

6. RECOLLECTING THE THREE JEWELS

This is the teaching known as the *Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels*. In this sutra, what does *jewel* mean? The Sanskrit word *ratna* has been translated into the Tibetan language as *kön-chog* (*dkon mchog*). The Tibetan translation of the word *ratna* is not literal. The translator at that time thought that if it were translated as jewel in Tibetan, there would be the possibility of it being understood as a gem, gold, silver, coral, and the like. So it is said that the translators decided to translate the term as *kön-chog*, which means excellent rarity or rare excellence. The translator himself revealed this. In the *Sublime Continuum* (*Uttaratantra*), when he was explaining the meaning of rare excellence, the Victorious Maitreya said, “Generally, an object that is very precious possesses six characteristics: it is rare, free from defilement, powerful, attractive, sublime, and unchanging.”

What does *recollecting* mean? Recollecting means keeping in mind each and every quality of the Three Jewels and recollecting them. If someone were to ask, “What are the benefits of recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels?” it is said that one of the benefits to arise through recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels is the production of faith. Examples of this faith in the Buddha are: producing faith in the Buddha who shows the path to temporary and ultimate bliss will lead you to taking refuge in the Buddha; it will lead you to producing the mind of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) for the sake of other sentient beings, which is a cause of attaining the state of complete buddhahood; and it will also motivate you to engage in virtuous actions, such as prostrations and making offerings to the buddhas. Producing faith in the Dharma will inspire you to study the Dharma. After understanding what you have studied, you then will see the necessity of putting it into practice and then you will really practice it. Producing faith in the Sangha will cause you

yourself to repeatedly aspire to gain the state of a bodhisattva, and it will also create a desire within you to make offerings to other bodhisattvas.

In brief, faith will create a desire within you to engage in virtuous actions. It will lead you to take refuge in the Three Jewels. It will also inspire you to perform such practices as the Seven-Limbed Practice, which is dedicated to the objects of refuge who are endowed with infinite qualities. If you do not have faith in the Three Jewels, no Dharma qualities will arise within your mind. In the sutras it is said, “A sprout will not arise from a burnt seed.”

There is enormous merit in remembering the qualities of the Three Jewels. Previously, when the Buddha Kaśyapa was teaching, a girl walked by that area and heard the Buddha teaching. In her mind she thought that the Buddha Kaśyapa had a very pleasing voice, and because of this she produced faith in the qualities of his voice. Due to the merit arising from this, in her next life she obtained rebirth in one of the heavens. So it was said by the Buddha. If you are able to gain such a result from just recollecting a single quality of a Buddha, then there is no question of the infinite merit accrued by studying, contemplating, and meditating on the qualities found in the sutras and their commentaries.

The Sanskrit word *sūtra* is translated in Tibetan as *do (mdo)*.¹ The sutras are to be understood as the collection of many different topics spoken by the Buddha. This particular sutra is known as the *Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels*. At the time when the translators started translating this sutra from Sanskrit into Tibetan, they added the words “Prostrations to the omniscient one.” This sutra is divided into three sections: recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, recollecting the qualities of the Dharma, and recollecting the qualities of the Sangha.

THE RECOLLECTION OF THE BUDDHA

There are two sources that explain the first of these, recollecting the qualities of Buddha, the Blessed One. These are the sutras of the Hinayana school and the sutras of the Mahayana school. According to the first, the Hinayana sutras, his qualities are described in the following manner:

In this way, Buddha, the Blessed One, is called the One Gone to Suchness, the Foe Destroyer, the Perfectly Accomplished Buddha, the One Who Possesses Knowledge and its Feet, the One Who has Gone to Bliss, the Knower of the World, the

Unsurpassable Charioteer Who Tames Sentient Beings, the
Teacher of Gods and Humans.

The part described here at the beginning of this sutra is the Hinayana sutra. Up to this point, it seems that there are different translations of the qualities of the Buddha. If we explain this in accordance with the word order in the Hinayana sutra, there are some differences. For example, the word *Buddha* is omitted in the Hinayana sutra, so a person trying to explain it as it is written would have a difficult time. For this reason, the words “In this way” and “the Blessed One” are placed side by side. Both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu similarly described it in their two commentaries on the sutra.

Among those nine qualities enumerated in the quote from the sutra, the first one is “the Blessed One” (Tibetan: *chom-den-dé/bcom ldan 'das*, Sanskrit: *bhagavān*). The meaning of this first quality is that the Buddha is called the Blessed One because he has destroyed the enemy that obstructs the attainment of enlightenment. Someone might ask, “What obstacle did the Buddha have?” Just when the Buddha was about to attain enlightenment (under the bodhi tree), the māra of the son of the gods created a lot of obstacles for him. Therefore, the Buddha’s main obstacle was the māra of the son of the gods. So, the Buddha is known as “the Blessed One” because he attained enlightenment after having defeated it. Furthermore, another meaning of “the Blessed One” is that the Buddha destroyed the three afflicting emotions (that is, desire, hatred, and ignorance), the twelve limbs of interdependent origination, and the two obscurations (that is, the emotional and cognitive obscurations). Therefore, he is called “the Blessed One.”

Normally, in the Sanskrit language, this term is known as *bhagavān*. The first part of this word, *bhaga*, means to destroy, fortunate, or excellence. The second part of that word, *vān*, means to possess. Therefore, it means the one who possesses the quality of destroying or the one who destroys the things that have to be destroyed. The second part of the word means the one who possesses those qualities that need to be possessed. Since he possesses excellence, he is called “the Conqueror.” So a person like this is known as *bhagavān*, or *chom-den* (*bcom ldan*).

Now, the syllable *dé* (*'das*) of *chom-den-dé* (*bcom ldan 'das*) was added on by the Tibetan translator. The reason is that he is using *chom-den* as a substitute for the word *leg-den* (*legs ldan*, “possessing goodness”). The term *leg-den* refers to worldly gods. In order that the word *leg-den* not be

understood to mean “worldly gods or higher beings,” the translator added the word *dé* to differentiate it from *leg-den* or *chom-den*. The word *chom* means defeating the four *māras*: the *māra* of the afflicting emotions, such as attachment and aversion; the *māra* of the aggregates, such as the impure aggregates arising from ignorance and the like; the *māra* of death, such as death caused by the power of one’s individual karma while not having any choice over the matter; and the *māra* of the son of the gods, who is a god within the realm of desire and who creates obstacles to Dharma practitioners. “The Conqueror” means that the Buddha has overpowered all four of these *māras*.

There is also another connotation of this known as the six excellences, which means six virtues. What do the six virtues mean? Firstly, it can mean six excellent qualities. The first of these six virtues is the excellent quality of power. Here, this denotes that no scholar is able to criticize the Buddha’s Dharma with logic and reasoning; they are not able to oppose it. The second excellent virtue is the excellent quality of the body. The Buddha’s body is very beautiful—even more beautiful than the body of a god. The third is the excellent quality of glory. This refers to the field of the Buddha’s activities. This field is extraordinarily vast, and the Buddha has an infinite number of perfectly trained disciples. The fourth is fame. His fame has spread to wherever his disciples reside. The fifth is the quality of transcendental wisdom. Through his wisdom, the Buddha has the realization of knowing all knowable things within relative and ultimate reality. He knows all things unerringly. The sixth excellent virtue is the quality of diligence. The Buddha can effortlessly and untiringly perform different activities for millions of sentient beings in one single moment.

The second epithet is “the One Gone to Suchness” (Tibetan: *dé-shin-sheg-palde bzhin gshes pa*; Sanskrit: *tathāgata*). The meaning of this appellation is unmistakably knowing the nature of all things as they are. Among all his qualities, the principal one is that the Buddha is the perfect teacher. For this reason the Buddha has this title, “the One Gone to Suchness.” Since no matter what teaching the Buddha might give, it always shows the true nature of all phenomena as it is, the Buddha has never taught anything that is a perverted wrong view. For this reason, the Buddha is called “the One Gone to Suchness.”

