

Lion's Roar

Buddha Nature in a Nutshell

By Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche*

Homage

namo gurave

*Mañjuśrī, you who are the definitive meaning,
The dharmatā nature of mind, untainted from time without beginning,
You continuously cut through the web of afflicted existence
With the ever sharp sword of reasoning that leads to certainty.*

Introduction

Here I will present the all-pervading sugatagarbha, which alone is the essential point of the teachings of all the victorious buddhas of the three times, their innermost wisdom, as well as the single most important point of sūtras and tantras. Since it is an extremely profound subject, the Buddha said that even for the mightiest of the great lords of the ten bhūmis,[†] it is as difficult to know as it is to perceive a form at night. There is no need to mention how difficult it is for ordinary beings to understand.

Our teacher the Sugata sometimes spoke clearly of the sugatagarbha's essence (*ngo bo*) by teaching emptiness. On other occasions he gave clarifications on its nature (*rang bzhin*) by explaining its primordially present qualities such as the ten strengths. We must understand that these two aspects do not contradict or exclude each other, but are one and the same (*zung 'jug*).

However, some people fail to reach a definitive understanding of the indivisibility of the two truths, this most subtle and profound point of the teachings. This leads some to consider that the sugatagarbha's essence (*ngo bo*) is not empty, and to fall into an eternalist view. Others think it is just empty and not primordially endowed with the qualities of the kāyas and wisdoms that are never separated from it, and fall into the view of nihilism and denial (*skur 'debs*). The turbid chatter of their various demonstrations and refutations, professed in the hope of establishing their own claims, is like dredging the muddy bottom

* Two editions of the Tibetan text were consulted. We used the version that is part of the Collected Works of Mipham Rinpoche (vol.4 (Pa), p.563-608), and one from the *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* compilation from Kathok monastery (vol.49 p.367-434) which contains a few less mistakes.

† Tenth bhūmi bodhisattvas are the most powerful (*dbang phyugs*) or supreme among all bodhisattvas on the bhūmis. (Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche)

of a lake. On the other hand, fortunate students who hold the pith instructions (*man ngag*) of their teachers like the pure essence of a nectar that soothes the heart, have a definitive appreciation of the wisdom which is the unity of empty space and clear light, where one does not exclude the other. With certainty they rest in the complete pacification of fixation on the extremes of either appearance or emptiness. This presentation follows their approach.

Generally speaking, the words of the Tathāgata are a valid source of knowledge or valid cognition, meaning that they are undeceiving and accurate scriptures. Nevertheless, we reach certainty about these undeceiving teachings through the three types of investigation.* When these investigations authenticate the scriptures, we find, in general, trust that they are genuine and accurate. More specifically, we achieve certainty in the meaning of the texts we study by determining that the meaning of the words as they are taught cannot be refuted by reasoning, *and* that there are authentic proofs to establish it. Doing this is important, and we should not give up applying the reasoning that establishes the authenticity of the scriptures, and simply trust what is explained at face value. Indeed, on the more general level there are, undeniably, accurate scriptures and erroneous ones. Moreover, even among the accurate scriptures, one must distinguish between definitive and provisional meaning.

In this way, ordinary people, who can eliminate misconceptions through receiving teachings and reflecting upon them, and can reach a definitive understanding of the different points of a topic by using the three types of valid cognition,[†] develop an irreversible certainty regarding the meaning of the teachings. If you do not do this, then for yourself you cannot establish with valid cognition a convincing and correct understanding, and for others you cannot make your point. You are like someone who cries, "There's a flesh eating ghost here!" even though he cannot see any ghost. Merely shouting this brings no personal conviction, nor does it persuade anyone else.

Learned people speak in accordance with accurate reasoning. When something is established by reason, the tongues of those who argue against it are naturally curtailed, while those who agree with it are filled with irreversible enthusiasm. By contrast, when a path is not established on the basis of sound reasoning, then despite all the beautiful words that may be used to explain it, numerous faults and controversy will surge up like water from a spring.

Here, adhering to the way the path was presented by the Victorious One and his heirs, the

* The three types of investigation are to verify that the *direct perception* of evident objects does not contradict the scriptures; that the *inferential cognition* of hidden objects does not contradict the scriptures; and that there is *scriptural consistency*—that scriptures neither contain any internal contradictions, nor contradict teachings given elsewhere by the Buddha.

† 'The three types of valid cognition' is another name for the three types of investigation just mentioned.

bodhisattvas of the lineage, and without tangling myself up in intellectual considerations, I will examine the correct reasoning and evidence brought forth in the different approaches to teaching the tathāgatagarbha, objectively and avoiding the tendency to hold onto a particular view. In this way, I will show how the assertions that the sugatagarbha is not empty in essence but is truly existent and permanent, as well as that it is completely empty and devoid of any quality, cannot be proven and can be refuted. I will also show that a tathāgatagarbha, which is empty in essence, while in nature primordially endowed with the qualities and present in the elements of sentient beings, cannot be refuted and can be established.

A. Proofs of the presence of the tathāgatagarbha in all sentient beings

Evidence for the presence of the tathāgatagarbha in the continua of all sentient beings is given in the *Sublime Continuum* (v.27) as follows:

Because the kāya of the perfect buddha is radiant,
Because suchness is indivisible,
Because they have the Potential,
Beings always have the essence (skt. *garbha*) of a buddha.

To reach a definitive understanding of this quotation, we shall use reasoning, first examining some mistaken readings advanced by others, and then looking at the authentic meaning as presented in our tradition.

1. The way some other commentators explain

Assertions of early Tibetan commentators

Early Tibetan commentators interpreted the first point—"The kāya of the perfect buddha is radiant"—to mean simply that dharmakāya wisdom pervades all objects; the second point—"Suchness is indivisible"—to indicate that suchness is similar in kind to mere void; and the third point—"They have the potential"—to mean simply that sentient beings can attain enlightenment. These explanations are not very detailed and fail to bring out the many crucial points of this important stanza, which is the very heart of the *Sublime Continuum*.

Problems with these assertions

The Kāya of the Perfect Buddha Is Radiant

The mere fact that the dharmakāya pervades everything does not establish the existence of an actual Potential. Indeed, the dharmakāya wisdom appearing in the *continua of others*, the buddha's awareness, simply pervades all objects and is present in all things by knowing them; but this mere presence is not reason enough for all to be able to reach enlightenment. Nor is the dharmakāya wisdom in *our own continuum* a reliable proof

beyond any doubt, since it does not appear at present.

Suchness is Indivisible

The Potential as the lack of inherent reality of things?

Mere approximate emptiness does not correspond to the Potential at all. Indeed, these earlier commentators consider the Potential to be like a seed that will transform into a sprout. They explain that no enlightened quality is present at the moment, but the path provides the conditions to transform the Potential into the qualities at a future time. The particular aspect (*ldog cha*) of absence of existence—to be empty of reality—is an uncompounded phenomenon devoid of the capacity to perform a function and cannot transform from one state to a different state. Indeed, on the conventional level, it is the compounded aspect of the seed which is considered able to transform into a sprout; we never think that the transformation of a seed into a sprout happens based on its lack of reality aspect.

Sentient beings can reach enlightenment because they lack reality?

Furthermore, to say the very reason sentient beings can reach enlightenment is that they lack reality, is talking without thinking. While it is correct that if mind truly existed, it would be impossible to reach enlightenment, just because something has no real existence does not mean that it can reach enlightenment. All phenomena—such as earth, stones and so on—lack any real existence, but no one can prove that they all can be buddhas *because* they lack inherent existence.

The Potential is the lack of reality of things because of the power of meditation on selflessness to eliminate obscurations?

