

The Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels

Along with a commentary by Khenchen Appey Rinpoche

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The Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels

Prostrations to the Omniscient One.

Thus the Blessed Buddha is the One Gone to Suchness, the Foe Destroyer, the Perfectly Accomplished One, the One Who Possesses Knowledge and Its “Feet,” the One Who Has Gone to Bliss, Knower of the World, the Unsurpassable Charioteer Who Tames Sentient Beings, and Teacher of Gods and Humans.

That Blessed Buddha is the One Gone to Suchness. He arose through corresponding causes of merit, and his root of virtue is inexhaustible. 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. Conforming to the stages of the field of enlightened activities, his appearance is not unpleasant to one’s sight and is delightful to devoted aspirants. His wisdom cannot be overpowered by others, and his powers are invincible. 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. He is the possessor of transcendental wisdom, inconceivable confidence, perfectly pure speech, a melodious voice, and a matchless body that is endlessly insatiable to behold. He is unaffected by desire, unaffected by form, and unmixed with formless ones. He is completely liberated from all suffering, thoroughly liberated from the aggregates, and unaffected by the elements. Possessing disciplined sensory perceptions, he has thoroughly cut all knots. He is completely liberated from all profound sufferings and freed from the world of existence. He has crossed the river. Having realized perfect wisdom, he is the one who abides in the transcendental

wisdom of the past, future, and present Blessed Enlightened Ones. Not abiding in Nirvana, he dwells in the state of perfection that sees all sentient beings. These are all the great attributes that explain the qualities of the Blessed Buddha.

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, timeless, praiseworthy, meaningful to behold, and understood by the discriminating wisdom of learned ones. It is firmly based on the Blessed One's teachings of moral discipline and renunciation that lead to the state of perfect Buddhahood. Lacking contradictions, it is complete, reliable, and cuts off going.

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

Commentary by Khenchen Appey Rinpoche

This is the teaching known as *The Sutra Recollecting the Three Jewels*. In this sutra, what does “jewel” mean? The Sanskrit word *ratna* has been translated into the Tibetan language as *dkon.mchog*. The Tibetan translation of the word *ratna* is not a literal translation. The translator at that time thought that if it were translated into Tibetan as “jewel,” there would be the possibility of it being understood as a gem, gold, silver, coral, and the like. So the translator decided to translate the term as *dkon.mchog*, which means “excellent rarity” or “rare excellence.” The translator himself revealed this. In the *Uttara Tantra*, when he was explaining the meaning of “rare excellence,” the Victorious Maitreya said, “Generally, there are six characteristics of something that is very precious: it is rare, stainless, powerful, attractive, superior to other things, and unchangeable.”

What does “recollecting” mean? Recollecting means keeping in mind whatever any person already knows to be the qualities of the Three Jewels. 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 that 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 Enlightenment Thought for the sake of other sentient beings that is a cause for 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. Now, producing faith in the Dharma will inspire you to study the Dharma.

After understanding what you have studied, you will then desire to put that into practice. Producing faith in the Sangha will cause you yourself to spontaneously 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 be able to arise within your mind. In a sutra it is said, “A flower will not arise from a burnt seed.”

There is enormous merit in remembering the qualities of the Three Jewels. Previously, when the Buddha Kashyapa was teaching, a girl walked by that area and heard the Buddha teaching. In her mind she thought that the Buddha Kashyapa 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 merit accrued by studying, contemplating, and meditating on the qualities found in the sutras and their commentaries.

The Sanskrit word *sutra* is translated in Tibetan as *mdo*. 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*. When the translator began translating this sutra from Sanskrit into Tibetan, he 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.

[First, to explain the Recollection of the Buddha:]

There are two sources that explain the first of these, recollecting the qualities of the Blessed Buddha. 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:

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

The part described here at the beginning of this sutra is the Hinayana version of *The Sutra [of Recollecting the Three Jewels]*. 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 inconsistencies. Since the word "Buddha," for example, is omitted [in the Hinayana sutra], a person trying to explain it as it is written would have a difficult time. For this reason, the words "Thus" and "the Blessed One" are placed side by side. Further, if someone were to continue explaining those words from the sutra, they would need to explain the nine qualities of the Buddha starting with "the Blessed One." In any case, we see that the one who possesses those nine qualities is known as Buddha. This is the meaning of the sutra. Both Asanga 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 [that the Buddha is] “*the Blessed One*” (Tibetan *bchom.lden.’das*; Sanskrit *bhagavan*). 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 Mara of the Son of the Gods created a lot of obstacles for him. Therefore, the Buddha’s main obstacle was the Mara of the Son of the Gods. So the Buddha is known as “the Blessed One” because he attained enlightenment after having defeated that demon. Furthermore, another meaning of “the Blessed One” is that the Buddha destroyed either the three afflicting emotions [i.e., desire, hatred, and ignorance], as understood from the twelve limbs of Interdependent Origination, or the two obscurations [of the afflicting emotions and knowable things]. Therefore, he is called “the Blessed One.”

