

Preface

The text translated in this book is an explanation of Buddhist philosophy, with some attention paid also to non-Buddhist schools of thought, from the perspective of a particular but important corner of the world of Tibetan Buddhism. Although it is a relatively short work, it represents centuries of philosophical investigation and analysis.

Its form is that of a commentary on a “root text,” Jamyang Shayba’s *Roar of the Five-Faced [Lion]*. A root text is a poem meant to be memorized and to be supplemented by a written or oral commentary. Jamyang Shayba wrote his own commentary to *Roar* called the *Great Exposition of Tenets*, an enormous work that is the most exhaustive treatment of comparative philosophical tenets in the history of Buddhism.

The shorter commentary translated here, *The Clear Crystal Mirror*, was composed later by Losang Gonchok, who came from the monastery founded by Jamyang Shayba and probably grew up studying the latter’s works carefully. It is a “word commentary,” one that paraphrases and expands the root text, which because of its brevity can be rather like a telegram. It is much more accessible than the *Great Exposition of Tenets* but it preserves the breadth and profundity of Jamyang Shayba’s thought and is informed by subsequent written and oral tradition.

Nevertheless, *The Clear Crystal Mirror* can be difficult, too. In the first place, Losang Gonchok presents philosophy by working school-by-school through the non-Buddhist and Buddhist systems of thought. He seldom makes explicit comparisons between the schools. Second, the issues with which he deals are in some cases extraordinarily complex, and even though he has attempted to simplify them, the text is sometimes too terse, sometimes too convoluted.

Accordingly, we have tried in our introduction (written by Daniel Cozort) to provide a simple and straightforward outline of the major points of comparison between the Buddhist schools. Then, in the translation section, we have supplied many explanatory notes for the text (written by both of us). We have tried to avoid burdening the reader with technical discussions and bibliographic notes. Our aim has been to introduce readers who have some background in Buddhism to the world of Buddhist philosophy, which, as our text reminds us, is not merely a world of intellectual games but a means to salvation.

The remainder of this preface explains the background of the text: its roots in the Tibetan Gelukba tradition; how Tibetan authors systematize the Indian tradition; the genre of tenets texts; the biographies of its authors; and the plan of the text. Readers who want to get right into the issues of Buddhist philosophy can skip ahead.

The Gelukba Tradition

This book is concerned with Indian Buddhist philosophy. Tibetan authors do not ever see themselves as innovators (although sometimes they are) but rather as interpreters—exegetes—of the glorious traditions that originate in Buddhism’s birthplace.

However, *The Clear Crystal Mirror* represents a distinctly Tibetan approach and differs from what a non-Tibetan scholar might write about Indian Buddhism. It is also

definitely a product of that particular Tibetan tradition called Gelukba, a monastic order to which both of our authors belonged. This is notable because the Gelukba tradition is more concerned than other Tibetan traditions with the sort of scholasticism represented here and because it has a unique way of presenting the subject of tenets.

The monastic order that came to be called Gelukba was established by the great scholar and reformer Dzongkaba Losang Drakpa (1357–1419). A child prodigy who studied with many great lamas around Tibet, especially with Rendawa of the Sagya order, he began to write philosophical treatises at the age of thirty-two. In his late thirties he had a vision of the Bodhisattva or Buddha personifying wisdom, Manjusri, who is said to have taught him directly. Another important vision occurred during the composition of his greatest work, the Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path. This time, he is reputed to have learned directly from the spirit of the Indian pandit (scholar) Atisha, who reinvigorated Tibetan Buddhism in the eleventh century and died in Tibet. Dzongkaba attracted many disciples with his brilliant synthesis of Indian philosophy and Tibetan commentary. In particular, his explanation of the Madhyamika school, which Tibetans consider the highest of all, was ingenious, intricate, and persuasive.

Dzongkaba never announced the establishment of a new monastic order, but it began to form following on his founding of Ganden Monastery near Lhasa in 1410. Others started to call his followers “Gandenbas.” It was not until later, when Dzongkaba’s writings were criticized by writers of the Sagya order, that the Gandenbas distinguished themselves from Sagya by calling themselves, somewhat immodestly, Gelukbas (“virtuous ones”). They were also called the “New Gadamba,” harking back to the Gadamba order established by Atisha’s disciple Dromdonba (1005–1064). Like Atisha, Dromdonba, and especially the great scholar and translator Ngok Loden Sherab (1059–1109), Dzongkaba emphasized that monasticism should not be only about ritual but should involve the rigorous study of Buddhist philosophy.

