Therefore, one should know the great mantra of Prajñāpāramitā, the mantra of the great spell, the unsurpassed mantra, the peerless mantra, the mantra that soothes all suffering. Because it is not false, it is true. The mantra of Prajñāpāramitā is spoken as follows: gate, gate, paragate, parasaṃgate, bodhi svāhā (gone, gone, gone beyond, utterly gone beyond: enlightenment!).

Source: Translated from "The Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra," ed. Edward Conze, in *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies* (London: Bruno Cassirer, 1967), pp. 148–67.[58]

4.2.3 The Perfection of Wisdom as the Middle Way

Another important theme of the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature, as indeed of the whole of the Mahāyāna, is that of the Middle Way, which avoids the two extremes. In the Buddha's biography, of course, these two extremes are defined as the life of the palace–self-indulgence and full affirmation of the things of this world–and the life of extreme asceticism–self-mortification and utter denial of the things of this world. We have already seen how, even in the Pali canon (see 3.2.5), this Middle Way was interpreted more philosophically as the path between the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, of existence and nonexistence. In the following selection, taken from the Chinese translation of a commentary (wrongly attributed to Nāgārjuna) on the *Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*, we find a whole series of other extremes proposed. The Perfection of Wisdom always shuns them both, even when the Middle Way itself becomes a new extreme!

Everlasting—that is one extreme; passing away—that is another extreme; give up these two extremes to go on the Middle Way—that is the Perfection of Wisdom. Permanence is one extreme, impermanence is another; give up these two extremes to go on the Middle Way—that is the Perfection of Wisdom. . . . Form is one extreme, formlessness is another; the visible is one extreme, the invisible is another; aversion is one extreme, nonaversion is another; . . . depravity is one extreme, purity is another; this world is one extreme, the supramundane is another; . . . ignorance is one extreme, the extinction of ignorance is another; old age and death are one extreme, the cessation of old age and death is another; the existence of all dharmas is one extreme, the nonexistence of all dharmas is another; give up these two extremes to go on the Middle Way—that is the Perfection of Wisdom.

Bodhisattva is one extreme, the six perfections are another; Buddha is one extreme, bodhi is another; give up these two extremes to go on the Middle Way—that is the Perfection of Wisdom. The six internal sense organs are one extreme, the six external sense objects are another; give up these two extremes to go on the Middle Way—that is the Perfection of Wisdom. "This is the Perfection of Wisdom"—that is one extreme; "this is not the Perfection of Wisdom"—that is another; give up these two extremes to go on the Middle Way—that is the Perfection of Wisdom.

Source: Translated from *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* (Taishō shinshū daizōkyō, ed. J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe [Tokyo, 1924–29], no. 1509, 25:370a–b].[59]

[58] Alternative English translation, Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), pp. 77–107.

4.3 PHILOSOPHICAL FORMULATIONS

The *Perfection of Wisdom* literature set many of the doctrinal themes of the Mahāyāna, but these were further developed and elaborated by various schools of thought. In India, it is possible to distinguish two principal schools of Mahāyāna philosophy: the Mādhyamika school, founded by Nāgārjuna (first to second century C.E.?) and Āryadeva (about 170–270 C.E.), and continued by such thinkers as Buddhapālita (about 470–540), Bhāvaviveka (about 490–570), Candrakirti (600–650), and Śāntideva (about 650–750); and the Vijñānavāda, or Yogacāra, school, which is associated with such figures as Maitreyanātha (about 270–350) (who is sometimes identified with the bodhisattva Maitreya), the brothers Asanga (about 310–390) and Vasubandhu (about 320–400), Dignāga (480–540), Sthiramati (510–570), Dharmapāla (530–561), Śāntirakṣita (about ?–788), and Kamalaśila (about 740–795), the latter two also being involved in a philosophical rapprochement with the Mādhyamikas.

Mahāyāna philosophy, however, was not limited to these two major philosophical schools. In addition, there arose less organized currents of thought, such as the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine and the Avataṃsaka doctrine of interpenetration and totality, which were developed in certain sūtras that were highly influential. In what follows, we shall sample all of these by means of some classic representative texts.

4.3.1 Nāgārjuna: Verses on the Noble Truths and on Nirvāṇa

Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Mādhyamika school and one of the great philosophers of world history, can be viewed, first, as a systematizer of Perfection of Wisdom doctrines. He too is preoccupied with the doctrine of emptiness, but his genius was in spelling out its implications for the rest of Buddhist thought.

Nāgārjuna's works are subtle and profound, and for the most part they are rather densely packed into concise verses. It may be helpful, therefore, to make a few preliminary points to be kept in mind in reading the following selections, taken from the 24th and 25th chapters of one of his most important works, his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikaḥ* (*Stanzas on the Middle Way*).

[59] Alternative English translation, K. Venkata Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Mahā-Prajñāpāramitā-śāstra* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1966), pp. 108–9.

First, it should be noted that Nāgārjuna here presents his arguments as responses to objections raised by philosophical opponents. Indeed, his method is said to have been merely to show that the philosophical assertions of others were ultimately untenable, and not to establish a philosophical position of his own. According to him, any assertion of a "Truth" can ultimately be dismantled, can be reduced to absurdity and shown to be inconsistent, because it necessarily freezes the reality it is supposed to express. Nāgārjuna realizes that were his views to be hypostatized in any way, they too would be untenable. Hence, he is wary of falling into the trap he springs on his opponents. He claims to set up no tenets of his own, only to demolish the tenets of others.

