

The Essence of Zhentong

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Om Svasti!

Here, the essence of Mahāyāna, the Madhyamaka of definitive meaning (*nītārtha*, *nges don*), will be characterized by:¹

- I. A General Presentation on the Classification of Philosophical Systems
- II. Identifying the Classifications of Madhyamaka
- III. Clearing Away Extremes Imputed by Others

I. A General Presentation on the Classification of Philosophical Systems

Non-Buddhist Systems

While views and philosophies of other [non-Buddhist] extremists lack a path to freedom, our own Buddhist views and philosophies are related through a path to freedom. Even though extremists do not have a path to freedom, some of them possess—while others do not possess—teachings that lead them to exalted states of existence.² For instance, materialists and most other nihilists who lack respect for actions and their effects, and who primarily endorse teachings that are hurtful, do not even have a clear path to exalted states. Sāṃkhyas, naked Jain ascetics, some followers of supreme beings, and extremists who meditate, often do possess paths to exalted states. They are then reborn as gods and humans within the desire realms due to their having relinquished harmful actions and created virtuous actions; they are reborn in the form realms due to having meditatively cultivated the four concentrations; and they are reborn in the formless realms due to having meditatively cultivated the four formless stabilizations.

The reason why extremists do not have a path to freedom is that they do not relinquish the mentality that fixates onto the egotistic self. This is known as “fixation onto the self of personhood.” In saṃsāra, from time without beginning, what has continuously come about is this persistent mentality that fixates onto the egotistic self. Even so, these philosophical systems assert its existence along with the many distinctive qualities that are themselves this very egotistic self and they then meditate on its meaning. Since they do not have anything that can counteract this fixation onto the ego, they are not able to relinquish this self-fixedness. Consequently, this self-fixation is the repetitive cause of their every upsetting emotion.

However, the more sophisticated extremists meditate on the coarse impermanence of birth, aging, sickness, death, and so forth; they know the suffering of this life and of

the desire realm; they affirm that coarse substances such as material forms lack a true reality; they decrease their attachments and know contentment; they develop loving-kindness and compassion; they meditate on the equanimity of friends and enemies; and they relinquish the four roots.³ Since they have an excellent view, meditation, and conduct, their path leads to exalted states.

Buddhist Systems

There are four Buddhist philosophical systems:

- (a.) Vaibhāṣika
- (b.) Sautrāntika
- (c.) Cittamātra
- (d.) Madhyamaka

The former two belong to the Hinayāna or vehicle of the *śrāvakas* and the latter two belong to the Mahāyāna. As for how these are defined as being either Hinayāna or Mahāyāna, they are designated according to those who accept the set of sūtras associated with the Hinayāna as being the consummate discourses of the Buddha, and those who accept the set of sūtras explicated within the Mahāyāna as being the consummate discourses. Accordingly, these are the Hinayāna philosophical systems and the Mahāyāna philosophical systems, and [those who uphold them] are referred to as "proponents of the Hinayāna" or "proponents of the Mahāyāna."

Nonetheless, individuals designated as being of the Hinayāna or of the Mahāyāna are not categorically fixed according to either philosophical system. That is to say, those who have generated within their mind-streams the motivation and behavior that leads to the Mahāyāna path are of the Mahāyāna. Those who have generated within their mind-streams the motivation and behavior that leads to the Hinayāna path are of the Hinayāna. If one has not generated either of these within their mind-stream, no matter what texts that person reads or what discourses that person may comprehend—even though they may say that they are of either one of these philosophical systems, they are not a person of the Mahāyāna nor are they a person of the Hinayāna.

Moreover, there are those who uphold a Mahāyāna philosophical system while entering onto a Hinayāna path, and there are those who uphold a Hinayāna philosophical system while entering onto a Mahāyāna path. There are those who uphold both a

Mahāyāna philosophical system while entering onto a Mahāyāna path, as well as those who uphold both a Hinayāna philosophical system while entering onto a Hinayāna path. There are also an incredible amount of those who uphold a philosophical system but do not enter onto a spiritual path. However, it is not possible for an individual to enter onto a path without a philosophical system.

Vaibhāṣika

As for the Vaibhāṣika, they assert that awareness including both the mind and the operations of mind, the ten objects such as material form and so forth, the non-concurrent factors such as production and destruction, the three types of unconditional [phenomena] such as space and so forth, and the materials of both past and future are each particularly established as being substantial and really existent.⁴ They assert that coarse materials as well as continuous materials are not real, they say that ordinary awareness arises from really established sensible objects and sense faculties, and that [the sense faculty of an] eye actually perceives images.

Among them, the best philosophers such as the Kashmiri adherents of the Vaibhāṣika, assert that all that is conditional is impermanent and is momentarily disintegrating, and that the individual self does not substantially exist except for being a mere mental imputation. The worst philosophers such as the Saṃmitīyas say that even though what is conditional is impermanent because it ultimately disintegrates, it does not momentarily disintegrate. Consequently, they assert all sorts of material things to be continuous. Though they are not the same as the extremists who designate the egotistic self to be permanent, unitary, and autonomous, they do generally assert that the mere egotistic self is established as real and substantial. Even though they do not actually have a path to freedom because of their perverse view of the self, they have taken refuge in the Three Jewels and are motivated by the wish to be free, so through their practices of listening, contemplating, meditating, and ethical behavior, they will eventually have the fortune of attaining liberation.

The Vaibhāṣika assert that the seven sections of the Abhidharma are discourses of the Buddha, and that much of what is said in the sets of sūtras is intended to be of provisional meaning (*neyārtha, drang don*). Therefore, they assert that it is imperative to

rely upon the views and practices according to the commentarial tradition as it is understood within the *Mahāvibhāṣā* treatise.⁵

Sautrāntrika

In considering these topics explained above, the Sautrāntrikas say that unconditional [phenomena] and factors are imputed, and that because they are merely mentally imputed, they do not really exist. Furthermore, any coarse continuum such as material forms and so forth as well as any continuum within awareness is not established as real; phenomena of the past and future are also considered to be mere imputations. Only the molecules of the present moment and instants of awareness are considered to exist as real, without differing facets. They assert that an eye [i.e. the sense faculty of an eye] cannot directly perceive images, and even the perceptual awareness of an eye cannot actually perceive images. That is, what is perceived by the perceptual awareness of an eye is the manifest appearance of an image within visual perceptual awareness itself. This is perceptual awareness representing a feature of an image. Nonetheless, in order for that feature to arise, there must be an exterior image that is transferring that particular feature.

