

The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems

*A Treatise Elucidating the Meaning of the
Entire Range of Spiritual Approaches*



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tural sources of the mahayoga approach. *The Web of Magical Display* was originally a large text that the Indian master Vimalamitra divided into a cycle of eight titles.

7. In Mahayana cosmology, the form of Vairocana called Himasagara has innumerable realms in every pore. In Himasagara's hands, which are folded in the lap, is a single mote, within which are countless universes. In the center of these is the greater universe known as "Basis Whose Center Is Adorned with a Flower," which consists of an ocean of scented water, in the center of which is a lotus flower. On this flower are stacked twenty-five universes. The thirteenth is our universe, "Difficult to Renounce," so called because it is difficult for us to divorce our minds from afflictive states. Scriptural sources for this cosmology include the sutras *The Garlands of Buddhas* and *The Reunion of Father and Son*.
8. Here "Akanishtha" refers to the "quasi-nirmanakaya sambhogakaya," in which sambhogakaya buddhas manifest in the perceptions of bodhisattvas on the tenth spiritual level. "Vajrapani" refers not to one of the eight great bodhisattvas of the Mahayana approach, but to an emanation of the sambhogakaya buddha Vajradhara who is in no way separate from Vajradhara and who was responsible for codifying the tantras.
9. "Others" refers primarily to Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara; like Vajrapani, they are emanations of, and not separate from, Vajradhara.
10. Vipashyin was the first of these one thousand buddhas.
11. Shakyamuni is the buddha of our age and the fourth of the thousand buddhas to appear; Adhimukta will be the last.
12. Vimalamitra was an Indian master who taught and translated texts in Tibet in the eighth century. His contemporary Padmakara, or Guru Rinpoche, was largely responsible for bringing the Buddhist teachings to Tibet. Nagarjuna was one of the most influential teachers of the Indian Buddhist tradition and codified the Madhyamaka system of Buddhist philosophy; Longchenpa discusses this system in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1

1. "Spiritual development," or "twofold spiritual development," as it is sometimes called, is generally described as a process of developing merit on the relative level and deepening one's experience of timeless awareness on the ultimate level.
2. This third line is not found in the version of the source text available to us.
3. Vasubandhu, *The Treasury of Abhidharma*, ch. 4, v. 110bd. Here "Shakyamuni" refers to Mahashakyamuni.
4. The five mind-body aggregates, which constitute the sum total of an individual's experience, are form, sensation, discernment, formative factors, and consciousness. See Mipham Rinpoche, *Gateway to Knowledge*, vol. 1, pp. 17–35.
5. Vajrasana (Vajra Seat) is the site of present-day Bodhi Gaya in northern India.
6. Vasubandhu, *The Treasury of Abhidharma*, ch. 6, v. 24ab. The rhinoceros's solitary habits made it a traditional metaphor for pratyekabuddhas, who live alone or in small isolated communities.