Because of this, some have asserted that Nāgārjuna is only a nay-sayer, a nihilist, denying all realities. To conclude this, however, would be a dangerous misunderstanding. For one thing, Nāgārjuna is such a thorough-going "nay-sayer" that he says no even to nihilism. For another, there is a distinct difference between denying reality and denying descriptions of reality. Nāgārjuna was acutely aware of the hypostatic powers of language, and for him, to "assert" that reality did not exist would be just as absurd as "asserting" that it did.

In this regard, mention should be made of the doctrine of the two truths: ultimate truth (paramarthasatya), sometimes called the "highest object truth," and conventional truth (saṃvṛtisatya), sometimes called "relative truth." Nāgārjuna mentions this theory of two truths only in passing in the passage below, but it is basic to his whole enterprise and to the Buddhist attempt at enlightening beings: conventional truths, expressed in conventional language, are needed in order to teach about the ultimate, about emptiness. Otherwise, no approach, no progress is possible for unenlightened beings caught in saṃsāra.

It is important to realize that Nāgārjuna had a keen appreciation of the dynamics of reality. He, in fact, equates emptiness (śūnyatā) with interdependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), thus causing some scholars to translate "śūnyatā" not as "emptiness" but as "relativity." Because "things" (dharmas) are empty of any inherent, separate, unchangeable, permanent, essential self-existence (svabhāva), it is possible for relativity, for interdependence, to occur. It is possible for things to interact, to come into contact with one another, to change, to come into existence, to pass away. If "things" were *not* empty, that is, if they *did* have svabhāva, it would be impossible for them—for their "essence"—to change, interact, or grow, because their "essence," their "inherent nature," what makes them "them," is by definition unchangeable, separate, and permanent. For Nāgārjuna, the world of svabhāva is a frozen landscape in which there can be no movement, no change, no interaction, no relativity. And to those who would object and say, "But the world is not like that!" Nāgārjuna would reply: "Precisely! That is why the world is emptiness."

In the first of the two passages below, from chapter 24 of his *Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna, using the logic just described, reacts to an opponent who seems to think that emptiness means that the Four Noble Truths, and consequently the whole of Buddhism, are devoid of reality. Not so, Nāgārjuna retorts, it is only without emptiness, that is, with svabhāva, that that would be the case. In the second passage (chapter 25), the argument turns to nirvāṇa. Here another dimension of Nāgārjuna's thought emerges: On the one hand, because of the special nature of nirvāṇa, Nāgārjuna has to push his "nay-saying" further and ends with the famous tetralemma, the fourfold negation of the Buddha in nirvāṇa as neither existing, nor nonexisting, nor both existing and nonexisting, nor neither existing nor nonexisting. On the other hand, because much the same language could be applied to saṃsāra, Nāgārjuna is led to conclude that nirvāṇa and saṃsāra are not distinct, not separable. At this point, the dialectic has come full circle.

Chapter 24: On the Four Noble Truths

[An opponent argues:]

1. If everything is empty, there can be no arising or passing away, and it follows that the Four Noble Truths [which involve the arising and passing away of suffering] do not exist.
2. And because the Four Noble Truths do not exist, there can be no understanding [of the truth of suffering], no abandonment [of the cause of suffering], no practice [of the Path], no realization [of nirvāṇa].
3. Nor, without these, can there be any knowledge of the four fruits [of the Path: stream-winner, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhatship]; and without these, there can be no individuals who are established in the four fruits, and none who are on the four paths toward them.
4. And if these eight kinds of individuals do not exist, there can be no sangha. And since the Four Noble Truths do not exist either, no true Dharma can be found.
5. And if neither the sangha nor the Dharma exists, how can there be a Buddha? Thus, in speaking of emptiness, you contradict the Three Jewels [Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha].
6. And you deny the reality of the fruits, of good and bad, and of all worldly conventions.

[Nāgārjuna replies:]

7. To this we say that you do not know what emptiness is all about. You are therefore distressed by emptiness and [what you wrongly see as the] implications of emptiness.
8. In teaching the Dharma, Buddhas resort to two truths: worldly conventional truth and ultimate truth.
9. Those who do not know the distinction between these two truths do not understand the deep reality in the Buddha's Teaching.
10. The ultimate cannot be taught without resorting to conventions; and without recourse to the ultimate, one cannot reach nirvāṇa.
11. Emptiness, poorly perceived, destroys those of slight intelligence, like a snake badly grasped or magical knowledge misapplied.
12. That is why the Buddha was at first averse to teaching the Dharma; he thought that it would be difficult for those of slight intelligence to fathom it.

