

Penetrating the Secret Essence Tantra:
Context and Philosophy in the Mahāyoga System
of rNying-ma Tantra

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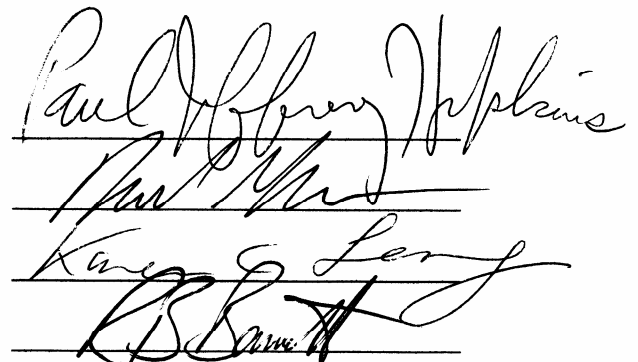
M.A., University of Virginia, 1993

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Religious Studies

University of Virginia

May, 2004


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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes the Zur tradition's (*zur lugs*) interpretation of the Mahāyoga Vehicle and its central scripture the *Secret Essence Tantra* (*gsang ba'i snying po rgyud, gubhyagarbhatantra*) found in the Old Schools (*rnying ma*) of Tibetan Buddhism. The perspective provided on this tradition is that of an early twentieth century commentary, the *Key to the Treasury* (*mdzod kyi lde mig*), composed by the Third Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima (1865-1926). The first part of the dissertation provides an introduction to the Mahāyoga system of beliefs and practices by viewing Mahāyoga from four different perspectives: doxographical, historical, scriptural, and philosophical. How Mahāyoga figures into the nine vehicle doxography of the Old Schools is presented through a discussion of the relevant section in *Oral Instructions of the Lord of Secrets* (*gsang bdag zhal lung*) by Lochen Dharmashrī (1654-1717), a prominent member of the Zur tradition upon whom Jikmé Tenpé Nyima heavily relies. The historical background of the *Key to the Treasury* is described through short biographies of the important figures in Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's lineage along with biographies of other important figures of the Old Schools relevant to this discussion. The scriptural background for the *Key to the Treasury* is provided through a discussion of the Mahāyoga corpus of tantras and means of achievement (*sgrub thabs, sādhana*) along with a chapter summary of the short version of the *Secret Essence*. Finally, the philosophy of Mahāyoga, according to the Zur tradition, is described through summarizing the central points in the first half of the *Key to the Treasury*. The conclusion of part one provides some tentative hypotheses concerning the origins of the *Secret Essence* and its Indo-Tibetan lineages along a comparison of the Zur interpretation with the other major hermeneutic tradition, the system of Ronzom Chökyi Zangpo (11th century) and Longchenpa (1308-1363). Part two of the dissertation contains a translation of the first half of the *Key to the Treasury*, which describes the general worldview and philosophy of the Zur tradition's interpretation of Mahāyoga.

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*To my father, Arthur W. Dickson, Sr.,
and
my love, Kim Pickett,
whose support and encouragement helped make this work possible.*

PREFACE

The Mahāyoga cycle of Tantras is an important, yet understudied, aspect of present-day Tibetan Buddhism. Found only within the Old Schools' hierarchy of nine vehicles, the scriptures of Mahāyoga are the origin for some of the Old Schools' unique, defining doctrines, but as the seventh of the nine vehicles, Mahāyoga has been relatively neglected by recent scholarship in comparison to the highest vehicle, Atiyoga. Yet, in all likelihood, Mahāyoga was the historical precursor to Atiyoga. Whereas the first Atiyoga scriptures probably appeared at the beginning of the ninth century,¹ Mahāyoga's central scripture, the *Secret Essence Tantra* (*gsang ba snying po'i rgyud, guhyagarbhatantra*), was most likely redacted some time around the middle of the eighth century of the present era, relatively speaking, just prior to the formal adoption of Buddhism as Tibet's state religion (around 762 C.E.). For this reason, as David Germano points out:

From a very early point onwards, the Mahāyoga *Guhyagarbha Tantra* (*gSang ba snying po*) represents the most normative vision of what constitutes a tantra for these Nyingma lineages.²

Thus, when Tibetans began to formally adopt Buddhism in the last half of the eighth century, the eighteen tantras of the Mahāyoga canon were the cutting-edge of Indian Tantric Buddhism. This new movement advocated a coherent set of radical practices that incorporated extremely antinomian elements, which heretofore had existed only on the fringes of society among self-exiled siddhas. Furthermore, the *Secret Essence Tantra* and the movement it represents were possibly the first to advocate a fundamentally enlightened

¹ E.K. Neumaier-Dargyay, *The Sovereign All-Creating Mind The Motherly Buddha: A Translation of the Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 22.

² David Germano, "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)" in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 17.2 (Winter 1994), 205.

nature that was the basis for *all* phenomena and experiences.³ Such a belief was the product of previous developments within Buddhist thought and itself was the precursor to later developments, such as the Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*) tradition of Atiyoga.⁴ As the *Secret Essence* was on the forefront of Buddhist Tantric development during the age when Buddhism was first formally adopted by the Tibetans, its importance for a correct understanding of Tibetan Buddhism's early history should not be underestimated. However, an understanding of this branch of tantra as it presently exists within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition must precede any attempt at uncovering the historical evolution of Mahāyoga and its relationship to early Tibetan Buddhism.

In the present state of scholarship, there are two substantial works on Mahāyoga. Herbert Guenther's *Matrix of Mystery* and Gyurme Dorje's 1987 doctoral thesis for the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). In the *Matrix of Mystery* Guenther interprets the *Secret Essence* through a combination of Existentialism, nuclear physics, and New Age terminology. Yet, he does so from the perspective of the Great Completeness, or *rdzogs chen*, tradition that belongs to the Atiyoga Vehicle, the highest of the nine Old School vehicles. Such is evident not only from the subtitle to his book—*Scientific and Humanistic Aspects of rDzogs-chen Thought*—but also from a passage at the beginning of the *Matrix of Mystery* equivalent to the author's promise to compose (*rtsom par dam bca*):

Once one begins to probe the essential insights of this fundamental mystery—as understood by the rDzogs-chen tradition—one is immediately

³ Certainly similar beliefs existed in pre-Tantric movements, such as the Mind Only (*sems tsam, cittamātra*) and Tathāgata-Essence (*de gshegs snying po, tathāgatagarbha*). Roughly, the former advocated that everything was the appearance of one's own mind, while the latter advocated that most or all individuals contain within them the essence of enlightenment. The *Secret Essence*'s innovation was to combine the two strains of thought, holding that there is an enlightened core to all phenomena that radiates out either pure (i.e., enlightened) or impure (i.e., saṃsāric) appearances. This core is considered to be the fusion of the sphere of reality (*chos kyi dbying*) and primordial wisdom (*ye shes*).

⁴ David Germano, "Architecture and Absence", 207-209.

faced with a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to comprehensibility...Nevertheless, we shall attempt to make as comprehensible as possible, in the chapters that follow, a number of the most essential insights into this matrix of mystery.⁵

Unfortunately, one of the obstacles to understanding Guenther's book is precisely his choice of terminology, or the hermeneutic grid that he lays over the original materials. His use of language, such as calling the maṇḍala "the mystery's configurational complexity", overwhelms the standard interpretations of the Tibetan tradition itself. While an argument can be made that the complex terminology is justified by the equal complexity of the Tibetan, I believe in this case it does more to obscure the meaning of the *Secret Essence* than to illuminate it.

The other available work on Mahāyoga and the *Secret Essence* is Gyurme Dorje's unpublished dissertation for SOAS, entitled "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its 14th Century Tibetan Commentary, *phyogs bcu mun sel*."⁶ This work also interprets the *Secret Essence* from an Atiyoga, or Great Completeness, perspective, being centered on a commentary composed by Longchenpa, the foremost advocate of the view that the *Secret Essence* is an Atiyoga scripture. Gyurme Dorje's dissertation is an indispensable resource for anyone seriously studying Mahāyoga, as can be seen from the number of times it is cited in what follows. However, the bulk of this work is either translation or related textual materials. Only 180 out of over 1500 pages of the dissertation are devoted to introducing the *Secret Essence* and the Mahāyoga system, and while Gyurme Dorje does a great deal to advance our knowledge and understanding of Mahāyoga, the task is far from complete.

⁵ Herbert V. Guenther, *Matrix of Mystery: Scientific and Humanistic Aspects of rDzogs-chen Thought* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1984), 3.

⁶ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its 14th Century Tibetan Commentary, *phyogs bcu mun sel*" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of London, 1987).

These works are useful for understanding the Atiyoga perspective on Mahāyoga and in particular how the great Old School polymath Longchenpa (1308-1363) interpreted the *Secret Essence*. Yet, there is another lineage of interpretation of this tantra within the Old Schools, which historically preceded Longchenpa's. Known as the Zur tradition (*zur lugs*),⁷ this school claims to interpret the *Secret Essence* from a purely Mahāyoga perspective without adulterating its philosophy with higher teachings. To my knowledge there have been no extensive studies done on the Zur tradition's interpretation of the *Secret Essence*. Yet, this lineage of interpretation is at least as important as Longchenpa's, if not more so.⁸ This dissertation was written in part to fill that gap in our knowledge of Mahāyoga's interpretation in Tibet.

During the course of my master studies at the University of Virginia, my advisor Jeffrey Hopkins suggested that I translate a commentary on the *Secret Essence* by the third Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima (1865-1926), entitled *Key to the Treasury*.⁹ This was a text greatly admired by the present Dalai Lama for its ecumenical attitude toward Old and New School tantras, which the Dalai Lama had mentioned in a talk given at Professor Hopkin's residence.¹⁰ As the text was from an Old School tradition focused more on meditative experience than logic and epistemology, I readily agreed. Over the next several semesters, I met weekly with Professor Hopkins for hour long sessions, in which he reviewed my

⁷ This tradition is named after the Zur clan, which institutionally established many Old School lineages in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in response to the rising New Schools.

⁸ Though originally my intention was to provide a thorough comparison between the two systems of interpretation, I gradually became aware that describing the Zur tradition was enough for one dissertation. A systematic comparison of the two traditions might reveal how much Longchenpa relied on Zur interpretations as well as how greatly later Zur members were influenced by Longchenpa's writings. In particular, Yungtön Dorjepel (1284-1365), being a slightly older contemporary of Longchenpa (to my knowledge the two never met), would be a good source for understanding the pre-Longchenpa Zur tradition, and certain parts of Lochen Dharmashrī's (1654-1717) commentaries have struck me as influenced by Longchenpa's interpretation.

⁹ Rdo Grub-chen III 'Jigs-med-bstan-pa'i-ñi-ma, *Dpal Gsang ba'i snying po'i rgyud kyi spyi don nyung ngu'i ngag gis nam par 'byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig* in *The Collected Works of Rdo Grub-chen 'Jig-med-bstan-pa'i-ñi-ma*. (Gangtok: Dodrup Chen Rimpoche & Delhi: Jayed Press, 1974; I-Tib 74-901179), vol. 3, 1-237.

¹⁰ See "Union of the Old and New Translation Schools" in *The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, Kindness, Clarity, and Insight* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1984), 200-224.

translation of the beginning sections of the *Key to the Treasury*. After finishing my coursework, I traveled to India in 1993-1994 on a Junior Fellowship from the American Institute for Indian Studies. During that year, I spent four months in Bylakuppe-Mysore, South India studying the *Key to the Treasury* with Khenpo Namdröl from Penor Rinpoché's Namdrölling Monastery. I met with Khenpo Namdröl each day for several hours, as he methodically and skillfully guided me through Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's often difficult text. Khenpo Namdröl regularly referred to other sources to enhance his commentary, but the source he most often used was Yungtönpa Dorjepel's *Mirror Illuminating the Meaning*.¹¹ The remainder of each day I spent transcribing the tapes of that day's session into notebooks, which have served as a valuable resource for this dissertation.

In the intervening years since returning from India, I came to realize that my translation of the *Key to the Treasury* would be only of limited use to those outside the tradition unless it was prefaced with a comprehensive introduction to the Mahāyoga worldview. The five chapters and conclusion of part one are my attempt to provide such an introduction. They aim at providing the necessary background for an understanding of the *Key to the Treasury*, while at the same time describing the tradition inherited and promulgated by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The approach of these chapters is to view the Mahāyoga tradition described in the *Key to the Treasury* from several different angles to paint a balanced picture. After discussing the background and reasons for its study in chapter one, Mahāyoga is first situated within the nine vehicle hierarchy of the Old Schools (chapter two). Then, in chapter three the history of Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's lineage is described. Next, chapter four analyzes the corpus of Mahāyoga literature along with a

¹¹ g.Yung-ston rdo-rje-dpal, *dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgyud gsal byed me long* in *Gaṅs-can bstan pa'i phyi mo Śāra 'gyur pa'i chos mdzod rin brgyud ma ṅams Bka' ma'i gzuñ: rNin ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, edited by H. H. Bdud-'joms Rinpoche (Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1983; I-Tib 2240; I-Tib 82-900981), vol. 28, 4-589. This is the version of the text that I have utilized in what follows. I do not mean to imply that this was the version of the text used by Khenpo Namdröl, though he did say it was from the *bka' ma rgyas pa*. However, I neglected to ask him which edition of the latter he was using.

summary of its root text, the *Secret Essence*, and the last chapter (five) provides an outline of the *Key to the Treasury* as a means to penetrate the key points of Mahāyoga philosophy. Finally, in the conclusion I provide a few hypotheses concerning the historical origins of Mahāyoga and its relationship to early Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history.

Thus, the focus of this dissertation is primarily on the twentieth century interpretation of the *Secret Essence* found in Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's *Key to the Treasury*. However, as authenticity and origins are so inextricably intertwined within Tibetan religious culture, there is moreover a fair amount of looking back to the preceding centuries involved within the text itself and thus also within this dissertation. In that respect, it has been my aim to present how the tradition itself describes its origins with an eye on testing out methods for sifting through the legendary material for historical information. Yet, the final thrust of my work has been to translate the *Key to the Treasury* both linguistically (the actual translation) and culturally (the chapters preceding the translation) for those interested few, who are willing to approach with humility and diligence this obscure and often recondite subject.

As usual, there are many people and organizations to acknowledge for their help in the preparation of this dissertation. I would particularly like to thank Professor Jeffrey Hopkins for all his guidance over the years and for his unflinching patience with my less-than-quick pace. I would also like to thank the other readers on my committee—Professors David Germano, Karen Lang, and Richard Barnett—for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions. Thanks also goes to the University of Virginia's Department of Religious Studies and Center for South Asian Studies for the excellent support they provided me during my coursework and to the American Institute for Indian Studies for funding my research in India. Thanks to Steve Weinberger and Debra Shade for their insightful queries and conversations that helped me fine tune my thoughts. Finally, I would like to thank Kim Pickett for her enduring enthusiasm and support during the final stages of this project.

1. PENETRATING THE *SECRET ESSENCE*

When Tibetans first began to systematically adopt Buddhism in the latter half of the eighth century C.E., the esoteric form of that religion was just beginning its rise to the fore as one of the predominant movements in Indian and Central Asia, and to a lesser degree in China.¹ While Tibetan religious histories (*chos 'byung*) tend to piously exaggerate the spread and influence of Tantra in Tibet, there is no doubt that this new form of Buddhism had an immediate and enduring popularity among the Tibetan people. One of the scriptures translated in that first wave of Tantric Buddhism to reach Tibet was called the *Secret Essence Tantra*.² This text was translated and its teachings spread primarily under the guidance of an Indian adept named Vimalamitra (*dri med bshes gnyen*). The movement gradually developed into a school of practice and belief that ultimately became one of the major branches of the Old Schools' teachings, the Mahāyoga Vehicle (*rnal 'byor chen po*).³ By the beginning of the

¹ Esoteric Buddhism, alternately designated as Tantra (*rgyud*) and Secret Mantra (*sangs sngags*), reached its developmental peak relatively early in China through the works of Śubhakarasiṃha (637-735), Vajrabodhi (671-741), and Amoghavajra (705-774). Chinese esoteric Buddhism remained focused on the initial Tantras that these three introduced, those of the Yoga Tantra system, the *Compendium of Principles* (*de nyid 'dus pa, tattvasaṅgraha*), the *Vajra Peak* (*rdo rje rtse mo, vajrāśekhara*), and so forth. Their system then is in some sense also a snapshot of the Buddhist Tantric movement in India at that time, since one need not posit a great number of years between the advent of a Buddhist sect in India and its subsequent development in China. The time it takes for doctrines, texts, and practices to spread could merely be the length of the journey, which would have been no more than a matter of months. The same could, of course, be true for influences that flowed in the other direction, from China to India. See Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 332-337 and Rolf W. Giebel, "The *Chin-kan-ting ching yü-chi'ieh shih-pa-hui chi[kuei]*: An Annotated Translation" in *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies* 18 (Naritasan Shinshoji, 1995), 107-201.

² Though there are several editions and versions of this tantra, the one I will be primarily using here is the twenty-two chapter version found in the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*). Two main editions of this have been utilized. One found in *The mTshams-brag Manuscript of the rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (Thimphu: Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), Bhu-313, Bhu-Tib-82-902165, vol. 20 (*wa*), 152.6-218.7. This mTshams brag (pronounced *tsham drak*) edition will be referred to as *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, according to the numbering of the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library catalogs of the *Collected Tantras* at (<http://iris.lib.virginia.edu/collections/literature/ngb>). The second edition to be used is from gTing skyes edition of the *Collected Tantras: rNin ma'i rgyud 'bum: A Collection of Treasured Tantras Translated During the Period of First Propagation of Buddhism in Tibet* (Thimphu: Dingo Khyentse Rimpoche, 1973; I-Tib(Bhu) 9; I-Tib(Bhu) 73-903590), vol. 14, 1.1-61.7. This edition will be referred to as *Secret Essence*, Tk.218.

³ The use of the plural term "Old Schools" to translate the Tibetan name *rnying ma* is based on the assumption that this sect, which formed in response to the development of the New Schools (*gsar ma*) in the 11th century

eleventh century C.E. the influence of the *Secret Essence* was great enough that its main antinomian practices were singled out as one of the targets of an ordinance by the Purang (*pu hrang*) king Lhalama Yeshé Ö in Western Tibet.⁴ Although its history in Tibet is peppered with controversy, the *Secret Essence* has come to be one of the defining scriptures of the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism. This dissertation will seek to explicate the Tibetan philosophical and practical system that developed around the *Secret Essence* tantra by looking at it from three different perspectives—doctrinal, historical, and literary—in an attempt to provide a more balanced view on this very important movement.

In particular, this overview of the Mahāyoga school will revolve around a general commentary on the *Secret Essence Tantra* by the Third Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima (1865-1926), called the *Key to the Precious Treasury, Briefly Distinguishing the General Meaning of the Glorious Secret Essence Tantra*.⁵ This text was chosen not only because it is a relatively short, yet concise summary of the topics within the Secret Essence system, but also because it was written by a scholar from the Non-Sectarian Movement (*ris med*). Jikmé Tenpé Nyima was the direct student of both Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820-1892) and Patrül Rinpoché Orgyen Jikmé Chökyiwangpo (1808-1887), as well as being an associate

C.E., is the product of an *ad hoc* amalgamation of movements that had little or no cohesion prior to their rally against these later developments. The plurality of the Old Schools is demonstrated by the fact that they had no unifying figurehead prior to the Chinese invasion in 1950 and subsequent exile of Tibetan hierarchs.

⁴ Samten G. Karmay, “The Ordinance of Lha Bla-ma Ye-shes’od” in *Tibetan Studies in Honor of Hugh Richardson*, eds. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (Wiltshire, England: Arisad Phillips, Ltd., 1979), 150-162.

⁵ Jigs-med-bstan-pa’i-ni-ma, Rdo Grub-chen III, *dpal gsang ba’i snying po’i rgyud kyi spyi don nyung ngu’i ngag gis rnam par ’byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig*. The primary edition used for the translation in here is *The Collected Works (gsuñ ’bum) of Rdo Grub-chen Jigs-med-bstan-pa’i-ni-ma*, vol. III (Gangtok: Dodrup Chen Rimpoche, 1974; reprint, Delhi: Dodrup Sangye; I(Sik)-Tib 74-901179; I(Sik)-Tib-260), 1-237. This “Delhi edition” is from woodblocks held in the library of Dujom Rinpoché. The other edition consulted is Jigs-med-bstan-pa’i-ni-ma, Rdo Grub-chen III, *dpal gsang ba’i snying po’i rgyud kyi spyi don nuñ nu’i ngag gis rnam par ’byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig* (Gangtok: Dodrup Chen Rimpoche, 1973; I(Sik)-Tib 73-903950; I(Sik)-Tib-295), 1-213. This is called the Gangtok edition and is from the fourth Dodrupchen’s own woodblocks. In general, the latter is a clearer version of the text. However, since I did not discover it until well into the translation, it is used as the secondary source. Hereafter, this work is referred to as *Key to the Treasury*, and unless otherwise specified all references are to the Delhi edition.

and student of Mipam Jamyang Namgyel Gyatso (1846-1912). All three of these well-known scholars from the Old Schools played a formative role in the Non-Sectarian Movement. The *Key to the Precious Treasury* reflects such an ecumenical outlook by often attempting to draw parallels between beliefs and practices of the Old Schools with those of the New Schools. Thus, the present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, cites this text as “the key for my analysis” in his talk on “Union of the Old and New Schools.”⁶

Though part of the Non-Sectarian movement, the Third Dodrupchen nonetheless implicitly discriminates between the two primary interpretations of the *Secret Essence* within the Old Schools, the Zur Tradition and the Rong-Long Tradition.⁷ At times, he will present both interpretations. However, he tactfully favors the Zur Tradition by presenting its interpretation first without necessarily naming it such and then presenting Longchenpa’s interpretation as a clearly differentiated afterthought. The thrust of such a format is to present the Zur Tradition’s interpretation as the standard one and to classify Longchenpa’s as a secondary though important interpretation.⁸ Nonetheless, the inclusion of both in a manner where Longchenpa’s interpretation is used to enhance the basic Zur tradition demonstrates the author’s ecumenical attitude, characteristic of his time. In a certain sense, he is attempting to help reconcile the rift within his own sect as well as that between the Old and New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

For these reasons, the *Key to the Precious Treasury* is an excellent primary source for discussing the worldview and practice of the *Secret Essence* in Tibet. However, as a relatively

⁶ The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, trans. and ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1985), 200-224, especially 206ff.

⁷ The Zur tradition was founded by the three Zur patriarchs—Zurpoché (born 954?), Zurchungwa (1014-1074), and Dropukpa (1074-1135). The Rong-Long tradition is the name given to the unique interpretation of the *Secret Essence* found in a trilogy of commentaries on that tantra penned by Longchenpa (1306-1363). His interpretation is based in part on the *Three Jewels Commentary* by Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (11th cent), which is the reason for the name of this hermeneutical tradition.

⁸ E.g.,... *zhes dpal ldan zur pa'i srol 'dzin chen po rnams bzhed la/ kun mkhyen gyi rgyal po yang... bzhed kyang / (Key to the Treasury, 142.1-142.2).*

brief, general commentary, it is insufficient to supply all the material needed for an adequately broad picture of this movement. Other sources, primarily from the Zur Tradition, have also been employed to fill in the gaps. These are: *Blazing Palace*, a line-by-line commentary by the eighth century Indian master, Vilāsavajra (8th century C.E.);⁹ *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning (Yung’s Commentary)*, a line-by-line commentary by Yungtönpa Dorjepel (1284-1365);¹⁰ *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, a general commentary from the transmitted teachings Samdrup Dorjé (1295-1376);¹¹ two texts by Lochen Dharmashrī (1654-1717/8)—*Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*,¹² a general commentary, and *Ornament to the Lord of Secrets’*

⁹ Vilāsavajra, *dpal gsang ba snying po’i ’grel pa rin po che spar khab slob dben sgeg pa’i rdo rjes mdzad pa* in *Commentaries on the Guhyagarbha tantra and other rare Nyingma texts from the library of Dudjom Rinpoche* (New Delhi: Sane Dorje, 1974), vol. 1, 1.1-222.6. This famous commentary is generally known by its abbreviated title, *spar khab*. While the Tibetans I asked were unwilling to commit to a translation of this brief title, it can be parsed into 1) *spar* – (pf. or fut.) to cause to blaze (*’bar bar byed pa*) and 2) *khab* – honorific for palace or house (*pho brang dang khyil gyi Zhe sa*) (*tshig mdzod chen mo*, vol. 2, 1655, 1688 and vol. 1, 220). Given that the maṇḍala of the *Secret Essence* is described as a blazing palace, such a title *spar khab*, for a commentary on the *Secret Essence*, makes sense, though I have not scoured the commentary for explicit textual support for this proposition. Nonetheless, hereafter, this text will be referred to as the *Blazing Palace*.

¹⁰ g.yung ston rdo rje dpal, *dpal gsang ba snying po’i rgyud don gsal byed me long* in *gangs can bstan pa’i phyi mo sngag ’gyur ba’i chos mdzod ring brgyud ma nyams bka’ ma’i gzhung: rNin ma bka’ ma rgyas pa* (Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1983, I-Tib 2240), vol. 28, 5.1-589.4. Hereafter, this text is referred to as the *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*.

¹¹ bsam grub rdo rje, *dpal gsang ba’i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa’i rgyud kyi khog dbub rin po che ’bar ba’i gur* in *gangs can bstan pa’i phyi mo sngag ’gyur ba’i chos mdzod ring brgyud ma nyams bka’ ma’i gzhung: rNin ma bka’ ma rgyas pa* (Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1983, I-Tib 2240), vol. 28, 591.1-713.6. Hereafter, this text is referred to as the *Tent of Blazing Jewels*. The table of contents (*dkar chag*) for Dudjom Rinpoche’s edition of the *rnying ma bka’ ma rgyas pa* describes this text as *sgrol ma ba bsam ’grub rdo rje’i gsung ldeb (bka’ ma rgyas pa*, vol. 28, 3.2). The title “proponent of Tārā” (*sgrol ma ba*) is a name given to Samdrup Dorjé (1297-1376). Given that the editor’s also place this text immediately after *Mirror Reflecting Reality*, the commentary by that Samdrup Dorjé’s contemporary and associate, such an authorial ascription seems justified. However, the lineage given by the text itself in the section on the “aural transmission of people” (*gang zag rna bar brgyud pa*) lists several “generations” past that particular figure Samdrup Dorjé ending with the author, “I, Namkha Chöwang the mantra-holder from Dro” (*bdag ’bro’i sngags ’chang nam mkha chos dbang*). The lineage includes the son of Samdrup Dorjé, Sanggyé Rinchen (*sangs rgyas rin chen*, 1350-1431) and his student, Gö Shünupel (*gos lo gzhon nu dpal*, 1392-1481). This indicates that text is a book of teachings communicated (*gsung ldeb*) by Samdrup Dorjé, the adherent of Tārā, but not actually written down by him.

¹² Smin-glin Lo-chen Dharma-shrī, *Gsan bdag zhal lun: A Commentary on the Guhyagarbha (Māyājāla) Tantra by Smin-glin Lo-chen Dharma-shri* (Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1972). Hereafter, this text is referred to as the *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*.

Intention, a line-by-line commentary.¹³ These have been contrasted with Gyurme Dorje's thesis on Longchenpa's *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions* in English¹⁴ as well as the Tibetan version of another text in that same trilogy, *Dispelling Mental Obscuration in the Ten Directions*.¹⁵ These materials will provide a sufficiently thorough summary of the major interpretations of the *Secret Essence* in Tibet and their most prominent doctrines. This study is not intended to reveal a *unique* interpretation of the *Secret Essence*. The purpose here is to describe some of the salient features of the Mahāyoga vehicle by focusing on a central textual tradition.

This description of the *Secret Essence* will be in two parts. The first part will explain the history, literature, and philosophy of the Old Schools' Mahāyoga vehicle. It will thus provide the context for the second half of the dissertation, which will contain the translation of Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's *Key to the Treasury*. The introductory part will attempt to provide an overview of the *Secret Essence's* school by approaching it from several different angles. First, it will look at how the *Secret Essence* is placed within the Old Schools' hierarchy of doctrines, known as the nine vehicles (*theg pa dgu*). This will place the movement in its synchronic aspect, as it presently manifests within the religion. However, embedded in this hierarchy is a mapping of the historical evolution of Buddhism prior and during its spread into Tibet. The doxographical hierarchy encodes the diachronic development of the religion, in the same way that, in biological terms, ontology recapitulates phylogeny. A discussion of the nine vehicles will therefore help place the *Secret Essence* historically as well as provide a philosophic context

¹³ Lochen Dharmashrī, *dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyī 'grel pa gsang bdag dgongs rgyan in gangs can bstan pa'i phyi mo sngag 'gyur ba'i chos mdzod ring brgyud ma nyams bka' ma'i gzhung: rNīn ma bka' ma rgyas pa* (Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1983, I-Tib 2240), vol. 32, 5.1-461.4. Hereafter, this text is referred to as the *Ornament to the Intention*.

¹⁴ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatattvaviniṣṭayamahātantra* and its XIVth century Tibetan Commentary *phyogs bcu mun sel*", Thesis presented to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1987. Hereafter, this dissertation is referred to as "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary".

¹⁵ Klong-chen-pa Dri-med-'od-zer, *dpal gsang ba snying po'i spyi don legs par bshad pa'i snang bas yid kyī mun pa thams cad sel ba* (Gangtok: rdo rje gzi brjid, 1973; I(Sik)-Tib-253; I(Sik)-Tib 73-905821).

for its teachings. This discussion will be based on Lochen Dharmashrī's description of the nine vehicles found in his *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*.¹⁶

As it is also important to know the specific historical circumstances of the *Secret Essence*, the description of its place in the nine vehicles will be followed by a discussion of the major figures in its lineage. The lineage of the *Secret Essence* given by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima in the *Key to the Treasury* will be reviewed, and a brief biography will be given for each member when available. There will also be some analysis of the founding legends, comparing them to the few facts at our disposal. This section will help provide further historical context for the *Secret Essence* by investigating the legends surrounding its founding fathers (and mothers) attempting to derive at least a rough sketch of the movement's evolution from those legends that concern the tantra's transmission from eighth century India to early twentieth century Tibet, when the Third Dodrupchen wrote the *Key to the Treasury*.

Having placed the *Secret Essence* in its historical and philosophical context, we will next turn toward the scripture itself. While there are three canonical versions of the tantra—a short, middle length, and longer—it is the shortest version that is considered to be the “root tantra” (*rtsa rgyud*) of all the others. Gyurme Dorje has shown how all twenty-two chapters of the short version are also found in the two longer ones. This would indicate either that the short version was redacted from the longer one or conversely that the longer ones are elaborations of the original short version. Based on the wave of literary activity that was sweeping Tibet in the eighth and ninth centuries, when the *Secret Essence* was probably first introduced into the region, one might hypothesize that the historical development of the *Secret Essence* was one of expansion. However, only a thorough literary analysis of the texts could provide material evidence to substantiate that hypothesis. It is clear from having studied with Tibetans and the abundance of commentaries that the short twenty-two

¹⁶ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 17.1-83.3.

chaptered version of the *Secret Essence* is the primary reference for its cult. Hence, the narrative of this version of the scripture will be described in general terms by outlining the story and providing a brief summary of each chapter. This will lay the literary foundation for the teachings in the *Key to the Treasury*.

Part one will conclude with an outline of the *Key to the Treasury* itself. As a general commentary on the *Secret Essence*, the *Key to the Treasury* sets out to describe the basic system of beliefs and practices revolving around that tantra. It does so by erecting a hermeneutic structure, or outline, that it imposes on the text. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima does not outline the *Secret Essence Tantra* according to the standard Zur method of “Erecting the Structure” (*khog dbub*) but instead adopts a different and probably earlier Indian scheme propounded by Vilāsavajra and Vimalamitra, a scheme that has different approach for the best, middling, and slowest students.¹⁷ A discussion of the primary topics found in his outline will aid in the reading of the translation itself. If part II contains the translation, the last chapter of part I is the translation of the translation, itself attempting to erect a structure outside of and mirroring the original. The last chapter will thus focus solely on the *Key to the Treasury*.

The task so defined for this dissertation is at once both exceedingly narrow and overwhelmingly broad. It seeks to describe a particular interpretation of a particular tantra, which represents merely one of nine vehicles within one of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Yet, it also endeavors to describe the general beliefs and practices of the Mahāyoga Vehicle, whose system is far from simple and whose history spans over a millennium, and its central scripture, the *Secret Essence Tantra*, a tantra of vast importance for both Tibet and the history

¹⁷ It is unclear whether “erecting the structure” (*khog dbub*) is the specific name for the outline generally followed by the Zur tradition or a more general phrase. It is one of the additional titles given to Samdrup Dorjé’s *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, which follows the same outline that, according to Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, was advocated by Dropukpa (*Key to the Treasury*, 19.6-20.2). The three-fold explanation of the name for the trainees with the best faculties, explanation of divisions for middling trainees, and explanation of the words for the slowest trainees is from Vimalamitra’s *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text* (*khog gzhung gsal sgron*, P4739), 134.3.7.

of Buddhist Tantra. In the course of writing this dissertation, I have repeatedly fallen into one side or the other of this hermeneutic Scylla and Charybdis, either narrowing my focus on inconsequential minutia or unrealistically broadening my range in a vain attempt to encompass centuries of human development. In the end, if I have erred, I hope it is on the side of being overly detailed rather than vaguely broad. However, in order to situate the reader in the horizon of *this* text, it is first necessary to digress to the more general concerns and methods I bring to its writing, before graduating on to the specifics.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

In seeking to describe another cultural phenomenon, in this case the *Secret Essence* movement in Tibet, I am attempting to translate its idiom into English. The systems, symbols, and practices that center on the *Secret Essence* are a structured language of culture that in its relational structure has meaning for those within it. Only the linguistic elements can be literally translated. However, by providing a view of the movement from different perspectives—doxographical, historical, and literary—a structured concept of the *Secret Essence* school can in some sense be reconstructed for those outside of (or on the edge of) the original cultural system. As a research scholar, I am interested in attempting to provide such a translation for the English-reading academic world.

Naturally, the project of translating a movement's beliefs and practices into another culture's language is necessarily an act of interpretation. There can be no denying that the following description of Mahāyoga reflects my own interests, inclinations, and prejudices. To somewhat mitigate this, the interpretive task that is translation must also be grounded on a reliable and authentic source, in this case the Tibetan oral tradition. The understanding of the *Secret Essence* described here has as its root four months of intensive study with Khenpo Namdröl at Namdrölling Monastery in Byllakupe, Mysore District, India from September, 1993 to January, 1994. We reviewed and discussed line by line the first part of the *Key to the*

Treasury, about two-thirds of the text. These discussions laid the groundwork for a broader review of the *Secret Essence* literature, which I performed on my own in subsequent years.

Other than the extensive teachings of Khenpo Namdröl, the information here is almost exclusively based on textual sources. Besides the primary Tibetan texts, a number of publications of recent Tibetan descriptions of the Old Schools and Tantra contributed to my understanding. The works of Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind* and *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, have been indispensable,¹⁸ as has the translation of Dudjom Rinpoché's two works contained in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.¹⁹ Specifically focusing on the Mahāyoga Vehicle, there is Robert Mayer's book on the Vajrakīla tradition²⁰ and Gyurme Dorje's thesis for the University of London, Longchenpa's chapter-commentary *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions*, which includes a translation of the tantra itself.²¹ More general sociological and historical studies have also been consulted; the most helpful of these have been Geoffrey Samuel's *Civilized Shamans*,²² Matthew Kapstein's work, including *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*,²³ and Ronald Davidson's *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*.²⁴ These represent some of the most sophisticated and mature studies of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and have strongly influenced my writing.

More specifically, I have chosen to investigate the *Secret Essence* from the three viewpoints of doctrinal classification, lineage history, and narrative structure, because each

¹⁸ Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind: An Anthology of Longchen Rabjam's Writings on Dzogpa Chenpo* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1989) and Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet*, ed. by Harold Talbott (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

¹⁹ Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, tr. and ed by Gyurme Dorje with collaboration of Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 2 vols. Hereafter, this text is referred to as *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

²⁰ Robert Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu gnyis* (Oxford: Kiscadale, 1996).

²¹ See note 14.

²² Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

²³ Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁴ Ronald Davidson's *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

approach provides a unique vantage point from which to assess the movement—philosophical, historical, and literary. These are, of course, not the only angles by which one can approach this topic. However, they are important in their respective ways. Below I will explore why those particular angles of doxography, lineage, and narrative have been chosen, while the last section will focus on general tantric themes that bear on the Secret Essence Tradition.

DOXOGRAPHY: SYNCHRONIZING THE DIACHRONIC

Ever since the advent of Buddhism, the followers of the movement have been concerned with organizing the plethora of teachings claiming to be Buddhist. The intensity of this concern is made clear by the legends of the various councils.²⁵ Regardless of the relative historicity of these councils, it is evident that Buddhists of this early period were concerned with regulating and organizing the variety of scriptures. The Buddha's pronouncement that his teachings should be the community's guide no doubt contributed to the focus on the texts.²⁶ According to the legends, the first council convened immediately after the Buddha's final passing into nirvāṇa, or death. Their task was to verify the extant teachings and in the process they are said to have formed the Pali canon, known as the Three Baskets, by organizing the teachings according to type: monastic discipline, aphorisms and stories, and philosophy. While according to tradition the canon was fixed at the time of Buddha's death sometime in the fourth or fifth century B.C.E., it was not written down until the first century.²⁷

²⁵ On these, see Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*, tr. and ed. by Paul Groner (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1993), 69-91.

²⁶ "... [W]hat I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma and discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher." (*Dīgha Nikāya*, Sutta 16, 6.1); English translation from *Thus Have I Heard: the Long Discourses of the Buddha*, tr. by Maurice Walshe (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987), 270.

²⁷ Maurice Walsh, tr., *Thus Have I Heard*, 46.

The existence of a canon has rarely, if ever, deterred Buddhists from creating new religious scriptures. As Buddhism evolved, the initial splits concerned interpretations of the existing corpus. These splits ultimately led to the eighteen schools of early Buddhism. Each school had its own version of the canon, which varied significantly. However, these canons followed a consistent style. Philosophical differences could in part be explained by focusing on different sections of the canon. It was not until the advent a new form of Buddhism—the Mahāyāna—that a new style of scripture arose that could not be so explained. These new “sūtras” were the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras and were distinguished by their apotheosis of the Buddha and the grandiosity of their descriptions. The Mahāyāna ideals were equally lofty, being summarized by the figure of the Bodhisattva.

These elaborate new sūtras eventually found their way into canons that were structurally parallel to the early ones as well as incorporating the texts from the early phase. The difference between the Mahāyāna movement and the earlier schools could no longer be explained as a different focus on the canon, because their scriptures were radically different—different enough to gain the designation “apocryphal” from adherents of the more traditional form of the religion.

Eventually, later Buddhist philosophers felt compelled to devise new explanations for their teachings. These explanations involved a form of doxographical classification that separated movements and their associated scriptures according to philosophic content. These classifications were then ranked from lowest to the highest, and such schemes became convenient explanations for the many divergent interpretations of Buddhism that coexisted on Indian soil. This well-known Indian genre of Tenets (*siddhānta, grub mtha*) also became popular in both Tibet and China, and such texts were constructed to place the author’s beliefs at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. For instance, doxographical explanations of the Three Wheels (*’khor lo gsum*) first appeared in the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*, a Mind Only text. Thus, it is not surprising that the hierarchy of the Three Wheels doxography describes the

Mind Only (*sems tsam, cittamātra*) beliefs as the definitive interpretation of Buddhism. The Buddhist doxographies of Tibet and China are similarly constructed.

In the course of history, Buddhism continued to develop new interpretations. The Middle Way School that championed the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras was followed by the Mind Only School and the Buddha Essence (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, tathāgatagarbha*) movement. These were eventually supplanted by ritualistic tantras, which were in turn displaced at the top by more esoteric forms of Tantrism. The doxographies that resulted from this historical evolution gradually became more elaborate. As tantra began to develop different forms, each of which claimed to surpass the previous, so that the doxographical hierarchies came to represent a map of Buddhism's intellectual history. In an article on the dating of the *Mahāvairocana Tantra*, Steven Hodge has the following to say about the four-fold division of Tantra propounded by the New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism:

[I]t is my view that this fourfold system of classification represents, in a general manner, the historical sequence in which the tantras were developed. In other words, the majority of the texts that came to be classified as Kriyā tantras derive from the earliest proto-tantric phase, leading on through Caryā tantras to the Yoga and later to the Anuttara-yoga tantras.²⁸

Giacomelli Orofino on the other hand questions the usefulness of using tantric doxography as a means for understanding tantric Buddhism's historical development:

These later traditions of systematization may be considered to be, in a way, a synthesis of the preceding schools of thought, although, as is already common opinion, the bibliographic systems of classification into which

²⁸ Steven Hodge, "Considerations on the Dating and Geographical Origins of the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhisūtra*" in *The Buddhist Forum*, volume III, edited by Tadeusz Skorupski & Ulrich Pagel (London: University of London, 1994), 58.

Vajrayāna literature was organized in the various traditions are of limited importance for a historical study of the development of the scriptures themselves, since the definitions of the various classes of tantras have shifted over time.²⁹

While it is true that the definitions of the various classifications have differed over time, that fact itself is of great importance for the historical study of the development of Tantric Buddhism. Different classifications are found in different texts. The root tantra defines five vehicles, while the *Garland of Views* gives a scheme of seven with the last vehicle divided into three subcategories to make a total of nine. Later Tibetan commentaries have the full doxography of nine vehicles found in the old schools. I believe these represent stages—or historical layers—in the systematization process of Tantric doxography. The more elaborate schemes developed subsequent to the simpler ones. It is safe to assume, therefore, that since the nine-vehicle system of the Old Schools is one of the most elaborate of the doxographies, it developed in the end days of Indian Buddhism that were simultaneously the vibrant creative days of Tibetan Buddhism's early codification.³⁰ The nine-vehicle doxography champions Atiyoga—more popularly known as the “Great Completeness” (*rdzogs chen*)—as the highest vehicle. The begins of this development can be roughly placed in the 9th century C.E.

On the other hand, in its third chapter the *Secret Essence* makes a reference to a doxographical scheme of five vehicles. This chapter describes that all the Tathāgatas emanate forth six beings that proceed to the six realms of cyclic existence. These “six sages” (*thub pa drug*), as they are called, are Emanation Bodies (*sprul sku*) of the Complete Enjoyment Body (*longs spyod rdzogs sku*) that itself is an outcome of the Reality Body (*chos sku*). They are sent

²⁹ Giacomella Orofino, “Notes on the Early Phases of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism” (unpublished paper), 3.

³⁰ This would be the time ranging from the Yarlung Dynasty (8th century) to the first “revival” of Buddhism that occurred in the 11th and 12th centuries and resulted in the formation of the New Schools.

as illusory emissaries, to enlighten the beings of their respective realm with a variety of teachings. After describing that, the text has the following passage:

They taught, teach, and will teach the 84,000 doctrines consisting of the vehicle of Gods and Humans, the vehicle of the Hearers, the vehicle of the Solitary Realizers, the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas, and the Highest Vehicle.³¹

It then lists each vehicle's corresponding teaching, making a one-for-one correspondence between *five* vehicles and *five* types of teaching. This five-vehicle doxography clearly represents an earlier stratum within the *Secret Essence* text as it exists today. Elsewhere there is a veiled reference to nine teachings that is often considered to refer to the nine vehicles, but this is likely a later interpolation. In his general commentary on the *Secret Essence*, Lochen Dharmashrī devotes a whole section explaining the tantra's enumeration of five-vehicles, before he proceeds to his own description of the nine vehicles.³² The way it is presented verges on being apologetic, as though to explain away an abnormality in the tantra. While an exegete like Lochen Dharmashrī may need to explain it away, for the historian the five-vehicle doxography presented in chapter three of the *Secret Essence* represents an earlier stage of the tantra's development, probably in the first half of the 8th century C.E. prior to the differentiation of Anu- and Atiyoga.³³

³¹ *thams cad kyang 'di lta stel 'dul ba'i dbang gis lha dang mi'i theg pa dang / nyan thos kyi theg pa dang / rang sangs rgyas gyi theg pa dang / byang chub sems dpa'i theg pa dang / bla na med pa'i theg pas/ ma rig pa'i rnam par rtog pa nyon mongs pa stong phrag brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i gnyen por/ chos stong phrag brgyad cu rtsa bzhi gsungs sol /gsung ngo / /gsung bar 'gyur rol (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 160.5-160.7).*

³² *sngar smos pa'i gnyen po de dag kyang dbang po'i bye brag gis theg pa lngar bsdu pa (Lochen Dharmashrī, Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 20.1-24.1).*

³³ Though it is not the objective of this paper to prove such, I believe that the core concepts of Anuyoga and Atiyoga are found in Mahāyoga. Anuyoga and Atiyoga developed different *systems of practice* out of the ideas first elaborated in Mahāyoga. In his article "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)", Professor David Germano maintains that the early form of the "Great Perfection", represented by the present-day Mind Series texts (*sems sde*), was a variation of Mahāyoga philosophy stripped of its elaborate ritualism See David Germano, "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 17:2 (Winter 1994), 203-336.

The nine-vehicle system of the Old Schools can therefore be looked at as a very rough timeline for the development of Buddhist thought. Its structure represents the different stages that Buddhist philosophy went through to reach the position of the higher, or inner, tantras. Certainly, the Hearer Vehicle can be seen to represent the most ancient form of Buddhism, even though that designation may be used for forms of the religion thriving today. The Bodhisattva Vehicle, which represents the sūtra-version of the Mahāyāna, was the next development, and this was followed by the various forms of tantra. It is also arguably the case, as Hodge asserted above, that the tantras evolved from Action tantra to Performance, through Yoga to the higher tantras. If we apply the same idea to the Old Schools' tantras, Mahāyoga would follow the Yoga Tantras and be followed by Anuyoga and then Atiyoga. The nine-fold doxography supports this interpretation. For, why would a later development classify itself *below* an earlier one, and how could an earlier development classify itself *above* a later one?

A discussion of the nine vehicles would not only assist in delineating the particular philosophical view and practice for each vehicle but also aid in understanding the history of Buddhism's development. Along these lines, the second chapter will explore the nine vehicle doxography as it is presented by an exegete of the *Secret Essence*: Lochen Dharmashrī in his *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions (gsang bdag zhal lung)*, a general commentary on the root tantra. This will provide a traditional explanation of the nine vehicles from one deep within the tradition being studied.³⁴ Furthermore, as mentioned above, Lochen Dharmashrī explicitly delves into the divergent doxography actually discussed in the root text. The questions of history and doxography can therefore be discussed by analyzing his description of the nine vehicles.

³⁴ Lochen Dharmashrī's description of the nine vehicles in his *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* is used, often verbatim, by Dūdjom Rinpoché in *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 223-274, 346-372. However, here I am referring primarily to Lo-chen's original text.

LEGENDS AND HISTORY

Having looked at the history of Buddhist philosophy through the nine vehicles, the next perspective on the *Secret Essence* will be to investigate the people involved in its transmission from its “revelation” in India up through its migration and establishment in Tibet. The life of an idea or group of ideas is only truly fleshed out by looking at the people who held those ideas. Buddhism as an Indian religion and its Tibetan offshoot were equally obsessed with lineages. One of the surest ways to authenticate that a teaching was “Buddhist” was to be able to trace its lineage back to a reliable, accredited source—the Buddha or a renowned Buddhist master. Needless to say, the description of a teaching’s lineage as the proof of its authenticity became a stylized skill and for some an art. The resulting descriptions reflected to varying degrees the reality of the situation. Since Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, especially in its tantric form, reveres the teacher (*bla ma, guru*) as god, the descriptions of past masters were more often eulogies rather than historical or scientific prose. The student of Tibetan lineages, having only hagiographies and pious doctrinal histories (*chos ’byung*) for her sources, has a limited ability to describe the definitive historical circumstances. The historian of early Tibetan religious movements and ideas is faced with the difficult task of sorting legend from history, exaggeration from fact.

Nonetheless, it is possible to sketch a rough historical outline based on the exaggerated hagiographies of the individual members by considering each to have some kernel of historical truth. The limit of skepticism in this case would be to throw out all Tibetan “biographies” unless they can be corroborated by another source. To do that, however, would be to cast the whole lineage of the *Secret Essence* as described by the Tibetan tradition into doubt. This is certainly a possibility. Unlike myths, however, which come from a deeper, more primal human reaction to their environment, legends evolve out of factual situations. Rather than reject the whole lineage as fictitious, it is better to attempt to determine the kernels of historical truth behind the hagiographies. The method for doing

this adopted here is to analyze the information from the hagiography, searching for possible additions of subsequent “believers” by questioning what their motivation would be. The more fanciful and also common aspects of hagiography—such as miraculous powers, signs and omens, and even visions—can be assumed to be exaggerations of some sort. However, for a story to alter a person’s place of origin is less likely unless the hagiography is modeled on a previous saint’s story. With such a critical yet forgiving eye, the scholar is able to at least speculate on the origins of a particular movement within Buddhism, such as the Secret Essence Movement.

In this vein, the third chapter will describe and discuss the lineage of the Secret Essence teachings as presented in Jikmé Tenpé Nyima’s *Key to the Treasury*. This description begins with the legendary origins of the tantra as part of the revelation of King Indrabhūti, to whom, according to legend, the Mahāyoga tantras were first revealed. This shadowy figure became the inspiration for an elaborate legend concerning seven dreams of the king, preceding and predicting the revelations of the Mahāyoga corpus. He is named as father of the lineage, and there appears no reason to doubt such an ascription. Interestingly enough, there are only three lineage-generations between King Indrabhūti and Vimalamitra. As lineage-generations do not require the extent of time that biological ones do, it is very possible that the two figures were at some point contemporaries. If Vimalamitra flourished circa 800 C.E., the advent of the *Secret Essence* could tentatively be placed around 750.

The other members of Jikmé Tenpé Nyima’s lineage for his *Secret Essence* teachings will also be discussed, through looking at a variety of sources. These sources include:

- ♦ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*,³⁵

³⁵ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*, “The rÑin-ma-pa Tradition: Part 1 and 2,” volumes 3 & 4 (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973). Hereafter, this reference work is referred to as *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*.

- ◆ Kozhül Drakpa Jungné and Gyelwa Lozang Khedrup, *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan Adept-Scholars*,³⁶
- ◆ Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*,³⁷
- ◆ Düjrom Rinpoché, *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*,³⁸
- ◆ Gölotsāwa, *Blue Annals*.³⁹

By looking at a variety of sources, a broader picture of each individual can be painted. However, because the lineage spans over a millennium of history, not every figure could be discussed. A certain selectivity was required. Since there was little or no available information on some of the intermediary figures, these are listed but not discussed in detail. The focus of this chapter is on the more influential and well-known members of the lineage. Its aim is to provide at the very least a chronological outline of the major figures in the *Secret Essence* lineage along with the works they penned on the topic.

THE TANTRA AS MYTH

According to Tibetan traditions, the teachings of the Mahāyoga vehicle find their source in a cycle of eighteen tantric scriptures.⁴⁰ Among these texts, the *Secret Essence* is considered to be the central one, both summarizing the contents of the other seventeen and acting as their source. Therefore, the commentarial tradition describes it as the “general tantra” (*spyi rgyud*)

³⁶ Ko zhul grags pa 'byung gnas and Blo bzang mkhas grub, *gang can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod* (Kansu'u: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992; CH-TIB 97-915828).

³⁷ Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet*, ed. by Harold Talbott (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

³⁸ See note 19.

³⁹ 'Gos gZhon-nu-dpal, *The Blue Annals*, tr. by George N. Roerich (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1949; 4th reprint 1988). Hereafter, this is referred to as the *Blue Annals*.

⁴⁰ As will be elaborated in Chapter 4, the Mahāyoga corpus consists of Tantras (*rgyud sde*) and Sādhanas (*sgrub sde*). Each section furthermore has a transmitted component (*bka' ma*) consisting of texts whose lineage stretches back to Indian figures and a revealed component (*gter ma*) comprised of works revealed in Tibet after supposedly being hidden by Padmasambhava. The eighteen tantras make up only the transmitted section of the Tantras, but as such they were probably the original texts of this system and contain most of the doctrines that serve as the basis for the other works, except where those works are later evolutionary developments that are precursors to other systems, namely Anuyoga and Atiyoga.

for the vehicle. As a consequence, the *Secret Essence* has been the topic of many Indo-Tibetan works, being the sole focus of a number of commentaries now preserved in the Tibetan canon. As the Mahāyoga vehicle is primarily advocated by the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the *Secret Essence* has become one of the defining scriptures for that sect, providing them with a means for differentiating themselves from the New Schools as well as supplying them with certain core beliefs that figure into their self-definition. The Old School Movement arose in part out of interpretations of the *Secret Essence* that served to define their own group as a distinct movement. The basis for these interpretations, of course, is the root text itself. Thus, an outline and investigation of the narrative structure of that text is essential to understanding the subsequent Tibetan interpretations that have arisen from it. Chapter four investigates the root text of the tantra viewing it as the “foundational” myth for its followers.

The *Secret Essence* has a non-standard opening line, which is one of the pieces of evidence use by detractors to claim the tantra was a forgery. Given that the tantra’s first chapter is neatly constructed using the outline of the five marvels, it is unlikely that the break with tradition represented by its opening line was accidental. Instead, it appears that the line was intentionally changed to shift the setting of the tantra from the pseudo-historical reality portrayed in the sūtras and the earlier tantras to an explicitly other-worldly mythic realm. One reason for doing this is that the narrative of the *Secret Essence* does not portray a one-time event that occurred in the past. Rather, as the commentaries clearly indicate, it describes a continually reoccurring set of events that are the basis for the phenomenal world. In this sense, the tantra takes on the role of a cosmogonic myth.

From the beginning, sūtras portrayed themselves as historical documents with their standard opening phrase, “Thus have I heard....” Despite their often mythic content and themes, each sūtra made a pretense of grounding itself in the historical time of Siddhartha with such an opening line. The “I” in the statement—“Thus have I heard”—refers to the

Buddha's cousin and attendant, Ānanda. In the legends of the first council, it is held that Ānanda recited from memory all the teachings that the Buddha gave during his tenure on earth. He prefaced each story with the famous line "Thus have I heard". The point of the phrase is to situate the teaching in an actual *historical time* of the Buddha as a means of authentication. Later Mahāyāna sūtras adopted this phrase as a standard introduction for the same reason despite the fact that the stories contained obviously mythological elements as well as accounts of miracles and were composed many generations after the life of Siddhārtha.⁴¹

Over time, as the Buddha was thus apotheosized, the lifetime of the Buddha became the Buddhist *illo tempore*, or sacred time. The Buddha became the incarnation of enlightenment, the Emanation Body (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*), one of the two Form Bodies (*gzugs sku, rūpakāya*). As with Christianity, the founder of the Buddhist movement became seen as the embodiment of the sacred. However, for Buddhism the sacred is enlightenment, the realization of ultimate truth. For these later Mahāyāna texts, the phrase "Thus have I heard" was used not only to lend authenticity to forged documents but came to situate the narrative in the Buddhist equivalent of sacred time, the lifetime of the historical Buddha.

The tantric texts continued this trend of increasing "sacralization" of the profane time (the historical life of Siddhārtha) by viewing the words of the phrase itself as sacred. The Sanskrit words *evaṃ mayā śrutaṃ* (Tib. 'di skad bdag gis thos pa), which translates "Thus have I heard", came to be seen by Tantric commentators as pithy syllables containing the whole meaning of the teaching. Thus, the syllables themselves came to be considered sacred. Similarly, the whole focus of tantra—in its later stages—shifted away from historical portrayals of reality toward mythic descriptions of the sacred. This is nowhere more evident than in the *Secret Essence Tantra* itself.

⁴¹ See Garma C. C. Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūta Sūtra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991).

In the description of the tantra contained in chapter four, I will present the *Secret Essence* as a myth in that it is the foundational story about a sacred, ordinarily unperceived reality. With its opening statement, the *Secret Essence* breaks from the tradition of locating the narrative in the historical life of the Buddha. Instead of the phrase, “Thus have I heard”, the *Secret Essence* begins with the statement, “At the time these words were explained...” (*'di skad bshad pa'i dus na*). The phrase is in stark contrast to the standard opening for Buddhist scriptures and is one of the primary pieces of evidence used by the opponents of the *Secret Essence* to call the scripture's authenticity into question. The author/compiler must have been aware that s/he was breaking with tradition by using this non-standard introduction. The use of the more general phrase dissociates the *Secret Essence* with the historical life of the Buddha and overtly places it, if not in a sacred time, then in an ambiguous one. The ambiguity is expressed by the commentarial tradition by describing the time when the narrative took place as the identity of past, present, future, and any other indeterminate time. As Lochen Dharmashrī says:

Here, saying “at the time” illustrates the sameness of the four times, because since the teacher, a Complete Enjoyment Body, teaches the doctrine in permanently continuous cycle, it transcends the definitiveness of one particular time.⁴²

The temporal situation of the *Secret Essence* is both outside of normal time and eternally present. The Tibetan commentarial tradition refers to this as a kind of generic time. Another famous exegete Yungtönpa (1284-1365) quotes an explanatory tantra, *The Ocean*, in his discussion of the inner interpretation for this phrase from among the outer, inner, and secret uncommon introductions:

⁴² *'dir dus na zhes pa dus bzhi mnyam pa nyid mtshon pa stel ston pa longspyod rdzogs pa'i sku ni rtag pa rgyun gyi 'khor lor chos ston pas dus res 'ga' ba gcig gi nges pa las 'das pa'i phyir!* (Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 59.1-59.2).

[The statement] “At the time [these words were explained]” refers to the marvel of time. *The Ocean* says:

The time of bliss is devoid of former and latter.

It abides as the nature of all three times [past, present, and future].

Hence, when one generates primordial wisdom, there is no apprehension of the three times. This is the inconceivable time, the time [when the tantra was taught].⁴³

Being devoid of former and latter, the time when the *Secret Essence* is explained is beyond historical time. The *Secret Essence* occurs *in illo tempore*. Thus, one might say, its unusual introduction, “at the time these words were explained...”, is an example of Eliade’s description of sacred time:

Religious man periodically finds his way into mythical and sacred time, re-enters the *time of origin*, the time that “floweth not” because it does not participate in profane temporal duration, because it is composed of an *eternal present*, which is indefinitely recoverable.⁴⁴

Through its introductory phrase, the *Secret Essence* dissociates itself from historical time and portrays its action instead in a mythic time, a time that the adherent is meant to recover through their meditation.

The narrative of the *Secret Essence*, moreover, does not describe human situations with human actors; it is rather a story about the sacred. As the Tibetan commentarial tradition

⁴³ *dus na zhes pa dus phun sum tshogs pa stel rgya mtsho las/ bde ba’i dus nyid snga phyi brall /dus gsum kun gyi ngo bor gnas/ lzhes pas/ ye shes skyes pa’i dus su dus gsum du ’dzin pa med pa ni bsam gyis mi khyab pa’i dus te dus sol* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting Reality*, 44.6-45.1).

⁴⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Narcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 88.

makes clear, the *Secret Essence* is a narrative about the ground of being in its already enlightened state, how it manifests in the world, and how it leads beings to enlightenment. Furthermore, the characters involved in the tantra are not human characters but embodiments of the divine.⁴⁵ The teacher of the text is not considered to be the human person of the Buddha, Siddhārtha after his enlightenment. Instead, he is Samantabhadra, the personification of primordial enlightenment, who has become for Tantra the embodiment of the sacred enlightenment.⁴⁶ Again, this is explicitly mentioned in the commentarial tradition. Yungtönpa gives a summary of the different Indian traditions concerning the nature of the teacher in his *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*:

In this text, the nature of the teacher is explained as seven [qualities], since the tradition of the *Blazing Palace* commentary says:

The limitless good qualities of the conqueror of the sixth [lineage] are condensed into seven.

In [Vimalamitra's] *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text*, it explains the nature of the teacher as [having] eight [aspects]:

The nature of the teacher has eight [aspects].

The vajra actor is just like that.

According to the small commentary [by Vimalamitra] the *Piṅḍārtha* the teacher is explained as having four natures, since it says:

The entity of supreme enlightenment,

⁴⁵ Each character in the narrative of the tantra represents a divine aspect of human existence.

⁴⁶ I would argue that the notion of Samantabhadra in the *Secret Essence* is an earlier, less refined one than the more well-known portrayals of that figure given in most descriptions of the Old Schools' theories. These latter depictions represent the Atiyoga conception of Samantabhadra, which developed out of and augmented the earlier Mahāyoga descriptions of this same figure. One piece of evidence that Samantabhadra was "just arriving on the scene" at the time of the *Secret Essence's* composition is that his name appears only once in the text, though his role is clearly depicted as a "Conqueror of the sixth lineage" (*rgyal ba rigs drug pa*).

The complete enjoyment of the play of doctrines,
 Lord of the Tathāgatas of [all] the directions and times, and
 Indifferentiable with all phenomena.

According to the instructions of the lamas of the lineage, it is asserted that the teacher has two natures: a nature indifferentiable from enlightenment and a nature indifferentiable from his retinue.⁴⁷

Also, Lochen Dharmashrī in his *Ornament of the Thought* says:

Because he is the final [state] devoid of dualistic subjects and objects—the apprehensions that cause defilement, the Tathāgata is the unmediated ground.⁴⁸

Similarly, the other characters in the tantra, who are considered to be the teachers retinue, are seen as manifestations of different aspects of the sacred. They are often not referred to by their common name but by names that link them with one of the five aggregates or the eighteen constituents, indicating that they are the purified form of these ordinary aspects of existence.⁴⁹ Many of these figures, the five Buddhas, the six sages, and so forth, are considered to be emanations of the teacher himself. They therefore share in his nature as the

⁴⁷ 'di la 'grel pa spar khab kyis/ rgyal ba drug pa'i yon tan mtha' yas pa yang mdor bdun du 'du stel zhes pas/ ston pa'i rang bzhin bdun du bshad/ khog gzhung gsal ba'i sgron me las/ ston pa'i rang bzhin brgyad dang ldan/ lbyed pa rdo rje de bzhin tel/ lzhes pas/ ston pa'i rang bzhin brgyad du bshad/ 'grel chung pin tar tha ltar nal/ byang chub mchog gi ngo bo dang / lchos rnams rol pa'i longs spyod dang/ lphyogs dus bde gshegs bdag po dang / lchos so cog dang dbyer med pa'ol/ lzhes pas/ ston pa'i rang bzhin bzhir bshad pal/ bla ma brgyud pa'i gdams ngag ltar nal/ ston pa mya ngan las 'das pa dang dbyer mi phyed pa'i rang bzhin dang / ston pa 'khor ba dang dbyer mi phyed pa'i rang bzhin gnyis su bzhed do/ (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 53.4-54.2).

⁴⁸ sgrib byed kyis zhen pa gzung 'dzin gnyis dang bral ba mthar thug pas gzhi ji lta ba de bzhin du gshegs pa'ol (Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 60.5-60.6).

⁴⁹ The five aggregates (*phung po lnga*) are the parts of the psycho-physical continuum of the individual. They are form, feeling, perception, composite factors, and consciousness. The eighteen constituents are another, more detailed break-down of the human person into object, sense power, and consciousness for each of the five physical senses and the mental sense, i.e., form, eye, eye-consciousness up to phenomena, mind, mental-consciousness. The exact correlation of these to figures in the *Secret Essence* maṇḍala will be given in chapter 4.

“entity of enlightenment” or the “unmediated ground”. Thus, both the teacher and the retinue are viewed as personifications of the divine, or sacred.

For the *Secret Essence*, the sacred is a union of primordial wisdom, or gnosis (*ye shes, jñāna*), fused with the nature, or sphere, of reality (*chos dbyings, dharmadhātu*). The prime actor in the narrative is Samantabhadra, who is the embodiment of that primordial wisdom, or in other words, “the nature...that is indifferentiable from all the vajra-essences of the enlightened body, speech, and mind of all the Tathāgatas in the ten directions and four times”.⁵⁰ The location of the narrative is in the highest pure land (*'og min, akaṅkṣṭa*) inside a palace that has arisen out of the sphere of reality and is composed of and decorated with this same primordial wisdom. The deities of the maṇḍala are emanations of Samantabhadra, the embodiment of primordial wisdom, and the teachings that comprise the bulk of the chapters are presented as the utterances of the teacher, his consort, or the retinue of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Since the whole scene of the narrative is a manifestation of primordial wisdom within the realm of reality, there frequently occurs such statements as, “Thus, the Tathāgata itself told this beneficial story to the Tathāgata itself.”⁵¹ These are not the statements of one human actor to another; these are statements of the sacred ground of being to the ground of being for the benefit of unrealized sentient beings.

Unlike many of the early sūtras, where the scripture’s connection to a particular ritual is not readily apparent, the majority of tantras have a direct connection to their ritual practice, the means of achievement, or *sādhana* (*sgrub thabs*). While the precedence of the myth or the ritual for any particular tradition is one of those chicken-and-egg questions better left untouched, if one were to hazard a guess in regards to many tantras, they appear to be written as explanations or justifications of the ritual. But, in either case, there is a close

⁵⁰ *phyogs bcu dus bzhi'i de bzhin gshogs pa thams cad kyi sku dang gsung dang thugs rdo rje'i bdag nyid* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 153.1-153.2).

⁵¹ *de bzhin gshogs pa nyid de bzhin gshogs pa nyid la ched du gleng ngo!* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 159.3-159.4).

connection between the tantric narrative and its ritual description. These tantras, such as the *Secret Essence*, clearly fulfill what Eliade describes as the “supreme function of myth”:

Hence the supreme function of myth is to “fix” the paradigmatic models for all rites and all significant human activities—eating, sexuality, work, education, and so on.⁵²

Tantras, rather consciously, present the paradigms for their corresponding *ritual* activity in the means of achievement. Correspondingly, one is enjoined to envision in the period subsequent to meditation that the world is the highest pure land, the place where the tantric narrative occurred. While this is not the only—nor, I would argue, the “supreme”—function of these myths, it is clearly the case that the myth described in the *Secret Essence* fulfills this function.

Thus, the narrative of the *Secret Essence* has the key features of a myth. It occurs in a kind of mythic time; the actors are personifications of the sacred, and it provides the paradigmatic models for ritual activity. The argument could be made that this is true for a majority of tantras, while not being so for a majority of sūtras, but such would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Nor has enough historical work on the development of Buddhist Tantra been done to clarify the reasons for this shift toward mythic narrative. Nonetheless, the tantras do represent a development that came out of the sūtras and the vestiges of this genealogy remain. The *Secret Essence's* opening phrase, discussed above, may differ in significant ways from the sūtra version, but it is clearly modeled on it. Other tantras more closely mimic the sūtras by beginning with “Thus have I heard”. The format describing a scene in which a dialog occurs is adopted from the sūtras, though the latter present it in concrete geographical terms whereas tantras generally describe a separate cosmological plane. In short, tantras, such as the *Secret Essence*, took the sūtra narrative format and mythicized it. The impetus for such

⁵² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 98.

a movement could well have been social and political. The Buddhists in competition with other religions of India felt compelled to develop myths such as these to attract followers and thereby patronage. However, it would be remiss to ignore the fundamental human need for a mythic sacred that Buddhists themselves must have felt. The admixture of Buddhism with local folk traditions that were the root of all the Tantric traditions initiated a breaking away from the rationalistic discipline of the monasteries. This newfound freedom from the restrictions of monastic Buddhism along with authentic visionary experiences resulting from undistracted meditation provided the necessary ingredients for the development or revelation of the tantric myths. As with all scriptures, the tantric texts were fashioned and edited over the centuries so that the forms presently available to scholars are not direct descriptions of the visionary experience but are the result of the revelation being filtered through generations of interpretations. The final results, the tantric texts as we have them, are an amalgamation of beliefs and practices patched together in a semi-coherent manner within a mythic narrative that have been used as the basis for much more coherent religious movements.

THE TANTRIC BACKGROUND

The point of seeing the *Secret Essence* as a myth is that it functions as a myth. That is, it serves to provide models for interpreting the world (cosmogony and cosmology) as well as to provide models for action (eschatology and the ritual *sādhana*). However, it does not do so within a vacuum. The date of the *Secret Essence's* composition, as of yet, cannot be pinpointed with any accuracy, and even if my supposition that the twenty-two-chapter version was redacted in the mid-eighth century is correct, the state of Tantric Buddhism at that time, as a coherent movement or system, remains unclear. At best, we can only speculate about the past. But, a greater understanding of the scripture and the traditions that grew out of or along with it can be achieved by understanding a few of the key themes in related genres of Buddhist tantric literature. Therefore, the remainder of this introduction will

contain a brief investigation of those themes that can inform our understanding of the *Secret Essence*. Seven such themes will be discussed here: the notion of manifest enlightenment (*mngon byang, abhisambodhi*), the five marvels (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga, pañcasamṛddhi*),⁵³ the maṇḍala, tantric physiology, deity yoga, the reinterpretation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and tantric eschatology.

MANIFEST ENLIGHTENMENT

The root Yoga Tantra, *The Compendium of Principles* (*de nyid 'dus pa, tattvasaṃgraha*), begins with a reworking of the story about the historical Buddha's enlightenment:

The Bodhisattva, Sarvārthasiddhi (another version of the name Siddhārtha), was meditating under the tree of enlightenment, when the eternal Buddha Vairocana and his retinue descend from the highest pure land. Displaying their Complete Enjoyment Bodies to him, they ask, "Why are you practicing these difficult tasks of asceticism? Surely, you don't think you can become enlightened in this way?" Without objection, the Bodhisattva humbly responds, "Then, how should I practice?" The Buddhas instruct him first to examine the nature of his own mind and recite a corresponding mantra. As a result, he visualizes a moon-disc. Next, they ask him to expand his mind by generating the mind of enlightenment and chant another mantra, after which he sees a "great" moon-disc. Then, the Buddhas instruct the Bodhisattva to give this enlightened mind form. By chanting a third mantra, he sees it as a vajra. Next, they tell him to use the vajra to make the qualities of enlightenment firm through the recitation of a fourth mantra identifying the Bodhisattva with the vajra. This draws the vajra-nature of all

⁵³ The Sanskrit equivalent to *phun sum tshogs pa* (marvel) is from Susumu Yamaguchi, *Index to the Prasannapadā Madhyamaka-vṛtti*, Part Two, Tibetan-Sanskrit (Kyoto: Heirakuji-shoten, 1974), 140. Other possibilities are *pañcasampanna*, *pañcasampatti*, and *pañcanispatti*.

*Buddhas into the Bodhisattva's visualized vajra, and the Bodhisattva sees them assembled there. Finally, they instruct him to see himself as the vajra and transform it into a Buddha's enlightened form, also through the efficacy of a mantra. At the end of these five steps, the Bodhisattva Sarvārthasiddhi has become fully enlightened as the Buddha Vajradhātu.*⁵⁴

This story is one of the first scriptural references to the doctrine of the five manifest enlightenments (*mngon par byang chub lnga, pañcābhisambodhi*). The name has a double connotation. Not only are these five (*lnga, pañca-*) steps toward the actual manifestation (*mngon par, abhi-*) of enlightenment (*byang chub, sambodhi*), but in each stage of the process the realization is made manifest in a different visualized form. The names for the five stages (provided by the later commentarial tradition) and their corresponding visualized sign are:⁵⁵

| <u>Manifest Enlightenment</u> | <u>Sign</u> |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. Manifest enlightenment through individual analysis (<i>so sor rtog pa las mngon par byang chub pa</i>) | moon disc |
| 2. Manifest enlightenment through generating the mind toward supreme enlightenment (<i>byang chub mchog tu sems bskyed pa las mngon par byang chub pa</i>) | full moon disc |
| 3. Manifest enlightenment through the vajra of stability (<i>brtan pa'i rdo rje las mngon par byang chub pa</i>) | vajra |
| 4. Manifest enlightenment through identity with the vajra (<i>rdo rje</i>) | Buddha-qualities entering |

⁵⁴ In this dissertation, indented italics are used to indicate narrative paraphrases as opposed to literal translations. Thanks to Steven Weinberger for providing the translation of the *Compendium of Principles'* opening on which this summary is based.

⁵⁵ The Tibetan names for the stages are from mKhas grub rje, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, translated by F. D. Lessing and Alex Wayman (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), 29-35.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| <i>bdag nyid las mngon par byang chub pa)</i> | into the vajra |
| 5. Manifest enlightenment through equality with all the | self-transformation into |
| Tathāgatas (<i>de bzhin gshogs pa thams cad kyi mnyam pa nyid las</i> | Mahāvairocana |
| <i>mngon par byang chub pa)</i> | |

Though first introduced with the Yoga Tantras, the story about the five manifest enlightenments is also found in the Mahāyoga tradition.⁵⁶ They are one of the many contiguities in doctrine and practice between the two vehicles and demonstrate Mahāyoga’s initial dependence on Yoga Tantra. Furthermore, it provides one of the clues that Mahāyoga most likely developed *out of* Yoga Tantra, as one would expect.

The importance of the five manifest enlightenments centers around the myth/ritual axis. The story in both vehicles has a strong mythic component, where divine, “always enlightened” Buddhas descend from the highest pure land and teach the Bodhisattva how to become enlightened. In some interpretations of *The Compendium of Principles’* story, Vairocana and the other Buddhas whisk Sarvārthasiddhi away from the Bodhi-tree and up to the highest pure land, where he is initiated into the five manifest enlightenments. That is, he is taken out of profane existence, where he is said to leave his maturation body (*rnam min gyi lus, vipākakāya*) and traveled to a sacred realm with his mental body (*gid kyi lus, manomayakāya*).⁵⁷ The highest pure land, which is by no means exclusive to *The Compendium of Principles* or even to Tantra, nonetheless describes a sacred place, just as Vairocana and the other Buddhas are deities—personifications of the sacred—rather than in

⁵⁶ mKhas grub rje, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, 25-39 discusses the Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra teachings on how the Buddha gained enlightenment. The five manifest enlightenments are first presented in the Yoga Tantra description. The Highest Yoga Tantra description then reworks the story using its own unique terminology and doctrines, such as the clear light (*’od gsal, prabhāsvara*), the wisdom initiation (*shes rab ye shes kyi dbang, prajñājñānābhīṣeka*). In the *Key to the Treasury*, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima also mentions the five manifest enlightenments as the means by which the Buddha gained complete enlightenment according to the Mahāyoga traditions. See page 436ff. below.

⁵⁷ mKhas grub rje, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, 27.

any way human. Because the primary actors are deities and, at least in some versions, the “hero” is transported by them to a sacred realm, this enlightenment story has the major defining characteristics of a myth.

The connection between this myth and its ritual practice is clearly worked into the story itself, where Sarvāthasiddhi is guided through a series of meditations that lead him to enlightenment. It is no surprise then that commentators such as Khedrupjé divide their explanation for each of the five manifest enlightenments into two parts: an explanation of that part of the myth and an explanation of the corresponding visualization for the practicing yogin.

The story thus provides a mythic anchoring for the tantric practice of identifying with the enlightened state. Such identification is done through a process of initially deconstructing the profane world with the manifest enlightenment of individual investigation, in which the practitioners “contemplate intensely the intrinsic purity of the sixteen kinds of voidness of their own supreme state of thought.”⁵⁸ In the next four steps, a sacred (i.e., enlightened) reality is then reconstructed. All of this is accomplished through the use of mantra and symbolic visualizations. Such is the basic paradigm of the fundamental, defining practice of Tantra, known as “deity yoga” (*lha'i rnal 'byor, devatāyoga*). Though perhaps self-consciously constructed as such, the myth found in *The Compendium of Principles* serves as the mythic paradigm for Yoga and Mahāyoga Tantra ritual practice of deity yoga.⁵⁹

THE HIGHEST PURE LAND

The notion that these primordial Buddhas, who personify the sacred, dwell in the highest pure land is also important for the general tantric worldview. The pure-land concept is a later

⁵⁸ mKhas grub rje, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, 29-31.

⁵⁹ The concept of deity yoga will be discussed in a following section from the point of view of Action Tantra.

development of Indian Buddhism that incorporated a strongly devotional aspect and may possibly have first developed among the stūpa worshipers of the early Mahāyāna period.⁶⁰ As with most Buddhist schools, the “pure land movement” had their own revered scriptures, commonly known as the “pure land sūtras”. The most famous example is the story of Amitābha’s western paradise found in the *Blissful Array Sūtras* (*sukhāvātīvyūhasūtra*). The sūtra explains that prior to his full enlightenment, the Bodhisattva Dharmākara, who was to become the Buddha Amitābha, made a series of forty-six vows concerning the nature of the land where he would be the presiding Buddha. In the larger version of that text these vows described features that Dharmākara did not want his future pure-land to have. For example, among his forty-six vows, he vowed, “May I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge” if:

- ♦ The inhabitants of his pure-land could die and be reborn in the three lower migrations,
- ♦ They were not born with a golden-hue to their bodies,
- ♦ They did not possess the perfections of miraculous power and self-control,
- ♦ They could not remember their previous lives,
- ♦ They had any notion of property, and so on.⁶¹

The notion of a pure-land, namely one that is devoid of the impurities of the human realm, came to be associated primarily with the second of the three enlightened bodies, the Complete Enjoyment Body.⁶² As the deified Buddhas became doctrinally institutionalized, each was associated with their own pure land. Thus, Akṣobhya came to preside over an eastern counterpart to Amitābha’s western paradise, albeit a less popular one according to the

⁶⁰ Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: a Survey with Bibliographical Notes* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), 201-211, “Pure Land Buddhism and the Ratnakūṭa-sūtra”. He says that Amitābha, the Buddha associated with one of the earliest Pure-land sects, was originally connected to stūpa worship (202).

⁶¹ Summary from Max Müller, tr., “The Larger Sukhāvātī-vyūha” in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, ed. by E. B. Cowell (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 11-24.

⁶² Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, 159.

surviving evidence. By the time this doctrine reached its final stages of development in the later tantras, the Highest Pure Land had come to represent the “sacred space” of Tantra. It was literally a place or land, completely set off from the profane world by being completely sacred. This was not always the case.

In the standard cosmology of Buddhism, there are three realms to cyclic existence: the desire realm (*'dod kham*s), the form realm (*gzugs kham*s), and the formless realm (*gzugs med kham*s).⁶³ In this notion, which developed among the eighteen sects of early Buddhism,⁶⁴ the whole of saṃsāra was divided into three realms. The desire realm is the tradition six types of migration—god, demi-god, human, animal, hungry ghost, and hell-beings. The form realm is a realm of a superior type of gods.⁶⁵ The formless realm is an un-localized region where advanced meditators, or yogins, are reborn.⁶⁶ Originally, the Highest Pure Land was the highest sub-realm of the form realm. The form realm is traditionally divided into seventeen areas. The majority of these are covered by the “four concentrations” (*bsam gtan bzhi*). Each of the four concentrations represents the place where one is born who has achieved that particular meditative stabilization in their previous life. Each is a god realm of progressively refined beauty, and each has three subdivisions. The twelve sub-levels of the four concentrations are topped by the “five pure places” (*gnas gtsang lnga*). These five, depicted graphically (lowest on the bottom, highest on the top), are:

⁶³ Information on the realms and their subdivisions is from Leah Zahler, ed., *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism: The Concentrations and Formless Absorptions*, with Lati Rinbochay and Denma Lochö Rinbochay, tr. Jeffrey Hopkins (London: Wisdom Publications, 1983), 23-47.

⁶⁴ Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, 127.

⁶⁵ “The Form Realm is so called because the gods of the Form Realm are free of the type of desire that beings have in the Desire Realm, but they still have desire for, or attachment to, visible form....” Zahler, *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism*, 41.

⁶⁶ “Above the Form Realm is the Formless Realm. It is so called because the beings there have separated from attachment to both the Desire Realm and the Form Realm... To be reborn in the level of Limitless Space [the first level of the Formless Realm], we would have to cultivate a meditative absorption in which we view form itself as gross and imagine that there is only space everywhere.” Zahler, *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism*, 45.

5. Highest (literally, “Not below”, ’og min, akanīṣṭa),
4. Excellent Sight (*shin tu mthong ba*),
3. Abundant Appearance (*gya nom snang ba, sudṛśa*)
2. Without Pain (*mi gdung ba, atapas*),
1. Not Great (*mi che ba, avṛha*).

While these areas, or lands, are still well within the cycle of rebirth, saṃsāra, or cyclic existence, they are considered to be “pure places”, because only Buddhist “saints”, known as “superiors” (*’phags pa, ārya*), are born there. Superiors are Buddhist practitioners who have reached a certain level of realization, the path of seeing. The original highest pure land was the highest of these five “pure places”, the highest physical location within cyclic existence inhabited only by Buddhist superiors.

In the later Buddhist worldview, however, another type Highest Pure Land was posited in conjunction with the deification of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. These figures, being divine agents that act in their world, were naturally located on the boundary between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, the highest pure place of early Buddhism. The Highest Pure Land of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is one example. These pure lands straddled the line between profane and sacred, between cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) and enlightenment (*nirvāṇa*), because they were places where only high-level Bodhisattvas were born or places where one was born for the last time before achieving enlightenment, as in Amitābha’s *sukhāvati*. In the *Secret Essence*, as we have seen, the pure land notion is extended further to refer to the ideal of a sacred place completely set apart from the realm of cyclic existence, the archetypal land of enlightenment.

THE FIVE MARVELS

The sacred location for the action of the tantric narrative is one of five qualities generally attributed by many commentarial traditions to a tantric scripture.⁶⁷ These are known as the five “marvels” (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga, pañcasamṛddhi**).⁶⁸ They are the five marvelous aspects of an authentic tantric scripture: its marvelous time, its marvelous place, its marvelous teacher, its marvelous retinue, and its marvelous teaching. That is, the miraculous teaching found in the tantric text occurred at a miraculous time in a miraculous place and was taught by a miraculous teacher to a miraculous audience. Descriptions of these five aspects of a tantra’s setting figure prominently in the commentarial literature. While this is a rubric that is primarily found within commentaries to explicate the beginning of a tantric scripture, in the case of the *Secret Essence* this rubric is obviously influential on the narrative structure that emerges, especially in the first chapter. Furthermore, the five marvels not only provided a method for explaining the contents of tantric scriptures, they also serve as a means of authentication and classification as a tantra. A text that contained descriptions of these five marvelous aspects could legitimately be called a tantra. It was for this reason that the debate in Tibet concerning the *Secret Essence*’s authenticity focused largely on the issue of whether it had the five marvels.

The five marvels focus on a tantra’s narrative. That is, they are qualities related to the action of the story. They describe respectively when the events in the tantra took place, where they took place, who the protagonists were, and what was said. In the common, standard format of a tantric narrative, these aspects are laid out in the introductory chapter, which is called the *gleng gzhi*, or in Sanskrit, *nidāna*. Though in later Buddhist hybrid

⁶⁷ Vimalamitra holds that there are six “marvels” (Vimalamitra, *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text*, 134.4.5: *ston pa gnas dang sdud pa ’khor dus dang ston pa rnam drug ste*), indicating the existence of different interpretations of these.

⁶⁸ The Sūtra Mahayanists call these the “five certainties” (*nges pa lnga*) of the Complete Enjoyment Body. See Lessing and Wayman, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric System*, 21-22.

Sanskrit the term *nidāna* comes to mean “introduction”, the term’s original meaning is “underlying cause”, reflected in the Tibetan translation, *gleng gzhi*, literally rendered as “basis of the story”.⁶⁹ These introductory chapters set the scene in which the dialogic discourse of the tantra that conveys the doctrinal content unfolds. Thus, the five marvels are usually set forth in the tantra’s initial, introductory chapter. In the case of the *Secret Essence* its first chapter is obviously structured according to the five marvels in the order of time, place, teacher, retinue, and teaching—a fact utilized by all the commentators.

MANDALA

Another distinguishing features of Buddhist Tantra that is relevant for the *Secret Essence* is the use of the mystic, microcosmic/macrocosmic diagrams, known as “maṇḍalas” (*dkyil ’khor*). A circular depiction of both the enlightened universe and the enlightened personality, the maṇḍala is one of those aspects of Tantric Buddhism that in the last half-century has developed a popular appeal to the Euro-American audience. This was in part due to the works of the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung and others, who popularized the maṇḍala as an archetypal symbol of the “Self”, or the totality of the psyche.⁷⁰ While one may justifiably dispute Jung’s conception of the “archetype” as either Platonic or Romantic or both, the importance of the maṇḍala as a symbol for the totality of the psyche is explicit in the tradition’s own descriptions and interpretations of it.

The Sanskrit term, maṇḍala, literally means “circular”. The Buddhist interpretation of the word, on the other hand, points more specifically to a central essence (*maṇḍa-*, *dkyil* = “center, core, pith”) encompassed by a surrounding retinue (*-la*, *’khor* = “encompassed,

⁶⁹ cf., MW, 548.1: first or primary cause, original form or essence, a cause of existence, any cause or motive, pathology. BHS, 295.2: cause, underlying and determining factor, motive, motivation, beginning, introduction, introductory chapter, theme, content, subject-matter, statement of subject matter, table of contents, summary.

⁷⁰ Roger Brooke, *Jung and Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 1991), 24, 32.

surrounding”?).⁷¹ Both meanings refer to the fundamental structure of the maṇḍala, which in all its many diverge forms follows the basic pattern of a circular arrangement with the central deity surrounded by groups of attendant deities in different sections of the circle. Similarly, the commentarial tradition speaks of a main deity (*rtsa ba*) and his or her retinue (*'khor*), as seen in the five marvels rubric, where teacher and audience are separate categories.

The maṇḍala is more than just teacher and retinue. The maṇḍala also describes the place where these deities reside. The typical Tibetan maṇḍala is drawn in the form of a circle, which encloses a square. The four sides of the square represent the four walls of a palace in which the deities reside. The square palace is divided into four sections by lines drawn from its center to the four corners, and each of its walls has a rectangular protrusion depicting four doorways. Often, there is an inner square, separating off an inner courtyard. The deities are not drawn in full form but depicted by symbolic representations, such as lotuses with the special hand-symbol for each deity resting on them. The four quarters of the circle are often colored differently, symbolizing one of the primary Buddhas. In the “higher” tantras, there are five primary Buddhas: Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi. Each is associated with a different consort, direction, aggregate (or, aspect of the personality), emotion, element, color, symbol, and mount. There are significant variations between lineages concerning these symbolic associations for each of the five main Buddhas. However, the following table lists the correspondences as described by both Alice Getty and Detlef Ingo Lauf:⁷²

| Buddha | Consort | Direction | Aggregate | Emotion | Element | Color | Symbol | Mount |
|-----------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|-------|--------|-------|
| Vairocana | Ākāśadhātviśvarī | center | form | ignorance | space | white | wheel | lion |

⁷¹ Lessing and Wayman, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, 270, n.1.

⁷² Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism: Their History, Iconography and Progressive Evolution Through the Northern Buddhist Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914. Reprint New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978), 31-42. Detlef Ingo Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 105-109.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---------|-------|---------------|--------|------------|--------|-------|----------|
| Akṣobhya | Locanā | east | consciousness | hatred | air/water | blue | vajra | elephant |
| Ratnasambhava | Māmakī | south | feeling | pride | fire/earth | yellow | jewel | horse |
| Amitābha | Paṇḍarā | west | perception | desire | water/fire | red | lotus | peacock |
| Amoghasiddhi | Tārā | north | formations | envy | earth/air | green | sword | Garuḍa |

Thus, while the maṇḍala is specifically the arrangement of the deities within a celestial palace, it also represents both the arrangement of cosmic forces (directionality, elements, colors, and animals) and the parallel arrangement of the components of the human personality (aggregates and emotions). More will be said below on the specific maṇḍala of the *Secret Essence* and how it relates to these correspondences.

Other figures are also traditionally found in most maṇḍalas of Tibet. The most important of these are the eight Bodhisattvas and their eight female counterparts, and the four guardians of the maṇḍala, who stand at the entrances to the palace. The eight Bodhisattvas are: Kṣitigarbha (*sa'i snying po*), Vajrapāṇi (*phyag na rdo rje*), Ākāśagarbha (*nam mkha'i snying po*), Avalokiteśvara (*spyān ras gzigs dbang phyug*), Maitreya (*byams pa*), Nīvaraṇaviṣkambhin (*sgrib sel*), Samantabhadra (*kun tu bzang po*), Mañjuśrī (*'jam dpal gzhon nu*), and their consorts are respectively: Lāsyā, Gitā, Mālā, Nṛtyā, Dhūpā, Puṣpā, Ālokā, Gandhā.⁷³ The four guardians, or gate-keepers, are at least in function equivalent to the four “protectors of the world” (*lokapāla*) or the four kings (*rgyal chen bzhi*). These are guardians reputed to dwell at the base of Mt. Sumeru, each in one of the four directions, guardian the gates that lead into Indra’s paradise.⁷⁴ However, in the case of the *Secret Essence*, deities are replaced by figures that are more specifically Buddhist.

⁷³ These figures find their roots in the Sanskrit tradition and so the names are given here in Sanskrit with Tibetan in parentheses. The Tibetan equivalents for the names of the consorts are simply transliterated Sanskrit and so are omitted.

⁷⁴ Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, 166.

In Mahāyoga there are two maṇḍalas: a peaceful one of forty-two deities and a wrathful one of fifty-eight. The figures described above belong to the peaceful maṇḍala. So, for the *Secret Essence* there are also the fifty-eight figures of the wrathful maṇḍala. Each of the ten male and female Buddhas have wrathful counterparts, known as Herukas. There are also the eight Keurima, who are wrathful ḍākinīs; the eight Mamo goddesses, fierce animal-headed ogres; the four animal-headed guardians, and twenty-eight animal-headed goddesses. These have been described in other sources and will be addressed in the chapter summaries in chapter four.⁷⁵

CHANNELS, WINDS, AND DROPS

Another feature common to a majority of the higher tantras is the description of a human psycho-physiology composed of energy conduits, energy currents, and charged particles, described by the tradition as channels (*rtsa*), winds (*rlung*), and drops (*thig le*). This is one of the numerous features that Buddhist tantras share with Hindu tantras. As usual, each lineage and tradition or each cycle of tantric scriptures will have their own unique variation on a general theme. The specifics of the *Secret Essence's* tantric physiology will be saved for later; here, the general beliefs that underlie that specific system will be briefly described.

Theories on psycho-physiology emerged with the later tantras of the inner vehicles in the Old Schools or the Highest Yoga Tantra Vehicle of the New Schools. They describe a network of channels throughout the physical body through which winds travel. The movement of these winds is responsible for a variety of physiological functions, such as breathing, urination, defecation and so forth. Furthermore, these winds, it is claimed, are the vehicles or mounts (*zhon pa*) of consciousness; they are the physical component of immaterial awareness. Because of this interconnection between the winds and consciousness, it is theorized that by controlling the winds one can control consciousness. They therefore

⁷⁵ These wrathful deities are covered in Detlef Ingo Lauf, *Secret Doctrines*, 141-156.

become integral to the tantric process of enlightenment, which after all is a mental transformation.

The channels through which these winds primarily travel permeate the entire body. There are, according to some systems, 72,000 of these vein-like channels.⁷⁶ However, they converge at important centers along the spinal column. These centers are known as “wheels” or *cakras* (*'khor lo*) and are considered to be the centers for important psychological and physical activities. The number of psychic centers vary from tradition to tradition. In the classical Hindu system, which contains the largest number, there are seven primary centers. These are, from top to bottom the thousand-petalled lotus (*'dab stong, sahasrāha*) on the crown of the head, the “forehead center” (*ājñācakra*) between the eyes, the “center of purity” (*viśuddha-cakra*) at one’s throat, the “unstruck center” (*anāhatacakra*) at the heart, the “jewel-filled center” (*maṇipūra*) at the navel, or solar plexus, the “self-supporting center” (*svādhiṣṭhānacakra*) at the root of the sexual organ, and the “root center” (*mūlāḍharacakra*) at the base of the spine known.

In the Buddhist Tantric traditions, there are five major centers. The forehead center does not figure as prominently, though in some systems it is seen as the upper endpoint, or opening for the right and left channels.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the lower two centers are generally combined in Buddhist systems to form a single “center”, in what is known as the “secret place” (*gsang gnas*).⁷⁸ This is generally regarded as the location of the Fierce Female (*gtum mo*). The resulting five main centers are thus:

1. the “center of great bliss” (*bde chen gyi 'khor lo, mahāsukhacakra*) at the crown,

⁷⁶ Geshe Lhundup Sopa, *An Excursus on the Subtle Body in Tantric Buddhism (Notes Contextualizing the Kālacakra)* in *JlABS*, 6:2 (1983), 63, n.32. And, Lati Rinpochoy & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1985), 14.

⁷⁷ Lama Govinda says the *ājñā-cakra* is “regarded as part of the ‘Thousand-petalled Lotus’.” Lama Anakarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1960), 141. Lati Rinpochoy gives the forehead *cakra* in a secondary list. Lati Rinpochoy & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth*, 65.

⁷⁸ Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, 140.

2. the “center of enjoyment” (*longs spyod kyi 'khor lo, sambhogacakra*) at the throat,
3. the “center of phenomena” (*chos kyi 'khor lo, dharmacakra*) at the heart,
4. the “center of emanation” (*sprul pa'i 'khor lo, nirmanacakra*) at the navel
5. the “center of sustaining bliss” at the secret place.⁷⁹

For the ordinary, unenlightened individual, these *cakras*, which are nexus where the secondary channels converge, are areas where the central channel, running along the spine, is constricted by the other two main channels. The centers are analogized to knots that constrict the movement of the psychic winds in this central channel. There are three primary channels contained in the spinal column. The right channel (*ro ma, rasanā*), the left channel (*rkyang ma, lālanā*), and the central channel (*dbu ma, avadhūti*). During the liminal moments of peak experiences when ordinary consciousness weakens, the winds gather into the right and left channels and then enter into the central channel.⁸⁰ Such moments are, for instance, in the deepest state of sleep, at the moment of death, during orgasm, when fainting, and even when sneezing. At these moments, the winds gather and briefly enter into the central channel, and correspondingly it is at these times that ordinary consciousness no longer functions. These are the moments when, instead, the clear-light (*'od gsal*) mind manifests. For the Old Schools, this clear-light is the nature of the mind and is the essence of enlightenment. It manifests during these peak, liminal experiences, because the coarse consciousnesses cease to function when the winds enter into the central channel. Similarly, it is believed that to gain enlightenment one must induce the withdrawal of winds into the central channel, in the strict Tibetan-physiological sense mimicking death. By becoming proficient at guiding the winds into and up through the central channel, the constrictions of that channel at the psychic centers are loosened—the knots become “untied” (*gdud pa grol*

⁷⁹ Lati Rinpoché & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, 65.

⁸⁰ Lati Rinpoché & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, 31.

ba). This allows for the movement of the charged, seminal particles, or drops (*thig le, bindu*), within the central channel.

The two main types of drops are the white and red ones, considered respectively to be derived from the original sperm cell donated by the father and the original egg cell donated by the mother. The original drop (i.e., zygote) that forms the nucleus of the human being is the “indestructible drop” (*mi shigs pa'i thig le*), resting at the heart center. However, a derivative white drop resides in the crown of one’s skull, and a red drop at the base of the spine. Through the process of meditation that opens the central channel, these drops are allowed to travel downward and upward respectively. They are brought together (at the heart), fused into the indestructible drop, and by their traveling up and down the central channel various forms of blissful enlightened mind are experienced when they visit the various *cakras*. In this way, the mind of clear-light is consciously experienced—as opposed to the unconscious moments of its experience mentioned above. Having experienced the clear light, one then has the ability to emanate an enlightened form, thus literally rebirthing oneself into Buddhahood. The process whereby this is done is the form of meditation found in the Highest Yoga or Inner Tantras. This form of meditation is generally divided into two parts, in which one first trains in generating oneself in an enlightened form through an imitation the three stages of death, intermediate state, and rebirth and then, once mastery has been attained, completes the process of purifying those three stages.⁸¹

TANTRIC SYMBOLISM

At this juncture, it is appropriate to make some slight mention of tantric symbolism. While tantric scriptures and commentaries often mention controversial topics such as sex, sacrifice, and the consumption of bodily fluids, they rarely do so explicitly. Instead, they almost always utilize a coded language. Certain standard Buddhist or common day terms are afforded an

⁸¹ Lati Rinpochoy & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, 26.

extra meaning, whether sexual or otherwise, and then substituted for the sensitive meaning in the appropriate context. Thus, while speaking of ritual sexual union, Buddhist tantric texts will not speak explicitly about genitalia but euphemistically use the terms *vajra* (*rdo rje*), which means diamond-like scepter, and *padma*, which means lotus, for the male and female organs respectively. While the use of these terms is a mere substitution of one thing for another based on analogy or metaphor, they also serve to bring in other secondary meanings, because the terms are also used in other contexts. For instance, the term *vajra* is often used to symbolize the nature of ultimate truth, which in Mahāyoga is a union of primordial wisdom and the sphere of reality, while the lotus is generally throughout later Buddhism seen to symbolize compassion. When speaking of ritual sexual intercourse, these meanings are not primary, nor are they necessarily ever mentioned in the commentarial literature. However, for any reader familiar with the Buddhist philosophical milieu, these other meanings would certainly be in the back of their minds. The terms are, for those readers, naturally polysemic and the use of them in these contexts invokes their many meanings.

It is important for what follows for the reader to understand some of the symbolic meanings of certain terms in relation to tantric believe and practice. Without such an understanding, much of the meaning can be overlooked, especially in the situation of a foreign reader reading a translation. Therefore, a list of the most prevalent terms along with their symbolic meaning is included below:

| <u>English</u> | <u>Tibetan</u> | <u>Meaning</u> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| great fragrance | <i>dri chen</i> | urine |
| great meat | <i>sha chen</i> | feces |
| jewel | <i>nor bu</i> | head of the penis |
| liberation | <i>sgrol ba</i> | ritual killing |
| lotus | <i>padma</i> | vagina |
| messenger | <i>pho nya</i> | consort |

| | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| moon | <i>zla ba</i> | white seminal drop |
| pure vessel and contents | <i>dag pa'i snod bcud</i> | human flesh |
| red nectar | <i>dmars rtsi</i> | blood |
| secret space | <i>mkha' gsang</i> | genitalia ⁸² |
| sun | <i>nyi ma</i> | red seminal drop |
| tongue of the vajra | <i>rdo rje'i lce</i> | opening of the urethra at the tip of the penis |
| union | <i>sbyor ba</i> | ritual sex |
| vajra | <i>rdo rje</i> | penis |
| white nectar | <i>dkar rtsi</i> | semen |

Some of these terms are used frequently in the translation below; others, less so. Five of them belong to a group known as the “five nectars” (*bdud rtsi lnga*). These are the “white nectar”, the “red nectar”, the “great fragrance”, the “great meat”, and the “pure vessel and contents”.⁸³ Together they are used in the ritual context of group-practice, where several pairs of yogins and yoginīs assemble, make offerings, and recreate the maṇḍala, as well as in the context of initiation. In the later context, at least in its popular, public form, the actual substances those terms are said to represent are not used but physical symbolic representations are, adding yet another layer of symbolism. The symbolic terms listed above, however, are used to symbolism the actual phenomena, which due to its cultural “numinosity”, cannot be explicitly named. It is important to remember these equivalencies, especially when reading the translation of the *Key to the Treasury* in the second half of this dissertation.

⁸² This is generally used for the female’s genitals but in the *Key to the Treasury* is used once to refer to both male and female genitalia. See *Key to the Treasury*, 75.2.

⁸³ See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 146 on “Five Nectars *bdud rtsi lnga*”.

DEITY YOGA

The form of meditation that is distinctive to tantra is known as deity yoga. According to Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), this is the object taught by all types of tantras *to their main trainees*.⁸⁴ However, only the highest tantras—Highest Yoga Tantra for the New Schools and the Inner Tantras for the Old Schools—use the stages of death, intermediate state, and rebirth on the path. The general structure of the deity yoga is best exemplified by a particular instance, such as the “six deities” (*lha drug*) of the Geluk presentation of Action Tantra deity yoga. These are the ultimate deity (*don dam pa'i lha*), the sound deity (*sgra'i lha*), the letter deity (*yi ge'i lha*), the form deity (*gzugs kyi lha*), the seal deity (*phyag rgya'i lha*), and the sign deity (*mtshan ma'i lha*).⁸⁵ In this meditation, one first contemplates the sameness of nature between oneself and the deity. Both are empty of true existence. “All phenomena are of the same taste in their final nature, emptiness.”⁸⁶ Thereby, all appearance is dissolved into the realization of ultimate existence, or their emptiness (ultimate deity). Within that realization of suchness, a flat, white moon disc is visualized with the sounds of the deity’s mantra resounding above it (sound deity). These sounds coalesce into the shapes of the letters that form the mantra (letter deity). The letters radiate beams of light, at the tips of which are forms of the deity that make offerings to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattva. The lights are reabsorbed into the letters along with the blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas so that

⁸⁴ H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Deity Yoga* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1981), 11, 47-62. The qualification—to their main trainees—is the present Dalai Lama’s interpretation of Tsongkhapa. The “main trainees” are not necessarily the most numerous but just the ones for whom the tantra was taught. Therefore, even if most of an Action Tantra such as the *Susiddhi Tantra* discusses rituals and practices other than deity yoga but nonetheless has some reference to deity yoga intended for the “main trainees”, then the most important practice of that tantra is deity yoga. On the other hand, Tsongkhapa in his *Great Exposition of Secret Mantra* is content just to show that the practice of deity yoga is referred to at least once in each of the four tantric corpora. To do this, he primarily cites the texts of Varabodhi and Buddhaghya. Interestingly, these are two important figures in the *Secret Essence* lineage in Tibet—Varabodhi being an alternative name for Vilāsavajra. This leads one to wonder whether the Tibetan polymath and the Indian scholars has similar or dissimilar agendas in demonstrating the existence of deity yoga in the Action Tantras.

⁸⁵ This description is taken from H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Deity Yoga*, 21-24.

⁸⁶ H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Deity Yoga*, 22.

the letters are transformed into an image of the deity (form deity). This image of the deity, also known as the “pledge being” (*dam tshig sems dpa’, samayasattva*) is inseparable from oneself, since the starting point (ultimate deity) was the nature of one’s own mind. The visualization of oneself as the deity is “sealed” or made stable by making specific hand-gestures at key points of the body (seal deity). Finally, one invites the actual deity, or wisdom being (*ye shes sems dpa’, jñānasattva*), to enter into the visualization, thus becoming one with the meditator (sign deity).

By comparing Action Tantra’s six deities with Yoga Tantra’s five manifest enlightenments, one can get a general sense of the Buddhist tantric meditation for identifying with the deity. The salient features of this form of meditation are:

1. Dissolution of the profane existence into emptiness,
2. Manifestation of the mind realizing enlightenment into a moon-disc,
3. Manifestation of one’s realization in a linguistic form, i.e., letter,
4. Transformation of the letters into a symbol of the deity,
5. Transformation of the symbol into the bodily form of the deity,
6. Merging of the visualized divine form with the actual divinity.

Though some of these steps may be omitted or elaborated, this is the general structure of tantric meditation for generating oneself as a deity in any of the Buddhist tantric systems. It is important to note that the process involves the dissolution of the profane world and the gradual building up of a sacred reality. The movement is from profane to sacred, but in Buddhist Tantra it involves *identification with* the sacred.

The use of identification with the sacred through the meditation of deity yoga is the reason why the tantric way is claimed to be a faster path to enlightenment than the sūtra

practice.⁸⁷ In the sūtra vehicles, one gradually accumulates merit and wisdom through the practice of the six perfections over three incalculable eons. These collections of merit and wisdom serve as the cause for achieving final Buddhahood. They are therefore called the causal vehicle (*rgyu'i theg pa*, **hetuyāna*). Tantra on the other hand uses a similitude of the effect state, namely a visualization of the deity's enlightened form, for the same result. Therefore, it is known as the effect vehicle (*'bras bu'i theg pa*, **phalayāna*). It is the utilization of the effect state in the path that makes its actualization faster for the tantric vehicles. This is known as "bringing the effect to the path" (*'bras bu lam du mkhyer*). Tsongkhapa describes this as a practice that accords with the Form Body of a Buddha, which is why tantra is faster and superior to the sūtra vehicles.⁸⁸ However, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima goes so far as to say that the highest level of enlightenment can *only* be obtained through tantric practice, a notion that Tsongkhapa explicitly refutes.⁸⁹

Each of the tantric vehicles has their own format for deity yoga. In the Highest Yoga Tantras and in the Inner Tantras, deity yoga is elaborated into a two staged process: the stage of generation (*skyes rim*, *utpattikrama*) and the stage of completion (*rdzogs rim*, *niṣpannakrama*). The stage of generation is equivalent to the meditation of deity yoga described above, where one generates oneself in the form of the deity through a process of dissolution and reappearance. In the *Secret Essence* system, one of the meditative schemes found in the stage of generation is a form of deity yoga known as the three concentrations (*ting nge 'dzin gsum*, *trisamādhi**), in which one progresses from the meditation on emptiness, through the meditation of the moon-disc, to the meditation of the enlightened form. Similar meditative techniques by the same name are also found in the Yoga Tantra *The*

⁸⁷ H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1987), 142-143.

⁸⁸ H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 114-116.

⁸⁹ *Key to the Treasury*, 141.4-142.2; H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 141-142.

Compendium of Principles and the Highest Yoga Tantra/Mahāyoga Tantra *Secret Assembly*. The stage of completion is the meditation through which one completes the process of enlightenment by way of manipulating the psycho-physical winds, withdrawing them into the central channel, loosening the knots at the channel centers, and moving the seminal drops up and down the central channel. It is at the stage of completion that one performs a controlled enactment of the stages of death, intermediate state, and rebirth. This stage purifies these unenlightened processes and thereby results in enlightenment. Whereas the stage of generation is a practice that is shared in form, if not in name, with the lower tantras, the stage of completion, the manipulation of the psychophysical constituents, and the imitation of death and rebirth are unique to the highest tantras.⁹⁰ Thus, when a commentator gives an “uncommon” or “unshared” (*thun mong ma yin pa*) interpretation for some aspect of a tantra, it is often done in reference to the stage of completion.

REINTERPRETATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SAṂSĀRA AND NIRVĀṆA

The tantric use of the stages of death, intermediate state, and rebirth in its path toward enlightenment is indicative of a reinterpretation of the relationship between cyclic existence and nirvāṇa that impinges on the method for achieving the latter. In the sūtra vehicles, characteristics of cyclic existence and the individuals profane existence in it are eschewed. The life of a householder is either to be renounced or else engaged in with a high degree of detachment. The negative emotions of desire, hatred, greed, pride, and so forth are to be abandoned through seeing the impurity, impermanence, and ultimate emptiness of all phenomena. Nirvāṇa is attained by gradually detaching oneself from cyclic existence. For sūtra, death, the intermediate state, and rebirth are the problem and do not figure in the

⁹⁰ The similarity between the generation stage and the practices of many lower tantras is the use of deity yoga. However, the generation stage of the higher tantras is unique in its imitation of death, the intermediate state, and rebirth in the process of deity-generation.

solution itself. There is a strict division between cyclic existence and nirvāṇa. To get to one, you must leave the other.

Tantra, on the other hand, takes a different approach, embracing these aspects of the problem situation as the bases, which need to be purified, for the enlightened state.⁹¹ Unlike Sūtra, Tantra does not emphasize the strict separation of the profane and sacred, cyclic existence and nirvāṇa. Rather, the two are seen as related in the manner of a continuum. Influenced by the Indian Tathāgata-garbha theories, the tantric view maintains that the enlightened state already exists in a seminal form within unenlightened individuals. There is not an ontological difference between the ordinary being and a Buddha; the difference lies in their understanding and perception. For some systems, such as the *Secret Essence*, the enlightened mind already exists as the seed or basis of all minds. It is merely covered with defilements. These defilements corrupt the naturally pure appearances so that unenlightened individuals perceive impure appearances. The tantric path is thus viewed as a means for cleansing the originally pure nature and thereby allowing Buddhahood to manifest.

The meaning of the word, *tantra* (*rgyud*), alludes to the continuity between cyclic existence and the enlightened state. The word literally means “thread”, a metaphorical image of continuity. The *Supplemental Tantra of the Guhyasamāja* (*gsang ’dus rgyud phyi ma*), the eighteenth chapter of that work, makes this explicit:

Tantra [continuum] is known as “a continuous [stream]”.

That continuous [stream] has three aspects:

The basis, the nature of suchness, and

That which is distinguished by being imperturbable.

The natural aspect is the cause.

Similarly, the imperturbable is the result.

⁹¹ Lati Rinpochoy & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, 26.

The basis [means] “method”.

These three combine [to form] the meaning of a continuous [stream].⁹²

This passage is commonly cited in the commentarial tradition for both the definition of the term “tantra” and the origin of its interpretive divisions into ground, path, and result. The ground is the original nature of the mind, its suchness. Some tantric traditions interpret this to be merely the mind’s emptiness of inherent existence, while others view it as an inseparable fusion of emptiness and primordial wisdom. In either case, it is the ground in that it is the basis of all consciousness and is the starting point for the path. The path is confusingly called the “basis” in the quote above. It is the means whereby the ground is purified and transformed into the effect, or the “incorruptible” fruit, or result. The meaning of “tantra (*rgyud*)” is that these three are connected as a continuum. The three, ground, path, and result, are merely different states of the same basic entity, the suchness of one’s own mind. The ground is not something to be gotten rid of, but something to be cultivated by the path and transformed into the fruit.

Similarly, the tantric attitude toward the phenomena of cyclic existence is affected by this holistic perspective. The sūtra view and the view of the lower tantras hold that certain aspects of cyclic existence are impure and should be rejected. The negative emotions (*nyon mong, kleśa*) are to be abandoned as are certain perverse practices—killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, intoxicants. Even dietary restrictions are imposed by some schools, as in the Action Tantra vows. While specifically not a license for hedonism or anarchy, the higher

⁹² *Secret Assembly*, Tb.409, v. 18, 944.4-944.5:

*rgyud ni rgyun zhes bya bar grags//
 rgyun de rnam pa gsum 'gyur tell
 gzhi dang de bzhin rang bzhin dang //
 mi 'phrogs pa yis rab phye ball
 rnam pa rang bzhin rgyu yin tell
 de bzhin mi 'phrogs 'bras bu'oll
 gzhi ni thabs shes bya ba stell
 gsum gyis rgyun gyi don bsdus pa'oll*

tantras consciously incorporate these “negative” aspects of cyclic existence into their path. As in the three continuums, these are to be transformed into a purified state. The negative emotions are transformed into aspects of the enlightened personality, while the non-virtues are made virtuous through practicing them within a heightened state of awareness of the purity and sameness of all phenomena. For these tantras, it is the dualistic notions of good and bad, clean and dirty, beautiful and ugly that keep people trapped in cyclic existence. They see the lower vehicles’ rejection of negative emotions and non-virtuous actions as unnecessarily promoting their dualistic conceptions. So, instead these are incorporated and transformed. Along the same lines, the higher tantras also advocate the use of substances that by human convention are considered repulsive and disgusting, such as semen, menstrual blood, human flesh, feces, and urine. In the higher tantric worldview, these are called the five nectars (*bdud rtsi lnga*), and they are included, at least symbolically, into their feast, offering, and initiation rituals.

TANTRIC RESULTS

As with all Great Vehicle schools of Buddhism, the goal or effect of the tantric vehicles is complete Buddhahood. In the Sūtra form of the Great Vehicle, Buddhahood was discussed in terms of the two, three, four, or five “bodies” (*sku, kāya*) of the Buddha.⁹³ These are forms in which enlightenment manifest for the perfected person. They are sequentially inclusive. The two bodies are the Form Body (*gzugs sku, rūpakāya*) and the Reality Body (*chos sku, dharmakāya*). The former is the actual “physical” manifestation of the Buddha’s body. The latter was the Buddha’s ultimate nature. Later developments of the Great Vehicle split the Form Body into the Emanation Body (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*)—the form that appeared to ordinary beings—and the Complete Enjoyment Body—the form that appeared to high-level Bodhisattvas in the Buddha’s pure land or in meditation. The four bodies derive from

⁹³ Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1983), 118-123.

splitting the reality body into an objective and a subjective aspect. The objective aspect is the emptiness of the Buddha, while the subjective aspect is the Buddha's wisdom consciousness that realizes emptiness. Similarly, the final enumeration of five Buddha-bodies results from dividing the Complete Enjoyment Body into two types: the actual Complete Enjoyment Body of a Buddha that abides in the Highest Pure Land and the imputed Complete Enjoyment Body, which is that of a tenth ground Bodhisattva.

Tantric systems often use the classical enumeration of three Buddha bodies. However, in the Old Schools' Mahāyoga system, there is a different enumeration of the five Buddha bodies.⁹⁴ These five consist of the classical three—Reality, Complete Enjoyment, and Emanation—with the addition of two new bodies—the Manifestly Enlightened Body (*mngon byang gi sku, abhisambodhikāya*) and the Vajra Body (*rdo rje sku, vajrakāya*). The body of manifest enlightenment is the simultaneous display of the three Buddha-bodies where each one remains distinct, while the vajra-body is the inseparable fusion of the three Buddha-bodies. These five are one of the ways that the Old Schools speak of the result of Buddhahood.

Another way that tantras discuss the stage of Buddhahood in terms of five enlightened characteristics. These are:

1. Enlightened form (*sku*)
2. Enlightened speech (*gsung*)
3. Enlightened mind (*thugs*)
4. Enlightened qualities (*yon tan*)
5. Enlightened activities (*phrin las*)

The inner tantras commonly use this pentad to discuss the different aspects of the enlightened state, even when they have their own particular descriptions of the results

⁹⁴ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 139.

accrued from practicing the path. The five are also connected with the five families of Buddhas, such that Vairocana is associated with enlightened form; Amitābha, with enlightened speech; Akṣobhya, with enlightened mind; Ratnasambhava, with enlightened qualities, and Amoghasiddhi, with enlightened activities. Similarly, the use of this pentad is extended to other situations, especially typology as in different classes of consorts, cycles of texts, and so forth.

Another example of a pentad used to describe the resultant state is the five primordial wisdoms that are often discussed in tantric contexts. These are five aspects of the enlightened mind viewed from different perspectives. They are:

1. The primordial wisdom of the sphere of reality (*chos dbyings kyi ye shes, dharmadhātujñāna*),
2. The mirror-like primordial wisdom (*me long gi ye shes, ādarśajñāna*),
3. The primordial wisdom of individual conceptions (*so sor rtog pa'i ye shes, pratyavekṣaṇajñāna*),
4. The primordial wisdom of equality (*mnyam nyid kyi ye shes, samatājñāna*), and
5. The primordial wisdom that accomplishes activities (*bya ba grub pa'i ye shes, kṛtyānuṣṭhānajñāna*).

Briefly, these are the inexpressible realization of the ultimate reality without any conceptuality, the vivid clarity recognizing phenomena for what they are, the unimpeded knowledge of all things, the equanimity that does not fall into extremes, and the wisdom that knows how to act for the welfare of all beings.⁹⁵

One of the unique aspects of the Mahāyoga tradition is another enumeration of results known as the four “awareness-holders” (*rig 'dzin, vidyādhāra*). These four are not all final results. The first three occur at different stages on the path and the fourth at the moment of

⁹⁵ Cf., *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 22-23.

enlightenment. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima describes these in some detail in the *Key to the Treasury*.

They are:

1. Fruitional Awareness-Holder (*rnam smin rig 'dzin*) – a practitioner on the path of seeing who still has a contaminated body,
2. Life-Empowered Awareness-Holder (*tshe dbang rig 'dzin*) – a practitioner on the path of seeing whose body is no longer contaminated,
3. Awareness-Holder of the Great Seal (*phyag chen rig 'dzin*) – a practitioner on the path of meditation who appears as the tutelary deity working for the welfare of sentient beings, and
4. Spontaneously Present Awareness-Holder (*lhun grub rig 'dzin*) – a tenth ground Bodhisattva on the final path to Buddhahood whose form is the imputed Complete Enjoyment Body.

These four are the stages of a Superior (*'phags pa, āryan*)—a practitioner on one of the ten grounds who has reached the path of seeing or beyond—that are traversed on the journey to final Buddhahood.⁹⁶ Even though they are not the final goal, they are designated as results, because achieving the path of seeing is a goal in itself for all ordinary beings.

These are a few of the basic concepts upon which the Mahāyoga tantric system is built. Many of these ideas are, in a certain sense, taken for granted by the commentators on the *Secret Essence*, which is the reason why they have been introduced in this preliminary chapter. The descriptions provided above are necessarily cursory, as each of the topics could itself be the subject of a dissertation. In what follows, there will be occasions to return to each and explore their particular manifestation in the Mahāyoga tradition. The next chapter will explore Mahāyoga's position within the Old Schools' nine vehicle hierarchy, where it falls in

⁹⁶ This is according to the Zur interpretation. In Longchenpa's description of these four, they span from the path of preparation to the path of no more learning, or Buddhahood.

that doxography and what it tells us of Buddhism's intellectual history. The third chapter will investigate the *Secret Essence* lineage described by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima. The fourth chapter will present a summary of the root text itself, while the fifth and final chapter will summarize Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's commentary, the *Key to the Treasury*.

2. DOXOGRAPHY IN THE OLD SCHOOLS

As an introduction to the history and worldview of the *Secret Essence*, it is best to begin with a description of its relative position within the philosophical horizon of Tibetan Buddhism. The *Secret Essence* has come to exist within a hierarchy of doxographical classifications that belongs to the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Through the structure of the successively more profound vehicles, Old School practitioners account for the vast variety of Buddhist teachings. In this sense, their classification of vehicles is a synchronic aspect of the religion, in that it is a specific, present-day manifestation of a religious phenomenon. Nevertheless, this very scheme encodes the historical development of Buddhist thought and is thus a map of the religion's diachronic evolution. Beginning with the Hearer Vehicle and culminating with Atiyoga, the Old Schools classify the variety of Buddhism methods into nine vehicles. These are seen as individual ways to achieve enlightenment, each leading to the goal of nirvāṇa. They are explained from the lowest to the highest but are not conceived as stages of a single individual. They are different possible methods and are, in that sense, cotemporaneous.

However, the progression of the nine vehicles neatly parallels the course of Buddhism's intellectual development. In the Old Schools' exegesis, the *Secret Essence* is described as the general scripture for the Mahāyoga class of tantras, the seventh of nine vehicles. Locating its thought within the Old Schools' doxographical hierarchy is important to properly understand the philosophy behind the text. Therefore, this chapter will summarize the nine vehicles based on a discussion by one of the tradition's leading scholars and, in demonstrating how the nine vehicles are a summary of the history of Buddhist thought, place the Mahāyoga tradition, of which the *Secret Essence* is the central scripture, in its historical context.¹

¹ The idea that the vehicles represent a historical evolution of thought has already be broached with regard to Tantra by Stephen Hodge and others (Steven Hodge, "Considerations on the Dating and Geographical Origins of the *Mahāvairocanaḥśambodhis-sūtra*" in *The Buddhist Forum*, volume III, edited by Tadeusz Skorupski & Ulrich Pagel (London: University of London, 1994), 57-83). Giacomella Orofino has challenged such an

The source used in this case is the *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* by the Old School scholar, Lochen Dharmashrī (1654-1717). The author is a well-known Old School exegete, younger brother to the treasure-revealer Terdak Lingpa Gyurmé Dorjé (1646-1714) and student of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, Lobsang Gyatso (1617-1682).² His two commentaries on the *Secret Essence*, the *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*³ and the *Ornament to the Lord of Secrets' Intention*,⁴ are particularly famous. Respectively commenting on the general meaning (*spyi don*) and the meaning of the words (*tshig don*), they are included in the ninth and tenth volumes of the Degé edition of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients*.⁵ The *Ornament of the Intention* is a detailed commentary that elucidates the words of the text, chapter by chapter. The *Oral Instructions*, however, is a general commentary. It covers the broad themes and general doctrines of the *Secret Essence* and the Mahāyoga Vehicle which developed out of it, as well as placing the practice within its historical and philosophical context. It is, therefore, a natural source for a description of the nine vehicles. The explanation of the nine vehicles in this work was so influential that it was used as one of the primary sources used by Dūjom Rinpoché in his description of the Old Schools' doctrine, translated as the first half of *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, where certain sections of Dūjom Rinpoché's description are taken word for word from *The Lord of Secrets' Oral*

assumption in an unpublished paper (Giacomella Orofino, "Notes on the Early Phases of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism" (unpublished paper), pp. 25). See chapter 1.

² Dudjom Rinpoché, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), vol. 1, 728. Hereafter referred to as *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

³ Lochen Dharmashrī, Smin-gliñ (1654-1718), *Gsañ bdag zhal luiñ: A Commentary on the Guhyagarbha (Māyājāla) Tantra by Smin-gliñ Lo-chen Dharma-shri*, (Leh: S. W. Tashigangapa, 1972; I-Tib 72-903163). Hereafter, this text is referred to as *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*.

⁴ Lochen Dharmashrī, *dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa gsang bdag dgongs rgyan* in *bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 32, 5.1-461.4. Hereafter, this text is referred to as *Ornament to the Intention*.

⁵ *dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyi rgyal po sgyu 'phrul dra ba spyi don gyi sgo nas gtan la 'bebs par byed pa'i legs bshad gsang bdag zhal lung*, Dg, vol. 9 (ta), 174b.7-355a.5 through vol. 10 (tha), 1.1-113b.7 and *dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa gsang bdag dgongs rgyan*, Dg, vol. 9 (ta), 31b.1-174b.7.

Instructions.⁶ Lochen Dharmashrī belongs to the Zur tradition, and he is one of the main sources used in Jikmé Tenpé Nyima’s *Key to the Treasury*. While the point of this chapter is to understand the doctrinal worldview inherited by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, Lochen Dharmashrī’s description of vehicles in the *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions* also aids us in understanding the history of Buddhist thought and the position of the *Secret Essence* within that history.

In the *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions* the nine vehicles falls in the general introductory section that precedes the actual commentary on the *Secret Essence*. As with most such scholastic commentaries, it embeds its description of the nine vehicles deep within a strict intellectual structure. Thus, the introductory section is divided into three subsections:

1. the doctrine that is to be explained,
2. the quintessential instructions by which that doctrine is explained, and
3. how it is explained by those quintessential instructions.

This is the beginning of the outline (*sa bcad*) for the introductory section. These outlines create a structure out of a series of topics, contextualizing each, and it is important to understand where a discussion falls within the outline in order to fully grasp its meaning. The outline structure that proceeds the description of the nine vehicles is as follows:

I. Introductory Section

A. The Doctrine to Be Explained

- 1. The General Meanings of the Word “Doctrine or Phenomena”**
- 2. The Meaning to be Understood Here**
- 3. The Excellent Doctrine**
- 4. Identifying the Doctrine to be explained**

⁶ For instance, the descriptions of the six tantric vehicles given in the section on the “Recapitulation of Resultant Vehicles” in Dūjom Rinpoché’s text (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 348-372; folios 213a.5-229b) are identical word for word to the corresponding section of Lochen Dharmashrī’s text summarized here (*Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*, 59.5-83.3).

*i. Entity**ii. Definition**iii. Etymology**iv. Divisions**v. Identifying the Meaning in This Context***a. The Meaning of the Term “Vehicle”****b. Divisions***1. General Divisions**2. Divisions in Detail***i. Condensing the Vehicles into Five According to the Five Antidotes****ii. The Actual Enumeration of Vehicles Thus Condensed**

Along the way Lochen Dharmashrī defines “doctrine” as:

The means of expression that engages the excellent doctrine, by which one realizes the object expressed.⁷

In other words, “doctrine” is the linguistic expression of the teaching. This is supported by the fact that the section on divisions is dominated by a discussion of scriptural baskets—the set of three or four groups of scriptures that form the Buddhist canon. In the fourth topic, “Identifying the Meaning on This Occasion”, the subject seems to jump from focus on the literary texts that embody the “doctrine” to the more abstract notion of “vehicles”, the path traveled by an adherent to the doctrine. However, as the doctrines themselves are so closely associated with specific texts, the jump is a natural one. Lochen Dharmashrī begins this section with an explanation of the Sanskrit word for “vehicle”:

⁷ *brjod bya rtogs pa'i dam chos la 'jug pa'i rjod byed dol* (7.5).

[The Sanskrit] word “*yāna*” means vehicle. Furthermore, because it is the very tracks one is to progress, it is [used to mean] path, and because of being the very bearer of the load, it is applied to carriages such as chariots and so forth. However, here by way of similarity, [the term] refers to the [Buddhist] paths such as the actions of the ten virtues and so forth, because these are paths that cause one to progress higher and higher.⁸

This leads into a general discussion the number of Buddhist vehicles, which is then followed by a more detailed analysis of the different vehicles according the Old Schools interpretation of Buddhism. The general discussion provides an overview of the enumerations found in the Indian Buddhist literature from one to infinite. It is initially pointed out that there is no definitive enumeration of vehicles, because the Buddhas teach whatever antidotes are necessary to train sentient beings. The assertion is supported by a citation from the *Descent to Lañka Sūtra*. With this basic pattern of enumeration followed by a scriptural citation as evidence, Lochen Dharmashrī proceeds to catalog enumerations of Buddhist vehicles from one to nine, capping the list with “an inconceivable enumeration.” The following table summarizes his series of general enumerations:

| # | Enumeration of Vehicles | Source |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Result ⁹ | <i>Lotus Sūtra</i> , <i>General Sūtra that Gathers All Intentions</i> |
| 2 | Causal Vehicle and Resultant Vehicle ¹⁰ | <i>All-Accomplishing King</i> |
| 3 | Causal, Outer Mantra, Inner Mantra ¹¹ | <i>Sūtra that Gathers All Intentions</i> |

⁸ *yāna zhes pa'i sgra las theg pa stel de'ang bgrod bya'i shul nyid kyi phyir lam dang / khur khyer pa po nyid kyi phyir shing rta la sogs pa'i bzhon pa la 'jug lal 'die de dang 'dra ba'i sgo nas dge bcu'i las lam sogs la'ang 'jug stel lam gong nas gong du 'grod par byed pa'i phyir rol (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 17.1-17.3).*

⁹ In terms of result there is only one vehicle, because all vehicles lead to the same result.

¹⁰ The causal vehicle is the Sūtra paradigm, and the resultant vehicle is the Tantra paradigm.

¹¹ The causal vehicle is Sūtra; the outer mantra is the three lower tantra vehicles, and the inner mantra is the three higher tantric vehicles.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| 4 | 3 Causal Vehicles and the Resultant Vehicle ¹² | <i>Mañjuśrī Magical Emanation Net</i> |
| 5 | 3 Vehicles of Definite Goodness (<i>nges legs</i>) and the 2 Vehicles of Manifest Superiority (<i>mngon mtho</i>) ¹³ | <i>Descent to Lan̄ka Sūtra</i> |
| 5 | 3 Vehicles of Definite Goodness, Vehicle of Manifest Superiority, the Highest Vehicle ¹⁴ | <i>Secret Essence Tantra</i> |
| 6 | 3 Causal Vehicles and 3 Resultant Vehicles ¹⁵ | <i>All-Accomplishing King</i> |
| 7 | Gods, Men, Hearers, Solitary Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, the Inner and Outer Secret ¹⁶ | <i>Abbreviated Maṇḍala</i> |
| 8 | (No specific enumeration given.) | <i>The Great Space</i> |
| 9 | (No specific enumeration given.) | <i>All-Accomplishing King</i> |
| ∞ | As many vehicles as thoughts | <i>Sūtra that Gathers All Intentions</i> |

The specific enumeration of the nine vehicles is not given in this summary, because it is the subject of the next section in the commentary. However, before proceeding to the enumeration of nine vehicles, Lochen Dharmashrī must first account for the fact that the tantra itself speaks of only five vehicles. The *Secret Essence* does not mention the nine vehicles but gives instead a list of five. It is safe to assume then that the nine vehicle system represents a later classification superimposed upon an already-existing literary tradition. In the four pages in the *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* devoted to the list of five vehicles pale in

¹² The three causal vehicles are the Hearers, Solitary Realizer, Bodhisattvas. The Resultant Vehicle is Tantra.

¹³ The three vehicles of definite goodness are the three causal vehicles, and the two vehicles of manifest superiority are the vehicle of gods and the vehicle of humans, listed separately.

¹⁴ The *Secret Essence* takes the five vehicles listed in the *Descent to Lan̄ka Sūtra*, combines the vehicle of gods with the vehicle of humans and adds the “highest vehicle” which refers to *all* of Tantra.

¹⁵ The *All-Accomplishing King* contains different enumerations of the vehicles, also being cited as the source for the nine vehicle enumeration. In Eva Neumaier-Dargyay’s translation of the Atiyoga scripture, there are two references to the “six vehicles” See E.K. Neumaier-Dargyay, *The Sovereign All-Creating Min—The Motherly Buddha: A Translation of the Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 61, 134. Neither of these explicitly enumerates them. In fact, they seem to refer to the six tantric vehicles rather than the breakdown given here by Lochen Dharmashrī.

¹⁶ “Secret” here means “Mantra,” or “Tantra,” vehicles.

comparison to the sixty pages he spends describing the nine vehicles. His description of the five is strictly to account for the disparity between the nine vehicles that are the norm and what the text itself describes. He thus only briefly addresses the five vehicles described in the *Secret Essence*. Nonetheless, his discussion is highly informative for understanding the historical development of the tantric vehicles in the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

THE FIVE VEHICLES IN THE TANTRA

In the *Secret Essence's* third chapter, the six sages, who emanate out from the maṇḍala of peaceful deities, teach five vehicles for the welfare of sentient beings. This is the sole explicit reference to vehicles, found in the short version of the tantra and is followed by a keyword summary of each teaching:

They taught, teach, and will teach the 84,000 doctrines consisting of the vehicle of Gods and Humans, the vehicle of the Hearers, the vehicle of the Solitary Realizers, the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas, and the Highest Vehicle. These were, are, and will be taught as antidotes to the 84,000 afflictions of ignorant conceptuality. As for all of those, they are the [teachings about] subjects and objects, inner and outer dependent arisings, that the subject (*'dzin pa*) is mistakenly imputed, the incontrovertibility of the cause and effect of actions, and so forth. The final teaching was that [we are] not stained by the cause and effect of actions; we will not be stained, and there is no staining.¹⁷

¹⁷ *lha dang mi'i theg pa dang / nyan thos kyi theg pa dang / rang sang rgyas gyi theg pa dang / byang chub sems dpa'i theg pa dang / bla na med pa'i theg pas/ ma rig pa'i rnam par rtog pa nyon mongs pa stong phrag brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i gnyen por/ chos stong phrag brgyad cu rtsa bzhi gsungs sol / lgsung ngo / lgsung bar 'gyur rol / de dag thams cad kyang gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'i phyi nang gi rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba dang / 'dzin pa dang 'phrul [read 'khrul] pa las bzlog pa dang / las dang las kyi 'bras bu chud mi za ba dang / las dang las kyi 'bras bus mi gos/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 160.5-161.2).*

Following the tradition of the third Zur patriarch, Dropukpa,¹⁸ Lochen Dharmashrī relates the teachings described in the last half of the passage with the vehicles enumerated in the first half. This comprises his discussion of the five vehicles.¹⁹

The discussion of the five vehicles centers on a certain rather elaborate simile, taken from the royal court. A foolish subject is strolling in the royal fruit gardens, when he unwittingly comes upon a poisonous tree. He picks one of its fruit and tastes it. Enjoying its sweetness, he continues to eat from it until he becomes sick and dies. That story is a simile for the life of an ordinary individual within cyclic existence in that grasping at poisonous desires we die and continue to be reborn. The similes for the five Buddhist vehicles use the same basic plot. In describing each of the five vehicles, Lochen Dharmashrī matches the list of doctrines in the citation above with the list of vehicles.

The Vehicle of Gods and Humans is where one practices good actions and abandons bad ones. Therefore, the simile for this vehicle is about a more discerning subject, who knows the difference between the poisonous and the edible trees. He eats only the good fruit but is unable to do away with the poisonous tree. The tantra describes teaching for gods and humans as “the incontrovertibility of the cause and effect of actions.”

The Hearer Vehicle is where one abandons the afflictions that trap one in cyclic existence. One does so by realizing one’s individual selflessness, while still inadvertently holding onto a subtle notion of subject and object. This is like another subject who comes upon the poisonous tree and says, “Wouldn’t it be better to dig the tree up from its roots and take it far away?” Because of the latent dualism in this view, the tantra summarizes it as “subjects and objects”.

¹⁸ As an interesting side note, he claims Dropuk-ba was in turn following Da-tik (*mda’ tik*), who was not only one of Zur Chung’s four pillars but also Dropuk-ba’s uncle.

¹⁹ *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*, 20.1-24.1.

The Solitary Realizer Vehicle is where one knows the path to realization due to past-life experience and achieves realization on one's own through meditating on dependent origination. Dependent origination is applied both to inner phenomena, such as minds, feelings, and thoughts, and external, inanimate phenomena. This is likened to a subject who thinks there is no need to drag the tree far away but instead pours acid on its trunk to prevent it from re-sprouting. The tantra describes them according to their object of meditation, "inner and outer dependent arisings."

The Bodhisattva Vehicle is unlike the first three, which abandon the things that keep one in cyclic existence. Instead, the Bodhisattva Vehicle transforms one's afflictive emotions and their resultant actions into enlightened attitudes and actions for the welfare of all. Similarly, a doctor who walks into the royal garden does not cut down the poisonous tree but uses its sap and bark to make medicine. Because in this vehicle everything is viewed as an illusion and one does not adhere to dualistic notions of subject and object, the tantra describes it as the view "that the subject (*'dzin pa*) is mistakenly imputed."

The final vehicle is the Mantra Vehicle, where all phenomena are believed to be naturally pure and, through a spontaneous transformation of perspective, can be viewed as such. This is like a siddha, or accomplished tantric master, walking into the garden and saying, "What's the point of cutting it down or turning it into medicine. It works fine just the way it is." Thereupon, he recites a mantra and produces a nectar superior to the medicine. The tantra describes this teaching with "The final teaching was that [we are] not stained by the cause and effect of actions; we will not be stained, and there is no staining." Lochen Dharmashrī equates the three negations of that sentence with the three groups—the lower tantras, Mahāyoga and Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. As he uses details of these tantric systems covered in the nine vehicles, the specific elaborations of the simile will be omitted.

Though, as a later commentator, Lochen Dharmashrī elaborates the basic fivefold scheme of the tantra into the nine vehicle system, the importance of the tantra's own

enumeration should not be lost. The five vehicles in the tantra represent an earlier formulation of the vehicle theory than is found in the refined nine-vehicle scheme. The five-vehicle scheme includes the vehicle of gods and men and does not differentiate separate tantric vehicles. Being the only vehicle that is not oriented toward liberation from cyclic existence, the vehicle of gods and men stands out as incongruous with the others and would be a likely candidate for editorial deletion. That there is no elaboration of tantric vehicles in the scripture itself provides further evidence that sections of the *Secret Essence* are relatively early, pre-dating the division of tantric vehicles, which probably arose during beginning of the “Inner Tantra” movement (800-1200 C.E.).

THE NINE VEHICLES

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism is that they assert a system of nine vehicles, ranked in ascending order, that encompasses all the vehicles of both Sūtra and Tantra. It is not that their description of the vehicles is particularly distinctive but that they arrange all nine of the vehicles together. The New Schools mention six of these nine vehicles in their dual doxographies. However, although they often speak of Sūtra and Tantra as a single coherent path, the New Schools generally discuss Sūtra and Tantra with separate doxographical enumerations, rarely, if ever, counting them together.²⁰ The Old Schools, on the other hand, speak of the “nine vehicles” (*theg pa dgu*) in a single enumeration. Describing the paths of both Sūtra and Tantra together as the “nine vehicles” is a unique feature of the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

This doxographical scheme is all-encompassing. For the Old Schools, all the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism can be classified within these nine vehicles. They are:

²⁰ Case in point is Tsongkhapa’s *Great Exposition on the Stages of the Path*, which portrays Sūtra and Tantra as a single contiguous path but is preserved as two distinct books, *Stages of the Path (lam rim chen mo)* and *Stages of Mantra (sngags rim chen mo)*.

1. the Hearer Vehicle (*nyan thos kyi theg pa*),
2. the Solitary Realizer Vehicle (*rang rgyal gyi theg pa*),
3. the Bodhisattva Vehicle (*byang chub sems dpa'i theg pa*),
4. the Action Tantra Vehicle (*bya ba'i rgyud kyi theg pa*),
5. the Dual Tantra Vehicle (*gnyis ka'i rgyud kyi theg pa*),²¹
6. the Yoga Tantra Vehicle (*yo ga'i rgyud kyi theg pa*),
7. the Mahāyoga Tantra Vehicle (*ma hā'i yo ga'i rgyud kyi theg pa*),
8. the Anuyoga Tantra Vehicle (*a nu yo ga'i rgyud kyi theg pa*), and
9. the Atiyoga Tantra Vehicle (*a ti yo ga'i rgyud kyi theg pa*).

These nine levels are not stages in a single person's path but different gradations of paths or means to enlightenment. There are some descriptions of adepts progressing to higher paths or falling into lower ones. However, such is not the main concern of these divisions. Instead, the nine vehicles represent nine different descriptions of the path to enlightenment, each with its own entrance (*'jug sgo*), view (*lta ba*), ethics (*tshul khrims*), meditation or cultivation (*bsgom pa*), practice (*spyod pa*), and description of the result or fruit (*'bras bu*).²² From first to last, Lochen Dharmashrī describes them in order of progressive profundity. Each is treated with equal respect, but the last vehicle, Atiyoga (“the pinnacle of yoga”), is revered as the highest path. Despite being highly esoteric and therefore restricted in dissemination, Atiyoga is the most popular teaching of the Old Schools, and this is due in great part to the efforts of Longchenpa and his followers. Therefore, among the Old Schools' teachings, it is Atiyoga that has garnered the most attention from contemporary scholars.

Nevertheless, in this description each vehicle is respectfully described within the nine-story hierarchy as a valid path to nirvāṇa, mapping in the progression from vehicle to vehicle

²¹ This vehicle is also known as the Performance Tantra vehicle (*spyod pa'i rgyud kyi theg pa, cāryatantra*).

²² These subtopics will serve as an outline in the descriptions of each vehicle below.

the course of Buddhism's intellectual development. Not only do the nine vehicles thus cover the whole spectrum of Tibetan Buddhism's teachings, they also serve to contextualize and define the various teaching of by placing them in relation to one another within a hierarchical structure. Thereby, descriptions of the hierarchy serve as a teaching tool, leading one to the final view. The order is so constructed that by understanding each successive vehicle one is gradually led to the view of Atiyoga. Yet, nonetheless all nine vehicles are respected paths to enlightenment and the three highest ones are particularly cherished. The description of the nine vehicles that follows is provided to contextualize the teachings of the *Secret Essence*. The reader should remember that, from among these nine vehicles, the *Secret Essence Tantra* is the central scripture for the seventh, called "Mahāyoga".

In the *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, Lochen Dharmashrī quickly dispatches the Vehicle of Gods and Humans by making a distinction within Buddhist vehicles between Vehicles of the World (*'jig rten pa'i theg pa*) and Vehicles That Transcend the World (*'jig rten las 'das pa'i theg pa*). The former are vehicles that produce happy rebirths, such as the Vehicle of Gods and Humans, while the latter are vehicles that lead to liberation from the suffering cycle of rebirth or, in this context, nirvāṇa. In explaining the divisions of Vehicles That Transcend the World, Lochen Dharmashrī discusses the nine vehicles of the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism.²³

He describes each vehicle in three parts: its entity, the etymology of its name, and six subtopics. "Entity" is the definition of the vehicle, which is always followed by a brief "etymology of its name. The bulk of each vehicles description is the "six subtopics." These are entrance (*'jug sgo*), view (*lta ba*), ethics (*tshul khrims*), cultivation (*bsgom pa*), activities (*spyod pa*), and result (*'bras bu*).²⁴ **Entrance** refers to the way a practitioner initially engages

²³ The description that follows is a paraphrase of Lochen Dharmashrī's discourse on the nine vehicles. His account begins at *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 35.6ff. More specific references will be given at the beginning of each vehicle's description.

²⁴ In the descriptions that follow, these subtopics will be highlighted in bold.

the doctrine. It is the way that a practitioner enters the vehicle, through adopting its worldview. In the first three vehicles, the entrance is described as a formulaic axiom, the truth of which is to be realized. These are the four truths, the twelve links of dependent origination, and the two truths, respectively. In the tantric vehicles, the entrance is described in two parts: the entrance of initiation (*dbang gi sgo 'jug*) and the entrance of action (*bya ba'i sgo 'jug*). The former is the suite of initiations required to practice that vehicle, and the latter is an axiom to be realized. The second of the six subtopics, or **view**, is the way that a person on that vehicle sees the world, what is true and what is false, its basic worldview. In the latter vehicles, this is discussed in relation to the two truths, conventional and ultimate. The **ethics** are the formal rules written up as a code that must be followed by practitioners of that vehicle. These are generally described in terms of the vows one takes as part of a vehicle's path. "**Cultivation**" is a translation of the Tibetan word, *bsgom pa*, that, depending on context, can also mean meditation. It refers to the way one cultivates the path in a vehicle, which in most cases involves meditation. The Tibetan word for **conduct** (*spyod pa*) can also be translated as "practice" or "activities". These are the kinds of actions that the ideal practitioner performs. Sometimes they involve ritual, and other times, a broader way of life. Finally, there is the **result**, or fruit, of the vehicle. In the tantric vehicles, this result is essentially the same, namely complete Buddhahood. The discussion of the result for those vehicles focuses more on the length of time needed to achieve the effect and the flavor of enlightenment achieved.