Normally, in the Sanskrit language, this term, “the Blessed One,” is known as *bhagavan*. The first part of this word, *bhaga*, means “to destroy,” “fortunate,” or “excellence.” The second part of that word, *van*, 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.” So a person like this is known as *bhagavan* or *bchom.lden*. He is also known as “the Blessed One” because he possesses all good qualities.

Now, the second part of the word [*bchom.lden.’das*, namely,] *’das*, was added on by the Tibetan translator. The reason for this is that the word *leg.lden*. can be substituted for the word *bchom.lden*. The term *leg.lden*. refers to worldly gods. In

order that the word *leg.lden*. not be understood to mean “worldly gods or higher beings,” the translator added the word *'das* to differentiate it [i.e., *bchom.lden.'das*] from *leg.lden* or *bchom.lden*. The word *bchom* means “defeating the four Maras”: the Mara of the Afflicting Emotions, such as attachment and aversion; the Mara of the Aggregates, such as the impure aggregates arising from ignorance and the like; the Mara of Death, such as the one who dies by the power of his [or her] individual karma while not having any choice over the matter; and the Mara of the Son of the Gods, who is a god within the realm of desire and who creates obstacles to Dharma practitioners. So *bchom.lden* means that the Buddha has already overpowered all four of these Maras.

There is also another connotation of this, known as *leg.pa.gdrup*, which means six excellences or six virtues. What do the “six virtues” mean? First, 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 by saying such things as “the logic and reasoning you use in relation to the teaching of the Dharma is incorrect.” The second excellent virtue is the excellent quality of body. The Buddha’s body is very beautiful—even more beautiful than the body of the gods. The third excellent virtue is the excellent quality of glory. The reason for this is that the field of the Buddha’s activities is extraordinarily vast and the Buddha has an infinite number of perfectly trained disciples. The fourth excellent virtue is the excellent quality of fame. His fame has spread to wherever his disciples reside. The fifth excellent virtue is the excellent quality of transcendental wisdom. Through his wisdom, the Buddha has the realization of knowing all knowable things within the relative and ultimate truths. He knows all things unerringly. The sixth excellent

virtue is the excellent quality of diligence. The Buddha can effortlessly and untiringly perform different activities for millions of sentient beings in a single moment.

The second epithet [of the Buddha] is “*the One Gone to Suchness*” (Tibetan *de.zhin.shek.pa*; Sanskrit *Tathagata*). The meaning of this appellation is unmistakably knowing the nature of all things as they are. This quality emphasizes that the Buddha is the perfect teacher. For this reason the Buddha has this title “the One Gone to Suchness.” The main reason for calling him “the One Gone to Suchness” is that no matter what teaching the Buddha might give, it always shows the true nature of all phenomena. It is not otherwise. 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 “*the Foe Destroyer*” (Tibetan *dgra.bchom.pa*; Sanskrit *arhat*). The first syllable of this word in Tibetan, *dgra*, refers to delusional afflicting emotions, such as attachment, hatred, and the like, that arise within our minds. Those afflicting emotions are called “enemies” because they cause obstacles to the practice of virtues. Due to this they also throw us into suffering, and so they are called enemies. Since the Buddha has destroyed all the afflicting emotions, he is called “the Foe Destroyer.” And so it shows that the Buddha has gained the perfection of the abandonment of the afflicting emotions.

The fourth epithet is “*the Perfectly Accomplished One*” (Tibetan *yang.dag.par.dzogs.pa'i.sangs.rgyas*; Sanskrit *samyaksambuddha*). What does “the Perfectly Accomplished One” mean? The one who has accomplished all the qualities of enlightenment and who has accomplished all knowledge is called “the Perfectly Accomplished Buddha.” The Buddha is one who has realized the wisdom that knows all knowable things in a completely perfect way. This explanation shows that the

Blessed Buddha is the one who possesses the perfection of realization. For this reason, it shows that the completely and perfectly enlightened Buddha is the teacher who is superior to other teachers. For example, the Foe Destroyers of the Shravakas 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 heretical schools, such as Hinduism, do not have all these qualities [such as abandonment of the afflicting emotions within their own minds, teaching without fault, and knowing phenomena as they truly are].