13. You have repeatedly objected to emptiness, but your faulty condemnation has nothing to do with our views, and does not apply to what is empty.
14. What is linked to emptiness is linked to everything; what is not linked to emptiness is linked to nothing.
15. You, putting off onto us your own deficiencies, are like someone who mounts a horse and then forgets he is on it.
16. If you view the true existence of existing things from [the perspective of each thing having] its own inherent self-existence [svabhāva], you will necessarily see those existing things as having neither cause nor condition, [as being totally unconnected to anything].
17. And you will deny cause and effect as well as [the possibility of there being] a doer, a deed, a doing, an origin, a cessation, or a fruit [of the Path].
18. Interdependent origination—that is what we call emptiness. That is a conventional designation. It is also the Middle Way.
19. There can be found no element of reality [dharma] that is not interdependently originated; therefore, there can be found no element of reality whatsoever that is *not* empty.
20. If everything were *not* empty, there could be no arising or passing away, and it would follow that the Four Noble Truths [which involve the arising and passing away of suffering] did not exist.
21. How could suffering *not* be interdependently originated? Indeed, suffering is said to be impermanent; thus it cannot be found to exist if it has its own [permanent] inherent self-existence.
22. And furthermore, how could there be an arising of suffering having its own inherent self-existence? Because for one who denies emptiness, there is no arising.
23. Nor could a cessation of suffering having its own inherent self-existence be found to exist; by insisting on the notion of inherent self-existence, you deny cessation.
24. Finally, if there is such a thing as inherent self-existence, there can be no practice of the Path. But that Path is cultivated, so it cannot be found to have its own inherent self-existence. [. . .]
31. According to your view, it follows that the Enlightened One is independent of his enlightenment, and enlightenment is independent of the Enlightened One!
32. According to your view, people who, by virtue of their own inherent self-existence, are [defined as being] unenlightened, will never attain enlightenment, even by means of the practices of a bodhisattva.
33. And no good or bad will be done by anyone, for what can be done by what is not-empty? That which has its own inherent self-existence does not act.
34. Indeed, acccording to your view, a fruit would be found to exist without [reference to having been brought about by] a good or bad deed, because for you a fruit is not found to be fashioned by good or bad deeds.
35. But if according to your view, a fruit *is* fashioned by good or bad deeds, how can that fruit that has *originated* from a good or bad deed not be empty?
36. When you deny emptiness, which is interdependent origination, you deny all worldly transactions.
37. For one who denies emptiness, there would be nothing at all to be done, doing would never get started, and a doer would not be doing.
38. According to the theory of inherent self-existence, the world should be [unchanging]: neither coming into being nor ceasing, utterly uniform and devoid of varying situations.
39. In the absence of emptiness, there could not be found to exist either the attainment of what has not yet been attained, or the bringing to an end of suffering, or the abandonment of all defilements.
40. One who perceives interdependent origination also perceives this: suffering, the origination of suffering, the cessation of suffering, as well as the path to the cessation of suffering.

Chapter 25: On Nirvāṇa

[An opponent argues:]

1. If everything is empty, there can be no arising or passing away; therefore, by what abandonment, by what cessation can nirvāṇa be expected?

[Nāgārjuna replies:]

2. [It is only] if everything is *not* empty that there can be no arising or passing away [and that one can ask]: by what abandonment, by what cessation can nirvāṇa be expected?
3. This is said about nirvāṇa: no abandonment, no attainment, no annihilation, no eternality, no cessation, no arising.
4. Nirvāṇa is not a thing, for then it would follow that it would be characterized by old age and death, for no thing is free from old age and death.
5. And if nirvāṇa were a thing, it would be karmically constituted, for no thing anywhere has ever been found not to be karmically constituted.
6. And if nirvāṇa were a thing, how could it not be dependent on other things, for no independent thing has ever been found.

7. If nirvāṇa is not a thing, can it be that it is a "nonthing"? [No, because] wherever there is no thing, neither can there be a nonthing.
8. And if nirvāṇa were a nonthing, how could it not be dependent on other things, for no independent nonthing has ever been found.
9. The state of moving restlessly to and fro [in saṃsāra] is dependent and conditioned; independent and unconditioned, it is said to be nirvāṇa.
10. The Buddha said that both existence and freedom from existence are abandoned. Therefore it is fitting to say that nirvāṇa is not a thing and not a nonthing.
11. If nirvāṇa were *both* a thing and a nonthing, liberation would also be *both* a thing and a nonthing, but that does not make sense.
12. If nirvāṇa were *both* a thing and a nonthing, it would not be independent [of other things], for both [things and nonthings] are dependent.
13. And how could nirvāṇa be both a thing and a nonthing? Nirvāṇa is not karmically constituted, but things and nonthings are.
14. [And anyhow,] how could nirvāṇa be both a thing and a nonthing? Like light and darkness, these two are opposites and cannot both exist at the same place.
15. Only if things and nonthings are established can the proposition "Nirvāṇa is *neither* a thing nor a nonthing" be established.
16. But how could it be asserted that nirvāṇa was found to be "neither a thing nor a nonthing?"
17. It is not asserted that the Blessed One exists after his passing away; nor is it asserted that he does not exist, that he both exists and does not exist, or that he neither exists nor does not exist.
18. Even while he is living, it is not asserted that the Blessed One exists; nor is it asserted that he does not exist, both exists and does not exist, or neither exists nor does not exist.
19. There is no distinction whatsoever between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa; and there is no distinction whatsoever between nirvāṇa and saṃsāra.
20. The limit of nirvāṇa and the limit of saṃsāra: one cannot find even the slightest difference between them.
21. Views about such things as the finitude or infinitude of the state coming after death, are related to the issue of nirvāṇa having beginning and ending limits.
22. Given that all elements of reality are empty, what is infinite? What is finite? What is both finite and infinite? What is neither finite nor infinite?
23. What is just this? What is that other? What is eternal? What is noneternal? What is both eternal and noneternal? What is neither eternal nor noneternal?
24. Ceasing to fancy everything and falsely to imagine it as real is good; nowhere did the Buddha ever teach any such element of reality.