Lochen Dharmashrī leads the reader through the nine vehicles by way of a series of divisions and subdivisions; the vehicles are not laid out linearly as a set of nine but are imbedded within different levels of a hierarchy. The hierarchy ranks the schools in ascending importance and portrays them as synchronic manifestations of the religion. However, it is my contention that the order presented in the hierarchy also portrays the historical evolution of the Buddhist doctrine. Each stage, barring one, represents a subsequent development in

Buddhist thought, ranging from the initial śramaṇic movement portrayed as the Hearer Vehicle to the culmination of Tantra in Atiyoga. In order to make sense of the disparity in views from different phases of Buddhist thought, the doxography of the nine vehicles arrays them in order of profundity. However, because the philosophical differences between these schools of Buddhism represent aspects of the paradigm shifts that progressively occurred in the development of Buddhist thought, the order of the nine vehicles also represent the general historical development of Buddhist thought over the centuries.²⁵

Lochen Dharmashrī begins his explanation of the nine vehicles with a discussion of how Buddhist vehicles are superior to worldly vehicles, external to Buddhism. These “external vehicles” (*phyi rol pa'i theg pa*), such as the vehicle of gods and humans, do not seek to transcend suffering but only seek a higher status within the cycle of rebirth. The *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* says:²⁶

Holding onto the Three Jewels, the objects of refuge, one either professes the view of the four seals, which are indicated in the scriptures, or one designates their source, and by training in the three genuine trainings, the result is the ability to transcend the peak of cyclic existence. Therefore, [Buddhist

²⁵ Such a broad statement requires some disclaimer. By its very nature, a doxography necessarily excludes certain aspects or movements within the religions. It is precisely because the nine vehicles are relatively broad and general categories that the historical correlation works in their case. However, the same cannot be said for more specific doxographies that take into account the subsects of the Sūtra vehicles, such as the Mind Only and Middle Way Schools.

²⁶ *dkon mchog gsum skyabs gnas su bzung nas/ lta ba bka' rtags kyi phyag rgya bzhi khas len pa'am/ de'i khongs su gtogs shing / yang dag pa'i bslab pa gsum la slob pas 'bras bu srid rtse las brgal nus pas 'phags tel/ phyi rol pa'i lam na de dag med pa'i phyir/ de la skyabs 'gro nil lam gyi gzhi rten la med du mi rung stel/ de sdom pa'i rgyu myang 'das kyi bsam pa rten byed nyid yin pa'i phyir/ skyabs su ma song ba la sdom pa mi skye lal/ sdom pas ma bsdams na yang dag pa'i lam med pa'i phyir stel/ skyabs 'gro bdun cu pa las/ dge bsnyen gsum la skyabs 'gro bal de ni sdom brgyad rtsa ba yin/ lzhes dang / lsdom pa kun la yod mod gyi/ lskyabs su ma song ba la med/ lces sol / lphyag rgya bzhi nil 'dus byas thams cad mi rtag pa/ lzag bcas thams cad sdug bsngal bal/ lchos thams cad bdag med pa/ lmyang na las 'das pa zhi ba'ol/ lslab pa gsum la slob pa nil/ lhag pa'i tshul khrims dang / sems dang / shes rab gsum la thos bsam bsgom gsum gyi sgo nas bslabs pas thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba stel/ 'od ldan las/ bslab pa gsum ni rab ston cing / lphyag rgya gsum dang yang dag ldan/ lthog ma bar dang mthar dge bal/ lsangs rgyas gsung du mkhas pas rtogs/ lzhes sol 'bras bu srid rtse las brgal nus pa nil... (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 36.2-37.2).*

vehicles] are superior [to worldly vehicles], because the external vehicles do not have those [features].

Regarding that, it is improper not to have going for refuge as the foundation of the path, because [refuge] is the cause for the vows, the very stabilization of the thought of nirvāṇa. This is because one who does not go for refuge does not generate the vows, and, if one is not bound by the vows, one does not have a virtuous path. The *Seventy Stanzas on Refuge* says:

Going for refuge to the three virtuous objects of reverence
Is the root of the eight [types of] vows [of individual liberation].

And:

Even though one dwells in all the vows,
If one does not go for refuge, one has nothing.

The four seals are (1) that all compounded phenomena are impermanent, (2) that all contaminated phenomena are suffering, (3) that all phenomena are selfless, and (4) that nirvāṇa is peace.²⁷ As for training in the three trainings, one trains by way of the three—higher ethics, higher meditation, and higher wisdom—whereby one is virtuous in the beginning middle and end. In the *Brilliant*, it says:

The three trainings are well taught, and
The three seals along with the genuine one
Are virtuous in the beginning middle and end.
The wise realize what is spoken [by] the Buddha.

²⁷ The numbers have been added to the translation.

The result [of Buddhist vehicles] is the ability to transcend the peak of cyclic existence.

The broadest division of Buddhist paths, into Sūtra and Tantra. Sūtra is also known as the Causal Vehicle, or the Definition Vehicle, while Tantra is called the Resultant Vehicle, or the Vajra Vehicle. These names help describe the nature of each vehicle. Through definition and delineation, the Sūtra schools teach the causes for Buddhahood, while, by describing the inseparable, or vajra, union of appearance and emptiness, Tantras teach a path that embraces the effect, or result. This delineation by method also represents a historical difference. Sūtra preceded Tantra as a movement.

Within the Causal Vehicle there is a further division into two: the Lesser Vehicle (*theg dman, hīnayāna*) and the Great Vehicle (*theg chen, mahāyāna*). The Lesser Vehicle only realizes the truth of an individual's liberation, while the Great Vehicle acts as a door to inconceivable liberation for all. However, because Tantra is also included within the Great Vehicle, the Sūtra version of the Great Vehicle, which is the third of the nine vehicles, is here called the Bodhisattva Vehicle. Since the Bodhisattva Vehicle does not realize the same meaning as the Vajra Vehicle, Lochen Dharmashrī claims it does not realize reality, indicating Sūtra's inferiority to Tantra. The fact that he makes this claim is telling in that he is describing an irreparable rift in view between Sūtra and Tantra, which prevents Sūtra practitioners from achieving the highest form of enlightenment without first proceeding onto the Tantric path. He thus presents the following hierarchy:

1. Sūtra Vehicle
 - a. Lesser Vehicle
 - i. Hearer Vehicle
 - ii. Solitary Realizer Vehicle
 - b. Sūtra Great Vehicle (= Bodhisattva Vehicle)

2. Tantra Great Vehicle

Within the Lesser Vehicle are found the first two vehicles of the classic nine: the Hearer Vehicle and the Vehicle of Solitary Realizers. The doctrine of the first of these, the Hearer Vehicle, stems from the Buddhist community's first interpretation of the doctrine.

THE HEARER VEHICLE

Following the template laid down for all vehicles, Lochen Dharmashrī begins his discussion of the Hearer Vehicle with its definition:

That which is a method whereby the awareness desiring one's individual liberation from the world realizes the selflessness of persons.²⁸

This is followed by an etymology for the name. In Tibetan the name for the Hearer Vehicle is *nyan thos*, a translation of the Sanskrit term *śrāvaka*.²⁹ Because the term *śrāvaka* can mean both “one who hears” (*nyan*) and “one who listens” (*thos*), the Tibetan translation of the term is a combination of those two verbal roots. The reason that they are called Hearers is that they engage in both hearing and listening.

The author then proceeds to the six subtopics: entrance, view, ethics, cultivation, conduct, and result. The entrance into the Hearer Vehicle is described in the following terms:

Disgusted with the suffering of cyclic existence, one enters by way of the four truths with the thought seeking one's own peace and happiness.³⁰

²⁸ *'khor ba las rang gcig pa thar pa 'dod blos gang zag gi bdag med rtogs pa'i thabs su gyur pa/ (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 37.5-37.6)*

²⁹ *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 37.5-42.2; The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, vol. 1, 156-159.*

³⁰ *'khor ba'i duh khas yid skyo nas/ rang zhi bde don gnyer gyi bsam pas bden pa bzhi'i sgo nas 'jug (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 38.1).*

The central feature to the entrance is the four noble truths. As is well known, these are the truth of suffering, the truth of origin, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path. Lochen Dharmashrī portrays them by way a comparison with a sickness and its cure. The truth of suffering is like a sickness; the truth of origins is like the cause of that sickness; the truth of cessation is like the happiness of being free from that sickness; and the truth of the path is like the medicine, or antidote, to that disease. In terms of Buddhist practice these are respectively what is to be known, what is to be abandoned, what is to be attained, and what one relies on.

As for the **view** of hearers, Lochen Dharmashrī says that they believe:

The coarse appearance of things that are the objects of apprehension can be destroyed and vanquished through the antidotes and awareness; the mental continuum that is the apprehender can be destroyed through the factors of the three times, and this coarse appearance of subject and object does not have a nature apart from merely appearing conventionally. Therefore, although they realize the selflessness of persons, they do not destroy with antidotes and awareness the [notion of] very subtle atoms that are the foundation for building the coarse appearance of things, the objects of apprehension, and since [for them] a moment of the apprehending mind does not have temporal parts, they hold the subtle apprehending subject and apprehended object as ultimate [truths]. Thus, they do not realize the selflessness of phenomena.³¹

³¹ *gzung yul dngos po rags snang 'di gnyen po dang blos gzhig cing gzhom du rung ba'i phyir dang / 'dzin pa sems gyi rgyun dus gsum gyi chas gzhig tu rung ba'i phyir dang / gzung 'dzin rags pa 'di kun rdzob tu snang ba tsam las rang bzhin med pas gang zag gi bdag med par rtogs kyang / gzung yul dngos po rags snang rtsom pa'i gzhi rdul phra rab 'di gnyen po dang blos gzhom du med pa dang / 'dzin sems skad cig ma dus kyi cha dang bral bas gzung 'dzin phra ba don dam du 'dod pa'i phyir chos kyi bdag ma rtogs tel (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 38.3-38.6).*

Unlike the Bodhisattva Vehicle and the six tantra vehicles, which also realize the selflessness of phenomena, the Hearers only realize the selflessness of persons. They seek merely to overcome the coarse appearances of the self. For them, the illusion of the self is overcome by dissecting the objects into subtle atoms and subjective minds into discrete moments of consciousness. Apart from these coarse subjects and objects merely appearing conventionally, there is no inherent nature. In this way, they realize the selflessness of persons. However, Hearers do not believe it is possible to dissect the subtle atoms or discrete moments of consciousness that compose the coarse appearances of subjects and objects. Since, in their view, objects are composed of real atoms and the apprehending mind is composed of real moments of consciousness, they assert the ultimate existence of a subtle apprehended object and a subtle apprehending mind. Therefore, they do not realize the selflessness of phenomena.

The **ethics** followed by Hearers is composed of the eight types of vows for individual liberation. These are the eight related sets of vows taken by the eight kinds of Buddhist practitioner: laymen (*dge bsnyen*, *upāsaka*), laywoman (*dge bsnyen ma*, *upāsikā*), male practitioners of the fast (*bsnyen gnas*, *upavāsa*) and female practitioners of the fast (*bsnyen gnas ma*, *upavāsī*), male novices (*dge tshul*, *śrāṃṇera*) and female novices (*dge tshul ma*, *śrāṃṇerika*), monks (*dge slong*, *bhikṣu*) and nuns (*dge slong ma*, *bhikṣuṇī*). The four levels, each with a male and female version, create a spectrum of practitioners ranging from the lay level to the specialist level of intensity. These vows are contained in the Discipline (*'dul ba*, *vinaya*) section of the Buddhist canon. The main set of these rules are the 250 vows taken by monks.

The **cultivation** (*bsgom pa*, *bhāvanā*) of the Hearers is a process that relies on pure ethics and initially involves listening to the scriptures of the Hearer Vehicle from a virtuous friend, or master. After hearing about the doctrine, one next contemplates the meaning of what was heard and finally meditates on those thoughts. In so doing, the mind is made serviceable

with calm abiding (*zhi gnas, samatha*), through meditating on a particular topic, such as ugliness, which acts as an antidote to desire. After that, one develops a special insight (*lhag mthong, vipāśyanā*) that contemplates the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths.³² In that way, one sees through and abandons the afflictive emotions of the three realms of existence (*kham s gsum*).

As for the **activities** of a Hearer, these involve the twelve qualities of purification, or the "twelve ascetic virtues" (*sbyangs pa'i yon tan bcu gnyis, dvādaśadhūtaguṇa*).³³ These are qualities that are recognized as the common practices of classical Buddhist monks, such as wearing only discarded clothing, eating only one meal a day that is received through begging, staying in isolation outdoors, and meditating in charnel grounds. Because in doing such activities one is seeking personal liberation, it is said that the activities of a Hearer involve mainly acting for one's own welfare.

Finally, there are two types of **fruits** or **results** for the Hearer Vehicle: situational results (*gnas skabs kyi 'bras bu*) that occur along the way and the final result. The three situational results are becoming a stream entrant, becoming a once returner, and becoming a never returner. The final result has two types: foe destroyers with remainder and foe destroyers without remainder, depending on whether or not their wisdom has passed from the contaminated body. The fruit of the Hearer Vehicle is the last aspect to be discussed by

³² According to Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 292-296, the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths are:

| <u>I. True Sufferings</u> | <u>II. True Origins</u> | <u>III. True Cessations</u> | <u>IV. True Paths</u> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| i. Impermanence | i. Cause | i. Cessation | i. Path |
| ii. Misery | ii. Origin | ii. Pacification | ii. Suitability |
| iii. Emptiness | iii. Strong Production | iii. Auspicious highness | iii. Achievement |
| iv. Selflessness | iv. Condition | iv. Definite emergence | iv. Deliverance. |

³³ These are 1. wearing clothing from a dust-heap, 2. owning only three robes, 3. wearing coarse clothe, 4. begging for food, 5. eating one's meal in a single sitting, 6. restricting the quantity of food, 7. living in isolation, 8. sitting under trees, 9. sitting in exposed places, 10. sitting in charnel grounds, 11. sitting even during sleep, and 12. staying wherever one happens to be. See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 169.

Lochen Dharmashrī in *The Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*. He then moves on to the second of the nine vehicles.

The Hearer Vehicle described in Lochen Dharmashrī's *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instruction* is clearly equivalent to modern-day Theravāda Buddhism in its view, path, and goal.³⁴ Theravāda Buddhism itself has strong affinities with the first stage of Buddhism's historical development in its formative period, during the śramaṇic movement. As an ascetic, Buddhism's founder, Siddhārtha, renounced his family and wealth and fled to the forest to meditate. There he sought through asceticism to gain liberation from the cycle of rebirth, whereby he would attain liberation for himself. What he found was not liberation (*mokṣa*) but extinction (*nirvāṇa*) of the false notion of a self, about which he spent his remaining days teaching. The Buddha preached a reinterpretation of the śramaṇic movement, deconstructing the Self and ethicizing *karma*. The early Buddhist doctrine, as far as it can be garnered from existing sources, is closely similar to Lochen Dharmashrī's description of the Hearer Vehicle—renunciation, isolation, asceticism. In the same way, modern Theravāda Schools, which are instances of the Hearer Vehicle, are modeled upon these “original” teachings of the Buddha. While its contemporary manifestation are the modern-day Theravāda schools, the Hearer Vehicle also represents the chronologically earliest stratum of Buddhist practitioner.

THE SOLITARY REALIZER VEHICLE

Lochen Dharmashrī moves next to the Solitary Realizer Vehicle. This vehicle does not obviously equate to a historical development within Buddhist thought. Instead, it is a category evolved as the logical consequence of Buddhism's doctrine of self-reliance. The

³⁴ Excellent descriptions of Theravāda Buddhism philosophy and practice may be found in Richard Gombrich's *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988) and Steven Collins' *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

inclusion of the Solitary Realizer Vehicle in the doxography allows for the possibility of individual's achieving the Buddhist goal on their own without indoctrination into the religion. In *The Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, the definition given for the Solitary Realizer Vehicle is somewhat obscure:

A method for actualizing enlightenment in one's last existence without relying on a master, where one meditates on the way of dependent arising through realizing one and one-half selflessnesses.³⁵

Lochen Dharmashrī calls the practitioners of this vehicle, “Solitary Realizers” (*rang rgyal, pratyekaBuddha*), precisely because they realize their enlightenment alone or in a small, select group *without* relying on a master. Similarly, they keep their realization to themselves. Teaching only a select group of disciples through gestures, they do not broadcast the doctrine to the general public.

The **entrance** into the Solitary Realizer path is by way of the twelve links of dependent origination instead of the four noble truths.³⁶ Lochen Dharmashrī describes their entrance thus:

[In their next to last life,] they understand that in their [present] body they will not have the fortune to achieve enlightenment, and so they make prayer-wishes. Due to these prayer-wishes, they take birth in a world where no Buddhas or Hearers have taken hold.... In that body, they become monks on

³⁵ *slob dpon la ma brten par srid pa tha ma'i tsho byang chub mngon du byed pa'i thabs bdag med phyed dang gnyis rtogs kyi sgo nas rten 'brel gyi lam bsgom pal* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 42.2-42.3).

³⁶ The twelve links are: 1. ignorance (*ma rig pa, avidyā*), 2. karmic formations (*'dus byed kyi las, saṃskāra karma*), 3. consciousness (*rnam shes, vijñāna*), 4. name-and-form (*ming gzugs, nāmarūpa*), 5. the six senses (*skye mched drug*), 6. contact (*reg pa, sparsha*), 7. feeling (*tshor ba, vedanā*), 8. attachment (*sred pa, tṛṣṇā*), 9. grasping (*len pa, upādāna*), 10. existence (*srid pa, bhava*), 11. birth (*skye ba, jāti*), 12. aging and death (*rga shi, jarāmaraṇa*). These are described with slightly different translations in Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 275-283. The twelve links is also a doctrine of modern Theravāda. The separation of the doctrine of the four noble truths and the doctrine of dependent arising between two vehicles is at odds with the historical reality. This belies the artificiality of Solitary Realizer Vehicle concept.

their own without a skilled master, and when they proceed to the cremation grounds, immediately upon seeing the bones, their minds turn toward [the nature of] cyclic existence. Through analyzing from where these bones arise, [they understand that the bones] arise from old age and death. Old age and death arise from birth, and so forth. Through such a progression they realize that the root of cyclic existence is ignorance. Thinking “How is one liberated from this?”, [they understand that] when ignorance is stopped, formational factors are stopped, all the way up to old age and death are stopped. Thus, they enter [the Solitary Realizer Vehicle] by way of the reverse direction of dependent arising.³⁷

With this passage, Lochen Dharmashrī explains how a Solitary Realizer can achieve liberation on his or her own without relying on a teacher. They do so through spontaneously realizing the twelve links of dependent origination and understanding that by reversing these steps one is liberated. This category allows for the possibility of persons who have attained realization without having actually heard the Buddhist teachings. The fact that it was admitted into the hierarchy of Buddhist doctrines shows a concern to include the possibility of the spontaneous realization of enlightenment, a concern especially powerful for the Old Schools who openly allow new revelation. However, the description is done in distinctly Buddhist terms. Such people automatically see the cause and effect chain leading from ignorance to old age and death, dependent arising. In particular, one enters the Solitary

³⁷ *rten de la byang chub thog pa'i skal ba med par shes nas smon lam btab pas sangs rgyas dang nyan thos kyi yongs su ma bzung ba'i jig rten du skye ba len tel... /rten de la mkhan slob med par rang byung gi dge slong du gyur cing / dur khrod du phyin nal rus ba mthong ma thag 'khor ba la yid byung stel rus pa 'di dang / gang las byung brtags pas rga shi las byung / de skye ba las byung ba sogsl 'di ltar rim gyis 'khor ba'i rtsa ba ma rig par rtogs tel 'di las ji ltar thar bar bya snyam pa nal yang ma rig pa 'gags na 'du byed 'gag pa nas rga shi'i bar 'gag pa stel lugs ldog rten 'brel rtogs pa'i sgo nas 'jug pa'ol (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 43.2-43.5).*

Realizer Vehicle through realizing “the reverse direction of dependent arising” (*lugs ldog rten 'brel*).

As for their **view**, Solitary Realizers see cyclic existence and nirvāṇa through the cause and effect of dependent arising. Like hearers, they comprehend a selflessness of persons, but in addition they also realize that the extremely subtle atoms are wrongly conceived as a self of phenomena, even though they ultimately lack inherent nature. However, Solitary Realizers view the momentary mind that is presently the apprehender as ultimately existing. To fully realize the selflessness of phenomena, one must realize it with regard to both objects *and* subjects. Thus, Solitary Realizers are described as “Those who realize one-and-one-half selflessnesses,”³⁸ because they realize the whole selflessness of persons but only half of the selflessness of phenomena, the selflessness of external phenomena but not of internal phenomena, such as minds.

The **ethics** for the Solitary Realizers are the same 250 rules of the Discipline as the Hearers follow. As for their **cultivation**, Lochen Dharmashrī says, they mainly meditate on the reverse direction of the twelve links of dependent arising as the antidote to cyclic existence. Concerning their **activities**, they do not communicate the doctrine to trainees with their mouth but effect the meaning through physical gestures. In terms of their **results**, Solitary Realizers who are like a rhinoceros (*bse ru lta bu*) complete the five paths by themselves in one sitting. With the supreme wish-fulfilling bliss, they become foe-destroyers who know that all contaminations are exhausted and that they will have no more rebirths. The parrot-like (*ne co lta bu*) Solitary Realizers achieve some of the paths prior to their final realization and practice together in small groups. The discussion of the fruit concludes Lochen Dharmashrī’s explanation of the Solitary Realizer Vehicle.

³⁸ *bdag med phyed dang gnyis rtogs zhes bya stel* (*Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*, 43.6-44.1).

The Solitary Realizers are somewhat of a mythical group, as is evident in their definition. They are said to realize enlightenment in isolation without the aid of a master and are not known for teaching the doctrine except through physical gestures. In some traditional works Solitary Realizers are described as maintaining the continuity of the doctrinal lineage through times when the religion is not extensively practiced in the world.³⁹ In this sense, they appear to be a logical consequence of the Indian Buddhist cyclical worldview. Whether or not that is the case, by the time Buddhism infiltrated Tibet, Solitary Realizers were an accepted part of the intellectual landscape, and the belief in them was adopted by Tibetans without hesitation. The Solitary Realizer Vehicle may have been merely a philosophically necessary classification, or it could be that they represent an actual group of practitioners, as the other vehicles do. Of the nine vehicles, the Solitary Realizer Vehicle is the only one that does not correspond to a historical development in the community's interpretation of the doctrine. The description evokes images of the group of forest-dwelling renunciates out of which Buddhism emerged, a loosely-defined movement called the *śramaṇas*, or ascetics. While, on the one hand, the Solitary Realizer Vehicle can be seen as a philosophical necessity to explain how the doctrine maintains continuity through dark ages, on the other hand, it may represent an older practice that has fallen into obscurity due to its relative lack of social responsibility.⁴⁰

³⁹ A good description of Solitary Realizers is found in Mañjuśrī's story of his previous life as a faux-Solitary Realizer in the *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra*. See Etienne Lamotte & Sara Boin-Webb, trans., *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra: The Concentration of Heroic Progress, An early Mahāyāna Buddhist Scripture* (London: Curzon Press & The Buddhist Society, 1998), 214-215.

⁴⁰ The tension between the individualism of the *śramaṇa* movement and the social responsibility that became part of Buddhism is symbolically described in some stories of the Buddha's post enlightenment experience. Having left his family and having wandered for six years in search of the truth that is the solution to suffering, Siddhārtha finally realizes enlightenment on his own under the Bodhi tree. His immediate plan is to keep this realization to himself, because there would be no one who could understand it. Only after the god, Brahmā, descends from heaven and pleads with the Buddha to at least try communicating his realization, does the sage finally assent to begin his teaching. On the other hand, Tibetans traditionally explain the Buddha's hesitation by saying that his refraining from teaching was in fact his first teaching, warning that the Buddhist teachings are extremely difficult.

THE BODHISATTVA VEHICLE

Having finished with the two branches of the lower vehicle, Lochen Dharmashrī turns to the Bodhisattva Vehicle.⁴¹ This vehicle represents the Sūtra version of the Mahāyāna, or Great Vehicle. Mahāyāna was a popular movement within Buddhism that began at least as early as the time of Aśoka (ruled 269-232 BCE) and came to fruition with the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* (1st century BCE) and the philosopher-adept Nāgārjuna (1st-2nd century CE). By the time Tibetans began to adopt Buddhism formally in the eighth century, Mahāyāna was the prevalent form of Buddhism in northern India and opposed itself to the earlier form of Buddhism, which they called the “Hīnayāna” (Lesser Vehicle). By the eighth century Tantra had also emerged. So, there were two types of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, the Sūtra-based version and the Tantra-based version. Both were adopted by the Tibetans.

Thus, all of Tibetan Buddhism may be classified as Mahāyāna, though the religion can be further divided into Sūtra Mahāyāna and Tantra Mahāyāna. In the nine vehicles, the division between Sūtra and Tantra is of greater importance in determining the structure than the Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna division. Sūtra is represented by the first three vehicles, while Tantra is represented by the last six. This is also the division governing Lochen Dharmashrī’s discussion, as the section on the nine vehicles is broken into 1. the causal, definition vehicles, or Sūtra, and 2. the resultant vajra vehicles, or Tantra.⁴²

The third vehicle of the nine vehicles is the Sūtra form of the Great Vehicle. It is called the Bodhisattva Vehicle, since the term “Great Vehicle” covers a larger scope including both Sūtra and Tantra. Following the previous two vehicles the third vehicle is also named after its main practitioner, the Bodhisattva. This vehicle represents the classical, non-Tantric form of the Mahāyāna, whose ideal practitioner is a Bodhisattva, one who seeks enlightenment for the welfare of all beings. Lochen Dharmashrī portrays the Bodhisattva Vehicle in a canonical

⁴¹ *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*, 46.1-52.4.

⁴² *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*, 37.3.

way, emphasizing its focus on the cultivation of compassion and the realization of emptiness. His discussion of the Bodhisattva Vehicle is prefaced by an explanation of the Great Vehicle's general superiority over the Lesser Vehicle. It is superior because with its great wisdom one is able to realize the two selflessnesses as the fundamental norm (*rnal ma*) and through its great compassion, one is able to do something to benefit others. The Lesser Vehicle, or Hīnayāna, as represented by the previous two vehicles, does not have such great wisdom or compassion. Hence, this is the reason for their respective names.

After explaining the general merits of the Great Vehicle, Lochen Dharmashrī turns to more specifically to the Bodhisattva Vehicle, which he defines as:

That which is the excellent method whereby one realizes that all phenomena are selfless and, out of great compassion, performs great waves [of good activities] for the sake of others.⁴³

With regard to the name of this vehicle, “Bodhisattva” is said to mean a being (*sattva*) who is striving for the enlightenment of a Buddha (*bodhi*). In Tibetan ‘Bodhisattva’ is translated as *byang chub sems dpa'*, where *byang chub* is *bodhi*, or enlightenment, and *sems dpa'* is *sattva*, or being. In both languages, the root word for ‘a being’ has a connotation of heroism to it, and in certain situations can even merit the translation of “warrior”. In his book *The Heart Sūtra Explained* Donald Lopez describes the etymology of the Tibetan term *byang chub sems dpa'* thus:

The term *byang chub* is the Tibetan translation of *bodhi*. *Byang* means purified and *byang pa* means learned. *Chub* means accomplished. Because Bodhisattvas are seeking to purify all faults and attain all good qualities, they are purified and accomplished (*byang chub*). Or, because they have studied

⁴³ *chos thams cad bdag med par rtogs shing / snying rje chen pos gzhan don rlabs po che spyod pa'i thabs dam par gyur pa!* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 46.5).

(*byang pa*) the two truths repeatedly and arrived at (*chub*) their meaning, they are accomplished in learning (*byang chub*). As mentioned, the Tibetan translation of *sattva* is *sems dpa'*, literally “mind-heroic.” Bodhisattvas are called heroic contemplatives (*sems dpa*) because they contemplate the welfare of transmigrators and annihilate demons and because they have endured hardship in repeatedly contemplating the two truths.⁴⁴

Through the great strength of their minds, the ideal practitioners of this vehicle are one-pointedly and effortlessly focused on achieving the highest enlightenment; because of this, they are called Bodhisattvas, or heroic warriors for enlightenment.

Lochen Dharmashrī discusses the Bodhisattva Vehicle through the same six categories as the previous two vehicles, namely its entrance, view, ethics, conduct, cultivation, and result. The **entrance** of the Bodhisattva Vehicle is by way of the two truths – conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa, samvṛtisatya*) and ultimate truth (*don dam bden pa, paramārthasatya*). According the Middle Way system, appearances occur uninvestigated and unanalyzed. However, when one has an awareness that knows appearances to be without truth, or entity, like illusions, and when with this awareness one joins the mind seeking enlightenment to great compassion and love, one engages appearances as conventional truths by way of entering into virtue and eschewing non-virtue. One also knows the ultimate truth that everything’s dispositional mode of abiding (*gshis kyi gnas lugs*) is devoid of conceptual elaborations. Thereby, one enters the doctrine by way of a union of the two truths.

All existent things, or objects of knowledge, are included in these two truths, the conventional truth that appears and the ultimate truth that is the way things are. Conventional truths are phenomena with characteristics that appear to an awareness as objects. There are both true and false conventional truths. True conventional truths appear

⁴⁴ Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Heart Sūtra Explained* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991), 38-39.

and are able to perform functions, like a man appearing as a man. False conventional truths appear but are unable to perform the functions of their appearance, such as a cairn appearing as a man.⁴⁵ The ultimate truth is that everything is devoid of all the extremes of conceptual elaboration. There is an enumerated ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) that is devoid of some portion of elaboration and the non-enumerated ultimate (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*) that is devoid of all elaborations. The former is merely “counted” as the ultimate, though it is not the fully qualified ultimate because some elaborations are still present. The latter is “not [merely] counted as the ultimate” (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*), because it is the fully qualified ultimate. Lastly, Lochen Dharmashrī says that one may wonder whether such two truths are one or different. Conventionally, they have one nature, but they are different conceptual isolates, just like a pool of water and a moon reflected in it. That is the union of the two truths.

The Great Vehicle **view** is the irreversible realization of the two selflessnesses.⁴⁶ One realizes the mode of being that is the union of the two truths, through all phenomena appearing conventionally like illusions and realizing how all elaborations are ultimately pacified in emptiness. The **ethics** of the Great Vehicle is three-fold: the vows for gathering virtue, vows for working for the sake of others, and vows for abandoning harmful activity. Great Vehicle **cultivation** is in general to cultivate the thirty-seven qualities of enlightenment on the four learner paths.⁴⁷ More specifically, there is the way the path of the Great Vehicle is cultivated from the beginning. According to the sūtras of definitive

⁴⁵ *dbye nal snang la don byed nus pa mi la mir snang ba lta bu yang dag kun rdzob/ snang la don bye mi nus pa tho yor la mir snang ba lta bu log pa'i kun rdzob stel* (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 47.5-47.6).

⁴⁶ *lta ba nil bdag med gnyis phyin ci ma log par rtogs pa'ol* (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 49.4).

⁴⁷ The thirty-seven qualities of enlightenment are a standard enumeration of the path in Great Vehicle Buddhism. They are listed in the *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 2, 184) as consisting of the four essential recollections (*dran pa nyer gzbag bzhi*), four correct trainings (*yang dag spong bzhi*), the four supports for miraculous ability (*rdzu 'phrul rkang bzhi*), the five faculties (*dbang po lnga*), the five powers (*stobs lnga*), the seven branches of enlightenment (*byang chub yan lag bdun*), and the eightfold path. The four learner paths are the path of accumulation (*tshogs lam*), path of preparation (*sbyor lam*), the path of seeing (*mtshong lam*), and the path of meditation (*sgom lam*) (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 136).

meaning, which Lochen Dharmashrī says are those of the *last* turning of the wheel of the doctrine—the Mind Only sūtras, one initially comprehends how everyone has a Buddha Essence. Having that for a reason, one then generates the mind seeking supreme enlightenment. This creates a meditative stabilization in which objects appear unhindered but apprehending conceptuality is pacified. This is calm-abiding. Special insight is to view appearances according to the eight similes of illusion,⁴⁸ and having decided that all coarse and subtle subjects and objects are empty, one investigates empty reality and places oneself in equipoise on the middle way free from extremes.

It is worthy to note that Lochen Dharmashrī here advocates the third turning of the wheel of doctrine as being definitive in meaning. The notion of three turnings of the wheel of doctrine is first mentioned in Mind Only sūtras, such as the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*.⁴⁹ The first wheel is the canon of the Hearer Vehicle, now preserved as the Pali Canon, containing the earliest sūtras. The second wheel is comprised of the Mahāyāna sūtras on the Perfection of Wisdom, the next major stage in Buddhism's doctrinal development. The third and final wheel contains the later Mahāyāna sūtras that promulgate Mind Only and Buddha Essence thought. Though the tradition views the three wheels as a doctrinal division, they also represent a historical evolution, since Pali sūtras of the first wheel were written before the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras of the second, which were written before the Mind Only sūtras of the third.

Most of the New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism take the second turning of the wheel as definitive, following the Middle Way School of Mahāyāna thought. Many scholars of the Old Schools, however, view the Mind Only scriptures, or the third turning, as definitive.

⁴⁸ These are being like a dream (*rmi lam, svapna*), illusion (*sgyu mad, māyā*), optical illusion (*mig yor, pratibhāsa*), mirage (*smig rgyu, marīci*), reflection of moon in water (*chu zla, udakacandra*), echo (*brag cha, partīsutkā*), castle in the sky (*dri za'i grong khyer, gandharvanagara*), and a magical emanation (*sprul pa, nirmita*) (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 161).

⁴⁹ P774, vol. 29.

Dudjom Rinpoché also asserts this when discussing the fundamentals of the Old Schools' doctrines. In his view, the third-wheel teachings are definitive because they differentiate between the emptiness of conventional appearances and the emptiness of ultimate reality. Concerning these teachings, he says:

Definitive meaning, on the other hand, is allocated to the third promulgation because [therein] things of relative appearance are empty of their own essence and the ultimate reality is empty of extraneous entities, so that the nature of these [attributes] is qualitatively well distinguished and then revealed.⁵⁰

The Old School adherence to the third rather than the second wheel of the doctrine has important implications in the development of their tantric doctrine. The belief that appearances arise from one's own mind is evident in the self-dawning doctrine of the *Secret Essence*, where pure appearances are called the self-appearances of primordial wisdom and impure appearances are the self-appearances of ordinary mind. Also, the substitution of an ultimate that is an affirming negative rather than a non-affirming negative as in the Middle Way allows for the assertion of an enlightened nature beyond the mentally created illusions. In the *Secret Essence* school, the union of primordial wisdom and the sphere of reality, emptiness, is the pure nature within all phenomena. Such a view is not possible from a Middle Way standpoint; it reflects instead a Mind Only orientation.

The Great Vehicle **practice**, according to *The Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, is to act for the welfare of sentient beings through cherishing others as oneself in the post-meditation period. This practice is composed of the six or ten perfections. As for the **result**, one progresses along the ten grounds or five paths to the path of no more learning, or the eleventh ground, the ground of thorough radiance (*kun tu 'od kyi sa*). At that point, one discards the body that seeks to serve oneself and adopts two form bodies to work for the sake

⁵⁰ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 188.

of others. With these, one acts for the welfare of all sentient beings until cyclic existence is emptied.

SŪTRA VERSUS TANTRA

The next six vehicles of the hierarchy are all Tantric vehicles. Within the nine-fold hierarchical classification Tantra is distinctly emphasized not only because it has the highest berths but also because its vehicles are more numerous. In fact, Lochen Dharmashrī's explanation of the next six vehicles begins with a discussion of Tantra's general superiority over Sūtra.⁵¹ In general, Tantra is said to be superior to Sūtra because Sūtra takes the causes for Buddhahood as its path whereas Tantra uses the fruit of Buddhahood as its path. The discussion of Tantra's superiority begins with a standard objection brought up by a hypothetical practitioner of the "Definition Vehicle", i.e., Sūtra. This person asks whether the fruit that Tantra takes as a path is an already-ripened fruit or a not-yet-ripened fruit, attempting to trap the Tantric practitioner into an absurd consequence. For, if the fruit that is the effect of the Tantric path is already ripened, then there would be an infinite regress, since whatever ripened fruit occurred would need to be taken again as the path, like using last year's fruit as this year's seeds. On the other hand, if the fruit were not yet ripened, this would not be taking the fruit as the path, since there has been no fruition and that which is not ripe cannot be the final fruit. Lochen Dharmashrī's response helps elucidate the paradigmatic shift from Sūtra to Tantra:

In terms of the way it is, the entity of the fact to be obtained abides in oneself, but in terms of realization, it is not realized. Therefore, just the method for realizing that [entity] is designated as "taking [the result] as the path". [Buddhaghya's] *Stages of the Path* says:

⁵¹ *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 52.5-57.3.

Thus, primordial wisdom abides in oneself.

It is the entity of all paths and results.

Because of this identity, there is the great method.

Therefore, actualization is nothing more than bringing it out of oneself.⁵²

That response is countered by another question from the hypothetical Sūtra opponent: when the path actualizes a fruit that already abides in oneself, is the previously existing fruit produced or not? Lochen Dharmashrī replies that in terms of its entity the fruit is not produced, but a manifestation and clarity of the fruit are produced at the time of Buddhahood.

The frequently cited example, to which he likens this, is that of a prince who is to be king wandering lost and unrecognized among the people, unaware of his true identity. When he is recognized for who he is, he is able to rule the people. His pedigree does not change, just the fact that he is recognized and manifests the power of royalty. This is a common simile in this genre of literature and among the Old School Tantrics in particular. A similar image is found in the *Sublime Continuum*, a Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha Essence) text that is purported to be the teaching of Maitreya, the future Buddha. In this text, the Buddha Essence is compared to, among other things, a future king within the womb of a low-caste mother. The *Sublime Continuum* is a central text for both the Mind Only movement and the Buddha Essence movement. We have already seen how Lochen Dharmashrī designates the third turning of the wheel—the Mind Only and Buddha Essence scriptures—as the teaching of definitive meaning. Such evidence demonstrates a strong connection between the Old schools' interpretation of Tantra and both of these movements. Furthermore, it appears that

⁵² *yin tshul nas thob bya don gyi ngo bo rang la gnas kyang / rtogs tshul nas ma rtogs pas/ de rtogs pa'i thabs tsam la lam du byed ces bdogs tel lam rim las/ de ltar ye shes rang gnas pa/ llam dang 'bras bu kun ngo bol /'brel ba bdag phyir thabs chen pos/ lmngon byed rang las byung bar zad/ (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 53.2-53.4).*

the influence of these Indian movements was stronger in the Old Schools of Tibetan Buddhism than in the New. This is most apparently the case with the inner tantras.

The Old Schools' predilection for the Third Wheel Scriptures is the result of an historical process. The tantras themselves were influenced by the Mind Only and Buddha Essence theories, following immediately on their wake historically. Like Mind Only, some tantras see ordinary appearances as the product of one's own mind, and like the Buddha Essence School, some tantras describe the path as manifesting what is already there but hidden. The Old Schools are, for obvious reasons, more closely related to an earlier form of Tibetan Buddhism that existed prior to second dissemination beginning with Atiśa. It was only during the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet that the Consequentialist branch of the Middle Way assumed the position as the pre-eminent Buddhist philosophy. The initial Indian patriarchs of Tibetan Buddhism, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, founded the Yogic Practice Autonomists, a branch of the Middle Way School that was influenced by Mind Only School, also known as the Yogic Practice School. The Yogic Practice Autonomists adopt the Mind Only belief that there are no external objects.⁵³ The formation of the "Old School" as a discrete branch of Tibetan Buddhism was part of the same historical process that formed the New Schools. However, the origins of the Old Schools stretch back to the initial insemination of Buddhism in Tibet, when the Yogic Practice Autonomists were most influential. It is probably the case that the Consequentialist movement was not in the beginning as prominent as it is among present-day Tibetan Buddhists but was rather competing with versions of the Mind Only and Buddha Essence movements. It was during this period that the roots of the Old Schools were formed and the influences of these latter forms of Buddhism are more wide ranging than those of the New Schools. The case could even be made that the exclusion of the Old Schools' tantras is a result of an inability to

⁵³ Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness* (London: Wisdom, 1983), 362.

reconcile them with the Consequentialist worldview. In any case, the interpretation of Tantra presented in the *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* is certainly influenced by Mind Only and Buddha Essence teachings, as seen by the precedence given to the third turning of the wheel of the doctrine that represents the scriptures of those schools.

In short, Lochen Dharmashrī says that the Sūtra or Definition Vehicle is called the Causal Vehicle, because the mind-itself (*sems nyid*) is taken as the cause for Buddhahood. They assert that one attains Buddhahood by advancing to higher stages on account of the two collections of merit and wisdom, and they take pure phenomena as the path that is the cause for Buddhahood. In this way, they assert a cause that precedes the effect. On the other hand, the Tantra or Secret Mantra Vehicle is called the Effect Vehicle, because they assert that the mind-itself has the nature of the effect—enlightened form and primordial wisdom—and primordially abides within oneself. They posit one thing that is both the cause and effect.

At this point Lochen Dharmashrī launches into an explanation of the three continuums (*rgyud gsum*). The meaning of the Sanskrit word *tantra* and the Tibetan word *rgyud* is “continuum”. The *locus classicus* for the discussion of the three continuums is the *Supplemental Tantra of the Secret Assembly*.⁵⁴ It speaks of three tantras, traditionally designated: ground, path, and fruit. The *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* describes how they are related as one continuum. From the perspective that the primordially abiding nature presently exists within oneself, it is called the ground or basis (*gzhi*). From the perspective of identifying it through acts of knowing and engaging, thus clearing away the adventitious defilements, it is called the path (*lam*). From the viewpoint of having actualized this ground through the path, it is called the fruit, or result (*'bras bu*). In fact, the Tantric Vehicle, according to Lochen Dharmashrī, does not differentiate earlier and later causes and effects.

⁵⁴ This is verse 33 of chapter 18 of the *Secret Assembly*. See chapter 1 for a full quotation.

For these reasons, it is known as the Effect Vehicle, or the Vajra Vehicle, the vajra representing an indivisible unity of reality.

The indivisibility of the conventional and ultimate truths or appearance and reality is an important theme for the *Secret Essence*, and Lochen Dharmashrī does not waste the opportunity to quote from the tantra itself on this topic. The particular passage he cites comes from the twelfth chapter, “On Collective Achievement”, though the sentiment is repeated throughout the tantra. This kind of quote is often used in the commentarial tradition to demonstrate that Buddhahood lies within:

Complete Buddhahood will not be found
In any of the four times or ten directions.
The mind-itself is complete Buddhahood.
Do not look for Buddhahood elsewhere.⁵⁵

Both the higher and lower tantras take the effect as the path. In the lower tantras, one does so through wisdom and the full number of ritual steps. In the higher tantras, there is nothing apart from the object of attainment, the effect. There is no progressing to that which has been ripened. Instead, the fruit itself is taken as the entity of the path, which is the means for its own manifestation. In the outer tantras, practitioners meditate viewing the enlightened form, speech, and mind of a deity, and in the inner tantras, they cultivate the realization that all phenomena have the nature of the maṇḍala of enlightened form, speech, and mind. Thus, both groups take the effect as the path.

Previous teachers have also asserted that the difference between Sūtra and Tantra is whether or not they are able to take conventionalities as the path. In the Perfection Vehicle, another name for the Sūtra Vehicle, the ultimate truth is the thing to be realized or achieved,

⁵⁵ *'di nyid las/ dus bzhi phyogs bcu gang nas kyang / rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas brnyes mi 'gyur/ lsems nyid rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas tel/ sangs rgyas gzhan du ma 'tshol zhi/ (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 54.4-54.5). Cf., Secret Essence, Tb.417, 191.4-191.5; Secret Essence, Tk.218, 38.4-38.5.*

and conventional truths are to be abandoned. However, in Mantra, since conventionally one practices with equality towards all phenomena, they take conventionalities as the path without abandoning them. Tantra is thus superior to Sūtra because it is not partial to one of the two truths. Lochen Dharmashrī again quotes Buddhaguhya as an proponent of this view.

INNER VERSUS OUTER TANTRA

Having discussed the difference between Sūtra and Tantra, Lochen Dharmashrī next turns to the various grades of tantra. The New Schools classify Tantra according to a fourfold doxographical scheme: Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra, and Highest Yoga Tantra. The first three are also called the lower tantras; the last group contains the higher tantras. The highest category is further divided into three sub-categories: Father, Mother, and Non-Dual tantras. However, among the Old Schools, these sub-divisions of the highest category, or something similar, are raised to the level of primary categories. The three lower tantric vehicles are called the “outer tantras of austerity” (*phyi thub pa rgyud*), and they are surpassed by three highest tantric vehicles, called the “inner tantras of method” (*nang thabs kyi rgyud*). The three inner tantra groups—Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga—are considered superior and therefore come at the top of the hierarchy.

Lochen Dharmashrī says that according to the teachings of the four main disciples of Dropukpa, the third patriarch of the Zur lineage,⁵⁶ there are five main differences between the inner and outer tantras. They differ by way of view, how they attain feats, initiation, practice, and effect. In terms of view, the inner tantras realize the identity of mind itself, whereas the outer tantras do not. As for how they attain feats, the outer tantras attain feats by hoping and asking the wisdom deity, but the inner tantras see the feats within the person, him or herself, since the mind-itself appears on its own as the maṇḍala of enlightened form and primordial wisdom. With regard to initiation, the outer tantras do not have the higher

⁵⁶ *zur lugs*. The Zur lineage is one of the Tibetan interpretive traditions of the *Secret Essence*.

three supreme initiations, whereas the inner tantras take those as their main ones. As for their practice, in the inner tantras one is able to practice with a method that uses the twenty phenomena of cyclic existence.⁵⁷ In the outer tantras, one cannot do this. Finally, in terms of the effect, the outer tantras achieve their result in three, five, or seven lifetimes, whereas the inner tantras achieve it in this very life. Other Tibetan scholarly opinions concerning the difference between the outer and inner tantras are also recorded in the *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*. The one worth noting, however, is that of Drölmawa Samdrup Dorjé (1295-1376 CE) and Yungtönpa Dorjepel (1284-1365 CE).⁵⁸ These two great scholars were the inheritors of the uninterrupted lineage from Dropukpa, the third patriarch of the Zur lineage.⁵⁹ According to their textual lineages, the inner tantras assert that the three—view, practice, and meditation—are indifferentiable, but the outer tantras do not.

THE ACTION TANTRA VEHICLE

Within the upper six tantric vehicles, Lochen Dharmashrī first describes the three outer tantras—Action, Performance, and Yoga.⁶⁰ The initial of these is Action Tantra. *The Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* defines Action Tantra as:

That which is a method whereby, through realizing the purity that is free from the four extremes as the ultimate truth, one conventionally hopes and strives for other feats.⁶¹

⁵⁷ The twenty phenomena are viewing each of the five aggregates as either the self, a possession of the self, part of the self, or the container of the self.

⁵⁸ These two commentators are often listed together as *sgrol g.yung gnyis* (e.g., *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 59.3).

⁵⁹ See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 666-668 for their hagiographies. See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 650ff. for their lineage. This section of the translation in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* is mistakenly labeled “Biographies of the Rong Tradition”, when in fact it concerns the lineage of the Zur System.

⁶⁰ The section on Action Tantra is from *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 59.5-63.1.

⁶¹ *don dam par mtha' bzhi dang bral ba'i dag par rtogs pas kun rdzob tu dngos grub gzhan la re zhing rtsol ba'i thabs su gyur pa!* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 59.5).

This vehicle is called “Action Tantra” (*bya ba'i rgyud, kriyātantra*), because it primarily teaches the performance of external actions and the attainment of external feats, which involve conventionalities. It is also divided into entrance, view, ethics, conduct, cultivation, and result. The **entrance** for Action Tantra has two parts: the initial entrance that serves to ripen the individual or initiation and the entrance of activities. The initial entrance is through the water and crown initiations and their accessories, which serve to make the student into a suitable vessel for the teachings of this vehicle. The entrance through actions is by way of three activities: bathing (*kehrus, snāta*), cleanliness (*gtsang sbra, śuchi*), and purity (*dag pa, śuddhi*). In this context, purity is threefold: purity of the deities and maṇḍala, purity of substances and enjoyments, and purity of mantra and meditative stabilization.

The **view** is described in terms of the two truths, conventional truths (*kun rdzob bden pa*) and the ultimate truth (*don dam bden pa*). For the ultimate truth Action Tantra asserts that the mind-itself (*sems nyid*) is the primordial wisdom of empty clarity that is devoid of the four extremes of existence, non-existence, appearance and emptiness. In the previous section, we saw that the Bodhisattva Vehicle divides conventional truths into correct and false conventionalities. Action Tantra takes both of these as false conventional truths. They assert that correct conventional truths are the good qualities of realizing reality appearing as the maṇḍala of the three families of deities.⁶²

Ethics in the Action Tantra Vehicle consists of eleven vows. There are five root vows, which deal mainly with cleanliness. These are the vows not to sleep on a throne, not to eat meat, not to drink beer, not to eat garlic, and not to eat radishes.⁶³ The branch vows are not to abandon the three jewels, not to abandon Bodhisattvas, not to abandon mantra, not to

⁶² The three families are the Tathāgata, Lotus, and Vajra families, represented respectively by Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi.

⁶³ *sgog pa la phug bza' mi bya* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 61.4). While Chandra Das (1202) defines *la phug* as “the radish: in Tibet a large round white root, not long and forked,” it appears from the Sanskrit term, *mūla*, and the use of *la phug* in other Tibetan compounds, such as *gung la phug* (carrot), that the term has a broader meaning.

abandon the seal (*phyag rgya, mudrā*), not to abandon the vajra and bell, and not to abandon the deity and lama.

The **cultivation** or **meditation** in Action Tantra is divided into that with signs and that without signs. Meditation with signs is generating the pledge-being, or oneself visualized as the deity, by way of a meditation known as the six deities (*lha drug*). The six deities refers to six stages in the meditative process. These are 1) meditation on one's emptiness as equivalent to the chosen deity's emptiness (the deity of emptiness, *stong pa nyid kyi lha*), 2) meditation on the sounds of the chosen deity's mantra emerging from that emptiness (the sound deity, *sgra'i lha*), 3) meditation on the letters of the mantra appearing on a moon-disc (the letter deity, *yi ge'i lha*), 4) meditation on these letters transforming into the form of the chosen deity (the form deity, *gzugs kyi lha*), 5) meditation on the sealing the visualization of oneself as the deity using hand-signs, or *mudrās* (the seal deity, *phyag rgya'i lha*), and 6) meditation on oneself as the deity (the sign deity, *mtshan ma'i lha*).⁶⁴ Then, having invited the wisdom being and making offerings, praising, and repeating mantra for it, one views the wisdom deity, i.e., the actual deity, the way a servant views their master and receives feats. The meditation without signs occurs after those six, when one's mind is placed in the purity of non-observation devoid of the four extremes, even though there are appearances from cultivating the deities with signs. In this way, one simultaneously meditates on each of the two truths.

The **activities** of Action Tantra are six fold. These are the astrological calculations for appropriate times of action, eating, dressing, cleaning, austerities for stabilizing one's observation, and the repetition of mantras. The final subdivision of Action Tantra is how they attain the **result**, or the **effect** of Buddhahood. Lochen Dharmashrī says that Action Tantras assert the attainment of the level of Vajra Holder in one of the three families. This

⁶⁴ H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Deity Yoga* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1987), 104-110.

level has the nature of the three enlightened forms—the Form Body, the Complete Enjoyment Body, and the Truth Body—and the five primordial wisdoms—the primordial wisdom of the sphere of reality, the mirror-like primordial wisdom, the primordial wisdom of equality, the primordial wisdom of individual concepts, and the primordial wisdom of accomplishing activities. This effect is achieved in seven lifetimes.

The Action Tantra Vehicle represents the earliest form of Tantric practice. Heavily influenced by Hinduism, it incorporates aspects of *pūja*—or offerings to the deities, the Brahmanical notion of purity, and the notion of subordination to the deity. Though the exact dating is difficult to establish, these tantras most likely developed during the late seventh century C.E. Discussing both the Hindu influence on and the approximate date for one Action Tantra, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, Glenn Wallis has this to contribute:

For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to note that the *Mmk* documents a form of Buddhism that was prevalent from, at the latest, the eighth century C.E. The strongest evidence for this is indirect: identical cultic patterns are recorded in Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava ritual texts. These texts are dated from the seventh to the ninth centuries with more certainty.⁶⁵

The influence of Hindu ritual texts continued in other forms of Buddhist tantras as well, including Mahāyoga. However, Action Tantras appear to be the earliest evidence of such influence at the time when Tantric forms of religion were developing in both Hinduism and Buddhism, during the seventh century C.E. From this perspective, it may be hypothesized Action Tantra represents the earliest form of Buddhist Tantra, a mixture of Hindu beliefs (monism, devotionism, and ritualism) with Mind Only and Buddha Essence thought.

⁶⁵ Glenn Wallis, *Mediating the Power of the Buddhas: Ritual in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa** (New York: SUNY Press, 2002), 10.

THE DUAL TANTRA VEHICLE

The second tantric vehicle is here called the “Dual Tantra Vehicle” (*gnyis ka'i rgyud*), because it takes some of its features from the previous vehicle, Action Tantra, and others it takes from the following vehicle, Yoga Tantra.⁶⁶ In other doxographies, this vehicle is called Performance Tantra (*spyod rgyud, cāryatantra*). But Lochen Dharmashrī focuses on its intermediate position and thus describes this vehicle as:

That which is a method for achieving feats through performing the view and meditation according to Yoga [Tantra] and by conducting oneself according to Action [Tantra].⁶⁷

This vehicle is called the Dual Tantra Vehicle, because it equally practices both the external activities of body and speech like Action Tantra and the inner yoga of the mind like Yoga Tantra. It has the same six divisions as the previous vehicles: entrance, view, ethics, cultivation, practice, and effect. As with all the Tantric vehicles there are two parts to its **entrance**—initiations and activities for engaging the doctrine. In addition to the water and crown initiations, Dual Tantras add the three initiations of vajra, bell, and name. Its activities for engaging the doctrine are the same as Action Tantra, as is its **ethics**, and **practice**. Its **view** and **cultivation** or meditative stabilization are, on the other hand, like those of Yoga Tantra. Finally, with regard to Dual Tantra’s **fruit**, the Old Schools assert that one attains the level of Vajra Holder of one of four families. These are the classic five families—the Buddha family, the Vajra family, the Jewel family, the Lotus family, and the Action family—with the Action family subsumed under the Jewel family. The fruit of the Dual Tantras is achieved within five human lifetimes.

⁶⁶ *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*, 63.1-64.2.

⁶⁷ *lta sgom yo ga dang / spyod pa bya ba ltar spyod pas dngos grub sgrub pa’i thabs su gyur pa/ (Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions*, 63.1-63.2).

The intermediate category of the Dual Tantras is a result of the later systematization of an earlier historical evolution. Yoga Tantras are clearly different from Action Tantras and developed after them. When Yoga Tantra was differentiated as a distinct category from Action Tantra, certain texts from the intermediate developmental period could not be classified as either group because they contained aspects of both. The “dual tantra” category was necessary to classify these intermediate tantras, since they were in part Action Tantras and in part Yoga Tantras. It is interesting to note that authors of the New Schools tend to avoid the name “Dual Tantras” preferring instead the title “Performance Tantra”. Is this because they are embarrassed by the historical evolution implied by that term? In any case, the second tantric vehicle likely represents the next phase of development on Tantric Buddhism found in such texts as the *Enlightenment of Vairocana Tantra*.

THE YOGA TANTRA VEHICLE

The third tantric vehicle and last of the outer tantras is the Yoga Tantra vehicle.⁶⁸ As the name suggests, there is a close connection between this vehicle and that of the *Secret Essence*, Mahāyoga. Evidence suggests that at one point in time, the term, Mahāyoga, was employed to refer to all of Tantra.⁶⁹ It was only with the advent of a certain cycle of tantras, the *Illusion Net* cycle, that Mahāyoga became a distinct philosophical school. That school borrowed heavily from its precursor, Yoga Tantra. Therefore, an understanding of Yoga Tantra is crucial to the understanding of Mahāyoga. Yoga Tantra gets its name from the prominence it gives to inner, mental yoga or meditation. Lochen Dharmashrī describes its as:

⁶⁸ *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 64.2-68.3.

⁶⁹ K. W. Eastman, “Mahāyoga Texts at Tun-huang” in *Bulletin of Institute of Buddhist Cultural Studies Ryukoku University* (Kyoto, 1983), No. 22, 44.

[A method] that asserts the effect is achieved through striving to adopt good conceptions and abandon bad ones, designating the ultimate as the blessing of signless reality and the conventional as the deities of the vajra sphere.⁷⁰

Yoga Tantra still has the notion of adopting what is good and abandoning what is bad. However, their notion relates less to activities than to conceptions, which are the primary objects judged as good or bad. Yoga Tantra views the ultimate to be the “blessing of signless reality” and the conventional appearance, including oneself, are viewed as “deities of the vajra sphere”. This vehicle is called Yoga Tantra (*rnal 'byor rgyud*), because in it one mainly does or demonstrates inner yoga (*nang gi rnal 'byor*).

Yoga Tantra’s **entrance** is also divided into initiations and actions. As for initiations, it has six. In addition to the five knowledge initiations (*rig pa'i dbang lnga*) of the Dual Tantras, there is also the initiation of the vajra master (*rdo rje slob dpon gyi dbang*). The entrance through actions is to engage in the doctrine by way of the meditative stabilization with signs (*mtshan bcas ky'i ting nge 'dzin*), that is meditating on the form of a deity and the aspects of the maṇḍala, and the meditative stabilization without signs (*mtshan med ky'i ting nge 'dzin*), namely meditating on emptiness via the visualized deity.

Yoga Tantra’s **view** is like the previous tantric vehicles a view of the two truths. For them, the ultimate truth is the emptiness that is the clear-light nature of all phenomena which is devoid of the signs of elaboration. With regard to conventional truths, there are false conventional truths that are the same as before, namely mistaken and non-mistaken ordinary appearances (e.g., a mirage and a cow), and correct conventional truths, in which everything that appears does so as the maṇḍala of the vajra-sphere, the blessing of realizing

⁷⁰ *don dam mtshan ma med pa'i chos nyid ky'i byin rlabs kun rdzob rdo rje dbyings ky'i lhar brtags te rtog pa bzang ngan blang dor gyi rtsol bas 'bras bu bsgrub par 'dod pa/ (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 64.2-64.3)*

reality. Therefore, they assert that these ordinary appearances, designated as autonomous by beings, do not actually exist.

The **ethics** of the Yoga Tantra Vehicle are the general vows of the five families mentioned in the *Vajra Peak*. One initially generates the mind of enlightenment and then assiduously does the training of the three ethics (*tshul khrims gsum kyī bslab pa*).⁷¹ Finally, one practices the particular ethics of Yoga Tantra. This consists of fourteen vows, divided among the Buddha five families in the following manner.⁷²

The three commitments of Vairocana:

1. Not to disparage one's master,
2. Not to transgress the three levels of vows,
3. Not to have anger toward one's vajra-brothers and sisters,

The four commitments of Akṣobhya:

4. Not to abandon loving kindness toward sentient beings,
5. Not to abandon the mind of enlightenment,
6. Not to disparage the Doctrine,
7. Not to divulge the secret of Tantra to those who are unprepared,

⁷¹ It is unclear what is referred to here. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 2, 113) mentions the three general commitments of tantra (*spyi'i dam tshig gsum*). These are taking refuge, generating the mind of enlightenment, and the bodhisattva vow. However, given that Lochen Dharmashrī mentions generating the altruistic mind of enlightenment as preceding these three ethics, these are probably not the three referred to here.

⁷² Lochen Dharmashrī only provides the number of vows associated with each of the five main Buddhas. This has been correlated in order to the list of the fourteen vows provided in F. D. Lessing and Alex Wayman, trans., *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978; reprint, 1993), 328, and reiterated in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 172.

The four commitments of Ratnasambhava:

8. Not to abuse the five aggregates as they are the five Buddha families,
9. Not to be prejudiced toward any phenomena, because all are pure,
10. Not to forsake compassion toward evil beings that harm Buddhism,
11. Not to conceptualize the indescribable nature,

The one vow of Amitāyus:

12. Not to have bad thoughts about those who believe,

The two commitments of Amoghasiddhi:

13. Not to transgress the vows that have been taken,
14. Not to disparage women, who are the incarnation of wisdom.

In another collection, thirteen commitments are described, by adding two uncommon commitments to the eleven commitments of Action Tantra.⁷³ A anonymous scripture (*ji skad du*) is quoted saying the two uncommon commitments are not to drink water and not to swear, but this could be an example of the enigmatic language tantras employed to hide their true meaning behind metaphors.⁷⁴

The **cultivation** of Yoga Tantra clearly falls in the arena of meditation. Whereas in the previous two tantra groups cultivation involved action, here it refers strictly to inner meditation. In the Tibetan, a single word is used, *bsgom*, because meditation is considered a form of cultivation. In Yoga Tantra, there is yoga with signs and yoga without signs. Yoga

⁷³ The collection is enigmatically called the *'byed 'phrul sde* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 66.1), which *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* translates as the *Miraculous Key to the Storehouse* (vol. 2, 252). It may be that *'byed 'phrul sde* is a scribal error for *bang mdzod 'phrul lde*, on which see note 94 below.

⁷⁴ The relevant part of the passage says: *lung gcig chu la mi btung zhing / nyams dang kha mi bsre ba bsrung /* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 66.2).

with signs is described as cultivating a yoga of male and female deities that has the four seals (*phyag rgya bzhi*) by way of the five manifestations of enlightenments (*mngon byang lnga*) and the four miracles (*cho 'phrul bzhi*). This needs to be unpacked a bit.⁷⁵ In the outer three tantras, one meditates on deities, which is equivalent to yoga with signs, but those deities are generally in isolation. In Yoga Tantra, the male and female deities are visualized. However, they are not imagined to be in union with their consorts.⁷⁶

These visualized deities are secured or sealed by the four seals. These are the seal of commitment (*dam tshig gi phyag rgya, samayamudrā*), the seal of the doctrine (*chos kyī phyag rgya, dharmamudrā*), the seal of action (*las kyī phyag rgya, karmamudrā*), and the great seal (*phyag rgya chen po, mahāmudrā*). The great seal is related to the enlightened form of a Buddha. It seals or secures the mind-basis-of-all as the mirror-like primordial wisdom. The seal of the doctrine is related to the enlightened speech of a Buddha. It seals or secures the intellect as the primordial wisdom of individual concepts. The seal of action is related to the enlightened activity of a Buddha, and it seals the sense consciousnesses as the primordial wisdom of accomplishing activities. The seal of commitment is related to the enlightened mind of a Buddha. It seals or secures the afflicted mentality as the primordial wisdom of sameness. In Yoga Tantra, one first creates the visualized deity or commitment-being and then invites the actual wisdom-being into it, viewing the deity without judgment like a friend or a sibling.

The five manifestations of enlightenments describe a process of meditation, which is shared among Yoga Tantras and Mahāyoga Tantras. It describes a gradual process of creative visualization that is said to parallel the Buddha's meditation in the highest heaven. The initial step is called emptiness (*stong pa nyid*). Here, everything is dissolved into emptiness. From within that focus on emptiness, a lunar disc appears. This is the step of the lunar-seat

⁷⁵ The following explanation is from *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 355-356.

⁷⁶ Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, 21.

(*zla gdan*) and represents compassion. On top of the lunar disc, one visualizes the seed syllables (*yig 'bru*) that represents the deity about to be visualized. The seed syllables is the enlightened speech of that deity. The fourth step is when the seed-syllables is transformed into the hand-symbol (*phyag mtshan*) of the respective deity. The hand-symbol is said to represent the deity's enlightened mind. The fifth and final step is when the hand-symbol transforms into the actual form of the deity. This is called thorough completion (*yongs rdzogs*) and represents the deity's enlightened form. The five manifestations of enlightenment are thus composed of symbolic representations for emptiness, compassion, and the enlightened body, speech, and mind of a Buddha. The parallel process that the practitioner undergoes is aided by the four miracles. The four miracles are the means whereby one practices and therefore the basis for any accomplishment that occurs through practice. They are in no apparent order the miracle of meditative stabilization (*ting nge 'dzin*), the miracle of empowerment (*dbang bskur*), the miracle of blessing (*byin gyis rlob*), and the miracle of offerings (*mchod pa*).

In the yoga without signs one places oneself in an equanimity where there is no duality between the ultimate signless entity and primordial wisdom's appearance factor in which the blessings of the ultimate appear as a deity. In terms of **practice**, using the regimen of cleanliness as an aid, they mainly meditate on a deity, and thereby accomplish the welfare of both self and other. The **effect** of full Buddhahood with the three bodies and five wisdoms is said to be achieved in three human life-times.

The connection between Yoga Tantra and Mahāyoga Tantra is demonstrated by similarities in their lists of canonical texts. Both traditions adhere to a group of eighteen tantras among which there are three texts shared in common. The list of eighteen Mahāyoga Tantra will be discussed in chapter four. The group of eighteen tantras within Yoga Tantra is known primarily through Chinese sources. One such source is Amoghavajra's *Indications of the Goals of the Eighteen Assemblies of Yoga of the Adamantine Pinnacle Scripture* (Ch. chin-

kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei, Jp. *kongō-gyō-yuga jūhachie shiki*), which has been translated by Rolf Giebel.⁷⁷ In the list of eighteen Yoga tantras given by Amoghavajra, there are three titles also found in the list of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras: the *Union of All Buddhas* (*sangs rgyas thams cad mnyam sbyor*, *Buddhasamāyoga*), the *Glorious Supreme Beginning* (*dpal mchog dang po*, *Śrīparamādyā*), and the *Secret Assembly* (*gsang ba'i 'dus pa, guhyasamāja*). In an unpublished paper presented to the 26th International Conference of Orientalists in Tokyo, Japan in 1981, Kenneth Eastman first brought forth the connection between the two collections. He notes that *The Compendium of Principles* and the *Net of Illusion* occupy similar positions in relation to their eighteen text cycles, as large composite works that were subsequently divided into eighteen parts. He also remarks on the similarities between Jñānamitra's commentary on the 150 stanza *Perfection of Wisdom* and the Mahāyoga tradition. Finally, he demonstrates that the original translation of the *Secret Assembly Tantra* is most likely attributable to Vimalamitra and dates it around 795 C.E. In conclusion, he states:

I believe that I am justified now in hypothesizing that the two collections stem from a single archetype.⁷⁸

Other similarities between the two systems also support this hypothesis. Both traditions speak of the five manifest enlightenments (*mngon byang lnga, pañcābhisambodhi*), the three meditative stabilizations (*ting nge 'dzin gsum, *trayasamādhi*), and the five families (*rigs lnga, pañcakula*). While the last enumeration is found in most of the tantras that date after *The Compendium of Principles*, it does not occur in the preceding two tantric vehicles. They also both contain sections on the subjugation of Śiva, or Maheśvara. This story appears only to be

⁷⁷ Rolf W. Giebel, "The *Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei*: An Annotated Translation" in *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies*, no. 18 (1995), 107-201.

⁷⁸ Kenneth Eastman, "The Eighteen Tantras of the Vajrasekhara/mayajala," presented to the 26th International Conference of Orientalists in Japan. Tokyo, May 8th, 1981.

found in the Yoga Tantra and Mahāyoga Tantra corpuses. From a historical perspective, it appears then that the Mahāyoga Tantras developed out of a body of belief and practice that eventually came to be designated as the Yoga Tantras.

THE MAHĀYOGA TANTRA VEHICLE

The next three sets of tantras represent the highest vehicles in the Old Schools' system.⁷⁹ These are Mahāyoga also called the Tantras (*rgyud*); Anuyoga, or the Transmissions (*lung*), and Atiyoga, or the Quintessential Instructions (*man ngag*). There are different opinions on how to differentiate these three categories of scriptures. However, Lochen Dharmashrī give precedence to the Zur tradition's interpretation. The Zur tradition (*zur lugs*) represents one of two main streams of interpretation concerning the *Secret Essence*. The other is called the Rong-Long tradition (*rong klong lugs*), after its two most famous proponents, Rongzom Chökyizangpo (11th century) and Longchen Rapjam (1308-1363). The main difference between the two is the hermeneutical approach each takes. The Rong-Long tradition interprets the three inner vehicles from the perspective of Atiyoga, whereas the Zur tradition interprets the three as distinct traditions with unique viewpoints.

As for how to differentiate the three inner tantric vehicles, the Zur tradition says that in Mahāyoga all phenomena are realized to be the display (*cho 'phrul*) of mind-itself, the indifferenciability of appearance and emptiness. In Anuyoga all phenomena are realized to be the energy of mind-itself (*rtsal*), the non-duality of the sphere and primordial wisdom. In Atiyoga, all phenomena are realized to be the self-appearances (*rang snang*) of self-arising primordial wisdom, the primordial, unimpeded production. This ranking of views represents a gradual merging of the two truths into a single indifferenciable entity. In Mahāyoga,

⁷⁹ *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 68.3-74.6. The discussion on Mahāyoga is prefaced by a general discussion on the three inner tantra sets. The Mahāyoga section actually begins at *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 70.3. This whole section of the *Lord of Secret's Oral Instructions* appears to have been used *verbatim* in Dūjom Rinpoché's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* as part of the "Recapitulation of the Resultant Vehicles", *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 357-363.

conventional truths are the display of the ultimate truth, like the image produced on a screen by a projector and the projector itself. In Anuyoga, conventional truths are the energy of the ultimate truth, like the image of a TV screen and the TV screen. In Atiyoga, conventional truths are the appearances of primordial wisdom itself, for which there is no appropriate analogy, though perhaps the relationship between dream images and the mind is closest. The “special conventional truths” are viewed as more external to the ultimate truth in Mahāyoga than in Atiyoga, where they are merged into a single entity. This is the Zur tradition’s most prevalent interpretation of the difference between the three inner Tantras.

Other opinions are that Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga respectively focus on practice (*spyod pa*), meditative stabilization (*ting nge ’dzin*), and view (*lta ba*); or that they respectively emphasize the generation stage, completion stage, and a meditation that is free from such efforts; or that they respectively have a great focus on the ten topics of tantra, a lesser focus on them, or no focus at all on them. Finally, Longchenpa’s opinion is that Mahāyoga tantras are the father tantras that have the nature of method and are taught for the sake of trainees with strong anger and a predominance of conceptuality; Anuyoga tantras are the mother tantras that have the stage of completion on the empty suchness and are taught for trainees with great desire and who enjoy mental abiding (*sems gnas pa*), and Atiyoga tantras are the non-dual tantras taught for trainees who have great ignorance and strive at activities. This interpretation, belonging to the Rong-Long system, differentiates the three inner tantras by method and not view, as the Zur tradition does. This is because for the Rong-Long system, the single view is the Atiyoga view, and the three inner tantras merely represent three different perspectives of the same view. Such a reductionism, where everything is reduced to Atiyoga, pervades Longchenpa’s writing, which are therefore more useful for understanding the Atiyoga school than they are for understanding Mahāyoga.

Mahāyoga is the first of the three inner tantra groups and so is the next that Lochen Dharmashrī describes. The *Secret Essence Tantra* is one of the most important tantras within

the Mahāyoga vehicle and is called the root tantra (*rtsa rgyud*) by the Zur tradition and the general tantra on enlightened mind (*spyi'i thugs rgyud*) by the Rong-Long system.⁸⁰ Lochen Dharmashrī defines Mahāyoga tantra as:

That which has the nature of attaining liberation through the union of realization and cultivation with respect to the meaning of the superior indifferentiable truth by way of mainly relying on method or the stage of generation.⁸¹

In the Mahāyoga vehicle liberation is achieved through a union of realization and cultivation of the truth. The truth of which it speaks is the superior indifferentiable truth (*lhag pa bden pa dbyer med*), the single entity where the superior conventional truth and the superior ultimate truth are inseparably mixed. The superior ultimate truth from an ontological standpoint is the sphere of reality (*chos kyi dbyings*); from an epistemological standpoint it is primordial wisdom (*ye shes*), and from a teleological perspective it is enlightened body (*sku*), speech (*gsung*), mind (*thugs*), qualities (*yon tan*), and activities (*phrin las*). These are “the seven riches of the ultimate” (*don dam dkor bdun*), the conceptual divisions of the superior ultimate truth. The superior conventional truth is the fact that conventional appearances are a display (*cho 'phrul*) of the ultimate. The truth realized by the Mahāyoga vehicle is the indifferentiable union of these two truths. The realization and cultivation of this indifferentiable truth are achieved through practicing the rites of the stage of generation, where the maṇḍala of peaceful and wrathful deities is visualized through a ritualized

⁸⁰ The source for the Zur tradition is a hand-written list I obtained from Khenpo Namdröl at Nam-dröl-ling Monastery in Byllakupe, India. The source for Rong-Long system is Long-chen-rab-jam-ba, *sngags kyi spyi don tshangs dbyangs 'brug sgra* (Sarnath: Nyingma Student's Welfare Committee, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, n.d.), 27ff.

⁸¹ *thabs bskyed pa'i rim pa la gts'o bor brten pa'i sgo nas lhag pa bden pa dbyer med kyi don la rtogs goms kyi sbyor bas grol ba thob pa'i rang bzhin no!* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 70.3-70.4).

meditative generation, which includes the five manifestations of enlightenment. The stage of generation is also generically called method (*thabs*).

Mahāyoga in Sanskrit means “Great Yoga”. It is called by that name because Mahāyoga is superior to external Yoga Tantra, since in Mahāyoga the awareness is joined to the meaning of non-duality. As for the six subtopics, its **entrance** is by way of initiation and action. Mahāyoga has four levels of initiation. It shares the vase initiation (*bum dbang*) with the three outer tantra classifications, but it adds the three higher initiations: the secret initiation (*gsang bang, guhyābhiṣeka*), the primordial wisdom initiation (*ye shes dbang, jñānābhiṣeka*), and the word/meaning initiation, known in Sanskrit as “the fourth one” (*tshig don dbang, caturtha*). In terms of action, one enters Mahāyoga through the practice of the three meditative stabilizations. These are:

1. the yoga of great emptiness (*stong pa chen po'i rnal 'byor*) that focuses on wisdom,
2. the meditative stabilization on compassionate illusion (*snying rje sgyu ma*) that is the method,
3. the meditative stabilization of the coarse and subtle seals (*phyag rgya phra rags*), the visualization of one's inner deities.

These three meditative stabilizations are part of the stage of generation.⁸² They are the **entrance** for Mahāyoga, because Mahāyoga is a path that mainly teaches the stage of generation.

The **view** in Mahāyoga is also described in terms of ultimate and conventional truths. In Mahāyoga it is asserted that the ultimate truth is spontaneously present as the essential cause but appears only to an awareness free from conceptual elaborations. Conventional truths are asserted to be the whole collection of conceptuality (*rtog tshogs*), the energy of the ultimate

⁸² In the *Key to the Treasury* the last category, the coarse and subtle seals, is broken down into three parts—the single seal (*phyag rgya gcig pa*), the elaborated seal (*phyag rgya spros bcas*), and the group achievement (*tshogs sgrub*)—thus making five meditative stabilizations. See chapter 5, page 413ff., below.

truth, appearing on its own as the maṇḍala of enlightened form and primordial wisdom. However, it is not that one or the other predominates; they appear equally as a single indifferentiable entity. Though it can be described in that way, the truth is said to transcend thought or expression, because such indifferentiability is beyond conception.

There are different ways to discuss the **ethics** of Mahāyoga, according to Lochen Dharmashrī. They can broadly be divided into practicing fourteen vows of Yoga Tantra, etc., and practicing the knowledge that the five meats, which are prohibited in other systems, have the nature of five nectars. The root tantra, the *Secret Essence*, describes five root vows and ten secondary ones. However, the Early Translation's unique phraseology speaks of Mahāyoga's twenty-eight vows. These are:

The three root vows:

1. viewing all objects as enlightened form,
2. viewing all sounds as enlightened speech, and
3. viewing all thoughts as enlightened mind,

The twenty-five ancillary vows:

- 4-8. five activities to be practiced (*spyad bya lnga*)—the rites of union (*sbyor*) and liberation (*sgrol*),
- 9-13. five things not to be abandoned (*mi spang bya lnga*)—the five afflictive emotions,
- 14-18. five things to be adopted (*dang du slang bya lnga*)—the five nectars,
- 19-23. five things to be known (*shes bya lnga*)—the aggregates, elements, objects, sacraments, and predispositions,

24-28. five things to be achieved (*sgrub bya lnga*)—enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities, and attributes.⁸³

The **meditation** or **cultivation** of Mahāyoga is broken down into two systems, representing the two major scriptural divisions of this vehicle, the Achievement class (*sgrub sde*) and the Tantra class (*rgyud sde*). The system taught mainly in the Achievement class of scriptures focuses on eight different deities. Their meditation refers to a combination of ritual action and visualization, formally called “means of achievement” (*sgrub thabs, sādhana*), because it is the way to achieve feats, either mundane magical powers or the supreme feat of enlightenment. In the Old Schools’ Mahāyoga vehicle, these have been given a separate classification from the tantras, because they represent a different genre. The Tantra class is more philosophically oriented, focusing on ontology and epistemology, whereas the Achievement class is more practically oriented, focusing on visualization and the ritual techniques. The eight subclasses of the Achievement category are broken down into five classes for achieving wisdom-deities and three classes of common achievements. The first five are described by Lochen Dharmashrī as follows:

1. Achievements for the enlightened form of the Ones-gone-to-bliss in dependence upon the four psychic centers of the Enlightened Form of Mañjuśrī,⁸⁴
2. Achievements for the enlightened speech of the lotus in dependence on the three neighs of Hayagrīva,⁸⁵

⁸³ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 182.

⁸⁴ *jam dpal gyi sku 'khor lo bzhi la brten nas bde gshegs sku'i sgrub pa* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 72.4). The four centers are each connected to different areas of Mañjuśrī's enlightened body. They are the center of abiding reality (*gnas kyi 'khor lo*) associated with Mañjuśrī's secret place or groin, the center of existence (*srid pa'i 'khor lo*) associated with his navel, the center of severing (*gcod pa'i 'khor lo*) associated with the arms of the deity, and the center of emanation (*sprul pa'i 'khor lo*) associated with his legs and feet (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 126).

⁸⁵ *rta skad thengs gsum la brten nas padma gsung gi sgrub pa* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 74.2-74.3). The three neighs are equated with the three continuums of the ground, path, and fruit (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 118).

3. Achievements for the enlightened mind of the vajra, Heruka, in dependence upon the single achievement of the authentic, self-arisen primordial wisdom, the awareness of enlightened mind,⁸⁶
4. Achievements for the enlightened qualities of the nectars, Vajrāmṛta, teaching that all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa are complete in their good qualities,⁸⁷
5. Achievements for the enlightened activity of the knife, Vajrakīla, that mainly teach the means for taming harmful creatures through sorcery,⁸⁸

The three common types of achievement are described much more briefly, in the following manner:

6. Conjuring the Female Demons (*ma mo rbod gtong*),
7. Cursing with Fierce Mantras (*drag sngags dmod pa*),
8. Worldly Offerings and Praise (*jig rten mchod bstod*).

These are collectively called the eight classes of the Achievement category of Mahāyoga (*sgrub sde brgyad*), and here they are used as categories of meditation or cultivation of the path. While these categories are scriptural division, they also differentiate the texts according to their practice, that is, according to which deities they take as their main one and the aim of their practice, related to that deity.

The Tantric group (*rgyud sde*) of scriptures within Mahāyoga are similarly differentiated according to their meditative practice. The Tantra class contains the well known group of eighteen tantras that have a connection with a similar group found in Chinese Buddhism.⁸⁹ Lochen Dharmashrī uses the same divisions for the subdivisions of this group that the New

⁸⁶ *thugs rig pa rang byung gi ye shes yang dag sgrub pa gcig bu la brten nas thugs rdo rje'i sgrub pa* (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 72.5).

⁸⁷ *'khor 'das kyi chos thams cad yon tan du rdzogs par ston pa bdud rtsi yon tan gyi sgrub pa* (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 72.5).

⁸⁸ *mngon spyod kyi las kyi gdug pa can 'dul ba'i thabs gts'o bor ston pa phur pa phrin las kyi sgrub pa* (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 72.5-72.6).

⁸⁹ This connection is outlined in Kenneth Eastman, "The Eighteen Tantras of the Vajrasekhara/mayajala".

Schools of Tibetan Buddhism use to differentiate all the Highest Yoga Tantras. He says that the Tantra class is divided into Father tantras, Mother tantras, and Non-dual tantras. The main example of a Father tantra is the *Secret Assembly* (*gsang 'dus, guhyasamāja*). It focuses on the stage of generation (*bskyed rim, utpattikrama*), the method side of tantric practice. This does not mean there is no corresponding stage of completion (*rdzogs rim, sampannakrama*) or wisdom side of the practice. Most, if not all, of the higher tantras have both of these stages. However, the tantras emphasize each differently. Father tantras practice by way of a non-conceptual, empty clarity (*gsal stong rnam par mi rtog pa*), using the stage of generation as its method and in the stage of completion mainly activating the psychic winds (*rlung*).

Mother tantras, on the other hand, are those such as the *Supreme Bliss* (*bde mchog, cakrasamvara*),⁹⁰ *O Vajra!* (*kye rdo rje, hevajra*), and *Authentic Happiness* (*bde dgyes yang dag, *samyaksukha*). These have less elaboration in the stage of generation and focus mainly on the wisdom of the stage of completion. It is said they practice by way of a non-conceptual, empty bliss formed by mainly activating the constituent that is the psychic drop, or “mind of enlightenment”. The Neuter (*ma ning*), or Non-Dual (*gnyis med*), Tantras are represented by the Magical Emanation cycle. One of the main tantras of this cycle is the *Secret Essence*. They practice a union of the generation and completion stages, by way of the non-conceptual primordial wisdom of clear bliss (*bde gsal mi rtog pa'i ye shes*) that is generated from the

⁹⁰ The translation of this title presents some interesting difficulties akin to those that must have been experienced by Tibetan translators of the Sanskrit. The Tibetans refer to this tantra with two abbreviated names: *bde mchog* (Supreme Bliss) and *'khor lo sdom pa* (Binding Together the Wheel). The Sanskrit title commonly used is *cakrasamvara*, which is composed of two parts. *Cakra* obviously means “wheel” (Tib. *'khor lo*) with all its associated connotations. *Samvara* is an alternative form or corruption of the word, *sambhara* (Tib. *sdom pa*), that which brings or binds together. However, if the word is considered not to be a corrupt form of *sambhara* but a derivation from the verb *samvṛ*, “to choose”, then *samvara* means “choice”. It is used metaphorically to refer to a husband, because it is the name given to the man chosen in a “women’s choice” (*svayamvara*) marriage. If the term *cakra* was considered a metaphor for the woman or wife, *cakrasamvara* could then possibly mean “wife and husband”; or, if *cakra* refers to the maṇḍala, then it could mean “man/husband of the maṇḍala”. If either of these were the case, the Tibetan’s choice of “Supreme Bliss” as a translation for this tantra’s name would be more understandable.

psychic channels, drops, and winds. In particular, they mainly activate the great primordial wisdom of the clear light.

That is a general Old School description of the practice in the three subdivisions of Mahāyoga tantras. However, quoting Vimalamitra's *Three Stages*,⁹¹ Lochen Dharmashrī maintains that the *Secret Essence* tradition *itself* divides the meditation into a meditation with signs and a meditation without signs, just as Yoga Tantra did. Meditation with signs is divided into the stage of generation and the stage of completion. The stage of generation is then practicing the indifferenciability of the deity and one's thoughts mainly by way of gradually generating the maṇḍala through the three meditative stabilizations.⁹² There are two forms of this. The meditation of a believer (*mos sgom*) is, for example, when one meditates on the branches of the stage of generation in a single session even though one has not attained firmness of meditative stabilization. Definite completeness (*nges rdzogs*) includes the five yogas—one on the paths of accumulation and one on each of the four sub-levels on the path of preparation—and the four knowledge holders, who represent the paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning.⁹³ The stage of completion, in this description, refers to the practices of manipulating the psychic winds through the psychic channels, knots, and centers. It has two versions. The instructions concerning the upper opening of the central channel, the one that exits the body at the crown of the head, are called the “quintessential instructions for melting and taming” (*'ju 'dul gyi man ngag*). The second version pertains to

⁹¹ *rim pa gsum, māyājālopadēśakramatrāya*. P4742.

⁹² *ting nge 'dzin gsum (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 73.6)*. These three contemplations are generally associated with the stage of generation. Different versions are said to be found also in the *Compendium of Principles (de nyid 'dus pa, tattvasaṃgraha)* and the *Secret Assembly (gsang ba'i 'dus pa, guhyasamāja)*. Here, they are as mentioned above: 1. the yoga of great emptiness or wisdom (*shes rab stong pa chen po'i rnal 'byor*), 2. compassionate illusion or method (*thabs snying rje sgyu ma*), and 3. the subtle and coarse seals (*phyag rgya phra rags*). These are also expanded into the five yogas. This appears to be a condensation of the six deities that are found in the lower tantras.

⁹³ The five yogas are known as the “five contaminated yogas of [the paths of] accumulation and preparation” (*zag bcas tshogs sbyor gyi rnal 'byor lnga*), and the four knowledge holders, as the “four types of uncontaminated knowledge holder” (*zag med rig 'dzin rnam pa bzhi*).

the lower opening in the sexual organ and is called the “quintessential instruction for the play of the three realms” (*kham s gum rol pa'i man ngag*). Finally, the signless meditation in the *Secret Essence* tradition's description of Mahāyoga is cultivating the meditative stabilization on reality or suchness.

The fifth aspect of Mahāyoga is its **practice** or **activities**. Lochen Dharmashrī says that in the Mahāyoga vehicle one can practice anything in the world without attachment because it is grasped by one's confidence in skillful means. Here, he quotes from a tantric text, entitled *Miraculous Key for Opening the Vault*.⁹⁴ This quote is illuminating because it refers to two controversial practices within Mahāyoga or ritual sex and ritual execution. The quote goes:

In Mahāyoga, the Generation [Stage],
One enjoys *Tana, Gaṇa*,
And all five nectars of the sacraments,
By applying the view of the great method.⁹⁵

According to *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*,⁹⁶ the Sanskrit word, *Tana*, is equivalent to the Tibetan word, *sgrol ba*, which means “liberation”. This euphemism refers to the practice of ritual killing that is seen as liberating a being from a negative existence and sending them to a better rebirth. *Gana* is in Tibetan *sbyor ba* or “union” and refers to ritualized sexual union aimed at unifying the polarized aspects of enlightenment. The five holy substances or sacraments (*dam dzas*) are the five most taboo human products: semen, urine, excrement, blood, and human flesh. Precisely because of their polluting valuation

⁹⁴ *bang mdzod 'phrul lde*. This appears to be Tb.159 (vol. 7, 659.1-739.2), whose main title is *byang chub sems kyi man ngag rin chen 'phreng ba*. All of its chapters, however, refer to their text as the *bang mdzod 'phrul gyi lde mig*.

⁹⁵ *bskyed pa ma hā yo ga ni/ lta na dang ni ga ṇa dang / dam dzas bdud rtsi lnga po lal / thabs chen lta ba'i spyod pas spyad/* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 74.5).

⁹⁶ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 24, n. 352.

within Indian and indeed most cultures, these taboo substances were incorporated and used in the activities of a tantric practitioner, either actually or symbolically, as a means to transcend conceptual, dualistic distinctions. In all cases, these “enjoyments” are interpreted as symbols of enlightenment, whether or not they are actually experienced or merely imagined.

The sixth and last subdivision of Mahāyoga is its **fruit**. Lochen Dharmashrī says that through Mahāyoga one actualizes the essence where the five enlightened forms are spontaneously present either in this life or in the intermediate state. This concludes his discussion of Mahāyoga, the seventh of the nine vehicles and the first of the inner tantra sets.

THE ANUYOGA TANTRA VEHICLE

The last two vehicles of the inner tantras, Anuyoga and Atiyoga, are worthy of their own independent studies. Although a number of scholarly works concerning Atiyoga or the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) have appeared in recent years, hardly any works on Anuyoga have been published. Both these vehicles are considered to be higher than Mahāyoga, their views and practices seen as more profound and effective. Whereas the first six vehicles can be seen as the foundation for Mahāyoga in that they lead up to its worldview, Anuyoga and Atiyoga take Mahāyoga as their foundation and build on it. The relevance of these two vehicles in understanding Mahāyoga is mainly in providing a context. Therefore, these two vehicles will be dealt with in an abbreviated way here. Certain of the topics, such as initiation and ethics, will be skipped over, because in this discussion they are less relevant.

As always, *The Lord of Secret's Oral Instructions* begins the discussion of Anuyoga with its definition or entity.⁹⁷ He defines Anuyoga as:

⁹⁷ The section on Anuyoga covers *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 74.6-80.4.

That which has the nature of attaining liberation through the union of realization and cultivation with regard to the fact that the sphere and primordial wisdom are non-dual by way of mainly relying on wisdom or the stage of completion.⁹⁸

We have already seen how the Old Schools distinguish the three inner tantras according to the amount of emphasis they give either the stage of generation or the stage of completion. Anuyoga is the vehicle that focuses on the latter. Other than that, the unique aspect of this definition that differs from Mahāyoga's is the object of its realization and cultivation. The realization in Anuyoga is the non-duality of the sphere of reality and primordial wisdom. This is a more subtle level of truth than what is realized in Mahāyoga, the indifferenciability of appearances and emptiness. Anuyoga speaks of ultimate reality and the wisdom that realizes it as being non-dual. Atiyoga will take this one step further.

The Sanskrit word, Anuyoga, means “subsequent yoga” (*rjes su rnal 'byor*). According to Lochen Dharmashrī, it is called this because it mainly teaches a path that is the subsequent imprint of wisdom. However, the name also suggests a temporal sequence, namely a vehicle that is “subsequent to” Mahāyoga. The **entrance** into this vehicle is by way of seeing the non-duality of the sphere of reality and primordial wisdom in its completeness all at once without gradual generation. The *Lock of Enlightened Mind* says:

The non-produced sphere itself is primordial wisdom;

The awareness of primordial wisdom is the manner of the sphere itself.

The play of non-duality is great bliss.

It is not entered into gradually.

In all the seals of appearance and existence

⁹⁸ *shes rab rdzogs pa'i rim pa la gts'o bor brten pa'i sgom nas dbyings dang ye shes gnyis su med pa'i don la rtogs goms ky'i sbyor bas grol ba thob pa'i rang bzhin!* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 74.6-75.1).

The great seal of appearance and existence is met with directly
Like a fish jumping out of water.⁹⁹

As for the **view** of Anuyoga, all things are seen as one's own mind, which is the open space (*mkha' klong*) or womb of the mother, Samantabhadrī, the non-produced nature devoid of conceptual elaborations. This is also known as “the primordial maṇḍala just as it is” (*ye ji bzhin pa'i dkyil 'khor*). That non-production itself radiates as a maṇḍala of self-arisen light that is the unimpeded awareness of everything. This is Samantabhadra or “the maṇḍala of the spontaneously present nature” (*rang bzhin lhun grub dkyil 'khor*). The radiant clarity of those two whose entity is not divided is the great bliss, the non-dual son of the sphere and primordial wisdom. This is the “maṇḍala of enlightened mind” (*byang chub sems kyi dkyil 'khor*). Therefore, Anuyoga views all phenomena as primordially enlightened in the maṇḍala of enlightened mind, the root nature that is the indifferentiability of those three kinds of maṇḍalas. Here, one of the citations Lochen Dharmashrī uses is from a text by the tantric Nāgārjuna called *The Field of Turquoise* (*g.yu thang*):¹⁰⁰

Out of the open space of Samantabhadrī, appearances and occurrences,
Dawns Samantabhadra, the uncreated maṇḍala.
In that very dawning, there is no dawning.
The great bliss of the father, mother, and child
Is spontaneously complete.¹⁰¹

Using the imagery of procreation, Anuyoga asserts that the unimpeded energy, which is the play of Samantabhadra, dawns out of the womb of ordinary appearances all at once as the

⁹⁹ *skye med dbyings nyid ye shes tel /ye shes rig pa dbyings nyid tshull /gnyes med rol pa bde ba chel rim par 'jug pa ma yin tel /snang srid phyag rgya thams cad lal /lchu la nya ldang ji bzhin dul /thugs phrad snang srid phyag rgya chel* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 76.4).

¹⁰⁰ Nāgārjuna, *g.yu thang ma kras dgu* (P4729), vol. 83, 88.2.4-90.5.5.

¹⁰¹ *snang srid bzang mo'i mkha' klong las /ma bskyed dkyil 'khor kun bzang shar/ /shar ba nyid na shar ba med/ /yab yum sras bcas bde chen pol /lhun rdzogs/* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 77.4-77.5).

body of a deity. The union of the two—Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī—produces as son, the mind of enlightenment.

The **meditation** of Anuyoga is divided into two paths, the path of method (*thabs lam*) and the path of release (*grol lam*). This terminology is also found in discussions on the Mahāyoga path. In both places, the path of method is one that cultivates the individual's control over, what are believed to be, the psycho-physical channels through the body that aggregate at important centers, through which the psychic winds and essential drops travel. There are two forms of this meditation. One that focuses on the upper opening in the body at the crown of the head, and another that focuses on the lower opening in the sexual organ. For the upper opening, one meditates on four or six centers, commonly known as *cakras* (*'khor lo*). For the lower opening, one relies on the “entering into equipoise of what is secret and what is space” (*mkha' gsang gnyis gyi snyoms 'jug*), secret referring to the penis and space referring to the vagina. This yoga of sexual union is said to be a means for generating the innate primordial wisdom (*lhan skyes kyī ye shes*). In Anuyoga, the second path, or the path of release, is divided into 1. arranging the meaning (*don bkod pa*) and 2. the play of signs (*rtags kyī rol pa*). Arranging the meaning refers to meditating with a non-conceptual meditative stabilization that is devoid of conceptual elaboration and is an unfabricated awareness born out of the essential reality just as it is. The play of signs is a meditative stabilization on deities with conceptual elaboration. In it, one mainly practices meditating on the clear, unadulterated maṇḍala of deities and divine worlds appearing instantaneously.

The **practice**, or **activities**, of Anuyoga generally involve the practice of equanimity (*mnyam pa nyid*). They are divided into three types: activities of blessing (*byin gyis rleb*), empowerment (*dbang bsgyur*), and method (*thabs*). These Lochen Dharmashrī does not explain other than quoting from the general scripture of Anuyoga, *The Sūtra which Gathers All Intentions*:

The activities of blessing as well as
 The activities of empowerment and method
 Are, for instance, like the sky, a king, or
 Like water [to a] bonfire.¹⁰²

The final aspect of Anuyoga discussed in *The Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* is the vehicle's **result**. Here it is said that in a single life one can actualize the enlightened body of bliss. This body has the nature of the four enlightened bodies and an entity that is the spontaneous, indifferentiable presence of the twenty-five qualities of the effect.

THE ATIYOGA TANTRA VEHICLE

The ultimate vehicle in the Old Schools' nine-fold system is called Atiyoga. In Sanskrit, one meaning of the prefix *Ati-* is the superlative. Lochen Dharmashrī says that it is called Atiyoga, because it is the peak of all vehicles and because it is the final stage toward completeness for both the stages of generation and the stage of completion. He defines this vehicle in the following way:

A method for liberating, right within oneself, the fact of primordial
 Buddhahood, whose nature is devoid of abandoning and adopting, hope and
 fear.¹⁰³

The **entrance** to this vehicle is by way of a special forms of initiation such as the initiation into the agility of basic awareness (*rig pa'i rtsal dbang*) and so forth. In terms of the activities for entering Atiyoga, one engages the doctrine by way of not engaging in anything. The **view** of Atiyoga similarly points to an acceptance of the spontaneous, natural way things are, which

¹⁰² *byin gyis rlob kyi spyod pa dang / dbang sgyur thabs kyi spyod pa stel / dper na nam mkha' rgyal po'am/ lji ltar me dpung chu po 'dra* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 80.2).

¹⁰³ *ye sangs rgyas pa'i don rang thog tu grol bar byed pa'i thabs/ spang blang re dogs dang bral ba'i rang bzhin nol* (*Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 80.5).

is reminiscent of the Taoist notion of non-action (*wu wei*). In Atiyoga, it is asserted that all appearances and occurrences that are the phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa are primordially and effortlessly enlightened as the entity of the great self-arisen primordial wisdom, the reality body or the great psychic drop. The **vows** taken in Atiyoga as part of their ethics are the vows of nihilism (*med pa*), hedonism (*phyal ba*), and so forth.¹⁰⁴ In terms of its **cultivation**, Atiyoga has three paths. In the Mental Class (*sems sde*), the emptiness of awareness is posited as the reality body. In the Expanse Class (*klong sde*), reality is posited as an entity without the energy of activity. In the Quintessential Instruction Class (*man ngag sde*), that which is primordially liberated is posited as reality devoid of needing to be abandoned or adopted. However, the general means of cultivating Atiyoga are the two practices of severance (*khregs gcod*) and leap-over (*thod rgal*). In the first, one places the mind unwavering within a view of primordial purity. The four ways of doing this are called abiding (*gnas*), unwavering (*mi g.yo ba*), equanimity (*mnyam nyid*), and spontaneous presence (*lhun grub*). In the second, leap-over, the four appearances gradually dawn in dependence on six essential points. According to the *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism's* translation, these four are “the visionary appearance of the direct perception of reality (*chos nyid mngon sum*), the visionary appearance of increasing contemplative experience (*nyams gong 'phel*), the visionary appearance of reaching the limits of awareness (*rig pa tshad phebs*), and the visionary appearance of the cessation [of apparitional] reality (*chos nyid zad pa*).”¹⁰⁵

As for the **activities** of Atiyoga, since whatever appears dawns as the play of reality, one acts without abandoning or adopting anything. To support this, Lochen Dharmashrī again cites the *Miraculous Key for Opening the Vault*:

¹⁰⁴ In *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 1, 370, vol. 2, 25, n. 356), it is correctly noted that the use of the terms, *med pa* and *phyal ba* in this context allude to something completely different from the heretical views that bear identical names. However, I would argue that the choice of the words nihilism and hedonism as names for high, esoteric practices is intentional, both as a means to ward off literalists and to challenge one's preconceived notions of right and wrong.

¹⁰⁵ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 371. Brackets in the original.

As for the activities of Atiyoga,
 He who has the life of view and meditation
 Acts according to his whim,
 Doing anything without delay,
 Just like the actions of a madman.¹⁰⁶

Finally, regarding Atiyoga's **result**, in this vehicle one brings to completion right now the state of abiding on the level of Samantabhadra's spontaneous presence. Through a full development of the four confidences,¹⁰⁷ cyclic existence is liberated into nirvāṇa. This completes Lochen Dharmashrī's explanation of the nine vehicles of the Old Schools in *The Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*.

CONCLUSIONS

This description of the nine vehicles is the standard portrayal of the hierarchy of methods described within the Old Schools. While there are different lineages of hermeneutics within the Old Schools, they all agree on the enumeration and general features of these nine vehicles. This nine-fold doxography is one of the factors that distinguishes the Old Schools from the New Schools, which rarely enumerate Sūtra and Tantra vehicles in the same list and divide Tantra into four not six vehicles—Action, Performance, Yoga, and Highest Yoga. The major difference between the two doxographies is that for the Old Schools the Highest Yoga category is divided into Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. The tantras that fall into these categories were for the most part rejected by the New Schools as spurious, apocryphal

¹⁰⁶ *a ti yo ga'i spyod pa nil /lta sgom srog dang ldan pa yis/ lshugs las byung ba'i spyod pa nil /ji ltar smyon pa'i spyod pa bzhin/ /gang la'ang thogs pa med par spyod/ (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 82.6-83.1).*

¹⁰⁷ *gdeng bzhi (Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions, 83.1).* They are 1. the confidence that one does not need to fear the three lower rebirths because one has realized the nature of reality that is devoid of ignorance, 2. the confidence that one does not have to seek the maturation of a result because one has reached the ground of awareness, 3. the confidence that one does not have to aspire for attainment because one experiences the bliss of nirvāṇa, and the confidence that one is no different from all Buddhas, because one has reached the final ground. On these, see the "Four Assurances" in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 124.

texts and were therefore excluded from the canon when it was redacted in the fourteenth century by Budön. In spite of this, the Old Schools continued to revere and practice these controversial tantras and eventually composed a supplemental canon, known as *The One Hundred Thousand Tantras of the Old Schools* (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*). The tantras contained in this collection are the key defining texts for the Old School traditions. Certain of these tantras, such as the *All-Accomplishing King* (*kun byed rgyal po*) and the *Secret Essence* (*gsang ba snying po*), are central to the Old Schools' self-definition in the same way that the *Secret Assembly* (*gsang ba 'dus pa*), the *Wheel of Supreme Bliss* (*bde mchog 'khor lo*), the *O Vajra!* (*kye rdo rje*) and the *Wheel of Time* (*dus 'khor*) are for the New Schools.

From either the Old Schools' or the New Schools' perspective, the doxographies found in Tibetan Buddhism are more than just an outline of philosophical views and practices. They both also present a vague outline of the historical development of Buddhist thought, especially with regard to the tantras. In this vein, what Steven Hodge says regarding the fourfold hierarchy of Tantric vehicles of the New Schools bears repeating:

It is my view that this fourfold system of classification [of tantras] represents, in a general manner, the historical sequence in which the tantras were developed. In other words, the majority of the texts that came to be classified as Kriyā [Action] tantras derive from the earliest proto-tantric phase, leading on through Caryā [Performance or Dual] tantras to the Yoga and later to the Anuttara-yoga [Highest Yoga] tantras.¹⁰⁸

Yukei Matsunga agrees when he says in his article, "A History of Tantric Buddhism in India with Reference to the Chinese Translations":

¹⁰⁸ Stephen Hodge, "Considerations on the Dating and Geographical Origins of the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhis-sūtra*" in *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. III, edited by Tadeusz Skorupski & Ulrich Pagel (London: University of London, 1994), 58. Bracketed material added.

In India and Tibet there is a fourfold classification of Tantra into *Kriyā*, *Caryā*, *Yoga*, and *Anuttarayoga*. This is a classification based upon the contents of the Tantras; and when the periods in which the texts were translated are considered, it also indicates the actual historical development of the Tantric system.¹⁰⁹

While neither author mentions the nine-fold hierarchy of the Old Schools, the same can be said for it, given that despite their differences concerning the highest tantras the two doxographies are identical for the lower ones. Even for the highest tantras a historical progression can also be inferred, though by no means proven.

The first three phases of tantric development mentioned by Hodge can be fleshed out by referring to Lochen Dharmashrī's descriptions of the vehicles. The "proto-tantric" phase represented by Action Tantra refers to the development of ritual practices (*sgrub thabs*, *sādhana*) that focus on external actions and the attainment of magical feats through the worship of a Buddha in the manner of a servant worshiping his or her lord. This initial phase represents the mixed influence of devotional practices, folk religion, and Hindu Śaivism on the development of Buddhism, probably in the sixth century C.E., when such practices were gaining popularity. The next phase is represented by the Performance Tantras. This group, as we have seen, is also called the Dual Tantras because they contain a mixture of external actions and inner yoga. Thus, they are a transitional group between Action and Yoga Tantras. This gradual internalization probably occurred at the beginning of the seventh century. In Yoga Tantra, "inner yoga" (*nang gi rnal 'byor*) is the defining characteristic. What began as external ritualistic actions that many ways were indistinguishable from their non-Buddhist counterparts evolved into internal meditation that was distinctly Buddhist. This

¹⁰⁹ Yukei Matsunga, "A History of Tantric Buddhism in India with Reference to the Chinese Translations" in *Buddhist Thought and Asian Civilization*, eds. Leslie S. Kawamura and Keith Scott (Dharma Publishing: Emeryville, 1977), 179.

probably occurred in the last half of the seventh century. Another indication that Yoga Tantras chronologically followed Performance or Dual Tantras but preceded the Highest Yoga Tantras is that Yoga Tantras are also the first to describe some of the central elements in what are known to be later Buddhist tantras. *The Compendium of Principles* is thus the first text to mention the five Buddha families. The main Performance Tantra, *The Enlightenment of Vairocana* (*rnam par snang mdzad mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa, vairocanābhisambodhi*), mentions only three families.¹¹⁰ Similarly, techniques of generation such as the five manifest enlightenments (*mngon byang lnga, abhisambodhi*) and the three meditative stabilizations (*ting nge 'dzin gsum*) first appear in *The Compendium of Principles*. Finally, one of the central themes of later Buddhist tantras, the subjugation of Maheśvara, is first seen in this root text for the Yoga Tantra vehicle. Given that all these elements can be found in tantras of the highest group, some if not all of which are certainly later than *The Compendium of Principles*, a historical development from Action Tantra to Yoga Tantra and beyond can be inferred.

The actual classification and application of names to these developments may have occurred relatively late however. Even in the textual tradition centered around the *Secret Essence Tantra*, a gradual refinement of prototypical doxographical categories can be seen, possibly in the relatively short time span ranging from the eighth to ninth centuries. The *Secret Essence Tantra* itself refers to two different enumerations of vehicles, and an important commentary on it attributed to Padmasambhava, *The Garland of Views*, is written in the genre of a doxography that specifically mentions only the three lower vehicles *as vehicles*. An analysis of these texts will clarify some aspects of the historical process whereby the various tantric classifications evolved.

¹¹⁰ R. Tajima and Alex Wayman, *The Enlightenment of Vairocana* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992), 320.

The first mention of vehicles in the *Secret Essence* is found in the third chapter of the short version of the root tantra.¹¹¹ In this chapter, there is a description of the teachings given by the six sages (*thub pa drug*), who represent the various Emanation Bodies that populate the six realms of cyclic existence. The first three chapters of the tantra are considered to discuss the basis or ground (*gzhi, āśraya*) from the triad of ground, path, and fruit. They therefore portray a process of emanation from the Reality Body, which is the union of primordial wisdom and emptiness, through the Complete Enjoyment Bodies, the representation of the maṇḍala in the highest heaven (*akanīṣṭa, 'og min*), to the Emanation Bodies, or the six sages. These six sages each go to one of the six realms of cyclic existence—the realms of the gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings. In these realms the Emanation Bodies train sentient beings in four ways:

1. through the example of their bodily deeds,
2. through the direct perception of their minds,
3. through their miraculous activities,
4. through their speech.¹¹²

In chapter three of the *Secret Essence*, the six sages' training of sentient beings through speech is described in the following manner:

By way of training, they taught, they teach, and they will teach the 84,000 doctrines consisting of the vehicle of gods and humans, the vehicle of the hearers, the vehicle of the Solitary Realizers, the vehicle of the Bodhisattvas, and the highest vehicle. These are the [teachings about] the dependent arising of inner subjects and outer objects, the mistaken designation of a subject, the

¹¹¹ Unless otherwise specified, allusions to the “root tantra” refer to the twenty-two chaptered version of the scripture (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417).

¹¹² *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 131-133.

incontrovertibility of cause and effect of actions, and so forth. The final teaching is that [we are] not stained by the cause and effect of actions, will not be stained, and there is no staining.¹¹³

Here, a common Mahāyoga enumeration of five vehicles is given, namely the vehicles of 1) gods and humans, 2) hearers, 3) Solitary Realizers, 4) Bodhisattvas, and 5) tantra. This is a relatively simplistic version of the vehicles, in that tantra is condensed into a single category with no elaboration of the various vehicles within tantra that make up the six higher levels of the nine-fold enumeration. There are several possible explanations for this. Because of the general nature of the passage's description, it may be that the inclusion of specific tantric vehicles was felt by the author to be unnecessary. This seems unlikely because of the precise descriptions of teachings associated with the vehicles. On the other hand, the author may have been trying to downplay the lower tantras by ignoring them. However, the passage is clearly attempting to connect the teaching of the *Secret Essence* with a preexisting tradition. If within that tradition distinctions between tantric vehicles were already accepted, ignoring these would weaken the import of the passage. A more plausible theory is that the author used an earlier doxographical scheme to lend the text antiquity and hence authenticity. Yet this does not seem to be a central concern for the authors of this text, since its unusual introductory chapter does not follow the standard format for Buddhist scriptures, which has been one of the central issues in the Tibetan argument over the tantra's authenticity. Most probably, this passage could in fact describe the doxographical categories prevalent at the

¹¹³ 'dul ba'i dbang gis lha dang mi'i theg pa dang / nyan thos kyi theg pa dang / rang sangs rgyas gyi theg pa dang / byang chub sems dpa'i theg pa dang / bla na med pa'i theg pas / ma rig pa'i rnam par rtog pa nyon mongs pa stong phrag brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i gnyen por / chos stong phrag brgyad cu rtsa bzhi gsungs sol / lgsung ngo / lgsung bar 'gyur rol / de dag thams cad kyang gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'i phyi nang gi rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba dang / 'dzin pa 'khrul las bzlog pa dang / las dang las kyi 'bras bu chud mi za ba dang / las dang las kyi 'bras bus mi gos/ gos par mi 'gyur/ gos su med pa ston pa'i mihar thug gol (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 160.5-161.2; *Secret Essence*, Tk.218, 11.2-11.5).

time of the its writing, which is an earlier scheme prior to the differentiation of the different tantric vehicles.

One piece of evidence in support of this is that the authors appear to be aware of tantric practices found in the other tantra group without explicitly differentiating them into vehicles. Another passage in the same chapter eludes to a nine-fold division of scriptures or genres of scriptures. Immediately after the description of the six sages teaching the different vehicles, all the Buddhas proclaim that “Whatever erroneous phenomena of cyclic existence that exist are due to the subjects and objects of ignorant conceptuality.”¹¹⁴ They go on to say that in fact “there is no corruption within the nature itself.”¹¹⁵ Buddhahood does not pass beyond sorrow (the literal meaning of *nirvāṇa*); it does not need to. Nothing does. For sorrow, or suffering, is merely an illusion. There is nothing to pass beyond. Why then is any teaching necessary?

In order to tame the fruitional activities of ignorance,
 It is taught that from renunciation one passes beyond sorrow.
 Discipline, Sūtras, Higher Philosophy, and
 Vows, Accomplishment, and Attainment,
 The Tantras of enlightened body, speech, and mind—
 These are thoroughly known in all directions.
 They issue from the secret essence, and
 This secret essential nature
 Is definitely delineated through the arising
 Of all the baskets and all the tantras.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *ji snyed ’jig rten ’khrul pa’i chos/ /ma rig rtog pa’i gzung ’dzin gyis/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 161.2-161.3).*

¹¹⁵ *rang bzhin nyid las nyams pa med/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 161.3-161.4).*

¹¹⁶ *ma rig smin mdzad ’dul ba’i phyir/ /byung nas mya ngan ’da’ bar ston/ /’dul ba mdo sde cho mngon dang / /dam tshig sgrub dang grub pa dang / /sku dang gsung dang thugs kyi rgyud/ /phyogs bcu kun tu rab grags pa/ gsang ba’i*

Here, the “secret essence” refers both to the tantra that is the means of expression (*brjod byed*), i.e., the written text, and the object it expresses (*brjod bya*), namely, the continuum of ground, path, and result. The *Secret Essence* is named after what it describes, namely the secret essence that *is* reality, the union of the sphere of phenomena (*chos dbyings*, *dharmadhātu*) and primordial wisdom (*ye shes*, *jñāna*). In both senses, it is seen as the source for all the Buddhist teachings. The teachings that spring from the secret essence are in this passage divided into nine groups. This is not a description of vehicles, which in the preceding passage of the same chapter were enumerated as five; this is a division of teachings.

The nine categories of the last passage are from the beginning clearly scriptural. Discipline, Sūtras, and Higher Philosophy are the traditional “baskets” of early and later canons. These are types of texts, a scriptural triad that is used almost universally among Buddhists, regardless of vehicle. Given that the list begins with these Three Baskets, the reader is led to believe the remaining six items are similarly “baskets” or groups of texts. The last three—tantras on enlightened body, speech, and mind—are also clearly scriptural categories. However, the middle three items of the list—vows, accomplishments, and achievements—are not so obviously genres of texts. Nonetheless, Longchenpa equates these with the three outer tantras: Action, Dual, and Yoga.¹¹⁷ The final three baskets mentioned are explicitly called tantras and are grouped according to the standard triad of enlightened body, speech, and mind. Since no mention is made of which titles belong to which of these last three baskets, it is impossible to determine exactly the intention behind that breakdown of tantric texts. However, in some descriptions of the eighteen Mahāyoga tantras, the texts are grouped according to a related five-fold enumeration of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. The triad of enlightened body, speech, and mind tantras, being a

snying po las 'phros tel /rang bzhin gsang ba'i snying po 'di/ /sde snod kun dang rgyud kun gyil /byung nas gtan la nges par 'bebs/ (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 162.1-162.3; *Secret Essence*, Tk.218 12.4-12.6).

¹¹⁷ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 535.

scriptural division, does not necessarily relate to the highest three vehicles—Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga—as Longchenpa would have it. It seems they more naturally fall within the scope of different kinds of Mahāyoga tantras.¹¹⁸

In short, the picture of Buddhism that emerges from the *Secret Essence*'s third chapter is one of five vehicles with nine scriptural categories. Practitioners of all the vehicles study to varying degrees the first three baskets, while the remaining six are genres of texts that belong solely to the fifth and “highest vehicle”, Tantra. Within Tantra, there are different types, but at the time this section of the *Secret Essence* was written these types of tantras were not yet differentiated into distinct vehicles. The unusualness of the terms used for the literature that came to be designated as Action, Dual, and Yoga Tantras—vows, achievements, and accomplishments—may not just be the typical obfuscation found in tantric writing as a whole. It may in fact represent an inchoate formulation of these categories, which only later became fixed, named, and institutionalized. Furthermore, the teaching associated with the “highest vehicle” in the first passage describes a general characteristic of Tantra as a whole—that we are not stained by the cause and effect of actions—an idea the tantric texts developed out of the Tathāgatagarbha theory. Taken together, these two passages allude to a historical situation where the Buddhist tantric movement was well established and beginning to develop distinct texts and practices, though these different strains had yet to be classified as separate vehicles.

This supposition is supported by another doxography found in an early “Tibetan” text, known as *The Quintessential Instructions or the Garland of Views* (*man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*), allegedly written by Padmasambhava, the Indian Buddhist missionary who became the

¹¹⁸ It is in fact Longchenpa's overactive propensity toward categorization that divides the Mahāyoga Tantras into the five groups of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 32-35). Yet, this implicitly contradicts his assignment of last three categories in this passage of the *Secret Essence* to Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga.

patron saint of Tibet.¹¹⁹ The text, as its name implies, is a doxography that documents a whole spectrum of philosophical views from non-Buddhist hedonists to the highest Buddhist view, problematically dubbed the “Great Completeness” (*rdzogs chen*). Though the attribution of the *Garland of Views* to Padmasambhava can neither be proven or disproved definitively, the text is at least as old as the 10th century CE for it is extensively quoted as a respected source in the *Lamp for the Eye of Meditation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*) by Nup Sangye Yeshe (832-943).¹²⁰ Samten Karmay thus places the composition of the *Garland of Views* in the late 9th or early 10th centuries CE.¹²¹ However, the text may be older, since it is also mentioned in the *Testament of Ba* (*sba bzhed*), the date of which is still a matter of debate.¹²² Karmay’s point in devoting a whole section of his book to the *Garland of Views* is that this text and the *Secret Essence Tantra* on which it comments are “the original source that gave birth to what is known as the doctrine of rDzogs chen.”¹²³ That it is the source for Atiyoga teachings is supported by the fact that neither “rDzogs chen” (Great Completeness) nor Atiyoga (the highest of the nine vehicles) are mentioned as stand-alone methods in either text, though the notion of great completeness is certainly propounded in both. However, Karmay goes too far when he introduces the *Garland of Views* as “the only extant work on

¹¹⁹ This text is also accepted by the New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism since it is found in their collection of “treatise” (*bstan bcos*), and all the sects assign Padmasambhava as its author. However, given the degree to which Padmasambhava’s story has been mythologized, it is extremely difficult for the conscientious scholar to assign any factuality to such suppositions. Any such assignments must necessarily be questioned as a means either to lend a text authenticity or to augment the status of this unique Tibetan saint.

¹²⁰ On Nup Sangye Yeshe, see *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 607-614.

¹²¹ Samten Gyaltzen Karmay, *The Great Perfection (rdzogs chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 149.

¹²² Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 143. He bases this information however on a latter version of the *Testament of Ba*, known as the *Supplemented Testament of Ba* (*sba bzhed zhabs btags ma*), an edition of which was published by R. A. Stein, *Une chronique ancienne de bSam-yas: sBa-bzhed* (Paris: Publications de L’institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1961). Steins edition dates to the 14th century. However, a recent discovery of an older version of the text that dates tentatively to the 11th century sheds a new light on this fact. In this version of the text, there is no mention of Padmasambhava leaving behind the *Garland of Views* when he left Tibet as there is in Stein’s version. See Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, trans., *dBa’ bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha’s Doctrine to Tibet* (Wein: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 8-14, 52-60.

¹²³ Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 152.

rDzogs chen attributed to Padmasambhava. It therefore represents the fundament work of this particular rDzogs chen tradition.”¹²⁴ In this statement, he exaggerates the importance of the “rDzogs chen tradition” for the *Garland of Views*, possibly reflecting the view of Rongzom Chö-gyi-sang-bo (11th century CE), who wrote a commentary on the text from a Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*) perspective.¹²⁵ To the contrary, it is commonly held among proponents of the Old Schools, regardless of the hermeneutic tradition to which they belong, that the *Garland of Views* is a commentary on the thirteenth chapter of the *Secret Essence Tantra*,¹²⁶ and in fact, the commentary itself does not in any significant way stray from the central themes and teachings of the *Secret Essence*. It is clearly a Mahāyoga commentary on a Mahāyoga tantra. To claim that the *Garland of Views* is a Great Completeness text is therefore to claim that the *Secret Essence Tantra* itself is a Great Completeness or Atiyoga tantra. (This is the position of both Rongzom and Longchenpa.) Since in modern circles, Great Completeness is associated solely with Atiyoga, such a claim unnecessarily conflates the higher three vehicles in a way that is not supported by other hermeneutic traditions. Furthermore, besides the use of the term “great completeness” (*rdzogs chen*), there is nothing in the text itself to indicate that the *Garland of Views* is in fact a work that belongs within the Atiyoga classification. Rather, it is a standard Indo-Tibetan doxography based on two stanzas from the thirteenth chapter of the *Secret Essence* and culminating with a description of *that tantra’s* highest teaching, the *mode (tshul)* of great completeness where all phenomena are spontaneously established as enlightened body, speech, and mind. This is not to say that

¹²⁴ Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 137.

¹²⁵ Roñ-zom Chos-kyi-bzañ-po, *slob dpon sangs rgyas gnyis pa’i gsung dngos/ man ngag lta ba’i phreng ba zhes bya ba’i ’grel pa* in *Selected Writings (gsuñ thor bu) of Roñ-zom Chos-kyi-bzañ-po* (Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1974; I-Tib 74-902673), 19-124. Hereafter, *lta phreng ’grel pa*.

¹²⁶ Cf. *lta phreng ’grel pa*, 20.2-3. *rgyud dang lung thams cad kyi spyi dpal gsang ba’i snying po las/ chos thams cad ye nas rdzogs pa chen por lhun gyis grub pa’i tshul bstan pal man ngag gi snying po’i le’u la ’jug pa’i yan lag dul man ngag lta ba’i phreng ba ’di mdzad dol*. This quote not only shows that the *Garland of Views* is held to be a commentary on chapter thirteen of the *Secret Essence*, whose title is *shin tu gsang ba man ngag gi snying po’i le’u*, but also that Rongzom considers it to be a text on the Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*).

either text teaches the Great Completeness doctrine advocated within the Atiyoga Vehicle, though, as Karmay rightly points out, the latter is a historical development of the *Secret Essence's* notion of great completeness.

As a doxography, the *Garland of Views* presents a hierarchical enumeration of vehicles that is in some ways equivalent to the one given in the tantra itself in that there is at least no definitive separation of the three higher tantric vehicles. The *Garland of Views* takes as its starting point the first two stanzas spoken by Samantabhadra at the beginning of chapter thirteen of the *Secret Essence*:

Those who do not realize [anything], those with wrong realization,
 Those with partial realization, and those not realizing correctly,
 Those with training, intention, and secrecy
 And those of the natural secret,
 Their topics are described by words that depend
 On a collection of names imputed through letters and sounds.
 The hidden and concealed meaning issues forth from within,
 Abiding in the indestructible mind of the teacher.¹²⁷

Here, we have yet another division, this time into eight types of religious practitioners with different views. The *Garland of Views* separates these into two broad categories: the views of perverse sentient beings (*sems can phyin ci log gi lta ba*) and the paths that transcend the world (*'jig rten las 'das pa'i lam*). Within the latter category, which represents Buddhist vehicles, there is a doxography similar to the nine vehicles with, however, some important differences. The author differentiates Buddhist vehicles into the dialectic vehicles (*mtshan*

¹²⁷ *ma rtogs pa dang log par rtogs/ /phyogs rtogs yang dag nyid ma rtogs/ l'dul ba dgongs pa gsang ba dang / l'rang bzhin gsang ba'i don rnams nil /yi ge sgras btags ming tshogs lal /brten pa'i tshig gis rab* (Tk: rang) *mtshon tel /khong nas gab sbas don 'byin pal /ston pa rdo rje'i thugs la gnas/* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 192.1-192.3; *Secret Essence*, Tk.218, 39.2-39.3).

nyid kyi theg pa) and the vajra vehicles (*rdo rje'i theg pa*), as we saw Lochen Dharmashrī do above. The dialectic vehicles are represented by the standard triad of Hearer, Solitary Realizer, and Bodhisattva Vehicles, as in the nine-fold division. The vajra vehicles are, on the other hand, only divided into three: Action Tantra, Dual Tantra, and Yoga Tantra. The first two are similar to the same categories found in the nine vehicle classification. However, concerning Yoga Tantra it is said:

The view of those who enter the vehicle of Yoga Tantra has two types: the vehicle of the external Yoga Tantras of asceticism and the vehicle of the inner Yoga Tantras of method.¹²⁸

The division into outer tantras of asceticism and inner tantras of method is here applied *only to Yoga Tantras*, whereas in the nine vehicles of the standard Old School presentation it is used to divide all six tantric vehicles into two equal groups. Furthermore, when the *Garland of Views* discusses the inner tantras, it divides them into ways or modes (*tshul*) and not distinct vehicles:

The view of those who enter the vehicle of the inner Yoga Tantras of method is of three types: the mode of generation, the mode of completion, and the mode of great completion.¹²⁹

Later doxographies associate Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga with emphasis on the stage of generation, the stage of completion, and the stage of non-duality or great completion, respectively. However, the *Garland of Views* explicitly mentions only the first six of the nine vehicles and does not mention Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga by name. Instead, it classifies them as inner Yoga Tantras of method. Even this last category is not clearly

¹²⁸ *rnal 'byor rgyud kyi theg pa la zhugs pa rnams kyi lta ba ni rnam pa gnyis tel rnal 'byor phyi pa thub pa'i rgyud kyi theg pa dang / rnal 'byor nang pa thabs kyi rgyud kyi theg pa'ol (man ngag lta phreng, 6.1-6.2).*

¹²⁹ *rnal 'byor nang pa thabs kyi rgyud kyi theg pa la zhugs pa rnams kyi lta ba ni rnam pa gsum stel bskyed pa'i tshul dang / rdzogs pa'i tshul dang / rdzogs pa chen po'i tshul lol (man ngag lta phreng, 6.4-6.5).*

differentiated, since both the outer vehicle of asceticism and the inner vehicle of method are called Yoga Tantras. As Karmay states:

The last three of the nine have the word *tshul* (*naya, vidhi, yukti*) [method] instead of *theg pa* (*yāna*) [vehicle] which suggests that they are in fact not considered to be independent in approach as implied by the term *theg pa*.¹³⁰

Thus, the list of vehicles as presented in *The Garland of Views* is noticeably different from the traditional nine vehicles, even though nine categories can be extracted from it:

- I. Hearer Vehicle
- II. Solitary Realizer Vehicle
- III. Bodhisattva Vehicle
- IV. Action Tantra Vehicle
- V. Dual Tantra Vehicle
- VI. Yoga Tantra Vehicle
 - A. External Yoga Tantras of Asceticism
 - B. Inner Yoga Tantras of Method
 - i. Mode of Generation
 - ii. Mode of Completion
 - iii. Mode of Great Completion

This scheme is a further development of the five vehicles mentioned in chapter three of the root tantra. The vehicle of gods and men, found in the tantra, is separated off as the preliminary topic of the “views of perverse sentient beings”. The “highest vehicle” of the tantra’s doxography is then split into three separate vehicles in the *Garland of Views*—Action Tantra, Dual Tantra, and Yoga Tantra. While there are a number of subdivisions to Yoga

¹³⁰ Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 146.

Tantra, these are not considered to be separate vehicles in the *Garland of Views*. In terms of the nine genres of scriptures described in that chapter of the tantra, the first five of these could be classified as the texts for 1-5 in the list above. Accomplishment (*'grub pa*) would then be, as Longchenpa suggests, the texts for the external Yoga Tantras (6.A), and the last three genres—the tantras of enlightened body, speech, and mind—would correspond to the methods of generation (6.B.i), completion (6.B.ii), and great completion (6.B.iii) respectively. However, these methods do not correspond to Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga.

In fact, in another Tibetan commentary on the *Secret Essence* by a contemporary of Longchenpa, Yungtönpa Dorjepel (*g.yung ston rdo rje dpal*, 1284-1365), the inner tantras of method are equated with just Mahāyoga. Yungtönpa's commentary is one of the main commentaries for the Zur hermeneutic tradition. He describes the outer tantras of asceticism distinctly as “three vehicles” and then proceeds to the inner tantras:

As for the inner tantras of method, those of Mahāyoga, having entered by way of method and wisdom, one realizes the great reality body of the superior indifferentiable truth. Thereby, one insatiably enjoys the sacraments of the five nectars. And, by meditation on the indifferentiability of the deities and [one's] conceptions, [Mahāyoga] raises [the practitioner] to the level of the effect, possessor of the unformed lotus. For that reason, it is called a vehicle.¹³¹

Not only is the topic explicitly stated to be Mahāyoga, but the doctrine of the “superior indifferentiable truth” and the indifferentiability of deities and one's conceptions are key

¹³¹ *nang pa thabs kyi rgyud rnal 'byor chen po ba ni/ thabs dang shes rab kyi sgo nas zbugs nas bden pa dbyer med lhag pa'i chos sku chen por rtogs pas dam rdzas bdud rtsi lnga la 'jol nyog du spyod cing / lha dang rtogs pa dbyer med du bsgom pas 'bras bu ma chags pad ma can gyi sar 'degs par byed pa'i don gyis na theg pas zhes bya'ol* (Yungtön Dorjepel (*g.yung ston rdo rje dpal*), *dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgyud gsal byed me long* (*Mirror Identifying the Meaning*), in *bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 28, 179.3-179.5).

elements to the Mahāyoga worldview and the five nectars are a central component to its practice. There is also a clear presence of the stage of generation in Yungtönpa's description, which we have seen is said to be a defining feature of Mahāyoga. In this commentary on the *Secret Essence* written in the same generation as Longchenpa's, the inner tantras of methods are equated solely with Mahāyoga, and not the triad of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga.

Such an interpretation could also be applied to the *Garland of Views*. Nowhere in that text does it describe anything like the triad of father, mother, and son maṇḍalas of Anuyoga or the practices of leap-over and severance of Atiyoga. The modes of generation, completion, and great completeness are described in Mahāyoga terms so that they all three easily fit within that vehicle's worldview. Concerning the great completeness, it is said:

The method of the great completeness is to cultivate the realization that all mundane and transcendent phenomena are primordially and indivisibly the nature of the maṇḍala of enlightened body, speech, and mind.¹³²

It then quotes the second chapter of the *Secret Essence*, a statement made by Samantabhadra that the aggregates are the five Buddhas, the sources and constituents are the Bodhisattvas, the elements and space are the major goddesses, and that everything is primordially enlightened. The great completeness of the *Garland of Views* is not the Great Completeness of Atiyoga. It is the highest of the teachings found within the *Secret Essence Tantra* itself.

The remainder of Samantabhadra's statement in chapter 2, not quoted in the *Garland of Views*, summarizes the Mahāyoga view of great completeness for a slightly different perspective:

Each and every phenomenon without exception
Is nothing other than Buddhahood.

¹³² *rdzogs pa chen po'i tshul nil 'jig rten dang 'jig rten las 'das pa'i chos thams cad dbyer med par sku gsung thugs kyi dkyil 'khor gyi rang bzhin ye nas yin par rtogs nas sgom pa stel (man ngag lta phreng, 7.2-7.3).*

Buddhahood does not find

Phenomena that are other than Buddhahood.¹³³

This form of Buddhist Tantric monism is certainly similar to the view of Atiyoga's Great Completeness doctrine. Thus, Karmay correctly identifies the *Secret Essence* and the *Garland of Views* as the main sources for Atiyoga's Great Completeness teaching:

Being the principal work dealing with the final stage of the process of the *rdzogs rim* meditation expounded in *Sny* [the *Secret Essence*], [the *Garland of Views*] is the original source that gave birth to what is known as the doctrine of rDzogs chen, a syncretic teaching mainly drawn from *Sny* and tinged with thoughts originating in *Sems sde*.¹³⁴

However, it is misleading to imply that the use of the term “great completeness” in the *Secret Essence* and the *Garland of Views* is equivalent to Atiyoga's use of the term, as he does earlier in the same paragraph when he says that the *Garland of Views* “is the fundamental text of one of the two rDzogs chen traditions.”¹³⁵

This confusion between the method of great completeness in the *Secret Essence* and the Great Completeness of Atiyoga is promoted by the tendency of the Long-Rong hermeneutic tradition to conflate Mahāyoga and Atiyoga, by claiming that the *Secret Essence* is actually an Atiyoga text. Such a claim serves the agenda of those two great authors, namely to promote Atiyoga and its Great Completeness doctrine. However, it does not help one understand Mahāyoga on its own terms. The Zur commentarial tradition on the other hand maintains a clear distinction between Mahāyoga and Atiyoga; they describe the *Secret Essence* as the highest of the Mahāyoga tantras. In Zur commentaries on the *Secret Essence*, the agenda is to

¹³³ *thams cad ma lus chos so cog /sang rgyas nyid las gzhan ma yin/ /sang rgyas nyid las gzhan pa'i chos/ /sang rgyas nyid kyis mi brnyes sol* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 157.1-157.2; *Secret Essence*, Tk.218, 7.7-7.7).

¹³⁴ Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 152.

¹³⁵ Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 151.

describe and comment on the Mahāyoga tradition itself, and they trace their lineage back to the first hermeneuts of this system: Vilāsavajra, Buddhaguhya, and Vimalamitra. This divergence of hermeneutical approach is at the heart of the differences between these two systems.

What then is the relationship between Mahāyoga, as represented by the *Secret Essence*, and Atiyoga? There is no reason to doubt the traditional assertion that the *Secret Essence* was originally translated during the reign of Trisong Detsen (*khri srong de'u btsan*, ruled 755-797 CE), though Samdrup Dorjé places the translation in the reign of Relpachen (*ral pa can*, ruled 815-836 CE).¹³⁶ Karmay claims that the use of the term *rdzogs chen* as the name for a particular teaching “goes back at the earliest to the ninth century A.D.”¹³⁷ If the *Secret Essence* was not an original Tibetan composition as the skeptics say, it would have existed at least half a century prior to the advent of the Great Completeness as a school of thought, since it was most likely translated into Tibetan sometime around the turn of the ninth century.¹³⁸ The two vehicles of Mahāyoga and Atiyoga thus represent, like scriptural divisions before them, a chronological development of the Buddhist Tantric doctrine, Mahāyoga teachings being the prior source for both Anu- and Atiyoga.

The doxographical schemes described by Lochen Dharmashrī and others thus present the philosophical and practical differences between the various vehicles of Buddhist as well as allude to a historical development of Buddhist thought from the earliest forms of Buddhism to the latest developments in Buddhist tantra. With this as a background, we can now turn

¹³⁶ Samdrup Dorjé (bsam grub rdo rje), *dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyī khog dbub rin po che 'bar ba'i gur* (*Tent of Blazing Jewels*) in *bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 28, 631. This is related to the same conflict in the accounts of Vimalamitra, the Indian scholar who supervised the extant translation of the *Secret Essence*. According to David Germano, some accounts place him in the reign of Trisong Detsen and others in the time of Relpachen. See David Germano, “The Seven Descents and the Early History of rNying ma Transmissions” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, edited by Helmut Eimer & David Germano, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 241-242.

¹³⁷ Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 152.

¹³⁸ By saying “at the earliest”, Karmay implies it was toward the *end* of the ninth century.

to describing the tradition of the *Secret Essence* itself by looking at the legends and mythology presented in the Tibetan traditions that center around this important text.

3. LEGENDS AND HISTORY

Tibetan Buddhist traditions have sought from an early period to prove the validity of their teachings by tracing their doctrinal lineages back to an Indian source. This is in part due to the influence of the Indian method for preservation of a tradition, oral transmission from a guru, or teacher, to a disciple. However, in Tibet, with the advent of competing schools of interpretation, the adherence to Indian lineages also became politicized. Legendary accounts of the debate at Samyé between the pro-Chinese and pro-Indian factions are popular among some sects of Tibetan Buddhism. These underscore the importance of doctrinal authenticity, and the alleged victory of the Indian camp plays a crucial role in certain groups' self-image as preservers of the Indic tradition.¹ For such believers, a teaching was considered valid only if its lineage could be traced back to an Indian source; a Tibetan Buddhist scripture could be authenticated only if there was a Sanskrit original. Later sectarian rivalries often focused on the discrediting of an opponent's teachings by calling into question the authenticity of their scriptures and lineages.² The tracing of a teaching's lineage back to Indian sources thus became one of the key means to prove the doctrine's validity, as well as to demonstrate its greatness.

In Tibet this conservative tendency of insisting on prior India sources was in constant tension with a vibrant movement of renewed revelation. Robert Mayer has pointed out that

¹ Butön, *History*, 191-195. Ṅag-dBañ Blo-bZaṅ rGya-mTSHo, *A History of Tibet*, tr. by Zahiruddin Ahmad (Bloomington, Indiana: Reasearch Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University, 1995), 65. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, on the other hand, does not describe the debate and makes only five references to Ho-shang Mahāyāna, the Chinese proponent in the debate. One places him in the time of Songtsen Gampo (511), and the other four occur in the context of refuting assertions that the Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*) is a form of his doctrine (896, 899, 905,906).

² For instance, many of the Old Schools' tantras were excluded from the New Schools' redaction of the Buddhist canon by Butön (1290-1364), for the ostensible reason that he had not seen the Sanskrit originals, and Mar-pa's claim to have studied directly under Nāropa, the Indian patriarch of the Ka-gyu teachings on the Great Seal, was challenged by his opponents. See Gos-lo-tṣā-ba gZhon-nu-dpal, *Blue Annals*, tr. by George Roerich, 102, n.1, and Ronald Davidson, "Reflections on the Maheshvara Subjugation Myth: Indic Materials, Sa-skyapa Apologetics, and the Birth of Heruka", in *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14:2 (Winter 1991), 220.

in contradistinction to the New Schools' idea of a closed, or fixed, canon, the Old Schools upheld an open canon that continued to admit new revelations.³ This was achieved through the mechanism of revealed treasures (*gter ma*). These treasures were believed to be texts hidden by Padmasambhava or one of his retinue in the earth, buildings, sky, or even the mind of the revealer. According to Tulku Thondup's, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, treasure texts were originally concealed for four reasons:

1. so that the teachings would not disappear,
2. so that they remain fresh without being diluted by many members in the lineage,
3. to maintain the purity of the teachings, and
4. to shorten the lineage.⁴

He also mentions the need to revitalize the doctrine for later generations:

It is beneficial for various types of Terma to be discovered at different periods to suit the mental desires, needs and capacities of people born at those times.⁵

At the appropriate time in history, Padmasambhava or a member of his retinue is reborn in Tibet as a treasure revealer (*gter ston*), who extracts the teachings from their hiding place and translates them into Tibetan. These revelations, also called the close lineage (*nye brgyud*) because there were no intervening human transmitters, came to hold an equal place alongside those teachings originating from India that were traditionally passed from teacher to disciple, in what is known as the distant lineage (*ring brgyud*).

³ Robert Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection; The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis* (Oxford: Kiscadale Publications, 1996), 1-63 (chapter one). This is a generalization of his argument and therefore oversimplifies the complex situation that Mayer describes. For instance, on page 19, he says:

Many of the bKa'-brgyud-pa, on the other hand, tended to more consistently favour an open canon, in part because several of their key founding hierarchs...had already made such irrevocably strong commitments to the rNying-ma-pa teachings before the firm establishment of the Kanjur that these could not later be contradicted without a major discontinuity of tradition.

⁴ Tulku Thondup Rinpoché, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of the Nyingma School of Buddhism* (London: Wisdom, 1986), 62.

⁵ Tulku Thondup, *Hidden Teachings*, 63.

The mechanism of revealed treasures allowed for the continual revitalization of the Old Schools' teachings so that reinterpretations appropriate to a later era could be awarded the same sense of authenticity as those teachings that originally spread from the mother land of India. As Mayer also points out, the treasure tradition of the Old Schools' and their belief in an open canon was directly connected to their shamanic tendencies in the sense of the term defined by Geoffrey Samuel in *Civilized Shamans*,⁶ especially since the manner of revelation is distinctly shamanistic. The New Schools' general advocacy for a closed canon, on the other hand, was related in part to their more clerical tendencies. They maintained the vibrancy of their tradition instead through a continued revitalization of their hermeneutics.

This tension between clerical scholasticism and shamanic experience is a theme found throughout the history of religions. It effected the course of Buddhism's history not only in Tibet, where the theme is evident in the early legends as well as the later history, but also in India itself. Mayer argues well the case that "the rNyingmapa cultures of ongoing revelation are indeed, as the rNyingmapa claim, directly continuous with older Indic models."⁷ He aptly points out that the Mahāyoga corpus as a whole is, for the Old Schools, a product of just such a shamanic revelation. The scriptures of the Mahāyoga system are broadly divided into two groups: the collection of tantras (*rgyud sde*) that were transmitted from India and the collection of means of achievement (*sgrub sde*) that are primarily treasures revealed in Tibet. The *Secret Essence* falls within the former category, and this group of tantras itself is said to have been revealed in India, rather than directly transmitted from the Buddha himself. According to the legend, the volumes of the eighteen tantras that compose the collection of tantras fell from the sky onto the roof of King Indrabhūti's palace, as

⁶ Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 8-10.

⁷ Mayer, *Phur-pa bcu gnyis*, 64ff.

prophesized in the king's own dreams.⁸ After a period of intense contemplation, he realized their meaning, and from him the teachings were transmitted through a series of Indian master, finally falling to Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava who brought the teachings to Tibet.

The belief in revelations is a natural consequence of the *Secret Essence's* own doctrine that all phenomena are primordially enlightened and that the sacred drama described in the text's narrative is perpetually enacted in the present moment. It is for this reason that there is no attempt in the text itself to connect the teachings directly to the historical Buddha, as is the case in the main Yoga Tantra, *The Compendium of Principles*.⁹ Instead, the Mahāyoga tradition holds that the teachings were revealed directly to King Indrabhūti. The belief in multiple Indrabhūtis could partly be the consequence of more conservative, clerical factions exerting pressure on the hagiography to conform to their notion of authenticity. In other words, the first of the three Indrabhūtis, described by Tibetans as being a contemporary of the Buddha who received initiation into the higher tantras from him, is probably an attempt to connect the revelations of an Indrabhūti, early 8th century C.E., to the historical Buddha. This, however, contradicts what little is known of the chronology of tantra in general and the Mahāyoga tantras in particular.

All Tibetan commentators are concerned with lineage as their stamp of validity. Thus, each commentary describes the author's lineage to varying degrees. In the *Key to the Treasury*, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima provides a partial lineage—highlighting certain successions and skipping over others. In the following, we will look at the important figures, both Indian and Tibetan, in his Mahāyoga lineage. Their lives will be described as they appear in the

⁸ As will be elaborated further on, there are three Indrabhūti-s in the Tibetan tradition, an elder, a middle and a younger. The Indrabhūti to whom the Mahāyoga scriptures were revealed was the middle Indrabhūti. He is also known to the Tibetans as King Jaḥ (*rgyal po dzal*).

