

# Contemplation

The Lamp of the Yogins Eye



Chapter Seven The Doctrine of Ati Yoga

Nubchen Sangye Yeshe

# **CONTEMPLATION:**

## **The Lamp of the Yogin's Eye**

### **Chapter 7: The Doctrine of Ati Yoga**

**Nubchen Sangye Yeshe**

**(c. 830 - 943)**

**DRAFT NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION**

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**Copy Left: May this merit benefit all beings.**

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## PREFACE

The particular relevance of the Contemplation: The Lamp of the Yogin's Eye (bSam gtan mig sgron / Samten Migdrön) [1], henceforth abbreviated as SM, for the understanding of Buddhism in the early phase of its dissemination in Tibet (8th-10th centuries) became evident to me from the beginning of the 1980s, when I heard about it from my teacher Namkhai Norbu and when Professor Ramon Prats, then his assistant at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples, provided me with a photocopied version of the text published in Leh in 1974. However, as soon as I was able to venture into the reading of the Tibetan source, I realized the extreme difficulty of a translation project, both for the extraordinary depth and complexity of the topics covered, and for the numerous errors accumulated over the centuries by the copyists.

The importance and the problematic nature of the SM have been summarized as follows by Tulku Thondup:

"This is a work of great value that provides much information on the different Buddhist viewpoints, on meditation, and on the history of its time. Unfortunately, in several points the text is not clear due to the language, the style, the handwriting of the copyist, and the compact nature of the material. It often requires interpretation and commentaries are not available. Today it is rare to find a scholar who knows the text and understands it deeply." [2]

The central theme of the SM is the doctrine of Dzogchen, also known in Sanskrit as Atiyoga (shin tu rnal 'byor, lhag pa'i rnal 'byor), to which the seventh chapter, that is, half of the entire work, is dedicated. My first approach to this fundamental teaching of Tibetan Buddhism was through the study of this text, which has since become a constant reference point in my research.

[1] The title most likely derives from chapter 60 of the dGongs pa 'dus pa (GD, TshB, pp. 465.6-469.6), entitled rnal 'byor mig gi sgron ma. Within the SM, however, the author names the work rNal byor mig gi bSam gtan (Contemplation: The Lamp of the Yogin's Eye). Regarding my translation of this latter title, cf. L, p. 2.3: rnal 'byor pa'i mig zhes bya ba'i bSam gtan 'di.

[2] Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, Buddha Mind: An Anthology of Longchen Rabjam's Writings on Dzogpa Chenpo, p. 119.

## 6 Preface

The systematic approach to the text dates back to the winter of 1991, when I had the opportunity to read the aforementioned chapter together with Dr. Thupten K. Rikey, who was then employed at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsa-la, India. I had planned to translate it in writing, but had to shelve the dream until 2005 when, thanks to a scholarship from the University of Turin for the Doctoral Program in Indological and Tibetological Studies, coordinated by Prof. Stefano Piano, I was finally able to work on the text systematically, with Prof. Erberto Lo Bue as my tutor. At the time, Carmen Meinert had already made public on the University of Bonn website her doctoral thesis, defended in 2004, focused on the relationship between Chan and Dzogchen in SM. [3] Meanwhile, Valeria Donati was completing an elaborate doctoral thesis dedicated to the complete translation of the same text, with an attached diplomatic edition; [4] a monumental work that she kindly sent me at the beginning of 2007. Unlike her research, mine is focused on the critical edition and translation of the seventh chapter.

The philological and hermeneutical problems of the text are many, but far from claiming to have solved them, I have nevertheless been able to address and discuss most of them with capable scholars and Tibetan teachers: in particular, I would like to mention, in addition to the aforementioned Dr. Thupten K. Rikey, the Ven. Yungdrung Nyima with whom I discussed the first draft of the text translation, the Ven. Khenpo Dorjee Tsering, Dr. Penpa Dorje and the Ven. Dr. Tashi Tsering, who assisted me in the research conducted at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India, as well as the Ven. Lama Urgyen Tendzin with whom I had some fruitful conversations at his residence in Sarnath. Without their help, I would not have been able to complete both the critical edition and the translation, which nevertheless remain subject to corrections and adjustments.

[3] Carmen Meinert, *Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Teachings: A Comparative Study in Light of the Philosophical Salvation Concept of 'Non-Representation' Based on the Dunhuang Documents of the Chinese Chan Master Wolun and the Work bSam gtan mig sgron of the Tibetan Scholar Nubchen Sangye Yeshe*.

[4] Valeria Donati, *The Lamp is Burning Bright: Gnoseological Approaches and Soteriological Perspectives in Nubchen Sangye Yeshe's Masterpiece*.



# INTRODUCTION

## 1. The Author

The SM is the work of Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes), described by Samten Gyaltsen Karmay as "the first great thinker and writer in the history of Tibetan Buddhism in the 10th century AD." [1] Although his importance is universally recognized, there is confusion among both ancient and modern scholars regarding the era in which he lived. [2] As early as the 15th century, the bka' rgyud pa historian 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481), summarizing the different historical positions, wrote:

"Some say he lived in the time of King Trisong Detsen, others that he lived in the time of King Ralpa Can (Ral pa can), and still others claim he lived in the time of King Khri Bkra Shis (Khri bKra shis brtsegs pa dpal). It seems correct to say that, having been born during the reign of King Ralpa Can, he lived until the time of King Khri Bkra Shis." [3]

King Ralpa Can succeeded King Sadnalegs (Sad na legs) in 815, while King Khri Bkra Shis was one of the two sons of King Pal Khor Tsan (dPal 'khor btsan), whose death would date back to 910. [4]

In The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, Dudjom Rinpoche states that Nubchen's passing occurred when he was 111 years old, [5] or 113 according to the original Tibetan version, [6] in the "water tiger" (chu stags) year corresponding to 943. 'Gos Lo tsā ba also maintains that according to the Tibetan historian 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, the great master Nubchen lived for 113 years. [7]

[1] Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, p. 100.

[2] David Germano, "The Seven Descents and the Early History of Nyingma Transmission", in Helmut Eimer – David Germano (eds), *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 253.

[3] 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba gZhon-nu-dpal, *The Blue Annals* (Deb-ter sñon-po), p. 108.

[4] Roberto Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang: According to mNga'ris rgyal.rabs by Gu.ge mkhan.chen Ngag.dbang grags.pa*, p. 547.

[5] Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. I, p. 614.

[6] bDud 'joms Ye shes rdo rje, bDud 'joms chos 'byung, p. 241.

[7] 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, op. cit., p. 105. Cf. David L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhist & Their Tibetan Successors*, p. 464.

## 8 Introduction

However, Padma 'phrin las (1641-1717), the second abbot of rDo rje brag and the author of a brief biography of Nubchen, cites the latter's alleged words stating that he had reached the age of 130 years. [8] Regarding his birth, the Nyingma apologist Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624) believes it occurred during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (755-797), [9] an opinion shared by Dudjom Rinpoche, who indicates the "male water mouse" (chu pho byi ba'i lo) year. [10] Snellgrove, accepting the same Tibetan date, gives the year 772; [11] while in the English translation of Dudjom's aforementioned work, the correspondence with the Christian era is calculated on the subsequent sixty-year cycle, resulting in the year 832. [12] The biography composed by Padma 'phrin las also places the birth of Nubchen during the reign of King Trisong Detsen, but the year is the "male wood mouse" (shing pho byi lo), corresponding to 784. [13] Thus, the only common element in the two Tibetan datings is the "mouse" animal.

Luciano Petech has drawn attention to the problem of dating during this period, noting that, "All dates in ancient times were expressed according to the twelve-year cycle, as was customary in monarchical documents. The addition of the names of the five 'elements', that is, the conversion to the sixty-year cycle beginning in 1027, was an uncertain process that caused many errors, partly attributable to the historians themselves and partly due to repeated copying of the texts. Normally, in a single text, the dates are consistent, while between different texts there are often discrepancies." [14]

[8] Padma 'phrin las, 'Dus pa mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar dad pa'i phreng ba, p. 173.3-4. Cf. Valeria Donati, *The Lamp is Burning Bright: Gnoseological Approaches and Soteriological Perspectives in Nubchen Sangs rgyas Ye shes' Masterpiece*, pp. 7-19 (translation), pp. 698-704 (transliteration).

[9] Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *gSang sngags nga 'gyur la bod du rtsod pa snga phyir byung ba rnam kyī lan du brjod pa nges pa don gyi 'brug sgra*, p. 278.

[10] bDud 'joms Ye shes rdo rje, op. cit., pp. 233, 240-241.

[11] David L. Snellgrove, op. cit., p. 464.

[12] Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., pp. 607, 613. The translators of the work in the second section of the same observe that, even if all dates from 790 to 953 were anticipated by sixty years, the dating for that period would still remain problematic (op. cit., vol. II, p. 95).

[13] Cf. Padma 'phrin las, op. cit., p. 160.5; Valeria Donati, op. cit., pp. 2, [7] 698.

## 9 Introduction

The only certain component from this period is the animal; the so-called "element" is often doubtful and sometimes manifestly incorrect. [14] Citing the alleged words of Nubchen himself, the biography specifies that he was sixty-one years old when, in the "male wood mouse" year, the intermediate revolt (kheng log bar pa) broke out, due to which he had to flee from sGrag, his native land in Central Tibet. [15] The most authoritative source on this tragic and obscure phase of Tibetan medieval history is a 13th-century historical work attributed to lDe'u Jo sras, [16] "the author who deals most extensively with the three kheng log and therefore offers the best insight into the events of that period." [17] The main protagonists of the revolts were the families of the old aristocracy, struggling for the conquest of power during the disintegration of the Tibetan kingdom. The era of these upheavals would be that of dPal 'khor btsan, who, according to lDe'u Jo sras, was born in 881 and reigned from 893 to 910, the year in which he was assassinated. Within this timeframe, the "male wood mouse" year that saw the outbreak of the second revolt would correspond to 904; consequently, according to Vitali, [18] if Nubchen was sixty-one years old in that year, he must have been born in the "male wood mouse" year 844. [19]

Dudjom identifies his birthplace as the upper sGrag valley in central Tibet. [20] His father was gSal ba dbang phyug of the gNubs clan. His mother's name was mChims mo bKra shis mtsho. At birth, he was given the name rDo rje khri gtsug, while Sangs rgyas ye shes was his religious name.

[14] Luciano Petech, "The Disintegration of the Tibetan Kingdom", in Per Kværne (ed.), *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Fagernes 1992, vol. 2, p. 653.

[15] Padma 'phrin las, op. cit., p. 168.2. Cf. Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., vol. I, p. 611 (see bDud 'joms Ye shes rdo rje, op. cit. p. 237).

[16] lDe'u Jo sras, *Jo sras chos 'byung* (Chos 'byung chen mo bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan), pp. 143-144.

[17] Roberto Vitali, op. cit., p. 545.

[18] Ibid., p. 547.

[19] It should be noted that, according to Tibetan custom, at the time of birth the newborn enters the first year of life, at the end of which, entering the second, they complete two years, and so on. This explains why, assuming 844 as the birth date, 904 marks the completion of the sixty-first year rather than the sixtieth; similarly, the 113 years of life attributed by the Tibetan tradition to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes should be considered.

[20] Based on the guide to the pilgrimage sites of Central Tibet written by 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse dbang po (1820-1892) (see Alfonsa Ferrari, mK'yen brtse's *Guide to the Holy Places of Central Tibet*, pp. 8, 46), Keith Dowman indicates the birthplace of Sangs rgyas ye shes in sGrag mda', in the lower valley 'The'.

## 10 Introduction

The tradition of the Nyingma order states that he received tantric initiation from the great guru Padmasambhava, [21] who came to Tibet during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (Khri Srong lde btsan), and is therefore commonly considered one of his twenty-five principal disciples. [22] Padmasambhava is cited in the SM, [23] but Nubchen does not name him as one of his principal teachers. Instead, he refers to other masters, as evidenced by this passage from the eighth chapter: "I, the mendicant, the monk of gNubs, Sangye Yeshe Rinpoche, offered what brings satisfaction, distributing teachings and offerings to many sages from various countries, including many learned paṇḍita from India, Vasudhara, the king of Nepal, and Chesang Kye (Chesang skyes), the translator from Gilgit. Thus, the paṇḍita were pleased, and I obtained empowerments. The treasure of their hearts opened, and eventually, I obtained the king of instructions; the ultimate understanding and thereby became the king of instructions." [24]

The biography states that Vasudhara arrived at Samye Monastery (bSam yas) in Tibet when Nubchen was six years old (or seven according to the Tibetan calculation) [25] and it was on this occasion that their first meeting took place. Five years later, at the time of his departure from Tibet, the master invited the eleven-year-old Nubchen to go without delay to the Kathmandu Valley (bal yul), and then to meet Rom bu Guhyacandra, an adept in many languages, in Vajrāsana (Bodhgayā). The following year, Nubchen undertook the first of his seven journeys to India.

[21] Cf. Padma 'phrin las, op. cit., p. 163.3-4, 6; Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., p. 607.

[22] See Tulku Thondup, *The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa*, pp. 152-153.

[23] L, pp. 11.5, 223.1, 223.6, 277.5.

[24] Ibid., pp. 497.6-498.3.

[25] Padma 'phrin las, op. cit., p. 161.

## 11 Introduction

Chesang Kye, another important teacher of Nubchen, was the Tibetan translator of the dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo (dGongs 'dus), [26] to which Nubchen dedicated an extensive commentary known as the Mun pa'i go cha. [27] The colophon of the dGongs 'dus states that "Chesang Kye, as the principal translator, translated the text into Tibetan and finalized the revision in the market of 'Bru sha [28] together with the Indian scholar Dharmabodhi and the lineage holder Dhanarakṣita." [29] Both Dhanarakṣita and the student Dharmabodhi were teachers of Vasudhara. [30] Moreover, not only Chesang Kye, but also Dharmabodhi must have been of particular importance to Nubchen; as Dalton has pointed out, [31] the colophon of the Mun pa'i go cha contains a devout homage to Dharmabodhi. [32] Therefore, it is understandable that the dGongs 'dus is the most frequently cited source in the Sems sde'i man ngag.

Nubchen established his hermitage at Yangdzong in the region of Drak (Yang rdzong sGrags), an important complex of caves blessed by the presence of Padmasambhava; [33] but he could not remain undisturbed in the sacred retreat for long, because "at that time the laws of the country had collapsed due to the fall of the Tibetan Empire."

[26] See dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo (dGongs 'dus): DK, pp. 172-579; PK, pp. 126-204 (ff. 81b3-276b4); TshB, pp. 2-617. The text was reportedly translated from the Gilgit (Bru sha) language, known as Burushaski. Cf. Jacob P. Dalton, *The Uses of the dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo in the Development of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 267 ff.

[27] See Mun pa'i go cha. The fundamental role played by Sangs rgyas ye shes in the transmission of the dGongs 'dus in Tibet is commonly recognized. Unlike Sangs rgyas ye shes, however, the rnying ma pa classify this text as belonging to the Anuyoga. Cf. Jacob P. Dalton, op. cit., p. 318; Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., vol. I, p. 537; 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba, op. cit., pp. 104, 159.

[28] The importance of Gilgit in the dissemination of Buddhism in western Tibet is attested by the fact that, as R. Vitali has pointed out (op. cit., p. 166), the sa skya pa master bSod nams rtse mo in the Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo (composed in 1167) recalls with unusual emphasis that in the "fire male dragon" year (836) a council was held in Bru sha.

[29] GD, TshB, p. 617: "The Indian scholar Dharmabodhi and the great lineage holder Dhanarakṣita, together with the principal translator Chesang Kye, translated the text from the Bru sha script and finalized it in the market of Bru sha."

[30] Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 488-489.

[31] J. Dalton, op. cit., p. 285.

[32] Mun pa'i go cha, II, p. 653.5-6.

[33] K. Dowman, op. cit., pp. 210-213.

## 12 Introduction

Immediately after the reign of King Langdarma, [34] there was a period of increasingly intense partisan struggle. [35] The tradition maintains that Nubchen resorted to his powerful magical arts to annihilate his enemies. In particular, Dudjom reports that Nubchen succeeded in terrifying King Langdarma, who at the time, was considered a persecutor of Tibetan Buddhists, to the point of obtaining freedom of religion for himself and his lay followers belonging to the tantric order. [36] We now know that King Langdarma, in reality, did not persecute Buddhists, but rather sought to impose limits on the excessive power of the monastic institution, "dismantling the system of maintaining religious communities, and it is not surprising that this action provoked the anger of the monastic community." [37]

In any case, the biography does not mention the episode of the encounter with the persecuting king, but reports the alleged confession of Nubchen, according to which he destroyed thirty-seven villages in sGrags by evoking a tornado; it then dwells on the consequences of the outbreak of the second revolt, when Nubchen had to flee from sGrags. It happened that, having taken refuge in the castle of Bye near sNye mo in gTsang, he found himself trapped, surrounded by soldiers who had pursued him to kill him. It was then that he was forced to invoke gods and demons (lha 'dre), who appeared ready to obey him; then he brandished the ritual dagger (phurbu / kila), uttered a deadly Mantra, and from the mountain in front, where many soldiers were located, a great fire erupted that annihilated all the enemies. [38] Padma 'phrin las continues with this statement: "It is known that Nubchen also composed the Samten Migdrön (bSam gtan mig gi sgron ma) as a good deed to atone for the guilt of that bad action." [39] However, it is important to remember that there is no trace of all this in the SM.

[34] Original insertion by the translators.

[35] Dudjom Rinpoche, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 609.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 612.

[37] S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, p. 9. Cf. Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation and Memory*, pp. 11-12.

[38] Padma 'phrin las, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169; V. Donati, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Cf. Dudjom Rinpoche, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 611-612.

[39] Padma 'phrin las, *op. cit.*, p. 169.6: de'i sdig sbyongs kyi dge bar bsam gtan mig gi sgron ma yang mdzad ces grag go. Cf. S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

## 2. The Era

To which era could the composition of the SM be attributed? To justify the late dating, S. Karmay has highlighted the fact that in a footnote the name King Langdarma (Glang Dar ma) appears, [40] which suggests that it cannot be attributed to the hand of Nubchen. [41] However, there is another observation that in my opinion is significant regarding the dating of the work. The closing verses begin as follows:

"Now that many reside in the hermitages due to the spread of the Great Vehicle that once flourished in this land of barbarians, may the power of this teaching, which has liberated all from the four nets, [42] restore their sight and lead them to the supreme state, so that they may guide countless beings." [43]

First of all, we note that Nubchen establishes a certain temporal distance between his era and that of King Trisong Detsen, when the dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet "originally occurred".

[40] S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102. See L, p. 15.3.

[41] According to another footnote on the same page as the one cited above, the oral transmission of Atiyoga would appear to be uninterrupted from 'Bro Lha bu rin chen (L, p. 15.6: 'bro lha bu rin chen nas bka' ma chad par bzhugs pa), identified by Karmay with 'Brom Rin chen 'bar (*op. cit.*, pp. 94, 210). The latter was a disciple of Myang Ting 'dzin bzang po, a dignitary of Khri srong lde btsan and a student of Vimalamitra (cf. 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, *op. cit.*, p. 192; Ramon Prats, *Contributo allo studio biografico dei primi gter-ston*, p. 46 n. 6; Tulku Thondup, *op. cit.*, p. 60). However, for a translator and teacher like gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, who received the transmission of Atiyoga directly from Indian as well as Tibetan masters, it would have made no sense to insert this footnote. It should also be noted that in the seventh chapter the footnotes indicate the incompleteness of two lists (see L, p. 428.3, 6), without indicating the missing elements, evidently unknown to the author of these annotations. Nevertheless, some footnotes could date back to a disciple of Nubchen, since two of them qualify certain beliefs expressed in the text as belonging to the "small monk" (ban chung), an epithet used by Nubchen himself in the closing passage referring to himself: see L, pp. 375.6, 419.2, 497.5, 502.5.

[42] A footnote defines the "four nets" as follows: 1) dbu ma pa (mādhyaṃika); 2) nyan thos rang rgyal (śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha); 3) so so'i skye bo (the common people or pṛthagjana); 4) mu stegs pa (the eternalists and nihilists or tīrthika).

[43] L, p. 502.1-3: lan gcig mtha' 'khob ('khor) rgyal khams 'dir theg chen dar ba'i rkyen stobs kyis dgon par gnas pa mang 'byung dus nga yi (nga'i) bka' 'di dar ba'i mthus kun kyang drva (dra) ba bzhi bor nas mig rnyed mchog gi sa thob ste mtha' yas sems can 'dren par shog. The commentary is at the beginning of the eighth chapter: *ibid.*, pp. 494.3-495.2.

## 14 Introduction

In the first chapter, Nubchen alludes to the period when the king and monks possessed the teachings transmitted by the Chinese master Hva shang Mahāyāna (ChinChin. Heshang Moheyan), and specifies that later this transmission was lost; so that, when the SM was written, the teachings of Hva shang could be known only through books, without following a master. [44] Other references to this temporal distance are found in the seventh chapter in relation to the exposition of Atiyoga, in those passages where the contrast between the understanding that men had of it in the past and that of contemporaries is highlighted. [45] Moreover, in the cited verses of the conclusion, Nubchen makes an explicit reference to the condition of Buddhism in Tibet at the time of the composition: "now that many dwell in the hermitages". The word "hermitage" translates *dgon pa*, which commonly indicates the monastery.

The secularist policy initiated by King Langdarma around 841 ended in 842 due to a deadly arrow shot by the ninth abbot of Samye Monastery. [46] His assassination led to the disintegration of the Tibetan kingdom. The anarchy that followed and, in particular, the end of both the "religious council" (*chos kyi mdun sa*), which had disciplined the translation and dissemination of the tantra, and the state support for the monastic institution, [47] favored the proliferation of new tantric texts and rituals, as well as the emergence of improvised masters, thus stigmatized in a document found in Dunhuang (Tung-huang) and most likely dating back to the end of the era of dPal 'khor btsan, who died in 910: [48]

A master who pays no heed to the prescribed signs and levels, becomes lost in erroneous directions.

[44] Ibid., p. 15.2-5.

[45] Ibid., pp. 298.4-5, 339.2-3, 368.2, 380.3.

[46] Regarding the assassination of Glang dar ma by lHa lung dPal gyi rdo rje, see S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 77-78. In 841, the Chinese emperor Wuzong (Wu-tsung) also began to show intolerance towards the Buddhist monastic institution. He adopted some repressive measures the following year, which were increased in 844 and culminated in 845 with the destruction of over 4,600 monasteries and 40,000 temples and other sacred places. The emperor died in 846. Cf. Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, pp. 226-232.

[47] S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-9, 121.

[48] Samten G. Karmay, "King Tsa/Dza and Vajrayāna" in Michel Strickmann (ed.), *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, vol. 1, pp. 209-210.



## 15 Introduction

These luminous epithets evoke the profound and sublime essence of the Ati Yoga teachings. They point to the ultimate nature of reality, which transcends the limited understanding of the mundane world.

Despite the abundance of spiritual teachers, there are few who truly grasp the significance of the teachings that lie beyond the confines of the ordinary. For every hundred disciples, there are a thousand self-proclaimed masters, and thus, there are scarce individuals who heed the profound insights of Buddhism. [49]

These words echo the sentiments expressed by the the revered scholar Nubchen in the seventh chapter (1.1.4.1.): "Some modern practitioners of the Mantras, lacking in broad learning of many teachings, do not have a firm comprehension, and their perspective is merely verbal. Claiming to be Samantabhadra, they engage in sexual union driven by desire and kill; using formulas like 'phaṭ', their conduct is coarse, licentious, and violates the precepts." [50]

The reference to the licentiousness of "some modern practitioners of the Mantras" suggests a period certainly after the demise of King Langdarma. However, the allusion in the closing remarks to the presence of many hermits, owing to the initial dissemination of Buddhism, seems to indicate a time preceding the outbreak of the second revolt (904), which also disrupted the lives of the recluses, especially in Central Tibet. [51] S. Karmay, on the other hand, postdates the composition of the SM to the late 10th century, [52] while V. Donati places it in the first quarter of the 10th century. [53]

[49] Drod dang tshod dang ma sbyar ba'i nor kar bor ba'i slob (slobs) dpon gyis 'jig rten 'das pa'i don mi (myi) rig slob ma brgya la slob (slobs) dpon stong lha chos nyan pa'i mi (myi) ma mchis. The Italian translation was conducted based on the English one.

[50] L, p. 455.3-4.

[51] I believe the SM was written before the MG for two reasons that are clear to me: a) the MG contains some clarifications and corrections regarding the comments on passages from the GD present in the SM (see pp. 184 n. 678, 185 n. 681-682, 187 n. 687-690); b) the MG contains implicit references to arguments developed in the SM (see note 196).

[52] S. G. Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, p. 102.

[53] V. Donati, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

## 3. Introductory Chapters

### 3.1. The First Chapter

The SM is structured in nine sections, the last of which is the conclusion or epilogue containing the fundamental verses, which are then commented on in the eight preceding chapters. The first three chapters serve an introductory function, in contrast to the four subsequent ones that constitute the central part of the work. The opening chapter, after the customary homage [54] and the explanation of the title, [55] addresses five topics: a) the search for the place (gnas) to retreat to; [56] b) the vow (dam bca') to be made at the beginning of the retreat; [57] c) the preliminary actions (sngon du bya ba); [58] d) the abandonment of attachments (chags pa spang ba); [59] and e) the elimination of the discouragement (skyo ba bsang ba) that may arise from prolonged retreat. [60] The five themes are generally addressed not from a single perspective, but from the specific viewpoint of the three main currents of Buddhist spirituality: the common teachings of the sūtra, the esoteric teachings of the tantra, and the final and superior teachings of Atiyoga. Since this research is focused on Dzogchen, it is on this tradition that I will also dwell in describing the overall structure of the work, without delving into the others.

a) The function of the retreat is to eliminate the obscuration of distraction, and in this regard, Nubchen cites The Dharma Mirror Commentary (Chos kyi me long dka' 'grel) [61] which states:

"Retreating from the lack of retreat is the activity of the Yogin. When one enters the meaning of yoga, in order to eliminate the obstacles caused by frivolous retentions and external distractions, it is necessary to cut off the travelers who come and go through the border that separates the exterior and the interior of the retreat place." [62]

[54] L, pp. 2.1-2.

[55] Ibid., pp. 2.2-5.4.

[56] Ibid., pp. 5.4-10.5.

[57] Ibid., pp. 10.5-13.2.

[58] Ibid., pp. 13.2-16.5.

[59] Ibid., pp. 16.5-20.5.

[60] Ibid., pp. 20.5-23.2.

[61] See GD: DK, p. 475.2-3; TshB, p. 452.1-3. Cf. MG, II, pp. 198.5-199.1; GDG, III, pp. 566.3-567.2.

[62] L, pp. 7.5-8.1:

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After establishing the function and importance of retreat, it is necessary to seek an appropriate place. According to the Buddhist system of mahāyāna, the retreat location must be auspicious; in this sense, the most important is the "Adamantine Site" (Vajrāsana) in Bodhgayā, where the Buddha attained enlightenment. According to the tantric tradition of inner yoga, that is, Mahāyoga, there are two types of locations: those that possess the characteristics indicated in the tantric sources, and those that have an auspicious history. Regarding the former, these are pleasant places, such as forests and large mountains with a good geographic position. The latter are, in particular, those where the sages of India and Tibet have attained realization. However, in *The Secret Essence* (gSang ba'i snying po), a fundamental text of Mahāyoga, it is also stated that "the universe of a thousand cubic worlds, extended in the ten directions, is from the beginning an isolated place." [63]

The same conception is central in Atiyoga, as confirmed by the following passage from *The Marvelous* (rMad du byung ba): "This great universe of a thousand cubic worlds is my place, my seat, my abode." [64] Here, the enlightened Consciousness (byang chub kyi sems, Bodhicitta), the original true nature of one's own Consciousness that constitutes the potential for enlightenment, is personified by one who has fully realized it: since the entire universe is its abode, is it not contradictory to deliberately seek a particular isolated place in which to meditate on it?

Nubchen responds to this plausible objection by explaining that, when one truly understands the meaning of the aforementioned quote, it does not necessarily lead to the rejection of retreat, but rather the search for an appropriate place, knowing that it is only a temporary minor circumstance, which offers certain advantages due to its qualities; however, one must not generate attachment to that single place, as such attachment is a serious illness that does not allow the vision of the great principle of Atiyoga, according to which there is no abandonment and adoption of anything. [65]

In another source, *The Commentary on the Spaces* (Klong 'grel) of Vimalamitra, [66] the text states:

[63] Ibid., p. 8.4: phyogs bcu stong (sto) khams ye nas dben.

[64] Ibid., p. 8.4-5: stong gsum gyi stong chen po'i 'jig rten gyi khams 'di dag nga nyid kyi yul lo bzhugs gnas so gzhal yas khang ngo.

[65] Ibid., p. 9.1: de ni gang la yang spang blangs med pa'i don chen po mthong du mi ster ba'i nad chen po yin te.

[66] 'Gos Lo tsā ba states that in Tibet, during the monarchical period, there were two Vimalamitra (op. cit., p. 191). Cf. David Germano, "The Seven Descents and the Early History of Rnying ma Transmissions", pp. 241-248. The Indian master Vimalamitra and the Tibetan master Vimalamitra.

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"The excellent place of retreat is to understand the true nature of Consciousness. The Gnosis of concentration is the supreme place of retreat. Do not seek the isolation of retreat, else one remains bound by the thought of the isolated place." [67] A passage from the Spiritual Advice (gDams ngag) of the same master further clarifies the point: "If one does not understand that isolation is in the Consciousness, even if one goes to the isolated retreat, the Consciousness will wander through the universe like a wild animal, while the body will remain guarding the deserted place in the bedroom, like a sleeping marmot in its den on the verdant plain." [68]

That said, it is nevertheless clear that for Sangye Yeshe, the realization of Dzogchen requires the practice in retreat, as stated in the seventh chapter:

"if there can be any continuator of the lineage (dgung 'tshob pa), [69] you must understand that this happens in a place of retreat!" [70]

If there are suitable places for retreat, there are others that are not suitable, whose defects must be examined. What is the fundamental criterion in the choice of the appropriate place according to Atiyoga?

A quote from The Instructions (Man ngag) summarizes the whole issue in these laconic terms:

"Having found a place where there are no obstacles to one's freedom, one will remain there." [71]

But, one might ask, what will one do there? Nubchen answers:

"Through self-awareness, one will observe one's essential characteristic in such a way as not to observe, so that it will become completely familiar."

The meaning of this is expressed in this passage:

*From The Instructions on the Enlightened Mind (Byang chub sems kyi man ngag):*

"Aspiring to truly grasp the essence of the enlightened mind, one must embrace solitude like a lion. By identifying the distractions that arise, one can distance themselves from those external influences. After doing so, one should reflect upon the mirror of the mind." [72]

[67] L, p. 9.1-2: gnas su sems nyid rtogs pa bzang ting 'dzin ye shes mchog gi gnas dgon pa'i dben pa bdag mi 'tshol (tshol) gnas kyi rtog (rtogs) pas bcings par mchi.

[68] Ibid., p. 9.3-4: sems la dben par ma rtogs na dgon pa'i dben par sus phyin kyang sems ni dmu (rmu) rgod stong khams nyul lus po nyal khang gnas stong bsrung spang phug phyi ba nyal ba 'dra.

[69] The "continuator of the lineage" is not a simple successor, but one who maintains the line of transmission of the teaching having fully realized it.

[70] L, p. 380.6.

[71] Ibid., p. 10.2-3: bdag dbang bar chad med pa'i gnas rnyed nas de na gnas par bya.

[72] Ibid., p. 10.3-5: 'o na der (dar) las ci bya zhe na de dag rang rig pas rang gi mtshan nyid la lta ba med pa'i tshul gyis blta ste 'dris goms su bya'o byang chub sems kyi man ngag las don nyid nyams su myong 'dod pas gcig pu seng ge bzhin 'dug nas g.yeng ba'i yul rnams thag bcad de 'brel yul dpag tshad du mar (mas) bshug de nas yid kyi me long blta zhes pa'i don to.

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b) At the beginning of the retreat, one should first take the vow to attain one's own liberation for the benefit of all beings. As stated in The Precepts of Padmasambhava (Padma'i bka'):

"When going to retreat, if one desires to go, at the beginning one must make this solemn promise: 'I will liberate myself from impermanence and suffering, and then I will realize the benefit of others.' Furthermore, since the beings living on earth are weak, one must develop compassion, thinking that happiness is what they should obtain, and that this happens when they are placed at the level of enlightenment, after one has fully realized the state of the victorious Buddha and obtained the five powers [73] of the Universal Guide." [74]

In the case of Dzogchen, since its practice is free from any action, [75] is it not contradictory to affirm the necessity of the vow? It is not, because it is possible to make such a vow knowing that its object is like the sky, in which there is nothing to take or leave. As stated in The Union of All Precious Ones (Rin po che kun 'dus):

"The object of the vow itself does not exist from the beginning. If one understands the principle that the object of the vow does not exist, although one makes the vow, there is no defect, its object being like the sky." [76]

[73] The five powers necessary to attain the state of a Buddha are the power of faith (dad pa), the power of diligence (brtson 'grus), the power of mindfulness (dran pa), the power of concentration (ting nge 'dzin), and the power of wisdom (shes rab).

[74] L, pp. 11.5-12.1: dgon par yong zhing (zhig) 'gro 'dod na dang por rab tu dam bca' ste bdag ni mi rtag sdug bsngal las thar nas gzhan don bsgrub pa yang gang zag sa pa nus zhan (gzhan) pas rgyal ba'i go 'phang rab bsgrubs te kun 'dren stobs lnga dag thob nas kun kyang byang chub sar bkod la bde ba thob bya snyam du yang bsams te snying rje bskyed par bya.

[75] Ibid., p. 12.2: rdzogs pa chen po'i lugs 'dir bya ba thams cad bral lo.

[76] Ibid., p. 12.4: dam du bca' ba'i yul rang gdod nas med dam du bca' ba'i yul med don rtogs na dam du bcas kyang skyon med nam mkha' 'dra. Cf. TK, Ka, p. 444.3-4; TshB, Ka, p. 625.1: dam du bcas pa'i yul yang rdul tsam med dam du bcas pa'i yul med gsal ba na dam du bcas kyang yul med nam mkha' 'dra.

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Nubchen continues as follows:

"When one begins the practice in that retreat place for one's own and others' benefit, having well understood the four textual traditions of non-conceptualization, specific to the individual vehicles, [77] without correction and alteration of the three gates, [78] one observes the reality of Consciousness and, also, one practices the corresponding conduct detached, without action and without interrupting activity. Indeed, according to the previous text, [79]

"In a pleasant retreat place, one must familiarize oneself with the secure understanding of the principle through vigor; then, through conduct, one practices without attachment to anything. Thus, one will reach the end of the path in accordance with the principle." [80]

c) Regarding the preliminaries, Nubchen writes that:

"Only at the beginning should one engage in listening to the spiritual teachings of the Dharma"; [81]

then, specifying that true listening is the understanding of the meaning, he cites

The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):

"With the light of words and phrases, the gold of meaning is indicated. The various grammatical categories are the servants of verbal expression." [82]

To understand the meaning, it is necessary not only to listen, but also to reflect, until the connection between words and meaning becomes evident. While the different Buddhist traditions agree on the importance of listening, they differ in terms of meaning; it follows that the instructions vary according to the tradition followed. Nubchen states that,

"According to the teachings of the Dzogchen Ati Yoga tradition, the true listening is the understanding of the meaning. Regarding the Atiyoga meaning, one should receive the oral transmission of the instructions on complete non-action." [83]

[77] The absence of conceptualization or discriminative thought (rnam par mi rtog pa, nirvikalpa) is the essence of contemplation, taught differently in the various textual traditions according to the vehicle (theg pa, yāna) or method followed. The four traditions are the central theme of the work, which will be discussed in more detail below.

[78] The three gates of psychophysical experience are the body (lus), speech (ngag), and mind (yid).

[79] The citation is not attested in the last source cited.

[80] L, pp. 12.5-13.2: bdag gzhan gyi don du gnas der las brtsam pa'ang theg pa so so'i mi rtog pa'i gzhung bzhi (gzhi) legs par khong du chud pas sgo gsum bcos slad med par sems kyi (kyis) chos lta ba dang rjes su mthun pa'i spyod pa'ang bya ba med bya ba mi 'gog ma chags par spyod do de yang nyams dga'i (dga' ba'i dga'i) gnas su brtson pa yis don rtogs gdengs la goms bya zhing spyod pas ci la chags med spyod des ni don bzhin mthar phyin 'gyur.

[81] Ibid., p. 13.2: dang po kho nar mnyan pa la 'bad par bya.

[82] Ibid., pp. 13.6-14.1: ming (mig) tshig sgron mas don gyi gser mtshon pa tshig gi rnam grangs gsung gi 'khor lo can. Vedi Bai, 1, Ga, p. 323.3.

[83] L, p. 15.6: lhag pa'i rnal 'byor dag la ni ci la yang bya ba med pa'i man ngag snyan khung  
brgyud pa thob par bya ba ste.

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d) To maintain a state of retreat, one must let go of attachment to desires, whether they are for material possessions or relationships. However, this can be challenging for those who are just beginning. If one examines deeply what one cannot detach from, one understands that nothing truly exists as it appears to the mind; yet, as soon as one leaves everything as it is without examining it, it starts to appear deceptively again. In fact, both the deceptive appearance and its negation due to examination are only temporary mental attributions: in reality, there is nothing to label and think about, neither in an affirmative nor in a negative sense. Whoever feels attachment for something or someone should understand that there is absolutely nothing to desire with attachment; however, even this understanding is only momentarily important, [84] since for Atiyoga, as previously specified, there is nothing to abandon or adopt.

e) If, however, it happens that one suffers due to prolonged solitude, such distress must cease. In this regard, Nubchen writes:

"The Atiyoga; our system, is founded on the true nature of reality accomplished Spontaneously; as such, it is not an isolation resulting from the elimination of something, but is isolated from any distraction from the very beginning by nature and is also detached from the term 'isolation'. If one remembers this without remembering it with the mind, who is taken by distress? For what does one grieve? For what does one rejoice? In this way, the distress will vanish without having eliminated it." [85]

[84] Ibid., pp. 20.3-5.

[85] Ibid., pp. 22.5-23.1: lhag pa'i rnal 'byor ni lhun gyis rdzogs pa'i chos nyid gzhi bzhag rang lugs ni bsal bas dben pa ma yin gyi ye nas dben pa ste dben pa'i tha snyad nyid dang yang bral ba de dran pa med pas dran na su zhig gang la skyo gang la dga' ste don des skyo ba ma bsal bar sangs par 'gyur ro.



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a) Regarding the first point, there are the gradual and direct methods of the sūtras, and there are the "great methods" of the tantras. The latter are of two kinds: the methods that employ supports and the method of non-action (bya ba med pa'i thabs). The methods that use supports are divided into two categories: external methods and internal methods. The internal methods, in turn, consist of two systems: the first includes various techniques ranging from meditations on the nāḍī (subtle energy channels) and cakra of one's own body to those on the moment of death. The second system requires sexual union. [90]

After mentioning this, Nubchen cites The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che), a source of Atiyoga that seems to justify the use of internal methods. [91] Does this mean that Dzogchen is based on such methods? The answer is clarifying:

"They do not constitute the understanding of the textual tradition of Dzogchen; however, in the case of the aforementioned citations, they are transmitted through those sources in order not to interrupt the understanding of their meaning." [92]

In Mahāyoga, in addition to the methods based on supports, there is also the method without support (rten med kyi thabs), previously defined as the "method of non-action." According to the methods with support, the Gnosis (ye shes, jñāna) sought by the Yogin arises from a specific emotional affliction (nyon mongs pa, kleśa), which can be strong desire or aversion; but this is not the supreme method, the one without support.

[87] Ibid., pp. 30.1-36.2.

[88] Ibid., pp. 36.2-40.2.

[89] Ibid., pp. 40.2-45.5.

[90] In the sixth chapter, Nubchen specifies that there are two kinds of instructions (man ngag): without support (rten med) and with support (rten can). The instructions with support can be based on the high or low cakra (those of the sexual organs) called, respectively, "upper gates" (steng gi sgo) and "lower gates" ('og gi sgo). Cf. L, pp. 222.3-6, 221.1-6, 220.1-6, 223.1: this should be the exact sequence of pages in L, corrected based on Ch.

[91] L, p. 27.3-5: de ni nam mkha' (mkhas) che las kyang che ba'i ye shes rnyed dka' ba shes rab thabs la brten pas 'grub ces pa dang yang ā li kā li zab tu bstan de ni a dang mdzes pa'i ta pa dang yan lag spros pa bzhin 'jig rten yongs kyi spyod yul la sangs rgyas gsung gi zab mo 'byung zhes ces gsungs so. Vd. TK, Ka, pp. 424.5, 426.2-3.

[92] Ibid., p. 27.5-6: 'o na rdzogs chen nang pa'i thabs la brten nam zhe na rdzogs pa chen po'i gzhung gi dgongs pa min a'ang re zhig de dag nas brgyud pas rtogs pa mi 'gog pa'i phyir.

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Our true nature is all-pervasive; therefore, everything is a path leading to it:

"Whatever is done—seeing, hearing, tasting, experiencing sensations, touching—is vividly clear within the space of Spontaneous Gnosis." [93] Thus, "it is not a matter of relying on emotional afflictions; indeed, beyond the realm of great Gnosis, which perceives reality as it is, there is no path to be sought elsewhere." [94]

b) The first harmonious factor with which one must accompany oneself is a teacher. The following excerpts from a quote from The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung chen po) give an idea of the qualities of the master one should seek:

"Regarding the nature of the excellent guru, his mind is stable and his Consciousness is clear and disciplined; he has an open and immeasurable intelligence; he faces difficulties with patience and is always upright; he acts with honesty and there is no deception in him; [...] he speaks sincerely and does not change his word; he acts as he has said to do; he does not experience pleasure or displeasure because of good or bad actions carried out by others towards him; [...] having abandoned frivolous entertainments and inferior activities, [...] he remains solitary in the continuity of retreat and on the solitary path [...]." [95]

Then Nubchen specifies:

"If one seeks a teacher who, although not endowed with all those qualities, has a good character and a deep understanding, the path of liberation will be without errors. If such a guru is not found, then one must seek an experienced spiritual companion." [96]

A harmonious factor with which the adept of Mahāyoga should accompany himself is the mudrā (phyag rgya ma) or partner in the tantric practice of sexual union. For those who follow Atiyoga, this topic is not relevant, while the third harmonious factor can be important in the preliminary phase: the Dharma books. [97] The fourth and last harmonious factor is the dākinī, a female spiritual guide. A suitable guide of this sort serves as an assistant (g.yog po), without however residing in the same place of retreat.

[93] Ibid., p. 28.6: mthong thos myong (myor) tshor reg pa ci byas kyang rang byung ba'i ye shes klong du wal wal rang gsal lo.

[94] Ibid., p. 29.6: 'dir nyon mongs (pa ngas mongs) pa la rten pa ni ma yin te de nyid ye shes chen po'i klong las lam gzhan nas btsal du med de.

[95] Ibid., pp. 31.4-32.3: bla ma dam pa'i rang bzhin yang yid brtan sems dangs dul ba dang tshad med yangs pa'i blo gros dang rkyen thub bzod ldan kun tu drang gsong por (thor) spyod la gya gyu med [...] bden par smra zhing tshig mi 'gyur ji skad smras pa bzhin du byed nyes dang legs pa'i las rnams las dga' dang mi dga' rtog 'dzin med [...] 'du 'dzi dman pa'i las rnams spangs (spang) [...] dgon pa'i rgyud dang dben lam dben [...].

[96] Ibid., p. 32.3-4: de kun dang ma ldan yang rang bzhin bzang la dgongs pa zab pa btsal na thar lam la nor sa med do de lta bu'i bla ma ma rnyed na grogs nyams can btsal lo.

[97] See: S. G. Karmay, The Great Perfection, cit., p. 97.

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c) Before addressing the topic of the defects of not meditating, Nubchen touches upon the related and popular topic of the methods to overcome the obstacles of unfavorable conditions (rkyen bzlog pa), which range from human and non-human enemies to diseases. Although there are various expedients to resort to in those circumstances, from common or magical weapons to medicines, the fundamental exhortation is not to be struck by emotional afflictions. [98] Moreover, the care of physical health in its various aspects, while necessary, is only momentarily important. What really matters is to remember the principle of the way of seeing, [99] without attachment to circumstantial expedients. [100]

The true obstacles arise from the failure to meditate. Limiting oneself to merely listening to and reflecting on the teachings of the Dharma, without cultivating the inner experience of the Dharma through meditation, is akin to having prescribed medicine for an illness but choosing not to take it. [101]

d) Regarding the qualities of meditating, in this introductory context it would be enough to emphasize the statement that "all attainments are realized through concentration." [102] Traditionally, it is explained that the "attainments" (siddhi) are of two types: supreme and ordinary. The supreme type is the enlightenment of a Buddha, which marks the liberation from the cycle of rebirths or saṃsāra. The ordinary type is manifold, as it includes various psychophysical powers, considered "side effects" of the control of the mind; this category includes the power of flight, invisibility, immortality and healing. [103]

Whatever the positive characteristic that distinguishes the meditative practice, Nubchen warns that "Just as both black and white clouds can block the sun, even the purest actions and Dharma activities can obscure clarity during meditation. Therefore, it is essential to set aside the luminous aspects of these qualities in contemplation."

[98] L, p. 35.2: nyon mongs pa'i dbang gis bsnun par mi bya'o/.

[99] The "way of seeing" is the theory of the teaching.

[100] L, p. 36.2: de lta bu'i lus kyi bkur ba'ang re zhig tsam las lta ba'i don dran pas de la ma chags par bya'o.

[101] Ibid., pp. 38.6-39.2.

[102] Ibid., p. 40.5: dngos grub thams cad ting 'dzin gyis 'grub par gsungs so.

[103] Cf. Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet*, pp. 246-247.

## 25 Translation

This principle of equanimity [104] is central to Dzogchen, as stated in the following quote from The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung) [105]:

"The Yogin of non-action does not construct stupas, read books, create sacred images, or perform mudra gestures; the recitation of Mantras clouds that concentration. The Yogin does not bow before authorities. This is not to seek material gains from those who do bow or to earn their reverence. This is not for achieving profit or attaining fame. The reason lies in the distractions brought about by the distractions of the relative world and the profound disturbances that can arise from it. Since the practitioner, thus distracted, would be far from that equanimous state, one must naturally leave this body in its authentic, unaltered form."

In this section [107], which concludes the introductory part, Nubchen states:

"it has been taught only that one meditates after understanding has occurred" [108];

but what is this understanding and how does one arrive at it? A passage from The Aphorisms of Meditation of the Master dPal dbyangs (mKhan po dPal dbyangs kyi bsgom lung) reads [109]:

"Having definitively ascertained the principle through authoritative scriptures, the instructions of the masters, and one's own reasoning [...]"

[104] L, p. 44.3-5: sgom pa'i dus su sprin nag po a cang yang ches dkar po yang nyi ma la sgrib pa dang 'dra bar rnam par dkar ba'i las chos spyod nyid kyang sgrib pas dkar phyogs btang snyoms su gzhas (bzhas) par bya.

[105] Cf. GD, DK, p. 474.5-7; GD, TshB, p. 451.3-7; MG, II, pp. 196.1-197.2; GDG, III, pp. 562.2-564.2.

[106] L, p. 45.1-4: bya ba med pa'i rnal 'byor pas mchod rten dag gi las mi bya glegs bam bklag par mi bya zhing gzugs brnyan brtsam pa'i las mi bya lag gi phyag rgya mi bcing (bya) zhing ngag gi bzlas pa de la sgrib rnal 'byor lus kyi (kyis) phyag mi bya rnyed dang bkur sti lta ma yin khe phyir ma yin grags phyir min ci phyir phyi rol g.yeng ba dang shin tu g.yeng ba yin pa'i phyir de la nye ba ma yin pas lus 'di rnal mas (rnam par rnal mas) gnas par bya'o.

[107] Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik published their translation of the chapter in "Lighting the Lamp: the Structure of the Bsam gtan mig sgron," Acta Orientalia, pp. 153–175.

[108] L, p. 52.3: rtogs nas bsgom pa kho nar gsungs.

[109] gNyan dPal dbyangs, lTa ba yang dag sgron ma, pp. 766.7-767.1.

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"With the correct trust in the true nature of reality, one will have the right confidence through the three means of knowledge (tshad ma, pramāṇa)." [110]

The passage refers to three means of knowledge (tshad ma, pramāṇa) [111] that both the teacher and the student must resort to before approaching the topic of meditation:

(1) The scriptures (lung, āgama), which are the authoritative statements of the Buddha or other beings cited to corroborate the theoretical exposition of the worldview. (2) The instructions of the masters (man ngag, upadeśa), which help clarify the meaning of the scriptures. (3) Reason or logic (rigs pa, yukti) [112] that employs analysis to arrive at an inferential knowledge of the meaning of the teaching.

Nubchen reiterates that it is precisely through these three means that one must understand, [113] so it is evident that in this context, understanding is the reasoned trust in the teaching on the true nature of reality.

If understanding must precede meditation, the latter is not only situated beyond listening, but also transcends reflection; therefore, the next step requires knowing how to recognize the "precipices" into which one can fall precisely because of both ordinary and reflection-created discriminative concepts or thoughts. This is why the absence of conceptualization is necessary. [114]

Nubchen distinguishes different types of conceptualization and as many forms of non-conceptualization. Here, too, he alludes to the two systems of sūtra, the gradual and the direct, the inner system of tantra or Mahāyoga, and the system of Dzogchen or Atiyoga. They are compared to the rungs of a ladder, [115] whose summit is represented by the fourth system, since "Atiyoga is the profound state of Spontaneous non-conceptualization." [116] The nature of this "non-conceptualization" is indicated with the following words, whose profound implications will be developed in the seventh chapter:

[110] L, p. 49.5-6: lung dang man ngag rigs (rig) pas thag bcad de chos kyi rang bzhin yang dag yid ches bya.

[111] Ibid., p. 49.5: rdo rje bkod pa las tshad ma gsum dang ldan pa'i blos rnam par rtog pa'i rjes bcad pa.

[112] This Tibetan term is often confused with rig pa, a homophonous word that renders the Sanskrit samvedana, here rendered as "awareness/Consciousness," or vidyā, that is, "knowledge, cognition."

[113] L, p. 49.4: lung dang man ngag rigs (rig) pa gsum gyis rtogs par bya.

[114] Ibid., p. 52.5-6: 'dir rnam par (L ins. mi) rtog pa dang bral dgos ched (L dgod pa dgos ched) ci ste de na (L den de na) bsam pa yang g.yang sa shes phyir.

[115] Ibid., pp. 60.6-61.1.

[116] Ibid., p. 55.5-6: lhun gyis grub pa'i mi rtog pa chen po a ti yo ga'o.

"Concerning the true nature (tathatā), which is Spontaneously accomplished, that is, the heart of the contemplation of Atiyoga, the supreme union, within the completely pure expanse of Spontaneous Gnosis, all entities of existence are intrinsically lucid by nature, with nothing excluded. The Spontaneous fulfillment of all causes and effects, arising without pursuit, embodies The Great Self [116.1], and there is not even a term that signifies the slightest deviation from that condition. Thus, self-awareness remains intrinsically clear, calm, and evident, without having been placed in that state, accessed, moved from there, or altered."

So, what is to be meditated upon? What deserves our attention? There is nothing. Only the true nature of nothingness exists. Who embraces it? In the vast realm of original non-conceptualization, there is no interruption of phenomenal appearance, no concept of what appears, and even the notion of non-conceptualization serves merely as a metaphor.

*From The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):* [117]

"Phenomena are immeasurable like the ocean. The non-conceptual state is as vast as the expanse of the sky." [118]

## 4. The Central Chapters

### 4.1. Gradual Path and Direct Path

The central part deals in detail with the doctrines of the four paths or meditative systems around which the main chapters are articulated:

(1) the gradual path or progressive access (rim gyis pa, rim gyis 'jug pa), primarily supported by the Indian master Kamalaśīla and outlined in the fourth chapter; (2) the direct path or sudden access (cig car ba, cig car 'jug pa), taught by various Chinese Chan masters and discussed in the fifth chapter;

[117] TshB, Ka, p. 700.1.

[118] L, p. 60.2-6: a ti yo ga lhag pa'i rnal 'byor gyi lhun rdzogs de bzhin nyid ni snang srid gyi chos so cog rang byung gi ye shes rnam par dag pa'i klong du sel med par ye nas rang gsal ba la rgyu dang 'bras bu ril ma btsal bar lhun gyis rdzogs pa ni bdag nyid chen po pas de la g.yo rdul ming yang med pas rang rig pa ma bzhag ma gyos ma bslad ma zhugs par lhan ne lhang nge ye gsal bar ci zhig bsgom ci zhig dran par byar yod de med med pa'i don de nyid kho na yod de dang du len pa su zhig ste ye mi rtog pa chen po la snang ba bkag pa yang med la de la rtog (rtogs) pa med de mi rtog pa nyid kyang bla dvags so khyung chen las snang ba rgya mtsho chen po bzhin mi rtog nam mkha'i mkha' ltar yangs zhes gsungs so.

(3) the Indian Buddhist tradition of the *sūtrayāna* or "Vehicle of the Discourses," which is the subject of the first five chapters; (4) the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of the Nyingma or "Ancient School," which is the focus of the fourth chapter; (5) the tantric system of Mahāyoga, which is the subject of the sixth chapter; (6) the path of Atiyoga or "Great Perfection" (*rdzogs pa chen po*), expounded in the seventh chapter.

During the reign of King Trisong Detsen, the first two paths were the focus of a "debate" that lasted about three years, from 792 to 794. [119] Unlike the documents found in Dunhuang, Tibetan historiography, directly or indirectly connected to The Testament of sBa (*sBa bzhed*), [120] argues that the king decreed the superiority of the gradual Indian path, prohibiting the teaching of Hva shang Mahāyāna in Tibet. This view has been followed by eminent scholars such as Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251), [121] Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364), [122] dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba (1504-1566), and Padma dkar po (1527-1592). [123]

The SM contains a detailed analysis of the two paths, but unlike the *sBa bzhed*, there is no mention of the "debate" that would have been convened by the king. It is certainly possible to read in Nubchen's exposition the expression of a confrontation between the two currents that took place in Tibet, but the outcome that emerges is not at all unfavorable to the teaching of Hva shang Mahāyāna, in line with the Dunhuang documents. [124]

[119] S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[120] Cf. Rolf Alfred Stein (ed.), *Une chronique ancienne de bSam-yas: sBa-bžed; mGon po rgyal mtshan* (ed.), *sBa bzhed ces bya ba sba gsal snang gi bzhed pa*.

[121] Sakya Pandita, *Illuminations*, pp. 64-65, 127-129; Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes: Essential Differentiations Among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems*, p. 234.

[122] Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub, *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, pp. 191-196.

[123] The narrative of dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba is found in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, while Padma dkar po's corresponding work is the *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i padma rgyas pa'i nyin byed* (see David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective*, p. 74).

