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2 THE MAHĀYĀNA MODE OF THOUGHT

THE aim of all Buddhist paths is liberation from the world of pain and delusion and awakening to the truth or reality that transcends it. The hallmark of the Mahāyāna way is that it does not teach abandonment of ordinary life in attaining authentic existence and genuine self-knowledge. The true transcendent realm also transcends any division between this world and the world of awakening, and is realized not through renouncing everyday life but through transforming it at its roots.

Shinran uses precisely the term "transformation" (see Passage 8), and his fundamental contribution to Buddhist tradition lies in articulating the nature of this transformation as realized in the path of Pure Land Buddhism. By doing so, he not only firmly grounded Pure Land teachings in general Buddhist, and particularly Mahāyāna, thought, but also played a crucial role in bringing Mahāyāna Buddhism to the fulfillment of one of its highest goals: a practicable and unflinching path to enlightenment accessible to all people.

Since Mahāyāna thought forms the foundation of Shinran's understanding of true reality and human attainment, it will be helpful to consider its basic character and elements. In this chapter, we will take up the Buddhist view of ordinary life, and then, drawing on formulations of the early Indian masters, focus on themes and modes of thought that allowed for the unfolding of the Pure Land path: 1) the radically nondualistic

quality of true reality or wisdom; 2) the complex structure of transformed awareness and life, in which wisdom is also itself compassion; and 3) the implications of such wisdom or reality for the process of transformation.

The Human Situation

Śākyamuni Buddha, in the first of his Four Noble Truths, pointed out the pain of human existence, and in the second, revealed its cause as blind and desperate craving or thirst.

It is sometimes said that the Buddha's teaching is needlessly pessimistic, viewing only the dark side of life. The Buddhist analysis of life lived in ignorance, however, is not based on our ordinary judgments of good and bad or relative happiness and discomfort. It points rather to a pervasive disquiet concerning all that threatens our sense of who we are. This anxiety is focused in its deepest levels on our fear of impermanence and death, and manifests itself as a fierce attachment to self—a self we cling to as actual and enduring, but which is only the image we view ourselves as, a fabrication of projected hopes and fears.¹

It is taught that our ordinary life is colored by four kinds of inverted thinking with which we refuse to recognize the truth about ourselves and the world: we assume what is impermanent to be everlasting; we pursue what actually brings pain out of illusions of self-gratification; we see what is defiled by egocentricity as pure; and we cling to what is egoless and non-substantial as possessing a permanent identity. Viewing the world with our imagined self at its center, we desire all that seems to enlarge or enhance our existence—whether possessions, family, power, or esteem—and at the same time, we regard whatever is menacing or diminishing with antipathy. Having made our selves into an object in the world to be protected and magnified, we view all things and people also as objects, judging them in terms of benefit to the self. Our lives, thus propelled by the incessant and

unfulfillable need to affirm the self, are inevitably pervaded in their depths by hunger, dread, and frustration.

By refusing to let go of our egocentric perspective on the world, we lock ourselves into a distorted vision and must experience over and over the disappointments and pain of being in discord with the way things actually are. Moreover, this pain leads us to cling all the more resolutely to the self. In Buddhist terms, our lives are characterized by *samsāra*—the “stream of existence from birth to death and death to birth” driven by the desires and hatreds arising from self-attachment. Samsara denotes bondage to the futile repetition of suffering that we are doomed to by our clinging. Shinran states we are “shackled,” bound about by our passions (Passage 7).

Śākyamuni Buddha was able to sunder the fetters of samsaric life by eliminating its cause—that is, by perceiving the reality expressed as the Four Noble Truths. Thus the third and fourth Truths: that pain can be overcome through the cessation of craving, and that there is a way to cessation in the Noble Eightfold Path (right view, thought, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and meditation). He did not grasp the Four Truths as abstract, objective doctrines. Rather, by realizing them as the actuality of his own existence through contemplative practice, he was able to eradicate the delusion and ignorance that give rise to craving and suffering. The fundamental aim of the Buddhist path, then, is to break through the false structures imposed on experience from the stance of the delusional self. “Buddha” means “awakened one,” and the goal of every Buddhist is to attain Buddhahood, to shake off the dream of obsessive attachments.

Most forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism teach personal discipline, meditation, and religious exercises by which one gradually strips away the “blind passions” (*kleśa*) that manifest self-attachment and releases one’s grip on the imagined self and its compulsions. Those who awaken the aspiration for enlightenment and follow the path are called bodhisattvas, “beings

of *bodhi*” or enlightenment. By annihilating such passions, bodhisattvas thoroughly eradicate the thinking, feeling, and perception predicated on the false self. Such thinking and feeling is characterized above all by the barrier placed between self and others, between the subject that thinks and perceives and the objects that it sets apart from itself and observes with feelings of possessiveness or aversion.

Bodhisattvas, then, are said to obliterate the dichotomous thinking based on subject and object. They perceive no beings or things of the world as separate from themselves, and no self divided from beings. Since the ordinary, unenlightened perspective of the self has been cast off, this realization is also called no-self, or non-ego. Since the ignorance that is the root of blind passions—the delusional thinking that sees with the self at the center of the world—has been dispelled, awakening is also *nirvāna*, the “blowing out” or extinguishing of passions and suffering.

One of the most important features of the wisdom realized by the bodhisattva, however, is that it is not mere quiescence—not a blankness in which the perceiving subject is annihilated. Rather, it functions to see the world as it truly is. When things are no longer turned into objects in the distorting glass of self-interest, the self likewise ceases to be a projection of desires and apprehensions—the objectified image of self—and becomes the self that knows, the actual subject. Thus, when inverted thinking is eradicated, one awakens to true reality characterized by the four noninverted qualities of nirvana: timelessness, bliss, purity, and authentic self. Here samsaric life, the life of ignorance, is transformed into the activity of wisdom or enlightenment. It may be said, then, that emancipation from samsaric life attained in the Buddhist path is fundamentally a new mode of awareness. It is not an extension of our usual ways of knowing into broader spheres, but the emergence of the world and the self free of the subject-object dichotomy.

Prajñāpāramitā or Nondiscriminative Wisdom

The activity of the noninverted mind is characterized by freedom from the false distinction between self and other, and by the consequent interfusion of seer and seen, subject and object. Because it is established by eradicating false discrimination, it is not mere perception, but also a mode of practice, and the wisdom or awakening that emerges in and through this seeing-practice is called supreme bodhi or enlightenment. The earliest Mahāyāna concept of such seeing is *prajñā* (wisdom), or more fully, *prajñāpāramitā*, “wisdom that has attained the other shore.” It is described in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras, which begin to appear from about the first century of the common era and which are considered the foundation of all Mahāyāna thought.

The central theme of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras is practice, that is, how the bodhisattva should perform *prajñā*. *Prajñā*, then, is at once wisdom *and* practice. The *Heart Sutra* begins:

When Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was practicing deep *prajñāpāramitā*, he clearly saw that the five aggregates are all empty.