Their statement that we can infer that the Potential is the lack of reality of things, simply based on the capacity of meditation focussing on the lack of reality of things to eliminate obscurations, is also not the outcome of deep thinking. Were this position correct, we would only need to meditate on emptiness, and there would be no reason to eliminate cognitive obscurations. But they also maintain the need for the elaborations of infinite accumulations. So to say at the same time that such an absence of existence (*med dgag*) is what we call “tathāgatagarbha” makes no sense. It would be the same as the potentials of Śrāvaka and Pratyekabuddhas. With this theory, proving the potential to become buddhas is impossible, because we cannot validly establish that the omniscient wisdom of the buddhas arises from eliminating all cognitive obscurations. Furthermore, since the absence of existence (*med dgag*) in itself has no omniscient aspect, it would be impossible for omniscience to manifest when reaching buddhahood.

Consequently, the idea that the Potential is compounded and changing suits them better, since it is actually more appropriate than considering the tathāgatagarbha as an absence of existence when their position. For them the Potential is simply seen as the seed of love, wisdom and power, which has been present from time without beginning in the continua of all sentient beings—for example, even wild beasts, rakṣasa and the like, show love and

care for their offspring, and know the difference between what harms them and what benefits them. When working with it and applying the path, impediments are removed and the seed develops further into the immeasurable wisdom, love, and power of a buddha. Once they explained that the Potential must be a cause producing a result, it is a marvel that they would reject that it is an entity (*dnegos po*) changing instant by instant, a cause producing a result, and instead posit that it is a non-entity (*dnegos med*), un-compounded and unable to produce anything.

The Potential as the lack of inherent reality of mind alone?

When considering this point, some think that the Potential is not the lack of reality in general but only the mind's lack of inherent reality. The answer to this is as follows: "You may very well consider that the Potential is the mind's lack of reality, but then it cannot act and produce anything. However, a phenomenon like a momentary instance of mind can produce the next instant. Therefore an un-compounded Potential is useless, and you may as well abandon this idea!"

The Potential as the union of mind and emptiness?

Some think that the Potential cannot be apprehended by separating the two truths, because it is the actual way things are (*gnas lugs*), which is the indivisible union of phenomena (*chos can*) or the clarity of mind, and the dharmatā nature (*chos nyid*) or emptiness. Here we need to distinguish between consciousness and primordial wisdom as well. Positing primordial wisdom as unchanging and un-compounded is completely correct, as this is found in the scriptures and is established by reasoning. However, to maintain the terrible stance that the union of a causal phenomenon—in this case the aspect of a momentary instance of consciousness—and its empty aspect can progressively transform into a buddha, is not strikingly sharp. Indeed, the Potential consequently has two aspects: one compounded and the other un-compounded. In this case, the useless un-compounded aspect is a mere Potential in name (*btags pa ba*), while the compounded aspect that can give rise to the fruit is the actual (*mtshan nyid pa*) Potential. As a result, the view of all the Mahāyāna sūtras—which explain that the inherently abiding Potential (*rang bzhin gnas rigs*) is the un-compounded dharmadhātu—is completely lost.

With this kind of assertion, the Potential is something created through a relation of production between a cause and its fruit, and the ordinary mind cannot be forsaken. You may, at the same time, say that the completely perfect dharmadhātu is the inherently abiding Potential, but this will only expose the crying contradiction between your words and your actual view. So, if we say that the Buddha nature (*sangs rgyas kyi rigs*) is the unchanging dharmadhātu, first, we need to understand what is actually meant by "dharmadhātu": the basis on which the word "dharmadhātu" has been applied is the ultimate in itself, the great indivisible union of the two truths, the actual middle (*dbu ma*, skt. *madhyamaka*) utterly beyond any resting place.

If you cannot recognize the dharmadhātu as the actual ultimate and consider it to be only

the approximate ultimate, you are like someone who sees monkeys in the forest but mistakes them for the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. You make the dharmadhātu something which it is not, and you consider this to be the Buddha nature. Then you focus on this when you meditate on the prajñāpāramitā, consider that it is the cause of the svabhāvikakāya and so on. Basically, you form a path that is merely a pale imitation of the Mahāyāna. Sūtras such as the Prajñāpāramitā also mention this kind of misapprehension.

What the terms “dharmadhātu” or “emptiness” refer to is the natural purity, the union of the two truths, the basic space of freedom from all the webs of conceptual elaboration experienced by the wisdom of our own rigpa. This is the real buddha nature which can turn into the svabhāvikakāya endowed with the twofold purity. This is what all the Mahāyāna sūtras and their commentaries teach. Consequently, the inherently abiding Potential cannot be asserted as anything other than un compounded. Since the dharmakāya is un compounded, it cannot produce a result different from itself as it ceases to exist. So, all the qualities of the dharmakāya can only be the result of elimination (*bral 'bras*). The tenth bhūmi ārya-bodhisattva regent of the Buddha clearly said this as well in the *Sublime Continuum*, and the glorious and noble protector Nāgārjuna in *In Praise of the Dharmadhātu*. Because of this, our tradition, following these great texts, holds that the Potential is the un compounded dharmadhātu; that the dharmadhātu is the way all phenomena are (*gnas lugs*), and yet is such that in itself it has never arisen and will never cease; it is the way in which the indivisible union of appearance and emptiness abides without falling into any extreme.

In brief

Compounded phenomena that appear to arise and cease have never stained the fundamental nature of the dharmadhātu, because they do not exist in the way they appear. Therefore, the primordially pure causal and resultant aspects of saṃsāra, and the natural and spontaneous clear light of untainted appearances are indivisible, beyond any possibility of being united or separated. With this crucial point we must recognize the actual way the sugatagarbha is.

2. How our tradition explains it

a) Meaning of the first line

The dharmakāya with qualities equal to space is the ultimate **kāya of the perfect** and completely enlightened **buddhas**. This dharmakāya, originally present in the continuum of an ordinary individual completely entangled in all the bonds of negativity, later becomes clear, “**radiant**”, or manifest, showing that the sugatagarbha is already present in the continua of all sentient beings. There are two points that this reason establishes: one from the common approach, and one from the exceptional approach.

i. The common approach

If there are sentient beings who manifest the primordial wisdom of dharmakāya, this means that they must have the Potential. They must have the potential to become buddhas, because becoming a buddha would be impossible without any such Potential. As Nāgārjuna says in his *In Praise of the Dharmadhātu* (v.11):

If the element is present,
Work will reveal the fine grains of gold.
But in the absence of the element,
Despite work, only mental afflictions will arise.

ii. The exceptional approach

This reasoning proves that the mind can be a cause for buddhahood, in the same way that a field can grow crops. But how does this prove that there is a specific Potential primordially endowed with all enlightened qualities? The argument also establishes this point because all the buddhas who have transcended obscurations possess the wisdom kāya, which is clearly uncompounded; it is not something compounded and impermanent by nature. This point is supported by both scripture and reasoning.

Scripture

Concerning scripture, the *Sūtra of the Great Enlightenment* says:

If a monk who observes perfect discipline says about the uncompounded tathāgatagarbha, "The tathāgatagarbha is compounded," he is a tīrtika, and death is better.

And also:

O son of noble family (*riḡs*), see the Tathāgata as a permanent kāya or body, an indestructible body, a vajra body, a body that is not made of flesh, a dharmakāya.

Further:

It is better to die, completely burning your tongue in a big wood fire, than to say, "The Tathāgata is impermanent." Do not even listen to such things.

This text also shows that the mere aspect of the absence of existence (*med dgag*) alone cannot successfully describe nirvāṇa:

"Emptiness, emptiness" refers to the fact that when searching, nothing can be found. "Nothing whatsoever," the Nigranthas also have; but liberation is not like that.

And:

What is liberation? It is the uncontrived element. This element is the Tathāgata.

The *Diamond Cutter Sūtra* says:

Those who see my body,
Those who hear my voice,
Have set upon a mistaken path.
Such people do not see me;
Buddhas are the view of suchness
And the guides are dharmakāya.
Since the dharmatā cannot be known,
These people cannot know me.

As this quotation and many others show, all the sūtras of definitive meaning teach extensively that the ultimate kāya of the buddhas is the dharmakāya, which is un compounded dharmatā.

