

***Commentary on “Instructions on the Garland of Views” the only written  
teaching by Padmasambhava (Lopon Pema Jungna)  
Teachings by H. H. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama  
Translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa  
Part 2***

We were speaking of the four axioms or seals of Buddhism and the fourth seal is:

**Nirvana is true peace**

Nirvana is the transcendence of sorrow and it refers to a state where one is totally free from conditioned existence, existence conditioned by means of the fundamental ignorance. We spoke about how our existence is characterized by ignorance and how our existence is subject or in the nature of suffering. The meaning of transcending sorrow here – sorrow refers to our nature of existence conditioned by afflictions and fundamental ignorance, because so long as we remain under such conditions, we are under the power of this distorted state of mind.

The root of which is the mistaken belief in self-existence or selfhood of one’s own being. By cultivating the wisdom that sees the non-existence of selfhood, by cultivating the wisdom of no-self, one will be able to recognize this grasping at self-hood is a mistaken state of mind. In this way, gradually one will be able to, as a result of enhancing the wisdom of no-self naturally able to gradually undermine the force of this grasping at selfhood and in this way remove it ultimately from one’s mind. That state where one is totally free of such afflictions and the fundamental ignorance is really the lasting state of happiness and peace, therefore in the fourth axiom there is statement that nirvana is true peace and the true peace here is referring to the lasting peace and tranquility.

In a sense what we find here in the teaching of the four seals or the four axioms is the theoretical basis of the Buddhist understanding of the path to liberation. The question is how do we integrate this theoretical knowledge of the four axioms into our actual practice of embarking upon the path to enlightenment? There is a natural sequence to how the understanding of one can lead to the understanding of the other. Therefore in a text we read “Because it is transient it is in the nature of suffering”. The realization of suffering will then lead to the understanding of the absence of selfhood.

What this suggests is that if we reflect deeply upon the nature of our own existence, particularly our own physical and mental elements, such as our. Body; mind and so on, these faculties all of which are really the object of our own cherishment. When we think of ourselves or the instinctive thought of “I am doing this”, “I am “the object of the sense of selfhood is really the physical and psychological elements that make up our existence. If you observe deeply the nature of these physical and mental qualities that make up your existence then it becomes fairly evident that none of them are permanent, they are all transient, all subject to fluctuations, changes and so on. The realization of their transient nature particularly in terms of their moment by moment existence can be something that can be understood intellectually.

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Once you gain an intellectual understanding of the momentary nature, the subtle impermanence of your body and mind then this intellectual knowledge can then be internalized through constant cultivation. This recognition and understanding of the transient nature of one's own existence can then lead to the understanding of their suffering nature. Because once we realize that our body and mind and our own existence is momentarily changing and subject to this moment by moment transience, that they are impermanent, then we also come to realize that they are the product of causes and conditions. Once we realize that they are the product of causes and conditions than we immediately come to recognize that they are under the power of causal conditions. This is in general for all conditioned things and in particular in the case of our own existence, our own existence is characterized by unenlightenment and this unenlightened existence is really conditioned by afflictions and karma. It is karma and afflictions that give rise to the unenlightened existence and at the root of which is the fundamental ignorance of the grasping at self-existence of our own self.

Once you recognize that, you come to realize that your existence is under the power of karma and afflictions. When we think about the nature of the afflictions, the mental and emotional afflictions, even the very term affliction, the Sanskrit word is klesha (Sanskrit) the Tibetan word is nyon-mong (Tibetan) even in the very etymology of the term nyon-mong there is an immediate connotation of something that afflicts us from within, something that creates deep disturbance, something that inflicts suffering within ourselves the moment they arise. Any form of existence that is under the domination of these afflictive states of mind are bound to be in the nature of suffering.

Recognizing that, you will also come to realize that on the one hand in our normal conceptions of selfhood we tend to grasp onto some kind of self as eternal, unitary and unchanging, but once you recognize that your body and mind are in a constant state of flux, you will come to realize that this belief in the self - unchanging, eternal , permanent entities is also misguided and in this way you will also gradually come to develop the insight into the no-self (anatman), absence of selfhood. You will also come to recognize that in fact the self that we tend to grasp at is not worthy of grasping because the grasping leads to all forms of suffering and afflictions and so on.

In this way, the realization of impermanence leads to the realization of the suffering nature, and the realization of the suffering nature culminates in the realization of no-self. It is this insight into no-self which eventually will help us gradually overcome the afflictions and the state where one has totally eliminated such grasping and their effects that is the true lasting peace which in the Buddhist language described as liberation or moksha. Once you have the recognition of the possibility of attaining such cessation of afflictions and the possibility of attaining liberation, then the genuine aspiration to attain liberation really arises in one's mind.

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When we speak of the Buddhadharma, the dharma of Buddhism, here I think the true definition of Buddhadharma really must be related to the quest for seeking liberation from cyclic existence. Any form of spirituality that is grounded upon and inspired by the aspiration to seek liberation- that is Buddhadharma.