[124] According to these manuscripts, the teaching of the "direct path" of Hva shang Mahāyāna in Tibet was authorized. Cf. Daishun Ueyama, "The Study of Tibetan Ch'an Manuscript Recovered from Tun-huang: A Review of the Field and its Prospects" in Whalen Lai – Lewis R. Lancaster (eds), *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet*, pp. 341-342; D. S. Ruegg, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58, 64-65, 83. Regarding the contents of this teaching, cf. Luis Gómez, "The Direct and Gradual Approaches of Zen Master Mahāyāna: Fragments of the Teachings of Ma-ho-yen" in Robert G. Gimello – Peter N. Gregory (eds), *Studies in Ch'an and Hua-yen*, p. 104 ff. See Jeffrey L. Broughton, *The Bodhidharma Anthology: The Earliest Records of Zen*, pp. 67, 98-103, 141-142 n. 20.

At the beginning of the second chapter, Nubchen states that "according to the system of the causal vehicle," that is, the non-tantric Buddhist tradition based on the sūtras, "the specific capacities of the students are two: sharp or dull; therefore, there are the gradual type and the direct type. Regarding the gradual type, there are the preferred texts of the Indian master Kamalaśīla, that is, the incomplete sūtras, whose meaning is provisional." [125] However, in reference to the direct type, "the texts of Heshang Moheyan, the last master in this lineage of transmission, teach the sudden access, therefore they concern the complete sūtras." [126] According to Buddhist hermeneutics, these latter sūtras contain the definitive meaning not subject to interpretation, unlike the others whose meaning is provisional. [127] Consistently with this assessment of the two currents, Nubchen dedicates the fourth chapter to the gradual path of the sūtras, also indicated by the expression *tsen man/men/min*, derived from the Chinese *jianmen* (*chien-men*); [128] while in the following chapter he presents the superior direct path, called *ston mun/men* based on the Chinese *dunmen* (*tun-men*). [129]

The fourth chapter begins by defining the specificity of the gradual path with this image:

"To climb a high mountain, one must proceed step by step; similarly, to realize the Dharmakāya of the Victorious Buddha, one must progressively reach the spiritual levels following the gradual training in the two truths, [130] in the state of calm and in clear vision." [131]

[125] L, p. 23.4-5: *rgyu'i theg pa'i lugs kyis kyang dbang po rno rtul gyi bye brag gi gnyis te rim gyis pa dang cig car ba'o de la rim gyis pa ni rgya dkar po'i slob dpon ka ma (mā) la shī (shi) la'i 'dod gzhung ste drang ba don gyi mdo sde yongs su ma rdzogs pa'i gzhung ngo.*

[126] Ibid., p. 24.5-6: *des brgyud pa'i tha ma ha shang ma hā yan gyi gzhung cig car 'jug pa ste yongs su rdzogs pa'i mdo sde'i gzhung ngo.*

[127] On the distinction between "provisional meaning" (*drang don*, *neyārtha*) and "definitive meaning" (*nges don*, *nītārtha*) cf. D. S. Ruegg, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-32; Tarthang Tulku, *Crystal Mirror*, vol. V, pp. 104-109.

[128] L, pp. 64-118.

[129] Ibid., pp. 118-186.

[130] The relative truth (*saṃvṛti satya*) and the absolute truth (*paramārtha satya*).

[131] L, p. 65.2-4: *ri bo che la 'jog pa'ang gom gcig gom gnyis phyin pas rdol ba dang 'dra bar rgyal ba'i chos kyis sku bsgrub pa yang bden pa gnyis dang zhi gnas lhag mthong la sngar rim par sbyangs nas je je la sa non par 'gyur.*



### 30 Introduction

The distinctive nature of the direct path is summarized at the beginning of the fifth chapter as follows: "According to the sudden access (ston mun), the definitive ascertainment of the mode of seeing occurs in the manner of panoramic vision, as if one had arrived at the summit of Mount Meru; in this regard, it is believed that in the true nature of reality, where the object to be evaluated and the subject of evaluation are unborn from the very beginning, the actual principle of absolute truth is known without having made any effort: it is stated that if one has the vision of that principle, one has the knowledge, as if one had reached the summit of Sumeru, the king of mountains, and the lower mountains appeared clear to the sight, without having considered them one by one." [132]

This exemplification of the two paths of the sutras resonates with the one attributed to Hvasang Mahāyāna in the sBa bzhed, [133] according to which the gradual access is represented by the monkey that reaches the top of a tree by climbing from below (mas 'dzegs), while the sudden access is like the eagle that suddenly arrives at the top of a tree by descending from above (yas 'babs). The critique of these examples attributed to Kamalaśīla is reported by Sa skya Paṇḍita in Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba. [134]

In sDom gsum rab dbye, he identifies an equivalence between the direct path of the "descent from above" and two other traditions that he defines as "the contemporary mahāmudrā" (da lta'i phyag rgya chen po) and "the Dzogchen of the Chinese system" (rgya nag lugs kyi rdzogs chen). [135] Embracing the historiographic line of the sBa bzhed, he contests the orthodoxy of Hvasang and, consequently, rejects the other two traditions as deviant.

With his condemnation of the "contemporary mahāmudrā", Sa skya Paṇḍita attacked the doctrine of the "white panacea" (dkar po chig thub), taught by Zhang Tshal pa brTson 'grus pa (1123-1193), a disciple of sGom pa Tshul khriṃs sNying po (1116-1169), in turn the nephew of sGam po pa bSod nams Rin chen (1079-1153). [136]

[132] L, p. 118.4-6: ston mun cig car 'jug pa yang dper ri rgyal rtse mor phyin na kun mthong ba'i tshul gyis lta ba'i thag bcad pa yang gzhal bya dang 'jal byed gdod nas ma skyes pa'i chos nyid du don nyid cir yang ma brtsal (stsal) ba nyid kyi (kyi) go bar 'dod de don de mthong na ri'i rgyal po ri rab kyi rtser phyin na ri bran ma bltas gsal ba bzhin go bar bzhed do.

[133] Cf. D. S. Ruegg, op. cit., p. 98.

[134] Sakya Pandita, Illuminations, p. 128.

[135] See Sakya Pandita, A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes, cit., pp. 118, 233-234.

[136] Sakya Pandita, Illuminations, pp. 65-69, 129-130. Cf. Michael Broido, "Sa-skya Paṇḍita, the White Panacea and the Hva-Shang Doctrine", Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, pp. 28; D. S. Ruegg, op. cit., pp. 102-104; S. G. Karmay, The Great Perfection, cit., pp. 197-198.

### 31 Introduction

Among the specific Buddhist traditions of the "later dissemination" (phyi dar), [137] the non-gradual path of mahāmudrā or "Great Seal", tracing back to eminent Indian masters like Saraha and Tilopā, [138] is the most similar to the Dzogchen of Sangye Yeshe, with which it must have had an ancient familial connection. In fact, one can find traces of it precisely in the seventh chapter of the SM, in a quote from The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal): [139]

"Samantabhadra, The Self-originated, unique, Supreme Bhagavat, is the Dharmakāya, the Great Seal of the Spontaneously perfected body, speech, and mind, and is the matrix of enlightenment present from the beginning [...]."

According to Sangye Yeshe, Dzogchen is "the best and highest yoga, the supreme vehicle," [140] independent of both the theoretical conceptions and the practical methodologies of the other Buddhist vehicles based on sūtras and tantras. This approach is also central in the mahāmudrā of Gampopa, who distinguishes three paths: the first is based on sūtras and uses mental analysis of phenomena to arrive, through inference (rjes dpag), at the understanding of the absence of intrinsic existence; the second is the specific one of tantras, which is based on the reception of the blessings (byin brlabs) of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; the third is the one of the direct understanding (mngon sum) specific to mahāmudrā, thus "a separate and independent path from sūtras and tantras," as Dakpo Tashi Namgyal (1512/13-1587) specifies. [141] What is its peculiarity? Gampopa synthesizes it thus:

"A genuine teacher reveals that the true nature of Consciousness is the Natural State (sahaja) known as Dharmakāya, or clear light. By adhering to the teachings of such authentic instruction on the definitive meaning, and by integrating understanding with experience, one comes to realize the unified essence of the uncontrived, self-arisen state."

[137] This definition refers to the new (gsar ma) Tibetan translations of Indian Buddhist teachings and their dissemination initiated in the second half of the 10th century.

[138] See Jampa Thaye, *A Garland of Gold: The Early Kagyu Masters in India and Tibet*.

[139] L, p. 372.1. See TshB, Ka, p. 609.6-7.

[140] L, p. 290.6.

[141] Takpo Tashi Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, p. 112; *Dvags po bKra shis rnam rgyal*, *Phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer*, p. 159: mdo sngags gnyis ka las logs su gyur pa'i gseng lam zhig yin par bzhed.

"The approach to seeing, meditation, and conduct concerning the Natural State of self-realized awareness transforms innate awareness into the direct path." [142]

The learned Sa skya Paṇḍita could not help but notice the extraordinary similarity between this approach and that of the Dzogchen championed by figures like Nubchen Sangye Yeshe.

## 4.2. Chan and Dzogchen

Sa skya Paṇḍita in sDom gsum rab dbye states that "the view of Atiyoga is Gnosis, but it is not a vehicle." [143] In the 14th century, 'Bri gung dPal 'dzin, a staunch critic of Dzogchen, will, will refer back to this criticism, citing The Garland of Contemplations (Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba), [144] the attribution of which to the charismatic Indian master Padmasambhava is confirmed by the sBa bzhed. [145]

[142] sGam po pa, Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs, p. 557.1-3: "A certain sublime teacher said that the innate awareness, the luminous Dharmakāya, is the path. By taking this unerring essential instruction as the path, without separating the three - the view, meditation, and conduct - from the natural awareness, one makes the innate awareness the direct path."

[143] Sakya Pandita, A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes, cited, pp. 133, 309: "The view of ati yoga is Gnosis, but it is not a vehicle." Cf. S. G. Karmay, op. cit., pp. 147-148. Sa skya Paṇḍita also refers to the fourfold classification of yoga accepted by the "new" (gsar ma) tantric traditions, i.e., not rnying ma. In his exposition, we find the familiar terms, but the order is different from the ancient one: yoga, Anuyoga, Atiyoga, Mahāyoga. They are not "vehicles" (theg pa) nor tantric systems (rgyud sde), but rather "stages of concentration" (ting nge 'dzin rim): Sakya Pandita, op. cit., pp. 132, 309. These four yogas thus characterize the "process of creation" (bskyed rim), cf. Alex Wayman, Yoga of the Guhyasamājatantra, pp. 131, 157-158; S. Beyer, op. cit., pp. 114-118. It is in this perspective that 'Jam mgon Kong sprul (1813-1899) interprets the "method of the Great Completion" (rdzogs pa chen po'i tshul) expounded by Padmasambhava in the Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba. Cf. 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba'i tshig don gyi 'grel zin mdor bsdus pa zab don pad tshal 'byed pa'i nyi 'od, p. 49.2-3.

[144] S. G. Karmay has published the translation of the Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba in op. cit., pp. 140-142.

[145] R. A. Stein, op. cit., pp. 25.16-26.1: slob dpon yar gshegs khar rje blon nyi shu la man ngag lta ba'i 'phreng ba bshad.

### 33 Translation

In the Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba, the vehicles explicitly named are seven rather than nine [146]

(1) nyan thos kyi theg pa (Śrāvakayāna) (2) rang sangs rgyas kyi theg pa (PratyekaBuddhayāna) (3) byang chub sems dpa'i theg pa (Bodhisattvayāna) (4) bya ba'i rgyud kyi theg pa (Kriyātantrayāna) (5) gnyis ka'i rgyud kyi theg pa (Ubhayatantrayāna) (6) rnal 'byor phyi pa thub pa'i rgyud kyi theg pa (Outer Yogatantrayāna) (7) rnal 'byor nang pa thabs kyi rgyud kyi theg pa (Inner Yogatantrayāna)

The first three vehicles encompass the three fundamental Buddhist "families": nyan thos (Śrāvaka), rang sangs rgyas (PratyekaBuddha) and byang chub sems dpa' (Bodhisattva). This is followed by the rdo rje'i theg pa (Vajrayāna), which is divided into three tantric vehicles: bya ba'i rgyud (Kriyātantra), gnyis ka'i rgyud (Ubhayatantra) and rnal 'byor rgyud (Yogatantra). The latter is further subdivided into two additional vehicles: the rnal 'byor phyi pa (Outer Yoga Tantra) and the rnal 'byor nang pa (Inner Yoga Tantra).

The text then proceeds to expound the specific subdivision of Inner Yoga into three tshul, or "means": bskyed pa'i tshul or "Means of Creation", rdzogs pa'i tshul or "Means of Completion", and rdzogs pa chen po'i tshul or "Means of Great Completion". In relation to the first two means, it is evident that the Tibetan expressions bskyed pa and rdzogs pa correspond respectively to the terms utpatti and utpanna, attested in Buddhist tantric literature to denote the two fundamental processes or stages (krama) of meditation.

Regarding the third means, 'Bri gung dPal 'dzin believes that it was not correctly understood by the Tibetan successors of Padmasambhava.

[146] Padmasambhava (Padma 'byung gnas), Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba (The Garland of Esoteric Instructions), pp. 3-7. Regarding the "nine vehicles" of the rnying ma pa, cf. Tulku Thondup, Buddha Mind: An Anthology of Longchen Rabjam's Writings on Dzogpa Chenpo, p. 3 ff.; Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., vol. I, p. 17 ff. The primary source of the nonuple formulation is the dGongs 'dus (GD), commented on by Nubchen in the Mun pa'i go cha: cf. MG, I, pp. 503.5-514.1, 559.6-564.5; II, pp. 421.4-425.5, 427.1-6. In the aforementioned classification, the seventh, eighth and ninth vehicles are called Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga respectively.

Implicitly referring to the aforementioned critique by Sa skya Paṇḍita, 'Bri gung dPal 'dzin writes:

"Nubchen Sangye Yeshe, who lived during the reign of King dPal 'khor btsan, [...] created many instructional texts on meditative practice; in particular, he blended the philosophical system of Hva shang with the Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba and created the thirteen fundamental texts of Dzogchen, namely the rMad du byung ba and others." [148]

The belief that Dzogchen is a kind of syncretism, in which heterodox doctrines converge, appears already in the edicts (bka' shog) of lHa bla ma Ye shes 'od and his great-grandson Pho brang Zhi ba 'od. The former was the king of Pu hrangs who worked to restore the Buddhist monastic institution in western Tibet at the beginning of the so-called "later dissemination" of the Dharma. In his edict, promulgated towards the end of the 10th century, it is stated:

"Now that the good karma is exhausted and the king's law has waned, false doctrines called Dzogchen are spreading in Tibet." [149]

The edict of the great-grandson, issued in 1092, is more explicit:

"The philosophy of rdzogs pa chen po is mixed with the doctrines of the heretics of the tīrthika. If it is practiced, it will lead to inferior rebirths. Being an obstacle to supreme enlightenment, it must not be practiced at all." [150]

In particular, among the works placed on the index, there is the rNal 'byor mig gi sgron ma, that is, the SM. Nubchen Sangye Yeshe is cited as the author of other rejected writings, but not of the thirteen texts of Dzogchen that 'Bri gung dPal 'dzin will attribute to him. The latter, although disapproved, are defined as "later translations of Vimalamitra", in accordance with the historiography of the Nyingma. [151]

Regarding the thesis of 'Bri gung dPal 'dzin, we note that the fifth chapter of the SM was written, according to the explicit statement of the author, by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe himself.

[148] Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, op. cit., p. 280.

[149] Samten G. Karmay, "The Ordinance of lHa Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od" in Michael Aris – Aung San Suu Kyi (eds), *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson: Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tibetan Studies*, Oxford 1979, pp. 154, 156.

[150] Samten G. Karmay, "An Open letter of Pho-brang Zhi-ba-'od, *The Tibet Journal*, vol. V, no. 3, pp. 17, 19. On the two edicts and the critics of Dzogchen see also Samten G. Karmay, "A Discussion on the Doctrinal Position of Dzogchen from the 10th to the 13th Centuries", *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 263, pp. 147-156.

[151] S. G. Karmay, "An Open Letter of Pho-brang Zhi-ba-'od", cit., p. 25 n. 101.

## 35 Introduction

Nubchen specifically highlighted the distinction between the direct path taught by Hwa shang Mahāyāna and Dzogchen: "In this section of the rNal 'byor mig gi bsam gtan, I have written in detail because I fear that someone may err due to the partial similarity between the ston mun and Dzogchen." [152] So, what are the similarities and differences between Hwa shang's direct path and Dzogchen? Sangye Yeshe indicates this at the end of the seventh chapter (5.2.1.):

"The tradition that upholds the sudden approach aligns with the Great Perfection in its terminology. Similar to Atiyoga, it teaches that there is no action or practice; however, in recognizing the unborn, absolutely real foundation, it asserts that the ultimate truth is this unborn and empty basis. Upon examining this teaching, we see that, unlike Atiyoga, there remains an alternation between the two truths, where one becomes familiar with the state of emptiness, necessitating effort to realize it. Thus, while practicing the non-duality of the two truths, this state is not fully experienced. Those who follow this tradition, clouded by their own perspective, have yet to access the non-dual state." [153]

For Nubchen, the direct path of Chan is considered superior to the gradual path based on the sūtras, yet it is ultimately transcended by Atiyoga. However, within the same Nyingma lineage, there are those, like Klong chen Rab 'byams (Longchenpa) (1308-1362), who strive to dismantle even this final barrier, equating Hwa shang's teachings directly with Dzogchen: [154]

"What the great master Ha shang expressed did not resonate with the minds of the unintelligent people of that era; yet, in truth, it is precisely so!" [155]

[152] L, p. 186: rnal 'byor mig gi bsam gtan gyi skabs 'dir ston mun dang rdzogs chen cha 'dra bas gol du dogs pa'i phyir rgyas par bkod do. Cf. Carmen Meinert, "Chinese Chan and Tibetan Dzogchen: Preliminary Remarks on Two Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts" in Henk Blezer (ed.), *Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet: Tibetan Studies 2: PIATS 2000: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, pp. 289-307.

[153] L, p. 490.3-6.

[154] Longchen Rabjam, *The Precious Treasure of the Way of Abiding*, p. 135. Cf. Herbert V. Guenther, *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective*, pp. 140-141; Sam van Schaik, "The Great Perfection and the Chinese Monk: rNying-ma-pa Defences of Hwa-shang Mahāyāna in the Eighteenth Century", p. 3.

[155] Klong chen pa dri med 'od zer, *mDzod bdun*, vol. I (sDe gsum snying po'i don 'grel gnas lugs rin po che'i mdzod ces bya ba'i 'grel pa), p. 155.4: slob dpon chen po ha shang gis gsungs pas de dus blo dman pa'i blor ma shong yang don la de bzhin nyid du gnas so.

### 4.3. Mahāyoga and Dzogchen

The sixth chapter of the SM is dedicated to the "great adamantine vehicle of the result, the inner system," [156] also referred to as the expression *rnal 'byor chen po* or the Sanskrit equivalent Mahāyoga. [157] The traditional schema of Buddhist vehicles peculiar to the Nyingma order does not stop at Mahāyoga, but continues with the vehicle of Anuyoga and culminates in that of Atiyoga. Since the seventh chapter expounds the path of Atiyoga, one might conclude "that the classification into Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga was a later development"; [158] but this is not the case, as the term Anuyoga actually occurs six times, [159] while the corresponding Tibetan expression *rjes su 'jug pa'i rnal 'byor* appears twice. [160] In particular, in the sixth chapter, the term Anuyoga is attested in reference to a quotation from the *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*. [161] The aforementioned text of Padmasambhava is traditionally classified as a source of Mahāyoga, so it is understandable that it is cited three times and solely in the sixth chapter; [162] but what is the significance of the treatment of Anuyoga in the context of Mahāyoga?

This question is answered by Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (1042-1136), the earliest commentator on the *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*. [163] He considers the term *tshul* a synonym of *theg pa* (*yāna*), implicitly justifying the well-known classification of the nine vehicles. Rong zom states that in the "midst of the inner yoga" there are the three *tshul* or "means" known as *bskyed rdzogs gsum*: *bskyed pa* ("generation"), *rdzogs pa* ("completion"), and *rdzogs pa chen po* ("Great Completion"). They are expounded both in a single tantric text and as means of meditation upon a maṇḍala of deities, which varies according to the level of understanding and concentration of the Yogin.

[156] L, p. 186.4: 'bras bu rdo rje theg pa chen po nang pa'i lugs.

[157] See in particular the end of the chapter (*ibid.*, p. 290.5), where it is stated that it is an explanation of the texts of the "great yoga" (*rnal 'byor chen po'i gzhung bshad pa'i le'u ste drug pa*).

[158] Herbert V. Guenther, "Meditation Trends in Early Tibet" in Whalen Lai – Lewis R. Lancaster (eds), *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet*, p. 362 n. 26.

[159] L, pp. 207.4, 312.5, 437.1, 491.2, 492.4, 493.5. The last two references present the term *a nu yo ga pa*.

[160] *Ibid.*, pp. 26.4, 220.6.

[161] *Ibid.*, p. 207.3-4. See note 166.

[162] *Ibid.*, pp. 192.4, 196.6, 207.4. Cf. S. G. Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, cit., pp. 142-143; Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "Miscellanea to a Recent Contribution on/to the Bsam-yas Debate", *Kailash*, XI.3-4, pp. 172-173.

[163] Cf. S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, p. 125 ff.

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Furthermore, the texts differ in the emphasis given to the three means. [164] For this reason, 'Jam mgon 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1914) in the epitome of Rong zom's commentary writes:

"The means of creation in Mahāyoga emphasizes the method (upāya), the process of creation. The means of completion in Anuyoga gives greater importance to wisdom (prajñā), the process of completion. The means of the Great Completion ati accentuates the union of method and wisdom in which the non-dual state consists." [165]

The Guhyagarbha, therefore, is a tantra of Mahāyoga, because it highlights the process of creation, nevertheless it also includes the process of completion and the Atiyoga phase that characterizes the "Great Completion." Therefore, Nubchen was right to treat the theme of Anuyoga in the context of Mahāyoga. Confirmation of this is sufficient to note that in the sixth chapter the partial indirect citation of the rdzogs pa'i tshul taken from Padmasambhava's text is explicitly connected to Anuyoga. [166] Furthermore, in the same chapter there are also two direct citations of the Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba, both connected to the rdzogs pa chen po'i tshul, that is, to Atiyoga. [167]

[164] Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, Slob dpon sangs rgyas gnyis pa'i gsung dngos/man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba zhes bya ba'i 'grel pa, pp. 85.6-86.3 (cf. RZCh, vol. I, p. 334): "rnal 'byord (sic) nang pa'i tshul la bskyed rdzogs rnam pa gsum gyi tshul gsum du gzahag pa' (sic) ni rgyud kyi gzahung gcig gam lha'i dkyil 'khord (sic) gcig bsgom pa'i tshul la'ang rnal 'byord pa shes rab dang ting nge 'dzind (sic) gyi stobs che chung gi bye brag gis tshul gsum du bshad pa yin la gzahung so so la yang tshul gsum gyi shas che chung gi bye brag yod do zhes kyang grags so. Cf. ibi, pp. 92.6-94.3 (RZCh, vol. I, p. 337).

[165] 'Jam mgon 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho, Slob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas kyis mdzad pa'i man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba mchan 'grel nor bu'i bang mdzod, p. 437: thabs bskyed pa gtso bor ston pa bskyed pa'i tshul ma hā yo ga dang shes rab rdzogs rim shas cher ston pa rdzogs pa'i tshul a nu yo ga dang gnyis med zung 'jug gtso bor ston pa a ti rdzogs pa chen po'i tshul lo.

[166] L, p. 207.3-4: lta ba'i phreng ba las don dam pa skye 'gag med pa las kun rdzob tu lha dang lha mor bsgom pa a nu yo ga'i skabs su gsungs pas [...]. Cf. Padmasambhava, Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba, pp. 6.6-7.2: rdzogs pa'i tshul ni don dam par skye 'From the perspective of the teachings, the ultimate meaning is that there is no birth or cessation, and in the context of the relative, the divine beings and the divine mothers are taught in a way that does not contradict."

[167] On pages 196.6-197.1, 207.3-4.



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The treatise on bhava is an exposition of Dzogchen based on the thirteenth chapter of the Guhyagarbhatantra [168] The subsequent rnying ma tradition defines this form of Dzogchen as "the Atiyoga of Mahāyoga" [169] Sangs rgyas ye shes, in the sixth chapter, differentiating the instructions with and without support, describes the latter as: "The absence of support is the oral transmission instruction that teaches meditation on reality as it is, free from action, reflection, and threefold discipline. This is specific to Atiyoga. [170] If the "means of the Great Completion" (rdzogs pa chen po'i tshul) is the Atiyoga of Mahāyoga, then the means of completion or rdzogs rim is the Anuyoga of Mahāyoga and the means of creation or bskyed rim is the Mahāyoga of Mahāyoga [171] This treatment of the three means is supported by a brief writing of Indrabhūti [172] which, in its essential simplicity, attests to an early stage of the Dzogchen tradition.

The fundamental elements of the two processes or stages of tantric meditation in accordance with the Guhyagarbha are expounded by Indrabhūti. The first, known in Tibetan as bskyed rim, or "creation process," is the gradual visualization of deities. When the practitioner succeeds in maintaining concentration on the visualized images, they then proceed to meditate according to the rdzogs rim, the "completion process," wherein the deities are visualized instantaneously.

[168] Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, Slob dpon sangs rgyas gnyis pa'i gsung dngos, p. 20.2-3 (RZCh, vol. I, p. 303); Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, rGyud rgyal gsang ba snying po dkon cog 'grel, pp. 192-203. Cf. dPal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid rnam par nges pa Guhyagarbha (La matrice segreta), DK, pp. 246.4-248.3.

[169] rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, dPal gsang ba'i snying po'i rgyud kyi spyi don nyung ngu'i ngang gis rnam par 'byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig, pp. 381.6-382.1: lung gi bka' sgo las ma hā'i ma hā ni lha'i dkyil 'khor rim pas bskyed pa'o ma hā'i a nu ni rang bzhin gyi dkyil 'khor lhun gyis grub pa'o ma hā'i a ti ni don dam ngo bo ma skyes pa'o zhes gsungs pa ltar rim 'jug gi spros pa che chung la ltos te gsum du phye ba [...] dang de'i nang nas kyang chos thams cad ye nas sangs rgyas par rtsal du bton nas ston pas ma hā'i a tir 'jog pa sgyu 'phrul mkhan po phal che ba'i bzhed pa.

[170] L, p. 222.4-5: de la rten med ni snyan khung brgyud pa'i man ngag de bzhin nyid bsgom pa bya bsam bslab pa bral bar ston pa ste a ti yo ga la khyad du gzugs so.

[171] To support these correspondences, rDo grub chen cites a source of ati-yoga known as Kun byed rgyal po (Chos thams cad rdzogs pa chen po byang chub kyi sems kun byed rgyal po): DK, p. 22.4-6; PK, f. 11b.4-6; see also rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, op. cit., p. 382.1-2. Cf. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu – Adriano Clemente, The Supreme Source. Kunjed Gyalpo: The Fundamental Tantra of Dzogchen Semde, p. 155.

[172] Regarding the figure of Indrabhūti, see Jo Nang Tāranātha, *The Seven Instruction Lineages*, pp. 24-25, 110 n. 97. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, pp. 242-245. For the three Indrabhūtis, cf. David L. Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra*, vol. 1, pp. 12-14; Tarthang Tulku, *op. cit.*, p. 394. According to the dGongs 'dus (GD), commented on by Nubchen in MG, Atiyoga was revealed in a dream, along with Mahāyoga and Anuyoga, to the mythical King Kuñjara/Dza, who gave rise to the oral transmission (gang zag snyan brgyud). This king is said to have lived in the region east of Bodhgayā. Later sources identify King Dza/Tsa with Indrabhūti of Za hor (Bengal) or Uḍḍiyāna. In contrast to this narrative, the official tradition attributes to the master dGa' rab rdo rje of Uḍḍiyāna the merit of having taught rdzog chen to humans for the first time. See J. P. Dalton, *The Uses of the dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, pp. 52-56, 67 n. 64, 111-112. However, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the colophon of the initial section of a mahāyoga text transmitted by Vasudhara to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes places King Dza right before dGa' rab rdo rje in the initiatory lineage (cf. gShin rje nag po gsang ba de kho na nyid kyi rgyud kha thun, p. 151.1-2; gShin rje nag po kha thun gsang ba de kho na nyid phyi ma'i rgyud, p. 156.5-6). Instead, the colophon of a text of atiyoga, the Bang mdzod 'phrul gyi me long (TK, p. 264.6-7), which gNubs chen composed by versifying the instructions received from gNyag Jñānakumāra, traces the transmission back to the Indian master Mañjuśrīmitra ('Jam dpal bshes gnyen), passing through g.Yu sgra snying po, his Tibetan teacher Vairocana, and Śrīsiṃha, the Indian disciple of Mañjuśrīmitra. However, this source is only the concluding part of a cycle, probably consisting of four texts (TK, Kha, pp. 148.7-264.7), the first of which should be the Byang chub sems kyi man ngag rin chen 'phreng ba. Now, the second chapter of this text, recounting the origin of the teaching, states that it was revealed by Samantabhadra to Vajrasattva in heaven; then the revelation passed to dGa' rab rdo rje, who transmitted it to 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen on a mountain (TK, Kha, p. 152.1-2). Up to this point, we would remain within the official historiographical tradition, except that the text concludes this lineage of the dharmakāya by stating that the teaching of 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen was heard in the depths of the ocean by a being called dGa' bo/po 'jog po (cf. TshB, Ja, p. 663.2). Aside from the mythological aspect of the first section, the association of gNubs Sangs rgya ye shes with gNyag Jñānakumāra could have a historical basis; however, if this possibility is accepted, it must be considered that, according to the colophons of various canonical sources, Jñānakumāra collaborated as a translator with Padmasambhava and, above all, Vimalamitra. See Jean-Luc Achard, "La liste des Tantras du rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum selon l'édition établie par Kun mkhyen 'jigs med gling pa."

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Namely: this is the process of creation of the process of completion, or, in other words, the completion of the process of creation. [173]

The most interesting part for us is the conclusion of the process of completion, described as follows: "Being firmly established in that concentration of the rdzogs rim, subsequently one must no longer create such thoughts, nor even meditate on the state devoid of concepts. With no duality of thought and absence of thought, it is the natural clear light. Without fixating on things and mental images, one abides in the state without references. Thoughts are without birth. If there is no birth, there is no cessation. Birth and cessation are not two separate things. The true reality is devoid of duality: the original condition and Gnosis are not dual; the Buddhas and sentient beings are not dual. Remaining thus, one attains realization, the state of Buddha in this very life, which is the result called Dharmakāya." [174]

Indrabhūti merely indicates the nature of the concluding phase without naming it. However, in the later and more elaborate sGyu 'phrul dbang gi gal po'i don 'grel by Buddhaguhya, [175] not only do the expressions "completion of creation" (bskyed pa'i rdzogs pa) [176] and "process of creation" (bskyed pa'i rim pa) appear, but also the term "process of completion" (rdzogs pa'i rim pa) is introduced.

[173] Indrabhūti, dPal gsang ba'i snying po'i rim pa gnyis kyi don, f. 210b.2-3: de ltar lha rnam bskyed pa ni bskyed pa'i rim par gsungs pa'o ting 'ting 'dzin de la legs gnas nas rdzogs pa'i rim pa 'dod pa yis skad cig nyid la lha rnam gsal rdzogs pa'i rim pa'i bskyed rim (rims) te bskyed pa'i rim pa'i rdzogs pa'o.

[174] Ibid., f. 210b.3-6: ting 'dzin de la legs gnas nas yang ni rnam rtog de mi sgom rtog med kyang ni sgom mi bya rtog dang mi rtog gnyis med de rang bzhin gyis ni 'od gsal te dngos po mtshan mar dmigs pa med dmigs su med pa'i ngang gnas pa rnam par rtog pa skye ba med skye ba med na 'gag pa med skye 'gag gnyis su mi bgos (dgos) pa de nyid gnyis su med pa ste dbyings dang ye shes gnyis su med sangs rgyas sems can gnyis su med de ltar gnas nas mngon gyur pa tshe 'di nyid la (las) sangs rgyas te 'bras bu chos kyi sku zhes bshad.

[175] Regarding the identity of this important 8th-century Indian master, cf. Erberto Lo Bue, "The Dharmamaṇḍala-sūtra by Buddhaguhya," in Gherardo Gnoli – Lionello Lanciotti (eds), *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, pp. 790-791; S. G. Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, cited, pp. 61-63; Stephen Hodge, "Considerations on the Dating and Geographical Origins of the Mahāvairocanaṅbhisambodhi-sūtra" in Tadeusz Skorupski – Ulrich Pagel (eds), *The Buddhist Forum. Volume III, 1991-1993: Papers in Honour and Appreciation of Professor David Seyfort Ruegg's Contribution to Indological, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies*, pp. 70-72; Ronald M. Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-159.

[176] Buddhaguhya (Sangs rgyas gsang ba), in sGyu 'phrul dbang gi gal po'i don 'grel, p. 251 (f. 182a.8).

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the stage of "development" (rdzogs pa'i bskyed rim), [177] already attested in Indrabhūti, but the final phase "free from action and effort" (bya ba brtsal dang bral ba) is defined as the "completion of completion" (rdzogs pa'i rdzogs pa). [178] In line with the explanation given by Indrabhūti, it is specified here that "regarding the completion of completion, there is no concept of letters, subtle states, and divine bodies, therefore it is called the 'great method free from effort'. Since from this point onwards it is no longer necessary to seek any of the qualities of the Buddhas, this means is called the 'Great Completion'." [179]

Consistent with the ancient tradition, Nubchen defines the final method as "without action", as it constitutes the concluding phase in which one must dispense with the supports that characterize both the bskyed rim and the rdzogs rim; but, unlike the text of Indrabhūti, which envisages only the gradual path, in the sixth chapter he also indicates the possibility of directly accessing this method, without having first stabilized concentration on a support: this depends on the practitioner's abilities. [180] The discussion of the sudden access to the method without action in the sixth chapter, [181] attainable by those with high abilities, is substantially indistinguishable from the exposition of Atiyoga in the seventh chapter. One is then led to wonder what need Nubchen and his masters had to isolate Atiyoga from its original context, as if Dzogchen had never been connected to the dyad of bskyed rim and rdzogs rim. [182] The only relevant difference found in the two aforementioned chapters regarding the method of "non-action" does not concern the content, but the sources cited to validate it. Apart from the GD, which we have already mentioned, and the KD, [183] on which the previous source is based, the twenty-two titles that appear in the

[177] Ibid., p. 251 (f. [182] .4-5); p. 252 (f. 184b.1).

[178] Ibid., p. 251 (f. [183] .3); p. 252 (f. 184b.1).

[179] Ibid., p. 252 (ff. 184b.7-185a.1): de'i rdzogs pa ni yi ge dang phra mo dang sku gang yang mi rtog pas thabs chen po bya brtsal dang bral zhes bya'o de phan cad sangs rgyas kyī yon tan kun btsal (brtsal) mi dgos pas rdzogs pa chen po zhes smos so.

[180] L, p. 223.4-5: dbye ba yang bsam pa'i dbang gis gnyis te rim gyis pa dang cig char pa'o dbang po rno rtul gyi bye brag gis bzhag go.

[181] Ibid., pp. 238.5-251.1. Cf. rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, op. cit. p. 438.4 sg.

[182] L, p. 360.5: "Since the Great Completion is free from creation and completion, there is no duality of increase and decrease" (rdzogs pa chen po bskyed rdzogs dang bral ba'i phyir 'phel 'grib gnyis med).

[183] See rDo rje bkod pa (The Adamantine Composition).

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The sources I have traced regarding the origins of Atiyoga are independent of the traditional literature of Mahāyoga and attest to the complete separation of Dzogchen from that tantric matrix. Nubchen cites these sources as authoritative scriptures that were evidently widely known in his era.

Among the Tibetan manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang (under Tibetan occupation from 781/7 to 848) by Sir Aurel Stein and preserved at the India Office Library in London, S. Karmay identified in 1973 two Dzogchen texts that could confirm the authenticity of the Atiyoga taught by Nubchen. The first source (IOL 647) is cited twice in the seventh chapter with the title *Khu byug* (The Cuckoo). [184] It is anonymous, but its antiquity and importance are indicated by the fact that it is wholly or partially incorporated into other significant sources, in addition to being considered one of the earliest Dzogchen texts, if not the very first, translated by the Tibetan master Vairocana in the 8th century. [185] The second source (IOL 594) is the *sBas pa'i rgum chung* (The Small Collection of Hidden Precepts) by Sangs rgyas sbas pa, who was most likely an important Indian master of Atiyoga known in Sanskrit as Buddhagupta. [186] His name appears in the sixth chapter of the SM along with those of Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava. [187] 'Gos Lo tsā ba identifies this Buddhagupta, Vimalamitra's teacher, with the renowned tantric master Buddhaguhya (Sangs rgyas gsang ba); S. Karmay also leans towards this identification, while N. Norbu prefers to keep the two identities distinct. [188] Now, Nubchen cites four times in the seventh chapter a text entitled *rGum chung*, [189] but, as S. Karmay has pointed out, it is not the *sBas pa'i rgum chung*, but rather the *Man ngag rgum chung* composed by gNyan dPal dbyangs.

[184] L, pp. 323.3, 347.4.

[185] Cf. S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48; Namkhai Norbu, *Dzog-chen: lo stato di autoperfezione*, p. 57; Ani Jinba Palmo (tr.), *The Great Image: The Life Story of Vairocana the Translator*, p. 148.

[186] Cf. S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-76; Nam mkha'i Nor bu, *sBas pa'i rgum chung: The Small Collection of Hidden Precepts*. The manuscript states that the teaching of Sangs rgyas sbas pa concerns Atiyoga: *phyogs ni a ti yo gar gtogs so*. Vd. S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, p. 74 (l.1).

[187] L, p. 223.1: *slob dpon bi ma la dang 'bu ta kug ta dang padmo'i gzhung*.

[188] Cf. 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, *op. cit.*, pp. 170, 191, 351; S. G. Karmay, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63; Nam mkha'i Nor bu, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-56; Ronald M. Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 376 n. 132.

[189] L, pp. 382.2, 404.1, 404.6, 440.5.

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Nonetheless, three of the verses cited appear almost identical in the *sBas pa'i rgum chung*. [191] The latter could therefore be a source of the teachings of dPal dbyangs, in which case it would corroborate the exposition of Atiyoga in the ninth chapter of the SM.

After this work by Sangs rgyas ye shes, if one excludes the supposed or actual translations of Dzogchen sources, [192] the most significant writing in line with this approach is the *Theg pa chen po'i tshul la 'jug pa by Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po* (11th century); [193] but precisely during that period, at the beginning of the new dissemination of the Dharma in Tibet, the texts of the *Bi ma snying thig* begin to appear, a cycle of Dzogchen instructions that are believed to have been secretly transmitted by the Indian master Vimalamitra (invited to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen) and subsequently concealed as *gter ma* (Terma) or "treasures", so that they could be rediscovered at the most propitious moment for their dissemination. [194] In contrast to the Atiyoga of the SM, the instructions of the *Bi ma snying thig* are based on the two tantric stages.

[191] gNyan dPal dbyangs, *rNal 'byor spyod pa'i lugs nges pa'i don la ji bzhin sgom thabs kyi sgron ma* (Man ngag rgum chung) pp. 769.7, 770., 770.1, 770.2-3; S. G. Karmay, op. cit., pp. 83-85 (vv. 3-4, 9-12, 17-24). In the sixth chapter, Sangs rgyas ye shes lists gNyan dPal dbyangs among the Tibetan masters who ascended to the heavens at the time of their departure (L, p. 278.2: *mkhan po gnyan dpal dbyangs mkha' 'gro mas bsus nas gshegs*). Cf. Sam van Schaik, "The Early Days of the Great Perfection", pp. 190 [194] [192] The most important of these sources is the *Kun byed rgyal po* (*Chos thams cad rdzogs pa chen po byang chub kyi sems kun byed rgyal po*). Cf. Eva Neumaier-Dargay, *The Sovereign All-Creating Mind*; Chögyal Namkhai Norbu – Adriano Clemente, *La suprema sorgente*. According to the colophon, the text would be a translation from Sanskrit conducted by the Tibetan Vairocana together with the Indian Śrī Sīmha, therefore during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (755-797); however, it is never cited by Sangs rgyas ye shes, while the existence of this source is attested in the edict of Pho brang Zhi ba 'od dating back to 1092.

[193] *Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po*, *Theg pa chen po'i tshul la 'jug pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos*. Cf. S. G. Karmay, op. cit., p. 125.

[194] Cf. R. Prats, op. cit., p. 45 ff.; Tarthang Tulku, op. cit., pp. 250-252; Tulku Thondup, *The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa*, p. 38 ff.

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In particular, they use various techniques of mental focus (*dmigs pa*) peculiar to the "process of completion". [195]

In the seventh chapter, Nubchen forcefully denounces the error of introducing into Atiyoga methods that involve searching and effort, using analysis or the concentration of the mind on concrete or visualized supports. [196] From the text, it is clear that this gradual praxis, evidently already in vogue in the second half of the 9th century, [197] was considered necessary by some teachers, but was categorically opposed by Nubchen, who considered it non-traditional, contradictory, and deviant. Yet, it will be precisely this innovative "technical" approach that will prove to be the most influential.

[195] Cf. Rang 'byung rdo rje, *Nyams len lag khrigs ma'i khrid ngo mtshar can*, p. 231.1-2: "In the unsurpassed yoga there are the process of creation, the union of creation and completion, and the process of completion. Here the process of completion is taught (*rnal 'byor bla na med pa la bskyed pa dang bskyed rdzogs mtshams sbyor ba dang rdzogs rim las 'dir rdzogs pa'i rim pa*)." The cited text is a summary of the meditative practice that characterizes the *Bi ma snying thig*. It was composed by the Third Karmapa (1284-1339), a disciple of Rig 'dzin Ku ma ra dza (1266-1343), who in turn was the teacher of Klong chen rab 'byams pa (1308-1363). The latter collected and commented on the Dzogchen instructions attributed to Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava according to the *gter ma* tradition. The correspondence between these meditative systems and the *rdzogs rim* of Mahāyoga is evident.

[196] L, pp. 298.5-299.4; 311.1-312.2; 327.6-328.6; 339.2-5; 352.1-4; 356.1-3; 368.1-4; 374.2-4; 380.3-5; 423.1-5. Almost identical passages are also found in MG: I, p. 513.4-6 (cf. L, pp. 327.6-328.6); I, p. 675.3-5 (cf. L, pp. 298.5-299.4, 374.2-4); II, p. 244.1-245.1 (cf. L, pp. 311.1-312.2). See J. Dalton, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-317.

[197] Confirmation of the Indian origin of this tendency could be the brief text of Nāgabodhi (*Klu'i byang chub*) entitled *A ti rnal 'byor gyi sgom pa'i thabs* (The Method of Meditation of Atiyoga). Nāgabodhi or Nāgabuddhi (9th century) met the tantric master Nāgārjuna on Mount Śrīparvata (Śrīśaila in Andhra Pradesh), who was a disciple of Saraha. Cf. Lama Chimpa – Alaka Chattopadhyaya (trs), *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, p. 127.

It will emerge victorious in Tibet, resurfacing in almost all the sources of Dzogchen that will proliferate in the centuries that follow. [198] This genre of literature, classified as *man ngag sde*, will be considered superior to the sources used by Sangye yeshe: most of them will fall under the *sems sde*; [199] while the GD, the most quoted text, particularly in the seventh chapter,

[198] It is on this basis that some important contemporary *nying ma pa* masters have reiterated the dependence of Dzogchen on the methods of the two tantric stages (*bskyed rim* and *rdzogs rim*): for example, see the comments in Long-ch'en Rab-jam-pa, *The Four-Themed Precious Garland: An Introduction to Dzog-ch'en, the Great Completeness*, pp. 37-39, and in Karma Chagmé, *Naked Awareness: Practical Instructions on the Union of Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen*, pp. 14-15. Even the great 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798) adopts the gradual procedure, nonetheless recognizing the possibility of the direct approach, the one without supports, which he considers feasible only for Yogin endowed with extraordinarily high abilities, such as dGa' rab rdo rje, Padmasambhava and Indrabhūti; consequently, in his *Klong chen snying thig* the value of the direct path remains relegated to the theoretical realm of the "way of seeing", while in practice ordinary people must follow a particular progressive path dependent on the two stages of tantra. Cf. Sam van Schaik, "The Resolution of the Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches to the Great Perfection in the Klong chen snying thig" in Henk Blezer (ed.), *Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Leiden 2000, pp. 309-320; Sam van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Methods of Dzogchen Practice in the Longchen Nyintig*, pp. 182, 187.

[199] The teachings of Dzogchen are classified into three main systems: *sems sde*, *klong sde*, *man ngag sde*. This classification, however, does not appear in the writings of Nubchen and in none of the texts he cites, while it is attested in some sources of the *man ngag sde*: cf. 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, op. cit., pp. 137-138, 170-171; Tulku Thondup, *The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa*, p. 153; Buddha Mind, cited, pp. 51-52; S. G. Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, cited, pp. 23-24, 207-208. The known meditation systems of the *sems sde* (see *nyang lugs*: DDz, vol 1, pp. 275-300; *kham lugs*: ibid., pp. 311-361; *a ro lugs*: ibid., pp. 363-378) use Mantra, concentration and visualization techniques, adopting a procedure similar to that which characterizes the gradual instructions of *mahāmudrā*: cf. Wang-ch'ug Dor-je, *La Mahamudra che elimina il buio dell'ignoranza*. Also the *klong sde*, whose introduction in Tibet is attributed to the Tibetan translator and master Vairocana in the 8th century (see 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, op. cit., p. 172 ff.), is based on the two tantric meditative processes, emphasizing the *rdzogs rim* which, specifically, is clearly related to *svarayoga*: cf. *rDzogs pa chen po klong sde'i snyan brgyud rin po che rdo rje zam pa'i sgom khrid kyi lag len*, DDz, vol. 1, p. 418; Swami Sivananda, *Svara Yoga*; by the same author see *Kundalini Yoga*, pp. 58-60; Swami Muktibodhananda, *Swara Yoga: The Tantric Science of Brain Breathing*.



this title will become a source of Anuyoga. [200] All this will contribute to discouraging the study of the SM, to the point that, as S. Karmay has noted, in 1800 it will not even be mentioned among the rare works [201]

## 4.4. The Seventh Chapter

At this point it is necessary to outline the specific path of the seventh chapter, focusing on the main themes and clarifying, as far as possible, the fundamental premises. The exposition of Atiyoga is divided into five parts:

- (1) Theory or "Way of Seeing" (lta ba, dr̥ṣṭi): This section focuses on the foundational understanding of the teachings.
- (2) Practical Theme of Meditation (sgom pa, bhāvanā): Here, the emphasis is on the experiential cultivation of insights gained from the theoretical understanding.
- (3) Subsequent Phase of Conduct (spyod pa, caryā): This part addresses the regulation of behavior during the periods between meditative sessions.
- (4) The Fruit or Goal of the Path ('bras bu, phala): This section discusses the ultimate outcome of the practice.
- (5) Appendix on Superiority: The final part demonstrates the superiority of Atiyoga over the other systems discussed in the previous chapters.

The initial part is the dominant one in terms of breadth and complexity [202] The introductory section (1.1.1.) begins with the explanation of the Sanskrit term Atiyoga and the Tibetan expression rdzogs pa chen po, that is, "Great Completion". The latter is interpreted as "Spontaneous completion" (lhun rdzogs), a phrase that, in turn, refers to an important term of mahāyāna: anābhoga, that is, "without effort"; its Tibetan version is lhun gyis grub pa (lhun grub), which in the translation of the text is usually rendered as "Spontaneous Presence". According to the Laṅkāvatārasūtra, the Buddhas teach that the tathāgatagarbha, the matrix or potentiality of enlightenment present in sentient beings, is effortless.

[200] Cf. Tarthang Tulku, op. cit., pp. 232-235; Tulku Thondup, The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa, pp. 23-24; Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 289, 485-489, 537, 608-609; J. Dalton, op. cit., p. 318. Following the classification of the GD as Anuyoga, some rnying ma pa masters, since Zur ham Shākya 'byung gnas in the 14th century, will question the actual presence of the specific Atiyoga initiation in the tradition of that same source: cf. J. Dalton, op. cit., p. 153 n. 30; Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., pp. 364-365.

[201] S. G. Karmay, op. cit., p. 102.

[202] L, pp. 290.6-403.2.

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consequently, "as long as there is a mind that strives in a deliberate manner, the pinnacle cannot be reached with regard to the vehicles." [203] In the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra), the most studied source in Tibet on the topic of tathāgatagarbha, it is stated that the state of Buddha has the quality of spontaneity, because mental elaborations or projections (prapañca, spros pa) and discriminative thoughts (vikalpa, rnam par rtog pa) have ceased to exist. [205] A scriptural quote within the same text states: "O Mañjuśrī, the Tathāgatha Buddha does not conceptualize and does not discriminate; however, his qualified activities are carried out Spontaneously, without conceptualizing and without discriminating." [206] A Buddha, in fact, does not have concepts or discriminative thoughts regarding who he benefits, the means employed, the place, and the time. [207]

Nubchen states that the "great principle" of Spontaneous Presence "is not something to which the mind should be directed," trying to understand it through concepts: "this principle is understood in direct self-aware perception." [208] To clarify this fundamental point, we must return to the sixth chapter, where a passage from Padmasambhava's Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba (The Garland of Contemplations) is cited, which reads:

"Direct understanding does not consist in relying solely on the words of scriptures (āgama) and instructions (upadeśa), and it is not even in contradiction with scriptures and instructions; it is the direct understanding that is attained through self-awareness." [209]

[203] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (tr.), The Lankavatara Sutra, p. 69 (78).

[204] Ibid., p. 116 (135).

[205] Jikido Takasaki, A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra), pp. 156-157.

[206] Ibid., p. 145. See Asaṅga, Theg pa chen po'i rgyud bla ma bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa (Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra), p. 149.7: 'jam dpal de bzhin gshegs pa ni rtog par mi mdzad rnam par rtog par mi mdzad mod kyi de lta na yang de 'di lta bu'i rang bzhin gyi mdzad pa 'di ni mi rtog rnam par mi rtog bzhin du lhun gyis grub par 'jug go.

[207] J. Takasaki, op. cit., pp. 351-352. Cf. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra, pp. 99-100, 216, 378-379.

[208] L, p. 291.2-3.

[209] Ibid., pp. 192.4-5: mngon sum par rtogs zhes (ces) bya ba ni lung dang man ngag gi tshig tsam la brten pa yang ma yin lung dang man ngag dang 'gal ba yang ma yin par rang gi rig (rigs) pas mngon sum du rtogs pa'o. Cf. Padmasambhava, Mang ngag lta ba'i phreng ba, p. 11.2-3: mngon sum par rtogs pa ni chos thams cad ye nas sangs rgyas par gnas pa de yang lung dang man ngag dang 'gal ba.

Shortly thereafter, the text emphasizes the equivalence between self-awareness and enlightened Consciousness, or Bodhicitta:

"Self-awareness, this enlightened Consciousness, transcends the notions of masculine and feminine. It is free from family lineage and unbound by the physical traits of form and color. It is also devoid of negative determinations. Omnipresent and universally clear, it does not conceive of characteristics and holds no concepts. It remains unmodified, uncreated, unexamined, unconsidered, and unaltered." [210]

Before delving into the topic of self-awareness, I will dwell on the expression "enlightened Consciousness." In Mahayana, Bodhicitta is of two types: absolute and relative. The former is defined by sGam po pa as "the emptiness that has the heart of compassion and is clear, unmoving, free from the extremes of mental elaborations." [211] It is said that its development begins when one attains the first level of Bodhisattva. However, this realization requires the prior development of the second type of Bodhicitta, outlined as "the vow to liberate all sentient beings from samsara through the motivation of compassion." [212] In the Gandavyuhasūtra, the relative Bodhicitta is described "as the seed of all the qualities of a Buddha, [...] because from it arises the maṇḍala of the activities of all Bodhisattvas, and also all the Buddhas of the past, future, and present." [213]

When the term Bodhicitta is mentioned in the ancient texts of Atiyoga, it refers primarily to its true essence; the absolute. However, this concept is further enriched by the qualities associated with relative Bodhicitta. These qualities include tathāgatagarbha, which embodies the luminous nature of Consciousness, often described as "clear light" (prabhāsvara). [214]

[210] L, p. 196.1-3: "One's own awareness, the enlightened mind, is without masculine or feminine gender, without family lineage, free from the physical characteristics of form and color, unadorned, omnipresent and clear, without perceiving characteristics, and unmodified, uncreated, uninvestigated, unconsidered, and unaltered."

[211] sGam po pa, Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan, p. 359.2: "The emptiness that has the heart of compassion, clear and unmoving, free from the extremes of mental elaborations." Cf. sGam.po.pa, *The Precious Ornament of Liberation*, p. 127.

[212] sGam po pa, Dam chos, cit., p. 359.4-5: "The vow to liberate all sentient beings from samsara through compassion."

[213] Sangs rgyas phal po che zhes bya ba shin tu rgyas pa chen po'i mdo, p. 618.1: "Bodhicitta is like the seed of all the qualities of a Buddha"; *ibid.*, p. 623.2-3: "From this arises the maṇḍala of the activities of all Bodhisattvas, and also all the Buddhas of the past, future, and present." Thomas Cleary (tr.), *Entry into the Realm of Reality: A translation of the Gandavyuha, the final book of the Avatamsaka Sutra*, pp. 352, 354.

[214] Cf. S. K. Hookham, *The Buddha Within: Tathagatagarbha Doctrine According to the Shentong Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhaga*, pp. 94-97; 278-279; J. Takasaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 45, 174, 188, 237, 327; Minoru Kiyota, *Tantric Concept of Bodhicitta: A Buddhist Experiential Philosophy*, pp. 7, 14, 38, 58-60, 87-91.

Padmasambhava describes it thus:

"The Self-aware clear light is empty, Dharmakāya. Like the sun rising in the cloudless sky, it knows all things clearly, without any discriminative thought. There is a great difference between understanding it and not understanding it." [215]

Therefore, the absolute Bodhicitta is self-aware, but what is the nature of this self-aware direct perception?

Some Buddhist schools of logic recognize The Self-cognizing (sva-saṃvedana, °-saṃvitti) function of ordinary human Consciousness as a type of "direct perception" (pratyakṣa), characterized by the absence of concepts (rtog bral). [216] Specifically, The Self-aware direct perception pointed out by Nubchen at the beginning of the seventh chapter is that accepted by Śāntarakṣita (725-788), a prominent exponent of madhyamaka (considered a yogācāra-mādhyamika-svātantrika). [217] According to this view, Consciousness is by nature self-aware or self-conscious, like a lamp that illuminates itself: this self-cognizing property is what distinguishes it from the non-sentient. Since self-awareness is not a separate Consciousness, but the very nature of Consciousness itself, it is considered a direct perception.

[215] Padmasambhava (Padma 'byung gnas), *Rig pa ngo sprod gcer mthong rang grol* (The Introduction to Awareness: Spontaneous Liberation through Naked Vision): rang rig 'od gsal stong pa chos kyi sku sprin med dvangs pa mkha la nyi shar 'dra rnam rtog mi mnga' cir yang sa ler mkhyen 'di don rtogs dang ma rtogs khyad par che. The text cited here is a collection of instructions attributed to Padmasambhava and rediscovered as gter ma by Karma gling pa in the 14th century, along with other texts belonging to the well-known funerary cycle of the Bar do thos grol: see my *Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga*, pp. 146-147; Padmasambhava, *Awareness: Rigpa*, p. 14. Cf. Dieter Michael Back, *Rig pa ño sprod gcer mthoñ rañ grol. Die Erkenntnislehre des Bar do thos-grol*, pp. 52-53; Padmasambhava, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, p. 45.