The five aggregates or *skandhas* refer to the basic elements that make up the self and all things in existence: form or the material world, sensation, thought, feeling, and consciousness. “Empty” means that they do not really exist. The other *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras similarly speak of practice and include lengthy catalogs of things and concepts to be seen as empty or actually nonexistent. Sometimes the repetitiveness of these sutras is regarded as a stylistic failing, but they are not treatises meant to systematically develop a body of doctrine, but rather guides to practice, and practice is repetitive performance (*bhāvanā*).

Among the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras, the *Prajñāpāramitā in Eight Thousand Lines*, the *Diamond Sutra*, and the *Prajñāpāramitā in Twenty-five Thousand Lines* are considered repre-

sentative of the earliest strata. The *Prajñāpāramitā in Eight Thousand Lines*, perhaps the oldest of these three, employs expressions typical of *prajñāpāramitā* thought such as “emptiness,” “not seeing,” and “not grasping,” teaching that “all things are empty” or “ungraspable.”² This emptiness is the content of the bodhisattva’s performance of *prajñā*, which is the contemplative practice of “not seeing” any thing. Not to see any thing means to cut off the dichotomous thinking (*vikalpa*) that distinguishes things and makes them into objects standing apart from the self, and this is for all things that become objects of such thought to be “empty” and nonexistent.

The term “empty” (*śūnya*) strongly suggests an ontological dimension, involving the question of existence or nonexistence, but as the content of practice, it also holds clear implications concerning the working of the mind. The bodhisattva practicing *prajñā* does not conceive or see or grasp anything, any object of thought or perception. This is because all things discriminated and identified by the egocentric mind are in reality “empty” or nonexistent. For the bodhisattva there is nothing, whether material existence or mental conception, to become the object of any act of perception, thought, or imagination. “Empty” is used to express the negation of things seen, and “not seeing” the negation of perception of delusive objects.

That things do not exist and that the bodhisattva practicing *prajñā* does not see or discriminate are two facets of a single reality. Emptiness and *prajñā* therefore refer to the same reality or awareness. Thus Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250), who expounded Mādhyamika thought, the first great school of Indian Mahāyāna, states that since all things that become objects in the field of mental activity are nonexistent, no “mental function that sees objects” arises.³ This is nondiscrimination (*avikalpa*, *nirvikalpa*). Vasubandhu (c. 320-400) terms it “no-mind” (*acitta*).⁴

Emptiness signifies the eradication of all objects of thought and perception, and this is at the same time nondiscrimination or not seeing. The simple absence of objects in itself, however,

is not wisdom. Rather, when all perception of objects is eliminated, wisdom arises. This is wisdom or awareness that functions when all objects set apart from the subject disappear—when objectifying thought ceases and subject and object, seer and seen, become one. This wisdom is *prajñā*, and the *bodhisattva* who practices it perceives things as they genuinely are.

The wisdom that functions in emptiness is also termed nondiscriminative wisdom (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*); it arises when all mental activity—“discrimination” (*vikalpa*) or “mind” (*citta*)—has been eradicated.⁵ Discriminative thinking and *prajñā* therefore stand in a relation of mutual exclusion. What we perceive by discrimination does not really exist, but is merely conceptualization and abstraction. The awareness that has not seeing any such objects as its fundamental nature, however, is able to touch and know the direct reality of each thing in itself. By practicing such awareness, the *bodhisattva* reaches true existence just as it is.⁶ Instead of seeing objects upon which to impose his own concepts and values, he is said to see “suchness” or “thusness” (*tathatā*), which is each thing and being emerging just “such” as it is, in immediacy and particularity, but at the same time recognized to be nonexistent. It is thus grasped not as some thing to be labeled or judged, but nondiscriminatively, in its nondifference with all other things, including the enlightened seer.

As we have seen, emptiness signifies the nonexistence of all objects of discriminative thinking and, by extension, the cessation of discriminative thought and perception, that is, “not seeing.” This “not seeing” is *prajñā*. Further, emptiness is also the content of the awareness of nondiscriminative wisdom (*paramārtha*, “highest object” or object of supreme wisdom); hence, it is synonymous with suchness or true reality. Emptiness, nondiscriminative wisdom, and suchness all signify aspects of a single, nondichotomous true reality.

The mental faculties of an unenlightened person take as objects the self and the things of the world—all that is made up of

forms, sensations, thoughts, feelings, and consciousness (the five aggregates). These may be labeled illusory discrimination. The mental faculties of the person of wisdom that arise where all such discrimination has been eradicated and all objects upon which dualistic thinking may be imposed have vanished is called nondiscriminative wisdom or *prajñā*. The object of such wisdom is the emptiness of all things, which is things just as they are.

Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form

Although the terms “emptiness” and “not seeing” express the core of *prajñāpāramitā* thought, logical formulations were later evolved that convey with greater lucidity the nature of *prajñā*. A characteristic expression is found in the *Prajñāpāramitā in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*:

Form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form. Form is itself emptiness, emptiness is itself form.

In the phrase, “Form is itself emptiness, emptiness is itself form,” “form” signifies all existing things, all objects of thought. A “form” can be grasped through perception or thought and belongs to the realm of existence. “Emptiness”—mathematically, “zero”—means void or nonexistent. “Is” indicates the identity or nondifference of form (existence) and emptiness (voidness, nonexistence), and thus clearly involves a logical self-contradiction.

In order to force this paradoxical expression of *prajñā* into the mode of ordinary discursive reasoning, it is sometimes claimed that what is negated by the term emptiness is not the existence of a form or thing itself, but merely the conception of it as substantial, with an enduring essence existing independently of other things.⁷ Thus, “Form is emptiness” is taken to mean that things conceived as entities do not really exist. Further, the “form” affirmed in “Emptiness is form” is again not the form itself, but form existing only in mutual interrelation and in-

terdependence with other things. By interpreting emptiness to mean “co-dependence” or “interrelatedness,” and by taking the single term “form” to have two different meanings—1) the false conceptualization of things as permanent entities, and 2) things existing relative to and dependent on other things—the self-contradictory character of the phrase is resolved, and it may be rationally understood. Thus, “Form is emptiness” is taken as a denial of the existence of permanent, substantial things as we ordinarily perceive them, and “Emptiness is form” expresses the affirmation of things that are rightly perceived to exist only interrelated with all other things. The first “form” is said to express the perspective of false discrimination, while the second expresses true wisdom.

While such an interpretation may seem logically satisfying, we must bear in mind that emptiness in the Prajñāpāramitā sutras is not taught to win the assent of our ordinary consciousness; it is inseparable from the meditative *practice* of not seeing. The phrase, “Form is empty . . . sensation, thought, feeling, and consciousness are empty,” describes how the bodhisattva practicing prajñā should view the elements that constitute existing things. Thus, it refers not to the illusoriness of our ordinary perceptions, but to the emptiness of form seen by the practicing bodhisattva. Likewise, the form affirmed in “Emptiness is form” must also refer to the form seen by the bodhisattva in practice. Literally understood, then, emptiness-contemplation holds a logically self-contradictory structure in which form is both negated and affirmed. This is one and the same form, seen by the bodhisattva in practice, not by two different people or from different states of awareness.

