

Chapter Six. Attainment

The Eight Great Eloquences

E3: The Eight Great Eloquence: The Result of the Four Principles

[VERSES 92~93]

*When contemplating the four principles,
Relying upon which to ascertain the two truths,
It brings the functions of the four reliances.
From within these immaculate, supreme causes,
The fruit of profound wisdom arises,
Perfectly illuminating everything.
Thus, sealed in the nature of awareness,
The eight treasures of eloquence are revealed.*

In the foregoing analyses, we have discussed ultimate truth and conventional truth, and then we have introduced the four principles which are used to ascertain the two truths. In observing the two truths by relying upon these four principles, we may depend on the four reliances as we progress. These topics, the two truths, the four principles, and the four reliances are extremely important for our practice and we must pay great attention to them.

Given these three immaculate, supreme foundations, the fruit of profound wisdom will eventually arise in our mind. When we have a wick, a fuel reservoir, and oil, light can be generated from an oil lamp to immediately dispels darkness. If we master the two truths through the four principles and follow exactly the four reliances, profound

wisdom will arise and perfectly illuminate everything. As a result, the eight treasures of eloquence that are sealed within the nature of awareness will be revealed. The eight treasures of eloquence are also known as the eight treasures of meritorious qualities.

Indeed, because all sentient beings possess the buddha nature, all are capable of developing the eight eloquences described below. However, for ordinary beings who may lack the proper causes and conditions, the eight eloquences remain hidden from their awareness, with no way of being revealed. Yet, if they correctly understand the two truths, the four principles, and the four reliances, and if they earnestly engage in practice, the hidden eight eloquences will be revealed and become evident to them.

Many people would say: “Empower me with your blessing, make me develop wisdom right away.” Indeed, it would be impossible to develop wisdom with just the puff of a blessing. If one genuinely hopes to develop wisdom and obtain eloquence, one must work hard to study the principles discussed above. In truth, before they attained their achievements, many eminent masters and enlightened persons attached particular importance to these teachings during their study and practice. Eventually, the mystery that was concealed in the depth of their minds was revealed. However, many still don’t understand or believe in the relationship between these teachings and their study and practice. If a person has genuine faith in the Buddhadharma, a proper foundation, an acceptance of these causal relationships, and a willingness to put them into practice, one would be able to obtain the fruits of the eight eloquences.

Throughout history, many great lineage masters were able to attain the eight eloquences. For example, in the biography of Mipham Rinpoche, as well as in his prayers, it is said that he had attained the eight eloquences. In his *Gateway to Knowledge*, Mipham Rinpoche explained the eight eloquences in great detail. The Buddha discussed this topic at length in *The Lalitavistara Sutra*.

[VERSE 94]

***The teachings that are heard and contemplated in the past,
Are never forgotten—this is the treasure of right recollection.
The various profound and vast meanings,
Are completely discerned—this is the treasure of intelligence.***

The first eloquence states that, having listened to the teachings of sutrayana and tantrayana from a teacher, one would never forget these teachings, but recollect them in a clear way. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is said: “It is the treasure of recollection, by reason of the absence of forgetfulness.” In the history of the lineage, many great masters might not have been fully understood the teachings at the time when they first started to study them. Yet, eventually, they were able to remember everything only by looking at it once. This is an indication of the first eloquence, the treasure of correct recollection.

Among the profound and vast teachings that the Buddha had taught, the profound refers to the teaching of emptiness and the vast includes all the other teachings in the five paths and in the ten grounds. The ability to differentiate and to understand these teachings in full is the second eloquence, the treasure of intelligence. *The Lalitavistara Sutra* says, “It is the treasure of intelligence, by reason of excelling in the ability of discerning the characteristics of the teachings.” In other words, this eloquence is the skillfulness in distinguishing the character of all teachings, in particular, the aspects of the profound and of the vast. There are many masters who possessed such qualities. For example, Mipham Rinpoche’s *Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way*, a sublime work that explains the profound and the vast. If he had not attained this treasure of intelligence, he would not have been able to compose such a great work.

[VERSE 95]

All doctrines in the sutras and tantras,

Are well understood—this is the treasure of realization.

Once heard, all meanings, with no exception,

Are never forgotten—this is the treasure of retention.