As for the seven sections of the Abhidharma, they do not consider these discourses [of the Buddha], and since there are mistakes in commentaries such as the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, they think that philosophies must be in accordance with their sets of sūtras.⁶

Hinayāna & Mahāyāna

Moreover, according to adherents from both of these philosophical systems, these sets of teachings were specifically taught to the *śrāvaka* disciples alone, and all of those sūtras known to the Mahāyāna such as the *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Ratnakuta*, and *Avataṃsaka* are not discourses of the victorious one.⁷ They say that what is Hinayāna and what is Mahāyāna is specific to the actions of individuals, and that there are no different discourses.

All that they assert as being really existent and their refutations of the Mahāyāna are the blemishes of their mistaken philosophical systems. Everything else as far as the selflessness of personhood, momentary disintegration and so forth are not mistaken.

Cittamātra

According to the *Cittamātra*, exterior referents such as forms and so forth are like the images within a dream. They are awareness itself appearing as this and that. Likewise, appearances are not external. For instance, let's use the example of an image, what is known as the visual faculty is the mind appearing as a feature of the eye. So, the particular qualities of an eye do not exist. Accordingly, what is known to be an image is the mind appearing as a feature of an image. So, the particular qualities of an image do not exist. From these [examples], it seems as though appearances merely arise as visual perceptual awareness.⁸ However, it would be a delusion to think that all three of these appear differently since they are the same essential substance of awareness.⁹ Consequently, the visual awareness that perceives an image perceives itself through itself. This is the cause for the feature of that image to arise, and there is nothing at all that is thought to exist externally as an image that transfers features different from that awareness. Nonetheless, they assert that from an unanalyzed and unexamined point of view, "an eye perceives an image." However, when analyzed, an image is not real, and what is established as real is the awareness that perceives a specific image.¹⁰

Consequently, ordinary awareness is established as the real nature of every type of awareness while the objective factor that appears to exist as an external reference, and the subjective factor that appears to exist as an interior awareness, are both considered distortions. So, the subject-object complex does not exist for them, and they assert that an ordinary awareness that is not involved in the subject-object duality is real. Moreover, because they assert that the objective factor and the subjective factor do not exist apart from each other, the subject-object complex is thought to function nondually. This is asserted to be pristine awareness, the mere intrinsic essence of ordinary awareness.¹¹

Though within their own tradition, adherents of the *Cittamātra* system presume that have they refuted the subject-object complex, when evaluated against more advanced philosophical systems, it is obvious that they have not come to refute the subject-object complex. This is because although they claim that the mere substance of the subject and object do not exist separately, they have come to claim that subjectivity does exist from its own perspective.

In this way, their mistaken assertions are that:

- Cognitions that appear as exterior referents such as images and so forth are established to be real.¹²
- The mere reversal of the identity of ordinary awareness is asserted to be the pristine awareness that is devoid of the dichotomy of subject-object.
- The nature of subjectivity is not asserted to be ordinary awareness itself but is rather the mere aspect that appears to be different from the cognition that perceives a particular objective reference.

Their other assertions are unmistakable.

Madhyamaka

Within Madhyamaka, there are two divisions:

- (1) Common Madhyamaka¹³
- (2) Great Madhyamaka¹⁴

Common Madhyamaka

Here in Tibet, Common Madhyamaka is known as “*rangtong*,” and in both India and Tibet, those [who adhered to this system] were known as “those who assert that there is no intrinsic essence.”¹⁵ The masters of this system were Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, Vimuktasena, and Śāntarakṣita, as well as their successors.

Although there are internal disputes among the many different divisions of this philosophical system, they are all in agreement that all conditional substances—including the mind, material forms, non-concurrent factors and all phenomena that is devoid of substantiality and is unconditional such as space and so forth, are relative. The mere absence of their intrinsic reality is considered to be ultimate.¹⁶ Both [relative and ultimate] are inexpressible as either the same or as a different nature, and their distinctions are merely in how they are presented. Since the nature of the ultimate expanse is considered to be nothing whatsoever, they teach that what is free from fabrications is like space.¹⁷ Through the example of illusion, they teach that even though there are relative appearances that occur within time, they are devoid of any reality and appear without interruption. Both [relative and ultimate] are asserted to be beyond all fabrications such as existent or non-existent, being and non-being, etc.

Moreover, the mistaken assertions of this philosophical system are that:

- The ultimate actuality of phenomena is a mere negation of fabrications, like space.¹⁸
- The pristine awareness of a Buddha is relative and is not established to be real.
- Ultimate reality is not established to be real.

In particular, the Prāsaṅgikā are mistaken in refusing to assert anything in their attempts to quell the debates of others (despite their presentation of a philosophical system), and in their assertion that perverted thinking can be reversed even while an ascertaining awareness has not come about. However, this system is not mistaken in asserting that all phenomena subsumed within the subject-object complex are devoid of reality, and that even the mere absence of any reality can not be established as real.

Both adherents of the Cittamātra and Rangtong Madhyamaka do not clearly assert within their own systems the definitive secret of the enlightened essence, and naturally radiant self-cognizant ultimate pristine awareness. Earlier masters who did not understand these abiding modes did not take *zhentong* as a topic for dispute, and even though later philosophers came about and indeed made their refutations, not a single one of them understood the crucial points of the *zhentong* philosophical system. So, these are solely refutations in which the thinkers on the opposing side of the argument were blind.

Great Madhyamaka

In Tibet, the Great Madhyamaka is the Madhyamaka of discerning cognition and is known as “*zhentong*.”¹⁹ This [system] was elucidated by the treatises of the majestic Maitreya, Asaṅga, the supreme scholar Vasubandhu, and was greatly clarified by Ārya Nāgārjuna’s *Dharmadhātustava*.²⁰ In fact, the proclamations of the two most supreme [Asaṅga and Nāgārjuna] is *zhentong*!

In this system, what is not considered to be real is:²¹

- That which is immaterial, such as the three unconditioned [phenomena] and imputed unconditioned [phenomena] as asserted by the Cittamātra system discussed below, material forms and so forth that are known to be external referents, the eight types of ordinary awareness, the fifty-one operations of the mind, and in brief—all phenomena of outwardly saṃsāra.
- All phenomena subsumed within the circumstantial paths.