This idea is expressed in another phrase characteristic of prajñāpāramitā thought: the formula “A is not-A; therefore it is A,” which appears repeatedly in the *Diamond Sutra*. “The world is no-world and therefore the world is called the world.” “Prajñāpāramitā is not prajñāpāramitā and therefore is called prajñāpāramitā.” D. T. Suzuki has termed this the “logic of

soku-hi” or “identity–mutual negation.”⁸ A and not-A stand in mutual opposition, but through their paradoxical identification, A is indeed A. That is, each thing in the world is negated and at the same time affirmed by emptiness. “A” is dissolved by emptiness, and yet the A pervaded by emptiness, so that it is like a phantasm or mirage, is true reality or suchness or the thing precisely as it is. In this way, a self-contradictory relation in which form and emptiness, existence and nothingness, finite and infinite are one and at the same time different is established. This is the essential structure of nondiscriminative wisdom or prajñā.

The phrase, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form,” should be understood to mean that, in the practice of prajñā, a single form—with a certain coloration and shape—completely dissolves and merges into vast, limitless nothingness and becomes the infinite void. Thus, form becomes one with emptiness. This means that the form seen by false discrimination is eradicated and discriminative thought, ceasing to limit and discriminate form, becomes prajñā, or wisdom that has attained the other shore. This is no-mind, or the eradication of both object and subject, or “all things are void.” Here, both object and wisdom are empty or nonexistent.

At the same time, this emptiness reflects itself in finite forms, so that “Emptiness is form.” Here, two aspects are implied. First, in wisdom or no-mind, where false discrimination has vanished, discrimination again functions as thought and perception, but on the basis of wisdom; hence, delimited forms are seen. This may be termed the discrimination of nondiscrimination, or the mind of no-mind. It is wisdom that arises in emptiness, through the practice of not seeing.

Second, emptiness not only implies the eradication of discriminative thinking, or prajñā as the discrimination of nondiscrimination, but is also, as we have seen, the true object perceived by supreme wisdom—suchness or reality just as it is. The essential character of emptiness is not mere negation, but

the nonduality of object and wisdom. Thus, it may be said that emptiness reflects or perceives itself in finite forms. Form is pervaded by emptiness (A is not-A), and it is this form that is true reality in which seer and seen are one. The form that is formless is identical with the mind of no-mind that sees it. Here, both mind and object are none other than emptiness or reality. For the seeing mind of *prajñā*, the object perceived is itself.

The delineation of the radically nondualistic reality that emerges with the complete obliteration of egocentric thought and perception is expressed in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras largely in ontological terms centering on emptiness, and Nāgārjuna further develops this thought by logically demonstrating the inseparability and interfusion of existence and nonexistence, employing the structure of complete mutual dependence or co-dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). These teachings, however, are not intended as objective descriptions of reality to be grasped by discriminative thought and discursive reasoning; they express the nature of practice and the awareness of the bodhisattva who has awakened nondiscriminative wisdom. In *prajñā*, there is no dualism of subject and object; reality is itself wisdom, and wisdom is reality. Thus, although the nature of the subjective or of awareness in emptiness remains obscure in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras and Nāgārjuna, reality must be seen to embrace the activity of the awakened mind. The existence and nature of this subjective aspect is one of the central themes of Yogācāra thought, the second great stream of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Three Aspects of True Reality

The early Yogācāra thinkers—Maitreya, Asaṅga (c. 315-390), and Vasubandhu—inherited the fundamentally nondualistic structure of reality taught by the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras and Nāgārjuna. Thus, at the core of their thought lies the interpenetration of existence and nothingness expressed in the sutras, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” They did not,

like Nāgārjuna, develop this structure in its horizontal framework—in terms of the interrelationships among things. (This direction of thought was later to evolve as the mainstream of Chinese Buddhism in the San-lun, T’ien-T’ai, and Hua-yen schools.) Rather, they explored the subjective aspect that “Form is emptiness” implies—the relationship between seer and seen or wisdom and suchness—and thus its vertical dimension of time and the continuity of the subject. Hence, they taught not only the eradication of samsara to reach nirvana and the resultant nonduality, but further the transformation in which, by passing through an absolute negation, samsara or blind passion is completely nullified and at the same time brought into an identity of opposites with nirvana. In this way, they delineated the structure by which true reality is inseparable from the illusory and unreal, and wisdom from false discrimination.

One of the central concepts developed in the Yogācāra school is the “three natures” or dimensions of reality that emerge in the awareness of the bodhisattva who has realized nondiscriminative wisdom. In outline, they correspond to the elements of form and emptiness in *prajñāpāramitā* thought. Of the three, “fulfilled nature” (*pariṇiṣpanna-svabhāva*) corresponds to emptiness, thusness, nirvana, or nondiscriminative wisdom.

The remaining two natures correspond to form. Prior to the emergence of Yogācāra thought, the basic issues in Buddhism were organized around contrasting terms: form and emptiness, sentient being and Buddha, blind passions and enlightenment, samsara and nirvana, all things (*dharma*) and thusness or dharma-nature (*dharmatā*). In order to treat the working of the mind, however, the Yogācāra thinkers divided “form” or “samsara” or “all things” into the seer and the seen.

The seer (discriminative mind) is termed “other-dependent nature” (*paratantra-svabhāva*), for it comes into existence through various causes and conditions. That it arises solely

from conditions implies that it exists, but is not truly existent.⁹ The bodhisattva recognizes that such mental activity as thinking and perception emerges from the seeds (*bīja*) of karma and blind passions; it therefore exists only provisionally and is by nature delusional, taking for objects what does not exist.

The seen is termed “discriminated nature” (*parikalpita-svabhāva*), since it is that which is differentiated and conceptualized by the seer as its object. For the unenlightened being, the objects perceived with defiled discrimination are thought to be real. For the bodhisattva who has attained nonobjectifying, nondiscriminative wisdom, however, all things that are the objects of discriminative perception are “always nonexistent” (*nityam asat*) or “not existent” (*na vidyate*).¹⁰ Hence, “discriminated nature”—objects of delusory thought being seen to be false, unreal, and nonexistent—expresses nothingness or true, noninverted reality.

It is important to bear in mind that each of the three natures, like the phrase “Form is emptiness,” expresses the awareness of wisdom and not an abstract doctrine about the world. If they are taken as expressing simply an intellectual understanding, they become another object of discriminative thought. In our ordinary perception, we do not see the subjectivity as arising from blind passions or things as unreal; in other words, other-dependent (subject) and discriminated (object) natures are not part of our awareness. In the experience of the bodhisattva in contemplative practice, however, the three natures express three facets or dimensions of the world as it actually is, and in their interrelationships, they delineate the interpenetration of existence and nonexistence, or the nonduality of samsara and nirvana, taking into account the subject-object dichotomy that is harbored in our experience of existence.