The third epithet is “Foe Destroyer” (Tibetan: *dra-chom-pal dgra bcom pa*, Sanskrit: *arhat*). The first syllable of this word in Tibetan, *dra* (*dgra*), refers to delusional afflicting emotions, such as attachment, hatred, and the like, which arise within our minds. Those afflicting emotions are

called enemies because they cause obstacles to the practice of virtue and throw you into suffering, and so they are called enemies. Since the buddhas have destroyed all the afflicting emotions, they are called “foe destroyers.” And so it shows that the Buddha has accomplished the perfection of the abandonment of the afflicting emotions.

The fourth epithet is “the Perfectly Accomplished One” (Tibetan: *yang-dag-par dzog-pé sang-gyé/ yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas*, Sanskrit: *samyaksambuddha*). This means the one who has perfectly accomplished all the qualities of enlightenment, the Buddha who has accomplished all knowledge, or the one who has realized the wisdom that knows all knowable things in a completely perfect way. This explanation shows that the Blessed One—the Conqueror—is the one who possesses the perfection of realization. It shows that the completely and perfectly enlightened Buddha is the teacher who is superior to other teachers. For example, śrāvaka foe destroyers possess the quality of a foe destroyer because they have abandoned all the afflicting emotions that arise within their own minds. However, they do not have the ability to teach without making some mistakes, and they do not know all phenomena as they truly are. Also, the teachers of the non-Buddhist schools, such as Hinduism, do not have all of these qualities (such as abandonment of the afflicting emotions within their own minds, teaching without faults, and knowing phenomena as they truly are).

The fifth epithet is “the One Who Possesses Knowledge and its Feet” (Tibetan: *rig-pa dang zhab-su-den-pa/ rig pa dang zhabs su ldan pa*). These two terms show the path to attain buddhahood. If someone were to ask, “Which path should we practice to attain buddhahood?” then this is elucidated in the following manner. First, to explain “knowledge” from the phrase “knowledge and its feet”: Suppose, for example, you need to walk to another country, in order to do this you need both eyes and feet. In this example, knowledge is analogous to eyes, and feet are analogous to the basis. When you walk, you look through your eyes and you move by your feet. Similarly, to attain the state of buddhahood you need both knowledge and basic practice. From among the three higher trainings, “knowledge” refers to the training of wisdom. “Feet” refers to the other two higher trainings—the training of moral conduct and the training of meditation. These last two play the role of being the basis or foundation of wisdom. In brief, this shows that through practicing the three higher trainings the state of buddhahood is attained.

In regard to wisdom, it is the mind that realizes the true nature of phenomena. Moral conduct is to be understood as the mind that is committed to relinquishing non-virtuous actions. In regard to meditation, since at this point we don't have freedom over our own mind, our mind is not able to rest in one place (that is, it is distracted). One-pointed concentration is needed to enable the mind to penetrate the true nature of phenomena. However, during the recitation of *sādhana*² or the performance of ritual, there are chances for the mind to rest in one place or focus on virtue. That very state of mind is called meditation.

Here is another way to explain this: "Knowledge" is understood as the right view from among the noble eightfold path, while "feet" are understood as the seven remaining limbs of the noble eightfold path. So, all eight parts of the noble eightfold path are needed to reach the city of liberation. Yet again, another way to explain this is: "Knowledge" refers to the three supernatural perfections of direct realization, and "feet" refer to the four achievements, such as the achievement of moral conduct.

The sixth epithet is "the One Who Has Gone to Bliss," known in Sanskrit as *sugata* (Tibetan: *dé-war-sheg-pal bde bar gshogs pa*). *Su* means bliss or happiness. *Gata* means gone. Further, this is explained as: By relying on a pleasant path, you arrive at a blissful destination. Therefore, he was given the name "the One Gone to Bliss." So, understand *sugata* to mean that you use a pleasing path to reach a happy destination. In some other traditions, the path is not pleasing or happy. For example, in the practice of Hinduism, some practitioners will immerse themselves for a long period of time in cold water during the winter, while others will sit or lie upon a bed of thorns. By these actions, they inflict much pain upon themselves. However, the followers of the Buddha do not practice Dharma in that manner. For them, through a pleasant path and through pleasant Dharma practices, they are able to attain buddhahood. Hindu practitioners claim that if you are too inclined toward the happiness of body and mind, then desire will arise. For that reason they believe that one should practice austerities. However, these types of spiritual practices are regarded as faulty by Buddhists. Why do we say this? The Buddha taught that when you are too happy, you become desirous. Similarly, by inflicting pain upon your body and mind, torturing yourself, you will become depressed and that will lead to anger. Therefore, the performance of virtuous activities is the method that will free you from the entrapment of worldly existence and allow you to gain the path that leads you to

liberation. Whatever practice you engage in, you should make sure that your action will lead you to the attainment of freedom from worldly existence. Otherwise, just engaging in austerities is meaningless and will never lead you to a higher result.

Further, if you look in detail at the meaning of the term *sugata*, then we see that *su* has the three meanings of good, irreversibility, and complete or without exception. *Gata* is to be understood as the Buddha's qualities of relinquishment and realization. If you were to explain the word *good* in relation to both the Buddha's quality of relinquishment and his quality of realization, then the first syllable *su* should be understood as "not relapsing" with respect to the quality of relinquishment. Once the Buddha has relinquished the afflicting emotions, they will not return because the Buddha's quality of relinquishment is a complete abandonment. For example, once you are cured from the disease of smallpox, this disease will never return for the rest of your life. Similarly, once you relinquish the afflicting emotions such as self-clinging, then no matter what external or internal conditions may appear, self-clinging will never arise within you again. For that reason the Buddha is called Sugata since he has gained perfect and complete relinquishment.

Next, we will explain the term *sugata* in relation to the Buddha's realizations. Since the Buddha perfectly realizes all knowable things, we address him as Sugata. This can be illustrated with the metaphor of a vase full of water where not even another drop can be added. Other teachers who impart the Dharma, such as arhats, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas, have irreversibly relinquished the obscuration of afflicting emotions. However, they do not possess the quality of realizing all knowable things. Therefore, teachers of other schools do not have the dual qualities that are suggested by the term *sugata*. The *Commentary on Valid Cognition* (*Pramāṇavārttika*) of Dharmakīrti attributes the characteristics good, irreversible, and complete to the Buddha's relinquishment and to his realizations, and provides numerous explanations regarding the Buddha's name and the significance of his qualities.

Then, following the words of the sutra, "the Knower of the World, the Unsurpassable Charioteer Who Tames Sentient Beings," are names that express the enlightened activity of the Buddha. Though these can be explained in detail, here we are explaining them briefly.

The seventh epithet is understood as "the Knower of the World" (Tibetan: *jig-ten khyen-pal/jig rten mkhyen pa*). Since the Buddha knows

the spiritual family and predispositions of all his disciples, he is addressed as “the Knower of the World.” The Buddha sees at all times which disciples have failed, which ones are deteriorating, which ones are progressing, which ones are about to go to lower births, and which ones have already arrived in the lower realms. The Buddha has the power to see all this. Further, he has the ability to see which ones need to be placed on the path to higher rebirth from the lower realms and which ones need to be placed on the path to liberation. So, Buddha is an omniscient one and is recognized as “the Knower of the World.”

The eighth epithet is known as “the Unsurpassable Charioteer Who Tames Sentient Beings” (Tibetan: *kyé-bu dul-wé kha-lo-gyur-wa la-na-mé-pa/skye bu 'dul ba'i kha lo sgyur ba bla na med pa*). Why is the Buddha known as “the Unsurpassable Charioteer?” Having seen the movements of sentient beings from birth to birth, the Buddha destroys the afflicting emotions of those living beings who are fortunate enough to be able to attain the path leading to the city of liberation. The Buddha will steer those beings along that path.

What does *charioteer* mean here? It is similar to one driving a horse cart, a car, or some other vehicle. In accordance with the predispositions and abilities of sentient beings that are to be tamed, the Buddha leads them onto the path of liberation. For this reason, the Buddha is addressed as “Charioteer and Tamer of Beings.”

