
FPMT BASIC PROGRAM

The Tathāgata Essence

Sublime Continuum of the Mahāyāna

(mahāyānottaratantraśāstra)

by

Maitreya

The First Chapter—Verses 1–168

With Outlines from Gyaltsab Je's Commentary

ANNOTATED

Translated into English from the Tibetan

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Sublime Continuum of the Mahāyāna (*mahāyānottaratantrasāstra*)

by Maitreya

The First Chapter—The Tathāgata Essence

Translator's Homage

I pay homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The Body of the Text

Identifying the entities [of the seven vajra points]

Buddha, Dharma, assembly, basic element, enlightenment,
Excellent qualities, and finally, enlightened activities— (1.1ab)

Enumeration of seven

The body of the entire treatise
Is condensed into these seven vajra points. (1.1cd)

How [the seven vajra points] are taught in sutra

These [seven] are presented by way of their characteristics and order
Following the [Questions of] King Dhāraṇīśvara Sūtra.
The [first] three points should be known from the introduction
And the [latter] four points from the divisions of the intelligent ones¹ and the victors.² (1.2)

Determining their order

From Buddha, the Dharma, from the Dharma, the assembly of āryas,
From the assembly, the [tathāgata] essence.³
Exalted wisdom is attained upon the ending of the element.
Attainment of this exalted wisdom is attaining supreme enlightenment
Endowed with attributes of powers and so on, that bring forth the welfare
of all sentient beings. (1.3)

¹ This refers to the fourth vajra point, the basic element. This basic element in the continuum of a bodhisattva is qualified by the sixty purifying dharmas: (1) the four ornaments, (2) the eight appearances, (3) the sixteen compassions, and (4) the thirty-two activities.

² This refers to the last three vajra points: enlightenment, excellent qualities, and enlightened activities. These are qualified by the eighty dharmas of the completely, perfectly enlightened victor. The eighty dharmas are: (1) the sixteen enlightenments, (2) the thirty-two excellent qualities, and (3) the thirty-two enlightened activities.

³ Here it refers to the tathāgata essence in the continuum of a bodhisattva who has overcome the four obstacles that hinder the transformation of the tathāgata essence into a fully enlightened buddha.

The Resultant Three Jewels

The Buddha Jewel

I bow down to the one without beginning, middle, or end,⁴ who has pacified [exertion],⁵
who through buddhahood awakened to enlightenment,⁶
Who upon enlightenment revealed the fearless and permanent path so that those who
had not realized it might do so,⁷
Who, carrying the supreme sword and vajra of knowledge and loving kindness, slashes
the sprouts of suffering⁸
And destroys the wall of doubt with its surrounding darkness of obfuscating views.⁹ (1.4)

Uncompounded, effortless,
Not realized by other conditions,
Endued with knowledge, loving kindness, and ability,
And endowed with the two welfares is buddhahood. (1.5)

It is uncompounded
Because its nature is without beginning, middle, or end.
It is effortless
Because of having the pacified dharma body. (1.6)

It is not realized by other conditions
Because it is the object of realization of oneself.
It is knowledge because it has realized the three aspects.
It is loving kindness because it shows the path. (1.7)

It is ability
Because it abandons suffering and afflictions through exalted wisdom and compassion.
The first three qualities fulfill one's own welfare.
The latter three fulfill the welfare of others. (1.8)

⁴ Refers to a nature body that is a factor of intrinsic purity, illustrating “uncompounded,” the first excellent quality of a buddha.

⁵ Refers to a nature body that is a factor of adventitious purity that has completely pacified exertion. It illustrates “spontaneous,” the second excellent quality of a buddha.

⁶ Refers to the excellent quality of not being realized by others' conditions, illustrated by the exalted knower of all aspects that realizes modes and varieties.

⁷ Refers to the excellent quality of possessing knowledge.

⁸ Refers to the excellent quality of possessing loving kindness.

⁹ Refers to the excellent quality of possessing ability.

The Dharma Jewel

I bow down to the sun of excellent Dharma.
It is inexplicable as not nonexistent, not existent, not existent and nonexistent,
not other than existent and nonexistent,¹⁰
Is devoid of description, is known by oneself alone [as an ārya],¹¹ and is pacification.¹²
With undefiled radiant light rays of stainless exalted wisdom,
The Dharma subdues attachment, anger, and obscuration with regard to all objects.¹³ (1.9)

Inconceivable, free from the two, nonconceptual,
Pure, clear, and of an antidotal class,
That which is and that by which there is separation from attachment—
The Dharma is endowed with the characteristics of the two truths [of cessation
and path]. (1.10)

Separation from attachment itself is included in
The truth of the path and the truth of cessation.
These two in that order
Should be understood through their three qualities respectively. (1.11)

Inconceivable
Because of being unanalyzable and inexpressible, and known by the āryas.
Peaceful because of being non-conceptual and without the two.¹⁴
By being the three, pure and so forth, it is like the sun.¹⁵ (1.12)

The Sangha Jewel

As the mind is in the nature of clear light, they perceive the entitylessness of
afflictions¹⁶ and
Therefore perfectly realize the pacification of the extreme of selflessness of all migrators.¹⁷
I bow down to those who perceive complete buddhahood in all, who are endowed
with unobscured intelligence,¹⁸ and
Who have the realization of exalted wisdom that holds as its object the purity of
infinite living beings. (1.13)

Because the perception of
Realizing modes, varieties, and inner knowledge is pure,
The assembly of the irreversible intelligent ones
Is endowed with unsurpassed excellent qualities. (1.14)

¹⁰ Refers to the excellent quality of inexplicability.

¹¹ Refers to a nature body that is a factor of intrinsic purity.

¹² Refers to a nature body that is a factor of adventitious purity.

¹³ Refers to the three excellent qualities (pure, clear, antidotal class) of the Dharma attributed to the truth of the path.

¹⁴ Refers to the three excellent qualities of the Dharma included within the truth of the path.