True Reality as Subjectivity-Only

The dynamic interrelationships among the three natures revolve around the Yogācāra concept of reality as “subjectivity-

only” (*vijñapti-mātratā*). “Subjectivity” here should be understood broadly as all mental activity of perception, thought, and feeling; it refers to the seeing subject that grasps and knows by discriminating between subject and object and among individual things.

Through contemplative practice in which the bodhisattva becomes aware that discriminated objects are illusory, he eliminates discrimination and realizes suchness or true reality, which is free of the subject-object dichotomy. The reality that is attained, however, is termed subjectivity-only; hence we find that subjectivity-only is identified with suchness and the nonexistence of both grasped object and grasping mind.¹¹ As a term, however, “subjectivity-only” implies discriminative perception. Thus, when subjectivity (discriminative thought and perception) has been eliminated, there is only subjectivity. As in the case of “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form,” we encounter here a flatly self-contradictory teaching. Yet, according to Yogācāra texts, in nondiscriminative wisdom or suchness, that there is no subjectivity and that there is only subjectivity are both established together.

Subjectivity-only signifies the simultaneous establishment, as a single whole, of absence of discriminative mental activity together with its existence. It is precisely such a structure, articulated in Yogācāra thought through the concept of the three natures, that can account for the functioning of wisdom where wisdom and its object, reality, are not differentiated into seer and seen.

The term “subjectivity-only” implies that the bodhisattva perceives objects but recognizes that such objects do not really exist. They do not arise from causes and are falsely perceived and delusional. This does not mean that the objects exist only in the mind. Rather, two contradictory elements are expressed here: 1) the eradication of subject and object and the realization of nondiscrimination, and 2) the functioning of perception and cognition where the subject-object dichotomy has been tran-

scended. This is the mind (perception and knowing) of no-mind (nondiscrimination).

Concerning the first element, when subjectivity-only has been established, there is no object grasped, for all objects have been eradicated as completely illusory and nonexistent. Further, when there is nothing perceived, neither can there be any functioning of the subject. Since it is taught that the seen (discriminative nature) is always nonexistent, the seer must also always be nonexistent.¹² In other words, both the seer and the seen are always empty. Since there is no seer, the term no-mind is used, and since there is no seen, it is said that there is “no object to be perceived” (*anupalambha*).¹³ The emptiness of all things (both seer and seen) is fulfilled nature. It is the emptiness taught in the Prajñāpāramitā sutras and corresponds to suchness, nondiscriminative wisdom, or nirvana.

Concerning the second element, although objects (discriminated nature) do not exist, it is taught that mental activity does exist in that it arises through causes and conditions. In fact, without the existence of subjectivity (other-dependent nature) that discriminates objects, the aspect of reality termed discriminated nature—which is the nonexistence of those objects—cannot be established.

Taking these elements together, it is said that the nonexistence of objects (discriminated nature) and the consequent nonexistence of discriminative thinking is fulfilled nature (emptiness, true reality). Thus, while the nonexistence of objects stands relative to the existence of the subject, the emptiness or nonexistence of the subject is absolute voidness or nothingness (*abhāva*) that embraces and pervades its existence. Fulfilled nature or emptiness, which is the nonexistence of seer and seen, does not exclude the existence of subjectivity, for it is absolute and harbors other-dependent nature within itself. In our ordinary objectifying thought, existence and nonexistence are utterly distinct, but when the subject-object dichotomy has been eradicated, “Form (existence) is emptiness (nonexistence) and emptiness is

form.” Thus, the “subjectivity” of “subjectivity-only” affirms the existence of the perceiving subject (discriminative thinking) precisely where subject and object have been eradicated. Since subjectivity-only signifies the wisdom or suchness realized by the bodhisattva, its two aspects of existence and nonexistence reflect the fundamental nondualistic structure of reality in Mahāyāna thought.

In relation to mental activity, this means that wisdom or suchness always holds within itself the discriminative mind, which is not true or real. That other-dependent nature exists means that false thinking exists; in other words, what is not true or real exists. In that this subjectivity is also without objects and therefore nonexistent, the existence of false thinking is true reality. “Not in reality” (*abhūta*) existing is itself true reality (*bhūta*). That subjectivity exists through not existing means, on the one hand, that it is false and unreal, and on the other, that it is true reality. Apart from the arising of such delusional thinking, there is no true reality.

Further, there is a temporal aspect. Since only subjectivity exists, this subjectivity (other-dependent nature) is the essence (*ātmaka*) of all things of samsara, both seer and seen;¹⁴ they are thus temporal and karma-created (*samskṛta*), arising from causes and conditions. Fulfilled nature is true reality; it is the nothingness of all things, including the subject, and thus is timelessness. Since other-dependent and fulfilled natures are both mutually opposed and nondifferent, the time of samsaric existence as perceived by the bodhisattva is not simply linear. It is pervaded by timelessness, and therefore experienced as a succession of discrete instants that is both continuous and discontinuous.

Other-dependent nature (seer and all things) exists in the immediate present only and perishes with each instant, for in the following instant it ceases to exist as subjectivity, becoming instead the object (discriminated nature) of the next instant’s subjectivity. Thus, all things exist only in the present instant, and

when the instant passes, they vanish and become nil. In the following instant, subjectivity and things both newly arise through causation in that instant.

The impermanent existence that is other-dependent nature—perishing with each instant—stands in opposition to the timeless (fulfilled nature), and further, these two interfuse. The single instant of time, in each instant, dissolves and merges with the eternal or timeless, and simultaneously, it is again born as an instant. In this way, the subjectivity—the temporal existence of the impermanent individual—in each instant dissolves and fuses with that which is true and real, and simultaneously, from there it is born. This subjectivity is the wisdom that constitutes the nature of the bodhisattva, the true subject that is never objectified. From the point that this wisdom first arises, the bodhisattva comes to live as time that may be characterized, “Time is itself timelessness, timelessness is itself time.” For the bodhisattva, each present instant of activity—bodily, verbal, and mental—is actual time established where the subjectivity stands, and also possesses the character of the eternal or timeless. That each instant is also eternity is the temporal aspect of “Form is emptiness” or “Samsara is nirvāṇa.”

Subjectivity-Only With No Object

The basic structure of subjectivity-only also has an epistemological aspect, describing the working of the enlightened mind. That other-dependent nature (all things, samsara, the karma-created) and fulfilled nature (nirvana, the uncreated) are both different and nondifferent means that subjectivity and no-subjectivity or nondiscrimination (*avijñapti*) are also so related.

Subjectivity refers basically to the seer in contrast to the seen. Subjectivity-*only*, then, is seeing and knowing without any object. This is subjectivity where both subject and object have been eradicated. In other words, it is discriminative thought and perception that occurs without departing from nondiscrimination, in which subject (wisdom) and object (suchness, empti-

ness) are nondual. This may be termed the mind of no-mind, or discrimination of nondiscrimination.

