Progressive Stages of Contemplation on Emptiness

An Exploration of the Buddhist Philosophical Systems

"My dharma has two modes, advice and tenets.
To children I speak advice and to yogis, tenets."
- The Buddha, Lankavatara Sutra

SOURCEBOOK OF READINGS

RIME SHEDRA CHANTS

ASPIRATION

In order that all sentient beings may attain Buddhahood,
From my heart I take refuge in the three jewels.

This was composed by Mipham. Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

MANJUSHRI SUPPLICATION

Whatever the virtues of the many fields of knowledge
All are steps on the path of omniscience.
May these arise in the clear mirror of intellect.
O Manjushri, please accomplish this.

This was specially composed by Mangala (Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche). Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

DEDICATION OF MERIT

By this merit may all obtain omniscience
May it defeat the enemy, wrong doing.
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death,
From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings

By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east
May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom,
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled.
May all beings enjoy profound, brilliant glory.

Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

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Sourcebook Table of Contents

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An Exploration of the Buddhist Philosophical Systems

An Advanced Buddhist Studies/Rime Shedra NYC Course

Ten Tuesdays from May 15 to July 17, 2018, from 7-9:15 pm

Shambhala Meditation Center of New York

Syllabus

1) **Class One: Introduction and Overview of the Course**
   a) **In Class Reading:**
      i) The Tibetan Genre of Doxography Structuring a Worldview, Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, 10 pages**, SB. pp. 185-194**

2) **Class Two: Buddhist Tenets**
   a) **Buddhist Philosophy**
      i) Chapter 1. What Are Tenets? 1-11**, SB. pp. 8-13**
      ii) Chapter 2. What Are Buddhist Tenets? 12-18**, SB. pp. 14-17**
      iii) Chapter 3. What Are the Buddhist Schools? 19-28**, SB. pp. 17-22**
      iv) Chapter 5. What Is a Person? 37-43**, SB. pp. 25-29**

3) **Class Three: Buddhist Tenets, Slight Return**
   a) **Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice**
      i) Chapter I: The Development and Character of Buddhist Philosophy
         (1) Guenther 13-23**, SB. pp. 49-54**
         (2) Mipham 25-30**, SB. pp. 55-57**
   b) **Cutting Through Appearances**
      i) Chapter 3 General Exposition of Buddhist Tenets 171-178**, SB. pp. 109-113**

4) **Class Four: The Vaibhashikas**
   a) **Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice**
      i) Chapter II: The Vaibhashikas
         (1) Guenther 31-51**, SB. pp. 58-68**
         (2) Mipham 63-68**, SB. pp. 69-71**
   b) **Buddhist Philosophy:**
      i) Chapter 9. What Is Valid Cognition? 66-73**, SB. pp. 41-44**

5) **Class Five: Vaibhashikas, Slight Return**
   a) **Cutting Through Appearances**
      i) The Great Exposition School 179-220**, SB. pp. 113-134**

6) **Class Six: The Sautrantikas**
   a) **Buddhist Philosophy**
      i) Chapter Ill: The Sautrantikas
         (1) Guenther 69-71**, SB. pp. 72-76**
         (2) Mipham 84-89**, SB. pp. 76-79**
   b) **Cutting Through Appearances**
      i) Chapter 5 The Sutra School 221-247**, SB. pp. 134-147**

7) **Class Seven: Chittamatrins**
   a) **Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice**
      i) Chapter IV: Mentalistic-Phenomenalistic Trends
         (1) Guenther 90-103**, SB. pp. 79-86**
         (2) Mipham 113-122**, SB. pp. 86-91**
   b) **Buddhist Philosophy:**
      i) Chapter 6. What Is the World? 44-53**, SB. pp. 30-34**
      ii) Chapter 8. What Did Buddha Mean? 60-65**, SB. pp. 38-40**

8) **Class Eight: Chittamatrins, Slight Return**
   a) **Cutting Through Appearances:**
      i) Chapter 6 The Mind Only School 249-278**, SB. pp. 148-162**
   b) **Buddhist Philosophy:**
      i) Chapter 4. What Is Ignorance? 29-36**, SB. pp. 22-24**

9) **Class Nine:**
   a) **Cutting Through Appearances:**
      i) Chapter 7 The Autonomy School 279-299**, SB. pp. 163-173**
   b) **Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice**
      i) Chapter V: The Madhyamikas
         (1) Svatantrika
            (a) Guenther 123-129**, SB. pp. 91-94**
            (b) Mipham 137-141**, SB. pp. 95-96**
   c) **Buddhist Philosophy:**
      i) Chapter 7. What Are the Two Truths? 54-59**, SB. pp. 35-37**

10) **Class Ten:**
   a) **Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice**
      i) Chapter V: The Madhyamikas
         (1) Prasangika
            (a) Guenther 141-142**, SB. pp. 97**
            (b) Mipham 150-154**, SB. pp. 98-100**
   b) **Cutting Through Appearances:**
      i) Chapter 8 The Consequence School 301-322**, SB. pp. 173-184**
   c) **Buddhist Philosophy:**
      i) Chapter 10. What Are Arhats and Buddhas? 74-81**, SB. pp. 45-48**

The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

1. Vaibhashika	Self and phenomena are compounded
2. Sautrantika	Compounded phenomena are mere appearances
3. Cittamatra	Appearances are mind
4. Madhyamika Rangtong	Mind is empty
5. Madhyamika Shentong	Emptiness is spontaneously present
6. Mahamudra	Spontaneous presence is self liberated

1. Shravakayana – Moments & Particles

When objects are destroyed or mentally dissected,
Nothing remains for mind to know.
Such things are completely false, like water and vases.
The genuinely existent are other than that.

2. Cittamatra – Non Dual Mind Only

That which has parts does not exist.
Subtle particles also are not existent.
Appearances apart from mind cannot be observed.
Experiences are like dreams.
Consciousness free from perceiver and perceived exists in geniune actuality.

3. Svatantrika Madhyamaka – Ultimate Emptiness

Appearances exist completely falsely – they are like illusions.
In genuine reality, nothing exists – it is like space.
Where there is observation - that is completely false truth.
That which is free from all observers and observed is actual genuine truth.

4. Prasangika Madhyamaka – Freedom from Conceptuality

That which is imagined by mind is the completely false truth;
It is expressed following worldly customs.
Actual genuine truth is free from conceptual elaborations –
It is beyond thought and expression.

5. Shentong Madhyamaka – Supremely Endowed Awareness

The imaginary and the other-dependent natures are the completely false truth;
Actual genuine truth is the perfectly existent nature -
Self-aware primordial awareness.

***The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, by Arya Nagarjuna**

The Dedication:

I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha, the best of teachers,
Who taught that whatever is dependently arisen is -
Unceasing, unborn, not annihilated, not permanent
Not coming, not going, without destruction, without identity
And free from conceptual construction.

The Four Skills of Madhyamaka
Analysis of the Emptiness of Essence in Phenomena

First, Identifying the Object to be Negated

Like taking a rope to be a snake,
Its essential nature is clinging
To what appears to an ordinary mind
As truly existent in terms of specific characteristics

1. Analyzing Causes, Chandrakirti's Vajra Slivers

Since it does not arise from itself, other,
Both of them, or without a cause,
Suffering does not arise.
Present suffering is also like this.

Neither from themselves, nor from another cause,
Not from both, nor yet without a cause –
Phenomena indeed of any kind
Are never born.

2. Analyzing Results, by Jnanagarbha

Since the result does not arise
From existing at the time of the cause,
From not existing, from both, or neither,
Suffering therefore does not arise.

Contributive causes cannot be ascribed
To things existing or without existence.
If things do not exist, what contribution can such causes make?
And if things "are," what is the cause accomplishing?

3. Analyzing Essence – Beyond One or Many, by Shantarakshita

Since it is beyond the nature of being one or many,
Suffering has no inherent existence
Like the suffering in a dream, for example,
The suffering in the bardo is also like this.

See how an instant has an end,
And likewise a beginning and a middle.
Because an instant is in turn three instants,
Momentariness is not the nature of the world

4. Analyzing Interdependence, by Nagarjuna

Like a moon in water, a rainbow, and a movie,
Mere appearances are interdependent arisings;
No phenomenon exists through possessing an essence.
The extremes of samsara and nirvana, and of permanence and extinction are transcended.

But for what originates dependently,
There are no phenomena;
Therefore without emptiness,
There are no phenomena.

Conclusion – Freedom from Conceptual Fabrication

Not existence and not nonexistence,
Not these two conjoined nor the opposite of this:
Freed from four extremes, the truly wise
Are those who keep within the middle way.

Buddhist Philosophy

Losang Gönchok's Short Commentary to Jamyang Shayba's Root Text on Tenets

by Daniel Cozort and Craig Preston

Snow Lion Publications
Ithaca and Boulder

What Are Tenets?

In *The Clear Crystal Mirror*, Losang Gönchok summarizes the views, or "tenets," of some well-known Indian philosophical schools. He is mainly concerned with the Buddhist schools, of course, and within them is much more concerned with those that his tradition thinks represent the higher, most correct worldviews. In this introduction to his text, we would like to provide the reader with some perspectives on the nature of tenets and the principal issues about which the Buddhist schools disagree.