Reasoning

As for reasoning, the final fruition, omniscient primordial wisdom, is indivisible, one taste with the primordial dharmadhātu. If it were an impermanent thing newly produced by causes and conditions, there would be many unwanted consequences, such as:

- it is not self-arisen primordial wisdom (*rang byung gi ye shes*);
- the pain of change has not been eliminated;
- it still has the characteristics of arising again and ceasing again;
- it is deceptive because it is self-disintegrating by nature;
- it cannot be the unfailing refuge as it ceases the moment it has arisen, and anything that results from the gathering of all the necessary causes doesn't last;
- it is not of one taste with all phenomena;
- it is not beyond all extremes;
- the natural characteristics of the mind, such as arising, are not refuted;
- it is not independent, but is a formation based on other factors.

Thus, a vast number of problems and faults arise if you consider that the vajra body is impermanent. Since the harm such a position brings is greatly far reaching, you must abandon this inferior path, and view the indivisible vajra body as un compounded and sacred permanence. We may opine, when evaluating with our ordinary limited vision

alone, that primordial wisdom cannot be uncompounded, because something cannot be cognitive and permanent at the same time. This is not very good thinking. The limited cognition that knows an object is necessarily impermanent. However, primordial wisdom that knows objects in one taste with them, the wisdom endowed with the "all-pervading vajra space", is not like that for the following reason. The state of the uncompounded natural radiance, or unchanging clear light, is the complete consummation of all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa ('khor 'das 'ub chub). Therefore, it is primordially beyond arising or ceasing. This is established by the knowing awareness the ultimate sort of investigation provides.*

The great uncompounded

So, primordial wisdom does not fall into the extremes of being compounded or uncompounded—it is the great uncompounded. It is not at all like a simple non-entity (*dn̄gos med*). Entities (*dn̄gos po*) and non-entities are both *phenomena* (*chos can*). Entities arise in dependence on other phenomena, and non-entities are imputed in dependence on phenomena different from themselves. In ultimate analysis, they are compounded, hollow, false, deceptive. But the sugatagarbha is the *nature* (*chos nyid*) of all phenomena, whether entities or non-entities. It is the great uncompounded, which is genuine and undeceiving. This is shown in the *Root Verses on the Middle Way* (XV.2):

The nature is uncontrived
And does not depend on anything.

And (XXV.13):

Entities and non-entities are both compounded.
Nirvāṇa is uncompounded.

In this way, the sūtras of definitive meaning, as well as the reasoning that investigates the ultimate nature of things, establish that this ultimate primordial wisdom of the dharmakāya pervades all of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa; is the great sameness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa; is uncompounded; and that its nature is the unchanging absolute reality. In this context, it is already present as the dharmatā, the nature of the primordial wisdom dharmakāya, free from increase and decrease in the continua of sentient beings, and with the potential to become manifest at some point. Although at the level of appearances, this can be obscured by adventitious stains and not manifest, or can manifest when free from obscurations, at the level of its nature there is not the slightest difference at any point in time, when in one moment it is better and the next moment not as good. This is because it is naturally uncompounded and unchanging. For example, the *Sublime Continuum* (v.51 c-d) says:

* i.e. valid cognition of pure vision (Khenpo Namdröl).

As before so it will be later—
The dharmatā is unchanging.

And (v.63):

The clear light nature of mind
Is unchanging like space:
The adventitious stains of desire and the like
Which arise from incorrect thinking, these mental afflictions cannot change it.

As this quotation and others express, all phenomena of saṃsāra are changing and unreliable. All appear to change while remaining in nature the dharmatā, and yet the pure aspect of mind, the tathāgatagarbha, is free of any change, like space. The teachings repeat again and again that you must know and understand this point.

This basic space of uncompounded clear light is never tainted by mistaken apprehensions about it; it is natural purity (*rang bzhin rnam dag*), and undeluded. Like the sun and its rays, it abides without separation from the self-radiance of the fundamental nature or from the spontaneous qualities characteristic of the fruition such as the ten strengths.

Further, the *Sublime Continuum* (v.155) says:

The element is empty of adventitious phenomena
Whose basic characteristic is to be separate from it.
But it is not empty of the unsurpassable phenomena
Whose basic characteristic is to be indivisible from it.

All the faults and suffering of saṃsāra come from the deluded mind which apprehends an “I”, and an identity in phenomena. These mistaken thoughts, however, have never stained or mixed with the fundamental nature of clear light. Since they are adventitious phenomena, like clouds in the sky, such defects are distinct from the element, and can be freed from them. Therefore, the very essence of the element is empty of these defects; in other words, they do not stain it. Self-arisen primordial wisdom abides, without relying on the pollution caused by these deluded appearances, as natural clear light and the suchness of all phenomena. The element is not empty of these ultimate qualities, which are never separated from the self-arisen primordial wisdom. The essence of the element is never without them; they are its fundamental nature, like the sun and its rays.

[388] The inherently abiding Potential (*rang bzhin gnas rigs*) is established in this way as dharmakāya in essence, uncompounded and primordially endowed with all the qualities. Then, because enlightenment can be reached, the wisdom dharmakāya must abide without increase or decrease in the continua of all sentient beings. We establish it by saying, "It is established by the power of facts that one actually becomes a buddha by

practising the path; and since the dharmakāya at the time of buddhahood is uncompounded, it cannot arise anew as a compounded thing due to causes and conditions. Therefore, it is already present in sentient beings as the essence of buddhahood."

Refutation of some objections

Regarding this point, some people wonder, "If the enlightenment itself is already present in sentient beings, then why does omniscient primordial wisdom not eliminate their obscurations?" Also, stuck in the subjects taught in the common vehicle, some may think, "If Buddha is the result and sentient beings are the cause, then there is the fault of the presence of the result in the cause, refuted by arguments such as, 'when the result is present in the cause, eating food entails eating excrement'."

Here is the reply we can give to such people:

"You haven't trained your mind in the sense of the extremely profound sūtras that present the definitive meaning, and you are guided only by a rough understanding of the ordinary teachings, [389] so it is no surprise that you have doubts. The way to understand is not like that. The clear light of primordial wisdom dharmatā is present equally in all without any difference. Yet, when adventitious delusion arises in our own minds, deluded mind and its objects appear—this is what is designated "samsāra". On account of this delusion, we cannot know the dharmatā that we have within ourselves as it is.

"For example, when we sleep, we perceive limitless appearances such as our body, objects, consciousness of visual objects, and so on, all by means of the sole mental consciousness. We perceive and apprehend the subject and the object separately, and yet in that moment, it is only the mental consciousness, which is unable to recognize itself the way it really is (*yin lugs*) and unable to recognize that there is no subject different from the objects. But, even though it cannot recognise it, its nature (*yin lugs*) is always the same. In the same vein, all phenomena abide as emptiness, but even though this is true, not everybody realises it, because there is still the possibility of delusion where appearance and reality are different."

The point this example illustrates is that mind and wisdom, or tathāgatagarbha, are respectively phenomena (*chos can*) and their nature (*chos nyid*). In other words they are called "buddhas" when teaching from the point of view of nature, the way they are (*gnas tshul*), [390] and "sentient beings" from the standpoint of appearances (*snang tshul*). Therefore, refuting this teaching by using the argument of the abiding result in the cause is simply not understanding what these teachings are saying.

This reasoning proves that the Potential is present at the time of the cause primordially endowed with all qualities, based on the fact or reason (*rtags*) that the dharmakāya is clearly manifest at the time of the result or fruition. Although, from the perspective of the

way things are in their nature (*gnas tshul*), there is no such thing as before and after or cause and result, when we consider the way they appear (*snang tshul*), we need to speak of cause and result, and this reasoning can be called "a reasoning based on the principle of dependency establishing cause from result".

b) Meaning of the second line— "Suchness is indivisible"

The nature of all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is emptiness, the great primordial clear light where they are indivisible in one taste. So buddhas and sentient beings are also indivisible on the ultimate level—this is the great equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Therefore, though the semblance of sentient beings manifests due to adventitious delusion, these appearances do not waver in the slightest from the dharmatā nature. This establishes—*based on the principle of nature*—that sentient beings definitely [391] possess the heart essence of buddhahood, the Buddha nature. The sūtras also say that all phenomena are primordially luminous clear light, that they are nirvāṇa or beyond suffering, and that they are by nature awakened in actuality.