- From among that which is subsumed within the fruition of buddhahood, the newly arisen facets and that which is subsumed within the externalizing perceptions of disciples.²²

In other words, the phenomena of sights and sounds, the phenomena that is divided among being phenomena or the actuality of phenomena, and the phenomena that is subsumed within the subject-object complex. At the moment of ascertaining the ultimate, this is all actuality and that which lacks actuality, as well as all that is conditioned and that is temporarily in its place.

Naturally radiant self-cognizant pristine awareness that is not divided from the expanse is known as ultimate reality, the unconditional actuality of phenomena.²³ This is the only established reality that can withstand the scrutiny of reasoning. Since those who uphold *rangtong* assert that this [expanse] is like space and is found to be insubstantial when critically analyzed, they don't consider this ultimate reality. However, this [*zhentong*] philosophical system is without flaws and is the system that is endowed with every enlightened quality!

Everyone who adheres to the Mahāyāna accepts all the Mahāyāna sūtras as the Buddha's discourses. Even so, the Cittamātra system upholds these four as definitive:

- *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*
- *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*
- *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*
- *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*

Other [sūtras] are then considered to be provisional in their meaning. The founders of this philosophical system were the early five-hundred masters.²⁴

While the Common Madhyamaka system upholds that all of the sūtras from the final turning are provisional in their meaning, they claim that the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* from the middle turning are of consummate definitive meaning.²⁵ Those determined as the authors of this system are just those mentioned earlier, Buddhapālita and so forth. According to their own understanding, they assert that the eight adherents of the essenceless, including Rāhulabhadra as well as the master Nāgārjuna were upholders of this philosophical system alone.

The Great Madhyamaka system relies upon the entirety of sūtras from all three turnings. More specifically, it relies on several sūtras of the initial turning including:

- *Kaccāyanagotta-sūta*²⁶
- *Mahasuññata-sūta*²⁷

Several [sūtras] from the occasion of the middle turning including:

- The Chapter Requested by Maitreya in the *Twenty Five Thousand Stanza Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*²⁸
- *The Five Hundred Stanza Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*²⁹

As well as several sūtras from the final turning such as the four sūtras and so forth that taught the ordinary coarse system of how the ultimate actuality of phenomena is established as real.³⁰ Then, it also relies upon several [sūtras] that taught the consummate definitive meaning including:

- *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*³¹
- *Mahābherīhāraḥaparivarta-sūtra*³²
- *Aṅgulimālīya-sūtra*³³
- *Śrīmālādevīsīḥanāda-sūtra*³⁴
- *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*³⁵
- *Ratnamegha-sūtra*³⁶
- *Praśantaviniścayasamādhi-sūtra*³⁷

These compose a subtle and extraordinary system, a secret narrative on how the very nature of the perfect expanse, the essence of the tathāgatas, and the absolute dimension of phenomena are constant, stable, and everlasting as well as on how the totality of the ultimate enlightened qualities of buddhahood reside inherently from original time.

The author who then elucidated the meaning of these sūtras was the majestic Regent Maitreya. In his *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, he concisely describes this through technical vocabulary,³⁸ in his *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhaṅga*, and *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*, he then explains this more extensively and lucidly;³⁹ and in his *Uttaratantra*, he resolves the subtleties of this extraordinary system on the meaning of the sūtras on the essence.⁴⁰

The authors of the commentaries on the intent of these texts were Asaṅga and his brother Vasubandhu. Asaṅga's commentary on the *Uttaratantra* expands and clarifies this extraordinary system, and Vasubandhu's commentaries on the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* in twenty [five] thousand stanzas called, "*Conquest over Harm*," and the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* are also extremely expansive and clear.⁴¹ In general, all of the treatises by these two brothers clarify the Zhentong Madhyamaka.

As for the general philosophical system of *zhentong*, this was elaborately explained in the works of Dignāga and Sthiramati as well as by many of their excellent students and successors. As for the extraordinary [philosophical system of *zhentong*], since this is difficult for most people to comprehend, it was diffused through the manner of whispered ear-to-ear transmission to the most outstanding disciples. Later, there were many in India who confused this Zhentong Madhyamaka with Cittamātra. Relying upon this, most Tibetans perpetuated this same confusion.

In Tibet, although there were many scholars who translated these texts, among those who authentically upheld this philosophical system were Lotsāwa Zu Gaway Dorje, Tsen Khawoché, and those of the meditative tradition of the *Five Treasures of Maitreya*.⁴² In particular, the one who made the profound zhentong pervade throughout this land like a lion's roar was the great omniscient Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen.

II. Identifying the Classifications of Madhyamaka

A.) The Ordinary Meaning of Madhyamaka

From [Maitreya's] *Madhyāntavibhāṅga* it reads,

Erroneous conceptualizing exists.
In that state, duality does not exist.
In this state, emptiness exists.
In that state, this also exists.

What is not empty is not non-empty,
In this way, everything is explained.

Because there is existence,
There is non-existence,
Because there is existence.

This is the way of Madhyamaka.

In terms of ascertaining relative reality, any awareness of the various appearances that emerge is merely erroneous thinking, and is relatively existent. Since the objective factor and the subjective factor appear in this way, they are mere mental projections and do not even exist relatively.⁴³ In this way, relative reality is free from the two extremes: (a) conceptualizing is free from the extremes of non-existence and nihilism by being accepted as merely relatively existing, and (b) it is free from the extremes of existence

and eternalism by being beyond all superimposed dependent phenomena such as the objective factor and the subjective factor.

The pristine awareness that is emptiness and free from fabrications exists within that state of the erroneous conceptualizing of ordinary awareness as the real mode of actual phenomena. In that state of the actuality of phenomena, during moments that are defiled, ordinary awareness is known to exist as naturally unreal. This includes observable phenomena, adventitious defilements that can be removed, and defilements that are to be discarded. Moreover, ultimate reality is known to be free from the two extremes. That is to say, since all phenomena subsumed within the subject-object complex, such as conceptualizing and so forth—do not exist as real, emptiness is real beyond the extremes of existence, non-existence, eternalism, and nihilism.

