

Illuminating the Threefold Faith:

An Invocation of the Seventeen Great Scholar-Adepts of Glorious Nalanda

1.

Lord of Lords, arisen from the compassionate wish to benefit wandering beings,
You have attained sublime protection, abandonment and realization,
And liberate sentient beings through teaching dependent arising.
I bow to you, Conqueror, Sun among Teachers.

2.

I call to mind esteemed Nagarjuna, who, as the Conqueror prophesied,
Introduced the Middle Way of the Supreme Vehicle, and was skilled in clarifying
The meaning of suchness, free of extremes, as intended in the Mother of the Conquerors,
Through the profound, logical presentation of dependent arising.

3.

I call to mind the Bodhisattva Aryadeva,
His principal spiritual son, the most learned and accomplished,
Who traversed the ocean of Buddhist and other philosophies,
Who is the glorious crowning jewel among all holders of Nagarjuna's treatises.

4.

I call to mind esteemed Buddhapalita,
Who clarified the ultimate meaning of dependent arising—thought of the Superior
[Nagarjuna],
Essential point of the profound, existence as mere designation and name—
And has ascended to the utmost state of accomplishment.

5.

I call to mind Acharya Bhavaviveka, erudite master
Who introduced a philosophical view
That refuted such extremes as truly existent production,
While accepting commonly verified knowledge and external objects.

6.

I call to mind Chandrakirti, who promulgated the complete path of Sutra and Tantra,
Who was skilled in expounding the profound and vast Middle Way,
In which appearance and emptiness eliminate the two extremes
Through dependent arising and the merely conditional (nature of things).

7.

I call to mind the Bodhisattva Shantideva,
Skilled in teaching a host of fortunate disciples
The truly marvellous path of great compassion
Through versatile means of reasoning, profound and vast.

8.

I call to mind the Great Abbot Shantarakshita,
Who introduced the non-dual Middle Way to suit disciples' mental dispositions,
Was well-versed in differentiating the reasonings of the Middle Way and valid cognition,
And disseminated the teaching of the Conqueror in the Land of Snows.

9.

I call to mind esteemed Kamalashila,
Who thoroughly explained the stages of meditation on the Middle Way view, free from
extremes,
And the union of calm abiding with special insight according to Sutras and Tantras;
He flawlessly clarified the Conqueror's doctrine in the Land of Snows.

10.

I call to mind esteemed Asanga,
Who Maitreya inspired and looked after,
Who was adept in disseminating all Mahayana discourses,
And revealed the vast path and, as the Conqueror prophesied, blazed the trail of Mind Only.

11.

I call to mind esteemed Acharya Vasubhandu,
Who, by maintaining the system of the 'Seven Treatises of Abhidharma,' and the non-duality
(of Mind Only),
Clarified the philosophies of Vaibhashika, Sautrantika and Vijnavada;
Foremost sage, renowned as a second Omniscient One.

12.

I call to mind esteemed Dignaga,
The logician who gave us the discerning insight of fine discrimination
By thoroughly opening one hundred doors of logic
To reveal the system of the Buddha's scriptures through empirical reasoning.

13.

I call to mind esteemed Dharmakirti,
Who fathomed the vital points of Buddhist and non-Buddhist modes of logic,
Granted conviction in the vast and profound paths of Sautrantika and Chittamatra through
reasoning,
And was adept in expounding the marvellous ways of Dharma.

14.

I call to mind esteemed Vimuktisena,
Who interpreted the Perfection of Wisdom that came from the Asanga brothers
In accordance with the Middle Way, free from the extremes of existence and non-existence,
And who lit the lamp illuminating the meaning of the 'Ornament (of Clear Realization)'.

15.

I call to mind esteemed Haribhadra,
Who clarified the three Mothers, supreme Perfection of Wisdom scriptures,

In line with Maitreyanath's pith instructions,
And who the Conqueror prophesied would expound the meaning of the Mother.

16.

I call to mind esteemed Gunaprabha, excelling in stability and learning,
Who integrated the intentions of a hundred thousand categories of Vinaya,
And in accordance with Mulasarvastivada,
Thoroughly and unmistakably explained individual liberation.

17.

