Sutra and Tantra: The Profound and Miraculous

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Lesson 2: The Union of Relativity and Voidness

Reading:
The Central Philosophy of Tibet, by Robert A. F. Thurman
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The Short Essence of True Eloquence Eulogy of Buddha Shakyamuni for his Teaching of Relativity
Reverence to the Guru, Manjughosha!

I praise that perfect Buddha,
The Supreme Philosopher,
Who taught us relativity;
Free of (real) cessation and creation,
Beyond nihilism and absolutism,
With no (real) coming and no (real) going,
Neither unity nor plurality,
The quieting of fabrications, bliss supreme!

I bow down to him whose insight and speech
Make him unexcelled as Sage and Teacher;
The Victor, who realized (ultimate truth),
Then taught us it as relativity!

Misknowledge itself is the very root
Of all the troubles in this fleeting world;
Who understood that and then reversed it,
Taught universal relativity.

Thereupon, how could it be possible
That the Geniuses would not understand
This very path of relativity
As the vital essence of your teaching?

Such being the case, who could discover
Anything even still more wonderful
To sing your praises for, O Savior,
Than your teaching of relativity?

“Whatever depends upon conditions
Is empty of intrinsic reality.”
What excellent instruction could there be,
More amazing than this discovery?

Although the naive can seize upon it
As just confirming their extremist bonds,
The wise use that same (relativity)
To cut their way out of fabrication’s trap.

This Teaching is not to be found elsewhere,
So you alone are entitled “Teacher”;
A term of consolation for escapists,
Like soothing a fox by calling him “lion!”
O wondrous Teacher! O wondrous refuge!
Wondrous philosopher! Wondrous Savior!
I pay full homage to that great Teacher
Who well expounded relativity!

O benefactor! To heal all beings,
You proclaimed (profound relativity),
The unrivaled reason to ascertain
Emptiness, the essence of the Teaching.

How can anyone who would understand
The profound law of relativity
As contradictory, or unestablished,
Ever fully understand your system?

Your position is that, when one perceives
Voidness as the fact of relativity,
Voidness of reality does not preclude
The viability of activity.

Whereas when one perceives the opposite,
Action is impossible in voidness,
Voidness is lost during activity;
One falls into anxiety’s abyss.

Thus, experience of relativity
Is most recommended in your Teaching,
And not that of absolute nothingness,
Nor that of intrinsically real existence.

The non-relative is like a sky-flower;
So there is nothing non-relational.
Things’ existence with objective status
Precludes dependence on cause and condition.

Thus you proclaimed that just because no thing
Exists beyond relative occurrence,
So nothing can really exist beyond
Voidness of intrinsic reality.

If things had any self-reality,
Since such could never be reversed, you said,
Nirvana would become impossible,
Since fabrications could not be reversed.

Dauntless in the assemblies of the wise,
You clearly proclaimed in your lion’s roar,
“Let there be freedom from identity!”
Who would ever presume to challenge this?
All systems are completely viable,
Since lack of intrinsic reality
And relativity do not conflict;
Never mind they complement each other.

“By the reason of relativity
There are no grounds to hold extremist views!”
For this excellent statement, you, Savior,
Are unexcelled among philosophers.

“All this objectively is emptiness!”
And “From this cause will occur this effect!”
These facts are mutually non-exclusive;
Certainties, they reinforce each other.

Than this, what could ever be more wondrous?
Than this, what could ever inspire more awe?
For this one principle, if you are praised,
It is real praise; and otherwise not so.

Those held in the slavery of confusions,
Helplessly resent you, (so free and clear),
Small wonder they find intolerable
The sound of “non-substantiality.”

But those who assert “relativity,”
The precious treasury of your discourse,
When they resent the roar of emptiness;
Really, they never cease to amaze me!

They hold unexcelled relativity,
The gateway to identitylessness,
As a real identity just by name;
Ah, how cleverly they deceive themselves!

They should be led by whatever technique
To that good path ever pleasing to you,
That incomparable shore of haven,
Well-traveled by the highest holy beings.

Reality, unmade and non-related,
Relativity, made and relative;
How can these two facts be brought together
In one instance, without contradiction?

Therefore, the relatively occurring,
Though ever free of self-reality,
Appears as if intrinsically real;
So you said all this is like illusion.
From this very fact one well understands
(The Centrists’) statement that, the way you taught,
Those who would strive to challenge (your Teaching)
Rationally can find no fallacy.

Why? Because this your elucidation
Makes utterly remote the tendencies
To reify and repudiate things
Empirical and hypothetical.

This very fact of relativity,
The reason one sees your speech is matchless,
Generates the certitude of the reason
Embodied in all your other teachings.