This being so, the relative subject-object complex, except for merely manifesting distorted perceptions, is empty of an intrinsic nature because its intrinsic nature is not causally established.⁴⁴ Consequently, anything that can be established as the nature of something else—within the division of self and other—cannot possibly be among the references of awareness. Since [the relative] is in every aspect empty, it is never non-empty. However, the actual phenomenon of pristine awareness is established from original time due to its intrinsic nature; yet since it is forever unchanging, it is not empty due to its intrinsic nature, and therefore constantly exists.

Some may wonder: Don't the sūtras explain that even the expanse of phenomena is empty?

In general, although there is what is empty and there is emptiness, these are not necessarily empty of an intrinsic nature.⁴⁵ Pristine awareness is known to be emptiness because it is empty of everything within the subject-object complex or of fabrications that are imbued with the qualities that consist of anything other than itself.⁴⁶

The Three Natures

With that under consideration, the three natures are (a) the imaginary nature, (b) the relational nature, and (c) the perfected nature.⁴⁷

- (a) The imaginary nature is everything apprehended through mental reifications, including:
- All that is insubstantial, such as space and so forth.
 - The apparent aspects of sensible objects, such as the images that arise within neurotic thought and so forth.
 - The relationship of name and meaning, when names are attached to meanings and meanings are distorted as names.
 - That which is internal and external, center and periphery, big and small, good and bad, superior, temporal, etc.
- (b) The relational nature is merely ordinary awareness actually perceiving the subject-object complex. This occurs when perceptions become dependent upon the habitual propensities of ignorance.
- (c) The perfected nature is naturally radiant, self-cognizant, and is free from all fabrications. Synonyms for it include: “the actual nature of phenomena,” “the expanse of phenomena,” “the actuality of existence,” “ultimate reality,” etc.⁴⁸

This being so, both the imaginary and relational natures are equally devoid of being real, equally distorted perceptions, and equally relative and artificial. What necessarily differentiates these distinct natures is that while the imaginary nature does not even exist relatively, the relational nature does relatively exist. Because the perfected nature does not relatively exist but ultimately exists, it exists as real.

Similarly, the imaginary nature imputatively exists, the relational nature substantially exists, and even though the perfected nature does not exist in the same way as either of those two, it exists free from fabrications. The imaginary nature is the emptiness of non-existence, the relational nature is the emptiness of existence, and the perfected nature is ultimate emptiness. From the majestic [Maitreya’s *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*] it reads,

When one knows the emptiness of non-existence,
And likewise the emptiness that is due to existence,
As well as the emptiness that is natural,
Then, it is said that one knows emptiness.

The imaginary nature is devoid of the very essence of characteristics, the relational nature is devoid of the very essence of what is born, and the perfected nature is ultimately devoid of any essence.⁴⁹ [From Vasubhandu's *Triṃśikā*] it reads,

Of the three natures,
By relying upon the three that are devoid of any essence,
It is taught that all phenomena are devoid of any intrinsic nature.

In this system, it follows that everything knowable is emptiness because they are devoid of an essence. With this in mind, that there is an emptiness of the nature of phenomena and that there is a non-emptiness of the nature of phenomena is accepted within the *zhentong* system, while there are internal contradictions to that system known as “*rangtong*.”⁵⁰

Therefore, the pure *rangtong* that was taught by the Buddha is that which abides as intrinsically empty within relativity, as well as within these three that are devoid of any essence. So, those who assert *rangtong* unerringly, and those who definitively assert that there is no essence are both proponents of *zhentong*. That Bhāvaviveka, Buddhapālita and others are known as asserting *rangtong* and the lack of any essence is a case of giving priority to what has become widespread among ordinary worldly people.

Some may wonder: If the perfected nature is established to be real, does it arise, dwell, and subside, does it come and go, change and reverse, have time and spatial reference? Is it one or many?

No. It necessarily follows that whatever possesses those are not real. The [perfected nature] is without arising, without dwelling, and without subsiding; it does not come or go; it is not one or many; it is without cause or result; by way of its own nature, it is beyond definition, what is to be defined, and their respective basis; it is free from all time and spatial reference. By way of its own nature, it is not related to the actual phenomena of the relative. Because it does not have separate parts that can be broken off, it remains partless. Because this is the actuality of all phenomena, this is omnipresent and all-pervasive.⁵¹

B.) The Extraordinary Meaning of Madhamaka

From [Maitreya's *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*] it reads,

Because the nature within everything
Is utterly pure without distinctions,
It is the tathāgata itself.
This is the essence dwelling in all beings.

This means that “nature” and “tathāgata” are of the same identity, and their meaning is known as, “the essence of the tathāgatas.” The terms, “the essence of the tathāgatas,” “the essence of the sugatas,” and “the essence of the Buddhas” all have the same meaning.⁵² Even though this resides equally within Buddhas, sentient beings, and all phenomena, it resides in the manner of an [embryonic] essence within sentient beings while it resides in a fully manifest manner within Buddhas.⁵³ Likewise, this essence dwells within the core of the mind-streams of sentient beings as the ultimate Buddha, and all sentient beings are said to be endowed with this essence of the tathāgatas. This essence of the sugatas also lies within sentient beings, and is alternatively referred to as the “natural abiding spiritual affinity” and the “factor” within sentient beings.

Some may wonder: Since this nature resides in the manner of an essence within Buddhas, and since it resides in the manner of an [embryonic] essence within sentient beings, is this nature twofold?

No, it is not. Buddha is this nature itself. Even when “Buddha” is explained as having the meaning of a person, in its own right, it is unhidden and manifest. So when the meaning of essence is understood as “indwelling and hidden,” the etymology of “essence” (*garbha*, *snying po*) as “hidden within” is incomplete. Although that very same nature of Buddhas dwells within sentient beings, it is not seen from the perspective of sentient beings themselves, and so this essence has the meaning of being hidden to sentient beings. However, when the meaning of “essence” is explained as being invariable, it is understood that even a Buddha is endowed with the essence of a Buddha. Therefore, this essence of the tathāgatas is free from being substantial or insubstantial. This is the actual unconditioned, the unconditioned ultimate.

As for the extraordinary and secret abiding reality, there are no disagreements about the fact that the expanse of phenomena that is buddhahood exists as the nature of

every enlightened quality of a Buddha, and is consequently not divisible from the expanse of phenomena that is sentient beings. So, what is so illogical about this essence of the tathāgatas that lies within the continuums of sentient beings also being the nature that abides within every enlightened quality of a Buddha? From [Maitreya's] *Uttaratantra* it reads,

That which is radiant, uncreated, indivisible,
And surpasses the sands in the River Gaṅges,
Is itself endowed with every phenomena of buddhahood.