[216] See Lati Rinpoche, *Mind in Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 18, 53-55, 58, 110-111.

[217] Cf. Herbert V. Guenther, *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice*, pp. 110-112, 119; Geshe Lhundrup Sopa – Jeffrey Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 124-126; James Blumenthal, *The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Śāntarakṣita*, pp. 82-90, 169; Ju Mipham, *Speech of Delight: Mipham's Commentary on Śāntarakṣita's Ornament of the Middle Way*, pp.

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Self-awareness, in its essence, transcends the duality of subject and object. [218] P. Williams highlights Kamalaśīla's, (disciple of Śāntarakṣita) assertion that this self-cognizant quality is recognized without the need for reasoning; it is intrinsically clear and self-evident, to the extent that even a cowherd can become aware of it. [219] The tradition followed by Nubchen acknowledges that this direct self-conscious perception serves as a means for even beginners to access an understanding of the true nature of their own Consciousness and, consequently, the absolute Bodhicitta. However, this theme is not explored in depth in the SM, as the introduction (ngo sprod) to this understanding occurs during the initiatic transmission from master to disciple. [220]

At the beginning of the second paragraph (1.1.2.), Nubchen states:

"In the vehicle of Atiyoga [...] there is not even an evaluable entity that can be assessed by one's discriminative intelligence (so sor rtogs pa'i shes rab)." [221]

He refers to the gradual path of Mahāyāna, where the development of intelligence (prajñā) is fundamental. This intelligence is not merely worldly, arising from the knowledge of various human disciplines, but rather supramundane, born from inner or spiritual insight. It is defined as:

"the discrimination of the entities that constitute the things to be examined; its function is to eliminate doubt." [222]

Discrimination involves discernment in which evaluable objects are assessed through examination (vitarka, rtog pa) and analysis (vicāra, dpyod pa), with the aim of understanding that all entities are, by nature, emptiness—without birth, without foundation, and lacking a root. [223]

[218] Regarding different modes of "non-duality", see Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *A Study of Svātantrika*, pp. 195-196.

[219] Cf. Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence*, pp. 19-35.

[220] An example of ngo sprod is the text of Padmasambhava cited above (see note 215).

[221] L, p. 291.4-5.

[222] Asaṅga, *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa* (Abhidharmasamuccaya), p. 96.4: brtag pa nyid kyi dngos po'i chos rnam la rab tu rnam par 'byed pa ste som nyi bzlog pa'i las can no.

[223] sGam po pa, *Dam chos*, cited, p. 531.3-4: chos thams cad rang bzhin gyis stong nyid skye ba med pa gzhi med rtsa bral du shes pa'o. Cf. sGam.po.pa, *Il Prezioso Ornamento*, cited, p. [220]. In the following pages, sGam po pa first addresses the theme of the knowledge of prajñā through the analytical method (ibid., pp. [220] 234); but, at the end of this detailed exposition, he states emphatically:

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In the following paragraph (1.1.3.), clarifying a plausible doubt about the possibility of liberation without resorting to examination and analysis, Nubchen introduces another cardinal expression of Atiyoga: "non-action" (*bya ba med pa*). It is synonymous with "non-effort" (*rtsol med*), as it refers to "the fact that there is nothing to be done to be liberated" [224] and, in the specific context, it means:

"There is nothing to evaluate. No action is required for examination. There is nothing to study. No reflection or analysis is necessary." [225]

In the seventh chapter, Nubchen often alludes to the objections of anonymous contemporary figures, tantric practitioners and Dzogchen teachers whom he considers deviant. The first objection (1.1.4.1.), starting from the observation that people's mental abilities are not so high as to allow the understanding of the teaching just exposed, asserts that the logical tools of examination and analysis nevertheless allow one to reach that realization. From Nubchen's reply, it is clear that he did not reject the generic use of the conceptual mind, recognized as central in the gradual system of the sūtra and secondary in the Mahāyoga, but its use in the specific context of Dzogchen (1.1.4.2.):

"In the context of Atiyoga, it is evident that the examination and analysis of mental research do not mean much. Since they are a deception, [...]"

They do not make sense. [226]

[223] (continued) Even those words that would make known the *prajñā* or one's own consciousness concern the ascertainment through concepts, while the meaning of *prajñā* or one's own consciousness transcends what is knowable or sayable (*Dam chos*, cit., pp. 554.5-555.1: *de ltar shes rab bam rang sems shes par bya ba'i tshig de dag kyang rtog pas bcad pa'i ngos nas yin la shes rab bam sems kyi don ni shes par bya ba'am brjod par bya ba las 'das pa yin no*). Cf. *Il Prezioso Ornamento*, cit., p. 234. Then, to confirm what has been said, Gampopa cites two sources, the second of which states: "Homage to the mother of the victorious ones [buddha] of the three times, the transcendent *prajñā* (*pāramitā*), ineffable, inconceivable, indescribable, which has the nature of the unborn and unceasing sky, the field of one's own self-aware gnosis" (*smra bsam brjod med shes rab pha rol phyin ma skyes mi 'gag nam mkha'i ngo bo nyid so so rang rig ye shes spyod yul ba dus gsum rgyal ba'i yum la phyag 'tshal lo*). Consistent with this conclusion, in the following section, *sGam po pa* explains the teaching of *mahāmudrā*, which allows, from a practical perspective, to familiarize oneself with the true nature of one's own consciousness or *prajñā*. These latter instructions do not substantially differ from those of *gNubs chen on atiyoga* (see *Il prezioso Ornamento*, cit., pp. 234-246; *Dam chos*, cit., pp. 556.2-573.2).

[224] L, p. 295.1.

[225] Ibid., p. 296.3-4.

[226] Ibid., p. 304.6.

The correct principle of the unique perspective of Atiyoga (1.1.5) is that the state of Buddha is already realized from the beginning, so "it does not arise at a certain moment from examination through discriminative intelligence." [227]

Nubchen is adamant about the irrelevance of conceptual mind; nevertheless, he makes ample use of various types of argumentative or demonstrative reasoning (*gtan tshigs*, *hetu*), such as scriptural citations, so that the person confused about the principle of Dzogchen, or not yet persuaded of its validity, can have trust (*yid ches pa*). However, there are different degrees of trust. The *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba* clarifies that deep trust comes from direct understanding, without relying merely on the words of the *āgama* and the *upadeśa*; [228] therefore, in the context of the perspective, direct understanding coincides with the trust born from the experience of self-awareness or self-Consciousness (*rang gi rig pa*). Padmasambhava explains that it is precisely this awareness (*rig pa*) that constitutes the path of the Yogin: after such understanding has occurred, one must become increasingly familiar with it until, through full confidence, the complete realization of the fruit is achieved. [229] The understanding understood as trust through self-awareness, then, is not the realization of the fruit; should we then understand it as coinciding with the so-called "direct vision"?

The gradual path of *mahāyāna* is articulated in five main stages, the third of which is defined as the "path of vision" (*darśana mārga*), [230] since it is there that the effective understanding or direct vision of the true nature of reality (*dharmatā*), otherwise called "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) or "absence of self" (*anātman*), occurs for the first time. Those who attain it are considered by the Buddhist community to be "superior beings" (*ārya*), in contrast to the so-called "common people," also defined as "immature" or "worldly." It is to this "vision" (*darśana*) that the following quote (1.1.6) refers:

"Whatever forms may appear to the eye, the essence of substance remains untraceable. True vision lies in the realm of non-seeing. The non-existent is the ultimate reality."

[227] *Ibid.*, p. 306.4.

[228] RZ, pp. 11.2-3,5: "not merely relying on the words of the *āgama* and the *upadeśa*, but with the deep trust born from self-awareness's direct understanding."

[229] *Ibid.*, p. 11.4,6: "Awareness itself is the path of the Yogin; [...] the manifest realization through the power of familiarization is the characteristic of the fruit."

[230] Cf. *sGam.po.pa*, *The Precious Ornament*, op. cit., pp. 249-250.

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The discovery of the ineffable self-awareness experience (brjod med rang rig) is only conventionally called "the discovery of vision". [231] Another excerpt from the same source reads:

"There is vision and yet nothing is seen, because the phenomena that appear are known to be devoid of intrinsic existence. When the profound practice of the secret understanding, the total union of the Buddhas, shines as the Spontaneous direct self-aware perception (rang byung rang rig mngon sum), that very Spontaneous Gnosis (rang byung ye shes) is called 'vision'." [232]

At this point, it is clear that the understanding through direct self-aware perception does not even coincide with this "vision", because it is not "ineffable" nor "Spontaneous": in fact, it can and must be indicated, explained, and exemplified by the teacher, so that the student can recognize it; the latter, in turn, can and must become familiar with it, maintain it, and stabilize it. But it is precisely through this that one can reach the direct vision, when personal effort gives way to impersonal naturalness and the word becomes the echo of pure wonder:

"This clear light, unborn from the beginning and Spontaneous, is the awareness, a child without father and mother: incredible! Not created by anyone, it is the Spontaneous Gnosis: incredible! Having not experienced birth, it has nothing to die: incredible! Although it is directly clear, there is no observer: incredible!" [233]

The second criticism (1.1.7.) concerns those who peddle a method based on madhyamaka, according to a specific non-gradual interpretation of the Chinese dunmen (ston men). This position is discussed at this point because it pertains to a deviant definition of "vision". In the third chapter, Nubchen alludes to the issue, stating that "although the followers of the sudden access ston men speak of non-duality, for them it means that everything is one in the way of seeing according to which the absolute truth is the unborn emptiness". [234] Consequently, they still seek the absolute truth, believing that it can be realized only when the mind is empty, that is, devoid of references (dmigs pa); but "the search for that unborn is an alteration of Consciousness, so they will never have the vision of the great principle." [235]

[231] L, p. 308.1-2.

[232] Ibid., p. 310.3-4. Cf. J. Takasaki, op. cit., pp. 156-157; S. K. Hookham, op. cit., p. 58.

[233] Padmasambhava, Rig pa ngo sprod gcer mthong rang grol: gdod nas ma skyes rang byung 'od gsal 'di pha ma med pa'i rig pa'i khye'u chung mtshar sus kyang ma byas rang byung ye shes mtshar skye ma myong zhing 'chi rgyu med pas mtshar mngon sum gsal yang mthong mkhan med pas mtshar. See Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga: p. 147; Padmasambhava, Consapevolezza: Rigpa, pp. 14-15. Cf. Dieter Michael Back, op. cit., pp. 52-55; Padmasambhava, Il libro tibetano dei morti, p. 45.

[234] L, p. 62.3: gal te gnyis med par smra ba yang ril don dam pa'i bden pa stong pa ma skyes par lta ba der gcig par 'dod de.

[235] Ibid., p. 61.3: de ma (Ch des, L dam > de ma) skyes pa don du gnyer ba ni sems bslad pa ste.

[236] The sugata are the Buddhas "well gone," as they have attained the bliss of perfect nirvāṇa.



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The great principle is that of Dzogchen, which coincides with the absolute enlightened Consciousness (1.1.8.). It is proclaimed thus: "Being the mother of the sugata, [236] it is the universal path. Without it the Buddhas would not appear, therefore it is the supreme path of complete liberation." [237] While the common gradual path of mahāyāna requires great effort before it can be transcended, [238] the supreme path indicated here teaches that it is possible to do without effort without any prior effort, provided one has the capacity. Nubchen affirms that:

"according to this great spiritual system, enlightenment occurs precisely through non-action." [239]

The effective understanding of the principle of Dzogchen is defined as "great understanding without understanding," [240] since it transcends conceptually veiled mental knowledge; nevertheless, in the tradition inherited from Nubchen, the masters have emphasized different but analogous teaching systems. The central section of the first part (1.2.) presents nine points of view, of which the correct understanding is discussed first, and then the defect of misunderstanding.

The first way of seeing (1.2.1.) is that of "absence of objectives" (gza' gtad dang bral ba'i lta ba). Nubchen clarifies that "the objective (gza' gtad) is a reference (dmigs pa)," [241] that is, a concept, an idea or an image that serves as a support for action directed towards its achievement. The most significant example of an objective is the notion of the goal represented by the ideal of enlightenment. When the understanding of the absence of objectives is lacking, [...]

[237] L, p. 314.3-4.

[238] The total abandonment of effort, according to the Daśabūmikasūtra, is possible only with the attainment of the eighth level of Bodhisattva. See D. T. Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, pp. 222-226.

[239] L, p. 313.2.

[240] Ibid., p. 315.3-4.

[241] Ibid., p. 317.1-2.

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The first way of seeing (1.2.1.) is that of the "absence of goals" (*don med pa*). If one seeks enlightenment by desiring it, one will never find it.

The second way of seeing (1.2.2.) is that of "Spontaneous Presence" (*lhun gyis grub pa*). We have already clarified that this expression means "effortlessness." The Buddha nature present in all beings is compared to the mythical "wish-fulfilling gem" (*yid bzhin nor bu*, *cintāmaṇi*): it is this that accomplishes the action and satisfies the needs when it is realized, but it does so without any concept, and thus Spontaneously. This notion is attested in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. [242]

Regarding misunderstanding, Nubchen alludes to the objection raised by those who, while accepting the "Spontaneous Presence" in theory, in practice believe that instructions on focused meditation (*dmigs pa'i man ngag*) are beneficial. Here the term *dmigs pa* indicates the intentional concentration of the mind on certain supports, whether physical or imaginary. Nubchen categorically states that "hoping for the realization of Spontaneous Presence through instructions on mental focusing is a deviation." [243]

The third way of seeing (1.2.3.) is that of the "Great Self" (*bdag nyid chen po*). This expression might at first glance appear heterodox or contaminated by non-Buddhist influences, but it is in fact another peculiar conception of *mahāyāna*, later developed in the tantric tradition of *Mahāyoga*. [244] In the *Śrīmālāsūtra* it is written:

"When sentient beings have faith in the Tathāgata and conceive of him as possessing permanence, bliss, self, and purity, they do not deviate. Why? Because the Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata has the perfection (*pāramitā*) of permanence, bliss, self, and purity." [245]

The *Ratnagotravibhāga* cites the aforementioned text to introduce a passage that reads: "It is the highest self (*paramātman*) because it is peaceful, having eliminated the mental elaborations of self and non-self." [246]

[242] J. Takasaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201, 325, 328, 355, 372.

[243] L, p. 328.2-3.

[244] *Ibid.*, pp. 200.6-204.4.

[245] Alex Wayman – Hideko Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, pp. 45, 102.

[246] J. Takasaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-211, 218-219. See *Asaṅga, Theg pa chen po'i rgyud bla ma bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa*, p. 185.2-3: *bdag dang bdag med spros pa dag nye bar zhi ba dam pa'i bdag*. Cf. S. K. Hookham, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-104.

In accordance with this tradition, Nubchen writes:

"In the naturally uncontaminated state of Consciousness, free from the notion of self and other, The Great Self without self is The Great Self." [247]

In the same paragraph, the five greatneses of the Buddha state (*sangs rgyas pa'i che ba*) are also discussed, a topic addressed in certain Dzogchen sources, although it is rooted in Mahāyoga. It consists of five ways to indicate the equality between the elements (earth, water, fire, air, space) and the tathāgatas (*Akṣobhya*, *Amitābha*, *Ratnasambhava*, *Amoghasiddhi*, *Vairocana*), as exemplified by the basic schema of the maṇḍala. [248]

Nubchen cites the misunderstanding of this perspective as the belief that "although everything is The Self, those who fail to see this principle need to practice a corrective method; therefore, if they engage with effort, they attain the Buddha state." [249] This is a similar contestation to the previous one, evoked multiple times to highlight its incongruence and danger in the context of Dzogchen.

The fourth way of seeing (1.2.4.) is that of "Spontaneous Gnosis" (*rang byung gi ye shes*), a topic already addressed in this introduction. Nubchen explains that its misunderstanding leads one to "strive to make the principle of Gnosis ever clearer, believing that it is born and becomes evident like an object." [250]

The fifth way of seeing (1.2.5.) concerns "freedom from search" (*bya btsal dang bral ba*). Here, the word "search" implies the notion of action (*bya*) performed with effort (*brtsal/rtsol*). It has a similar meaning to *lhun gyis grub pa*, but emphasizes not so much the way in which the Buddha nature operates and manifests, but the fact that it is not attainable through mental activity and transcends the effort to realize it. Although the practitioner seeks to achieve the goal by doing something, whatever action they take, they can never realize what is already present beyond personal effort; therefore, it is stated that all activities are "already accomplished" (*zin pa*) from the beginning. The text considers the following twenty actions prescribed by the gradual approach of tantric Buddhism and clarifies in what sense they are "already accomplished": 1) realizing the benefit of beings; 2) forming the maṇḍala; 3) offering the gift; 4) adhering to the norms of conduct; 5) understanding through the way of seeing; 6) engaging in meditation;

[247] L, pp. 329.6-330.1.

[248] Ibid., pp. 213.1-6.

[249] Ibid., p. 339.4.

[250] Ibid., p. 344.2-3.

7) Maintain the vow; 8) Perform the ritual practice; 9) Achieve the attainments; 10) Complete the accumulation of merit and wisdom; 11) Do not dissipate the attainments achieved; 12) Access the spiritual levels; 13) Complete the empowerments; 14) Eliminate the obscurations of meditation; 15) Perform the symbolic gestures or mudrā; 16) Recite the Mantra; 17) Engage in the ritual embrace; 18) Correct the defects of thoughts; 19) Manifest the signs of inner progress; 20) Attain the warmth of contemplative experience. To confirm the above, one of the cited passages is the following: "Since the goal is already realized, the disease of effort is abandoned." [251] The passage is from *The Cuckoo* (Khu byug). [252]

Nubchen writes that some practitioners of Dzogchen, not properly understanding the aforementioned principle, "speak of the absence of effort and intentionally pursue the goal with effort. In reality, those who seek the principle of non-action through action are like a woman who hopes to arouse attraction by dancing." [253] Instead, the system of the ancient masters is comparable to the conduct of the woman who rests in the great principle, that is, in the original condition of reality, without abandoning the king: mindfulness. [254]

The sixth way of seeing (1.2.6.) emphasizes the theme of "Great Bliss" (bde ba chen po). The Ratnagotravibhāga, commenting on the cited passage about the Tathāgata "endowed with permanence, bliss, self, and purity," states:

"The perfection (pāramitā) of bliss (sukha) should be known as such for two reasons: because, having abandoned all the causes of suffering, the concatenation of latent tendencies (vāsanā) has been destroyed; and because, having realized all types of cessation of suffering, the cessation of the mental body is realized." [255]

Unlike the aforementioned source, which speaks of the elimination of suffering, and also departing from the "supported methods" of Mahāyoga, Nubchen writes:

"Without having abandoned pain, Great Bliss has arisen within."

[251] Ibid., p. 347.4.

[252] See note 184.

[253] L, p. 352.4.

[254] Ibid., pp. 351.6-352.1.

[255] J. Takasaki, op. cit., pp. 209-211, 218-219. Cf. Asaṅga, op. cit., p. 185.5-6: rgyu rnam pa gnyis kyis bde ba'i pha rol tu phyin par rig par bya ste sdug bsngal kun 'byung ba'i rnam pa thams cad spangs pas bag chags kyis mtshams sbyor ba bcom pa'i phyir dang sdug bsngal 'gog pa'i rnam pa thams cad mngon du byas pas yid kyi rang bzhin gyi lus 'gags pa mngon du byas pa'i phyir ro.

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Yet, without understanding this principle, some who aspire to the realization of Dzogchen:

"intentionally seek a kind of bliss. They do not see that bliss is The Self, and thus turn their backs on it. It is as if they were searching for the elephant while standing on top of it: in this way, they will never find it." [257]

The seventh way of seeing (1.2.7.) is focused on "non-duality" (gnyis su med pa). The most well-known antecedent of this theme in mahāyāna is chapter VIII of the Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra. [258] The contrast between the deceptive perception of dualism (self/other, good/evil, action/inaction, etc.) and the truth of non-duality is addressed by Vimalakīrti through silence; instead, Nubchen concludes his lengthy argument with the following words:

"those who practice correctly [...] engage in the recognition of the principle of non-duality with the 'vigor of non-action' (bya ba med pa'i brtson 'grus)." [259]

The quoted expression, a paradoxical but effective synthesis of Atiyoga, appears three times in the seventh chapter, while in the rest of the work it is attested in an almost identical form only once in the sixth chapter. [260]

The eighth way of seeing (1.2.8.) is the conception of the single Great Sphere (thig le chen po gcig), already present in Mahāyoga. In the sixth chapter, it is written: "What designates The Great Self? It designates the Dharmakāya, the Great Sphere, the reality as it is of all beings, The Self-awareness: indeed, what appears as the beings of saṃsāra, the bodies and any aspect of suffering and pleasure, is inseparable from that Great Sphere." [261] In the seventh chapter, Nubchen reaffirms the same principle, however, by resorting to the authority of various specific sources of Atiyoga, then he writes: "For the Great Being who dwells in such knowledge, existence shines forth as the pure realm of the Victorious Buddhas."

[256] L, p. 353.2.

[257] Ibid., p. 356.2-3.

[258] See chapter IX in the translation by Charles Luk, Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra, p. 87 ff.

[259] L, p. 369.2-3.

[260] Ibid., p. 263.5: "With the vigor of non-doing, one attains the matrix of enlightenment" (bya byed med pa'i brtson 'grus kyis des ni byang chub snying po len). The passage is taken from the sGyu 'phrul brgyad bcu pa, the most extensive version of the gSang ba snying po (Guhyagarba), the main source of Mahāyoga (TshB, Zha, pp. 2-364). Nubchen also writes on non-duality from the point of view of Mahāyoga: L, pp. 204.5-210.5.

[261] L, pp. 202.6-203.1: bdag nyid chen po gang la bya zhe na rang rig pa chos thams cad kyī de bzhi nyid thig le chen po chos kyī sku la bya ste der 'khor ba'i chos lus dang sdug bsngal bde mtshan ma ji snyed du snang ba dbyer med de.

The last way of seeing (1.2.9.) is the one preferred by Nubchen: the foundation (gzhi) as it is (ji bzhin pa, yathābhūtam). Here the expression "as it is" is used as a synonym of "true reality" (de kho na nyid, tattva) or "suchness" (de bzhin nyid, tathatā), important terms in Buddhist philosophy. [262] The opposite of reality "as it is" consists in the reality adulterated by the manipulative action of the mind, but in the great system of Dzogchen "all that is modified and altered due to action dissolves." [263] "Therefore, the Ati yogi has not reflected by establishing a logical demonstration and analyzing it. He has not manifested the sought-after intent. He has not examined, analyzed, and evaluated. Without any of those actions, he has ascertained the foundation without having ascertained it. He knows the true reality as it is without knowing it." [264] At this point, Nubchen, once again turning his critical eye to contemporary Buddhists, states: "Nowadays, most people condemn this way of seeing, reject it, deny it, and make it disappear." [265]

At the conclusion of the theoretical section, approximately halfway through the chapter, the theme of meditation, on which the second part is focused, is announced. [266] If the mind (blo), understood as a rational faculty or intellect, must not have a role in the understanding of the way of seeing, a fortiori it must not have one in the meditative experience. These are the words of Nubchen:

"For the great men who have understood the essential point, the mind is not involved in the experience of the Dharma." [267]

[262] Cf. D. T. Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, p. 114 ff.; Thomas A. Kochumutton, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience (A New Translation and Interpretation of the Works of Vasubandhu the Yogācārin)*, pp. 33-34, 159-160.

[263] L, pp. 377.6-378.1.

[264] Ibid., p. 379.4-6.

[265] Ibid., p. 380.3-4.

[266] Ibid., pp. 403.3-444.4.

[267] Ibid.

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There is no access of the mind to meditation, and they are also detached from the negation of access. [268]

The practical teaching begins with the exposition of the method of physical posture (2.1.). Unlike other Buddhist traditions, where there are precepts and rules regarding the position to be assumed with the body and its correction during meditation, here "there is nothing definitive regarding the correction of the body"; [269] in fact, "there is no definitive physical posture" [270] because, "if it is not assumed intentionally, there is no contradiction between sitting with crossed legs, etc., lying supine, prone or rolling". [271] The only appropriate advice, therefore, is to "assume the posture that is comfortable", [272] but remaining free from the defect of laziness.

Nubchen also returns to the question of physical isolation and reaffirms that "there is no place of retreat to be chosen intentionally"; [273] nevertheless, the contemplative experience cultivated for a long time in a secluded place is essential, as evidenced by this passage:

"Nowadays, there are many who, attached to the village, having only a physical way of seeing, blame the practice of the great principle conducted in retreat". [274]

The second initial point is the method that allows the access of Consciousness to the meditative state (2.2.). Previously, Nubchen had denied the possibility of an access ('jug pa) of the mind (blo) to meditation. Now he uses the same term "access", but the subject is Consciousness (sems). Although blo and sems are generally synonymous, the former term refers to the rational function of the intellect, while the latter indicates the cognitive capacity of Consciousness in particular. It is the latter that can access meditation, and it does so paradoxically without accessing it intentionally with the concept or idea of doing so:

"The method of access of Consciousness consists in accessing the meditative state without accessing it". [275]

But when this happens, since the mind is inseparable from the object, "there is no contradiction between the mind and the object". [276]

[268] Ibid., p. 402.3-4.

[269] Ibid., p. 403.4.

[270] Ibid., p. 403.5.

[271] Ibid., p. 403.5-6.

[272] Ibidem.

[273] L, p. 405.2.

[274] Ibid., p. 405.5-6.

[275] Ibid., pp. 405.6-406.1.

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Consciousness, it is the mind itself that accesses it, "due to the fact that no reflection and analysis has arisen." [276]

According to the gradual tradition, the meditative experience should be developed in sessions (thun), but in the case of Atiyoga (2.2.4.2.), "there are no distinct periods that should be considered as meditative sessions based on the passage of hours"; [277] however, "having understood that there are no sessions, there is no defect even in dividing the time of meditation into sessions." [278]

Nubchen succinctly expounds eight teaching systems of the masters on the access of Consciousness to the meditative state, that is, on how the mind is left in the condition of "inner gathering" (2.3.). None of these systems, however, prescribes any technique characterized by the intentional modification of the body and Consciousness or the use of concentration supports. The fortunate practitioners of Atiyoga, in fact, "do not examine anything, do not reflect on anything, have nothing to do, do not pursue the intent of realization, do not manifest it, do not wish that the principle be clear, do not purposefully create the notion of the true nature of reality, do not focus on it, do not even fixate on these indications, do not strive and do not adopt anything: this is meditation." [279]

The most recurring objection to this practical approach is that it is extremely difficult. From the critical hints of Nubchen, it emerges that, in his time, some alleged teachers of Dzogchen were circulating in Tibet who claimed to possess particular upadeśa (man ngag) on focusing (dmigs pa), thanks to which it would have been possible to realize enlightenment in a short time. They attacked the tradition followed by Nubchen, claiming that it was insufficient, ineffective, and not suitable to lead to the state of Buddha, similar to a body with only legs (2.3.10.3.1.).

Despite the staunch defense of the ancient tradition supported by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe and other masters until the 11th century, the disputed "technicistic" approach cited here will prevail. It will end up imposing a gradualistic approach based on Mahāyoga in which, however, the label Dzogchen will no longer define solely the final "effortless and actionless" phase, but will designate the entire system centered on rdzogs.

[276] Ibid., p. 406.5-6.

[277] Ibid., p. 411.3.

[278] Ibid., p. 411.5-6.

[279] Ibid., p. 422.1-4. See 2.3.10.2.



Echoes of the controversy involving Nubchen, as well as the anonymous authors of the canonical sources of Atiyoga later classified as *sems sde*, can also be found in the opposing sources, subsequently cataloged as *man ngag sde*. The alleged demonstration of the superiority of *man ngag sde* over *sems sde*, for example, is a topos that has decisively influenced the biased disinterest of the Nyingmapas in the scriptures known and cited by Nubchen. [280] Another common place, a significant echo of the ancient confrontation, is the preeminence of *thod rgal* over *khregs chod* within the *man ngag sde*. [281] Finally, an inclusive strategy followed in the *man ngag sde* has been to relegate the non-gradual path of Dzogchen to the theoretical realm of the "way of seeing," considering it truly traversable only by a few exceptional individuals, endowed with the same extraordinary abilities as masters like Indrabhūti, Garab Dorje, and Padmasambhava. [282]

After a mention of the correspondence between the contemplative teaching of Dzogchen and the essential instructions on the moment of death (2.3.4.), Sangye Yeshe addresses the complex theme of defects, the obstacles that one who practices meditation may encounter (2.4.). The heart of the teaching is outlined right at the beginning with these words:

"although the defects of thought arise, like clouds in the sky or impurity in water, the three doors [283] are not to be corrected intentionally." [284]

The conclusion (2.4.9.) specifies that, according to the system followed here, the defects themselves are not to be corrected; therefore, as proof of this singular assumption, some quotations follow, the second of which states: "The thought that arises is not eliminated deliberately; and when it does not arise, the absence of thoughts is not assumed as the support of Consciousness." [285] Indeed, thought itself is the reality as it is, yet "there is no dwelling there." The passage is from *The Fine Gold* (*Sems bsgom*) of Mañjuśrimitra. The commentary attributed to Sangye Yeshe explains this teaching in depth.

[280] Cf. Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, *Buddha Mind*, cit., pp. 47-52; Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 319-326, 329-330; Longchen Rabjam, *A Treasure Trove of Scriptural Transmission: A Commentary on The Precious Treasury of the Basic Space of Phenomena*, p. xii.

[281] Cf. Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, op. cit., pp. 67-76; Dudjom Rinpoche, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 335-345; Sam van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection*, cit., pp. 99-101, 130.

[282] See note 198.

[283] The three doors of experience are body, speech and mind.

[284] L, p. 425.4-5.

[285] Ibid., p. 440.6.

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The same master provides further clarifications: "Any sensory object that appears and any thought that arises is not different from the true nature of reality; therefore, [...] there are no flaws. If there are no flaws, why do sentient beings transmigrate? Because they cling to various images." [286]

This means that the flaw is not objective, but subjective, as it consists in the fixation of the mind on images (*mtshan ma*, *nimitta*), that is, deceptive notions or representations that the mind itself creates, thus believing to come into contact with actual reality. "Therefore, Subhuti, it is said that the Bodhisattva, the Great Being, must develop a non-abiding Consciousness; that is, he must develop a Consciousness that does not abide on anything. He must develop a Consciousness that does not abide on forms; he must develop a Consciousness that does not abide even on sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and mental objects [...]. He must develop a Consciousness that does not abide even on the absence of entities; he must develop a Consciousness that does not abide on anything." [287]

Thus speaks the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, indicating the nature of the development of the absolute Bodhicitta, detached from any illusory subjective image.

In the final paragraph (2.5.), it reads: "the intentional correction of the three gates and the effort represent the peg of fixation and are an obscuration." [288] The term "peg" (*phur pa*) refers to the previous paragraph on posture, where this quote is read: "In the conviction that the correction of the body and the Consciousness is valid lies the peg of fixation." [289] The passage is taken from the *Man ngag rgum chung* of gNyan.

[286] Mañjuśrīmitra ('Jam dpal bshes gnyen), *Byang chub kyi sems bsgom pa don bcu gnyis bstan pa*, p. 109.3-5: *yul gyi rnam pa gang snang sems kyi rtog pa ci skye yang chos nyid las mi gzhan pas [...]* *skyon med do skyon med na sems can ci'i phyir 'khor zhe na mtshan ma rnam pa sna tshogs la 'dzin pa'i phyir te*. Cf. Mañjuśrīmitra, *Primordial Experience: An Introduction to rDzogchen Meditation*, p. 102.

[287] 'Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa rdo rje gcod pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo, pp. 248.5-6, 252.5-6: *rab 'byor de lta bas na byang chub sems dpa' chen pos 'di ltar mi gnas par sems bskyed pa zhes bya'o ci la yang mi gnas par sems bskyed par bya'o gzugs la yang mi gnas par sems bskyed par bya'o sgra dang dri dang ro dang reg bya dang chos la yang mi gnas par sems bskyed par bya'o [...]* *chos med pa la'ang mi gnas par sems bskyed par bya'o ci la'ang mi gnas par sems bskyed par bya'o*. Vd. Edward Conze, *I libri buddhisti della Sapienza: il Sutra del Diamante e il Sutra del Cuore*, pp. 42, 48.

[288] L, p. 443.6.

[289] Ibid., pp. 404.6-405.1.

The text of Pal Dyang holds particular significance, as the second of the two Tibetan verses, namely "the peg of fixation stands", also appears in the sBas pa'i rgum chung of Sangye Bapa. [290]

If there are no defects to correct by deliberately modifying posture and Consciousness, there are also no "session interruptions" (thun mtshams) even while practicing meditation in sessions. The true meditative state is one in which "discriminative thoughts naturally do not move or arise": [291] it is likened to a Great Sphere (thigle) in which all is present effortlessly, both contemplation and activity; therefore, "since there is no alternation between emerging from concentration and returning to it, there is no meditation." [292]

The third part is dedicated to the "path of conduct" (spyod lam, ĭryāpatha), [293] which traditionally designates personal behavior in the four fundamental physical situations of daily life: walking, sitting, lying, and standing. Nubchen begins the chapter by stating the essence of the topic:

"Even regarding the path of conduct, there is nothing to practice deliberately. Why? Because everything is done by the sugata." [294]

Subsequently, in order to explain the meaning of this statement, he develops four arguments that define as many forms of conduct:

"the conduct of great compassion, the effortless appropriate conduct, the conduct of the great method, and the Spontaneously accomplished conduct."

In mahāyāna, the supreme intelligence (prajñā) is the wisdom that sees the true nature of reality, that is, "emptiness" (śūnyatā); however, this wisdom alone does not lead to the state of Buddha unless it is united with the method/means (upāya) represented by compassion (karuṇā). The indissoluble union of the two is Bodhicitta, the development of which constitutes the path of the Bodhisattva. In the Gaṇḍavyūha, the final section of the Avataṃsakasūtra, the pilgrim Sudhana encounters some great Bodhisattvas, the last of whom is Samantabhadra. He appears to him, together with the Buddha Vairocana, in a wondrous celestial realm and with a radiant body. Sudhana, contemplating the miraculous expressions of Samantabhadra's immense powers, derived from the development of Bodhicitta, sees the many ways in which compassion operates prodigiously throughout the cosmos and understands that, in truth, all things exist and occur precisely due to the spiritual energy of superior beings like Vairocana and Samantabhadra. [295]

[290] See note 186.

[291] L, p. 444.3.

[292] Ibid., p. 444.3-4.

[293] Ibid., pp. 444.4-462.6.

[294] Ibid., p. 444.4-5.

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The notion of Bodhicitta, in which method and wisdom are united, is also central to Mahāyoga, which ritualizes its cosmic unfolding revealed in sūtras like the Gaṇḍavyūha and brings the metaphysical vision of Bodhisattvas like Sudhana to embodiment in the human forms of the Yogin and the Yoginī. [296] In Dzogchen finally, Samantabhadra becomes the supreme personification of the realization of Bodhicitta: essentially, he is no different from the Buddha Vairocana, therefore he is the bhagavat; indeed, he is the primordial Buddha (gdod ma'i sangs rgyas), the absolute Bodhicitta that pervades all, that is, The Great Self.

The conduct of great compassion (3.1.2.1.), translating into practice the aforementioned culminating vision of Samantabhadra, is nothing other than the natural expression of the contemplation of the absolute Bodhicitta in the reality of everyday life: "The activities and incessant emanations of Spontaneous Gnosis are the activities of The Self. If one has this understanding, it is The Self that performs the benefit of others, without seeking great compassion and without any reference points." [297] A quote reads: "Spontaneous Gnosis, without departing from the original condition of reality, is Samantabhadra manifested in various ways, the Protector of beings who possesses equanimous compassion towards the entire universe of a thousand worlds." [298]

The appropriate conduct free from effort (3.1.2.2.) implies that, unlike other Buddhist systems, in Atiyoga it is not necessary to perform ritual actions, such as making offerings to divine beings, reciting sacred texts, and dedicating merits for the benefit of others. Yet, even though there is nothing to be done intentionally, what needs to be done is not neglected. [299]

The conduct of the great method (3.1.2.3.) is illustrated synthetically by this quote: "Thanks to the special understanding of Gnosis, whatever is done according to the four types of conduct, does not become a bond but complete liberation." [300]

[295] Thomas Cleary, *op. cit.*, p. 379 ff.

[296] See L, pp. 198.3-200.5. Cf. Das Gupta, Shashibhusan, *Obscure Religious Cults*, pp. 26-32; Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, pp. 85-106.

[297] L, p. 445.2.

[298] *Ibid.*, p. 445.4-5.

[299] *Ibid.*, pp. 447.4-5, 448.2.

[300] *Ibid.*, 452.3.

Regarding the conduct of Spontaneous fulfillment (3.1.2.4.), Nubchen writes: "Wherever there is nothing that does not have the quality of the action of Buddhas, therefore here all conducts are activities of Buddhas." [301] Although the masters have found it useful to articulate the explanation of conduct by differentiating its four modalities, the conclusion of Sangye Yeshe brings the attention back to what unites them: "The essence of the four conducts of Atiyoga is not different and, though being one, appears as fourfold. There are no intentional divisions in conduct: always and everywhere there is equality in conduct." [302] This equality is due to the "great wisdom" that sees the absence of intrinsic existence. Only in this way is it possible to enjoy everything "with the method of non-attachment." [303]

In the context of conduct, Samantabhadra personifies the method, while Samantabhadri, his female counterpart, represents wisdom. If the conduct of the great method is separated from the great wisdom, the actions are defined as "demonic"; this happens when

"the way of seeing is on the tongue and not in the heart, while the conduct is rough." [304]

This is a deviation from the right conduct (3.2).

"Therefore, although having the certainty of the way of seeing, it is appropriate to pay extreme attention not to commit negative actions." [305]

It is with these last words that Nubchen begins the final chapter dedicated to the appropriate conduct (3.3.), in which he describes the precepts of the textual tradition that regulate the behavior of those who, not having yet achieved the direct vision of reality as it is, wish to live in retreat. In the concluding paragraph (3.3.4.) he specifies that "the Great Yogins perform these actions, but do not cling to what they do and have no notion of practicing asceticism"; [306] they are free from the idea of having to reject one thing and accept another; nevertheless they are active. Although they are perfectly capable of remembering what needs to be done, they do not remember it on purpose, since "they are beyond mental involvement." [307]

The fourth part addresses the theme of the fruit, [308] the goal of the way of seeing, meditation and conduct.

[301] Ibid., p. 453.5-6.

[302] Ibid., p. 454.4-5.

[303] Ibid., p. 455.2.

[304] Ibid., p. 456.1.

[305] Ibid., p. 456.4.

[306] Ibid., 462.4.

[307] Ibid., p. 462.6.

[308] Ibid., pp. 462.6-490.1.

The Yogin of Dzogchen does not nourish the hope of obtaining the fruit and does not even fear not achieving it; yet "the manifestation of experience, meditative warmth, prophetic dreams, and signs arises without interruption". [309]

The first of the four aspects of the fruit (4.1.) is experience (nyams), on which Nubchen is peremptory: "in Atiyoga there is no experience to indicate by saying 'this is what is felt'"; [310] nevertheless, the text proceeds to expound the remaining three points based on the tradition of Mahāyoga. The second aspect is "warmth" (drod), a technical term that designates what the Yogin experiences internally when progressing in contemplation (4.2.). The third aspect is significant dreams (4.3.), those that indicate the purification of latent tendencies, the liberation from fear, the attainment of spiritual levels, the actual mastery of the levels reached, the achievement of the Bodhisattva condition, the mastery in understanding the teaching, the vision of the truth taught by the Buddha, and the reception of prophecies about one's spiritual realization.

The fourth aspect of the fruit consists of the final signs, as they manifest in daily life (4.4.).

The following chapter is dedicated to the "Spheres of action of the demons" (4.5.), real mystical experiences that must be lived with the correct attitude, so that they do not become great obstacles, as the following quote states: "If the true nature of these experiences is understood, they are excellent signs. Whoever does not understand in this way is a wandering demon." [311] Therefore, Nubchen concludes by clarifying that "one must not cling with attachment even to those experiences." [312] Any mystical experience should be recognized as a sign indicating a result, similar to cinnabar indicating the presence of gold in the ground, or smoke revealing the ignition of a fire, etc. (4.6.).

This discourse also includes the topic of so-called miracles (4.7.), understood here both as the mastery of one's Consciousness over material elements, and as uncommon abilities to help others through teaching or in extraordinary ways.

Given the initial premise on the ineffability of true contemplative experience according to Atiyoga, one might expect the rejection of any description of signs, including the previous one derived from Mahāyoga (4.8.); but the peculiarity of Dzogchen does not lie in such a negation, but in the recognition that "the manifestation of experience, meditative warmth, prophetic dreams, and signs arises without interruption".

[309] Ibid., pp. 462.6-463.1.

[310] Ibid., p. 463.1-2.

[311] Ibid., p. 479.4.

[312] Ibid., p. 480.2.

The fact that "with regard to the various magical miracles of concentration, no point of reference is conceived and there is no certainty." [313] All phenomena, both of saṃsāra and of nirvāṇa, are equally "miracles" (cho 'phrul) of Consciousness; since they manifest as a magic, "there is no reason to cling to those signs." [314] They are comparable to the appearance of rainbows and lightning, while the sky symbolizes the enlightened Consciousness that does not conceptually conceive what appears, being devoid of reference points to fixate upon. Analogous to the effortless sky, the final fruit is a Spontaneous Presence, therefore it is "already accomplished" from the beginning (4.9.).

The fifth part concludes the seventh chapter by addressing the theme of the dialectical comparison with the supporters of the other Buddhist paths discussed previously. The debate recounted by Nubchen seems to aim at elucidating the fundamental arguments that could convince the counterpart from a logical perspective. However, at the end of the discussion, it becomes clear that the stringent reasoning adduced actually has the function of convincing the Dzogchen adept himself, still confused about "the principle of effortless concentration," as evidenced by these final words: "By responding in this way, the views of each vehicle are differentiated, and one's own specific view is definitively ascertained." [315]

In my Italian translation, I (Giuseppe Baroetto) have aimed to remain as faithful as possible to the Tibetan text, often prioritizing fidelity over elegance to capture the cryptic essence of the original. However, I have taken the liberty to deviate from the source's style by adding section titles, which are also included in the text summary. I believe this highlighted division of topics will assist readers in following the logical progression of the introduction.

In the notes accompanying the translation, I primarily focused on presenting the most significant original terms and, when necessary, explaining my lexical choices. For enhancing semantic completeness and clarity, I have utilized footnotes in square brackets. Additionally, I have numbered the citations, placing the figures within curly brackets, in both the translation and the critical edition, which is addressed in the second volume.

(English Translation Note: I (litepresence) have adopted a more dynamic translation approach, emphasizing cadence, elegance, and word choices, along with occasional glosses that highlight the meaning of Atiyoga for a contemporary Western audience. I have also integrated any bracketed glosses made by Baroetto directly into the translation for a smoother reading experience. For academic review, please refer to the Italian version.)

[313] Ibid., p. 484.5.

[314] Ibid., p. 484.6.

[315] Ibid., p. 494.1-2.

## 5. The Verses of Ati Yoga

Following the brief eighth chapter, which includes the explanation of the dedication of the merits derived from the composition of the text and the indication of how it should be transmitted to others, [316] the conclusion completes the treatise with the fundamental verses commented on in the previous eight sections. Since they constitute the heart and essence of the entire work, I have translated the eight verses of Ati Yoga below, around which the seventh chapter is built. The references to the verses in the corresponding section of the commentary have been highlighted in bold both in the translation and in the critical edition.

- (1) In the direct realization of the Great Perfection, the primal truth shines forth, self-evident, without the mind's striving.
- (2) Though there is nothing to grasp or discern, it is the vast knowing beyond knowing. [317]
- (3) Great Yogins, unbound by mental constructs, abide without meditation. Even as thoughts stir, the three doors—body, speech, mind—need no correction. In our way, correcting flaws becomes a crutch of fixation, veiling the radiant expanse.
- (4) Free from the breaks of formal sessions, conduct flows unbroken; thoughts neither arise nor subside. The essence of Ati Yoga is the Great Sphere, the pristine state.
- (5) Thus, no path oscillates between absorption and return; all is accomplished by the Sugatas' spontaneous presence.
- (6) Great Yogins, free from rejecting or embracing, neither suppress mere recollection nor cling to memory on the relative plane.
- (7) Their realization, untouched by hope or fear, shines forth. Though experiences—heat, visionary dreams, or signs—may manifest, there is no need to grasp them.
- (8) Heralds appearing in the vast sky, they arise as Spontaneous Presence, their nature inseparable from the sky-like expanse. [318]

[316] Ibid., pp. 494.1-499.6.

[317] The insertion attempts to fill a gap in the Tibetan verse based on the commentary.

[318] L, pp. 501.4-502.1: rdzogs chen ngang nyid mngon chud bzhag med don chen rang gsal ba'ang gzhal med rtogs med rtogs hen 'jug bral sgom med skyon byung yang sgo gsum bcos med de nyid rang lugs 'chos 'dzin phur sgrib yin thun mtshams bral bas mi g.yo mi ldang ngang chen thig le bas re mos ldang 'jug spyod lam med de kun kyang bde gshegs mdzad spong len ngang bral bri tar dran tsam mi 'gog dran med cing re dogs bral yang nyams drod rmi (Ch, L rmis) ltas rtags 'char chags med pa'ang nam mkhar (Ch, L mkha') mtshan snang bzhin pas lhun grub rang bzhin nam mkha' 'dra'o.



## 70 Introduction

[318.1] The Great Perfection (rdzogs chen) is the natural condition (ngang nyid), the manifest essence (mngon chud) that is unestablished (bzhag med). Its profound meaning (don chen) is self-luminous (rang gsal ba'ang), requiring no contrived realization (gzhal med). There is no realization (rtogs med) apart from this spontaneous presence (rtogs hen 'jug bral), and no meditation (sgom med) is flawed (skyon byung yang). The three doors—body, speech, and mind (sgo gsum)—are uncreated (bcos med). This very nature (de nyid) is the natural state (rang lugs) of upholding the teachings (chos 'dzin), embodying the essence of the Great Perfection (phur sgrib yin), free from the dualities of existence and non-existence (thun mtshams bral bas).

It cannot be grasped (mi g.yo) nor held (mi ldang). The Great Perfection (ngang chen) is the primordial sphere (thig le), which is not to be followed (bas re mos) or contrived (ldang 'jug spyod lam med). All phenomena (de kun kyang) are the activity of the fully awakened ones (bde gshegs mdzad), free from mental grasping (spong len ngang bral). Mere thoughts (bri tar dran tsam) do not obstruct (mi 'gog) this state, nor is there fixation on them (dran med cing). Free from hopes and fears (re dogs bral), this is the vivid experience (yang nyams drod rmi) akin to the sky (nam mkhar, Ch, L rmis).

Signs and symbols (lta rtags) arise without attachment ('char chags med pa'ang), and the nature of reality (nam mkhar, Ch, L mkha') is sky-like. Appearances (mtshan snang) manifest as spontaneous presence (bzhin pas lhun grub), and the essence (rang bzhin) is like an intimate friend (nam mkha' 'dra'o).

# TRANSLATION

## 1. THE VIEW

### 1.1. Introduction

#### 1.1.1 The Great Completion

This exposition presents the principle [1] of Ati Yoga, the highest and most profound form of yoga, known as the supreme vehicle [2] and the mother of all victorious Buddhas. Its name is the Great Completion. [3]

Why is it called this? Because it articulates the principle of the Spontaneous and unsought completion of all countless entities, [4] allowing for a clear understanding of naked liberation. [5] This vehicle serves as the ultimate treasury of all teachings and the great universal progenitor of all Buddhas. Its essence [6] lies in the state of Spontaneous Presence. [7]

This principle is grasped through direct, self-aware perception. [8] Thus, the great principle, which transcends the rational mind, [9] only becomes evident in self-awareness. [10] But why is this so?

[1] Don (artha): the meaning or significance, and at the same time, the reason or purpose.

[2] The vehicles or means (yāna) group the teachings given by the Buddha, which allow one to traverse the paths and reach the levels of spiritual realization. According to the tradition followed by the author, the vehicles are nine, of which Atiyoga is the last and the highest.

[3] rDzogs pa chen po.

[4] Chos (dharma). The entities are the factors of reality that characterize the wheel of transmigration (saṃsāra) or the state of extinction (nirvāṇa) of the same.

[5] gCer grol: the liberation from the conditioning of discriminative thoughts (rnam rtog) that occurs effortlessly when, by merely seeing the true nature of Consciousness through awareness (rig pa) or self-awareness (rang rig), they naturally vanish.

[6] Ngo bo (bhāva).

[7] lHun gyis grub pa (anābhoga).

[8] Rang rig pa'i mngon sum (svasaṃvedana pratyakṣa).

[9] Blo (mati, buddhi): the rational mind, that is, the intellect that knows through concepts and images.

[10] Rang gi rig pa.

### 1.1.2. Nothing to Evaluate

In the vehicle of Atiyoga, [11] as taught in the tantras, āgamas, and upadeśas, [12] there exists not a single evaluable entity [13] that should be assessed by one's own discriminative intelligence [14]. Why is this so? All known entities inherently possess, from the very beginning, the nature [15] of the state of Buddha within the vast expanse [16] of Spontaneous Gnosis [17], remaining unchanged. In such a context, who perceives anything worthy of evaluation? Who articulates the reasoning [18] behind it? What philosophical position [19] is being pursued? What subject [20] undertakes the evaluation? Given that there are no individual essences [21] of these evaluable entities, the Atiyoga vehicle reveals that there is nothing to be evaluated.

[11] Shin tu rnal 'byor.

[12] The tantras (rgyud) are the specific textual sources of esoteric Buddhism. The āgamas (lung) are extracts from authoritative scriptures, or aphorisms and sayings of masters. The upadeśas (man ngag) are the instructions of teachers. This triad constitutes the tradition upon which the author bases his discussion of Atiyoga.

[13] gZhal bya (prameya). Since "to evaluate" ('jal ba) means to know (shes pa), gZhal bya is generally synonymous with shes bya or "knowable", that is, an entity that is the object of knowledge. Specifically, in this context, the evaluable entities are the phenomena to which the mind clings with attachment.

[14] So sor rtogs pa'i shes rab. The Tibetan term shes rab (prajñā) could be rendered as "wisdom"; however, I have preferred to use the word "intelligence", since here shes rab indicates the cognitive mental process of reason (rigs pa'i shes pa) that discerns the true nature of things by analyzing (dngos po'i gnas lugs dpyod byed) them. Cf. TshDz, II, p. 2691.

[15] Rang bzhin (svabhāva).

[16] Thig le. This term translates the Sanskrit bindu which commonly indicates a point or dot. Since the space (klong) of such bindu is boundless, the expression "vast expanse" is used.

[17] Rang byung gi ye shes. It is customary to translate the Tibetan term ye shes (jñāna) as "wisdom", but I have preferred to use this Italian word in the context of the "accumulation of wisdom" (ye shes kyi tshogs). While wisdom can be accumulated through experience, Gnosis is always one and transcends any sensory object.

[18] gTan tshigs (hetu).

[19] Grub pa'i mtha' (siddhānta).

[20] The subject performing the evaluation is the valid means of knowledge (tshad ma, pramāṇa), through which the clinging to phenomena is severed (see note 51).

[21] Ngo bo.

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Individual entities, are not perceived amid Spontaneous Gnosis. [22]

*In this context, The Treasury (mDzod) states:*

{1} In dividing the essence of things, [23] where could anything still be sought? [24]  
Who is so deluded as to seek in this fractured way? In the state of non-action, there  
is nothing to be sought mentally.

According to this passage, if one attempts to find a philosophical position through such evaluation, it reveals a mental delusion; for it is clear that within the Consciousness [25] of the seeker exists the dualistic notion [26] of subject and object.

*Furthermore, The Universal Presence (Yul kun la 'jug pa'i rgyud) [27] states:*

{2} In dividing an atom, the ten directions are lost.

Thus, the act of division through demonstrative reasoning ultimately leads to a loss of clarity.

[22] The object to be evaluated, the demonstrative reasoning, the philosophical position in which the logical conclusion consists, and the Consciousness that evaluates exist illusorily as substantially distinct factors only for the rational mind; in Spontaneous Gnosis, their separation is not perceived as real. Here, "to perceive" (dmigs pa) means to conceptually conceive, focus on, or take as a reference point.

[23] dNgos po rnam kyī ngo bo. A "thing" (dngos po, vastu) is, generically, any directly knowable object, through the five physical senses or through the mind, such as a concept. What is not directly knowable, but can only be thought, such as an abstract idea, is a "non-thing" (dngos med) devoid of concreteness.

[24] With discriminative intelligence, the object to be evaluated is analyzed by dividing it into smaller and smaller parts, and when no image of an individual essence remains in the mind, the conclusion is reached that the object is empty, that is, devoid of self (bdag med) or intrinsic existence.

[25] Sems (citta). Although it is customary to translate this term as "mind," I believe that "Consciousness" better expresses its peculiar cognitive meaning, distinguishing it from the rational meaning of the mind (blo, yid).

[26] gNyis 'dzin.

[27] Parenthesis indicate citations whose canonical source has been traced, discussed in the critical edition, and indicated in the bibliography of the second volume.

*From The Wheel of Life (Srog gi 'khor lo):*

{3} Without having abandoned evil and without having practiced good, one remains in the condition [28] of heaven. When examining the three realms [29], one discovers that there is neither saṃsāra nor suffering. If divided into parts, what is found is not the matrix of the sugatas [30].

Thus, when we say, "if one examines the three realms," does this imply that there is an object to evaluate here? If this question is posed, any answer reveals a lack of cognition [31] regarding true reality [32]. Indeed, "without having abandoned and without having practiced" signifies that everything is clear [33] in the state of Spontaneous Presence, where duality does not exist. In contrast, the phrase "if one examines," which carries a different implication, does not refer to evaluation. The right path consists of arriving abruptly [34] at understanding through self-awareness, precisely without having reflected on anything, nor examined or analyzed anything [35]. This is considered the highest form of evaluation.

*In this regard, it is stated in The Instructions (Man ngag):*

{4} The analytical mind does not access the essence of the inconceivable sky, beyond analysis and reflection. When transcending reflection, there is nothing left to contemplate or focus on [36]. If the mind is left in its Natural State without having analyzed anything, there is no distance from true reality. If the mind remains in its Natural State without having reflected on anything, there is no alteration of reality as it is.

[28] Ngang (nisarga).

[29] Khams gsum (tridhātu): the realm of desire ('dod pa'i khams), the realm of form (gzugs khams) and the realm without form (gzugs med kyi khams). Humans and animals on our planet are part of the first realm.

[30] bDe gshegs snying po (sugatagarbha, synonym of tathāgatagarbha): the innate original potential, comparable to the seed of a lotus flower, which makes the realization of the state of Buddha (sugata / tathāgata) possible. It is not the emptiness that is reached by mentally dividing things.

[31] Ma rig pa.

[32] De kho na nyid (tattva).

[33] gSal ba. This term encompasses the meanings of clarity and purity.

[34] Thog tu phebs pa.

[35] Examination (rtog pa, vitarka) is the initial general or coarse consideration of the object, its thought or concept, while analysis (dpyod pa, vicāra) is the subsequent deepening of the evaluation.