Perception without any object presents a paradox; hence, subjectivity-only tends to be understood not literally, but conceptually. Throughout most of the history of Yogācāra thought in China and Japan, it has been interpreted to mean that things regarded as existing objectively, independent of the subject, actually exist only within the mind.¹⁵ In this interpretation, Yogācāra thought is clearly a kind of idealism. A close reading of basic texts, however, shows that subjectivity-only means not that subjectivity evolves and projects an object from within itself, but rather that the perceiving subject is without any object that is seen. Other-dependent nature (perceiving subject) and discriminated nature (nonexistent object) therefore stand in an ontological relationship of existence and nonexistence, and also in an epistemological relationship of subject and object. When bodhisattvas establish the three natures through performing meditative practices, thus bringing subject and object into these relationships, they attain subjectivity-only.

It is taught, therefore, that in subjectivity-only, “seen and seer are the same, the same.” “Same” is used twice here. On the one hand, the wisdom that sees is nondiscriminative and does not differentiate things, for it does not stand in dualistic opposition to objects. On the other hand, the suchness that is seen, the object, is nondifferentiated, and there is no discrimination as things. Nondiscriminative wisdom (subject) and suchness (object) are the same from either standpoint, for the seer is not divided from the seen.

Nevertheless, there is subjectivity. It is not our usual perception, but direct knowing, without any mediation of word or conceptualization. Moreover, such awareness is authentic self-knowledge, for since subject and object are not divided, there is knowing without any object, meaning that wisdom sees itself. This is to grasp reality without objectifying it in any way. When wisdom sees a thing or form (*rūpa*), in that form, seer and seen

are the same.

Because of this nondifference of subject and object, in Yogācāra thought, subjectivity (*viññapti*) is used to signify both the seer and the seen. As the seen, it is called “subjectivity that has appeared as form, etc.” (*rūpa-ādi-pratibhāsā viññapti*). This seen is not simply an object, but simultaneously is itself subject or seer. However, since seer and seen must also stand in opposition in the activity of perception, it is impossible for either to be both seer and seen simultaneously. Hence, the nondifference of seen and seer is not mere identity, but possesses a self-contradictory structure of mutual negation simultaneous with identity. When “subjectivity that has appeared as form” is the seen, the seer vanishes and, at the same time, is identical with the seen. Here, things are known truly as they are, without conceptualization, through the subject becoming them. Further, when subjectivity as form is established in the standpoint of the seer, the seen vanishes and, at the same time, is identical with the seer. Here for the first time the subject comes to know itself without falsely objectifying itself.

The first aspect—subjectivity knowing things by becoming them—is awareness that arises without mediation, from within the form itself. This is the sameness or nondifference of subject and object in which the subject has become one with things.

In the second aspect—subjectivity knowing itself without objectifying itself—this awareness is further established in the standpoint of the subject; hence, subjectivity knows itself directly, without constructing a false self. Without knowing things by becoming them, it is impossible for the subjectivity to know itself without objectifying itself, just as it is impossible for the finger to point to itself. The realization that is self-knowledge without self-objectification is achieved precisely because, at the same time, one knows things by becoming them. There is only subjectivity without any object, and since this subjectivity immerses itself in things (form)—becomes empty and the same as no-subjectivity or no-mind—it is seen as things. In

“subjectivity appearing as form” in this way, genuinely knowing things and knowing oneself are both established freely and without hindrance, and the bodhisattva carries on a life characterized by both aspects of awareness.

The Unfolding of Wisdom as Compassion

Reality and wisdom, being essentially one and nondifferent, share a common structure. The complex relationship between form and emptiness or samsara and nirvana—the identity of mutually opposing elements together with the transformation of the former into the latter—also characterizes the relationship between false discrimination and nondiscriminative wisdom. Moreover, this structure clarifies one of the central elements of Mahāyāna thought: the necessary unfolding of wisdom as compassionate activity in the realm of samsara.

Among the basic Mahāyāna schools, it was the Yogācāra that delineated most clearly the process of practice from the perspective of the practitioner; thus, this school casts the greatest light on the nature and functioning of wisdom in its various stages of development. In Yogācāra thought, the bodhisattva's entire career, from first hearing the teaching, is said to be characterized by nondiscriminative wisdom. Three kinds or levels of nondiscriminative wisdom are distinguished—preparatory, fundamental, and subsequently attained.

Practice begins with hearing the teaching of subjectivity-only. The wisdom established by hearing is the shallowest level of nondiscriminative wisdom. Although the term “nondiscriminative” is used, the subjectivity still retains its activity of thought and conception, and it still harbors in its depths the discrimination characterized by the subject-object dichotomy. Thus, although people of this stage seek to realize the teaching of “subjectivity-only with no object” (nondiscriminative wisdom), for them the teaching itself becomes an object of discriminative thought. Such thinking is termed “thoughts and words based on dis-

crimination" (*manojalpa*). Nevertheless, this thinking is also a kind of wisdom—"preparatory" wisdom—because it is born from hearing the teaching, and therefore differs from the inverted and defiled discrimination of samsaric existence.

By advancing from hearing to reflection and practice, one gradually deepens the wisdom of the preparatory stage. The remaining discrimination is eventually eradicated, and the opposition of seer and seen is completely broken through. Objects of thought cease to be established, and even the concept of all things as subjectivity-only ceases to arise. At this point, one realizes fundamental nondiscriminative wisdom. All discriminative thinking vanishes, and one is said to touch (*spr̥śate*) suchness or emptiness. This point also signifies attainment of the stage of non-retrogression, which means that, having once entered the transcendent realm, one will never again fall back into the bondage of samsaric existence.

Attainment of fundamental wisdom or the stage of non-retrogression, however, represents only the first of ten great stages in the bodhisattvas' practice. They attain fundamental wisdom through profound contemplative practice, but they remain in complete objectlessness only briefly and soon emerge again into the world of discrimination. Because they have passed through aeons of samsaric existence, a residue of blind passions still remains in the depths of the mind to be eliminated through the deepening practice of *prajñā* or nondiscrimination. This process is represented by the remaining stages, from the second to the stage of *Tathāgata* or supreme Buddhahood. *Tathāgata*, a synonym for Buddha, signifies one who has "arrived at" or "emerged from suchness."

In each of these stages, not only the stage of *Tathāgata*, bodhisattvas reach ultimate reality, for they see suchness at each stage, and the suchness thus seen is always the same. The true transcendent realm is beyond all speech and thought, but after entering, they emerge again into the world of words and thoughts, and then re-enter the realm in which thought is again

eradicated. This is performed repeatedly. By doing so, the deep root of samsara and blind passions is thoroughly cut through. In this process, initial attainment of fundamental wisdom and entry into the stage of non-retrogression occurs with the first seeing of suchness; hence it is termed the "path of insight or seeing". After this, the seeing of suchness is repeated numerous times; this is called the "path of practice."