⁹ *The Compendium of Principles'* mythos is based on a reinterpretation of the Buddha's enlightenment portrayed in the first chapter of that scripture—the story of Sarvārthasiddhi, another version of the name Siddhārtha.

primarily hagiographical material found in Tibetan, augmented with relevant information from more recent scholarship. The point will be to see how these stories serve both to lend authenticity and validity to the Mahāyoga cycle. Secondly, we will investigate how this information may help to actual date the evolution of the Mahāyoga corpus and more specifically the *Secret Essence Tantra*.

While these hagiographies are heavily laden with mythological material, they contain kernels of fact. Surely, many of the stories are clearly fantastic, involving supernatural powers and beings. However, one cannot discard the Tibetan tradition and completely disregard these stories, merely because they contain fantastical elements. Instead, it is logical to assume that the characters in the stories are based on actual people involved in the transmission, whose stories were gradually elaborated over time by pious devotees. Also, one cannot ignore political and doctrinal motivations in the elaboration of these stories. Stories are augmented and biographies expanded not merely out of devotion but also to demonstrate a doctrine's or interpretation's superiority over others, as well as to establish their validity within Tibet's critical intellectual landscape. Extracting the grain of historical fact from these pearls of Buddhist literature involves a process that balances these two methodological approaches. As far as possible within the limits of this work, I will in this manner attempt to extract the kernels of truth contained in these hagiographies. In the course of exploring the Indo-Tibetan lineage for Mahāyoga in some detail, there will also be a brief description of the scriptures of the Mahāyoga corpus and the most important commentaries on the *Secret Essence*.

THE LINEAGE IN INDIA

KING INDRABHŪTI

The name of King Indrabhūti is scattered throughout Tibetan tantric hagiographical, historical and commentarial literature. The New Schools consider him to be the originator of the *Secret Assembly* tradition, while the Old Schools consider him to be the revealer of the whole Mahāyoga corpus, of which the *Secret Assembly* is a part. He is associated with the *O Vajra!* cycle¹⁰ as well as with the “co-emergent” (*lhan skyes, sabāja*) school of Buddhist thought.¹¹ He is counted as one of the eighty-four adepts in that cycle of literature, and a number of important tantric adepts are considered to be among his progeny or siblings, namely Padmasambhava, the great patron saint of Buddhism; Śhāntarakṣita, the Bodhisattva who established the monastic discipline; Kambalapāla, or Lawapa (*lwa ba pa*, the blanket-siddha); and Lakṣhmīnkarā, one of the few women among the eight-four siddhas. Sometimes Indrabhūti is considered to be king of Oḍḍiyāna (*o rgyan*), possibly in north-western India; elsewhere, King of Zahor (*za hor*), possibly in north-eastern India. Indeed, the stories concerning this King Indrabhūti are so varied and at odds that scholars, Tibetan and non-Tibetan alike, have necessarily concluded there was more than one King Indrabhūti.¹²

The Tibetan tradition posits three Indrabhūtis: the elder Indrabhūti, the middle Indrabhūti, and the younger Indrabhūti.¹³ According to some, the middle Indrabhūti is also

¹⁰ Snellgrove, *Hevajra Tantra*, vol. 1, 13.

¹¹ Jo Nang Taranātha, *The Seven Instruction Lineages*, translated and edited by David Templeman (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1983; reprint 1990), 25-26. Indrabhūti is credited with text called *Proof of the Co-Emergent* (*lhan cig skyes grub*, P3107, vol. 69, 71.1.1-74.1.8).

¹² Most of the sources referred to in the immediately preceding and following notes assert multiple Indrabhūtis. The notable exception is perhaps the earliest reference to the king's story in Jñānamitra's *Commentary on the 150 Modes of the Glorious Perfection of Wisdom* (*'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa*; P3471). As will be explained anon, the king's son in that story is called Shākrabhūti, which could well be an alternative form for Indrabhūti.

¹³ In Tibetan these are: *indra bhū ti chen po*, *indra bhū ti bar ba*, and *indra bhū ti chung ba*. Their brief biographies culled from various sources can be found in Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 117, 157, and 253 respectively.

called by the name “King Dza”, though Samten Karmay has shown how this name represents the Tibetan mythologization of King Indrabhūti.¹⁴ It is this figure that is most important in the tantric lineages and is claimed to be the source of the Old Schools’ Mahāyoga lineage. I believe it is possible to—in Snellgrove’s words—“reject” one of these Indrabhūtis “as barren,”¹⁵ namely the first, and posit the other two as father and son. Before this can be discussed however, their individual stories as they appear in Tibetan traditions need to be laid out in summary.

THE ELDER INDRABHŪTI

The story of the elder Indrabhūti is found in the Jonang lama Tāranātha’s work entitled *The Seven Instruction Lineages* (*bka’ babs bdun ldan*), which has been translated into English by David Templeman.¹⁶ Khetsun Sangpo reproduces the Tibetan of this story verbatim in his *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*.¹⁷ In Tāranātha’s work the story begins the chapter on the Action Seal (*las kyi phyag rgya, karmamūdra*) transmission, which deals mainly with the Great Seal (*phyag rgya chen mo, mahāmudrā*) and the *Secret Assembly* lineages.

Tāranātha describes the elder Indrabhūti in hyperbolic terms. “He was by nature Vajrapāṇi”. As king of Oḍḍiyāna, he enjoyed vast wealth and moreover was a “master of all the secret mantras of this particular doctrine.” It is claimed that he lived at the time of the

¹⁴ *sa ho ra’i rgyal po indra bhu ti bar pa’am mtshan gyi rnam grangs rgyal po dzah ru grags pa de...* (Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 157). Samten Karmay, “King Dza/Tsa and the Vajrayāna” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R. A. Stein*, edited by Michael Strickmann, Vol. 1, (Institut Belge de Hautes Etudes Chinoises Bruxelles, 1981), 192-211. Karmay’s point is that “... since the tantras mentioning King Tsa/Dza are controversial works and their genuine Indian origin is doubted, this legendary figure was probably a Tibetan creation” (207). Karmay does indeed draw out the mythological aspects of the king’s story and demonstrates how these are connected to the figure of King Tsa/Dza. However, the information he uses in demonstrating how the Tibetan figure was mythologized into King Dza has little impact on the historicity of the Indian figure of Indrabhūti.

¹⁵ Snellgrove, *Hevajra Tantra*, vol. 1, 13.

¹⁶ Taranātha, *The Seven Instruction Lineages*, 24-25.

¹⁷ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 117-118.

Buddha, for he “saw the very face of the Enlightened One,” and the story of Indrabhūti’s meeting with the Buddha forms the bulk of the king’s hagiography. The plot of this story runs as follows:

One day, the king spots a flock of what he believes to be red birds flying over head. When he questions his ministers regarding the spectacle, they inform him, “Those are not birds; they are Arhats of the Great Sage”, the Buddha. The king earnestly wishes to meet with the Buddha but is told the sage will not travel such a great distance. Nonetheless, the king lays out a meal for the five hundred flying Arhats, who accepted his invitation. After the meal, Indrabhūti asks them for some teachings. They teach him the standard form of Sūtra Vehicle practice: “Abandon the attributes of desire and hold the Three Higher Trainings and the Six Perfections!” Distraught about abandoning all the pleasures of his life, the king asks if there is not some other way to achieve enlightenment without renouncing the “five sensual pleasures”. At this, the Arhats disappear, and a voice from the sky proclaims that the king is not meant for the Hearer or Solitary Realizer Vehicle but is destined for the Bodhisattva Vehicle. These voices then coalesce into a boundless maṇḍala into which the king was initiated, whereby he achieved perfection. The Buddha magically appears and instructs Indrabhūti in “all the Tantras.” The king in turn teaches all his subjects, and at the end of his life he and his consorts simply disappear, being transformed into Complete Enjoyment Bodies.

In Tāranātha’s work this story ends with the king and his whole kingdom achieving enlightenment, and their bodies disappearing. The connection to later generations of the lineage is made through a female disciple of the king’s, Sahajasiddhī, who is reborn and instructs Kukurāja, who is an established figure in the later lineage of the middle Indrabhūti.

Thus, the story of the elder Indrabhūti is dominated by mythological elements—flying monks, teleporting Buddhas, and disappearing saints. Other than the obvious purport of proving the validity of the teachings associated with Indrabhūti, the story highlights the tension between the Sūtric anti-worldly attitude and the Tantric in-the-world-ness. Indrabhūti balks at the Sūtra teachings given by the Arhats and asks for a teaching that does not involve renouncing the five pleasures. This teaching is Tantra. In this light, the story is a Tantric charter myth.

While Indrabhūti in general is a figure revered by many different tantric lineages, this particular story of Indrabhūti the senior is primarily connected with the *Secret Assembly* tradition. Khetsun Sangpo retells the narrative of Indrabhūti the elder under the heading “The Lineage of the *Secret Assembly*”.¹⁸ The connection of the story to the *Secret Assembly* tradition is further evidenced by Gö Shünnu Pel’s statement in *The Blue Annals*:

The adepts of the (Guhya) samāja agree that the Guhyasamājatantra had been preached by the Munīndra himself, following a request of Indrabhūti, the great king of Oḍḍiyāna, at the time when the Buddha had manifested himself in Oḍḍiyāna and initiated the king.¹⁹

The Blue Annals explicitly states that the adepts referred to here are the New School adherents to this tantra, translator Gö Lhetsé²⁰ and his followers among others. Gö Lhetsé was one of the great promoters of the *Secret Assembly Tantra* in eleventh century Tibet. He was also a “vociferous opponent” of the Old Schools, who came into conflict with Zur the younger (1014-1074) and whose *Broadside* attacks the authenticity of the *Secret Essence*

¹⁸ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 119.

¹⁹ 'Gos gZhon-nu-dpal, *The Blue Annals*, tr. by George N. Roerich, 359. Hereafter, referred to as *The Blue Annals*. “Munīndra” is an epithet for the Buddha.

²⁰ 'gos lhas btsas.

Tantra.²¹ The fact that this story of Indrabhūti the senior is associated with Gö Lhetsé's New School interpretation of the *Secret Assembly Tantra* is significant.

The *Secret Assembly Tantra* is also found in the Old Schools among the collection of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras. These tantras, as will be related in more detail below, were believed to have fallen onto the roof of King Indrabhūti's palace. This is the middle Indrabhūti, also known as King Dza. Such a story about newly revealed texts appearing from the sky would be acceptable to the Old Schools, among whom the treasure-revealer tradition developed,²² but for the stricter guidelines of the New Schools the teaching would need to be traced back to an authentic Indian master and the tantra, to the Buddha himself. The proponents of the New Schools, such as Gö Lhetsé, found themselves in a difficult position. They revered the *Secret Assembly Tantra* but could not accept its origin-myth. To accept that these texts were revealed directly by Vajrapāṇi to Indrabhūti would be to accept the possibility of new revelations in the future and thus leave the canon open-ended for shamanic reinterpretation.

Instead, the more clerical factions of the New Schools chose to rework the myth about Indrabhūti by removing him one step from the profane world and mythologizing him. Indrabhūti is in this version of the story elevated to the status of Vajrapāṇi, the redactor of the tantras, and ultimately he becomes a Complete Enjoyment Body. Furthermore, he is projected back in time to the era of the Buddha so that he can receive the teachings directly from the Buddha's mouth. The authenticity of the *Secret Assembly Tantra*, which is highly important for the New Schools, is therefore proven without having to resort to the notion of new revelation, as in the story of the middle Indrabhūti, who is the discoverer of the Old

²¹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 643 & vol. 2, 58 n.783.

²² The Old Schools (*rnying ma*) were not so named until the arising of the New Schools (*gsar ma*), which can be roughly placed in the eleventh century. It was in this same period that the first treasure-revealer (*gter ston*) appeared. This was Sangye Lama (c. 990-1070). See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 751-752.

Schools' Mahāyoga tantras. This along with the near complete lack of any historical anchors in elder Indrabhūti's story casts serious doubt on that figure's historical validity.

THE MIDDLE INDRABHŪTI

As opposed to Indrabhūti the elder and Indrabhūti the younger, the middle figure is usually known as just "Indrabhūti", or in Tibetan legend as King Dza. The Old Schools consider this king to be the revealer of the eighteen tantras of the Mahāyoga corpus. The *locus classicus* of his legend is found in Jñānamitra's commentary on the *One Hundred and Fifty Stanza Perfection of Wisdom*.²³ While ostensibly being a commentary of the Sūtra Vehicle, since it concerns the Perfection of Wisdom, this commentary mentions *The Union of All Buddhas* and *The Secret Assembly* and is traditionally considered to be a tantric text. Not much is known of the text's author, Jñānamitra, though he can be provisionally placed at the beginning of the eighth century. The story of King Indrabhūti related in the commentary is the earliest version presently known.

The story is presented in the introduction to explain the history of the scripture being commented on, namely the *One Hundred and Fifty Stanza Perfection of Wisdom*. This "sūtra" is said to have been extracted from *The Glorious Supreme Beginning*, one of the more famous of the eighteen tantras.²⁴ While the Old Schools view this tantra as belonging to the Mahāyoga corpus, the New Schools consider this tantra to belong to the Yoga Tantra Vehicle. Kenneth Eastman has alluded to a possible connection between the Sino-Japanese tradition of eighteen tantras in China and Japan and the eighteen scriptures of the Mahāyoga corpus, and Rolf Giebel's full translation of Amoghavajra's (705-774) summary of the

²³ Jñānamitra, *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa (āryaprajñāpāramitānayaśaṭīkā)*, in *Tibetan Buddhist Canon* (Oakland, Calif.: Dharma Press, 1981), vol. 59, 543.7-586.5 (=P3471).

²⁴ *dpal mchog dang po, Shriparamādyā.*

eighteen texts demonstrates this clearly.²⁵ In Sino-Japanese traditions the list centers around *The Compendium of Principles*, which for them is the most important. One of its major explanatory tantras, *The Vajra Pinnacle*,²⁶ is also prevalent. However, three tantras in the list are ones that are classified as Mahāyoga tantras by the Old Schools. These are *The Glorious Supreme Beginning*, *The Secret Assembly*, and *The Union of All Buddhas*.²⁷ The intimate relationship between the Yoga and Mahāyoga Tantra is thus evident by these overlapping lists.

In Tibet, among the Yoga Tantras only *The Glorious Supreme Beginning* is found within the eighteen Mahāyoga tantras. *The Compendium of Principles*, *The Vajra Pinnacle* and others did not fall into that category. The fact that the story of Indrabhūti's revelation, which for the Old Schools is associated with the Mahāyoga tantras, is first found in a commentary on a scripture said to be extracted from *The Glorious Supreme Beginning* could account for the latter's inclusion in the Mahāyoga cycle. Another indication that the story of Indrabhūti in Jñānamitra's text represents an earlier tantric development is that the scriptures are called "sūtras" and not "tantras". *The Compendium of Principles* likewise designates itself as a "sūtra". In any case, the story from Jñānamitra's commentary along with *The Glorious Supreme Beginning* being included in the list of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras clearly demonstrates the close connection between the Yoga and Mahāyoga tantras.

The story of Indrabhūti is given at the beginning of Jñānamitra's commentary to explain the history of the one-hundred and fifty stanza Perfection of Wisdom.

²⁵ Kenneth Eastman, "The Eighteen Tantras of the Vajrashekhara/Māyājāla," paper presented to the 26th International Conference of Orientalists in Japan (Tokyo: May 8th, 1981). Rold W. Giebel, "The *Chin-kang-ting ching yü-chi'ieh shih-pa-hui chi[kuei]*: An Annotated Translation" in *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies*, no. 18, (Naritashi, Japan: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1995), 107-201.

²⁶ *rdo rje rtse mo, vajraśekhara*.

²⁷ Giebel, "The *Chih-kang-ting...*", 114.

If I were to explain the history of this scripture, from the previous time when the Buddha was in the land of humans for eighty years, he trained [beings] with *The Union of All Buddhas*, *The Secret Assembly*, etc.²⁸

However, he says that at that time there were no humans who were suitable trainees for the eighteen tantras. So, these were taught in the lands of the gods—the Land of the Four Lineages of Great Kings, The Heaven of the Thirty-three, and the Joyous Realm.²⁹ Jñānamitra continues:

Later, after the Buddha passed beyond sorrow, the king of Zahor along with his retinue had marvelous faith in the doctrine.³⁰

The story does not explicitly name the king as Indrabhūti until the end. However, it does connect him with the kingdom of Zahor and the yogi Kukurāja, which are features of the middle Indrabhūti's story. More importantly, it does not mention how much time elapsed between the Buddha and Indrabhūti, just that Indrabhūti came some time later. This is a source of confusion for the later Tibetan traditions. The middle Indrabhūti's story in Jñānamitra's text can be summarized as follows:

Since Indrabhūti and his retinue were suitable to be trainees for the eighteen "sūtras", that cycle of texts "came to the land of Zahor, through the blessings of Vajrapāṇi."³¹ However, as the king could not understand them, he searched for someone who could. Discovering Kukurāja in the central kingdom of Malapa,³²

²⁸ *gsung rab 'di'i lo rgyus bshad nal sngon sangs rgyas mi yul na lo brgyad cu bzhugs pa'i tshe nal sarva vuddha sa ma yo ga dang gu hya sa ma dza la sogs pas 'dul ba...* (Jñānamitra, *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa*, 543.7-544.1).

²⁹ *rgyal chen ris bzhi dang sum cu rtsa gsum dang dga' ldan la sogs pa'i gnas na...* (Jñānamitra, *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa*, 544.1-544.2).

³⁰ *smad kyis sangs rgyas mya ngan las 'das pa'i 'og tu za hor gyi rgyal po 'khor dang bcas pa ngo mtshar du chos la dad bdag cig 'dug pa...* (Jñānamitra, *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa*, 544.2).

³¹ *sarba Buddha sa ma yo ga la sogs pa sde chen po bco brgyad phyag na rdo rje'i byin rlabs kyis za hor gyi yul du gshags pa dang* (Jñānamitra, *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa*, 544.3).

³² *yul ma la ba* (Jñānamitra, *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa*, 544.4).

the king sent him an invitation to inspect the texts. Kukurāja hesitates, fearing if he does not understand the texts, the king would develop doubts about Buddhism. Instead, he asks that the books first be sent to him for inspection. As suspected, when they arrive, Kukurāja cannot understand them and is severely distraught. At this point, Vajrasattva appears to Kukurāja and grants him the ability to comprehend the revealed scriptures. Kukurāja then travels to Zahor. There, he instructs the king, having his retinue enact the Vajra-Realm maṇḍala, according to the instructions of Vajrasattva. Concerned with the propagation of the teachings, Indrabhūti has Kukurāja also instruct his son, Shakrabhūti, who in turn teaches it to his son. Extracting the one-hundred and fifty modes of the Perfection of Wisdom from The Glorious Supreme Beginning, Shakrabhūti teaches this to his sister, Gomadevī,³³ from whom it was transmitted to future generations.

Jñānamitra's version of the story differs significantly from the corresponding legend in the Tibetan Mahāyoga tradition. The latter equates the middle Indrabhūti with a figure known as King Jaḥ.³⁴ The connection between the two versions is obvious, as the Tibetan King Jaḥ story follows the same basic plot as Jñānamitra's Indrabhūti version. However, as Samten Karmay has shown, the story has been mythologized for Tibetans. There are a number of elaborations in the story of King Ja that are significant for the discussion here. While some recent scholarly work has pointed out the connection between the two versions of the stories, the connection is downplayed by the tradition itself, which rarely refers to Jñānamitra as a

³³ Jñānamitra refers to Gomadevī as Indrabhūti's "the daughter" (*sras mo*). This would make her the sister of Shakrabhūti. Her name is given as *go ba de byi* in the Tibetan text. However, the standard form of her name is Gomadevī. (Dp, 59:139.1.5).

³⁴ *rgyal po dzah*.

source. The elaborated Tibetan version of the story therefore also merits separate attention here.

The Old Schools adaptation of King Indrabhūti's story places it within a larger cosmological scheme. The Old Schools describe three levels of doctrinal transmission, known as the three lineages (*brgyud gsum*). These are:

1. The Lineage of the Conquerors' Intention (*rgyal ba'i dgongs brgyud*)
2. The Awareness Holders' Symbolic Lineage (*rig 'dzin brda'i brgyud*)
3. The Human Aural Lineage (*mi rnyan brgyud*).

The first refers to the relation between a Buddha and his or her emanation or the immediate retinue. In the case of an emanation, the intention or understanding of an enlightened being is passed directly to his or her emanation. As for those beings in their retinue, who have separate continuums, the intention, or understanding, can be passed directly from mind to mind. Awareness Holders in the second lineage are human and non-human beings who have attained an enlightened level. The transmission between them occurs through the non-verbal symbolic means of postures and hand-gestures, while the aural lineage that occurs among humans is a transmission from the teacher's mouth to the student's ear. These three correspond to the three enlightened bodies of the Buddha—the Reality Body (*chos sku, dharmakāya*), the Complete Enjoyment Body (*long spyod rdzogs sku, sambhogakāya*), and the Emanation Body (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*).³⁵ The three types of lineages represent the primary mode of transmission for the respective Buddha Body. In Mahāyoga, the Human Aural Lineage begins with the figure of King Indrabhūti, a.k.a. King Jaḥ, who lived twenty-eight

³⁵ This is implicit in the description of the three lineages given in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 447-450.

years after the passing of the Buddha. The story found in Dūjom Rinpoché's *History* may be summarized as follows:³⁶

At that time, five sages gathered on Mt. Malaya in Shrī Laṅkā to bemoan the disintegration of the Buddhist teachings. Due to their lamenting, Vajrapāṇi appears to them. As compiler of the tantras, he had been empowered by the Buddha to teach the tantric vehicle. He thus instructs the five sages, who become the first humans to understand the tantra. They represent the Awareness Holders' symbolic transmission within the human realm.³⁷ Simultaneously, King Jaḥ has seven prophetic dreams. He dreams that:³⁸

1. *Vajrapāṇi spoke the doctrine causing all beings to understand. A vajra came from his heart and melted into the king's. A sun came from the deity's crown and dissolved into the king's.³⁹*
2. *All the Buddhas were riding on the sun and moon. They turned a golden wheel and discussed the doctrine of Mahāyoga.*
3. *Golden-colored clouds covered the sky. Magical lightening lit up the whole universe, and its magical thunder proclaimed the sound of the excellent doctrine. Precious substances rained down.*

³⁶ This version is a summary of the account given in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 454, 458-460.

³⁷ The Awareness Holders' transmission is of two type: the symbolic transmission to non-humans and the symbolic transmission to humans and non-humans. The five sages, being composed of a god, a nāga, a yakṣa, an ogre, and a human, are classified as the latter. For their names, see "five sages" in numerical glossary.

³⁸ The summary of King Jaḥ's seven dreams comes from two primary sources—Samdrup Dorjé's *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 624.4-627.1, and Longchenpa's *Dispelling Mental Obscuration*, 7a.6-9a.4.

³⁹ Samdrup Dorjé, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, (624.5). These are signs of enlightened speech, mind, and body respectively. Longchenpa's version of the dream of the three signs is:

Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of Secrets, came to him. A blazing vajra issued from Vajrapāṇi's heart and melted into the king's heart; a sun came from the crown of Vajrapāṇi's head and melted into the crown of the king's head, and a moon issued from the deity's feet and melted into the king's feet. All appearances and occurrences sloshed in the king's belly. (Longchenpa, yid kyi mun sel, 7b.1-3).

4. *A rain of nectar poured from the sky, purifying the mental defilements of the trainees, and all beings cried, “Hail the vajra yogi!”*
5. *A jeweled chest, filled with magically written scriptures, fell from the clouds in the sky like a meteor.*
6. *Many Awareness Holders and Bodhisattvas made offerings and circumambulated the books, praising them.*
7. *A voice from the sky prophesized the advent of the Mahāyoga teachings and the king’s realization of them.*

Upon waking, the king, in accordance with his dreams, discovers a jeweled chest full of texts on the top of his palace along with a golden image of Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of Secrets. He worships the image and understands the chapter on “Viewing the Visage of Vajrasattva”. With that as his basis, he practices meditating on Vajrapāṇi for seven months.⁴⁰ After this time, even though he had already realized the meaning of the scriptures thoroughly, he seeks out a respected teacher for the sake of appearances. Thus, he invites Kukurāja to come look at the texts, but the later requests the texts be sent to him first. Kukurāja also understands the chapter on “Viewing the Visage of Vajrasattva” and, based on that, practices for seven month, after which Vajrasattva comes to him. Kukurāja asks to understand all the meanings of the text. Vajrasattva replies that Vajrapāṇi would teach him. Vajrapāṇi actually comes and instruct him. After practicing according to Vajrapāṇi’s instruction, Kukurāja comes to realize the meaning of the Magical Emanation Net cycle. He then divides the 100,000 stanza that originally fell on King Indrabhūti’s roof into the eighteen texts of Mahāyoga. He instructs the King

⁴⁰ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 459; *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 628.6. *Key to the Treasury* (12.4) says “six months.”

and his son in this tantric doctrine, and the lineage of human masters proceeds from there.

While this version of the story places Indrabhūti in a time period *close* to the era of the Buddha, it does not portray him as an associate of the Buddha. The Old Schools demonstrate some confusion on this topic, for the Indrabhūti of the Mahāyoga foundational myth is generally considered to be the middle one who was an associate of several well-known eighth century C.E. figures. Dūjom Rinpoché unabashedly points this out when he says:

Some say that King Jaḥ was none other than Indrabhūti the Great, who had been empowered by the Teacher himself, but others maintain that he was that Indrabhūti's son. Some even believe him to have been an intermediate Indrabhūti. Thus, there are various dissimilar opinions; but, because ordinary persons cannot image the emanations of great sublime beings, perhaps they are all correct! And yet, upon examining the chronology, we find he is described as the contemporary of master Kukkurāja. For this reason he may well be an intermediate Indrabhūti.⁴¹

Dūjom correctly perceives that the weight of the historical evidence places Indrabhūti, the revealer of the Mahāyoga tantras, in the eighth century. He thus ignores the statement in the hagiography that this Indrabhūti was alive twenty-eight years after the Buddha.

He can do this, because direct continuity with the teaching of the historical Buddha is not as important for the Old Schools as for the New Schools. The New Schools developed the myth of Indrabhūti the elder in order to connect tantras such as *The Secret Assembly* directly to the Buddha. They claim that Indrabhūti lived at the time of the Buddha and

⁴¹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* vol. 1, 458-459.

moreover make him an actual emanation of Vajrapāṇi. He received the transmission of the tantras from the Buddha himself. This proved the authenticity of these tantras while at the same time obviating the notion of new revelation, inherent in Jñānamitra's version. The Old Schools, on the other hand, did not see the need to connect Indrabhūti directly with Shākyamuni. As with Indrabhūti the elder, he was projected back in time to a period close to the Buddha's to lend his story greater authenticity. However, a specific gap of twenty-eight years separates the two figures precisely to demonstrate the mechanism of revelation that becomes the basis of the Tibetan treasure tradition.

The key element of the Old Schools' version is that Indrabhūti's revelation occurred simultaneously with the teaching of the tantras by Vajrapāṇi on the peak of Mt. Malaya. Vajrapāṇi is considered to be the compiler of these tantras. As will be shown in the next chapter, the events of the *Secret Essence* itself and, by implication, the rest of the corpus occurred in the mythic time, *in illo tempore*. Vajrapāṇi was entrusted as the compiler of the texts and can be considered the being who wrote them down. Then, at the same moment, he initiates the Awareness Holders' symbolic lineage by teaching the five sages on Mt. Malaya and the human aural lineage by revealing the texts on the roof of Indrabhūti's palace. Indrabhūti's story is situated in the cosmology of the Old Schools so that there is a simultaneous tripartite communication of the tantra—its genesis. On the ultimate realizational level, the Reality Body eternally communicates with itself. On the mystical communicatory level, the Complete Enjoyment Body symbolically communicates with the Awareness Holders, and on the physical, verbal level, the actual texts are revealed to King Jaḥ, or the middle Indrabhūti.

For the Old Schools the validity of the texts is not due to their dating back to the time of the Buddha. In fact, their revelations occur after the Buddha's death, even if only twenty-eight years later. Their validity comes from the fact that they are the expression of the ultimate, symbolically dressed in the speech and deeds of the Complete Enjoyment Body,

and compiled into written texts by the redactor Vajrapāṇi, who himself is an emanation of the Complete Enjoyment Body. This version of the story opens the way for further revelations in the future as long as they are products of this threefold emanatory process. Texts can be authenticated by assigning authorship to an enlightened being, an Emanation Body, who put down in words the symbolic communications of the Complete Enjoyment Body and hid these texts until the time was appropriate for their revelation by another Emanation Body. This, of course, lays the foundation for or perhaps justifies the Tibetan tradition of treasure revealers.

The story of King Jaḥ is, as Samten Karmay has shown, primarily a Tibetan invention that originated from the need for the Old Schools to distinguish the Mahāyoga Tantras from the Yoga Tantras.⁴² By comparing Jñānamitra's excerpt on Indrabhūti with King Jaḥ's story, one will notice several places where the story has been embellished in the latter version:

1. The addition of the dream-signs,
2. The introduction of Vajrapāṇi to the story,
3. The falling of the texts and statue onto the king's palace, and
4. The switch of location from Zahor to Oḍḍiyāna.

The additional story concerning King Jaḥ's dreams serves a dual purpose in the narrative. For one, through the figure of Vajrapāṇi, the dreams connect the teaching of the tantra to the five sages on Mt. Malaya—Awareness-holders' Lineage—to the revelation of the tantra to King Indrabhūti—the Human Aural Lineage. At the same time that Vajrapāṇi is instructing the five sages, Indrabhūti is dreaming of that deity. Signs of Vajrapāṇi's enlightened body, speech, and mind emanate from the deity into the king's body, so that the king becomes in essence identical with Vajrapāṇi. The dreams also ostensibly prophesize the progressive revelation of the Mahāyoga tantras. First, the king's essence is transformed into Vajrapāṇi;

⁴² Samten Karmay, "King Tsa/Dza and the Vajrayāna", 206-207.

the Buddhas then teach the doctrine; marvelous natural events occur; a rain of nectar falls; the jeweled chest full of scriptures fall from the sky; they are worshiped, and finally the king is prophesized to realize them. In describing this progression, the dream-sequences employ elements of higher tantric symbolism, such as the sun and moon, purifying nectar, the vajra, and so forth. Such symbolism is most prevalent in the higher tantras, Mahāyoga and above, and most likely indicates a later accretion to the story. As Jñānamitra's commentary is on a text associated with the Yoga Tantra cycle, it is not surprising that the episode of the dreams is absent. The dreams are an aspect of King Jaḥ's story (the Tibetan apotheosis of Indrabhūti) and not of the Indian Indrabhūti.

Not only is Vajrapāṇi a central figure in Indrabhūti's dreams, he is also the one who actually transmits the teachings to Kukurāja and the king. This differs from Jñānamitra's story, where the initiating Bodhisattva is Vajrasattva. Jñānamitra mentions Vajrapāṇi only briefly, saying the texts came to the land of Zahor "through the blessing of Vajrapāṇi". The two deities belong to the same Vajra family of deities. Vajrasattva means "Vajra Being", and Vajrapāṇi means "Vajra Scepter in Hand". The term "Vajra" is extremely important in tantric philosophy and practice, representing the inseparable and indifferentiable union of wisdom and emptiness. Vajrasattva is also closely related to the *Secret Essence* and the Mahāyoga tantras, which are believed to be part of the Magical Emanation Net of Vajrasattva. Whereas Vajrasattva is a peaceful deity, Vajrapāṇi appears in wrathful form. In Jñānamitra's story it is Vajrasattva who instructs Kukurāja and has him instruct the king and retinue to perform the Vajradhātu maṇḍala. In the Tibetan stories, Kukurāja first reads the chapter on "Beholding the Visage of Vajrasattva," which is the eight-fourth chapter of the long version of the *Secret Essence*.⁴³ Upon realizing and practicing that chapter, he meets with

⁴³ *sgyu 'phrul rgyas pa*, Tb.423, 294.3-299.2, "rdo rje sems dpa' zhal mthong ba'i le'u/" Also found in *sgyu 'phrul le lhag*, Tb.420, 561.3-565.7, "Chapter 31: skeyes bu dam pa blo rtsal rab kyis/_rdo rje sems dpa' zhal mthong ba'i le'u ste gcig pa/".

Vajrasattva, who figuratively passes the scepter off to Vajrapāṇi. It is Vajrapāṇi who instructs Kukurāja and the king. The elaboration of Vajrapāṇi's role in this story demonstrates that deities growing popularity among the Tibetans. It demonstrates that in the time period between the writing of Jñānamitra's story and the development of the Tibetan version, the wrathful form of Vajrapāṇi came to supercede the peaceful form of Vajrasattva in this particular tantric circle.

The origin of the texts by descending onto the roof of King Jaḥ's palace is another aspect of the story added in the Tibetan mythologization. Jñānamitra glosses over the origin of the body of texts by merely saying that they appeared in the land of Zahor, due to the good karma of the king and his retinue. The sky-motif can be seen as a Tibetan addition for it also figures in the legendary story of the earliest Tibetan Kings. The first of these kings claimed to have come from the sky, and the first seven are said to have ascended back into the sky at the time of death, through a "sky-cord".⁴⁴ The magical appearance of the texts also demonstrates the method of revelation, known as "mind-treasure".⁴⁵ At the same time, it represents the transition of the doctrine from the timeless realm of the Truth Body (Samantabhadra) into the temporal human realm of the Emanation Body (King Jaḥ) through the action of the Complete Enjoyment Body (Vajrapāṇi).

The final addition to Indrabhūti's story mentioned here is the switch of location from Zahor to Oḍḍiyāna. The kingdom of Oḍḍiyāna, which is traditionally located in the north-western region of the Indian sub-continent, has come to hold an important place in the Tibetan religious imagination primarily due to its connection with Padmasambhava. The

⁴⁴ ṅag-dBañ Blo-bZaṅ rGya-mTSHo, *A History of Tibet*, 10-11. The first king, gNya' khri bstan po, was born to human parents, but because he was "more than human" and therefore a threat to his father's rule, he was banished from the kingdom. With the aid of Padmapāṇi (Avalokiteshvara), he magically appeared on a peak above the Yarlung valley, from whence he climbed down to the valley. When the people there asked him from where he had come, he pointed to the sky. They took this to mean "he had come from the gods." The sources for this story are cited by the Fifth Dalai Lama as the *bKa' 'khol ma* and the *Maṅi bka' 'bum* (8).

⁴⁵ *dgongs gter*. Tulku Thondup Rinpoché, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, 88-90.

saint is believed to have come from Oḍḍiyāna, where he was a prince, the adopted son of King Indrabhūti. This connection between Padmasambhava, Oḍḍiyāna, and Indrabhūti may account for the geographical switch in King Jaḥ's story. If the Indrabhūti who revealed the Mahāyoga texts was the same Indrabhūti who was father of Padmasambhava, then he must have come from Oḍḍiyāna. Thus, the locale for King Jaḥ's story was switched from Zahor to Oḍḍiyāna. This was a point of contention within the Old Schools, for Longchenpa openly refutes this aspect of the King Jaḥ story:

It is also not suitable to assert, as some do, that King Jaḥ is Indrabhūti, the King of Oḍḍiyāna, because this is a position contradictory with the statement “on the southeast border of Jambudvīpa [India].”⁴⁶

Therefore, the designation of the middle Indrabhūti as king of Oḍḍiyāna can similarly be disregarded as a result of Indrabhūti's mythologization, since it is not mentioned in Jñānamitra's earliest version and some Tibetan openly refute that identification. Jñānamitra instead describes Indrabhūti as king of Zahor. Similarly, the Yoga Tantras identify him as the Bengali king, Prakāshachandra,⁴⁷ while Longchenpa points to the prophecy that locates him on the southeastern border of India.

Thus, the middle Indrabhūti's hagiography appears to have gone through several stages of augmentation, informed by various political agenda. Nonetheless, the germ of the story, found in its earliest form, Jñānamitra's version, cannot be completely discounted. Though we may never be able to uncover the actual facts, these legends concerning the middle Indrabhūti seem to point to an actual person who lived during the eighth century C.E. somewhere in the eastern or south-eastern section of India. This person came across a group of Buddhist tantric texts that were beyond his comprehension. He then engaged the aid of a

⁴⁶ Longchenpa, *yid kyi mun sel (Dispelling Mental Darkness)*, 10a.6.

⁴⁷ Samten Karmay, “Tsa/Dza and the Vajrayāna”, 297-298. The Yoga Tantras equate King *Tsa* of Zahor with this figure.

siddha, named Kukurāja, who helped the king decipher the meaning of the texts. Together, they embraced the practice, and from them the lineage spread. As several commentaries on the *Secret Essence* are attributed to Indrabhūti,⁴⁸ we can assume that the *Secret Essence* or some kernel of it was among the texts discovered by Indrabhūti.

THE YOUNGER INDRABHŪTI

The middle king Indrabhūti, or King Jaḥ, had two children who figured prominently in the lineage of the Mahāyoga tantras, his son Shakrabhūti and his daughter Gomadevī. The word, Shakra, being synonymous with Indra, the son is also known as Indrabhūti the junior.⁴⁹ Some traditions equate him with the adept Lawapa, or Kambalapāda,⁵⁰ who is among those mentioned in Abhayadatta's *Lives of the Eighty-four Great Siddhas*.⁵¹ Not much historical information is included in his biography other than lineage details. The majority of his hagiography is comprised of stories about his magical powers. The primary example is the story about how he got the name Kambalapāda, or in Tibetan Lawapa (*lwa ba pa*), “man with the woolen blanket”:

Once, five hundred witches came to obstruct his meditation. To hide from them, he turned himself into a woolen blanket. Despite this ruse, they saw through his illusion and tore the blanket into five hundred piece, one portion for each sorceress to swallow. However, he reappeared and turned them all into sheep. When they complained to the king, presumably his father, the king petitioned Kambalapāda

⁴⁸ P4649 and P4683 comment directly on the *Secret Essence*. P4546 and P4900 are on general tantric topics.

⁴⁹ *indra bhū ti chung ba*. The daughter, Gomadevī's story will be discussed below.

⁵⁰ *rgya gar gyi bla ma phyis byon pa 'ga' zhig gis slob dpon lwa ba pa de rgyal po'i sras shig yin yul yang o rgyan gyi nang tshan zhig yin zhes gsungs pa ltar na indra bhū ti chung ba yin pa gor ma chag stel* (Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 253). Also see, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 485-487 and Jo Nang Tāranātha, *The Seven Instruction Lineages (bka' babs bdun ldan)*, trs. and ed. by David Templeman (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1990), 33-35.

⁵¹ Abhayadatta, *Buddha's Lions: The Lives of the Eighty Four Siddhas (caturāṣīti-siddha-pravṛitti, grub thob brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i lo rgyus)*, trs. sMon-grub Shes-rab and James B. Robinson (Berkeley: Dharma Press, 1979).

to reverse his spell. He did so, having each witch vomit up their piece of his blanket so he could reconstruct his only piece of clothing, as he was, without it, quite naked.

This is the reason for his name Lawapa, or Kambalapāda, which means one who wears a woolen cloth. Another of his names was Shakraputra, which displays a similarity with the name of Shakrabhūti, son of the middle Indrabhūti. Shakra is another title for the Vedic god Indra so that Shakrabhūti could well be an alternate form of Indrabhūti. Furthermore, the suffix “putra” means “son”, rendering the meaning of Shakraputra as “son of Indra”, or possibly “son of Indra[bhūti]”. In either case, if this figure was the actual son of a king, the focus of his hagiography on miraculous powers and the minimal use of clothing indicate that he adopted the lifestyle of a mendicant siddha.

The lineage information concerning the younger Indrabhūti is varied. Jñānamitra claims that he taught his own son, whose name is not mentioned, as well as his sister Gomadevī. Dūjom Rinpoché gives the following lineage:⁵²

Indrabhūti, the middle → Kukurāja → Indrabhūti, the younger →
Siṃharāja → Uparāja → Gomadevī

Interestingly enough, he equates Shakrabhūti with Uparāja rather than the last Indrabhūti. This appears to be an anomaly, as Jikmé Tenpé Nyima gives the same lineage without mentioning the name Shakrabhūti.⁵³ Elsewhere, in the Anuyoga lineage, Dūjom Rinpoché mentions that Indrabhūti the younger empowered Siṃhaputra and Kukurāja the younger.⁵⁴ The latter is said to have empowered Garap Dorjé. It is also claimed that he participated in a competition of miracles with Vilāsavajra and taught the people of Oḍḍiyāna with his father,

⁵² *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 462.

⁵³ *Key to the Treasury*, 12.5.

⁵⁴ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 487-488.

King Jaḥ. If any stock can be placed in these tidbits of information scattered throughout the miracle stories, we may surmise that his student, the younger Kukurāja, initiated Garap Dorjé into the Mahāyoga lineage rather than the elder Kukurāja, as some claim.⁵⁵ Furthermore, these stories demonstrate how closely knit the circle of initiates was, as Vilāsavajra, who was a disciple of Gomadevī, would have been a younger contemporary of King Jaḥ.

KUKURĀJA

As already mentioned, the Tibetan tradition holds that there was an elder and a younger Kukurāja. The elder Kukurāja was a peer of King Jaḥ, the middle Indrabhūti, while the younger Kukurāja was a disciple of Shakrabhūti, or the younger Indrabhūti. Both play a role in the lineage of Mahāyoga, but it is the elder Kukurāja that primarily concerns us here. Khetsun Sangpo give Kutārāja as an alternate form of his name.⁵⁶ Both forms mean “King of the dogs”, which derives from the legend that the great adept taught in the form of a dog to a pack of dogs during the day, while at night they would transform into their divine human form and perform the group maṇḍala practice. Tāranātha places Kukurāja during the reign of Dharmapāla (r. 790-815), which is not completely out of the question.⁵⁷ From among the eighteen Mahāyoga tantras, he is said to have attained realization through the *Secret Moon Drop* and to have been an adept in the *Union of All Buddhas*.

As already discussed, Kukurāja is directly connected to the revelation of the Mahāyoga corpus. In the story of the middle Indrabhūti, Kukurāja is called from the middle kingdom of Malava to help decipher the Mahāyoga scriptures. With the help of Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi, he does so and initiates the king and his court. The story of King Jaḥ however

⁵⁵ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 466.

⁵⁶ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 257.

⁵⁷ H. G. Ralinson, *India: A Short Cultural History* (London: Cresset Press, 1937; reprint 1965), 205. Cf., Rama Shankar Tripathi, *History of Ancient India*, 354ff.

minimizes the dependence on Kukurāja by claiming that Indrabhūti's plea for help was a pretense to demonstrate humility. Thus, Indrabhūti is generally regarded as Kukurāja's teacher. The tradition claims that Kukurāja then divided the original text of one hundred thousand verses into the eighteen separate scriptures that compose the present-day corpus. Indrabhūti and Kukurāja are thus presented by the tradition as co-founders of the Mahāyoga tradition.

So that the doctrine will be preserved, King Indrabhūti has Kukurāja instruct his son, Shakrabhūti, whose biography has already been related. Shakrabhūti instructed the scholar, Uparāja, and he in turn is said to have instructed the King's daughter, Gomadevī. This is the standard lineage given in Tibet for the Mahāyoga tantras. However, Jñānamitra's commentary on the *One-hundred and Fifty Verse Perfection of Wisdom* says that Shakrabhūti transmitted that text directly to Gomadevī, after having extracted it from the *Supreme Glorious Beginning*.⁵⁸

GOMADEVI

Gomadevī is considered to be the daughter of the middle Indrabhūti and the sister of the younger. She is mentioned in lineages of Mahāyoga, though her story is not found under this name in the hagiographical literature. However, the story of the well-known Lakṣmīṅkarā shares certain features with Gomadevī so that it can be surmised that the two were one and the same person.⁵⁹ Her story may be summarized as follows:

Lakṣmīṅkarā was sister to a king Indrabhūti. She was betrothed to the son of a king, Jalendra, but when she saw the prince returning from a hunt with several slaughtered deer, she was so saddened that she renounced the worldly life and lived in the cemetery, where due to her practice she became a great adept.

⁵⁸ Jñānamitra, (Dp, 59:138.4.1).

⁵⁹ See Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 764-767 for Lakṣmīṅkarā's biography.

As both figures are described as sisters of a king Indrabhūti, they appear to be identical. Several texts are ascribed to Lakṣmīnkarā in the Tibetan canon. One of these is a commentary on *The Verification of the Co-Emergent*, a text written by Indrabhūti.⁶⁰ It is from her that the lineages of Mahāyoga are said to have spread. The general consensus is that her main student was Vilāsavajra, through whom the teachings of the *Secret Essence* were passed. However, in his short discourse on the lineage of the *Secret Essence*, Orgyen Jikmé Chökyi Wangpo (1808-1887), more commonly known as Patrül Rinpoché, claims that Gomadevī taught *both* Vilāsavajra and Buddhaguhya, and this is the tradition followed by his student, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, the author of *The Key to the Treasury*.⁶¹

VILĀSAVAJRA

According to the traditional lineages, the Mahāyoga tantras were transmitted from Gomadevī to Vilāsavajra (*sgeg pa'i rdo rje*).⁶² According to Khetsun Sangpo, he was born in a land called *Ṇamṇara*.⁶³ Vilāsavajra was scholar, who spent ten years of his life at the famous Buddhist monastery of Nālandā. He was particularly versed in the Mind Only doctrine of Asaṅga and, according to Tāranātha, was a “follower of the Vijñāna-mādhyamika (*rnam rig dbu ma pa*) philosophy”.⁶⁴ He apparently went by several names, each associated with a different event in

⁶⁰ Indrabhūti, *lhan cig skyes grub*, P3107. Lha-lcam rje-btsun-ma Dpal-mo (Lakṣmī Bhaṭṭarikā), *lhan cig skyes grub kyi gzhung 'grel*, P3108.

⁶¹ dPal-sprul O-rgyal-'jigs-med-chos-kyi-dbang-po, *gsang snying 'chad thabs brgyud gsum lo rgyus* in *The Collected Works of dPal sprul o rgyal 'jigs med chos kye* (sic.) *dbang po*, vol. 2 (Gangtok: Sonam T. Kazi & Delhi: Jayyed Press, 1971), 182.2. *Key to the Treasury*, 12.6.

⁶² Vilāsavajra's story is found in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 463-464. Two relevant hagiographies are found in Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 264-265 (*sgeg pa'i rdo rje*) and vol. 1, 266-270 (*la li ta bajra*). It is unclear whether Vilāsavajra is the same as the Mahāsiddha Lilapāda, whose story is in Robinson, *Buddha's Lions*, 25-26. Until recently, scholars have reconstructed his Sanskrit name as Lilāvajra. However, Ronald Davidson in his translation and commentary on the *Litany of Names of Mañjuśrī* has made a strong case that the correct version of this figure's name is Vilāsavajra.

⁶³ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 264. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 1, 463) has *Samṣara* for the name of his country.

⁶⁴ Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, translated by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970; reprint 1990), 272.

his life. His ordination name was Varabodhi, and it was under this name that he wrote commentaries on Action and Performance tantras.⁶⁵ He is said to have practiced the *Litany of the Names of Mañjuśrī* on a small island in Oḍḍiyāna named Dhima, where he achieved realization.⁶⁶ Besides penning an important commentary on the *Litany*, he was the author of the famed *Blazing Palace* (*spar khab*), a highly influential commentary on the *Secret Essence*.⁶⁷ He also is associated with the *O Vajra!* tantra.⁶⁸ According to Davidson, Vilāsavajra can be placed in the latter half of the eighth century, because he is said to have worked with Ma Rinchenchok after the latter's ordination, which occurred in 779.⁶⁹ He transmitted the Mahāyoga tantras to two important figures—Buddhajñānapāda, whose interpretation of *Secret Assembly* was one of the six to enter Tibet, and Buddhaguhya, through whom the lineage of the *Secret Essence* passed.

BUDDHAGUHYA

It is said that Buddhaguhya came from central India and was ordained at Nālandā.⁷⁰ He traveled widely, residing in Vārāṇasī, Oḍḍiyāna, Mt. Potalaka, and Mt. Kailash. The doxographies universally proclaim him to have been a disciple of Buddhajñānapāda from

⁶⁵ The Tibetan for this name is *byang chub mchog*. This is often reconstructed into Sanskrit as *Uttamambodhi*. However, the translators of Tāranātha's history give it as Varabodhi (Tāranātha, 272), as does Jeffrey Hopkins in his work on Action Tantra (Hopkins, *Deity Yoga*, 47-62, 259). Other names of Vilāsavajra include Sūryavat, Vishvarūpa, and Līlavajra. For references to works in the Tibetan canon ascribed to these names, see Tāranātha, *History*, 418.

⁶⁶ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 463. *o rgyan gyi gling phran ma dhi ma zhe bya bar...* (Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 264).

⁶⁷ The version of this commentary used here is: Vilāsavajra, *dpal gsang ba snying po'i 'grel pa rin po che'i spar khab slob dpon sgeg pa'i rdo rjes mdzad pa* in *Commentaries on the Guhyagarbha tantra and other rare Nyingmapa texts from the library of Dudjom Rinpoché* (New Delhi: Sanje Dorje, 1974; I-Tib 74-900928; I-Tib-1252), 1-222. It is also found in *bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23, 389.1-619.4.

⁶⁸ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 265.

⁶⁹ Davidson, *The Litany of names of Mañjuśrī*, 6-7.

⁷⁰ His story is found in Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 542-546; *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 464-466.

whom he received the transmission of the *Secret Assembly*.⁷¹ He allegedly attained some realization, after practicing the means of achievement for Mañjuśrī and then went to Oḍḍiyāna where he studied the Yoga and Mahāyoga tantras under Vilāsavajra. In the latter part of his life, he dwelt in hermitage on the slopes of Mt. Kailash, practicing the means of attainment for the Vajra-Realm Maṇḍala, an important maṇḍala in the *Compendium of Principles*. While residing there, the Tibetan king Trisong Detsen invited him to Tibet. However, he declined the invitation and sent in his place a five-part letter of advice to the king and people of Tibet. This letter is preserved in the Peking edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canon.⁷² Despite his refusal to come to Tibet, Buddhaguhya allegedly taught many Tibetan who came to him. The tradition further claims that during this time he made the first translation of the *Secret Essence Tantra* with, of all people, Vairocana.

Buddhaguhya wrote works on the Performance Tantras, *Tantra of the Great Vairocana* and *Sublime Concentration*, as well as on the means for attainment of the Yoga Tantra Vajra-Realm maṇḍala.⁷³ However, his most famous works are on the *Secret Essence*. These are the *Stages of the Path*,⁷⁴ the *Lesser Stages of the Path*,⁷⁵ and the *Stages of Vajra Activity*.⁷⁶ Along with his teacher, Vilāsavajra, and his student, Vimalamitra, he co-authored another influential text, entitled the *Heart Drop*.⁷⁷ Other less well-known texts attributed to Buddhaguhya focus

⁷¹ *The Blue Annals*, 372; *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 464-465. Stephen Hodge questions this relationship “given the disparity in their ages.” Stephen Hodge, tr., *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra with Buddhaguhya’s Commentary* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 22.

⁷² Buddhaguhya, *bod rje ’bangs dang btsun rnams la spring yig*, P5693.

⁷³ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 466.

⁷⁴ Buddhaguhya, *lam rin chen mo* in *bka’ ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23, 5.1-133.3. This is also called *lam rnams par bkod pa* (*bka’ ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23, 133.3) and is found under that name in the Peking edition of the Tibetan canon as well (P4736).

⁷⁵ Buddhaguhya, *rgyu ’phrul drwa ba’i lam rnam par bshad pa chung ngu* in *bka’ ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23, 135.1-157.4. It is not found in the Peking canon.

⁷⁶ Buddhaguhya, *sgyu ’phrul dra ba rdo rje las kyī rim pa* (P4720), vol. 83, 70.3.7-78.3.8.

⁷⁷ Buddhaguhya, Vilāsavajra, and Vimalamitra, *thugs kyī thigs pa’i man ngag* (P4738).

on initiation and meditation in Mahāyoga.⁷⁸ He is claimed by the tradition to be the teacher of Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava.

VIMALAMITRA

Vimalamitra is an important figure in many Old School lineages, especially the lineage of the *Secret Essence*. In many ways he appears to have played as important a role in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet as Padmasambhava and Shāntarakṣita did. However, the Tibetan mythic imagination did not glorify him in quite the same way as those others. This is not to say that Vimalamitra's biography was not mythologized but that his story did not play as significant a role in Tibetan religious imagination's self-image. It is thus that in Dūjom Rinpoché's summary of the great figures who lived during the early propagation, Vimalamitra's name is conspicuously absent:

Among those kings, Songtsen Gampo and Trhisong Detsen were particularly great in their kindness. The scholars Shāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava, and the translators Thönmi Sambhoṭa, Vairocana, Kawa Peltsek, Cokro Lúi Gyeltsen and Zhang Yeshe De were all most gracious and wonderful.⁷⁹

Correspondingly, Vimalamitra's biography must be pieced together from references scattered throughout Dūjom's work. There is no single section devoted to him in the history of the Mahāyoga lineage, as there is to Vilāsavajra, Buddhaguhya, and Padmasambhava, though he was certainly as influential in the formation of the Mahāyoga School in Tibet as any of those figures were. Instead, his biography is found in the history of Atiyoga as part of a section that focuses primarily on Śrī Simḥa and Jñānasūtra, a fact to be discussed anon.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ E.g., *dbang gi don nges par 'byed pa* (P4722), *rdo rje sems dpa'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i 'od kyi rim pa* (P4731), *sgyu 'phrul khro bo'i dbang bskur ba dkyil 'khor rdo rje las kyi rim pa* (P4761), and *sgyu 'phrul dbang gi gal po'i don 'grel* (P4762).

⁷⁹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 522.

⁸⁰ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 497-501.

According to *The Blue Annals*, there were actually two Vimalamitras, an earlier one and later one. The earlier one was invited to Tibet during the reign of Trisong Detsen. He was a tantric lay practitioner. The latter lived during the reign of Relpachen and was a monk.⁸¹ This could account for the claim, made by some, that Vimalamitra reached the advanced age of two hundred years.⁸² In all likelihood, the biographies of the two figures became conflated into a single person. Thus, Samdrup Dorjé mistakenly places the Vimalamitra who transmitted the *Secret Essence* in the time of Relpachen, whereas in fact the earlier Vimalamitra was the one involved in the Mahāyoga transmission.⁸³

Vimalamitra received the instructions on the Mahāyoga tantras and in particular the *Secret Essence* from Buddhaguhya. He is also considered to be the one who introduced certain lineages of the Great Completeness teachings to Tibet, which have been compiled as *The Seminal Point of Vimala (bi ma la snying thig)*.⁸⁴ Furthermore, he was a prolific translator and writer, contributing a vast number of works to both sections of the Tibetan canon—translated scriptures and penned commentaries. His wide-ranging career is more easily explained through positing two Vimalamitras whose stories were later conflated. In the present state of our knowledge, it is impossible to definitively separate the two figures. However, a brief investigation of his hagiography may shed some light on this matter.

⁸¹ *The Blue Annals*, 191-192.

⁸² Eva M. Dhargye, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), 57.

⁸³ *RBG*, 630.4ff. Gö-lo-tsa-wa explicitly states that the earlier Vimalamitra “did not dress in monastic robes but went about attired as a yogin” and that this was the Vimalamitra who taught Tantric subjects. He lived during the reign of Trisong Detsen. The later Vimalamitra, who was a monk and wrote a commentary on the *Pratimokṣa*, lived during the reign of Rel-ba-jen (*The Blue Annals*, 191).

⁸⁴ This cycle of texts was redacted by Longchenpa and is found in the *Four-part Seminal Point, snying thig ya bzhi* (New Delhi: Trulku Tsewang, Jamyang and L. Tashi, 1970), vols. 7-9.

Vimalamitra was allegedly born in western India, in a land called Hastivana.⁸⁵ The majority of his hagiographies make only passing reference to the fact that he studied the Mahāyoga under Buddhaguhya, though the number of commentaries he wrote on it indicates that he was quite interested in that school. The traditional hagiography's of Vimalamitra focus more on his relationship to Jñānasūtra than on Vimalamitra. Jñānasūtra's life literally parallels Vimalamitra's in that they were born at the same time. The traditional hagiography proceeds to relate the two stories as one:⁸⁶

Together, Vimalamitra and Jñānasūtra become the greatest adepts among five hundred scholars living at the seat of enlightenment, Bodhgayā. Then, Vajrasattva appears to them and exhorts them that, if they desire enlightenment, they should travel to China. Vimalamitra leaves immediately for China, where he meets Shrī Siṃha. Shrī Siṃha instructs him in the Great Completeness doctrine but does not entrust him with the texts. When Vimalamitra returns, he tells Jñānasūtra of the master, Shrī Siṃha. At that point, Jñānasūtra himself sets off for China, where he receives the complete empowerment and teaching from Shrī Siṃha, as well as the texts themselves, just before the master's death.

Vimalamitra meanwhile is doing the practice in a cremation ground. There, he has a vision of dākinīs who urge him to find Jñānasūtra. He does so and receives the complete Atiyoga transmission. When Jñānasūtra passes away and his body dissolves into light, Vimalamitra cries out in great distress, whereupon Jñānasūtra's enlightened form reappears in the sky. A jeweled box

⁸⁵ His story is found in Tarthang Tulku, *Crystal Mirror*, vol. V, 191-195; Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 1, 536-541; *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 497-501; Tulku Thondup, *The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa* (Marion, Ma: Buddhayana, 1984), 54-59; Thundop, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 68-73, and Sangs-gyas-gling-pa, *gter-ston*, (1340-1396), *bka' thang gser phreng* (Kalimpong: Dujom Rinpoché, 1970; I-Tib 79-9922880; I-Tib-760), 449.1-464.4, especially from 455.1ff.

⁸⁶ The sources for this version of the story are

containing the texts of the pronouncement for Atiyoga falls into Vimala's hand, and he attained confidence in the unerring reality.

After this, Vimalamitra lived under the patronage of the king Haribhadra of Kāmarūpa in the east for ten years and then under the patronage of another king, Dharmapāla, in the western city of Bhirya, finally coming to reside at the court of a King Dharmacandra. During this last period, based on the magical foresight of a Tibetan Minister named Nyang Tingngedzin Zangpo, King Trisong Detsen sent three translators—Ma Rinchenchok, Jokru Luigyeltsen, and Kawa Peltsek—to bring back a Buddhist master from India. Carrying a great quantity of gold, they travel to the court of King Dharmacandra (whom they call Indrabhūti) and, while presenting the gold, request him send a Buddhist master from his entourage. He asks the group of five hundred monks attendant at his court. They nod to Vimalamitra, who agrees to go.

Once Vimalamitra departs for Tibet, the ministers of the Indian kingdom are plagued by bad dreams. These are interpreted as omens of the sage's inauspicious departure. So, the Indian ministers send letters to their counterparts in Tibet, spreading bad rumors about Vimalamitra. This fuels the ministers suspicion about Buddhism. They confront Vimalamitra, who proves himself by performing miracles, such as destroying a Buddhist statue by bowing to it and then recreating it in an improved form.

The first point to note about the hagiography of Vimalamitra is that he is overshadowed by the figure of Jñānasūtra. If mentioned at all, his tutorship with Buddhaguhya in the Mahāyoga tantras and his own abilities are referred to only in passing. Instead, the narrative almost immediately focuses on Vimalamitra's relationship with Jñānasūtra and their acquisition of the Atiyoga teachings that come to form the Heart Drop tradition. In that

relationship, Vimalamitra plays an obviously inferior role. Forgetting to obtain the actual texts and quintessential instructions from Shrī Siṃha, he must ultimately receive them from Jñānasūtra. In comparison to Jñānasūtra, he is an inferior member of the Atiyoga lineage. As an Indian master, his figure becomes a source of authentication. The traditional hagiographies contain an episode where Vimalamitra and Yudra Nyingpo compare realization and find themselves equal. Yudra Nyingpo was one of the main disciples of Vairocana. The episode clearly represents an attempt to validate the doctrine taught by Vairocana. However, other than discussing him as a transitional Indian figure that lends authority, the hagiographical narratives do not glorify the achievements and qualities of Vimalamitra himself to the extent they do for other figures.

On the other hand, when aspects of Vimalamitra's hagiography are connected with the story of the middle Indrabhūti, his importance as a major influence on the development of early Tibetan Buddhism is evident. For, he is a central figure in the lineage of the Mahāyoga tantras. After the episode with Jñānasūtra, the hagiographies mention Vimalamitra's residence at the courts of several kings. One is in eastern Indian, Kāmarūpa, and another is king Dharmapāla in western India, who is also sometimes called Indrabhūti.⁸⁷ Furthermore, one account, in the *Golden Rosary of Precepts* (*bka' thang ser 'phreng*), a treasure discovered by Sanggyé Lingpa in the fourteenth century, claims Buddhaguhya was the one who advised the king to send Vimalamitra.⁸⁸ Given that Buddhaguhya was taught by Vilāsavajra, a student of Gomadevī, daughter of King Indrabhūti, it is plausible that he resided for some time at the court of either Indrabhūti the middle or Indrabhūti the younger, presuming these represent historical personages. As Vimalamitra was Buddhaguhya's direct disciple, he too could have

⁸⁷ Dūjom Rinpoché (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 501) gives the king's name as Dharmapāla, but Sangs-gye-ling-ba (*bka' thang gser phreng*, 455.2-455.3) clearly gives it as "the Indian King of Doctrine Indrabhūti, known as 'a great king who protects the doctrine' (i.e., *Dharmapāla*)" (*rgya gar chos kyi rgyal po indra bhū ti dha rma rā dza bya ba khyed chos skyong ba'i rgyal po chen por grags pas*).

⁸⁸ *bka' thang gser phreng*, 456.2-456.3.

been associated with that court. As evidence that the three masters were alive at the same time, there is an instance of a text in the Peking edition of the Translated Treatises (*bstan gyur*) penned by all three—Vilāsavajra, Buddhaguhya, and Vimalamitra.⁸⁹ It is therefore possible that the king, to whom the Tibetan delegation was sent, was the king who discovered the Mahāyoga tantras or probably his son.

Such details of Vimalamitra’s story may have been lost when the Atiyoga teachings were introduced into Tibet. The Atiyoga teachings came after Mahāyoga and are arguably influenced by Chinese thought.⁹⁰ In seeking to promote their new philosophy, the proponents of Atiyoga developed stories demonstrating its superiority. One way to do this was to adopt the existing hagiographies of saints so that they came to glorify Atiyoga. If Atiyoga arrived in Tibet during the ninth century, Buddhism would have been well established and Vimalamitra would have been renowned as a patriarch of Mahāyoga. Because of his popularity, his story was adopted by the adherents of Atiyoga in order to glorify their own patriarch, Jñānasūtra. As this strategy succeeded, many Tibetan works now include Jñānasūtra’s biography before that of Vimalamitra, and the story about Vimalamitra focuses mainly on the greatness of Jñānasūtra or other figures in the Atiyoga lineage. In being reworked to promote Atiyoga, the hagiographies of Vimalamitra came to underemphasize his true importance for Tibetan Buddhism *vis-à-vis* the Mahāyoga Tantras.

In fact, Vimalamitra was the pivotal figure through whom the Mahāyoga teachings were transmitted to Tibet. While Buddhaguhya and Padmasambhava are also mentioned in this regard, the depth of their influence is not as great. Buddhaguhya refused to visit Tibet, though he worked with Tibetans who came to him. His influence was mainly through the

⁸⁹ *thugs kyi thigs pa*, P4650.

⁹⁰ The connection of Shrī Siṃha with China along the parallel between Atiyoga’s emphasis on “non-striving” and Taoism’s “non-action” hint at a Sino-Indian influence with regard to the basic philosophy. However, the practical manifestations of each system are vastly different. Vairocana also spent a great deal of time “in exile” in eastern Tibet and traveled to China. See Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 26-29.

commentaries he penned, which would have been promoted in person by Vimalamitra. Padmasambhava, on the other hand, is a heavily mythologized figure, whose historicity is difficult to determine. As will be discussed below, based on one of the earliest source, the *Testament of 'Ba*, Padmasambhava in all probability did not remain in Tibet for much more than a year.⁹¹ His importance for the history of the lineages may therefore be limited, despite the fact that his importance for the Tibetan imagination is unparalleled. Rather, among the figures in the histories that have survived to the present, Vimalamitra is the most prominent Mahāyoga teacher to have visited Tibet, and it is his teachings that most strongly influenced the shape of the Mahāyoga School in Tibetan Buddhism.

Vimalamitra's works are often cited in later Tibetan commentaries. Lochen Dharmashrī relies on him heavily. The works of Vimalamitra are often quoted or referred to in the Tibetan commentaries. Some of these include:

- ◆ *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text*⁹²
- ◆ *Ball of Meaning*⁹³
- ◆ *Drop of Enlightened Mind*⁹⁴
- ◆ *Commentary on the Short Book on Self-Abiding*⁹⁵
- ◆ *The Eye Commentary*⁹⁶

⁹¹ The description is found in the *Testament of Ba*, 52-59. The account is not explicit about the dates of Padmasambhava's visit. However, the narrative does not portray years passing. Instead, it appears that Padmasambhava quickly aroused the suspicion of the Tibetan nobility, who proceeded to drive him out of Tibet.

⁹² *khog gzlung sgron me*, P4651. Cf., *Key to the Treasury*, 20.1-20.2; *RBG*, 493.2-493.3.

⁹³ *piṅḍārtha*, P4667. Cf., *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 90.5-90.6; *Key to the Treasury*, 18.5.

⁹⁴ *thugs kyis thigs pa*, P4650, coauthored with Vilāsavajra and Buddhaguhya. Cf., *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 229.4; *Key to the Treasury*, 163.3-163.4; *RBG*, 639.6.

⁹⁵ *dpe chung rang gnas kyī 'grel pa bi ma las mdzad pa* (*Key to the Treasury*, 17.2.). Khenpo Namdröl commented that there was a commentary on the *Secret Essence* written by *Siddhārthadevī (*don grub de wi*) called the *Small Book on Self-Abiding* (*dpe chung rang gnas*) and that Vimalamitra wrote a commentary on it. I have not been able to identify either text among the existing collections.

⁹⁶ Vimalamitra, *rdo rje sems dpa'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i rgyud dpal gsang ba'i snying po shes bya ba'i sphyan 'grel pa*, P4756. Cf., *Key to the Treasury*, 34.6 & 195.6. This is not to be confused with *Mahāyoga Instructions Opening the Eye of Wisdom* (*rnal 'byor chen po shes rab 'byed kyī man ngag*), P4725, also attributed to Vimalamitra. Both attributions come from *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 226, 254.

♦ *The Three Stages*⁹⁷

In all, the list of doctrines and texts associated with Vimalamitra is vast. In the Peking edition of the Tibetan canon over fifteen treatises on Mahāyoga are ascribed to this figure.⁹⁸ He is also said to have brought the transmitted precepts of Vajrāmṛta of the Achievement Section of Mahāyoga to Tibet.⁹⁹ In addition, it is claimed by the adherents of Atiyoga that he is responsible for an important strain of the Innermost Spirituality (*snying thig*) teachings, though this is very likely another instance of adaptation or else is referring to a different Vimalamitra. Concerning those Atiyoga teachings, Dūjom Rinpoché says:

He gave teaching on the most profound esoteric instructions, those of the Innermost Spirituality, to the king [Trisong Detsen] and Nyang Tingdzin Zangpo in secret, but seeing no other worthy recipients, he translated and concealed the books at Gegong in Chimpu.¹⁰⁰

An eighth century inscription verifies Vimalamitra's instruction of Nyang Tingdzin Sangpo who was tutor to Trisong Detsen.¹⁰¹ However, the lineages of these teachings continues with Nyang Tingdzin Sangpo after a hiatus of fifty-five years. Nyang Tingdzin Sangpo is also the name of one of King Relpachen's regents, who was executed in 836 C.E. in the wake of that king's assassination.¹⁰² The tradition presumes that this is the same person who tutored Trisong Detsen (749-797 C.E.). If Vimalamitra first arrived in Tibet around the time that Samyé was finished, 779 C.E., then the emergence of Nyang Tingdzin Sangpo as a teacher of

⁹⁷ Vimalamitra, *sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i man ngag rim pa gsum pa (māyājālopadēśa-kramatrāya)*, P4742.

⁹⁸ These are: 4724, 4725, 4732, 4738, 4740, 4742, 4746, 4747, 4755-4757, 4764, 4765, 4769, 4772, 4776, 4777, and 4780.

⁹⁹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 480-481.

¹⁰⁰ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 555.

¹⁰¹ Samten Karmay, "A Discussion on the Doctrinal Position of rDzogs-chen from the 10th to the 13th Centuries" in *Journal Asiatique* CCLXIII (1975), 149.

¹⁰² Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New York: Potala Publications, 1984), 49, 51.

the Innermost Spirituality fifty-five years later would have occurred in 834. This was two years prior to Nyang Tingdzin Sangpo's execution during the reign of Relpachen.

To posit a single Vimalamitra who was the patriarch of all these lineages stretches the limits of plausibility. He was already a master in the Mahāyoga tantras and a renown scholar when he supposedly set off for China. Even if he were a prodigy, he could be no younger than twenty at that time. He then studied twenty years with Shrī Siṃha, spent ten years in Kāmarūpa, and finally joined the Pāla court in Bengal before he was invited to Tibet. Thus, by the time he reached Tibet, he would have been at least 50 to 55 years old. If he were still alive during the reign of Relpachen as some maintain, then he would have indeed been of an advanced age. It is for this reason that the Tibetan hagiographies ascribe the feat of longevity particularly to him among all the Indian patriarchs, because the chronology of his biography demands it. Dūjom Rinpoché's explanation above is another method of accounting for the long span of year—by claiming Vimalamitra hid the teachings for later discovery.

This problem is mitigated if we accept Gölotsāwa Shünupel's thesis that there were two Vimalamitras. However, he claims that the Vimalamitra during the time of Relpachen was a monk. This would most likely discount him from being either a Mahāyoga or Atiyoga practitioner of the time. Nevertheless, it appears from this analysis that there may have been two tantric Vimalamitras:

1. a Vimalamitra from India, who came to Tibet during the reign of King Trisong Detsen and taught primarily the Mahāyoga tantra, giving teachings on both the Tantra Section and the Achievement Section.
2. a Vimalamitra from China arrived in Tibet during the reign of King Relpachen (or perhaps even later) and passed on the instruction of the Innermost Spirituality teachings.

It is possible that both of them first migrated to the Pāla empire in Bengal, which was the center of Indian Buddhist activity at the time, prior to departing for Tibet.¹⁰³

Such a theory accounts not only for the chronological implausibility of Vimalamitra's hagiography as it exists in the Tibetan tradition but also helps explain the dearth of information concerning his study of the Mahāyoga tantras.¹⁰⁴ Nothing is said of this other than the fact that he studied with Buddhaguhya, whereas the story of his study under Shri Simha, which fills up most of his hagiography, has a distinct flavor of the siddha tradition that became so popular in Tibet. Given what we know from other sources, the Tibetans, particularly some of King Trisong Detsen's ministers, were initially suspicious of Buddhism and its Indian practitioners. There are other stories, similar to Vimalamitra's above, where individual practitioners were the targets of calumny. These stories have the distinct flavor of xenophobia. Given that little was known of Buddhism in those days, the Tibetans of that era would have had only slight interest in the biographies of its teachers. However, by the time of Relpachen and Lang Dharma, Buddhism had sufficiently captured the Tibetan imagination that the whole movement was viewed as a threat by certain factions within the government.¹⁰⁵ This is the ostensibly reason for Relpachen's assassination and Lang Darma's subsequent "persecution" of Buddhism in Tibet. The Tibetans of this later era would have been more inclined to glorify those adepts who brought new teachings to Tibet than the Tibetans of Trisong Detsen's time. As little was known of the earlier Vimalamitra and more was known of the latter one, when their stories were combined, the events of the latter's life

¹⁰³ However, Tulku Thondup (*Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa*, 57) relates that Vimalamitra was invited from the court of king Indrabhūti of Kapila (*ser skya'i grong*).

¹⁰⁴ In his article on the "seven descents" (*bka' babs bdun*) David Germano argues that the accounts of an earlier visit by Vimalamitra during the reign of Trisong Detsen are "largely fabricated" and that the Indian sage probably visited Tibet just after Trisong Detsen's death. Furthermore, he claims the Gö Lotsawa Shönnu Pel's thesis that there were two Vimalamitras is based only on the fact that there are "two non-tantric normative exegetical works attributed to Vimalamitra, which he assumes must be a second figure than the tantric scholar." See David Germano, "The Seven Descents and the Early History of rNying ma Transmissions", 241-248.

¹⁰⁵ Samten Karmay, "The rDzogs-chen in its Earliest Text: A Manuscript from Tun-huang" in Barbara N. Aziz & Matthew Kapstein (eds.), *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization* (Delhi: Manohar, 1985), 276.

came to dominate the hagiography. Another possibility is that the propagators of the Atiyoga teachings co-opted Vimalamitra's name in their quest for authenticity, using an already revered figure, the "earlier" Vimalamitra, to lend validity to their teachings, by adding fictional episodes to his biography. This would explain the definite subordination of Vimalamitra to Jñānasūtra presented in Vimalamitra's own "biography."

The reason the two Vimalamitras were conflated, or that one aspect of his story was a fictional interpolation, is again the issue of authenticity. After the debate at Samyé, India became for many adherents of the New Schools the only valid source for Buddhist teachings, and after the advent of the New Schools, the earliest Indian figures became the most authoritative sources of knowledge. A teaching which had connections with China and appeared at the end of Relpachen's reign would have met with resistance on both fronts. However, such doubts were resolved by conflating the two Vimalamitras and thereby connecting the Innermost Spirituality teachings with the original Vimalamitra, who certainly came from India. Thus, the Innermost Spirituality teachings are described as having arisen during the reign of Trisong Detsen, being brought *from India* by Vimalamitra. In order to account for the distinct gap in time between the first Vimalamitra's arrival and the appearance of the Innermost Spirituality teachings, it is asserted the Vimalamitra concealed the teachings in Chimpu as well as in the mind of Nyang Tingngedzin Sangpo to be revealed at a later time. The present conflated hagiography of Vimalamitra probably developed, in the highly contentious and critical atmosphere of the later spread of the doctrine.

The hypothesis of two Vimalamitras can only be substantiated with a detailed linguistic and historical analysis of his Mahāyoga texts and the Innermost Spirituality corpus. Such is beyond the scope of the present project. However, it will be assumed in what follows that the Vimalamitra who commentated on and promoted the Mahāyoga tantras *was not* the same Vimalamitra who spread the Innermost Spirituality teachings. The Mahāyoga tantras, and in particular the *Secret Essence*, were, I believe, the precursors to Atiyoga thought, in that

Atiyoga takes the seminal ideas of Mahāyoga and draws them to their ultimate conclusion. Mahāyoga developed the key ideas of primordial purity and spontaneous presence in its notion of the union of the two truths. However, such ideas were elaborated within the framework of a path of generation, which was highly ritualized. Atiyoga extracts these ideas from their ritual context, teaching in their stead methods for the immediate practice of non-duality. As the concern of this thesis is Mahāyoga, it will focus only on the Mahāyoga version of these ideas and their practice, and any mention of Vimalamitra will refer to the one who was connected with that lineage, namely the disciple of Buddhaguhya and the teacher of Ma Rinchenchok.

The Mahāyoga lineage was thus extended from Gomadevī, the daughter of King Indrabhūti, to Vilāsavajra, then Buddhaguhya, and then Vimalamitra. Patrül Rinpoché states that both Vilāsavajra and Buddhaguhya taught Vimalamitra.¹⁰⁶ There is—as mentioned above—even one text written by all three figures: Vilāsavajra, Buddhaguhya, and Vimalamitra. This is one of two texts found in the *Translated Treatise* called the *Heart Drop* (*thugs kyi thigs pa*)¹⁰⁷ Thus, it seems likely that the first Vimalamitra, who was responsible for the spread of much of the Mahāyoga teachings in Tibet, was no more than two generations away from their discoverer, King Indrabhūti. Even a relatively high age difference of twenty years between each generation of teacher and student places Vimalamitra’s birth only forty to sixty years after Gomadevī’s. However, the teaching probably spread faster than that, and it would not be stretching the facts to posit that Vimalamitra was actually a younger contemporary of Gomadevī. It could have been that the court from which Vimalamitra was called to Tibet was indeed that of Indrabhūti, who “discovered” the Mahāyoga scriptures, where Vilāsavajra, Buddhaguhya, and Vimalamitra were all in residence. In any case, he was temporally close to the genesis of the *Secret Essence*.

¹⁰⁶ dPal-sprul O-rgyal-'jigs-med-chos-kyi-dbang-po, *gsang snying 'chad thabs brgyud gsum lo rgyus*, 182.2.

¹⁰⁷ Buddhaguhya, Vimalamitra, Lilāvajra, *thugs kyi thigs pa* (P4650).

It is also interesting to note that Dūjom Rinpoché states, "...there were only three gurus between Vimalamitra and Dropukpa" (1074-1135).¹⁰⁸ The lineage supplied is that Vimalamitra taught the Nun Tremo of Rong Hot Springs, who passed it to Marpa Sherap Ö, who instructed Langtön Darma Sönam, who taught Dropukpa. For this Vimalamitra to be the same person who promulgated the *Secret Essence* to the Tibetans in the eighth and ninth centuries (roughly 775 to 825), the lifespan of each of these individuals would need to be approximately one hundred years! An equally likely explanation is that the Vimalamitra mentioned here by Dūjom Rinpoché is a latter person with the same name, who lived during the end of the tenth century, teaching the Atiyoga Heart Drop cycle.

THE PROBLEM OF PADMASAMBHAVA

The figure of Padmasambhava is extremely important in the legends of Tibetan religious history. Not only has a great body of revealed literature developed around his hagiography, but he is also the object of a great many devotional practices in Tibetan Buddhism. All the revealed treasures trace their origin in one way or another back to this figure, and the treasure revealers are viewed as either his incarnations or incarnations of his close associates. Stories about Padmasambhava dominate the depictions of Buddhism's initial spread in Tibet so that in many ways he is considered to be the patron saint of that country. In fact, he came to be considered "the second Buddha". Needless to say, a large number of Tibetan doctrinal lineages connect themselves to this name. The *Secret Essence* is one of these. However, the story of Padmasambhava is highly mythologized, and given the weight his name carries as an authority for the later generations of Tibetans, this attribution is subject to some doubt.

Padmasambhava is considered to be one of the three major figures in the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet, along with the King Trisong Detsen and the "Bodhisattva"

¹⁰⁸ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 649.

Shāntarakṣita. These three are known as “the adept, the master, and the religious king”.¹⁰⁹ When Trisong Detsen sought to establish Buddhism in his country, he initially invited Shāntarakṣita, who was then living in Zahor. Shāntarakṣita came to Tibet and began to teach the vows of Discipline. However, when he attempted to teach the more profound doctrines of Buddhism, there were fierce storms and floods, which were interpreted as signs that the local demons were displeased. Shāntarakṣita voluntarily retired to Nepal, telling the king of “a mantra adept called Padmasambhava, who is, at present, the most powerful in the world.”¹¹⁰ Padmasambhava is invited to Tibet, and he subdues the demonic forces in Tibet with his mantric abilities. This allows Shāntarakṣita to return and establish a monastic order in the snow lands. Thus, Padmasambhava is seen as the patriarch of all tantric practices in Tibet, while Shāntarakṣita is viewed as the patriarch of the monastic discipline.

In these early days, the tantric practices were kept well guarded in keeping with the Indian tradition of tantric secrecy. This is evident from restrictions placed upon the translating and spread of tantric material and the fact that tantric works were not listed in the Denkarma catalog compiled in the time of Trisong Detsen.¹¹¹ The legends claim that Padmasambhava taught a small circle of twenty-five disciples, including the king, certain of these profound teaching, such as the *Innermost Spirituality* (*snying thig*), and hid the rest in various places throughout Tibet to be revealed by later generations. This is meant to explain the origins of the treasure tradition, which first emerged in Tibet in the eleventh century.

The existence of Padmasambhava’s cult in Tibet makes it extremely difficult to discern any historical fact behind the legends centering on him. These legends are so full of hyperbole and stories of supernatural powers that their credulity is highly questionable. In

¹⁰⁹ *mkhan slob chos gsum* is an abbreviation for *mkhan po slob dpon dang chos rgyal gsum*. The adept (*mkhan po*) is Shāntarakṣita, the master (*slob dpon*) is Padmasambhava, and the religious king (*chos rgyal*) is Trisong Detsen.

¹¹⁰ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 533.

¹¹¹ Marcelle Lalou, “Les Textes Bouddhiques au Temps du Roi Khri-sroñ-lde-bcan” in *Journal Asiatique* 241:2 (1953), 313-353.

fact, some of the earliest existing sources of this time period make only scant reference to the figure of Padmasambhava. *The Testament of Ba (dba' bzhed)* is a work, whose origins stretch back to the ninth century. It claims to be written by Ba Selnang,¹¹² a minister in the time of Trisong Detsen. In this work, Padmasambhava plays only a minor role. It confirms that Padmasambhava was invited to Tibet, on the recommendation of Shāntarakṣita, to subdue demons, who were believed to have caused certain natural disasters. However, according to *The Testament of Ba*, Padmasambhava stays only a short time in Tibet, taming merely a few demons, and quickly exciting the suspicion of the ruling class. The recent translators of this work theorize that Padmasambhava's subjugation of water demons and other connections he had with water-rituals along with the fact that water was a key element in the hegemony of the ruling class suggest the ruler's of Tibet might have felt threatened by this water-loving shaman.¹¹³

The Testament of Ba has always been an extremely important text for later Tibetan historians. From the twelfth century onward, when comprehensive histories of the "spread of the doctrine in Tibet" began to emerge, there were very few ancient sources, which were quoted extensively. One of these was *The Testament of Ba*. That its testimony carried substantial weight for Tibetan historians is evident in the fact that both the Fifth Dalai Lama and Dūjom Rinpoché apologize either indirectly or directly for its description of Padmasambhava as a relatively insignificant figure. The Fifth Dalai Lama says:

Many accounts have appeared as to whether the Ācārya stayed or did not stay a long time in Tibet. Although (they show) how (facts) appear (differently) in

¹¹² *dba' gsal snang*. The syllable, *dba'*, is a clan-name that in the sources is alternatively spelled *sba*, *rba*, or *'ba'*. See *dBa' bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet*, translated by Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, preface by Per K. Sørensen (Wein: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 2000). Hereafter, referred to as *dBa' bzhed*. On its dating, see pp. x-xi of the preface and pp. 11-14.

¹¹³ *dBa' bzhed*, 13-14.

the minds of high and low, they are the miscellaneous talk of those who do not understand the facts but are deeply attached to their different creeds.¹¹⁴

Here he is referring to Tibetan scholars of “low” intelligence who use the *Testament of Ba* and other sources to claim that Padmasambhava did not stay a long time in Tibet. Elsewhere concerning the dating of the first ordination, he elaborates:

If some low persons, wildly drunk on rice-wine at celebrations, look, in these words which illuminate (the deeds of) those Dharmarājas, for a sign to relegate the endless deeds of religion and government to oblivion, (then), even if they use the *sBa-bZhed* [*Testament of Ba*], which is (used by) most learned men, as a source, a reliable (source), free of corruptions, seems to be difficult (for them to find).¹¹⁵

For him, it is the misinterpretations of these sources and the corruption of the texts by interpolation that lead to such wrong views concerning the length of Padmasambhava’s stay in Tibet.

As for Dūjom Rinpoché, he initially takes a different tack, saying:

The *Testament of Ba* and other works, which tell us that Padmasambhava stayed in Tibet for but a brief period, do so because the master emanated a second body to be seen by the evil ministers. Then, his escorts saw him fly into the sky from the summit of the mountain on the frontier of India and Tibet, across the narrow pass of Tongbap.... But his real body remained in solitary hermitages, and in mountain caves in Zhotö Tidro, Chimpu, and

¹¹⁴ ṅag-dBañ Blo-bZaṅ- rgya-mTSHo, *A History of Tibet*, translated by Zahirudding Ahmad (Bloomington, Indian: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1995), 55.

¹¹⁵ ṅag-dBañ Blo-bZaṅ- rgya-mTSHo, *A History of Tibet*, 61.

elsewhere. In these locales he continued to turn the wheel of the unsurpassed, secret doctrine for the king and his fortunate subjects.¹¹⁶

As though this argument was not enough to convince skeptics that Padmasambhava had a profound effect on the development of Buddhism in Tibet despite the absence of any prominent accounts in the early historical literature, Dūjom provides another thesis:

Furthermore, we should not think that Padmasambhava could not have completed all the bountiful acts he desired during just a short visit. He was adept at inconceivable miraculous powers, like the ability to make his body manifest in all Buddha-fields simultaneously...In sum, whether his visit appeared to have been long or short depended upon the purity or impurity of his disciples' perception.¹¹⁷

The last line is nothing less than intellectual coercion, similar to the Fifth Dalai Lama's argument. For, he claims that those "disciples" who believe Padmasambhava could not have performed such vast activities because he dwelt only a short time in Tibet have impure vision! The vehemence of both the Fifth Dalai Lama's and Dūjom Rinpoché's arguments *ad hominum* is evidence that the premise of Padmasambhava's lengthy stay is threatened by the earlier historical sources, such as *The Testament of Ba*.

Whatever the truth of the matter concerning Padmasambhava's role in the early dissemination, it is obvious that his figure was gradually mythologized over time. The Old Schools promoted this trend by using Padmasambhava as an authority figure whose presence in a lineage was the equivalent of a stamp of authenticity. It is thus that he is associated in one way or another with almost all of the Old School lineages, that of the *Secret Essence* being

¹¹⁶ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 517. In his *History*, the Fifth Dalai Lama has a similar discussion on the *Testament of Ba*'s description of Padmasambhava.

¹¹⁷ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 518.

no exception. In fact, Padmasambhava is associated with the *Secret Essence* through several different lines of transmission. In Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's account he is placed along side Vimalamitra as a co-disciple of Buddhaguhya, who was a disciple of Vilāsavajra, the disciple of Gomadevī, the daughter of King Indrabhūti, the middle.¹¹⁸ However, in Dūjom's history it is maintained that the younger King Indrabhūti and the second Kukurāja taught a figure known as the “Zombie” Sukhasiddhi, which is alternative name for Garap Dorjé, the legendary founder of the Atiyoga tradition. He in turn taught one, Vajrahāsyā, who passed the teachings onto a Kṣatriya by the name of Prabhāhasti. It is claimed that Prabhāhasti was the teacher of both Buddhaguhya and Padmasambhava.¹¹⁹ The *Crystal Mirror* on the other hand places all three—Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Buddhaguhya—as disciples of Vilāsavajra.¹²⁰ Of particular interest is Patrül Rinpoché's account of the *Secret Essence's* lineage, where the only mention of Padmasambhava is along with Vimalamitra as the teacher of Nyak Jñānakumāra without mentioning Padmasambhava's own teachers.¹²¹ The account he gives describes how three different streams of teachings on the *Secret Essence* converge on the ninth century figure, Nup Sanggyé Yeshé.¹²² The three streams described by Patrül Rinpoché are depicted in the chart on page 195. In his description, only the first stream goes back to the revealer, King Indrabhūti, whom he calls King Jaḥ. This lineage passes through Vimalamitra to Ma Rinchenchok and Nyak Jñānakumāra. The second stream begins with Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava teaching Nyak Jñānakumāra, while the third stream

¹¹⁸ *Key to the Treasury*, 12.6.

¹¹⁹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 466-468. This passage only mentions “Indrabhūti and Kukurāja” without designating which pair is being referenced. However, on p. 487, he says:

... the younger Indrabhūti empowered Simhaputra and the later Kukurāja; and he explained the [Anuyoga] tantras to them. The later Kukurāja empowered the great master Sukha the “Zombie”....

¹²⁰ *Crystal Mirror: Journal of the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center*, volume VI, (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1984), 346.

¹²¹ dPal-sprul O-rgyal-'jigs-med-chos-kyi-dbang-po, *gsang snying 'chad thabs brgyud gsum lo rgyus*, 182.4.

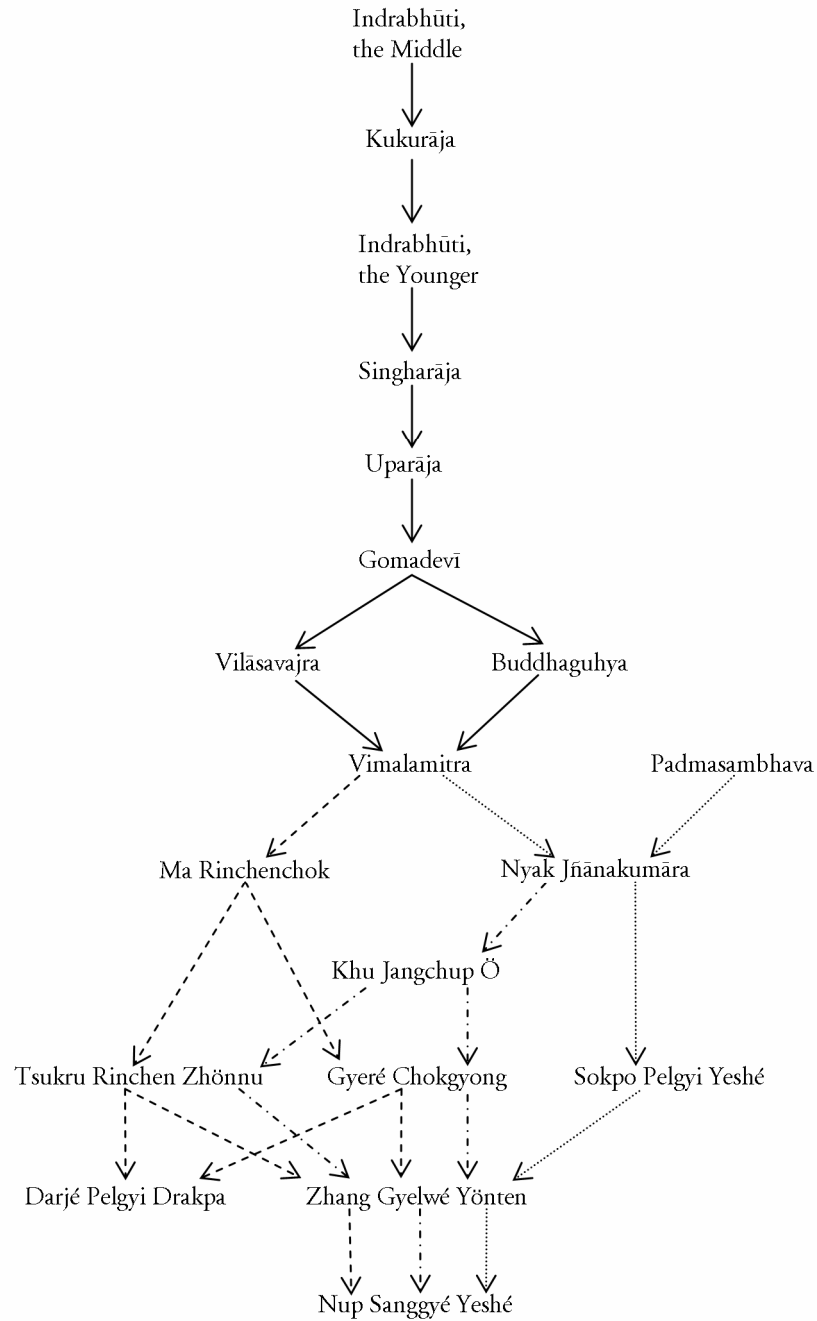
¹²² *gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes*. According to Dūjom Rinpoché and other later Tibetan historians, date him from 832 to 943 C.E. However, according to the Chinese sources and the earlier Tibetan annals, his dates are 772-885 C.E. See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* vol. 1, 607ff. and vol. 2, 53, n. 715.

merely begins with Ma Rinchenchok and Nyak Jñānakumāra with no mention of its Indian source. The chart of Patrül Rinpoché's lineage demonstrates Padmasambhava's peripheral role in this version of the Tantra's tradition, while Vimalamitra's role is decidedly central. It is possible that Padmasambhava's name was added to the lineage because, for one, he was already associated with Nyak Jñānakumāra and secondly his name came to provide authenticity and approval in the eyes of the Old School adherents, due to the elaborations of his legend. If this were indeed the case, one could also assert that the authorship of the *Garland of Views* was attributed to Padmasambhava for the same reason.

Thus, Patrül Rinpoché's account leaves Padmasambhava in a peripheral role, in much the same way as *The Testament of Ba* does. Whereas Dūjom Rinpoché resorts to elaborate arguments to defend Padmasambhava's exaggerated role in the lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, the tradition represented by Patrül Rinpoché makes only cursory mention of him. The difference in these two interpretations of the tradition may lie in the difference between the two hermeneutic traditions of the *Secret Essence*, the Zur tradition and the Rong-Long tradition. The former interpreting Mahāyoga as Mahāyoga does not need to associate Padmasambhava with its lineage, because Padmasambhava was a figure originally associated with the Dzokchen tradition of Atiyoga. On the other hand, since the Rong-Long tradition, represented here by Dūjom Rinpoché, seeks to interpret the *Secret Essence* as an Atiyoga tantra, whose main topic is the Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*), Padmasambhava's association with the lineage is more important.

THREE STREAMS OF THE SECRET ESSENCE TRANSMISSION

ACCORDING TO PATRUL RINPOCHÉ¹²³



¹²³ The three streams of transmission that stem from Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava are indicated by dashed, dotted, and dash-dotted lines.

The dubiousness of Padmasambhava's ascription to the *Secret Essence* lineage was noticed also by Eva Dargyay in *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism*. Though her conclusion is partly based on a misinterpretation, she is correct in asserting that:

The tradition of Padmasambhava seems to be less reliable, since he was instructed by an incarnation of 'Jam-dpal-bshes-gnyen and (according to the PK [*Padma dKarmo*]) "was taught by other Wisdom-Holders (*Rig-'dzin*). According to the literature listed in that tradition sequence...Padmasambhava's tradition seems to have been formed as a variation of the Tradition of Meditative Realization (*sgrub-sde brgyud pa*).¹²⁴

As further evidence, she claims that Padmasambhava's tradition was a conscious imitation of Vimalamitra's instructions (*man ngag*) because it was called "The line similar to the one of instruction' (*man ngag lta bu'i phreng ba*)." However, here she is misinterpreting the name of the *only* commentary on the *Secret Essence* attributed to Padmasambhava, *The Quintessential Instructions—A Garland of Views* (*man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*), for the name of the lineage as a whole, at the same time as she is misreading the title.¹²⁵ This mistake of an otherwise rigorous scholar is understandable in light of the fact that the *Garland of Views* is the only concrete piece of evidence connecting Padmasambhava with the *Secret Essence*, and it is not beyond possibility that some scholars refer to Padmasambhava's *Secret Essence* lineage as the lineage of the *Garland of Views*. However, there is no sure evidence connecting that text with the historical Padmasambhava!

The *Garland of Views* is a decidedly ancient text. It is often cited in Nup Sanggyé Yeshé's *Lamp for the Eye of Concentration*, a text that dates back to the ninth century. Commenting

¹²⁴ Eva Dargyay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), 31.

¹²⁵ The difference between her reading of the supposed name for the lineage and the title of Padmasambhava's text is underlined in the parenthetical Tibetan included above. In fairness to Ms. Dargyay, this most likely is the result of a scribal error. Though the source she cites is Düjom's history, exact page references are not supplied, making it difficult to definitively verify or refute her assertions.

on a verse from the thirteenth chapter of the *Secret Essence*, the *Garland of Views* organizes the Buddhist teachings into nine systems, though it does not call each of these vehicles, as noted in the previous chapter. Tradition ascribes the text to Padmasambhava, but it is his only commentary on Mahāyoga. Thus, there is not a corpus of work with which to compare it. The connection of Padmasambhava with the *Garland of Views* is made by the Old School proponents of Atiyoga in part to create a bridge between the *Secret Essence Tantra's* and the Great Completeness doctrine of the Heart Drop cycle. The method of “great completeness” described in the *Garland of Views* falls squarely within the Mahāyoga teachings. The connection made by such an argument is based only on a similarity in vocabulary. While Padmasambhava’s authorship of the *Garland of Views* cannot be disproved, the traditional assumption that it was written by him should be drawn into question. In all probability, the mythology that arose around Padmasambhava incorporated this stray, anonymous commentary on the *Secret Essence* into its worldview, reinterpreting it and the *Secret Essence* as Atiyoga texts.

THE LINEAGE IN TIBET

Buddhaguhya, Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra are the three Indian figures in the *Secret Essence* lineage to have direct contact with Tibetans. It can be claimed with some certainty that all three were alive in 761/762, when Trisong Detsen, the king of Tibet renowned for first importing Buddhism, turned twenty. This is the age when he first became interested in the religion.¹²⁶ Since he corresponded with Buddhaguhya concerning Buddhism and invited both Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra to teach the religion in Tibet, these events must have taken place sometime after 762. From these three Indian teachers onward, but primarily

¹²⁶ Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 60.

through Vimalamitra, the lineage of the *Secret Essence* passed through Tibetans, who translated the important Indian commentaries on the tantra and penned their own.

The Tibetan lineages of the *Secret Essence* thus arose in the time of King Trisong Detsen, the last half of the eighth century. The biographies of the early Tibetan Buddhists are, in typical fashion, described through the scheme of different canonical enumerations, such as the “seven test cases” (*sad mi mi bdun*), or the first monks ordained at Samyé Monastery, and the “twenty-five chief disciples” (*grub thob rje dang ’bangs nyer lnga*) of Padmasambhava.¹²⁷ The seven test cases were, according to the legend, the first seven men to be ordained as monks in Tibet. The twenty-five chief disciples are enumerated as the King Trisong Detsen along with twenty-four of his subjects, who were ministers, monks and/or scholars. Tucci has shown that the lists of the seven test cases are far from reliable. They vary a great deal and appear to have been manipulated over time for political purposes.¹²⁸ The same can be assumed for the names of the twenty-five chief disciples, several of whom are also listed as one of the seven test cases.¹²⁹ It is among these lists that the names and biographies of the early Tibetan masters of the *Secret Essence* are found. It has already been mentioned that

¹²⁷ For the latter, see Tulku Thondup, *Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa*, 150ff and Tulku Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986), 231-234.

¹²⁸ Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 320-335. He gives an example (326-327) of how Butön altered his version of the list to include the families of his patrons.

¹²⁹ According to Tulku Thondup (*Hidden Teachings*, 231-234), there are two ways to count the twenty-five disciples with and without King Trisong Detsen (*khri sgrong lde’u btsan*). Without the king, the twenty-five disciples are as follows (asterisks indicate members of the seven test cases according to this source): 1. Nup-sang-gye-ye-she (*gnubs sang rgyas ye shes*), 2. Ngen-lam-gyel-wa-chok-yang (*ngan lam rgyal ba mchog dbyangs*)*, 3. Nam-khe-nying-bo (*nam mkha’i snying po*), 4. Nyak Jñānakumāra (*gnyag lo ye shes gzhon nu*), 5. Ye-she-tso-gyel (*ye shes mtsho rgyal*), 6. Drok-mi Pel-gyi-ye-she (*’brog mi dpal gyi ye she*), 7. Lang Pel-gyi-seng-ge (*lang dpal gyi seng ge*), 8. Vairochana (*rnam par snang mdzad*), 9. Yudra Nyingpo (*g.yu sgra snying po*)*, 10. Na-nam Dor-je-dü-jom (*sna nam rdo rje bdud ’joms*), 11. Ye-she-yang (*ye shes dbyangs*), 12. Sok-bo-hla-pel (*sog po lha dpal*), 13. Na-nam-ye-she (*sna nam ye shes*), 14. Khar-chen Pel-gyi-wang-chuk (*mkhar chen dpal gyi dbang phyug*), 15. Den-ma-tse-mang (*ldan ma rtse mang*), 16. Ka-wa-bel-tsek (*ska bad pal brtsegs*)*, 17. Shüid-pu Pel-gyi-seng-ge (*shud pu dpal gyi seng ge*), 18. Dre Gyel-we-lo-drö (*’bre rgyal ba’i blo gros*), 19. Khye-chung-lo-tsa (*khye’u chung lo tsa*), 20. Dren-ba-nam-kha (*dran npa nam mkha*), 21. O-dren Pel-gyi-wang-chuk (*o bran dpal gyi dbang phyug*), 22. Ma Rinchenchok (*rma rin chen mchog*)*, 23. Hla-lung Pel-gyi-dor-je (*lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje*), 24. Lang-dro Göñ-chok-jung-ne (*lang gro dkon mchog ’byung gnas*), and 25. La-sum Gyel-wa-chang-chup (*la gum rgyal ba byang chub*)*. When the list includes King Trisong Detsen, then either Yudra Nyingpo or Drok-mi Pel-gyi-ye-she is dropped.

two Tibetans—Kawa Peltsek and Cokro Luigyeltsen—were sent by King Trisong Detsen to invite Vimalamitra to Tibetan. Both of these figures are mentioned in some of the lists of the seven test cases, and Kawa Peltsek is in the list of twenty-five disciples.

In terms of the text of the *Secret Essence Tantra* itself, three translations were reputed to have been made during this early period, each involving both an Indian master and one or more Tibetan translators.¹³⁰ It is claimed that the Tibetans Be Jampel and Drenka Mukti first translated the *Secret Essence* with Buddhaguhya at Mount Kailash. The second translation is said to have been made by Nyak Jñānakumāra with Padmasambhava, and the third translation of the text was made by Vimalamitra, Ma Rinchenchok, and Nyak Jñānakumāra. The latter is the translation found in all extant versions of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients*.¹³¹ Given Vimalamitra's influence as a pivotal figure in the transition of Mahāyoga Tantra to Tibet, some historical accuracy can be attributed to that attribution. The factuality of the second translation is however questionable. It may be that the Padmasambhava tradition sought to place its stamp on the highly influential Mahāyoga tradition by portraying Padmasambhava as an important figure in the introduction of Mahāyoga. A similar process could also account for the fact that Tibetans ascribe authorship of the *Garland of Views* to Padmasambhava. Vimalamitra's historical presence in the lineage is verifiable through the fact that there are multiple canonical commentaries found in the canons of both Old and New Schools and that these commentaries describe a coherent and consistent system. Thus, with regard to the Tibetan lineage of the *Secret Essence*, we will investigate the figures of this early time period who are associated with Vimalamitra, namely Kawa Peltsek, Jokro Luigyeltsen, Ma Rinchenchok and Nyak Jñānakumāra. The sources for their biographies include the modern Tibetan work, *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan*

¹³⁰ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 81.

¹³¹ See bibliography for references to the different editions of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*).

Scholar-Adepts,¹³² and the translation of Dūjom Rinpoché's *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

KAWA PELTSEK

Little more is known of Kawa Peltsek (*ka wa dpal brtsegs*) other than the fact that he was one of the two Tibetans who invited Vimalamitra from India to Tibet. According to the *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan Scholar-Adepts*, he was born in the middle of the eighth century C.E. in the Phenyül valley, north of Lhasa.¹³³ He was a skilled translator, reputed to be one of the seven test cases ordained by Shāntarakṣita as well as one of the twenty-five chief disciples of Padmasambhava, under whom he studied tantra. Though any of these connections may also be a later attribution, the lists of translations attributed to Kawa Peltsek demonstrate the genres of Buddhist scriptures and commentarial literature that attracted the early Tibetan Buddhists of his day. The texts he reputedly translated concern the subjects of the discipline, the perfection of wisdom, incantations (*dhāraṇīs*), and Dual, or Performance, Tantra.¹³⁴ The Peking edition of the Tibetan canon contains doxographical treatise entitled *Explanation of the Stages of the View* (*lta ba rim pa bshad pa*), which merits further attention from scholars of Buddhism's intellectual history.¹³⁵ Similar interests can be seen in his companion, Jokro Luigyeltsen.

¹³² Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod* (kansu: mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992).

¹³³ Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 116-117.

¹³⁴ The relevant texts among those listed in the *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 116 are: 'dul ba lung, shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i bsdus don, 'phags pa rnam par mi rtog par 'jug pa'i gzungs, phyag na rdo rje rigs pa mchog gi rgyud chen po, rtsa ba'i rgyud las rnam par snangs mdzad mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa'i rgyud bsdus don.

¹³⁵ P5843, vol. 144 (*ngo*), 128.1.7-129.1.4.

JOKRO LUIGYELTSSEN

A contemporary of Kawa Peltsek, Jokro Luigyeltsen (*lcog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan*) was also born in the middle of the eighth century C.E. His ordination is not mentioned in the *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan Scholar-Adepts*, nor does he appear in the lists that Tucci gives of the seven test cases.¹³⁶ However, he translated several texts on the individual liberation vows of a monk and the discipline. He was renowned as a great translator and accompanied Kawa Peltsek on the journey to find Vimalamitra in India. As with many of these early figures, the *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan Scholar-Adepts* devotes the majority of its section on this person to the list of texts he translated. The contents of this list are telling with regard to the interests of early Tibetan Buddhists. The majority of the texts Jokro Luigyeltsen translated relate to monastic discipline.¹³⁷ He also translated the root text for the Middle Way School and several of its commentaries.¹³⁸ Other translations cover tantric subjects such as a means of attainment (*sgrub thabs, sādhana*) for Akṣobhya, who happens to be a central deity for the *Secret Essence*, along with other related scriptures.¹³⁹ Yet, another is an incantation associated with Action Tantra.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the subjects covered by Jokro Luigyeltsen's translations parallel those covered by his companion, Kawa Peltsek: discipline, the perfection of wisdom, incantations (*dhāraṇīs*), and tantra.

¹³⁶ Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 505-506.

¹³⁷ E.g., *dge slong pha'i so thar gyi mdo, dge slong ma'i so thar gyi mdo, 'dul gzhung phyi ma*, and *'dul gzhung phyi ma zhu ba rdzogs pa* (Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 505-506).

¹³⁸ *dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab, dbu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel ba ga las 'jigs med, dbu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel ba, dbu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel ba shes rab sgron ma, dbu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel ba shes rab sgron ma'i rgya cher 'grel ba* (GKM, 506).

¹³⁹ *mi 'khrugs pa'i sgrub thabs* (Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 506).

¹⁴⁰ *shes rab bskyed pa'i gzungs* (Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 506).

The *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan Scholar-Adepts* cites an interesting verse by Ngok Loden Sherap (*rngog blo ldan shes rab*) praising the translators of the past:

Vairocana is equal in extent to the sky.

The two—Ka and Jok—are like the pair—the sun and the moon.

Rinchen Zangpo is only the great morning star.

We are like fireflies.¹⁴¹

The sectarian ranking in this verse is obvious. Vairocana as carrier of the Atiyoga lineages is on top, equated to the sky. Next come Kawa Peltsek and Jokro Luigyeltsen, like the great lights in the sky. In the inferior third place, there is the New Schools most revered translator Rinchen Zangpo (*rin chen bzang po*). Lastly, in a common gesture of humility, the author lists his own generation. The middle place awarded to Kawa Peltsek and Jokro Luigyeltsen is noteworthy is lower than Atiyoga and yet higher than the New Schools tantras. Such a description matches both Mahāyoga and Anuyoga tantras. Furthermore, the natural imagery is craftily chosen to symbolize the difference in thought. The Atiyoga view is like the sky—immeasurable, spontaneously present and pure. The view of Ka and Jok is likened to the sun and moon. These two symbols are also used in Mahāyoga's Path of Method, where the psychic body is manipulated through yogic meditations. The sun symbolizes the red energy-drops situated at the base of one's spine, and the moon symbolizes the white drops of enlightenment that reside inside the crown of one's skull. This would be a natural analogy to make since Atiyoga often expresses its greatness by deprecating the excessive ritual required for Mahāyoga, where one gradually generates the deity and works within that visualization. Just as the sky is the place where the sun and moon course, Atiyoga is, according to its proponents, the fundamental view that makes Mahāyoga possible.

¹⁴¹ *rngog blo ldan shes rab kyis "bai ro tsa na nam mkha'i mtha' dang mnyam/ ska cog rnam gnyis nyi zla zung zhig 'dral rin chen bzang po tho rang skar chen tsam/ kho bo cag ni srin bu me khyer mtshungs/ zhes bsngags brjod mdzad 'dug/ (GKM, 505).*

While Ngok Loden Sherap's verse clearly ranks the various translators, it also points to the close relationship between Kawa Peltsek and Jokro Luigyeltsen. As in that verse, whenever mentioned they are invariably listed as a pair. They were roughly the same age, and the lists of their translations portray similar interests. This pair traveled to India and brought Vimalamitra, the holder of the Mahāyoga lineages, to Tibet. Though they were the first to have contact with Vimalamitra and had an interest in tantra, there is no indication that he taught them anything specifically about the *Secret Essence*. In fact, the traditional lineages for the *Secret Essence* do not mention either Kawa or Jokro. Instead, the two figures of this generation found within the *Secret Essence* lineage are: Ma Rinchenchok and Nyak Jñānakumāra.

MA RINCHENCHOK

Ma Rinchenchok (*rma rin chen mchog*) is the shortened form of Majo Rinchenchok, an eighth-century Tibetan from the Majo (*rma jo*) family. Probably the most important disciple of Vimalamitra, he came from Phenyul, as did Kawa Peltsek, and was one of the seven test cases ordained by Shāntarakṣita in 775 as well as one of the twenty-five chief disciples of Padmasambhava. Under King Trisong Detsen, he was minister of religion.¹⁴² Among the translations listed for Ma Rinchenchok, a number of them concern a text called *Praise of Limitless Good Qualities*.¹⁴³ There is also a text on maṇḍala rites and a means of achievement for Heruka, the main wrathful deity in Mahāyoga.¹⁴⁴ Overall, there are fewer texts in the list of Ma Rinchenchok's translations than either of the two previous translators, which could

¹⁴² *rgyal po khri srong lde btsan gyi chos blon yin/* (Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 1312).

¹⁴³ *yon tan mtha' yas kyi bstod pa* (Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 1312).

¹⁴⁴ *dkyil 'khor thams cad kyi rjes su 'jug pa'i cho ga lnga ba* and *dpal he ru ka'i sgrub thabs* (Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 1312).

mean he did not have the time to write due to his involvement with either worldly state affairs and/or meditative practice.

Another interpretation, however, is that the teachings Ma Rinchenchok left behind were not preserved in literature to the extent that they were preserved in oral traditions. This is indeed what the Tibetan traditions imply. For, it is not merely his translations that make Ma Rinchenchok important for them but also his position in the various lineages of teachings. In Patrül Rinpoché's description of the three streams of transmission for the *Secret Essence* (see chart on page 195), Ma Rinchenchok is said to have taught the *Secret Essence* to three men: Tsukru Rinchen Zhönnu (*gtsug ru rin chen gzhon nu*), Gyeré Chokgyong (*gye re mchogs skyong*), and Khu Jangchup Ö (*khu byang chub 'od*). These disciples accounted for two of the three streams of transmission proceeding from Vimalamitra to Nup Sanggyé Yeshé (*gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes*). The third stream proceeds through the other important disciple of Vimalamitra, Nyak Jñānakumāra.

NYAK JÑĀNAKUMĀRA

Nyak Jñānakumāra (*gnyags dznyānakumāra*) was from the Yarlung valley, born in the first half of the eighth century. He also was supposedly ordained by Shāntarakṣita and a disciple of Padmasambhava. After the death of Trisong Detsen, the designs of persons hostile to Buddhism forced him to leave central Tibet for a period. He figures in the lineage of the Vajrakīla teachings, which were allegedly given to him by Vimalamitra. However, among his translations, there is also a commentary on the *Litany of Names for Mañjuśrī*, a text within the Mahāyoga corpus.¹⁴⁵ He was one of the two major disciples of Vimalamitra and assisted Vimalamitra and Ma Rinchenchok in the earliest extant translation of the *Secret Essence*. According to Patrül Rinpoché, his two main students were Khu Jangchup Ö and Sokpo

¹⁴⁵ *mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i 'grel ba mtshan don* (Ko-zhul-grags-pa-'byung-gnas and rGyal-ba-blo-bzang-mkhas-grub, *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*, 679). This text is one of the four cycles of the Magical Emanation Net, namely the Mañjuśrī Magical Emanation Net (*'jam dpal sgyu 'phrul drwa bā*).

Pelgyi Yeshé. Through those disciples, the *Secret Essence* teachings were transmitted eventually falling to Nup Sanggyé Yeshé.

NUP SANGGYÉ YESHÉ

Nup Sanggyé Yeshé (*gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes*) was a very influential figure for early Tibetan Buddhism in general and for the lineages of the *Secret Essence* in particular. According to the *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan Scholar-Adepts*, Sanggyé Yeshés was born in the first half of the 800s and lived to be 130 years old, though this is likely either an exaggeration or a mistake for 113.¹⁴⁶ This is the age Snellgrove gives him, providing the more specific dates, 772-885. On the other hand, the *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* describes a similar life-span but places him significantly later, 832-943.¹⁴⁷ Khetsun Sangpo's *Biographical Dictionary* agrees with the 832 birth-date and the 130-year lifespan, claiming Nup's dates to be 832-962.¹⁴⁸ Tulku Thondup wisely does not venture to supply a date.¹⁴⁹ His father was from the Nup clan, and his mother was from Chim.¹⁵⁰ As all great men of his day were, he is said to have been ordained by Shāntarakṣita and initiated by Padmasambhava. Though reputedly a monk, he had a son, Nup Yönten Gyatso, and it is also claimed he traveled seven times to Nepal and India.

In the *Key to the Treasury*, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima describes Nup Sanggyé Yeshé as the person who combined three streams of the Mahāyoga transmission stemming from Vimalamitra.¹⁵¹ These three streams branched from that Indian master's two main disciples, Ma Rinchenchok and Nyak Jñānakumāra. Ma Rinchenchok taught Tsukru Rinchen

¹⁴⁶ *khong ni spyi lo'i dus rab bryad pa'i dus stod tsam du yab gnubs rigs gsal ba'i dbang phyug dang / yum mchims mo bkra shis 'tsho gnyis kyi sras su sku 'khrung/ dgung lo brya dang sum cur bzbugs sol (gang can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod, 937).*

¹⁴⁷ Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 458. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 607ff.

¹⁴⁸ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, 155.

¹⁴⁹ Tulku Thondup, *The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapas*, 152-154.

¹⁵⁰ These are *gnubs* and *mchims* respectively.

¹⁵¹ *bi ma las rma gnyags gnyis la gdams/ de gnyis nas bryud pa'i chu bo gsum du gyes pa gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes la gcig to 'dres/ (Key to the Treasury, 13.2-13.3).*

Zhönnu and Gyeré Chokgyong, while Nyak Jñānakumāra taught Sokpo Pelgyi Yeshé. Together, they taught Khu Jangchup Ö, thus creating three lineages. According to Patrül Rinpoché, these three streams of transmission are:¹⁵²

| <u>Stream 1</u> | <u>Stream 2</u> | <u>Stream 3</u> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Vimalamitra | Vimalamitra & Padmasambhava | Vimalamitra & Padmasambhava |
| Ma Rinchenchok | Ma Rinchenchok & | Nyak Jñānakumāra |
| Tsukru Rinchen Zhönnu & | Nyak Jñānakumāra | Sokpo Pelgyi Yeshé |
| Gyeré Chokgyong | Khu Jangchup Ö | Zhang Gyelwé Yönten |
| Zhang Gyelwé Yönten | Tsukru Rinchen Zhönnu & | Nup Sanggyé Yeshé |
| Nup Sanggyé Yeshé | Gyeré Chokgyong | |
| | Zhang Gyelwé Yönten | |
| | Nup Sanggyé Yeshé | |

While all three streams have Vimalamitra at their head and two share Padmasambhava, these lineages can be distinguished by their second generation as:

- ♦ a lineage from Ma Rinchenchok (stream 1),
- ♦ a lineage from Nyak Jñānakumāra (stream 3), and
- ♦ a mixed lineage from both (stream 2).

Interestingly, Nupchen's teacher, Zhang Gyelwé Yönten (*zhang rgyal ba'i yon tan*), is actually the person in whom the three transmissions combine. However, his importance is overshadowed by the greatness of his student, Nup Sanggyé Yeshé.

¹⁵² See chart on page 196.

His most famous extant work is the *Lamp for the Eye of Concentration* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*), a doxographical summary of the major vehicles in Tibetan Buddhism of his day.¹⁵³ The text is extremely important because it is one of the earliest detailed description of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy from an indigenous author. The text contains chapters on the teachings of the gradualists, the suddenists, Mahāyoga, and Atiyoga. This ninth-century commentary often cites the *Garland of Views*, attributed to Padmasambhava, indicating the latter is also an early text. Both of these works are important sources of information concerning early Indo-Tibetan Buddhist doctrines, and further studies of them are necessary for modern scholars to have a clearer grasp of the intellectual landscape of that period.

Nup Sanggyé Yeshé became the central figure for the transmission of the Secret Essence in central Tibet. As for his students, Patrül Rinpoché lists “four sons held by his heart” (*thugs zin sras bzhi*) and one “excellent son” (*sras kyi dam pa*). The latter was his biological son, Nup Yönten Gyatso, and the others were: So Yeshé Wangchuk, Bagor Lochen Pakpa, Ten Yönten-chok, and Su Legpa Drönmé. Of these, So Yeshé Wangchuk is mentioned as his main disciple also in the *Tent of Blazing Jewels* and the *Key to the Treasury*.¹⁵⁴ From So Yeshé Wangchuk, the lineage was transmitted through several teachers culminating with Nyang Yeshé Jungné, the teacher of Zurpoché. Yungtönpa’s *Commentary* and the *Tent of Blazing Jewels* gives the following intervening lineage:

So Yeshé Wangchuk (*so ye shes dbang phyug*),

Wangtung Changchub Gyeltsen (*dbang thung byang chub rgyal mtshan*),¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Nupchen Sanggyé Yeshé (gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes), *rnal ’byor mig gi bsam gtan or bsam gtan mig sgron: A treatise on bhāvanā and dhyāna and the relationships between the various approaches to Buddhist contemplative practice*, edited by ’Khor-gdon Gter-sprul ’Chi-med-rig-’dzin, Smarntsis Shesrig Spenzod, volume 74 (Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1974. I-Tib 74-902536).

¹⁵⁴ bSam-drup-rdo-rje, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 633.1. *Key to the Treasury*, 13.3—together with Nup’s son, Yönden-gyam-tso.

¹⁵⁵ For this name’s prefix, *Tent of Blazing Jewels* has *dbang thung* (633.1) whereas *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 423 has *ngan thung* and *The Blue Annals*, 109 has Nab-thuñ.

Kongtsun Sherap Yeshé (*kong btsun shes rab ye shes*),
 Tsang Ger Tung Sherap Tsultrim (*gtsang ger thung shes rab tshul khrims*),
 Nyang Sherapchok (*nyang shes rab mchog*),
 Nyang Yeshé Jungné (*nyang ye shes 'byung gnas*).

However, the *Blue Annals* and, following it, the *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* claim that this was not a linear succession but that the second through fourth members were all disciples of So Yeshé Wangchuk.¹⁵⁶ In the *Key to the Treasury* Jikmé Tenpé Nyima provides the same lineage, saying that Nyang Sherapchok was taught directly by So Yeshé Wangchuk and Nups Yönten Gyatso.¹⁵⁷ The revised lineage is therefore much shorter:

So Yeshé Wangchuk
 Nyang Sherapchok
 Nyang Yeshé Jungné

The *Blue Annals* also claims that between Nupchen Sanggyé Yeshé and Zurpoché there was only one teacher, because Zurpoché studied with one of Nupchen's four main students, Bagor Lochen Pakpa.¹⁵⁸ However, the main teacher of the first Zur patriarch is generally considered to be Nyang Yeshé Jungné. His student, Shākya Jungné, established the lineage of the Zur family tradition that became one of the major preservers of the ancient traditions of higher tantras—Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga.

¹⁵⁶ *The Blue Annals*, 109. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 616.

¹⁵⁷ *des gnubs yon tan rgya mtsho dang so ye shes dbang phyug la bshad/ de gnyis ka la nyang shes rab mchog gi zhus/* (*Key to the Treasury*, 13.3).

¹⁵⁸ *The Blue Annals*, 109.

THE ZUR TRADITION

THE ELDER ZUR, SHĀKYA JUNGNÉ

The tradition speaks of the three ancestors of Zur as the final establishers of the Old School teachings in Tibet. Khetsun Sangpo's biographical encyclopedia gives this standard summary:

In the end the teachings of Secret Mantra fell on the Zur [family]. Zur the Elder, Shākya Jungné, obtained it at first. Zur the Younger, Sherap Drak, established the traditions. Zur Shākya Senggé [Dropukpa] spread it and made it vast. Therefore, they are renowned as the “Three Ancestors of the Zur [Family].”¹⁵⁹

These three patriarchs of this Old School lineage are commonly known as Zurpoché (the elder Zur), Zur Chung (the younger Zur), and Dropukpa (One from the cave at Dro).¹⁶⁰ They are all blood relations, Zur Chung being the cousin once removed of Zurpoché, and Dropuk being Zur Chung's son. The stories of this lineage in both Khetsun Sangpo's work and Dūjom Rinpoché's history connect the family to India.¹⁶¹ Dūjom Rinpoché's source claims the family originated in India, giving a lineage of descendents from the first Indian immigrant:

Ösel Lhawang Zhünu Tsuktorchen,

Manda Zangzhüchen,

Zur Gyelwa Sumdrak,

¹⁵⁹ *gsang sngags kyi bstan pa tha mar zur la babs tel zur po che shākya 'byung gnas kyis dbu brnyes/ zur chung pa shes rab grags kyis srol btod / zur shākya seng ges dar zhing rgyas par mdzad na zur mes dbon gsum zhes grags la/* (Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 3, 170).

¹⁶⁰ These are respectively *zur po che*, *zur chung ba*, and *sgro phug pa*.

¹⁶¹ Both of these reference works are summarizing or directly quoting from other sources.

Zurpa Shenyen Takdrachen,

Rinchen Gyatso¹⁶²

Both Khetsun Sangpo and Dūjom Rinpoché hold that Zur Atsara, from the generation preceding Zurpoché's, lived in India for ten years, but as Atsara is also a possible Tibetan transliteration of the Sanskrit title *ācārya*, it is difficult to identify this figure precisely. The two most complete lineages of the Zur family are Gölotsāwa's and Dūjom Rinpoché's:¹⁶³

Gölotsāwa's *Blue Annals* (110)

Zur Sherap Jungné

(*zur shes rab 'byung gnas*)

|

Zang Mikpoché (*bzangs mig po che*)

|

Lhajé Zurpoché

(*lha rje zur po che*)

|

Zur Gom

(*zur sgom*)

|

Zur Chung

(*zur chung*)

¹⁶² These are: *'od gsal lha dbang gzhon nu gtsug tor can, ma nda zhangs zhus can, zur rgyal ba gsum sgrags, zur pa bshes gnyen stag sgra can*, and *rin chen rgya mtsho*. The last named figure is named as the father of Tsho-zang Mik-bo-che (see below).

¹⁶³ *The Blue Annals*, 110. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 616.

Düjrom's History (616)

Tshozang Mikpoché (*mtsbo bzang mig po che*)

| |

Zur Atsara

Zurzang Sherap Jungné

(*zur a tsa ra*)

(*zur bzang shes rab 'byung gnas*)

| |

Zur Thakpa Gomchen

Lhajé Zurpoché

(*zur thag pa sgom chen*)

(*lha rje zur bo che*)

|

Zur Chung

(*zur chung*)

Though in one place, the *Blue Annals* thus portrays Zur Chung as Zurpoché's nephew, in another it describes the two—Zur Gom, the father of Zur Chung, and Zurpoché—as cousins. In the story of how Zur Chungwa became Zurpoché's apprentice, Zur Gom's father is said to be the son of a man by the name of Atsara, and the two cousins have never met:

There was an elderly beggar monk called Zur-sgom, a son of one named the grand-father A-tsa-ra, who went on a begging round. Lha-rje rGya-bo-pa [Zur Chung] was a young novice who followed after his father. When they came to 'Ug-pa-luñ, Lha-rJe Zur-po-che said: "What is your family name?" "It is Zur"—replied the father. "Well, you should leave this young novice with me. I can foster him!"¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ *The Blue Annals*, 113-114. It could be inferred that Zur-gom was among Zur-bo-che's brothers, who are listed as *lha rje sman pa*, *sgom chen shāk-sde*, and *sgom chen rdor 'byung*, as "Zur Gom" could refer to either of the latter two. However, this would discredit the story of Zur Chung's adoption, for it hardly seems likely that he would have to ask his brother, "What is your family name?"

This description of Zurpoché and Zur Chung as cousins once removed matches the lineage given in Dūjom Rinpoché's *History*. However, while Khetsun Sangpo agrees with the designation of Sherap Jungné as Zurpoché's father, he claims that "Zur Atsarya" was another name for the same person.¹⁶⁵ This translates to Zur Chung being Zurpoché's nephew in agreement with the *Blue Annals* first account. To further complicate the situation, the translators of Dūjom further on name Rinchen Gyatso as Zurpoché's grandfather, though by the above lineage he would be Zurpoché's great-grandfather.¹⁶⁶ Despite all these discrepancies, it is clear that Zurpoché came from a family particularly devoted to the Buddhist teachings. As this religious fervor stretched back several generations, the family adhered to the Old School ways, though Zurpoché himself lived during the advent of the New Schools and even received teachings from the Shākya patriarch and great translator Drokmi.¹⁶⁷

Whatever their origins and connections to India, the Zur family ended up in Dokham (north-eastern Tibet), where Zurpoché was born, in the last half of the tenth century C.E., in the town of Yardzong, also known as Sarmo.¹⁶⁸ He was given at birth the name he held throughout his career, Shākya Jungné (*shākya 'byung gnas*), and came to be known as Zur the Elder, or Zurpoché (*zur po che*), in contrast to his eminent and equally famous disciple/nephew, Zur the Younger, or Zur Chung Sherap Drakpa (*zur chung shes rab grags pa*). His other title, Ukpa Lungpa (*'ug pa lung pa*), "One of the Owl Country," derives from a time when he used, for his meditation retreat, a cave in the Danak valley with an owl's nest

¹⁶⁵ *yab zur ā tsarya zhes bya ba chung ngu la rab tu byung nas bsnyen par rdzogs pa'i mtshan she rab 'byung gnas zhes by ba rga gar du lo bcu bzugs tel* (Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 3, 171).

¹⁶⁶ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 618. This is most likely an error in the translation for the word, *mes*, a generic term for "ancestor" that often means grandfather but could equally be translated as great-grandfather.

¹⁶⁷ *The Blue Annals*, 112.

¹⁶⁸ Respectively, *mdo khams*, *yar rdzong*, and *gsar mo*. Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 90. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 617.

in it. Thus, the religious center he founded also came to be called Ukpa Lung, although it is a fair distance from Danak.

From his birth, he was believed to be an incarnation. Thus, he was from an early age given the appropriate training. He learned to read and write from his father and was ordained by Lachen Gongpa Rabsel (*bla chen dgongs pa rab gsal*). According to Dūjom Rinpoché, he initially studied the Sūtras and Tantras under his “grandfather,” Rinchen Gyatso. He then traveled to central Tibet where he practiced the Action Tantras at Yarlung. Not satisfied with its practice of austerities, he sought out the more profound practices of the higher tantras. He initially studied Vilāsavajra’s *Blazing Palace* commentary on the *Secret Essence*, the *Sūtra which Gathers All Intentions*, and the Great Completeness with Namkhade, but his primary master for the Magical Emanation Net teachings was Nyang Yeshé Jungné. Others he studied with included Drekhrochung from upper Nyang, Rok Shākya Jungné from Chimpu, and Ce Shākya Gyeltsen. Not only did he study the Mahāyoga tantras, but his training included the Anuyoga and Atiyoga teachings as well, both the root tantras and the exegetical treatises on them. It appears from his hagiography that he had a particular affinity for Yangdak Heruka, the central deity for one of the eight Transmissions of the Word.

Though he is reported to have spent a great deal of time in solitary meditation, Zurpoché also found time to have numerous disciples and build the initial structure of the religious center, Ukpa Lung at the mouth of the Shang valley. Among his many disciples, the tradition holds that there were four or five main ones, or “pinnacles” (*rtse mo*). These are listed as: Zhang Gö Chungwa from old Lhasa, the pinnacle of consecrating knowledge; Zanggom Sherap Gyelpo of Shangtsonya, who was the pinnacle of meditative accomplishment; the priest Minyak Jungdrak who was the pinnacle of explanations; and

Deshek Gyawo from Thak, the pinnacle of the view and intention.¹⁶⁹ The last mentioned was his favorite disciple and designated successor, Zur Chungwa. Though the hagiographies give no indication that Zurpoché wrote any commentaries that have survived to the present, he is responsible for founding the religious establishment known as Ukpa Lung in the lower part of the Shang valley and a temple-complex at Dropuk. The first he founded based on a vision, and it became the seat for his Zur tradition. The latter was the toponym from which the third patriarch, Dropukpa, derived his familiar name. Leadership of the Zur tradition was passed on by Zurpoché's pronouncement to his best student and nephew, Zur Chung Sherap Drakpa.

THE YOUNGER ZUR, SHERAP DRAKPA (1014-1074)

According to Khetsun Zangbo, Zur the Younger (or Zur Chung) Sherap Drakpa (*zur chung shes rab grags pa*) was the nephew of Zurpoché.¹⁷⁰ Sherap Drakpa was the son of Zur Gomchen, Zurpoché's brother or alternatively cousin. Zur Chung was born in Yeru (*gyas ru*) in eastern Tsang in 1014. At a young age, he was adopted by Zurpoché and lived with this teacher until adulthood. Some accounts say he ran away from home to find Zurpoché; others that Zurpoché adopted him directly from his father. In either case, severed from his family connections, Zur Chung lived in poverty during his early career. The hagiographies say that Zurpoché had Zur Chung marry a rich widow for her wealth, only later to have him abandon her to practice meditation.¹⁷¹ Because he practiced meditation for thirteen years on Mount Drak Gyawo (*brag rgya bo*), he came to be called the Tathāgata of Gyawo, or Deshek Gyawopa (*bde gshegs rgya bo pa*).

¹⁶⁹ *ra sa'i zhang 'gos chung pa mkhyen rgya'i rtse mo, shangs mtsho nya'i sgom sgrub kyi rtse mo, ban gyi mi nyag 'byung grags bshad pa'i rtse mo*, and *thag gi bde gshegs rgya bo lta dgongs kyi rtse mo* (bSam-drup-rdo-rje, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 622-623).

¹⁷⁰ Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 3, 204-205.

¹⁷¹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 637.

Zur Chung was the most promising of Zurpoché's students and became the second patriarch of their lineage. His hagiographies, as is common, are filled with miraculous stories, all of which need not be repeated here. However, the dominant theme in these stories is the magical killing and resurrecting of beings. This is one of the defining practices of Mahāyoga, known as "liberation" (*sgrol ba*) because it is believed that killing beings in bad rebirths a powerful yogin can liberate them so that they are born in a Buddha-field or Pure land. For example, the following stories are found in the *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*:

Once, Zurpoché and Zur Chung came across "a vermin-infested bitch and her puppies."¹⁷² Zurpoché petted the bitch as they passed, but Zur Chung killed her and her puppies and then proceeded to eat the "vermin." When others in their entourage expressed their indignation, Zurpoché replied, "Even I knew the dogs were bound for evil destinies, but I could not 'liberate' them. Zur Chungwa has done so, and it is a great wonder." At which point, Zur Chung gazed meditatively at the canine corpses, which transformed into goddesses, and vomited up the vermin, which flew up into the heavens.

On another occasion, when Zur Chungwa was invaded by an army of ants, he told his attendant to bring a mallet; and with it crushed the ants. The attendant felt disgusted and said, "Think of the sin!"

Zur Chungwa replied, "If you had no faith in that, I'll do it this way." And popped the ants into his mouth and blew out, whereupon all of them arose in the form of Vajrasattva and departed into the sky.¹⁷³

¹⁷² *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 638.

¹⁷³ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 639.

Yet another story relates how he killed and resurrected local deities. These stories evoke the Mahāyoga theme of “liberation” (*sgrol ba*), ritual killing for the victim’s benefit. While there are no corresponding indications that he practiced the complementary ritual of “union” (*sbyor ba*), which refers to tantric sexual practices, Zur Chung was not a monk. At the prompting of Zurpoché, he married a rich widow for financial support, only later to leave her also at his teacher’s command, and in the last year of his life he fathered a son, who became the third patriarch of the Zur lineage.

The hagiographies also emphasize the growing tension between the Old and New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism in the time of Zur Chungwa. Several of his stories revolve around disputes between him and members of the emerging new orders. Four of his main disciples were students of Khyungpo Draksé (*khyung po grags se*), who was famous for establishing the “Old Nyāya” school of logic in U-Tsang.¹⁷⁴ Khyungpo Draksé had sent the four to refute Zur Chung in debate, because he “was a proponent of erroneous doctrines.”¹⁷⁵ However, in their discussions with Zur Chung, they were unable to defeat him and due to the power of his personality resolved to leave their master and become the students of Zur Chung. When he learned that his students had defected to Zur Chung, Khyungpo Draksé announced, “Anyone who kills one like Zur Chungwa, who harbors perverse opinions and leads everyone astray, will certainly attain Buddhahood!” When Zur Chung heard of this from his students, he smiled. When asked why he was smiling, he gave his famous response:

As for doctrines, this, my secret mantra tradition of the greater vehicle, is it!
For it is the tradition of secret mantra that maintains that Buddhahood may
be attained by ‘liberation’; the dialecticians do not think so. Now, even such
a great dialectician as Khyungpo Draksé has said that anyone who kills one

¹⁷⁴ *The Blue Annals*, 70.

¹⁷⁵ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 640.

like Zur Chungwa will attain Buddhahood. So, in his innermost heart, he has turned to my doctrine. Therefore, I am delighted!¹⁷⁶

Gö Khukpa Lhetsé (*gos khug pa lhas btsas*), a New School proponent of the *Secret Assembly* and a strong opponent of the Old Schools, is also said to have ordered his followers not to bow to Zur Chungwa, and he furthermore wrote a refutation of the Old Schools' tantras known as the *Broadside*.¹⁷⁷

Though at least in the Old School accounts Gö Khukpa Lhetsé could not refrain from paying homage to Zur Chungwa, the Zur patriarch was not always the winner in contests between the two masters. Among the traditional list of Zur Chung's disciples there is a group known as the "Three Useless Ones" (*go ma chod mi gsum*). They are deprecated in this way, because, feeling that the Old Schools' teachings were in some ways insufficient, they went to New School teachers. While their master was in his thirteen year retreat, Gojatsa (*'go bya tsha*) received teachings on the *Hevajra Tantra* from the very same Gö Khukpa Lhetsé to augment his practice of the *Secret Essence*; Mikchung Wangseng (*mig chung dbang seng*) received teachings on the Yoga Tantras from Sumpa Yebar (*sum pa ye 'bar*) to assist his Magical Emanation maṇḍala practice, and Gochung Wangngé (*'go chung dbang nge*) studied logic with Bangka Darchung (*spang ka dar chung*). Sumpa Yebar was associated with the great New School translator, Rinchen Zangpo, and Gochung Wangngé, whose father studied with Rinchen Zangpo's disciple, Ngok Lekpé Sherap (*rngog legs pa'i shes rab*), is listed among those who tried to refute Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo.¹⁷⁸ It is said that Zur Chung had to break his thirteen-year retreat because of these defections, which left no one to run the college at Ukpa Lungpa.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 641-642.

¹⁷⁷ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 643, vol. 1, 914-917, vol. 2, 89 n.1274.

¹⁷⁸ *The Blue Annals*, 353-354. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 708.

¹⁷⁹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 643.

Despite such difficulties, Zur Chung Sherap Drakpa is said to have established the customs of the Zur tradition by systematizing its teachings, a move made necessary by the emerging competition of the New Schools. He is also claimed to have had a great many students. The most prominent of these are the four disciples he converted from among Khyungpo Draksé's students. These became known as the four pillars (*ka ba bzhi*). Patrül Rinpoché lists these as:¹⁸⁰

1. Shākyayé, the teacher from Kye, the Pillar of the Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen gyi ka ba skye ston shā kya ye*),
2. Yangkhyé Lama, the Pillar of Anuyoga (*mdo'i ka ba yang khyad bla ma*),
3. Len Shākya Zangpo, the Pillar of Magical Emanation (*sgyu 'phrul gyi ka ba blan shā kya bzang po*),
4. Datik Chö Shākya, the Pillar of Activity and Achievement (*phrin sgrubs kyi ka ba mda' tig chos shā kya*).

These four are called pillars because they held up the house of the Zur tradition. For, it was these four who taught the Old Schools' Tantras to Zur Chungwa's son and groomed him to be the third patriarch of the Zur lineage. It is to his hagiography we now turn.

DROPUKPA SHĀKYA SENGGÉ (1074-1135)

In his later years, Zur Chungwa took Josemo Damo Tsukdorham (*jo sras mo mda' mo gtsug tor lcam*) as his consort, because he saw that in her womb a great “emanation” could be conceived. She was one of Zur Chung's disciples and the sister of Datik Chö Shākya, the Pillar of Activity and Achievement. Though the fact that Zur Chung did not marry her caused some tension among his other disciples, she gave birth in 1074 to a son, whom they named Shākya Senggé (*shākya seng ge*). Zur Chungwa died when the child was only eight

¹⁸⁰ dPal-sprul O-rgyal-'jigs-med-chos-kyi-dbang-po, *gsang snying 'chad thabs brgyud gsum lo rgyus*, 183.2-183.4.

months old, and the infant was brought up by his mother and maternal uncle, Datik Chö Shākya. At fifteen, he was taught the *Secret Magical Emanation Net*, or the *Secret Essence*, by Len Shākya Zangpo, the third of Zur Chung's four pillars. He later received teachings on Anuyoga from his uncle, who had raised him, and from the other two pillars he learned the Great Completeness doctrine. At nineteen, he was formally recognized as the hierarch of the estate associated with Ukpa Lung. He is said to have “hammered home the four nails” at Dropuk in Nyari and so came to be called Dropukpa (*sgro phug pa*).¹⁸¹ The hagiographies relate a meeting between Dropukpa and Padampa Sanggye, the founder of the Pacification tradition (*zhi byed*), where the latter received him favorably.

Skilled in many doctrines, Dropukpa appears to have been particularly knowledgeable in the *Magical Net of Vajrasattva*, and especially in the *Secret Essence*. Dūjom Rinpoché has this to say about the third Zur patriarch:

Dropukpa was perfectly endowed with the attributes of knowledge, love and power. He acquired the eye of the doctrine, having thoroughly mastered the meaning of the *Glorious Tantra of the Secret Nucleus which is definitive with Respect to the Real* [i.e., the *Secret Essence*]...In consequence, the so-called teaching tradition of the Lord of Secrets, Dropukpa, has continued to be discussed even up to the present day, and is renowned like the sun and moon.¹⁸²

Indeed, Dropukpa is mentioned in connection with setting up the structure (*khog dbub*) of the Zur tradition.¹⁸³ The name for this type of commentary literally means “erecting the inside.” It is a phrase that resonates with the title for Vimalamitra's commentary, the *Inner Text* (*khog gzhung*), and is often mentioned in connection with that text. “Setting up the

¹⁸¹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 647.

¹⁸² *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 648. *Bracketed material added.*

¹⁸³ *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 85.2.

structure” is a type of general commentary in the Zur tradition that explicates the *Secret Essence* through five topics:

1. the existence of the mind-as-such,
2. the error of not realizing it,
3. the compassionate perspective of the omniscient toward those who err,
4. how to generate compassion within that perspective, and
5. how to then effect the welfare of migrators.¹⁸⁴

Dropukpa is considered the source of this hermeneutical method, which is followed by Samdrup Dorjé’s *Tent of Blazing Jewels* but is politely set aside in the *Key to the Treasury*.

The lineage of these teaching runs through these three patriarchs of the Zur family and spreads from Dropukpa to many people of Tibet and Kham. Dropukpa is said to have had twelve special disciples who are grouped into three sets of four based in part on the etymologies of their names: the four black ones, the four teachers, and the four grandfathers.¹⁸⁵

FOUR BLACK ONES (NAG PO BZHI)

1. Zur Nak Khorlo (*zur nag ’khor lo*)
2. Gya Nakgi Kharwa (*rgya nag gi mkhar ba*)
3. Nyang Nak Dowo (*nyang nag mdo bo*)
4. Da Nak Tsukdor Wangchuk (*mda’ nag gtsug tor dbang phyug*)

OUR TEACHERS (STON BZHI)

1. Nyedön Chöseng (*nye ston chos seng*)
2. Zhangdön (*zhang ston*)

¹⁸⁴ cf. *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 600ff.

¹⁸⁵ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 648-649.

3. Gyabdön Dorjé Gönpö (*rgyab ston do rje mgon po*)
4. Gyadön (*rgya ston*)

FOUR GRANDFATHERS (MES BZHI)

1. Tsangpa Jidön (*gtsang pa byis ston*)
2. Yungdön Horpo (*g.yung ston hor po*)
3. Bongdön Chakkyu (*spong ston lcags kyu*)
4. Upa Chöseng (*dbus pa chos seng*)

This represents the central Tibetan lineage and a separate lineage is also mentioned for Kham.