[36] dMigs su med.

{5} Not analyzing is the correct path.

{6} The mind that reflects and analyzes does not access the non-dual nature [37] of the sky. It is not discovered in that condition through reflection, and without having reflected, it is not lost.

Nevertheless, where there is coherence with the principle of Spontaneous Presence, there is the correct path free from deviations; resting in that principle is the great evaluation without something to evaluate, the great non-examination. Since this principle is detached from evaluation through demonstrative reasoning, no search for anything is undertaken; and since it cannot be penetrated through search and analysis,

*The Great Sky (rDo rje sems dpa' nam mkha' che) states:*

{7} Not being born, it is devoid of cessation; from the very beginning, the original condition [38] is not shaken by thoughts of searching regarding the matrix of enlightenment [39]

*From The Great Shaking (rTsal chen sprug pa):*

{8} Regarding the original condition of reality, [40]non-dual, completely untainted [41] by examination and analysis, someone will be deceived by the behavior of immature people [42] who think erroneously.

However, the practitioner should fully ascertain that, with respect to the space of the original Great Bliss [43] there is no error in not analyzing and not dividing things in the moment.

[37] Rang bzhin.

[38] dByings (dhātu): the primordial substrate that constitutes the basis of all entities of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, comparable to the celestial space.

[39] sNying po byang chub. I understand this expression as corresponding to byang chub kyi snying po (see note 59).

[40] Chos dbyings (dharmadhātu).

[41] rNam dag.

[42] Byis pa: the worldly or common people who do not practice the Dharma or, although practicing it, have not yet attained the direct vision of its principle.

[43] bDe ba chen po (mahāsukha).

### 1.1.3. Liberation without Action

Then, if nothing is examined and analyzed, is the liberation of Consciousness even possible?

Liberation occurs because there was never anything to be done to become liberated.

What is the reason?

In the state that is beyond examination and analysis, the very bond is no longer perceived [44], and it is for this reason that one speaks of "liberation", only conventionally [45].

*From The Great Sky (rDo rje sems dpa' nam mkha' che):*

{9} In the true nature of reality as it is [46], intentions [47] are the condition of emotional impassivity. Without having acted, one is free; thus, it is liberation. In the state of Spontaneous Gnosis, there is no search; one is free, and the true path of liberation is directly experienced.

The intention that constitutes the principle of Atiyoga is non-action [48], therefore liberation occurs precisely without having to do anything in order to know [49] the principle as it is. Then, for the moment, what indicates this principle?

*The Epitome (sPyi chings) states:*

{10} The vast ocean of the Secret Mantra, which constitutes the essential vehicle of the tantras, cannot be understood through deductive intelligence, [50] examples, proofs, [51] or demonstrative reasoning. Indeed, the inconceivable depth in which the great identity [52] of the Secret Mantra consists, abundant with marvelous accomplishments, [53] is difficult to fathom.

[44] Ma dmigs pa.

[45] Tha snyad.

[46] Ji bzhin.

[47] The intentions (don) are the goals or principles that are pursued, which motivate the actions aimed at their achievement.

[48] Bya ba med pa.

[49] Rig pa.

[50] rJes su dpog pa'i shes rab: the prajñā that discerns through inference (anu-māna).

[51] Tshad ma (pramāṇa). In addition to direct perception and inference, valid means of knowledge can also be the recourse to the verbal authority (lung) of the scriptures or masters and comparison or analogy (dpe nyer 'jal). In the context of the citation, the term tshad ma does not refer to all pramāṇa, nor to a specific one, but has the generic meaning of logical proof or evidence.

[52] bDag nyid che.

[53] dNgos grub (siddhi).

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Therefore, realization is attained through engaging with sacred texts (āgama) and receiving personal insights from those with experiential knowledge (upadeśa)."

*From The Refined Gold (Sems bsgom rdo la gser zhun):*

{11} Difficult to examine and explain, and free from the conventions of verbal expression, it is unreachable by words and not recognized by immature persons and non-Buddhists. However, one must scrutinize the principle of the definitive [54] āgama of the Buddha and the upadeśa of the teachers.

Regarding the system of teaching such āgama and upadeśa, it consists in teaching precisely that there is nothing to evaluate, nothing to examine, nothing to study, and no reflection or analysis required; thus, this system embodies the principles of a perfect logical demonstration [55] that is free from errors.

Thus, if one shows a clod of earth to someone who desires to see gold, they do not see it, but recognize it when the gold itself is shown to them. Similarly, the principle that is not to be analyzed, free from verbal expression and mental reflection, is not discovered by deducing it through research and analysis; rather, it is known when the absence of effort in the search is taught. [56] This knowledge [57] is the supreme valid means of direct perception.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung chen po):*

{12} He asked: Noble beings, [58] where should the matrix of enlightenment [59] be sought?

[54] Nges pa'i lung. The Buddha's sayings, being addressed to people with different capacities, do not all have the same value, meaning, or principle (don, artha); in fact, while some have a clear, surely definitive meaning (nges don, nītārtha), as they contain the ultimate truth, others have a provisional meaning, subject to interpretation (drang don, neyārtha), where the truth must be conjectured.

[55] gTan tshigs.

[56] Bya rtsol.

[57] Go ba.

[58] The quote contains a dialogue from chapter 15, taken up in some of the following quotes from the same source, where the "noble teacher" (bshes gnyen dam pa) Vajrapāṇi, an emanation of the Buddha, poses some questions to five "noble beings" (skyes bu dam pa) on Mount Malaya in Śrī Laṅkā. Vajrapāṇi's main interlocutor is the demon (*rākṣasa*) Rāvaṇa, king of Laṅkā. The questions aim to test the five disciples' understanding of the teaching.

[59] Byang chub kyi snying po: the matrix of the state of Buddha, that is, the potential of full spiritual awakening or enlightenment (bodhi) innate in all beings, without which it would not be possible to achieve this ultimate goal. It is synonymous with "enlightened Consciousness" (byang chub kyi sems, Bodhicitta).



## 78 Translation

They replied: It is not sought anywhere. He asked: Why is it not sought? They replied: The very matrix of enlightenment does not dwell anywhere.

From the same text:

{13} He asked: Noble beings, with what example is the matrix of enlightenment [60] explained? They replied: Noble teacher, there is no adequate example, for the matrix of enlightenment is not to be generated with any example.

He asked: Is it not to be indicated with examples? They replied: If we consider some partial examples, these are: the sky [61], the sun [62], the precious gem that fulfills desires [63], the precious gold [64], a lamp [65], the antidote to poisons [66], the elixir [67].

[60] sNying po byang chub.

[61] As the sky, the enlightened Consciousness is without boundaries and center, pervades everything and is eternally unceasing.

[62] As the sun, the enlightened Consciousness shines on everything, without partiality, and does not accept or reject.

[63] As the precious gem, the enlightened Consciousness fulfills desires and gives what is necessary without thinking; in doing so, it is not exhausted nor increased, and with its splendor it eliminates darkness, remaining pure like clear water.

[64] As the precious gold, the enlightened Consciousness is always such and has no contaminations or impurities.

[65] As a lamp, the enlightened Consciousness dispels darkness and, in doing so, illuminates things allowing for clear vision.

[66] As the antidote to poisons, the enlightened Consciousness transforms emotional afflictions into wisdom (ye shes) and suffering into Great Bliss.

[67] The enlightened Consciousness transforms thoughts into the expanse (klong) of Gnosis.

[67.1] "elixir" was chosen to replace Philosopher's Stone; a term from Western Alchemy.

## 79 Translation

the chrysoberyl, [68] the great ocean, [69] the heart of the vajra, [70] the function of eclipsing with power [71] and paying attention, [72] the precious golden mineral, [73] the function of generating intense joy. [74]

Therefore, no philosophical position is sought, and there is nothing to be pointed out. If something is pointed out, it is non-duality that is indicated by the example, detached from action and the agent, from reflection and analysis.

*From The Wondrous (rMad du byung ba'i rgyud):*

{14} All learning collapses. [...] The absence of any learning is the learning of the wise one that I am. [75]

Therefore, it is a learning detached by nature from any action aimed at examining and analyzing. The meaning thus expounded implies that the encounter with the perfect, correct principle has already occurred from the beginning: this is the supreme method. [76]

[68] Like lapis lazuli (vaiḍūrya), the enlightened Consciousness is by nature free from impurities and immutable. [68.1] Like chrysoberyl (vaiḍūrya), enlightened Consciousness is characterized by clarity, transformation, and focused insight. There is considerable debate on this term and some scholars also consider sapphire the correct translation.)

[69] Like the great ocean, the enlightened Consciousness is very deep, and the waves of its qualities manifest without it being exhausted or increased.

[70] Like the heart of the diamond (rdo rje), the essence of the enlightened Consciousness is immutable, perfect, and indestructible, having no opponents.

[71] Like a lion, which by its own strength eclipses the other animals, the enlightened Consciousness surpasses the thoughts in splendor.

[72] Like the empirical Consciousness that pays attention by turning to objects, the enlightened Consciousness is free from obstacles in its awareness and cognitive lucidity, as it pays attention without mental involvement.

[73] Like the precious golden mineral, which remains the same regardless of the form it assumes, the enlightened Consciousness is perfectly the same unique ultimate reality in all beings of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

[74] The realization of the enlightened Consciousness generates an ecstatic wonder, comparable to the sight of a rainbow or a work of art, because everything is clearly present without confusion, yet at the same time empty, devoid of intrinsic existence.

[75] Here the "I" is The Great Self (bdag nyid chen po), that is, the enlightened Consciousness, the original true nature of one's own Consciousness.

[76] Thabs (upāya): the means or instrument to realize an objective.

This meaning also represented the noble pursuits [77] and interests of the great men of the past.

#### **1.1.4. First Critique**

##### **1.1.4.1. Objection**

Some modern practitioners of Mantra [78], who fail to grasp the essential point of the view [79], assert: "Even if this holds true regarding the foundation of entities [80], it does not apply to the mental capacities of individuals. Indeed, they continue to lack perfect understanding, and thus require demonstrative reasoning to evaluate matters; nevertheless, through this process, they will uncover the philosophical position that embodies the principle of enlightened Consciousness. Therefore, the examination and analysis that characterize discriminative intelligence must also be central in the context of upadeśa."

##### **1.1.4.2. Reply**

Those who maintain such a conviction regard it as supremely important, viewing it as the crux of the perspective; thus, they resemble monkeys that have licked honey [81]. If it is indeed true that in the practice [82] of the profound principle of Ati Yoga, one does not remain ensnared in a state of annihilation [83], nor is there anything to do or think, it is equally true that these blind ones engage in examination and analysis, resulting in a limited conceptual position.

[77] sPyod pa'i yul (gocara).

[78] sNgags pa (mantrin).

[79] lTa ba (dṛṣṭi).

[80] Chos kyi gzhi: the original condition (dbyings) that constitutes the true nature of reality (chos nyid).

[81] Complacent in their conceptual conviction, like excited monkeys licking honey, such people merely imitate the true sages, lacking the qualities of true masters. The example of the monkey is found in rTsal chen sprug pa (The Great Shaking). Cf. the comments in TshB, Ka, p. 454.6-7; Bai, 5, Nya, p. 333.2-5.

[82] sPyod pa (caryā). This term generally indicates conduct, behavior, or activity.

[83] Yal bar 'dug pa.

## 81 Translation

Whatever actions they undertake, their conviction becomes a limited perspective. [84] Why is this the case? The non-duality that arises from evaluating dualistic entities is itself dualistic. Why? Because the so-called non-duality gives rise to duality.

When examining and analyzing entities that are not free from inquiry, one supports a philosophical position that claims to be free from inquiry: [85] this very conviction is not free from inquiry. If something exists that is free from inquiry, then there must also be something that is not free from inquiry.

In examining entities that are not Spontaneously present, the ignorant assert the existence of Spontaneous Presence: this very conviction is not a Spontaneous Presence. Why? If there is a Spontaneous Presence that arises from examining what is not Spontaneously present, then dependent on that Spontaneous Presence, there must also be something that is not Spontaneously present.

When analyzing entities that are not fully accomplished, someone upholds the philosophical position of the Great Completion: this very conviction is not fully accomplished. Why? Because if something is fully accomplished, then dependent on that, there must also be something that is not accomplished.

In examining the entities of causes and circumstances, someone supports the philosophical position of Spontaneous Gnosis: this very conviction becomes the opposite of Spontaneous Gnosis. Why? Because it arises from the examination of causes and circumstances.

Some uphold the philosophical position of the single Sphere, deriving it from extensive reflection and analysis based on various terms: [86] this very conviction possesses the nature of multiplicity. Why? Because it arises from the examination of multiple entities, and if that position of the single Sphere exists, then dependent on it, there are multiple entities.

When examining and analyzing the entities of self and other, someone asserts The Great Self: [87] this very conviction is a dualistic entity. Why? Because if The Great Self exists as a defined philosophical position examined in relation to self and other, then dependent on that Great Self, there is also its opposite.

[84] mTha'.

[85] bTsal ba dang bral ba.

[86] Tha snyad.

[87] bDag nyid chen po.

## 82 Translation

The perspective that asserts there are no goals [88] becomes a goal in itself when held by anyone who reflects on any object considered a goal. The very act of believing in the correctness of the absence of goals creates a conviction that shapes one's viewpoint. Why is this the case? Even the belief that one should not pursue any goals is, paradoxically, a form of goal-setting, as it directs attention and intention toward the concept of having no goals.

Moreover, the belief that there is no goal to be achieved, supported by examining the entities of achievement, is something that must be realized. Why? Because when one pursues the absence of a goal to be achieved, dependent on that, there exists the opposite entity that must be realized.

When examining the entities of suffering and emotional afflictions [89], someone upholds the philosophical position of Great Bliss: this very conviction implies suffering. Why? Because bliss is asserted by denying what is suffering and emotional affliction; and because if one exists, so must the other.

Additionally, by analyzing the entities of philosophical positions, one claims freedom from the limitations [90] of all philosophical positions: this very conviction is a limited position. Why? Because if there is freedom from limited positions, there must also be limited positions; indeed, the very conviction of the absence of limited positions is itself a limited position.

Reflecting on sentient beings [91] that transmigrate in saṃsāra and analyzing them, someone asserts the state of a Buddha who does not transmigrate: this very conviction is the position of a sentient being. Why? Because if there is the realized state of a Buddha achieved through the abandonment of saṃsāra, then there are also sentient beings.

By reflecting on the entities of deliberate access to non-duality and analyzing them, one asserts the position that there is no need to access non-duality: here, there is an access that implies effort. Why? Because one acts to achieve the absence of access, and if there is an absence of access, there is also access.

Furthermore, when examining the entities of meditation [92], if one claims that there is nothing to meditate on, this very conviction is a meditation that implies effort. Why? Because there is action aimed at the absence of meditation.

[88] gZa' gtad med pa.

[89] Nyon mongs pa (kleśa): unwholesome mental states that generate suffering (sdug bsngal); the main emotional afflictions are five: desire/attachment, aversion, delusion, pride, and envy/jealousy.

[90] mTha'.

[91] Sems can.

[92] bsGom pa (bhāvanā): the cultivation of the perspective through the state of calm abiding (zhi gnas, śamatha) and clear seeing (lhag mthong, vipāśyanā).

## 83 Translation

Some, analyzing the entities of attainment, assert that there is no spiritual fruit to be gained: this very belief is an attainment through effort. Why? Because if there is nothing to attain, there remains the hope of attaining something.

After analyzing the entities involved in the correction [93] of the defects of contemplation [94], some claim that there is nothing to correct: this very belief is a correction through effort. Why? Because the assertion that there is nothing to correct itself becomes a form of correction.

However, since any belief that has been formed is a limited position, being misled by examination and analysis creates the causes for further concepts [95]. Thus, the principle can never be truly perceived.

*Therefore, The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung) states:*

{15} All dualistic concepts, such as liberation and non-liberation, etc., are limited positions.

Thus, they are a deception.

*Furthermore, it is stated in The Instructions (Man ngag):*

{16} If the limits of examination are numerous, the limits of analysis are even greater.

Additionally:

{17} Extensive examination and analysis are comparable to the multitude of stars in the sky.

*From The Instructions (Man ngag):*

{18} If the mind that analyzes and reflects turns toward the essence of the sky, which is devoid of reflection, it represents a significant flaw compared to the non-reflective sky. Through analysis, one does not immediately reach the essence. Through reflection, one does not encounter the principle.

[93] bCos pa.

[94] bSam gtan (dhyāna).

[95] rTog pa (kalpanā).

*From The Sovereign of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{19} Since the very act of indicating with examples and examining is considered a valid means of knowledge, the notion [96] of what has been indicated and examined arises; thus, the result is merely a stream of Consciousness capable of indicating.

If one examines, the certain notion of the meaning arises; what is thus born is the result of diligent effort. [97]

*From The Great Soaring Eagle (Khyung chen lding ba'i rgyud):*

{20} If one considers that analyzing the verbal positions, such as those of the āgama of the Buddha, is the way, then it consists in following the stream of thoughts, [98] which is equivalent to chasing a mirage.

In the context of Atiyoga, [99] it is evident that the examination and analysis of mental searches mean little. Since they are a deception, they are meaningless; therefore, the great men who practice Atiyoga do not see things in that way. Then, if the examination and analysis are a deception, what is the correct principle of Atiyoga?

### **1.1.5. The Correct Principle**

From the beginning, there is no expression [100] of "non-duality." What is already by nature free from search is not to be glorified [101] as free from search. From the beginning, there is no term "Spontaneous Presence." The original Great Perfection is free from being glorified as Great Perfection. From the beginning, Spontaneous Gnosis is not to be labeled even as Spontaneous Gnosis. From the origin, the Great Sphere is not called "Great Sphere." In the past, present, and future, the term "Great Self" does not exist.

[96] 'Dzin pa.

[97] rTsol sgrub.

[98] rTog pa.

[99] lHag pa'i rnal 'byor.

[100] Tha snyad.

[101] sGro gdags su med.

Without distinguishing between the entrance and the interior, [102] freedom from goals is not merely described as being free from goals. What is inherently realized from the outset is not magnified into something that must be attained. There exists no expression for abiding naturally in profound bliss.

From the beginning, [306] non-duality remains unaltered [103] by the assertion that one need not access it. What has not deviated from its natural clarity [104] since the start is not corrected by the claim that there is nothing to meditate upon. The limitless state [105] is not articulated as being free from limits. Nor is it necessary to demonstrate that what transcends even the term "concept" [106] requires correction. What is inherently Buddha is not constituted or labeled as "Buddha." Why? Because it is already realized from the outset, it is neither considered, corrected, altered, grasped, nor created. It does not emerge at a specific moment through the scrutiny of discriminative intelligence, for it is, by nature, free from signs [107] and verbal expressions from the very beginning. This understanding is profoundly challenging to grasp.

*From The Lamp of Clarity (gSal ba'i sgron ma):*

{21} An illusion, [108] not born from the beginning, will not be diminished by the assertion of its unborn nature.

Furthermore:

{22} Phenomena [109] are not perceived dualistically, and their true nature [110] is not something that exists. Beyond the explanations surrounding the overcoming of attachment, [307] there are no words to convey the original condition of reality. It is ineffable.

Recognize the significance of this principle of perception! Although it is ineffable, it is nonetheless referred to as "the great principle without difficulty."

[102] sGo phugs.

[103] bSlad pa.

[104] Rang gsal.

[105] mTha': the extremes of eternalistic and nihilistic positions.

[106] rNam rtog (vikalpa): discriminative thought.

[107] brDa.

[108] sGyu ma (māyā).

[109] Chos can (dharmin).

[110] Chos nyid (dharmatā).



### 1.1.6. The Discovery of Vision

Why is it stated that "the truth of the authentic principle [111] is seen through this complete absence of examination"? I respond as follows: All entities are devoid of the duality of self and other, subject and object of knowledge. Thus, this very non-seeing, this non-observation of anything, is termed "vision" only metaphorically; [112] indeed, there is no vision of anything apart.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung chen po):*

{23} Having comprehended with certainty [113] that the mind itself [114] is unborn, [115] unoriginated, [116] without birth, [117] just as it has been from the beginning, [118] that its innate nature is Spontaneous Presence, [119] that it is the enlightened Consciousness which constitutes the root, [120] and that the three sublime maṇḍala represent the true reality, [121] then the understanding [122] of the Buddhas is experienced in this way:

[111] Yang dag pa.

[112] Bla dvags.

[113] Nges par chud.

[114] Sems nyid.

[115] The mind itself is "unborn" (ma byung) from causes.

[116] It is "unoriginated" (ma skyes) from conditions or circumstances.

[117] Its essence is from the beginning "without birth" (skye ba med pa).

[118] Ye ji bzhin pa: "just as it has been" in that it is free from excesses or defects of evaluation (sgro skur med) due to thoughts. This defines the maṇḍala of the original condition (dbyings kyi dkyil 'khor).

[119] The mind, in addition to being in its essence "without birth," has an incessant nature (rang bzhin 'gags med). This continuity is not produced by anyone or anything, but manifests Spontaneously as presence (lhun gyis grub pa). This defines the maṇḍala of luminous awareness ('od gsal rig pa'i dkyil 'khor).

[120] The absence of birth and cessation characterizes the maṇḍala of enlightened Consciousness, which constitutes the root (rtsa ba byang chub kyi sems kyi dkyil 'khor) of all entities of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

[121] The three sublime (dam pa) maṇḍala of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha constitute the indivisible true nature of reality (dbyer med pa'i chos nyid).

[122] dGongs pa.

## 87 Translation

Consciousness [123] and mental events [124] all become like the sky. [125]

Furthermore, from the same text:

{24} Any appearance of form that is seen reveals no traceable substance. [126] The non-seeing is indeed the true seeing. The discovery of the ineffable self-awareness experience is merely conventionally referred to as "the discovery of vision."

Again, from the same source:

{25} He asked: O noble beings, do you see that matrix of enlightenment? [127] They replied: O noble teacher, we see the matrix of enlightenment [128] without having seen it. He asked: In what way do you see it without having seen it? They replied: Without having seen the matrix of enlightenment, we see everything as the matrix of enlightenment. [...]

{26} He asked: Noble beings, do you see the true nature [129] of all reality? They replied: Noble teacher, we have not seen the true nature of all reality. He asked: Why have you not seen it? They replied: Because we do not perceive it. [130]

[123] Consciousness (sems) is the cognitive faculty (rnam par shes pa) in general that, coming into contact with the objects of the five senses and mental contents, becomes aware of them.

[124] Mental events (sems las byung ba, caitta) are sensations (tshor ba), notions ('du shes), and conditioning impulses ('du byed).

[125] The experience of a Buddha is comparable to the sky, as it is devoid of the notions of center and periphery, self and other. Everything appears clearly without confusion, but there is never a departure from the great clarity of self-awareness.

[126] rDzas.

[127] sNying po byang chub.

[128] Byang chub kyi snying po.

[129] Rang bzhin.

[130] Mi dmigs. To perceive (dmigs pa) in a dualistic sense means to have mental references to objects.

## 88 Translation

He asked: "Noble beings, have you not seen the true nature of all reality?" They replied: "Noble teacher, we see it."

He asked: "Noble beings, how do you see it?" They responded: "The true nature of all reality, we see it as unmodified, [131] unaltered, [132] not derived, [133] unborn, [134] just as it is—the true reality, [135] the maṇḍala as it has been from the beginning." [136]

He asked: "Do you see the state of Buddha?" They replied: "We have not seen it."

He asked: "Why have you not seen it?" They responded: "Because we do not perceive it.""

He asked: "Have you not seen it?" They replied: "We see it."

He asked: "How do you see it?" They responded: "Everything is Buddha in reality as it is, [137] for it is all-pervasive. Thus, we see it as the Spontaneously present maṇḍala of nature."

He asked: "Do you see sentient beings?" They replied: "We have not seen them."

He asked: "Why have you not seen them?" They responded: "Because we do not perceive them."

He asked: "Have you not seen them?" They replied: "We see them."

He asked: "How do you see them?" They responded: "We see all sentient beings as the maṇḍala of the enlightened Consciousness that is the root."

From the same text:

{27} One sees, and yet nothing is seen, because the phenomena that appear are devoid of intrinsic existence. [138]

[131] It is not modified (ma bcos) by an agent.

[132] It is not altered (ma bslad) by thought.

[133] It is not derived from a cause (rgyu).

[134] It is not born on the basis of conditions or circumstances (rkyyen).

[135] It is the true reality (de kho na nyid) because it is not erroneous.

[136] Such is the condition free from mental projections or elaborations (spros pa).

[137] De bzhin nyid (tathatā).

[138] They are empty of intrinsic existence (rang bzhin med pa).

When the profound practice of the secret understanding, the total union of the Buddhas, shines forth as the Spontaneous direct self-aware perception, [139] that very Spontaneous Gnosis is called "vision."

If we adhere to these citations, it follows that if one acts with the intent to have the vision, one deviates into the mere words contained in the tantras and āgamas, indeed there is the flaw of not having understood that the true meaning of those words is The Self. [140] Therefore, in this great spiritual system, there is nothing to do in order to have the vision of the principle; for this reason, since everything is The Great Self, the principle is by nature clear, [141] without having sought it or seen it: this natural clarity itself is the supreme eye. This principle is nothing other than the revelation of the understanding of the Victorious Ones transmitted in the upadeśas.

### **1.1.7. Second Critique**

#### **1.1.7.1. Objection**

Not having understood the aforementioned principle, without the certainty [142] of the way of seeing and devoid of the upadeśa of the valid spiritual lineage, [143] someone who has exercised the tongue in the study of the inferior ways of seeing, affirms: "Through self-awareness, there are no mental references [144] with respect to the so-called reality as it is, the essence in which the true nature of reality consists, unborn and empty; [145] having no concepts, there is not even an object of Gnosis. When there are no references, [146] there is no duality of subject and object: this alone is the Great Perfection, since there is no action and vision there." [147]

[139] Rang byung rang rig mngon sum.

[140] bDag nyid.

[141] Rang gsal ba.

[142] gDengs.

[143] The lineage (brgyud pa, paramparā) consists in the transmission of the initiatic understanding from one person to another.

[144] dMigs 'dzin: to hold the mind fixed on an object of the five senses or imaginary.

[145] sTong pa (śūnya).

[146] Mi dmigs.

[147] See L, p. 156.4-5: "The Bodhisattva Śrīgarbha said: 'To mentally dissect having references is duality. Not having mental references is absence of duality'"

### 1.1.7.2. Response

The person who speaks in this way, asserting that this is the Great Perfection, is based on the contemplation of the Middle Way. [148]

*From The Epitome (sPyi bcings):*

{28} Asserting that such a system is that of the unsurpassed Great Perfection, one relies solely on the contemplation of sudden access. [149] To demote the king's son to a servant means to contradict the āgama.

Therefore, this is equivalent to demoting the noble son of the king to a servant, because it deeply contradicts the āgama. Now, one's own deceptive way of seeing appears as that of the Great Perfection, so it is false, similar to when forms appear double, if the sight is strongly disturbed due to the intake of arura, [150] barura, [151] or due to fever. These ignorant people follow only an idea [152] and are in great confusion within.

### 1.1.8. The Universal Path

So, what is the understanding of the principle of the Great Perfection, the vehicle unbound by action? It is the generative mother of all the victorious Buddhas, the antidote to all coerced actions. Indeed, since it is the non-dual state, not accepting and not rejecting is accessing non-duality.

[148] dBu ma (madhyamaka).

[149] sTon men (Chin. dunmen).

[150] Lat. Terminalia chebula Retz.; Harītakī. See Bhagwan Dash, Pharmacopoeia of Tibetan Medicine, p. 293.

[151] Lat. Terminalia belerica Roxb.; Bibhītakī. Ibid., p. 276. The expression a bar is an abbreviation of the two aforementioned non-toxic drugs, although in Dash it appears once to indicate only the first (ibid., pp. 7, 292).

[152] Blo.

## 91 Translation

Regardless of the method and path practiced, without this understanding, one does not attain the state of Buddha. Therefore, it is crucial to realize the state of Buddha, and all actions aimed at that attainment must be of great importance. Why is this so?

Up to and including Anuyoga, in relation to the principle of equality [153] of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, there is still a separation between the access door and the interior; one becomes familiar [154] with such equality, and the meaning of the teaching is indicated by signs. [155] Therefore, without freedom from action to manifest [156] the purpose of the effort, one does not see the principle of non-action as happens in Atiyoga.

Let's give an example: when the sea is dirty and turbulent, the dirt emerges; but if it is not dirty, having naturally clarified itself, all the reflections appear, without any need to search for them. Similarly, by seeking the state of Buddha through the lower vehicles, one will never encounter it, because one is not in accord with the immutable [157] essence. According to this great spiritual system, enlightenment happens precisely through non-action. Since the primordial Buddha [158] appears without having sought enlightenment, all beings, from the fully purified victor to the being in the hell of avīci, [159] attain final liberation through this principle of non-action. Therefore, all the Victorious Ones have become Buddhas by understanding this principle.

*From The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba):*

{29} Even I, Vajrasattva, thanks to this wonderful enlightened Consciousness, have also become a Buddha at Vajrāsana. [160]

Furthermore, from The Refined Gold (rDo la gser zhun):

{30} Having the quality of the mother of all sugatas, it is the sole path of all the Victorious Ones. It is the foundation of the ocean of practices [161] that

[153] mNyam pa.

[154] 'Dris goms.

[155] rTags.

[156] mNgon du byed pa.

[157] Mi g.yo ba.

[158] Phyi mo'i sangs rgyas.

[159] mNar med pa'i dmyal ba: the lowest level of hell.

[160] Bodhgayā: the place where Śākyamuni attained perfect enlightenment.

[161] sPyod pa.

They constitute the paths of the pāramitās, [162] such as ethics, etc. [...] Also, all the so-called entities of the complete liberation of the superior beings, [163] however many they may be, as well as their qualities, emanate from the fulfillment of the same illuminated Consciousness. Even all the immortal Bodhisattvas, [164] the great family of superior beings, do not manifest without the illuminated Consciousness. Therefore, this illuminated Consciousness is the supreme path of complete liberation.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{31} The matrix of enlightenment is present as the mother of all the Buddhas, totally quiescent, as it is, without mental elaborations. [165]

*From The Six Spheres (Thig le drug pa):*

{32} It is explained that the illuminated Consciousness is any path of complete liberation. Being the mother of the sugatas, it is the universal way. Without it the Buddhas would not appear; therefore it is precisely the supreme path of complete liberation.

*From The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba):*

{33} The sole sole medicine that benefits sentient beings in the three realms is the illuminated Consciousness; there is no other. If one knows the principle of the illuminated Consciousness, there are no causes in which the entities of saṃsāra consist, and all quickly attain enlightenment.

*From The Great Eagle in Flight (Khyung chen lding ba):*

[162] Pha rol phyin.

[163] 'Phags pa (ārya): those who have achieved the direct vision of the true nature of reality.

[164] Byang chub sems dpa'.

[165] Ma spros.

If the great medicine of the immovable [166] Natural State is not used, the causes of ascent to the higher realms [167] will embrace emotional afflictions.

Therefore, without this path, not even the victorious Buddhas appear. Despite the paths followed, without the path of non-action, one will not be liberated from the prison of diligent effort, and the drying up of the ocean of saṃsāra will never happen for beings. In order to establish beings in bliss, without having established them intentionally through non-action, one must rely on this path.

## **1.2. The views of the masters**

### **1.2.0. Enunciation**

The way of seeing that, through this method, consists in encountering the perfect principle without encountering dualistically is the great understanding [168] devoid of understanding. In general, there is only one way of seeing. However, here, for the moment, I will explain some fundamental convictions of the masters [169], which are nonetheless innumerable. The systems are different, but, whatever the explanation, the essence is the same.

Some explain the way of seeing as the absence of objectives; similarly, there is the way of seeing of Spontaneous Presence, the way of seeing of The Great Self, [316] the way of seeing of Spontaneous Gnosis, the way of seeing of freedom from seeking, the way of seeing of Great Bliss, the way of seeing of non-duality, the way of seeing of the Great Sphere, and the way of seeing of our great system [170] that consists in freedom from all limited positions without having abandoned them.

[166] Mi g.yo.

[167] The higher realms are those of the gods (lha, deva), the titans or demigods (lha min, asura), and humans. The causes of such rebirths are the merits of virtuous actions, but not being sufficient to allow the abandonment of saṃsāra, they are inseparable from emotional afflictions.

[168] rTogs pa.

[169] bShes gnyen.

[170] Rang lugs chen po.



### 1.2.1. The Absence of Objectives

Regarding the view of the absence of objectives, [171] there is the explanation of the correct principle and the explanation of the defects of the deviation caused by the misunderstanding of that principle.

#### 1.2.1.1. The Understanding

This is the explanation of the correct principle. Buddha, sentient beings, saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, are all merely conventional designations. [172] Their essence [173] appears diverse, yet it does not exist as such. The field [174] of Spontaneous Gnosis is by nature free from everything, without anything having been eliminated; there is no objective [175] of having to discover enlightenment somewhere, nor is there the objective of the desire for the principle to become clear through its knowledge. [176] So, where is the mental reference [177] to an intrinsic existence? There is none. This does not arise from the elimination of objectives. Indeed, since there are no objectives from the very beginning, this statement need not even be made; since its true meaning is The Self, it is not something to be intentionally found: for example, it is like the sun that does not seek the luminosity of the fireflies.

*From The Great Eagle (Khyung chen):*

{35} In the Natural State [178] of the Great Nectar, the method of the objective is not perceived.

*From The Union of All Precious Ones (Byang chub kyi sems rin po che kun 'dus):*

[171] gZa' gtad dang bral ba'i lta ba.

[172] Tha snyad kyi bla dvags: conventional verbal expressions whose value is purely metaphorical.

[173] Ngo bo.

[174] sPyod yul (gocara).

[175] gZa' ba.

[176] Rig pa.

[177] dMigs gtad.

[178] Rang bzhin. The true nature of things is not an objective to be achieved by practicing a method of realization, but the present Natural State beyond any correction.

## 95 Translation

{36} If one understands that this is the matrix, the potential of complete enlightenment, where are the goals and purposes? If one truly comprehends the state of fulfillment without anything to do, even if one has a goal and follows a path to reach it, one is beyond the horizon of the goal.

Therefore, if one surely understands the principle of the absence of goals, any action undertaken with a goal does not interrupt the activity, and nothing is done with effort, so one is free from the horizon of the goal.

*From The Essence of Enlightened Consciousness (Byang chub kyi sems tig):*

{37} There is no horizon of the goal. [181] The capacity to strive is lacking.

There are many quotes like these, but whatever the explanation, it is meant that the goal is a reference [182] and here, in Atiyoga, the very principle of the absence of goals, the lack of references, is not something that should be held in the mind.

*From The Instructions (Man ngag):*

{38} If one does not dwell even on the absence of mental images, [183] what is the use of speaking of not dwelling on images?

It is necessary to ascertain the fact that there is no thought [184] on which one should dwell.

[179] Yul las 'das.

[180] sPyod yul.

[181] gZa' ba'i yul.

[182] dMigs pa (ā lambana).

[183] mTshan ma (nimitta). The term literally means "sign," but it indicates a distinct mental representation that allows defining what is perceived.

[184] bSam pa.

### 1.2.1.2. The Misunderstanding

Now I explain the defect due to the misunderstanding of the absence of objectives. The blind who act to manifest the objective and seek the goal [185] do not understand that the intent [186] to be manifested and the goal are The Self. They plunge into despair, like those herbivorous animals [187] chasing the mirage of water in the hot summer.

*From The Wondrous (rMad du byung ba):*

{39} There is no enlightenment for one who desires it. Such a person is far from the levels and the supreme enlightenment of complete liberation. One who understands the true nature of reality, which is like an illusion, is certain that the enlightened Consciousness is The Self. Since it is to the matrix of enlightenment that The Self refers, there is neither attainment nor renunciation. The enlightenment of the Buddhas is a conventional expression, it does not actually occur.

Therefore, the objective is a deception and here there are no objectives.

*From The Great Eagle in Flight (Khyung chen lding ba):*

{40} Accessing a path, when there is no path, is the great sickness of the path. Desiring the attainment of the goal is comparable to the pursuit of the mirage by the cervids. There is nothing to be found and never will enlightenment arise from the three worlds. [188] Even the status that depends on the ten levels [189] is an obscuration [190] of enlightenment.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

[185] 'Bras bu (phala).

[186] Don.

[187] Ri dvags: this term usually refers to cervids.

[188] The three worlds ('jig rten) are those of the gods, humans and nāga: the gods dwell above, above the earth; humans live on the earth, while the nāga are below the earth.

[189] Sa bcu: the ten stages of realization of the Bodhisattva.

[190] sGrib pa (āvaraṇa).

{41} The path of Brahma, [191] which ascends from one level to the next, is not in alignment with the teaching that is free from action. If one were to proceed on a path, there would be no attainment, just as one could not reach the boundaries of the sky.

Therefore, having an objective and traversing a path to reach it is a delusion.

*Thus, in this context, Space (Klong) states:*

{42} The Bhagavat [192] Samantabhadra, [193] being wise, has said that the enlightened Consciousness, unmodified in its nature as it is, is not something upon which one should meditate with an objective.

This is how one must find certainty.

### **1.2.2. The Spontaneous Presence**

Regarding the perspective of the great state that is Spontaneously present, [194] its exposition is twofold: the principle and the flaw.

#### **1.2.2.1. The Understanding**

This is the explanation of the correct principle. Always, without beginning or end, the essence [195] in which the true nature of the Buddhas, sentient beings, and all their fields of activity consists is the unsurpassed innate Buddha that constitutes the great state of reality [196] present Spontaneously. What is its characteristic?

[191] Tshangs pa'i lam: the path that leads to ever higher states of purity (gtsang ma).

[192] bCom ldan 'das: an epithet that could be rendered as "divine."

[193] Kun tu bzang po: "Universal Goodness," the personification of the Dharmakāya, the "spiritual body" that characterizes the essence of the Buddhas.

[194] lHun gyis grub pa'i ngang chen: the "Natural State" that constitutes the unique true essence of all entities, both of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra.

[195] Ngo bo nyid.

[196] Chos nyid.

This is exemplified by the wish-fulfilling jewel: [197] despite one's own merits being few, through the use of the jewel, any desire becomes manifest. It becomes exceedingly challenging to ascertain, articulate, or affirm whether such manifestations reside within the jewel, outside of it, in between, nowhere, or in all three realms simultaneously. The question of why they appear distinctly, especially when they may be intertwined within the jewel, or if they exist truly as separate entities, remains elusive; nevertheless, every desire appears fulfilled.

In a similar vein, the reality of the great Spontaneously present state is also evidenced [198] by all its qualities. However, it is difficult to scrutinize and elucidate whether these qualities are singular or manifold, or whether the blessings [199] of these qualities genuinely exist in this point of space. Yet, the great blessings manifest naturally and are unceasing. Furthermore, while the nature [200] of the precious wish-fulfilling jewel serves as an apt illustration,

*The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung) states:*

{43} The precious jewel possesses no discriminative thoughts [201] and performs its function effortlessly. [202] Through it, desires are fulfilled, needs are satisfied, hopes materialize, and there is no interruption in the manifestation of qualities. Joy is generated without depleting the jewel's potential; beings are guided along the path of happiness, and actions are consistently accomplished without obstacles to their realization or repetition of requests. The precious jewel gives abundantly, and necessities are fulfilled. O lord of Laṅkā, these aspects [203] are partial, yet regarding the example of the jewel of self-awareness as it exists in itself, there is no partiality.

[197] Yi bzhin nor bu (cintāmaṇi): a mythical precious stone believed to fulfill any desire of its possessor.

[198] bZhag pa.

[199] Byin rlabs (adhiṣṭhāna): the power or energy of enlightened Consciousness that manifests naturally as the qualities (yon tan) of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

[200] Ngo bo.

[201] rNam par mi rtog pa (nirvikalpa): The precious jewel has no idea or concept of fulfilling someone's desires.

[202] Since the jewel performs the action of fulfilling desires, it follows that beings experience satisfaction ('dod pa tshim pa).

[203] Chos.

According to the quotation, the state of innate Great Bliss is eternally liberated from all sensory objects; [204] thus, devoid of both a conceptualizing subject and a conceptualized object, it embodies the essence of profound non-conceptuality. The precious gem fulfills the needs and aspirations of all practitioners on the path [205] and their disciples [206], ensuring that any desire for attainment [207] they harbor becomes manifest. This precious gem encompasses all superior and intermediate realizations without exception. There is never a moment when these attainments are absent; they continuously generate joy for the disciples, and their qualities are boundless. It establishes all practitioners on the path in genuine happiness [208].

Concerning the actions of others, they are always fully realized, and their manifestations are unobstructed. There is no need to reiterate the request to benefit others. The precious gem grants the objects of desire as they are envisioned, fulfilling all purposes, with whatever manifests being unceasing. Furthermore, from the same text:

{44} It possesses continuous qualities. It engages in continuous activities.

The principle of the innately present state cannot be adequately conveyed by merely indicating its characteristics. It permeates everything without exception and eludes mental perception. It is unassociated with anything. Thus, metaphorically [209], it is referred to as "the innately present state." Moreover, it is neither created at a specific moment by a victorious Buddha, nor conceived by the practitioner on the path, nor does it arise from entities like Phyva [210] or Īśvara; it is a Spontaneous Presence from the very beginning.

[204] sPyod yul (gocara).

[205] Lam pa.

[206] gDul bya.

[207] dNgos grub.

[208] Yang dag pa'i bde ba.

[209] Bla dvags su.

[210] An ancient Tibetan deity of the indigenous bon po religion who personifies fortune.

*From The Cuckoo (Khu byug):*

{45} Since the goal is already realized, the affliction of effort is relinquished: this condition is recognized to remain Spontaneously in the Natural State.

Thus, it is taught that the goal is inherently realized [211] from the very beginning and is not to be pursued; even all paths and objectives are fulfilled within the vast expanse of great Gnosis without the need for seeking.

Therefore, as recited in The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):

{46} The intention of the mind [213] serves as the benefactor: through observation, it has revealed its power. The vision attained is the accomplishment. It embodies the completed inner absorption [214].

*From The Wheel of Life (Srog gi 'khor lo):*

{47} The three piṭaka [215], the tantras, and the essential upadeśa are realized within Consciousness [216].

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{48} The original condition of the variegated reality, which is nothing, as conscious awareness [217] serves as the matrix of enlightenment. This represents the philosophical stance of Spontaneous yoga, the utterly pure Gnosis of Yogins who engage in the great method, embodying the understanding of non-duality. Without hope in the primordial condition, the primordial condition itself becomes evident [218].

[211] bZhag pa yin. Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (11th century) in Theg pa chen po'i tshul la 'jug pa (RZ, I, p. 525) interprets bzhag pa (Skt. sthita) as mnyam par bzhag pa, "inner absorption": btang snyoms chen po'i ngang la lhun gyis gnas pa 'di ni mnyam par bzhag pa zhes bya ba'i don yin no/. Cf. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, Dzog-chen: The Self-Perfected State, p. 85.

[212] Grub zin pa.

[213] Yid (manas): the mind as the faculty that perceives objects not perceivable by the five senses.

[214] mNyam bzhag (samāhita): the realization of perfect quiescence (zhi gnas).

[215] sDe snod (piṭaka). The three baskets of non-tantric or exoteric Buddhism are the collections of disciplinary rules (vinaya), teachings (sūtra), and philosophical studies (abhidharma).

[216] Thugs.

[217] Shes pa rig can.

[218] gSal ba. "Clear" signifies "evident" in terms of direct perception.

This quote teaches that both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa possess the nature [219] of Spontaneous Presence, rendering hope and fear irrelevant.

*From The Union of All Precious Ones (Rin po che kun 'dus):*

{49} The understanding of the equanimous state that fulfills the hopes of all beings, without exception, and the great vehicle that leads to it permeates everything, and there is no being that is not accomplished.

The quote elucidates that in the Spontaneously completed [220] awareness, qualities and blessings arise effortlessly, without being sought; since this represents the true identity [221] of all things, it is asserted that nothing is ever eliminated or attained.

*From The Widespread Bliss (bDe 'byams):*

{50} The undivided [222] Spontaneously completed Sphere, the great primordial condition, is impassive, precious from the very beginning. Being devoid of action, it embodies the great Spontaneously completed Sphere.

Furthermore:

{51} Being immutable, it is akin to black wool: [...] if one examines it, one understands that it is black by nature. So it is for the level of realization, which is reached directly, remaining Spontaneously in the Natural State.

*From The Comprehensive Ascertainment (sPyi gcod):*

{52} The state of natural fulfillment, beyond which there is nothing from the beginning, is not subject to the change of death and is unalterable and stable, like gold

[219] Ngo bo.

[220] lHun gyis rdzogs pa'i rig pa.

[221] bDag nyid.

[222] dByer med.



This citation indicates the immutable state that need not be sought.

*From The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba):*

{53} Great Being, the bodies [223] of the supreme victors, though manifesting in diverse modalities, are all akin to a precious gem.

Further:

{54} In whatever manner the color of the body of the victors appears and manifests, it resembles the color of a precious gem: the white hue of a gem is the gem itself, and regardless of whether it is red, yellow, green, or any other color, it remains the same gem. It is not that this color is the gem while that one is not. Similarly, for the bodies of the victors, the colors and forms represent their bodies; there is nothing that is not their bodies.

This signifies that all qualities are fulfilled; that is, the same concrete reality [224] serves as the maṇḍala of the body and the Gnosis of the Buddhas. The fortunate [225] disciple comprehends this principle effortlessly, without needing to engage in any action to grasp it. Since there is nothing to be done to know it, being the original state as it is, the mere recognition of that principle allows all sensory objects [226] to manifest clearly as that same precious gem, Spontaneously fulfilled. From the same text:

{55} Whatever the person who discovers the gem in the three realms desires, that desire is realized. This realm transforms into the very gem that fulfills desires.

[223] sKu (kāya).

[224] dNgos po nyid.

[225] sKal pa dang ldan pa.

[226] bDag gi spyod yul.

Therefore, it is not as if the world has become something other than it is; rather, it means that what is has manifested naturally. [227] Consequently, there is no collection of merits and wisdom to accumulate and seek at this moment. Whatever is done or accomplished, there is neither waste nor accumulation, and thus the text states:

{56} This illuminated Consciousness embodies true enlightenment. Without the need for accumulated experiences, realization occurs instantaneously. By honoring one's own intrinsic nature [228], the heart of the practice remains intact. The thoughts arising from one's own heart, when contemplated, manifest as the body of the Buddha, ever-present and Spontaneous [231].

Understanding this principle leaves no room for doubt. As stated in the same text:

{57} The actions of the illuminated Consciousness effortlessly fulfill every desire, akin to a wish-fulfilling tree [232]. Through the continuous bliss of enlightenment, all becomes the matrix of supreme awakening.

Numerous citations echo this sentiment. Yet, regarding The Great Self that has always been present, who perceives it, and what is perceived? If there is nothing to seek in what is seen, then one encounters the original purity of perception, a Spontaneous Presence that reveals the correct way of seeing.

[227] Rang shar ba.

[228] Rang bsngags pas. The various editions of the cited source offer a different reading: "Through one's own Mantra" (rang sngags kyis).

[229] sNying po.

[230] sNying po.

[231] The same thought that naturally arises from the illuminated Consciousness is the Spontaneous body of the Buddhas.

[232] 'Dod rgu'i dpag bsam ljon shing. 'Dod rgu'i is a hypothetical emendation of the original lectio 'dge tshol', "novice".

Even though the teachings may be seen as nearing the final phase of five hundred years [233], some who present the Dharma assert:

"While this may be true, this way of seeing pertains only to the foundation [234], and thus it is not beneficial; the upadeśas on focus [235], the methods for cultivating experience, are what truly matter."

Those who express such views resemble someone attempting to unlock a safe with a bone key. Indeed, seeking the realization of Spontaneous Presence through instructions [236] on mental focus [237] is a misdirection. If this misunderstanding persists, liberation remains unattainable; such is the outcome of misguided effort.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{58} In comparison to the profound method of original Spontaneous Presence, the practice [238] that involves correcting the cause is not the ultimate approach. If one remains ensnared in the practice that clings to causes, what value is there in the great method of non-conceptualization?

Thus, it becomes evident that this represents a significant deviation.

The Great Self

In relation to the vision of the great Atiyoga [239], the perspective of The Great Self will also elucidate the correct principle and the deviations arising from misunderstanding.

[233] Here reference is made to the last phase of the ten that make up the prophesied temporal cycle by the Buddha. It begins at the time of Śākyamuni and ends with the period in question, in which the Buddha's Dharma degenerates due to the lack of a genuine way of seeing and conduct.

[234] gZhi.

[235] dMigs pa. The focus of the mind has an object as a reference point, which can be physical or imagined through visualization.

[236] Man ngag (upadeśa).

[237] dMigs 'dzin.

[238] sPyod pa.

[239] lHag pa'i rnal 'byor chen po.

### 1.2.3.1. The Understanding

What is the correct principle? All entities, encompassing self and other, the ego and all that appears as self, possess the identity [240] of self-aware Gnosis that does not dwell [241] on anything. This awareness is inherently clear, untouched by transformation or alteration, and it transcends even the term "Great Self." Indeed, it has existed beyond the conventions of words and letters from the very beginning.

Should we then abandon the need to name this way of seeing? It is named to counteract attachment to alternative paths and the hopes of beginners drawn to the great vehicle. Since the essence [242] of reality is naturally free from the overestimations and underestimations [243] of self and other, in the state of The Great Self, all entities perceived as other are, without exception, nullified by The Self. Why?

As stated in The Epitome (sPyi bcings):

{59} The Self exists. The other does not exist. The Great Self, being Spontaneously present, exists. In the state of Samantabhadra, since all is one, there is no other.

Thus, in the state of Consciousness that is naturally uncontaminated [244] by the notions of self and other, The Great Selfless self [245] embodies The Great Self. Furthermore, as will be elaborated below, since there is no goal to be realized and no other path to be sought, the term "Great Self" is employed. In this context, since apart from The Self there is no other goal, no other essence called Buddha,

The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung chen po) states:

{60} He asked: Noble beings, how is the matrix of enlightenment realized?  
They replied: It is not to be realized.

He asked: Why is it not to be realized?

They replied: Because it is already realized from the very beginning.

[240] bDag nyid: The Self or the inalienable essence.

[241] Mi gnas pa.

[242] Ngo bo.

[243] sGro skur.

[244] Ngang gis dag pa.

[245] Nga med pa'i nga chen po.

He asked: In what way is it realized from the very beginning?

They responded: It does not arise from another; it arises from itself, it is effortless and Spontaneous, therefore it is certainly known through direct experience from the very beginning.

Consequently, there is no need to actualize it or seek it.

*From The View that is a Cloud of Teachings (lTa ba chos nyid sprin):*

{61} Sentient beings arising from delusion and Buddhas arising from understanding have the nature of The Self; all without exception are included within The Self.

Indeed, it is not that some other existing thing is included within The Self.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{62} Everywhere, all that is used and enjoyed arises from The Self.

Therefore, if something appears, it is not another that appears but The Self, since universally The Great Self appears to itself; [247] for there is only The Self that enjoys The Self. The same text states:

{63} Being like the sky, it is boundless and not an entity that depends on something else. [...] Entities do not arise from anything other than awareness [248] through its own power, through unequaled Gnosis.

This quote explains that there are no other paths and goals beyond the Gnosis of The Great Self.

*From The Ornament of Bliss ('Phra bkod):*

{64} The Great Self, the venerable all-encompassing union, is the universal synthesis, the supreme life. [250]

[246] Ngo bo.

[247] Rang snang.

[248] Rig pa: self-aware Consciousness (rang rig).

[249] Kun 'dus.

[250] Srog.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{65} It is the primary reality [251] that consists of the union of the entire assembly of the Victorious Ones, the identity [252] of all the external, internal, and secret maṇḍalas.

*From The Pervasive Bliss (bDe 'byams):*

{66} Everything is complete in itself, without needing to desire anything. Being without name, it is the identity of yoga.

*From The Noble Lord (rJe btsan dam pa):*

{67} Atiyoga is the God of gods. Among the yogas, it is the supreme one. Among the superior beings [253], it is the highest, therefore it is the progenitor of all the adamant Victorious Ones, the noble lord Samantabhadra.

The Great Self of all reality is the progenitor of all the Victorious Ones and is proclaimed as the source of the vehicles. The Great Being who thus encounters the principle of the Buddha state, without having anything to do to understand it, is the personification of all the Victorious Ones, since in awareness, the original Buddha state, all the Victorious Ones are accomplished.

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{68} Since I have understood the principle of enlightened Consciousness, I am the personification of all the Buddhas. I am the tomb of all the Buddhas. I am the great crematorium.

Indeed, The Great Self is the union and the source of all the Victorious Ones. The Great Self has no equal, therefore it possesses the great pride [254] and is without opponents; since it is the identity of the qualities, it is the great pride and, metaphorically, it is also called "I". [255]

So, it has been stated that "The Great Self is the source of everything". In what way is it so? All phenomena conceived mentally are transient manifestations of both virtuous and unvirtuous thoughts.

[251] gTso bo.

[252] bDag.

[253] 'Phags pa.

[254] Nga rgyal chen po.

[255] Since nga rgyal, here translated as "pride", literally means "victorious I", the author clarifies that "I" is only a metaphor, which refers to the enlightened Consciousness.

The Great Self, having never been mentally conceived by anyone, has no phenomenal existence. It is present as "emerged prior to all", from which all has arisen, yet it is without beginning.

The previous text states:

{69} Great Being, I, the sole one, have emerged at the beginning, before millions of kalpa. I have appeared even before the elements [257] The body, speech, and Consciousness of the Buddhas have emanated from me; therefore, the very consciousness [258] of the Great Being that you are, being my blessing, is the union of all the Buddhas of the three times [259] and the Great Yogins, and has emerged from me as a manifest [260] ray of light.

If one knows this principle without having known it with the mind, since the true identity is The Great Self, one does not establish intentionally at the level of Buddha, the goal. From the same text:

{70} The Yogin who knows this principle does not dwell at the level of Buddha; for, all is just the level of Buddha, my Consciousness. All sentient beings are born from me.

The same text also states:

{71} Though fleeing swiftly to the infinite, one goes not to any other place than the original condition in which my true nature [262] consists. Bow down to me who am beyond the existence and the void of non-existence.

Therefore, understand me, the enlightened Consciousness free from limited positions [263]

[256] Glo bur ba.

[257] 'Byung ba: earth, water, fire, air, space.

[258] Thugs.

[259] Past, present, and future.

[260] mNgon sum nyid.

[261] Ma rig par rig na.

[262] Chos nyid.

[263] mTha': the limits or extremes of eternalistic (existence) and nihilistic (non-existence) positions.

Further:

{72} I bow to me, the supreme body of Gnosis of all the Buddhas, for by opening the mouth of Gnosis, I completely destroy the foundation [264] of many billions of hearts that, disturbed by ignorance, sustain the delusion [265] of belief in things.

Therefore, the one who conquers all emotional afflictions and their traces, without having abandoned them, is The Great Self. After these and other phrases, the text affirms:

{73} Yama [266] here kills only some gods and men. Since he kills, he is called "The Terrific." Thus he is universally known. But what name should be given to one like me, who terrifies by consuming all, both animate and inanimate? Even if I consume all the Buddhas, I am not satisfied. Bow to me who even more consume all sentient beings, having obscured them, thirsty for their blood. For what reason should one like me, hardly to be opposed, who makes the individual Consciousness [267] pass away and maternally proliferates many children, be called Samantabhadra?

