

Chapter One. The Opening

The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality is one of the most important of Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche's works. Despite its brevity, its content is quite extraordinary. It explains how to understand the conventional truth and the ultimate truth through the two types of valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate by means of referential reasoning. From the other treatises such as *Beacon of Certainty* and *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, we can deeply understand the importance of the valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate. If we understand the two types of valid knowledge, we will be able to understand the principles of the Middle Way, of the Buddhist Logic, and of the Mind-Only School.

Actually I had the intention to explain this treatise over ten years ago. It discusses the profound and vast teachings, especially the four principles and the two types of valid knowledge, by means of which we will generate in our mind a sincere faith in the Buddhadharma. Today most people lack right knowledge and right view. The certainty about the Dharma obtained by means of reasoning is indeed very precious and rare. So I planned to explain this treatise a long time ago. But the causes and conditions are rather subtle and they did not mature until today. Thanks to the requests by some Dharma friends, we are now able to study this treatise together.

The Explanation of the Title

A1: The Title

The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality that shows the key points of understanding the Buddha's teaching by means of the wisdom of reflections has three parts: the title of this treatise, the main part of this treatise, and the perfection of composing this treatise.

We begin from the explanation of the title: *The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*. The title tells us what is to be expressed in this treatise by using a metaphor of sword. The word "ascertaining" means to understand, to realize through reflection. The term "reality" indicates that it is not the literal meanings of the Buddha's teachings, but the true reality of all things that the Buddha taught. The wisdom that is able to understand the true reality of all things taught by Buddha Shakyamuni is like a sword. A precious and sharp sword is capable of cutting instantly anything it encounters. Likewise, the wisdom being described here is able to lead us to completely grasp the real meaning of all the Buddha's teachings, including both Mahayana and Vajrayana. When we generate such wisdom, we find no difficulty in understanding the meaning of sutras and tantras, or the meaning of the conventional and the ultimate truths.

In this world, innumerable sentient beings are in a pitiful condition as they are trapped in the net of ignorance and afflictions. In what manner can we destroy this net? Precisely with the sword of wisdom. Without the sword of wisdom, sentient beings remain in this net, and are never able to pull themselves out. Through the blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas, however, when one attains this sword of wisdom, which is mainly composed of the two types of valid knowledge of the

conventional and of the ultimate, one is able to effortlessly eradicate all wrong views. Therefore, as the title suggests, by studying this treatise, one can generate the supreme right view and certainty in the true reality of all things.

Among the treatises by Mipham Rinpoche, we find the *Five Swords* and the *Five Lotuses*, including *The Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*. These treatises contain extraordinarily essential instructions that we need to tame our mind, especially in this degenerate age.

I will give a brief explanation of this treatise. The readers may use its commentary by Lhagsam Tenpa Gyaltzen as a reference book, titled *The Sun Illuminating the Buddha's Teaching: A Commentary on the Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality*. The author is a direct disciple of Mipham Rinpoche, and the praises of Mipham Rinpoche are seen here and there in his words.

The Prostration & the Pledge

A2: The Main Part

B1: The Wholesome Beginning

C1: The Prostration

[VERSE 1]

Your system is correct and free from all faults,

Which can be verified through the three points that leave no doubt.

The treasure of sublime wisdom,

Before you, glorious Manjushri, I prostrate myself.

"System" here means doctrinal tradition, or philosophy. Relying on scriptural authority and reasoning, some people do their best to study all phenomena. When their study is brought to the utmost point, they are said to have established a system, or a philosophy. Both non-Buddhists and Buddhists regard their own systems as valid knowledge of understanding this world. The fact is, among all doctrinal traditions, there are correct and mistaken systems. Generally speaking, the views of non-Buddhist systems can be divided into the views of nihilism and the views of eternalism, all of which are mistaken views. In the Buddhist doctrinal traditions, there are many systems. From those of the common vehicle to those of the Mahayana vehicle, all of them are correct systems, and the highest ones are those of the Mahayana.

The systems of the Mahayana put forth the profound and the vast teachings that are completely free from confusion, afflictions and faults. By means of the three kinds of valid knowledge, that is, Buddhist scriptural authority, direct perception and inference, one is able to understand the vast and the profound meanings of the Buddhadharma without any doubt. Here the three points can also be referred to as

the three modes of a valid inference, which are, establishable position, positive logical pervasion and negative logical pervasion.

Who possesses the treasure of wisdom that is free from all faults? It is Manjushri, the embodiment of the wisdom of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, first of all, Mipham Rinpoche prostrates himself before Manjushri, the ultimate source of the wisdom that knows all profound and vast teachings. There are different ways of paying homage, such as paying homage by abiding in the nature of the mind, or prostrating oneself with devotion through body, speech, and mind.

This verse also implies that, whoever studies this treatise, Manjushri himself will accept them as disciples and empower them. In the course of our study and practice, we must generate certainty in the profound and the vast teachings through the three kinds of valid knowledge, and eliminate all doubts, so that we can achieve supreme wisdom. In order to do so, each of us needs the powerful blessings from Manjushri.

C2: The Pledge

[VERSE 2]

Profound, vast, and difficult to penetrate,

Is the nectar-like teaching of the Buddha.

Upon those who wish to savor it,

I here bestow the light of wisdom.

The teachings of our fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni can be condensed into two kinds: the profound and the vast. Both of them are indeed very difficult to understand. The profound teachings were passed down and propagated mainly by Nagarjuna; the vast teachings were by Asanga. These two sages are like the sun and the moon in the world. The term “profound” indicates the wisdom of emptiness that transcends conceptual thought and is beyond all extremes and elaborations; whereas the term “vast” refers to the practices for the accumulation of all the other merits

through the five paths or the ten bodhisattva levels. In the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, one stanza says:

Profound is emptiness,

And vast are all the other qualities.

By understanding the principles of the profound and the vast,

You shall thus gain all these qualities.

If we understand these teachings of the profound and the vast, then we attain the ability of understanding all phenomena. Therefore, such teachings are the true nectar of all the Buddha's teachings.

Having accumulated merits and wisdom from previous lives and possessing extraordinary connection with the Dharma, those who wish to gain certain understanding of the profound and the vast Dharma teachings, must first receive the blessings from buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the enlightened beings. Here, Mipham Rinpoche prays to Manjushri as well as all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great masters, that relying on their wisdom and assistance, he can bestow the light of wisdom upon his followers.

What is the light of wisdom? Mipham Rinpoche has presented us this treatise that bears his empowerment, enabling us to enjoy the nectar of the Buddha's teachings through learning this text, and helping us to really generate in our mind the wisdom to understand the profound and the vast teachings. If this light of wisdom merges with our minds, we will have achieved the greatest of all achievements.

People often say, "Teacher, grant me your empowerment! Bless me, help me obtain wisdom!" But if you truly wish to obtain wisdom, you should learn treatises such as this. Only then will wisdom develop in your mind. If you do not study, but only seek immaterial empowerment, you may not obtain a result in the short term. Therefore, we should study excellent treatises such as this one. This will be very beneficial to us.