

*Sacred Illusion: On Purity and Creation in
Je Tsongkhapa's Philosophy of Tantra*

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Dedication

This essay is dedicated to all my teachers: those of times long past, known to me only by their names, writings, and ever-living ideas; those of recent memory, some now deceased, each of whom has set me on the road of inquiry; and those always present, in their guidance and vast love, who never cease to push me beyond the limits of what I thought was true. To each of you I offer my heart's gratitude, ever inexpressible in words.

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day . . . “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn't happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”

“I suppose you are real?” said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

“The Boy's Uncle made me Real,” he said. “That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always.”

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

—Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, 1922

But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed star differs from star in glory.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. . . .

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. . . . When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

'Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?'

—*1 Corinthians 15.35-44, 51-55*

(NRSV, Anglicized Edition, slightly modified, based on USCCB 2016 Version.)

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Introduction

“What is REAL?” said the Rabbit to the Skin Horse one day¹. . . and who among us has not asked the same question, of our parents, of our teachers, of ourselves, of the trees and mountains and the sky, perhaps over and over again for many years? Perhaps we watch the play of early morning light illuminating spring leaves to iridescent green, or marvel at the dance of a spider’s web appearing and disappearing as wind nudges a far off branch within the sunlight’s trajectory, to cast the web into or out of shadow. Perhaps we reflect on the march of tiny insects making their daily rounds within the bark of a great cedar, and wonder what “home” looks like to them. Or perhaps we walk down a city street when crushed by such pain that it seems we have lost all hope for joy in this world and cry out in a voice silenced by sobs too deep for breath: *What is real?*

Tragedy, or even just bitter disappointment, can make philosophers of us all. It is one thing to ask metaphysical questions in the abstract, and quite another to ask them when burning with the weight of personal urgency: “How did things get to be this way? This is intolerable. Is there anything I can do about it?” Or else in the outburst of joy, when an experience of beauty so expands our scope of vision beyond its ordinary habits, we become light-hearted enough to ask: “How could anything be so perfect? Where did the universe come from? Why is there anything at all?” But how many of us ever find satisfactory answers to our deepest questions? It is all too easy to fall back into the pressures and distractions of daily life, and to think such searchings were merely an aberration of an emotionally fraught mind.

From the perspective of the famed Tibetan Buddhist philosopher, Je Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa (*rje tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*, 1357-1419), however, it is an essential practice of the spiritual path to *deliberately* bring one’s mind into a state of emotionally intense, yet still calmly sober recognition of the urgency of our human situation – on a daily basis. For it is from such a ground that he believes the most authentic discoveries can be made, concerning both the nature of reality as it is, and the way in which such insight might eventually enable any one of us to stop the river of suffering, both for ourselves and for others.

The present dissertation concerns the systematic thought of this influential figure, known to many as Lord Tsongkhapa,² and seeks to unravel several difficult interpretive questions, which I will raise based on careful examination of selected themes across more

¹ See Margery Williams, 1983, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 4-6.

² The Tibetan term “Je” (*rje*) means “lord,” and is a term of respect for a teacher of high caliber. While for simplicity’s sake, and to follow scholarly convention, I will omit this title in most cases herein, I intend its attitude of respect to be implied throughout.

than a dozen of his collected works. Tsongkhapa is perhaps best known in modern academic circles for his rigorous logic, his unique interpretations of Middle Way philosophy, and his systematic presentations of vowed morality. There is a major portion of Tsongkhapa's thought, however, which remains inadequately studied. Within Tsongkhapa's collected works of approximately five thousand double-sided folios, well over half consists of extensive commentaries on and ritual texts prescribing the secret practices associated with the various systems of Indian Buddhist Vajrayāna. While the present dissertation cannot begin to give a thorough account of this massive and diverse library of compositions, I wish to enter Tsongkhapa's tantric thought by reading a select body of material that I expect will provide a representative window through which to begin to understand the logic of his tantric corpus as a whole.

In brief, the motivation for my inquiry is as follows. As it has been presented to me by a number of teachers who stand firmly within the Geluk lineage of Tibetan Buddhism (of which Tsongkhapa is considered to be the philosophical father), there is a tight correspondence between Tsongkhapa's innovative presentation of the Middle Way (Skt. *madhyamaka*) view, and the logic according to which he explained the great variety of meditative practices associated with Buddhist tantra, or Vajrayāna.³ That is, many Geluk teachers, including His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, wish to say that the view of reality that Tsongkhapa worked to expound – in relation to a particular canon of Indian texts associated with sūtra-based philosophy – should also provide the theoretical and ethical grounding needed for the creative and world-transformative practices of

³ Tsongkhapa explains the term Vajrayāna (*rdo rje theg pa*) in his *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*, by citing the Kālacakra commentary, *Immaculate Light* (*dri med 'od*, Skt. *Vimalaprabhā*):

A 'vajra' [diamond] is the great unsplittable and indestructible thing; and being the Great Vehicle [Mahāyāna], it is the Vajra Vehicle. It is that which combines as one: (a) what has the identity of the result – the method of mantra, and (b) what has the identity of causes – the method of the perfections.

See the *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra* (*sngags rim chen mo*, formally titled: *rgyal ba khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang chen po'i lam gyi rim pa gsang ba kun gyi gnad rnam par phye ba*, "A Complete Breaking Open of All the Crucial Points of the Secret Steps of the Path of the All-Pervasive Lord, the Victorious One, Vajradhara"), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ga, 12b1 (24):

རྫོག་ཆེ་ནི་མི་བྱེད་པ་དང་མི་ཆོད་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ཉིད་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ཡིན་པ་ནི་རྫོག་ཆེ་ཐེག་པ་སྟེ། སྟེན་པ་གྱི་ཚུལ་དང་པ་རྫོལ་ཏུ་བྱིན་པའི་ཚུལ་འབྲས་བྱ་དང་རྒྱུའི་བདག་ཉིད་གཅིག་ཏུ་འབྲས་པར་གྱུར་བའོ།

Vehicle is the literal meaning of the Sanskrit "yāna" (Tib. *theg pa*), in the sense of vehicular capacity (though I will more frequently translate it as "Way"). A person who enters the "Greater Vehicle," or Mahāyāna, is considered to have the capacity to wish to take every living being, without exception, to enlightenment. Simply speaking, those two things which are "indivisible" in the Vajra Way are method and incisive wisdom (*thabs dang shes rab*), though the specific referent varies according to the level of tantra of which one is speaking. See the extended discussion of this idea in Chapters Three through Five.

Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Je Tsongkhapa are from the Sherig Parkhang, Dharamsala, c. 1997 pecha edition of the "Collected Works of the Lord" (rje'i gsung 'bum), printed from the Tashi Lhunpo wood-blocks. Following the wood block folio and line citation, Arabic page numbers printed in the modern edition are in parentheses. Except where directly quoted from published books, all translations from Tibetan throughout the dissertation are my own.

tantric meditation to make sense. To express such logic in a most encapsulated form, as I have understood it: If it is true that the worlds of our ordinary appearances lack any inherent character of existing from their own side in the way they appear, and instead come into being, *for* each one of us, based principally upon the seeds and propensities unfolding within our own minds, then if we can plant a very different set of seeds within our own minds, we might indeed begin to experience and function from the perspective of a drastically different kind of world – a pure world – within a relatively short period of time. By entering such a new way of being, the practitioner would gradually gain the ability to help other living beings learn how to follow the same kind of purifying and transformative path, and would eventually be able to lead others also to a state of freedom and ultimate fulfillment.

Stated in such a summarized way, the theory might sound promising and tantalizingly hope-filled, even if incredibly difficult to put into practice at all the levels of detail required by any of the various systems of Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayāna, as they have come down to the present generation, now spread around the globe. Yet it is one thing for a teacher highly educated and practiced within the Tibetan Geluk tradition (for example), to say that “this is what Tsongkhapa says,” and “this is what he means,” to an audience of Tibetan monks and nuns who are currently being trained within Tsongkhapa’s textual lineage, and who have the capacity (if they wish) to study and memorize the very texts to which the teacher refers, and it is quite another thing when such a teacher expresses the same ideas to non-Tibetan practitioners who do not have access to the whole of Tsongkhapa’s writings, whether prevented by barriers of language, education system, or simply the lack of time to study in the same way the teacher has. It is yet another task to attempt to piece together, one by one, the immense variety and complexity of ideas at stake, based directly upon the texts attributed to Tsongkhapa’s own authorship, in order to support – or question – in a scholarly way what a master teacher might be able to say in a few sweeping strokes with the confidence of his own hard-won understanding. It is such a task of textual inquiry that I have felt compelled to take on; arduous, even impossible to carry out as it has at times seemed to be.

Thus I am unabashed in admitting that my investigation of Tsongkhapa’s writings has been driven by questions that are peculiar to my own experience, interests, and uncertainties. While there is little debate among scholars that Tsongkhapa was indeed a systematically oriented thinker, I cannot claim anything comprehensive or systematic about my own inquiry here. Rather (as I will explain in the section on methodology below), I have simply attempted to follow the trail of evidence pertaining to a specific set of questions as far as I could, within the limits of the present project. Nonetheless, it is my hope, not only that the questions I have entertained will be those shared by many, scholars and practitioners alike, but also that the preliminary answers I have discovered

within Tsongkhapa’s writings might be meaningful to some, while they might spark the determination for further inquiry in others.

Why Illusion?

As is evident from the title of this dissertation, my principal questions revolve around the themes of illusion, purity, and creation within Tsongkhapa’s thought. Nevertheless, the way in which I understand these themes to be wound together may not be easy to grasp immediately, so it will take a little explanation even to be able to frame clearly the actual problems at stake.

Buddhist literature, across centuries and cultures, is replete with images and examples of illusion. However, such illustrations are not always used with the same intent, nor have they been interpreted with consistent philosophical meaning across the many strands of Buddhist exegesis, diverse as these are. Historically, both in the Buddhist countries of Asia, and in Euro-American discourse as well, the term “illusion” has often been understood in a negative sense, as though it implies that the world of suffering is to be cast away as insignificant and inconsequential. Confusion about this concept still leads many to question whether there is ultimately any *positive* goal to Buddhist practice, and often stands as a bone of irreconcilable contention in dialogue between Buddhism and monotheistic religions that assert a metaphysically real creation by a Creator God. In my own experience, when speaking of Buddhist ideas at the broadest level with contemporaries who might have a little – or even much – knowledge of the subject, my conversation partner will sometimes readily raise the idea of illusion, but with the assumption this means that nothing in the phenomenal world is really here, and the implication that therefore maybe nothing really matters, anyway. Picture the phrase “but it’s all illusion,” accompanied by a dismissive wave of the hand and some reference to everything being empty, “right?” It is disturbing to me that the sophisticated history of Buddhist thought on the subject of illusion could still be misunderstood so frequently.

From my earliest encounters with Middle Way thought in general, and with Tsongkhapa’s interpretations in particular, it was impressed upon me that for Nāgārjuna (c. second to third century CE) and for Tsongkhapa alike,⁴ the fact that things are empty of inherent nature, and the fact that they appear and function in a way that is “like an illusion,” is inseparable from the fact that ethically-charged actions bring their inevitable

⁴ The initial reference for my reading of Nāgārjuna’s thought was Jay Garfield, 1995, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna’s Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press), while my first serious encounter with Tsongkhapa’s thought was through an English translation of a commentary to Tsongkhapa’s *Three Principal Paths* (*lam gyi gtso bo rnam gsum*) by Pabongka Rinpoche (*pha bong kha pa byams pa bstan ’dzin ’phrin las rgya mtsho*, 1878–1941) translated by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin and Michael Roach, 1998, *The Principal Teachings Of Buddhism With A Commentary By Pabongka Rinpoche* (Howell, NJ: Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Press).

results in our experience, and that everything we do matters inexorably in creating how the “illusion” that is our reality will continue to unfold. Nevertheless, over the course of almost fifteen years of research, the more deeply I have engaged with the rich details of Tsongkhapa’s writings, in all their variety of subject matter, the more concerned I have become that the abundant extant scholarship and contemporary philosophical reflection on the general meaning of the Buddhist “Middle Way” still tends not to address, in a deeply satisfying way, the problem of *why* a fundamental lack of inherent nature would support and not detract from the functional capacity of all actions and their results. I have sensed that there might be compelling philosophical solutions dwelling within Tsongkhapa’s writings that would help to offer creative avenues of thought by which to resolve some of the logical impasses in scholarly studies of the Indian Middle Way philosophers. Not only that, I have wondered whether Tsongkhapa’s reading of the Middle Way, especially when understood in the context of his tantric writings, might offer an important counterpoint to apparent contradictions that arise in dialogue between generalized Buddhist explanations regarding “where things come from” and theological explanations regarding the same shared range of human experiences.

From what I have discovered repeatedly in Tsongkhapa’s writings, however, it has also become clear to me that one might not be able to find such philosophically satisfying answers by studying his Middle Way treatises alone. Rather, one would have to take into account the sophisticated interaction between Tsongkhapa’s writings on cosmology, ethics, logic, perception theory, and human psychology, as well as his explanations of the theories of deep karmic memory associated with the systems of Yogic Practice (Skt. *yogācāra*, also known as Mind-Only, Skt. *cittamātra*) and his exegesis of scores of Indian commentaries on the esoteric practices of tantra, just in order to glimpse the full perspective from which he was explicating any single point of doctrine by the last two decades of his life, which were his most prolific period.

That is, I do detect within the full scope of Tsongkhapa’s writings the potential for a yet more complex and sophisticated understanding of the relationship between dependent arising and emptiness than I have yet seen elucidated within English-language scholarship. Of course, the very title of Elizabeth Napper’s 1989 translation, *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness: A Tibetan Buddhist Interpretation of Mādhyamika Philosophy Emphasizing the Compatibility of Emptiness and Conventional Phenomena*, as well as its content and that of many other translations of Tsongkhapa’s works on the Middle Way⁵

⁵ See, for example, Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa and Joshua W. C. Cutler, editor-in-chief, with the Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, 2000, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path of Enlightenment, Vol. III* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion); Tsong kha pa, Jay Garfield, and Ngawang Samten, 2006, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press); Jeffrey Hopkins and Kevin Vose, 2008, *Tsong-kha-pa’s Final Exposition of Wisdom* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications); and Robert A. F. Thurman, 1991, *The Central Philosophy*

cannot help but reveal the fact that Tsongkhapa saw these two sides of reality to be inseparable. What I propose, however, is that we might come to appreciate more fully the soteriological richness and potential of Tsongkhapa's Middle Way position – and hence his understanding of illusion – when we begin to read it consistently and directly in the light of his writings on other great systems of Buddhist thought, including Vasubandhu's encyclopedic accounts of Higher Knowledge (Skt. *abhidharma*), Asaṅga's explanations of the Mind-Only system, and Dharmakīrti's theories of epistemology, or modes of valid perception (Skt. *pramāṇa*).⁶ Furthermore, in a way that may be contrary to convention for the Geluk tradition,⁷ I believe that we can gain greater insight into Tsongkhapa's own vision of a fully balanced Middle Way worldview, precisely by turning to the passages where he explained that view within the context of Vajrayāna itself. The trend in scholarly studies has been for each of these topics in Tsongkhapa's thought to be treated separately, in the context of individual translations of his works, which is natural, since Tsongkhapa himself tended to write focused treatises devoted to just one or another subject or perspective at a time (with the exception of the Steps of the Path literature, in which many diverse topics are indeed compiled within a single systematic work). Nonetheless, I think the time has come for there to be attempts at synthetic analysis of

of Tibet: A Study and Translation of Jey Tsong Khapa's "Essence of True Eloquence" (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), to name some of the most important translations of Tsongkhapa's Middle Way works to date.

⁶ Geshe Thupten Jinpa emphasizes this synthesis in the Introduction to his 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way* (London: RoutledgeCurzon), 9: "In his works on Madhyamaka philosophy, the first of his two primary areas of focus, Tsongkhapa develops a highly systematic reading of Nāgārjuna's thought as interpreted by Candrakīrti, combined with the sophistication of Dharmakīrti's (c. 650 CE) epistemological language. The result of this intellectual enterprise is a profoundly powerful philosophical synthesis that is perhaps best described simply as 'Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka.'" In the conclusion to his brilliant study, however, Geshe Thupten Jinpa acknowledges that it has remained outside the scope of his particular work to explore "the critical question of how far Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought differs from that of his Indian predecessors," explaining this difference to lie in the fact that, "unlike many of the Indian Mādhyamika thinkers, Tsongkhapa develops his Madhyamaka philosophy within a wider system of thought and praxis that includes Dharmakīrti's epistemology and Asaṅga's (c. 310-90) and Vasubandhu's Abhidharma phenomenology and psychology on the one hand, and Vajrayāna Buddhism on the other." While I, too, will not be able to address properly the question of Tsongkhapa's uniqueness vis à vis his Indian predecessors (see the discussion just below), I do intend to shed some light on places where Tsongkhapa's understanding of Dharmakīrti, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu converge in his reading of Vajrayāna texts.

⁷ See Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason*, 185: "As regards the question of Vajrayāna influence, I have followed a methodological principle in my reading that is salient in Tsongkhapa's own writings, which is that although Tsongkhapa constantly invokes Madhyamaka ideas in his discourse on Vajrayāna, he very rarely, if ever, brings into his Madhyamaka discussion any specifically Vajrayāna concepts. This inclines me to think that . . . Tsongkhapa can be seen as adopting a Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka reading of Vajrayāna, but not vice versa." While I agree with Geshe Thupten Jinpa's statement here, in that Tsongkhapa never explicitly brings a Vajrayāna perspective into his sūtra writings on Madhyamaka, nonetheless I think that we can gain greater insight into the potential *implications* of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka view, as an overarching philosophy of ultimate meaning, precisely from studying those places where he "invokes Madhyamaka ideas in his discourse on Vajrayāna."

Tsongkhapa's thought as a whole, even long before so much as half of his collected works have been rendered or published in English translation.

Within the last few decades, debates on how to read the Indian Middle Way thinkers Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva (c. third century CE), Buddhapālita (c. fifth to sixth century), Bhāvaviveka (c. sixth century), and Candrakīrti (c. seventh century) in a mode that is philosophically accurate to their texts have continued to abound;⁸ and there remains a considerable critique as to whether Tsongkhapa's interpretations of these figures, especially his readings of Candrakīrti, are indeed faithful to the intent of Candrakīrti's own writings.⁹ I will not be engaging directly in either of these heated debates here, however, because I think that to do so properly would require an entirely different kind of project, one that would focus intently word by word on the interpolations that Tsongkhapa makes when glossing the Tibetan translations of Candrakīrti's writings which were available to him. Though I will at times indicate the precise words that are glossed from Candrakīrti's own texts where appropriate within this dissertation, I find it would be a distraction to attempt to critique at every moment whether Tsongkhapa's is an exegetically faithful reading, or whether it appears to read into Candrakīrti's words Tsongkhapa's own complex understanding, inevitably projected backwards from a vantage point that comes at least seven hundred and fifty years later, from an entirely different country, language, and Buddhist cultural milieu. To address such issues properly, it would also be necessary to compare Tsongkhapa's Tibetan-language interpretation with the extant portions of Candrakīrti's texts available to us in Sanskrit, but insofar as it is unlikely that Tsongkhapa had those Sanskrit editions available to him, and insofar as it appears that Tsongkhapa's direct knowledge of Sanskrit

⁸ See, for example, Georges B. J. Dreyfus, Jay Garfield, Guy Newland, Mark Siderits, et al., ("The Cowherds"), 2011, *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press); Jay L. Garfield, 2008, "Turning a Madhyamaka Trick: Reply to Huntington," in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 36, no. 4: 507-527; in response to C.W. Huntington, 2007, "The Nature of the Mādhyamika Trick," in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* vol. 35: 103-131; and Richard P. Hayes, 2003, "Nāgārjuna; Master of Paradox, Mystic or Perpetrator of Fallacies?" (Paper presented to the Philosophy Department at Smith College).

⁹ See, for example, Dan Arnold, 2005, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief* (New York: Columbia University Press), 267n54; Kodo Yotsuya, 1999, *The Critique of Svatantra Reasoning by Candrakīrti and Tsong-kha-pa: A Study of Philosophical Proof According to Two Prasāngika Madhyamaka Traditions and Indo-Tibetan Studies* (Stuttgart: Steiner). See also David Seyfort Ruegg's appraisal and defense of Tsongkhapa's hermeneutical and "philosophical *aggiornamento*" with respect to Indian Buddhist thought in Ruegg, 2004, "The Indian and Indic in Tibetan Cultural History, and Tsong kha pa's Achievement as a Scholar and Thinker: An Essay on the Concepts of 'Buddhism in Tibet' and 'Tibetan Buddhism,'" in *The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle: Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 2010, pp. 375-398, esp. 393-395. Cf. Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 1999, "Tsongkhapa's Qualms about Early Tibetan Interpretations of Madhyamaka Philosophy" in *Tibet Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2, 3-28, and T. J. F. Tillemans, 1992, "Tsong kha pa *et al* on the Bhāvaviveka-Candrakīrti Debate" (Narita, Japan, 5th Seminar, Aug 1989: PapersFirst).

was limited,¹⁰ I think it would be anachronistically unfair and perhaps philosophically unproductive to critique Tsongkhapa for linguistic (mis)interpretations of Sanskrit originals whose language he was likely not reading at all. Thus, for now, I prefer to read Tsongkhapa on his own terms, in his own language, in a limited attempt to understand his own comprehensive vision.

I make the deliberate choice, then, to take Tsongkhapa as an example of how one Tibetan thinker, steeped in the scriptures of Buddhist India (as they were available to him in Tibetan translation), attempted to make sense of the inextricable connection between the metaphysical “emptiness” of all things, and the infallibility of a moral system of cause and effect that functions to bring about the great variety of appearances in a way that is repeatedly stated to be “like an illusion.” Thus I hope to show, from Tsongkhapa’s perspective at least, how the term “illusion” need not be understood in a vague or negative sense, but rather as a highly technical philosophical term for how it is that things appear once one has recognized that they do not *really* exist in the way that they appear.

Why *Sacred Illusion*?

To understand this intimate connection between emptiness and illusion in Tsongkhapa’s sūtra-based thought, however, would not automatically lead us to understand what it would mean for there to be a *sacred* illusion. For the latter, I suggest that one would need to leap into the depths of Tsongkhapa’s proposed methods for how to purify the entire scope of one’s perceptions in a uniquely tantric sense. For it is in the context of such practices that he asserts again and again that the appearances that will begin to arise upon the “empty” basis of a reality that never had any nature of its own will now be able to dawn consistently as a world that is experienced to be special, holy, even divine. This is not to say that in Tsongkhapa’s view there cannot be genuinely sacred experiences based on sūtra practices alone. Far from it. Rather, I refer to the fact that the tantric practices are specifically and explicitly designed to cultivate an experience of the sacred in a consistent way, until no appearance could dawn as anything but the apparition of a divine mode of creation.

Now the English word, “sacred,” of course has many connotations derived from usage in a variety of religious contexts, not only those associated with the Abrahamic religious traditions. Throughout the present writing, my use of this word might be read in the broadest sense of that which is “set apart” from the ordinariness of our everyday worlds and from the negative states of mind habitually associated with so many of the difficult experiences and situations that arise for us on a daily basis. Yet as this

¹⁰ See Christian K. Wedemeyer, 2006, “Tantalising Traces of the Labours of the Lotsawas: Alternative Translations of Sanskrit Sources in the Writings of Rje Tsong Kha Pa,” in Davidson and Wedemeyer, eds., *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis* (Leiden: Brill), 149-182.

dissertation progresses, I hope that the word may take on more and more valences of what it would mean to be “sacred,” or “holy,” within the context of Tsongkhapa’s worldview in particular. Does it have to do with the qualities of wisdom and infinite compassion associated with Buddhas and bodhisattvas? Does it have to do with an aesthetic sense of beauty that transcends our ordinary modes of perception? Does it have to do with the sense of liberation – even temporary – that comes from human contact with beings, places, or objects that somehow evoke a taste, glimpse, or vision of a world better and purer than our own? Or might it have to do with the ineffable perfection of a moment of correct seeing, when the eye of the mind is in contact with truth, with reality as it is, free of our usual veils of misperception and prejudice?

There are several different Tibetan words that could be translated as “sacred,” or “holy,” and I do not always have any one of them in mind, in particular. But it is worth mentioning them briefly here for context. Principally, there is “*dam pa*,” which can often refer to a holy person, or to a worthy teacher whom one holds dear, and is also an adjective that can pay honor to its noun as being of high religious and soteriological significance, as in the “sacred teaching” (Tib. *dam pa’i chos*, Skt. *saddharma*)¹¹ or the ultimate meaning/highest truth (*don dam*, Skt. *paramārtha*). There is also “jin-lap-chen” (*byin rlabs can*, Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*), which refers to that which has been blessed, empowered, or consecrated. So that, too, would be “sacred.” Finally there is, “tsa-chen” (*rtsa chen*), which has the sense of what is of great value, precious, inconceivably rare and meaningful. I would suggest that in Tsongkhapa’s world, if one understood the unbelievable *rarity* of meeting with a human life in which one could encounter the *holy* teachers and teachings by which one might receive the *blessings* that could lead one to the ability to realize the *ultimate* truth about reality, then indeed one might have an idea of what “sacred” would mean in Tsongkhapa’s thought, even if he had never heard the particular word as we think of it in English. I leave it to my reader to ponder these possible valences as the dissertation unfolds.¹²

¹¹ From here onwards, the default language of terms listed in parentheses is Tibetan, unless noted otherwise: e.g. “Skt.” abbreviates Sanskrit.

¹² Note that I use the words “divine,” “divine being,” and “divinity” in a much more technical sense, translating the Tibetan term *lha*, which in turn often translates the Sanskrit term *deva*. This is an extremely polyvalent word in both languages, used across several religious traditions. Even limited to a Buddhist context, the word can refer to a wide range of types of beings, from the local spirits believed to inhabit trees and mountains, to the “worldly gods” born within the form and formless realms of the cycle of suffering, all the way up to what are understood to be the tantric manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. For clarity’s sake, I limit my use of the English “divine being” *solely* to Tibetan uses of the word *lha* that refer to members of an enlightened world, or *maṇḍala*. On the other hand, I use “god” or “gods” to refer to beings of the form and formless realms who are understood to dwell still within *samsāra*. Thus, with respect to Buddhas and very high (i.e., tenth-level) bodhisattvas, I am choosing the word “divine” for its etymological relationship to the Sanskrit *deva*, but using it in a precise sense defined by the present Buddhist context. As will become clear from Chapter Three onwards, the quality of “divinity” here does refer to the infinite array of enlightened qualities of a Buddha (and their close approximation in high

Valences of “Purity”

In order to understand the possibility for a consistent experience of the sacred to arise amidst a world that Buddhist literature has so often seemed to characterize as beset by suffering, we must explore a second topic that pervades Tsongkhapa’s thought, even though it is not usually among the initial words one might have associated with his philosophy. This is the notion of “purity.” Again, I use here an English word that could actually translate a number of different Tibetan words, several of which will be used thematically throughout Chapters Three, Five, and Six. Three of these key terms – *rnam par dag pa* (Skt. *viśuddha*); *zag pa med pa* (Skt. *anāsrava*); and *dri ma med pa* (Skt. *vimala*) – which I translate as “totally pure,” “immaculate,” and “stainless,” respectively, all have connotations of being free of stains or obscurations, in one form or another. The verb *sbyang ba* (Skt. *viśodhana*, *pariśodhana*), however, has the active sense of working to purify, as in training, practicing, or even (in the Tibetan usage) exercising in order to perfect something. We will explore in Chapter Six, however, at least one instance where such purificatory training will end in the total elimination of that which it purifies, rather than the polishing or cleansing of it. We will also discover that Tsongkhapa uses the terms for purity (*rnam dag* and *zag med*) in some instances where he will ultimately interpret it to mean the purity that is free of possessing any nature at all, as opposed to simply being free of stains, in a conventional sense. There is a delicate interplay in his thought, especially his tantric thought, between the purity that is a lack of inherent nature, which was always the case, and the purity that is a lack of defilements, which must be gained through practice (*sbyong ba*) of the path.

From the beginning of my research, my quest has been to understand the relationship between these two kinds of purity in Tsongkhapa’s thought, and how a precise understanding of them might help to overturn stereotypes that still hold Buddhism to be fundamentally pessimistic or negative in its metaphysical outlook. That is, if emptiness of inherent nature can be understood and associated with the same terms that describe a state of being that is free of all defilements, and all possibility of suffering, then there would be a clear sense in which the fundamental nature of reality itself – and therefore the primordially indwelling nature of every living being – is being described as *pure*. If we can see that this is as true for Tsongkhapa as it is well known to be true for other Tibetan thinkers – especially those associated with the tradition of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) – this might have significance for future comparison between these two major rivers of Tibetan Buddhist thought, encompassed by the “Geluk” and

bodhisattvas), principal among these being the omniscient wisdom understanding all things, both in their ultimate reality and their individual appearances; the ultimate love that is the fully realized “wish for enlightenment” (*byang chub kyi sems*, Skt. *bodhicitta*); and the power, or capacity, to create innumerable emanations to serve the needs of living beings. Again, I leave it to my reader to discern whether such qualities are comparable to the referent of the word “divine” in the context of Abrahamic religions.

“Nyingma” lineages, respectively. From the point of view of interreligious dialogue as well, I believe Tsongkhapa’s subtle distinctions on the issue of purity – especially with regard to the ultimate nature of a person – offer a fascinating possibility for a point of *rapprochement* between a theistic vision of origins, in which all things are understood to have been created in purity, and a typical Buddhist diagnosis of the fallen state, in which all things appear to be defiled by ignorance, mental afflictions, and their results.

Creation: Both Pure and Impure

This leads us to the question of creation, which in Tsongkhapa’s thought is inseparable from the question of mind. That is, if in Buddhist texts it is often stated that there is no creator deity, and that instead all things arise from a beginningless web of dependently related events, does this not continue to beg the theologically oriented cosmological question: Where did the very possibility come from for there to be minds and beings to act out the events at all, and whence did the very elements arise, of which the worlds are made? Our inquiry into the components of Tsongkhapa’s own cosmological thought will lead us into a sustained investigation of Tsongkhapa’s views on “karma,” or the laws of ethically-charged actions and their results. I will argue that the meaning of “karma” is also an issue of tremendous importance and potential misunderstanding within contemporary discourse, and will try to elicit as much detail as possible from a variety of sources, both in Tsongkhapa’s works, and those of his immediate disciples, in order to piece together a plausible picture of Tsongkhapa’s overall view of karmic causation, one that is more multifaceted and subtle than the study of any single presentation might reveal. With this almost overwhelmingly complex picture as a springboard, we can then continue our investigation into what Tsongkhapa might have meant by saying, with Candrakīrti, and echoing several sūtra sources, that all worlds are made from mind, even as he eventually refutes what is known as the “Mind-Only” view.

I believe that it is only through unraveling the complexity of these principles – regarding the way that entire worlds of suffering could be “created” by minds soaked in ignorance – that we might have any chance of understanding what Tsongkhapa will mean for there to be worlds created from the depths of a totally pure mind, that is, a Buddha’s mind, in the context of Vajrayāna.¹³ It is here, in the idea of a fundamentally pure level of creative mind – as understood (1) in its original condition, (2) while practicing the path, and (3) at the time of the final result – that I also think we might find possibilities, not

¹³ Again, it is not that there are not references to pure worlds being created by Buddhas in the Mahāyāna sūtra literature, for there are indeed many such references, but since I will eventually be focusing specifically on Tsongkhapa’s instructions for how to take such a result “as the path” in a tantric sense, it will become most relevant, here, to look at the descriptions of creation from a totally pure mind particularly as these appear in the tantric literature upon which Tsongkhapa comments so extensively.

only for a touchstone of meaningful comparison with genuinely theological systems, but again for elucidating points of more evident parallelism between Tsongkhapa's milieu and the Tibetan Buddhist presentations found in the Great Perfection tradition.

Again, I have consciously chosen Tsongkhapa's thought as just one example of how a Tibetan master – one who is revered by many and vehemently disputed by others¹⁴ – navigated the array of Indian Buddhist texts that he had available to him, in order to present what I will readily acknowledge as his own unique interpretation of Indian Buddhist thought. For many reasons that will become evident through the course of this study, I find Tsongkhapa's perspective meaningful, not only as one alternative for articulating the way in which many strands of Indian Buddhist literature might be read in harmony and counterpoint with one another, but also as an unusual conversation partner for future dialogue with other traditions of religious thought. Though it does not appear that Tsongkhapa had any direct contact with members of Abrahamic religions during his lifetime, I think it will be clear that he addresses perennial themes of religious inquiry in ways that might stretch and challenge the paradigms of other systems, if theologians are to consider carefully what the presence of a sophisticated Vajrayāna tradition in Tibet, such as that represented by Tsongkhapa's mature thought, might reveal about the diversity of soteriological systems that continue to be practiced in our world today. Due to the limited scope of this project, however, I will not be able to enter directly into these potential themes of interreligious comparison here; nonetheless I ask my reader to accept hints and footnotes spread throughout this study as suggestions for further exploration.

Primary Goals

From the perspective of Buddhist scholarship, then, this dissertation has two overarching goals: One concerns a clarified perspective on the relationship between Madhyamaka (Middle Way), Cittamātra (Mind-Only), and Pramāṇa (the study of valid perception) in Tsongkhapa's thought, and the other concerns Tsongkhapa's vision for

¹⁴ For treatment of some debates with Tsongkhapa's thought in the history of Tibet, see for example: Sonam Thakchoe, 2007, *The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), as well as Jeffrey Hopkins, 1999, *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism: Dynamic Responses to Dzong-Ka-Ba's "The Essence of Eloquence"* (Berkeley: University of California Press); 2002, *Reflections on Reality: The Three Natures and Non-Natures in the Mind-Only School*, (Berkeley: University of California Press); and 2005, *Absorption In No External World: 170 Issues in Mind-Only Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications). For a study of an earlier thinker whom Tsongkhapa debated and whose thought has continued to be held up in opposition to Tsongkhapa's views to the present day, see also: Cyrus Stearns, 2010, *The Buddha from Dölpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen*, Revised and enlarged edition (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications). For a study of a later thinker in that same competing tradition (who is also highly respected by Geluk tantric commentators), see Jeffrey Hopkins, 2007, *The Essence of Other-Emptiness by Tāranātha* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications).

how Vajrayāna (tantric) practices are supposed to work upon a practitioner, in the sense of ontological, psychological, and epistemological transformation.

First, my research will suggest that one reason Tsongkhapa strove to preserve Dharmakīrti's epistemological system, even in the wake of a thoroughgoing Middle Way critique, may have been that Tsongkhapa saw an intimate connection between the ripening of karmic tendencies (*bag chags*, Skt. *vāśana*) – as explained in Mind-Only treatises – and every single act of concept-driven perception. Because Tsongkhapa clearly held the cause and effect of dependent origination (by which I will argue he primarily meant cause and effect as driven by *karmic* factors) to be inseparable from the truth of emptiness, it was for the most part no contradiction for Tsongkhapa to continue to explain the side of appearances according to the complex and counter-intuitive theories of karmically-laden perceptual faculties associated with both Asaṅga's Mind-Only system and with Dharmakīrti's epistemology. I would suggest that Tsongkhapa did not subscribe either to a Middle Way view that would render logical argumentation meaningless, *nor* to one that would merely preserve the conventions of ordinary language and commonsense ideas about how we perceive. Rather, with Dharmakīrti, Tsongkhapa demanded a thorough revision of our ordinary intuitions about how we perceive, about how cause and effect come about, and about the ontological status of both outer objects and inner consciousness. Yet for Tsongkhapa, in the end it is the *Middle Way* that must effect such a complete revision of everyday intuitions, every bit as much as would a Mind-Only view, if not more.¹⁵ Eventually, it is from that shift in perspective, demanded by what Tsongkhapa sees to be an authentic Middle Way view, that I think the logical doorway opens for him to make the even more radical epistemological somersaults required by the creation stage of highest yoga tantra, as we will examine in Chapter Four.

Thus I would observe that there is one way to interpret the “absurd consequence” reasoning associated with the Mādhyamika Prāsaṅgika (Middle Way Consequence) thinkers¹⁶ that can make it seem to us rather easy to accept, perhaps quite tame, even as

¹⁵ My thanks to Dan Arnold for clarifying the issues at stake here, in conversation, November 6th, 2016. Though he would probably disagree with Tsongkhapa's reading of Candrakīrti in light of Dharmakīrti in the way I propose it here, Professor Arnold's comments highlighted for me what it was I had been noticing Tsongkhapa “doing all along” (in his interpretations of both Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti), especially as will become apparent in the texts I have translated for Chapters Two and Five.

¹⁶ See Kevin Vose, 2009, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan Creation of Prāsaṅgika* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), for an astute analysis of the way in which the categories of **prāsaṅgika* (Tib. *thal 'gyur ba*) and **svātantrika* (Tib. *rang rgyud pa*) appear to have been created by Tibetan exegetes (living prior to Tsongkhapa's time) who then projected those categories back onto the Indian authors whom Tibetan exegetes saw as having championed one or the other mode of reasoning. This complex subject is not one with which I will deal directly in the present dissertation, though I will on occasion reference Tsongkhapa's use of the terms “Consequence” (for *thal 'gyur*) and “Independent Reasoning” (for *rang rgyud*). My reader should be aware that for Tsongkhapa these categories were simply assumed as representing the distinction between two camps of *Indian* authors. See also Georges B. J. Dreyfus and Sara

secular philosophy. That is, there is a way to read the deconstructive arguments of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti so that they represent a sophisticated, but intuitive challenge along the lines of what we post-moderns wanted to say anyway – about literary deconstruction, about perspectivalism, about not presupposing metaphysical presence, or about becoming intensely self-conscious of what takes place when we superimpose constructed systems upon ever-receding horizons of experience. This is what I have seen termed, by many scholars, as a “therapeutic” reading of Nāgārjuna.¹⁷ Throughout this dissertation, however, I will gradually suggest that there is a much more challenging, and perhaps soteriologically more profound, way to understand the logical turns of both Nāgārjuna’s and Candrakīrti’s Middle Way. In this case I am reading these Indian authors solely through the lens of Tsongkhapa, but I would readily maintain that similar conclusions might be reached when taking any of a number of other great Tibetan philosophers for one’s interpreters, both within and beyond Tsongkhapa’s particular lineage.¹⁸ Whether or not this complex worldview is what a direct reading of Nāgārjuna

L. McClintock, 2002, *The Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction: What Difference Does A Difference Make?* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications).

¹⁷ (A) For an example of the trend to refer to Nāgārjuna’s philosophical purpose as one of “therapy,” see the Introduction to Joseph Loizzo, 2007, *Nāgārjuna’s Reason Sixty (Yuktiṣaṣṭikā) With Chandrakīrti’s Commentary (Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti)* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies), 8, where Loizzo proposes that the purpose of Candrakīrti’s three major commentaries is: “1) to articulate Nāgārjuna’s conventionalist method as a therapeutic philosophy of language . . . 2) to apply his language therapeutic method to define the epistemology of Centrism . . . and 3) to translate this social epistemology into a Centrist anthropology, combining philosophical language therapy and communicative ethics in a self-corrective practice meant to produce enlightened altruists (*bodhisattva*) as ideal epistemological and social agents.” While I doubt Loizzo wishes to reduce Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti’s soteriological purpose to language therapy, I am concerned about the secularizing implications of such a characterization. (B) For an astute summary and critique of literature aimed at comparing the deconstructive thought of Jacques Derrida and Nāgārjuna, see Lara Braitstein, “No Views is Good Views: A Comparative Study of Nagarjuna’s *Sunyata* and Derrida’s *Différance*” in *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*, vol. 5, no. 2, August 2004. (C) For an example of how a broad understanding of Nāgārjuna’s thought (as an effort to overcome the positing of absolute metaphysical presence) has made its way into inter-religious dialogue as a means of countering entrenched “onto-theology,” see, for example, John P. Keenan, 1989, *Meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), and “The Emptiness of Christ: A Mahayana Christology,” in *Anglican Theological Review* 75:1 (Winter 1993): 48-63. While all these comparative approaches are fascinating attempts to grapple with Nāgārjuna’s thought outside its Buddhist context, I sense they miss something, as Lara Braitstein points out, for lack of deep familiarity with, or else appreciation of, the way Nāgārjuna has been interpreted within the vast scope and context of Indian as well as Tibetan Buddhist thought. I would offer that including Tsongkhapa’s interpretations of Nāgārjuna in such conversations may offer rich material for new steps in comparative efforts. (See also Matthew Kapstein’s mention of this theme at the start of Matthew Kapstein, 2001, *Reason’s Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian & Tibetan Buddhist Thought* [Boston: Wisdom Publications], 3.)

¹⁸ Such work would remain for further studies of how a variety of Tibetan thinkers from different lineages analyze the relationship between the Madhyamaka critique and the grand systems of uniquely Buddhist worldview found in the treatises of Abhidharma, Yogācāra, and so on. Certainly, their philosophical solutions are not all the same. As a source for a next step in this discussion, see, for example, the forthcoming translation of a series of essays comparing Old and New School (*gsar rnying*) interpretations of Madhyamaka thought written by the nineteenth century Tibetan scholar/practitioner, Lozang Do-ngak Chökyi Gyatso Chok (*blo bzang mdo sngags chos kyi rgya mtsho mchog*, 1903–1957), included in *Open*

or Candrakīrti in either Sanskrit or Tibetan might elicit (a point upon which I will suspend judgment), I will submit that Tsongkhapa did have a particular reading of their intent, which cannot be separated from the depth and breadth of his understanding of the ornate Buddhist cosmological, ontological, ethical, and epistemological systems usually associated with the systems of Abhidharma and Yogācāra.

I will maintain that in order to understand the complex scope of Tsongkhapa's thought, we must read his commentaries in several diverse genres side by side with one another, so as to observe how he himself could work from a point of view where, for the most part, the systems set forth by what he readily termed "higher" and "lower" schools of Indian Buddhist philosophy did not fall into contradiction, but rather complemented one another. For Tsongkhapa, each literary system offered indispensable material that often could not be found in the textual corpus of the other systems. For example, it appears that Candrakīrti did not write explicitly about the intricate variety of karmic seeds and tendencies, while Dharmakīrti did not write on the stages of world-formation that appear in Vasubandhu's compilation of Abhidharma, and so on. Thus I will propose that Tsongkhapa's reading of the Middle Way cannot be fully understood without viewing it through the lens of what he knew and maintained to be essential from the texts of Vasubandhu, Asaṅga, and Dharmakīrti, along with their many Indian commentators. Since my reading of Tsongkhapa's sūtra philosophy constitutes only one part of this thesis, however, I must take such examinations primarily as preparatory material, in order to show further how these layers provide the vital foundation upon which stands Tsongkhapa's vision of transformation in a tantric context.

My second major goal is to enter into a persistent, investigative dialogue with the themes at play in Tsongkhapa's explanations of how to practice the first stage of highest yoga tantra, namely the "creation stage" (*bskyed rim*, Skt. *utpattikrama*). Given that in Tsongkhapa's Middle Way view, the manner in which we experience our respective worlds, and the way in which those worlds will actually *function* for us, is shaped entirely by the inner conditioning we bring to each moment, I wish to ask how Tsongkhapa develops the components of a uniquely tantric worldview that, if accepted and practiced consistently, could act to shape and influence the very process by which world-making perception takes place. How does Tsongkhapa intend his reader to think and practice, and

Mind: View and Meditation in the Lineage of Lerab Lingpa, translated by B. Alan Wallace, edited by Eva Natanya (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications), especially "A Jeweled Mirror of Pure Appearances: Establishing the Unity of the Views of the Old and New Translation Schools of the Secret Mantrayāna." Chökyi Gyatso argues clearly that the views propounded by the lineages of Tsongkhapa and Longchenpa (*klong chen rab 'byams pa*, 1308-1363), respectively, have the same ultimate intent (*dgongs pa gcig*), though he knows there are many among his readers who will strongly disagree with him, and begs them to keep a "fresh mind" (*blo gsar pa*). As I observed on many occasions during my field research at Tibetan monasteries in India, the issues of inter-sectarian disagreement continue to be debated hotly by young monks in training, to this day.

how, based on his own philosophical principles, does he expect certain constellations of practices to affect the practitioner, at every level of his or her being?

Even in the midst of writings that are intended as instructions for actual practice, Tsongkhapa is continuously engaging a thick and variegated textual tradition that stretches back hundreds of years. Any scholar who approaches the body of first-millennium Indian Buddhist tantric literature will recognize the diversity of voices, paradigms, symbolic explanations, etymological glosses, and paradoxical evocations that characterize those texts.¹⁹ Tsongkhapa engages in repeated efforts to organize, systematize, coordinate, and sometimes adjudicate between those voices, in order to present his readers with a coherent structure that will make sense for actual practice. Clearly, Tsongkhapa is making interpretive choices on every page of his commentaries. As with Tsongkhapa's reading of Indian Buddhist philosophers on sūtra-based subjects, here, too, I cannot begin to assess comprehensively, at a suitable level of philological detail, the exegetical maneuvers that Tsongkhapa enacts in relationship to each of his Indian tantric source texts. Instead, my purpose is to recognize and elucidate for my own reader what might be the theoretical principles at stake that Tsongkhapa employs consistently across his interpretations of Vajrayāna literature.

It is evident that Tsongkhapa thinks Vajrayāna practices do make sense, and that their intended results are achievable. It is my purpose to attempt to understand, given the logic of Tsongkhapa's own thought across a great variety of genres, *why* such practices might or might not make sense within the rich context of their own thought-world. That is, the very practices intended to change a *practitioner's* thought-world from the ground up are themselves embedded in a tightly woven theoretical and symbolic religious and cultural framework. While I will be focusing far more on the theoretical than the symbolic side, I expect that whatever insights may be gleaned from a better understanding of that theoretical side might help those already familiar with the symbolic and aesthetic systems of Buddhist tantra to gain new perspective on how such symbols and images might function to change the one who meditates upon them. That is, what did Tsongkhapa think *should* be happening when a practitioner becomes habituated to the particularities of the symbolic and aesthetic worlds pertaining to one or more tantric systems?

In many cases, I will address the questions that tend to arise for those practicing a Buddhist tantric *sādhana* (a daily ritual involving both meditative visualization and oral recitation) within one of the extant Tibetan lineages. Thus I ask what kind of worldview

¹⁹ For a provocative treatment of this literature from a historical perspective, see for example, Ronald Davidson, 2002, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press) and an alternative response to that treatment in Christian Wedemeyer, 2013, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press).

would be required in order for a well-trained practitioner to be able to sustain traditional Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayāna practices without collapsing under cognitive dissonance or debilitating doubt. Whether directly or indirectly, Tsongkhapa offers one set of answers to such questions, and it is my purpose to explore, understand, and present those responses. For example, how does Tsongkhapa approach difficult themes such as “the path of desire,” “divine pride,” or “pure view”? How did he grapple with historically contested issues such as the relationship between conceptuality and nonconceptuality at various stages in tantric meditation? What kind of a worldview would be logically necessary for the entire physical world and its inhabitants to vanish before one’s valid perceptions in the course of a meditation on the ultimate nature of phenomena? How might Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of what is supposed to be happening during such meditative dissolutions provide keys for unraveling many other apparent contradictions in tantric theory? It should be clear that I am not addressing questions of meditative praxis *per se*, but rather my inquiry focuses on a particular vision of “how tantric meditation is supposed to work” that seems to inform Tsongkhapa’s explanations across a wide range of sources.

At a granular level, I wish to provide the necessary background and textual analysis to test the following hypothesis. Based upon the intricate connection between three ideas affirmed by Tsongkhapa – (1) that all objects lack inherent nature, (2) that karmic cause and effect remain infallible, ripening “like an illusion”²⁰ within the mindstream, and (3) that karmic tendencies act as the proximate cause for how an empty object will appear to a conceptual state of mind²¹ – I propose that Tsongkhapa understands the ritual practices and visualizations of the creation stage to involve a process of *using karmic seeds in order eventually to put an end to karmic seeds*. That is, it appears to me that in Tsongkhapa’s view, such practices use the very process by which perception of empty objects has come about “all along” within saṃsāra, in order, first, to transform the way one apprehends appearances, and then eventually, to turn that process back on itself, until there are no more karmic seeds.

Tsongkhapa’s Vajrayāna

In order to unfold the elements of this interpretive hypothesis, I will enter into a broad exploration of Tsongkhapa’s tantric thought, using two major works as my primary foundation, known by their abbreviated titles as the *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra* and the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition.”* My research will be supported by several shorter commentaries by Tsongkhapa, as well as other supplementary texts that appear in his collected works, such as records of “private advice” from the master, apparently

²⁰ See especially Chapter Six, note 67.

²¹ See Chapter Five, note 179.

compiled by Tsongkhapa's immediate disciples. Though Tsongkhapa wrote extensively on many different Vajrayāna systems, for the purposes of this overall inquiry into his tantric theory, I will take as my primary example the system of practices associated with the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* (*Tantra of the Secret Gathering*, or else the *Gathering of Secrets Tantra*²²). This Sanskrit scripture seems to have existed in Indian Buddhist monasteries by the seventh century CE, and evidently generated two major streams of commentarial literature, known to Tsongkhapa as the “Ārya system” (*’phags lugs*) and the “Jñānapāda system” (*ye shes zhabs lugs*) respectively.

Now, to explain the history, significance, controversy, and religious context that lie in wait behind the very mention of this Indian Buddhist esoteric scripture and its lineages, both in India and Tibet, would be a dissertation in itself. Indeed, much non-Tibetan scholarship has been carried out with respect to this tantric system, beginning with Benoytosh Bhattacharyya's critical edition of the Sanskrit root tantra in 1931.²³ I will not review this scholarship here, as this has already been done recently, with what I see to be a well-placed critique of its trends, by Christian Wedemeyer in his *Āryadeva's Lamp*,²⁴ as well as by John Campbell in his dissertation, “Vajra Hermeneutics.”²⁵ Instead I will draw a rough arc of what I take from the arguments of these scholars and their sources, to establish a bare outline of possible history. Then, leaving aside many disputed issues, I wish to jump forward to Tsongkhapa's own historical context, in order to look back, as it were, through the lens of what seems to have been his own view of these lineages. I am well aware that I will not be able to give even an adequate beginning to an intellectual biography of Tsongkhapa within these pages. However, my primary purpose is to set the stage, introduce some key terms, and to raise *as questions* the very problems of historicity, time, identity, myth, and reality, around which such historiographical uncertainties revolve. For in the end I am proposing that we look to Tsongkhapa's

²² For the latter translation, see Gavin Kilty's explanation in his Introduction to Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, Gavin Kilty, and Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2013, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages: Teachings on Guhyasamāja Tantra* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 8-9. Due to the difficulty of translating this title in a way that captures all its potential variations, and due to the familiarity of the Sanskrit name, I have chosen to retain the word “Guhyasamāja” untranslated throughout. Since I will not be dealing with the details of the tantra itself, nor its symbolic exposition in Tsongkhapa's works, I will not begin an exegesis here as to what this “secret” or “secrets” may refer.

²³ Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, 1931, *Guhyasamāja Tantra or Tathāgataguhyaka*, critically edited with introduction and index by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya (Baroda: Oriental Institute).

²⁴ See the Introduction to Christian K. Wedemeyer, 2007, *Āryadeva's Lamp that Integrates the Practices (Caryāmelāpakapradīpa): The Gradual Path of Vajrayāna Buddhism according to the Esoteric Community Noble Tradition* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University), esp. 1-43. For a critique of twentieth century approaches to tantric scholarship, see also Wedemeyer, 2001, “Tropes, Typologies, and Turnarounds: A Brief Genealogy of the Historiography of Tantric Buddhism,” *History of Religions* 40, no. 3: 223-259.

²⁵ John R. B. Campbell, 2009, “Vajra Hermeneutics: A Study of Vajrayana Scholasticism in the *Pradipoddyotana*,” PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, esp. 39-108.

thought itself as one way to approach the basic philosophical issues that swirl around the attempt to tell any story of the past, or the present, “correctly.”

A Date for the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*?

We really have no evidence as to when the Sanskrit text of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* first appeared or began to be practiced within Indian Buddhist circles, only evidence as to when it must already have been present, namely a *terminus ante quem*. Ronald Davidson²⁶ cites a collection of eighteen esoteric scriptures²⁷ whose titles are mentioned in Chinese by the “Inner Asian monk Amoghavajra (705-774),”²⁸ which include in their number “some form of the *Guhyasamāja*.”²⁹ That is, by the mid-eighth century, the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* was already known well enough to be included in a collection of prominent Buddhist tantric works that could be read by a multi-lingual scholar traveling from Central Asia. It is also highly likely that the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* was translated into Tibetan during the first wave of imperial translation that took place in eighth-century Tibet; though apart from being mentioned in histories and catalogues, no version of such a translation survives.³⁰ We do have evidence of the presence of practices involving the recitation of secret words, or *mantra*, within Indian Buddhist monasteries as early as the mid-sixth century, judging from pointed references, along with arguments pro and con, in the works of both Bhāvaviveka (c. 500–570 CE) and Dharmakīrti (who may have flourished as early as the mid-sixth century CE).³¹

Some contemporary scholars have seen the doxographical efforts to categorize the classes of Buddhist tantric scripture that was undertaken by late first-millennium Indian scholars, as well as by many generations of Tibetans, as reason to think that the tantras actually appeared in the order of their later taxonomic categories. Based on the date of a Chinese report (c. 680 CE) regarding “the esoteric path [as a] new and exceptional event in India,”³² some scholars have dated the composition of a major performance tantra (Skt. *caryā-tantra*) to the mid-seventh century. In order to maintain a supposed doxographical sequence of development from “lower” to “higher,” there has then been an attempt to

²⁶ Ronald Davidson, 2002, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 145-146.

²⁷ Known as the *Vajraśekhara*, or *Vajroṣṇīśa*. The work in the Chinese Tripiṭaka attributed to Amoghavajra that mentions this collection is *Chin kang ting ching yü ch'ieh shih pa hui chih kue*, T. 869.

²⁸ These dates and ethnicity are identified in Campbell, 2009, “Vajra Hermeneutics,” 44.

²⁹ Davidson, 2002, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 146.

³⁰ See Campbell, 2009, “Vajra Hermeneutics,” 45.

³¹ See Kapstein, 2001, *Reason's Traces*, 240-256. For a review of possibilities for the dates of Dharmakīrti, see Vincent Eltschinger, 2010, “Dharmakīrti: Revue internationale de philosophie” in *Buddhist Philosophy*, 2010.3 (253): 397–440. Following H. Krasser, Eltschinger suggests that Dharmakīrti was known to Bhāvaviveka and Sthiramati, “two philosophers clearly belonging to the 6th century (both around 500–570).”

³² Davidson, 2002, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 118.

figure the yoga and great yoga tantras as having developed immediately after that.³³ It seems to be based on such logic that the composition of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* (as a form of great yoga tantra) would have to be crammed into a small window within the late seventh or early eighth century. Davidson concludes that it “is evident that the synthesis [of esoteric scriptures] was effected in decades, not centuries, although it eventually took centuries to work through all the consequential developments.”³⁴ Campbell points out many difficulties with such logic – both the assumption that tantras appeared in the sequence of their later doxological classification, and the assumption that Chinese reports or dates of translations always give a perfect reflection of what was going on in India and when.³⁵

From these arguments, far more complex than I have indicated here, I will conclude only that the date of the first appearance of any form of the *Guhyasamāja* root tantra in India remains an open question that may never be answered according to reliable historical methods. I think, further, that it is important to be able to leave this *terminus post quem* deliberately open-ended, entertaining the possibility that the scripture could have been in silent or secret existence (even if not well known enough to leave traceable footprints) as early as the first half of the first millennium CE, barring any clear evidence to the contrary. I am not actually conjecturing that it was secreted away in monks’ cells or anything like that, which would be impossible to prove; rather I am suggesting that we simply acknowledge the lack of clear evidence for its inception, precisely in order to be able to approach much later Tibetan accounts of the lineage of the tantra, along with traditional stories about how it was first taught and transmitted, without undue scholarly prejudice as to what “really happened.”

Two Traditions

What we may surmise with a little more reassuring historical precision, however, is the period during which the two major strands of commentarial literature developed around the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. What may be the slightly earlier lineage is traced to the figure of Jñānapāda, also known as Buddhajñānapāda, or even Buddhaśrījñāna. This is a well-documented author with several works appearing in both the sūtra and tantra sections of the Tengyur (or the Tibetan canonical collections of Indian commentaries in Tibetan translation). David Ruegg affirms him to have been a disciple of Haribhadra, a teacher in the so-called Yogācāra-Madhyamaka school of philosophical interpretation.

³³ See Campbell, 2009, “Vajra Hermeneutics,” 48 and 48n96, citing Stephen Hodge, “Considerations on the Dating and Geographical Origins of the *Mahāvairocanaśāmbodhi-Sūtra*,” in *The Buddhist Forum Volume III*, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), 58, and Antony Tribe, in Paul Williams *et al.*, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge), 272n15.

³⁴ Davidson, 2002, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 118. Also partially cited in Campbell, 2009, 56.

³⁵ See the entire argument in Campbell, 2009, “Vajra Hermeneutics,” 47-54.

This association alone would date Jñānapāda to the late eighth century, and according to the Tibetan historian Jonang Tāranātha (1575–1634), Buddhajñānapāda flourished during the reign of Dharmapāla (c. 770-810 or 775-812 CE).³⁶ In addition to sūtra treatises, Jñānapāda wrote numerous works on the Guhyasamāja system, including what is known as the *Oral Instructions of Mañjuśrī*³⁷ and the *Samantabhadra Sādhana*,³⁸ which were in turn interpreted by a distinct school of followers, many of whom we will encounter via Tsongkhapa's citations in Chapters Three and Four. So it is evident at least that there was a thriving tradition of Guhyasamāja practice and scriptural analysis by the early ninth century in India.

The second lineage of Guhyasamāja commentary is known to Tsongkhapa as the “Ārya tradition” (*’phags lugs*). The Sanskrit word *ārya* will appear repeatedly in this present writing as a technical term designating a type of person, one who has reached a particular type of spiritual realization, namely the direct perception of ultimate reality. This is how the word (and its Tibetan translation, *’phags pa*) is used in innumerable instances throughout Buddhist literature. Here, however, the word refers to a particular realized being, namely *the* Ārya, Nāgārjuna, and hence acts as a title. By extension, its intent is to refer to Ārya Nāgārjuna and his spiritual sons, namely, in this case, a person by the name of Āryadeva, as well as Nāgabodhi (a.k.a. Nāgabuddhi) and an author by the name of Candrakīrti. The difficulty is this: It is perfectly clear that the group of Sanskrit Guhyasamāja commentaries which Tibetans come to designate collectively as the “Ārya tradition,” became extant during an entirely different historical period from that of the group of famous Sanskrit works on the Middle Way that have been consistently attributed to an Ārya Nāgārjuna (c. second to third century CE), to an Āryadeva (c. third century CE), and to a Candrakīrti (c. seventh century), as already mentioned previously. Most contemporary scholars have presumed, not unreasonably, that the tantric writers were a completely different group of people, who simply *assumed* the names of Buddhist authors of such indisputable renown, in order to lend legitimacy to their unprecedented collection of esoteric teachings, and to their unique presentation on how to practice and interpret the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* itself (which is quite distinct from that of Jñānapāda *et al*, for example).

³⁶ David Seyfort Ruegg, 1981, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz), 101-102 with n320, n323 and n324. This figure is not to be confused with a later Buddhaśrījñāna who was invited to Tibet c. 1200. See Chapter Three below, notes 38 and 43.

³⁷ Buddhaśrījñāna, *Oral Instructions on How to Meditate on the Very Reality of the Two Stages, Dvikramatattvabhāvanā-nāma-mukhāma* (*rim pa gnyis pa’i de kho na nyid bsgom pa zhes bya ba’i zhal gyi lung*, a.k.a. *’jam dpal zhal lung*), Toh. 1853, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *di*. Tradition relates that Buddhaśrījñāna received transmission and teachings on the Guhyasamāja directly from Mañjuśrī in a vision. See Gavin Kilty, 2013, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*, 10.

³⁸ Buddhajñāna, *Samantabhadra-nāma-sādhana* (*kun tu bzang po zhes bya ba’i sgrub pa’i thabs*), Toh. 1855, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *di*.

I find that Professor Wedemeyer provides an admirable critique, however, of the assumptions and implicit or explicit ridicule of the “traditional view” that have gone along with much non-Tibetan scholarship regarding this issue.³⁹ He goes on to present an argument, based on the work of the same seventeenth-century Tibetan historian mentioned above, Jonang Tāranātha, that at least some astute Tibetan scholars were (a) not unaware of the fact that there was a long time gap between the authorship of the seminal Middle Way works and the appearance of the Ārya tradition of Guhyasamāja, and (b) did indeed care deeply, not only about verifying the authenticity of Indian authorship, but about providing a plausible account of how such teachings did in fact come into the world, as the compositions of particular, identifiable, realized beings. I need not go into the details of Wedemeyer’s argument and conclusions here, but I wish simply to sketch the “story” depicted by Tāranātha, so as to indicate at least one example of how a highly reputable Tibetan scholar would have looked at such things.

Tāranātha acknowledges⁴⁰ that at the time the Ārya and his sons were actually in this world, they did not spread these teachings on the Guhyasamāja widely, either to their ordinary disciples or even to their extraordinary ones. Rather, they greatly clarified the sūtra system (i.e., through their Middle Way treatises), and even elucidated the practices of secret mantra associated with action and performance tantras.⁴¹ Likewise, Tāranātha says that when Candrakīrti was acting in our human world, he did not spread the *Illuminating Lamp*,⁴² either. Rather, once Nāgārjuna’s direct student, Nāgabodhi, had achieved the indestructible vajra body, known as a “rainbow body,” he went to reside on Glorious Mountain (*dpal gyi ri bo*, Skt. *śrī parvata*), a place in South India associated with both Nāgārjuna and his own tantric teacher, Saraha.⁴³ There Nāgabodhi remained until the time came when people were actually practicing the vehicle of mantra. (This implies that he remained there for many centuries, yet if possessing an immortal vajra

³⁹ Wedemeyer, 2007, *Āryadeva’s Lamp*, esp. 7-17.

⁴⁰ Wedemeyer quotes from both Tāranātha’s *Great Commentary on the Five Stages* (*rim lnga ‘grel chen*), as well as his *History of Buddhism in India* (*rgya gar chos ‘byung*). Since Wedemeyer includes the Tibetan in his footnotes, my paraphrase here is based on my own reading of the Tibetan, which is for the most part in accord with Wedemeyer’s reading (as opposed to the earlier English translations that he critiques). For citations and a much more extensive discussion, see Wedemeyer, 2007, *Āryadeva’s Lamp*, 18-26.

⁴¹ This, of course, would suggest that *those* tantras should have existed as early as the second century CE, but that is another problem altogether.

⁴² Candrakīrti, *Pradīpodyotana-nāma-ṭīkā*, *sgron ma gsal bar byed pa zhes bya ba’i rgya cher bshad pa*, Toh. 1785, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *ha*. This is detailed commentary on the *Guhyasamāja* root tantra. See Appendix One for a short excerpt from Tsongkhapa’s word for word gloss and annotation of this text.

⁴³ Saraha, the Great Brahmin, is perhaps one of the most elusive figures in the Guhyasamāja lineages lists, frequently said to have been Nāgārjuna’s teacher, and the one to initiate him into the Guhyasamāja maṇḍala. For a detailed study of the Tibetan literature and myriad conflicting stories surrounding this figure, who seems to defy any attempts to place a “historical” date upon his life, see Kurtis Schaeffer, 2005, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Tibetan Traditions of the Buddhist Poet-Saint Saraha* (New York: Oxford University Press).

body, this would not be considered incongruent, according to the very category of tantric teachings the story is meant to illustrate.) Then Nāgabodhi spread this cycle of Guhyasamāja teachings (i.e., those composed by Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, and Candrakīrti, but not yet shown to anyone) in the human world.

Tāranātha acknowledges that there are two possibilities for how this actually came about. Either Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva actually wrote down their Guhyasamāja treatises in a former time, and then asked Nāgabodhi to spread them when pure disciples were ready, or else, when such disciples' time actually came, Father and Son would compose the treatises in the body of a Holder of Awareness (*rig pa 'dzin pa*, Skt. *vidyādhara*),⁴⁴ and then teach them to those with the good fortune to be able to understand. Nevertheless, adds Tāranātha, there is no debate as to the fact that these treatises were composed by the Father and his Sons. (Here the “Father and Son(s)” certainly refers to Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, and is probably intended to include Nāgabodhi, possibly the Guhyasamāja commentator named Śākyamitra, and certainly Candrakīrti as well.)

Tāranātha's story picks up in the human world in the ninth century, during the reign of King Devapāla (c. 810-850) and his son.⁴⁵ This would accord nicely with the dates of Jñānapāda having originated the other lineage of Guhyasamāja commentary within the same half-century. Here a yogi, Mātāṅgīpā, depicted by his very name as the son of an outcaste, meets Āryadeva, and through this blessing, suddenly comes to an

⁴⁴ Wedemeyer glosses this “*rig pa 'dzin pa'i lus nyid kyis bstan bcos de dag mdzad de*” as implying that “Nāgārjuna *et al.* themselves composed these works at a later point while embodied in a kind of mystical, immortal *vidyādhara*-form” (Wedemeyer, 2007, *Āryadeva's Lamp*, 20). However I am not certain that the body of a *vidyādhara* need be thought of as quite so ethereal. Rather, according to the very teachings of the Five Stages of Guhyasamāja at hand, if someone who has reached the indestructible body of illusion (another name for the vajra body, or rainbow body) possesses the capacity to send emanations at will, then it would, according to this way of thinking, be perfectly possible for such a being to become incarnate again as someone who looks human, but actually possesses the realizations of a *vidyādhara*. I am certainly reading later Tibetan theories of reincarnation lineages into this, but, as Wedemeyer himself soon points out (21-22), Tāranātha is willing to compare what he thinks was going on in India with later Tibetan understandings of treasure-revealers and visionary experiences through which new texts are revealed. Thus I do not think it impossible to suppose that Tāranātha had in mind that there might actually have been other forms who looked and acted like human beings, who wrote those texts and spread them during the Pāla dynasty, but whose identity and mindstreams were none other than Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, and Nāgabodhi, respectively. More likely, however, I think it would be legitimate to read the Tibetan “*rig pa 'dzin pa'i lus nyid kyis*” as referring specifically to Nāgabodhi himself, by the title of “the *Vidyādhara*.” This would accord with the quotation that Wedemeyer cites from Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* (*rgya gar chos 'byung*) on p. 22, where Nāgabodhi, the *Vidyādhara*, is the sole custodian of this cycle of Guhyasamāja teachings (as well as of a cycle on the *Buddhakapāla Tantra*).

⁴⁵ Wedemeyer, 2007, 22-23 and 23n51. Wedemeyer has switched from Tāranātha's *Great Commentary on the Five Stages* to his *History of Buddhism in India* in order to complete the story, and points out that this early ninth century time frame accords plausibly with the “postulated range of AD 850-1000” that Wedemeyer had previously worked out based on a relative chronology from inter-textual references.

understanding of the teaching.⁴⁶ Through meditating on what he realized, this Mātāṅgīpā gains spiritual attainments, and “discovers the complete tantric treatises of Ārya Nāgārjuna and his sons.”⁴⁷ The implication, by the way that Tāranātha has told the story, is that this is a *visionary* meeting with Āryadeva, not an ordinary meeting with a person supposed to be living on the earth during the reign of Devapāla. One might also suppose that Tāranātha understands the “discovery of the complete tantric treatises” to have occurred at the level of mystical revelation, such as that experienced by later Tibetan treasure revealers.⁴⁸ Whether or not one believes that visionary encounters with realized beings who have transcended death are actually possible, I think Wedemeyer has made a convincing argument as to why one should not think that Tibetan scholars in general were ‘merely confused’ about historical time, or thoroughly ‘duped’ by a legacy of counterfeit Indian authors who had written ‘fraudulently’ under pseudonyms in the ninth century.⁴⁹

I have not yet found a place where Tsongkhapa treats directly the issue of Nāgārjuna’s authorship across diverse genres or disparate time periods, but it is clear from his extensive commentaries on the works of Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, and Candrakīrti, across both sūtric and tantric contexts, that he considers each of them to be but a single author. As Wedemeyer points out, and Tsongkhapa frequently makes evident, Tibetan master scholars such as Tsongkhapa or Tāranātha were often aware when there were two Indian figures by a single name, or one figure with multiple names. (For example, there is the case of Nāgabodhi/Nāgabuddhi, to whom Tsongkhapa refers interchangeably as *klu’i byang chub*, abbreviated to *klu byang*, or else *klu’i blo*, following the particular attributions in the Tengyur.) Here, however, it is essential to Tsongkhapa’s understanding of the entire “Ārya tradition” of Guhyasamāja commentary that these are the very same figures – the very same individual continua of mental consciousness – whose works on the Middle Way are foundational to his entire worldview. Since this current dissertation

⁴⁶ A verse of supplication composed by Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen (*rgyal tshab rje dar ma rin chen*, 1364-1432) places this in a burial ground, evoking a world of Buddhist tantra so pertinent to the ninth century.

*I make supplication at the feet of Mātāṅgīpā,
The heart-son who followed after the Ārya, supreme,
Who by practicing with hardships
In the charnel grounds of Vegara,
Found the attainments, supreme.*

འཕགས་མཆོག་དེ་ཡིས་རྒྱུ་བྱས་ཀྱི་སྐུ་༥ བེ་ག་ར་ཡི་དྲར་ཁྱོད་ཆེན་པོ་དུ༥ བརྟུ་ལ་ཞུགས་སྟོན་པས་མཆོག་གི་དངོས་གྲུབ་བརྟེན༥ མ་རྟི་གི་པའི་ཞབས་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས༥༥

See the *Compilation of the Essential Elements for Keeping Practice Commitments: The Root Tantra of the Glorious Guhyasamāja, Sādhana, and so forth*, *dpal gsang ba ‘dus pa’i rtsa rgyud dang sgrub thabs sogs nyams bzhes nyer mkho gnad bsdus*, edited by Khedrup Norsang, Ramoche Series, vol. 1, Sidhbari, Dharamshala, India: Gyutö Library, 2015, 118-119. Authorship attributed to Gyaltsab Je on p. 124.

⁴⁷ Tāranātha, *chos ‘byung*, 101b4-101b6, as cited in Wedemeyer, 2007, 24n52: ‘*phags pa klu sgrub yab sras kyi sngags gzhung mtha’ dag rnyed*.

⁴⁸ Tāranātha has already made the comparison to Tibetan treasure traditions. See Wedemeyer, 2007, 22n50.

⁴⁹ See Wedemeyer, 2007, 15-17.

focuses precisely on the intersection between that Middle Way worldview and the theoretical plausibility of tantric practice in Tsongkhapa's thought, I must emphasize how important it is to recognize that *for Tsongkhapa*, there was only one Ārya Nāgārjuna, only one Glorious Candrakīrti, and so on. I would also add that if one assumes in advance, from any alleged stance of historical objectivity, that Tsongkhapa "must have been" wrong about this, one has potentially made it a foregone conclusion that the realizations of an indestructible vajra body, towards which the entire Guhyasamāja system points, are categorically impossible. That is, one potentially denies the possibility that there could ever be a valid and functional reality in which such a visionary encounter might have taken place, between a "ninth century" Mātāṅgīpā outcaste yogi and a still-living, enlightened continuation of the Buddhist monk Āryadeva, whose earthly existence had occurred in the "third century." I hope it is needless for me to say that I do not think foregone conclusions about impossibility to be a constructive way to approach an entire soteriological system of religious thought. Indeed, a sincere journey into Tsongkhapa's worldview might well challenge us to begin reconsidering many of the things we had thought were impossible.

Though I need not go into all the details here, Wedemeyer points out that, in its theme of particular revelations communicated across periods far separated by time, Tāranātha's explanation of the transmission of the Ārya system parallels traditional stories about the initial teaching of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* itself. Citing the Sakya master Amé Shap (*'jam dgon a myes zhabs*, 1597-1659), Wedemeyer relates the story⁵⁰ of how the Buddha Śākyamuni, during his own historical lifetime in this world, is said to have revealed the secret world of the Guhyasamāja maṇḍala for the first time while granting empowerment to a King Indrabhūti, near the land of Udyāna/Oḍḍiyāna (probably the Swat Valley of present-day Kashmir). At that time the Buddha also entrusted the root and explanatory tantras⁵¹ to the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi. (This is an episode that appears in many stories of the revelation of Buddhist tantras.) Even as the teaching is said to have flourished at that time and place, the story goes that the land was gradually emptied of humans (perhaps because they were all reaching enlightenment), and the scriptures – written in sapphire ink on gold paper – were preserved in a shrine house that was eventually submerged by a lake. Meanwhile, Vajrapāṇi had transmitted the tantra to the serpentine *nāga* beings who lived underwater, many of whom reached high realizations. Only much, much later, once the lake had dried up and the shrine re-emerged, did the scriptures become visible again to the human world.

⁵⁰ See Wedemeyer, 2007, 26-29 and 29n56 and 57. In addition to quoting Amé Shap, Wedemeyer cites Butön Rinchen Drup (*bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290-1364) as well as the *Blue Annals* of Gö Lotsawa (*'gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal*, 1392-1481).

⁵¹ For an overview of these core Guhyasamāja texts, see Wedemeyer, 2007, 43-48.

From the point of view of a *living* lineage, other versions of the story relate that an advanced female practitioner (Skt. *yoginī*) born from among the *nāgas* eventually transmitted the empowerment and teachings to another king, Visukalpa. Now Visukalpa is said, in yet a host of other stories, to have been the teacher of one Rāhulabhadra, who became known as Saraha.⁵² It is in this way that the Saraha who is said to be Nāgārjuna's tantric teacher transmitted the Guhyasamāja system back to this world. So to say that Nāgārjuna and his immediate disciples then had to wait another six hundred years or so before the world was once again ready to receive the lineage – initially in the figure of Mātāṅgīpā – only repeats the same theme that occurs from the inception of the tantra. Interestingly, this story would also accord with the lack of evidence for the presence of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* in India – whether as a scripture or as a practice – until the eighth-century period immediately preceding the appearance of the two famous lineages of commentary, that of Jñānapāda and the Ārya tradition, respectively. But it does not suggest that the tantra did not *exist* before that time. I think it is essential to be able to make this distinction – between a teaching existing in general and its being extant in a particular world – in order to understand how various strands within the Tibetan tradition attempt to make sense of their own complex and manifold lists of lineage masters.