Subsequently Attained Wisdom

The bodhisattva's emergence from fundamental wisdom into the realm of samsara, besides indicating a residue remaining from samsaric existence, possesses another, deeper significance. As we have seen in considering "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form," true reality in Mahāyāna thought has a complex and self-contradictory structure whereby what is true and real is inseparable from what is false, illusory, temporary, and unreal. In Yogācāra thought, the presence of this structure in the concept of wisdom is indicated by the development of the third type of wisdom, the "subsequently attained." Subsequently attained wisdom is established only in fusion with the false discrimination that characterizes beings of samsaric existence; nevertheless, its essence is nondiscriminative wisdom, and it forms the core of great compassion. Moreover, because the wisdom of this stage reflects the complex structure of true reality, it is said to represent a level more fully consummated than fundamental wisdom itself.

When bodhisattvas first attain fundamental wisdom, they realize dharma-body (*dharmakāya*, "reality-body"). Dharma-body is synonymous with suchness, emptiness, and *prajñāpāramitā*, and indicates true reality. It is also, however, characterized by three kinds of nonduality: that of the karma-created—the ephemeral things of the world arising from causes and conditions—and the uncreated; of existence and nonexistence; and of the many and the One. These indicate essentially the nonduality of samsara (form, discrimination) and nirvana

(emptiness, nondiscrimination). Dharma-body itself, however—realized with attainment of fundamental wisdom—is the uncreated, and the aspect of the karma-created remains to be fully developed from it.

Thus, it is also taught that upon attaining fundamental wisdom, the bodhisattva realizes three Buddha-bodies, which are three dimensions of enlightenment or wisdom: the body of self-nature, the body of enjoyment, and the body of transformation or accommodation. The first is synonymous with formless true reality or the uncreated, but the latter two are said to take on form in order to manifest dharma and lead beings to awakening. Thus, dharma-body develops the karma-created from within itself as Buddha-bodies that are manifestations of wisdom accommodated to ignorant beings, and this development is the emergence of “subsequently attained wisdom.”

To regard the perceiving self and its objects as simultaneously existent is to perceive by discriminating subject and object. In attaining fundamental wisdom through the practice of not seeing, however, subject and object are both eradicated and the subject-object dichotomy is transcended. Nevertheless, dharma-body or wisdom develops thought and perception again, as its aspect of the karma-created. This new seeing or subjectivity, termed subsequently attained wisdom, is not mere seeing. On the one hand, it arises from causes and conditions and may be said to exist; thus, it corresponds to the existence of self and beings in samsara. As with the thought and perception of unenlightened beings, this seeing may be called discrimination, for it perceives beings and distinguishes things in the world. On the other hand, though thought and perception arise, the discrimination of the self and the world is realized to be false and illusory, for subject and object have already been eradicated through contemplative practices. Hence, objects independent of the self and the self that grasps them are realized to be actually nonexistent and non-different in the emptiness that pervades them. This discrimination therefore differs from the false discrimination of unen-

lightened beings, which does not realize itself as delusional and which sees self and things as real. The subjectivity of subsequently attained wisdom genuinely grasps that the mind is false discrimination and that the objects it perceives do not really exist; that is, it never parts from nondiscrimination or the transcendence of the subject-object dichotomy.

Thus, perception (discrimination) arises out of suchness or dharma-body (nondiscrimination). Both the discriminative perception of things and their sameness are realized simultaneously. Seeing is possible without imposing the delusional split between subject and object because the subjectivity developed from nondiscriminative wisdom sees not an objective world apart from itself, but nothing other than the subjectivity itself. In other words, rather than the dichotomy between subject and object, there is “subjectivity only with no object.” As we have seen, this subjectivity knows things by becoming them, and in this way also comes to know itself as subject.

Bodhisattvas of subsequently attained wisdom see unenlightened beings in samsaric existence, but at the same time, they realize the perceiving self and the beings and objects they perceive to be falsely discriminated and in reality nonexistent. This may be called the interpenetration of the false and the true. The realization that one’s own thought and perception are false is itself true reality established from the stance of subsequently attained wisdom. Further, if unenlightened beings seen by subsequently attained wisdom are taken as samsara, since nondiscriminative wisdom corresponds to nirvana, the relationship between false discrimination and nondiscriminative wisdom is consistent with Nāgārjuna’s statement, “The limit of nirvana is the limit of samsara; between them, there is not the slightest difference” (*Madhyamaka-kārikā*, xxv, 20).

Here, false discrimination, samsara, and falsely discriminated things have the structure of being affirmed through being negated, or existing through not existing. Unenlightened beings as perceived by wisdom have nonexistence or nothingness as

their fundamental nature. In temporal terms, they are impermanent, standing upon absolute falsity. At the same time, they are not independent existence, but are penetrated by and grounded in nondiscriminative wisdom, or suchness, or timelessness. This is temporal, provisional existence (假有, *J. keu*), or appearance-existence characterized by delusion, or what arises from causes and conditions. The person of subsequently attained wisdom realizes the self as this kind of subjectivity or wisdom. Our ordinary subjectivity is incapable of genuinely seeing itself or perceiving things as they are. When false discrimination does not know its own reality—when it regards what is unreal as real, or temporal as enduring—it is indeed inverted, false discrimination. But when it has come to know itself as false discrimination, it is the fullest realization of nondiscriminative wisdom. The deeper the functioning of this self-realization—the self-awareness of genuine subjectivity—the more clearly emerges the self-identity of contradictory elements in the very basis of existence. Such a fusion of false discrimination and wisdom is the epistemological aspect of the reality expressed “Form is emptiness” or “Samsara is nirvana.”

The Activity of Subsequently Attained Wisdom

As we have seen, subsequently attained wisdom has a double-faceted structure, for it discriminates and therefore differs from fundamental wisdom, but it nevertheless stands in nondiscrimination or suchness (true reality). This complex fusion of contrary elements constitutes genuine nondiscriminative wisdom in its fullest development. Bodhisattvas first eradicate all seeing and discrimination to realize fundamental wisdom, then emerge again into the realm of samsara or forms. Upon emerging, they perceive unenlightened beings and they work to bring such beings to enlightenment.

That false discrimination exists, that subjectivity arises conditionally, that the unenlightened are attached to nonexistent objects as actually existent—these are the very content of sub-

sequently attained wisdom, which functions noninvertedly in the world of false discrimination. Bodhisattvas, through the discrimination of subsequently attained wisdom, perceive ignorant beings undergoing the suffering of samsaric existence because of their attachments to delusive objects. Moreover, because their perception transcends the dichotomy of subject and object, they see unenlightened beings as themselves, and experience the pain of samsara as their own. From this feeling and recognition of oneness arises the desire to lead all beings to awakening.

Here again, the dual aspects of discrimination and nondiscrimination interact. Because the bodhisattvas never part from nondiscrimination, they do not consider the self as real or objects seen as actually existing things and beings. Thus the Pure Land master T'an-luan (476-542) states:

In saving beings, one perceives no object of salvation. The bodhisattva, in observing sentient beings, sees that in the final analysis they are nonexistent. Although he saves countless sentient beings, in reality there is not a single sentient being who realizes nirvana. Manifesting the act of saving sentient beings is thus like play. (Realization, 17)

At the same time, through discrimination they not only perceive unenlightened beings, but become able to express dharma, which transcends words and concepts, and to guide beings to realization of it. Through the discrimination of nondiscrimination, bodhisattvas are able to discern the nature of beings and devise “skillful means” by which to draw them from their ignorance.