I call to mind esteemed Shakyaprabha, ideal Vinaya holder,
Master of the treasure of the three trainings' qualities,
Who, in order to ensure the longevity of the flawless Vinaya teaching,
Thoroughly explained what the vast scriptures meant.

18.

I call to mind Jowo Atisha, kind Lord
Who caused the Sage's teaching to flourish in the Land of Snows,
Who expounded doctrines vast and profound—complete teaching of the Conqueror—
In the context of paths of persons of three capacities.

19.

Making such invocations with an unflinchingly pure mind
To these exceedingly fine sages, ornaments for the world
And sources of stupendous, elegant teachings,
Inspire me that my mindstream matures and that I may achieve liberation.

20.

Through understanding the meaning of the two truths, the ground reality of how things are,
I ascertain by way of the four truths just how beings arrive in and leave cyclic existence,
And so valid cognition engenders a firm faith in the three refuges.
Inspire me to be enduringly grounded in the path to liberation.

21.

Inspire me to master renunciation, the mind intent on liberation—
Total pacification of suffering and its causes;
And the uncontrived altruistic awakening mind rooted in compassion,
The boundless yearning to protect wandering beings.

22.

Inspire me to gain conviction with effortless ease,
In the profound points of all paths of the Perfection Vehicle and Vajrayana,
By listening to, contemplating and meditating on
The meaning of commentaries of the great pioneers.

23.

May I, in successive births, perfectly obtain a human life endowed with the three trainings,

And serve the doctrine as the great pioneers did,
By safeguarding and promoting scriptures and insights
Through explanation and practice.

24.

May all Sangha communities be strengthened by noble, learned practitioners
Who devote their time to hearing, contemplation, teaching and practice,
And have totally given up wrong livelihood;
May this whole wide world be forever adorned with such beings.

25.

Due to these invocations—traversing all grounds and paths of Sutras and Tantras
And quickly achieving the state of an Omniscient Conqueror
That spontaneously fulfils the two purposes—
May I work for sentient beings as long as space endures.

Thus, the foremost sages of the Noble Land of India, as mentioned above, have composed numerous excellent, meaningful treatises that grant insight to those who think critically about the profound and vast teachings of the Fully Enlightened Supramundane Victor, the Buddha. To this day, even after nearly two thousand five hundred fifty years have passed, those treatises survive intact for us to study, contemplate and meditate on. Therefore, I am grateful to those masters who were the cream of sages, and aspire to follow them in my practice with unflinching faith.

At the present time, when the world has made great progress in the fields of science and technology, and we are distracted and preoccupied by the hustle and bustle of our lives, it is extremely important that followers of the Buddha should have faith based on an understanding of what he taught. Therefore, in analysing his teachings closely, with an unbiased and inquisitive mind seeking the reasons (that underlie) them, and developing faith supported by an understanding of those reasons, these excellent texts concerning the profound and vast, by such renowned masters as the 'Six Ornaments and Two Supremes', as well as Buddhapalita, Arya Vimuktisena, and so forth, are indispensable. With this in mind, I commissioned a new thangka painting depicting the seventeen scholar-adepts of Nalanda. I added nine other masters of the vast and profound lineages to (those portrayed in the) traditional painting of the 'Six Ornaments and Two Supremes'.

Consequently, I was moved to compose an invocation with whole-hearted respect for these supreme sages and some of my aspiring Dharma friends encouraged me. This is how it came about that I, the Shakya Bhikshu Tenzin Gyatso, who am in the back row of those studying the works of these sages, have composed this text 'Illuminating the Threefold Faith', an invocation of the seventeen great and renowned sages of Nalanda, having developed unfeigned conviction in the superb works of these sublime masters.

It was completed at Thekchen Chöling, Dharamsala, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh, India, on the 1st day of the 11th month of the Iron Snake Year in the seventeenth Tibetan

'rabjung' (sixty-year cycle), corresponding to 15th December 2001 of the western calendar, 2545 years, according to the Theravada system, after the Buddha passed away.
May Peace Prevail.

Translated by the Venerable Geshé Lhakdor in Dharamsala, 26 February 2002. Revised by Tenzin Wangdue, Nicholas Vreeland and Jeremy Russell, December 2020.