels of meaning are (1) literal meaning, (2) general meaning, (3) hidden meaning, and (4) ultimate meaning. If one wishes to grasp the meaning of Vajrayana teachings, one must certainly understand these four levels of meaning. They will be discussed in more detail below.

One must rely on the essential teachings and oral instructions of the lineage masters because it would be extremely difficult to realize the true nature of the mind if one abandons the instructions of one’s master. Why were there so many individuals who have achieved

awakening in the Chan tradition? It was thanks to the instructions of their masters, as well as their ways of expression. It is the same in the tantra traditions, where the master's instructions are extremely important. If one relies on the master's instructions and on stainless reasonings, one will grasp the meaning of Vajrayana teachings.

**Verse 77**

**All things are originally in the inseparable union**

**Of primordial purity and great equality,**

**Which is ascertained**

**By means of the two types of valid knowledge.**

The nature of everything is the inseparable union of primordial purity and great equality, where great equality refers to the great emptiness. As we engage analysis by means of the two types of valid knowledge in the sutra traditions, namely, the valid knowledge of the ultimate and the valid knowledge of the conventional, we would realize that all things are equal and pure. Indeed, there is no single principle in the tantra traditions that cannot be established by the valid knowledge of the sutra traditions. Therefore, we must have confidence that the Vajrayana teachings are the most essential and profound teachings of the entire Buddhadharma.



### **Verse 78**

**In the tradition of sutra and in the stage of generation,  
In the stage of completion and in the Great Perfection,  
Through the literal, general, hidden, and ultimate  
meanings respectively,  
One grasp their essential points without contradictions.**

Let us turn to the four levels of meaning. With no contradiction, we are able to grasp the essential points of the sutra traditions through literal meaning, those at the stage of generation through general meaning, those at the stage of completion with elaboration through hidden meanings, and those at the stage of completion without elaboration through ultimate meanings. From this, we also understand how the term “union” is interpreted in different ways according to different contexts.

### **Verse 79**

**Having obtained the profound realization of the  
ultimate meaning,  
The heirs of the Buddha, endowed with supreme wisdom,  
Maintain the inexhaustible treasury of the Dharma,  
Like the victory banners of the Dharma of transmission  
and of realization.**

If, through listening and reflection, and relying on the essential instructions of one's teacher, one genuinely grasps the principles in the wish-fulfilling tantra tradition, and generates an unshakeable certainty, this wise person is the heir of the Buddha, who, like the son of a wheel-turning king, will not be damaged by any adversity or erroneous view. And even if one is unable to understand all the principles of Vajrayana perfectly, by simply placing an unshakable faith in one's teacher and in his methods, and by earnestly putting into practice the essential instructions that point directly to the nature of the mind, one can also become the heir of the Buddha, "the son of a wheel-turning king".

These heirs of the Buddha will obtain an inexhaustible treasury of the Dharma, and will be able to perfectly accept and maintain the most essential and valuable principles of Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching. They will thus uphold the victory banner of the Dharma of transmission and of realization.

Such is my teacher, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. I think what he has accomplished in his lifetime is truly remarkable. He was versed in both traditions of sutra and tantra. He understood both the doctrinal teachings and the oral instructions. And he not only understood them himself, but also handed them all down to us with a loving mind. Furthermore, his transmission of these teachings went beyond the literal level. He empowered us by

passing on their meaning. For large groups of his disciples, we are truly fortunate that having received such teaching, an inexpressible joy arises from the depth of our hearts. Particularly, some of his great disciples have genuinely grasped the instructions taught in the Vajrayana traditions, especially the knowledge of the nature of the mind. Moreover, they have also begun to gradually transmit this knowledge and realization to the next generations in their own ways. So they are truly the recipients, the holders, and the bearers of the tathagata's teachings.

In contrast, if what a person says is appealing on a verbal level only while at the same time he or she does not put these words into practice, and the view of Vajrayana on the indivisibility of equality and purity or even the realization of the basic teachings such as impermanence and renunciation are absent in this person's mind, then such individual is neither a genuine bearer of the Dharma nor a rare spiritual teacher for he or she is merely repeating in an uncritical manner what is said by others.

Therefore, no matter if we are a religious mentor or an ordinary student, we should first generate, from the depth of our hearts, a firm confidence in the tantra traditions. Then, by following the methods explained above, we would strive to gain an understanding of the doctrinal principles of the Vajrayana teaching. Further, we must also be accompanied by the essential instructions of our

teacher. As these causes and conditions come together, we would begin to recognize the nature of our minds. And after that, we must put them into practice with no interruption, as if restless. Without continuous practice, this recognition of the nature of the mind won't take too much effects as the time of our death approaches. In the boundless samsara, various conceptual minds and unvirtuous habits could contaminate our minds. Hence, we must break free from them and be able to stably maintain and abide in the nature of the mind. In so doing, we would become true inheritors of the tathagata's teachings.

## RELY ON WISDOM, NOT THE CONCEPTUAL MIND

### *G4. Rely on Wisdom, Not the Conceptual Mind*

#### **Verse 80**

**When practicing according to definitive meaning,**

**Do not rely on the mind that pursues terms and  
expressions,**

**That discriminates conceptually, and that is dual, as  
perceiver and perceived,**

**Rather, rely on the wisdom of non-duality.**

In the foregoing we've said that one should not rely on the person, but that one must rely on the teachings. Concerning the teachings, there is a linguistic expression of the teachings, and there is the meaning of the teachings. We must rely on the meaning of the teachings, and cannot rely on their superficial expression. Furthermore, as for the meaning of the teachings, there are definitive and provisional meanings. We must rely on the teachings of definitive meaning.

Once we penetrate the definitive meaning of the teaching, and put it into practice through meditation, we should not rely on a conceptual and dualistic mind that pursues linguistic discrimination and operates through a perceiving subject and a perceived object. In contrast, we must rely on the wisdom that transcends the duality of perceiver and perceived.

However, if it is currently too difficult for us to rely on the non-dual wisdom, we must rely on the teaching that is the object of the non-dual wisdom of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Such teaching, if it is taught by the Buddha, must be a sutra that ascertains the ultimate truth such as the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, or a tantra that consists of the supreme instructions such as the Dzogchen practice. If such teachings were not from the Buddha, then they must be given by those great bodhisattvas such as Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, Maitreya, and etc. In relying upon these teachings, wisdom will gradually develop in our mind.

We must understand that some teachings are objects of the conceptual mind, that is, they are teachings that follow what we ascertain with our conceptual minds and with language. This is necessary for common beings to understand them. But other teachings, such as the view of emptiness, as well as the luminosity of the essence of tathagatas, are all teachings realized by buddhas and bodhisattvas with their wisdom. Being the pure objects of the

wisdom of buddhas and bodhisattvas, common beings sometimes find them difficult to fathom.

What we should pursue then are not those teachings that can be ascertained by the dualistic conceptual mind. As it is said in the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, “Because ignorance enshrouds nature, it is said to be conventional.” Ignorance obscures the mind of ordinary beings, hence, the teaching that is the object of our ignorant mind is a conventional teaching that cannot thoroughly ascertain the ultimate truth. Therefore, what we must pursue is the transcendental teaching of the non-dual wisdom only through which we can achieve liberation from samsara.

In today’s world, Dharma practice is sometimes linked to the purpose of business, for healing the sick, for obtaining renown, and for attaining temporary accomplishments. All of these will not help us eliminate the afflictive and cognitive obstructions in our mental continuums, nor can they grant us genuine liberation from samsara. However, if we truly pursue the teachings of non-dual wisdom, eventually we will be able to eliminate these afflictive and cognitive obstructions. Hence, as we seek out the Dharma teachings, we must pay attention to the above.

Furthermore, the teacher is the source of the Buddhadharma. Today, in the age of degeneration, one should seek a teacher endowed with

the aspiration of Bodhichitta and the correct view of emptiness. If a master has no knowledge of these transcendental teachings, it would be hard to attain genuine wisdom by relying on this master.

In sum, we must rely on wisdom and not rely on the conceptual mind. In order to do so, we should learn and recite the precious treatises composed by accomplished masters, in which all they discuss are about the wisdom of absorbing into and of emerging from the meditation of emptiness. The best practice is to gradually integrate these teachings with our mind.