Tenets, Losang Gönchok tells us, are "established conclusions." That is, they are the end product of a process of reasoning that has considered various possibilities and has tentatively eliminated all but one. They are not mere beliefs; we cannot be real proponents of Buddhist tenets without having studied, debated, and struggled with the implications of our views.

This is important because, as we shall see, the real goal of tenets study for Gelukbas is that the student become a living, breathing Prâsaêgika-Mâdhyamika, a proponent of the greatest Buddhist school. To be a Prâsaêgika is to be a master of the art of "flinging consequences *(prasaṅga)*"; it is to know how to take any statement and wring from it whatever might logically follow. Prâsaêgikas are not supposed to preach doctrine at their opponents. They are to ask others for their opinions and pursue relentlessly all of their implications. This, it is thought, will enable those persons to see not only what is wrong with their views but to arrive at correct ways of thinking themselves. Those who are not Prâsaêgikas have simply not thought deeply enough about the consequences of their own views.

But it is easy to see that there is a paradox in this, for if a tenet is a final conclusion, and the final conclusion of all reasoning is the Prâsaêgika view, would it not follow that only Prâsaêgikas have actual tenets? Only a Prâsaêgika is someone who truly embodies the meaning of a tenet as a conclusion reached only upon eliminating *all* other possibilities.

So, we must say that while tenets are conclusions established by a process of reasoning, that process is not necessarily complete. A hypothetical Vaibhåÿika, for instance, may have no familiarity with the texts of the Mahåyåna Buddhist schools (Cittamåtra and Mådhyamika), either by lack of exposure or because of regarding the latter as inauthentic, as not being true teachings of the Buddha. And even if we are aware of other positions and the reasoning that establishes them, we may not yet have properly understood them and are not in that sense "aware" of them. Thus, tenets are not necessarily final conclusions, even if they are "established."[1] Of course, is this not the nature of our knowledge in general? Our "facts" are merely empirical verities that can and often are altered or even discarded as our knowledge increases.

Did the Buddha Teach Philosophy?

Did the Buddha teach these systems of tenets? The answer to that question is both yes and no. First, we must remember that the Buddha taught a great deal. His teaching career of forty-five years resulted, long after his death, in enormous scriptural collections (canons) in the various countries to which Buddhism has spread. The Tibetan canon is the largest of all, with two divisions of 108 and 225 volumes. The Buddhist schools in general maintain that the Buddha was a master pedagogue who deliberately taught different points of view for the different kinds of persons who could benefit from them. It might even have been the case that different persons heard different teachings at the same time and place. According to the Mahåyåna schools, this was not merely a matter of differing styles or of emphasizing different aspects of the doctrine but sometimes involved views that are in direct contradiction.

For example, whereas in general the Buddha spoke of the things in the world as ordinary persons view them—as having an existence completely independent of the persons who apprehend them—in some teachings, such as the *Descent to Laṅkā Sūtra*, he said quite the opposite, that there is no world external to consciousness.[2]

[1]Some teachers go further and explain that to be a tenet-holder of a system, we must have realized the selflessness taught by that system (a topic we will discuss later). In that case, there would be very, very few tenet-holders.

[2]We are trying to give an example of teachings that contradict each other but as might be expected, this is controversial. So it must be borne in mind that since the Hînayåna schools may not accept this sÛtra as valid, it is not an example for them. Also, some Mahåyånists (Bhåvaviveka, the Svåtantrika) felt that in this case, the Buddha's words had been misunderstood and he was not in fact contradicting any other teaching.

(We will discuss this issue a little later.) For certain persons, this teaching is an appropriate "medicine" that helps them to overcome their attachments to material things. The "medicine" that will ultimately cure ignorance can be administered at a later time.

We will say more later about the number of schools and the problem of their identification. For now, we should just note that the higher schools in particular do not attempt to establish their superiority over the lower schools by claiming that the scriptures upon which others depend are inauthentic. They are perfectly willing to concede that all of the scriptures in the vast Tibetan canon are Buddha's but they insist that, of course, they cannot all represent the Buddha's own, true "final thought." Thus, one of the occupations of the higher tenet systems is hermeneutics, the science of interpreting literature.

Buddhist hermeneutics is a complex and interesting area of Buddhist philosophy that we will briefly examine later. It will suffice to say here that while the Buddha is the source of the various systems of tenets, Gelukbas consider that the scriptures relied upon by the systems lower than the highest, final system of Præsaêgika "require interpretation" in order to understand what the Buddha meant. They either are literally what he said (but do not represent his own final thought, which must be interpolated), or, although they *do* represent his own final thought, they need further clarification. To refer again to our example about the reality of the external world, Præsaêgikas claim that at certain times and places the Buddha deliberately taught that there are no external objects. This eventually resulted in the formation of the Cittamåtra school. However, these statements require interpretation because they do not explicitly state the way phenomena actually exist (that they are "empty of inherent existence" or "not established by their own character").

Gelukbas make these judgments in a way that relates to what we have been saying about the nature of tenets. Scriptures are distinguished into definitive and non-definitive categories based upon what in them stands up to reasoning, for of course, the Buddha's own final thought must be logically impeccable. His own dictum, that his teaching ought to be analyzed the way a goldsmith tests a lump of ore, is used to separate the absolutely, literally reliable scripture from that which is only provisional. There are scriptures that are themselves about hermeneutics, showing how to distinguish the definitive and non-definitive. Cittamåtrins use the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* and Mådhyamikas, the *Teaching of Akṣayamati Sūtra*. However, it is never enough to say that a position is correct simply because the Buddha said it was.

The Sources of Tenets

The Buddha's teaching as captured in his own discourses, the sÔtras, is usually but not always clear and well-organized, and it is certainly not "systematic." He was not attempting to establish various philosophical schools but rather to meet the needs of his immediate listeners. Even if his teachings had been presented in that way, succeeding teachers in various historical and cultural circumstances would have to interpret them in order to bridge the gaps in understanding that naturally arise whenever the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader are separated by history or culture. Exegesis, or scriptural interpretation, is inevitable, and it is from exegesis that Buddhist tenets are developed. This process began immediately after the Buddha's death.

The source of the tenets of the various schools are, then, not so much sÔtras as exegetical works that developed a following for their particular views. They are relatively few in number:

- Vaibhåýikas rely on the anonymous *Mahāvibhāṣā*.[1]
- Sautrântikas rely on the works of Dignåga and DharmakØrti, or Vasubandhu.
- Cittamåtrins rely either on Dignåga and DharmakØrti or on Asaêga and Vasubandhu.
- Svåtantrikas rely on Bhåvaviveka or õåntarakýita.
- Präsaêgikas rely upon CandrakØrti.

It is notable that most of these works were composed in the relatively brief period of the fourth to seventh centuries C.E.

To belong to a "school," therefore, really meant to have a kind of intellectual commitment. It is not like the kind of commitment that causes someone to be identified as a Shi'ite Muslim, a Protestant Christian, or a Shaivite Hindu, but is more like the kind of commitment that might cause someone to be identified as a political liberal, conservative, or moderate. It certainly did not lead to physical isolation and antagonism. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang visited India in the seventh century and found tenet-holders of all varieties living and studying together at Nålanda Monastery. It is hazardous and, we think, unhelpful to guess at the

[1]Because this text was not translated into Tibetan until the twentieth century, Tibetans actually understand the school from Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma*.

affiliations any particular person had with a "school" unless they clearly identified it themselves. Then, as now, traditional Buddhist scholars have played roles in order to understand better the perspectives of their opponents. And of course, they have changed their minds as they have grown older.

So far we have established that the Buddha did not teach particular systems of tenets as such, although he taught about a great many subjects and, at least according to most Mahåyånists, articulated viewpoints that were apparently contradictory. The subsequent tradition organized and interpreted these teachings in various ways. Certain teachers developed followings. But are these "systems of tenets"? Not really, and that is where the genre of tenets texts comes in.

The seminal texts of Indian Buddhism are just a starting point for scholars like Jamyang Shayba or Losang Gönchok, who are system-builders. Just as the SÔtras are not systematic expositions of tenets, neither are the exegetical works that we have just identified. That they are analytical and have more the form of an argument does not mean that they are necessarily complete in themselves. For instance, Losang Gönchok explains at some length the "unique tenets" of the Präsaêgika school, which he traces back to Någårjuna. However, a close look reveals that Någårjuna himself made explicit assertions about only a few of the sixteen points presented by Jamyang Shayba; we arrive at the remainder by developing the implications of certain statements.

To give another example, as we shall see there are thought to be many different positions within the four schools and their sub-schools on what constitutes a "person," but few of these tenets are clearly stated in the texts. Gelukbas believe that only the Präsaêgika school correctly maintains that there is nothing within the mind-body continuum—the five aggregates—that *is* the "person"; rather, the person is something that is merely designated in dependence on mind and body. Everyone else gets it wrong, in one way or another. Some Cittamåtrins, for instance, speak about a neutral, continuously operating consciousness that they call the mind-basis-of-all. Although no Cittamåtrin ever baldly states that the mind-basis-of-all *is* the person, because of the way it is described and because it is said to travel from one lifetime to the next, we infer that this is their version of the person and ascribe it to them as one of their tenets.