“Unsurpassable” should be understood to mean that there is no one superior to the Buddha who can lead sentient beings to the state of liberation. In the sutras there are several reasons cited as to why the Buddha is matchless. Sentient beings who are difficult to discipline can be tamed only by the Buddha. Even those whose mental continuums were filled with delusion were able to be tamed by the Buddha. For example, the Buddha’s younger brother, Nanda, had a difficult time being apart from his wife Puṇḍarīkā due to his attachment to her. Through very skillful means, the Buddha convinced his brother to become a monk. He then led him in the practice of meditation, and finally Nanda attained the state of arhatship. Another case involved Aṅgulimāla (“Garland of Fingers”), a frightful and ferocious killer whose mind was filled with anger and hatred. Just hearing his name brought great terror to the hearts of people. Generally speaking, Aṅgulimāla was a very famous person due to his renown as a fearsome mass murderer. However, through the Buddha’s assistance, he became a monk and entered the path. Even then,

he still frightened people. One time he was listening to the Buddha's teaching along with an assembly of others who included King Prasenajit of Śrāvastī. During the teaching Aṅgulimāla happened to cough, and even this caused the king to tremble. In yet another case, there is the story of a dimwitted Sthavira monk called Kṣudrapaṇṭaka. During his studies his teacher asked him to memorize the syllables *om* and *bhu*. When he tried to memorize the syllable *om*, he would forget the syllable *bhu*. When he memorized *bhu*, then he would forget *om* again. Even this person was trained by the Buddha. In order to purify his obscurations the Buddha first had him clean the shrine room of the monastery. Through this and other skillful means, the Buddha was able to cause him to purify his afflicting emotions and obscurations. Later, he became a learned monk. Not only that, but the Buddha placed him in meditation practice, and later he attained the state of arhatship. In a similar way, there was another Sthavira monk by the name of Tengyé Ösung who was a very proud and arrogant person, because he possessed many qualities, such as clairvoyance and the ability to display miraculous feats. In order to discipline him, the Buddha himself displayed many miraculous acts. Even though he was impressed by so many miraculous feats, this monk continued to believe that he had more special qualities than the Buddha. However, since the Buddha continued to display even more miracles, he finally generated true faith in the Buddha. He requested teachings from the Buddha and eventually attained the state of arhatship.

The ninth epithet is “the Teacher of Gods and Humans” (Tibetan: *lha-dang mi-nam-kyi-tön-pal lha dang mi rnams kyi ston pa*). Generally, the Buddha gives teachings to all sentient beings, without bias and regardless of their spiritual propensity. However, though the Buddha teaches all beings, gods and humans are the only two types of disciples who are capable of practicing the path of liberation. Other than god and human foe destroyers (that is, arhats), there is no other category of foe destroyers, such as animal foe destroyer. Therefore, the principal disciples of the Buddha are gods and humans. For this reason, the Buddha is addressed as “the Teacher of Gods and Humans.” This last phrase in the Hinayanists' rendition of this sutra refers to the Buddha being known as “the Blessed One.”

If someone were to ask, “Who is this person endowed with these nine qualities that have been explained here?” we would have to say that this unique person who possesses these nine qualities is none other than the

Buddha, the Blessed One. The meaning of the Sanskrit term *bhagavān* can sometimes be interpreted as “known as.” Therefore, without using the term “the blessed one,” it is all right to translate the phrase as follows: the one who possesses the nine qualities is “known as the Buddha.”

What is the meaning of the word *buddha*? There are two syllables in Tibetan for the word *buddha*: *sang* and *gyé* (Tibetan: *sangs rgyas*). *Sang* refers to awakening from sleep. *Gyé* refers to the full blossoming of a flower. Therefore, *sang-gyé* means awakening from the sleep of ignorance and having developed the understanding of knowable things. Consequently, in the Sanskrit language, the name Buddha can be understood as either of these meanings. In Tibetan, however, “Buddha” is translated as *sang-gyé*. Ārya Asaṅga said that there are three qualities within the word *buddha*. Since the Buddha himself has awakened from the sleep of ignorance, he possesses the perfection of relinquishment. Since the Buddha causes others to awaken from the sleep of ignorance, he possesses the perfection of compassion. Since the Blessed One has developed his own realization and wisdom, he possesses the perfection of realization that sees all things as they are. In this way, Asaṅga has explained the term *buddha* in relation to these three qualities.

Those who have not studied Buddhist philosophy think that studying the Dharma is a very difficult task. For this reason, some of you may think that you are not able to study the Dharma. However, it is not only the study of the Dharma which may appear difficult, but also any worldly matter that you have not studied will not be easy to understand at first. However, if you become accustomed to it, difficult worldly matters as well as the study of the Dharma will become easier to understand. There is no task you cannot accomplish if you apply appropriate diligence. We should all study the Dharma. It is especially important for the monks and nuns involved in Dharma practice to study the Dharma first. Generally speaking, the study of the Dharma is not something that should be done solely by monks and nuns. It is very important for all humans who aspire to gain happiness and who wish to discard suffering—whether monks or nuns, female or male lay practitioners—to study and practice the Dharma. Some people may have studied and understood the Dharma, and a few individuals with [sufficient] merit may have actively engaged in its practice. Still, even if you do not practice but only listen to the Dharma, the seed of liberation is sown within your mind continuum.

The second section or latter part of the *Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels* concerning the Buddha reads,

That Blessed One, the Buddha, is the One Gone to Suchness.
He arose through corresponding causes of merit, and his root
of virtue is inexhaustible.

The meaning of this is as follows. Generally, we will not be able to keep this human body forever. One day this body will perish. In that way, even the śrāvaka foe destroyer who has gained great realization will also die one day, and his ability to benefit sentient beings is limited. However, even though his physical body may not be present, the enlightened activities of the Buddha remain forever, without disruption, until samsara is emptied.

If someone were to ask, “Why is this so?” there are two reasons that explain why the Buddha’s enlightened activities will endure in this universe. The first reason is shown by the earlier sentence of this sutra that reads, “He arose through corresponding causes of merit.” “Merit” refers to virtue. The resultant enlightened activities of the Buddha are the results that correspond to the causes of numerous virtuous deeds. It is taught that samsaric beings who act in virtuous ways, such as upholding their moral discipline, can expect, generally speaking, five different types of results. Among these is the fully ripened result of virtue. It is said that some living beings in samsara may engage in virtues, such as maintaining moral conduct, for the sake of attaining a human birth in their next life. If they engage in this type of virtue along with making the aspiration, “May I attain human birth in my next life,” consequently they will attain that higher rebirth. This is known as the fully ripened result of that virtuous activity. The virtue which served as its cause will be exhausted, and it will not carry on further than the next lifetime. The Buddha’s enlightened activity, on the other hand, is the result corresponding to the virtue he accumulated at the time when he was a bodhisattva. The virtues accumulated through his enlightened activities were not for the purpose of his simply gaining a human rebirth. Instead, he made an aspiration that the results of his actions would benefit of all sentient beings.

The meaning of the phrase “corresponding causes of merit” in relation to action (that is, karma) is explained as a result which is similar to whatever action was performed. For example, whatever virtuous action that you perform now will result in a similar virtuous action in the future. Likewise, whatever non-virtuous action you are getting accustomed to

now will result in a similar non-virtuous action or behavior in the future. So, this is known as “the result corresponding to its cause.” Therefore, the Buddha accumulates merit by such actions as maintaining moral conduct for the purpose of continuing to perform similar virtuous actions in the future for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, whatever result is gained from that would be turned into an aspiration, such as, “May I continue to engage in the practice of generosity for the sake of others” or “May I be able to continue to maintain moral conduct for the sake of others.” The Buddha would make such aspirations so that he would continue to obtain the result corresponding to its cause.