For example, many of the basic ethical practices such as avoidance from the ten negative actions, that ethical practice alone cannot be characterized specifically as Buddhist path because it is common to all religious traditions. For the same reason, deliberately abandoning the act of killing out of fear for legal consequences that cannot even be characterized as a religious practice. On the other hand, if someone deliberately takes a vow not to kill on the basis of fear that as a karmic consequence one might be reborn in the lower realms of existence and deliberately adopts an ethical stance, that is a common ethical practice to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious traditions.

However, if one's practice of an ethical discipline such as deliberate avowal of abandoning the act of killing motivated by or grounded upon the aspiration to attain liberation as defined earlier – the liberation or total freedom from mental afflictions, ignorance and so on, that kind of ethical practice could be described as truly Buddhist practice.

For example, generally when we speak of taking refuge in the Three Jewels, we speak of the dharma jewel and the dharma jewel in the context of the three jewels is really defined in terms of the cessation of afflictions. Of the three objects of refuge, the three jewels, the dharma jewel is the most important one. However, in the actual sequence of going for refuge, we say we go for refuge to the Buddha first, and then Dharma second and the Sangha, the spiritual community third. This reflects the chronological order in which they come into being in the context of a specific historical Buddha. For example in the case of Buddha Shakyamuni, he came to the world and then gave the teachings which constituted the scriptural dharma and on the basis of the practice of these teachings, realizations took place in the mind of the disciples. Together the scriptures and the realizations constitute the true dharma jewel. These individuals who have gained direct realization of the truth of the dharma, they became the members of the sangha, the arya sangha, the noble members of the sangha. In this way there is a chronological order.

Even in the case of Buddha himself, in order for the Buddha to become fully enlightened it was necessary for the Buddha to internalize the knowledge of the dharma and reflect on its importance. The same goes for the noble members of the sangha, the arya members as well. It is the embodiment of this dharma knowledge which makes them arya, noble. To reflect and indicate the importance of the dharma jewel, it is said in the scriptures that even the Buddha would arrange the seat on which he would sit in respect for the teachings. To reflect the importance of the dharma he arranged his own cushion and seat when he was giving the dharma teachings.

To go back to the text, we were talking about the differences between the non-Buddhist philosophical schools on the one hand and Buddhist philosophical schools on the other and

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how the demarcation was made on the basis of whether or not one adheres to the four seals or the four axioms of Buddhism. Among which, the most important one is the notion of no-self and the denial or rejection of a belief in an eternal independent self. In a sense this becomes, the characteristic mark of Buddhism which is the rejection of any notion of independent self existence, eternal, unchanging self.

Historically if you look at the many philosophical schools in Ancient India, the demarcating line between Buddhist and non-Buddhist really converges on the question of selfhood or self-existence. On the one side are Buddhists who on the whole reject any notion of eternal , unchanging, independent self and the non-Buddhist schools on the whole believe in one form or another or a version of self-existence or atman which is eternal, unchanging and unitary. Other than that within the non- Buddhist schools there are theistic schools and there are non-theistic; and there are some who believe in rebirth and some who do not. The distinction then is really on the basis of the position on the question of self. Also within the non-Buddhists there are some who accept the idea of liberation or moksha and some who reject the idea and possibility of liberation or moksha. It is really on the question of the nature of self and the existence of self that the demarcation is drawn between Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools.

In the text we read on Page 33“ ***the extremists uphold the existence of an eternal self as they reify all phenomenon through conceptual imputation***”

The reference to conceptual imputation here suggests that it is a reasoned philosophical standpoint, a postulate. It is not just an innate , natural conception of selfhood we are talking about. We are talking about a reasoned philosophical standpoint where on the basis of philosophical analysis and reflection, one adheres to a standpoint that upholds the belief in eternal, independent self-existence, selfhood. This is common to all non- Buddhist schools. Within that group of non-Buddhists who uphold the eternal self doctrine, there are differences. We read in the text that “***the extremists comprise of those who view the presence of effects where there is no cause***”– this refers to the Indian school Charvaka who reject the notion of rebirth and so on. Although they believe in an eternal, enduring, unchanging self but they do not espouse the doctrine of rebirth or reincarnation. In a sense they accept the effect which is the existence of self, but they reject the notion of rebirth which is the cause.

The next line reads “***those who view cause and effects erroneously***” and that refers to schools such as the Samkhya school which understand the origin of the cosmos in terms of what is called a primal substance, a *prakrit* which is again permanent , unchanging and so on. This (line) also refers to the Indian Theist schools which believe in unchanging eternal first cause, self-causation or a naturally arising cause. The problem from the Buddhist point of view is that if the cause is characterized as eternal and unchanging then how can you account for the origin of the world of effects all of which very evidently reflect the quality of changing, fluctuation and transience?. How can one account for the origination of these effects from a cause that is unchanging and eternal?