¹⁵ Refers to the three excellent qualities of the Dharma included within the truth of cessation.

¹⁶ Refers to the excellent quality of knowing modes. Inner knowledge is shown implicitly.

¹⁷ The extreme of selflessness refers to the inherent existence.

¹⁸ Refers to the excellent qualities of liberation, which is the purity of the three kinds of obscurations: the obscuration of attachment, the obscuration of mental afflictions, and the obscuration of omniscience.

The qualities of knowing modes and varieties

Knowing modes

Because they realize migrators to be pacified by nature,
[They realize] things as they are,
[Due to] natural, thorough purity
And afflictions being exhausted from the beginning.¹⁹ (1.15)

Knowing varieties

They are endowed with [knowledge of] varieties
Because the mind that realizes the final objects of knowledge
Sees that the nature of omniscience
Is present in all sentient beings.²⁰ (1.16)

The qualities of inner knowledge and freedom from the obscurations of attachment and obstructions

Inner knowledge

Whatever is realized in this way
Is seen by one's own [exalted] wisdom.²¹ (1.17ab)

Freedom from the obscurations of attachment and obstructions

It is pure because in the undefiled sphere
There is neither attachment nor obstruction. (1.17cd)

Because the realization of the exalted wisdom is pure,
It is [close] to the Buddha's unsurpassable exalted wisdom.
Therefore, the irreversible ārya
Is a refuge for all beings.²² (1.18)

The meaning of refuge

Presentation of conventional refuge

From the perspective of {the teacher, the teaching, and the learners,
By way of the three vehicles and
By way of affinity to those three activities.
The three refuges are presented (1.19)

[Presentation of] ultimate refuge

Proving that any refuge that is not a buddha is not an ultimate refuge

Because of being abandoned, because of being deceptive,
Because of being nonexistent, and because of having fear,
The two Dharmas²³ and the assembly of nobles
Are not the everlasting supreme refuge. (1.20)

¹⁹ Refers to the excellent quality of knowing modes.

²⁰ Refers to the excellent quality of knowing varieties.

²¹ Refers to the three excellent qualities of inner knowledge.

²² Refers to the three excellent qualities of liberation, which is the purity of the three kinds of obscurations: the obscuration of attachment, the obscuration of mental afflictions, and the obscuration of omniscience.

²³ The Dharma of scripture and the Dharma of realization.

Proving that only a perfect and complete buddha is the ultimate refuge

Ultimately, the refuge of living beings
Is solely the Buddha.
Because the subduer is endowed with the dharmakāya,
[The subduer is] the finality of the assembly [of nobles]. (1.21)

The meaning of jewel

They are jewels because they are rarely encountered,
Because they are stainless, because they have power,
Because they are the ornaments of the world,
Because they are excellent, and because they are changeless. (1.22)

The Causes and Conditions for Attaining [the Resultant Three Jewels]

The meaning of cannot be conceived

Suchness with stains, [enlightenment] without stains,
Undeiled excellent qualities of the Buddha, and the deeds of the Conqueror—
Those [causes and conditions] from which the virtuous Three Jewels arise
Are the objects of those who realize the ultimate. (1.23)

These [causes and conditions] cannot be conceived and are solely objects of knowledge of buddhas

The Three Jewels and its lineage are
Objects [only] of those all-seeing ones.
These four aspects²⁴ in their respective order
Are inconceivable by way of four reasons. (1.24)

Establishing inconceivability

Because [the basic element] is pure yet has afflictions,
Because [enlightenment is] thoroughly without afflictions yet is to be purified,
Because [the excellent qualities] are undifferentiable,
And because [the deeds] are spontaneous and nonconceptual. (1.25)

Presentation of each cause and condition

[The basic element] that is to be realized, the realization,²⁵
The branches [of the excellent qualities of the Buddha],
And the [deeds] that are for the sake of realization—
In this order [of four], the first point is the cause,
The [other] three are conditions for purification. (1.26)

²⁴ The four aspects here refer to: (1) lineage, (2) enlightenment, (3) enlightened qualities, and (4) deeds of the conqueror.

²⁵ The final realization of the basic element—enlightenment.

An Explanation of the Basic Element of Tathāgata Essence

The causal phase—an explanation of the basic element of tathāgata essence

The tathāgata essence briefly explained by three points

Because the [activities] of the dharmakāya are pervasive,
Because suchness²⁶ is undifferentiable,
And because of having the lineage,
All sentient beings always have the buddha essence. (1.27)

Because the exalted wisdom of a buddha abides in the multitudes of sentient beings,
Because the undefiled nature is nondual,
And because buddha essence is labelled [*buddha*, the name of] its result,
It is said that all living beings are endowed with buddha essence.²⁷ (1.28)

The Ten Presentations

Establishing the basic element to be pure by nature by way of the ten presentations

Synopsis

(1) Nature, (2) cause, (3) result, (4) function, (5) possession, (6) manifestation,
(7) State, and similarly (8) the meaning of all-pervasiveness,
(9) Immutability, and (10) indivisibility of qualities
Are said to be the intended meaning of the ultimate basic element. (1.29)

Explanation of nature and cause

Short presentation

Nature

Its nature is always unafflicted,
Like the purity of a jewel, space, and water. (1.30ab)

Cause

It arises through devotion to the Dharma,
Supreme wisdom, samādhi, and compassion. (1.30cd)

Extensive explanation

The meaning of nature

Because of [having] power,
Being unchangeable, and by nature moistened [with compassion],
It resembles the qualities of
A precious jewel, space, and water. (1.31)

²⁶ Here suchness refers to emptiness of true existence. This suchness in the mind of a buddha and the suchness in the mind of a sentient being are undifferentiable in their entity.

²⁷ This verse seems to be only present in certain translations of the root text. And as Gyalsab Je and other major commentators did not comment on it, it is unclear if it was added during a translation.