In relation to the teaching, it is said that there are “two dimensions of truth”: supreme truth (*paramārtha-satya*), which transcends words and concepts, and worldly truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*), the verbal expression of supreme truth. These concepts are often interpreted as two kinds of truth established from different standpoints, but in the thought of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga,

and Vasubandhu, they indicate a single perspective and a single truth. Their differentiation concerns the activity of bodhisattvas who, on realizing fundamental nondiscriminative wisdom, acquire the three Buddha-bodies and, manifesting themselves to lead others to enlightenment, teach their realization through subsequently attained wisdom. The words of the teaching are “worldly” in that they belong to the realm of words and concepts; they are “truth” because they are the verbal expression of true reality. Ordinary words that do not express true reality—whatever sort of truth they may express—are not truth in the sense of the “two truths.”

Worldly truth has two aspects: the words of the teaching that arise from subsequently attained wisdom and express dharma or supreme reality, and the things of samsaric existence that are, through subsequently attained wisdom, conceived discriminatively. The teaching is permeated by true reality that transcends words, for subsequently attained wisdom is inseparable from nondiscriminative fundamental wisdom. This results in logical self-contradiction, both in such expressions as “Form is emptiness” and in the internal structure of such concepts as subjectivity-only. These words, however, can arise only from the second aspect, the field of things and concepts that itself harbors the realization of being temporary and unreal. In subsequently attained wisdom, all karma-created things—all objects of false discrimination—have been dissolved and negated and, at the same time, through being made empty (nonexistent, not objects of false discrimination), have become things as they truly are (grasped nondiscriminatively, from within). In worldly truth, both aspects of words and things, conceived through the discrimination of nondiscrimination, are established on this standpoint of subsequently attained wisdom, and thus are made to manifest what is true and real.

Both the Prajñāpāramitā sutras and Nāgārjuna assert that supreme reality cannot be expressed in words. A Yogācāra text, however, states:

Through nondiscriminative subsequent wisdom, the bodhisattva, amidst the forms of all things, being himself non-inverted, is able to teach others the causation of all things as he has realized it. (*Mahāyānasamgraha*)

In Yogācāra thought, perhaps because it was able to articulate the development of awakening into the phase of subsequently attained wisdom, we find confidence in the bodhisattva’s ability to teach his realization of dharma.

The Structure of Attainment

Simultaneous Identity and Transformation

In Mahāyāna thought, one goes out from samsara and attains nirvana, but this at the same time means that one breaks through their duality. Thus, the bodhisattva path is characterized by two contradictory elements. On the one hand, samsara and nirvana or blind passions and enlightened wisdom stand in mutually exclusive opposition. As long as one is possessed of blind passions and false discrimination, one is not enlightened, and in order to attain enlightenment, one must rid oneself of them. Nirvana is attained by negating and transcending samsaric existence. On the other hand, the nirvana thus attained is nondiscriminative wisdom that no longer views samsara and nirvana dichotomously. The bodhisattva realizes wisdom, and through it returns to life in this world.

That worldly existence is not abandoned must not be understood superficially, however, for one does indeed break free of samsara. But while the person who simply dwells in samsara is attached to it and does not seek nirvana, the one who has abandoned samsara to enjoy the bliss of nirvana adheres to nirvana. The true transcendent realm is free of all forms of attachment. Since persons of wisdom are not bound by any clinging, they dwell neither in samsara nor nirvana. Hence, the Mahāyāna

concept of nirvana is “nirvana of no abiding place” (*apratisthita-nirvāna*).

In that bodhisattvas have eradicated discriminative thinking and feeling, they have attained nirvana, but since for them there is no distinction between samsara and nirvana, they do not abandon samsaric existence and remain in nirvana. This is expressed as “not dwelling in nirvana.” That they do not abandon samsara means that they give rise to discrimination. Through the functioning of discrimination, they distinguish beings and things in samsara, but their thinking and perception differs fundamentally from that of ignorant human beings who take their delusional perceptions to be real. Though they discriminate, they never part from nirvana (nondiscrimination, suchness), and thus they perceive things in their genuine immediacy, yet pervaded by nonexistence. They do not, therefore, impose their own attachments on things, and hence are not tied to samsaric existence.

Though free of samsara, they have experienced the sameness (*samatā*) of sentient beings in samsara and themselves. That is, their perception of beings holds the realization that sentient beings’ minds and their own minds—or false discrimination and nondiscriminative wisdom—are one. When the mind thus awakened seeks to relate itself to sentient beings, it is called great compassion. Bodhisattvas go out from samsara and reach nirvana, but without remaining in nirvana compassionately re-enter the world of samsara to lead others to awakening. They return to the ordinary life of beings, but their existence is transformed into the life of enlightened wisdom. In attaining this mode of existence lies the fundamental character of the Mahāyāna path.

The Logical Structure of Realization

As we have seen, in the Prajñāpāramitā sutras the content of wisdom is expressed, “Form is itself emptiness,” meaning that the world of ordinary experience (samsara) is abolished and at

the same time unfolded as things as they are, in their true reality (*tattva*, “it-ness”). “Form is emptiness” does not indicate simple identity, for form (existing things) and emptiness (non-existence) are mutually contradictory terms. It also implies the process by which form becomes established on the foundation of true existence by passing through a complete negation. Form (self and all things) sinks into emptiness (no subject or objects), and at the same time emptiness, limiting itself as form, becomes existing things. There is no form apart from emptiness, no emptiness apart from form. Here lies the realization of prajñā, which is not seeing (nondiscrimination) and at the same time seeing (discrimination of nondiscrimination, or things as they are).

In order to clarify the realization of prajñā, Nāgārjuna teaches the identity of samsara and nirvana by means of a dual negation:

Samsara is without any distinction from nirvana;

Nirvana is also without any distinction from samsara.

(*Madhyamaka-kārikā*, xxv, 19)

Here, samsara and nirvana (form and emptiness) are brought into a relationship of nonduality through the negation of each side. The Prajñāpāramitā formulation of “Samsara is nirvana”—the identity of opposites—is also “neither samsara nor nirvana.” The world of nondiscriminative wisdom is and is not samsara, it is and is not nirvana. This stance is possible, however, only through the religious experience in which nirvana is established through the complete extinction of samsara (discriminative thinking). Nāgārjuna therefore teaches a process of thoroughgoing negation by which form (samsara) is made empty (nirvana), for example, in his exposition of eighteen types of emptiness.