Source: Translated from Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikaḥ*, ed. J. W. de Jong (Adyar: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1977), pp. 34–40.[60]

4.3.2 The Ongoing Dialectic

Despite Nāgārjuna's advocacy of the Middle Way, and his precautions against nihilistic interpretations, the doctrine of emptiness presented in the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature was seen by some as being too negativistic or, perhaps more accurately, as being in need of interpretation so that it would not be viewed negativistically. The *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* (*The Unraveling of Hidden Intentions*, or *Explanation of Mysteries*), a text of the early third century C.E., reflects this view in its account of the "Three Turnings of the Wheel of the Dharma." According to this, the Buddha, when he preached his first sermon in the Deer Park near Benares, denied the existence of the Ātman but affirmed the reality of dharmas. This was the doctrine of Nikāya Buddhism. Later, in the so-called second turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, the Buddha proclaimed the emptiness of those dharmas and posited the Absolute in negative terms. This was the doctrine of the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature. According to the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*, both of these views are true but conventional, in need of interpretation in order to be understood properly. The third turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, with which the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* wishes to identify itself, claims to represent the Buddha's views of the Absolute explicitly, directly, without hidden meaning. Doctrinally, the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* marks the transition between the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts and the full development of the Vijñānavāda school. Its later chapters, in fact, contain a presentation of many basic Mind-Only Vijñānavāda views.

One of these is the subject of the following selection: the view of the threefold absence of inherent self-existence (niḥsvabhāvatā). To this threefold denial of inherent self-existence corresponds the assertion of the three aspects, or natures (trisvabhāva), of reality, a sort of Vijñānavādin counterpart to the Mādhyamika notion of the two truths. Elements of reality (dharmas) can be thought of as having a falsely constructed, or imaginary, nature (parikalpita svabhāva). This is involved in attributing to them inherent self-existence, which they do not have. This is also the world of subject-object dualism in which we, ignorantly, live our lives. But dharmas are also said to have a "dependent nature" (paratantra svabhāva); here the separation and false conception of objects disappears and we see only their underlying interconnections, their

[60]Alternative English translations, Frederick Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), pp. 212–17; David Kalupahana, *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986) pp. 326–69; Kenneth Inada, *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay* (Tokyo, 1970), pp. 143–59; for ch. 25, Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, (Benares: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, n.d.), pp. 282–329; and Stephan Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience*, (Encino: Dickenson, 1974), pp. 212–15.

dependently originated nature. Finally, there is what is called the "perfected nature" (pariniṣpanna svabhāva), which amounts to permanently seeing reality in its suchness (tathatā), as it truly is, as one does in meditation.

Sometimes, the three natures are distinguished by the simile of a mirage. When we see a mirage and think what we see is water—that is the falsely constructed nature. When we see a mirage and realize that what we are seeing is not water but a phenomenon caused by other things (heat waves, glare)—that is the interdependent nature. When we see a mirage, know that both the notions of water and of mirage are ultimately false, and see what is actually there, realizing that it is inherently neither water nor mirage—that is the perfected nature.

Then the bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata said this to the Blessed One: "Blessed One, once, when I found myself alone, I had this reflection: 'On several occasions, the Blessed One has spoken of the inherent characteristics of the five skandhas, . . . of the Four Noble Truths, . . . of the eighteen dhātus, . . . of the four applications of mindfulness, . . . of the Noble Eightfold Path. . . . However, on another occasion, the Blessed One stated that all dharmas are *without* inherent self-existence, are not originated, not destroyed, originally peaceful, of the nature of nirvāṇa.' I would like to ask: What was the hidden intention of the Blessed One in describing things in this way?"

The Blessed One replied: "Your thought is good and legitimate. . . . Listen and I will tell you the hidden intention with which I teach that all dharmas are without inherent self-existence, not originated, not destroyed, originally peaceful, of the nature of nirvāṇa.

"When I teach that, I do so with reference to the threefold lack of inherent self-existence of all dharmas, to wit: the lack of inherent self-existence with regard to character, the lack of inherent self-existence with regard to origination, and the ultimate lack of inherent self-existence.

"What, then, Paramārthasamudgata, is the lack of inherent self-existence of dharmas with regard to their character? It is the falsely constructed [parikalpita] character. How so? Because its character is established by names and conventions and is not inherently established, it is called the lack of inherent self-existence with regard to character.

"And what, Paramārthasamudgata, is the lack of inherent self-existence of dharmas with regard to their origination? It is the dependent [paratantra] character of dharmas. How so? Because its character originates not by itself but through the power of causation by something other than itself, it is called the lack of inherent self-existence with regard to origination.

"And what, Paramārthasamudgata, is the ultimate lack of inherent self-existence of dharmas? Those dharmas that are interdependently originated, and so have no inherent self-existence due to their origination, also have an ultimate lack of inherent self-existence. How so? Paramārthasamudgata, that which, in dharmas, is the object of purification, that is what I call the Ultimate. This object of purification does not have the character of dependence. That is why it is said to have an ultimate lack of inherent self-existence. Moreover, Paramārthasamudgata, the perfected (pariniṣpanna) character of dharmas is also said to be the ultimate lack of inherent self-existence. How so? Paramārthasamudgata, the non-self of dharmas is called their lack of inherent self-existence. That is the Ultimate. Since the Ultimate is made manifest by the lack of inherent self-existence of all dharmas, it is said to be the ultimate lack of inherent self-existence."

Source: Translated from Etienne Lamotte, *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra: L'explication des mystères* (Louvain: Université de Louvain, 1935), pp. 65–69.[61]

4.3.3 Vasubandhu: Types of Consciousness

Approximately two hundred years after Nāgārjuna was establishing the Mādhyamika and one hundred years after the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* was being compiled, the monk Vasubandhu, who is reputed to have started his career as a Nikāya Buddhist, converted to the Mahāyāna and helped further establish the Vijñānavāda school, also known as the Yogacāra, or the Cittamātra, school. In English, it is often referred to as the Mind-Only, or the Consciousness-Only, school.