Within the Gelukba order in Tibet, there were many great monasteries. The three close to Lhasa—Ganden, Drebung, and Sera, all established within a single decade by disciples of Dzongkaba—are special academic centers, granting the doctorate degree of geshe (kalyanamitra, “spiritual friend”). Students from as far away as Russia and Mongolia undertook long, difficult, sometimes dangerous journeys to reach Lhasa and suffered many privations once there in order to be worthy of this degree.

Each of the monasteries contained several nearly autonomous colleges. In these institutions there is a particular emphasis on the study of philosophy, and each of the colleges within the monasteries has a tradition, mostly oral, of points of difference with the other colleges. Jamyang Shayba and Losang Gonchok came from the philosophical tradition of the Gomang College of Drebung Monastery, although each spent most of his life far away from Lhasa in the Amdo region at Labrang Drashikyil Monastery, founded by Jamyang Shayba.

The Gelukba Approach to Tenets

How does our text differ in its approach from Western histories of philosophy? One major difference is that it scarcely discusses history. There are indications of the

chronology of writers, to be sure, but we do not learn anything about the historical circumstances in which a school developed, where within India it was popular, how many people followed it, what kind of people they were, how long it lasted, or how it influenced other schools. Another difference is that it is not as complete as it might be. Some schools that no longer existed in northern India but were important (notably the Theravada) are left out.

A more subtle difference is that these presentations of tenets are attempts to construct coherent, logically consistent, and complete systems of thought, even if the basis for doing so is a bit thin. The seminal Indian texts upon which the tenets of the various schools are based are often terse and sometimes cryptic. In an effort to clarify these texts, the Gelukbas sometimes resort to subtle qualifications that they interpolate into the explicit language of the original sources. They contend that they are merely drawing out the implications of a terse text, but others accuse them of doctoring the original.

To name a particularly important instance, the Gelukba tradition clarifies the difficult reasoning of Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamika school, by modifying his main terms. Nagarjuna is famous for the “tetralemma” that things are neither produced from themselves, from others, from both themselves and others, or neither from themselves nor others. That something is not produced from itself (as some non-Buddhist schools such as Samkhya would contend) is not disputed; nor are the last two possibilities ever accepted. But since the world obviously says that things are produced by something other than themselves, the second term must be explained. Dzongkaba attempts to show that what Nagarjuna meant was not that there is no production from other but that this production is not inherently other; it is only conventionally other. In the first two terms of the reasoning, then, Nagarjuna rejects true or inherent existence (independent existence, or existence from a thing’s own side) but upholds conventional existence (existence imputed in dependence on a thing’s parts, etc.)

Dzongkaba was roundly criticized for this and other interpretations of Madhyamika by the fifteenth-century Sagya scholar Daktsang Shayrap Rinchen (born 1405), known as Daktsang the Translator, and a good bit of our text is concerned with defending Dzongkaba (mainly by attacking Daktsang). We are not concerned here with whether Dzongkaba’s additions are necessary to make sense of Nagarjuna. The point is that what we read in the present work is really “Gelukba Madhyamika” rather than Madhyamika per se, if such a thing could be determined (and there is certainly no scholarly consensus on the meaning of Nagarjuna, or for that matter, many of the other Indian Buddhist philosophers).

How much does it matter? In theory, little. The formulation of tenets is mainly a heuristic device. The purpose of tenets study, as we will discuss in the next chapter, is to use the temporary adoption of philosophical positions to work logically through many possibilities in order to arrive at an “established conclusion” (tenet) in which we feel confident. It is not supposed to be a matter of indoctrination in the “correct tenets” of Buddhism, even if it is true that in the end a particular school (the Prasangika) is labeled “correct” and that it is presumed that eventually we will reach the same conclusions as its proponents. Ideally, we are to study tenets so that our minds will be sharpened and our presuppositions exposed and scrutinized.