The meaning of cause

The kinds of persons with the obstructions and the obstructions themselves

(1) Animosity toward the [Mahāyāna] Dharma, (2) view of self,
(3) Fear of the sufferings of samsara, and
(4) Lack of concern for the welfare of sentient beings are the four obstructions
Of (1) those of great desire, (2) tīrthikas, (3) hearers, and (4) the self-arisen.²⁸ (1.32abcd)

The antidotal causes

The cause of purifying [these] is the four Dharmas,
Such as the superior devotion and so forth. (1.32ef)

Specific explanation: the nature of the causes that are antidotes to the obstructions

Those who have the seed of devotion to the Mahāyāna Dharma,
Whose mother is the wisdom that gives birth to a buddha's truth [body],
Who abide in the womb of blissful concentration, and whose nurse is compassion
Are the heirs to succeed the subduer. (1.33)

Explanation of result and function

Short presentation

Result

The perfection of the qualities of purity, self, bliss, and
Permanence is the result. (1.34ab)

Function

It has the function of being weary of suffering, and the
Intention and aspiration to attain peace. (1.34cd)

Extensive explanation of result

In summary, the result of these [four causes] is
Distinguished by the four antidotes
That oppose
The fourfold misconceptions regarding the dharmakāya. (1.35)

Because the [dharmakāya] is pure by nature
And has abandoned [the adventitious defilements as well as] the imprints, it is [the
perfection] of purity.
It is the highest self, having pacified
The elaborations of self and selflessness. (1.36)

It is [the perfection of] bliss because of having reversed
The aggregates of a mental nature and their causes.
It is [the perfection of] permanence as it realizes
Samsara and nirvana to be equal [in nature]. (1.37)

²⁸ Solitary realizers.

With wisdom, it severs all clinging to self.²⁹
Because of clinging to sentient beings, those endowed with compassion do not
reach [the extreme of] peace.³⁰
By trusting the methods for enlightenment—compassion and cognition—
The āryas do not turn to [the extremes of] samsara or nirvana. (1.38)

Extensive explanation of function

If the buddha element did not exist,
The aversion to suffering would not occur.
There would be no wanting, no striving, no yearning
For nirvana. (1.39)

Seeing [respectively] the faults of suffering and the benefits of happiness
In samsara and nirvana
Is the function of the lineage,
Since those without the lineage are without [seeing these]. (1.40)

Explanation of possession

Short presentation

Possessing the quality of cause

Limitless like the great ocean
[Is the lineage]—source of inexhaustible jewel-like qualities. (1.41ab)

Possessing the quality of result

It is like the flame of a lamp,
Whose entity is endowed with indivisible qualities. (1.41cd)

Extensive explanation

Explanation of possessing the quality of cause

Because the basic element comprises
The dharmakāya, exalted wisdom of the victor, and great compassion,
It resembles an ocean
By way of a vessel, jewels, and water. (1.42)

Explanation of possessing the quality of result

In the undefiled basis, the clairvoyances, the exalted
Wisdom, and undefiled suchness
Are indivisible. Therefore, they resemble a lamp's light,
Warmth, and color. (1.43)

[Categories of manifestation]

By way of the different manifestations of suchness in
Ordinary beings, āryas,³¹ and perfect buddhas,
The perceiver of suchness³² taught the essence of the conquerors
To sentient beings. (1.44)

²⁹ With the direct realization of emptiness, the bodhisattva overcomes cyclic existence through knowledge.

³⁰ Due to compassion, the bodhisattva does not abide in the extreme of peace.

³¹ Āryas here refers to learner āryas.

³² The perceiver of suchness refers to the Buddha alone.

Ordinary beings are mistaken [in seeing the truth].
Those who see the truth oppose [this mistaken view].
[The minds of] the tathāgatas see things as they really are,
Free from error and elaboration. (1.45)

State

By nature indivisible; divided only by different states

Impure, impure and pure, and
Totally pure are respectively
Indicating [the ultimate nature of the mind] of sentient beings,
Bodhisattvas, and tathāgatas. (1.46)

The basic element
Included within the six topics of nature and so forth
Is indicated by way of three names and [imputed]
On the three states. (1.47)

All-pervasiveness

Establishing it to be of a single nature but pervading every state

Just as space with its nonconceptual nature
Pervades all, in the same way,
The nature of the mind, the undefiled realm,
Pervades [all phenomena]. (1.48)

[The ultimate nature of the mind's] general character
Pervades faults, qualities, and the final [qualities],
Just as space pervades forms in their lesser, intermediate, and
Supreme aspects. (1.49)

Immutability

IMMUTABLE BY NATURE

Because of having adventitious faults
And being naturally endowed with qualities,
As in the earlier, so in the later states
It is in its true nature of being changeless. (1.50)

IMMUTABLE DURING THE IMPURE STATE

Unchanged by karma and affliction, creators of the aggregates

Short presentation

Untainted by the phenomena of mental afflictions

Just as the all-pervading space
Is subtle and therefore untainted by faults,
In the same way, this state³³ in all sentient beings
Is not altered [by karma and afflictions]. (1.51)

³³ State refers to the basic element.

Untainted by birth and destruction caused by the above

Just as all worlds
Arise and disintegrate in space,
Similarly, the senses arise and disintegrate
In the unconditioned sphere.³⁴ (1.52)

Extensive explanation

Untainted by the phenomena of destruction

Just as space
Has never been burned by fire,
Likewise, the [basic element] has never been burned
By the fires of death, sickness, and old age. (1.53)

Untainted by the phenomena of birth

Example

Earth depends on water, water on air,
And air on space.