All manifests there [268], yet only relatively [269] it is explained that the Buddhas have already encountered this principle, since they have truly understood it; therefore, having already become The Great Self, they have already been consumed by it. Even sentient beings are liberated here, therefore the source states: "even more I consume all sentient beings." Yet, essentially, there are no Buddhas and sentient beings there. From the previous citations it also follows that this same Great Self is the mother of all the Victorious Ones.

[264] Kun gzhi (ālaya): the fundamental or subconscious Consciousness in which the impressions or traces (bag chags, vāsanā) of experiences are deposited in the form of latent tendencies that, emerging as conditioning impulses ('du byed, saṃskāra), determine the concatenation of actions or karma.

[265] gTi mug.

[266] gShin rje: the "Lord of Death," personification of death.

[267] Rang rig.

[268] Byung thebs: like the waves of the ocean, phenomena arise from The Great Self and return there.

[269] Bri ta (vṛta): that is, according to "relative truth" (saṃvṛti satya), a truth that obscures or conceals.



The text states:

{74} The so-called maṇḍalas reside within me, the maṇḍala of fulfillment.

Thus, without causes and conditions being either relinquished or generated, the Great Self of Spontaneous Gnosis manifests universally to itself, yet simultaneously remains without a fixed abode.

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{75} Authentic Gnosis emerges from Consciousness, just as happiness and suffering, the Dharma, and the wisdom of the Buddha arise; so too does the Saṅgha. From Consciousness spring forth the pāramitās, bodhi, and padma. [270]

Therefore:

{76} All that is to be experienced, whether enjoyed or not, will thus arise.

The understanding [271] of the Great Self, as revealed, occurs naturally and without alteration; when this realization dawns, the clarity within this state of understanding is marked by five grandeurs.

All entities, the five elements, and everything composed of these elements, are encompassed within the condition [272] of the Great Self, embodying the grandeur of the Buddha's state in the original condition of reality, [273] free from limits and boundaries.

According to the text just cited, the purification [274] from limits and all obscurations of karma is inherent; thus, through this natural purification in the original state of reality, even what appears as the five great elements manifests [275] as profound Gnosis in direct self-conscious perception. This is the magnificence of the manifest state of the Buddha. [276]

[270] Bodhi and padma may refer to the tantric symbolism of the male and female generative energies.

[271] Rig pa.

[272] Ngo bo.

[273] Chos kyi dbyings su sangs rgyas pa'i che ba.

[274] Dag pa.

[275] Byung thebs.

[276] mNgon du sangs rgyas pa'i che ba.

The greatness of the Buddha state [277] in The Great Self consists in the fulfillment of the five elements in Gnosis, The Great Self, self-awareness.

Concerning the greatness of the Buddha state, it arises from the original, unforced, and Spontaneous Presence of the five elements, which correspond to the five Buddha families. Thus, the so-called state of Buddha reflects the true nature of these tangible entities. [279]

Concerning the greatness of the total absence of the Buddha state [280], in The Self of the enlightened Consciousness, the great emptiness of the original state, the term "Buddha" is also resolved. [281]

*In this regard, The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung) states:*

{77} Whatever is, is the Buddha state in the original condition. What appears as the five great elements is the continuously abiding Bhagavats who act, the Buddhas of eternal compassion, who dwell everywhere as the omnipresent true nature of all reality. Their continuous activity manifests according to the wishes of sentient beings and as the beings conceive them. [...] The true nature is the emptiness, which reveals its presence in the activity for the benefit of beings. [...] The Buddha directly manifested to the physical senses is the celestial expanse [283] that constitutes the universal original condition devoid of boundaries, present as the empty spaciousness of all things and non-things [284] in the three realms, the bodies and the places in all directions.

[277] bDag nyid chen por sangs rgyas pa'i che ba.

[278] De yin pa'i sangs rgyas pa'i che ba.

[279] dNgos po'i chos.

[280] Thams cad nas thams cad du sangs rgyas pa med pa'i che ba.

[281] Grol ba.

[282] Since there is nothing that is not the Buddha state, even the term "Buddha" is only a metaphor, which vanishes in the ineffable condition of reality as it is. In this sense, one can speak of the total absence of the Buddha state without contradicting the tradition.

[283] mKha' dbyings.

[284] dNgos med.

There are five categories of explanations, of which the remaining four are omitted. [285] The same source continues:

{78} The Buddha state of the Great Self is Samantabhadra, who encompasses and unifies all. It embodies the Gnosis that forms the magnificent universal vehicle. It represents the concentration of union, the synthesis of all. It is the clear vision that dispels obscurations, shining forth as wisdom. It fulfills all knowable things without hindrance or ignorance. [...]

Regarding the Buddha in this context, space is the illuminating essence; the earth is the unshakable holder of the vajra; fire is the source of jewels; water is the infinite and flexible, clear splendor; and wind is the certainty that accomplishes all. [...]

In terms of the absence of the Buddha state, the primordial purity of all within the void, along with the fullness of all things, free from confusion and infused with that purity, constitutes the original, unmodified state of Buddha. The great elements are the bhagavat.

[285] The remaining four explanations concern the manifestation of the Buddha state in the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air).

[286] The true nature of the element space.

[287] The true nature of the element earth.

[288] Ting nge 'dzin (samādhi).

[289] The true nature of the element water.

[290] lHag mthong.

[291] The true nature of the element fire.

[292] The true nature of the element air.

[293] Vairocana.

[294] Vajrapāṇi (Akṣobhya).

[295] Ratnasambhava.

[296] Amitābha.

[297] Amoghasiddhi.

[298] Ye sangs.

[299] rGyas pa.

[300] Ye nas sangs rgyas pa.

*From The Iron Commentary on "The Great Sky" (Nam mkha' che lcags 'grel):*

{79} The term Sattva [301] signifies the matrix of enlightenment. It abides everywhere, endowed with five greatnesses.

This explanation is particularly excellent. The Great Self, as defined, is free from both the object and subject of perception, representing the supreme mode of seeing that is devoid of any point of reference. [302]

### 1.2.3.2. Misunderstanding

Regarding the danger of not recognizing this principle, today there are certain individuals, whom have fixed points of reference, and proclaim:

"The inquiry 'if everything is The Self, what need is there to practice a method of correction?' refers to the true nature, the understanding of the tathāgata. [303] Those who fail to see this principle must practice a method of correction; therefore, if they engage with effort, they can attain the state of Buddha."

Those who speak in this manner, due to their own negative experiences, are comparable to someone who builds a masonry structure on unstable ground and ultimately finds themselves in despair. [304] Why is this so? Because the Buddha is The Self, and outside of The Self, one will never discover the enlightenment they seek.

*From The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):*

{80} From the very beginning, the Buddha is present as the direct perception of The Self, but if it is not recognized, there the thought [305] arises in a manner analogous to a shadow.

Thus, Consciousness becomes the basis for emotional afflictions.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{81} In the direct perception of the fact that The Self is the Buddha from the very beginning, what Buddha is to be prayed to, and from where does it come?

[301] The passage cited here explains the meaning of Vajrasattva, "Adamantine Being," the revealer of the teaching, the personification of enlightened Consciousness.

[302] dMigs gtad.

[303] De bzhin gshegs pa: synonym of sugata/Buddha.

[304] I mean a ground in which the necessary material for construction is lacking.

[305] rTog pa.

As such, prayer is the wheel of delusion, [306] comparable to the pursuit of the mirage by weakened deer.

Therefore, having pleased the teacher with their favored conduct, the fortunate disciples who have received from the master the great method, that which consists in encountering the principle without having something to seek, must protect it like the heart.

### **1.2.4. Spontaneous Gnosis**

#### **1.2.4.1. Understanding**

The way of seeing of Spontaneous Gnosis is as follows. In the condition [307] of Spontaneous Gnosis, free by nature from causes and circumstances, even all entities consisting of birth and cessation are from the beginning the state of Buddha; therefore, they are by nature lucid [308] as great Gnosis, similar to the celestial light, without exterior and interior.

*From The Ten Qualities (Yon tan bcu):*

{82} The earth, the water, the fire, the air, as well as the animate and inanimate reality of the world, all are by nature the original condition of Gnosis. There is no Gnosis apart from this.

Since such great Gnosis is by nature detached from sensory objects, from the beginning there exists no fixed notion [309] of the way of seeing. For example, it is like the celestial space that does not conceptualize and does not consider itself.

*From The Great Eagle (Khyung chen):*

{83} Spontaneous Gnosis is a non-conceptual state always present as it is.

*From The Ten Qualities (Yon tan bcu):*

[306] 'Khrul 'khor: the repetition of actions caused by delusion, that is, by the mental confusion that constitutes saṃsāra.

[307] Ngo bo.

[308] Rang gsal: they appear naturally and without obscurations in Spontaneous Gnosis, which does not perceive them as different from itself.

[309] rTog 'dzin.

{84} There is no expressible way of truly seeing. The way of seeing without a way of seeing is the only supreme way of seeing.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{85} Without one's own mind, the senses are detached from sensory objects.

This means that the object is not perceived. According to the upadeśa of the understanding of the essential point, the characteristic of this view is to be completely detached from the attributes [310] of existence and non-existence, permanence and cessation, as well as going and coming; therefore, it cannot be described in this way.

*From The Great Eagle (Khyung chen):*

{86} Spontaneous Gnosis in itself is detached from verbal positions.

If that Spontaneous Gnosis is The Self, what is perceived and what is seen? There is no conceptualization. From the same text:

{87} The Spontaneous Gnosis is always present as it is in the greater dimension [311]. There is no wonderful object [312] of vision. The eye that sees this is not logical to hear anything. Such Gnosis is detached from any description.

Then, what is the defect of what is born in the variety of causes and circumstances? Are the causes and circumstances also present in the valid means of knowledge of direct perception? I answer that the understanding of the true essence of causes and circumstances is like the sun, while the causes and circumstances themselves are like the rays. The understanding is Spontaneous Gnosis, so the causes and circumstances are not something to be abandoned. The understanding is not born from causes and circumstances. That alone is the true essence not subject to birth, therefore it is the adamant Gnosis.

[310] mTshan ma.

[311] Yul.

[312] Yul.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{88} The cause in itself is adamantine, as are the circumstances. Being unborn, the adamantine essence is devoid of cessation.

*From The Sovereign of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{89} The Gnosis that fulfills desires is limitless, and therefore is invisible and ineffable.

It is said that such great Gnosis is "unlimited" because it is not a partial emptiness. [313]

*From The Ornament of Bliss (bDe ba 'phra bkod):*

{90} It is not perpetually non-existent, like the decaying pith of a banana; [314] rather, it arises from the absence of substantiality, [315] like the light of the sun and moon.

Thus, the totality of Gnosis's qualities manifests naturally without having sought those qualities. It permeates [316] and pervades everything, therefore

The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba) states:

{91} My enlightened Consciousness is subtle and free from impurities; [317] it is without seed and not composed of particles; being without particles, it has no impurities. It is present in all the sugatas and sentient beings.

If the knowledge of this principle is certain, then even what appears as a bad field of activity is the level of a Buddha, such is the great quality of understanding.

[313] Nyi tshe ba'i stong pa. The true emptiness taught by the Buddha is not partial, because it is inseparable from the clarity of Gnosis..

[314] The pith of a banana (chu shing) is not woody, as one might believe, but is composed of water. This is an example of the emptiness of phenomena. Furthermore, the banana produces fruit only once, then dries up. Gnosis is not like the banana, but is rather comparable to the light of the sun and moon, which arises from the emptiness of the sky and manifests ceaselessly.

[315] dNgos po med.

[316] sNums: like the oil present in sesame seeds.

[317] Zag pa med.

Regarding this, the same text states:

{92} For example, the understanding of the principle of the wondrous enlightened Consciousness is as follows. There is a mountain of quartz and colored semi-precious stones, and there is a mountain of gems. Even though the gems are very precious, due to the light of a Chrysoberyl just the size of a sheep's louse, the entire mountain of quartz and semi-precious stones and the entire mountain of gems appear as Chrysoberyl. Similarly, this manifestation of the thousand systems of worlds [319] of the enlightened Consciousness in the sky of Gnosis is marvelous, since it is said that "even all three realms are seen as precious" and "even the three existences become precious."

#### 1.2.4.2. Misunderstanding

Lacking this firm certainty, one strives to make the principle of Gnosis ever clearer, believing that it arises and becomes evident like an object. This is a delusion. The Spontaneous Gnosis that seeks Spontaneous Gnosis is comparable to the medicine itself seeking the physician: thus one ends up trapped in the net of suffering.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{93} Since one is deluded, conditioned by immature people, it is as if the medicine itself sought the physician.

#### 1.2.5.1. The Understanding

The way of seeing of freedom from seeking [319] is defined as follows. According to the system of great Atiyoga, the environment is the immeasurable, unmodified victorious palace [320], and the six kinds of beings that inhabit it are the indivisible unity of awareness and emptiness.

[318] sTong spyi phud. In Buddhist cosmology, a system of worlds includes the three realms (desire, form, and formless); a thousand of them form the first cosmic order, which could be equated to a solar system. The universe would be formed by a thousand systems of worlds cubed.

[319] Bya btsal.

[320] gZhal yas khang.



The Spontaneous Vajra Light Buddha [321] is the inherent nature; the three realms have the identity [322] of the body, speech, and Consciousness of the Buddhas, while the emotional afflictions are transferred into the true nature of reality. Suffering is Spontaneously present as Great Bliss; obscurations naturally shine forth as Gnosis; birth and death transform into eternal life; old age and decline are the primordial Buddha state, unchanging and unaltered. So, what is there to seek in this moment?

The principle of this freedom from seeking must be understood as follows:

(1) Since sentient beings are naturally situated in the Buddha state, the benefit of beings is already accomplished from the very beginning. (2) In the Spontaneous reality as it is, all the Victorious Ones are perfectly accomplished without any confusion, so the maṇḍala is already formed from the outset. (3) The universe of a thousand times a thousand worlds [323] has the nature of complete liberation, so the offering [324] is already given from the start. (4) Whatever action is performed, it is the activity of the Buddhas, for there is nothing that is not the activity of Samantabhadra, so the conduct [325] is already practiced from the beginning. (5) Everything is self-lucid [326] in the great Gnosis, without notions and concepts, so the understanding through the mode of seeing has already occurred. (6) The state of Great Bliss is not something one emerges from or enters [327] in the past, present, or future, so meditation is already practiced. (7) Whatever action is done, it does not transcend the Great Sphere of Gnosis, so the vow [328] is already maintained. (8) Due to the Spontaneous accomplishment, with no remaining intent [329] to be realized, the practice [330] is already done. (9) Phenomena and beings [331] have naturally arisen as the bodies and wisdom of the Buddhas, so the attainments are already obtained. (10) The three bodies [332] of the Buddhas are the enlightened Consciousness itself, so the accumulation of merit and wisdom is already complete.

[321] Rang byung rdo rje 'od kyi sangs rgyas.

[322] bDag nyid.

[323] sTong gsum.

[324] mChod pa.

[325] sPyod pa.

[326] Rang gsal.

[327] 'Byung 'jug.

[328] Dam tshig (samaya).

[329] Don.

[330] bsGrub pa.

[331] sNang srid.

[332] Dharmakāya, Sambhogakāya, Nirmāṇakāya.

(11) The accomplishments are already present, never declining from the space of equality. [333]  
(12) The sovereign of Spontaneous Gnosis has no paths to traverse, so the levels are already attained. [334] (13) Everything is included within The Great Self, so the empowerments are already completed. (14) In this way, the Gnosis that has not abandoned the limits is not associated with anything; therefore, the obscurations are already eliminated. (15) Whatever appears has the nature of the mudrā, so the meditation in which mudrā are assumed is already practiced. [336] (16) What is perceived as sound is the word of the Victorious Ones, so the recitation of Mantras is already done. (17) There being neither union nor separation with respect to the queen of dhāraṇī from the beginning non-dual, the union is already accomplished. (18) The thoughts of sensations are lucid as Gnosis, and there is no term "concept", so the defects of thoughts are already corrected. (19) The Great Self-Awareness has arisen without any interruption, [339] so the signs [340] of progress are already manifest. [20] In the equanimous space of self-awareness, there is no duality, so the heat [341] of the meditative experience is already attained.

Thus, through the twenty meanings of "already accomplished" [342], it is understood that the principle of freedom from seeking [343] is already determined; therefore, who seeks and what is sought? The one who strives seeking and the very search are canceled from the beginning. [344] The following quotes help to have confidence [345] in the principle thus expounded.

[333] The accomplishments obtained are not dispersed but remain.

[334] bsNums pa

[335] Ngo bo.

[336] Mudrā is a symbolic gesture or sign. All phenomena are a sign of the true nature of reality.

[337] gZungs kyi rgyal mo: the best of the Yoginī or consorts in the practice of sexual yoga.

[338] Byung tshor rtog pa.

[339] Ma 'gags pa.

[340] rTags.

[341] Drod: "heat" is synonymous with "progress".

[342] Zin pa.

[343] gTan la phebs zin pa.

[344] Ka nas dag: like stains that need not be removed, because they do not actually exist originally.

[345] Yid ches pa.

*From The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):*

{94} Since the goal is already realized, in the Natural State [346] of the Great Nectar, free from attachment and peaceful, devoid of concreteness [347] and completely detached, the method of the objective [348] is not perceived.

*From The Cuckoo (Khu byug):*

{95} Since the goal is already realized, the disease of effort is abandoned.

*From The Six Spheres (Thig le drug pa):*

{96} With the ambrosia of the "already accomplished," the suffering of effort is eliminated, and one remains always in the dimension [349] just as it is, free from action.

*From The Great Shaking (rTsal chen):*

{97} Without anything to do, since it is devoid of aspiration [350], the Spontaneous fulfillment of the Great Shaking, which is not to be accomplished [351], is the meaning of the true original reality.

*From The Union of All Precious Ones (Rin po che kun 'dus):*

{98} Thus, what is accomplished from the beginning through the ambrosia of the "already accomplished", is not accomplished by acting. Since everything has the quality of the "already accomplished," if the original condition is understood, action is always performed in the state of supreme enlightenment.

[346] Rang bzhin.

[347] dNgos po med.

[348] gZa' ba'i thabs.

[349] Yul.

[350] sMon pa.

[351] bsGrub med.

*From The Widespread Bliss (bDe 'byams):*

{99} With no action, it is the blessed Sphere. With no three times, it is the blessed Sphere. With nothing to seek, it is the blessed Sphere. The original condition is not shaken by the desire to strive.

*From The Wish-Fulfilling Gem (Yid bzhin nor bu):*

{100} The clear light [352], Spontaneous and unmodified from the beginning, is not to be sought through effort: that is the essential principle.

*From The Noble Lord (rJe btsan dam pa):*

{101} Dedicating to that is the cloud of offerings. Remaining always in it is the method of practice [353]. Not regressing by nature is the attainment [354], so that every intent is fulfilled Spontaneously like a mudrā [355].

*From The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba):*

{102} It is not necessary to recite Mantra, pray, and offer oblations. It is not necessary to develop the altruistic intent of the enlightened Consciousness. It is not necessary to invoke the deity from the outside. The offering is not made externally, and one does not seek to obtain the attainment from someone else.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{103} Being unconstrained by the body, speech, and Consciousness of the visualized deities, the dimension of Spontaneous Gnosis is supremely great. [...] Even without Mantra and mudrā, there is no deterioration of the commitment.

[352] 'Od gsal ba.

[353] sGrub thabs (sādhana).

[354] dNgos grub.

[355] Phyag rgya: I mean the form of the divine body (sku phyag rgya), whose vision appears to the practitioner as a sign of realization; such vision should not be sought, since the highest realization consists in remaining Spontaneously in one's Natural State.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems bsgom pa):*

{104} There is no mental effort, and there is no awareness of anything. One is free from both knowledge and ignorance.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{105} He asked: Noble beings, do you truly wish to go to the realms [356] of the Buddhas? They replied: We do not truly go there.

He asked: Why do you not go there? They replied: Because the totality of the levels of sentient beings is the same as the pure realms of the Buddhas.

{106} He asked: You, noble beings, do you wish to realize the matrix of enlightenment? They replied: Noble teacher, we do not wish to, for the matrix of enlightenment is already fully mature. [357]

He asked: Why do you not wish for it? They replied: Because the so-called "noble beings" and the so-called "sentient beings" have never departed from the matrix of enlightenment.

{107} He asked: Noble beings, do you wish for the Spontaneous realization of the Dharmakāya? They replied: We do not wish for realization.

He asked: Why do you not wish for realization? They replied: Because the desired realization arises from the union of the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. [358]

He asked: Noble beings, do you truly wish to go to the levels? They replied: We do not go there at all.

He asked: Why do you not go there? They replied: Because everything is already situated at the level of Buddha without anyone ever having gone there.

[356] Zhing khams.

[357] The quote in TshB reads: "Noble teacher, we do not wish for it at all." This alternative reading would be consistent with the subsequent question.

[358] The Dharmakāya exists naturally from the beginning as a Spontaneous, innate presence in every being; therefore, to wish for its realization means not recognizing this Spontaneous Presence, but instead relying on the gradual accumulation of merit and wisdom in order to attain it.

According to a certain [359] mode of teaching, the ultimate attainment of the principle of freedom from action is this: although the entire universe of a thousand systems of worlds to the third power is offered, superior beings are not delighted by it; despite traversing the paths for eons, the level of enlightenment is not reached; whatever virtuous action of the three doors [360] is performed, one does not become a Buddha; although the state of Buddha is sought in the four times [361], it is not found; despite continuous meditation, there is nothing to be done to make the principle clear; even by rolling around or standing on one's head, however one may turn, the essential principle is not transgressed, because the great principle is clear in oneself.

Then, have we concluded that nothing should be done? To this question I respond thus: if this means that "both virtues and the action of effort are flaws," we should ask: how is it possible to abandon what is good and useful, casting it away? It is not cast away. Why? The great system of Atiyoga free from action does not consist in throwing everything away, nor is it intentional effort. Without abandoning the principle, there is no effort. If one understands this, whatever is done, the activity is not interrupted, and there is also no cause for seeking. [362] However, the conduct according to the great system of the ancients is this: there is neither abandonment nor adoption of anything, and one does not even seek to follow the principle of freedom from action, nor is one liberated from action. May future fortunate practitioners of this spiritual system also act in the same way! This practice is called "the mode of the woman who rests in the great principle"; that is, resting in the original condition of reality, without abandoning the king of awareness. [363]

#### 1.2.5.2. The Misunderstanding

Having disregarded the gnosis that embodies the understanding of the aforementioned principle, certain individuals, like blind men adrift in distraction and swept along by the tide of effort, champion the doctrine of "Great Accomplishment." They proclaim the absence of effort while secretly striving to achieve their goals with focused intention. In reality, those who seek the principle of non-action through action resemble a woman who believes she can inspire attraction merely through her dance.

[359] rNam pa gcig tu.

[360] The three doors of psychophysical experiences are the body (lus), speech (ngag), and mind (yid).

[361] The four times are the past, present, future, and indeterminate time.

[362] There is no need to strive for the realization of the goal.

[363] Rig pa'i rgyal po.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{108} If one searches here and there, from that search the realization cannot arise.

In this way, it has been ascertained that realization is not attained by seeking it.

### **1.2.6. The Great Bliss**

#### **1.2.6.1. The Understanding**

According to the view of Great Bliss, when one examines the nature of what creates and experiences any consistent entity—comprising karma, emotional afflictions, and their resultant suffering—one realizes that it does not exist intrinsically. However, if one allows everything to remain as it is, all things can manifest. Thus, devoid of inherent essence from the very beginning, phenomenal reality is pure within the expanse of Great Bliss, which is the enlightened Consciousness.

Great Bliss arises naturally, even in the presence of suffering. The term "Great Bliss" retains its meaning, yet it remains ineffable; free from the mental constructs surrounding the notion of "Great Bliss," it is the same phenomenal reality. Therefore, it is not something to be sought elsewhere.

*From The Great Eagle (Khyung chen):*

{109} The abandonment of worldly reality, of evil actions, such as those of butchers, of prostitutes, and the five immediate transgressions, [365] is completely accomplished: this is the essence of the Dharma. There is nothing other than Great Bliss.

[364] sNang ba.

[365] The transgressions that, at the moment of death, immediately cause rebirth in hell (dmyal ba) are five: killing one's father, mother, a saint (arhat), creating a schism in the monastic community (saṅgha), and making a Buddha's body bleed with malicious intent.

Comprehending the essential point of this principle, self-awareness is lucid as Great Bliss, and the very cycle of rebirth in lower states is lucid as Great Bliss; therefore, all fields of activity, without exception, are pure.

*Therefore, The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che) states:*

{110} In the dimension of knowledge, [366] there is Great Bliss. It is the completely pure world.

In that state, naturally free from deviations, obscurations, and punitive rebirths, there is neither hope nor fear.

*From The Ornament of Bliss ('Phra bkod):*

{111} Due to the Great Bliss; the enlightened Consciousness, it is understood that the continuous emergence of the so-called distraction and even the abyss of saṃsāra are the enlightened Consciousness.

And also:

{112} In the Great Bliss of the body, speech, and Consciousness of the Buddhas, where is the so-called deviation? Who seeks to deviate?

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{113} This entire universe, comprising a thousand systems of worlds cubed, embodies the Great Perfection that defines the Buddha's level. It represents the culmination of great enlightenment; it is the very essence of the Great Bliss within the Buddha realm; it signifies the true state of enlightenment. The wondrous enlightened Consciousness is, in essence, the foundation of all reality.

Furthermore:

{114} In the universe of a thousand systems of worlds to the third power, there do not even exist the words "transmigration" and "emotional affliction"; besides the manifestation of the Buddhas, there is not even a term to indicate the cause of rebirth as a sentient being.

[366] Go ba'i yul.



Beyond the Great Bliss of the Buddhas, there are not even the terms that designate the karma of sentient beings and suffering. This is repeatedly stated.

And further:

{115} In this universe, comprising a thousand systems of worlds cubed, there exists neither saṃsāra nor nirvāṇa. The reality of Great Bliss is, in essence, the maṇḍala of the elements.

In such a state, the deepest hell has been emptied, the form of saṃsāra has been eliminated, the lower realms have been swept away, errors have arisen as the path of enlightenment, the universe has been placed in bliss, deviations and obscurations have been transferred to the Great Bliss, suffering has the quality of enjoyment [368], therefore one dwells continuously in the delightful womb of the Great Bliss, without making it a support. From the same text:

{116} The enlightened Consciousness, the realization of which is accomplished on this path, is the bliss in the present life, is the bliss in the future life, is the bliss of the Buddhas and is the fulfillment in the state of Buddha, because it is equal to the state of Buddha.

If this principle is treated according to the upadeśa of self-awareness, it is explained that there is nothing else to seek, for the bliss is The Self; therefore, there is no projection [369] of Consciousness there, no complacency, and nothing is conceptualized.

#### **1.2.6.2. Misunderstanding**

Those who do not have the fortune to understand this principle, the people born in the last era, whose mind is like a fist in the dark [370], desire to be free from suffering, having directed the Consciousness to the [con-

[367] Chos nyid.

[368] Longs spyod.

[369] 'Phro ba.

[370] The mind that tries to understand or realize the meaning of the Great Perfection is comparable to someone who would try to hit a target by throwing punches in the dark.

Continuing the Great Completion. Thus, they intentionally seek a kind of bliss. They do not see that bliss is The Self, so they turn their backs on it. It is as if they were searching for the elephant while standing on top of it: in this way, they will never find it.

*From The Great Eagle in Flight (Khyung chen):*

{117} Desiring bliss, they turn their backs on it. Being infected by the disease of attachment to bliss, bliss seeks bliss. There is deception regarding enlightenment. Primordial craving [371] ruins the Dharma. It is not seen that that subject seeking bliss is Buddha.

It is a great deviation, therefore those who correctly practice the principle should not have such a way of seeing.

# 1.

## 1.2.

### 1.2.7. Non-duality

#### 1.2.7.1. Understanding

Since Atiyoga [372] is great, there is the way of seeing of non-duality as expounded. The principle of the great effortless bliss, the enlightened awareness present from the beginning, is the non-duality of all that is known as a limited position [373]. In what does it consist?

If one examines the essence of enlightened awareness, one sees that it does not exist intrinsically; but, if one thinks, it appears as everything that is experienced; therefore, in enlightened awareness there is no duality of existence and non-existence. Its nature is completely indeterminate, yet the existence of enlightened awareness is attested [374] by all the entities of its qualities; therefore, it is devoid of the duality of eternalism and nihilism.

[371] Ye rngam. The term rngam, translated as "craving", also means "splendor" (in reference to people or animals); furthermore, the expression ye shes rngam pa, "the splendor of Gnosis", to which ye rngam also seems to refer, is attested. The unaware subject of its primordial splendor, craving enlightenment, throws itself on the Dharma like a mouse on the harvest of a wheat field, but in doing so, it ruins it.

[372] lHag pa'i rnal 'byor.

[373] mTha'.

[374] bZhag pa.

The state of Great Bliss, in which there are no boundaries or limits, transcends the definition of essence through names and categories. This essence is not perceived anywhere, so there is no duality of monism and pluralism. Thus, the essence of self-awareness appears in many ways, yet there is no self-awareness to be grasped mentally; hence, there is no duality of birth and non-birth. Awareness, the sun of Spontaneous Gnosis, from the beginning radiates its light impartially; therefore, there is no duality of day and night.

The six kinds of beings are, from the beginning, the Spontaneous Vajra Buddha of Light, beyond such an appellation, [375] so there is no duality of Buddha and sentient being. The true nature of reality, Spontaneously accomplished, has arisen naturally [376] from the beginning as the "fruit," [377] consisting of the bodies and wisdom of the Buddhas, without even needing to utter the word "fruit"; hence, there is no duality of cause and effect. The Great Self, unmodified from the beginning, is clear in itself, so there is no duality of gate of access and interior. The Great Bliss, naturally free from effort, is thus from the beginning and need not be sought at the moment; therefore, there is no duality of effort and non-effort.

In the natural manifestation of the attainments [378] of the great qualities, there is no duality of achievement and non-achievement. In the Spontaneous expression of the wise Gnosis, [379] there is no duality of understanding and non-understanding. The great confusion [380] is lucid [381] as the enlightened Consciousness, which neither moves nor clings to anything, so there is no duality of meditation and non-meditation. Any phenomenon and existence is the true nature of the Consciousness [382] that appears and exists, so there is no duality of the presence and absence of the sensations of discriminative thoughts. [383] In the great ocean of awareness, naturally unmoving, free from verbal conventions, there is no duality of inner absorption [384] and non-absorption. Since the Great Bliss naturally pervades everything, there is no duality of fame and lack of fame.

[375] Bla dvags.

[376] Rang shar ba.

[377] 'Bras bu.

[378] dNgos grub.

[379] mKhyen pa'i ye shes.

[380] gTi mug.

[381] gSal ba.

[382] Sems kyi rang bzhin (cittaprakṛti).

[383] rNam rtog gi byung tshor.

[384] mNyam par bzhag pa.

Since in the state of Samantabhadra there are no excesses or deficiencies in evaluating anything, there is no duality of good and bad. As the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death manifests [385] in the enlightened Consciousness, there is no duality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. The non-dual enlightened Consciousness has arisen naturally from the beginning without cause and conditions, so there is no duality of cessation and non-cessation. The Natural State [386] is inherently free from a support and that which is supported, so there is no duality of abiding and non-abiding in it. The related entities, as well as the superior and inferior ones [387], have arisen from the beginning in the expanse of Gnosis, so there is no duality of going and coming. Everything is clear in the Dharmakāya of the Great Sphere, without having perceived the environments and beings that live in it, so there is no duality of external and internal. All limited positions have been completely abandoned, so there is no duality of this and that faction.

The Great Self, which is lucid as the Natural State [388], is unparalleled; therefore, there is no duality of self and other. In the view of Atiyoga, the universal ancestor of the Victorious Ones, everything is lucid; therefore, there is no duality of a view that is great and small. In the equanimous state of the great primordial condition, there are no terms "lord" and "servant," "master" and "subordinate"; therefore, there is no duality of high and low. The appearance of all the activities of the environments and beings has arisen from the beginning as the activities of the Victorious Ones, so there is no duality of action [389] and non-action. All conventional expressions are the right path of truth, the great Gnosis, so there is no duality of affirmation and negation. The view of Spontaneous fulfillment, which does not wane in the three times, is free from gradualness; therefore, there is no duality of beginning and end. Being a state free from the eternalistic designations of existence and the nihilistic designations of non-existence, not finding even a center within it, it is devoid of the duality of center and boundary. Since the Great Perfection, the Natural State, is without center or circumference, it is free from the duality of large and small.

[385] Byung thebs.

[386] Ngang nyid.

[387] According to the Venerable Tashi Tsering, the related entities (phan tshun) are the pairs of opposites, such as good and bad, hot and cold, etc. The superior and inferior entities (yan man) are those classified in a hierarchical order; for example, the sentient beings divided into the three lower realms (hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals) and the three higher realms (humans, titans, and gods).

[388] Rang bzhin ngang.

[389] sPyod pa.

[390] Bla dvags.

Fulfillment arises beyond the cycles of creation and completion [391], transcending the futile dance of increase and decrease. The emotional afflictions born from the five bonds are, in truth, the very essence of primordial wisdom [392], unveiling that liberation and non-liberation are but illusions of duality.

The ineffable true nature of all things eludes expression, dwelling beyond the futile divide of speech and silence. Free from form and color, yet embracing them without attachment, it dissolves the duality of manifestation and non-manifestation. Beyond the clamor of countless labels, it erases the divide of multitude and scarcity. Naturally liberated from the torment of discriminative thoughts [393] and afflictions, it shatters the illusion of peace and unrest. In the expanse of spontaneous wisdom, darkness lingers uncast aside as clarity blazes forth, erasing the duality of light and shadow. Just as sesame oil saturates its seeds, every dualistic phenomenon is permeated by enlightened awareness [394], revealing no separation between the pervaded and the unpervaded.

There is no genuine grasp of sensory objects or mental constructs, though they may appear; thus, the duality of perceiving [395] and not perceiving vanishes. Within the spontaneously pure maṇḍala, no flaws can be found, dissolving the duality of purity and impurity. The Atiyoga view stands rootless and foundationless, upending the duality of support and supported. The essence of the path and teachings is the Self alone, obliterating the duality of learning and its end. Any action taken leaves no trace in the mind, erasing the duality of virtue and vice. In the realm untouched by dualistic karma [396], nothing is gained or lost, banishing the duality of higher and lower realms. In the naturally accomplished state [397], where even views like eternalism and nonduality remain ungrasped, the duality of error and non-error fades away. The essence of great equality, untethered to any seed or condition, annihilates the duality of cause and circumstance.

[391] bsKyed rdzogs.

[392] Ye shes mkhyen rig.

[393] rNam rtog.

[394] sNum pa.

[395] dMigs pa: although there is the empirical perception of objects, they are not perceived subjectively through the filter of one's own mental references (concepts, images, judgments and evaluations).

[396] The positive karma of virtues and the negative karma of vices.

[397] Rang bzhin.

According to the textual tradition [398] of Ati Yoga, forms, sounds, and thoughts [399] have, from the outset, naturally emerged as the bodies, speech, and minds of the Buddhas, erasing the futile duality of seeking and not seeking the goal. In the vast expanse of Great Perfection, every being across the universe—spanning a thousand worlds cubed, down to the three lower realms—dwells as a Buddha; thus, the duality of attaining and not attaining Buddhahood dissolves into nothingness.

In this non-dual state, transgression and corruption hold no sway, shattering the duality of observing and not observing vows. The six classes of sentient beings are enveloped in spontaneous compassion, obliterating the duality of compassion and its absence [363]. All phenomena, from the very beginning, rest in great perplexity, unmarred by distinctions or explanations, so the duality of benevolence and its lack fades away. Everything bears the untainted nature [400] of the Sugatas' pure realms, transcending the duality of realization and non-realization, and thus, the duality of altruistic joy and its absence vanishes. Across the three times, there is no true departure or entry, yet activity flows ceaselessly, dissolving the duality of equanimity and its absence [401].

The punitive realms of birth unfold as gateways to Great Bliss, upending the duality of deviation and non-deviation. The hells themselves reside at the pinnacle of Great Perfection, erasing the duality of falling and not falling. Subject and object [402] are, from the very beginning [403], inseparable and void, casting aside the duality of obscuration and non-obscuration. Towards all things, whatever they may be, there is no act of adopting or rejecting, for in that state, one is liberated from both the perceived object and the perceiving subject, dissolving the duality of seer and seen. One perceives nothing as a mental reference at all, banishing the duality of evaluation and non-evaluation through demonstrative reasoning.

[398] gZhung.

[399] Dran rtog.

[400] Ngo bo.

[401] Compassion, benevolence, altruistic joy, and equanimity are the four immeasurable or divine states, the contemplation of which was taught by the Buddha himself.

[402] gZung 'dzin: it is not about the empirical subject and object, but about their mental polarity.

[403] Ka nas dag pa.

The entities of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa [404] are mere illusions, non-existent yet eternally unceasing; thus, the veil between relative and absolute truth [405] is torn asunder, leaving no duality to grasp.

All non-dual entities—those and countless others—persist without truly existing, appearing without substance. They do not exist, yet they dance before us; therefore, none can be confined by the limiting decree, “this is it.” Even the assertion “it is non-dual” slips from any fixed origin, offering nothing to ponder or dissect.

Yet, in a flash, understanding erupts unbidden, untethered to mental reflection or perception. Indeed, the essence of self-awareness—being void yet unending—reveals itself without revelation. In that instant, a flawless, unshakeable knowing dawns, purged of all doubt. Though the textual arguments [406] that kindle such confidence defy exhaustive elaboration, I present these glimpses:

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha’ che):*

{118} It is one, utterly free of disparate facets. The Yogin soars like a bird through the boundless sky. In a matrix neither forged nor born, where do these fabricated entities [407] truly abide? Both the external and internal dissolve into the external, and what is external merges as internal. There is no hidden core to comprehend or claim.

Furthermore:

{119} There, the external and internal promises manifest inherently, akin to the psychophysical aggregates and constituents [408]. Across the three times, these promises entwine inseparably with those aggregates and constituents, rendering the very term “promise” an empty echo.

[404] Ma grub: their real existence is not proven.

[405] The "relative truth" (kun rdzob bden pa, saṃvṛti satya) concerns the veil of deceptive appearance, while the "absolute truth" (don dam bden pa, paramārtha satya) reveals the excellent reality as it is in itself.

[406] gTan tshigs.

[407] sGros btags.

[408] Phung po kham: the five aggregates (skandha) and the eighteen constituents (dhātu) of the common human experience dominated by the dualistic notion of subject and object.

*From The Comprehensive Ascertainment (sPyi gcod):*

{120} In the void of pure actions, the radiant sun of clarity fails to rise, and the shadows of unwholesome deeds linger undispelled [...] There dwells no transcendent deity, no sacred entity to invoke. All things within the boundless expanse of reality converge as one [...] The six realms of sentient beings fade away, as do the Buddhas themselves. Even awareness [409] vanishes, along with any pretense of abiding in it [...] There is no ebb or flow, no decline or growth. No soul reaps benefit, and no spirit endures harm [...] Neither appearance nor transformation holds sway. Wisdom and method dissolve into nothingness [...] Enlightenment and the path are mere phantoms, illusions without substance. The dual truths evaporate, leaving only the fundamental essence—utter, unyielding void.

*From The Wonderful (rMad byung):*

{121} All is unborn, pristine and free from stains. There is no enlightenment, no glimmer of full understanding. The eighteen constituents of experience and the elements themselves cease to be. The true nature of reality mirrors the sky—devoid of image [410], eternally unchanging; it harbors neither duality nor the void of duality.

{122} No letter emerges that does not spring from you. As the tantras declare, the creations of the maṇḍala encompass all aspects while bearing none, for enlightened Consciousness eclipses all calculation, rendering the factors of the path obsolete.

And further:

{123} There is no path to tread, no progression to pursue. No Buddha exists, nor any seed of Buddhahood. Enlightenment is absent, along with the very word that names it. No level of awakening can be found. Sentient beings and the breath of life dissolve into emptiness [...] Bliss fades, and goals crumble to dust. Hope and fear evaporate like mist. There is no abiding place, no sanctuary to claim. No vehicle journeys forth, no gateway to any path. Aspiration withers, and practice falls silent. Abandonment and adoption hold no meaning. Since Consciousness finds no dwelling, it manifests as the enlightened Consciousness [409]—a state upon which one need not meditate, for it simply is.

[409] Rig pa.

[410] mTshan med: the defined mental representations that filter perception.



{124} No concept emerges, and no entanglement ensnares; devoid of objects, the mind stands empty, stripped of sense faculties. There is no boundary of outside and inside, no gateway of entrance, no hidden interior; thus, the great expanse [411] merges seamlessly with inner reality, indistinguishable and whole.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha' rgyal po):*

{125} The unenlightened person is but a fleeting illusion, a shadow without substance. The provisional meaning and the two truths dissolve into nothingness, leaving no trace.

*From Abiding Naturally in the Greatness of Samantabhadra (Kun tu bzang po che ba la rang gnas pa):*

{126} It exists, yet holds no real form—like the moon's reflection on water, true reality lacks intrinsic essence. It does not exist, nor is it utter annihilation—like the vast expanse of the sky, it pervades everywhere. Being one, it defies multiplicity; all things converge into the single absolute [412], devoid of duality and not a formless void [413]. It permeates everything, manifesting as the Buddha's body, diffused throughout all.

Furthermore:

{127} However true reality is described, it eludes every description, for it is not anything of that. It is not mere emptiness, since the feeling of mindful awareness [414] arises within it [...] It avoids eternalism, as nothing holds true reality. It shuns dualism, for no concepts define it. It is not a singular entity, since it encompasses all. With no origin at the beginning, it knows no end—no death, no passing away. In this present moment, bereft of real substance [415], it endures neither as permanent nor as graspable, a essence beyond all fixation.

[411] dbyings.

[412] don dam.

[413] phyal ba.

[414] dran bzhin tshor.

[415] dngos po'i rdzas.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems bsgom):*

{128} There is neither a non-existence that clings to existence, nor an absence that denies non-existence; with such confines dissolved, no middle ground emerges, and no one lingers in the middle.

{129} Birth and destruction fade away, erasing self and other; death and departure vanish, dismantling eternalism and nihilism alike. Thus, it dawns clear: neither nirvāṇa nor the wheel of delusion [416] holds sway, for all is but an illusion of separation.

As for what must be known by oneself [417]—this principle of self-awareness [418]—one need not strive to unveil it; understanding blossoms naturally when reality remains unperceived, undifferentiated, unaltered, and unexamined.

#### 1.2.7.2. Misunderstanding

Yet, certain contemporary Mantra practitioners, veiled in referential views [419], grasp not this essence and cling to fixed conclusions [420], proclaiming no duality as their final truth. Believing true reality to be unchanging, their vision narrows, confined to mere absence of concepts, non-action, and non-duality. Thus, the profound principle eludes them, leading astray, like the blind groping for a path in endless night.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{130} It is the state of universal equality; thus, realization cannot arise from a fragmented view, for all partiality dissolves into the whole.

In this way, it is revealed that true understanding cannot flower from a perspective bound by any position, for it transcends all limits.

[416] 'Khrul 'khor: saṃsāra or cyclic existence.

[417] Rang gis rig par bya ba (svaṣaṃvedya).

[418] Rang rig pa.

[419] dMigs pa'i lta ba.

[420] mTha': any philosophical position.

*From The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):*

Since beings and their true nature are eternally fused, inseparable as one, no superior explanation of so-called “absolute reality” [421] can arise, for all labels dissolve into the void. When one clings to the illusion of a deceptive path versus the path of enlightenment, true nirvāṇa remains unattained, a mirage ungrasped.

Thus, in their failure to secure the refuge of non-duality beyond thought [423], they fixate on an illusory absolute truth or grasp at its philosophical shadows, birthing a deceptive view of self-awareness—mistakenly hailed as a valid means of knowledge [424]. They are like one plagued by muscae volitantes [425], convinced that a mere pile of stones is a living form. Yet, those who practice rightly, even in the darkest age [426], embrace the principle of non-duality with the unforced vigor [427] of pure non-action, recognizing it as the essence of all.

## 1.2.8. The Single Great Sphere

### 1.2.8.1. The Understanding

Some behold all reality as the embodiment of the Single Great Sphere—a vast, unbounded expanse [411]. What does this system reveal? Elaboration [428], the very fabric of delusion, manifests as the condition [429] of beings, appearing distinct to those ensnared in error or treading fragmented paths across various levels. Yet, enlightened Consciousness—self-awareness itself—shines as the Buddha-state within this Sphere, naturally free from all projections. In this realm, beings of dualistic elaborations are neither perceived nor abandoned; they simply cease to bind. Thus, by mere convention, we name it “single,” for it eludes the grasp of ordinary minds, a reality beyond all artifice.

[421] Don dam chos.

[422] gDeng.

[423] bSam pa.

[424] Spontaneous Gnosis of self-awareness transcends the mind, and is therefore beyond svasaṃvedana understood as a valid means of knowledge (pramāṇa).

[425] Rab rib: a visual disturbance related to the presence of moving bodies in the vitreous humor, sometimes described as “flying flies”.

[426] Dus ngan.

[427] brTson 'grus.

[428] sPros pa (prapañca): mental projections that filter the perception of reality, creating a fragmented representation.

[429] Rang bzhin.

The Primordial Radiance, though it is not a singular essence, it flows free from the confines of “oneness” [370], a vast radiance untethered. To shatter dualistic chains, it is taught that the original reality [430] harbors no excesses of evaluation [431]—no overreaching grasp, no undercutting void.

If this principle is to be grasped through self-awareness, do not mistake it as something apart from your own being; it is the true nature of The Self, unadorned and unnamed. It manifests not as an “I” or “other”; it is not a treasure to be sought by the mind’s dissection, as if it were a tangible form to behold. Thus, observe it rightly, without the blade of analysis, for in pure presence, it reveals itself.

What is this correct observation? Let there be no ripple of thoughts [432], no stir in the mind’s depths. In that stillness, one uncovers the experience of the Great Sphere within, a boundless expanse where all dissolves into innate light. These are the threads of wisdom woven through the texts:

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha’ che):*

{132} Pervaded by the Dharmakāya, this dimension is one; thus, in its supreme vastness, it dwells as the utmost greatness, unyielding and complete.

*From The Essence Free from Elaborations (sPros pa med pa’i tig):*

{133} Gnosis shines in utter purity, thus it is one; hence, the path of liberation fades away. Beyond the extremes of monism and pluralism, the essence of original reality stands unobscured [371], as the universal self remains rooted in its primordial state, unmoving and whole.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{134} With the myriad vehicles harmonized as one, the eighteen unique qualities [433] of the Buddha adorn the pinnacle of total completion [434]. Like rivers merging into the ocean, these qualities flow from the vase of consecration [435], a treasure of the divine lords, branching forth in radiant fullness.

[430] Phyi mo’i chos.

[431] sGro skur: the excess or overestimation of the eternalistic extreme and the defect or underestimation of the nihilistic extreme.

[432] bSam pa.

[433] Ma ’dres chos.

[434] Yongs su rdzogs pa.

[435] rGyal thabs spyi blugs.

Furthermore:

{135} Samantabhadra, the Self-originated, singular and supreme Bhagavat, embodies the Dharmakāya—a boundless essence, pure and unchanging.

{136} In the original condition of unborn reality, no sentient beings arise, for the entities of existence are spontaneously present from the dawn of time. Their source is the primordial state of enlightened Consciousness, ever-accomplished, dwelling in all like the fruit of nirvāṇa that clings to no extreme. Devoid of elaborations, it mirrors the waxing moon's glow, a whirlpool of water where expansion and absorption flow as one. Thus, the accumulations of merit and wisdom unfold like the Buddhas' body, speech, and Consciousness—effortless and complete.

{137} Samantabhadra, the Self-originated, singular and supreme Bhagavat, is the Dharmakāya, the Great Seal [436] of spontaneously accomplished essence, speech, and mind. It is the matrix of enlightenment, present from the beginning, now attaining the supreme level of the Unexcelled Victor—a realm where all is inherently fulfilled.

*From The Union of All Precious Ones (Rin chen kun 'dus):*

{138} The Dharmakāya is pure from the outset, abandoning the metaphorical ocean of saṃsāra, which is utterly empty. In this, all extremes of affirmation and negation merge as one in the original condition of reality [371], a single tapestry woven from the void.

[436] Mahāmudrā.

*From The Diffused Bliss (bDe 'byams):*

{139} Within the unfettered and fully accomplished bhaga [437]—that primordial matrix of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, vast as the womb of existence—the great, original condition of the indivisible and spontaneously accomplished Sphere unfolds as the body, speech, and Consciousness of the Buddhas, merging center and circumference [438] into one radiant whole.

*From The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba):*

{140} In delusion, we see that all beings, born from The Self, hold no differing viewpoints, for no discriminating insight divides them; thus, it remains a state of delusion [...]. Yet, since all beings share the essence of the sugatas' Consciousness, when one embraces the supreme secret, all dwells in the single self; without discrimination of levels or paths, it reveals itself as delusion's end.

Furthermore:

{141} Like the wish-fulfilling gem, the divine body—spontaneously present, unthought and unsought—exists as one in these three realms. When one delights in the supreme secret, the sole, supreme level, all converges in the single Self, a unity beyond all striving.

There are myriad such textual arguments that affirm the principle of the single Sphere, revealing what it is and what it is not. In this realm, nothing is abandoned; indeed, since it exists not as a fixed entity, the single Sphere, free from all elaborations, casts aside nothing.

*From The Ornament of Bliss ('Phra bkod):*

{142} Consciousness in itself is formless, yet it fully embraces forms; though it pervades all, no color or figure can be grasped, for it is the essence unbound.

[437] Bhaga is a Sanskrit term indicating the female genitals, a metaphor for the universal matrix of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

[438] Allusion to the maṇḍala or circle of divine beings who no longer transmigrate.

This principle is the very revelation of the Victorious Ones' intent. For the Great Being who abides in such knowledge, existence shines like the pure realm of the Enlightened Ones. Consequently, seeking impurities would be as futile as searching for earth and stones on the Golden Island of Jambudvīpa 4—a sacred expanse where none are found, for all is inherently pure. From the same text:

{143} What is seen—the phenomena and beings—manifests as the pure realm itself, all dwelling in enlightened Consciousness, an undivided whole.

#### 1.2.8.2. Misunderstanding

Those who have not understood, lacking such recognition, possess minds like frayed sacks pierced through, striving toward their aims with futile effort. They believe in a single pursuit, reducing all to one entity, acting as if in that direction alone lies truth, and thus they deviate—like seeking the sun by chasing darkness.

*From The Great Space (Nam mkha' che) 5:*

{144} Thus, according to this scripture, linking such actions to that state as it is only obscures it. If one holds such conceptions, realization vanishes there.

Therefore, this condition remains unseen. Why? The Great Sphere consists of six Spheres:

(1) Boundless and limitless, it is the source of all, thus the Sphere of the original condition [439]; (2) Untainted by extremes, it is the Sphere of the completely pure original condition [440]; (3) Impartial and unaltered, it is the Sphere of the true nature of reality [441]; (4) Naturally arising without causes, it is the Sphere of great Gnosis [442]; (5) Stable and complete, with no remnants, it is the Sphere of Samantabhadra [443];

[439] dByings kyi thig le.

[440] dByings rnam dag pa'i thig le.

[441] Chos nyid kyi thig le.

[442] Ye shes chen po'i thig le.

[443] Kun tu bzang po'i thig le.

(6) All dimensions, from the Buddha's realm above to the hells below, are spontaneously accomplished, with no center or periphery; thus, it is the Sphere of Spontaneous Presence [444], an indivisible essence beyond reference points [445].

The Great Sphere appears sixfold, yet not one exists truly; its true nature eludes those with reference points, for it is the reality ungraspable, free from all extremes.

### **1.2.9. The Basis as It Is**

#### **1.2.9.1. The Understanding**

##### **1.2.9.1.1. Peculiarities**

The way of seeing the basis as it is [446]—the unmodified, unaltered essence of all entities—holds ultimate validity. Why? Only the true reality [447] of things, unmarred and unchanging, embodies the Great Perfection of Atiyoga. Its synonyms arise from its qualities, countless and profound, yet essentially one: free from mental references [448], it is known as “free from objectives.” With all goals fulfilled, it is “Spontaneous Presence.” Devoid of suffering, it is “Great Bliss.” Lacking otherness, it is “Great Self.” Without elaboration, it is “great sphere.” Beyond limited positions, it is “non-duality.” In total clarity, it is “Spontaneous Gnosis.” Without hope in other aims, it is “free from effort.” Though labels differ, they are one in essence—all synonyms of the basis as it is. Therefore, understand the true reality of things in this way: not as something to alter, but as the primordial state, self-evident and complete.

[444] lHun gyis grub pa'i thig le.

[445] dMigs pa can.

[446] gZhi ji bzhin pa.

[447] De kho na nyid.

[448] dMigs 'dzin.



In what is free from goals from the very beginning, there is not even the perspective of freedom from goals. In the original Great Self, no perspective of the Great Self arises. In the original Spontaneous Presence, the perspective of Spontaneous Presence vanishes. In the original non-duality, no perspective of non-duality exists. In what is free from effort from the outset, there is not even the perspective of freedom from effort. In the original Great Bliss, no perspective of Great Bliss emerges. In the perspective of the original Great Sphere, there is no perspective of the Great Sphere. In the original Spontaneous Gnosis, there is not even the perspective of Spontaneous Gnosis. Therefore, regarding the true reality of things—the reality that is just as it is—there is not even such a perspective. Why? Because neither the subject nor the object of any perspective holds sway.

The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa) states:

One transmigrates without understanding that nothing is abandoned or neglected; therefore, since in Spontaneous Presence there is no separation between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, there is no perspective and nothing to hold a perspective on. As a result, in this great system, all that is modified and altered due to action is dissolved, leading to liberation.

#### 1.2.9.1.2. Objection

Regarding this, one might object: “If there is no action to perform, liberation is impossible. Indeed, even if the infernal beings in Avīci have not departed from the state of equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, they still transmigrate without exception because they have not understood. Therefore, it is logical that they must engage in realizing true reality. If they do not engage, how can they liberate themselves?” 6.

#### 1.2.9.1.3. Response

I respond that it is true: although the transient aggregates of the infernal beings do not depart from equality, they still transmigrate, but you do not understand. Even the infernal beings, when their sensation of weakness becomes acute, engage aiming at happiness and do not find it. For what reason? They grasp at effort where none is needed, mistaking the unmodified basis for something to achieve. In the Dzogchen view, true reality is the innate state, beyond action and striving, where liberation dawns as the essence of all, not through pursuit but through recognition.

[449] Liberation.

Those who do not understand pursue a purpose [450]—the intent [451] of freedom from effort—and, having manifested it, convince themselves they have grasped it; but for one who truly understands, no such pursuit exists, for the absence of effort is simply following self-awareness, that is, The Self.

Similarly, those who do not understand chase the idea [452] of the absence of goals; if they understood, they would realize that the absence of goals is The Self itself.