What is the Value of Tenets Study?

Systematic philosophy is a Tibetan obsession, apparently building on late Indian Buddhism. East Asia went in quite a different direction, with schools based on particular sÔtras that became virtual mono-texts for those who followed them. The

Tibetan tradition, by contrast, depends little upon sÒtras themselves and heavily on the rich Indian commentarial literature, which lends itself more to system-building. Of course, that means that the Tibetan monk, compared to his Theravåda or East Asia counterparts, does much more reading.

Another tradition brought to Tibet from India is that of formal scholastic debating. Gelukbas are renowned for their belief in the value of study and debate, especially in comparison to some of the other orders of Tibetan Buddhism, which place more emphasis on the practice of meditation. It is not that they do not value meditation, at least in principle; but they see scholarship as an essential form of practice, too. As the contemporary Gelukba Geshe Jampa Gyatso, director of a teacher training program for Westerners (the Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy), says, "If one is ignorant, one cannot meditate. The Kadampa geshes have a saying that 'meditating without having listened to teachings is like someone without hands trying to climb a snow mountain.'"[1] Study and debate are supposed to remove misconceptions and sharpen the mind so that meditation can be more effective.[2]

This might be said to be a theme running throughout Tibetan Buddhism, inasmuch as all the orders, even those that do not emphasize study and debate, acknowledge the Great Debate in the late eighth century in which the Indian paòdit KamalaŸla is reputed to have bested the Chinese meditation master named "Mahåyåna." That debate is said to have determined that Tibet would follow a "gradual" approach to enlightenment. There is still controversy over the site, date, and content of the debate, but it is true that the kind of philosophical study that emerged in Tibet is nourished by the idea that enlightenment is preceded by a lengthy, difficult process of perfection.

In the Gelukba monasteries, the positions of all schools are studied in order to fully understand the Buddhist context of the highest system, the Præsaêgika school.[3] Jamyang Shayba says in our text that "the views of the lower systems are a platform for [understanding] the views of the upper systems." We need a platform because it is too difficult and perhaps too dangerous to leap immediately to the study of

[1]Gyatso, "Climbing," 28.

[2]It should be noted that all of the time spent on debate comes at a price. Although Tibetan monks in general read more than other Buddhist monks, other orders may read more than Gelukbas. Dreyfus (*Sound*, 132) notes that Nyingma monks at the Namdroling Monastery just down the road from the Gelukba monastery of Sera in south India read and learn thirteen texts in half the time their Gelukba counterparts devote to five.

[3]The Gelukbas assert that all the major Tibetan sects are Præsaêgika, even if some of those sects do not explicitly identify themselves as such. For the Gelukba reasoning behind this assertion, see Hopkins, *Meditation*, 531–8—mostly a paraphrase of Janggya's *Presentation*, 291.9–9.8.

Præsaêgika (which would mean, basically, its explanation of emptiness). The twentieth-century Gelukba abbot, Kensur Yeshey Tupden, recommended that:[1]

> The student who has faith in emptiness but does not understand it begins by studying the Vaibhåÿika system, then Sautrântika, Cittamåtra, Svåtantrika, and finally Præsaêgika. This method guards against undermining students' understanding of dependent arising, so that they will not [wrongly] conclude that validly established phenomena do not exist at all.

Kensur Rinpoche was concerned that a student, taught that nothing anywhere has any existence from its own side, but exists only as a nominal imputation (which is what "emptiness" means in the Præsaêgika system), might misunderstand what is meant and fall into some sort of nihilistic view. It is far better, it is thought, to begin with a strong affirmation of the world as it appears in all its variety and come to see what might be deficient in that view, than to begin with doubt and have to be convinced that the appearances of the world have value. (Of course, not everyone agrees. Bhåvaviveka, the founder of Svåtantrika school, said that adopting the Cittamåtra view and then using the Mådhyamika philosophy to reject the true existence of the mind is like wallowing in mud so that we can wash and get clean; it would be better not to get dirty in the first place.)

Beginning with the lower schools is also a "Præsaêgika" procedure, since Præsaêgikas work from the basis of other's views. We naturally are naive realists who believe in the true existence of whatever appears to our senses and doubt what does not. There is no harm, ultimately, in learning most of Buddhist thought from within that perspective, and there is the advantage that when the path of reasoning leads, as it inevitably will, to the established conclusions of the Præsaêgika, that the lessons learned will be all the more striking because of being hard-won.

Another way of putting this is that Gelukbas believe that the elimination of our ignorance depends upon accurately identifying, and then directly opposing through reasoning, the misconceptions we have about the reality of the self and the world. Dzongkaba says,

> One cannot see that there is no inherent existence without coming to disbelieve in the object of the conception of inherent establishment.[2]

[1]Klein, *Path*, 86.

[2]From Dzongkaba's *Middling Exposition of Special Insight*, unpublished translation by Hopkins, 26.

To "disbelieve" means to have believed and then to have abandoned one's belief. But how can this occur unless we have correctly ascertained our beliefs in the first place? One of the benefits of learning the tenets of the lower schools is that it may help us identify the beliefs that we may hold unconsciously, so that they can be subjected to analysis.

Still, it should not be thought that study and debate of tenets is itself liberating. Gelukbas emphasize that these are just steps upon the way. It is undoubtedly useful to eliminate the misconceptions that may match up with certain philosophical tenets but the final elimination of ignorance will depend upon identifying and rooting out a level of misconception that goes beyond any philosophical formulation. Erroneous tenets constitute mere "artificial" errors. Much more serious, and a universal problem rather than just a malady of philosophers, is the "innate" misconception of inherent existence that occurs simply through one's assent to the false manner in which ordinary things appear.

How Are Tenets Studied?[1]

The issues involved in books such as the present one are the very stuff of monastic education, permeating the curriculum. However, study of tenets books was not a formal part of the curriculum, except in a few places. One of them was Gomang College of Drebung Monastery, where monks normally memorized Jamyang Shayba's "root text" early in their studies, prior to the classes on the Perfection of Wisdom. They then had an outline of tenets to which they could make reference as they continued their studies, and which could be supplemented by commentaries, principally Jamyang Shayba's own *Great Exposition of Tenets*.

In the monastery, texts by renowned Indian scholars are formally the basis of study and students memorize those designated as "root" texts. Notably, sÒtras (Buddha's discourses) are rarely studied. Even the Indian texts, translated from Sanskrit, are scarcely less difficult for young Tibetan monks than they are for us. Therefore, they rely upon Tibetan commentaries, such as those by Dzongkaba, and even more on special monastic debate manuals.[2] Each monastic college has its own. (Jamyang Shayba is the author of those used at Gomang College.) The debate

[1]Some of this section has been adapted from Cozort, "The Making…"

[2]However, Dreyfus notes (*Sound*, 116–7) that manuals are not used for the topics of monastic discipline and Abhidharma and that the commentaries the monks study are not exclusive to the Gelukba tradition.

manuals supply hypothetical debates, a systematic summary of "our own system," and responses to hypothetical objections.

Teachers teach the root texts and the debate manuals, following which students pair up to engage each other in long, formal sessions of dialectical debates on the material. The better students also read the Indian and Tibetan sources and the works of Gelukba founder Dzongkaba. (Some of the debate manuals are commentaries on Dzongkaba's Mådhyamika works, which are themselves commentaries on Indian texts.)

The Gelukba monasteries of Sera, Ganden, and Drebung awarded the geshe degree upon completion of a very ambitious curriculum and a final examination by debate.[1] Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Geshe Rabten completed the typical curriculum at Sera Monastery's Jay College, which they described in this way:[2]

- **Collected Topics on Valid Cognition**. The aspiring scholar, usually a young boy, is grounded in topics of logic, epistemology, and psychology for at least three years. He relies on his debate manual, the basis for which is the *Commentary on (Dignāga's) "Compendium on Valid Cognition"* by DharmakÒrti (seventh century). Much emphasis is placed on learning how to debate as the student considers topics such as sameness and difference, subjects and objects, karma, and parts and wholes. The topics of **Types of Mind** (literally, "awareness and knowledge," *blo rig*) and **Signs and Reasoning** are also studied at this time.
- **Perfection of Wisdom.** For five years, he studies seventy topics related to the spiritual path of Buddhist practitioners at all levels, based on Maitreya's (fourth century) *Ornament for Clear Realization*, various commentaries, and the Sera Jay debate manual.
- **Middle Way.** For four years, in two separate classes, he studies the Mådhyamika philosophy based on the debate manual, which is essentially a commentary on Dzongkaba's commentary on CandrakÒrti's (seventh

[1]It should be noted that many monks, then and now, are not interested in or capable of advanced philosophical studies. However, it continues to be a very strong tradition, especially at the monastic universities that grant the geshe degree. It should also be noted that there are higher and lower types of the geshe degree and that examination by debate is not required for the lower type.

[2]Sopa, *Lectures*, 41–2. Time estimates are his but he notes that circumstances could easily extend the time required; brilliance and hard work could shorten it. Geshe Rabten (38) differs from this account only in noting that after the Abhidharma class there is a Karam (*bka' ram*) class that reviews discipline and Abhidharma in detail.

century) *Entrance to the Middle Way*. The ten Bodhisattva perfections and grounds are covered, although the main topic is emptiness.