Dropukpa established a permanent place for the Zur tradition's interpretation of Mahāyoga both in central Tibet and in Kham. He lived at a time when the New Schools of interpretation were forming in opposition to the variety of teachings that had been transmitted or forming since the dynastic period. The New Schools threatened the Old Schools formally by attacking the authenticity of their scriptures and translations and informally by competing for resources. In response, the loosely organized movement of Tibetan Buddhists that adhered to the older teachings gradually formed into a coherent group of sects known as the Old Schools.

Dropukpa was central in organizing the Zur tradition's establishment. From him, it was transmitted for several generations until the next period of renaissance for Tibetan Buddhism, the fourteenth century. In that century, two proponents of the Zur interpretation, Yungtön Dorjapel and Grölwapa Samdrup Dorjé, produced seminal works on the *Secret Essence* that have exerted a profound influence on the tradition since then. The lineage from Dropukpa to these two figures, as given by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, is:

Dzangnak Öbar (*gtsang nag 'od 'bar*),

Medön Gönpö (*mes ston mgon po*),

So Sherap Tsultrim (*sro shes rab tshul khrims*),

Danak Dudülbum (*rta nag bdud 'dul 'bum*),

Da Shākyapel (*mda' shākya 'pel*),

Zur Jampa Senggé (*zur byams pa seng ge*).

Zur Jampa Senggé (*zur byams pa seng ge*) lived in the 13th-14th century C.E.¹⁸⁶ His father was a powerful and influential Buddhist Tantrika of unspecified origin, who used his public office and his magical abilities to benefit the people in general. By age 15, Jampa Senggé was living at the main Zur college, Ukpa Lung, where he studied the *Secret Essence* under the tutelage of Da Shākyapel (*mda shākya 'phel*). At twenty, he was initiated particularly into the Zur tradition of the *Magical Net* by another lama, Tatön Ziji (*rta ston gzi bjid*). One source maintains that Zur Jampa Senggé lived only to his twenty-seventh year.¹⁸⁷ Despite such a short life, it is said that he had two superior disciples—one of his earlier years and one of his later years. Yungtön Dorjepel (*g.yung ston rdo rje dpal*) was considered the best disciple of his earlier years, and Samdrup Dorjé (*bsam grub rdo rje*), the foremost disciple of his later years. These two figures left lasting marks on the Zur tradition's interpretation of the *Secret Essence*.

YUNGTÖN DORJEPEL (1284-1365)

Dorjepel, also known as the teacher from Yung (*g.yung ston pa*), was born as a member of the Len (*glan*) clan at Tshongdu (*tshong 'dus*) in the year 1284, the Wood Monkey year. He was initially a student of Zur Jampa Senggé from whom he learned among other things the Yamāntaka Cycle. In his youth, he visited China, where he became known for his feats of sorcery, such as making rain fall. Upon returning to Tibet, he studied with many teachers, receiving teachings from such reknown scholars as the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorjé (1284-1339) and Butön Rinpoché (1290-1364). He wrote a text that differentiated the

¹⁸⁶ A.D. *brgya phrag 13 pa'i smad 14 nang bar roll* (GKM, vol. 3, 443). The other source used here is *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 663-667.

¹⁸⁷ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 665.

Buddhahood of the Sūtra Vehicle from that of the Tantra Vehicle, which is said to have inspired great faith in those that saw it. Unfortunately, this text is no longer extant. In the *Secret Essence* tradition, he penned a highly influential line-by-line commentary on the root tantra, *Mirror Illuminating the Meaning*, or *Yung's Commentary*, which is still read today by the Nyingma teachers.¹⁸⁸ Yungtönpa died in 1365, at the age of eighty-two. The sources give no account as to who his students were. However, he is generally mentioned along with a younger contemporary and fellow disciple of Zur Jampa Senggé, Samdrup Dorjé.

SAMDRUP DORJÉ (1294-1376)

Samdrup Dorjé (*bsam grub rdo rje*) was from the Tanak (*rta nag*) valley north of Shigatsé, west of Lhasa.¹⁸⁹ He was born to a long-standing Nyingma family in the Wood Sheep year (1294-5). His father's name was Bumpel (*'bum 'phel*) and his mother's Pelgyen (*dpal rgyan*). He studied with renowned scholars, such as Zur Jampa Senggé, his main teacher, and Len Nyatselwa Sönam Gönpö (*glan nya tshal pa bsod nams mgon po*).¹⁹⁰ According to the *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, it was the latter who initiated him into the *Magical Emanation Net* cycle, though Khetsun Sangpo claims that he first listened to teachings on the cycle of texts at age eight from his father and the younger brother of Lama Dodebum (*bla ma mdo sde 'bum gyi gcung po*).¹⁹¹

At ten, he knew all the forms and activities of the peaceful and wrathful deities. At nineteen, he studied much of the Eight Transmissions of the Word for two years under

¹⁸⁸ g.yung-ston rdo-rje-dpal (1284-1365), *dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgyud don gsal byed me long* in *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa* (I-Tib-2240; I-Tib-82-900981), vol. 28 (Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama, 1983), 4-589. Also known as the "commentary of Yung" (*g.yung 'grel*). Hereafter referred to as *Mirror Illuminating the Meaning*. In his private oral commentary on the *Key to the Treasury* in 1993, Khenpo Namdröl often used this commentary as a supplemental source.

¹⁸⁹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 667-668. Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 3, 458-463

¹⁹⁰ *zur byams pa seng ge* and *glan nya tsal ba*. The latter is mentioned in the *Key to the Treasury* (*Key to the Treasury*, 668).

¹⁹¹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 668; Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 3, 458-459.

Nyangdön Dorjé Senggé.¹⁹² At twenty-one, he went to Ukpa Lungpa, the center of the Zur tradition, where he studied this tradition's interpretation of the three higher tantra classes as transmitted by Jampa Senggé. He also listened to teachings by Da Shākyapel (*mda' shākya dpal*) on the higher tantras and the New School tantras. At twenty four, he went to another focal point of the Zur lineage, Dropuk, where he taught to the 300 students of Jampa Senggé.

He also studied with the great master, Sönam Gönpö, of the Len family in Nyatsel of Shang (*shangs kyi nya tshal*), and by this teacher was given the name, Dorjé Dechentsel (*rdo rje bde chen rtsal*). He became particularly adept at Anuyoga (*mdo*) and the Genuine (*yang dag*) cycle of the Eight Transmissions. He took the lay-person's vows from a scholar from religious seat of Jonang, named Sönam Drakpa (*jo gdan tshogs pa'i mkhan chen bsod nams grags pa*), and from him received the name Samdrub Dorjé. In a hermitage in the upper part of the Nyang valley, he received instruction on the Essence-Drop of the Great Completeness from Sönam Lodrö and completed the practice of this. At forty, he founded the Dharmasphere (*chos dbyings*) monastery at Tanak. He is claimed to have had many realization-experiences. Samdrub Dorjé is also known by the generic title, "The adherent of Tārā" (*sgrol ma ba*). Among his disciples are numbered the Zur Lama Taisitu Senggepel, Zur Ham Shākya Jungné, Zur Shākya Gyeltsen, Shākya Dorjé, and a Sakyapa Drakpa Gyeltsen.¹⁹³ He died at the age of 81, in the year of the Wood Rabbit (1375-1376).

A general commentary on the *Secret Essence*, known as the *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, comes out of his lineage of teachings. This commentary models itself on the commentarial tradition of Dropukpa, since it uses the latter's five-fold scheme of "setting up the structure." As it is often associated in tandem with Yungtönpa's commentary, it appears to be an important text

¹⁹² *nyang ston rdo rje seng ge* (Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 3, 459).

¹⁹³ *dpal ldan sa skya pa'i gdung brgyud bdag po chen po dbang grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet*, vol. 3, 462). This is not the same person as the Phamo Drugpa ruler of Tibet, Drak-ba-gyel-tsen (1373-1432), who would have only been three at the time of Samdrub Dorjé's death.

of the latter Zur tradition. Though attributed to Samdrup Dorjé, the attribution probably refers to the source of the teachings rather than the actual writing; for the lineage given in the text itself indicates that it was written well after this master's death. This lineage, found in the fifth section, not only mentions Samdrup Dorjé in the third person, but also includes the well-known author of the *Blue Annals*, Gö Lotsawa Zhönnupel (1392-1481), who lived well after Samdrup Dorjé. Furthermore, the author explicitly mentioned at the end of the lineage is Namkha Chöwang of the Dro clan (*'bro'i sngags 'chang nam kha' chos dbang*), disciple of the great teacher of the Dro, Namkha Trinlé (*'bro ston chen po nam mkha' phrin las*).¹⁹⁴ Thus, the extant text of the *Tent of Blazing Jewels* has at least been modified since the time of its author. Nonetheless, the teachings in the *Tent of Blazing Jewels* appear contemporaneous with Yungtön's *Commentary*, and they both fall well within the Zur tradition of interpretation, descended from Dropukpa. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima continues his lineage from these two with:

Drölchen Sanggyé Rinchen (*sgrol chen sangs rgyas rin chen*), 1350-1431

Gö Lochen Shönnupel (*'gos lo chen gzhon nu dpal*), 1392-14-81

The 4th Shamarpa, Chökyidrakpa (*chos kyi grags pa*), 1453-1524

The Drikhung Lama, Rinchen Püntso (*'bri gung rin chen phun tshogs*), 1509-1557

Rangdröl Nyida Sanggyé (*rang grol nyi zla sangs rgyas*)

Tsewang Norgyé, son of Khönjo (*'khon jo sras tshe dbang nor rgyas*)

The teacher of Kön, Penjor Lhündrup (*'khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub*), 1561-1637

Zurhen Drashi Künga (*zur chen bkra shis kun dga'*)

Trinlé Lhündrup of the Darding family (*dar sdings rig 'dzin phrin las lhun grub*), 1611-1662

Gyurmé Dorjé (*'gyur med rdo rje*), 1646-1714

¹⁹⁴ bSam-drup-rdo-rje, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 636.5.

THE TREASURE-REVEALER GYURMÉ DORJÉ (1646-1714)

Pema Garwang Gyurmé Dorjé (*pad ma gar dbang 'gyur med rdo rje*), also known as the Awareness-holder Terdak Lingpa (*rig 'dzin gter bdag gling pa*), is considered to have been the Speech-Emanation of the great translator Vairocana (8th cent. C.E.).¹⁹⁵ He was born in the area of Dranang (*gra nang*) about 50 km south of Lhasa on Monday, March 26, 1646. His father's name was Nyödön Sangdak Trinlé Lhündrup (*gnyos ston gsang bdag phrin las lhun grub*, 1611-1662), and his mother was Lhadzin Yangjen Drölma (*lha 'dzin dbyang can sgrol ma*), both of noble families. At age four, he was initiated into the treasures of Guru Chöwang (*gu ru chos dbang*), the *Eight Transmitted Precepts, the Consummation of Secrets*, and in his tenth year he had a vision of Padmasambhava while being empowered into the treasures of Nyangrel Nyima Özer (*nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer*, 1136-1204). He first met the great Fifth Dalai Lama, Lozang Gyatso (*blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617-1682), at Drepung Monastery in 1657, when “he offered a lock from the crown of his head”.¹⁹⁶ In their next meeting at Samyé in 1663, Gyurmé Dorjé had a vision of the Dalai Lama as Avalokiteśvara and became the latter's student.

While he learned all three branches of the higher tantras—Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga, at thirteen he began to extensively study the *Secret Essence*, the *Sublime Continuum* (a Mind-only/Tathāgata-essence text by Maitreya), the *Mind at Rest*, and the *Wish-fulfilling Treasury*.¹⁹⁷ Later in his life, he studied the commentaries of Nup Sanggyé Yeshé, the teachings of the Zur patriarchs, Sakya Paṇḍita's (1182-1251) *Analysis of the Three Vows* (*sdom gsum rab dbye*), and the *Profound Inner Meaning* by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé (*rang byung rdo rje*, 1284-1339), as well as the texts of Longchenpa. He received the

¹⁹⁵ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 825-834.

¹⁹⁶ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 826.

¹⁹⁷ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 827. The *Secret Essence* is, of course, the root scripture for Mahāyoga. The *Sublime Continuum* is a revealed text reputedly composed by Maitreya, the future Buddha, and can be classified as a Mind Only and Tathāgata-Essence scripture. The *Mind at Rest* and the *Wish-fulfilling Treasury* are both works on Atiyoga by Longchenpa.

Anuyoga transmission from Daktön Chögyel Tendzin (*dwags ston chos rgyal bstan 'dzin*) from whom he received the name Gyurmé Dorjetsel.

Gyurmé Dorjé's revelations of treasures began when he was eighteen year old in 1663 with the discovery of the *Innermost Spirituality of the Awareness-holder*.¹⁹⁸ In the years to follow, he discovered the scriptures of *Yamāntaka, the Destroyer of Arrogance*, the *Wrathful Guru*, the *Atiyoga and Vajrasattva Cycles*, and the *Doctrinal Cycle of the Great Compassionate One as the Universal Gathering of Sugatas*.¹⁹⁹ In 1670, he founded the monastic establishment of Mindrölling (*smin grol gling*) just south of his homeland, Dranang. This became a famous center for Nyingma learning and meditation, of which Gyurmé Dorjé was the first “throneholder” (*khri 'dzin*). Mindrölling remained Gyurmé Dorjé's home base until his death in 1714 at the age of 69.

Though he spent his younger years in study and meditation, at the age of thirty-eight in 1683, Gyurmé Dorjé began to engage in promotional activity. He gave teachings on the Nyingma tradition that were wide-ranging both topically and geographically. The great Fifth Dalai Lama, Lozang Gyatso, numbered among his students during this time, as did the second Dzokchen Rinpoché, Gyurmé Tekchok Dendzin (*'gyur med theg mchog bstan 'dzin*, b. 1697). It is claimed that his students came from as far of as Mön in the south, Ngari in the west, and Kham in the east.²⁰⁰ However, among his main student was his younger brother, Lochen Dharmashrī, one of the most famous exegetes of the *Secret Essence*.

LOCHEN DHARMASHRĪ (1654-1717)

While Derdak Lingpa Gyurmé Dorjé became famous for his revelations, his younger brother, Lochen Dharmashrī (*lo chen dharma shrī*) was a renowned and influential exegete of

¹⁹⁸ *rig 'dzin thugs thig* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 828).

¹⁹⁹ These are respectively: *gshin rje gshed dregs 'joms*, *gur drag*, *rdo sems a ti'i skor*, and *thugs rje chen po bde gshegs kun 'dus kyi chos skor*. (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 828).

²⁰⁰ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 830.

the Mahāyoga tradition.²⁰¹ In fact, Lochen Dharmashrī's erudite scholarship had a greater impact of the *Secret Essence's* hermeneutical tradition than the works of his treasure-revealing brother. The scholar-monk appears to have been particularly interested in this root scripture of the Mahāyoga Vehicle, and his two main commentaries on that tantra are cited often in later commentarial literature on the *Secret Essence*. The detail in his work reflects thoroughness akin to Butön's, and his personal history demonstrates an ecumenical attitude that was a precursor to the Non-Partisan Movement (*ris med*) in the 19th century.

Born into an Old School family in the Wood Male Horse Year (1654), Lochen Dharmashrī first performed the refuge-ceremony under his brother, Gyurmé Dorjé. He also received the entire empowerment of his brother's treasures from the revealer himself, as well as taking the Bodhisattva vows for developing the enlightened attitude. Due to Gyurmé Dorjé's close connection with the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, the latter bestowed both the preliminary and the full monastic vows on Lochen Dharmashrī at age fifteen and twenty respectively. Lochen Dharmashrī studied under various teachers. Not only did he learn about Buddhist doctrine, especially the Discipline (*'dul ba, vināya*), but he also studied the linguistic sciences of poetry, grammar, and orthography; Indian and Chinese astrology; and Sanskrit. His main teacher for the *Secret Essence* was Gyurmé Dorjé. It is said that Lochen Dharmashrī experienced a flash of insight when his brother taught him Vilāsavajra's *Blazing Palace* and *Yungtönpa's Commentary* in conjunction.²⁰² His many disciples included the Sakya scholar, Ngawang Kunka Drashi (b.1517), demonstrating his ecumenical attitude. In 1712, he traveled to Chamdo in Dokham, where he gave empowerments and teachings on a wide variety of Nyingma topics and converting a number of disciples there. His most noteworthy achievements, in the field of literature, were the composition of two exegetical works on the

²⁰¹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 728-732.

²⁰² "When, in particular, Dharmashrī heard the great treasure-revealing guru deliver an oral exegesis of the *Secret Nucleus* which combined the *Parkap Commentary* and *Yungtonpa's Commentary*, he plumbed the depths of all the overt and hidden meanings of that tantra." *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 730.

Secret Essence Tantra. These works—the *Lord of Secrets’ Oral Instructions* and the *Ornament to the Lord of Secrets’ Intention*—are still revered in the Old Schools’ curricula. They were influential enough that the Degé edition of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* included them among the Mahāyoga tantric scriptures.

INTERVENING LINEAGE (18TH TO 19TH CENTURIES)

The *Key to the Treasury* abbreviates the lineage that proceeds from the Minling brothers, Dardag Lingpa and Lochen Dharmashrī, who died in 1714 and 1717 respectively. After discussing their role in the lineage, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima says:

Then, it was gradually transmitted. From the excellent scholar-adept Getsé Sönam Dendzin, or Jikmé Ngotsar, [it was passed to] Vajradhāra Padma Trashi. The Conqueror’s son Zhenpen Tayé listened to him. He bestowed it upon two people—my teacher, the heart-son of the Superior Mañjuśrī, the omniscient Emanation Body, Ogyen Jikmé Chökyiwangpo and the [all] pervasive lord of the ocean of maṇḍalas the highly skilled Vajradhāra, Padma Damchö Özer Pelzangpo.

These last two figures are more commonly known as Patrül Rinpoché (*dpal sprul rin po che*, 1808-1887) and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (*’jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po*, 1820-1892). The intervening lineage between Lochen Dharmashrī and these important figures appears to have been abbreviated by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima. With the words "Then, it was transmitted gradually" (*de nas rim par brgyud de*), he seems to jump several lineal generations to Jikmé Ngotsar (*jigs med ngo mtshar*), also known as Getsé Sönam Tendzin. The only information available on this figure is from the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center’s database. That source says that he was a Nyingma born in the 18th century, who was a disciple of Peljor Gyatso (*dpal ’byor rgya mtsho*) and teacher of Ogyen Jikmé Chökyi

Wangpo (*o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po*), or Patrül Rinpoché.²⁰³ This is different from the *Key to the Treasury*, which places two lineal generations between them—Padma Trashi (*pad ma bkra shis*) and Zhenpen Tayé (*gzhan phan mtha' yas*). It would not be possible for a direct disciple of Lochen Dharmashrī to have been Patrül Rinpoché's teacher, as the span of over one hundred years between the death of the Minling brothers and the maturity of Patrül Rinpoché makes that impossible. Jikmé Ngotsar was probably an elder contemporary of Patrül Rinpoché. Therefore, the lineage in the *Key to the Treasury* must skip over the intervening lineage from Lochen Dharmashrī to Jikmé Ngotsar.

Another source tells us that Zhenpen Tayé, the third figure in the above lineage, was born in 1800 and was a direct disciple of the first Dodrupchen Rinpoché, Jikmé Trinlé Özer (*'jigs med phrin las 'od zer*, 1745-1821), the Dharma-heir of Jikmé Lingpa (*'jigs med gling pa*, 1730-1798).²⁰⁴ Zhenpen Tayé hailed from Amdo, an area on the Dzachu River known as Gemang.²⁰⁵ He was a contemporary of Do Khyentsé Yeshé (*mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes*, 1800-1866), while his students included Patrül Rinpoché and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo.²⁰⁶ These three are respectively the mind, speech, and body incarnations of Jikmé Lingpa. The first Dodrupchen was the chief student of Jikmé Lingpa, entrusted with protecting his revelations of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse*. It is no wonder that the third Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, the author of the *Key to the Treasury*, is intimately connected to this lineage. He was a student of both Patrül Rinpoché and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo. So, before turning to his biography, their lives must first be considered.

²⁰³ Gene Smith, <http://www.tbrc.org/cgi-bin/tbrcdatx?resource=P2881>.

²⁰⁴ Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 198. Jikmé Lingpa is the treasure-revealer for the *Heart Drop of the Great Expanse* revelations.

²⁰⁵ See Map 9, E23 in volume 2 of *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

²⁰⁶ See Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 338-339.

PATRUL RINPOCHÉ OGYEN JIKMÉ CHÖKYI WANGPO (1808-1887)

Jikmé Chökyi Wangpo (*jigs med chos kyī dbang po*), who became known as Patrül Rinpoché (*dpal sprul rin po che*), was a student of the first Dodrupchen, contemporary and associate of the second, and teacher of the third. He is believed to have been the speech incarnation of Jikmé Lingpa. He was born in Dzachuka valley in Kham in 1808 and belonged to the same clan as the first Dodrupchen, the Mukpodong.²⁰⁷ At an early age he was recognized as the reincarnation of Pelgé Samden Püntsoḳ. Thus, he became known as Patrül Rinpoché, a tulku of Pelgé Rinpoché. The first Dodrupchen confirmed his recognition as such, at which point he bestowed on him the name Ogyen Jikmé Chökyi Wangpo. Thereupon, child was moved to the residence of the Pelgé lama. He studied with a number of teachers. However, his primary teachers were Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu (*jigs med rgyal ba'i myu gu*) and Do Khyentsé (*mdo mkhyen brtse*). From Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu he received the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* (*klong chen snying thig*) transmission, especially focusing on the preliminary practices. These teachings are the basis for Patrül Rinpoché's most famous work, *Sacred Words of Lama, Samantabhadra* (*kun gsang bla ma'i zhel lung*).²⁰⁸ Though only eight years his senior, Do Khyentsé also appears to have had a profound effect on the young Patrül Rinpoché. Tulku Thondup relates the following story:

One day Do Khyentsé, who was wandering while performing esoteric exercises, suddenly showed up outside Paltrül's tent. Do Khyentsé shouted, "O Palgé! If you are brave, come out!" When Paltrül respectfully came out, Do Khyentsé grabbed him by his hair, threw him on the ground, and dragged him around. At that moment, Paltrül smelled alcohol on Do Khyentsé's breath and thought, "The Buddha expounded on the dangers of

²⁰⁷ Sources for Patrül Rinpoché's life are Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 201-210.

²⁰⁸ Thondup, *Master of Meditation and Miracles*, 172.

alcohol, yet even a great adept like him could get drunk like this.” At that instant, Do Khyentsé freed Patrül from his grip and shouted, “Alas, that you intellectual people could have such evil thoughts! You Old Dog!” Do Khyentsé spat in his face, showed him his little finger (an insulting gesture), and departed.²⁰⁹

The scene is familiar from Tibetan hagiographical literature concerning Siddhas, the itinerant, iconoclastic yogins, popular during the last phase of Buddhism in India. The theme of a novice strictly adhering to the Buddhist law being enlightened by the eccentric and antinomian behavior of the teacher is common to this genre. True to this mold, Tulku Thondup continues to describe Patrül Rinpoché’s subsequent realization:

Patrül realized, “Oh, I am deluded. He was performing an esoteric exercise to introduce me to my enlightened nature.” Patrül was torn by two conflicting feelings: shock over his own negative thoughts and amazement at Do Khyentsé’s clairvoyance. Sitting up, he immediately meditated on the enlightened nature of his mind, and a clear, sky-like, open, intrinsic awareness awakened in him.²¹⁰

Though such a description may be exaggerated, exposure to the siddha way of life had a profound enough effect on Patrül Rinpoché that at the age of twenty he closed his estate and took up the life of a wandering hermit.

After years of meditation, in 1851, when Patrül Rinpoché was 43, he met Gyelsé Zhenpen Tayé (*rgyal sras gzhan phan mtha’ yas*, 1800-?) at Yarlung. According to the *Key to the Treasury’s* lineage, Zhenpen Tayé was his main teacher with regard the *Secret Essence* teachings. Tulku Thondup says that Patrül Rinpoché studied the *Secret Essence* under

²⁰⁹ Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 202.

²¹⁰ Thondup, *Master of Meditation and Miracles*, 202.

Zhenpen Tayé for three years.²¹¹ After that, Patrül traveled widely throughout Amdo and at one point stayed at the first Dodrupchen's former residence. In 1856, Do Khyentsé came to Golok, where Patrül was staying. During that time, Patrül received some empowerments of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* from Do Khyentsé and performed a purification ceremony with him and the second Dodrupchen, Jikmé Phüntsook Jungné (*'jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas*, 1824-1863).²¹² In 1872, at the age of 64, Patrül Rinpoché met the third Dodrupchen, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima was only eight at the time. However, the third Dodrupchen remained close with Patrül Rinpoché for the remaining fifteen years of the latter's life, and his commentary on the *Secret Essence, Key to the Treasury*, names Patrül Rinpoché as one of his root lamas. Patrül Rinpoché died in 1887 at the age of 79/80 in his homeland in Kham.

JAMYANG KHYENTSÉ WANGPO (1820-1892)

Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (*'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po*) was considered to be the body incarnation of Jikmé Lingpa (*'jigs med gling pa*).²¹³ He was born to a privileged family in Degé in 1820. His father, Rinchen Wanggyel (*rin chen dbang rgyal*), was an administrator of the Degé palace, and his mother was of Mongol descent. He was recognized as the incarnation of Jikmé Lingpa at the age of eleven and as the incarnation of a lama from the Ngor Monastery in the next year. From his fifteenth year onward, he began to have visions, which ultimately led to his discovery of "treasure texts" (*gter ma*). At the age of nineteen, he received the transmission of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* from Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu (*'jigs med rgyal ba'i myu gu*, 1765-1843). At twenty, he moved to central Tibet, where he discovered several treasure texts at the Ngor Monastery. These were the first of the many

²¹¹ Thondup, *Master of Meditation and Miracles*, 203.

²¹² Thondup, *Master of Meditation and Miracles*, 212.

²¹³ Sources for Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo's life are Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 215-221 and *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 849-858.

discoveries he would continue to make throughout his life. At twenty-one he was ordained as a monk at the Mindröling Monastery in central Tibet, the seat of Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dharmashrī. Though he spent a great deal of time in Kham, he made frequent trips to central Tibet, where he studied with many well-known teachers including Trichen Tashi Rinchen of Sakya, Lhatsün Rinpoché from Drepung Monastery, Mikgyur Namkhé Dorjé, and Kongdrül Lodrö Tayé.

Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo is most renowned for the central role he played in the ecumenical Non-Sectarian movement (*ris med*) that originated in eastern Tibet. Together with Patrül Rinpoché, Jamgön Kongdrül Lodrö Tayé (*'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas*, 1813-1899), and Chokgyur Lingpa (*mchog gyur gling pa*, 1829-1870), he initiated a reform movement that countered the severe sectarianism of Tibetan Buddhism at the time by promoting a curriculum that combined Old Schools' teachings with those of other sects—Kadampa, Sakya, Kagyü, and Geluk. However, according to Tulku Thondup, his main practice was the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse*, the Old School treasure revealed by Jikmé Lingpa.²¹⁴ His non-sectarian attitude is best illustrated by the diverse group of students he taught who, in addition to a number of Old School practitioners, include male and female practitioners from the Sakya sect, the fourteenth and fifteenth Karmapas along with other Kagyü adherents, and several Gelukpas. Among his Old School students were Mipam Namgyel (1846-1912) and the third Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima (1865-1926). The latter is, of course, the author of the *Key to the Treasury*, the focal point of this dissertation and the source for the lineage just described. It is to his life that we will now turn.

²¹⁴ Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 218. He cites Dilgo Khyentse as the source for this.

JKIMÉ TENPÉ NYIMA, THE THIRD DODRUPCHEN (1865-1926)

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima (*'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma*) was the second reincarnation of Jikmé Lingpa's chief disciple, Dodrupchen Jikmé Trinlé Özer.²¹⁵ Thus, he was known as the third Dodrupchen (*rdo grub chen sku phreng gsum pa*). He was born in 1865 in the upper part of the Mar River valley in Golok, Amdo. His father was a famous Buddhist adept and treasure-revealer Dūjom Lingpa (*bdud 'joms gling pa*, 1835-1904),²¹⁶ and his mother was Sönamtso (*bsod nams mtsho*) of the Shaza Dākki family.²¹⁷ He was the oldest of several boys, all of whom were famous in their own right. Among them were Khyentsé Tulku Dzamling Wanggyel (*mkhyen brtse sprul sku mdzam gling dbang rgyal*, 1868-1907),²¹⁸ Pema Drodül Sangngak Lingpa (*pad ma 'gro 'dul gsang sngags gling pa*, 1881-1924),²¹⁹ Tulku Namkha Jikmé (*sprul sku nam mkha' 'jigs med*, 1888-?),²²⁰ and Tulku Dorjé Drakdül (*sprul sku rdo rje khrags 'dul*, 1892-1959?).

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima was identified as Dodrupchen's incarnation in a prophecy by the fourth Dzokchen Rinpoché Mingyur Namkhé Dorjé (*mi 'gyur nam mkha'i rdo rje*, 1793-?) and was enthroned at the age of five at the Yarlung Pemakö Monastery. He studied at the Dzokchen Monastery with Khenpo Pema Dorjé but had difficulties with his studies until he had a vision of Do Khyentsé. In his seventh year, he met Patrül Rinpoché in the Dzachuka Valley and received many teachings from him, particularly focusing on Śhāntideva's *Guide to*

²¹⁵ Sources for Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's life are Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 237-250; Thub-bstan-phrin-las bzañ-po, Rdo Grub-chen IV, 1927-, *Rdo grub chen 'jigs med phrin las 'od zer gyi 'khrungs rabs rnam thar: the brief biography of the First Rdo Grub-chen 'jigs-med-phrin-las-'od-zer (1745-1821) and his successors in the Rdo Grub-chen lineages [sic] of incarnations* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Dodrupchen Rinpoché, 1985; I-Tib-2743; I-Tib 85-903289), 21.1-36.6.

²¹⁶ He was the previous incarnation of the famous Dūjom Rinpoché Jik-drel-ye-she-dor-je (1904-1987), head of the Nying-ma sect in exile and author of the two works translated in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

²¹⁷ *yum sha za dākki'i rigs bsod nam mtsho* (Thub-bstan-phrin-las bzañ-po, *Rdo grub chen 'jigs med phrin las 'od zer gyi 'khrungs rabs rnam thar: the brief biography of the First Rdo Grub-chen*, 25.5).

²¹⁸ He was considered to be an incarnation (*tulku*) of Do-khyen-tse (1800-1866).

²¹⁹ Also known as Tulku Dri-me-ö-zer, his consort was the famous female adept of Lhasa, Se-ra Khan-dro.

²²⁰ He was considered to be an incarnation of Patrül Rinpoché.

the Bodhisattva's Way of Life. Patrül Rinpoché was particularly impressed by the young tulku, when at the age of eight Jikmé Tenpé Nyima gave teachings on the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* before a large assembly. From then until his death in 1887, Patrül Rinpoché was Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's main teacher, though Jikmé Tenpé Nyima also studied under several other well-known figures of the period, including Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, Migyur Namkhé Dorjé, Ju Mipam Namgyel (*ju mi pham rnam rgyal*, 1846-1912), and the treasure-revealer Sögyel, a.k.a. Lerab Lingpa (*gter ston bsod rgyal las rab gling pa*, 1856-1926).

Appropriately for one raised in the ecumenical spirit of his day, the breadth of his studies were vast from Discipline and logic to the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras and the Middle Way School, finally culminating in the Tantras. Because his teachers were some of the great Non-Sectarian (*ris med*) masters of the day, he received teachings on both the Old and the New School tantras. Some time in his twenties, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima was crippled by an illness and thereafter remained in strict seclusion in a hermitage near the Dodrupchen Monastery. He maintained a strict retreat, and only a select few were granted audiences, these mainly being his attendants and a few famous lamas and treasure-revealers. He was often asked for and made prognostications through his dreams, and he had extensive knowledge of revealed treasures.²²¹ Every year Jikmé Tenpé Nyima would give teachings and empowerments on the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* to eight monks who had been chosen to do a year long retreat.

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima composed five volumes of commentaries on a wide variety of topics that are contained in his *Collected Works*.²²² Some of his more well-known works include *Memory of a Bodhisattva*, *Explanation of Treasures*, *Bringing Happiness and Suffering into the*

²²¹ He wrote a work entitled *Explanation of Treasure [Texts]* (*gter gyi rnam bshad*) and helped the treasure-revealer Sö-gyel Rinpoché decipher some of his revealed texts (Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 243, 248).

²²² 'Jigs-med-bstan-pa'i-ni-ma, Rdo Grub-chen III, 1865-1926?, *The Collected Works (gsun 'bum) of Rdo Grub-chen 'Jigs-med-bstna-pa'i-ni-ma* (Gangtok: Dodrup Chen Rimpoche, 1974; I(Sik)-Tib-260; I(Sik)-Tib 74-901179), 5 vols. Hereafter, *Collected Works*.

Path, and *The Key to the Treasury*.²²³ *Memory of a Bodhisattva* concerns the use of mnemonic devices called dhāraṇī in the Great Vehicle practice.²²⁴ It was highly renowned among Tibetan scholars and even won the praise of the Geluk scholar, Amdo Geshé, or Jampel Rolpé Lodrö (*'jam dpal rol pa'i blo gros*).²²⁵ *Explanation of Treasures* is a general discussion of revealed “treasure” texts that draws on his experience of deciphering texts revealed by Sögyel Rinpoché.²²⁶ *Bringing Happiness and Suffering into the Path* belongs to the genre of Tibetan literature known as “mind training” (*blo sbyong*).²²⁷ It contains a short but eloquent discussion on how one can use the adventitious events in one’s life—both pleasurable and painful—to further one’s progress toward enlightenment.

The last text, *The Key to the Treasury*, is the focus of this dissertation.²²⁸ As mentioned above, it is a general commentary on the *Secret Essence Tantra*, the root text for the Mahāyoga Vehicle. Written in 1916 when Jikmé Tenpé Nyima was 51, it represents the thought of his later years and is still popular among Old and New School scholars. However, *The Key to the Treasury* was not Jikmé Tenpé Nyima’s only work on the subject of the *Secret Essence*. His very first work written in 1885, at the young age of 21, was also a general commentary on the same tantra. Entitled *Feast of Good Explanations* (*legs bshad dga' ston*), it is said to be influenced by the views of the New Schools. Initially, Dodrupchen III did not

²²³ These are respectively *byang chub sems dpa'i gzungs, gter gyi rnam bshad, skyid sdug lam mkhyer*, and *mdzod kyi lde'u mig*. For full titles and references to these works, see below.

²²⁴ *byang chub sems dpa'i gzungs kyi rgyan rnam par bshad pa rgyal yum lus bzang mdzes byed legs bshad phreng ba* in *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (*kha*). For an excellent discussion of this work from the perspective of modern semiotics, see Janet Gyatso, “Letter Magic: A Peircean Perspective on the Semiotics of Rdo Grub-chen’s Dhāraṇī Memory” in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. by Janet Gyatso (Albany: SUNY, 1992), 173-213.

²²⁵ Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 248-249.

²²⁶ *las 'phro gter brgyud kyi rnam bshad nyung gsal ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* in *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (*ca*). This work is one of the many sources used in Tulku Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of the Nyingma School of Buddhism*, ed. by Harold Talbott (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986), 213 (WO).

²²⁷ *skyid sdug lam 'khyer* in *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (*kha*).

²²⁸ *dpal gsang ba'i snying po'i rgyud kyi spyi don nyung ngu'i ngag gis rnam par 'byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig* in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 1-237.

realize this, but through the influence of Mipam Rinpoché and the *Gathering the Sugatas of the Eight Precepts*,²²⁹ “a new understanding of Nyingma views and a strong confidence in them awakened in him.”²³⁰ It was based on this insight that he later wrote the *Key to the Treasury*. Thus, the *Key to the Treasury*—not the *Feast of Good Explanations*—has become the text used in Nyingma monastic curricula today and is popular even among scholars of the New Schools.

Though it is known for its “uniquely Nyingma views”, the *Key to the Treasury* is cited by the present Dalai Lama Dendzin Gyatso in his talk on the “Union of the Old and New Translations Schools”.²³¹ In this article, the Dalai Lama uses the *Key to the Treasury*’s presentation of the “seven treasures of the ultimate”²³² and the presentations of the ultimate in the *Secret Assembly* and the *Wheel of Time*—tantras that are seminal for the New Schools—to demonstrate the underlying unity in the Old and New Schools’ depiction of the fundamental mind of clear light. In his discussion of the continuum of the ground (*gzhi rgyud*), Dodrupchen gives as its synonym “indifferentiable truth” (*bden pa dbyer med*), that is, the inseparability of the special conventional truth and the special ultimate truth. The special ultimate truth can be divided into the sphere free from elaboration (the natural ultimate), the self-luminosity of the mind (the primordial-wisdom ultimate), and the ability to produce the five qualities of the effect state—enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. Dodrupchen summarizes these in the following way:

In brief, those are nothing more than individual differentiations [of one thing] by way of 1) clear light’s factor of non-conceptuality, 2) its factor of

²²⁹ *bka’ bgyad bde gshogs ’dus chen*. This is the treasure cycle of Nyang-rel Nyi-me-ö-zer.

²³⁰ Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 241.

²³¹ Tenzin Gyatso, *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, tr. and ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins, co-ed. by Elizabeth Napper, (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1985), 200-224.

²³² *don dam dkor bdun* (*Key to the Treasury*, 51.2).

clarity, and 3) the factor of that [clear light] serving as the basis for the fruitional features.²³³

According to the Dalai Lama, this description resonates with the *Secret Assembly's* description of the illusory body (*sgyu lus*), the third of the five stages, and the *Wheel of Time's* doctrine of empty form (*stong gzugs*). By his own account, he first noticed the similarities between the Old and New Schools presentation of the fundamental clear-light when reading Tsongkhapa's commentary on the introductory verse to the *Secret Assembly*, in which Tsongkhapa "establishes that all environments and beings are the sport of mere wind and mind".²³⁴ With this as his inspiration, he began to compare the doctrines of the *Secret Assembly*, the *Wheel of Time*, and the Great Completeness doctrine of the Old Schools in search of a basic similarity. Later, "Reading Dodrupchen was as if he were stroking my head in confirmation, giving me the confidence that my insight was not unfounded."²³⁵ The similarity, he concludes, is that "The substance of all these paths comes down to the fundamental innate mind of clear light."²³⁶ Though the *Key to the Treasury* is a presentation of the Old Schools' unique views, these views are not antithetical to the New Schools, as the Dalai Lama demonstrates. A comparison of the *Key to the Treasury* with Dodrupchen's earlier work on the *Secret Essence*, the *Feast of Good Explanations*, would be an informative study, since the latter work is said to be influenced by New School doctrines.

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima lived out the rest of his life in his hermitage near Dodrupchen monastery, though once he considered moving the monastery when his patronage base was forced to migrate due to tribal warfare. He never strayed from his religious upbringing with Non-Sectarian scholars; in his monastery the sūtras were taught using Geluk commentaries,

²³³ *mdor na 'od gsal gyi mi rtog pa'i cha dang / gsal ba'i cha dang / des 'bras chos kyi rten byed pa'i cha las so sor phye bar zad dol* (*Key to the Treasury*, 51.2-51.3).

²³⁴ Tenzin Gyatso, "Union of the Old and New Schools", 220.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

while the tantras were taught using Nyingma commentaries.²³⁷ He maintained a simple and modest lifestyle for both himself and his monastery, strictly adhering to the monastic discipline. It is said that he refused to allow Sögyel Rinpoché's consort into his hut, as a woman had never crossed his threshold before. Instead, he gave her teachings from his doorway. The treasure-revealer Sögyel was one of his close friends, and he visited Dodrupchen on a number of occasions. Other important lamas who visited him include Rikdzin Chenmo (*rig 'dzin chen mo*), the head of the Dorjedrak Monastery; Katok Situ Chökyi Gyatso (*kaḥ thog si tu chos kyi rgya mtsho*, 1880-1925), and Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö from Dzongsar (*mkhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros*, 1893-1959). Jikmé Tenpé Nyima died in the Fire Tiger year (1926) at the age of sixty-two. His reincarnation, Thubden Trinlé Pelzang (*thub bstan phrin las dpal bzang*, b. 1927), is the present Dodrupchen IV.

SCHOLARS NOT LISTED IN THE LINEAGE

This completes the list of scholars and adepts given in the lineage section of the *Key to the Treasury*. However, several key persons who will figure prominently in the follow discussion are not mentioned by the third Dodrupchen. These include such personages as Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo, Longchenpa, and Mipam Rinpoché, all of whom wrote their own commentaries on the *Secret Essence*. Jikmé Lingpa, the treasure-revealer of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse*, and the first two Dodrupchen's, who are considered the keepers of that cycle of teachings, are also not mentioned. Their absence in his text is explained by the fact that these figures were not in the lineage of transmission through which the teachings on the *Secret Essence* came to Jikmé Tenpé Nyima. The *Key to the Treasury* represents the Zur Tradition's interpretation of the *Secret Essence* from the perspective of Mahāyoga.²³⁸ The

²³⁷ Thundop, *Master of Meditation and Miracles*, 244.

²³⁸ *rgyud ma hā yo ga'i tantra gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid rnam nges pa la zur lugs ltar gyi dgongs 'grel spyi don rin chen mdzod kyi lde'u mig zhes bya ba dang* / (Thub-bstan-phrin-las bzañ-po, *Rdo grub chen 'jigs med phrin las 'od zer gyi 'khrungs rabs rnam thar*, 35.2-35.3).

works and revelations of these other scholars focus primarily on the highest Old School vehicle, Atiyoga. The commentaries on the *Secret Essence* penned by Rongzom, Longchenpa, and Mipam in particular represent another interpretation of the *Secret Essence* from the perspective of Atiyoga that is at odds with the tradition represented in the *Key to the Treasury*.

As has been shown, the *Key to the Treasury's* interpretive stance on the *Secret Essence* is derived from the school founded by the three patriarchs of the Zur family. This interpretation is known as the “Zur System” (*zur lugs*). The other tradition of interpretation concerning the *Secret Essence* bases itself on the works of two famous Tibetan scholars—Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (11th century C.E.) and Longchen Rabjam (1308-1363). This latter tradition, known as the “System of Rong and Long” (*rong klong lugs*), is founded primarily on two Indian sources. The first source is a well-known commentary on the *Secret Essence* composed by an Indian master Sūryaprabhāsiṃha (*nyi 'od seng ge*). Apart from his influential text, the *Vast Commentary on the Secret Essence* (*gsang snying rgya cher 'grel pa*),²³⁹ little biographical information is given concerning this person. His name could conceivably be shortened to Śrī Siṃha, which is the name of the great Atiyoga patriarch,²⁴⁰ and as it is claimed that the Sanskrit of his commentary was translated into Tibetan by Vairocana in Kham,²⁴¹ the text could be connected with eastern Tibet and possibly China. The text is quoted by most commentators on the *Secret Essence*. However, when classified, it is considered to be an Atiyoga interpretation of the Mahāyoga tantra. The other major source for the System of Rong and Long is the *Garland of Views*, traditionally attributed to Padmasambhava. As there will be some discussion on the differences between these

²³⁹ Sūryasimhaprabha, *Dpal Gsañ ba sñin po'i rgya che 'grel pa: The Śrī-guhyagarbha-vipulaṭīka-nāma translated into Tibetan* (Gangtok: Dodrup Sangyay Lama, 1976; I-Tib-1565; I-Tib 76-902441).

²⁴⁰ The term, Śrī, means “Glorious” and is often used as a honorific title, while his full name, Sūryaprabhāsiṃha, could be abbreviated to its last member, siṃha. At present, however, this is mere speculation.

²⁴¹ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 688.

hermeneutic stances in what follows, we will now look at the biography's of figures from the System of Rong and Long and other figures associated with the Third Dodrupchen but absent from his lineage in the *Key to the Treasury*.

RONGZOM CHÖKYI ZANGPO (11TH CENTURY)

One of the most famous proponents of an Atiyoga-interpretation for the Secret Essence is the eleventh century figure, Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (*rong zom chos kyi bzang po*).²⁴² The *Chronological Who's Who of Tibetan Scholar-Adepts* states that he was a contemporary of Marpa Dowa Chökyi Wangchuk (*mar pa do bo chos kyi dbang phyug*, 1042-1136).²⁴³ However, it is also related in Rongzom's biographies that he left a favorable impression on Atisha, who said, "This master is, in fact, the deceased master Kṛiṣṇācārin of India. How could I be able to discuss the doctrine with him?"²⁴⁴ If this story is not dismissed as sectarian braggadocio, Rongzom either would have been a child when he met Atisha, or he was slightly older than Marpa Dowa Chökyi Wangchuk, since Atisha arrived in Tibet in 1042 and died in 1054.

Rongzom was born in lower Tsang in the Narlungrong district of Rulak to the religious Rongben family.²⁴⁵ It is claimed he is the incarnation of the Indian Paṇḍita Smṛitijñānakīrti. As a youth he studied first with his father, Rongben Tsültrim Rinpoché, and then with Gartön Tsültrim Zangpo. Another of his teachers was Yazi Böntön from whom he received the lineages of the great translator Vairocana as well as other lineages from India and China. He appears to have received the Mahāyoga teachings from one Dotön Senggé. For, it is under this teacher that following story reportedly occurred:²⁴⁶

²⁴² Most of the information for this biography comes from *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 703-709.

²⁴³ *GKM*, 1639.

²⁴⁴ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 706.

²⁴⁵ *rong ban*. His father was Rong-ben Rinchen-tshül-trim, and his grandfather was Rong-ben Pel-gyi Rinpoché.

²⁴⁶ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 707. Bracketed material added.

...He once dreamed that he was eating a porridge he had prepared of the *Secret Nucleus* [a.k.a., the *Secret Essence*], with vegetable broth made of the *Buddhasamayoga* [or, the *Union of All Buddhas*]. He told this to his master [Dotön Senggé], who said, “How wonderful! It is a sign that you have completely internalized those doctrines. You should compose a commentary on each.

To fulfill his teacher’s instructions, Rongzom did write a commentary on each tantra. His *Commentary on the Union of All Buddhas* contains the esoteric instructions on the view and meditation of the Great Completeness and teaches how to train one’s wisdom-awareness. He also wrote a highly influential commentary on the *Secret Essence Tantra*. The commentary begins with the verse:

The nature of the Three Precious Jewels
Is enlightened mind.

Thus, it has come to be called the *Precious Jewel Commentary* (*dkon mchog ’grel*).²⁴⁷ This is one of the commentaries on which Longchenpa relies in his Atiyoga interpretation of the *Secret Essence*. Rongzom also wrote a commentary from the Atiyoga perspective on the *Garland of Views*, a commentary of chapter thirteen of the *Secret Essence*, supposedly penned by Padmasambhava. Both of these two commentaries have been highly influential in forming the tradition of interpreting the *Secret Essence* as an Atiyoga text.

LONGCHENPA (1308-1363)

Perhaps the most well-known figure of the Old Schools other than Padmasambhava, Longchenpa (*klong chen pa*) holds the highest regard of the Old School proponents (Nyingmapas) in the same way that Tsongkhapa (*tshong kha pa*, 1357-1419) does for the

²⁴⁷ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 707.

Gelukpas, Milarepa (*mi la ras pa*, 1040-1123) for the Gagyüpas, Sakya Paṇḍita (*sa kya paṇḍita*, 1182-1151) for the Sakyapas, Atīsha (c. 1042-1054) for the Kadampas, and Sherap Gyeltsen (*shes rab rgyal mtshan*, 1292-1361) for the Jonangpas. He was the great systematizer that brought coherency and consistency to a spectrum of diverse teachings that often were in many ways at odds with each other. Such systematization was already underway in the Old Schools with the emphasis on the nine vehicles as a means to bring all the teachings within a single structure, and it entailed a specific interpretation of each doctrine. Longchenpa took this approach one step further. He saw the Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*) teachings of Atiyoga as the pinnacle of all Buddhist teachings; not only is the Great Completeness the final path into which all others led, but the Great Completeness, or Atiyoga, is also the root of all doctrines, a viewpoint advocated in many Atiyoga tantras. Longchenpa brought systemization to the diverse Old School doctrines by subsuming them all under the auspices of Atiyoga's Great Completeness philosophy and practice.

Longchenpa was born in 1308 in the Dra valley of Yoru in south-central Tibet, to Denbasung (*bstan pa srung*), a yogi from the Rok (*rog*) clan, and Sönamgyen (*bsod nams rgyan*) from the Drom (*'brom*) clan. Both of his parents were dead by the age of 11. Enough English works have covered his life story so that it need not be repeated in depth here.²⁴⁸ One interesting fact is that he is believed to have been an incarnation of Pemasel (late 8th cent.), daughter of King Trisong Detsen. Padmasambhava is said to have entrusted the Essence Drop (*snying thig*) teachings of the Great Completeness to Pemasel on her death bed. Longchenpa's introduction to this genre was through the *Essential Drop of Vimalamitra*, which were first bestowed on him by Rikdzin Kumārāja (*rig 'dzin ku mā rā dza*, 1266-1343) at age 27. After many years of privation, when Longchenpa was 32, one of his yogi-disciples

²⁴⁸ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 575-596. Tulku Thondup Rinpoché, *Buddha Mind: An Anthology of Longchen Rabjam's Writings on Dzogpa Chenpo* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), 145-188. Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 109-117.

obtained a copy of the *Essential Drop of the Dākinī* (*mkha' 'gro snying thig*), a treasure discovered by the female adept Pema Ledreltsel (*pad ma las 'brel rtsal*, 1291-1315?). Longchenpa was initiated into this treasure's cycle by a direct disciple of Pema Ledreltsel. Thereafter, the promotion of the Essential Drop genre as a whole was central to his life-work. Among his great accomplishments, he authored three supplemental texts for the Essential Drop (*snying thig yab bzhi*) cycle.²⁴⁹ It is no wonder that he came to be seen as an incarnation of both Pemasel and Pema Ledreltsel. His advocacy of this teaching clearly influences all his written works including his commentaries on the *Secret Essence*.

Longchenpa was a prolific author as well as a treasure-revealer. His works include three series of texts—the Seven Treasures, the Three Cycles on Relaxation, the Three Cycles on Self-Liberation, the Three Cycles on Dispelling Darkness, and the already-mentioned Three Supplemental Drops.²⁵⁰ The Cycle on Dispelling Darkness is composed of three texts that comment on the *Secret Essence Tantra* from different analytical perspectives. One is a topic summary; one, a general commentary, and the last is the famous chapter-commentary, *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions* (*phyogs bcu mun sel*). The chapter-commentary has been translated as the doctoral thesis of Gyurme Dorje for the London School of Oriental Studies.²⁵¹ These texts describe the *Secret Essence* from an Atiyoga perspective. They are revered and studied extensively by modern Tibetans, and there is in general a significant Atiyoga influence in the presentation of the Mahāyoga teachings today. However, the other Mahāyoga tradition of interpretation, the Zur tradition, has not been forgotten. In light of Longchenpa's greatness and the reverence placed on him and his works, later Old School

²⁴⁹ These are known as the *Supplemental Drop of the Lama* (*bla ma yang thig*) for the *Essential Drop of Vimala*, the *Supplemental Drop of the Dākinī* (*mkha' 'gro yang thig*) for the *Essential Drop of the Dākinī*, and the *Subtle Supplemental Drop* (*zab mo yang thig*) for both. Tulku Thondup Rinpoché, *Buddha Mind*, 157-158.

²⁵⁰ These are *mdzod chen bdun*, *ngal gso skor gsum*, *rang grol skor gsum*, *yang tig rnam gsum* and *mun sel skor gsum*. See Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, 155-158.

²⁵¹ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary, *phyogs bcu mun sel*" (Ph.D. Diss, University of London, 1987).

scholars, such as Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, needed to address Longchenpa's interpretation, even when they aligned themselves more with the Zur tradition. This does not mean they necessarily had to agree with him. We find in the *Key to the Treasury* a number of references to Longchenpa's interpretation, which are usually placed after the main discussion of a topic, relegated to the status of secondary notes.

JIKMÉ LINGPA (1730-1798)

Jikmé Lingpa (*'jigs med gling pa*) is arguably the most influential Old School scholar for the promotion and spread of Longchenpa's teachings. He was born in 1730 in the Chonggyé (*'phyong rgyas*) valley, which is near Yarlung in Southern Tibet. It is said in childhood he remembered being an incarnation of Vimalamitra and the treasure-revealer Sanggyé Lama (*sangs rgyas bla ma*, 1000-1080?), though he was not recognized as such. Instead, he entered the monastic system as a simple novice without a great deal of wealth. Not an ardent student, his focus was on his inner life of compassion and visions. At the age of thirteen, he met the treasure-revealer Rikdzin Tukchok Dorjé (*rig 'dzin thugs mchog rdo rje*) for whom he immediately experience a profound devotion. When he was twenty-eight, he began a strict retreat for three years. During this time, he focused on the practice of the *Self-Liberation of Thought* (*dgongs pa rang grol*), discovered by Drodül Lingpa (*'gro 'dul gling pa*), and found resolution to all his questions in Longchenpa's Seven Treasuries. Around the same time, he discovered in a vision the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse*,²⁵² a mind-treasure, though he kept the revelation a secret for seven years.

In his second three-year retreat at age 31, he had three visions of Longchenpa in which he obtained the blessing of Longchenpa's enlightened body, speech, and mind. It was after this that he first taught the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* in 1765 to a group of fifteen

²⁵² It is no accident that the name of the treasure he discovered *klong chen snying thig* contains the name of the author he so revered, Longchenpa (*klong chen pa*).

students. It spread quickly, achieving renown. At 34, Jikmé Lingpa moved to Tseringjong, a hermitage in Chonggyé, which became his main residence for the rest of his life. At 43, he compiled a collection of the Hundred Thousand Tantras of Old Schools (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*) in twenty-five volumes and composed a catalog of the collection.²⁵³ This was later published through the backing of the Queen-Regent of Degé, Tsewang Lhamo (*tshé dbang lha mo*), and has become known as the Degé edition of the Collected Tantras. In 1787-1788, a teacher by the name of Sönam Chöden (*bsod nams mchod rten*) came from the Do valley on the Amdo-Kham border. Lama Sönam became Jikmé Lingpa's chief disciple, known as the first Dodrupchen Jikmé Trinlé Özer (*jigs med phrin las 'od zer*, 1745-1821), the main doctrinal heir (*rtsa ba'i chos bdag*) of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse*. Later in 1788, Jikmé Lingpa gave teachings to the King and Queen of Degé and secured their patronage. At the age of 65, in 1794-1795, he had a son with his consort. Four year later, the throneholder of Sakya recognized the boy as one of the two heads of the Drikhung Kagyü tradition, the incarnation of Chökyi Nyima (*chos kyi nyi ma*, 1755-1792). That same year (1798), Jikmé Lingpa died.

The legacy he left behind—the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse*, the compilation of the *Collected Tantras*, and the institutional simplicity of his hermitage at Tseringjong—had a lasting effect on the following generation of Old School practitioners. One of the most popular teachings of the Old Schools, the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse*, continues to be taught today. The influence of this line of teachings is represented in the Tibetan imagination through the attribution of Jikmé Lingpa's reincarnations and through the

²⁵³ See *rig 'dzin jigs med gling pas bzhengs pa'i rnying ma rgyud 'bum gyi chos tshan dkar chag* in Thub bstan chos dar, *rnying ma rgyud 'bum gyi dkar chag gsal ba'i me long* (pe cin: mi rigs dpe sgrun khang, 2000), 270-305. While this text is not found in the Degé edition of the Hundred Thousand Tantras of the Old Schools, it presumably has been incorporated into a larger history of the collection by Kathok Getsé Gyurmé Tsewang Chokdrup (*kaḥ thog dge rtse'i 'gyur med tshé dbang mchog grub*) entitled *bde bar gshengs pa'i bstan pa thams cad kyi snying po rig pa 'dzin pa'i sde snod rdo rhe theg pa snga 'gyur rgyud 'bum rin po che'i rtogs pa brjod pa lha'i rnga bo che lta bu'i gtam* in *rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, Dg.448, vol. 26, 1a.1-333a.7.

doctrinal lineage passed down from the first Dodrupchen. The figures who are seen as Jikmé Lingpa's incarnations, namely Do Khyentsé Yeshé, Patrül Rinpoché, and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, have been discussed above. Yet, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's preceding incarnations of the Dodrupchen are not mentioned in his lineage for the *Secret Essence*. Thus, now we will turn to the lives of the first two of the Dodrupchen incarnations—Jikmé Trinlé Özer (1745-1821) and Jikmé Püntsock Jungné (1824-1863).

JIKMÉ TRINLÉ ÖZER, THE FIRST DODRUPCHEN (1745-1821)

The first principal doctrine-holder of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* (*klong chen snying thig*) teachings was Jikmé Trinlé Özer (*'jigs med phrin las 'od zer*).²⁵⁴ His father was a member of the Buchung (*bu chung*) clan in the Mukpodong (*smug po sdong*) lineage, and his mother was from the Nizok tribe. Jikmé Trinlé Özer was born in 1745 in the upper part of the Do valley in the Golok province of Amdo. It is claimed that at the early age of three he remembered his past lives but that his parents forbid him from discussing them, as they feared he was possessed by a demon. He entered the Gochen Monastery of the Pelyül lineage at the age of fourteen, studying there with Sherap Rinchen, whose teacher was a disciple of Kunzang Sherab (*kun bzang shes rab*, 1636-1699), the founder of the Pelyül lineage. At twenty-one, he traveled to central Tibet, along the way receiving teachings from Situ Chökyi Jungné (*si tu chos kyi 'byung gnas*, 1700-1774) at Pelbung (*dpal spung*) Monastery in Degé. Upon reaching central Tibet, he studied with Gampopa's fifth incarnation, Jampel Trinlé Wangpo, at Daklha Monastery, the monastery founded by Gampopa. He also received teachings from important lamas of Zhechen Monastery, Dzokchen Monastery, and Pelyül

²⁵⁴ The sources for this biography are Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet*, ed. by Harold Talbott (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 136-162; Thub-bstan-phrin-las-bzañ-po, Rdo Grub-chen IV, *Rdo Grub chen 'jigs med phrin las 'od zer gyiy 'khrun's rab rnam thar: the brief biography of the First Rdo Grub-chen 'jigs-med-phrin-las-'od-zer and his successors in the Rdo Grub-chen lineages* [sic] *of incarnations* (Gangtok: Dodrupchen Rinpoché, 1985); Tulku Thondup, *Tantric Traditions of the Nyingmapa*, 88-93.

Monastery. After that, due to family obligations, he remained in his home valley of Do from ages twenty-five through thirty, after which due to a vision he resumed his travels. He first returned to Dzokchen Monastery and then made his second pilgrimage to Tibet. On that trip, he met and received teachings from the thirteenth Karmapa Dudül Dorjé (*karma pa bdud 'dul rdo rje*, 1733-1797). After this, he did a three-year and then, at age thirty-eight, a four-year retreat.

During a shorter retreat on the *Essential Drop of the Three Channels* (*rtsa gsum gsang ba snying thig*), the third Dzokchen Rinpoché (1759-1792), who had given him the transmission, sent Jikmé Trinlé Özer a copy of Jikmé Lingpa's *Precious Treasury of Enlightened Qualities* (*yon tan rin po che mdzod*). Upon reading it, Jikmé Trinlé Özer developed "uncontrived devotion" toward its author. At age forty-one, he made his third pilgrimage to Tibet, during which he met Jikmé Lingpa for the first time near the Tseringjong hermitage in Yarlung. Jikmé Lingpa had already dreamed about him the night before and immediately took him on as a disciple. Later, Jikmé Lingpa recognized him as an incarnation of Prince Murum Tsenpo, a son of king Trisong Detsen, and bestowed on him the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* teachings. Returning to eastern Tibet, Jikmé Trinlé Özer gave the transmission in Dzokchen Monastery and elsewhere. But, he frequently returned to central Tibet to be with Jikmé Lingpa until the latter's death in 1798. By then, due to his own actions and his association with Jikmé Lingpa, he had become a well-known teacher. The government in Lhasa invited him to perform a ceremony, during which some miraculous events are said to have occurred. Because he was paid such high respect by the government, he became known as the great adept from Do valley, or Dodrupchen.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ In the *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, map 10 (F26-G24) there are a series of streams that parallel but run progressively south-west of each other. One of these valleys is the Do valley, from which Dodrupchen ("Great Adept of Do") gets his title. Thus, much of the action in this lineage of incarnation occurs among these valleys. From the one in the north-east to in the south-west, the valleys and their streams are called: Mar, Do, Ser, Nyi, Zhe, and Dza.

The first Dodrupchen was quite involved in the politics of his day. When he was visiting Samyé in 1791, many people were fleeing the area do to the threat of a Gurkha invasion. Dodrupchen performed a Sang offering from the top of a hill and prophesized there would be nothing further to fear from the Nepalese. Later, an official in the Tibetan government sent a request for this prophecy in writing. At another time, he was also requested by the Lhasa government to perform a variety of ceremonies for the welfare of the government and the country. In 1793 he was invited to the Queen's palace in Degé and from then on remained an influential figure in that court. Under the queen's patronage, Jikmé Trinlé Özer laid the foundation for the Ogmin Rikdzin Pelgyeling Monastery in Dzachukha valley in Kham. The Mongol king, Chingwang Ngawang Dargyé (1759-1807), was also his patron, inviting Dodrupchen to give teachings in the Blue Lake region. After several years in that area, he was eventually detained by the Chinese Amban because he had not registered as required by law. However, upon meeting him, the Chinese official was so impressed with Dodrupchen that he released him without further incident. The Amban then became a patron of Dodrupchen and procured a letter from the Chinese emperor ordering the lama to remain in the Blue Lake area. In 1799 he was however allowed to return to his homeland, the Do valley in Amdo. With the help of his student Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu, he finished the building of his Drodön Lhündrup Monastery in the Do valley. After that, it appears his travel restriction was lifted as he visited the Queen-regent of Degé and her son, the crown-prince, several times from 1802-1809 and also journeyed to several important Old School monasteries. It was do to his influence with the Degé court that the principality sponsored the publication of the Jikmé Lingpa's edition of the *Collected Tantras of the Old Schools* along with his catalog. In 1810, the first Dodrupchen set up a meditation center in the Ser (*gser*) valley south-west of Do, which became popularly known as Yarlung Pemakö Monastery (*yar lung pad ma bkod*). This remained his residence for the rest of his life until his death in 1821. Though he did not leave Yarlung Pemakö for the next ten years, he received many important

and influential visitors including Do Khyentsé, the Fourth Dzokchen Rinpoché, Gyelsé Zhenphen Tayé, Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu, and representatives from the Degé palace.

The two main students of Jikmé Trinlé Özer were Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu (*jigs med rgyal ba'i myu gu*, 1765-1843) and Do Khyentsé Yeshé Dorjé (*mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje*, 1800-1866). Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu was from the Dzachukha valley, or “Head of the Dza River.” It is called this because it “is the valley around the source of the Dza (Nyak Ch'u/Yalung) River.”²⁵⁶ This area is south-east of the Do valley. Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu was influential in spreading the teachings of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* throughout eastern Tibet, and he was one of Patrül Rinpoché's main teachings on that subject. As for Do Khyentsé Yeshé Dorjé, he was from the Mar Valley, which is between the Dza and the Do. Jikmé Trinlé Özer recognized him as the mind-incarnation of Jikmé Lingpa, when the boy was one-year old. Do Khyentsé became the principle student of Jikmé Trinlé Özer and the dharma heir of Jikmé Lingpa's teachings. At the encouragement of his teacher, Do Khyentsé adopted the lifestyle of a wandering yogi. On the night of the first Dodrupchen's death, Do Khyentsé received his last testament in a vision, even though the two were days apart. In 1844, it was Do Khyentsé who transmitted the *Heart-Drop of the Great Expanse* teachings to Jikmé Trinlé Özer's incarnation, the second Dodrupchen.

JIKMÉ PÜNTSOK JUNGNE, THE SECOND DODRUPCHEN (1824-1863)

Jikmé Püntsook Jungné (*jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas*), who was recognized as the second Dodrupchen, was born to the same clan as the first, the Buchung clan of the Mukpodong lineage, located in the Do valley in Amdo.²⁵⁷ His father's name was Buchung Chöpen, and his mother was known as Apangza Tsomo. He lived a relatively short life of thirty-nine years,

²⁵⁶ Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 163.

²⁵⁷ The information for his life is from Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 211-214.

dying during an outbreak of small pox. According to the common practice, the first Dodrupchen prophesized of his reincarnation in a verse:

After this [life] through the power of three absorptions
 [I will be born as] Phüntsook Jungne,
 A messenger who will demonstrate the enlightened activities of the three
 Buddha bodies, and
 A creator of various miracles as the source of benefits.²⁵⁸

The second Dodrupchen was recognized and confirmed by the Sakya Gongma. He was enthroned at Dodrupchen's retreat center, Yarlung Pemakö. At the age of 10, he studied the preliminary practices and the Great Completeness with Jikmé Gyelwé Nyugu. At age 20, he received the transmission of the *Essential Drop of the Great Expanse* from Do Khyentsé. His main associates during his adulthood were Do Khyentsé and Patrül Rinpoché.

Sometime during the three years (1862-1865) that Gönpo Namgyel, chief of Nyakrong province, terrorized the whole area with his standing army, the chief warned the second Dodrupchen of his plans to attack the Ser valley, where he was residing. Apparently, the Dodrupchen legacy had won the favor of the warlord, since Gönpo Namgyel sent the lama a communication that he would not attack the monastery of Yarlung Pemakö. However, the second Dodrupchen wrote back that the harming the people of the Ser valley is the same as harming his monastery. Thus provoking the ire of a powerful tyrant, Jikmé Püntsook Jungné was forced to flee the monastery of Yarlung Pemakö, founded by the first Dodrupchen.

In 1862, he moved to the Tsangchen plain in the upper Do Valley, where he began construction on a new monastery, that later became famous as the Dodrupchen monastery. However, a local leader who had hoped that the second Dodrupchen would choose his niece as a consort became angry when Jikmé Püntsook chose someone else. Thus, Jikmé Püntsook

²⁵⁸ Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 211.

was forced to flee to Dartsedo (now Kanding), where he became one of the religious advisors for the King of Chakla. In the next year, a smallpox epidemic broke out in Dartsedo, and it is claimed Jikmé Püntsok took on the epidemic himself. After his death, the epidemic supposedly ended. Just before dying, he said:

In this life, I had so many problems because of women. Next life, I will take rebirth as a person who will not even look at the face of a woman.²⁵⁹

His next incarnation, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, the author of the *Key to the Treasury*, was indeed a very strict monk. Saying a yogi should die like a stray dog, Jikmé Püntsok Jungné lay down in the street of Dartsedo with his head pointing downward and died. Tulku Thondup relates an interesting story immediately following the death of the second Dodrupchen:

Soon Do Khyentsé arrived with his son, Rikpe Raltri. Do Khyentsé shouted at Dodrupchen's body, "Why are you dying like a stray dog?" and he kicked the body. Dodrupchen's body sat up in the meditation posture as if he were alive and remained in absorption for a week. When three-year-old Rikpe Raltri saw Dodrupchen's body sitting up, he experienced a great shock, and that shock awakened the realization of the ultimate nature in him. Since then, Rikpe Raltri always said, "My supreme lama is Dodrupchen Jigmé Phüntsok Jungné."²⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have explored the lineage of the *Secret Essence Tantra* as found in the third Dodrupchen's *Key to the Treasury*. The central Indian figure for the Mahāyoga transmission appears to have been the pundit Vimalamitra. He probably belonged to the first generation

²⁵⁹ Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 214.

²⁶⁰ Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 214.

of Mahāyoga practitioners as he appears to have been a younger contemporary of the “discoverers” (more likely compilers) of these teachings, King Indrabhūti and the Siddha Kukurāja. The recently compiled teachings of Mahāyoga met with some resistance in eighth century Tibet, especially with their overt sexual metaphors and practices and the explicit advocacy of violence. The secrecy of these teachings was guarded strictly in the early period, but after the fall of the Yarlung Dynasty in the first half of the ninth century, these bizarre teachings and practices spread unchecked.

In the eleventh century, the Zur family gathered the authentic transmissions of these teachings descending from Vimalamitra through Nup Sanggyé Yeshé. The three Zur patriarch established religious centers, systemized the teachings, and initiated many lineages of teachings, which maintained distinct boundaries between the three types of inner tantras. Their time period was the same as the initial generation of New School advocates, and they engaged in basically the same activity.

Three centuries later, during the renaissance of the fourteenth century, Longchenpa wrote his famous commentary on the *Secret Essence* that portrays the tantra as an Atiyoga text teaching the Great Completeness philosophy. The reformation that he brings about reduces the Mahāyoga teachings to a subset of Atiyoga. However, the interpretation of Mahāyoga as Mahāyoga continued elsewhere in Tibet, especially in the east. Thus, it was ironically Longchenpa’s most staunch advocate, Jikmé Lingpa, who, through his connection with the Degé court and the lands beyond, helped revive the teachings of the Zur tradition that had survived in Amdo and Kham by combining them with Longchenpa’s Essential Drop teachings. Jikmé Lingpa’s dharma-heir, the first Dodrupchen Jikmé Trinlé Özer was the holder of these uniquely Old School teachings, which were passed down through his disciples and incarnations to the author of the *Key to the Treasury*, the third Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima.

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's lineage for the *Secret Essence* teachings does not mention Longchenpa or Jikmé Lingpa, because the perspective of the *Key to the Treasury* is from the Zur tradition. The Zur tradition is a separate lineage from Longchenpa's that interprets the *Secret Essence* as a strictly Mahāyoga tantra. The Longchenpa tradition (also known as the Rong-Long tradition, in abbreviation for Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo and Longchenpa) views the *Secret Essence* as a particular form of the Great Completeness teachings, which is the source of all teachings. Longchenpa achieved his great systematization by an equally great project of reduction, where all teachings are reduced in essence to Atiyoga. The Zur tradition, represented here by the *Key to the Treasury*, presents the Mahāyoga interpretation as it was codified in the 11th century. However, we shall see that the differences between these two interpretations are relatively meager, and the formation of the two systems was perhaps politically motivated more than anything else. The question remains: What was at stake for these two systems of interpretation? Before it can be answered, an understanding of the tantric text itself is necessary. It is to a description of the *Secret Essence Tantra's* narrative that we turn next.

4. MAHĀYOGA LITERATURE

The *Key to the Treasury* is a general commentary (*spyi don*) on the *Secret Essence Tantra*. The root tantra itself is described as the “general tantra (*spyi rgyud*)” for the Mahāyoga vehicle as a whole. Thus, most of the Tibetan treatises on Mahāyoga, including the *Key to the Treasury*, use the *Secret Essence* as their major primary source, citing the scripture often. However, the Mahāyoga tradition depends on a large body of scriptures, and the *Secret Essence* is just one of these works. In the course of his explanation of the *Secret Essence*, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima also refers to a number of other texts from this cycle including different tantras (*rgyud*), means of achievement (*sgrub thabs*), and revealed treasures (*gter ma*). Before delving into the specifics of the *Key to the Treasury*, it is first necessary to describe 1) this body of literature, 2) the place of the *Secret Essence* within it, and then 3) outline the narrative structure of the *Secret Essence* itself.

The majority of the scriptures that compose the Mahāyoga corpus are found in the *Collected Tantras of the Old Schools*.¹ The cycles of scriptures associated with the Mahāyoga Vehicle is traditionally divided into two main groups: the tantra class (*rgyud sde*) and the means of achievement class (*sgrub sde*). The first deals with the traditional style of esoteric Buddhist scripture known as “tantra (*rgyud*)” that is modeled on the earlier sūtra genre and purports to be a dialog between a Buddha and his or her retinue. The second group contains a class of texts known as “sādhana (*sgrub thabs*)”, or “means of achievement”, that describes the stages of the ritual meditative practices focusing on particular tantric divinities. While these two classes have come to be included under the single rubric of Mahāyoga, such a

¹ *rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. There are several editions of this collection of esoteric scriptures that were excluded from the canons formed by the New Schools, named after the monastery or locale where each was printed. The extant editions, along with their sigla, are the De-ge (*sde dge*) = Dg, the Kyi-drong (*skyid sgrong*) = Kg, the Ting-gye (*gting skyes*) = Tk, the Tsham-drak (*mtshams brag*) = Tb, and the Rik-dzin-tse-wang-nor-bu (*rig 'dzin tshang nor bu*) = Rt. The volumes that contain the Mahāyoga scriptures for the editions used in this work are: Dg v.9-v.24, Tk v.14-33, and Tb v.18-46.

conglomeration no doubt represents a later stage of systematization for a diverse and often discordant body of literature.

THE TANTRA CLASS (RGYUD SDE)

The tantra class, or cycle, of scriptures is broken down in several different ways by later commentators. There are three major schemes for enumerating the scriptures contained in this category; these are the list of eighteen great tantras (*rgyud sde chen po bco brgyad*), the set of eight Magical Emanation tantras (*sgyu 'phrul sde brgyad*), and the four sets of Magical Emanation tantras (*sgyu 'phrul sde bzhi*). Of these three schemes, the list of eighteen tantras of the Magical Emanation cycle appears to be the oldest. A similar scheme for the Yoga Tantras is found in a Chinese work by Amoghavajra (705-774) that is a summary of the eighteen texts of the *Yoga Tantra* cycle.² It was probably written sometime between 746 and 771, and though it concerns a different doxographical genre of tantra, Amoghavajra's list contains certain key members of the Mahāyoga Tantra cycle, such as the *Secret Assembly*, the *Glorious Supreme Beginning*, and the *Union of All Buddhas*.³ Another reference to the eighteen tantras of the Mahāyoga vehicle, roughly contemporaneous to Amoghavajra's list, is found in Jñānamitra's commentary to the *150 Stanza Perfection of Wisdom*, also considered to be a Yoga Tantra text.⁴ The close connection between the Yoga Tantras and the Mahāyoga Tantras is evident from the similarities of the list of eighteen and from the

² Rolf W. Giebel, "The *Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei*: An Annotated Translation" in *Journal of Naritashan Institute for Buddhist Studies*, No. 18 (Naritashi, Japan: Naritashan Shinshoji, 1995), 107-201.

³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴ Jñānamitra, *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol du phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu ba'i 'grel pa* (Dharma Press 2647, 138.4.2-138.4.3; vol. 59, 544.2-544.3), *slad kyis sangs rgyas mya ngan las 'das pa'i 'og tu za hor gyi rgyal po 'khor dang bcas pa ngo mtshar du chos la dad pa dag cig 'dug pa theg pa de'i 'dul snal (skal?) du gyur cing snod du gyur nas/ sarba Buddha sa ma yo ga la sogs pa sde chen po bco brgyad phyag na rdo rje'i byin gyi rlabs kyis za hor gyi phul (?) du gshags pa dang* / *The Perfection of Wisdom in 150 Stanzas* is said to have been redacted from the *Glorious Supreme Beginning*, the only tantra to be associated with both the Yoga Tantra and Mahāyoga Tantra vehicles. The New Schools categorize it as a Yoga Tantra, while the Old Schools place it in the Mahāyoga Tantra Vehicle.

common mythology of the revelations of King Indrabhūti, Jñānamitra's commentary being the earliest rendition of that story. Kenneth Eastman has even theorized that the two cycles of eighteen tantras—the Yoga Tantras and the Mahāyoga Tantras—come from a single archetype.⁵

As for the other two enumerations, Gyurme Dorje cites the treasure-text, the *Injunctions of Padmasambhava* (*padma'i bka' thang*), as “perhaps the earliest specific references to the eightfold and fourfold divisions.”⁶ The *Injunctions of Padmasambhava* was a text discovered by Ogyen Lingpa (1323-1360?), and the reference cited by Gyurme Dorje is scant:

The four sets of Magical Emanation—Vairocana and so forth—and
The eight groups of the secret Vajrasattva Magical Emanation...⁷

The eightfold enumeration is also referred to by Samdrup Dorjé (1295-1376) in his *Tent of Blazing Jewels* and by Sanggyé Lingpa (1340-1396) in his *Golden Rosary of Injunction*.⁸ Samdrup Dorjé explicitly states that the original enumeration was the eighteen tantras, while the eightfold grouping was a Tibetan interpretation:

In India, Mahāyoga consists of the eighteen great tantras. In the Tibetan translation of these, there are the eight sets of the Magical Emanation [Cycle], the four sets of explanatory tantras, along with the sixty-four subtle quintessential instructions on those.⁹

Interestingly, he does not mention the fourfold grouping of the Magical Emanation but refers to a different group of four explanatory tantras. As for the fourfold grouping of the

⁵ Kenneth Eastman, “The Eighteen Tantras of the Vajrāsekharā/Māyājāla,” (Paper presented to the 26th International Conference of Orientalists in Japan, Tōkyo, May 8th, 1981).

⁶ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 37.

⁷ *nam snang la sogs sgyu 'phrul sde bzhi dang / gsang ba rdor sems sgyu 'phrul sde tshan brgyad!* (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 37).

⁸ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 38.

⁹ *'di la rgya gar na tantra chen po sde bco brgyad du yod pa las/ bod du bsgyur ba la sgyu 'phrul sde brgyad/ bshad rgyud sde bzhi/ de dag gi man ngag phra mo drug cu rtsa bzhi dang bcas pa* (RBG, 599.2-599.3).

Magical Emanation, Lochen Dharmashrī says that this enumeration is the assertion of Len Ṭikapa and Longchenpa (1308-1363).¹⁰ Thus, the earliest literary references to both the fourfold and eightfold enumerations seem to have first appeared in the first half of the fourteenth century. They may have developed before that time, being transmitted orally. However, a more precise understanding of the origins of the eight and four-fold divisions will have to wait until an exhaustive search of the extant material has been done. Nevertheless, the list of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras preceded both, being the original list to have come from India.

THE EIGHTEEN TANTRAS

There are two versions of the list of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras prevalent in the Old Schools' commentarial tradition—one according to the Zur tradition and one according to Longchenpa. According to Gyurme Dorje, the list of the Zur tradition “gained acceptance from the time of” Derdak Lingpa (1646-1714) and “corresponds to the structure of the *Collected Tantras*.”¹¹ When I was studying the *Key to the Treasury* with Khenpo Namdröl at Namdrölling Monastery in South India, as part of my studies he presented me with a list of the eighteen tantras entitled, “The Eighteen Great Tantras of the Zur Tradition (*zur pa'i lugs kyī tantra chen mo sde bco brgyad*).” It was the very same list that Gyurme Dorje describes as Derdak Lingpa's. The designation of the list as belonging to the Zur Tradition is certainly no proof that it dates back to the time of the Zur patriarchs. However, such a history cannot be discounted, since Zurpoché, Zur Chung, and Dropukpa were not as concerned with penning commentaries as with promulgating oral traditions. Circumstantial evidence such as the list's structure matching the organization of the texts in the *Collected Tantras* also hints at its temporal priority. Furthermore, the Zur list appears, in much the same way as the nine-

¹⁰ *glan tika pa dang l_kun mkhyen chen po ni'_sgyu 'phrul sde bzhir bzbed de/* Lochen Dharmashrī, *bsang bdag zhal lung* (Shechen Monastery: Digital Text, n.p.).

¹¹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhya garbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 35.

vehicle system, to encode in its structure a historical progression. While Longchenpa's version systematizes the list to accord with the five-fold division of the effect state—enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities, and activities, the Zur list breaks the eighteen into five, uneven categories:¹²

A. The five tantras that are the basis and root (*gzhi dang rtsa bar gyur pa'i rgyud*

***Inga*):**

1. The tantra of enlightened form, *Union of All Buddhas*¹³
2. The tantra of enlightened speech, *Secret Moon Drop*¹⁴
3. The tantra of enlightened mind, *Secret Assembly*¹⁵
4. The tantra of enlightened qualities, *Glorious Supreme Beginning*¹⁶
5. The tantra of enlightened activities, *Garland of Activities*¹⁷

B. The five tantras of play that teach achievement as the practice (*sgrub pa lag len*

***tu bstan pa rol pa rgyud sde Inga*):**

6. *Play of Heruka Tantra*¹⁸
7. *Play of the Supreme Horse Tantra*¹⁹
8. *Play of Compassion Tantra*²⁰

¹² In his unpublished paper, “The Eighteen Tantras of the Vajrāṣekhara/Māyājāla,” Kenneth Eastman records a list of eighteen tantras from the *Precious Treasury of History* (*chos 'byung rin po che gter mdzod*) that matches this one from the Zur tradition. The *Precious Treasury of History* is traditionally considered to be work of Longchenpa.

¹³ *sku'i rgyud sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor* (Tb.402, v.18, 2.1-51.7; Tk.237, v.16, 163.1-273.2; Dg.205, v.11, 297b.5-313a.7).

¹⁴ *gsung gi rgyud zla gsang thig le* (Tb.406, v.18, 357.1-548.7; Tk.241, v.16, 375.2-543.5; Dg.210, v.12, 21b.7-88b.7).

¹⁵ *thugs kyi rgyud gsang ba 'dus pa* (Tb.409, v.18, 752.3-969.7; Tk.242, v.17, 2.1-177.4; Dg.211, v.12, 88b.7-157a.2).

¹⁶ *yon tan gyi rgyud dpal mchog dang po* (Tb.412, v.19, 213.4-579.6; Tk.243, v.17, 177.5-470.4; Dg.212 & Dg.213, v.12, 157a.2-272b.7).

¹⁷ *phrin las kyi rgyud las kyi phreng ba* (Tb.413, v.19, 579.6-785.7; Tk. v17, 470.5-627.4; Dg.214, v.12, 272b.7-343a.5).

¹⁸ *he ru ka'i rol pa'i rgyud* (Tb.410, v.19, 2.1-181.1; Tk.245, v.18, 2.1-184.4).

¹⁹ *rta mchog rol pa'i rgyud* (Tb.407, v.18, 548.7-717.7; Tk.246, v.18, 184.4-315.2; Dg.215, v.13, 1.1-54.b7).

²⁰ *snying rje rol pa'i rgyud* (Tk.247, v18, 315.2-449.4; Dg.216, v.13, 54b.7-126b.7).

9. *Play of Nectar Tantra*²¹

10. *Twelve Ritual Daggers*²²

C. The five tantras that serve as branches of activity (*spyod pa yan lag tu 'gro ba'i rgyud sde Inga*):

11. *Piled-up Mountain*²³

12. *Flash of Primordial Wisdom*²⁴

13. *Array of Commitments*²⁵

14. *One-Pointed Meditation*²⁶

15. *Rutting Elephant*²⁷

D. The two tantras that fill out what is incomplete (*ma tshang kha skong ba'i rgyud gnyis*):

16. *Magical Emanation Net of Vairocana*²⁸

17. *Noose of Method*²⁹

E. The root tantra (*rtsa rgyud*):

18. *Secret Essence*³⁰

This classification divides the texts according to their general topic: the root tantras of each of the five deities, the means of achievement for those five, the activities for those five, plus

²¹ *bdud rtsi rol pa'i rgyud* (Tb.629, v.34, 206.6-359.3; Tk.248, v.18, 449.4-567.3; Dg.217, v.13, 126b.7-175b.7).

²² *phur pa bcu gnyis* (Tb.414, v.19, 785.5-1013.7; Tk.249, v.19, 2.1-199.4; Dg.218, v.13, 175b.7-269b.7).

²³ *ri bo brtsegs pa* (Tb.411, v.19, 181.2-213.3; Tk.133, v.6, 323.6-349.3; Dg.45, v.3, 1.1-12b.4; Bg.188, 213.1-239.6).

²⁴ *ye shes rnam glog* (Tb.369, v.15, 2.1-212.7; Tk.190, v.12, 276.1-438.7; Dg.163, v.7, 314a.7-366b.6).

²⁵ *dam tshig bkod pa* (Tb.97, v.4, 371.5-465.5; Tk.194, v.12, 560.1-626.7).

²⁶ *ting 'dzin rse gcig* (Tb.246, v.9, 896.3-908.4; Tk.168, v.8, 558.4-569.3; Dg.34, v.2, 200a.6-203b.7).

²⁷ *glang chen rab 'bog* (Tb.405, v.18, 250.4-357.1; Tk.250, v.19, 199.4-288.7; Dg.219, v.13, 251b.7-285b.7).

²⁸ *rnam snang sgyu 'phrul drwa ba* (Tb.443, v.22, 699.3-829.7; Tk.251, v.19, 289.1-395.3).

²⁹ *thabs kyi zhags pa* (Tb.416, v.20, 123.6-152.6; Tk.252, v.19, 395.3-422.6; Dg.220, v.13, 285b.7-298a.7).

³⁰ *gsang ba snying po*. There are three versions of this text, which are enumerated in the set of eight Magical Emanation Tantras.

two supplemental tantras and one general tantra that encompasses the whole vehicle. The Zur system classifies these texts according to their contents.

Longchenpa, on the other hand, is more concerned with consistency in the classification scheme than with the actual contents of the texts themselves. His list groups the tantras according to a more symmetrical 6 by 3 schematic. The types of tantras are derived from taking the five aspects of enlightenment—enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities, and activities—adding a sixth general category and subdivided these six by enlightened form, speech, and mind. Assigning one tantra to each category, he replaces a number of the titles from the Zur list with other more obscure titles, some of which cannot be precisely identified within the *Collected Tantras*. The end result is as follows:³¹

A. Enlightened Form Tantras

1. The enlightened form of enlightened form tantra—*Rutting Elephant*,³²
2. The enlightened speech of enlightened form tantra—*Elephant Entering Water*,³³
3. The enlightened mind of enlightened form tantra—*Union of All Buddhas*,³⁴

B. Enlightened Speech Tantras

4. The enlightened form of enlightened speech tantra—*Piled-up Mountain*,³⁵
5. The enlightened speech of enlightened speech tantra—*Great Lotus Lord*,³⁶
6. The enlightened mind of enlightened speech tantra—*Esoteric Moon Drop*,³⁷

C. Enlightened Mind Tantras

7. The enlightened form of enlightened mind tantra—*Gathering at the Peak*,³⁸

³¹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 34.

³² *sku'i sku rgyud glang po rab 'bog*.

³³ *sku'i gsung rgyud glang po chur 'jug*. Not found.

³⁴ *sku'i thugs rgyud sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor*.

³⁵ *gsung gi sku rgyud ri bo brtsegs pa*.

³⁶ *gsung gi gsung rgyud padma dbang chen*. Not found.

³⁷ *gsung gi thugs rgyud zla gsang thig le*.

³⁸ *thugs kyi sku rgyud rtse mo 'dus pa*. Not found.

8. The enlightened speech of enlightened mind tantra—*Proliferation from One*,³⁹

9. The enlightened mind of enlightened mind tantra—*Secret Assembly*,⁴⁰

D. Enlightened Qualities Tantras

10. The enlightened form of enlightened qualities tantra—*Blazing Lamp*,⁴¹

11. The enlightened speech of enlightened qualities tantra—*One Hundred Thousand Nectar-Commitments*.⁴²

12. The enlightened mind of enlightened qualities tantra—*Glorious Supreme Beginning*.⁴³

E. Enlightened Activities Tantras

13. The enlightened form of enlightened activities tantra—*Glorious Pure Garland*.⁴⁴

14. The enlightened speech of enlightened activities tantra—*Tantric Transmission of the Mother-Demons*.⁴⁵

15. The enlightened mind of enlightened activities tantra—*One Hundred Thousand Vidyotamala*.⁴⁶

F. General Tantras

16. The general enlightened form tantra—*Noose of Method*.⁴⁷

17. The general enlightened speech tantra—*Array of Commitments*.⁴⁸

18. The general enlightened mind tantra—*Secret Magical Emanation*.⁴⁹

³⁹ *thugs kyi gsung rgyud gcig las 'phros pa*. Not found.

⁴⁰ *thugs kyi thugs rgyud gsang ba 'dus pa*.

⁴¹ *yon tan gyi sku rgyud sgron me 'bar ba*. Not found.

⁴² *yon tan gyi gsung rgyud bdud rtsi samaya 'bum sde*. Not found.

⁴³ *yon tan gyi thugs rgyud dpal mchog dang po*.

⁴⁴ *phrin las kyi sku rgyud dpal phreng dkar po*. Not found.

⁴⁵ *phrin las kyi gsung rgyud ma mo rgyud lung*. (Tb.708, v.39, 2.1-197.6; Tk.393, v.30, 2.1-124.7; Dg.369, v.22, 218a.1-279b.4).

⁴⁶ *phrin las kyi thugs rgyud bidyotamala 'bum sde*. Not found. Kapstein and Dorje list this as “Hundred Thousand Verse Tantra of Supreme Awareness” or “Hundred Thousand Verses of the Vajrakīla Tantra” (*phur pa 'bum sde*) with the note: “Apparently not preserved in its entirety at the present time.” (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 241).

⁴⁷ *spyi'i sku rgyud thabs zhags*.

⁴⁸ *spyi'i gsung rgyud dam tshig bkod pa*.

Longchenpa's list is most notable for its consistency and orderliness. Whereas all the titles in the Zur tradition's list of eighteen tantras are identifiable among the texts of the *Collected Tantras of the Old Schools*, several titles in Longchenpa's list are not as easily identifiable, possibly because he is using alternative text titles. In any case, his list has a forced symmetry to it with the choice of titles being dictated in part by that symmetry. Longchenpa's list is constructed to show the pervasiveness and interconnectedness of the effect state—the five aspects of enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities, and activities, with the general category being added to achieve the total of eighteen. His list does not tell the reader much about the contents of the texts but subliminally points to the notion of the ever-present Great Completeness by its very structure. Longchenpa's Great Completeness agenda dictates the composition of his list of eighteen tantras more than the need for accurately describing the Mahāyoga tradition as it was transmitted from India. In this way, Longchenpa's comprehensive systematization often obscures the accurate presentation of the individual systems it claims to incorporate. It is interesting to note that Samdrup Dorjé's commentary, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, also uses Longchenpa's list of the eighteen tantras, although for the most part that commentary adheres to the Zur interpretation.⁵⁰

THE EIGHT MAGICAL EMANATION TANTRAS

As with the eighteen tantras, there are two sets of the Eight Magical Emanation Tantras (*sgyu 'phrul sde brgyad*)—one according to the Zur tradition and one according to Longchenpa. Samdrup Dorjé gives the following list of eight, along with their respective topics:⁵¹

1. *Secret Essence*, which is the root tantra of the Magical Emanation teaching that mind and primordial wisdom are self-appearances;⁵²

⁴⁹ *gsang ba sgyu 'phrul*. Presumably, he is referring to the *Secret Essence* (*gsang ba'i snying po*) here.

⁵⁰ Samdrup Dorjé, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 629.4-630.2.

⁵¹ Samdrup Dorjé, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 631.5-632.3.

2. *Goddess Magical Emanation*, which describes the manifestation of the play;⁵³
3. *Eight-[Chaptered] Magical Emanation*, which teaches the completion of the maṇḍala;⁵⁴
4. *Magical Emanation in Forty [Chapters]*, which teaches the completion of enlightened activity;⁵⁵
5. *Unsurpassed Magical Emanation*, which mainly teaches initiation;⁵⁶
6. *Magical Emanation in Eighty [Chapters]*, which teaches the fulfillment of enlightened qualities;⁵⁷
7. *Great Magical Emanation Net of Mañjuśrī*, whose teachings encompass the whole scriptural collections;⁵⁸ and
8. *Magical Emanation Appendix*, which teaches the vows as supreme.⁵⁹

The same list with a few minor variations is given by both Sanggyé Lingpa in his treasure, *The Golden Rosary of Proclamations (bka' thang gser phreng)*,⁶⁰ and by Pawo Tsukla Trengwa

⁵² *sems dang ye shes rang snang du ston pa sgyu 'phrul rtsa ba'i rgyud gsang ba'i snying po/* This is the most commonly cited version of the root *Secret Essence* tantra in twenty-two chapters. It is found in the following versions: Tb.417, v.20, 152.6-218.7; Tk.218, v.14, 2.1-61.7, Dg.189, v.9, 1.1-27a.6; Dg.201, v.14, 60a.6-82a.7.

⁵³ *rol pa mngon par brjod pa lha mo sgyu 'phrul/* (Tb.422, v.20, 609.2-717.7; Tk.226, v.15, 2.1-96.7; Dg.199, v.11, 1.1-34b.3).

⁵⁴ *dkyil 'khor rdzogs par ston pa sgyu 'phrul brgyad pa/* (Tb.421, v.20, 580.6-609.1; Tk.223, v.14, 549.6-571.7; Dg.193, v.10, 113b.7-123a.6). The scribe mistaken has this as *sgyu 'phrul rgyas pa*.

⁵⁵ *phrin las rdzogs par ston pa sgyu 'phrul bzhi bcu pa/* (Tb.418, v.20, 218.7-337.6; Tk.221, v.14, 317.4-415.4; Dg.195, v.10, 135a.2-182b.2)

⁵⁶ *dbang gts'o bor ston pa sgyu 'phrul bla ma/* (Tb.419, v.20, 337.6-417.2; Tk.224, v.14, 572.1-638.7; Dg.200, v.11, 34b.3-60a.6).

⁵⁷ *yon tan mthar phyin par ston pa sgyu 'phrul [brgyad] bcu pa/* (Tb.423, v.21, 2.1-326.4; Tk.220, v.14, 67.6-317.4; Dg.203, v.11, 148a.7-248b.7).

⁵⁸ *sde snod yongs la khyab par ston pa 'jam dpal sgyu 'phrul drwa ba chen po/* (Tb.424, v.21, 326.4-349.6; Tk.227, v.15, 96.7-118.6; Dg.123a.6-135a.2). This is the well-known *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī (mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti)* (Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhya garbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 46).

⁵⁹ *dam tshig mchog tu ston pa sgyu 'phrul le lag/* (Tb.420, v.20, 417.2-580.5; Tk.222, v.14, 415.5-549.5; Dg.196, v.10, 182b.2-238b.7).

⁶⁰ Sañs-rgyas-glin-pa, *gter-ston*, 1340-1398, *o rgyan gu ru padma 'byung gnas kyi skyes rabs rnam par thar pa rgyas par bkod pa padma bka'i thang yig* (Kalimpong: Dujom Rinpoché, 1970; I-Tib 79-922880; I-Tib-760), 399.5-400.1.

(1504-1566) in his *Scholars' Feast* (*mkhas pa'i dga' ston*).⁶¹ This list includes the three versions of the *Secret Essence*—the short (#1), the middling (#4), and the long (#6)—as well as other related scriptures whose name contains “Magical Emanation”. Besides this connection of similar names, the list is rather haphazard without a logical order. In this and other ways, the Zur tradition’s list of eight Magical Emanation tantras is significantly different from the list given by Longchenpa. The reason for this is that Longchenpa creates another level of division of Magical Emanation tantras that subsumes the list of eight within it. To do so, he takes some of the titles in the above list and promotes them to the higher level. Since Longchenpa’s list of eight Magical Emanations is connected to his list of Four Magical Emanations, it will be discussed in the next section.

THE FOUR SETS OF MAGICAL EMANATION TANTRAS

The list of four Magical Emanation Tantras (*sgyu 'phrul sde bzhi*) is the invention of Longchenpa and another scholar, Len Ṭikapa, whose identity I have been unable to establish.⁶² As a great systematizer, Longchenpa attempts to bring order to the somewhat chaotic list of eight Magical Tantras by extracting the Mahāyoga tantras not directly connected to the *Secret Essence* from the list of eight and creating a more general category of the four Magical Emanation Nets. These are:

1. The *Magical Emanation Net of Vajrasattva*,

⁶¹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 38-39.

⁶² “Len (*glan*)” is the name of a family, who contributed several members to the Buddhist movement, primarily as translators. “*tī ka ba*” means “one [skilled in] Indian commentaries.” The *gangs can mkhas grub rim byon* mentions the following members from the Len clan: *glan chung dam ma tshul khrims* (14th century), *glan dar ma blo gros* (11th century), *glan tshul khrims byang chub I* (1004-1103), *glan tshul khrims byang chub II* (1128-1192), *glan ye shes shes rab* (10th century). Dudjom Rinpoché mentions *glan chos rgyal* (14th century?), *glan nya tshal pa bsod nams mgon po* (14th century), *glan sā kya byang chub* (11th-12th century), *glan sā kya 'od pa* (12th century?), *glan sā kya bzang po* (11th century), and *glan gsal ba* (14th century). There is a strong connection between the *glan* clan and the *zur* clan. *Glan sā kya bzang po* was a disciple of Zur Chungwa; *glan sā kya byang chub* was a disciple of Dropuk-ba, *glan nya tshal pa* was teacher to Samdrup Dorjé—a proponent of the Zur lineage—and *glan gsal ba* was the latter’s student. The use of a semi-anonymous member of the Len clan as collaboration for Longchenpa’s “four Magical Emanation Nets” may have been a way to give more weight to his assertion.

2. The *Magical Emanation Net of Vairocana*,⁶³
3. The *Magical Emanation Net of the Goddess*, and
4. The *Magical Emanation Net of Mañjushrī*.

The *Magical Emanation Net of Vairocana* is an addition not found in the original list of eight Magical Emanation tantras. The other titles are extracted from that list. Longchenpa then divides the first member—the *Magical Emanation Net of Vajrasattva*—into the eight Magical Emanation tantras. In place of the *Magical Emanation Net of the Goddess* and the *Magical Emanation Net of Mañjushrī*, Longchenpa adds three of the *Secret Essence*'s four explanatory tantras, thus making total of nine items in his list of eight! Longchenpa's list is:⁶⁴

1. The *Secret Essence*,
2. The *Forty-Chaptered Magical Net*,
3. The *Eight-Chaptered Magical Net*,
4. The *Superior Magical Net*,
5. The *Supplementary Magical Net*,
6. The *Eighty-Chaptered Magical Net*,
7. The *Mirror of Indestructible Reality*,
8. The *Oceanic Magical Net*, and
9. The *Penetrating Magical Net*.

The last three titles are considered by most Old School scholars to be part of a list of four exegetical, or explanatory, tantras (*bshad rgyud*) related to the *Secret Essence*. One can only wonder why Longchenpa chose to include three of the four instead of two, since the inclusion of three makes his list exceed eight items. With a better understanding of the contents of these texts, perhaps his motivation will become clearer.

⁶³ *rnams snang sgyu 'phrul*. This is the only work not found in the above list. It is also not found in the De-ge edition of the NGB. It is found in Tb.443, v.22, 699.3-829.7, and Tk.251, v.19, 289.1-395.3.

⁶⁴ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyaagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 40 and 317.

THE FOUR EXPLANATORY TANTRAS

The Tibetan commentarial tradition also provides a list of four explanatory tantras (*bshad rgyud*) that accompany the *Secret Essence* and provide more detailed descriptions of various aspects of the path. The four are categorized according to the two paths of Mahāyoga—the path of release (*grol lam*) and the path of method (*thabs lam*)—each of which is further subdivided into gradual (*rim gyis pa*) and sudden (*cig char ba*). The path of release is a contemplative method in which one meditates on certain axioms (the four realizations, the three purities, the four samenesses, and the single essence), which through their realization leads to enlightenment. A suddenist on this path is one who realizes the view, the path, and the effect nearly simultaneously, while a gradualist first sets up the view, then travels the path, and finally reaches the effect. The path of method is a psycho-physiological method involving the manipulation of psychic energy (winds and drops) through the psychic channels of the body, thereby inducing states similar to death and rebirth. The gradualist of this path practices solo, focusing on the upper opening of the central channel at the crown of the head, while the suddenist practices in tandem with a consort and focuses on the lower opening at the tip of the sexual organ. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima assigns the four explanatory tantras to these four aspects of the path in the following manner:⁶⁵

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| <i>Essence of Primordial Wisdom</i> ⁶⁶ | – Gradual path of release |
| <i>Mirror of Vajrasattva</i> ⁶⁷ | – Sudden path of release |
| <i>Vajra Ocean</i> ⁶⁸ | – Gradual path of method |
| <i>Penetrating Magical Emanation</i> ⁶⁹ | – Sudden path of method |

⁶⁵ *Key to the Treasury*, 17.6-18.1.

⁶⁶ *ye she snying po*. Tb.428, *dpal sgyu 'phrul dra ba ye shes kyi snying po'i rgyud*, vol. 21, 477.4-509.5.

⁶⁷ *rdo rje sems dpa' me long gi rgyud*. Tb.441, *rdo rje sems dpa'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba gsang ba thams cad kyi me long zhes bya ba'i rgyud*, vol. 22, 480.6-692.6.

⁶⁸ *rdo rje rgya mtsho*. Tb.437, *sgyu 'phrul rgya mtsho zhes bya ba'i rgyud*, vol. 22, 2.1-103.1.

⁶⁹ *sgyu 'phrul thal ba*. Tb.438, *sgyu 'phrul thal ba'i rgyud*, vol. 22, 103.1-186.4 and Tb.439, *sgyu 'phrul thal ba'i rgyud chen po*, vol. 22, 186.5-322.2.

While agreeing with his first two assignments, Pawo Tsukla Trengwa and Samdrup Dorjé reverse the order of the last two designating the *Vajra Ocean* as the sudden path of method and the *Penetrating Magical Emanation* as the gradual path of method.⁷⁰ As for the difference between a root tantra and an explanatory tantra, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima says:

As for the differences between the two, a root tantra and an explanatory [tantra], there are many opinions. However, Rok Deshek Chenpo says:

Tantras which arise first and are objects of explanation are root tantras. Other tantras which arise later and are means of explanation are explanatory tantras.

Although this is correct, root and explanatory [tantras] are not mutually exclusive, as is the case, for instance, with the supplemental tantra [of the *Secret Essence*].⁷¹

The supplemental tantra, which here is described as both a root and explanatory tantra is short five chapter text found in the *Collected Tantras* and focuses primarily on the effect state.⁷²

These thirty-four texts serve as the main scriptures for Mahāyoga. Further in-depth studies of individual members of this group would be necessary before attempting to flesh out the historical relation between them and the development of the corpus. However, I would hypothesize that a core group of six of these titles—*Union of All Buddhas*, *Secret Moon Drop*, *Secret Assembly*, *Glorious Supreme Beginning*, *Garland of Activities*, and *Chanting the Names of Mañjushrī*—probably preceded the others and were the sources upon which the

⁷⁰ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 39; *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 632.2-632.3.

⁷¹ *rtsa bshad gnyis kyi khyad par ni bzhed pa mang yang/ rog bde gshegs chen pol thog mar byung zhing bshad byar gyur pa'i rgyud rtsa rgyud/ rjes la byung zhing 'chad byed du gyur ba'i rgyud gzhan bshad rgyud ces gsungs ba ltar 'ihad la/ rtsa bshad mi 'gal tel/ rgyud phyi ma bzhin no/* (*Key to the Treasury*, 18.1-18.2).

⁷² Tk.219, vol. 14, 62.1-67.5, and Tb.426, vol. 21, 469.3-476.2.

others elaborated. These probably arose at the beginning of the eighth century C.E. Based on the orderliness of their content and structure, it appears that the *Secret Essence* series of texts came after these probably in the mid eighth century and that the short version arose first, being gradually augmented to form the medium and long version. The intertextuality between the *Secret Essence* and the other texts in the eight-fold Magical Emanation has yet to be determined.

MEANS OF ACHIEVEMENT CLASS

It is safe to assume that the second group of Mahāyoga texts, the means of achievement class (*sgrub thabs sde*), progressively came after the original tantras and that the revelations of “hidden” texts are actually Tibetan compositions seeking in part to bring coherence to the chaotic collection inherited from India. The means of achievements (*sgrubs thabs, sādhana*) are subdivided in two ways. With respect to their subject, they are subdivided into eight classes according to each means of achievement’s main deity. The eight deities consist of five supramundane deities and three mundane ones. The supramundane deities represent the five families of Buddhas that first appeared with the Yoga Tantras and became developed as independent deities in the Highest Yoga Tantras. The following chart shows these deities, their family, and the primary enlightened aspect corresponding element of profane existence associated with them.

| Deity (Skt.) | Deity (Tib.) | Family (Buddha) | Enlightened Aspect |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka | <i>jam dpal gzhin rje gshad</i> | Tathāgata (Vairocana) | Enlightened Body |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Hayagrīva or Aśvottama | <i>rta mgrin</i> <i>rta mchog</i> | Lotus (Amitābha) | Enlightened Speech |
| Heruka | <i>yang dag thugs</i> ⁷³ | Vajra (Akṣobhya) | Enlightened Mind |
| Vajrāmṛta | <i>'chi med bdud rtsi</i> | Jewel (Ratnasambhava) | Enlightened Qualities |
| Vajrakīla | <i>rdo rje phur pa</i> | Action (Amoghasiddhi) | Enlightened Activity |

While the five supramundane, or transcendent, deities are propitiated and meditated on in the quest for enlightenment, the three mundane deities are associated with worldly gains. They are taken from the Sanskrit tradition:

| Deity (Skt.) | Deity (Tib.) | Etymology |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Mātṛikā | <i>ma mo</i> | “little mothers” |
| Lokastotrapūjā | <i>mchod bstod</i> | “worldly praise and worship” |
| Vajramantrabhīru | <i>drags sngags</i> | “fierce mantras” |

The other major division of means of achievements is done regarding their textual sources. There are also of two types: transmitted means of achievement (*bka' ma*) and revealed treasures (*gter ma*). All eight deities have both transmitted and revealed texts. So, this is the division given precedence in Tibetan accounts. Of course, the two are nonetheless intimately connected, with the treasure accounts connecting all eight transmitted cycles through the figure of Padmasambhava.

⁷³ This Tibetan name is a meaning translation, probably because “*Heruka*” has no exact etymology in Sanskrit. The Tibetan, *yang dag thugs*, literally means “Genuine Mind” and is used in the typology for means of achievements. Often, Tibetan texts will simply transliterate the Sanskrit name, Heruka.

According to the Tibetan tradition, each of the eight cycles of means of achievement is associated with a different set of Indian masters by whom they were introduced into the world, generally through revelation, and from whom they were transmitted. The Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka cycle was initiated by Jñānavajra and Bodhivajra. The Hayagrīva cycle was promoted by the tantric Nāgārjuna. The Heruka cycle was begun by the Indian Siddha Hūṃkara. The Vajrāmṛta cycle originated with Vimalamitra, and the Vajrakīla cycle came from Prabhāhasti through Padmasambhava. However, even this information concerning the transmitted texts (*bka' ma*) comes through the primary treasure cycles (*gter ma*), the two being so interwoven that their isolation is impossible at the present state of scholarship.

The treasure cycles concerning the eight meditational deities were among the first treasures to be revealed in Tibet.⁷⁴ They were discovered in the 12th and 13th centuries at a time when the New School teachings were rapidly gaining popularity and in some places supplanting the Old Schools. Thus, they represent in part an attempt at reorganizing the Old Schools' mythos in a way that serves to unify their diverse teachings under a conservative, nationalistic rubric. Their reinvented mythology glorifies three figures as central to the initial spread of Buddhism: King Trisong Detsen, the Bodhisattva Śāntirakṣita, and the Tantrika Padmasambhava. The triumvirate of ruler, religious institutional leader, and magical yogin serves to unite the wide-range of religious phenomena into a single spectrum and supplies validity to the Old School teachings by appealing to the nationalistic memory of the "Yarlung dynasty". Through the elaborate mythology that arose around these three figures, they became respectively the paradigmatic patron, monk, and tantric practitioner to whom all valid teachings could be traced. Whereas the New Schools used Indian origins as the stamp of validation for doctrines, the Old Schools validated their doctrines by connecting

⁷⁴ According to Dudjom Rinpoché, the first treasure revealer was Sang-gye-la-ma (10th-11th century). Known of his treasures are extant. The second treasure revealer was Dra-ba-ngön-she (b. 1012) who discovered the four medical tantras. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 751-754.

them with one of these three figures. This is especially true of the tantric teachings, which were validated through connecting them in one way or another with the figure of Padmasambhava. The earliest, extant stages of the apotheosis of Padmasambhava are found in the treasures concerning the eight meditational deities in Mahāyoga, and it is also within these texts that the scheme organizing the chaotic corpus of sādhanas into a coherent canon and its accompanying mythology were first introduced.

The two central cycles on the eight deities are the *Gathering of All Sugatas* (*bde gshegs thams cad 'dus pa*) discovered by Nyangrel Nyimé Özer (1124-1192) and the *Consummation of Eight Secret Proclamations* (*bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs*) discovered by Guru Chöwang (1212-1270). It is in the first of these that the myth concerning the origin of the eight transmitted precepts first appears. Dudjom Rinpoché portrays this story in the following way:⁷⁵

The Bodhisattva Vajradharma did not perceive there to be anyone in the human world to who the booking containing the general and special means for attainment could be revealed for the time being, so he entrusted them to the ḍākinī Mahākarmendrāṇī. She inserted the five general tantras and the ten special tantras of the eight transmitted precepts concerning means for attainment into a casket mad of eight kind of precious gems. Having inserted the special tantras into separate caskets, she then concealed them all invisibly in the garden of the Śāṅkarakūṭa Caitya in the Śītavana charnel ground.

Later the eight great accomplished masters learned of this through their supernormal powers. They assembled there and devoted themselves to the formation of an enlightened intuition, whereby they librated a host of mundane ḍākinīs and arrogant spirits by means of vows of truth and

⁷⁵ *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 482-483.

appropriate substances. The ḍākinī Mahākarmendrānī actually arrived, owing to the power of their contemplation, of which the intention was service to others. Bringing forth the caskets, she entrusted the gold casket containing the tantra of *Mahottara* to Vimalamitra; the silver casket containing that of *Śrīheruka* to Hūṃkara; the iron casket containing *Yamāntaka* to Mañjuśrīmitra; the copper casket containing that of *Hayagrīva* to Nāgārjuna; the turquoise casket containing that of *Vajrakīla* to Padmasambhava; the bse-stone casket containing that of *Mātarah* to Dhanasaṃskṛta; the agate casket containing that of *Mundane Praise* to Rambuḡuhyā; and the zi-stone casket containing that of *Malign Mantra* to Śāntigarbha. Each of them became adept in his own subject and attained the accomplishments of the way of mantras.

From the casket made of eight kinds of precious gems there emerged the transmitted precepts comprising the tantra and esoteric instructions of the *Gathering of the Sugatas*, which subsumes all the aforementioned means for attainment at once; and this fell to master Padmasambhava.

This story serves to unite the separate meditative traditions transmitted to Tibet by the eight India masters into a single coherent tradition, whose master is the paradigmatic yogin, Padmasambhava. Even the name of the treasure cycle, *Gathering of Sugatas*, describes its intention of gathering diverse traditions under a single rubric. This was, no doubt, in response to an age of increased competition for prestige, patronage, and power, when the older traditions were being threatened by more the organized New Schools and responded with organizations of their own. The reorganization involved both adapting the Tibetan historical mythos so that ruler (Trisong Detsen) and yogin (Padmasambhava) composed an indispensable pair for the propagation of the religion and stability of the region, as well as a

reorganization of the corpus of transmitted literature into a more coherent canon, in which all esoteric practices were in some way connected to Padmasambhava. Even though the *Secret Essence Tantra* is not a revealed treasure, it was too important in the early period not to be co-opted by the Padmasambhava cult. This was done in two ways. First, they attributed the middle of three translations of the root text to Padmasambhava and Nyak Jñānakumāra.⁷⁶ Secondly, the cult attributed the anonymous but influential commentary on the *Secret Essence*, known as the *Garland of Views*, to the figure of Padmasambhava, thus indelibly etching the latter's name onto the Mahāyoga tradition.

SUMMARY OF THE SECRET ESSENCE

The *Secret Essence Tantra* is not a revealed sādhanā but belongs to the class of tantras allegedly transmitted from India. There are three primary versions of the *Secret Essence Tantra* found in the Old Schools' collections. The most popular version is the shortest, composed of 22 chapters. This is the version upon which most of the commentarial literature focuses. The middling-size version has 46 chapters and is known as "The Forty", and the largest is "The Eighty", or "The Vast (*rgyas pa*)", with its 82 chapters. Each version is divided into two sections, one concerning the maṇḍala of peaceful deities and the other on the maṇḍala of the wrathful one. In comparing the three versions, Gyurme Dorje notes that all the chapters of the standard, 22-chaptered version are also found in the middling and long editions of the text. The extra chapters found in the middling and long versions of the

⁷⁶ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 81. The first translation of the short version of the tantra was supposedly done by Buddhaghya and Vairocana, but this is probably an example of the Vairocana cult co-opting the tantra for purposes of lending itself authenticity. Neither of those two translations are extant, which is the primary reason for doubting the veracity of the tradition. The "third" translation is probably the only one two have been done. It was translated by Vimalamitra (whose close connection with Mahāyoga has already been discussed), Ma Rinchenchok, and Nyak Jñānakumāra. This is the version found in the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients*. A fourth translation of the root text was done by Thar-lo-nyi-ma-gyel-tsen and Gö-lo-tsa-wa Zhu-nu-bel in the 15th century upon the rediscovery of a Sanskrit manuscript.

tantra primarily focused on the wrathful deities, whereas the number of sections on the peaceful deities remained almost the same. Gyurme Dorje concludes:

It is therefore in the longer version that the maṇḍala of wrathful deities reaches its fullest expression, while all three versions differ far less in their presentation of the peaceful maṇḍala.⁷⁷

He adds that this is in line with Longchenpa's opinion that the shorter version was more widely disseminated because it did not elaborate on the more secret topic of the wrathful deities. In the present state of knowledge on the subject, there is not enough information to decide conclusively which version was the precursor of the others. However, there is circumstantial evidence to indicate that the shorter version is an earlier one, such as its wide circulation, its designation as the "root tantra" (*rtsa rgyud*), and the fact that Indian commentaries base themselves on the short version, though they will cite the others. Furthermore, if the history of the *Perfection of Wisdom* cycle is taken as a model, one could surmise that the Indo-Tibetan tendency for elaboration led to increasingly larger texts, since the evolution of the *Perfection of Wisdom* was from the 8,000 line version to the 25,000 line version to the 100,000 line version.⁷⁸

Whatever the reason, the twenty-two-chapter version of the *Secret Essence* was the most popular in Tibet. Its first fourteen chapters concern the maṇḍala of peaceful deities; the next seven are about the wrathful deities, the last chapter being a conclusion for the text as a whole. The Tibetan title for this version of the text as found in the Tsamdrak (*mtshams brag*) edition of the *Collected Tantras of the Old Schools* is *gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa*.

⁷⁷ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhya garbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 56-57.

⁷⁸ With the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature the period of expansion was followed by one of contraction, where progressively shorter texts emerged, such as the *Heart Sūtra*. In the tantric milieu of the *Secret Essence*, however, there were not abbreviated scriptures. Instead, the means of achievements, or *sādhana*s, held a similar position as the abridged version of the tantra.

In English, this is *Secret Essence, Definitive Suchness*.⁷⁹ The colophon of that text states that it was translated by Vimalamitra and Ma Rinchenchok.⁸⁰ However, tradition holds that Nyak Jñānakumāra also was involved in the translation, and this is corroborated by the gTing skye edition's colophon.⁸¹ It has been translated into English by Gyurme Dorje as part of his doctrinal thesis for the University of London, and this translation along with the original Tibetan manuscripts are the sources for the summary to follow.

GENERAL STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS

As mentioned above, the *Secret Essence* is divided into two unequal sections. The first fourteen chapters concern the maṇḍala of the forty-two peaceful deities, and chapters fourteen through twenty-one deal with the maṇḍala of the fifty-eight wrathful deities, who will be described in more detail in the summary of chapter fifteen. The last chapter is a general concluding chapter for the whole tantra. Together, these two groups of gods form the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities that are best known through their role in death-iconography in such works as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.⁸² According to Gyurme Dorje, the “*bka' ma*” commentarial tradition groups the chapters of both major sections into the triad of ground (*gzhi*), path (*lam*) and result (*'bras bu*), in the following way:⁸³

- Peaceful Maṇḍala
 - Ground: Chapters 1-3

⁷⁹ *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 152.7.

⁸⁰ *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 218.7.

⁸¹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaḡarbbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 81. *Secret Essence*, Tk.218, 61.6-61.7. Gyurme Dorje (80-81) says that Jikmé Lingpa in his *Catalogue to the Collected Tantras of the rNying ma* describes three chronological translations. The first was executed by Buddhaguhya and Vairocana. The second, by Padmasambhava and Nyak Jñānakumāra, and third, by Vimalamitra, Ma Rinchenchok and Nyak Jñānakumāra. However, I cannot find any other references to this. *The Blue Annals* only has the latter, and I couldn't find anything in a quick scan of the *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

⁸² This is the name commonly used in English translation for the *bar do thos grol*, or *Liberation through Hearing*.

⁸³ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaḡarbbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 59-61.

- Path: Chapters 4-13
- Result: Chapter 14
- Wrathful Maṇḍala
 - Ground: Chapter 15
 - Path: Chapters 16-20
 - Result: Chapter 21

The titles of these chapters as found in the Tsamdrak edition of the *Collected Tantras* are as follows:

1. The Introduction (*gleng gzhi'i le'u ste dang po*)
2. Generating the Ultimate and Conventional Minds of Enlightenment into Primordial Wisdom (*don dam pa dang kun rdzob kyī byang chub kyī sems ye shes su bskyed pa'i le'u ste gnyis pa*)
3. Delineating All Doctrines (*chos thams cad gtan la 'bebs pa'i le'u*)
4. Arranging the Circle That Is the Garland of Letters (*yi ge 'phreng ba'i 'khor lo bkod pa'i le'u ste bzhi pa*)
5. The Meditative Stabilization for Accomplishing the Magical Emanation Net (*sgyu 'phrul dra ba bsgrub pa'i ting nge 'dzin gyi le'u ste lnga pa*)
6. Elaborating the Maṇḍala (*dkyil 'khor spros pa'i le'u ste drug pa*)
7. Condensing the Maṇḍala and Secret Mantra (*dkyil 'khor bsdus pa dang gsang sngags kyī le'u ste bdun pa*)
8. Blessing All the Limbs into the Maṇḍala and Elaborating the Seal (*yan lag thams cad dkyil 'khor du byin gyis brlabs nas phyag rgya spros pa'i le'u ste brgyad pa*)
9. The Secret Commitments for Setting Up the Vajra (*rdo rje bkod pa'i gsang ba'i dam tshig gi le'u ste dgu pa*)
10. Bestowing Initiation (*dbang sbyin pa'i le'u ste bcu pa*)

11. The Group Maṇḍala (*tshogs*⁸⁴ *kyi dkyil 'khor gyi le'u ste bcu gcig pa*)
12. The Group Achievement (*tshogs bsgrub pa'i le'u ste bcu gnyis pa*)
13. The Essence of the Extremely Secret Quintessential Instructions (*shin tu gsang ba man ngag gi snying po'i le'u ste bcu gsum pa*)
14. The Offerings which Please (*mnyes pa'i mchod pa'i le'u ste bcu bzhi pa*)
15. Disseminating the Cloud of Maṇḍalas whose Nature is Wrathful (*khro bo rang bzhin gyi dkyil 'khor gyi sprin rnam par spros pa'i le'u ste bco lnga pa*)
16. Disseminating the Communication Maṇḍala of the Great Group of Wrathful Deities (*khro bo'i tshogs chen po'i gsung gi dkyil 'khor spros pa'i le'u ste bcu drug pa*)
17. Demonstrating the Wrathful Maṇḍala (*khro bo'i dkyil 'khor bstan pa'i le'u ste bcu bdun pa*)
18. Demonstrating the Excellent Offerings (*mchod sbyin dam pa bstan pa'i le'u ste bco brgyad pa*)
19. The Commitments (*dam tshig gi le'u ste bcu dgu pa*)
20. The Blessing of Spontaneously Present Enlightened Activity (*lhun gyis grub pa'i 'phrin las byin gyis rlob pa zhes bya ba'i le'u ste nyi shu pa*)
21. Praising the Wrathful Deities (*khro bo'i bstod pa'i le'u ste nyi shu gcig pa*)
22. Pleasing and Retaining (*mnyes pa dang yongs su gzung ba'i le'u ste nyi shu gnyis pa*)

Though not exactly parallel, the peaceful and wrathful sections have certain similarities. Chapters seven and sixteen are both on mantras; chapters six and seventeen describe their respective maṇḍalas; chapters nine and nineteen concern the peaceful and wrathful commitments; chapters eleven and twenty both deal with rituals, and fourteen and twenty-one are eulogies. Due to its position in the text as a whole, chapter fifteen cannot technically

⁸⁴ *Secret Essence*, Tb.417 has “*chags kyi dkyil 'khor*” (190.3). *Secret Essence*, Tk.218 has “*tshogs kyi dkyil 'khor*” (37.5).

be an introduction. However, it does introduce a completely different narrative (wrathful deities) from chapter one (peaceful deities) and thereby serves as the introduction to the chapters on the wrathful deities that follow. The relationship between the neatly divided peaceful and wrathful sections is a subject that merits further attention.

According to the tradition, the main teacher of the *Secret Essence* is Samantabhadra. However, he and his consort, Samantabhadrī, are only mentioned by that name in the second chapter. The primary speaker is generally called the “Tathāgata Great Joy” (*de bzhin gshogs pa dgyes pa chen po*), although his consort and retinue also participate in the dialog. Sometimes at the end of a chapter, the text will simply state, “The Tathāgata itself said this to the Tathāgata itself.”⁸⁵ Such statements emphasize one of the primary doctrines of the *Secret Essence* tradition that everything is merely the self-appearance of a monolithic primordial wisdom. This is from the enlightened perspective of its primordial purity. On the other hand, from the unenlightened perspective, impure appearances are merely the diverse appearances of ordinary mind. The obvious Mind Only overtones of such statements is another topic that merits further analysis as does the relationship of that school to the development of Buddhist Tantrism as a whole, but such is beyond the scope of the present study.

The basic structure for each chapter other than the first and the fifteenth, which are the introductions to the peaceful and wrathful sections respectively, is that the teacher, the Great Joy, will enter into a particular type of meditation, whereupon he will give a rambling and obscure discourse on a certain aspect of tantric practice or world view. These discourses do not openly lay out the practice or doctrine. Instead, the teachings are replete with heavily symbolic and metaphoric language that renders their meaning ambiguous and difficult to penetrate. The extensive commentarial material, both Indian and Tibetan, provides the keys

⁸⁵ *de bzhin gshogs pa nyid kyis de bzhin gshogs pa nyid la ched du brjod dol* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 194.4-194.5).

for interpreting these recondite statements. In the chapter summaries that follow, I have attempted to present descriptions of the narrative and discourse themselves without delving into the intricacies of the commentarial interpretations. The commentaries are, however, indispensable for even a literal understanding of the text so that some overlap is unavoidable. The point is to provide a basic understanding of the root text that is the source for the beliefs and practices of the Indo-Tibetan commentarial tradition that grew out of it.⁸⁶

CHAPTER ONE: THE FIVE MARVELS

As with many tantric texts, the first chapter of the *Secret Essence* is a standard form of introduction (*gleng gzhi, nidāna*) that sets the scene for the rest of the narrative and the discourses embedded within it.⁸⁷ The doctrinal structure through which this introductory scene is described is called the five marvels (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*), known elsewhere as the five certainties (*nges pa lnga*). These are the marvel of time, place, teacher, retinue, and teachings. Some commentators add a sixth marvel, the marvel of the compiler, but in the *Secret Essence* tradition, the compiler and the teacher are considered one and the same,

⁸⁶ The following sources were used in the construction of the chapter summaries. For the root text itself, I have referred primarily to the mTshams brag edition (Tb.417) with reference to Gyurme Dorje's critical edition of the text. (The latter was not used as the main source because it is more difficult for others to obtain and has no line numbers for precise reference to specific passages.) For an Indian commentary, I have used Vilāsavajra's *Blazing Palace* (Vilāsavajra, *dpal gsang ba snying po'i 'grel pa rin po che'i spar khab slob dpon sgeg pa'i rdo rjes mdzad pa* in *Commentaries on the Guhyagarbha tantra and other rare Nyingmapa texts from the library of Dudjom Rinpoché* (New Delhi: Sanje Dorje, 1974; I-Tib 74-900928; I-Tib-1252), 1-222). For the Zur tradition texts, I have used two chapter-commentaries, Yungtön Dor-je-bel's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning* (*dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgyud don gsal byed me long* in *bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 28, 5-589) and Lochen Dharmashrī's *Ornament to the Lord of Secrets' Intention* (*dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa gsang bdag dgongs rgyan* in *bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 32, 5-461). For Longchenpa's interpretation, I have used Gyurme Dorje's translation of Longchenpa's line-by-line commentary, *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions* (*phyogs bcu mun sel*).

⁸⁷ Sources for chapter one are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 152.7-156.4; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 16.2-35.1; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 41.6-108.3; Lochen Dharmashrī's *Ornament of the Lord of Secrets' Intention*, 51.5-97.6; Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 332-436.

because all the immediate retinue is emanated directly from the teacher.⁸⁸ The first chapter of the *Secret Essence* is fashioned in such a way that each of these five marvels is individually and serially described. Because this chapter establishes the framework for the rest of the narrative and because the characters and themes touched on are relevant to the general teaching of the *Secret Essence*, the introduction will be described in greater detail than the remaining chapters. To demonstrate how the author of the introduction consciously constructed the chapter using the outline of the five marvels, the passages that relate to each marvel will be quoted in full, followed by a summary of their interpretation according to the Zur tradition. The order of the five marvels as they appear in the text of the introduction is time, place, teacher, retinue, and teaching.

THE MARVEL OF THE TIME

At the time these words are explained...⁸⁹

Unlike the Sūtras which explicitly situated themselves in a historical context with the preface of “Thus have I [Ānanda] heard...”, the *Secret Essence* is unusually vague about its temporal origins. It begins with the ambiguous phrase, “At the time these words are explained...” Some detractors of the *Secret Essence* cited this unusual introduction as one of the defects that proves the text is not an authentic tantra.⁹⁰ They claimed it had a corrupt introduction. However, proponents easily refuted this by citing other examples of tantras with unusual beginnings that these detractors hold to be authentic, such as the *Litany of the Name of*

⁸⁸ This is true in that Vajrapāṇi (the compiler) is considered to be an emanation of Samantabhadra (the teacher), as all deities are. Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 337.

⁸⁹ *‘di skad bshad pa’i dus nal* (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 182).

⁹⁰ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 64. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 916.

Mañjuśrī, the *Wheel of Bliss*, and the *Wheel of Time*.⁹¹ The Tibetan commentarial tradition on the *Secret Essence* refers to the time referred to by this statement as a kind of generic time. In discussing the inner interpretation of this phrase from among the outer, inner, and secret uncommon introductions, Yungtönpa says:

“At the time” is the marvel of time. *The Ocean* [an explanatory tantra] says:

The time of bliss is devoid of former and latter.

It abides as the entity of all three times.

When primordial wisdom is produce there is no apprehension of the three times. It is an inconceivable time, the time [of this tantra’s action].⁹²

Similarly, Lochen Dharmashrī explains in his *Ornament to the Thought*:

Here, the phrase, “at the time...”, illustrates the equality of the four times, because it transcends the certainty of one particular time, since the teacher, or Complete Enjoyment Body, teaches the doctrine in a permanent, continuous cycle. This expresses the greatness of it not being an ordinary time.⁹³

The four times, he refers to, are the three times—past, present, and future—plus an “undetermined time”.⁹⁴ The underlying equality of these different times is the marvel of the time (*dus phun sum tshogs pa*) when the *Secret Essence* was spoken. It is continuously and forever being taught. A comparison of the above passage with Eliade’s description of mythic time shows obvious similarities:

⁹¹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 346 and Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 59.6.

⁹² Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 44.6-45.vol. 1, *dus na zhes pa dus phun sum tshogs pa stel rgya mtsho las/ bde ba’i dus nyid snga phyi brall/ ldus gsum kun gyi ngo bor gnas zhes pas/ ye shes skyes pa’i dus su dus gsum du ’dzin pa med pa ni bsam gyis mi khyab pa’i dus te dus sol*

⁹³ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 59.1-59.2: *’dir dus na zhes pa dus bzhi mnyam pa nyid mtshon pa stel ston pa longs spyod rdzogs pa’i sku ni rtag pa rgyun gyi ’khor lor chos ston pas dus res ’ga’ ba gcig gi nges pa las ’das pa’i phyir/ ldus thun mong ma yin pa’i che ba smos pa’ol*

⁹⁴ In Tibetan these are respectively *’das pa*, *da lta ba*, *ma ’ongs pa*, and *ma nges pa’i dus*.

Religious man periodically finds his way into mythical and sacred time, re-enters the *time of origin*, the time that “floweth not” because it does not participate in profane temporal duration, because it is composed of an *eternal present*, which is indefinitely recoverable.⁹⁵

The marvel of the *Secret Essence’s* time is not “an ordinary time”, that is “it does not participate in profane temporal duration.” It “transcends the certainty of one particular time” because it is taught “in a permanent, continuous cycle.” In other words, “it is composed on an *eternal present*, which is indefinitely recoverable.” Lochen Dharmashri’s description of the marvelous time was penned almost a millennium after the composition of the tantra itself. Yet, the neatly constructed introduction demonstrates significant authorial care and intention. It is not outlandish to suppose that the authors of the tantra intended to indicate a mythic time through changing the introductory phrase to “At the time these words were explained” from the norm, “Thus have I heard”. The tantra itself teaches that enlightenment is eternally present and constantly accessible. The enlightened teachings of the tantra become accessible in this way only if the tantra is set in a time (and place) that is “indefinitely recoverable” through meditation. Setting the tantra’s discourse in a mythic time allows for continual, direct access to its teachings, as well as periodic regeneration of the doctrine through opening an avenue for new revelation.

THE MARVEL OF THE TEACHER

At the time these words are explained, the Tathāgata is a genuinely complete Buddha, a transcendent conqueror, the one of great enjoyment, the vajra-identity of the enlightened body, speech, and mind of all the Tathāgatas in the ten directions and the four times, whose nature is not distinct, not

⁹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Narcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 88.

different, and indifferentiable from everything, totally, wholly, and without exception.⁹⁶

The teacher of the *Secret Essence* is Samantabhadra, who is also described in the commentarial tradition as the “teacher belonging to the sixth lineage” (*ston pa rigs drug pa*).⁹⁷ The sixth lineage is the single highest family above and beyond the five families of Buddhas mentioned above. The teacher of the sixth lineage is Samantabhadra, who is the nature of all Buddhas. On this point, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima says the following:

When all the conquerors of the ten directions and four times are condensed, they are included in the five families [of Buddhas], and all five of those are also included within [the teacher of] the sixth family. Thus, he is the lord of all [Buddha] families. [This] is also called “Having a nature free from being one or many.”⁹⁸

The teacher of the *Secret Essence* is a manifestation of the reality body (*chos sku, dharmakāya*) and, while it is said he possesses “great enjoyment”, he is not to be confused with the Complete Enjoyment Body (*longs sku, sambhogakāya*). Following Vilāsavajra's *Blazing Palace*, most commentators divide the tantra's description of the teacher, cited above, into seven qualities:

1. He is a Tathāgata.
2. He is genuinely complete.
3. He is a Buddha.

⁹⁶ *de bzhin gshegs pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das/ longs spyod chen po byogs bcu dus bzhi'i de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku dang gsung dang thugs rdo rje'i bdag nyid/ ma lus mi lus lus pa med pa thams cad dang so so ma yin tha mi dad dbyer med pa'i rang bzhin tel* (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 182).

⁹⁷ *Key to the Treasury*, 11.2.

⁹⁸ *phyogs bcu dus bzhi'i rgyal ba thams cad bsdu na rigs lngar 'du zhing lnga po'ang rigs drug pa la 'du bas tigs thams cad kyi bdag por bzhus pa stel gcig dang du ma dang bral ba'i rang bzhin zhes kyang bya'ol* (*Key to the Treasury*, 36.1-36.2).

4. He is a Transcendent Victor.
5. He is the one who has great enjoyment.
6. He is the vajra-identity of the enlightened form, speech, and minds of all the Tathāgatas in the ten directions and four times, and
7. He is one whose nature is not distinct, not different, and indifferentiable from everything, totally, wholly, and without exception.⁹⁹

He is a Tathāgata, or “one who has gone thus”, in that he has arrived at the “basic object of knowledge, the unmediated abiding reality, or disposition.”¹⁰⁰ He is a genuinely complete, because the resultant state is spontaneously complete, since there is nothing to abandon in the wisdom of non-duality.¹⁰¹ He is also a Buddha (*sangs rgyas*). The Sanskrit word, Buddha, is derived from the root, *budh-*, to awaken, and means “awakened one”. The Tibetan equivalent, on the other hand, broadens the meaning of the word. *sang* not only means “awakened” but also “cleansed”, while *rgyas* means “extended”. Tibetan etymologies of the word, therefore, tend to be somewhat creative. Yungtönpa, for instance, says:

As for the term, “*sangs rgyas* (Buddha)”, as he has cleansed away (*sangs*) the bad views of those on the [Bodhisattva] grounds and so forth, self-arising primordial wisdom spreads everywhere, and since he has mastered the level of the highest primordial wisdom, it extends (*rgyas*) [everywhere]. Both of those have the nature of primordial wisdom without middle or end.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace (spar khab)*, 17.6-19.5. See also Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 53.4-60.2, and Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 60.4-66.2.

¹⁰⁰ *gzhi shes bya gshis kyi gnas lugs ji lta ba bzhin du’ol* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 54.3).

¹⁰¹ *yang dag par rdzogs pa zhes pa nil gnyis med kyi ye shes la spang bya med pas yang dag par ’bras bu lhun gyis rdzogs pa’i don no/* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 54.6).

¹⁰² *sangs rgyas zhes pa nil sa pa la sogs pa’i lta ba ngan pa sangs nas rang byung gi ye shes kun tu gdal te ye shes bla ma’i sa non pas na rgyas pa ste de ka ye shes mtha’ dbus dang bral ba’i rang bzhin no/* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 55.2-55.3).

He is also a transcendent victor (*bcom ldan 'das*), because he has subdued the four demons, possesses the qualities of greatness, and has passed beyond all the limiting characteristics.¹⁰³ He is the great one who enjoys (*long spyod chen po*) all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa without having to adopt or abandon anything.¹⁰⁴ As the sixth teacher, Samantabhadra, Lord of All Lineages, he has five good qualities each of enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. With these twenty-five, he combines all the good qualities of the Buddhas of the other five lineages, or families, into a single vajra-identity that is the nature of them all. Finally, as for the lord of this tantra, Samantabhadra, who is of the sixth lineage, his awareness is not different from the illusory conventional truth of all phenomena and all beings in the three realms, the three times, or the three places,¹⁰⁵ and ultimately he is not different from the ultimate truth of these things being uncreated. His nature is the third truth of the indifferenciability of the conventional and ultimate.¹⁰⁶ This is how the commentarial tradition following the Zur system interprets the opening passage of the *Secret Essence* on the marvel of the teacher.

As this is a higher tantric text, Samantabhadra is not alone but is accompanied by his queen, or consort (*btsun mo*), Samantabhadrī. She is not described in the introductory chapter; nor is Samantabhadra himself actually mentioned by name, since the teacher described here is beyond such sexual distinctions. Both of those names first appear at the

¹⁰³ *bcom ldan 'das zhes pa'i 'bru rgyas par phyag gi skabs su bshad zin la/ bsdus pa tsam bshad na bdud bzhi bcom/ che ba'i yon tan dang ldan/ mshan nyid kyi mtha' kun las 'das pa stel* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 55.3-55.4). The four demons are the demon of afflictive emotions (*nyon mongs pa'i bdud*), the demon of the aggregates (*phung po'i bdud*), the demon of death (*'che bdag gi bdud*), and the demon of the deities (*lha'i bu yi bdud*).

¹⁰⁴ *longs spyod chen po zhes pa nil 'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa'i dngos po gnyis la longs spyod bzhin du blang dor gyi spyod yul dang bral zhing gzhan las khyad par du gyur pas na chen po stel de ka mnyam pa nyid du mngon du mdzad kyang spyod yul dang bral ba'i rang bzhin no/* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 55.5-55.6).

¹⁰⁵ The three realms are the desire realm (*'dod khams*), the form realm (*gzugs khams*) and the formless realm (*gzugs med khams*). The three times are the past (*'das pa*), the present (*da lta*) and the future (*ma 'ong ba*). The three places are above the earth (*sa bla*), below the earth (*sa 'og*), and on the earth (*sa steng*).

¹⁰⁶ *'dod khams gzugs khams gzugs med gsum gyis bsdus pa'i sems can dang chos thams cad dang rgyud kyi bdag po drug pa kun tu bzang po rig pa sgyu ma las so so ma yin don dam ma skeyes pa las tha mi dad bden pa gsum pa dbyer med pa'i rang bzhin no/* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 57.6-58.1).

beginning of the second chapter. Nonetheless, Samantabhadrī has an important role in the tantra, as the counterpart to Samantabhadra. As an integral aspect of the teacher and therefore part of the marvel of the teacher, she deserves to be mentioned here, though the Indo-Tibetan commentaries do not discuss her in this context. Whereas Samantabhadra is depicted as blue, Samantabhadrī is shown as a white woman. Both are naked and in tantric sexual union. Their union is the symbol for the secret essence, which is the inextricable union of method (Samantabhadra) and wisdom (Samantabhadrī). She is considered to be the “source of the origination of all maṇḍalas”.¹⁰⁷ She is also symbolic of the expanse of reality (*chos dbying, dharmadhātu*), whereas Samantabhadra is the symbol of primordial wisdom (*ye shes, jñāna*). In this sense, she can be seen as continuing the role of Prajñāpāramitā, the Goddess of the Perfection of Wisdom, but in a more intimate and central way. For, despite the fact that the tradition all but ignores her in its homages and panegyrics (as the language tends to reduce the dual-sexed figure to the masculine), she is literally foremost in the graphic depictions of “Samantabhadra”, being on top and in front. She is central to these images, as they symbolically portray the union of opposites that is the indescribable essence of all and they cannot do that without her.

THE MARVEL OF THE PLACE

The next passage of the introduction to the *Secret Essence* describes the place where Samantabhadra is and where the rest of the narrative will unfold. This is the marvel of the place (*gnas phun sum tshogs pa*):

In the realm of the Highest Pure Land, there glows a wheel of primordial wisdom, which is baseless and without measure. In order to extend itself as immeasurable good qualities, the primordial wisdom becomes square [in

¹⁰⁷ Lauf, *Secret Doctrines*, 102.

shape], an inestimable mansion of blazing jewels completely unhindered in the ten vast directions. It is adorned by the superior primordial wisdoms suddenly [appearing] as jewels. The sole existing primordial wisdom, which is not different from all the maṇḍalas of the four times and ten directions, comes together at the peak [of this mansion]....

[The mansion] has thresholds for entering by way of the four liberations and landings [made] of the eight liberations. Without inside and outside, it is thoroughly within. In it, there are a lion-throne of fearlessness, an elephant-throne of strength, a horse-throne of magical display, a peacock-throne of power, a Garuḍa-throne of non-obstruction [all of them with] a sun and a moon disk naturally radiating light, resting on a precious, unblemished lotus.¹⁰⁸

The location (*gnas*) for the events of the narrative is in the “highest pure land” (*’og min, akaṅiṣṭa*). This is not the land by the same name that is the highest level of the Form Realm, part of cyclic existence, but is one up from that.¹⁰⁹ However, according to Lochen Dharmashrī, this does not necessarily mean that the highest pure land of the *Secret Essence* is physically higher than the highest level of the Form Realm. Rather, it refers to an

¹⁰⁸ *’og min gyi gnas mtha’ dang dbus med pa nal gzhi tshad med pa’i ye shes kyī ’khor lo gsal ba lal ye shes rin po che ’bar ba’i gzhal yas khangl rgya phyogs bcur yongs su ma chad pa/ yon tan dpag to med pa rgyas pa’i phyir gru bzhir gyur pal lhaḡ pa’i ye shes rin po che’i glo ’bur gyis mdzes pal rtse mo phyogs bcu dus bzhi’i sangs rgyas kyī dkyil ’khor ma lus pa thams cad/ so so ma yin ngo bo nyid gcig pa’i ye shes kun tu ’khyil pa/... rnam par thar pa bzhi’i sgo nas ’jug pa’i sgo khyud can/ rnam par thar pa bryad kyī rta babs dang ldan pa/ phyi dang nang med pa kun tu yang nang du gyur pa nal mi ’jigs pa sengs ge’i khri dang / stobs glang po che’i khri dang / rdzu ’phrul rta yi khri dang / dbang rma bya’i khri dang / thos pa med pa nam mkha’ lding gi khri dang / rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal ba nyi zla’i dkyil ’khor dang / gos pa med pa padma rin po che’i gdan la / (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 182-183).*

¹⁰⁹ *’og min gyi gnas ’di ni gzugs kham kyī rtse mo ’jig rten gnas kyī ’og min las nyis ’gyur gyis spags pa* (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 70.4-70.5). The Highest Pure Land (*’og min*) that is the highest level of the Form Realm is listed as one of the “Five Pure Places” at the upper levels of the Fourth Concentration in Leah Zahler, Lati Rinpoché, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1983), 44.

advancement of awareness onto the path of seeing, since the pure land of a Buddha is the self-appearance in which s/he abides and not some separate place from the realms that appear impure to ordinary beings.¹¹⁰ Being the extremely pure sphere of reality (*chos kyi dbying*), it is not limited in any way without boundaries or a center but is as inconceivable as space.¹¹¹

In this realm, the five primordial wisdoms appear as an inestimable palace (*gzhal med khang, vimāna*). Each of the primordial wisdoms becomes one of the five parts of the palace—its four walls and center. These are the result of primordial wisdom appearing on its own as shape and color. As a sign that these primordial wisdoms interpenetrate each other, the walls and center are bedecked with jewels and other ornaments composed of the other four primordial wisdoms.¹¹² As an indication that the whole palace is enveloped in the sphere of the primordial wisdom that is the sole entity, the self-knowing primordial wisdom of enlightened mind appears on its own as all the maṇḍalas of all the Buddhas at the very peak of the palace.¹¹³ The passage continues with a litany of various types of ornaments, which for the sake of brevity will be passed over here.