[While] space does not depend on the elements of
Air, water, and earth. (1.54)

The phenomena illustrated by the example

Similarly, the aggregates, constituents, and sense powers
Are based on karma and afflictions.
Karma and afflictions are always based
On incorrect mental attention. (1.55)

Incorrect mental attention
Depends on the purity of the mind,
[While] the nature of the mind
Does not abide in all those phenomena.³⁵ (1.56)

Correspondence of the example with the phenomena

The aggregates, sensory sources, and constituents
Are to be known as like the earth.
Karma and afflictions of sentient beings
Are to be known as like the water element. (1.57)

Incorrect mental attention
Is considered similar to the air element.
[The mind's] nature, just like the space element,
Has no foundation and does not rest [in incorrect mental attention]. (1.58)

Characteristics of incorrect mental attention

Incorrect mental attention
Depends on the nature of the mind.
Incorrect mental attention
[Is the door] for the emerging of karma and afflictions. (1.59)

³⁴ The unconditioned sphere refers to the basic element.

³⁵ The mind does not abide in phenomena such as karma and afflictions.

Characteristics of karma and affliction

From karma and afflictions—which are like water—
Aggregates, sensory sources, and constituents derive.
Just as [the water element] springs up and vanishes,
They³⁶ too arise and disintegrate. (1.60)

Characteristics of their base

Just like the element of space, so too the nature of the mind
Lacks causes and conditions and
Lacks the collection [of causes and conditions]; it [therefore]
Has no arising, disintegration, and abiding. (1.61)

Summary

Unchanged by karma and affliction

The mind's nature of clear light
Is unchanging—just like space.
Those adventitious stains such as desire, which derive from wrong concepts,
Do not afflict [the emptiness of the mind]. (1.62)

Neither do karma and afflictions—likened to water and
So on—produce [the basic element].
Nor will it be burned by the intolerable
Fires of death, sickness, and old age. (1.63)

Unchanged by old age, etc., destroyer of the aggregates, and likened to fire

The fire at the end of time, the fire of hell, and ordinary fire
Should be understood, in this order,
As being similar to the three fires
Of death, sickness, and old age. (1.64)

IMMUTABLE DURING THE IMPURE AND PURE STATE

The [ārya bodhisattvas], freed from the sufferings of aging, [sickness, and death]
And realizing the [basic element's] nature as thusness,
Are liberated from the misery of rebirth and so forth.
But [having realized the basic element's nature], the intelligent ones display [birth]
in order to cultivate compassion. (1.65)

IMMUTABILITY DURING THE PURE AND IMPURE STATES DEFINED ON THE BASIS OF BIRTH

Features of the pure state

Ārya [bodhisattvas] have eradicated
The sufferings of death, sickness, and old age from the root.
They are free from the [sufferings of samsara] because they are not reborn
By the force of karma and afflictions. (1.66)

³⁶ Aggregates, sensory sources, and constituents.

How the nature of the impure state is characterized by pure and impure causes

Because [of the method aspect] and the direct realization [of the basic element] just as it is,
They are beyond birth and so forth.
Having the essence of compassion,
They manifest death, sickness, and old age. (1.67)

IMMUTABILITY DURING THE PURE AND IMPURE STATES DEFINED ON THE BASIS OF BUDDHA AND ORDINARY BEINGS

Qualities for the accomplishment of one's own welfare

[Even though] the children of conquerors³⁷ realize the immutable nature,
They are seen by those who are blinded by ignorance
As [taking] rebirth and so forth—
This is truly wonderful! (1.68)

Qualities for the accomplishment of others' welfare

Those who have attained the domain of āryas
Display themselves in the domain of the childish—
This is the method of those friends of migrators
And supreme compassion. (1.69)

Untainted although dwelling in the world

Although gone beyond all worlds³⁸
They³⁹ do not depart from the world.
For the sake of the world
They engage in the world without being affected by its defilements. (1.70)

Correlating the example with the meaning

Just as a lotus growing in water
Is unsullied by [impurities] in the water,
In the same way, they are born in the world
But are not sullied by worldly dharmas. (1.71)

Qualities of the non-returners

Accomplishing tasks,
Their mind constantly blazes like fire.
They permanently abide in equipoise within
The concentration of the absorption of pacification.⁴⁰ (1.72)

Causes of effortless enlightened activity

By the propelling power of [prayers]
And because of being separated from all conceptuality,
In order to ripen sentient beings
They do not [need] to employ effort. (1.73)

³⁷ This is referring to a bodhisattva on the first ground who directly realizes emptiness.

³⁸ The worlds of ordinary beings, hearers, and solitary realizers.

³⁹ The bodhisattvas from the second to the seventh grounds.

⁴⁰ Here pacification refers to the pacification of coarse exertion, suffering, and afflictions.

Knowledge of appropriate enlightened activity for the sake of disciples

They know precisely by whatever [appearance] and with which [method]
Each [student] needs to be tamed,
Whether by teaching, by [displaying] a form body,
By conduct, or by deeds. (1.74)

Effortlessly engaging in enlightened activities relying on those methods

In this way, for living beings filling the limits of space,
The intelligent ones always work perfectly,
Enacting spontaneously and without obstruction
The welfare of sentient beings. (1.75)

The pure and impure qualities of the last life bodhisattvas

Pure aspect

This [mode] of the bodhisattvas
In post meditation sessions
Is [renowned] in the world as being equal to the tathāgatas
By way of perfectly liberating sentient beings. (1.76)

Impure aspect

It is true to say that
The difference between the earth and a speck of dust, and
Between the great ocean and [the water in] the hoof print of an ox,
Is the difference between a buddha and a bodhisattva. (1.77)

IMMUTABLE DURING THE TOTALLY PURE STATE

[The dharmakāya of the tathāgatas in the totally pure state is] immutable
because of being endowed with the qualities of inexhaustibility.⁴¹
It is the refuge of migrators because it is continuous and without end,
is always without
The two [extremes of deprecation and superimposition] and without
conceptuality, and
Is in the nature of not being subject to destruction because it is not formed
[by karma].⁴² (1.78)

Indirect teaching by negation

There is no birth, no death,
There is no harm, and no aging.
Therefore, [the dharmakāya of the tathāgatas] is
Permanent, constant, at peace, and unalterable. (1.79)

Indirect teaching by affirmation

[The dharmakāya of the tathāgatas] is not born with a
Mental body because it is permanent.
It does not die and transmigrate with inconceivable transformation
Because it is constant. (1.80)

⁴¹These qualities refer to the thirty-two qualities of separation, the ten powers, and so forth.