- **Monastic discipline.** For four years, he studies Buddhist ethics as delineated in the rules of monastic life through the debate manual based on Guêaprabha's (fourth century) *Sūtra on Discipline*.
- **Abhidharma**. For four years, he studies topics such as cosmology, meditative states, and psychology through commentaries on Vasubandhu's (fourth century) *Treasury of Abhidharma*.[1]

There were many small additions to this curriculum, such as the annual winter debating sessions on the Dharmakîrti's *Commentary on (Dignāga's) "Compendium on Valid Cognition"* and much time spent memorizing rituals and prayers. Students were organized into classes with teachers who met with them in the mornings and imparted a commentary on the text. Then, many hours were spent in memorization and debate. Monks were expected to learn by heart many texts, such as the Indian root texts for their classes, as well as the definitions, divisions, and illustrations of the debate manuals. They were not allowed to bring books to the debating courtyard but rather had to cite passages from memory. In Tibet, as many as eight hours per day were spent debating.[2] In India, Sera Jay's schedule includes two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening.

Viewed from the perspective of Western standards, it may seem that the education of a Sera monk is at once broad and narrow, deep and shallow. On the one hand, he learns only Buddhist philosophy. What he learns about Buddhist philosophy is also limited; there is nothing, for instance, from the East Asian or Theravåda traditions. He deals with only certain kinds of texts on a regular basis; he reads little of the SÔtra or even commentarial literature except what is filtered through the debate manuals. He reads a relatively small number of texts, considering how many years he is a student.

On the other hand, every student becomes an expert on every matter, great and small, that has occupied Buddhist philosophy. The debate manuals he uses, which

[1]The Abhidharma literature is comprised of analyses by Buddhist scholars of the material that is in the Buddha's discourses (sÔtras). This process of analysis began very soon after the Buddha's death, and some Abhidharma-like material is even included in the sÔtras themselves, which were not in final form for hundreds of years. But in the early Buddhist canon, the Abhidharma became a separate "basket" from the sÔtras and the discipline texts (*vinaya*). Since the word Abhidharma can now be found in English dictionaries and since no translation of the term (such as "knowledge") is very meaningful, we have left it untranslated.

[2]Rabten, 50–1.

are anthologies of pertinent texts from across the Indian and Tibetan traditions, present him with multiple points of view, and he hears more from his teachers. Finally, he explores the topics in fine detail through testing them in the debating courtyard. For Gelukbas, it is much more important to memorize and debate than it is to read broadly.

When we studied tenets with lamas in India and America, our teachers subjected the texts to probing analysis and often tried to debate with us. Those from Drebung Monastery's Loseling College, which does not use Jamyang Shayba's texts, were particularly free with their criticisms of his assertions, although they sometimes agreed with him, even when it contradicted the explanations of their own debate manual author, Paòchen Sönam Drakba (1478–1554).[1]

In terms of the content of the monastic curriculum, it is easy to see that monks are exposed to the different schools of tenets in stages. From the beginning, they learn logic, epistemology, and psychology in texts composed from the point of view of the lower schools. The Collected Topics book that is their starting point is a summation of some fundamental points from the same material, the writings of Dharmakîrti, that are the basis for the school of the Followers of Reasoning of the Sautråntika and Cittamåtra schools. They study Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* and his own separate explanation of it, respectively, the bases for the Vaibhåýikas and for the Sautråntikas Following Scripture. They study the main texts of the Mådhyamika school, which also serves as a study of the Cittamåtra school inasmuch as those texts throughly explain and refute the school.

In the debating courtyard, therefore, everyone takes on the roles of proponents of the lower schools of tenets beginning with the Sautråntika presentation. It is even the source of a Westerner's aphorism: "When you scratch a Gelukba geshe, there is a Sautråntika underneath."

[1]However, on occasions of important public debate, such as those for the geshe degree, it is expected that a monk will uphold the manuals of his college. Also, the freedom of expression that characterizes the debating courtyard does not necessarily extend to publication, as Georges Dreyfus notes in his account of his own fifteen years as a monk *(Sound)*. In print, a monk is expected to hew to the positions established in his college.

What Are Buddhist Tenets?

We have now discussed how tenets have come about and how and why they should be an object of serious study. Before going on to some of the key issues that divide schools of Buddhist philosophy, we should briefly consider what unites them. One way to begin to explore that is to do what our text does and ask how Buddhism differs from the schools it rejects.

What Buddhists Have in Common With Other Indian Schools

The first part of Jamyang Shayba's root text concerns non-Buddhist Indian philosophies. It must be admitted that for the most part, he has misrepresented them, sometimes badly. However, there is value in these presentations, for they explain some of the concerns of Buddhist philosophy, both in the positive sense that Buddhists are in agreement with the general worldview of most of these schools and in the negative sense that some Buddhist tenets are rejections of their central assertions.

With a few exceptions, the Indian schools, Buddhism included, accepted the reality of rebirth and karma in a universe that is vast, perhaps infinite, and is populated by many types of beings who are experiencing different realities, mostly unaware of each other. Saôsåra, the "wandering" of beings from one kind to another of these rebirths, life after life, is the basic problem. Although a small minority of living beings enjoy fabulous comforts and delights, most experience a great deal of suffering.

Although this may seem to be a pessimistic outlook on life, nearly all[1] of the Indian schools share a common hope of liberation (*mokṣa*) or passage beyond suffering (nirvåòa). They agree that the cause of bondage is neither the machination of a malevolent spirit nor the misjudgment of a primordial ancestor, as we see so often in the world's religions. Rather, the cause of saôsåra is our very own ignorance about our true nature, and therefore, we ourselves can do something about it. Thus, they also agree that personal experience leading to wisdom is the answer. Wisdom is supra-rational but reason is not rejected; it is the first step.

It is in their identification of ignorance that the schools vary considerably.

The **Sāṃkhya** school is the one on which our authors concentrate the most, perhaps because its description of self is the one with which Buddhism most clearly differs. The Såôkhyas are the principle "dualistic" school; they say that there are two eternal, uncaused principles, Nature (*prakṛti*, or *pradāna*) and Spirit (*puruṣa*). Everything that exists, except Spirit, is included within Nature, even subtle states of consciousness that we might not expect to be lumped in with material constituents.

Our ignorance is that we mistakenly think that Nature itself or something within it is our true self. However, our true self is Spirit, that pure, indivisible, mere "witness" to events. The reason for this confusion is the very manifestation of Nature, which occurs through the interaction of the three "strands" of which it is composed. We can have direct experience only of that which has evolved from pure Nature. Spirit is experienced only indirectly, reflected to our ordinary mentality through the subtle level of consciousness called *buddhi*, the subconscious awareness. The most common error, therefore, is to mistake that subtle level of our own minds for the immutable and infinite Spirit.

The goal of spiritual discipline is to reverse the process of manifestation until even the subconscious awareness is withdrawn, at which point Spirit is isolated and ignorance is eliminated.

Advaita Vedānta is the principle "monistic" school, although it is treated very briefly here. Advaita Vedåntins say that our ignorance is to believe in our own reality, identifying "self" with our bodies and/or minds. However, only one ("mono") entity really exists; it is the Infinite, Bra¯man, which is permanent and indivisible. The spiritual path, primarily one of meditation, reveals the illusion in

[1]They are not mentioned specifically in our text but the Ajīvakas are one school that recognized the faults of saôsåra without believing in an escape from it.

which we live and allows us to shed our birth identity and become, or merge with, the Infinite. (There are also dualistic Vedåntins, for whom our souls are not identical with the Infinite and who rely on a devotional relationship with God for liberation.)

Vaiśeṣikas and **Naiyāyikas** explain that the primary cause of fear, suffering, and death is ignorance in which the self is wrongly identified with the body. Self is an entity separate from the body and mind, and liberation comes from knowing this. (By the way, the VaiŸeýikas are famous for their explanation of the composition of things by the aggregation of tiny particles, which has led some to conclude that there is a connection between this school and the Buddhist Vaibhåýika school.)

Jainism (Nirgrantha) shares many views with Buddhism. Ignorance refers to our lack of understanding about the limits of our knowledge and the true cause-effect relationships in the world. We act with desire and hatred because of limited knowledge and the incorrect inferences that flow from it. Liberation from rebirth is not only a matter of knowledge, however, because karma, a material substance, encrusts the soul and can be removed only through asceticism. Knowledge prevents the further accumulation of karma. When liberation occurs, it is a state of bliss and omniscience, fused with the universe.

There are various theologies among the **Vaiṣṇavas** (those who worship Viýòu) and **Śaivas** (those who worship õiva). Most of them are based on the philosophies of SåÔkhya or Vedånta, with Viýòu or õiva as the eternal principle with whom (or which) we seek union or who is reality itself.

In India there are always exceptions, and there was a school that rejected the prevailing viewpoint that we have been describing. The **Ayatas** differ from the preceding schools because they reject rebirth. Some of them also reject karma and the existence of beings other than those that appear on earth. Of all the schools discussed in our text, they are the only "proponents of annihilation" (that is, who say we are annihilated at death; we might call them "scientific materialists").