Refutation of objection

You may think, "If that is the case, and the presence of the Potential is established because suchness is indivisible, then the consequence of what you said earlier to others in a refutation also applies to you: earth, stones and so on also have the nature!"

First Answer according to the common approach

We need to understand that the term "Potential" applies to the genuine cause of buddhahood—buddhahood being attained when the two obscurations that arise from deluded mind are eliminated, and the mind "opens" to see the nature of phenomena without any delusion. Material things such as earth and stones which are not sentient do not accomplish a path. So even if on a conventional level they may be thought to be indivisible from suchness, there is no point in considering that earth, stones and so on have the Potential. They appear due to the mind, but mind does not appear due to external phenomena like earth or stones. We can understand this using the example of appearances in a dream and consciousness at the time of the dream. Within this mind that is the creator of the three realms [392], abides the dharmatā or sugatagarbha, the absolute virtue, the untainted nature—like natural quality of wetness in water. By knowing this, since the appearances of saṃsāra are simply the play of consciousness and nirvāṇa just the display of primordial wisdom, there is no point in discussing earth and stone as if they were different from mind.

Second Answer according to the exceptional approach

Moreover, from the point of view of the authentic meaning, all appearances manifest without ever moving from the primordially enlightened state of dharmatā, and without ever going beyond being the tathāgatagarbha. This I strongly maintain. As the Buddha

says in the *Condensed Prajñāpāramitā* (VIII.186):

The purity of form should be known the purity of the fruition.
From the purity of fruition and form know the purity of omniscience.
The purity of omniscience and fruition, and the purity of form
Are like space—indivisible and inseparable.

Accordingly, the purity that is freedom from obscurations of the subject (*yul can*) is the purity, or nature, of the objects (*yul*) such as forms and so on. Because in fact, there only appears to be a progressive liberation from the obscurations that veil self-appearances (*rang snang*), while the actual essence remains in its primordial state free from any obscuration. [393]

Therefore, at buddhahood—where all the defilements of the element, the subject or awareness (*rig pa*), have been purified—no actual object is left to purify. For example, when an eye disorder is cured, the distorted images are naturally cleared away.

We may think, "In that case, when one person becomes enlightened, all impure appearances should also cease." But this is not the case, because an individual will see appearances that contradict reality for as long as he is obscured by the obscurations of his own personal perception.

But then you may also wonder, "If all the aspects of reality and appearances are in harmony at buddhahood, then does a buddha experience all these impure appearances or not? If he does, then all phenomena are not perfectly enlightened; and if he doesn't, then he cannot know all the paths sentient beings drift upon, and so on."

The omniscient primordial wisdom knows all possible phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa effortlessly and spontaneously in a state of one taste with itself. As it sees everything that appears to it as great purity, without ever straying from this vision, it is aware of all the appearances perceived by the six classes of beings going round in saṃsāra exactly as they appear to each one of them. [394] Owing to the power of the complete exhaustion of all the obscurations of dualistic perception involving subject and object, it sees all possible phenomena (*chos can*), in a distinct and perfectly complete way, within the expanse of the dharmatā (*chos nyid*) their nature. It is because of this crucial point that the unarising and unceasing primordial wisdom sees everything instantaneously in one taste with them. "Such wisdom is difficult to understand for bodhisattvas on the bhūmis; what need to speak of those with ordinary perceptions!"

The Buddha explains this in the *Collection of Bodhisattva Teachings* (*Bodhisattva-piṭaka*) as follows:

The great equality of all phenomena

Is realised completely by self-arising wisdom in equality.
Therefore, the vision of the perfect Buddha,
The Tathāgata, is equality.

And:

Because it knows the natural luminous clarity of the mind as it is, the wisdom that is aware of a single instant of mind is called “unsurpassable, genuine and perfect enlightenment.”

Similarly, Candrakīrti said (*Introduction to the Middle Way*, 11.11):

Space is not divided up because containers are divided into different vessels.
Just so, whatever phenomena there are, suchness is not separated in different categories.
[395] Therefore, when you perfectly comprehended the single taste of great equality,
O Excellent Wise One, you comprehended everything knowable in a single instant.

As this says, the great primordial wisdom that is indivisible from basic space pervades all phenomena, and sees them without activity or effort like the moon and the stars reflecting in a lake. In this way the perception is pervasive. It occurs in a state of complete pacification of concepts. This is the primordial wisdom of self-arising clear light, and it manifests by the power of actualising as it is the dharmatā abiding in the ground, once all obscurations have been completely exhausted. Incontrovertible conviction in this can be gained based on ultimate analysis into the nature of things.* Otherwise, if we evaluate with a limited mind, we will reach the conclusion that either there is no wisdom at buddhahood; or that there is wisdom, but it is transient and similar to the ordinary mind. Either we will think that the buddhas cannot see the realms of sentient beings; or that they can, but still have impure perceptions. We will not be able to establish the single taste of the essence of the wisdom that knows the nature of things, and the wisdom that knows all things. We will only be stirring up a mud of concepts and contradictions, and that is all we will be seeing. [396]

c) The meaning of the third line, "They have the potential (*rigs*)"

All sentient beings have the Potential (*rigs*), meaning that they have the potential to become buddhas. This is because adventitious stains can be eliminated and the dharmakāya, primordially endowed with the qualities, is present in each and every

* 'Ultimate analysis into the nature of things' (*mthar thug dpyod pa'i chos nyid kyi rigs pa*) here refers to pure vision (*dag gzigs*), as opposed to ordinary limited vision (*tshur mthong*) (Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche).

individual without distinction.

If beings possess the Potential to reach Buddhahood, then without doubt they possess the heart essence of a buddha, the buddha nature. This is because there is a time when they are buddhas, while at the same time the dharmakāya of the buddha is uncompounded, meaning that there are no distinctions of before and after or of good and bad in its nature.

This third reasoning is based on the *“principle of efficiency”*, whereby we know that a particular result is produced by a particular cause.

However here, this is not a case of inferring a result simply on the basis of the existence of its cause because of the following key point*. The dharmatā suchness of the Potential is unchanging, and it is not worse at that time and better at the time of the result. For however long as the adventitious stains remain, becoming free from them is always possible. Therefore the Potential never loses its capacity for buddhahood. [397]

Summary of the three reasons

—The Potential which is present as a cause is not different from the dharmakāya at the time of the result.

—If dharmakāya is present at the time of the result, it must also be present when we are sentient beings, without any increase in qualities at the result, or alteration in sentient beings.

—Even though we may attach the labels of “cause” and “result”, or “before” and “after” to it, the Potential itself is simply the one taste of the single essence of unchanging dharmadhātu.

These three arguments establish that all sentient beings have the tathāgatagarbha, as they are drawn from the authentic approach of reasoning which rests on the power of facts.

This reasoning which establishes the presence of the tathāgatagarbha in all sentient beings shows that ultimate liberation, the tathāgata, and the nature of all phenomena are the ultimate truth and not different from one another. Furthermore, when we realise that this is all because of the tathāgatagarbha itself, we also establish that there is only one single ultimate vehicle. But those who believe otherwise and think, for example, that the sugatagarbha is not present in the elements of sentient beings but is present at

* The existence of a cause can be inferred based on the presence of the result, but the existence of a result cannot be inferred with certainty based on the presence of its cause, as the cause may or may not yield the result, depending on the circumstances.

buddhahood*—that the qualities do not exist at the time of the cause, but appear anew at the time of the result—[398] follow approaches that turn away from the meaning of the Mahāyāna. The reasoning such people use to establish the single ultimate vehicle is like the omen reflected in a mirror divination—it appears but then vanishes.

