

Mountain Dharma: The Ocean of Definitive Meaning

Part 2: The Path

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Teaching the Profound Path by Which That Eternal Buddhahood May Be Obtained

The inseparable Dharmakaya of Buddhahood, whose qualities are inseparable from its nature, intrinsically abides within all sentient beings. That does not mean that the two accumulations of merit and pristine wisdom that constitute the path are unnecessary. That is because 1) to attain enlightenment, incidental defilements must be cleared away, and 2) to perform benefits for all sentient beings, the relative form kayas —Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya— must be developed.

To have a completely auspicious, authentic path, there must be perfect and complete view, meditation, and action. Moreover, these three must exist well in two forms, ordinary and extraordinary.

Teaching the Completely Pure and Correct View Realizing Self-Emptiness

To realize the widely-famed correct ordinary view, it is necessary to resolve that, in the way things really abide, all relative phenomena are nothing at all, like the horns of a rabbit or the son of a barren woman. Relative phenomena are not established as anything at all, not even as mere appearance. Therefore, they are non-existent, like a flower in the sky. The sources for this view in the Buddha's Middle Turning, like Nagarjuna's Collection of Reasoning, are utterly well-known.

Teaching Completely Pure and Correct Meditation without Concepts and Free from Proliferation

How to rest in the equanimity of meditation within the above state should be known from the instructions of the holy guru. There are also very extensive scriptural sources, like the following in the Mother of the Conquerors:

Shariputra, the genuine yoga of Bodhisattva Mahasatvas is like this: It is the yoga of the essence without relative real things and empty of real things other than that.

And:

Shariputra, Bodhisattva Mahasatvas who train in this way do not train in concepts of any dharma.

And:

Resting in the equanimity of meditative absorption, with no mindfulness and no mental activity, is the mindfulness of the Buddha.

And:

If even concepts of Dharma are abandoned, why mention what is not Dharma.

And:

The Leader proclaimed that conceptualized perception, is how samsara is displayed on this shore. Destroying and abandoning conceptualized perception is going to the other shore.

And:

Not thinking of either arising or non-arising is the supreme practice of the perfection of *prajna*.¹

And:

A Bodhisattva who thinks, "these aggregates are empty," is courting in conceptualized characteristics; and thus, that Bodhisattva has no faith in the realm of the unborn, *dharmata*.²

And:

Freedom from conceptualized perceptions of a variety of real things is courting in complete peace. Courting in complete peace is courting in the supreme perfection of *prajna*.

And:

Not seeing according to preconceptions of Dharma and non-Dharma, the three times, the three realms, the perfections, and so forth, up to omniscience, is completely perfecting meditation on the perfection of *prajna*. [...]

And:

For any phenomenon, do not see, attentively observe, apprehend, contemplate, meditate on, dwell on, mix with, desire, be attached to, take to heart, unite with or, discriminate yourself from notions of pleasant or painful, permanent or impermanent, self or selfless, peaceful or not, empty or not, having conceptualized characteristics or not, wished-for or not, compounded or not, arisen or not, ceased or not, isolated or not, meritorious or not, morally wrong or not, corrupting or not, emotionally afflicted or not, world-transcending or not, emotionally afflicted or completely purified from affliction, applying exertion or not.

The Buddha did indeed give a great number of very famous extensive teachings like this. However, they should be viewed after having brought it about that you also have the instructions of the glorious Bodhisattvas of the tenth level, so that you can apprehend these teachings according to these Bodhisattvas' view of the Buddha's intention.

Teaching the Necessity of the Profound Points of the Oral Instructions

When you meditate in this style of non-meditation, there are many gates to meditative absorption, called the "precious lamp," and so forth that unify shamatha and vipashyana meditation. To practice these, extraordinary, profound instructions are required for stopping the winds, binding the channels, and so forth.

There are also other renowned teachings about the ordinary conceptual meditations of loving-kindness, compassion, equalizing phenomena within the single essence, exchanging self and other, visualization of the deities and their environment in the developing stage, and so forth. Ordinary and extraordinary Buddha activity too are taught elsewhere.

¹ *Prajna* (Sanskrit), translated as "wisdom," "intelligence," or "discernment," is described as the understanding of the true nature of phenomena. In the context of meditation, it is the ability to understand the three characteristics of all things: impermanence, insubstantiality, and dependence on causes and conditions.