Some of the other schools are lukewarm in their concern with saÔsåra. **Mīmāṃsaka** developed as a response of Vedic priests to the criticisms of several schools, including Buddhism. It is mainly concerned with the interpretation of the wisdom texts, the Vedas, and how the performance of sacrifices can improve life now and prevent bad rebirth in the future. According to Losang Gönchok, it teaches that one

type of rebirth, in the heaven of Brahmå, is permanent. However, liberation is just the dissolution of the mind and body at the time of death without subsequent rebirth. The schools identified as **Brāhmaṇa, Vaiyākarana**, and **Guhyaka** in our text are minor schools that are linked by similar concerns.

In summary, Buddhism shares the concerns of most of these schools: the problem of saÔsåra; its basis, delusion; its perpetuation, by karma; and the path of wisdom that leads away from it. In many ways, Buddhism stands in the middle of the views of these schools, since they include nihilists (who do not believe in future lives), eternalists (who believe in a permanent self, spirit or god), determinists (who think our lives are predetermined), and indeterminists (who think that events are random). It even forms a middle way not only between hedonists and ascetics (the middle way of behavior promulgated by the Buddha) but in style between the dry rationalists and the ecstatic devotionalists.

However, in one way Buddhism is quite distinct. It defines ignorance in a radically different way, one that is exactly the opposite of most of the non-Buddhist schools. In Buddhism, wisdom consists in understanding the *non*-existence of the self as it is defined in the non-Buddhist schools. Hence, the presentation of non-Buddhist tenets emphasizes the way in which the self is described, and, to a lesser extent, what is said about causality.

What Is a Buddhist?

Buddhism is not a "natural" religion, to use Joachim Wach's term, because we are not automatically Buddhists by birth (as we might be Hindus or Jews by birth, for instance, whether or not we ever become religiously observant). We have to *choose* to become Buddhists. And since it is a matter of choice, anyone can be a Buddhist; no one is excluded because they do not meet a standard of bloodline or ethnicity. That has helped to make Buddhism one of the few true "world" religions—religions that can easily cross cultural boundaries and become a global fellowship.

A Buddhist is simply a person who "goes for refuge" to the Three Jewels—the Buddha, his Teaching, and his Spiritual Community—which means that such a person considers them to be a haven from the terrors of saÔsåra. The *actual* refuge is the Teaching—in particular, true paths (the method) and true cessations (the elimination of the afflictive karma that causes rebirth). The Buddha is the teacher of the refuge, and the Spiritual Community is a congregation of helpmates and teachers. The Jewels act as helpers, not saviors; we must still make our own efforts.

Janggya says that going for refuge means: to know the qualities of the Three Jewels; to know the difference between them; to accept them; and not to go elsewhere for refuge.[1] He adds that it is not necessary to understand the Teaching fully in order to know its qualities and distinguish it from the other Jewels. We may go for refuge out of mere faith or out of a desire to avoid bad migrations.

Two particularly interesting points stem from this definition. First, it seems possible that we could *be* Buddhists without having formally identified ourselves in this manner. It is sufficient to meet the definition if we find ourselves fundamentally in agreement with the essential teachings of Buddhism and believe that it has salvific power, even if we do not practice it ourselves.

Second, it is clear that a Buddhist does not necessarily have a deep understanding of profound matters such as emptiness, as otherwise there would be few Buddhists! Nevertheless, being a Buddhist is not a matter of faith in the man, Buddha, or faith in claims that cannot be verified by reason; it is a matter of having concluded, insofar as we are able, that what the Buddha taught is correct.[2] In short, it is a matter of having "established conclusions," or tenets, that are Buddhist. (Then, depending on what they are, we may or may not be identifiable as belonging to a particular school of tenets.)

What is a Buddhist Tenet-Holder?

In the sense that anyone who takes refuge in the Teaching has arrived at certain conclusions that he or she feels are characteristically Buddhist, all Buddhists hold tenets. However, the tenets themselves might not be Buddhist, since they may not meet the standard of what are called "the four seals," described below. For instance, we might not understand properly the meaning of "selflessness," erroneously concluding that Buddhists reject any kind of self. In that case, although we might be Buddhists because of meeting the standard of taking refuge and might in a sense

[1] *Presentation*, 14.1.

[2] For *some* matters, Buddhists must take statements on faith. Although everything can be established by reasoning, sometimes this occurs only indirectly, as in the case of the subtle workings of karma. A "scriptural proof" is a statement such as, "Through giving, resources; from ethics, a good migration" (that is, if one performs acts of giving in this life, one will be born with good resources in a future life; if one practices good ethics, one will have a good rebirth).
This is a "proof" only in the sense that once we have established by reasoning that the Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths or emptiness is correct, we trust that his unverifiable statements are also correct.

even be holders of tenets because of having come to reasoned conclusions, we would not be holding a Buddhist tenet.

The "four seals" are tenets that are so called because they "stamp" a tenet as Buddhist. All Buddhist partisans, i.e., tenet-holders, propound the four seals, though they may disagree about certain aspects of them.

1. **All composed phenomena are impermanent**. This simply means that anything that has causes will change moment by moment, even if that change is imperceptible.[1]
2. **All contaminated things are miserable**. Everything in our experience is "contaminated" because it is ultimately the product of our ignorance. That is, intentional actions (karma) performed while misunderstanding the way things exist are the forces that cause our own births and the formation of the cosmos itself. All of these things are "miserable" in the sense that impermanence itself is a kind of suffering.
3. **All phenomena are selfless**. "Self" refers to what non-Buddhist schools describe as our true selves: a permanent (i.e., unchanging), unitary (i.e., indivisible), independent entity at the core of our being. No such "self" exists and there are no objects that are used by such a "self."
4. **Nirvāṇa is peace**. Nirvåòa is not a place or a kind of consciousness but the absence of the afflictions of desire, hatred, and ignorance.

These characteristics are continuous with early Buddhism. The Buddha taught about the "three marks" of impermanence, selflessness, and suffering; the four seals are these three marks with the addition of the assurance of nirvåòa. The four seals are also all implied in the teaching of the Four Noble Truths.

Alternately, the Buddhist view could be described as a middle way avoiding the two extremes of "permanence" or "nihilism." All of the non-Buddhist schools described in the first part of *The Clear Crystal Mirror* are guilty of one or the other. Let us discuss these a little further.

[1] "All composed phenomena" refers to things that have causes. Vaibhåÿikas deny the permanence of things merely on the grounds that they do not have continual existence but the other schools go further, understanding that things actually undergo change very rapidly at all times ("subtle" impermanence). The Vaibhåÿikas think that production, abiding, aging, and disintegration occur serially but the other schools say they occur simultaneously. That is, a thing lasts only for the moment of its production and must be reproduced in every succeeding moment until its final moment.

Proponents of Permanence are those who "deny too little." They say that something exists that in fact does not, such as a permanent self. It is the conception of a self found in the Hindu Upaniýads: an individual soul (*ātman*) that is identical with Brahman—infinite being, consciousness, and bliss (*sat-cit-ananda*). Therefore, this soul/self is (1) permanent (in the sense of not changing moment to moment); (2) indivisible; and (3) independent (it is uncaused and does not produce an effect). Buddhists maintain that this is merely a *coarse*, or crude, false conception of a self. Therefore, its refutation would not be sufficient to win liberation from saÔsåra. We must overcome the most *subtle* false conception of a self. Also, this conception is merely *artificial*—one learned from parents or teachers—not one that we would naturally, innately hold.

Proponents of Annihilation are nihilists, those who "deny too much." They believe only what they see, hear, and so forth. In other words, they are skeptical materialists, and most secular Westerners would probably find much in common with them. They do not believe in karma or rebirth, for which Buddhists accuse them of lacking belief in inference itself. Specifically, they deny that persons can be designated in dependence on mind and body.

As we have seen, all non-Buddhist sects (except the Ayata, which is nihilistic) fall grossly to an extreme of permanence because of their assertion of a permanent, indivisible self. Each Buddhist school has its own interpretation of the "middle way" between the extremes of denying too much or too little, about which we will say more below. Of course, all views other than that of the Råsaêgika-Mådhyamikas fall to an extreme. The non-Råsaêgika Buddhist schools also fall to an extreme of permanence because they assert that phenomena truly exist. However, this error is considered to be less harmful than that of the non-Buddhists.

The views of the Buddhist schools are increasingly subtle as we consider in turn the Vaibhåýika, Sautråntika, Cittamåtra, and Svåtantrika-Mådhyamika schools. But because the views of the higher schools are quite subtle and require the refutation of grosser views, familiarizing ourselves with the views of a lower school can enable us to grasp the full meaning of the views of a higher one.

What Are the Buddhist Schools?

The idea of four schools of tenets was received from late Indian Buddhism. Within the four main schools, three are split into sub-schools and one sub-school is split into sub-sub-schools, for a total of eight schools (not counting the many sub-schools of Vaibhåýika). In ascending order of proximity to the correct position of the highest school, the Råsaêgika school, they are as follows.