The prayers addressed to the Guhyasamāja lineage in Geluk⁵³ monasteries to this day reflect both the multiplicity of the transmission stories, as well as the fact that such multiplicity continues to be honored as the *story* of how the teaching reached the present generation.⁵⁴ Perhaps what is most important is not the historical verifiability of these

⁵² See Kurtis Schaeffer, 2005, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 25; as well as Gianpaolo Vetturini, 2007, *The bKa' gdams pa School of Tibetan Buddhism* (PhD Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), 75.

⁵³ This is the name of the monastic tradition of Tibetan Buddhism that traces itself directly to Tsongkhapa as its founder and spiritual guide.

⁵⁴ For example, in a particular sequence of offerings to the teachers of the lineage, there is one lineage tree drawn from the Buddha Vajradhara directly through the transcendent bodhisattva *Ratnamati/*Matiratna (*blo gros rin chen*) to Nāgārjuna and then directly to Mātāṅgīpā, all the way up to Tsongkhapa, via Butön Rinchen Drup and Khyungpo Hlépa (*khyung po lhas pa*). This is followed by the utterance, “And again,” (*slar yang*), after which the litany returns to the Buddha Vajradhara and traces the lineage indicated by the stories cited here: Vajrapāṇi, Indrabhūti, the Yoginī born from the *nāgas*, Visukalpa, Saraha, Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, *Śikṣāvajra, Kṛṣṇācārya, and so on, through about five centuries of Indian and Tibetan lineage figures, including the earlier, eleventh century Gö Lotsawa, Khugpa Hlétse (*'gos khug pa lhas btas*), coming to Tsongkhapa in about 1390 through Rendawa Shönu Lodrö (*red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros*, 1348/9-1412). This latter lineage list substantially matches the one given by Baser Kachupa (*'ba' ser dka' bcu pa*, fl. 14th-15th century) in his record of Tsongkhapa's oral teachings, *Notes on the Creation Stage of the Guhyasamāja* (*gsang 'dus bskyed rim gyi zin bris*), rje'i gsung 'bum vol. ca, 40a1-5 (821). There Nāgārjuna is followed explicitly by Āryadeva, Nāgabodhi, Sākyamitra, Candrakīrti, *Śikṣāvajra, and Kṛṣṇācārya (in that order). Yet a third lineage is recounted in the prayer of supplication written by Tsongkhapa's immediate disciple, Gyaltsab Je, which passes from the Buddha Vajradhara to the bodhisattva *Ratnamati, Nāgārjuna, and Mātāṅgīpā, and then directly to Tilopa, Nāropa, and Marpa, a lineage which Tsongkhapa also received from Khyungpo Hlépa (via Butön Rinpoche), apparently during Tsongkhapa's studies with this master in 1391.

stories, but rather how these stories, bound up with the names that are echoed in prayer and supplication so many thousands of times over a practitioner's lifetime, affect a person's mind and heart. What does it mean to draw direct, unbroken links between a time long gone, when the monk Śākyamuni Buddha appeared in the form of the divine prince, Vajradhara, whom most of our world was not yet ready to see or understand, in order to teach a king in a mystical land to the northwest of India, and the period of intense philosophical debate and intellectual innovation that occurred within the Buddhist monasteries of early first-millennium India? What does it mean, furthermore, to connect the profound realizations of emptiness with which the Ārya, Nāgārjuna, and his sons are so naturally associated, with the revelation, to an outcaste in a burial ground, of a highly symbolic visionary practice directed towards reaching immortality in a body of transcendent light?

The prayers and offerings made to the lineage tell a story about the wildly diverse history of Buddhism, traced through just a few figures. Wedemeyer emphasizes that Tāranātha also explained the direct textual transmission through the immortal Vidhyādhara Nāgabodhi, along with other visionary encounters between members of the Ārya clan and worthy disciples during the time of King Devapāla and his sons, as the *reason* why the lineage of the Ārya cycle of Guhyasamāja teachings is so short.⁵⁵ That is, Tibetans knew well how many generations of teachers usually fit into a century, and thoughtful scholars such as Tsongkhapa might have deduced just from the Tengyur that hundreds of years must have passed between Nāgārjuna's six treatises on Middle Way reasoning, for example, and Candrakīrti's commentaries, with Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, and many others coming in between. By the fourteenth century, for example, they knew that their lineage lists were replete with Tibetan names covering just a few centuries, while referencing only a handful of lineage figures from India. It was obvious that some tantric lineage lists were longer or shorter than others, and in normal human years, one could almost measure time by such lists. So it would have been clear

For the lineage prayers, see "Compilation of the Essential Elements for Keeping Practice Commitments," *gsang 'dus nyams bzhes nyer mkho gnad bsdus*, 118-119, 219-221. For dates in Tsongkhapa's life, see Jamyang Shepa ('jam dbyangs bzhad pa, 1648-1721), *The String of Wish-Giving Gems (rje btsun tsong kha pa chen po'i rnam thar ras bris kyi tshul brgya lnga gsum pa tsinta ma Ni'i phreng ba thub bstan rgyas byed phan bde'i rol mtsho chen po)* as quoted in Tibetan and translated in Geshe Michael Roach and Christie McNally, 2008, *King of the Dharma: The Illustrated Life of Je Tsongkapa, Teacher of the First Dalai Lama: With the Complete Paintings and the Original Text of the All-Knowing One, Jamyang Shepa Dorje, 1648-1721* (Howell, NJ: Rashi Gempil Ling, First Kalmyk Buddhist Temple), 334-336. Note that there is also a tradition whereby the same bodhisattva *Matiratna (i.e., *blo gros rin chen*) grants the lineage of the Great Seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*) to Saraha. So although the stories vary widely, there is a certain consistency in the main characters across many sources. See Schaeffer, 2005, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 23 ff.

⁵⁵ See Wedemeyer, 2007, 22 and 22n50, citing Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*.

that in terms of Vajrayāna, something had happened quite late in India. But why did Śākyamuni’s tantric teaching have to wait so long?

Perhaps one lesson that the stories transmit, apart from inspiring the practitioner with tales of what hardships yogis of the past have endured – and what realizations they have gained – is the idea that a teaching, no matter how sublime, or how well-guarded in celestial or subterranean realms, will simply not appear in our manifest world until there are disciples who are ripe to hear or see it. To view the stories through such a lens becomes intimately connected with the themes of dependent origination, virtue, and emptiness that will run throughout this inquiry. Wedemeyer says that “what one sees is not the wholesale rejection of historical realism, but merely a restriction of its appropriate scope of application.”⁵⁶ Indeed, it is not that Tsongkhapa or any of the many great Tibetan scholars did not care about history, for they did, often meticulously so.⁵⁷ It is just that for them, *the range of possibilities of what it means to be a plausible story* are vastly different from what they are for those of us whose worldview is shaped by a post-modern, critical, scientific realism. Thus my purpose here is not to look at history, but to examine in depth the very worldview that would enable such historical “discrepancies” – as they might appear to us – simply not to be a problem for Tsongkhapa and his co-religionists. Wedemeyer says that “for the tradition this ‘problem’ was in fact the *solution* to a prior—and presumably more pressing—difficulty: that of the legitimacy of ongoing scriptural revelation.”⁵⁸ I would suggest that in a thought-world where the possibility of attaining a vajra body was a reality – a reality proclaimed by the very scriptures being taught – it may not even have been the case that anyone felt they had to “make anything up” in order to secure the authority of a textual tradition. Rather, what if someone had actually just experienced what they understood to be visionary revelations, and told their

⁵⁶ Wedemeyer, 2007, 39.

⁵⁷ See how many times Tsongkhapa questioned or refuted the attribution of authorship for texts included within the Guhyasamāja section of the Tengyur, as is made evident in Gavin Kilty’s translation of Tsongkhapa’s *rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i man ngag rim pa lnga rab tu gsal ba'i sgron me* in Gavin Kilty, 2013, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*. See esp. the annotated Tengyur listing in the Bibliography (620-625), with the repeated notes: “(authorship refuted by Tsongkhapa),” or “(authorship doubted by Tsongkhapa).” Tsongkhapa also expresses his doubts about attributed authorship of commentaries within the Mahāyāna tradition, as in, for example, *The Essence of Eloquence: A Commentary on Distinguishing the Interpretable and the Definitive* (*drang ba dang nges pa'i don rnam par phye pa'i bstan bcos legs bshad snying po*), vol. *pha*, 21b3-4 (522), where in the midst of a rather complex argument Tsongkhapa states, referring to claims made in a text called *The Great Commentary on the [Sūtra] Commenting on the True Intent [of the Sūtras]* (i.e., *mdo sde dgongs 'grel*, Skt. *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*):

. . . Since [these ideas] also contradict the *Bodhisattva Levels* and the *Summary of the Greater Way*, and since they furthermore quote [Dharmakīrti’s] *Ascertainment of Valid Perception*, the claim of some, namely that this text was written by Asaṅga, is gross failure to examine the situation.

བྱང་ས་དང་བསྟན་པ་དང་ཡང་འགའ་ལ་དེར་རྒྱུ་ཅེས་ཀྱི་ལུང་ཡང་བྲངས་པས། ཁ་ཅིག་དེ་མོགས་མེད་ཀྱིས་མཛད་ཟེར་བ་ནི་མ་བཞགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་འོ།

⁵⁸ Wedemeyer, 2007, 17.

story – with all the morphological transformation and embellishment that story-telling inevitably involves – to the next generation, and the next, and the next?

Starting a Story

For all the precision of secure dates, locations, and authorship to which we may indulge ourselves when we come to the life of Tsongkhapa himself, I would suggest that we are on no more firm footing as to what *really* happened – based on any one or more accounts recorded over the centuries – as long as we think that there was a “really” there. Indeed, it was Tsongkhapa’s philosophical life’s work to show precisely how it is the thinking and grasping to a “what’s really there” that gets us all into trouble over and over again. On the other hand, it was his philosophical life’s work to show that once we understand how every “actually” arises only from the inextricable interdependence of countless causal and perspectival factors, then we may by all means say in many different ways what happened, for whom, and what it meant, and what it effected for them, and how that affects us, and how our understanding it in a certain way will affect others, and so on *ad infinitum* into the future. To read any one of the many accounts of Tsongkhapa’s life is to glimpse again and again how his actions were aimed constantly at planting seeds, at setting in motion causes⁵⁹ that would have much greater ramifications in the future than anyone could have seen or understood at the time. Indeed, the farther from his own time the biographies are written, the more perspective they gain on how his actions seem to have been aimed at serving people far into the future, in addition to those who saw his face and heard his voice.⁶⁰ Appreciating such foresight is just one part of the awe that his tradition and lineage of followers hold for Tsongkhapa, up to the present day.

To offer the barest outline of his story:⁶¹ Tsongkhapa was born towards the end of the Tibetan fire-bird year, 1357/58,⁶² in the region of Tsongkha (“Onion Valley”) near

⁵⁹ See Jamyang Shepa’s *String of Wish-Giving Gems* in Geshe Michael Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 377- 418, esp. 377, 404, and 413.

⁶⁰ For a critical analysis of the development of the biographies of Tsongkhapa and his principal disciples through time, however, see Elijah Ary, 2007, “Logic, Lives, and Lineage: Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen’s Ascension and the ‘Secret Biography of Khedrup Geleg Pelzang,’” Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, and 2015, *Authorized Lives: Biography and the Early Formation of Geluk Identity* (Boston: Wisdom Publications).

⁶¹ For further details see Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 297-421, as well as “A Short Biography” in Robert A. F. Thurman, translator and editor, 1982, *The Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives), 3-34. See also Thurman, 1991, *The Central Philosophy of Tibet*, 65-89, for a more elaborated presentation of Tsongkhapa’s life story. Pages 22-49 of this book also provide sketches of the lives of the great Indian philosophers to whom I will refer frequently: Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Buddhapaṇita, Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, Vasubandhu, Sthiramati, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti.

⁶² The year of Tsongkhapa’s birth is always cited by contemporary scholars at 1357. However, in Jamyang Shepa’s *String of Wish-Giving Gems*, it clearly states that his birth took place *at the end* of the bird year, which in the Tibetan calendar would typically be January or February of the following year, namely 1358. I have not yet been able to consult numerous biographies to see if there is consistency to this reference of the “end” of the year. See Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 307: “Towards the [end of the] same Year

the Tsongchu River in the far-eastern corner of the Amdo region of eastern Tibet.⁶³ He took the novice vows of a monk by the age of seven or eight, receiving the name Lobsang Drakpa, after having begun his formal studies with a respected local teacher, Dundrup Rinchen (*don grub rin chen*). According to some accounts, he had already received numerous tantric initiations and was engaging in tantric retreats even before becoming ordained.⁶⁴ By the age of about sixteen he left home for central Tibet, never to return. For at least the next twenty years, the “Renowned One with the Good Heart from Tsongkha”⁶⁵ traveled from monastery to monastery throughout central Tibet, studying with many of the most respected Buddhist teachers of his time. His fierce and captivating performance on the debate ground became legendary, and he is said to have had a phenomenal capacity for memorization.⁶⁶ One of his principal teachers from the time he was about nineteen was a master from the Sakya lineage, Jetsun Rendawa Shönu Lodrö (*red mda’ ba gzhon nu blo gros*, 1348/9-1412).⁶⁷ Tsongkhapa maintained a close relationship with this teacher throughout his life, and in addition to studying with him all the major topics of sūtra philosophy, Tsongkhapa received a Guhyasamāja lineage from Rendawa around 1390. This appears to have been the lineage of the “Ārya tradition” that was passed down via the eleventh century Tibetan translator, Gö Lotsawa Khugpa Hlétse (*’gos lo tsA ba khug pa lhas btsas*).⁶⁸

Soon afterwards, in 1391, Tsongkhapa also received Guhyasamāja empowerments and teachings from Khyungpo Hlépa Shönu Sönam (*khyung po lhas pa gzhon nu bsod nams*), who carried both the Gö lineage, as well as that of Marpa the Translator (*mar pa lo tsA ba chos kyi blo gros*, c. 1012-1097), via the illustrious Butön Rinchen Drup (*bu*

of the Bird [1357], his Mother dreams that a crystal door within her heart is opening, and that angels have appeared to make the offering of bathing. At dawn then the child is born.” (*bya lo’i mjug yum gyi thugs ka’i shel sgo phye zhing mkha’ ’gros khrus gsol pa rmis rjes tho rangs ’khrungs*). This issue, along with the fact that Tibetans usually count age from the time of conception, rather than actual birth, may account for at least some of the discrepancies in the numbers cited for years and ages between the work of Geshe Roach and Prof. Thurman.

⁶³ This is now the prefecture-level city of Haidong in the Qinghai Province of China.

⁶⁴ See Robert Thurman, 1982, *The Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa*, 5-6.

⁶⁵ A literal translation of his name, Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa.

⁶⁶ See Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 317 (translating Jamyang Shepa’s *String of Wish-Giving Gems*), regarding the year 1377, when Tsongkhapa is about twenty: “He is memorizing seventeen folios of text a day, every day, and during the assembly of monks he is passing spontaneously into deep states of meditation where he maintains perfect concentration.”

ཤོག་གྲུ་བཅུ་བདུན་རེ་རྒྱུན་དུ་བརྒྱུང་། རྩོགས་སྡེ་ཐབ་པོའི་ཉིང་རེ་འཛིན་ལ་བཞུགས་པའི་མཉམ་བཞག་གི་ཉིང་རེ་འཛིན་བརྟན་པོ་བྱུང་།

⁶⁷ See Carola Roloff (Jampa Tsedroen), 2009, *Red mda’ ba, Buddhist Yogi-Scholar of the Fourteenth Century: The Forgotten Reviver of Madhyamaka Philosophy in Tibet* (Wiesbaden: Reichert), for an excellent study of the unique points in Rendawa’s Middle Way interpretation. Detailed comparison of this work with Tsongkhapa’s own interpretations remains an important field for further research, to discover just how much Tsongkhapa followed his human teacher, and just how much of his distinctive approach may have come from his own personal revelations and discoveries.

⁶⁸ See Introduction, note 54, above.

ston rin chen grub, 1290-1364).⁶⁹ As Tsongkhapa relates clearly at the start of his own *Practical Instruction for Completing the Five Stages in a Single Sitting*, Marpa, during his numerous trips to India, had received transmissions of both the Jñānapāda and the Ārya traditions.⁷⁰ So, judging by his later writings on all these subjects, it seems that Tsongkhapa received both the Ārya and Jñānapāda lineages from Khyungpo Hlépa. By the time he was about thirty-four, it appears that Tsongkhapa had received the full array of lineage transmissions for the Guhyasamāja that existed in Tibet at that time.⁷¹

In his tantric writings, Tsongkhapa clearly selected the Ārya system as his preferred method for teaching the ritual practices of the Guhyasamāja creation stage, basing his own sādhanā text on Nāgārjuna's *Abbreviated Practice*,⁷² and writing a detailed explanation of Nāgabuddhi's commentary on that, *The Steps of Exposition*,⁷³ a text to which I will refer many times herein. In terms of the Guhyasamāja “complete stage,” Tsongkhapa wrote primarily on the Five Stages⁷⁴ system attributed to Ārya Nāgārjuna, and as elucidated by the (tantric) Candrakīrti. Tsongkhapa did write an explanation of the sādhanā for the Jñānapāda system,⁷⁵ wherein the central figure is Mañjuvajra rather than Akṣobhyavajra, though this maṇḍala does not appear to be widely practiced in Geluk monasteries today. Nonetheless, as we will see, within his *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*, it was actually Jñānapāda upon whom Tsongkhapa relied for the core ideas from which he would develop what I will call his philosophy of Vajrayāna

⁶⁹ For an important study of this pivotal figure in the generation prior to Tsongkhapa, see David Seyfort Ruegg, 1969, *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente). For discussion of his role in the formation and printing of the canonical Kangyur (words of the Buddha in translation) and Tengyur (Indian commentarial literature) see Kurtis R. Schaeffer, 2004, “A Letter to the Editors of the Buddhist Canon in Fourteenth-Century Tibet: The ‘Yig mkhan rnam la gdams pa’ of Bu ston Rin chen grub,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 124 (2): 265-281.

⁷⁰ See *A Practical Instruction for Completing the Five Stages in a Single Sitting: An Explanation of the Five Steps in the Practice of the King of Secret Teachings, the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i rdzogs rim rim lnga gdan rdzogs kyi dmar khrid), rje'i gsung 'bum vol. nya, 3a5-6 (215): “In particular, [Marpa] relied upon seven master scholars as his gurus for the Ārya tradition and the Jñānapāda tradition of the Guhyasamāja, respectively.”

འཇིག་རྟེན་འདུས་པ་འབྲས་ལུགས་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཞབས་ལུགས་མོགས་ལ་མཁས་པའི་བླ་མ་བདུན་བརྟེན་ནོ།

⁷¹ He also received many transmissions of Marpa's lineage for the Six Dharmas of Nāropa from Kagyu masters around this time, as well as empowerments into and teachings on all the other major cycles of tantric practice upon which he later wrote voluminously, but these details need not concern us at this point.

⁷² Nāgārjuna, *Pinḍikṛtasādhana* (sgrub pa'i thabs mdor byas pa), Toh. 1796, sde dge bstan 'gyur, vol. ngi. For a critical study of this text, see Roger Wright, 2010, *The Guhyasamāja Pinḍikṛta-sādhana and Its Context*, M.A. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

⁷³ Nāgabuddhi, *The Steps of Exposition for the Method of Reaching the Gathering*, 'dus pa'i sgrub pa'i thabs rnam par gzahag pa'i rim pa, *Samājasādhanaavyavasthālī*, Toh. 1809, sde dge, rgyud, vol. ngi.

⁷⁴ Derived from the text by that name: *Pañcakrama* (rim pa lnga pa), Toh. 1802, sde dge bstan 'gyur, rgyud, vol. ngi.

⁷⁵ See *Elucidating the True Thought of Mañjuśrī: A Method for Reaching the Lord Mañjuvajra* (rje btsun 'jam pa'i rdo rje'i sgrub thabs 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyi dgongs pa gsal ba), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. nya.

meditation, which applies across all four classes of tantra. So both lineages became indispensable to Tsongkhapa's tantric thought.

From the point of view of his education alone, it is clear that Tsongkhapa lived at a unique juncture in Tibetan history: at a time when there was relative political peace,⁷⁶ when there were many thriving monasteries of diverse lineages between which he could move freely, apparently without too much inter-sectarian strife. His comprehensive studies also took place within the first fifty years after the Tibetan canons of Indian works in translation – the Kangyur and Tengyur⁷⁷ – had been compiled and had begun to be printed. It is evident that Tsongkhapa brought to his education an extraordinary mind and capacity for memorization, inquiry, and practice. But he also had at his disposal an array of books and teachers steeped in an already confident Buddhist tradition such as he would not have found in Tibet even a century before.⁷⁸

On the other hand, it is clear that Tsongkhapa's insatiable hunger for learning was in part due to his dissatisfaction with many of the explanations he received. His works show him grappling with diverse points of view, and he repeatedly takes it upon himself to adjudicate between many possible ways of interpreting passages of Indian Buddhist literature. It is also evident from his biographies, however, that Tsongkhapa did not write most of his major works until the last two decades of his life. It seems as though he waited until he was sure of his position – perhaps in many cases based on meditative insight or realization of some kind – before writing the major treatises on both sūtra and tantra that we associate with his name today.

Meanwhile, however, Tsongkhapa had been *teaching*, orally, at least from the time he was twenty (c. 1377).⁷⁹ His fame as a debater and teacher continued to grow until, at the age of about thirty-six, in the water monkey year of 1392/3, he decided to withdraw from public life and go into a four-year period of intensive spiritual practice and meditation retreat. He took with him eight disciples to the region of Olka, southeast of Lhasa. It was during this period that Tsongkhapa was able to devote the time and single-pointed focus necessary to develop the meditative practices and realizations that would become the source of his piercing clarity and inspiration throughout the last two decades of his life. It is unclear exactly when the “retreat” ended, for there was a good deal of travel narrated even during those four years, but by 1396 Tsongkhapa was already

⁷⁶ See Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho, and Zahiruddin Ahmad, 2008, *The Song Of The Queen Of Spring, Or, A History Of Tibet* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture), esp. Chapter XVII on the “Later PHag-Mo-Gru-Pa” period.

⁷⁷ See Introduction, note 69, above.

⁷⁸ See Ronald Davidson, 2005, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press) for a careful inquiry into the very different climate of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries in Tibet, when a steady stream of transmissions and translations was still arriving from India, and there was not yet any certainty as to what Buddhism in Tibet would look like.

⁷⁹ Jamyang Shepa's *String of Wish-Giving Gems* in Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 318.

reported to have been teaching again.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, in contrast to the exhaustive listing of the topics he studied and teachings he received during the early years, from the mid-1390's onwards, his biographies focus more and more upon reports of visions, mystical encounters with transcendent beings, and prophecies received and fulfilled. One pivotal experience in 1397 is often taken to have been a direct perception of emptiness, which, if that is indeed what took place, would have made Tsongkhapa himself an ārya, of the stature of Nāgārjuna. He seems to admit as much himself in the opening stanzas of *The Essence of Eloquence*.⁸¹ It would certainly explain the confidence with which he explained his view of emptiness in the decades that followed. What is less well-known, and even more difficult to assess, are the reports of his profound tantric realizations – of the wisdom of great bliss, of the meltdown of the red and white elements within the central channel of his subtle body, of innumerable dreams, visions, and direct encounters with enlightened beings, and even of reaching enlightenment itself, during his own death process.⁸²

I need not review here the “four great deeds,” including the revival of strict monastic discipline, the rejuvenation of spiritual energy and enthusiasm among the lay community through the Great Prayer Festival, his efforts to restore statues and temples, his direct or indirect founding of monasteries, or the many other extraordinary stories reported about Tsongkhapa's life, practices, ritual actions, and the extensive teachings he continued to grant through to the final months of his life in 1419. For now, I simply wish to point my reader to the annotated bibliographical listing of the texts to which I will refer

⁸⁰ Ibid., 353.

⁸¹ See *The Essence of Eloquence: A Commentary on Distinguishing the Interpretable and the Definitive, drang ba dang nges pa'i don rnam par phye pa'i bstan bcos legs bshad snying po*, vol. pha, 2a3-4 (483). Here I quote the translation of Geshe Michael Roach that appears in Asian Classics Institute Course Fifteen, p. 4: www.acidharma.org/aci/online/_media/text/course15/C15Reading.pdf. (Cf. Robert Thurman, 1991, *The Central Philosophy of Tibet*, 63ff.):

These are points that many with no little
Mass of spiritual qualities—
Filled with realizations won
With much learning of great holy books
And much pain spent in the ways
Of reaching conclusions with reason—
Have tried their best, but nonetheless
Have failed to realize.
Here though I will explain them,
With thoughts of purest love,
For I have seen them perfectly
Through the Kindness of my Lama,
The Protector, the Gentle One.

[གཞུང་ལུགས་མང་ཐོས་རིགས་པའི་ལམ་དུའང་། རང་ལ་མེད་[sic]མང་བསྐྱེན་མཛོད་པར་རྟོགས་པ་ཡི། ཡོན་ཏན་ཆོགས་ཀྱིས་མི་དམན་དུ་མས་གྱང་། འབད་གྱང་རྟོགས་པར་མ་གྱུར་གནས་དེ་ནི། འཇམ་མགོན་ལྷ་མའི་བླ་ཀྱིས་ལེགས་མཛོད་ནས། བཞིན་དུ་བརྟེ་བའི་བསམ་པས་བདག་གིས་བཤད།

⁸² See Jamyang Shepa's *String of Wish-Giving Gems* in Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, esp. 346, 372, 373, 390-397, 403-404, 417-418.

in this dissertation, arranged by topic in roughly chronological order, based upon the dates provided by Jamyang Shepa (*'jam dbyangs bzhad pa*, 1648-1721) in his biography called *String of Wish-Giving Gems*.⁸³ Rather than follow a traditional story in praise of all that Tsongkhapa did and said, I would prefer to allow the select number of texts that I will analyze herein to speak for themselves. Once these titles and their contents become familiar, I would encourage my reader to return to the biographical material already extant in English, and begin to place the locations and periods of Tsongkhapa's life during which he must have been writing about these things. We might then imagine the scenes: of mountain hermitages and busy monasteries, of periods of retreat juxtaposed with periods of intensive activity, teaching, and travel. We might try to envision just how many canonical texts he had physically in front of him at any given time, and whether some or many of his thousands of quotations from the entire range of works in the Tengyur were perhaps still memorized from his years of monastic study.

Most important for our present purposes is to raise a question along the lines of what I wrote above regarding the presence of otherworldly or supernatural episodes within the history of the Guhyasamāja lineage. Here, I think, the question could take this form: Given the content of Tsongkhapa's writings, how might we imagine or infer the kind of person he was, or the kind of experiences he might have had? That is, as long as one looks at the more mystical elements of Tsongkhapa's biographies from the "outside," they might look simply fantastical, mythical, or hyperbolic. But if we come to understand, through the inner passageway, as it were, of exploring his own logic and tantric worldview, I would suggest that we might gain a better glimpse of how he himself might have endeavored to transform his own empty world. If, as we will examine in Chapter Four, the central purpose of creation stage practice is to overcome the thought that things are normal, and all the thousands of hours of tantric ritual and meditation are designed to break through that single "flaw" within the human psyche, then, if the practices *do* make sense, or if they do "work," what kind of a world might one find oneself living in, even after a few decades of the kind of olympian efforts Tsongkhapa and his close disciples are said to have brought to their practices? If reality is not as it appears, and if, as Hamlet says, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy,"⁸⁴ then who is to say it would have been impossible for Tsongkhapa to experience the kinds of things to which his biographies repeatedly bear witness? Thus, without passing judgment, or even suggesting who he was or what he was, apart from a brilliant mind, I seek to let Tsongkhapa's writing tell us as much or more about him than further efforts at biography might do at this point.

⁸³ See Introduction, note 54, and the "Selected Bibliography of Tsongkhapa's works" in the Bibliography.

⁸⁴ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act One, Scene 5, line 167-8.

Methodological Considerations

In terms of my overall approach to Tsongkhapa's body of work, I would like to invoke the arc of what Geshe Thupten Jinpa writes in his own Introduction to *Self, Reality and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way*.⁸⁵ Though of course I am not a Tibetan, much less a monk or a geshe, I would like to think that my own sustained encounter, for fifteen years, with Tsongkhapa's milieu of thought and practice, has also brought me "to read Tsongkhapa, as it were, from within his own writings and inherited philosophical and intellectual legacies"⁸⁶ much more than from outside of them. Thus I, too, endeavor to "listen" to Tsongkhapa "when he says that he is arguing for a specific thesis," and I have, with Geshe Jinpa, thought it reasonable to make⁸⁷

. . . the fundamental assumption that there is a systematic approach in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought and that it contains a high degree of cohesion and completeness. This does not mean that I have ruled out *a priori* any inconsistencies, gaps, and so on in his thinking. It does mean, however, that I believe there is an overall framework of intended coherence in Tsongkhapa's thought and that I take it seriously.

Indeed, I would point to the research and explanation that Geshe Jinpa has provided regarding "Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka" as important background for the present dissertation. Since Geshe Jinpa acknowledges several times, however, that treatment of Tsongkhapa's Vajrayāna lies beyond the scope of his own study, I hope that my research here will continue the thread of Geshe Jinpa's work, extending it into what I have termed Tsongkhapa's "philosophy of tantra."

It should be clear, however, that I am using the term *philosophy* loosely here, and without precise reference to the long history of that word in Greco-European-American thought. In his Introduction to *Reason's Traces*, Matthew Kapstein has offered valuable reflections on both the difficulty and potential in using the word "philosophy" conjoined with "Buddhist." He addresses the critique that⁸⁸

. . . one may well object that this "Buddhist philosophy" is not really philosophy at all; it is, to appropriate an expression well-known to historians of philosophy in the West, merely the "handmaid" of the Buddhist analogue to theology. That such thinkers as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti remain firmly within the ambit of the Buddhological project, despite the impressively sceptical dimensions of their path,

⁸⁵ See Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason*, 1-9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁸ Kapstein, 2001, *Reason's Traces*, 19.

may be taken by some as proof positive that Buddhist philosophy has never claimed for itself the perfect autonomy of reason that is often supposed to be a hallmark of the Western traditions of rational inquiry derived ultimately from the Greeks. . . . Even the most radical deconstructions of the world and the self in Buddhist contemplative experience, where the disposition to hanker after the merest grain of reality in body or mind is undone, must be seen to be indexed to specific soteriological projects and the axiological assumptions that accompany them.

As I have already suggested, it is precisely that “indexing” of Buddhist deconstructive arguments to the “specific soteriological projects” described in both sūtric and tantric literature on the steps of the path to enlightenment, that I wish to emphasize and celebrate throughout this present study. In Part III of his own work, Prof. Kapstein addresses historically volatile issues regarding how the sphere of “tantric mysticism” could be not only condoned, but apparently practiced and reflected upon theoretically by some of the greatest rational thinkers in Buddhist history, both in India and Tibet. As he says, it is “a *prima facie* problem for the interpretation of the tradition to understand just how these two spheres are related to one another.”⁸⁹ Not only is it clear that the presence of Vajrayāna in the Indian Buddhist tradition from at least the sixth to seventh centuries onwards influenced the way in which Buddhist masters *thought* about the perennial problems of soteriological path and practice, but it seems – and in the Tibetan tradition this is readily evident – that the enactment of “tantric ritual and meditational practice” played a crucial role “in the formation of the religious agent” who did the thinking; “for, in this respect, tantrism complemented and cooperated with the educational formation that . . . was essential to the project of Buddhist philosophy overall.”⁹⁰

In my effort, then, to elucidate what I see to be Tsongkhapa’s philosophy of tantra, I use the word *philosophy* in a practical sense, that of seeking to understand Tsongkhapa’s own explicit or implicit *theory* of how and why such practices would work, based on his decisively Buddhist worldview. I have chosen to engage Tsongkhapa’s thought as much as possible on its own terms, without any systematic attempt to draw comparisons with the themes or questions of Euro-American philosophy *per se*. As mentioned above, if there is any direction towards which my comparisons will point, it is to dialogue with theological systems such as Christianity, in particular. Such comparisons will remain undeveloped, however, since, as Geshe Thupten Jinpa points out, the “activity of reconstruction must, in fact, precede any process of systematic comparison,” and it is this work of “elucidating and understanding,”⁹¹ in an analytically challenging

⁸⁹ Kapstein, 2001, *Reason’s Traces*, 21.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁹¹ Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason*, 4.

way, on which I must focus now, in order to provide the substantial basis for deep and rich comparison later on.

My engagement with Tsongkhapa's thought is first and foremost based in close reading of his texts. Fortunately, there is no reasonable historical doubt as to the authenticity of his body of work, which appears to have been printed in a steady stream since the early fifteenth century.⁹² Of course there are minor textual discrepancies between different editions of his collected works. However, for the most part these exist at the level of errata in the carving or ink impression of individual words or letters, not at the level of content, composition, or structure. In consulting several editions whenever I was in doubt as to a reading (including both published bound editions and digital inputs of Tsongkhapa's corpus, which were clearly based upon sets of woodblock prints different from those that I had in front of me⁹³), I have repeatedly been impressed by the *consistency* of each text across numerous editions, differing only in such minor errors, often a matter of a single letter or vowel stroke.

In general I take the information given in the Tibetan colophons to each of Tsongkhapa's collected works at their word, and find them to be remarkably honest and illuminating as to actual authorship. There are numerous discrete texts included in the "collected works" that are obviously not written by Tsongkhapa, but rather are signed by one or more of his disciples. These works usually indicate whether they are notes taken from an oral teaching by "the Lord" (i.e. Tsongkhapa), a summary of crucial points distilled from a number of his other written works, or else a collection of private advices

⁹² See David P. Jackson, 1990, "The Earliest Printings of Tsong-kha-pa's Works: The old Dga'-ldan Editions," in *Reflections on Tibetan Culture: Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie*, edited by Lawrence Epstein and Richard F. Sherbourne (Lewiston, Maine: Edwin Mellen Press), 107-116.

⁹³ As mentioned above (note 3), my primary source has been a complete pecha edition of the "Collected Works of the Lord" (rje'i gsung 'bum), printed c. 1997 at the Sherig Parkhang, Dharamsala, from the Tashi Lhunpo wood-blocks (purchased in 2015 from the Sherig Parkhang warehouse in Ramesh Park, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi). I have also consulted a bound, printed, book edition of Tsongkhapa's collected works (*'jam mgon bla ma tsong kha pa chen po'i gsung 'bum*) published in Delhi, India in the late twentieth century, received as a gift from the Gytö Monastery Library in Sidhbari, India. (Unfortunately, there is no publication information in any language printed within this 13-volume edition.) The digital editions I have consulted and searched are from the Asian Classics Input Project (ACIP), currently available at http://www.asianclassics.org/downloads_direct.html. ACIP files are the basis for most of my digital quotations in Tibetan script, though I have corrected and amended each of them to match the folio numbers, editorial punctuation choices, and spellings of the Tashi Lhunpo pecha edition that I was reading. All remaining errors and typos not marked by "sic" are my own. Though Tsongkhapa's works are spread throughout the ACIP database, organized by subject, not by author, I was aided by prior access to and familiarity with the offline ACIP Release 6 database (c. 2008), as well as the Gofer 1.0 (1) search engine designed to find quotations within the entire catalogue, including the Kangyur and Tengyur (based on the 2013, 25th Anniversary Release database). For a nearly complete listing of Tsongkhapa's works, with ACIP digital input numbers, see Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 440-458. For several of Tsongkhapa's works I have also consulted recent Tibetan critical editions published by Sera Mey Library, and Gytö Monastery Library, respectively. Unique references to contemporary Tibetan monastic scholars' editorial notes or else alternative readings taken from these editions are marked in the footnotes where appropriate.

that may have already been passed through an extra generation before being written down. Works that are personally authored by Tsongkhapa, on the other hand, are almost always signed with some form of his personal name – “Glorious Lobsang Drakpa” or else “Tsongkhapa from the East” are common forms – though some tantric works add the title of “Guhyasamāja yogi,” and the like. Such texts often include a location as well as the name of the scribe, and/or the person who requested the composition.

I find all these factors confidence-inspiring, further supported by the fact that the style and structure of Tsongkhapa’s personally authored works is generally so distinct from those composed as condensed mnemonics by disciples. That said, I do not hesitate to rely on the supplementary works for valid information about Tsongkhapa’s teachings, since there is notable consistency to the viewpoints and resonance to the *voice* expressed by those notes. One can still hear Tsongkhapa speaking, even through his students’ records. Considering the intellectual caliber of these students in their own right, principally Gyaltsab Je and Khedrup Je, I am inclined to think they had memories as prodigious as Tsongkhapa’s, and were quite capable of making nearly comprehensive synopses later, perhaps not unlike the way that Mozart is said to have been able to write down Gregorio Allegri’s *Miserere* after having heard it only once.⁹⁴

Paying close attention to words and shifting valences of meanings depending on context,⁹⁵ I have striven to follow the trails of keywords (made possible by digital searches and some fortuitous finds while reading) and to hear echoes in Tsongkhapa’s vocabulary across diverse genres, including works of sūtra and tantra. This brings me to a deeply intertextual approach, in which I am reading numerous texts at once, and attempting to explain them to my reader concurrently, as well. I have found this leads to the need for making numerous cross-references within the structure of the dissertation, as well as repeated suggestions for further reading in the translations included in the appendices. While there is no need for my reader to follow these cross-references at all times, I place them as a kind of “hyperlinked” guide for familiarization and review. Not unlike the monastic practices of memorization, communal debate, and private contemplation of ideas learned, I hope that the process of circling back to key points might encourage my reader to rethink old topics repeatedly from new perspectives. Certainly, this has been my own method of discovery, return, and rediscovery at a deeper level, each time I attempt to ask a question again within a new textual context.

In terms of genre, I would say this dissertation might resemble the Tibetan genre of an “in-depth, critical analysis” (*mtha’ dpyod*) on “difficult points” (*dka’ ba’i gnad*). I have chosen particular theoretical questions on which to focus, and will follow a trajectory of inquiry and reasoning as far as is possible to address those questions,

⁹⁴ James Bone, “Vatican reveals Wolfgang Mozart’s papal honour,” in *The Australian*, August 16th, 2011.

⁹⁵ See Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason*, 7.

without attempting to cover all the ideas relevant to that subject. Certainly, I am not attempting to make a comprehensive presentation on any particular philosophical school, subject, or practice, even within Tsongkhapa's thought alone. Rather, I think of this work as "going on the hunt" to pursue a train of questions persistently across numerous contexts within Tsongkhapa works, in order to intuit overarching principles. My choice of texts has often been based on instinct and subsequent discovery; it is certainly not exhaustive. I might have chosen an entirely different set of texts to make similar arguments, or different ones. Nonetheless, I have become familiar enough with the consistency of Tsongkhapa's thought to sense that the main points made here would not be blatantly contradicted by further research into Tsongkhapa's scores of other untranslated works on tantra, for example. This does not mean, of course, that there are not countless more surprising discoveries to be made in such research. Like Geshe Thupten Jinpa, I acknowledge the chronological development of Tsongkhapa's thought, but also see no problem in letting his early work on the Mind-Only school, for example, speak in direct concert with his mature works on Middle Way and Vajrayāna. I take each of his works as strands within the tapestry of what is in the end a coherent body of thought.

Because it has been essential to my inquiry to read every chosen portion of these texts in Tsongkhapa's Tibetan, and not in translation, I have also found it necessary to produce my own translations for nearly every quoted passage, even if that particular text does already exist in English translation. I hope this will create a consistent style for my reader, with a recognizable translation vocabulary throughout. Even more importantly, I know that I never would have been able to *recognize* the resonances of the specific Tibetan words and phrases that have formed the throughline of my inquiry, had I been relying upon various English renditions of the respective texts, each with a different translation vocabulary. I am aware that my nearly exclusive reliance on primary texts results in relatively few citations of secondary scholarship throughout large portions of this research, but this was a deliberate choice. It has been my intent to enter Tsongkhapa's constellation of texts and textual resources with a fresh eye, and to explore possibilities for creative reasoning from within that circumscribed milieu.

Thus my mode of interpretation is one of synchronic philosophical inquiry, far more than it is one of historical contextualization. I would echo Geshe Thupten Jinpa in pointing out that Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka – and indeed Tsongkhapa's Vajrayāna – cannot be equated or confused with Geluk Madhyamaka or Vajrayāna.⁹⁶ Since my fieldwork included extensive study at contemporary Tibetan Geluk monasteries in India, I am well aware of the differences between the types of texts studied as contemporary monastic textbooks and Tsongkhapa's own compositions. Often the monastic textbooks

⁹⁶ Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason*, 5.

were authored within a century or two after Tsongkhapa's passing, but already they are written in a style that summarizes key points for straightforward study, and presents debates to be considered and performed on the monastic debate ground. They tend not to include the extensive exegetical techniques and creative argumentation found in Tsongkhapa's great treatises. It seems at times that Tsongkhapa was fighting for the very survival of a worldview he thought might be on its deathbed or the revival of an Indian tradition he thought might already have died.⁹⁷ The later writers come from within a confident Geluk tradition that is already certain that its founder's views were correct, and which seeks to resolve apparent contradictions, either within Tsongkhapa's writings, or between Tsongkhapa's writings and those of the first few generations of his followers. Since readers who do not already belong to the Geluk monastic system are often less inclined to the "scholastic" traditionalism implicit in those later works, I find that the freshness and urgency of Tsongkhapa's style might actually be more suited to address the probing questions of those born and raised outside his tradition, even when they are already sympathetic to it.

Thus I will endeavor to understand and explain the ideas at hand as I think Tsongkhapa meant them, based on all the textual evidence I have. Of course this is always a tendentious enterprise, filled with the risks of hermeneutical inquiry separated from its subject by many centuries and immense cultural disparities. Nonetheless, I will try to paint a possible picture, in which my reader may detect different details, patterns, and structures than I do. Though I cannot help but draw on my own horizons throughout the act of reading and interpreting, at times I will explicitly grapple with Tsongkhapa's meaning from my own perspective as a non-Tibetan, twenty-first century woman whose initial training in philosophy and theology stood firmly within the traditions of European continental philosophy, as well as those of ancient and medieval Christianity. During my fieldwork, I had the good fortune to study at length with a brilliant contemporary exponent of Tsongkhapa's tradition, Geshe Khedrup Norsang, both at Sera Monastery in Bylakuppe, India, and at Gyutö Tantric Monastery, in Sidhbari, India. I will occasionally quote his oral explanations for added clarity on how the lineage has understood Tsongkhapa's views. Nonetheless, I always return to Tsongkhapa's texts for his own explanations, even as I am aware that all interpretation of the *meaning* is, in the end, my own. Of course it follows that all errors remain my own as well.

Outline of Chapters

Chapters One and Two set the philosophical stage by exploring in depth some of the ideas from Tsongkhapa's sūtra thought that I see to be most pertinent for

⁹⁷ See Jamyang Shepa's *String of Wish-Giving Gems* in Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 390-392, for a story regarding Tsongkhapa's reported expression of this sentiment with respect to the practices of the tantric system of Cakrasaṃvara.

understanding what he assumes his reader will know when coming to his tantric commentaries. In Chapter One I lay groundwork to begin demythologizing the idea of karma in Tsongkhapa’s worldview. I seek to understand just what Tsongkhapa seems to have meant by dependent origination as the source of all things. To this end I carry out a broad investigation of the theories of causation that lie in the background of his thought – both those he accepts (mostly drawn from Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*), and those he does not (i.e., the reported views of non-Buddhists in India). Distilled from this array of explanations, I focus on the idea of karmic “traces” (my unconventional translation for the Sanskrit *saṃskāra*), and how Tsongkhapa seems to have understood these as the foundation for both physical and mental worlds within the cycle of suffering (Skt. *saṃsāra*).

Chapter Two builds on these ideas to show how Tsongkhapa understood *all* worlds – both pure and impure – to be created from mind. Thus we will examine both (1) how he understands mind to be the agent of karma, without which karma could not exist, and also (2) how he affirms that each *moment* of mind within *saṃsāra* arises in dependence upon karmic factors. In order to clarify how he can hold the mind to be the creator of worlds, yet not hold mind to be the only thing that really exists, I explore Tsongkhapa’s arguments to this effect in his commentary to Candrakīrti’s *Entering the Middle Way*, called the *Illumination of the True Thought*. These debates will take us into various permutations of illusion, culminating in the famous example of how a single object can appear validly in mutually contradictory ways to different types of beings. I take Tsongkhapa’s creative explanation here to form the implicit philosophical template for the way in which every type of ontological “transformation” is supposed to occur due to Vajrayāna creation stage practices.

Chapters Three and Four explore the principal ideas that Tsongkhapa himself explains as the core of tantric practice. Here I depend mainly upon his *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*, while continuing to thread key passages and concepts from one of his major Guhyasamāja commentaries, the *Exegesis of* [Nāgabuddhi’s] “*Steps of Exposition*” (which has stood as the backbone for the dissertation since Chapter One). Chapter Three places the practices of unsurpassed yoga tantra within the context of what Tsongkhapa explains to be the four classes of tantra, differentiating the types of meditation that are supposed to (a) make Vajrayāna practice distinct from that of practices associated with the Mahāyāna sūtra tradition and (b) make unsurpassed yoga distinct from the practices of the other three classes of tantra. I examine the controversial notion of the path of passion, as well as the meaning of taking the result as the path, and explore how Tsongkhapa ties these to the unique factor of speed attributed to the Vajrayāna in general and unsurpassed yoga in particular. Most importantly, I begin to unpack Tsongkhapa’s

pivotal explanation of how to meditate on the “indivisibility of clarity and the profound,” and highlight the philosophical components necessary for this to make sense.

Chapter Four delves into the heart of Tsongkhapa’s theory of the creation stage in unsurpassed yoga, using the Guhyasamāja system as a model. I juxtapose the two unique things to be abandoned from the point of view of creation stage – the appearance of things as ordinary, and believing them to be that way – with their respective antidotes as Tsongkhapa describes them: the visualization of clear appearances and the pride, or identification with a divine, enlightened being. I problematize this concept of “divine pride” and then focus on a significant passage from Chapter XII of the *Steps of Mantra* in which Tsongkhapa cites Jñānapāda and his school of interpreters for the justification, not only of meditation on emptiness within the creation stage, but also for the efficacy of “contrived” visualization as a method to cut the root of saṃsāra.

Chapters Five and Six draw arguments from Tsongkhapa’s sūtra works into ever more complex dialogue with the principles I see to be at work in his explanations of Vajrayāna creation stage. These chapters are structured around the two major meditative dissolutions into emptiness that take place in Tsongkhapa’s Guhyasamāja sādhana, written according to the Ārya tradition. Chapter Five begins by examining the proposed relationship between meditation on emptiness – understood according to the precise parameters presented so far – and the experiential vanishing of all appearances that is supposed to occur for the practitioner during a sādhana. I then grapple with a problem that arises in later Geluk commentary on Tsongkhapa’s explanation of “the indivisibility of clarity and the profound” during the visualization of clear appearances, questioning whether it is strictly *possible* according to Middle Way principles. In an attempt to address this conundrum raised by the tradition, I turn to Tsongkhapa’s presentation on the two realities in his *Illumination of the True Thought*, as well as to his discussion of the omniscience of Buddhas and the “concordant ultimate” in his *Ocean of Reasoning*. Finally, I turn to Khedrup Je’s record of Tsongkhapa’s teaching on the “Chapter on Direct Perception” from Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika*, to elucidate what I see to be a crucial point about the interaction between karmic tendencies and the actual act of perception. Not only does this idea enable us to bring together all that was said earlier about karmic causation, but it enables us to analyze – drawing on Tsongkhapa’s own use of the same Tibetan terms across diverse genres – what is supposed to be happening in the very state of mind that meditates on the tantric maṇḍala, as it transforms the mental imprints and tendencies, session by session, day by day, year by year.

Chapter Six considers the logic underlying Tsongkhapa’s exegesis of the *Om śūnyatā* mantra. Returning to the *Illumination of the True Thought*, I draw upon Tsongkhapa’s unique use of the phrase “mere I” (*nga tsam*) and his positing of its role as the infusion substrate for all the karmic seeds and tendencies, in the absence of a

“foundation consciousness” in the Mind-Only sense. Relying upon the reportage from Khedrup Je’s brother, Baso Chö Je (*ba so chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1402-1473), of a private instruction by Tsongkhapa on how to identify the “mere I” in meditation, I connect that insight back to what Tsongkhapa has suggested should be happening during the tantric meditation on the *Om śūnyatā* mantra. Here I pinpoint what I understand to be the logic behind the pivotal action described in Chapter Four, whereby the practitioner is to reverse ordinary pride and engage in authentic identification with the divine being, whose essence is now understood as the primordial, indwelling mind of clear light whose ultimate nature is the emptiness of “me.” After juxtaposing several more sets of texts, I conclude Chapter Six with a reflection on how, in the light of all we have examined, repeated *sādhana* practice could be understood to transform the very seeds for experiencing death as death, birth as birth, and so on. I argue that in Tsongkhapa’s view, if there was no other identifiable world than the one which appeared to us based on how a “beheld aspect dawned before consciousness based upon the power of tendencies,” then transforming the *tendencies* could indeed effect thorough-going change in how one perceived a world. Nonetheless, that would still be operating at the level of subtle concepts, not yet at the foundational energetic levels of *extremely* subtle winds and primordial mind.

The Epilogue takes up the threads of several discussions still left unfinished, and also suggests how Tsongkhapa’s theoretical perspective seems to change, once he is describing deceptive appearances explicitly in terms of a psycho-physical union of subtle winds and mind. It is beyond the scope of this project to enter into any detail on the practices of the complete stage, or Tsongkhapa’s extensive tantric theory in that regard. Such would be the topic of a separate monograph. Nonetheless, based on what we have examined so far, I indicate the six distinct levels of what it means to “like an illusion,” which are mentioned by Tsongkhapa in his *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp on the Five Stages*, as well as in several other texts on the “Five Stages” system of the tantric Ārya Nāgārjuna. I also return to the comparisons begun in Chapter Five regarding the indwelling mind of clear light, described from a Guhyasamāja perspective, and the pristine awareness (*rig pa*) that lies at the heart of the Great Perfection tradition. As a source, I touch upon the anomalous but undeniable significance of the *Garland of Supreme Medicinal Nectar: Questions and Answers* (*zhus lan sman mchog bdus rsti’i phreng ba*) within Tsongkhapa’s collected works. Such a comparison between the infinite creative possibilities that come from the union of the clear light and illusory body at the fifth stage of Guhyasamāja, and the idea of the natural radiance of pristine awareness in a Great Perfection context, adds new perspective to my original questions about creation and purity in Tsongkhapa’s thought, from the point of view of advanced stages of the Vajrayāna path.

Chapter One: A World Made of Karma

Those who are wise with respect to what is
See functioning things as changing, misleading phenomena;
Without self, empty, hollow,
And totally set apart.

What has nowhere to stay cannot be perceived.
Without root and without abode;
Sprung entirely from ignorance as their cause
Utterly devoid of beginning, middle, or end.

Like the plantain tree, they have no core;
Like a city of ghosts,
Or the unbearable cities of the insane,
Wanderers appear like an illusion.

—Ārya Nāgārjuna, *Sixty Verses on Reasoning*¹

* * *

. . . So it may be true that during the first stage, one meditates primarily upon the side of appearances – a circle of divine beings – but one gains a very powerful ascertainment of what it means for nothing to have a nature of its own, and building on that, one trains oneself to see how everything dawns as though it were an illusion.

. . . This yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound is, furthermore, that with which you meditate on each part of the practice for gaining realizations. From the viewpoint of this ultimate import, the root tantra of Hevajra states:

The yogi of the creation stage
meditates on elaboration, with austerities.
Taking the elaboration to be like a dream,
eliminate elaboration by means of elaboration.

Its explanatory tantra, the *Tent*, states further:

For instance a moon in the water
is a collaboration of conditions, neither true nor false.
In the same way here, the circle of the maṇḍala
has the nature of being luminous and crystal clear.

—Je Tsongkhapa, *The Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*²

¹ *Yuktiṣāṣṭikākārikā* (*rigs pa drug cu pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa*), Toh. 3825, sde dge bstan 'gyur, dbu ma, vol. tsa, 21a7-21b1 (as quoted, with one line missing, in Tsongkhapa's *Ocean of Reasoning, An Explanation of "Incisive Wisdom: Root Verses on the Middle Way," dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ba, 246a1-3 [493]; see Appendix Twelve):

དངོས་ལ་མཁས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ནི། དངོས་པོ་མི་རྟག་སྤྱི་བའི་ཆོས། གསལ་གྲངས་སྤྱི་བ་བདག་མེད་པ། རྣམ་པར་དབེན་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་མཐོང་། གནས་མེད་དམི
གས་པ་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། ཅེས་མེད་ཅིང་གནས་པ་མེད། མ་དེག་རྒྱ་ལས་ཤིན་ཏུ་བྱུང་། རྟོག་མ་དབུས་མཐའ་རྣམ་པར་སྤངས། རྒྱ་ཤིང་བཞིན་ཏུ་སྤྱིང་བོ་མེད། འི
'མེ་ཁྲོང་ཁྲོང་འབྲུ་བ་སྟེ། ཁྲོངས་པའི་ཁྲོང་ཁྲོང་མི་བཟད་པ། འབྲོ་བ་སྤྱི་མ་བཞིན་ཏུ་སྤྱང་།

² *sngags rim chen mo*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ga, 402a2-6 (803):

In stark contrast, we see here two very different perspectives on “illusion,” as exemplified in the types of classical Indian Buddhist books that Tsongkhapa takes as his primary sources. In the first, we glimpse what has often been interpreted negatively, as a pessimistic outlook by which Buddhist authors say nothing is real, and everything is just a fantastical projection, with “no core,” like the “unbearable cities of the insane.” Without context, and without explanation, it could seem a depressing and fruitless philosophy indeed. Yet according to Tsongkhapa’s complex interpretation of Nāgārjuna’s true intent, I will try to show that even within its own context, Nāgārjuna’s sūtra philosophy of the Middle Way need not be interpreted negatively at all. Indeed, the very “emptiness” of phenomena could serve as the infinite potential for liberation and transformation.

When juxtaposed directly with a morsel of tantric instruction, however – as exemplified here by Tsongkhapa’s quotations from the cycle of the *Hevajra Tantra* – we see a completely different perspective from the outset. Using an alternative set of analogies for illusion,³ the authors of these tantras emphasize the ways in which we can naturally think of illusory phenomena as beautiful, tantalizing, even transcendent or surreal, stretching the weighty boundaries of our ordinary concrete existence. Actively visualizing and dwelling in a world of one’s own imagination, which is explicitly understood to be “like an illusion,” the creation stage practitioner is supposed to use such conceptual elaboration in order eventually to put an end to elaboration, that is, to cancel all the wrong ways of seeing that were the cause of beginningless suffering.

In order to understand how Tsongkhapa himself, within the diversity of his writings, moves seamlessly from one view of illusion to another, we must begin from the ground up, as it were, examining exactly what he means by illusion in each case. By the end of this dissertation, we will be able to look back and recognize no less than six distinct types of illusion that Tsongkhapa identifies from the perspective of an advanced tantric practitioner. Tsongkhapa says repeatedly that even someone very accomplished on

... རིམ་པ་དང་མེད་སྐྱབས་སུ་སྒྲུབ་ཐོགས་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ལོ་གཙོ་བོར་སྒྲོམ་པ་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་ཆོས་ནམས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་ངེས་པ་ལྟགས་བྲག་བྲངས་ནས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྱུ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་འཆར་བ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཅིང་། ... ཐབ་གསལ་གཉིས་མེད་ཀྱི་ནལ་འབྱོར་ཡང་མངོན་ཏོགས་སྒྲོམ་རེས་ཀྱིས་བྱའོ། །དོན་གྱི་དབང་འདི་གཟིགས་ནས། གྱི་དོར་ཅ་རྒྱུད་ལས། བསྐྱེད་པའི་རིམ་པའི་ནལ་འབྱོར་གྱིས། །བརྟལ་ཞུགས་ཅན་གྱིས་སྒྲོམ་པ་བསྒྲོམ། །སྒྲོམ་པ་མི་ལམ་ལྟར་བྱས་ནས། །སྒྲོམ་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་སྒྲོམ་མེད་བྱ། །ཞེས་དང་། དེའི་བཤད་རྒྱུད་གྲུང་ལས་ཀྱང་། །དཔེར་ན་རྩ་ལྷ་ལྷ་བ་ནི། །ཐོགས་དག་བདེན་མིན་རྩན་པའང་ཡིན། །དེ་བཞིན་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་འཁོར་ལོ་འདིར། །དྲངས་ཞིང་གསལ་བའི་རང་བཞིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།

³ For what is perhaps the most famous example of such “beautiful” illusions being cited in a sūtra context, see the verse at the close of the *Diamond-Cutter Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa rdo rje gcod pa theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Toh. 16, bka' 'gyur, sher phyin sna tshogs, vol. ka, 121a1-132b7), recited almost as a mantra in Tibetan monasteries:

Look upon things that are made from other things to be like this:

A star, an obstruction in the eye, a butter lamp, or an illusion

A dewdrop, a bubble, a dream, lightening, or else a cloud.

།སྐར་པ་རབ་རིབ་མར་མེད་དང་། །སྒྱུ་མ་ཐེལ་བ་རྩ་བྱར་དང་། །མི་ལམ་ཐོག་དང་སྤྱིན་ལྷ་བྱ། །འདུས་བྱས་དེ་ལྟར་བལྟ་བར་བྱ།

For a fascinating contemporary illustrated study of ways in which images of illusion are used in Buddhist thought, see also Jan Westerhoff, 2010, *Twelve Examples of Illusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

the lower levels of the path will still have no idea what it means to recognize the illusion in the way that the most advanced practitioners can do.⁴ Nonetheless, one must have understood each of those earlier meanings of illusion, along with the entire worldview that goes along with each of them, in order to become the kind of person who can realize the highest meanings of illusion.

As a theme that runs throughout his works, Tsongkhapa sees maturation on the spiritual path to be a graded, stepwise process; one that requires clear understanding and assimilation of ideas appropriate to one's current level, before one would be prepared to enter into the trainings and explanations appropriate to the next level. In practice, however, at least as I have seen these ideas treated within current monastic curriculum at Tibetan institutions of learning within Tsongkhapa's lineage, this does not mean one actually has to have *realized* the deepest meaning of every idea before being allowed to study what comes next. In Geluk education, as in Euro-American systems of education, one can study theory quite extensively, where the only prerequisites for advancement are some official demonstration of having learned what came before. Demonstration of meditative accomplishment, however, is not an entrance examination for further study, even with regard to advanced tantric topics.

Nevertheless, Tsongkhapa's thought is difficult and delicate, and must be approached in a suitable frame of mind in order for anything to make sense. It was in order to address our own personal prerequisites for approaching this material that I began the Introduction with a thought experiment. I am certain we have all had experiences that opened our hearts, which allowed us to glimpse a world that was not quite ordinary. Perhaps we doubted them, or shut the door on them because it was too painful to feel the nature of human loss or disappointment *that* authentically. Or perhaps we looked upon our contemplative reveries as childish or impractical. But as the second set of quotations above suggests already, the stages of Vajrayāna practice depend upon a consistent and determined cultivation of a limitless sense of imagination. In the course of this dissertation, I will not be explaining many of the specific instructions for tantric meditation nor describing the details of any secret maṇḍalas. Rather, as stated in the Introduction, I am seeking the *logic* of the trajectory that I believe drives Tsongkhapa's thought as a whole, across sūtric and tantric sources.

Still, in order to be in the right frame of mind to try to understand the alternative realities in which most tantric practice is designed to take place, I will ask my reader to keep returning to his or her own personal experiences of raw authenticity in the face of

⁴ Tsongkhapa's discussion of up to six types of illusion appears in several different texts, to be discussed in the Epilogue. See for example, *The Great Book on the Steps of Mantra* (*sngags rim chen mo*), vol. *ga*, 402b2-4 (804) and 444b3 – 446a6 (888-891); *The Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp on the Five Stages* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), vol. *ja*, 235a4 – 239b2 (471-480); and in *The Ultimate Private Advice: Blessing Oneself* (*man ngag gi mthar thug bdag byin rlabs*), vol. *cha*, 4b5 – 7b3 (460-466).

death, sincere and boundary-free compassion for others' pain, the delight of artistic enchantment, awe before nature, and even the hopelessness of despair.⁵ I contend that such human experiences are doorways to a tangible understanding of the meaning of illusion across all the contexts discussed by Tsongkhapa. That is, in all cases, for something to be *illusory* means that the way a thing appears, and the way it actually exists, do not match (*snang tshul dang gnas tshul mi mthun pa*). In Tibetan Buddhist literature this is the most basic definition of that fraught word, “illusion.”

In order to grasp Tsongkhapa's many definitions of illusion at a technical, philosophical level, however, we must delve deeply into the meaning of emptiness, for every realization of illusion only comes on the heels of understanding clearly that things are not as they appear, in a very precise sense. So in every case we must ask: Exactly how were they appearing, and of what are they said to be empty?

This is where understanding the “two truths,” or “two realities” (*bden gnyis*, Skt. *satyadvaya*) of the Middle Way presentation becomes so important. The creation stage meditation indicated by Tsongkhapa above relies upon uniting, indivisibly, a realization of emptiness with an active recognition of all appearances as being “like an illusion.” Yet in order to understand the indivisible union of appearances and their emptiness, we would have to know very well what each one is individually – for each is the inverse of the other. In briefest terms, within classical Middle Way treatises there are said to be two realities, one ultimate, and one conventional, or “deceptive.” They are like two sides of a coin, and the ultimate reality is inseparable from the fact that appearances do not exist in the way that they appear. That is, the ultimate truth about appearances is that they are illusory.

In order for Tsongkhapa's explanation of an ultimate reality and a deceptive reality⁶ to make sense, however, we would have to understand how he describes the mistaken state of mind that is deceived about the aspect of reality which is therefore termed “deceptive.” Recognizing this quality of deception in our everyday experience can become key to understanding the term “like an illusion.” In other words, to identify what it is we think is there, but is not really there, we need to understand the unique method by which Tsongkhapa identifies “the thing to be refuted” (*dgag bya*, Skt. *pratiṣedhya*) when one says that reality is empty of something we mistakenly thought to exist. In order to pinpoint that “thing denied” by the Middle Way school, however, Tsongkhapa often

⁵ Thus I will not review here the traditional stages of motivation and preparation that Je Tsongkhapa mentions at the beginning of most of his works; we will touch on many of them, however, before this study is through. Ample scholarship has been done in English on Tsongkhapa's most famous presentations of the “Steps of the Path” (*lam rim*). See especially: Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa and Joshua W. C. Cutler, editor-in-chief, with the Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path of Enlightenment, Vol. I-III*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2000, 2002, and 2004.

⁶ *don dam bden pa*, Skt. *paramārthasatya*, and *kun rdzob bden pa*, Skt. *saṃvṛtisatya*. See the discussion regarding my translation of the latter term in Chapter Five, “Interlude on the Two Realities,” and the explanations that appear throughout Appendix Five.

spends nearly half of a treatise on the view of emptiness carefully presenting and then refuting the positions of the Mind-Only system, either as they appear in the treatises of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, or else as cited unsympathetically by Candrakīrti.

In order to grasp the Mind-Only viewpoint in juxtaposition to that of the Middle Way, we need to recognize that, according to Tsongkhapa's interpretations at least, one primary bone of contention between the two schools revolves around what it would mean for a thing – particularly the mind itself – “to exist through characteristics of its own” (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa*), and whether or not this is possible. Furthermore, one reason the schools seem to have disputed so much about *how* the mind exists, was in order to explain how it is that the seeds of morally charged action (*las*, Skt. *karma*) and mental afflictions (*nyon mongs*, Skt. *kleśa*) can be stored and cultivated in such a mind, in order that they might give rise to their proper fruits in the future. Yet if one did not recognize how *both* of these schools of the Mahāyāna (Greater Way) equally see the mind to be at the foundation of all phenomena, not only would the doctrine of karma be difficult to maintain, but at the level of Vajrayāna, personal tantric practice would be rendered pointless, because one would have no idea *why* one was meditating on worlds that, to one's current perceptions, do not even exist. Thus I find Tsongkhapa's presentations of the debates between the Mind-Only and Middle Way schools extremely pertinent to understanding his own view of how tantra works.

To make sense of these debates, then, I propose that we must first come to appreciate the degree to which the concept of morally charged action lies at the root of every form of the Buddhist worldview that Tsongkhapa inhabited. He not only saw it to be the reason why good or bad things happen to us, but readily posited the forces of karma at the foundation of the physical universe as well. For a clear demonstration of this point, we will look repeatedly to one of his tantric commentaries, the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition.”* But grasping the import of that text will require that we are already grappling with the fundamental questions of *creation* and *causation*. What makes a world to exist in the way that it does? What lies at the foundation of the possibility of existence at all? What would distinguish an illusory world from a real one?

I have said that for something to be illusory means that things are not as they appear. However, in order to think of this in a manner that does not merely refer to illusion in the ordinary sense of rainbows, movies, and *trompe l'oeil*, but as something that would apply to *every object in the universe*, we must start with the most general Buddhist descriptions of how things actually do exist, in order to gradually come to an understanding of how they do not.

Reliance and Relationship

The most widespread Buddhist term used to describe how things do exist is that which has been most often translated as “dependent origination,” or “dependent arising.”

The full Tibetan phrase is *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba* (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*), which literally means “arising in dependence and relationship.” Thus all changing, functioning things (*ngos po*, Skt. *bhāva*) are said to arise in reliance on causes and conditions. The *Abhidharmakośa* (“Treasury of Higher Knowledge”) of Vasubandhu (fl. c. fourth century CE)⁷ discusses six main types of causes, five results, and four conditions. This is an immensely complex subject, but suffice to say that these causes do not describe mechanical causation in the way that empirical science investigates the interplay of physical forces.⁸ Rather, the explanation of causation upon which Tsongkhapa depends is one that focuses upon the chain of moments of awareness as they continue through time, the individual thoughts that spring up in that field of awareness, the particular types of physical objects with which different sensory awarenesses can interact, and the ethical content of causal forces replicated in the mind through time, based on actions in relationship to *other* beings who can feel pleasure or pain. Studying these causes and conditions offers a kaleidoscopic picture of events, in which myriad factors, both simultaneous and sequential, give rise to the particular sensory and mental perceptions, emotions, conceptual fabrications, valid understandings, and more or less blatant misunderstandings that show up in the experience of any given sentient being, moment after moment.

In a very practical sense, we might recognize the salutary effect of reflecting on complex causation. For example, when something good or bad happens to us, how often do we fully consider the countless interrelated factors that brought us to the place where we could see ourselves there, having such-and-such an experience? An authority figure upon whom we depend for our livelihood criticizes us unjustly and we are angry; at the moment of intense negative emotion, it looks as though the situation is just what it is, unchangeable and unacceptable. This creates a reaction of emotional pain. To be able to reflect on the diverse circumstances that contributed to the situation – our own previous actions and attitudes, those of all the people around us, the emotional stress the authority

⁷ The dates and identity of Vasubandhu as the author of the *Abhidharmakośa* have been contested in various ways. For a complex yet inconclusive argument that supports the earlier dating of a single Vasubandhu to the late fourth century CE, see Lambert Schmithausen, 1992, “A Note on Vasubandhu and the Laṅkāvatārasūtra,” in *Asiatische Studien*, vol. 46: 392-397. See also Schmithausen, 1987, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies), vol. II, 262n101.

⁸ For a foundational study of key ideas held by the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣikas, as presented in opposing ways by Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra, see Collett Cox, 1995, *Disputed Dharmas: Early Buddhist Theories on Existence. An Annotated Translation of the Section on Factors Dissociated from Thought from Saṅghabhadra's Nyāyānusāra* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies), esp. 85-100. The discussion in these pages, regarding Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika theories about the continuity of karma, the possibility of causation in a radically impermanent world, the feasibility of “possession” (Skt. *prāpti*, what I will later translate as “holds”) vs. “seeds,” and the nature of time, raise many issues that will appear as recurrent themes within my own study of Tsongkhapa’s ongoing dialogue with concepts that can be traced to early Buddhist texts. See also Johannes Bronkhorst, 2009, *Buddhist Teaching in India* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom).

figure may be under, and so on – is to recognize that the “reality” of the situation has infinitely more nuance to it than when we first reacted. In that moment, one might say we have recognized the “illusion” of the “impossible and infuriating situation” in which we first found ourselves. “It was not quite what it appeared to be,” we say, with relief. At the introductory level, penetrating the illusory quality of a suffering situation has eased our negative emotion – even a little bit.

This simple realization, however, has only a shadow of the sophistication that Tsongkhapa intends when he refers to the Middle Way view that sees things to be “false.” To get to *that* meaning, I would argue that we must pay close attention to the fact that for Tsongkhapa, and for much of the history of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thought preceding him, the most important type of causation was that related to *karmic* intention, action, and its variously manifest results in later experience. The main way in which Buddhist understanding of karmic causation differs from the most widespread Euro-American theories of moral effects is that karmic causes are usually seen to take much longer to bring about their respective results – sometimes even thousands or millions of years, *within the mental continuum of a single living being*. This understanding of karma, then, relies inextricably upon a concept of the mental continuum (*rgyud*, Skt. *saṃtāna*) as a phenomenon that goes on forever without a break. Only in the context of such a view of mental continuity could one engage the theory of karmic cause and effect precisely as it stands in classical Buddhist scriptures. Otherwise it seems one would have to bend the rules and try to make all the causes and results pertain only to a single human lifetime, which from an Indian or Tibetan Buddhist point of view would be absurd – or else not a theory of karma at all, but something else.

The Problem of Karma

In both his great and briefer books on the steps of the path to enlightenment, Tsongkhapa presents “karma and its effects” upon a rubric of four infallible principles, or consistencies, with which karma is said to function. (He in turn relies on various Indian Buddhist scriptures as support for his statements, but I will focus on Tsongkhapa’s own words here.) In order to describe the principle of certainty (*las nges pa*), whereby the quality of a result matches the quality of the action, Tsongkhapa writes:⁹

Whether one is an ordinary or a highly realized being, every happiness, in the form of a feeling of comfort – down to the experience that arises for a being born

⁹ The [Briefer] *Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, a.k.a. *lam rim chung ngu/ lam rim 'bring*), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *pha*, 54b6-54a3 (110-111):

སོ་སོ་སྐྱེ་བོ་དང་འཕགས་པ་གང་ཡིན་ཀྱང་ཆོར་བ་སེམས་བཞིན་སྐྱེ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་བདེ་བ་ཐོབ་པ་ཅན་སེམས་ཅན་དཔྱུལ་བར་སྐྱེས་པ་ན་རྒྱུད་བསིལ་བ་ལངས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྐྱེས་པ་ཡན་ཆད་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་ཕྱོད་དགེ་བའི་ལས་བསགས་པ་ལས་འབྱུང་གི། མི་དགེ་བའི་ལས་ལས་བདེ་བ་འབྱུང་བ་ནི་གནས་མེད་ལ། ཆོར་བ་གདུང་བའི་ནམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེལ་ཐོབ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་བཞིན་སྐྱེ་བའི་རྒྱུད་ལ་སྐྱེས་པ་མན་ཆད་ཐམས་ཅད་ཕྱོད་མི་དགེ་བ་བསགས་པ་ལས་འབྱུང་གི་དགེ་བའི་ལས་ལས་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེལ་འབྱུང་བ་ནི་གནས་མེད་དེ།

in hell when a cool breeze stirs – arises from virtuous actions collected in the past. But a situation where happiness arises from nonvirtuous action does not exist. Every suffering, in the form of a feeling of discomfort, even up to that which comes in the mental stream of an *arhat*, arises from nonvirtuous actions collected in the past. But a situation where suffering arises from virtuous action does not exist.

This categorical statement leaves no room for exceptions. If one is speaking of the deepest layers of causation – not merely sequential occurrence in time – it would seem the point is that no experience of pain should be attributed to any circumstantial cause as its real reason, but rather understood as the reflection or natural unfolding of nonvirtuous action done in the past. This is said to be true even for an *arhat*,¹⁰ or someone who has altogether ceased to have negative emotions, but who may still retain the seeds of negative deeds committed in the past. Though it is not explicitly stated here, it must be added that the very same person who did an action is the one who will experience the corresponding result.¹¹ Of course I should modify the term “person” with the term “mental continuum,” for as mentioned already, sometimes it is said that a karmic imprint, or seed, might take millions of years before bringing about its own distinct effect. In this case, the name and identity of the “person” might have changed countless times between the moment of the cause and the moment of the result, but the theory of karma would assert that the continuity of mental consciousness has gone on without interruption. Therefore the stream of the “imprint” of the causal event has never disappeared. There is said to be an unbroken link between the person who experiences the result and the one who created the action, even if there is no conscious memory whatsoever of the “original” deed.¹²

Tsongkhapa goes on to specify what theories of causation the first principle of karma excludes:¹³

¹⁰ The translations “foe destroyer” or “enemy slayer” translate the Tibetan rendering of this term: *dgra bcom pa*. Though this follows constructed etymologies of the Sanskrit term as *ari-hant*, the Sanskrit word *arhat* means “worthy, venerable, respectable” (See Monier-Williams Online 2011 at www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/webtc5/), as does the Pāli *arahant*. Hence I will leave the term “arhat” untranslated throughout.

¹¹ This becomes clear in the third of the four principles: “There is no meeting with a deed not done.” *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 54b6 (110): ལས་མ་བྱས་པ་དང་མི་ཐུག་པ།

¹² We will have opportunity to examine this point in detail from both Mind-Only and Middle Way viewpoints in Chapter Two and again in Chapter Six.