Thus, the phrases “Form is emptiness” and “Samsara is nirvana” hold two aspects, reflecting the two dimensions—identity and transformation—of the attainment of wisdom or nirvana. One is that the phrases may be reversed so that they express non-

duality: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form," "Samsara is nirvana, nirvana is samsara." Simultaneously, however, these phrases imply a single direction, an irreversible movement "toward emptiness through eradicating form," "toward nirvana through freeing oneself from samsara." Here, a transformation occurs in which samsaric existence is eliminated through practice and nirvana is established.¹⁶

The irreversible aspect, as the dynamic application of the thorough negation expressed "neither samsara nor nirvana" or "neither existence nor nothingness," indicates the bodhisattva's deepening practice of nondiscrimination that continues to eradicate false thought and blind passions. It constantly moves toward the ultimate stage of perfect enlightenment. The reversible aspect signifies that this practice of negation, through the realization of suchness with each step, reaches the ultimate at every stage of advance. Hence, the direction of the former aspect is eliminated and all things become seen as they truly are. This is the meaning of Nāgārjuna's statement, "Because of emptiness, all things are established."

The irreversible, directional aspect, through its conformity with the non-directional aspect, constantly gives up its directionality, and going from samsara to nirvana is actually to return to samsara—or rather, it is never to go anywhere from the very beginning. At the same time, the non-directional aspect, through its conformity with the directional aspect, signifies the movement of deepening and purifying ever more the nirvana or absolute nothingness that forms the basis of samsara or existence. The practice of these mutually contradictory aspects together is prajñā or nondiscriminative wisdom.

Practice and Realization

The realization of prajñā and the transformation of samsaric existence may be viewed from two opposite perspectives. First, for the practicer, this transformation does not occur suddenly only once, but involves a long process, from first hearing the

teaching and undertaking practice to the attainment of the final stage of Tathāgata. Since it is a process, the negation or transcendence of ordinary life through the perfection of not seeing occurs gradually. Nevertheless, at some point the annihilation of blind passions becomes thorough, so that complete liberation from samsara is accomplished and one enters the true transcendent realm. This point is attainment of the stage of non-retrogression and forms the core of transformation. Having once attained the true transcendent realm, one will never fall back into bondage, but will continue to deepen one's awakening until one attains complete, supreme wisdom.

Second, from the perspective of true reality or non-discriminative wisdom, the realm of attainment is nondual with every point along the path of practice. This is expressed as the nonduality of cause (practice) and result (enlightenment). The distinction between these elements is based on the difference between sentient beings and Tathāgata (thus gone one, one who has reached suchness), the distance between them, and points to the process that leads from ignorance to awakening. It is taught, however, that even the place farthest from Tathāgata, the first awakening of aspiration at the beginning of the path, is already nondual with the goal of perfect enlightenment.

In terms of performing practice, it has been common to interpret emptiness to mean that when all forms and concepts have been broken through, and further emptiness itself has been broken through and made empty, so that true emptiness in which nothing at all remains has been attained, then genuine existence manifests itself. Early masters have stated, however, that breaking through the false is itself the manifesting of truth. Each instance of breaking through false discrimination is always, in itself, the emergence of the true and real, and there is no true reality apart from the false becoming false. At the same time, each stage of practice retains its particular place in the bodhisattva's progress to full realization.

In the *Awakening of Faith*, a compendium of Mahāyāna

thought attributed to Aśvaghosha, two contrasting dimensions of enlightenment are distinguished: “original enlightenment,” which all beings are said to possess inherently, and “acquired enlightenment,” which is attained through performing practices. The movement from unenlightenment to “acquired enlightenment” implies the process by which beings fulfill the cause of awakening, and “original enlightenment” denotes suchness or Buddhahood, the end that is always nondual with the cause. These terms reflect the understanding of emptiness as both “breaking form and making it empty” (acquired enlightenment) and “form as originally empty” (original enlightenment). In each instance of “emptying” form or abolishing discriminative thinking, one realizes original, transtemporal emptiness. From this perspective, it is meaningless to distinguish different points along the path. Every step from sentient being to Buddhahood has the significance of returning to the origin, of dissolving the path.

This means that suchness is nondual with every sentient being—whether it be an ordinary person, a sage of long religious practice, or a bodhisattva who has realized wisdom. Sentient beings, without awaiting the fulfillment of practice, are from the very beginning Buddhas. We are, however, unaware of this. To become a Buddha is none other than to awaken and return to the original self. For this awakening to be established, our unenlightened, delusional thinking must be extinguished; this is the significance of practice. When enlightenment is attained through the elimination of blind passions, one awakens to the fact that one has possessed this enlightenment originally.

This complex structure of attainment is rooted in the fundamental vision of reality in Mahāyāna thought that we have considered in this chapter. The nonduality of cause and result arises directly from the nonduality of timeless, uncreated true reality with all karma-created beings. Samsara and nirvana stand in mutual opposition, so that samsara must be eradicated for nirvana to be attained, and at the same time they are one and

nondual. In Pure Land Buddhism, this nonduality is developed as the activity of the Buddha in the realm of samsara, opening forth a way by which all beings may attain awakening.

NOTES

1. Shinran treats the problem of death and the anxiety surrounding it in relation to the belief that one's future is determined in the final moments of life, and the resolution of this anxiety is a major element in his development of the Pure Land path; see Passages 12 and 15.
2. “Not seeing” (*na samanupaśyati*); “not grasping” (*na upalabhate*).
3. *Madhyamaka-kārikā*.
4. *Triṃśikā*, verse 29.
5. “Although the term ‘nondiscriminative wisdom’ differs from ‘*prajñāpāramitā*,’ the meaning is the same” (Asaṅga, in *Mahāyānasamgraha*).
6. Nondiscriminative wisdom “sees the object just as it is” (*yathābhūta-artha-darśana*), (Sthiramati, in his commentary on *Triṃśikā*). Nāgārjuna further states, “The knower sees true reality” (*tattva-darśana*), (*Madhyamaka-kārikā*, xxvi, 10).
7. Concerning the tendency to assess Buddhist texts by standards of logical consistency, see Yoshifumi Ueda, “Reflections on the Study of Buddhism,” *Eastern Buddhist*, xviii, 2 (Autumn 1985), pp. 114–130.
8. *Soku-hi no ronri* 即非の論理. In English works, he formulates it as “A is Not-A and Not-A is A.” Further, he states concerning the awakening it expresses: “It is to become Prajñā itself where there is no distinction between the subject and the object of intuition, and yet there is a clear perception of the distinction—that is the distinction of non-distinction and the discrimination of non-discrimination” (*The Essence of Buddhism*, Kyoto, 1948, p. 13).
9. *Sat na ca tattvataḥ* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*, by Maitreya).
10. “Always nonexistent” (*Madhyāntavibhāga*, III, 3); “not existent” (*Triṃśikā*, 20).
11. Also with “thusness of mind” (*cittadharmatā*), *Triṃśikā*, 25–26, and Sthiramati's commentary.
12. “Through [grasped objects being] discriminated nature, other-dependent nature (subjectivity) is empty” (Sthiramati's commentary on *Triṃśikā*, 22).