The Four Schools and Their Branches

Vaibhāṣika (Great Exposition School)
Sautrāntika (SÒtra School)
- Sautråntikas Following Reasoning
- Sautråntikas Following Scripture

Cittamātra (Mind Only School)
- Cittamåtrins Following Reasoning
- Cittamåtrins Following Scripture

Mādhyamika (Middle Way School)
- Svåtantrika (Autonomy School)
  - Yogåcåra-Svåtantrika (Autonomy Yogic Practice School)
  - Sautråntika-Svåtantrika (Autonomy SÒtra School)
- Råsaêgika (Consequence School)

This hierarchy is highly disputable. For instance, there is little evidence of real Indian "schools" in the sense of lineages dedicated to a certain systematic view.

However, for Gelukbas this scheme represents the distillation of certain definite and strong currents in Indian thinking, based on the intellectual heritage translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan during the formative period of Tibetan Buddhism (sixth century C.E. onwards). What follows is a thumbnail sketch of each of them.

"**Vaibhāṣika**" is a cover term for many small sects that can be identified in early Buddhism. There are generally held to be eighteen sub-schools, although different ancient authors had different lists. Historically, the most important sub-school seems to have been the Sarvåstivåda. Their relationships are very complex, as our text indicates.

The term Vaibhåýika means "follower of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*" (the *Great Exposition of Particulars*, an anonymous collection of teachings on the topics of the Abhidharma). However, not all of them follow that text, about which our authors knew little anyway because it had not been translated into Tibetan. Tibetan authors take Vasubandhu's fourth-century *Treasury of Abhidharma* as their main source for understanding Vaibhåýika. Philosophically, Vaibhåýikas are the most "realist" of the schools in the sense that they regard as truly real the tiny atoms out of which material things are made. Anything larger, constructed out of the aggregation of these atoms, is just "imputedly existent" and is "conventional" as opposed to "ultimate."

"**Sautrāntika**" just means "follower of SÒtra" (i.e., scripture), which in itself would seem to mean nothing because all Buddhist schools are followers of scripture. However, Sautråntikas doubt that the Abhidharma literature or the Mahåyåna scriptures are the word of Buddha; therefore, they rely on their unique list of authentic scriptures. The Sautråntikas probably began as dissenters from the Vaibhåýikas, who rely on the Abhidharma to such a great extent.

Some are called Followers of Reasoning because they rely upon works by Dignåga and DharmakØrti, who lived in the fifth and seventh centuries and are renowned for the development of logic and epistemology in response to Hindu schools. They differ from Vaibhåýikas and the other Sautråntikas in many small ways, such as the way in which they define ultimate and conventional truths. Others are called Followers of Scripture, which really means only that they are not the Followers of Reasoning. They rely on Vasubandhu's *Explanation of the "Treasury of Abhidharma,"* wherein he modifies some of the positions of his original Vaibhåýika work. It is not clear that the Sautråntikas existed very long, since the latter is their only unique text.

"**Cittamātra**" is a term applied to those who take literally the teaching in the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* and some other places that there is nothing external to consciousness, i.e., that the world is "mind only" (*citta-mātra*). Some are called Followers of Reasoning because, like their Sautråntika counterparts, they rely upon the works of Dignåga and DharmakØrti. The others are, of course, called Followers of Scripture. They follow the works of Asaêga and Vasubandhu. (Asaêga converted his half-brother, Vasubandhu, to the Mahåyåna; hence, Vasubandhu is an important source for three of the four main schools—Vaibhåýika, Sautråntika, and Cittamåtra. Vasubandhu is even indirectly related to the Followers of Reasoning, both Sautråntika and Cittamåtrin, through his student Dignåga.)

The most significant of their differences from the Sautråntikas is that they reject the existence of external objects. Also, the Followers of Reasoning argue that all persons eventually become Buddhas (a teaching known as "one final vehicle").

"**Mādhyamika**" just means "follower of the Middle Way," which is true of all Buddhist schools, but connects us to this school's foremost text, Någårjuna's *Mādhyamikakārikā* or "Treatise on the Middle Way." Någårjuna demonstrated that nothing truly or ultimately exists but that things do conventionally exist. That is, although things do not exist the way in which they appear, which is as if they had their own independent existence, they actually do exist.

Tibetan traditions consider the Mådhyamika school to have two branches, the split having taken place in the sixth century C.E. when Bhåvaviveka criticized Buddhapålita, who lived a century earlier, for his interpretation of the *Treatise on the Middle Way*. CandrakØrti (seventh century), in turn, defended Buddhapålita.[1] Bhåvaviveka's school is called Svåtantrika ("Autonomy"), CandrakØrti's,Råsaêgika ("Consequence"). These names reflect two methods for helping others to realize emptiness, which in themselves are not very different. Bhåvaviveka would present the listener with a formal argument, a syllogism, whereas Buddhapålita and CandrakØrti would only present the consequences of an opponent's view.

However, Dzongkaba ascertained that there is a significant difference in view between the two because they have a different idea of "conventional truths," about which we will say more later. Svåtantrikas include within existing phenomena (in the category of "conventional truths") some things that are unreal. These include

[1]This division was not recognized in India but was probably made in the late eleventh or early twelfth century after CandrakØrti's works were translated into Tibetan. The three texts in question are commentaries by Bhåvaviveka, Buddhapålita, and CandrakØrti on Någårjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way*. For an extensive analysis of the Bhåvaviveka/Buddhapålita/CandrakØrti debate, see Hopkins, *Meditation*, 441–530 and the recent Dreyfus/McClintock volume.

optical illusions such as reflections or mirages, but more seriously, they also include truly existent things, things that seem as though they do not depend even on the awarenesses to which they appear. Although Svåtantrikas themselves admit that nothing actually does exist this way, because they know that this is how things appear to ordinary people, they count such things as legitimately existent. Præsaêgikas also try to remain true to the conventions of the world, but they do not endorse truly existent things as conventional truths.[1]

Svåtantrikas can themselves be divided into Yogåcåra and Sautrântika branches, the former relying on the views of the Indian abbot õåntarakýita, who was instrumental (along with Padmasambhåva) in establishing the first monastery in Tibet, Samye. The Yogåcåra branch, like the Cittamåtra school (Yogåcåra, "practice of discipline," is an alternate name for Cittamåtra), maintains that there are no external objects.

The Hierarchy of the Schools

The way in which these schools form a hierarchy is nothing that was self-evident in the Indian context. It has been constructed by Gelukbas who are looking at Indian Buddhist treatises through the lens of Dzongkaba's interpretation of Præsaêgika-Mådhyamika. It may not even be appropriate, for instance, to place the Sautrântikas in the "Hînayåna" camp; they may have been Mahåyånists who did not clearly identify themselves as such.

Nevertheless, it is fascinating to consider the criteria by which one school is "better" than another. They are not in order of founding, for instance, as we might expect. To be sure, the Vaibhåýika school, the main type of which was the Sarvastivåda, does predate the arising of the Mahåyåna tradition and the founding of the Mådhyamika school, which can be roughly placed in the first century C.E. However, the Sautrântikas and Cittamåtrins rely upon works written in the fourth and seventh centuries C.E.

[1]Although it may not be obvious, there is a connection between the use of syllogisms as opposed to logical consequences and the way in which the Svåtantrikas maintain that ruly existent things are conventional truths. Dzongkaba reasoned that if we rely on syllogisms, we must be assuming that there is an appearance common to both the stater and the hearer. Since at least one of the two persons, the one to whom the syllogism is directed, perceives truly existent objects, it must be the case that truly existent objects exist, at least on the level of conventional truths. If we rely on consequences, however, we are not stating any positive thesis but merely drawing attention to the deficiencies of the other person's view.

Rather, as indicated in the last chapter, the schools are arranged according to their approach to the "middle way" of denying the extremes of permanence and annihilation. Each succeeding school includes more in what it regards as "permanence" and less in what it regards as "annihilation."[1]

Roughly, we move gradually from radical "substantiality" to radical "insubstantiality" as we go from Vaibhåýikas to Præsaêgikas. At the one end, Vaibhåýikas call "ultimate truths" the substance particles out of which they say all things are built; they have substantial existence, by which they mean that they can be perceived without depending on anything else. At the other end, Præsaêgikas say that nothing substantially, truly, inherently, or ultimately exists (these terms all being equivalent); absolutely nothing has anything other than a mere nominal, imputed, interdependent existence, even the ultimate truth of all things, their emptiness of inherent existence.

Avoiding Permanence. We can see this movement as we consider how the schools claim to avoid the extreme of permanence. Each succeeding school enlarges the category of "permanence."

- Vaibhåýikas think that it is sufficient to *deny the existence of a permanent, independent, singular self and to assert that anything that is caused, disintegrates*. (Some non-Buddhist schools, e.g., Såôkhya, claim that the cause continues to exist in the effect, since manifest existence is not new creation but an unfolding of what already exists in Nature, which contains all things.) However, they regard all things as substantially *established*, i.e., as having independent existence, and they regard irreducible particles as substantially *existent*, i.e., as being something we can recognize without depending on any other things.
- The Sautrântikas Following Reason go further, maintaining that despite appearances, *things change rapidly, moment by moment* (a notion called "subtle impermanence"), and that *there are some things that exist not on their own but only by imputation*, such as space. However, they, like the Vaibhåýikas, regard other things as having substantial existence.
- The Cittamåtrins avoid the extreme of permanence by *denying that external objects truly exist* and by maintaining that *things are not by their own nature the basis of names* (i.e., that they do not have identity until we give it to them conceptually). They do not accept the existence of

[1]This way of putting it was suggested by Newland, *Appearance*, 59–60.