¹³ *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 55a3-5 (111):

།དེའི་ཕྱིར་བད་སྟག་ནམ་ནི་རྩ་མེད་དང་གཙོ་བོ་དང་དབང་སྟག་སོགས་མི་མཐུན་པའི་རྩ་ལས་བྱུང་བ་ཡང་མིན་པར་དགེ་མི་དགེ་ལས་སྤྱི་ལས་བདེ་སྟག་སྤྱི་དང་།
བདེ་སྟག་གི་ཁྱད་པར་སྣ་ཆོགས་པ་ནམས་ཀྱང་ལས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཁྱད་པར་སྣ་ཆོགས་ལ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མ་འཆོལ་བར་སོ་སོར་འབྱུང་བའི་ལས་འབྲས་དེས་ཅན་ནམ་མི་
སྟེ་ལས་འབྲས་པ་རྟེན་པ་ནི། སངས་རྒྱལ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཡང་དག་པའི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞེས་པ་དཀར་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གཞིར་བསྟགས་པའོ།

Compare entire quotation to *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 103b5-104a4 (238-239). For an interesting analysis of parallel points according to how

Therefore no happiness or suffering could ever come without a cause, or else from a cause that was not congruent with it, such as from a Primal Force [*gtso bo*], a Powerful Lord [*dbang phyug*], or the like. Thus happiness and suffering in general come from virtue and nonvirtue in general, and all the various specific instances of happiness and suffering come, one by one, without the slightest confusion, from specific instances of the two types of actions. This is the certainty, or infallibility, of action and its results. Finding certitude in this idea has been praised as the foundation of all “pure white practice” [*dkar chos*], and is known as “the perfect view of all Buddhists.”

The key idea comes in the phrase, “a cause that was not congruent with it” (*mi mthun pa'i rgyu*). How often do we think that things are “made by” a force or agent whose identifying properties are completely different from the thing that it makes? Is the potter not entirely different in nature from the pot? Tsongkhapa’s point here, though, is that to be worthy of the name “cause” a thing should be, in some sense, an earlier version of the thing that will come later. As we will see, the concept of karmic causation is far more complex than some kind of cookie-cutter replication of events. However, Tsongkhapa does state explicitly here that there is an infallible relationship between specific “paths of action” (*las kyi lam*, Skt. *karmapatha*, which include the motivation and other extenuating circumstances of the situation in which the deed took place) and the experiential results that the mental traces of such actions will bring about in the future. Before becoming baffled by the potential convolution of such a theorem, we should note that the primary thing that is supposed to “match” between the cause and the result is the quality of comfort or discomfort that, at the time of the original deed, accompanies virtue or nonvirtue, respectively, and at the time of the result, will be experienced as pleasure or pain, respectively, by the continuation of the stream of awareness of the being who acted. At the time of an “original” deed, however, the notion of “virtue and nonvirtue” implies that it was the being *towards whom* the deed was done who experienced comfort or discomfort as a result of one’s actions. At the time of the result, it is the later continuation of the *agent* who experiences that “congruent” comfort or discomfort herself. The question of how or why that experience is said to “come back” – or else seem to reverse direction after encountering another mindstream, is one that we will have to keep in mind when examining the theory of mental seeds.

External Creators

For now, we return to the other possibilities for creative agents that are cast aside in this passage. Buddhist thought has a long history of denying that the world was made in any of the various ways, whether theist or atheist, that the philosophically diverse

they appear to have developed within an Indian context, see Noa Ronkin, 2005, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon), esp. 194-236.

schools of Indian religion claimed it to have come into being.¹⁴ The “Primal Force” here generally refers to the *pradhāna* of Sāṃkhya thought, an example of a “nontheist” explanation for cosmic origins, which bore a complex relationship to the development of the Yoga tradition. This Primal Force, understood as *prakṛti*, was thought to be an extremely subtle primordial nature, composed equally of the three non-conscious properties known in Sanskrit as *rajas*, *tamas*, and *sattva*. I will roughly translate these as “particle, darkness, and strength,” though the terms have far wider range and deeper symbolism than these English words suggest. These primordial, impersonal qualities were understood to have unfolded or evolved themselves into their transformations, or expressions (*rnam* ‘gyur, Skt. *vikāra*), which produced the myriad elements and forms of beings in the world, including, specifically, the things that cause harm and unhappiness for conscious beings who are trapped in such a material morass.

Though contemporary scientific views bear little similarity to Sāṃkhya philosophy in most respects, I still do not think it inappropriate to draw one parallel between them. Theories of modern physics and cosmology do seek some fundamental force or array of forces, which are inanimate and non-conscious, from which all objects and beings of the universe have in some way evolved. The main idea that Tsongkhapa refutes here, following Indian Buddhist thinkers from Nāgārjuna (c. second century CE) to Śāntideva (c. eighth century CE), is the notion that some random force, *not driven by conscious thought*, could ever be the cause for all the things that happen to us. How could inanimate matter ever carry, much less generate, the interpersonal, moral qualities that produce distinctly conscious experiences of happiness or unhappiness in us? The most basic “karmic” logic is this: The quality of joy or pain can only be the proper result of experiences of joy or pain that were generated in the past, whether in ourselves or in someone else. At root these are mental experiences which rely upon how conscious beings treat one another. Joy comes from giving joy; pain comes from inflicting pain. As Śāntideva had clearly stated in his *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* (*Bodhicāryāvatāra*), the first reason to recognize this is in order not to get angry at the

¹⁴ For a very concise summary of the historical context and development of such arguments, see Matthew Kapstein, 2005, “The Buddhist Refusal of Theism,” in *Diogenes* 52 (1): 61-65. For a detailed book-length analysis of the logical attacks on Naiyāyika proofs for the existence of a certain kind of creator god made by a late Indian Buddhist author, Ratnakīrti, see Parimal Patil, 2009, *Against a Hindu God* (New York: Columbia University Press). While I will not be able to enter into the rich theological issues at play in any one of these inter-religious debates as they took place in India, I think it essential that whenever engaging with such debates, one take care to understand exactly what kind of “god” is being refuted. For this may not at all resemble the idea of a God or gods that one personally has in mind when at first approaching an Indian or Tibetan religious milieu from the context of Abrahamic or Greco-European thought. For a more detailed analysis of the arguments given by Vasubandhu and Dharmakīrti than I will be able to offer here, as well as discussion of some unique additions by Śāntarakṣita, see Richard P. Hayes, 1988, “Principled Atheism in the Buddhist Scholastic Tradition,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 16, no. 1: 5-28. For a very different perspective, one with which I think Tsongkhapa’s Vajrayāna view may ultimately be in accord, see B. Alan Wallace, 1999, “Is Buddhism Really Nontheistic?” Paper presented at the National Conference of the American Academy of Religion. Boston, MA.

supposed random machinations of “primal forces” that could never have been the real cause of our unhappiness, anyway.¹⁵

The Powerful Lord (*dbang phyug*, Skt. *īśvara*) that Tsongkhapa mentions here is, in other similar contexts, often referred to by the Tibetan word for an ultimate Self: *bdag* (Skt. *ātman*). As glossed in the commentary that Tsongkhapa’s prominent disciple, Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen (*rgyal tshab rje dar ma rin chen*, 1364-1432), wrote to Śāntideva’s *Guide*, the term *bdag* in Śāntideva’s text refers to an original “knowing person” (*shes rig gi skyes bu*),¹⁶ that is, the alternative Sāṃkhya idea of a *puruṣa* (Original Person), which is a more circumscribed concept than that of “*ātman*” in general. At a later place in the *Briefer Steps of the Path*, when commenting on a verse from Candrakīrti’s *Entering the Middle Way*, Tsongkhapa glosses the term “*bdag*” with the phrase, “those ideas thought up by the non-Buddhists: a Self, a Primal Force, and so on . . .”¹⁷ Thus in both places Tsongkhapa has added the Tibetan word for “and so on” (*sogs*) to a list of non-Buddhist ideas for a supreme original being, implying that he intends to subsume all the views of the diverse schools of non-Buddhist Indian thought in one sweep. This may seem a blatant generalization of what are in fact many distinct systems within Hindu religion, but by Tsongkhapa’s time in Tibet, images of non-Buddhist Indian philosophy had long since become simplified into stereotypes of “what we do not believe.” Acknowledging his broad stroke, we might still recognize that there is something that the Sanskrit terms *īśvara* and *puruṣa* do have in common, namely, the idea of a supremely knowing being who is unchanging, existed before all things, and created all things and beings out of its own willing thought.

To understand the metaphysical reasons why Tsongkhapa cannot accept the notion of an absolutely unchanging creator being, we must turn to his sources, the Indian authors upon whom he and his disciples relied for these ideas, namely Śāntideva, Vasubandhu, and Dharmakīrti. To quote Śāntideva’s verses on this point in full:¹⁸

¹⁵ See *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, *Bodhicāryāvatāra* (*byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa*), Chapter 6, v. 26-30, translated below.

¹⁶ See Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen, *Entry Point for the Children of the Victorious Ones: An Explanation of the “Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life”* (*byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa’i rnam bshad rgyal sras ’jug ngogs*), *rgyal tshab rje’i gsung ’bum*, vol. *nga*, 61b1-4 (124).

¹⁷ *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, *rje’i gsung ’bum*, vol. *pha*, 199a5 (399):

ལྷ་སྒྲུག་གིས་ཀློག་བཟླས་པའི་བདག་དང་གཙོ་བོ་སྒྲུག་དང་།

¹⁸ Śāntideva, *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, *byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa*, Toh. 3871, sde dge bstan ’gyur, dbu ma, vol. *la*, 15b3-6:

།གཙོ་བོ་ཞེས་བྱས་པ་འདོད་དང་། །བདག་ཅེས་བཟླས་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ། །དེ་ཉིད་བདག་ནི་འབྱུང་བ་ཞེས། །ཆེད་དུ་བསམས་ཤིང་འབྱུང་བ་མེད། །མ་སྒྲུབ་པར་
ནི་དེ་མེད་ན། །དེ་ཆེ་སྒྲུབ་པར་འདོད་པ་གང་། །ཡུལ་ལ་རྟག་ཏུ་གཡེང་འགྱུར་བ། །འགག་པར་འགྱུར་བའང་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཅི་སྟེ་བདག་དེ་རྟག་ན་ནི། །མཁའ་བཞིན་གྱི་
དཔ་མེད་པར་མཛོམས། །རྒྱུན་རྒྱུས་གཞན་དང་མཛད་ན་ཡང་། །འགྱུར་བ་མེད་པ་ཅི་བྱར་ཡོད། །བྱེད་པའི་ཆེ་ཡང་སྟོན་བཞིན་ན། །བྱེད་པས་དེ་ལ་ཅི་ཞིག་བྱས། །དེ་
ཡི་བྱེད་པ་འདི་ཡིན་ཞེས། །འབྲེལ་པར་འགྱུར་བ་གང་ཞིག་ཡོད། །དེ་ལྟར་མཁས་ཅད་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་། །དེ་ཡི་དབང་གིས་དེ་དབང་མེད། །དེ་ལྟར་ཤེས་ན་སྦྱུལ་ལྟ་
བུའི། །དངོས་པོ་ཀླན་ལ་ཁྱོ་མི་འགྱུར།

What they want to call a “Primal Force”
 or else conceive as some kind of “Self” –
 any such being could never be
 something that decided, “Now I will arise”
 in order to do something,
 for it never could arise.

Since it never came into being,
 it has no starting, so at that point,
 what do you think will start?
 It always and forever turns towards its object,
 so there’s no way it could ever stop.

Why, if that Self were unchanging,
 then like the sky
 it could manifest no action at all.
 Even if it met with some other conditions,
 what could they ever do
 to something that never becomes?

Whenever they did something
 it would remain as before;
 though something may be done,
 as far as that Self is concerned
 what could ever be done?
 You may say, “This is its work,”
 but what kind of relationship
 ever could there be?

In this way everything comes about
 through the power of other things:
 powerless but to be powered by others.
 If you can understand this, then
 you will not become angry
 at anything, since all that functions
 is just like an emanated show.

According to Gyaltsab Je’s commentary, the logic is this: Suppose there *were* such a blind, unconscious, primal force (Skt. *pradhāna* or *prakṛti*), or else a conscious, unchanging being (Skt. *ātman* or *puruṣa*). If such a source had somehow “always existed,” was without predecessor, and was completely unchanging, then how could it ever begin to transform into its expressions, all of its own accord, as the Sāṃkhya theories about it claim? Similarly, if there were a completely unchanging and eternal conscious being, how could the intention to rise up in order to *do* something – namely to experience objects and thus create them – ever begin, all of its own accord? Gyaltsab Je says this is simply impossible, because any being that was utterly unchanging, existing

without a cause itself, could never in turn have the power to act. Rather, it would be as inert as the non-existent horns on a rabbit's head.¹⁹

The key philosophical principle at play here is that, according to Indian Buddhist thought, in order for causation to be possible at all, there must be change. For one thing to be the cause of another, it must undergo some change, and for one thing to be the result of another, it must in turn be something that has the nature of changing, so that it, too, will sooner or later give rise to its own result. Thus, to posit something that has “always existed” without change *is* possible, but such a thing could only properly be conceived to exist as an absence, or as a logical entity that is never involved with the chain of cause and effect. The classical example of such an unchanging thing is unobstructed and unproduced space (*thogs med 'dus ma byas kyi nam mkha'*).²⁰ This is not “space” in the sense of a distance between localized points. Rather, it refers to the absence of obstruction that allows any physical object to exist *in* a location without instantly being “dis-placed” by something else. In this sense, such “empty place” always remains without change, even as billions of objects may move “into” or “out of” it over time. One cannot even conceive of such space as having had a “beginning,” because it is not something that was ever caught up in the change that makes the measure of time. Yet it can also only be known as an absence, understood by the lack of potential obstruction. As such one need not look for its cause. But this also means it could never *do* anything. “Why, if that Self were unchanging, then like the sky it could manifest no action at all.” Note that the Tibetan word for “sky” and “space” is the same.

According to this logic then, it becomes absurd to think of an existing being with energetic, physical content, like a Primal Force, which is also unchanging and uncaused. Even if one were to be able to imagine such a thing, it would become logically contradictory to try to pinpoint a moment when that unchanging thing ever *started* to change, in order to bring about its “expressions.” This reasoning demands that there would have to be some other cause to trigger the process – in which case one would already have admitted that something else existed prior to or along with this supposed creator, and therefore the unchanging entity must not be the ultimate creator of all things in any case.

This argument is applied equally to the problem of either a supposedly unconscious (*pradhāna*) or conscious (*puruṣa*) originary source. Particular to the latter notion, of an unchanging and uncaused “knowing person,” however, is the question of

¹⁹ Gyalsab Je Dharma Rinchen, *rgyal sras 'jug ngogs*, gsung 'bum, vol. *nga*, 61b1-62a5 (124-125).

²⁰ Note that this has sometimes been translated as “uncomposed” or “uncompounded” space. Though an argument could be made that this is the meaning of *'dus ma byas* (literally, “not made through the bringing together of different factors”), it could also be philosophically misleading in the case of unobstructed space, because, though not brought about by causes and conditions, such space *is* “composed,” insofar as it is composed of its parts, namely, the ten directions. This idea becomes particularly important in Middle Way arguments for “empty space” lacking inherent nature, but we need not treat these points here.

how an absolutely unchanging mind could ever “turn to” its objects and thus know a world of variety and constant change. Though the concept of an “unchanging thing which also functions” (*rtag pa'i dngos po*) was clearly raised in the interreligious debates re-enacted by Dharmakīrti and Śāntideva, from a Buddhist point of view it is an oxymoron. Śāntideva’s *reductio ad absurdum* goes like this: If a state of consciousness were actually completely unchanging (as presentations of the consciousness that is *ātman* suppose it to be), then let alone asking how that knowledge could ever start, there is actually no way it could ever stop, either. The implication is that even if changing objects of the world ceased to exist, as they do all the time, the “unchanging” knowledge of them could never alter; it would be fixed and stuck in a single state of knowledge. The irony of the verse is that, at least in the Tibetan translation, the term I have rendered as “turns toward” could equally well be translated as “distracted” (*g.yeng*), so that the line could also be read, “It is always and forever distracted by its object, so there is no way it could ever stop.” Śāntideva is certainly poking some fun here, as he tries to demolish views of a monolithic consciousness that is so permanently fixed that it could never actually *perceive* the infinitely varied flow of changing things that both begin and end. He is certainly not addressing the subtleties of his opponents’ views, much less deeply held religious beliefs, but that is not usually the way of logical debate.

A century or so earlier (c. seventh century CE), the Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti was writing similar arguments against the possibility of an unchanging state of omniscience. As Gyaltsab Je titles the section in his fifteenth-century commentary, the point comes under the heading of a “Refutation of an Omniscience that Knows How to Craft All Knowable Objects,” which will be set in opposition to the subsequent “Proof for the Existence of an Omniscience that Knows Directly the Real State of All Things, i.e., How It Is That They Exist.”²¹ For Buddhism does, of course, assert the existence of a Buddha who knows both the ultimate and deceptive natures of all things, but it is emphasized that just because a Buddha knows all things does not mean he or she created them.²² We will examine this point below, but first it is worthwhile to examine Dharmakīrti’s verses refuting the possibility of an *unchanging* valid perception (*tshad*

²¹ Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen, *tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le'ur byas pa rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, rgyal tshab rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha*, Drepung Loseling Library Society Edition, 2002, 213:

ཤེས་བྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་བཟོ་ཤེས་པ་ཀུན་མཁྱེན་ཡིན་པ་དགག་པ་དང་། ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་ནི་ལྟར་གནས་པ་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་ཤེས་པ་ཀུན་མཁྱེན་དུ་བསྐྱབ་པ་
ལོ།

²² For a detailed study of the category of omniscience in Buddhism, seen through the lens of two later Indian thinkers who were very influential in Tibet, see Sara McClintock, 2010, *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla on Rationality, Argumentation, and Religious Authority* (New York: Wisdom Publications).

ma, Skt. *pramāṇa*), particularly insofar as it might be attributed to a creator such as a Powerful Lord (*dbang phyug*, Skt. *īśvara*).²³

There is no such thing as an unchanging valid perception:
because (1) a valid perception must realize
existing things that function,
and because – since knowable things are not unchanging –
(2) that [perception which meets them]²⁴ must itself be variable.
It makes no sense for things to grow
from what is unchanging, because
(3) they are things that grow in stages,
and because (4) it would be unsuitable for it to rely.

Now we see how closely Śāntideva had been echoing Dharmakīrti’s reasoning. First, there is the fact that if something is omniscience, then most of its objects will be functioning, changing things, since these are what constitute the vast majority of existing things. Then, secondly, this knowledge must engage with, or literally “meet” that which it knows, and it is a basic principle of the Indian Buddhist theory of mind that, in the act of knowing, consciousness in some way takes on, or at least reflects, the qualities of that which it knows. A very rough example would be that of a mirror: A mirror takes on the appearance of the colors and shapes that it reflects, even though it does not actually “become” those things in nature. Here, then, if the preponderance of existing things are in a constant state of flux, the quality of awareness in which they appear will also take on those countless different aspects, and thus be rendered variable – even if its basic nature as omniscient awareness will continue on in a constant stream. This, at least, is how Dharmakīrti conceives of a Buddha’s knowledge. But an absolutely unchanging omniscience, such as that apparently conceived by schools of later Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva thought,²⁵ could never budge enough for changing things to be reflected in it (or so the argument goes).

Dharmakīrti’s third reason in turn echoes a line from the second chapter of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*, which comes amidst Vasubandhu’s report on the different types of causes and conditions enumerated by a group of Buddhists known as

²³ Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā*, *tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le'ur byas pa*, Toh. 4210, sde dge bstan 'gyur, vol. ce, 107b7:

ཆད་མ་རྟག་པ་ཉིད་ཡོད་མིན། །དངོས་ཡོད་རྟོགས་པ་ཆད་བྱིང་དང་། །ཤེས་བྱ་མི་རྟག་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས། །དེ་ནི་མི་བརྟན་ཉིད་བྱིང་རོ། །རིམ་བཞིན་སྐྱེ་བ་ཅན་དག་ནི།
།རྟག་ལས་སྐྱེ་བ་མི་འབྲེད་བྱིང་། །རྟོགས་པ་མི་རུང་བ་ཡི་བྱིང་།

My translation follows the explanation in Gyaltsab Je’s commentary. Numbers in brackets indicate the four different reasons given to support the first statement, i.e., that an unchanging valid perception cannot exist.

²⁴ Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen, *thar lam gsal byed*, Drepung Loseling Library Society Edition, 2002, 213:

དེ་འཇམ་གྱི་ཆད་མ་དེ་ནི་མི་བརྟན་པ་ཉིད་ཡིན་དགོས་པའི་བྱིང་།

²⁵ For a counterpoint to these stereotypes, see George Chemparathy, 1968, *Two Early Buddhist Refutations of the Existence of Īśvara as the Creator of the Universe*, and 1969, “Two Little-Known Fragments from Early Vaiśeṣika Literature on the Omniscience of Īśvara,” *Adyar Library Bulletin* 33: 117-134.

Suppose you say, “If one keeps the eyes resting motionless, then they will behold form in stages, but in terms of the eyes, there will be no distinction between different actions. Similarly, it may be true that, because *knowable things are not unchanging*, the moments of consciousness of the Powerful Lord *must be variable*. But the Powerful Lord, the creator of consciousness, is without change.”

- In terms of the eyes, there may be no distinction between different actions, but an earlier moment of beholding must turn into a later beholding.

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into a distinct and different later moment of knowledge – one which beholds an object with either slightly or greatly altered content – then *change has taken place*. It does not matter if the overall nature of the consciousness, as knowing subject, remains similar from moment to moment. Something about the total picture of knowing in relation to known has shifted, and therefore, according to Gyaltsab Je’s argument, one cannot say that the knowledge is self-identical from moment to moment, and therefore somehow impervious to the flow of change.

It should be added that from certain Buddhist perspectives (suggested in many Mahāyāna descriptions of the nature of enlightened existence), to say that something changes does not *necessarily* denigrate or insult it.³⁰ For example, a Buddha’s omniscient wisdom is said to be changing, and this is held in highest esteem. The compassion of a Buddha is a changing mental phenomenon; therefore it can generate action and infinite creativity. The ultimate reality of a Buddha, on the other hand, is understood to be unchanging. This too is held in highest reverence. The distinction made between unproduced and functional natures is not necessarily made with a view to one being pure and the other impure, or one being greater and lesser, but simply as an observation about the way things exist. The distinction between exalted and holy states of being vs. those which are undesirable, or ordinary, is made on different grounds within many strains of Buddhist thought, as we will explore throughout this dissertation.

At a deeper level, then, what I think is being refuted in these arguments is the notion of a Self with an inherent essence or substance that would remain absolutely the same even as momentary or accidental characteristics, such as the content of awareness, might shift through time. The example about vision attributed to the non-Buddhist opponent suggests that there could be a stable Self who remains motionless, even as different content might be engaged in its field of vision. But the Buddhist understanding of consciousness that Gyaltsab Je espouses here is that if the content changes, the consciousness changes. To think that some essence remains apart from the activity would be a symptom of the “grasping to a self” (*bdag ‘dzin*, Skt. *ātmagrāha*) that most Buddhist philosophy unilaterally diagnoses as our *problem*, rather than placing on a pedestal to worship as a god.

If we return now to Vasubandhu’s line, “Not a Powerful Lord and the like, because of stages and such,” there is yet another point to be made about why, in general, Buddhism cannot accept the notion of a single, unchanging creator. If the multitude of

associated with or affected by causes and conditions, and thus “unchanging” in the proper sense, as described above with the example of unproduced space.

³⁰ One can see how this idea is developed in many Tibetan philosophical interpretations as the complex doctrine of the “bodies” (Skt. *kāya*) of a Buddha promulgated in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* attributed to Maitreya, and written down by Asaṅga. For a rich historical-critical treatment of both Indian and Tibetan traditions on this material, see John J. Makransky, 1997, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press).

worlds and beings and events unfolds through change in time – what we might term history – then how could the sheer protractedness of events be attributed to the “act” of a changeless being, who, logically speaking, could not even “act”? It would seem that even if one single act could come about, then everything would “happen at once,” so to speak, based on that single cause. But if there is no variation in the single cause, what would be, then, *the cause*, for the countless different things that happen? Why must history unfold, gradually, according to myriad factors and events? As Tsongkhapa comments on a verse from the ninth chapter of Śāntideva’s *Guide*:³¹

Events may be illusory, or false, but still, insofar as results arise from *various conditions*, they arise as *various*, or as *illusions*. But they are not from individual, single causes, because in no case at all is there a *single condition* that could have the *capacity* to produce *all* results.

According to this reasoning, then, to attempt to attribute the nature and specificity of each and every phenomenon to but a single cause is to miss the point of how things do come about in a continuous flow of interdependence, where each event exists in reliance on and relationship to other events, to such a degree of complexity that it becomes virtually impossible even to single out “one” cause as the reason for “one” event, much less to attribute all the variety of events to an individual cause. Nonetheless, countless factors do come together to make the appearance of a (mostly) coherent flow of experience and events, much as the work of hundreds of actors, dancers, musicians, painters, stagehands, composers, choreographers, rehearsal hours, and audience members do come together to produce the illusory appearance of a “single,” yet still “various,” theatrical show.

Dharmakīrti’s fourth reason from above (“because it would be unsuitable for it to rely”) closely matches the verse already quoted from Śāntideva’s sixth chapter: “Even if it met with some other conditions, what could they ever do to something that never becomes?” We saw that Gyaltsab Je glosses Dharmakīrti’s line as “*because it would be unsuitable* for an unchanging thing *to rely* on conditions.” In turn, Gyaltsab Je explains Śāntideva’s argument as referring to those Naiyāyikas (*rigs pa can*) who hold that although the Self is unchanging in nature, yet still it can produce a result through meeting

³¹ *Reveling in a Clear Mind: Commentary to the Chapter on Incisive Wisdom from “Guide to the Way of Life,”* spyod ’jug shes rab le’u’i Tlkka blo gsal bzhes pa, rje’i gsung ’bum, vol. ma, 7b2 (820):

སྤྱོད་མཁའ་རྒྱལ་པ་ཡིན་ཡང་སྤྱོད་ཆོག་པའི་རྒྱལ་པ་བྱུང་བའི་འབྲས་བུ་སྤྱོད་མཁའ་སྤྱོད་ཆོག་པ་སྤྱོད་ཆོག་གི་རྒྱུ་རེ་རེ་ལས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྒྱུ་གཅིག་གིས་འབྲས་བུ་ཀླན་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱས་པ་གང་ན་ཡང་མེད་པས་སོ།

The root verse is from Śāntideva’s *Bodhicāryāvatāra* (*byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa*), Toh. 3871, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. la, 31a7:

From various conditions come
the various illusions themselves
but in no case at all can a single condition
have the capacity for all.

སྤྱོད་ཆོག་པ་རྒྱལ་པ་བྱུང་བ་ཡི། སྤྱོད་མ་དེ་ཡང་སྤྱོད་ཆོག་ཏིང། རྒྱུ་གཅིག་གིས་ནི་ཀླན་ཀྱས་པ། གང་ན་ཡང་ནི་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན།

with other conditions. The point however, is the same, namely that even if one were to imagine something with an absolutely unchanging essence, then even a thousand conditions could encounter it, but it would have no capacity, in itself, to become or effect anything else. Similarly, Gyaltsab Je says there were those who would claim that although an unchanging thing would never affect others in a way that transformed its own essence, yet still it could give rise to an effect that was other than itself (*phan pa don gzhan byed do*). In response to the notion of inherent essence that such non-Buddhist schools seem to have been using, however, Śāntideva retorts, “but what kind of relationship ever could there be?” Gyaltsab Je elaborates that there could neither be a relationship of identity (*bdag gcig gi 'brel pa*) because the creator would be of a different essence than its creation, nor a relationship of causal origin (*de byung gi 'brel pa*), because there had been no change in the cause to give rise to a result, as explained already.³² Such an argument can only be made from within this strictly univocal notion of causation.³³

Where does this leave, us, then? Surely not in “atheism,” in the sense of an anti-religious system that denies the possibility of a unitary source and meaning to the universe. Or does it? Based on what we have examined so far in terms of Buddhist karmic view, we see a picture of a universe in which myriad causes bring about myriad results, working within the minds of living beings, in perfect consistency and moral correlation, based on the nature of action itself, and the effects it brings in the emotions of others. There is no question of a “first cause,” because it is a cycle of existence that has whirled round from a time without beginning (*srid pa'i 'khor lo thog ma med*),³⁴ where every event has a cause, and every cause was in turn caused by something else. To posit something “unchanging” as a stop-gap measure for the question of origins is no help in Buddhism, because unchanging things are quite literally timeless, and cannot participate in the stream of causation. It is a universe in which no misery can be blamed on the will of an all-powerful god, but this does not mitigate the fact of the misery: It is a universe in which actions created by beings who have no idea who they are or how things really work continue to create new causes out of desire and aversion, leading nowhere but more and more cycles of suffering, for eons upon eons. This is the picture of the suffering cycle, or *saṃsāra* (*'khor ba*). If the story ended there, things would seem dismally meaningless, fractured, and hopeless indeed.

Yet have any of these logical arguments denied the existence of ultimate meaning (*don dam bden pa*)? Or of a foundation for the totality of existence that might be of an entirely different order than all things presently caught up in the chain of causation? The

³² Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen, *rgyal sras 'jug ngogs*, gsung 'bum, vol. *nga*, 61b6-62a4 (124-125).

³³ For a very different approach to the notion of divine causation, in a Christian context where the term is often used analogically, to great effect, see Thomas G. Weinandy, 1985, *Does God Change?: The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, Mass: St. Bede's Publications).

³⁴ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Toh. 4089, sde dge bstan 'gyur, mngon pa, vol. *ku*, 7b4, Chapter 3.

arguments have simply denied the possibility of one cause that is privileged as opposed to other causes, of one single condition from which myriad effects of diverse natures could ever arise. They have denied the possibility that one mind could single-handedly create all the events that bring pain and misery to other minds, namely, to ourselves. But they have not denied the possibility of creation itself, for practically speaking, things are being *created* constantly. Furthermore, they have not denied the possibility of a completely different kind of existence than we currently encounter; on the contrary, as Dharmakīrti's arguments will go on to show, there should be at least one, likely countless many Buddhas, or omniscient beings, who have reached a state of ultimate bliss beyond suffering, in which they know perfectly the true nature of all things. By writing the entire second chapter of his *Commentary on Valid Perception* (Skt. *Pramāṇavārttika*) as an exegesis of the opening obeisance from Dignāga's *Compendium of Valid Perception* (Skt. *Pramāṇasamuccaya*),³⁵ Dharmakīrti attempts to show that the Buddha *came to be* a person of valid perception (*tshad mar gyur pa* – i.e., not one who always was that way, like a supposedly unchanging Powerful Lord), ultimately because he had generated limitless compassion for the beings he saw caught in the cycle.

The array of logical refutations, I think, is meant to establish an important idea, namely, that in Buddhism, the highest honor one can pay is not to worship a single being who knew all things eternally, in order to create them individually out of nothing. On the contrary, in a world acknowledged to be one of constant suffering, one would hardly give thanks to a creator being, even if there was one. Rather, the highest honor one can pay is to prostrate to a Buddha, who, seeing the agony of living beings trapped in a cycle of ignorant action, practiced a path over many eons in order to see the real nature of things, to put an end to every fault within himself, and to gain every knowledge with which he could then teach others.³⁶ In a strange sense, then, from this point of view, since without

³⁵ Dignāga, *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, *tshad ma kun las btus pa*, Toh. 4203, sde dge bstan 'gyur, tshad ma, vol. ce: "I bow down to the One who turned correct, Who brings benefit to wanderers, to the Teacher, Who has Gone to Bliss, to the Protector . . ."

ཆད་མར་གྱུར་པ་འཇོ་ལ་མན་བཞེད་པ། །སྟོན་པ་བདེ་གཤེགས་སྟོབ་ལ་བྱུག་འཆམ་ནས།

³⁶ This sentence paraphrases the gloss that Dharmakīrti gives to Dignāga's lines over the course of Chapter Two of the *Pramāṇavārttika*. We see a similar formulation of the qualities of a Buddha at the beginning of the section (found in both Tsongkhapa's great and briefer books on the "Steps of the Path") concerning why a Buddha is a worthy object of refuge for those who have developed a healthy fear of suffering in future lives. As stated in the *Briefer Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. pha, 47a1-3 (96):

One who himself is free of every fear, who knows the method by which to free others from fear, who has holy great compassion towards all without preference for those close nor indifference for those far away, and who works for the benefit of all regardless of whether they have done something good for him or not: such a being is worthy of refuge. Furthermore, only a Buddha has these qualities; since the Powerful Lord and the rest lack them, the Buddha himself is the Refuge. Consequently, the *dharma* that he teaches and the virtuous community of listeners are worthy of refuge also.

the fact of suffering there could be no reason for compassion, one might say that suffering is the catalytic cause for Buddhas to come into being. As we will see by examining the tantric presentations of the Guhyasamāja system, however, this is not the only way that Buddhist thought depicts the universe, or the reality of Buddhas. There is another way, looking back from the side of Buddhahood, in which the story of origins may appear quite differently, even if not in complete contradiction with the sūtra view as Dharmakīrti and those who explicate him present it.³⁷

We have looked at *how*, but it is important again to ask *why* many of the great Indian Buddhist thinkers in the Mahāyāna Sanskrit tradition (i.e., Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Dharmakīrti, Śāntideva, and so on) find it necessary to refute non-Buddhist notions of a creator god, especially as these continued to develop within the burgeoning Vaiśnava and Śaiva traditions. As mentioned above, the context in which Śāntideva first raised this point was in his sixth chapter, on the perfection of patience. That is, he was exhorting his readers to cast aside any conception of causation or creation that would allow them to pass off the blame for unpleasant occurrences onto someone else – whether it be onto another monk in the monastery, a sworn enemy, the random chance unfoldings of inert “primal matter,” or a “creator of the universe” who supposedly “made this happen to me.” Śāntideva’s point – and Tsongkhapa has echoed this in his presentation of the principles of action and its consequences as the all-pervasive reason for our experiences of comfort or discomfort – is that the ultimate source of the fact that a situation can arise *as unpleasant* for us, must be our own past actions towards others.³⁸ If we can understand, deeply, the way that diverse conditions have come together to

རང་ཉིད་འཇིགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་གྲོལ། གཞན་འཇིགས་པ་ལས་སྒྲོལ་བའི་ཐབས་ལ་མཁས། གུན་ལ་ཐུགས་རྗེ་ཆེན་པོ་ཉི་འོང་མེད་པར་འཇུག་པན་བཏགས་མ་
བཏགས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་དོན་མཛད་པ་ཞིག་སྐྱབས་སུ་འོས་ལ། དེ་ཡང་རངས་རྒྱས་ཁོ་ན་ལ་ཡོད་ཀྱི་དབང་སྤྱུག་སོགས་ལ་མེད་པས་དེ་ཉིད་སྐྱབས་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་བྱི
ར་དེས་བསྐྱན་བའི་ཆོས་དང་ཉན་ཐོས་ཀྱི་དགེ་འདུན་ཡང་སྐྱབས་སུ་འོས་སོ།

³⁷ For the notion of what Paul Griffiths calls “maximal greatness” as a motivation for the formulation of both theological and buddhological doctrine, see Griffiths, 1989, “Buddha and God: A Contrastive Study in Ideas about Maximal Greatness,” *The Journal of Religion* 69, no. 4: 502-529; Griffiths, 1990 “Encountering Buddha Theologically,” *Theology Today* 47, no. 1: 39-51; and Griffiths, 1994, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 58-60 ff. While there are many ideas within these works that I find extremely valuable, I must disagree with Griffiths conclusions regarding what he sees to be a fundamental contradiction in Buddhist thought, as expressed in *On Being Buddha*, 181-202. I believe that meticulous engagement with Tsongkhapa’s interpretations of the categories of a Buddha’s omniscience, as well as with Tsongkhapa’s particular understanding of how awareness free of both error and the appearance of duality would be possible (see my Appendix Twelve and Chapter Five below), would offer a way to resolve or even dissolve the seemingly intractable problems that Griffiths raises, based on his own extensive study of the Sanskrit tradition. I cannot imagine Tsongkhapa agreeing to Griffiths suggestion that “it is not like anything to Buddha to be Buddha,” (*On Being Buddha*, 190) and hope that my own research here will provide a step in understanding how Tsongkhapa could see Buddhas as genuinely experiential and personal beings, without finding himself in the state of fundamental doctrinal paradox that Griffiths proposes.

³⁸ See especially *byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ‘jug pa*, Toh. 3871, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. 1a, 18b6: “If I had never harmed someone else in this way, no one could ever bring harm to me.”

།འདི་ལྟར་མང་གཞིན་མ་བྱས་ན། །འགའ་ཡང་གཞིན་པ་མི་བྱེད་དོ།

produce the “emanated show” or “illusion” of our experience, Śāntideva argues, it will deeply mitigate our urge to get angry, even as we are also working to feel compassion and sympathy for the feelings and misperceptions of some other person who may be hurting us.³⁹

It should at this point be clear, then, that the theory of karma and its results is understood to extend to the content of experienced feelings, but what about the rest of reality? That is, it may not be too hard to imagine that intention-driven deeds done towards others in the past could be a cause or influence for presently arising pleasure and pain, but what about the universe itself? If Buddhism rejects two of the most widespread answers for where a world comes from – namely, inanimate matter/energy, or else the design of an unchanging creator being – then it may beg the questions: Where do the mental streams themselves come from, which create the karmic actions with their thought and intentions? Where does the matter come from that is the raw material for the bodies with which they do the deeds, and for the environments that they inhabit? What is the ultimate cause for the existence of physical things and all their patterned complexity?

Interlude on Contemporary Concerns

There has been much debate throughout the history of Buddhist thought as to just what constitutes “karma” and as to just how much karma “causes” within an experienced world. It is my own observation that this ambiguity, arising from the multiplicity of Buddhist schools, languages, cultural contexts, and so on, over time, has contributed to a growing confusion among contemporary practitioners who live in countries that were not historically Buddhist, and who often attempt to learn about Buddhist thought from as many sources as they can, eclectic as these sources may be. As such interested practitioners absorb information from a variety of teachers, books, and more or less qualified friends, they may not be aware of, or even be able to absorb, all the details of the historical circumstances and arguments that might stand behind the abbreviated presentations made by one or another learned, or not-so-learned, Buddhist teacher. As practitioners of meditation, yoga, and even tantra go on to engage in their own ongoing personal inquiries, many contradictions can arise, as they try to apply a still impartial understanding of a particular Buddhist system within a cognitive context that remains very different from the thought world in which that system was developed. For example, some may hold to a notion of “karma” creating the main emotional events in their experienced world, but also, quite naturally, look to the worldview of modern science and technology to solve the “practical” problems of electronic machines, physical health, and so on, in order to have the leisure to “get back to meditating” once the outer ordinary world seems stable. But it is never so easy as that, and cognitive dissonance arises.

³⁹ Tsongkhapa follows the structure of Śāntideva’s reasoning closely in his own chapter on the perfection of patience in *byang chub lam rim che ba*, rje’i gsung ’bum, vol. *pa*, 258a6-275b3 (547-582).

Others may attempt to integrate their discoveries gleaned in meditation with the paradigms of modern psychology and neuroscience, taking the “practical” Buddhist ideas that seem relevant to their experience, and leaving the rest of a Buddhist metaphysical or cosmological paradigm aside as antiquated or “religious.”⁴⁰ Others may find the ideas expressed in one Buddhist tradition quite suitable to their worldview, but then criticize a friend for not understanding Buddhism correctly – when the first might be quoting the Pāli sources of contemporary Theravāda Buddhism and the other might be quoting a fourteenth or nineteenth century Tibetan text, all as translated into English by scholars, each of whom also had their own context, prejudices, and so forth, which in turn influenced translation choices. No one can escape a context, but great strife arises when each cites his or her own context as the right one, without attending to the vast complexity of the causes and conditions that led to the current transmission of ideas.

I will touch upon just a few of the qualms I have heard over the years, so that these questions may remain in the background throughout the inquiry to come. Some may ask, “How can my past actions force someone else to do something to me in the present, if it’s only my own mind that stored the imprint?” Or else, “It may be cosmic justice, but who keeps track?” As expressed recently in a popular online journal article co-authored by an accomplished Theravāda meditation master:⁴¹

. . . we confront what we call “the administrative nightmare.” How can all those good and bad deeds possibly be kept track of? And not just in one lifetime, but across infinite lifetimes? What conceivable cosmic ledger could account for all those transactions? It seems like an administrative impossibility to coordinate that vast amount of information and organize events so everything unfolds correctly, and justice gets served to the right people, at the right time, in just the right way. The organizational details are so complex that it leads people to say that karma is some infinitely subtle, ineffable cosmic order, inaccessible to even the most sophisticated minds. An even bigger problem is that, with infinite lifetimes, absolutely everyone would have enough karma for nearly anything to happen to them. Put it this way: we all have everything coming. The irony is that this view of karma ends up undermining its original purpose of explaining an individual’s unique, personal history.

The article goes on to paraphrase the Pāli *Nibbedhika Sutta*, which the co-author, Culadasa, translates elsewhere more formally as: “Intention, monks, is karma, I say. Having intended, one creates karma through the body, through speech, through the

⁴⁰ See the analysis of this phenomenon in David L. McMahan, 2008. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, especially Chapter 7.

⁴¹ Culadasa and Matthew Immergut, “Karma: It’s Not About What We Do,” www.elephantjournal.com/2015/02/karma-its-not-about-what-we-do/.

mind.”⁴² In his recent book, *The Mind Illuminated*, Culadasa goes on to elaborate complex theories of mental processes that are based in part upon Pāli scriptures, and in part upon his own knowledge of neuroscientific theories, as well as his own extensive experience in meditation. Through his teaching, however, Culadasa insists that karma, as “intention” alone, *does not* determine what happens to us, but is only a matter of how we react to it.⁴³ Thus he takes a thoroughly scientific approach to the notion of outer causes and conditions, but adds to that an inner realm of formidable cognitive insight that is based squarely in Buddhist thought. However, with respect to karma, he directly counters the teaching of many contemporary teachers in the Tibetan tradition, who do say that the deeds we enact towards others *will* come back to us in precise forms, whether sooner, or much, much later. Culadasa and Immergut’s article continues:

So too, getting sick is not the result of one’s bad karma. People grow old, experience the pain of illness, and eventually die. *The Buddha never said you could plant the right karmic seeds to avoid any of these.* They’re simply not optional. However, whether or not we suffer when confronted by them is entirely up to us. . . . This unpredictability happens because there are other levels of causality working in the universe. *Not everything is our karma.* . . . To say that everything is our karma is to usurp this vast spectrum of causality into *a singular, self-centered mind*. When we realize the complexity we’re dealing with, we no longer see events as a result of karma, but rather as the product of *certain physical causes and conditions*. We also no longer fall prey to magical thinking, believing, for example, that by giving away money and being nice, we will get money in return and be showered with niceness. Instead, we realize that when we replace hatred with compassion, or greed with generosity, those intentions will shape the type of being we become, whether rich or poor.⁴⁴

These lines highlight some crucial points of contemporary doubt: Does karma determine our life circumstances, such as illness, economic status, relationships, and so forth, or is it only about the feelings that arise in response to our situations, and how we actually react in our words and deeds, creating habits for future response? Is karma only about “patterns” of behavior and “tendencies” for how we view the world, or is it a question of some all-pervasive force that is anonymously creating every detail of our lives? Is karma a determinism, *per se*, and does it leave any room for free will?⁴⁵ Is it a

⁴² *Nibbedhika Sutta*, Anguttara Nikaya 6.63, in Culadasa and Matthew Immergut, *The Mind Illuminated: A Complete Meditation Guide Integrating Buddhist Wisdom and Brain Science*, Dharma Treasure Press, 2015, 453n8.

⁴³ See especially Culadasa and Immergut, 2015, 404-407.

⁴⁴ www.elephantjournal.com/2015/02/karma-its-not-about-what-we-do. Italics added to emphasize points of contention that I will attempt to address from Tsongkhapa’s point of view over the course of this dissertation.

⁴⁵ See an excellent treatment of this question by Alexander Berzin at

view that drives one into a solipsism, when one considers the whole world to be “coming from me”? Is the notion of karmic causation a kind of de-mythologized theological justice, or is it more like a cold-hearted law of nature, leaving one with the impression of a universe that is fragmented into billions of individual causal chains and that seems mechanical, pointless, and “unspiritual” (as a friend complained to me once)?

Could karmic theory ever be completely compatible with scientific materialism as a paradigm? Just how much and in what way do our current thoughts and actions matter? Finally, is there any way to verify a theory of karma through reason and/or direct experience, or does it always require faith in the Buddha’s word? Is karma just a black box phrase for everything we do not understand about the universe, like “dark matter” and “dark energy”? Or might Indian and Tibetan writings on karma eventually reveal more complexity and nuance than even all these qualms have presupposed?

In the sections and chapters that follow, I will attempt to unpack in detail what Tsongkhapa’s own vision of a karmic world might have looked like. Because Indian Buddhist theories of karma had already been embraced so fully in Tibet by the time he was writing, Tsongkhapa was in no position to ask many of the meta-questions that contemporary people living in a scientific age would ask. Though he did devote one early commentary⁴⁶ and significant portions of his “Steps on the Path” texts to analyzing the process and ramifications of karmic seed-formation, this was not the primary concern of his life’s work. His overarching concern, rather, was to argue for a view of *emptiness* that was completely in keeping with the view of karma and dependent origination that he inherited from his teachers without too much question. That is, he proffered far more analytical energy to adjudicating between the Mind-Only and Middle Way schools’ views of emptiness, than he did to tearing apart and logically re-constructing Vasubandhu or Asaṅga’s presentations on karma and causation. Yet because it is well-known that he repeatedly defended the infallible workings of cause and effect as being totally congruent with the deepest understanding of emptiness, it goes without saying that karmic theory was of the utmost importance to him. But was it everything?

I wish to explore the possibility that, while in a sūtra context at least, in most of the passages where Tsongkhapa uses the term “cause and effect” (*rgyu ’bras*) he is primarily referring to the same constellation of infallible relationships that he intends when he explicitly uses the term “karma and its effects” (*las ’bras*). Though it is certainly true that not *all* of the types of causes, conditions, and results referred to in the

www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/sutra/level4_deepening_understanding_path/rebirth_karma/analysis_free_will_versus_determinism/analysis_free_will_vs_determinism.html.

⁴⁶ *yid dang kun gzhi’i dka’ ba’i gnas rgya cher ’grel pa legs par bshad pa’i rgya mtsho* (*The Ocean of Eloquence: An Extensive Commentary on Difficult Points Concerning the Afflicted and Foundation Consciousnesses*, henceforth abbreviated here as the “*Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*,” following the Tibetan Geluk conventional abbreviation of *kun gzhi rgya cher bshad pa*), rje’i gsung ’bum, vol. *tsha* (671-790).

Abhidharma literature, at least, are directly karmic, I will argue that they are all explained to be in some way tangential to the central driving cyclic force of karma and the afflictions. But I will also propose that a noticeable shift in worldview, specifically regarding karma, takes place between the so-called “Hīnayāna” schools whose views Vasubandhu reports in the *Abhidharmakośa*, and the distinctively Mahāyāna views elaborated by Asaṅga in his Mind-Only treatises. The deeper one goes into a view of the emptiness of phenomena (i.e., not only the lack of a personal self), the *more* ubiquitous the subtle workings of karmic seeds and potentials are seen to become, and not less. This shift is further compounded by the Middle Way critique of Mind-Only views as expressed in Candrakīrti’s *Entering the Middle Way* (Skt. *Madhyamakāvātāra*). Tsongkhapa’s commentary on this work, the *Illumination of the True Thought of the Middle Way*, constitutes one of Tsongkhapa’s most important philosophical treatises. Examining numerous key passages of the latter book, we will eventually come to ask: How does Tsongkhapa’s explanation of Candrakīrti’s Middle Way view, as the fact that things are established by nothing more than conceptual designation (*rtog pas btags tsam*), only intensify, and not diminish, the implications of the more explicitly “karmic” Mind-Only presentation, regarding mental seeds planted in a consciousness that is the “foundation of all” (*kun gzhi*, Skt. *ālaya*)? Tsongkhapa says that in the Middle Way view, karma and its effects “make even more sense,”⁴⁷ but does it depict their influence as being any more all-pervasive within the cycle of suffering?

Tsongkhapa’s vision of the inseparability of emptiness and dependent arising is perhaps most famously expressed in his brief poem on the Steps of the Path, known as the *Three Principal Paths*. In it he uses all three key phrases: the infallible relationship between karma and its effects (*las ’bras mi slu*), infallible cause and effect (*rgyu ’bras . . . slu med*), and infallible reliance and relationship (*rten ’brel bslu ba med pa*). Does he consider each of these groups of infallible relationship to be co-extensive with one another, or is each a subset of the next? The answer is not immediately evident.⁴⁸

Think over and over of the infallible relationship
between karma and its effects, contemplate every

⁴⁷ See Appendix Five (277) and all of Appendix Six, as well as the discussion in Chapter Six, “A Mere Basis for All the Seeds.”

⁴⁸ *The Three Principal Paths*, *lam gyi gtso bo rnam gsum*, rje’i gsung ’bum (*bka’ ’bum thor bu*), vol. *kha*, 231a1-231b4 (675-676).

ལམ་འབྲས་མི་སྦྱ་འཁོར་བའི་སྤྱད་བསྐྱུ་རྣམས། ཡང་ཡང་བསམས་ན་གྱི་མའི་སྤང་ཤས་ལྟོག་ཡང་། གང་ཞིག་འཁོར་འདས་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི། རྒྱུ་འབྲས་རྣམ་ཡང་བསྦྱ་བ་མེད་མཐོང་ཞིང་། དཔེ་གསལ་བའི་གཏད་སོ་གང་ཡིན་ཀྱང་ཞིག་པ། དེ་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་དབྱེས་པའི་ལམ་ལ་ཞུགས། སྤང་བ་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་བསྦྱ་བ་མེད་པ་དང་། སྦྱང་བ་ཁས་ལེན་བྱེད་པའི་གོ་བ་གཉིས། རྗེ་སྤྱི་སོ་སོར་སྤང་བ་དེ་སྤྱི་དུ། ད་དུང་ཐུབ་པའི་དགོངས་པ་རྟོགས་པ་མེད། རྣམ་ཞིག་རེས་འཛོག་མེད་པར་ཅིག་ཅར་དུ། རྟེན་འབྲེལ་མི་བསྦྱར་མཐོང་བ་ཅོམ་ཉིད་ནས། དེས་ཤེས་ཡུལ་གྱི་འདྲིན་སྤངས་ཀྱང་ཞིག་ན། དེ་ཆེ་ལྷ་བའི་དབྱེད་པ་རྗེས་པ་ལགས། གཞན་ཡང་སྤང་བས་ཡོད་མཐོང་མེད་པ་དང་། སྦྱང་བས་མེད་མཐོང་མེད་ཞིང་སྦྱང་བ་ཉིད། རྒྱུ་དང་འབྲས་བྱུང་འཆར་བའི་རྒྱུ་ཤེས་ན། མཐོང་འདྲིན་ལྷ་བས་འཕྲོག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ།

suffering of the cycle: turn back your hankering
for a future life . . .

Suppose you see the infallible cause and effect
of every existing thing, whether of the suffering cycle
or beyond, and the point of contact upon which you were focusing
as an object entirely dissolves; then you are someone who has entered
the path that pleases the enlightened ones.

Consider the infallible reliance and relationship of appearances,
and sheer absence, beyond taking any position –
as long as your understanding of these two ideas shows up one by one
then still you have not realized the true thought of the Able One.

One day they will no longer alternate, but in a single instant
the very fact of seeing infallible reliance and relationship alone
will dissolve the confident apprehension with which you were
holding to objects; then your analysis of the view is complete.

Moreover, appearances clear away the existence extreme
while emptiness clears away the extreme of non-existence;
and when you understand how emptiness dawns in cause and effect,
then you will never be stolen off by extreme views.

In order to understand the implication of these lines, which will have ramifications throughout Tsongkhapa's tantric thought as well, we must return methodically to our inquiry into karma, but now deliberately broadening our question from that of “What makes happiness and suffering?” to that of “What makes worlds?”

The Foundation of Worlds

Within Indian Buddhist literature in the sūtra tradition, perhaps the most famous source for a clear explanation of how the physical foundation of worlds themselves could be formed as a result of karmic impulses is Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*. At the beginning of his fourth chapter, Vasubandhu states unequivocally that “The worlds in their diversity emerge from karma.” He goes on to explain the many different types of deeds, and the respective types of results they bring about. Like the presentation on causes and conditions, this, too, is a vast topic with many permutations and elaborations. The most important principle for the sake of our purposes at the moment, however, appears in the remainder of this opening verse:⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, 10b7, Chapter Four, v.1:

ལས་ལས་འཇིག་རྟེན་སྣ་ཚོགས་སྐྱེས། རྟེན་སྣ་སེམས་ས་དང་དེས་བྱས། སེམས་ས་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ལས་ཡིན་ནོ། དེས་བསྐྱེད་ལུས་དང་ངག་གི་ལས།

This means movements of the mind [*sems pa*, Skt. *cetanā*]
 and what is done because of them.
 Movements of the mind are mental karma.
 That which is created from them
 is karma of body and speech.

What this verse challenges the reader to consider is whether the entire panoply of realms and beings described in the preceding third chapter of the *Abhidharmakośa* could at root be caused by the very cycles of thought and physical/verbal action that Vasubhandu goes on to describe in his fourth chapter. It may be easy to see how thoughts can motivate physical or verbal actions – this is our lived world of human experience – but to be able to imagine how thoughts and actions expressed by one group of people in one universe long in the past could ever be the propelling cause for the formation of planets and new species of life in another universe, billions of years later, is quite a different problem. The only point agreed upon by nearly all schools of Buddhism, here, is that there is an unbroken continuity of mental experience and causation within the mindstream of each of the beings who were once acting in that “other universe” and who then found themselves born in quite a different world. Just how this comes about, however, and how the energy and ethical content of the action would be “carried” within the mindstream of each being, was a question of considerable contention between different schools of thought in Buddhist India.

If one wanted to understand how to unravel the cycle of karmic action and result altogether, in order to put an end to suffering experience, then this would be rather an important question indeed. For all schools do agree that the primary condition that enables the residue of past actions to keep growing and producing their experiential fruit, is ignorance (*ma rig pa*), or a fundamental “not-knowing” that the cycle is happening at all, much less precisely how it might be taking place, moment to moment, or eon to eon.⁵⁰ Coming to know the real nature of things is said to be the only way to halt the cycle. If one further wanted to understand how to *transform* the way in which the energy of past deeds was constantly driving experience, then, as in the art of alchemy, one would also need to understand, in perfect detail, what the “original condition” or basis was, which one now aimed to turn, systematically, into something else. While the former approach, that of trying to cut off the cycle of suffering at its root, is a shared goal for all forms of

See the analysis of this verse in Sonam Kachru, “Minds and Worlds: A Philosophical Commentary on the *Twenty Verses* of Vasubandhu” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2015), 276-289, especially 276n28.

⁵⁰ See for example, *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 165b5-6 (362), where Tsongkhapa paraphrases the *Rice Seedling Sūtra* (*sA lu ljang pa'i mdo*): “The Sower who is Ignorance plants the seed of consciousness in the field of actions. If that seed is moistened with the water of craving, it is explained that the sprout of name and form will be actualized in a mother’s womb.”

མ་རིག་པའི་འདེབས་པ་སྒྲིལ་པ་ལས་ཀྱི་ཞིང་ལ་རྩ་མཉམས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་བཏབ་པ་དེ་སྲིད་བའི་རྩ་མཉམས་བརྒྱན་པར་བྱས་ན་མའི་མངལ་དུ་མིང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱ་བུ་འབྱུང་བར་བཞག་གོ།

Buddhism, the latter, that of trying to transform the process as it is happening, is more specifically associated with the path of Vajrayāna (though not exclusive to that vehicle). In either case, understanding the precise generative power of karmic thought and action becomes essential.

Tsongkhapa did not write an Abhidharma commentary, though two of his closest disciples did write extensive ones, perhaps reflecting explanations given by their teacher.⁵¹ Nonetheless, Tsongkhapa makes continuous reference to both Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* (abbreviated as “*mdzod*”) and Asaṅga's *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (abbr. as “*kun btus*”) throughout many of his major works, especially those on the Steps of the Path, wherever he is presenting the nature of the universe, describing the different types of beings, and especially when making presentations on karmic causation. Interestingly, we further find Tsongkhapa making repeated reference to the *Abhidharmakośa* in a tantric commentary on the stage of creation in Guhyasamāja, called *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition.”*⁵²

Tsongkhapa organizes his explanation of Nāgabuddhi's text upon a conceptual paradigm that he refers to in terms of the “congruent object” (*mtshun yul*) and “how to meditate on what is congruent with it” (*de dang mtshun par sgom tshul*).⁵³ This rubric illuminates Tsongkhapa's vision of the whole purpose of the “stage of creation” (*bskyed rim*, Skt. *utpattikrama*) in the unsurpassed class of tantra. He sees it as a method in which one will systematically dissolve the fundamental seeds, or propensities, that currently cause us to experience a meaningless cycle of births and deaths driven by actions of which we now have no memory. In their place, the tantric meditator is supposed to plant, deliberately, a new array of world-creating mental seeds, which are intended, at first, to replicate the formal structures of a divine world indicated and described in the revealed scriptures of the Guhyasamāja Tantra and associated texts. Gradually, as these new seeds ripen and bear fruit in the meditator's mind, visceral experiences of a new kind of world should begin to take place. Only at the “stage of what-is-complete” – or what I will call the “complete stage” (*rdzogs rim*, Skt. *utpanna-* or *niṣpannakrama*)⁵⁴ – and particularly at

⁵¹ See Gyalwa Gendun Drup (rgyal ba dge 'dun grub, 1391-1474), *Lamp on the Path to Freedom, An Exegesis of the Abhidharmakośa* (*mngon pa mdzod kyi rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*), dge 'dun grub pa'i gsung 'bum, vol. *nga*, on the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu, and Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen, *Essence of the Ocean of Abhidharma* (*chos mngon rgya mtsho'i snying po*), gsung 'bum vol. *ga*, on the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* of Asaṅga.

⁵² The root text is by Nāgabuddhi (*klu'i blo*, better known as Nāgabodhi, Tib. *klu'i byang chub*), *The Steps of Exposition for the Method of Reaching the Gathering*, 'dus pa'i sgrub pa'i thabs rnam par gzhaq pa'i rim pa, *Samājasādhanaavyavasthālī*, Toh. 1809, sde dge bstan 'gyur, rgyud, vol. *ngi*, 121a6-131a5.

⁵³ *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”*: *Clarifying the Meaning of Crucial Points in the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*rnam gzhaq rim pa'i rnam bshad dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i gnad kyi don gsal ba*), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha*, 10a1 (21) and *passim*.

⁵⁴ I will explain the reason for my unconventional translation choice, i.e., “complete stage” as an abbreviation for what should be understood as “the stage of what-is-complete,” according to Tsongkhapa's argument from his Indian sources at the beginning of Chapter Four. I believe this is consistent with the

the stage of the illusory body, should such experiences become fully actualized as the stable reality of a divine world, in which the yogi now functions more and more continuously as a near-Buddha still in training.

Yet, logically speaking, it is only once the seeds of ordinary perceptions have been properly dissolved that there would even be “space,” as it were, for the mind to access intimations of a world that is metaphysically and epistemologically contradictory to our own, a world that even approximates what one might term a “paradise” or “pure world” (*dag zhing*). In order to dissolve the seeds of ordinary perceptions, however, one would need to have valid reason to convince oneself that there was something about those perceptions that was not fixed in the first place, not set in stone as “real.” That is, one would have to understand what it would mean for appearances not to exist inherently: One would have to be able to recognize the “illusory” nature of an ordinary world.

If one firmly believed that the domain of one’s current experience is the only kind of world there is, and that this physical universe as observed by our senses is the only possible “real” world, then to sit still for hours meditating on some imaginary realm with regally dressed Buddhas and bodhisattvas would be no more than that – mere imagination or fantasy. Yet if one had gained philosophically sound conviction that one’s *own* day-to-day world is also something not-quite-real, something whose experiential content is determined moment to moment by one’s own perceptions – or even mostly by perceptions – then it might make sense to try to do something, *from the inside*, about all that is unsatisfactory in that world being created on the stage of one’s mind. If a suffering world is ultimately formed by the mind, then it might follow that it could also be progressively dismantled by the mind, and another, more exquisite and more beneficial world formed in its place. Yet if the mind as we know it is still subject to the very faults that force it to perceive an otherwise empty existence as suffering in the first place, how could we ever suppose ourselves capable of suddenly just “choosing” to see differently? Of course, perhaps we know from attempts at utilizing the “power of positive thinking” that attitude can help to a limited extent. But sheer wishing never stopped anyone from dying, nor from undergoing any of the other unavoidable evils of our human existence. Fundamental transformation cannot be as simple as mere imagining.

The spiritual logic employed by the practices of the stage of creation is necessarily complex. It does not gloss over such problems easily. As Tsongkhapa interprets Indian tantric commentaries on the various practices of visualization and

perfected tense of the Sanskrit. Harunaga Isaacson has shown the alternative Sanskrit term sometimes cited, *sampannakrama*, to be “an anomaly, which . . . does not appear in any original Sanskrit source and appears to have crept in through another wrong back translation from Tibetan.” See Harunaga Isaacson, 1999, “The Classification of Practice into Utpattikrama and Utpannakrama in the Higher Buddhist Tantric Systems,” (Unpublished paper presented in Hilary Term at Oriental Institute, University of Oxford), as summarized in Elizabeth English, 2002, *Vajrayogini: Her Visualization, Rituals, and Forms: A Study of the Cult of Vajrayoginī in India* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 173.

recitation, he asks some of the same questions that modern meditators ask, when they encounter tantric rubrics as strange and foreign. But there are other essential questions that Tsongkhapa does not address directly in his tantric commentaries, simply because he expects his reader to have hashed out his or her doubts about the subtleties of Buddhist worldview already, before coming to the tantric practice. Specifically with regard to the view of emptiness, while Tsongkhapa makes reference to how one should meditate on emptiness at particular points in a tantric practice, he explicitly or implicitly refers his reader to his other extensive writings on that subject, in a philosophical and non-tantric context. I would suggest that his treatment of karma in *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* is likewise an example of a place where he merely hints at a much broader and deeper understanding, which he expects his reader to have gained already, when studying Abhidharma literature, if the reader is to comprehend the transformative power of the point he is making with regard to the Guhyasamāja stage of creation practice in particular.⁵⁵

The primary purpose of the stage of creation, then, is to generate, through precisely scripted visualization, new and powerful images in the mind that will eventually purify the practitioner’s vision of the world in which he or she lives, and the living beings whom he or she encounters. In order to purify something, however, it would be necessary first to understand what it is that needs to be cleansed. Tsongkhapa calls this the “basis to be purified” (*sbyong gzhi*). In presenting the nature of this ordinary basis – i.e., our human life on this planet – Tsongkhapa provides descriptions of how the world-system we currently inhabit was created, implicitly elaborating on Vasubhandu’s statement that “The various worlds emerge from actions.” Here, glossing Nāgabuddhi’s words in the root text,⁵⁶ Tsongkhapa repeatedly uses the phrases “by the power of karma” (*las kyi*

⁵⁵ See *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* (*rnam gzhag rim pa’i rnam bshad*), vol. *cha*, 3b5-6 (8), where, after a very brief summary of the shared prerequisites of the steps of the path, Tsongkhapa adds:

Since it is extremely important to bestow certainty about these steps of the path with reference to the public scriptures, I have previously explained the steps of the path to enlightenment extensively, and since I still wish to write an explanation of the commentaries to the other treatises in accordance with mantra, here, apart from that little bit, I will not explain them.

ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་དེ་དག་ནི་གསུང་རབ་སྤྱི་ལ་ངེས་པ་སྟེར་བའི་གལ་པོ་ཆེ་ཡིན་པས་སྔར་ཡང་བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པར་རྒྱས་པར་བཤད་ཅིང་སྤྲོད་ཡང་ཟུགས་དང་བསྟན་ནས་གཞུང་གཞན་གྱི་འགྲེལ་པར་འཆད་པར་འདོད་པས་འདིར་དེ་ཙམ་ལས་མི་བཤད་དོ།

Incidentally, I take this sentence as a direct indication that Tsongkhapa wrote this *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* before writing his comprehensive *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra* (*sngags rim chen mo*), a treatise with which I will deal extensively in Chapters Three through Six. This sequence is corroborated by his biographies.

⁵⁶ Nāgabuddhi, *Steps of Exposition* (*Samājasādhanaavyavasthāli*), Toh. 1809, sde dge, vol. *ngi*, 122a2-3:

In this way, by the power of the karma of all these living beings, all the winds that have fully emerged churn thoroughly, and by doing so, the great mountain, made from a mass of gold and other materials, and the other mountains spring forth. Then the inconceivable palaces of the gods, down to the continents surrounded by a ring of iron mountains, with their fields and majestic trees and willows and so on, all spring forth.

dbang gis),⁵⁷ “from the force of karma” (*las kyi stobs las*), or “by the inner power of karma” (*las kyi mthus*), or else grammatical variations on the meaning “through previously collected karma” (*bsags pa’i las kyis*, *sngon byas las kyis*), or finally “by the karma sprung from habitual tendencies” (*bag chags las byung ba’i las kyis*) to describe the process of planetary and human evolution, from a time before the earth was formed.

There are passages in this commentary that seem almost mythological in their depiction of gold-laced cosmic rain clouds, great symmetrically placed mountains of iron, people with bodies made of light who walk on air, food that replenishes itself with no need for cultivation, and so on. There is even a progressive “fall” from an earlier paradisiacal state that has elements familiar to biblical literature, as one person becomes attached to food in a way that breaks the perfection of the daily rhythm, encourages others to partake greedily as well, and so it goes downhill from there.⁵⁸ What I find most important for our current inquiry, however, is the precise way in which Tsongkhapa describes the transition from each episode in the story to the next. Rather than there being a decree from the heavens, or a fight among the gods that instigates some change in the human realm – as is the pattern in so many etiological myths, across diverse ancient cultures – Tsongkhapa carefully points out that the only force driving the glacially slow,

དེ་ལྟར་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་ཡང་དག་པར་བྱུང་བའི་རླུང་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཡང་དག་པར་བསྐྱབས་པས་གསེར་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཚོགས་ཀྱིས་བྱས་པ་
འེ་རི་རབ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རི་དང་། ལྷའི་གཞལ་མེད་ཁང་དང་། སྒྲིང་ལྷགས་རིས་བསྐྱོར་བ་ཚུན་ཆད་དུ་ཤིང་དང་ཕྱོན་པ་དང་ལྷག་མ་ལ་སོགས་པ་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར་
རྟེན།

Also attributed to Nāgabuddhi is a text called the *Analysis of Actions* (*Karmāntavibhaṅga*, *las kyi mtha' rnam par 'byed pa*) Toh. 1811, sde dge, rgyud, vol. *ngi*. I have yet to read this text on karmic activity within the Guhyasamāja system, or to explore Tsongkhapa's references to it (which I have seen), but it may be very relevant for further research into the topics I am analyzing here.

⁵⁷ This Tibetan phrase appears to render consistently the Sanskrit term *ādhipatyāt* in the context of karmic causation. See Sonam Kachru's insightful argument for translating *ādhipati* (which in this form can also appear in Tibetan as the *bdag rkyen*, or governing condition, to be discussed below) as “subvening influence” based in the technical concept of “supervenience” in Kachru, “Minds and Worlds,” 271-272: “I believe Vasubandhu's term ‘*ādhipati*’ is usefully, and not only accidentally or conveniently glossed with the help of the contemporary category of ‘supervenience’, for the term ‘*ādhipati*’ is not here an idle synonym for ‘cause’. . . this is a category of relation explicitly held by Vasubandhu to be irreducible to that of efficient causation or constitution. . . tokens of type X exhibit *ādhipati* over tokens of type Y, when tokens of type Y vary as a result of variations in tokens of type X—with the important addition that for Vasubandhu, it is types of things constitutively related (and not only accidentally so) that exhibit this relation.” In this present dissertation I will continue to use a simpler and more literal translation of the Tibetan *las kyi dbang gis* (i.e., “by the power of”) but ask my reader to keep in mind the notion of such “subvening influence,” where “a set of properties *A* supervenes upon another set *B* just in case no two things can differ with respect to *A*-properties without also differing with respect to their *B*-properties. In slogan form, ‘there cannot be an *A*-difference without a *B*-difference’.” McLaughlin, Brian and Bennet, Karen, “Supervenience,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/supervenience/>, as cited in Kachru, 2015, 271n26. Kachru goes on to explain that the “contemporary notion of ‘supervenience’ is simply the inverse of the relation Vasubandhu here has in mind.” (272)

⁵⁸ See *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* (*rnam gzhas rim pa'i rnam bshad*), vol. *cha*, 10a5-6 (21), 11b4 (24), 21a1-2 (43), 32b2 – 33b5 (66-68), and my further discussion of these passages in Chapter Three, “Fall from Paradise.”

steady, and seemingly unstoppable unfolding of cosmic and planetary events is nothing but the collective karma collected by these beings in the past.

For we know that in a Buddhist Abhidharma context, even when describing the formation of a whole world-system out of a state in which there was no material universe at all, there is never a presentation of “the first time.” Rather, Tsongkhapa had to *begin* the discussion by describing the age of destruction (*’jig pa’i bskal pa*) of the previous world-system, which had in turn had its own beginnings in a similar way, on the heels of the destruction of a world-system before that, and so on, *ad infinitum*. We will discuss his treatment of the eon of destruction in Chapters Two and Five, since the disintegration of physical worlds is taken as one of the “objects held in common” (*mithun yul*) to which a tantric meditation on emptiness will correspond. Since my present purpose, however, is to explore Tsongkhapa’s vision of how our ordinary world was created, I will begin with his treatment of the eon of formation (*’chags pa’i bskal pa*). Yet we must keep in mind that this was never an actual first instance of creation.

Commenting on Nāgabuddhi’s text, Tsongkhapa writes:⁵⁹

Then, in the beginning, *by force of what arises in reliance and relationship* – that is, the karma of living beings – there in space appears a sign of the vessel that is to come, some gentle winds. *Little by little they stir*, or rise up. Then *all those winds expand*, that is, they become a *disk of wind* that *forms over space*. The height of these winds measures at 1,600,000 *yojana*, while their *breadth* is one “countless” *yojana*, that is, an enormously large number. They harden to the point

⁵⁹ *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition,”* vol. *cha*, 10a3-10b2 (21-22):

དེ་ནས་ཐོག་མར་རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བ་སྟེ་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་སྟོབས་ལས་ནས་མཁའ་ལ་སྟོང་གི་སྒྲ་སྒྲུང་བའི་རྒྱང་འངས་པོ་དག་ཁང་གི་ཁང་གིས་གཡོ་བའམ་ལྔ་ལྟེ་དེ་ནས་རྒྱང་དེ་རྣམས་འབེལ་བར་གྱུར་བ་ནི་རྒྱང་གི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་དུ་གྱུར་ཏེ་ནས་མཁའ་སྟེང་དུ་འཆགས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །རྒྱང་དེའི་མཐོ་དམན་གྱི་ཆད་ནི་དཔག་ཆད་འབྲམ་ཕྱག་བཅུ་དྲུག་དང་། རྒྱར་ནི་དཔག་ཆད་གངས་མེད་པ་གཅིག་སྟེ་ཆན་པོ་ཆེ་ཆན་པོའི་རྩོམ་ཀྱང་གཞིག་མི་བྱས་པར་སྐྱེ་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །རྒྱང་འདི་ཡི་དང་པོའི་རྒྱ་ནི་གཞུགས་ཁམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱང་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེའི་སྟེང་དུ་རྒྱའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་འཆགས་ཏེ། རྒྱང་གི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་དེ་ལས་སྒྲིན་གསེར་གྱི་སྟེང་པོ་ཅན་བྱུང་བས་ཤིང་དེའི་འཕང་ལོ་ཅན་གྱི་ཆར་གྱི་རྒྱན་བབ་པར་གྱུར་ཏེ་དེ་ལས་རྒྱའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་དུ་གྱུར་ཏོ། །རྒྱ་དེ་ཐང་ཀར་མི་འཛོ་བ་ནི་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་ཡིན་པར་རྒྱང་གིས་བབ་བ་བཞིན་དུ་རྒྱ་འཛིན་པའི་ལུགས་གཉིས་མཛོད་འགྲེལ་ལས་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱི་མ་ནི་སྐྱེ་བའི་དངོས་གཞི་དང་མཐུན་ནོ། །རྒྱ་དེ་ཡི་རྩམས་ཀྱི་ཆད་ནི་དཔག་ཆད་འབྲམ་ཕྱག་བཅུ་གཅིག་དང་སྟོང་ཕྱག་ནི་ལྟེ། །སྐར་ཡང་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་མཐུ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་རྒྱང་གིས་རྒྱ་དེ་ཀྱན་ཏུ་བསྐྱབས་པ་ལས་ལོ་སྐར་བསྐྱོལ་བའི་སྤྱིས་མ་ཆགས་པའི་རྒྱལ་དུ་རྒྱ་དེའི་སྟེང་རྣམས་གསེར་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་བའི་གྲུང་ཏེ་རྒྱའི་སྟེང་དུ་འཆགས་སོ། །

This glosses Nāgabuddhi’s passage in the *Steps of Exposition*, sde dge, vol. *ngi*, 121b5-7: “Then, by force of the stream of what arises in reliance and relationship, little by little the winds stir. All those winds then expand, to a height of 1,600,000 *yojana*. . . . [and so on]”

དེ་ནས་ཡང་རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་གྱི་སྟོབས་ལས་ཁང་གིས་ཁང་གིས་རྒྱང་རྣམས་གཡོས་ཏེ། རྒྱང་དེ་རྣམས་འབེལ་བར་གྱུར་བ་ནི། རྩམས་སུ་ནི་དཔག་ཆད་འབྲམ་ཕྱག་བཅུ་དྲུག་གོ། ་་་

that they could not be scratched even by a diamond.⁶⁰ The first cause of this wind is the wind of the form realm.