7. Ibid., ch. 4, v. 118.
8. Here “Akanishtha” refers to a pure sambhogakaya realm. See Introduction, note 2.
9. This is one of the states of absorption that lead to rebirth in the realm of formlessness, so called because beings reborn there (as a result of cultivating the corresponding state of meditative absorption in the preceding lifetime) have no form visible to others, but are only “states of mind.” The state of “nothingness” is the third of the four states of this realm and is so named because the mind of a being in this state remains in a trance in which it cannot conceive of anything whatsoever.
10. The Sanskrit term *sugāta* (literally, “one gone to bliss”) is an epithet for a buddha.
11. According to this interpretation, the Buddha left his body by the bank of the Nairanjana River while his mind was in the pure realm of Akanishtha, where he was empowered by the buddhas of the ten directions.
12. This line is not found in the version of the source text available to us.
13. “Bodhimanda” means “Center of Enlightenment,” another name for Vajrasana. Mara is the personification of forces and circumstances that hinder one’s attainment of enlightenment; the legends of the Buddha’s enlightenment depict it as a battle of wills between the Buddha and Mara.
14. Buddhajñāna, *The Sphere of Freedom*, ll. 435–49.
15. This corresponds to the above-mentioned “empowerment with great rays of light.” It eliminates what are referred to in the sutra tradition as “subtle cognitive obscurations,” which in the Vajrayana are called “the habit patterns of transition through the three subtle stages of experience.” The terms “sun” and “moon” refer to two of the stages, which culminate in the third, “eclipse,” in which the last traces of these habit patterns are overcome. Such terminology is associated with the advanced yogic disciplines of the Vajrayana approach.
16. Here the term refers to the pure “quasi-nirmanakaya” realm mentioned in the Introduction, note 8.
17. Here “immaculate abode” refers to a naturally present, pure nirmanakaya realm, also called Akanishtha. It is called “naturally present” because it manifests effortlessly in the perceptions of all who experience it; it is not, however, considered “awareness’s own manifestation,” being rather a state that manifests in response to other beings’ perceptions. This realm, which consists of light, is accessible to spiritually advanced bodhisattvas and to highly realized yogins of the Vajrayana approach. It is above the seventeenth, and highest, level of the realm of form in samsara, and so is often grouped with the form realm (and referred to as “Akanishtha in the realm of form”), but in fact is not considered to be part of samsara. It is often mistaken for the Akanishtha that is the fifth of the five immaculate abodes of the form realm within samsara (and thus the highest of the seventeen levels of the form realm). However, as Longchenpa notes in *The Dragon’s Roar of Pure Melody: An Overview of the Significance of the Mantra Approach*, the latter Akanishtha cannot be the one intended in this case, because according to this interpretation one cannot awaken to buddhahood within sam-

sara. Even though Shakyamuni awakened to buddhahood at Bodh Gaya, the actual site, known as Bodhimanda, which is much subtler, is not considered to be part of samsara. And, of course, Longchenpa states that in awakening to buddhahood at Bodh Gaya, Shakyamuni did so only “in the manner of one awakening” (i.e., he seemed to undergo a process of awakening in order to provide others with an example, not because he himself needed to undergo it).

18. “Akanishtha in the realm of form” refers to the naturally present, pure nirmanakaya realm referred to in note 17.
19. Here “immaculate abodes” refers to both the immaculate abode that is not considered to be part of samsara (Akanishtha in the realm of form) and the five immaculate abodes that are part of the realm of form. See note 17.
20. Here “Akanishtha” refers to a pure sambhogakaya realm.
21. The first reference to Akanishtha is to a pure sambhogakaya realm. The second is to the immaculate abode of Akanishtha that is above the realm of form. The idiom “to awaken to buddhahood as Vajradhara” is to be understood here in the sense of “awakening to complete enlightenment”: it means to experience for oneself the state of primordial unity. A more provisional sense of the idiom is the manifestation, in other beings’ perceptions, of the form of the sambhogakaya buddha Vajradhara with specific attributes.
22. In Buddhist cosmology, there are three orders of universes: A one-thousand-fold universe consists of one thousand world systems similar to our own, each with a central mountain surrounded by four major continents (here translated as “worlds”). The intermediate-sized universe mentioned in the citation, a two-thousand-fold universe, consists of one thousand universes of the first order, i.e., one million world systems. A “three-thousand-fold universe” consists of one thousand intermediate-sized universes, or one billion world systems.
23. In addition to the zenith and nadir, the six directions include the four cardinal directions. “Other dimensions” refers to universes such as those in Vairocana Himasagara’s pores.
24. *The Heart Essence of Secrets*, ch. 3, ll. 2–4. The “five kinds of ordinary beings” refers to the six classes, with those of the gods and demigods conflated.
25. The source text reads: “those who have gone in these ways.”
26. Maitreya, *The Highest Continuum*, ch. 2, vv. 53c–56d.
27. The five noble ones studied under the same spiritual teacher as the future Buddha Shakyamuni and followed him when he left that teacher in order to advance in their practice. They left the future buddha in disgust at his apparent lack of ascetic rigor, but after his enlightenment became his first students, to whom he taught the four noble truths.