One of the preoccupations of this school was the analysis of consciousness. For the Vijñānavādins, that was equivalent to an analysis of reality-as-we-know-it, because like all Buddhists they believed that we know reality only through the consciousnesses that come with our senses and our minds.

Vijñānavāda is sometimes called a philosophically "idealist" school, implying that it does not believe in the reality of the external world, that it sees the world and everything as being somehow "unreal"—nothing but a projection of our consciousness. Vasubandhu would probably have found such a statement bizarre and still based on a mistaken subject-object dualism. He is not trying to show the *unreality* of the world but rather to analyze its *reality*. That reality is characterized by the absence of subject-object dualism.

In a sense, subject-object dualism is the "villain" for Vasubandhu the way inherent self-existence was the "villain" for Nāgārjuna. And just as the Mādhyamikas called on emptiness to deal with their problem, the Vijñānavādins call on consciousness-only to handle theirs. At times this consciousness-only ultimately seems to resemble emptiness, but at others it seems that some real assertions about it are possible.

In unpacking their notion of reality, the Vijñānavādins were very good at distinguishing between types of consciousness and eventually developed a system of eight consciousnesses. The first six of these they shared with the Nikāya Buddhist schools: the five consciousnesses associated with the five physical senses (that is, the consciousnesses involved in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching) and the mental consciousness associated with the brain seen as one of the sense organs (that is, the consciousness involved in thinking). To these were added a seventh consciousness called the mind

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[61]Alternative French translation, Lamotte, *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*, pp. 192–94.

(manas), which is chiefly involved in our giving to ourselves (and to objects) a false sense of individuality, and an eighth consciousness called the storehouse consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), or the "granary consciousness," which is said to contain all the "seeds" for what become "consciousness-moments" or "consciousness-events" (what we usually called reality). Ultimately, then, reality might be envisioned as but a series of seeds (bījā) in the granary consciousness that sprout, germinate, are harvested, and are once again stored, all in the granary consciousness. Sometimes, in this connection, the notion of vāsanā (the residual impressions, traces, or impregnations of mental, verbal, and physical events) is used instead of, or in addition to, the notion of seeds.

In the following selection from his quite condensed work, the *Treatise on Consciousness-Only in Thirty Stanzas,* Vasubandhu begins with the granary consciousness. He then moves on to manas and the other six senses, and sees fit to list all of the mental states or factors that can accompany those consciousnesses. In sum, then, in this part of his work he gives us an Abhidharmic list of elements of reality (dharmas), all of which are seen as part of, or associated with, consciousness. He then turns to assert that all of this elaboration amounts to making ultimately false discriminations (vikalpa); it is therefore "merely perception" (vijñaptimātra). And he further warns against reifying the notion "all this is merely perception" and setting it up as though it itself were some sort of external object of perception.

The original text is in verse, but as sentences often overlap from one stanza to another, it has here been translated as prose.

. . . The transformation of consciousness is of three kinds: coming to fruition, intellectualizing, and perceiving sense-objects.

The consciousness that is called "coming to fruition" is the granary consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna); it comprises all of the seeds (bīja). Its substratum, its disposition, its perceptions cannot be discerned, but it is always accompanied by the following factors: linkage to sense objects, attention, feeling, conceptualization, and volition. Its feelings are [neither pleasant nor unpleasant but] neutral, and it is undefiled and karmically indeterminate. . . . Its behavior is like the current of a stream. At arhatship, there occurs in it a fundamental revolution.

The intellectualizing consciousness is called "the mind" [manas]. As it develops, it is dependent on the granary consciousness and takes it as its object. It is karmically indeterminate but obstructed by four defilements to which it is always connected. These are called false view of the Self, delusion about the Self, pride of the Self, and love of the Self. Whenever the mind comes into being, it is accompanied by linkage to sense objects and by the other mental factors: attention, feeling, conceptualization, and volition. It ceases to exist at arhatship, or in the trance of cessation, or on the supramundane path. That is the second transformation of consciousness.

The third transformation concerns the consciousnesses dependent on the six senses: [the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousnesses]. They are meritorious and/or demeritorious. They

are accompanied by the three kinds of feeling [that is, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations], and they are connected to the following mental factors: the five mental factors that accompany them everywhere; the five special [mental factors which are not always present]; the meritorious mental states; the defilements, which are demeritorious; and the secondary defilements, which are also demeritorious.

First, the five mental factors that accompany the sense consciousnesses everywhere are: linkage to sense objects, attention, feeling, conceptualization, and volition.

The special mental factors are: zeal, resolve, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

The meritorious mental states are: faith, modesty, fear of blame, lack of desire, lack of hatred, lack of delusion, striving, serenity, carefulness, and noninjury.

The defilements are: greed, hatred, confusion, pride, false views, and doubt.

The secondary defilements are: anger, enmity, disparaging others, irritation, envy, selfishness, deception, guile, assault, immodesty, nonfear of blame, sluggishness, excitability, lack of faith, sloth, carelessness, loss of mindfulness, distraction, and nondiscernment; there are also remorse and sleepiness, reflection and investigation, two pairs which are double factors [that can be either defiled or undefiled].

The first five sense consciousnesses [that is, the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile consciousnesses] arise in the granary consciousness, either together or not, depending on conditions. They are like waves on the water. The sixth sense consciousness, the mental consciousness, always arises with them except in a situation where there is no recognition; in the two trance states where there is no mental consciousness; in dreamless sleep; in fainting; or in unconsciousness.