Above that, a disk of water forms: *From the disk of wind comes a cloud with a core of gold, which turns into a stream of falling rain, no bigger than a chariot wheel, which becomes a disk of water.* This water does not all pour down at once; as to the means by which the water is retained, there are two positions stated in the *Commentary to the Abhidharmakośa*. One says it is by the power of *karma*, and the other says that it is the winds that form something like a storehouse. The second position is in accord with the main part of the *Levels* [*sa'i dngos gzhi*, i.e., the *Yogācārabhūmi*]. The *height* of the water is 1,120,000 yojanas. Then *yet again*, the *wind* that arose by the inner force of living beings thoroughly *churns* those *waters*. In the way that foam forms on boiling milk, all that is on top of the water turns into the *foundation of the earth with the nature of gold*. It is *formed over the waters*. . . .

There is much at play in this traditional Buddhist depiction of the sequential creation of the layered “disks” (*dkyil 'khor*, Skt. *maṇḍala*) of elements that will form the basis of a world (*'jig rten*, Skt. *loka*). It will take much work to unravel philosophically, step by step. First, Tsongkhapa quotes Nāgabuddhi’s own use of the complete expanded phrase for what has usually been translated as “dependent origination” or “dependent arising,” but which I am rendering here as “arising in reliance and relationship” (*rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*, Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*). In this context I am confident that Tsongkhapa understands the reference to be made specifically to the twelve links, or branches (*yan lag bcu gnyis*) of reliance and relationship, as depicted most famously in the wheel of existence (*srid pa'i 'khor lo*).⁶¹ That is, it is not simply interdependence as we might

⁶⁰ Though not a quotation from Nāgabuddhi’s text, Tsongkhapa quotes this sentence and many of his other interpolated phrases exactly from Vasubandhu’s *Commentary to the Abhidharmakośa*, *chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa*, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyāṃ*, Toh. 4090, sde dge bstan 'gyur, mngon pa, vol. ku, 144a6.

⁶¹ Tsongkhapa uses the abbreviated phrases “*rten 'brel*” and “*rten 'byung*,” in addition to the full “*rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*,” throughout his works, perhaps most famously in what is known as his *Praise of Dependent Origination*, whose full title is *The Essence of Eloquent Praise, In Honor of the Blessed, Transcendent, Victorious Buddha, Our Great Friend Who is Unacquainted with the Things of the World, the Unsurpassed Teacher, for Speaking of the Profound Way in which Things Arise in Reliance and Relationship* (*sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das 'jig rten thams cad kyi ma 'dris pa'i mdza bshes chen po ston pa bla na med pa la zab mo rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba gsung ba'i sgo nas bstod pa legs par bshad pa'i snying po*), rje'i gsung 'bum (*thor bu*), vol. kha, 15a4-18b4 (243-250). Though Tsongkhapa does not elaborate anything about the twelve links in this *Praise* (which is focused more upon the indivisibility of emptiness and interdependence than on describing any specific mechanism of causality), nonetheless, in the second verse he does refer to how the Buddha taught “arising in reliance and relationship” in order that, by seeing it, a person could reverse the root of all troubles in the world, namely ignorance, which is of course the first link of the twelve (*'jig rten rgud pa ji snyed pa/ de yi rtsa ba ma rig stel/ gang zhig mthong bas de ldog pa/ rten cing 'brel bar 'byung bar gsungs/*). Many teachers and philosophers throughout human history have taught that things rely on other things; that is not particularly unique. What is unique to the Buddha’s teaching are the twelve links of interdependence, and the accompanying analysis of how the cycle of suffering perpetuates itself based on a particular misunderstanding of reality and the karmic acts

speak of it in a contemporary scientific context, such as the interdependence of protons and electron fields, or of gravitational space-time and an event-horizon, as in theories of the big bang, which might well acknowledge intricate relationships between matter and energy at all levels of an existing universe. Of course Tsongkhapa would not be referring to such things, but one might still harbor the impression that “reliance and relationship” could refer to any of billions of types of causes, whether physical or mental, that could somehow set a new universe in motion. Indeed, many contemporary readers would be inclined to “interpret” the classical Buddhist language in more scientifically plausible terms. But here Tsongkhapa glosses Nāgabuddhi’s use of that rich Buddhist phrase with no more explanation than, “that is, by force of the karma of living beings” (*ste sems can gyi las kyi stobs las*). With no further analysis, Tsongkhapa asserts that it is this *karma* that has shaped the precise details of every new universe that forms, and one of which we now inhabit. How is the discerning reader to conceive of this?

I propose that we must examine, in sequence, two major topics associated with Abhidharma literature before we can proceed further, namely the presentation of the twelve links of reliance and relationship, as well as that of the six causes, four conditions, and five types of results. In Vasubhandu’s *Abhidharmakośa* these two topics (first the causes, then the twelve links) precede his own treatment of the formation of a world, and all of these topics in turn precede the elaborate explanation of karma. So, while not following Vasubhandu’s sequence exactly, I still believe it is advisable to gain an understanding of the complexity of each of these topics before we can appreciate the implications of Tsongkhapa’s repeated references to karma here in his tantric *Guhyasamāja* commentary. For I take this passage as an example of a place where Tsongkhapa expects his reader to know what he is referring to, based on prior monastic study. We could look for Tsongkhapa’s own explanations of “reliance and relationship” in any of a number of places throughout his writings, but the presentation in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* seems to be his most detailed treatment of the twelve links. Though I will not elaborate that entire discourse here, I believe the most salient points are as follows.

Twelve Links of Reliance and Relationship

In the context of the path for a “person of medium scope” within the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, Tsongkhapa presents the twelve links as a method for giving rise to the state of mind that is determined to reach freedom from suffering. He first presents the twelve in their familiar order, but goes on to explain their interaction according to

done on the basis of that ignorance. Therefore if Tsongkhapa is to praise the Buddha’s teaching as absolutely unique in the world, and actively juxtapose that to the views of non-Buddhists, it would seem that he is primarily referring to the twelve links when he writes of “arising in reliance and relationship,” not only in this *Praise*, but throughout his writings. I will continue to unfold this hypothesis throughout the analysis to follow.

several complex rubrics, based on both the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* and *Yogācārabhūmi* of Asaṅga, as well as Ārya Nāgarjuna's *Pratītyasamutpāda-hṛdaya-kārikā*. These rubrics reveal that the twelve are not solely linear, but rather embed within their sequence at least two alternative ways of describing parallel processes, from different perspectives, and at different times. The twelve then begin to appear as a complex web of interdependence themselves, where one cannot even understand one part of the cycle without understanding another parallel cycle that was already in motion. This presentation will also help to fathom the notion of “beginningless time” as Tsongkhapa receives it from his Indian sources.

1. Ignorance

Regarding the first link, ignorance, Tsongkhapa points out that there are two authoritative interpretations of this term, and he does not adjudicate between them.⁶² One, by Dharmakīrti, takes the *Abhidharmakośa* comparison of ignorance to “unfriendliness” or a “lie” (*ma rig mi mdza' brdzun sogs bzhin*)⁶³ to mean that it is not merely an absence of knowledge, nor just something other than knowledge, but that is an active mis-knowing, a logical opposite (*'gal zlar gyur pa'i mi mthun phyogs*) of correct knowledge about reality, specifically regarding the lack of a self to a person. The other interpretation, which Tsongkhapa attributes to the “Honorable Brother Asaṅga,”⁶⁴ says that of the two

⁶² For a detailed comparison of how this term appears across several of the major texts attributed to Vasubandhu and Asaṅga, respectively, see Jowita Kramer, 2013, “A Study of the *Samskāra* Section of Vasubandhu's *Pañcaskandhaka* with Reference to Its Commentary by Sthiramati” in *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, edited by Ulrich Timme Kragh (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University), 1006 and 1017-1019. Kramer's analysis of the extant Sanskrit sources accords well with Tsongkhapa's recognition of the divergent definitions appearing in the canonical literature available to him in Tibetan. For this work of Vasubandhu, cf. Artemus B. Engle, 2009, *The Inner Science of Buddhist Practice: Vasubandhu's Summary of the Five Heaps with Commentary by Sthiramati* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications).

⁶³ Vasubandhu, *chos mngon pa'i mdzod*, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Toh. 4089, sde dge bstan 'gyur, mngon pa, vol. ku, 8a2, Chapter Three.

⁶⁴ Tib. *slob dpon thogs med sku mched ni*. The translation appearing in Cutler *et al.*, 2000, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. I, 316, takes this to be both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, which would usually make sense according to the phrase “*sku mched*,” which often refers to those two “honorable brothers” in particular. However, since Tsongkhapa was quoting Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* in the first place regarding “unfriendliness” and the “lie,” I would need to see a particular reference where Vasubandhu indicates that in that place he was only reporting another view, and actually held a different one himself, in order to justify this translation. On the contrary, though Vasubandhu raises the debates of many opponents in his own *Commentary* (*Bhāṣyam*, sde dge, vol. ku, 1321b5-133a1), he sometimes seems to maintain the view expressed in his root verses in the *Kośa*. (Cf. *Abhidharmakośabāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, Trans. Leo M. Pruden, based on Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Asian Humanities Press 1988, Vol I, 419-422. The Sanskrit *Bāṣyam* from which this translation is made, however, is clearly slightly different in its actual content than the one from which the Tibetan translation I am citing was produced.) Gyalwa Gendun Drup's early-fifteenth century commentary in his *Lamp on the Path to Freedom* summarizes the arguments in Vasubandhu's own *Commentary*, and further seems to indicate that Vasubandhu was expressing the view that “*ma rig pa*” is an active mis-knowing. See Gyalwa Gendun Drup, *thar lam gsal byed*, gsung 'bum, vol. nga, 84a3-6:

possibilities – an ignorance which grasps right meaning by the wrong end vs. an ignorance that is merely “confused” about the correct meaning – this first link is the latter: a simple lack of realization. According to either interpretation, Tsongkhapa says, the principal antidote is the same, the incisive wisdom that realizes the lack of a self.⁶⁵ Following Asaṅga, Tsongkhapa goes on to divide that “confusion” into two types: confusion about the meaning of karma and its results, and confusion about the meaning of reality, the former of which leads a mental continuum into lifetimes of misery, and the latter of which leads to lives of happiness.⁶⁶ In these lines Tsongkhapa uses the somewhat unusual phrase “collects traces” (*‘du byed gsog pa*) instead of the more familiar idiom, “collects karma” (*las gsog pa*). This phrase immediately anticipates the second link, often

Suppose you ask, ‘What is the essence of ignorance like?’ It is not merely an absence of knowing, nor is it merely anything other than knowing. Rather, it is a separate *dharma* (*chos gzhan*), belonging to the class of objects that are discordant and contradictory to the awareness that is primordial wisdom. For example, unfriendliness is not merely the absence of a friend, nor just someone other than a friend, but is placed in the class of objects that are discordant with friendship. Moreover, false words are placed in the class of objects that are discordant with true words. If you ask the reason why ignorance is not merely an absence of knowing, and not merely anything other than knowing, there is such a reason: It is because ignorance was spoken of [in the scriptures] with such words as ‘a thorough entanglement,’ and so on. Suppose you say that the faulty discrimination that looks upon the perishable assembly is ignorance. But the perishable view cannot be ignorance. Because (1) it is a view, and because (2) that ignorance is inextricably linked [*mtshungs ldan*] with this view, and because (3) that ignorance is taught to be something that makes discrimination afflicted. [i.e., Ignorance cannot be identical with the view of the perishable assembly, because it is related to it.]

མ་རིག་པའི་ངོ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུ་ནི། རིག་པ་མེད་ཅུང་དང་། རིག་པ་ལས་གཞན་ཅུང་མིན་གྱི། རིག་པ་ཡི་ཤེས་ཀྱི་འགལ་བ་མི་མཐུན་ཕྱོགས་སུ་གྱུར་པའི་ཆོས་གཞན་
ཏེ། དཔེར་ན། མི་འཇོལ་བ་དེ་མཇོལ་བ་མེད་ཅུང་དང་མཇོལ་བ་ལས་གཞན་ཅུང་མིན་གྱི། མཇོལ་བའི་མི་མཐུན་ཕྱོགས་ལ་འཇོག་པ་དང་། རྒྱན་ཆོག་ཀྱང་བདེན་ཆོ
ག་གི་མི་མཐུན་ཕྱོགས་ལ་འཇོག་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། །རིག་པ་མེད་ཅུང་དང་རིག་པ་ལས་གཞན་ཅུང་མིན་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཅི་ཞེ་ན། དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་
ཡོད་དེ། མ་རིག་པ་དེ་ལ་ཀུན་ཏུ་སྦྱར་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཆོག་གིས་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར། གལ་ཏེ་ཤེས་རབ་དན་པ་འཇིག་ཆོགས་ལ་ལྟ་བུ་དེ་མ་རིག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ་ཞེ་ན།
འཇིག་ལྟ་མ་རིག་པ་མིན་པར་ཐལ། དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་ཞིང་། མ་རིག་པ་དེ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་མཐུངས་ལྟན་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། མ་རིག་པ་དེ་ཤེས་རབ་ཉོན་མོངས་བྱེད་དུ་བསྟ
ན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

⁶⁵ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path (byang chub lam rim che ba)*, vol. pa, 162a2-6 (355).

⁶⁶ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. pa, 162b1-2 (356):

ལས་འབྲས་སྤངས་པ་དང་། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་སྤངས་པ་གཉིས་ཡོད་དེ། དང་པོས་ནི་དན་འགྱོར་འགྱོ་བའི་འདུ་བྱེད་གསོག་ལ། གཉིས་པས་ནི་བདེ་འགྱོར་འགྱོ
བའི་འདུ་བྱེད་གསོག་པར་གྱན་ལས་བཏུས་སུ་གསུངས་སོ།

Though Tsongkhapa does not mention it here, this Tibetan wording, though based on the *Abhidharma-samuccaya*, also closely echoes the Tibetan translation of Ārya Nāgarjuna’s verse in *The Letter to a King: The Garland of Precious Jewels (Rājaparīkathā ratnamālī*, Tib. *rgyal po la gtam bya ba rin po che’i phreng ba*, Toh. 4158) (Sherig Parkhang, Dharamsala, 1999 print edition, 8):

That grasping is confusion

Where there is confusion, there is no liberation

Those who say nothing exists go on to lives of misery

Those who say things really exist go on to lives of happiness

One who thoroughly knows the perfect as it is

Since he relies on neither of the two, is set free.

།འཇིན་པ་དེ་ནི་སྤངས་པ་སྟེ། །སྤངས་པ་ཡོད་ན་མི་གྲོལ་ངོ། །མེད་པ་ནི་དན་འགྱོར་འགྱོ། །ཡོད་པ་ནི་བདེ་འགྱོར་འགྱོ། །ཡང་དག་ཇི་བཞིན་ཡོངས་ཤེས་བྱིར
། །གཉིས་ལ་མི་བརྟེན་ཐར་པར་འགྱུར།

translated as “compositional activity” or “compositional factors” (*'du byed*, Skt. *saṃskāra*, Pāli *saṅkhāra*), but which I will render simply as “traces.”

2. Traces

In both Sanskrit and Tibetan, the word *saṃskāra* (Tib. *'du byed*) literally means “putting together”⁶⁷ or “forming something” but in this context has the specific connotation of a mental energy, impulse, or disposition that accompanies an action of body, speech, or mind. The image in traditional Tibetan paintings of the Wheel of Existence is of a person making pots. So I will continue the clay imagery here, with the sense of action that leaves a trace, or imprint, in the mental stream. Technically speaking, however, this second link refers not to the actions of body and speech themselves, but to those movements of the mind (*sems pa*, Skt. *cetanā*) that are directly driven by the mis-knowing/confusion of the first link, which accompany every moment of an action of body, speech, or thought, and which have not yet turned into long-term seeds or tendencies.⁶⁸

The Sanskrit term *saṃskāra* is used mostly in an active sense (that of “making”), while its participial form, *saṃskṛta* (Tib. *'dus byas*), has the passive sense of “that which is made,” and frequently refers to functioning or produced things in general. Over the course of this dissertation, we will examine the degree to which “things which are made” are – in Tsongkhapa’s understanding at least – understood to be made precisely by the mental act of “putting together” which is *saṃskāra*. In this context, then, I understand *saṃskāra* to be something like the active record that is continuously formed, drawn, or traced in the mind just before, alongside, and just after, the action of thought, words, or physical movement which the “movement of the mind,” or “intention” instigated. Thus it is like a “trace” in the sand or sky of the mind left by an action as it is still taking place, but also like the initiating movement of “tracing” a letter with a stylus through several layers of impressable media: The impulse of writing pushes through to other layers where the visible action will take place in a world, but the impulse is the artist’s private source

⁶⁷ See Monier-Williams 2011 entry for *saṃskāra* at: www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/webtc5/. See also Tilmann Vetter, 1988, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 50, where he explains the Pāli form, *saṅkhāra*: “This is a difficult word, etymologically coming close to ‘states/things being formed or prepared [to do something in the future]’.” It will become clear, however, that much of Vetter’s explanation of the twelve links from the point of view of the Pāli canon, does not accord precisely with Tsongkhapa’s interpretation. Since it is not my purpose here, and is a vast subject in itself, I will not attempt to pursue comparison of the presentations of the twelve links across different strata of Buddhist literature, but will rather limit myself to an attempt to understand Tsongkhapa’s interpretation and how it runs throughout his entire thought.

⁶⁸ See Vasubandhu’s own gloss in his *Commentary to the Abhidharmakośa* (*Bhāṣyām*, sde dge, vol. ku, 124b2-3): “The traces appear ‘at the time of previous karma.’ To this we can add that what are here called ‘the traces’ are whatever appear at the time of *karma*, wholesome and such, in a previous lifetime. From whatever that *karma* was, comes what is ripening now.”

འདུ་བྱེད་དག་ནི་སྤྱོད་ལས་ཀྱི། གནས་སྐབས་ཞེས་བྱ་བར་སྦྱར་དེ། ཆོ་སྦྱ་མ་ལ་བསོད་ནམས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ལས་ཀྱི་གནས་སྐབས་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་འདི་ལ་འདུ་བྱེད་ནམས་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ལས་གང་གིས་འདིར་ནམས་པར་སྦྱོན་པའོ།

of the form and content. Furthermore, the top-layer “tracing,” analogous here to what is left over in the mental stream of consciousness, is also where a residue of the image will remain for the artist to keep, even after the outer “product,” or karmic action, below has been separated and displayed.⁶⁹

Tsongkhapa does not go into detail here, but simply interprets the term to mean action in the sense of karma – i.e., the morally charged movements of the mind that instigate and accompany action.⁷⁰ Introducing the second link, he writes,⁷¹

Traces are karma. There is the karma that is not merit, that propels lives of misery, and the karma that propels lives of happiness. The latter is of two types, the karma of merit that propels lives of happiness in the desire realm, and the unwavering karma that propels lives of happiness in the upper realms.

Why, then, is the word for the second link, *saṃskāra*, or traces, traditionally distinct from the general word for action and its residues, namely, karma? The main point here seems to be that it refers to the immature form of a mental trace, before it has even coagulated into a “seed,” much less ripened into an energy capable of bringing about an experiential result. It is karmic energy in a raw or immature state, as opposed to the ripe and burgeoning karma that shows up at the tenth link.

3. Consciousness

The third link is consciousness. Tsongkhapa raises a point of contention that will be of importance in our discussion of the debates between the Mind-Only and Middle Way schools of thought.⁷²

⁶⁹ This differs from other technical uses of the term ‘*du byed*, as in the fourth of the five “heaps” (‘*du byed kyi phung po*) and its later stages will become clear in the extensive treatment of karmic seeds to follow below. I am indebted to Alexander Berzin for many clarifications on this topic, though I do not adopt his translation system. See www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/sutra/level2_lamrim/intermediate_scope/twelve_links_dependent_arising/twelve_links_02.html#nca8279e1df660fee17.

⁷⁰ On this point see Jowita Kramer, 2013, “A Study of the *saṃskāra* Section of Vasubandhu’s *Pañcaskandhaka*,” 988: “The explanation of the fourth *skandha* as the sixfold intention (*cetanā*), which in later texts is provided as the traditional interpretation of *saṃskāra*, seems to be a later (though still canonical) interpretation of the term. The clear distinction of harmful and benevolent impulses activating good and bad deeds or leading to rebirth in a good or bad place also appears to be a later stage of development in the usage of the term *saṃskāra*.”

⁷¹ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path (byang chub lam rim che ba)*, vol. *pa*, 162b2-3 (356).

འདུ་བྱེད་ནི་ལས་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཡང་རྒྱ་འཁོར་འཕེན་པའི་བསོད་ནམས་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ལས་དང་། བདེ་འཁོར་འཕེན་པའི་ལས་སོ། རྩི་མ་ལང་གཉིས་ཉེ། འདོད་ཁམས་

ཀྱི་བདེ་འཁོར་འཕེན་པའི་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱི་ལས་དང་། ཁམས་གོང་མའི་བདེ་འཁོར་འཕེན་པའི་མི་གཡོ་བའི་ལས་སོ།

⁷² *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 162b2162b3-4 (356).

རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི། མཛོད་ལས། རྣམ་ཤེས་ཆོག་ལ་གསུངས་ཀྱང་། འདིར་གཙོ་བོ་ནི་ཀུན་གཤིས་ལས་ལེན་པ་རྣམས་ལྟར་ན་ཀུན་གཤིས་ཡིན་ལ། ཁམས་མི་ལེན་

རྣམས་ལྟར་ན་ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་སོ།

For a detailed comparative analysis of different views of this third link in the Sanskrit literature, from the *Yogācārabhūmi* to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, and *Mahāyānaśāstra*, etc., cf. Robert Kritzer, 1993, “Vasubandhu on *saṃskārapratyayaṃ vijñānam*” in *JIABS*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 24-55.

As for consciousness: In the sūtras, consciousness is described in terms of six groups. According to those who accept the existence of a foundation consciousness the main one here is that foundation consciousness. According to those who do not accept such a thing, the main one is the mental consciousness.

The classic “six groups” of consciousness refer to the eye-consciousness, the ear-consciousness, the nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and finally the mental consciousness. The Mind-Only position, as developed in the various works traditionally attributed to Asaṅga and Maitreya, asserts two further “groups” of consciousness: the afflictive mind (*nyon yid*, Skt. *kliṣṭa-manas*) and the foundation consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*, Skt. *ālaya-vijñāna*). Tsongkhapa wrote a detailed analysis of these distinctive views of the Mind-Only school quite early in his career,⁷³ and this work may comprise the most detailed analysis of the process of karmic seed-formation and ripening that he ever wrote. Though we will examine this book at greater length later, for now it is sufficient to grasp the notion that traces of the conscious experience of having acted, spoken, and thought in certain ways in the past could turn into the propelling causes for the nascent consciousness that is said to enter a mother’s womb. That is, this third link refers to the most basic stream of consciousness that is said to form the consistent continuity of a person throughout a lifetime, from the moment that consciousness enters a womb at conception, to the moment a later instant of that same stream of consciousness departs from the physical body at the time of death.⁷⁴

Tsongkhapa actually distinguishes two parts to the third link: (3a) the consciousness at the time of the cause and (3b) the consciousness at the time of the result. The first refers specifically to the “moment at which the tendency for the *karma* is infused,” while the second refers to a moment of consciousness in the future, which depends upon the former instance of planting a seed, and which crosses the border into a place of birth. If the actions collected when forming the traces of karma were non-virtue, then that consciousness which crosses the border into a new life will find itself in a place of misery. If the actions collected were filled with merit, or were unwavering, then in reliance upon this the resultant consciousness will be one that crosses the border into

⁷³ *yid dang kun gzhi'i dka' ba'i gnas rgya cher 'grel pa legs par bshad pa'i rgya mtsho*. (*The Ocean of Eloquence, an Extensive Commentary on Difficult Points Concerning the Afflicted and Foundation Consciousnesses*.) rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *tsha*. See Gareth Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence: Tsong Kha Pa's Commentary on the Yogācāra Doctrine of Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 16-19, for a cogent and convincing argument that Tsongkhapa likely wrote this work “either when he stayed in Sa skya in the winter of 1389-90, or, perhaps, even earlier in the summer or fall of 1386,” i.e., in his late twenties or early thirties. Regardless of the exact dating, it is one of his earliest significant works, and reveals Tsongkhapa’s thinking about Cittamātra ideas at a formative stage in his intellectual development.

⁷⁴ Tsongkhapa comments in detail on this process from a tantric perspective in his *Notes on the Stage of Vajra Recitation*. See Chapter Six, note 90. See also Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyā*, vol. *ku*, 124b3-4: “‘Consciousness’ is the heap that crosses the border. The five heaps as they are at the moment of crossing the border into a mother’s womb are ‘consciousness.’”

ནམ་ཤེས་མཆམས་སྒྱུར་བྱང་པོ་ཡིན། །མདེ་མངལ་དུ་ཉིང་མཆམས་སྒྱུར་བའི་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ལ་བྱང་པོ་ལྷ་ནི་ནམ་ཤེས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

realms of happiness, whether in the desire realm or in the upper two realms of form and formlessness.⁷⁵

It is important to note at this point that when speaking of the type of karma that projects a whole life – the realm, the body, the environment, the parents, the general type of fortune or misfortune a living being might have – the term used is “ripening,” whether referring to the karma itself or to its result. Earlier in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, Tsongkhapa had enumerated the “ripened results” (*rnam smin gyi 'bras bu*) when treating karma and its results in detail. There he writes:⁷⁶

As for the ten paths of karma, there are three grades of each, depending upon the degree to which the three poisons acted as their foundation: small, medium, or great. Thus killing and each of the rest of the ten [non-virtues] done with the poisons acting to a great degree will produce a hell being, each done on the basis of the poisons in medium strength will produce a craving spirit, and each done with small strength will lead to birth as an animal. This is what is said in the main part of the *Levels* [*sa'i dngos gzhi*, i.e., the *Yogācārabhūmi*], but in the *Sūtra of the Tenth Level*, the results of the small and medium, respectively, are reversed.

Thus these results are seen in some cases to come from a single defining action in a past life, done with very intense motivation towards a person of great importance, or else repeated actions that became habitual and thus gained force by sheer accumulation. Though Tsongkhapa only mentions ripened results of negative actions, here, his later reference to merit and the “unwavering” karma of practices like deep and sustained states of meditation throughout one’s life, make clear that there would also be “ripened results” of the ten paths of *virtue*, as well as the countless other kinds and combinations of actions one could do in the course of a life. It is further significant to begin to note the number of times and ways that Tsongkhapa uses the word *brten pa* (to depend or rely upon) in his writing on karmic processes. It is this basic and almost casual linguistic usage of “in reliance upon that” which I will posit forms the warp and woof of his understanding of “dependent origination” throughout his thought.

In both the *Great* and *Briefer Steps of the Path*, Tsongkhapa is readily alternating

⁷⁵ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 162b5-163a2 (356-357). This paragraph is a close paraphrase of these lines.

⁷⁶ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 118b4-5 (268). This translation verges on a paraphrase, since many words needed to be added in order for the idea to be clear. I have, however, avoided excessive brackets, since I think my interpolations are obvious based on the Tibetan grammar. A “path of karma” refers to a complete action, including the object towards whom the act is done, the motivation, whether or not the action is completed, and how one feels about it afterwards.

ལས་ལྷན་བཅུ་པོ་རེ་ཡང་གཞི་དུག་གསུམ་རྒྱུ་འབྲིང་ཆེ་གསུམ་ལ་བརྟེན་པས་གསུམ་གསུམ་སོ། །དེ་ལ་སློག་གཅོད་སོགས་ཆེན་པོ་བཅུ་པོ་རེ་སྤྲུལ་བ། འབྲིང་བཅུ་པོ་རེ་སྤྲུལ་ཡི་དུགས་དང་། རྒྱུ་དུ་བཅུ་པོ་རེ་སྤྲུལ་འབྲིང་སྟེ་བར་སའི་དངོས་གཞིར་གསུངས་ལ། ས་བཅུ་པའི་མདོ་ལས་ནི་རྒྱུ་འབྲིང་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བུ་ལྷོག་སྟེ་གསུངས་སོ། །

between Abhidharma and Yogācāra sources for his treatment of karma. He is not committing to a particular philosophical interpretation here⁷⁷ but is rather relying on various authoritative sources to present a broad portrait of the Indian Buddhist views on karma and the rest of the key components of worldview seen to be essential for a person's individual progress on the path. Not until the final sections of the *Steps on the Path*, on the perfection of incisive wisdom, will Tsongkhapa decide clearly between those Indian views he finds to represent the highest interpretation of the Buddha's teaching and those he sees to be flawed in some way. Since, apart from a few key points, the Middle Way school does not explicitly add new content to most of the topics that make up a Buddhist cosmology or ethical theory, Tsongkhapa repeatedly and unabashedly turns to the texts associated with "lower" schools, whether Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna, in order to elaborate this content held in common. Thus, though the "twelve links" are in general a teaching associated with the earliest transmission of Buddhism, since Tsongkhapa is citing Mind-Only interpretations of it from the beginning of his *Steps of the Path* presentation, I do not find it incongruent to add here some details from his *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, an explicitly Mind-Only text.⁷⁸ Here he examines the notion of consciousness as a ripening that lasts across an entire lifetime – and indeed that sustains the thread of unbroken cause and effect that would be seen to go across lifetimes. Commenting on his own root verses, Tsongkhapa writes,⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Witness his mention of the option of whether the second link be taken as the "foundation consciousness" or not. See Sparham's comments on this point in Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 20 and 34n49. I do not, however, see this as an ambiguity in Tsongkhapa's own thinking at this period in his career, since the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* was written in 1402, well after Tsongkhapa was writing from the perspective of his own mature view of the Middle Way, which some scholars would attribute to his realizations in 1398 (or 1397). (See Thurman, 1991, *The Central Philosophy of Tibet*, 84-85.) I see Tsongkhapa's mention of the position of those accepting a foundation consciousness, at this point, to be indicative of his own continued concern to make students aware of the difference between the schools' viewpoints, and to further point out the usefulness of the "foundation consciousness" idea in understanding certain processes, even if he will insist that at a later point in one's thought one must reject this idea altogether. That said, the *Illumination of the True Thought of the Middle Way* (*dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*), whose explicit refutation of a foundation consciousness we will discuss in Chapter Six, appears to have been written as late as 1418. For the source of these dates (and the alternative date of 1397 for Tsongkhapa's major realization of emptiness), see Jamyang Shepa, *The String of Wish-Giving Gems*, in Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 362, 369, and 405.

⁷⁸ See Chapter One, note 46. This is the same text translated in Gareth Sparham's *Ocean of Eloquence*, but all my translations are original, and will differ significantly from his on some points.

⁷⁹ *yid dang kun gzhi'i dka' ba'i gnas rgya cher 'grel pa legs par bshad pa'i rgya mtsho*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *tsha*, 12b5-13b6 (694-696). Cf. Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 60-63.

ལྷག་མ་མེད་དང་དོན་མེད། །བར་དུ་རྒྱན་མི་ཆད་དུ་འཇུག་ཐེག་དམན་གྱི་ལྷག་མེད་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་འདས་དང་། ཐེག་ཆེན་གྱི་དོན་མེད་ཉིང་འཛིན་གྱི་ཆེས་སུ་ལྷོག་ཅིང་དེའི་རྒྱན་མི་ཆད་དུ་འཇུག་གོ། དེ་ཡང་ཇི་སྐད་དུ། ལས་ཀྱི་བག་ཆགས་འཛིན་གཉིས་ཀྱི། །བག་ཆགས་བཅས་པ་སྒྲ་མ་ཡི། །རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པ་ཟད་ནས་གཞན། །རྣམ་སྤྲིན་བསྐྱེད་པ་དེ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྷན་ཆེ་སྒྲ་མའི་དགེ་སྤྲིག་ལས་ཀྱིས་འཕངས་པའི་ཀུན་གཞིའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་དེ་ཆེ་འདིར་ཇི་སྤྲིན་མ་ཤིའི་བར་དུ་འཇུག་ཅིང་། ལས་དེའི་རྣམ་པ་ཟད་པའི་ཆེ་དེ་ལོག་ནས་ཡང་ལས་ཀྱི་མས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་འཇུག་པས་རྒྱན་མི་ཆད་དོ། །འདིར་ཅིའི་ཕྱིར་ཉན་དུ་གྲུར་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཁོ་ན་ལ་རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པ་ཞེས་བྱ། མིག་སོགས་དབང་སྒྲ་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནམ་ཞེ་ན། ཉེས་པ་མེད་དེ་འདི་ལྷན་རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པ་ནི་མ་བསྐྱིབས་ལ་ལུང་དུ་མ་བསྐྱན་པ་དང་། ཆེ་ཇི་སྤྲིན་གྱི་བར་དུ་རྒྱན་མི་ཆད་དུ་འཇུག་པ་དང་། རྒྱན་གྱི་དགེ་བཅས་མི་དགེ་བས་འཕངས་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་ཡིན་པ་སྟེ་ཁྱེ།

It engages in a stream without a break

Up to “no remainder” and “like a vajra.”

[The foundation consciousness] is turned back following upon the “*nirvāṇa* without remainder” of the lesser vehicle, and the “concentration like a vajra” of the greater vehicle. As it is stated,⁸⁰

This it is: The previous tendencies of karma
along with the previous tendencies of the two types of grasping.
Once the ripening of these is exhausted
they create another ripening.

The ripened foundation consciousness that was propelled by the virtuous and sinful karma of a previous life engages throughout this life until death. When the power of that karma is exhausted, then, leaving that life behind, once again, it engages in the dream created by the karma of the latter [life], and so it goes in an unbroken stream.

Suppose you say, “Now why should it be the case that one refers only to the consciousness that serves as a basis as ‘what is ripened’? Aren’t the five faculties of the eye and so forth also ripened?” There is no problem here, because this kind

ད་པར་གསུམ་དང་ལྷན་པ་ཞིག་དགོས་པ་ལས་དེ་ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་བཅས་ལས་གཞན་པ་ལ་མི་རུང་བའི་བྱིར་ཏེ། མ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལུང་མ་བསྐྱར་དེ་དགེ་མི་དགེའི་རྣམ་
སྤྲིན་དུ་འགལ་བ་མེད་ལ་དགེ་བ་དང་མི་དགེ་བ་ནི་རིམ་པ་བཞེན་མི་དགེ་བ་དང་དགེ་བའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་དུ་འགལ་ཏེ་དེ་གཉིས་མི་མཐུན་པ་དང་གཉིན་པོ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་
རྟོ། །གལ་ཏེ་དགེ་བ་ཉིད་དགེ་བའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་དང་མི་དགེ་བ་ཉིད་མི་དགེ་བའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་དུ་འགལ་བ་མེད་པས་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་ལུང་མ་བསྐྱར་ཁོ་ནར་མ་དེས་སོ་ཞེ་ན། དེ་ལྟ་
ན་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ལྟོག་པ་མེད་པའི་སྤྲིན་དུ་འགྱུར་ཏེ། འདི་ལྟར་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་ནི་ཆོར་བས་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་རི་སྤྲིད་འཆོའི་བར་དུ་རྒྱན་མི་ཆད་དུ་འཇུག་པ་ན་རྣམ་
སྤྲིན་དགེ་བ་ཡིན་ན་དགེ་མེས་སྐྱད་ཅིག་ཀྱང་རྒྱན་མི་ཆད་དུ་འཇུག་པས་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྤྱེ་བའི་སྐྱབས་མེད་ལ་སྤྱེ་བ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་དེ་སྤྲིན་དུ་འགྱོ་བའི་འ
གག་པའང་མེད་དོ། །རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་མི་དགེ་བ་ཡིན་ན་མི་དགེ་བའི་མེས་སྐྱབས་རྒྱན་མི་ཆད་པའི་གཉིན་པོ་སྤྱེ་བའི་སྐྱབས་མེད་ལ་དེ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་
ལྟོག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ། ་་་ །དེའི་བྱིར་མ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལུང་མ་བསྐྱར་ཁོ་ནར་མ་དེས་སོ། ་་་ །ཡང་ཐེག་བསྟན་སུ་རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་རྒྱན་ཆད་པ་ནི་
ཉིད་མཆོངས་སྤྱོད་པ་མ་གཏོགས་པ་གཞན་དུ་མཛོན་པར་འགྱུར་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་ཞེས་འབྱུང་བས་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་རི་སྤྲིད་འཆོའི་བར་དུ་འཇུག་དགོས་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་
མ་ཤིའི་བར་དུ་འབྱུང་དགོས་པ་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནི་མ་ཤིའི་གོང་དུ་ཡང་ལྟོག་པ་མཛོད་པའི་བྱིར་དེ་དག་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་མཆོན་ཉིད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཀུན་ལས་བདུས་སུ་
ཡང་། རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པ་གང་ཞེ་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་མཆོངས་པར་ལྷན་པ་དང་བཅས་པའི་ཞེས་འབྱུང་དོ། །དེས་ན་ཉོན་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཁོ་ན་རྣམ་སྤྲི
ན་ཡིན་ནོ།

⁸⁰ Sparham cites this as the *Trimṣikā-kārikā* of Vasubandhu (*Ocean of Eloquence*, 60). While this is correct, I disagree with his translation, however (which he cites as following “Anacker [1984:188],” 63n15), with its interpolation of “a ‘dual’ [i.e., subject/object] apprehension,” since if the reference were to the duality often refuted by the Mind-Only School, the terms would be reversed, in both the Sanskrit he cites (“*grāha-dvaya*,”) and in the Tibetan. That is, it would be some form of *gnyis su ’dzin pa*, *gnyis ’dzin*, or else *gzung ’dzin gnyis*. But since the sequence of words is reversed, I am confident that the reference here is to the “two types” of grasping, namely, to a self of a person and to a self of things, countered by the two types of selflessness (*gang zag gi bdag med* and *chos kyi bdag med*). When Tsongkhapa refers to the *’dzin gnyis* in other texts, it is clear that it is this to which he is referring. If holding things *to be* two were the intended meaning, why would it not be “*gnyis ’dzin kyi*”? Furthermore, it is the tendencies for the two types of self-grasping which are traditionally held to be abandoned at the stages mentioned here. Though related, this is not the same issue as holding subject and object to be two (i.e., of separate substance), in the Mind-Only school. The reasoning for the remaining places in which my translation differs substantially in meaning should be evident from careful reading of the Tibetan.

of ripening is something that must have three distinguishing properties: (1) It is non-obscuring and morally neutral,⁸¹ (2) it engages in an unbroken stream as long as one is alive, (3) and it is a result that is propelled by previous virtue and non-virtue. Further, it would be inappropriate for anything other than the foundation consciousness and its circle [i.e. the mental functions inextricably linked with it] to do this work. This is true because the fact of being non-obscuring and morally neutral does not stand in contradiction with the ripening of virtue and of non-virtue. But the ripening of non-virtue and virtue does stand in contradiction with virtue and non-virtue, respectively, because these are incompatible and an antidote, respectively [i.e., non-virtue is incompatible with virtue, and virtue is an antidote to non-virtue.]

Suppose someone says, “There is no contradiction in virtue itself being the ripening of virtue, and non-virtue itself being the ripening of non-virtue. It is only neutral ripening which is indefinite.” But if this were the case, then we would have the difficulty that there could be no turning back from the totally afflicted side of things. In this way, if what is ripened were to engage in an unbroken stream throughout every lifetime, as long as one lives, then if what is ripened were virtuous, one would be engaging without a break in a virtuous state of mind, and there would be no opportunity for the totally afflicted side to start. But then a prior cessation also never would have taken place. If what is ripened were non-virtuous, then there would be no opportunity for an antidote to that unbroken stream of non-virtue to start. With no antidote, what is totally afflicted would never be turned back. . . . Therefore, it can definitely only be non-obscuring and morally neutral. . . . Furthermore, since the statement appears in the *Summary of the Greater Way* that the breaking of this stream of ripened consciousness cannot come about except when crossing the border,⁸² and because what is ripened must be something that engages as long as one lives, it must exist until death. Therefore, since we see instances where the eyes and so forth are turned back prior to death, these cannot be “what is ripened” in the definitive sense.

Furthermore, this statement appears in the *Compendium of Abhidharma*: “What is

⁸¹ A more literal translation of *lung ma bstan* might be “morally unspecified,” but for this to make sense one has to know that the term refers to actions about whose ethical status the Buddha never made a statement as recorded in scripture. Here, however, it refers to an existing thing that does not have the character of being either virtue or non-virtue, because it does not, in itself, possess the “charge” of a karmic action. But as we will see, it can certainly “carry,” or “store,” such charge, without itself being a karmic act that would have its own result in the form of pleasure or pain. Hence, it is “morally neutral.”

⁸² This may be a paraphrase, or a quotation from a different edition. Cf. Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theḡ pa chen po bsdus pa*, Toh. 4048, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, sems tsam, vol. *ri*, 11a7, where the wording differs slightly, but is problematic: “Because, except for crossing the border, from the [time that] the stream of ripened consciousness is broken, it cannot arise elsewhere.”

ནམ་པར་སྤྱིན་པའི་ནམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་རྒྱུ་ཆད་ནས་ཉིད་མཆམས་སྦྱར་བ་མ་གཏོགས་པར་གཞན་དུ་འབྱུང་བ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

the ripening? It is the foundation consciousness along with what is inextricably linked to it.” Therefore, only the consciousness that serves as a basis is “ripened.”

The point here is this: That which ripens directly from karmic traces, tendencies, or seeds, is not itself something that is in turn already creating new positive or negative moral energy for the future – which it would have to be if it were, in fact “virtuous” or “nonvirtuous” in itself. Rather, the category of being morally unspecified, or neutral, allows for the existence of things that *carry the potential* results of karmically charged action, but which are not yet creating new seeds, in themselves. Yet in this case of the ripened consciousness, because it serves as the basis (*rten du gyur pa*) for the very continuity of the person throughout a lifetime, it provides the opportunity for new morally charged karma of all kinds and strengths to be created, traced, infused, and perpetuated “in reliance upon” that consciousness as a basis. (The “*rten*” I am translating as “basis,” here, is the same word as that which is “relied upon” in “*rten cing 'brel bar byung ba*,” or “arising in reliance and relationship.”)

Yet if that neutrality were not in place, as Tsongkhapa argued, karma would become absolutely fixed – “deterministic” perhaps? – in that there would be no “room” for anything else to happen during a lifetime except for a strict continuation of the exact quality of mind with which the life began. Tsongkhapa is using something of an absurd consequence argument here, even far removed from any explicit Middle Way reasoning. But he is showing what it would have to look like if virtuous karma ripened into *virtue itself*, as opposed to ripening into a neutral flow of awareness that simply displays the environments and objects and experiences that will *trigger*, in other aspects of the person’s mind, the positive and negative feelings that will in turn characterize experiences as having been the result of virtue or non-virtue, respectively. (For as we have seen, the character of a moral action is defined by its short- and long-term effects as pleasure or pain.) Because the basic mind is not inherently virtue or non-virtue – and this is not a metaphysical statement about emptiness, here, but an ethical statement of neutrality – then not only can a wide variety of ethically-charged experiential results occur in the course of a lifetime, but there is also the “freedom” to create a variety of new kinds of karma during that life, because the only continuum that is present throughout the whole lifetime is understood to be ethically neutral in itself. This is an idea that might take on more and more significance as we progress through the layers of Tsongkhapa’s soteriological vision.

It is also important to recognize, then, the distinction between the word “ripening” used loosely in the sense of ripened seeds – which could apply to the ripening of many kinds of both physical and karmic seeds through a lifetime – and this strictly definitive sense of the “ripened result,” which refers specifically to the mind of a whole lifetime, along with the kind of realm it will inhabit. The more particular results of individual deeds as individual experiences or tendencies to have certain kinds of experiences day to

day are referred to by the terms “results congruent with their causes” (*rgyu mthun gyi 'bras bu*), as well as “governing results” (*bdag po'i 'bras bu*), which usually have to do with environmental conditions. But all of these rely upon the ripened consciousness as the condition of their possibility within a lifetime.

To understand the import of the third link, then, in its two parts, is to imagine how a moment or moments of consciousness that witness the total circumstances of an action done by one person, at one time, could serve as the basis for traces to be drawn, or fragrant tendencies to be infused, or seeds to be planted in the mind, which in turn could spend hundreds or thousands of “years” in a dormant state, until they are triggered by the intense grasping of appropriation at the moment of death within the same unbroken continuum of mental events. That grasping is supposed to revive, trigger, or catalyze (*gsos btab pa*) certain ripe seeds, which in turn creates the power to propel, or project (*'phen pa*) a new iteration of the same mental stream across the border into a new life in a mother’s womb or other type of birth. When speaking of a “mental stream,” one refers to the unbroken *causal* continuum, moment to moment from time without beginning; but when referring to consciousness as a ripened result, one is indeed speaking of something new, insofar as the ripening of those particular karmic tendencies had not come into being in just that way before, and insofar as the realm that the newly ripened consciousness now displays as its focal object may or may not bear any resemblance to that of the lifetime just departed. Just because a mental stream is understood to go on forever, does not mean it is not caused. Rather, it is *continually caused*. With ignorance still present in the mind, actions will still be enacted, forming new traces, which will in turn propel another lifetime of consciousness, and so on. In a sense, the story is complete within the first three links, with the remaining links simply an elaboration of what happens in between each of the first three, and with emphasis on other aspects of the process.

What the ripened half of this third link challenges one to ponder, however, is what it would mean to say that if there had not been any traces of action from the past, the very basis of consciousness upon which a lifetime’s capacity to think, act, and exist depends, simply would not arise. Lifetimes are supposed to continue in the cycle of suffering because the mind is always imbued with ignorance, and because it always keeps moving, i.e., acting, i.e., tracing traces. But to say that consciousness, especially the overall “ripened consciousness,” is *caused*, is to imply that if circumstances had not come together, it would not exist. This is one way in which such conditioned consciousness could be seen to differ radically from non-Buddhist notions of an eternal soul or Self, much less an unchanging Powerful Lord, and such. It also means that the very amalgam of conscious forces that allow a person to create new karmic actions are themselves seen to be caused by the energy of previous karma, in the form of a continuity of ripened consciousness. Again, it is a cycle which had no beginning. Consciousness that does not

see correctly creates actions, which create more blind consciousness, which creates more actions. This is the crux of the twelve links of dependent origination, *and the reason they are understood to be the Buddhist alternative to a cosmological or theological creation theory.*

4. Name and Form

Once ripened consciousness has crossed the border into a new life, the five heaps begin to differentiate themselves, still driven by the energy of the past traces that propelled the mind into this particular type of existence. Tsongkhapa glosses “name” (*ming*, Skt. *nāma*) as referring to the four heaps, or aggregates, that do not involve form,⁸³ so that, when adding “form” (*gzugs*, Skt. *rūpa*), this link becomes equivalent to the five heaps. The four mental heaps, designated by “name,” are, in brief: feeling (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral), discrimination (the basic mental function that identifies and distinguishes objects), mental functions (Skt. *saṃskāra*), referring to all the remaining activities of the mind, along with karmic factors not directly linked with a mental state,⁸⁴ and consciousness. Here the latter refers to the remaining five sense consciousnesses apart from the mental consciousness, in a non-Mind-Only context, and the remaining seven consciousnesses apart from the foundation consciousness, in a Mind-Only context.

The Buddhist notion of form is notoriously difficult to define. The accepted Geluk monastic definition is “Form is whatever is suitable to be form” (*gzugs su rung ba gzugs kyi mtshan nyid*). Thus it is roughly equivalent to that which we ordinarily think of as possessing sensible, physical properties that can be indicated within a shared world, as opposed to mental properties that are private. However, these physical properties are not understood primarily in terms of mass and dimension, but in terms of how an object appears to certain sense faculties. The apparently circular definition implies that form is whatever one can point out as being “form” to someone else who is also experiencing it through their senses. For example, a particular kind of form can never be described fully to someone who lacks the sense faculty to observe it herself.

⁸³ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 163a2 (357).

⁸⁴ Note that it is at times ambiguous in the Abhidharma, Sautrāntika, and Yogācāra literature of the first half of the first millennium CE, whether the term *saṃskāra* has quite the same meaning when used for the second link as for the fourth heap. See Jowita Kramer, 2013, “A Study of the *Saṃskāra* Section of Vasubandhu’s *Pañcaskandhaka*,” 987n2: “A proper English rendering of *saṃskāra* as found in the *Pañcaskandhaka* is difficult, since when this text was composed, the two original meanings of the term, i.e., “impulses” and “all impermanent objects of experience,” seem to have been intermingled in the course of time, and the concept of the *saṃskāras* became a “receptacle” for all those factors that could not be included in any other *skandha*, as for instance the “*saṃskāras* dissociated from mind” (*cittaviprayuktāḥ saṃskārāḥ*).” While Kramer chooses not to translate the term, I will instead continue to use the evocative translation of “traces” when referring to *saṃskāras* as karmic imprints, while I will not often have reason to refer to the fourth heap by a single term, but will rather specify individually the types of factors, such as “unlinked traces” (*ldan min ‘du byed*, Skt. *cittaviprayuktāḥ saṃskārāḥ*) and mental functions (*sems byung*, Skt. *caitta*), along with various sub-categories within those two groups, as the need arises.

Thus the most prominent subset of the heap of form comprises the objects of the visual field, namely color and shapes. These are also termed “form” in the narrow sense. But the heap of form (*gzugs kyi phung po*, Skt. *rūpaskandha*) also includes the physical body of a living being, with all its limbs and sensory faculties, as well as what comes into contact with those faculties, including smells, tastes, textures, and sounds. The heap of form also includes what are known as the “great elements” (*byung ba chen po*) or the different calibrations of observable energy that comprise the physical world – earth, water, fire, and wind.⁸⁵ In mentioning the elements of the outer world I raise a point of debate: To what degree are they “outer”? Or else, if all the objects of my senses are part of the heap of form, then where does “my” heap of form stop?

At this point, then, it is crucial to note a further distinction between the heap of form in general, and the “heap of form taken on” at birth (*nyer len gyi gzugs kyi phung po*, Skt. *upādāna-rūpa-skandha*). The latter clearly refers only to the body of a living being, as we would ordinarily think of its physical limits, porous as those may be with regard to food, water, air, the vibrations of sound, and so on. The former can often seem to refer to the general category of the heap of form, but not to that appropriated by a particular living being. Though Tsongkhapa does not use any modifying phrase for “form” in his brief presentation of “name and form,” here, I think it can safely be assumed that he is in fact referring to the “heap of form taken on” by an individual being, since that is precisely what this link refers to, pinpointing the steps of the process as a body forms in the womb.

Tsongkhapa adds that for a being taking birth in the formless realm, there is no form apart from the seeds for it: This point takes on added significance in light of his *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, where Tsongkhapa presents the exhaustive argument that a foundation consciousness must appear uniquely – and in a circumscribed way – for each individual being in a realm.⁸⁶ It is not as though all the realms of existence show up in a single foundation consciousness that everyone somehow partakes of according to their karma. Rather, the propelling karma *produces* a particular ripened foundation consciousness, which in turn, by the power of other seeds, “appears” (*snang ba*) as the environment and inhabitants of the “realm into which” a being is born. Thus, from a Mind-Only point of view, it might make more sense to say that the consciousness *turns into* the realm, rather than entering it. The remaining seeds that,

⁸⁵ I term these calibrations of energy because their technical meanings are perhaps closer to what science would call “states of matter” than they are to the ordinary natural phenomena by which they are named. That is, every physical particle is understood to possess each of these in some proportion, though one or another may be dominant. Thus hot water has a high degree of fire element, a flexible tree branch has much water element in addition to the dominant earth element, and a liquid fuel-burning jet engine displays plenty of wind element, too. The four might better be termed as “solidity, liquidity, thermal energy, and kinetic energy,” respectively. (I owe those terms to B. Alan Wallace, Lecture, February 12th, 2017.)

⁸⁶ *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 8a6-9b5 (685-688).

given the right circumstances, could give rise to other realms, remain dormant until their time is ripe.⁸⁷ We shall return to this point.

5. Six Sensory Fields

In general the term that I will translate as “sensory field” (*skye mched*, Skt. *āyatana*) refers to the interaction between a sense power, or faculty (*dbang po*, Skt. *indriya*) and its objective field (*yul*, Skt. *viṣaya*). Thus it is the gateway through which an object incites a mental perception to begin (*skye ba*) and then to intensify or proliferate (*mched pa*). Here Tsongkhapa takes the six sensory fields to be equivalent to the sensory and mental faculties (though in a Guhyasamāja context it will sometimes be used to refer just to the objects of those faculties.) He points out that in the case of birth from a womb, the sensory field of the body (i.e., sense of touch), as well as that of the mind have already existed from the earliest “oval” stage of the fetus, associated with the link of “name and form,” so it is only the remaining four sensory fields that are developing at the time designated by this fifth link. He adds that in the case of miraculous birth, all six sensory fields will appear instantaneously at the point of crossing the border into the new life, while the stages of birth from an egg and from “warmth and moisture” will be similar to those of birth from a womb, except for the womb part. He also makes the distinction that the fourth link refers to attaining the essence of a new body, while the fifth refers to the differentiation of that body into specific functions, so that it may become an “experiencer.”⁸⁸

What Tsongkhapa does not mention here, but is clear from his earlier *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, is that from a Mind-Only school point of view, name and form, as well as the six sensory fields, are *all* developing as displays of the foundation consciousness, being the further effect of traces, tendencies, and seeds collected in a previous life. To understand this point we must recognize that in that work, Tsongkhapa defines the foundation consciousness that serves as a basis (*rten du gyur pa'i kun gzhi*, which is equivalent to the resultant half of the third link) according to four dimensions:⁸⁹

(1) its object of focus, (2) its aspect, (3) its essential nature, and (4) its companions.

- The first dimension, or “focal object” (*dmigs yul*), in turn consists of three parts:
 - (a) the five actual objects (*don lnga*), namely, the sense objects of visible form,

⁸⁷ See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 9b4 (688). “For example, if a seed staying in a storage bin were to meet with certain conditions, it would be suitable to produce a sprout. Therefore we can call the seed ‘the condition-maker for a sprout.’”

དཔེར་ན་སྤྱད་ན་གནས་པའི་ས་ཐོན་དེ་རྒྱུ་དང་ཐང་ན་སྤྱུ་གྱུ་བསྐྱེད་ཅུང་ཡིན་པས་སྤྱུ་གྱུ་འི་རྒྱུ་ཕྱེད་ཅེས་བརྗོད་པ་བཞིན་ནོ།

⁸⁸ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path (byang chub lam rim che ba)*, vol. *pa*, 163a3-6 (357).

⁸⁹ See *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 7b6-8a1-2 (684-685). This is an explanatory paraphrase, closely following the Tibetan.

sound, smells, tastes, and textures,

(b) the five faculties (*dbang po lnga*) of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, which are known in code here as a “living being” (*sems can*), and

(c) the tendencies (*bag chags*, Skt. *vāśana*) for grasping to the fabricated constructs (*kun brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid*, Skt. *parikalpita-svabhāva*) we make about a “self” and about “things” as if those constructs were real.

- Tsongkhapa explains the second dimension, “aspect” (*rnam pa*), as meaning that “the vessel [of a world] and its inhabitants appear, but since the foundation consciousness does not itself ascertain them, it cannot bring about a subsequent determination, either.”⁹⁰ One of the complexities of the Mind-Only school viewpoint is that it often seems to propose that consciousness could somehow manifest as both subject and object at the same time. But this necessitates that “consciousness” is also not always fully cognitively aware, and that there are aspects of it, such as seeds, that are hidden from view, but must still “be” there in order for other phenomena to become manifest. Thus even when this consciousness is said to be appearing as the environment and living beings of a world, the basic mental functions with which the foundation consciousness is linked (see below) can do no more than grasp the raw sense data that is appearing in the foundation. It takes other types of awareness – namely the mental consciousness – to observe and mentally label the objects of observation with conceptual constructs (the famed *parikalpita-svabhava* of Mind-Only thought.)⁹¹
- The third dimension, “essential nature” (*ngo bo*), refers to the idea that the foundation consciousness is non-obscuring (i.e., not in itself an afflictive hindrance), and morally neutral, as we have seen.
- The fourth dimension, known as the “circle” (*'khor*) or “companions” (*grogs*), specifies that there are five “always-going” (*kun tu 'gro ba*) mental functions which will always be inextricably linked (*mtshungs ldan*) with the foundation consciousness because they “are present in every state of mind,” namely:⁹²

⁹⁰ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 8a1-2 (685):

ནུས་པ་སྣོད་བཅུད་དེ་དག་སྣང་ཡང་རང་གིས་ཀྱང་མི་ངེས་ལ་རྗེས་སུ་ངེས་པ་ཡང་འདྲེན་མི་རྒྱས་པ།

It is important to note that the Tibetan word I translate as consciousness is “*rnam par shes pa*,” which, very literally, might seem to mean “knowing an aspect,” or “knowing in an aspect,” in that to be conscious is to be conscious *of* something, as Euro-American philosophy has long pointed out. This would be more comfortable, however, if the word were “*rnam pa shes pa*,” since in Tibetan one would not really need the transitive particle. However, as it is, “*rnam par*,” also just means “very,” or “emphatically,” and is used as a standard translation of the Sanskrit prefix “*vi-*,” in this case rendering the Sanskrit “*viññāna*.”

⁹¹ See Tsongkhapa’s root verses in *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 8a6-8b1 (685-686):

Towards the part of foundation consciousness that is ‘beheld’

the five consciousnesses do the beholding,

and the sixth applies conventional labels. . .

ཀྱུན་གཞིའི་གཟུང་ཆ་དག་ལ་ནི། །ནུས་ཤེས་ལྔ་ཡིས་འདྲིན་བྱེད་ཅིང་། །བྱུག་པས་ན་སྣང་འདོགས་པས་ན།

⁹² *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 12a5-6 (693):

- (a) “contact, since it is the cause of all mental functions,”
- (b) feeling, “since it is that which holds as its object of focus any one of the three aspects in which experience comes to every state of mind” – i.e., pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (note that the feeling associated with the foundation consciousness, however, is always neutral),
- (c) discrimination, “since it does no more than slice up distinctions within an object,”
- (d) mental movement, “since it is no more than a movement towards an object,”⁹³
- and (e) attention (*yid la byed pa*, Skt. *manasikāra*), “because it is no more than directing the mind towards its own object of focus.”

All this leads us to a passage that will be crucial for understanding the inner workings of the twelve links from a Mind-Only perspective. I would argue, moreover, that this is equivalent to a simply “Mahāyāna” perspective for Tsongkhapa, in nearly all respects except those that have to do with a deconstructive inquiry into the nature of *how* things exist. After quoting both Asaṅga’s *Madhyānta-vibhāga* and Vasubandhu’s *Triṃśikā-kārikā*,⁹⁴ Tsongkhapa goes on to gloss his own root verses (in italics):⁹⁵

Suppose you ask, “How do those tendencies, which cannot be expressed as being either the same as or different from what is ripened, become a focal object for what is ripened?”

*Because, by the power of seeds
it appears as a place, actual objects,
and a body, we assert them
all to be objects of focus.*

Although those *seeds* do not turn into objects by appearing, nonetheless, *by their power*, that ripened foundation consciousness turns into something that *appears*

། ཀློན་ཏུ་འགྲོ་བ་ལྔ་དང་ནི་སྤྲུངས་པར་ལྷན་ཏེ། རེག་པ་ནི་སེམས་བྱུང་ཀླན་གྱི་རྩྭ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིང་དང་། སེམས་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་ཚྱུང་བ་རྣམས་པ་གསུམ་ལས་གང་ཡང་
རུང་བ་གཅིག་དམིགས་པའི་བྱིང་དང་། ལུལ་གྱི་སྤྱུ་རིས་གཙོད་པ་ཙམ་དང་། ལུལ་ལ་གཡོ་བ་ཙམ་དང་། རང་གི་དམིགས་པ་ལ་སེམས་གཏོད་པ་ཙམ་སེམས་ཐམས་
ས་ཅད་ལ་ཡོད་པའི་བྱིང་རྟོ།

⁹³ Note that it is this to which Vasubandhu equates karma. See Chapter One, note 49, above. Based upon Tsongkhapa’s description here and in other places, I find he uses this term in a sense that is broader and more primal than the more common English translation of “intention.” It appears that such impulses are most often *not* “intentional” in the colloquial sense, though they do form the basis for “motivated karma.”

⁹⁴ See Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 52 and 61n1-2, for Sanskrit source references.

⁹⁵ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 8a4-6 (685):

། རྣམ་སྤྱོད་དང་དེ་ཉིད་དང་གཞན་དུ་བརྗོད་དུ་མེད་པའི་བག་ཆགས་རྣམ་སྤྱོད་གྱི་དམིགས་པར་རི་ལྷར་འགྱུར་ཞེ་ན། ས་ཐོན་གྱི། །དབང་གིས་གནས་དོན་ལུས་སུ་ནི།
། །སྤང་བྱིང་དམིགས་པ་དག་ཏུ་འདོད། ས་ཐོན་དེ་སྤང་ནས་ལུལ་དུ་མི་འགྱུར་ཡང་དེའི་དབང་གིས་ཀླན་གཞི་རྣམ་སྤྱོད་དེ་གནས་དབང་རྟེན་དང་། ལུས་དབང་པོ་དང་།
ར། དོན་ལུལ་ལྔའི་སྤྱོད་བཅུད་དུ་སྤང་བར་འགྱུར་བས་ན་དམིགས་པར་བཞག་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་ལུལ་གྱི་དབང་གིས་ཤེས་པ་དེའི་རྣམས་པ་ཅན་དུ་བྱུང་བས་ལུལ་དེ་མི་སྤྱོད་
ར་ཡང་དམིགས་པར་འདོད་པ་བཞིན་རྟོ།

as the vessel and inhabitants, namely, *a place*, which is the basis for the powers, *a body*, which is the sense powers, and the *actual objects* that are the five objective fields. Therefore we can establish the seeds as *objects of focus*. For example, it is like this: Since it is true that, by the power of an objective field, a moment of knowing arises in its aspect; then, although that objective field does not appear, still *we assert* it as something that can be focused upon.

This epitomizes the Mind-Only position that the foundation consciousness *turns into* the appearing aspect of environments, one's own body, and the objects one perceives directly through the senses moment by moment, throughout the course of a lifetime. Within the dimension of the foundation consciousness that can be focused upon, there are both the beheld sense objects, and the sense faculties that behold them. This is the sense in which the Mind-Only school asserts that objects and the perception of them are really “of one substance” (*rdzas gcig*), even though the conceptualizing mind thinks subject and object to be entirely separate vectors, coming from different causes.

The objects of focus also include the tendencies, which, though they never appear directly to any state of mind, can still be said to be something focused upon, since they constitute the causal condition “by the power of which” the sensible aspect of appearances arise.⁹⁶ The basic mental functions that arise in tandem with the foundation consciousness are understood to perceive objects of the senses at a direct and nonconceptual level, but no part of the foundation consciousness itself is supposed to form conceptual thoughts about things. According to this presentation, that task is left to the sixth, the mental consciousness, whose function it is to elaborate, in a conceptual way, the details about things perceived by the first five types of sense consciousness. As Tsongkhapa explains:⁹⁷

Objects of the mental consciousness, such as “the twelve links,” “the past,” and so on, which are pasted together conceptually – and which are other than the three of the sense powers, their actual objects, and tendencies – never become an objective field for the foundation consciousness. This is true because (1) these are made into an objective field only through being pasted together conceptually by the mental consciousness, and because (2) the foundation consciousness is free of the type of discrimination that applies conventional labels and that grasps fine details.

That which appears to the senses is seen to be nothing more than the expression of

⁹⁶ See Chapter Five, “By the Power of a Tendency,” for a more subtle analysis of this point from an epistemological and tantric perspective.

⁹⁷ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 11b5-12a1 (692-693).

དབང་དོན་བཀ་ཆགས་གསུམ་ལས་གཞན་པའི་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་ཡན་ལག་བརྩ་གཉིས་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། འདས་སོགས་སྒྲོ་བཏགས་ནམས་ནི་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ཡུལ་དུ་མི་འ
གྱུར་ཏེ། དེ་དག་ནི་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་སྒྲོ་བཏགས་ནས་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱས་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་ཞིང་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ཡང་ཐ་སྟོད་འདོགས་པའི་འདུལ་ས་བཟ་བར་འཛིན་པ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་
ཕྱིར་རོ།

energies pent up within the seeds, which had been resting on the foundation consciousness as potential energies until their time was ripe.

This presentation should raise many questions regarding how multiple beings could live in what certainly appears to be a shared world, what sort of seeds might give rise to the myriad thoughts, conceptualizations, and afflictions that show up in the mental consciousness, and the degree to which the action of mental construction and labeling could seem to be beneficial or detrimental to a living being’s longterm experience, and/or liberation. For now, however, it is enough to recognize that according to a Mahāyāna understanding of the twelve links, the six sensory fields themselves are also projected on the basis of tendencies from a previous lifetime, and could be seen as the natural unfolding, or display, of the resultant consciousness described in the third link.

We have reached the point in the twelve links where, in the human realm, at least, a new baby is about to be born. Could it have any idea where it or the world it is about to “enter” came from? Who would imagine it all to be no more than a manifestation of consciousness propelled by former deeds?

6. Contact

A baby touches the placental fluid and feels warmth. A mother’s movement presses on its head and it feels discomfort. Contact has taken place. Tsongkhapa defines it as follows:⁹⁸

Once the triad of the object, the sense faculty, and the consciousness have come together,⁹⁹ objects are determined to be pleasant, unpleasant, and something in-between. Where it is stated, “Due to the condition of the six sensory fields,” this also signifies both the objects and the consciousnesses.

That is, Tsongkhapa suggests that the six sensory fields should be expanded to include what are elsewhere known as the eighteen domains (*kḥams*, Skt. *dhātu*), including the interaction of an object, a power, and the consciousness that receives that sensory or mental data *as* the qualia of an experience unique to each of the senses. But this link does not only include the raw, preconceptual, sensory experience. Tsongkhapa indicates that as soon as anything is transmitted through the senses, a basic discriminatory action enters in, which identifies the sensory contact as something attractive, unattractive, or neutral.

⁹⁸ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 163a6-163b1 (357-8).

ཡུལ་དབང་རྣམ་ཤེས་གསུམ་འདུས་ནས་ཡུལ་ཡིད་དུ་འོང་མི་འོང་བར་མ་གསུམ་ཡོངས་སུ་གཅོད་པ་ལྟེ། སྒྲིམ་ཆེད་བྱུག་གི་རྒྱུན་གྱིས་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་ནི་ཡུལ་དབང་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱང་མཆོད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

⁹⁹ It should be noted here that the Tibetan word for coming together, “*dus pa*,” is the same as the word used to translate the Sanskrit, Guhyasamāja (*gsang ba ’dus pa*), as in the Secret Gathering, Assembly, or Collection. Since the entire Guhyasamāja practice is based on the purification of the interaction between sense, object, and consciousness, it is no coincidence that it is this very “coming together,” in the form of contact, at the midpoint of the twelve links, that must ultimately be transformed by the “Secret Gathering.”

7. Feeling

Although an experience of pleasantness or unpleasantness was said to arise instantaneously upon contact, a separate step is distinguished at which that sensory awareness gives rise to the actual mental function of feeling, whether in the aspect of happiness, suffering, or equanimity. Tsongkhapa says that this feeling “follows congruently upon” the determination of the type of contact encountered, i.e., whether it was with an object that had the property of being pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral in the first place. But here is where one might recall that in the Mind-Only presentation, both the object and the sense power – as well as the consciousness – are all said to have arisen from the *same seed* in the foundation consciousness, on the basis of prior karmic action. So where did the image of pleasantness, and so forth, come from? Could it be nothing more than a replication of the “image” traced in one’s own mindstream when a past action triggered “pleasantness” in the mind of someone else? This, after all, is what the notion of a “trace” coming to ripening would imply.

8. Craving

Tsongkhapa explains:¹⁰⁰

As for craving: It is the craving not to be separated from a feeling of happiness, and to be separated from suffering. As for the statement, “Due to the condition of feeling, craving arises”: When gathered together with ignorance, the condition of contact produces craving, but if there is no ignorance, feeling may come, but craving will not arise. In such a case, contact is the experience of the objective field and feeling is the arisen, or ripened, experience. If these two are complete, then it is “complete in all experience.”

This last is a technical phrase that also refers to the *sambhogakāya* (*longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku*) of a Buddha in the Mahāyāna presentations, including those connected to the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. Across most Indian and Tibetan interpretations of the works attributed to Maitreya, it is accepted that a Buddha continues to have *experience*, and specifically does experience the ripening of the two collections of merit and wisdom, the former of which is said to produce the limitless enjoyments of a “Buddha field,” or what might be envisioned in Euro-American language as a “paradise.” Thus even at this juncture, Tsongkhapa is pointing out that there is a way to experience objects free of the affliction of craving, if and only if one is free of ignorance. This is a philosophical doorway through which one may posit a different kind of joy – which will not perpetuate

¹⁰⁰ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 163b2-3 (358).

སྲིད་པ་ནི། ཚོར་བ་བདེ་བ་ལ་མི་འབྲུག་པ་དང་སྦྱག་བསྐྱེད་ལ་འབྲུག་པར་སྲིད་པ་འོ། །ཚོར་བའི་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་སྲིད་པ་སྦྱེ་བར་གསུངས་པ་ནི་མ་དག་པའི་འདུས་ཏེ་རེག་པའི་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་སྲིད་པ་བསྦྱང་གྱི། མ་དག་པ་མེད་ན་ནི་ཚོར་བ་ཡོང་ཁྱེད་སྲིད་པ་མི་སྦྱེ་འོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་རེག་པ་ནི་ཡུལ་གྱི་འོངས་སྦྱོང་དང་། ཚོར་བ་ནི་སྦྱེ་བའམ་ན་མ་སྦྱིན་གྱི་འོངས་སྦྱོང་ཡིན་པས་དེ་གཉིས་ཇོགས་པ་ན་འོངས་སྦྱོང་ཇོགས་པ་ཡིན་འོ།

a cycle of suffering – and it is foundational for practices of Buddhist tantra.

9. Appropriation

If ignorance remains in play, however, the craving will coagulate or intensify into one or more of four kinds of grasping, or, more literally “close appropriation” (*nye bar len pa*, Skt. *upādāna*). Tsongkhapa writes that grasping towards four types of objects constitutes the four types of close appropriation, namely:¹⁰¹ (1) that which yearns for the desirable objects of the senses; (2) that which holds on to harmful views, such as believing in an eternal self, or else in a self that will cease altogether at death; believing one’s own mistaken views to be supreme; believing certain ascetical practices to lead to liberation in themselves; or “getting things backwards” (*log lta*) by actively disparaging the ideas of past and future lives, karma and its results, and so on, or else holding that the “Powerful Lord or Primal One, and so on, are the cause of wanderers”; (3) that which aspires to bad morality or harmful ascetical practices based on a mistaken view of them, and (4) that which looks upon the previously appropriated heaps – which are both destructible, and a mere collection of parts – and thinks that these are inherently “I” and “mine.”¹⁰²

This horde of attitudes, which Tsongkhapa follows his tradition in considering to be fundamentally damaging to one’s mental continuum, gather momentum over the course of a lifetime, until the moment of death. Though the connection between links nine and ten can happen in any moment, it is considered the last moments of consciousness within a particular lifetime that are most crucial for determining the type of seed that will break open to project the consciousness of the next life.

10. Existence

Tsongkhapa states that this link is a case where a “cause is being given the name of its result,” hence it does *not* yet refer to the new life within cyclic existence (*srid pa*), but to its immediate cause. Tsongkhapa says that it is the point at which “the tendencies of karma infused into the consciousness by previous traces are triggered by craving and appropriation, and gain a powerful inner force to lead into another existence later on.”¹⁰³

11. Birth and 12. Aging and Death

Birth is essentially the same as the resultant consciousness in the second half of the third link, i.e., “the consciousness that first crosses the border into any one of the four places of

¹⁰¹ See *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 152a5-152b4 (335-336).

¹⁰² See Appendix Four (178-181), and Chapter Six, “A Mere ‘I,’” for further analysis of this “view of the destructible collection,” or “destructible view.”

¹⁰³ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 163b6 (358):

ལྷན་གྱི་འདྲ་བྱེད་གྱིས་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལ་ལས་གྱི་བག་ཆགས་བསྐྱོས་པ་སྤྱོད་ལོན་གྱིས་གསོས་བཏབ་པས་ཡང་སྤྱི་བྱི་མ་འདྲེན་པ་ལ་མཐུ་ཅན་དུ་གྱུར་པ་སྟེ། རྒྱུ་ལ་འབྲས་བུ་འི་མིང་གིས་བཏགས་པ་ལོ།

birth.”¹⁰⁴ Tsongkhapa defines aging simply as what happens when “the heaps ripen and become different,” and death is what happens when “the similarity of type within the heaps is cast off.”¹⁰⁵ That is, though Tsongkhapa would assert that the heaps are never *exactly* the same from one instant to the next throughout the entire course of a lifetime, he does of course acknowledge that there is a general continuity, not only of causal chains, but also of what we would commonly call “identity.” Thus aging is the change that occurs as the “fruit” manifested by a certain type of body and mind gradually ripens – or matures – and death is what happens when that stream of heaps is relinquished entirely, even though, given the triggering of a previous set of karmic traces at link ten, the causal continuum would go on, projecting yet a new life.