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The third subdivision we read *“those who view the absence of effects where there is a cause”*. This (line) refers to another category of non-Buddhist schools that while accepting the self to be eternal, unchanging and permanent they accept the basis of selfhood which is the body and mind to be transient, fluctuating and so on. What is being pointed out here is there is a contradiction of the characteristics of the cause on one hand and the effects on the other.

Having described the various forms of non-Buddhist philosophical beliefs the (text) sums up with a sentence to say that *“all of these are views of ignorance”*

As a summary to all of this discussion we find something similar in Je Tsongkhapa’s praise to Buddha Shakyamuni, where he states the following, he states, referring to the Buddha “the truth that you have revealed on the basis of your own personal insight which is the truth of no-self and the emptiness of inherent existence and those who follow after your teaching and example in the understanding of these truths , for these individuals gradually they will be further and further away from all sources of downfall. However, those who are contrary to the path that you have revealed even though they may resort to all sorts of hardships including ascetic practices such as physical penances and so on, they will continue to proliferate the basis for afflictions. This is because they are continuing to reinforce their clinging to the notion of selfhood.

The idea here is that in addition to the innate grasping at selfhood that we all naturally possess, sometimes as a result of philosophical analysis one may also reinforce and solidify them through a process of philosophical reasoning. In which case in addition to the innate grasping at selfhood, one will also have a strong and powerful grasping of philosophically acquired form. Here the distinction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist is really made on the basis of whether one affirms the basis of grasping or selfhood or one rejects and denies the object of grasping or selfhood. Jamyang Shepa summed up in his root text of the Indian philosophies that it is on the basis of whether one is affirming or rejecting the object of grasping or selfhood, the distinction between the Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools is made.

Then the question that can be raised is why is there such a proliferation of so many philosophical standpoints or philosophical schools including various forms of Buddhist philosophy?

As a form of response to this possible question we find a statement in the Lankavatara Sutra a reference to many different forms of spiritual vehicles. It refers to the vehicles of the celestial beings, refers to the vehicles of the humans and so on , and the point being made is that so long as sentient beings exist, there will be multiplicity and diversity of mental inclinations and dispositions and so on.

From the Buddhist point of view if we observe the diversity of the major world’s religions we observe in the world today, all of them emphasize the practice of ethical discipline, ethical living. All of them emphasize the importance of cultivating love and compassion

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and the practice of warm-heartedness aimed at the creation of a better human being, a kinder and more compassionate human being. Ethical practices are at the heart of all of these traditions. Many of these religious traditions also have a spiritual practice that is aimed at a higher level of attainment such as being reborn in heaven, or some form of that – a kind of deeper spiritual attainment. From the Buddhist point of view this multiplicity of traditions can be seen as referred to in the scriptures as the vehicles of the humans and the divine beings.

In ancient India there were also non-Buddhist spiritual traditions where in addition to ethical practice and ethical discipline there were also highly developed and refined meditation techniques all of which are aimed at cultivation of a single pointed deep and heightened state of mind, many of which are described as form and formless states. Many of these meditative practices that emphasize the cultivation of single pointedness of mind, that is *shamatha* or calm abiding and also penetrative insight (*vipassana*) by reflecting deeply on the defects of existence in the desire realm and then transcending the level of senses and moving beyond the states of what are referred to as form and formless states. These forms of practices and religious systems that enshrine them are from the Buddhist and scriptural point of view (*the Lankavatara Sutra point of view*) would be understood as the Vehicles of the Brahma.

Then there are other paths such as the paths that are aimed primarily at attainment of liberation from cyclic existence and the elimination of the fundamental ignorance of the grasping at selfhood and so on. These paths which are described in the scriptures as paths transcending the world, these paths again have other divisions such as the shravaka vehicle (disciple's vehicle), the pratyekabuddha (hearer's or self-realized ones) and the bodhisattva vehicle as described in the text.

As Lankavatara Sutra states that as long as diversity of human thoughts remain, their will be a diversity of spiritual paths that will be appropriate for the individual human beings. What this suggests is recognition at a profound level that given the diversity of mental dispositions, spiritual inclinations and interest of sentient beings, there is a need for the diversity of spiritual paths, corresponding to the diversity of mental dispositions, spiritual inclinations and interest of sentient beings there will evolve paths that are appropriate and suited to the different mental dispositions and the needs and spiritual inclinations of sentient beings. If that is the case, if that is a fact, then there is simply no basis to argue or claim that in one way or another, that this is the best path or this is the worst path. This is as the evaluation of the validity of the path really has to be done on the basis of whether a particular path is beneficial and suited for a given individual.

Simply because from a certain philosophical point of view, certain philosophical traditions or viewpoints a certain path is described as higher that does not mean it is the “best”. This is because depending on the need of the individual there will be a specific path that will be best for that individual. As a Buddhist when one comes to recognize that kind of

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understanding then one will immediately come to appreciate the need for and the importance of greater inter-religious understanding and greater religious harmony.