#### **Verse 81**

**As for the ordinary mind that operates with conceptual  
ideas,  
Whose nature is the duality of perceiver and perceived,  
The object it grasps, along with itself, is illusory,  
And it can never realize the actual nature of reality.**

Why should the ordinary mind not be pursued? Because it operates on conceptual discrimination, it has attachments to the existent or to the nonexistent, to establishment or to negation, to emptiness or to appearance, and it is entirely of the nature of the perceiver and of the perceived. Perceiver and perceived are mere illusions of the conceptual mind in ordinary beings. Anything that can be



grasped is entirely illusory. In both the *Sutra on the Ten Grounds* and *The Jewel-Heap Sutra*, it is said that all things that we see, hear, and feel are illusory. In *The Lankavatara Sutra* it is also said: "All things arise conventionally, but ultimately they lack the nature of self-existence." The implication here is that the appearance of all things is in an illusion that only exists in the conventional realm, for if there is production there is also cessation. Indeed, the ultimate true reality that is beyond all conceptual elaborations cannot appear in the conventional realm, for it is absolutely not the object of a conceptual mind.

Hence, by merely having such discriminating mind, one is never able to realize the actual nature of reality that is beyond the perceiver and perceived. In other words, as long as the web of conceptual grasping is not eliminated, it will be impossible to realize the ultimate state that is beyond conceptual elaboration. If we genuinely transcend the grasping of all appearances, then, at that very moment, we will understand the true nature of all things.

In the *King of Samadhi Sutra* it is said: "Far from the two extremes, the wise abide in the middle way." It means that having reached beyond the four extremes and the eight elaborations, the wise truly dwell in the middle way. This is the essential meaning of the Middle Way. It should be clear to all that the conceptual mind is

nothing but a temporary grasping. For example, our conceptual minds may grasp emptiness or luminosity: “These things are empty, these things are luminous.” And this is understandable, for our conceptual minds perceive objects only in this way and are unable to see their true nature. But when you reach the ultimate state, it will become clear that all things are indeed false, illusory, and unreal.

If we only seek such unreal things, then we are wrong. It is as if someone in need of water saw a mirage on a distant path. On the surface, it might look like a real river, yet in truth the mirage cannot quench anyone’s thirst. Along the same reasoning, the ultimate object to be attained by whoever aspires to liberation is the non-dual wisdom of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Prior to obtaining this kind of wisdom, all appearances being grasped are mere illusions.

Clearly, this is our ultimate goal. In *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, all things are refuted with no exception, including virtue, non-virtue, the tathagata, etc. In order to reach such heights, we will need to abandon everything that we have learned on a conventional level.

## Verse 82

As for attachment, be it to the real or to the unreal,  
To both the real and the unreal, or to neither the real nor  
the unreal,  
All of them, along with the way of attachment,  
are grasping,  
And are within the domain of Mara,

As long as there is attachment, no matter if it is attachment to such real things as the pillar or the bottle, or to such unreal things as empty space or the son of a barren woman, or to both or to neither of these, provided that you have a perceived object and a perceiving mind, these are in fact forms of grasping that are from an unstable and discriminating mind, a mind that cannot be used as a sword to cut samsara at its very root.

From the standpoint of the ultimate view of emptiness, if there is anything to grasp, whether virtuous or non-virtuous, at that very moment this very grasping is comparable to the activity of a Mara. In the *Sutra on Manjusri's Playful Dance*, it is said, "However much one grasps, one's actions will amount to that much, and such is Mara's activity."

What we must know is that all kinds of grasping and discrimination are obstacles to practice. Here, the verse says that attachment to

anything is a type of grasping. In the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, it is said that this grasping is an obscuration to practice. In *The Jewel-Heap Sutra*, the Buddha said to the assembly that if someone experiences perceiver and perceived, he or she has fallen under the influence of Mara. In like manner, a lack of confidence in the Mahayana is also due to Mara's temptations. Therefore, from the standpoint of prajnaparamita, what is generally called Mara is not necessarily a terrifying figure with eyes wide open and protruding fangs. The real Mara is the grasping to any appearance or conception when one desires to engage the concentration of the non-dual wisdom, or when one ascertains the view of the ultimate. Such grasping includes grasping to mere emptiness, grasping to the essence of the tathagatas, and grasping to the aspiration of Bodhichitta.

In some of his instructions, Mipham Rinpoche said that when one ascertains the view of the ultimate, attachment to all such things must be dissolved into the realm of reality. In *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is said that nirvana is nonexistent, and that the tathagata, the Three Jewels, and the Four Truths are also nonexistent. Having analyzed through reasoning and scriptural evidence, everything loses its substance to be grasped.

### **Verse 83**

**As is stated in the sutras.**

**On the basis of any kind of refutation or establishment,**

**It is impossible to destroy whatever is grasped.**

**Having seen that there is nothing to refute or to establish,  
one is liberated.**

No matter what method we employ to refute or to establish, in no way can we destroy all that has been grasped. "Refutation" refers to the negation of the existence of existing things. For example, when someone engages the reasoning of neither one nor many, or the diamond splinters, in order to analyze the pillar or the bottle, one concludes that they both are nonexistent. "Establishment" refers to positing the nonexistence of things, such as the son of a barren woman, mere emptiness, or the reality of the emptiness of all things. Some commentators regard this manner of refutation and establishment to be the tathagata's implied meaning. Yet it is not. For, if one engages such mode of refutation and establishment, one will be utterly unable to destroy all that have been grasped, or to put an end to concepts.

Therefore, as we ascertain the view of the ultimate, we must get rid of all attachments by eliminating dualistic perceptions and conceptual elaborations. Once we have eliminated all conceptual elaborations, we will see that either on the conventional or on the ultimate level, there is nothing whatsoever to establish, and there is nothing whatsoever to refute. Only then and at that very

moment, will we have genuinely seen the reality of all things or their ultimate truth, thus we attain liberation.

In like manner, the same reasoning is explained in the scriptures and commentaries of the sutra and tantra traditions, such as in Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization* and in the *Hevajra Tantra*. In the *Uttaratantra Shastra*, Maitreya says: "There is nothing to be refuted in this, nor is there anything to establish. Observing the true nature as the way it truly is, one sees the true nature and attains liberation." When we ascertain the view of the ultimate, there is nothing whatsoever to be refuted, nor is there the slightest trace of anything to be established. If we rely on the master's instructions with sincere devotion, then the proper causes and conditions will eventually come together to enable us to see and abide in the true nature of reality. As a result, we will surely gain liberation from the three realms of samsara. Examples of this process are found in the biographies and teachings of many lineage masters.

In sum, when we see that there is nothing to be refuted or to be established, at this very time we will have reached the highest state and the domain of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Ordinary beings like us should have confidence in this process and pray that they may reach this state.

#### **Verse 84**

**Having done away with both perceiver and perceived,  
The primordial wisdom naturally reveals its luminosity.  
Having eliminated all four conceptual extremes,  
This is called supreme primordial wisdom.**

After one reaches this state, is it a state that lacks any feeling, or is it some other kind of state? Indeed, it is in no way a state with no feelings, like an arrow shot in midair, or a rock thrown into the ocean. In this particular state, from the perspective of attachment, all extremes such as existence and nonexistence, being and nonbeing, have been eliminated. There is absolutely no attachment to any conceptual elaboration and the perceiver and the perceived have both dissolved naturally into the true realm of reality. However, from the perspective of self-awareness, one is capable of knowing the natural luminosity of the realm of reality by means of one's individual realization. In other words, without depending on causes and conditions, the primordial wisdom of individual realization would naturally manifest.

As it is said in the scriptures, "The natural, primordial wisdom manifests without abiding." In the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, it is also said, "There is no mind in the mind, for the nature of the mind is luminosity." This nature of luminosity exists naturally, just like sunlight will naturally appear where there is a sun. Yet this is not

something insentient. Also it is not as if one were sleeping at night, lacking any feeling whatsoever. It is, as discussed in the *Beacon of Certainty*, a state where one would naturally know by oneself.

Therefore, although all attachments have been eliminated, there does exist this kind of supreme state beyond all kinds of attachments. And of all attainments, this is the most supreme. In the *Condensed Prajnaparamita*, it is said: “One attains the sublime, subtle wisdom of no death, hence it is called the perfection of wisdom.” The implication is that, when we attain the wisdom of no birth and no death, this is the wisdom from the other shore, namely, prajnaparamita, or the perfection of wisdom. The perfection of wisdom is in no way a conceptual thought saying, “All things are empty.” In contrast, it is one’s genuine realization of the true nature of all things, attained as a result for one’s master’s instructions and one’s devotion to the Buddha’s teachings. On the path of cultivation, all practitioners at different stages should be able to attain this sublime wisdom. Yet no one who lacks cultivation in the Buddha’s teaching, or who lacks faith in achieving Buddhahood, will ever attain this wisdom.