Interlocking Cycles

It may be obvious by now that – despite popular psychological interpretations to the contrary – all twelve links could never be completed in a single lifetime. Tsongkhapa specifies that for even a single round of “arising in reliance and relationship” to take place requires at least two and at most three lifetimes: one for the first three “projecting links” (*’phen pa’i yan lag*) to gather the requisite karmic traces, one for the three “actualizing links” (*mngon par ’grub par byed pa’i yan lag*) of craving, appropriation, and existence to trigger the tendencies, and one for the “actualized links” (*mngon par grub pa’i yan lag*) of birth and aging/death to appear as their result. Tsongkhapa says that when considering a single cycle of karmic action and ripening, the “projected links” (*’phangs pa’i yan lag*) of name and form through feeling should be subsumed under the same lifetime as the actualized links of birth through death, in which case the sequence of the twelve links would look more like: 1-3a . . . 8-10 . . . 11-12 (a.k.a. 3b-7).

Though Tsongkhapa acknowledges that many lifetimes might intervene between the time at which certain traces are collected and their tendencies deposited, and the later time when they would ripen into a lifetime of birth, aging, and death, he points out that these intervening lifetimes would actually constitute different cycles of dependent origination. That is, though the cycle turns round and round, the general circumstances of any given lifetime would have to be the result of a distinct set of karmic seeds planted in another specific lifetime in the past, and though countless eons may intervene between the creation of traces during the projecting links and the ripening of a resultant consciousness and its associated body, mind, and experiences in the projected links, from the moment that tendencies are triggered by the actualizing links (8-10) they must be actualized as birth, aging and death in the very next lifetime. It also means that the feeling of link seven, which might produce the craving of link eight within a matter of seconds,

¹⁰⁴ According to Abhidharma literature, these are birth from an egg, birth from a womb, birth from warmth and moisture, and “miraculous” or spontaneous birth, in which a being appears in a realm already fully-formed.

¹⁰⁵ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 164a1 (359).

must actually have been the *result* of karmic seeds planted and triggered during an entirely different cycle of interdependence, even as it serves as an actualizing link and *cause* within a current cycle.¹⁰⁶

At minimum, a cycle can be completed in two lifetimes, when seeds are planted through traces and awareness of those traces, then nourished and catalyzed by craving, appropriation, and existence in the same lifespan, and then actualized as a ripened consciousness, along with its heaps, in the very next life. Though in the course of a lifetime there may also be karmic tendencies in the form of “congruent causes” (*rgyu mthun*) that bring their results in various individual tendencies and experiences that do not necessarily belong to the very same cycle of karmic cause and effect as the overall “ripened result” that turned into the consciousness, heaps, and realm of existence into which one was born, it also seems that the catapulting karma (*'phen byed kyi las*) does limit the other types of seeds that will have opportunity to express their results during that lifetime.

Tsongkhapa quotes Nāgārjuna's *Verses on the Essence of Dependent Arising* (*rten 'brel snying po*, Skt. *Pratītyasamutpāda-hṛdaya-kārikā*) to specify how the twelve links can be divided among the first two of the four realities seen by āryas (*'phags pa'i bden bzhi*). Thus ignorance, craving, and appropriation are considered mental afflictions (*nyon mongs*, Skt. *kleśa*), while traces and the tenth link of “existence” are karma (in its immature and mature stages, respectively), together making up the reality of the source (*kun 'byung bden pa*, Skt. *samudaya-satya*). The remaining seven (consciousness through feeling, plus birth and aging/death) are the reality of suffering (*sdug bsngal bden pa*, Skt. *duḥkha-satya*), considered from different points of view: in the sense of how they will turn into suffering as the heaps mature, and also how they are already suffering, in the sense of the explicit pain of birth, aging, and death in themselves.¹⁰⁷ Thus at least half of “reality” is covered, as it were, by the twelve links as an explanation for how things arise. But do the twelve links explain the suffering side of reality *comprehensively*?

The fact that this very short text attributed to Nāgārjuna, should be one of Tsongkhapa's main sources in this section on the twelve links is significant for our earlier question regarding the degree to which Tsongkhapa's use of the terms for dependent

¹⁰⁶ See *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 164a2-4 (359), where Tsongkhapa quotes the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* for the divisions in “projecting” and “projected,” “actualizing” and “actualized,” 165b6-166a5 (362-363) for the discussion of how many lifetimes it takes to complete a cycle, and 165a1-2 (361) for how feeling and craving would belong to distinct cycles.

¹⁰⁷ See *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 165b4-5 (362) and Nāgārjuna, *Pratītyasamutpāda-hṛdaya-kārikā*, *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i snying po'i tshig le'ur byas pa*, sde dge bstan 'gyur, dbu ma, vol. *tsa*, Toh. 3836, 146b:

The first, the eight, and the ninth are affliction

the second and tenth are karma

while the remaining seven are suffering.

དང་ཐོ་བརྒྱུད་དང་དགུ་ཉེན་མོངས། །གཉིས་དང་བརྒྱུ་ལས་ཡིན་ཏེ། །ལྷག་མ་བདུན་ཡང་སྦྱག་བསྐྱུ་ཡིན།

relationship and dependent arising – *rten 'brel* and *rten 'byung* – throughout his discussions of Middle Way philosophy, may or may not *always* relate to the twelve links in particular. At the beginning of Nāgārjuna's *Root Verses on Incisive Wisdom* (*rtsa ba'i shes rab*, as Tibetans abbreviate *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*), he bows down to the “sacred proclamations of the fully enlightened Buddha, which have revealed that anything arisen in reliance and relationship” is free of the eight extremes – of stopping or starting, or being cut off or lasting forever, of coming or going, of being identical or different – and therefore is “peace” (or *nirvāṇa*), and has “pacified all elaboration.”¹⁰⁸ In the famous twenty-fourth chapter, Nāgārjuna declares:¹⁰⁹

Whatever arises in reliance and relationship, that we explain to be emptiness.

This is labeled in dependence: That itself is the middle way.

Since there does not exist even a single thing that does not arise in dependence, so there does not exist even a single thing that is not empty.

In the penultimate chapter of the same *Root Text*, “Investigation Twenty-Six,” Nāgārjuna devotes his analysis finally to the “twelve links of existence” (*srid pa'i yan lag bcu gnyis*), as he calls them there. The themes of the chapters of the *Root Text* have of course closely paralleled the themes of the twelve links all along: with questions of causes and conditions, agent and action, desire and rebirth, past and future, traces, contact, afflictions, karma, and so on. But my question remains: Is the scope of “dependent origination” in general ever broader than the scope of what has arisen specifically through what the Buddha taught as the “twelve links of existence,” or the “wheel of existence” (*srid pa'i 'khor lo*)? That is, when Nāgārjuna himself used the word *pratītyasamutpāda* in writing his *Verses on the Essence of Dependent Arising*, which is explicitly and solely a treatise on the twelve links, and when he used the same crucial phrase throughout the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, did he always have the same scope of referent in mind?

My working hypothesis is as follows: When Nāgārjuna, or Tsongkhapa following after him, is speaking in terms of the first two of the four realities, referring to the cycle of suffering and its causes, then indeed it would seem that since every aspect of suffering life is meant to be explained in some way within the scope of the twelve links, then these and “dependent arising” in general are most likely equivalent sets. “*Whatever arises in reliance and relationship, that we explain to be emptiness.*” If one were then to interpret

¹⁰⁸ Nāgārjuna, *Incisive Wisdom: Root Verses on the Middle Way*, *Prajñā-nāma-mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, *dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab*, sde dge bstan 'gyur, dbu ma, vol. tsa, Toh. 3824, 1b2-3.

གཞི་གཞི་ཅིང་འབྱུང་བ་ལྟར་ལྟར་། འགག་པ་མེད་པ་སྤྱུ་མེད་པ་། ཆད་པ་མེད་པ་རྟག་མེད་པ་། འོང་བ་མེད་པ་འགོ་མེད་པ་། ཐང་དང་དོན་མེད་དོན་གཅིག་མེད་པ་། སྤྱོད་པ་ཉེར་ཞི་ཞི་བསྟན་པ་། རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་ཀྱས་སྤྱོད་པ་ཀྱི། དམ་པ་དེ་ལ་བྱུག་འཆལ་ལོ།

¹⁰⁹ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba'i shes rab*), Toh. 3824, 15a6-7 (24:18-19):

རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྱུང་བ་ལྟར་ལྟར་། དེ་ནི་སྤྱོད་པ་ཉེར་བྱ་བ་ལས། དེ་ནི་བརྟན་ནས་གདགས་པ་སྤྱུ། དེ་ཉིད་དབྱ་མའི་ལས་ཡིན་ནོ། གང་གིས་རྟེན་འབྱུང་མ་ཡིན་པའི། རྫོགས་འགའ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི། དེ་གིས་སྤྱོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི། རྫོགས་འགའ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

this pivotal sentence specifically in the context of the twelve links, and the way in which they – quite literally – *revolve* around the interrelationship between ignorance, the planting of karmic traces (i.e., *saṃskāras*), and their ripening into a body and mind that experiences continual suffering due to misunderstanding reality, then it must carry a significance that many non-Tibetan philosophical interpretations of Nāgārjuna have tended to leave aside.

That is, if one simply takes “dependent origination” to refer to the myriad interactions of cause and effect, agent and action, past and future, such as we observe them in our ordinary experience, it may well be true that these surface interactions can be analyzed – and successfully deconstructed – according to Nāgārjuna’s arguments. But has one appreciated the full weight of the specific types of deeply hidden causes and temporally-protracted results that Nāgārjuna is clearly referring to within the context of his uniquely Buddhist *milieu*: namely, “traces” planted by “actions” long “past” which nonetheless give rise to their “results” as the very “heaps” and “sensory fields” by which living experience is said to take place “now”?¹¹⁰ After all, it is Nāgārjuna who explained the workings of karma in detail in his *Letter to a King*, represented most famously by the verse:¹¹¹

From giving comes enjoyment of wealth, from discipline comes happiness
 From patience comes radiant beauty, and from effort comes glory
 From meditative equipoise comes peace, from intelligence comes freedom,
 And from a heart of love you accomplish all things.

Furthermore, how might Nāgārjuna’s declaration of the “emptiness” of such deep causal interactions – as being the only metaphysical status by which they could ever actually come about – point even more emphatically to the power of karmic actions and predispositions to shape individuals’ varying experiences of a world that is also “empty” of any nature of its own?

If an experienced world has no nature, *and* if the process of seed-planting and ripening also has no nature, then this indeed might open the door for complete transformation of the cycle of suffering to be possible. This certainly seems to be Nāgārjuna’s point when he says again and again that it is only *because* all these things are empty that meditation, realization, the fruits of the path, liberation and *nirvāṇa* are possible. But this also leads me to conjecture that his overall referent for

¹¹⁰ The quotation marks are intended to emphasize the fact that all of these are nothing more than labels, applied in dependence, and therefore empty, yet still designating constellations of phenomena that appear to function universally. There is a far more profound significance to the process of “labeling,” however, which we shall explore extensively below.

¹¹¹ *The Letter to a King: The Garland of Precious Jewels (Rājaparīkathā ratnamālī)* (Sherig Parkhang, Dharamsala, 1999 print edition 63):

སྤྱན་པས་ཡོངས་སྤྱོད་ཁྱིམ་བདེ། །བཟོད་པས་མདངས་ལྗན་བཙུན་པས་བརྩེད། །བསམ་གཏན་གྱིས་ཞི་སྒྲོལ་པས་གྲོལ། །སྤྱད་བཅེ་བས་ཞི་དོན་ཀུན་ལྔུལ།

pratītyasamutpāda must in the end be broader than the wheel of suffering existence alone. That is, if meditation, being a changing process that uses a mind that was itself produced the twelve links, is ever to become a *cause* for liberation, then it should be able to bring about, eventually, a caused and resultant state that is not itself part of the self-perpetuating cycle. For example, Nāgārjuna states ironically,¹¹²

According to you, it follows that Buddhas do not depend on enlightenment
and according to you, enlightenment does not depend on Buddhas.

With your “inherent nature” as it is, whoever is not a Buddha
might strive at the activities of enlightenment – for the sake of enlightenment –
but could never achieve enlightenment.

Buddhist teaching depends on the idea that one can engage in activities that will, rather than becoming causes for future suffering, become causes and conditions for an everlasting state of enlightenment itself. Yet here, by using the same root word for “dependence” (*brten pa*, Skt. *pratītya*), while referring to the very relationship between the name of a “Buddha” and the name for the resultant state of enlightenment (*byang chub*, Skt. *bodhi*), Nāgārjuna clearly indicates an example of “dependent arising,” in the sense of dependent designation, entirely subsumed in the realm beyond suffering, within the same pair of verses in which he also indicates an example of “dependent arising,” in the sense of activities bringing results, that would work directly to bridge the gap between suffering existence and that which is utterly beyond it. Yet Nāgārjuna is also the one who, in the very next chapter, on *nirvāṇa*, states that,¹¹³

Between the cycle of suffering and “gone beyond grief”¹¹⁴
there is not the slightest distinction at all.

He means this, of course, in the sense that both are equally empty of inherent nature, and therefore no “thing” – or world – is either *samsāra* or *nirvāṇa* from its own side. But could it also imply that there is nothing about the process at the heart of the twelve links – namely the planting of seeds to bring about worlds and experiences – which is inherently productive of suffering? Tsongkhapa has already suggested this with his reference to the glorified enjoyment body of a Buddha as the alternative to the link of feeling, when ignorance is not present. But what would such transformation entail? Precisely what is it about all causal processes, whether within the cycle or beyond it, that, being empty, enables them to work? For most people in non-Tibetan cultures, just saying things are

¹¹² Nāgārjuna, *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba'i shes rab*), Toh. 3824, 15b6-7 (vv. 24:31-32):
ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་སངས་རྒྱུ་བྱང་ཆུབ་ལ། མ་བརྟེན་པར་ཡང་ཐལ་བར་འགྱུར། ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་བྱང་ཆུབ་སངས་རྒྱུ་ལ། མ་བརྟེན་པར་ཡང་ཐལ་བར་འགྱུར། ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་ར་
ང་བཞེན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ནི། སངས་རྒྱུ་མེན་པ་གང་ཡིན་དེས། བྱང་ཆུབ་སྤྱོད་ལ་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཕྱིར། བཅའ་ཁྲུང་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཐོབ་མི་འགྱུར།

¹¹³ Nāgārjuna, *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba'i shes rab*), Toh. 3824, 17a1-2:
འཁོར་བ་ལྷ་པོ་འདས་པ་ལས། ཁྱད་པར་རྩང་ཐད་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། ལྷ་པོ་འདས་པ་འཁོར་བ་ལས། ཁྱད་པར་རྩང་ཐད་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན།

¹¹⁴ My translation here, of course, is based upon the Tibetan descriptive rendering of the word *nirvāṇa*, and not upon the Sanskrit denotative meaning of being “extinguished.”

“merely labeled” would not seem to hold the kind of motivating power it would take to drive someone to commit to life-transforming practices requiring thousands of hours in meditation and ritual performances. “Hey, why not just *call* it something different? But you still die anyway. . .” The notion of “mere labeling” can seem trivially superficial within a Euro-American culture that still inherits the long-term erosion of a theologically oriented realist metaphysics by philosophical nominalism and eventually by scientific materialism.

I would posit that the “dependent designation” (*brten nas gdags pa*, Skt. *prajñaptirupādāya*) of Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way – and Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of it – is far more deeply integrated with the Mind-Only school’s metaphysically rich theories of karmic seeds, tendencies, and the primordially pure seed for enlightenment than many have assumed, and that this thick cosmological undercurrent to the Middle Way deconstructive debate is indispensable to Tsongkhapa’s understanding of how and why tantric practice would work, taking the Guhyasamāja as our example. Before returning to Tsongkhapa’s commentary on Nāgabuddhi’s *Exposition*, then, we must examine more fully the nature of ignorance, of causes and conditions, and of seeds, from Tsongkhapa’s interpretations of the fourth century Honorable Brothers: Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.

Breaking the Cycle

We have already seen Tsongkhapa refer to the fact that if ignorance is not present at the instance of either a desirable or undesirable feeling at link seven, then craving will not arise. But why should it be ignorance that makes one want to get away from something unpleasant? Why should it be a misperception that makes one not want to be separated from something that brings happiness? Are these not natural and healthy instincts? Does Buddhism say it is wrong for people to want to be happy? Of course not, but this perception of Buddhist “detachment” seems to hang on tenaciously in some popular imaginings of Buddhist thought.

To understand an answer from Tsongkhapa’s point of view, however, we would need to delve more deeply into his explanation of ignorance as the first link. Earlier in the *Great Steps of the Path*, when setting forth the primary mental afflictions one by one, Tsongkhapa defines ignorance as follows:¹¹⁵

Ignorance is that afflicted state of not knowing, due to a mind that is unclear about the nature of the four realities, karma and its results, and the Rare and Supreme Ones [i.e., the Three Jewels].

Thus, in this context, Tsongkhapa clearly expresses his opinion as to which version of “not-knowing” he thinks is correct, namely, whether it is a mere confusion, or an active

¹¹⁵ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 152a2-3 (335):

མ་རིག་པ་ནི། བདེན་བཞི་དང་ལས་འབྲས་དང་དགོན་མཆོག་གི་རང་བཞིན་ལ་སྒྲོ་མི་གསལ་བས་མི་ཤེས་པའི་ཉན་མོངས་ཅན་ནི།

“mis-knowing.” It will be a salient feature of his Middle Way interpretation that ignorance must be held to be an *afflictive* mental state, and not merely an inert fogginess. Here, also, Tsongkhapa is more specific as to what it is about reality that ignorance misunderstands. Rather than focusing only on not understanding the lack of self to a person, here he essentially says that ignorance means being unclear about the fundamental teachings of Buddhism – and that this itself is a damaging and afflicted state.

Leaving aside for now the questions of comparative religion raised by this statement, let us ask, practically speaking: What would it mean for *this* kind of ignorance to be present, at the moment that a karmic trace is about to be drawn, connected to an action about to be done with craving in response to a feeling? First of all, it implies that a person who has no understanding of, much less inclination for, the idea of a liberation from and transcendence of our current world of experience (represented here by the Realities of Cessation and the Path, as well as the very idea of a *buddha*, *dharma*, and *sangha*), would seem to have no reason to consider any ultimate goal beyond the call of natural desires and aversions, and the instinct to take care of “me” and “mine” – even if compassion for humans and animals has been developed to the point where “me” includes family, friends, neighbors, etc., and “desires” include careful consideration of long-term goals, ramifications, and so on. But if a person is already thinking in terms of the ramifications of his or her actions, and this consideration has the capacity to curb the instinct to grab or steal, lie, or harm another life, I would suggest that implicitly this person is already thinking in terms of actions and their results, even if only from an external perspective, and not from the point of view of inner seeds and future births.

From the inner perspective, however, Tsongkhapa elaborates on how ignorance about karma and its results in the Buddhist sense would relate to turning the wheel of existence:¹¹⁶

In this way, one deposits tendencies of negative karma in the consciousness, due to the traces of non-virtue motivated by an ignorance that is confused about karma and its results. These are sufficient to actualize the links from consciousness through feeling at the time of the result in one of the three realms of misery. When these are triggered over and over again by craving and appropriation, the tendencies of karma gain inner force, and actualize birth, aging, and the rest, in a later life of misery.

¹¹⁶ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 165a5-6-165b1 (361-362).

དེ་ལྟར་ན་ལས་འབྲས་ལ་སྒྲིངས་པའི་མ་དེག་པས་ཀྱན་ནས་བསྐྱངས་པའི་མི་དགེ་བའི་འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱིས་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལ་ལས་ངན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་བཞག་ནས། ངན་སྲིད་གསུམ་གྱི་འབྲས་དུས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ནས་ཚོར་བའི་བར་འབྲུབ་བྱུང་དུ་བྱས་པ་དེ། སྲིད་ལེན་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ཡང་ཡང་གསོས་བཏབ་པས་ལས་ཀྱི་བག་ཆགས་མཐུ་ཅན་དུ་གྱུར་ནས་བྱི་མ་ངན་འཁོར་སྐྱེ་ན་སོགས་འབྲུབ་ལ།

If in the moment one were about to follow instinctive desires – to the point that one’s action would do harm to someone else – what would happen if one knew well, and understood deeply, the idea of karma and its results? Would that be enough to create the restraint necessary to avoid the negative action, and therefore break the cycle for even one instant, stopping oneself from tracing the traces that could only lead to seeing more things one wanted to be separated from, rather than more of the things one naturally desired? Furthermore, when experiencing a pleasant feeling, while understanding karmic theory well, would the newly trained impulse be to wonder what kind of beneficial action in the past created the trace that is now expressing itself as this pleasant feeling, rather than to obsess about how to get more of the feeling in the short term, regardless of the means?

Though Tsongkhapa does not go into detail here, the implication that can be drawn from his earlier extensive treatment of karmic results and correlations is that if someone has been taking karmic theory very seriously, that understanding alone could become a restraining force, as well as a motivation to focus one’s energies more and more on cultivating benefit for others, rather than seeking only what instinct wants. That is, an inner understanding that future pleasant feelings could only be the result of past and present virtuous actions, might well be enough motivation to engage more and more in such actions. Meanwhile, “consuming” the results of good karma blindly, without actively thinking about how to create more virtuous seeds for the future, would be another expression of the ignorance that fails to understand karma and its results down to the fine details. To live by karmic theory, however, would require that one care deeply about the future continuation of a “me” that would experience those results, even in a future lifetime, when the “person” is nonetheless different. The cultivation of such a concern would in turn require a well-honed understanding and acceptance of the teachings regarding the reality of suffering and the reality of the path – as encompassed by the twelve links – so that at a certain point there would be no question in one’s mind about the inevitability of future rebirth while still in the cycle. Furthermore, one would probably have little reason to accept fully the teachings of the twelve links if one did not have some sincere faith that they were taught by someone who knew what he was talking about in a cosmic sense – i.e., a Buddha who had seen such things directly. Thus it begins to make sense, at least, why “the four realities, karma and its results, and the Three Jewels” would fit together so tightly in a definition of what it would be that the “ignorance” which does not plan well for future lives has failed to understand clearly.

Conversely, it becomes feasible to see how an erosion of basic ignorance – defined this way – could at least lessen the production of negatively charged traces within one’s mind, on a daily basis. But could it ever stop the cycle? Would “doing good deeds and avoiding bad ones” be enough to end suffering altogether?

Tsongkhapa goes on to explain that, “one deposits the tendencies of excellent karma in the consciousness, due to the traces of merit from ethical discipline, and so on, encompassed by the desire realm – and with unwavering traces from meditative stillness, and so on, as encompassed by the upper two realms – all motivated by an ignorance that is confused about the meaning of lacking a self.”¹¹⁷ When activated by craving, and so on, these traces in turn produce the links from consciousness through feeling in the desire realms of happiness, as well as in the upper realms of the gods. Such is the motivation of a person of “lesser capacity” within the “Steps of the Path” system, where the practitioner initially learns to cultivate beneficial causes for future lives, both by restraining oneself from non-virtue and also exerting oneself in benefitting others. Note, however, that although Tsongkhapa describes genuinely virtuous activities, with beautiful and long-lasting results, the primary modifier of the sentence is that they are “motivated by an ignorance . . .” As long as one misunderstands reality, things cannot turn out well indefinitely.

To stop the cycle altogether, then, one would have to address directly the second aspect of ignorance as defined at the first link, namely confusion about the nature of reality. Echoing his initial statement about the certainty of karma, Tsongkhapa here praises the Buddha’s teaching on “how the wheel of existence is turned by way of the twelve links” for being:¹¹⁸

. . . that which destroys the unbearable darkness of confusion – the root of all decay; *that which clears away every backwards view that holds outer or inner traces to spring up without a cause, or from a cause that is not congruent with them*; and that cherished jewel from the treasure-chest of the Victors’ Speech, which urges the mind towards a path of freedom by inciting the fierce disgust that comes from becoming aware of the definition of the cycle just as it is.

By now we are in a better position to understand what a non-congruent cause (*rgyu mi mthun pa*) would imply, namely, that an inner or outer phenomenon could ever arise without having unfolded from a stream of consciousness, based on the ripening or coming to maturation of karmic *traces of a similar type*.¹¹⁹ That is, through his praise of

¹¹⁷ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 165b1-3 (362).

ཡང་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་སྒྲིབ་པའི་མ་ཐོག་པས་ཀླན་ནས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་འདོད་ཁམས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་སོགས་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱི་འདུ་བྱེད་དང་།
ཁམས་གོང་མས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཞི་གནས་བསྐྱོམ་པ་སོགས་མི་གཡོ་བའི་འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱིས་ནམ་ཤེས་ལ་ལས་བཟང་པོའི་བག་ཆགས་བཞག་ནས།

¹¹⁸ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 167a4-6 (365). Italics added.

རྒྱད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྩ་བ་སྒྲིབ་པའི་སྤྱན་པ་མི་བཟང་བ་འཛོམས་པར་བྱེད་པ། རྒྱ་མེད་པ་དང་རྒྱ་མི་མཐུན་པའི་རྒྱ་ལས། ཕྱི་ནང་གི་འདུ་བྱེད་ནམས་འབྱུང་བར་འ
ཇོན་པའི་ལོག་པར་ལྷ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་སེལ་བ། རྒྱལ་བའི་གསུང་གི་མཛོད་ཀྱི་གཅེས་པའི་རྩོམ་པ་འཁོར་བའི་མཚན་ཉིད་རི་ལྷ་བ་བཞེན་རིག་ནས་སྦྱོལ་སྤྱོད་པ།
པོས་ཐར་པའི་ལམ་ལ་ཡིད་བསྐྱེད་པ། སྤར་དེ་ལྟར་གོམས་པ་ནམས་ལ་འཕགས་པའི་གོ་འཕང་འཛོམ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་སད་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ཐབས་དམ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

¹¹⁹ When referring to outer and inner results, here, Tsongkhapa uses the same word as that which we have been translating “traces,” namely, ‘*du byed*, but I believe it must be in the general sense of a conditioned

the Buddha's teaching on the twelve links, further suggesting that these were also his primary referent when Tsongkhapa wrote his seminal *Praise of Dependent Origination*, Tsongkhapa seems to assert that the complex interactions of these twelve provide an explanation for the arising of *all* phenomena within the cycle: both outer, as the shared physical world, and inner, as that subsumed by an individual's mental continuum. When Tsongkhapa glossed Nāgabuddhi's use of the phrase "by force of the stream of what arises in reliance and relationship" in reference to the start of the formation of an entirely new planetary system with no more than, "that is, the karma of living beings," it certainly seems he had no qualms about attributing the start of the whole of a physical universe to the cycle of the twelve links as its cause, above all to the links that Nāgārjuna defined to be "karma" – namely traces and existence.

Yet what would it mean to say that "everything" short of the enlightened side of reality is caused by karma? Could this ever be taken as a plausible cosmological theory for our own planet, especially when read in the context of a modern society where the momentum of scientific discovery continually uncovers details about our physical world that it seems no one could ever have dreamed up in ethical terms? Even in Tsongkhapa's own context, would it be an over-simplification to say that everything is "caused" by karma, just because Tsongkhapa repeatedly used the phrase "by the power of karma" in commenting upon an Abhidharma presentation of the formation of a world-system, or just because the second and tenth links of the wheel of existence seem to be so pivotal? What about mental afflictions, even ignorance itself: What causes these? Is that also karma? What about contributing conditions that enable seeds to ripen at a particular time? What about the outer elements? Is not even the Buddhist story much more complex than attributing everything to good and bad intentions and the deeds they motivate, i.e., roughly speaking, karma? After all, as Tsongkhapa wrote in commenting upon Śāntideva, "in no case at all is there a single condition that could have the capacity to produce all results."¹²⁰ Even if "karma" is acknowledged to be no more than an umbrella term that in fact refers to a wide variety of conditions, processes, transformations, stages, ripenings, appearances, reactions, and so on, still, in the context of Buddhist philosophy, it is sometimes counterproductive to reduce these to a single idea, since this might only feed our tendency to reify – or deify – what is in fact complex and interdependent into a supposedly simple, uniform "Cause."

Six Causes, Five Results, Four Conditions

To progress further in the precision of our inquiry, then, we must examine what would have stood in the background whenever Tsongkhapa referred to "causes" and "conditions" – his reference library, as it were, for such concepts. Once again, it is the

phenomenon, rather than a karmic trace, since he is referring precisely to the "backwards views" of those who do not accept the notion of karmic traces in the first place.

¹²⁰ See Chapter One, note 31, above.

Abhidharmakośa that remains his source for the general topic of causation, and the terms defined there run throughout his discourses on both Mind-Only and Middle Way thought, even if the views he expresses by employing those terms differ considerably at times from the Vaibhāṣika schools whose positions Vasubandhu was, for the most part, reporting in the *Abhidharmakośa*. Vasubandhu presents six types of causes as a side note to his statement regarding the production of impermanent things, namely, that “Whatever has neither causes nor conditions is not something that will produce, nor by starting have anything to create.” He goes on to enumerate.¹²¹

We assert the causes to come in six types:
the acting cause, the simultaneously-emergent
equal-share, linked by the same,
always-going, and the ripening cause.

I will rely here on the commentary of Gyalwa Gendun Drup (*rgyal ba dge 'dun grub*, 1391-1474, later known as the First Dalai Lama) for a basic understanding of these causes, leaving aside numerous points of subtle debate. I maintain the conjecture that even if Gyalwa Gendun Drup had not received instruction on the *Abhidharmakośa* directly from Tsongkhapa, still, the mode of his explanation would have reflected the first-generation teaching of Tsongkhapa's school of thought. To excerpt from the *Lamp on the Path to Freedom*:¹²²

¹²¹ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Toh. 4089, 5b6.7-6a1, Chapter Two.

རྒྱ་དང་རྒྱ་དག་མེད་པར་ནི། རྒྱེ་བས་བསྐྱེད་བྱ་སྐྱེད་བྱེད་མིན། ་་་ བྱེད་རྒྱ་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བ་དང་། རྒྱལ་མཉམ་མཚུངས་པར་ལྷན་པ་དང་། རྒྱུ་ཏུ་འགྲོ་དང་ནས་སྒྲིན་དང་། རྒྱ་ནི་ནས་བ་བྱ་ཏུ་འདོད།

¹²² Gyalwa Gendun Drup, *Lamp on the Path to Freedom, An Exegesis of the Abhidharmakośa* (*mngon pa mdzod kyi rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*), gsung 'bum vol. nga, 64a5-66b4. (This entire section continues to be a direct gloss on Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* verses, but for clarity's sake I will omit the italicization of glossed words and phrases in this case. Some italics are added for emphasis throughout.)

ཆོས་གཅིག་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཆེན་རང་ལས་གཞན་པའི་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཆོས་དེ་སྐྱེ་བ་ལ་གོགས་མི་བྱེད་པའི་ངོ་བོར་གནས་པས། བྱེད་རྒྱའི་རྒྱར་འཛིག་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན། རྒྱ་ལ་པོས་འཆེ་བར་མ་བྱས་པ་ལ་རྒྱལ་པོས་བདག་བདེ་བར་བྱས་སོ་ཞེས་བརྗོད་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། ་་་ གང་གི་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱའི་མཚན་ཉིད་ནི། གང་པན་རྒྱུན་འབྱས་བྱུང་བའི་སྒྲིན་ནས་པན་འདོགས་བྱེད་དོ། ་་་ ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བའི་འབྱུང་བ་བཞི་བཞིན་དང་། སེམས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་འཇུག་དང་སེམས་བཞིན་དང་། མཚན་ཉིད་སྐྱེ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་མཚན་གཞི་བཞིན་ནོ། ་་་ གསུམ་པ་སྐྱལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་ནི། འབྲས་བྱ་དང་རིགས་འདྲ་བའོ། རིགས་འདྲ་བའི་དོན་ཡང་དགོ་བ་ཐག་བཅས་དང་། ཐག་མེད་འདུས་བྱས་ནས་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་ནས་དང་། མ་བསྐྱེད་ལུང་མ་བསྐྱེད་ནས་སོ། རེས་ན་བྱང་པོ་ལྷ་པོ་དེ་སྐྱལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱའོ། ་་་ བཞི་པ་མཚུངས་ལྷན་གྱི་རྒྱ་ནི། སེམས་དག་དང་སེམས་བྱང་ཉེན་མཚུངས་ཅན་ནས་སོ། རེ་ན་སེམས་སེམས་བྱང་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱར་ཡང་བཤད། མཚུངས་ལྷན་གྱི་རྒྱར་ཡང་བཤད་ན། རྒྱ་པར་ཅི་ཡོད་ཅི་ན། པན་རྒྱུན་འབྲས་བྱར་གྲུར་པས། ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་དང་། མཚུངས་ལྷན་ལྷན་མཚུངས་པར་ལྷན་པའི་སྒྲིན་ནས་མཚུངས་ལྷན་གྱི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ནོ། གང་པར་ན། མགྲོན་པོ་ནས་པན་རྒྱུན་སྟོབས་བསྐྱེད་ནས་ལས་ཏུ་འགྲོ་བ་དང་། ཐས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་བྱ་བ་ལ་ཐུན་མོང་ཏུ་མོངས་སྐྱོད་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། རྒྱ་པ་རྒྱུ་འགྲོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་རྒྱ་ནི། ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་ནས་ཀྱི་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཡང་རང་དང་ས་གཅིག་པའི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་གྱི་རིགས་གཅིག་པ་མི་དགོས་སོ། ་་་ རྒྱུ་འགྲོའི་རྒྱ་ནི་རང་གི་འབྲས་བྱའི་ལྷན་བྱང་བ་ཞིག་དགོས་སོ། རྒྱལ་པ་ནས་སྒྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱ་ནི། མི་དགོ་བ་དང་དགོ་བ་ཐག་བཅས་ནས་ཁོ་ན་ཆོས་ཅན་ནས་སྒྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ནོ། རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་སྟོབས་དང་ལྷན་ཞིང་། སྐྱེད་པའི་རྒྱ་དང་བཅས་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར། དཔེར་ན། རྒྱ་དང་བཅས་པའི་ས་བོན་གྲང་མོ་བཞིན་ནོ། རྒྱུང་པ་བསྐྱེད་ནས་ཆོས་ཅན། རྒྱ་སྒྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། སྐྱེད་པའི་རྒྱ་དང་བཅས་པ་ཡིན་ཡང་། རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་སྟོབས་དང་མི་ལྷན་པའི་ཕྱིར། དཔེར་ན། རྒྱ་

“What is an *acting cause*?” When a thing starts, everything which is other than that thing, but remains without stopping that thing from starting, can be considered an “acting cause.” For example, it is like saying, “I was not harmed by the king, so the king made me happy.” . . .

As for the definition of a *simultaneously-emergent cause*, it refers to those things which mutually assist one another through becoming one another’s respective results. . . . It is (1) like the four elements that arise simultaneously [with the physical object which contains them], (2) like the mind and the functions following upon the mind, or (3) like the definition, starting, [stopping, and staying], and the thing defined [which possesses those characteristics]. . . .

As for the third, the *equal-share cause*, it belongs to the same class as its result. “The same class” means it can refer either to stained or unstained produced things that are virtuous, to afflicted things, and to those things that are non-obscuring and morally neutral. Thus the five heaps are equal-share causes. . . .

The fourth type is the *linked-to-the-same cause*. It refers to states of mind and the mental functions that share in the same basis [as those states of mind]. Suppose someone says, “But you have also explained mind and mental functions as simultaneously-emergent causes. If you now explain them as linked causes, what is the difference?” Insofar as they turn into a mutually shared result, they are simultaneously-emergent causes, and insofar as they share something that is the same, the five things that are linked are linked causes. For example, it is like a group of guests who, by mutually increasing their strength, go on their way together [i.e., the simultaneous cause], and in reliance on common food and such, enjoy the partaking [the linked cause].

The fifth is the cause known as *always-going*. It belongs to everything that is mentally afflicted, and it is the cause of whatever is on its own level, but it does not have to be of the same class. . . . We say that an always-going cause has to be something that happened before its own result.

The sixth is the *ripening cause*. Consider those things which are non-virtue, or only those virtuous things that are stained: They are ripening causes, because they have their own force, and they exist along with the moisture of craving. For example, they are like a viable seed that has moisture. Consider things which are morally neutral: They are not ripening causes, because although they do have the moisture of craving, they do not possess the force of their own essential nature. For example, they are like a wet, rotten seed. Consider all stainless things: They are not ripening causes, because although they possess the force of their own essential nature, they lack the moisture of craving. They are, for example, like a viable seed without moisture.

Examining these causes carefully, one will begin to realize that any single event in the course of a day could involve all six types of causes. Let us take as an example a simple,

དང་བཅས་པའི་ས་ལོན་རྒྱལ་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། །ཟག་མེད་ནམས་ཚོས་ཅན། ནམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རང་གི་ངོ་མོ་སྟོབས་དང་ལྷན་ཡང་སྲིད་པའི་ཆུན་དང་བྲལ་བའི་
ཕྱིར། དཔེར་ན་ཆུན་དང་བྲལ་བའི་ས་ལོན་གྲུང་མོ་བཞིན་ནོ།

but particularly vivid sensory experience, such as eating a piece of chocolate – or anything one finds suitably stimulating to focus one’s attention on the question: Where did this experience come from?

Everything that has ever taken place in the history of this universe is an **acting cause** (*byed rgyu*) for the experience, from the extinction of the dinosaurs, to the signing of the Declaration of Independence, to the harvesting of the cocoa beans from which the actual piece of chocolate was made. Because the eating of the chocolate is happening now, we can be certain that nothing stopped it. The concept of the acting cause is so broad as to seem almost meaningless in terms of what we usually think of as a “cause,” but it also points to the infinity of the web of interdependence. Indeed, if one really thought about it long enough, one might be able to draw the chain of connections quite clearly as to why the fact there are no dinosaurs on this planet now is somehow enabling one to experience this taste, and so on, for more and more “relevant” examples of acting causes. This idea also adds credence to why the notion of dispelling obstacles is considered to be so important in Tibetan Buddhist ritual practice. If something is present that has the power to prevent a thing from happening, then the intended event cannot occur, even if all the other necessary causes are in place. Thus it is not irrelevant to think of preventing potential obstacles as a key *cause* to the success of an endeavor, whether spiritual, political, or otherwise. The notion of acting causes could also shed light on why, in a Buddhist context, every person could be said to be responsible for everything that takes place in a universe. Insofar as one has not gained the capacity to prevent an evil act from happening, one stands within this ontology as a cause for that act, no matter how remote. Thus reflection on the limitless chain of causation, even in this outer sense, can be taken as an impetus for the “pure exalted thought” (*lhag bsam rnam dag*) in which an aspiring bodhisattva takes personal responsibility for bringing every living being to enlightenment. I have never seen a Tibetan text invoke the acting cause in just this way, but I think it bears consideration.

For ease of analysis, I will take the second and fourth, the **simultaneously-emergent cause** (*lhan cig 'byung ba'i rgyu*) and the **linked cause** (*mtshungs ldan gyi rgyu*) together, since the latter can be seen as a subset of the former. The key to simultaneously-emergent causes is that they are mutual: Between two things, each is the cause and result of the other, respectively. Thus the individual elemental properties “will emerge” (*'byung ba* – the word for the “elements” is the same as the future tense of the Tibetan verb “to arise” or “to emerge”) upon observation of a physical thing. These are simultaneous to the whole of the thing itself, but also cannot be detected in isolation, apart from the physical thing of which they are properties. On a hot day the melting piece of chocolate may be exhibiting a balanced mix of solid and liquid properties, along with noticeable heat. But its relative lightness would demonstrate its property of “air” – being “light and moving” – in comparison, say, with a piece of lead the same size.

The notion of a primary state of mind (*gtso sems*) and the mental functions that emerge from it (*sems byung* – the same verb, again, and the same as in the Tibetan term for dependent arising, *rtan byung*, which we have been analyzing all along) is fundamental to Buddhist psychology. Earlier in the *Abhidharmakośa*, Vasubandhu treated these in detail, but most relevant for our purposes is the fact he asserts that three commonly used terms for “mind” (*sems*, *vid*, and *rnam shes*, Skt. *citta*, *manas*, and *viññāna*) are in fact *don gcig*, or “have the same referent.” According to Gyalwa Gendun Drup’s commentary, Vasubandhu is also saying that mind and mental functions, insofar as they share in five things which are the same (*mtshungs pa*), also have the same referent, even though the connotation of the names is different.¹²³

In general, the primary mind refers to the basic state of conscious awareness in which one has the phenomenological experience of thoughts, perceptions, emotions, images, and so forth, arising moment to moment. The mental functions include everything from feeling and the basic capacity to discriminate between objects,¹²⁴ along with all the mental afflictions, such as jealousy and pride, up to virtuous mental states such as faith and moral conscientiousness; along with morally variable states such as sleepiness or regret, ascertaining states such as the ability to focus on an object, and so on. Thus a primary state of awareness is inextricably “linked” to any mental function that may arise in it, according to five things: (1) Both arise in relation to the same *sense faculty*; e.g., the primary consciousness of touch that feels the texture of the melting chocolate on the tongue may be associated with a mental affliction such as strong desire, or else a virtuous state of mind such as non-attachment. (2) Both this basic awareness and the accompanying thoughts and emotions arise in relation to the same *focal object*, namely the warm, viscous texture, and (3) in relation to the same appearing *aspect* of that object as it presents itself to consciousness. That is, the thoughts or emotions, whether virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral, are each fixed upon the same image that is

¹²³ Because considered so important, each of these mental functions is assigned a “heap” of its own. See Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Toh. 4089, 5a6, Chapter Two:

Mind, intellect, and consciousness
all mean the same; mind and mental arising
with basis, focus, and aspect, too,
all linked to the same, in five different ways.

མེས་སྤྱོད་ཡིད་དང་རྣམ་ཤེས་ནི། རྟོག་གཅིག་མེས་སྤྱོད་མེས་སྤྱོད་དང་། རྟོག་དང་དཔྱད་པ་དང་རྣམ་བཤས་དང་། མཚན་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་ལྔ་ལྟར་མེས་སྤྱོད་ལྟར་།

The corresponding commentary is in Gyalwa Gendun Drup, *mngon pa mdzod kyi rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, gsung ’bum vol. *nga*, 56a3-5.

¹²⁴ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Toh. 4089, 2b5-6, First Chapter:

Because they turn into the root of strife
because they are the cause of the cycle
and for the sake of the sequence:
out of all the mental functions
feelings and discrimination
are placed out on their own.

རྟོག་པའི་རྩ་བར་འགྱུར་པ་དང་། འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བྱིར་རིམ་རྩའི་བྱིར་། མེས་སྤྱོད་རྣམས་ལས་ཚོར་བ་དང་། འདུ་ཤེས་ལོགས་ཤིག་ཕུང་ལོར་གཞན་གྱི་ལས་ལྟར་།

simultaneously arising in the primary consciousness, which is no more than simply aware of that image. (4) All of these occur at the same *time*, and (5) all are of a single *substance*. This last is explained differently according to different schools (regarding its relationship to seeds and tendencies), but the main point for now is that what is linked is always mental, as opposed to consisting of physical form or any of the non-linked factors (*ldan min 'du byed*) that we shall treat below.

In the instant that the tongue makes contact with the chocolate, all of these primary mind/mental function pairs arise as mutually dependent causes of one another; in this way they are “simultaneously-emergent.” But we have explained this only in relation to texture; a distinct set of linked mental events might arise in relation to taste, or, on a cold day, in relation to the sound of the crunching, or of the saliva while chewing – or the distraction of someone else talking while one is trying to concentrate (*ting nge 'dzin* – another mental function) on the taste and smell of the chocolate. Either positive or negative mental states could arise in response to the voice, depending on one’s relationship to that person, what they are perceived to be saying, and so on. In each case, however, the five linked causal pairs would arise simultaneously in response to each stimulus that appears in consciousness. Verbally conceivable thoughts would also arise in the mental consciousness, and one could have a further reaction to these, and so it goes, all in the matter of a few seconds, or less. It is no wonder that according to some Abhidharma analyses there are said to be sixty-four discrete mental events in the time it takes to snap a finger – though this already counts sequential events, not the myriad simultaneous ones pertaining to the simultaneously-emergent cause.

Gyalwa Gendun Drup’s example of the group of guests as an illustration of the distinction between a simultaneously-emergent cause and a linked cause in relation to mind and mental functions seems to be one of emphasis: the simultaneous cause stresses the fact that each relies on the other (consciousness and mental function, respectively), while the linked cause stresses the fact that they mutually rely on a common object, understood from these five concomitant, or linked perspectives (*mtshungs ldan lnga*).

Turning to the **equal-share cause**, (*skal mnyam gyi rgyu*) we might say that if one were to reflect intensely on such philosophical ideas while eating the chocolate, and in so doing come to a new insight about the meaning of interdependence, this would be a result of having studied or listened to specific teachings on that topic in the past.¹²⁵ What is “equal” in the equal-share cause is the basic quality of virtue, non-virtue, or moral neutrality of the cause, which must be directly reflected in its result. However, judging

¹²⁵ I use this example because Gendun Drup focuses his debates regarding the equal-share cause on the question of how levels of spiritual understanding within different realms can or cannot result from previous moments of spiritual understanding on similar or different topics within the same or a different realm. For a different kind of reflection on the idea of positive spiritual development, see Appendix Eight, as well as Chapter Six, “Using Seeds to Put an End to Seeds,” below.

from the classical debates, what is “equal” must actually be more specific than just whether or not something is virtue, and so on. There are precise categories of identity to every action, as they are labeled at the time of the action, and it seems these form the essence of what it means to be an equal-share, or “same status,” cause. Thus the five heaps of a person, insofar as they produce a continuation of *themselves* in the next minute, or the next year, and remain an unbroken continuum of what they were at birth, form a chain of equal-share causes for a person within a single realm. The fact that a consciousness entered my mother’s womb and began to develop into name and form, and so on, would provide a continuity of equal-share causes for the tongue which is now able to taste the chocolate, the nose which smells it, and the rest. Equal-share causes can both cause things in the future, or things in the present, but cannot, in the present, be designated as causes for things that have already happened.

The *always-going cause* (*kun tu ‘gro ba’i rgyu*) refers specifically to the way that mental afflictions perpetuate themselves, and are ever-present in any being who has not yet reached the state of an arhat. Since always-going causes are only said to occur prior to their result, there is a sense in which this term could also be taken to mean that the afflictions are the driving¹²⁶ causes that keep instigating the actions that turn the cycle of suffering. Thus the fact one has felt untamed desire for sensual objects in the past, and failed to understand the nature of that affliction or how to break its cycle, allows the same affliction to arise again now, when faced with a similar circumstance. The fact that the always-going cause “does not have to be of the same class,” i.e., of the same ethical status, as its result, but only has to occur within the same realm of existence, points to how mentally afflicted states give rise to other mentally afflicted states in a complex chain, where each does not necessarily have the same character as the one that drove it. Tsongkhapa illustrates this dynamic in describing how the primary mental afflictions develop from one another in sequence, based upon ignorance as their root.¹²⁷

There is also the sense in which the whole array of mentally afflicted states continue to be “always-going causes” for the same array of mentally afflicted states. Precise congruency of type between cause and result comes with the equal-share cause, but the mechanism by which saṃsāra perpetuates itself through a network of afflicted

¹²⁶ This is Alexander Berzin’s translation of the term. See www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/sutra/level4_deepening_understanding_path/types_phenomena/causes_conditions_results.html

¹²⁷ Though he never uses the technical term “always-going cause” in that *Steps on the Path* presentation. See, for example, *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path (byang chub lam rim che ba)*, vol. pa, 152b4-153a4 (336-337): “Insofar as you hold to a self through the view of the destructible collection, you cut a distinction between the importance of yourself vs. that of others, and having made that division, you are attached to what pertains to you and you feel antipathy towards that which pertains to ‘other.’ Furthermore, focusing on yourself, you get puffed up . . .”

དེ་ཡང་འཛིན་ལྟ་བུ་བརྒྱུད་བ་ན་རང་གཞན་སོ་སོ་བར་རིས་སུ་གཙོད་པར་བྱེད་ལ། དེ་ལྟར་བཅད་ནས་རང་གི་ཕྱོགས་ལ་ཆགས་པ་དང་གཞན་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་ལ་ཞེ་སྤང་འབྱུང་ཞིང་བདག་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་ཁེངས་ཡང་སྟེ་ལ།

thoughts is supposed to come with the always-going cause.¹²⁸ There is also the idea that mental afflictions, in themselves, are not non-virtuous karma; they are the causes that *lead* one to do harmful actions, which in turn leave a trace, or vibration of “non-virtue” within the mental stream. But just to observe a mental affliction arise in the mind is not itself considered to create negative traces, until and unless one believes or identifies with the afflicted thought and then acts upon it, whether through further rumination (mental karma), or outer actions of body and speech. It also seems that in Tsongkhapa’s view, the fact that a mental affliction arises does not necessarily have to be considered the *ripened* result of a particular karmic action created in the past; rather, there are various tendencies for particular sequences of mental afflictions that run continuously in the mind of any suffering being. These tendencies¹²⁹ are also considered to arise from seeds, but not in the same way that the objects of the sense powers and the five heaps themselves are said to arise as the “ripening” of the seeds of particular virtuous or non-virtuous actions done at a particular time in the past.

Thus we are in a position to appreciate what distinguishes the *ripening cause* (*rnam smin gyi rgyu*) from the other two ethically meaningful types of causes. This last type refers specifically to the ripening of karma, in the sense we have already seen it within the analysis of the twelve links. As I have suggested, according to Asaṅga’s Mind-Only interpretation (in his *Summary of the Greater Way*), a single seed in the foundation consciousness can ripen into the whole interaction of sense object, its appearing aspect, and the sense power. Therefore, although in Vasubandhu’s presentation of Abhidharma simultaneously-emergent and linked causes are analyzed separately, it would follow from a Mind-Only viewpoint that both poles of a simultaneous causal pair, such as the heaps and the elements from which they are formed, as well as both poles of a linked pair of mind and mental functions, must be seen to arise from a *single* karmic seed at any given moment. Though it is difficult to apply Mind-Only analysis within an Abhidharma context, I think it is not inappropriate to make this observation here.

¹²⁸ Tsongkhapa also states that mental afflictions are actually worse than karma, because without afflictions, karma would cease to be created, and would no longer be triggered to ripen, either. See *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 151a5-151b1 (333-334):

Both karma and mental afflictions are necessary as the causes that establish the cycle, but of the two, mental afflictions are primary. This is true because, if there were no mental afflictions, there might still be previously collected karma beyond reckoning, but, just as a seed, without moisture, soil, etc., cannot accomplish the production of a sprout, so karma, without its simultaneously contributing condition, will not produce the sprout of suffering. Also, if there are mental afflictions, even if a karmic deed has not been collected previously, as soon as the affliction arises, then karma will be collected anew, and later you will take on heaps.

འཁོར་བ་འབྲུབ་པའི་རྒྱ་ལ་ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་གཉིས་དགོས་ཀྱང་། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཉོན་མོངས་མེད་ན་སྤར་བསགས་གྱི་ལས་བགྲངས་ལས་འ
དས་པ་ཡོད་ཀྱང་རྒྱན་དང་ས་ལ་སོགས་པ་མེད་པའི་ས་བོན་གྱིས་སྤྱ་གྱུ་མི་འབྲུབ་པ་བཞིན་དུ། ལས་ལ་སྤྲོན་ཅིག་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་མེད་པས་སྤྱག་བསྐྱུལ་གྱི་སྤྱ་གྱུ་མི་འབྲུབ
པའི་བྱིར་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་ཡོད་ན་ལས་སྤར་བསགས་མེད་ཀྱང་དེ་མ་ཐག་གསར་དུ་བསགས་ནས་བྱང་པོ་བྱི་མ་ལེན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

¹²⁹ See Chapter Two, “Types of Seeds and Tendencies,” under “Seeds for what brings on bad situations.”

Further, I would suggest that the dynamics of the vast acting causes, as well as the specificity of the simultaneous and linked causes, describe *how* things occur, setting them in their scene, as it were. But it seems that the equal-status, the always-going, and ripening causes are meant to explain *why* things occur.¹³⁰ They are, perhaps, closer to satisfying an Aristotelian notion of causation, as explaining “why this happened rather than that.” It is especially the ripening cause, which can only be understood to unfold over a protracted period of time, that may bear resemblance to the notion of a teleological, or final cause.¹³¹ A ripening *cause* refers to the karmic energy that is deposited during and upon completion of an ethically-charged deed, but that previous deed only becomes “what it is,” karmically, from the perspective of its having given rise to its result in the future, *qua* pleasant or unpleasant feeling, as it appears at the seventh link of dependent arising. The feeling, in turn, only arises after contact has occurred between sense faculty and object, each of which has in turn ripened from past seeds. Thus a ripening cause can be fully understood and even designated only from the perspective of its ripened result.

If one asks *how* you see the chocolate, you might answer, “The eye depends upon the chocolate as its focal condition, the mental function of desire depends mutually upon the linked sense consciousnesses that detect the dark brown color, shininess, scent, and so on, while the heat and solidity of the chocolate depend upon the piece of chocolate, and vice versa.” But if one asks *why* the chocolate is appearing as something good to eat, as opposed to poison, as it would for someone with an allergy, then this would be seen to depend on both equal-share causes within a lifetime and ripened causes across lifetimes, both of which have explicitly to do with ethically-charged action. *Why* a particular sequence of mental afflictions can arise in response to the situation – based on habit from how one reacted in past similar situations – would then be explained by the always-going cause. But there are still more details to examine before all the ramifications will become clear.

Five Results

To continue with Gyalwa Gendun Drup’s commentary:¹³²

¹³⁰ I am indebted to the explanations of Geshe Michael Roach for emphasizing the difference between “how” and “why” with respect to understanding karmic causation.

¹³¹ The connection of karmic causation to “teleology” was suggested during a lecture by Sonam Kachru, September 1st, 2015. See also Kachru, “Minds and Worlds,” 170 and *passim*.

¹³² Gyalwa Gendun Drup, *mngon pa mdzod kyi rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, vol. *nga*, 67a5-67b6. འབྲས་བྱ་དེ་དག་རྒྱ་གང་གི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ནི། རྒྱ་ཐ་མ་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱུའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཡིན། བདག་པོའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ནི། རྒྱ་དང་པོ་བྱེད་རྒྱུའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཡིན། རྒྱ་མཐུན་གྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ནི། སྐལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་དང་ཀུན་འཁོའི་རྒྱུའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཡིན། སྤྲེས་བྱ་བྱེད་འབྲས་ནི། ལྷན་མཚུངས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཡིན་ནོ། ་་་ རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་དེ་མ་བསྐྱབས་ལ་ལུང་དུ་མ་བསྐྱན་པའི་ཚུས་ཡིན་གྱི། དགེ་བ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དགེ་ཅ་ཆད་པའི་རྒྱད་ལའང་ཡོད་པའི་བྱིར། ཉོན་མོ་ངས་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཉོན་མོ་ངས་སྤངས་པའི་རྒྱད་ལའང་ཡོད་པའི་བྱིར། སེམས་ཅན་དུ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་མ་བསྐྱས་པ་ནི་ཐུན་མོང་བ་

Suppose you ask, “From which causes do each of the results come?”

- Ripened results are the result of the very last cause, the ripening cause.
- Environmental [or “governed”] results are the result of the first type of cause, the acting cause.
- Results congruent with their causes result from the equal-share and always-going causes.
- Person-made results are the result of both the simultaneous and the linked causes. . . .

A ripened result is an existing thing that is non-obscuring and morally neutral, but it is not virtue, because it can exist in the mindstream of a being whose root of virtue has been severed [i.e., due to performing a very negative deed]. It is not something afflicted, either, because it can exist in the mindstream of someone who has eliminated the mental afflictions. It is encompassed by the mindstream of what is expressed as a “sentient being,” because that which is not encompassed by a mindstream is shared in common, and if a ripened result were shared in common, some problems would follow suit: A deed which was done could simply go away, or else you could meet with the result of a deed which you had not done. Since there are some causes and results that are just so, then in order to divide them, [the Buddha] specified what arises from virtue and what from non-virtue. Since there are also some things that develop specifically from concentration, so in order to divide them he specified – not what arises in simultaneity with or just after something finishes – but what will happen much later.

A result that is congruent with its cause is of the same class as its own cause. This is because (1) the equal-share cause displays a similar aspect to its result, and (2) although the always-going cause may display an aspect that is dissimilar from its result, it is definitely similar in the sense of being on the same level, and insofar as it is something afflicted.

A privative result occurs when, by force of a mind of incisive wisdom, you finish off something which was to be eliminated.

A result made by a person is of two types: (1) a created person-made result, and (2) an achieved person-made result. The first of these, a created person-made result, is a result in which someone brings something else about by his or her own

ཡིན་ལ། རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཐུན་མོང་བ་ཡིན་ན། ལས་བྱས་པ་རྒྱུ་མཐོན་པ་དང་། མ་བྱས་པ་དང་ཐུན་པར་ཐལ་བའི་སྤྲིན་ཡོད་པའི་བྱིར། དེ་ཙམ་ཞིག་རྒྱ་འབྲས་འགའ་ཞིག་ལ་འཇུག་པས། དེ་གཅན་པའི་བྱིར་དུ་ལུང་དུ་བསྐྱུན་པ་དགེ་མི་དགེ་གང་རུང་ལས་བྱུང་བ། དེ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་གྱི་རྒྱས་བྱུང་ལ་ཡང་ཡོད་པས། དེ་གཅན་པའི་བྱིར་དུ་ལུང་དུ་བསྐྱུན་པ་དེ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་དང་རྗེས་ཐོགས་དེ་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་འབྱུང་བ་མ་ཡིན་པར། ལུང་དུ་བསྐྱུན་པ་དེའི་བྱིས་འབྱུང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །རྒྱ་མཐུན་གྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ནི། རང་གི་རྒྱ་དང་རིས་འབྲས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྐལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་ནི་རང་གི་འབྲས་བྱ་དང་རྣམ་པ་འབྲས་པ་དང་། གྲུན་འགྲོའི་རྒྱ་ནི་རང་གི་འབྲས་བྱ་དང་རྣམ་པ་མི་འབྲས་པ་གཅིག་པ་དང་། ཉན་མོངས་ཅན་དུ་འབྲས་བར་དེས་པའི་བྱིར། བྲལ་བའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ནི། རྒྱ་མཐུན་རབ་ཀྱི་སྤྲོ་བས་ཀྱིས་སྤང་བ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡོད། །སྤྲོས་བྱ་བྱེད་འབྲས་ལ། བསྐྱེད་པའི་སྤྲོས་བྱ་བྱེད་འབྲས་དང་ཐོབ་པའི་སྤྲོས་བྱ་བྱེད་འབྲས་གཉིས། དང་མོ་ནི་གང་གི་སྤྲོ་བས་ཀྱིས་གང་སྤྲོས་པའི་འབྲས་བྱ་དེ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་སྤྲོས་བྱ་བྱེད་འབྲས་དང་། གང་གི་སྤྲོ་བས་ཀྱིས་གང་ཐོབ་པའི་འབྲས་བྱ་དེ་ཐོབ་པའི་སྤྲོས་བྱ་བྱེད་འབྲས་ཡིན་ནོ། །རང་རྒྱུའི་སྤང་བ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་འདུས་བྱས་རྣམས་ནི། བདག་པོའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཡིན། དེ་ཡང་འདུས་བྱས་ཁོ་ནའི་ཡིན་གྱི། འདུས་མ་བྱས་ལ་བདག་འབྲས་མེད་དོ།

strength. An achieved person-made result is a result in which someone achieves something through his or her own strength.

All the produced things that had not arisen prior to their own causes are *environmental results*. Moreover, these results consist solely of produced things, whereas among unproduced things there are no environmental results.¹³³

We have already examined the concept of the *ripened result* (*rnam smin gyi 'bras bu*) with respect to the third link of dependent arising. In a Mind-Only school context, we saw that it refers primarily to the foundation consciousness of a being born into a certain realm, which lasts from the moment of conception up to the moment of death, when the consciousness projecting that realm for that person ceases to exist. Here, however, the notion of ripening causes and ripened results seems to be broader, referring to the whole range of virtuous or non-virtuous karmic deeds that, via the medium of a seed, bring forth their results far into the future. In our example, the chocolate could be understood as a ripened result insofar as it is the *type of thing* that a person born into a human realm in our present age can experience, especially if the person has a strong store of virtue from generous acts of giving and sharing sensory pleasures. It might also be understood to be the result of a specific act of giving done in the past.

To understand Gendun Drup's commentary here, it is essential to know the remaining principles of karma, the first of which, the principle of certainty, we treated above ("The Problem of Karma"). The second principle, as explained by Tsongkhapa, is that karma expands (*las 'phel che ba*). Thus even a trifling deed – for good or ill – is said to be able to produce a result that is exponentially larger and more significant than the original deed. Tsongkhapa points out that this occurs for "inner" cause and effect to an extent that could never happen with outer cause and effect.¹³⁴ Hence there is rarely a literal "one to one" correspondence between deeds and results, but rather, a whole lifetime of pleasant sensory experiences could be understood as the result of a single act of selfless generosity towards a person in need during a previous existence. On the other

¹³³ All this commentary directly glosses Vasubandhu's verses introducing the five results in the *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Toh. 4089, 6a4-5:

Ripened results are of the last; governed results are of the first;
cause-congruent, of equal-share and always-going, the ones of a person are of two kinds.
Ripened is a thing not specified: expressed as sentient being, specified for what springs later.
Cause-congruent is similar to a cause; privative, finished off by mind.
By whomever's strength whatever is created
that result is created by the action of a person.

ནམ་མཁའ་འབྲས་བུ་ཐ་མའི་ཡིན། །བདག་པོའི་འབྲས་བུ་དང་པོའི་ཡིན། །རྒྱ་མཐུན་སྐུ་མཉམ་ཀླན་འགོ་བའི། །སྤྲེལ་བུ་པ་ནི་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཡིན། །ནམ་མཁའ་ལྷུང་དུ་མ་
བསྐྱན་ཆོས། །སེམས་ཅན་བརྗོད་ལྷུང་བསྐྱན་ཕྱིས་འབྱུང་། །རྒྱ་མཐུན་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་བའོ། །བལ་བ་སྒོ་ཡིས་ཐད་བའོ། །གང་གི་སྟོབས་ཀྱིས་གང་སྤྲེལ་བའི། །འབྲས་
དེ་སྤྲེལ་བུ་བྱེད་ལས་སྤྲེལ།

¹³⁴ See *The Briefer Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*), vol. *pha*, 55a6 (111):
“Expansion of the result from an inner cause such as this does not exist with outer causes and effects.”

་་་ ནང་གི་རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་འབྲས་པ་ནི་བྱི་རོལ་གྱི་རྒྱ་འབྲས་ལ་མེད་དོ།

hand, how one thinks or acts in relation to a single piece of chocolate in the moment of mouth-watering desire can plant a seed that might have immense ramifications in the future.

For example, if you noticed a starving child on the street nearby eyeing your chocolate, and failed to share or even try to provide a small meal for the child as well (out of stinginess or disgust, not legitimate extenuating circumstances), or worse yet, you had stolen the chocolate from someone else out of spite, then the simple act of enjoyment could turn into a ripening cause for life in a realm of misery or else the experience of poverty and constant disappointment even amidst a future human life. On the other hand, if one made sure one had attempted to share as fully as possible with all in sight, especially with someone one did not like or did not know, that concomitant act of generosity, along with the repeated habit of acting in such ways month after month and year after year, could become a ripening cause for a future life of plenty in upper realms. If, further, one conceived of making a sacred offering – through the eating – to countless enlightened beings throughout the cosmos, the act of eating itself could be understood to become a source of limitless merit on a path to liberation. This point becomes key to Tsongkhapa’s understanding of the various practices of tantric transformation and seed-planting.

The third principle, mentioned directly by Gendun Drup here, is, in Tsongkhapa’s words, that one “cannot meet with a karma not done” (*las ma byas pa dang mi phrad pa*).¹³⁵ Gendun Drup glosses Vasubandhu’s cryptic phrase, “expressed as a sentient being” (*sems can brjod*), as meaning that the cause and effect relationship with respect to “ripening” must be encompassed, or subsumed, within the mental stream of what is known as “a sentient being,” otherwise it could not give rise to its result uniquely and

¹³⁵ *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 54b6 (110). Tsongkhapa makes an important, but unexplained comment in both the greater and briefer books on the *Steps of the Path* with regard to this third principle, namely (ibid. 55b2-3 [112], cf. *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 160a3-5 [243]):

If one has not collected the karma that will turn into the causes for happiness or suffering, then one absolutely will not experience the happiness or suffering that are the results of such karma. Those who enjoy the results of what was collected over countless eons by the Teacher need not collect all of its causes themselves, but they must collect one part of them.

བདེ་སྤྱད་ཚུངས་པའི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་པའི་ལས་མ་བསགས་ན་ལས་དེའི་འབྲས་བྱ་བདེ་སྤྱད་གཏན་མི་ཚུངས་བ་སྟེ། མྱོན་ལས་ཚོགས་གངས་མེད་པ་བསགས་པའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ལ་སྤྱད་པ་ནམས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་དེའི་རྒྱུ་མམས་ཅད་བསག་མི་དགོས་ཀྱང་ཆ་གཅིག་བསག་དགོས་སོ།

The implication seems to be that, insofar as disciples benefit immeasurably from the goodness amassed by a Buddha over countless eons, it would be impossible for them to have personally created every one of those causes themselves, or they would be Buddhas already. However, in order to so much as have the opportunity and capacity to hear and put that Buddha’s teachings into practice, requires a significant amount of personally ripened virtue already, on the part of the disciple. This would be the “one part” to which Tsongkhapa refers. This point, however, makes clear that Tsongkhapa does consider it possible to experience things within a genuinely shared world, where not every last detail of experience is strictly produced by one’s own “ripened” karma. The presentation I focus upon here is meant to highlight what I see to be Tsongkhapa’s vision of the very complexity of a universe of genuine causal interactions between beings, whether suffering or enlightened.

exclusively for the continuation of that mental stream in the future. If it were “shared in common” – as are the outer elements – then the principle of karmic particularity would not make sense. A ripened result of a deed done by one person could then be experienced by the continuation of a different mental stream, which according to the understanding of what traces are – namely indelible impressions upon the mental stream itself – would be absurd. Karmic cause and result must be exclusive to the trajectory of each mental stream. Likewise, if a ripening cause were not understood to unfold exclusively within the continuity of a mental stream, the fourth principle, namely, that “a karma done will never go to waste” (*las byas pa chud mi za ba*) could not be preserved, either. That is, material things like plants can decompose and be so transmuted into soil, and so on, that they seem to “disappear” altogether into the surrounding environment. But because karmic seeds are sustained by mind – which is considered to be indestructible in its continued propagation of itself as mind – nothing can destroy a seed altogether, prior to its coming to fruition as experience.

Gyalwa Gendun Drup explains Vasubandhu’s next cryptic phrase, “specified for what springs later” (*lung bstan phyis ’byung*) in a way that further distinguishes the ripened cause-effect pair from all other types of causation. All the others, except for the acting cause, either bring about their result simultaneously, or immediately after the final moment of the cause. That is, equal-share and always-going causes work in the present, or from the immediate past of the previous moment; they cannot lie fallow across hundreds of years the way that ripening causes are understood to do.¹³⁶ This means that for ordinary people, it would be impossible to see the connection between karmic causes and results directly. Apart from the reports of those who have reached deep states of meditative absorption in which they claim to have accessed memories from the fabric of a deep layer of consciousness where imprints were deposited across limitless time, no single person’s ordinary conscious memory lasts long enough to witness both the doing of the act and the result it will bring about in a later lifetime. This is why many Buddhist

¹³⁶ See Gyalwa Gendun Drup, *mngon pa mdzod kyi rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, gsung ’bum vol. nga, 67b6-68a2:

Except for the acting cause, the other five causes sustain their result from the present, but do not sustain their result from the past or into the future. This is because what was sustained in the past is finished, and there is no capacity to sustain a result into the future. Both the simultaneous and the linked causes make their results emerge ‘thoroughly,’ that is, initially, because cause and result exist at the same time. As for the equal-share and always-going causes, they make their results emerge both in the present and from the past, because the result emerges immediately following the final moment of its cause. One of them, the ripening cause, will make its result emerge from the past, but it does not do so simultaneously, nor in the moment just after something finishes. This is because the result emerges later.

ཁྱེད་རྒྱུ་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་རྒྱ་ལྡན་ལྷན་པས་འབྲས་བྱ་འཛིན་གྱི། འདས་མ་འོངས་ཀྱིས་འབྲས་བྱ་མི་འཛིན་ཏེ། འདས་པས་བཟུང་ཟིན་མ་འོངས་པ་ལ་འབྲས་བྱ་འཛིན་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར། ལྷན་མཚུངས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་འབྲས་བྱ་རབ་ཏུ་སྟེ་དང་ཐོར་འབྱིན་པར་བྱེད་དེ། རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཏུས་མཉམ་པའི་བྱིར། ལྷན་མཉམ་དང་ཀླུ་འཕྲིའི་རྒྱ་གཉིས་ནི། ད་ལྟར་གྱི་དང་འདས་པ་དག་གིས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱིན་པར་བྱེད་དེ། རང་གི་མཚུགས་ལོགས་དེ་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱིན་པའི་བྱིར། གཅིག་ནས་སྤོན་གྱི་རྒྱ་ནི་འདས་པས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱིན་པར་འགྱུར་གྱི། ལྷན་ཅིག་དང་ཆེས་དེ་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འབྲས་བྱ་བྱིས་འབྱིན་པའི་བྱིར།

thinkers openly acknowledge that one could not discover the principles or inner workings of karma through rational analysis alone. There is simply no direct evidence of karmic cause-and-effect connections for a person who can only perceive the consciousness of a single lifetime, and who has no access to the layers of consciousness in which karmic traces and memories are “stored.” The word I translate as “specified” (*lung bstan*) also has the connotation of “prophecy.” Thus the Buddha is said to have prophesied (based on his own meditative insight into the karma of every living being) “what would happen later” in the case of hundreds of types of karmic actions and their results. A ripened result, however, is “unspecified” (or what I have been calling “morally neutral”), insofar as, simply being a *result*, and not yet a new karmically-charged action of its own, it has no future to say anything about. This idea would provide one rationale for enduring painful situations with patience: As long as one does not create any new negatively charged actions, the mere fact that negative karma is ripening cannot be specified as a “bad deed.” It is simply a suffering to be endured, with no further negative consequence, unless one thinks or acts in reaction to it in a way that creates new negative seeds.

Tsongkhapa explains the **results congruent with their causes** (*rgyu mthun gyi 'bras bu*) in some detail with respect to the ten principal paths of non-virtue in his *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*.¹³⁷ These in turn shed light on what the “equal-share” and “always-going” causes should consist of – if indeed it is they that are referred to every time Tsongkhapa mentions “congruent causes” or “results congruent with their causes” throughout his writings, as in the statements quoted above about things not coming “from a cause that is not congruent with them.” I am inclined to think, however, that such general references to congruent causes must include the concept of ripening causes as well. The correlating results that Tsongkhapa lists are not always exactly the same as the path of non-virtue they correspond to; rather, it can sometimes take imagination to see how the stored form of the past deed could go through a process of maturing and transmuting until it rises to give the results listed there. Drawing upon the *Chapter of the Truth-Sayer* (*bden pa po'i le'u*, Skt. *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta*) and the *Sūtra on the Ten Levels* (*sa bcu pa'i mdo*, Skt. *Daśabhūmikāsūtra*), Tsongkhapa lists, for example, that someone who has killed, even if later born as a human (the ripened result), will have a “short life and much illness”; the person experiencing the result of a previous lifetime in which an earlier instance of that mental stream committed sexual misconduct will find the people working for them to be unruly, or unstable, and will have competition for a partner; for someone who has engaged in much meaningless speech, the person experiencing the result will find that no one respects what they say, or takes them seriously, while the person’s sense of self-worth will turn to uncertainty, and so on. Tsongkhapa adds that “teachers of the past” have said that the result congruent with its

¹³⁷ See *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. pa, 118b5-119a5 (268-269).

cause in the form of an action is the fact that one takes pleasure in doing more of the same, while encountering all these specific difficulties is a congruent result in the form of experience.¹³⁸

Leaving aside for now the *privative result* (*bral ba'i 'bras bu*), which refers to a path of cessation during which certain mental afflictions are finished off forever, as well as the *person-made result* (*skyes bu byed 'bras*), we turn to the *environmental* or *governing result* (*bdag po'i 'bras bu*). Though the word *bdag po* (Skt. *adhipa*) means a lord, owner, or commander, I will refer to this result more frequently as “environmental” because that is what it often indicates: the environment in which we find ourselves, which roughly “governs,” or determines our experience. This also refers to results that are clearly shared in common with others. Since Vasubandhu specifies that it is the result of “the first,” namely, the acting cause, it might imply that our environments could be formed mostly from the random effects of other chains of causation that have nothing to do with the specificity of a karmic stream “subsumed within a sentient being,” but rather include all the other shared causal vectors of communal life and inanimate elemental activity on a planet, as long as nothing stopped anything from happening. Because an acting cause could be just about anything, right?

Yet Tsongkhapa uses the same term, *bdag po'i 'bras bu*, to describe a specific set of ten environmental situations that he takes to correspond with each of the ten non-virtues, respectively, as he did with the congruent results.¹³⁹ For example, the future

¹³⁸ See *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 119a1-5 (269). The Tashi Lhunpo block-print, as well as all other editions of the *lam rim chen mo* that I have consulted finish this sentence with *bla ma gong ma rnams mir skyes na yang srog gcod sogs de dag la dga' bar 'gyur ba byed pa rgyu mthun gyi 'bras bu dang snga ma rnam myong ba rgyu mthun gyi 'bras bur bzhed do*. However, Geshe Michael Roach, who has translated this portion of the text in Asian Classics Institute Course Nine:

www.acidharma.org/aci/online/_media/text/course9/C9Reading.pdf, 65, translates the latter part of the sentence with the following translator’s note: “They say then that experiencing the various results just listed is a ‘ripened’ consequence [the second *rgyu mthun* here is likely a text error for *rnam smin*; this is the corrected reading].” If Geshe Roach is basing his reading on Sera Monastery oral tradition, especially that of his teacher, Khensur Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin (1921-2004), then this could also make sense in the context of Tsongkhapa’s sentence structure. It would also add colorful detail to our notion of ripened results, beyond simply the name of a realm into which a being is born. The “congruent result,” then, would be related more explicitly to the continued patterns of behaving in similar ways (consistent with the idea of equal-share causes), and to repeated bouts of similar patterns of mental afflictions (due to always-going causes). On the other hand, read as it appears in the block-prints, Tsongkhapa might be making the distinction between “results of congruent causes that are actions” and “results of congruent causes that are experiences,” a distinction I have seen in his *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*. I cannot elaborate on these alternative readings, however, without further research into Geluk interpretations of this text since Tsongkhapa.