From real experience, you teach so well,
Those who train themselves as your disciples
Go far beyond every kind of trouble,
Having reversed the root of all evil.

But those who turn away from your Teaching,
Though they struggle wearily long and hard,
Continue just to invite more problems,
Sticking to habitual views of self.

O wonder! When the wise do understand
The difference between these two (trainings),
How can they fail to feel (most gratefully)
Reverence for you from their inmost hearts?

Not to cite the richness of your teachings,
To achieve mere general understanding
Of just the meaning of some small portion
Confers, even that, the highest pleasure.

Alas, my mind conquered by confusion,
Though I came from afar to seek refuge
In the profusion of your excellence,
I could not embody its smallest part.

Yet when I stand before the Lord of Death,
And the stream of life is not quite ended,
I will consider myself fortunate
To have even this slightest faith in you.

Of teachers, the Teacher of relativity,
Of wisdoms, the wisdom of relativity;
These are like imperial victors in the world,
Making you world champion of wisdom, over all.
Whatever you taught is penetrated
By means of relativity itself,
And since that really becomes Nirvana,
No deed of yours does not deliver peace.

O Wonder! Whoever hears your Teaching,
Finds liberating peace in everything;
And so who could possibly not respect
Those who strive to uphold such a Teaching?

As it overcomes all oppositions,
Is free from internal contradictions,
And fulfills both main goals of human beings,
My delight ever grows for this system.

For its sake you gave again and again,
Throughout long incalculable aeons,
Sometimes your body, other times your life,
Your loved ones, and vast treasuries of wealth.

When I see such excellences as yours,
Seeing how your heart anchors the Teaching,
Just as a steel fish-hook hooks tight the fish;
How sad my fate, not to hear it from you!

The very energy of that sadness
Keeps my mind unwavering (from the Teaching),
As the attention of the anxious mother
Never wanders from the beloved child.

Even when I reflect upon your speech,
Thinking “That Teacher, radiantly haloed
With veils of light-rays, ablaze with glory
Of magnificent signs and holy marks,
Spoke in this way with his heavenly voice!”
Then the image of great Shakyamuni
Just flashing in my mind’s eye, heals me well,
As the moon’s rays heal the pangs of fever.

Though that good system is so marvelous,
Unskilled persons get totally confused
In every respect, as if they were
All entangled like a coconut’s hairs.

Having understood this problem, I then
 Schooled myself in (the writings of) skilled sages,
Studying with manifold exertions,
Seeking your intent again and again.

And I studied numerous treatises
Of the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist schools,
Yet unremittingly my intellect
Was still tormented in the trap of doubt.

So I went to the night-lily garden
Of the treatises of Nagarjuna,
Prophesied to elucidate rightly
The principle of your final vehicle,
Free of the extremes of being and nothing.

There I saw, by the kindness of the Guru,
All illumined by garlands of white light,
The true eloquence of the glorious Moon (Chandrakirti),
Whose expanding orb of taintless wisdom
Courses freely in the sky of Scripture,
Dispels the darkness of extremist hearts,
Eclipses constellations of false truths;
And then, my mind at last obtained relief!

Of all his deeds, his speech is the supreme;
And for this very reason, true sages
Should commemorate a perfect Buddha
For this (teaching of relativity).

I renounced the world on the example of that Teacher,
My study of the Victor’s speech is not inferior,
I am a Buddhist monk, diligent in yoga-practice,
And such is my reverence for that most eminent Seer!

By my Guru’s kindness I was thus fortunate to meet
The liberating Teaching of the unexcelled Teacher,
And I dedicate this virtue as a cause of all beings’
Being looked after by the holy spiritual teachers.

May the Teaching of that Benefactor, until world’s end,
Be undisturbed by the winds of perverse prejudices,
And achieving faith in the Teacher by understanding
The natural way of the Teaching, may it be ever full!

May I uphold the wholesome system of Shakyamuni,
That illumines the principle of relativity,
Through all my lives, though I give up body and even life!
And may I never give it up, even for an instant!

May I spend all day and night in the consideration
Of liberative techniques to propagate this success
Which was achieved by that best Leader through countless trials,
By making strenuous efforts the essence (of his lives)!

As I make effort on this way with pure high resolve,
May the gods Brahma, Indra, and all the World-protectors,
Good Mahakala, and the other Dharma-guardians
Be my constant friends forever and never let me down!

This *Essence of True Eloquence*, a praise of the Unexcelled Teacher Lord Buddha, the unsolicited best friend of all peoples, from the perspective of his teaching of profound relativity, was composed by the learned monk, bLo-bzang Grags-pai dPal, at the royal mountain retreat of Tibet, the heavenly retreat of O-de-gung-gyal, otherwise known as Victory Monastery. The scribe was Nam-mkha dPal.