The fifth epithet is “*the One Who Possesses Knowledge and Its Feet*” (Tibetan *rig.pa.dang.zhabs.su.ldan.pa*). These two terms show the path to attain Buddhahood. If someone were to ask, “practice of what kind of path will help you attain Buddhahood?” then this is explained 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. To do this you need both eyes and feet. In this example, knowledge is analogous to eyes, and feet are analogous to the basis on which you stand and by which you move. So when you walk you look through your eyes and you move with 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*” refer 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.

With respect 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. With respect 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 [i.e., it is distracted]. One-pointed concentration is needed to enable the mind to penetrate into the true nature of phenomena. However, during the recitation of *sadhanas* [Vajrayana Deity recitation practices] or the performance of rituals, there are chances for the mind to rest in one place or focus on some 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 that "*knowledge*" refers to the three supernatural perfections of direct realization, and "*feet*" refer to other perfections, such as the perfection of moral conduct.

The sixth epithet [for the Buddha, i.e., "*the One Who Has Gone to Bliss,*"] is known in Sanskrit as *sugata* (Tibetan *bde.war. gsheks.pa*). *Su* means "bliss" or "happiness." *Gata* means "going." Further, this is explained as: By relying on a pleasant path, you arrive at a pleasant destination. 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. Thus, *sugata* means “going pleasantly.” 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 austere penances. However, these types of Hindu spiritual practices are regarded as faulty by Buddhists. Why do we say this? 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. In other words, through these mind-pleasing methods you will attain liberation from the bonds of samsaric existence. 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 an action of penance is meaningless and will never lead you to a higher result.

Further, if we look in detail about the meaning of the term *sugata*, then we see that *su* refers to “good,” “never falling back,” 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* simply 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. So 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.” This means that the Buddha 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.” For example, it is similar to a vase full of water to which not even one more drop can be added. Other teachers who impart the Dharma, such as Arhats, Shravakas, and Pratyekabuddhas, have relinquished the afflicting emotions of obscurations so that these afflicting emotions will not return. 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 meaning of the qualities of the Buddha, or Sugata, is explained in great detail in Dharmakirti’s *Pramanavartika* as “good,” “not falling back,” and “without exception” in relation to the Buddha’s qualities of relinquishment and realization. Also, in the words of the sutra, the Buddha’s names and the qualities of his enlightened activities, such as Knower of the World, Tamer of Sentient Beings, Unsurpassable One, Charioteer Who Tames Sentient Beings, etc., are all explained in great detail. However, here we are explaining them briefly.

The seventh epithet is understood as “*Knower of the World*” (Tibetan *’jig.rten.mkhyen.pa*). Since Buddha knows the races and predispositions of all his disciples, he is addressed as “Knower of the World.” The Buddha knows which disciples have faults, 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 have

already been 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 *skyes.bu.'dul.ba'i.kha.lo.sgyur.ba.bla.na.med.pa*). Why is the Buddha known as “the Unsurpassable Charioteer Who Tames Sentient Beings”? Having seen the movements from birth to birth of sentient beings, the Buddha destroys the afflicting emotions of living beings who are fortunate enough to be able to attain the path leading to the City of liberation. For those beings, the Buddha will steer them along that path.

What does “*charioteer*” mean here? It is similar to one driving a horse cart or some other vehicle. In accordance with the predispositions and abilities of sentient beings, 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 continuum was 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 Pundarika 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 Angulimala, 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, Angulimala 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 that included King Prasanjit of Sarvasti. During the teaching Angulimala happened to cough, and even this caused the king to tremble. In yet another case, there is the story of a dimwitted Stavira monk. 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 also 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 Stavira monk by the name of *brtan.rgya.'od.srung* who was a very proud and arrogant person. He possessed many qualities, such as clairvoyance and the ability to display miraculous feats. Due to this, he was very haughty and conceited. In order to discipline him, the Buddha himself displayed many miraculous acts. In his mind, though, even when the Buddha demonstrated so many miraculous feats, this monk continued to believe that he had more special qualities than the Buddha. In order to tame him, the Buddha continued to display even more miracles. Finally, this caused the monk to produce true faith in the Buddha. He then received teaching from the Buddha and eventually attained the state of Arhatship.

The ninth epithet is "*the One Who is the Teacher of Gods and Humans*" (Tibetan *lha.dang.mi.rnam.kyi.ston.pa*). Generally, the Buddha gives teachings to all sentient beings, without bias and regardless of their race. However, though the

Buddha teaches all beings, gods and humans are the only two types of living beings who are capable of practicing the path of liberation. Foe Destroyers (Arhats) are of two kinds: god Foe Destroyers and human Foe Destroyers. There is no such category 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.”