Even in the context of Buddhism, we speak of four philosophical schools, Vaibhashika, Sautantrika, Cittamatra (The Mind Only) and Madhyamika , and we also speak of the vehicles, the Lesser and Greater Vehicle and so on, all of which are attributed to the single teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni. What we have here is a situation where if we were to ask what is the Buddha's own final standpoint, why did the Buddha teach such diversity and sometimes quite opposing or contradictory teachings in his scriptures ?

The Buddha's own final standpoint may from the point of view of the Madhyamaka be that of the Middle Way philosophy but it is also a fact that the Buddha did teach the philosophy of the Vaibhashika school, Sautantrika school and Cittamatra school and the practices of the Lesser Vehicles and so on. What we see here even in the Buddhist context is the recognition of how the Buddha's teachings of the dharma have to be understood in the context of its appropriateness to the given audience. In a sense, it is not a case of an enlightened being who only wants to reveal one truth to everybody. It is the case if a Buddha having to select what is the most beneficial and effective and suitable in a given context and a given situation.

What we understand here is that the profundity, value and the validity of a teaching has really to be based on the evaluation of how beneficial it is. If it is beneficial in a given context it is profound, if it is not beneficial then no matter how profound it is, it has no value. So the validity and value of a spiritual teaching really has to be evaluated on its effectiveness and its benefit to a particular context. From this point of view, we then cannot say that this is a more profound teaching than that, the profundity and validity has to be judged contextually. Similarly, we can use that as an example from our own tradition and then extrapolate from this perspective and then extend it to other religious traditions. If you look at other religious traditions, generally speaking, we can see two dimensions to any spiritual tradition; there is the ethical teaching dimension and there is the dimension which can be described as philosophical or metaphysical. In the realm of metaphysics and philosophy, there may be a lot of differences between the religious traditions. However, on the level of the ethical dimension there is a uniformity of message in all the great traditions of the world, all of them carry the same message of love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, and the need for simplicity and contentment and discipline. All of these are common messages of the ethical teachings of all the religious traditions. From that perspective one cannot say "this is a better religion than that, or this is the best religion or this is not so and so on", one cannot simply make any such judgments because they all carry the same message.

Now on the philosophical side, what we can see in a sense is that the philosophy and metaphysics, are the premises or explanations which culminate in the outcome which is the core of the religious teachings, which are the ethical teachings. The ethical teachings are the outcome of the philosophical analysis. In the realm of philosophy obviously there are a

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lot of differences, because the differences lie in how you explain the importance of love, the importance of compassion, the importance of forgiveness and so on. How you ground the importance of these ethical practices and what explanations and reasons you give - there will be differences between the different religious traditions. For example, for some individuals the approach of the theistic traditions, where a belief in a all-powerful creator, a divine being is the foundation of your philosophical understanding and the ethical teachings are grounded upon that fundamental belief. Where if you are grounded in that belief, then the whole premise of your ethical practice would be to try and live your life according to how you can fulfill the wish or the will of that powerful creator. For some individuals that theistic approach has a sense of immediacy, a sense of power and an effect. Whereas for some individuals, the explanations of the importance of the ethical teachings from a non-theistic approach may be more suited where it is explained that the importance of love, compassion and so on has to do with understanding one's own individual responsibility , the cause and effects and so on. This kind of non-theistic approach where the emphasis is on understanding oneself as one's own ultimate salvation. That kind of approach will be more effective and carry a greater resonance.

Therefore, we cannot really say that this particular approach is best or better, as best or better has to be judged on the basis of individual context. However, purely on the metaphysical and philosophical level one can speak of certain philosophical ideas as being more sophisticated, more refined and more logical than others - that may be possible. That may be possible but as a tradition as a whole there is simply no basis for making judgments about some being better and others being worse.

I often give the example of medicine, when we look at medicines we can make distinctions between different forms of medicine on the basis of how expensive the individual drugs are because of the ingredients that go into making the particular pill. However, when we make the evaluation about what is the best medicine, we cannot really make it on the basis of which one is more expensive. The value of medicine really lies in its effect of curing the particular illness. Whatever is the most effective medicine for that particular illness, from that point of view that is the best medicine, regardless of whether it may be less expensive than other types of medicine. Of course, from the point of view of the cost, we can talk about some medicines being more valuable in the sense that it is more expensive as opposed to others. In a proper sense, the value of the medicine has to be judged in its effectiveness with relation to a specific ailment.

However, when we try to define medicine, the defining characteristic of a medicine ( in relation to curing an illness) we cannot define medicine in terms of how much it costs. We can only define medicine in terms of its effectiveness in relation to a particular ailment. Similarly when we speak of a spiritual practice or spiritual teaching, we can only define the value of a spiritual teaching in relation to its effectiveness in transforming our emotions and thoughts.

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Imagine when the Buddha was in India, of course Buddha taught and appeared in India in a cultural context of the presence of many other spiritual traditions and schools that were available there. Within that context Buddha brought his own message of no-self, rejection of belief of eternal abiding enduring self and so on and in some instances Buddha has debated with his contemporaries on the virtues and drawbacks of believing in the notion of selfhood and so on, however Buddha has never stated anywhere in his teachings, nor did he expect that the entire people of India turn to Buddhism or turn into Buddhists. He had never imagined or claimed the possibility, or demanded that all Indian people follow the Buddhist path.