⁴²The tathāgata in the completely pure state is qualified by being permanent, constant, peaceful, and unchanging.

It is not harmed by the sickness
Of the subtle imprints because it is pacified.
It does not age by unaltered, non-afflicted [karma]
Because it is eternal. (1.81)

The explanation from the sutras of the four phenomena, permanence, etc.

The uncompounded basic element,
Is to be known as permanent and so forth,
Through two lines, and likewise two lines,
And two lines and two lines, in their respective order. (1.82)

Applying the explanation to the teaching

Because the [dharmakāya] is endowed with limitless qualities,
It has the meaning of being immutably permanent.
Because it is equal to the limit (of samsara),
It has the meaning of being a constant entity of refuge. (1.83)

Because it is in the nature of nonconceptuality,
It has the meaning of pacified reality, free from duality [of the two extremes].
Because it [is endowed] with the quality of not being produced [by the two karmas],⁴³
It is not subject to destruction—this is the meaning of being eternal. (1.84)

Indivisibility of Qualities

Establishing indivisibility from the qualities of freedom at the time of total purity

[The perfect complete buddha] is the dharmakāya, the tathāgata, the ārya's ultimate truth,⁴⁴ and [non-abiding] nirvana—
These [four] are just as indivisible as the sun and its rays.
And because of the indivisibility of the qualities,
There is no [non-abiding] nirvana apart from buddhahood. (1.85)

Explanation of the logic for the indivisibility of the ultimate qualities

In brief, the non-afflicted sphere⁴⁵ is distinguished
By four meanings, and is to be known
By way of four synonyms—
Dharmakāya, and so forth. (1.86)

Indivisible from the qualities of the buddha,⁴⁶
Attainment of the lineage as it is,⁴⁷
Reality that is non-deceptive and not false,⁴⁸
And by nature at peace since beginningless time.⁴⁹ (1.87)

⁴³ Contaminated and uncontaminated karma.

⁴⁴ The ultimate truth here refers to the ārya's truth of cessation.

⁴⁵ The emptiness of an exalted wisdom of all aspects.

⁴⁶ Refers to the first of the four synonyms—the dharmakāya.

⁴⁷ Refers to the second of the four synonyms—the tathāgata.

⁴⁸ Refers to the third of the four synonyms—the ārya's ultimate truth.

⁴⁹ Refers to the fourth of the four synonyms—the non-abiding nirvana.

The significance of establishing this indivisibility

Thoroughly complete enlightenment in all aspects,
Abandonment of defilements with their imprints,
Buddhahood, and non-abiding nirvana
Are ultimately nondual. (1.88)

The nature of this indivisibility of the qualities

Liberation is inseparable in its character from
All aspects, the innumerable, the inconceivable, and
The quality of being without defilement.
Whatever is this liberation is also the tathāgata. (1.89)

The totality of the qualities as illustrated by the example of the painters

For example, painters who are specialized in [painting]
Individual [parts of the body]
[Paint] whatever part is known to them and
Do not work on any other part than that. (1.90)

The example

To them a sovereign king hands a canvas and orders them,
“All of you, paint my portrait!”
Upon hearing this,
They begin to collaborate on painting the portrait. (1.91)⁵⁰

Then one of the engaged [painters] leaves for another place.
By departing and leaving [their part of the portrait] incomplete,
The portrait in its entirety could not be actualized.
This is the way the example is applied. (1.92)

The meaning

The individual parts of the [portrait] are expressions of
Generosity, discipline, patience, and so on.
Emptiness, which is endowed with all aspects,
Is expressed by the complete portrait [of the king]. (1.93)

An analogy to illustrate indivisibility

Because wisdom, exalted wisdom, and liberation⁵¹
Are indivisible from luminosity, radiance,
And purity, they resemble
The [indivisibility of the] light, rays, and disc of the sun. (1.94)

The meaning of the assertion that the hearer and solitary realizer do not possess the ultimate vehicle and ultimate nirvana

Hence, without attaining buddhahood,
There is no attainment of [non-abiding] nirvana,
Just as the sun cannot be observed
Set apart from [its] light and light rays. (1.95)

⁵⁰ The Tibetan text used for the current translation seems to indicate three verses instead of the verses 1.91 and 1.92 presented here. The translator's three verses have been combined into two for this Basic Program edition to maintain consistency with the numbering system of the previous Basic Program translation, commentary and course materials.

⁵¹ These three refer to the wisdom knowing modes, the wisdom knowing varieties, and the nature body.

Summary

The tathāgata essence
Is set out by way of [these] ten presentations. (1.96ab)

The Nine Similes

Establishing obscuration of the basic element by adventitious defilements through nine similes

[At present, the basic element] dwells within a shell of afflictions and
Is to be known by way of examples. (1.96cd)

Illustrating how the removal of the obscurations will reveal the essence

Short presentation

Illustrations of obscured phenomena possessed by obscuring phenomena

Like [1] a buddha in a decaying lotus, [2] honey among bees,
[3] Grain within a husk, [4] gold amidst filth,
[5] A treasure [of jewels] in the earth, [6] the seedling and so forth [within] a small fruit [seed],
[7] A statue of the conqueror in tattered robes, (1.97)

[8] A lord of humans in the womb of a lowly woman,
And [9] a precious [golden] image in a clay [mold],
Similarly, the basic element of natural purity abides within sentient beings
Obscured by the adventitious defilements. (1.98)

Short presentation of the individual illustrations of obscured and obscuring phenomena

The defilements are compared to [1] a lotus, [2] bees, [3] a husk, [4] filth, [5] earth,
[6] A seed, [7] tattered robes, [8] a woman tormented by fierce suffering, and
[9] the earth constituent.
The naturally pure, precious basic element is compared to
[1] A buddha, [2] honey, [3] a kernel, [4] gold, [5] treasure,
[6] A banyan tree, [7] a precious statue, [8] a supreme lord of the continents, and
[9] a precious image. (1.99)

Extensive explanation

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of the four defilements, dormant desire, etc.