Since the Buddha has made an aspiration not to waste the root of virtue, his virtue will never be exhausted. Due to this, it is said that the Buddha and his enlightened activities are never spent. The merit arising from such selfless activities produces great merit that is endless. So, the second reason that explains why the Buddha’s enlightened activities will endure in this universe is shown by the words of the sutra, “his root of virtue is inexhaustible.” So, whatever virtues that are performed to gain buddhahood for the sake of others are never exhausted or wasted.

The ultimate result that one gains by practicing the path of the Hinayana is the result of a foe destroyer. When one attains the state of a foe destroyer, one’s roots of virtue are exhausted with entering into the śrāvaka’s parinirvāṇa, whereas through practicing the Mahayana path, one gains the state of ultimate buddhahood. Having attained the state of a Buddha, the root of virtue never becomes exhausted.

The subsequent words of the sutra read:

He is adorned with patience and is the foundation of the treasures of merit. His body is adorned with the noble minor marks and decorated with the flower blossoms of the noble major marks. His conduct corresponds to the levels of enlightened activities, his appearance is not unpleasant to one’s sight and is delightful to devoted aspirants.

With respect to the Buddha, these six expressions show how he benefits sentient beings by manifesting the various *kāyas*.

The first two expressions, “He is adorned with patience and is the foundation of the treasures of merit,” illustrate the causes from which the Buddha’s enlightened bodies are produced. Two causes are explained. These are the root or main cause and the lesser branch causes. The root or

main cause is the one that produces the overall body of the Buddha. The lesser causes mean those that produce the individual aspects of the body. The first phrase, “adorned with patience,” refers to the root cause. The second phrase, “the foundation of the treasures of merit,” refers to the cause of the aspects. Generally speaking, the word *patience* means that no matter what difficulties you may face, you do not become angry and your mind does not become disturbed. In brief, “adorned with patience” signifies that the beautified body of the Buddha arises from the cause of patience. Generally, if you cultivate patience, you will gain a beautiful body as a result. In contrast to that, if you display a black face with anger and resentment, you will be born with an ugly body as a result. Not only will that be the result in this life, but also in the next one. The beautiful body of the Buddha is a result of his meditating on patience again and again at the time when he was practicing on the path as a bodhisattva. Due to that, his body is described as “adorned with patience.”

Anger is a very major fault. It takes us a long time to eradicate anger from its roots. Having extensively reflected on the shortcomings and faults of anger, we think that we should overcome anger. And therefore it is very important to begin to the practice of cultivating patience starting from today. How are we to practice patience? For example, even if we are being killed by others, we should try not to be defiled by anger. Instead we must try not to engage in negative, non-virtuous activities of body, speech, and mind. This was said by the Buddha. Even if someone robs us of all our belongings, we should wish that these things be of benefit to them by reflecting, “By the merit of this generous gift of my belongings, may those robbers themselves become the treasure of generosity.” Thus, instead of letting anger arise, we should try to produce patience.

From the phrase “the foundation of the treasures of merit,” the word *merit* means virtuous action. The word *treasures* refers to inexhaustibleness. The word *foundation* refers to the source from which arise many other merits. In brief, this phrase shows that the individual aspects of the Buddha’s beautiful body are the result of the accumulation of numerous merits. It is said that ten times the merit of all sentient beings and the merit that is the cause of producing one pore of the Buddha’s body are equivalent. One hundred times the merit that is able to produce all the pores of the Buddha’s body will produce one of the minor marks of enlightened perfection. One thousand times the merit that produces all the eighty minor marks of enlightened perfection produces one of the thirty-two major marks of enlightened perfection. Among the thirty-two

major marks of enlightened perfection, twenty-nine of them can individually be produced by one thousand times the merit that produces all the eighty minor marks of enlightened perfection. Now, ten thousand times the merit that produces each of the other twenty-nine major marks of enlightened perfection will produce the curl of hair located between the eyebrows of the Buddha. One hundred thousand times the merit that produced the curl of hair will produce the *uṣṇīṣa* (that is, the protuberance at the top of the Buddha's head). Ten million times the merit needed to produce the *uṣṇīṣa* will produce the “conch of Dharma,” which seems to signify the Buddha's voice.

The phrases “adorned with the noble minor marks” and “decorated with the flower blossoms of the noble major marks” explain the very nature of the main structure of the Buddha's body. The minor and major marks are the physical characteristics that beautify the Buddha's body, the minor marks being the subordinate ones while the major marks are the principal ones. There are eighty minor marks, such as coppery-colored fingernails. “Adorned with the noble minor marks” means that the Buddha's body is adorned and beautified by these eighty minor marks.

The “major marks” refer to the shape of the wheels on the Buddha's palms and feet, the *uṣṇīṣa* on the crown of the head, and the like. “Decorated with the flower blossoms of the noble major marks” means that just as any physical body is beautiful when adorned with a garland of flowers, so similarly those major marks, such as the wheels on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, make the Buddha's body beautiful.

The phrase “His conduct corresponds to the levels of enlightened activities” indicates that the Buddha possesses excellent conduct. “Corresponds to the levels” indicates that the Buddha behaves in ways that correspond to the spiritual level of those that encounter him. So, it corresponds to their intellectual limitations. No matter what behavior or conduct the Buddha is engaged in, those who behold him always find him attractive, pleasing, and soothing to their minds. In brief, whatever action the Buddha is performing, such as walking, sitting, sleeping, talking, etc., his enlightened activities are calming to the mind of the observer.

The words “his appearance is not unpleasant to one's sight” describe the enlightened physical activities of the Buddha. What are the physical actions of the Buddha? When someone sees the Buddha and observes his behavior, they think that he is truly an exceptionally noble being, and

clear faith and devotion arise within them. Therefore, disciples who meet him always see him as an agreeable sight and not displeasing to look upon.

The three phrases of the sutra, “delightful to devoted aspirants,” “his wisdom cannot be overpowered by others,” and “his powers are invincible,” all demonstrate the types of enlightened activities the Buddha performs for the sake of the different types of disciples. The essence of this conveys the idea that the Buddha receives seekers of the spiritual path in different ways. Generally speaking, there are two types of seekers who go to see him. One is the type who sees him out of devotion. The other type of seeker is the one who goes with the idea of competing with him.

The first type, the one with devotion, is further divided into two groups: The first kind is, for example, someone who has only heard about the Buddha but does not know anything about his qualities. So, out of curiosity that person wants to see what the Buddha is like in actuality. Due to that thought, a virtuous seed or latency that had been planted previously in his mind ripened and enabled him to see the Buddha. Even that type of person is known as one who possesses what is known as “desiring faith.” This type of person does not possess faith in the real sense. The reason for this is that it is just a desire to see the Buddha. Real desiring faith is as follows: One hears of the qualities of the Buddha and comes to understand those qualities. Due to that, there arises faith in the Buddha. When this type of faith occurs within a person, it gives rise to the ripening of the root of virtue that already exists within that person’s mind continuum. For this reason that person now goes to see the Buddha. This is the true meaning of faith. It is for this reason that two kinds of desiring faith are described.

These are the two types of people who possess desiring faith. When either of them is in the Buddha’s presence, they become very happy—hence the sutra says “delightful.” People who engage in meditation, for example, experience both great physical and great mental joy. Similarly, at the time when people, out of devotion, come to see the Buddha, they become physically and mentally delighted and happy. Therefore the sutra says “delightful to devoted aspirants.”

The two subsequent lines from the sutra read,

His wisdom cannot be overpowered by others,
and his powers are invincible.

These lines indicate the people who go to see the Buddha with the intention of competing with him. They are also divided into two groups: the first is the person who wants to debate with the Buddha due to that person's pride in his knowledge of logic among the five sciences. His intention is to defeat the Buddha through his knowledge. The second type of person is one who is physically very strong. This person has the intention of defeating the Buddha through the art of wrestling.

Among these two, the first, the person who wants to defeat the Buddha through his skills in debate, is unable to do so once he finds himself in the presence of the Buddha. The reason for this is that the Buddha's wisdom cannot be overpowered or defeated by the wisdom of any other living being. The second person is described in the sutra where it reads, "his powers are invincible." Even though a person wants to physically compete with the Buddha, there is no way the Buddha's physical strength can be defeated by gods or men. The Buddha's body possesses matchless strength. There were many people who physically competed with him, but no one succeeded in overpowering him.