"indivisible particles," either. However, they do not apply the same criticism to the mind.[1]

- Mådhyamikas *deny that anything has true existence*, ultimately. However, the Råsaêgika branch goes further by denying that things have true existence in any way, even conventionally.[2]

Avoiding Annihilation. We can also see the movement from "more to less" when we consider how the schools avoid the extreme of annihilation. Each succeeding school accepts a greater level of non-existence.

- Vaibhåÿikas say that *all phenomena have substantial establishment*. They mean, basically, that all things exist independently of other things.[3]
- Sautråntikas say that *things are established by their own character* as the bases of names and concepts and that the continuum of a product exists even after its destruction. (For instance, ashes exist after wood is burned.)
- Cittamåtrins deny the existence of external objects but assert that those *non-external things are truly existent*.[4]
- Mådhyamikas deny the true existence of things, ultimately, and Råsaêgikas go further by denying the inherent existence of things in any sense, but they insist that *things do conventionally exist*.

[1]There is some controversy over whether Asaêga asserts that the mind truly exists (see Nakamura, 279) but our texts do not reflect it.

[2]The twentieth-century Gelukba abbot Kensur Yeshey Tupden felt that the Cittamåtrins come closer to the Råsaêgika view than do the other Mådhyamikas, the Svåtantrikas, primarily because they give more primacy to the mind and less to the mind's object.

[3]In addition, those things that we can recognize even when they are physically broken or imaginatively separated (which, as we shall see, are what they regard as "ultimate truths") are also said to be *substantially* existent.

[4]Impermanent things *must* truly exist. There are *permanent* phenomena, too, and they are merely imputedly, not truly, existent. "Permanent" phenomena are so called because they have no causes but are just negations of some sort. For instance, space, the mere absence of obstructive contact; the mere absence of a marching band in my office; the mere absence of an inherently existent thing in my meditation (i.e., its emptiness)—all these are not caused and not changing moment to moment.

School	Avoids Permanence	Avoids Annihilation
Vaibhåÿikas	No permanent self; causes disintegrate	All things are substantially established
Sautråntikas Following Reasoning	Subtle impermanence	Impermanent things are established by their own character
Cittamåtrins	No external objects	Impermanent things truly exist
Svåtantrika-Mådhyamikas	No true existence ultimately	True existence conventionally
Råsaêgika-Mådhyamika	No true existence even conventionally	Conventional existence

Hīnayāna vs. Mahāyāna

Buddhist schools are either Hînayåna (Lesser Vehicle) or Mahåyåna (Great Vehicle).[1] There is no third "vehicle" to enlightenment, despite the fact that in contemporary Western literature the Vajrayåna (Diamond Vehicle), the tantric teachings, is sometimes called a third vehicle; it is simply tantric Mahåyåna. The Vaibhåÿika and Sautråntika schools are considered to be Hînayåna; the Cittamåtra and Mådhyamika schools, Mahåyåna.

The grounds for distinguishing Hînayåna and Mahåyåna are new ideas based on the Mahåyåna scriptures. What are these scriptures? We know that they were unknown to the world before about the first century. Jamyang Shayba explains that this is because after the Buddha taught them to appropriate audiences in his own time, they had to be hidden for four hundred years in the underwater world of the Någas so that they would not be misunderstood. They were recovered by the great

[1]Hînayåna is an obviously pejorative term taken from the Mahåyåna sÔtras. Some modern authors use "Theravåda" instead, reasoning that it is the sole modern heir of the Hînayåna schools, but Theravåda historically was just one of many non-Mahåyåna schools. We use the term here mainly because it is the one employed by our authors. Roger Jackson has suggested that we think of "lesser" as meaning "fewer sÔtras"!

Någårjuna, who was able to explain them properly, establishing the Mådhyamika school.

We might expect that the Hînayåna would reject the authenticity of these newly discovered scriptures, and indeed they did. However, Jamyang Shayba, without explaining further, maintains that later Hînayåna schools came to accept the authenticity of the Mahåyåna scriptures, although obviously they did not adopt new tenets.

Whatever is the actual case, it is clear that the Mahåyåna introduced new ideas that were not present in the scriptures followed by the Hînayånists alone. Let us first look at three interrelated concepts: the *selflessness of phenomena*, the *obstructions to omniscience*, and the *Bodhisattva grounds*.

Selflessness of Phenomena. Both Mahåyåna schools (Cittamåtra and Mådhyamika) maintain that we have misconceptions not only about the nature of the person, as "selflessness" implies, but about the nature of things in general. The same term, "self," is used to refer to a kind of misconception that actually has to do with things such as houses and cars. (Perhaps this is not so confusing, since sometimes we do talk about our possessions as though they were persons.) The Mahåyåna schools differ on their description of the selflessness of phenomena but we will explore that in another chapter.

Obstructions to Omniscience. The misconceptions about phenomena other than persons do not prevent one from becoming an Arhat, one who is liberated from saôsåra. (Arhat was rendered in Tibetan as "Foe Destroyer," referring to the Arhat's destruction of the "foes" of the afflictions of ignorance, etc.) However, these misconceptions do obstruct omniscience, which is a very important quality of Buddhas. Since the aspiration of a Bodhisattva, the ideal person, is to become a Buddha, they must be eliminated.

The Hînayåna schools do not speak of obstructions to omniscience as such. Vaibhåýikas say that those rare persons who become Buddhas are able, by accumulating great merit, to remove "non-afflictive obstructions" that prevent ordinary persons from knowing the past or foretelling the future, from knowing what is happening in distant places, from knowing the specific karmic cause of events, and from knowing the special qualities of Buddhas. ("Non-afflicted" means "not connected with ignorance," which is why Hînayåna and Mahåyåna are so

different on this point.)[1] Buddhas are able to know anything to which they turn their attention (a more modest "all-knowingness" as opposed to the sense of omniscience in the Mahåyåna, which is that Buddhas know everything at every moment).

Bodhisattva Grounds. The scheme of Bodhisattva grounds is related to the ideas of the selflessness of phenomena and the obstructions to omniscience. These are ten gradations of the last major stage of the spiritual path leading to Buddhahood, the path of "meditation." They are set forth exactly as successive levels of the removal of the obstructions to omniscience, which in turn results from realizing the selflessness of phenomena. In other words, continued meditation gradually expands our abilities, our good qualities, and our scope of knowledge.

Bodhisattva Ideal. We have not mentioned the Bodhisattva ideal as a way to distinguish Hînayåna and Mahåyåna. That is because our text makes clear that this would be incorrect. The Bodhisattva is distinguished by embodying *bodhicitta—the* selfless, altruistic great compassion that seeks Buddhahood in order to be maximally helpful to others. It is well known that the Mahåyåna tradition places great emphasis on the Bodhisattva ideal; most of its schools maintain that all persons eventually become Bodhisattvas themselves.

However, Jamyang Shayba considers this to be a distortion, since, although rare, there are Bodhisattvas within the Hînayåna, too. To be a Bodhisattva is a matter of motivation, not philosophy, so it is conceivable that some persons would be Hînayånists by tenet but Mahåyånists by path, and the reverse would be true as well. In fact, it is likely, since if it is so difficult to become a Bodhisattva, few holders of Mahåyåna tenets would be true Bodhisattvas.

Holding Tenets vs. Practicing the Path

One of the controversies in *The Clear Crystal Mirror* concerns attempts to correlate the three types of Buddhist practitioners (Hearers, Solitary Realizers, and Bodhisattvas) with particular schools. Jamyang Shayba says that such attempts are mistaken because all three types are found in each school.

[1]Guy Newland (*Appearance*, 23) makes the observation that since Vaibhåýikas deny the ultimacy of most things, making it clear that they have only an imputed existence (one that requires dependence on other things), they also identify a sort of selflessness of phenomena.

A Hearer is one who hears doctrine, practices it, and proclaims it to others but who has not yet developed *bodhicitta* (altruistic compassion). Such a person may become liberated in a minimum of three lifetimes but will not become a Buddha until he or she switches to the Bodhisattva path.

Solitary Realizers are persons who have no teacher in their last lives; they also extend their practice for a hundred eons, which is why they get a similitude of a Buddha's body when they become enlightened. There are two types of Solitary Realizers: the *rhinoceros-like* who extend their practice because they believe they are to become Buddhas, and the *congregating*, who, because they had a teacher earlier in their last lives, are not so solitary.

Bodhisattvas have the extraordinary motivation to attain enlightenment for the sake of others. They also practice for an extraordinary length of time, up to three periods of "countless" great eons.