Therefore, those who aspire to the supreme vehicle should apply all their intelligence to this point [the sugatagarbha].

A teaching such as this, that presents the element primordially endowed with qualities, as being present at the level of sentient beings is an extremely profound subject—in fact an inconceivable one. Therefore, the Buddha told his disciples to trust his words; that his words are undecieving, while they are difficult to understand by oneself. This shows that this teaching speaks of the profound ultimate. As a result, small-minded intellectuals have perpetually argued against it, criticizing it at length and bringing up all of the problems they can possibly find based on preconceived ideas, such as the consequence that buddhas and sentient beings would fundamentally have the same mind. The *Sūtra Unravelling the Thought* says,

Realms in formation and ultimate reality [399]
Are characterized by neither being the same nor being different.
Whoever considers them as either the same or different
Does not understand the way they are.

Accordingly, the dharmatā nature (*chos nyid*) of the mind—the tathāgatagarbha or element—, and phenomena—the mind that possesses it (*chos can*)—, do not need to be posited as either the same or different. Even though the way things are (*gnas tshul*) never goes beyond the dharmatā nature (*chos nyid*), this does not contradict the fact that delusion can still exist in the way they appear (*snang tshul*). Not only that, but if this were not the case, a number of problems would arise. For example, there would be no such thing as liberation, no one could ever be deluded and so on. The fact that the way things appear and the way they actually are do not correspond to one another is the reason that deluded sentient beings exist, and it is the reason they can become buddhas after eliminating delusion by means of the path.

Although reasoning that investigates the ultimate nature of things establishes all phenomena as emptiness, this does not refute the existence of the qualities of the sugatagarbha. This is because the unsurpassable qualities do exist while being empty in essence, and is also what great beings have been advocating.

*The Tibetan text says *sangs rgyas dus na med pa dang/*, which could be translated as 'it is not present at buddhahood'. Yet, Khenpo Namdröl Rinpoche observed that it should rather be *sangs rgyas dus na yod pa dang*: 'it is not present at buddhahood'. We've followed Khen Rinpoche's reading in the translation.

Therefore, the teachings of the Intermediate Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma which show [400] that all dharmas of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are empty, establish the same thing for the Buddha Nature, because the sugatagarbha is also emptiness, devoid of inherent existence.

However, this teaching on the sugatagarbha, which has the particularity of presenting the inseparability—beyond assembling and parting—of the empty aspect and of the appearance aspect, the kāyas and wisdom empty by nature, is the intention of the definitive meaning sūtras of the Final Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma. Only in that respect are these teachings superior to the Intermediate Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, and why the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* praises the purport of the teachings of the Final Turning as supreme. They do not intend this with respect to the entire range of these teachings, but only to their presentation of the definitive meaning. We can clearly determine this from other sūtras such as the one that presents the process of purifying the element or Potential using the example of the refining of a jewel.*

That is why we need to bring together emptiness as taught in the Intermediate Turning, and appearances, the wisdom and kāyas presented in the Final Turning. Therefore we should regard the meaning of the Intermediate and Final turnings to be definitive, without excluding one at the cost of other [401]. The Omniscient Longchenpa held this view. No incompatibility is found between the two aspects, such that we need to consider one as a provisional meaning if we see the other as the definitive meaning. Not only that, but to take them together and see this sugatagarbha as the causal continuum (*rgyu rgyud*) is the basis for the pith instructions (*man ngag*) of the Vajrayāna teachings. Therefore, we need to realize how all the teachings of Buddha boil down to a single key point. This ultimate point of the teachings is the sole intent of all the great āryas such as Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, which can be clearly realised on the basis of texts such as Nagarjuna's *In Praise of the Dharmadhātu*, and *Explanations on Bodhicitta*, or Asanga's *Commentary on the Sublime Continuum*.

As Nāgārjuna said:

All the sūtras on emptiness
Taught by the Victorious one
Counteract negative emotions
And do not alter the element.

According to this quotation, the ultimate result of analysis investigating into the ultimate nature of things is the indivisible unity of the two truths, the vajra-like reality [402]. This is

*In the *Sutra Requested by King Dhāraṇīśvara* (*Dhāraṇīśvarapariṣcchāsūtra*, T 147). See for example Dudjom Rinpoche, *History of the Nyingma*, Boston: Shamabala, p.187-188.

the basic space that cannot be altered by the minds of intellectuals. Therefore faults found based on ultimate reality do not touch it.

Now I will explain how this element abides within the continua of sentient beings. From the perspective of the essence of the nature of things (*gnas lugs*), all phenomena are encompassed within the expanse of the dharmatā, and the dharmatā itself abides in the great equality, free from any arising or ceasing. Within this great equality, all distinctions of good and bad such as saṃsāra and nirvāṇa; all divisions such as here and there, self and other, big and small; all categories of time such as before and after, and so on, do not exist. It is the single sphere (*thig le nyag gcig*) of the dharmadhātu, beyond change and transformation.

Even though this is how things are (*gnas lugs*), in accordance with deluded adventitious appearances we perceive the physical bodies, minds and objects of the sentient of the three worlds of existence, and as a result do not see the dharmatā nature. This does not mean that the dharmatā does not exist—not in the slightest does it move away from its nature. Moreover, this dharmatā nature of the mind just described, does not manifest simply because it is enclosed in the sheath of adventitious obscurations [403]. Rather, it abides as an essence (*bcud*) or as the very heart (*snying po*) at the centre, and so is called "Potential" or "essential nature" (*snying po*, skt. *garbha*). This can be understood through nine examples such as the underground treasure.

Although it is described differently in three different contexts based on the degree of adventitious obscurations—impure, pure and impure, and extremely pure—no difference are seen at the level of the element itself. The *Sublime Continuum* says (v.28):

Because the primordial wisdom of the buddhas is always present in sentient beings,
They are never separate from the stainless nature,
And since the "Buddha Nature" has been named after the fruit,
The Buddha said that all beings possess the essential nature (*garbha*) of a buddha.

And (v.144ab):

Its nature is the dharmakāya;
It is also suchness and the Potential.

And (v.47):

The impure, the pure and impure,
And the perfectly pure are known respectively as
Ordinary beings, bodhisattvas
And tathāgatas.

Those who are ignorant of this [404] make all sorts of assertions and refutations thinking that this "buddha-nature" is somewhere boxed within the aggregates like a juniper berry in an urn. They associate it with a mind composed of deluded and non-deluded aspects that co-exist like light and darkness. In this way they are only barking without reaching the intent of Mahāyāna. Thus, no point is found in sharing this heart advice with a crowd of negative logicians who have not trained in the Mahāyāna. Such profound teachings should not be given to immature people and tīrthikas because they lack the capacity to receive and hear them properly. Dharma should be explained to them beginning with teachings on the lack of identity in things, on impermanence and so on, by establishing each point with proper reasoning. Otherwise, as it cannot be established with the limited ordinary cognition alone, teaching the tathāgatagarbha is pointless; the result will only be making projections onto what does not exist, and denying what does.

By contrast, those who first train their minds in the basic Buddhist philosophical systems, who develop definitive conviction and an understanding of great emptiness—the ultimate in itself—will immediately trust in this heart advice that teaches the tathāgatagarbha [405].

In light of this, we must know and understand the crucial points for accomplishing the path, and must recognize the faults of thoughts such as, "Even though it is the authentic path, it cannot be established by reasoning, but must be realised through experience," or, "If it cannot be established with our limited cognition, then it is not an authentic path."

B. Refuting some misconceptions concerning the nature of the element

This has three parts:

1. Refuting the view that the element is truly existent and not empty
2. Refuting the view that the element is an empty void
3. Refuting the idea that the element is impermanent and compounded

1. Refuting the view that the element is truly existent and not empty

Refutation based on the scriptures

In the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* it says:

The bodhisattva Mahāmati asked the Bhagavān, "How is the permanent, constant, and eternal tathāgatagarbha, which is enclosed in the sheath of defilements, and spoken of in the Buddha's sūtras, different from the self of the tīrthika theoreticians? They also speak of a self that is devoid of the "guṇas" and so on."