¹³⁹ See *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 119a5-120a4 (269-271), from which I am closely paraphrasing these examples. Tsongkhapa also adds an alternative term, *dbang gi 'bras bu*, or “result by the power of,” a phrase which appears at least six times in the Kangyur (likely as an alternative translation for the same Skt. **adhipatiphala*), all in the course of one *sūtra*, the *Ārya-saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (*dam pa'i chos dran pa nye bar gzhag pa*), sde dge bka' 'gyur, 0287. In each instance the term finishes a phrase that begins with either “*sems can rnams kyi dbang gi 'bras bu*” (“a result brought about by the power of all [or

result of killing and violence is that in the “vessel” (*snod*) of the world inhabited by the beings who inherit such karma, food, drink, medicinal herbs, crops, and so on, will have little power, will be difficult to digest, and will make people sick, so that most beings will die before their expected lifespan is finished. The beings who carry the previous karma of speaking falsehood will find themselves in situations where, although people attempt to cooperate on some activity, in the end the project cannot flourish, and people cannot work in harmony; rather, they are mostly cheating one another, feel much fear, and there are many reasons to be afraid. The future continuation of beings who have used much harsh speech will find themselves in a world that is harsh and threatening, filled with physical obstacles like fallen trees, thorns, stones, and sharp, broken refuse, a dry desert with no springs of water, and so forth. Those whose past imprints for coveting others’ good fortune are now being expressed environmentally find that even the good things they possess start to diminish and degenerate, never increasing, year by year, month by month, day by day. So it goes for each of the ten nonvirtues, where the result of past deeds is quite literally seen to expand into the quality and processes of an entire world, in its physical, biological, and social aspects. Thus, although any individual being cannot meet with a result that a previous instance of the same mental stream did not plant, still, it is clearly considered possible that a whole group of beings experiencing similar circumstances could be experiencing the shared environmental result of similar karmic actions in which each person involved in the current situation had participated previously. This shared aspect seems to be one feature that distinguishes the environmental results from those that are individually “ripened” or “congruent to their causes.”

Yet Tsongkhapa’s presentation demonstrates that in his view, at least, environmental results are due to karmic influences, and not some notion of random, unconnected “acting causes.” If this explicitly karmic presentation seems too narrow an interpretation of Vasubandhu’s statement that “governed results are of the first [i.e. acting causes],” then perhaps we have not yet understood what acting causes *are*, only what they are not. That is, we know that acting causes are said to be those which do not prevent something from happening, but if their *results* are specified to be environmental results, and the examples given for these are explicitly karmic in quality, then does this exclude the possibility of non-karmic environmental conditions altogether? My hypothesis is that in Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of his sūtra sources, acting causes and their broad

many] living beings,”) “*sems can rnam las kyi dbang gi ’bras bu*,” (“a result brought about by the power of the karma of living beings,”) or in one case “*chos dang chos ma yin pa byas pa’i dbang gi ’bras bu*” (“a result brought about by the power of having done things according to *dharma* or not according to it”). One final case refers specifically to a result brought about by the beings of the northern “continent” of a Buddhist world-system, Unpleasant Sound (*sgra mi snyan*). These contextual appearances certainly suggest that the sūtric use of the term Tsongkhapa equates with “governing result” refers to situations in which the karmic deeds of many people work together to produce an environmental result. This would fit well with the example of an acting cause being, “I was not harmed by the king, so the king made me happy.” In the broader sense, then, an environmental result is still one in which the collective actions of living beings (including one’s own) “did not stop something from happening to me, so they are a cause for it.”

spectrum of environmental results are simply another way of looking at “results congruent with their causes,” yet with one significant difference from the equal-share and always-going causes: Acting causes include *everyone else’s actions* and therefore highlight the way in which one individual’s experience does genuinely interact with the intentions, deeds, and karmic ripenings that other beings are in the midst of experiencing at any given moment of communally shared life.

This might begin to address an important philosophical question that arises repeatedly while analyzing karmic theory. When another person insults me, and I am hurt, is it possible to say that the other person’s actions *affected* me? Of course, in conventional terms, we have to be able to say this, even if a deep analysis of my own karmic perspective would have to reveal that I could not actually have “been hurt” by that person’s words if it were not for the precise array of seeds, tendencies, memories and sore spots I held in my mind at that moment of interaction. But insofar as the other person’s words to me could create a karmic trace *in their mind*, based upon their motivation, their relationship to me, and whether or not the words were actually said, heard, and understood, then a Buddhist theory of cause and effect would have to account for the cause and effect relationship between the other person’s words and my hearing of them (another person’s bullet and my wound, another person’s gift and my receiving of it, and so on). Insofar as there is nothing in the other person’s karmic path of action (*las kyi lam*) that prevents the words from reaching my ears, that person and his or her action fit Vasubandhu’s abhidharmic definition of an acting cause *for my experience*. This would be the case even as, in terms of their own experience, they would be creating ripening, equal-share, and always-going causes for themselves at that moment, and *for them*, their mental activity at that time is a person-made result. However, insofar as *I* hear the words, this could be said to be an environmental result of an acting cause *for me*. According to Tsongkhapa, even the kinds of words we hear others say, not to mention how we will tend to react to them, can also be a result of the previously collected traces of karmic paths.

Whether the words strike me as pleasant or unpleasant, life-shattering or simply laughable, would depend, then, upon the flow of always-going afflictions in my mindstream, the equal-share causes that have conditioned me to react virtuously or non-virtuously to certain triggers within this realm, as well as the ripening causes that drive me to have certain kinds of experiences over the course of a whole lifetime. That is, if I seem to be reacting to a single instance of being hurt by someone’s words, but “it” drives me to change jobs, or relationships, or leave the country, then according to this particular karmic theory there must have been much broader ripening forces at work that drove me to do those things, which may or may not have “actually” been triggered by the specific events to which I happened to attribute my decisions in my own subsequent narration of the story. After all, we are constantly telling ourselves stories about “why” things

happened or unfolded the way they did, but short of seeing thousands of years into the past history of a mindstream, according to karmic theory, we really have no idea why; except, according to Tsongkhapa, that there must have been a congruent cause somewhere along the line. Again, it is worth considering, if not always easy to discern, which types of causes are describing *how* relationships, and which offer explanations as to *why*. Insofar as environmental conditions seem to be a result of others' actions – including both animate and inanimate forces – this may be a valid description of how things came to be, but insofar as my encountering those conditions is inextricably caught up in a flow of cause-congruent factors related to my own karmic traces, this approach would seem to offer much deeper answers as to why *this* is happening to *me* in the way that it appears, at any given moment.

Attempting to fathom how the collective traces of an entire population could provide acting causes for the environment of a new planet or galactic world-system to form, is a different yet not unrelated question. We will revisit it when returning to Tsongkhapa's commentary on the Abhidharma vision of world-creation via Nāgabuddhi's *Steps of the Exposition*. To round out our discussion of causation, however, we must attend to the four conditions, since they are able to summarize the whole rubric.

Four Conditions

To continue with Gendun Drup's *Abhidharmakośa* commentary:¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Gyalwa Gendun Drup, *mngon pa mdzod kyi rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, gsung 'bum vol. nga, 68a6-69b6.

མདོ་ལས་རྒྱུན་ནི་བཞི་པོ་དག་ཏུ་གསུངས་ཏེ། རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུན། མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱུན། དམིགས་པའི་རྒྱུན། བདག་པོའི་རྒྱུན་རྣམས་སུ་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར། འོན་ཏེ། དང་རྒྱུན་ལ་བྱང་པར་ཅི་ཡོད་ཅི་ན། བྱང་པར་མེད་དེ། མདོ་ལས། རྒྱ་གཉིས་དང་རྒྱུན་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ཡང་དག་པའི་ལྷ་བ་སྦྱེད་དེ། གཞན་གྱི་སྦྱ་དང་ནང་གི་རྩལ་བཞིན་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པའོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར། བྱང་པར་མེད་ན་སོ་སོར་བསྐྱེད་པ་གང་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། གཏུལ་བྱ་ལ་ལྷོས་ནས་སོ་སོར་བཤད་དེ། དཔེར་ན། ལམས་དང་སྦྱ་མཆེད་བཞིན་འོ། རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། བྱེད་རྒྱ་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་རྒྱ་ལྷེ། དེ་དག་ཅི་རིགས་པས་འབྲས་བུ་སྦྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱུན་ནི། སེམས་དང་སེམས་བྱུང་རྣམས་ཡིན་གྱི། ལྷན་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་དང་གཟུགས་ཅན་རྣམས་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ... །ཆོས་རྣམས་ཐམས་ཅད་དམིགས་པའི་རྒྱུན་ཡིན་ཏེ། རང་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིར། བྱེད་རྒྱ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་བདག་པོའི་རྒྱུན་དུ་བཤད་དོ། །འབྲས་བུ་མང་བས་ན་བདག་པོའི་རྒྱུན་ནོ། ... སེམས་དང་སེམས་བྱུང་རྣམས་རྒྱུན་བཞི་ཡིས་སྦྱེད་པར་བྱེད་དེ། བྱེད་རྒྱ་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་རྒྱ་ལྷེ་ཅི་རིགས་པས་རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུན་དང་། སེམས་སེམས་བྱུང་སྦྱ་མས་མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱུན་དང་། ཡུལ་ལྷ་འཕྲུལ་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱིས་དམིགས་པའི་རྒྱུན་དང་། རང་མ་གཏོགས་པས་བདག་རྒྱུན་བྱས་པ་ལས་སྦྱེ་བའི་ཕྱིར། ལྷོ་མས་པར་འབྲུག་པ་གཉིས་རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུན་དང་མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱུན་དང་བདག་རྒྱུན་གསུམ་གྱིས་སྦྱེད་ལ། མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱུན་གྱིས་སྦྱེད་དེ། དེ་མདོར་བར་འདུ་བྱེད་པ་སྦྱོར་པས་པར་འབྲུག་སེམས་ལ་རག་ལས་པའི་ཕྱིར། ... སེམས་སེམས་བྱུང་དང་སྦྱོར་པ་འབྲུག་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ལྷག་མ་གཞན་ལྷན་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་དང་གཟུགས་ཅན་རྣམས་ནི། རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུན་དང་བདག་པོའི་རྒྱུན་གཉིས་པོ་དག་ལས་སྦྱེ་བ་ཡིན་གྱི། མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པ་དང་དམིགས་པའི་རྒྱུན་ལས་སྦྱེ་བ་མིན་ཏེ། མདོར་བར་འདུ་བྱེད་པ་སེམས་ལ་ལ་རག་པ་ལས་པའི་ཕྱིར། དེས་ན་རྒྱུན་བཞི་པོ་དེར་གྲངས་ཤིང་གྱི། དབང་ལྷག་དང་ལ་སོགས་པ་གཙོ་བོ་དང་རྒྱུན་ཉག་པ་ལས་སྦྱེ་བ་མིན་ཏེ། །དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་ཤིམས་ཀྱིས་སྦྱེ་བ་དང་། སོགས་པ་ཤིམས་འགའ་སྦྱེ་བ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར།

This section interprets Vasubandhu's verses introducing the four conditions in his *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Toh. 4089, 6a7-6b1:

The conditions were spoken as being four:

The one called “*cause*” is the causes, five,

According to the *sūtras*, there are four types of conditions, because there are (1) *causal conditions*, (2) *matching, immediately-preceding conditions*, (3) *focal conditions*, and (4) *environmental conditions*. Now you may ask, “What is the distinction between a cause and a condition?” There is no distinction, because a *sūtra* states:

Perfect view is born from two
causes and two conditions:
The words of another and how
you put them to work
inside your own mind.

“If there is no distinction, then how are they taught as individual things?” That they are explained individually depends upon the needs of the disciple. For example, it is like the domains and the sensory fields.¹⁴¹

What is known as the *causal condition* consists of the five causes, not including the acting cause, because it is according to their respective class that a result is produced.

The *matching, immediately-preceding condition* consists of mind and mental functions, but cannot be something that has form, nor can it be an unlinked trace.¹⁴² . . .

mind and mental functions, born things all;
what is not the last: *matched, immediately-preceding*;
focal is all the things there are;
the one called “acting cause”
is explained as *governing*.

ཁྱེད་ནི་བཞི་པོ་དག་ཏུ་གསུངས། རྒྱ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་རྒྱ་ལྡན། སེམས་དང་སེམས་བྱང་སྤྱེས་པ་ནམས། སྤྱི་མཁའ་མཆོད་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག འཇིགས་པ་ཚོས་ནམས་ཐམས་ཅད་དོ། བྱེད་རྒྱ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དག་པོར་བཤད།

¹⁴¹ That is, the domains (*kham*s, Skt. *dhātu*) are usually taught as eighteen: the six sense faculties, the six objects, and the six types of consciousness. The sensory fields (*skye mched*, Skt. *āyatana*) are usually taught as twelve: the six sense faculties and the six objects, or else just as the six sense faculties (as we saw in the fifth link of the wheel of life). The point here is that they do not describe different phenomena, but simply analyze a single process from different directions. Likewise, causes and conditions (*rgyu dang rkyen*, Skt. *hetu* and *karaṇa*) are not actually different in nature, but the presentations look at them from different, and mutually enriching, angles.

¹⁴² This important term, *ldan min* ‘*du byed* (Skt. *viprayukta-saṃskāra*), has often been translated from the Tibetan as “non-associated compositional factor.” The “*ldan min*” is an abbreviation for “*sems dang mtshungs ldan ma yin pa*,” which means that it is “not linked with mind” (Skt. *cittaviprayukta*) in any of the five ways that mind and mental functions are linked, as described above. Thus these are factors, or, as I have been translating here, *traces*, that are not mental phenomena, nor do they possess form. They are conceptually designated (*btags yod*) functioning things, which are accepted as such even by schools (such as the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika) that claim things must exist really in order to function. As we will see, in the case of karmic traces, according to a Cittamātra explanation, they are a conceptually designated *potentiality*, which do not display substantial identity until they actually ripen into the triad of consciousness, sense, and sense object. There do also exist such things as linked traces (*mtshungs ldan gyi* ‘*du byed*, Skt. *saṃprayukta-saṃskāra*), which are none other than the inseparable pairs of primary states of consciousness and the mental functions linked to them. Apart from the faculties of feeling and discrimination, these linked traces constitute the fourth heap itself (Skt. *saṃskāra-skandha*), with its array of various mental functions. See Chapter One, note 84, above.

Every existing thing is a *focal condition*, because it is suitable to be the object of a consciousness that takes it as its object of focus.

Whatever is considered to be an “acting cause” is explained to be an *environmental condition*. Because it has an overabundance of results, it is a “governing” condition [*bdag po'i rkyen*, Skt. *adhipatipratyaya*]. . . .

Mind and mental functions are produced from all four conditions. This is because (1) whatever belongs to the respective class of any one of the five causes (apart from the acting cause) serves as the causal condition. (2) A previous instance of mind and its mental functions serves as the matching immediately-preceding condition. (3) The five objective fields, or else all existing things, serve as the focal condition, and (4) an instance of mind and mental functions is born from everything (except itself) that acts as an environmental condition.

The two types of meditative absorption¹⁴³ are born from three: (1) the causal condition, (2) the matching, immediately-preceding condition, and (3) the environmental condition. They are born from the matching, immediately-preceding condition because they rely on the mind that engaged in the absorption to be the tracing which brings it forth [*mngon par 'du byed pa*]. . . .¹⁴⁴

That which is other than mind, mental functions, or the two types of meditative absorption, namely, (a) unlinked traces and (b) that which has form, is born from both causal and environmental conditions, but not from matching, immediately-preceding or focal conditions. This is because [if a non-linked trace], it does not rely on a tracing mind to bring it forth [*mngon par 'du byed pa sems la rag ma las pa*] and because, [if possessing form], it is inert matter.

Thus there is a definite count to the four conditions, but things are not born from a “Powerful Lord” and “the like,” i.e., a Primal Force or an unchanging cause. This is because all working things grow in stages and “the like,” namely, they are born intermittently.¹⁴⁵

Thus the four conditions can be seen almost like a complex four-dimensional graph function in which one might “locate” an event at the intersection of four, three, or two conditions, depending on what type of phenomenon one is attempting to describe, as follows:

¹⁴³ Tib. *snnyoms par 'jug pa*, Skt. *samāpatti*, i.e., the two formless realm meditations of “cessation” and “beyond discrimination,” which have no focal object

¹⁴⁴ It seems the point here is that, though these rarified meditative absorptions do not actually take any object as their focal point, still, in each moment, they depend on the moment of meditative absorption that came before, as an immediate condition for their existence. The phrase which I translate here as “the tracing which brings it forth” is the full form of what is abbreviated in the twelve links as *samskāra*, namely *mngon par 'du byed pa* (Skt. *abhisamskāra*). See my discussion of this term in the next section.

¹⁴⁵ This glosses the same *Abhidharmakośa* verse discussed above in the section on “External Creators” (see Chapter One, note 27).

- (a) **environmental** conditions = acting causes → environmental results
- (b) **causal** conditions = the remaining five causes
 - ripening causes → ripened results
 - equal-share and always-going causes → cause-congruent results
 - simultaneous and linked causes → person-made results
- (c) **matching, immediately-preceding** conditions (mind and mental functions only)
- (d) **focal** conditions (any existing thing)
 - All four conditions → mind and mental functions
 - (a), (b) and (c) → meditative absorption
 - (a) and (b) only → unlinked traces and physical form

Figure One: The Four Conditions

With the introduction of the *environmental*, or *governing*, *condition*, we see that it refers to nothing other than the set of acting causes; these produce the environmental result, or everything that governs the basic context in which an event can take place. As I have noted, however, even these wide-ranging conditions can be understood, according to Tsongkhapa's interpretation of his sources, in a way that is deeply imbedded in karmic causality, at the large-scale, collective level. The set of *causal* conditions actually includes five dimensions, namely, the remaining five types of causes already discussed. However, from the point of view of their results, these can be reduced to three: the ripened results, which come much later than their causes, and are always specific to a particular mindstream; the cause-congruent results, which can come about immediately following their causes according to a more familiar "bumper-car" model of causality through time, whether as equal-share causes, related to virtue, non-virtue, or moral neutrality, or else as the afflictions themselves; and the person-made results, which are simply the results of simultaneous and linked causes, namely, what is happening with respect to a given mind in a single moment.¹⁴⁶

The set of *matching, immediately-preceding* conditions refers to the moment of mind that gives rise to the next moment of mind, instant by instant. The *focal* condition is

¹⁴⁶ It is important to note, then, that the person-made results are not quite what we might think, namely what happens when a person, as a so-called autonomous agent, acts upon things in the world. This would suppose a notion of person which is rejected at nearly all levels of Buddhist thought. Rather, what is produced or achieved by a "person" (*skyes pa* here, not *gang zag*) refers simply to the way that a mind gives rise to mental functions, or the way the elements serve as the basis for a body, and vice versa. It does *not* even seem to refer to what happens when a person "achieves" certain realizations over time, since these belong to the sequential model of the equal-share causes, not the contemporaneous model of the simultaneous and linked causes. This remains a point for further research.

that upon which a moment of mental awareness focuses, and there is a sense in which the very existence of the moment of awareness – as awareness *of* something – depends upon that focal condition in order to arise at all. However, as we see in the exceptional case taken from advanced meditative theory, there are said to be states of meditation in which the mind is so intensely withdrawn that it can no longer focus on an objective condition at all. Nonetheless, there is still a condition that would give rise to that moment of mind, namely, the immediately-preceding condition of the previous moment of concentration, which in turn can be traced back to the moment at which there was a focal object upon which the mind was concentrating before it slipped into the withdrawal of a formless realm absorption.¹⁴⁷

It is significant that the phrase used here – literally, “the putting together that brings it forth” (*mngon par ’du byed pa*, Skt. *abhisamṣkāra*) – is the expanded form of the term I have been translating as “trace.” It suggests that the continuity of mind itself is being formed by an ongoing string of traces from time without beginning, whether those traces have an explicit focal object as a condition to trigger them, or are simply replications of the precise content of a previous moment of mental awareness. But those traces are in turn driven by, or are what drive, the array of always-going, equal-share, and ripening causes; they participate in the mutuality of simultaneous and linked causes, since the act of making traces through intention is an ever-present type of mental function; and they contribute to the vast array of acting causes/environmental conditions via the collective karma of many beings. So it would seem (nearly) everything in the cyclic world involved with mind does come down to traces. But what *are* they?

Traces and the End of Traces

In a section of the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* on “how karma is accumulated,” just following the exposition of the mental afflictions, Tsongkhapa treats the difference between the “action of a moving mind” (*sems pa’i las*), which initiates karmic action, and the “motivated action” (*bsams pa’i las*) of body and speech, which is driven by such mental impulses. Tsongkhapa quotes Asaṅga’s *Compendium of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*) for a definition of those “movements of the mind,” which Vasubandhu had equated with mental karma.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ This is my own preliminary interpretation of Gyalwa Gendun Drup’s point, here. For further information on these formless realm absorption, see Leah Zahler, 2009, *Study and Practice of Meditation: Tibetan Interpretations of the Concentrations and Formless Absorptions* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), esp. 260-263, as well as 346-349, translating Tsongkhapa’s *Notes on the Concentrations and Formless Absorptions* (*bsam gzugs zin bris*, vol. *tsha*).

¹⁴⁸ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 154b2-3 (340):

ཀུན་ལས་བརྒྱས་ལས། མེས་པ་གང་ཞིན་མེས་པ་མཛོན་བར་འདུ་བྱེད་པ་ཡིད་གྱི་ལས་ཏེ། དགེ་བ་དང་མི་དགེ་བ་དང་ལུང་དུ་མ་བསྐྱན་བ་རྣམས་ལ་མེས་པ་འདྲུག་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ལས་ཅན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར། རང་དང་མཚུངས་བར་ལྡན་པའི་མེས་པ་ཡུལ་རྣམས་ལ་གཡོ་ཞིང་སྐྱེལ་བར་བྱེད་པའི་མེས་པ་བྱུང་ཡིད་གྱི་ལས་སོ།

As it is stated in the *Compendium*: “What is mental movement? It is the mental action of bringing mind towards and forming a fusion [i.e. a trace: *sems mngon par ‘du byed pa yid kyi las*]. It is that which *has* karma; what brings a mind to engage in virtue, non-virtue, and that which is morally unspecified.” That is, mental karma is the mental function that stirs and urges towards its objects a mind that is linked with it.

Here we run into the near-impossibility of translating the Sanskrit term *abhisamṣkāra* in a way that will convey all of its implications. While I have thus far been translating its abbreviated, nominal form as “traces,” here we see the expanded term in its active verbal form, working as a participle.¹⁴⁹ Tsongkhapa’s gloss offers a vivid picture of what he understood the *Compendium of Abhidharma* quotation to mean. As we have already seen, “mental movement” or “intention” (*sems pa*, Skt. *cetanā*) is one of the five mental functions that is always present, and always linked with a primary state of consciousness. In his *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, Tsongkhapa referred to “mental movement” as that which “is no more than a movement towards an object.”¹⁵⁰ Here he elaborates that it is that function of the mind (*sems byung*, lit. “what emerges from consciousness”) that draws the very consciousness with which it is inextricably linked towards an object. To personify a bit, we might say that it is the type of mental energy, or magnetic vibration (*g.yo ba*) that takes interest in something as an object, and calls to the primary state of awareness, “Hey, come over here, look at this.”

Of course it is far subtler than that, as mental movement is said to accompany every instant of awareness in an ordinary being. Though not an affliction in itself, insofar as it is an ever-present mental function, it is also designated by the term “always-going” (*kun tu ‘gro ba*). In the key term used to describe what mental movement does, namely “*abhisamṣkāra*,” the Sanskrit prefix *abhi-* essentially means “to, towards, into, over, upon,” but is often an intensifier, which when added to verbs of motion “expresses the notion of going towards, approaching.”¹⁵¹ Its Tibetan translation, *mngon par*, also has the connotation of “manifestly,” “evidently,” or “actually.” Thus, in Tibetan, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* quotation conveys a visceral sense of mental action (Skt. *manas-karman*) being that which draws mind towards something, and then continues by

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Jowita Kramer, 2013, “A Study of the *Samṣkāra* Section of Vasubandhu’s *Pañcaskandhaka*,” 1002, where she translates this *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (as well as the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*) definition of *cetanā* as: “*cittābhisamṣkāro manaskarma* (activating the mind [or] mental activity).” The Tibetan translation that Tsongkhapa uses would not suggest the “[or]” interpolated by Kramer; rather it suggests an appositive, i.e., “[*cetanā* is] the mental activity [*manaskarma*] that is: activating [*abhisamṣkāra*] the mind.” Kramer’s citation of the *Pañcaskandhaka* here would further support Tsongkhapa’s interpretation: “*guṇato doṣato ‘nubhyataś cittābhisamṣkāro manaskarma* (activating the mind [or] mental activity in relation to the virtuous, unvirtuous, and neither [virtuous] nor [unvirtuous]),” though again I would question the interpolation of “[or]” and rather translate it as: “the mental activity that is: activating the mind in relation to the virtuous, unvirtuous, and neither [virtuous] nor [unvirtuous].”

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter One, note 93, above.

¹⁵¹ Monier Williams 2011 entry for “*abhi*.” See www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/webtc5/.

“actually,” or “manifestly,” putting something together (Skt. *abhi-saṃskāra*). We can now further understand *saṃskāra* as the *connection* (i.e., “putting together”) *that is made between a state of consciousness and an object*.

However, this is not simply the “contact” of the sixth link, for that is a different one of the five ever-present mental functions, which Tsongkhapa described elsewhere as “the cause of all mental functions.”¹⁵² By adding the word “urges” (*skul bar byed pa*) to his description of mental movement here, Tsongkhapa gives the sense that there is already the subtlest form of desire, of wanting, of impulse, in this basic mental stirring, or movement (*g.yo*). It is this drawing of the mind towards its object *in a certain way* that does not just create the trace, *it is the trace*. It is the pathway that awareness takes towards a perceived “object.” Insofar as it moves on the basis of ignorance (the first link), it does not understand the nature of the object towards which it surges. Reaching out in the “darkness” of ignorance, the mind turns towards, or pays attention to (*vid la byed pa*) and touches (*reg pa*) an object. Drawn towards it by mental movement, the mind fuses with the object, thinking it is “real.” This drawing together, or fusing (*‘du byed pa*) of awareness and object *is* the mental action, or mental karma. The trace, or pattern of movement, or vibration, that it leaves in the mental stream is the residue of karma (*saṃskāra* in its perfected, nominal form).

Since the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* definition goes on to say that this “karma-possessing” (*las can*) mental function is what draws the mind to engage with what is virtue, non-virtue, or morally unspecified, we might further say that karma, in its most primal form, is *the way that consciousness moves toward and fuses with its object*. This describes one’s private “karma of a moving mind”; on the other hand, “motivated karma” is that action which takes overt form in the sonic vibrations of speech or the coarse movements of a physical body. The way in which those coarse movements further impact *other* living beings – who can experience the changes effected upon their perceived world by such vibrations, and can experience pleasure or pain in reaction to those experiences – defines, in retrospect, the kind of karma that was created by the vibrations of mind, speech, and body of the first person.

Thus, before we have even begun to discuss “emptiness” in earnest, we might begin to glimpse, at the granular level, the vibrational relationality of Vasubandhu’s doctrine of karma. Deeds themselves are only defined by how they affect living beings, and how they affect living beings is further defined by the subtle movements of each being’s mind throughout the process of intending, acting, perceiving, and in turn receiving one another’s physical and verbal action in a shared world. Yet Tsongkhapa asserts here, in briefest comment upon a long and complex debate that runs through the history of Buddhist Abhidharma, that for Master Vasubandhu, “Since he wants to assert

¹⁵² See the *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, 12a5 (693), as cited above, note 96.

that there is a mental movement that engages *at the same time* as the communicating [form] of body and speech, therefore he explains that both kinds of karma [i.e. karma of body and speech]¹⁵³ are mental movement.”¹⁵⁴ That is, actions of body and speech are essentially physical (*gzugs can*); according to Buddhist schools other than those of the Vaibhāṣikas, physical form cannot be carried in a mindstream, much less transmitted across lifetimes over thousands or millions of years. Thus, according to Vasubandhu’s critique, as well as Mind-Only interpretations, the karma that will give rise to its result later has to continue in the form of an imprint that can “remain” or replicate itself in the mental stream. Although physical and verbal actions and their immediate consequences for other beings are certainly what give shape to the way that a karmic trace will be formed, nonetheless, according to the Sautrāntika (“Sūtrist”) and Mind-Only schools, technically speaking the outer action that can be perceived by others is *not* the karma itself.

The actual “karma-possessing mental movement” (*sems pa . . . las can no*), then, is the vibration set up in the mindstream before, during, and after an action – the reverberations that accompany an action, as it were, within one’s own mind. Thus the stream of karma is formed from all the moments of mind-moving-towards-and-fusing-with its object that take place over the course of intending to do an action, doing it, and reflecting upon it afterwards. According to the Mind-Only presentations, those movements of the mind – which are “actually forming traces” (*abhisamkāra*) – eventually coagulate, after the deed is finished, to form an invisible seed, even as the active vibration and conscious memory of a particular deed fade from the presence of moment to moment consciousness.

The seed, however, is said (by Vasubandhu) to be stored in the foundation consciousness as an *unlinked trace* (*mtshungs par ldan min ‘du byed*). This means that, although the etched trace of “putting things together in a certain way” (*‘du byed pa*, Skt. *saṃskāra*) continues through time, it is no longer actively linked with a state of mind, or consciousness. That is, a seed is not aware. But at subtle layers of consciousness, the mind can remain aware *of* seeds. This is the function the foundation consciousness is meant to serve: It is conceived as a separate consciousness that continues and bridges the gap between lifetimes in an unbroken chain of causation, precisely in order to maintain the subtle and inchoate “awareness” of seeds and tendencies as its focal objects, until circumstances are ripe for those seeds to rise at the forefront to the six standard groups of consciousness once again, thus turning into their experiential results. But these ripened

¹⁵³ Thanks to Alexander Berzin for clarification on this point. See his talks on “What Karma Actually Is: The Gelug Prasangika Presentation” at www.berzinarchives.com/web/x/nav/group.html_1979263678.html, especially Sessions Three and Five.

¹⁵⁴ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 154b5-6 (340). Italics added. ལུས་ངག་གི་རིག་བྱེད་དང་མཉམ་དུ་འབྲུག་པའི་སེམས་སྤྱོད་ལས་བཞེད་པས་ལས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སེམས་པར་བཞག་དོ།

results are not in themselves further karmic movements of the mind; rather, according to Tsongkhapa's presentation of the Mind-Only school view that we examined earlier, the results manifest precisely *as* the five heaps of a living being, including the sense faculties, consciousnesses, and the apparently outer objects perceived.

Of course the mind will continue to create new karmic impulses *in response* to every situation that arises as a ripening, but these new impulses will start a new cycle of dependent arising; they are not themselves the result of the prior seeds. Hence the Mahāyāna theory of karma avoids “determinism” at its fundamental level. Though one's responses are of course heavily conditioned by habitual tendencies and the always-going causes of the mental afflictions, in principle there is nothing about the ripening of a seed that would force one to respond in a certain way. The ripening is considered the reality of suffering; the afflictions and forming new traces are the reality of the source of suffering. This distinction is crucial to understanding the possibility of liberation in Buddhist soteriological thought.

According to this logic, then, the only way to break the cycle is to prevent the mind from engaging in the kinds of new karmic impulses that have always traced new traces, in response to every experience that a ripened body, mind, and world turned into, over and over again. In describing how those who have actually come to understand reality correctly might begin to break down the cycle, Tsongkhapa quotes (within the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*) what he considers to be a definitive statement from Nāgārjuna. In full, the verses from the conclusion of Nāgārjuna's twenty-sixth chapter, examining the twelve links, are as follows:¹⁵⁵

The root of the cycle is making traces
 Therefore the wise ones *make no trace*
 The unwise is a maker, since
 He does not – from having seen suchness – know.
 If to not-knowing there is an end
 Then of the traces there will be no becoming;

 By understanding that it will cancel ignorance
 They meditate on suchness.
 Since there is an end to both,
 Neither this nor that will come about.

¹⁵⁵ Nāgārjuna, *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba'i shes rab*), Toh. 3824, 17b3-5, emphasis mine.
 །འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བ་འདུ་བྱེད་དེ། །དེ་བྱིར་མཁས་རྣམས་འདུ་མི་བྱེད། །དེ་བྱིར་མི་མཁས་བྱེད་པོ་ཡིན། །མཁས་མིན་དེ་ཉིད་མཐོང་བྱིར་རོ། །མ་རིག་འགགས་པར་གྱུ་
 ར་ན་ནི། །འདུ་བྱེད་རྣམས་ཀྱང་འབྱུང་མི་འགྱུར། །མ་རིག་འགག་པར་འགྱུར་བ་ནི། །ཤེས་པས་དེ་ཉིད་བསྐྱོམས་པས་སོ། །དེ་དང་དེ་ནི་འགགས་གྱུར་པས། །དེ་ད
 ང་དེ་ནི་མཐོང་མི་འགྱུར། །སྤྲལ་བསྐལ་བྱུང་པོ་འབའ་ཞིག་ས། །དེ་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་ཡང་དག་འགག།

See Tsongkhapa's citation in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. pa, 155a6-155b1 (341-342). For my translation of “*mkhas min de nyid mthong phyir ro*” cf. the Sanskrit edition of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Edited by Douglas Bachman, 2001), Chapter 26.10: *saṃsāramūlān saṃskārānavidvān saṃsarotyayataḥ / avidvān kārakastasmānna vidvāṃstattvadarśanāt*.

It is the only way to end completely
Those heaps of suffering life.

According to Nāgārjuna, then, the only way to end the whole of saṃsāra is to put an end to “both” of the first two links: ignorance and traces. If one did not see an object as inherently real, the impulse to “fuse” with it and thus make manifest a trace (*mngon par 'du byed pa*) would not arise. It is this “cognitive fusion” which, as we will examine from a Mind-Only perspective, “infuses” (*bsgos pa*) the fragrances, or tendencies, deep into the subtle layers of consciousness, to remain as unlinked traces until they are ready to ripen. But even as experience from previous karma arises, if there is no fusion, if there is no movement of the mind that drags consciousness over to lock onto an object as something “real”, and then to act with afflictive thoughts in response to it, new karma cannot be traced, and new seeds cannot be deposited (*bsgos pa*).

As Tsongkhapa indicated in his comments on the seventh link of feeling, it is here that the cycle can be interrupted, *if ignorance is not present*. That is, even though a pleasant or unpleasant feeling arises, if one somehow understood exactly how and why a certain feeling was coming – i.e. only on the basis of the manifesting vibration of past congruent causes within one’s own mind, and no other reason – then the impulse to act based on craving and appropriation would not arise. Then, not only would previous karma not be triggered at a tenth link of “existence,” but new karma would not be created in a fresh cyclic instance of links one through three, etc. The moment when this breaking of the cycle is considered to be most crucial is the moment of death, i.e., with the ideal that there would be no craving or appropriation to trigger the seeds that would project a new birth, aging, and further death. Nonetheless, since it is clear that the twelve links are also understood to be happening constantly in a series of mini-cycles from moment to moment and day to day, the goal of practice would be to learn how to cancel the actualizing links of “craving” through “existence” over and over again.

As the above-quoted verse from Nāgārjuna indicates, however, the Indian Mahāyāna tradition insists repeatedly that it is not so easy to just stop craving. Even intellectual understanding of karma and its results is not enough: In order to cancel ignorance and therefore the ingrained tendency for mental impulses to arise perpetually in response to perceived objects, it is said one must see reality as it is, or “suchness” (*de nyid*, Skt. *tattva*) directly. Tsongkhapa states that if someone has gained direct realization of “suchness, the lack of a self,” thus becoming a realized being, or “ārya,” then although there may still be birth within the cycle by force of karma and the afflictions, it will become impossible to collect any *new* projecting karma (*'phen byed kyi las*).¹⁵⁶ Without creating any new causes for suffering birth, and while continuing to purify the mind of previous karma and afflictions, then gradually, for the ārya, the cycle will grind to a halt.

¹⁵⁶ See the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 155b2 (342).

But what then? If all things arise in dependence and relationship – and we have gone a long way to suggesting that the primary referent of “dependent arising” in Nāgārjuna’s thought is precisely the twelve links, which his teaching is explicitly aimed at annihilating – then is the goal of Buddhism to eliminate dependent arising, and therefore *existence*, altogether? There are certainly many who have thought as much. Indeed, there are scriptures in the Pāli canon that have been and are still interpreted by many among the Theravāda tradition to say that any possible continuation of the body or mind of an arhat is utterly “cut off” at death, with nothing and no one to return or endure (in Tibetan: *bem rig rgyun ’chad pa*). Though there are some who would argue for some experiential component to the “bliss” of final nirvāṇa, it remains a point of considerable debate.¹⁵⁷

The Mahāyāna tradition, on the other hand, has consistently claimed that there is an entirely different dimension to reality, not based on ignorance at all, in which cause and effect still function, but no longer as “karma” *per se* . . . since there is no longer the process of unwittingly planting seeds and being surprised by their ripening long after the original deed is forgotten, and so on. Something about understanding the true nature of reality is said to undo the suffering cycle – but opens the door for an entirely different mode of “dependent arising,” this one free of ignorance, craving, birth, aging and death. It is this possibility that lays the foundation for all of tantric practice, certainly, since the whole of tantric theory is based upon the notion of “creating causes” that must ripen into vast “results” within an extraordinarily brief period of time, in order to reach enlightenment more quickly than in the sūtra vehicle of the perfections. If enlightenment did not “come about” on the basis of causes and conditions planted in the mind, Vajrayāna practice would be pointless. Yet will Nāgārjuna’s frequent statements that birth must be ended altogether, that the “wise ones make no trace,” and so on, ever be contradicted in a tantric context?

Furthermore, we are still left with ample ambiguity as to what constitutes this “lack of a self” about which ignorance is confused. What is it, *beyond* simply understanding the laws of karma and its consequences, that the wise realize directly about reality? What it is that one would have to know, indubitably, at the moment that feeling arises, that would cancel any urge to react in such a way as to create new traces – if traces are merely the impulse of the mind to surge towards *something*? If Tsongkhapa states so clearly that it is the understanding of *dependent arising* that becomes inseparable from the understanding of emptiness, so that, “One day they will no longer alternate, but in a single instant the very fact of seeing infallible reliance and relationship alone will dissolve the confident apprehension with which you were holding to objects; then your analysis of the view is complete”: What deeper understanding might one gain about

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, “What Happens to an Arahant at Death? A Dialogue between Bhikkhu Bodhi and B. Alan Wallace,” unpublished text of an email correspondence, June 2014.

dependent arising – precisely *as* the karmic cycle – that could lead directly to an understanding of the emptiness so praised by Middle Way philosophers?

Finally, to return to our original quest, have we yet elaborated a theory of karma deep and all-pervasive enough to justify the Abhidharma claim that it is from *karma* that physical planets and cosmic systems arise, much less Nāgabuddhi and Tsongkhapa's use of that idea as the starting point for explaining a Guhyasamāja practice of the stage of creation? To begin to address all these questions, we will eventually return in greater detail to Tsongkhapa's *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, where he elaborates the many different types of seeds and tendencies. To place that in the full context of Middle Way thought, however, we must first turn to detailed arguments that Tsongkhapa makes *vis á vis* the Mind-Only school explanation of ultimate reality, and what it is "empty of" as these appear in his mature philosophical works: *Illumination of the True Thought: An Extensive Explanation of "Entering the Middle Way,"* and *The Essence of Eloquence: A Commentary on Distinguishing the Interpretable and the Definitive*. Before all this, however, we shall return to Tsongkhapa's elaboration of the story of the eon of formation in his *Exegesis of the "Steps of the Exposition."*

Chapter Two: A World Made From Mind

In this way, as explained before when describing the formation of gold, by the power of the karma of all these living beings, a cloud arises with a core made of the various elements. The rainwaters that fall from it come to rest above the golden foundation of the earth. Having been churned and hardened by the winds that emerged by the power of the karma of all these living beings, they spring forth into the great mountain and the rest of the eight mountains; the inconceivable palaces of the gods, from the Land of the Thirty-Three on down; the four continents and the eight subcontinents; the outer mountainous environs making a ring of iron mountains; down to the fields and majestic trees and willows and so on.

Now as for the great mountain and so forth, the *Commentary to the Abhidharmakośa* states that, given that the rainwaters are churned by the wind, the elements (which are an assemblage of gold and so on) are then gathered together by winds created by the inner force of karma. Built up into heaps, they turn into the mountains and continents. The main part of the *Levels* [from the *Yogācārabhūmi*] explains that from the finest of those elements springs forth the great mountain, from the middling come the seven golden mountains, and from the least come the four continents, the eight subcontinents, and the mountainous environs.

—Je Tsongkhapa, *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”*¹

Karma Spinning Elements

What does it mean to say that a world begins from the movement of wind? It is not an unfamiliar idea outside of Buddhist circles; indeed the Hebrew Bible states that:

¹ *rnam gzhag rim pa'i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 11b2-6 (24). (This is a gloss on Nāgabuddhi, *Steps of Exposition*, *rnam gzhag rim pa*, sde dge, vol. *ngi*, 122a2-3, quoted above in Chapter One, note 56.)

ལྷ་གསལ་འཆགས་པའི་དུས་སྟེ་བཤད་པ་དེ་ལྷ་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་ཁམས་སྣ་ཆོགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱིང་པོའི་ཕྱིན་བྱུང་སྟེ་དེ་ལས་བབ་པའི་ཆར་གྱི་
ཆུ་རྣམས་གསལ་གྱི་ས་གཞིའི་སྟེང་དུ་གནས་སོ། །དེ་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་བྱུང་བའི་རྒྱུད་གིས་བསྐྱབས་ཤིང་འཐས་པར་བྱས་པས་རི་རབ་ལ་
སོགས་པའི་རི་བརྒྱད་དང་། སུས་ཅུ་ཙུག་སུས་པ་མན་ཆད་ཀྱི་ལྷའི་གཞལ་མེད་ཁང་དང་གླིང་བཞི་གླིང་ཕན་བརྒྱད་དང་མཐའ་ལྷགས་རིས་བསྐྱོར་པའི་ཁོང་ཡུག་གི་
རི་ཆུན་ཆད་དུ་ཤིང་དང་ཕྱོད་ཤིང་དང་ལྷག་མ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱུང་བར་གྱུར་ཏོ། །རི་རབ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེ་དག་ཀྱིས་རྒྱུད་གིས་ཆར་གྱི་ཆུ་བསྐྱབས་པ་ན་གསལ་ལ་སོག
ས་པའི་ཆོགས་བྱུང་བ་རྣམས་ལས་ཀྱི་མཐུས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རྒྱུད་གིས་བསྐྱས་ནས། སྤང་བར་བྱས་པ་རྣམས་རི་དང་གླིང་དུ་འགྱུར་བར་མཛོད་འགྲེལ་ལས་གསུངས་ལ
། ཁམས་དེ་དག་མཆོག་ལས་རི་རབ་དང་འབྲིང་ལས་གསལ་གྱི་རི་བདུན་དང་ཐ་མ་ལས་གླིང་བཞི་གླིང་ཕན་བརྒྱད་ཁོང་ཡུག་གི་རི་རྣམས་བྱུང་བར་ས་ཡི་དངོས་ག
ཞི་ལས་བཤད་དོ།

In the beginning Elohim created *hashomayim* (the heavens, *Himel*) and *haaretz* (the earth). And the earth was *tohu vavohu* (without form, and void); and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Ruach Elohim was hovering upon the face of the waters.²

This “Ruach Elohim” has been translated alternatively as “a wind from God,” the “Spirit of God,” or even, in other contexts, as “the breath of God.”³ While I cannot elaborate a theological comparison here, I think it worthwhile to keep all the Genesis stories in mind as we continue to examine Tsongkhapa’s treatment of the Abhidharma worldview in a tantric context. In particular, what is it about “wind/breath/spirit” (Tib. *rlung*, Skt. *prāṇa*, Gk. *pneuma*) that is considered, across cultures, to be so fundamental to the creation of a world?

As he continues to gloss Nāgabuddhi’s root text, Tsongkhapa makes it clear that, according to his Indian sources, it is by the inner force (*mthus*) of karma that the winds begin to move – after a period of total emptiness, when all remnants of a physical universe had been destroyed at the end of the last eon of destruction. Tsongkhapa had stated earlier that the “first cause of this wind is the wind of the form realm.”⁴ According to Vasubandhu’s compilation of Buddhist cosmology, during an eon of destruction all the physical components of a world are progressively burned away by the rising of seven suns, each hotter and more total in its destructive effects than the last. Prior to this, however, all the living beings inhabiting that world have already died and been reborn, either into the lower realms of other world systems, or into the sublime form and formless realms of the same world system in which the desire realm is about to collapse. Thus no living beings are actually said to be destroyed by the seven suns. With this notion, we already encounter the conundrum of something being said to happen amidst physical elements – indeed something quite gargantuan and catastrophic – without any living beings “there” to experience it. But the mindstreams of living beings have not ceased to exist; they have either been reborn in a completely different world system, one that is not undergoing destruction at that time, or they are living out very long lives as “gods” absorbed in the meditations of the formless realm, or else engaging in the subtle and exquisitely beautiful archetypal images and abstract experiences of the celestial palaces of the form realm.

Meanwhile, the particular world system in discussion remains “emptied” of physical matter related to the gross elements, for a very long time. Then, in the present case of a world destroyed by fire, since everything from the second level of the form

² Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB), Bereshis 1. (Cf. Genesis 1:1-2)

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Bereshis+1&version=OJB>

³ See <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/7307.htm>, in Strong’s Concordance, where “*ruach*,” is defined as “breath, wind, spirit.”

⁴ See the translation cited at Chapter One, note 59, above.

realm on upwards continues to exist, there is a place of continuity, as it were, from which the energy of movement called wind can arise. Tsongkhapa specifies that the inconceivable palaces of the desire realm gods form first, from above; it is only afterwards that the gentle winds, driven “*by force of what arises in reliance and relationship*,” begin to stir, gradually gaining strength until they become hard as a diamond. Nevertheless, Tsongkhapa finds it relevant to add that these winds are a direct continuation of energies that were already moving, however subtly, in the form realm, and he uses the word “first cause” (*dang po'i rgyu*). However, Tsongkhapa sees no contradiction in saying also that these winds are stirred anew “by force of” the karma of living beings. Was it not also the karma of living beings that drove the winds of the form realm to stir in a prior time? Perhaps this double attribution of causation indicates a distinction between a *how* and a *why*: one might identify “acting” and “equal-share” types of causes unfolding to constitute the movement and propagation of physical elements, but the “reason” they move is said to be the ripening of the karma of living beings. Still, to turn the distinction back on itself: *How*, or by what mechanism, could the karma of living beings – something carried only in mindstreams – actually become the reason *why* something will manifest on such a grand scale *as physical*? This is a question of paramount importance if one is ever to find it plausible that ethically-based karmic seeds could translate into something as objectively “real,” and concrete, as a planet or galaxy.

Furthermore, our conundrum returns: Within the nascent world system, there are not supposed to be any beings living outside the form and formless realms at this point, so there are simply no sentient beings around to “watch” the gathering winds, the golden rain, and so on. Perhaps the only mind that could in fact witness such a process would be the mind of an omniscient Buddha, who is said to see all things, past, present, and future, as one moment. But if it is the karma of *living beings* that is supposed to be driving the process, it would seem to follow that there should also be some living beings witnessing it, because does not karma always ripen in the form of manifest perceptions? Exactly where, then, and for whom, is the cosmogonic process described by Abhidharma literature understood to take place? Is it simply a logical extrapolation of what “must have happened” in order for there to be a world for humans, animals, and so forth, to live in now? Or is it something that Buddhist scholars accept only on the basis of reportage, compiled from scattered sūtra references, representing what the Buddha himself is supposed to have seen when perceiving all time and space directly from his meditation under the *bodhi* tree?⁵

⁵ It is true, however, that beings of the form realm are said to have powers of clairvoyance. My thanks to Dr. B. Alan Wallace for making this point: email communication, February 18th, 2016. This might imply that form realm beings could be thought to “watch” the process of world-formation going on in a desire realm prior to actually taking birth there. I have not yet found such a possibility for the perceptual grounding of the elemental processes during an eon of formation discussed in a Tibetan text, however.

Let us leave this question as an enigma for the moment, as it may help to drive our inquiry, later, into Tsongkhapa's presentations of his view of emptiness. It is interesting to note, however, that when Tsongkhapa actually quotes Abhidharma sources, whether in his Steps of the Path writings, or even in the context of this advanced Guhyasamāja commentary, he does not apply the kind of piercing logical analysis that he does when dealing with Mind-Only or Middle Way material. It is as though all he is concerned to do is to report the various views of Indian Buddhism accurately, and weave them together into a meaningful narrative for the practitioner. While he will have plenty to say about how to interpret the transformative practices based upon such a cosmological worldview, he has little to critique about whether these stories themselves are an accurate representation of universal processes. At a certain point, does even Tsongkhapa take the deeply hidden laws of karma, and stories of an age long past, on faith in authority?

Meanwhile, we return to our own analysis of causation in this context. There are some further points from Gyalwa Gendun Drup's commentary that will be relevant to our questions regarding the causal status of the elements within an Abhidharma system, as understood by one of Tsongkhapa's direct disciples:⁶

Elements serve as both the simultaneously-emergent causes and the equal-share causes for elements. This is because an element is the simultaneously-emergent cause for an element that exists at the same time as it does, and because a previous instance of an element is the equal-share cause for a later instance of the element. Elements do not act as always-going causes, because they are not something with mental afflictions, nor do they act as ripening causes, because they are neither virtue nor non-virtue. They do not act as linked causes, because they are inert matter. . . .

Things made from elements are mutually simultaneous causes for other things made from elements, as well as being equal-share and ripening causes for them. This is because (1) something made from elements is a simultaneously-emergent cause for the seven [non-virtues of body and speech] that are to be abandoned by stainless meditative equipoise; because (2) an earlier instance of something made from elements is the equal-share cause for a later instance of a thing made from elements; and because (3) *the eyes and so forth that grow from ripening in a later*

⁶ Gyalwa Gendun Drup, *mngon pa mdzod kyi rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, gsung 'bum vol. nga, 70a1-70b1. (Italics added.)

འབྲུང་བས་འབྲུང་བ་དེའི་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྲུང་བའི་རྒྱ་དང་སྐལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་ལ་གཉིས་བྱེད་དེ། འབྲུང་བས་རང་དང་དུས་མཉམ་བའི་འབྲུང་བ་དེའི་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྲུང་བའི་རྒྱ་དང་། འབྲུང་བ་སྐལ་མཉམ་འབྲུང་བ་བྱི་མའི་སྐལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་བྱེད་པའི་བྱིར། གཏན་འཁྲུག་རྒྱ་མི་བྱེད་དེ། ཉན་མོངས་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར། རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱ་མི་བྱེད་དེ། དགེ་མི་དགེ་གང་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར། མཚུངས་ལྡན་གྱི་རྒྱ་མི་བྱེད་དེ། བཅ་མོ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར། . . . འབྲུང་གུར་གྱིས་འབྲུང་གུར་གཞན་གྱི་པན་ཚུན་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྲུང་བའི་རྒྱ་དང་། སྐལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་དང་། རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱ་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་བྱེད་དེ། བསམ་གཏན་ཟག་མེད་ཀྱི་སྒོར་བ་བདུན་པོ་དེ་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྲུང་བའི་རྒྱ་དང་། འབྲུང་གུར་སྐལ་མཉམ་འབྲུང་གུར་བྱི་མའི་སྐལ་མཉམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་དང་། ཆེ་འདྲིའི་དགེ་མི་དགེའི་རྣམ་པར་རིག་བྱེད་ལས་བྱི་མའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་སྤྲེས་ཀྱི་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པ་འབྲུང་བའི་བྱིར། འབྲུང་གུར་གྱིས་འབྲུང་བ་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱ་རྣམ་པ་གཅིག་བྱེད་དེ། ཆེ་འདྲིའི་དགེ་མི་དེའི་རྣམ་པར་རིག་བྱེད་ལས་བྱི་མའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་སྤྲེས་ཀྱི་དབང་པོའི་ཆོགས་པ་ན་ཡོད་པའི་འབྲུང་བ་དེ་འབྲུང་བའི་བྱིར།

lifetime arise from the communicating [form] of virtue and non-virtue done in this life. Something made from elements is a ripening cause for the elements in only one case; because the elements that exist within the assembly of sense powers that are born from ripening in a later lifetime arose from the communicating [form] of virtue and non-virtue done in this life.

Here is what we may glean from these paragraphs: Because the “things that emerge” (*'byung ba*, Skt. *bhūta*), i.e., “elements,” are inert matter (*bem po*), they cannot be involved in the linking of mind and mental functions, nor can they act in the direct propagation of mental afflictions. Since they have no quality of being either virtue or non-virtue, they cannot act as ripening causes. As accepted by most schools of philosophy, whether Buddhist or not, matter itself has no moral properties. Nonetheless, Gendun Drup understands the Abhidharma system to accept that elements, as well as things made from elements (*'byung gyur*), such as the body of a living being, can be the *results* of morally charged ripening causes. That is, ordinarily, one element, such as earth, can be thought of as supporting the existence of other elements simultaneously in the present moment. One type of element can also be seen to act as the immediate, equal-share cause for more of the same element to exist in the next moment – such as a gust of wind being a cause for more wind to keep moving a moment later. Insofar as the body of a living being is the simultaneous support for anything that the living being does with that body, however, one can say that a physical body made of elements is a simultaneous cause for the types of morally non-virtuous actions that one can do with body and speech.⁷

Furthermore, according to an idea associated with the Vaibhāṣika system, the physical “communicating” (*rnam par rig byed*, Skt. *vijñapti*) form of actions done with body and speech – i.e., the fact that others can see or hear what you are doing – can become a ripening cause, because the sense powers made from earth, water, and so on, which are part of the ripened result of a body in a future life, are seen to be the ripened result of the deeds that one did *in* a body in a previous lifetime. Gendun Drup even goes on to say that the raw elements themselves can be ripened results, for the same reason. Thus elements themselves cannot be moral causes, but what one *does* with elemental matter, while living in a body, can become a moral cause for the emergence (*'byung ba*) of new elements (*'byung ba*), and their complex configurations (*'byung gyur*), to arise in the future, based on the connection between the third link of consciousness and the fourth link of name and form. Thus, according to this particular presentation, *physical elements themselves can arise directly as the result of deeds.*

Such correspondence may be conceivable at the level of the body of a living being, but has it been of any help in addressing our question regarding the movement of

⁷ By implication, it would seem the body is also a simultaneous cause for virtuous actions, but the example refers only to the seven which are *abandoned* by someone remaining in the withdrawal of form-realm level meditation, i.e., the seven non-virtues of body and speech.

winds on a cosmic scale in a world where no living beings have yet been born? It is important to remain aware that this discussion of world-formation has so far remained mostly within the context of the Vaibhāṣika schools of thought, upon which Vasubandhu based his reportage in the *Abhidharmakośa*. In that school, the individual constituents of reality – whether physical, mental, or unlinked traces – are all seen to exist ultimately, with their own defining characteristics. Thus karma has an inherent causal mechanism, explained in that school by the idea of “holds” (*thob pa*, Skt. *prāpti*), that is not considered to be driven by consciousness *per se*. Rather, it unfolds according to its own laws, in dependence upon and in relationship to myriad causes and conditions, but apparently quite independently of any living being’s explicit awareness of it, at many stages of the process. Thus, as I understand it, it would not be a problem in this system for the energy of the collective karma of living beings to give rise to the movement and formation of elements over the course of billions of “years,” to prepare a planet, oceans, mountains, and vegetation for them, long in advance of anyone actually being born there. For the future inhabitants of what is known as the vessel of a world, this would be a display of environmental results writ large, where these are, again, seen as the results of the vast array of acting causes. But when analyzed individually, there would be the simultaneous and equal-share causes of elemental energies supporting and propagating each other, while there would also be the ripening causes driving the process teleologically, as it were, to produce a result suitable for expressing the full outcome of karmic actions created in concert by huge groups of living beings long in the past. In this presentation, the “inner force” of karma seems to have a causal efficacy of its own, that need not be linked with the moment to moment perceptions of the living beings who will nonetheless experience the results of such karmic forces eventually.

It is a tremendous proposition, to think of a world somehow being prepared in advance in exact calibration to the karmic traces already stored within the mental streams of living beings who cannot even imagine the future lives they might come to live on a planet they cannot even perceive yet in its formation – while they continue to live elsewhere, absorbed in the blissful meditations of form or formless realms, or else suffering the fruits of past evils in the lower realms of world systems far, far away.

Yet there can be something quite terrifying about this presentation of karma, too, where the “mechanism” appears as a cold and invincible force over which we have little or no control in the present, so that past deeds lurk irreversibly in their threat of future outcome. Indeed, some early schools of Buddhism did see karma to be virtually irrevocable, until such time as the final nirvāṇa of an arhat dissolved any possibility of future heaps in which traces could ripen. It is mostly with the appearance of the Mahāyāna, as scriptures such as the *Sūtra of the Four Things* (*chos bzhi bstan pa’i mdo*, Skt. *catur-dharma-nirdeśa-sūtra*) began to teach practices of karmic “purification,” that the idea could become prevalent that the power of karmic seeds could somehow be

altered or deactivated before they had given rise to their result. But such practices are deeply founded in a Mahāyāna understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena – including the karmic seeds themselves. While the basic principles of karma seem to have been accepted throughout all schools of Indian Buddhism, the interpretation of *how* those principles are maintained within the fabric of reality differs greatly.

Thus when Tsongkhapa does come to interpret, even briefly, the Abhidharma presentation of world-formation, he can do so only within his own Mahāyāna, and specifically Middle Way, viewpoint. As I have suggested, his perspective in no way diminishes the weight given to karma in that causal process, but only enhances it. While in the Abhidharma system we have examined a great diversity of causes and conditions, some of which are explicitly not karmic, and not mental (e.g., equal-share causation propagating the physical elements), according to the Middle Way and Mind-Only presentations, there is nothing at all that could be said to sustain itself or its causal processes “out there on its own.” But then, if not independent, what constant helper would they need? For both of these Mahāyāna schools of thought, the answer is *mind*, in all its creative facets.

The Creator of Worlds

While clarifying a fine point on the sequence of practice in the Guhyasamāja sādhana,⁸ Tsongkhapa offers an answer to the perennial question of “who made the world?” It is rare amidst his writings to find such a point stated so explicitly.⁹

⁸ Tsongkhapa is glossing the following passage from Nāgabuddhi’s *Steps of Exposition*, sde dge, vol. *ngi*, 122a4-5:

Then that lord of consciousness, the Great Vajradhara, the creator of beings-with-a-mind, after creating the vessel of a world, must certainly send forth realms of living beings. Because it is stated,

When you have meditated first upon the place
then create the three vajras and meditate.

འདི་ནས་ནམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་བདག་པོ་དོན་རྒྱུ་ཆེན་པོ་སེམས་ཅན་སྐྱེད་པར་མཛད་པ་པོས་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཉེན་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་འོག་ཏུ་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ཁམས་ངེས་པར་སྐྱེལ་པར་མཛད་པེ། གནས་ནི་བསྐྱོན་པ་སྣོན་འགྲོ་བས། དོན་རྒྱུ་གསུམ་བསྐྱེད་བསྐྱོན་པར་བྱ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

Though digital searches reveal that this concluding verse appears numerous times in the Tengyur, it is always in the form of a quotation, as it is here. Thus its original form would appear to have been from the *Guhyasamāja* root tantra, but I have not been able to locate any variation of this verse in either the root tantra or the “latter tantra” (*rgyud phyi ma*), nor in any of the four explanatory tantras (*bshad rgyud*). Just before the passage I translate here, Tsongkhapa quotes a findable verse from the eleventh chapter of the root tantra (*yi ge bhrum gyi gnas bsgoms te, rdo rje gsum 'byung bsgom par bya*: “Having meditated on the place of the syllable *bhrum* / bring forth the three vajras and meditate”), seemingly identifying that this is the verse Nāgabuddhi must be referring to here, even though, given the latter reference to the seed syllable *bhrum*, the difference is more than just a matter of variant Tibetan translations.

⁹ *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* (*rnam gzhag rim pa'i rnam bshad dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i gnad kyi don gsal ba*), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha*, 12b6-13a6 (26):

སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ཁམས་སྐྱེལ་པ་པོ་ནི་ནམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་པ་བདག་པོ་ཡང་ཡིན་པ་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་ནམས་ཀྱི་སེམས་ཉི་མ་དག་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་སྐྱེད་པར་བྱེད་པ་པོ་འོ། །འདིས་བྱུང་མོང་གི་ལས་བསགས་ནས་སྣོད་དང་ཐུང་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ལས་བསགས་ནས་བཅུད་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཉེན་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལ་དབང་བྱེད་པས་ན་བདག་པོ་འཕེལ་བྱེད་པ་པོ་འོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཡང་དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ལས། རི་བཞིན་རང་གི་བསྐྱེད་བཅོས་དེ་དེ་ལས། །སྐྱ་སྟེགས་ནམས་ཀྱིས་གང་ཟག་སོགས་དེ་དག །སྐྱས་པ་དེ་

As for who it is that *sends forth realms of living beings*, it is something that is both *consciousness*, and also a *lord*. For it is that which creates the mind of all *beings-with-a-mind*, that is, impure living beings. It wields dominion over the creation of worlds: the vessels that come from the accumulation of actions shared by these living beings, and the inhabitants that come from the accumulation of actions unique to each one. Therefore it is a *lord*, or creator. Similarly, *Entering the Middle Way* states,¹⁰

*Since the Victorious One did not see
the person and so on – those things
claimed by those outside the fold
according to their respective scriptures –
to be, any of them, a creator,
he said the mind alone
is maker of the worlds.*

It also says,¹¹

*By mind itself are the worlds of living beings arranged, and by mind itself
are the immense variety of worlds that are the vessels set forth.
It is stated that every wanderer, without exception, was born from karma.
If you abandoned the mind, then even karma would not exist.*

The Great Vajradhara¹² is the creator of pure living beings, that circle of divine beings. This is true because it is said that all the sacred circles – consisting of foundations, and those who rest upon such foundations – are the parts of his own holy body, sent forth as these [pure worlds].

Later on [in Nāgabuddhi's text], the mind of the intermediate state will also be called the lord of consciousness, *the vajra of holy mind*. Yet it would not make sense to explain these two – the lord of consciousness and Vajradhara – as though they were one and the same. Furthermore, to explain that the living beings of the

དག་བྱེད་པོར་མ་གཟིགས་ནས། །རྒྱལ་བས་སེམས་ཙམ་འཛིན་ཉེན་བྱེད་པོར་གསུངས། །ཞེས་དང་། སེམས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ནི་སེམས་ཙན་འཛིན་ཉེན་དང་། ལྷོད་ཀྱི་འཛི
ག་ཉེན་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྣ་ཚོགས་འགོད། །འགྲོ་བ་མ་ལུས་ལས་ལས་སྐྱེས་པར་གསུངས། །སེམས་སྤངས་ནས་ནི་ལས་ཀྱང་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་སོ། །རྫོ་རྗེ་འཆང་ཆེན་པོ་
ནི་དག་པའི་སེམས་ཙན་ལྷའི་འཁོར་ལོ་བསྐྱེད་པར་མཛད་པ་པོ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཉེན་དང་བཞེན་པའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ཐམས་ཅད་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྐྱུའི་ཆ་ཤས་རྣམས་དེར་སྐྱུལ་པར་གསུ
ངས་པའི་བྱེད་རོ། །འོག་ནས་བར་དོའི་སེམས་ལ་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་བདག་སོ་སྟགས་རྫོ་རྗེ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་བདག་སོ་དང་རྫོ་རྗེ་འཆང་གཉིས་
གཅིག་ཏུ་འཆང་བ་མི་འཐད་ལ་རྫོ་རྗེ་འཆང་གིས་འཁོར་བའི་སེམས་ཙན་བསྐྱེད་པར་འཆང་བ་ཡང་དོན་མིན་ནོ། །རྫོ་རྗེ་འཆང་ནི་འདིར་ལྷག་མོས་ཀྱི་གཙོ་བོ་ལ་གསུ
ང་ངོ། །སེམས་ཙན་ཀྱི་ཁམས་གཉིས་སྐྱུལ་པའི་དུས་ནི་དག་མ་དག་གི་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཉེན་གཉིས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་འོག་ཏུ་འོ།

¹⁰ Candrakīrti, *Entering the Middle Way*, dbu ma la 'jug pa, Madhyamakāvatāra, sde dge bstan 'gyur, dbu ma, vol. 'a, Toh. 3861, 6:86. My translation follows Tsongkhapa's commentary in *Illumination of the True Thought: An Extensive Explanation of "Entering the Middle Way," dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rgya cher bshad pa dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. ma, 190a2-190b5 (381).

¹¹ *Entering the Middle Way*, 6:89. Tsongkhapa's commentary appears in *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. ma, 192a2-192b4 (385).

¹² *rdo rje 'chang chen po*, Skt. mahāvajradhara: "The Great Vajra-Holder," where the meanings of "vajra" remain to be explained throughout Chapters Three through Five.

suffering cycle were created by Vajradhara is not the meaning. Here, Vajradhara is a being held as the principal figure of the [maṇḍala of] sheer conviction. The time to *send forth* the two *realms of living beings* [i.e., pure and impure] is *after creating* the two *worlds*, which are pure and impure vessels.

There is immense significance encapsulated within these paragraphs, which will take much work to unpack. This passage comes very shortly after the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, in which Tsongkhapa glossed Nāgabuddhi's explanation of the formation of the disks of the elements according to the ordinary condition of things within the cycle. The theoretical point at stake is that, once understanding how the world in which we currently live came into being, the creation stage meditator is meant to produce, at first only as a visualized mental image, a picture of an ideal world that is symbolically correlated to the suffering world he or she is seeking to transform. However, if this is to be more than a mere exercise in wishful thinking, or aesthetic idealization, or even fantastical escapism, the meditator must understand quite precisely the stuff of which the suffering world was made in the first place. Otherwise, neither the preceding meditative dissolution into emptiness, nor the following creation of a crystalline palace inhabited by majestic divine beings will carry much metaphysical weight. Nor will it be convincing enough to the meditator to bring about transformational results of any lasting significance. If one cannot dissolve, even logically and conceptually, every last trace of the universe as it appears to us now, by means of the meditations on emptiness that precede each new creation in a tantric practice ritual (Skt. *sādhana*), it will be no more than child's play. Though he does not say so directly, I will posit that Tsongkhapa recognized this fact, and that is why he cared so much to offer – spread across the many genres of his work – every philosophical tool he knew, in order to lead the perspicacious disciple to an unshakeable understanding of the logical foundations for the ample use of imagination that would be required in the course of creation stage practice.

Thus, although in his *Exegesis of "Steps of the Exposition"* Tsongkhapa has already treated the preparatory emptiness meditation that is meant to echo the destruction of a previous physical world by fire, here he returns to the point that grounds the very possibility of *creating a new world* by means of the mind alone. For, in effect, he is stating that there was never any other force that ever created a world, whether pure or impure. It is in the nature of mind that the creative capacity for making all worlds dwells, for better or for worse. In this passage, however, Tsongkhapa also draws the fine and crucial distinction between the kind of mind that creates a suffering saṃsāra, over and over again, and the kind of mind that can actually generate a divine paradise, and the angelic beings who populate such a paradise – none of whom is fundamentally separate or divided from the sublime creative intelligence who is their source.

This distinction between pure and impure mind runs deep within the Vajrayāna

tradition – from the Old (*rnying ma*) to the New (*gsar ma*) Translation schools of Tibet – and is perhaps one theme that enables Buddhist tantra to maintain its philosophical distinction from non-Buddhist tantric systems and from classical monotheism as well.¹³ That is, very broadly speaking, in a monotheistic system, whether Indian or Abrahamic, there would be some idea of a single creating mind that forms the myriad entities of existence, each with unique identities of their own, even if these natures are regularly misperceived by the many living beings who are also creatures. In a Buddhist Vajrayāna context, because ultimately entities will be found to lack any inherent identity of their own, it is the quality of whichever individual mind is creating appearances that determines how those appearances will appear at any moment, whether pure or impure. Thus diverse minds create diverse kinds of worlds. Yet just as there are many varieties of monotheistic philosophy, Tsongkhapa’s multi-layered understanding of mind will also turn out to be more nuanced than such a coarse contrast with theological systems might suggest, as we will see.

To begin to understand the ramifications of Tsongkhapa’s passing reference, here, to two verses from Candrakīrti’s *Entering the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), we will turn first to Tsongkhapa’s explanation of those same verses in the context of his own extensive commentary on that work, called *Illumination of the True Thought of the Middle Way*. These are verses 86 and 89, respectively, from the extensive chapter on the sixth bodhisattva level, and so they appear nearly two-thirds of the way through Tsongkhapa’s commentary, towards the end of a very long and complex debate between the Middle Way and Mind-Only school viewpoints as characterized by Candrakīrti. Specifically, the verses come at the point in the debate where Tsongkhapa, interpreting Candrakīrti, attempts to prove that in the *Sūtra on the Ten Levels* (*sa bcu pa’i mdo*, Skt. *Daśabhūmikāsūtra*) when the Buddha stated that, “In this way these three realms are mind only,”¹⁴ the word “only” was *not* meant to refute the existence of external matter, as many followers of the so-called “Mind-Only” viewpoint seem to have claimed.

Now the collection of views typically classified under the rubric of “those who claim that there is only mind” (*sems tsam pa*, Skt. *cittamātrin*) is notoriously complex, and Tsongkhapa’s various writings on this school acknowledge that not all of its historical proponents in India actually held the same positions. Nonetheless, in roughest summary we can say that members of this stream of Mahāyāna thought took the primacy

¹³ See the extensive discussion of pure and impure mind in Chapters Five and Six. For detailed exposition of the type of Śaivite tantric philosophy indicated in my mention of non-Buddhist tantric systems here, see, for example, John Nemecek, 2011, *The Ubiquitous Śiva* (New York: Oxford University Press), and Mark S.G. Dyczkowski, 1987, *The Doctrine of Vibration* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press).

¹⁴ *Sūtra on the Ten Levels*, *sa bcu pa’i mdo*, *Daśabhūmikāsūtra*, sde dge bka’ ‘gyur, phal chen, vol. *kha*, 220.4: འདི་ལྟར་ཁམས་གསུམ་པོ་འདི་ནི་སེམས་ཙམ་སྟེ།

A very similar quotation appears in the *Journey to Lañka Sūtra*, *Lañkāvatāra-sūtra* (*lang kar gshegs pa’i theg pa chen po’i mdo*), Toh. 107, mdo sde, vol. *ca*, 87a.3: འདི་ལྟར་ཁམས་གསུམ་པོ་འདི་ནི་རང་གི་སེམས་ཙམ་སྟེ།

of perception and the influence of karmic propensities so seriously, that they found it difficult – if not impossible – to sustain the notion of an autonomous “outer world” of physical matter and elemental causation that was not in some way directly dependent upon and caused by the ripening of karmic seeds in the conscious minds of individual perceivers. Based upon quotations from certain Mahāyāna sūtras that were conducive to this interpretation, the foundational writings attributed to Asaṅga and to Vasubandhu (as well as the later Dharmakīrti), developed unique ways of understanding the emptiness of phenomena, while still preserving as *real* what they understood to be the primary locus of dependent origination, namely the planting and coming-to-fruiting of karmic propensities in consciousness, especially the foundation consciousness. As Tsongkhapa understands the perspective taken by this system, in order for the causal efficacy of karma to be sustained, something possessing inherent characteristics of its own has to carry and display these causes and effects; otherwise the whole functionality of virtue and nonvirtue would collapse, and the Buddha’s teaching would come to naught. In many ways, this school might be seen as a reaction to nihilistic exaggerations or misunderstandings of Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way texts, which appear to have preceded the foundational texts of the Mind-Only system by several centuries.

As we have seen, what Tsongkhapa called the Mind-Only explanation of the twelve links also teaches that each of the seeds stored in this consciousness ripens into a triad of object, sense faculty, and sense consciousness (*don dbang shes gsum*). Thus, although there is an appearance to a sense faculty of something that looks like an “outer” object, *in fact* (they say), there was only ever an appearance within consciousness.¹⁵ In the famous presentation of the three essential natures (*ngo bo nyid gsum*, Skt. *trisvabhāva*) of the Mind-Only school, it is consciousness that comes out as the only real locus for dependent things (*gzhan dbang*, Skt. *paratantra*), not physical things like trees or rocks.¹⁶ Typically, then, the Mind-Only position rejects the notion of outer physical form (*phyi rol pa’i gzugs*) that could ever exist in such a way that it had basic building-blocks of particles or atoms so small and so fundamental that they had no parts (*rdul cha med*). This is a direct refutation of presentations of outer matter as they are found specifically in the Abhidharma and Sautrāntika schools. However, Tsongkhapa himself argues in various places that Asaṅga’s explanation of the development of the five heaps in the *Summary of the Greater Way* clearly indicates that a “proper” Mind-Only view must allow for the existence of the heap of form, as distinct from the four mental heaps¹⁷ – even if that heap of form is still understood to arise as something *substantially*

¹⁵ For a very concise explanation of this view, see *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 164a3-164b6, as translated in Appendix Seven (329-330), where Tsongkhapa is commenting on Candrakīrti’s root verses 6:62 and 6:63, which explain the Mind-Only view being refuted by Candrakīrti’s Middle Way position at that point in the debate.