² *Dharmata* is the innate nature of phenomena and mind; phenomena as it really is or as seen by a completely enlightened being, without any distortion or obscuration; true or absolute reality. It is often translated as "Suchness" or the "true nature of things."

Within This Teaching, Saying Well What Exists, Does Not Exist, and So Forth, and Identifying These

In brief, by applying these key points to body and mind, the winds in the channels are bound. When the winds and mind that moves by being mounted on the winds are stopped, meditative absorption that unifies shamatha and vipashyana can arise well. At that point, a pure and correct view is required that knows fully and correctly as they are what exists and what does not exist, according to the Third Turning.

That is because, to experience pristine wisdom properly, it is necessary to encounter experienced phenomena as they are, distinguishing well according to the different Wheels of Dharma, the natural and the artificial, the fundamental way things are and the incidental, the essential kernel and the husk, pristine wisdom and consciousness, the apparent and the non-apparent, pristine wisdom that is self-arisen and pristine wisdom that is risen from another, self-aware consciousness, and pristine wisdom, the two truths, the Four Noble Truths, the three natures³, the five topics⁴, and so forth.

It is also necessary to encounter experientially as they are, the outer, inner, and the non-dual 'other,' distinguishing them well according to profound Vajrayana.

Teaching That, To Do This, It is Necessary to Know the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma

Why? Practicing the meaning of the Three Turnings corresponds with purification of coarse, subtle, and very subtle defilements from Sugatagarbha.

First Turning practice is in accord with preliminaries to subsequently meditating on the profound, definitive meaning of the Great Vehicle.

Second Turning practice is in accord with special meditative absorption that meditates in equanimity without proliferation on that profound meaning, as self-emptiness.

In Third Turning practice, a special meditative absorption arises in subsequent attainment. Then existence, non-existence, and so forth, are well distinguished in an experiential encounter with pristine wisdom that is also in accord with profound Vajrayana.

³ "The three natures are the imaginary, the dependent, and the perfected. Whatever is grasped by mental designation is the imaginary nature. Non-entities and the appearances of objects arising in the mind are imaginary. The relationship between name and object, such as grasping the name as the object or mistaking the object as the name, are also imaginary. Outer, inner, fringe and center, big and small, good and bad, space and time, and so on, whatever is grasped by thought is imaginary in nature.

"The dependent nature is simply consciousness which arises as subjective and objective poles, based on the habitual tendencies of ignorance. The perfected nature is self-aware, self-luminous, and free from contrivance. The synonyms of the perfected nature are dharmata, dharmadhatu, suchness, and ultimate truth.

"The dependent and imaginary natures are equally false and relative. However, it is necessary to separate them into individual categories. The imaginary nature does not exist even on a relative level. The dependent nature exists on a relative level. The perfected nature does not exist on a relative level, yet it truly exists on an ultimate level.

"Therefore, imaginary nature exists by designation, and the dependent nature exists as perception. The perfected nature does not exist in either of these two ways, rather it exists in an uncontrived way.

"The imaginary nature is non-existent emptiness. The dependent nature is existent emptiness. The perfected nature is ultimate emptiness." —*Jetsun Taranatha, Maha Madhyamaka*

⁴ Moral Conduct, Views, Reasoning, Mental Structures and Functions, and Cultivation

Teaching by an Example How, in the Three Turnings, Three Stages of Defilements are Purified

The Sutra Teaching the Great Compassion of the Tathagata, also called the Sutra Requested by King Dharanisvara, discusses purifying the defilements of Sugatagarbha in stages, according to the Three Turnings:

Child of noble disposition, it is like this, for example. Skilled jewelers who know good methods for purifying jewels take a completely unpurified jewel of vaidurya covered with mud, from the family of precious stones. Soaking it in a sharp mineral salt solution, they completely clean it by rubbing it with a coarse cloth.

However, they do not cease their effort with just that. After that, soaking it in an acidic liquid, they completely clean it by polishing with a softer cloth.

However, they do not cease their effort with just that. After that, soaking it in another excellent liquid, they completely clean it with a sheer cloth. Then, completely purified and free from defilements, it is called “vaidurya.”

Child of noble disposition, similarly, the Tathagata knows that the nature of sentient beings that is completely impure with incidental defilements is really Dharmadhatu, Sugatagarbha. He arouses sadness in beings who enjoy samsara. He does so by giving sobering discourses about impermanence, suffering, selflessness, and impurity. By that he makes them enter into the discipline of Noble Ones of the First Turning.

