

THE SYSTEMATICS OF MAHĀYĀNA IN KAMALAŚĪLA

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Complexity of doctrine is characteristic of world religions; indeed, the more widespread a religion, the more complex seems to be its doctrine. But the very manifoldness of the doctrine's tenets demands a unified organization if they are not to exist in a state of chaos. The reduction of manifold tenets to unity is achieved by classifying them under key concepts, which themselves can be reduced to a unitary insight, and from which the tenets are evolvable in a kind of deductive fashion. This reduction is what is known as systematics, or systematic theology.

An identical corpus of tenets can be systematized in a variety of ways, depending on the concepts chosen, each way constituting a distinctive and coherent unit or system. World religions are fecund in systems: one can almost argue that a religion's wideness of appeal is proportionate to its ability to generate theological systems. Particularly fecund in this regard are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. What is distinctive about Buddhism is that its founder, the Buddha (circa 566–circa 486 B. C.), clearly appears to have had a more systematic mind than the founders of the other faiths, and to have furnished his religion with the key concepts for organizing its theologies from the very start of his teaching career.

The key concepts are the Four Noble Truths: Pain, Origin, Suppression and Way. They constitute the essence of the Buddhist doctrine; they proclaim the Buddha as a healer, and display the stages of his therapy. Thus Pain is the disease, Origin the diagnosis, Suppression the remedy and Way the medication. But they are only a modicum of what the Buddha was convinced he had learnt from his Enlightenment. An incident is reported of the Buddha plucking some leaves off a tree in a wood, and then asking his disciples if more leaves were in his hand, or had remained on the trees

of the wood. The disciples replied that there were naturally more on the trees. Likewise, declared the Buddha, what he had disclosed to them, the Four Noble Truths, was little compared to what he had intuited. The Buddha discouraged speculation, and confined himself only to such teaching which, as he claimed, was conducive to religious advancement, dispassion, tranquility, enlightenment and nirvāṇa¹⁾. His approach was thus more *soteriological* (concerned with realizing salvation) than *ontological* (related to the metaphysical essence of things).

However, within the deceptively simple Truths, a whole mine of intricate concepts lay concealed. Clarifying the Truths themselves was no simple matter, even for the Buddha, as he realized when attempting to explain the second Truth. For that purpose he devised the theory of Conditioned Coproduction (*pratityasamutpāda*), with its twelve interlocking conditions, a theory as complicated as any devised. Multiplicity upon multiplicity of concept germinated in the minds of the Buddha's disciples as they pondered the Truths – it was as if the few leaves in the Buddha's hand had themselves sprouted as much foliage as had remained on the trees in the wood. To take a few examples : Natures (*dharma*), Conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) and Unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*), Contaminated (*āsrava*) and Uncontaminated (*anāsrava*); the 5 Components (*skandha*); the 12 Receptacles (*āyatana*); the 18 Substances (*dhatu*); the 22 Faculties (*indriya*); the Associated Mental States (*caittadharma*); States Dissociated from the Mind (*cittaviprayuktadharma*); the three Spheres (*dhatu*), of Desire (*kāma*), Form (*rūpa*) and the Formless (*arūpya*); the Intermediate State (*antarābhava*); Mental Cognitions (*manovijñāna*); the World Receptacle (*bhājanaloka*); Appraisal and Nonappraisal (*vi-jñāpti* and *avijñāpti*); wholesome (*kuśala*) and unwholesome (*akuśala*) actions; obstacles (*āvaraṇa*) to liberation; and Latencies (*anuśaya*).

The maze of concepts of which the above form a small part, came to constitute the Abhidharma, the Super-Doctrine or the Doctrine of Natures. (compiled between 486 and 286 B. C.; definite redaction 100 B. C. to A. D. 100). Having presumably sprouted from the Truths, these concepts appeared to obfuscate them almost completely. Some order was introduced into the

concepts by the use of the numerical method. As for instance, 3 Jewels, 4 Truths, 5 Components, 6 Perfections, 7 Factors of Enlightenment and the 8-fold Way. But the threes, fours, fives and other groups became so numerous as to overwhelm the most powerful memory. (The Buddhists were unable to wholly free themselves from this numericism; but the Hindus, who were the Buddhists' disciples in many things, were able in this regard to profit from their mentors' shortcomings). One way out of this predicament was to obliterate the parasitical concepts and so uncover the majestic lineaments of the Truths. This is what the great Nāgārjuna (circa A. D. 105?-c 202?) sought to do, by engaging on the demolition of the Abhidharmic concepts through the aid of a dialectical device, the tetralemma (*catuṣkanaya*), taken from the Abhidharma itself.