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of three poisons when dormant

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of dormant desire

Simile

When seeing that in a lotus of poor color
There dwells a tathāgata radiant with a thousand marks,
A person with the undefiled divine eye
Takes it out from the whorl of its lotus petals. (1.100)

Meaning

Similarly, the sugatas with their buddha eye see their own nature
Even in those abiding in the hells of no respite. (1.101ab)

Purifying the basic element of defilements

Those without defilements [abide] until the end of time, freeing [sentient beings]
From their defilements through their compassion. (1.101cd)

Extensive explanation

Just as a person endowed with the divine eye sees the sugata within a foul lotus
and breaks open its petals,
The Subduer, seeing the essence of a perfect buddha [within] living beings
Obscured by a shell of attachment, hatred, and so forth,
Through compassion engages in overcoming those defilements. (1.102)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of dormant anger

Simile

Just as a beekeeper seeking honey,
Seeing it surrounded by a swarm of bees,
Separates it with skill
From the entire swarm of bees, (1.103)

Meaning

So the great sage with the eye of omniscience
Sees the basic element comparable to honey (1.104ab)

Removing the defilement

And forever eradicates the obscurations
That are likened to the bees. (1.104cd)

Explanation

Even if the honey is obstructed by billions of bees,
The beekeeper separates the honey to use it as desired.
In the same way, the uncontaminated consciousness in sentient beings is like honey,
The afflictions like bees, and the Conqueror skilled in controlling them
like the beekeeper. (1.105)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of dormant ignorance

Simile

As kernels of grain in their husk
Are inedible by humans,
Those wishing to use them for a meal and so on
Must extract them from their husk. (1.106)

Meaning

In the same way, [the basic element of] sentient beings is entangled with afflictions. (1.107a)

Removing the obscuration

For as long as [the essence] of the conqueror
Is not liberated from the defilement of afflictions,
Till then, the conqueror's deeds will not manifest in the three realms. (1.107bcd)

Explanation

Just as kernels of grain, such as rice, buckwheat, or barley, when unthreshed,
still with their awns, and unprepared,
Cannot become a tasty meal enjoyed by humans,
So the lord of Dharma present in sentient beings, whose body has not been released
from the shell of afflictions,
Cannot bestow the taste of the joy of Dharma to beings tormented by the hunger
of their afflictions. (1.108)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of the three poisons when manifest

Simile

Just as the gold of a traveler
That has fallen into a filthy, rotten place
Would not deteriorate for many hundreds of years
Because of its indestructible nature, (1.109)

And just as a god endowed with the divine eye,
Upon seeing it, tells a person:
“Purify this supremely priceless gold and craft it into something precious,
[Like a statue of the tathāgata],” (1.110)

Meaning

Similarly, the conquerors see the qualities [of the naturally pure basic element]
In sentient beings sunken into afflictions, which are like filth, (1.111ab)

Removing the obscuration

And in order to cleanse the mire of afflictions,
They let fall rains of sublime Dharma for all beings. (1.111cd)

Explanation

Just as a god seeing gold dropped into a filthy, rotten place
Earnestly shows its supreme beauty to humans so that they might completely clean it,
In the same way, the conquerors see in sentient beings the precious [essence] of
complete buddhas
Fallen into the filth of afflictions and teach them the Dharma in order to purify that
[basic element]. (1.112)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of the imprints of ignorance

Simile

Just like an inexhaustible treasure lies
In the earth under the house of a poor man,
But he does not know of it,
And the treasure does not announce itself with “here I am,” (1.113)

Meaning

Similarly, as the precious treasure enclosed within the mind—
By nature free from defilement, with neither [the two kinds of selflessness] to be
Established nor the [two selfs to be] refuted—is not realized,
All these beings continuously experience many forms of the suffering of poverty. (1.114)

Explanation

Just as a treasure that lies buried under the house of a poor man does not announce
Itself to him with “here I am,” and he is not aware of it,
Likewise, the Dharma treasure abides in the house of the mind, and sentient beings,
who are like the pauper, are unaware of it.
In order for them to attain [the dharmakāya], the great sage was born in the world. (1.115)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of path of seeing and path of meditation abandonments

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of the path of seeing abandonments

Simile

Just as the seed within the fruit of a mango or similar tree
Has the indestructible potential [of becoming] a seedling,
And, relying on plowed earth and water,
Will gradually grow into a majestic tree, (1.116)

Meaning

So also within the skin of the fruit of ignorance and so on
Of sentient beings lies the virtuous dharmadhātu, and

Similarly, by relying on virtue, [the basic element] will gradually transform
Into the essence of a majestic conqueror. (1.117)

Explanation

Just as, by way of the conditions of water, sunlight, air, earth, time, and space,
Trees grow from within the peels of the mango and coconut fruits,
Similarly, the seed and sprout of complete enlightenment enclosed within the peel of
Sentient beings' afflictions, through the conditions of such⁵² and such⁵³ virtues,
Will increase the realization of Dharma. (1.118)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of path of meditation abandonments

Simile

A statue of the tathāgata made of precious jewels is
Wrapped in tattered, foul-smelling robes.
A god, having seen it lying on the road,
Makes it known to [passersby] so that it might be rescued. (1.119)

Meaning

[The one] endowed with unobstructed vision sees
The tathāgata essence covered in a multitude of afflictions, even in animals, (1.120ab)

Removing the obscuration

And so, for the sake of liberation,
Shows the method. (1.120cd)

⁵² The virtues of listening, contemplating, and meditating.

⁵³ The virtues of the basic element.

Explanation

Just as one with the divine eye sees the image of the Tathāgata, precious by nature,
Wrapped in foul-smelling robes
Lying on the road, and shows it to people so that they might rescue it,
Likewise, the conqueror sees that the basic element, wrapped in the tattered robes
of afflictions and lying on the road of samsara,
[Exists] even in animals and teaches the Dharma so that they might be liberated. (1.121)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of the defilements found in the impure and pure levels.