The third is known as the treasure of realization, an unobstructed understanding of the teachings proclaimed by Buddha Shakyamuni in the twelve canonical classes of the sutrayana and in the four great tantra classes of the tantrayana. Regarding the detailed classifications of tantras, there are seventeen great classes of tantras about the Great Perfection and the eighteen great tantras about the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*. I often think that, regardless of whether he taught sutra or tantra, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche knew them all like the palm of his hand. He had genuinely attained the treasure of realization. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is called “treasure of wisdom”, where it says, “by reason of being able to realize the meaning of all scriptures.”

The fourth is the treasure of retention, an ability to fully recall all meanings. Retention is also called dharana in Sanskrit, which includes the forbearance dharani, the teaching dharani, the meaning dharani, and the dharani empowering secret mantras. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is called the “treasure of dharani”, where it says, “by reason that all that is heard can be retained.” Regardless of whether it is a teaching or any other topic, when one can recall it perfectly and clearly, one has attained the treasure of dharani.

We know that when the Buddha was alive, many sravaka and pratyekabuddha attained dharani or retention and were able to perfectly recall the teachings. So, after the Buddha entered nirvana, they relied on these skills to compile the collections of scriptures as instructed by the Buddha before his nirvana.

[VERSE 96]

Satisfying sentient beings with excellent teachings –

This is the treasure of eloquence.

***The great, precious treasury of the sublime Dharma,
Is to be guarded in its entirety—this is the treasure of true Dharma.***

The fifth is called the treasure of eloquence, meaning one is able to deliver the good teachings in accordance with the reality, in ways that can be fully understood by living beings and to make them joyful and satisfied. Many people obtained exceptional benefits after receiving teachings, experiencing a sense of extreme joy and satisfaction. This is an indication of the master's "treasure of eloquence" as described in *The Lalitavistara Sutra* where it says the treasure of eloquence is "capable of generating joy in sentient beings". In other words, sentient beings can experience genuine joy through listening to these teachings.

Such joy is not the same as the pleasant feelings that good dancers or singers can often bring to an audience. Instead, it is the joy of Dharma based on the certainty of the Buddha's teachings. For example, when we talk about the faults of afflictions such as desire and anger, we believe, from the depth of our heart, that afflictions do have these faults. And when we talk about the merits of liberation, we know exactly what the benefits will be in breaking free from samsara. Hence, we generate great joy from the depth of our hearts because we know that what we've heard represents true reality.

The sixth one is the treasure of the true Dharma, which means one has the determination to protect and maintain the authentic Dharma. It has two parts, the realization of the Dharma, and the spreading of the Dharma. The former includes the generation of the right views and an unshakeable faith in the Dharma teachings, such as those contained in the twelve canonical classes of the Buddhist Tripitaka. The precious Buddhadharma is like a wish-fulfilling jewel. As such, dharma practitioners are willing to practice it, protect it, maintain it, defend it, and spread it, and in so doing, are even willing to defend it with their own lives. Such behaviors are exhibited when

one has obtained the treasure of the true Dharma. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it is called “treasure of attaining the true Dharma”, where it meant “protecting the Buddhadharma”.

[VERSE 97]

Not severing the continuous lineage of the Three Jewels –

This is the treasure of the aspiration to awakening.

Gaining acceptance of the nature of equality and the nonproduction of all things –

This is the treasure of accomplishment.

The seventh is called the treasure of the aspiration to awakening, or the treasure of bodhichitta. It means that one must become an heir to the tathagata’s inheritance, and to maintain the lineage of the Three Jewels with no interruption. Everything that the tathagata has passed down to us, whether it is bodhichitta, wisdom, or compassion, is part of the merits of the Buddha. One should strive to pass them to all sentient beings, this is called the inheritance of the tathagata’s teaching. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it says, “It is the treasure of bodhichitta, by reason of not letting the lineage of the Three Jewels become extinct.”

Although we might not have the same treasure of bodhichitta that many eminent masters had, many of us still have certain treasures of bodhichitta. That is because the meritorious qualities in our minds, such as wisdom and renunciation, have indeed been passed down directly from the Buddha and from the lineage masters. Moreover, since we protect and uphold the good teaching of the Buddha, show respect to the Sangha, and keep the vows of laypersons and above, we are preventing the lineage of the Three Jewels from becoming interrupted. Wherever the Three Jewels are represented, there would not be any evil spirits and heretics and the Buddha Shakyamuni’s teachings would be upheld.

Sometimes I feel that in this age, among an ant-like crowds of human beings, how

fortunate is it that we possess this human body and are endowed with freedoms and advantages! As such, everyone should feel joy and aspire as follows: “For as long as I live, I will do my very best for the sake of the Three Jewels and for the Buddhadharma. I will abstain from performing any evil action that terminates the lineage of the Three Jewels.” If we maintain this aspiration in our hearts, our actions will follow our hearts and they will be meaningful.