There follows a description of the interior of the palace, which paradoxically is without the distinction of inside and outside. As with most maṇḍalas, it is entered by way of four gates. Here the four gates are said to symbolize the four liberations (*thar pa bzhi*). These are the three common entrances to liberation—emptiness (*stong pa nyid*), signlessness (*mtshan m med pa*), and wishlessness (*smon pa med pa*)—plus the uncommon (i.e., tantric) entrance—the naturally clear light (*rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba*).¹¹⁴ By way of these four, one spontaneously enters into great enlightenment.¹¹⁵ Just inside and just outside each gate, there is a landing and a set of stair for mounting and dismount a horse (*rta babs*), these eight

¹¹⁰ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 72.4-72.6.

¹¹¹ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 74.4-74.5.

¹¹² Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 751.-76.1.

¹¹³ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 76.1-76.3.

¹¹⁴ Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 75.1. SDGG, 77.6-78.1.

¹¹⁵ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 77.6-78.1.

landings the eight approaches to liberation (*thar pa brgyad*). Or, as Lochen Dharmashrī describes them, the eight landings represent “signs of entering into liberations from cyclic existence through having traveled the eight vehicles.”¹¹⁶ Yungtönpa states that these eight vehicles are the seven vehicles from Mahāyoga on down plus the vehicle of gods and humans (*lha mi'i theg pa*).¹¹⁷ Traditionally, however, the eight liberations are eight paths that liberate one “from the manifest activity of specific afflictions” and are included in the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment.¹¹⁸ This is how Longchenpa interprets them.¹¹⁹

The palace is described as without an inside or an outside, because it is nothing but the appearance of self-knowing primordial wisdom's energy. For the same reason, it is also described as “thoroughly within” (*kun tu yang nang du gyur pa*).¹²⁰ Inside it, there are five thrones, which are, according to the commentarial tradition, Bodhisattvas on the last ground who have emanated themselves in the form of a lion, elephant, horse, peacock, and Garuḍa.¹²¹ They are situated respectively in the center, east, south, west, and north sections within the palace, or maṇḍala, and they symbolize in turn the four fearlessnesses (*mi 'jigs pa bzhi*) of enlightened mind, the ten strengths (*stobs bcu*) of enlightened body, the four supports of magic (*rdzu 'phrul gyi rkang pa bzhi*) that are enlightened qualities, the ten powers (*dbang bcu*) of enlightened speech, and the four enlightened activities which are not

¹¹⁶ *'khor ba las rnam par thar pa theg pa brgyad bgrod nas 'jug pa'i rtags* (Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 78.4-78.5).

¹¹⁷ *lha mi'i theg pa zhes bgrangs pa'i theg pa brgyad kyang yin la/ YG*, 76.2.

¹¹⁸ Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 207. The eight liberations (*rnam thar brgyad*) are: 1. Liberation of the embodied viewing form (*gzugs can gzugs la lta ba'i rnam thar*), 2. Liberation of the disembodied viewing form (*gzugs med gzugs la lta ba'i rnam thar*), 3. Liberation of Beauty (*sdug pa'i rnam thar*), 4. Liberation whose source is infinite space (*nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched kyī rnam thar*), 5. Liberation whose source is infinite consciousness (*rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched kyī rnam thar*), 6. Liberation whose source is nothing whatsoever (*ci yang med pa'i skye mched kyī rnam thar*), 7. Liberation whose source is neither discrimination or non-discrimination (*'du shes med 'du shes med min skye mched kyī rnam thar*), 8. Liberation that is the cessation of consciousness and feeling (*shes dang tshor ba 'gog pa'i rnam thar*).

¹¹⁹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 381.

¹²⁰ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 79.4.

¹²¹ Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 76.6-77.3. Yungtönpa quotes both the explanatory tantra, *The Ocean*, and Vilāsavajra's *Blazing Palace* in support of this assertion.

obstructed by attachment to liberating migrators (*phrin las 'gro ba sgröl la chags pa dang thogs pa med pa*).¹²² On each the thrones, there are three cushions—a sun disc, a moon disc, and a lotus, each symbolizing an aspect of the naturally radiant enlightened mind. The sun disc symbolizes the wisdom that is the lack of inherent nature; the moon disc symbolizes method that is unhindered, and the lotus symbolizes that the enlightened mind is undefiled by faults. They are called “precious thrones” because they represent the spontaneous establishment of everything that is necessary and all that is desired, like wish-fulfilling jewels to the hopes of trainees.¹²³

THE MARVEL OF THE RETINUE

Sitting on the thrones in the palace made of primordial wisdom, just described, are the occupants of the maṇḍala. They are the marvel of the retinue (*'khor phun sum tshogs pa*). They consist of the five Buddhas, their consorts, the sixteen male and female Bodhisattvas, the four gatekeepers and their four consorts. In the enumeration of forty-two peaceful deities, the six sages are also included, but their description will be postponed until the summary of chapter three, where they first appear. As mentioned above, the teacher of the maṇḍala is Samantabhadra, Lord of the sixth lineage. He is not included in the standard list of five Buddhas. Rather, he encompasses them all. In the *Secret Essence*, the five Buddha families are considered to be emanations of Samantabhadra, i.e., their minds and realization are identical to his. They are called “the retinue of non-dual intention” (*dgongs pa gnyis su med pa'i 'khor*), meaning that they are emanations of the teacher and possess the same mental continuum as his.¹²⁴ So, in the context of the tantra being taught, Akṣobhya, who is normally

¹²² Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 79.4-80.6. Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 77.6-78.4.

¹²³ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 80.6-81.1. Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 79.1-79.3.

¹²⁴ Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 81.6. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima calls this group “the retinue whose nature is non-dual [with that of the teacher] (*rang bzhin gnyis su med pa'i 'khor*)” (*Key to the Treasury*, 38.4-

considered by the Zur tradition to be the main deity of the maṇḍala, is in fact part of Samantabhadra's retinue, sitting to the east in front of Samantabhadra who sits in the center.¹²⁵

THE FIVE BUDDHAS AND THEIR CONSORTS

The introduction thus continues with a description of the five main Buddhas in the maṇḍala—Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi—though the reader will notice that they are not mentioned by name:

On these precious thrones, there appears the various [forms of] enlightened body, speech, and mind everywhere, whose bodies are without front or back, who appear facing forward from all sides, who have the major and minor marks [of a Buddha] and are inconceivable. Through the mode of conduct in which their two feet of method and wisdom are equally [placed], they sit in the lotus-posture. These are the following transcendent victors: the Tathāgata King of Consciousness, the Tathāgata the King of Form, the Tathāgata the King of Sensation, the Tathāgata King of Perception, and the Tathāgata King of Mental Formations. They all sparkle in their respective colors of sky-blue, white, yellow, poppy [red], and green.¹²⁶

38.5). They are contrasted to “the retinue with special awareness” (*rig pa khyad par can gyi 'khor*), who are described as Bodhisattvas on the final stage of their paths.

¹²⁵ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 81.5.

¹²⁶ ... *rin po che'i gdan la/ sku mdun dang rgyab med pal thams cad du zhal thal le bar gsal zhing mtshan dang dpe byad du ldan pal/ bsam gyis mi khyab pa thams cad du/ sku gsung thugs sna tshogs par kun tu snang bal thabs dang shes rab kyi zhabs gnyis mnyam pa'i brtul zhugs kyi skyil mo krung du bzhuks pal/ ye shes drug gi phyag ye shes rin po che'i phyag rgya 'bar ba can/ sku gsung thugs bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i dbu gsum dang ldan pal/ bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshogs pa rnam par shes pa'i rgyal po dang/ de bzhin gshogs pa gzugs kyi rgyal po dang/ de bzhin gshogs pa tshor ba'i rgyal po dang/ de bzhin gshogs pa 'du shes kyi rgyal po dang/ de bzhin gshogs pa 'du byed kyi rgyal po dang/ de dag kun kyang mthing kha dang/ dkar po dang/ ser po dang/ le brgan dang/ ljang khu'i mdog tu 'tsher bal (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaḥarabhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 183).*

The five Buddhas, who are sitting on the five thrones in the center of the celestial palace, are emanations of the enlightened body, speech, and mind of Samantabhadra. They therefore have the miraculous qualities of appearing to face forward in all directions and possess the major and minor marks of a Buddha. They sit in the lotus position as a symbol of the interpenetration of method and wisdom. However, they are not mentioned by name. Instead, they are designated as the King of Consciousness, the King of Form, the King of Sensation, the King of Perception, and the King of Compositional Mental Factors. The analogy of the five Buddhas with the five aggregates appears in many tantric scriptures.¹²⁷ However, in this text the fact that the five Buddhas—Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi—are not named explicitly creates a certain ambiguity.

The colors associated with each Buddha are the standard set of colors described in the Buddhist tantric tradition. In most iconic representations, Akṣobhya is blue; Vairocana is white; Ratnasambhava is yellow; Amitābha is red, and Amoghasiddhi is green.¹²⁸ With these correspondences, it is natural to assume that Akṣobhya is intended by the name King of Consciousness and so forth down the line, since this is the order of colors listed in the tantra itself. Indeed, such an interpretation matches what is found in the *Hevajra* tradition discussed by Snellgrove,¹²⁹ that of the *Secret Assembly* described by Wayman,¹³⁰ as well as the

¹²⁷ Cf. *Secret Assembly Tantra*, chapter 17, verse 50:

*pāñcaskandhāḥ samāsenā pañca buddhāḥ prakīrtitāḥ/
vajrāyatanānyeva bodhisattvāgryamaṇḍalamiti/*

- *Guhyasamāja Tantra or Tathāgataguhyaka*, ed. by Dr. S. Bagchi, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts No. 9, (Darbhanga, Bihar: Mithila Institute, 1965), 111, l. 5-6.

*/mdor na phung po lnga mams ni/
/sangs rgyas lngar ni rab tu bsgrags/
/rdo rje skye mched nyid dag kyang/
/byang chub sems dpa'i dkyil 'khor ro/*

- Tb.409, vol. 18, 920.5-920.6.

¹²⁸ Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism: Their History, Iconography and Progressive Evolution Through the Northern Buddhist Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928, 2nd edition; reprint New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978), 31-42.

¹²⁹ See diagrams in Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra*, 127, 129.

schemes found in Detlef Ingo Lauf's work on the Tibetan Books of the Dead¹³¹ and in Tucci's *The Theory and Practice of the Maṇḍala*.¹³² However, this is assuming that the order of colors in the list corresponds one for one to the order in the list of names, King of Consciousness, etc. Such seems a logical assumption until that method is extended to the list of thrones discussed above. The thrones are given in the following order: lion, elephant, horse, peacock, and garuḍa. When these are correlated to the Buddha *generally* associated with each type of throne, the following order is produced: Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi, the first two being switched. Vairocana's throne is generally the lion, while Akṣobhya's is the elephant.¹³³ A similar confusion emerges, when we look at the list of consorts that follows.

They are non-dual with the assembly of their consorts, that is, the excellent consorts—the sphere of appearance, the sphere of hardness, the sphere of pliancy, the sphere of warmth, and the sphere of mobility. And so forth. Being thus, they are limitlessly infused with the whole sphere of reality. They are, for example, like sesame seeds completely infused [with oil].¹³⁴

To understand this list, it is necessary to penetrate two levels of symbolism. In general worldview of the higher tantras, the consorts of the five Buddhas are equated with the five basic elements that compose the universe: space, earth, fire, water, and air. This principle is similarly applied here. However, the elements are mentioned by their function rather than

¹³⁰ Wayman, *The Yoga of the Guhyasamāja*, 211.

¹³¹ Detlef Ingo Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, translated by Graham Parkes (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 113.

¹³² Giuseppe Tucci, *The Theory and Practice of the Maṇḍala*, translated by Alan Houghton Brodrick (New York: Dover Publications, 2001), 53.

¹³³ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, 31, 36.

¹³⁴ *btsun mo dam pa snang ba'i dbyings dang / sra ba'i dbyings dang / mnyen pa'i dbyings dang / dro ba'i dbyings dang / bskyod pa'i dbyings la sogs pa btsun mo'i tshogs dang gnyis su med par chos kyi dbyings kun tu mtha' yas par khyab pa nil 'di lta stel dper na til gyi gang bu bzbin du gang nas khyab bar bzugs sol* (Gyurme Dorje, "The Guhyagarbhatantra and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 183-184).

their name. The realm of appearance is space; that of hardness, earth; that of pliancy, water; that of heat, fire; and that of motility, air. As for the correspondence between the goddesses and the elements, the *Secret Essence* itself provides the correlations in its second chapter:

Earth and Water are Māmakī and Locanā.

Fire and Air are Pāṇḍarā and [Samaya]tārā.

Space is [Ākāśa]dhātviśvarī.¹³⁵

Matching these correlations with the list of “realms” given as names for the goddess in the first chapter, their order of appearance is Ākāśadhātviśvarī, Māmakī, Locanā, Pāṇḍarā, and Tārā. This leads to even greater confusion because in general the consorts are associated with the Buddhas in the following way:¹³⁶

Ākāśadhātviśvarī → Vairocana
 Māmakī → Akṣobhya
 Locanā → Ratnasambhava
 Pāṇḍarā → Amitābha
 Tārā → Amoghasiddhi

Correlating all the lists discussed so far into a single chart, we arrive at the following table of correspondences as found in the text itself:

| Buddha | Location | Throne | Color | Element | Consort |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| King of Consciousness | Center | Lion | Blue | Space | Ākāśadhātviśvarī |
| King of Form | East | Elephant | White | Earth | Māmakī |
| King of Sensation | South | Horse | Yellow | Water | Locanā |

¹³⁵ *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 156.6-157.1. This agrees with other interpretations such as Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, 105-109.

¹³⁶ Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamājatantra*, 132. Lauf, *op. cit.*, and Getty, *op. cit.*, assign Māmakī to Ratnasambhava and Locanā to Akṣobhya.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|---------|-------|------|---------|
| King of Perception | West | Peacock | Red | Fire | Pāṇḍarā |
| King of Formations | North | Garuḍa | Green | Air | Tārā |

From this chart, two competing versions of the maṇḍala emerge. Based on the order of the aggregates and colors, the primary or central deity could be seen as Akṣobhya with Vairocana in the secondary eastern position. On the other hand, based on the thrones and the goddesses, Vairocana could be seen as the central deity with Akṣobhya in the east. Indeed, these two interpretations of the *Secret Essence's* maṇḍala appear in the Tibetan commentarial tradition. Yungtönpa and Lochen Dharmashrī give the following interpretation of the names of the Buddhas in the tantra:¹³⁷

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| King of Consciousness | = | Vajrasattva/Akṣobhya ¹³⁸ |
| King of Form | = | Vairocana |
| King of Sensation | = | Ratnasambhava |
| King of Perception | = | Amitābha |
| King of Compositional Factors | = | Amoghasiddhi |

This is the system followed in general by the proponents of the Zur tradition (*zur lugs*), so named because it follows the interpretation of three patriarchs of the Zur family. A different system advocated by Longchenpa, on the other hand, switches the first two deities to produce the following correspondences:¹³⁹

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------|
| King of Consciousness | = | Vairocana |
| King of Form | = | Akṣobhya |
| King of Sensation | = | Ratnasambhava |
| King of Perception | = | Amitābha |

¹³⁷ Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 82.3-84.4. Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 83.5-84.2.

¹³⁸ Vajrasattva is associated with the Vajra family, i.e., the family of Akṣobhya.

¹³⁹ Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 420.

King of Compositional Factors = Amoghasiddhi

The King of Consciousness is assumed by both groups to be the central deity of the maṇḍala, and so the controversy over the interpretation of the name is a disagreement over who is the central deity. The choice of either Akṣobhya or Vairocana as the central deity has important ramifications for the classification of the tantra and therefore for the interpretation of the *Secret Essence* as a whole and is directly related to whether the *Secret Essence* is interpreted as a Mahāyoga or an Atiyoga tantra. For, in general, the Mahāyoga tantras have Akṣobhya in their center position, while the Atiyoga tantras exclusively reserve this position for Vairocana.

THE SIXTEEN BODHISATTVAS

The remainder of the retinue, the eight great Bodhisattvas, their female counterparts, the four gatekeepers and their consorts, are also known as the “retinue with special awareness” (*rig pa khyad par can gyi 'khor*).¹⁴⁰ In the usual style, the text lists these through metaphoric names. These names are derived from different aspects of the sense perception process along with certain important facets of the Buddhist worldview. The next passage of the introduction names the sixteen male and female Bodhisattvas, the identification of which can vary significantly between hermeneutic traditions:¹⁴¹

Then, there is the assembly of the great Bodhisattva Vajra-Seeing, the great Bodhisattva Vajra-Hearing, the great Bodhisattva Vajra-Smelling, and the great Bodhisattva Vajra-Tasting and their Consorts—What-Is-Seen, What-Is-Heard, What-Is-Smelled, and What-Is-Tasted. The great Bodhisattva Vajra-Seer, the great Bodhisattva Vajra-Hearer, the great Bodhisattva Vajra-

¹⁴⁰ Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 29.5.

¹⁴¹ Detlef Ingo Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 114-115, where he says that there is an “irregularity (independent of the tradition of the gurus) in the assignment of the eight kinds of awareness to the individual Bodhisattvas.” Dismissing the importance of these discrepancies, he consults merely a single text.

Smeller, the great Bodhisattva Vajra-Taster and their consorts—the Past, the Present, the Future, and the Unpredictable Time¹⁴² are there....¹⁴³

The two systems of interpretation, the Zur tradition and that following Longchenpa, agree on the correlations drawn from these names to the standard list of Bodhisattvas, guardians, and their consorts, as demonstrated in the tables below.

The eight Bodhisattvas and their eight consorts are designated with the names of four of the sense consciousnesses, organs, and objects with the addition of the four times. Even the correlations themselves are not obvious, as the designations for the consciousnesses and the organs are not explicit. For instance, with regard to the act of seeing, the names Vajra-Sight, Vajra-Seer, and What-is-seen are used. According to the Yungtönpa's commentary, "sight" (*mtshong ba*) refers to the visual consciousness; "seer" (*mtshong byed*), to the visual organ, or the eye; and "What is seen" (*mtshong bar bya*), to the visual object.¹⁴⁴ The same applies with the other senses used. Notably, only four of the five senses are used in these analogies. The fifth sense, touch, is reserved for the gate-keepers of the maṇḍala, which will be discussed in the next section. The sixteen Bodhisattvas are:¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 334.

¹⁴³ *de nas byang chub chen po rdo rje mtshong ba dang / byang chub chen po rdo rje thos pa dang / byang chub chen po rdo rje snom pa dang / byang chub chen po rdo rje myong ba dang / bstun mo mtshong par bya ba dang / mnyan par bya ba dang / bsnam par bya ba dang / myong bar bya ba'i tshogs dang / byang chub chen po rdo rje mtshong byed dang / byang chub chen po rdo rje thos byed dang / byang chub chen po rdo rje snom byed dang / byang chub chen po rdo rje myong byed dang / bstun mo 'das pa dang / da ltar dang / 'byung ba dang / ma byon pa'i tshogs dang /* (Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 184).

¹⁴⁴ Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 89.1-89.6.

¹⁴⁵ The correspondences are taken from YG, 88.6ff. But, as noted above, these match those given by Longchenpa (Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 424-427).

| Name in <i>SN</i> (masc.) | Standard Name | Name in <i>SN</i> (fem.) | Standard Name |
|---|--|--|--|
| Vajra-Seeing <i>rdo rje mthong ba</i> | Kṣitigarbha <i>sa'i snying po</i> | What is seen <i>mthong bar bya ba</i> | Lāsyā <i>la sye ma</i> ¹⁴⁶ |
| Vajra-Hearing <i>rdo rje thos pa</i> | Vajrapāṇi <i>phyag na rdo rje</i> | What is heard <i>mnyan par bya ba</i> | Gītā <i>gī rti ma</i> |
| Vajra-Smelling <i>rdo rje snom pa</i> | Ākāśagarbha <i>nam mkha'i snying po</i> | That which is smelled <i>bsnam par bya ba</i> | Mālā <i>mā le ma</i> |
| Vajra-Tasting <i>rdo rje myong ba</i> | Avalokiteśvara <i>spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug</i> | What is tasted <i>myong bar bya ba</i> | Nṛtyā <i>nī rti ma</i> |
| Vajra-Seer <i>rdo rje mthong byed</i> | Maitreya <i>byams pa</i> | The Past <i>'das pa</i> | Dhūpā <i>dhū pe ma</i> |
| Vajra-Hearer <i>rdo rje thos byed</i> | Nīvaraṇaviṣkambhin <i>sgrib sel</i> | The Present <i>da ltar</i> | Puṣpā <i>pu ſpe ma</i> |
| Vajra-Smeller <i>rdo rje snom byed</i> | Samantabhadra <i>kun tu bzang po</i> | The Indefinite Time <i>'byung bar ma nges pa'i dus</i> ¹⁴⁷ | Ālokā <i>ā lo ke ma</i> |
| Vajra-Taster <i>rdo rje myong byed</i> | Mañjuśrī <i>'jam dpal gzhon nu</i> | The Future <i>ma byon pa</i> | Gandhā <i>gandhe ma</i> |

The sixteen are often divided into two groups of eight—the eight male and the eight female Bodhisattvas. The groups of eight Bodhisattvas are also divided into two groups of four, based on their position in the maṇḍala. The four inner male Bodhisattvas are Kṣitigarbha, Vajrapāṇi, Ākāśagarbha, and Avalokiteśvara. The four outer male Bodhisattvas are Maitreya, Nīvaraṇaviṣkambhin, Samantabhadra, and Mañjuśrī. The female Bodhisattvas are divided into along the same lines, corresponding to their male counterpart.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ The Tibetan transliteration of the Sanskrit inevitably differs from one author to the next. The version used here is that of Yungtön-Dorjapel (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 89ff.)

¹⁴⁷ The tantra itself lists this as only *'byung ba*, but Yungtönpa provides this gloss (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 90.2).

¹⁴⁸ See Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 218.5-221.3.

THE DESTROYERS

The last eight deities to be mentioned in the first chapter are the four guardians, or gate-keepers, and their consorts. Again, these are described in symbolic terms in the tantric passage itself. The destroyers, or guardians, are equated to aspects of the sense of touch, while their consorts are equated with the negation of certain principle wrong views:

...along with the assembly of the great destroyer Vajra-Touch, the great destroyer Vajra-Toucher, the great destroyer Vajra-Tangible-Object, and the great destroyer Vajra-Touch-Consciousness together with their consorts—Not-Permanent, Not-Nihilistic, Not-Self, and Not-Marked—and so on. Without rising up in speech, they sit non-dually.¹⁴⁹

The guardians are wrathful figures because of the nature of their position in the maṇḍala—that is, to protect the doors. That is, they are “destroyers”. Their analogy to the sense of touch privileges this sense by setting it apart from the others. Using the sense of touch as the symbol for the wrathful gate-keepers to the maṇḍala, which contains the rest of the personality, might be a way to symbolically unite the two controversial practices of ritual sex (*sbyor ba*) and ritual killing (*sgrol ba*). The correspondences for the guardians and their consorts, as found in the tantra itself, are as follows:¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ ... *dang 'joms pa chen po rdo rje reg pa dang / 'joms pa chen po rdo rje reg byed dang / 'joms pa chen po rdo rje reg bya dang / 'joms pa chen po rdo rje reg shes dang / bstun mo rtag par ma yin pa dang / chad par ma yin pa dang / bdag tu ma yin pa dang / mtshan mar ma yin pa la sogs pal de lta bu'i tshogs brjod kyi mi lang ba dang / gnyis su med par bzbugs sol* (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 184).

¹⁵⁰ Correspondences are taken from Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 90.3ff. The assignment of directions is from Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 218.5-223.5. The directional assignments differ from Lauf, *Secret Doctrines*, 137-138, where Yamāntaka is assigned to the southern gate and Vijaya is assigned to the eastern one.

| Location | Name in SN (masc.) | Standard Name | Name in SN (fem.) | Standard Name |
|---------------|---|--|--|------------------------------------|
| Northern Gate | Vajra-Touch <i>rdo rje reg pa</i> | Amṛtakunḍalin <i>bdud rsi 'khyil ba</i> | Not Permanent <i>rtag par ma yin pa</i> | Añkuṣī <i>lcags kyu ma</i> |
| Western Gate | Vajra-Toucher <i>rdo rje reg byed</i> | Hayagrīva <i>rta mgrin</i> | Not Annihilated <i>chad par ma yin pa</i> | Paśī <i>zhags pa ma</i> |
| Southern Gate | Vajra-Tangible-Object <i>rdo rje reg bya</i> | Vijaya/Mahābala <i>stobs po che</i> | Not Self <i>bdag du ma yin pa</i> | Śrīkhalā <i>lcags sgrogs ma</i> |
| Eastern Gate | Vajra-Touch- Consciousness <i>rdor rje reg shes</i> | Yamāntaka <i>gshin rje gshed</i> | Signless <i>mtshan mar ma yin pa</i> | Ghaṇṭā <i>dril bu ma</i> |

OTHER FIGURES IN THE MAÑĪĀLA

The description of the maṇḍala in the introductory chapter ends here with the four gate-keepers. All together there are forty-two deities in the peaceful maṇḍala, including the teacher and the retinue. The forty-two peaceful deities are:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī | = 2 |
| Five Buddhas and Consorts | = 10 |
| Sixteen Male and Female Bodhisattvas | = 16 |
| Four Gate-keepers and Consorts | = 8 |
| Six Sages | = 6 |
| <hr/> | |
| Total | = 42 |

The six remaining figures in the retinue, not mentioned in chapter one, are commonly called the “six sages” (*thub pa drug*). They are emanated teachers, who appear in the tantras third chapter, and will be described in detail in the summary of that chapter. The maṇḍala described in chapter one, however, is only the maṇḍala of the forty-two peaceful deities. The description and practices associated with the maṇḍala of the peaceful deities are discussed in chapters one through fourteen, separately from those associated with the maṇḍala of the

fifty-two wrathful deities. The latter are discussed in chapters fifteen through twenty-two and will be described, though more briefly, in the individual summaries of those chapters.

THE MARVEL OF THE TEACHING

The introductory first chapter of the *Secret Essence* concludes with a spontaneous expression of the doctrine that issues from the union of the deities with their consorts:

Then, this very secret of just those secret maṇḍalas, where the Tathāgatas and the assembly of their consorts are non-dual, issues from the vajra of enlightened body, speech, mind, good qualities, and activity:

E! E ma! E ma'o! The maṇḍala of primordial wisdom that empowers one into the sphere of suchness has a compassionate nature. Its very self-appearance radiates as pure magical illusion [in] the reflection of concentration. In that is the wish-fulfilling jewel—the qualities of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities and activities in which there is nothing to be eliminated. That is the very place of the supreme vajra, the ornamental wheel that is inexhaustible.

[Thus, they spoke these] secret vajra-words.¹⁵¹

This statement is a summary of the *Secret Essence's* teaching, and along with the remaining chapters of the tantra for the “marvel of the teaching” (*bstan pa phun sum tshogs pa*). According to Yungtönpa, this passage is a summary of the introduction as a whole, each word or phrase correlating to a passage in the body of the introduction. Relating it also to

¹⁵¹ *de nas de bzhin gshogs pa btsun mo'i tshogs dang gnyis su med pa'i gsang ba'i dkyil 'khor de dag nyid kyi gsang ba 'di nyid sku dang gsung dang thugs dang yon tan phrin las rdo rje las phyung ngo / e e ma e ma hol de bzhin nyid kyi dbyings nyid dbang sgyur ye shes dkyil 'khor thugs rje'i ngang / rang snang ba nyid ting 'dzin gzugs brnyan sgyu ma rnam dag gsal ba nil sku gsung thugs dang yon tan 'phrin las sel med pa yi yon tan yid bzhin rin po che/ mi zad par ldan pa rgyan gyi 'khor lo rdo rje mchog gi gnas nyid dol zhes rdo rje gsang ba'i tshig tu'ol* (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhya garbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 184-185).

various types of maṇḍalas, he claims it is a brief description of how the maṇḍala of the ground, the union of primordial wisdom and the sphere of suchness, emanates through a series of stages, related to the maṇḍalas of the path, resulting in the maṇḍala of the final effect. It is this union of the three continuums—ground, path, and result—that is the scene described here in which the rest of the narrative takes place.¹⁵²

The passage suggests that the ultimate nature of reality is not only the emptiness described by the Middle Way School of Sūtra Mahāyāna. It also has an active aspect of primordial wisdom with which emptiness is inextricably fused. This union of wisdom and emptiness has a compassionate nature so that it radiates, or projects, the maṇḍala of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities, the nature of the effect. What it does not describe here, but what is described elsewhere, is that for the ordinary person this illusion-like reality of the effect is masked by adventitious defilements cause by our predispositions. Hence, the ever-present effect state is not experienced by the ordinary defiled individual. The remaining chapters in the peaceful section of the tantra describe the transformation of the ordinary world into the divine world (chapter 2), the enlightened activity of teaching (chapter 3), the literary nature of reality (chapter 4), the meditation on reality (chapter 5), the maṇḍala (chapter 6), the mantras (chapter 7), the mudrās—or hand-signs (chapter 8), the commitments (chapter 9), the initiations (chapter 10), the maṇḍala of the assembly (chapter 11), group-achievement (chapter 12), the quintessential instructions (chapter 13), and the final offering of praise (chapter 14).

CHAPTER TWO: TRANSFORMING THE ORDINARY INTO THE DIVINE

The second chapter is entitled “Generating the Ultimate and Conventional Minds of Enlightenment into Primordial Wisdom” (*don dam pa dang kun rdzob kyi byang chub kyi*

¹⁵² Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 95.2-103.5.

sems ye shes su bskyed pa'i le'u ste gnyis pa).¹⁵³ All the commentaries designate this chapter as “the raising up of the discourse” (*gleng bslang ba*). Whereas the introduction in chapter one described the cause for the teaching of the tantra, namely the maṇḍala of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, chapter two describes the condition for the teaching of the tantra, namely viewing the ordinary profane world as sacred and the introductory dialog between teacher and retinue. It is here that the name Samantabhadra is first introduced as the teacher. The commentarial tradition also maintains that this chapter describes the bestowal of the secret and wisdom initiations on to the retinue.

The chapter opens by saying that as the teacher and Transcendent Conqueror (*bcom ldan 'das*) who is the active male subject, Samantabhadra penetrates his consort Samantabhadrī, who is the passive, female object. This union makes all the Tathāgatas become unified in a single nature. Then, this nature of “having gone thus” communicates to itself in an initial verse statement. The verses equate the five Buddhas with the five aggregates, the five elements with the five consorts of those Buddhas, and states that everything is primordially enlightened. There is “nothing other than Buddhahood itself.” Then, along the same vein Samantabhadrī adds that the five impurities are places of bliss and that there is no doctrine of the Conquerors other than this supreme essence of all. These statements generate all conventional truths into primordial wisdom. These two statements by Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī are described by the commentarial tradition as the bestowal of the secret initiation, the second of the four initiations unique to the inner tantras, where the teacher and his consort deposit a drop of their combined seminal essences into the mouths of the trainees.

¹⁵³ Sources for chapter two are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 156.4-159.5; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 35.1-48.3; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 108.3-144.4; Lochen Dharmashrī's *Ornament of the Intention*, 97.6-115.4, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 436-461.

Next, they transform ultimate truth into primordial wisdom. This comes from a series of verse-statements that emerge from their single identity, statements that is decidedly Middle Way School in tone:

Ema'o! This marvelously wonderful doctrine!
 The secret of all the complete Buddhas is that
 Everything is produced through non-production.
 In production itself, there is no production.¹⁵⁴

They repeat the verse for cessation, abiding, observation, and coming-and-going. These five verses are said to represent the generation of the five minds by the retinue—the fluctuating/rising mind (*g.yo ldang gi sems*), the disintegrating/engaging mind (*'jig 'jug gi sems*), the abiding mind (*gnas pa'i sems*), the aspiring mind (*smon pa'i sems*), and the final mind (*mtshar thug gi sems*). This is considered to be the bestowal of the wisdom initiation, the third of the four initiations of highest yoga tantra.

After this, the retinue consisting of the five Buddhas who are considered to be emanations of the teacher makes a statement to arouse the compassion of the teacher for those that have separate continuums from him:

Ema'o! The primordially secret doctrine!
 In the appearance of variety, it is naturally secret.
 By way of entity, it is excellently secret.
 In not being other, it is extremely secret.¹⁵⁵

The Zur tradition maintains that this is the bestowal of the secret initiation on the disciples present who have separate continuums from the teacher. Lochen Dharmashrī comments that

¹⁵⁴ *e ma'o no mtshar rmad kyi chos/ lrdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kun gyi gsang/ lskye ba med las thams cad skyes/ lskyes pa nyid na skye ba med/ (Tb.417, 157.7).*

¹⁵⁵ *e ma'o ye nas gsang ba'i chos/ sna tshogs snang la rang bzhin gsang/ lngo bo nyid kyis rab tu gsang/ lgzhan du min la shin tu gsang/ (Tb.417, 158.5-158.6).*

this verse speaks of four types of “secrecy”. The “secret essence” is primordially secret, because although the qualities of the effect are spontaneously present in the nature of reality, they are not realized. It is naturally secret, because in the appearance of the variety one does not realize one’s own nature. It is excellently secret, because in its entity it is free from all kinds of duality—object and mind, cause and effect, etc.—but ordinary beings view it dualistically and so do not realize it. Finally, it is extremely secret, because even though it is the very entity of the mind-itself, unrealized people search for it elsewhere outside themselves.¹⁵⁶

The above verse characterizes everything as having a unified nature. That statement causes all the trainees present to mature out of their remaining ignorance. They then in unison make a final statement that all suffering and the appearances of bodies and so forth are due only to mistaken conceptuality that is based on the notion of “I”. In reality no bondage but only “knots in the sky that are urgently tied.”¹⁵⁷ This reality, they continue, emanates out various teachers through its compassion. This is the subject of the next chapter. The second chapter closes by again describing the above conversations as the Tathāgata itself conversing with the Tathāgata itself.

CHAPTER THREE: EMANATING TEACHERS

The third chapter is called “Delineating All the Doctrines” and continues the narrative where chapter two left off, namely with the emanation of embodied teachers.¹⁵⁸ In this chapter, the last six figures that are part of the maṇḍala of forty-two peaceful deities are introduced. These are the six sages (*thub pa drug*), Emanation Bodies who are described as the “blessing of great

¹⁵⁶ Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 111.1-112.1.

¹⁵⁷ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 440. *nan gyis mkha’ la mdud pa ’dor!* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 159.3).

¹⁵⁸ Sources for chapter three are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 159.5-163.2; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 48.3-60.6; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 144.4-203.3; Lochen Dharmashrī’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 115.4-144.3, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 461-543.

compassion” emanating out from the basic awareness (*rig pa*). Though they are not mentioned by name in the chapter itself nor in the several commentaries used here, in general the Old School tradition associates each one with one of the six realms of cyclic existence according to the following table:¹⁵⁹

| Sage | Realm |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Indra (<i>brgya byin</i>) | Gods |
| Vemacitra (<i>thags bzang ris</i>) | Demi-gods |
| Shākyamuni (<i>shākya thub pa</i>) | Humans |
| Siṃha (<i>seng ge rab brtan</i>) | Animals |
| Jvālamukha (<i>kha 'bar ma</i>) | Hungry Ghosts |
| Yama (<i>chos kyī rgyal po</i>) | Hell |

Each emanation takes the form of the supreme being for that realm. Indra is the king of the gods. For Buddhists, Shākyamuni would be the supreme human. The name Siṃha means “lion”, the king of the animals, and Yama is the “Lord of the Dead”.¹⁶⁰ One can presume that Vemacitra and Jvālamukha hold similar positions for the demi-gods and hungry ghosts respectively. They emanate from the inseparable union of Samantabhadra’s and Samantabhadri’s essential enlightened minds, appearing in each of the six realms without moving from that place of union in the same way that the sun and moon can be reflected in different pools of water without moving from their position.¹⁶¹ These emanations then act for the welfare of the beings in their realms through the four types of training:

¹⁵⁹ The Tibetan names for these are from Lauf, *Secret Doctrines*, 123. The Sanskrit names are from *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 152.

¹⁶⁰ The Tibetan for Yama taken from Lauf (*chos kyī rgyal po*) is an alternate name, meaning “the king of *dharma*”, the usual Tibetan equivalent being *gzhin rje*, meaning “Lord of the dead”.

¹⁶¹ *gang las na de bzhin gshags pa drug pa'i sku dang gsung dang thugs thabs yab dang shes rab yum gnyis su med pa thig le byang chub kyī sems dbyer mi phyed pa'i rdo rje las byung zhing 'thon pa'i tshul nil zla ba dang nyi ma las m*

1. through viewing the enlightened body,
2. through directly knowing the enlightened mind,
3. through miracles, and
4. through enlightened speech.¹⁶²

They each manifest the twelve deeds of an enlightened being and possess the six manifest knowledges (*mngon shes drug*)—clairvoyance, clairaudience, knowledge of others' minds, miraculous abilities, knowledge of past lives, and knowledge of having exhausted corruption.¹⁶³ They teach in the past, present, and future all the doctrines of the five vehicles—those of Gods and Humans, the Hearers, Solitary Realizers, Bodhisattvas, and the Highest Vehicle (Tantra). It then gives a brief summary of the content of each of these five vehicles:

| Vehicle | Doctrine |
|--------------------|---|
| Gods and Humans | “incontrovertibility of the cause and effect of actions” ¹⁶⁴ |
| Hearers | “the [teachings about] subjects and objects” ¹⁶⁵ |
| Solitary Realizers | “inner and outer dependent arisings” ¹⁶⁶ |
| Bodhisattvas | “that the subject is mistakenly imputed” ¹⁶⁷ |

g.yos bzhin chu skyogs tha dad kyi nang du gzugs brnyan snang ba ltar 'gro ba rigs drug gi gnas so sor snang bar gyur to/ (Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting Reality*, 148.4-148.5).

¹⁶² Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 117.5ff. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 133 (“Four kinds of instruction”). Gyurme Dorje, “The *Gubiyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 494. These can be summarized as training through enlightened body, speech, mind, and activities.

¹⁶³ *lha'i mig gi mngon shes, lha'i rna ba'i mngon shes, pha rol gyi sems shes pa'i mngon shes, rdzu 'phrul gyi bya ba shes pa'i mngon shes, sngon gyi gnas rjes su dran pa'i mngon shes*, and *zag pa zad pa'i mngon shes*. See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 148-149, 153.

¹⁶⁴ *las dang las kyi 'bras bu chud mi za ba* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 161.1).

¹⁶⁵ *gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'i* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 160.7).

¹⁶⁶ *phyi nang gi rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 160.7-161.1).

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Highest Vehicle | “the final teaching that [one is] not tainted by the cause and effect of actions, will not be tainted, and there is no tainting” ¹⁶⁸ |
|-----------------|---|

This is the summary of vehicles mentioned in the chapter on doxography. The point to be noted here is that the summary of the Tantric doctrine reduces all tantra to an Atiyoga-like position. Tibetan commentators assign the three parts of that summary to Mahāyoga (“one is not tainted”), Anuyoga (“one will not be tainted”), and Atiyoga (“there is no tainting”).

The remainder of the chapter is a long statement in verse made by all the Tathāgatas. It describes the essence of the teachings given by the six sages. They explain that all the erroneous phenomena of cyclic existence derive from ignorant conceptuality, which spins into the appearance of subject and object. The nature, however remains uncorrupted, since self and other are merely false conceptions. Nothing is ever separated from the true nature. The result of all the vehicles is the same: returning to this nature. Nothing passes beyond sorrow because nothing is ever separate from enlightenment. The Buddhas appear to achieve enlightenment in order to tame the misconceptions of others. All the doctrines, therefore, issue from the secret essential nature. The doctrines are taught through imputing words, but there is no reality to the words themselves. The self-knowing mind knows all as selfless and empty without there being an object or observer and realizes that nothing exists separate from enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities.

In the course of describing how all doctrines issue from and return to the secret essence, two other references to a number of vehicles are given. The first is an couplet, often quoted in the commentaries, that describes five vehicles without specifically enumerating them. The

¹⁶⁷ *'dzin pa 'khrul pa las 'dogs pa* (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 190 and Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 53.1). *Secret Essence*, Tb.417 has: *'dzin pa dang 'phrul pa las bzlog pa* (161.1), and *Secret Essence*, Tk.218 has: *'dzin pa 'khrul pa la 'dog pa* (11.4).

¹⁶⁸ *las dang las kyi 'bras bus mi gos/ gos par mi 'gyur/ lgos su med pa ston pa'i mthar thug* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 161.1-161.2).

couplet is meant to portray the supremacy of the Mahāyoga vehicle, being the only vehicle that leads to the supreme result, or fruit:

Four vehicles definitely emerge [from bad migrations and cyclic existence],
 but
 [Only] one vehicle abides in the [final] result.¹⁶⁹

While this reference agrees in enumerating five vehicles, the chapter also gives another rather enigmatic list of teachings, which has nine members. As alluded to in the chapter on doxography, this has been interpreted by the tradition as referring to the classic set of nine vehicles in the Old Schools, though the reference itself is by no means clear. The relevant verses also give the flavor of this chapter in general:

Discipline, Sūtras, Higher Philosophy, and
 Vows, Accomplishment, and Attainment, and
 The tantras of enlightened body, speech, and mind
 Are thoroughly known in all ten directions.

 They issue from the secret essence, and
 This secret essence nature
 Is definitely delineated through the arising
 Of all the baskets and all the tantras.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ *theg pa bzhi yis nges 'byung la/ ltheg pa gcig gi 'bras bur gnas/* (Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 57.2). The bracketed material is based on his interpretation. All other versions differ slightly in the Tibetan with meaningful ramifications for the translation. Gyurme Dorje has: *theg pa bzhi yis nges 'byung la/ ltheg pa gcig gi 'bras bur gnas/* (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhya garbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 191). He translates this as “Disillusioned with the four vehicles, One abides in the result of the single vehicle” (463). This translation does not, in my opinion, capture the flavor of the Tibetan due to a misinterpretation of the Buddhist technical term, *nges 'byung*, or “definite emergence”. *Secret Essence*, Tb.417 has: *theg pa bzhi yi nges 'byung las/ ltheg pa gcig gi 'bras bur gnas/* (161.7), and *Secret Essence*, Tk.218 has: *theg pa bzhi'i nges 'byung la/ ltheg pa gcig gi 'bras bur gnas/* (12.3).

¹⁷⁰ *'dul ba mdo sde chos mngon dang / ldam tshig sgrub dang grub pa dang / lsku dang gsung dang thugs kyi rgyud/ lphyogs bcu kun tu rab grags pa/ lgsang ba'i snying po las 'phros tel/ rang bzhin gsang ba'i snying po 'di/ lde snod kun dang rgyud kun gyi/ lbyung nas gtan la nges par 'bebs/* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 162.1-162.3).

This is by no means a fully formed reference to the nine vehicles of the Old Schools, though it appears to be a precursor to such an enumeration. Compared with the passages above, one can see different historical layers of the chapter. These last verses were most likely inserted at a later time, when the diversity of tantric texts had encouraged greater categorization, while the verses concerning five vehicles were written at a time when Tantra was in a less systematized state.

After teaching that all doctrines are identical in source and illusory in nature, the chapter concludes with two verses summarizing the general teaching given by the six sages. The verses issue from the maṇḍala of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and make two separate but related assertions. The first verse says that the root of cyclic existence is the false notion of self and that therefore all abodes, beings, and their sufferings are merely artificial mental creations. Second, the second verse claims that the enlightened mind is primordially present. It is self-cognizing and knows itself to be the wonderful attributes of enlightenment. One only needs to recollect what is already there to achieve enlightenment. The chapter concludes by stating that these verses summarize all the teachings of the six sages and all Buddhas everywhere. Thus, the chapter lives up to its name of “Delineating all Doctrines” (*chos thams cad gtan la 'bebs pa'i le ste gsum pa*).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE REALITY OF SYLLABLES

The fourth chapter is entitled “Arranging the Circular Garland of Syllables” (*yi ge 'phreng ba'i 'khor lo bkod pa*).¹⁷¹ Prefaced by the end of the preceding chapter, which alluded to the emptiness of words and names, this chapter describes the nature of reality through the Sanskrit syllabary, or the building blocks of language. The standard collection has total

¹⁷¹ Sources for chapter four are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 163.2-166.5; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 60.6-71.3; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 203.3-230.5; Lochen Dharmashri's *Ornament of the Intention*, 144.3-164.4, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 544-599.

number of forty-three syllables, which is one greater than the number of deities in the peaceful maṇḍala.¹⁷² The implication in the tantra is that the letters represent “seed syllables” for the deities. Though in the text itself this is not explicitly asserted, such assignments are made in the commentaries. In his *Ornament to the Intention*, Lochen Dharmashrī says:

The forty-two letters are manifestly established as the nature of the forty-two conquerors.¹⁷³

The equivalencies presented in this chapter add a third layer to the microcosm/macrocosm equations common throughout Indian, and especially Tantric philosophy. The earliest references in Indian literature to the microcosm/macrocosm parallel are found in the *Rig Veda*’s “Hymn to Puruṣa”, where the various parts of Puruṣa’s body become elements of the cosmos—the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth, and so forth.¹⁷⁴ In this Buddhist version of the microcosm/macrocosm parallel, the microcosm is the Buddhist typology of the personality—the five psycho-physical aggregates and the eighteen sense sources—to which are added certain important Buddhist concepts—selflessness, the four times, and so forth—

¹⁷² The Sanskrit letters in the standard syllabary are:

ka, kha, ga, gha, nga,
ca, cha, ja, jha, nya,
ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa,
ta, tha, da, dha, na,
pa, pha, ba, bha, ma,
ya, ra, la, va,
sha, ṣha, sa, ha, a, kṣa,
i, ī, u, ū, e, ai, o, and au.

Because of the symbolic importance of the implicit vowel sound, *a*, it is placed at the beginning of the sequence and equated with Samantabhadrī, in the fashion of later *Perfection of Wisdom* texts equating the sound with emptiness. The number is reduced to forty-two by assigning both the vowels *o* and *au* to the northern gatekeeper, Amṛtakuṇḍalin (*bdud rtsi ’khyil ba*).

¹⁷³ *yi ge bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis ni rgyal ba zhe gnyis kyi rang bzhin du mngon par grub stel* (162.5). See also, Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, the section on *yi ge bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis kyi don bshad pa* (215.6ff.), for specific correspondences.

¹⁷⁴ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *The Rig Veda: An Anthology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 31. While in this myth Purusa is the cosmic giant and certainly does not represent the microcosm. His name literally means “human being” and so implies a connection with the discrete individual.

to round out the number. The macrocosm, for the Buddhist interpretation, is not the universe we experience but the maṇḍala of forty-two deities that represents the enlightened state. IN addition, between these two, an intermediate set of equivalencies are added that are the syllabic building-blocks of language. This intermediary position for the syllables highlights their role in transforming profane illusion into sacred reality. The syllables are stepping stones to experiencing the enlightened reality in two ways. They are the seed syllables for the deities, used in the process of generating their bodily visualization, and they are the components for mantras, used in the process of solidifying one's visualization of the deity. This chapter in the tantra's typical enigmatic fashion lays out the correspondences to the syllables and describes the initial step in the visualization process. It is for this reason that the chapter is described by the commentaries as initiating the section on the path.

The chapter begins with all the Tathāgatas becoming of a single mind, from which emanates the garland of letters, through which "all phenomena abide as only names". The verse that follows describes a common image used in many tantric meditations: a white syllable *A* emanates many tiny *As* filling the entire universe. These are reabsorbed without changing the original syllable. Then, the consonants that form names also emanate out and are reabsorbed. This is called the cause for generating primordial wisdom. The syllables are then recited, beginning with the original *A* (which is not technically a syllable because it is the inherent vowel in all syllables). This recitation causes all the worlds to vibrate. A long verse section follows, describing each of the syllables. *A* is equated with emptiness that abides as the essence of all phenomena, as *A* abides as the essence of all syllables. The commentaries assign *A* to Samantabhadrī, the personification of the sphere of reality (*chos kyi dbyings*). From it, all the syllables, which themselves are the source for all names and words, originate. The nature of these syllables is the mind, which lacks any substantiality and is selfless. From the baseless and selfless mind, all the names and appearances emanate. Conversely, the nature of the mind is the syllables, which lack substantial existence. Then, each of the syllables,

along with certain important punctuation marks, is equated to an aspect of the enlightened world—*A* is the “uncreated suchness” and so forth. These equivalencies follow a certain pattern of relation, as shown below:

| Type of Consonant | Related to: | Maṇḍala Personification |
|---|---|--|
| linguals or cerebrals | magical emanation (<i>sgyu 'pbrul</i>) | five Buddhas |
| dentals | net (<i>drwa ba</i>) | five consorts of the Buddhas |
| gutturals | enlightened mind (<i>thugs</i>) | four inner male Bodhisattvas and the eastern gatekeeper |
| palatals | enlightened form (<i>gzugs</i>) | four inner female Bodhisattvas and the southern gatekeeper |
| labials | enlightened speech (<i>gsung</i>) | four outer male Bodhisattvas and the western gatekeeper |
| semi-vowels (<i>ya, wa, ra, la</i>) | freedom from birth, abiding, disintegration, and emptiness | four outer female Bodhisattvas |
| sibilants (<i>sha, ṣa, sa</i>) and <i>ha</i> | no permanence, no annihilation, selflessness, and signlessness, | four female gatekeepers |
| vowels except <i>o</i> and <i>au</i> | the six realms | six sages |
| vowels <i>o</i> and <i>au</i> | disintegration of everything | northern gatekeeper |

Whereas Samantabhadrī is symbolized by the inherent sound *a*, found in all the syllables, Samantabhadra is symbolized by the last letter of the syllabary, *ḥṣa*. Thus, in union the couple is literally the Sanskrit equivalent of “the alpha and omega”. The chapter closes with a final statement that is touted as the “secret description of these very maṇḍalas”. As a whole, the circle of syllables represents the union of method and wisdom, or appearance and emptiness. It demonstrates how all phenomena—profane and sacred—issue from the reality body. The syllables are the cause for gathering the enlightened mind. For, through this

collection of forty-two syllables, the resultant state of a conqueror is established. The force that issues forth this garland of syllables is the force that gathers together the causes and conditions of one's enlightenment. Thus, the syllables are like a vow that is never to be transgressed.

The closing statement is described as “secret, vajra words”. The chapter itself ends with all the forty-two Tathāgatas transforming themselves into the circle of letters. These letters serve in the subsequent chapter as the starting point for the meditation that leads to the full representation of the maṇḍala in chapter six. It is thus that the commentarial tradition categorizes chapter four as the first chapter on the path in the peaceful section of the tantra.

CHAPTER FIVE: MEDITATING TO ACHIEVE THE MAṆḌALA

The fifth chapter, entitled “The Meditative Stabilization for Achieving the Magical Emanation Net” (*sgyu 'phrul drwa ba bsgrub pa'i ting nge 'dzin*), concerns the meditation employed to achieve the maṇḍala that is to be described in the next chapter.¹⁷⁵ Though the chapter itself is composed almost entirely of panegyric verses on the meditatively induced awareness indicated by the title, the commentarial tradition discusses the topic in terms of the “three characteristics” (*mtshan nyid gsum*) and the three meditative stabilization (*ting nge 'dzin gsum*). The three characteristics are commonly listed as follows:

1. The cause, the characteristic of knowing, the view;
2. The condition, the characteristic of engagement, the meditative stabilization;
3. The manifestation, the characteristic of the result.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Sources for chapter five are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 166.5-168.6; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 71.3-78.5; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 230.5-250.2; Lochen Dharmashri's *Ornament of the Intention*, 164.4-178.4, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 600-626.

¹⁷⁶ These are respectively *rgyu shes pa'i mtshan nyid lta ba*, *rkyen 'jug pa'i mtshan nyid ting nge 'dzin*, and *mngon du gyur pa 'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*.

The first characteristic, the view, is an understanding of the philosophical view of Mahāyoga that is induced through pondering certain axioms, such as the four realizations (*rtogs pa bzhi*), the three purities (*dag pa gsum*), or the two equalities (*mnyam pa nyid gnyis*). The characteristic of engagement, or meditative stabilization, is familiarizing oneself with that knowledge again and again, and the characteristic of the result is what ultimately manifests due to such familiarization.¹⁷⁷ These are not described in order within the chapter itself, but the commentaries achieve the necessary order by addressing the verses non-sequentially. While the title of the chapter and its position in the sequence of chapters would indicate that it primarily concerns the second characteristic of meditative stabilization, it clearly contains verses pertinent to the other two characteristics.

In the chapter itself, the verses are introduced by a single sentence stating that from the circle of letters described in the previous chapter the Magical Emanation issued forth a purposeful statement. The rest of the chapter is a verse-description of the meditative stabilization. It begins with:

The baseless mind-as-such

Is the root of all phenomena.

The mind-as-such has a syllabic nature.

The syllables are a precious wish-fulfilling cloud.¹⁷⁸

The first two lines describe the view of the nature of reality. The next two describe the initial step in the meditative process in which letters emerge out of a realization of wisdom-emptiness. The next verse describes how the syllables represent the maṇḍala of the Magical Emanation. In this way, the verses begin with a description of another triad related to the

¹⁷⁷ See Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, *Key to the Treasury*, 79.4-80.4, where he quotes the *locus classicus* for the three characteristics—Padmasambhava’s *Garland of Views—The Quintessential Instructions*, 11.5-11.6.

¹⁷⁸ *rtsa ba med pa’i sems nyid ni/ lchos rnams kun gyi rtsa ba yin/ lsems nyid yi ge’i rang bzhin tel/ lyi ge yin bzhin rin chen sprin/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 166.7-167.1).*

three characteristics, the three meditative stabilizations. These are a set of three meditations, or yogas, that are the progressive steps to visualizing oneself as the deity or in the more elaborate form as the maṇḍala of deities. The three meditative stabilizations are:

1. The yoga of great emptiness,
2. Illusory compassion,
3. The single and elaborated seals.¹⁷⁹

This first yoga is the meditation on the nature of reality, the fused identity of primordial wisdom and the sphere of reality that is without characteristic. The second is the meditation on how that reality creates illusory appearances out of its compassionate nature. In this meditation, first the letters appear, then the hand-symbols of the deities that compose the maṇḍala. The last yoga is the result, where in the final step the hand-symbols transform into the deities themselves. This is either done for an individual deity (the single, or coarse, seal) or for the whole maṇḍala (the elaborated, or subtle, seal).

The next section of the chapter describes the great benefits of such a meditation. It says that by achieving the maṇḍala in that way great things will be accomplished. Meditation on the maṇḍala will produce nectar that will cure the four hundred and four ailments. It will purify the bad destinies in cyclic existence, and through it all things will be accomplished. It transforms into the elements of the universe and destroys them again. All things are accomplished through it.

The self-appearances of suchness and primordial wisdom—
Names, words, forms, and so forth—transform as one wishes,
Just like illumination arising in darkness.

¹⁷⁹ These are *stong nyid chen po'i rnal 'byor*, *snying rje sgyu ma*, and *phyag rgya phra rags* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 111, “Three Contemplations”). The latter is also known as *phyag rgya gcig spros*, which is what is translated here. Another version of the three is: *de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin*, *kun tu snang ba'i ting nge 'dzin*, and *rgyu'i ting nge 'dzin* (*tshig mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1, 1028, “*ting nge 'dzin gsum*”, (1)).

This is the way an [alchemical] elixir turns [things] into gold.¹⁸⁰

The next short section discusses the causes for success in the meditation. Achievement of this maṇḍala, it says, is accomplished through offerings to the teacher, effort, clear realization (*rtogs pa gsal*), commitments (*dam tshig*), incantations (*sngags*), and seals (*phyag rgya*). The practitioner who does not possess these qualities will be destroyed by the practice.

There then follows several verses on the view that is the basis for the whole meditation both in terms of being the first characteristic and being the object of the first meditative stabilization. The whole meditation, the chapter then says, starts from non-observation of things and no things:

Whoever does not know non-observation

Does not know the sphere of reality.

Therefore, know non-observation by destroying

[The perception of] things and no things.¹⁸¹

Then, there are a series of negations concerning the baseless and rootless mind-as-such. It is not male, female, neuter or sexless. Nor does it have a family lineage. It is not a color, form, or a place. It is not anything.

Finally, the chapter discusses the results, or benefits, of the primordial wisdom that is made manifest through such a meditation. “The primordial wisdom that is the sphere of suchness is the cause of all the seals of method.”¹⁸² The inconceivable maṇḍala is the display of primordial wisdom, the supreme seal of the fearless Samantabhadra. Through it, the wild mind is tamed, and whoever stabilizes their incantations and seals will achieve the great feat

¹⁸⁰ *de nyid ye shes rang snang ba'il / ming tshig gzugs sogs yid bzhin gyis / mun la snang byung ji bzhin dul / gyur ba gser gyur sman gyi tshull* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 167.4-167.5).

¹⁸¹ *gang gis dmigs med mi shes pal / de yis chos kyi dbyings mi shes / de phyir dngos dang dngos med pal / jigs pas dmigs med shes par gyis* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 168.1-168.2).

¹⁸² *de bzhin nyid dbyings ye shes tel / thabs kyi phyag rgya kun gyi rgyud* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 168.3).

of Buddhahood. The chapter ends with a statement saying the Tathāgatas were pleased by the show (*gzigs mos*).

CHAPTER SIX: THE MAṄḌALA

The sixth chapter is called “Elaborating the Maṅḍala” (*dkyil ’khor spros pa*).¹⁸³ This chapter repeats the description of the maṅḍala from the first chapter, though in even less explicit detail. It is introduced with the statement that the Tathāgatas “willed the maṅḍala of their own greatness to be brought forth in all ten directions....”¹⁸⁴ They then chant a description of the maṅḍala. The commentarial tradition divides the maṅḍala’s description into three parts. These are three different types of maṅḍalas that are described:

1. The maṅḍala of meditative stabilization,
2. The maṅḍala of enhanced meditative stabilization, and
3. The maṅḍala of the naturally enlightened form.¹⁸⁵

These three maṅḍalas essentially mirror the three characteristics and the three meditative stabilizations mentioned in the summary of chapter five. They deal respectively with the nature of the ground, path, and result. The maṅḍala of meditative stabilization is meditating on the primordial wisdom that is one aspect of the indivisible reality. The maṅḍala of enhanced meditative stabilization is based on the first and visualizes the supporting maṅḍala and supported deities within in. The maṅḍala of the naturally enlightened form views all phenomena as the result, or the five enlightened form. This is the basic outline of chapter six.

¹⁸³ Sources for chapter six are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 168.7-172.2; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 78.5-91.2; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 250.2-276.4; Lochen Dharmashrī’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 178.4-201.4, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 626-681.

¹⁸⁴ *jig rten drug gi phyogs bcu thams cad la nyid kyi che ba’i dkyil ’khor ’byung bar bzhed nas* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 168.7-169.1). The rendering of *bzhed* as “willed” is from Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 626.

¹⁸⁵ These are *ting nge ’dzin gyi dkyil ’khor*, *lhag pa’i ting nge ’dzin gyi dkyil ’khor*, and *rang bzhin sku’i ting nge ’dzin*. See Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 251.4-274.5 and Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament of the Intention*, 179.3-199.3.

It begins with a verse that first identifies the maṇḍala of meditative stabilization as primordial wisdom viewed within a spatial context. It is in this context that the first of two references to the term “great completeness” in the tantra is made, though neither this nor the use of the term in chapter nineteen refer to the Atiyoga system of meditation:

When primordial wisdom is examined in terms of four directions and a
center,
There is the spontaneously arisen, inconceivable maṇḍala.
The yogi who realizes this great completeness
Experiences the great maṇḍala that is the source of all [maṇḍalas].¹⁸⁶

Yungtönpa asserts that the first couplet of this verse addresses the gradualist path, while the second half speaks of the suddenist path.¹⁸⁷ When primordial wisdom is examined in spatial terms, it becomes a maṇḍala. The gradualist path analyzes primordial wisdom into the five coordinates—four directions and a center—which are then equated to the five types of primordial wisdom. The suddenist path focuses on the spontaneous presence of the maṇḍala of primordial wisdom and realizes its completeness all at once. Thus, in this context the use of the term “great completeness (*rdzogs chen*)” refers to the suddenist path of Mahāyoga and not to the any form of Atiyoga practice. This hints at the possibility that Atiyoga is the full development of the suddenist path of Mahāyoga. After the full elaboration of the myth of the debate at Samyé, probably sometime by the 11th century, the suddenists became *personae non gratis* in Tibet.¹⁸⁸ At the same time, this was one of the most intriguing aspects of Mahāyoga—the nearly instantaneous realization of Buddhahood. In order to maintain

¹⁸⁶ *ye shes phyogs bzhi dbus brtags tel /dkyil 'khor bsam yas lhun grub ni /rdzogs chen rtogs pa'i rnal 'byor pas/ /kun 'byung dkyil 'khor chen por spyod/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 169.1-169.2).*

¹⁸⁷ Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 252.2.

¹⁸⁸ Nup Sang-gye-ye-she (10th century) discusses the suddenist and gradualist schools unapologetically, and undoubtedly the New Schools that emerged in the 11th century augmented the myth to suit their decidedly gradualist agenda.

viability in the Tibetan milieu, the “suddenists” had to redefine themselves as proponents of the “Highest Yoga”, Atiyoga, and out of this redefinition, a separate movement evolved based on the fundamental premises of the *Secret Essence* but with its own unique theories and practices.

The maṇḍala of enhanced meditative stabilization is portrayed next through a concise description of the peaceful maṇḍala. It has four spokes and a rim. The inner courtyard has four corners. Each of the four walls has an ornamental door. The forty-two deities sit on sun-, moon-, and lotus-cushions, and there are the five thrones (lion, elephant, horse, peacock, and garuḍa). These represent the five Buddhas: Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi. There are the king and queen of the maṇḍala, namely Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī, and from right to left, the kings (the inner Bodhisattvas) of seeing, hearing, smelling, and feeling with their consorts. The outer Bodhisattvas, the seer, hearer, smeller, and feeler, sit in the corners with their consort. The six sages are also in the inner courtyard, and the four destroyers along with their consorts stand in the doorways.¹⁸⁹

It then relates third maṇḍala of the naturally enlightened form. The verses describe the great, supreme body-seal (*sku yi phyag rgya che mchog*) that does not stray from suchness but nonetheless displays the form body of liberation for the sake of trainees. Thus, its nature is the single emptiness though it appears in various forms. It shows forms that accord with the level of the trainee. For Hearers, it appears as a Foe-destroyer; for the practitioners of Tantra, the form of Vairocana. In the Highest Heaven, it does not speak in words, but by viewing its body the doctrine is taught. When the trainees in that heaven see this enlightened form, they can identify all their impurities as though they were looking in a mirror. This maṇḍala abides in all objects of activity and contains the two collections of merit and wisdom. It is “the birthless and deathless enlightened body of totality”,¹⁹⁰ which is equated with the Reality

¹⁸⁹ For the Tibetan and Sanskrit names of these figures, see the summary of chapter 1 above.

¹⁹⁰ *skye shi med pa'i g.yung drung skul* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 171.3).

Body. This introduces a brief description of the five enlightened bodies: the Reality Body (*chos sku*), the Complete Enjoyment Body (*long spyod sku*), the Emanation Body (*sprul sku*), the Vajra Body (*rdo rje'i sku*), and the Manifestly Enlightened Body (*mngon byang gi sku*). The chapter ends with a short statement that the non-observation of object and observer is the maṇḍala of self-knowing primordial wisdom. The expanse is pervaded by sameness and non-sameness, and the emanations of the maṇḍala lack conceptual elaboration.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MANTRAS FOR GENERATING THE MAṆḌALA

The seventh chapter concerns the mantras used in the ritual generation of the maṇḍala and its deity-inhabitants.¹⁹¹ The bulk of the chapter is filled with these Tibetan transliterations of Sanskrit phrases, some with semantic meaning; others, without. Therefore, the chapter's summary is brief. Its title is “The Condensed Maṇḍala and Secret Mantras” (*dkyil 'khor bsdus pa dang sang sngags*) refers to the fact, made explicit in the commentaries, that each mantra is assigned to a particular stage in the creation of the maṇḍala and the generation of its occupants.¹⁹² The commentaries make the explicit connection between the particular mantras and particular aspects of the visualized maṇḍala.

The introduction to the mantras begins with the utterances emerging from the enlightened body, speech, and mind of all the Tathāgatas and their consorts. The initial mantras are those associated with the generation of the maṇḍala and the five main Buddhas.¹⁹³ Similar mantras are also found in the *Secret Assembly Tantra Guhyasamāja* and

¹⁹¹ Sources for chapter seven are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 172.2-175.5; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 91.2-99.5; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 276.4-303.2; Lochen Dharmashri's *Ornament of the Intention*, 201.4-224.4, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 682-710.

¹⁹² Vilāsavajra explicitly states that the maṇḍala here is the maṇḍala of communication, or speech-maṇḍala (*gsung gi 'khor lo*) and that it is condensed because only five such maṇḍalas are considered, however many there actually may be (*dkyil 'khor bsdus pa dang gsang sngags kyi le'u zhes bya ba nil gsung gi dkyil 'khor ji snyed pa yang gsung lnga kho nar bsdus pa lnga'i ngo bo dang las dang gzhal yas khang dang/ lha rnams kyi sngags kyi ngo bo dang las rnams bshad pa'i le'ul* Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 99.4-99.5).

¹⁹³ Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 91.3-91.5.

other tantras. In the *Secret Essence*, each mantra is prefaced by a seed syllable that is, presumably, the initial step of the visualization. Through intoning the mantra the seed syllable is visualized to transform into the item itself. These first six mantras and the corresponding item generated are:¹⁹⁴

| Mantra | Used to generate... |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>Bhrūṃ viśva viśuddhe</i> | the inestimable palace (<i>gzhal yas khang</i>) |
| <i>Hūṃ vajradhṛk</i> | Akṣobhya |
| <i>Oṃ jinajik</i> | Vairocana |
| <i>Sva ratnadhṛk</i> | Ratnasambhava |
| <i>Aṃ arolik</i> | Amitābha |
| <i>Ha prajñādṛk</i> | Amoghasiddhi |

The next five mantras are those of the five female Buddhas of the families, presumably in corresponding order with their male counterparts:¹⁹⁵

| Mantra | Used to generate... |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Muṃ dhūdushvari</i> | Lady of the Vajra Realm |
| <i>Lam tesharati</i> | Lady of the Suchness Realm |
| <i>Muṃ moharati</i> | Lady of the Jewel Realm |

¹⁹⁴ Vilāsavajra says merely that the mantras, “*Hūṃ vajradhṛk*” and following, represent the five Buddha families (*bhūṃ badzra dhṛk ces bya ba la sogs pa ni rigs lnga bskyed pa’i sngags so*). The specific associations are taken from the seed syllables for the respective deities described in Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamāja*, 210.

¹⁹⁵ Correspondences are from Yungtönpa, 280.5-281.3. He does not identify them by name but merely designates them the lady of their respective family’s realm, e.g. “Lady of the Vajra Realm (*rdo rje dbying gi dbang phyug ma*)” to refer to consort of Akṣobhya, the Lord of the Vajra Family. These names are not to be confused with Ākāśadhātviśvari’s name in Tibetan, *nam mkha’ dbying gi dbang phyug ma*, which literally means “Lady of the Realm of Space”. Here, Ākāśadhātviśvari is called the “Lady of the Suchness Realm (*de bzhin dbying phyug ma*)”.

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Pyam ragarati</i> | Lady of the Lotus Realm |
| <i>Tam vajrarati</i> | Lady of the Action Realm |

The first part of the chapter provides the complete list of seed-syllable/mantra pairs for all the figures of the maṇḍala in the following order:

- Five Buddhas & Five Consorts
- Four Inner Bodhisattvas and Four Consorts
- Four Outer Bodhisattvas and Four Consorts
- Eight Male and Female Gate-keepers
- Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī
- Six Sages

This is followed by a short series of mantras meant to imbue the visualization of the maṇḍala with reality and to seal that reality within the visualization. The set of mantras is concluded by a prayer:

Om! King of primordial wisdom equipoised now

In the astonishing body, speech, mind

Good qualities, and enlightened activities!

May I be joined with the great seal!

om vajra samaya hūm! om vajra samaya stvom!

*om vajra samaya ho! jah hūm bam hoh!*¹⁹⁶

Due to that statement, the “maṇḍala of speech” resounds in the ten directions. It causes the Transcendent Conqueror to dissolve into the maṇḍala of the non-duality of actor and action.

¹⁹⁶ *om ye shes rgyal po sku gsung thugs/ lyon tan 'phrin las/ rmad po chel /da nyid du na mnyam sbyor bas/ lphyag rgya chen por bdag sbyor cig lom badzra sa ma ya hūm/ lom badzra sa ma ya stvom/ lom badzra sa ma ya ho/ ldzah hūm bam hoh/* (Tk.419, 173.2-173.3).

From this great identity, more mantras arise, which are for the sake of “absorbing the primordial wisdom of the great identity and its blessing”.¹⁹⁷ The initial set uses the standard phrase “*oṃ mahāśūnyatā jñānavajrasvabhāva ātmako haṃ*” or “Om! I have the nature of the vajra of great emptiness and primordial wisdom.” Various other qualities replace “great emptiness” (*mahāśūnyatā*), namely: “great appearance” (*mahādarśa*), “great individual cognition” (*mahāpratyavekṣana*), “great equality” (*mahāsamatā*), “great approach to the created” (*mahākṛtyupasthāna*), “the great body of all the Tathāgatas” (*sarvatathāgatamahākāya*), “the great speech of all the Tathāgatas” (*sarvatathāgatamahāvāg*), “the great mind of all the Tathāgatas” (*sarvatathāgatamahācitta*), *sarvatathāgatamahānurāgaṇa*, and “the great worship of all the Tathāgatas” (*sarvatathāgatamahāpūjā*).

The chapter concludes with a lengthy discourse in verse on the relationship between speech and reality, which is summarized as follows. Although this marvelous doctrine, spoken by all the Buddhas, passes beyond verbal communication, it nonetheless arises as various clear sounds that are the parts of the maṇḍala of the sole communication (*gsung gcig kyi dkyil 'khor*). These sounds pervade everywhere—all words and names, all mundane speech, and the scriptures of all the vehicles. Suchness, or the inexpressible reality, is proclaimed in all verbal sounds, even though it is comprehended differently. Since all sound participates in suchness, there is no communication that is separate from suchness. However, in suchness there is no speech. The unwritten communication and the communication of basic mind are not from the mouth, but through the communicative blessing of compassion communicating directly with the minds of migrators. This kind of communication does not stray from the disposition of suchness but is related to suchness the way the sound of an echo is related to the original sound.

¹⁹⁷ *bdag nyid chen po 'i ye shes dang byin bsdu ba zhes bya ba 'di* (173.4-173.5).

CHAPTER EIGHT: BLESSING THE BODY WITH HAND-SEALS

The eighth chapter is entitled “Blessing all the limbs into the maṇḍala and subsequently elaborating the hand-seals (*phyag rgya, mudrā*)” (*yan lag thams cad dkyil ’khor du byin gyis brlabs nas phyag rgya spros pa’i le’u ste brgyad pa*) and deals with the ritual transformation of the profane body into a sacred reality.¹⁹⁸ This ritual involves the placement of the peaceful deities on various parts of the body. Visualizing the five Buddhas and their consorts on the fingertips of each hand, the practitioner creates various hand-symbols, or *mudrās*, through joining fingers from the right and left hands. By this process, the microcosm of the human body is ritually blessed into the reality of the macrocosmic maṇḍala. Because of the powerful nature believed to reside within these *mudrās*, or hand-seals, the language employed in their description is highly symbolic and represents a prime example of the enigmatic tantric code-language (*samḍhyābhāṣya, ldem skad*). With only a short lead-in, the chapter proceeds directly into verse.

Within the magical emanation net, it says, everything is the seal (*phyag rgya*) of supreme enlightenment. This is the secret of definitively ascertaining suchness. It then describes the constituent parts of the hand signs. On the fingers of the right hand, symbolized by Akṣobhya, are solar discs with the syllables of the Tathāgatas of the five families: *hūṃ*, *om*, *svā*, *āṃ*, and *hā*. On the fingers of the left hand, symbolized by Ratnasambhava, are the syllables of their consorts: *mūṃ*, *lāṃ*, *māṃ*, *pāṃ*, and *tāṃ*. From joining the syllables at the fingertips in various ways, different *mudrās* are formed. The initial *mudrā* formed is the general seal, described as bestowing the great bliss of being unified with the conquerors. It is also known as the seal of one-pointed primordial wisdom.¹⁹⁹ The following chart shows the

¹⁹⁸ Sources for chapter eight are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 175.5-179.2; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 99.5-108.6; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 303.2-325.2; Lochen Dharmashri’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 224.4-241.1, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 711-745.

¹⁹⁹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 722.

placement of the seed syllables, the Buddha-family with which each finger is associated, and how the fingers are joined to form this initial, general seal:²⁰⁰

| Finger | Family | Right Hand (Tathāgatas) | Left Hand (Consorts) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Thumb (<i>mthe bong</i>) | Lotus (<i>padma</i>) | <i>hā</i> (Amitābha) | <i>tāṃ</i> (Pāṇḍarātārā) |
| Index (<i>mdzub mo</i>) | Tathāgata (<i>de gzhags</i>) | <i>om</i> (Vairocana) | <i>lāṃ</i> (Ākāśadhātāvīśvarī) |
| Middle (<i>gung mo</i>) | Vajra (<i>rdo rje</i>) | <i>hūṃ</i> (Akṣobhya) | <i>mūṃ</i> (Māmakī) |
| Ring (<i>srin lag</i>) | Jewel (<i>rin chen</i>) | <i>svā</i> (Ratnasambhava) | <i>māṃ</i> (Pāṇḍarā) |
| Pinky (<i>mthe'u chung</i>) | Action (<i>las</i>) | <i>āṃ</i> (Amoghasiddhi) | <i>pāṃ</i> (Samayatārā) |

In the general mudrā, the thumbs and pinkies of opposite hands touch at their tips; the index and middle fingers of opposite hands touch, and the two ring fingers touch. The description of the general mudrās is followed by the mudrā for each individual family. These are composed by one pair of fingers of the same type joined at the finger-tips extending outward, while the remaining eight fingers are interlaced and clenched inwardly in a fist, while still being conjoined at the tips. A specific symbol is also visualized at the tips of the extended fingers. These mudrās are then held at various places of one's own and one's consort's body. In this way, the verses proceed through the five families: Vajra, Tathāgata, Jewel, Lotus, Action.²⁰¹ After that, there is a recapitulation of the various hand-symbols of the five Tathāgatas, followed by a list of other seal. The seals of the four door-keepers and their symbols are described next, followed by a mention of the six sages' seals without any

²⁰⁰ This arrangement is described in Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 226.1-227.4.

²⁰¹ The symbols for the Vajra, Jewel, and Lotus families are the same as the family name. The Tathāgata family is represented by a wheel, while the Action family is represented by a sword.

description. Lastly, there is a mention of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī, the final result of the great seal.

Thus, there is a diversity of mudrās. They can be condensed into the five associated with the five Buddha-families or into the one vajra mudrā. However, everything abides in the disposition of the great seal (*phyag rgya chen po, mahāmudrā*) from which there is no movement. Using the mudrās, the forty-two deities are placed on the limbs on one's body, whereby one becomes the central deity. Similarly, the other deities in the maṇḍala are revealed. They all are based in the same reality. However, due to people's different predispositions, they are seen differently. This is like the various positions of a dancer, which all have their basis in a single body but appear differently. There are innumerable hand seals, which are taught in Tantra. They cannot be restricted to any specific number, because they are the movement of the nature of reality. Along with everything else, the mudrās abide within the entity of the great seal. The great seal is not a physical hand-gesture that seals one's realization, as the others are, but is the fundamental nature of reality, the fusion of emptiness and wisdom that is imprinted on all appearances although the average person does not see it. Thus, the chapter ends with a generalization similar to the end of the previous chapter. Namely, all appearances are sealed with the fundamental nature of reality, wisdom-emptiness.

CHAPTER NINE: THE PHYSICAL MAṆḌALA RITE

The ninth chapter, “The Secret Commitments of the Vajra Array”, concerns the construction of the maṇḍala.²⁰² This type of maṇḍala is called “the enhanced reflected maṇḍala” (*lhag pa gzugs brnyan gyi dkyil 'khor*).²⁰³ The chapter begins with the Great Joyous

²⁰² Sources for chapter nine are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 179.2-184.7; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 108.6-131.6; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 325.2-366.6; Lochen Dharmashri's *Ornament of the Intention*, 241.1-280.5, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhya garbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 746-864.

²⁰³ Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 108.6.

One entering into equipoise on the array of secret vajra commitments. The description of the rite that follows ostensibly discusses the building of an external physical maṇḍala. However, the first verse describes “the excellent maṇḍala of enlightened mind” as being “in the palms of the great seal” and only four inches wide. As for the physical maṇḍala, one draws it in a level place using the five seeds, five scents, five precious substances, five essences, five medicines, and five nectars.²⁰⁴ The five seeds purify the five aggregates into the five Buddha-bodies.²⁰⁵ The five scents purify the five senses into the five enlightened activities.²⁰⁶ The five precious substances purify the five sense-objects into five enlightened qualities.²⁰⁷ The five essences purify the five consciousnesses purified into the five primordial wisdoms.²⁰⁸ The five medicines purify the five aspects of the desire realm into the five communications,²⁰⁹ and the

²⁰⁴ The descriptions of these sets of five are taken from Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 244.3-244.6; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 11.4-11.6, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 814-815. The last is the source for the enumerations of the seeds, scents, jewels, essences, medicines, and nectars.

²⁰⁵ The five seeds are barley, wheat, peas, sesame, and rice (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 815). The five aggregates are form, feeling, perception, composite factors, and consciousness. The five Buddha-bodies are the reality body, the Complete Enjoyment Body, the Emanation Body, the Manifestly Enlightened Body, and the Vajra Body.

²⁰⁶ The five scents are camphor, saffron, white sandalwood, red sandalwood, and aloeswood. The five senses are the eyes, ear, nose, tongue, and body. The five enlightened activities are pacification of suffering, increase of provisions, overpowering those who need to be tamed, wrathfully uprooting those who resist training, and spontaneously accomplishing all without effort (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 143).

²⁰⁷ The five precious substances (literally, “jewels”) are gold, silver, coral, pearl, and gems. The five objects are form, sound, smell, taste, and tangible object. The five enlightened qualities are having pure Buddha-fields, immeasurable celestial palaces, and exalted thrones, as well as radiating pure rays of light and the enjoyment of acting as one wishes (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 143).

²⁰⁸ The five essences are salt, honey, molasses, butter, and fruit. The five consciousnesses are the respective consciousnesses of the five sense-objects. The five primordial wisdoms are, as discussed in the introduction, the primordial wisdom of the sphere of reality, the mirror-like primordial wisdom, the primordial wisdom of individual conceptions, the primordial wisdom of equality, and the primordial wisdom accomplishing activities.

²⁰⁹ The five medicines are “white Acorus Calamus (*shu dag dkar po*), Cedrus Deodars (*dbang po lag pa*), *Tinospora Cordifolia* (*rle? tres*), *Solanum Xanthocarpum* (*kantakāri*), and mango fruit (*smra’i? ’bras bu*)” (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 815). The five aspects of the desire realm are “the five qualities or capabilities having form, sound, smell, taste, or touch” (*gzugs dang / sgral dril rol reg bya bcas kyi yon tan nam nus pa lnga*)” (*tshig mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1, 1419-1420). The five communications are the teachings of the five Buddha-bodies to their respective retinues: the actual communication of non-production (*skye med don gyi gsung*), the symbolic communication of the intention (*dgongs pa brda’i gsung*), the verbal communication of expression (*brjod pa tshig gi gsung*), the vajra-communication of indivisibility (*dbyer med rdo rje’i gsung*), and the communication of manifest enlightenment (*mngon byang gi brjod pa*) (*tshig mdzod chen mo*, vol. 2, 3014).

five nectars purify the five constituents into the five lineages.²¹⁰ The lines of the maṇḍala are to be composed of awareness.

The maṇḍala is described as having four spokes and four walls with four gates. On the thrones inside, the sun, moon and lotus cushions are no bigger than a chickpea with syllables on them that are merely the size of a sesame seed. There is a variety of offerings: cloth, flowers, food, drink, song, and dance. Oblations are made into a fire with the shape of a mouth. One then imagines the “great seal of offering” in which all ten directions become Buddha-fields and “blaze forth as a mass of precious things.”²¹¹ Through this, one either gradually or suddenly enters into equipoise on reality depending on the clarity of one’s mind. Offerings are said to be made to “she who has clarity or consecration”, indicating one’s consort. One invites all the maṇḍalas out of the expanse, and pleases them by pleasing her. Through the supreme identity and the stability of the magical emanation net, all the maṇḍalas are pleased and become manifest. Since nothing abides or is observed, one mediates on space within space. First, the teacher enters the maṇḍala; then, the student enters. More offerings are made, which purify the defilements, and gradually the empowerments of assistance (*phan pa’i dbang*) and the empowerments of capability (*nus pa’i dbang*) are bestowed.

Several alternative versions of the maṇḍala are then described. These are physical and mental maṇḍalas measuring anywhere from three body lengths to the whole inconceivable realm of space. Some are drawn with color powder and strings or visualized. In either case, it is from the play of meditative stabilization that one achieves the blessing of the maṇḍala with its letters, thrones, seals, and forms. Thus, no matter what the form of the maṇḍala, if one has the meditative stabilization, one will attain liberation. Once one has thoroughly engaged

²¹⁰ The five nectars are menstrual blood, semen, urine, feces, and human flesh. The five constituents are space, earth, water, fire, and wind, and the five families are the Tathāgata, Vajra, Lotus, Jewel, and Action families.

²¹¹ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 747-748.

or understood the maṇḍala of self-appearance, then the ritual maṇḍala will be completed automatically. Everything will be the merit of one's own mind. Wisdom itself will arise as the forms of the maṇḍala. Through the play of primordial wisdom the conquerors will actually appear and bestow blessings and empowerment. This is the seminal drop of primordial wisdom within the seminal drop of primordial wisdom. Since it has no erroneous realizations, it is never separate from the expanse of reality. Since it has compassion, it appears in various forms of maṇḍalas to the beings in the six realms of cyclic existence. If one enters the maṇḍala of great bliss with faith, one will attain the primordial wisdom equal to one's capacity. Otherwise, if one does not have faith, one will be lost.

CHAPTER TEN: EMPOWERMENTS

The tenth chapter, “Conferral of Empowerment” (*dbang sbyin pa*), deals with the Mahāyoga empowerments.²¹² There are eighteen empowerments in the Mahāyoga system, consisting of the fifteen ordinary sacraments (*sgrub rdzas thun mong bco lnga*) and the three profound empowerments (*zab dbang gsum*). The former is divided into the ten assisting empowerment (*phan dbang bcu*) and the five enabling empowerments (*nus dbang lnga*). The latter consists of the secret empowerment (*gsang dbang*), the empowerment of discriminating primordial wisdom (*shes rab ye shes kyi dbang*), and the empowerment of words and meanings (*tshig don gyi dbang*). The three profound empowerments are often spoken of in the higher, or inner, tantras, but because they only existing in those higher systems they are also called the uncommon empowerments.

The chapter begins with the Great Joyous One entering into the meditative stabilization called “Conferral of the King” (*rgyal po sbyin pa*). The verse statement, which composes the

²¹² Sources for chapter ten are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 184.7-186.6; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 131.6-136.1; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 366.6-384.1; Lochen Dharmashri's *Ornament of the Intention*, 280.5-293.6, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 865-881.

bulk of the chapter, describes the various empowerments of the *Secret Essence* tradition. The initial verse describes the “seal of method and wisdom” (*shes rab thabs kyi phyag rgya*), which is a metaphor for sexual union of the male and female practitioners. In this position, the “syllables of bliss”²¹³ (semen) issue from the vajra (penis) into the lotus (vagina). Deposited on to the tip of the student’s tongue, they melt and transform into the maṇḍala. This is a concise description of the three profound empowerments.

Next, the five enabling empowerments, unique to the *Secret Essence*, are explained. A wheel-shaped palace is visualized at the ears. The essential nature of the seminal drop gathers there and forms the seals of the syllable *trām*, from which the maṇḍala of Ratnasambhava emanates. Thus, one is empowered to listen to all secrets—the secret, the most secret, and the supreme secret. This is the empowerment of the listener (*nyan pa’i dbang*). Next, a palace is visualized at the heart. From the seminal drop, the garland of letters is formed there, and these create the maṇḍala of the enlightened family. Thus, one is empowered to grasp the indestructible reality. This is the empowerment of the meditator (*bsgom pa’i dbang*), associated with Akṣobhya. Then, a palace is visualized at the hands, where the seminal point forms into the seal of *hām* and emanates the maṇḍala of action. One is empowered to do all activities. This is the empowerment of enlightened activity (*phrin las kyi dbang*), associated with Amoghasiddhi. Then, a palace is visualized on the tongue. The seminal drop forms into the seal of *hrīḥ* and emanates the maṇḍala of the doctrine. One is empowered to teach beings in accordance with their capacity. This is the empowerment of the explainer (*’chad pa’i dbang*) and is associated with Amitābha. Finally, on all five limbs of the body one visualizes celestial palaces with the syllables, *hūṃ*, *om*, *svā*, *āṃ*, and *hā*, from which emanate “the five maṇḍalas and the row of wrathful deities”.²¹⁴ One is empowered into the vajra reality. This is

²¹³ *bde ba’i ’bru* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 185.1).

²¹⁴ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 867.

the empowerment of the vajra-king (*rdo rje rgyal po'i dbang*) and is associated with all five Buddha-families.

A warning concerning the misuse of the *Secret Essence's* teachings is then given: those who do not receive initiation will get no results and be forsaken. This is followed by a list (with no explanation) of the ten assisting empowerments (*phan pa'i dbang*): Tiara (*dbu rgyan*), Crown (*cod pan*), Garland (*'phreng ba*), Armor (*go cha*), Victory Banner (*rgyal mtshan*), Seal (*phyag rgya*), Umbrella (*gdugs*), Vase (*bum pa*), Food and Drink (*bza' btung*), and the Five Essences (*snying po lnga*).²¹⁵ The chapter closes with a verse on the benefits of receiving such empowerments—long life, marvelous bliss, and liberation.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE GROUP MAṄḌALA

The eleventh chapter is called “Maṅḍalas of the Assembly”, or alternatively “Maṅḍalas of the Feast Offering” (*tshogs kyi dkyil 'khor*).²¹⁶ According to Longchenpa, this is the first of two chapters that describe the stage of generation.²¹⁷ Yungtönpa and Lochen Dharmashrī also combine their commentaries on chapters eleven and twelve into a single section. The eleventh chapter begins with the Great Joyous One entering into a meditative stabilization known as “Becoming a King of Magical Emanation” (*sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i rgyal po bsgyur ba*). The first verse of the beneficial statement that follows describes the four realizations, important on the Path of Release—one of the two paths of Mahāyoga.²¹⁸ These are the realizations of

- the sole cause (*rgyu gcig pa*),

²¹⁵ *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 186.4-186.5.

²¹⁶ Sources for chapter eleven are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 186.7-190.3; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 136.1-151.1; Yungtönpa's *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 384.1-430.2; Lochen Dharmashrī's *Ornament of the Intention*, 293.6-324.5, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 882-949. The Tibetan word *tshogs* properly means “assembly” or “gathering”. However, it is also used to mean the “assembly” of offerings of the ritual feast. Both meanings apply to the content of this chapter.

²¹⁷ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 889.

²¹⁸ Its compliment is the Path of Method (*thabs lam*), which deals with the subtle body meditation.

- the mode of syllables (*yig 'bru'i tshul*),
- blessing (*byin gyis rlabs*), and
- direct perception (*mngon sum pa*).

This is followed by a brief description of how the human psycho-physical aggregates are ripened as the maṇḍala of peaceful or wrathful male deities and the sense objects are ripened as the maṇḍala of peaceful or wrathful female consorts, while the gathered offering become the maṇḍala of pleasure.

This, in turn, is followed by a description of the rite of sexual union (*sbyor ba*). Three types of women are mentioned: goddesses, nāgas, and women of bad lineage. The practice is done through the four limbs of approximation and achievement (*bsnyan sgrub bzhi*), namely 1. approximation or service (*bsnyan pa*), close approximation or further service (*nye bsnyan*), achievement (*sgrub pa*), and great achievement (*sgrub chen*). After this, there is a description of the rite of “release” (*sgrol ba*), or ritual killing, described as the use of an effigy for dispatching those who are “fields of compassion”, i.e., whose great evil will lead them to terrible rebirths. Through realizing suchness, everything is merely illusion. Thus, though one performs the rites of union and release, nothing is actually performed. One realizes the three purities—of worlds, beings, and continuums—through the two ordinary equalities and two superior equalities.²¹⁹

The chapter then describes the “maṇḍala that is the collection of yogins” (*rnal 'byor tshogs pa'i dkyil 'khor*).²²⁰ There are three forms of the maṇḍala of the assembly. The maṇḍala with five clusters is based on the five Buddha families. It has a central deity surround by four others. The maṇḍala with three clusters is composed of the Tathāgata family of Vairocana,

²¹⁹ The two ordinary equalities are that all phenomena are ultimately the same in possessing a nature of emptiness and relatively the same in being illusory. The superior or extraordinary equalities are that all phenomena are the same in having their ground in the clear-light nature and that all phenomena are the same in being the self-appearing play of that ground.

²²⁰ *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 186.4.

Vajra family of Akṣobhya, and Lotus family of Amitābha, representing enlightened body, speech, and mind. The maṇḍala with a single cluster involves only the enlightened family of Samantabhadra, “the lineage of lineages” this is considered “the mind of enlightened mind.” Thus, through the assembly (*tshogs*) of deities the rites are achieved and accomplishments attained.

In terms of the meditation, the yogin first dwells in spontaneous sameness and acts unhindered. All the maṇḍalas emanate from and then dissolve into the vajra family (single cluster), transforming the adept so that he personifies the great seal. Similar meditations can be done with the families of enlightened body, speech, and mind (three clusters) or with the five families (five clusters). The verse statement ends with an exhortation for the adept to find the appropriate location and accessories, to not let the vows degenerate, and to act without laziness. Thereby, he or she will “obtain the supreme, genuine, secret of indestructible reality.” The length of time this takes, it says in the last verse, “are explained according to their description in the tantras.”²²¹ The conclusion of the chapter states “With these words, the Tathāgata held meaningful discourse with the Tathāgata himself.”

CHAPTER TWELVE: COLLECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT

The twelfth chapter is called “Achievement of the Feast-Offerings” (*tshogs sgrub*), which can alternatively be translated as “collective achievement”.²²² It portrays a feast or gathering in which the group practices the achievement of the maṇḍala.²²³ The verses describe a variety of accumulated (*tshogs*) offerings. The chapter begins with the Great Joyous One emanating a

²²¹ This line was used by opponents of *Secret Essence* to demonstrate that it was a corrupt tantra (*rgyud log pa*) because it refers to the “tantras” the way a commentary would.

²²² Sources for chapter twelve are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 190.3-191.6; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 151.2-159.3; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 384.1-430.2; Lochen Dharmashri’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 293.6-324.5, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 950-981.

²²³ *de nas dkyil ’khor de dag nye bar bsgrub pa’i thabs bstan pa’i phyir/ de nas zhes bya ba la sogs pa gsungs sol* (Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 151.2).

cloud of magical display and entering into a meditation called “the array of ornaments” (*rgyan bkod pa'i ting nge 'dzin*).²²⁴ The verses that follow describe various offerings, which are called “seals”, and their results. By the seal of dance and hand movements, one attains the ability to go under the earth or fly in the sky. By the seal of song and poetry, one obtains accomplishment in the doctrine. By the seal of jewelry and clothes, one attains the status of a blazing, peerless king. By the seal of food and drink, one becomes accomplished in the wish-fulfilling enlightened form and nectar. By the seals of the vowels, which represent the rite of “union” (*sbyor ba*), and consonants, which stand for “liberation” (*sgrol ba*), one achieves all one’s desires.

The next topic described in this chapter is a scheme for delineating the progress of a practitioner, known as the three characteristics (*mtshan nyid gsum*). These are:

1. The characteristic of knowledge (*shes pa'i mtshan nyid*) or the view (*lta ba*)
2. The characteristic of engagement (*'jug pa'i mtshan nyid*) or the paths (*lam*) of the creation and completion stages, and
3. The characteristic of the result (*'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*).

Holding (*gzungs*) to the knowledge, the first characteristic, and to the engagement, the second characteristic, respectively act as the cause and condition for achieving the third characteristic, or the result. The result is to attain the status of one of the four knowledge-holders—the fruitional, life-empowered, of the great seal, and of spontaneous presence.

There is, then, a mention of the thirteen Bodhisattva grounds. These are the standard list of ten Bodhisattva ground with the addition of the Universal Light, the Unattached Lotus-Endowed, and the Holder of Indestructible Reality.²²⁵ The next verse describes visualizing

²²⁴ *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 190.4.

²²⁵ In Tibetan, these are *kun tu 'od gyi sa, ma chags pad ma can gyi sa, rdo rje 'dzin pa'i sa* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 357-358). Lochen Dharmashrī calls the latter *'khor lo tshogs chen gyi sa* (Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 321.5-322.1).

the “king of primordial wisdom in union with his consort” sitting on sun and moon cushions in the sky. Through this, one comes to meditate on all maṇḍalas. The next verse reiterates a common theme throughout the tantra:

The mind-itself is complete Buddhahood.

Don’t search elsewhere for Buddhahood.²²⁶

The conclusion assures the reader that even if the ritual is incomplete, the mistakes or omissions themselves are pure, and there is no defect.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE SECRET INSTRUCTIONS

The thirteenth chapter, “On the Essence of the Extremely Secret Quintessential Instructions” (*shin tu gsang ba man ngag gi snying po*), is one of the most important chapters of the tantra primarily because of the famous commentary on that chapter, *The Quintessential Instructions, Garland of Views* (*man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*), ascribed to Padmasambhava.²²⁷ The chapter begins with all the maṇḍalas of the vajra body, speech, and mind of all the Buddhas condensing into one. The Great Joyous One then enters into meditation on the essence of the most supreme commitment, which is that all things are spontaneously poised in great completeness (*rdzogs chen*), at which point the verses of the chapter are uttered. These verses begin with a list of various levels of beings in terms of their realization of the truth but are described by the commentarial tradition as different approaches (*sgo*) to the truth. Eight types of beings are listed, and these are sometimes called the eight vehicles. They are described in the tantra as:

1. Those who do not realize anything,

²²⁶ *sems nyid rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas tel /sang rgyas gzhan du ma tshol cig* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 191.4-191.5).

²²⁷ Sources for chapter thirteen are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 191.7-194.5; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 159.3-174.6; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 430.2-460.2; Lochen Dharmashrī’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 324.5-359.5, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 982-1053.

2. Those with wrong realization,
3. Those with partial realization,
4. Those who do not realize correctly,
5. Those with training,
6. Those with intention,
7. Those of the secret,
8. Those of the natural secret.

Old School commentators attempt to match these up with their nine-vehicle hierarchy, though in many ways it is an imperfect fit. In his chapter-commentary on the *Secret Essence*, titled the *Blazing Palace*, Vilāsavajra provocatively describes these eight as follows:

Those who do not realize anything are the worldly hedonists. Since they adhere to externals that deviate from their initial appearance, they are called deviants. The two [extreme views of] permanence and nihilism are wrong realizations. They deviate from [the correct] position...Hearers and Solitary Realizers are those with partial realization. Those [propounding] cognition, who realize one portion [of the truth], and the Middle Way adherents are only those who do not realize correctly, because [for them] the suchness of things abides in the entity of the three ultimates, but they do not actualize that indifferentiable [union] of the two truths...Even though they teach what is correct, Action [tantra practitioners] train the three doors through conduct, and in Yoga [tantra] the practitioner takes the inner yoga as the main [thing]. Since they abide in an extraordinary view and conduct, there are those of the secret. These are the [first] two inner [divisions of Tantra/Mahāyoga]. Atiyoga [is the vehicle] teaching that, although the nature of all things abides

as the result, there is only the obscuration of the various stages of adhering to imputations.²²⁸

The phrase translated above as “two inner [divisions of Tantra/Mahāyoga]” (*nang gnyis po*) is ambiguous in the Tibetan. Lochen Dharmashrī says that these are Mahāyoga and Anuyoga. However, in this context, he claims that the terms Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga refer to the three divisions of Mahāyoga.²²⁹ In his extensive commentary on the *Secret Essence*, *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions*, Longchenpa follows a similar line by saying that “those of the secret” refers to the general Mahāyoga practitioners, while “those of the natural secret” refers particularly to the practitioners of the *Secret Essence*.²³⁰ In his interpretation, the practitioners of the *Secret Essence* are separated out from the general practitioners of Mahāyoga. However, since he sees the *Secret Essence* as belonging to the Atiyoga Vehicle, he says that its view is “in accordance with the Great Perfection”.²³¹

The confusion concerning the interpretation of this passage in the *Secret Essence* is a result of the historical position of that text. Being written at a time—the mid-eighth century—when the concepts that ultimately came to form the Atiyoga Vehicle were first being developed. The kernel of Atiyoga’s philosophical view is contained within the text of the *Secret Essence*, but the trademark practices of that vehicle—Leap-over (*thod rgal*) and

²²⁸ *ci yang ma rtogs pa ni 'jig rten phyal pa stel snang ba dang po las gol ba'i phyir zhen pas gol ba zhes bya'o/ lrtag chad gnyis ni log par rtogs pa stel phyogs las gol ba'o/... nyan thos dang rang rgyal ni phyogs tsam rtogs pa'o/ lnam par rig pa ni phyogs gcig rtogs pa'o/ ldbu ma pa ni dngos po rnam kyi de kho na nyid don dam pa gsum gyi ngo bor gnas pa la bden pa gnyis mi phyed pa de mngon du ma byas pa'i phyir/ yang dag nyid ma rtogs pa kho na'o/... yang dag par bstan mod kyi spyod pas sgo gsum 'dul ba kri ya dang / spyod pa bas nang gi rnal 'byor gtsor byed pa yo ga dang / phal la med pa'i lta spyod la gnas pas gsang ba stel nang ba gnyis po dang / dngos po thams cad kyi rang bzhin 'bras bur gnas kyang / brtags pa la zhen pa'i rim pa sna tshogs kyi bsgrub pa tsam du ston pa'i a ti yo ga'o/ (Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 106.6-161.1).*

²²⁹ *phyi rgyud man chad thun mong gi yul du ma gyur pas gsang ba ni pha rgyud bskyed pa ma hā yo ga dang / ma rgyud rdzogs pa a nu yo ga'o/ lchos thams cad ye nas rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa rang byung gi ye shes su gnas pa'i don a nu man chad kyi yul du ma gyur pas gsang ba ni gnyis med kyi rgyud a ti yo ga stel ma hā yo ga la gsum du phyed ba'i bskyed rdzogs gsum mo/ (Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament to the Intention*, 328.4-328.6).*

²³⁰ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 996-997. He refers to the *Secret Essence* by the name of the cycle of texts it belongs to the *Magical Emanation Net* cycle.

²³¹ “Great Perfection” is here translated as Great Completeness.

Break-through (*khregs chod*)—and its inner divisions of Mind Series, Expanse Series, and so forth had yet to fully form. In this sense, it can be said that the *Secret Essence* does present the view of “great completeness”. However, though the *Secret Essence*’s view is similar to the Old Schools’ Atiyoga Vehicle, its practice is distinctly Mahāyoga. At the time of its initial appearance, Buddhist tantric practitioners probably viewed the *Secret Essence* as different from and even superior to the other Mahāyoga tantras, but did not classify it as a separate vehicle. Its radical views and practices influenced later generations, which gradually developed those views and practices into a separate way, known as Atiyoga. In the course of this development, the developers of Atiyoga adopted the *Secret Essence*’s unique terminology, calling their practice the “Great Completeness”.

The verses on the different views conclude with a statement that all the topics taught in these schools are contained in the indestructible mind of the teacher. There then follows an enigmatic verse on maṇḍalas that cryptically describes the stage of generation (*bskyed rim*):

With the maṇḍala of that which has a maṇḍala,
Meditate on the maṇḍala in the maṇḍala.
The maṇḍala arises from the maṇḍala.
The maṇḍala of exalted mind is the supreme vehicle.

Such language is intentionally mystifying and can only be elucidated by reference to the commentarial tradition. Vilāsavajra’s interpretation makes it clear that the various instances of the word “maṇḍala” refer to different types of maṇḍalas which are related to the three types of meditative stabilization—on emptiness, on illusory compassion, and on the coarse and subtle seals—the practice of the stage of generation:

[These lines] are explained in terms of the stages of external generation.
Having identified the natural maṇḍala, with an awareness of that, one meditates on the maṇḍala of meditative stabilization in the context of

meditative stabilization on emptiness. Then, in the context of meditative stabilization on illusion one makes clear the maṇḍala of reflection without drawing it. Then, in the context of the subtle [seal], one gathers the three realms into a *hūṃ*, the illusion of primordial wisdom. When one meditates on the maṇḍala of enhanced meditative stabilization, the wisdom-being is in one's heart, and one is thoroughly taught the blessing of initiation, whereby all appearances are distinguished. In that context, the aggregates and so forth are thoroughly complete [as] the branches clarified in the maṇḍala of meditative stabilization. Through that, one meditates on objects of enjoyment as thoroughly pure.²³²

The different types of maṇḍalas are described in detail in the various commentaries. One begins with the natural maṇḍala, the union of the sphere of reality and primordial wisdom, approaching it through meditation on emptiness. The maṇḍala of meditative stabilization is the visualized maṇḍala, while in the practice of the maṇḍala of enhanced meditative stabilization the visualized maṇḍala is “enhanced” by a physical representation into which one is initiated by the vajra-master. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima covers the various types of maṇḍalas in the second major section of his commentary, the section on the ten topics of Tantra.²³³

The thirteenth chapter of the *Secret Essence* continues with a series of equivalencies that relate aspects of the individual practitioner's subtle continuum to the macrocosmic maṇḍala:

The secret drop is the realm of the maṇḍala.

²³² Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 162.4-163.2. *dkyil 'khor ldan pa'i dkyil 'khor gyis zhes bya ba ni phyi rol tu bskyed pa'i rim pa'i dbang du bshad pa ni/ rang bzhin gyi dkyil 'khor ngo shes nas/ de'i blos stong pa nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin gyi skabs su ting nge 'dzin gyi dkyil 'khor bsgom/ de nas sgyu ma'i ting nge 'dzin gyi skabs su gzugs brnyan gyi dkyil 'khor mi bris par gsal bar byas/ de nas phra mo'i skabs su khams gsum ye shes sgyu ma nyi hūṃ du bsdus tel/ lhag pa'i ting nge 'dzin gyi dkyil 'khor du bsgom pa'i dus nal/ thugs kar ye shes sems dpa' dang / dbang bskur byin gyis brlabs pa rab tu bstan nas/ snang ba rnam par 'byed pa'i skabs su/ phung po la sogs pa lhag pa'i ting nge 'dzin gyi dkyil 'khor du gsal ba'i yan lag rnam yongs su rdzogs pas/ spyod yul yongs su dag par bsgom pa'ol*

²³³ Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, *Key to the Treasury*, 150.4-163.3.

The elements are the consorts of the wisdom families.

The great [elements] are the Tathāgatas of the great families.

The mind of enlightenment is the vajra-assembly.

The senses, objects, times, and awarenesses

[Exist] in the maṇḍala of Samantabhadra.²³⁴

This is said to be seen through the five primordial wisdoms that are the identity of all. Through unifying the male and female seminal drops, there is the play of blissful primordial wisdom, and through that play of sexual union, one makes offerings to the primordial maṇḍala. Through this merit, the magical illusions of primordial wisdom dawn spontaneously. Such is the actuality of all Buddhas and is the insight into the identity of all the qualities of the effect state. By abiding in this “maṇḍala”, the maṇḍala of completions is spontaneously established. From it, all other maṇḍalas, which are maṇḍalas of compassion, issue forth. One acts within the maṇḍala of magical illusion, while contemplating the maṇḍala of completion, where there is no subject and object. Within this state, the self-arising, excellent enlightened form is spontaneously established.

The verses close with a description of the benefits of this practice. One will be considered a son of the Buddhas and will dwell in absolute purity. Through it, the five enlightened bodies will be completed. In all the tantric teachings, there is no secret definitive meaning other than this. The wise will share this with people of appropriate capacity but will not impart it to those who are unsuitable unless they wish to roast and freeze in hell. The chapter concludes with the now classic statement, “The Tathāgata itself said this to the Tathāgata itself.”

²³⁴ *gsang ba'i thig le dkyil 'khor dbyings/ l'byung ba shes rab rigs kyi yum/ lchen po rigs kyi de bzhin tel lbyang chub sems ni rdo rje'i tshogs/ ldbang po yul dus rig pa rnams/ lkun tu bzang po'i dkyil 'khor la/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 192.4-192.5).*

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: EULOGY TO THE PEACEFUL MAṄḌALA

The fourteenth chapter, “Eulogy that Pleases” (*mnyes pa'i mchod pa*), concludes the section of the tantra that deals with the peaceful deities.²³⁵ As its name indicates, this short chapter consists of a song sung by the Great Joyous One to the maṅḍala of all the Tathāgatas on the merits of the maṅḍala described in the previous chapters. It sums up the basic points elaborated previously. The great seminal drop is the maṅḍala of primordial wisdom, while the assembly of deities and consorts is the maṅḍala of merit. The seminal drop contains the primordial wisdom that is the indestructible reality. The maṅḍala of deities represent the complete perfection of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities, epitomized by “the primordially and spontaneously complete Samantabhadra.” From the seminal point that is the “expanse of sameness or magical display” all the maṅḍalas emanate and are reabsorbed. Through this, all the higher purposes are spontaneously present at every moment. The song concludes with a description of the central theme of great identity:

Om! All without exception is enlightened form, speech, and mind.

This is the great identity of enlightened form, speech, and mind.

The enlightened form, speech, and mind pervade everything.

This is the great seminal drop of enlightened form, speech, and mind. *Ho!*

²³⁵ Sources for chapter fourteen are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 194.5-195.6; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 174.6-178.6; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 460.2-466.1; Lochen Dharmashrī’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 359.5-364.6, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1054-1063.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE MYTH OF RUDRA—INTRODUCTION TO THE WRATHFUL DIETIES

The second major section of the *Secret Essence* deals with the wrathful deities.²³⁶ This section begins with the fifteenth chapter, “Emanating the Cloud of Maṇḍalas Whose Natures are Wrathful” (*khro bo rang bzhin gyi dkyil ’khor gyi sbrin rnam par spros pa*). The chapter relates the story of the subjugation of Maheśvara, or the Hindu god Śiva. That this is a common theme in certain later Buddhist tantras has already been documented.²³⁷ The story appears to have originated with the *Sarvatathāgatattvaśaṅgraha Sūtra*, or *Compendium of Principles*, which was probably compiled at the beginning of the eighth century and from then on became a popular theme taken up by other tantric narratives, especially in the Mahāyoga tradition.²³⁸ The myth, as it appears in the *Compendium of Principles*, may be briefly summarized as follows:²³⁹

Vajrapāṇi is asked to emanate the members of his Buddha-family for the maṇḍala but refuses to do so as long as there are “criminals” such as Maheśvara around. Through uttering a mantra, Vairocana magically drags Śiva and his retinue to the peak of Mt. Sumeru and demands their submission to the three jewels. Śiva refuses and threatens them with his wrathful form (Rudra), claiming himself to be “Lord of the Triple World”. Vairocana and Vajrapāṇi utter a mantra, whereupon Śiva’s whole retinue utters a cry of pain and submits to the three jewels. Śiva, on the other hand,

²³⁶ Sources for chapter fifteen are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 195.6-206.2; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 178.6-188.3; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 466.1-496.5; Lochen Dharmashrī’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 364.6-390.2, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyaagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1064-1143.

²³⁷ Ronald M. Davidson, “Reflections on the Maheśvara Subjugation Myth: Indic Materials, Sa-skyapa Apologetics, and the Birth of Heruka” in *JLBS*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1991), 197-235. Robert Mayer, “The Figure of Maheśvara/Rudra in the rÑin-ma-pa Tantric Tradition” in *JLBS*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1998), 271-310.

²³⁸ Davidson, “The Maheśvara Myth”, 199, 218. Mayer, “The Figure of Maheśvara”, 282-283.

²³⁹ This is an abbreviation of Davidson’s synopsis, 200-202.

dies. They revive him, hoping he will be converted, but he remains obdurate. Vajrapāṇi then tramples Śiva and his consort, Umā, under his two feet. With the utterance of another mantra, Śiva's consciousness is sent to a pure land and reborn as a Buddha. Then, Śiva and all his retinue are renamed and set up within the maṇḍala.

The obvious sectarian rivalry between Hinduism and Buddhism portrayed in the story should not be ignored, but it is by no means the only thing going on here. Besides demonstrating Tantric Buddhism's superiority over their Hindu Shaivite rivals, to whom they were ironically much indebted, the myth's narrative makes use of earlier Buddhist themes such as the defeat of Māra and the conversion stories found in the early canon with Śiva replacing the traditional figure of Māra as the ultimate symbol of evil. Furthermore, the myth embodies the classic Indian theme of bringing balance back to an imbalanced universe; Śiva and his retinue are wreaking havoc, and Vajrapāṇi and Vajrasattva restore the natural order.²⁴⁰

In the Mahāyoga cycle of tantric texts, which very likely post-date the *Compendium of Principles* version, the Maheśvara subjugation myth becomes an integral part of its worldview. It thus holds a central position in the Mahāyoga textual and ritual cycles that focus on the destruction of negativities, such as the *Vajra-Dagger* (*rdo rje phur pa, vajrakīlaya*) cycles.²⁴¹ The story in, for instance, the seventh chapter of the root text of the *Vajra-Dagger* is very much similar to the original *Compendium of Principles* version, accounting for the change in Buddhist deities.²⁴² There are however a few important additions. In the *Vajra-Dagger* version, Maheśvara and his retinue draw attention to themselves by the harm they are causing to the world. That is, their role as disruptive,

²⁴⁰ Davidson, "The Maheśvara Myth", 216-217.

²⁴¹ Mayer, "The Figure of Maheśvara", 304.

²⁴² The story is summarized by Mayer, "The Figure of Maheśvara", 289-291.

negative forces that need to be tamed is emphasized. To tame them, Vajrakīlaya manifests in a special wrathful form. The Hindu deities are subdued and trampled on as in the *Compendium of Principles* version. However, then the Buddhist deities manifest in their vajra-dagger form where the lower half of their body is a knife. With the chanting of some mantras, the Hindu deities are “killed, and their remainders roasted or burned and eaten,” which reduces their pulverized bodies into a lake of filth. The ritual of “liberative killing” (*sgrol ba*) is taught in the middle of the story. Then, ten wrathful deities along with a “waste-disposal deity Ucchuṣmakrodha” appear. The latter drinks up the lake of filth that is the remains of the Hindu pantheon, and they join the maṇḍala. The main Buddhist deity, Vajrakīlaya, then has sex with each of the Hindu goddesses, and they join the maṇḍala as the twenty-eight Īśvarīs, which completes the divine circle. The *Vajra-Dagger* cycle clearly brings out the darker aspects of the myth by emphasizing the killing, death, and destruction of the Hindu gods. However, it does so not out of a mere macabre fascination with death. The story emphasizes the taming of negative forces so that the death of the Hindu pantheon is seen as a transformation of profane negativity into a divine reality. Along with this, the narrative embodies a rebellion against Buddhist norms (i.e., no killing and no sexual misconduct), demonstrating that what appears to be profane can in fact be sacred.

The Maheśvara subjugation myth, as found in chapter fifteen of the *Secret Essence*, is nearly identical to that found in the *Vajra-Knife* cycle. However, it is prefaced with an explanation of how Maheśvara, or more particularly his demonic form, Rudra, developed into the monster he is. In that way, the chapter breaks with the narrative format established in the previous chapters on the peaceful deities. Rather than the Great Joyous One entering into a particular meditation and giving a discourse, it begins with a statement that the Lord of Tathāgatas displays the wrathful maṇḍala, followed by the rhetorical question, “Why is this the case?” The prose explanation that follows makes the fifteenth chapter more similar to the first than any of the others, for not only does it have a long prose introduction but in

that introduction it lays out a description of the wrathful maṇḍala. The major difference is inclusion of the myth of the subjugation of Maheśvara.

The explanation of Maheśvara's evolution begins with a corrupt tantric practitioner, who is interested only in the hidden secrets (*sbas pa'i gsang ba*) without realizing the concealed secrets (*gab pa'i gsang ba*). That is, this practitioner is interested in the trappings of ritual sex and killing without first understanding the true nature of reality concealed in ordinary appearances. Thereby, without understanding the law of cause and effect, he performs these actions lacking any realization and accrues the causes for rebirth in a hell-realm. After experiencing the hell-realms for many eons, he is reborn as a hungry ghost and suffers in that realm for a number of eons. Finally, he is born as a great demon who “through the force of intoxication and degeneration” conquers the three realms. It is at this point one finds a statement that is similar to the opening lines of the previous chapters:

Then, in order to demonstrate the brilliance of the great pride that tames the self in the three existences and the ten directions of the world within the magical emanation net that is the great Tathāgata's array of vajras, the Lord of the vajra body, speech, and mind of all the Tathāgatas, the transcendent conqueror Great Joy entered into equipoise on the meditative stabilization of the kind of the magical emanation net which emanates a great cloud that is the maṇḍala of wrathful conquerors, and from within the realm of Tathāgata-ness, the great wrathful Ladies issued forth.²⁴³

The wrathful female deities then entwine with their wrathful male consorts. They all dissolve, and with the resonance of a wrathful mantra, innumerable wrathful maṇḍalas arise.

²⁴³ *de nas de bzhin gshegs pa che ba'i rdo rje bkod pa'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba las/ jig rten drug gi phyogs bcu srid pa gsum gyi bdag po 'dul ba'i nga rgyal chen po'i gzi brjid ston pa'i phyir/ de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs rdo rje'i bdag pa'il bcom ldan 'das dgyes pa chen pos/ khro bo'i dkyil 'khor gyi sprin chen po rnam par 'phro ba'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i rgyal po'i ting nge 'dzin la snyoms par zhugs tel/ de bzhin nyid kyi dbying nyid nas/ khro mo dbang phyug chen mo mngon du phyung stel (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 197.4-198.1).*

All the worlds tremble at their emergence, which causes Maheśvara and his retinue of demons all to faint. Then, the Great Joyous One and his retinue transform into horrific blood-drinkers, and there is a description of these, along with a placement of the various families in the four directions. They use as their thrones the unconscious bodies of Maheśvara and his army of demons. The later awaken and threaten the Buddhas, telling them to go away. Instead, the wrathful Buddhist deities pull out the hearts of the trapped demons, cut off their limbs, and disembowel them. The deities eat the flesh of the demons and wear their bones as ornaments. Then, everything condenses into a single syllable and a retinue of female wrathful deities gathers. Their names indicate they are either personifications of abstract qualities (Power Woman, Lust Woman, etc.) or they are theriomorphic goddesses (Pig Woman, Great Orange Goat-headed Woman, etc.), totally twenty-eight in all. These are then assigned to the various Buddha families—Vajra, Tathāgata, Jewel, Lotus, Action. Then, by saying various seed-syllables—*ha*, *he*, and *phaṭ*—more groups of female deities emanate forth. These are the Mamo goddesses. They initially sit around the perimeter of the maṇḍala, blazing with fire and sitting with threatening expressions. Then, with the utterance, “*phaṭ!*”, the Mamo goddesses are sent back to their respective realms.

At this point, the Great Lord and his maṇḍala say a mantra, whereupon they defecate the remains of Maheśvara and his retinue. The feces gathers into a lake from which Ucchusamakrodha arises. He drinks up the filth, and through him, Maheśvara and the demons are re-embodied and regain consciousness. They make a vow of submission to the wrathful maṇḍala and offer up their wives, sisters, and daughters. They are then handed vajras, given the name initiation, and set up at the perimeter of the maṇḍala. This is the end of the chapter, which has no extensive verse section as the previous ones did. The only verse statements made in this chapter are the utterances of mantras by the wrathful deities and the

words spoken by Maheśvara and the demons—cursing the Buddhas at the beginning and their submission at the end of the chapter.

The chapter self-consciously recognizes itself as a Buddhist form of theodicy by following the opening statement of the wrathful maṇḍala’s emanation with the rhetorical question, “Why is this so?” This rhetorical device is distinctly out of place in a scripture that otherwise adheres to the standard formula of the teacher entering into a meditation and giving a sermon. The oddities of the narrative in comparison with the rest of the text and the fact that the Maheśvara subjugation myth is a common theme for this cycle of tantric literature lends weight to the speculation that the peaceful and wrathful sections of the *Secret Essence* were originally separate texts. The *Secret Essence* as it exists today with its distinct sections of the peaceful and wrathful deities is very likely the amalgamation of two separate traditions.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: WRATHFUL MANTRAS

The sixteenth chapter is entitled “Elaborating the Great Wrathful Host’s Maṇḍala of Speech” (*khro bo’i tshogs chen po’i gsung gi dkyil ’khor spros pa*).²⁴⁴ As this title indicates, the chapter deals with the mantras, or power-laden speech acts, associated with the wrathful deities. The chapter has a more typical beginning than the previous one. It introduces the verses by saying that the Great Joy, who is now in his wrathful, Heruka form, brought forth “these maṇḍalas of speech” so that the wrathful deities might be accomplished through commitment, i.e., in the yogin’s practice. The maṇḍalas of speech referred to are the mantras that compose the bulk of the following verses. These mantras, as usual, are for the most part in Sanskrit and are composed primarily of the deities’ names with some qualifying adjectives and violent exhortations, such as “strike”, “burn”, and so forth. They are to be used in the

²⁴⁴ Sources for chapter sixteen are: *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 206.2-209.2; Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 188.3-190.4; Yungtönpa’s *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 496.5-506.1; Lochen Dharmashri’s *Ornament of the Intention*, 390.2-399.4, and Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1144-1159.

ritual generation of the wrathful maṇḍala. Thus, according to the commentarial tradition, each of the wrathful deities, male and female, have their own mantra, and in fact by counting each of the twenty-eight repetitions of the syllable “*bhyo*” at the end as individual mantras, there are a total of fifty-eight, equivalent to the number of the wrathful deities.

The first five mantras are longer than the rest, containing relatively complete grammar. They represent the five wrathful versions of the five central Buddhas. They are not invoked by name, other than Heruka, which is this tantra’s general appellation for a wrathful deity, but are named according to the family, or lineage, over which they rule. Thus, the first mantra, the one for the Tathāgata family, is representative of the other four with the substitution of Vajra, Jewel, Lotus, and Action as the family name:

Om! Great Glorious Heruka of the Tathāgata [family], great fierce one, put
an end to all evil things. Strike! Burn! Cook! *Hūṃ! Hūṃ! Hūṃ!*²⁴⁵

The next five mantras are for the female wrathful consorts of the five Herukas. Again, a general name is used for them “Great Lady of Wrath” (*mahākrodhīśvarī*), and their specific designation is by their ruling family. Their mantras also have basic semantic meaning, the first one being translated as:

Om! Great Lady of Wrath of the Tathāgata [family], [to] all evil things [say]
*Hūṃ! Phaṭ!*²⁴⁶

Hūṃ and *Phaṭ* are, according to Longchenpa, seed syllables respectively used to subdue and shatter.²⁴⁷ The other four mantras for the principle female deities of the wrathful maṇḍala vary slightly from this one, by slightly modifying the consort’s title. As before, there is one

²⁴⁵ *om sarvatathāgata mahāśrīheruka mahācāṇḍa sarvadustānataka hana dāha pacha hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 206.4-206.5). Here, the Sanskrit actually has “All the Tathāgatas” instead of “Tathāgata [family]” translated above. The latter translation is a meaning translation that allows one to see the parallelism between these five mantras.

²⁴⁶ *om sarvatathāgata mahākrodhīśvarī sarvadustāna hūṃ phaṭ* (Tb.206.7).

²⁴⁷ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1153.

mantra for each Buddha-family, going through the list in the same order: Tathāgata, Vajra, Jewel, Lotus, Action.

The next eight mantras are those for the eight Mātārīs or Keu-ri-mas.²⁴⁸ These wrathful female deities, which Lauf analogizes with the Furies, have no male counterparts. They are also called “Wisdom-Dākinīs of the eight kinds of awareness” and are considered to be the terrifying aspects of the eight peaceful Bodhisattvas previously encountered.²⁴⁹ Their mantras are composed through the formula: *oṃ vajra* (name) *ha*. They are, listed in the order given in the tantra: Kaurī (white), Caurī (thief), Pramohā (deluded), Vetālī (zombie), Caṇḍālī (fierce), Pukkāsī (fragrant), Ghasmarī (eater of unclean flesh), Smaśānī (frequenter of charnel grounds).²⁵⁰

These mantras are followed by those for the eight Piśācīs, or Tra-men-ma goddesses, which Lauf identifies with the Mamo goddesses.²⁵¹ These are also wrathful goddesses without male consorts, but they have a theriomorphic appearance, bearing animal heads. They are associated with the eight kinds of objects for the eight kinds of awareness and the eight consorts of the peaceful Bodhisattvas, making them the counterparts to the eight Mātārīs.²⁵² Their mantras follow the formula: *oṃ vajra* (name) *he*. They are respectively: Siṃhamukhī (lion-faced), Vyāghramukhī (tiger-faced), Śṛgālamukhī (fox-faced), Śvamukhī (wolf-faced), Gṛdhramukhī (vulture-faced), Kaṅkamukhī (heron-faced),²⁵³ Kākamukhī (raven-faced), and Ulūkamukhī (owl-faced). They are considered to be flesh-eating goddess, and as with the

²⁴⁸ Longchenpa calls them “Mātārīs” (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1154). Lauf calls them “Keurimas” (*Secret Doctrines*, 147).

²⁴⁹ Lauf, *Secret Doctrines*, 147.

²⁵⁰ The English translations of these names are from Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1154.

²⁵¹ Longchenpa calls these “Piśācīs” (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1154), while Lauf calls them *phra men ma* and also the more common name, *ma mo* (*Secret Doctrines*, 148).

²⁵² Lauf, *Secret Doctrines*, 148.

²⁵³ The meaning of the Sanskrit word *kaṅka* is uncertain. MW has “heron” (242.1). The translation of Longchenpa’s commentary has “kite” (Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1155), and Lauf has “black death bird” (*Secret Doctrines*, 149).

eight Mātariś, each is assigned one of the cardinal or intermediate directions by the commentarial tradition.

The next set of mantras are those of the four female gate-keepers of the wrathful maṇḍala. These are four wrathful Dākinīs with animal heads. They are, by the tradition, associated with the four immeasurables (*tshad med bzhi*): compassion, love, joy, and equanimity. Their Tibetan names are Da-dong-ma (*rta gdong ma*) or horse-faced, Pak-dong-ma (*phag dgong ma*) or pig-faced, Seng-dong-ma (*seng gdong ma*) or lion-faced, and Drül-dong-ma (*sprul dgong ma*) or snake-faced. Their Sanskrit names are uncertain, evidenced by the confusion over the correct form of the Sanskrit of their mantras.²⁵⁴ If these mantras follow the form of the previous two groups, their format is: *oṃ vajra* (name) (seed-syllable). However, the last syllable does not remain constant but progresses through the four syllables: *jaḥ*, *hūṃ*, *baṃ*, *hoḥ*. The “names” are also somewhat unusual: *āryatejaten* (“sublime charisma”), *amoghā* (“successful”), *lokā* (“illuminator”), and *bhasmī valayavatī* (“turning to ashes”).²⁵⁵

There then follows twenty-eight repetitions of the syllable, “*bhyoḥ*”. These are said to represent the twenty-eight Īśvarīś.²⁵⁶ These are wrathful, animal-headed goddesses in four groups of seven. They form the outer ring of the maṇḍala, each group being associated with one of the four cardinal directions.²⁵⁷ The remaining mantras of the verse section of this chapter consist of those mantras used in the ritual creation of the maṇḍala. They are for summoning the deities, making offerings to them, and beseeching their blessings.²⁵⁸ The chapter then concludes stating that the whole universe is burned up and filled by the wrathful maṇḍala.

²⁵⁴ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1437, n. 10.

²⁵⁵ Translations are from Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1155.

²⁵⁶ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1155.

²⁵⁷ Lauf, *Secret Doctrines*, 150-152.

²⁵⁸ Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 1156-1157.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: WRATHFUL MAṄḌALA

The seventeenth chapter, “On Demonstrating the Wrathful Maṅḍala” (*khro bo'i dkyil 'khor bstan pa*), is the wrathful version of chapter six, which describes the maṅḍala of peaceful deities. Following a brief, non-descript introduction, the verses of this chapter give an abbreviated description of the wrathful maṅḍala of reflection (*gzugs brnyan gyi dkyil 'khor*), that is, the visualized maṅḍala. The fundamental layout is the same as the peaceful version—a circle with four spokes surrounded by four walls with four gates. The difference is that these are blazing with fire and adorned with horrific ornaments, such as skulls and snakes. Inside, there are five thrones, supported on the talons of a bull, buffalo, leopard, tiger, and bear respectively. On these sit the five main wrathful deities or Herukas of the five families. They have three heads, six arms, and four legs and are colored dark-brown, dark-blue, dark-yellow, dark-red, and dark-green. They wear various wrathful ornaments and hold terrific hand-symbols—human skulls, swords, axes, etc. They are embraced by their five consorts and beautified by various “mudrās”, namely the wrathful Ḍākinīs that compose the remainder of the maṅḍala.²⁵⁹ This short chapter ends by saying that the maṅḍala radiated throughout the entire universe.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: WRATHFUL OFFERINGS

The eighteenth chapter is “The teaching of the excellent offerings and gifts” (*mchod sbyin dam pa bstan pa*). Lochen Dharmashrī explains these are offerings to the Tathāgatas and gifts to the Ḍākinīs.²⁶⁰ The beginning of the chapter is unremarkable, leading straight into the verses. The verses describe the offerings of liberation (*sgrol ba*), union (*sbyor ba*), sacraments

²⁵⁹ These are named euphemistically. There are the “situational mudrās” (*gnas kyi phyag rgya*), referring to the eight Keurimas associated with the eight consciousnesses; the “objective mudrās” (*yul gyi phyag rgya*), referring to the eight Mamo goddesses associated with the eight objects; the “mudrās of the four gates” (*sgo bzhi'i phyag rgya*); and a “host of concubines and maid-servants”, referring to the twenty-eight Íśvarīs.

²⁶⁰ *Ornament to the Intention*, 408.3.

(*dam rdzas*), and enjoyments (*longs spyod*). The first offering is to liberate the whole world, having first liberated one's own conceptuality. It should be remembered here that liberation is a euphemism for compassionate ritual killing. The second is the practice of ritual sexual union, in which by pleasing oneself all the Tathāgatas are similarly please. The third is to offer the five nectars—urine, excrement, blood, flesh, and semen—to the maṇḍala that is equal with oneself in order to attain equanimity or sameness (*mnyam nyid*). The fourth is to offer qualities of the desire realm, such as food, drink, clothing, and so forth. One visualizes a maṇḍala of these items dissolving into the maṇḍala of wisdom deities.

The remainder of the verses in this very short chapter deal with results procured by such offerings. There are two verses concerning this. The first describes the mundane achievements. It states that since the good qualities of the Buddhas do not exist apart from self-awareness, then certainly the mundane good qualities of gods and other beings in the world must be the same. The second verse depicts the supreme accomplishment, complete enlightenment. It says that as yogins perfect the great seal, the maṇḍala will blaze forth in proportion to the negation of the dualistic mind.²⁶¹ With that, the chapter ends as abruptly as it began.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: WRATHFUL COMMITMENTS

The nineteenth chapter, “The Commitments”, is equivalent to the ninth chapter of the section on the peaceful deities. In line with its title, the chapter discusses the commitments involved for this tantric practice. Because it belongs to the section on the wrathful deities, these commitments deal with the more antinomian or left-handed practices of tantra, and as is usual for tantric texts, the chapter advocates actions that on the surface appear contradictory to the Buddhist morality common to the lower or more exoteric schools. Preceded only by a terse, standard introduction, the first verse of this chapter by laying out

²⁶¹ See *PKb*, 196.1.

the premise behind these tantric ethics: if the highest vehicle is properly understood, then even though one acts through afflictive emotions, one does not accumulate negative karma but instead accumulates the collection of merit and wisdom necessary for Buddhahood. Furthermore, the commitments that make up this unusual ethical code encompass all the commitments of all the lower vehicles so that by keeping to these commitments one upholds all other types of commitments.

The text follows with a series of verses detailing how all actions are incorporated into the tantric path, here advocated. Because in the realization of emptiness, no permanent, static entity is observed, there is no such “thing” as “a life” or “the taking of a life”. These are just misconceptions, the implication being that murder in this context is permissible. Similarly, objects and owners are merely the illusions of one’s own mind. So, “there is no theft”.²⁶² Designating phenomena with words or names is a lie, because those phenomena are illusions. Therefore, “practice lying to the lie itself.” Finally, it discusses the “supreme king of lust” as what is beyond the relative existence of lust (*chags pa*) and no lust (*ma chags pa*). These verses thus implicitly advocate the practice of four out of the five deeds to be abandoned by the lay person in non-Tantric Buddhism: killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants.

At this point, the five root commitments (*rtsa ba’i dam tshig*) and the ten secondary commitments (*yan lag gi dam tshig*) are listed. The root commitments are five in number:

1. Do not abandon the mind of enlightenment.
2. Respect one’s teacher.
3. Do not interrupt the practice of mantra and mudrā.
4. Love all beings so that they may enter the genuine path, and
5. Do not talk about this path to the wrong type of person.

²⁶² Tb, 210.6.

There are ten secondary commitments which are separated into the five things not to be abandoned (*mi spang ba lnga*) and the five things that are not to be discarded (*mi dor ba lnga*).²⁶³ The commitments are not to respectively abandon or discard these things. They are:

The Five Things Not to Abandon

obscurity

lust

rage

pride

jealousy

The Five Things Not to Discardwhite nectar (semen, *bdud rtsi dkar po*),red nectar (menstrual blood, *bdud rtsi dmar po*),great stink (feces, *dri chen*),great flesh (human flesh, *sha chen*),water (urine, *chu*).

Together, the ten secondary commitments and the five root commitments are called the commitments of equanimity (*mnyam pa'i dam tshig*). When one holds these commitments, everything is unified in equality, and one will attain the great completeness (*rdzogs chen*). If transgressed however, Buddhahood will not be attained. The verses then exhort the practitioner not to associate with those of degenerate commitments, describing the negative, unpleasant consequences of allowing any of these commitments to lapse. Next, the verses briefly mention there are three hundred and sixty subdivisions of these commitments: each of the five root commitments having thirty two and each of the ten secondary commitments having twenty. Finally, they conclude with a description of the benefits from adhering to these commitments: one will join the ranks of Samantabhadra's entourage, attaining a state where everything is the seal of enlightened body, speech, and mind. Worldly leaders and their aides will respect and honor one, and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will bless one as a son or brother. These commitments encompass all the innumerable commitments found in lower vehicles so that if these are kept pure, all commitments are kept pure. Therefore, the last verse says, if there is a lapse of any sort, rectify it immediately.

²⁶³ *Ornament to the Intention*, 420.3ff.

CHAPTER TWENTY: WRATHFUL RITES

The twentieth chapter is entitled “On the Blessing of Spontaneously Present Enlightened Activity” (*lhun gyis grub pa'i 'phrin las byin gyis rlob pa zhes bya ba'i le'u*). One of the longer of the wrathful chapters, it primarily deals with the rites to be performed in relation to the wrathful maṇḍala. Whereas the rites of the peaceful maṇḍala focus on the sexual practice of ritual union (*sbyor ba, gāna*), the rites elaborated here concern mainly the practice of ritual liberation (*sgrol ba, tāna*), a euphemism for compassionately motivated murder. Though this is not the express object of all the rites, it is certainly the paradigm. These rites are part of the group accomplishment (*tshogs sgrub*), in which a group of practitioner-couples gather in an isolated place and, recreating the maṇḍala, enjoy a ritual offering feast.

The chapter begins with the central deity, the Great Joy, entering into a meditation called “blessing of the spontaneously present commitments” (*lhun gyi grub pa'i dam tshig byin gyis rlob pa*) and giving a description of the rituals. The rites thus related concern all four types of enlightened activity are described: fierce, controlling, increasing, and pacifying. In each case, the group of practitioners arrange themselves in a particular shape and make offerings into the ritual fire. An effigy of the relevant being is made out of symbolic substances with its name written on a piece of paper at its heart. The creature is summoned into the effigy, and the effigy is stabbed with the sacred knife (*phur pa*). The result of the fierce rites is that anything can be destroyed. The controlling rites allow one to subjugate any force. The increasing rites grant all desires. The pacifying rites will make anything immovable. The remaining offerings left over from the feast are given to the secondary, attendant goddesses. The powers of Heruka are extolled with the aim of encouraging the practitioner not to transgress their commitments, and the great benefits of the practice are described.

Then, there is a distinct break in the narrative with the line, “The main rites of achievement of the wrathful [maṇḍala] are as follows...”²⁶⁴ The verses that follow discuss the benefits of various forms of song and dance. Those mentioned are the song and dance of the Blood Drinkers, of the Great Lady of the Treasury, of the Great Incense Goddess, of the Great Lion-faced Goddess, of the Great Swan-faced Goddess, and of the secondary females in the maṇḍala. The last verse describes locations for the performance of such ceremonies, such as in a dense thicket. Having said those words, the chapter closes with a statement that the Tathāgata itself is purified in the Tathāgata itself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: EULOGY TO THE WRATHFUL DEITIES

The twenty-first chapter, “Eulogy to the Wrathful Deities” (*khro bo'i bstod pa*), does not begin with the transcendent conqueror Great Joy entering into a meditative stabilization. Instead, he and the rest of the deities in the maṇḍala make terrifying expressions and sing a song of praise. The song describes the wrathful Heruka, the king of the maṇḍala, in terms of the five Buddha-families he emanates, as manifestation of his five qualities of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. The fierce Buddha-body blazes with fire, emanates rays like many suns, has wrathful expressions, and bares his hideous fangs. The fierce Buddha-speech resonates like a thousand peels of thunder and the demolishing of thousands of mountains. It gives forth a terrifying laugh, and the wind from the speech blows away all negativities. The fierce Buddha-mind illuminates the whole maṇḍala with the light of primordial wisdom. This wisdom is the essential seminal drop of all the varieties of appearance. The fierce Buddha-qualities are a great cloud which rains down the maṇḍala and provides all that is desired. The fierce Buddha-activities conquer all demons so terrifyingly that it frightens even the assembled maṇḍala of deities. The song of praise ends with a general statement about Heruka. He is vajra earth, vajra water, vajra fire, and vajra wind.

²⁶⁴ This is the only place other than the fifteenth chapter where there is such a break in the narrative.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: ADVICE AND TRANSMISSION

The last chapter of the tantra is called “On Being Pleased and Thoroughly Retaining” (*mnyes pa dang yongs su gzung ba'i*). One of the shortest chapters, it begins with the simple statement that the Great Joy, the Tathāgata, made a statement on the retention of stability to the Tathāgata itself. As the chapter’s title indicates, the five verses that follow are divided into two general subjects. According to the commentarial tradition, “being pleased” refers to general instructions, or advice (*gdams pa*), given to the retinue, and “retaining” refers to the entrustment of the spoken words to specific guardians. The first two verses of general instructions summarize the contents of the *Secret Essence* in terms of the four appearances (*snang ba bzhi*). These are the appearances of the ground (*gzhi snang*), mistaken appearances (*'khrul snang*), appearances of the path (*lam snang*), and appearances of the result (*'bras snang*). The appearances of the ground is that the nature of everything is the very entity of the Tathāgata; this is the way things naturally are. Mistaken appearances are what appear to ordinary beings who due to karmic predispositions see these basic appearances through the lens of conceptuality and so perceive everything dualistically as subject and object. Appearance of the path are the realizations of the various Bodhisattva levels up to the level of enlightenment. They appear as what is suitable according to the level of the practitioner. The appearances of the result are what appear to Tathāgatas, i.e., enlightened beings.

The commentarial tradition speaks of three kinds of entrustment. There is the entrustment of the text to Vajrapāṇi as the compiler, the entrustment of the doctrine to the Mamo Goddesses and the Ḍākinīs, and the general entrustment to beings who have realized it.²⁶⁵ The first two are not explicitly mentioned in the verses, which concentrate on the general entrustment. Their import is that what is spoken in this tantra is the sole secret of all the Tathāgatas. Therefore, anyone who realizes it becomes identical with Samantabhadra,

²⁶⁵ YG, 582.1-583.4.

regardless of whether they received all the empowerments of the tradition. Such a one should teach it to a suitable trainee, who will become a spiritual son born from enlightened mind and will abide in the highest level of attainment. In this way, the teaching will be preserved. The five verses cause all the Tathāgatas to rejoice and together enter the sphere of equality, thereby ending the chapter.

CONCLUSIONS

The discerning reader of the twenty-two chaptered version of the *Secret Essence* is left with the distinct impression that the present text is a compilation of two originally separate works, a tantra on the forty-two peaceful deities and one on the fifty-eight wrathful ones. They have two completely different casts of characters, and yet they cover similar topics, much as any two separate tantras, for example the *Secret Assembly* and the *O Vajra*, do. Furthermore, the structures of the two major sections are quite similar, beginning with an introductory story that “sets the scene” for the rest of the chapters to follow and ending with a eulogy. Minor stylistic variations, such as the unusual use of a rhetorical question at the beginning of the wrathful section and references to the wrathful maṇḍala awkwardly appended to verses in the peaceful section, reinforce this conclusion. Gyurme Dorje has pointed out that in comparing the three versions of the *Secret Essence*—the short 22-chaptered one, the middling one of approximately 40 chapters, and the extensive one of about 80 chapters—the longer versions add more wrathful chapters than peaceful ones. He suggests a comparison with the history of the Perfection of Wisdom literature, which was expanded over time. Though such a comparison has yet to be done and is beyond the scope of the present work, the assumption that the shorter *Secret Essence* precedes the others is not far-fetched. If this were the case, one could also speculate through extrapolation that the kernel of the *Secret Essence*’s peaceful section in some form preceded the wrathful one and that as the Hindu Śaiva movement

developed their texts and the Buddhist Tantrikas began to borrow material from them,²⁶⁶ the wrathful section was appended to the peaceful section and was gradually expanded over time. However, at present this is nothing more than mere conjecture.

Nonetheless, the *Secret Essence* text as a whole is well-crafted work, systematically structured to present a complete cosmology and eschatology. The peaceful section describes the primordial purity of all things as the self-appearance of primordial wisdom. It begins with the emanation of the maṇḍala out of primordial wisdom in the very highest land within cyclic existence (chapter 1). The teacher and retinue then describe the view that all phenomena are primordially pure (chapter 2). Emanation bodies are sent to the various realms of cyclic existence and teach all the doctrines (chapter 3). The maṇḍala of seed-syllables for the forty-two deities is then described (chapter 4). The description of how all things emanate from this maṇḍala follows (chapter 5), particularly the maṇḍala of deities (chapter 6). Then, come the aspects of the practice: mantra (chapter 7), mudrā (chapter 8), the vows (chapter 9), initiations (chapter 10), the individuals meditation (chapter 11), the group's celebration (chapter 12), and the quintessential instructions (chapter 13). These are concluded by the eulogy (chapter 14).

The wrathful section on the other hand begins with a discussion of the purpose of the wrathful maṇḍala, which is done through the story of Maheśvara's subjugation (chapter 15). This myth describes in essence the origin of evil in the world.²⁶⁷ Interestingly enough, the origin of evil is from a misinterpretation of the practice of the *Secret Essence*. Rudra in a previous life sought the hidden meanings without understanding the concealed meanings.

²⁶⁶ The borrowing of Śaiva tantric materials by the Buddhists has been demonstrated effectively by Alexis Sanderson, through detailed linguistic analysis. Alexis Sanderson, "Pious Plagiarism: Evidence of the Dependence of the Buddhist Yoginītantras on Śaiva Scriptural Sources," paper given at Seminar over Tantrism, CNWA, Leiden, April 1995.

²⁶⁷ Matthew Kapstein, "Samantabhadra and Rudra; Innate Enlightenment and Radical Evil in Tibetan Rnying-ma-pa Buddhism" in *Discourse and Practice*, eds. Frank Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 71.