The next epithets from the sutra read,

He is the teacher of all sentient beings and the father of all bodhisattvas. He is the king of all noble beings and the captain who leads others to the city of nirvana.

These four epithets show that the Buddha is capable of helping sentient beings by performing any kind of task that will fulfill their needs. The first, "the teacher of all sentient beings," indicates benefiting sentient beings by giving all of them Dharma teachings. For beings in the three lower realms, the Buddha will radiate rays of light from his body. On occasion, the Buddha will go to the hells and other lower realms so that beings may meet him, and by the sight of his body and the light rays, those beings feel happy. This sighting of the Buddha purifies their unwholesome actions, and they gain rebirth into the higher realms. This is the manner in which the Buddha helps living beings in the lower realms. In order to assist those beings who live in the higher realms but who have not entered the path that leads to liberation, the Buddha establishes them in the practice of moral conduct and giving. It is in this way that the Buddha benefits these living beings. For people who have the opportunity to gain liberation since they have already entered the path, the Buddha gives teachings that lead them directly to liberation.

“The father of all bodhisattvas” signifies the idea that the bodhisattvas are the children of the Buddha, and the Buddha is the father of the bodhisattvas. It is said that the Buddha performs the duties of a father to those bodhisattvas.

The word *noble*” in the phrase “the king of all noble beings” refers to the noble beings among the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas of the Hinayana Vehicle. This phrase actually shows that for these beings the Buddha plays the role of a king, and the noble beings are like attendants or subjects of the Buddha. For example, the universal monarch has many queens as well as many sons. One of these sons possesses distinguishing marks on his body. The universal monarch would give that son his most precious possessions, especially the precious wheel, and choose him as his successor. In that way, that very son is the son of the universal monarch and the universal monarch is the father of that son. Similarly, since the Buddha transfers all his special qualities to the bodhisattvas, the Buddha becomes the father and the bodhisattvas become the sons. Since the other sons of the universal monarch listen to their father and obey whatever he asks them to do, they become like subjects to him. In an analogous way, since the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas carefully observe the rules and engage in Dharma practices, such as maintaining the moral conduct taught by the Buddha, they obtain their targeted results. So those śrāvakas are the subjects of the Buddha, and the Buddha is like their king. The explanation given above is in relation to those who have already entered the path.

For those three types of beings who have not entered the path of liberation, the Buddha is given the title “captain.” So, the next section of the sutra reads, “the captain who leads others to the city of nirvana.” Conforming to their individual dispositions and tendencies, the Buddha guides those beings who have not entered into the path leading to the city of nirvana. For these beings, the Buddha plays the role of a captain. The term *captain* is used to show that he is the leader of all those guides who take people to other cities.

The next section of the sutra reads,

He is the possessor of infinite transcendental wisdom, inconceivable eloquence, perfectly pure speech, a melodious voice, a body that one can never be satiated to behold, and a matchless body.

These six epithets here describe the Buddha's altruistic activities for the benefit of others, and the different skillful means or tools he uses to perform enlightened activities. Among all the spiritual activities performed by the Buddha, the giving of teaching is the most important one.

Among the six different types of skillful methods, the first is the enlightened activity of the mind of the Buddha that is shown by the phrase, "infinite transcendental wisdom." This means that since knowable things have no limit, the Buddha's transcendental wisdom and mind that pervades and knows them all is also limitless. Therefore the Buddha is acknowledged as the possessor of immeasurable transcendental wisdom.

The three phrases that read "inconceivable eloquence, perfectly pure speech, a melodious voice" exemplify the three enlightened activities of speech. Within these, the phrase "inconceivable eloquence" shows that the Buddha possesses self-composure that is never exhausted and is without fault. When speaking about eloquence, we see two types: expressiveness in relation to words, and accurateness in relation to meaning.

The first, expressiveness in connection to words, means that no matter how much explanation is needed to explain even a single term, the Buddha can give an explanation lasting many eons. Even then, his explanation of that term would not be exhausted. The second, accurateness in relation to meaning, means, for example, that the Buddha has the ability to answer in a single moment the hundreds of thousands of questions asked over a period of many eons by hundreds of thousands of disciples. His capacity to give answers is inexhaustible.

The Buddha is able to answer all questions asked of him in one utterance, though disciples may hear different replies in accordance with their own needs and abilities. For example, in the collection of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka (The Three Baskets) there are three different sutras that were taught by the Buddha. Although the Buddha gave just one teaching, it was heard and understood in different ways and was thus recorded as three separate sutras.

The phrase "perfectly pure speech" indicates there are no mistakes in the Buddha's speech and that his speech is not unpleasant to listen to. The Buddha's voice does not have the flaws of being imprecise or faltering. In brief, his speech is free of all defects and possesses all qualities. Therefore, one can say that the Buddha's body, speech, and mind possess all capabilities and are free from all faults.

The next phrase, “a melodious voice,” indicates that the Buddha’s voice is pleasing and calming to listen to. The melodious speech of the Buddha is said to possess five or sixty types of qualities. In either case, the Buddha’s speech also has inconceivable qualities.

One epithet is identified as “a body that one can never be satiated to behold” because even if you look at the Buddha’s body for a long time, still the mind of joy you receive from this is not satiated. Since the Buddha’s body is not unpleasant, you just feel like looking at it again and again.

Next, we have the appellation “matchless body.” This designation shows that the form, the physical body, of the Buddha is unlike any other. We should understand that the Buddha always manifests himself in a physical form similar to those beings he is attempting to train. For example, if the disciples are from the realm of desire and are humans—that is to say, womb-born beings—the Buddha himself manifests as having been born from a womb. His physical form and his behavior will be in accord with those whom he is training. In this way the Buddha is never affected by the faults of the place where he dwells or where he performs the benefits of sentient beings.

There are three realms of existence where the Buddha accomplishes the benefit of sentient beings. Within these three realms of existence, the Buddha usually dwells in the realm of desire and the realm of form for the sake of sentient beings. The reason for this is that the principal method of the Buddha is to give teachings in order to train sentient beings. The teaching has to reach the ear of the disciple who is receiving the teaching. Since living beings dwelling in those two realms have physical bodies, the Buddha bestows teachings there. Because sentient beings in the formless realm do not possess physical bodies, the Buddha does not abide or teach there.

The next section reads,

He is unaffected by desire, unaffected by form, and unmixed
with formless ones.

The word *desire* in the phrase “He is unaffected by desire” is to be understood as the realm of desire. The realm of desire here means the place where we human beings reside. The greatest fault of this realm is our craving for and attachment to sensual pleasures. Even though the Buddha

lives there for the sake of sentient beings, he is affected neither by the fault of craving for this realm's happiness and sense pleasures, nor by the fault of reacting with anger.

The phrase “unaffected by form” refers to the realm of form, which is the dwelling place of the higher gods. Here the gods have many attachments, such as dwelling in one-pointed meditative states, enjoying the celestial palaces where they abide, and the like. Even though the Buddha visited and taught in this realm, he was never affected by any of the beatific qualities found there. In this way, the Buddha remained unstained by the faults of the realm of form.

The Buddha never actually took birth into the formless realm, and he was free from the afflicting emotions of that realm. For that reason, the Buddha is synonymously known as “unmixed with formless ones.”

The following part of the sutra demonstrates that the Buddha accomplishes the benefits of sentient beings without becoming attached to any part of this phenomenal world. This shows that the Buddha is never plagued by the afflicting emotions that are dependent upon attachment to the aggregates, elements, or sensory perceptions.

The next part of the text states,

He is completely liberated from all suffering,
thoroughly liberated from the aggregates,
and unaffected by the elements.

He has disciplined the sources of sensory perceptions.