In response [406], the Bhagavān spoke thus, "It is not the same. First, the buddhas explain that the meaning of the expressions 'three doors of liberation', 'nirvāṇa,' and 'non-arising' is the tathāgatagarbha. Then, in order for immature beings to abandon their fear of lack of identity, they teach the domain beyond all concepts—the sphere of experience without appearance—by means of the teachings on the tathāgatagarbha. Mahāmati, the great bodhisattvas of the present and future should not fixate upon a self."

It is also said that someone who conceives of real entities cannot reach liberation. Furthermore, the emptiness of being empty of other phenomena, while not being empty of its own essence, does not fulfil the meaning of emptiness. Among the seven types of emptiness, this kind of emptiness is an inferior type, which, it is said, "should be abandoned", and so on. Teachings on this are limitless.

The Buddha also said:

Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is neither permanent [407] nor impermanent. If asked why, the reason is because both permanence and impermanence are faulty.

And:

Constructs are the hold of demons;
You should go beyond existence and non-existence.

And:

If there is something beyond the supreme truth of nirvāṇa, then it is also like an illusion and a dream.

Refutation based on Reasoning

In accordance with the meaning of these scriptures and others, reasoned analysis shows that the tathāgatagarbha can be the nature (*chos nyid*) of the mind because of the key point that it is empty in essence. Based on this crucial point, it pervades everything, remains permanent for all time, is inconceivable, and is such that all the aspects of its qualities can arise impartially. If, on the contrary, it was not empty of its own essence, and was truly existent, then it could not possibly have the nature of other phenomena and so on. Also, it could not be the outcome of the valid cognition investigating into the ultimate, because the hallmark of this analysis is that all phenomena lack true existence. Therefore, to say that the reasoning into the ultimate establishes one thing that truly exists is like saying that darkness arises from light. [408]

True existence is also not established by the valid cognition investigating into the conventional level of reality, because although it may *appear* to be truly established from

the conventional perspective, this reasoning can never thoroughly establish that something is not empty. Therefore, since neither of the two types of valid cognition can establish something as truly existent, this proof is like a flower growing in the middle of the sky. Establishing it is pointless and only tires one out.

2. Refuting the view that the element is an empty void

People who do not understand the particular point that the basic space is the unity of appearance and emptiness, consider that the element—the basic space of phenomena—and emptiness are simply a mere absence of existence (*med dgag*), or in other words, the approximate ultimate. In this way, they contradict the scriptures, which state that the element is primordially endowed with all the qualities. This is a grave mistake, as the *Sūtra of the Samādhi of the Wisdom Seal* says:

There are people who don't really aspire to follow the Dharma, but only want to
get something for themselves;
They do not observe the precepts, yet they claim to teach enlightenment.
In the future, there will be people
Who like to speak in this way and say, "Everything is empty."

And:

Emptiness does not arise; no one produced it.
Unseen; it does not arrive, nor does it depart.
Yet some hold it is a referent and say, "We practise emptiness."
[409] People speaking like that are just thieves who steal the Dharma.

And:

Concepts about the Dharma of absence
Are distractions that ensnare immature beings.

The *Condensed Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (I.9) says:

Bodhisattvas, realising that "the aggregates are empty"
Is still relating to characteristics and is not confidence in non-arising
phenomena.

From the *King of Samādhi Sūtra*:

"Existence" and "nonexistence" are both extremes;
"Pure" and "impure" are also extremes.
Therefore, completely abandoning these dual extreme positions,

The wise do not dwell even in the middle.

From the *Sūtra For the Benefit of Angulimāla*:

Alas! There are two types of beings who destroy the sacred Dharma in this world: those who maintain an extreme view of emptiness, and those who profess a self in the world. These two destroy the sacred Dharma and turn the Dharma upside-down.

The sūtras and śāstras repeatedly teach that since emptiness is the antidote which purges all wrong views, [410] to grasp at it and hold on to it as an entity or a non-entity is a wrong view that cannot be remedied, and further, that all the conceptions of being empty or not empty should be abandoned.

Even when we analyze using reasoning, the concept of absence of existence (*med dgag*), the mere cutting off of true existence, is only applied by means of concepts holding on to the elimination of the object of refutation, but does not come close to the actual nature of things (*gnas lugs*), free of any projection. I need not go into details, because it is easy to get to the bottom of this.

The mere aspect of absence of existence (*med dgag*)—the emptiness of true existence—is not the genuine basic space of phenomena or their nature; contemplating on this is just a preliminary step for beginners. The sūtras state (the *Sūtra of the Samādhi of Final Peace Magic*):

Mañjuśrī, consider the merit accumulated by a bodhisattva who gives the three jewels whatever they need for a hundred god-years. Compare this to the merit generated by another bodhisattva who contemplates, even for the duration of a finger snap, that all conditioned phenomena in existence are impermanent, all conditioned phenomena are suffering, [411] all conditioned phenomena are empty and all conditioned phenomena are selfless. The latter generates greater merit, immeasurably.

3. Refuting the idea that the element is impermanent and compounded

The ground is the sugatagarbha. Fully manifest, like a sun free from clouds, it is the omniscient primordial wisdom. One may wonder whether this omniscient wisdom is permanent or impermanent. The sūtras sometimes say that omniscience is permanent, and sometimes that it is impermanent. However, we should understand as follows.

The scriptures say that omniscience is impermanent in accordance with the perspective of those in need of training (*'dul bya*) who have not yet been completely transformed. This is also grounded in sound reasoning, as the *Commentary on Valid Cognition* shows.

Valid cognition is not permanent. Because the objects realised through valid cognition are entities,
And since objects of knowledge are impermanent,
It is also impermanent.

[412] Omniscience is not permanent because it does not arise without causes, which would be irrational (it has its causes—the path through which the practitioners accustom themselves to bodhicitta and emptiness, and so on), and because omniscience is a valid cognition that is the direct perception of all phenomena.

Since valid cognition is undeceived mind, there cannot be any valid cognition that would be permanent. This is because valid cognition only evaluates existent entities as they are, and these objects are all impermanent objects of knowledge. Therefore the evaluating valid cognition must also be impermanent. As instances of valid cognition manifest one after the other, they are not permanent.

If valid cognition were permanent, it would be incapable of functioning and would certainly be incapable of all activities, including evaluating objects.

Therefore, since omniscience as something permanent completely contradicts reason, it is established as impermanent. Likewise, all entities are impermanent while all non-entities are said to be "permanent". But since there is no basis for permanent things, in reality there are no "permanent phenomena".

These points must be established for tīrthika philosophers and Buddhist followers of the common vehicle who have not trained themselves in the method that transforms their minds into the essence of inconceivable suchness. [413] This is because, apart from the way ordinary consciousness perceives, they have no other means.

However, from the perspective of the complete transformation—the wisdom vision—omniscience is established as permanent. This is because the argument used to establish its impermanence—knowable phenomena arise and cease each instant; the instances of wisdom as the subject also arise every instant, one after the other, and so on—is simply the way it appears to those who have not accomplished this omniscience completely. But what is seen to appear in this way is not established in the actual way things are (*gnas thsul*), where there is not a single phenomenon that arises momentarily. Moreover, there is no need to mention that a sequence of time and so on derived from it is not established. For example, in a dream, although we perceive limitless times and infinite expanses, in reality they are not established.