That is, he performed the carefully guarded, “outrageous” rituals of the tantra without understanding the sublime, esoteric view that is to accompany them. Therefore, the wrathful deities appear, and the maṇḍala is formed through the subjugation of Rudra. This is followed by a description of wrathful mantras (chapter 16), the wrathful maṇḍala (chapter 17), the burnt offerings (chapter 18), the vows (chapter 19), and the rituals (chapter 20). This section also closes with a eulogy (chapter 21). A final section of praise and entrustment closes the tantra as a whole (chapter 22).

The two sections are similar in concern but differ in application. As Robert Mayer points out, Mahāyoga is primarily concerned with transformation.²⁶⁸ The peaceful section is based on the premise that all appearances are the manifestation of the union of primordial wisdom and the sphere of reality. Because the defiling mind interferes, it distorts these appearances into manifestations of impurity. In fact, nothing is impure; the five aggregates are the five Buddhas. The way to realize this is to internalize this view and perform practices that utilize conventionally impure materials (urine, feces, blood, semen, and human flesh) or involve nominally impure acts (feasting, song & dance, and sex). These material and activities are transformed into vivifying nectars and enlightened acts, through the practitioner seeing their innate purity. Thereby, one’s profane life, which is in fact illusory, is transformed into sacred reality. The wrathful section, conversely, while still implicitly about transformation, more explicitly concerns subjugation, as its introductory chapter makes so obviously clear. The transformation of evil in the person of Maheśvara is achieved not through viewing him differently but through his ultimate defeat, destruction, and resurrection. The story entails a battle, death, disintegration, rebirth, and final submission. Whatever the historical origins of the *Secret Essence*, these two sections naturally belong together as an antonymy. As the most famous practice to issue from the peaceful section is ritual sex (*sbyor ba*) and that which

²⁶⁸ Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu gnyis*, 116-128. Mayer makes this claim rather broadly but not unadvisedly for Mahāyoga as a whole.

derives from the wrathful section is ritual murder (*sgrol ba*), one could say that the two sections represent respectively the transformation of profane lust into sacred love and the transformation of ordinary hate into divine justice.

The *Secret Essence* is one of group of texts, the eighteen tantras of the Mahāyoga vehicle, believed to have originated in India. Some of these tantras, such as *The Ultimate Beginning* (*dpal mchog dang po, paramādya*), the *Secret Assembly* (*gsang ba 'dus pa, guhyasamāja*) and the *Buddha Union* (*sangs rgya mnyam sbyor, Buddhasamāyoga*), are included within the New Schools canonical redaction, but many are not. While the Old Schools base their interpretation of Mahāyoga primarily on the *Secret Essence*, they do not exclusively do so. The corpus as a whole is seen as explaining the various branches of the vehicles belief and practice in all their intricacies. They furthermore are all said to derive from a single source, the revelations of King Indrabhūti, sometimes called in Tibetan literature King Dza, and transmitted from him through a lineage of Indian and then Tibetan masters. It is to this corpus of Tantric scriptures that form the basis of Mahāyoga and the lineage of masters/commentators that we will turn to next.

5. MAHĀYOGA PHILOSOPHY

This last chapter of part one describes the philosophy of the Mahāyoga vehicle. No single book can describe the philosophy of a whole movement, let alone one chapter. However, a scholar can attempt to capture the structure of a movement's thought and thereby delimit the bounds within which its discourse occurs. Tibetan philosophy is prime for such a methodology, because its most popular modes of thought are highly structured. This is evinced by the detailed attention given to outlines (*sa bcad*) and catalogs (*dkar chag*) in their primarily religious literature. A general commentary, such as the *Key to the Treasury*, is built around a detailed and well-planned outline. To arbitrarily impose an external hermeneutic grid upon it would be to violate the author's intention. Instead, interpretation should only occur after the process of description has been satisfactorily complete. Given that the present scholarship on Mahāyoga is far from complete, the goal of this chapter is to describe the Mahāyoga system in hope of providing the foundation for future, more synthetic analyses.

For these reasons, this chapter will focus on the description of Mahāyoga philosophy as given by the participants themselves, in this case Jikmé Tenpé Nyima and the lineage he represents. Since the original sources are in another language, namely Tibetan, providing such a description requires translation, which as noted above is itself an act of interpretation. However, a naked translation does not as effectively describe a foreign system as it does in tandem with a condensation, or summary, of the translated text. Whereas faithful translation requires that a technical document be translated technically, summary allows the translator to put the foreign concepts naturally into her native idiom. This kind of summary may be considered to be a translation of the translation itself. This chapter attempts to provide such a summary for the Mahāyoga philosophy within Tibetan Buddhism.

What is meant by “philosophy” here? “Philosophy” is not limited to mean merely detailed analyses of particular concepts within a system but is afforded a broader definition akin to “worldview”. Whereas philosophy may be interpreted as an intellectual stance,

worldview refers to the totality of being in the world, the perspective from which one views one's experience. In actuality, worldviews cannot be fully described in words. Instead, as a surrogate, one can only begin to outline the boundaries within which an adherent of the system thinks. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima and, I would argue, Indo-Tibetan commentaries in general intentionally do just that. They outline the structure of a philosophical system in order to define the arena of thought for its adherents. By summarizing the structure of his commentary, the *Key to the Treasury*, we may begin to see the vague outlines of a worldview that can for convenience be dubbed, Mahāyoga philosophy.

STRUCTURE OF THE KEY TO THE TREASURY

The *Key to the Treasury* is a general commentary on the *Secret Essence Tantra*. This differentiates it from a word-commentary that focuses on explaining each line of the root text. General commentaries provide an outline of the whole system that has developed around the tantra. No attempt is made to distinguish historical layers. For, the scripture and its system are believed to have been taught by the Buddha himself and have been transmitted faithfully from his day to the present through a lineage of enlightened beings. The system and its root scripture are fused in the Tibetan perspective. General commentaries do not focus primarily on the literary text but on the total system of belief and praxis, referring to the root text to support their interpretations. They do so by dividing their subject into relevant topics that are themselves divided, and so on. We will focus here on the general structure of the Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's commentary, highlighting some of the important points that the author draws out. This structure is organized in such a way that the outline itself implicitly teaches the fundamental tenets of the system, such as the fundamental enlightened nature of reality and that all appearances compassionately emanate from that nature.

After the obligatory homage verses to the Buddha and his personal teachers, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima announces that he will write a general commentary on the *Secret Essence Tantra*, which is “the source of the four rivers of Secret Mantra, the framework of all the tantras, transmissions, and quintessential instructions, and the final thought of the Conqueror distilled into an essence.”¹ He then lays out the primary outline for his commentary. This first level of outline demonstrates the origin of the Mahāyoga systems beginning with Siddhārtha’s revelation of his already enlightened nature and his teaching of the tantra and ending with a discussion of the Mahāyoga system as a whole. Thus, the outline-level of the *Key to the Treasury* has the following three topics:

1. The Way That the Tantra Was Taught by the Buddha.
2. The Way It Was Transmitted from Him.
3. The Actual Meaning of the Tantra.

He thereby introduces the main topic, the meaning of the tantra, by creating a link between that “meaning” and the revered founder of the religion. Doing so not only establishes the system’s authenticity but also seeks to establish the greatness of the Teacher. Both points are made in a way to implicitly demonstrate facets of the Mahāyoga philosophical worldview.

HOW THE TANTRA WAS TAUGHT

The section on how the tantra was taught begins by stating that the Buddha was already free from the cycle of rebirth but, out of great compassion for sentient beings, he chose to be reborn as Siddhārtha. In order to enlighten others, he proceeded to perform the classical twelve deeds of the Buddha.² Whereas sūtra descriptions of the Buddha’s life story focus on

¹ *gsang sngags chu bo bzhi'i 'byung gnas/ rgyud lung man ngag thams cad kyi srog shing / rgyal ba'i dgongs pa mthar thug gi snying po bcu du dril ba!* (*Key to the Treasury*, 5.3-5.4).

² The twelve deeds of a Buddha are: 1. descent from the Joyous Pure Land (*tuṣita*), 2. conception, 3. birth, 4. mastery of the arts, 5. sporting with the retinue, 6. renunciation, 7. asceticism, 8. meditation under the tree of enlightenment, 9. conquest of the array of demons, 10. becoming a Buddha, 11. turning the wheel of the

the eighth deed, his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the description here, following earlier tantric theories, focuses on the seventh deed of performing asceticism on the banks of the Nairāñjanā River. In this regard, the *Key to the Treasury* adopts the Yoga Tantra version of Siddhārtha's enlightenment:

While he was residing there, he was aroused by the Buddhas of the ten directions, whereupon he left that imputed body there, [and with his] wisdom body went to the Highest Pure Land, where he found enlightenment through the five manifest enlightenments. Then, having gone to the summit of Mount Meru, the shore of the ocean, the country of Oḍḍiyāna, and the city of Zahor, he taught the limitless tantras of secret mantra such as this one to a pure circle [of trainees. Then] returning to his imputed body, he demonstrated to the common appearance the remaining deeds [of a Buddha], going to the Bodhgayā and so forth.³

This places the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment and the teaching of the tantras including the *Secret Essence* prior to the public manifestation of enlightenment, which occurs under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgayā. In this tantric version Buddha's enlightenment happens during the stage of extreme asceticism through an out-of-body experience. He leaves his "imputed body" behind and in his "wisdom body" is transported to a heavenly realm where he is taught a method of meditation—the five manifest enlightenments—that leads to full realization.⁴ In that wisdom body, he teaches the *Secret Essence* and all tantras to a pure

doctrine, and 12. entering into final *nirvāṇa*. See Sopa and Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (New York, 1976), 88-89.

³ *klung ne ranydzā na'i 'gram du dka' thub mdzad cing bzbug pa'i tshe phyogs bcu'i sangs rgyas kyis bskul nas btags pa'i lus der bzbag ste ye shes kyi lus 'og min du gshegs nas mngon byang lngas byang chub brnyes/ de nas ri rab kyī rtse dang / rgya mthso'i 'gram dang / o rgyan dang / za hor rnams su gshegs nas 'khor dag pa rnams la 'di nyid la sogs pa'i gsang sngags kyī rgyud sde mtha' yas ba bstan/ slar btags pa'i lus la zbug nas byang chub snying por gshegs pa sogs mdzad pa lhag ma rnams mthun snang du bstan/ (Key to the Treasury, 6.5-7.2).*

⁴ The term "imputed body" (*btags pa'i lus*) refers to the physical body of the Buddha. According to the Middle Way School philosophy, imputed existence (*btags yod*) means that the thing does not exist as an entity

retinue, before returning to his physical body and actually demonstrating enlightenment in the human realm. This places the teaching of *Secret Essence* prior to all other teachings of the Buddha. The claim is that it was one of the first scriptures he spoke and therefore can live up to the assertion made at the opening of the commentary that the *Secret Essence* is the source of all scriptures.

The theme of the Buddha's story as portrayed in the *Key to the Treasury* is "already enlightened". The Buddha is already enlightened when he takes birth. The five manifest enlightenments reveal his true enlightened nature. He was already enlightened when he went to Bodhgayā. The theme is one that is prevalent in descriptions of Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*) in the Atiyoga system, but it is also prevalent in the language of the *Secret Essence* itself. In this way, the story pictorially describes a belief of Mahāyoga philosophy that the completeness of enlightenment already exists within each sentient being. The story of the founder's enlightenment initiates the reader as it were into the discourse of the system.

Next, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima describes two different positions on when the Emanation Body taught the *Secret Essence*. Sūryasiṃhaprabha maintains that the Emanation Body taught the tantra at the same time as the Complete Enjoyment Body, since they are like a face and its image in the mirror. Whatever one does, the other does. Vilāsavajra, on the other hand, opines that the Emanation Body taught the sūtras of the "common vehicle" in the land of humans, while the Complete Enjoyment Body taught the higher tantras in the highest pure land. His implication is that the Emanation Body spoke the tantra at some other time. Through citing the third chapter of the text, where it describes that the six sages (*thub pa drug*), or Emanation Bodies of whom Siddhārtha is one, teach "the highest vehicle", i.e., Tantra, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima explicitly refutes the position that the Emanation Body did not

independent of its parts. See Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 302-304. In Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's description, the use of the term contrasts the illusory nature of the physical body in contrast to the real nature of the wisdom body (*ye shes kyi lus*).

teach the *Secret Essence* in the land of humans. Moreover, he continues, scholars of the system maintain that the opinions of Sūryasiṃhaprabha and Vilāsavajra are not contradictory, because anything is possible for the magical powers of a Buddha.

HOW THE TANTRA WAS TRANSMITTED FROM THE BUDDHA

The second section of the *Key to the Treasury* concerns the way that the *Secret Essence* teachings were transmitted from the Buddha to disciples and later generations. This is presented through a well-documented scheme of the Old Schools, known as the “three transmissions” (*brgyud gsum*).⁵ These are:

1. the conqueror’s transmission through mind (*rgyal ba dgongs brgyud*),
2. the Bodhisattva’s transmission through basic awareness (*sems dpa’ rig brgyud*), and
3. the yogin’s transmission through the ear (*rnal ’byor rna brgyud*).

The three transmissions represent the descent of the sacred into the profane world. The Buddha’s transmission directly from mind to mind is the initial “teaching” of the tantra. This occurs in the highest pure land (*’og min*) that is on the “liminal” ground between cyclic existence and nirvāṇa. Locating it there is symbolic of the fundamental ground, which is both the causal origin of the tantra and one of its primary topics. This ground is primordially beyond the dualistic distinctions of conceptuality. It cannot be conceptualized as either cyclic existence or nirvāṇa. The highest pure land is itself emanated from the basic nature as are most, if not all, of the deities who participate in the text’s narrative. The Bodhisattva’s transmission represents the crossing over from the primordially pure, non-conceptual realm to the worldly realm. This is a transmission to beings of exceptional mental powers, who can realize the tantra’s meaning merely through being shown symbolic hand gestures or hearing certain mantras. The final transmission of the human yogins begins with the initial revelation

⁵ See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 447-457. Tulku Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, 46-49. Eva M. Dargay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet*, 12-17.

of the tantra to King Indrabhūti in the human world and follows its transmission through time in India and Tibet, as discussed in chapter 3. Again, the ostensible point of these three is to authenticate and validate the root text by tracing its origins, but they also demonstrate the tenet that its teaching is directly emanated from the basic ground. These topics can be seen in the detailed discussion of each lineage that Jikmé Tenpé Nyima provides.

THE CONQUEROR'S TRANSMISSION THROUGH MIND

The teacher of the *Secret Essence* initially transmits the teachings from mind to mind without the need of audible words. There are two ways this occurs depending on the recipient. The main deities of the maṇḍala, the five Buddhas and the sixteen Bodhisattvas, etc., are considered to be emanations of the teacher. Therefore, being of the same continuum as the teacher, they have the same realization that he does. However, some say another retinue exists outside that circle of emanations. These attendants have separate mind-streams from the teacher. They are all Bodhisattvas of the highest-level, who are about to attain enlightenment. According to Khenpo Namdröl, one of the differences between the Zur system and Longchenpa's system is over the existence of beings, who were not emanations of the teacher, in the Highest Pure Land at the time of the initial teaching of the *Secret Essence*. The Zur lineage maintains that high-level Bodhisattvas of separate continua were present, assuming the form of the five thrones upon which the central Buddhas sit and so forth. They further maintain that worldly deities were gathered around the perimeter of the maṇḍala as part of the retinue. Longchenpa, on the other hand, maintains that the whole scene—the maṇḍala, the deities, the palace—was all an emanation of the Teacher. No beings of separate continuums were present. Longchenpa's interpretation represents the tantra's narrative as an archetype, in a pure land, completely removed from profane existence and completely self-contained. He emphasizes the mythic quality of the story—that everything is an already enlightened purity. By admitting other beings into the retinue, the Zur interpretation on the

other hand attempts to ground the story in a pseudo-historical reality by maintaining the presence of separate personalities, even if these persons are legendary. The point of the Zur position is to demonstrate that at the time of its teaching the *Secret Essence* had the efficacy to enlighten beings. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima follows the Zur tradition in positing “a retinue that is together with the teacher but has a separate continua”.⁶ The teacher transmits the teaching to them through initiation, whereby they become one in thought with him.

Whether or not one admits the presence of separate beings in the Highest Pure Land at the time of the teaching, the retinue present for the discourse of the *Secret Essence* is called “the retinue that is together with the teacher” (*lhan cig pa'i 'khor*). This is contrasted with the second type of retinue, described in the commentarial tradition, “the retinue separated [from the teacher]” (*go phye ba'i 'khor*).⁷ This is the group of later practitioners of Secret Mantra in following generations, who were not actually present at the teaching of the tantra, but for whom it was intended.

THE BODHISATTVA’S TRANSMISSION THROUGH BASIC AWARENESS

What Jikmé Tenpé Nyima calls “the Bodhisattva’s transmission through basic awareness” is elsewhere called “the symbolic transmission of awareness holders” (*rig 'dzin brda brgyud*).⁸ This refers to the transmission from “pure Bodhisattvas”, who can transmit the teachings merely by aiming their powerful mind at their students and displaying various hand-signs (*phyag rgya, mudrā*) or chanting concise powerful phrases (*sngags, mantra*). By this means, the disciples instantly realize all the meanings of the tantra. In essence, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima says that this kind of transmission is a form of transmission through thought, as with the

⁶ *ston pa dang rgyud tha dad pa'i lhan cig pa'i 'khor* (*Key to the Treasury*, 9.3).

⁷ *'khor phun sum tshogs la lhan cig pa dang go phye ba'i 'khor gnyis* (*Key to the Treasury*, 38.4). Cf., Yungtönpa, *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning*, 51.6.

⁸ Cf., *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 452-456.

Buddhas, but because of the use of verbal and physical symbols and because the transmitters are Bodhisattvas and not Buddhas, it is differentiated as a separate category.

Two types of the Bodhisattva's transmission through basic awareness are enumerated—one to non-humans and one to both humans and non-humans. The first is where the lords of the three families—Mañjuśrī of the Tathāgata family, Avalokiteśvara of the Lotus family, and Vajrapāṇi of the Vajra family—transmit the teachings respectively to the god, Drakden Chokgyong; the nāga, Lugyel Jokpo, and the demon, Gardadong.⁹ Each of the students initiates a lineage among their class of beings, the gods, nāgas, and demons. The second type of Bodhisattva's transmission is to both humans and non-humans. This pertains to the story that is found elsewhere in the Old School tantric tradition about five sages who, in bemoaning the absence of the Buddha twenty-eight years after his death, invoke Vajrapāṇi to initiate the transmission of tantra in the world. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima calls them “the five nobles of excellent lineage”.¹⁰ These include the three non-humans above as well as the ogre, Lodrö Tabten, and the human, Vimalakīrti. The use of the figure made famous by the Great Vehicle sūtra, *The Teachings of Vimalakīrti*, is likely due to the similarities that sūtra has with the general tantric worldview, being a transitional work between sūtra and tantra in that the sūtra's plot foreshadows the narrative devices used in the hagiographies of the tantric siddhas.

The story commonly associated with these five figures probably originated with the Anuyoga tantras, since the most frequently used citation comes from the *Sūtra Gathering All Intentions*.¹¹ In his *Dispelling Mental Obscuration*, a general commentary on the *Secret Essence*,

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the transmission to non-humans, see Samdrup Dorjé, *Tent of Blazing Jewels*, 621.5-623.4. He gives the name of the demon as *grags ldan mchog skyong*, which is suspiciously similar to the name of the god, *grags ldan phyogs skyong*. Most commentators give the demon's name as *skar mda' gdong* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 443, under “Ulkāmukha” and Thinley Norbu, *The Small Golden Key* (New York: Jewel Publishing House, 1985), 10).

¹⁰ *dam pa'i rigs can drwa ma lnga* (*Key to the Treasury*, 11.4).

¹¹ See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 458; Karmay, “King Tsa/Dza and Vajrayāna”, p197-199. In both cases they refer to an unlocatable text called the *Supplemental Tantra on the Arising of Cakrasaṃvara* (*dpal sdom pa 'byung ba'i rgyud phyi ma*). However, the source more often cited by scholars I

Longchenpa gives the following passage which he describes as “a prophecy from the *Sūtra [Gathering All] Intentions*” (*mdo dgongs pa lung ston*):

Twenty-eight years after
 I have disappeared from this world,
 At the southern border of Jambudvīpa [India]
 The great, fortunate noble among men
 Called King Dza and
 The remainder of the lesser assisting Bodhisattvas,
 The lord of Lanka and so forth
 Through blessings that are in harmony with compassion
 Will be taught by Vajrapāṇi.¹²

This legend of the Bodhisattva’s symbolic transmission states that twenty-eight years after the Buddha a group of five nobles led by King Dza, or Indrabhūti, gathered at the peak of Mt. Malaya in Śrī Laṅka. There, they bemoaned the decline in Buddhism since the death of the teacher and the absence of the tantric teachings in the world. Due to their personal power, Vajrapāṇi appears to them and teaches them the tantras. In the *Key to the Treasury* and Longchenpa’s *Dispelling Mental Obscuration*, Vajrapāṇi is said to have specifically taught them the *Secret Essence* at that time.

spoke with was the Anuyoga *Sūtra Gathering All Intentions*. This is also mentioned in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

¹² *nga ni 'di nas mi snang nas/ llo ni brgyad dang bcu gnyis nal/ l'dzam gling shar lho'i phyogs mtshams gyi mi las skal ldan drwang ma che rgyal po dza zhes bya ba dang/ l'grogs kyi sems dpa'i dman pa'i lus/ llang ka'i bdag po la sogs la/ l'thugs rje mthun pa'i bying rlabs kyis/ phyag na rdo rjes ston par 'gyur/* (Longchenpa, *yid gyi mun sel*, 5a.4-5a.6). Due to xylographic corruptions other versions of the passage give the time after the passing of the Buddha as one hundred and twelve years (*brgya dang bcu gnyis*) instead of twenty-eight years (*brgyad dang bcu gnyis*).

THE YOGIN'S ORAL TRANSMISSION

The third transmission is the oral transmission of yogins from generation to generation. It is here in this section that Jikmé Tenpé Nyima lays out the lineage for his interpretation of the *Secret Essence* that served as the basis for chapter three of this present work. It is divided into two subsections: the way in which the tantra initially arose in the human world and how it was transmitted. The first subsection describes the legend of King Ja, who is made to be a contemporary of the five nobles. The story describes the king's seven dreams and the rain of a book and image onto the king's palace. The king makes supplication to the statue and, due to his good karma, comes to realize the meaning of the seventy-fourth chapter in the long version of the *Secret Essence*, a chapter entitled "Beholding the Face of Vajrasattva".¹³ He practices that for six months, after which he meets directly with Vajrasattva who reveals to him "the limitless meanings of this book". Interestingly, this version of the story leaves out the back and forth between the King and Kukurāja that other earlier versions describe. Here, the king is solely responsible for the revelation of the cycle of texts, whereas in other versions the responsibility is shared with Kukurāja.

The transmission of the tantra from King Ja/Indrabhūti to the present day is described above in Chapter 3. It consists merely of a sequential list of names in the lineage divided into the Indian lineage and the Tibetan lineage. Gyurmé Dorjé and Lochen Dharmashrī are the only one's in the lineage to whom Jikmé Tenpé Nyima devotes more than a single line. About these two figures, he says:

These two, the great treasure-revealer and his brother, together with their heart-sons wrote many good explanations concerning this tantra, which were like jeweled lamps, on initiation, means of achievement, maṇḍala rites,

¹³ Tb.423, 294.3-299.2: *rdo rje sems dpa' zhal mthong ba'i le'u/* Also found in Tb.420, *sgyu 'phrul le lhag*, "Chapter 31: skyes bu dam pa blo rtsal rab kyis/_rdo rje sems dpa' zhal mthong ba'i le'u ste so gcig pa/", 561.3-565.7.

analysis of the scope, commentaries on the tantra, and so forth. By introducing this continuation of explaining and listening, their kindness to the teaching was inconceivable.¹⁴

These two figures are indeed important for their role in reinvigorating the Zur system's interpretation of Mahāyoga in face of the gaining popularity of the Atiyoga interpretation following upon the influential works of Longchenpa.

The section on the oral transmission ends with general praise for all the members of the lineage, humbly excluding himself:

In brief, except for myself [these are all] lords of yoga who have attained the rank of a learned one by training in the topics of the tantra corpora, have made serviceable the approximation to the state of maṇḍala deities, and have attained the heat of realization of the two stages [of generation and completion]. Due to the transmission of such an unbroken series of great lords of yoga, it has come down [to us] in the present, such that the river of initiation has not dried up, the lamp of explanation has not gone out, and the magnificent luster of the blessings has not faded.¹⁵

Clearly, as with all lineage statements, his main point here is to validate the teaching's authenticity by tracing its origins. However, in doing so, he has already broached the topics of a primordially enlightened ground from which the teachings emanate that is beyond the dualistic distinctions of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. This is implicit in the description of the three

¹⁴ *gter chen sku mchad 'di gnyis thugs sras dang bcas pas rgyud 'di'i dbang dang / sgrub thabs/ dkyil chog / rgyud 'grel/ mtha' dpyod sogs rin po che'i sgron me lta bu'i legs bshad mang du mdzad cing / 'chad nyan gyi rgyun btsugs pas bstan pa la bka' drin bsm gyis mi khyab/ (Key to the Treasury, 14.3-14.4)*

¹⁵ *mdor na kho bo 'ba' zhig ma gtogs pa rgyud dse'i gnas la sbyangs bas mkhas pa'i go 'phang brnyes shing / 'khor lo'i lha la bsmen pa las su rung bal rim gnyis kyi rtogs pa'i drod thob pa'i rnal 'byor dbang phyug gi phreng ba bar ma chad pa brgyud pa las da lta'i bar du dbang gi chu po ma skam/ bshad pa'i sgron me ma nub/ byin rlabs kyi gzi 'od ma yal bar byon pa yin lol/ (Key to the Treasury, 15.2-15.4).*

transmissions, which are described in descending order from the Conqueror's transmission of thought to the oral transmission in the human world. The theme of gradual descent from the primordially enlightened state into manifest emanation is repeated several times throughout the structure of the *Key to the Treasury's* outline.

THE ACTUAL MEANING OF THE TANTRA

As is the case with many Tibetan commentaries, the initial topical division, while important, is introductory. In the *Key to the Treasury* the first two topics are treated briefly while the third topic is the main topic of the commentary, namely the meaning of the *Secret Essence Tantra*. This has a brief explanation and an extensive explanation. The first section discusses in a general how the object of explanation is this tantra, the means of explanation are through scripture, reasoning, and quintessential instructions, and the mode of explanation is the different hermeneutic schemes for dividing its topics. In his explanation of what is to be explained, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima takes the position that all the inner tantras have the same object and goal, "the sole reality of the fundamental clear-light". The difference between Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga is in their approach to this final goal. Mahāyoga uses elaborate and extensive rites of generation (meditating on oneself as a deity); Anuyoga uses abbreviated and shortened rites, while Atiyoga advocates immediately placing oneself in the clear-light without the use of meditative generation, that is, meditating on oneself as a deity. He further mentions a subdivision of Mahāyoga described in the treasure-cycle of Nyangrel Nyimé Özer (1136-1204) that applies the triad of Mahā, Anu, and Ati to Mahāyoga itself. He quotes from a sādhana in that cycle:

Mahā of Mahā is to generate a deity's maṇḍala by stages. Anu of Mahā is a spontaneous establishment of the natural maṇḍala. Ati of Mahā is the unproduced face of the ultimate.¹⁶

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima maintains that the *Secret Essence* tantra is a Mahāyoga tantra, because one uses the elaborate means of generating oneself into “Vajradhāra” through the four branches of service and achievement (*bsnyen sgrub yan lag bzhi*). Furthermore, he says within Mahāyoga it is Ati of Mahā, because the *Secret Essence* teaches that all phenomena are primordially enlightened. Thus, even though the thought of the *Secret Essence* is equal to that of Atiyoga, it is a Mahāyoga tantra because it focuses on elaborate means of generating oneself as a deity.

For the outline of the extensive explanation, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima dismisses a common Zur-tradition hermeneutic, which he attributes to the third Zur patriarch, Dropukpa. It is also the hermeneutic used in Samdrup Dorjé's *Tent of Blazing Jewels*. This scheme involves dividing a commentary on the *Secret Essence* into five parts:

1. the natural mode of subsistence of phenomena,
2. the mistaken way it appears to those who have not realized the truth,
3. the way it is perceived by a Buddha,
4. how to generate compassion on those who do not realize it, and
5. how to effect the welfare of sentient beings.

¹⁶ *bde 'dus grub pa lung gi bka' sgo las/ ma hā'i ma hā ni lha'i dkyil 'khor rim pas bskyed pa'ol/ lma hā'i a nu ni rang bzhin gyi dkyil 'khor lhun gyis grub pa'ol/ lma hā'i a ti ni don dam ngo bo ma skyes pa'ol* (*Key to the Treasury*, 16.4-16.5). The *Consortium of Sugatas* is a treasure cycle revealed by Nyang-rel Nyi-ma-ö-zer (*nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer*, 1136-1204). A catalog of that cycle done by the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology gives the full name for this text—the last text in volume Nga—as *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa las/ gsang sngags lung gi bka' bsgo*. See Ācārya Tsultsem Gyatso, *Catalogue of Bka'-brgyad Bde-gshegs 'Dus-pa*, Nyingmapa Catalogue Series VII, Vol. 3 (Gangtok: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1997), 23.

Instead of such a hermeneutic, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima following the advice of his teachers goes further back to the Indian sources, in this case Vimalamitra, using a scheme found in his *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text*. In that text, Vimalamitra says:

For the best, there is a teaching of the title; for the middling, divisions;
For the lowest, [explanations] setting free the meaning of the words.¹⁷

While the title is taught *mainly* for those with the best faculties and the divisions are taught *primarily* for those with middling intelligence, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima points out that they are not the sole recipients of those teachings. In both cases, he says the title is taught to those of middling and lowest capabilities and the divisions are taught to those with the lowest faculties in order to implant predispositions for their future understanding of the text. Thus, even though the emphasis in the *Key to the Treasury* is placed on the divisions, he devotes several pages to the explanation of the title.

THE TITLE OF THE TANTRA

The full title of the root text cited by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima is *The Vajrasattva Magical Emanation Net, The General Scripture of All Definition and Tantric [Vehicles], The Secret Essence Tantra*.¹⁸ His commentary on the title is therefore divided into three sections, one each on the three parts of the title. He associates these respectively with the triad of tantra, scripture, and quintessential instructions,¹⁹ which are pseudonyms for Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. However, here he uses the terms metaphorically to refer to the focus on the generation stage, completion stage, and the great completeness, the central topics of those three corpora.

¹⁷ *sgyu 'phrul khog gzhung las/ rab la mtshan bstan 'bring la dbye/ ltha mar 'bru gnyer dgrol ba'ol* Vimalamitra, *sgyu 'phrul man ngag gsal ba'i sgron me*, 134.3.7. Cf. *Key to the Treasury*, 20.1-20.2.

¹⁸ *rdo rje sems dpa' sgyu 'phrul drwa bal mtshan nyid dang rgyud thams cad kyi lung kyi spyi/ gsang ba snying po de kho na nyid nges pa/* These three parts of the title are laid out in the section from *Key to the Treasury*, 21.1-31.6.

¹⁹ *rgyud, lung,* and *man ngag*.

In the first part of the title, Vajrasattva refers to the main deity of the tantra, the name of the maṇḍala, and the name of the tantra. In the Zur tradition, the main deity is held to be Akṣobhya, who is the ruler of the Vajra family.²⁰ In his Bodhisattva form, he is Vajrasattva. As he is the main deity, the maṇḍala in which he resides also bears that name, while it is also the name of the tantra in the sense that there are several Magical Emanation Nets and this one is distinguished as being the *Vajrasattva Magical Emanation Net*. The name, Vajrasattva, means “vajra-being” or “vajra-hero”. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima next describes the two parts of that name. “Vajra” (*rdo rje*) is a term that is difficult to translate accurately as it refers to a breadth of meaning that is not found in English. While the translations of “diamond” or “adamantine” denote its pure nature, they do not necessarily invoke the meaning of indivisibility that is primary to the term, vajra, since diamonds can be cut. In Tantric Buddhism, vajra primarily denotes an indivisible union. In this system, it denotes the union of wisdom and emptiness that is the ground for all being. As Jikmé Tenpé Nyima says,

A vajra is indivisible and indestructible; it is wisdom-emptiness.²¹

This emptiness, he goes on to describe, refers to the clear-light nature of the higher tantras, a radiant clarity experienced by all at the moment of death and realized by practitioners through meditatively simulating the stages of death. In the Mahāyoga system, the clear-light nature is inextricably fused with the primordial wisdom realizing it, and this is termed vajra.

Sattva, or the second half of the name Vajrasattva, is the Sanskrit word for being. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima’s explanation of this term emphasizes how the vajra-nature abides in the world. It is firm in that it never changes. It is inclusive in that it abides in all things, and it is “realizational” in that one is able to realize it by clearing away one’s obstructions and

²⁰ Longchenpa, on the other hand, holds that the central deity of the maṇḍala is Vairocana.

²¹ *rdo rje ni mi phyed mi shigs pa ste shes rab stong pa nyid dol* (*Key to the Treasury*, 21.3-21.4).

accumulating the two collections of method and wisdom. Akṣobhya, being a symbol of the primordial basis and the enlightened result, is thereby called Vajrasattva.

Whereas the term Vajrasattva is interpreted as describing the ultimate reality, Magical Emanation Net is said to describe the conventional appearances. It does so using the metaphor of gender and the sexual act. The male and female genders are complimentary opposites. In the sexual act, these opposites are unified into a whole. In the explanation of Magical Emanation Net, “magical” is taken as referring to the feminine aspects of reality; “emanation” refers to the masculine aspects, while “net” refers to their intertwining, resulting in the following four types of interpretation:

| Type of Interpretation | Magical | Emanation | Net |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| conceptual collection | five elements | coarse factors derived from them | relation of support and supported |
| definitive meaning | wisdom-emptiness | self-clarity radiating from it | relation of indifferenciability |
| provisional meaning | mother-deities | father-deities | sexual union |
| inseparability of deities and conceptuality | conceptual collection | deities | non-duality |

The conceptual collection (*rtog tshogs*) is a term designating the ordinary person’s perspective on the world. It is more than just conceptuality but also alludes to the appearances of an unenlightened mind. Because everything has the nature of wisdom-emptiness, it is primordially enlightened, or pure. However, to the ordinary being’s dualistic distinctions, they appear as the impure phenomena of our “everyday” world. Because these ordinary appearances are the result of a conceptual overlay, they are called the “conceptual collection”. In short, conceptual collection refers to all ordinary, impure appearances. The actuality of these impure appearances is that they are pure. Thus, what the ordinary person sees as the five elements—earth, water, fire, wind, and space—are by nature the female deities Māmakī,

Locanā, and so forth. This is referred to above as the “inseparability of deities and conceptuality”. The type of interpretation labeled “conceptual collection” is from the perspective of ordinary appearances. The five elements are called “magical” in that they act as the basis for the other coarse factors of existence, which are their “emanations”. The relationship of the five elements as the basis and the coarse factors as supported by those elements is the meaning of “net”.

The second part of the title, *The General Scripture of All Definition and Tantric [Vehicles]*, is interpreted to allude to the all-encompassing nature of the *Secret Essence Tantra*. It is a general scripture because all other Buddhist teachings were taught to lead one to its teachings. Thus, all the teachings both stem from the *Secret Essence* and finally flow back into it.

The final part of the title is considered to be the main title of the text and the one used in common parlance when referring to it. While I have been using an abbreviated form, the full form of its title is *Secret Essence Definitive Suchness*.²² Each of the four words in this title is commented on separately. “Secret” (*gsang ba*) has two meanings: hidden and concealed.²³ Hidden refers to the natural way that something is obscured from sight in the way one might say, “The house is hidden behind those trees.” In the same way, the fundamental nature of reality is “naturally” obscured by ordinary conceptuality and is therefore difficult to see. Concealed, on the other hand, refers to the active concealing of something with the intention of keeping it secret. Because of the sensitive and powerful nature of the topics expressed in the *Secret Essence*, it must be concealed from those who are not prepared for its teachings.

The meaning of the term “essence” (*snying po*) is described through three synonyms, given in Sanskrit: core (*sāra*), heart (*hṛdaya*), and inner essence (*garbha*). As the fundamental

²² *gsang ba snying po de kho na nyid nges pa*.

²³ *gab* and *sbas* respectively. Here, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima follows Longchenpa instead of the Indian patriarchs, Vilāsavajra and Vimalamitra.

ground is the single source from which both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa arise, it is the core of all these phenomena. Because realizing it is the only way to achieve enlightenment, it should be cherished as one's heart is. The Sanskrit term, *garbha*, is commonly translated as “womb”, which is its primary meaning. However, its other meanings include “the inside, middle, interior of anything”.²⁴ This is the meaning intended here. Specifically, our author glosses it as “the pithy quintessence, like the sap within the bark”.²⁵ It is this latter meaning that is the main one in the context of the *Secret Essence*.

As for the next word in the title, suchness (*de kho na nyid*),²⁶ there are also three types: unfabricated suchness, unmistakable suchness, and suchness that is not other.²⁷ The unfabricated suchness is the abiding reality, whose nature is originally and primordially pure. It is also called the “causal suchness”, because that reality abiding in oneself is the cause for final enlightenment. By realizing it, one achieves enlightenment. The unmistakable suchness is that same reality when it shines through in the effect-state of Buddhahood. Thus, it is called the “fruitful suchness”. The suchness that is not other refers to the tenet in this system that the previous two are not different from each other but are the same thing. The only difference is in one's perception of that basic fact. This is also called “the suchness that is one taste of cause and effect”. The final word in the title is “definitive” (*nges pa*). This single suchness that is the secret essence of all things is definitive in that it is precisely what is realized by all those who achieve Buddhahood, and this tantra teaches it just as they realized it.

²⁴ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 349.

²⁵ *shun pa'i nang gi snyin po lta bu bcud 'dus pa* (*Key to the Treasury*, 29.1-29.2).

²⁶ This is according to the Tibetan word order.

²⁷ *ma bcos pa'il ma nor ba'il gzhan ma yin pa'i de kho na nyid dol* (*Key to the Treasury*, 29.3).

GENERAL STRUCTURE

For trainees of middling capacity, there is an explanation of the general structure of the system. This occupies the bulk of the *Key to the Treasury's* pages. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima outlines the *Secret Essence's* meaning into five topics:

1. the cause for the tantra's occurring,
2. the condition for its occurring,
3. the result, or the actual occurrence of the tantra,
4. the purposes of it arising and the relationships between those purposes, and
5. the advice given in the transmission of the tantra's teaching to later generations.

The first two explain the background that leads up to the actual teachings contained in the tantra. These represent the first two chapters of the tantra's narrative as described in chapter four of this work. The actual description of the Mahāyoga worldview falls in the third category, which is the result of those two, the occurrence of the tantra itself. The last two topics, which are standard commentarial devices, are treated summarily at the end of the work and will not be discussed here.

In his discussion of these five topics, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima introduces another theme prevalent throughout the commentarial tradition of Mahāyoga, the notion of the human being as the embodiment of the fundamental reality. As can be seen in his discussion on the ground, the Mahāyoga system maintains that the ground of reality—a fusion of emptiness and wisdom—pervades all phenomena. It therefore also pervades individual human beings. In fact, the subtle psycho-physiology found in this vehicle is built around this fact. As is common in the higher tantras, the subtle human body contains at its center an “fundamental, indestructible mind” (*gnyug ma mi shigs pa'i sems*) that is here equated to the ground of reality. This indestructible mind rests at the channel wheel at the heart within the central channel that rises vertically along the spine connecting the opening of the urethra to

the opening at the top of the crown. It is surrounded by pure factors (*dwangs ma*), which are metaphorically described as seed-syllables. These pure factors are designated by specific letters but are said to represent the places where the potentialities for appearances of enlightened body, speech, and mind are stored. Just outside of these, there is another ring of “syllables” that are the impure factors (*snyigs ma*). The pure and impure factors are responsible respectively for pure and impure appearances. As the energy that is inherent in the indestructible mind radiates outward, it travels first through the pure factors and then through the impure ones. Both types of factors act as a kind of lens that shapes the energy into phenomena appearances. The pure factors initially transform the energy into what would be pure appearances but these in turn get transformed by the impure factors into ordinary phenomenal appearances of the mundane world.

One of the distinguishing features of the inner tantras, or for the New Schools the highest yoga tantras, is the use of practices that manipulate the subtle body. These practices focus on simulating the process of death in which the energy-winds that carry the consciousness gradually withdraw into the central channel and then into the indestructible drop at the heart. The special practices of the inner tantras force the psychic winds into the central channel and thereby fan the psychic fire that resides at the navel. The heat from this fire rises up the central channel and melts the drop of enlightenment located just inside the peak of the crown of one’s head. The melting drop begins to descend, and as it passes each of the four major channel-wheels, one experiences a new depth of joy. These are the four joys of descent from above (*yas babs kyi dga’ ba bzhi*). As the mind of enlightenment is brought back up the central channel, one experiences even deeper forms of joy, which are called the four joys of stability from below (*mas brtan gyi dga’ ba bzhi*). Since each of the four joys can also be subdivided again into four, they are sometimes referred to as the sixteen joys.

The description of this path in Mahāyoga is slightly different. The blazing fire melts the mind of enlightenment. However, its movement causes the indestructible mind at the heart

to increase in radiance. This in turn causes the pure factors to blaze up and burn away the impure factors, allowing for the manifestation of pure appearances and the realization of enlightenment in this body. A practitioner is introduced to such a subtle body practice through the “three higher supreme empowerments”. These are the secret empowerment (*gsang dbang*) in which the teacher and his consort model the sexual practice that ignites the inner fire, the wisdom empowerment (*shes rab ye shes kyi dbang*) in which the disciple is taught to practice it with his consort, and the word-meaning empowerment (*tshig don dbang*) in which the disciple is introduced into the sameness of all things.²⁸

The subtle body practice is called in Mahāyoga the path of method (*thabs lam, upāyamārga*). The path of method is one of the two subdivisions of the Mahāyoga path and mainly deals with manipulating the psychic channels, winds, and drops in one’s subtle body.²⁹ It has two sub-types: the path of method focusing on the upper opening of the central channel where one relies only on one’s own body, using meditative technique to manipulate the subtle factors within the body, and the path of method focusing on the lower opening at the tip of the sexual organ, which entails practicing ritual sex with a tantric consort. Since the practices manipulating the subtle body are unique to the inner tantras, they are called “uncommon” (*thun mong ma yin pa*).

In discussing the five topics of the tantra’s general meaning, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima often divides a particular section into “uncommon” and “common”. The uncommon interpretation of a topic, which he invariably discusses first, is done in terms of the subtle body and the psycho-physical practices of the path of method. In such an interpretation, the various aspects of the topic are metaphorically equated with aspects of the individual’s

²⁸ On these three empowerments, see *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 114; Alex Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamāja*, 143-154.

²⁹ Both paths have meditations that focus on the subtle body. However, in the path of release it is used as an aid to enhance one’s realizations, whereas in the path of method subtle body meditation is used as the primary means for achieving realization.

psycho-physiology. For instance, in discussing the tantra's introduction, the teacher is in one interpretation equated with the indestructible mind, and the retinue is equated with a person's ordinary mind. Thus, when the indestructible mind is activated, radiates outward, and transforms the ordinary consciousness into the five primordial wisdoms, this is considered, according to the uncommon interpretation, to be the Samantabhadra teaching the retinue. By introducing each topic with a discussion of the uncommon interpretation, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima is continually emphasizing the belief of this system that the enlightened mind dwells within the present body and can be activated effectively through the special inner tantric practices on the path of method.

THE CAUSES FOR THE ARISING OF THE TANTRA

The causes that produced the tantra are the five marvels found in the first chapter. As mentioned in chapter 4, the tantra's first chapter holds a particularly special position in the commentarial tradition. This is true not only for the *Secret Essence*, but for many of the later tantras special attention was paid to their introductions. The first forty syllables of the *Secret Assembly Tantra* are given special attention in Chandrakīrti's *Brilliant Lamp*, where the author devotes a verse to each syllable.³⁰ Elsewhere, commentators afford special emphasis to the standard introductory phrase, "Thus have I heard" and especially the first two words *evaṃ mayā*, which come to symbolize the "essence of tantra".³¹ The name given to the introductory chapter is *gleng gzhi* in Tibetan.³² This literally means the "foundation of the story". Here, I have translated it as "introductory background" but a more colloquial translation would be "setting the scene". The introductory background is the cause for the arising of the tantra in that it sets the scene for the action and dialog of the narrative to take

³⁰ Alex Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamājatantra*, 1-22.

³¹ G. W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra: with the Commentary Yogaratnamālā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992), 3.

³² Skt., *nidāna*.

place. That scene is described dogmatically through the five marvels of place, teacher, retinue, teaching, and times.

The tradition speaks of two kinds of introductory backgrounds—the uncommon and the common. The uncommon introductory background, as mentioned above, occurs in the context of the path of method, which is sub-divided into the path of method focusing on the upper opening and the one focusing on the lower opening. Therefore, the two uncommon introductory backgrounds are done in terms of the tantric psycho-physiology, equating the five marvels with parts and locations on the body.

The uncommon introduction associated with the upper opening of the central channel associates the five marvels with aspects of the practitioner’s psycho-physical body. The teacher, retinue, and so forth are seen as analogs for aspects of the subtle physiology. The “place” is the channel wheel at the heart, known as the “wheel of phenomena” (*chos kyi ’khor lo*). It has four main channels feeding into it, and in its center is the indestructible mind that, in this system, relies on “the drop of the five refined essences” (*dwangs ma lnga’i thig le brten te*). This mind is the “teacher”. The “retinue” consists of the eight collections of consciousness. These are the eight types of profane consciousness taken from the Mind Only system, ranging from the eye-consciousness to the mind-basis-of-all.³³ The “teaching” is primordial wisdom of bliss, clarity, and non-conceptuality. The doctrine is taught to the retinue, when the indestructible mind is awakened and spreads bliss to the retinue through the psychic winds. The “time” is whenever one manifests the enlightened thought of timelessness where the past, present, and future are blended into one.

The other uncommon introduction is related to the lower opening of the psychic body. It relates the five marvels to both the practitioner’s body and the body of his consort in terms of the practice of ritual sex, euphemistically termed “union” (*sbyor ba*). Thus, the “place” is

³³ The Old Schools hold the third turning of the wheel of the doctrine, or the Mind Only scriptures, to be definitive.

the vagina of the female consort. The “teacher” is the drop of semen that is held without emission at the tip of the male’s penis. The “retinue” is the consciousnesses of both the male and female practitioners, which receive the teaching through the ritual practice of intercourse. The “teaching” is the primordial wisdom that occurs at the end of their progress through the five minds. The “time” is again whenever this practice is done and one succeeds in blending the three times.

Next, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima discusses the common introductory backgrounds. They are common in the sense that they are shared with the outer tantras, whereas the introductions dealing with the subtle body are not. Here, he describes three different types of introductory background, those of the Complete Enjoyment Body, the wrathful deities, and the Emanation Body. The scene described in the tantra itself is the story of the Complete Enjoyment Body with only a minor reference to Emanation Bodies in the figures of the six sages in chapter 3 of the scripture. The Complete Enjoyment Body’s is the introductory background that receives the most detailed explanation in the commentary. Citing the *Eye Commentary* by Vimalamitra, he emphasizes that the place where the tantra occurs is *not* the highest pure land (*’og min*) within cyclic existence but is the “highest pure land of the great lord” (*dbang phyug chen po’i ’og min*). It is not an ordinary place but has the nature of the realm of reality. The foundation for the palace, which is the structure that supports the maṇḍala of deities, is the five primordial wisdoms; the four noble truths are its walls, and the indifferenciability of the two truths is the space of its courtyards.

The teacher is similarly described in hyperbolic terms. The fundamental nature of the teacher is described in four ways. First, he has the nature of complete enlightenment so that he is fully in control of his realization. Therefore, he is constantly in meditation, while his good qualities arise naturally without effort or exertion. Being without limits or bounds, the nature of his realization is ultimately beyond description. Second, his nature is to enjoy the sport of phenomena. Without actually perceiving dualistic subjects and objects, the

Complete Enjoyment Body plays with them nonetheless, while maintaining complete equanimity and non-attachment. Third, he is the source of all the Buddhas. Since all Buddhas can be condensed into the five primary Buddhas of the maṇḍala and those five are merely emanations of the Complete Enjoyment Body, he is the “Lord of All the Tathāgatas”. Finally, the Complete Enjoyment Body is inseparable from all phenomena, because it always dwells in the realization of the two truths—the ultimate truth and the conventional truths.

In terms of his appearance the teacher’s outward aspect symbolizes different facets of his realization. Being seen to face forward in every direction is a symbol that he is the Reality Body; that he possesses the major and minor marks is a symbol that he is a Complete Enjoyment Body, and emanations issuing from every pore of his body is a symbol that he is an Emanation Body. He is thereby the union of the three enlightened bodies. Furthermore, being in union with his consort symbolizes the non-duality of his method and wisdom. Having six arms symbolizes that he has the six types of primordial wisdom.³⁴ That each of those arms holds a different hand-implement represents how he works for the welfare of others. His three faces serve as a sign that he has the three liberations: emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness.

The retinue of the Complete Enjoyment Body is separated into two basic types. There are those members of the retinue that were present at the teaching of the *Secret Essence*. These include both beings that are emanations of the main teachers, such as the five Buddhas, who are called “the retinue of non-dual nature” (*rang bzhin gnyis su med pa’i ’khor*), and the sixteen Bodhisattvas, who are called “the retinue of special basic awareness (*rig pa khyad par can gyi ’khor*). Jikmé Tenpé Nyima is careful to point out that according to Dropukpa, the third Zur patriarch, Bodhisattvas with separate continuums from the teacher must have also been in this group, since the second chapter mentions that after hearing the verse on the four

³⁴ The five standard primordial wisdoms plus the self-arisen primordial wisdom (*rang byung ye shes*).

types of secrets an innumerable number of beings “ripened out of their ignorance”.³⁵ Thus, for the Zur tradition, the retinue consisted of both beings who are emanations of the teacher and those who are not. In either case, because they are present at the teaching, they are called “the retinue that is together [with the teacher]” (*lhan cig pa'i 'khor*). When that retinue came together the teacher, the *Secret Essence* was taught. The other retinue is made up of those disciples who did not participate in the actual teaching of the tantra but are later trainees for whom the teaching was intended. They are called “the retinue separated [from the teacher]” (*go phye ba'i 'khor*).

THE CONDITION FOR THE ARISING OF THE TANTRA

The condition for the occurrence of the tantra is known as the “raising of the discourse”.³⁶ This refers to the interaction between the teacher and the retinue that produces the dialog and action of the scripture’s narrative. The commentarial tradition locates this in the second chapter of the tantra where Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī each make proclamations concerning the hidden purity of everyday reality after which the retinue responds with an exclamation of the five verses beginning with “E ma’o! This marvelous wonderful doctrine.” These three statements lead up to an expression by the retinue of the secrecy of reality, which is interpreted as an exhortation for the teacher to give the teaching of the *Secret Essence*. He is said to have assented to teach the tantra through non-verbal signs, such as smiling and raising his eyebrows. It is in this sense of portraying the actions that resulted in the teaching of the tantra that this part of the narrative is called the “raising of the discourse”.

In the “uncommon” interpretation, specific to the inner tantras, these three initial statements by Samantabhadra, Samantabhadrī, and the retinue are interpreted as symbolic of Samantabhadra bestowing the three higher initiations of the inner tantras on the retinue.

³⁵ *'gro ba'i rnam par rtog pa ma rig pa las/ 'gro ba lnga'i ris bsam gyis mi khyab par smin pa* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 158.7).

³⁶ *gleng bslang ba*.

These are the secret initiation, the wisdom initiation, and the fourth initiation. The secret initiation is generally described using the imagery of sexual union. The literal reading of texts portrays a process whereby the master and his consort enter into sexual union and the disciple is initiated by having a mixture of their seminal fluids sprinkled on his tongue, though some commentaries are adamant in claiming this is merely symbolic.³⁷ In the wisdom initiation, the disciple then takes a consort and practices withdrawing the winds into the central channel, causing the inner fire to blaze up, and melt the drop of enlightenment inside the crown of his head. As this descends, he experiences the four joys of the forward process. In the fourth initiation, also called the word initiation, the process is continued but the drop of enlightenment is drawn upward. The statements by Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī in the second chapter of the tantra are interpreted as the bestowal of the secret initiation, whereas the five verses of the retinue are considered to represent the wisdom and word initiations. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima does not interpret the secret initiation symbolically, as some do. For, he ends this section with an explanation of how it is possible for Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī to bestow these initiations if they are wisdom-bodies that do not possess semen and menses.

THE RESULT OF THE TANTRA OCCURING

The result produced by the gathering of the maṇḍala in the first chapter—the introductory background—and the exhortation of the teacher by the retinue in the second chapter—the raising of the discourse—is the teachings contained in the tantra. The general discussion of the meaning of the tantra is found in this section, which occupies the bulk of Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's commentary. This he divides into two sections a general presentation of the three continua and the detailed explanation of the ten topics of tantra. Only the general presentation is translated in part II, as this lays out the basic aspects of the Mahāyoga

³⁷ Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamajatantra*, 148-152.

worldview. He arranges his discussion of the general meaning around a well-known tantric triad—the ground-continuum (*gzhi rgyud*), path-continuum (*lam rgyud*), and result-continuum (*'bras rgyud*). These are called the three continua (*rgyud gsum*) in the sense of being three parts of one continuum. In the Mahāyoga system and the higher tantra's in general, the three—ground, path, and result—all belong to the same continuum but represent different stages of its realization by the individual. The *locus classicus* for the three continua is the *Supplemental Tantra* of the *Secret Assembly*, found as eighteenth chapter appended to the root text, though the *Key to the Treasury* abbreviates the citation:

Continuum is explained as [meaning] continuous.

From method and cause [issues] the result.³⁸

The cause is the ground, or the natural continuum, which is the fundamental reality of all things. The method is the path through which one realizes the abiding reality and thereby achieves the result of complete enlightenment. Thus, in his general explanation of the three continua, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima defines the three continua in the following way:

1. The ground is that which is the source of all phenomena;
2. The path is that which has the exertion of knowing and engaging that ground, and
3. The result is that manifestation of reality, or the ground, where one has progress to the point of no more enhancement.

Old School scholars agree that the ground is the actuality of the way things are (*gnas lugs*). However, there is some disagreement over the path and result. Len Nyatselwa defines the path as that which engages. Yet, this definition can be seen as excluding the view from the path. The view of all phenomena as primordially enlightened, emanating from the ground, is

³⁸ *rgyud phyi ma las/ rgyud ni rgyun chags la bshad del thabs dang rgyu las 'bras bu'ol* (*Key to the Treasury*, 48.3). See Lessing and Wayman *Introduction to Buddhist Tantric Systems*, p.266 n.14. Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamajatantra*, 165. The actual quote from the *Secret Assembly Tantra* is slightly more elaborate. It is given in full and translated in chapter one above.

traditionally taken to be the starting point for the path. The tradition also posits three characteristics (*mtshan nyid gsum*) of the path that are mutually exclusive—the characteristic of knowing, the characteristic of engaging, and the characteristic of the result.³⁹ The view falls within the first category, as its primary characteristic is knowledge. To define the path as that which engages excludes the view, characterized by knowing, from the path, a position that is untenable for the tradition. The view is a factor of consciousness of one who is engaging in the path, though its object is the ground-continuum. For this reason, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima extends Len Nyatselwa's definition to include both knowing and engaging on the path.

In terms of the result, there are also a number of positions. These have to do with another description of the results of the Mahāyoga path found in the Indo-Tibetan commentarial tradition, known as the four types of awareness-holder.⁴⁰ These are the fruitional awareness-holder (*rnam smin rig 'dzin*); the awareness-holder who controls his lifespan, or life-empowered awareness-holder (*tshe dbang rig 'dzin*); the awareness-holder of the seal (*phyag rgya rig 'dzin*), and the spontaneously present awareness-holder (*lhun grub rig 'dzin*). Jikmé Tenpé Nyima describes all four in the context of the path-continuum, because he considers these to be results that occur along the way to the final result of Buddhahood. Lochen Dharmashrī, on the other hand, posits all four in the result-continuum, as they are results of following the path.⁴¹ An intermediate position is that of Longchenpa, who posits the first three awareness-holders as part of the path-continuum and the last as part of the result-continuum. This is because he sees the spontaneously present awareness-holder as one who has attained Buddhahood, whereas Jikmé Tenpé Nyima defines that awareness-holder

³⁹ In Tibetan these are respectively *shes pa'i mtshan nyid*, *jug pa'i mtshan nyid*, and *'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*. See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 111.

⁴⁰ *rig 'dzin rnam pa bzhi*.

⁴¹ The *Key to the Treasury* does not discuss Lochen Dharmashrī's position. This is from Khenpo Namdröl's oral commentary.

as one just prior to Buddhahood on the tenth and highest ground of a Bodhisattva. He is clear in his definition of the result-continuum that only Buddhahood falls within that category.

It is through these three continua that Jikmé Tenpé Nyima describes the basic Mahāyoga worldview. They are a continuum in that they represent the same fact, the basic nature of reality, in different stages of manifestation. The ground is its natural unmanifested state; the path is the endeavor to manifest this fundamental reality and represents different stages of partial manifestation, while the result is the final, full manifestation of reality in the enlightened state of Buddhahood. In the *Key to the Treasury* these three categories are used to summarize the tantra’s essential meaning.

THE GROUND

The ground-continuum can be seen from two perspectives. Its primary meaning refers to the abiding reality that is the essential ground of all phenomena, including sentient beings. However, when the inherent radiance of the ground is distorted through adventitious karmic predispositions held within the individual’s mind and body, it serves also as the ground for ordinary, impure appearances. The *Key to the Treasury* describes both meanings of the ground. These are respectively called “the essential ground that is the abiding reality” (*gnas lugs ngo bo nyid kyi gzhi*) and “the ground for imputing error” (*'khrul pa btags pa'i gzhi*).

In his discussion of the ground as the essential ground that is the fundamental abiding reality, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima uses a citation from Lochen Dharmashrī’s *Ornament to the Intention*. The citation is used to highlight the primary characteristics of the ground, which may be summed up as:

- ◆ It is beyond the distinction of bondage and freedom.
- ◆ It is self-knowing.
- ◆ It is the mind of enlightenment.

- ◆ It is the indifferentiable union of the two superior truths, and
- ◆ It is devoid of the objects perceived by ordinary minds.
- ◆ It abides always and forever.

He equates the abiding reality, or mode of subsistence, with the clear-light nature of the mind, which he also calls “the final very subtle mind”, “the mind-vajra”, “the innate nature”, and “primordial wisdom”.⁴² This union of the sphere of reality and primordial wisdom is naturally pure without any defilements. In the Mahāyoga system, conceptuality, or dualistic thinking, is the main source of defilements that cover the pure nature of the mind/reality. As the ground is without any such defilements, it is also without the dualistic distinction of bondage and release. It is not bound by anything but merely covered over by impure conceptuality. When the fundamental reality that is a fusion of clear-light emptiness and primordial wisdom is realized, it knows all phenomena to be appearances of its own energy. Therefore, it is self-knowing. As this primordial wisdom is the core of all minds, it is the essence, or core, of both ordinary minds and the enlightened mind. Hence, it is the mind of enlightenment.

As we have seen, the concept of the two truths developed with the sūtra version of the Great Vehicle, or the Bodhisattva Vehicle according to the Old Schools’ doxography. For them, the ultimate truth was the abiding reality of emptiness, while conventional truth included all the phenomena that appeared to the mind. In Mahāyoga, the ultimate truth is the clear-light reality. It is the sphere of reality, free from conceptual elaborations, but it is also the self-luminous final nature of the mind, or primordial wisdom. Through the doctrine of the three continua, the ultimate truth also serves as the basis for the features of the result state, which has five aspects: enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities and activities. Freedom from conceptuality, self-luminous primordial wisdom, and serving as the basis for

⁴² Respectively, *shin tu phra ba'i sems mthar thug*, *sems kyi rdo rje*, *rang bzhin lhan skyes*, and *ye shes*.

the five aspects of enlightenment are called “the seven riches of the ultimate” (*do dam dkor bden*). In Mahāyoga, this is called the superior, or special, ultimate truth (*lhag pa don dam bden pa*). Correspondingly, the display of pure appearances that radiate outward from the special ultimate truth is designated as the superior, or special, conventional truth (*lhag pa kun rdzob bden pa*). That display is always there but is said to be unveiled when the practitioner realizes the ultimate reality. These two special truths are unified in the sole basis of reality, the vajra-mind of enlightenment, in that the display of pure appearances is indifferentiable from the sphere of reality. However, these pure appearances cannot be seen by ordinary minds, because they are covered with imputed defilements. Such minds see ordinary appearances, which are produced through the distortion of the minds energy by those obscuring factors. Thus, pure appearances are called the self-appearances of primordial wisdom (*ye shes kyi rang snang*), while impure appearances are designated as self-appearances of ordinary mind (*sems kyi rang snang*). Just as the ordinary mind cannot view the self-appearances of primordial wisdom, the enlightened mind does not see impure appearances. Therefore, it is said to be free from the ordinary minds’ objects of activity. Since primordial wisdom is the entity, or the fundamental nature of the mind, the ground is also said to abide primordially.

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima points out that such a presentation of the ground differs dramatically from other tantric presentations, even the highest yoga tantra of the New Schools. In those other systems, the consciousness at the time of death gradually withdraws into the indestructible mind until there is an experience of the clear light of death. In the intermediate state and again at rebirth, the coarse minds reemerge from the clear light and are established—though not inherently—according to one’s karmic predispositions. The Old Schools’ system of the inner tantras is unique in that it maintains that all the coarse elements of impure appearance—the ordinary consciousnesses and the psychic winds that serve as their mount—all contain an essential factor of primordial wisdom-clear light. “Hence, it is

asserted that the ground that is the root of all minds and appearances is only the basic mind of clear light.”⁴³

Since this abiding reality is the natural ground of all phenomena, it is also the basis for the impure appearances of sentient beings. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima takes this as a secondary topic in his discussion of the ground. In the sense that emptiness-wisdom is the basis for mistaken appearances, it is called the “ground for imputing error” (*'khrul pa btags pa'i gzhi*). This discussion revolves around the concept of misconceived appearances (*zhen snang*). It is not that there is any error in the ground itself, which is primordially pure but that its display dawns in a distorted manner. The distortion comes from ordinary being mistakenly conceiving these appearances to be impure. It is in this sense that they are called misconceived appearances. While emptiness-wisdom dawns in the form of deities and pure lands, deluded individuals perceive these to be the ordinary appearances of the mundane world. These ordinary appearances are therefore called the “conceptual collection” (*rtog tshogs*), because the totality of these appearances is due to the erroneous imputations of conceptuality. Thus, the point of the path in Mahāyoga, where one practices at visualizing the world as a pure land and oneself as the deities within it, is to transform the conceptual collection into the maṇḍala of deities. Because the pure appearances, which are indifferentiable from the ground, are the basis for the misconception of ordinariness imputed onto them, the ground is also the basis for imputing error.

The notion of a pure enlightened reality that is the fundamental nature of the mind is not new to Buddhism. It is also the primary topic of the Buddha Essence scriptures such as Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum*, a text of the third turning of the wheel of doctrine, which the Old Schools take as definitive. These texts talk about a Tathāgata-essence (*bde gshogs snying po, tathāgatagarbha*) that resides in all beings. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima devotes a portion

⁴³ *snang sems thams cad kyi rtsa ba'i gzhi sems nyid 'od gsal kho nar 'dod pa* (*Key to the Treasury*, 57.3).

of the section on the ground to explaining the difference between Mahāyoga's description of the ground and the *Sublime Continuum's* description of the Tathāgata-essence. In actuality, the two descriptions portray the same phenomena. The ground described in Mahāyoga is the same as the Tathāgata-essence. The difference lies in how the two describe the process of manifesting, or purifying, it.

The sole object that leads to enlightenment is the fundamental nature of the mind. Therefore, since they both lead to enlightenment, the final goal of sūtra and tantra is the same thing. In the sūtras of the third wheel, realization of the Tathāgata-essence is the cause for enlightenment, just as in Mahāyoga realization of the ground is the cause. However, the purification process in both the sūtra vehicles and the outer tantra vehicles involves a gradual purification of the mind until one can connect to the Tathāgata-essence, whereas in Mahāyoga the ground is initially revealed by the master to the disciple through the special techniques of the inner tantras. In the latter, the teacher suddenly reveals the nature of the disciple's mind, using the skillful means of meditatively manipulating the subtle body and so forth, and this initial experience is then taken and cultivated in the path until it is stable and spontaneous. Thus, the inner tantric practice is called taking the result into the path. The sūtras on the other hand take the defiled, ordinary mind and gradually purify it until its nature is finally revealed at the level of Buddhahood. The difference lies in the method of realization, not in what is being realized or the final result. In a general sense, this corresponds with Tsongkhapa's presentation of the difference between Sūtra and Tantra, which is said to lie in the method (i.e., deity yoga) and not the ultimate result.⁴⁴

THE PATH

The second of the three continua is the path-continuum (*lam rgyud*). In the inner tantras, the initial entrance to the path is through initiation, or empowerment. In the three profound

⁴⁴ H.H the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffery Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, 60-66.

empowerments—the secret, wisdom, and word-meaning empowerments—the basic nature of the mind is revealed to the disciples. This experience is then cultivated in the path. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima introduces his discussion of the path through the concept of the five minds (*sems lnga*). These are:

1. the arising mind (*g.yo ldang gi sems*): the initial entrance into the path,
2. the aspiring mind (*smon pa'i sems*): the wish to progress to higher levels,
3. the engaging mind (*'jug pa'i sems*): the actual practice that leads to higher levels,
4. the abiding mind (*gnas pa'i sems*): the mind that abides at a level of the path, and
5. the completed mind (*mthar phyin pa'i sems*): the mind that has achieved the desired goal.

These five minds can also be applied to the practices involving the subtle body in Mahāyoga's path of method. The initial movement of the seminal drop that gives rise to bliss is the arising mind. The aspiring mind wishes to move the drop further. The engaging mind engages in practices to do so. The abiding mind is when the drop abides at one of the stations along the central channel, while the final mind is the experience of innate bliss at the end of the forward and reverse movement of the drop along the central channel.

The particular path discussed in the *Key to the Treasury* is the path of Mahāyoga, which in contrast to the sūtra paths is considered a short path. Mahāyoga's path is of two types: the path of method, which focuses on the important points in the subtle body, and the path of release, in which one induces a realization of the ground through meditating on axiomatic propositions. Both paths also have two types: sudden and gradual. As mentioned in chapter four, each of the four explanatory tantras for the *Secret Essence* describes one of these four paths:

1. Gradual path of release: *Essence of Primordial Wisdom*
2. Sudden path of release: *Mirror of Vajrasattva*

3. Gradual path of method: *Vajra Ocean*
4. Sudden path of method: *Penetrating Magical Emanation*

The path of method and the path of release are not different stages of the path. Both paths involve the two stages of generation and completion, and so each one is a complete path unto itself for separate individuals. However, aspects of the path of method are found on the path of release and vice versa. The difference, according to Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, is that in the path of method one *mainly* focuses on points in the subtle body, while in the path of release one *mainly* is “released into reality” through the three wisdoms of hearing, thinking, and meditating. Consistent with his previous discussions, he begins with the path of method, which involves the subtle body.

THE PATH OF METHOD

Of the two primary paths in Mahāyoga, the path of method mainly deals with the tantric physiology of channels, centers, and drops. In the *Secret Essence* system, the subtle body has six cakras, or channel-centers, and three primary channels. The six channel centers are divided into the four main ones and the two secondary ones. The four main ones are:

1. the wheel of great bliss at the crown (*spyi bo'i bde chen gyi 'khor lo*),
2. the wheel of enjoyment at the throat (*mgrin gyi longs spyod kyi 'khor lo*),
3. the wheel of phenomena at the heart (*snying ga'i chos kyi 'khor lo*), and
4. the wheel of emanation at the navel (*lte ba'i sprul pa'i 'khor lo*).

In addition to these, there are two secondary channel centers below the channel-wheel at the navel. They are:

5. the fire-center (*me dkyil*), which is four fingers below the navel, and
6. the wheel of downward voiding (*thur sel gyi 'khor lo*).

This description is similar to other highest yoga tantras, as is the Mahāyoga description of the three channels—a central channel going through the middle of the spine, and one to both sides of it. The right and left-hand channels twist around the central channel at the location of the six cakras, thereby constricting it and preventing the flow of consciousness through it. In Mahāyoga the central channel is further divided into the central channel of method (*thabs kyi dbu ma*), which is equated with the *avadhūti* (the common Sanskrit name for the central channel); the central channel of wisdom (*shes rab kyi dbu ma*), which is associated with the “channel of life” (*srog rtsa*), and the central channel of non-duality, which is located behind the others and is made of pure light.

Moreover, in the inner tantras, it is said that the consciousness rides on subtle psychic winds. These winds course through the body carrying the consciousness through secondary channels the branch off from the three main ones. In tantric meditation, one seeks to withdraw these winds and their consciousnesses into the central channel drawing them upward and thereby loosening the constricted points at the cakras, or channel-wheels (*'khor lo*). These winds then serve to activate the seminal drops in the body, particularly the white drop, called the mind of enlightenment, located in the crown of the head. As this drop descends through the central channel and then rises again, one experience different stages of joy that ultimately lead to enlightenment.

The winds can be drawn into the central channel either through its opening at the crown of one’s head or through the bottom opening located in male’s at the tip of the penis.⁴⁵ Correspondingly, there are two types of the path of method: one dealing with the upper opening and one dealing with the lower opening. The practice of the upper opening involves focusing on specific points within the practitioner’s own body in order to activate the psychic winds, while the practice of the lower opening does so through ritual sexual practice with a

⁴⁵ The Tibetan portrayals that I have seen on this subject are not specific about the subtle physiology of the female body.

consort and therefore depends on another's body. The former is also called "the path of melting and taming" (*'ju 'dul pa'i lam*), while the latter is dubbed "the sport of the three realms" (*khams gsum rol pa'i lam*). Jikmé Tenpé Nyima describes the path of method dealing with the upper opening first.

USING THE UPPER OPENING—THE PATH OF MELTING AND TAMING

There are two types of practice concerning the upper opening of the central channel—the one shared in common with other highest yoga tantras and the one special to Mahāyoga. The former involves focusing on important points in the body—at the channel centers and so forth—in order to stop the movement of wind in the right and left channels. By doing so, the wind is forced to enter the central channel, whereby it causes the fire-center to blaze up. The heat rises to the crown of one's head, where it melts the white drop. As the white drop descends, one experiences the four joys of descent from above. Drawing it back upward, one then experiences the four joys of ascent from below. At the end, one reaches the innate joy in where there is no further conceptual elaboration. As this practice is shared with other highest yoga tantras, it is called the common one.

In terms of the practice of the upper opening that is special to Mahāyoga, the most important point on the body is at the channel-center at the heart. The focus of this practice is therefore at the heart-center, known as the wheel of phenomena. This center is visualized to be a lotus with eight petals. The central channels and the right and left channels pierce its center, rising vertically through it. Along the horizontal plane, four secondary channels emerge. These are called:

1. the channel of reality (*chos nyid kyi rtsa*) in the front,
2. the channel of primordial wisdom (*ye shes kyi rtsa*) to the right,
3. the channel of qualities (*yon tan gyi rtsa*) to the left, and
4. the channel of one's own continuum (*rang rgyud kyi rtsa*) in back.

The front and back channels each have three petals surrounding them, while the right and left have only one, making a total of eight.

The indestructible drop (*mi shigs pa'i thig le*) is located in the very center of the heart-wheel. This drop contains the indestructible mind, which is the root of all consciousness. The drop is composed of the five great refined-factors (*dwangs chen lnga*), which are the root factors of the five basic elements—earth, water, wind, fire, and space—and which in their purified form are equated with the five female Buddhas. On the channel of reality, that issues horizontally out of the indestructible drop, there sits there syllable *om* just inside the wall of the central channel. This syllable is said to contain the seeds for achieving an enlightened form in the future. On the channel of primordial wisdom, just inside the central channel, there sits the syllable *āḥ*, symbolizing the potentiality for achieving enlightened speech. On the channel of qualities, sits the syllable *hūṃ*, which represents the potential for achieving enlightened mind. These three syllables are called the proximate refined factors (*nye ba'i dwangs ma*). For, they are refined essences that are close to the indestructible drop at the center. Just outside the central channel wall, resting on these same three channels, are six syllables representing the seeds for coarse ordinary appearances. These are called the unrefined factors (*snyigs ma*). On the channel of reality, there is a *su* and *tri* syllable, which represent the potentiality to be born as a demi-god or an animal. On the channel of primordial wisdom, there is a *pre* and *du*, which represent the potential to become a hungry ghosts and hell-beings. Finally, on the channel of qualities, there is a *a* and *nṛi*, symbolizing the potential to become gods and men.

The special practice of the upper opening occurs on the path of completion, after one has attained competence on generating oneself as a deity during the path of generation. It further assumes that one has already internalized the Mahāyoga view, not only that all phenomena are primordially enlightened and pure, but more specifically that the indestructible drop at the center of the heart-wheel has the capacity to emit any and all types of appearances. The

idea is that the indestructible drop emanates this energy from creating appearances, which first passes through the three refined essences and creates pure appearances. In ordinary people, the energy next passes through the six unrefined factors and is distorted to create the impure appearances of ordinary existence. The practice involves focusing one-pointedly on the indestructible drop at one's heart, which contains the clear-light mind of primordial wisdom. By focusing on it, one activates the capacity for the dawning of pure appearances. This radiates outward causing the three refined factors—i.e., the three syllables *om*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*—to blaze up. The heat from these causes the unrefined factors to melt away like butter and become purified. One thereby achieves one's innate natural purity.

USING THE LOWER OPENING—THE SPORT OF THE THREE REALMS

The most esoteric and controversial practices of the inner tantras revolve around the sexual practices utilizing the lower opening of the subtle body. This practice, known in Mahāyoga as “union” (*sbyor ba*), is described in the eleventh of the root tantra:

Goddesses, female nāgas, and women of bad lineage
 Either differentiating or not differentiating [them],
 There is the nature of service, close service,
 Accomplishment, and then great accomplishment.
 Therefore, spread the maṇḍala of the blissful mind
 In the maṇḍala of the consort's lotus.
 Through the gifts of supreme joy and equanimity
 [Made] to the whole cloud-mass of Buddhas, [everything] dissolves.
 That essence of the sun and moon of attainment
 Is taken up by the vajra-tongue [into] the maṇḍala.
 One will become a lord of the wish-fulfilling clouds

Flying in the sky, blazing brightly, [with] longevity, and so forth.⁴⁶

This passage uses the symbolic language often found in the tantric milieu. Vajra refers to the male's penis, while lotus refers to the female's vagina. The maṇḍala of the blissful mind is the white drop of the male that descends from the crown of the head to the tip of the penis. While the passages states that this drop spreads in the consort's lotus, this is not referring to emission but to the mixing of the white drop of the male with the red drop (generally associated with menses) of the female. This mixture of red menses with white semen is the "sun and moon of attainment". It is drawn up again by the male through the opening at the tip of the penis, or the vajra-tongue, into the center of the heart cakra, thereby leading to final enlightenment.

The passage also mentions a common tantric scheme of the four branches of service and accomplishment (*bsnyen sgrub yan lag bzhi*), and this is the breakdown that Jikmé Tenpé Nyima uses to open his discussion on the path of method at the lower end of the central channel. The scheme appears to have originate with the *Secret Assembly Tantra*, another Mahāyoga tantra, and is associated with the stage of generating oneself as a deity.⁴⁷ In such contexts, the four branches of service and attainment are described as:

1. Service (*bsnyen pa*): propitiating the deity that is being visualized,
2. Intimate Service (*nye bar bsnyenpa*): praying that the deity's blessing will descend on oneself.
3. Accomplishment (*sgrub pa*): the descent of the deity into the practitioner.

⁴⁶ *lha mo klu mo rigs ngan mol /dbye 'am yang na mi dbye bar/ /bnyen pa dang ni nye bsnyen dang / /sgrub pa dang ni sgrub chen pol /lyhum gyi padm'i dkyil 'khor dul /bde ba thugs kyi dkyil 'khor sprol /sangs rgyas sprin tshogs ma lus la/ /dgyes mnyam mchog gi sbyin pas bstim/ /sgrub pa'i nyi zla snying po del /dkyil 'khor rdo rje lce yis blang / /mkha' 'gro gsal 'bar tshe la sog/ /lyid bzhin sprin gyi bdag por 'gyur/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 187.4-187.7).*

⁴⁷ Beyer, *Cult of Tārā*, 106-108. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 125. Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamāja*, 34-35, 156-161.

4. Great Accomplishment (*sgrub chen*): the ultimate union of deity and practitioner in terms of body, speech, and mind.

In the eleventh chapter of the *Secret Essence* and consequently in Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's discussion of the path of method at the lower opening, the context is obviously different. Here, we are dealing with the rite of sexual union, and most commentators explicitly bring this out in their interpretation of this passage.⁴⁸ In the *Key to the Treasury*, "service" refers to initial arousing the consort through flirtations practices found in the manuals on love-making. "Intimate service" is visualizing oneself and the consort as deities and embracing for the purpose of achieving enlightenment. Through the sexual practice, the inner fire is ignited by the winds that are drawn into the central channel, causing the white seminal drop to begin to move. After passing through the four major channel-wheels during which one experiences four successively profounder types of joy, the white drop abides at the tip of the penis, whereby one experiences the innate joy. This is accomplishment. Withdrawing the white drop, now mixed with the female's red drop, and raising it up again to the crown of one's head, whereby it suffuses the body with bliss is the great accomplishment. Thus, here the four branches of service and accomplishment are interpreted strictly within the practice of "union".

THE PATH OF RELEASE

The second of the two primary paths in Mahāyoga is the path of release through wisdom. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima introduces his discussion on this path through the three characteristics of the path (*mtshan nyid gsum*). As noted above, these are:

1. the characteristic of the knowing, or the view (*lta ba shes pa'i mtshan nyid*),

⁴⁸ Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 139.5-140.6. Gyurme Dorje, "The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary", 908-914. *Key to the Treasury*, 74.6-77.1.

2. the characteristic of engaging, or meditative stabilization (*ting nge 'dzin 'jug pa'i mtshan nyid*), and
3. the characteristic of the result, or manifestation (*'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*).

The *locus classicus* for these is the *Garland of Views*, which Jikmé Tenpé Nyima cites in his commentary.⁴⁹ These three represent the initial entrance into the path through generating the proper view, the repeated engaging in meditation on that view, and the results of having meditated. As parts of the path, each of these is described in his discussion of the path of release. The results spoken of in the third characteristic are not the final result of Buddhahood but the results that occur along the path, the discussion of which is done in terms of the four awareness-holders.

THE VIEW, OR THE CHARACTERISTIC OF KNOWING

Before one can practice the actual meditation of Mahāyoga's path of release, it is necessary to have an initial direct perception of the view, that the ground-continuum is the abiding reality of all phenomena and that ordinary appearances—the conceptual collection—are in reality pure appearances of maṇḍalas and deities. This is done through preliminary meditations that familiarize the practitioner with certain axiomatic principles until they are directly realized. Thus, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima divides this section into what is to be comprehended, how it is comprehended, and the goal of comprehending. The object to be known in the view is basic purity of the conceptual collection, or the collection of misconceived appearances. The means for comprehending them are the various axioms—the four realizations, the three purities, the four equalities, and the great identity—and the goal is to have a direct comprehension of the ground, or abiding reality.

⁴⁹ Padmasambhava, *man ngag lta ba'i 'phreng ba*, 12.6.

Since the purpose of the view is to come to a direct realization of it, the axioms for meditation, being the means for achieving this, are the primary topic covered in this section. They are the way one comprehends the view. However, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima leads into the topic through another device, taken from Buddhaguhya's *Stages of the Path*: the five historical facts, the five modes of followers, and the five phrases. These three categories mirror to a certain degree the three transmissions (*brgyud gsum*) discussed above, in that they represent a spectrum from subtle to coarse and from mythic time to present day. The five historical facts represent the actual teaching of the five enlightened bodies to their respective retinues. The Reality body communicates through non-production itself. The Enjoyment Body communicates through symbolic gestures. The Emanation Body communicates through words. The Vajra Body communicates through a "vajra-communication", and the Manifest Enlightenment Body communicates through blessing. In the five modes, these communications are seen by subsequent followers non-verbally symbolized in aspects of everyday reality. The clarity of space might point out non-production—the communication of the Reality Body. The brightness of the sun might teach self-luminosity—the communication of the Manifest Enlightenment Body—and so forth. In this way the tradition leaves open the possibility for spontaneous realization of the ground without indoctrination.

The last of the three, the five phrases, is where the different reasonings, or axioms, of the view are described. The five phrases are the teachings of the five enlightened bodies put into words and taught to subsequent generations. The four enlightened bodies, excluding the Emanation Body, have reasonings that do not require analysis in that one does not analyze the statement but it is merely meditated on like a *koan* in Japanese Buddhism. Thus, the Reality Body's reasoning is: "All things are non-produced like space." The Emanation Body's reasonings, on the other hand, require analysis. Within the types of Emanation Body's

reasonings, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima speaks of the valid reasonings from root text itself that we shall turn to next.

THE FOUR KINDS OF REASONINGS

Despite the many levels of outline in which the discussion of the four kinds of reasonings from valid scriptures is embedded in the *Key to the Treasury*, they are the central topic for the view. The other reasonings mentioned cover a broad spectrum from non-verbal communications of a teacher, to intuiting the teachings from nature, to direct revelation from a Buddha. However, the reasonings actually taught in the root tantra itself are considered the main ones, and they are described at length in the *Key to the Treasury*. These are four kinds of reasonings: the four realizations, the three purities, the four equalities, and the great identity.

The four realizations (*rtogs pa bzhi*) are mentioned by name in the eleventh chapter of the root tantra. They are:

1. the realization of the sole cause,
2. the realization of the mode of syllables,
3. the realization of blessing, and
4. the realization of direct perception.

Each of these is phrased by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima in the manner of a syllogism so that he presents four axiomatic reasonings for the four realizations. The realization of the sole cause is based on the Mahāyoga tenet that the primordially pure ground is the sole cause for both pure and impure appearances. Neither type of appearance can actually be established within the ground itself, because it can appear as anything. This a reasoning from the perspective of the ground's emptiness, or the superior ultimate truth. The mode of syllables refers to an analogy to the Indo-Tibetan syllabary that is commonly used in sūtra and tantra to demonstrate how reality—emptiness in the sūtras and emptiness-wisdom in the tantras—

permeates all appearances and occurrences. Indo-Tibetan “alphabets” are actually syllabaries, because the individual “letters” represent basic syllables. The consonants are all pronounced with an implicit “a” sound that is not written. The mode of syllables says that in the same way that “a” invisibly pervades all the consonants, so too the ground invisibly pervades all appearances. This is a reasoning from the perspective of the ground’s dawning as various things, or the superior conventional truth. The realization of blessing is called such because it proceeds by the force of the previous two reasonings as an extra blessing. Here, by the power of the first two realizations, one realizes that the superior two truths—ultimate and conventional—are actually an indifferentiable entity. Through the reasoning of the sole cause one understands the nature of the ground, or the ultimate truth, and through the reasoning of the mode of syllables one understands its play, or conventional truth. Having completed these two realizations, one is “blessed” with the realization of their indifferentiability. Finally, the realization of direct perceptions is that the final mode of reality is not an object for an ordinary mind but is only realized in direct perception by the primordial wisdom that is the root of all ordinary minds.

The second type of reasoning is the three purities (*dag pa gsum*). This is also mentioned in the eleventh chapter of the *Secret Essence*. With this reasoning, one realizes that the external world, or vessel, is pure; the beings who live in it, or contents, are pure, and the mind-streams, or mental continuums, of sentient beings are pure. This comes from statements throughout the tantra, especially in chapter two, which equate these three with factors of pure appearance. The external world is made up of five elements, which in the enlightened perspective of pure reality are the five female Buddhas. Sentient beings are made up of five aggregates, which in their pure reality are the five male Buddhas, and mental continuums are made up of five consciousnesses, which actually are the five primordial wisdoms. The purities viewed from the enlightened perspective are believed to be the way

these phenomena actually exist. Meditating on the syllogism of the three purities aids one in realizing this.

The third type of reasoning is the four equalities, or samenesses (*mnyam pa bzhi*). These are divided into two groups of two: the two common equalities and the two uncommon equalities. Each group has an equality relating to the ultimate truth and one pertaining to conventional truths. The two common equalities are shared with the lower vehicles. They are that 1) all things are equal in being ultimately non-produced and free from extremes and that 2) all things are equal in being like an illusion. The two uncommon, or superior, equalities relate particularly to the Mahāyoga worldview. They are that 3) all things are equal in being devoid of all conventional designations superimposed by the adventitious mind and that 4) all things are equal in being the self-appearances of primordial wisdom.

The fourth and final type of reasoning is the great identity (*bdag nyid chen po*). According to Buddhaguhya, the source for this reasoning is the ninth chapter of the root text. This reasoning states that nothing is established the way it appears, because all appearances are identical in being the self-appearances of primordial wisdom. Thus, the reasoning of the great identity follows directly from the four samenesses.

These four types of reasonings are the main way for initially entering into the path of Mahāyoga. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima speaks of these as “the reasonings of valid scriptural sayings” or “the four actual teachings of the tantric scripture”,⁵⁰ because they all have their source in the text of the *Secret Essence Tantra*. He also mentions other types of reasonings, such as reasonings shared with the lower vehicles. These are called “reasonings where the words are concordant but the meaning is superior”,⁵¹ because the wording of these reasonings is the same as in the Sūtra vehicle but the meaning is interpreted from the Mahāyoga perspective of

⁵⁰ *tshad ma bka' gzhang gi gtan tshigs* (*Key to the Treasury*, 88.2) and *rgyud gzhang gi dngos bstan bzhi* (*Key to the Treasury*, 102.4).

⁵¹ *sgra mthun don spags kyi gtan tshigs* (*Key to the Treasury*, 99.1ff).

the ground. However, the main means for realizing the Mahāyoga view are the four reasonings actually taught in the scripture itself: the four realizations, the three purities, the four equalities, and the great identity. Through these four types of reasoning one initially enters the path of Mahāyoga. One does so by knowing these reasonings. So, they are “that which is characterized by knowing” (*shes pa'i mtshan nyid*). The view is the necessary preliminary step for actually engaging in the practices of the path—the stage of generation and the stage of completion—because in Mahāyoga the meditations of those two stages involve viewing all things as pure appearances emanating from the ground of reality. The meditation of the path is grounded in a direct perception of the Mahāyoga view and cultivates this until its final fruition in Buddhahood.

MEDITATIVE STABILIZATION, OR THE CHARACTERISTIC OF ENGAGING

Whereas the view is meant to bring the clear light nature to direct realization, meditation stabilization (*ting nge 'dzin*) is for stabilizing that realization. In practicing meditative stabilization one is actually engaging the ground and utilizing one's initial realization of it in the path. As with most of the higher tantras, the meditation of Mahāyoga's path of release is complex. It is generally divided into the stage of generation (*bskyed rim*), in which as a preliminary for the following stage one practices generating oneself and one's world as deities and the divine residence, and the stage of completion (*rdzogs rim*), where within that vision of divine purity one simulates the stages of death, intermediate state, and rebirth in order to achieve the authentic yoga where those three are transformed into the three enlightened bodies—the Reality Body, the Complete Enjoyment Body, and the Emanation Body.

The main division of meditative stabilizations, which applies to both the stage of generation and the stage of completion, is the five yogas. These are:

1. the yoga of the great empty (*stong pa chen po'i rnal 'byor*),
2. the yoga of illusory compassion (*snying rje sgyu ma'i rnal 'byor*),

3. the yoga of the coarse and subtle single seal (*phyag rgya gcig pa phra rag kyi rnal 'byor*)
4. the yoga of the elaborate seal (*phyag rgya spros bcas kyi rnal 'byor*),
5. the yoga of collective achievement in groups (*tshom bu tshogs sgrub gyi rnal 'byor*).

The yoga of the great empty is equated to the ordinary individual's dissolution into the clear light of death. In this practice, one simulates the experience of death and perceives the clear light as the Reality Body. The yoga of the illusory compassion is equivalent to the winds and minds of that individual in the intermediate state. Here, one takes these winds and minds as the Complete Enjoyment Body. The last three types of meditative stabilization are seen as different stages of taking the ordinary birth-state of an individual as the Emanation Body. Thus, the yoga of the single seal is analogized to the formless state of the individual in the intermediate state entering into the womb at the time of conception and the gestation of the fetus, producing the new baby. The yoga of the elaborate seal is equivalent to the growth of the child from birth to adulthood, and the yoga of collective achievement is equated to the full maturity of the individual at adulthood, surrounded by a retinue of friends.

Through these five yogas, one takes the ordinary experiences of death, intermediate state, and rebirth into the path, using them to achieve the final realization of the ground. They are initially cultivated on the stage of generation by the practitioner him or herself. Then, in the stage of completion, they are practice together with a consort, and in the final yoga of group achievement along with several other couples, who together recreate the maṇḍala of the peaceful or wrathful deities. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima discusses two procedures for meditating on the generation and completion stages. In the first procedure, the practitioner meditates on the two stages together. When s/he has finished the generation stage of the meditative stabilization on the great empty, s/he progresses to the completion stage for that meditative stabilization. Then, s/he moves onto the generation stage for the meditative stabilization of compassionate illusion, after which s/he does the completion stage, and so forth. This is

called “training in the union of generation and completion from the very beginning.”⁵² The second procedure is when one cultivates the stages of generation and completion serially. One first completes the generation stage for all five meditative stabilizations and then proceeds to the completion stage. However, the training in the union of the generation and completion stages is considered to be the main procedure for one on the path of release. Since in this method the practitioner is continually returning to the fabricated yoga on the stage of generation, the first four meditative stabilizations are posited as falling within the path of accumulation, while the last meditative stabilization, collective achievement, is considered to be the path of preparation, in which one experientially cultivates the realization of the ultimate truth.

Another division of the path is into meditation by belief (*mos sgom*) and definite completion (*ngeś rdzogs*). Meditation by belief is when one practices the meditation of visualizing the deities and maṇḍala conceptually motivated by the belief that the practice will lead to realization. Definite completion is when one practices upon having an aspect of non-conceptual realization. The measure of realization is through the rubric of the five experiences (*nyams lnga*). These are the experience of motivation, attainment, familiarity, stability, and finality.⁵³ One experiences these with each of the five meditative stabilizations and brings that experience to the next higher level. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima equates meditation by belief with the stage of generation and definite completion with the stage of completion. This is in line with his description of the generation and completion stages in terms of the three natures of the Mind Only doctrine:

⁵² *dang po nas bskyed rdzogs zung 'brel du slob tshul* (*Key to the Treasury*, 108.6).

⁵³ *g.yo ba'i nyams, thob pa'i nyams, goms pa'i nyams, brten pa'i nyams, and mthar phyin gyi nyams.*

Therefore, some earlier [sages] have said, “The stage of generation is an imputational nature; the stage of completion, a thoroughly established one.”

This is, indeed, a profound thought.⁵⁴

Thus, in the stage of generation one trains the mind at visualizing each of the five steps, and in the stage of completion one achieves a vivid clarity of those visualizations. The visualizations on the stage of completion are considered to be the perception—though not necessarily the full realization—of actual reality, and the experience of this reality is brought into successively higher levels. During the progressive stages of this practice, one achieves certain non-final results that are considered to be results of the path. These are not the final result of Buddhahood, but they are given a special status within the three characteristic, which Jikmé Tenpé Nyima addresses next.

MANIFESTATION, THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE RESULT

The final of the three characteristics is that of manifestation or the result. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima condenses is careful to distinguish between the characteristic of the result (*'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*) and the result-continuum. The latter is the full manifestation of the ground as pure appearances in the effect state of Buddhahood. The characteristic of the result refers to fruitions that occur along the path. Similar to the ten Bodhisattva grounds, these represent milestones along the path to full enlightenment. The Old School tradition of Mahāyoga discusses these in terms of the four awareness-holder (*rig 'dzin bzhi*) of progressively more profound realization. These are:

1. the fruitional awareness-holder (*rnam smin rig 'dzin*),
2. the life-empowered awareness-holder (*tshe dbang rig 'dzin*),
3. the awareness-holder of the great seal (*phyag rgya chen gyi rig 'dzin*), and

⁵⁴ *de'i phyir gong ma kha cig kun btags bskyed rim dang yongs grub rdzogs rim gyi mal 'byor zhes gsungs pa yang dgongs pa zab bol* (*Key to the Treasury*, 107.4-107.5).

4. the spontaneously present awareness-holder (*lhun grub gyi rig 'dzin*).

The first two—the fruitional and the life-empowered awareness-holders—cannot be achieved by the same person. Instead, they represent different ways that one initially attains the level of a superior on the path of seeing. The fruitional awareness-holder attains the path of seeing while still possessing a contaminated continuum, which is the fruition of past actions. Their continuum is contaminated in that they cannot control the arising of misperceived appearances. They cannot control the time of their death. They cannot control whether they get sick or not, and they cannot control how they will be reborn. The life-empowered awareness-holder has achieved the ability to purify these contaminations through his or her realization of the five primordial wisdoms. Such a person has also achieved the path of seeing, but because they have a greater ability, they have control over their life-forces, and so are called life-empowered.

Having achieved the path of seeing, both the fruitional awareness-holder and the life-empowered one progress to the state of an awareness holder of the great seal, which occurs on the path of meditation. The awareness-holder of the great seal has a body that appears in the form of the tutelary deity, on which they meditated during the stages of generation and completion. Thus, there are five types of this awareness-holder, one for each of the five Buddha families. The awareness-holder of the great seal traverses the path of meditation from the second to the tenth Bodhisattva level, at which point they attain the status of a spontaneously present awareness-holder. According to the Zur tradition, on the final stage of the tenth ground, known as the “final path”, one achieves a body that is similar in appearance to the Complete Enjoyment Body of a Buddha. On this stage, one also has most of the abilities of a Buddha, but not all. Longchenpa on the other hand sees the level of spontaneously present awareness-holder as synonymous with Buddhahood. So, he includes this level within the effect, or result, continuum.

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima gives a detailed analysis at the end of the section on awareness-holders. His focus is on the concept of “empty form” (*stong gzugs*), which according to Yungtönpa is the same concept as in the *Wheel of Time* though the practices for achieving it are vastly different. Empty form designates the appearances that the meditator causes to radiate forth from his or her realization of emptiness. In the Mahāyoga tradition, as we have discussed, the ground on which one meditates has both a factor of emptiness and a factor of wisdom. The latter itself has the ability to radiate outward various forms. Therefore, in the abiding ground there is a factor of appearance.

In the five meditative stabilizations one first realizes the empty nature of the ground and then in the second meditative stabilization realizes its capacity for self-appearances. These self-appearances are forms created out of emptiness and so are “empty form”. In the final meditative stabilization of the group practice one gains a direct realization of the ground and the ability of the ground to appear on its own. This is the attainment of the path of seeing, the first of the Bodhisattva grounds, from which point one is considered to be a superior. One then attempts to induce supreme bliss through the visualization of the empty forms. Those of sharp intelligence who are able to generate this bliss purify their coarse body and attain the status of a life-empowered awareness-holder, who has a pure body. The life-empowered awareness-holder will achieve the status of an awareness-holder of the great seal without having to die. Those practitioners who are less able can only leave the imprints of the practice on their consciousness and in the intermediate state between births achieve the status of an awareness-holder of the great seal. In this Zur system, the awareness-holder of the great seal falls within the path of meditation, while the spontaneously present awareness-holder is one on the final path of a tenth ground Bodhisattva.

At the end of the section on awareness-holders, the author gives a detailed account of Longchenpa’s assertions on the topic, as these differ significantly from the Zur tradition. In Longchenpa’s view one person can travel on all four levels of awareness-holder. He places the

fruition awareness-holder on the path of preparation as one who is able to ripen their mind into the tutelary deity. The life-empowered awareness holder is placed on the path of seeing. The awareness-holder of the great seal is on the path of meditation up to and including the final path of a tenth ground Bodhisattva, while the spontaneously present awareness-holder is equivalent to Buddhahood. Longchenpa also posits two kinds of fruition awareness-holder, one who achieves the highest stage of the path of preparation and becomes a life-empowered awareness-holder and one who does not. The latter achieves the awareness-holder of the great seal in the intermediate state. Despite these differences in positing the four awareness-holders, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima concludes the section with a detailed analysis of how the two interpretations are compatible, concluding:

When it is explained in this way, the assertions of the Zur system and those of the Omniscient Lord of the Doctrine [Longchenpa] merely differ in identifying the basic characteristics of a fruition awareness-holder. And...there is also the difference between [this assertion and the Zur system's] assertion that [the collective practice] is not necessarily required. Except for just that, they appear to be in agreement on the essential points.⁵⁵

Here, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima truly ecumenical attitude clearly emerges. Though his focus is primarily on the Zur interpretation of the *Secret Essence*, he is careful to mention the important divergences of Longchenpa's system and whenever possible offer suggestions as to how the divergent views can be reconciled. He uses a similar approach when mentioning differences and similarities between the *Secret Essence* and the tantras that are popular among the New Schools, such as the *Wheel of Time Tantra* and the *Secret Assembly*.

⁵⁵ 'di lta bu'i tshul gyis bshad na zur lugs dang kun mkhyen chos rje'i bzhed pa gnyis kyang nam smin rig 'dzin gyi mtshan gzhi ngos 'dzin la mi mthun pa tsam dang /... tshogs spyod ma byas pa dang / byas kyang dgos pa ma grub pa la bzhed pa'i khyad par yang yod del de tsam ma gtogs gnad kyi 'gangs gcig par snang la! (*Key to the Treasury*, 139.5-140.1).

THE RESULT

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima ends his general explanation of the *Secret Essence's* meaning with a brief discussion of the final result of Buddhahood. This is called the result-continuum, because it is not the generation of something new but a manifestation, or revelation, of the primordial ground that exists as the reality of all things. The initial direct perception of the ground is cultivated in the path-continuum until it finally manifests in all its functionality in the effect state. As already mentioned, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima is careful to distinguish the result-continuum from the characteristic of the result that occurs in the context of the path. He discusses the final state of Buddhahood in terms of the twenty-five qualities of the result. These twenty-five take the five enlightened attributes of a Buddha as their basis. These are enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities and activities. Each of these in turn has five aspects to arrive at the total number of twenty-five. Since the translation of the *Key to the Treasury* lays out the enumeration of these twenty-five qualities of the result, there is no need to repeat them here.

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have attempted to outline the beliefs and practices of the Mahāyoga vehicle as described in the twentieth century interpretation of the *Secret Essence* found in Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's *Key to the Treasury*. That commentary portrays the hermeneutical stance promulgated by the Zur tradition as passed down to Jikmé Tenpé Nyima through his two main teachers, Paltrül Rinpoché and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo. However, as we have seen in the last chapter, the author also provides a significant amount of comparison with the other major interpretive lineage of the *Secret Essence*, the system of Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo and Longchenpa. In comparing the two Old School traditions, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima is faithful to his ecumenical upbringing as a member of the Non-Sectarian (*ris med*) movement that flourished in his day. While he primarily focuses on the Zur tradition, he provides sometimes lengthy discussions of the diverging interpretations of the Rong-Long system, in which he sometimes attempts to reconcile the differences as minor without being substantive. Yet, his method is not reductive; he fully acknowledges the differences of interpretation in an unbiased manner. As the thrust of his commentary is to describe the Zur tradition, the Zur interpretation is always described first, followed by Longchenpa's interpretation, clearly as an afterthought, but the latter is presented in an even-handed and respectful manner. The *Key to the Treasury* is therefore an important text in helping us understand the primary differences between these two interpretive streams of the Tibetan Mahāyoga tradition to which we shall return shortly.

To the extent possible, I also have attempted in this dissertation to present Tibetan understandings of the Mahāyoga system in an even-handed and unbiased manner. To do so, I opted to view the tradition from several different angles as the background for my translation of the first part of the *Key to the Treasury*, viewing Mahāyoga from the perspectives of 1. its position within the Old Schools doxography of nine vehicles as presented in Lochen Dharmashrī's *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, 2. the lineage of its

transmission from India to Tibet described in the *Key to the Treasury*, 3. its canon of scriptures and a summary of the root tantra supported by the commentaries of Vilāsavajra, Yungtön Dorjepel, and Lochen Dharmashrī, and 4. its basic philosophy and praxis through outlining the major topics of the *Key to the Treasury*. In those chapters, I resisted interpretive suppositions so as not to overwhelm the tradition’s horizon with my own agenda. At the same time, I have attempted to keep in mind during the writing that in light of the postmodern critique of reason, objectivity is a questionable enterprise. Therefore, for the most part, I have focused on translation as a consciously interpretive way to open a window onto that traditional horizon. Not only does Part II contain the translation of a substantial portion of the *Key to the Treasury*, but the preceding chapters are primarily based on Tibetan sources, translated by myself or others. In those chapters, I have gathered and organized the relevant information pertaining to the topic, resisting as far as possible the urge to overlay my own hermeneutical agenda. The strength of such a method is to provide a relatively “objective” description of the Tibetan Mahāyoga system.

However, one of the drawbacks to such a method is that it leaves one without a sense of conclusion. Indeed, this work was meant not to close the book on Mahāyoga but to open the door for further research. The lack of finality the reader may experience upon finishing the last page is an invitation to further exploration of this important topic within Tibetan Buddhism. Much needs to be done for a truly comprehensive understanding of the topic. Textual research on the content of the Mahāyoga canon has only just begun. Important early Indian and Tibetan commentaries, such as Vilāsavajra’s *Blazing Palace*, Nup Sangyé Yeshé’s *Lamp for the Eye of Concentration*, and Yungdönpa Dorjepel’s *Mirror Illuminating the Meaning*, need to be translated and studied in more detail. The contents of the Dunhuang collection of texts on Mahāyoga need to be cataloged, summarized, and translated. More analysis on the relationship between Mahāyoga and Atiyoga needs to be done, and so on. Certain scholars are presently working to fill some of these lacunae, and their work will no

doubt provide valuable insight into this complex tradition. It is my hope that these pages may be a useful resource for those and other scholars.

Despite the lack of conclusiveness that is inevitable in works on little-known topics, such as Mahāyoga, we can glean from the preceding pages a few theoretical propositions that *seem* to be supported by the present state of our knowledge. In the remaining pages here, I would like to present the following observations as hypothetical propositions based on what I have learned in the course of writing this work. Being based on the present incomplete state of my knowledge, these propositions may either be supported or disproved by subsequent studies that go in more depth on one topic or another.

1. Vimalamitra was the primary transmitter of the *Secret Essence Tantra* and the Mahāyoga teachings to Tibet.

From the discussion—in the third chapter—of Jikmé Tenpé Nyima’s lineage, it appears that the central figure in the tantra’s transmission to Tibet was the Indian scholar Vimalamitra. Arriving in Tibet sometime in the late eighth century, he was a tantric practitioner, dressing in layperson’s garb. The association of this Vimalamitra with the Seminal Drop (*snying thig*) traditions of Atiyoga’s Quintessential Instructions section (*man ngag sde*) is probably a latter accretion. However, it is clear he was strongly connected with Mahāyoga. According to the Zur lineage, the other figure traditionally associated with the transmission of the *Secret Essence*, Padmasambhava, played only a minor, peripheral role. The three streams of transmission that merge into one in the figure of Nup Sangyé Yeshé all pass through Vimalamitra, while Padmasambhava is only peripherally associated with just one of those three. Furthermore, there are fifteen commentaries on Mahāyoga topics attributed to Vimalamitra in the Peking edition of the Tibetan Translated Treatises (*bstan ’gyur*), while only one such commentary is attributed to Padmasambhava. Even that attribution is questionable, given the pervasive reach of the Padmasambhava cult. Finally, the Zur

tradition relies heavily on the works of Vimalamitra and his teachers, especially the *Heart Drop*, the *Condensed Meaning* (*piṅḍārtha*), and the *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text*, thereby indicating Vimalamitra's centrality for that lineage.¹

2. The *Secret Essence Tantra* was probably compiled in Eastern India around the middle of the 8th century C.E.

This hypothesis follows in part from the previous point of Vimalamitra's centrality to the lineage. The hagiographies of the various figures in the lineage are so replete with myth and legend that separating out the historical facts is at the least problematic. It is my contention, however, that the basic timeline presented in the lineage hagiographies, when separated from the apotheosis, provides a rough guide for the history of the tradition. The lineage presented in Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's commentary and that of his teachers, describes Vimalamitra as the student of Buddhaguhya and Vilāsavajra. The attribution in the Peking edition of the Tibetan canon that the *Heart Drop* was coauthored by these three figures offers some slight validation to this premise. The lineage further states that Buddhaguhya and Vilāsavajra were both disciples of Gomadevī, the daughter of King Indrabhūti. As King Indrabhūti was the alleged revealer of these scriptures, Vimalamitra was, according to this lineage, at most only two generations removed from the "founder" of the tradition. A late eighth century inscription attests to Vimalamitra's presence in Tibet at that time, which would then place the supposed revelation of the tantras around the middle of that same century.

The exact history of the formation of the Mahāyoga canon and the *Secret Essence* in particular will probably never be known. At this point, all we can do is speculate. If we tentatively assume the existence of Indrabhūti as an actual person, we can speculate that he

¹ It remains to be seen how extensively the Rong-Long tradition relies on the works of Vimalamitra. He is certainly quoted in Gyurme Dorje's translation of Longchenpa's *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions*; however, a more thorough analysis would have to be done to determine whether he was as popular a source for Longchenpa as he was for Jikmé Denpé Nyima and other proponents of the Zur tradition.

was the one responsible for the initial redaction of the eighteen Mahāyoga tantras. As the tradition says that the Siddha Kukurāja was the redactor, perhaps Indrabhūti acted as his sponsor. It is doubtful that they penned the *Secret Essence* or any of the eighteen tantras. Yet, they may have been the ones who gathered the diverse traditions into a coherent group. Given that there are earlier Yoga Tantra versions of the list of eighteen tantras from the turn of the eighth century and given that both lists share three titles, it is likely that the redaction consisted of expunging older titles from the Yoga Tantra list of eighteen tantras and adding more recent compositions including the *Secret Essence*.

The importance of this for an understanding of Mahāyoga is twofold. First, it means that the *Secret Essence* and the other latter Mahāyoga tantras, i.e., the titles not shared by both lists, represent the cutting edge of Buddhist Tantric speculation in the mid-8th century. This is roughly the same time period when Buddhism was first being officially imported into Tibet (cir. 762 C.E.). While the text was obviously changed in translation and no doubt succumbed to editorial revision in subsequent generations, a thorough analysis of it gives some hints concerning the situation of Buddhist tantric thought at that time. A thorough comparison with the Yoga Tantra tradition would reveal the ways in which Mahāyoga texts depend on Yoga Tantra ideas and the ways they are innovative. For instance, Mahāyoga's radical antinomianism in comparison with Yoga Tantra helps explain the strict secrecy with which tantras were transmitted in the Dynastic Period and provides clues as to what may have occurred during the "dark age" after the assassination of Lang Dharma (850-1000 C.E.).

Secondly, seeing Mahāyoga as the forefront of Buddhist psycho-technology in its day will help in understanding the subsequent evolution of Buddhist thought in Tibet in the centuries to follow. The *Secret Essence* was, if not the first, then the most eloquent expression of the central thesis of the inner tantras that there is a clear-light nature to the mind, which is a fusion of emptiness and wisdom and which exists as the core of all coarse, defiled minds. Because the *Secret Essence* presents the basic view of all the higher tantras, Longchenpa sees

the tantra as an Atiyoga text, while the present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, finds in the pages of Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's commentary on the tantra confirmation that the highest teachings of the Old and New Schools are pointing to the same reality. As David Germano has concluded in his "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)," Mahāyoga represents the normative version of Tantra for the Old Schools, which is due to the fact that it was the cutting-edge of Tantric Buddhism in the eighth century.² Furthermore, using the evidence of the *Garland of Views*, he has shown how the early Atiyoga speculation represented in the Mind Series of texts in all probability evolved out of speculation on Mahāyoga's completion stage techniques.³ Thus, a clearer picture of Mahāyoga and its main scripture, the *Secret Essence*, will aid in our understanding of the later developments of Anuyoga and Atiyoga.

Information concerning the location of the *Secret Essence's* composition is scant and circumstantial. In his general commentary on the *Secret Essence*, Longchenpa refutes the notion that it originated in Oḍḍiyāna in the northwestern part of India and claims instead that it came from Zahor (the land of King Indrabhūti), which was in the south-east.⁴ Another piece of evidence for the location of the *Secret Essence's* origin, as has been noted by previous scholars, is a commentary in the Peking edition of the Translated Treatises entitled the *Array of Quintessential Instructions for the Magical Emanation [Net Cycle]*.⁵ Allegedly penned by the middle Indrabhūti who discovered the cycle, this text begins with the following statement:

In the east, in the country of Indra,
Having the lineage of the prince *Vajrakūṭa (?),

² David Germano, "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 17.2 (Winter 1994), 203-336.

³ David Germano, "Architecture and Absence", 223.

⁴ Longchenpa, *yid kyi mun sel*, 6b.3-6b.5, 10a.5-10a.6.

⁵ Indrabhūti, *sgyu 'phrul man ngag rnam par bkod pa* (P4737), vol. 83, 120.2.7-129.4.1.

I, Indrabhoti (*sic*), achieved the Magical Emanation net
Directly taught to me by the Lord of Secrets.⁶

While hardly conclusive, these two pieces of evidence point to an origin in eastern Indian for the tantra, possibly in modern day Orissa or Bengal. Further studies on this topic, especially detailed linguistic analysis on the text itself, may reveal more solid information on the land of the *Secret Essence's* origin.

3. The tantric innovations found in the *Secret Essence* are twofold: A) the full integration of the Mind Only and Buddha Essence ideas with the general tantric milieu and B) its extreme antinomianism.

While the Mind Only and Buddha Essence ideas can arguably be found throughout all forms of Tantra, it is only with Mahāyoga that these ideas become fully integrated into the central ideology. Mahāyoga does this with the innovation of “the union of the superior two truths”. The fundamental nature of all phenomena is a fusion of the sphere of reality with primordial wisdom. The primordial wisdom has a factor of radiance that dawns as either pure or impure appearances (Mind Only). This fusion, or union, is the fundamental core of all minds and is already enlightened (Buddha Essence). Enlightenment is merely the process of revealing that inner core. Mahāyoga represents the integration of these ideas with the Yoga Tantra praxis and the mature development of the wrathful deity cycle. It thereby acts as the foundation for the Mind-Series form of Atiyoga, which bases itself on this philosophical standpoint but strips out the oppressively complicated ritual elements.⁷

The extreme antinomian elements of the *Secret Essence* and its companion Mahāyoga works are obvious and perhaps over-emphasized in modern scholarship. The incorporation

⁶ *shar phyogs indra'i lung pa nal /rgyal bu rdo rje brtsegs pa rul /rigs can indra po ti ngas/ /gsang ba'i bdag pos mngon bstan pa'i/ /sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i bsgrub pa yang / (Indrabhūti, *nam bkod*, 120.2.7-120.3.1).*

⁷ Germano, “Absence and Architecture”, 230.

of the flashy techniques of ritual sex and ritualized murder are easy targets for sensationalism. However, this was not apparently the intention of these practices. The strict admonitions to secrecy are indications that the practitioners of Mahāyoga were *not* supposed to act like the “shock jocks” of their day but were to keep the unusual practices to themselves. The shock factor involved in these practices was reserved for the practitioner him or herself in that they were meant to dispel one’s dualistic notions of good and bad, clean and dirty, and so forth. The antinomianism was strictly for soteriological purposes and was at the same time the logical consequence of Mahāyoga’s philosophical premise of innate enlightenment. In this arena as well, the *Secret Essence* lays the foundation for the Tibetan Atiyoga Mind-Series teachings, which extends the antinomianism “to rule-governed hermeneutics of all types, rather than a focus on manifest transgressions involving sexual fluids, ritual sacrifice and shocking public displays.”⁸

4. There are three major differences between the Zur interpretation and the Rong-Long interpretation of the *Secret Essence* concerning: A) the central deity of the maṇḍala, B) the existence of trainees with separate continuums in the Highest Pure Land, and C) the relationship between the characteristic of the effect (*'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*) and the effect continuum (*'bras rgyud*).

As this present work is a description of the Zur tradition from the perspective of an early twentieth century commentary on the topic, the primary focus was that tradition and not the other tradition of Rongzom and Longchenpa. However, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima himself clearly elucidates these major differences between the two traditions of interpretation, as mentioned above. In the final analysis, he often reduces the differences to the level of minor variations,

⁸ Germano, “Absence and Architecture”, 231. I disagree with the implication here that Mahāyoga teachings originally encouraged “shocking public displays”. Though I do think they ended up assuming that role in Tibetan hagiographies, the extreme secrecy with which these tantras were managed in the Dynastic Period and the rhetoric of secrecy within the textual tradition itself both indicate that these teachings were in the early days guarded quite closely.

either out of his respect for Longchenpa or from his general ecumenical attitude. Such an apparently unbiased and even-handed comparison of any two opposing systems is indeed rare, but without further comparison with other works it is impossible to tell how much he is glossing over or how much he is attempting to reconcile the traditions. Thus, the actual extent and importance of these differences remains unclear.

The major difference between the Zur tradition's interpretation of the *Secret Essence* and that of the Rong-Long tradition concerns the central figure of the maṇḍala. This figure is differentiated from the actual teacher of the tantra, which both traditions maintain is Samantabhadra, the primordial Buddha. The central deity referred to here is the one at the center of the maṇḍala that is meditated on in practice. In the original teaching of the tantra in the Highest Pure Land this figure is displaced and holds a position just in front, i.e., slightly to the east of the central throne. When meditating on the maṇḍala during a session of practice, this figure holds the position on the central throne. In the Zur tradition this figure is Akṣobhya, while for the Rong-Long tradition it is Vairocana. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima cites strong scriptural support for the choice of Akṣobhya, leaving the reason for the Rong-Long choice of Vairocana unclear. Whereas in Tibetan traditions Akṣobhya is usually associated with wrathful deities, here the assumed form is the peaceful one, traditionally associated with Vajrasattva.⁹ Vairocana, on the other hand, is traditionally connected to the Yoga Tantras in his all-knowing (*kun rig, sarvavid*) form and belongs to the Tathāgata family.¹⁰ In the *Secret Essence* there is some indication that this latter family is more prominent in the wrathful section than in the peaceful one.¹¹ However, the question remains why Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo and Longchenpa resist the scriptural evidence for placing

⁹ See Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, 36-37.

¹⁰ Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, 31-35.

¹¹ In the opening chapter of the wrathful section (chapter 15), the Vajra Family associated with Akṣobhya is clearly placed in the east and by process of elimination the Tathāgata-family of Vairocana is in the center (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 199.2-199.5), while in the wrathful mantra chapter (chapter 16), the Tathāgata-family mantras are listed first, and the Vajra-family mantras are listed second (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 206.4-206.5).

Akṣobhya in the center and prefer instead Vairocana. Is it to maintain continuity with the Yoga Tantra tradition? Or, is it somehow connected with their interpretation that the *Secret Essence* is an Atiyoga scripture, perhaps because of Vairocana's association with the "Ādi-Buddha" that Getty describes? Only future, more detailed scholarship can provide the answer to these questions.

The next difference between the two traditions of interpretation pointed out by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima concerns the retinue of the maṇḍala at the time of teaching the tantra. In chapter four, we have seen Tibetan descriptions of the place the tantra was taught as a primordially pure land on the border of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa, the latter fact symbolizing its transcendence of conceptual extremes. In line with their Atiyoga perspective, the Rong-Long tradition maintains that everything in this pure land is an emanation of the primordial Buddha, Samantabhadra. Therefore, the whole retinue has the same continuum as the teacher. On the other hand, the Zur tradition maintains that there were certain tenth-ground Bodhisattvas and worldly deities who appeared in the pure land at the time of the teachings. While the Rong-Long interpretation is meant to show the complete purity and oneness of the foundational scene, the Zur interpretation focuses on the efficacy of the teaching in that the scripture itself claims that certain beings became enlightened during the course of its sermons.

The final major difference pointed out in the *Key to the Treasury* concerns the doctrine of the four awareness-holders (*rig 'dzin bzhi*, **caturvidhyādhāra*). These are described in the context of the "characteristic of the result" (*'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*), which is one of the three characteristics of the path. Following the Zur tradition, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima maintains the following:

1. All awareness-holders are on the Superior learner paths, i.e., the path of seeing and the path of meditation.

2. The fruitional awareness-holder and the life-empowered awareness-holder are two different ways of achieving the path of seeing, which therefore cannot be both achieved by the same person.
3. The spontaneously present awareness-holder is the equivalent of a tenth ground Bodhisattva on a final path to enlightenment.

He contrasts this with an extensive description of Longchenpa's system, which holds to the following:

1. The four awareness-holders span the paths from the path of preparation to the path of no more learning, i.e., final Buddhahood.
2. The fruitional awareness-holder is one on the path of preparation, while the life-empowered awareness-holder is one on the path of seeing. Therefore, a single person *can* achieve both.
3. The spontaneously present awareness-holder is the same as final Buddhahood, i.e., one on the path of no more learning.

While these differences concern detailed doctrinal points, they are perhaps significant. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima and the Zur tradition limit the scope of awareness-holders to those results of direct insight that occur while on the path. They can thereby maintain a clear distinction between the characteristic of the result, or the four awareness-holders, and the result-continuum, or final Buddhahood. Longchenpa broadens the scope to include those who have not had direct insight (the path of preparation before the path of seeing) as well as final Buddhahood so that in his system the characteristic of the result overlaps with the result-continuum. The specific implications of these differences also warrant further study.

These are the three most prominent differences between the Zur tradition and the Rong-Long tradition that emerge from a reading of the *Key to the Treasury*. However, while this helps to open up the subject, further investigation into the nature and implications of these

differences will be necessary to understand their historical importance in fleshing out these two traditions. Often doctrinal or philosophical differences are merely used as a mask for politically or socially motivated sectarianism, and this could well be the case here. However, the extent of our knowledge at present is insufficient to make any definitive proposals regarding the reasons for the evolution of these two systems.

The importance of the *Secret Essence Tantra* lies in its position as the central scripture of the Tibetan Mahāyoga Vehicle. As such, it represents the single most important scriptural source for understanding that movement within the Old School hierarchy of doctrines, and as the focus of controversy in Tibet over its authenticity (which I have only briefly alluded to here), it is also significant source for understanding the social and political dynamic between the Old and New Schools. Furthermore, detailed textual analyses of the *Secret Essence* and related scriptures could provide a window into the tantric attitudes and movements in 8th century India and Tibet and help to flesh out the historical evolution of Tantra by demonstrating the exact nature of its relationship to the Yoga Tantras and how it served as the foundation for the later developments of Anuyoga and Atiyoga.

The *Key to the Treasury*, on the other hand, provides an early 20th century perspective on the Mahāyoga tradition, a perspective which is important in a number of ways. The two major scholarly works done on *Secret Essence* to date view the tantra from the Atiyoga perspective of the Rong-Long system. In contrast, the *Key to the Treasury* provides a description of the Zur tradition's unique interpretation of the tantra, while at the same time explicitly describing the differences from Longchenpa's system. This makes the commentary an excellent introduction to the Zur tradition of interpretation, because not only does it maintain a clear consistency with earlier Zur lineage figures, such as Yungdönpa, but it also lucidly highlights the differences with the Rong-Long system. At the same time, as the Dalai Lama points out in his talk on "Union of the Old and New Translation Schools", the *Key to the Treasury* provides avenues for rapprochement between the Old and New Schools by

discussing similarities between the *Secret Essence* and New School tantras, such as the *Wheel of Time*. This is a result of the author's participation in the Non-Sectarian movement. Furthermore, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's writing is eloquent without being obscure, making his commentary a text of considerable literary value as well.

These conclusions, based on the evidence provided in the preceding pages, suggest a number of possible areas for more detailed research. The goal of this dissertation has been to lay the ground work for an understanding of the Zur interpretation of the Mahāyoga system by presenting the available information in an organized and coherent way. The method used has been to view the tradition from several different angles—doxography, history, literature, and philosophy—to provide a more well-rounded description of the tradition represented by the Old School's presentation of the Mahāyoga vehicle. This description, however, is primarily based on an early 20th century commentary, the *Key to the Treasury*, which represents merely one interpretation of the *Secret Essence*. Works based on other commentaries would augment the information and possibly correct any mistakes contained herein.

I have resisted as far as possible the temptation to overlay an external hermeneutic grid onto the material at hand. Such idealistic objectivism may be out-dated in this postmodern world. However, I have attempted to balance it with an awareness of the relativism of interpretation and translation. What I have sought to present here is, in Gadamer's terms, the blend of my horizon with the text's horizon and in the process to provide some form of stepping stone for further research that will continue to broaden our understanding of this extremely important movement.

PART II: TRANSLATION

The Key to the Precious Treasury, Briefly Distinguishing the General Meaning of the Glorious Secret Essence Tantra

Composed by Jikmé Tenpé Nyima (1865-1926)

Translated by Nathaniel Garson

INTRODUCTION

Homage to the glorious lama, who is Vajrasattva. [3]¹

Homage to the lama, lord of the all-pervasive circle,

Whose speech on the tantras fashions into the magical net body,

The cloud of magnificence that is the inseparable vajra,² [4]

The exalted body which is the sphere of the ultimate and the basic mind free
from defilement. [5]

The illumination of the secret, supreme tantras,

Acts as the sun of the three unsurpassed lineages, causing the land of trainees,

The lotus-garden of blossoming youth, to achieve the two accomplishments.³

May [this sun] remain steadily in the sky of [my] mind.

Although the profundity of the meaning of tantra is difficult to ascertain by one
such as I,

Listen with an unbiased mind to [this] exposition of only a part,

That relies upon the good explanations of lamas in the transmission,

Like an echo following someone's voice.

¹ Page numbers included in brackets mark the beginning of a page from the Delhi edition of the *Key to the Treasury*. Rdo Grub-chen III 'Jigs-med-bstan-pa'i-ñi-ma, *Dpal Gsang ba'i snying po'i rgyud kyi spyi don nyung ngu'i ngag gis rnam par 'byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig* in *The Collected Works of Rdo Grub-chen 'Jig-med-bstan-pa'i-ñi-ma* (Gangtok & Delhi: Dodrup Chen Rimpoche & Jayyed Press, 1974; I-Tib 74-901179), vol. 3, 1-237. The other edition used was: Rdo Grub-chen III 'Jigs-med-bstan-pa'i-ñi-ma, *Dpal Gsañ ba'i sñin po'i rgyud kyi spyi don ñuñ ñu'i ñag gis rnam par 'byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig: A General Commentary on the Guhyagarbha Tantra and various writings on Rdzogs-chen practice* (Gangtok: Dodrup Chen Rimpoche, 1973; I(Sik)-Tib 73-903950). This is referred to as the Gangtok edition.

² Underlined words are those highlighted by the *nges bzung* mark in Tibetan. These are honorific marks underneath a syllable indicating it is part of the author's root teacher's name. In this case, the two syllables underlined are *rdo rje* (vajra) and *gzi bjid* (magnificence). *rdo rje gzi bjid* is a secret name for Jam-yang Khyentse-wang-bo (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 734), who was the author's root teacher.

³ *grub gnyis* (5.1). Ordinary feats (*mtshun mong gi dngos grub*) and the extraordinary feat (*mchog gi dngos grub*) of Buddhahood.

Here I will compose, for the sake of reminding [myself], a brief presentation on the general meaning of the king of tantras, *Secret Essence, Definitive Suchness, the Magical Emanation Net of Vajrasattva*; a treasury within the ocean of teachings which are sacred word-treasures of the early translation; source of the four rivers of secret mantra; framework for all tantras, oral transmissions, and quintessential instructions; essence of the Conqueror's final reflection distilled into an extract, that teaches mind and primordial wisdom as the self-luminous indifferentiable truth. This [presentation] has three [parts]: how it was spoken by the teacher, how it was transmitted from him, and an explanation of the actual meaning of the tantra having that transmission.

THE WAY IN WHICH THE TANTRA WAS SPOKEN BY THE TEACHER [5.6]

Our Teacher, although himself free from all the bonds of attachment, came under the influence of great compassion for sentient beings who have entered into the cage of cyclic existence and [6] who, being oppressed by the thick darkness of obscurations, are completely ignorant of the way out. For the sake of sending forth great waves of illumination of the excellent doctrine to which the light of a billion suns does not compare, he took birth, possessing the adornments of the limitless good qualities of a lotus-lord.⁴ At a time when the life span of beings had fallen to one hundred years, he was born as the son of Śuddhodana, king of the Shākya clan, which was like the tip of a victory banner higher than all [the other] clans.

Shākyamuni or “Lion of the Shākyas,” whose white banner of renown shines over the three levels,⁵ initially acted to thoroughly ripen sentient beings with many skillful means that accorded with the ways of worldly enjoyment, such as playing the games of a youth, learning

⁴ *padmo dbang 'byor* (6.3).

⁵ The three levels are areas where different beings live: below the ground where the Nāgas live (*sa 'og klu'i srid pa*), on the ground where humans live (*sa'i steng mi'i srid pa*), and above the ground, or in the sky, where the gods live (*gnam steng lha'i srid pa*). See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 120, “Three Spheres (of Existence) *sridsa gsum*”.

the arts and sciences, living with the royal consorts, and so on.⁶ Having done this, when he had reached twenty-nine years of age, he abandoned the dominion and wealth of a king and became homeless. He practiced asceticism on the banks of the Nairāñjanā River.⁷ While he was residing there, he was aroused by the Buddhas of the ten directions, whereupon he left that imputed body there, [and with his] wisdom body went to the highest pure land, where he found enlightenment through the five manifest enlightenments.⁸ [7] Then, having gone to the summit of Mount Meru, the shore of the ocean, the country of Oḍḍiyāna, and the city of Zahor,⁹ he taught the limitless tantras of secret mantra such as this one to a pure circle [of trainees. Then] returning to his imputed body he demonstrated with common appearances the remaining deeds [of a Buddha], going to the Bodhgayā¹⁰ and so forth.¹¹

Accordingly, because the two, the teaching of secret mantra by the Emanation Body and the teaching of the secret mantra in the highest pure land by the Complete Enjoyment Body, are like a face and its reflected image, it is not that [the Buddha] did the former upon having abandoned the state of the latter. This is the way it is explained by the master Sūryasimhaprabha¹² in his *Extensive Commentary on the “Glorious Secret Essence, Definitive*

⁶ These are some of the twelve deeds of a Buddha, considered to be events that take place in each Buddha’s life. For the full list, see note 11.

⁷ *ne ranydza na* (6.5). The Sanskrit name for this waterway is according to Monier-Williams (570), where he lists it as “f. N. of a river (Nilajan) falling into the Ganges in Magadha (Behar)”.

⁸ *mngon byang lnga* (6.6). For a brief discussion of the five manifest enlightenments in their tantric context, see Chapter 1. For another Mahāyoga description of the Buddha’s enlightenment experience, see Sūryasimhaprabha (Ñi-ma’i-señ-ge’i’od), *dpal gsang ba’i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa’i rgya cher ’grel pa, Śri-guhyagarbha-vipulaṭika-nāma* (Gangtok: Dodrup Sangyay Lama, 1976; I-Tib 76-902441; I-Tib-1565), 5.4-6.1.

⁹ Oḍḍiyāna is said to be the home of Padmasambhava, while Zahor is the home of Śāntarakṣita. See *The Legend of the Great Stūpa*, pp.22, 69, 74.

¹⁰ *byang chub snying po* (7.2). In Sanskrit this is *bodhimāṇḍa*. According to Franklin Edgerton’s *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* (415), *maṇḍa* means “the best, supreme point” so that in English the phrase renders as “supreme point of enlightenment”, referring to the Bodhi-tree at modern-day Bodhgayā.

¹¹ In all, the twelve deeds of a Buddha are: 1. descent from the Joyous Pure Land (*tuṣṭita*), 2. conception, 3. birth, 4. mastery of the arts, 5. sporting with the retinue, 6. renunciation, 7. asceticism, 8. meditation under the tree of enlightenment, 9. conquest of the array of demons, 10. becoming a Buddha, 11. turning the wheel of the doctrine, and 12. entering into final *nirvāṇa*. See Sopa and Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (New York, 1976), pp.88-9.

¹² *nyi ’od seng ge* (7.4). In a Tibetan edition of his major commentary, this figure’s name is given as *nyi ma’i seng*

Suchness”.¹³ [In another way] after having demonstrated the deed of gaining enlightenment in the land of humans, while the Teacher was turning the wheels of the doctrine within the common vehicles, his Enjoyment body explained the tantras in the highest pure land. This position is how it is explained by Vilāsavajra in his *Blazing Palace*.¹⁴ The all-knowing king of the doctrine [Longchenpa] also made assertions agreeing with the latter.

Regarding that highest pure land where he taught the tantras, it was the highest pure land of the Great Lord [Avalokiteśvara].¹⁵ There are two highest pure lands, [one] which is the land of the Enjoyment Body and [another] that of the Emanation Body, which is a similitude of the former. [8] With respect to the latter, there are also said to be two, the land of the Natural Emanation Body¹⁶ known as half-Emanation and half-Enjoyment Body, and the highest pure land of the pure type,¹⁷ which is an abode of the gods.

ge'i 'od, sūryasimhaprabha (cf. below). Dorje and Kapstein give it as *sūryaprabhāsimha* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 436).

¹³ *Sūryasimhaprabha* (Ñi-ma'i-señ-ge'i-'od), *dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgya cher 'grel pa, Śri-guhyagarbha-vipulatika-nāma* (Gangtok: Dodrup Sangyay Lama, 1976; I-Tib 76-902441; I-Tib-1565).

¹⁴ I could not locate a precise statement of this position in the *Blazing Palace*. Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's wording seems to indicate that he is deducing this position from several statements within Vilāsavajra's text, such as the one in the third chapter:

Through the blessing of the causes and conditions of this tantra being fulfilled, there issued forth the six teachers of the three baskets, the three outer tantras, and the tantras of enlightened body, speech, and mind as well as teachers who tame through inconceivable [means], and they taught and delineated simultaneously. (*rgyud 'di'i rgyu rkyen tshang ba'i byin gyis brlabs las/ sde snod gsum dang / sngags phyi pa gsum dang / sku gsung thugs kyi rgyud rnams kyi ston pa drug dang / bsam gyis mi khyab pas 'dul ba'i ston pa rnams 'thon nas/ dus mnyam du gsungs shing gtan la phab pa...*)

– Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 58.1-58.3.

¹⁵ This is the Pure Land of an Enjoyment Body and is where the tantra was taught. It is also called the self-appearing highest pure land (*rang snang 'og min*).

¹⁶ *rang bzhin sprul sku'i zhing khams* (8.1). These are the Pure Lands of the five Buddhas—Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi—who are considered to be Emanation Bodies of Samantabhadra. They are not located in the three realms (*khams gsum*), though their inhabitants are both superiors (*phags pa*) and ordinary beings (*so so'i skyes bu*).

¹⁷ *gtsang ris* (8.1). The highest pure land associated with the form realm is found as the highest of the five pure place (*gnas gtsang lnga, pañcāsuddhāvāsakāyika*), which are apart from the four concentrations. They are called pure places, because only superiors—those who have realized emptiness—can be born there. See Lati Rinbochay, Denma Lochö Rinbochay, Zahler, and Hopkins, *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism*, (London: Wisdom Publications, 1983), p.41-45.

Scholars say that these modes of explanation are not in any way contradictory, because the fields of a Tathāgata’s magical artifice are inconceivable. One earlier [scholar], in dependence on the mode of explanation in the *Blazing Palace*, [mistakenly] asserted that aside from only the common vehicles the Emanation Body did not teach the Mahāyoga Tantras in the land of humans. This is not feasible, because it contradicts the statement in the root tantra itself that in the context of training by speech the section on the four trainings which are deeds of the Emanation Body says, “the highest vehicle and...”¹⁸ Since the mode of explanation in the highest pure land is the main [mode of teaching] explicitly indicated in the first chapter, both modes of explanation by the Enjoyment Body and by the Emanation Body are evident in the tantra itself.

HOW THE TANTRA WAS TRANSMITTED FROM THE TEACHER [8.5]

This section has two parts: a general presentation of the three transmissions and a detailed explanation identifying each.

GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE THREE TRANSMISSIONS [8.5]

There are three transmissions, as stated in *The Ocean*—an explanatory tantra:

Conquerors, Bodhisattvas, and Yogins

Transmit through thought, basic mind, and the ear.¹⁹

This is the uncommon vocabulary of secret mantra in the early translations. [9]

With respect to that, the Conqueror’s transmission through thought is two-fold. For example, because the form of a rabbit exists on the single moon in the sky, however many

¹⁸ *bla na med pa'i theg pa dang* / (8.4). This agrees with *Secret Essence*, Tk.218, 11.3, but Tb.417, 160.6 has: *bla na med pa'i theg pas*! The four taming of the Emanation Body are: 1. taming through the great merit of Enlightened Body (*sku bsod nams chen pos 'dul ba*), 2. taming through the direct perception of Enlightened Mind (*thugs mngon sum pas 'dul ba*), 3. taming through inconceivable miracles (*rdzu 'phrul bsam gyis mi khyab pas 'dul ba*), and 4. taming through the knowledge [conveyed in] speech (*gsung rig pas 'dul ba*). (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 133).

¹⁹ *rgya mtsho las/ rgya ba sems dpa' rnal 'byor pal / dgongs pa rig pa rna bar brgyud!* (8.6).

images of the moon arise in water they all appear to possess the markings of a rabbit.²⁰ Similarly, one can posit that by the mere fact that a being of the sixth lineage, who sets forth [the tantra], has completely ascertained the meaning of the tantra, the retinue of all the male and female Tathāgatas, of the father and mother Bodhisattvas, and of the peaceful and wrathful [deities] who are emanated by that [person also] ascertain the meaning of the tantra. This is a transmission due to the sameness of thought between the principal [deity] and surrounding [emanations]. There is another mode of transmission through thought [as follows]. Through communicating the thought of profound initiation to those in his company who have separate continuums from him,²¹ the Teacher and attendants become indifferentiable in thought.

“Bodhisattva’s transmission through basic mind” is similar to “awareness holder’s transmission through symbols,” which occurs elsewhere.²² Since instructors who are pure Bodhisattvas have gained an enlightened body achieved from mantric primordial wisdom, they aim their enlightened mind—the thought of primordial wisdom of basic mind—at their company of Bodhisattvas who have thoroughly ripened continuums. Then, by their merely displaying the modes of communication of mantra and mudrā, in that moment the circle realizes all of the meanings of the tantra. [10] Moreover, although this is a particular type of transmission of the meaning through thought, in order to distinguish it from the mode of transmission that is a Conqueror’s transmission through thought, it is not called “transmission through thought” but “transmission through basic mind”.

As for the yogin of “yogin’s transmission through the ear,” this is not, for instance, someone who has risen as a deity from the beginning but is one who, having assumed an

²⁰ Just as some Western traditions see a man in the moon, the Indo-Tibetan traditions see the shape of a rabbit in the shadings on the moon’s surface.

²¹ *rgyud tha dad pa’i lhan gcig pa’i ’khor* (9.3).

²² *sems dpa’ rig brgyud* and *rig ’dzin brda brgyud* (9.4-9.5).

ordinary basis²³ and cultivated the path, has attained any of the stages from “heat” on up. This [exposition] is done in common terms of the mode of appearance to trainees, but, according to the way things actually are, there also are Conquerors and Bodhisattvas among these yogins, as was the case with the great master Padmasambhava. Successive transmission of the initiation, tantra, and quintessential instructions from the mouths of such earlier yogins to the ears of later ones is transmission through the ear.

The Great Omniscient One [Longchenpa] said it is not contradictory for there be a mode of transmission through the ear even among Buddhas, although this is nothing like a learners’ transmission through the ear. Also, since the scriptures of many sūtras and tantras establish this as well, it is not suitable to say that with regard to Conquerors there is only a transmission through thought and with regard to the Bodhisattvas there is only a transmission through basic mind. Hence, it should be explained that with respect to yogins the main [mode of] transmission is through the ear, the uncommon mode of transmission by Bodhisattvas is through basic mind, [11] and the uncommon mode of transmission by an actual Buddha is transmission through the thought.

DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE THREE LINEAGES [11.1]

This section has three parts: explanation of the Conqueror’s transmission through thought, explanation of the Bodhisattva’s transmission through basic mind, and explanation of the yogin’s transmission through the ear.

EXPLANATION OF THE CONQUEROR’S TRANSMISSION THROUGH THOUGHT

[11.2]

This is the transmission from the Teacher, [a Buddha of] the sixth lineage, to the five families of regents, etc., and from the five families to the company that is together with them

²³ Ordinary body and mind.

[but have separate continuums].²⁴

EXPLANATION OF A BODHISATTVA'S TRANSMISSION THROUGH BASIC MIND

[11.2]

This section has two parts: transmission to non-humans and transmission to both humans and non-humans. Transmission to non-humans [refers to when] Bodhisattvas of the three families of Conqueror's children²⁵ explained [the meaning of this tantra] to the three awareness-holders—a god, a nāga, and a yakṣa, these being Drakden Chokgyong²⁶ and so forth. Concerning the transmission to humans and non-humans, twenty-eight years after the Conqueror slept in [final] peace, five sages having excellent lineages²⁷ assembled magically on the peak of Mt Malaya, on an island in a lake on the outskirts of a village in the country of Lanka. Imagining the Buddha, they took up a song of lamentation, whereupon, Vajrapāṇi appeared and taught [them this] tantra.

EXPLANATION OF THE YOGIS' TRANSMISSION THROUGH THE EAR [11.5]

This section has two parts: the way this tantra initially arose in the land of humans and how it was transmitted from that.

THE WAY THIS TANTRA INITIALLY AROSE IN THE LAND OF HUMANS [11.6]

As was just explained, at the time when the Lord of the Secret, Vajrapāṇi, collected the [Buddha's] word, by his blessings [12] King Jaḥ of Zahor, also known as Indrabhūti, had seven dream-omens: “Symbols of exalted body, speech, and mind dissolved [into him]; a

²⁴ *lhan cig pa'i 'khor* (11.2).

²⁵ *rgyal sras rigs gsum sems dpa'* (11.3). These three Bodhisattvas—Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi—are also called the “Lords of the Three Families” (*rigs gsum mgon po*). See David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1987), 195.

²⁶ *grags ldan mchog skyong* (11.3-11.4). See note 27.

²⁷ According to one source, these are the god *grags ldan phyogs skyong*, the yakṣa *skar mda' gdong*, the rakṣa *blo gros thabs ldan*, the nāga *klu rgyal 'jog po*, and the human *dri med grags pa*. Thinley Norbu, *The Small Golden Key* (New York: Jewel Publishing House, 1985), 10, n.6.

precious tome descended; he engaged in discussion of the doctrine; he was proclaimed holy by everyone; he performed great offerings; a rain of jewels fell; and he was prophesized to become a Buddha.”²⁸ Then, in accordance with that, a volume of tantra and an image of Vajrapāṇi, eighteen inches tall, actually descended onto the roof of the palace. Through making supplications, his latent predispositions [resulting] from having previously studied secret mantra were activated, whereupon he realized [the meaning of] “The Chapter on Beholding the Face of Vajrasattva”.²⁹ After that, relying on that [chapter] and the image of Vajrapāṇi, he practiced for six months. He came face to face with Vajrasattva, and through [the deity’s] blessings he came to know the limitless meanings of this book.

HOW THE TANTRA WAS TRANSMITTED [12.4]

King Jaḥ explained it to Kukurāja. From him, it was transmitted in succession to Indrabhūti,³⁰ Simḥarāja,³¹ Uparāja,³² and to his daughter, Gomadevī.³³ Together with their groups, they all went to the land of awareness-holders. Gomadevī explained [the tantra] to Vilāsavajra³⁴ and Buddhaguhyā.³⁵ Buddhaguhyā instructed the great master Padmasambhava³⁶ and Vimalamitra.³⁷ [13] This is how [this tantra] arose in the Land of Superiors.³⁸

²⁸ *sku gsung thugs rtags thim pa dang / rin chen glegs bam babs pa dang / chos kyi bro ba byed pa dang / lkun gyis dam par bsgrags pa dang / lmchog pa chen po byas pa dang / rin chen char du babs pa dang / lsangs rgyas sa la lung bstan ba’o / lzhes pa’i rmi ltas bdun byung zhing / (12.1-12.2).*

²⁹ Tb.423, 294.3-299.2, Chapter 74, *skyes bu dam pa blo rtsal rab kyi rdo rje sems dpa’ zhal mthong ba’i le’u ste don bzhi pa’*

³⁰ *intra bhū ti* (12.5). The transliterations are given for the names as they appear in the text. Page and line numbers are listed only when they are different from the previous name.

³¹ *seng ha rā dza.*

³² *u pa rā dza.*

³³ *sras mo go ma dai vi.*

³⁴ *sgeg rdor* (12.6).