*His Holiness speaks in English: That is the basis of mutual respect- among the different traditions. In fact, I think mutual admiration. I am Buddhist, sometimes I describe myself as a staunch Buddhist, but so I disagree with some of the views. But I respect sincerely because it worked among the humanity in the past, today and in the future and gives immense benefit to millions of people. So there is plenty of reason to respect, to admire, to appreciate. That is the proper way to develop, promote genuine harmony among the spiritual traditions.*

We now read from the text , the section on the Buddhist paths begins

***“the path that transcends the world consists of two categories (i) the dialectical vehicle and (ii) the indestructible vehicle (of Vajrayana) . The dialectical vehicle in turn is threefold : (i) the vehicle of the disciples (ii) the vehicle of the self-realized Ones and (iii) the vehicle of the bodhisattvas”***

***Of these the view of those who have entered the vehicle of the disciples is as follows.*** Here it refers to the Lesser Vehicle philosophical views of Shravaka. Their view is explained in the following : ***“They maintain that the nihilistic view denying everything and the eternalistic view asserting the existence of eternal realities, which are postulated by the extremists by means of reification and denigration, are as untrue as perceiving a (coiled) rope as a snake”***

Here the nihilistic view refers to the standpoints such as the unreflective, materialistic or nihilists who on the whole reject the notion of life after death, pre-existence and so on. Eternalist view here refers to the belief in eternal, enduring, independent self that we spoke about.

Those who adhere to the philosophical viewpoint of the disciples’ vehicle maintain that these postulates such as the rejection of rebirth and so on which constitutes denigration and the belief in an eternal self and so on constitutes reification, these are as untrue as seeing a coiled rope as a snake. Then having explained what they reject, the author goes on to explain what they espouse.

***“(in contrast) they view the aggregates, the elements and the sources, (which are composed of) the four great elements, as well as the consciousness to be ultimately real.”***

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What this points to is their philosophical understanding of the nature of reality where they see the physical, material world as being constituted by indivisible partless particles which are devoid of special dimensions and it is through the constitution of these indivisible particles, or the aggregation of these that they understand the origin of the physical and material objects and they understand the origin and nature of the consciousness in terms of aggregation of the points of consciousness or the points of mental states which are indivisible temporally (from the point of view of temporal processes). They understand both of these, external material objects and internal mental states to be ultimately real.

***“(And) it is by the means of meditating on the four Noble truths that, in due course, the four kinds of results are realized”***

The followers of the Shravaka Vehicle, the disciples’ vehicle, they maintain that it is on the basis of the practice of the four noble truths that one will in due course attain the four kinds of results. The four kinds of results refer to the stream-enterer, once returner, never returner and Arhats stage.

Next is the explanation of the view of the followers of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, which is the self-realized ones . We read in the text ***“The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the Self-Realized Ones is as follows. With respect to viewing the eternal self and so on that are postulated by the extremists by means of reification and denigration to being non-existent, they are similar to the Disciples”***.

The point being made here is that with relation to the teaching on no-self (anatman) the adherents of the Pratyekabuddha vehicle and the adherents of the disciple vehicle, they share the same position. With respect to the doctrine of no-self (anatman), the position is the same. Then we read ***“the difference is that they understand the aggregate of form and one aspect of the reality-element to be devoid of self-existence”***

This is a reference to the uniqueness of the viewpoint of the Pratyekabuddhas. The reference to the one element, one part of the reality element refers to the understanding of the absence of selfhood to the object as opposed to the subject. Within the world of subject and object, the adherents of this viewpoint are capable of rejecting the self-existence of the objects but not of the subjects. They believe in the ultimate reality of the subject of experiences.

This way of differentiating the Sharvakas (the disciples) and the Self-realized Ones is similar to the one found in Maitreya’s *Abhisamayalamkara* (Ornament of Clear Realization) where the wisdom of the three vehicles are clearly differentiated. The primary wisdom of the Sharvaka (the disciples) Vehicle is that of the insight into no-self (anatman), and the primary wisdom of the Pratyekabuddhas (the Self-Realized Ones) is the non-duality of subject and object (which is similar to the Mind-Only school standpoint) and the primary wisdom of the bodhisattavas is the insight into the no-self of phenomena.

Then we read that ***“Also at the time of attaining the fruit of Self- Realized One’s state, unlike disciples, they do not depend upon a spiritual mentor”***

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The Self-Realized Ones are able to gain the realization without dependence on the presence of a teacher.

Then we read ***“(rather) due to the force of their past habituation, they realize the profound ultimate reality (dharmata) by means of the twelve links of dependent origination and attain the fruit of Self-Enlightenment”***.