The Genre of Tenets Texts

Although the genre of tenets books reached its apogee with eighteenth-century Tibetan texts, perhaps with Jamyang Shayba's root text and its commentaries, it began in India. The *Points of Controversy* (Kathavatthu) records a third-century b.c.e. debate between the Sthaviravada and several other schools; while not a tenets book as such, it may be the first work to document tenets formation. Bhavaviveka, retroactively considered to be the founder of the Svatantrika-Madhyamika school, wrote the *Blaze of Reasoning* in the sixth century; Shantaraksita, the *Compendium of Principles* in the eighth century. Bhavaviveka's text is used by Jamyang Shayba to sort out the Vaibhaṅgika sub-schools. Jetari, in his *Discrimination of the Sugata* in the tenth century, referred to the four schools.

In Tibet, two early books on tenets were Beltsek's *Explanation of the Stages of Views* and Yesheday's *Differences Between Views*, both from around 800. The great Nyingma scholar Longchen Rapjam wrote his *Treasury of Tenets, Illuminating the Meaning of All Vehicles* in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth, the great Sagya scholar Daktsang wrote the *Ocean of Good Explanations, Explanation of 'Freedom from Extremes Through Understanding All Tenets.'* As we have mentioned, Jamyang Shayba wrote his great work on tenets at the end of the seventeenth century in no small part as a reply to Daktsang.

Jamyang Shayba's root text on tenets and his auto-commentary, published in 1689 and 1699 respectively, are the most comprehensive of the tenets texts. They were followed about four decades later by the last of the large, comprehensive works on tenets, Janggya Rolbay Dorjay's *Clear Exposition of the Presentation of Tenets, Beautiful Ornament for the Meru of the Subduer's Teaching*. A smaller work that is even more comprehensive, treating the four orders of Tibetan Buddhism briefly, was subsequently written by his student, Losang Chogyi Nyima. There have been a number of smaller "primers" written after Jamyang Shayba. One, the *Presentation of Tenets, a Precious Garland* by Gönchok Jikmay Wangbo, the second Jamyang Shayba (i.e., his reincarnation), has been translated into English several times.

As may already be clear, the major figures of Gelukba tenets works form a close circle of reincarnate lamas (tulkus) with an "eastern" flavor. It is centered in Amdo, the eastern province of Jamyang Shayba's Labrang Drashikyil Monastery and Janggya's Gönlung Jambaling Monastery. In Jamyang Shayba's time, the area was controlled by Dzungar Mongolians. In fact, the Janggya lamas and Ngawang Belden, Jamyang Shayba's great annotator, were themselves Mongolians.

The first Janggya lama, Ngawang Chöden, tutored Jamyang Shayba in tantric studies. The second Janggya, Rolbay Dorjay (1717–1786), taught the second Jamyang Shayba lama, Gönchok Jikmay Wangbo (1728–91), and the third Tügen lama, Losang Chögyi Nyima (1737–1802).

Gönchok Jikmay Wangbo, in turn, taught Gungtang Denbay Drönmay, whose work clarifies a number of points involved in the Madhyamika school critique of the philosophy of the Cittamatra school. Another of his students was probably Losang Gonchok, the author of our text.

The Root Text, Its Commentary, and Their Authors

Jamyang Shayba won his geshe degree at the Gomang College of Drebung Monastery, and thus his verses, and Losang Gonchok's commentary on them, surely reflect the traditions of oral debate at that college. Jamyang Shayba's own commentary is replete with hypothetical debates, some of which may have been drawn from real debates in the Gomang courtyard, where he served as abbot for seven years.

Jamyang Shayba's sixteen-*folio* root text is entitled *Presentation of Tenets, Roar of the Five-Faced (Lion) Eradicating Error, Precious Lamp Illuminating the Genuine Path to Omniscience* and was written in verse in 1689. (We have decided, however, not to present it as poetry.) The verses have a strange relationship with the Dalai Lamas. According to Geshe Tupden Gyatso, a twentieth-century Gomang College scholar, they were written at the behest of Jamyang Shayba's student, Sanggyay Gyatso, while he was the regent of the great Fifth Dalai Lama. The request was made in the name of the Dalai Lama, who died in 1682 but whose death was concealed by Sanggyay Gyatso for fourteen years.

Jamyang Shayba's own enormous commentary on the verse treatise (530 folios in the Drashikyil edition, probably four times the length of *The Clear Crystal Mirror*) was written ten years later. It is usually referred to as the *Great Exposition of Tenets* but its full title is the rather grand *Explanation of "Tenets," Sun of the Land of Samanta bhadra Brilliantly Illuminating All of Our Own and Others' Tenets and the Meaning of the Profound, Ocean of Scripture and Reasoning Fulfilling All Hopes of All Beings*. It was published in 1699, the year before he became the abbot of Gomang.