A term more accurate than “the four noble truths” might be “the four truths of spiritually advanced beings.” They are not truths that are evident to ordinary beings, but are seen to be so by those who are spiritually advanced, i.e., who have attained the path of seeing in any of the three approaches of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas.

28. Vasishtha was a sage during the ancient Vedic period of Indian history, but here

the name is most likely a reference to the Buddha's great-great-grandfather, which would make the "descendants of Vasishtha" kinsmen of the Buddha. See Roerich (trans.), *The Blue Annals*, p. 13.

29. Varanasi.

30. *The Great Treasury of Detailed Explanations* is an enormous compendium of the Abhidharma teachings of the Vaibhashika system of Buddhist philosophy, said to have been compiled shortly after Buddha Shakyamuni's passing by some five hundred arhats, including the Buddha's close student Upagupta. It was first translated from Sanskrit into Chinese, from which a Tibetan translation has been undertaken only recently. Thus, Longchenpa seems to be citing a source that quotes *The Great Treasury of Detailed Explanations* rather than a translation of the text itself.

31. *The Commentary on "The Hundred Thousand Stanzas"* is probably a reference to the two-volume commentary by the Indian Buddhist master Damsh-trasena.

32. The ordinary retinues consisted of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. An arhat, "one who has vanquished the inner foe," is someone who has attained the fruition of the Hinayana path; see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this path and its fruition.

33. The term "afflictive states" denotes states of mind that cause one to commit negative actions, which lead to experiences of physical and mental distress. Some of these are emotional states (desire, anger, etc.), while others are misguided beliefs (such as a belief in the reality of the perishable mind-body aggregates) or habit patterns such as laziness and inattentiveness. A more detailed treatment can be found in Chapter 3, where Longchenpa discusses the bases of mental states according to the Vaibhashika system.

34. The term "fields of experience" refers to a model involving twelve factors: the five physical sense faculties of vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch; the mental faculty, which coordinates the sense data received through the senses; and the six kinds of objects of these faculties (forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental objects such as ideas and concepts).

The model termed "components of perception" comprises eighteen factors: six "outer" components (the objects of the five senses and of the coordinating mental faculty); six "inner" components (the six faculties themselves, which are called "supports" of consciousness); and six avenues of consciousness that these faculties support (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile consciousness, plus the coordinating mental faculty, a conceptual mode of consciousness that organizes sense data into a coherent worldview and creates concepts and ideas concerning that world).

There are twenty-two controlling factors: the five senses, the mental coordinating faculty, life force, the masculine and feminine genders, five kinds of sensations (mental and physical pleasure, mental and physical pain, and neutral sensations), ordinary positive faculties (faith, diligence, mindfulness, meditative absorption, and sublime knowing), and three faculties that pertain to

spiritually advanced beings (the promotion of omniscience, the gaining of omniscience, and the mastery of omniscience).

For a discussion of these topics, see Mipham Rinpoche, *Gateway to Knowledge*, vol. 1, pp. 36–50, 61–79.

35. The Adzom Chögar and Dergé editions of the *Treasury* read: “I manifest to beings as a universal sovereign.”
36. Maitreya, *The Highest Continuum*, ch. 4, vv. 74–5. In the source text, these verses include two more lines and read as follows:

The sound of an echo
occurs within someone’s consciousness;
it is nonconceptual and unfabricated,
and not located externally or internally.
Similarly, the enlightened speech of the Tathagata—
nonconceptual and unfabricated—
occurs within someone’s consciousness,
but is not located externally or internally.