¹⁶ See Tsongkhapa, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 155a3-155b1, translated in Appendix Seven (311-312). (Italicized words appear in Candrakīrti’s root verse 6:47).

¹⁷ See Tsongkhapa, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 153b2-4 (308) and 194a1-3 (389).

inseparable from the ripening of a karmic mental seed emerging from the foundation consciousness. Thus, from the very beginning of his representation of the Mind-Only viewpoint in this commentary, Tsongkhapa seems to be arguing that not even all proponents of the Mind-Only school understood the true intent of the Mind-Only view, as it was presented in the works of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.

Setting aside the question of their actual historical proponents, the central Mind-Only *tenets* that Candrakīrti refutes over the course of *Entering the Middle Way*, as explicated by Tsongkhapa, are as follows: (1) that a foundation consciousness could ever exist through a nature of its own as something other than the stream of mental consciousness, (2) that a consciousness existing with nothing outside of itself could ever exist through its own nature, and (3) that a special kind of simultaneous reflexive awareness (*rang rig*, Skt. *svasaṃvitti*) could ever exist as a final arbiter of valid perception by which to establish dependent things as ultimate reality. Candrakīrti's verses 6:86 and 6:89 come, then, at the culmination of scores of layered arguments that aim to distinguish how, in contradistinction to the Mind-Only view, the Middle Way position does *also* understand a world to arise from karma, in dependence upon individual minds, but in a way that does not require anything – neither outer matter nor inner consciousness – to exist through inherent characteristics of its own at any level.

Again and again, this view comes in direct opposition to the reported Mind-Only outlook, which would claim that *in order* for the mind to be the real locus of karmic seeds and the wellspring for karmic consequences displaying themselves as a world, the mind itself must exist through defining characteristics of its own (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa*).¹⁸ Since at other points in his Guhyasamāja commentaries Tsongkhapa defines the very emptiness to be meditated upon specifically as that which is empty of anything existing through its own defining characteristics (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pas stong pa'i stong pa nyid*), I would suggest that if we are to understand precisely what Tsongkhapa himself means by this, in a Guhyasamāja context, we must be deeply familiar with these arguments contra Mind-Only positions as they appear in his *Illumination of the True Thought* and *Essence of Eloquence*. While I cannot encapsulate all of these arguments here, I will present the key points of the preceding section on the meaning of “the word only” (*tsam gyi sgra*). I include this because I think that when

¹⁸ Since some form of this phrase appears at least seventy-seven times in Tsongkhapa's *Illumination*, while it appears only a few times (only once in this exact form) in the Tibetan translation of Candrakīrti's *Auto-Commentary*, it is clearly a point that was of enormous importance to Tsongkhapa, while it may be questioned whether Candrakīrti meant exactly the same thing by *svalakṣaṇa*, or **svalakṣaṇena siddha*, even in this context. See Dan Arnold, 2005, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief*, 267n54, for an argument that Tsongkhapa took the Tibetan forms of this phrase in ways Candrakīrti had never intended. See also, Tsongkhapa's own justification as to why he consistently reads “the distinction of the thing to be refuted” as implied in Candrakīrti's text, as translated in Appendix Seven (307-309). Much further research remains to be done to follow the exact trajectory of Tsongkhapa's interpretation and transformation of this phrase across all his mature works, and across all contexts, from Sautrāntika to Cittamātra to Madhyamaka.

Tsongkhapa simply quoted those two verses of Candrakīrti in his *Exegesis of the “Steps of the Exposition,”* he expected his monastic readers to know the context and details of the argument to which he was referring, just by invoking those lines at the very cusp of explaining how to meditate upon a maṇḍala of divine beings.

What is Meant by “Mind Only”

At the beginning of this round of the debate in Candrakīrti’s staged drama between imaginary proponents of varying positions, someone of the Mind-Only school taunts the Middle Way proponent for trying too hard to please “the world,” with its conventional perceptions of outer matter, and so on. Candrakīrti’s text has just finished defending why the so-called “deceptive reality” in the Middle Way presentation of the “two realities” does not stand in contradiction to the perceptions of ordinary people, while those proponents of a Mind-Only position that would deny the existence of outer matter altogether will always be disproven “by the world.” According to Tsongkhapa’s paraphrase of Candrakīrti’s auto-commentary to his own root verses, this Mind-Only taunter says,¹⁹

Nonetheless, out of fear of being disproven by scripture, you must still agree that things are “mind only.” As it is stated in the *Ten Levels*, “Think it over: in this

¹⁹ Tsongkhapa, *Illumination of the True Thought*, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 188b-189a2 (378-379). Compare to Candrakīrti, *Auto-Commentary to Entering the Middle Way*, *dbu ma la ’jug pa’i bshad pa*, *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, dbu ma, vol. ‘a, Toh. 3862, 276b2 ff. Tsongkhapa quotes or paraphrases Candrakīrti’s auto-commentary at such length amidst his own commentary that it would be a work of scholarship in itself simply to divide out word for word where and how Tsongkhapa is glossing Candrakīrti. Though I will attempt to do this with quotation marks in a few of the passages quoted below, even this cannot be exact, since the word changes are sometimes so slight as for it to be impossible to render the quality of the “paraphrase” in translation. Thus I will continue to cite Tsongkhapa, with the implication that one should follow closely in the *bshad pa* (known to many Tibetan authors as the *rang ’grel*) as well. The references in the Sera Mey Library, 2011, two volume edition of Tsongkhapa’s *dbu ma la ’jug pa’i rgya cher bshad pa dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba* are extremely useful, but still not exact. Where that edition uses roman quotation marks to set off passages cited from the auto-commentary, often what remains within the quotation marks is still replete with Tsongkhapa’s gloss or paraphrase, hence not an exact quotation at all. What further research into this process of glossing may reveal, however, is precisely how closely Tsongkhapa was indeed following Candrakīrti’s arguments. A large portion of the *Illumination of the True Thought* cannot be said to be Tsongkhapa’s “original” work. Thus I would suggest we can find the “originality” of his insights precisely in the passages that have no correlate in the auto-commentary at all. When quoting these I will generally indicate that they are Tsongkhapa’s unique contribution.

ལུང་གི་གོམས་པ་ལས་འཇིགས་པས་སེམས་ཅན་དུ་ཡང་ཁས་ལེན་དགོས་ཏེ། ས་བཙུ་བ་ལས། དེ་འདི་སྣང་དུ་སེམས་ཏེ། འདི་ལྟར་ཁམས་གསུམ་པོ་འདི་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་སྟེ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིན་ན། བརྗོད་པ་བྱུང་བའི་གསུང་གི་རྩིས་ལྟར་སྣང་ལས་སྣང་བའི་མདོ་སྟེང་ས་གཞི་བསྟར་བ་ལ། མཐུན་ལྟེ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་མ་ཤེས་བར་ནས་བར་ཤེས་པ་དངོས་པོར་སྦྱ་བའི་རྒྱུ་ནས་བར་ཡོངས་སུ་འགྱུར་བར་འཁྲུག་བ་ཁྱོད་ནི། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དངོས་པོར་སྦྱ་བའི་རྒྱ་ཅན་ཞིག་བཙུ་བར་འདོད་པས། རང་གི་སྒྲོ་སྟོན་གྱི་བྱམ་པ་སོ་མ་བཏང་བ་གཤམ་ཞིང་བསྟུགས་ནས་དུམ་བུ་རྣམ་པར་བརྒྱུད་ཆོག་པ་ན། དེའི་རང་བཞིན་ཤེས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བཞད་གད་བྱ་བ་ཉིད་དུ་འགྱུར་བར་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །མདོའི་དགོངས་པ་འདི་ནི་ཇི་ཇི་ལྟར་ཁྱོད་གྱི་སྒྲོ་ལ་སྦྱང་བ་དེ་ལྟར་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཡང་འདིར་མདོའི་དོན་ཅི་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། དེའི་བྱིར་བཤད་པ། རྩིས་པ། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལས་འཇིགས་པས་སེམས་ཅན་དུ་ཡང་ཁས་ལེན་པ། རྟག་བདག་བྱེད་པོ་བཀག་པ་རྟོགས་ཕྱིར་དེས། །བྱེད་པ་པོ་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་ཡིན་པར་རྟོགས། 84 ་

way these three realms are mind only.”

[The Middle Way proponent responds:] “Oh you, who when you fix upon the earth foundation of the sūtras made of the sapphire jewels of the Victors’ speech expressed – since you do not know it to be sapphire, you mistake it, completely transforming it into the aspect of the water of those who profess consciousness to be the real functioning thing. Since you want to twist it into being ‘nothing more than’ the water of professing consciousness to be the real functioning thing, you cast away the fresh vase of your own intelligence, and, scrubbing and filling, though you read a hundred passages, you turn them into the same old joke that ‘their nature is consciousness.’ However the true intent of the sūtras may appear to your intellect, that is not it. If you then ask, ‘What is the meaning of the sūtra?’ I will explain it to you.”

[The bodhisattva who has brought forth, who stands before, who realizes what it means for the three realms of existence to be consciousness alone – due to the realization that refutes as maker an unchanging Self realizes that the creator is nothing more than mind. (84)]

Tsongkhapa’s subsequent gloss of Candrakīrti’s commentary clarifies that this verse refers to a bodhisattva of the sixth level, who, having refuted other kinds of supposed creators, comes to understand that the scriptural references to the three realms being nothing more than mind all mean that “the maker is deceptively only a mind, nothing more than that.”²⁰ Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa both go on to quote the surrounding passage from the *Sūtra on the Ten Levels*, which connects the pronouncement of “mind only” directly to a long teaching on the twelve links of dependent origination, which the Buddha has been expounding in this very section of the sūtra.²¹

As it explains extensively in the *Ten Levels*: “You must conceive thoroughly the forward progression of what arises in reliance and relationship. . . . In that way, think about how the suffering heaps are the maker of the great tree of suffering, and that without someone who experiences the feelings, just these [heaps] alone bring it all to actuality. Think it over: Because you insist on believing in a maker,

²⁰ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 189a3 (379). ཀུན་རྫོབ་སེམས་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཁོ་ན་བྱེད་པ་ལོ་ཡིན་པར་རྟོགས་པའི་བྱེད།

²¹ Cf. *Sūtra on the Ten Levels*, *sa bcu pa’i mdo*, *Daśabhūmikāsūtra*, sde dge bka’ ‘gyur, phal chen, vol. *kha*, 220.2 ff. The quotation here varies slightly from Kangyur edition available to me (KL00044E3, 145A), but the meaning is substantially the same. As quoted in Tsongkhapa, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 189a3-6 (379):

ས་བརྩ་བ་ལས། ལུགས་སུ་བྱུང་བའི་ནམ་པར་རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བ་ལ་རབ་རྟེན་གྱོ། དེ་ལྟར་ན་སྤྱག་བསྐྱེལ་གྱི་ཕུང་པོ་སྤྱག་བསྐྱེལ་གྱི་ལྗོན་པ་བྱེད་པ་ལོ་
དང་། ཆོར་བ་ལོ་མེད་པ་འབའ་ཞིག་ལོ་འདི་མངོན་པར་འབྱུང་བར་འབྱུང་རྩ་སྤྱམ་མོ། །དེ་འདི་སྤྱམ་དུ་སེམས་ཏེ། བྱེད་པ་ལོ་ལ་མངོན་པར་ཞེན་པས་ལས་ནམས་ཡོ་
ད་པར་གྱུར་ཏོ། །གང་ན་བྱེད་པ་ལོ་མེད་པ་དེ་ན་རྟོན་དམ་པར་ལས་ཀྱང་མི་དམིགས་སྤྱམ་མོ། །དེ་འདི་སྤྱམ་དུ་སེམས་ཏེ། ཁམས་གསུམ་པོ་འདི་ནི་སེམས་ཙམ་སྟེ།
སྟོན་པའི་ལན་ལག་བརྩ་གཉིས་པོ་གང་དག་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པས་རབ་རྟེན་སྟེ་བཀའ་སྤྱུལ་པ་དེ་དག་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་སེམས་གཅིག་ལ་བརྟེན་པ་དག་གོ་ཞེས་
ཏུ་ཆེར་གསུངས་མོ།

observers. An utterly “blind” particle of matter, if one could even imagine such a thing, could never even “know” that it had moved. In fact how could movement even be conceived without reference to a measurement of space (which also requires an observer)? Is it even intelligible (we spoke of mind again) to conceive (but without a mind) of causation, or transformation, from one state of affairs to another (yet with none of them observed, therefore no “difference” identified), without a knowing consciousness to be aware and take its measure (*tshad ma*, Skt. *pramāṇa*)?

From many points of view, we may establish that mind is essential to lend meaning to any process of causation, to participate as an observer who in turn influences any system it observes, and to engage in any process of imaginative creativity and action requiring forethought.²⁴ But to what extent can we attribute existence to anything at all in a way that it could (be thought to) exist on its own, utterly independent of mind or perception? This is the problem that Mind-Only school philosophers worked so hard to think through, and it is by no means a dead issue in contemporary philosophy. But many of the other candidates for “world-makers” that had been rejected by Buddhist scriptures were also conceived by their advocates in terms of intelligence: e.g. the Powerful Lord. So there is something much more precise about the Buddha’s statement here than just the truism that creativity or agency requires consciousness. The sūtra is referring specifically to a mind, one’s own mind, upon which the whole of experienced existence – including planets – would always have depended. But it is also said to be a mind that could eventually perceive the emptiness of all agency, including that of its own creative awareness. That is much more difficult.

The second point I take from Tsongkhapa’s gloss above is that he reads

²⁴ See, for example, Andrei Linde, “Universe, Life, Consciousness,” in *Science and the Spiritual Quest*, 1998, accessed at www.andrei-linde.com/articles/universe-life-consciousness-pdf, p.11:

In order to describe the universe *as we see it* one should divide the universe into several macroscopic pieces and calculate a conditional probability to observe it in a given state under an obvious condition that the observer and his measuring apparatus do exist. Without introducing an observer, we have a dead universe, which does not evolve in time. Does this mean that an observer is simultaneously a creator? . . . Suppose that somebody asks you how the universe behaved one millisecond after the Big Bang. According to quantum mechanics, this is a wrong question to ask. Reality is in the eye of an observer, and there were no observers in the early universe. Of course we do not really need to know an exact answer. We only need to know a set of possible histories of the universe, take a subset of these histories consistent with our present observations, and use it to predict future. This is quite satisfactory from a purely pragmatic point of view, as long as one recognizes [the] limitations of science and does not ask too many questions. If we do not care about the cat, we do not really care about the universe. But then we do not really care about [the] reality of matter. . . .

But we cannot rule out the possibility *a priori* that carefully avoiding the concept of consciousness in quantum cosmology constitutes an artificial narrowing of one’s outlook. A number of authors have underscored the complexity of the situation, replacing the word *observer* with the word *participant*, and introducing such terms as a “self-observing universe”. In fact, the question may come down to whether standard physical theory is actually a closed system with regard to its description of the universe as a whole at the quantum level: is it really possible to fully understand what the universe is without first understanding what life is?

Vasubandhu's rejection of actual objects charitably, in light of Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti, claiming that Vasubandhu *also* meant only that non-sentient objects cannot be the creators of things, not that they do not exist at all. Based on Tsongkhapa's approach throughout his own comments in this book, as distinct from his direct gloss of Candrakīrti, I am under the impression that Tsongkhapa actually wanted to protect the great luminaries – particularly Asaṅga and Vasubandhu – from most of the criticisms directed at the Mind-Only school (*sems tsam pa'i lugs*) in general. Later on, he will insist that if Mind-Only proponents claim that outer form does not exist at all, then this would contradict the very teaching on foundation consciousness found in Asaṅga's *Summary of the Greater Way*, since there Asaṅga explains how each of the heaps, including that of physical form, develops from the foundation consciousness that crosses the border into a new birth. But at that point he warns that one should not take this to mean that anyone who thinks the Mind-Only position needs no outer objects is thus refuted: "Because there are very many who *do* explain the unique presentation of Mind-Only to be taught thus."²⁵ In both the *Illumination of the True Thought*, and in the *Essence of Eloquence*, there is a sense in which Tsongkhapa identifies a pure Mind-Only doctrine – as written about principally by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu – which he takes to be of immense benefit as a teaching for disciples of a certain inclination, as distinct from the so-called Mind-Only opponent who is repeatedly trounced by Candrakīrti's arguments for the stupidity of "his" inconsistencies and absurd positions. This is a point which deserves further exploration throughout Tsongkhapa's works. We must remain aware that in India, as in the virtual world of literary figures with which Tsongkhapa dealt from his vantage point in fourteenth-century Tibet, there were many "Mind-Only" views, and not all in harmony with one another, nor as easily classifiable as later Geluk doxographies may imply.

Oftentimes, as in Tsongkhapa's explanations of Middle Way thought, the key distinction is whether or not one has understood the precise *kind* of outer form that is being refuted, insofar as it is something towards which ignorance is mistaken.²⁶ Thus, insofar as ordinary people think that outer things arise based on *their own* causes and conditions, and not as a direct result of the ripening of a seed within the consciousness of an observer, people are said to believe in a *kind* of outer form that, according to the Mind-Only viewpoint, does not exist at all. If one fails to use the distinguishing words, however, specifying an "outer form such that it would not come from the same karmic cause as the consciousness that beholds it," but rather refutes "outer matter" in general, then all sorts of problems ensue, as Tsongkhapa shows by quoting the founding authors of the Mind-Only system. Nonetheless, there are other issues germane to the Mind-Only

²⁵ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 194a2-3 (389):

དེས་ན་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་མེད་གཞུགས་སྒྲེ་བ་སོགས་ཁས་ལེན་ཡང་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལས་ལེན་མི་དགོས་པར་འདོད་པ་ལ་བརྒྱུག་ནས་སྤྲོ་བར་མི་བྱ་སྟེ། མེས་ས་ཙམ་གྱི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རྣམ་གཞག་སྟོན་པ་ན་དེ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་མར་དོ།

²⁶ See Tsongkhapa's own precise discussion of this point, appearing in an earlier section of *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 153a4-154a6, translated in Appendix Seven (307-309).

viewpoint that, even when expressed accurately in Tsongkhapa’s view, must still be refuted from a Middle Way perspective, as a matter of soteriological exigency. Principally, these revolve around what it means for mind itself – or the karmic tendencies that ripen within mind – to exist through characteristics of their own.

Candrakīrti’s verse 6:85 goes on to reference the “vajra” of speech with which the Buddha pinned down the high and lofty mountain of the views of non-Buddhists. Both Tsongkhapa’s and Candrakīrti’s commentaries now quote the *Journey to Laṅka Sūtra* as further evidence that when saying, “All the creators: a person, a stream, the heaps, or conditions / A collection of atoms, a Primal One, or Powerful Lord, / I explain to be mind only,”²⁷ the Buddha again intended to refute other possibilities for creators of the worlds, but not to say that there was nothing else in existence but mind. It is directly in reference to the words of this sūtra quotation that we come to the verse 6:86 that Tsongkhapa quoted in his *Guhyasamāja* commentary. Tsongkhapa’s gloss is as follows:²⁸

Since, or just as, he did not see to be a creator what each of the sects of those outside the fold claim according to their respective doctrines, based on their respective scriptures, to be the creator – namely a person and so on, or else a stream, or heaps, or the like – the Victorious One said that the mind alone is the maker of worlds.

Candrakīrti himself comments that the words “person, stream, heaps, and so on” are included here in what is refuted, because insofar as even those who call themselves Buddhists might conceive that such things, as independent agents in themselves, could ever create the worlds, they have not realized the true meaning of the Buddha’s teaching and so count as being “outside the fold,” or “beyond the pale” (*mu stegs*, Skt. *tīrthika*) of Buddhism.

Having established the first meaning of “mind only” as one that cancels out all other possibilities for world-creators, Candrakīrti’s argument continues to propose another, parallel interpretation, namely that “mind is the primary thing,” in a way that need not also refute the existence of outer objects. That is, the Middle Way does not want to refute outer objects at all, even if one *were* to add the distinction of such refuted outer objects as being only such that they are thought to have come from a cause separate from the karmic tendency that produced the consciousness perceiving them. Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way will assert the central role of the karmic tendency, but he does not want to

²⁷ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 190a1-2 (381):

གང་ཟག་རྒྱུ་དང་ཕུང་པོ་དང་། དེ་བཞིན་རྒྱུ་དང་རྣམ་དག་དང་། གཙོ་བོ་དབང་ལྷན་གྱི་དཔེ་རྣམས་། སེམས་ཙམ་དུ་ནི་ངས་བཤད་དོ། ཞེས་ལང་གཤེགས་ལས་གསུངས་ཏེ།

²⁸ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 190a2-4 (381):

ཇི་བཞིན་ཏེ་ཇི་ལྟར་རང་རང་གི་བསྐྱེད་བཅས་ཀྱི་གྲུབ་པའི་མཐའ་དེ་དང་དེ་ལས། ལྷ་ལྷེགས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གང་ཟག་དང་སོགས་པས་རྒྱུ་དང་ཕུང་པོ་སོགས་ཀྱི་དཔེ་པོར་སྐྱེས་པ་དེ་དག་གྱེད་པ་པོར་མ་གཟིགས་ནས། རྒྱལ་བས་སེམས་ཙམ་ཞིག་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་བྱེད་པ་པོར་གསུངས་སོ།

explain it the way the Mind-Only school does, because he finds that the Mind-Only explanation leads inexorably towards reifying the mind, which the Middle Way emphatically does not want to do.

In both of these two Middle Way interpretations of the Buddha’s dictum of “mind only,” however, there is a more profound point at stake, based on the proof from the twelve links of dependent arising: *that the mind itself has no inherent characteristics of its own*. This is where classical proponents of the Mind-Only school cannot go. For them, the mind is the one ultimate functioning thing, which must exist through its own defining characteristics, in order to be able to bring about its results as experience.²⁹ But for Tsongkhapa, it is at this untenable edge of Mind-Only view, where even mind would lack a nature of its own, that – without relinquishing the infallibility of karmic causation – the ontological possibilities for tantric transformation are unleashed. This is why I believe Tsongkhapa thought it so important to quote this verse in his Guhyasamāja commentary.

To continue with the argument as it appears in the *Illumination of the True Thought*, Candrakīrti’s verse 6:87 follows here, with Tsongkhapa’s tight gloss:³⁰

*[Just as the ‘Buddha’ is explained by his expansion towards reality
So mind alone is the main thing and to refute thus the existence
Of form here in the worlds cannot be the meaning of the sūtras
When in the sūtras it is stated: “mind alone.” (87)]*

“Just as a ‘Buddha’ is explained to be one who” has a mind that “has expanded towards reality, although the former word” ‘pure’³¹ “is not made manifest,” or is

²⁹ See the quotation from Tsongkhapa translated in Appendix Seven (329-330).

³⁰ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 190b6-191a3 (382-383). Translated words from the verse are in italics, while quotation marks indicate words directly quoted from Candrakīrti’s *Auto-Commentary*. The root verse from *Madhyamakāvatāra* is as follows:

འདི་ཉིད་རྒྱུ་ལ་སངས་རྒྱུ་བསྐྱེད་ཅིང་བཞིན། འདི་བཞིན་སེམས་ཙམ་གཙོར་གྱུར་འདི་གཞིན་ལ།
མཛོད་ལས་སེམས་ཙམ་ཞེས་གསུངས་གཞུགས་ནི་འདིར། འགོག་པ་དེ་ལྟར་མཛོད་ཡི་དོན་མ་ཡིན།⁸⁷

(Direct quotation fragments from Candrakīrti, *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa*, sde dge bstan 'gyur, dbu ma, vol. 'a, Toh. 3862, 277b6 ff. are marked in blue below.)

ཅི་ལྟར་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་སྒྲོ་རྒྱུ་ལ་སངས་རྒྱུ་ཞེས་བཤད་པ་ན། ཚིག་སྒྲུ་སངས་ཞེས་པ་མི་མཛོད་པར་བྱས་ནས་ཉེ་མི་མཛོད་ཀྱང་། སངས་རྒྱུ་ཞེས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡོད་པ་ཅི་ལྟར་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། གཞུགས་དང་སེམས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས་སེམས་ཙམ་ཞེས་གཙོ་བོར་གྱུར་པ་ལ་ཚིག་གི་མ་གཙོ་བོར་གྱུར་པ་མི་མཛོད་པར་བྱས་ནས། མཛོད་ལས་འདི་གཞིན་ལ་སྒྲེ་ཁམས་གསུམ་ནི་སེམས་ཙམ་མོ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པར་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། འདི་ལྟར་སེམས་ཙམ་མོ་ཞེས་པ་འདིར་ནི་སྒྲེ་འདིས་ནི། གཞུགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་ཁམས་གསུམ་འབྲུབ་པ་ལ་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་པ་སེམས་པར་བྱེད་ཀྱི། སེམས་ཙམ་ཞེས་ཁོ་ན་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་གྱི་ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་གཞུགས་ནི་མཛོད་དོ་ཞེས་འགོག་པ་དེ་ལྟར་འཆད་པ་ནི་མཛོད་ཡི་དོན་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

³¹ Although it may seem that the commentary here is a strange artifact of Tibetan translation – where *sangs rgyas* (“purified-expanded”) is explained as the *meaning* of what a Buddha is, even though it does not directly translate the Sanskrit “*buddha*,” which means “awakened” – the recently released Sanskrit edition of these root verses reveals that Candrakīrti must indeed have been making a very similar point in Sanskrit, although in relation to what was actually a “latter word” – *tattva* – here translated as “reality” (Tib. *de nyid*). According to the *Madhyamakāvatāra-kārikā* text published by Li Xuezhong in *China Tibetology* (No. 1, March 2012), p.13, the Sanskrit reads:

buddho yadvad buddhatattvo niruktas tadval lokaś cittamātrapradhānaḥ |

not evident; “in the same way,” just as the explanation of ‘Buddha’ is like that, so among the two of form and mind, just “mind alone is the primary thing,” even though the latter phrase, ‘is the primary thing’ is not evident. Therefore, *when in the sūtras*, “it says ‘these three realms’” or *the worlds*, “‘are mind alone’ you should understand it thus. Therefore,” this saying *here* of ‘mind alone’ “clears away any idea that form and the rest could ever be the primary thing³² that establishes the three realms. But it is *not*” the meaning of the sūtra explained thus “to refute by saying” outer “form does not exist, while just mind alone and only that” is established by a nature of its own.

The next verse goes on to posit that even if someone understands the meaning of the statement that “these three realms are mind only,” in the sense of the mind being primary, but goes on to say that material form itself does not exist at all, so that they see mind to exist inherently, but eliminate matter altogether, then that person has completely misunderstood the import of the Buddha’s whole teaching in that sūtra, namely, that the mind, too, is dependently originated, born from delusion and karma. Relying closely on Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa explains this point in a way that addresses one of our central issues from Chapter One.³³

uktaḥ sūtre cittamātram niṣedho no rūpasyetiḥa sūtrārtha evam || 6.87.

It is Tsongkhapa who interpolated “pure” (*sangs*) as Candrakīrti’s “former word” (*tshig snga ma*) (which the Tibetan translator of the *Auto-Commentary*, ‘Gos khug pa lha btsas, would have had to alter from what in Sanskrit must have been “latter word” in order to make the Tibetan comprehensible). If Tsongkhapa had been glossing the Sanskrit directly, he may well have interpolated “reality” (*de nyid zhes pa*) as being what is not manifest in the name, rather than “pure.” In any case, the point of the analogy is the same: An explanatory word is missing, but that does not mean it is not implied. Nonetheless, the notion that the Sanskrit word *buddha* is an abbreviation for *buddhatattva* (“awakened towards reality”) may offer a new insight into an early meaning for *sangs rgyas* that is no longer the way that Tibetans explain this most basic term. That is, if “*sangs*” is read from the point of view of reality itself (*tattva*) being utter purity (*sangs*) (as opposed to *sangs* being an adjective describing a Buddha’s mind from the subjective point of view), then there is a sense in which “opened towards pure reality” (*sangs la rgyas pa*, echoing Tsongkhapa’s gloss, *de kha no nyid la blo rgyas pa*, where *blo* is also *buddhi*) could render a single meaning for both *buddhatattva* and *sangs rgyas*, when awakening and expanding are seen as parallel also, as any consideration of this verse from both languages would require.

³² Tib. *gtso bo*, Skt. *pradhāna*, the same word as for the non-Buddhist “Primal One” just refuted.

³³ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 191a6-192a2 (383-385). (Direct quotation fragments from Candrakīrti, *dbu ma la ’jug pa’i bshad pa*, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. ‘a, Toh. 3862, 278a2 ff. are marked in blue.)

ལ་ས་བཅུ་པའི་མདོ་དེའི་ཉིད་ལས་རྣམ་ཤེས་མ་རིག་པ་དང་འདུ་བྱེད་གྱི་འབྲས་བླུ་གསུངས་ཀྱི། རང་གི་མཆོན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་ནི་མ་གསུངས་སོ། །རྟེན་འབྱུང་དུ་
ཡང་གསུངས་ལ་རང་གི་མཆོན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་ཡང་གསུངས་ན་ནི་གསུང་བ་ལོ་འབྲུལ་ཟད་ལ་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རང་ལུགས་སུ་བཞེད་པ་མི་སྲིད་པས། གཏུལ་གྱི་ག
ཞན་དགྱི་པའི་བྱིར་གཞན་རྩོད་ཞལ་གྱིས་བཞེས་པར་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །གཉིས་ཀྱི་རང་ལུགས་སུ་མི་རུང་བ་ནི་གལ་ཏེ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་
པར་གྱུར་ན་ནི། རྣམ་ཤེས་དེ་མ་རིག་པའམ་འདུ་བྱེད་ལ་མི་ལྟོས་པར་འབྱུར་བ་ཞིག་ན། ལྟོས་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེའི་བྱིར་རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ནི་མེད་དོ།
།དེའི་བྱིར་རྣམ་པར་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཁོ་ན་སྟེ། རབ་རིབ་ཅན་གྱིས་དམིགས་པའི་སྐྱེལ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལྟར། བྱིན་
ཅི་ལོག་གི་རྒྱུ་ཡོད་ན་ཡོད་པའི་བྱིར་ལ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ལྟར་བྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་གི་རྒྱུ་མེད་ན་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ་སྟེ་ལྟར་བསམས་སོ། །བྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་མ་རིག་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཡོད་ན་
རྣམ་ཤེས་ཡོད་པ་ནི་བཞེན་འབྲེལ་ལུགས་འབྱུང་གིས་བསྟན་ལ། མ་རིག་པ་མེད་ན་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལྟོག་པ་ནི་ལུགས་ལྟོག་གིས་བསྟན་པའི་མཐུན། དེ་ལྟར་འདུ་བྱེད་དུ་སྟེ།

In the same *Sūtra of the Ten Levels*, it is stated that consciousness is the result of both ignorance and traces, but it does not say that it is established through defining characteristics of its own. If the one who spoke of dependent arising were also to have spoken about it being established through characteristics of its own, the speaker would finish in error. Therefore, since it is impossible for us to embrace both of these as our own position, you should know that it was in order to lead other disciples that, in the presence of others, [the Buddha] lent his honorable assent [to that other view].

As for why the two together are unsuitable for our own position: “Suppose consciousness were established through its own self-nature. That” consciousness “would be something that came about without relying upon either ignorance or traces, but it would at the same time be something reliant.” Therefore its being established through its own self-nature does not exist. “Therefore, in every way, consciousness is never something that could exist by its own nature. Just like the ‘hair’ focused upon by someone with cataracts, and so on: If there are aberrant conditions, it will exist, and only in that way, because if the aberrant conditions are not present, it will not exist. So think it through.”

If the aberrant condition of ignorance exists, consciousness exists. This is taught through the forward progression of dependent arising; but if ignorance does not exist, consciousness is stopped. This is taught by the reverse progression. At the end of that teaching, “it is stated extensively that thus the problems of the many faults that turn into traces are formed, but if you analyze individually that things have no essential nature, that there is no growing, and no stopping, then in this way, how could anyone with a mind who laid eyes upon the statements of this scripture ever conceive consciousness to exist substantially?” They would not. But for those who did, it would be a case of doctrinal views made up by an inner grasping to things as real. Furthermore, the *Sixty Verses [on Reasoning]*, by Nāgārjuna states:

The world has ignorance as its condition.
Since this is something the Buddha spoke,
how could it ever be unreasonable
to say that this world

ར་པ་ཉེས་པ་མང་པོའི་སྒྲིན་ཆགས་ཤིང་ངོ་མོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ་དང་། མ་སྐྱེས་པ་མ་འགགས་པར་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ན་ཞེས་རྒྱས་པར་གསུངས་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟར་ན་སེམས་དང་བ
ཅས་པ་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཉིད་ལས་གསུངས་པའི་ལུང་མཐོང་ནས་རྣམ་ཤེས་རྒྱས་སྤྱོད་པར་རྟོག་པར་བྱེད་དེ་མི་བྱེད་དོ། དེ་ལྟར་བྱེད་པ་ནི་ནང་གི་བདེན་འཛིན་གྱི་གྲུབ་
མཐས་བྱས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །རིགས་པ་དུག་ཅུ་བ་ལས་ཀྱང་། འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་རིག་རྟོག་ཅན་དུ། གང་བྱིར་རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་གསུང་། དེ་ཡི་བྱིར་ན་འཛིན་རྟོག་
'འདི། །རྣམ་རྟོག་ཡིན་ཞེས་ཅིས་མི་འཐད། །མ་རིག་འགགས་པར་གྱུར་ན་ནི། གང་ཞིག་འགག་པར་འགྱུར་བ་དེ། །མི་ཤེས་པ་ལས་ཀྱན་བརྟགས་བར། །རི་ལྟ་བུ
ར་ན་གསལ་མི་འགྱུར། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། རང་གི་ངོ་མོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་ན་གནས་ལུགས་སྤྱོད་པར་འགྱུར་ལ། དེའི་ཆེ་འཁྲལ་བ་ལོག་པ་ན་གསལ་དུ་འགྲོ་དགོས
ཀྱི། ལྟོག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་པའི་དོན་ནོ། །

is a fabrication of the mind?

If you put a stop to ignorance,
then how could it ever be that what
is utterly constructed by not knowing
would not be cleared away
when ignorance came to an end?

The meaning is this: If something were established through its own essential nature, it would be established as the way things really are. At the moment you overturned your mistake, though, it should disappear into clarity. But [if it were the way things really are] it would be impossible to turn back.

In Chapter One, I posed the question whether, in the context of the suffering cycle at least, the term “dependent origination” – or “arising in reliance and relationship” – might not *always* be referring, in one way or another, specifically to the twelve links of dependent arising, especially insofar as these revolve around the interrelationship between ignorance, karmic traces, and the ripened consciousness from which beings and their worlds of experience are said to arise. Here we see Tsongkhapa, closely echoing Candrakīrti’s argument, present what is often known as the king of reasonings for proving emptiness via dependent origination (*rigs pa’i rgyal po rten ’brel gyi gtan tshigs*), specifically invoking the relationship between these first three of the twelve links, as the final clincher to refute the Mind-Only school’s main position, after over a hundred pages of other specific refutations.

The logic is simply this: if there were a mind that could exist inherently, through its own defining “marks” or characteristics (*rang gi mtshan nyid*, Skt. *svalakṣaṇa*), then, taking this idea to its logical end, *it*, being an entity unto itself, could not be caused. Since the Buddha clearly stated, in the same section of the *Sūtra of the Ten Levels*, that consciousness is dependent upon the traces from a former life that give rise to the string of instances of consciousness that will constitute a new lifetime, it is clear that consciousness does not arise on its own, nor does it carry within it its own unique way of being from its own side that could somehow perpetuate itself inherently. Thus one might add here that even a stream of moments of mind are not *solely* dependent on past moments of mind, without any other conditions needing to be present. Rather, the fact that saṃsāric consciousness itself will continue in a stream relies upon the energy of the traces, those habits of *turning towards* (*abhisamṣkāra*) this or that appearance as an object, which leaves a trail of karmic energies that force there to be a mind that keeps perceiving, in a way that constantly misperceives, but still *perceives*.

Turning to Nāgārjuna as the highest authority on matters of Middle Way, Tsongkhapa then invokes the same idea we encountered in Chapter Twenty-Six of the *Root Verses on the Middle Way*, namely, that if one were to be able to put an end to the formation of karmic traces on the basis of ignorance, then the conditioned *consciousness*

itself from which the rest of suffering experience flows, simply would not arise. But there is an even deeper idea here than just some notion of stopping a faucet at its source so that no more water will flow out. To speak of the end of suffering with such an example might still suppose that there was a real world, produced by real causes, whose real source one might somehow find and stop. Rather, what Tsongkhapa's use of this quotation from the *Sixty Verses of Reasoning* suggests, is that insofar as *all the worlds of saṃsāra* and *all their living inhabitants* arise on the basis of mistaken perceptions based in not being aware (*ma rig pa*), then the entire fabrication of planets, events, sufferings, triumphs, and deaths that take ignorance as their first cyclic cause, have no existence apart from the incessant projection of false conceptual fabrications (*rnam rtog*).

If, however, the mistaken state of mind were to cease, says Nāgārjuna, then the entire array of worlds built upon its basis would also be instantly cleared away. If, on the other hand, the worlds or the mind that fabricated them had one shred of inherent existence – one shred of existence *not* based upon the twelve links of dependent arising with ignorance at their root – then even if you were at last to perceive correctly, the suffering worlds would continue to exist for you, and liberation would be impossible. Tsongkhapa expresses this idea clearly in one verse from his famous *Praise of Dependent Origination*:³⁴

Since there is no way to turn back an inherent nature, so the Buddha stated
That if things had even the slightest bit of a nature in themselves
Then it would be impossible ever to go beyond grief
And there would be no turning back to all elaboration.

If one were to be able to identify and “overturn” one's mistaken state of mind, however, it would indeed be like waking from a dream, and realizing that none of the characters or events in the dream was ever real to begin with. They vanish instantly, *without a trace*.

In Tsongkhapa's understanding, such a realization is the ideal starting point for authentic Vajrayāna creation stage practice. Even aside from such a context, however, understanding this point philosophically should drastically alter the question of origins and universal creation from which we began this inquiry. If the central assertion of the Middle Way is that the worlds are created by mind, and mind is created by karmic traces, which are in turn based on misperceptions and ultimately groundless habits of conceptualization, then does this not imply that all suffering is based on *not* understanding how reality actually exists? We hear this so often in a Buddhist context one might almost miss the implied inverse: If all suffering is based on a mistake, then would this not suggest that if one *did* perceive reality correctly, one would discover the

³⁴ In *Praise of Dependent Origination*, *rtan cing 'brel bar 'byung ba gsung ba'i sgo nas bstod pa legs par bshad pa'i snying po*, rje'i gsung 'bum (*thor bu*), vol. *kha*, 16a3-4 (245).

|རང་བཞིན་ལྷོག་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར། |ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་བཞིན་འགའ་ཡོད་ན། |ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་འདུང་པ་མི་རུང་གིང། |སྒྲིམ་ཁྱེད་ལ་མེད་པར་གསུངས།

absolute opposite of suffering, indeed perhaps an inconceivable and all-pervasive bliss?

I made reference in the previous chapter to the fact that many people in contemporary culture ask if there is not some cosmic injustice to the theory of karma. Many find it abhorrent to think that people would suffer because they are somehow reaping the results of deeds “they” – within any reasonable span of memory – did not do. People reject the idea because it seems unjust, and declare that they do not like the idea of a universe – or else countless worlds – that was designed to operate on such principles. However, such a complaint would be implicitly or explicitly based upon a theistic paradigm in which all things, insofar as they exist, are understood to be part of an omnipotent divine plan. But if we take seriously the idea presented here, namely, that the whole panoply of suffering worlds is said to be based directly upon a mis-knowing, it is clear that there was no one “in the know” who ever designed or preordained the condition of ignorance, and so on, in the first place. Rather, this explanation should point to the conclusion that whatever *is* the foundation of reality as it is – or as it might be known perfectly – *is not* the cause or reason for the reams upon reams of pain. Thus there would be no one to blame but mistakenness itself. But in that case, one is simply blaming what was always a fault, never a sublime intelligence. There is nothing very counterintuitive about lamenting a failure to know. As Nāgārjuna wrote, “If you put a stop to ignorance, then how could it ever be that what is utterly constructed by not knowing would not be cleared away when ignorance came to an end?”

If there is a reality, then, which could be seen perfectly, and the outcome of such knowing could be nothing but the antithesis of pain, then one might well have reason to think that there is a completely different kind of world available, *beyond* the mere cessation of the false worlds that a mistaken state of mind has been projecting for so long. Since we are already examining this presentation through the lens of the Guhyasamāja system, it would be appropriate at this point to begin to speak about the divine mind of Vajradhara, as mentioned by Tsongkhapa in our original passage above. This discussion must wait for its proper place, however, in Chapters Four through Six. For now, in order to appreciate the intensity of the contrast, I suggest we must first go still deeper in trying to understand the nature of the mistaken state of mind in Tsongkhapa’s view. Thus I will quote in full Tsongkhapa’s crucial commentary to the above-quoted verse 6:89, in which he closely paraphrases Candrakīrti:³⁵

³⁵ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 192a2-192b5 (385-386). (Direct quotation fragments from Candrakīrti, *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa*, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. 'a, Toh. 3862, 279b3 ff. are marked in blue.)

༩། སེམས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་འཛིན་ཏེ་དང་། རྫོད་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཏེ་ཉིན་ཏུ་སྒྲ་ཚོགས་འགོད། །འགྲོ་བ་མ་ལུས་ལས་ལས་སྐྱེས་པར་གསུངས། །སེམས་སྤངས་ནས་ནི་ལས་ཀྱང་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། 89 ། སེམས་གཏོ་མ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ཉིད་བསྟན་པའི་བྱེད་བཤད་པ་དེ་ལ་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་འཛིན་ཏེ་ནི་རང་གི་སེམས་ཀྱིས་བསགས་པའི་ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པས་བདག་གི་དངོས་པོ་རྟེན་པ་ཡིན་ལ། རྫོད་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཏེ་ཉིན་ཏུ་སྒྲ་ཚོགས་པ་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་དེ་དག་ཁོ་ནའི་སེམས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བསགས་པའི་བྱུན་མོང་པའི་ལས་ཀྱིས་འགོད་པ་སྟེ་སྤྱད་དེ། རྫོད་གི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ནས་འོག་མིན་གྱི་རྫོད་ཀྱི་མཐར་ཐུག་པའོ། །དེ་ལ་རྩ་བུ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་མདོངས་ལ་སོ

[By mind itself are the worlds of living beings arranged, and by mind itself are the immense variety of worlds that are the vessels set forth. It is stated that every wanderer, without exception, is born from karma. If you abandoned the mind, then even karma would not exist. (89)]

“In order to show that the mind is primary, I will explain”: On this point, as for the *worlds of living beings*, the things one finds to be “mine” come from the karma and mental afflictions amassed by one’s own mind. As for the *immense variety of worlds that are the vessels*, these are *arranged* or produced, from the karma amassed in common by the *minds themselves* of only those living beings [who inhabit them]. This goes for every farthest reach of the vessels, from the disk of wind all the way up to [the heaven of the form realm called] Below None.

Now in this regard, the various intricate patterns on the face, and so forth, of a peacock and the like are produced only from the karma that is unique to each of those living beings. The various colors and petals of a lotus and so forth are produced from the karma shared in common by living beings. You should understand all the rest in this way. As it is said:

‘Tis by the power of living beings’ karma
that the black mountains rise in time:
It is like the trees of swords or jewels
in the worlds of a mind that is in hell or high above.

Now as for whether each of the two worlds [of vessels and of living beings] is created by karma shared in common or not, this is a point that is explained even in the great books of Mind-Only. Therefore, even in the Mind-Only school it is not as though the worlds understood as vessels do not exist. In this way, *it is stated that every wanderer, without exception, is born from karma*, and that *if you abandoned the mind, then even karma would not exist*. Since karma can only be collected by a being with a mind, even karma depends upon the mind.

In this way, in dependence upon the statement in the *Ten Levels* that there is no

གས་པ་སྤྱོད་ཆོག་པ་ནི། སེམས་ཅན་དེ་རྣམས་ཁོ་ནའི་ལས་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པས་སྐྱེད་པའོ། །བརྒྱ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་འདབ་མ་དང་ཁ་དོག་སྤྱོད་ཆོག་པ་ནི། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ཐུན་མོང་གི་ལས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་པའོ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གཞན་ལའང་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །དེ་སྐད་དུ། སེམས་ཅན་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་རི། རྩ་བའི་དུས་སུ་སྐྱེས་ཏེ་དབེར། །སེམས་དཀྱུལ་མཐོ་རིས་འཛིན་ཏེ་དུ། །མཚོན་དང་རིན་ཆེན་གྱི་དབང་ཞིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། །འཛིན་ཏེན་གཉིས་ཐུན་མོང་གི་ལས་ཡིན་མིན་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ནི། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་གཞུང་དུ་ཡང་བཤད་པས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུགས་ལའང་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཏེན་མེད་པ་མིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་འགྲོ་བ་མ་ལུས་པ་ལས་ལས་སྐྱེས་པར་གསུངས་ཤིང་། སེམས་སྤངས་ནས་ནི་ལས་ཀྱང་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་སེམས་དང་བཅས་པ་ཁོ་ནས་ལས་གསོག་པའི་ཕྱིར་ན་ལས་ཀྱང་སེམས་ལ་བརྟེན་པའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་པ་བཅུ་པར་བྱེད་པ་སོ་དང་ཚོར་བ་སོ་མེད་པ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས། ཅན་གྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་སོ་གཞན་འགོག་པར་བསྟན་ལ། ཡན་ལག་བཅུ་གཉིས་སོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་སེམས་གཅིག་ལ་བརྟེན་པར་གསུངས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས། ཅན་གྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་གཙོ་བོར་གྱུར་པར་བསྟན་ཏེ། བཤད་པ་ལྟར་དགག་ཕྱོགས་དང་ཕྱི་མ་སྤྱོད་ཕྱོགས་ནས་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་འགྲོ་བ་རབ་དུ་འཇུག་པ་ལ་སེམས་ཉིད་གཙོ་བོའི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་གྱི། སེམས་ལས་གཞན་པ་ནི་གཙོ་བོའི་རྒྱ་མིན་པས། མདོ་ལས་སེམས་ཅན་ཞིག་གཙོ་བོར་བཞག་གི་གཟུགས་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །གལ་ཏེ་གཟུགས་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་མོད་ཀྱི་སྟེ་ཀྱང་གཟུགས་དེ་ལ་ནི་སེམས་བཞིན་དུ་འགྲོ་བའི་བྱེད་པ་སོ་ཉིད་ནི་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེས་ན་སེམས་ལས་གཞན་པའི་བྱེད་པ་སོ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ་བཞག་གི་ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་གཟུགས་ནི་བཞག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

maker and no one who experiences feelings, it is taught that the word “only” rules out other makers. Relying upon the statement that all twelve of the links depend upon a single mind, it is taught that the word “only” means that mind is primary. The former explanation is from the perspective of negation, while the latter is made from the perspective of proving something. Therefore, the mind itself is the primary cause that drives wanderers to flow forth, and anything other than the mind is no such primary cause. Thus the sūtra sets forth that just the mind alone is primary, while form [i.e., physical matter] is not.

[Suppose you admit that form exists: Well, but it is not the very creator in the way that mind is, so a creator other than mind is refuted, but we did not reject form altogether. (90)]³⁶

Suppose you wish to admit that form is something that exists. Well, or nonetheless, that form [i.e. matter] is not the very creator of wanderers in the way that the mind is. So, a creator other than mind is refuted, or rejected, but outer form is not rejected altogether.

It is crucial to recognize, within the categorical statement of a Middle Way view of karma that is included here, that although several key aspects of the Mind-Only view are being modified, the central import of the Mind-Only presentation, namely that the variety of beings and worlds arise directly out of the potential energy of karmic seeds, is never refuted. That is, we see that outer form is not rejected, but from Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way perspective, it is not that outer matter is *not* appearing on the basis of ripening karmic propensities, either. By saying that mind is primary, while admitting that physical matter still exists, I will argue from many sources that Tsongkhapa cannot possibly mean to imply here that somehow: ‘physical matter still exists secondarily, but from its own independent stream of physical causes and conditions, unrelated to mind.’ How could he?

Tsongkhapa has just been glossing Candrakīrti’s verse explicitly attributing the arrangement of the two kinds of worlds – those vessels that are natural environments and the “worlds” that are living beings themselves – to the minds of living beings as their creator. The physical environments that are shared in common by many living beings are thus said to be shaped by the karmic energies that all the living beings inhabiting such worlds happen to share.³⁷ This does not mean, however, that there is some kind of

³⁶ The root verse from *Madhyamakāvatāra* is: གཤམ་ཏེ་གཟུགས་ཡོད་མོད་ཀྱི་དེ་ལ་ནི། ཤེས་ས་བཞིན་བྱེད་པ་ཤིན་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། དེས་ན་སེམས་ལས་གཞན་པའི་བྱེད་པ་ལོ། །བཟོག་གི་གཟུགས་ནི་བཀག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།⁹⁰

³⁷ This would be according to the idea of the environmental result – *bdag po'i 'bras bu* – described in Chapter One. It is perhaps significant that in the passage from the *Exegesis on the “Steps of Exposition,”* Tsongkhapa is glossing Nāgabuddhi’s original phrase, “*nam par shes pa'i bdag po rdo rje 'chang chen po sems can skyed par mdzad pa po,*” the “lord of consciousness, the Great Vajradhara, the creator of beings-with-a-mind.” (See Chapter Two, note 8, above.) Insofar as consciousness is said to be the “lord” and “creator,” it could also, at a more technical level, be said to be the “governing condition” (*bdag po'i rkyen*) for all things. Since Tsongkhapa makes no specific reference to this meaning of the word “*bdag po*” in this

collective foundation consciousness in which all the karmic traces of many living beings are literally held “in common.” Rather, even from a Mind-Only perspective, this would simply mean that the mental streams of different beings carry imprints that are very similar in content, perhaps due to having witnessed or participated in certain deeds or events together in the past. But it would also mean that beings have the capacity to walk and work together in a world that appears similarly enough to each of them that there can be common consensus about what is “real” and what is “imaginary,” about what is “true” and what is “false” for that world – like the colors of a particular flower being red and not violet – within a shared framework of sensory experience and conceptual designation among a community of perceivers.

Then, the specific attributes of the physical body that each living being looks upon and calls “mine” – here exemplified by the colors of a peacock’s feathers – are said to be the result of karmic traces individual to each being. However, even though in the immediately previous section of the *Illumination of the True Thought* we saw Tsongkhapa argue that mind is a result of karma, here we see the statement that even karma depends upon the mind. There should be no contradiction in this, since the cycle of twelve links has no real beginning, and because the always-prior existence of mind is already implied in the first link of ignorance. That is, there can be no *misperception* without a raw ability to perceive, which was always already aware. In the context of the twelve links, the very existence of a lucid and knowing mind is mutually dependent upon the energy of karmic traces, which we have now seen described in terms of the way that a mind surges towards its object based on not understanding its real nature.

If we imagine this inextricably interdependent process in a subtle way, we might be able to glimpse – theoretically – a connection between the constantly self-perpetuating movements of mind that are karma, and the physical vibration of energy in space that Buddhist Abhidharma has ubiquitously called “wind” (*rlung*, Skt. *vāyu* or *prāṇa*). Allowing the imagination to play, we might even be able to trace back through our own conceptions of the evolution of a planet and be able to envision how, “in the beginning,” all matter and energy were nothing more than vibration. Theories of contemporary physics would allow us to say the same about our physical world even now. What is so distinct about this Buddhist presentation, however – in presentations ranging from Abhidharma, to Mind-Only, to Middle Way, to Guhyasamāja – is that the shape and fluctuations, the heat, eventual coagulations, fluidity, and ever-more stable solidity of the patterns of those vibrations should be considered, at every level, to depend directly upon the concomitant mental vibrations that are the energy of ripening traces within the minds of the many living beings who will or who do inhabit the configurations of vibrational matter that will come to be called, for them, “a world.”

context, however, I will leave this as a mere point of conjecture, an observation of an echoed word in the Tibetan, which may or may not correspond to Sanskrit uses of *ādhipati* and its variants.

From the perspective of Guhyasamāja practice, as we have seen, there is immense importance to the idea that the first impulse forming a physical vessel for living beings should be *wind*, at the vast cosmic level. I would suggest that although there is no formal presentation of subtle “inner” winds in the context of Mahāyāna sūtra teachings, it will not be difficult to connect this idea theoretically to the notion of the subtle and extremely subtle inner winds that are taken as the basis for yogic practice at the stage of what is complete. According to Tsongkhapa, “what is complete” actually refers in part to these winds that are already functioning, naturally, within a practitioner, as karmically driven energies. To begin thinking about karmic traces as the mental vibrations that ineluctably shape our experience of outer things already anticipates this idea, and goes beyond anything that Tsongkhapa will say explicitly about the nature of dependent origination in a sūtra Mahāyāna context. Nevertheless, I believe it is not in contradiction with what he has written here in the *Illumination of the True Thought* regarding the creation of the worlds, when we keep in mind all the threads we have been examining thus far.

The fact that the Middle Way view affirms outer matter, where the Mind-Only school saw no way to establish it, is, for Tsongkhapa, a point of crucial importance for Guhyasamāja practice. If the physicality – or movement through space – of subtle wind were denied altogether, or even discounted in a qualified way that did not allow for a robust understanding of physical substrates existing in a genuinely shared world, many or most of the complete stage practices would be rendered nonsensical. Furthermore, I think that as we continue to examine the differences between a Mind-Only and Middle Way view of emptiness, the latter view will emphasize ever more clearly what it would mean for nothing at all to have any nature apart from how the mind vibrates it into being at any given moment. But to speak of vibration is not yet to speak of meaning. Nevertheless, it is “meaning” – drawn with mental pictures – that makes one vibration differentiable from another, giving rise to feeling, preference, and action. To begin to explore the source of the pictures that make a world “what it is” for each of us, we must turn to Tsongkhapa’s monastically famous explanation of how, from a Middle Way perspective, the differing karmic imprints of different beings can project mutually incompatible *meaning* onto what is seemingly a single “outer object.”

Dreams, Cataracts, Skeletons, Performances, Reflections, and Empty Rivers

The Buddhist scriptural example is well known: When looking upon a single stream of fluid in an outer environment, where a human being sees water, certain types of craving spirits (*yi dvags*, Skt. *preta*) will see a river of pus and blood, while a desire-realm god will see ambrosia, and a being absorbed in the meditations of the formless realm will not perceive anything but empty space.³⁸ In our own world of experience, it may be easier to conceive of the simple fact that what appears to a human as a writing

³⁸ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 169b2-5 (340), translated below at Chapter Two, note 87.

instrument or else a highly-prized garment may quite validly appear to a dog or cat as a gnawing instrument or a prize toy for chewing and tearing. At a more sophisticated level, we might offer examples of bats that navigate via sonar, or insects such as the butterfly *Eumaeini*³⁹ that send and receive signals via infrared frequencies invisible to the human eye. The more intricate the observations of science become, the more evident it is to us that beings with radically different modes of sense perception – not to mention different modes of “reacting to” reality, even at a pre-rational level – will have more or less drastically different experiences of what is ostensibly the same thing, were “it” to be left unobserved in its so-called natural state.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that the issue at stake in this Buddhist example of mutually incompatible karmically driven perceptions might help to take us a step further, in our imaginative consideration of multiple worlds, than it would be within the wherewithal of even the most sensitive empirical experiments of contemporary science to do. That is, when scientists take measure of reality, they must inevitably work within the range of the sense perceptions and conceptual parameters available to a *human* being. Of course, the ingenuity of ever more precise measurements – and the technological capacity to transform energy waves between different spectrums and frequencies – has enabled scientists to take measurements of myriad phenomena across space and time that are indeed utterly imperceptible to the human senses under normal conditions. But the very capacity of scientific experiment to measure reality “as it is” must presuppose that the reality under consideration is still, at some infinitesimal level, revealing itself according to its own nature, the way it “would be” even if it were not being observed. The breakthroughs of quantum mechanics, following upon Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, have thoroughly unsettled this presupposition; nonetheless, the majority of scientific fields must still proceed with their inquiry as though there were a single shared world – the world of earthly biology, geology, chemistry, classical physics, and so on – in which all the species of this observable planet, at least, are currently living.

What the Buddhist scriptural references to beings of ontologically different *realms* challenge us to consider, however, is what it would mean for perceptions of reality to differ so completely, that a being of one realm would, under all but the most exceptional circumstances, be categorically incapable of perceiving the very data that beings of another realm perceive. Again, we may be able to detect, according to our understanding and measurement of infrared waves what the butterfly we perceive is “doing with” the energies that exist in our apparently shared world; but have we perceived what it means to *be* a butterfly, or a bat?⁴⁰ Or, more simply, we can certainly

³⁹ See <http://apam.columbia.edu/yu-wins-nsf-grant-study-perception-and-use-infrared-radiation-insects>.

⁴⁰ Cf. Thomas Nagel’s now proverbial article, “What is it like to be a bat?” *The Philosophical Review* LXXXIII, 4 (October 1974): 435-50.

see what a dog has done with our favorite pen, but can we experience “the world” that the dog experiences, from her perspective? Almost certainly not.

If we are to understand the import of Tsongkhapa’s discussion of the metaphysical problem of ontologically incompatible perceptions of what is still claimed – even by his Indian Buddhist sources – to be a “single reality,” I would suggest we try to grapple with the implication of these arguments from the point of view of a soteriological outcome, particularly from a Vajrayāna perspective. That is, as we have indicated, the practices of the creation and complete stages are primarily aimed at generating and then actualizing the practitioner’s capacity to perceive, interact with, inhabit and embody a world of beings and their environments that are, under our present circumstances, categorically imperceptible to us. That is, from a tantric perspective, the purpose of hammering at the most subtle distinctions of how to explain a “multiple worlds” theory in terms of karmic propensities and an empty basis, is in order to open the possibility of cancelling – at least temporarily – the appearance that the world we perceive is the only one. The meditator must do this in order to create space – infinite metaphysical space – in which to generate, and eventually enter, a pure world that is utterly free of the pain-producing flaws of this saṃsāric one. If in the meditator’s mind there were still the least doubt that the world he or she was living in when the meditation started is the “real” one, while the world being entered is “merely imagined,” then the practices would only be able to have a shadow of their effect.

Nonetheless, even Tsongkhapa will call the creation stage the “constructed stage,” or the “contrived yoga” (*brtags pa’i rim pa / bcos ma’i rnal ’byor*), as opposed to the stage that makes use of what is already “complete” within the yogi’s body (*rdzogs pa’i rim pa*). So he acknowledges that at the beginning, at least, there is still a thoroughly demonstrable difference between the world of ordinary daily experience and the tantric world the practitioner is trying to access. But from the perspective of ultimate reality, neither world is inherently more real than the other. Understanding the philosophical guts of the difference between real and imagined, even in the context of Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way view, and continually questioning the complex process by which one attempts to transform the very mind from which all such experience is being said to emerge, would become indispensable to a practitioner’s sanity along the way.

Tsongkhapa comes to comment upon this example of flowing water, mentioned in just one line from Candrakīrti’s verse 6:71, towards the end of a much longer series of discussions regarding the Mind-Only school’s understanding of illusion. As we have seen, a central Mind-Only position is this: The existence of sensory experience, complete with its triads of sensory objects, sense faculties, and sense consciousnesses, depends directly upon the ripening of seeds and tendencies from within the foundation consciousness, which was itself catapulted forth from karmic seeds triggered at the end of a previous lifetime. Though it appears that there are outer objects, in actuality, there is

nothing more than consciousness *taking on* the appearance of the variety of outer and inner phenomena. Though we cannot treat this fully here, the most basic explanation of *emptiness* from a Mind-Only point of view would be as follows: There are real dependent things (*gzhan dbang gi ngo bo nyid*, Skt. *paratantra-svabhāva*), which exist through defining characteristics of their own, but since it has been claimed that outer matter whose nature is different from consciousness cannot really exist, in the end the “real” dependent things, upon which all appearances of causation are based, must always be of the nature of consciousness itself, arising in dependence upon their real causes, namely the ripening of inner tendencies (*bag chags*, Skt. *vāśana*).⁴¹

Then the mental consciousness concocts constructs (*kun brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid*, Skt. *parikalpita-svabhāva*) about dependent things, and in turn believes that those *constructs* really exist through characteristics of their own – particularly (1) the constructs that hold subject and object to be of a separate substance and (2) those constructs that assume these two did not come from the same karmic cause, whereas in fact they did. But insofar as the mind still soaked in ignorance thinks its constructs *about* real things exist with a degree of reality that those constructs do not in fact have, this mental consciousness is mistaken. When someone engaged in profound meditative practice (Skt. *yogācārin*) realizes that caused and dependent reality is in fact *free* of existing as something bifurcated into subject and object (beholder and beheld), and *free* of possessing inherently the constructs we fabricate about it, and *free* of coming about as a result of anything other than the ripening of tendencies that derive from previous actions, that practitioner realizes the actual way that all of reality is established (*yongs su grub pa'i ngo bo nyid*, Skt. *pariṇiṣpanna-svabhāva*), which is its emptiness.⁴² Once one has realized the way that reality is free of existing definitively according to the constructs that one's tendencies for creating verbal expressions (*mngon par brjod pa'i bag chags*, Skt. *abhilāpana-vāśana*) made one think about it, the play of apparent subjects and objects that do still appear after such a practitioner emerges from meditation, would seem to that practitioner to be an illusion, like a dream. This is a most abbreviated explanation of how Tsongkhapa understands the meaning of emptiness/illusion in that school.

According to this system, then, although 99.9% of what we ordinarily experience is engaged only through the veil or overlay of conceptual constructs, nevertheless, a definitively existing reality must be posited to *undergird* the whole process of conceptualization, even the fact of becoming attached to and insisting upon our conceptualizations as real. There has to be a real mind – say the Mind-Only proponents – in order for there to be a conscious subject there to create the constructs, and there have to be real dependent things appearing as objects, indivisible from mind as they may be, in

⁴¹ See Appendix Seven (329-330).

⁴² See Tsongkhapa's very concise explanation of this Mind-Only view in his commentary to Candrakīrti's verse 6:47, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 154a6-155a3, as translated in Appendix Seven (310-311).

order for there to be something *upon which* for us to paste our constructs. However, from a Middle Way point of view, if even one instance of suffering reality is posited as existing inherently – even and especially a foundation consciousness – then, as we saw Tsongkhapa write in his *Praise of Dependent Origination*: “Since there is no way to turn back an inherent nature . . . if things had even the slightest bit of a nature in themselves, then it would be impossible ever to go beyond grief.” Although contemporary Tibetan teachers such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama have been quoted as saying that Vajrayāna can be practiced, at least initially, with either a Mind-Only or a Middle Way view of emptiness,⁴³ it is clear throughout Tsongkhapa’s tantric commentaries that he was adamant that one could not reach the highest realizations of Vajrayāna practice without discovering and maintaining a full-fledged Middle Way Consequence view.⁴⁴ Where,

⁴³ See His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 1995, *The World of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 117, regarding the meditation accompanying utterance of the *Oṃ svabhāva* mantra (to be discussed here in Chapters Four and Five): “In the beginning, this takes place only at the level of your imagination. Still, this serves as a form of rehearsal that prepares you for the eventual experience when your own wisdom realizing emptiness actually arises in the form of a deity. Therefore, if you lack an understanding of emptiness as expounded either by the Yogācāra or the Madhyamaka school, then a successful practice of tantric yoga becomes extremely difficult.” However, on p. 133, His Holiness is quoted further as saying:

Some practitioners may have a view of emptiness which is not as complete as that of the Madhyamaka-Prāsaṅgika school, but is closer to the views propounded by the Yogācāra or Madhyamaka-Svātantrika schools. By applying certain meditative techniques of tantra, such as igniting the inner heat or penetrating the vital points of the body through wind yoga, the practitioner can experience a melting of the elements within the body that induces an experience of bliss—eventually reaching a state where one is able to dissolve the gross levels of mind and the corresponding energies. With this deep level of meditative experience conjoined with even an incomplete understanding of emptiness, the practitioner may be able to progress to a more subtle understanding of emptiness, eventually perceiving that every phenomenon is a mere mental imputation, a mere designation imputed on a base. The experience of great bliss may help the practitioner to perceive all things and events as mere manifestations of bliss, or the “play” of the subtle wind. In this way, the meditator can realize the most subtle experience of emptiness. For that type of person, the experience of bliss is attained first, and the realization of emptiness comes later.

⁴⁴ Even from a sūtra perspective, see for example, Tsongkhapa’s comment at the end of a refutation in *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 168b1 (338): “Thus, insofar as the Mind-Only proponents lack the virtuoso capacity of the incisive wisdom that realizes the final definitive meaning, this mixing together of philosophical tenets is only something to be cleared away.” (See the argument preceding this statement in Appendix Seven). On the other hand, see Tsongkhapa’s point near the very end of *The Essence of Eloquence: A Commentary on Distinguishing the Interpretable and the Definitive*, *drang ba dang nges pa’i don rnam par phye pa’i bstan bcos legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 117b6-118a2 (714-715):

Thus, just as I have explained it before, you should understand that the traditions of the two great innovators [Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga], which set forth suchness, do so after distinguishing what is interpretable and what is definitive in the classical scriptures. It may be true that this occurs extensively in the context of the Perfection Vehicle, but the paṇḍits who commented upon the treatises of secret mantra, and all the accomplished masters, too, set forth the meaning of suchness in accord with either one of these systems. There is no third option apart from them. Therefore, you should understand this method as the path by which to set forth suchness throughout the classical scriptures of both sūtra and mantra.

དེ་ལྟར་སྐར་བཤམ་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་གསུང་བའི་གྲི་བྱང་པའི་སྤྱི་བོ་ན་ཉིད་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་པའི་ཡིད་རྟེན་མཁའ་གཉིས་མོ་འདི་ནི་པ་རོལ་དུ་བྱིན་པའི་ཐེག་པ་འཛིན་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་རྒྱུ་མཛད་ཀྱང་། གསུང་སྐབས་ཀྱི་གཞུང་འགྲེལ་བའི་པཱི་ཏ་དང་། གྲུབ་ཐོབ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་དེ་གཉིས་གང་རུང་ཅིག་དང་མཐུན་པར་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་པ་ལས་གཞན་པའི་བྱང་གསུམ་མེད་པས་ཚུལ་འདི་ནི་གསུང་བའི་མདོ་སྐབས་མཐའ་དག་གི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་པའི་ལམ་དུ་ཞུ།

then, according to the Middle Way, does the main fallacy in the Mind-Only view lie, even when it is expressed in its most elegant and cogent form, including all the necessary distinctions with regard to what is refuted?

Dreams

Within *Entering the Middle Way*, Candrikīrti presents a Middle Way refutation of a series of examples raised by his imaginary Mind-Only school interlocutors, regarding dreams, the “hairs” that appear to someone with an eye defect such as cataracts, and the “skeletons” visualized by a meditator. The latter meditation involves imagining the whole world in a state of decay, in order to develop acute awareness of impermanence and an attitude of renunciation from saṃsāra. To begin with the dream analogy, which will be essential to our discussion of illusion throughout, the sequence of arguments is as follows:⁴⁵ A Mind-Only proponent, attempting to prove that consciousness must exist with its own defining characteristics, gives the example of a monk going to sleep in his little monastic cell, and dreaming of a herd of mad elephants. Since there is no way – if they were real – those elephants could fit inside his bed-chamber, the example is meant to illustrate what it means for there to be a mental consciousness that experiences an appearance of outer objects where in fact no outer objects exist at all.

Tsongkhapa, in his gloss of Candrakīrti’s auto-commentary to the elliptical verse 6:48, responds that if in a dream a mind, through its own inherent characteristics, were ever to take on the form of a herd of mad bulls, then, just as there is no objective field of elephants, so too, according to “my system,” i.e., the Middle Way, a mind appearing through its own defining marks of “mad bull-ness” would not exist either, because it is something that could never start. This is a classical case of an “absurd consequence” (Skt. *prasaṅga*) argument, which one has to follow carefully to get the point. From an examination of both Candrakīrti’s auto-commentary and Tsongkhapa’s gloss, each of which introduces variant words for “bull” without explaining why the example has switched from that of a “herd of elephants,” I believe the point is this: If there were a consciousness whose inherent characteristic was to be imprinted, say, with the image of a herd of mad bulls, then, following the notion of having “definitive characteristics” to its absolute end, it would mean that a mind imprinted with mad bulls could never become anything else: You could never even dream of elephants – much less begin to perceive some real outer elephants breaking through the walls of your room. On the other hand, if

ས་པར་བྱའོ།

It will become clear in Chapters Three through Six that although Tsongkhapa relied heavily on the philosophical theories of Indian Vajrayāna masters (such as Jñānapāda and his school) who may well have been working and thinking primarily within a Yogācāra/Mind-Only context, Tsongkhapa nonetheless interprets their tantric theory from the perspective of a Middle Way Consequence view. I ask my reader to keep in mind the subtle ways in which Tsongkhapa seems to integrate the language and views of Mind-Only and Middle Way schools throughout his tantric writings.

⁴⁵ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 155b4-169a4 (312-339).

you were dreaming of wild elephants, then a mind defined by the characteristic of appearing as “bulls” could never come into being, either. *A definitively established mind could never change*. Since this is absurd, such a definitively established mind does not exist, just like the dreamed-of elephants that never existed anyway.

Tsongkhapa’s further commentary to this point is indicative of his clarifications of Candrakīrti throughout his writings. He insists that it is *not* as though Candrakīrti is saying that, “just as the elephant that appears in a dream does not exist, so in the same way the subject state of consciousness also does not exist,” full stop. Rather, because it is clear to Tsongkhapa, from so many other cases in the commentary and root verses, that Candrakīrti is applying a distinction regarding the specific thing to be refuted (*dgag bya la khyad par sbyar ba*), namely a mind that could be established through any nature of its own, Tsongkhapa insists that we must read the statements here in the same way. That is, Candrakīrti is refuting the claim to inherently definitive existence, not to the existence of consciousness in general.⁴⁶

The key argument is this: If the dreaming mind existed inherently, then when one woke up, all the things it had conjured should continue to exist, every bit as much as they did during the dream. That is, insofar as there is a subjective pole that can remember, “During my dream I saw . . .,” then the memory from the point of view of the objective pole, that is, the experience *of* an object that thinks, “During my dream, I saw *this* . . .” should have equal existential status.⁴⁷ So, if the mind existed inherently, then when you woke up there should still be elephants in the room – since according to this view of mind, the “things” that appear as its objects should still be of the same substance as the consciousness itself. Or if the elephants are not there, and obviously not, one would have to acknowledge that ultimately, the dreaming *consciousness* had no more inherent reality than the animals, places, people, and situations it might have imagined. From a Middle Way point of view, both subjective and objective poles should always be equal in status: both equally lacking in definitive characteristics, and both equally illusory in their manner of appearing.

Nonetheless, Candrakīrti’s Middle Way position still has a very precise way of maintaining the distinction between ordinary dream-life and ordinary waking-life at the practical level. In fact, Tsongkhapa seems to be arguing that this Middle Way school is able to maintain this distinction far more credibly than the Mind-Only school ever could. This point will be significant for our understanding of the nature of meditative visualizations, later on. That is, if the mind of the dream *really* had the qualities of appearing as a herd of wild bulls or elephants, then when you woke up, that appearance would have to be *as real* as it was in the dream – if reality is actually no more than mind appearing as this or that. But according to the Middle Way view, the way in which karma

⁴⁶ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 156a4-156b2, as translated in Appendix Seven (313-314).

⁴⁷ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 156b5-6, translated in Appendix Seven (314).

manifests as the outer objects that are validly perceived by one being or another in the ordinary waking state is actually much more complex than just “my mind appearing as this” and “your mind appearing as that.” Because the Middle Way view acknowledges a shared “outer world” that is every bit as empty, ontologically, as the inner world of individuals’ minds, the way in which karma governs our experience of a shared world in the waking state, with all its physical sense objects, can be maintained as something suitably distinct from the weak and inchoate ripenings of karmic tendencies in the form of images projected in the dream state, as we all know from practical experience.

The supposed Mind-Only proponent tries out the dream example again by suggesting that insofar as it is impossible to have a sensory field of physical form in a dream, so too it is impossible to have an eye consciousness that would be triggered by a visual impression on the sensory faculty of the eye. Thus, they say, there was really only ever a mental consciousness, whether in the dreaming or waking state. But my understanding of Candrakīrti’s Middle Way response, via Tsongkhapa, is that if there is nothing to act as a condition for the eye consciousness, then likewise there would be nothing to act as a condition for the mental consciousness to perceive something *as* outer form. But as Candrakīrti has already suggested, it is impossible for the mental consciousness to exist without conditions at all, because then it would either be fixed, always perceiving the same thing forever, or else could never have started at all. Tsongkhapa explains:⁴⁸

In this way, if it were as you say, then just as in a dream an outer object can never start, then in the same way, a mental consciousness could never start by its own nature, either. Therefore, just as when you are awake, if you see a physical form, there is a gathering together of eye, and form, and consciousness, so in the same way, even in a dream, if you are able to determine an object, then it is focused upon by a mind that comes from the gathering together of the triad. Insofar as in that dream there is neither eye, nor form that is an object of the eye, then the mind produced by the two – an eye consciousness – does not exist either. *Thus all the triads of eye, form, and mind belonging to a dream are utterly false.* Like these three, the ear and so on (the rest of the triads following after the triad of the eye), also cannot start through any nature of their own.

Tsongkhapa goes on to clarify that for all five sets of three pertaining to the five physical senses, they cannot exist in a dream, but “insofar as there is an appearance in their aspect, they are false. The triad pertaining to the mind does exist in a dream, but insofar as it does not exist through its own nature, while still appearing to do so, it is also false.”⁴⁹ Here Tsongkhapa will go on to make an important distinction that revolves around a different Middle Way interpretation of the issue, suggested by Bhāvaviveka, who was

⁴⁸ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 157b3-6, Appendix Seven (316).