However, the Tathagata does not cease his effort with just that. After that, he makes those of the Great Vehicle realize the way of the Tathagata with discourses about self-emptiness, marklessness, and wishlessness, according to the Second Turning.

However, the Tathagata does not cease his effort with just that. After that —with talk of the Third Irreversible Wheel of Dharma that completely ascertains absolute truth, with completely pure and true talk of purifying the three aspects of action by causes of various natures— he makes sentient beings who abide in all the vehicles enter into the realm of the Tathagata. When they enter there, they manifestly realize the nature of the Tathagata within their bodies. That is called “the unsurpassed object of worship.”

Well Discriminating and Resolving the Differences Between the Three Turnings

Concerning the differences between the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, in terms of provisional meaning and definitive meaning, and their being taught clearly with excellent distinctions or not, the Sutra That Definitively Comments on the Intention says:

Then the Bodhisattva Paramarthasamudgata asked the Blessed One, “At first, in the region of Varanasi, speaking to the rishis in the Deer Park, teaching the Four Noble Truths for those who would purely and truly abide in the Hearer vehicle, the Blessed One fully turned a wondrous, marvelous First Wheel of Dharma. Previously no god or human, had ever turned one like it. That Wheel of Dharma turned by the Blessed One was surpassable, an occasion for elimination by analysis, provisional, and, on engaging with the words, their actual topics were disputable.

Then the Blessed One turned a Second Wheel of Dharma for those who would engage in the Great Vehicle, beginning with absence of arising, cessation, and nature; peace from the beginning; and natural, complete nirvana. It was wondrous and marvelous in speaking about the aspect of self-emptiness. That Wheel of Dharma turned by the Blessed One was surpassable, an occasion for elimination by analysis, provisional, and disputable.

Then the Blessed One turned a Third Wheel of Dharma for those purely and truly abiding in all vehicles, beginning with absence of arising, cessation, and nature; peace from the beginning; and natural complete nirvana. It was wondrous and marvelous in possessing excellent distinctions. That Wheel of Dharma turned by the Blessed One was unsurpassable, not an occasion for elimination by criticism, of the definitive meaning, and not disputable.

When sons and daughters of good disposition hear this teaching by the Blessed One of the Third Turning, beginning with absence of arising, cessation, and nature; peace from the beginning; and natural complete nirvana, hearing it produces devotion. The Hearers make an effort to write its words down. Having written them down, they memorize them, read them, pay them worship, purely and truly spread them to others, receive reading transmissions of them. They perform activities of expressing them, contemplating them, and meditating on them. When they do so, how much merit will these Hearers create?

The Blessed One spoke to the Bodhisattva Paramarthasamudgata saying, "Such an absolutely noble son or daughter of good disposition will produce immeasurable, incalculable merit. Though indeed it is not easy to give an example of it, I will present some to you briefly. For example, Paramarthasamudgata, it is like this. If the particles of earth on the tip of a fingernail are compared to the particles of earth of the whole earth, they do not come near a hundredth of them, a thousandth of them, or a hundred thousandth of them. No enumerable fraction, exemplification, or comparison comes near it. If the water in an ox's footprint is compared to the water in the four great oceans, that example does not ... come near it.

Let us say that such an absolutely Noble One has the merit of engaging in the combined aspects from producing devotion to meditation, as they are explained in the Sutras of provisional meaning. If that merit is compared to the merit for such a one who combines the aspects from being truly established in producing devotion to being truly established in meditation, as they are explained in the Sutras of definitive meaning, it does not ... come near it ...

According to those words, and so forth, when the formless yoga of the perfection of wisdom is being practiced, it is necessary to be free from all conceptions. Therefore, all objects are refuted, in order to stop grasping of them by the perceiver. Many aspects like non-existence, non-establishment, exclusion of everything, and emptiness of everything are diligently taught. However, these teachings are not so diligent in distinguishing what exists and what does not exist, and so forth. Therefore, the Second Turning is said to be taught through the aspect of speaking about negating all conceptions as self-emptiness.

When the meditative absorption uniting shamatha and vipashyana meditation arises by practicing the yoga of the perfection of wisdom, distinguishing what is existent and non-existent and what is empty and not empty is taught. Therefore, we must be introduced to how they abide and how they are. The reason we need to do this is because not everything is non-existent and unestablished.