#### **Verse 85**

**Like sunshine appearing to a blind person,  
It is never seen by ordinary beings.**



**Failing to know it, however much they think about it,  
Foolish beings generate fear.**

Suppose a blind person is faced with forms of matter such as pillars, bottles, mountains, rivers, and the earth, because he or she has no functioning eyes, he or she has no way to behold the myriads of sights. Along the same reasoning, for foolish beings who lack any accumulation of merits and who lack confidence in the Mahayana teaching, although the primordial nature of the mind and the essential nature of all things have been with them from the beginning and have never abandoned them, regardless of the perspective from which they might consider, these beings will never be able to completely understand the true nature.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, there is an excellent testimony of this: Take, for example, someone who is blind since birth, who does not see the sun, yet this does not mean that there is no sun rising in the world. Anyone who has eyes will see it clearly, and all will follow their task and do their jobs. Along similar lines, according to differences in terms of whether or not they practice, as well as differences concerning the power of what they practice, people may attain entirely different achievements. In general, common beings are like blind people, although the sun rises, they are utterly unable to see it. But enlightened beings, along with individuals who practice, are comparable to people who have functioning eyes.

As a result of their individual accumulated acts and to the state they have achieved through practice, they are perfectly able to see.

Therefore, common beings will find it hard to accept this state, regardless of how much they ponder about it. Not only can they not accept it, fear will also arise in the minds of some foolish individuals: if everything is empty, and all things that truly exist are actually nonexistent, then, will not the principles of cause and effect, such as good rewards following virtuous actions, and bad rewards following non-virtuous actions, also entirely collapse? Will virtue and non-virtue be entirely nonexistent? As Aryadeva once said: "Upon hearing the name of emptiness, great fear arises in the mind of all fools." In *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna also said: "Those with shallow wisdom see all things as the appearance of either existence or nonexistence." That is, individuals with a limited wisdom see everything as either the appearance of existence, or as the appearance of nonexistence. Beyond these two, they are unable to see the primordial and authentic aspect of all things since it is fundamentally hidden from them.

The people of this world, including both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, are especially attached to appearance. I once heard someone said: "That person has superhuman powers, he can

emanate light!” Many regard this kind of phenomena as particularly rare. In fact, this is not the case. For if dimly radiating a tiny bit of light amounts to a superhuman power, then sweating should also be considered the manifestation of a superpower.

### **Verse 86**

**However, relying on the true and noble teaching,  
On the reasoning of refuting all extremes,  
And on the power of the master’s instructions,  
As if one’s vision were restored, one will see that for oneself.**

Since common beings are unable to see the true aspect, like blind people who are unable to see anything, then is it fundamentally impossible for the primordial and true nature of all things to be seen? This is absolutely not so. Throughout history, we have seen the biographies of numerous great masters who have genuinely realized the true nature of things.

As such, if we rely on their manner of awakening, we would then also be able to see the true nature of all things. But what must we rely on specifically? First, it is the reliance on the noble teaching of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, and especially the scriptures of definite meaning, that is, the supreme and noble teachings of the Mahayana spoken by the Buddha, such as the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, *The Jewel-Heap Sutra*, and *The Lankavatara Sutra*.

Second, it is the reasonings that refute all extremes and all conceptual elaborations, such as the reasonings explained in Nagarjuna's *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, in Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, and in Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*. These works are all well-proven thanks to the unparalleled wisdom of their authors and generations of masters.

Third, it is the important instructions of the lineage masters, such as the instructions passed down from generation to generation. Beginning with Padmasambhava and up to Patrul Rinpoche, Mipham Rinpoche, and Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, thanks to the power of their sublime instructions, it is possible to see the fundamental nature of all things quite easily. These include instructions in the sutra traditions, those from the lineage masters of the Chan tradition, and even more in the tantra traditions.

These three conditions mentioned above are indispensable. However, some individuals today say the following: "In studying the Buddha's teaching one only needs to study the sutras, not shastras." And some eminent masters in the Han Buddhism also have the similar opinion. They emphasize that, "It is enough to concentrate your efforts on the study of a few sutras, and you needn't study any commentary beyond these." I believe that we must question these statements.

Historically in India, there were just a few masters, such as Nagarjuna, prophesied by the Buddha who were capable of genuinely relying on their own power to interpret Buddhist sutras. Beyond them, many great masters of later ages, including Chandrakirti, explicitly claimed not to be able to fully rely on their own power to explain Buddhist sutras. In his *Introduction to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti said,

*This way of explanation I, the bhikshu Chandrakirti,  
Gathered from the Karikas that teach the Middle Way,  
And here correctly I have set it down  
According to both scripture and instruction.*

So he was able to understand the profound teaching by relying on the noble teaching and on correct reasoning, aided by such instructions as those contained in Nagarjuna's treatises. If that was how he composed his work, requiring Buddhist sutras and shastras, as well as the informed reasonings of other masters in order to understand the profound teaching, how would we ordinary beings be able to grasp the profound meaning of the Dharma without the help of the commentaries composed by the great masters of the past?

Without the masters' instructions, we ordinary beings cannot possibly "chew" scriptures relying on our own power. Without

the reasonings of the eminent masters of the past, it is simply not sufficient to just look up words in a dictionary. It is indeed true that some commentaries were not really composed by great accomplished masters. At present, as ordinary practitioners or scholars write commentaries, no matter how well they write such works, their commentaries may not necessarily comply with the conceptual and scholastic definitions of commentaries specific to the Mahayana shastras.

In sum, we must have confidence in the Buddhadharma, and we must rely on Buddhist sutras and shatras, on the reasonings that refute all extremes, and on the essential instructions by our masters. Eventually, we will be able to see the true nature of all things, like a blind person who, having obtained clear vision, is able to see all forms.

If one reaches the first bhumi of a bodhisattva, one can then attain such state. However, when our status is that of a common being, we should be able to achieve an illustrative primal wisdom, a state that is similar to enlightened wisdom. In his *Beacon of Certainty*, Mipham Rinpoche says that, although we are now ordinary beings, by means of the instructions of our master, we can virtually see the fundamental luminosity of our minds in a way that is free from the four extremes and the eight conceptual elaborations, so that

we will have profound confidence, and harbor no doubts, in the teachings that we bear.

**Verse 87**

**At that time one is able to savor,**

**The nectar-like taste of the Buddhadharma.**

**With eyes filled for hundreds of times with faith and joy,**

**One concentrates always on the Buddha's wisdom body.**

At that very moment, one will be perfectly able to savor the fine taste of the teachings imparted by Buddha Shakyamuni in the second and third turnings of the Dharma wheel. One will then experience the state described therein, a state where emptiness and luminosity are non-dual, a state that is entirely beyond language and thought. This is comparable to the fine taste savored by a mute person, who is unable to express it. Although one may have perfectly comprehended this state, one will find certainly difficult to illustrate it to others through language and concepts.

Because one would know perfectly the taste of this state, one will generate the mind of great bliss. This mind of bliss is not the same as what people experience in everyday life such as receiving a salary or buying candy. The latter types of bliss are actually a kind of false appearance, it is—"Ha, ha, ha!"—a mere laughter from a joke because there still exist several undesirable states in

one's mind. In contrast, the mind of bliss is a genuine pleasure that emanates from one's liberation from the boundless cycle of existence. Because one has destroyed the roots of samsara and attained the state that is entirely beyond the cycle of life and death, one deeply rejoices in it.

At this time, one will be able to clearly see all things with the eyes of wisdom. The enlightened eyes of wisdom are similar to our own eyes, yet they are not physical eyes. As when one reaches the first bhumi of a bodhisattva, the eyes of wisdom can clearly perceive all objects and concentrate at all times on the Buddha's wisdom body, the dharmakaya. Ever absorbed in the joy of the teaching, this body is permeated by the bliss of the teaching.

Many people have gained benefits from the study of the Buddha's teachings. Yet these benefits are not based on simply repeating the related words. Instead, these individuals have experienced, through their own efforts, and in their own mind, the wisdom that the Buddha has spoken about in his discourses in the form of a special, incredible bliss that arises in their hearts, something that is not comparable to any worldly, ordinary bliss.

After we have studied this sublime Buddhadharma, we should vow not to turn back from this path. One of the methods not to turn back is the method explained in the *Extensive Biography of Buddha*



*Shakyamuni*: if one often recites the name of Buddha Shakyamuni, one will not turn back from the bodhisattva path. Among the Buddha's five hundred great vows, the most important vow was not to turn back from the bodhisattva path. In this regard, the Buddha has an uncommon power not found in other buddhas. Therefore, we should, as much as we can, turn our devoted prayers to our fundamental Buddha Shakyamuni, vowing not to turn back from the bodhisattva path. In this way, we will certainly experience the highest and most sublime state of the Buddhadharma.

**Verse 88**

**In this, all things without exception**

**Are seen in their ultimate state of equality**

**Having attained the conviction that is beyond expression,**

**One speaks the inexhaustible treasury of the Dharma.**

At this time, you will have realized the state of equality, where all things such as good and evil, happiness and suffering, high and low, rich and poor, are perfectly and infallibly equal, and where there is no discrimination. This is a state beyond thought, where all expressions become ineffable. At this time, one will have also obtained a kind of confidence, or certainty, which cannot be expressed through language. Even though gods, humans, nonhumans, evil

spirits, adherents of non-Buddhist religions, or individuals with wrong views, may want to deny or show no consideration for this state of yours, they will do so in vain, for you will have already perfectly awakened to the true nature of all things.