These nine phrases in the Hinayanists’ rendition of this sutra refer back to the Buddha being known as “the Blessed One.” Therefore, this last phrase, “the Teacher of Gods and Humans,” completes the enumeration of terms referring to the Buddha who has the nine qualities that have just been explained.

If someone were to ask, “Who is the Buddha?” we would have to say that that unique person who possesses these nine qualities is none other than the Blessed Buddha. The meaning of the Sanskrit term *bhagavan* [usually translated as “the Blessed One,” as explained above,] can sometimes also be interpreted as “known as.” Therefore, without using the term “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.” These are *sangs* and *rgyas*. *Sangs* refers to awakening from sleep. *Rgyas* refers to the complete blossoming of a flower. Therefore, *sangs.rgyas* means awakening from the sleep of ignorance and increasing the understanding of knowable things. Therefore, in the Sanskrit language “Buddha” refers to either of those two syllables. However, in Tibetan “Buddha” is translated as *sangs.rgyas*.

Arya Asanga said that there are three qualities within the word “Buddha.” Since Buddha himself has awakened from the sleep of ignorance, he possesses the

perfection of relinquishment. Second, the Buddha causes others to awaken from the sleep of ignorance. So, the Buddha possesses the perfection of compassion. Third, the Blessed One increases his realization of wisdom. Therefore, Buddha possesses the perfection of realization which sees all things as they are. In this way, Asanga 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 that 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-to-understand worldly matters as well as the study of the Dharma will become easier. There is no task you cannot accomplish if you apply appropriate diligence. We should all study the Dharma. Especially, it is immensely important for the monks and nuns involved in the practice of the Dharma 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, but may not have actively engaged in its practice. Still, through the merit arising from merely listening 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, “*The Blessed 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 Shravaka 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 first sentence of this section of the sutra, which reads, *“He arose through corresponding causes of merit.”* “Merit” refers to virtue. The enlightened activities of the resultant Buddha are the results that correspond to the causes of multiple virtues. Commonly, it is said that there are five different types of results. Among these is “the ripening 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 the 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 ripened result of that virtuous activity.” At that very time the result of that person’s virtue is complete, and it will not carry on further than the next lifetime, whereas at the time when the Buddha 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 all sentient beings. In this way, the Buddha’s activities resulted in “a ripening result of virtue.”

The meaning of the phrase “the result similar to its cause” in relation to karma is explained as [referring to] a result that is similar to whatever action was

performed. This is known as “the result similar to its cause.” For example, whatever virtuous action is performed now will result in a similar virtuous action in the future. Likewise, whatever non-virtuous action is performed now will result in a similar non-virtuous action in the future. So, this is known as the result similar 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 was gained from that would be turned into an aspiration, such as “May I be able to 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 similar 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 have been performed to gain Buddhahood for the sake of others are never exhausted.

The ultimate result that you gain by practicing on the path of the Hinayana is the result of a Foe Destroyer. After having attained the state of a Foe Destroyer, your root of virtue is exhausted when you enter into Parinirvana, whereas through practicing on the Mahayana path, you gain the state of ultimate Buddhahood. Having attained the state of a Buddha, the root of virtue never becomes exhausted. All this shows that even after attaining the state of a Buddha, your merit 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. Conforming to the stages of the field 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 *kayas* [i.e., enlightened forms].

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. Mainly, there are two causes that 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 limbs 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 limbs. 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 meditate on 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 destroy anger from its roots. Understanding the faults of anger, it is therefore appropriate to think that you should overcome your anger. The practice of meditation on patience must start from today. How are you to meditate on the practice of patience? For example, even if you are being killed by others, you should try not to be defiled by anger. Instead you must try not to engage in harmful, non-virtuous activities of body, speech and mind. This was said by the Buddha. Even if someone robs you of all your belongings, you should reflect upon it with the thought, "By the merit of this generous gift of my belongings, may those robbers themselves become the treasure of generosity." Instead of letting anger arise, you should try to produce patience instead.

The word "*merit*" in the phrase "*the foundation of the treasures of merit*" means virtuous action. The word "*treasures*" refers to the Buddha's merit, or root of virtue, being inexhaustible. The word "*foundation*" refers to the Buddha being the source from which many other merits arise. In brief, this phrase shows that the individual limbs 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 is equivalent to the merit that is the cause of producing one pore of the Buddha's body. 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 produces the curl of hair will produce the *ushnisha* [the protuberance at the top of the Buddha's head]. Ten million times the merit needed to produce the *ushnisha* will produce the "conch of Dharma." The conch of Dharma seems to signify the Buddha's voice.