Any of these types can be found among any of the proponents of the tenet systems. For instance, a Hīnayānist *by tenet* can be a Bodhisattva *by motivation*. That is, there can be Hearers who, although they are Hīnayānists *by tenet* (i.e., are Sautrāntikas or Vaibhāṣikas), are Mahāyānists *by path* because of their altruistic motivation. Therefore, they respect Mahāyānists such as Nāgārjuna. The reverse is also certainly true. There are Mahāyānists by tenet who lack the Bodhisattva motivation and, therefore, are still Hīnayānists by path.

Summary

We have seen that the various schools of Buddhist tenets do not represent different types of practice or motivation. Their differences are philosophical.

The two Hīnayāna schools can be distinguished from the two Mahāyāna schools by their distinctive stances on the inter-related issues of the selflessness of persons, the obstructions to omniscience, and the Bodhisattva grounds. However, the principal means by which the schools are arranged in a hierarchy is through their take on the Buddha's middle way between the extremes of affirming or denying too much of how the world appears to us.

What Is Ignorance?

Why do we suffer and die? Buddhism answers: because we do not understand ourselves and our world. Suffering and death are not inevitable, as many religions teach; they are not our punishment for sin; they are not what a mythic ancestor chose for us. Rather, this regrettable condition is the result of a terrible misunderstanding.

It is important to keep in mind that the ignorance with which we are concerned is not a lack of knowledge, such as my ignorance of Swahili; it is bad knowledge, a *mis*-understanding, a *mis*-conception. To some degree, our ignorance is of our own making, since we may have been taught to believe in a false kind of existence. Buddhism indicts many of the non-Buddhist Indian schools, and by extension the world's largest religions, for teaching that there is a soul, or inner self, that is unchanging, independent of whatever is going on in our minds and bodies, and is singular. One of the four "seals" that mark a doctrine as Buddhist is the denial of precisely this sort of entity.

However, these sorts of ideas are "artificial"; they are constructions, ideas that must come to us from outside. Although they are very unhelpful, no Buddhist school regards them as being the real cause of our problem, which is a level of misconception that is somewhat more subtle and much more insidious, since it comes to us naturally—it is "innate." Ignorance is not, therefore, fundamentally a matter of taking the wrong stance, of having an incorrect philosophical position; it is a universal problem of the tutored and untutored alike.

We will look below at what the various schools identify as this innate ignorance but all of them involve the concept that with regard to a person or thing there is something that independently *is* that person or thing—the essence, or true reality of it—which then may be conceived in different relationships to the mind and body (in the case of the person) or to the parts of the thing. Put another way, they all

involve something other than what wisdom understands, which is that nothing has that sort of independent existence.

To use a crude metaphor, ignorance is, in some way, to think of the self as our hard core, like the pit of a peach. Even after the flesh of the peach has dried up and blown away, the pit remains. All Buddhist schools reject the concepts of the non-Buddhist schools on the grounds that they see the self as a peach. However, most of the Buddhist schools also have a tendency towards "peachiness," one that is more subtle.

The Prâsaêgika school says that the self is really an onion; if we peel away the layers (all the different aspects of mind and body), we find that the core is empty. What constitutes our aggregates of body and mind are our "layers." "Self" is just a convenient way to refer to the whole, but it is inevitably made into a peach pit rather than being recognized as the empty onion core it really is. There is no "essence" or intrinsic character to anything; our existence is relational and dependent. In the next chapter we will discuss the various choices Buddhist schools have made regarding the basis for designating a relational and dependent "self."

The following table shows the range of misconceptions and the harm that the various schools think they do.[1] It is arranged in terms of how these misconceptions prevent liberation from suffering or the liberation of the mind from its obstructions to omniscience. Only the elimination of those labeled "subtle" will change one's status but dealing with the "coarse" conceptions may be an important step towards that result.

The harmful misconceptions are listed in order of most coarse to most subtle from the point of view of the Prâsaêgika school. Again, it is important to bear in mind that we are not discussing philosophical views but the sorts of innate misconceptions that ordinary people may have. Any given individual tends to one or another of them in ordinary situations. After the table we will sketch them individually.

[1]Adapted from Hopkins, *Meditation*, 300–1.

Conception	Obstructiveness	Schools
Permanent, single, independent person	Coarse obstruction to liberation	All schools (but Prâsaê-gika considers it an "artificial" conception)
Self-sufficient person	Coarse obstruction to liberation	Prâsaêgika
Self-sufficient person	Subtle obstruction to liberation	All schools except Prâsaêgika
Phenomena are naturally bases of names; subject and object are different entities	Subtle obstruction to omniscience	Cittamâtra
Subject and object are different entities	Coarse obstruction to omniscience	Yogâcâra-Svâtantrika
True existence	Subtle obstruction to omniscience	Svâtantrika
Inherent existence	Subtle obstruction to liberation	Prâsaêgika
Appearance of inherent existence; *stains* of conceiving the two truths as different entities.	Subtle obstruction to omniscience	Prâsaêgika

Permanent, Indivisible, Independent Person. This is the conception that there is a self that is uncaused and does not act as a cause, is without parts, and is independent of the mind and body. This is the classic formulation of the Indian Upaniŷads about the *ātman*, the individual soul that is in truth identical to the Infinite, the Brahman. It does not match exactly the concept of soul in any other religion, although in most religions there is at least one soul that survives death and, therefore, is independent of the mind and body in life.

Although all Buddhists reject this concept, even the Hînayâna schools regard it as a "coarse" conception and think that there is a slightly more subtle level of ignorance. Therefore, overcoming this type of ignorance is not sufficient to win liberation. Prâsaêgikas make the further qualification that this conception is not innate, or natural, but is the result of tutoring.

Self-Sufficient Person. This is the conception of a self that is not only permanent and unitary but is the "boss" of the mind and body. That the self is "self-sufficient" means that it can appear to the mind without depending on other objects, i.e., that it can appear to our minds without depending on the mind and body.

This conception prevails in our ordinary talk about the self. Do we not speak of "my body" or "my mind" as though the "I" is the owner or master of mind and body, which are like its possessions or subjects? When we reminisce, or plan for the future, do we not say "When *I* was five…," or "When *I* am sixty…," as though the "I" of the child, the adult, and the senior is exactly the same? In our hearts we feel that there is something irreducibly *me* here, which is special, unique, and unlike the mind and body, not changing all the time. Do we not describe a search for identity as "finding" ourselves, as though there was a "real" me underneath the flux of personality? Do we not believe that we have utter free will? In the West, at least, we believe in our individual integrity—that we can do without other people and just be ourselves (a richer, better version of what we are presently).

Most of the Buddhist schools consider this type of conception to be the crucial obstacle to liberation. The Prâsaêgika school alone identifies a yet more subtle type of conception, the conception of inherent existence, which is described below.

Phenomena Are Naturally Bases of Names. When we see something familiar, it seems to be *naturally* the basis of the name we give it; that is, it does not appear to be something that *has to be named*. For instance, when we see a flat surface supported by legs, we immediately feel that it *is* a table, not merely that it is something to which we must attach the name "table." According to the Cittamâtra school, the flat-surface-with-legs appears to our eye consciousness to be a table, and then we immediately conceive that this appearance is correct. (Prâsaêgikas say that this is absurd, since if it were true, we would know flat-surface-with-legs as a table even if we had no concept of table or knew the name "table.")

Subject and Object Are Different Entities. This is the conception that our consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental) are independent of their objects, such that an object causes perception. For instance, we assume that first the sun rises, and then that the light entering our eyes leads to an awareness of the sun.

Cittamâtrins (and Yogâcâra-Svatantrikas) contend that there are no external objects; subject and object are caused simultaneously by a single karmic potency. Because they necessarily arise together, they are one entity, like flame and heat. This conception goes together with the previous one since it is precisely because we misconceive of things as naturally the basis of a name—again, as being something without having to be named—that we conceive of them as being different entities from consciousness.

True Existence. This is a conception that applies to all phenomena, not just persons. It is that any phenomenon has what we might call "pointable existence": that there is something—one of the aggregates or parts; their collection; or, something apart from them—that can be pointed to *as being* that phenomenon. For instance, it is said that when we refer to ourselves, we conceive of some aspect, such as the mind itself or the feelings, as *being* what we really are; when we point to a table, we feel that there is something that really *is* the table, such as its top or the mere collection of its parts. Somehow the table itself is *within* the parts of which it is made. This conception is subtler than the conception of a self-sufficient person because it usually does not involve conceiving that there is an entity apart from the mind and body that controls them.

Inherent Existence. This conception also applies to all phenomena. Like the conception of true existence, we conceive of something we can point to; however, we do not conceive of this as being anything from among the aggregates (or parts). Rather, the self or thing just seems to be indistinguishable from the aggregates or parts. The "I" or the "thingness" is somehow more important but not distinguishable from that to which it is intimately related. With another phenomenon, such as a table, the conception is that there is some "tableness" that pervades the table and is its real identity, without any conception that the table is some specific part, etc. Again, this conception is *innate*, not something learned.

***Appearance* of Inherent Existence**. As stated, this includes the "stains" of conceiving the two truths as different entities. Prâsaêgikas do not differentiate between what we must understand to become liberated persons (Arhats) and what we must understand to become Buddhas. The conception of inherent existence is always the target. At one point along the path, our direct realization of the emptiness of inherent existence will eliminate all of the afflictions of ignorance, desire, and hatred