In the scriptures, the Pratyekabuddhas, the Self-Realized Ones are particularly associated with a deep understanding of the mechanism and the dynamics of the twelve links of dependent origination; both in terms of forward causation of the first chain in the link leading to the second link in the chain and so on. Similarly it also refers to the understanding of the twelve links of dependent origination and the dynamics of how by bringing the end of the latter, one can bring about the end of the former link in the chain.

This knowledge of the twelve links of dependent origination in the context of Self-Realized Ones refers to understanding both its causal dynamics and also the dynamics of how they are brought to its end. The ultimate reality refers to the Self-Realized Ones understanding of the absence of the duality between subject and object. So we read that ***they realize the profound ultimate reality (dharmata) by means of the twelve links of dependent origination and attain the fruit of Self-Enlightenment”***.

Next is the Bodhisattva Vehicle and we read the following ***“The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the bodhisattvas is as follows. All phenomenon of thoroughly afflicted and enlightened classes are on the ultimate level devoid of intrinsic nature while on the conventional level they possess their individual characteristics in clearly distinctive manner”***.

This particular sentence explains the philosophical viewpoint of the Middle Way School which represents the Bodhisattva’s philosophical standpoint. Historically, among the commentators on Nagarjuna’s teaching on emptiness there emerged broadly two distinct approaches. On the one side were the great masters like Bhavaviveka, Haribhadra, Shantarakshita (who came to Tibet) and Kamalashila ; all of whom while rejecting the notion of true existence on the ultimate level, they maintained and accepted some notion of *svabhava* or self-nature on the conventional level.

On the other side are commentators again on Nagarjuna such as Buddhapalita, Chandrkirti, Shantideva who rejected the notion of self-nature (*His Holiness disputed the translation of self-nature to translate for svabhava which is also translated as intrinsic being, self-nature and own being by various translators etc*) they are not rejecting individual characteristics of phenomenon, for example solidity is the defining nature of the earth element. The point is that one is not rejecting any notion of nature; individual phenomenon having their own defining nature, such as solidity is the defining nature of the earth element and heat is the defining nature of the fire and so on. This kind of defining nature is not being rejected, what is being rejected is some kind of intrinsic being or *svabhava*. On the other side are great masters like Buddhapalita, Chandrkirti, Shantideva who reject the notion of *svabhava* who not only reject the notion of true existence on the ultimate level but also reject the

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notion of *svabhava* (own being, intrinsic being , self being etc) even on the conventional level. What we see here is that historically there emerged different interpretations of Nagarjuna's teachings on emptiness.

The differences lie in the acceptance or rejection of the notion of *svabhava* (*self-nature*) on the conventional level. The differences of whether or not even the *sharvakas* and self-Realized Ones , whether it is necessary for them to realize the emptiness of phenomenon in order to gain liberation; some maintain yes and some maintain no.

Similarly there is a difference of opinion on whether or not between the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena, there is a difference of subtlety. Of course from these details, there emerged broadly speaking two different approaches to understanding Nagarjuna's teachings on emptiness

The text then goes on to read ***“The bodhisattvas aspire to seek the unexcelled enlightenment, which is the culmination of traversing the ten levels and the fruit of practicing the six perfections one by one.***

What is being pointed out here is that in terms of the path, Bodhisattvas traverse through the ten Bodhisattvas bhumis or the levels or grounds by means of practicing the ten perfections. When we speak of ten perfections in addition to the six, in addition to the sixth which is the perfection of wisdom there are the sub-divisions of the perfection of skilful means, power, aspiration and transcendent wisdom. It is on the basis of practicing these ten perfections that the Bodhisattvas finally aspire to attain the unexcelled enlightenment by traversing the ten bodhisattava bhumis, one by one.

Next we read in the text ***“The indestructible vehicle [of Vajrayana ] has three classes: (i) the vehicle of Kriya-tantra, the action tantra (ii) the vehicle of Ubhaya-tantra both the external activity and internal and (iii) the vehicle of Yoga-tantra. Yoga Tantra is a generic term used for both Yoga and Highest Yoga Tantra***

Then we read the explanation of the first tantra :

***“The view of those who have entered Kriya-tantra is as follows. Whilst there are no origination and cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level one visualizes [oneself] in the form of a deity and cultivates the deity's image,”***

What this points out is that in general one of the defining characteristics of the Vajrayana path is the practice of deity yoga. The text here explains what the heart of the deity yoga practice is. The heart of the deity yoga practice is to generate oneself into the deity on the basis of generating a deep insight into the ultimate nature of oneself. The text reads that ***there are no origination and cessation on the ultimate level.*** In reality, there is no origination and cessation on the ultimate level but what is being pointed out here is that one must cultivate the recognition of that, an awareness and cognition of that truth. The very mind that has understood that and has gained that realization, that mind itself then arises in the form of a deity. We read that ***on the conventional level one visualizes***

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*[oneself] in the form of a deity and cultivates the deity's image,"* which is the body and attributes which symbolizes the mind and the hand implements, and the mantra repetitions which represent the speech, on the basis of the power of the coming together of the necessary ritual articles and other conditions.