The whole transformation of consciousness is itself ultimately a false discrimination, and because it is a false discrimination, it does not exist. Therefore, all this is merely perception.

The granary consciousness contains all the seeds; its transformation takes place according to a process of give and take between it and the false discriminations to which it gives rise [and which in turn affect it. This process leaves in the granary consciousness] residual impressions [vāsanā] of actions, which along with the residual impressions of dualistic grasping give rise to a new "coming to fruition" when the former "fruition" has died out. [. . .]

As long as consciousness is not content with being perception only, there will continue to be a tendency toward dualistic grasping. This is so even with the thought "All this is perception only." If you come to apprehend this and set it up in front of you, you are not being content with "this only." But when consciousness truly no longer apprehends any object of consciousness, it abides as consciousness only; for when what it grasps does not exist, there is no grasping. It is then free of thought, nondependent, transcendent knowledge. This is the fundamental revolution of all consciousness, the destruction of the double depravity. This

element is also free from evil attachments, unimaginable, meritorious, constant, blissful. It is the liberation body, which is called the Dharma body of the Buddha.

Source: Translated from Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikāvijñaptikārikā*, ed. Stefan Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), pp. 422–23.[62]

4.3.4 In Praise of the Bodies of the Buddha

In the final line of his *Thirty Stanzas*, Vasubandhu makes reference to various notions of the body of the Buddha. In fact, another doctrine that is associated with the Vijñānavādin school but that was broadly influential in the whole of Mahāyāna Buddhism was the doctrine of the three bodies (trikāya) of the Buddha. Some attempt was made to associate this doctrine with the three natures doctrine (see 4.3.2), but more simply this was a scheme that distinguished the dharma body (dharmakāya) of the Buddha, sometimes also called his essential body, or self-existent body (svabhāvikakāya); the body of shared enjoyment (saṃbhogakāya), sometimes also called the body of bliss; and the magically fashioned body, or transformation body (nirmāṇakāya). The dharmakāya was thought to be transcendent and ineffable, the saṃbhogakāya to be a sort of glorified body in which the Buddha preached to assemblies of bodhisattvas, and the nirmāṇakāya to be an expression of the Buddha's skillful means, a projection in this world for the sake of preaching to human beings. In the Mahāyāna, the body that the Buddha had when he lived in this world as Gautama was such a nirmāṇakāya.

Several texts on the bodies of the Buddha could be quoted here. One of the most straightforward, however, is the following short piece, which is actually a hymn in praise of the bodies of the Buddha. By the end of the fourth century it had already attained a certain popularity among Mahāyānists. A transcription of the Sanskrit original was preserved in both the Chinese and Tibetan canons.

I venerate the incomparable Dharma body of the Buddhas, to be realized by oneself, which is neither one nor many, the basis for the great accomplishment of one's own purpose and that of others, neither being nor nonbeing, like empty space, of a single taste, whose inherent nature is hard to comprehend; which is unstained, unchanging, benign, peerless, all-pervading, free from discursive thought.

I venerate the enjoyment body, which is supramundane, inconceivable, the fruit of hundreds of good deeds, powerful, which spreads great brilliance in the midst of the assembly to the delight of the wise, which uninterruptedly proclaims the lofty sound of the good Dharma throughout the Buddha worlds, which is established in the great kingship of the Dharma.

[62]Alternative English translation, Anacker, *Seven Works*, pp. 186–89.

I venerate the magically fashioned body of the Buddhas, which can shine forth anywhere like a fire, in order to "cook" beings to perfection; which, tranquil, repeatedly reveals in different places the Wheel of the Dharma leading to complete enlightenment; which employs many forms and takes away the terror of the three realms of existence by the skillful means of taking on various bodies; which, with great purpose, seeks out beings in the ten directions.

With devotion I pay homage to the three bodies of the Buddhas, who have as their one concern the good of all beings, who bring the immeasurable merits of the Mahāyāna, who eliminate the wrong paths of mind and speech. May the merit that I have accumulated, seed of enlightenment, procure for me the three bodies; may I enjoin the whole world to follow the path to enlightenment.

Source: Translated from *Trikāyastava*, ed. Sylvain Lévi, in Edouard Chavannes, "Les inscriptions chinoises de Bodh-gaya," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 34 (1896):19–20.[63]

4.3.5 Queen Śrīmālā Explains the Womb of the Tathāgata

In addition to the various theories of the bodies of the Buddha, there occurred another development in Mahāyāna buddhology: the evolution of the theory of a "Buddha within." This came to center on the notion of the Tathāgatagarbha, that is, the womb or embryo of the Tathāgata, a doctrine that was of central importance in several major Mahāyāna sūtras and was very influential in a number of ways in later Mahāyāna thought.

The basic concept behind the Tathāgatagarbha theory is that living beings all have within them the potentiality for enlightenment, that all of us are potential Buddhas. The Tathāgatagarbha is thus the presence of Buddhahood within us, even as we are unenlightened, living in saṃsāra. Freed from the defilements of saṃsāra, the Tathāgatagarbha is none other than the Dharma body of the Buddha.

The word *garbha* means womb, or matrix, but it can also mean embryo, or seed. Hence, as the doctrine evolved, different traditions took it in different directions. On the one hand, it came to be seen as a seed, as the germ for eventual enlightenment, and as such it was associated with such things as bodhicitta, the "mind of enlightenment" (see selection 4.4.2). On the other hand, it also came to be seen as a matrix, an environment in which enlightenment could develop, and as such it was associated with such things as the granary consciousness (ālayavijñāna). In fact, in certain later texts, (for example, the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*), the Tathāgatagarbha is explicitly identified with the ālayavijñāna.