This first part, “completely liberated from all suffering,” refers to being free from the aggregates, elements, and bases of sensory perceptions since all three of these are of the nature of suffering. However, this phrase is not found in some versions of this sutra. The next part, which reads “thoroughly liberated from the aggregates,” states that the Buddha is free from all faults in relation to the five aggregates. The next section says “unaffected by the elements.” This refers to the set of eighteen elements or *dhatus* (that are a part of human existence). Being unaffected means that the Buddha does not have faults that arise from the eighteen elements. For example, in relation to the element of form, there does not arise attachment or aversion to forms. Therefore, it is said that Buddha does not have any faults arising from perceiving the elements, such as form. Further, the phrase “he has disciplined the sources of sensory perceptions”

shows that the Buddha is free from the flaws and faults of the twelve sources of sensory perceptions.

He has thoroughly cut all entanglements.

He is completely liberated from all suffering and freed from craving.

He has crossed the river.

The following four phrases explain that the Buddha has already perfectly relinquished all afflicting emotions. For that reason he is known as the one who possesses the perfection of relinquishment. The word *entanglements* in the next phrase, “he has thoroughly cut all entanglements,” refers to the faults of the unwholesome afflicting emotions, such as desire. Since we are deeply habituated and shackled to the afflicting emotions that are like the knots of threads and ropes, it is difficult to untie ourselves from them. So for ordinary beings it is difficult to relinquish the knot-like afflicting emotions. It is said, though, that the Buddha is the one who has abandoned the afflicting emotions.

The word *suffering* from the phrase “He is completely liberated from all suffering” means to be free from the faults of the afflicting emotions. Why is this so? The more you are habituated to the afflicting emotions the more your mind is troubled by them. However, it is said that the Buddha does not possess this kind of defilement. So, the Buddha is “freed from craving” due to his relinquishment of craving and desire.

The word *river* in the phrase “He has crossed the river” is a general term for the afflicting emotions. For instance, a river with a strong current can freely carry away objects, such as logs. Similarly, overpowered by the afflicting emotions, sentient beings are carried away by the great ocean of samsaric sufferings. Therefore, here *river* is used as a metaphor for the afflicting emotions. And since the Buddha has relinquished those afflicting emotions, he is known as one who “has crossed the river.”

If the meaning of these previous four phrases is explained in relation to desire in a more explicit way, it is shown that there are two different types of desire. The first is the desire to meet someone or with something that you have not previously encountered. The other type of desire is the desire to enjoy what you already possess.

The abovementioned *craving* in the line “liberated from craving” refers to craving to obtain something you have not yet acquired. When you

then come in contact with that object of your desire and your thoughts are full of yearning, your mind becomes bound by the object of desire. Due to this, the neurotic entanglement of the afflicting emotion of desire arises. It is said that the Buddha has relinquished both craving and the emotional entanglements that are based on craving.

When you obtain the object of your desire and enjoy it, you become more attached to it. Due to this the afflicting emotion of desire greatly increases and becomes a powerful river of passion. Since the buddhas have already crossed that type of river, they never experience the consequences, such as mental agony, profound suffering, or unhappiness.

Having perfected transcendental wisdom, he abides in the transcendental wisdom of all the buddhas of the past, future, and present.

Not abiding in nirvana, he dwells in the state of perfection.

He dwells in the state of perfection that sees all sentient beings.

These are the great perfect attributes and virtues of the buddhas, the blessed ones.

The following four phrases explain the perfection of the realization of the Buddha. There are three types of wisdom possessed by the Buddha. The first is the wisdom that is all-knowing; the second is the wisdom that is unmistakable; and the third is the non-abiding wisdom.

The first type is shown by the phrase “Having perfected transcendental wisdom.” Generally, transcendental wisdom refers to the mind of the noble ones. It also refers to the transcendental wisdom that has gone beyond, that is, the Perfection of Wisdom. Perfecting transcendental wisdom means bringing transcendental wisdom to its furthest limit. Commonly, all phenomena are designated to possess two different characteristics: nature and special attributes. We understand “nature” to be the basis of the features of all phenomena, starting from form and going up to omniscience. We understand “special attributes” to be their salient features. For example, the nature of matter is form itself. The special attribute of form refers to its qualities, such as beauty, ugliness, and the like. Since the Buddha directly perceived all of these, that type of knowledge is called the transcendental wisdom that is all-knowing.

The second aspect, unmistakable transcendental wisdom, refers to the idea that there are many buddhas who reside in different buddha fields or in different countries. Since these buddhas reside in different places, they will appear in different forms—some being tall, some short, etc.—in accordance with the place they are residing. However, there are not the slightest differences as far as their mind of *dharmakāya* is concerned. It is not possible to speak of greater or lesser qualities.

“Abides in the transcendental wisdom of all the buddhas of the past, future, and present” means that there is no contradiction in the wisdom and qualities of their minds. The transcendental wisdom of all the buddhas is one and the same, and the buddhas abide therein.

Third, the non-abiding wisdom is expressed with the sutra’s phrase “Not abiding in nirvana.” The wisdom of relinquishment is the fruit of the Hinayana Vehicle, whereas the wisdom of the Buddha, the Blessed One, does not abide in the parinirvāṇa of the Hinayana Vehicle. In other words, the Buddha does not abide in the nirvana of the śrāvaka. “He dwells in the state of perfection” refers to the Buddha’s abiding in the Mahayana nirvana, the ultimate state of enlightenment. This “state of perfection” is the true nature of mind that is purified of temporary stains. All buddhas are abiding in that ultimate state.

When the text states, “he dwells in the state of perfection that sees all sentient beings,” this is explained to mean that the buddhas abide in three different kāyas. The dharmakāya (“dharma body”) of the Buddha looks over all sentient beings, the sambhogakāya (“bliss body”) benefits the great bodhisattvas, and the nirmāṇakāya (“emanation body”) performs beneficial actions for the sake of living beings in the three realms of existence. In this way, since the *rupakāya* (that is, the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya) and the dharmakāya benefit sentient beings, these three kāyas are known as the state in which he looks after all sentient beings. Thus it is said in the sutra.

All that has been explained up to this point illustrates “the great perfect attributes and virtues of the buddhas, the blessed ones.” What does *perfect* mean? The qualities that have been described are perfect because there are no exaggerations in terms of saying something that is not there. It shows that those are the real qualities the Buddha possesses. For example, when going for refuge, the Three Jewels of the Buddhist refuge are seen to possess great qualities, whereas the teaching and teachers of other schools not only lack similar qualities, but also contain faults. Therefore, just as

the great qualities of the Buddha are revealed here, so you should reflect on them and understand that our teacher, the Buddha, possesses those great qualities that have just been explained.

THE RECOLLECTION OF THE DHARMA

The noble Dharma is virtuous in the beginning, virtuous in the middle, and virtuous in the end. It possesses wholesome meaning, wholesome words, and is unmixed. It is utterly complete, utterly pure, and utterly spotless. This doctrine, well taught by the Blessed One, is perfectly seen, free from sickness, never-ending, praiseworthy, meaningful to behold, and understood by the self-aware discriminating wisdom of learned ones. It is well based on the Blessed One's teachings of moral discipline and renunciation that lead to the state of perfect buddhahood. Lacking contradictions, it is all-inclusive, reliable, and puts an end to going.

The meaning of the term “holy Dharma” should be understood in the following way: generally speaking, *dharma* means all phenomena. Among them, the best Dharma is known as the noble Dharma, and this holy Dharma refers to the teaching of the enlightened one. The sutra states: “The noble Dharma is virtuous in the beginning, virtuous in the middle, and virtuous in the end.” In the beginning, the Buddha discusses the training of moral conduct. This moral conduct should be practiced first among all the various practices of the path. Since that very practice is revealed in the Buddha's scriptures, the noble Dharma is called “virtuous in the beginning.” The word *virtue* itself refers to faultless and undeceiving. Regardless of your status as being ordained or lay, those who enter into the Dharma path should possess the basis of moral conduct in the beginning. Then, in the middle, you should cultivate concentration or calm abiding (Skt. *samatha*). For this reason, the Buddha's Dharma is called “virtuous in the middle.” The final or ultimate practice among the three trainings is cultivating the wisdom that realizes selflessness. Since the wisdom that realizes selflessness is shown, therefore the Buddha's teaching is spoken of as “virtuous in the end.”