Another method was to organize the Abhidharmic doctrines rationally, on the basis of the key concepts discussed above: in other words, to create an Abhidharmic systematics. Toward the end of his life, the Buddha himself was able to see how manifold were the tenets that had grown out of his teaching; he attempted to reorganize them in what is known as the Vaiśālī Summary²⁾. While the method adopted was basically numerical, the Summary was an effort to present the whole of Buddhist doctrine as an amplification of the Fourth Noble Truth. An outline of the Summary is as follows:

THE SYSTEMATICS OF THE VAIŚĀLĪ SUMMARY

1. The 4 Bases of Self-possession (*smṛti*)
2. The 4 Right Exertions (*pradhāna*)
3. The 4 Bases of Power (*ṛddhi*)
4. The 4 Faculties (*indriya*)
5. The 5 Strengths (*balapadāni*)
6. The 7 Factors of Enlightenment (*sambodhi*)
7. The 8-fold Way (*mārga*)

These topics are further subdivided in minute fashion, but the rational interconnection between them is hard to see. There is also a certain amount of redundancy. For instance, Self-Possession is the subject of the

first topic, but it is also a subtopic under the fourth (the 4 Faculties) and the fifth (the 5 Strengths) topics. Still, its defects apart, the Vaiśālī Summary introduced a new idea, of summarizing the entire Buddhist teaching under one concept, that of the fourth Noble Truth, the Way. This notion was in harmony with the soteriological tenor of the Buddha's thought.

Thus the Buddha himself established the two principal methods of systematization that his disciples were to follow in organizing the corpus of Buddhist doctrine: the Four Noble Truths and the Fourth Noble Truth. The first approach tended to have a pronounced ontological emphasis, the second a soteriological one. Among those who constructed their systems on the basis of the Four Noble Truths were Dharmaśrī (circa A. D. 50) and Vasubandhu (circa A. D. 400-480 ?); among those who opted for the Fourth Noble Truth were Buddhaghoṣa (circa A. D. 400), Kamalaśīla (A. D. 792) and Tsong Kha Pa (1357-1410). The first approach provided the framework for a complete systematization of Buddhist thought, definitively achieved by Vasubandhu; the second, for a less comprehensive one, or one where comprehensiveness could be achieved only at the price of a certain cumbersomeness.

The pattern behind Vasubandhu's great work was first outlined by Dharmaśrī³⁾, who organized the doctrines of Buddhism in a triple hierarchy. The lower rung of this hierarchy consisted of the multifarious tenets of the Abhidharma. The intermediate rung comprised the seven key concepts under which the tenets were classified: Substances (*dhatu*), Formations (*saṃskāra*), Actions (*karma*), Latencies (*anuśaya*), the Noble Ones (*ārya*), Knowledge (*jñāna*) and Reflection (*samādhi*). The top rung was made up of the Four Noble Truths, which provided the pattern for further organizing the key concepts, as can be seen from the following outline of Dharmaśrī's book, *The Essence of the Doctrine of Natures (Abhidharmahṛdaya/Abhidharmasāra)*:

THE SYSTEMATICS OF DHARMAŚRĪ: SCHEME 1

1. THE TRUTH OF PAIN

Chapter 1. Substances

- Chapter 2. Formations
- 2. THE TRUTH OF ORIGIN
 - Chapter 3. Actions
 - Chapter 4. Latencies (or Passional Nuclei)
- 3. THE TRUTH OF SUPPRESSION
 - Chapter 5. The Noble Ones
- 4. THE TRUTH OF THE WAY
 - Chapter 6. Knowledge
 - Chapter 7. Reflection

However, underlying the pattern of the Truths (with their soteriological content) was another, simpler (and more ontological) one, for Dharmaśrī was endeavoring to reduce the quaternity of the Truths to a unitary concept. And he could not find a concept more unitary and irresolvable into any ulterior concept than that of Reality, which he then classified tripartitely as follows : Reality as such, phenomenal Reality and transcendental Reality. The structure of Dharmaśrī's systematics was thus really as indicated below :

THE SYSTEMATICS OF DHARMAŚRĪ : SCHEME 2

- 1. REALITY AS SUCH
 - Chapter 1. Substances
- 2. PHENOMENAL REALITY
 - Chapter 2. Formations
 - Chapter 3. Actions
 - Chapter 4. Latencies
- 3. TRANSCENDENTAL REALITY
 - Chapter 5. The Noble Ones
 - Chapter 6. Knowledge
 - Chapter 7. Reflection