Once you have attained this certainty, you will be able to speak the Buddhadharma to others through all expedient means. The inexhaustible treasury of the Buddhadharma will also naturally emanate from your wisdom with no particular effort. Examples of this are found in the biographies of many Nyingma lineage masters. Although His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche had become advanced in age and he had not been able to read anything for more than a decade, the clarity and richness of his explanations of the scriptures still impressed everyone.

Therefore, when one has attained this state, one will be able to speak the inexhaustible treasury of the Dharma for the benefit of living beings. Through our confidence and the blessings of the lineage masters, as the proper causes and conditions come together, we will achieve this very state and trigger the same wisdom.

**Verse 89**

**Having mastered the principles of the two truths,  
And having seen the inseparable union of the two truths,**

**One knows that, just like the husk is removed in order  
to reveal the grain,  
All the various methods are expedient means leading to  
this point.**

At the outset, learn the instructions about ultimate and conventional truths from a qualified teacher, understand in every respect what is the ultimate truth of emptiness and what is the conventional truth of appearances, as well as notions such as the entity and divisions of the two truths. In due course, understand the indivisible union of the two truths, namely, that the ultimate and the conventional truths are indeed mutually compatible and inseparable, with no contradiction. The true nature of appearance is emptiness, and the manifestation of emptiness is appearance. As it is said in the *Heart Sutra*, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form; form is not other than emptiness; and emptiness is not other than form.” At this time, one understands that, just as the husk is removed in order to reveal the grain, all Dharma practices are performed for the sake of reaching this essence, namely the indivisible union of the two truths.

Once this essence is obtained, as the ultimate and the conventional truths merge perfectly into one entity, all vehicles, paths, and skillful means no longer exist. For this reason, in order to help us understand the indivisible union of the two truths, the Buddha

provided the eighty-four thousand teachings; and so, the eighty-four thousand teachings ultimately amount to the indivisible union of the two truths.

In the tantra traditions, the indivisible union of the two truths is called the great equality, whereas in the sutra traditions it is called the indivisible union of appearance and emptiness, and also can be called the single final vehicle. In the *Sutra Requested by Kashyapa*, it is said: “Oh, Kashyapa, there is only one vehicle. If one realizes the equality of all things, one is Buddha. This is the single vehicle, it is not two or three.” The implication is indeed that the teachings of all vehicles are of a single entity, and as such there are not two, three, or multiple vehicles, any of the latter statements is of provisional meaning.

For this reason, we must know that the different vehicles are all indeed set forth for the sake of attaining Buddhahood, or for the sake of realizing the ultimate truth of the indivisible union of appearances and emptiness. This is comparable to the essential part of the grains that we eat, whereas all the other teachings are for the sake of realizing the single final vehicle. As it is stated in the *Lotus Sutra*, “All innumerable teachings are indeed one vehicle.” The Buddha proclaims a vast number of teachings in accordance with the capacities of different living beings, yet in truth, what they must understand is the single final vehicle. The

reasonings concerning the single final vehicle can be found in Maitreya's *Uttaratantra Shastra*, in Nagarjuna's *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, and in Mipham Rinpoche's *Beacon of Certainty*. Chandrakirti also remarked, "Thus the Buddha taught living beings one unparalleled and undivided vehicle." In other words, the Buddha has proclaimed a variety of vehicles and each individual teaching for different beings, yet in truth all these teachings and vehicles are undivided, for there is no other vehicle beyond them. Hence, what we must bear in mind is that the single final vehicle is the actual entity of the myriads of teachings.

Therefore, we must rely on the non-dual wisdom instead of conceptual mind. Perhaps, in the capacity of common beings, we are now unable to obtain the wisdom that is perfectly beyond all conceptual elaborations. And yet this very wisdom is the goal that we must pursue.

#### **Verse 90**

**Hence, the Buddha knows all expedient means,**

**And expedient means are called the genuine path.**

**With this in mind, in the teacher and his noble teaching,**

**An irreversible confidence is generated.**

The compassionate Buddha knows to perfection the faculties, intentions, and lineage of all living beings. Accordingly, he proclaims

innumerable teachings to them. Still, all such expedient means are for the sake of making sentient beings understand the ultimate truth of all things, and to eventually lead them to obtain Buddhahood. This is the reason why we call expedient means the genuine path.

In the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha set forth the following parable: The mansion of a household caught fire, but while the father promptly escaped the burning house, his children remained inside, grasping to their toys, unwilling to exit. Particularly concerned, the father tricked them, saying that there were sheep carts, deer carts, and ox carts outside, so that the children would leave the mansion. Certain children liked deer carts, others sheep carts, while even others liked ox carts. In this way, all the children successfully left the mansion. The parable illustrated that the vehicle of Hearers, the vehicle of solitary buddhas, and the vehicle of bodhisattvas can all lead beings to liberation. Hence, all expedient means are genuine paths.

One must not say that only the teachings of Vajrayana are correct, and that in the sutra traditions the vehicle of hearers or the vehicle of humans and gods are not genuine. To provide different teachings to living beings of different capacities is in fact the right thing to do. Furthermore, as an alternative example, suppose that there are three remarkable disciples who, perhaps, each individually chose

a different master. If one of such disciples happens to choose a master who is not suitable for him, then this master will not be of great benefit to the disciple.

Therefore, the Buddha has spoken different teachings to different beings. In this way, we will reach the understanding that our fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni is the only valid person in the entire world. As stated in the *Extensive Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni*, in his many births through the cosmic ages, the Buddha has given everything for the sake of living beings, and, eventually, his mental continuum perfectly transformed into the nature of wisdom and compassion. The genuine teaching that the Buddha has spoken is excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, and excellent at the end, and it is the course through which living beings attain happiness. Therefore, we must have an irreversible confidence in our fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni and in all the teachings that he has spoken.

There are practitioners among us who, from the depth of their hearts, have generated an irreversible and unshakeable confidence in the Buddha and in the Dharma. If the confidence you have thus generated is truly unshakeable, then in no way will your mind follow evil spirits, non-Buddhists, humans, or non-humans who may use any means to tempt you or deceive you. Even when you are faced with troubles in life or in the course of practice, someone

attempts to seduce you into slandering the Buddhadharma, in no way will you blindly follow the opinions of others. Therefore, this certainty is of the utmost importance. In a eulogy to the Buddha, a virtuous master of the past said, “I abandon all other guides and take refuge in you, Buddha, for you are endowed with all virtuous qualities, having gone beyond all faults.” Therefore, if someone genuinely recognizes the Buddha’s meritorious qualities, as well as the sublime qualities of the Dharma, he or she will possess an irreversible confidence.

For example, although I may not be the inventor or maker of a certain object, I may still be knowledgeable about the way it works. If anyone says that such an authentic object is a counterfeit or is a forgery, I will in no way believe this person’s statements. On the other hand, if I am not particularly knowledgeable about this object, I may be confident about it now but there is the chance that after some time, I may no longer be so. Therefore, we must understand by means of reasoning and wisdom the meritorious qualities of the Buddha and those of the Dharma. In this way, as Mipham Rinpoche explains here, we will generate an irreversible confidence.

Certainly, in speaking of a genuinely irreversible confidence, it is the bodhisattvas of the first level and higher who generally possess such an extremely stable confidence. But common beings can have



a similarly irreversible confidence also. As for me, I don't have any other realizations or meritorious qualities. Yet still, my confidence in the Buddha and in the Dharma has been irreversible since the time I have generated it. Even if I were cut into pieces, I would certainly feel pain, and perhaps I would yell "Ouch! Ouch!" Yet if in that very moment someone told me, "You should believe that the Buddha is untruthful", I will not believe that as long as I am alive. My confidence in the Buddha is neither blind faith, nor is it a matter of blindly accepting someone else's words. Take, for example, the flavor of candy that one has already tasted. Having known the taste of candy, one will never doubt its sweetness. Similarly, I believe firmly, without the slightest doubt, in the perfect accuracy of the Buddhadharma.

Along the spiritual path, it is very important to generate a genuinely irreversible and unshakeable confidence in Buddha Shakyamuni and in his teachings by means of listening and reflection. This is emphasized by Longchen Rabjam, Mipham Rinpoche, and His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. I often think about the great kindness of His Holiness. If he had not so often dispensed teachings to us, we would still have confusions in the Buddhadharma today because we are not individuals of sharp faculties. Furthermore, in this modern society that is polluted by the five impurities, individuals struggle to form the correct view and behavior. As

a result of the work of the lineage masters, many of us have fortunately gained such a firm confidence.