Also, in the Hindu teachings, the practice of the three trainings is explained. However, the training that is expounded there does not lead to

the attainment of liberation. Since the three trainings spoken of by the Buddha are able to lead the faithful to liberation from the causes and results of samsara, these three trainings are known as superior trainings.

The scriptural Dharma of the Buddha unmistakably explains all subjects in accordance with the true nature of phenomena. Therefore, this Buddhadharmā “possesses wholesome meaning.”

The language of the scriptures is free from poetic expressions and figures of speech that are difficult to understand. The teachings are expressed in common, colloquial language, easy to understand. Therefore, they are said to be “wholesome words.” This passage explains the qualities of the scriptural Dharma.

The qualities of the Dharma of realization are shown by the expressions “unmixed” and “utterly complete, utterly pure, and utterly spotless.” The first, “unmixed,” refers to the idea that the Buddhadharmā is not mixed with, or not corrupted by, the teachings of other traditions. Therefore, it is said that the Buddhadharmā is unique. For example, Dharma practices like that of concentration can be found in the mental continuums of Hindu as well as Buddhist practitioners. However, there does not exist one single extraordinary Dharma [realization] that the mind-stream of Buddhist practitioners would not contain but that could be found in the mind-stream of practitioners of other traditions. On the other hand, there exist extraordinary Dharma [realizations] that Buddhist practitioners possess but followers of other traditions do not. Therefore, the Buddhadharmā is called “unmixed.”

The phrase “utterly complete” indicates that the Buddhadharmā has all the remedies to eradicate all obscurations, such as those of the afflicting emotions and the like. Through the practice of Hindu Dharma, some of the gross afflicting emotions of the realm of desire and the realm of form can be relinquished. However, Hindu Dharma lacks the complete slate of antidotes. It cannot assist you in abandoning all the afflicting emotions of all three realms of existence.

The Buddhadharmā is known as “utterly pure” because the Dharma of realization is not affected by the afflicting emotions. It is known as “utterly spotless” because it plays the role of an antidote that eradicates all afflicting emotions completely. Since the practices of Hindu Dharma are not unconditioned but contaminated, they act as a basis for the arising of afflicting emotions.

This is one way to explain this section. However, in the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras* (*Mahāyānasūtrāṅkāra*) of Ārya Maitreya there is a slightly different explanation of the nine phrases starting with “virtuous in the beginning” and ending with “utterly spotless” that disclose the qualities of the Dharma.

The next epithets of the Dharma found in the sutra read as follows: “This doctrine, well taught by the Blessed One, is perfectly seen, free from sickness, never-ending, praiseworthy, meaningful to behold, and understood by the self-aware transcendental wisdom of learned ones.” These epithets are also found in other sutras that illuminate the qualities of the Dharma. Here, these different parts of the various sutras are combined together.

The first of these nine phrases, “This doctrine, well taught by the Blessed One,” shows that the Buddha’s discourses clarify the topics to be discussed without any errors or mistakes. For this reason it is called “well taught.”

The phrase “is perfectly seen” shows that the Tripiṭaka does not contain lectures based on assumptions and hypotheses but teachings that express the Buddha’s direct perception of the true nature of all phenomena. This direct perception is free of assumptions or imagination.

The word *sickness* in the phrase “free from sickness” refers to the afflicting emotions. Just as our body and mind are tormented by sickness, so these sickness-like afflicting emotions, such as attachment and hatred, cause suffering to arise in the mind-stream of sentient beings. Therefore, afflicting emotions are identified as sickness. Since the Buddhadharma is the remedy that relinquishes afflicting emotions, it is characterized as “free from sickness.”

The term *never-ending* refers to the view that once you relinquish the obscurations of the afflicting emotions and the like, they will not return again. The state of relinquishment of those afflicting emotions will never be exhausted. It is everlasting. Hindu practitioners, in contrast, do relinquish their afflicting emotions through practicing their spiritual path, but it is certain that they will return. The reason for this is that they did not manage to eradicate the seeds of the afflicting emotions.

The term *never-ending* also carries the connotation that the teaching of the Buddha is easy and pleasing to practice, whenever you wish. For instance, you can practice the Dharma while you are walking, or you can practice the Dharma when you are eating, and so forth.

The word *praiseworthy* means that one's own Dharma of realization directs all Dharma practitioners toward the path of liberation. Liberation can be placed in the palm of the practitioner's hand. Next, the expression "meaningful to behold" signifies that the Buddhadharmā is meaningful to contemplate. Why is this so? This Dharma is extraordinary. When this Dharma is grasped, you will see the true nature of all phenomena. Due to that, you will gain temporary and permanent results, and therefore the Dharma is "meaningful to behold."

The phrase "understood by the self-aware transcendental wisdom of learned ones" means that from among all philosophical tenets, the most superior Dharma is the truth of cessation, or nirvana. It is also the flawless true nature of phenomena. The realization of the ultimate nature of all phenomena cannot be understood through explanations given in words or sentences. Nor can it be understood by the conceptual mind that wonders what it could be. Rather, it must be understood through the power of individual self-aware transcendental wisdom. Thus it is said by the Buddha. Individual self-aware transcendental wisdom is the mind that directly perceives the true nature of phenomena. Therefore, the supreme Dharma—the truth of cessation, or nirvana—can be understood by learned ones who are well versed in Buddhist philosophy through self-aware transcendental wisdom. You should also be aware that there are various interpretations by other masters concerning these seven phrases.

The Dharma "is well based on the Blessed One's teachings of moral discipline and renunciation that lead to the state of perfect buddhahood" and, "lacking contradictions, it is all-inclusive, reliable, and going is put to an end." These phrases describe the qualities of the Dharma. The first phrase, "It is well based on the blessed one's teachings of moral discipline," means that all the teachings of the Buddha, whether it is of the Hinayana Vehicle or the Mahayana Vehicle or the sutras or the tantras, have been given as methods to discipline the afflicting emotions that disturb the mind of sentient beings. The term *renunciation* literally means "definite release" and refers to the definite release from the drawbacks of cyclic existence. This means that the Dharma can achieve the perfection of relinquishment that eradicates all faults.

The third phrase, "lead to the state of perfect buddhahood," shows that through relying upon the Dharma you can attain the state of buddhahood. Since buddhahood, which is the perfection of realizations, is the ultimate

result of practicing Dharma, it is the Dharma that has the capacity of bringing about this perfect realization.

Additionally, renunciation could be interpreted to mean that by relying on the Dharma, you can obtain the state of Hinayana arhatship, while the line “leads to the state of perfect buddhahood” signifies that by relying on the sacred Dharma, you can obtain the state of a Buddha.

The phrase “lacking contradictions” means that there are no contradictions in the different teachings given to specific disciples. Here, you cannot find any disagreement in the numerous Dharma teachings given by the Buddha because these teachings were given to help sentient beings in accordance with their own specific predispositions.

The next phrase, “it is all-inclusive,” means that the teachings of the Mahayana Vehicle include all the teachings of the Hinayana Vehicle.

The term *reliable* means that you can trust or have confidence in the Buddhadharmā. The reason for this is that all disciples who embark on the path of practice as taught by the blessed one will definitely achieve a small or great result in accordance with the level of practice they have engaged in. Their diligence will not be in vain.

The phrase “going is put to an end” refers to going further. “Put to an end” means stopping the movement of going so that there is no need to go further. The actual meaning of this is that you do not need to exert yourself forever in the practice of the Buddhadharmā once the result of your spiritual journey is attained. For example, once a practitioner of the Hinayana Vehicle has attained the state of arhatship in the Hinayana Vehicle, the journey has come to an end. Additional practice is not necessary. Or again, once the ultimate result of buddhahood has been attained by the person training on the path of the Mahayana Vehicle, no further effort or exertion is needed.