The phrase "*adorned with the noble minor marks and decorated with the flower blossoms of the noble major marks*" explains the very nature of the main structure of the Buddha's body. The minor and major marks are the physical qualities that beautify the Buddha's body. Among these two, the minor marks are 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 hands and feet, the *ushnisha* 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 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 first part of the phrase "*conforming to the stages of the field of enlightened activities*" indicates that the Buddha possesses the infinite perfection of enlightened activities. The second part indicates that no matter what behavior or activities 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 second part of the phrase, *“his appearance is not unpleasant to one’s sight and is delightful to devoted aspirants,”* describes the enlightened activities of the Buddha’s body. When people see the Buddha’s body and observe his behavior, not only do they think that this “being” is an exceptional one, but also a clear faith and devotion arises within them. Therefore, onlookers always see him as an agreeable sight and not displeasing to look upon.

The [next 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 natures possessed by his 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 devotees who go to see him. One is the type who sees him out of devotion. The other type of disciple 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 seed is planted in his mind that, when ripened, enables him to see the Buddha later. As a result of this, he later goes to see the Buddha. That type of person is known as one who possesses what is known as “desiring faith.” That kind of faith, however, is not desiring faith in the real sense. The reason for this is that it is just a desire to see the Buddha.

Real desiring faith [that of the second kind of disciple with devotion,] 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 "desiring 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. For example, people who engage in meditation experience both great physical and mental joy. Similarly, at the time when people see the Buddha they become delightfully happy. Those people are acknowledged to be delightfully happy with desiring faith.

The subsequent phrases from the sutra, "*his wisdom cannot be overpowered by others, and his powers are invincible,*" indicate the people who go to see the Buddha with the intention to compete 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. The reason for this is that the Buddha's wisdom cannot be 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 power can be overpowered. The reason for this is that the Buddha's physical strength cannot 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 defeating 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 teachings. Some sentient beings in the three lower realms are caused to be born in the higher realms just by seeing light rays issue from his body. On occasion, the Buddha will go to the lower realms, and by the sight of his body 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 Arhats, Shravakas, and Pratyekabuddhas of the Hinayana Vehicle. This phrase actually shows that the Buddha plays the role of king and that the noble beings are like attendants of the Buddha. For example, a Universal Monarch has many queens as well as many sons. Among them, 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 Universe 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 Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas carefully observe the rules and engage in Dharma practices, such as maintaining the moral conduct taught by the Buddha, they obtain their aimed-for results. So those Shravakas 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 who have not entered the path, the Buddha is given the title “captain.” So, the next phrase 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 yet entered the path leading to the City of Nirvana. Therefore, the Buddha is addressed as the guide or charioteer who leads sentient beings into the City of Liberation. So, in this instance, the Buddha plays the role of a guide. Accordingly, “guide” refers to the leader who directs someone from one place to another.

The next section of the sutra reads, *“He is the possessor of transcendental wisdom, inconceivable confidence, perfectly pure speech, a melodious voice, and a matchless body that is endlessly insatiable to behold.”* There are six epithets here that describe different skillful means possessed by the Buddha. These different skillful means, or tools, are used to perform enlightened activities, though the main one is giving teachings. 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 *“transcendental wisdom.”* This means that the Buddha’s wisdom and mind know all the limitless knowable things. So, it is said that the Buddha is acknowledged as possessor of immeasurable wisdom.

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

The first, confidence in connection to words, is 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. Second, confidence in relation to meaning is, for example, that the Buddha has the self-assurance to answer in a single moment hundreds of thousands of questions asked over a period of many eons by hundreds of thousands of disciples. In this way he has the ability to answer boundlessly.

The Buddha is able to answer any question asked of him, though disciples may hear it differently. Though the Buddha says one thing, the disciples understand it in accordance with their own needs and abilities. For example, in the collection of the Tibetan Tripitaka [i.e., the complete teaching of the Buddha known as the Three Baskets], there are three different versions of *The Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels* that were taught by the Buddha. The Buddha actually gave just one teaching, but 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 from all defects and possesses all [excellent] 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 [excellent] qualities.

One epithet is identified as “*a matchless body that is endlessly insatiable to behold*.” This attribute indicates that even if you look at the Buddha’s body for a long time, still the 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 outshines the bodies of all others. 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 human beings or womb-born beings, the Buddha himself manifests in a similar form. 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 wherever he performs the benefits of sentient beings.