As it is explained, this [expanse of phenomena] is endowed with every enlightened quality that comprises the nature of the unconditioned. This is every enlightened quality of ultimate buddhahood.

Therefore, the pristine awareness of the expanse of phenomena solely pervades ultimate reality. Even though from primordial time, the other four types of pristine awareness primarily abide as the ultimate, each has slight relative portions that are realized anew through the process of meditation along the path.⁵⁴ The ten powers, four kinds of fearlessness and so forth are similar as well. The qualities of an exalted body such as the major and minor marks [of beauty], and the qualities of exalted speech such as the sixty variations [of melody], each equally share aspects that are relative and ultimate. Similarly, the essential dimension is entirely ultimate, the exalted dimension of phenomena is predominantly ultimate, and both the resplendent dimension and the emanatory dimension share equal proportions if they are not divided into the actual and the imputed.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, enlightened activities appear within the perspectives of others as being relative while the energy and capacity of pristine awareness remains ultimate.

So, from primordial time, all that is ultimately consumed within the exalted dimensions, types of pristine awareness, qualities, and enlightened activities abides within the essence of the tathāgatas. When someone becomes a Buddha, these are not then newly acquired but are merely separated from the defilements that have eclipsed them. However, all that is relative is realized anew. This is why Buddhas of the past and Buddhas of the future are ultimately of the same identity. Even those who are relative are undifferentiated in their nature from the time they realize buddhahood, and from that time

onwards. Nonetheless, until that time [of realization], they are different, even though they are expressed as being neither the same nor different.

Therefore, the newly realized causes and effects that are generated through meditation along the path are effects that are produced, but are not real. However, buddhahood that abides from primordial time, and it is this buddhahood that is merely freed from the coverings that obscure it through meditation along the path. This process is called, “the liberative effect” while the path is referred to as, “the cause of liberation.” These are merely imputed causes and effects, not actual. Moreover, this liberative effect is not the analytical cessation that is described in the *Abhidharma* as, “liberation that is mental exhaustion.”⁵⁶ This is a real cessation and an ultimate liberative effect, such as is explained in the *King Dhāraṇīśvara-sūtra* where it reads, “Because this is exhaustion from primordial time, it is called, ‘exhaustion.’”⁵⁷

Some may wonder: Since obscurations are relinquished through the power of the path, wouldn't this be equivalent to mental exhaustion?

Obscurations are not relinquished from the perspective of the expanse of phenomena, but are relinquished from the perspective of individuals. So, for those individuals who are Buddhas, their realization is merely designated as, “realization through the liberation of mental exhaustion.” However, since the expanse of phenomena is unblemished by defilements from primordial time, there is no new exhaustion through the mind. Because of this, the essence of the tathāgatas and the nondual pristine awareness that pervades the nature of phenomena are equally adorned with all of the ultimate enlightened qualities of buddhahood. Just this great and invariable perfected nature is endowed with every aspect of pristine awareness while remaining free from all fabrications. This is the only unmistakable abiding reality. Because it is established as real, it is the object of experience for the undistorted pristine awareness of the exalted ones. Because it is invariable, it is constant, stable, and everlasting. Moreover, this enlightened essence that resides as the qualities of all of the major and minor marks is explained by numerous synonyms throughout all of the tantra sections of secret mantra.

In brief, whatever phenomena of sights and sounds may occur, regardless of whether they are called, “relative” or “the subject-object complex” or “distorted phenomena,” this perfected nature remains unblemished. Furthermore, the unblemished

does not exist as distinct and separate things. Even though these things exist within the actual abiding mode of the relative, it is not possible to blemish the expanse of phenomena. Because the relative consists merely of distorted perceptions, what remains in abiding reality is not established—like the horns of a rabbit. So, it is not possible to blemish the unblemished.

Therefore, this perfected nature—the enlightened essence—is never empty of its own nature. Since from original time, this is empty of the extrinsic and relative, this ultimate reality of the perfected nature is known as “*zhentong*” (extrinsic emptiness), not “*rangtong*” (intrinsic emptiness).⁵⁸ Accordingly, all that is relative is empty of its extrinsic nature as well as empty of its intrinsic nature. Since the ultimate is only empty of its extrinsic nature, this system is asserted to be Zhentong Madhyamaka.

In this way, in order to reverse your fixations on the various phenomena of saṃsāra, meditate on impermanence and the renunciation of suffering. Also renounce your mental involvement in concern for yourself, and rely upon the continuum of your mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*). In order to relinquish your coarse fixations on the relative, meditate on ascertaining the unreality of the relative. To relinquish your subtle fixations on the discursive thinking of the relative, meditatively subsume yourself non-conceptually within the expanse.⁵⁹ Through this process, you will then gradually come to encounter the non-conceptual enlightened essence directly. Subsequently, the entire progress of meditation along the path is for the sake of encountering the perfected nature.

III. Clearing Away Extremes Imputed by Others

Though this can be known from my *Ornament of Zhentong Madhyamaka*, and will be explained in greater depth elsewhere, I will give the concise essence here:⁶⁰

In the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* others asked, “Aren’t the major and minor marks of the enlightened essence the same features as those of the soul of the extremists?”⁶¹ In response, it was explained [by the Buddha] that “These are not the same features because they are of emptiness.” So, it is said that this enlightened essence does not exist as real, and if these major and minor marks were to exist, then they would be from the system of the extremists. It is also said that like space, what is not established whatsoever is known as the “enlightened essence.”

However, the mere recognition of different kinds of emptiness as meaning the unreal and the non-existence of anything whatsoever without definition is the mental fault of fixating onto one's own erroneous philosophical system.⁶² From the [*Laṅkāvatāra-*] *sūtra* it reads, "The reason why these are not the same features as the extremists is because of the manifestation of emptiness, not because these major and minor marks are not manifest." So, the claim that the enlightened essence of the completely radiant major and minor marks is explained to be interpretive in meaning is reduced to a mere deception within the world of lies.