THE RECOLLECTION OF THE SANGHA

The Sangha of the Great Vehicle dwells appropriately, knowledgeably, truthfully, and harmoniously. They are worthy objects of being venerated with joined palms and with prostrations. They are a magnificent merit-field capable of using offerings in a proper way. Being an ideal recipient of gifts, they should be given great offerings in any place or at any time.

One should recollect the Sangha by understanding the qualities of the Sangha that are explained by the words of the sutra, “The Sangha of the Great Vehicle dwell appropriately, knowledgeably, truthfully, and harmoniously,” and so forth. Though the words of the sutra say “The Sangha of the Mahayana Vehicle,” all these qualities of the Sangha cited in the scripture also apply to the Sangha of the Hinayana Vehicle. In some translations of the *Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels* it is written, “The Sangha of the śrāvakas dwell appropriately, knowledgeably, etc.” Both of these are suitable to be used. Therefore, these phrases explain the recollection of the Sangha of both vehicles.

The Tibetan word *gen-dün* (*dge 'dun*) is the translation of the Sanskrit word *sangha*. Here, Sangha refers to noble beings. The meaning of the word *sangha* denotes a person who has great faith in the Three Jewels, who aspires (*'dun* in Tibetan) to the performance of virtuous actions (*dge* in Tibetan), and who has unshakable devotion in the Dharma even if an ignorant evil being or someone similar were to speak badly of it.

Sangha can also mean assembly. If this were explained from the Theravada perspective, a group of at least four fully ordained monks is called an assembly, or Sangha, whereas from the Mahayana perspective even one person alone can constitute an assembly, or Sangha. In brief, for Mahayanists “assembly” refers to anyone who has an assembly, or collection, of virtuous qualities.

The phrase “dwell appropriately” means that since the Sangha who practice the Dharma accomplish numerous virtuous actions taught by the Buddha, it is said that they “dwell appropriately.” A person who dwells on the path of liberation is called one who “dwells knowledgeably,” so this phrase refers to someone who is seeking nirvana or liberation. The belief of ordinary people in an existing self is a view that is distorted and crooked. So, the phrase “dwells knowledgeably” refers to the belief that the self-clinging view of ordinary beings is the wrong view. Opposite to that, the members of the noble Sangha enter into the practice of the noble eightfold path that espouses the view of selflessness. For this reason they are therefore known as those who “dwell knowledgeably.”

Furthermore, since the Sangha have entered into the higher training of moral conduct, they are called those who “dwell appropriately.” Since they possess the higher training of wisdom within their minds, they are called those who “dwell knowledgeably.” Finally, since they possess the higher training of concentration meditation, they are called those who “dwell truthfully.”

The Sangha live together “harmoniously.” They possess a similar view of ultimate reality, observe similar moral conduct, perform similar meditations, possess similar types of clothing, engage in the similar livelihood of begging for alms, and do not engage in fighting with each other but treat each other respectfully. In this way, they are also known as “dwelling harmoniously.”

The next section of the Sutra contains the phrases, “They are worthy objects of being venerated with joined palms and with prostrations.” To explain the meaning of this: Due to the Sangha being endowed with the three trainings, it is said that the mind-streams of the members of the noble Sangha of the Mahayana and Hinayana Vehicles are trained in meditation. For this reason they are worthy of receiving respect from others through their joining their palms together. The phrase “joined palms” is a symbol that includes the belief that the Sangha is worthy of receiving prostrations of body, and homage by speech and mind. Joining palms together, making prostrations, and paying respect are synonymous. In some of the other redactions of this sutra, only “worthy of being venerated with joined palms” or “worthy of receiving prostrations” is considered necessary to be used.

Developing faith in even one member of the Sangha rewards one with a greater amount of merit than giving gifts to all sentient beings. Therefore, the Sangha are worthy of receiving respect through the joining of palms and making prostrations.

The phrase “They are a magnificent merit-field” means that since the Sangha of the Mahayana and Theravada vehicles are endowed with the higher training of wisdom, they are said to be a field for the accumulation of merit. For example, if seeds are sown in fertile earth, a good harvest will result. Similarly, if you make an offering with devotion to the Sangha who are endowed with the higher training of wisdom, vast merit will be produced. For this reason, the Sangha are known as the field of the accumulation of magnificent merit. The term *magnificent* refers to abundance. Since anyone can acquire an abundance of merit through developing devotion to the Sangha, the Sangha are designated “a magnificent merit-field.”

The phrase “capable of using offerings in a proper way” means that if someone who is not an earnest practitioner receives offerings from a devout follower and selfishly uses that offering, it is a grave fault. On the other hand, Sangha members endowed with the higher training of

wisdom deserve offerings and are capable of using them. If that type of Sangha member receives an offering from a devout follower and uses it, there is no fault in that action. Further, the person who makes an offering to such a suitable practitioner acquires matchless merit. For this reason, the Sangha are known as “capable of using offerings in a proper way.”

The phrase “being an ideal recipient of gifts” means that since the members of the noble Sangha have good moral conduct, they are proper recipients for giving. Further, since the Sangha are endowed with the higher training of moral discipline, they are proper beneficiaries of receiving offerings. If it is asked, “Are the Sangha a field of offering at some particular time or at some particular place?” the answer is no. Regardless of time or place, the Sangha are always a very proper recipient of offerings. Thus the phrase “they should be given great offerings in any place or at any time” is explained. Any offering made to them, whether small or huge, is of great benefit to the donor because the Sangha are engaged in the higher trainings.

At the time of giving or receiving the Dharma, the teacher should bestow the Dharma with proper motivation, and the listener should also listen to the Dharma with proper motivation. It is said that one will acquire vast merit merely by hearing just one verse of the Dharma. Moreover, even taking a single step toward the place where the Dharma is being taught produces great merit if one is endowed with the right motivation. Therefore, we should dedicate all the merit arising from this teaching for the sake of all sentient beings so that they can attain buddhahood.

Translated by Jhampa Losal and Jay Goldberg.

5. TRANSFORMING OUR MINDS: THE FOUR MIND CHANGING CONTEMPLATIONS AND OTHER PRACTICES

1. Chapter 7, verse 14. The whole verse reads: Relying on the boat that is the human body, cross over the great river of suffering! Since it is difficult to find this boat again in the future, oh fool, do not spend your time in sleep.
2. Chapter 7, verse 7. The whole verse reads: Since death will come quickly, until then gather the accumulations [of merit and wisdom]! Even if you abandon laziness at that time, it will be too late, so what would you do?
3. Derge Kangyur vol. 46, p. 88a2.
4. *Letter to a Friend*, v. 104. The whole verse reads: If your head or clothes were to catch fire, do not pause to extinguish it! Rather, exert effort to stop future rebirth. There is no purpose superior to this.
5. The three realms are the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.
6. The Tibetan term (*nges 'byung*) that is here translated as “spiritual resolution,” is generally translated as “renunciation,” but the meaning is the determination to achieve liberation from samsara.
7. This means that all sentient beings always experience the three kinds of suffering (i.e., the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the all-pervasive suffering of compoundedness).
8. In samsara, there is no true or genuine happiness that is uncontaminated by mental afflictions.

6. RECOLLECTING THE THREE JEWELS

1. The Tibetan term *mdo* means “to abbreviate” or “bring together”.
2. Vajrayāna deity recitation practices.

7. THE SEVEN-BRANCH PRACTICE BASED ON SAMANTABHADRA'S ASPIRATION FOR EXCELLENT CONDUCT

1. Words and phrases which have been quoted from the text are left in bold. This is intended to make it easy for the reader to distinguish between commentary and quote.
2. The hands, the knees, and the head.
3. This generally refers to the accumulations of merit and wisdom through which enlightenment is attained.
4. The stupa represents the mind of the Buddha.
5. The cardinal and intermediate directions along with above and below.
6. The Tibetan word for buddha is “sang-gyé” (*sangs rgyas*), which literally means “purified [and] developed.”