The eighth is called the treasure of accomplishment or receptivity to the Dharma. It means that one is able to fully accept the teaching of emptiness and all other inconceivable teachings. Some with less-developed faculties feel fear upon hearing that all things are emptiness. While others, unlike them, can fully accept the emptiness of all things that are beyond conceptual elaboration, and can accept the unfathomable state of all buddhas. This is receptivity to the Dharma. In *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, it says: “It is the treasure of accomplishment, by reason of attaining the receptivity to the teachings on nonproduction of things.”

In general, upon hearing about the teaching of emptiness and the inconceivable states of realization, an individual belonging to the Mahayana lineage would not have any doubt. He or she would think: “The tathagata’s realization is inconceivable, and the mystery concerning all things is inexpressible; since the Buddha said so, how do I, a being of lesser faculties, have the ability to go against it? Anything the Buddha has spoken is perfectly true and correct.” If we have this kind of confidence and understanding, it would also be considered as a receptivity to the nonproduction of things.

When we attain the noble fruition of the first bodhisattva ground or higher, we would attain the genuine eight eloquences or the eight treasures of meritorious qualities. Still, there are those among us who may be capable of attaining a similar state. The eight eloquences are frequently discussed in the treatises concerning this

topic and we should develop a clear understanding of their meaning.

[VERSE 98]

***Those who are freely endowed with the abundance of, and never separated from
The eight great and inexhaustible treasures
Will be praised by buddhas and bodhisattvas
And become a lord of the three realms.***

After one attains the eight eloquences through listening, reflection, and meditation, this person will never be separated from them from that time on. In other words, he or she is liberally endowed with the inexhaustible treasures of meritorious qualities and becomes a son of the tathagatas. Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, the virtuous masters, together with humans and nonhumans, will praise this individual as a great master, a son of the Buddha, a keeper of knowledge, and as a sage. Not only that, this individual will also become, in a very short time, a lord of the three realms, a teacher of the world, attaining the resultant state of a perfectly enlightened buddha.

For this reason, as practitioners, we should learn the skillful means for attaining the eight eloquences. These skillful means, as we have already discussed above, are listening, reflection, and meditation by relying on the four principles and the four reliances. In this manner, we will most surely attain such meritorious qualities. Clearly it would not be possible to gain all eight eloquences in a short time. However, as we proceed in our practice, we must seek to understand these meritorious qualities and pursue the fundamental way of practice. Applying these principles to our lives with zeal, we will become good practitioners.

Good practitioners are held in high regards by many non-practitioners. For example, because of their meritorious qualities such as wisdom and altruism, non-practitioners take delight in many dharma teachers and practitioners. On the surface,

it may appear as if most people are the same. However, in truth, there could be significant differences on many aspects such as each person's predispositions and realization. Although it would be difficult for most to actually obtain the eight eloquences in the near future, I very much hope that as we practice we will at least become sincere and authentic practitioners endowed with the qualities of a good person, and that we can direct our aspirations and practices, and our best efforts, toward bringing benefit to others. In this way, we will be praised and recognized by others, and by buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The greatest barrier to attaining the eight eloquences is one's attachment to self, a strong attachment that can find no origin. This self-attachment is the greatest obstacle to our practice and to the attainment of the eight eloquences. Recognizing this, the great masters of the Kadampa tradition taught that the target of our practice should be the elimination of all selfish thoughts.

Since the objects of our attachment through desire or anger are indeed illusory and dream-like, there is no need to cling to them. Many in the world still seek what they have desired since childhood, things that lack real meaning for attachment. As we practice, we must avoid becoming attached to such unreal things, particularly to ourselves. Instead, we must dedicate our practice towards altruism. In this way, we would most certainly succeed.

The Result of Understanding the Two Truths

C3: The Result of Understanding the Two Truths

In the foregoing, we have discussed the two truths that will have to be understood, and the two kinds of valid knowledge that can be used to understand the two truths, namely, valid knowledge of the ultimate and the valid knowledge of the conventional. As we ascertain the two truths with the two valid knowledge, we would obtain the following results which are explained below.

[VERSE 99]

The valid teachings of the victorious Buddha

Can be established by the valid knowledge.

Therefore, through the valid path, one generates conviction,

And sees the true fruition of the valid teachings.