³⁵ *sangs rgyas gsang ba.*

³⁶ *slob dpon chen po padma.*

³⁷ *bi ma mitra.*

³⁸ i.e., India.

In Tibet, Padmasambhava taught the *Garland of Views*³⁹ etc., to the assembly of the king and his subjects, and it appears that there is also a transmission from him. Nevertheless, concerning what is renowned to [our] previous [masters], Vimalamitra instructed Ma and Nyak.⁴⁰ From those two, [the teachings] branched into the three rivers of transmission. These were combined into one in Nup Sanggyé Yeshé.⁴¹ He explained it to Nup Yönten Gyatso⁴² and So Yeshé Wangchuk.⁴³ Nyang Sherapchok⁴⁴ requested [the teaching] from both of them. From him, it was transmitted to Nyang Yeshé Jungné,⁴⁵ Shākya Jungné—the elder from Zur,⁴⁶ Sherap Drak—the younger from Zur⁴⁷—his four main spiritual sons—and Dropukpa Shākya Senggé.⁴⁸ Those three from Nyak, Nup, and Zur are known as the three distributors of secret mantra.⁴⁹ From Dropukpa there arose twelve pupils who grasped his mind and thousands of pupils who were leaders⁵⁰ maintaining colleges. Thus, the activity of this tantra spread in all directions.

The learner's transmission of that [is as follows]. Dzangnak Öbar⁵¹ [instructed] Metön Gönpö.⁵² [From him it was transmitted to] So Sherap Tsültrim,⁵³ to Tanak Dödulbum,⁵⁴ to Da Shākypel,⁵⁵ to Zur Jampa Senggé,⁵⁶ to the two different [people known as] the foremost

³⁹ *lta phreng* (13.1).

⁴⁰ *rma gnyags gnyis* (13.2). These are the two main disciples of Vimalamitra, *rma rin chen mchog* and *myang ting nge 'dzin*. See *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, p.464-5.

⁴¹ *gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes*.

⁴² *gnubs yon tan rgya mtsho* (13.3).

⁴³ *so ye shes dbang phyug*.

⁴⁴ *nyang shes rab mchog*.

⁴⁵ *nyang ye shes 'byung gnas*.

⁴⁶ *zur po che shākya 'byung gnas* (13.3-13.4).

⁴⁷ *zur chung shes rab grags* (13.4).

⁴⁸ *sgro phug pa shākya seng ge*.

⁴⁹ *gnyags nubs zur gsum de dag la gsang sngags kyi babs so gsum du grags* (13.4-13.5).

⁵⁰ *gdugs thogs* (13.5).

⁵¹ *gtsang nag 'od 'bar* (13.6).

⁵² *mes ston mgon po*.

⁵³ *sro shes rab tshul kbrims*.

⁵⁴ *rta nag bdud 'dul 'bum*.

⁵⁵ *mda' shākya 'pel*.

⁵⁶ *zur byams ba seng ge*.

Tārā [worshipper] and [the teacher of] Yung,⁵⁷ [14] to Drölchen Sanggyé Rinchen,⁵⁸ to Shönnupel—the great translator from Gö,⁵⁹ to Chökyi Drakpa—the fourth in the line of Red Hats in the Karma lineage,⁶⁰ to Rinchen Püntsok from Drigung,⁶¹ to Rangdröl Nyida Sanggyé,⁶² to the son of Könjo Tsewang Norgyé⁶³ to the teacher of Kön Beljor Lhündrup⁶⁴ to Trashi Künga from Zurchen⁶⁵ to the awareness-holder Trinlé Lhündrup from Darding⁶⁶ to the king of the doctrine, the great treasury—Gyurmé Dorjé.⁶⁷ The great translator, Dharmashrī heard it from him. These two the great treasure-revealer and his brother, together with their heart-sons wrote many good explanations concerning this tantra, which were like jeweled lamps, on initiation, means of achievement, maṇḍala rites, analysis of the scope, commentaries on the tantra, and so forth. By introducing this continuation of explaining and listening, their kindness to the teaching was inconceivable.

Then, it was transmitted in stages; from the excellent scholar and adept Gedzé Sönam Tendzin⁶⁸, or Jikmé Ngotsar,⁶⁹ [it was passed down to] the Vajradhāra Padma Trashi.⁷⁰ The Conqueror's son Shenpen Tayé⁷¹ heard it from him. He granted it to my two lamas, Superiors who are heart sons of Mañjushrī, the omniscient Emanation Body Jikmé Chökyi Wangpo from Ogyen⁷² and the all-pervasive lord of the ocean of maṇḍalas, the great scholar

⁵⁷ *rje sgrol g.yung* (13.6-14.1). This is a reference to Samdrub Dorjé (*bsam grub rdo rje*), the worshipper of Tārā (*sgrol ma ba*), and Yung-tön-do-je-pel (*g.yung ston rdo rje dpal*). Both of these important commentators on the *Secret Essence* lived in the 13th and 14th centuries and were disciples of Zur Jampa Senggé.

⁵⁸ *sgrol chen sangs rgyas rin chen* (14.1).

⁵⁹ *gos lo chen po gzhon nu dpal*.

⁶⁰ *karma zhwa dmar bzhi pa chos kyi grags pa*.

⁶¹ *'bri gung rin chen phun tshogs*.

⁶² *rang grol nyi zla sangs rgyas*.

⁶³ *'khon jo sras tshe dbang nor rgyas* (14.2).

⁶⁴ *'khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub*.

⁶⁵ *zur chen bkra shis kun dga'*.

⁶⁶ *dar sdings rig 'dzin phrin las lhun grub*.

⁶⁷ *'gyur med rdo rje* (14.2-14.3).

⁶⁸ *dge rtse bsod nams bstan 'dzin* (14.5).

⁶⁹ *'jigs med ngo mtshar*.

⁷⁰ *padma bkra shis*.

⁷¹ *gzhan phan mtha' yas*.

⁷² *o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po* (14.6). This is Pa-trül Rinpoché (*dpal sprul rin po che*, b. 1808), one of

Vajradhāra [15] Padma Damchö Özer Pelzangpo.⁷³ There was further transmission through the former instructing the Vajradhāra Sönam Namgyel⁷⁴ and the latter instructing the excellent, foremost, venerable leader precious Mipam Namgyel.⁷⁵

In brief, except for myself [these are all lords of yoga] who have attained the rank of a learned one by training in the topics of the tantra corpora, have made serviceable the approximation to the state of maṇḍala deities, and have attained the heat of realization of the two stages [of generation and completion]. Due to the transmission of such an unbroken series of great lords of yoga, it has come down [to us] in the present, such that the river of initiation has not dried up, the lamp of explanation has not gone out, and the magnificent luster of the blessings has not faded. The details of this history should be made known from other [sources].

THE ACTUAL MEANING OF THE TANTRA [15.4]

The explanation of the actual meaning of the tantra [has two parts:] (1) a brief presentation of the three—object of explanation, means of explanation, and mode of explanation—and (2) an explanation of the actual meaning of the tantra.

BRIEF PRESENTATION CONCERNING THE EXPLANATION [15.5]

In general, within Highest Secret Mantra there are the three tantric categories of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. With respect to the differences between these three, the final, essential meaning of all tantras is the sole reality of fundamental clear light, having the

Jikmé Tenpé Nyima's teachers.

⁷³ *padma dam chos 'od zer dpal bzang po* (15.1). The fourth Dodrupchen's biography of Jikmé Tenpé Nyima says that this figure was a scholar from Dzok-chen Monastery known as Pe-ma-dor-je. *mkhan chen rdo rje 'chang padma dam chos 'od zer dpal bzang po'am/ rdzogs chen mkhan pad rdor* (Thub-bstan-phrin-las bzañ-po, Rdo Grub-chen IV, 1927-, *Rdo grub chen 'jigs med phrin las 'od zer gyi 'khrungs rabs rnam thar: the brief biography of the First Rdo Grub-chen 'jigs-med-phrin-las-'od-zer (1745-1821) and his successors in the Rdo Grub-chen lineags [sic] of incarnations* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Dodrupchen Rinpoché, 1985; I-Tib-2743; I-Tib 85-903289), 29.5-30.1).

⁷⁴ *bsod nams rnam rgyal*. This is the treasure-revealer Sö-gyel Rinpoché (1856-1926).

⁷⁵ *mi pham rnam rgyal*. This is the famous Old School exegete and polymath, Mi-pham Rinpoché (1846-1912).

character of a non-duality of profound [emptiness] and manifest [appearances], and there are three different doors for initially entering into that meaning. [16] There is the gradual training in the two areas where the sphere and primordial wisdom are taken as the path: the extensive rites of generation and those rites where the elaborations of generation are much condensed, both of which take the three enlightened bodies as the path. And, there is a manifesting of wisdom through the exertion-less method of self-placement⁷⁶ without depending on a fabricated rite of generation. If one asserts that from among these [three categories] those [tantras] that primarily teach the first and those that primarily teach the second and third are respectively posited as Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga, this is for the moment a convenient explanation and, furthermore, one which accords with Rok's assertions.⁷⁷ With regard to the aforementioned extensive and brief rites of generation and with regard to different extensive and brief maṇḍalas, there are also many points to be analyzed, but I fear that would be too much.

Also, with respect to Mahāyoga, the *Oral Instructions on the Transmission [of Secret Mantra]*, that is a sādhana of the *Consortium of Sugatas* says:

Mahā of Mahā is to generate a deity's maṇḍala by stages. Anu of Mahā is a spontaneous establishment of the natural maṇḍala. Ati of Mahā is the unproduced face of the ultimate.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ rang bzbag.

⁷⁷ rog gi bzbed pa dang yang mthun nol (16.3). This is probably Rok Sherap ö (rog shes rab 'od) whose lineage is described under "Miscellaneous Lineages of the Zur and Kham Traditions" in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 701-702. That source claims that he composed a text called *Lecture Notes on the Ground, Path, and Result according to the Magical Net* (sgyu 'phrul gzhi lam 'bras gsum stong thun) and a *Commentary on the Array of the Path of the Magical Net* (lam rnam bkod kyi 'iikā), neither of which could be located. Khetsun Sango's *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 3, 364) gives dates for Sherap ö who was son of Rok Dra-shi-drak (rog bkris grags kyi sras) as 1166-1244.

⁷⁸ bde 'dus grub pa lung gi bka' sgo las/ ma hā'i ma hā ni lha'i dkyil 'khor rim pas bskyed pa'ol / ma hā'i a nu ni rang bzhin gyi dkyil 'khor lhun gyis grub pa'ol / ma hā'i a ti ni don dam ngo bo ma skeyes pa'ol (16.4-16.5). The *Consortium of Sugatas* is a treasure cycle revealed by Nyang-rel Nyi-ma-ö-zer (nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, 1136-1204). A catalog of that cycle done by the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology gives the full name for this text—the last text in volume Nga—as bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa las/ gsang sngags lung gi bka' bsgo. See Ācārya

Accordingly, there is a division into three, relative to the amount of elaboration on the gradual procedure. From among the three, here [the *Secret Essence Tantra*] is a Mahāyoga tantra, because it teaches in accordance with what is said in the *All-Accomplishing King*:

In Mahāyoga one who wishes to become Vajradhāra,
 Having entered through the door of method and wisdom,
 Achieves Vajradhāra through the four aspects of service and achievement
 In the maṇḍala that is the pure [aspect] of one's own continuum.⁷⁹ [17]

Also, within that [Mahāyoga category], because [the *Secret Essence*] teaches through emphasizing that all phenomena are primordially enlightened, it is posited as Ati of Mahā. This is the assertion of most scholars of the Magical Emanation and has its sources in Vimalamitra's *Commentary on the Small Book on Self-Abiding*⁸⁰ and the *Key to the Word of Secret Mantra* from the *Consortium of Sugatas*,⁸¹ etc.

Furthermore, it is the king of all tantras, the peak of all vehicles, the source of all the teachings, the general commentary on all the scriptures, the innermost essence of the thought of all Conquerors, the exalted mind of all fruits, the tracks of passage of all Tathāgatas, and the great path of the yogins. That which possesses these eight greatnesses is the glorious *Secret Essence Tantra*. From among the eighteen great tantras of Mahāyoga, this *Secret Essence*—

Tsultsem Gyatso, *Catalogue of Bka'-brgyad Bde-gshegs 'Dus-pa*, Nyingmapa Catalogue Series VII, Vol. 3 (Gangtok: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1997), 23.

⁷⁹ *kun byed las/ ma hā rdo rje 'chang 'dod pas/ lthabs dang shes rab sgor zhugs nas/ /rang rgyud dag pa'i dkyil 'khor las/ ltsnyen sgrub nmam bzhis sgrub par byed/* (16.6). cf. Neumaier-Dargya, tr., *The Sovereign All-Creating Mind: The Motherly Buddha* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 135. The passage in the *All-Accomplishing King* is found at Tb.1, vol. 1, 130.3-130.4.

⁸⁰ *dpe chung rang gnas kyi 'grel ba* (17.2). Khenpo Namdröl commented that there was a commentary on the *Secret Essence* written by *Siddhārthadevī (*don grub de wi*) called the *Small Book on Self-Abiding* (*dpe chung rang gnas*) and that Vimalamitra wrote a commentary on it. I have not been able to identify either text among the existing collections.

⁸¹ *bde 'dus gsang sngags bka'i lde mig* (17.2). This is another text in the *Consortium of Sugatas* treasure-cycle. In Sikkimese catalog its full title is given as *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa las/ gsang sngags bka'i lde mig* (Tsultsem Gyatso, *Catalogue of Bka'-brgyad Bde-gshegs 'Dus-pa*, 23).

according to the *Commentary on the Glorious Excellent Garland* by Kukurāja⁸²—is a tantra that summarizes all eighteen sets, and—according to the omniscient lama—it is a general enlightened mind tantra.⁸³

By what means is it explained? By means of scripture, reasoning, and quintessential instructions. Concerning scripture, there are four explanatory tantras of this *Secret Essence*—the *Essence of Primordial Wisdom*⁸⁴ and the *Mirror of Vajrasattva*,⁸⁵ which teach the gradual and simultaneous paths of release, and [18] the *Ocean*⁸⁶ and the *Penetrating*,⁸⁷ which teach the gradual and simultaneous paths of method. There are these four, as well as the supplemental tantra,⁸⁸ and so forth. As for the differences between the two, a root tantra and an explanatory [tantra], there are many opinions. However, Rok Deshek Chenpo⁸⁹ says:

Tantras which arise first and are objects of explanation are root tantras. Other tantras which arise later and are means of explanation are explanatory tantras.⁹⁰

Although this is correct, root and explanatory [tantras] are not mutually exclusive, as is the case, for instance, with the supplemental tantra [of the *Secret Essence*].

Concerning quintessential instructions, the best [occur when] those who have attained the path of Superiors in Highest Secret Mantra are able to explain the meaning of tantra through their clairvoyance. The middling [occur when] those who have been manifestly blessed by their personal deity are able to elucidate the tantras. The least are the tantric

⁸² *ku ku rā dza'i dpal phreng ba dam pa'i 'grel ba* (17.5). I have not been able to locate this text.

⁸³ *spyi'i thugs rgyud* (17.5).

⁸⁴ *ye she snying po* (17.6). This is *dpal sgyu 'phrul dra ba ye shes kyī snying po'i rgyud* (Tb.428).

⁸⁵ *rdo rje sems dpa' me long gi rgyud* (17.6). This is *rdo rje sems dpa'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba gsang ba thams cad kyī me long zhes bya ba'i rgyud* (Tb.441).

⁸⁶ *rgya mtsho* (18.1). This is *sgyu 'phrul rgya mtsho zhes bya ba'i rgyud* (Tb.437).

⁸⁷ *thal ba* (18.1). There are two versions of this tantra in the NGB: *sgyu 'phrul thal ba'i rgyud* (Tb.438) and *sgyu 'phrul thal ba'i rgyud chen po* (Tb.439).

⁸⁸ *rgyud phyi ma* (18.1). This is *dpal gsang ba'i snying po'i phyi ta* (Tb.426).

⁸⁹ *rog bde gshes chen po* (18.1). See *supra*.

⁹⁰ *thog mar byung zhing bshad byar gyur pa'i rgyud rtsa rgyud/ rjes la byung zhing 'chad byed du gyur ba'i rgyud gzhan bshad rgyud* (18.1-18.2).

commentaries and the miscellaneous quintessential instructions formulated by anyone who possesses a fully-qualified lineage of quintessential instructions from former awareness-holders. [Some of these are Vilāsavajra’s] *Blazing Palace*,⁹¹ [Vimalamitra’s] short commentary *Ball of Meaning*⁹² and so forth, and [Buddhaguhya’s] *Stages of the Path*,⁹³ the *Heart Drop*,⁹⁴ the [Padmasambhava’s] *Garland of Views*,⁹⁵ and so forth.

Concerning reasoning, those who explain the vajra topics of tantra with the pride of knowing dialectics and with obstinacy disturb the teachings with their own fabrications. Although a person has much dry understanding of general phrases saying “Such and such is explained in such and such [a text],” such a person has not gained firm ascertainment so that one cannot be led astray from the meaning of tantra. Therefore, the most valuable [teachers] are those who themselves have ascertained and are skilled in explaining to others the meaning of the root tantra through logic, i.e., pure reasons, [19] in accordance with elucidation by the quintessential instructions of individual adepts, relying upon the explanatory tantras.

With regard to how this tantra is explained, Lhajé Zurpoché asserts that there are four modes of explanation:

- I. explaining tantras through tantras,
- II. explaining tantras through commentaries,
- III. explaining tantras through means of achievement, and
- IV. explaining tantras through quintessential instructions.

⁹¹ *spar khab* (18.4). Vilāsavajra, *dpal gsang ba snying po’i ’grel pa rin po che’i spar khab slob dpon sgeg pa’i rdo rjes mdzad pa* in *Commentaries on the Guhyagarbha tantra and other rare Nyingmapa texts from the library of Dudjom Rinpoché* (New Delhi: Sanje Dorje, 1974; I-Tib 74-900928; I-Tib-1252), 1-222.

⁹² *pinḍārtha* (18.4). Vimalamitra, *dpal gsang ba snying po’i don bsdus ’grel pinḍārtha* (P4755).

⁹³ *lam rim* (18.4-18.5). Buddhaguhya, *lam rim chen mo* in *bka’ ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23, 5.1-133.3 (=P4736) and Buddhaguhya, *lam rim chung ngu* in *bka’ ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23, 135.1-157.4 (=P4734?).

⁹⁴ *thugs thig* (18.5). Vilāsavajra, Buddhaguhya, and Vimalamitra, *thugs kyi thigs pa* (P4738).

⁹⁵ *lta phreng* (18.5). Padmasambhava, *man ngag lta ba’i ’phreng ba* (*Garland of Views*) in *Selected Writings (gsun thor bu) of Roñ-zom Chos-kyi-bzan-po*, edited by ‘Khor-gdon Gter-sprul ‘Chi-med-rig ’dzin (Leh: S.W. Tashigangpa, 1974), vol. 1, 1-18 (=P4726).

In the [Vimalamitra's] *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text*,⁹⁶ there are two:

- I. Methods for explaining the general text of a tantra, such as explaining it in four [ways]—
 1. outlining the structure by way of its general meaning,
 2. listing the contents,
 3. interpreting the words, and
 4. settling [the meaning] through objections and answers, etc.—and
- II. Methods for explaining the individual tantric topics—
 1. explaining the view through analysis and debate,
 2. explaining the conduct through practical techniques,
 3. explaining mandalas through meanings and words,
 4. explaining initiation through oral instructions,
 5. explaining commitments through their enumeration,
 6. explaining activities through ritual formulations,
 7. explaining achievements through practice,
 8. explaining meditative stabilization through [the stages of] completion and generation,
 9. explaining offerings their through external and internal [forms],
 10. explaining mantras through combining pure sounds and explaining hand-symbols through the stage of generation.

⁹⁶ *khog gzhung gsal sgron* (19.2). Vimalamitra, *sgyu 'phrul man ngag gsal ba'i sgron me* (P4739). The title of the text in the Peking canon translates as *Lamp Illuminating the Quintessential Instructions of the Magical Emanation*. However, the Tibetan commentarial tradition generally refers to this text as *Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text* (*khog gzhung gsal sgron*), though this title does not appear in the text itself. Dorje and Kapstein translate this as *Illuminating Lamp of the Fundamental Text* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 241).

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTUAL MEANING OF THE TANTRA [19.6]

Although according to the assertion of the Secret [Mantra] lord, Dropukpa, there are explanations through the five—the natural mode of abiding of phenomena, the mistaken mode of appearance to those who have not realized [the truth], the mode of perception by an Omniscient One, [20] the mode of generating compassion feeling pity, the mode of effecting the welfare of migrators—and so forth, my excellent lamas make explanations, following the statement in the [*Lamp Illuminating the*] *Inner Text of the Magical Emanation*:

For the best, there is a teaching of the title; for the middling, divisions;

For the lowest, [explanations] setting free the meaning of the words.⁹⁷

Therefore, here I will also explain it in this way.

Regarding this, there are three [parts]: (1) teaching the title of the tantra for those trainees with the best of faculties who understand through mentioning [only] the beginning, (2) opening up the general topics [of the tantra] for those with middling faculties who understand through slightly extensive presentations, and (3) explaining by way of interpreting each word for those with the lowest faculties who understand through elaborations. Along those lines, by merely explaining the meaning of the title to trainees with sharp faculties whose engagement of wisdom is quick, they are able to realize all the points expressed in the tantra. Hence, the teaching of the title is for their sake, but it is not for their sake alone, because it must also be taught in order to establish predispositions—in the two [others], those of middling and low faculties—for understanding through mentioning [only] the title [in the future]. By explaining the general meaning to those of middling faculties, one is able to produce in them an understanding that separates out the important tantric meanings.⁹⁸ Hence, it is mainly taught for them, [21] but for those of low faculties it also

⁹⁷ *sgyu 'phrul khog gzhung las/ rab la mtshan bstan 'bring la dbyel/ ltha mar 'bru gnyer dgrol ba'o/* (20.1-20.2). Vimalamitra, *sgyu 'phrul man ngag gsal ba'i sgron me*, 134.3.7.

⁹⁸ *rgyud don gyi 'gangs gshog pa'i go ba* (20.6).

[serves] the purpose of more easily apprehending the meanings of the words of the text by having studied the presentation of the body of the text prior to unraveling the meaning of the individual words, just as a horse runs [a race better] after [first] seeing the track.⁹⁹

EXPLANATION OF THE TITLE [21.1]

With regard to the title, it has three parts: [Vajrasattva Magical Emanation Net, the General Tantra, and *Secret Essence Definitive Suchness*].

[VAJRASATTVA MAGICAL EMANATION NET]

The first [part of the title], Vajrasattva Magical Emanation Net, indicates the name that is shared by three things: the tantra, the chief deity of the maṇḍala, and the being who sets it forth. Furthermore, concerning the meaning of that, *The Mirror*, an explanatory tantra, says:

The self-awareness of the non-duality of all phenomena
Is the very mind of enlightenment,
This undifferentiated nature
Is called “Vajra.”¹⁰⁰

Hence, a vajra is indivisible and indestructible; it is wisdom-emptiness. As for the expression “emptiness” throughout this [text], the clear light nature is called emptiness, because the clear light nature has an aspect of just emptiness, since for one in its factor of non-conceptuality it is empty of both elaborative conceptuality and inherent existence, and secondly yogins who have quintessential instructions achieve equipoise on emptiness through setting in equipoise on that [clear light]. The Omniscient Lama¹⁰¹ and Derdak Lingpa,¹⁰² etc.

⁹⁹ *dkyus mthong nas rta rgyud pa ltar* (21.1).

¹⁰⁰ *me long las/ chos rnams ma lus gnyis med pa’i/ rang rig byang chub sems nyid dol/ ltha dad med pa’i rang bzbin nyid/ rdo rje zhes ni bshad pa yin/* (21.2-21.3).

¹⁰¹ *kun mkhyen bla ma* (21.6). This probably refers to Longchenpa (1308-1363), the great systematizer of the Old Schools teachings. However, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima could be referring to his own teacher, Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820-1892).

call this “emptiness which is an affirming negative.”¹⁰³ From within the two, method and wisdom, this is in the class of wisdom; hence, it is called wisdom, [22] but it is not the mental factor, wisdom.

Sattva, on this occasion, is explained as threefold: firm, inclusive, and realizational. [It is called] firm because that very pure nature, which is a union in one taste of the mind of enlightenment—the self-aware method—and wisdom-emptiness, abides for [all] time without beginning or end and does not become something of a different character. Because the seal of just that [very pure nature] is impressed in all animate and inanimate [phenomena] and because all animate and inanimate [phenomena] dawn as the magical display of that, they abide in the sameness [of this nature]. Therefore, [it is called] inclusive. By the power of being free from obstructions and by the power of completing the two great collections, one manifests—exactly as it is—just that [clear light], the factuality of the vajra-like mode of being. [Therefore, it is called] realizational. The two former are posited as “Vajrasattva which is the non-duality of ground and result” in terms of the mode of subsistence, and the latter is posited as “Vajrasattva that is the result” from the viewpoint of a stainless mode of perception.

Akṣobhya, the main deity of the maṇḍala and the being who sets forth [this tantra], is a symbolic appearance of just that [pure nature]. He is also known as “Vajrasattva”. The actual main [principle] of the maṇḍala, in which the three—firm, inclusive, and realizational—become one, is the union of a non-learner [i.e., enlightenment]. [23] However, the Vajrasattva of the stage of generation—in which one abides implementing the realizational Vajrasattva as the path through taking the firm and inclusive Vajrasattvas as the basis for

¹⁰² *gter bdag gling pa* (21.6). Der-dak-ling-ba, an associate of the fifth Dalai Lama, was founder of Mindröling and a great treasure revealer. He lived from 1646 to 1713.

¹⁰³ *ma yin dgag gi stong nyid* (21.6). An “affirming negative” (*ma yin dgag, paryudāsapratīṣedha*) is a negation that implies (or affirms) a positive phenomena in its place. See the appendix on “Negatives” in Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 721-727.

achievement—and the Vajrasattva of the stage of completion—in which that [Vajrasattva of the stage of generation] is still possessed—must be taken as only partially similar [to the actual Vajrasattva of enlightenment].

With regard to Magical Emanation Net [in the title, *Vajrasattva Magical Emanation Net*], *The Vajra* says,

The meaning of the relationship between method and wisdom,

Which is called “magical emanation [net]” is explained in four [ways].¹⁰⁴

Therefore, there are the four magical emanation nets of the conceptual collection,¹⁰⁵ the definitive meaning, the provisional meaning, and the inseparability of the deities and conceptuality. From among these, the first [the magical emanation net of the conceptual collection] is explained on the occasion of [the phrase], “The elements are the mothers of the wisdom lineages”.¹⁰⁶ The subtle factors that are the drops containing the essence of those five elements are the basis from which appearances of the aggregates and constituents dawn without being distinguished. Hence, it is called “magical”. The coarse factors of aggregates and constituents that appear in various ways from those are called “emanations”, and those two [subtle drops and coarse forms] related as support and supported are called “net”.

As for the second, [the magical emanation net of definitive meaning] is the final essence that is wisdom-emptiness, in which appearances dawn in their way without distinction like magical illusions. Hence, it is called “magical”. The self-radiance of that [wisdom-emptiness] radiating as the primordial wisdom that is self-arisen basic mind, or method, is called

¹⁰⁴ *rdo rje las/ thabs dang shes rab 'brel ba'i don/ lsgyu 'phrul zhes ni bzhir bshad do/ (23.2).*

¹⁰⁵ *rtog tshogs (23.2).* Khenpo Namdröl described the “conceptual collection” as the “basis for mistaken designation” (*'khrul ba btags pa'i gzhi*) or mistaken appearances (*'khrul snang*) that are the phenomena of cyclic existence (*'khor ba'i chos*). Here, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima describes it in terms of the five elements, which are produced from subtle drops that contain their essence. When these are purified, they appear correctly as the five “mothers”. Similarly, when the five aggregates are purified, they appear as the five “fathers”. The conceptual collection refers to these phenomena in their impure appearance, which is obscured by conceptuality.

¹⁰⁶ *byung ba shes rab rigs kyi yum/ (23.3).* The statement is found in the 13th chapter of the root text (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 192.4-192.5).

“emanation”, and the relationship of those two as an indifferentiable entity is called “net”.

Concerning the third [the magical emanation net of provisional meaning], [24] the meaning of “magical” is the mother deities appearing as seals, which are symbolic of that [wisdom-emptiness]. The meaning of “emanation” is the father [deities], which are symbolic of that [self-radiance, or method]. Those father and mother [deities] dwelling in blissful bodies face-to-face is the meaning of “net”.

With regard to the fourth [the magical emanation net of the inseparability of the deities and conceptuality], “magical” [means] the conceptual collection. Just their dawning as deities through the method that is self-knowing realization is [the meaning of] “emanation”. The relationship of the two, the conceptualizations of deities and their nature, as non-dual is [the meaning of] “net”.

Furthermore, these [explanations] are set forth in terms of ground and result. Hence, when they are associated with the ground, there is the conceptual collection and the basis for its appearance, the clear light basic mind. Only to first two [types of] magical [emanation] nets [can be associated with the ground]. When [the four types of magical emanation net] are associated with the result, [to call] the conceptual collection [a result] is nothing more than imputing the name of the phenomena that is the ground onto the phenomena that is the result; the definitive meaning is the realizational Reality Body; the provisional meaning is the uncommon Form Body of Secret Mantra, and the indifferentiable deity and conceptuality is the state of purification of all aggregates and constituents in one taste as vajra deities.

When these [Vajrasattva and magical emanation net] are treated in terms of their main [reference], it seems that Vajrasattva is explained especially from the point of view of the ultimate, and that magical emanation net is explained from the point of view of conventionalities. It is taught that having realized the Vajrasattva magical [emanation] net which is the basic state, [one] takes as the path both the ground and the result in order to

attain the Vajrasattva magical [emanation] net which is the effect state; that continuum of the path is also designated with that name, [Vajrasattva magical emanation net]. [25]

[THE GENERAL SCRIPTURE]

The second [part of this tantra's name], “a general scripture of all definition and tantra [vehicles]”, is designated as a name [of this tantra] from the point of view of its greatness. Furthermore, concerning the meaning of this, *The Vajra* says:

That which teaches individually is oceanic tantra.

Since all meanings—teaching with respect to this, teaching by this,

Teaching for the sake of this—are contained in this [tantra],

It is called “a general scripture”.¹⁰⁷

All paths for achieving high status,¹⁰⁸ definite goodness,¹⁰⁹ and omniscience¹¹⁰ that are expressed in the Definition Vehicle scriptures are taught as platforms to the path of this [tantra], and the paths with and without signs of the external Secret Mantra¹¹¹ and the secret topics, which are expressions of all the special Highest Yoga Tantra sets and whose essence is the non-duality of the profound and the manifest—all of these are taught in this tantra. Because all the other scriptural collections¹¹² and tantras are set forth stemming from just these topics taught here, they derive from this [tantra], and all those teachings either directly or indirectly flow toward understanding the meaning of this tantra's thought, the

¹⁰⁷ *rdo rje las/ so sor bstan pa rgya mtsho'i rgyud/ l'dir ston 'dis ston 'di phyr ston/ ldon kun 'di la yongs rdzogs pas/ lung gi spyi zhes bshad par yin/ (25.2).*

¹⁰⁸ *mngon mtho, abhyudaya.* This refers to birth in one of the three upper levels of cyclic existence as a god, demi-god, or human.

¹⁰⁹ *nges legs, niḥśreyasa.* Here, this means liberation from cyclic existence.

¹¹⁰ *thams cad mkhyen pa, sarvajña.*

¹¹¹ The external Secret Mantra (*gsang sngags phyi pa*) sets are Action Tantra (*bya rgyud, kriyātantra*), Performance Tantra (*spyod rgyud, caryātantra* or *upatantra*), and Yoga Tantra (*rnal 'byor rgyud, yogatantra*).

¹¹² This refers to the three collections (*sde snod gsum, tripitika*) of Buddhist scriptures in the Sūtra Vehicle: 1) discourses of the Buddha (*mdo sde, sūtra*), 2) discipline (*'dul ba, vinaya*), 3) manifest knowledge (*chos mngon pa, abhidharma*).

indifferentiability of the special two truths. For those reasons [*The Secret Essence Tantra*] is the general structure of all the scriptures. [26] This is also called a name that is concordant with the scriptures.

[SECRET ESSENCE, DEFINITIVE SUCHNESS]

With regard to the third [part of the name], the title that is designated from the point of view of the entity of the meaning itself, or the title that is concordant with quintessential instructions, is “*Secret Essence, Definitive Suchness*”, just the one that appears at the beginning of the book. Regarding this, Vimalamitra’s short commentary¹¹³ explains that all four parts of this name indicate the nature, greatness, character, and definitiveness of [this] tantra:

Nature is summarized as what is called *Secret*.

Greatness is summarized as the meaning of *Essence*.

Suchness is summarized as its character.

Definitive is summarized as the definitive meaning.¹¹⁴

With respect to this, let us express a little of the general meaning. Using as an example the establishment of this universe of a billion worlds from a great many and a great variety of causes and conditions, most sūtras say that complete enlightenment is not achieved through a small or abbreviated casual collection. In this way, according to the Perfection Vehicle, which is taught for those trainees who have enthusiasm for the vast, there is no chance of attaining enlightenment without resorting to hard work at the practices of the two collections in limitless forms, over limitless time, and with limitless skill-in-means in terms of the mode of training. Although this is so, on this occasion [the path of] Highest Secret [Mantra], which is taught for trainees who have enthusiasm for the profound and who

¹¹³ Vimalamitra, *dpal gsang ba snying po'i don bsdus 'grel pa piṅdārtha* (P4755).

¹¹⁴ *bi ma la'i 'grel chung dul rang bzhin gsang ba zhes bya stel lche ba zhes bya snying po'i don/ lde kho na nyid mtshan nyid del lnges pas nges don mdor bstan pa/* (26.2-26.3).

possess the most supreme [karmic] lot, [27] has the features that 1) [enlightenment] can be accomplished through a brief path, in one short life time of this degenerate era, and easily, and 2) it can be accomplished through just this path without relying on being supplemented by another one. As is said in the *Union Drop*:

Therefore, why do it through that vast [path]?

Through a brief one, there is Buddhahood itself.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, the reason for this is its power of solely delineating [the way] to take primordial wisdom as the path, this being unique [to Highest Secret Mantra], which is not taught clearly in the three external tantra sets and below. This tantra calls such “the yoga of the great Reality Body which is the indifferenciability of the special two truths”. The depths of what is expressed here is this. Therefore, it should be understood that all the parts of the title [*Secret Essence, Definitive Suchness*] also teach mainly just this [indifferenciability of the special two truths].

When [the words of this part of the title] are explained individually, the meaning of *secret* is as follows. Although in [Vilāsavajra’s] *Blazing Palace* [“secret”] is divided into the three—natural, [concealed, and hidden]¹¹⁶—and Vimāla divides it into four adding the untaught secrecy, I will explain it according to the assertion of the two masters, Rong and Long as composed of the two, hidden¹¹⁷ and concealed,¹¹⁸ in accordance with what is said here in this tantra:

From within issues forth the meanings, hidden and concealed.¹¹⁹ [28]

With regard to secret in the sense of hidden, because the natural continuum, which is the

¹¹⁵ *dpal kha sbyor thig ler/ de phyir de rgyas ci zhig byal/ lmdor bsdus pas ni sangs rgyas nyid/* (27.1-27.2).

¹¹⁶ *de la gsang ba la gsum stel rang bzhin dang/ sbas pa dang/ gab pa’o/* (Vilāsavajra, *Blazing Palace*, 8.4).

¹¹⁷ *gab pa*. Chandra Das (214) has *mi mngon par bya ba*—“that which is not manifest”—as one of its synonyms.

¹¹⁸ *sbas*. The Sanskrit equivalent *gupta* means protected, guarded, concealed. Monier-Williams, 359.

¹¹⁹ *rgyud nyid las/ khong nas gab sbas don ’byin pa/* (27.6-28.1). *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 192.3.

mode of abiding, and the paths and results dependent on it are profound and have depths difficult to fathom, no one except those of very sharp faculties is able to realize them. With regard to secret in the sense of concealed, because the uncommon essentials of the view, meditation, and behavior of Highest Secret [Mantra] must be concealed in all aspects from those who are not [proper] receptacles, it is posited as [to be concealed]. Therefore, it is explained that those two [types of secrecy] are divided by way of the difference that there are some things that are difficult to realize and some that are unsuitable for realization.

Concerning the meaning of *essence*, it has three equivalent terms [in Sanskrit]: *sāra* [core],¹²⁰ *hṛdaya* [heart],¹²¹ and *garbha* [womb].¹²² When it is explained in relation to the first of these [*sāra*—core or substance], it is applied to the one base from which spread the manifold [phenomena]. Therefore, through realizing or not realizing mind-as-such, all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvana are emitted, and moreover this tantra, which delineates that [mind-as-such], is the basis for sending forth all teachings. When [essence] is explained through *hridaya* [heart], it refers to that which should be cherished like the heart. No matter from which vehicle-approach one enters, in the end one does not pass beyond this [realization of mind-as-such]. Hence, it is the main object sought by those desiring enlightenment. In its earlier [stages], it is called the “causal essence”, [29] and in its later [stages], it is called the “fruitful essence”. *Garbha* [womb] is the main meaning [of “essence”] within the book. It should be taken as meaning the pithy quintessence, like the sap within the bark. Even when compared to all the higher and lower vehicles, because the essentials of skill-in-means for achieving enlightenment are included and contained in this path, there is no other path superior to it. Hence, the essentials of ground, path, and result

¹²⁰ The text reads *sara*, but Chandra Das has *sāra* (p. 503), whose meanings are more appropriate: core, pith, firmness, strength, power, energy, the substance or essence or marrow. (Monier-Williams, p. 1203).

¹²¹ The text reads *hridaya* instead of *hṛdaya*, which means the heart, soul, mind, center, core, essence (Monier-Williams, p.1302).

¹²² *Garbha* means the womb, the inside, middle, interior (Monier-Williams, p.349).

are contained [here] in all their pith.

Suchness has three [types]: unfabricated suchness, unmistaken suchness, and suchness that is not other. With respect to the unfabricated suchness, the primordial wisdom—whose nature is originally pure—is polluted with the dirt of adventitious conceptuality and its predispositions and thereby is designated as a “sentient being”. When those [i.e., adventitious conceptuality and its predispositions] have utterly disappeared, one is designated a “Buddha”, and just through meditation upon having nakedly extracted the fundamental nature by means of the skillful methods of Highest Secret Mantra, the pollutants disappear by themselves, just as ice melts into water. Hence, the path of the clear light essence [the unfabricated suchness] is called the “causal suchness”.

With respect to unmistaken suchness, only through that path making the self-subsistent primordial wisdom devoid of defilements, do all the maṇḍalas of exalted body and exalted wisdom arise by themselves in manifest clarity. Hence, this is called the “fruitional suchness”. With respect to suchness that is not other, [30] since it is as [stated above], both the object to be realized—the ground—and the object to be achieved—the result—do not exist separately from the sole, fundamental, indestructible mind. [Therefore] this [suchness that is not other] is also called the “suchness that is the one taste of cause and effect”.

Concerning the meaning of *definitive*, these presentations of such a ground, path, and result are not like the round-about teachings that are taught for the sake of leading trainees, but are teachings of the final thought for those precious trainees with sharp faculties just as it was realized by the Conqueror himself.

In accordance with internal and secret [interpretations, I will give] a partial explanation. According to an internal [interpretation], although the indestructible [drop] at the heart abides in oneself primordially, it is difficult to make known, and hence, it is secret. Since all the profound points of Secret Mantra are included in just that [drop], it is the essence. Just that appearance of primordial wisdom, which is manifestly awakened through the

quintessential instructions of excellent lamas, is suchness. Because that drop at the heart is definite as the life of the three—basis, path, and fruit—it is definitive. Although in the completion stages of tantra there are many different features of the channel-wheels on which one puts concentrated focusing, in Secret Magical Emanation [Tantras] one takes the channel-wheel at the heart as the main one. Hence, it was set forth in that way. This is one interpretation [of the internal name].

Moreover, when [the respective words of the title] are associated with the four channel-wheels, [31] the drop of the five ladies of the spheres at the navel is secret. The drop of wisdom-essence at the heart is essence. The drop of the blissful craving¹²³ at the throat is suchness, and the drop of Samantabhadra at the crown of the head is explained as “definitive”.

According to [an interpretation in] the secret mode, although the drops situated in the channels are endowed with the taste of the wisdom of bliss and exist as an integral part of oneself, one does not know it, and therefore, it is secret. Since the pith of all the aggregates and constituents is included in that drop, it is the essence. One’s innate own-face, which is perceived just as it is by means of concentrated focusing through profound techniques, is suchness. That very drop definite as the life of the essentials of all three—basis, path, and fruit—is explained as “definitive”. These are the quintessential instructions of my lineaged lamas.

In that way, since this tantra includes the essential points of the three—tantra, transmission, and quintessential instruction—there are three titles: concordant with tantra [Mahāyoga], concordant with transmission [Anuyoga], and concordant with quintessential

¹²³ *mgrin pa'i rngams ma'i thig le* (31.1). Khenpo Namdröl discussed the meaning of *rngams* in terms of the Fierce Female, or Du-mo (*gtum mo*), fire. When it blazes, there is a rising of the red psychic drops and a descending of the white drops at which point there is a feeling of bliss (*bde ba*) which is like craving (*sred pa*). In that phrase *rngams* refers to the bliss of the melting white factor (*zhu ya'i dkar cha'i bde ba*) and *ma* refers to the bliss of the red factor (*dmar cha*) melting.

instructions [Atiyoga].¹²⁴ It is said, since the quintessential instructions that rely on [the *Secret Essence's*] own entity, Mahāyoga, abide in the stream of Atiyoga [teachings], only the title concordant with the quintessential instructions is mentioned at the beginning of the book.¹²⁵

EXPLANATION OPENING THE GENERAL MEANING [31.6]

This has two parts: unfolding the categories of the meaning, and unfolding the categories of the words.

UNFOLDING THE CATEGORIES OF THE MEANING [31.6]

This also has five parts: (1) the introductory background, or the cause for the arising of this tantra; (2) the raising the discourse, [32] or the condition through which this tantra arose; (3) the meaning of the tantra that is to be thoroughly known, or the effect of the arising of this tantra; (4) the tantra's purpose and relationships,¹²⁶ and (5) the advice to the retinue and transmission of the teachings.

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND [32.1]

When the retinue to whom it was taught assembled together, this tantra arose. Therefore,

¹²⁴ “tantra, transmission, and quintessential instruction” (*rgyud/ lung / man ngag/*) are designations for the scriptures of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga respectively. Thus, he is associating the name “*Vajrasattva Magical Emanation Net*” with Mahāyoga, “*a general scripture*” (*lung gi spyi*) with Anuyoga, and “*Secret Essence, Definitive Suchness*” with Atiyoga.

¹²⁵ Khenpo Namdröl said that the tantra's own entity is Mahāyoga, but the quintessential instructions that rely on it are in the Atiyoga category. Though the *Secret Essence* is Mahāyoga, its topic (*brjod bya*) is the Atiyoga of Mahāyoga. Therefore, the name given at the beginning of the book is the one concordant with the quintessential instructions, namely “*Secret Essence, Definitive Suchness*”.

¹²⁶ *dgos 'brel*. This is short for the topic (*brjod bya*), the purpose (*dgos pa*), the ultimate purpose (*nying dgos*), and the relationship (*brel ba*). The topic is the meaning taught on a particular occasion; the purpose is to open the path for entering into the intended meaning; the ultimate purpose is to manifest omniscience by engaging in that path, and the relationship is the connection between the purpose and the ultimate purpose, the purpose and the topic, and so forth (*tshig mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1, 463). An author is supposed to indicate these four—also called the *dgos sogs bzhi*—at the beginning of a text, so it is surprising that in this list it is presented fourth.

that which has the five marvels¹²⁷ is the introductory background. As for the etymology of “introductory background”, [part of the Sanskrit] equivalent for it, “*dāna*”,¹²⁸ applies to giving. It is called “introductory background” because it gives certainty to those who lack conviction due to not finding a history that has a [valid] source and because it serves as the background for relating the meaning of this tantra. When divided, there are two [types] of introductory backgrounds, uncommon and common.

THE UNCOMMON INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND [32.3]

The uncommon introductory background is associated with the path of method. This also has two [aspects]: [the uncommon introductory background] associated with the path of the upper [end of the central channel] and the one associated with the path of the lower [end of the central channel]. With respect to the first of those, the *place* is the four channels of the wheel of doctrine at the heart, and the *teacher* is the indestructible mind in the center of that wheel of channels abiding in dependence on the drops of the five refined essences. The *retinue* is the eight groups of consciousnesses,¹²⁹ having for their mounts the karmic-winds which course through the channels and petals, and the *teaching* or *doctrine* is the inconceivable thought—primordial wisdom of bliss, clarity, and non-conceptuality. Having transformed the karmic-winds into primordial wisdom through the power of awakening the inconceivable [drop], the eight groups [of consciousnesses] are pervaded by the taste of bliss-emptiness. This is the doctrine taught by the teacher [the indestructible mind] to the retinue [the eight consciousnesses]. [33] As for the *time*, it is the time of manifesting the thought of timelessness in which the three times¹³⁰ are melded in equality.

¹²⁷ The five marvels (*phun su mtshogs pa*) are place (*gnas*), teacher (*ston pa*), attendants (*'khor*), teaching (*bstan pa*), and time (*das*). See chapter four, the summary of the root tantra, the section on chapter one of the scripture.

¹²⁸ The actual Sanskrit equivalent for *gleng gzhi* is *nidāna*.

¹²⁹ The eight groups of consciousnesses are: the five types of sense consciousnesses, the intellect, the afflicted intellectual consciousness, and the consciousness—basis-of-all.

¹³⁰ Past, present, and future.

Concerning the introductory background associated with the lower [end of the central channel], the lotus of the vajra-consort, which has the shapes for the four activities, is the *place*.¹³¹ The drop of the mind of enlightenment containing the essence of the constituents in the channel that is in the center of the male's vajra-jewel¹³² is the *teacher*. The secret consciousnesses of the two, father and mother, having the method of performing [the sex act] and binding [the movement of the winds and seminal drops], are the *retinue*. The innate primordial wisdom at the end of the completion of the five minds¹³³ of the path of method is the *doctrine*. The generation of that retinue [the secret consciousnesses] into the entity of that doctrine [the innate primordial wisdom] through the power of that teacher [the abiding of the drop of the mind of enlightenment in the center of the vajra-jewel] is the meaning of the teacher's responding to the retinue's inquiry. [The explanation of] *time* is as above. These are the five marvels. How the explanatory tantra comments within associating these [five] with the four letters, "*evaṃ māyā*,"¹³⁴ occurring at the beginning of the tantra is to be known from the *Ornament of Thought*.¹³⁵

It is clearly suitable to explain that the introductory backgrounds of the higher and lower openings also emerge respectively by the force of the tantra's words in the second chapter

¹³¹ *rdo rje btsun mo'i padma las bzhi'i dbyibs can ni gnas* (33.1-33.2). "Having the shape of the four activities (*las bzhi'i dbyibs can*)" refers to the shapes assigned to different layers of the consorts vagina, which are related to one of the four ritual activities of higher tantras. The "door" (*sgo*) is a triangle associated with peaceful rites (*zhi ba*). The "courtyard" (*khyams*) is a square associated with rites of expansion (*rgyas pa*). The "women's inner part" (*nang gi skye dman gyi cha* = uterus?) is semi-circular associated with rites of control and power (*dbang*). The "tip of the sphere-ladies' channel" (*dbyings phyugs ma'i rtsa gi sna cig*) is circular and associated with fierce rites (*drag po*).

¹³² *rdo rje nor bu*. The head of the penis.

¹³³ The five minds arising mind (*g.yo ldang gi sems*), wishing mind (*smon pa'i sems*), engaging mind (*'jug pa'i sems*), abiding mind (*gnas pa'i sems*), final mind (*mtshar phyin pa'i sems*). In the context of the path of method, the arising mind is when the drop begins to move and bliss is generated; the wishing mind is wishing for the next higher state of bliss; the engaging mind is when one enters into a new state of bliss; the abiding mind is when the bliss is stabilized due to the seminal drop abiding stably in the channel, and the final mind is the innate primordial wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*).

¹³⁴ (33.4). Probably a misspelling of *evaṃ māyā*, which is short for *evaṃ māyā śrutam* (thus have I heard...), the standard phrase at the beginning of most sūtras and tantras, though this Tantra is exceptional in that it does not begin with this standard phrase.

¹³⁵ *dgongs rgyan* (33.5). Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament of the Intention*, 55.6-57.3.

that teach the secret empowerment and the latter two empowerments, because such is known through the way that possessing the five inner marvels or possessing the five secret marvels serves as an introductory background.¹³⁶ On the occasion of the raising of the discourse [in the second chapter], [34] the teacher bestows an effect-initiation on the retinue that is together with him, whereupon they are enlightened through the five inner manifest enlightenments. When this happens, for the sake of the retinue whose understanding is separate [from the teacher] the entire tantra arises within the context of the purposeful statements formulated as a response [to the retinue] inquiry such as “*e ma’o*—the primordially secret doctrine”¹³⁷ and so forth. The former excellent ones assert the essential point that those five such manifest enlightenments are the way one becomes enlightened in the highest pure land of the heart and in the highest pure land of the secret [place], and because of that essential point, the five marvels, which rely on those [places], become the introductory background.

THE COMMON INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND [34.3]

This has three parts: (1) the introductory background of the Complete Enjoyment Body, or the special introductory background of the special arising of this tantra; (2) ancillary to that the introductory background of the wrathful deity taught for the benefit of trainees, and (3) the introductory background of the Emanation Body that tames migrators, or the general introductory background of the teaching.

¹³⁶ With regard to the second chapter of *Secret Essence*, Khenpo Namdröl claimed that the first two verse statements by Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri represent the secret initiation (*gsang dbang*), while the statement on “non-production” and so forth by the “great identity” represents both the wisdom initiation (*sher dbang*) and the great bliss initiation (*bde ba chen po’i dbang*). Since the secret initiation concerns the upper opening and the other two concern the lower opening, the trainees being initiated in the second chapter (who in fact are emanations of the main teacher) must possess the five inner and five secret marvels as described above. Therefore, these verse statements in the second chapter implicitly teach the secret and inner introductory backgrounds, despite the fact that the chapter itself is considered the “raising of the discourse” (*gleng bslang*).

¹³⁷ *e ma’o ye nas gsang ba’i chos/* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 158.5).

THE INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND OF THE COMPLETE ENJOYMENT BODY [34.4]

Concerning the first, the [*Lamp Illuminating the*] *Inner Text* says:

Teacher, place, retinue, compiler,

Teaching, and time—through these one should know [the introduction].¹³⁸

Although [Vimalamitra thus] explains [the introductory background] in these six marvels, here it will be done as five, through including the marvel of compiler in the retinue.

THE PLACE [34.6]

With respect to those, the *place* is the latter one from the explanation in the *Eye Commentary*¹³⁹ of the five highest pure lands consisting of the actual highest pure land, the highest pure land of basic mind, the secret highest pure land, the highest pure land situated in cyclic existence, and the highest pure land of the Great Lord.¹⁴⁰ The Great Lord indicated here [35] is one rich in the kingdom of unsurpassed doctrine, a Complete Enjoyment Body. Such a place is explained from the viewpoint of the two, nature and entity. With regard to the first, the general nature is the sphere of reality, as stated in the short commentary [*Ball of Meaning* by Vimalamitra]:

The sphere of reality without limits or a center

¹³⁸ *khog gzhang las/ ston gnas 'khor dang sdud pa dang / l/bstan pa dus kyis shes par bya/* (34.4-34.5). The Peking edition reads differently: *ston pa gnas dang sdus pa 'khor/ l/dus dang ston* (sic.) *pa rnam pa drug stel/* (Vimalamitra, *khog gzhang gsal sgron*, 134.4.5).

¹³⁹ *spyang 'grel* (34.6). Vimalamitra, *rdo rje sems dpa'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i rgyud dpal gsang ba'i snying po shes bya ba'i spyang 'grel pa* (P4756).

¹⁴⁰ Khenpo Namdröl described the “actual highest pure land” (*don gyi 'og min*) as “the sphere of reality that is the final mode of reality” (*cho dbyings gnas lugs mthar thug*), the “highest pure land of basic awareness” (*rig pa'i 'og min*) as “the self-aware primordial wisdom that realizes the sphere of reality” (*chos kyid dbyings la rtogs pa'i rang rig pa'i ye shes*), the “secret highest pure land” (*gsang ba'i 'og min*) as the “consort’s vagina” (*yum gyi kha*), the “highest pure land situated in cyclic existence” (*'jig rten gnas kyid 'og min*) as “one of the five pure places” (*tshangs lnga'i gnas ris*), and the “highest pure land of the Great Lord” (*dbang phyug chen po'i 'og min*) as the “place of the Complete Enjoyment Body” (*long spyod sku'i gnas*).

That is asserted as the highest of places.¹⁴¹

However, with regard to the nature of the individual parts, the nature of the circle that is the foundation is the five primordial wisdoms; the nature of the sides is the four truths; the nature of the inner courtyard is the indifferentiable [two] truths, and so forth. The entity of the place is its particular features, as the short commentary [the *Ball of Meaning* by Vimalamitra] says:

The foundation of the inestimable mansion, its decorations, extent,

Shape, projections, peak,

Ornaments, doorways, hitching posts,¹⁴²

Characteristics and types of cushions,

[The place] should be distinguished through these eleven [features].¹⁴³

THE TEACHER [35.5]

The explanation of the marvel of the *teacher* also has the two [aspects of] nature and entity. Moreover, just as identifying the meaning of the symbolism in a maṇḍala is called “teaching the principle of the maṇḍala”, the principle of primordial wisdom that is the pure residence and residents is designated as “the nature [of the teacher]”, and the features of their forms are designated as “the entity [of the teacher]”. Therefore, nature must be taught from the point of view of the Reality Body, [36] and entity from the point of view of the Form Body.

With regard to those [two], the nature of a teacher is explained in four [parts] as the short commentary [the *Ball of Meaning* by Vimalamitra] says:

¹⁴¹ 'grel chung las/ mtha' dbus med pa'i chos kyi dbyings/ lde ni gnas kyi bla mar 'dod/ (35.2). Vimalamitra, *Ball of Meaning*, 179.3.5.

¹⁴² rta babs, toraṇa (cf. Chandra Das, p.532 and Monier-Williams, p.456). The *tshig mdzod chen mo* (vol. 1, 1060) has: pho brang sogs kyi phyi rol tu rta las babs sa'i mtshams kyi sgo lta bul

¹⁴³ 'grel chung las/ gzhal yas gzhi dang rgyu dang rgyal/ ldbyibs dang glo 'bur rtse mo dang / lrgyan dang sgo khyud rta babs dang / lmtshan nyi gdan gi rnam pa stel/ lbcu gcig dag gis dbye par byal/ (35.4-35.5). See Vimalamitra, *Ball of Meaning*, 179.3.5-179.3.6.

The entity of supreme enlightenment,¹⁴⁴
 The enjoyment within the sport of phenomena,
 The lord of the Sugatas in the [ten] directions and [four] times,
 And that which is indifferentiable with all phenomena.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, the first of these is the nature of having matured into suchness.¹⁴⁶ That is, [the teacher] has actualized the real nature of phenomena in a way that he is always in meditative equipoise due to having abandoned all obstructive defilements, and by the power of [being] that [way], he finds the ocean-like good qualities of the result that are self-arisen and gained without exertion. This is the nature of the unsought, spontaneously arisen good qualities.¹⁴⁷ Since each of his primordial wisdoms has the nature of Samantabhadra,¹⁴⁸ they cannot be apprehended [in such a way that one could say], “This is their measure.” Therefore, he has the nature of primordial wisdom without limits or a center.¹⁴⁹ Although he abides at a level of having complete abandonment and realization, that level is not expressible as either of the two extreme positions of cyclic existence and [solitary] peace, nor can the thought of equipoise be characterized by any conceptual mind.¹⁵⁰ Even though he has gained dominion over the resultant [state in this way], he has the nature whose entity cannot be demonstrated.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ Jikmé Tenpé Nyima has *byang chub mchog gi ngo bo dang* (36.1), whereas Vimalamitra’s text in the Peking has *byang chub chen po’i rang bzhin dang* (Vimalamitra, *Ball of Meaning*, 179.2.7).

¹⁴⁵ *’grel chung las/ byang chub mchog gi ngo bo dang / lchos rnams rol par longs spyod dang / lphyogs dus bde gshegs bdag po dang / lchos so cog dang dbyer med pa’o/* (36.1-36.2). See Vimalamitra, *Ball of Meaning*, 179.2.7.

¹⁴⁶ *de bzhin nyid du nar son pa’i rang bzhin* (36.3). In his commentary, Khenpo Namdröl associated this nature with the title, “Tathāgata” (*de bzhin gshegs pa*), given to the Buddha in the introduction to the *Secret Essence*.

¹⁴⁷ *yon tan ma btsal lhun gyis grub pa’i rang bzhin* (36.3-36.4). This nature is associated with the title, “genuinely complete” (*yang dag par rdzogs pa*), given to the Buddha in the tantra’s introduction.

¹⁴⁸ *kun tu bzang po’i rang bzhin* (36.4). This could alternatively be translated as “an all-good nature”, both meanings are meant here.

¹⁴⁹ *ye shes mtha’ dbus dang bral ba’i rang bzhin* (36.4). This is associated with the title, Buddha (*sangs rgyas*).

¹⁵⁰ *mtshan ma’i yul can*.

¹⁵¹ *ngo bo bstan du med pa’i rang bzhin* (46.6). This is associated with the title, “Transcendent Victor” (*bcom ldan ’das*).

With regard to the second [aspect of the Teacher's nature mentioned by Vimalamitra, enjoying the sport of phenomena], although his primordial wisdom has control over immeasurable illusory objects of enjoyment, [the teacher] does not deviate from the real nature, which is devoid of apprehending [subject] and apprehended [object]. [37] This is also called "the nature that has actualized equanimity and is free from [dualistic] objects of enjoyment".¹⁵²

With regard to the third [aspect of the Teacher's nature, being lord of the Sugatas in the ten directions and four times], when all the Conquerors of the ten directions and four times are condensed, they are included within the five lineages. All those five are also contained in [a being of] the sixth lineage. Hence, [the teacher] is a lord of all the lineages. This is also called "the nature free from being one or many".¹⁵³

With regard to the fourth [aspect of the Teacher's nature, that which is indifferentiable from all phenomena], even all phenomena of cyclic existence that are included within the three realms and three times do not exist outside of the actuality of the indifferentiable special [two] truths, and the thought of a Conqueror of the sixth [family] dwells permanently and pervasively in those two truths. [This] "great non-dual identity" is also called "the nature in which the three times are not fused or separated".¹⁵⁴

The second, the entity [of the teacher], also has four [aspects]: the meaningful sign¹⁵⁵ that the teacher is the identity of the three bodies, the meaningful sign of the non-duality of his method and wisdom, the meaningful sign that he possesses the six primordial wisdoms, and the meaningful sign that he has the three complete liberations.

Furthermore, concerning the first [the meaningful sign that the teacher has the identity

¹⁵² Khenpo Namdröl added that the "illusory objects of enjoyment" (*sgyu ma'i spyod yul*) were "pure appearances" (*dag pa'i snang ba*), while the "objects of enjoyment" (*spyod yul*) that are absent in the Buddha's nature are those of subject and object (*gzung 'dzin gyi spyod yul*).

¹⁵³ *gcig dang du ma dang bral ba'i rang bzhin* (37.2).

¹⁵⁴ *gnyis su med pa'i bdag nyid chen por dus gsum 'du 'bral med pa'i rang bzhin zhes kyang bya'ol* (37.4).

¹⁵⁵ *don rtags* (37.4).

of all three enlightened bodies], the fact that his exalted body is seen straight on from all directions as without a front or back is the meaningful sign that he has the identity of a Reality Body. The fact that he possesses the final qualities of the major and minor marks is the meaningful sign that he has the identity of a Complete Enjoyment Body, and [38] the fact that emanations spread forth from every hair on his body is the meaningful sign that he has the identity of an Emanation Body.

Concerning the second [the meaningful sign of the non-duality of his method and wisdom], the fact that the father [Samantabhadra] and mother [Samantabhadri] embrace within both equally sitting in a cross-legged posture is the symbol of dwelling in non-abiding nirvāṇa by means of great compassion and non-apprehending wisdom.

With regard to the third [the meaningful sign that the teacher possesses the six primordial wisdoms], his six arms are the sign of having gained the six [wisdoms] consisting of the five primordial wisdoms plus self-arisen primordial wisdom. That those [arms] hold six symbols, a vajra and so forth, is the sign of effecting¹⁵⁶ the welfare of migrators.

Concerning the fourth [the meaningful sign that he has the three liberations], the fact he has three faces—blue, white, and red—is a sign for the indifferenciability of the three—(1) exalted body and emptiness, (2) exalted speech and signlessness, and (3) exalted mind and wishlessness.

THE RETINUE [38.4]

The marvel of the *retinue* has two [parts]: the retinue that is together [with the teacher] and the retinue that is separated [from the teacher]. The first has [three parts:] the retinue of a non-dual nature, the retinue of the special basic mind, and the retinue who listen to the discourse with faith. With regard to the first [the retinue of a non-dual nature], there are the five families of Conquerors, the Tathāgata King of Consciousness, etc. Concerning this

¹⁵⁶ *mjod* (38.3). *mdzad* (Gangtok, 35.6).

[central deity] called “King of Consciousness”, the great Omniscient One [Longchenpa] set forth many proofs that it was Vairocana, but Zur in dependence upon sources such as the *Tantra of the Rutting Elephant*,¹⁵⁷ Sūryasimhaprabha’s commentary [*The Extensive*], [39] and [Buddhaguhya’s] *Stages of Vajra Activity*¹⁵⁸ asserted that it was Akṣobhya. Derdak Lingpa¹⁵⁹ and his brother also followed the latter [assertion]. The *Penetrating [Magical Emanation Net]* says:

When on top of the fearlessness at the center of the channel-wheel,
The Lord Samantabhadra teaches
The source—Magical Emanation—to the retinue,
Akṣobhya, the Conqueror, is in the front.¹⁶⁰

In accordance with this, these five [Lords of the] lineages are the retinue in relation to a [being of the] sixth lineage arising as the teacher of the tantra, and in general according to their fame as “the five lineages of beings who explain [the tantra]”, they are also the teacher. Therefore, they are both the teacher and the retinue.¹⁶¹

Concerning the second [the retinue of special basic mind], it is stated in the *Ocean*:

Out of the particulars of the Tathāgata’s enlightened mind,
Conquerors, Bodhisattvas, and so forth appear on their own, and...¹⁶²

As that says, because [these figures] are self-appearances from the particulars of primordial wisdom that is the basic mind mantra—namely, the teacher’s enlightened mind—they are called “the retinue of the special basic mind”.¹⁶³ Furthermore, concerning that [retinue],

¹⁵⁷ *glang chen rab ’bog gi rgyud* (38.6).

¹⁵⁸ *rdo rje las rim* (39.1). Buddhaguhya, *sgyu ’phrul dra ba rdo rje las kyi rim pa* (P4720).

¹⁵⁹ *gter bdag gling pa* (39.1). Great treasure-discoverer and founder of Mindröling Monastery, lived 1646-1713.

¹⁶⁰ *thal ba las/ ’khor lo’i lte bar mi ’jigs steng / lbdag po kun bzang ’khor rnams la/ l’kun ’byung sgyu ’phrul ston pa’i tshel/ lmi bskyod rgya po mdun na gnas/* (39.2).

¹⁶¹ Literally, “they are the common loci of both teacher and retinue”. *ston ’khor gnyis ka’i gzhi mthun nol* (39.3).

¹⁶² *rgya mtsho las/ de bzhin thugs kyi khyad par las/ l’rang snang rgyal ba sems sogs dang /* (39.4).

¹⁶³ *rig pa khyad par can gi ’khor* (39.5).

there are the sixteen male and female Bodhisattvas—Vajra-Sight,¹⁶⁴ Vajra-Object-of-Sight,¹⁶⁵ and so forth—and the eight male and female wrathful Subduers—Vajra-Contact,¹⁶⁶ Not-Being-Permanent,¹⁶⁷ etc. Although for [one] included within the level of Buddhahood the different entities of sense objects and so forth do not exist, the names of the aggregates and constituents are given to [those] deities due to the fact that the vajra-aggregates, constituents, and spheres—which are of the same taste—are conceptually isolatable factors, so that [students] will understand that the male and female Tathāgatas and the male and female Bodhisattvas are emanated separately. [40]

These [deities] are the retinue actually instructed by the words of the tantra, this being done for the sake of [us] future disciples who meditate on the circle of the maṇḍala in accordance with the introductory background. However, according to the assertions of the foremost Dropukpa¹⁶⁸ and the teacher Nyay,¹⁶⁹ etc., a limitless [number] of Learner [Bodhisattva] Superiors who have other continuums than the teacher must also be [included] in the retinue together [with the teacher], because if such were not the case, then the statement in the second chapter that the teacher, through bestowing the profound initiation on the retinue, cleared away their defilements of conceptuality would not be fitting.

Concerning the third [the retinue who listen to the discourse with faith], the [*Lamp Illuminating*] *the Inner Text* says, “the great gods listening with faith”.¹⁷⁰ These are the great gods, Bhagavan Mahādeva,¹⁷¹ etc., who abide in the external perimeter [of the maṇḍala].

The second [the retinue which is separated from the Teacher’s] are those fortunate ones with sharp faculties who are motivated towards [Secret] Mantra. Although they are not the

¹⁶⁴ *rdo rje mthong ba.*

¹⁶⁵ *rdo rje mthong bar bya ba.*

¹⁶⁶ *rdo rje reg pa.*

¹⁶⁷ *rtag par ma yin pa.*

¹⁶⁸ *sgro phug pa* (40.2). The third Zur patriarch, lived 1074-1134 C.E.

¹⁶⁹ *nye ston* (40.2). One of the “four teachers” (*ston bzhi*), part of the enumeration of Dropuk-ba’s disciples.

¹⁷⁰ *khog gzhung las/ dad pas nyan pa’i lha chen rnams/* (40.4). P4739, 134.5.1.

¹⁷¹ *legs ldan mahā daiva* (40.5).

retinue assembled in the highest pure land, they are trainees for whom this tantra was specifically taught. Therefore, they are mentioned as being in the retinue of Vajrasattva.

THE MARVELS OF THE TEACHING AND THE TIME [40.6]

The marvel of the *teaching* is just this kind of non-dual tantras, and [41] the marvel of the *time* is the time when the teacher, retinue, and so forth [mentioned] in the introductory background assemble.

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND OF THE WRATHFUL DEITIES [41.1]

This also has the five marvels [place, teacher, retinue, teaching, and time]. From among these, the *place* is in the great blazing charnel ground bedecked with extremely fearful ornaments.

Concerning the *teacher*, the [*Sūtra that Gathers [All the Buddhas'] Intentions*] says:

Pacification will not benefit

The very vicious and fierce.

Through the seal of wisdom and method

In wrathful [forms] Tathāgatas accomplish all.¹⁷²

Accordingly, [the *teacher*] is the Wrathful One of the seal of exalted activity. Also with regard to that, from the three guises—that of the wrathful sage, that of the childish dwarf, and that of the glorious and resplendent fright¹⁷³—it is the latter.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² *dgongs 'dus las/ shin tu gdug cing gtum pa lal /zhi bas phan par mi 'gyur tel /shes rab thabs kyī phyag rgya las/ /kbro bor de bzhin gshogs kun mdzad/* (41.2-41.3). Despite its designation as a “sūtra”, this is an Anuyoga Tantra text: *sangs rgyas thams cad kyī dgongs 'dus pa'i mdo*, Tb.373, vol. 16, 2.1-617.5.

¹⁷³ *rngams mrijid* (41.3). *rngams brjid* (Gangtok, 38.6). The *DTCM* has *rngam brjid* (vol. 1, 696): *jigs su rung ba'i nyams* (“a posture that is suitable to be feared”).

¹⁷⁴ Khenpo Namdröl explained that there are three types of wrathful forms in terms of their outward aspect. The form of a wrathful sage (*drang srong khros pa'i cha*), which is very tall with long legs and arms, is exemplified by the main deity of the *Supreme Bliss* (*bde mchog*). The aspect of the childish dwarf (*mi'u thung byis pa*) is very short and small. The aspect of glorious and resplendent fright (*dpal chen rngams brjid kyī cha*) is man-sized and is resplendent (*zil brjid*) and hungering for spoiled disciples (*'dul bya gdug pa can gyi rngams*).

With respect to the *retinue*, of the two—the retinue of trainees and the retinue of trainers—the first is Rudra together with his retinue. Furthermore, even though it is explained that this Rudra indicated here is an emanation in terms of his actual measure of being; in terms of the level of appearance he recited a fierce knowledge mantra of an earlier Buddha and meditated on the deity of such a mantra, but due to his not being effected by the essentials of the profound view and due to his being cut off by corrupted vows, at the end of a series of bad transmigrations he became a monster of karma¹⁷⁵ possessing the power of a knowledge mantra. By means of this mantra, he brought under his power all of the desire and form realms, except the five lands of Superiors,¹⁷⁶ [42] and he wreaked havoc on the world. [This monster] came to have a large retinue of the vicious and fierce.

Concerning the second [the retinue who are the trainers], there are the collection of the four types of blood drinkers¹⁷⁷ and the twenty sisters/girls/daughters. It is said that the twenty-eight great ladies¹⁷⁸ are included in both the retinue of trainees and the retinue of trainers.

With respect to the *teaching*, since the self-abiding primordial wisdom is explicitly taught in the father tantras from the viewpoint of liberating and in the mother tantras from the viewpoint of joining, [the *teaching*] is the two joining [and] liberating.¹⁷⁹ The *time* is the

¹⁷⁵ *las kyi srin po* (41.6).

¹⁷⁶ These are the five upper divisions of the Form Realm that are beyond the Fourth Concentration. They are also called the Five Pure Places (*gnas gtsang; shuddhāvāsakāyika*) and are areas in which only Superiors—those on the path of seeing or higher—are born. The names of these places are Not Great (*mi che ba; avr̥ha*), Without Pain (*mi gdung ba; atapas*), Excellent Appearance (*gya nom snang ba; sudṛśa*), Great Perception (*shin tu mthong ba; sudarśana*), and Not Low (*’og min; akanisṭha*). For a more detail description, see Zahler, et. al., *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism*, pp.44-45.

¹⁷⁷ *khrag ’thung bzhi* (42.1). According to Khenpo Namdröl, these are in Longchenpa’s system Padma-Heruka, Ratna-Heruka, Karma-Heruka, and Vajra-Heruka, these being the four deities in the four directions around the central Buddha-Heruka, respectively the forms of Amitābha, Ratnasambhava, Amoghasiddhi, and Akṣobhya. In the Zur system, the Vajra-Heruka form of Akṣobhya is the central deity, and the Buddha-Heruka of Vairocana is one of the four blood-drinkers.

¹⁷⁸ *dbang phyug nyer brgyad* (42.1-42.2). Though the feminine particle is left off of their name, this refers to the twenty-eight “powerful animal-headed goddesses” of the wrathful maṇḍala. See Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, 150-154.

¹⁷⁹ *sbyor sgrol* (42.3). This refers to ritual sex (*sbyor*) and liberative killing (*sgrol*).

appointed time for training the vicious trainees of mantra.

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND OF THE EMANATION BODY [42.3]

From the five [marvels], the *place* is the land of an Emanation Body, which is established by a Tathāgata according to what s/he wished for on the prior path of learning. In connection with this land, there is the nature of a billion [worlds with] four continents, and in general there also are lands of an Emanation Body that possess many hundred-billion-ten-millions of [worlds with] four continents.

In terms of this teaching, the *teacher* is the king of the Shākya. Relative to the six lineages of trainees, [the teacher] is posited as the six Subduers. Furthermore, there are various cases of taming, such as those for hell beings and hungry ghosts by the king Yama, those for some animals by the king of deer, etc.—[these teachers] having a form which accords in type [with the beings taught]—those by a Buddha’s emanated form adorned with the major and minor marks, [43] and those by an actual supreme Emanation Body. However, since just the supreme Emanation Body is the principal, fundamental one, it is the main one of the literal reading of the tantra.

With respect to the *retinue*, when done in terms of the main one, [it consists of] the two, gods and humans, according to the statement, “teacher of gods and humans”. The principals even among those are the four types of retinue,¹⁸⁰ and in general there are [members of the retinue] in any of the six realms.

The *teaching* is the four tamings—taming through exalted body, exalted speech, exalted mind, and magical emanation. Concerning those, the first is the exalted body which has the twelve great deeds.¹⁸¹ It is the basis through which the doctrine is taught. The remaining three are the mode of teaching through the three kinds of miracles. At first, through magical

¹⁸⁰ *khor nam pa bzhi* (43.2). These are monks (*dge slong*), nuns (*dge slong me*), laymen (*dge bsnyen*), and laywomen (*dge bsnyen ma*).

¹⁸¹ See note 11 above.

emanation [a Buddha] causes the retinue to aspire. Then, having seen the minds of [those in] the retinue through clairvoyance, s/he speaks all. After that, s/he bestows the perceptual instructions and subsequent teachings. [Some] think that and [others that] it does not arise in that order; the intention is according to the former. The *time* is the time of setting up the lamp having accomplished the three—completion, fruition, and purification.

Furthermore, according to the second chapter [of the tantra] when by means of the effect initiation the retinue which was together with [the Buddha] overcame the subtle demons which are predisposition for the three appearances¹⁸² or predispositions for emission, [44] the sign of that appeared externally as the introductory background of the wrathful [deities]. Not only that but also since the introductory background of the Emanation Body which tames transmigrating beings comes up in the first chapter's statement, "exalted body, speech, and mind thoroughly appearing in various [forms]",¹⁸³ and in the second chapter's statement, "creating various elaborations for the sake of teaching",¹⁸⁴ it is explained that these two [the introductory background of the wrathful deities and the introductory background of the Emanation Body] are secondary introductory backgrounds [in relation to the introductory background of the Complete Enjoyment Body].

RAISING THE DISCOURSE [44.1]

Concerning the raising of the discourse, through the teacher and the retinue using the technique of question and answer, there arises the potential for the meaning of the tantra, appropriate to the awareness of the trainees. That [question and response] is called "the raising of the discourse", since it serves as the condition for the arising of the teaching by way

¹⁸² These are the three appearances which, according to the Guhyasamāja tradition, manifest before the attainment of the mind of clear light, namely: 1) radiant white appearance (*snang ba dkar lam pa'i snang ba*), 2) appearance of red increase (*mched dmar lam pa'i snang ba*), and 3) appearance of black near attainment (*nyer thob nag lam pa'i snang ba*). For more information see Lati Rinbochay and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Snow Lion, 1979), pp.38-48.

¹⁸³ *sku gsung thugs sna tshogs par kun tu snang ba* (44.1). Cf., *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 154.4.

¹⁸⁴ *bstan phyir spro ba sna tshogs mdzad* (44.2). Cf., *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 159.3.

of [the retinue] urging [the teacher] to relate the actual meaning of the tantra that is to be told. When divided, there are two [types], uncommon and common.

UNCOMMON RAISING OF THE DISCOURSE [44.4]

From these, the first [the uncommon raising of the discourse] has the manner of secret initiation and the manner of the higher two initiations.¹⁸⁵ Concerning the first [the manner of the secret initiation], by means of the sun and moon minds of enlightenment,¹⁸⁶ which have arisen from the union of the teacher in father and mother [aspect], initiation is bestowed on the awareness-holders who are the retinue accompanying [the teacher]. The father, through holding the factor of method, makes the purposeful statement that all stable and moving phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa are extended and purified in the one divine maṇḍala of endless purity; the mother, through holding the factor of wisdom, makes the purposeful statement that all stable and moving phenomena are from the beginning not other than the sphere of natural purity, [45] whereby this greatly ignites the retinue's realization of the uncommon two truths.

With regard to the second [the manner of the two higher initiations, the Buddha] made statements for the sake of generating the minds [of the retinue] into primordial wisdom, the five passages [beginning with] “*E ma'o!* This marvelously wonderful doctrine!”¹⁸⁷ Since at that time the four minds, which will be explained [later]—fluctuating/rising [mind], disintegrating/descending [mind], abiding [mind], and wishing [mind]—were the preliminaries, [the retinue] attained the entity of the wisdom initiation at the end of the

¹⁸⁵ The two higher initiations are the knowledge wisdom initiation (*shes rab ye shes kyi dbang*), and the word initiation (*tshig dbang*).

¹⁸⁶ *nyi zla byang chub kyi sems* (44.5). These are the white seminal drop (=the moon) of the male practitioner and the red seminal drop (=sun) of the female practitioner. In the secret initiation, the teacher and his partner perform ritual sex, during which their combined sexual fluids is extracted. The disciples are initiated by placing a drop of this fluid on their tongues.

¹⁸⁷ *e ma mtshar lnga* (45.2). This refers to the third speech in chapter two, which is made up of five verses each of which begins with the phrase: *e ma'o ngo mtshar rmad kyi chos!* (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 157.7-158.4).

forward process of the sixteen joys.¹⁸⁸ Also, at the end of the sixteen joys of stability from below the initiation of great bliss was complete. [The retinue thereby] attained the mind of enlightenment brought to completion in which the thought of the teacher and retinue is indifferentiable. This is the condition for the occurrence of questions and answers later on; therefore, it is the raising up of the discourse.

Here, the teacher is Samantabhadra, who possesses a primordial wisdom body free from the three—semen, menses, and wind. He bestows the substance initiation of the white and red drops on the retinue, and the awareness-holders—who, abiding at a high level, have their bases in the highest pure land, whose bodies are devoid of semen and blood, and whose minds are devoid of the craving for sex—receive the two higher initiations in dependence on a consort. The way that such is not contradictory is as follows. Since the teacher has perfected the attainment of mastery, there is no stopping him from bestowing the sun and moon blessings¹⁸⁹ for the sake of the retinue, and although the pure retinue [46] does not have the affliction of craving sex, they do seek the innate bliss. Also, although in general those whose physical basis is that of [a body in] the highest pure land do not have semen and blood, there are exceptional cases in which some of those in the highest pure land who practice Highest Mantra have such a special basis possessing the six constituents.¹⁹⁰ Or, according to the assertion of Lochen Rinpoché, bases of learners are not devoid of *subtle*

¹⁸⁸ The sixteen joys of the forward process are experiences produced through meditating on the subtle psychic body. They occur after the heat of the Fierce Female (*gtum mo*) has begun to melt the white drop of enlightenment at the crown of the head. It flows downward, and when it reaches the throat chakra, one experiences “[simply] joy” (*dga’ ba*). It then proceeds down to the heart chakra, where one experiences more intense joy, called “supreme joy” (*mchog dga*). From there, it descends to the navel, where one experiences “special joy” (*khyad dga*). Finally, the white drop reaches the tip of the sexual organ, and one experiences the “innate joy” (*lhan skyes dga*). This is the forward process. The reverse process is when the practitioner subsequently draws the white drop back up to the throat chakra. Sixteen joys are posited for each direction by dividing each joy into the same four categories of simple joy, supreme joy, special joy, and innate joy.

¹⁸⁹ i.e., the secret initiation that involves distributing the mixture of the male and female seminal fluids (sun and moon) to the disciples.

¹⁹⁰ These are bone, marrow, regenerative fluid, flesh, skin, and blood. The first three are from the father; the last three, from the mother. See *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, 30.

semen and blood. Thus, I think it is also suitable to explain it from that point of view. One should dispel the [apparent] contradictions in such ways.

According to explanations and so forth by the Omniscient King of the Doctrine [Longchenpa] within citing the *Drop of Liberation*,¹⁹¹ a Conqueror's child on a final path enters the path of no-more-learning through the wisdom initiation. Although such [an explanation] is acceptable, here it is explained that [a Conqueror's child on a final path] enters [the path of no-more-learning] through the secret initiation. These explanations are due to different modes of positing the two systems' paths of secret initiation; or in another way, since this mode of bestowing the effect initiation is qualitatively similar with the mode of bestowing the secret initiation, it is only *called* the secret initiation. One should analyze which [of these explanations] is more fitting. There are also qualms with respect to the two latter initiations, and these need to be eliminated. [The reasonings for this] can be understood through those [above].

COMMON RAISING OF THE DISCOURSE [46.6]

When in dependence on such profound initiations the secret of the teacher's exalted mind was manifested just as it is, [the retinue] having delineated the meaning of that by means of the four secrets,¹⁹² asked [the teacher] to set forth this tantra for those sentient beings who are under the influence of error. [47] This is implicit in [such statements as] "*E ma'o!* The primordially secret doctrine!"¹⁹³ and so forth. Then, since all the suffering of existence has its root in mistaken apprehensions and so is only adventitious, suitable to be eliminated, and since the basic disposition [of reality] is without the duality of bondage and release but pure like space, he knew that teaching this tantra [would be] meaningful. Thus, he accepted to

¹⁹¹ *grol ba'i thig le* (46.3).

¹⁹² *gsang ba bzhi*. These are the four types of secret mentioned in the fourth speech in chapter two of the tantra, namely the primordially secret, the naturally secret, the excellently secret, and the extremely secret. See chapter four of the introduction.

¹⁹³ *e ma'o ye nas gsang ba'i chos!* (47.1).

teach it with the six ways of showing pleasure—smiling, moving the eyebrows, etc.

THE MEANING OF THE TANTRA TO BE KNOWN [47.3]

The third [topic] is the effect [of the introductory background and the raising of the discourse]—the meaning of the tantra that is to be thoroughly known. This section has two parts: a general explanation of the three continuums and a detailed explanation of the conditioning factors of the path, the ten topics of tantra. One scholar says the former is explained mainly in terms of the object of expression, whereas the latter is explained mainly in terms of the means of expression.

GENERAL EXPLANATION OF THE THREE CONTINUUMS [47.5]

[Continuum] is explained as the three consisting of 1) that which is to be realized, i.e., the ground or causal continuum, 2) that by which it is realized and by which one progresses, that is to say, the method or path-continuum, and 3) that in which there is completion, the continuum of the result. This is because just as when one knows that oil exists in the sesame seeds, one engages—without holding back—in the tiresome [process] of grinding and filtering, and having done so, obtains the oil. Similarly, when one knows well how the ultimate ground for achieving Buddhahood exists in one’s own continuum [48] and knows its distinctive features, one can practice through making effort upon having ascertained the essentials of skillful means in which one takes just that [ground] as the path in a manner concordant in aspect with the very pure state of the result and carries it on up [to Buddhahood]. By that means one will attain the final result. Since in this way the three—ground, path, and result—are related as one continuum, they are called a “continuum”. This is because the *Continuation [of the Guhyasamāja] Tantra* says:

Continuum is explained as [meaning] continuous.

From method and cause [issues] the result.¹⁹⁴

Here, method means path, and cause means the ground.

Concerning these three, Len Nyatselwa¹⁹⁵ says, “That which subsists is the basis. Engagement is the path. Fruition is the result.”¹⁹⁶ [But] Lochen Rinpoché¹⁹⁷ says:

If such were the case, it would follow that the subject, a view, is not a path-continuum, because 1) a path-continuum necessarily has the characteristic of “engaging” and 2) a view is not an [instance of] engagement. You assert the first part of the reason, and the last part is established, because a view is characterized by “knowing” and the two characteristics of knowing and engaging are not the same.¹⁹⁸

However, Len responds to that:¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ *rgyud phyi ma las/ rgyud ni rgyun chags la bshad del/ thabs dang rgyu las 'bras bu'ol* (48.3). According to *Tantra in Tibet* (p.109, n.32), P81, Vol.3, 200.1.2-200.1.2 is the section on the three continuums. Lessing and Wayman (*Introduction*, p.266 n.14) translate a similar verse from Chap. 18 of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. The Sanskrit for “continuous” (*rgyun*) is *prabandha*, and synonyms for cause (*rgyu*, *hetu*), method (*thabs*, *upāya*), and fruit (*'bras bu*, *phala*) are respectively nature (*prakṛti*), (*ādhāra*), and (*asambhārya*).

¹⁹⁵ *glan nya tshal ba*. There is a Len Nya-tsel-wa So-nam Gönpö (*glan nya tshal pa bsod nams mgon po*) who initiated Ten-nak Dröl-ma-wa Samdrup Dorjé (*rTan-nag sgrol-ma-ba bsam-grub-rdo-rje*) (1295-1376) into the *Magical Net* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 668). Khenpo Namdröl said the source of the quote was probably Zur Ham Shākya Jung-nge, whose family name—Khen-po claimed—was Len Nya-tsel-wa. He also was a contemporary of Samdrup Dorjé (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 671-672).

¹⁹⁶ *'di gsum la glan nya tshal ba/ gnas pa gzhi/ 'jug pa lam/ smin pa 'bras bu zhes gsung* / (48.3-48.4).

¹⁹⁷ Lochen Dharmashrī (1654-1717).

¹⁹⁸ *lo chen rin po che nil de ltar na lta ba chos can/ lam rgyud ma yin par thal/ lam rgyud la 'jug pa zhes pa'i mtshan nyid kyis khyab pa gang zhig/ lkyod 'jug pa ma yin pa'i phyir/ rtags zur dang po khas/ phyi ma grub stel/ khyod shes ba'i mtshan nyid gang zhig/ shes 'jug gi mtshan nyid gnyis mi gcig pa'i phyir/ zhes gsungs kyang* / (48.4-48.6). There are three “defining characteristics” (*mtshan nyid gsum*) in the *Secret Essence* tradition. These are:

1. that which is characterized by knowing, the view (*lta ba shes pa'i mtshan nyid*);
2. that which is characterized by engaging, the path (*lam 'jug pa'i mtshan nyid*);
3. that which is characterized by the result (*'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*).

Traditionally, the view (*lta*) is considered to be that which is characterized by knowing, because it is the knowledge of the way things are (*gnas lugs*). However, as such, it is also considered to be the first step in the path, traditionally described as characterized by engaging. Lochen Dharmashrī objects to Len’s definition of the path as engagement, because it excludes the view from being part of the path.

¹⁹⁹ Khenpo Namdröl said the response is actually Dodrupchen’s.

It does not entail [that the view is not a path-continuum because it is not characterized by engaging]. For, it is feasible to make the distinction that, although the first of the three characteristics [the view] *is* a path-continuum that engages [the ground], it is not the characteristic of engagement within the division into the two, [the characteristic of] engaging and [that of] knowing.²⁰⁰ [49]

This answer should be analyzed.

Lhajé Chel²⁰¹ calls the result-continuum a final fruition of qualities. He says that the result-continuum does not encompass results that are [on the] path.²⁰² In our own system, it is asserted as follows:

1. that which is the source of all phenomena is [the meaning of] ground;
2. that which involves the exertion of knowing and engaging is [the meaning of] path, and
3. the actualization of the real nature of phenomena that has gone to the point of no further advancement is [the meaning of] result.

THE GROUND-CONTINUUM [49.3]

The first [of these], the ground-continuum has two parts: 1) the primary meaning—the essential ground that is the mode of subsistence—and 2) the ancillary meaning—the ground for imputing error.

²⁰⁰ *glan gyis de la ma khyab stel mtshan nyid gsum gyi dang po de 'jug pa lam gyi rgyud yin yang shes 'jug gnyis kyi zlas phye ba'i 'jug pa'i mtshan nyi ma yin pa'i khyad par 'thad pa'i phyir/ zhes lan btab* (48.6-49.1). The point being made here is that, while the view is a kind of path in that through it one engages reality, it is characterized by knowing and not by engaging. Therefore, it does not fall into the category of the second characteristic, the characteristic of engaging.

²⁰¹ *bla rje dpyal*. According to Khenpo Namdröl and *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 1, 653), this refers to the great translator from Jel, Gun-ka-dor-je (*dpyal lo tsā ba kun dga' rdo rje*). He lived c. 12th cent.

²⁰² I.e., he excludes results that occur on the path from being part of the result-continuum, which he considers to be only the state of final Buddhahood.

THE ESSENTIAL GROUND WHICH IS THE MODE OF SUBSISTENCE [49.4]

The *Ornament of the Intention* says:

The mode of subsistence that is without bondage or release abides primordially as the self-knowing mind of enlightenment, the indifferentiable [special two] truths devoid of objects of activity.²⁰³

Concerning that, the scriptures of the Conqueror say more than once that out of all the stable and moving phenomena the mind is the only principal one, and that mind is here differentiated from the many subtle and coarse [types of minds] as the final very subtle mind, the mind-vajra, the clear light, the innate nature, and so forth. [50] Primordial wisdom from the statements in this tantra, “[ordinary] mind and self-appearing primordial wisdom”, also is just this [final very subtle mind], and the other coarse minds should be taken as “[ordinary] mind” in that two-fold division.

Even while those other minds are tormented by the **bondage** of actions, afflictions and suffering, the entity [of primordial wisdom] is not even slightly defiled, due to which such primordial wisdom is said to be “free from bondage and release”. It is called “self-knowing”, because when it is clearly experienced in one’s continuum, primordial wisdom knows its own mode of subsistence—emptiness—and hence it is not captivated by the elaborations of signs; or because all appearances and occurrences become appearances of the primordial wisdom that **knows** them as solely **self**-appearance.

In other [systems]²⁰⁴ they do not say much more than just that this coarse mind matures into the primordial wisdom of Buddhahood through the force of meditatively cultivating a path of the two collections. However, in this system just this vajra-primordial wisdom, the

²⁰³ *dgongs rgyan las/ 'ching grol med pa'i gnas lugs rang rig pa byang chub kyi sems bden pa dbyer med spyod yul dang bral bar ye nas gnas pa* (49.4-49.5). In what follows, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima gives a lengthy commentary on this definition, word by word. In the translation, the words highlighted in bold are from this definition.

²⁰⁴ Khenpo Namdröl said this refers to the non-tantric definition vehicle, which asserts that one develops one’s ordinary coarse mind into the wisdom of Buddhahood.

secret core of those **minds**, is asserted as the essence of the primordial wisdom of great **enlightenment**. Hence, it is called “the mind of enlightenment”.

With regard to the two truths, although in general there are many ways to posit them, here they are the two truths of the uncommon system of Secret Emanation, or the **special two truths**.²⁰⁵ [Concerning the special ultimate truth] from the viewpoint of the sphere [of reality] free from elaborations, [51] the special ultimate truth is the natural ultimate. From the viewpoint of self-luminosity²⁰⁶ devoid of obscuring defilements, it is the primordial wisdom ultimate. Its abiding as the treasure of the five fruitional features—enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities—is the fruitional ultimate. Since the third [way it abides] is divided into five, these are known as “the seven riches of the ultimate”.²⁰⁷ In brief, they are nothing more than individual differentiations [of one thing] by way of 1) clear light’s factor of non-conceptuality, 2) its factor of clarity,²⁰⁶ and 3) the factor of that [clear light] serving as the basis for the fruitional features.

With regard to the special conventional [truth], although it is explained as “an appearance of the clear light’s energy”,²⁰⁸ the Tathāgata Zur Chungwa says that all phenomena appearing as a display of basic mind is the system of Mahāyoga; their appearing as the energy of basic mind is the system of Anuyoga; their being the self-appearances of just basic mind is the system of Atiyoga.²⁰⁹ It seems to be appropriate, in accordance with that statement, to call [special conventional truths here] “a display”. The display of the ultimate

²⁰⁵ *lhag pa'i bden gnyis* (50.6). These are the special ultimate truth (*lhag pa don dam bden pa*) and the special conventional truth (*lhag pa kun rdzob bden pa*).

²⁰⁶ The same Tibetan word, *gsal ba*, is translated as both luminosity in “self-luminosity” (*rang gsal*, 51.1) and clarity in “factor of clarity” (*gsal ba'i cha*, 51.2), in order to emphasize the breadth of meaning it conveys.

²⁰⁷ *don dam dkor bdun* (51.2). These seven are: 1. the natural ultimate, 2. the primordial wisdom ultimate, and the five enlightened aspects of the effect state, namely 3. enlightened form, 4. enlightened speech, 5. enlightened mind, 6. enlightened qualities, 7. enlightened activities. They are all considered to be the same entity (*ngo bo gcig*).

²⁰⁸ *de'i rtsal snang* (51.3).

²⁰⁹ *bde gshegs zur chung pa chos thams cad rig pa'i cho 'phrul du snang ba ma hā/ rig pa'i rtsal du snang ba a nul rig pa nyid rang snang ba a ti'i lugs zhes gsungs pa* (51.3-51.4).

dawns as myriad worlds in which all environments and beings are pure. There are some who say it is difficult to distinguish this [special conventional truth] from the fruitional ultimate, but there is a great distinction between the basis for dawning and the phenomena that dawn.²¹⁰ The union in which these two truths **abide as one entity** is called the “indifferentiable special truth”.

A mind that has coarse elaborations—i.e., appearances in the manner of **objects** and subjects—**does** not nakedly perceive such a union of the two truths, which is the mode of being, not merely [something] fabricated by an awareness. [52] Hence, [this union] is said to be “beyond being an object of activity of an [ordinary] mind” or “devoid being an object of activity of an [ordinary] mind”.²¹¹ It is not suitable for one to propound that the ultimate truth is not an object of knowledge, being misled by teachings like this that it is devoid of being an object of an awareness’ activity. This is because saying such explicitly contradicts the statements 1) in *Heruka Gel-bo*:

From within objects of knowledge it is excellent.

Hence, this is the etymology [of “ultimate”].²¹²

And 2) in the *Oral Instructions*, citing a summation of a sūtra [which say] that all phenomena abide primordially in the nature of the mind of enlightenment just as it is and that this is the meaning of the tantra that is to be understood.²¹³

²¹⁰ The fruitional ultimate is that aspect of the clear light primordial wisdom that *serves as a basis* for the dawning of enlightened form, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. It is the basis for dawning (*'char gzhi*) and part of the special ultimate truth. The appearance of those five aspects of the result state are the phenomena that dawn (*shar chos*), as such they are part of the special conventional truth.

²¹¹ *sems kyi spyod yul las 'das pa'am spyod yul dang bral ba* (52.1).

²¹² *he ru ka gal po las/ shes bya'i nang nas dam par nil gyur phyir nges pa'i tshig yin no!* (52.2). This is probably the *dpal he ru ga'i gal po*, Tb.599, vol. 33, 568.6-619.4. Although the Tibetan word used here for “object of knowledge” is *shes bya*, the Sanskrit word for “object”, *artha*, could also be translated as *don*, which simply means topic, object, or meaning. This is a common folk etymology describing the ultimate (*don dam pa, paramārtha*) as the object (*don, artha*) that is best or excellent (*dam pa, parama*).

²¹³ *zhal lung du mdo'i don bsdu drang par chos rnams thams cad byang chub sems/ lji bzhin ngang du ye gnas pal* (52.3). Khenpo Namdröl identified the source as Buddhajñānapāda's commentary on *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī* (*'jam dpal mtshan brjod pa, mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*) entitled *'jam dpal zhal lung*.

And 3) by all the former awareness-holders [who hold] that a path-continuum performs two activities—knowing the ground and attaining the result.

Furthermore, [one should not assert that the ultimate is not an awareness' object of activity], because there are limitless damages [to that position] by way of reasoning.

Moreover, the **primordial** wisdom, as it is called, **abides** as an entity that is none other than the fundamental nature of the mind. Therefore, [the quote above] also says, “abides primordially”.

The coarse minds, which are born from the predispositions for evoking the three appearances,²¹⁴ do not exist at the level of the result, and due to that an emptiness in which those [coarse minds] are taken to be the basis²¹⁵ also does not exist there. Hence, one must posit the suchness that turns into the Reality Body of a Tathāgata [53] as the sphere of this fundamental primordial wisdom. Therefore, just this [suchness] is also the final basis of the thought, thinking of which [the Buddha] taught in the sūtras of the final wheel about the Sugata-essence.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, when it is explained that those sūtras, which [Buddha] spoke thinking of the [Tathāgata-nature], are not scriptural collections that teach fundamental mind, this is easier to maintain [in debate]. However, on this [point] many former seers of the supreme—the Conqueror Longchenpa and so forth—assert that because the essence of a Sugata, which is taught in those sūtras, and the fundamental mind indicated here are the same, just this [fundamental mind] is not only the basis of the thought for those [sūtras] but also their object of expression.

Objection: In that case, would not sūtra and mantra be indistinguishable?

Response: To this Lochen Rinpoché of Minling, et. al., maintain that although there is no

²¹⁴ *snang gsum 'pho ba'i bag chags* (52.5-52.6). This most likely refers to the three appearances prior to death: that of radiant white (*snang ba dkar lam pa'i snang ba*), that of red increase (*mched dmar lam pa'i snang ba*), and that of black near attainment (*nyer thob nag lam pa'i snang ba*).

²¹⁵ *stong gzhir byas pa'i stong nyid* (52.6).

²¹⁶ *bde gshegs snying po, *sugatagarbha* (53.1). This is the same as tathāgatagarbha.

difference [between sūtra and mantra] in the assertion of an unchangeable basic awareness as the ground for purification, the assertion of that very [awareness] as having a nature of innate, immutable bliss is a distinctive feature of mantra. Since this meaning is a difficult essential point, I will mention merely an approach for analysis in dependence upon the texts by the omniscient father and son.²¹⁷

Although the two—the fundamental mind discussed within Highest [Yoga] Tantra and the essence of a Tathāgata taught within the final wheel—have different names, they mean the same thing. [54] However, even though that fact abides pervasively in all migrators, being obstructed by minds that mistakenly [perceive] subjects and objects, it is not seen. Therefore, in order to actualize it, these mistaken minds must be cleared away. With regard to that assertion, there is no difference between sūtra and mantra. Nevertheless, they have different modes of purification.

Not only in the sūtras but also in the Yoga Tantras and below, it is simply taught that, through cultivating a path of the profound [wisdom] and the vast [method] in relation to this coarse mind alone, one is gradually purified into the realm of non-conceptuality and that, having done this, in the end one contacts the actual essence of a Sugata. However, [in Highest Yoga Tantra] through the method of a vajra-master bestowing initiation, the clear light—i.e., the essence of a Tathāgata—is awakened as the three bodies. Due to having first arranged such a dependent arising, fundamental mind is then revealed through the profound, secret, skillful technique of immediately eliminating this mind of mistaken conceptuality. Having taken just that on up [to the level of Buddhahood], one easily and quickly connects with the result. These means of connecting with the result and their accompanying [topics] are not taught anywhere other than Highest Yoga Tantra. Presentations of channels, winds, and drops—which are not needed on the occasion of the

²¹⁷ The father here is Longchenpa, and the son is Jik-med-ling-ba.

former [i.e., sūtra] mode for achieving the path—and the teachings on fundamental mind from the perspective of great bliss and so forth also do not exist in the sūtra position. [55]

When it is explained in this way, all the presentations of the higher and lower vehicles come to abide without dispute or confusion like the petals of a lotus. Moreover, it would not follow that one must obtain initiation to be suitable to listen to sūtras on the essence of a Sugata, because bestowal of initiation is mainly for the sake of training in the Highest Yoga Tantra path. This is like, for example, the fact that although in the context of Highest Yoga Tantra the purpose of having achieved the innate bliss through many endeavors²¹⁸ is to cultivate emptiness with that bliss, it is not necessary to receive initiation to [merely] listen to [teachings on] emptiness.

Objection: If the teaching of such an essence of a Sugata from within the sūtra category is not for the sake of taking it as the path now, what is the purpose of [teaching that in the sūtra context]?

Response: The way to abandon this fault[y way of thinking] should be known in terms of the statement of five reasons in Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum of the Great Vehicle*:

Throughout [the scriptures of the middle wheel doctrine] it is said that all objects
of knowledge are empty in all respects

Like clouds, dreams, and a magician's illusions,

But why has the Conqueror said here [in the scriptures of the final wheel of
doctrine]

That the essence of a Buddha exists [from the start spontaneously in the
continuums of] sentient beings?

It was set forth so that persons having the five faults might abandon them:

1. [The fault of] a discouraged mind [and non-enthusiasm for the path,

²¹⁸ In Delhi edition (55.2) read 'bad for 'bang in accordance with Gangtok (51.5).

which is to think that enlightenment cannot be achieved; this is due to not knowing that the ultimate basic element exists in oneself, and such discouragement is an obstacle to generating the intention to become enlightened;

2. the fault of non-respect] despising others as lowly, [thinking that these sentient beings are low; this is due to not knowing of its existence in others and is an obstacle to assuming the care of others;
3. the fault of] incorrect conception [falsely holding that the adventitious defilements exist in the basic element whereas from the start they do not; this is due to not knowing of its existence in all others and is an obstacle to the wisdom realizing the true mode of subsistence;
4. the fault of] deprecating the true doctrine [thinking that good qualities which are indivisible in entity with the basic element do not exist whereas they do, and
5. the fault of] excessive attachment to oneself [due to not knowing that the nature of the element of Superior's qualities is equal in oneself and others, this being an obstacle to realizing oneself and others as equal].²¹⁹

This also requires fine distinctions. The dispelling of contradictions of statements such as the

²¹⁹ Although only the first line is quoted, two stanzas are supplied here to elucidate all five reasons:

*sprin dang rmi lam sgyu bzhin de dang der//
 shes bya thams cad rnam kun stong pa zhes//
 gsungs nas yang 'dir rgyal rnams sems can la//
 sangs rgyas snying po yod ces ci ste gsungs//
 sems zhum sems can dman la brnyas pa dang//
 yang dag min 'dzin yang dag chos la skur//
 bdag cag lhag pa'i skyon lnga gang dag la//
 yod pa de dag de spang don du gsungs//*

Tibetan is from the Asian Input project's version of *rgyud bla ma* (61b.6-62a.1). English translation is taken, with slight modification, from unpublished translation (1987) by Jeffrey Hopkins, p.25. The bracket commentary is translated by Professor Hopkins from Mi-pham (1846-1912).

Commentary on the Sublime Continuum calling the essence of a Tathāgata a “permanent reality”, etc., and the dispelling of contradictions of some [other] statements, which are even more difficult to explain than that, should be known from putting together the whole structure of the great Omniscient One’s texts, but I am not going to speak of that here.

I do not see a great contradiction even when, in another way,²²⁰ one interprets delineations of the clear light of Mantra in dependence on sūtras of the final wheel and [Maitreya’s] *Sublime Continuum*, etc., as merely teaching how the final meaning of the thought of those profound sūtras feeds into Highest Secret Mantra, saying, “If such delineations are explained as being in terms of the respective final basis of thought of those sūtras and treatises, then it is like this...” This should be analyzed in detail by the upholders of our system.

Concerning how that primordial wisdom comes to be the basis for both cyclic existence and nirvāṇa, within most new and old Highest Yoga Tantras it is stated as follows. When sentient beings circle in the five transmigrations, [at the time of death] the former aggregates are collected into just that sphere of the clear light through the stages of earth dissolving into water and so forth.²²¹ Then, the winds and minds of the three appearances and the [eighty]

²²⁰ Here, he is possibly returning to the above position (53.2) that these final wheel sūtras are not “scriptural collections teaching fundamental mind”.

²²¹ In Highest Yoga Tantra the process of death involves eight stages of dissolution (*thim rim*). These are the dissolution of 1) earth into water, 2) water into fire, 3) fire into wind, 4) wind into the eighty conceptions, 5) the eighty conceptions into the mind of white appearance, 6) the mind of white appearance into the mind of red increase, 7) the mind of red increase into the mind of black near-attainment, and 8) the mind of black near-attainment into the clear light of death. In the four initial stages there are also many other factors—the corresponding aggregate, sense-organ, sense-object, and basic wisdom—which dissolve simultaneously with the element. Concerning the meaning of dissolution, Yang-jen-ga-way-lo-drö (*dbyangs can dga’ ba’i blo gros*) says (Lati Rinbochay & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, p.38):

That earth dissolves into water means that the capacity of the earth-wind to act as a basis of consciousness degenerates, whereupon the capacity of the water-wind to act as a basis of consciousness becomes more manifest. Thus, since this is like a transference of the capacity of the former to the latter, it is said that earth dissolves into water, but it is not that ordinary earth dissolves into ordinary water.

Elsewhere (p.46), he says that the meaning of dissolution is that the former mind ceases and the latter becomes more manifest. Since in this type of presentation the fundamental mind of clear light must in some way cease

conceptions again gradually develop out of that very [clear light] as well as the indestructible wind. These having developed, one achieves the intermediate state and rebirth. Once one has taken rebirth,²²² actions and afflictions assemble the aggregates of future suffering [in that lifetime] along with the external environment, and these come to be established according to how they were formed. In that way, one cycles [in cyclic existence] like the wheel of a water-mill.

However, within the early translation of Secret Mantra it is explained as follows. Even when dwelling in the live body now, all the factors that are the winds and minds of coarse [elaborations in the manner of] subjects and objects abide pervaded by the wind and mind of primordial wisdom, like sunlight and its heat. Hence, it is not that even all appearances of objects [57] do not each have a factor of appearance of the clear light primordial wisdom, but within those the wind and mind of primordial wisdom are the fundamental factors, and the coarse factors arise as their display. Due to the fact that [the fundamental factors] exist as the life of those [coarse ones, the latter] engage in their respective functions, and when the primordial wisdom develops into the mistaken winds and minds, due to that even the appearances of primordial wisdom become mistaken appearances. Hence, it is asserted that the ground that is the root of all minds and appearances is only the basic mind of clear light.

[For different sentient beings] the way the clear light primordial wisdom abides in the body as well as the way it dawns are not the same. [So] the techniques for causing it to dawn are similarly not limited to just one [way]. Therefore, although it is the case that [the clear light's] dawning at the time of death and so forth have the aspect of an empty vacuity like space free from the three conditions,²²³ and although it is the case that there are dawnings [of

or become inactive once one passes into the intermediate state (*bar srid*), here the author will contrast it with the Nying-ma presentation, where the basic mind remains as the root of all minds and appearances.

²²² Rebirth, here, means at the point of conception.

²²³ These are the three appearances prior to death, also known as the three pollutants, *bslod byed gsum*.

the clear light] only in the central channel²²⁴ and so forth, all the [instances] of the clear light are not limited to [just] those. I have mentioned this slight [presentation of the basis] due to the fact that it is needed on the many occasions of practicing appearances as deities and so forth, but I have not stated what extensively appears in the cycle of the Great Completeness.

That is how the [clear light primordial wisdom] serves as the basis of the thoroughly afflicted phenomena of cyclic existence. There are, moreover, ways that it serves as the basis of the purified class [of phenomena], but [58] the main one has already been expressed above in explaining the meaning of the mind of enlightenment.

Concerning the mention of “self-appearances of primordial wisdom” on these occasions, they are appearances that are none other than primordial wisdom itself. They are pure appearances, established according to the way that primordial wisdom dawns under its own power. Also, “self-appearances of mind” [mentioned on these occasions] are the appearances of impure things, that is, ordinary dawnings of appearances and minds due to that primordial wisdom’s having been disturbed by the [ordinary] mind. Since these are nothing more than factors of appearance merely imputed by the [ordinary] mind itself and are not established by way of their own entity, they are called “self-appearances”. Because abodes, bodies, and so forth of the latter are neither factors of primordial wisdom nor factors of mind, they are not actual self-appearances. However, [the root tantra] says in the chapter on “Generating the Ultimate and Conventional Mind of Enlightenment into Primordial Wisdom”:

Although they search for phenomena “other than [primordial wisdom] itself”

Conquerors do not find them.²²⁵

²²⁴ *dh’uti’i rtsa ’khor* (57.5). *Dhūti* is an abbreviation for *avadhūti*, the Sanskrit name for the central channel. Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), Vol. 2, p.72. See D. L. Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), part I, pp. 35-39.

²²⁵ *nyid las gzhan zhes bya ba’i chos/ l’tsal yang rgyal bas mi brnyes so/* (58.4-58.5). Cf., *Secret Essence*, Tb.417,

In order to ascertain the meaning of the thought behind such statements that teach appearances and occurrences as equally pure, all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa are taught through including them within the class of self-appearances.

THE GROUND FOR IMPUTING ERROR [58.6]

Concerning this, Rok Deshek Chenpo says, “Although the ground has no error, error has a basis.” Accordingly, [59] although the fundamental nature has no error, its display dawns erroneously. It serves as the basis of coarse and subtle cyclic existences²²⁶ through the erroneous superimposition of misconceived appearances,²²⁷ which cover and obstruct the essential face of the mode of being. Therefore, it is called “the ground for imputing error”.

Furthermore, since something appears to a perceiving mind and is misconceived in accordance with those appearances, [we speak of] “misconceived appearances”. This is how [the words] should be put together, according to the general layout in the texts.²²⁸ On the other hand, in this [particular] system it is said, “Although the supramundane appears, it is misconceived to be cyclic existence.” That should be explained as: “Without realizing appearances as deities, one misconceives them otherwise.” In any case, it is explained that misconceived appearance are posited as misconceiving what is in fact non-dual as dual. One conceives things, which are not other than the nature-less reality, to be autonomous external appearances, independent, and with their own character.

Moreover, the main cause for deviating from the factuality of the mode of being is obscuration, or ignorance, and that [ignorance] has two types, innate and imputational.²²⁹

157.5.

²²⁶ Subtle cyclic existences are the three appearances, or minds of appearance, that immediately precede and follow the clear light of death. Coarse cyclic existence is everyday life.

²²⁷ *zhen snang* (59.1).

²²⁸ *gzhung spyi skad dang bstun na* (59.2).

²²⁹ *lhan skyes dang kun btags*. In the context of the Ge-luk-ba system these terms can be translated as “innate” and “acquired,” where the innate is the subtler conception of inherent existence, which is the root of cyclic existence, established through beginningless conditioning and the acquired is the coarser conception, which fortifies the former, established from contact with false philosophical systems, i.e., “bad tenets”. (See *Meditation*

Also, here we do not posit those two as imputed or not imputed by bad tenets but explain them as (1) the ignorance that is non-realization, i.e., merely being obscured with respect to the essential sphere and (2) the ignorance of wrong conceptions that conceive appearances and minds to be autonomous. [60] The main one is the latter. This is the misconception of appearance²³⁰ indicated on this occasion. In my mind, the essential ground is taught in terms of the basis for achieving Buddhahood, and the ground for imputing [error] is taught in terms of the root of cyclic existence where one strays into [becoming] a sentient being. If the former were not taught, the essential tenet of this [system] that all phenomena are primordially enlightened could not be settled, but if the latter were not taught, there would be no identifying the main object to be abandoned in relation to that [nature]. Thus, the two have been described [here] in the manner of main and ancillary [topics].

THE PATH-CONTINUUM [60.3]

Do the producers, the three types of wisdom, generate the object produced, the five common and the five supreme minds? They do generate them.²³¹ In the *Three Stages* it is said:

It is taught that the five minds are generated

By the three aspects of the entity, wisdom.²³²

on *Emptiness*, p.96). However, in this presentation the imputational (*kun btags*) is presented as the main type of ignorance.

²³⁰ *snong* (60.1), *snang* (Gangtok, 56.2).

²³¹ The three types of wisdom are the wisdom of hearing (*thos pa'i shes rab*), the wisdom of thinking (*bsam pa'i shes rab*), and the wisdom of meditating (*sgom pa'i shes rab*). The five minds (*sems lnga*) are the rising mind, the aspiring mind, the engaging mind, the abiding mind, and the final mind (see below). In Mahāyoga, the literary source for the discussion of these five minds is the statement of the five verses in the second chapter of the root tantra that each beginning with: “E ma’o! This marvelously wonderful doctrine!” The five minds have a special interpretation in the context of both the path of release and the path of method. These are the supreme five minds. In lower systems, they do not use the terminology of the five minds but describe states of consciousness along the path that are structurally similar and thereby can be called the five minds. These are what the author refers to here as the common five minds.

²³² *ngo bo shes rab rnam gsum gyis/ sems lnga skyes par bstan pa yin/* (60.4). The source is *sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i man ngag rim pa gsum pa (māyājālopadésakramatrāya)*, P4742, 144.4.8-144.5.1, which is attributed to Vimalamitra in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, 279. The text in the Peking edition speaks of four minds and not five: *ngo bo shes rab rnam gsum gyis/ sems bzhi skyes par bstan pa yin/* However, in his *khog gzhung gsal*

Here, the five common minds are the five minds enumerated within each of the vehicle of gods and humans, the paths of Hearers and Solitary Realizers, the paths of Bodhisattvas, and the paths of the three general tantra sets, but the five supreme minds are enumerated within just the path of Mahāyoga itself.

The initial thought that wishes to enter such and such a path is the arising mind (*g.yo ldang gi sems*). The strength of that aspiration having become greater, thinking “How nice it would be if I gained that path,” is the aspiring mind (*smon pa'i sems*). That which practices in accordance with [such a] wish [61] is the engaging mind (*'jug pa'i sems*). Having entered [the path], that which abides in a continuum of practice is the abiding mind (*gnas pa'i sems*). That which in the end achieves the desired purpose is the final mind (*mthar phyin pa'i sems*).

[When the phrase] “mind of enlightenment” appears affixed to the end of each of these, it should be explained in relation to whichever [of the following positions] is more convenient.²³³ It is done in terms of the five supreme minds [of Mahāyoga]. Or in another way, even with respect to the five minds of the Hearer and Solitary Realizer Vehicles they are called such from the point of view of their respective enlightenment, or it is a case in which the actual usage of the term does not fulfill [all the requirements] of the etymology. Moreover, it is not the case that within the scriptural collections of the Hearers there is a teaching that condenses their paths into the five minds and so forth; rather, it is the case that within the texts of *this* tantra set [i.e., Mahāyoga] there are teachings condensing Hearer paths into the five minds and so forth.

Question: How are these methods, or path-continuums?

Answer: Since they are cooperative conditions for actualizing the object of attainment—

sgron (134.2.2) Vimalamitra clearly speaks of the five minds: *g.yo ldang smon 'jug gnas mthar phyin/*

²³³ In other words, the phrases—awakening mind of enlightenment, aspirational mind of enlightenment, practicing mind of enlightenment, abiding mind of enlightenment, and the final mind of enlightenment—can occur in a number of different contexts. They are used in the context of any of the different Buddhist vehicles. Hence, mind of enlightenment does not necessarily mean one particular thing, but its meaning should be explained in one of the three ways that are elucidated here.

the result-continuum—they are methods, and since they are the tracks by which and on which one progresses, they are paths.

When [path-continuums] are divided from the viewpoint of main and ordinary ones, there are [two]: (1) the short path (*nye ba'i lam*), just this path of the highest magical [emanation] net, and (2) long paths (*ring ba'i lam*), the paths of the four common vehicles and of the three external tantra sets.²³⁴ Furthermore, if actual trainees of the former [Mahāyoga], having forsaken this path, enter into those [ordinary paths], [62] they are greatly distanced from the supreme feat [of Buddhahood]. Also, when those having the lineage of the other vehicles accomplish their own path, even though they have entered a perfection path or an external tantra path from the beginning, they achieve complete enlightenment over a long period of time relative to [a practitioner] on this [Mahāyoga] path. What need is there to mention those who previously have traveled on a lower [vehicle] path? Hence, these are called “long paths”. Also, the [*Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text*] says:

In the mere common path-platforms,

They practice the cause and effect of the ten perfections.²³⁵

Accordingly, in the path of this [Mahāyoga system] merely training in common types of realization for the sake of purifying [one's] senses and attitudes, which are the vessel [for practice], is a path of common length.

When the special path is divided, there are the two, the path of ascertainment through method and the path of release through wisdom. The explanatory tantra, *The Ocean*, says, “It is taught as the path of release and method.”²³⁶

²³⁴ The four common vehicles are the Vehicle of Gods and Humans, the Lower Vehicle, the Solitary Realizer Vehicle, and the Great Vehicle. The three external tantra sets are Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, and Yoga Tantra.

²³⁵ *khog gzhung las/ thun mong lam stegs tsam nyid dul lpha rol phyin bcu rgyu 'bras spyod/* (62.2-62.3). Vimalamitra, *khog zhung gsal sgron*, 134.5.8.

²³⁶ *bshad rgyud rgya mtsbo las/ grol lam thab su rnam par bstan/* (62.4-62.5).

Concerning the differences between these two, in general the method which is part of the phrase “path of method” also occurs within the path of release, as [in the case of] group practice.²³⁷ The wisdom realizing reality which is explained in the context of the path of release also must exist on the path of method, because if [the path of method] were devoid of that [wisdom], the essence of the path would be lost.

Furthermore, it is also not the case that both method and release are posited for the path of a single person, [63] [since] these are asserted as two entire paths of different people, one on the path of method and one on the path of release. Along these lines, [some say that] in relation to stage of completion, which is the center-post of the path, one relies in one’s initial efforts on the quintessential instructions concerning the method of focusing on important points in the body [i.e., the path of method], and [then] one relies on merely the method of placement, where the mind is placed on whatever it flows to [i.e., the path of release]. Although it is suitable to explain the difference [between the path of method and the path of release] like that, here according to the *Ornament of the Intention*, causing the bonds of one’s continuum to be **released** into reality mainly by way of the three wisdoms is taken to be the path of release, and causing the effect to be quickly achieved mainly by way of the features of **method**—the amazing disciplined conduct²³⁸—is taken to be the path of method. This is the assertion of Nyetön Chöseng²³⁹ and so forth.

Furthermore, having realized the way that special two truths abide indivisibly, familiarization [with that] is the general framework of just this [Mahāyoga] system’s path.

²³⁷ *tshogs spyod* (62.5). Khenpo Namdröl says this is the “collective achievement in groups” (*tshom bu tshogs sgrub*), where groups of yogins and yoginīs recreated the maṇḍala in a group practice. The groups (*tshom bu*) referred to are the five Buddha-families. This is the last of the five yogas found on the path of release. However, this group practice involves the practice of ritual sex (*shyor ba*) and killing (*sgrol ba*), which are the “methods” referred to in the phrase “path of method”.

²³⁸ *brtul zbugs kyi spyod pa rmad du byung ba* (63.3-63.4). This refers to the practices focusing on the upper opening and lower opening of the central channel, which entail the practice of liberative killing and ritual sex.

²³⁹ *nye ston chos seng* (63.4). Nye-dön-chö-gyi-seng-ge of Gong-drang was one of Dro-phuk-ba’s many disciples, belonging in particular to a group classified as the “four teachers” (*ston bzhi*) because their names all contained the word “teacher”, or *ston* (*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 649, 660).

However, progressing on the path mainly in relation to just that [familiarization with the special two truths] is posited as the path of release, and having added on top of that the separate method of the quintessential instructions, progressing along the path mainly depending on that [method] as well is posited as the path of method. Therefore, due to that fact, the framework of the three characteristics²⁴⁰ is taught extensively in the context of the path of release, while [64] at the time of explaining the path of method nothing more than merely the path of method's own particular features are described. It is not at all the case that the three characteristics do not exist on the path of method. For example, it is like [the fact] that although the six perfections are also contained in the Mantra path, the Mantra Vehicle is not a Perfection Vehicle, and the texts of the Perfection Vehicle²⁴¹ expand upon the topic of the deeds of the six perfections, whereas in the Mantra [Vehicle the texts] mainly teach the distinguishing features of Secret Mantra itself. Hence, through this explanation about a greater or lesser scope with respect to the paths that are taken to be the main ones of the individual [paths of] method and release, it is evident that one can also understand the fact that in the context of the meaning of the title, the introductory background, and so forth explanations according to the path of release are called explanations in accordance with the common or general [way of looking at it].

When [the difference between these two paths] is done in terms of the speed of the path, it is explained that the path of release is like the element of stone which has been placed next to the jewel, *Kaustubha*,²⁴² gradually changing into gold, and that the path of method is like the element of iron instantaneously transforming into gold through the application of

²⁴⁰ These are (1) the cause, the characteristic of consciousness (*rgyu shes pa'i mtshan nyid*), (2) the condition, the characteristic of engagement (*rkyen jug pa'i mtshan nyid*), and (3) the characteristic of the effect which is the path (*lam gyur gyi 'bras bu'i mtshan nyid*).

²⁴¹ *phyen* (64.2), *phyin* (Gangtok, 59.6).

²⁴² This is the "name of a celebrated jewel obtained with thirteen other precious things at the churning of the ocean of milk and suspended on the breast of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu." (Monier-Williams, 318).

makṣika.²⁴³ However, there also appears an oral system that says, “One on the path of release who progresses gradually is slower than one on the path of method who progresses gradually, but one on the path of release who progresses suddenly is faster even than one on the path of method who progresses suddenly.”²⁴⁴ [65]

It is said:

Either, the path of release is explained first, treating it in terms of explaining the common one initially and the special one subsequently, or, having thought it more convenient for the explanation, the path of method is explained first.²⁴⁵

That being the case, here I will explain the path of method prior [to the path of release] in accordance with the *Ornament of the Intention*, because even in the path of method itself, according to the progressive sequence of the two yogas—the yoga of method and the yoga arisen from method, the [yoga of] method precedes [the yoga arisen from method] and also because [the yoga] arisen from method can be known from within the path of release.

PATH OF METHOD [65.3]

This section has two parts: (1) the path of melting and taming at the upper opening and (2) the path of the sport of the three realms at the lower opening. The activities of melting and taming the basic constituent within the central channel cause primordial wisdom to dawn. Therefore, it is called “the path of melting and taming”. And, in fourth chapter of the tantra the [sense] objects are called exalted body; the sense-powers, exalted speech; the consciousnesses, exalted mind, while the body, which [fully] appears is explained as the

²⁴³ Khen-po described this as an ointment (*rtsi*) that instantly transformed iron into gold. In classical Sanskrit *makṣika* is an alternative spelling of *makṣikā*, bee or fly (Monier-Williams, 771-772). In Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, there is word with a similar root but different ending, *makṣita*, that means smeared (Edgerton, 414).

²⁴⁴ *grol lam rim gyis pa thabs lam rig gyis pa las bul yang / grol lam cig char ba ni thabs lam cig char ba las kyang myur zhes gsung srol yang snang ngo!* (64.6-65.1).

²⁴⁵ *thun mong sngon dang khyad par rjes su bshad pa'i dbang du btang ste grol lam dang por dang / 'chad bde ba la bsam nas thabs lam dang por 'chad pa gang yang rung zhes gsungs pa* (65.1-65.2).

Desire Realm, partially appearing speech as the Form Realm, and non-appearing mind as the Formless Realm. Among such explanations, the main one is the playful sport of Mantra where one joins the three—the lotus-object of contact, the vajra-sense organ, and the bliss-consciousness.²⁴⁶ Thus, this is called “the sport of the three realms”. The former depends on one’s own body, and the latter depends on the body of another. [66] Even one who mainly takes the path of melting and taming must train in the sport of the three realms in order to bring forth enhance the benefit [of their practice], and even one who mainly does the sport of the three realms must first make the three—channels, drops, and winds—definitely serviceable through the path of melting and taming. Although that is the case, relative to what one mainly does it is permissible to posit these as paths of two [different] people, as [mentioned] previously.

PATH OF MELTING AND TAMING AT THE UPPER OPENING [OF THE CENTRAL CHANNEL] [66.2]

The first, the yoga of the upper opening, is explained in two [parts]: the common one and the special one. With regard to the first, the explanatory tantra, *The Ocean*, says:

By the movement of the wind and fire through the
Two groups of three channel-wheels and the three life-posts,
One milks the cow of space. Hence, [this] is known as [the path of] the upper
one.²⁴⁷

Two groups of three channel-wheels are the four main channel-wheels—namely, the wheel of great bliss at the crown (*spyi bo bde chen gyi 'khor lo*), the wheel of enjoyment at the throat (*mgrin pa long spyod kyī 'khor lo*), the wheel of phenomena at the heart (*snying ga chos kyī*

²⁴⁶ Lotus refers to the vagina. Vajra is a symbol for the penis, and the bliss is that of sexual union.

²⁴⁷ *bshad rgyu rgya mtsho las/ 'khor lo gsum gnyis srog shing gsum/ lme rlung 'gro bas nam mkha'i bal/ lbzho bas steng du rnam par grags* (66.3-66.4).

'khor lo), and the wheel of emanation at the navel (*lte ba sprul pa'i 'khor lo*)—as well as the two contributing wheels,²⁴⁸ i.e., the sphere of fire known in other tantras as “the wheel of Brahma” blazing upward²⁴⁹ from the Fierce Female of the navel [region] located at a measure of four finger-widths below the navel and below that the downward-voiding wind, which fans that fire. The three life-posts are the middle, left, and right [channels].

Concerning the meaning of the rest [of the quote], through focusing on the important points by observing [the seed syllables or drops] at the four channel-centers, [67] the movement of [wind in] the right and left channels is stopped, and with the essence of [those] winds the fire [at the navel] is ignited. [That fire] proceeds straight up the path of the central channel, and “the cow of space”—i.e., the letter *ham* at the crown—is stirred. Then, due to the pearl-like mind of enlightenment descending, one experiences the four joys of descent from above and stability from below, and in particular at the time of [the last of the four joys] the innate joy one enjoys the encompassing and pervasive sphere that is without conceptual elaboration.

With respect to the second [the special yoga of the upper opening], there are two parts: 1) the important topic that primordial wisdom is generated from the body and 2) having understood that, how to focus on the important points. Regarding the first, as for how the self-subsisting primordial wisdom which, as explained previously, is completely pure from the start abides in the vajra-body at this very moment, it abides as an entity of empty and luminous great bliss in the middle of the five great refined factors at the center of the wheel of phenomena at the heart and is the basis for the dawning of all appearances. The *Mirror of Vajrasattva* says:

That which dwells at the heart of embodied beings

²⁴⁸ *rkyen gyi 'khor lo* (66.6).

²⁴⁹ *yar* (66.5), *sngar* (Gangtok, 62.2).

Is the form of the self-arisen, uncontaminated primordial wisdom.

It is the indestructible drop, great bliss,

All-pervasive like space,

The nature of the non-abiding Reality Body.²⁵⁰

And the *Small Book on Self-Abiding* says:

The indestructible drop of primordial wisdom,

The vajra-essence of exalted body, speech, and mind,

Which has abandoned [conceptions of] one and many,

Appears variously but [68] cannot be characterized.²⁵¹

When the capacity for the display [of conventional phenomena] to arise from that is gradually activated, initially there arise subtle factors of the three—white, red, and wind [constituents]—that have the function of inducing pure appearances, which accord with that [primordial wisdom]. These are the proximate refined portions, the quintessences and essential parts of all the other refined portions. Those are disturbed by factors of perverse conceptions and appearances that have come continuously from beginningless time. From that [disturbance], there arise the main unrefined portions of the three—channels, basic constituents, and winds—which produce bad, impure appearances. And, just as flowing water turns into an element as hard as stone through coming into contact with the cold of winter, [when] together with those [unrefined portions] the objects of self-appearance also dawn as aspects of the ordinary, whereupon [mistaken] conceptions and appearances again increase. In this way, the cycle of mistaken object and subject revolves.

Furthermore, when this is explained in a little more detail, in this system the essential

²⁵⁰ *rdo rje me longs las/ lus can snying la gang gnas pal /rang byung zag med ye shes gzugs/ /mi shigs thig le bde chen po/ /nam mkha' lta bur kun khyab bal mi gnas chos sku'i rang bzhin yin/ (67.5-67.6).*

²⁵¹ *dpe chung rang gnas las/ mi shigs ye shes thig le ni/ /sku gsung thugs kyi rdo rje'i bdag /gcig dang du ma rnam spangs pal/ sna tshogs snang la mtshon du med (67.6-68.1).*

point at the heart is taken as the main one. Concerning that, according to the *Ornament of the Intention* there are eight channel-petals and four great channels [at the heart].²⁵² From among those, in front at the channel of reality there are the proximate refined factor [in the form of] the letter *om* (ཨོཾ) and the [distant] unrefined factor [in the form of] the letters *su* (སུ) and *tri* (ཌི); to the right at the channel of primordial wisdom there are the refined factor [in the form of] the letter *hūṃ* (ཧཱུྃ) and the unrefined factor [in the form of] the letters *a* (ཨ) and *nṛi* (ཎི); and to the left at the channel of qualities there are the refined factor [in the shape of] the letter *āḥ* (ཨཱཿ) and the unrefined factor [in the shape of] the letters *pre* (ཤི) and *du* (དུ). [69] The three letters [*om*, *hūṃ*, and *āḥ*] abide close to the central channel. Those proximate refined factors arise from the qualities of the five [great] refined factors, which are at the center. The letter *om* arises from the quality of the crystalline tube, the refined factor of flesh or the channels.²⁵³ It produces the refined factors of the channels in the body and the qualities of those, and nourishing the continuum of those that have [already] been produced, it causes them to increase. The letter *āḥ* arises from the red factor of the indestructible [drop]. It generates and nourishes the refined factors and qualities of blood. The letter *hūṃ* arises through the power of the qualities of the indestructible wind. It generates and nourishes the refined factors and qualities of breath.

Positing [the drop which is in front] as *om* is from the point of view of that drop predominantly having the capacity for generating various pure appearances, because *om* is the seed of the exalted body-vajra. Using that as an illustration [for the others], it should also be

²⁵² Lochen Dharmashrī, *Ornament of the Intention*, 340.6-341.3. The four are the channel of reality (*chos nyid kyī rtsa*) in front, the channel of primordial wisdom (*ye shes kyī rtsa*) to the right, the channel of qualities (*yon tan gyī rtsa*) to the left, and the channel of one's own continuum (*rang rgyud kyī rtsa*) in back. The front and back channels have three petals associated with them, while the right and left have one each, thus making a total of eight channel-petals (*rtsa 'dab brgyad*).

²⁵³ The crystalline tube (*shel sbug can*, 69.2) is part of the white-factor (*dkar cha*) that comes from the father, and therefore it is the source of flesh, the most subtle form of which is the psychic channels. It is called such because it has the shape of a clear glass pipe and has the nature of light. According to Khenpo Namdröl, the qualities that rely on it are the qualities of the path and result.

known that positing [the drop on the right] as *āḥ* is from the viewpoint of [that drop predominantly having the capacity for] generating any and all types of appearances of letters and sounds and that positing [the drop on the left] as *hūṃ* is from the viewpoint of [that drop predominantly having the capacity for] generating good meditative stabilization. However, it is also explained that the actions that are the means for achieving the exalted body and are being accumulated nowadays are stored in the *om*; those that are the means for achieving exalted speech are stored in the *āḥ*, and those that are the means for achieving exalted mind are stored in the *hūṃ*.²⁵⁴

Similarly, it should also be known that the two [syllables] *su* and *tri* [70] have two capacities, one for generating the unrefined factor of the channels and the other for generating appearances and conceptions of demi-gods and animals.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, the actions accumulated nowadays, through which one is born in those two transmigrations, also invigorate the capacities of those two. The two [syllables] *pre* and *du* drive the activities with respect to the unrefined portion of blood and generate the appearances and conceptions of hungry ghost and hell-beings. *A* and *nṛi* drive the activities with respect to the unrefined portion of the breath, and they generate and so forth the appearances and conceptions of the two, gods and men.

Concerning the second [how to focus on the important points], there is a capacity for emitting any and all types of appearances that exists with the indestructible mind which is an essence that is a composite of the five refined factors. It is guided nowadays by the seeds of any of the six types of transmigrations; that being the case, having transformed this [capacity], which dawns as a great array of ordinary mistaken appearances, into the

²⁵⁴ According to Khenpo Namdröl, these two interpretations entail that the shapes of the syllables—*om*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*—are not necessarily present in the heart-center but that the refined factors residing there are designated as these syllables based on their capacities.

²⁵⁵ Both the *su* and *tri* have the capacity for generating the channels, but *su* generates the appearances and conceptions of a demi-god, while *tri* generates those of an animal. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* for the following four syllables.

appearances of myriad purities, one enters into the abiding reality of the seven riches of the ultimate.²⁵⁶

In order to bring this about, one first practices the view and the stage of generation. By training single-pointedly in holding the mind on the indestructible [drop] at the heart, or the drop of Samantabhadra, the drop is ignited, and having become serviceable it dawns as the indestructible mind, the intention of the inconceivable clear light, which is devoid of the scum of conceptuality. At that time within having previously trained in the stage of generation [71] and having held the mind on the five refined factors, one focuses on the channel in which the uncommon appearances of primordial wisdom dawn. [This is called] the silk-thread-like [channel]²⁵⁷ or the crystalline tube [channel].²⁵⁸ Due to focusing on that, the capacity for the dawning of pure appearances that are together with the indestructible [drop] is activated into a manifest [state], whereupon one sees limitless appearances of exalted bodies and [pure] lands in the manner of a reflection dawning in a clear mirror. Through the force of that, according to the stages in which they first arose, the magnificence and capacity of the three syllables blazes greatly. By the power of those having been ignited, all the refined factors of the upper and lower body become powerful just as when a butter lamp is refueled its own light increases, and, having been ignited, the channels and basic constituents are spread with bliss.

However, there are channels, winds, and constituents of the very subtle and coarse kinds, or the kind [that belongs to] the refined primordial wisdom and the kind that is impure and unrefined. As for the channels, winds, and constituents of those two classes, it is a natural fact that when one increases the other becomes weaker. Hence, as much as the three letters are ignited, that much the capacity of the six seeds decreases. This is also called burning and

²⁵⁶ These are the natural ultimate, the primordial wisdom ultimate, and the fruitional ultimate which consists of exalted body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. See *supra*.

²⁵⁷ *dar skud lta bu* (71.1).

²⁵⁸ *shel sbug can* (71.1).

purifying the six types [of transmigrations] by one on the stage of completion.

It is like this: through the force of arousing the great, indestructible, fundamental refined factor, the refined factors of the channel-petals are ignited. With regard to that, in proportion to however much they are ignited, they come under the influence of the indestructible [refined factor]. [72] Thereby, the other refined factors enter into the three root letters in stages, and those three also enter into that [indestructible drop], which is endowed with the five [great] refined factors. Thereby, the capacity of the supreme refined factor becomes surpassingly manifest.

Question: How is that?

Answer: It is said, “From among the five refined factors earth makes bliss stable; water makes bliss cohesive and supple; fire ripens bliss; wind extends bliss; space makes it into a great completeness equal to space.”²⁵⁹ In brief, this means that the experience of great bliss is made thick,²⁶⁰ vast, and stable. Through the force of that, the appearances of empty forms²⁶¹ also become clearer, vaster, and more stable. In order to bring about such an uncommon mode of arousing the essentials of the refined factors, initially from the time of cultivating the stage of generation, all appearances whatsoever are viewed as the maṇḍala and that [maṇḍala] is also viewed as “the self-appearance of primordial wisdom”, i.e., just a display which is spread out from the indestructible mind. Moreover, in order to bring that about, on the occasion of the view, building confidence in identifying and determining [things] in that way must be taken as the life [of this path].

The explanation of how to achieve empty form on this occasion and the explanation in Kālacakra of the appearances that are signs of having bound the ten winds²⁶² into the central

²⁵⁹ *dwangs ma lnga las sas bde ba brten par byed/ chus bde ba sdud cing mnyen/ mes bde ba smin/ rlung gis bde ba rgyas/ nam mkha' mkha' mnyam rdzogs pa chen por byed ces gsungs tel* (72.2-72.3).

²⁶⁰ *'thug* (72.3).

²⁶¹ *stong gzugs kyi snang ba* (72.3).

²⁶² The ten winds mentioned in the context of the Silk Ribbon Initiation in Kālacakra are: fire-accompanying wind, turtle wind, upward-moving wind, chameleon wind, pervasive wind, devadatta wind, serpent wind,

channel are similar merely in that [they are both] appearances of the clear light. [73] However, since this [empty form in the context of Mahāyoga] is an appearance of the indestructible wind being activated in its own place,²⁶³ they are different. The two, this [empty form of Mahāyoga] and the appearances that dawn for a Great Completeness Leap-over practitioner are somewhat similar except for the fact that the [Great Completeness Leap-over] brings out basic awareness' energy with respect to its factor of radiance²⁶⁴ whereas the [Mahāyoga] does not and the that the [Mahāyoga] has the exertion of holding the mind but the [Great Completeness] does not. Furthermore, this is nothing more than an analysis of whether those appearances are or are not dawning as signs of the ten winds entering into the central channel. It is not an explanation that “In order for these to dawn it is not necessary for the ten winds to enter into the central channel.”²⁶⁵

In order to merely see [the divine body]—from among the two, seeing and attaining a divine body on the stage of completion, within the explanation of great treasure-revealer [Gyurmé Dorjé] and his brother [Lochen Dharmashrī]—or in order to merely gain serviceability of one's realization of clear light, it is sufficient to meditate on just the drop of Samantabhadra [at the heart]. However, for the sake of attaining that divine body or for the dawning of a fully developed realizational clear light, or thick clear light,²⁶⁶ one should definitely value as assisting factors the observation of the short *a* at the navel, the quintessential instructions of Samantabhadrī;²⁶⁷ the observation of the hungering²⁶⁸ at the

dhamñajaya wind, vitalizing wind, and downward voiding wind. See Tenzin Gyatso, *The Kālacakra Tantra: Rite of Initiation*, tr. and ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins (London: Wisdom Publication, 1985), p.112.

²⁶³ *rang mal du sad pa* (73.1).

²⁶⁴ *gdangs kyi cha* (73.2).

²⁶⁵ In other words, for these appearances to dawn the ten winds must have *already* entered into the central channel, but these appearances are not signs that occur while the winds are entering the central channel, because presumably this occurred earlier.

²⁶⁶ *'thug po 'i 'od gsal* (73.5).

²⁶⁷ On this, Lochen Dharmashrī says in his *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* commentary on the *Secret Essence*.

As for the second, it is meditating on the channel-wheel at one's navel. By meditating on that according to the quintessential instructions, the drop is made serviceable whereupon a non-duality of bliss and emptiness dawns. Through that, the conceptual collection shines forth as

throat, the pure union;²⁶⁹ and the observation of the letter *ham* at the crown, the quintessential instructions of great suffusion.²⁷⁰ [74] [One should value these three meditations] because in proportion to how much one meditates actually observing the essential point of the Fierce Female, the blazing and dripping become stronger, and the blazing and dripping cause the primordial wisdom to blaze in accordance with the progressively stronger satisfaction of the indestructible [mind]. This enhances the clarity and

the forty-two enlightened bodies and primordial wisdoms, and at that time the light from the channel-wheel of phenomena [at the heart] descends downward. By dissolving into the drop of Samantabhadrī, it extinguishes (? *chad*) the substance of the refined essence, whereby one abides in the entity of the five primordial wisdoms, the non-duality of bliss and emptiness. This is the quintessential instructions of the drop of great bliss, or of Samantabhadrī. (*gnyis pa ni_lte ba'i 'khor lo sgom thabs tel_de man ngag bzhin du bsgoms pas thig le las su rung nas/_bde stong gnyis med du shar bas rtog tshogs sku dang ye shes bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis su gsal zhing /_de'i tshes chos kyi 'khor lo'i 'od mar babs te kun tu bzang mo'i thig le la thim pas dwangs ma'i rgyu ba chad nas bde stong gnyis med ye shes lnga'i ngo bor gnas pa ni kun tu bzang mo'am bde chen thig le'i man ngag gol* from Lochen Dharmashrī, *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* (*gsang bdag zhal lung*), Zhe-chen Monastery electronic edition, n.d., p. 328).

²⁶⁸ *rngams ma* (73.5). Khen-po repeatedly emphasized the meaning of “hunger” with regard to *rngams*. Here, he said this represents the craving for the nectar of bliss from the *ham* at the crown of one’s head. The “*ma*” suffix seems to personify this craving in the female form. However, the translation has kept it abstract.

²⁶⁹ *sbyor ba dag pa* (73.6). On this Lochen Dharmashrī says:

As for the third, it is the method for meditating on the channel-center at the throat. The upward movement of the light from the great refined factor at the heart strikes the drop at the throat channel-center. Melting it, the bliss of the two channel-centers become unified at the same time, and through the generation of bliss, when one experiences the taste of the five primordial wisdoms, it is without there being taste and taster. This teaching is the quintessential instructions of pure union. (*gsom pa ni/_mgrin pa'i 'khor lo'i sgom thabs tel/_snying ga'i dwangs ma chen po'i 'od gyen du song ba mgrin pa'i 'khor lo'i thig ler phog de zhu ba las 'khor lo gnyis bde ba dus gcig tu mnyam par sbyor zhing /_bde ba skyes pas ye shes lnga'i ro myang ba nal/_myang bya myong byed med par gnas su ston pa ni sbyor ba dag pa'i man ngag gol* from Lochen Dharmashrī, *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*, *gsang bdag zhal lung*, Zhe-chen Monastery electronic edition, n.d., p. 328).