The claim that the [enlightened] essence is permanent as asserted within the system of the extremists is also reduced to a refutation within the *Essence Sūtras*.⁶³ Moreover, it is not acceptable to assert that the meaning of permanence is the permanence of a continuum.⁶⁴ This is because saṃsāra, the entire subject-object complex, is merely the permanence of a continuum. So, if the mere permanence of a continuum was sufficiently permanent, then all conditioned phenomena would have to be permanent.

Some may wonder: Since it is initially defiled and then later becomes undefiled, it must be impermanent?

From the perspective of the expanse of phenomena, it was never initially defiled nor did it later become undefiled. However, the extent to which it becomes defiled or undefiled depends upon one's own individual mind-stream. Accordingly, the context of the actuality of phenomena does not change due to the changing contexts of sentient beings.

Some may wonder: Isn't it inadmissible that the pristine awareness of Buddhas exist within the mind-streams of sentient beings?

This contradicts the direct statements, "... this is because the pristine awareness of Buddhas resides within the multitude of sentient beings."

Some may wonder: Isn't it inadmissible that the enlightened qualities of Buddhas exist within the mind-streams of sentient beings? For example, if the power to know what is definite and what indefinite existed within the mind-streams of sentient beings, then it

would necessarily follow that all sentient beings would understand what is definite and what is indefinite.⁶⁵

Even though this is often claimed, it is not correct. This is because we do not assert that everything within the mind-streams of sentient beings is Buddha. Also, if it necessarily follows that these enlightened qualities and Buddha must dwell within the mind-streams of sentient beings, then when a Buddha sits on a throne, it must follow that even that throne would understand everything there is to know!⁶⁶ In this way, how could the eight modes of ordinary awareness within the mind-streams of sentient beings be Buddha? Even the Buddha that dwells there does not dwell according to the modes of relative support and what is supported, but dwells according to the mode of the ultimate actuality of phenomena.

Conclusion

At this point, it is important that we have a brief discussion on vocabulary. As for the three progressive dharma wheels: (1) the initial dharma wheel was concerned with the Four Noble Truths;⁶⁷ (2) the middle dharma wheel was concerned with the absence of characteristics; (3) and the final dharma wheel was concerned with elegantly making distinctions.

The initial [turning] consisted of the Hinayāna sūtras, the collection of scriptures that were explained for the *śrāvakas*. Although the middle [turning] consisted of the primary sūtras of the Mahāyāna, its intended meaning is hidden. As for the final [turning], this is the exposition [on the middle turning], and it extremely clearly teaches the definitive meaning.

The three natures are (a) the imaginary nature, (b) the relational nature, and (c) the perfected nature:

- The imaginary nature is twofold: the objective imaginary nature and the subjective imaginary nature.⁶⁸
- The relational nature is twofold: the impure relational nature and the pure relational nature.⁶⁹
- The perfected nature is twofold: the invariable perfected nature and the incontrovertible perfected nature.⁷⁰

Among these, the actual imaginary nature is the objective while the actual perfected nature is the invariable, and not the incontrovertible that is the same essence as the invariable. The pure relational nature is subsumed within the incontrovertible, and the subjective imaginary nature is of the same essence as the relational nature. When analyzed through reasoning, the actual relational nature is subsumed within the imaginary nature while the abiding mode of the actuality of phenomena for both is the perfected nature. All phenomena are subsumed within both the imaginary nature and the perfected nature.

These divisions of the three natures within all phenomena, and the two perspectives of relative ordinary awareness and ultimate pristine awareness are in relation to saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Since forms, sounds, smells, tastes and so forth are among the perspective of relative ordinary awareness, they are unreal. Since the forms, sounds and so forth of the actuality of phenomena are among the perspective of pristine awareness, they are established as real. While there are variable perspectives of the relative, all phenomena of the ultimate are devoid of defect or contradiction.

Colophon

This was written at the hermitage of Chölung Changtse by the one called, “Tāranātha” upon request for a few seekers. Tashi!!!

Translated by Michael R. Sheehy at Jonang Jamdha Ngedon Chökor Ling Monastery, Golok, Amdo, Tibet. Points of difficulty were clarified by Khenpo Kunga Sherab Saljay Rinpoche.

Endnotes

¹ The following translation is based upon the ‘Dzam thang edition of the *Gzhan stong snying po*, see Tā ra nā tha, *Gzhan stong*.

² *Mtho ris kyi mngon par mtho*, elevated or high states of existence within the cycle of saṃsāra. These are heavenly or celestial realms that can be traversed through advanced meditation but are not free from the innate pains of sentience.

³ *Rtsa bzhi*: (1) killing; (2) stealing; (3) sexual misconduct; (4) lying.

⁴ Awareness (*shes pa*) is both mind (*sems*) and the operations of mind (*sems byung*); the ten objects (*yul bcu*) are the five sensible objects (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles) and the five faculties of sense (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body); non-concurrent factors (*ldan min ‘du byed*) are the formations that are neither awareness nor sensible objects, and are therefore a separate category; the three types of unconditional phenomena (*‘dus ma byas gsum*) are: (1) space (*nam mkha’*); (2) cessation due to individual analysis (*so sor brtags ‘gog*); (3) cessation of what cannot be analyzed (*brtags min gyi ‘gog pa*).

⁵ *Bye brag tu bshad pa chen po* or *Bye brag bshad mdzod [mtsho]*; *The Great Exposition on Particulars* by Vasumitra. Here, *bltos* should read, *bstan bcos* and occurs twice.

⁶ Here, *bltos* should read, *bstan bcos*.

⁷ *Sher phyin, Dkon brtsegs, Phal chen*.

⁸ That is, from both the perceptual faculty of vision and the form of an image, the perceptual awareness of an eye becomes consciously manifest, merely as an appearance.

⁹ *Shes pa’i ngo bor rdzas gcig*.

¹⁰ The Cittamātra assert that while forms or images (*gzugs*) are not established to be real (*ma grub*), the awareness (*shes pa*) or mind (*sems*) that perceives that image is established to be real (*bden par grub*).

¹¹ This passage reads, *rnam shes kyi rang ngo tsam ye shes su ‘do pa yin no*, Tā ra nā tha, *Gzhan stong*, 177. In the Cittamatra system, pristine awareness (*ye shes*) is considered to be merely of the same nature as ordinary awareness (*rnam shes*).

¹² *Vijñapti, rnam rig*.

¹³ *Dbu ma phal pa*.

