



The Asian Classics Institute



Diamond Mountain University

In-Depth Course 1
Teachings of the Future Buddha:
The Uttara Tantra of Maitreya

Homework and Quiz Master, Class Eight: Other Schools on Buddha Nature

1) Describe how the Detailists—the Abhidharma School—explain Buddha-nature, and why. (Sanskrit and Tibetan tracks give the description in these languages.)

[The members of this school describe Buddha-nature in terms of “Buddha-nature for a realized being” (*arya*), saying it consists of keeping to the principle of not wanting much, and being satisfied with what you have. This is because without this attitude as a foundation or seed, one has no hope of becoming a realized being or reaching nirvana.

འདྲེན་ཚུང་ཚོས་ཤེས་འཕགས་པའི་རིགས།

duchung chokshe pakpay rik

अल्पेभः संतोष आर्य वंश

alpeccha sam.tos.a a-rya vam.s.a

*2) State how the Mind-Only School describes Buddha-nature, and then how they distinguish between the two classical types of Buddha-nature. (S, T for description of Buddha-nature.)

[The Mind-Only School describes Buddha-nature as “An undefiled seed in the mind, possessed by a suffering living being.” This is called “developable” Buddha-nature whenever it has been developed through learning and so on; and “innate” or “natural” whenever it has not been so developed.

ཟག་མེད་སེམས་གྱི་ས་བོན།

sukme semkyi sabun

अनास्रव चित्तबीज

ana-srava cittabi-ja

3) List the two principal works that we will use for our presentation of the idea of Buddha-nature according to the Tibetan school of “other-emptiness” (*shentong*); also name the two authors, and their dates. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

(a) *The Deep Inner State* by the His Holiness the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339) (We will also be using the commentary to this by Jamgon Kongtrul, next.)

ཟབ་མོ་ནང་དོན།

sabmo nangdun

ཀམ་རང་བྱུང་དོན་རྗེ།

karma rangjung dorje

(b) *The Moon of Diamond: a Teaching on Other-Emptiness*, by Kongtrul Yonten Gyatso (also known as Garwang Lodru Taye), (1813-1899)

གཞུང་ཐོན་ལྷོ་བླ་བྱིད་དོན་རྗེ་ལྷོ་བ།

shentong tatri dorjey dawa

ཀོང་རྒྱལ་ཡོན་ཏན་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

kongtrul yunten gyatso

གར་དབང་ལྷོ་གྲོས་མཐའ་ཡས།

garwang lodru taye

4) According to Jamgon Kongtrul, there are three great Tibetan fathers of the other-emptiness traditions. Name them and give their dates.

(a) {His Holiness the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339);

(b) the omniscient Dolpowa Sherab Gyeltsen (1292-1361), also known as Jonangpa Sherab Gyeltsen and originally a Sakya scholar; and

(c) the Nyingma master Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1363), also known as “the omniscient Drime User.”]

5) The Tibetan school of “other-emptiness” is tied to the Jonangpa tradition. Explain the name “Jonangpa” and relate a little about the history of this lineage.

[The word “Jonangpa” refers to Jomo Nang, an area near the town of Shigatse, south of Lhasa. It is said in some sources that the idea of “other-emptiness” began with a Lama named Yumo Mikyu Dorje, who lived in the 11th century. He wrote texts on the idea, and a monastery in this area named Jonang Gonpa (“Monastery of Jonang”) was later founded by a member of his lineage named Kunpang Tukje Tsundru (1243-1313). Because he contributed greatly to the spread of this school, Dolpowa Sherab Gyeltsen (1292-1361) earned the name of “the Jonangpa,” and is referred to as such for example in the works of Je Tsongkapa. (He was a “grand-disciple” of Master Kunpang.) The school later went into decline, but was revived by Jetsun Taranatha (b.1575), who wrote a famous history of Buddhism and was especially active in Mongolia. The famed Gelukpa trulkus of the Jetsun Dampa lineage, considered a sort of “Dalai Lama” of Mongolia, are considered to be his reincarnation.]

*6) Give an explanation of what the “other” (*shen*) in the expression “other-emptiness” (*shentong*) means.

[There are three great characteristics of the ancient Indian school of the Mind-Only: totality, dependent things, and constructs. The Jonangpa School of Tibet holds that “totality” refers to a “wisdom which perceives that subjects and objects are not two separate things.” This wisdom is “empty (*tong*) or devoid of *other* (*shen*) things included in deceptive reality, such as dependent things and constructs.” As such it is “other-empty.” (Quoted from *The Great Dictionary*.)]

*7) How does the idea of “other-emptiness” (*shentong*) relate to the Buddha-nature which is the subject of our class?