37. This sentence refers to a classification of the four noble truths as taught from three points of view: (1) their essence, which is the acknowledgment of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path to its cessation; (2) their purpose, which is the recognition of suffering as such, the elimination of its origin, the full experience of its cessation, and cultivation of the path to its cessation through meditation; and (3) their fruition, which is the recognition of suffering but without the belief that it exists as some “thing” to be recognized, the elimination of its origin without the belief that it exists as some “thing” to be eliminated, the full experience of its cessation without the belief that it exists as some “thing” to be fully experienced, and cultivation of the path through meditation without the belief that the path exists as some “thing” to be cultivated.
38. There are three sutras entitled *The Exalted Passing into Complete Nirvana*; see Sources Cited. “An additional two” can be taken to refer to either two months or two years, depending on which of the following interpretations one adopts.
39. The ordinary sources are those followed by the shravaka schools; the extraordinary sources are those of the Mahayana.
40. Traditionally, someone born even a short time before the new year was considered one year old at birth, and two when the new year started; similarly, a year was added to the age of someone who died after the new year.
41. According to most accounts of the Buddha’s nirvana, Drona was asked to serve as a mediator when the various factions of the Buddha’s students could not agree on the division of his remains; as a brahmin rather than a committed Buddhist, Drona was able to make an impartial decision.
42. The four teeth were the eighth portion of the Buddha’s sacred remains.
43. The Trayastriṃśa, or “Realm of the Thirty-three” (i.e., thirty-three major gods of the Vedic system of ancient India), is situated on the summit of Sumeru and ruled by Indra; it is the second lowest of the six levels of gods in the realm of desire.

44. The eighth portion was not entirely in the human world because three of the teeth were taken to the realms of the Trayastrimsha gods, the rakshasa demons of Kalinga, and the nagas of Ravana.

Chapter 2

1. As Longchenpa's discussion makes clear, the term "Buddha" in this context does not refer simply to the historical nirmanakaya buddha Shakyamuni; the sambhogakaya and dharmakaya are also authentic sources of the Buddha's words. The shastras are treatises written by qualified masters who explained the meaning of the Buddha's teachings in order to edify and guide practitioners.
2. An epithet of Buddha Shakyamuni (or any buddha), "Bhagavat" means "Fortunate One" or "Glorious One" and has often been translated as "Blessed One." The equivalent Tibetan term (*bcom ldan 'das*) carries a richer meaning. A buddha is one who has "conquered" (*bcom*) the forces that bind one to samsara, has "accomplished" (*ldan*) excellent qualities, and has "transcended" (*'das*) the limitations of both samsara and mere personal salvation.

Here "Akanishtha" refers to Akanishtha in the realm of form, mentioned in Chapter 1.

3. In the sutra teachings, "the lords of the three families"—Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrapani—are among the eight great bodhisattvas in the retinue of every nirmanakaya buddha such as Shakyamuni. In the present context, that of the Vajrayana teachings, they are emanations who are not separate from the expounder of the tantras, whether Buddha Shakyamuni or the primordial buddha (usually referred to as Samantabhadra or Vajradhara, who expounded tantras considered to predate the historical Buddha). In the tantras, these emanations are part of the naturally manifest retinue that appears in the sambhogakaya realm of Akanishtha. In the sutras, these bodhisattvas are peaceful manifestations; in the Vajrayana, the emanations may appear in either peaceful or wrathful forms.
4. In the Vajrayana teachings, Guhyapati (Lord of the Secret Approach) is considered a form of Vajrapani responsible primarily for codifying the tantras.
5. Here "Akanishta" refers to Akanishtha in the realm of form.
6. *Reciting the Names of Manjushri*, sec. 1, ll. 45–8.
7. After the Buddha's parinirvana, certain beings described as "children of the gods" criticized his followers for failing to practice his teachings and for thus contributing to their disappearance from the world.
8. The Three Compilations, those of Sutra, Vinaya, and Abhidharma, present the Buddha's words according to the sutra tradition.
9. These were ten instances in which the Vaishali monks had relaxed or altered the Buddha's proscriptions concerning the conduct of monks. They claimed that after a monk had committed an act contrary to the teachings, he could purify himself by clapping his hands and uttering the nonsense syllables "Hulu hulu!" or, alternatively, by causing the rest of those in his chapter to rejoice in his action.