²⁷⁰ *khyab brdal chen po* (73.6). On this Lochen Dharmashrī says:

As for the fourth, it is the method for meditating on the channel-wheel of great bliss [at the crown]. The light from the neck [center] strikes the channel-center at one’s crown, whereupon melting into light, it generates the uncommon indifferentiability of bliss and emptiness that has the form of space. That is the intention of all the conquerors, and by experiencing that, one sees the faces of all the Buddhas at the same time. (*bzhi pa ni/_bde chen 'khor lo'i sgom thabs tel/_mgrin pa'i 'od kyis spyi bo'i 'khor lo la phog pas 'od du zhu nas bde stong dbyer med nam mkha'i gzugs can kun gyi thun mong ma yin pa skyes pa de ni rgyal ba thams cad kyi dgongs pa yin la/_de nyams su myong bas ni sangs rgyas kun gyi zhal dus gcig la mthong ba yin no/* from Lochen Dharmashrī, *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* (*gsang bdag zhal lung*), Zhe-chen Monastery electronic edition, n.d., pp. 328-9).

stability of the divine body, which is a self-appearance of that [primordial wisdom], and greatly diminishes the six seeds of the life-fortress,²⁷¹ that is, the basis for imputing error.

The loosening of the channel-knot through vajra-repetition is not explained here. However, upon the bliss of blazing and dripping greatly increasing in the path of the central channel from the navel up to the crown, the mind is withdrawn by means of that bliss. When this happens, even the winds of the channel-petals are drawn into that path, since wind and mind operate together. Through the power of withdrawing the winds like that, the channel-knots of the central channel become loosened naturally. Hence, the essential points [of Guhyasamāja and the like] are thoroughly contained [in this *Secret Essence Tantra*].

Those [essential points] are explanations of a little of the meaning upon arranging the contents of the texts on the quintessential instructions of the upper opening. The actual practice of cultivating the quintessential instructions of the four [upper] channel-wheels resides clearly in the commentary on this tantra [called] *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions*,²⁷² the *Instructions on the Meaning of (Longchenpa's) "Resting the Basic Mind"*,²⁷³ the *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions*,²⁷⁴ and so forth.

PATH OF THE SPORT OF THE THREE REALMS AT THE LOWER OPENING [74.6]²⁷⁵

Concerning this, [75] one investigates and searches for a seal [i.e., consort] who is fully qualified, according to the statement in the root tantra's eleventh chapter, "Goddesses,

²⁷¹ *srog mkhar* (74.2).

²⁷² *phyogs bcu mun sel* (74.5) This is the word-by-word commentary by Long-chen-pa (1308-1363). See the bibliography.

²⁷³ *sems nyid ngal gso'i don kbrid* (74.5). *Resting the Basic Mind* is the first book in the *Trilogy on Resting (ngal gso skor gum)* which was translated by Guenther in the three volumes of *Kindly Bent to Ease Us* (Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1975). The other two books in this trilogy on the Great Completeness are *bsam gtan ngal gso* and *sgyu ma ngal gso*. It is unclear which commentary (*don kbrid*) on *Resting the Basic Mind* is being referred to here.

²⁷⁴ This is Lochen Dharmashri's *gsang bdag zhal lung* (74.6).

²⁷⁵ This is called the "Sport of the Three Realms" because, as was explained above, the main explanation in this context is of "the playful sport of Mantra where one joins the three—the lotus-object of contact, the vajra-sense organ, and the bliss-consciousness." See *supra*.

female Nāgas, or women of bad descent....”²⁷⁶ Having summoned and obtained one, those [acts which] initiate sexual desire through the practices described in the *Treatise on Passion*²⁷⁷ are **service**.²⁷⁸ [Then, there are three discriminations related to intimate service.] Generating [oneself and the seal] into male and female deities is divine discrimination. Blessing the secret space²⁷⁹ into a vajra and a lotus is discrimination of mantra. Thinking “Through depending on this method I will achieve the innate primordial wisdom” is the discrimination of doctrine. [When] within having these three discriminations one incites an intertwining²⁸⁰ [of one’s own body and the consort’s body] through four symbols, that is **intimate service**. Becoming absorbed [in sexual union] by means of the four seals, one excites the wind of sexual desire, whereby the Fierce Female blazes up, and the moon is melted by her light. It falls downward. Through its coming along that course, the four joys are experienced in stages

²⁷⁶ The full text is:

*lha mo klu mo rigs ngan mol
dbye 'am yang ni ma dbye bar/
bsnyen pa dang ni nye bsnyen dang/
bsgrub pa dang ni sgrub chen po/
yum gyi padma'i dkyil 'khor dul
bde ba thugs kyi dkyil 'khor sprot/
sangs rgyas sprin tshogs ma lus la/
dges mnyam mchog gi sbyin pas bstim/ (Secret Essence, Tb.417, 187.4-187.6).*

This translates as:

Goddesses, female Nāgas, and women of bad descent
Distinguishing [between them] or not,
There is service and intimate service,
Achievement and great achievement.

In the maṇḍala of the mother’s lotus
Bliss, the maṇḍala of enlightened mind, spread.
Through offering supreme joy and equanimity,
[The couple] dissolves into the whole cloud [like] assembly of Buddhas (Cf. Gyurme Dorje, “The *Guhyagarbhatantra* and its XIVth Century Tibetan Commentary”, 883).

²⁷⁷ *'dod pa'i bstan bcos* (75.2).

²⁷⁸ Following the quote, given above, from the eleventh of the root text, this section discusses the practice at the lower opening of the central channel in terms of the four branches of service and achievement (*bsnyen sgrub bzhi*). These are service (*bsnyen pa*), intimate service (*nye bar bsnyen pa*), achievement (*sgrub*), and great achievement (*sgrub chen*). These words are highlighted in bold in the following.

²⁷⁹ *mkha' gsang* (75.2). This is a euphemism for the genitals of the two partners.

²⁸⁰ *bsnol ma* (75.3).

at the four channel-wheels. At the end of that, [the white drop of the moon] is held at the tip of the jewel without emission. Completely attaining innate joy through doing this is **achievement**. Taking up the sun and moon with the tongue of the vajra, they are drawn up by way of the opposite technique, whereupon the factors of joy gradually fill the individual places of the channel-wheels. At the end of that, the innate [joy], which arises through depending on the letter *ham* at the [channel] wheel of great bliss [at the crown], is brought to completion. [76] This is **great achievement**. From among the three ways to posit the four branches of service and achievement—at the time of the path, at the time of achievement, and at the time of union—this is the latter.

In the continuation tantra of this [*Secret Essence Tantra*] another special way of positing the [four branches of] service and achievement is described:

The yogin joining with the yoginī

Is taught as “service”.

Applying *Kakkola* to the *Bo*²⁸¹

Is called “intimate service”.

Manifestly joining the two channels

Is taught as being achievement.

Joining the two innate [blisses]

Is called the great achievement.²⁸²

There is also a way to posit the five minds—arising mind and so forth²⁸³—with respect to

²⁸¹ Monier-Williams (241) lists *Kakkola* as “a species of plant (bearing a berry, the inner part of which is waxy and aromatic)” and “a perfume prepared from the berries of this plant.” The symbolic meaning of *bo* is unclear. Khenpo Namdröl commented that these refer to the lotus of the female and the vajra of the male practitioner, respectively.

²⁸² *'di nyi kyi rgyud phyi ma las nil rnal 'byor rnal 'byor mar 'brel bal /bsnyen pa zhes byar bstan pa yin/ po la ka kko la sbyor bal /nye bar bsnyen par brjod pa stel /rtsa gnyis mngon par 'brel ba nil /sgrub pa yin par bstan pa'ol /llhan cig skeyes gnyis 'brel ba nil /sgrub pa chen por brjod pa'ol (76.1-76.3).*

²⁸³ These are arising mind, aspirational mind, engaging mind, abiding mind, and final mind. See *supra*.

those. This is known from the commentaries.

The single greatest essential point of the path of the messenger²⁸⁴ is just the essential of binding the channel, according to the statement in *The Penetrating*:

Having abandoned [impure appearances], if one does not know
 The drawing in and binding of Vajradhātviśvarī's channel,
 One will not attain the Reality Body
 In limitless vajra-eons.²⁸⁵

This is also the reason for analyzing consorts.

In the commentaries it is said that through this method the conceptual collection dawns as the maṇḍala of exalted body and primordial wisdom. As for the meaning of that, [77] the whole conceptual collection becomes intoxicated with the single taste of great bliss, whereupon it becomes free from the corrosion of discrimination that apprehends things as individual. Just as some excellent ones explain, “Even though [things are] different from the perspective of conceptuality, they become one in the perspective of primordial wisdom.” This is called “binding the aggregates and constituents into the maṇḍala of bliss.”

In many places in this [tantra], here and elsewhere, the impure aggregates, constituents, and sense-spheres are explained as the “conceptual collection”. With regard to this, having taken conceptuality as the conception of misconceived appearances and adherence to that,²⁸⁶ [some] explain it as that which is conceptualized from [the distinction between] what is conceptualized and what conceptualizes. Although this is suitable, I think it might be correct, if one explains [the conceptual collection] from the viewpoint that all impure

²⁸⁴ *pho nya'i lam* (76.4). *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 2, 80, note 1130) says, “The messenger (*pho-nya*) is the consort or partner who acts as an intermediary, bringing to the practitioner the pristine cognition of co-emergent bliss.” Khenpo Namdröl said this means the “female seal” (*phyag rgya ma*), i.e., consort.

²⁸⁵ *thal ba las/ spangs nas rdo rje dbyings phyug rtsal ldgug dang bsdam pa ma shes nal lrdog rje'i bskal pa mtha' yas par/ lchos sku thob par mi gyur rol* (76.4).

²⁸⁶ Reading *rnam rtogs la byas nas* in accordance with Gangtok (71.5), as Delhi (77.3) is unclear.

appearances are emanations of wrong conceptuality. This agrees with the statement in the third chapter [of the tantra]:

Abodes and sufferings, the cycle of error and so forth,
Are nothing other than just wrong conceptuality.²⁸⁷

Even in terms of one on the instantaneous path of method described above, the order of the paths of the second and third initiations is definite, and in the third initiation there is nothing but cultivation in dependence on another's body of just that meaning which was clearly made known in the second initiation by the method that depends on one's own body. Hence, I do not think that the mode and so forth for achieving a primordial wisdom body is other than that.

PATH OF RELEASE THROUGH WISDOM [77.6]

In terms of the path's speed, [78] there are two paths of release through wisdom: the path of a suddenist and the path of a gradualist. From these, the first is as stated in [Lochen Dharmashrī's] commentary [*Ornament to the Lord of Secrets' Intention*]:

There are some with the most superior faculties who in one stroke²⁸⁸ complete the realization and contemplation of indivisible [reality]. They are called 'suddenists', and...²⁸⁹

Concerning that, the ground for reckoning suddenists and gradualists is the three characteristics. However, even if it is possible in the opinion of Ngari Paṅchen Rinpoche²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ *le'u gsum par/ gnas dang sdug bsngal 'khrul 'khor las sogs pal /log rtog nyid las gzhan du ci yang med/* (77.3-77.4). *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 162.6.

²⁸⁸ *chig chod du* (78.1). Realization refers to the path of seeing and familiarization refers to the path of meditation. Thus, at least the progression over the first eight Bodhisattva grounds is quick.

²⁸⁹ *'grel ba las/ dbang po yang rab kha gcig dbyer med chig chod du rtogs goms mthar phyin par byed pa yod de cig char ba zhes bya zhing* (78.1-78.2).

²⁹⁰ *mnga' ris paṅ chen rin po che*. This is the treasure discoverer mNga' ris Paṅ chen Padma dBang rgyal (1487-1543). According to 'Dod 'joms Rin po che, he was considered a mind-emanation of mKhri srong lde'u bstan

and so forth to posit a suddenist who completes those three just at the same moment, all suddenists are not definitely like that. On the other hand, [all] those whose realization is very quick are called “suddenists”. These are persons, but the paths of a suddenist are the meditative stabilizations and so forth in their continuums. In further detail, at the beginning of training in the path of this [tantra] one sets up the main points of the reasonings²⁹¹—such as the four realizations and so forth.²⁹² With that one finds the unfabricated realization of the clear light. Then, all appearances and beings dawn as the single maṇḍala of self-manifesting primordial wisdom. By setting in meditative equipoise on the meaning of that, one immediately²⁹³ attains a supportive realization,²⁹⁴ which is steady without increasing or diminishing, whereupon one passes to the level of an awareness-holder in the manner of an illusion.²⁹⁵

Such a quick realization arises from the cause of certain special people—who have powerful continuums, faculties, and roots of virtue [79]—previously planting great waves of prayer-wishes for this path of the Magical Emanation Net, and so forth. Furthermore, there are those who did not learn the path of the Magical Emanation Net in previous lives and are in this life suddenists relying on the procedure of the path and this path of the Magical Emanation. However, it is not contradictory for these people to have gradually trained in lower paths up through the previous lifetime. In the oral tradition,²⁹⁶ such a one is known as

(*The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 805). His most famous work is the *sDom gsum rnam par nges pa'i bstan bcos* or *The Treatise on Ascertaining the Three Vows* (*bka' ma rgyas pa*, v.37).

²⁹¹ There are four points of reasoning (*gtan tshigs bzhi*). In *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* these are called the “Four Axioms of Mahāyoga” and are listed as the four kinds of realization (*rtogs bzhi*), the three purities of Mahāyoga (*dag pa gsum*), the four modes of sameness (*mnyam pa bzhi*), and supreme identity (*bdag nyid chen po*).

²⁹² *rtogs rnam pa bzhi*. According to the same source, these are the realizations of the single basis (*rgyu gcig pa*), the manner of the seed-syllables (*yig 'brug tshul*), consecration or blessing (*byin gyis rlabs pa*), and direct perception (*mngon sum pa*).

²⁹³ *'phral la* (78.6).

²⁹⁴ *rkyen thub kyī rtogs pa* (78.5).

²⁹⁵ *mig 'phrul bzhin du* (78.6).

²⁹⁶ *brgyud pa'i bka' 'srol* (79.3).

“a suddenist, sharp by training”,²⁹⁷ and the Great Lord of Secrets Dropukpa (1074-1135) says:

Like those who are definite in the lineages of the three vehicles, the lineages and faculties of sentient beings are various. Hence, there are also suddenists of sharp faculties.²⁹⁸

Through that, it is easy to understand how to differentiate gradualists into two, those sharp by training and those who are naturally sharp.

Concerning this, the great master’s *Garland of the Quintessential View* says:²⁹⁹

With regard to that, one’s goal will be brought to completion through the three characteristics. Knowing the modes of the four types of realization is the characteristic of knowledge. Familiarizing [with those] again and again is the characteristic of engagement. Manifestation by the force of familiarization is the characteristic of the result.³⁰⁰

According to that statement, the three characteristics are (1) the cause, or the characteristic of knowing—view; [80] (2) the condition, or the characteristic of engaging—meditative stabilization; and (3) the characteristic of manifestation—the result. When done in terms of that which causes one to know the object engaged in practical application, i.e., the object of

²⁹⁷ *sbyang rno cig char ba* (79.3).

²⁹⁸ *theg gsum rigs nges ltar sems can gyi rigs dang dbang po sna tshogs yin pas dbang rno cig char ba’ang yod ces gsang bdag sgro bug pa chen po gsung ngol* (79.3-79.4).

²⁹⁹ In *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (v.1, p.265) this same passage is translated as follows:

Concerning this, the goal is conclusively reached by means of the three characteristics. Awareness, or the four kinds of realization, is the characteristic of perception, the repeated experience of it is the characteristic of the entrance, and the actualization of it by the power of experience is the characteristic of the result.

See the same for a nearly identical commentary on this.

³⁰⁰ *man ngag lta ba’i phreng ba las/ de la mtshan nyid gsum gyis don mthar phyin par ’gyur tel/ rtogs pa rnam pa bzhi’i tshul rig pa ni shes pa’i mtshan nyid dol/ lyang nas yang du goms par byed pa ni ’jug pa’i mtshan nyid dol/ lgom pa’i mthus mngon du gyur pa ni ’bras bu’i mtshan nyid dol* (79.5-79.6).

meditation, it is posited as the view. When it is done in terms of engaging in practical application, or the means of meditation, it is posited as the meditative stabilization, and when it is done in terms of manifesting the aims of meditation, it is posited as the result. As for the characteristic of the result, there are two types of results:

- 1 the final result, which is the manifestation of everything to be realized and
- 2 path results where there is only partial manifestation.

From between those two, the former is equivalent to the result-continuum, and the latter is the third characteristic [of the result] in the context of a path-continuum.

The difference between sentient beings and Buddhas is whether or not they have purified themselves of the misconceived appearances explained earlier. The main means for eliminating misconceived appearances is one's view. That very [view] is nurtured again and again and its generation is lengthened until the effect state of an awareness-holder is achieved.³⁰¹ This is why [the three characteristics of view, meditative stabilization, and their results] are posited as the three—cause, condition, and result.

In the texts of the common Great Vehicle, mind-generation is like the seed for complete enlightenment, and the other practices, the view and so forth, are called aids to that.³⁰² However, [such] is a different presentation from this one. [81] Here one can posit even the

³⁰¹ There are four levels of awareness-holders: the fruitional awareness-holder (*rnam smin rig 'dzin*), the life-empowered awareness-holder (*tshe dbang rig 'dzin*), the awareness-holder of the great seal (*phyag rgya rig 'dzin*), and the spontaneously present awareness-holder (*lhun grub rig 'dzin*). The Zur tradition holds that all the Awareness Holders are on learner paths, but Longchenpa maintains that the spontaneously present awareness-holder is equivalent to Buddhahood.

³⁰² The *locus classicus* for this simile is the *Supplement to the Middle Way* (*madhyamakāvātāra*, *dbu ma la 'jug pa*; 1.2). The translation from *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism* (p.102) is:

Mercy (*brtse nyid*) alone is seen as the seed
Of a Conqueror's rich harvest,
As water for development, and as
Ripening in a state of long enjoyment,
Therefore at the start I praise compassion.

It should be noted however that Shantideva maintains in the ninth chapter of *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* that all practices are for the sake of wisdom.

uncommon, conventional mind-generation within the class of the view.³⁰³ Hence, there is no confusion of classes [between the three characteristics].

THE CAUSE—THE CHARACTERISTIC OF KNOWING [81.1]

This section has three parts: the object to be comprehended, the means of comprehending, and the meaning to be established.³⁰⁴

OBJECT TO BE COMPREHENDED [81.2]

The object to be comprehended is explained as the collection of misconceived appearances, or the collection of appearances and misconceptions. However, when the intention behind that [explanation] is sought, it [should be understood as follows]. Having taken the mistaken objects of observation of wrong conceptuality as the subject, one comprehends or ascertains them as primordially pure entities. Hence, it is evident that [the object to be comprehended] is to be taken as the actual collection³⁰⁵ of [both] such [impure] subjects and the predicate to be established [their primal purity]. This can be understood, when one investigates well the way the example is posited in the [Lochen Dharmashrī's] *Sacred Word of the Lord of Secrets*:

By ascertaining misconceived appearances, one will arrive at reality. This is like realizing there is a striped rope by analyzing the consciousness that mistakes it to be a snake.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ According to Khenpo Namdröl, the uncommon, conventional mind-generation (*thun min kun rdzob sems bskyed*) is “the mind generated into the identity of knowing that oneself and limitless sentient beings are primordially enlightened” (*bdag dang mtha' yas sems can rnams ye nas sangs rgyas yin pa la yin par shes pa'i bdag nyid byang chub sems bskyed do*). This can be included in the view, because it is a view of primordial purity.

³⁰⁴ These are *gzhal bya*, *'jal byed*, and *grub mtha'*. The last term (*grub mtha'*) is often translated as “tenets”, but here Khenpo Namdröl glossed it as *grub don*, the meaning to be established.

³⁰⁵ *tshogs don* (81.3).

³⁰⁶ *gsang bdag zhal lung las/ zhen snang gtan la phab pas chos nyid phebs par 'gyur te sbrul 'khrul gyi shes pa la dpyad pas thag khrar rtogs pa bzhin no/* (81.4).

MEANS FOR COMPREHENDING [81.5]

The second, or the means for comprehending, are the reasonings, because it is ascertainment of the relevant meaning by way of reasons. It has three parts, according to the statement in [Buddhaguhya's] *Stages of the Path*, "Those are the five facts, modes, and words."³⁰⁷ These are reasonings of the five historical facts (*sngon byung dngos lnga'i gtan tshigs*), reasonings of the five modes of followers (*rje 'jug tshul lnga'i gtan tshigs*), and reasonings of the five phrases (*tshigs lnga'i gtan tshigs*).

THE FIVE HISTORICAL FACTS [81.6]

With respect to the five historical facts, [82] in past history the five enlightened bodies as teachers displayed the meaning of reality in direct perception to five retinues by way of five types of communication. The Reality Body as teacher communicated [the meaning of reality] to the retinue—Ocean of Primordial Wisdom—through a communication that is the fact itself of non-production.³⁰⁸ The Complete Enjoyment Body communicated [the meaning of reality] to the retinue—Ocean of Fruition—through a symbolic communication that is exalted thought. The Emanation Body communicated to the retinue—Ocean of Belief—through verbal expressions. The Vajra Body communicated to the Indifferentiable Vajra retinue through a vajra communication, [and] the Manifest Enlightenment [Body] communicated to the retinue—Ocean of Conquerors—through a communication that was the blessing of basic mind.

Concerning this, [some] former professors of the Magical Emanation [Cycle, such as Longchenpa] say that since the retinues of the four enlightened bodies, other than the Emanation Body, do not have misconceived appearances, in terms of what happened in the past these communications are not [actual] reasonings, but they are reasonings for the

³⁰⁷ *lam rim las/ de nyid dngos lnga tshul dang tshig* (81.6).

³⁰⁸ *skye med don gyi gsung* (82.1).

realization of [later] followers in that they are aids for proofs [concerning the nature of reality]. Therefore, they are [merely] designated as reasonings [but are not actual ones]. Others [from the Zur tradition] say that even the retinues of the four exalted bodies have certain types of subtle misconceived appearances to be eliminated and, hence, [all] these communications are actual reasonings. Lochen Dharmashrī says that since there are subtle obstructions to omniscience even on a final [stage of the] path, the latter [statement, that these communications are actual reasonings] is correct.

In comparison, I think that (1) those on a final path become the retinue of all three enlightened bodies, the Reality Body and so forth, through just their becoming the retinue that is together with the Complete Enjoyment Body and [83] that (2) differentiating them by way of isolatable factors, those who attain realizations concordant with the Reality Body are called the Ocean of Primordial Wisdom retinue and those who attain realizations partially similar to the Vajra and Manifest Enlightenment Bodies are [respectively] called the Vajra retinue and the Ocean of Conquerors retinue. This is because on learner paths one does not directly perceive the Wisdom Reality Body³⁰⁹ and also because it is impossible to describe [these five] teachers as different since just the actual collection of the three—the Reality Body, the Complete Enjoyment Body, and the Emanation Body—is separately posited as the Vajra Body from the viewpoint of those three being an indivisible entity and as the Manifest Enlightenment Body from the viewpoint of those three being different isolates. [The difference between those two enlightened bodies] is no more than that. Moreover, as for the understood meaning of the vajra communication and so forth, the convention of communicating³¹⁰ is used for the retinue's complete realization of the meaning of the tantra through the teacher's just setting in equipoise on the thought of the indifferenciability of the three bodies and so forth. This is like the Conqueror's transmission through thought.

³⁰⁹ Only those on a path of no-more-learning, i.e., Buddhahood, directly perceive the Wisdom Reality Body.

³¹⁰ *brda sprad pa'i tha snyad* (83.3).

As far as I understand it, it is asserted that, on this occasion of the path of release, without previously practicing the methods of focusing on important points in one's own and another's bodies [but] in dependence upon merely the reasonings, one newly induces a realization of the stage of completion. Regarding the reason for being able to induce such, it is due to the fact that since this path is formulated in terms of trainees with surpassingly sharp wisdom, they are called ones on the wisdom path, i.e., the path of release, [84] and such [trainees] are able to eliminate elaborations of misconceived appearances in dependence upon a mere reasoning, and by the power of having eliminated them they are able to nakedly perceive the fundamental mode of being. Moreover, by way of a vajra-master merely focusing his *thought* [on them], or by way of a vajra-master's mere *symbolic* method,³¹¹ or by way of a vajra-master merely stating the beginning *words* [of a reasoning]³¹² certain [trainees] who have very sharp faculties cut through their misconceived appearances. Doing this, the vajra-master is able to characterize clearly the self-abiding primordial wisdom [for such trainees]—"It is thus...." This is like making these divisions of the three—facts, modes, and words—for the sake of generating ascertainment in those with sharp faculties by way of enumerating which teaching belongs to which mode of release. Furthermore, in the verbal transmission of the omniscient lama [Patrül Rinpoché] it is said:

Joining to the clear light of the path only by means of reasonings without relying on binding the activities of the channels, winds, and drops is a great

³¹¹ *brda thabs tsam* (84.2).

³¹² In the Gangtok edition (77.6), the words *dgongs*, *brda*, and *tshig* are highlighted, which is the reason for the italics here. In the Delhi edition (84.2) only *brda* is highlighted. The three represent the three means for comprehending mentioned above: the five facts which are primarily wordless communications, the five modes of followers which involved symbolic communication, and the five verses, or words, which are verbal communications. The words themselves also evoke a connection with the three transmissions—Conqueror's transmission of thought/intention, Bodhisattva's symbolic transmission of basic awareness, and the yogin's oral transmission.

distinctive feature of this tantra. Hence, here the reasonings must be taken as the life [of the path].³¹³

Therefore, since all the ways of characterizing primordial wisdom by the reasonings—ranging from the five historical facts up to and including those for understanding by analysis—are similar in being modes of release through wisdom, even the five facts are called “reasonings” out of their being similar [with the others]. When it is done like that, [85] one realizes that both of the two assertions stated above have both a factor of correctness and a factor of incorrectness that need to be distinguished.³¹⁴ This mode appears as a difficult point of the path of release.

THE FIVE WAYS OF COMMUNICATING TO FOLLOWERS [85.1]

Concerning the second, [the reasonings of] the five ways [of communicating to followers], for those [trainees] with the very best sharp faculties, all phenomena that are known to appear identify the meaning of the tantra in accordance with the communications of the five historical enlightened bodies. Furthermore, these reasonings are modes of communicating [the meaning of the tantra] concordant with those [communications] of the [five] teachers—the Reality Body, Complete Enjoyment Body, Manifest Enlightenment Body, and Emanation Body. They are respectively:

1. the reasoning of the fact of non-production, which is [that everything is] like space characterized by non-production,
2. the reasoning that symbolizes the intention, which is [that everything is] like a

³¹³ *bla ma thams cad mkhyen pa'i gsung rgyun las kyang / rtsa rlung thig le'i byed pa cing la mi ltos par gtan tshigs kho nas lam gyi 'od gsal sbyor ba ni rgyud 'di'i khyad chos chen po yin pas 'dir gtan tshigs srog tu bzung dgos* (84.4-84.5).

³¹⁴ This first assertion by Longchenpa is correct in stating that the five facts are only designated as reasonings but are not actual ones. It is incorrect in stating that the retinue does not have misconceived appearances. Correspondingly, Lochen Dharmashrī and the Zur tradition is correct in stating that the retinue does have misconceived appearances but is incorrect in the assertion that the five historical facts are actual reasonings.

- reflection in a mirror identifying the obstructions,³¹⁵
3. the reasoning of the self-knowing manifest clarity, which is [that everything is] self-illuminating non-conceptuality like the center of the sun,
 4. the vajra reasoning of indifferentiability, which is [that everything is] like an echo, [illustrating] the indifferentiability of emptiness and [appearances] that are renown, and
 5. the verbal reasoning of expressions, which is [that everything is] like the pure voice [of the Buddha], engaging the minds of all.³¹⁶

This accords with the saying of the former Conquerors that “All appearances dawn as teachers and religious texts.” Also, when in dependence on the sign that is the appearance of objects the realization of non-production dawns, the reasoning falls within the Reality Body’s mode of communication.³¹⁷ When through that sign [i.e., the appearance of objects] [86] one identifies the obstructions in one’s own continuum, the reasoning comes to be within the Complete Enjoyment Body’s mode of communication. When [through that sign] one identifies the basic mind of unimpeded brilliance, the reasoning comes to be within the Manifest Enlightenment Body’s mode of communication. When one knows from the very moment they appear that [appearances] are empty entities, the reasoning comes to be within the Vajra Body’s mode of communication, and when one sees just a single thing as a way to know a variety of the thought in Secret Mantra—just as a single [phrase] of a Conqueror’s

³¹⁵ Just as one uses a mirror to view dirt and so forth on one’s face, these reasonings help one to identify one’s obstructions through seeing all appearances as the self-appearances of one’s own mind.

³¹⁶ *kun yid jug pa* (85.5). This refers to the belief that when a Buddha speaks everyone in the audience hears exactly what they need to hear for their progress toward enlightenment.

³¹⁷ About this, Jeffrey said:

It can get so that the appearance of inherent existence itself draws one into emptiness, because one immediately reflects on the discrepancy [between what appears and the way it is]. So, as soon as you see appearance, it draws you into emptiness. One uses the appearance of objects as the sign of emptiness, and thus the appearance itself is a mode of communication of non-production.

pure speech dawns as various types of language and various meanings according to the situation of each trainee—the reasoning comes to be within the Emanation Body’s mode of communication.

THE FIVE PHRASES [86.3]

As for the third, the five phrases are these five modes expressed in words. Words that indicate [all phenomena] to be the self-appearance of non-production are the words of the Reality Body. Words that are signs of the hidden intention are those of the Enjoyment Body. Words that indicate [all phenomena] to be indifferentiable [with emptiness] like a vajra are those of the Vajra Body. Words and letters that indicate [all phenomena] to be the self-appearance of primordial wisdom are those of the Manifest Enlightenment Body, and the transmitted words of the definitive instructions are words of the Emanation Body. When those [five] are condensed, there are two, as [Buddhaguhya] says in his *Stages of the Path*:

Although they are thus, when condensed there are two:

Four without subsequent analysis and one with subsequent analysis.³¹⁸

These two are: (1) “the four exalted bodies’ reasonings for understanding without analysis”, being done in terms of trainees with very sharp faculties who understand the tantra’s meaning without relying greatly on the weariness of analysis, and (2) “the Emanation Body’s reasonings for understanding with analysis”, [87] being done in terms of [trainees with] dull faculties who understand the tantra’s meaning mainly in dependence upon doing analysis. When [the reasonings] are comprehended in this [way], I think that, from among the five phrases, a phrase that teaches [all phenomena] to be the self-appearance of non-production must be a precise³¹⁹ indication of the meaning through an utterance such as “All phenomena are not produced” without elaborately explaining it. Extend that analysis to the reasonings of

³¹⁸ *lam rim las/ de lta mod kyi bsdu na gnyis/ lbzhi rjes mi dpyod gcig rjes dpyod/* (86.5).

³¹⁹ *bcar phog tu* (87.2).

the three other exalted bodies. That being the case, although those with supremely sharp faculties do not rely on extensive teachings of the reasonings for understanding the tantra's meaning, it is nonetheless definite that a substitute of a reasoning is necessary, since [otherwise], without there being a cause [for realization], there would be no realization of the tantra's meaning.

Furthermore, the [trainees who are] the main object, i.e., the purpose for teaching the [verbal] reasonings, are called "those with dull faculties" in comparison with the former [trainees with supremely sharp faculties mentioned above]. However, in general they are [trainees] with very sharp faculties, because they are the main, special, intended trainees of this tantra. [The main intended trainees of this tantra must be those with very sharp faculties,] because it is unsuitable [to say] that this tantra, which is the pinnacle of the whole tantric corpus, was intended for those with dull faculties.

EMANATION BODY'S REASONINGS FOR UNDERSTANDING THROUGH ANALYSIS
[87.6]

With regard to the reasonings of the Emanation Body [which are reasonings for understanding through analysis], there are two types: reasonings where the meanings of the words are concordant and those where the meanings of the words are discordant. [88] The first are delineations upon conjoining the meaning to be proven and the reasoning without the words being contradictory. I think this short phrase, "without the words being contradictory", must be added [here, because] if [the difference] referred to whether or not something was a fully qualified contradictory reasoning, there would be no way to posit reasonings where the meanings of the words are discordant.³²⁰

³²⁰ A "fully qualified contradictory reasoning" means a statement where the reason contradicts the predicate. Khenpo Namdröl gave the following syllogism as an example: "The subject, a sound, is impermanent, because it is permanent" (*sgra chos can/ mi rtag pa yin te rtag pa yin pa'i phyir*). That is a fully qualified contradiction. This is not what Jikmé Tenpé Nyima is referring to by reasonings in which the meanings of the words are discordant. Instead, he is referring to reasonings where the words are contradictory (in being opposites) but the

[Reasonings where the meanings of the words accord] are of two types: reasonings from valid scriptural sayings and reasonings where the words accord [with the lower vehicles] but the meanings are superior. The first are explanations according to the actual teaching of a tantric scripture. There are four of these, consisting of the reasonings of the four realizations, those of the three purities, those of the four equalities, and those of the great entity.³²¹

THE FOUR REALIZATIONS [88.4]

Concerning the reasonings of the four realizations, the eleventh chapter of the tantra says:

The sole cause and the method of the syllables,
Blessing into magnificence and direct perception,
By these four types of thorough realization,
Everything is the great Conqueror of manifest completeness.³²²

With respect to that, the various appearances of ordinary abodes, enjoyments, etc., and the minds that have various ways of conceiving those appearances as good or bad, to be abandoned or adopted, and so forth, are the thoroughly afflicted class of cyclic existence, and appearances of the perfect primordial wisdom, which are the opposite of those, are the pure class of nirvāṇa. Neither of these is established in the realm or expanse of the mind's fundamental mode of abiding. That expanse alone is the cause or basis of appearance for all those [pure and impure appearances], and if, from the perspective of that expanse, the appearances and minds of cyclic existence were established, the expanse would fall into the

meaning is not. He will later give the following syllogism as an example of a reasoning where the meaning of the words is discordant: "The subject, mind-itself, is nothing whatsoever, because it is anything [whatsoever] since in its mode of appearance it appears by itself without hindrance" (*sems nyid chos can/ yang dag par ci yang ma yin tel/ snang tshul du ma 'gags par rang snang bas ci yang yin pa'i phyir*, 101.6-102.1). Here, although the words are contradictory, the meaning is not.

³²¹ *rtogs pa bzhi'il dag pa gsum gyil mnyam pa bzhi'i/ bdag nyid chen po'i gtan tshigs* (88.3-88.4). These are the well-known "axioms" of Mahāyoga. See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 275-276.

³²² *rgyud kyi le'u bcu gcig par/ rgyud gcig pa dang yig 'bru'i tshull/ lbyin gyis brlabs dang mngon sum pal/ rab tu rtog pa rnam bzhi yis/ lthams cad mngon rdzogs rgyal po che/* (88.4-88.5). Cf., *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 187.1.

class of cyclic existence, whereby it would be unsuitable to purify those appearances and minds. However, if the pure appearances were established from the perspective of that [expanse], [the expanse] would fall under the pure class [of phenomena], whereby it would not be suitable to be the basis for the appearances of cyclic existence. If the appearances and minds were established autonomously or under their own power, then in the final realm there would be no basis for appearance. Since [these positions] are incorrect, that mode of establishment must be refuted. Therefore, the [Vimalamitra's] *Eye Commentary* extensively explains these as reasonings that one with the refutations of the four extreme [types of] production [in the Great Vehicle].³²³ Since that is the case, it is asserted that the final mode of abiding of the expanse does not have even the slightest very subtle elaborations of dualistic appearance. This is an analysis that starts from an emptiness that is an affirming negative.

In short, when setting up the practice, it is said that all four—sole cause, mode of syllables, blessing, and direct perception—are established as reasonings through apprehending [the following] four [facts] as what are to be proven:

1. [the reasoning of the sole cause proves that] the nature [of the expanse] is unproduced;
2. [the reasoning of the mode of syllables proves that] its play is unobstructed;
3. [the reasoning of blessing proves that] its entity is indifferentiable, and
4. [the reasoning of direct perceptions proves that] its characteristic is separate from awareness. [90]

THE REASONING OF THE SOLE CAUSE [90.1]

When [the reasonings] are applied to that statement, [the reasoning of the sole cause] is as follows:

The subject, the appearances of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa, are not produced

³²³ *spyān 'grel las mtha' bzhi'i skye 'gog dang gcig du bral gyi rig pa rgyas par bshad dol* (89.4).

within the nature of the expanse, because there is no other final basis for the appearance of those two apart from that single expanse.³²⁴

One should understand this to be the mode of setting up [the reasonings as presented] in the *Ornament of the Intention*. The scholars of Magical Emanation say:

Although, in that way, the factor of appearance is not established from the perspective of the expanse, it is not possible for the expanse to be devoid of primordial wisdom, and primordial wisdom has a spontaneously established factor of appearance. Just as, when there is no rope, there is no basis for mistaking it to be a snake, if the mind's fundamental mode of abiding had no appearance at all, then there would necessarily be no mistaken appearances whatsoever.

This is the [incontrovertible] vajra-word.

Furthermore, due to the quintessential point, stated above, that the root expanse does not fall into either class, it dawns by itself as boundless,³²⁵ illusion-like appearances. The meaning of “boundless” is a limitless [number of] particulars and [it also points to the fact] that even one thing such as water can appear as anything due to [one's] karma, [the use of] knowledge-mantras, [the practice of] concentration, and so forth. In brief, [the expanse] is not cut off in any direction. In this tantra, [91] it is said again and again that everything is exhausted as merely names. This is the final reason for boundless appearances, but the reason for appearances not being established in the expanse also resides there.

³²⁴ The expanse is the basis for the appearance of cyclic existence or nirvāṇa in terms of whether it is realized or not. When it is not realized, cyclic existence appears. When it is realized, nirvāṇa appears. Neither class of appearance is established in the expanse itself. For, if either of them were, it could not act as the basis for the appearance of the other.

³²⁵ *ris med* (90.5).

THE REASONING OF THE MODE OF SYLLABLES [91.2]

Although the appearances of primordial wisdom have no boundary or direction, the mind apprehends them as distinct forms in certain directions. Not only that but even when on the stage of completion one sees empty form, the energy, through which it dawns boundlessly and pervasively, is not complete, but the adventitious conceptions and obstructions [still] engage in distinctions. That appearance is not the final factor of its fundamental mode of being. When there is no pollution by adventitious [minds], all the types of maṇḍalas composed of the self-appearances, which are none other than the primordial wisdom of Vajrasattva, have a thoroughly unbounded extent like the sphere of reality. Such a thing is called “the appearance of myriad purities”, and just that is also the very entity of the thoroughly pure deities. Thus, it is well known that all the pure residences and residents have the entity of a Tathāgata. This is referred to as “the manner of syllables” and “establishing appearances as deities”. When the practice of the reasoning is set up, [the syllogism] is as it occurs in *The Ornament to the Intention*:

With regard to the subject—the tone of non-production or mind-itself—its unimpeded play dawns by itself as the enlightened body, speech, and minds of the deities, [92] because such is realized through the illustration that [in Sanskrit and Tibetan] the non-descript letter, ཨ (a) itself, appears without hindrance in the many distinct letters [of the alphabet].³²⁶

That the sphere is without conceptual elaborations is like the fact that the letter ཨ (a) does not possess the many [other] letters [within it]. Nevertheless, various appearances dawn as the display of that sphere. This is like the fact that the collection of vowels and consonants occur through transforming the ཨ (a) by [applying] different effective forces at the five

³²⁶ *dgongs rgyan las 'byung ba ltar/ sems nyid skye med kyi gdangs chos can/ rol ba 'gags med lha'i sku gsung thugs su rang snang ba yin te/ mtshon du med pa'i yi ge a nyid mtshon byed yi ge du mar ma 'gag par snang bas mtshon nas rtogs pa'i phyir/ (91.6-92.1).*

stations [of speech, i.e., the lips, teeth, palate, back of the mouth, and throat]. In the context of a suddenist on the path of release, *The Ocean* says:³²⁷

Due to appearing as enlightened body, speech, and mind,

Everything without exception is realized as the ornament of communication.

Accordingly, one realizes the indifferenciability of the superior two truths through the illustration that the three letters—ཨ་ (*a*), ཨུ་ (*u*), and མ་ (*m*)—are combined into the single syllable, ཨོ་ (*om*).³²⁸ This is also called “the mode of syllables”.

THE REASONING OF BLESSING [92.5]

For instance, when a white cloth is led through the [dye of] the madder root,³²⁹ it becomes red. Similarly, when viewed from the perspective of the sole cause and the mode of syllables, all phenomena—whatever and however they appear—dawn as the sole maṇḍala of the conqueror, which is the indifferenciability of the special two truths. Thereby, [93] all appearances and activities are blessed into Buddhahood by those two modes. When explained like that, this agrees with *The Garland of Views*,³³⁰ and it is evident that one can legitimately apply this to the reasoning of blessing in this context. I think it is also easy to understand when the application is set up as follows:

³²⁷ *rgya mtsho* (92.4). Tb.437.

³²⁸ Here, he is referring to the pronunciation of ཨོ་ (*om*). The “o” is considered to be composed of an “a” plus a “u”.

³²⁹ *btsod* (92.5). Chandra Das (1005) gives the Sanskrit equivalent as *māñjīṣṭā*, which he translates as “a creeper”. Monier-Williams (774) defines *māñjīṣṭā* as “Indian madder, *Rubia Munjista*”, the root of which is used to make a red dye.

³³⁰ *lta phreng dang mthun* (93.1). *The Garland of Views* (10.6-11.2) says the following about the reasoning of blessing:

The realization by way of blessing is, for instance, like the way white cloth is when it is inserted into [a solution] that has the power to dye it red. The power to bless all phenomena into Buddhahood is realized as a blessing through the power of the sole cause and the mode of syllables. (*byin gyis brlabs kyi rtogs pa ni dper na ras dkar po la dmar por byin gyis rlab pa'i mthu btsang la yod pa bzhin du chos thams cad sangs rgyas par byin gyis rlob pa'i mthu yang / rgyu gcig pa dang yig 'bru'i tshul gyi mthus byin gyis rlob par rtogs pa'o*)

The subject, the two superior truths, is an indifferentiable entity, because such [a realization] issues from the blessing or force of delineating those two as the nature and its play.³³¹

Or, in another way one should say:

The subjects, these things that appear, are primordially purified and extended into the nature that is the indifferentiability or union of the two superior truths, because such is seen through the power or blessing of the two realizations, sole cause and the manner of syllables.³³²

THE REASONING OF DIRECT PERCEPTION [93.4]

Thus, all phenomena become enlightened into the indifferentiability of the [two] truths. Which consciousness clearly establishes that? This is taught in the following way. Even when those with clever minds analyze it for a long time, they are unable to see it directly, because it is not within the scope³³³ of the [ordinary] mind, in the same way that the spheres of activity³³⁴ for gods and humans are different. However, when the unwavering thought of self-luminous primordial wisdom that transcends the [ordinary] mind dawns, at first one

³³¹ *lhag pa'i bden gnyis chos can/ ngo bo dbyer med yin tel khyod gnyis rang bzhin dang rol pa r gtan la phab pa'i byin rlabs sam shugs las de ltar thon pa'i phyir/*

³³² *'di ltar snang ba'i dngos po chos can/ lhag pa'i bden gnyis dbyer med dam zung 'jug gi rang bzhin du ye nas sangs rgyas pa yin tel rgyud gcig pa dang yig 'br'i tshul du rtogs pa gnyis kyi stobs sam byin rlabs las de ltar mthong ba'i phyir* (93.3-93.4). Neither of these syllogisms is found in the *Ornament of the Intention*, which gives the following syllogism (taken from the electronic edition):

[With regard to the subject] the two—the non-produced nature and [its] unimpeded play, by the power of actually realizing them there implicitly arises the blessing of realizing their indifferentiability, because, through the spontaneous presence of being the entity of the seven treasures of the superior ultimate [truth], the container [worlds] and the contained [sentient beings] appear on their own as the maṇḍala of enlightened body and primordial wisdom, [in terms of] isolating [the factor of] its appearance (*rang bzhin skye med dang rol pa 'gags med gnyis dngos su rtogs pa'i mthus de gnyis ngo bo dbyer med du rtogs pa'i byin rlabs shugs la 'byung ba yin tel_ lhag pa don dam dkor bdun ngo bo nyid rgyur lhun gyis grub pas de'i snang ldog snod bcud sku dang ye shes kyi dkyil 'khor du rang snang ba'i phyir/*

³³³ *spyod yul* (93.5).

³³⁴ *spyod yul* (93.5).

experiences something like the bliss of [having] a young virgin. Experiencing this, one does not know how to express it, [94] and although one may have confidence in that, it [still] has to be seen by oneself in an unbiased manner. The reasoning of direct perception is as follows:

The subject, the indifferenciability of the two truths, is beyond the scope of [ordinary] awareness, because it is realized by self-knowing direct perception in its objectless self-luminosity.³³⁵

One should remember the previous explanations about the statements, “the sphere, primordial wisdom, and the mind,” and not confuse [these words] with the general terminology of [other] texts.

THE THREE PURITIES [94.3]

The root tantra says, “The vessels (worlds), their contents (beings), and mental continuums are realized to be pure and....”³³⁶ Concerning this, one can state:

The subject, the phenomena of inner and outer appearances, is primordially purified and extended, because of possessing the three purities.³³⁷

Or, one can state:

The subject, the triad of vessels, contents, and continuums, is primordially purified and extended, because they are respectively purified into the five male

³³⁵ *bden pa dbyer med chos can/ blo'i spyod yul las 'das pa yin tel rang rig mngon sum gyis yul med rang gsal du rtogs pa'i phyir/* (94.1-94.2). This is slightly different from the syllogism given in the *Ornament of the Intention* (electronic version):

The indifferenciable [two] truths are beyond the scope of [ordinary] awareness, because it is realized in its objectless self-clarity by a self-knowing direct perceiver without the duality of object viewed and consciousness that views (*bden pa dbyer med de'ang blo'i spyod yul las 'das pa yin tel_ bta bya'i yul dang lta byed kyi shes pa gnyis su med pa rang rig mngon sum gyis yul med rang gsal du rtogs pa'i phyir*).

³³⁶ *rtsa rgyud nyid las/ snod bcud rgyud rnams dag rtogs shing /* (94.3). This is also in chapter 11 of the root tantra several verses after the one on the four realizations. Cf., *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 188.2.

³³⁷ *snag ba phyi nang gi chos rnams chos can/ ye nas sangs rgyas pa yin tel dag pa gsum dang ldan pa'i phyir/* (94.4).

Tathāgatas, the five female Tathāgatas, and the five primordial wisdoms.³³⁸

These two statements have the same meaning. Furthermore, however many particular inner and outer things [we perceive] now, the conception of ordinary appearance extends to them all, and just as that extends, so one deviates from the pure mode of abiding. Similarly, [95] however much one exercises³³⁹ the view that knows all those observed objects to be primordially pure entities, to that degree one greatly cuts through wrongly apprehended appearances. Even though there are limitless observed objects that are wrongly apprehended appearances, here they are described by condensing them into the three—vessel, contents, and mental continuums.

To illustrate this with one of the aggregates, the fact that the mere aggregate of form abides in the identity of all the aggregates—feeling, etc.—is the vajra-aggregate of one taste, and that some part of the vajra-aggregate of one taste pervades all animate and inanimate things is the eternal, most pervasive form-aggregate.³⁴⁰ These two together are the meaning of the pure form-aggregate.³⁴¹ These meanings also are the final meaning of “boundless self-appearances,”³⁴² and having already explained that the form-aggregate of sentient beings is primordially pure as boundless self-appearances, by just such a method all three—container

³³⁸ *snod bcud rgyud gsum chos can/ ye nas sangs rgyas pa yin tel/ rim bzhin de bzhin gshegs pa yum lnga dang yab lnga dang ye shes lngar dag pa'i phyir* (94.4-94.5). This is similar to the syllogism that Lochen Dharmashrī gives in the *Ornament to the Intention* (electronic edition), which is slightly more elaborate:

Everything included within the external container world [composed of] the five elements, the beings who are contained therein [composed of] the five aggregates, and their individual collections of eight consciousnesses is primordially enlightened as the maṇḍala of enlightened bodies and primordial wisdom, because those three—container, contents, and continua—are respectively pure just as they are as the five mother Tathāgatas, the five father [Tathāgatas], and the five primordial wisdoms (*phyi snod kyi 'jig rten 'byung ba lnga dang /_nang bcud kyi sems can phung po lnga dang de dag rang rang gi rnam shes tshogs brgyad kyis bsdu pa rnam ye nas sku dang ye shes kyi dkyil 'khor du sangs rgyas pa yin tel/ snod bcud rgyud gsum po de rim pa ji lta bar de bzhin gshegs pa yum lnga dang /_yab lnga dang /_ye shes lngar dag pa'i phyir*).

³³⁹ *rtal sbyang pa* (95.1).

³⁴⁰ *rtaḡ khyab chen po'i gzugs phung* (95.3). This reading is supported by Gangtok (88.1) and Khenpo Namdröl.

³⁴¹ *dag pa'i gzugs phung* (95.3).

³⁴² *rang snang ris med* (95.4).

worlds and so forth—are thoroughly pure. This is the meaning of the three aspects of purity.

THE FOUR EQUALITIES [95.5]

The text says, “Through the two equalities and the two superior equalities.”³⁴³ [The reasoning is done] like this:

The subjects, all appearing phenomena, are primordially enlightened, because through the four equalities they abide equally.³⁴⁴

As for these four, all inner and outer things occur in two ways, appearing to the mind as pure and impure, [96] but they do not exist in the way they are viewed, or conceited,³⁴⁵ as truly being good or bad, to be adopted or abandoned. With respect to the abiding reality of those phenomena, there are two [kinds of] ultimates: the enumerated and the non-enumerated.³⁴⁶ However, except for this being a differentiation relying on the features of the subjective consciousnesses [comprehending them], [all phenomena] are equal in being non-produced and free from extremes. And, even when it is done in terms of either correct or false conventionalities, these are equal in being empty of true [existence] like illusions. Those two [equalities] are the way of positing the equality of existence and peace which is common to both sūtra and tantra. This is not merely for the sake of leading [trainees of] lower [vehicles to this one], but the yogis of this path must view the equality of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa

³⁴³ *mnyam nyid lhag pa'i mnyam gnyis kyis!* (95.5). Cf., *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 188.2-188.3.

³⁴⁴ *'di ltar snang ba'i chos thams cad chos can! ye nas sangs rgyas pa yin tel mnyam pa bzhis mnyam par gnas pa'i pbyir!* (95.6). Lochen Dharmashrī give the following syllogism in his *Ornament to the Intention* (electronic edition):

All phenomena are primordially enlightened, because through the four equalities one realizes the non-duality of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa (*chos thams cad ye nas sangs rgyas pa yin tel mnyam pa bzhis 'khor 'das gnyis med du rtogs pa'i pbyir!*)

³⁴⁵ *rlom pa* (96.1).

³⁴⁶ *rnam grangs yin min gyi don dam gnyis* (96.1-96.2). Khenpo Namdröl explained the enumerated ultimate as the “empty apprehender of non-true existence” (*bden par med pa'i 'dzin stong*) and that it was called such because it was only ‘counted’ as an ultimate truth but was not an actual one. The “non-enumerate” ultimate is the actual final ultimate that is the negation of the four extremes of existence, non-existence, both, and neither. In more colloquial translation, these might be called the pseudo-ultimate and the non-pseudo-ultimate.

also through these modes, because these two are known by the epitaph, “the common equalities.”

However much one stresses a presentation of emptiness either as an affirming or non-affirming negative, it is only done in dependence on how one establishes the negation of that which is superimposed by the adventitious mind. From the perspective of the superior ultimate which has transcended the [ordinary] mind, it is devoid of the conventions of both negations. Similarly, when one meditates within having negated the impure misconceived appearances through the present coarse mind, [everything] dawns as pure. However, such purities and impurities [97] are not distinguished in terms of being or not being appearances to an adventitious mind,³⁴⁷ and one cannot establish the appearance of purity as the mode of abiding of impure things. Therefore, this is nothing but a trifling [realization]. Yet, when one comprehends it in relation to the actual superior conventional truth, all such karmic appearances and all appearances fabricated by meditative stabilization without abandoning or adopting any of them are equal in being solely the self-appearing circle of primordial wisdom, just like one does not find an ordinary stone on a golden island. These two [equalities] are the superior equalities.

When explaining that the self-arisen primordial wisdom is taught in the last wheel [of the doctrine], there is a great need to determine whether or not one should assert [the equalities taught therein to be] “superior equalities”, or “uncommon equalities”. Nevertheless, taking the sūtras that teach such to be exceptions, these [equalities] are posited as uncommon in relation to the sūtra system in general. Or in another way, [when one is explaining how the self-arisen primordial wisdom is contained in the last wheel] the essence of a Tathāgata is shown through the conceptual isolate of the seven riches of the ultimate, but the viewing of

³⁴⁷ Because they both are appearances of an adventitious mind. That is, this is a realization of the ordinary mind (*sems*), which is why in this meditation one cannot see the pure mode of abiding of all phenomena. Such can only be seen by the self-knowing primordial wisdom, the basis of all, the only truly non-adventitious mind.

appearances and occurrences as pure and equal in dependence upon that [essence of a Tathāgata by itself] does not exist in the system of the sūtras. Therefore, one should say, “From that perspective, these are posited as uncommon.” I think the latter [statement] is better. In the *Ornament of the Intention* on the eleventh chapter, [the uncommon equalities] are explained according to the former [way]. But, it is easier to understand the way it occurs when the two equalities—that all phenomena are ultimately not produced and [98] conventionally like illusions—are posited as the common ones, and the two equalities—that all phenomena are ultimately the seven riches of the ultimate and conventionally the enlightened bodies and primordial wisdom—as the uncommon ones.

THE REASONING OF THE GREAT IDENTITY [98.1]

Although in accordance with [Buddhaguhya’s] *Layout of the Path*³⁴⁸ it seems suitable to cite the passage from the ninth chapter [of the tantra], “Self-arisen primordial wisdom appears without abiding,”³⁴⁹ this must be analyzed. As for the meaning [of this reasoning], it should be expressed as follows:

As for the phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvāṇa, in their mode of appearance they appear as many things, but in their mode of being they are not established as such, because they primordially abide as the identity of the sole self-arisen primordial wisdom, the unproduced mind-itself.³⁵⁰

It is said that this is illustrated by the example of knowing what [someone’s] family lineage is through the story of their ancestral history. In brief, all phenomena are taught as the direct

³⁴⁸ *lam rnam bkod* (98.2). This is the alternative name for Buddhaguhya’s *Greater Stages of the Path* (*lam rim chen mo*).

³⁴⁹ *rang byung ye shes gnas med snang* (98.2). Cf., *Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 184.4.

³⁵⁰ *'khor 'das kyi chos rnams chos can/ snang lugs [lā] du mar snang yang yin lugs la de ltar ma grub stel sems nyid skye med rang byung gi ye shes gcig gi bdag nyid du ye nas gnas pa'i phyi'* (98.2-98.3).

descendants³⁵¹ of the clear light or mind-itself.

Moreover, the four realizations delineate in general the essential points for viewing all [things] as pure and equal. The three purities demonstrate the way they are pure through differentiating the particulars. The four equalities differentiate the particulars of how they are equal, and the great identity determines that the end point of all the essential points of purity and equality is the self-arisen primordial wisdom. When these are explained like that, it fits with the commentator from Nyang³⁵² and with the thought of Mindrölling's Lochen Dharmashrī.

REASONINGS WHERE THE WORDS ACCORD [WITH THE LOWER VEHICLES] BUT THE MEANINGS ARE SUPERIOR [98.6]

There [99] are four of these: (1) the reasoning of the specific and general characteristics of the afflictive emotions, (2) the reasoning of being free from extremes, (3) the reasoning of division, and (4) the reasoning of illustrative examples. The first is as follows:

The five poisons or afflictive emotions are not truly established as objects to be abandoned, because in both their specific and general characteristics they are empty by way of entity.³⁵³

Although the positing of both general and specific characteristics for the five poisons is in accordance with the lower [systems], the method of positing these two [here] is not in

³⁵¹ *gdung rigs* (98.4). Literally, “bone family”, but in Tibetan this has the equivalent meaning to the English, “blood relative” or “direct descendant”.

³⁵² *nyang ṭi ka pa* (98.6). The exact reference here is unclear. Khenpo Namdröl thought it perhaps referred to the treasure-revealer Nyang-rel Nyi-me-ö-zer. However, Nyang is the name for a long river and its valley in west central Tibet. Several figures associated with the Zur tradition bore the toponymic name Nyang including Zur-bo-che's teacher, Nyang Ye-she-jung-ne, and one of Dropuk-ba's disciples, Nyang-nak-do-wo. One of Samdrup Dorjé's teachers was also called “the teacher from Nyang”, Nyang-dön Dor-je Seng-ge, and during the Dynastic Period the figure Nyang Ting-nge-dzin-zang-bo was an associate of Trisong Detsen and Vimalamitra. The title *ṭi ka pa*, or in its correct form *ṭī ka pa*, generally refers to one skilled in Indian commentarial traditions. Hence, the use of the Sanskrit word for commentary, *ṭīka*, in the designation.

³⁵³ *nyon mongs dug lnga chos can/ spang byar yang dag par ma grub stel rang spyi'i mtshan nyid gnyis char du ngo bo nyid kyis stong pa'i phyir/* (99.1-99.2).

agreement. In the lower systems their general characteristic is the aspect of a thoroughly non-pacified mind. As for their individual characteristics, ignorance is the aspect of thorough obscuration; anger is the aspect of a thoroughly belligerent mind; pride is the aspect of haughtiness;³⁵⁴ desire is the aspect of craving an object, and jealousy is the aspect of being unable to bear another's good fortune.³⁵⁵ But, here the general characteristic of the afflictive emotions is asserted to be that they are the basic mind free from elaborations, and their individual characteristic is asserted to be that the basic mind appears as different capacities of illusion. Hence, these [meanings] are called "superior". This latter characteristic does not refer to an isolated meaning [for each afflictive emotion] but refers to their nature or reality, and one should remember the explanation, given above in the section on the ground-continuum, of how the reality of the afflictive emotions are basic mind, primordial wisdom. [100] It is not that the former mode of explaining them [according to the sūtra interpretation] is not asserted here [in this system], but when the afflictive emotions are taken as the path, the main meaning is the latter, and that is a superior doctrine, which is not in accord with the lower systems.

The second, the reasoning of being free from extremes, is stated as follows:

As for the abiding reality of all phenomena, elaborations of extremes are in no way established in it, because it is devoid of being truly one or many.³⁵⁶

Although the words agree with [the way it is] commonly [explained that] emptiness lacks any extreme whatsoever—existence, non-existence, permanence, or annihilation, here [the reasoning] is superior because, having differentiated mind and primordial wisdom, it demonstrates that no conception of extremes functions within the sphere of primordial

³⁵⁴ *khengs pa* (99.4). Means "full, puffed up."

³⁵⁵ *phun tshogs* (99.4).

³⁵⁶ *chos thams cad kyi gnas lugs chos can/ khyod la mtha'i spros pa ci yang ma grub stel yang dag par gcig dang du ma dang bral ba'i phyir/* (100.1-100.2).

wisdom.

The third, the reasoning of division, is stated as follows:

The subject, a pot, has no inherent existence, because it is void when analyzed through having many features, such as shape, color, and so forth.³⁵⁷

In accordance with the common [presentation], those things that appear as coarse elements [mistakenly seem] to be truly established as they appear, but when that true establishment is divided into parts, it is not found [to exist], and such an awareness negates it. Although this is concordant in terminology, here this reasoning causes those phenomena, whose reality is [the syllable] མུམ་ (*mūm*),³⁵⁸ to dissolve into the sphere of the clear light. Therefore, it is superior.

The fourth, the reasoning by illustrative example, is stated as follows:

As for the subject, mind-itself, its entity is not in any way established, because it is not graspable, like space.³⁵⁹

Although stating it like this is terminologically concordant with the general way the scriptures apply the example's meaning, [101] it is said that here the reasoning is superior because apart from merely illustrating reality with the metaphor³⁶⁰ of space it is not for the sake of establishing the three modes of reasoning.³⁶¹ However, it appears that this needs some analysis.

³⁵⁷ *bum pa chos can/ rang bzhin med del dbyibs dang kha dog sogs chos du ma dang ldan pas brtags na dben pa'i phyir/* (100.4).

³⁵⁸ The syllable, *mūm*, is the seed-syllable for the Māmākī, the consort of Akṣobhya. In the *Secret Essence* tradition, she is the pure form of the earth-element. Thus, the true reality of something made from earth, such as a pot, is *mūm*.

³⁵⁹ *chos thams cad kyi gnas lugs chos can/ khyod la mtha'i spros pa ci yang ma grub stel yang dag par gcig dang du ma dang bral ba'i phyir/* (100.1-100.2).

³⁶⁰ *brda thabs* (101.1).

³⁶¹ *rtags kyi tshul gsum* (101.1). These are 1) the presence of the reason in the subject, i.e., that the mind-itself is not graspable; 2) the pervasion, i.e., that whatever is not graspable is not in any way established, and 3) the counter-pervasions, that whatever is established in any way would be graspable. On the three modes of reasoning, see Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 449-451, 730-733.

REASONINGS IN WHICH THE MEANING OF THE WORDS IS DISCORDANT [101.2]

These things that appear as things to ordinary sentient beings are primordially purified and extended as the indifferenciability of the superior two truths. However, they are not understood as such. The reason for this is as follows. When the secret essential of the superior two truths is brought to conclusion, one arrives at a point where the sphere of mind-itself is without any predication or is not established as anything, but the things which appear, dawning as any of a variety of things, exist like an illusory city. Hence, confused by this [illusory dawning], [ordinary beings] mistakenly wander away from the sphere's mode of existence. On the other hand, when one identifies the view [of this system], [the ability of the ground to] dawn as any type of appearance is established as the reason for the sphere being without predication. With this marvelous skill-in-means one unravels the knot of conceiving "many" and "one taste" as separate positions. This is called "destroying the conceptions that hold to the position of 'is' and 'is-not'" in [Buddhaguhya's] *Layout of the Path*.³⁶² Such a reasoning is explained as follows:

The subject, mind-itself, is genuinely not anything, [102] because it is anything since in its mode of appearance it unceasingly appears on its own [accord]. The reason is established, because it becomes whatever one analyzes and thinks it to be, and hence reality appears on its own as the entity of all phenomena.³⁶³

The basis for determining concordance and discordance in the reasonings where the words are concordant but the meaning superior and in the reasonings where the meanings of the words are discordant is not the same, because the former is posited as agreeing in terminology with the mode of explanation in the lower vehicles, and the latter is posited as

³⁶² *yin min gyi phyogs 'dzin gzbig pa zhes lam rnam bkod las gsungs te/* (101.6).

³⁶³ *sems nyid chos can/ yang dag par ci yang ma yin te/ snang tshul du ma 'gags par rang snang bas ci yang yin pa'i phyir/ rtags grub stel ji ltar brtags shing bsam par ltar 'gyur pas na chos kun gyi ngo bor chos nyid rang snang ba'i phyir/* (101.6-102.2).

the discordance, in language and meaning, between the predicate and the reason [of the syllogism]. The point of discordance in this latter [example] is merely the two phrases “is not anything” and “is anything”.

Furthermore, that delineation of how to identify the view, [using] as a source the four actual teachings of the tantric scripture, the four realizations and so forth, clearly unravels the final basis of the thought, which was hidden or not revealed, behind those conventions described in the scriptures of the lower [vehicles]—such as “specific and general [characteristics]”, “free from extremes”, and so forth. Having done so, it demonstrates that the other scriptural collections flow into this one. We call this the occurrence of a reasoning where the words are concordant but the meaning is superior. Also, within those four there appear to the unskilled what seem to be great contradictions. Having taken even these apparent contradictions as mutually beneficial aids, there incidentally issues forth, or one incidentally identifies, a marvelously fine quintessential point for not wandering into the abyss of deviant obscurations. [103] We call this the occurrence of discordant reasonings.

THE MEANING TO BE ESTABLISHED [103]

What happens when one delineates such? One will find the actual view, the characteristic of knowledge. As for the entity of that, *The Stages of the Path* says:

Just like a reflection in a clear ocean,
Without applying the mind to the [objectival] basis of language,
There is the self-knowing direct perception free from observed objects.
Without disturbing the self-clarity free from the three [times],
One brings to completion the view that relies on hearing and thinking

And that acts as a definite platform [on the way to Buddhahood].³⁶⁴

Accordingly, with a self-knowing direct perception one nakedly realizes the abiding reality, or indifferentiability of the two superior truths, as a self-luminosity devoid of objects. This direct perception and the direct perception on the occasion of the four realizations have the same meaning. To explain it clearly, having actually found the realization of the clear light, one produces a wisdom, which is a factor of that [clear light]. In *[Lamp Illuminating] the Inner Text* it says:

The lamp of spontaneous primordial wisdom itself

Is the supreme, naturally luminous eye.³⁶⁵

In this context, regarding the explanation of the phrase “self-knowing direct perception”, [it is used] because one realizes in direct perception that the primordial wisdom abiding in oneself is the whole object of understanding.³⁶⁶ [104] However, when the clear light of the path dawns to direct perception, one does not necessarily directly see the sphere of reality. Therefore, this is not in contradiction with the assertion by both the foremost Dröl and Yung³⁶⁷ that at this [time] one sees reality by way of a meaning generality. To the extent that one is unable to engage the sphere of the clear light because of the way that even the slightest appearance of duality interrupts it, to that degree one does not nakedly see reality. That mere amount of perception is not a thoroughly complete and fully qualified sphere of non-conceptuality.

³⁶⁴ *lam rim las/ rgya mtsho dwangs pa'i gzugs brnyan ltar/ lsga rten yid la byed min par/ rang rig mngon sum dmigs bral bal/ rang gsal gsum bral mi bgul bar/ lnges par gdeng su gang byas pal/ lthos bsam brten pa'i ltar mthar phyin/* (103.2-103.3).

³⁶⁵ *khog gzhung las lhun grub ye shes sgron ma nyid/ rang bzhin gsal ba spyen gyi mchog* (103.5).

³⁶⁶ *rang gnas kyi ye shes go yul du ma lus par mngon sum du rtogs pa'i rgyu mtshan yin* (103.6f).

³⁶⁷ *rje sgrol g.yung rnam gnyis* (104.6). Samdrup Dorjé and Yungtönpa . See *supra*.

Question: If there is one on the gradual path of release who nakedly realizes the clear light, is not it contradictory that he or she must again enter into the yoga of the great empty through the series of five experiences?³⁶⁸

Response: It is not contradictory, because although one momentarily realizes the clear light like the sun peeking out from behind the clouds, it is still under the control of conceptuality, and therefore one needs to gradually attain stability, just as the Great Omniscient One said, “If it is identified but not made familiar, you will be taken by the enemy of conceptuality like a small child in battle.”³⁶⁹ If one does not contact the actual intention of the clear light but finds a certainty arisen from thinking about the two superior truths, [105] this must be asserted as just the ordinary characteristic of knowing. This completes the explanation of the characteristic of knowing.

In the context of dividing the Mahāyoga Tantras into three groups, it is said:

In the father tantras such as the *Secret Assembly Tantra* and so forth, the completion stage of radiant, empty winds is mainly taught. In the mother tantras such as the *Supreme Bliss* and so forth, the completion stage of blissful, empty drops is taught, and in the non-dual tantras such as the *Secret Essence* and so forth the completion stage of the great clear light primordial wisdom is taught.³⁷⁰

It is evident that the latter stage of completion refers to the path of release. As explained previously, in the path of method the generating, abiding, and increasing of the completion

³⁶⁸ *nyams lnga mthar chags kyi sgo nas* (104.4). The five experiences are explained below (108.6-110.1). They are the experience of movement (*g.yo ba'i nyams*), the experience of attainment (*thob pa'i nyams*), the experience of familiarization (*goms pa'i nyams*), the experience of stability (*brtan pa'i nyams*), and the experience of completion (*mthar phyin pa'i nyams*).

³⁶⁹ *kun mkhyen chen pos/ rang ngo 'phrod kyang goms 'driś ma byas na/ l'nam rtog dgras 'khyer g.yul ngo'i bu chung 'dra/* (104.5-104.6). The “Great Omniscient One” (*kun mkhyen chen po*) refers to Longchenpa.

³⁷⁰ *ma hā yo ga'i rgyud la gsum du 'byed skabs/ gsang 'dus sogs pha rgyud rnams so gsal stong rlung gi rdzogs rim dang / bde mchog sogs ma rgyud du bde stong tig le'i rdzogs rim dang / gsang snying sogs gnyis med rgyud las 'od gsal ye shes chen po'i rdzogs rim gtso bor ston zhes 'byung ba* (105.1-105.3).

stage primordial wisdom—each and every step—is done by the yoga of channels, winds, and drops. In this path [of release] it appears that one progresses in terms of taking the view as the path in lieu of [these yogas on the path of method], and it is not suitable [to say that] the path of method does not have that [method of taking the view as the path]. Therefore, it has been explained [here] extensively.

THE CONDITION—THE CHARACTERISTIC OF ENGAGING [105.5]

The *Stages of the Path* says:

In the way that worldly existences gradually ripen,

The stages of engagement are posited as five,

Because these are the self-awareness of all things.

Death is ultimate truth.

The intermediate birth is conventional [truth].

The three stages of a creature are the actual non-duality [of the two truths].³⁷¹

Accordingly, [106] having purified the misconceived appearances of ordinary birth, death, and intermediate state, taking the clear light of death as the path as the Reality Body is the ultimate yoga of the great empty. Taking the winds and minds of the intermediate state as the Complete Enjoyment Body is the conventional yoga of compassionate illusion. Then, there are the three stages of the yoga for purifying the coarse birth-states along with their surroundings into the Emanation Body. These are the five meditative stabilizations (*ting nge 'dzin lnga*).³⁷²

³⁷¹ *lam rim las/ srid pa rim par smin tshul gyis/ l'jug pa'i yan lag lnga ru bzhag /gang dag dngos kun rang rig phyir/ /shi ba don dam bden pa stel /skye ba bar ma kun rdzob yin/ /skyes pa'i rim gsung gnyis med don/ (105.5-105.6).*

³⁷² As the meditation purifying the birth-state into the Emanation Body is broken down into three parts, there are five meditative stabilizations all together. These five are in order:

1. the yoga of the great empty (*stong pa chen po'i rnal 'byor*),
2. the yoga of compassionate illusion (*snying rje sgyu ma'i rnal 'byor*),
3. the single seal (*phyag rgya gcig pa*),
4. the seal with elaboration (*phyag rgya spros bcas*),

As for those last three stages, the sole seal is what accords with the period from when the scent-eater³⁷³ enters the womb to when [the child] comes out, and (4) the seal with elaboration is what accords with the period from birth to when the child has an extended circle of friends. (5) The collective, group practice is what accords with the mature person achieving a definite form and a profitable [occupation]. It is explained like this in the *Six Stages*.³⁷⁴ As for the sole seal, when it is joined with the generation of the three vajra-rites, Lochen Dharmashrī describes it as follows, citing the *Importance of Heruka*³⁷⁵ as his source.³⁷⁶ The seed-syllable of enlightened speech is like the winds and minds of the intermediate state initially entering into the father's sperm and the mother's egg. The hand-symbol of enlightened-mind is like the condition of hardening such as the first two weeks of embryonic development.³⁷⁷ The completion of the enlightened body is like giving birth to a completed body from a tortoise or fish egg.

5. the collective achievement in groups (*tshom bu tshogs sgrub*).

³⁷³ *dri za* (106.2). I.e., consciousness in the intermediate state between rebirths.

³⁷⁴ *rim drug* (106.4). The *Six Stages* (*rim pa drug pa*) is a commentary on the *Secret Essence* path written by Vilāsavajra (P4741, vol. 83, 139.3.6-144.2.8). The six stages elaborated in that text consist of view plus the five meditative stabilizations, listed with slightly different names:

1. the characteristic of knowing about the meaning that naturally abides (*rang bzhin gyis gnas pa'i don rjes su shes pa'i mtshan nyid*)
2. the stage of meditative stabilization on suchness (*de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin gyi rim pa*),
3. the stage of meditative stabilization that is like an illusion (*sgyu ma lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin gyi rim pa*),
4. the stage of subtle meditative stabilization (*phra mo'i ting nge 'dzin gyi rim pa*),
5. the stage of meditative stabilization that differentiates appearances (*snang ba rnam par 'byed pa'i ting nge 'dzin gyi rim pa*),
6. the stage of inconceivable, spontaneously present meditative stabilization (*bsam yas lhun gyi grub pa'i ting nge 'dzin gyi rim pa*).

³⁷⁵ *he ru ka galpo* (106.6).

³⁷⁶ The three vajra rites (*rdo rje'i cho ga gsum*) are a method of generating oneself as the deity, described in terms of enlightened body (*sku*), speech (*gsung*), and mind (*thugs*). The first rite is to meditate on the seed-syllable of the deity, or enlightened speech. In the second rite this transforms into the hand-symbol of the deity, which is enlightened mind, and in the third rite, the hand-syllable transforms into the complete enlightened body of the deity. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (vol. 1, 279 & vol. 2, 116) describes the three rites in the context of Mahāyoga.

³⁷⁷ *mer nur* (106.5). In Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, the first week of development is called *mer mer po* or 'of oval shape' and "looks like rice water or sweetened curd." The second week it is called *nur nur po* or 'of oblong shape' and "thick cream or coagulated fat" (Guenther, p.64). The passage above is referring to both weeks by conflating their names into a single term.

As for other ways of dividing the meditative stabilizations, there are the two stages of generation and completion. [107] It is said in the supplement to this very tantra:

The stages of a moon, vajra, and so forth
That join one to the aspect of the deity
Are explained to be “the stage of generation”.
The yoga that is achieved naturally
Is called “the stage of completion”.³⁷⁸

Thus, the stage of generation is:

The fabricated yoga which, having taken the two factors of (1) the birth, death, and the intermediate state of cyclic existence and (2) the three uncommon, enlightened bodies as concordant in aspect, fulfills the essential points of purity, completion, and ripening when it is meditated on as the ripener of the stage of completion.³⁷⁹

And, the stage of completion is:

The unfabricated yoga that is the type of path that actually transforms birth, death, and the intermediate state into the three enlightened bodies.³⁸⁰

Therefore, some earlier [sages] have said, “The stage of generation is an imputational nature; the stage of completion, a thoroughly established one.” This is, indeed, a profound thought.

³⁷⁸ *'di nyid kyi rgyud phyi ma las/ lha yi rnam pa'i sbyor ba yil /zal ba rdo rje la sogs rim/ /bskyed pa'i rim pa zhes su bshad/ /rang bzhin grub pa'i rnal 'byor nil /rdzogs pa'i rim pa zhes byar brjod/ (107.1-107.2).*

³⁷⁹ *'khor ba'i skye 'chi bar do gsum dang / thun mong ma yin pa'i sku gsum ste gzhi 'bras de gnyis char dang rnam par mthun par byas nas rdzogs rim gyi smin byed du sgom pa'i dag rdzogs smin gsum gyi gnad tshang ba'i bcas ma'i rnal 'byor ni bskyed rim (107.2-107.3).* As for the three essential points (*gnad*), Khenpo Namdröl said the following. Purity refers to completely removing objects of abandonment. Completion refers to bring to completion in oneself the full measure of all the good qualities of the result state, and ripening refers to how the stage of generation acts as the ripener for the stage of completion.

³⁸⁰ *skye 'chi bar do sku gsum du dngos su sgyur ba'i lam gyi rigs su gnas pa'i ma bcas pa'i rnal 'byor ni rdzogs rim yin (107.3-107.4).*

Or else, [when the stages of meditative stabilization are divided] there are two: meditation by belief (*mos sgom*) and definite completion (*nges rdzogs*). Meditation by belief is:

To practice, through just thought and belief, a full means of achievement—from the circle of protection to the bodily protection of donning armor—in each session of meditation, despite not having attained stability in the meditative stabilizations.³⁸¹

And definite completion is:

Training in the final formation in a way that, when one has completed the five experiences—motivation, attainment, familiarity, stability, and finality—in any one of the former five [meditative stabilization], such as the great empty and so forth, one brings the initial [experiences] into later and later [meditative stabilizations].³⁸² [108]

It is explained that way in the [Buddhaguhya's] *Stages of the Path*. Although one can bring the stage of generation to final completion through applying the meditation of this method described as “meditation by belief” in four sessions, nevertheless that [kind of explanation] does not occur much in this oral tradition. It is also not held here [in this system] that meditating on all the steps of the means of achievement in each session is necessarily meditation by belief from the division into meditation by belief and definite completion, because it is said that one meditates in such a way even in the context of the group practice, which is [within] definite completion. This meditation by belief is necessarily a stage of generation, and the meditative stabilizations that are to be fully cultivated within each of its

³⁸¹ *ting nge 'dzin la brtan pa ma thob kyang mos mno tsam gyis thun re'i nang du srung 'khor nas go ba go lus srung bar gyis sgrub thabs tshang ba re nyams su len pa mos sgom* (107.5-107.6)

³⁸² *stong chen sogs lnga po snga ma snga ma la g.yo thob goms brtan mthar phyin gyi nyams lnga rdzogs pa na gdod phyi ma phyi ma la 'jug pa'i tshul gyis mthar chags su slob pa nges rdzogs* (107.6-108.1).

session are just those four ranging from the seal with elaboration on down.³⁸³ However, many who have accomplished non-seeing, which is a sign of mental stability, have found it necessary to posit [some] performances of group practice also as meditation by belief. Therefore, in general there are all five [meditative stabilizations] within meditation by belief.

It is said that definite completion has two parts, [the stages of] generation and completion, and that even in terms of how one trains in it there are two different [ways] due to the particular features of the person [practicing]. These are (1) the method of training in the union of generation and completion from the very beginning and (2) entering into the stage of completion [only] after having finally completed the stage of generation.

As for the first, initially through the conceptual yoga of the great empty, [109] one completely cultivates each of the five experiences. The experience of movement (*g.yo ba'i nyams*) is like water falling down a steep hill. The experience of attainment (*thob pa'i nyams*) is like water falling into a deep chasm. The experience of cultivation (*goms pa'i nyams*) is like water flowing slowing on the northern plains. The experience of stability (*brten pa'i nyams*) is like the surface of a lake rippled by the wind, and the experience of completion (*mthar phyin gyi nyams*) is like an ocean without waves.

From within having cultivated each of these five experiences with the conceptual yoga of the great empty, there issues forth a familiarity with the taste of the clear light experience in the completion stage. When that happens, one begins to meditate on the yoga of compassionate illusion with [mental] fabrications. That turns into the unfabricated compassionate illusion of the stage of completion. When the five experiences are completed, one trains in the stages of generation on observing the coarse and subtle sole seal. With that

³⁸³ Khen-po explained that on the stage of generation one meditates on the first four meditative stabilizations, or yogas—the great empty, illusory compassion, the single seal and the seal with elaboration—completely in each session. In the stage of completion, however, one cultivates each of the yogas, or meditative stabilizations, until it has been brought to completion. That is, one does not move on to the next higher yoga until one has all of the five experiences with the present stage.

as a cooperating condition, one sees the single seal, the enlightened body of the deity. One acquires the capacity of stable clarity with regard to that, and then one initially [does] the stage of generation also for the yoga of the seal of elaboration, gradually moving to the stage of completion. Having brought the seal of elaboration to completion, one connects [to the clear light] through the secondary cause of practicing collective achievement, whereby one attains the path of a superior. Since, for instance, this stage of generation of the sole seal is a fabricated yoga in the continuum of one who has not experienced the attainment of the stage of completion, it is called such things as “the completion [stage] of generation” and “the generation [stage] of completion”. [110]

As for the second [the serial practice of the stages of generation and completion], initially one meditates until the attainment of stability in the great empty of the generation stage. Then, one does that with compassionate illusion. When, through such stages, one arrives at the end of seal with elaboration’s generation stage, one accomplishes [the state of] an awareness-holder in either the desire or form [realms] through collective achievement. Then, one wanders in the lands of sky-dwellers,³⁸⁴ etc., and together with a group of *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* one will bring the five paths to completion in dependence on the stage of completion. It is said that although there are two such [ways], the actual way of meditating, mainly [used by] gradualists on the path of release, is the former.

[THE STAGE OF GENERATION]

Having stated merely the seeds for [a more detailed] analysis of such a general presentation, I will describe in part the individual identification of each of the five meditative stabilizations. The yoga of the great empty is placing oneself in equipoise on the sphere of emptiness—that is, the abiding reality of all things, the non-apprehension of anything, the clear light—and viewing this as the entity of the Reality Body. The yoga of compassionate illusion is to

³⁸⁴ *mkha’ spyod kyi zhing* (110.2).

meditate knowing that the compassion [observing] what is not apprehensible³⁸⁵ toward illusory sentient beings, who do not realize such, is the nature of the Complete Enjoyment Body. The yoga of the sole seal has a subtle and coarse aspect. The subtle seed-syllable is meditating on one's own mind—indifferentiable emptiness and compassion—as a white letter, A, and then observing letters issue forth from and condense back into that. And then out of that, with either an elaborate or condensed rite of generation, one meditates on the single pair of the male and female root deities along with the nine secondary deities, these being the wisdom-being at the heart [111], the three deities of blessing,³⁸⁶ and the five deities of the crown.³⁸⁷ This is the coarse sole seal.

According to the opinion of Nyel Sanggyé Drak,³⁸⁸ it is explained that the maṇḍala is distinguished by the main deities of the different families being together, while the group is distinguished by being composed of individual main deities within the same family. Thus, there are four divisions of the seal with elaboration: the two elaborations, that of the maṇḍala and that of the groups, [along with] the elaboration of the number [of deities] and the elaboration of the [number of their] faces and hands.

With regard to that, the elaboration of the maṇḍala is as follows. The middling maṇḍala of the peaceful deities has forty-two deities. The extensive version has eighty-two through adding the forty male and female Bodhisattva of the immediate families to that.³⁸⁹ The condensed version is the eighteen, [consisting of] the male and female deities of the five

³⁸⁵ *dmigs med pa'i snying rje* (110.5). On this term, see Hopkins, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, p.120.

³⁸⁶ *byin rlabs kyi lha gsum* (111.1). These are Vairocana at the crown of the head, Amitābha at one's throat, and Akṣobhya at one's heart.

³⁸⁷ The five deities of the crown (*dbu rgyan gyi lha lnga*) are the five primary Buddhas arranged on the five points of the crown, i.e., the regal headdress that one is wearing when visualizing oneself as a deity.

³⁸⁸ *gnyal sangs rgyas grags* (111.2). It is unclear who this figure is. Khetsun Sangpo's *Biographical Dictionary* (vol. 4, 280) lists a *sangs rgyas grags* who studied with Abhayākaragupta (11th century) and was skilled in the Kālacakra.

³⁸⁹ In the extensive version of the maṇḍala, each of the five Buddhas has an additional set of four Bodhisattva couples surrounding them, which comprise the additional forty deities. These figures are not explicitly mentioned in the short version of the tantra.

families and the male and females [deities] who are the four sets of guardians. The middling wrathful maṇḍala has seventy-eight by adding the male and female wrathful deities to the well-known fifty-eight. The extensive version has one hundred and eighteen by adding the immediate families to that. The condensed version consists of the fifty-eight wrathful deities.

As for the groups, there is [the single group of] eighteen consisting of the male and female Akṣobhya, [112] the four pairs of their immediate vajra-family, and the [four pairs of] male and female guardians. There are also the forty-six, [arrived at] through adding the eight pairs of wrathful deities—the ten minus the ones in the zenith and nadir—to the main deities of the three lineages—enlightened body, speech, and mind—along with their immediate families, and there are the seventy, consisting of the male and female deities of the five lineages, their immediate families, and the ten wrathful deities. These are respectively the single group, the three groups, and the five groups.

In the case of the wrathful deities, the deities of the place, those of the country, the door protectors, and the ladies are the same [in each version].³⁹⁰ To those are added the ten deities of the Vajra family, the main couple with their retinue, and the ten pairs of male and female wrathful deities, making seventy-eight. There are ninety-eight by adding also the main couples and their retinues of the Buddha and Padma [families], and there are one hundred and eighteen by adding also the remaining two families to that. These are as above [the single group, the three groups, and the five groups].

As for the number of deities, according to the eighth chapter [of this tantra] there are three elaborations: the elaboration into 1,000 Buddhas, the elaboration into 24,000

³⁹⁰ *gnas yul sgo skyong dbang mo rnams yod mnyam* (112.3). According to Khenpo Namdröl, these refer to the eight Mamo goddesses of the place (*gnas kyi ma mo brgyad*), the eight lions of the country (*yul gyi seng ge brgyad*), the four gate keepers (*sgo skyong bzhi*), and the twenty-eight ladies (*dbang phyug ma nyi shu rtsa brgyad*), making a total of forty-eight wrathful deities that are the base for the brief, middling and extensive versions of the maṇḍala.

Buddhas, and the spontaneous elaboration into an inconceivable number of Buddhas.³⁹¹ When these types are applied also to the wrathful deities, there are the three elaborations: the elaboration into 1,450 deities, the elaboration into 76,850 deities, and the spontaneous elaboration into an inconceivable number of deities. It is said that, “The spontaneous elaboration into an inconceivable number must be on a Superior’s path.” However, though one cannot actually do such elaboration until that point, it is not that one cannot meditate on it. [113]

As for [the number of] faces and arms, the extensive version of the peaceful deities is when except for the six sages and the consorts everyone has three faces and six arms. The middling version is when only the conquerors of the six families have three faces and six arms. The condensed version is when everyone has one face and two arms. As for the wrathful deities, it is explained in the tantra that the main deities have either countless heads and arms or nine heads and eighteen arms and that even the Mamo goddesses of the retinue have three heads and six arms.³⁹² However, for the lineaged practice in the extensive version the five families have three heads and six arms; in the middling version just the main deities have three heads and six arms, and in the condensed version they all have one face and two arms.

The [last of the five meditative stabilizations] collective practice in groups is when, having meditated on those [other four meditative stabilizations] again within each session, one induces their enhancement or makes them become special. This has three parts: (1) grasping the basics through the five marvels, (2) paving the way³⁹³ with the four branches of

³⁹¹ The tantra itself (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 178.3-178.4) says little more than “The forty-two will spread out in three [ways]” (*bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis gsum ’phror ’gyur*). The numbers presented here are from the commentarial tradition.

³⁹² This refers to the passage in the fifteenth chapter where the wrathful deities are alternately described as having infinite heads and arms, nine heads and eighteen arms, and three heads and six arms (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 198.6-200.4).

³⁹³ *gzhung bsrang ba* (113.5). Literally, “straightening the main road”.

service and achievement, and (3) teaching when one attains the result of [becoming] an awareness-holder.

GRASPING THE BASICS OF GROUP PRACTICE THROUGH THE FIVE MARVELS

[113.5]

[In the collective practice in groups] there are the five marvels of place, time, accessories, achievers, and means of achievement. In a pleasant place where there are no interruptions to self-initiation [the group] builds a three-storied house in which the first floor is for making the provisions, the second for paving the way to achievement, and the third for engaging in the secret practices.³⁹⁴ [114] This is the marvel of place. Calculating the date through doing the practice of astrology is the marvel of a good time. Collecting together all the necessary accessories—nourishing food, medicine for reversing [negative] conditions, substances for the practice, and substances for offering—is the marvel of accessories. The master should have eight natures, as it is said:

[In] the teacher there occur eight [qualities]:

He has the treasury [of view, meditation, and conduct] and has completed
the stream [of initiation].

He takes care [of his disciples] and is skilled in tantra and activities.

He possesses the quintessential and elaborate [experiences].³⁹⁵

And according to the following passage, the retinue should have six qualities:

To persevere in making offerings to the teacher, to have clear realizations,

³⁹⁴ *gsang spyod la 'jug pa* (113.6f). Khenpo Namdröl explained this as a reference to ritual sexual union (*sbyor ba*) and liberative killing (*sgrol ba*).

³⁹⁵ Only the first line is given in the text (114.2), Khenpo Namdröl provided the rest of the stanza. He did not identify the source:

*ston pa mdzod ldan chu bo rdzogs/
gnyer ldan rgyud dang las la mkhas/
man ngag spros dang brgyad byung ngo!*

To keep the commitments, [recite] the mantras,
 And to know the seals without defect.
 One who possesses these requisites will become accomplished.
 One who lacks them will be unsuccessful and lost.³⁹⁶

These two—teacher and retinue—are combined into one as “the marvel of the achievers”. To gather together such an assembly of whatever size—small, medium, or large—and to engage in the traditions of the four types of service and achievement is the marvel of the means of achievement.

PAVING THE WAY WITH THE FOUR BRANCHES OF SERVICE AND
 ACHIEVEMENT [114.4]

At the time of achievement, there are four [branches] of service and achievement. The first of these is service. It has two parts: the preliminary service and the service of actions to be done. The first is just to have previously trained in bringing to completion the four meditative stabilizations from the seal with elaboration on down. As for the second, these are the preliminary rites done for the land, the preparations, the confessions [of downfalls] and fulfillments [of vows], demarking the boundary, drawing the maṇḍala, and donning the costumes. Having done those, [the disciples] should be lined up by seniority.³⁹⁷ [115] Then, dividing the recitation into cultivating the three meditative stabilizations, the meditative stabilization on the maṇḍala [in one, three, and five groups], and the five meditative

³⁹⁶ This second verse (114.3) is from Chapter 5 of the root tantra (*Secret Essence*, Tb.417, 167.5-167.6). The whole stanza is:

ston pa mchod brtson rtogs pa gsal/
dam tshig sngags dang phyang rgya rnams/
ma nyams shes shing yo byad ldan/
‘grub ‘gyur mi ldan don med brlag/

The English translation is from Gyurme Dorje, p.601.

³⁹⁷ *gral tshug gyi phyang nas rtags gdab bar bya* (114.6). Concerning this, Khenpo Namdröl said that the disciples line up in order of seniority based on who received initiation first with the less senior disciples prostrating to the more senior ones.

stabilization of the active stages,³⁹⁸ one who has the three manifestations should chant the recitation.³⁹⁹ Those differentiations of the maṇḍala [then] dissolve into oneself, and one does the collective offering, etc. This is the service of the first night, [called] the branch of service.

When reciting in accordance with those stages of action, strive at becoming a suitable vessel for the feat of emanating and reabsorbing the white clear light, for up to half of however much time there is to practice. This is [called] the branch of intimate service. For the remaining half of the time, one should bring into one's power the feat of emanating and re-absorbing the red clear light. This is [called] the branch of achievement. When there arises confidence in the signs of attaining the feats, condense the feats with the blue clear light, and give rise to the feats through the deities, substances, and [secret] spaces of the consorts. This is [called] the branch of great achievement.

In the tantra itself, when the collective achievement is taught, it is described [from the perspective of] extracting, within a state of non-apprehension, the capacity of some means for thoroughly enjoying the five pleasurable substances of this world. Therefore, the point of collective achievement must be to ignite and stabilize the realization of suchness by way of extending the primordial wisdom of great bliss. By the force of that, the continuum of the four previous meditative stabilizations will also become highly distinguished. Therefore, it is both the means for enhancing [those other meditative stabilizations] [116] and the reason why the feats are quickly accomplished.

The taking of bliss in general as the path or the taking of the particular bliss of melting as the path is not necessarily the stage of completion. Since this is well known, I will not dissect it [here]. In the commentaries, the way to use the vowel and consonant materials⁴⁰⁰ is not

³⁹⁸ *las rim gyi ting nge 'dzin lnga po* (115.1). These are the five meditative stabilizations when they act as a cause for bringing the special abilities, or feats, into the practitioner.

³⁹⁹ The three manifestations (*gsal ba gsum*) are visualizing oneself as the commitment deity, visualizing the wisdom deity in space, and seeing lights traveling between the two.

⁴⁰⁰ *a li ka li'i yo byad* (116.2). This refers to the materials used for the two controversial practices. *a li* refers to the materials used in ritual sex (*sbyor ba*), while *ka li* refers to the materials used in liberative killing (*sgrol ba*).

clearly expressed except in the sections on giving rise to the feats. However, it is not that [the use of these substances] do not exist [in the practice of Mahāyoga], because it is understood through the occurrence of statements such as the one in the offering [section] of the means of achievement, “By their being joined together in the great offering of embracing...”⁴⁰¹

TEACHING WHEN ONE ATTAINS THE RESULT OF BECOMING AN AWARENESS-HOLDER [116.3]

Through having practiced with fierce effort one attains in a definite period of time, such as six months and so forth, an awareness-holder’s body, possessing the qualities of subtlety, lightness, and so forth, which accords with the [bodies of] either Desire or Form Realm deities. It is said, “Which of the two awareness-holders—of the Desire or Form Realm—one attains is due to the difference between [using] an action or a wisdom seal.” Such an awareness-holder is a great, common feat.

In the *Stages of the Path* [Buddhaguhya] describes differences such as the best collective achievement of the peaceful deities is attained in six months and the worst in one year and four months, while the best of the wrathful deities is attained in two months and the worst in six. With regard to that, there are assertions that [the difference in the amount of time between the peaceful and wrathful versions] is a feature of the recitation of mantras, sprinkling, and wrapping.⁴⁰² [117] Nevertheless, it is convenient when, in accordance with the assertion of Nardön,⁴⁰³ the majority refer to [this difference as] due to the fact that wrathful deities tame interruptions and arise as deities of fierce and swift enlightened activity.

⁴⁰¹ *sgrub thabs kyi m chod pa'i nang dul 'khril ba'i mchod chen mnyam sbyor bas/* (116.2-116.3). The means of achievement (*sādhana*) referred to here is, according to Khenpo Namdröl, from the *Consortium of Sugatas*.

⁴⁰² *'dzab 'thor 'dril gyi khyad par du* (116.6). Using the example of mantra recitation (*'dzab*), Khenpo Namdröl said the wrathful achievement was faster because a single recitation is done for all the deities, whereas in the peaceful version a recitation is done for each deity.

⁴⁰³ *snar ston* (117.1). This is probably Nar-dön Seng-ge-ö. He is mentioned cursorily in the *Blue Annals*, 157 and *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 77, 78, and 702, but no information is given other than that he was a member of the Zur tradition and composed some commentaries, whose titles are not given.

I wonder if there is also some slight difference because of who the deliverers of the feats are.

In other Mahāyoga tantras⁴⁰⁴ it is said that in order to accomplish the great common achievement at the end of collective achievement [the group] must continue until the burnt offering and yantra [are completed].⁴⁰⁵ But, here it is said that awareness-holdership is attained during the time of collective achievement itself without relying on those [rituals]. Concerning these two statements, there are assertions that the former is done in terms of a slightly stable stage of generation and the latter in terms of a greatly stable one. However, since it is explained that even those collective practitioners who bring to completion the subtle yoga do it as the former do, one should analyze whether these must be differentiated by some feature such as the means of achievement.

For all these higher and lower meditative stabilizations of the seals, one should remember that the understood meaning of boundless self-appearances explained in the section on the view is the life-force [of the practice]. In the Master Jñānapāda's texts,⁴⁰⁶ he says that the stage of generation destroys delimited space and time. This is also similar in method. However, [118] the *Assembly of Sugatas* says:⁴⁰⁷

Although in the maṇḍala of boundless self-appearances the measure of the number [of deities], the [number of] the faces and hands, etc. are not definitely one particular way, if they were not taught as definite in the means of achievement, one would be unable to generate a meditative stabilization with clear aspects and stable pride. Therefore, it is taught that way [in the means of achievement].

The above five meditative stabilizations are done only in terms of the stage of generation,

⁴⁰⁴ I.e., the *Secret Assembly*.

⁴⁰⁵ *'khrul 'khor* (117.3).

⁴⁰⁶ *slob dpon ye shes zhabs kyi gzung* (117.6).

⁴⁰⁷ *bde gshegs 'dus pa* (118.2). This is the treasure cycle discovered by Nyang-rel Nyi-me-ö-zer (1124-1192).

and the five meditative stabilizations within the stage of completion are as follows.

[THE STAGE OF COMPLETION]

Initially forsaking other religious and non-religious activities,⁴⁰⁸ one should sit having the seven qualities of Vairocana,⁴⁰⁹ the bodily essentials, and one should dwell in either of the two methods of placement,⁴¹⁰ the mental essentials. The two methods of placement are placement [in reality] through the power of great awareness, or wisdom, and placement [in reality] through the lesser awareness, or the instructions. The first [method of placement through the power of great awareness] also has two [types]: 1. placing [the mind] in the container of awareness,⁴¹¹ which is situating oneself in the vivid, objectless awareness merely through inducing the thought, “[I will] place the mind in reality free from [conceptual] elaborations,” and 2. placing [the mind] after having seen [reality], which is situating the mind with unwavering clarity in the entity of the view, upon having remembered it as delineated above. As for the latter [placement through instructions], when one inwardly views the entity of one’s own mind, one sees nothing whatsoever, and one situates [the mind] authentically in that entity. [119] Although all three are not different in situating one in the suchness of the mind, they are divided through being different methods or approaches to placement.

In either cases, through training one-pointedly and without interruption, the space-like clear light devoid of coarse objects and subjects manifests, whereupon limitless aspects of

⁴⁰⁸ *chos dang chos min gyi bya ba* (118.3). That is, virtuous and non-virtuous activities.

⁴⁰⁹ *rnam snang gi chos bdun dang ldan pa* (118.3). These are sitting 1. with legs crossed in the lotus-posture (*rkangs pa skyil krung*), 2. having the hands placed equally (*lag pa mnyam bzhag*), 3. with the spine straight (*sgal tshigs drang bor bsrang ba*), 4. with the neck slightly bent (*mgrin pa cung zad gug pa*), 5. with the shoulders splayed like the wings of a peacock (*dpung ba rgod gshog ltar brkyangs pa*), 6. with the eyes pointing down at the tip of the nose (*mig sna rtser phabs pa*), and 7. with the tongue touching the upper palate (*lce ya rkan la sbyar ba*). See bKra shis rgyal mtshan, *chos kyi rnam grang bzhugs so* (zi ling: mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992), 91-92.

⁴¹⁰ *bzhag thabs* (118.3).

⁴¹¹ *rig pa spyi blugs su ’jog pa* (118.5).

shape and color dawn, which are like an illusory city. These are the reflection-like appearances of the empty clear light, or the appearances of form that are aspects of the empty clear light. They are called “empty form”.⁴¹² Through an extended meditative session, the clear light becomes thicker, and as it gradually thickens, those empty forms will become more and more crystal clear⁴¹³ and greatly increase. Since such a clear light is empty of mistaken conceptuality, this is called “the meditative stabilization of the great empty” (*stong pa chen po'i ting nge 'dzin*). At this point, it is evident that one develops the energy to mix with the non-conceptual realm that is the clear light's own mode of being without mainly activating that dawning of empty forms.

When one has cultivated the purification of that, one generates a more extensive clear light and, having combined it with blissful appearances, dwells one-pointedly. Thereby, the limitless appearances [of empty form] increase, greater than before. All those [120] will dawn as only things of bliss in the non-observable, namely things of the uncommon compassion [observing] what is not observable. When that is stabilized, one attains the special quality of [having made] empty form serviceable. Therefore, there is the ability for one on the stage of completion to transform into the single-seal of a deity through merely some slight conditions. By purifying the energy for such in meditative equipoise, even when one arises from that, all beings dawn as the illusion-like play of compassion and great bliss while being empty form. This is the yoga of compassionate illusion (*snying rje sgyu ma'i rnal 'byor*).

Then, at the time of unifying creation and completion, in dependence upon any impelling condition such as the meditative stabilization that is the stage in which one generates a similitude of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri, all those empty forms are awakened into the aspect of the single-seal deity-body. This is the yoga of the single seal (*rgya*

⁴¹² *stong gzugs zhes* (119.2). The term “empty form” is also used in the context of a later tantric path, that of the *Wheel of Time* (*dus 'khor, kālacakra*).

⁴¹³ *je dwangs je gsal* (119.4).

gcig gi rnal 'byor). It is called such because however many deity-bodies of empty form dawn they are the same in having the single aspect of being like Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī. However, it does not seem to be the case that there does not dawn more than one enlightened body of empty form. Within this oral tradition there is the statement, “Beginning with the single seal, there is a divine body of union.” The intention behind this is that [the yoga of the single seal] merely proceeds to unify the empty of the first meditative stabilization and the compassion of the second, [121] but this is not an actual enlightened body of union.⁴¹⁴

Then, through the slight condition of a stage that generates the elaborate maṇḍala and the groups’ circles, there dawns limitless aspects of empty form—the main deity, the retinue, and the groups, and in each of those there dawns innumerable [deities and aspects] as [discussed] in the context of elaboration through number. [These appearances] dawn in thorough completeness without being mixed. From that point until bringing it to completion is [called] the seal with elaboration. Such are the four initial meditative stabilizations.

In this context of the stages for generating the seal [with] elaboration, one meditates on the maṇḍala of the forty-two Buddhas in order to purify the whole conceptual collection—the aggregates, constituents, and so forth—into the deities, and one meditates on all the deities of the maṇḍala completely within each of those deities [with their bodies acting] as the pure land in order to achieve all the good qualities of purity with respect to each of those factors—the aggregates and so forth.⁴¹⁵ Moreover, that method in which one purity becomes the identity of all the purities takes as its reason the fact that all [the members of] the conceptual collection have the indestructible [mind] as their life-force. In order to meditate

⁴¹⁴ The actual enlightened body of union (*zung 'jug gi sku dngos*) occurs only at Buddhahood.

⁴¹⁵ The eternal, most pervasive form-aggregate (*rtaḡ khyab chen po'i gzugs phung*) was discussed above (95.3). Since the essence of the pure form-aggregate is the ground, its essence is the essence of all phenomena. Therefore, the form-aggregate pervades all phenomena.

on that, there is the observation that each of the deities arrayed in the body has its own wisdom-being, [122] and so forth. Therefore, knowing the indifferenciability of deities and conceptuality appears to be the single most precious point on the paths of generation and completion.

Even on the occasions attained subsequent to those meditations, whatever yoga of meditative equipoise is done, it impresses its seal on all appearances and activities, whereby one binds the conceptuality that is discordant with that yoga. This is also a quintessential point. It appears that this is along the lines of [the second of the ten topics of tantra] conduct, or resolution.

Similarly, as for the way that the very training in which [one meditates on] the meditative stabilization during the day is taken as the night-time yoga, there are statements in the tantric commentaries⁴¹⁶ that in the context of the great empty the clear light of the waking hours and the thick clear light of sleeping at night are practiced in tandem and that in the context of compassionate illusion all the daytime appearances and all the dream appearances are seen as illusory. Therefore, [those commentaries] clearly demonstrate the way to purify sleep and dreams through the first two yogas, and through that method one is able to also understand [the way sleep and dreams are purified by] the meditation upon having transformed the compassionate illusion of dreams into the single and elaborate seals.

Furthermore, with the citation of the *Stages of the Path* above, “Death is the ultimate truth”, and so forth⁴¹⁷ one can rightly extrapolate that death and the great empty are combined and that the intermediate state and compassionate illusion are combined, and so forth. [123] Therefore, even though [those yogas] are not designated as “quintessential instructions on combining [the five stages of ordinary existence with the five meditative

⁴¹⁶ *rgyud 'grel las* (122.3). Here, Khenpo Namdröl mentioned particularly Lochen Dharmashrī's *Lord of Secrets' Oral Instructions* and his *Ornament to the Intention of the Lord of Secrets*.

⁴¹⁷ 105.5-105.6.

stabilizations]”,⁴¹⁸ they fulfill the meaning. Nevertheless, since in this [system] the single and elaborate seals of [both] the dreaming state and the intermediate state are purifiers of [both] the waking state and birth, it is not the same as other [systems].⁴¹⁹ Moreover, in the context of the view, in dependence upon the reasonings one views the coarse common appearances of mind and primordial wisdom, apprehending them as [belonging] only to the class of the self-appearances of primordial wisdom. Thereby, one awakens in direct perception the clear light that is the goal to be achieved. This is the first approach to actually arousing the uncommon appearances of primordial wisdom. Here, the uncommon appearances of primordial wisdom should be taken [to mean] empty form.

Having seen such appearances in the first meditative stabilization, in the second one achieves power over them just as they are seen. From the third onward, one transforms into the deities body and trains in that ability. Thus, within the mode of abiding that is the essential ground there is the ability to elaborate all the aspects of subtle appearances. Through arousing that ability with the winds of primordial wisdom, it is awakened into clarity, and when the mother [clear light] that is the quality of the ground and the son [clear light] that is a path of knowing and engaging meet, they act to assist each other, whereby the ability to establish the actual state of the maṇḍala of supporting [palace] and supported [deities]—the self-appearances of primordial wisdom [124]—easily become complete. This is the great essential point on the path of the Magical Emanation Net. Since on the occasion of both [the paths of] method and release there is no difficulty in untying this knot of joyful

⁴¹⁸ *bsre ba'i man ngag* (123.1).

⁴¹⁹ For instance, the *Secret Assembly* where, according to Khenpo Namdröl, the purifiers of the dream state and the intermediate state, which respectively induce the purity of the waking state and birth, are completely different paths. Indeed, in *The Six Yogas of Nāropa (nā ro'i chos drug)* the third practice is “dream yoga” while the fifth practice is “intermediate state (*bar do*) yoga”. See Garma C. C. Chang, *The Six Yogas of Nāropa and the Teachings on Mahāmudrā* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1977), 54, 88-94, 101-111. However, that same text (93) does contradict this notion by saying, “One of the main purposes of Dream Yoga practice is to assist one to realize the Illusory Body in the Bardo state, and in this lifetime.”

realization, the intention that issues upon there being some capacity [in that practice should be held] dear.

The meditative stabilization of group achievement is that which, upon having finished the elaborate seal, connects one to an uncontaminated path through having achieved immutable bliss in dependence upon any of the extensive, middling, or abbreviated group practices where one successively gathers the enjoyments and powers of a yogin or in dependence upon a single goddess of empty form. This is also called the “uninterrupted meditative stabilization”. On the occasion of group practice there is indeed a marvelous meditative stabilization on the elaborate seals, but this is not the fourth in the division of five meditative stabilization, and one should also understand the others, the great empty and so forth, according to that [principle].⁴²⁰

The teachings that occur in the ostensible reading of the root [text]’s ninth chapter and its commentaries concerning the time when one accomplishes [the state of] an awareness-holder, or the result, are done in terms of just this group practice on the stage of completion. There, they explain that at the time of group practice one enters into a different quality of result⁴²¹ through the features of meditating on a single group of deities, three groups, and so forth. [125] Since [they also] explain that there are cases where one leaps over the elaborate [seal going directly from] the single seal to the group practice, whether or not it is necessary to relate [the different qualities of the result] in such a fashion [should be] analyzed.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ In the collective group practice one does all five meditative stabilizations, but the four lesser meditative stabilizations done in this context are nonetheless classified as collective group practice.

⁴²¹ I.e., a different one of the four awareness-holders.

⁴²² The meditation on one, three, or five groups of deities is initially cultivated in the meditative stabilization of the elaborate seal and then acted out in the group practice. If it is possible to completely skip the elaborate seal, then one cannot say that the different types of result are due to whether one practices one group, three groups, or five groups.

As for how one should present the two paths of accumulation and performance with regard to these characteristics of knowing and engaging,⁴²³ in *The Cluster*, a commentary on *Binding the Circle*,⁴²⁴ it explains that the stage of generation up until the time one achieves through group practice [the status of] an awareness holder within the desire and form realms is posited as the path of accumulation and that the entrance into the stage of completion on up is posited as the path of preparation. This is in line with the latter mode of training [serially] in the two stages [of generation and completion] described above, and since it also agrees with the most well known way of explaining it, it is easy to hold to this [position].

However, there must be another presentation for the position where the generation and completion [stages] are meditated on side by side. Thus, in our system of explanation in the Magical Emanation, it must be [explained] according to the well known [statement], “The path of accumulation [consists of] the four yogas of the path of completion, and the path of preparation [is] the group practice.” This position agrees with the clear and broad statements in many [texts] such as the root text and commentary of the *Wish-fulfilling Treasury*⁴²⁵ and so forth that there a number of yogas in the stage of completion that occur through the winds and minds entering the central [channel] due to the power of meditating on Highest Mantra’s path of accumulation. [126]

Furthermore, as long as one relies on a fabricated and analytical yoga, for that long one is on the path of accumulation, and when one has progressed to only a naturally present yoga, or an unfabricated yoga, that is posited as the path of preparation. Although placement on

⁴²³ Both Sūtra and Tantra present a system of five paths (*lam lnga*), which are actually five stages of the path. These are the path of accumulation (*tshogs lam*), the path of preparation (*sbyor lam*), the path of seeing (*mithong lam*), the path of meditation (*sgom lam*), and the path of no-more-learning (*mi slob lam*). The path of accumulation is so called because one is accumulating the necessary collections of merit and wisdom, while in the path of preparation one is preparing for the actual perception of reality, which occurs on the path of seeing. The path of seeing is when one has a direct insight into the empty nature of reality. The path of meditation is bringing that initial insight to higher and higher levels, and the path of no-more-learning is final Buddhahood.

⁴²⁴ *sdom tī ka snye mar*

⁴²⁵ *yid bzhin mdzod rtsa ’grel* (125.6). This is one of the “seven treasuries” (*mdzod bdun*) by Longchenpa, who composed both the root text and the auto-commentary.

the path of accumulation is done in terms of a fabricated yoga, it is not contradictory to posit unfabricated yogas of one on the path of accumulation as a path of accumulation. Through this, due to the essential point of not finishing the stage of generation prior to initially entering the stage of completion, even after achieving the elaborate seal on the stage of completion, one must train one's ability in emanating and withdrawing [the deities] in dependence on the stage of generation. Therefore, that is the reason for placing the initial four yogas on the path of accumulation.

In this position of emanating inconceivable, spontaneously present [appearances] from the elaborate seals, the details require some refinement. When such is done, in the system of alternating between the stages of generation and completion, one must assert that most of the qualities of an ordinary being's stage of completion are completed on just the path of accumulation, and on the path of preparation, one does the four levels of heat and so forth but does not see [reality]. Therefore, I think there comes to be a very great difference from other systems of the path of Highest [Yoga] Tantra. [127] Still, I beseech the wise to investigate and analyze this in detail. There are also assertions that correlate the time on the path of accumulation with the single seal and below and the time on the path of preparation from the elaborate seals [on up]. However, I will not discuss those here.

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE RESULT [127.2]

The third [characteristic], results that are paths, has two [types]: paths and beings. With regard to paths, there are three [that are results]: the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the final path, and as for people who have those in their continuums, these are the four awareness-holders according to the statement, "Fruitional, Life-empowered, Seal, Spontaneously Present...."⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ *nam smin tshé dbang phyag rgya lhun gyis grub/* (127.3).

THE FRUITIONAL AWARENESS-HOLDER [127.4]

The first, a fruitional awareness-holder, is one on the path of seeing with the following three qualities:

1. Who is not free from the coarse, fruitional body-basis,⁴²⁷
2. Whose mind has ripened into the enlightened body of the tutelary deity, and
3. Who, once freed from the seal of the body, will definitely join the awareness-holders of the great seal.

When that [level of a fruitional awareness-holder] is attained, many other good qualities are also attained, such as being able to act for the welfare of migrators in just the world of the four continents, and so forth. They say there are two ways to explain [the use of] the term “fruitional awareness-holder” for this [stage], one from the viewpoint of being bound by the fruitional body that is a seal [of cyclic existence] and the other from the viewpoint of the mind ripening as the deity’s enlightened body. [128]

LIFE-EMPOWERED AWARENESS-HOLDER [128.1]

A life-empowered awareness-holder is a person on the path of seeing whose body is not contaminated and who has the primary physical features of a wheel-turning king or a deity of the desire or form realm. They act for the welfare of sentient beings in a billion [worlds with] four continents through their twenty-five sense consciousnesses which are the imprint of the stage of completion and through the six prescient consciousnesses that are generally known.⁴²⁸ Here, the contamination referred to in the phrase “not contaminated” is fourfold:

⁴²⁷ That is, they have the four contaminations mentioned below in the context of a life-empowered awareness-holder.

⁴²⁸ These are the five presciences—clairvoyance (*lha'i mig mngon shes*), clairaudience (*lha'i rna ba'i mngon shes*), knowing the minds of others (*pha rol gyi sems shes pa'i mngon shes*), knowing how to perform illusions (*rdzu 'phrul gyi bya ba shes pa'i mngon shes*), and remembering past lives (*sngon gyi gnas rjes su dran pa'i mngon shes*)—along with the prescience of having exhausted one’s contaminations (*zag pa zad pa'i mngon shes*).

1. the contamination of afflictive emotions, i.e., the superimposition of mistaken apprehensions (*zhen pa phyin ci log gi sgro 'dogs nyon mongs pa'i zag pa*),
2. the contamination of the body, i.e., the body being cast aside without one's control (*lus rang dbang med par 'dor ba lus kyi zag pa*)
3. the contamination of the constituents, i.e., health and illness arising uncontrollably (*kham s bde mi bde rang dbang med par 'byung ba kham s kyi zag pa*),
4. the contamination of birth-place, i.e., one has assumed a body uncontrollably due to one's previous actions (*las kyi rang dbang med par lus len pa skye gnas kyi zag pa*).

The first of these is the main one; the remaining three are secondary. With regard to that, these two awareness-holders [fruitful and life-empowered] are not different in terms of having attained the actual fully qualified clear light. Nor are they different in terms of having realized the abandonment that extinguishes the root contamination. However, [Buddhaghya's] *Lesser Stages of the Path* says:

There are two paths of seeing, one that has attained ability and one that has not,⁴²⁹

Citing this passage, it is explained that they are distinguished [in two ways, either] through the feature of being able or unable to purify the coarse body with the fire of primordial wisdom due to either having sharp or dull faculties or through the feature of whether or not they have exhausted the three ancillary contaminations. [129] Therefore, it is not possible for one person to travel on both these awareness-holder [paths], because one cannot attain the path of seeing twice.

⁴²⁹ *lam chung las/ nus pa thob dang ma thob pa'i/ mthong lam gnyis su 'gyur ba yin/* (128.6).

AWARENESS-HOLDER OF THE GREAT SEAL [129.1]

An awareness-holder of the great seal is one who has a body basis in the aspect of the tutelary deity, decorated with the major and minor marks; who displays an Emanation Body in various forms, such as hunters, prostitutes, and so forth; and who works for the welfare of migrators equal to the field of a Complete Enjoyment Body through presciences that are superior to even those of a life-empowered awareness-holder in terms of clarity, stability, and purity. At this [stage] one abides in a special path of meditation. It has as many divisions as the nine levels of the path of meditation, and in the context of the five families, all nine also are done into five types.

SPONTANEOUSLY PRESENT AWARENESS-HOLDER [129.4]

A spontaneously present awareness-holder is one who abides in the special path of a tenth grounder, known as “the final path”; who has a form that is a copy of a Buddha’s Complete Enjoyment Body; and whose realization and activity are partially similar to those of Buddhahood.⁴³⁰

When it is said that in those later two awareness-holders [the great seal and the spontaneously present] the subtle defilements, which are latencies and abide innately,⁴³¹ are abandoned, the defilements referred to are only the obstructions to omniscience, because it is explained that [all] the afflictive obstructions, without differentiating them into imputed and innate, are abandoned on the path of seeing. [130]

There are also [situations where] one attains Buddhahood without traversing [more] than one awareness-holder [level] on a learner’s path and so forth, because it is described that some very intelligent [people] leap over to Buddhahood from the life-empowered [stage], skipping both the great seal [stage] and the spontaneously present [stage], or [others] skip

⁴³⁰ *rtogs pa dang phrin las kyang sangs rgyas nyid dang phyogs mtshungs pa’ol* (129.5).

⁴³¹ *lhan cig gnas pa dang bag la nyal gyi dri ma phra mo* (129.6).

just the great seal [stage] or they skip the spontaneously present [stage, progressing to Buddhahood] from the great seal [stage].

[ANALYSIS OF AWARENESS-HOLDERS]

If we are to give a small approach to analyzing these difficult points, although in general there are great differences between this and the system of *The Wheel of Time*, the conqueror Yung⁴³² and so forth explain that they are similar in thought in terms of how one achieves the immutable bliss in dependence on the seal of empty form and how one purifies the course aggregates and constituents through that. The omniscient king of the doctrine [Longchenpa] also explains it like that. For, the *Vajra[sattva] Magical Emanation* says:

The grounds and their qualities
Are asserted [to come] from the winds and great bliss
Being generated and increased in the channels.
The basis of purification and the purifiers increase and decrease.
Existence and nirvāṇa increase and decrease.
Four types or three or five wheels
[Have] two each; one is not enough.
Through the final tenth ground, there is the ground of primordial wisdom.
With the fourth [wheel], upper and lower are made known.⁴³³ [131]

Quoting that, [Longchenpa's] *Wish-fulfilling Treasury* says:

⁴³² Yung-tön-Dorjepel (*g.yung ston rdo rje dpal*, 1284-1365), author of an influential commentary on the twenty-two chapters of the root tantra, called *Mirror Reflecting the Meaning of the Glorious Secret Essence Tantra* (*dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgyud don gsal byed me long*) in the *rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 28 (Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama, 1983; I-Tib-82-900981), 5-589.

⁴³³ *sgyu 'phrul rdo rje las/ sa dang sa yi yon tan rnamsl/ rtsa rnam kyi ni skye 'bri las/ lrlung dang bde chen las 'dod del/ lsbyang gzhi sbyong byed 'phel dang 'gribl/ lsrld dang mya ngan 'das 'phel 'gribl/ lnam bzhi'am gsum mam lnga 'khor lol/ lgnys gnyis kyi ni gcig ma rdzogs/ lsa bcu tha mas ye shes sal/ lbzhi pas steng dang 'og tu gragsl* (130.4-130.6).

When the wind and mind of the fourth wheel are made serviceable,

The good qualities of the four paths gradually dawn.

Through loosening two channel-knots at each [of the four wheels] in the
central channel,

It is asserted that the good qualities of the tenth ground dawn within.⁴³⁴

[These passages] in the root text and its commentary are explanations of how the coarse body is consumed by immutable bliss, and some former adepts have said that except for the difference in coarseness and subtlety of the explanations they are one in thought.

If it is done that way, it is like this: having attained empty form during the single seal and the elaborated seal, one does the collective practice in order to induce great bliss through the power of such a seal, and the moment one attains the bliss that never changes is the beginning of the pure factor of the physical body. Therefore, this can be posited as a life-empowered awareness-holder whose coarse body has become crystalline clean.⁴³⁵ As for those of dull faculties, although they have attained the great seal and the collective practice forms imprints on them, they cannot induce the supreme bliss. Therefore, it must be asserted that although they attain the path of a superior, there are both those who have purified the encrusted body⁴³⁶ and those who have not. For these reasons, although one necessarily becomes enlightened in that lifetime where one attains immutable bliss, [132] it is asserted that the mere attainment of a fully qualified empty-form body does not have such a mind [of immutable bliss]. One can know this through the explanation of a fruitional awareness-holder.

⁴³⁴ *yid bzbin mdzod kyil l'khor lo bzhi yi rlung sems las rung tshel llam bzhi'i yon tan rim bzbin 'char ba stel/dbu ma'i rtsa mdud gnyis gnyis grol ba las/lsa bcu'i yon tan nang nas 'char bar bzhed/* (130.6-131.2).

⁴³⁵ *dwangs ma* (131.5).

⁴³⁶ *snyigs ma'i lus* (131.6). *snyigs ma* and *dwangs ma* are antonyms. Their translation here respectively as “encrusted” and “crystalline clean” express only part of these words’ full meaning.

The way that a fruitional [awareness-holder] establishes the great seal in the intermediate state is as follows. That very subtle wind at the time of their death is purified by the actual fully-qualified clear light like cleaning gold, and it is cleansed into the stainless constituent. Through the previous [practices of] compassionate illusion⁴³⁷ and so forth one cleanses the misapprehended appearances⁴³⁸ of dreams, life, and the intermediate state. By the power of this one attains an empty-form body. When that enlightened [empty-form] body arises out of the clear light due to the dependent arising of clarity, stability, and completion, it is evident that there is no difficulty in arising as an illusory body of union adorned with the major and minor marks.

At the time of moving from being a life-empowered [awareness-holder] to being one of the great seal, the coarse body is established as a divine body, but there is no description of how this is accomplished.⁴³⁹ For instance, in [the stages of] a life-empowered [awareness-holder] and the great seal attained by that, the clarity, stability, and purity of the empty form body has been perfected. Nevertheless, since they are only connected with the meditative stabilization on the empty form, one should not say, “their body-basis of empty form is fully enlightened”, but one should say, “If the great seal is attained in the intermediate state, they are fully enlightened in an illusory body basis, but if they attain it in this life, they are fully enlightened in a basis, where the coarse body has become crystalline clean.” [133]

A leap-over path where one goes from the path of seeing to the path of no more learning bypassing the path of meditation is not asserted here, but there are explanations of becoming fully enlightened from the life-empowered [stage] skipping the great seal and spontaneous presence and so forth. Leap-over [paths] are enumerated in relation to the three different body bases of an awareness-holder, a vajra-body that has an ordinary appearance⁴⁴⁰ and so

⁴³⁷ *rnying rje sgyu ma* (132.2).

⁴³⁸ *snang zhen* (132.3).

⁴³⁹ *sgrub tshul zur pa med do/* (132.4).

⁴⁴⁰ *rdo rje'i lus tha mal ba'i cha byad can sogs* (133.2).

forth. Whether it is asserted that for example some extremely sharp individuals complete everything from top to bottom in one instant of immutable bliss should be examined.

LONGCHENPA'S ASSERTIONS [133.3]

As a side note, I will also teach the assertions of the Omniscient Lord of the Doctrine [Longchenpa]. He says that regarding [the four awareness-holders]:

1. the fruitional awareness-holder incites devotion⁴⁴¹ toward ripening the mind into the seal of the tutelary deity,
2. the life-empowered [awareness-holder] is on the path of seeing,
3. the mere [the awareness-holder of] the great seal [is everything] ranging from initially attaining the realization of a Superior's path to being on the special path of meditation, and
4. the spontaneously present [awareness-holder] is a path of no more learning.

Those [four] are posited in relation to their mental realization, while those [awareness-holders] who have the special fruitional body basis⁴⁴² and so forth are posited in relation to the awareness-holder's body. [Longchenpa says that] those two ways of positing it are one entity with different conceptual isolates, since the life-empowered [awareness-holder] is posited from the viewpoint of the body being crystalline clean, and the great seal [awareness-holder] is posited from the viewpoint of the mind having attained a Superior's path. [134] In relation to that, it is also easy to understand how there is no contradiction in saying the second is "life-empowered" and the third is "the great seal".

[According to Longchenpa] there are two fruitional [awareness-holders], those who having attained the supreme qualities [stage of the path of preparation] are joined in this [life] to the life-empowered [awareness-holder], and those who without attaining the

⁴⁴¹ *mos skyod* (133.4).

⁴⁴² *rnam smin gyi lus rten khyad par can* (133.6).

supreme qualities will attain the great seal body in the intermediate state. The former attains all four awareness-holder [levels], and the latter attains no more than three. Those two being such, there is a big difference between the two paths of seeing that they attain. This is the meaning of such scriptural passages as, “one who has attained ability and one who has not”. The path of seeing attained by the latter one is suitable to be an awareness-holder of the great seal in relation to its mind, but in relation to its body it is not any of the four awareness-holders. I think that a fruitional [awareness-holder] who achieves the great seal in the intermediate state without attaining the supreme qualities must have greatly cleansed his or her realization of the stage of completion and does not just have the stability of the stage of generation. Although the term, “path of seeing”, is applied to the fruitional awareness-holder, it is difficult to count them as anything other than having acquired the special insight of the stage of completion on up. Therefore, if a fruitional [awareness-holder] on the stage of generation is posited, one must assert them as merely ordinary [people and not Superiors].

The *Stages of the Path* says:

Having loosened the knot that is the body-seal,

The enlightened body of the great seal becomes manifest. [135]

That is called a fruitional awareness-holder.⁴⁴³

Based on such explanations and so forth, [Longchenpa] teaches that when a fruitional awareness-holder dies, there is a connection to the [awareness-holder of] the great seal, but he does not assert that [this passage] says, “Whoever is a fruitional awareness-holder must die before they achieve the great seal!” The awareness-holder Jikmé Lingpa asserts that “attaining or not attaining” the supreme qualities in this life is [done] in relation to whether or not one

⁴⁴³ *lam rim las/ lus kyi rgya mdud grol gyur nas/ /phyag rgya'i sku nyid gsal 'gyur ba/ lram par smin zhes de la brjod/* (134.6-135.1).

does the collective performance.⁴⁴⁴ It is also the opinion of the omniscient [Longchenpa] that the connection between the supreme qualities [stage of the path of preparation] and the awareness-holder [stage] proceeds in terms of the immutable bliss.

This has already been explained, and even though there are different opinions such as positing the limitless boundary of immutable bliss within the high [level of] practice through belief and so forth, the position that the attainment of the first moment of that bliss and the acquisition of a Superior's path are simultaneous is the thought of the omniscient [Longchenpa]. If it is not done in this way for those reasons, [one's position could be] harmed by scripture and reasoning, and so forth. I will not elaborate on how this is so. However, the meaning of the explanations in the *Great Chariot of Definitive Meaning* and so forth⁴⁴⁵ that moments of immutable bliss destroy the channel knot in the central channel⁴⁴⁶ [136] is different from explanations elsewhere of the channel-knots and how they are destroyed in that [here the immutable bliss] causes the channels to dissolve into light. How that is so will also not be explained.

In general, some former scholars of the Magical Emanation wish to posit a moment when a fruitional awareness-holder has separated from this body but has not yet arrived as an awareness-holder of the great seal. Regarding that, Nyetön Chöseng⁴⁴⁷ expresses the fault of [such a moment] being in contradiction with the scripture, “Without forsaking, they establish the other.”⁴⁴⁸ Nevertheless, among those who posit a fruitional [awareness-holder]

⁴⁴⁴ *tshé 'dir chos mchog thob ma thob ces pa ni tshogs spyod byas ma byas la rig 'dzin 'jigs med gling pa bzbed dol* (135.2-135.3). The author is here referring to the passage from Buddhaguhya's *Lesser Stages of the Path* quoted above (see page 567).

⁴⁴⁵ *nge don shing rta chen po sogs* (135.6). This is Longchenpa's auto-commentary on his *Resting in the Mind-Itself* (*sems nyid ngal gso*).

⁴⁴⁶ *dhū ti'i rtsa mdud* (135.6).

⁴⁴⁷ *nye ston chos seng* (136.2). A disciple of Dropuk-ba (*sgro phug pa*), Nye-dön-chö-seng hailed from Gongdring (*sgong drings*). Among Dro-phuk-ba's twelve favorite disciples he was one of the four “teachers”, because their names contained the word “to teach”, *ston*. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 648-649, 660.

⁴⁴⁸ *mi 'dor 'god pa gzhan gyi'ol* (136.2).

as one who has attained the path of seeing prior to death, I think it is good to posit the basis of the Zur system as follows.⁴⁴⁹

According to the former [view of there being a moment when one is no longer a fruitional awareness-holder but has not yet attaining the status of an awareness-holder of the great seal], one cannot prove that such a fruitional [awareness-holder], having repeatedly attained the immutable bliss, does not achieve the great seal in this life.⁴⁵⁰ However, if that were the case, then it would contradict the explanations by the Zur system itself that a fruitional [awareness-holder] and the great seal attained by him or her and so forth [represent] a nirvāṇa without remainder because this coarse body is not carried over to the great seal, and that a life-empowered [awareness-holder] and the great seal attained by him or her and so forth are a nirvāṇa with remainder because the opposite of that [is true]. Also, it does not seem to be good to assert that a superior who has exhaustively abandoned the afflictive obstructions through having previously achieved the empty-form body of primordial wisdom as well as having attained the actual clear light [137] [could] come under the influence of death due to karma and so forth.

According to this latter view, when one who does collective achievement on the path of preparation achieves the immutable bliss through the power of the great seal, [such a person] becomes one on the path of seeing, and even if one does not attain that, through the power of death one attains the indestructible [mind] by means of the thick clear light that [still] has elaborations of dualistic appearance,⁴⁵¹ whereby [that person] becomes one on the path of seeing. From among those two, the one who attains the path of seeing by the former [method] should be explained as a life-empowered [awareness-holder], while the second one should be explained as a fruitional [awareness-holder]. When it is done like that, since that

⁴⁴⁹ *'di nyid zur lugs gzhir bzhag la'ang bzang bar sems tel* (136.3-136.4).

⁴⁵⁰ *sna ma ltar na de 'dra'i rnam smin pa des slar mi 'gyur ba'i bde ba thob nas rgya chen tshé 'dir 'grub pa'ang med par sgrub mi nus la'* (136.4).

⁴⁵¹ *de ma grub kyang 'chi ba'i stobs kyis 'thug po'i 'od gsal gnyis snang gi spros pas mi shigs pa thob stel* (137.2).

latter one on the path of seeing has already withdrawn from mind and body, she or he is described as above, “having separated from the body,” but she or he abides in the fruitional body until arriving at the intermediate state. And, since [the awareness-holders of] the great seal did not issue forth outside of their body, they are also described as “not having separated from the encrusted body of obstructions.” And, those who have previously ripened the mind into an enlightened body and have attained the great seal in dependence on the intermediate state before it was over, have the complete set of three qualities discussed previously. However, the meaning of not having exhausted the three contaminations refers only to the body having impure, encrusting factors that are elements of the previous body basis, but still it is not necessary that they are powerless over their health. [138] For instance, according to the assertions that [the status of] fruitional awareness-holder is attainable in this lifetime, although that [awareness-holder] has not exhausted the contaminations of their birth situation, she or he will definitely be joined to the great seal in the intermediate state. Therefore, it is asserted that [the fruitional awareness-holder] necessary does not take rebirth powerlessly. Even though this [person] acquires the path of seeing, she or he does not transcend the encasement of the ordinary, fruitional body-seal. Therefore, even the etymology is preserved.⁴⁵² But if the method of positing a fruitional awareness-holder is done like that [i.e., if they are asserted to transcend the fruitional body], then it contradicts the explanation in the *Stages of the Path* that they are obstructed by the body:

[Those who have] the fruition of perfect clarity in deity yoga
Are obstructed by the net of the body.⁴⁵³

This is because it is reasonable to assert that they are not obstructed by the net of coarse aggregates and constituents [only] when they abide in the clear light of death. [This

⁴⁵² *sgra bshad kyang mi 'jig go/* (138.2).

⁴⁵³ *lam rim las/ lha yi rnal 'byor gsal rdzogs smin/ llus kyi drwa bas bsgribs gyur pa/* (138.3).

assertion] is also harmed by the explanation of the meaning of their prescience's object, "They act in the countries and realms of limitless continents".⁴⁵⁴

Objection: It follows then that it is reasonable to refute also the explanation that they do not forsake the acting for the welfare of others through the four enlightened activities, [described in the statement]:

The fruitional one completes the enlightened activities,
Whereby not forsaking [the one], they establish the other.⁴⁵⁵

Response: There is not fault [for three reasons]. First, this does not mean that the clear light is obstructed, and it is also not the actual meaning of having stopped [them], when one utterly severs the connection to the subtle and coarse aggregates. [139] However, one will not manifest the illusory body until one has issued out of the previous fruitional body. For that [reason], such an exalted body is conventionally designated as obstructed. That is known through such passages as:

The mind grasps the deity's form
And the knot of the body seal is untied.
Thus, one manifests the enlightened seal body itself.⁴⁵⁶

And:

With the seal of the eye and the seal of the earth [element] just as they are,
One does not obtain attainment of the hand-seal.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁴ *dpag tshad gling khams yul la spyod/ ces mngon shes kyi yul don bshad pas kyang gnod/* (138.4-138,5). There is no indication of the quotation's source. Given the context, it is likely from Buddhaguhya's *Stages of the Path*.

⁴⁵⁵ *smin pas phrin las rdzogs byed pas/ lmi 'dor 'god pa gzhan gyi 'ol/* (138.5). The last half of this passage is quoted above as Nye-dön-chos-seng's proof that there is no momentary gap between the state of a fruitional knowledge holder and that of a knowledge holder of the great seal. See page 574.

⁴⁵⁶ *yid kyis lha yi gzugs bzung zhing / llus kyi rgya mdud grol gyur nas/ lphyag rgya'i sku nyid gsal gyur pa/* (139.2).

⁴⁵⁷ *rgya mig rgya sa ji lta bar/ lphyag rgya thob la ma rag pa'i/* (139.2).

The second reason there is no fault is that it is permissible to connect the ability of prescience to what is just the mode of attainment. Third, it merely teaches the way one progress in yoga:

Through the mind ripening into the deity's body, one's ability at enlightened activity for others becomes superior. By way of this, the fruitional [awareness-holder's] primordial wisdom of meditative equipoise [realizes] the non-duality of the profundity/clarity and stops the two extremes of existence and nirvāṇa.⁴⁵⁸

This latter is an extremely important essential point.

When it is explained in this way, the assertions of the Zur system and those of the Omniscient Lord of the Doctrine [Longchenpa] merely differ in identifying the basic characteristics of a fruitional awareness-holder. And, when the Awareness Holder Jigmé Lingpa⁴⁵⁹ arranged and set forth the Omniscient One's thought, [he said] the reason for not attaining the life-empowered awareness-holder in this life through the single and elaborated seals is that one does not do the collective practice. Thus, there is also the difference between [this assertion and the Zur system's] assertion that [the collective practice] is not necessarily required. Except for just that, they appear to be in agreement on the essential points, but there is a big difference in their disagreement over the essential point of whether to assert [the existence of] a fruitional awareness-holder who attains the path of seeing in this life and will establish the great seal in the intermediate state.

Regarding that, those [who hold] to the Zur system say that the characteristic of the result, within the three characteristics, is [the set of] these four awareness-holders. Therefore,

⁴⁵⁸ *gsum pa sems lha'i skur smin pas gzhan phan phrin las kyi nus pa cher lhag pa'i sgo nas rnam smin pa'i mnyam bzbag ye shes de zab gsal gnyis med dang srid zhi'i mtha' gnyis 'gogs pa'i rnal 'byor du 'gro lugs ston pa tsam yin pa'i phyir tel* (139.3-139.4). This is not a passage from another text but is the author's concise description of the fruitional knowledge holder's yoga and as he notes himself is "very important."

⁴⁵⁹ *rig 'dzin 'jigs med gling pa* (139.6).

they think this cannot be posited on the level of an ordinary being. They posit the fruitional awareness-holder only as one on a Superior's path and assert that one cannot posit [a fruitional awareness-holder] by way of merely the completion of the fundamental mind into a divine form.⁴⁶⁰ The Omniscient [Longchenpa says that] "the feats of an awareness-holder" are commonly and mainly posited in relation to the special bodily feats. This is very well known in all the upper and lower tantric groups. [He] also [says that] when one has attained the deity body of the stage of completion [called] "ripening the mind into the deity's body", one is not in a fruitional body but one has acquired an awareness-holder body that is included in the class of supreme accomplishments. Therefore, thinking that it is correct for this to be the first of the four awareness-holders, he asserts a common ground between those who abide on the level of practice through belief and the awareness-holders. When it is explained like that, one will perhaps discover [a way] to test the definitiveness of each system. [141] One should know that although one [system] explains this enlightened body where "the mind was ripened into a divine body" as being within the class of mind and the other [system] explains it within the class of body, there is no contradiction. This much at least is easy to understand.

THE RESULT CONTINUUM [141.2]

The third [topic] is the result-continuum, that which has been brought to completion. This is the final stage where the ground manifests just as it is through the path having clarified the adventitious defilements that are the objects to be abandoned in relation to the essential ground that is the mode of abiding.⁴⁶¹ According to the statement in the *[Lamp Illuminating the Inner Text]*, "The final accomplishment is called the result,"⁴⁶² when the thought of those

⁴⁶⁰ *gnyug sems lha'i skur rdzogs pa tsam gyis 'jog mi nus par bzhed/* (140.3-140.4).

⁴⁶¹ *gnas lugs ngo bo nyid kyi gzhi* (141.2).

⁴⁶² *khog gzhung las/ grub pa mthar phyin 'bras bur brjod/* (141.3).

who seek the highest stage is thoroughly complete, that is the result. Since the stream is never severed, it is described as a “continuum”.

Within the canon of the Perfection Great Vehicle this is extensively taught to be the result [known as] great enlightenment, but there is a big difference between that Buddhahood, which is achieved through practice of a path of devotion and the two collections, and the Buddhahood explained within highest Mantra where one actualizes just as it is the abiding measure of the natural ground’s continuum. It is also incorrect [to say that] Secret Mantra’s uncommon result can be established without relying on its uncommon path. Therefore, [142] the final path of a spontaneously present awareness-holder is merely designated as Buddhahood, but the great and glorious upholders of the Zur tradition assert, “The actual Buddhahood of the Mantra path must be attained outside of that.”⁴⁶³

On the other hand, the Omniscient [Longchenpa] asserts that the Buddhahood explained within the Sūtra position is the same as the spontaneously present awareness-holder of this tantra, and he is referring to the spontaneously present [awareness-holder]’s final path. Therefore, [the Zur system and Longchenpa] are not one in thought. According to the latter, a Buddhahood where all phenomena become manifestly enlightened in all ways is extensively explained within the Sūtra position. However, since it is not possible for an adventitious mind to take such a manifest enlightenment as its basis for achievement, one must definitely rely on the highest path. Therefore, [Longchenpa says] “Although there is one Buddhahood achieved by two vehicles, it cannot be attained by the path of Sūtra alone.”⁴⁶⁴ For fear of too many words, I will not create more elaboration.

When one divides the phenomena of results, there are many [divisions], such as the ten powers—fearlessness and so forth—that are generally known, the seven branches of union

⁴⁶³ *snags lam gyi sangs rgyas dngos ni de’i phyi nas ’thob dgos so zhes dpal ldan zur pa’i srol ’dzin chen po nmams bzbed la/* (142.1-142.2).

⁴⁶⁴ *de’i phyir theg pa gnyis kyi thob bya’i sangs rgyas gcig yin kyang mdo lam rkyang pas ’thob mi nus zhes pa stel/* (142.4-142.5).

known only in Highest [Yoga Tantra], and so forth. However, when it is done in terms of this tantric scripture, there are the twenty-five phenomena of the result: [the five phenomena of enlightened form, the five phenomena of enlightened speech, the five phenomena of enlightened mind, the five phenomena of enlightened qualities, and the five phenomena of enlightened activity]. [143]

The first [set] is the five enlightened forms [or bodies] (*sku lnga*). The awareness of the sphere that is free from partiality is the reality body, and while not straying from that [awareness of the sphere], demonstrating the complete enjoyment of the supreme vehicle's doctrine to Bodhisattvas who are superiors is the [complete] enjoyment body. Showing the supreme form that is born and labors to the perspective⁴⁶⁵ of both the pure and impure trainees in common is the Emanation Body. The indifferenciability of those three is the vajra [or diamond] body. The unadulterated⁴⁶⁶ factors of appearance of those three are the Manifest Enlightenment Body.

As for the five enlightened communications (*gsung lnga*), primordial wisdom itself, which is always in meditative equipoise on the sphere devoid of thought or expressions, is from the perspective of being the basis of all expressions the reality body's communication of the fact of non-production. That form of the Complete Enjoyment Body is the symbolic communication of the thought from the perspective that merely by seeing it the retinue enters into the state of the inconceivable secret. In each moment, teaching the immeasurable doctrines in the various languages of trainees is the Emanation Body's communication through verbal expressions. The fact that whatever is said is nothing other than the indestructible primordial wisdom's own words is the vajra [or diamond body's] communication of indifferenciability. Just that one primordial wisdom dawning as all the types of melodious sounds is the manifest enlightenment [body]'s communication of the

⁴⁶⁵ *snang nor* (143.2).

⁴⁶⁶ *ma 'dres pa* (143.3). Literally, this means "unmixed".

blessing of basic mind. The difference between those last two is [144] from the perspective of their conceptual isolates: [the first] condenses many into one, and [with the latter] just one thing dawns as many. When joined to only the transmission of mind, it is also suitable to explain these as leading straight to the five historical facts [mentioned] previously.⁴⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the actual teaching of the seventh chapter in both the root text and commentaries is what was just explained.

Concerning the five enlightened minds (*thugs lnga*), the primordial wisdom [that knows] the sphere of reality is the non-conceptual enlightened mind of the reality body. The primordial wisdom of equality is the Complete Enjoyment Body's enlightened mind of great equality. The primordial wisdom of achieving activities is the Emanation Body's enlightened mind that tames migrators. The primordial wisdom of individual concepts is the vajra-[body's] enlightened mind of inseparability. The mirror-like primordial wisdom is the manifest enlightenment [body's] enlightened mind that clarifies everything.

Concerning the five enlightened qualities, they are a thoroughly pure realm, an inestimable mansion without limit or measure, [emanating] light-rays that are clear and pure, thrones of superior features, and enjoyments that are blissfully enjoyed in the nine realms. Concerning the five enlightened activities, these are the spontaneously present enlightened activities of pacifying the external suffering of this life along with its causes, extending the beneficial reserves, controlling trainees on the three levels [under, on, and above ground], annihilating those who are very difficult to train with fierce [means], and all those occurring effortlessly according to the time and capacities of the trainees. The presentation of the

⁴⁶⁷ *dgongs brgyud kho na la sbyar na sngar sngon byung dngos lnga'i thad du bshad pa liar yang rung mod del* (144.1).

supporting enlightened body, the supported primordial wisdom, and the deeds of enlightened activity are included within these [twenty-five phenomena of the result state].

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