The notion of the Tathāgatagarbha was to find important resonances in later Mahāyāna thought outside of India. In East Asia, for example, it can be associated with the Zen notion of the Buddha-mind, or Buddha-nature, to be found within us through the process of meditation; in Tibet, it helps us understand

[63]Alternative English translation (of the first three stanzas), George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949), p. 2.

notions such as the "self-existent intrinsic awareness" (rang-byung rig-pa) featured in certain schools of thought, such as Dzog-chen.

The following presentation of the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine is taken from a sermon that Queen Śrīmālā, a laywoman and the daughter of King Prasenajit of Kośala, is reputed to have preached to the Buddha himself.

Blessed One, of the Four Noble Truths, three are impermanent and one is permanent. Why is that? Because three of the truths [suffering, its origination, and the path to its cessation] refer to things that are karmically constituted; and what is karmically constituted is impermanent; and things that are impermanent are false and deluding, untrue, impermanent, and unreliable. Therefore, the three truths mentioned above are ultimately untrue, impermanent, and unreliable.

The truth of the cessation of suffering, however, is apart from that which is karmically constituted; and anything apart from what is karmically constituted is permanent; and things that are permanent are not false and deluding, but they are true, permanent, and reliable. Therefore the truth of the cessation of suffering is the ultimate one. . . .

But, Blessed One, what is called the cessation of suffering does not mean the destruction of dharmas, because the cessation of suffering has no beginning, was not created, does not arise, and does not become exhausted; distinct from what is exhaustible, it is permanent, unchangeable, inherently pure, and apart from the storehouse of the defilements. Blessed One, . . . when it is not apart from the storehouse of defilements, this Dharma body of the Tathāgata is called the Tathāgatagarbha. . . .

Blessed One, if there were no such thing as the Tathāgatagarbha, there would be no turning away from suffering and no longing for nirvāṇa. Why is that? Because the six sense-based consciousnesses [the eye, ear, nose, taste, tongue, and mind consciousnesses], and their accompanying mental faculty (the manas)—these seven—are momentary and discontinuous and cannot retain the impression of suffering. Thus they cannot bring about revulsion from suffering or longing for nirvāṇa.

But, Blessed One, the Tathāgatagarbha is without beginning, it does not arise or cease, and it can retain the impression of suffering; so it can bring about revulsion from suffering and longing for nirvāṇa.

Blessed One, the Tathāgatagarbha is not a Self, nor a living being, nor a soul, nor a person. The Tathāgatagarbha is not for those who believe in a real person, who have heterodox views, or who are confused by emptiness. Blessed One, the Tathāgatagarbha is the womb of the Dharma realm, the womb of the Dharma body, the womb of the supramundane, the womb of intrinsic purity.

Source: Translated from *Śrīmālādevī siṃhanāda sūtra*, (Taishō shinshū daizōkyō, ed. J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe [Tokyo, 1924–29], no. 353, 12:221c–222a, 221c, and 222b).[64]

[64]Alternative English translation, Diana Mary Paul, *The Buddhist Feminine Ideal* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), pp. 203–7, 192, 215; see also Garma C. C. Chang, *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), pp. 378–81 (which translates Taishō shinshū daizōkyō, no. 310, 11:677a-77c); and Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 100, 98–99, and 104–6. © 1974 by Columbia University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

4.3.6 Sudhana's Vision of the Cosmos

Finally, one more aspect of Mahāyāna thought needs to be considered here. If the Tathāgatagarbha theory develops the notion of the potentiality of Buddhahood within saṃsara, the Avataṃsaka doctrine tells of the total interpenetration of Buddhahood and saṃsāra. One of the earliest expressions of Avataṃsaka thought can be found in the *Gaṇḍavyūha sūtra* (second century C.E.?), which might be described as an epic adventure with philosophical, cosmological, and soteriological implications. It tells the story of Sudhana, who in his quest for enlightenment visits over fifty teachers, each of whom instructs him and sends him on his way to yet another master. His pilgrimage culminates in visits to Maitreya (the future Buddha), and to the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, in whose body he perceives the totality of the cosmos.

This vision is reflective of Avataṃsaka doctrine (and the *Gaṇḍavyūha sūtra* itself was, in fact, later incorporated into the massive *Buddha-Avataṃsaka sūtra*). The Avataṃsaka view of the world could simplistically be described as the flip side of the Mādhyamika. Rather than destroying the notion of svabhāva (inherent self-existence) by proclaiming the *emptiness* of all elements of reality (dharmas), the Avataṃsaka destroys the same notion by proclaiming the utter "fullness" of all dharmas. Each and every element of reality contains and is itself contained in each and every other element of reality in the entire infinite cosmos. All the Buddhas of all the universes can be found in a single speck of dust—in all specks of dust—in all the universes. Sometimes, in order to explain this view, the simile of a hall of mirrors is used: a person sitting in the middle of a polyhedral chamber, the walls, floor, and ceiling of which are entirely mirrored, would be reflected in all those mirrors, and the reflections in all those mirrors, in turn, reflected in all those mirrors, and so on ad infinitum. Another analogy might be the case of a perfectly floodlit stadium, so that the shadows cast in one direction by the players on the field are canceled out by the lights that are coming in the other direction. Then, in this shadowless world, imagine that the players (dharmas) themselves are not solid, shadow-casting bodies but lights . . .