That is especially true because the ground in which something is non-affirmingly negated as empty and non-existent is simultaneously affirmed as that thing is negated. Also, the ground in which something is determined to be excluded is simultaneously determined to be affirmed. Thus, the ground in which all faults are naturally abandoned is realized to abide in self-existence, complete with all the intrinsic qualities of the ultimate. Therefore, the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma that teaches this is said to possess excellent discrimination.

On the other hand, the Second Turning, due to its purpose, teaches even things that are not self-empty to be empty of themselves, and so forth. It does not have the excellent discrimination of the Third, and therefore, is not without internal contradiction. Thus, for several reasons, the Sutra that Completely Ascertain the Intention says that the Second Turning is surpassable, an occasion for elimination by analysis, provisional, and disputable. [...]

It is the same regarding the superiority of the Vajra Vehicle over the final turning. Tripitakamala's Lamp for the Three Modes says:

Though the meaning is one, the mantra treatises
are better because they are not confused,
have many skillful means, and are without difficulties,
and are created for those with sharp faculties.

What meaning is the same in Sutra and mantra? The meaning of the perfection of wisdom is the same in the Second Turning, the Third Turning, and the Vajra Vehicle. Likewise, all of the following have the same meaning in those three: Vajrasattva, Vajradhara, the essence inseparable from the fruition that is the absolute ground of emptiness, [...] the source of dharmas, [...], secret, great secret, lotus of the essence that is inseparable from the fruition, the absolute ground of emptiness, realm of space, Sugatagarbha, the element of nirvana, Buddha Nature, pure being, naturally luminous mind, naturally pure mind, absolute bodhicitta, Suchness, emptiness, marklessness, ultimate reality, just That, Dharmakaya, Svabhavikakaya, the naturally pure enlightened family of the essence, inseparable from the fruition that is the absolute ground of emptiness, all-pervading Dharmata without establishing or clearing away, the middle beyond extremes, self-arising pristine wisdom, the innate nature, the self-existing nature, the changeless perfectly established, and so forth.

All these teachings of its many aspects refer to the space of Dharmadhatu where everything is naturally pure, the absolute truth of pristine wisdom knowing itself.

[...] There is no valid refutation of absolute Dharmadhatu being the perfection of wisdom. Their equivalence in non-dual self-awareness is established by valid scriptural sources. Neither scripture nor reasoning teaches this equivalence to be merely imputed.

In "non-dual pristine wisdom," what is non-dual with what? Dharmadhatu and the self-awareness that is self-arising pristine wisdom are non-dually mixed as one. They are of equal taste from the start. This ultimate Suchness is experienced as inseparable union, the single taste of the ultimate, fundamental nature. That union is the non-conceptual way things are for absolute emptiness and compassion, skillful means and wisdom, knower and known, and inseparable awareness and the space of the dhatu.

Pristine wisdom that also fulfills the criteria of the perfection of wisdom unites 1) the perfection of wisdom of the ground and 2) the perfection of wisdom of the ultimate fruition as the inseparable essence of non-conceptual Suchness.

However, the paths for manifesting this, what is accomplished by them, and the assertions in the texts that teach this as their expressed meaning all consist of mere conceptual imputations. That we must distinguish the conceptual words and the non-conceptual meaning is true of the Greater Madhyamaka, Mahamudra, Innate Union, the Union of All The Buddhas, Vajra Yoga, Ati Yoga, [...] and so forth.

All linguistic terms taught as synonyms of Suchness in all paths and texts are imputed words that are established as empty of themselves. However, all phenomena that occur within experience of the inseparable nature of ground and fruition fulfill all the criteria of the absolute meaning itself.

The foregoing general commentary on all the profound, ultimate Sutras and Tantras is a great releaser of knots in all the vajra words that are taught. It is also a great commentary on the meaning of the intention of what was taught, the great profound intention of all these texts. However, to realize this intention properly, abandoning habitual propensities that arise from former quarrels, we must depend on the four reliances⁵ and the lamp of experience, according to the instructions of the tenth level Bodhisattvas.

⁵ Rely on the message, not on the messenger; rely on the meaning, not on the words; rely on the original intention, not on self-interested speculation; and rely on the entirety of the Dharma, not on partial understanding.