In terms of practice, many lineage masters have the following requirements: (1) our view should be connected with scriptural authority and with reasoning, that is, our view must be established both by means of scriptural authority and by means of reasoning; (2) our practice should be connected with personal experience, for practice with no experience is useless; (3) our behavior should be connected with time, meaning, for example, that I now have the capacity of a beginner, and so at this time I must act according to the behavior required for the common vehicle, whereas, on the other hand, if I have attained a state in which none of the four great elements can damage me, or in which I no longer have any attachment, hatred, or ignorance, I can then act according to the behavior of Vajrayana; hence behavior is connected with time.

According to these instructions, we should connect our view with scriptural authority and reasoning at the outset. This is a crucial point. Without a firm foundation based on scriptural authority and reasoning, you may wear the monastic robe and listen to the teachings today and continue for a number of years, however, you may be easily persuaded by teachings from non-Buddhists or from worldly individuals because you have no certainty of your view. That would indeed be very regrettable.

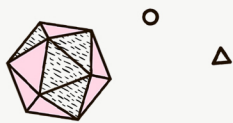
### **Verse 91**

**By attaining the supreme non-abiding wisdom,  
One is naturally liberated from the extremes of existence  
and of peace.  
And one's great and effortless compassion,  
Pervades throughout boundless time and space.**

He or she who is endowed with irreversible confidence eventually attains the wisdom that does not abide anywhere. At this time, he or she naturally attains complete liberation from the three realms of existence as well as from the peace of nirvana. As explained in the *Ornament for Clear Realizations*, "Not abiding in the three realms thanks to wisdom, not clinging to nirvana thanks to compassion." Because one is endowed with transcendent wisdom, one has eliminated entirely the roots of cyclic existence. From then on, one will never be reborn into cyclic existence driven by the power of former actions. And, because one is endowed with the sublime mind of great compassion, one no longer permanently abides, as in the case of certain types of hearers, in the peaceful state of nirvana. At that time, dwelling in an effortless state, one generates an extremely strong mind of compassion for the living beings who have not yet realized the non-duality of equality and purity, and who are unaware of the indivisible union of appearance and

emptiness. Such a great compassion is not constrained by limits in terms of time or space.

For most individuals, expressing the mind of compassion has to meet certain criteria: because I am on good terms with a certain person and when I feel pity for him or her I will have compassion for him or her; if an enemy I hate is in distress, I will think he deserves that suffering and will not have compassion for him; for all the living beings who are suffering, I might have compassion for them sometimes but when I'm not in a good mood, or when I'm particularly busy, I may find them all annoying and will not have compassion for them, even those with whom I am on good terms. In fact, the scope of most of our compassion is quite limited and not universal. Indeed, only the enlightened beings' effortless compassion is pervasive throughout boundless time and space.



# Chapter Six

## ATTAINMENT

COMMENTARY ON *THE SWORD OF WISDOM*

## THE EIGHT GREAT ELOQUENCES

### *E3. The Eight Great Eloquence: The Result of the Four Principles*

#### **Verse 92**

**When contemplating the four principles,  
Relying upon which to ascertain the two truths,  
It brings the functions of the four reliances.  
From within these immaculate, supreme causes,**

#### **Verse 93**

**The fruit of profound wisdom arises,  
Perfectly illuminating everything.  
Thus, sealed in the nature of awareness,  
The eight treasures of eloquence are revealed.**

In the foregoing analyses, we have discussed ultimate truth and conventional truth, and then we have introduced the four principles which are used to ascertain the two truths. In observing the two truths by relying upon these four principles, we may depend on the four reliances as we progress. These topics, the two truths, the

four principles, and the four reliances are extremely important for our practice and we must pay great attention to them.

Given these three immaculate, supreme foundations, the fruit of profound wisdom will eventually arise in our mind. When we have a wick, a fuel reservoir, and oil, light can be generated from an oil lamp to immediately dispels darkness. If we master the two truths through the four principles and follow exactly the four reliances, profound wisdom will arise and perfectly illuminate everything. As a result, the eight treasures of eloquence that are sealed within the nature of awareness will be revealed. The eight treasures of eloquence are also known as the eight treasures of meritorious qualities.

Indeed, because all sentient beings possess the buddha nature, all are capable of developing the eight eloquences described below. However, for ordinary beings who may lack the proper causes and conditions, the eight eloquences remain hidden from their awareness, with no way of being revealed. Yet, if they correctly understand the two truths, the four principles, and the four reliances, and if they earnestly engage in practice, the hidden eight eloquences will be revealed and become evident to them.

Many people would say: “Empower me with your blessing, make me develop wisdom right away.” Indeed, it would be impossible to

develop wisdom with just the puff of a blessing. If one genuinely hopes to develop wisdom and obtain eloquence, one must work hard to study the principles discussed above. In truth, before they attained their achievements, many eminent masters and enlightened persons attached particular importance to these teachings during their study and practice. Eventually, the mystery that was concealed in the depth of their minds was revealed. However, many still don't understand or believe in the relationship between these teachings and their study and practice. If a person has genuine faith in the Buddhadharma, a proper foundation, an acceptance of these causal relationships, and a willingness to put them into practice, one would be able to obtain the fruits of the eight eloquences.

Throughout history, many great lineage masters were able to attain the eight eloquences. For example, in the biography of Mipham Rinpoche, as well as in his prayers, it is said that he had attained the eight eloquences. In his *Gateway to Knowledge*, Mipham Rinpoche explained the eight eloquences in great detail. The Buddha discussed this topic at length in *The Lalitavistara Sutra*.

#### **Verse 94**

**The teachings that are heard and contemplated in the past,  
Are never forgotten—this is the treasure of right  
recollection.**



**The various profound and vast meanings,  
Are completely discerned—this is the treasure of  
intelligence.**

The first eloquence states that, having listened to the teachings of sutrayana and tantrayana from a teacher, one would never forget these teachings, but recollect them in a clear way. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is said: “It is the treasure of recollection, by reason of the absence of forgetfulness.” In the history of the lineage, many great masters might not have been fully understood the teachings at the time when they first started to study them. Yet, eventually, they were able to remember everything only by looking at it once. This is an indication of the first eloquence, the treasure of correct recollection.

Among the profound and vast teachings that the Buddha had taught, the profound refers to the teaching of emptiness and the vast includes all the other teachings in the five paths and in the ten grounds. The ability to differentiate and to understand these teachings in full is the second eloquence, the treasure of intelligence. *The Lalitavistara Sutra* says, “It is the treasure of intelligence, by reason of excelling in the ability of discerning the characteristics of the teachings.” In other words, this eloquence is the skillfulness in distinguishing the character of all teachings, in particular, the aspects of the profound and of the vast. There are many masters

who possessed such qualities. For example, Mipham Rinpoche's *Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way*, a sublime work that explains the profound and the vast. If he had not attained this treasure of intelligence, he would not have been able to compose such a great work.

**Verse 95**

**All doctrines in the sutras and tantras,  
Are well understood—this is the treasure of realization.  
Once heard, all meanings, with no exception,  
Are never forgotten—this is the treasure of retention.**

The third is known as the treasure of realization, an unobstructed understanding of the teachings proclaimed by Buddha Shakyamuni in the twelve canonical classes of the sutrayana and in the four great tantra classes of the tantrayana. Regarding the detailed classifications of tantras, there are seventeen great classes of tantras about the Great Perfection and the eighteen great tantras about the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*. I often think that, regardless of whether he taught sutra or tantra, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche knew them all like the palm of his hand. He had genuinely attained the treasure of realization. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is called “treasure of wisdom”, where it says, “by reason of being able to realize the meaning of all scriptures.”

The forth is the treasure of retention, an ability to fully recall all meanings. Retention is also called dharana in Sanskrit, which includes the forbearance dharani, the teaching dharani, the meaning dharani, and the dharani empowering secret mantras. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is called the “treasure of dharani”, where it says, “by reason that all that is heard can be retained.” Regardless of whether it is a teaching or any other topic, when one can recall it perfectly and clearly, one has attained the treasure of dharani.

We know that when the Buddha was alive, many sravaka and pratyekabuddha attained dharani or retention and were able to perfectly recall the teachings. So, after the Buddha entered nirvana, they relied on these skills to compile the collections of scriptures as instructed by the Buddha before his nirvana.

#### **Verse 96**

**Satisfying sentient beings with excellent teachings—**

**This is the treasure of eloquence.**

**The great, precious treasury of the sublime Dharma,**

**Is to be guarded in its entirety—this is the treasure of  
true Dharma.**

The fifth is called the treasure of eloquence, meaning one is able to deliver the good teachings in accordance with the reality, in ways that can be fully understood by living beings and to make them

joyful and satisfied. Many people obtained exceptional benefits after receiving teachings, experiencing a sense of extreme joy and satisfaction. This is an indication of the master's "treasure of eloquence" as described in *The Lalitavistara Sutra* where it says the treasure of eloquence is "capable of generating joy in sentient beings". In other words, sentient beings can experience genuine joy through listening to these teachings.