Dharmaśrī's scheme was followed by Vasubandhu in his great work, *The Envelope of the Doctrine of Natures (Abhidharmakośa)*⁴⁾. There was no change of pattern, but the subject matter was amplified through the addition of three chapters : on the Faculties, the Cosmos and the Non-Soul. The structure of Vasubandhu's opus, the most complete systematization of

Buddhist theology, is as follows, where the Four Noble Truths are made concordant with the threefold division of Reality :

THE SYSTEMATICS OF VASUBANDHU

1. REALITY AS SUCH

The Truth of Pain

Chapter 1. Substances (*dhātu*) : the Constituents of Reality

Chapter 2. Faculties (*indriya*) : the Functions of Reality

2. PHENOMENAL REALITY

Chapter 3. Cosmos (*loka*) : the Forms of Phenomenal Reality

The Truth of Origin

Chapter 4. Action (*karma*) : Causes of Phenomenal Reality

Chapter 5. Passional Nuclei or Latencies (*anuśaya*) : Conditions of Phenomenal Reality

3. TRANSCENDENTAL REALITY

The Truth of Suppression

Chapter 6. The Paths of the Noble (*pudgalamārga*) : Liberation, climax of Transcendental Reality

The Truth of the Way

Chapter 7. Knowledge (*jñāna*) : Causes of Liberation

Chapter 8. Concentration (*samāpatti*) : Conditions of Liberation

4. ESSENCE OF REALITY : NON-SOUL

Chapter 9. The Ascertainment of the Person (*pudgalaviniścaya*)

The second basic approach to systematization was to classify all doctrinal tenets under the Fourth Noble Truth or the Eightfold Path. This approach is that of three thinkers. First, Buddhaghōṣa, who adopts the traditional interpretation of the Eightfold Path as the Threefold Discipline (*triśikṣa* : Virtue, Concentration and Wisdom). Second, Tsong Kha Pa, who envisages the Fourth Noble Truth as the way of each of the Three Noble Ones : the weak, the middling and the superior (or Bodhisattva). Third, Kamalaśīla, who confines his systematics to the way of the Bodhisattva alone.

The first of these thinkers, Buddhaghōṣa, in his *The Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), following partly in the footsteps of Upatissa (circa A. D. 100), attempted to organize Buddhist doctrine under the Threefold Disci-

pline, at the same time making the latter accord with the Sevenfold Purification, as follows:⁶⁾

THE SYSTEMATICS OF BUDDHAGHOṢA

1. VIRTUE/MORALITY (*śīla* : right speech, action, livelihood)

Purification 1 : of Virtue (chapters 1 & 2)

2. CONCENTRATION (*sāmaḍhi* : right effort, mindfulness and concentration)

Purification 2 : of Consciousness (chapters 3-13)

3. WISDOM (*prajñā* : right views, and intentions)

Purification 2, contd. : of Consciousness, contd. (chapters 14-17)

Purification 3 : of View (chapter 18)

Purification 4 : by overcoming doubt (chapter 19)

Purification 5 : by knowledge of what is and what is not the Way (chapter 20)

Purification 6 : by knowledge and vision of the Way (chapter 21)

Purification 7 : by knowledge and vision (chapters 22 & 23)

The main drawback of this scheme is the disproportionate amount of space given to the second Purification (11 out of 23 chapters), which, moreover, is distributed among two books (the second and the third) with differing themes, in a somewhat awkward and inelegant manner.

In contrast to Buddhaghoṣa's systematics, Tsong Kha Pa's is elegance itself. Its basis is a dual scheme of the Law and its Practitioners, and it concentrates on the Bodhisattva, the foremost practitioner. In the process, the Tibetan master synthesizes the work of three great Mahāyāna theologians : Śāntideva, supreme representative of the Great Vehicle's devotionism ; Asaṅga, of its Idealism ; and Nāgārjuna, of its Vacuism (*śūnyavāda*). The following is an outline of Tsong Kha Pa's masterwork, *The Steps to the Path of Enlightenment* (*Lam Rim Chen Mo* ; in Sanskrit, *Bodhipratipatkrama*) : ⁷⁾