Such a world view commonly calls to mind words such as totality, interpenetration, luminosity, infinity. It portrays reality not as we commonly see it in our ignorance but as it truly is. It is a view of the dharmadhātu, the Dharma realm, as perceived by a completely enlightened being. The following final vision of Sudhana tries to describe it.

Then Sudhana, the son of the guild-master, reflecting upon the body of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, saw in every single pore of that body untold quadrillions of Buddha fields being entirely filled up with Buddhas. And in every single one of those quadrillions of Buddha fields he saw Tathāgatas surrounded by countless assemblies of bodhisattvas. And he saw that all those quadrillions of fields had various bases, various

forms, various arrangements, various surrounding mountains, various clouds covering the sky, various Buddhas arising, various proclamations of the Dharma. And just as he saw all this in every single pore, so too he saw it in all the pores without exception, in all the major and minor physical marks, in all the major and minor limbs of Samantabhadra's body. In every single one he saw quadrillions of fields, from which issued clouds of fashioned Buddha bodies, equal to the number of atoms in all Buddha fields, pervading all of the world systems in the ten directions, bringing beings to the maturity of unsurpassed complete enlightenment.

Then Sudhana, the son of the guild-master, guided by the words and instructions of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, entered into all the world systems within the body of Samantabhadra and brought beings there to maturity. Moreover, the meritorious roots and knowledge accumulated by Sudhana, the son of the guild-master, during his meetings, audiences, and service to spiritual friends as numerous as the atoms of a Buddha field, did not amount to even a hundredth, a thousandth, a hundred thousandth, a billionth, of the meritorious roots he accumulated by virtue of his audience with Samantabhadra. In one moment of thought, he entered more Buddha fields, . . . in a single pore of the body of Samantabhadra than the whole series of fields he had entered from the time of his arousing the thought of enlightenment to the time of his audience with Samantabhadra. And as it was for one pore, so it was for all pores. Proceeding, in each moment of thought, through world systems as numerous as the atoms in countless Buddha fields, he still did not arrive at the end. . . .

He explored one Buddha field for an aeon. He explored another for as many aeons as there are atoms in countless Buddha fields, without ever leaving that field. In each and every moment of thought, he entered quadrillions of Buddha fields and brought beings there to the maturity that is unsurpassed complete enlightenment.

And gradually he came to equal the bodhisattva Samantabhadra in his quadrillions of vows and practices; he came to equal all the Tathāgatas; he came to equal them in the pervasion of all fields; he came to equal them in the fulfillment of practices; . . . he came to equal them in turning the Wheel of the Dharma; he came to equal them in the purity of knowledge; he came to equal them in voice and speaking; he came to equal them in great love, in great compassion, and in the inconceivable liberation of bodhisattvas.

Source: Translated from *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, No. 5 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960), pp. 427–28.

4.4 THE BODHISATTVA PATH

As we have seen, one of the hallmarks of Mahāyāna Buddhism is its emphasis on and elaboration of the doctrine of the bodhisattva. Most simply, the word *bodhisattva* can be defined as meaning "a being headed for Buddhahood," that is, a being in whom the aspiration for complete enlightenment has been roused. In Nikāya Buddhism, the word refers primarily to the Buddha Gautama prior to his enlightenment (in all of his past lives as a bodhisattva), and to the future Buddha Maitreya, who is presently a bodhisattva, awaiting his turn for Buddhahood. In the Mahāyāna, however, every sentient being can be seen as ultimately "headed for Buddhahood" and so is potentially or actually on the bodhisattva path.

4.4.1 The Necessity of Compassion

The motivating force behind the actual practice of the bodhisattva path is the element of compassion, the desire to help alleviate the sufferings of others, either by guiding them to enlightenment or by assisting in more material ways. This factor, it is sometimes claimed, is one of the things that differentiated the bodhisattva from the arhat, and in some contexts, as we shall see, it led to the notion of bodhisattvas who actually postpone their own parinirvāṇa in order to continue to work in saṃsāra for the welfare of all sentient beings. More immediately, as the following selection by Kamalaśila (eighth century) makes clear, the development of compassion for others can be seen as a crucial first step on the bodhisattva path.

One who wishes to gain omniscience swiftly must strive in three things: in compassion, in the thought of enlightenment, and in meditation. And one should practice compassion from the very outset, for we know that compassion alone is the first cause of all the qualities of Buddhahood. As we read in scripture:

> Blessed One, a bodhisattva should not practice too many things at once: for if a bodhisattva can master and truly understand just one thing, then he will hold all the qualities of Buddhahood in the palm of his hand. And what is this one thing? It is great compassion: Blessed One, it is through compassion that a bodhisattva holds all the qualities of Buddhahood in the palm of his hand. . . .

And again we read:

> The great compassion of a bodhisattva does not perish. And why is that? Because it precedes all else. Just as a man's breath precedes his ability to live, the great compassion of a bodhisattva precedes his endowment with all the merit and knowledge of the Great Vehicle.

And again we read:

> What is the beginning of a bodhisattva's practice, and what is its abode? Great compassion is the beginning of a bodhisattva's practice, and it abides among living beings.

Thus a bodhisattva is impelled only by the desire to help others, with no regard for himself; and he sets out upon a long and arduous path, ever exerting himself to acquire merit and knowledge. As we read in scripture: "When his compassion aims to bring all beings to maturity, there is no happiness at all which he will not renounce. . . ."

Now this compassion grows through an increasing concern for beings who suffer; and thus he should meditate upon these beings, that