Those who do not understand pursue the intent of Spontaneous Presence; if they understood, they would see that Spontaneous Presence is The Self. Those who do not understand seek Spontaneous Gnosis; if they understood, they would know that Spontaneous Gnosis is the same as The Self. Those who do not understand pursue Great Bliss; if they understood, they would recognize that Great Bliss is The Self. Those who do not understand chase the Great Sphere; if they understood, they would follow the Great Sphere that is The Self. Those who do not understand seek the great non-dual Self; if they understood, they would embody The Great Self that is themselves. Those who do not understand, driven by purpose, pursue the intent of reality just as it is and manifest it; one who understands does not pursue it, for even reality just as it is—is The Self. Without volition [453]—that driving force of intention—desires dissolve into the void.

Therefore, the Yogin of Ati does not reflect through logical demonstrations or analysis. They do not manifest the sought-after intent, nor examine, analyze, or evaluate. Without any such actions, they ascertain the foundation without ascertaining it. They know the true reality just as it is without knowing it; they find it without finding it; they realize it without realizing it; they see it without seeing it; they understand it without understanding it; they obtain it without obtaining it; their understanding clarifies without clarification; they experience it without experiencing it.

For example, if one desires to see the stars in the sky, it is not by dispelling the clouds that the sky clears and the stars appear; rather, by leaving the clouds to themselves, they dissipate, revealing the stars naturally. Regarding the realization of this understanding, there is nothing to do intentionally, nor is that understanding denied.

The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa) states:

One transmigrates without understanding that nothing is abandoned or neglected; therefore, since in Spontaneous Presence there is no separation between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, there is no perspective and nothing to hold a perspective on. As a result, in this great system, all that is modified and altered due to action is dissolved [449], liberating all into the essence.

#### 1.2.9.1.2. Objection

Regarding this, one might object: “If there is no action to perform, liberation is impossible. Indeed, even if the infernal beings in Avīci have not departed from the state of equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, they still transmigrate without exception because they have not understood. Therefore, it is logical that they must engage in realizing true reality. If they do not engage, how can they liberate themselves?”

#### 1.2.9.1.3. Response

I respond that it is true: although the transient aggregates of the infernal beings do not depart from equality, they still transmigrate, but you do not understand. Even the infernal beings, when their sensation of weakness becomes acute, engage aiming at happiness and do not find it. For

what reason? They cling to effort where effort is futile, mistaking the unmodified basis for something to achieve. In Dzogchen, true reality is the innate state, beyond action and striving, where liberation arises not from pursuit, but from recognition of what is already present.

[450] Sems.

[451] Don.

[452] Blo.

[453] Sems pa (cetanā).

[454] bZhags pa. Cf. note 211.

Those who do not understand pursue a purpose [450]—the intent of freedom from effort—and, upon manifesting it, convince themselves they have understood; but for one who truly understands, no such pursuit exists, for the absence of effort is simply The Self, the innate state beyond striving.

Likewise, those who do not understand chase the idea of the absence of goals; if they understood, they would realize that the absence of goals is The Self itself.

Those who do not understand seek the intent of Spontaneous Presence; if they understood, they would see that Spontaneous Presence is The Self. Those who do not understand pursue Spontaneous Gnosis; if they understood, they would know that Spontaneous Gnosis is the same as The Self. One who does not understand chases Great Bliss; if they understood, they would recognize that Great Bliss is The Self. Those who do not understand pursue the Great Sphere; if they understood, they would follow the Great Sphere that is The Self. Those who do not understand seek the great non-dual self; if they understood, they would embody The Great Self that is themselves. Those who do not understand, driven by purpose, pursue the intent of reality just as it is and manifest it; one who understands does not pursue it, for even reality just as it is is The Self. Without volition [453]—that impulse of intention—desires fade into the boundless.

Thus, the Yogin of Ati does not reflect through logical proofs or analysis. They do not manifest the sought-after intent, nor examine, dissect, or judge. Without such actions, they ascertain the foundation without ascertaining it. They know true reality just as it is without knowing it; they find it without finding it; they realize it without realizing it; they see it without seeing it; they understand it without understanding it; they obtain it without obtaining it; their insight clarifies without clarification; they experience it without experiencing it.

For example, if one desires to see the stars in the sky, it is not by dispelling the clouds that clarity comes and the stars appear; rather, by leaving the clouds to themselves, they dissolve naturally, revealing the stars as they are. In the realization of this understanding, there is nothing to do intentionally, nor is that understanding rejected.

The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa) states:

One transmigrates without understanding that nothing is abandoned or neglected; therefore, since in Spontaneous Presence there is no division between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, there is no perspective and nothing to hold a perspective on. As a result, in this great system, all that is modified and altered by action dissolves [449], releasing all into the essence.

Regarding the actions performed, there is not even the notion of what has been done. Nevertheless, the great individuals, those who adhere to the correct principle of the Dharma, attain the state of vidyādhara [455] in this way, as many have before them.

Nowadays, most people condemn this way of seeing, reject it, and let it fade. Many do not even discern good from evil, so they neither abandon evil nor adopt good, nor renounce what is unvirtuous. Some, even if they desire to practice, do not understand what spiritual practice truly entails.

Few are the fortunate ones. With indirect understanding, they use practice as a support, remaining constant. In meditation, if they align with this principle, they draw near to realization; indeed, it depends not on the duration of meditation or a fortunate destiny [456]. Therefore, if a continuator of the lineage appears, it happens in a place of retreat!

#### 1.2.9.1.4. Exposition

What is called “the foundation, the true nature of reality as it is” [457] cannot be grasped by saying “it is so.” Considering it in various ways, it is everything and nothing at once. It is believed explainable and yet inexplicable. It is easy to examine and difficult. There is something to become familiar with and nothing. There is something to analyze and nothing. It appears in manifold ways and is not as it appears. It exists as differentiated and yet does not. It remains while being transitory; it is transitory while remaining. It ceases while not ceasing; it does not cease while ceasing. It is unique while multiple; it is multiple while unique. It is indeterminable while determinable; it is determinable while indeterminable. It arises as differentiated; it arises while there is nothing to arise. There is something to think about while there is not.

[455] Rig 'dzin: one who has attained spiritual mastery. Four levels of vidyādhara are distinguished: complete maturation (rnam smin rig 'dzin), power over life (tshe dbang rig 'dzin), great seal (phyag chen rig 'dzin), and Spontaneous Presence (lhun grub rig 'dzin).

[456] Las 'phro.

[457] gZhi ji bzhin pa'i chos nyid.

There is nothing to think about when there is something, and yet nothing to ponder when there is not; there is something to remember [458] when nothing exists, but nothing to recall when it does. There is something to point out when absence prevails, but nothing to indicate when presence arises. There is something to say when silence reigns, but nothing to utter when words emerge. There is something to access when it is absent, but nothing to enter when it is present. There is something to meditate on when emptiness holds sway, but nothing to contemplate when fullness appears. And so on—its definitions are inconceivably vast, mere metaphors [459] that veil the truth, making the essence of true reality truly difficult to express.

What we call “freedom from all limited positions [460]” is liberation from the very positions that claim to free us, for any stance is but a shadow of duality. Indeed, every statement made, like this and others, carries the flaw of expression; thus, one never reaches understanding by declaring there is nothing to say. And yet, it is so!

*Therefore, as The Small Grains (rGum chung) reveals:*

{145} No matter how many profound words are uttered, they will not align with the principle.

This means one must encounter the principle inwardly, through awareness alone. What do you think of true reality? How do you consider it? What do you analyze? What method do you practice? What do you meditate on? It has been ascertained that even at the verbal level, there is nothing to do, for the essence unfolds without effort.

“Then, if true reality is not something to be indicated verbally, why speak of it?” To this, I reply: as explained before, the principle is as it is, and this very explanation serves as a pointer, so there is a need to express it. The following textual arguments instill confidence in this system’s correctness, free from excesses or defects.

*From The Great Eagle (Khyung chen):*

{146} If one examines it, nothing is found; yet, leaving it as is, the variegated manifestation arises in excellence. The true nature of reality does not appear as a thing, yet its mode of becoming reveals itself to all.

[458] Dran pa.

[459] Bla dvags tsam.

[460] mTha' thams cad dang bral ba.

Thank you for the additional text and your positive feedback—I'll continue revising this segment from Nubchen Sangye Yeshe's Samten Migdron in our established style, focusing on enhancing the cadence for a rhythmic, meditative flow and amplifying the radical Dzogchen vision of effortless, non-dual reality. I'll integrate the key concepts from the provided internet information, such as "Dri ma med" (stainlessness or purity) and "dNgos med" (non-functional or formless phenomena), to inform the revisions without inline footnotes.

Revised Version Furthermore:

{147} It is naturally that obstacles have been abandoned, and naturally that qualities have been ascertained. There is no desire to adopt or cling, nor does the slightest complacency arise. Like the eagle soaring in the sky, enlightened Consciousness knows no expansion or contraction, needs no emptying, and holds no objectives; like the ocean, it exists from the beginning, giving rise to all beings, its qualities boundless as the heavens, with no fixed place of gathering.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{148} The true nature of supremely secret reality is not heard with the ears by another; thus, not even with speech can anything be said of it.

*From The Ornament of Bliss ('Phra bkod):*

{149} It is nothing, yet it can be anything.

*From The Wheel of Life (Srog gi 'khor lo):*

{150} This nectar, the great medicine of immortality, is accomplished in Gnosis, so it need not be sought elsewhere. All is equal in the original condition of reality, the sole cause. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Everything is clear in enlightened Consciousness, the reality as it is.

*From The Wonderful (rMad du byung ba):*

{151} The pure essence of the five great elements is the same immaculate [461] enlightened Consciousness. It is difficult to examine the matrix devoid of concreteness [462] and limpid: such Gnosis bears the quality of the Buddhas' own Consciousness.

[461] Dri ma med.

[462] dNgos med.

Furthermore:

{147} It is naturally that obstacles have been abandoned, and naturally that qualities have been ascertained. There is no desire or adoption, nor does complacency arise. Like the eagle in the sky, enlightened Consciousness knows no expansion or contraction, needs no emptying, and holds no objectives; like the ocean, it exists from the beginning, giving rise to all beings, its qualities vast as the heavens, with no fixed gathering place.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{148} The true nature of supremely secret reality is not heard with the ears by another; thus, not even speech can capture it.

*From The Ornament of Bliss ('Phra bkod):*

{149} It is nothing, yet it can be anything.

*From The Wheel of Life (Srog gi 'khor lo):*

{150} This nectar, the great medicine of immortality, is accomplished in Gnosis, so it need not be sought elsewhere. All is equal in the original condition of reality, the sole cause. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Everything is clear in enlightened Consciousness, the reality as it is.

*From The Wonderful (rMad du byung ba):*

{151} The pure essence of the five great elements is the same immaculate enlightened Consciousness. It is difficult to examine the matrix devoid of concreteness and limpid: such Gnosis bears the quality of the Buddhas' own Consciousness.

{152} The infinite, boundless universe of a thousand cubic systems of worlds is precisely the entirely pure realm of the Buddhas.

This teaches that Buddhas and sentient beings do not exist and yet appear; they exist and do not. Further:

{153} In this regard, being unborn, enlightened Consciousness does not die. From the very beginning, it has not derived from anything, so it goes nowhere. Not abiding in extremes, it is nirvāṇa. Since it is free from subject and object, it is originally empty.

This passage reveals that there is no birth and death, and yet there is; there is and there is not. There is no coming and going, and yet there is; there is and there is not. There is no abiding, and yet there is; there is and there is not. There are no saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and yet there are; there are and there are not. One is not free from subject and object, and yet one is; one is free and one is not. All beings are empty, and yet they exist; they exist and are empty. Therefore, since no characteristic can be determined, one may think anything, yet nothing arises in reality.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{154} The nature of reality is not fixed in one way, so it manifests as observed.



The maṇḍala of Consciousness—thus indicated, the clear light [463], the essence of Secret Mantra [464]—is the true reality as it is, the supreme way of seeing. “Secret” reveals the inexpressible core, where “Mantra” serves as a verbal expression, the very source of innate qualities, arising not from effort but as the essence of awareness. To expound this principle fully, the textual arguments follow.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{155} O Lord of Laṅkā, “Consciousness” is uncreated, unmodified, and arises as the variety of phenomena. The so-called maṇḍala is what constitutes a “Sphere”.

[463] 'Od gsal.

[464] gSang sngags: the esoteric vehicle (vajrayāna).

[465] sNang ba.

“Light” is the innate luminosity, the effortless expansion of Consciousness as conceptualization dissolves. “Clear” means that, beyond what remains unknown, Consciousness remains unobscured by any arising phenomena. “Secret” signifies its inexpressible essence, while “Mantra” serves as a verbal expression that evokes the qualities of primordial awareness, like faint echoes of the innate. “Essence” points to the foundational ground of all manifestation, empty of any solid form and beyond mental grasp. “As it is” denotes its unmodified and unchanging state. “What it is” reveals that it arises without creation or imposed labels. “True reality” designates the unmistakable and immutable nature of awareness itself.

Furthermore:

{156} It arises without creation, for it cannot be pursued through deliberate action. It remains unmodified, as it is the primordial foundation in its natural state.

Therefore, the true reality as it is can only be known through metaphor, as the inconceivable essence. Thus, from the same text:

{157} Lord of Laṅkā, this true reality is also termed “supreme enlightened consciousness” and “true nature of beings, reality in its essence,” “emptiness of consciousness” 466, “that which surpasses all limits,” “non-fixation on the middle way” [467] (Madhyamaka: the balanced path beyond extremes like eternalism and nihilism), “real foundation of all Buddhas” [468] (the the innate ground of awakening), and “source of all emanations” [469] (the diverse manifestations of enlightened forms, known as Nirmāṇakāya).

The text continues:

{158} Lord of Laṅkā, such names have been applied with purpose, yet no true names can capture this reality. Understand that these designations are mere metaphors. [...] Therefore, the Buddha is a metaphor. The Dharma is a metaphor. Enlightenment is a metaphor. Likewise, the original condition and primordial awareness, the Dharmakāya, the various Buddha bodies, sentient beings, worlds, and all entities—in whatever way they are named or defined—must be seen as metaphors. [...] A metaphor is an adventitious attribution, not an original attribute. [...]

[466] sTong pa nyid (śūnyatā).

[467] dBu ma (madhyamaka): the middle way between the extremes of limited conclusions, such as eternalism and nihilism.

[468] dNgos gzhi.

[469] sPrul pa: the diverse forms of manifestation of the Buddhas known collectively as Nirmāṇakāya.

If they were original attributes, all that is adventitious would not appear. [...] What is adventitious is like clouds—impermanent, not inherent, and unable to withstand examination. [...] Therefore, names, signs [470], verbal conventions, mental images, attributions, karma, and the maturation of karma are adventitious: they arise and vanish, obscure and disappear. Lord of Laṅkā, if karma and its maturation existed as unchanging realities, they would be “the way things are.” [...] Since this is not the case, understand that “the way things are” is a metaphor designating what is unconditioned by anything. [...] Thus, all entities are beyond names and words, inexpressible and unspeakable.

It follows that nothing will be conceptualized. The discovery of this experience is the great non-conceptual state [471], free from all grasping. From the same text:

{159} He asked: O Keeper of Secrets [472], is not even the fundamental principle [473] conceptualized, as the basis for attribution?

They replied: Lord of Laṅkā, not even the fundamental principle is conceptualized. It is a non-discriminative state [474]. Why? Even the Buddha, in searching, would find no principle to determine as “thus.” Therefore, ultimately, the non-conceptual state and adventitious concepts are called “Buddha” and “sentient beings”; but in the way things are, neither exists at all. However, the immature, obscured by the clouds of adventitious thoughts, create dualistic concepts of saṃsāra and enlightenment, of sentient beings and Buddhas.

[470] brDa.

[471] Mi rtog pa chen po.

[472] gSang ba'i bdag po: an epithet of Vajrapani.

[473] gZhi'i don.

[474] rNam par mi rtog.

To conceptualize the non-conceptual truly means not having matured the capacity to refine understanding. Furthermore, the true reality as it is, devoid of causes and circumstances, and yet without obstacles, manifests as Spontaneous Presence. It follows that it is independent of anything; detached from support, it has no abode; lacking a base, it needs no foundation; never diminishing, it does not cease; without perpetuation, it is not permanently fixed; free from categorized entities, it is not an aggregate; without a root of creation, it is not caused; by nature without aids, it lacks favorable conditions; beyond cause and circumstance, it is not produced by them; without individual essence, it is unparalleled and not created by another; it is not that nor the other; not defined as Buddha or sentient being, it has no spiritual family [475]; from the beginning, not belonging to any family, it has no continuum [476]; though essence appears everywhere, such appearance is not real, so it does not change; free from extremes, it does not manifest; devoid of a real foundation [477], it has no inherent essence. Thus, true reality is free from these seventeen conventional expressions. From the same text:

{160} Unrelated to anything, Consciousness has no abode. Lacking support, it does not cease. It is not permanent. It is not an aggregate. It is not derived from a cause. It is not produced by circumstances or anything else. It is not that nor the other. It has no spiritual family. It has no continuum. It does not change. It does not appear. It is devoid of essence. The true reality is seen as it is.

According to this teaching, true reality as it is is free from fifty conventional expressions, dissolving all into the vast, ungrasped expanse.

[475] Rigs med pa.

[476] rGyud.

[477] dNgos gzhi.

Furthermore:

{161} The true reality, the authentic Secret Mantra, is free from all analysis; it perceives no boundaries or center; it holds no excess or deficiency; it knows no acceptance or rejection; it transcends cause and effect; it is pure from the outset; it is complete from the beginning; no action is needed to realize it; no effort is required; it is not to be sought; it derives from nothing other than The Self; it has no opponents; it has no creator; it is uncreated; it is unlabeled; it is devoid of identity; it is unmodified; it is unaltered; it is the very reality of The Self; it is certain and unerring; it is just as it is; it is unceasing; it is unborn; it does not decline; it does not disperse; it does not appear; it is not derived; it does not go; it is present from the start; it pervades all; it has no name; it has no form; it holds no mental images; it is beyond verbal conventions; it is not an object to be seen; it is not to be identified; it is not to be pointed out; it lacks examples; it is immeasurable; it is not to be examined; it surpasses reasoning; it is invaluable; it is unthinkable; it is inconceivable; it is the universal source; it is the eternal great equanimity; it is solely the Spontaneous awareness of emptiness.

Thus it is stated. According to a certain teaching mode, the same text recites:

{162} Since it is just as it is, it is always free from the marks of spiritual family. It eludes verbal conventions. It has no aspect. It does not exist as an object. There is no access to such reality. There is no realization as the state of Buddha. There is no prophecy on the Dharma's dissemination. There is no discovery of certainty. It is always enlightenment itself. It is precisely the matrix of enlightenment. It is precisely true reality. It is precisely what is authentic. It is precisely true certainty. It is not precisely other than itself. It is precisely without birth. It is precisely without cessation. It is precisely the reality as it is. It is precisely what is not erroneous.

[478] gNyen po.

[479] bDag med pa (nairātmya): the absence of identity concerns both the subject, that is, the person (gang zag, pudgala), and the entities (chos, dharma) of the phenomenal reality perceived by the subject.

[480] rTog ge.

[481] Rig pa.

It is the very nature of reality. It is the original condition of reality. Being inconceivable, it is the unthinkable. It is the ultimate truth. [482]

This quote teaches that the true reality is free from eight verbal conventions and, in addition to that, has fourteen characteristics. From the same text:

{163} The matrix of enlightenment has no characteristics and is devoid of intrinsic existence. It is not perceived as an object. It is familiar. It is examined with certainty. It is analyzed thoroughly. It appears in various ways. Its being is certain. It manifests itself everywhere. It includes everything. It pervades everything. It arises everywhere. It is completely pure. It is not determined at all. It is not pervaded by anything. There is nothing that is not pervaded by it. It is devoid of high and low. It is without superior and inferior. It is devoid of good and evil. In it there is no spaciousness and narrowness. It is without cause and effect. It is devoid of masculine and feminine. It is without spiritual family. It is without form and formless. It is without color and colorless. It is without scent and scentless. It is without taste and tasteless. It is without touch and touchless. It is without sound and soundless. It is without thought and thoughtless. It is without mind and mindless. It is without consciousness and consciousnessless. It is without mind and mindless. It is without consciousness and consciousnessless. In it there is no spaciousness and narrowness. It is without cause and effect. It is devoid of masculine and feminine genders. It is without a spiritual family. It has no form. It has no karma and its maturation. It is without exterior and interior. It is without birth. It is devoid of change. In it there is no darkness and light. There is no before and after. There is no center and periphery. There is no self and other. There is no diligent effort.<sup>483</sup> There is no adoption and rejection. It is by nature unmodified. It is totally clear light. It is not altered. It is not derived. It is not born. If this is so Lord of Laṅkā, what are the characteristics and what is the intrinsic existence of the matrix? The matrix of enlightenment transcends manifestation and non-manifestation, so its characteristics and intrinsic existence are not perceived.

Thus it is explained that the true reality possesses thirty-eight characteristics. Furthermore, from the same text:

{164} He asked: What do you call "the matrix of enlightenment"? They replied: Noble teacher, "the matrix of enlightenment" denotes the supreme understanding [484] of all Buddhas.

He asked: Noble beings, what do you call "the supreme understanding"? They replied: The true nature [485] of all, the true reality [486].

[482] Yang dag pa'i mtha' (bhūtaḥkoṭi).

[483] rTsol sgrub.

[484] dGongs pa.

[485] Rang bzhin.

[486] De kho na nyid.

He asked: Why is the true nature of all called the "Secret Mantra"? They replied: Because the true nature of all, no one has seen it, nor comprehends it; it does not have the quality of a sensory object; it is ineffable; it transcends verbal expression; it is not thinkable; it is inconceivable, difficult to examine and explain.

Furthermore:

{165} He asked: [...] How does the matrix of enlightenment appear? They replied:  
The matrix of enlightenment cannot appear even for an instant.

He asked: Does it not appear at all? They replied: It appears depending on how one looks at it.

He asked: How does it appear universally? They replied: It is so. Since it pervades everything, it is without manifestation. It is not something hidden and is not seen as it is. From the very beginning, one has not been separated from it, yet it is not recognized. If one examines it, nothing is seen nevertheless it manifests in various ways. Even though it appears in various ways, it is devoid of concreteness. Even if one wanders through eons in saṃsāra, one does not lose it and is not deprived of it. Even if one is clothed in different traces of experiences, it does not change. Without having parts, even at the atomic level, it pervades the environment and beings. It is precisely the variety of phenomena that arises from emptiness. Without having a real foundation [487], it is precisely what is named and designated in various ways. Without a place to seek it, it is precisely what is realized, whatever there is to be realized. Without having forms and images, it is precisely what appears, whatever one looks at. Without there being anything objectively, it is precisely the awareness of anything. It is the infinite one that pervades and embraces everything. It is the sole reality free from everything, in which nothing has been abandoned. Devoid of exterior and interior, it is always the intimate.

[487] dNgos gzhi.

Countless things have arisen from it, yet it remains inexhaustible. Unidentified and unclassified, it is precisely what is designated in various ways. Immaterial, it abides in permanence. Without elevation, it moves in the sky. Without limbs, it traverses the realms. It has not moved from anywhere and has gone everywhere. Without moving, it is swift and unobstructed. Though it has produced diverse things, it has not moved from the single original condition. Not moving from the single original condition, it appears as the variety of things. All access it, therefore it is the path. Having rejected nothing, it is saṃsāra. Since one is deluded by not recognizing its presence, it is precisely sentient beings. By ferrying across the four rivers, [488] it is the very ferry of liberation. Traversing through realms and paths, it is the very journey. Having no dualistic references, it is enlightenment. Being the awareness of diverse perceptual data, it is Consciousness itself. Knowing everything, it is wisdom. [489] Being total clarity, it is concentration. [490] Since it has gone beyond limits without having traversed intentional realms and paths, it is the abode of the Buddhas. Being unparalleled, it is supreme. Being wondrous, it is the highest. Since it is superior, it is the highest. As nothing dominates and opposes it, it is unexcelled. Being unfathomable, it is profound. Being invaluable, it is secret. Being subtle, it is not evident. [491] Everything springs forth from it, therefore it is beings. Unchanging, it is the true reality. Being the very level of direct vision, it is the Bodhisattva. Since it is a purified continuum and pervades all knowable entities, it is the Buddha. Constituting the foundation, it is the root. Generating everything, it is the mother. Since the Gnosis has sprung from there, it is the father. Maintaining the lineage of the Victorious Ones, it is the son. Since it is Spontaneous, it is autonomous. Being the reality as it is, immutable and incessant, it is the great lineage. It is difficult to transgress that law, therefore it is the great commitment [492] of continuous contemplation. Since it is totally alive, it is life itself. Knowing no exhaustion, it is the great treasure.

[488] The four rivers are birth, old age, sickness, and death.

[489] Shes rab.

[490] Ting nge 'dzin.

[491] Mi gsal ba.

[492] Thugs dam.



Realization of desires is wealth. Performing the actions of all with unceasing compassion, it is the servant. Being truly splendid, it is the very body of the Buddhas. From it arises verbal expression, therefore it is the very speech of the Buddhas. Knowing all things, it is the very Consciousness of the Buddhas. Since it fulfills all desires, it is the very qualities of the Buddhas. Performing the actions, it is the very activity of the Buddhas. Moving towards objects, it is the very desire. Enjoying them, it is the great fruition. Being the cause of all things, it is the great requirement. Being the fulfillment of needs, it is the great accumulation. Being effortless, it is the realization of all. Manifesting magically as the diverse things, it is the great miracle. Appearing as mental images, it is the very mudrā. Not sought elsewhere, therefore it is the very approach. [493] Arising Spontaneously, it is the complete approach. [494] Being the same matrix of enlightenment, it is the attainment. [495] Being the same goal, it is the great attainment. [496]

This quote teaches that the true reality as it is, the matrix of enlightenment, from the beginning has naturally arisen as saṃsāra, the Dharma of the path, the goal, and also everything, while at the same time having no abode. Furthermore:

{166} In the immovable sky of reality as it is, no matter how many conventional expressions designate the movement of living beings and the atoms of the material environment, beyond the single ocean of non-conceptual Gnosis, absolutely nothing exists. Such Gnosis is the great maṇḍala of the Spontaneously present nature.

{167} Even though one passes from one form to another, transmigrating in the world, one does not reach any place outside the original condition which is the matrix of enlightenment. Even though one goes to the limitless realms of the Buddhas, one does not move from that matrix. Even though all the infinite Victorious Ones are generated, the

[493] bsNyen pa: the first of the four phases of divine worship (bsnyen sgrub).

[494] Nye ba'i bsnyen pa: the second phase.

[495] bsGrub pa: the third phase.

[496] bsGrub pa chen po: the fourth phase.

The matrix does not increase at all. Even though countless sentient beings emerge, that same matrix is not diminished. From the same text:

{168} Keeper of Secrets, is the manifestation of all phenomena the Secret Mantra?  
Or, is their true unmanifest nature the Secret Mantra? Or, is the Secret Mantra  
something different from both?

The Keeper of Secrets said: O Lord of Lanka, the manifestation of all phenomena is not the Secret Mantra. If it were the Secret Mantra, there would be a contradiction with the expression "Secret Mantra" and there would be no difference between the conceptual knowledge [497] of sentient beings and the understanding of Buddhas. The Secret Mantra does not even exist as something other than this. If it were merely something else, all phenomena would not be included in the reality [498] of the Secret Mantra. Nor is the unmanifest true nature of all the Secret Mantra. If non-manifestation were the Secret Mantra, the others, proponents of a nihilistic position, would be perfectly correct. Nor is what is not both [499] the Secret Mantra. If something that is not both were the Secret Mantra, there would be no other place to seek and find the so-called Secret Mantra. [...] Lord of Lanka, the so-called Secret Mantra is devoid of the duality of manifestation and non-manifestation; what is free from the essence of both and does not fixate on the middle way is the true reality of the Secret Mantra.

However, the true reality as it is is the true nature of Consciousness, the clear light, whose characteristic is that it never ceases. Since it is not considered to be definable by precisely what it is, even one who abides in the great Atiyoga is free from all notions [500] without having negated them; therefore, reality manifests and there is no concept. Why? Everything is The Self and The Self manifests as everything; therefore, both

[497] 'Du shes.

[498] Chos nyid.

[499] Manifestation and non-manifestation.

[500] bSam pa.

The manifestation and the non-perception are clear at the same time, without any point of reference. Is this ever possible? Consider the example of the magician who creates the illusion of an infantry, of illusory horses and elephants, of 'Gro ba bZang mo, [501] and so on. Whatever he produces, whether a battle or the pleasure of music, the spectators subject to the illusion experience a sense of wonder, while the magician does not experience wonder. Such apparitions are present and are illusions; therefore, those entities, such as the infantry, etc., do not exist in reality and have no awareness of both the observers, i.e., the magician and the spectators. For the great men who have understood the essential point, therefore, there is neither access of the mind to meditation, and they are free even from the negation of access. For them there is no meditation, no distraction, and no way of seeing; the understanding is already accomplished, the realization is already accomplished. Whatever mental image manifests, it is naturally lucid in the original Spontaneous condition. How can they be harmed in mind and body devoid of identity? [502] Know that for them there is not the slightest suffering. Therefore, at the beginning, through the way of seeing, , it is most important to definitively ascertain that the principle of Atiyoga is not something to be ascertained with the mind.

### 1.2.9.2. Misunderstanding

The ignorant deviate from the correct way of seeing, in fact, while they believe that reality as it is is only this concrete reality as it appears, they declare that this belief is the Great Accomplishment.

In this way they remain at the level of ordinary people. [503] The deviations that consist of having references, [504] etc., have been explained exhaustively above.

[501] 'Gro ba bZang mo is an incarnation of the divine being Tārā and the heroine of a popular Tibetan theatrical work.

[502] bDag med: such beings no longer identify with the mind and physical body.

[503] Phal pa: worldly or immature people who do not practice the Dharma or, although practicing it, have not yet attained the direct vision of its principle, the truth pointed out by the Buddha. When effective understanding occurs, unobscured by concepts, opinions, and thoughts of any kind, the practitioner becomes a superior being ('phags pa, ārya), a natural member of the Saṅgha.

[504] dMigs 'dzin.

## 2. MEDITATION

### 2.0. Preface

Possessing the golden principle as expounded, the practical aim is meditation, which is not something the mind must access. In this regard, there is the method of physical posture and the method of Consciousness access.

### 2.1. The Method of Physical Posture

Regarding the method of physical posture, there is nothing fixed regarding the correction of the body, as taught in the other vehicles starting from the yoga of creation [505] Since one is liberated from a fixe [506] notion of the body, there is no definitive physical posture established. Then, should one reject the crossed-legged posture [507] etc. of the lower vehicles? As long as one does not mentally fixat [508] on the body, the crossed-legged posture, etc. need not be rejected; in fact, if one does not deliberately assume it, there is no contradiction between sitting cross-legged, etc., lying supine, prone, or rolling around: the Yogin should assume the posture that is comfortable; however, it is not to be done with indolence [509] To help instill my same confidence in this principle, there are the following quotes.

*From The Grains (rGum chung):*

{169} The body and Consciousness are unborn and without basis, like the sky: there is no need to correct them.

Furthermore:

{170} If one understands that the body is like magic, one need not even assume the upright, cross-legged seated posture. Whatever posture one adopts through the threefold conduct of body, speech, and mind, there is no purposeful action and no one acting.

[505] bsKyed pa'i rnal 'byor: this refers to Mahāyoga.

[506] 'Dzin pa'i 'du shes.

[507] sKyil mo krung.

[508] Ma dmigs.

[509] sNyom las: the indolence caused by attachment to pleasure.

There is no purposeful action, nor is there one who acts.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{171} Since there is no support to rely upon, when the posture is comfortable, there is no need to correct the body.

Furthermore:

{172} When practicing contemplation, one should not correct the body to isolate it. Where there is its isolation without its correction, that very place is isolation from the beginning. [510] This is the domain of the supreme yoga.

And also:

{173} Since the infinite pure realms are the body, the physical body is free from harm without having abandoned it. Since even isolation within the body is isolation, there is no need to even sit with a straight back and crossed legs.

Here it is stated that there is no so-called method of physical posture, so the assumption of a posture is not rejected. Then, what is the defect of correction? Since the one who corrects the body has a fixed notion [511] of the body, due to this fixation mental they will never see the principle.

*This is why it is read in The Grains (rGum chung):*

{174} In the belief that the correction of the body and Consciousness is valid, lies the stake of fixation. [512]

*From The Revelation of Yoga (Grub pa'i lung):*

{175} It is with attachment [513] that one corrects the conduct; therefore, the correction of the body is an alteration.

[510] dBen pa.

[511] 'Dzin pa (graha): the grasping and mentally holding onto something, identifying with that notion.

[512] 'Dzin pa'i phur pa.

[513] zhen pa.

Therefore, the correction of the body is a deviation. Furthermore, even with regard to the place, there is no retreat [514] to be chosen intentionally. As explained earlier [515] Gnosis is the great isolation; hence, since the six kinds of beings are Spontaneous Buddhas, even if one encounters a person, in truth it is an encounter between Buddhas. Consequently, one also abandons the attachments [516] to the intentionally sought retreat. It is not even about comfortably staying in a village, merely citing the words of the teaching. After one has firmly understood the principle, one remains in retreat, without anything to abandon and adopt. Furthermore:

{176} One must not modify the cave in the dwelling immeasurable of the deities. The true reality of that cave, this condition invaluable and unmodified, is from the beginning the wonderful dwelling, Spontaneously arisen without any agent.

This means that any place where one finds oneself is good. Therefore, even if one encounters people, no judgments are made, there is no dissolution of the meditative state, and not even the idea that there is someone to encounter is conceived.

Nowadays, many are those who, attached to the village, having only a physical way of seeing [517] blame the practice of the great principle conducted in retreat. Truly great is the cause of downfall created by these.

### **2.2.1. Enunciation**

The method of access of Consciousness consists in accessing the meditative state without accessing it. In fact, in the true reality as it is, nothing is perceived with the mind as a reference point, so that The Self is lucid in the condition [518] of the great non-conceptualization.

[513] Zhen pa.

[514] dGon pa.

[515] The topic is discussed in the first chapter (L, p. 9.1-2).

[516] Chags pa.

[517] Mig tsam gyi lta ba.

[518] Ngo bo.

Therefore, it is stated that the very awareness that there is now nothing to be accessed is the access.

*From The Extracts (bKol mdo), explanations of the lo tsā ba dPal brtsegs: [519]*

{177} Ati Yoga consists in accessing meditation through the Gnosis devoid of reference points to focus on. [520]

Therefore, there is no intentional access.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{178} He asked: Noble beings, does one remain in the immutable state precisely in the absence of concepts? [521] They replied: One does not access the non-conceptual state.

He asked: Why does one not access it? They replied: Since The Self is devoid of concepts, from the beginning it is not necessary to access the absence of concepts. If The Self were not devoid of discriminative thoughts [522] from the beginning, then The Self should access the absence of discriminative thoughts; but this is not the case, because everything is devoid of discriminative thoughts from the beginning.

If we adhere to the meaning of the quote, we understand that the mind of the Yogin has had access to meditation by the very fact that no reflection and analysis has arisen.

*From The Teaching of the Non-Conceptual State (Mi rtog pa'i lung):*

{179} Through the awareness [523] devoid of concepts, one accesses the condition [524] of the non-conceptual sky. Through the awareness devoid of reflection, one accesses the condition of the sky without references.

This is clear.

[519] One of the main translators of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan, who lived during the monarchical period, from the reign of Khri strong lde btsan to that of Ral pa can.

[520] dMigs su med pa.

[521] Mi rtog pa.

[522] rNam par mi rtog pa.

[523] Rig pa.

[524] Rang bzhin.

### 2.2.2. The Three Flaws

There are three flaws [525] in the way of leaving the mind in the meditative state. What are they? They consist of the threefold fixation of firm conviction: [526] the fixation of consideration, [527] the fixation of complete investigation, [528] and the hybrid fixation. [529]

The principle that is just as it is is not at all something upon which one should reflect; however, since one becomes convinced that it is "just this," there is a consideration of what it is. Thus, the true principle is not seen. This is the flaw of grasping, [530] that is, the belief that consists in saying "it is this."

Regarding the complete investigation, the true nature of reality is an immense spaciousness in itself, free from reflection and analysis; however, one gathers inwardly and searches for the state of Consciousness of meditation. For example, this flaw is a notion comparable to the wasp searching for a hole in which to nest; indeed, there is the thought, the feeling, or the idea: "If one meditates in this way, will it be good? If one remains thus, will it be right?" This is the flaw of generating reflective thoughts.

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{180} Having moved, even for an instant, from the principle of the foundation, birth and cessation arise. If from there many thoughts [531] develop and every kind of search for the path arises, the various paths develop. How can all this be the true nature of reality?

Aside from the transmission [532] of the principle taught here through this quotation, there is an obstacle that consists in not being able to truly see the true nature of reality.

Regarding the hybrid fixation, in the impartial space, from the very beginning untainted by discriminative thoughts, it is not necessary to search for anything.

[525] sKyon.

[526] Nges par 'dzin pa.

[527] Yid la byed pa (manasikāra).

[528] Yongs su 'tshol ba.

[529] 'Phra men.

[530] 'Dzin pa.

[531] Dran pa.

[532] brGyud pa.



The so-called true nature of reality; however, since the mind [533] does not comprehend the essential point of non-duality, if it presents itself as a mixture, it is a hybrid condition: sometimes the principle of imagelessness is clear, sometimes there is the movement of mental images. In this way, the goalless meditation is not understood.

Furthermore:

{181} If there is no vision of the bliss that constitutes the true nature of Consciousness, in the mind the clear principle devoid of images and the confused movement of images are mixed and inseparable.

This is clear, but it is only through transmission of the teaching from one person to another that its meaning is arrived at.

### **2.2.3. The Three Methods**

However, since the true nature of Consciousness is free from the aforementioned defects, only conventionally is the way the mind is left in the meditative state explained. In general, it consists of the method for attaining that state, the method for stabilizing it, and the method for not fixating [534] on anything. It is through the inner part of the way of seeing that the three methods are learned; therefore, the meditation is also in accordance with the principle that has been definitively ascertained above: there is no separation between the principle and the one who meditates, because they are one, the essence as it is of the true nature of reality. Therefore, the Yogin of ati has left the mind as it is, without having left it intentionally.

Similarly, since the true nature of reality is Spontaneously present, The Self-awareness is also left in the state present Spontaneously. The true nature of reality is clear in the condition [535] of the Great Sphere, so The Self-awareness is also left in the state of the Great Sphere. Since the principle is free from action and effort, The Self-awareness is free from action and effort. The true nature of reality is non-dual, so the awareness is non-dual. The true nature of reality is free from goals, so the awareness is free from goals.

[533] Blo.

[534] Mi 'dzin pa: not grasping anything with the mind.

[535] Ngo bo.

The true nature of reality is Spontaneous Gnosis, so self-awareness is Spontaneous Gnosis. The true nature of reality is the great universal self, so the mind is The Great Self. The true nature of reality does not think about anything at all, so the mind does not think of anything. The true nature of reality does not move in any direction, so the mind does not move in any direction. The true nature of reality does not engage with any object, so the mind does not engage with any object. The true nature of reality is undisturbed, so the mind is undisturbed. The true nature of reality does not appear in any way, so the mind does not appear in any way. In the Natural State of reality [536], there is no examination, analysis, searching, or adoption; therefore, the mind does not examine, analyze, search, or adopt anything. The true nature of reality does not arise and does not cease, so one's own mind never arises, does not remain anywhere, and is never arrested [537]. In the great state of the true nature of reality, there is no intentional action, no correction, and no alteration; therefore, one's own mind also does not act intentionally, does not correct, and is not altered.

The true nature of reality is clear and non-conceptual; therefore, self-awareness too is clear and non-conceptual. The true nature of reality does not emerge, does not access [538], and is devoid of notions [539]; therefore, self-awareness also does not emerge, does not access, and is devoid of notions. The true nature of reality does not even abide in the absence of concepts, motion, and references; therefore, one's own mind also does not abide even in the absence of concepts, motion, and references. The true reality of beings is continuous from the very beginning, without interruptions [540]; therefore, self-awareness too is the great continuity in the three times, without interruptions. For what reason? What constitutes the true nature of reality as it is, is precisely self-awareness. When this understanding dawns, one will not even think of abiding instantly [541] in the great system of Atiyoga.

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

[536] Chos kyi ngang

[537] Mi 'gogs

[538] The true nature of reality does not emerge (mi 'byung), going out from itself, and does not access (mi 'jug), entering into itself.

[539] 'Du shes

[540] Thun mtshams: the intervals between meditation sessions.

[541] Cig car. Not only the idea of gradual access is limiting, but also that of immediate or sudden access.

{182} Once access to the matrix of enlightenment has occurred, since in the empty entity there is no empty object [542], one does not dwell even in that emptiness.

Therefore, it is clear that there is no object on which to focus the mind.

## 2.2.4. Critique

### 2.2.4.1 Objection

Then, someone might object that, since in the last quote the expression "once" has been used, once access to the meditative state has occurred, there is no object, but when one does not remain in that state and there is no inner gathering, the object is experienced, so there is also separation between meditation sessions.

### 2.2.4.2. Reply

In truth, there is no emergence and access with respect to the meditative state, for which the expression "once" has been used in reference to the disciple. [543] However, here there are no distinct periods that should be considered as meditation sessions [544] based on the passage of hours; indeed, in the state as it is, identical from the beginning, [545] there is no action of meditation on something by someone. Having definitively ascertained this truth, nothing ceases of what is brought forth from remembrance, [546] yet there is no common remembrance.

*Thus affirm The Instructions (Man ngag):*

{183} Without common remembrance, even men do not perpetuate transmigration.

[542] Yul.

[543] The disciple's point of view is that there is a moment when one enters the meditative state and one when one emerges from it.

[544] Thun.

[545] Ye mnyam.

[546] Dran pa (smṛti). This term can indicate both the attention, mental presence or non-forgetfulness of the meditative state, and the common remembrance or simple thought of something.

*From The Heard Transmission (rNa ba rgyud):*

{184} If such a state is not forgotten for a long period, the experience of the word "access" arises in accordance with its true meaning.

In brief, there is no elimination of the meditative session, as if it were a defect, nor is there its adoption. Therefore, having understood that there are no sessions, there is no defect even in dividing the time of meditation into sessions. Since the heart of such meditation is enlightenment, the duration of the meditative state is indeterminable.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{185} Lord of Laṅkā, the time is in no way determinable: the four seasons, a lunar month, half a month, a full day, from morning to evening, [547] a session of four hours, half a session, a second, a minute, forty-eight minutes, an instant, the original moment as it is, an era, an indeterminate period of eras.

Therefore, this quote refers both to the duration of the vision, when the awareness [548] appears to the practitioner of the path, and to the Spontaneous manifestation [549] of the matrix of enlightenment in those same moments.

## **2.3. The Masters' Explanations**

### **2.3.1. First System**

According to a teaching mode, the spacious attainment [550] of the Atiyoga meditation is expounded as follows. From The Oceanic Space (rGya mtsho klong):

[547] Twelve hours.

[548] Rig pa.

[549] Rang shar ba.

[550] Klong phebs pa.

{186} The uninterrupted understanding of the great space that has existed from the beginning is the meditation on the space of the great enlightened Consciousness.

If we adhere to the meaning of the quote, it follows that: by definitively ascertaining the principle of Atiyoga through the aforementioned way of seeing, if Consciousness is naturally left in the condition of awareness, [551] without being aware of anything, not deliberately chasing thoughts, but only remembering not to get lost in them and having nothing to remember, [552] this is the correct meditation. If the duration of this meditation is prolonged through the power of non-action, the original true nature of reality becomes naturally evident.

### 2.3.2. Second system

According to a teaching modality, the meditation on the specific way of seeing of Atiyoga consists in resting and must be practiced as indicated in the following passages.

*From The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):*

{187} The lightning-like Gnosis is detached from all thoughts.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{188} Being the state of contemplation, there is nothing to think. [553] According to the true nature of reality, unthought and unpurified, the discriminative notion [554] arises precisely from thought. [555]

[551] Rig pa.

[552] Dran pa: to return to the past or simply to think by evoking an idea.

[553] bSam du med.

[554] rNam rtog.

[555] The translation is based on Ch (in L there is a lacuna), but the passage in the canonical source sounds different: "the Gnosis arises precisely from the discriminative notion" (rnam rtog nyid las ye shes skye).

If we adhere to the meaning of the citation, it follows that the Spontaneous Gnosis in which awareness [556] consists is detached from sensory objects. Since there is nothing by nature to be thought, self-awareness is devoid of any reflection and analysis. It radiates its own light in the space of Gnosis, where there are no fixed concepts; [557] as such, awareness is like the sky. The sky neither thinks of anything nor abides on anything; therefore, the mind is left in the meditative state without having been left. It is stated that, whatever one does, one must not disregard this principle.

### 2.3.3. Third System

Further, according to a particular mode of teaching, the great meditator [558] who abides in the Great Completion has left the mind in the meditative state as indicated in the following passages.

*From The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):*

{189} Phenomena are immeasurable like the ocean. The non-conceptual state is as vast as the expanse of the sky.

If we adhere to the meaning of the citation, it follows that awareness is itself clear as the ocean of Gnosis. None of the entities that appear from that natural radiance is blocked, nor should it be retained, since there is no need to do anything mentally: [559] just as the clear reflections of the stars in the limpid ocean are not grasped, whatever has arisen naturally is neither blocked nor conceptualized, and self-awareness is itself clear, without the mind having thought about what appears. There being neither breadth nor narrowness, it is stated that the mind is left in the undifferentiated meditative state. Even in the four moments of conduct, [560] one must train oneself not to fall from the space of this principle.

[556] Rig pa.

[557] 'Dzin rtog.

[558] sGom chen pa.

[559] Yid la mi bya.

[560] sPyod lam rnam bzhi: when walking or standing still, lying down or standing up.

### 2.3.4. Fourth System

Further, according to a mode of teaching,

*The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che) states:*

{190} Meditation is having left the true nature of the unmanifest reality as it is, without having sought it.

If we adhere to the quote, it follows that the matrix of enlightenment, as it is, is untouched by any limit; [561] therefore, in the experience of that which appears as an object in the three times, [562] that object [563] is devoid of individual essence. Thus, one should not have any point of reference [564] in such a phenomenon. What is modified is altered; hence, with no corrective action, the true nature of phenomena is left in the condition of natural clarity without having left it. This is the excellent method.

### 2.3.5. Fifth System

According to a mode of teaching,

*The Meditation on Consciousness (Sems bsgom) recites thus:*

{191} The Gnosis that does not separate any aspect is bewilderment [565] and is the clear, unobstructed light, free from all thoughts; immutable by nature, it is obscuration and is present as the regal concentration.

If we adhere to the sense of the quote, it follows that the Spontaneously accomplished Gnosis, as it is, is free from any partiality and is inherently clear, untouched by any limit. Therefore, there is nothing to think about; the basis for the manifestation of discriminative thought is lacking. Not perceiving a mental movement, the Gnosis is clear as the great immutable, while being devoid of a sought-after clarity. It is akin to

[561] mTha': the nihilistic or eternalistic extreme positions.

[562] Past, present, and future.

[563] Don.

[564] dMigs gtad.

[565] gTi mug (moha).

Like the sun, which does not need to become clear at this moment, and therefore does nothing intentionally to shine. This is the supreme meditation. If one does not pursue the idea [566] of Spontaneous Presence and there is no action to manifest it, it is the correct meditation that diffuses spaciouly its own light. The mere remembrance [567] of this is sufficient: being detached from all mental considerations due to common recollection [568], through it, it is ascertained that entities subject to birth and death do not exist in the three times.

### 2.3.6. Sixth System

According to a mode of teaching,

*The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po) recites thus:*

{192} The true nature of reality, being inconceivable, is the great sky. The sky is free from all thoughts. Since it is inconceivable, the sky is untainted by thoughts. In the sky, there are no references and there is nothing to which one must refer. The sky absolutely transcends all characteristics. Not existing as something definable, the sky is also devoid of sky. The sky, the true reality, is not something on which one should meditate; therefore, the ineffable sky transcends the negation of meditation.

If we adhere to what emerges from the two cited stanzas [569], we understand that the sky, the true reality of things, is from the beginning a Spontaneously diffused clarity. There, the object and subject of meditation are not perceived, neither in the past, nor in the present, nor in the future. Therefore, one need not think in any way about the mind that must meditate or the sky of meditation; one does not conceptualize, adopt, reject, meditate, or have references. Without even referring to the so-called non-meditation, or, or thinking about it or caring about it, the sky of true reality is clear: since the mind from the beginning has not

[566] Blo.

[567] Dran pa: the attention in which the non-conceptual principle is not forgotten.

[568] The same term (dran pa) is used to indicate the recollection of the past or the simple fact of thinking about something.

[569] The original text consists of two stanzas, each of which is formed by four verses.



Distanced from the true nature of reality, such clarity is called "settled meditation". [570]

### 2.3.7. Seventh System

According to a teaching method, the practitioners of Atiyoga have left the mind in the meditative state as follows.

*From The Union of All Precious Ones (Rin po che kun 'dus):*

{193} There is no object of meditation, and one does not dwell in meditation on the absence of objects. If there is attachment to meditation, the desire for bliss is the suffering of the notion of self. [571] If the purity in which there is no meditative state is well understood, even while meditating, there is no defect, because the original condition of reality is like the sky.

If one experiences meditation as described here, it is definitively ascertained that the effortless reality [572] is free from the object of meditation; thereafter, neither is meditation denied. The body and Consciousness are left, with deep relaxation and open attention, in that which is free from all actions. Due to the power of non-action, there is no loss of the inner principle. The natural clarity [573] in the absence is the meditation. The characteristic of this "clarity in the absence" is that, while meditating, there is no fixed concept [574] of meditation and, at the same time, there is no fixed concept of not having focused on a reference point. [575] The meditative state with which one must become familiar is not ceased and, at the same time, there is nothing to do. This is the supreme method.

[570] mNyam par bzhag.

[571] bDag 'dzin (ātmagraha).

[572] Chos.

[573] Rang gsal ba.

[574] rTog 'dzin.

[575] dMigs pa mi dmigs pa.

### 2.3.8. Eighth System

According to a mode of teaching, if the mind is left centered in the correct principle of meditation, it is left as follows.

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{194} Great Being, the true essence of the supreme meditation of an omniscient Buddha is not something to be perceived. In the union with my body, there is no enlightenment nor meditation.

If we adhere to this quote, it follows that Spontaneous Gnosis is by nature clear, without the duality of self and other, in the boundless and limitless space. This is the supreme meditation on the immovable. What is its characteristic? In the state of great Gnosis it is understood that all is included [576] in The Self; therefore, awareness does not fall here within oneself, objects do not appear there outside of oneself and there is no fixed concept. From that meditative state the adventitious emotional afflictions do not naturally arise. This principle is the revelation of the understanding of the victorious Buddhas, the oral transmission. [577] Furthermore, the beginning Yogin has left the mind in the meditative state as follows. From the same text:

{195} Unborn entities, not having an individual essence, are not something on which one should meditate. Embracing them completely in the manner of the sky, one obtains what is everywhere celebrated as attainment. [578]

Again:

{196} Of the entities arisen from self-awareness, there is none on which one should think. The state that has such non-conceptual quality is precisely the marvelous enlightened Consciousness.

The meaning of the quote is that, since everything is devoid of individual essence, there is no duality of object and awareness.

[576] sNum pa.

[577] sNyan khung brgyud pa: the instructions transmitted from teacher to student in an unbroken lineage.

[578] dNgos grub.

The state unborn, self-awareness as it is, radiating from within, is clear like the sun risen in the sky. If there is no sitting, no recollection, [579] no action to manifest the goal, no intentional meditation, no distraction, and no abandonment of distraction, this is called "leaving the mind"; if one remains there, this is called "practicing the path of the Dharma," "seeing correctly," "practicing yoga." It is the same field of activity as the Victorious Buddha.

*From The Oral Transmission (rNa brgyud kyi man ngag):*

{197} When reality appears as it is, one does not analyze the objects out there, nor does one re-enter the awareness [580] within; the sensations, [581] although they cease, are not interrupted; if the mind is devoid of movements, not involved [582] in any way, then one suddenly attains understanding and the taste of Great Bliss arises Spontaneously.

### **2.3.9. Summary**

Whatever the explanation, such meditation systems are only the teaching methods of the eminent masters and the textual traditions of the Dharma, which depend on the fact that the minds of the respective persons to whom they are addressed differ from one another; therefore, in truth, there are no systems more or less profound: in whatever way one meditates, according to one system or another, one will suddenly attain understanding.

In summary, since Atiyoga is the Great Perfection, it is the intrinsic foundation of all entities, never modified in any way. Since it is as it is, the mind is not at all involved, one does not meditate and is not distracted, the thoughts of the six sense objects have not been interrupted, and, at the same time, there is no seeing and hearing; there is not even the cause of the sensations, and, although sensations exist, one neither rejects nor follows them. It is thus that the foundation of all entities is self-evident, without reflection and analysis, in the space of great Gnosis.

[579] Dran pa: to recall the past or think about something.

[580] Shes pa.

[581] Byung tshor.

[582] Mi 'jug.

## 2.3.10. Discussion

### 2.3.10.1. Conceptual Meditation

Even the states of concentration of this great vehicle, as thus expounded, are many; let us suppose that the principle of meditation should be determined through eight types of concentration: the master concentration, the concentration of great freedom, the concentration of The Great Self, the concentration that surpasses in splendor, the concentration of the great immovable, the concentration of the union of appearance and emptiness, the concentration of the great bewilderment, the concentration of the great conquest.

If it were so, [583] then the beginner would not love the presence of mental images, while they would love the absence of images; they would not love the proliferation of thoughts, while they would love the reduction of thoughts; they would not love the mental movement, while they would love the absence of movement. By saying they have no thoughts, they would produce thoughts; by saying they are free from sensory objects, they would manifest them. Therefore, one who meditates in this way does not see the principle; indeed, later, the sensations of thoughts are reborn. [584]

For example, it is like in the case of fire and smoke: if one is clear, the other diminishes. It is like for water and impurity: if there are waves, the impurity rises; if there is no wave movement, the impurity does not rise. It is like for rain and fog: if it rains, the fog dissipates; if the rain stops, the fog rises. Thus, until a bit of clarity regarding the principle is made in the Consciousness of the beginner, although in the meditative state there are no movements of thoughts, as soon as it is interrupted the thoughts reemerge.

*From The Great Eagle (Khyung chen):*

{198} Due to the concept of "just as it is," the meditation is conceptual. Since the Great Bliss is desired, such meditation is the sickness of attachment.

[583] After the exposition of the eight systems, the beginner might create the concept of the states of concentration listed here, having as a reference the opposite notion of their absence, and then engage with every effort to realize them. This theme is also addressed in the sixth chapter (L, pp. 237.5-238.5).

[584] Byung tshor.

If the security [585] of the principle of complete equality is not found, even though the mind does not move at all when left in the meditative state, subsequently thoughts re-emerge, because the principle has not been definitively ascertained. If water is drawn where there are algae, by immersing the ladle, in the end the algae will separate; but, as soon as the ladle is withdrawn, again the algae will compact and cover the water. Therefore, pursuing the true nature of reality and desiring it is only a cause of defects.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{199} The defects have arisen from having considered as qualities what is not.

The same text recites:

{200} From where do the demons [586] arise? They always arise from engagement.  
[...] Wherefore the very disengagement is a demon. [587]

Thus the defects arise.