Jamyang Shayba's full name is Jamyang Shayba Dorjay Ngawang Dzöndrü. He was born in 1648 in lower Amdo, the easternmost region of Tibet (now in Qinghai Province of the People's Republic of China), in the area of Ganggya Dingring. A serious student, he became a novice monk in his teens, traveling to Lhasa at the age of twenty-one to enter the Gomang College of Drebung Monastery. At age twenty-seven he became a fully ordained monk, and at twenty-nine he entered the Tantric College of Lower Lhasa, Gyumay. Among his teachers were the great Fifth Dalai Lama, Losang Gyatso, whom he met when as a boy His Holiness stopped in Amdo on his way to China. Jamyang Shayba was also taught by the first of the line of reincarnating Janggya lamas, Ngawang Chöden.

At the age of thirty-three he entered a two-year meditation retreat in a cave near Drebung, thereby attaining yogic powers. He wrote prolifically for the rest of his life. Among the dozens of texts collected in the fifteen volumes of his "Collected Works" are his famous monastic textbooks on the five "root" topics: Valid Cognition; the Perfection of Wisdom; the philosophy of the Madhyamika school; Abhidharma; and Monastic Discipline.

In 1709 Jamyang Shayba returned to Amdo at the invitation of the Dzungar Mongolians. In the following year he founded the Labrang Drashikyil Monastery (sometimes referred to as just Labrang), which grew into a major center of the Gelukba monastic order; a tantric college was also established there in 1717. Drashikyil's first abbot was Ngawang Drashi, who, using Jamyang Shayba's writings, authored the

Collected Topics textbook still studied by those beginning the Gomang curriculum. Jamyang Shayba died at age seventy-three or -four in 1721 or 1722. His line has continued. The sixth Jamyang Shayba lama is currently building a new house at Labrang.

About Losang Gonchok we know much less. If the author of our text is the Losang Gonchok who was a student of Gonchok Jikmay Wangpo, Jamyang Shayba's reincarnation, which seems likely, he was born in 1742 in Amdo and became a monk at a young age. He became a master of all texts, sutra and tantra, and had many students at Labrang Drashikyil, his monastery. He died at the age of eighty, in 1822.

The title of Losang Gönchok's commentary is *The Clear Crystal Mirror, A Word Commentary on Jamyang Shayba's Root Text on Tenets*. A word commentary is one that minimally paraphrases all of a root text so that its meaning can be understood. *The Clear Crystal Mirror* exceeds this requirement by explaining many issues at some length. It admirably compresses Jamyang Shayba's *Great Exposition of Tenets* without deleting important points. It avoids the copious citation of Indian sources and construction of hypothetical debates that swell Jamyang Shayba's own commentary, giving the student of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism an extensive but not unmanageable handbook of Buddhist philosophical discourse.

Jamyang Shayba's root text and Losang Gönchok's *The Clear Crystal Mirror* are clearly oriented toward demonstrating the superiority of the Prasangika-Madhyamika school, which they, and all other Gelukbas, consider to be the greatest of the Indian schools and hence the one that actually reflects the thought of the Buddha. Nevertheless, there is great respect for the other schools of Buddhist tenets, since it is the presumption of the Prasangika school that the Buddha deliberately taught many kinds of doctrine in order to serve the needs of persons of different dispositions and capacities, and that understanding the views of the lower schools is the key to understanding the views of the higher schools.

Most of the text is devoted to Buddhist tenets, with only about forty pages given over to summaries of all of the major non-Buddhist tenet systems of India, provided principally, it seems, to demonstrate the uniqueness of Buddhist philosophy. Of the chapters on Buddhist tenets, much less space is given over to the lower schools than is given to the higher ones; in particular, the Prasangika school receives close attention. The order in which the schools are discussed reflects the Gelukba assessment of their respective proximity to the Buddha's own views; thus, we are led slowly through the nest of issues that constitute Buddhist philosophy until we reach the most subtle topics in the Prasangika inventory, the nature of Buddhahood and the practice of secret mantra, the swift method for attaining Buddhahood restricted to the most intelligent and compassionate of those with the Prasangika view.