The ultimate wisdom is the complete transformation into the ultimate reality of the dharmatā free arising and ceasing, just as it is. When this final wisdom is reached, this

wisdom is the wisdom *kāya* where subject and object are indivisible. [414] Even before transformation has taken place, it is the basic nature of the ordinary mind or *dharmatā*, the natural clear light of unity. So since even then it is unchanging, it is the “naturally abiding Potential” that is without distinctions of before and after. Differences between the different defilements—which are changing, adventitious and removable, and arise and cease moment by moment; and between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, or good and bad, and so on, appear incontrovertibly and undeniably to the dualistic perception of those who have not brought about this transformation. Yet the fundamental nature abides as the great equality in which arising and ceasing, and dualistic phenomena do not exist. In that state, all differences of time and space are subsumed (*'ub chub*). This is the object of the *āryas'* individual self-aware primordial wisdom, which is untainted by changes in the three times. So why not call it “great permanence”, since it exists yet does not arise and cease instant by instant?

[415] In this way, all objects of knowledge found in space and time—all entities that are changing, as well as nonentities like space—are subsumed in an equal taste within the *dharmatā* nature. However, the *dharmatā* nature (*chos nyid*) is not at all subsumed within these phenomena (*chos can*), the changing entities and so on. For example, although clouds are in space, space is not subsumed within clouds.

Therefore, the fundamental nature—the great equality of the luminous and clear expanse of *dharmatā*—is the single (*nyag cig*) self-arising primordial wisdom (*rang byung ye shes*) that naturally pervades all entities, and is innately (*lhan skyes*) present in phenomena. When it has adventitious obscurations and its nature is not manifest, these obscurations can be eliminated by the five paths—which come down to elimination and realisation. Through the power of elimination, the great primordial wisdom where subject and object are indivisible can be attained. When that happens, the self arisen primordial wisdom knows all objects of knowledge* spontaneously without conceptualizing and without effort, in one taste with the fundamental nature of *dharmatā*, and one has gained the omniscient wisdom that knows all aspects.

However, through this process, the self-arising primordial wisdom is not produced by a cause, [416] because the *dharmakāya*—free from adventitious defilements—is the resultant freedom or the result of elimination (*bral ba'i 'bras bu*). It appears to be a new production from some causes, but only appears like this in the perception of those who haven't operated the transformation. Ultimately, within the nature of *dharmatā* or the essence of the *dharmakāya*, all phenomena are free of arising or disintegration and have always been equal and actually enlightened. They are actually enlightened, or we could say, they are primordially the peace of *nirvāṇa*; they are by nature clear light, and so on. This is the ultimate intent of the profound *sūtras*, which is difficult even for bodhisattvas on the *bhūmis* to fathom, needless to mention ordinary people. Simply trusting in the

* Khenpo Namdrol corrected *shes pa* to *shes bya* in the Tibetan text.

authentic intent of these teachings is praised as being the same as receiving a prophecy that you will never fall back, so you should have joy, interest, aspiration, and enthusiasm towards the authentic intent of these teachings.

In this way, merit derives from viewing the Tathāgata's dharmakāya as permanent. For example, the *Sūtra of the Samādhi of Final Peace Magic* says:

[417] Mañjuśrī, consider the merit any son or daughter of noble family accumulates by offering whatever can be wished for to the fourfold community*, in each world system in the ten directions, and for ten million kalpas of the gods. Compare that to another noble son or daughter who, in order to act appropriately, says, "The Tathāgata is permanent. The Tathāgata is changeless." The latter generates greater merit, immeasurably.

And in the *Sūtra of the Great Enlightenment*:

Kaśyapa, without being distracted, the sons and daughters of this noble family should always keep in mind these two phrases: "The Buddha is permanent" and "The Buddha is present."

And:

Those who earnestly consider that the inconceivable one is permanent are sources of refuge.

By contrast, those who view the body or kāya of the Tathāgata as impermanent have not even taken refuge; on top of that the problems arising from seeing the vajra kāya as impermanent are endless, [418] as the sūtras point out. We need to learn about these shortcomings from the scriptures, and develop a genuine confidence in the authentic meaning of these teachings.

In this way, the very essence of the sugatagarbha is free from all elaborations of conceptual constructs such as existence and nonexistence, or eternalist views and nihilist views. It is the indivisible unity of reality, the great equality of the single sphere (*thig le nyag cig*). In this natural state of things, all phenomena that appear and exist are the one taste of suchness. This natural state is seen as it is, which means that we see the authentic reality where nothing needs to be added or removed, and as a result, are free from all grasping. This is the excellent view that realizes the ultimate. From the *Sūtra Called the Teaching on the Factors Conducive to Enlightenment*:

Mañjuśrī, whoever sees that all phenomena are beyond absence of equality, free

* Monks and nuns, male and female lay practitioners.

of duality and arise without duality, this person has the authentic view.

From the *Sūtra Requested by Gaganagañja*:

Entities and non-entities are for the consciousness;
Whatever abides in the ultimate true nature,
The wise does not grasp at these
With any view that they are entities or non-entities.

In the *Collection of Bodhisattva Teachings Sūtra*:

[419] At the level of the ultimate, before the discerning wisdom (*shes rab*) and before the primordial wisdom (*ye shes*) of an *ārya*, there is not the slightest phenomenon to know, nothing to abandon, to meditate upon, or to actualize.

However, when properly clarifying differences by means of the valid cognition that analyzes the conventional, we come to know, for example:

- the truth as truth, such as knowing the noble path to be infallible;
- the false as false, such as knowing that those who teach liberation through meditating on a self are mistaken;
- the impermanent as impermanent, as when knowing that all compounded phenomena change instant by instant;
- the permanent as permanent, as when knowing that sugatagarbha or self-existing wisdom never changes in any way whatsoever;
- the non-existent as non-existent, such as knowing that the individual identity of things or self, and dualistic appearances have no inherent existence;
- the existent as existent, such as knowing the way things appear interdependently, the incontrovertible law of causality, [420] or knowing that the spontaneous sugatagarbha quality is naturally present within all sentient beings as their very nature, and so on.

This is how unmistaken wisdom apprehends the way things are on the conventional level. So to know this and integrate this knowledge brings immense qualities, because this is the root of the virtue that is the absence of ignorance.

In this way, the sugatagarbha is also taught in the sūtras by means of different Dharma teachings, both in general and with specific presentations. In particular, some teachings say that sentient beings do not have a self yet the sugatagarbha, which is beyond the conceptual elaboration of self and selflessness, is called the “great self”, for example. There are also teachings on the supreme transcendent qualities of purity, bliss, permanence, and self. They are presented so that we come to know the existing great non-abiding nirvāṇa that is peace, the cooling of passions, the excellence, the ultimate quality, the unchanging, and that it exists. Thus, the *Sūtra of the Great Enlightenment* says:

The "self" is the phenomenon which is real and genuinely permanent.
The owner free from change or transformation [421] is called the "self."

There are many such quotations.

Someone who simply develops aspiration, joy, interest, and enthusiasm towards the Buddha Nature when hearing such explanations about the profound sugatagarbha, already derives enormous benefit from it. As the *Sublime Continuum* says (378-381):

The wise one who has enthusiasm towards that object known to the buddhas,
Becomes a vessel gathering enlightened qualities.
Indeed to delight genuinely in those qualities that are inconceivable
Surpasses the merit of all sentient beings.

If we compare someone who, as he labours to reach enlightenment, offers
golden lands adorned with jewels,
Every day in number equal to all the atoms in the buddhafi elds, to the kings of
Dharma,
To someone who hears but one word of this and, having heard, has enthusiasm
for it,
The latter is the one who gains the greater merit, as his is much greater than the
merit that derives from generosity.

If we compare a wise person who, wishing to reach the unsurpassable
enlightenment, for numerous kalpas,
Keeps the flawless discipline effortlessly with body, speech and mind,
To someone who hears but one word of this and, having heard, has enthusiasm
for it,
[422] The latter is the one who gains the greater merit, as his is much greater
than the merit that derives from discipline.

If we compare someone who quenches the fire of destructive emotions raging in
the three worlds through his meditative concentration,
And perfects the attainment of the divine state and the Abode of Brahma, as a
means to supreme irreversible enlightenment,
To someone who hears but one word of this and, having heard, has enthusiasm
for it,
[422] The latter is the one who gains the greater merit, as his is much greater
than the merit that derives from meditative concentration.