The key characteristic of Kriya Tantra is the emphasis on the need for the external activities and the ritual conditions as an aid for bringing about the realization of the inner deity yoga state.

Here we are talking about the various levels of the path of Vajrayana Vehicle. It is important to understand what is meant by Vajrayana, the Indestructible Vehicle or Indivisible Vehicle. Vajra here has the connotation of indivisibility, in that sense we are talking about a vehicle that has indivisibility as its central characteristic. What is the indivisibility we are speaking of here? The indivisibility here refers to the indivisibility of the method aspect of the path and the wisdom aspect of the path. It is the indivisibility of these two aspects of the path, method and wisdom which are the essence of Vajrayana path.

However, insofar as the need for the union of the method and wisdom is concerned, this is also emphasized in the Perfection Vehicle, the Sutra Vehicle as well. For example we find in Nagarjuna's text, there is an aspiration at the conclusion of a text where he draws parallel or correlations between the two accumulations – the accumulations of wisdom and the accumulation of merit as corresponding to the two Buddhakayas, the form body of the Buddha and the Truth Body of the Buddha. It is by relying upon a path which has the two accumulations of merit and wisdom one aspires to attain Buddhahood, which is the embodiment of the two Buddhakayas, the two Buddha bodies of form and reality. Similarly Chandrakirti explains in his *Supplement to the Middle Way, Madhyamakavatara* where he compares the two aspects of the path, method and wisdom as the two wings of a bird that cruises across the ocean to reach the shore of enlightenment. Again there is an emphasis on the need for the union of the method and wisdom aspect of the path.

However in the context of the non-Vajrayana path, the Sutra approach, the union of the two is really understood as one complementing another. The method aspect of the path and the wisdom aspect of the path are seen as two independent streams of realization. The method is primarily characterized by the practice of the five perfections such as generosity, cultivation of awakening mind and so on whereas the wisdom aspect of the path is primarily characterized by the wisdom of emptiness. It is the complementarities of these two aspects of the path that one develops the union of method and wisdom. However in the Vajrayana context, the union of the two is really understood at a much more profound level, where the union is not a matter of two factors, one complementing the other but rather it is a union in the form of indivisibility.

In other words, both the method aspect of the path and the wisdom aspect of the path have to be present within a single event of a mental state. How that is achieved in the Vajrayana path is reflected even in the early stages of the practice. For example in the deity yoga meditation the core of the deity yoga practice is to first generate understanding of

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emptiness. This wisdom of emptiness is then imagined as arising and taking the form of a deity, where within a single mental cognitive event there is a realization of emptiness and also the visualization of oneself as a deity present in a single event of the mind. They are inseparable.

Ultimately the true meaning of the indivisibility of method and wisdom arises at the Highest Yoga Tantra level where within a single instant of the clear light state of mind both the factor for the attainment of Buddha's *Rupakaya*, the form body and the factors for the attainment of Buddha's *Dharmakya* the Reality body, both of them are present in a single instant of the experience of clear light. This is the ultimate meaning of the indivisibility of method and wisdom. However, even in the lower classes of tantra such as the Kriya Tantra (the Action Tantra), deity yoga meditation conveys this indivisibility of method and aspect be it on the level of imagination because it is at really at the level of visualization. However, within a single visualization both the aspects of the path are present

This reference to the absence of origination and cessation on the ultimate level as I pointed out earlier really implies the need for not just it being the fact but also the need for cultivating that understanding within oneself as the basis for the deity yoga meditation. Generally speaking, as it is stated in Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, where he states that in a system where emptiness is possible, everything is possible. In a standpoint where emptiness is not possible, no function is possible. From that point of view, generally speaking if one's standpoint embraces the understanding of emptiness within that standpoint all functions of the everyday world, of cause and effects and so on will be tenable. That understanding is there. Here in this context the understanding of how one arises on a conventional level as a deity although on the ultimate level there is no cessation and origination.

The meaning here is a deeper one which is explicitly brought out in (Jamgon) Kongtrul's commentary of this particular section where he says that while abiding mentally on equipoise, one's mind equipoised on the absence of origination and cessation on the ultimate level. This reference to one's mind being equipoised refers to the need for a deep understanding of the emptiness of origination and cessation on the ultimate level. This I think is an important point because normally there are quite a number of people who perceive themselves as practitioners of Vajrayana , Tantrayana, we do sadhana practices , we have mantra recitations and we also do some form of visualization of oneself as a deity .It is important to understand exactly what is the core of that deity yoga meditation , what is supposed to happen when you generate yourself as a deity?.

In the course of deity yoga meditation not only must one visualize oneself as a deity, but also one must cultivate the identification of oneself as a deity. In addition to the visualizing oneself as a deity there is also the need for cultivating the identity of a deity. There is a form of identification that takes place and if there is no understanding of emptiness as the basis of that meditation then what could be happening is the further reinforcement of the

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sense of clinging to the notion of “I”, of our ordinary sense of selfhood which is grounded upon our ordinary bodily existence composed of flesh, bones and so on.