Valid teachings are the teachings taught by the Buddha. All discourses spoken by the Buddha, including the provisional and ultimate teachings, are true and undecieving, and are correct valid knowledge. How do we know this? It is through the unmistakable direct perception and inference, or through the valid knowledge of the conventional and the valid knowledge of the ultimate. Some might regard the statement that what the Buddha taught is the valid teaching as merely an assumption. Yet it is not so, for the Buddha is the one who genuinely benefits others, and his statements are entirely correct and beyond refutation. Among all the excellent statements in the world, the Buddha's teachings are the most correct and thus can be established as correct valid knowledge.

In his *Compendium of Valid Knowledge*, Dignaga says: "Homage to the absolute valid knowledge, the one who is devoted to the benefit of sentient beings, the great

master, the well-gone, and the protector.” This verse praises the Buddha’s altruistic mind, as well as his numerous meritorious qualities such as having become the one with valid knowledge. Nagarjuna also says: “I bow my head before the Buddha, whose teaching is first among all.” This means that the words spoken by the Buddha rank first among all words in the world and no one is capable of surpassing them. By earnestly studying the related scriptures and commentaries, we will understand this insight.

In the chapter entitled *Establishing the Buddha as the One with Valid Knowledge* of his *Commentary on Valid Knowledge*, Dharmakirti discusses why the Buddha is the valid person through the valid knowledge of the conventional. Nagarjuna, who is well known as the bodhisattva of the first ground, establishes the Buddha as the valid person through the valid knowledge of the ultimate, mainly from the perspective of the profound. By following Nagarjuna’s reasoning, we know that the Buddha had perfectly understood the nature of emptiness, and that no ordinary being is capable of knowing such profound meaning. Meanwhile, Asanga, who reached the third bodhisattva ground, discussed from the perspective of the vast sublime instructions given by the Buddha concerning the five paths and the ten grounds. Through his instructions we know that the Buddha is the only person who is capable of understanding the way of establishing the paths and grounds, as well as the vast aspects of all things in the world.

Therefore, if we study the Buddha’s instructions, as well as the instructions of the great Indian masters such as Nagarjuna, Asanga, Dharmakirti and Dignaga, or the instructions of the great Tibetan and Chinese masters, we will eventually come to the understanding that the Buddha is truly the one with valid knowledge, and that the path explained by the Buddha is entirely correct. If we follow this valid path we will reach beyond the ocean of suffering and attain the peace of nirvana. We should all develop, from the depth of our hearts, an irreversible confidence and conviction as along the path of practice, this conviction is indeed something precious and rare.

When we have developed such conviction and can remain unchanged by anyone in the world, we will become a real follower of the Buddha and will further see the true fruition of the valid teaching. We will even be able to see perfectly and clearly the truths that are hard to understand by sravaka, pratyekabuddha, not to mention the wise in the world and in the heavens, and the scientists and literary scholars acclaimed by contemporary society. At that time, no one—demons, non-Buddhists, and the whole of conceptual thoughts of misleading doctrines—will be capable of altering our view.

In his *One Hundred and Fifty Verses in Praise of the Buddha*, Asvaghosa says:

*Upon hearing the authentic teaching from the World Conqueror,
All mistaken traditions become frightened,
The Lord of Maras becomes deeply worried,
While humans and gods develop a profound faith.*

The implication here is that, having heard the genuine instructions spoken by the World Conqueror, the unparalleled teacher Buddha Shakyamuni, any adherent of an erroneous tradition will become terrified, the Lord of Maras will become deeply concerned, whereas those among humans and gods who have planted roots of virtue will develop joy and confidence from the depth of their hearts. Indeed, no worldly truth can compare with the Buddha's teachings and doctrines.

We should possess a faith in Buddhism towards the Buddha's teaching, a faith that is not merely in words, and not an adoration based on mere belief or blind faith. By studying the Buddha's teachings, people of all ages, whether they are old or young, would come to the following realization: although there are many famous figures in the world throughout history, such as movie stars, pop stars, or leaders, who received unanimous acclaims by millions of individuals; the only unparalleled guide who is truly free from faults, who is endowed with all meritorious qualities, and who has explained the path of liberation to sentient beings, is our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, together

with all buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times. Although words from various famous historical figures seemed appealing to many, the truth is if we follow them, we would not gain liberation.

Many adore pop stars or movie stars, but once you have heard their songs or seen their movies, what will it mean to your present or future life? It could only leave satisfied for a very short time: “This song is so good! The music is so moving!” Its value will go only so far. In contrast, we should all understand that the value of the Buddha’s words and their benefits for our present and future lifetimes are immense.