There are three realms of existence where the Buddha accomplishes the benefits 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 into the ears 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 word “*desire*” in the [next] 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 the Realm of Desire is attachment. Since we value our desires so much, it is easy to become attached to them. Even though the Buddha lives in this Realm of Desire for the sake of sentient beings, he is affected neither by the craving to experience this realm’s happiness nor by the fault of reacting with anger.

The [next] phrase, “*unaffected by form,*” refers to the Realm of Form. The Realm of Form 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.

With respect to the next phrase, *“unmixed with formless ones,”* 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 next part of the sutra demonstrates that the Buddha accomplishes the benefits of sentient beings without becoming attached to any phenomena. This shows that the Buddha is never plagued by the afflicting emotions that are dependent on attachment to the aggregates, elements, or sensory perceptions. So, the next part of the text states, *“He is completely liberated from all suffering, thoroughly liberated from the aggregates, and unaffected by the elements.”*

The first phrase here, *“completely liberated from all suffering,”* refers to being free from all three: form, elements, and sensory perceptions. Since all three of these are of the nature of suffering, it is said that the Buddha is general free from all 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 final part of this section says, *“unaffected by the elements.”* This refers to the set of eighteen elements [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 [next] phrase, *“possessing disciplined sensory perceptions,”* shows that the Buddha is free from the field of the twelve sensory perceptions.

The following four phrases explain that the Buddha has already perfectly relinquished all afflicting emotions. For that reason the Buddha is known as “the one who possesses the perfection of relinquishment.” The word *“knot”* in the next phrase, *“he has thoroughly cut all knots,”* refers to the faults of the unwholesome afflicting emotions, such as desirous attachments. Since we are deeply habituated and shackled to the afflicting emotions, which are like the knots in 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 words *“suffering”* in the [next] phrase, *“He is completely liberated from all profound sufferings and freed from the world of existence,”* 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 the world of existence”* due to his relinquishment of craving and desire.

The word *“river”* in the [next] phrase, *“He has crossed the river,”* is a name 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 little clearer way, it is shown that there are two different types of desire. The

first one is the desire to meet someone who, or to meet with something that, you have not previously encountered. The other type of desire is the desire to enjoy what you already possess.

Craving to obtain something you have not acquired before, your mind becomes bound in the field of desire. Due to this, the knot of the afflicting emotion of desire arises. It is said that the Buddha has already relinquished both the knot-like faults of desire that are based on craving.

By enjoying an object of your desire that you have already obtained, you become more attached to it. Due to this, the afflicting emotion of desire becomes greater and greater, just as a river's current becomes more and more powerful. Since the Buddha has already crossed this type of river, he never experiences the mental agony of profound suffering.

The next 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 transcendental wisdom that is all-knowing; the second is the transcendental wisdom that is unmistaken; and the third is the non-abiding transcendental wisdom.

The first type of transcendental wisdom is called "the transcendental wisdom that is all-knowing." Generally, transcendental wisdom refers to the mind of the Noble Ones. It also refers to the transcendental wisdom that has gone beyond [i.e., the Perfection of Wisdom]. Commonly, all phenomena are designated to possess two different characteristics: nature and special attribute. Their "nature" refers to the fundamental knowing of all phenomena just as they are, starting from form and going up to omniscience. For example, the nature of form means knowing form in itself. The "special attribute" means the defining quality of all the objects of phenomenal existence. The special attribute of form refers to its qualities, such as

beauty, ugliness, and the like. Since the Buddha knows all of these, that type of knowledge is recognized as “the transcendental wisdom that is all-knowing.”

The second [type of wisdom possessed by the Buddha], “unmistaken 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, the mind or Dharmakaya of all these Buddhas is non-different. So it can be said that there are no differences, big or small, in their qualities.

[The next phrase in the sutra,] “*He is the one who abides in the transcendental wisdom of the past, future, and present Blessed Enlightened Ones,*” means that there is no difference in the transcendental wisdom and qualities of their minds. So, it is said that the Buddhas abide in the very same transcendental wisdom.