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of the defilements found on the impure levels

Simile

Just as an unsightly woman, vulnerable, and
Residing in an unprotected dwelling,
Holds in her womb a glorious king
But is unaware of the lord of humans within her, (1.122)

Meaning

Likewise, birth in samsara is like the unprotected house;
Impure sentient beings are like the pregnant woman;
The undefiled basic element is like [the king] abiding within her.
Those endowed with such will have protection. (1.123)

Explanation

Just as a woman of unappealing form dressed in stained clothing lives in an unguarded
place experiencing great suffering,
Even though she bears a lord of the earth in her womb,
Similarly, within sentient beings there is a protector, but beings nonetheless abide in
a state of suffering,
Their unprotected minds being restless by the force of afflictions. (1.124)

Establishing by illustration the adventitious nature of the defilements found on the pure levels

Simile

Just as, having seen a flawless statue cast in gold inside [a clay mold]—
[The gold] pure but the outside in the nature of clay—
Those who understand this remove the outer contaminants
In order to purify the gold therein, (1.125)

Meaning

Likewise, seeing that the stains [covering] the
Clear light [nature are] adventitious, (1.126ab)

Removing the obscuration

Like the [clay] mantle of the precious gold, sentient beings,
Through purifying the defilements, attain supreme enlightenment. (1.126cd)

Explanation

Just as a goldsmith astutely perceives the undefiled peaceful nature of a shining golden statue
Fixed inside a clay mold and removes the clay from it,
So too the omniscient one, knowing the peaceful mind to be like the pure gold,
Purifies the defilements with the chisel of Dharma teachings. (1.127)

Summary

Similes of the obscuring phenomena

Within a [decaying] lotus, a swarm of bees,
A husk, filth, earth,
Peel of a fruit, tattered robes,
A woman's womb, and a clay mold, (1.128)

Similes of the obscured phenomena

There is a buddha, honey, a kernel,
Gold, treasure, a tree, a precious statue,
A wheel-turning king,
And a golden image. (1.129)

The mind naturally pure but with adventitious stains

[Just as the afflictions neither exist by way of their own nature, nor are they in the nature of the mind, so]
The realm of sentient beings is not tied to the shell of afflictions.
Existing since beginningless time is the nature of the mind [—emptiness of true existence].
Since beginningless time [is the tathāgata essence] free of defilements. (1.130)

Individual explanations of the phenomena illustrated by the similes

Types of obscuration of the basic element

The division of the obscurations into nine defining characteristics

Attachment, anger, ignorance,
Their dormant [states], their forceful arising,
The abandonments of the path of meditation and path of seeing,
And those pertaining to the pure and impure grounds (1.131)

Are well illustrated by the nine similes of
The covering of a lotus and so forth;
But the divisions of the shells of subsidiary afflictions
Go beyond the limits of division. (1.132)

Summary

Summarizing the nine defilements,
Attachment and so forth,
They have been well explained, in their respective order,
By the examples of the chalice of the lotus and so on. (1.133)

The types of obscured persons

By way of those defilements, the childish [ordinary beings],⁵⁴
[Hinayāna] arhats,⁵⁵ [Hinayāna ārya] learners,⁵⁶ and
The wise [Mahāyāna āryas]⁵⁷
[Are explained] to be impure in their respective order by four, one,
two, and two [defilements]. (1.134)

Correspondence in the similes of basic element obscurations

Extensive explanation

Just as the presence of a lotus born from mud
Induces delight at first and
Fades in its attraction later on,
The same is so for the pleasure of desire. (1.135)

Just as bees
When becoming greatly agitated will sting,
Likewise, when hatred arises,
Suffering swells in the heart. (1.136)

Just as a kernel of rice and so forth
Is covered by the outer husk,
So the understanding of the [tathāgata] essence
Is obstructed by the shell of ignorance. (1.137)

Just as filth is unpleasant,
Likewise, in those with attachment,
Forceful arising [of the three poisons] acts as the cause for
Reliance on the desire [realm] and so is likened to filth. (1.138)

Just as precious treasure is buried
And one not knowing [of it] cannot obtain it,
Also for beings, the self-arisen [tathāgata essence]
Is buried under the ground of imprints of attachment. (1.139)

Just as a seedling and so forth by growing gradually
Breaks through the husk of a seed,
So the realization of suchness
Destroys the abandonments on the path of seeing. (1.140)

⁵⁴ Ordinary beings are impure with respect to four: dormant attachment, dormant anger, dormant ignorance, and forceful manifestation of the three.

⁵⁵ Hinayāna arhats are impure with respect to one: the ground of latencies of the first ground.

⁵⁶ Hinayāna ārya learners are impure with respect to two: the objects of abandonment of the path of seeing and the objects of abandonment of the path of meditation.

⁵⁷ Mahāyāna āryas are impure with respect to two: the objects of abandonment of the seven impure grounds and the objects of abandonment of the three pure grounds.