However, what is required in the Vajrayana deity yoga meditation is not only a clear perception of oneself as a deity with visualization but also an identification of the deity on the basis of a pure, purified aggregate. What is required is not only the dissolution of the grasping to inherent existence of ourselves but also a dissolution on the level of appearance, of our own perception of oneself as ordinary person composed of bodily existence of flesh, bones and so on. Therefore one goes through the process of dissolution into emptiness and therefore (Jamgon) Kongtrul writes in the commentary that from within that state, devoid of origination and cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level one arises as a deity.

The point being made here is that not only on the level of apprehension one needs to reject or negate the inherent existence of oneself but also on the level of perception as well one must dissolve one’s perception of oneself as ordinary person and from within that state of emptiness one then assumes the form of a deity. It is that realization of emptiness of oneself that assumes the form of the deity. When that happens there is a real union, otherwise what happens is that no matter how many times one may recite the mantra, how many times one may visualize oneself as the deity, none of them will truly become Vajrayana practice because the core element of the practice of deity yoga is missing.

No matter how one may have done a three year retreat or one may have recited the mantra of the deity so many times and so on, none of them will truly become Vajrayana practice. The point being made here as explained before is that as a foundation for the practice of Vajrayana, to engage in a successful practice of Vajrayana, it is indispensable to have at least some form of experience of the understanding of emptiness. Without the understanding of emptiness there is simply no basis for the cultivation of the deity yoga practice. When we speak of the understanding of emptiness here it could be according to the Cittamatra (Mind Only school) or according to the Middle Way School. Historically in India there have been yogis of followers of the Cittamatra, Mind Only School or Middle Way School who have been great Vajrayana realized masters.

An understanding of the ultimate nature of reality either according to the Cittamatra or the Middle Way is indispensable as a foundation for a successful deity yoga meditation. In order for the understanding of emptiness to become an effective antidote to overcoming the subtle obstructions to knowledge which is the primary obstacle to the attainment of full enlightenment, it is indispensable that the realization of emptiness is complemented with the factor of bodhichitta, the awakening mind.

The point I am making is that in order for one to engage successfully in the Vajrayana practice it is indispensable to have the realization of the sutra system of the path, particularly the realizations of emptiness and bodhichitta. For a follower of purely the Perfection vehicle, the Sutra system of the path there is no need for any realizations of the

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Vajrayana path. For the practitioners of the Vajrayana , it is indispensable to have the realization of emptiness and bodhichitta, the awakening mind as presented in the Perfection Vehicle.

If one's practice of the Vajrayana path, the deity yoga meditation is really grounded upon a deep understanding of emptiness as presented in the Sutra Vehicle and complemented with bodhichitta, the practice of awakening mind; then that very understanding of emptiness at the level of imagination assumes the form of whatever particular deity one may be practicing or emphasizing. Once you have a clear visualization of the deity, one needs to reflect on the emptiness of that deity. When you have that kind of combination, of a clear visualization of the deity on the basis of the understanding of emptiness and then once again reflect on the emptiness of the deity then truly in one's practice there will be the union of what is called the profound aspect of the path as well as the luminosity or clarity aspect of the path as well.

In terms of the sequence of the path or practice, when we speak of one's realization of emptiness being complemented by bodhichitta , the awakening mind, it is not the case that when you actually have the experience of emptiness the bodhichitta should be consciously present at the moment. When you actually have the experience of emptiness at that moment , at that point, in terms of the content of your thought or your mental state there will be the mere simple negation of intrinsic existence .

What is required is initially to cultivate bodhichitta, the awakening mind, and once your experience of bodhichitta, the awakening mind becomes very strong and intense, then at that point you should reflect upon the ultimate nature of that individual, this "I" who is aspiring for the attainment of Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings or on the nature of the sentient being for whose benefit you wish to attain enlightenment, or the nature of enlightenment itself. So you subject these and ultimately or eventually one's own self to critical analysis and examine whether or not they possess inherent existence and once you arrive at the realization that the self too is devoid of intrinsic existence, at that point you dwell your mind single pointedly on that conclusion that you have arrived at where you have totally negated any possibility of intrinsic existence of one's own self.

Then that state of mind which is the state of realization of emptiness of one's own self is then imagined on the level of imagination as transforming into a deity (whatever from of deity you may be visualizing). Once you have a clear visualization of the deity, then once again reflect upon the emptiness of that deity. What you see here in this process is the two stages or two instances of meditation on emptiness, at the initial stage you meditate on the emptiness of yourself and at the culmination you meditate on the emptiness of the deity .

Insofar as both of these are realizations of emptiness, they are equal. The difference is that in the former case, the object of meditation of emptiness is a contaminated object which is the unenlightened existence of your own self, whereas in the latter case, the object of the

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meditation on emptiness is an enlightened form albeit on the level of imagination but it is the form of the deity.

There is a difference between these two types on the level of imagination. Although both of these are meditations on emptiness, there is a difference in terms of the object upon which the meditation on emptiness takes place.

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