The third type [non-abiding transcendental wisdom] is shown in the next phrase where the sutra reads, “*Not abiding in Nirvana, he dwells in the state of perfection that sees all sentient beings.*” This indicates that the Buddha never abides in the Parinirvana of the Hinayana Vehicle. So it shows that the transcendental wisdom attained by the Blessed One relinquishes the result of the Hinayana practitioner. In other words, the Buddha does not abide in the Nirvana of the Shravaka. When it says “*he dwells in the state of perfection,*” this 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 from temporary stains. Therefore, the Blessed Buddha is 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 Buddha abides in three different

enlightened forms [i.e., *kayas*]. The Dharmakaya (Dharma Body) of the Buddha looks over all sentient beings, the Sambhogakaya (Bliss Body) benefits the great Bodhisattvas, and the Nirmanakaya (Emanation Body) performs beneficial actions for the sake of living beings in the three realms of existence. In this way, since the Dharmakaya and the Rupakaya [which consists of the Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya] benefit sentient beings, these three *kayas* are known as the basis that looks after all sentient beings. Thus it is said in the sutras.

With respect to the Buddha, all that has been explained up to this point illustrates the great attributes and virtues of the Blessed One. What do perfect qualities mean? The qualities that have been described are perfect because there are no exaggerations in terms of saying something that is not there. This shows that those are the real qualities the Buddha possesses. For example, when going for refuge, the field of refuge, the Three Jewels, is seen to possess great qualities, whereas the teachings 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.

[Second, to explain the Recollection of the Dharma:]

The meaning of the term *Dharma* should be understood to generally mean 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 addressed as "*virtuous in the beginning.*" The word "virtue" itself refers to being faultless and undeceiving. Regardless of your status of 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 meditate on concentration (*vipassana*) or calm abiding (*shamata*). For this reason, the Buddha's Dharma is addressed as "*virtuous in the middle.*" The final or ultimate practice among the three trainings is meditation on 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.*"

Even in the Hindu schools, the practice on 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 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 Buddha Dharma can also be spoken of as [possessing] "*wholesome meaning.*"

The words in the scriptures that explain the Buddha's teaching are free from poetic expressions and are expressed in common, colloquial language. So, these pleasing words are easy to understand. Therefore, the Buddha's teaching is said [in the sutra] to be "*wholesome words.*" This is talking about the qualities of scriptural Dharma.

The qualities of the Dharma of realization are shown by the phrases, "*unmixed,*" "*utterly complete,*" "*utterly pure,*" and "*utterly spotless.*" The first among these, "*unmixed,*" refers to the idea that the Buddha's Dharma is not mixed with, or

not corrupted by, the teachings of other schools. Therefore, it is said that the Buddha's Dharma is unique. For example, the Dharma practice of concentration can also be found in the mental continuum of Hindu practitioners. This is the same concentration practice used by Buddhists. However, none of these concentration practices is separate or distinct from Buddhist mental trainings. Since Buddhist practitioners possess uncommon Dharma that other schools may copy, Buddha Dharma is called "unmixed."

The phrase "*utterly complete*" indicates that the Buddha Dharma has all the remedies to eradicate all obscurations, such as those of the afflicting emotions and the like. Through the practice of the 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.

Buddha Dharma is also known as "*utterly pure*" because the Dharma of realization is not affected by the afflicting emotions. Likewise, it is known as "*utterly spotless*" because it plays the role of an antidote that eradicates all afflicting emotions completely. The practices of Hindu Dharma are contaminated due to the fact that they act as a basis for the arising of afflicting emotions.

This is one way to explain this section. However, in the *Sutralankara* of Arya Maitreya there is a slightly different explanation of the nine phrases starting with "*virtuous in the beginning*" and ending with "*utterly spotless*" that discloses 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, timeless, praiseworthy, meaningful to behold, and understood by the discriminating wisdom of*

learned ones.” These epithets are 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 Tripitaka is the Buddha’s direct perception of the true nature of all phenomena. This direct perception is free from 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 the sickness-like afflicting emotions, such as attachment and hatred, place sentient beings in suffering. Therefore, the afflicting emotions are identified as sickness. The Buddha Dharma is also identified as “free from sickness” because it is the remedy that relinquishes the afflicting emotions.

The term *“timeless”* refers to the view that once you relinquish the obscurations, such as the afflicting emotions and the like, those relinquished afflicting emotions will not return again. The time of relinquishment for those afflicting emotions is never exhausted. For example, even though Hindu practitioners relinquish their afflicting emotions through practicing their spiritual path, it is certain that it will return. The reason for this is that they have not eradicated the seed of the afflicting emotions.

The term *“timeless”* also means that the teaching of the Buddha is easy and pleasing to practice, whenever you wish. For instance, you can practice Dharma while you are walking, or you can practice the Dharma when you are eating, etc.

The term “*praiseworthy*” means that the Dharma of realization transfers to the practitioner who is on the path to liberation. Liberation can be placed in the palm of the practitioner’s hand.