### **2.3.10.2. The Non-Conceptual Meditation**

Therefore, the fortunate ones, [588] if they practice according to this spiritual system, with the mind do not examine anything, do not reflect on anything, have nothing to do, do not pursue the realization intent, do not manifest it, do not wish for it to be clear, do not purposefully create the notion of the true nature of reality, do not focus on it, do not even fix on these instructions, do not strive, and do not adopt anything: this is meditation.

[585] gDengs.

[586] bDud (māra): the tempters who personify the obstacles to the attainment of enlightenment.

[587] The omitted verse reads: "From the absence of engagement, demons do not arise" ('grus med nyid las bdud mi 'byung/). This does not imply indolence, because even "disengagement" due to laziness is a demon.

[588] sKal pa dang ldan pa.

Therefore, if the striving mind intervenes, it is an error; if there are reflections and analyses, there is division; if mental images are followed, there is dispersion; if the intent, the idea of the goal is pursued, there is deviation; if awareness does not arise from within, the deity descends like a demon and the Buddha arises as an enemy, there is fear of one's own conduct and, even in meditation, one flies away due to the whirling wind of thoughts. This has been fully ascertained.

### 2.3.10.3. Critique

#### 2.3.10.3.1. Objection

Regarding this principle, recently there are those who, having instructions on focusing [589], slander saying: "I have the upadeśa of the masters of India, thanks to which one becomes a Buddha in days or months. Your such explanations, which consist only of the legs [590], are without purpose."

#### 2.3.10.3.2. Reply

It is evident that in these people the great principle has not yet arisen. Determining the great principle through some focusing methods is equivalent to creating the clay model and the casting of the statue of a Khams inhabitant without knowing what his face looks like [591]. However, if you possess the methods to become a Buddha, I do not even need to become a Buddha here, since the state of Buddha is clear in itself. In the vehicle of Atiyoga, which is qualitatively superior even to Mahāyoga, it is sufficient to remember [592] the unsurpassed principle, the pinnacle of the three baskets [593] and of the tantra, as explained above.

[589] dMigs pa'i man ngag.

[590] According to this objection, Sangs rgyas ye shes's teaching on Dzogchen would concern only the foundation (gzhi) of reality and would lack the practical instructions on the path (lam) that allow to obtain the fruit ('bras bu), so it is equated to the legs of a body.

[591] Sangs rgyas ye shes was born in Central Tibet where he probably also composed this text. Khams was the Tibetan region of the eastern border.

[592] Dran pa: to have present or not to forget.

[593] sDe: abbreviation of sde snod (piṭaka), that is, sūtra, vinaya and abhidharma.

Even the valid instructions on the moment of death [594] concern the same principle. There, at the moment of death, without the Consciousness ceasing and without references, there is no conditioning of the karmic imprints of mental images.

*From "The Marvelous" ("rMad du byung ba"):*

{201} The marvelous enlightenment of the unborn is not covered by emotional afflictions and karma.

*From "The Great Sky" ("Nam mkha' che"):*

{202} What is equally present in the different beings is defined as karma. If there were the conditioning of karma, there would be no Spontaneous Gnosis.

*In "The Comprehensive Ascertainment" ("sPyi gcod") it is stated:*

{203} Virtuous karma, non-virtuous karma, and so on, do not even exist as conventional expressions.

*As covered in "The Instructions of the Three Masters" ("A tsa ra rnam gsum brgyud pa'i man ngag").*

The instructions on the moment of death, therefore, also concern precisely this point. According to a teaching modality, one should dwell in the concentration of the moment of death.

*Furthermore, from "The Instructions on the Blissful Space" ("Man ngag bde klong"):*

{204} The great secret of the instructions concerns the moment of death and is hidden in the unmodified spherical bindu, at the center of the three secret strongholds. There is certainty about where the life of Consciousness has been planted. Above, in the expanse [595] of the three summits, there is an unfathomable and spacious depth. In the immeasurable abode of Bodhicitta, completely pure like a precious treasure, the immortal life has been planted. There the path free from deviations is shown. In the immeasurable, precious, and unsurpassed, the life of the enlightened ones has been planted.

[594] Instructions on the moment of death.

[595] dByings.

The precious abode of a thumb's breadth, the king of life, the destination, rides the stallion of the breath devoid of elevation. Having been elevated with A and YA, in the vast space of the bindu of Akaniṣṭha, [596] in the vast space devoid of hope and fear, there is no birth and death, there is full joy. Just as molten gold, poured into the mold, assumes the clear semblance of a form, if the universe assumes the clear semblance of Consciousness, it is the realization of The Great Self. Both meditation and non-meditation are the way of words. If one fully comprehends, such comprehension is the royal meditation.

The explanation of the meaning of these instructions must be requested from the accomplished teacher, offering everything to receive it, including one's own body and life, with the heart [597] devoid of greed.

## 2.4. The Defects

### 2.4.1. In General

When one abides in the principle thus expounded and meditates on it, although the defects of thought [598] arise, like clouds in the sky or impurity in water, the three gates [599] are not to be corrected intentionally.

The defects are the same as those expounded in the vehicle of Mahāyoga, but in Atiyoga there is a difference in the way of correcting them. As in mahāyoga, [600] the innate [601] defect is the concept of subject and object, which arises naturally, without there being deeply rooted causes and momentary circumstances. The defect that arises from circumstances is like the echo due to sound, for it is generated at the moment as something adventitious. The defects created intentionally are those that consist in the actual correction of the three gates.

[596] 'Og min: a pure land of the Sambhogakāya, where the Bodhisattva of the tenth level attain final enlightenment.

[597] Sems.

[598] bSam pa.

[599] Body (lus), speech (ngag) and mind (yid).

[600] In the sixth chapter, the first three defects treated here are mentioned (see L, p. 229.1).

[601] lHan cig skyes pa'i skyon.



The defect of experience [602] consists in thinking of the principle as an object. The defect of what appears naturally is the pleasure due to seeing, for example, a mirror adorned with stars. The root defect consists in meditating by placing the controlling subject [603] as the basis of meditation. Such defects do not arise at the same moment, but gradually.

First, what should be realized is the equanimity [604] with respect to the need to access the meditative state with effort; if it is obscured, it is a defect. When the access to the meditative state is obscured, one must realize that, at the beginning, the obscuration consisting in the need to access that state with effort also arises. Here the defect is twofold: the general or common one and the particular one. Not seeing the common defect, there are many falls into errors, for which there are specific defects. Some of these defects arise as follows.

The desire to access the principle of the meditative state is the common defect of lack of access. The desire that the principle be clear in a certain way is the defect of mere thinking, since there is the thought that the meditative state should be just as it has been established mentally. The defects of alteration in short are these: manifesting the meditative state deliberately, striving in this direction and trying to experience it. They are comparable to the agitation of the flame of a candle due to the wind: thus one falls from the space of non-action. However, there are cases where, having thought [605] for a moment about the meaning of those defects, as has been ascertained, they arise Spontaneously, without having generated them consciously. The reason for this is that some understand with certainty the way of seeing and ascertain the fact that the mind should not be left deliberately in the meditative state, but they cannot practice the meditation of non-meditation, [606] since they have many mental images; moreover, having exercised the intelligence that is the cause of clear vision, [607] they have many thoughts [608] that arise.

[602] Nyams su myong ba.

[603] bDag po.

[604] bTang snyoms.

[605] Dran pa.

[606] Mi sgom pa'i sgom pa.

[607] lHag mthong (vipaśyanā): the understanding of the true nature of reality that is attained by exercising the discriminative intelligence (so sor rtogs pa'i shes rab) through examination and analysis.

[608] Dran pa.

They arise without control. This happens because in the past they have heard and reflected on the great vehicle, but have not meditated, so moments of inner stillness [609] are few.

They should be able to remain as observers, without thinking anything, nor blocking thoughts or analyzing what they observe. How? By relaxing inwardly, Consciousness expands a bit; then, by gathering inwardly, without having gathered anything intentionally, since there is no action, the mind is left in the meditative state and stabilizes naturally. For them, even the other methods [610] that serve to stabilize the mind do not cease to be useful, because everything is a means with respect to this stabilization.

#### **2.4.2. The Six Demons**

Furthermore, there are the six demons of concentration: the demon that obstructs through great laziness [611] and much activity; the obstructing demon of the distracted and agitated mind, [612] which is comparable to a flickering flame moved by the wind; the obstructing demon of little effort and great sleep; the demon that obstructs with obscurity [613] and great desire; the obstacle due to following thoughts. [614]

#### **2.4.3. The Ten Obscurations**

There are also the ten obscurations: the obscuration of obscuration, when intelligence [615] is not clear; the obscuration of reckless agitation, when there is clarity; the obscuration of torpor, [616] as if a person were entering a dark room; the obscuration that consists in attachment,

[609] Mi g.yo ba.

[610] The method just described is the specific one of Atiyoga, suitable for those who have the ability to apply it; those who do not have such capacity, in order to stabilize the mind, should adopt another effective method, proper to a different system.

[611] Le lo.

[612] g.Yengs rgod.

[613] rMugs.

[614] The demons listed are five instead of six, as indicated by a footnote without adding anything else.

[615] Shes rab.

[616] 'Thib pa.

The obscuration of the taste of the pleasure of contemplation; the obscuration of the duality of subject and object, due to the arising of mental knowledge [617] in the original awareness [618]; the obscuration consisting in the belief of being able to become clairvoyant; the obscuration of not being free from the desire to perform miracles; the obscuration that consists in identifying with mental knowledge, having become arrogant [619] of one's own way of seeing [620].

#### **2.4.4. The six defects**

These are the six defects of contemplation: the defect of passion [621], when a great desire suddenly arises; the defect of hostility [622], when great aversion arises; the defect that consists in the thought of harming, due to great envy [623]; the defect of presumption [624], due to great pride; the defect of confusion [625], due to great bewilderment; the defect of self-fixation [626], when there is attachment to one's own way of seeing and pride.

#### **2.4.5. The deviations**

##### **2.4.5.1. Nihilism**

Furthermore, there are many deviations [627]. The deviation of the nihilists is the nihilistic way of seeing of the tīrthika [628].

[617] Shes pa.

[618] Ye shes.

[619] bsNyems pa.

[620] Two obscurations are missing, as indicated by a footnote without naming them.

[621] Sred len.

[622] mNar sems.

[623] Phrag dog. This term can also mean "jealousy".

[624] Khengs sems.

[625] rMongs sems.

[626] Ngar 'dzin pa.

[627] Gol ba.

[628] Mu stegs pa: the supporters of doctrines that are in contrast with the Buddha's "middle way".

In the state of the Great Bliss of enlightened awareness, the way of seeing that is known by oneself, personally, [629] it is clear in the Gnosis of awareness, as there is no unclear vision; thus, the deviation of nihilists is eliminated.

#### **2.4.5.2. Indifference**

The deviation of distracted indifference [630] consists in having no purpose [631] due to not knowing any intent. The illuminated Consciousness, which is detached from the world, does not follow the notions of existence, non-existence, and mental images; thus, the deviation of distracted indifference is eliminated.

#### **2.4.5.3. Eternalism**

The deviation of the lack of clarity regarding the monistic principle is the view of eternalism, which consists in believing in the appearance of The Self without understanding its true nature, whereby the authentic principle of The Self is not clear. Since the Great Bliss of enlightenment has the quality of being independent as self-awareness, the great splendor [632] of Gnosis has arisen Spontaneously, and there is no attachment [633] to anything; thus, the deviation of eternalism is eliminated.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{205} It is said that the mind of one who adheres to eternalism or nihilism deviates from the conviction of the essential principle.

This quote identifies the defect.

[629] So sor rang gis rig pa.

[630] Phyal ba.

[631] gTad med.

[632] sNang ba chen po.

[633] 'Dzin chags.

#### 2.4.5.4. The Common Deviation

If one follows the sensations of the thoughts that move in the mind [634] and the corresponding images, one deviates into the condition of the common worldly people. [635] This deviation is eliminated by understanding, without having anything to think about, that self-awareness is nothing that can be mentally determined.

#### 2.4.5.5. The Absence of Notions

If one remains stupefied without the sensations of the thoughts that move in the mind, it is the deviation of the absence of notions. [636] It is eliminated by understanding that the great Gnosis is itself clear without partiality.

#### 2.4.5.6. The Four Contemplations

Regarding the deviations of the four contemplations, it has already been said before; [637] for now, I will also deal with them here.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{206} All those whose interest [638] in direct vision is little see the absence of identity [639] as the support of meditation. [640] There is examination and there is no analysis with respect to what is interrupted. [641] This is only the first contemplation.

[634] Dran byung: I understand this expression as an abbreviation of 'gyu dran byung tshor.

[635] People who have not attained the direct vision of the true nature of reality.

[636] 'Du shes.

[637] The topic is addressed in the fourth chapter (see L, p. 78.2-6).

[638] Mos pa.

[639] bDag med.

[640] They meditate on the five aggregates of the person, etc. as lacking individual identity, but they do not have the direct vision of this absence.

[641] The contemplation consists in the interruption of the perception of the five senses and the mind. The treatment of the four dhyāna (Pali jhāna) in the ancient Buddhist tradition (currently attested by the theravāda order) is different from that expounded here, which, in turn, also differs in part from the explanation of Nubchen in the fourth chapter of this same work. Cf. Henepola Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, p. 49 ff.

When one abides in the emptiness of the subtle, total emptiness, there is no examination and there is only analysis - this is the second contemplation. When the mind is left with certainty in the void and joy arises, this is the third contemplation. With the fourth contemplation, realized by oneself or through someone else who has explained it, there are no flaws and one abides in the state immutable.

Here, in Atiyoga, the deviations of the four contemplations are canceled due to the fact that awareness is devoid of sensory objects, so there is no effort, nothing to examine and analyze, no pleasure of attachment to the taste of concentration and no fixed notion [642] of equanimity.

#### 2.4.5.7. Śrāvaka

Furthermore, if one pacifies the mind by interrupting the sensations of discriminative thoughts [643] one deviates into the system of the śrāvaka [644] Here, in Atiyoga, the sixfold group [645] psychophysical is not interrupted, because the state devoid of visual and auditory perceptions occurs naturally. From the same text:

{207} The sensory objects of the sixfold group are images [646] The images appear as things. Therefore, leaving everything at will, there is no negation of those images.

[642] 'Dzin pa.'

[643] 'rNam par rtog pa'i byung tshor.'

[644] 'Nyan thos: the listeners or direct disciples of the Buddha.'

[645] 'Tshogs drug: the group of the six Consciousnesses that perceive the objects of the five physical senses and the mental sense.'

[646] 'mTshan ma (nimitta). The literal meaning of the term is "sign".'

Furthermore: [647]

{185} Any image that arises from the six sensory gates in the mind emerges spontaneously and dissolves naturally, so it is left as it is. Since its true nature is unborn, there is nothing to negate. That image as it is is the same true reality.

#### 2.4.5.8. PratyekaBuddha

If one clings to the taste of peace after thought has ceased, one falls into the one-sided position of peace, the extreme of nirvāṇa. [648] This is the deviation of the pratyekaBuddha. [649] Furthermore, from The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):

{209} Desiring to attain direct perception of the true nature of reality, one meditates continuously on its cause. Being attached to meditation, the sense of equanimity towards that bliss does not arise.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{210} Not abiding in the cause, the state without movements in which there is attachment to the taste of the bliss of concentration, is the true nature of reality. Therefore, concentration on the state in which there is attachment, that level of peace, does not transcend suffering.

In the non-dual state, there is no one who, being attached to something, experiences the taste of concentration.

*From The Teaching of the Non-Conceptual State (Mi rtog pa'i lung):*

[647] The following quote has been corrected based on the source. The incorrect text would read as follows: "Any image of the six sensory gates that arises is the reality as it is, unmodified and Spontaneous. Not being born, it is not to be negated."

[648] Saṃsāra and nirvāṇa understood in this way are two extremes, transcended by the "middle way".

[649] Rang rgyal ba (synonym of rang sangs rgyas): the Victorious Ones who have realized nirvāṇa on their own, without following the teaching imparted by someone else.

[650] mNgon sum: direct perception.

Until the mind moves, if one thinks of the gross and subtle movements of the traces [651] as images, that is the Sphere of action of the demons. The gross and subtle movements of the traces are not the journeys of Consciousness. They have no separate existence from Consciousness. When the attentiveness of wisdom [652] devoid of references arises, if one fully accesses the original condition devoid of thoughts, if one does not follow the sensations, if one is not dominated by opacity [653], by obscuration, and if one does not cling to the taste of concentration, it is the meditation in which the non-conceptual state is not conceptualized. The four extreme positions, such as those of eternalism and nihilism, are inconsistent, so one does not fall into the view of the *tīrthika*. Since the secret Gnosis truly arises, one does not fall into the view of interruption sensorial. Remaining entirely in the essential principle, one does not follow either extreme of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, so one does not fall into the view of the *pratyekaBuddha*. The essential principle is devoid of obscurations, and the Gnosis is clear, therefore it is not dominated by opacity and obscuration.

#### 2.4.5.9. *Cittamātra*

One deviates into *cittamātra* when one affirms that in the state of the original Great Bliss, things appear as a deception, when one considers the non-dual Gnosis as the Gnosis of the pure world [654] and the non-conceptual Gnosis as instantaneous.

[651] Bag chags (*vāsanā*): the experiential impressions that remain unconsciously as latent inclinations.

[652] Shes rab dran.

[653] Bying.

[654] Dag pa 'jig rten pa. For *cittamātra*, entities are divisible into three categories thus characterized: totally conceptual (*kun brtags*, *parikalpita*), dependent (*gzhan dbang*, *paratantra*) and absolutely real (*yongs grub*, *pariniṣpanna*). Dependent entities are the phenomena that appear based on causes and circumstances. The impure dependent reality (i.e., of the impure world) is that which appears to common beings in dependence on karma and latent traces or inclinations (*vāsanā*). The pure dependent reality (i.e., of the pure world) is that which appears to superior beings (*ārya*) when they emerge from the state of inner recollection, for example the vision of the pure realms of the Buddha. Cf. Longchen Rabjam, *The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems*, pp. 83-84.



*From The Pure Gold (Sems sgom):*

{212} It is perfectly understood that the very vision of entities as deception is itself a deception.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{213} The immediacy and subsequence of bliss are defects of appearance.

This is clear, so here such defects are eliminated by understanding that the universe of a thousand systems of worlds to the third power bears the imprint of Great Bliss, in which there are no sensory objects, thus there is no deception that consists in appearance, there is no dual Gnosis, and there is no the moment of non-conceptual Gnosis.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems sgom):*

{214} The original condition of reality and the adamantine pinnacle of the Gnosis that knows it do not exist somewhere, so non-conceptual Gnosis is not instantaneous. The roots of pure virtues are non-existent like a reflection, so the Gnosis of the pure world does not exist.

#### **2.4.5.10. Madhyamaka**

One deviates into the sautrāntika system of madhyamaka when, considering what is from the beginning without boundaries and limits, one sees relative truth as the mere illusion of appearance and absolute truth as the true nature of reality unborn.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{215} In the original condition of reality, the great true nature of reality devoid of characteristics, there is no characteristic of illusion. Whatever illusory transformation that appears in the original condition of reality, the Victorious One has not extolled as the path of illusion.

[655] mDo sde.

### 2.4.5.11. Sudden Access

All beings are inherently empty. Any defect of body, speech, and mind is the same emptiness. Therefore, the body is empty and in a state of isolation; speech and mind are also empty and in a state of isolation; thus, one abides in the threefold withdrawal. If one believes that one is realized through such withdrawal, one deviates into the system of sudden access ston mun. [656]

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{216} Naming the subtle door, with the isolation of Consciousness one seeks the path and clings to isolation in the continuity of withdrawal. If one examines it, one understands that that isolation is a conceptual meditation.

Here this deviation is canceled by the fact that in the state of great Gnosis, there is nothing to be done to empty the mind of concepts.

*From The Great Eagle (Khyung chen):*

{217} There is nothing to be corrected through an antidote, not abiding in the dimension [657] free from effort.

*From The Instructions of the Three Masters (A tsa ra rnam gsum gyi man ngag):*

{218} Correcting defects by relaxing inwardly is equivalent to rendering the sky spacious by relaxing it inwardly. Since there is no intrinsic existence of each thing, all reality converges into the enlightened Consciousness, and the true nature of reality need not be rendered spacious.

### 2.4.5.12. Mantrayāna

#### 2.4.5.12.1. General Deviation

Now the deviation in the vehicle of Mantra is discussed. In the space of the true reality as it is, there is nothing that can be identified as an essence.

[656] Chin. dunmen.

[657] Yul.

Therefore, if one experiences body tremors, etc., due to meditation, believing that the nature of the lights and circles [658] of the bodhisattvas is permanent, one deviates into the vehicle of mantra.

Regarding the nature of the luminous Spheres [658] of the Bodhisattvas, one deviates into the vehicle of Mantra by mistakenly believing it to be permanent.

*From The Great Space (Nam mkha' che):*

{219} Here there is not even the name of a state to be attained through wrathful conduct. If one appears as A and Pa, [659] one desires to generate magical bliss. This too is the defect of fixation. [660]

*From The Instructions of Āryadeva (Ā rya de va'i man ngag):*

{220} Nondual bliss is none other than enlightenment: the heart does not palpitate, and the body does not tremble; the torso does not shake in rejection and acceptance, there is no sweating, and the hairs do not stand on end.

This is clear. According to a teaching method, one deviates into the characteristics of the vehicle of Mantra when one meditates on the aggregates, [661] constituents, [662] and bases [663] of psychophysical experience as deities; in this way, at the outset the thought of impure appearance arises, after which one does not dwell on it or become involved in it. [664]

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{221} Even the union [665] of method and wisdom in the three forms of existence appears as an illusion, merely nominally.

[658] Thig le: the radiant Spheres in which the deities are visualized.

[659] According to the commentary in Bai, A (the initial letter of anutpāda) signifies that all entities are "unborn," i.e., empty of an intrinsic identity or existence; whereas Pa (the initial syllable of padma, "lotus") symbolizes the creation of all entities. In the tantric context to which the author refers, the syllable A represents Bodhicitta, i.e., the male seed, while padma indicates the female sexual organ.

[660] 'Dzin pa.

[661] Phung po.

[662] Khams.

[663] sKye mched (āyatana).

[664] Although the thought (rtog pa) of impure appearance may arise, it is replaced by the visualized image of pure appearance, i.e., the deity and its dimension or maṇḍala; in this way, one avoids becoming involved ('jug) in ordinary thought and dwelling (gnas pa) on it.

[665] sByor ba. For an alternative version, see A. Clemente (tr.), *The Total Space of Vajrasattva*, p. 39.

The great sacred place of the universal emperor [666] is also a dwelling of union due to illusion.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{222} If one has not understood that, despite the merits created through meditation on the deities, even the lineage of divine bodies, appearing as magical rainbows, is an illusion, then one must understand that in the great way of Spontaneous complete purity, one realizes it even without merits. Thus has the Victorious One stated.

Therefore, this deviation is eliminated not based on the merits of Mahāyoga.

#### **2.4.5.12.2. Peculiar Deviations**

##### **2.4.5.12.2.1. Mahāyoga**

Now I explain the deviation in the reality as contemplated in the vehicle of Mantra. All beings are in the state of the great equality of the three times, The Self-aware Gnosis. When the mind accesses such reality as it is, if one has a meditation to be practiced subsequently, as happens for the adept of Mahāyoga, [667] one has not understood that The Great Self is without action.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

{223} If one is not free from attachment in such non-action, even the state of equality of the three times is subject to emergence and access. [668]

[666] 'Khor lo bsgyur ba (cakravartin).

[667] In the practice of Mahāyoga, the concentration on the reality as it is (de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin) is the first of the three stages of meditation that characterize the "process of creation" (bskyed rim). The second concentration requires the visualization of the seed syllable (sa bon) of the deity. The third concentration is the visualization of the deity and its maṇḍala. Cf. Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche, *The Secret Oral Teachings on Generating the Deity*, pp. 44-52; Lo chen Dharma-śrī, *Dzog Chen Meditation*, pp. 38-40.

[668] 'Byung 'jug.

This is a deviation. It is eliminated by understanding that here, in the state of great Gnosis spontaneity, one is free from thoughts; therefore, with no arising and access, it is the state of great continuity. From the same text:

{224} Spontaneous Gnosis does not depend on the senses, so all the limits of hope and fear are completely dissolved.

#### **2.4.5.12.2.2. Anuyoga**

Regarding the deviation in Anuyoga, that system is clearly superior to Mahāyoga, where anything is done with a view to attainment: in Anuyoga one leaves the mind in equanimity and asserts that there is nothing to be done with a view to attainment; however, if one considers the superior Atiyoga, one sees that in Anuyoga there is the yab-yum divine distinction, the effort in visualization of colors and numerous deities, the examination of the meaning of symbols, the distinction between the access door and the interior, the instantaneous creation of innumerable deities from the state without references, and the action for others' benefit: all this is a deviation. Such deviation is canceled in the context of the way of seeing, explaining that here [670] there is no distinction, system of meditation, etc. These are the explanations of the deviations that characterize the Mantra vehicle.

#### **2.4.6. The three deviations of the tīrthika**

Furthermore, according to a teaching modality, there are three deviations: the state of annihilation [671], the indifference [672] in which there is no intent, the unidirectional focus [673].

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

[669] The divine masculine and feminine figures.

[670] "Here" means "in Atiyoga".

[671] Yal ba.

[672] Phyal ba.

[673] dMigs pa rtse gcig pa.

{225} Those who here crave the error of degeneration deviate in three ways: annihilation, [674] indifference, and unidirectional focus. [675] Those who are here blind due to their way of seeing, based on the ego [676] determine a philosophical position. Those with the conviction of non-existence end up there in the formless realm and think that there is nothing to realize; thereafter, as soon as such conviction changes, they are reborn in a bad existence.

They deviate like tīrthika.

#### 2.4.7. The Fourteen Defects

In addition to this, there are the fourteen [677] defects of contemplation: much laziness; much activity; agitation of the Consciousness; being conditioned by the six mental distractions; [678] obscuration of the Consciousness; desiring that the way of seeing becomes clear in concentration; too much sleep; hoping to realize the goal; fear of deviating or falling into the defects; having doubts; gathering the Consciousness inward; projecting the Consciousness towards objects; desiring to perform many spiritual activities; [679] desiring the occurrence of action for the benefit of beings; [680] enjoying chatter. [681]

[674] This refers to the lack of will caused by letting the mind wander without control (sems yan par btang nas).

[675] Fixing the mind on a reference or an image.

[676] bDag.

[677] In MG (II, p. 558.4), Nubchen, commenting on the same text cited here, counts fifteen defects, as there actually are.

[678] In the sixth chapter, dedicated to Mahāyoga, six types of distraction are listed (L, p. 234.2-3): natural distraction, external distraction, internal distraction, the distraction of images (mtshan ma), the distraction of mental activity (yid la byed pa), and the distraction of falling (gnas ngan len) due to pride.

[679] Chos spyod. The tradition lists ten "spiritual activities": transcribing the teachings of the Buddha, performing offering rituals (pūjā) to the "Three Jewels" (Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha), giving gifts, listening to the Dharma, memorizing the Dharma heard, reading, explaining or reciting Dharma texts, reflecting and meditating on the meaning of the Dharma.

[680] In MG (ibid.), the commentary is different, since 'byung, translated here as "the happening," is interpreted as an abbreviation of yid 'byung, which means "disenchantment, discontent, regret, dissatisfaction," that is, "generating discontent with the intention of meditation" (bsgom pa'i don la yid 'byung skyed pa).

[681] The commentary in MG precedes this explanation with another: "attachment to the delicious, pleasant taste of concentration" (ting nge 'dzin gyi ro dga' bde la chags pa).

These defects do not arise because, by definitively ascertaining the condition of equality, there is no thought of action. Furthermore:

{226} Here, what obstructs is laziness, excessive activity, agitation, distraction, obscuration, desire, sleep, hope, fear, doubt, absorption, projection, activity, occurrence. [681] Even such obstacles, in their true nature, are the reality as it is.

#### 2.4.8. The Twelve Obscurations

Furthermore, there are twelve obscurations: rendering the Consciousness immobile; desiring that the sole principle becomes clear; delighting in the peace of Consciousness; experiencing the suffering of fear [439] due to incapacity; the arising of many reflective and analytical thoughts; [683] desiring clairvoyance; desiring to perform miracles; having the conviction "there is nothing but this" and, therefore, thinking that it is enough; despising the views of others; becoming arrogant about one's own view; considering that states of Consciousness arise from objects; desiring to pacify discriminative thoughts.

If the obscurations are explained in this way, the last two are forms of correction, since in the source it is stated that the causes of suffering have arisen by themselves and are pacified by themselves. [684] However, certainly there are the ten defects, which have already been mentioned earlier. [685] In particular, regarding arrogance, the Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal) states:

[682] The translation is consistent with Nubchen's previous interpretation, although the commentary in MG seems to be more accurate and reliable.

[683] bSam dpyod.

[684] See note 690 and citation 233.

[685] Compare the "ten obscurations" (2.4.3) with the defects listed here, excluding the last two.

{227} There are those who find themselves in this great position of Lord of the Mantra, but lacking the understanding of the external, internal, and secret meaning, [...] deluded, without caution, in a state devoid of attentiveness and meditative warmth, with violence and arrogance, convinced that there is no one else like them, they claim to be a superior individual compared to anyone they compare themselves to and denigrate others. Even if such a person meditates visualizing themselves as a deity, they are in contradiction with the principle of royal equality; therefore, their view and conduct are separated, and what they do becomes a demonic action.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems sgom):*

{228} Becoming proud of one's own knowledge, considered greater and superior to that of all others, attachment and aversion arise, and conflict ensues. This is delusion. Thus, the principle is not seen.

Further regarding such obscurations:

{229} What obscures the supreme principle is rendering the Consciousness immobile, desiring clarity, enjoying peace, experiencing the suffering of fear, the arising of thoughts, desiring clairvoyance, desiring to perform miracles, the conviction that there is nothing else, the disdain for different views, and self-conceit. Emergence and quiescence are the same state. [686] [687] [688] [689] [690]

[686] Unlike the previous commentary, in MG (II, p. 559.5) it reads: "delighting in the immobility of Consciousness" (sems mi g.yo ba la dga' ba).

[687] MG (ibid.): "desiring to obtain peace" (bde ba thob par 'dod pa).

[688] MG (II, p. 559.6): "desiring to be free from suffering or also, when there is attachment to the taste of contemplative peace, the suffering of effort due to the fear of incapacity" (sdug bsngal bral bar 'dod pa dang yang bde ba'i ro la chags pa dang las su ma rung du dogs pas rtsol ba'i sdug bsngal).

[689] MG (II, pp. 559.6-560.1): "The arising of many mental mice, or the desire that the signs of warmth arise" (rtog pa'i rkun bu mang po skye ba'am drod rtags skye bar 'dod pa).

[690] The obscurations have Spontaneously emerged (rang byung) and naturally subside (rang zhi).



## 2.4.9. Conclusion

If such defects arise, etc., also discussed in the chapter on the Mahāyoga of creation, [691] in our system [692] those same defects are not to be corrected.

*From The Small Grains (rGum chung):*

{230} If Consciousness does not exist, like a mirage, who is it that does not abide and has no referents? The meditation defined as "the sky that does not abide in itself" is meaningless.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems bsgom):*

{231} One does not deliberately eliminate the thought that arises; and when it does not arise, one does not assume the absence of thoughts as the support of Consciousness. The goal is not something to be manifested. The very movement of the smallest thought, that which seems not to be Mañjuśrī, [693] is that same reality symbolized by Mañjuśrī. There one does not abide.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{232} Through the non-verbal way of seeing, if one definitively ascertains that the true nature of all mental images is the true nature [694] of Consciousness, without having corrected anything, one is not distracted, or one is balanced through the ability to face distraction. Where are the diligent effort, hope, and fear? The antidote to what is contrary and meditation are not necessary.

Therefore, there is not even separation from distraction. Furthermore:

{233} The causes of suffering, such as the five poisons, etc., have arisen from themselves and vanish from themselves, therefore they are the very reality as it is.

[691] bsKyed pa: the imaginative creation of the maṇḍala.

[692] The system of Atiyoga followed by Nubchen.

[693] 'Jam dpal: personification of the wisdom (shes rab) of the Buddhas.

[694] Chos nyid.

*From The Six Principles (Don drug pa):*

{234} Whatever image of discriminative thoughts may appear, if one understands that the very nature of that same concept is the true nature of reality [695] such a state is precisely the original condition of reality, and there is no need to meditate on anything else.

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{235} For example, clouds, mist, haze, the moon, the sun, and clusters of stars manifest from the conditio [696] of the sky, yet they remain in that condition as the sky. Similarly, any miraculous sign that appears from the sky of Consciousness [697] being free from judgment, the thought cannot re-emerge after it has dissolved instantly; therefore, there is no need to think of individual antidotes to neutralize distinct poisons. The thoughts are like the rugged slopes of rocky mountains, all of which remain beneath the eagle. For such the eagle of great Gnosis, the terms "deviation" and "obscuration" do not even exist.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{236} If, apart from the original condition of Consciousness, there is nothing that can be called "other" than the unattached and unwaning Consciousness of Great Bliss, where are the "deviations" and "obscurations"? Who goes in search of deviations and obscurations? How can someone find deviations and obscurations? The very deviations and obscurations in their true nature are the original condition of the same Consciousness.

Therefore, this meditation on the correct principle is free from deviations.

[695] Chos nyid.

[696] Rang bzhin.

[697] The direct quotation ends at this point, so the author continues the exegesis with an indirectly quoted passage dominated by the image of an eagle soaring above a mountain.

## 2.5. The Characteristics

What is the nature of meditation? From the same text:

{237} It is genuine, [698] immovable, and empty. [699] In that state, no identity is seen at all, no aspects are seen, no conceptualization occurs, no discriminative thoughts arise, nothing is disturbed, no thoughts occur, and no projections are made. Consciousness is formless, and what arises from Consciousness is also formless. Since there is nothing with form, even enlightenment is formless. The true nature of Consciousness is enlightenment. The nature of enlightenment is that of all beings. The true nature of all beings is the ultimate reality.

Thus, the quote exposes the twelve characteristics of meditation. In addition to these, there are specifically twenty-two characteristics that illustrate the non-dual nature akin to the sky: such a nature is unique; it is not obscured; [700] it is spacious; it is devoid of forms and colors; it is uncompounded; [701] it is without the dichotomy of subject and object; it is without boundaries and center; it is without development and diminution; there is no movement and fluctuation in it; there is no creation and maintenance; there is no dissolution and emptiness; [702] there is no change; nothing exists that is not permeated by it; nothing exists that does not emanate from it; there is nothing it cannot do; it is without birth; it is without decline; it is without characteristics; it is without cause; it is without circumstances; it is without fruit; it is without effort; and it is without the impulses that determine its manifestation. These thirty-four characteristics align the symbol of the sky and its meaning. If one remains in such a meditative state for a long time, the signs presented here will naturally arise as well.

Previously, it was explained in detail that, in the absence of such knowledge, the intentional correction of the three gates and the effort represent the stake of fixation and are a darkening.

[698] Yang dag pa.

[699] dBen pa: not touched by the limits of eternalistic or nihilistic positions.

[700] Mi gos pa.

[701] 'Dus ma byas (asaṃskṛta).

[702] Creation (chags), maintenance (gnas), dissolution ('jig), and emptiness (stong) are the four fundamental cycles of Buddhist cosmology.

Regarding this, the same text states:

{238} In the state where there is no mental object to focus on, [703] the Yogin of great equanimity is the very reality as it is; therefore, the actions of isolating the body and correcting the mind indicate that one has ended up in a deviation.

Thus, the very correction of what is not to be corrected is the fixation and the stake of thought. It follows that, with regard to the practice [704] of the Atiyoga principle, since it is free from interruptions of meditative sessions [705], the principle is itself clear, Spontaneously so from the beginning, and discriminative thoughts do not move nor arise naturally. The principle of Atiyoga is the Sphere of the great state present Spontaneously from the beginning, therefore it diffuses its light everywhere like Dharmakāya. Thus, it has been fully ascertained that, since there is no momentary alternation of emergence from concentration and return to the same, there is no meditation. Then, in this case, how is the conduct of the post-meditative phase considered?

## 3. THE CONDUCT

### 3.1. The Pillars

#### 3.1.1. The Principle

Also, with regard to the path of conduct, there is nothing to be practiced intentionally. Why? Because everything is done by the sugata.

#### 3.1.2. The Four Conducts

For now, the conduct of Atiyoga consists of four types: the conduct of great compassion, [706] the effortless appropriate conduct, the conduct of the great method, and the conduct accomplished Spontaneously.

[703] dMigs su med.

[704] sPyod pa.

[705] Thun mtshams.

[706] Thugs rje chen po.

Regarding the conduct of great compassion, since compassion here constitutes the great source of the method, the great compassion impartially accomplishes the benefit of beings. How is this so? The incessant Consciousness, the referent-less awareness, since it does not purposefully guide the beings of saṃsāra, is also the great compassion already accomplished from the beginning. [707] The activities and the incessant emanations [708] of Spontaneous Gnosis are the activities of The Self. If one has this understanding, it is The Self that accomplishes the benefit of others without seeking great compassion and without references.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{239} Since the benefit of beings is enacted by benevolence, the great compassion is not practiced at all.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{240} In the condition [709] of the sky, unborn and without abode, the king of awareness displays the great, extraordinary miracle of compassion.

Further:

{241} Spontaneous Gnosis, while not departing from the original condition of reality, is Samantabhadra manifested in diverse ways, the Protector of beings who possesses equanimous compassion towards all worlds.

Additionally:

{242} Regarding the ocean of appropriate practices that bring harmony, although one's own benefit and the benefit of others are

[707] The unedited passage would read: "The incessant Consciousness, the referent-less awareness, since it purposefully guides the beings of saṃsāra, is not yet the great compassion already accomplished from the beginning."

[708] sPrul pa.

[709] Rang bzhin.

From the very beginning, the benefit of beings is fully realized through great compassion, which arises Spontaneously.

Further:

{243} Thus, having understood the original condition of reality as it is, great compassion will develop towards those who do not comprehend. Once compassion is born, through the concentration of illusion [710], the various skillful activities for the benefit of beings are accomplished.

*From The Union of All Precious Ones (Rin chen kun 'dus):*

{244} All wishes are fulfilled, and the method of compassion is not rejected.

*From The Wheel of Life (Srog gi 'khor lo):*

{245} To place the beings of saṃsāra in nirvāṇa, without the Spontaneous Gnosis having moved from the original condition of reality, the compassion of equality towards all realms arises.

Furthermore:

{246} The original condition of reality, devoid of inherent identity [711] and impartial, is like space, the universal guide that places beings in the original condition of enlightenment.

In short, the great compassion, which is not practiced intentionally, is not subject to the three times: whatever action is done or accomplished, whatever appears, is the activity of Spontaneous awareness, The Self; thus, without moving from the equanimous state of The Self, the benefit of beings is accomplished. Indeed, in the state of great compassion, the notion of acting in reference to an object has been dissolved in Spontaneous Gnosis. One who understands in this way abides in that state.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

[710] sGyu ma'i ting nge 'dzin.

[711] bDag med.

{247} Abiding in emptiness [712] is abiding in great benevolence.

This is clear, for the four immeasurable states [713] are fulfilled without having sought them.

### 3.1.2.2. The effortless appropriate conduct

Being free from effort, one acts without an aim [714] to pursue. Unlike Mahāyoga, nothing is done intentionally so that something becomes operational, [715] for example, true concentration; therefore, there is nothing to undertake. For, if what is undertaken were non-action, it would be precisely a conduct that involves action; therefore, here naturally there is nothing to do nor anything to undertake.

Then, if there is nothing to do, does one simply sit without doing anything? I reply by affirming that one does not even fixate [716] on sitting: if there is sitting, there will also be non-sitting; but since the four types of conduct [717] do not cease, nor does one fixate on them, whatever is done, nothing is done. There is nothing to do. There is not even the neglect of what is to be done. In the assured understanding of such conduct, there is nothing to do intentionally, for example, offering, ritual recitation, etc., of the vehicles inferior.

*From The Diffused Bliss (bDe 'byams):*

{248} Whatever diverse actions are performed, [...] being the same Sphere, there is nothing to abandon.

[712] sTong pa nyid.

[713] Tshad med pa bzhi ga: benevolence, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity.

[714] Don.

[715] Las su rung bar byas pa.

[716] Ma dmigs.

[717] The "way of conduct" consists of the four bodily activities: going ('gro ba), sitting ('dug pa), lying (nyal ba), and standing ('chag pa).

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{249} In all the realms of the Buddhas, The Self is the universal divinity; therefore, with the universal offering, one offers to The Self.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{250} Since the enlightened Consciousness is equal in sentient beings and Buddhas, the maṇḍala of offerings is not gradually prepared. Since the enlightened Consciousness is one in all beings, it is free from the dedication of merits in favor of others. Although the offerings, the ornament of the collection, are arranged, since they are naturally present, there is no wandering in search of them. Since everything is Spontaneously present, the merits are not dedicated. Since everything is pure from the beginning, it is the nectar.

Furthermore:

{251} Since it is given without holding back, it is the offering of bali [720] Such are the activities of non-action.

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{252} In the true nature of reality, completely free from effort, there are no ritual practice and the focus of practice.

*From The Teaching of the Dharma (rNal 'byor chos gzhung chen po'i yon tan):*

{253} All that appears as body and form has not moved from the original condition of reality from the beginning, therefore it is immutable. Since it is not conceptualized, there are no mental references. Not appearing anything, one does not cling to anything. Everything is in the state of Dharmakāya, therefore the effort due to the duality of subject and object subsides.

[718] mChod pa.

[719] bsNgo ba.

[720] gTor ma: a ritual "cake" usually offered to non-human entities of three types: those with protective functions on the territory (phyogs skyong), the elementals ('byung po) and the obstructing spirits (bgegs).



This is the teaching of the Dharma of the body. So, what is to be done? All beings are already from the beginning the Spontaneously present Buddha state without any effort.

Therefore:

{254} Regarding verbal action, understanding that the recitation of the Mantra of the heart, as well as all the words and letters of all beings, is the Gnosis inherent in the Consciousness of the Buddhas, whatever is recited is the recitation of the true nature of everything. If one understands that the miracle of Gnosis is the principle of non-duality, whatever is spoken with the voice is the teaching of the Dharma. According to the teaching of one's own Consciousness, the ordinary five poisons of conditioned impulses, malignity, [721] cruelty, [722] wrong views, etc., which arise when reality is not known as it is, are not wrong views and deviant mental states. The true nature of reality is devoid of sweetness and hardness. The calm and benevolent Consciousness, [723] the state of Buddha, is impartial, thus it is completely equanimous, open and relaxed towards everything; it is in harmony with all and is never annoyed, [724] not biased, [725] never loses patience with what goes wrong, and is free from attachment and clinging to what goes well. Therefore, it is also possible that there is no duality of the various entities of cause and effect, when in the immutable original condition, the undistracted mind remains unwavering in equanimity. This is the teaching of the Yogin's Consciousness.

*From The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Action (Bya bral rdzogs pa'i lung):*

{255} The true nature of Consciousness does not appear as any phenomenon, so no kind of conduct is practiced. If nothing particular needs to be done, such as discussing in a partisan way, thoughts of purity and impurity, attachment to what is superior and aversion to what is inferior, rejection and acceptance - how can these actions be the yoga of the Great Vehicle?

[721] gNod sems.

[722] gDug sems.

[723] Des pa.

[724] 'Gras pa.

[725] Ris med.

From Dwelling Naturally in the Greatness of Samantabhadra (Kun tu bzang po che ba rang la gnas pa):

{256} Since happiness and suffering are thoughts, what Dharma is there of one's own victory and another's defeat? If one is deceived in conceiving the duality of good and evil, who teaches that desire is insatiable? In the impartial state devoid of superior and inferior, who praises oneself and disparages others? Where there is nothing to be abandoned and accepted, who speaks of rejection and acceptance?

One should cultivate trust in this principle through these textual arguments.

### **3.1.2.3. The Conduct of the Great Method**

This is the conduct of the method of Samantabhadra. In the condition [726] of Samantabhadra, the state of a Buddha, from the very beginning there is no entity that is to be abandoned or accepted, therefore there are also no terms "deviation" and "obscuration." Having such a firm understanding, not deviating from the conduct, without abandoning anything, is the conduct of the method of Samantabhadra. The following citations help to have trust in this principle.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems sgom):* [727]

[726] Ngang.

[727] The commentary on the text cited here, explaining the meaning of verse 95, states: "Although it appears that a lotus is stained by the red of the muddy water, its natural color is not diminished nor is it stained by the new color. Similarly, even the practice of the five qualities of worldly desire appears as if stained by evil; however, just as the lotus is not stained by the water color, such practice is not stained by evil [...]." The "five qualities of worldly desire" are the objects of the five senses. Cf. Mañjuśrīmitra, *Primordial Experience*, p. 97.

{257} Since there are no practices of method and wisdom, they are equal to the conduct of demons. Nor are the demonic actions taught [728] by the six non-Buddhist teachers [729] abandoned, nor are they considered to be impure.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor lung):*

{258} Whatever action of the four types of conduct is performed, it does not become a bondage, since it is a means of liberation.

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{259} The conduct of ascetic discipline [730] is not the true conduct. Engaging the Consciousness in the knowledge of Consciousness is the conduct of enjoyment. The opening of the great method is the supreme conduct.

*From The Teaching of the Dharma (Chos gzhung):*

{260} For example, if an expert physician goes into the forest during the full moon of the seventh month, [731] when the branches and leaves are luxuriant, he finds that there is nothing that grows there that does not have medicinal qualities for curing the ailments of the four types of physical constitution. [732]

[728] The commentary confirms the reading pa, without the genitive case (pa'i) attested instead by the citation, in which case the translation would be: "Nor are the teachings of the six non-Buddhist teachers and the demonic actions abandoned, nor are they considered to be impure." See Mañjuśrīmitra, op. cit., p. 98.

[729] They lived in the time of the Buddha Śākyamuni and did not accept his teaching. A footnote indicates these names: Nag po can gyi bu kor (i.e., Ka tyā'i bu nog can, Kahuda Katyāputra); Mi pham skra'i lva ba can (Ajita Keśakambala); 'Od srung rdzogs byed (Pūrṇa Kāśyapa); Kun tu rgyu gnag lhas kyi bu (Maskari Gośālīputra); gCer bu pa gnyen gyi bu (Nirgrantha Jainīputra); sMra 'dod kyi bu mo'i bu Yang dag rgyal ba can (Sañjaya Vairatthīputra).

[730] brTul zhugs.

[731] From mid-August to mid-September.

[732] 'Du ba rnam bzhi. According to traditional Tibetan medicine, there are three fundamental physical constituents or humors: air (rlung), bile (mkhris pa), and phlegm (bad kan). The physical constitution is determined by the predominance of one of the three types of constituent or their combination.

Similarly, knowing that there is no good and evil, rejection and acceptance, superior and inferior, trusting that everything is good, understanding that this principle is the authentic word [of the Buddha], then conduct free from any doubt is the teaching of the Dharma of yoga.

Further:

{261} For example, the physician 'Tsho byed gzhon nu [733] by combining poisons and substances, whatever they may be, transforms them into beneficial ambrosia. Similarly, the Yogin skilled in the principle of the Dharma, in whatever way they practice the entities of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, does not err, and everything comes to have the nature of Great Bliss.

*From The Great Garuda (Khyung chen):*

{262} In the enjoyment of desires, imbued with compassion, whatever the enjoyment, enlightenment is enjoyed.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{263} It is asserted that even the five types of qualities [734] enjoyed by all are the ornamentation of the original condition of reality.

Furthermore:

{264} Since the categories of entities are infinite, hundreds of thousands, in whatever way one acts, a flower blossoms.

{265} The phenomenal entities examined by the subject [735] appear according to the specific circumstances, therefore neither is rejected nor accepted.

[733] A contemporary physician of Buddha Śākyamuni and devoted to him.

[734] The objects of the five senses.

[735] 'Dzin pa.

*From The Six Spheres (Thig le drug pa):*

Abandon nothing. They are enjoyed through the method of not considering appearance at all.

*From The Ornament of Bliss ('Phra bkod):*

{266} Through the special understanding of Gnosis, whatever is done according to the four types of conduct becomes not a bond but complete liberation.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{267} One's own benefit and that of others are Spontaneously present, and nothing has been abandoned. In the ocean of conducts, one does whatever one pleases. The cause of the birth of the lotus is the mud, and the lotus is not covered by it. If one comes to understand that in the true nature of reality there is no attachment, the Gnosis without attachment is in no way subject to corruption. The inconceivable conducts of compassion, whatever they may be, are the conducts of the yoga method. This is how one practices the conduct.

*From The Comprehensive Ascertainment (sPyi gcod):*

{268} Even while acting without fear, in whatever way one acts, a flower is born there.

*From The Epitome (sPyi bcings):*

{269} Nothing has been blocked, and everything is left to one's liking: carry on such conduct until enlightenment.

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{270} One's own wealth emanates from itself. In The Self-emanating Buddha bodies, one experiences one's own wealth everywhere.

Further:

[736] dGongs pa.

[737] Longs spyod.

All beings that arise from the body are enjoyed. All beings that arise from Consciousness are enjoyed. All beings that arise from speech are enjoyed. All beings that arise from beings are enjoyed.

Understanding occurs without the interruption of the individual sensory functions, comparable to the colors of the silks of Varanasi. From the same text:

{272} Bhagavat Buddha is wise due to the correct accumulation of an incalculable accumulation of immeasurable merits.

Thus it is stated, therefore one should neither reject nor adopt anything.

#### **3.1.2.4. The Conduct of Spontaneous Fulfillment**

Regarding the conduct of Spontaneous fulfillment, in the state of Buddha present in all reality the word saṃsāra does not even exist. The fruit that is clear for a short time, comparable to the full moon of the eighth month, [738] is the conduct. Everywhere there is nothing that does not have the quality of Buddha's action, therefore here all conducts are Buddha's activities.

*From The Ten Qualities (Yon tan chen po bcu):*

{273} The conduct of Atiyoga is that natural, Spontaneous, the Great Fulfillment of all: the conduct of tīrthikarthika and practitioners of kriyā, as well as of all beings of the three realms and those included in the four types of birth. [739]

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{274} There is no one who acts nor the action. Therefore, all that appears as worldly conduct of ordinary sentient beings who transmigrate and of tīrthika is naturally accomplished activity of Buddha.

[738] From mid-September to mid-October.

[739] Birth from womb (mnal), from egg (sgo), from heat and moisture (drod gsher), from miraculous causes (rdzus skyes).

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{275} The actions of the many beings are the supreme, secret principle, the very activities of the Buddhas themselves.

Thus, leaving behind textual arguments, there is the welcoming awareness: this happens when, without contradicting both, there is trust in the principle. There should be no doubts about this.

The essence of the four conducts of Atiyoga is not different, and though one, it appears as fourfold. There are no intentional divisions in the conduct: always and everywhere there is equality in the conduct. Whether one exits the state of equanimity of inner absorption, to enter the phase of action, or does not exit it, there is no difference with respect to the vision. [740]

*In this regard, Abiding Naturally in the Greatness of Samantabhadra (Kun tu bzang po rang gnas pa) states:*

{276} Like the reflection of the moon in water, a mirage or an illusion, which appear and are devoid of intrinsic existence, [741] reality is not an evident nothingness and nor is it something that exists truly. Remembering that it is devoid of intrinsic existence, since it is beyond existence and non-existence, is a sign [742] of understanding through great wisdom. If one remains in the equanimous state similar to the sky, it is a sign of penetration by great wisdom. The immovable, unconditional inner absorption is a sign of realization through great wisdom. If one enjoys everything with the method of non-attachment, it is a sign of attainment through great wisdom.

Therefore, without disregarding [743] the principle, the manifestation of illusory phenomena is not interrupted.

### **3.2. The Deviations**

Regarding the deviations of the conduct, some modern practitioners of the Mantras, being devoid of vast listening to many teachings, do not have a firm understanding, and their view is only verbal.

[740] mThong lugs.

[741] Rang bzhin.

[742] r742] rTags.

[743] Ma nyams pa.

Claiming to be Samantabhadra, they engage in sexual union driven by desire and kill; using the syllable phaṭ, their behavior is rude, licentious, and violates the rules. In doing so, they anchor themselves in hell.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems sgom):*

{277} Beings of virtue not embraced by the conduct of Samantabhadri, [744] whatever they may be, even if it is the conduct of Samantabhadra, are demonic actions, which are consumed and come to an end. Actions characterized by both conducts, even if they are demonic, are the conduct of enlightenment. This is what is stated.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{278} The textual foundations of actions devoid of compassion, even if they merely proclaim the words of Samantabhadra, contradict the essential principle. On such bases one does not attain realization.

*From The Commentary on the Spaces (Klong 'grel):*

{279} If the way of seeing is on the tongue and not in the heart, while the conduct is rude, there is no correct conduct. This is a deviation. It goes without saying that one is not liberated even if completely virtuous actions are not embraced by this method.

*Indeed, The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che) states:*

{280} Although making offerings to the guru, giving gifts, and all similar meritorious actions, if the capacity for unwavering awareness free from attachment is lacking, those actions become great fetters.

*From The King of the Sky (Nam mkha'i rgyal po):*

[744] Kun tu bzang mo: the female personification of the state of Buddha, represents the "great wisdom" that sees the ultimate nature of beings or "emptiness." Samantabhadra (Kun tu bzang po), the male counterpart, personifies the method or means of "great compassion."



{281} Without this perspective, conduct is conditioned by illusion. If the conduct is not embraced by this perspective, one does not transcend the cycle of rebirth.

### 3.3. Appropriate Conduct

#### 3.3.1. Importance

Therefore, even with the certainty of the perspective, it is appropriate to be extremely cautious not to engage in negative actions.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{282} By continuously developing the ability to refrain from evil, the merits are immense.

#### 3.3.2. Inclination

Regarding the qualities of the inclination [745] for such conduct,

*The Dharma Teaching (Chos gzhung) states:*

{283} Even without possessing understanding, due to the inclination for activities performed according to the textual tradition [746], the blessing of compassion appears within oneself. Just as black alum released on gold makes it shine without altering it, through conduct the principle is correct, the textual tradition is not corrupted, the benefit of good actions does not diminish, and the concentration of the mind becomes clear. Therefore, through the instructions of the skilled teacher, each action is empowered to become true nectar, after which the non-dual state of Buddha is realized.

[745] Mos pa.

[746] gZhung.

### 3.3.3. The Precepts

#### 3.3.3.0. Necessity

In general, the great meditator of the Secret Mantra, the great vehicle, understands with certainty the way of seeing things as they are; however, not having had the direct vision of the principle [748] in order to be upright and appropriate in conduct, one must act according to the following precepts.

#### 3.3.3.1. The Conduct of the Body

Regarding the conduct of the body, in the impartial state of all beings there is no movement of the ego towards higher levels; therefore, one must not behave in a hypocritical manner [749] hoping to appear better. Since everything is The Great Self, one should not have attachment towards friends and remain alone. Like an elephant, one must be very cautious, dignified, and stable. The physical conduct, whatever it may be, must not be corrected intentionally. One remains permanently in retreat in any appropriate place. One should not erect many partition walls, nor have attachment to that dwelling. In the four conducts, having ceased physical activities, one does not leave the principle. Regarding clothing, it is enough to not suffer from the cold; beyond that, one should not study to modify it with ornaments, hoping to make it more beautiful. With respect to food, one should not intentionally generate attachment to the tasty one. One should not adorn oneself vainly nor display oneself ostentatiously. Here are the textual arguments that help to have trust in this teaching.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{284} This is the conduct of the adamantine body. Not having reached high, one should not behave hypocritically. Since everything is the same one, one should remain alone. One's attitude should be like the gaze of the elephant [750] and thus remain naturally. Where one remains, one should remain steadfastly. One should not have attachment

[747] The adamantine vehicle (vajrayāna).