¹⁴ *Dbu ma chen po*.

¹⁵ *Niḥsvavhāvavādin, ngo bo nyid med par smra ba..*

¹⁶ This passage reads, *de rnam kyi rang bzhin bden med tsam ni don dam yin*, Tā ra nā tha, *Gzhan stong*, 178. The standard critique of Rangtong Madhyamaka is that all phenomena lack an enduring inherent essence or intrinsic nature. This absence of any intrinsic reality (*rang bzhin bden med*) is equated with emptiness (*stong pa nyid*), and is considered ultimate (*don dam*).

¹⁷ This is a reference to the expanse of phenomena (*dharmadhātu, chos dbyings*).

¹⁸ *Dharmatā, chos nyid*.

¹⁹ *Rnam rig gi dbu ma*.

²⁰ Nāgārjuna’s *Dharmadhātustotra (Chos kyi dbyings su bstod pa)*, *Praise to the Ultimate Dimension of Phenomena*. Hopkins lists a few texts of each of these masters, Hopkins (2007), 62-3.

²¹ These are all *bden med*.

²² *Gsar du byung ba’i cha* are newly produced effects along the spiritual path and are not inherent attributes of the path. *Gdul bya gzhan snang* are responses conjured by Buddhas for the sake of their disciple’s education and are not inherent but temporarily perceived occurrences.

²³ *Don dam bden pa (paramārtasatya)* is translated throughout as “ultimate reality.” For Zhentong Madhyamaka, pristine awareness (*ye shes*) is indivisible from the expanse of phenomena (*chos dbyings*), and is synonymous with the enlightened essence (*tathāgatagarbha, de gshegs snying po, buddha-nature*). It is important to note here that enlightened essence is considered ultimate—beyond relativity, and is emptiness (*stong pa nyid*) though it does not lack an intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin med*), as Rangtong Madhyamaka asserts. See below for further discussion on this point.

²⁴ According to this historical analysis, the Cittamātra system came about from the set of sūtras gathered and cared for by five-hundred figures including Avitarka while the Madhyamaka was initiated by Saraha and then later expanded by Nāgārjuna, see Ngag dbang (1992), 9.

²⁵ The three sets of the Buddha’s discourses or “turnings of the wheel of dharma” are: (1) the initial turning that was intended for *śrāvaka* disciples, and which includes teachings on the insubstantiality of personhood and phenomena; (2) the middle turning that comprises the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* and teaches emptiness,

that all phenomena lack an intrinsic essence; (3) the final turning teaches buddha-nature, how ones own enlightened essence is perpetually radiant pristine awareness.

²⁶ *Ka hya A na'i gdams ngag gi mdo, The Sūtra on Spiritual Advice to Katyāna.*

²⁷ *Mdo sde chen po stong pa nyid, The Great Sūtra on Emptiness.*

²⁸ *Sher phyin nyi khri lnga stong pa'i byams zhus kyi le'u.*

²⁹ *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā- prajñāpāramitā-sūtra, Sher phyin lnga brgya pa'i mdo.*

³⁰ These are the four sūtras mentioned above in the Cittamatra section.

³¹ *De bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo.*

³² *Rnga po che chen po'i mdo.*

³³ *Sor mo'i phreng ba la phan pa'i mdo.*

³⁴ *Dpal 'phreng senge sgras zhus pa'i mdo.*

³⁵ *Mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo.*

³⁶ *Dkon mchog sprin ba'i mdo.*

³⁷ *Rab tu zhi ba rnam nges kyi ting nge 'dzin gyi mdo.*

³⁸ *Mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan, The Ornament of Clear Realizations.*

³⁹ These are: (1) *Theg pa chen po'i mdo sde rgyan gyi tshig le'ur byas ba, The Ornament of Mahāyāna Scriptures*; (2) *Dbus dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa, Differentiating the Middle from Extremes*; (3) *Chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa, Differentiating Phenomena from the Actuality of Phenomena.*

⁴⁰ [*Mahāyānottaratantra-śāstra, Ratnagotravibhāga*] *Theg pa chen po'i rgyud bla ma'i bstan bchos, Elucidating the Jewel Matrix.*

⁴¹ This *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* is the *Yum gsum gnod 'joms.*

⁴² This is referred to as the meditative tradition (*sgom lugs*) in contrast to the analytic tradition (*thos bsam gyi lugs*). Tibetan forefathers of this lineage include Lotsāwa Gzu Dga' ba'i Rdo rje, Btsan Kha bo che (b. 1021), etc. For a complete list of masters in this transmission lineage, see Sheehy (2007). The *Five Treasures of Maitreya (Byams chos sde lnga)* are listed above.

⁴³ *Blos btags pa* is a conceptual imputation that is created by the ordinary mind.

⁴⁴ This passage reads, *rang gi ngo bos grub rgyu med pa'i phyir rang gi ngo bos stong la, Tā ra nā tha, Gzhan stong, 183.* The subject-object complex is empty of an intrinsic nature because it is impossible to establish its intrinsic nature.

⁴⁵ This passage reads, *rang gi ngo bo stong pa yin mi dgos, Tā ra nā tha, Gzhan stong, 184.* This is a crucial distinction between Zhentong Madhyamaka and Rangtong Madhyamaka: the point being that for Zhentong Madhyamaka, the expanse of phenomena (*chos dbyings*) and that which is equated with the ultimate is emptiness that does not lack an intrinsic nature. For Rantong Madhyamaka, that which lacks an intrinsic nature is emptiness, and that is ultimate. Throughout Zhentong Madhyamaka literature, ultimate emptiness is referred to as the “Great Emptiness” (*stong pa chen po*).

⁴⁶ Tāranātha is glossing the definition of “zhentong” (*gzhan stong*); that which is empty (*stong*) of anything other (*gzhan*) than itself, the very intrinsic nature of what is ultimate.

⁴⁷ The three natures (*trīsvabhāva, rang bzhin gsum / mtshan nyid gsum*) are: (1) imaginary nature (*parikalpita, kun brtags*); (2) relational nature (*paratantra, gzhan dbang*); (3) perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna, yongs grub*).