Next, the expression “*meaningful to behold*” signifies that the Buddha’s Dharma is meaningful to contemplate. Why is this so? This Dharma is unique. When this Dharma is grasped, you will see the true nature of all phenomena also. Due to that, you will gain temporary and permanent results. So, the Dharma is “meaningful to behold.”

The phrase “*understood by the discriminating wisdom of learned ones*” means that from among all philosophical tenets, the most superior Dharma is the Truth of Cessation [i.e., Nirvana]. This very phrase is also understood to mean that the true nature of phenomena is free of stains. 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 discriminating wisdom. Thus it is said by the Buddha. Discriminating 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 discriminating wisdom. You should also be aware that there are different interpretations by other masters concerning this seventh phrase.

Now, the following phrases from the next section of the sutra read, “*It is firmly based on the Blessed One’s teachings of discipline and renunciation that lead to the state of perfect Buddhahood,*” and “*Lacking contradictions, it is complete, reliable, and cuts off going.*” These describe the qualities of the Dharma. The first phrase, “*It is*

firmly based on the Blessed One's teachings of discipline," means that all the teachings of the Buddha, whether they are of the Lesser Vehicle (Hinayana) or the Greater Vehicle (Mahayana), or the Sutras or the Tantras, have been given in the Vinaya [i.e., the teachings on moral discipline] simply to overcome the afflicting emotions that disturb the mind of sentient beings. The term "*renunciation*" 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 is the ultimate result of practicing Dharma, it is identical to perfect realization. In addition, renunciation could also mean that by relying on the Dharma, you can obtain the state of Theravada Arhatship.

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 complete,*" means that the teachings of the Greater Vehicle include all teachings of the Lesser Vehicle.

The term "*reliable*" means that you can trust or have confidence in the Buddha Dharma. 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 "*cuts off going,*" refers to going further. The word "*cuts*" means stopping the movement of going, so that there is no need to go further. The actual

meaning of this is that there is no necessity to undertake further practices once the result of your spiritual journey is attained. For example, once you have attained the state of Arhatship in the Lesser 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 Greater Vehicle, no further effort or exertion is needed. Since the final destination has been reached, there is no need to advance further.

[Third, to explain the Recollection of the Sangha:]

It is important to understand the qualities of the Sangha that are explained by the words of the sutra, such as, *“The Sangha of the Great Vehicle dwells appropriately, knowledgably, honestly, harmoniously.”* Though the words of the sutra refer to the Mahayana Sangha, these qualities of the Sangha also apply to the Theravada Sangha. In some of the translations of *The Sutra of Recollecting the Three Jewels* it is written, *“The Sangha of the Lesser Vehicle dwells appropriately, knowledgably, truthfully, harmoniously.”* Both of these are suitable to be used. Therefore, these phrases explain the recollection of the Sangha of both vehicles.

The word *dge.’dun* in Tibetan is the translation of the Sanskrit word *sangha*. Here, “Sangha” refers to noble beings. The meaning of the word “Sangha” denotes the person who has great faith in the Three Jewels, who aspires to the performance of virtuous actions, and who has unshakable devotion to the Dharma even if an ignorant demon or someone similar were to speak badly of it.

Also, *sangha* can mean “assembly.” If this were explained from the Theravada perspective, to possess a Sangha means that there are at least four monks gathered together. This group of monks is called an “assembly” or *sangha*, whereas from the

Mahayana perspective, one person alone can constitute an “assembly” or *sangha*. In Mahayana, 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 perform numerous virtuous actions, they are said to “dwell appropriately.” The person who dwells on the path of liberation is called the one who “*dwells knowledgably*,” so this phrase refers to the one seeking Nirvana or liberation. The phrase “*dwells truthfully*” 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, which espouses the view of selflessness. For this reason they are known as those who “dwell truthfully.”

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 knowledgably*.” 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. In this way, they are also said to “*dwell harmoniously*.”

The next section of the sutra contains the phrases, “*They are objects worthy of being venerated with joined palms and with prostrations*.” To explain the meaning of this: Due to the Sangha being endowed with the higher training of meditation, it is said that the Noble Sangha of the Greater and Lesser Vehicles are worthy of receiving

respect by others through their joining their palms together. The term *“joined palms”* is a symbol that includes the belief that the Sangha is worthy of receiving prostrations of body, 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 receiving respect with joined palms”* or *“worthy of receiving prostrations”* is considered necessary to be used.

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

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. In contrast, 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 a proper object for receiving gifts”* means that since the Noble Sangha are endowed with good moral conduct they are a proper field for giving. Further, since the Sangha are endowed with the higher training of moral discipline, they are a proper field for 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 field of receiving 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 we 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 we are 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.