[748] Such a practitioner has not yet reached the "path of vision."

[749] Tshul 'chos.

[750] Without hesitation (tsham tshom) and anxiety (bag tsha ba), but with great caution (zon bag che ba).

Regarding conduct, in any situation, one should remain in the unmodified Natural State. One should not suffer, enduring something like heat and cold, but use clothing only considering damage and protection; beyond that, one should not modify the attire for the sake of elegance and embellishment. One should arrange everything to be comfortable where one is.

Regarding food, as a support for maintaining the body, whether good or not, depending on whether the ingredients are available or not, one should not deliberately seek anything beyond what is available, becoming attached to the better taste; this is only permitted if there is a fear of dying and if there is an important necessity. One should not consume food to become fat and have a beautiful appearance. Regarding the enjoyment of the meal, maintaining the principle of reality as it is, one should not examine what one eats. One should not have the common human attitude of eating to satisfy the appetite instinctively. One should not think of accepting what is tasty and rejecting what is not. One should not beg for food following the conduct of the inferior vehicle. From the same text:

{285} Regarding the food of the adamantine Mantra vehicle, the Yogin who practices the contemplation of the thus ascertained principle should not intentionally seek the ingredients for nourishment, beyond what is already available and only to sustain the body. How can one eat for the purpose of getting fat and in view of beautiful appearance? Without correcting the food, one will eat it naturally, as it is. The correction of food for the purpose of nourishment should not be practiced. There is no acceptance and rejection, depending on whether one feels attachment for the tasty flavor or detachment for the non-tasty flavor. The food is not something to be taken from others to accumulate. One should absolutely not nourish oneself by begging for food, because doing so is not beneficial to oneself and others, [751] therefore it is not at all the correct subsistence.

[751] Begging for food is a cause of distraction, since it happens to dislike or like what is offered and, consequently, to develop aversion or attachment towards the offerer.

### 3.3.3.2. The Conduct of Speech

Regarding the conduct of speech, one speaks amiably for the benefit of the Dharma, but does not laugh boisterously like horses. One must be rigorous in speech and not lie. One should not speak frivolously. [752] Whatever is said should be in relation to one's own and others' benefit. When it is not necessary to speak, it is not the time, and even when one finds oneself with friends who practice contemplation, one should not speak idly. [753] Using indicative examples in discourse, one speaks evaluating the understanding of others. Since everything is the Great Bliss, one speaks in accordance with what is valid, [754] and since whatever is said regarding the Dharma the principle is ineffable, one speaks without losing that principle, without hoping that one's words are grandiose and appropriate. From the same text:

{286} The field of activity of the adamant speech is nothing other than the amiable speech having the excellent Dharma as its aim; it is not the flattering words and the derisive laughter. In everything that is said, one must be certain. One must speak sincerely and not change one's word. One must act in accordance with what one affirms. One does not speak at random. What one says must be meaningful. One speaks only at appropriate times and when necessary; [755] apart from that, one must not speak idly. Indicating everything that needs to be explained with examples, one will make it understood at once. Since everything is a valid means of knowledge, one must speak validly. Thus the conduct of the adamant voice for the Yogin of the unmodified natural state is explained.

[752] 'Chal ba.

[753] 'Chal gtam.

[754] Tshad ma.

[755] For example, one speaks if someone asks and to give advice.

[756] Yid.

### 3.3.3.3. The Conduct of the Mind

Regarding the conduct of the mind [756], the same text states:

{287} This is the field of activity of the adamantine mind. The mind is unaltered, undistracted, and free from thought. It is not distracted, it is not clouded, it is clear and remains quiet. It is not attached to objects of desire. It is free from excesses and defects of evaluation. In it there is no adoption or rejection, no attachment or aversion. The mind does not hide its own flaws and does not flaunt its own qualities, so it is not greedy. It is impartial, has no boundaries, and is completely pure. Clad in the armor of commitment, it straightens the path of conduct. Producing the medicine of concentration, which transforms the poisons of wrong views, it possesses the winning weapon of right view. It abides in the adamantine fortress of non-dual view and, having the wish-fulfilling gem,<sup>757</sup> possesses intellect. <sup>758</sup> It is unconditioned and unchanging. In this original state, it is one with everything. To reveal itself to someone's mind, it is always gracious and alert;<sup>759</sup> consequently, it has restraint.<sup>760</sup> In this original condition, it is one with everything. To reveal itself to someone's mind, it is always gracious and vigilant;<sup>759</sup> consequently, it has restraint.<sup>760</sup> It is devoid of the sense of self or ego, so it is with everyone and everything. Everything is that non-dual consciousness, therefore the mind is benevolent.<sup>761</sup> Being empty of what appears here, it thinks of nothing. Being the stillness of true reality, it is free from restlessness. No attainment and qualities scaturisce da qualcos'altro che non sia la coscienza illuminata, quindi nella mente non c'è ricerca della meta altrove. È priva di cose materiali, quindi non è ipo- crita.<sup>762</sup> È senza passioni, quindi non ha desideri. Essendo distaccata, si accontenta. Non si aggrappa alle immagini mentali di alcunché, quindi è priva di purezza e impurità; è priva dei tre tempi e non esiste neppure come qualcosa di superiore.

The conduct consists in adhering to the principle thus expounded.

[758] Blo gros. The intellect allows the connection of the two fundamental aspects of meditation: the state of calm abiding (zhi gnas) and clear vision (lhag mthong).

[759] Bag yod: the vigilance of the mind that is attentive to itself.

[760] Khrel yod.

[761] Des pa.

[762] It does not pretend to be detached from material things.

### 3.3.4. Conclusion

Regarding this appropriate conduct, the Great Yogins perform these actions, but they do not cling to what they do and have no notion of engaging in ascetic practices [763]; in fact, they practice conduct without naturally having an objective. They are naturally detached from rejection and acceptance, yet they perform all actions. On the relative plane, they do not block the mere impulse to act due to memory [764] of what they must do; at the same time, if they are impelled by memory, they have nothing to intentionally remember and are beyond mental involvement [765].

## 4. THE FRUIT

### 4.0. Statement

The aforementioned understanding is free from both hope and fear regarding the signs of progress and the fruit; nevertheless, the manifestation of experience, meditative warmth, premonitory dreams, and signs arises without interruption.

### 4.1. The Experience

Regarding the experience [766], it can be like the states of Consciousness described in the chapter on Mahāyoga; however, even though it manifests in that way, in Atiyoga there is nothing to indicate by saying "this is what is felt," because such an indication would refer to an object to be experienced.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{288} It is easy and it is difficult; being easy, it is difficult. It is not present as a direct perception, yet it pervades everything. By saying "it is so," only verbally, it is not even indicable by Vajrasattva.

[763] dKa' thub.

[764] Dran pa: being attentive to the present.

[765] Yid la byed pa.

[766] Nyams.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{289} If one touches the unborn principle, one understands that it is none other than one's own state. Even that self-awareness is not indicable, nor can it be described to others by saying "this is what is felt." There is nothing that is indicable in words.

One mode of teaching is that attested in The Meditation on Consciousness (Sems sgom pa'i rgyud):

{290} If one were to ask: "How much does one desire [767] that an inconceptualizable state be clear in the mind?" I would respond by asking: "Who experiences the principle of the profound non-conceptual state?" Since it is an experience, [768] that which causes it is a concept.

The sure understanding of the principle by which nothing is experienced is conventionally called "experience," yet it is not indicable by saying "this is it".

## 4.2. The Heat

According to one mode of teaching, the heat [769] of the experience consists at first in movement, then in attainment, and finally in stability.

*From The Instructions of the Three Masters (A tsar rnam gsum gyi man ngag):*

{291} The initial sensation of Consciousness is this: notions [770] arise and are interrupted. The intermediate sensation is this: the notions, since they are born, are illusions, and so they are recognized as illusory; in this case, they should neither be interrupted nor followed. The final sensation is this: the original condition without birth and cessation is precisely the non-conceptual condition, [771] so one should not dwell there either.

[767] Zhen.

[768] Myong ba.

[769] Nyams drod.

[770] 'Du shes: simple thoughts or concepts.

[771] rNam par mi rtog pa'i dbyings.

Therefore one should not dwell even there. There are three ways in which the experience of meditation occurs: the first experience consists in feeling that a notion has arisen, after which it vanishes; the experience of familiarity occurs when the notion arises and, having recognized it as an illusion, one neither interrupts it nor follows it, thus it is an equanimous condition; the final sensation is that of not even abiding in the equanimous condition.

From "The Heard Transmission" (Man ngag rna rgyud):

{292} When the non-verbal meaning appears as the true nature [772] of the mind, the triple great heat arises: external, internal, and secret. The external heat: one does not even perceive the movement of the breath [773] that enters and exits. The internal heat: as soon as the state of equality shines directly, one no longer has the perception of the presence of the body, as if it were cotton moved by the wind. The secret heat: when the space of the mother, Samantabhadrī, becomes clear, one experiences the Great Bliss, the taste of the true nature of reality; at the moment when bliss arises, it is not as if it arose in oneself alone, but since there is no being that is not permeated by the universal ground, [774] everything has the delicious taste of Great Bliss.

From the same text:

{293} Then a triple heat arises. After the movement of the traces of experience that appear as mental images has been interrupted, the mind remains pure in a manner similar to the clear sky. If a sense of bliss arises, without mental images moving, it is the first type of heat. Regarding the second type, if all the entities of existence, both external and internal, appear directly and are perceived without fear, this experience is called "the unwavering vision" and constitutes the second type of heat.

[772] gShis.

[773] L 465.

[774] Kun gzhi.



The third type, without doing anything, leaving everything in the all-pervasive great state, the awareness in the reality as it is has the quality of the vase of consecration of reality; therefore, the encounter between Consciousness and the Dharma occurs, without any detailed explanation of the texts. Like the mixture of water and milk, the mind becomes one with the Great Bliss. In the past, such an experience had never arisen in the mind, therefore now there is the cessation of the continuous fear, and consequently, all the obscurations of the emotional afflictions are swept away in the same instant.

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{294} When one understands this principle and becomes familiar with it for a long period, the heat due to the experience of its vision is the great sign of the encounter with the same principle. According to the upadeśa and the āgama, such heat manifests in eight ways, so that the three points of movement, attainment, and stability are experienced with certainty. The heat that arises experiencing those three points is explained as the sign of the great heat. The subordinate heat is the enlightened Consciousness of compassion that springs forth towards the beings of saṃsāra. The notion arises that the beings conceived as mental images are not reliable. It is truly incredible such a deception to believe that the beings are so as they appear mentally! In this way, the notion of wonder arises. Beings who have not understood this principle seek the authentic principle through the great method of arduous effort, but how long is the path! Although there is the fruit of the accumulation of merits and wisdom, they cannot see that principle. Such is the notion that arises. Regarding the heat of the experience due to this understanding, from the Consciousness of the fortunate one who attains it the Dharma springs forth, without having been explained to him according to the procedure of the tantra. All the teachings, beyond hundreds of thousands, are clear to his speech, and he is capable of extracting the certain arguments, indicating their meaning verbally.

Furthermore:

{295} Due to the distinct mental capacity, the heralds [775] of the heat of concentration appear. If the principle of authentic truth is explained, the listener is not frightened, not shocked, and joy is born in their heart. If the authentic principle is seen with certainty, disinterest [776] in the entities of saṃsāra is experienced. When one is familiar with the authentic principle, the faith in the ascertained Dharma is unwavering. When one has the vision of the authentic principle, one does not delight in words and approaches the true principle. When one has the vision of the principle, Gnosis is born. When Gnosis is born, it is understood that all things that appear are like an illusion. If one sees the principle of the true nature of reality based on the understanding of illusoriness, one sees the unapparent principle, without anything appearing. In the moment when the appearance-less existence is seen, all miraculous animations [777] arise. That is the portent of the vision of the truth. Then a sign similar to the vision of grains of dust in sunrays arises. This is the portent of movement. Then an experience similar to the vision of mirages arises, which is called "initial heat". Then an experience similar to the movement of ocean waves arises, which is called "intermediate heat". Then an experience similar to the sensation of a great wind that has no obstacles arises, which is called "final heat". [778] Subsequently, developing the heat of the letters, an experience similar to the vision of a great rain of letters arises. This is called "heat of attainment". Then, similar to the clouds rising in the sky, the capacity of concentration is elevated. This is the heat of ultimate stability. Then, involuntarily, one's own body levitates only to the height of a tāla, [779] then it rises even higher. This is the heat of ultimate clarity.

*From The Teaching of the Dharma (rNal 'byor gyi chos gzhung):*

[775] sNga ltas.

[776] sKyo ba.

[777] Cho 'phrul rgyu ba.

[778] These are the signs (rtags) of movement (g.yo ba).

[779] A tropical palm tree known as "toddy palm".

{296} Accessing meditation, whether one has understanding or not, at the beginning the notion of sadness arises; then analysis and anxiety arise; then arises the listlessness of discouragement in any situation; then one feels oneself small and docile; then one feels that all the entities that appear as they are perceived by ordinary people are false, an illusion or a dream; then, developing compassion towards those who consider these phenomenal entities as concrete, identify with the suffering and cling to partial views, one feels that every vain thing is a deviation; then one feels no longer attached to anything and, without the slightest fear and apprehension, the body is light as cotton and its presence is not felt. When the mental Consciousness is like the called *dar lo lce'i me tog* flower, lifted by the goddess *bSkyed ma*, and everything returns to the experience of elevation, thanks to one's ability to concentrate on the total unreality of all entities, mere appearances that manifest everywhere the extreme distraction of the mind, one meditates as one wishes and the desire to transform anything is realized. From this moment on, there being the meditative warmth of the illuminated Consciousness, that warmth is precisely the Great Bliss of Samantabhadra. Even if the warmth does not arise according to this explanation, although awareness is little, if one meditates in the aforementioned way, gradually, one will become a *vidyādhara* of Spontaneous Presence, after which one will become Samantabhadra.

{297} Remaining clearly present, without deviating from the authentic principle, means obtaining the warmth in which the teaching of the Dharma consists.

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{298} From the warmth of the body arises the capacity, then the thought of sleep is conquered and the patience of the body is obtained: this is the first warmth. When one does without material food, the complexion is healthy and the senses are clear: this is the so-called "second warmth". When one is as light as cotton, the concept of good or bad health does not arise and one is free from the whole set of diseases: this is the stability of the great warmth.

### 4.3. Dreams

As these types of heat progressively arise, there will also emerge signs and indications regarding prophetic dreams. On this matter, the same text states:

(1) There are many prophetic dreams, the signs of which are divinatory. The Yogin must know them. Here are the omens of purification from traces of experience: dreaming continuously of disrobing; dreaming continuously of taking a full bath; dreaming of eliminating masses of impurities; dreaming of crossing a river of pure water and swimming in the pure waters of the sea; dreaming of washing under the rain; dreaming that someone else pours water from a vessel onto one's own body; dreaming of being scorched by a great fire; dreaming that a great wind blows one's body away from high peaks and that as a result it disintegrates. These are the prophetic signs of purification from traces.

(2) Here are the heralds of freedom from fear: dreaming of returning from a battle; dreaming of completely healing from an illness; dreaming of escaping from prisons; dreaming of evading the executioner; dreaming of escaping from predators; dreaming of recovering from poisonings; dreaming of being freed from bindings; dreaming of succeeding in cutting a thick rope. These are the great positive signs.

(3) Here are the heralds of the attainment of spiritual levels: dreaming of ascending the steps of a throne; dreaming of climbing a common wooden ladder; dreaming of climbing trees green; dreaming of going very high; dreaming of reaching the summit of a mountain; dreaming of climbing a precious ladder; dreaming of climbing a stūpa; dreaming of ascending the heavenly ladder. These are the significant omens.

(4) Here are the heralds of the mastery of spiritual levels: dreaming of sitting on a high throne; dreaming of riding an elephant; dreaming of riding lions; dreaming of riding an eagle in flight; dreaming of reaching the top of a stūpa; dreaming of being on the peak of a mountain; dreaming of being in the celestial space; dreaming that clouds emanate from one's body; dreaming of being above the sun; dreaming of being above the moon. These are the signs premonitory of abiding in the levels of yoga.

(5) Here are the heralds of the son of the Victor [780] one dreams of being entrusted with a mansion by the king; one dreams of being appointed a minister; one dreams of exercising dominion over others; one dreams of giving orders to common people; one dreams of conquering the leaders of other communities; one dreams of winning great battles; one dreams of becoming a king; one dreams of flowers blooming on one's head. These are the premonitory signs of becoming the son of the Victor.

(6) Here are the heralds of mastery in the Dhar-ma: one dreams of finding profound books; one dreams of writing and analyzing them at length; one dreams of explaining and teaching them to others; one dreams of ascertaining their meaning; one dreams of looking into mirrors; one dreams of looking at a full crystal vase, examining it, and drinking its contents; one dreams of gathering precious stones; one dreams of a wheel coming to rest on one's hand; one dreams of grasping the sun and moon; one dreams of twirling Mount Meru on one's head. These are the omens of mastery in the Dharma.

(7) Here are the heralds of the vision of truth: one dreams of seeing places never seen before; one dreams of seeing the immense universe of a thousand systems of worlds to the third power; one dreams of going to other continents; one dreams of reaching the summit of Mount Meru; one dreams of seeing the immense sky; one dreams of reaching the bottom of the ocean; one dreams of holding a lamp; one dreams of gazing at the solar disc; one dreams of investigating the universe. These are the great premonitory signs of the vision of truth.

(8) Here are the heralds of the reception of prophecies: one dreams of hearing the sounds of musical instruments; one dreams of hearing the rumble of thunder; one dreams of hearing the roar of the lion; one dreams of hearing discourses on the Dharma; one dreams of the face of an sacred image smiling; one dreams of hearing the voice of the Buddha without seeing the body; one dreams of a goddess singing aloud; one dreams of hearing sounds coming from celestial abodes; one dreams of being told "friend, friend"; one dreams of discussing the Dharma. These are the omens of prophecies.

[780] The "son of the Victor" is the Bodhisattva.

## 4.4. The Signs

The factors that presage the appearance of the signs of heat are indicated as follows.

*From The Refined Gold (Sems bsgom pa):*

{300} Free from intentional effort, there is no mental activity, no disturbance by anything, and an equanimous awareness; since there is no attachment to anything, nor excitement and fear due to the objects of the five senses and the mind, one neither abandons them nor remains fixed on them. Then it is understood that the four wisdoms of the inalienable reality of equanimity, the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment, and the pāramitā are included in that state of Consciousness.

The quotation states that the signs appear in the aforementioned manner.

*From The Dharma Teaching (Chos gzhung):*

{301} This is the sign of understanding: one does not consider the external and internal Dharma [781] in a partisan way. This is the sign of familiarity: there is openness towards everything and no momentary rejection and acceptance. This is the sign of understanding: whatever one sees, one does not perceive flaws, nor conceives of anything as concrete [782] This is the sign of meditation: there is no concept regarding the flaw, nor is there attachment to qualities. This is the sign of experience: one does not reject the entities of saṃsāra, nor does one fixate on the entities of nirvāṇa. This is the sign of realization: the desire for bliss does not arise, and one does not consider suffering as a flaw. This is the sign of complete realization: day and night there is no distraction, nor is there change over time. This is the sign of confident realization: having gone beyond the notions of eternalism and nihilism, one has confidence in the absence of birth and death. This is the final sign: since the Gnosis devoid of notions and concepts manifests in the space of the true nature of reality devoid of intrinsic existence, without the mind having been modified, if the fundamental state of Consciousness [783] has been altered by causes and circumstances, such Gnosis is evidently clear in its radiance, a spacious and lucid understanding.

[781] The "external Dharma" are non-Buddhist religions or philosophies, while the internal Dharma are the teachings of the Buddha.

[782] dNgos po.

[783] Kun gzhi.

*From The Six Principles (Don drug pa):*

{302} Thus, the non-distraction from the state of enlightened Consciousness in all situations in the three times is the Dharmakāya.

If this absence of distraction becomes powerful, it is understood that the world is devoid of intrinsic existence.

Such signs appear for a long time, and if one does not cling to any Dharma in a partisan way, it is a sign that one experiences the meaning [784] of the Dharmakāya. Whatever is done to oneself in good or evil, if one does not rejoice when someone does good to us, nor gets angry when someone does evil to us, it is a sign that one experiences the sense of non-duality. If, despite having the lightning vision of a Buddha, one does not consider it a good thing, and if, upon seeing a furious demonic entity, one does not think it is a bad thing, then it is a sign that one experiences the sense of equality. If one does not adopt what is superior or good, nor reject what is inferior or bad, it is a sign that one experiences the sense of impartiality. If the Consciousness does not move in happiness and suffering, in good and evil, it is a sign that one experiences the sense of Great Bliss.

Whatever is done, whatever the conduct, if there is no fixation and attachment, it is a sign that one experiences the sense indicated by the name Samantabhadra. Whatever the disease that arises, the enemy that opposes or the obstructing force, if one is not unhappy, when one does not seek elsewhere the blessed goal, [785] it is a sign that one experiences the absence of the need to seek attainment. Being detached from the past and future, one does not think of death as suffering, therefore it is a sign that one experiences the sense of eternal life. If one is aware that any environment and living being is not something other than oneself, it is a sign that one experiences the sense of The Great Self. If, upon seeing a celestial maiden, passion does not arise, and if, upon seeing a blazing rākṣasa, the Consciousness is not shaken by fear, then it is a sign that one experiences the meaning of reality as it is.

[784] dGongs pa.

[785] dNgos grub.

Whatever is done with the body and speech, if one does not focus on the action performed, not thinking it a burden, it is a sign that one experiences the sense of freedom from effort. If one is not weary of operating in the world, not even remaining in saṃsāra for kalpa, it is a sign that one experiences the sense of the incorruptible great compassion.

Such signs appear thus: whatever is done, one does not decline from concentration and there is no hope of realizing the goal; although having the vision of the infernal world, there is no fear of ending up there; although one has the vision of the realms of the Buddha, no contentment arises; although seeing demons and rākṣasa, the one's Consciousness is not shaken by fear; although seeing a celestial maiden, no passion is felt; whatever action is performed, there is nothing that does not become an accumulation of merits, therefore virtuous action does not cease; the negative aspect of karma is not abandoned, nor is the positive one adopted; whatever the conduct of others towards oneself, such as beating and striking, the one's Consciousness is not disturbed. These are the nine signs.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor lung):*

{303} The certainty of the great concentration appears thus: if ever one declines, if there is no hope, no fear, no contentment arises, the Consciousness is not shaken, there is no passion, no cessation, no adoption and no disturbance, then it is the Natural State.

## 4.5. The Spheres of Action of Demons

In addition to this, the eighteen Spheres of action of demons also appear [786] one sees many Buddha and Bodhisattva seated before oneself; one teaches them the Dharma; one sees that one can emit many emanations from one's own Consciousness in an instant; one clearly sees all the Dharma taught by the victorious Buddha; one clearly knows all the times, past and future; one sees all the entities that are in the intermediate state on the path of the six states of existence [787] one feels for them an uncontrollable great compassion; one sees clearly without any difference between day and night.

[786] bDud kyi spyod yul.

[787] rGyud drug: the hell beings, the hungry ghosts, the animals, the humans, the titans and the gods.



You can cross rocks, mountains, and bodies of water without any trouble; you can move through the sky or stay on the ground like a bird; one sees the Victorious Ones who prophesy after having placed their hands on their own head; one knows how to teach the Dharma in the languages of all beings; one sees oneself as an object of veneration by the world, beings, and the environment; one sees equally the universe of a thousand systems of worlds to the third power as if it were on the palm of one's hand; one sees clearly the environment and living beings; one goes everywhere without obstacles; all the devas, rākṣasas, and vidyādharaś will give the order: "Be a teacher of Dharma"; Brahmā, Indra, and so on, will come to pay homage to the practitioner. These are the eighteen demonic Spheres of activity.

In this regard it is said:

{304} These are the demonic Spheres of activity of the Yogins. One sees the noble beings before oneself. [788] One speaks the noble Dharma to the noble beings. One sees innumerable emanations issued from one's own Consciousness. One clearly sees all that has been said by the noble beings. One knows all times and sees them clearly. All those who are in the intermediate state on the path of the six states of existence appear. Spontaneously arises compassion for those beings. One sees the total splendor clearly. One goes everywhere without obstacles. One moves in the sky and remains on the earth like a bird. The noble beings, with arms outstretched, prophesy. One expounds the Dharma in the language of anyone. One sees oneself as an object of veneration by the animate and inanimate world. [789] Everything is seen as equally arranged on the palm of the hand. The true nature of reality as it is appears clearly. Since one is skilled in concentration, there are no obstacles. The noble beings will give the order to teach for the benefit of others. The divine Lords of the world will pay homage. If one understands the true nature of these experiences, these are excellent signs. One who does not understand in this way is a mistaken demon.

[788] The first part of the unedited verse, also attested in all the sources consulted, is *dam par 'dun mthong*: "One sees oneself aspiring to the noble beings". The correction is based on the previous exegesis and the commentary in MG.

[789] The literal translation of the verse would be: "One sees the animate and inanimate world as a sacred abode (*bsti gnas*)". Note that Nubchen interprets *bsti* as an abbreviation of *bkur sti*, "veneration".

Furthermore:

{305} There is no notion of joy or remorse for any good actions or guilt of the past, present, or future. Everything arises of itself and vanishes of itself, therefore it is the same reality as it is.

Therefore, those signs also arise.

*From The Instructions on Enlightened Consciousness (Byang chub sems kyi man ngag):*

{306} Consciousness and the images of phenomena are thus: there are no limits of self and ego, so all phenomena are qualities, so there is no gratification. Due to pride, the conceit of one's own qualities, if arrogance, [790] presumption, and the notion of superior and inferior arise, certainly the truth has not been seen; therefore, it is spoken of as "the Spheres of action of the demons." Consequently, if one perfectly understands that they are illusions, being devoid of haughtiness, [791] one is a Buddha.

Therefore, one should not cling with attachment even to those experiences.

## 4.6. The Value of the Signs

*From The Adamantine Composition (rDo rje bkod pa):*

{307} There are the signs of distinct mental capacity; physical omens, appearance; signs in the manner of the discovery of marvelous things; prophetic dreams, the signs of which are divinatory; omens of great motivation. Thanks to them [...]

It is stated that the signs are of five kinds. The same text reads thus:

[790] Dregs.

[791] Rlom sems.

{308} Where cinnabar emerges, there is the source of gold. [792] Similarly, whatever the quality of the fruit of meditation, superior or inferior, having become adept in the causes through knowledge of these premonitory signs, the signs that appear, whatever they may be, are connected to such causes.

Therefore, knowing what the signs are, one engages.

## 4.7. Other Signs

From the same text:

{309} Then, like an earthquake, it happens that the body trembles and shudders. This is called the "first sign." Then, if one practices the capacity for concentration, everything is produced just as one imagines it. If one meditates having fire as the base, one becomes the very substance [793] of the fire.

Subsequently, the text states:

{310} Thus, in whatever way one meditates on a material base, one becomes that on which one meditates. This is the attainment of the great sign. If one perfects the capacity of mental concentration, the capacity of the truth of speech arises: when one sees the great fire that consumes, saying "be calm," it will calm in that instant. If the current of a river causes damage, saying "stop," it will stop in that instant.

[792] The text cites other examples before the one quoted: "the premonition of fire is the sign of the spreading smoke; wherever smoke arises and is present, it is certain that there is fire. Similarly, the premonition of water is indicated by the fact that steam, waves, and small living organisms emerge; there it is certain that water springs forth. Consider thus the premonitory sign of wind: since the clouds run and fragment, it is certain that a strong wind arises" (dper na me yi snga ltas ni du ba'i mtshan ma rgyas par 'byung du ba gar byung gnas de na me nyid yod par nges pa yin de bzhin chu yi lnga ltas kyang rlangs dang rlabs dang srog chags 'byung de na chu nyid 'byung bar nges rlung gi ltas kyang 'di lta ste sprin rnam rgyug cing dum bur 'chad des na rlung chen 'byung bar nges).

[793] Rang bzhin.

And further, the text states that the wind becomes calm and any disease, whatever it may be, ceases with a snap of the fingers; what is said becomes reality.

Moreover, according to the same source: [794]

{311} Even if no material food is consumed, the senses are intact and the complexion is healthy: this is the sign that one tastes the flavor of concentration. In addition to this, there are physical omens. After the crossed-legged posture is assumed, one levitates a cubit, then moves up to the height of a tāla. This too is the sign of a great omen. Furthermore, one moves in the clear sky, proceeding with steps, does not sink in water, penetrates the earth, is not burned by fire, and binds the wind. These too are great omens. If the capacity of the truth of the body is perfected, the capacity of power also arises: the blessings of power are inconceivable. If one desires or needs something, the earth, stones, or sand are transformed into gold, silver, and so on. From arid lands, water is made to spring forth, and from coals, trees are made to grow. Needs such as these and others are fulfilled according to one's wishes. If the power and the capacity of conduct are perfected, the qualities of benefits are completed: [795] desirable goods manifest, all desires are realized, and even wondrous things of extraordinary qualities are discovered. [796] These are auspicious omens. Regarding the omens of the beings that gather [797] around the Yogin, it happens that such a master is venerated by all and pleases all, is lovable to all, conquers all, and becomes the supreme authority for all. These are great omens.

{312} All miracles, such as riding the sun and moon, uprooting Mount Meru and spinning it, throwing the world far away, eliminating the kalpa of consumption in fire, and so on, the faculty to display such signs through particular capabilities, these and other magical manifestations [798] are the miracles of magical manifestations.

[794] The following quote deals with the second type of signs, defined as "physical omens, the appearance," a topic already partially addressed earlier.

[795] 'Byor pa.

[796] These are the "signs in the manner of the discovery of wondrous things."

[797] These would be the "omens of great motivation" ('dun pa mang po'i snga ltas). In MG (II, p. 568.5), commenting on a homologous passage of the GD, Sangs rgyas ye shes writes of "omens of beings who are motivated," rather than "omens of beings who gather": the canonical lectio 'du ba ("to gather") is replaced by 'dun pa ("to be motivated"). The latter term also means "to aspire," "to long for" or the corresponding noun.

[798] rDzu 'phrul.

Regarding the miracles of the teaching, [799] the Yogin is capable of teaching the disciplines to all disciples in various ways, in the language of each one, in accordance with the Dharma expounded in the language of everyone. These are the miracles that characterize the teaching. The certain miracle that consists in the appearance of the doors of Dharma [800] is explained thus: thanks to the particular capacity of concentration of the Yogin, the worlds are shaken and all the disciples are amazed; making them happy, each one savors the joy. These are the miracles of the appearance of Dharma. Regarding the miracles that characterize the universal verbal expression, from the necklace of secret letters the sounds of Dharma are emitted as a magical manifestation, so that all beings seen and heard are universally perceived as Mantra sounds and there is nothing that does not have the quality of Mantra.

Thus it is affirmed.

## 4.8. Critique

### 4.8.1. Objection

"Then, since Atiyoga does not depend on anything and is devoid of an essence that can be identified, in this teaching one does not accept the aforementioned explanation about the appearance of signs and indications."

### 4.8.2. Reply

In the case that someone made this statement, we could ask ourselves if it is true.

[799] rJes su bstan pa'i cho 'phrul.

[800] Chos kyi sgo: the teachings that allow access to the understanding of true reality.

[801] rTags.

I reply that, in general, if it is true that such signs [801] appear to the practitioner of Mahāyoga, the great yoga, just as it is true that the enlightened Consciousness, that which is as it is, is the source of all wonderful phenomena without rejecting any aspect [803] of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, it is equally true in that system. Similarly to the ocean and the waves, the very essence in which the true nature of reality without birth has appeared of itself [804] as the miracle of the arising of signs, a manifestation that is incessant.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{313} That is the matrix, therefore what emanates from it is a great wonder.

And further:

{314} This wondrous, extraordinary manifestation is like the sky unbound by action: it arises of itself immediately on the basis of the absence of any reference, in a state of bewilderment [805].

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{315} From the original condition without birth, from me who am the condition of the completely pure enlightened Consciousness, the miraculous phenomena of birth are projected.

From the same text:

{316} Beings are clearly known in direct perception as magical illusions; therefore, with regard to the various magical miracles of concentration, no point of reference is conceived, and there is no certainty.

Having expounded the sense of the wondrous miracle of all beings on the basis of the source entitled The Wondrous (rMad byung), it has been ascertained completely, without any doubt, in what the appearance of signs truly consists. However, since such an appearance is a miracle of consciousness, there is no reason to cling to those signs.

[802] By "here" is meant in the Atiyoga vehicle.

[803] mTshan ma.

[804] Rang shar ba.

[805] gTi mug.

For example, it is like the appearance in the sky of signs such as rainbows and lightning; therefore, whatever appears, one does not fixate [806] on it.

## 4.9. The Final Attainment

After such signs have appeared, when the obscurations that interfere are cleared, in what way is it explained the conventional expression "attainment of the fruit"? It is stated that the fruit is a Spontaneous Presence, whose nature is like the sky; thus speaking, one adheres to the āgama.

*As stated in The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{317} The vision has already occurred. The purification has already occurred. The benefit has already been accomplished. The desires have already been fulfilled. The qualities have already been displayed. Likewise, the attainments have already been realized. Therefore, the expression "attainment of the goal" has arisen from the discovery of such a reality as it is.

The theme of the quote is the six realizations already accomplished, previously discussed in detail. In addition to that explanation, there are the following considerations. Regarding the purification from obscurations, which has already occurred, the practitioner of Mahāyoga overcomes those obstacles intentionally without abandoning them, as if transforming a poison into medicine. Here, in ati- yoga, as explained previously, it is taught that in the state as it is of all reality saṃsāra is from the beginning the state of Buddha in nirvāṇa; errors open the way to enlightenment; suffering arises as an apparition in the true nature of reality; emotional afflictions have arisen as Great Bliss; obscurations are naturally clear [807] as great Gnosis; the three lower states of existence and the excellent higher states are from the beginning the state of Buddha, without any correction or transformation. At the moment, it is not even necessary to transform the obscurations into Gnosis, as if it were alchemy; indeed, in the understanding of the original natural purity, there is no term "obscurations": in the state that is like the clear ocean, one is free from

[806] Ma dmigs.

[807] Rang gsal.

*From The Spontaneous Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal):*

{318} Even the accumulated darkness of kalpa is illuminated in an instant [...] by the solar rays of Gnosis, the sovereign of awareness.

Therefore, this means that this path is not a path to be traversed; it is the very awareness of the principle.

*From The Union of All Precious Ones (Rin po che kun 'dus):*

{319} Through the yoga arisen like the sun in the space of Gnosis, at this supreme level nothing has been realized, because the fruit is a Spontaneous Presence. All the flaws of experiential traces have been completely eliminated by the great clear light of Gnosis. Therefore, it is stated that this great vehicle is like the sun rising in the sky, so that the darkness of limits does not exist from the beginning.

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{320} Even "nine times thirty" Meru mountains will be pulverized like diamonds by meditation, thanks to this wonderful enlightened Consciousness.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{321} Instantly shining the secret in the ocean of karma, of emotional afflictions and suffering, it is understood that all this does not exist.

Furthermore:

{322} Thanks to the instant vision of the secret principle, it is understood that all reality becomes the secret matrix.

*From The Marvelous (rMad byung):*

{323} The enlightened Consciousness is like a sharp blade, a sword tempered in sesame oil. The enlightened Consciousness is the universal path.



It is like the lotus untainted by the mud of flaws and the fire that blazes at the end of the kalpa: whatever the suffering endured or the negative action committed, the Yogin realizes himself as the unsurpassable Buddha.

Therefore, in the specific context of Atiyoga, with no attachment to anything, the obscurations of karma, its maturation, birth, and existence are eliminated from the very beginning. [808] Being a state of being free from the notion of identity [809] and the three times, the emotional afflictions are by nature unborn; thus the obscurations of the emotional afflictions are forever eliminated. Neither does one cling to the true reality, since it pervades all from the beginning, is without duality, and therefore is just as it is. The obscurations of the knowable are eliminated, since the true reality is free from them from the very beginning. However, the original purity does not need the effort required by the application of the antidote and is the same purity that meets the principle of the "already accomplished" without meeting it; conventionally, this is called "eliminating the obscurations." It has already been explained that such original purity is free from accumulation of merits and wisdom.

Regarding the attainments already realized from the beginning, since self-awareness is present as the true identity [810] of all attainments, even though there is nothing to eliminate and obtain, the unsought encounter with the principle of non-attainment is conventionally called "manifestation of attainment." Nothing more than this. But essentially, there are not even the expressions that designate the Spontaneous manifestation of attainment and non-manifestation. To evoke inspiration, some quotes follow.

*From The Fine Gold (Sems bsgom):*

{324} Regarding the meditation on the state of being of the completely pure enlightened Consciousness and its particular qualities, when it happens that a wise person fully realizes that sublime Consciousness, such Consciousness has the quality of the highest of the three divine bodies, and therefore it is the so-called Dharmakāya. Thus has the Victorious One stated. Since it has the quality of the sublime knower, it is also called "the eye of wisdom." It is also the non-conceptual Gnosis, the supreme adamantine pinnacle.

[808] Ye dag.

[809] bDag 'dzin.

[810] bDag nyid.

*From The Revelation of Yoga (rNal 'byor grub pa'i lung):*

{325} The nature of the sky is devoid of intrinsic existence. There is nothing to examine, so it is free from concreteness. Beyond this matrix, there is nothing to realize. With the elimination of various dualistic thoughts, compassion continuously arises. Shining like a lamp, it dispels the darkness. All qualities have Spontaneously arisen from this wish-fulfilling gem. It is without birth and death, thus free from fear. It is completely indeterminate, therefore it does not fear. If it is fully understood, one is free from any effort. In the dimension of knowledge, there is no path. [...] While investigating elsewhere through the three roots [812] it is not found, since the secret principle has arisen from the same self-awareness.

*From The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che):*

{326} All qualities and powers have Spontaneously arisen based on the subtle understanding of reality as it is, as soon as it has occurred.

This theme has already been explained in detail in the section on the way of seeing. Therefore, simply because there are no attainments and goals to be obtained elsewhere, it is said that "they have Spontaneously arisen." Thus, this certain understanding is the attainment, without anything having been attained or not attained.

*From The Wonderful (rMad du byung ba):*

{327} One renounces with the discipline of the three vehicle [813] and abides in the goal of the single vehicle.

[811] Ngang.

[812] According to the commentary in MG, the three roots would be the mind (blo), discussion (gros) and method (thabs).

[813] The vehicle of the śrāvaka, the vehicle of the pratyekaBuddha and the vehicle of the Bodhisattva.

The Three Stages of Non-Conceptualization [814] are the Renunciation. The Final Conclusion [815] of all those vehicles is this Vehicle of Spontaneous Fulfillment. Since it has been precisely explained that, without understanding this, there is no way to attain the state of Buddhahood otherwise, the absolutely special [816] designation of this vehicle is also true. Regarding this specificity, it is also believed to be the already fully accomplished realization, comparable to the sky.

## 5. Concluding Discussion

### 5.1. Premise

Concerning the explanation of the peculiarities of the vehicles, there being embarrassment due to a third person who does not know Atiyoga, it should be known that the twenty meanings of the "already accomplished" are in themselves sufficient to persuade them. To this end, leaving aside the textual arguments of the Upadeśa and the Āgama, the rational arguments shall be demonstrated to the mind of the counterpart. In this way, it will be persuaded. In short, in order to facilitate understanding, I will reduce the arguments to the basic themes and posed pose some questions.

### 5.2. The Basic Themes

#### 5.2.1. Sudden Access

The tradition that supports Sudden Access [817] is in agreement with the Great Completion in terms of the employed terminology. Like Atiyoga, it teaches that there is no action nor practice; however, considering the unoriginated foundation, the absolutely real, [818] it affirms that the absolute truth is the unborn and empty foundation.

[814] In the third chapter (L, p. 54.1-6), Nubchen distinguishes three types of non-conceptualization: worldly, supramundane, and superior. The first consists of the forms of contemplation taught by the Buddha's masters and adopted by him as techniques to achieve the tranquility of inner concentration. The second is specific to Śrāvaka and PratyekaBuddha. The third is that specific to Mahāyāna.

[815] Grub mtha'.

[816] Khyad par chen po.

[817] sTon mun (Chin. dunmen).

[818] Yongs su grub pa.

If we examine this teaching, we understand that, unlike Ati Yoga, there is still an alternation of the two truths, one becomes familiar with the state of emptiness, and there is effort to realize it; thus, while practicing the non-duality of the two truths, it is not experienced. Being obscured by one's own way of seeing, those who follow this tradition currently need to access the non-dual state.

### 5.2.2. Mahāyoga and Anuyoga

Mahāyoga is in the direction of Ati Yoga with respect to the principle; but, regarding non-duality, in Mahāyoga there is no freedom from the enormous effort to become familiar with it, since it is not understood that the principle is The Self. Anuyoga is truly special, compared to Mahāyoga; however, while practicing a way of leaving the mind in the meditative state without effort, in Anuyoga the equanimity of non-effort is practiced intentionally.

Furthermore, in Mahāyoga, based on reality as it is, the image of oneself as a deity is gradually created, and the benefit of beings is accomplished. In Anuyoga, the divine image is created instantaneously, after which the benefit of beings is accomplished; therefore, not seeing the great Spontaneous action-free conduct of innate wisdom, one deviates from the accomplishment of one's own and others' benefit realized by remaining in the non-conceptual state. Consequently, if it is compared to the superior vehicle of Ati Yoga, it is seen that in Anuyoga there is still an alternation of the two truths.

According to one teaching mode, there is also a difference between these vehicles regarding the essential principle. The reality as it is contemplated in the vehicle of the Mantra is the total non-dual clear light of self-awareness. According to the Great Completion, the reality as it is Spontaneously accomplished is the final state itself, the great non-duality without differentiations, the level of supreme wisdom. [819] [820] Therefore, the difference between these systems is very great.

[819] De bzhin nyid.

[820] Ye shes bla ma'i sa.

## 5.3. Inquiries

### 5.3.1. Yogācāra-Mādhyamika

Further, according to a teaching modality, the Yogācāra-Mādhyamika states: "I maintain that all entities are one's own Consciousness, as appearances included within Consciousness, which is free from the four limits of existence, non-existence, etc.. Is there a superior way of viewing this?"

### 5.3.2. Sautrāntika-Mādhyamika

The Sautrāntika-Mādhyamika states: "Although the interdependently originated entities, as such, are appearances, the essence is the great void [822] unborn, which is detached from eternalism and nihilism. Is there something higher, a superior principle?"

### 5.3.3. Sudden Access

One who upholds the sudden access called ston mun says: "In the state of the void, unborn from the beginning, of all entities, the two truths do not exist; therefore, I also affirm the principle that there is no diligent effort of practice, hope, and fear. Where is a superior principle?"

### 5.3.4. Mahāyoga

The practitioner of the vehicle of internal Mantra yoga says: "Non-dual self-awareness is clear in the state of reality as it is; if anything appears, it is nothing but an appearance of self-awareness. Therefore, the aggregates, constituents, and bases of psychophysical experience are the maṇḍala of the deities. What need is there for a doctrine superior to this principle?"

[821] rTen cing 'brel bar 'byung ba (pratītyasamutpāda).

[822] dBen pa.

### **5.3.5. Anuyoga**

The follower of Anuyoga says: "From the state of Great Bliss, the enlightened Consciousness that is the non-dual offspring of the original condition and Gnosis, all beings are instantly emanated as bodies of Buddha and maṇḍala, so that the two benefits are realized. Is there anything superior?"

## **5.4. Replies**

### **5.4.1. Yogācāra-mādhyamika**

When such questions are posed, Atiyoga replies thus to the adept of yogācāra-cittamātra: "To hold that all beings are included in Consciousness and that the true nature of Consciousness is instantaneous is an error. To hold that according to absolute truth the true nature of reality is the unborn void is a delusion. Being beyond the instant and the void, I am superior." [823]

### **5.4.2. Sautrāntika-mādhyamika**

Atiyoga replies thus to the sautrāntika-mādhyamika: "You who consider all beings according to the two truths, when their true nature is that of the great indivisible Sphere, you delude yourself. I do not even conceive of what is non-dual according to duality of the two truths; therefore, I who all pervade and embrace am greater."

### **5.4.3. The Sudden Approach**

Atiyoga replies thus to the practitioner of ston mun: "Although the non-dual, empty, and unborn state is free from action, you have not seen the non-dual state free from action, nor have you even heard of it.

[823] The superiority is a quality of Atiyoga understood both as a Dharma system and as a spiritual realization. Although you willingly [824] welcome me, the action-free crown, you need to see me by correcting me; therefore, I am greater.

#### **5.4.4. Mahāyoga**

Ati Yoga responds thus to the practitioner of the internal Mantra vehicle: "In the reality as it is, there is no duality; inserting the effort of creation of the image of oneself as the divine body and the action for the others' benefit is a mistake. In this way one can never hope to understand the principle of effortless concentration; therefore, I am the only Spontaneously present victor."

#### **5.4.5. Anuyoga**

Ati Yoga responds thus to the practitioner of Anuyoga: "The reality as it is, unaltered, is not something to be sought; it is a mistake to think that it is not free from the creation of the maṇḍala, distinguishing between the entrance door and the interior. You too do not know at all the state free from the entrance and creation from the very beginning. [825] I, being Spontaneous, am superior."

### **5.5. Conclusion**

By responding thus, the views of each vehicle are differentiated, and one's own specific view is definitively ascertained. This explanation derives from The Heard Transmission (Man ngag rna brgyud) and also from The Differentiation of Views (lTa ba la shan).

[824] The Tibetan expression translated here is a correction. The unemended text could be rendered as: "Since you need to see me, the action-free crown, by correcting me even for a kalpa, I am greater."

[825] 'Jug bskyed. According to Venerable Tashi Tsering, the entrance refers to the so-called "self-initiation" (bdag 'jug), when one requests the deity to descend into oneself. The creation represents the phase in which one imagines oneself to be the deity (bdag bskyed).

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From the extensive commentary entitled:

Contemplation: The Lamp of the Yogin's Eye

this concludes the seventh chapter, The Doctrine of Ati Yoga, which elaborates extensively on the textual tradition of the Great Perfection.



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3. The Precepts a. Necessity b. The Conduct of the Body c. The Conduct of Speech d. The Conduct of the Mind
4. Conclusion

The Fruit

1. Enunciation
2. The Experience
3. The Heat
4. The Dreams
5. The Signs
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1. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION 5.1. Premise 5.2. The Fundamental Themes 5.2.1. Sudden Access 5.2.2. Mahāyoga and Anuyoga 5.3. Questions 5.3.1. Yogācāra-mādhyamika 5.3.2. Sautrāntika-mādhyamika 5.3.3. Sudden Access 5.3.4. Mahāyoga 5.3.5. Anuyoga 5.4. Replies 5.4.1. Yogācāra-mādhyamika 5.4.2. Sautrāntika-mādhyamika 5.4.3. Sudden Access 5.4.4. Mahāyoga 5.4.5. Anuyoga 5.5. Conclusion

## ABBREVIATIONS

Bai The rGyud 'bum of Vairocana (Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum), Leh, S. W. Tashigangpa, 1971, TBRC.

Ch Nubchen Sangye Yeshe, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes rin po ches mdzad pa'i sgom gyi gnad gsal bar phye ba bsam gtan mig sgron.

DDz 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, gDams ngag mdzod, Paro, Lama Ngodrup – Sherab Drimey, 1979-1981, 18 vols.

DK bKa' 'gyur, sDe dge edition, Chendu, TBRC.

DT bsTan 'gyur, sDe dge edition, Chengdu, TBRC.

GD De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi thugs gsang ba'i ye shes/ don gyi snying po rdo rje bkod pa'i rgyud/ rnal 'byor grub pa'i lung/ kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo/ theg pa chen po mngon par rtogs pa/ chos kyi rnam grangs rnam par bkod pa zhes bya ba'i mdo (dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo).

GDG mKhan po Nus ldan rdo rje, dPal spyi mdo dgongs pa 'dus pa'i 'grel pa rnal 'byor nyi ma gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad gzi ldan 'char kha'i 'od snang (dGongs 'dus 'grel pa).

GSB Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med sgam po pa 'gro mgon bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung

## 250 Abbreviations

bum yid bzhin nor bu, Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, Kathmandu, 2000, 4 vols., TBRC

ins. inseruit

KD The Essence of Wisdom, the Heart of All the Tathagatas' Minds; The Wrathful Vajra Lineage; The Sutra of the All-Encompassing Awareness; The Tantra of the Attainment of Yoga (The Sutra of the All-Encompassing Awareness).

KShG The Extensive Oral Transmission, Chengdu, n.d., 110 vols.

L Nubchen Sangye Yeshe, The Meditative Concentration of the Eye of Yoga or The Lamp of Meditative Concentration.

MG Nubchen Sangye Yeshe, The Key that Illuminates the Armor of Darkness: The Sun of Yoga, the Collected Thought of All the Buddhas (The Armor of Darkness).

MP Collected Writings of 'Jam-mgon 'Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho, Gangtok, S. T. Kazi, 1976.

NyKG The Extensive Oral Transmission of the Nyingma School, Kalimpong, Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987, 58 vols., TBRC.

NyY Longchen Rabjam, The Four Heart Essences.

PK Kangyur, in D. T. Suzuki (ed.), The Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition, Tokyo-Kyoto, Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute, 1955-1961, vols. 1-45.

PT Tengyur, in D. T. Suzuki (ed.), The Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition, Tokyo-Kyoto, Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute, 1955-1961, vols. 46-150.

RZ Selected Writings of Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo, Smarntsis shesrig spendzod Series, Leh, 1974.



## 251 Abbreviations

### [1] Abbreviations

RZCh Rong zom Chos bzang gi gsung 'bum, Chengdu, Sichuan mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999, vols. I-II.

sans. Sanskrit

SM bSam gtan mig sgron

SZ Collected Writings of Sog-zlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, Delhi, Sanje Dorjii, 1975.

TBRC Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, New York, [www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org).

TK Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum (reproduced from manuscripts preserved at gTing skyes dgon pa byang monastery in Tibet), Thimphu, Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche, 1975.

TshB The Mtshams-brag manuscript of the Rñing ma rgyud 'bum, Thimphu, National Library, 1982, TBRC.

>< pro, "instead of"

## 252 Abbreviations

RZCh Rong zom Chos bzang gi gsung 'bum, Chengdu, Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 1999, vols. I-II.

sans. Sanskrit

SM bSam gtan mig sgron

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TBRC Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, New York, [www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org).

TK Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum (reproduced from manuscripts preserved at gTing skyes dgon pa byang monastery in Tibet), Thimphu, Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche, 1975.

TshB The Mtshams-brag manuscript of the Rñing ma rgyud 'bum, Thimphu, National Library, 1982, TBRC.

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Nubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, *The Lamp of Contemplation* [2], Leh, S. W. Tashigangpa, 1974.

Gnyan dPal dbyangs, *The Lamp of the True View* [3]: DT, vol. 213 (No), pp. 766 [4] 767.7 (ff. 383b [4] 384a.7); PT, vol. 150, n. 5919, p. 234 (ff. 285a.8-286a.6).

Gnyan dPal dbyangs, *The Lamp Illuminating the Definitive Meaning of the Yogic Tradition* [4] *The Grains of the Oral Instructions*: DT, vol. 213 (No), pp. 769.6-770 [4] (ff. 385a.6-385b.4); PT, vol. 150, n. 5922, p. 235 (ff. 287a.8-287b.7).

Mañjuśrimitra ('Jam dPal bshes gnyen), *The Twelve-Point Exposition of the Meditation on the Mind of Enlightenment*, DT, vol. 65, Ngu, pp. 88 [4] 117 [3] *The Meditation Instructions of the Master dPal dbyangs* [5]: see Gnyan dPal dbyangs, *The Lamp of the True View*.

[1] gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes rin po che's mdzad pa'i sgom gyi gnad gsal bar phye ba bsam gtan mig sgron

[2] rNal 'byor mig gi bsam gtan or bSam gtan mig sgron

[3] lTa ba yang dag sgron ma

[4] rNal 'byor spyod pa'i lugs nges pa'i don la ji bzhin sgom thabs kyi sgron ma

[5] mKhan po dPal dbyang kyi bsgom lung

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*Vimalamitra, The Counsels* (I consigli): source not available.

*Vimalamitra, The Commentary on the Expanse* (Il commento degli spazi): source not available.

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*The Cuckoo* (Il cuculo): (a) *The Stainless Tantra of Sun and Moon*, chapter 2: Bai, 2, Ka, p. 31.2; TK, Ka, pp. 394.2-3; TshB, Ka, pp. 696.7-697.1; (b) *The Great Perfection in One Ground*: Bai, 5, Pa, p. 306.2-3; TK, Ka, p. 419.2-3; (c) *The King of All-Creating*, chapter 31: TK, Ka, pp. 97.1-2; TshB, Ka, pp. 113.3-5; (d) *The Glorious Victory Banner*: TK, Ka, pp. 526.2-544.4; TshB, Ka, 499.6-524.6.

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(e) bKra shis mi 'gyur ba gsal bar gnas pa'i rgyud, chapter 8: TK, Ka, p. 594.5-6; TshB, Ca, pp. 67.3-5; (f) commentaries: (1) see mDo bcu, chapter 8: TK, Ka, p. 305.3-5; TshB, Ka, p. 453.4-6; (2) Bai, 1, Ka, pp. 2.1-14.4; (3) Bai, 5, Ta, pp. 341.1-351.2. (4) modern editions and translations: Karmay, Samten G., *The Great Perfection*, pp. 50-59; Namkhai Norbu, *Dzog-chen: The Self-Perfected State*, p. 60. Khyung chen lding ba (*The Great Eagle in Flight*): (a) rDzogs pa chen po sa gcig pa (= Kun byed rgyal po, chapter 22): Bai, 2, Nya, pp. 366.1-370.3; Bai, 5, Pa, pp. 308.1-314.1; TK, Ka, pp. 419.4-423.3; (b) Kun byed rgyal po, chapter 22: TK, Ka, pp. 73.7-77.6; TshB, Ka, pp. 87.4-91.6; (c) Khyung chen gyi rgyud: TK, Ka, pp. 475.6-495.2; TshB, Ka, pp. 537.5-560.6; (d) shorter version: see Nyi zla dang mnyam pa dri ma med pa'i rgyud, chapter 5: Bai, 2, Ka, pp. 32.6-34.3; TK, Ka, pp. 395.7-397.4; TshB, Ka, pp. 699.1-700.7; (e) cf. Yul kun la 'jug pa'i rgyud, *passim*; (f) commentary (cf. b-c): see mDo bcu, chapter 8: TK, Ka, pp. 306.6-312.7; TshB, Ka, pp. 455.2-462.3. Man ngag (*The Instructions*): unidentified source.

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[3] The Precious All-Encompassing: See The Precious All-Encompassing Mind of Enlightenment.

[4] The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba'i rgyud): (a) Canonical source: Bai, [2] Kha, pp. 106.1-171 [3] TK, Kha (i), pp. [2] 68;

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[1] The Tho.ling gtsug.lag.khang is a monastery in Tibet, and this footnote indicates that the text is commemorating the millennium of this monastery.