Through familiarization with ārya paths,
The core of the view of the transitory collection is overcome.
The objects of abandonment by the exalted wisdom of the path of meditation
Are illustrated by tattered robes. (1.141)

The defilements in relation to the seven [impure] grounds
Can be compared to the defilement of the covering of the womb.
Being freed from the covering of the womb
Is similar to the fully-ripened nonconceptual exalted wisdom. (1.142)

The defilements connected to the three pure grounds
Are likened to the covering of a clay mold.
Through the vajra-like samādhi of the mighty one,
They are overcome. (1.143)

Summary

Thus the nine defilements, attachment and so on,
Correspond to the similes, of the lotus and so forth. (1.144ab)

Correspondence in the similes of the obscured basic element

Because the basic element can be subsumed into three natures,
It corresponds to a buddha and so on. (1.144cd)

General explanation [of the similes]

Its nature is the dharmakāya,
Suchness, and the lineage.
These should be known by way of three, one, and
Five similes respectively. (1.145)

Extensive explanation of the correspondence

Correspondence to the dharmakāya

The dharmakāya is to be known as twofold:
The [first is the] utterly undefiled dharmadhātu,
Which is the concordant cause of the [second, the dharmakāya of] teaching, by way of
Profound [definitive] and various [interpretable sutras]. (1.146)

Because the [wisdom dharmakāya of realization]
Is beyond this world,
An example cannot be found in this world.
Therefore, it is presented as similar to the [body of the] tathāgata and the basic element. (1.147)

The teaching [of the sutras of definitive meaning] in a subtle and deep way
Is like the singular taste of honey.
The teaching [of the sutras of interpretable meaning] in multiple ways
Is similar to kernels hidden in their husks. (1.148)

Correspondence to suchness

As the nature is
Unchanging, virtuous, and of natural purity,
So suchness is said
To resemble a golden statue. (1.149)

Correspondence to lineage

Simile for the entity of the lineage

Like a treasure and a fruit tree,
The lineage is known to be twofold—
The beginningless naturally abiding [lineage],
And the [developmental lineage] perfectly arising [through hearing and
contemplating the naturally abiding lineage]. (1.150)

Simile for the potential of the lineage

Divisions of potential

It is held that the three bodies of a buddha
Are attained by virtue of this twofold lineage:
The first body by way of the first
And the latter two by way of the second. (1.151)

Explanation of the simile

The beauty of the nature body
Should be known as like a precious statue
Because it does not naturally arise
And is a treasure of good qualities. (1.152)

Possessing the majesty of the Great [Vehicle] Dharma,
The perfect enjoyment [body] is like a wheel-turning king.
Because of being in the nature of a reflection,
The emanation [body] is likened to a golden image. (1.153)

The Consciousness that Perceives the Basic Element

In the hearer and solitary realizer, the basic element is understood through faith

The ultimate [essence] of the self-arisen
Is to be realized through faith, (1.154ab)

The four kinds of persons do not perceive it differently

Just as when the sun shines,
Those who are blind will not see it. (1.154cd)

Identifying the Nature of the Basic Element

Actual meaning

The true state of phenomena of the basis

There is nothing to be removed,
There is not the slightest to be added. (1.155ab)

The view that realizes this true state

Reality is to be seen as reality. (1.155c)

The result of meditating on this view

Upon seeing reality, you are liberated. (1.155d)

Establishment

The basic element is empty of adventitious [defilements],
Which are separable in character.
It is not empty of the unsurpassable qualities,
Which are of inseparable character. (1.156)

The Purpose of Teaching that Sentient Beings Possess the Basic Element

Argument

Like clouds, dreams, and illusions,
All objects of knowledge in every way are said to be empty.
Why, then, do conquerors say here
That sentient beings have buddha essence? (1.157)

Response

This was taught to those who have the five faults—
[1] Having a discouraged mind, [2] looking down on others,
[3] Apprehension of the unreal, [4] deprecating the real Dharma,
And [5] self-cherishing—in order to dispel them. (1.158)

Explaining how the former and latter are non-contradictory

The reality limit is
Devoid of all composite phenomena.
Afflictions, karma, and fruitions
Are said to be like a cloud and so on. (1.159)

Afflictions are said to be similar to clouds;
Karma is likened to the enjoyments in a dream;
The aggregates, which are fruitions of karma and afflictions,
Are likened to the magical manifestation in an illusion. (1.160)

The purpose of teaching the existence of the element

Short presentation

Having been expounded beforehand in this way,
And again, in this Uttarantra,
It is presented that the basic element exists
In order to abandon the five faults. (1.161)

Individual explanations

An obstruction to the development of bodhicitta

Not having heard about this,
Some, due to the fault of self-contempt
Stemming from a discouraged mind,
Do not generate bodhicitta. (1.162)

An obstruction to the bodhisattva practices

Some, by generating bodhicitta,
Proclaim, “I am a supreme [bodhisattva],”
Looking down on others
Who have not generated bodhicitta. (1.163)

An obstruction to an aspect of practice; understanding the true state

By not understanding, they will be at fault

In the mind of those [who do not see the basic element],
Knowledge of reality does not arise.
Therefore, clinging to the incorrect,
They do not realize the perfect reality. (1.164)

The way to realize

Because of being formed and adventitious,
The faults of sentient beings are not real.
The perfect qualities [of the basic element] are pure in their nature
Because the faults are selfless. (1.165)

An obstruction to developing love and compassion, the causes of bodhicitta

General [drawbacks of not knowing the basic element]

Those who cling to unreal faults
And deprecate true qualities

Do not attain the love that sees
Themselves and sentient beings as equal. (1.166)

Consequence

Upon hearing it in this way,
One generates enthusiasm,
The same respect [for others] as for the buddhas,
The wisdom, the exalted wisdom, and the great love. (1.167)

Summary of the benefits of being free from the five faults

Through generating these five qualities of
Lack of [self-]contempt, view of equality,
Lack of faults, [being] endowed with qualities, and
The love [arising] from the equality of oneself and sentient beings,
One swiftly attains buddhahood. (1.168)

This concludes the first [chapter] on the tathāgata essence from the *Mahāyāna Uttaratantra Treatise, The Lineages of the Three Jewels*.

Colophon

This text was translated into English from the Tibetan by Chandra Chiara Ehm (Tenzin Tsomo) based on the oral commentary received by Lharam Geshe Lobsang Lekshe at Sera Je Tsangpa Khangtsen, India, in 2017. Geshe-la based his explanation mainly on Gyaltsab Darma Rinchen's commentary but also referred to the Uttaratantra commentaries of Dondrub Rinchen, Mipham Gyatso and Choje Lodro Tenpa on the side. The headings are from the translation of Gyaltsab Darma Rinchen's commentary by Sophie McGrath (Tenzin Sangmo) and Gavin Kilty.