[As noted above, “other-emptiness” refers to the wisdom or state of mind or wisdom which perceives that subjects and objects are not separate. His Holiness Karma Rangjung Dorje, according to Jamgon Kongtrul, describes Buddha-nature as “that primordial mind, the state of indivisible ether and wisdom, which is like a reflection of the moon in water; beyond all true or false; that which cannot ever be identified; and beyond all names.” The school thus seems to mix together as Buddha-nature the wisdom which perceives emptiness and the emptiness or “clear light” which it perceives. They are attacked on this point by our own school, which does not accept an unchanging functional thing.]

8) How does Jonangpa himself (Master Sherab Gyeltsen) describe the two kinds of Buddha-nature?

[He says that the natural or innate Buddha-nature is an actual Buddha, complete with the 32 qualities of enlightenment, which has existed for all time as a component part of every suffering living being. “Developable” Buddha-nature then consists of new occasions of Buddha-nature which are created as one engages in actions such as learning. We thus see the influence of the Mind-Only School in his thinking.]

*9) The members of the Jonangpa School differentiate between “great” followers of the Middle Way (Madhyamika) and “regular” followers of the Middle Way, grouping these last together with followers of the three lower schools of classical Indian Buddhism: the Detailists (Abhidharma schools); Sutrists (logic schools); and Yogists (Mind-Only School). Explain how they draw the distinction between their own “great” version of the Middle Way, and the “regular” Middle Way and other groups.

[They say that “regular” followers of the Middle Way speak about how all existing objects are empty of any essence of their own. Those of the lower schools talk about the lack of a self to the person, and the lack of truth to objects of perception; whereas the Yogists speak of wisdom devoid of duality. But because all these views are still mistaken, they are “far from enlightenment.” The only people who can really have any experience of the wisdom free of duality are those who are perceiving it directly, or those who are training their minds through meditation on nothing at all, or a space-like vision.]

The idea that analysis of or contemplation on emptiness could be useful is a “delusion.”]

10) Give four criticisms of the “other-emptiness” and Jonangpa ideas of Buddha-nature mentioned by Gyalsab Je in his explanation of *The Commentary on the Latter Part (Uttara Tantra)*.

(a) [Ultimate reality is an unchanging thing. The wisdom which perceives that there is no difference between subject and object is a working thing. It is a contradiction to say that Buddha-nature is somehow a mix of both things at the same time.

(b) A Buddha's essence body is described as possessing two kinds of purity: natural purity or emptiness, and an achieved purity of negativities. It is contradictory to say that the mind from beginningless time has been pure in both ways, since then there would be nothing left to achieve, and we would already be Buddhas.

(c) You define “other-emptiness” (*shentong*) as something “devoid of deceptive objects,” and equate this to ultimate reality and Buddha-nature. When you say “devoid of deceptive objects,” do you mean “never *involved* with deceptive objects” or “never *being* deceptive objects”? The former can't be the case, since you say ultimate reality—Buddha-nature—spreads to all beings. And the latter can't be the case, since you don't need to be a special disciple or “great” follower of the Middle Way to see that ultimate reality is not deceptive reality.

(d) You say that thinking and analysis are of no benefit in reaching the wisdom which is free of all duality; that this can only be reached in “thoughtless” meditation. Why then do you undertake to explain for example “other-emptiness” to people?]

11) A beautiful concept in the structure of Jamgon Kongtrul's *Diamond Moon* is that this Lama first discusses the *idea* of Buddha-nature, and after that presents a series of actual *practices* which one can follow to realize this nature. Summarize his final advice for practice.

[He says: “Feel deep love and belief that the Lama who imparts these essential instructions to you is the Dharmakaya itself. Reflect to yourself that, since all living beings possess the Buddha-nature, then—whether you are able at this point to recognize it or not—they all ultimately combine within themselves already the 64 high qualities of an enlightened being. Practice thus the universe of purity.]

12) On the very first page of his *Diamond Moon*, Jamgon Kongtrul gives us a clue as to why a high Lama might take an untenable position concerning emptiness and Buddha-nature. What does He say?

[He says: “It's not that we make this distinction between literal and figurative teachings

because there is any chance that some part of Lord Buddha's teachings could be intentional lies—something false. Rather, these teachings were all given relative to certain differences within people's minds: whether they were capable of entering into those inconceivable depths or not. As such, Lord Buddha began the first of the three steps in the Turning of the Wheel in the way that a mother would begin her baby with mush, before going on to solid food.”]

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes a day, analytical meditation considering the difference between seeing Buddha-nature as something positive—a seed in the mind; and something negative—the lack of a self-existent object.