Thus, there is great purpose in knowing and having genuine interest in this profound and difficult subject. This teaching on sugatagarbha, the irrevocable lion's roar of the very heart of the supreme vehicle, is an extremely profound and exceptional teaching. It is

difficult for those who have little previous training and who are not intelligent enough to have interest in these explanations. The *Sūtra of the Discussion on the Tathāgata* states:

Those with immature minds have doubts about
This wisdom of mine.
It does not stay with them;
Like an arrow shot in the sky falls down.

And, from the *Sūtra Gathering All the Threads*:

[423] Thus, because foolish people go to the lower realms blessed by the māras, they find faults in this. Their minds even find faults in the Dharma teachers who present the Tathāgata.

And from the *Sūtra Requested by Brahmadaṭṭa*:

When the Buddha teaches the Dharma perfectly,
Those who indulge in unwholesome actions think such teachings are wrong.
They do not trust the Dharma, and when doubts arise,
They go crazy for billions of kalpas.
Because their thoughts are devoid of trust in the Dharma, they commit negative actions;
Their minds are prey to aversion and anger and cannot be guarded.
They have abandoned everything that is meaningful,
And because of their lack of faith, hold on only to the dregs.
They are boastful and maintain a haughty attitude,
As the faithless do not bow down to anyone else.

And:

They run against the Dharma saying things that are incorrect,
As they obfuscate the teachings of the Victorious Ones.
They have doubts and qualms just like a non-Buddhist.
[424] As they squander and oppose the Dharma,
The faithless eventually abandon the teachings.

From the *Elimination of Lax Discipline Sūtra*:

Śāriputra, this world will be filled with imperfect people who will be solely preoccupied with everyday material concerns, intent on arguing, and only able to harm themselves and others.

Thinking over these quotations and other such teachings, I realise that people born in

these times of degeneration and at the extremity of the transmission line of the teachings, are mostly damaging the essential points of the supreme vehicle handed down through the long lineage, and make up Dharma teachings, as they fail to understand the four reliances. Furthermore, those who realise what a loss this is for this very life-force of the Mahāyāna path are extremely rare. Nonetheless, I was born at the extremity of the teaching lineage handed down by the vidyādharas of the Early Translation School. I have seen and heard many precious oral instructions of this lineage, and had the good fortune to take upon the crown of my head the lotus feet of many perfect [425] spiritual friends, such as the omniscient Dorje Zibji Tsal (Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo) who is the regent of Padmasambhava and is Mañjuśrī appearing in a human form. Thanks to this, and although I am of an age and intellect that is not mature, I have gained a bit of confidence in this profound subject.

This presentation of the Potential, properly showing how it is completely non-abiding since it is the indivisible unity [of appearance and emptiness] free from all extremes, yet naturally abiding as the dharmadhātu, is a lion's roar, for as the *Sutra Requested by Brahmaviśeṣacinti* says:

Son of the gods, a lion's roar is words spoken without attachment to any real phenomena. Words spoken with attachment to reality are not a lion's roar; they are a fox's whining. Teachers who hold onto a view are not endowed with the lion's roar.

The *Sūtra of the Great Enlightenment* also says:

The lion's roar resounds when a definitive explanation that all sentient beings have the buddha nature and that the Tathāgata is always abiding and is immutable, is presented.

And:

Son of noble family, [426] giving numerous explanations in empty places is not resounding the lion's roar; only when the presentation is given in the midst of a large assembly of learned and wise individuals is it called "resounding of the great roar of the lion". At this time, to roar like a lion is not to make an explanation saying that all phenomena are impermanent, suffering, selfless, and completely impure; the lion's roar resounds only when explaining that the Tathāgata is permanent, bliss, the self, and completely pure.

You can know from these quotations and many others the meaning of the expression "resounding the lion's roar", as they show at length the connection between this example and what it illustrates.

This faithful presentation of sugatagarbha may not accord with the teachings of some other high-minded individuals, but this should not disturb you because it lays out the authentic approach. As the *Introduction to the Middle Way* (VI.118) says:

The arguments in our treatises do not come from fascination with polemics;
They only show suchness to attain liberation.
If, when suchness is fully explained,
The views of some different traditions come apart, how can I be blamed?

[426] Giving this kind of explanation is also a way to protect the Dharma, because as the *King of Samādhi Sūtra* says:

"How do we protect the Dharma?" By refuting in a way that accords with reality those who contradict the Buddhadharma.

It is also upholding the doctrine. In the *Sūtra Requested by Gaganagañja*, the Buddha said:

Anyone who has found the characteristic features of the Victorious One's enlightenment
Is upholding the characteristics of the Dharma, and
Whoever fully experiences this spotless limit
Upholds the Dharma of all the buddhas.

If we uphold the Dharma in this way, we repay the kindness of the buddhas and at the same time we gain immeasurable merit. The *Sūtra of the Definitive Teaching on the Great Compassion of the Tathāgata* says:

So, by closely abiding with the Dharma of the Victorious One and,
Thanks to the Dharma, having renunciation and no interest in worldly things,
We uphold the Dharma of the Sugatas and
Repay the kindness of all the buddhas.

[428] And from the *Sūtra Requested by Gaganagañja*:

Even if he taught for ten billion kalpas
The limit of the Buddha's wisdom would not be reached.
Likewise, there is no measure to the merit
Of upholding the Tathāgata's sacred Dharma.

Although I have gained enough "confident eloquence" (*spobs pa*) to speak a little about
The teachings in the great scriptures of the supreme vehicle,
I am young in age and not matured by the training—
Who would rely upon the words of a crazy monk like myself?

These days, people follow those who are famous,
Lacking the intelligence to discriminate between correct and incorrect ways.
The demon of jealousy sows confusion in most of them,
So I realise this is not a time for perfect discourses.

However, because I constantly offer devotion
To my sublime teacher and my yidam deity residing on the lotus of my heart,
The words and the meaning of the excellent scriptures
Have dawned with extreme clarity within the expanse of my awareness.

When in one life, people are enthusiastic about training their minds with these perfect explanations,
In other births even taken after a long time and in other places, [429]
This genuine enthusiasm for the Buddha's way of teaching
Will increase like the waxing moon.

The wise rejoice at such a presentation
Of the most profound point,
A joy beyond the happiness that falls to the extremes of existence or peace.
This is therefore a feast for the assembly of fortunate ones!

May the lion's roar of the supreme vehicle
Presenting the unity of appearance and emptiness where all grasping at reality has been completely abandoned,
Subjugate the hordes of animals of bad views, and
Spread across the ten directions as the very essence (skt. *garbha*) of the Victorious One's teachings!

This came in response to the request of my Dharma brother Guṇa (Khenpo Yönten Gyatso), a guardian of the treasury of jewels that are the three trainings. He asked me to write whatever came to my mind to explain the verse starting, "Because the kāya of the perfect buddha is radiant. . . ". So, I, the monk Lodrö Drimé wrote it down spontaneously as it arose. May virtue abound!

The original text remained hidden among the other volumes of the Supreme Lama, and was found again after twenty-four years. At that time the great master Lungtok Tenpe Nyima was preparing woodblocks. Those who had earlier requested the teaching also gathered again, and with wisdom and intelligence asked if there were a need to add things or bring any other change to the text. As a result, Lodrö Drimé Jampel Gyepé Dorje (Mipham Rinpoche) prepared in two days a new copy essentializing a few sections from the original text, and adding a couple of important points that had not been mentioned. This took place at Gewar Drupkhang Düle Namgyal Ling during the waning moon of the Saga Dawa month (4th lunar month) in the Iron Rabbit year of the 15th

Calendrical Cycle. Mangalam!*

Translated by Gyurmé based on Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche's teachings. Edited by Ian Ives, Judith Amtzis and Chris Tomlinson.

* In 1892, probably in June.