Such joy is not the same as the pleasant feelings that good dancers or singers can often bring to an audience. Instead, it is the joy of Dharma based on the certainty of the Buddha's teachings. For example, when we talk about the faults of afflictions such as desire and anger, we believe, from the depth of our heart, that afflictions do have these faults. And when we talk about the merits of liberation, we know exactly what the benefits will be in breaking free from samsara. Hence, we generate great joy from the depth of our hearts because we know that what we've heard represents true reality.

The sixth one is the treasure of the true Dharma, which means one has the determination to protect and maintain the authentic Dharma. It has two parts, the realization of the Dharma, and the spreading of the Dharma. The former includes the generation of the right views and an unshakeable faith in the Dharma teachings, such as those contained in the twelve canonical classes of the Buddhist

Tripitaka. The precious Buddhadharma is like a wish-fulfilling jewel. As such, dharma practitioners are willing to practice it, protect it, maintain it, defend it, and spread it, and is so doing, are even willing to defend it with their own lives. Such behaviors are exhibited when one has obtained the treasure of the true Dharma. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is called “treasure of attaining the true Dharma”, where it meant “protecting the Buddhadharma”.

**Verse 97**

**Not severing the continuous lineage of the Three Jewels—**

**This is the treasure of the aspiration to awakening.**

**Gaining acceptance of the nature of equality and the**

**nonproduction of all things—**

**This is the treasure of accomplishment.**

The seventh is called the treasure of the aspiration to awakening, or the treasure of bodhichitta. It means that one must become an heir to the tathagata’s inheritance, and to maintain the lineage of the Three Jewels with no interruption. Everything that the tathagata has passed down to us, whether it is bodhichitta, wisdom, or compassion, is part of the merits of the Buddha. One should strive to pass them to all sentient beings, this is called the inheritance of the tathagata’s teaching. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it says, “It is the treasure of bodhichitta, by reason of not letting the lineage of the Three Jewels become extinct.”

Although we might not have the same treasure of bodhichitta that many eminent masters had, many of us still have certain treasures of bodhichitta. That is because the meritorious qualities in our minds, such as wisdom and renunciation, have indeed been passed down directly from the Buddha and from the lineage masters. Moreover, since we protect and uphold the good teaching of the Buddha, show respect to the Sangha, and keep the vows of laypersons and above, we are preventing the lineage of the Three Jewels from becoming interrupted. Wherever the Three Jewels are represented, there would not be any evil spirits and heretics and the Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings would be upheld.

Sometimes I feel that in this age, among an ant-like crowds of human beings, how fortunate is it that we possess this human body and are endowed with freedoms and advantages! As such, everyone should feel joy and aspire as follows: "For as long as I live, I will do my very best for the sake of the Three Jewels and for the Buddhadharma. I will abstain from performing any evil action that terminates the lineage of the Three Jewels." If we maintain this aspiration in our hearts, our actions will follow our hearts and they will be meaningful.

The eighth is called the treasure of accomplishment or receptivity to the Dharma. It means that one is able to fully accept the teaching of emptiness and all other inconceivable teachings. Some with

less-developed faculties feel fear upon hearing that all things are emptiness. While others, unlike them, can fully accept the emptiness of all things that are beyond conceptual elaboration, and can accept the unfathomable state of all buddhas. This is receptivity to the Dharma. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it says: "It is the treasure of accomplishment, by reason of attaining the receptivity to the teachings on nonproduction of things."

In general, upon hearing about the teaching of emptiness and the inconceivable states of realization, an individual belonging to the Mahayana lineage would not have any doubt. He or she would think: "The tathagata's realization is inconceivable, and the mystery concerning all things is inexpressible; since the Buddha said so, how do I, a being of lesser faculties, have the ability to go against it? Anything the Buddha has spoken is perfectly true and correct." If we have this kind of confidence and understanding, it would also be considered as a receptivity to the nonproduction of things.

When we attain the noble fruition of the first bodhisattva ground or higher, we would attain the genuine eight eloquences or the eight treasures of meritorious qualities. Still, there are those among us who may be capable of attaining a similar state. The eight eloquences are frequently discussed in the treatises concerning

this topic and we should develop a clear understanding of their meaning.

**Verse 98**

**Those who are freely endowed with the abundance of,  
and never separated from  
The eight great and inexhaustible treasures  
Will be praised by buddhas and bodhisattvas  
And become a lord of the three realms.**

After one attains the eight eloquences through listening, reflection, and meditation, this person will never be separated from them from that time on. In other words, he or she is liberally endowed with the inexhaustible treasures of meritorious qualities and becomes a son of the tathagatas. Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, the virtuous masters, together with humans and nonhumans, will praise this individual as a great master, a son of the Buddha, a keeper of knowledge, and as a sage. Not only that, this individual will also become, in a very short time, a lord of the three realms, a teacher of the world, attaining the resultant state of a perfectly enlightened buddha.

For this reason, as practitioners, we should learn the skillful means for attaining the eight eloquences. These skillful means, as we have already discussed above, are listening, reflection, and meditation



by relying on the four principles and the four reliances. In this manner, we will most surely attain such meritorious qualities. Clearly it would not be possible to gain all eight eloquences in a short time. However, as we proceed in our practice, we must seek to understand these meritorious qualities and pursue the fundamental way of practice. Applying these principles to our lives with zeal, we will become good practitioners.

Good practitioners are held in high regards by many ordinary people. For example, because of their meritorious qualities such as wisdom and altruism, non-practitioners take delight in many dharma teachers and practitioners. On the surface, it may appear as if most people are the same. However, in truth, there could be significant differences on many aspects such as each person's predispositions and realization. Although it would be difficult for most to actually obtain the eight eloquences in the near future, I very much hope that as we practice we will at least become sincere and authentic practitioners endowed with the qualities of a good person, and that we can direct our aspirations and practices, and our best efforts, toward bringing benefit to others. In this way, we will be praised and recognized by others, and by buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The greatest barrier to attaining the eight eloquences is one's attachment to self, a strong attachment that can find no origin.

This self-attachment is the greatest obstacle to our practice and to the attainment of the eight eloquences. Recognizing this, the great masters of the Kadampa tradition taught that the target of our practice should be the elimination of all selfish thoughts.

Since the objects of our attachment through desire or anger are indeed illusory and dream-like, there is no need to cling to them. Many in the world still seek what they have desired since childhood, things that lack real meaning for attachment. As we practice, we must avoid becoming attached to such unreal things, particularly to ourselves. Instead, we must dedicate our practice towards altruism. In this way, we would most certainly succeed.

## THE RESULT OF UNDERSTANDING THE TWO TRUTHS

### *C3. The Result of Understanding the Two Truths*

In the foregoing, we have discussed the two truths that will have to be understood, and the two kinds of valid knowledge that can be used to understand the two truths, namely, valid knowledge of the ultimate and the valid knowledge of the conventional. As we ascertain the two truths with the two valid knowledge, we would obtain the following results which are explained below.

#### **Verse 99**

**The valid teachings of the victorious Buddha**

**Can be established by the valid knowledge.**

**Therefore, through the valid path, one generates conviction,**

**And sees the true fruition of the valid teachings.**

Valid teachings are the teachings taught by the Buddha. All discourses spoken by the Buddha, including the provisional and ultimate teachings, are true and undeceiving, and are correct valid

knowledge. How do we know this? It is through the unmistakable direct perception and inference, or through the valid knowledge of the conventional and the valid knowledge of the ultimate. Some might regard the statement that what the Buddha taught is the valid teaching as merely an assumption. Yet it is not so, for the Buddha is the one who genuinely benefits others, and his statements are entirely correct and beyond refutation. Among all the excellent statements in the world, the Buddha's teachings are the most correct and thus can be established as correct valid knowledge.

In his *Compendium of Valid Knowledge*, Dignaga says: "Homage to the absolute valid knowledge, the one who is devoted to the benefit of sentient beings, the great master, the well-gone, and the protector." This verse praises the Buddha's altruistic mind, as well as his numerous meritorious qualities such as having become the one with valid knowledge. Nagarjuna also says: "I bow my head before the Buddha, whose teaching is first among all." This means that the words spoken by the Buddha rank first among all words in the world and no one is capable of surpassing them. By earnestly studying the related scriptures and commentaries, we will understand this insight.