⁴⁸ *Chos nyid, chos dbyings, de bzhin nyid, don dam bden pa.*

⁴⁹ The imaginary nature lacks any qualities or characteristics because it is imputed (*mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa, lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāva*); the relational nature lacks the power of being generated or born since it exists under the influence of dependent forces (*skye ba ngo bo nyid med pa, utpattiniḥsvabhāva*); the perfected nature lacks everything that is not ultimate and that is therefore relative (*don dam pa ngo bo nyid med pa, paramārthaniḥsvabhāva*). See also Hopkins (2007), 88.

⁵⁰ See Hopkins, 90-91 for reference to an alternative reading according to the Smarṅtsis Shesrig Dpemzod edition of Tā ra nā tha's “Collected Works.” My translation is based on the ‘Dzam thang edition.

⁵¹ Here, *chos nyid* should read, *chos rnams.*

⁵² The terms used here are: (1) *tathāgatagarbha, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*; (2) *sugatagarbha, bde gshegs sning po*; (3) **buddhagarbha* or *buddhadhātu, sangs rgyas snying po* (commonly translated as “buddhanature”).

⁵³ Here, *chos nyid* should read, *chos rnams.*

⁵⁴ The four types of pristine awareness besides the pristine awareness of the expanse of phenomena (*chos dbyings kyi ye shes*) are: (1) mirror-like pristine awareness (*me long lta ba'i ye shes*); (2) pristine awareness

of equanimity (*mnyam pa nyid kyi ye shes*); (3) discerning pristine awareness (*so sor rtog pa'i ye shes*); (4) all-accomplishing pristine awareness (*bya ba grub pa'i ye shes*). Together, these are the five types of pristine awareness or five wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*).

⁵⁵ These are: (1) *ngo bo nyid sku*; (2) *chos sku*; (3) *longs sprul [sku] gnyis*.

⁵⁶ This phrase from the Abhidharma reads, “*bral ba blo yi zad pa'o*.”

⁵⁷ This phrase from the sūtra reads, “*gdod nas zad bas de phyir zad ces bya*.”

⁵⁸ Here, Tāranātha gives a succinct definition of *zhentong*, “*des na yongs grub bde gshegs snying po de ni rang gi ngo bos nam yang mi stong la / gzhan kun rdzob kyis gdod nas stongs pa'i phyir / yongs grub don dam bden pa de ni gzhan stong yin gyi rang stong min no*.” *Gzhan stong*, 190, 2. While buddhanature or the enlightened essence is not empty of its own intrinsic nature, it is empty of everything that is relative and “other” than itself. Consequently, it is referred to as “*zhentong*” (what is empty of everything extrinsic) as opposed to “*rangtong*” (what is empty everything intrinsic).

⁵⁹ In the *Zhentong Madhyamaka* contemplative system, meditation begins with counteracting the individual’s coarse fixations on the real existence (*bden grub*) of relative phenomena by meditating on the absence of the relative as real (*kun rdzob bden med*). This process of meditative cultivation then proceeds to counter one’s subtle fixations on the discursive thinking of the relative (*kun rdzob kyi rnam rtog*), and culminates with non-conceptual absorption in the expanse of phenomena (*chos dbyings*).

⁶⁰ See Tā ra nā tha, *Gzhan stong dbu ma'i rgyan* and *Gzhan stong dbu ma'i rgyan gyi lung sbyor* for more extensive discussion on the polemics of *zhentong*.

⁶¹ This is a reference to the atman (*bdag*) of the non-Buddhist systems in India.

⁶² Tāranātha is here referring to the different types of emptiness, including the emptiness of the relative and the emptiness of the ultimate. In response to the assumption that all types of emptiness are unreal (*bden med*) and without definition (*rnam med*), this line suggests that the ultimate emptiness is real (*bden*) and always endowed with definition (*rnam pa kun ldan*).

⁶³ The set of ten *Essence Sūtras* (*snying po'i mdo*) are: (1) *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra* (*De bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo*); (2) *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī-sūtra* (*Rnam par mi rtog pa la 'jug pa'i gzungs gyi mdo*); (3) *Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda-sūtra* (*Lha mo dpal phreng sen ge sgras gzungs gyi mdo*); (4) *Mahābherihāraparivarta-sūtra* (*Rnga po che chen po'i mdo*); (5) *Aṅgulimāliya-sūtra* (*Sor mo'i phreng ba la phan pa'i mdo*); (6) *Mahāsūnyatā-sūtra* (*Stong nyid chen po'i mdo*); (7) *Tathāgatamahākaraṇīrdeśa-sūtra* (*De bzhin gshegs pa'i thugs rje chen po bstan pa'i mdo*); (8) *Tathāgatagūṇājñānācintyaviṣayāvātāra-sūtra* (*De bzhin gshegs pa'i yon tan dang ye shes bsam gyis mi khyab pa la 'jug pa'i mdo*); (9) *Mahāmegha-sūtra* (*Sprin chen po'i mdo*); (10) *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* (*Mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo*).

⁶⁴ This point is stressed throughout the *zhentong* literature: when the term “permanent” (*nitya, rtag pa*) is used in this context, it is not referring to a permanence of a stream or continuum (*rgyun gyi rtag pa*). In fact, Tāranātha makes this explicit in his text comparing the views of Dolpopa and Sakya Chogden where he writes, “*rgyun gyi rtag pa 'dus byas rtag pa rtag pa de yang min*” or “This permanence is also not the conditioned permanence that is the permanence of a continuum.” See Tā ra nā tha, *Zab don*, 221.

⁶⁵ This is a reference to one of the ten powers of a Buddha, the power to know what is definite and what is indefinite (*sthānāsthāna-jñāna-balam, gnas dang gnas ma yin pa mkhyen pa'i stobs*).

⁶⁶ This is to say, if all beings were Buddhas because the enlightened essence dwelled within them, then likewise if a Buddha were to sit on a throne, then that throne would also have the power of that Buddha. However, being imbued with buddhanature and being a Buddha is different.

⁶⁷ The four truths or Four Noble Truths (*āryasatya*) are: (1) suffering (*duḥka*); (2) the origin of suffering (*samudaya*); (3) the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*); (4) the way to cease suffering (*mārga*).

⁶⁸ *Gzung ba'i kun brtags* and *'din pa'i kun brtags*.

⁶⁹ *Ma dag pa'i gzhan dbang* and *dag pa'i gzhan dbang*.

⁷⁰ *'Gyur med yongs grub* and *phyin ci ma log pa'i yongs grub*.

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