THE SYSTEMATICS OF TSONG KHA PA

BOOK 1. THE LAW AND THE NOBLE ONES

Chapter 1. The Buddhist Law

Chapter 2. The Three Types of Noble Ones, Practitioners of the Law

Chapter 3. The Weak Type of Noble One

Chapter 4. The Middling Type of Noble One

BOOK 2. THE SUPERIOR TYPE OF NOBLE ONE : THE BODHISAT-
TVA, AND HIS SIX PERFECTIONS

Chapter 5. The first four Perfections of the Bodhisattva : generosity, morality, patience and energy (synthesis of Śāntideva's thought)

Chapter 6. The fifth Perfection of the Bodhisattva, meditation (synthesis of the Idealism of Asaṅga)

Chapter 7. The Sixth Perfection of the Bodhisattva, wisdom (synthesis of the Vacuism of Nāgārjuna, as well as of the Diamond Vehicle)

We come finally to Kamalaśīla, and to his analysis of the Bodhisattva Way. Kamalaśīla divides his work into three parts, corresponding to the three basic aspects of the Mahāyāna : compassion (*karuṇā*), Thought of Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) and Realization (*vyavasthāpanam*), each previous aspect giving rise to the successive one. The following is an outline of Kamalaśīla's brief work, *The Stages of the Bodhisattva's Experience* (the *Bodhisattvabhāvanākrama*, or just *Bhāvanākrama*) : ⁸⁾

THE SYSTEMATICS OF KAMALAŚĪLA

(The numbers in parentheses correspond to those of Tucci's edition)

1. COMPASSION (1-3)

- 1) Primacy of Compassion (1)
- 2) Method of meditating on Compassion (2)
- 3) Compassion, cause of the Thought of Enlightenment (3)

2. THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT (4-16)

- 1) Nature of the Thought of Enlightenment (4)
- 2) Necessity of Practice (*pratipatti*), realizer of the Thought of Enlightenment (5)
- 3) Necessity of Wisdom (*prajñā*) and Means (*upāya*), components of the Thought of Enlightenment (6-8)
- 4) The three types of Wisdom : scriptural (*śrutamayi*), reflective (*cintāmayi*) and experiential (*bhāvanāmayi*)
- 5) Reflective wisdom and its methods, authority and logic (10-11)
- 6) Experiential wisdom, and its methods, tranquility (*śamatha*) and concentration (*śamādhi*; 12-16)

3. REALIZATION, FULFILMENT OF THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTE-

MENT : THE STAGES OF LIBERATION (17-23)

- 1) The fruit of Concentration, Insight (*darśana*) as non-Insight (*adarśana*) (17-19)
- 2) Concomitance (*yuganaddha*) of Wisdom and Means, realizer of Liberation (20-21)
- 3) The Inaugural Stage toward Liberation (22)
- 4) The Stage of the Path of Insight (*darśanamārga*, 23)
- 5) The Stages of the Path of Experience (*bhāvanāmārga*) and the Stage of Buddhahood (23)

This skeletal structure is fleshed with definitions, scriptural quotations, arguments and exposition, which brings out the nuances and synthesizes seven centuries of Mahāyāna speculation. But that is material for another discourse.

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- (1) *Sutta Nipāta*, LVI, 31. (2) *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. See A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 2nd revised edition. Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1980, ch. 4. (3) Charles Willemsen (trans.), *The Essence of Metaphysics*. Brussels, 1975. (Translation of Dharmaśrī's *Abhidharmamahādaya*) (4) P. Pradhan (ed.), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*. Patna : K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975. See also the following articles on Vasubandhu coauthored by myself with Francis Tiso : "A Buddhist Classification of Reality. A Translation of the First Chapter of the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu", *A. R. I.* 6 (1987), pp. 51-84; "The Evolution of Buddhist Systematics from the Buddha to Vasubandhu", *Philosophy East and West*, April 1988, pp. 172-186. (5) *The Path of Freedom of the Arahant Upatissa...Translated from the Chinese by the Rev. N. R. M. Ehara, Soma Thera and Kheminda Thera*. Colombo : Dr. Roland D. Weerasuria, 1961. (6) Bhikku Ñāṇamoli (trans.), *The Path of Purification*. Colombo, 1956. (Translation of Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*) (7) Alex Wayman, *Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1978. (Partial translation of Tsong Kha Pa's *Lam Rim Chen Mo*) (8) Giuseppe Tucci (ed.). *Minor Buddhist Texts, Part II. First Bhāvanākrama of Kamalaśīla*. Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts with Introduction and English Summary. Serie Orientale Roma, IX, 2. Rome : ISMEO, 1958.

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