In the chapter entitled *Establishing the Buddha as the One with Valid Knowledge* of his *Commentary on Valid Knowledge*, Dharmakirti discusses why the Buddha is the valid person through the valid

knowledge of the conventional. Nagarjuna, who is well known as the bodhisattva of the first ground, establishes the Buddha as the valid person through the valid knowledge of the ultimate, mainly from the perspective of the profound. By following Nagarjuna's reasoning, we know that the Buddha had perfectly understood the nature of emptiness, and that no ordinary being is capable of knowing such profound meaning. Meanwhile, Asanga, who reached the third bodhisattva ground, discussed from the perspective of the vast sublime instructions given by the Buddha concerning the five paths and the ten grounds. Through his instructions we know that the Buddha is the only person who is capable of understanding the way of establishing the paths and grounds, as well as the vast aspects of all things in the world.

Therefore, if we study the Buddha's instructions, as well as the instructions of the great Indian masters such as Nagarjuna, Asanga, Dharmakirti and Dignaga, or the instructions of the great Tibetan and Chinese masters, we will eventually come to the understanding that the Buddha is truly the one with valid knowledge, and that the path explained by the Buddha is entirely correct. If we follow this valid path we will reach beyond the ocean of suffering and attain the peace of nirvana. We should all develop, from the depth of our hearts, an irreversible confidence and conviction as along

the path of practice, this conviction is indeed something precious and rare.

When we have developed such conviction and can remain unchanged by anyone in the world, we will become a real follower of the Buddha and will further see the true fruition of the valid teaching. We will even be able to see perfectly and clearly the truths that are hard to understand by sravaka, pratyekabuddha, not to mention the wise in the world and in the heavens, and the scientists and literary scholars acclaimed by contemporary society. At that time, no one—demons, non-Buddhists, and the whole of conceptual thoughts of misleading doctrines—will be capable of altering our view.

In his *One Hundred and Fifty Verses in Praise of the Buddha*, Asvaghosa says:

*Upon hearing the authentic teaching from the World Conqueror,  
All mistaken traditions become frightened,  
The Lord of Maras becomes deeply worried,  
While humans and gods develop a profound faith.*

The implication here is that, having heard the genuine instructions spoken by the World Conqueror, the unparalleled teacher Buddha Shakyamuni, any adherent of an erroneous tradition will become

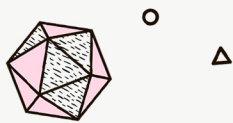
terrified, the Lord of Maras will become deeply concerned, whereas those among humans and gods who have planted roots of virtue will develop joy and confidence from the depth of their hearts. Indeed, no worldly truth can compare with the Buddha's teachings and doctrines.

We should possess a faith in Buddhism towards the Buddha's teaching, a faith that is not merely in words, and not an adoration based on mere belief or blind faith. By studying the Buddha's teachings, people of all ages, whether they are old or young, would come to the following realization: although there are many famous figures in the world throughout history, such as movie stars, pop stars, or leaders, who received unanimous acclaims by millions of individuals; the only unparalleled guide who is truly free from faults, who is endowed with all meritorious qualities, and who has explained the path of liberation to sentient beings, is our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, together with all buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times. Although words from various famous historical figures seemed appealing to many, the truth is if we follow them, we would not gain liberation.

Many adore pop stars or movie stars, but once you have heard their songs or seen their movies, what will it mean to your present or future life? It could only leave satisfied for a very short time: "This song is so good! The music is so moving!" Its value will go

only so far. In contrast, we should all understand that the value of the Buddha's words and their benefits for our present and future lifetimes are immense.





# Chapter Seven

## THE ENDING



# THE MANNER OF COMPOSING THIS TREATISE

*B3. The Wholesome Ending*

*C1. The Manner of Composing This Treatise*

**Verse 100**

**His vision is completely and utterly pure.**

**His great compassion has reached perfection.**

**The bliss-gone buddha has shown the path, and says,**

**“I have tasted the flavor of the nectar I have discovered,**

**Verse 101**

**And I wish that, by the four principles,**

**And the four reliances, you will taste it, too.”**

The Buddha possesses two meritorious qualities: (1) he sees everything in its utmost clarity because in his wisdom, the Buddha knows the true nature of everything in the world and see it as clearly as the palm of his hand; (2) he has a great, consummate, all-encompassing compassion towards all sentient beings of this

world who have not yet understood the true nature of all things. In his *Commentary on Valid Knowledge*, Dharmakirti explains the nature of the Buddha from the two aspects, wisdom and compassion.

In contrast, what we ordinary beings see lacks purity, our vision like being affected by cataracts and completely obscured by them. Our compassion is also limited, conditional and not all-encompassing. In the *Commentary on Valid Knowledge*, Dharmakirti says, “The teachings that are spoken for skillful means arise from compassion, the teachings that are spoken for truth arise from wisdom.” With his wisdom, the Buddha perfectly explains the ultimate truth of emptiness and the conventional truth of appearance. With his compassion, the Buddha provides the means for all sentient beings to obtain liberation from the ocean of suffering.

The Buddha has thus revealed a profound and vast set of teachings and paths to all sentient beings in the form of the nectar-like Dharma. When he attained supreme enlightenment, the Buddha said, “I have obtained the nectar-like Dharma, profound, peaceful, beyond conceptual elaborations, luminous, and uncompounded.” A means by which we can obtain this nectar-like Dharma is through the four principles and the four reliances discussed above.

Let’s reflect further on this key point. Although the present work by Mipham Rinpoche amounts to only about one hundred stanzas,

here he provides one specific essential instruction. That is, the very flavor of the nectar-like Dharma realized by the Buddha and the eminent masters of the past can only be obtained by relying upon the four principles and the four reliances. Without them, unless one is already very advance in one's practice, ordinary beings like us will have difficulties experiencing the flavor of this nectar.

**Verse 101**

**Although this nectar has now been shared,  
In such age of degeneration,**

**Verse 102**

**Sentient beings tend to an opposite direction to the path,  
Hence they can hardly taste it.  
Having seen this, with pure intention,  
And a mind of supreme devotion for the teachings,  
I wrote this.**

When the causes and conditions are finally aligned, one can begin to receive and experience the flavor of the sublime nectar-like Dharma. This is possible because each sentient being has been endowed with the essence of the tathagatas, and the Buddha has equally shared the teachings with all sentient beings. Yet, whether or not one can actually obtain the Dharma depends on one's karmic connections. To illustrate, I have now provided an

explanation of Mipham Rinpoche's teachings to all of you. Yet, will everyone equally gain from it the great benefits that are possible? Not necessarily. Those who have confidence, virtuous roots, and a sincere desire for this teaching, could greatly benefit from these teachings in this life as well as in all future lifetimes. Yet others may not only be unable to gain confidence, but may even develop a mistaken understanding from it. Likewise, although all sentient beings are fundamentally equal and have equally been exposed to the Buddha's teachings, individual results could vary greatly depending on each of their own conditions.

This is especially true in this modern age that is marked by the five types of degeneration. Although the Buddha's nectar-like sublime teachings are present, individuals may still run in the opposite direction. Because they are not seeking the nectar of the Buddhadharma by means of the four reliances and the four principles, they are unable to obtain the right result and to experience the truth of genuine Buddhadharma. Indeed, this is not a uniquely current phenomenon. It also prevailed soon after the Buddha's parinirvana. In the final part of his *Abhidharmakosa*, Vasubandhu explains that when the bright eye of the world closed, that is, when the Buddha entered nirvana and the majority of the sages who witnessed the authentic Dharma, such as Mahamaudgalyayana and Shariputra, also passed into nirvana, audacious individuals

who had not really understood the truth came out to undermine the Buddha's teachings with their own incorrect views.

This was true even when Vasubandhu, who were called "second buddha", were alive, let alone in today's age of degeneration. It is just as the Buddha said in the Mahayana scripture, *The Surangama Sutra*, that in the age of final Dharma, there will be as many wicked masters spreading their doctrines as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. It is indeed so, for today, masters who give teachings that accord with the authentic Dharma and valid reasonings are as rare as the stars seen during daytime while those who spread erroneous paths and erroneous conceptual thoughts are many. In this age, regrettably, the vast majority of people have not tasted the principles of the two truths proclaimed by the Buddha.

When Mipham Rinpoche saw the lamentable circumstances in this age of degeneration, a pure intention and desire naturally arose in his heart to benefit all sentient beings. Having observed that in this age that so many are completely unable to understand that the Buddha is the one with valid knowledge and how genuine faith in Buddhism can arise through the four principles and the four reliances, he engendered an uncontainable great compassion for all sentient beings. At the same time, he had a sincere feeling of reverence, and supreme devotion for the Buddhadharma. With

his pure intention and with a respectful mind, Mipham Rinpoche composed *The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*.

We should similarly adopt such an attitude in studying this work. When I saw so many people relied not on the teaching but on individuals, I felt the urgency to introduce this work to all Buddhists as soon as I can. I know it would not benefit everyone but I hope it will have an impact on many people. I also have a respectful mind toward the Buddhadharma and know how rare and how precious it is. With this in mind, I want to share the teaching on this treatise. I hope everyone would recognize that this treatise is very precious and that everyone should study this treatise with a compassionate mind towards all sentient beings. When you have understood this treatise and when you have the opportunity, I urge you to share this precious teaching with everyone. I am certain that this sublime treatise by Mipham Rinpoche will bring an endless stream of benefits to a great many people.

## THE DEDICATION OF THIS VIRTUOUS DEED

### *C2. The Dedication of This Virtuous Deed*

#### **Verse 103**

**By the merit of this concise explanation  
Of the doctrines arising from immaculate wisdom  
That is born of reflection,  
May all beings attain the fruition of Manjushri.**

The wisdom born of reflection through the detailed observations explained above is free from any stain. Ordinary people of the world write commentaries, engage in translations, compose new works, and have published many books. However, they do so with different goals in their minds, and could have a selfish intention. For example, during the short spans of their lifetimes, some people engage in these activities for the sake of becoming famous, while others in order to earn money, and so on. But here, as Mipham Rinpoche says, the doctrines expounded in this work arise from the immaculate wisdom born of reflection, and have no such faults.



The content of this work is not very lengthy, its texts being rather condensed and having only one hundred and four stanzas. As such, it is known as a “concise explanation”. Still, it includes all of the Buddha’s teachings, and covers the vast number of scriptures in the sutrayana and tantrayana traditions. Here, the author dedicates the merit of composing this work for the benefit of all living beings so that they will eventually attain the fruition of Manjushri.

There are unimaginable merits in merely hearing the name of Manjushri, let alone in attaining his fruition. In my *History of Mount Wutai*, I provided a short explanation of the merits of hearing Manjushri’s name as well as the merits of chanting Manjushri’s mantra.

A lay practitioner once asked me online: “You presented so many of Manjushri’s merits but what do we do if everyone only prays to Manjushri without studying other teachings?” I replied: “I don’t believe this will happen, for although Manjushri’s merits are indeed great, the predispositions of living beings are all different. As such it is unlikely that all sentient beings would only learn the teachings of Manjushri.” I then continued with a metaphor. “Take, for example, a person who does commercials for a Mitsubishi automobile. Although he or she may say that such a car possesses such and such good qualities, we should not worry that everyone will only buy a Mitsubishi. The commercial may be completely

accurate and the car may indeed be a good car. Still, some people will be unwilling to buy it and opt for another brand. Similarly, all individuals have different predispositions and even if I were to praise Manjushri's and Avalokitesvara's merits equally, faith in Manjushri will arise in some individuals and faith in Avalokitesvara will arise in others. Therefore, even though we promote the merits of chanting a buddha's name, we need not be worried whether other buddhas may also have sentient beings to liberate or not." As people begin to engage in listening and reflection, some may be troubled by these aspects. There is no need to be concerned.

Mipham Rinpoche was commonly acknowledged in many works as a manifestation of Manjushri. Yet, it seems that in many of his writings, he paid homage to Manjushri as his deity. And also in his dedications, he often expressed the wish for all sentient beings to obtain the same fruition as Manjushri. Those who have read Mipham Rinpoche's biography will know that he had an uncommon connection with Manjushri all his various lifetimes. This is also true for our guru, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, who often paid homage to Manjushri, and who, in his dedications of merit, often expressed the wish for all sentient beings to obtain the same fruition as Manjushri.

# THE PERFECTION OF COMPOSING THIS TREATISE

## *A3. The Perfection of Composing This Treatise*

### **Verse 104**

**Thanks to the sun of Manjushri's speech,**

**The lotus of my mind blossoms with devotion.**

**As these honey drops of excellent explanation flows  
therefrom,**

**May they bring joy to the bees of good fortune.**

In writing *The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*, Mipham Rinpoche received Manjushri's empowerment and described it as a radiant sun. Relying on the sun's radiance, the lotus of his mind blossomed with devotion. Just as a lotus can only blossom when it is exposed to sunlight, the lotus of one's mind can only blossom with the aid of the three kinds of faith and the blessings from buddhas and bodhisattvas.

With the opening of the lotus of his mind, valuable teachings flew out like the honey drops of the lotus. Mipham Rinpoche wishes all bees endowed with good fortune—those sentient beings who have an auspicious connection with the Mahayana in this or previous lifetimes—would naturally gather and partake of this honey with joy.

Here, Mipham Rinpoche uses this lively metaphor to illustrate that those whoever obtains Manjushri's empowerment will naturally awaken to the mystery or the nature of one's mind. This individual will in turn be able to give many excellent teachings to benefit other sentient beings, gathering swarms of disciples with karmic connections to him or her side. This is like a lotus flower which blossoms with the sun, its stamens producing the flower's pollen, attracting bees from everywhere to naturally gather there.

As followers, we must have sincere faith in Manjushri and pray to him often. When the two necessary conditions, Manjushri's blessing and our devotion, are met, wisdom will arise. As wisdom arises, one will be able to speak the Dharma eloquently and fluently. It will then no longer be necessary to strenuously memorize and chant every day. Instead, we will be like our guru His Holiness who carried out his practice every day without memorizing and reading books. But when he taught the Dharma, words of wisdom flowed naturally out of his mouth. His Holiness also mentioned this in his

songs of realization, saying that without any effort and without the help of any knowledge or conceptual thoughts obtained from hard practice, the hidden treasures of wisdom manifested spontaneously in his mind. He was able to provide benefits to sentient beings without any additional preparation.

Dharma teachers are often delighted when someone approaches them and ask to be a disciple. After offering to accept them and teach them the Dharma, these teachers are sometimes very disappointed when their students abandon their studies. There is no need to feel this way. If you have truly shared your wisdom and have met the supreme conditions for teaching the Buddhadharma, disciples from all corners of the earth will naturally gather around you.

Therefore, when His Holiness was alive, he was not afraid of having no disciples at all. Quite the contrary, everyone was concerned that there were too many people around him as a result of his empowerment by Manjushri and the lineage masters. I believe that it is essential that one prays to Manjushri. Just to be clear, there is no difference when it comes to their nature regardless of one's chosen deity. Still, I believe that to improve your memory and other meritorious qualities such as your intelligence to distinguish between good and bad choices, you would need the empowerment of Manjushri, the deity of wisdom. For this reason, we should

chant Manjushri's mantra "Om a ra pa ca na dhi" as often as we can.

*I had meant to compose The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality. Recently, upon the request made by the learned Lhagsam Tenpa Gyaltsen, I, Jamphel Gyepa (Mipham Rinpoche), wrote it in a single day on the twenty-ninth day of the third month of the Sakyong year (i.e. Wood Bird, 1885). May all be auspicious! There are one hundred and four stanzas. How excellent!*

According to Mipham Rinpoche's biography, Lhagsam Tenpa Gyaltsen did not appear to be an exceptional figure among all his disciples. But since Mipham Rinpoche recognized him as a learned scholar, he must have indeed been exceptional. Following Mipham Rinpoche's instructions, he wrote *The Sun Illuminating the Buddha's Teaching: A Commentary to the Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*. During my teaching, I have also used his commentary as one of the main references.

I am extremely pleased that I have now concluded the commentary on this treatise. Although the treatise only amounts to one hundred and four stanzas, Mipham Rinpoche's instructions are exceptional and would greatly benefit everyone in this life and in all future lifetimes. Mipham Rinpoche completed the present work in a single

day. I wonder how long it would take us to commit it to memory. I hope that you will all read it always and refer to it in your lives.

With the merit that comes from presenting this great work, may all great masters from all ten directions have long and productive lives in this world, may the Buddhadharma prosper more and more day after day, and may all sentient beings obtain both the temporary and the ultimate benefits!

## Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great masters, to the flourishing of the Buddha Dharma, and to the welfare of all sentient beings.



It is always our wish to present a work of the highest quality to the readers so that anyone who reads this text would find inspiration. So we would very much appreciate your comments, feedback or suggestions for how this text might be improved and made more valuable. You are also greatly welcomed if you want to make a contribution to any of our other projects of translation.

Please email us at: *[translation@khenposodargye.org](mailto:translation@khenposodargye.org)*



ཡི་གེ་ཉི་ཤུ་རྩ་དྲུག་པ་ཡོད་དཔེ་མཛད་ནང་ལུ་ལམ་གྱི་ན་དཔེ་ཆ་དེ་ཅི་ཡོད་ན་  
ལག་ལེན་ཀྱང་ཉི་ཤུ་པ་མི་འགྲུང་བར་ལམ་གྱི་དཔེ་ཆ་ལྟར་ལས་གསུངས་སོ།།

For Non-Commercial Use Only