⁴⁹ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 158a2, Appendix Seven (317).

also one of Candrakīrti's virtual debate opponents. It seems, from Tsongkhapa's explanation of Candrakīrti's reference,⁵⁰ that Bhāvaviveka wanted to refute the Mind-Only position by claiming that there is indeed a kind of form that exists in dreams and serves as an object for every moment of dreaming mental consciousness. This is the "form included within the sensory field of phenomena" (*chos kyi skye mched du gtogs pa'i gzugs*), that is, precisely the kind of form we see only in our mind. But apparently Bhāvaviveka wanted this kind of form to exist through its own characteristics also, as a real objective focal condition to give rise to the mental consciousness perceiving the shapes and colors of a dream. Tsongkhapa explains Candrakīrti's terse complaint, saying that if, in order to refute the Mind-Only school, a Middle Way philosopher felt the need to resort to positing yet another definitively existing thing, then this would completely defeat the purpose of having used a dream analogy in the first place.

That is, if the Middle Way person is trying to use the dream analogy in order to demonstrate that things are not real (*bden med*), insofar as the three of object, faculty, and consciousness are all "false," then it is useless to posit a type of form belonging to the sensory field of mental phenomena that could somehow exist apart from consciousness "by itself" as a simultaneous causal condition for mental perceptions within the dream. Thus Tsongkhapa draws what is from his perspective an inseparable connection between the idea of things being "real" and things "having their own nature." In Bhāvaviveka's system, known to Tibetan doxography as representing the portion of the Middle Way tradition that accepts syllogistic reasoning "for one's own mindstream" (*rang rgyud pa*, Skt. *svātantrika*), things could be thought to exist through their own natures, but still be illusory, or unreal, as in a dream. But for Tsongkhapa, this is a contradiction in terms.⁵¹

It would be impossible to demonstrate that an actual object marked in this way was itself false. This is because, as long as you have not rejected the idea that things could exist through a nature of their own, the logical reason meant to prove that things are not real will never follow from this example.

⁵⁰ See the Sera Mey Library, 2011, two volume edition of Tsongkhapa's text: *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rgya cher bshad pa dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba*, edited by Téwo Geshe Ngawang Yönten (the bo dge bshes nga dbang yon tan) and Gelrong Geshe Tubten Kunkyen (rgal rong dge bshes thub bstan kun mkhyen), *et al.*, vol. II, p.17n07. For the actual source of Bhāvaviveka's argument, to which Tsongkhapa thinks Candrakīrti is referring here, the Tibetan footnote quotes a long passage from the fifth chapter of his auto-commentary to his *Heart of the Middle Way*, known as the *Blaze of Reasoning* (*Madhyamakahrdayavṛtti-tarkajvāla*): *slob dpon legs ldan gyi dbu ma snying po'i rtoḡ ge 'bar ba le'u lnga pa rnal 'byor spyod pa'i de kho na nyid gtan la dbab pa la 'jug pa las*, bstan bsdur ma, dbu ma, vol. *dza*, 498, line 17 ff. Though the quoted passage (in Tibetan translation) seems to be saying what Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa think it does, it would require further research on my part to compare this point in detail to Bhāvaviveka's entire argument in context.

⁵¹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 158b6-159a1 (318-319).

དེས་མཆོད་པའི་དངོས་ཀྱི་དོན་བརྒྱན་པ་ཉིད་དུ་གྲུབ་པ་མི་སྲིད་པའི་བྱིར་ཉེ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མ་བཟག་པར་བྱ། བདེན་མེད་སྐྱབ་པའི་རྟགས་ཆོས་དཔེ་དེ་ལ་རྗེས་སུ་འགྲོ་བ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེས་ན་སྤར་རང་གི་ལུགས་ཀྱི་མི་ལམ་ན་གང་སྤང་ཐམས་ཅད་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་ལན་བཏབ་པ་ཆེས་ལེགས་སོ།

Nonetheless, Tsongkhapa does go on to accept that the type of form that “appears clearly [*gsal bar snang ba*] in dreams” is in fact “similar to things posited within the sensory field of phenomena – such as the skeletons that appear clearly only to the mind,” and is thus willing to categorize such “clear appearances” as being a type of form belonging within the sensory field of mental phenomena. But the key difference is that he does not hold them to exist according to inherent characteristics, and goes on to say that, “Furthermore, they are forms that are thoroughly conceptualized [*kun brtags pa'i gzugs*] from the five types of [outer] form. From this you should come to understand many similar things.”⁵² We should keep this point in mind later, since one of the primary practices of the creation stage of unsurpassed yoga tantra is known as the visualization of “clear appearances” (*gsal snang*), the same word Tsongkhapa uses here. That is, we may take from this passage a clue as to how Tsongkhapa might have described the ontological status of the visualizations of the maṇḍalas during creation stage.

What is even more important to understand at the moment, though, is Candrakīrti's original reasoning, namely that if there is no visual form to trigger an eye consciousness, then there can be no mental consciousness, either. This seems to skip a step in logic. Why couldn't it all just be in our minds, as in dreams? The key, I think, is Tsongkhapa's reminder to apply the distinction of the object to be refuted: Candrakīrti is refuting the Mind-Only version of a mental consciousness that could ever exist definitively *without needing to rely upon an objective focal condition* – because, according to their position, there are never any objects apart from consciousness. It would be a mind that only projects but never actually “perceives.” Thus it seems Candrakīrti is turning the logic back on his opponents: If you say that without visible form there can be no eye consciousness, then why shouldn't you agree that without a mental “object” there can be no mental consciousness? Because the logic is the same. But if you agree that mental consciousness must *rely upon* a mental phenomenon as its objective focal condition (*dmigs rkyen*), then you have acknowledged that consciousness does not exist inherently, but is rather constantly interdependent. Now the Mind-Only proponent might retort that indeed he holds mental consciousness to be a dependent thing, relying instead upon karmic tendencies as its immediate cause,⁵³ but the sticking point of the debate will always be that the Mind-Only person says that a thing must possess its own characteristics *in order* to be an effective cause or a result, and the Middle Way person will respond that to be radically dependent upon causes means that something cannot possibly “hold” its own nature, or defining characteristics, for even a moment. Therefore

⁵² See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 159a2-4 (319).

མི་ལམ་ན་དབང་ཤེས་མེད་བས་ལྟལ་ལྟར་སྒྲུང་བ་ནུས་ཞི་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཁོ་ན་ལ་སྒྲུང་བས་ན། དེ་ལ་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུ་མཆེད་སོགས་ལྟ་བུ་མེད་ཀྱང་། ཡིད་ཅམ་གྱི་འོར་ཀེང་རུས་གསལ་བར་སྒྲུང་བ་ལྟ་བུ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུ་མཆེད་དུ་འཛོག་བ་དང་འབྲས་བུ། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུ་མཆེད་ཀྱི་གཟུགས་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཡང་དེའི་གཟུགས་ལྟ་བུ་ལས་ཀྱི་ན་བརྟགས་པའི་གཟུགས་ཡིན་ནོ། །འདིས་ནི་འདྲ་བ་མང་སོ་ཞིག་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

⁵³ See Appendix Seven (329-330).

it can only be defined with respect to the context in which it is being isolated *as* something to be conceived.

According to Tsongkhapa's perspective, every moment of conscious awareness, insofar as it has "content," depends not only on a previous moment of consciousness, but must still depend upon the full array of causes and conditions presented in the Abhidharma. Thus even mental consciousness – whether dreaming or awake – must rely upon the focal condition that is the appearance of a *dharma*, or a perceivable thing, in its field of awareness in order to arise *as* consciousness. As opposed to the Abhidharma idea, however, in this Middle Way Consequence view, neither the *dharma*, nor the mental "sense" faculty, nor the mental consciousness, have any definable nature apart from (a) their interaction with one another, *and* (b) the mere labeling that goes on when we attempt to analyze in retrospect what was "actually" taking place. If, however, one were to hold even such a mental object or focal condition as something existing with its own characteristics, as Candrakīrti thought Bhāvaviveka wanted to do, then this would defeat the purpose of recognizing the inextricable interdependence of the three poles of any act of perception. Insofar as objects, faculties, and consciousnesses *seem* to have some nature of their own, though in fact they do not, they are said to be false; "just as in a dream," where it may seem there are triads of the physical senses, but in fact there cannot be.

The point, however, is not that waking life is exactly the same as dream life. Tsongkhapa is clearly arguing that the triads pertaining to the five senses do not exist in a dream, whereas they do exist when awake. Furthermore, he writes that the mental pictures of form that arise in dreams – or in imagined visualizations while awake – are total conceptualizations, and uses the Mind-Only term for actively constructed conceptualization (*kun tu brtags pa*), not the typical Middle Way term for mere labeling (*btags pa tsam*), which is applied equally to all existing things. That is, even in Tsongkhapa's "own position" there is a clearly delineated distinction between the objects of the five physical senses in the shared outer world, and the objects of mere imagination within our minds. But at another level, *all* are equally unreal, in that they appear to exist as independent entities, whereas they do not in fact exist that way, and appear as though they do not depend for their distinction *as* objects upon our conceptual designations, whereas in fact they do.

Here we begin to taste the flavor of Tsongkhapa's Middle Way version of illusion: Rather than saying that mind is real but outer objects are illusory, or that everything *really* comes from your mind, this Middle Way perspective must maintain that all three poles of perception are equally false, or deceptive. Thus Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Candrakīrti's Middle Way position uses the dream example to prove something quite different from what the Mind-Only proponents had wanted to do. The new example shows that all *functioning things*, not just outer objects, are fundamentally false, insofar as their appearances deceive us, just the way dreams make us think they are

real. In commenting on Candrakīrti's verse 6:53, Tsongkhapa draws a sweeping picture of how all phenomenal reality is indeed like a dream, from the perspective of those who are really *awake*, namely Buddhas:⁵⁴

Therefore, insofar as in this world there is a sleep of not-knowing, then to the perceptions of those who are in the waking state, being free of the ordinary sleep that is distinct from this ignorance, although things cannot grow through any essence of their own, nevertheless, the perceptual triads still exist, since the dream dreamed by the sleep of ignorance is still going on. In the same way, as long as one is not free of that sleep, or does not wake from that sleep, so long, to those dreamers, the triad of objects, faculties, and consciousness will exist.

Just as, for one who wakes from sleep, the triads from the dream have no existence, so for all those Buddhas, who have finished off, or torn out from its root, the sleep of delusion, and have made manifest the absolute space of phenomena, since the triads have no existence, there is also no "consciousness with nothing outside."

Furthermore, to the holy gaze that sees how things exist, the triads do not appear, but to the holy gaze that sees things in their variety – although for that subject state of mind itself, nothing appears by the power of being contaminated by the tendencies of ignorance – nonetheless, all those things that appear by the power of the contaminated consciousness of other persons, insofar as they appear to that holy gaze, appear to the Buddha, and this is divine knowledge.

Thus we see incidentally, here, one iteration of Tsongkhapa's answer to the conundrum of how Buddhas – who are said to be free of karmic seeds and free of conceptual thought – would ever perceive suffering beings. If, according to a Middle Way view, every mind is understood to perceive only according to the karmic energies ripening within its own continuum, then how would a Buddha, who is beyond the whole cycle, ever "be able" to perceive anything within suffering reality at all, if that Buddha was completely free of the ignorance and traces that are the root causes for every perception in the cycle? Here Tsongkhapa, following Candrakīrti, turns the Mind-Only school dream analogy back on itself, and expands it to apply to the "sleep" of ignorance itself. As long as one is drugged by that sleep, the false triads of perception will continue to appear according to their respective causes and conditions. But insofar as it *is* possible to wake from that sleep entirely – the Awakening that is *bodhi* – then all three components of suffering perceptions would cease altogether, revealing that the isolated pole of a so-called "consciousness with nothing outside" could never have existed anyway.

⁵⁴ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 159b4-160a2, in Appendix Seven (320-321). Compare the last paragraph to Tsongkhapa's more extensive analysis of this point, translated in Appendix Twelve.

Tsongkhapa continues with his own interpretation of the nature of a Buddha's omniscience, using a classical distinction between the "gaze that sees how things exist" (*ji lta ba gzigs*) and the "gaze that sees things in their variety" (*ji snyed pa gzigs*). To the former kind of knowing, all perceptions based on falsehood will indeed have vanished: This is the timeless meditation of a wisdom that transcends the twelve links, which certainly implies that *consciousness*, precisely as non-inherent, could still arise based on entirely different kinds of causes than we have been discussing thus far. Tsongkhapa does not address that crucial point here, however. To this pure kind of knowing, all phenomena that arise anywhere, based on any sorts of causes and conditions at all, would appear to the omniscience of a Buddha. The very possibility of such knowledge within a Buddhist philosophy thoroughly obviates solipsistic reasoning. Beyond and including the spirals of suffering individuals' projected worlds, there remains an infinitely vast array of knowable things – from the configuration of planets and cosmic forces driven by shared karmic energies, down to the most subtle flicker of a mental affliction in the mind of any living being – that can appear as knowable to a mind unlimited by conceptual thought, even though that mind is utterly free of the *causes* that would make any one of those mental or physical events appear as "real," much less as "mine." It is as though the Buddha is watching us dream.⁵⁵

Cataracts and Empty Potentials

There are several more examples we must have at our disposal in order to understand Tsongkhapa's distinctive interpretation of the "stream of fluid" that can arise as mutually contradictory things for different beings. The first example is that of a person with cataracts: Everyone knows that it is possible for someone with an eye disease to see things, like the appearance of "hairs" or other fuzzy apparitions floating across the visual field, that are not really out there in the shared world of appearances. The Mind-Only school takes this as an example parallel to the dream: Since it is possible to see things even when there are no objects outside, this proves that consciousness produces its own appearances from its own side, without relying on anything outer. Right?

Candrakīrti's Middle Way argument *ad absurdum* comes back with two options. Either we take a "normal" person without cataracts as the arbiter of truth, in which case, for the person with cataracts, both the appearance of the hairs and the consciousness perceiving them would be deemed false, or we take the definitively established mind of the person *with* cataracts as the arbiter of truth, in which case the hairs would have to be real, even for someone without cataracts. Because, goes the argument, if the mind establishing the hairs, even with no objective support whatsoever, existed definitively and therefore validly, then even if one did not have cataracts, as soon as anyone looked

⁵⁵ Thanks to Dr. B. Alan Wallace for this last image, which he draws from the Great Perfection tradition. However, I believe that Tsongkhapa's analysis here lends itself very well to the analogy, also.

towards the place where the person with cataracts was seeing “hairs,” that person would also have to see hairs: “Because they would be exactly the same in not having an objective field.”⁵⁶

Tsongkhapa explains how this example relates to the overall topic that is the great sub-heading under which the entire debate with the Mind-Only school, constituting about a third of the book, is situated. This is the topic of “refuting birth from another” (*gzhan skye dgag pa*), the second of the four points in Nāgārjuna’s famous tetralemma, or four impossible choices for real causation.⁵⁷ It is the most difficult choice to refute, because it is what we normally think: Things come from other things. The point of the debate, according to Tsongkhapa’s repeated clarifications, is that the idea of “things” we think of when we think things come from other things, however, is already infected with a grasping to a certain notion of the identity of “things” that holds them to exist out there on their own, inherently, with a nature of their own, with defining characteristics of their own, and so on. It is *this kind of identity* which is being refuted, not the simple fact of causation or change as it takes place constantly in an illusory way. But even from the qualified point of view of Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way, there may be great danger in jumping too quickly to the notion of “merely labeled conventions,” insofar as we are likely to go right back to thinking of things exactly the way we did before, as *real*, yet now merely calling them “merely labeled,” and thus missing the soteriological intent of the entire argument.

We have seen that Abhidharma literature enumerated a list of six causes and four conditions, all of which can be recognized as functioning continually in various ways to bring about an experienced reality. We have seen that the factors of karmic causation are held to be crucially important within that system, but are not the only types of causes. We have begun to see that the Mind-Only school deeply intensifies and broadens the ubiquity of karmic causation, through its theory regarding the ripening of seeds and tendencies, indeed claiming that these are solely responsible for the whole panoply of our inner and apparently outer experiences. Ignorance itself can be understood from a Mind-Only viewpoint as failing to understand how both the sensory and mental objects we experience are equally arising from seeds within each of our own minds. Thus the Mind-Only perspective radically re-orientes *how* one would look at causation, forcing one to consider one’s own past actions and beginningless tendencies as the primary causes for all experience, rather than looking for outer, apparently “independent” chains of causation in a so-called material world. Thus the locus for causation is shifted, but the Mind-Only viewpoint, remaining within a fundamentally functionalist paradigm, *never*

⁵⁶ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 160a3-160b1, translated in Appendix Seven (321-322), where Tsongkhapa paraphrases Candrakīrti’s own gloss to verses 6:54 and 6:55.

⁵⁷ The four are: birth from oneself, birth from another, birth from both, or birth from neither.

questions the possibility of real causation itself. We must catch this difference in order for any of these debates to make sense.

The entire section on “refuting birth from another” began from an explicit presentation of the four conditions, along with the six causes as nested within them,⁵⁸ exactly as explained by Vasubandhu, in order to establish the basis of refutation.⁵⁹ By the section of the text we have just been examining, however, it is long since clear that the four conditions are only being refuted insofar as they are thought to exist inherently, and never being refuted point blank. On the contrary, we now encounter a case where the Mind-Only viewpoint would in effect do away with the focal condition as having any causal efficacy, and, as we will see in the case of the blind person, would effectively reduce the governing condition of a sense faculty to a mere epiphenomenon of the ripening tendencies.⁶⁰ Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way view claims it will actually *preserve* the distinctiveness of each of the four conditions, with the all-pervasive caveat that none of them can exist apart from a conceptual framework of interdependent designation. But this framework would in turn be conditioned by the merely labeled tendencies ripening in the merely labeled mind of the merely labeled person doing the labeling.

In the present context, then, Tsongkhapa points out that if the appearance of hairs to a person with cataracts was *really* arising only from a consciousness that was established inherently, then it would have to follow that the appearance of hairs was not dependent upon the cataracts at all, insofar as these would merely be an extraneous feature of the consciousness, and unrelated to the supposedly definitive causal chain of ripening tendencies posited by the Mind-Only position. Thus it would follow that even someone without cataracts could see the same “hairs” since both persons would be equal in having no objective field outside their minds. This invokes the classical extreme consequence of inherent “birth from another,” namely, that if the causal other was *really* and inherently other, and hence totally unrelated to its result, then “anything could come from anything,” (*thams cad thams cad las skye bar thal ba*) and causation would be rendered meaningless.⁶¹ Because these conclusions are acknowledged to be absurd for all parties, the imaginary Mind-Only response given by Candrakīrti addresses seriously the fact of differing experience between beings, but solely from the perspective of differing states of karmic ripening.⁶²

⁵⁸ See Chapter One, Figure One, above.

⁵⁹ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 97b3-98b5 (196-198).

⁶⁰ See Appendix Seven (329-330).

⁶¹ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 160b1-3, translated in Appendix Seven (322).

⁶² *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 160b6-161a2 (322-323), referencing Candrakīrti’s verse 6:56:

རྣམ་ཤེས་སྤྱི་བའི་བག་ཆགས་སྤྱི་བའི་ཆུ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེའི་བྱིར་གང་ཐག་གང་ལ་སྤྱི་ན
མ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་སྤྱི་མ་གཞན་གྱི་སྤྱི་བའི་བག་ཆགས་སྤྱི་བའི་ཡོད་པ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ལ། སྤྱི་ཤད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་འབྱུང་གི། གང་གི་བྱིར་རབ་ཅི་བ་མེད་

The cause for whether or not a state of consciousness will arise is whether or not the previously planted tendencies that give rise to a consciousness ripen or do not ripen. Therefore, to a person for whom a tendency – planted by another, previous instance of the consciousness of the mental aspect of a hair – is ripening, and only to that person, will a consciousness with the aspect of a hair come forth. But *since* for *those who see* an objective field without being affected by cataracts, the *potential*, or tendency, for a *mind* appearing as a hair is *not ripening*, to *someone* without cataracts a *mind* seeing hairs will *not come about*. But it is not as though such a mind does not arise because it is bereft of a functioning thing that exists as the knowable thing that is a hair.

That is, according to this position, even the reason that those without cataracts do *not* see fuzzy hairs in front of their vision, is *not* because there are no hairs existing as “things to be known” (*shes bya*). In this case it would not really matter. Rather, the lack of appearing hairs would be due only to the fact that for this person the image of hairs is not ripening from a seed in his or her mindstream. Once again, the Mind-Only position attempts to establish reasoning for things appearing the way they do, yet without relying upon any supposed outer reality at all.

The fact that the argument – both in Candrakīrti’s text and Tsongkhapa’s commentary – goes from here directly into a step by step refutation of the possibility of *real* causation from karmic potentials (*nus pa*), whether in the present, the past, or the future, reveals clearly in the end, according to Tsongkhapa’s interpretation, that the problem is not with the notion of causation from karmic potentials, but the problem is in thinking that any of these exist inherently, or as definitively different from one another, even in a stream of causation. Although it might seem at first as though this is a systematic refutation of causation from karmic potentials, it turns out Tsongkhapa is not refuting that central import at all, rather he is only refuting what he sees to be the still-faulty way in which some proponents of the Mind-Only school might have construed the insights of this distinctively Mahāyāna vision of profound dependent origination, as characterized in Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way*.

The very construction of the arguments refuting growth from a potential that could exist through its own nature as “other” reveals much about what this object to be refuted might look like, were it to exist. If such a definitive potential were to exist as a cause in the present, then it would have to exist at the same moment as its result, the (supposedly) definitive consciousness. In that case there might be a relationship of possession, whereby one could say, “This is the potential’s consciousness,” but then both would already exist and the one could not really be an efficient *causal condition* for the

བར་ལུལ་མཐོང་བ་དག་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཤིང་སྐྱེ་བའི་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲིབ་པ་བཞག་ཆགས་ནི་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲིབ་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་རབ་ཅིག་མེད་པ་དེ་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཤིང་མཐོང་བའི་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲིབ་པ་མི་འགྱུར་བ་ཡིན་གྱི། ཤེས་བྱ་སྐྱེ་ཤིང་སྐྱེ་བའི་དངོས་སོ་དང་བྱལ་བས་སྐྱེ་དེ་མི་སྐྱེ་བ་མིན་ནོ་ཞེ་ན།

other. Or you might say that the consciousness comes *from* the potential, but in that case, still, the result would already exist at the time of the cause, and if this were the way effective causation always worked, as distinct from the mutually supporting simultaneous causes, the emerging sprout would be the same as the seed, and the seed would never be destroyed, which we know is not the case.⁶³

If the potential really existed *before* its resultant consciousness had arisen, there would be the difficulty that since the future consciousness was totally non-existent, one could not even speak of it as “something” in relation to which the potential could be a cause, i.e., as a distinct thing (*khyad par gyi chos*), which would characterize the potential as “its” basis of distinction (*khyad par gyi gzhi*). The opponent comes back with the fact that in the world, we speak of non-existent future things all the time, in order to make distinctions with respect to the actions of currently existing things. For example.⁶⁴

In the world, you say, “Cook up some rice porridge,” and “Weave a cloth from this yarn,” while thinking of the rice dish that is to come, and the blanket that is to come. Even the *Abhidharmakośa* states, “The three who entered the womb: the two of a wheel emperor and a self-emerging . . .,” explaining the womb-enterers to be the ones who entered the womb as a cause for becoming the wheel emperor, and so on. In the same way, when considering the consciousness that will emerge, we accept as a convention the phrase, “the potential for consciousness.”

Candrakīrti’s own *Commentary* bypasses this comeback by insisting that since a potential established through its own nature is just as thoroughly non-existent, and incapable of starting to exist, as the son of a woman who is still barren, the opponent’s argument will be hollow as long as he holds to *that* kind of potential as his premise. Tsongkhapa’s further explanation is worth quoting in full:⁶⁵

⁶³ This argument paraphrases *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 161a5-161b3 (323-324).

⁶⁴ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 162a1-3 (325).

འདིག་རྟེན་ན་འབྲས་ཆན་ཆོས་ཤིག་ཅེས་པ་དང་། སྤྲུལ་པ་འདི་ལ་རས་ཡུག་ཐོགས་ཤིག་ཅེས་འབྲུང་འགྱུར་གྱི་འབྲས་ཆན་དང་། སྤྲུལ་པ་ལ་བསམས་ནས་དེ་སྐད་སྤྲུལ་པ་དང་། མཛོད་ལས་ཀྱང་། མངལ་དུ་འཇུག་པ་གསུམ་དག་སྟེ། །འཁོར་ལོ་སྦྱར་དང་རང་བྱུང་གཉིས། །ཞེས་འཁོར་སྦྱར་སོགས་སུ་འགྱུར་བྱ་ཞིག་མངལ་དུ་འཇུག་པ་ལ། དེ་དག་མངལ་དུ་འཇུག་པར་བཤད་པ་བཞིན་འབྲུང་བར་འགྱུར་བའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལ་བསམས་ནས་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱས་པ་ཞེས་བསྟན་པར་འདོད་དོ་ཞེ་ན།

⁶⁵ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 162a6-162b5 (325-326), emphasis mine.

།དབྱུ་མ་བས་སུ་གྱ་སྟེ་བ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་འགོག་པའི་སྐབས་མང་པོར། སྤྲུ་གྱ་ས་བོན་གྱི་དུས་སུ་མེད་ཀྱང་སྟེ་ན། དེ་བོད་གི་རྒྱ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་སྟེ་བར་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་ཏེ་ཅང་ཐལ་བ་འཕེན་པའི་གནད་ནི་རང་མཚན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་སྤྲུ་གྱ་ནི་སྐབས་གཅིག་ཏུ་མེད་ན་དུས་ནས་ཡང་མེད་དགོས་པས། གཞི་ས་གྲུབ་དང་ཁྱད་མེད་དུ་འགྲོ་བའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་གྱིས་ཡིན་གྱི། སྤྲུ་གྱ་ས་བོན་གྱི་དུས་ན་མེད་ཀྱང་སྟེ་ན། དེ་བོད་གི་རྒྱ་ཡང་སྟེ་བར་ཐལ་ཞེས་འགོག་པ་གཏན་མིན་ནོ། །དེ་གས་པ་འདིས་ནི་འབྲས་ཆན་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་བཤད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟེ་བ་ལྟར་ན། འབྲས་ཆན་སོགས་འབྲུང་འགྱུར་ཡང་གཏན་མེད་དགོས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །གཞན་ཡང་རྣམ་ཤེས་འབྲུང་འགྱུར་ཡོད་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས་དེའི་རྒྱས་པ་འཛོག་ལ། རྒྱས་པ་ལས་རྣམ་ཤེས་འབྲུང་དོ་ཞེས་རྒྱས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས་རྣམ་ཤེས་འཛོག་ན། བན་ཚུན་གྱི་དོན་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་འབྲུབ་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་འདོད་དོ་ཞེ་ན། དེ་ལྟར་ན་རྣམ་ཤེས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མིན་པར་ཉིད་ཅེས་དམ་པ་མཐུན་རབ་མངལ་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གསུང་སོ། །འབྲེལ་པར་རིང་བྱུང་དང་པ་རོལ་རྩ་ལྟུང་ལྟུང་འབྲུབ་རྣམས་ནི་བཏགས་པར་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་གྱི། གྲུབ་པ་རང་བཞིན་པ་མེད་པར་གསུངས་པས་དེ་དག་ལ་གྲུབ་པ་སྤྱིར་འགོག་པ་མིན་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་འགོག་པའི་ཁྱད་པར་རྣམས་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་སྤྱི་ནི་ཁོ་བོ་ཅག་གི་སྤྱི་

In many instances where a Middle Way person refutes that a sprout could grow through its own defining characteristics, it is said that, “At the time of the seed, there is no sprout, but if it were ever to begin, then the horns of a rabbit, and so on, would also start to grow.” Now the point that catapults us into this ridiculous consequence is this: If a sprout that exists through its own defining characteristics does not exist at one instant, then it must never exist at all. This is true by means of the reason that if a basis is not established, then its distinguishing feature will turn out to be non-existent, too. But *in general*, to say that, “If at the time of the seed, there is no sprout, then were it ever to begin, it would follow that the horns of a rabbit, and so on, can grow,” is no refutation at all.

The cooked rice and so on can be explained with this reasoning, too; because insofar as it must be an arising with its own nature, then cooked rice and the rest could never exist at all as something still coming into being. *On the other hand, in reliance upon a consciousness coming-into-being that does exist, one can posit its potential.*

If, by saying, “consciousness emerges from a potential,” you posit consciousness in reliance on a potential, you can establish it in dependence upon a mutually interdependent meaning. If you say, “I accept that,” then indeed, it is in this way that all the holy masters of great knowledge have expressed the very fact of consciousness not being established through a nature of its own.

As it says in the *Commentary*, everything that is established in reliance – like long and short, far and near – becomes something that exists nominally, but the existence has no nature of its own. For these things, it is not a general refutation of existence, but you should understand all the distinctions regarding a refutation of existence *through a nature of its own*. If you say it like this, then it will be something that concords with what we ourselves say.

With this in mind, the subsequent refutation of potentials that could have existed in the past, as part of the very causal chain that makes karma work, is both less shocking and more meaningful. Again, it is not that the notion of causation in a stream is impossible in general. Rather, insofar as the opponent wants a new consciousness to arise from a potential that is really other – a potential that was deposited at the moment that a long-ago previous instance of consciousness was ending – it is this possibility of a definitive other that is being refuted, not the nominal existence of a stream.

The Mind-Only school proponent wants there to be a single stream that includes all its individually separate and substantial parts. Where the Middle Way would point to the classic extreme consequence of birth from another – namely, that if the parts of the

stream were substantially separate, then they could never really affect one another, there would be no relationship, and “anything could come from anything” – the Mind-Only response is that even though the parts of the stream are substantially distinct, nonetheless there is *one* stream. This means it will have causal relationship and efficacy that cannot be confused with that of another stream, such as that of another sentient being. But once again the Middle Way position turns this argument back on itself: If each part of the causal stream were substantially distinct, then logically they would have to be as completely separate as two different people – such as two famous Buddhist figures, Maitreya and Upagupta. Then the parts of one stream would be every bit as much “other” as separate streams, and there would be no opportunity – no available time (*go skabs*) – at which to collect them all into a stream that would be “really” one. Tsongkhapa points out that this is an argument made only to refute what was wrong in the opponent’s position: “It does not follow through to a mere other.”⁶⁶

Thus, even from a Middle Way Consequence point of view, it is the fact of streams that should make birth from another nominally possible. But as we will see, it is because even the streams are seen to be empty of inherent characteristics, that practices that actively alter the way the practitioner views the merely labeled continuum of his or her own mind can radically alter the way one’s own karmic propensities are perceived. This could even affect how they are perceived as past causes, and therefore how they will continue to give rise to their fruits into the future. When even karmic potentials are realized to be empty of inherent nature, then the energetic potency they offer might be transformed, quite dramatically, into infinite potential. For when the mind understands that the karmic seeds and tendencies never had any *necessary* identity in the first place, the active creation of new images and new causes can take up and integrate the old energies, while gradually transforming their former content. Herein lies the crux of the tantric alchemical engine. But if karmic potentials bore inherent characteristics, they could never give rise to anything but their “inherent” fruit, and could never be transmuted.

A Blind Man Dreaming

Nevertheless, empty potentials would still emphatically *not* mean that anything can come from anything, or that everything is only coming from my mind, in a simplistic sense. There is yet another dimension to the Mind-Only proposition of the dream analogy, which Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa will rebuff in order to clarify more precisely why the Middle Way must assert the conventional existence of outer matter (*tha snyad du phyi rol gyi don khas len pa*).⁶⁷ If indeed it were the case, as Candrakīrti has posed the

⁶⁶ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 164a1 (329): གཞན་ཙམ་ལ་འཕེན་པ་མིན་པར་ ་་

⁶⁷ See Gyaltsab Je’s *Notes on the Eight Difficult Points: Arranged as a Mnemonic According to the Speech of the Lord Himself*, *dka’ gnad brgyad kyi zin bris rje’i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa*, included in

Mind-Only opponent claiming, that just as in a dream there is no outer matter, but mind itself emerges in the aspect of forms, sound, and the rest, and so too in the waking state there are no outer objects but only the ripening of potentials into conscious awareness, then:⁶⁸

. . . why wouldn't a blind person who is awake come to see physical forms and the rest just as well as someone who is not blind? Because in both the dream and the waking state they are exactly the same in not having an eye faculty. Furthermore, if, without form and the rest, consciousness could begin through its own nature, there would be nothing to distinguish a dream from the waking state at all.

The Mind-Only response is that it lies in the power and timing of the ripening potentials: If a potential ripens, then anyone will see forms, whether awake or not, blind or not. But if a potential does not ripen, no forms can be seen even if wide awake with perfectly good eyes. Of course, according to this view, one would not even have eyes if the potential wasn't ripening, because the tendencies ripen into the object *and* the sensory faculty in this school. But the Mind-Only person does acknowledge that “due to the condition of sleep, there will only be dreams,”⁶⁹ while visual images will in general not appear to a person with the overall karmic propensities to be blind, when he or she is awake. The Mind-Only defender insists, however, that the cause for the difference between seeing images or not seeing images is not the lack of healthy eyes, but the lack of ripening tendencies. This is meant to be an example for what everyone's life is like, not just a blind person.

The Middle Way debater is still dissatisfied with this answer, repeating the question of *why* the blind person would not be able to see forms just as well when awake as when dreaming, if the forms were not coming from outside, and the lack of forms were not coming from lack of eyes, and the dreams were not actually caused by the sleep. Conversely, if the karmic potentials for seeing forms were not ripening when the blind person was awake, then why shouldn't it be the case that when dreaming there would be no such potentials ripening, either? It seems the Mind-Only view has to provide an answer as to what really *causes* certain kinds of potentials to ripen at one time and not at another. If there were truly “nothing outside,” then there could be no other causal factor whatsoever but one's own mind itself. But this would be problematic even for a faithful Mind-Only proponent to defend as expressing the most profound meaning of “dependent

rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *ba*, 6a5-7a1 (579-581), for a concise summary of the main points of this argument, apparently as Je Tsongkhapa taught it orally in Gyaltsab Je's hearing.

⁶⁸ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 165a2-3 (331):

སད་པའི་ཡོང་བ་ལ་ཡང་མ་ཡོང་བ་ལྟ་བུའི་གཞུགས་མཐོང་བ་སོགས་ཅེའི་བྱང་མི་སྐྱེ་སྤྱི་མི་ལས་དང་སད་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཡང་མིག་དབང་མེད་པར་མཛུངས་པའི་བྱེ་ར་རོ། །འདི་ཡང་བྱེའི་གཞུགས་སོགས་མེད་པར་རྣམ་ཤེས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བ་སྐྱེ་ན། མི་ལས་དང་སད་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ལ་ཁྱད་མེད་པའི་གནད་གྱིས་ཡིན་ནོ།

⁶⁹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 165a4-5 (331): ་གཉིད་ཀྱི་རྒྱན་གྱིས་མི་ལས་ཁོ་ན་ན་ཡོད་ཀྱི་སད་པ་ལ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ་ ་

origination.” Tsongkhapa comments here: “This, furthermore, is the way to encounter the thing to be refuted.”⁷⁰

That is, what Tsongkhapa is posing deliberately as an extreme consequence of the Mind-Only position, would seem to offer a unilateral view of ripening karmic streams that are not dependent on contributing conditions whatsoever. In this exaggerated depiction, presented in order to bring one face to face with the so-called “definitively established mind to be refuted,” it would be as though there is a single internal computer program running, and when its own seeds are ready to ripen, they will ripen into an entire world, with a progressively vanishing psychological possibility for effective interaction or meaningful interdependence with other beings. This would seem to be the consequence, even when those other beings are logically established to exist, as they clearly are, by historical exponents of the Mind-Only school.⁷¹ It is just that if one takes the notion of an inherently existing mind and non-existent outer world literally enough, the specter of solipsism might become ever more difficult to counter in one’s day to day actions.⁷² But for a practitioner of the Mahāyāna, which is a path ineluctably centered upon limitless compassion for *other* beings, the notion that one can never actually perceive those beings except by logical deduction beyond the veil of one’s personal mental ripenings might become a frustrating weight to bear, even if there remains a

⁷⁰ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 165a6 (331): །འདི་ཡང་དགག་བྱ་ལ་གཏུགས་པའི་ལུགས་སོ།

⁷¹ For a “proof” of the existence of other beings, as distinct from one’s own mindstream, within Dharmakīrti’s presentation of what appears to be a Mind-Only system, see Dharmakīrti, *Establishing Other Mindstreams*, *Samtānāntarasiddhi-nāma-prakaraṇa* (*rgyud gzhan grub pa zhes bya ba’i rab tu byed pa*), Toh. 4219, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, tshad ma, vol. *che*, 355b-359a, and its only extant Tibetan commentary, by the Mongolian Geshe, Ngawang Tendar Lharampa (*ngag dbang bstan dar lha rams pa*, c. 1759 or 1751-1831 or after 1839), *dpal chos kyi grags pas mdzad pa’i rgyud gzhan grub pa zhes bya ba’i bstan bcos kyi ‘grel pa mkhas pa’i yid ‘phrog* (*Captivating the Hearts of Scholars: A Commentary to the Treatise known as “Establishing Other Mindstreams,” by the Glorious Dharmakīrti*), in *mkhas pa’i dbang po a lag sha bstan dar lha rams pa’i gsung ‘bum* (Lanzhou, China: Kan su’u mi rigs dpe skrun khang), 2011, pp. 157-183 (TBRC: W4CZ34261). Though there is an extant English translation of Dharmakīrti’s difficult root text in Stcherbatsky, F. Th., 1930, *Buddhist Logic* (New York: Dover Publications), this is a root text and commentary that certainly deserve further research and updated translation. For discussion of Ngawang Tendar, and his relevance for studies of Tsongkhapa, see Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, 1999, “Remarks on the ‘Person of Authority’ in the Dga’ ldan pa / Dge lugs pa School of Tibetan Buddhism,” Review of *Persons of Authority: The sTon pa tshad ma’i skyes bur sgrub pa’i gtam of A lag sha Ngag dbang bstan dar, A Tibetan Work on the Central Religious Questions in Buddhist Epistemology* by Tom J. F. Tillemans, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 119, no. 4: 646-672.

⁷² Tsongkhapa addresses this point elliptically in a brief passage in his early *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, *kun gzhi’i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 8b, translated in Appendix Eight (686). As he is still arguing from a Mind-Only point of view in this terse work, perhaps we gain a glimpse of his initial grappling with the problem, and his attempted defense of conventional realities that can be shared intersubjectively, even within the Mind-Only system. By the time he is interpreting Candrakīrti in his mature Middle Way works, however, Tsongkhapa is willing to follow Candrakīrti’s lead in taking the Mind-Only view to its most absurd potential consequences, even if Tsongkhapa maintains that these were not intended by the system’s innovators.

promise of breaking through those veils at some future point of realization on the ārya paths. Tsongkhapa glosses Candrakīrti's tight answer as follows:⁷³

Suppose someone claims that this “not making sense” is mere words. Then what we have already said is enough, as before. *Because, for someone seeing dreams, just like the blind person when awake, one is bereft of a basis for consciousness, that is, the action of the faculty.* What presents itself to consciousness in the aspect of what was seen, based upon an eye faculty bearing the name of “a potential,” is not something possessed of a mental consciousness that arose from the transformation of a ripening potential for mental consciousness.

That is, the representation of shape and color that arises in direct dependence upon an eye faculty, and which will in turn present itself to an *eye* consciousness, is still not the same as a *mental* consciousness that arises directly from *its* own specific ripening potential for *mental* consciousness. Tsongkhapa seems to imply that this would be the case even if the faculty is also understood to be ripening directly from a potential. Mental consciousness may or may not rely directly upon the sense consciousnesses: We can think about things conceptually that we may never have seen, or we can reflect upon memories that present themselves to us in mental images. But both of these instances of the mental sensory field of phenomena are still quite distinct from the direct representation of form that appears to the eye consciousness in dependence upon the encounter of the physical organ of the eye with outer stimulants such as light striking a healthy eyeball. Even if one were to say that the eyeball ripened from a “potential,” that still does not make it identical to mental consciousness alone.

Thus, from a Middle Way perspective, it seems the karmic potential that ripens as an eye faculty must be designated as something distinct from the karmic potential that ripens as an eye consciousness, much less the one that ripens into a mental consciousness. If the illusion of the full triad of perception is to arise in the waking state, potentials for each aspect of experience must be ripening in delicate coordination with one another, and in dependence on countless other factors, including the possibility of meaningful interaction with an “outside world” and “physical form.”

Thus the Mind-Only doctrine that the triad of object, faculty, and consciousness all arise from a *single* seed, seems to be refuted with this argument as well,⁷⁴ though that point is not made explicitly here. Rather, although the Middle Way certainly accepts that

⁷³ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 165a6-165b2 (331-332), emphasis mine:

ཁག་ཏེ་རིགས་པ་མེད་པར་ཆོག་ཙམ་གྱིས་དེ་སྐད་སྒྲ་ན། ཁོ་ཙོ་ཅག་གིས་ཀྱང་སྒྲ་ལྟར་སྒྲས་པས་ཆོག་གོ་མི་ལམ་མཐོང་བ་ལ་ནི་སང་པའི་སྐབས་ཀྱི་ཁོང་བ་ལྟར་
རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྟེན་དབང་པོ་བྱེད་པ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་བྱིང་། ལུས་པའི་མིང་ཅན་གྱི་མིག་གི་དབང་པོ་ལ་རྣམ་ཤེས་བརྟེན་པའི་རྣམ་པའི་རྗེས་སུ་བྱེད་པ། ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ལུས་པ་སྒྲིན་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་འགྱུར་བ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་ཞོ།

⁷⁴ See the presentation of this idea by Alexander Berzin in “What Karma Actually Is: The Gelug Prasangika Presentation” at www.berzinarchives.com/web/x/nav/group.html_1979263678.html, esp. Session Two.

personal experience is arising constantly based upon seeds and tendencies, it would seem that it is the very complexity of the interaction between *many different* seeds ripening in very quick succession and at different layers of one's being that allows for there to be a meaningful difference between waking life and sleeping life, between the dreams of a blind person and the sights of a person with well-functioning eyes, even as against those of someone with cataracts. But nowhere does Tsongkhapa's Middle Way argument say that the fact of having working eyes as opposed to not having them is *not* dependent on karmic potentials. It is the specificity of how *many* distinct and interdependent causal factors must be going on in any given interaction of objects, senses and awareness that is deeply complexified, not simplified, when seriously grappling with a Middle Way view. This analysis might add yet new context to the point we saw from Śāntideva's *Guide*.⁷⁵

From various conditions come
the various illusions themselves
but in no case at all
can a single condition
have the capacity for all.

Tsongkhapa's concluding argument is as follows:⁷⁶

Therefore, just as the lack of eyes does not cause tendencies to ripen into objects that could appear to a waking blind person, likewise, in dreams also, the *sleep* is not the cause for the tendencies to ripen into the appearance of objects. *Because if consciousness with nothing outside itself existed through a nature of its own, it would not rely upon the ripening of tendencies at all.*

Since from tendencies that are false, the false consciousness that appears as the objects of a dream does arise, therefore, even in a dream, you must accept both (1) the false consciousness that appears as the functioning things (like physical form and the rest) of an objective field like that of the waking state, as well as (2) the eyes of the dream that are the *cause* (i.e., that serve as the basis) of the *realization* (i.e., the consciousness). . . . Although in a dream there are no objective fields, faculties, or consciousnesses pertaining to the eye consciousness and the rest of the five, still with respect to the person who is dreaming the dream, insofar as

⁷⁵ See Chapter One, note 31, above.

⁷⁶ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 165b2-166a1 (332-333), emphasis mine:

།དེའི་ཕྱིར་མིག་མེད་པ་སངས་པའི་ཡང་པ་འདི་ལ་དོན་སྣང་གི་བག་ཆགས་སྒྲིན་པ་རྒྱ་མཚན་པ་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་དེ་ལྟར་སྤྲོས་པ་ལ་མེ་ལྟོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དོ། །གང་གི་ཕྱིར་བག་ཆགས་བརྒྱན་པ་ལས་སྤྲོས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཕྱི་དོན་སྣང་གི་ལུས་པ་བརྒྱན་པ་སྤྲོས་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར། མི་ལམ་དུ་ཡང་སངས་པའི་སྐབས་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཡུལ་གྱི་དངོས་པོ་གཟུགས་སོགས་སུ་སྤྲང་བའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་བརྒྱན་པ་དང་། མི་ལམ་གྱི་མིག་རྟོགས་པ་སྤྲོས་པར་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱ་སྤྲོས་པའི་ལྟ་བུ་ལྟར་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལས་སྤྲང་བར་བྱའོ། ་་་ མི་ལམ་ན་མིག་ཤེས་སོགས་ལྟའི་ཡུལ་དབང་རྣམ་ཤེས་གསུམ་མེད་ཀྱང་། མི་ལམ་སྤྲོས་པའི་གང་ཟག་གི་དོར་དེ་གསུམ་དུ་དམིགས་པ་ཡོད་པས་མི་ལམ་གྱི་མིག་དང་། མི་ལམ་གྱི་མིག་ཤེས་དང་། མི་ལམ་གྱི་གཟུགས་གསུམ་སོ་ཁས་སྤྲང་བར་སྤྲོས་ཀྱི། དེ་གསུམ་མིག་སོགས་སུ་བྱུང་པར་འདོད་པ་མིན་ཏེ། སྤྱི་མའི་རྟ་གླང་དང་སྤྱི་མའི་མི་ཁས་ལེན་ཀྱང་། དེ་དག་རྟ་གླང་དང་མིར་འདོད་མི་དགོས་པ་བཞིན་ནོ།

there are triads to be focused upon, it teaches that we should accept the triad of an eye in the dream, and an eye consciousness in the dream, and form in the dream. Nonetheless, we should not assert that these are to be established as an eye and so forth. *It is like the fact that we can accept illusory horses or cows, or illusory people, but it is not necessary to assert that these are horses, cows, or people.*

From this Middle Way viewpoint, then, even the karmic tendencies have no nature of their own – hence they are “false,” whether ripening in sleep or in the waking state. We have already seen that even valid perceptual triads in the waking state must be deemed “false” insofar as they appear to exist inherently but in fact do not. Nevertheless, the illusion of the dreams is distinct from the illusion of the waking state, because the illusion of the dream lacks the *ripening* of actively functioning sense faculties, much less the ripening of karmic propensities that will in turn be able to *interpret* the incoming data regarding outer matter as something with sensible qualia and therefore as a suitable basis to be conceptualized as “this” or “that.” It is central to Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way interpretation that precisely with respect to deceptive reality, valid perception must rely upon a valid basis. What he calls an illusory person (*sgyu ma’i mi*) in the ordinary sense here, like one we see on a movie screen, is still different from a person to whom we can talk and listen, and with whom we can hold hands or share a meal. Thus Tsongkhapa can say, in a subsequent section:⁷⁷

Thus it states that all things are merely labeled with names, and no more, but (1) ultimately, and (2) by their very essence, they are not there. [*The Sūtra of the Meeting of the Father and the Son*] lists these two in order to apply the distinction of the thing refuted, and in every case when setting forth our own position, it is said that things are made through merely tacking on a name.

It is stated that if even in a dream one cannot find the dreamed objects of one’s romance, what need is there to say [that one will not be able to find those persons] when you wake up? There are some who exaggerate this claim, saying that there is no difference between a person in a dream and a person during the waking state in terms of whether he or she is a person or not, but this is nonsense in the extreme. For it is stated that during the dream state, you will never find any living beings who assist in making your romance, but during the waking state we must posit that you would be able to find such living beings.

Thus, as is commonly understood regarding the Middle Way view, the conventions of the world are upheld – for the most part. All these points are crucial to understanding the philosophical distinctions underlying the different levels of realization of “illusion” that Tsongkhapa describes within the stages of creation and completion in the Guhyasamaja system, also. But as we immediately approach the argument regarding “flowing water,”

⁷⁷ See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 168a3-6, in Appendix Seven (337).

we are introduced to two other examples of illusion. The key challenge will be to determine which, out of all these analogies, will best demonstrate the way that “the force of karma” could affect and influence individual perceptions in a shared world, according to Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way view.

Skeletons and Performances

The argument begins once again from the complaint of a supposed Mind-Only opponent. He wonders how it is possible, in a case where *everyone* will agree there is no outer object – such as when a meditator visualizes the whole world in a state of decay, the ground strewn with bones and carcasses, and his own body turned into a skeleton – for such a “clear appearance” to arise in the mind, based on practice, if there is not even a *mind* that is established through its own characteristics. That is, in a case where it is obvious that no outer objects are activating mental awareness, must there not be a mental faculty that always possesses its own definitive qualities, namely of being “clear and aware” (*gsal shing rig pa*), in order for there to be anything there at all that will be able to produce the admittedly “false” visualization?

Tsongkhapa glosses Candrakīrti’s verse 6:69 to mean that even the practitioner who meditates on the repulsive (*mi sdug pa*) in this way will see that the perceptual triad is not arising through any nature of its own. Here precisely, it was taught in various sūtras that one should:⁷⁸

contemplate what is *wrong*, that is, what is not reality as it is, in this concentration. If the consciousness to which the skeletons appeared were established through its own nature, then as it appeared, so it should become, and that contemplation would become one that had reality as it is as its objective field.

That is, if the consciousness, being identical in substance to everything that appeared in it, were established inherently, then it would be real, not imaginary, and everyone else should be able to see the skeletons, too. Then this would contradict the very goal articulated in teaching the meditation, namely, that one should meditate on what is *not* actually the case at present, in order to bring about a change in one’s heart. One is not, however, meditating in order to convince oneself that what one has visualized is real and everyone else who cannot see it is just wrong. Mere visualization, because it engages the mental faculty and consciousness, not the five physical sensory fields, does not change the shared physical world in the present, no matter how skilled the meditator. Hence this is a crucial point from the perspective of tantric visualization, too. Although the subject matter may be quite different in most cases, the principle of visualizing what is not actually the case in order to bring about an internal change in one’s being, remains

⁷⁸ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 168b4-5 (338):

ཉིང་རེ་འཛིན་དེ་ནི་ལོག་ས་སྟེ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ས་ཡིན་ས་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་བར་བསྟན་ས་སྟེ་མདོ་ལས་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །ཀྱང་རྒྱས་སྟངས་པའི་ཤེས་ས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་
གྲུབ་ན། དེའི་སྟངས་བ་ཡང་དེ་ལྟར་འགྱུར་བས་ཡིད་བྱེད་དེ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་ཅན་དུ་འགྱུར་རོ།

consistent. Thus the fact that Candrakīrti raises the following example, in verse 6:70, to demonstrate the practical difference between such a visualized world and “reality as it is” (*de kho na nyid* – apparently used here in a conventional, not ultimate, sense) is relevant for those beginning tantric meditators who might wonder why, “if everything is empty,” what they visualized in meditation does not immediately transform the shared outer world of appearances. Tsongkhapa glosses Candrakīrti’s *Auto-Commentary*:⁷⁹

If it were not like this, then consider the following: If you watch a theatrical performance or the like, then for all those who turn their eyes to that objective field, just as a sensory mind, i.e., an eye consciousness with the aspect of that objective field, will arise for one person, then in the same way – or with a similar aspect – it will also arise for all the other audience members. Likewise, exactly like the practitioner with a mind of repulsion, then for those counterparts who are not such practitioners, if they (that is, anyone who wants to see skeletons and the like as an objective field) just turn their minds towards the objective field seen by the practitioner as skeletons, they will realize skeletons, i.e., the sight will arise. It would be just like the consciousness of blue and so on.

A theatrical performance is an illusion in its own way – innumerable colors, sets, costumes, voices, intonations of sound by instruments, movements of bodies that look different from every direction – assembled in a more or less planned and choreographed way to produce an “effect” that will be shared mutually by the members of the audience. Everyone sees and hears something a little bit different, depending on his or her physical vantage point, as well as mental, emotional, and cultural background with the subject matter, art form, language, and so forth. Nonetheless, when one person turns his eyes towards a visual field, and another audience member turns her eyes towards the same “stage,” some relative agreement can usually be reached about what took place in a given performance (“Did you see that dancer fall?” or “O, what a gorgeous voice!” and so on). But, goes the *reductio ad absurdum*, if a meditator’s mind and all that appeared in it were to exist definitively, then anyone else who walked into the vicinity and looked in the direction of the meditator’s gaze – even without visualizing, and without meditative skill or practice – would see the earth strewn with skeletal bones, as easily as different audience members looking at the stage would see the color blue on a stage backdrop. Since then “this concentration would turn out not to be false, that is, it would not be a

⁷⁹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 168b5-169a2 (338-339):

།དེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་ན་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་གར་གྱི་ལྟ་མོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡུལ་དེར་མིག་གཏང་བ་ནས་ས་ལས་ཇི་ལྟར་གང་ཟག་གཅིག་ལ་དབང་པོའི་སྒོ་མིག་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡུལ་དེའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་སྐྱེ་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་སྐྱེ་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་ལྟ་མོ་བ་གཞན་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་སྐྱེ་བ་ཇི་ལྟར་དུ། མི་སྤྲུལ་པའི་ཡིད་ཅན་གྱི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པ་ལྟར་ཅིག་ཤོས་ཏེ་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པ་མ་ཡིན་པས། རྣམ་འབྱོར་བས་ཀའང་རུས་མཐོང་བའི་ཡུལ་དེར་སྒོ་གཏང་བ་སྐྱེ་ཀའང་རུས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ལ་ལྟ་འདོད་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་ཀའང་རུས་ཏྟགས་པ་སྐྱེ་མཐོང་བ་སྐྱེ་བར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། སྒོ་མོ་སོགས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་བཞིན་ནོ།

contemplation of an object that is wrong,”⁸⁰ the whole situation would contradict scripture, which in the context of this argument is considered enough to refute this version of a Mind-Only position once again. But we should continue to wonder about the difference between the situations, in light of the far more radical example that follows.

Reflections and Rivers

It is from here that Tsongkhapa begins to comment directly on the first half of Candrakīrti’s verse 6:71, and writes for several pages without referencing Candrakīrti’s *Auto-Commentary* at all.⁸¹ I would propose that these are some of the most important pages in his whole corpus for understanding the depth to which he understands the force of karma to be the pivotal condition that shapes every sentient being’s perception of a world in which no object can be established through any nature of its own. If we further apply the principles Tsongkhapa offers here, beyond the sūtra-based analysis of ordinary perceptions to the tantric world of ritual creation, I believe this logic can illuminate numerous critical Vajrayāna practices, from the transformation of “foul substances” into the sacred “inner offering,” to the creation of a pure maṇḍala built on disks of the elements, to the possibility of actually arising as Vajradhara based upon a lifetime of practice. The half-verse to which Tsongkhapa’s analysis refers is as follows:⁸²

*The same as one with vision affected by cataracts
A craving spirit perceives a river of flowing water as pus.*

Tsongkhapa continues.⁸³

You should also understand how to reply by giving the example of illusions – which are the same as what is seen by someone whose vision is affected by cataracts – and with the example of an image in a mirror, and so on. You should also understand as explained previously the case where a mind perceiving pus and

⁸⁰ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 169a3 (339): ཉིང་འཛིན་འདི་བརྒྱན་པར་ཉེ་ལོག་པའི་དོན་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པར་ཡང་མི་འགྱུར་ལོ།

⁸¹ Interestingly, the *Commentary* actually states here that “it is permissible to elaborate,” as though Candrakīrti had written it precisely as an instruction manual for teaching the verses. See *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa*, *Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya*, sde dge bstan 'gyur, *dbu ma*, vol. 'a, Toh. 3862, 271b2: “You should know, furthermore, that the logic is the same as that which was explained above, with respect to the line [in verse 6:54], *Whoever sees hairs by the inner force of cataracts*. It is permissible to elaborate.” །རབ་རིབ་མཐུ་ལས་སྒྲ་ནམས་གང་མཐོང་བ། །ཞེས་གང་བཤད་པ་དེ་དང་མཚུངས་པ་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་རིགས་ཅན་གཞན་ཡང་རིག་པར་བྱ་སྟེ་སྒྲོས་པས་ཆོག་གོ།

⁸² *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Toh. 3861, 6:71a: རབ་རིབ་དང་ལྗན་དབང་པོ་ཅན་མཚུངས་པ། །རྩ་འབབ་ལྱང་ལ་ཡི་དྲགས་ནག་ཆོ་ཡང་།

⁸³ Followed by Tsongkhapa, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 169a4-169b2 (339-340):

།དེ་བཞིན་དུ་རབ་རིབ་དང་ལྗན་པའི་དབང་པོ་ཅན་དང་མཚུངས་པའི་སྒྲ་མ་དང་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་སྟོན་གས་དཔེར་འགོད་པ་ལ་ཡང་ལན་གདམ་ཚུལ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་ལ། རྩ་འབབ་པའི་ལྱང་ལ་ཡི་དྲགས་ནམས་ལ་ནག་ཁག་གི་སྒྲོ་སྟེ་བ་ལ་ཡང་སྒྲ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱལོ། །དེ་ལ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲེ་མཆེད་ཀྱི་གཟུགས་ལྟ་ནི་དངོས་པོར་སྒྲ་བའི་གྲུབ་མཐས་བཏགས་པ་མིན་གྱི། མདོ་ལས་གསུངས་ཤིང་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱང་དེ་ལྟར་དུ་བཞེད་དོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་ཀེང་རུས་མེད་ཀྱང་དེ་གསལ་བར་སྤང་བ་ནི། གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་དང་འབྲེལ་བར་གཟུགས་ཅན་དུ་འདོད་དགོས་པ། འདི་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཁོ་ན་ལ་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་པས། གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་བཞིན་དུ་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲེ་མཆེད་མིན་ལ། སྒྲེ་མཆེད་གཟུགས་ཅན་ལྟག་མ་དགྲ་ཡང་མིན་པས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲེ་མཆེད་ཀྱི་གཟུགས་ཀྱང་བཏགས་པ་ཞེས་འབྲུང་བའོ། །མིག་ཤེས་ལ་སྒྲ་ཤད་དུ་སྤང་བ་ནི་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་བཞིན་དུ་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲེ་མཆེད་དོ། །ཡི་དྲགས་ལ་རྩ་ལྱང་ནག་ཁག་ཏུ་སྤང་བ་ནི་དེའི་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་པས་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲེ་མཆེད་དུ་གཞག་དགོས་སོ།

blood arises for craving spirits in relation to a river of flowing water.

In this regard, the five types of form that belong to the sensory field of mental objects are not designated by those philosophical systems that assert functioning things. But they are mentioned in sūtras and we ourselves accept them as such. Therefore, although there are no skeletons, they appear clearly, and we must accept them to possess form in the way that a reflected image does.

But insofar as the skeletons only appear to the mental consciousness, they are not part of the sensory field of form [i.e., actual visible objects] in the way that a mirror image is. Since it also does not belong to any of the rest of the nine physical sensory fields [i.e., ear and sound, nose and smell, tongue and taste, body and touch, or eyes themselves] it arises as “totally constructed form, belonging to the sensory field of mental objects.”

What appears to the eye consciousness as a hair [in the case of someone with cataracts] is, like a reflected image, the sensory field of form. When a river of water appears to a craving spirit as pus and blood – since it is an appearance to the eye consciousness – it must be set forth as the sensory field of form.

Thus it is clear from the half-verse and from Candrakīrti’s brief comment (see note 81 just above) that Candrakīrti intends the commonly-cited scriptural examples – wherein beings of other realms perceive drastically different things than humans do – to be interpreted, philosophically, along the same lines as the previous discussion regarding a human being with cataracts. Now one’s immediate reaction might be that this means the perceptions of the human realm become the “gold standard” of reality, while the perceptions of beings from other realms, either tormented or benefitted by particularly strong karmic influences, will have *misperceptions* comparable to those of a human with faulty vision. After all, the Middle Way debater had just worked rather hard to show that if perceptions were only coming from an inherently established consciousness, then there would be no way to say who was right, and even people without cataracts would be seeing hairs in a white wash-basin. Further, we have said that Candrakīrti’s Middle Way position finds it very important to maintain the necessity of a valid basis for perceptions of a material outer world. Is the influence of individual karma, then, reduced to the status of “a defect in the eye of the beholder”?

Of course this conclusion would not sit well with everything we have said thus far about the Buddhist view of karma in general, and it is precisely the sort of misinterpretation that Tsongkhapa will go to great lengths to disprove. If the analogy with cataracts would seem to take us there, perhaps it is because we are not yet understanding the *cataracts* in the way that Tsongkhapa wants to, either.

Tsongkhapa begins by distinguishing illusions, such as those false images produced by cataracts, from images, such as reflections in a mirror. Both are illusory – in

that on closer examination, they are actually not what they appeared to be – but the way the illusion comes about is different. Tsongkhapa then compares both to the immediately preceding example of the visualized skeletons, to show how such “clear appearances” to the mind are both like and unlike images seen in a mirror. He acknowledges that the “functionalist” positions (*dnegos por smra ba’i grub mtha’*) do not separate out a category of form that appears only to the mental consciousness. From a Mind-Only school perspective perhaps it should already be obvious why not: because for them *all* form is only mental. Still, based on unelaborated sūtra references,⁸⁴ he asserts that “we ourselves,” i.e., the Middle Way Consequence proponents, accept that such a category exists (although not definitively so, as it appears Bhāvaviveka wanted it to).

Tsongkhapa insists in many places throughout his writings that for a highly skilled meditator, the objects of visualization can eventually appear with the kind of vividness, stability, and distinct clarity with which an object reflected in a well-lit and flawless glass mirror would appear to a healthy visual consciousness. Nonetheless, since Candrakīrti has just demonstrated that in this case there *are* no skeletons that possess outer physical form, one must posit that the clearly visualized skeletons belong solely to the sensory field of mental phenomena. They are *like* the reflected image in that they appear to be real, but when you “go to touch them,” or investigate in some other way, it will turn out they were only an image, not real bone. Yet they are *unlike* the mirror image in that a reflection is still something that reaches one’s eye consciousness via the eye faculty and can thus be established as outer form, but the images of the visualized skeletons never reached one’s eye consciousness at all. That is why they can be “seen” equally well by a meditator in a dark room with eyes closed as by a meditator in broad daylight with eyes partially open. Mental visualizations have nothing to do with the physical eye, except perhaps insofar as memories of past visual images can be used as part of the mental construction of such form. Once a meditator is working with a memory, however, the imaginative transformation is already taking place solely within the domain of the mental faculty and mental consciousness.

Against this newly clarified conceptual backdrop, then, Tsongkhapa can say that “what appears to the eye consciousness as a hair” – and it is crucial to note the grammar here – belongs to the sensory field of (outer) form. Like the reflection, it is not what it appears to be, i.e., a hair that you could pick up and tie in a knot. But unlike the visualized skeletons, there is still something appearing to the visual faculty and hence the eye consciousness. Contemporary optometry can tell us precisely what types of molecular conglomerations are producing the shadows on the surface of the eyeballs, but from a

⁸⁴ A Tibetan edition of this text, printed at Sera Mey Library, Sera Monastic University, 2011, which includes copious references as well as conjectures regarding the scriptural quotations to which Tsongkhapa may be referring, notes here (Vol. II, 48, note 81), “The finding of a sūtra quotation has not arisen,” (*mdo lung rnyed son ma byung*). I have not yet had opportunity to engage in such a search myself.

pre-scientific Indian or Tibetan point of view the philosophical point would remain unchanged.

Something is appearing to the eye faculty; it looks to the mind of the perceiver like a hair, but it is not really a hair. All the components for an “illusion” are present. On the other hand, it was not *merely* imagined, like the skeletons. Furthermore, there is something unique to the makeup of the living being doing the perceiving that makes that person see something others do not see – an “inner force” (*mtshu*, being a rather distinctive and multivalent Tibetan word for a majestic and mysterious kind of power).⁸⁵ It is on the basis of all these factors that the analogy can be made to how the “inner force” of karma (*las kyi mthu*) shapes actual perceptions. As we will see, however, the comparison between a craving spirit’s perception of bloody pus and a human-with-cataracts’ perception of hairs is *not* being made with respect to the degree to which one can subsequently interact with the object of perception in a way that it generally continues to function as the working thing it appears to be. In that sense, the perceptions brought about by karma are usually, at the level of deceptive reality, said to be valid; they are not mistaken in the everyday sense. Thus karma would penetrate much more deeply into the fabric of perceptual unfolding than a mere physical obstruction in the eye. The merely labeled “hairs” one validly perceives *by the force of karma* are ones that can grow out of a head, that you can comb and tie up, can turn white, fall out, and remain long after a corpse decays, and so on.⁸⁶

Tsongkhapa goes on to quote a verse from Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way*, along with an Indian commentary on it, which becomes the new basis for his analysis of the problem, more so than Candrakīrti’s line of verse above.⁸⁷

Insofar as for a craving spirit, an animal, a human, and a god,
a single thing is, according to the members of each class,

⁸⁵ In Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatāra*, v. 6:54, for example, *mtshu* translates the Sanskrit word *prabhāva*.

⁸⁶ On the other hand, one could still say that it was the force of karma that caused the person to perceive him- or herself as having cataracts in the first place. But that does not seem to be a factor in the analogy here. When such Middle Way texts use everyday analogies for processes that permeate the fabric of *all* existing phenomena, i.e., with respect to all-pervasive ideas like emptiness or illusion, it can become awkward to then try to apply the universal principle back to the subject matter of the analogy. Nevertheless, we will encounter places where Tsongkhapa does so explicitly with regard to the analogy of reflections in a mirror, so it is worthwhile to remain aware that the possibility for turning everyday analogies back on themselves is always on the horizon. See Appendix Five (231-232).

⁸⁷ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 169b2-5 (340):

ཤེག་བསྐྱུས་ལས་ཀྱང་། ཡི་དྲགས་དྲུག་འགྲོ་མེ་རྣམས་དང་། །ལྷ་རྣམས་ཇི་ལྟར་རིགས་རིགས་སུ། །དངོས་གཅིག་ཡིད་ནི་ཐ་དང་ཕྱིར། །དོན་མ་གྲུབ་པར་འདོད་པ་
ཡིན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་། འདི་ལ་ཤེག་བསྐྱུས་སུ་དངོས་པོ་གཅིག་གང་ཡིན་དང་། །སོ་སོར་མཐོང་རྒྱུ་གསལ་བར་མ་བཤད་དོ། །དེའི་བཤད་སྦྱོར་དགེ་བསྟན་བ
ཅུན་པས་མཛད་པར། །རྒྱ་ཁྱུང་གི་དངོས་པོ་ལ་རང་རང་གི་ལས་ཀྱི་རྣམས་སྤྱི་དབང་གིས་ཡི་དྲགས་ཀྱིས་རྣལ་ལ་སོགས་པས་གང་བར་མཐོང་བ་དང་། །དེ་ཉིད་ལ་
དྲུག་འགྲོ་ཉ་ལ་སོགས་པས་གནས་ཀྱི་རྣམས་པར་བྱེད་པ་དང་། །མི་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ནི་མངར་བ་དང་དྲངས་བ་དང་བསེལ་བའི་རྒྱུར་རྟོག་ཅིང་ཁྱུས་བྱེད་དོ། །འབྲུང་
ངོ་དེར་འབྱུག་གོ་ནས་མཁའ་མཐའ་ཡས་སྤྱེ་མཆོད་ལ་སྟོམས་པར་ཞུགས་པའི་ལྷ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ནི་ནམ་མཁའ་མཐོང་སྟེ། །གཞུགས་ཀྱི་འདུལ་ལས་རྣམས་པར་བཤིག་པའི་
ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེས་བཤད་དོ།

different in their minds, we assert that it is never established as an actual object.⁸⁸

But on this point, in the *Summary of the Greater Way* it is never explained clearly just what “a single thing” is, nor what each of the individual modes of seeing is. The Venerable Layman with lifetime vows [*Upāsaka Bhadanta*] has applied an explanation as follows:

By the power of the ripening of each of their individual karma, upon the single functioning thing of a river of water, a craving spirit sees it filled with pus and so forth; upon the same thing, animals such as a fish and so on think of it as home and live there. Humans will think of it as water – sweet, clear, and cool – and they will wash with it and drink it and swim in it. Those gods who have entered into the meditative absorption on the sensory field of infinite space, will see space; because they have utterly obliterated the ability to discern ‘form.’

As mentioned above, the examples quoted in this passage should challenge us to recognize that the degree of incompatibility between the perceptions being discussed here should theoretically exceed even the most extreme examples that we know from scientific examination of the animal kingdom on this planet. While it is easy to think of fish seeing water as their home, even as for humans it is something to wash with or drink, it is a very different thing to imagine a sentient being for whom the molecular constitution of clean H₂O would not function as such when they encountered a sampling of it, but rather for whom the complex molecular constitution of red and white blood cells, bacteria and dead tissues comprising “bloody pus” (*rnag khrag*) would arise with full functionality from the “same river” instead.

The point here is that in Buddhist cosmology the environmental vessels inhabited by different realms of beings can sometimes coincide spatially, but in most cases beings of different realms are said to be mutually invisible to one another, or sometimes only uni-directionally invisible. The manifest interaction between human and animal realms is considered an exceptional case, but it is generally acknowledged that only the most advanced meditators with clairvoyant abilities could ever have the capacity to perceive the craving spirits directly. For anyone else living in a Buddhist society, well-considered belief in such realms might be based solely upon scriptural authority, and indeed there are examples in Tibetan interpretation of Dharmakīrti’s logic as to why it would be improper to claim one has knowledge either to affirm or to deny such realms when indeed one has never had a valid perception of the beings in such realms oneself.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Cf. Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theg pa chen po bsdu pa*, Toh. 4048, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, sems tsam, vol. *ri*, 16a1-2.

⁸⁹ See Dharmakīrti, *Commentary on Valid Perception*, *Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā*, *tshad ma rnam ‘grel gyi tshig le ‘ur byas pa*, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, vol. *ce*, Toh. 4210, 94b5:

Though the analogy will fall short, if we are to try to imagine what is meant by the case of a formless realm being who has obliterated the capacity to perceive form, we might take the following thought experiment. Suppose a neutrino had consciousness as it passed unobstructed through the earth and came out the other side unscathed. Insofar as “from the neutrino’s perspective” all that we as humans currently “conceptualize as form” has virtually no effect on the neutrino, it may offer a rough analogy to what it would be like for a being whose mind could not only pass unobstructed through space, but had reached the point where it could not even conceptualize traveling in space or matter at all, i.e., a being of the formless realm, with nothing to call a “body.”

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the verse Tsongkhapa quotes from the *Summary of the Greater Way* was written by Asaṅga as a demonstration of the Mind-Only position that there can be no outer objects. As we have seen, Tsongkhapa only quotes Asaṅga with the greatest respect, never derision, and so he seems to be taking this verse as a statement of high authority here. Nevertheless, he admits that it is not clear from Asaṅga’s text just what the “single thing” (*dngos gcig*) would be, when each living being perceives “it” in mutually incompatible ways. How one understands the “single thing,” however, will have immense consequences for how one reads the conclusion of the last line, that “we assert it is never established as an actual object [*don*, Skt. *artha*].”

It is important to note that each of these words – *dngos po* and *don* – are highly polyvalent in Tibetan Buddhist literature. In general, *dngos po* (pronounced “ngüpo,” translating both the Sanskrit *bhāva* and *vastu*) is defined as “something with the capacity to perform a function” (*don byed nus pa*), and so in most cases I will translate it as a “functioning thing.” But there is also the sense in which *dngos*, even in very colloquial contemporary Tibetan, means “really” or “actually,” in the ordinary sense of daily speech (“ngü né ré” – “It really happened,” or, “It’s actually like that”). Then “*don*” (pronounced “dhün”) also means “meaning,” as well as “benefit, purpose, goal, function, referent, actuality” and so on. But the technical sense in this Mind-Only context does refer to the “objects” of the senses, insofar as they are thought to exist separately. Thus it is any possibility for an independent “objective referent” that is being rejected by the verse. The verse could also legitimately be translated as: “Insofar as for a craving spirit, an animal, a human, and a god, a single *reality* is, according to the members of each class, different in their minds, we assert that it cannot be established as an *actual meaning / purpose /*

When with no valid perception
has one ever engaged,
the result is that one has never
engaged with the absence.

མཛད་མ་རྣམས་ནི་མི་འཇུག་པ། མཛད་ལ་མི་འཇུག་འབྲས་བྱ་ཅན།

Gyalsab Je treats this verse directly with the example of a “meat-eater” (*sha za*, Skt. *piśāca*), a type of malignant spirit classified as belonging to the realm of craving spirits (Skt. *preta*). See Gyalsab Je Darma Rinchen, *thar lam gsal byed*, Drepung Loseling Library Society Edition, 2002, 17.

function / referent.” When beings’ perceptions of what was thought to be one functioning reality are acknowledged to be so radically different as this, the “object” vanishes. “What” could ever be there? It is crucial to recognize that it is the two forms of *this* word, *dn̄gos po* (“thing”) and *dn̄gos* (“reality/function”), upon which the emptiness meditation, with its accompanying verse, that precedes the meditative creation of the Guhyasamāja maṇḍala is based. We shall examine that verse from the *Guhyasamāja* root tantra in detail in Chapter Five, but I see its philosophical import to lie within the present conundrum.

A Unique World For Each Living Being?

Before we proceed to Tsongkhapa’s mature Middle Way analysis of the philosophical problems raised by these lines, it is worthwhile to note that he considered the same verse from the *Summary of the Greater Way*, within its proper Mind-Only context, in his very early work, the *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*. The issue at hand there, speaking strictly from *within* the viewpoint of the Mind-Only system, is whether there is a single foundation consciousness for all sentient beings, or whether each living being carries, and in fact is formed by, a unique foundation consciousness. Tsongkhapa argues very clearly (while at that point taking on a Mind-Only perspective) that each being must have an individual foundation consciousness, or else all sorts of problems and contradictions would ensue. He has just finished explaining why the seeds for the environments pertaining to the realms of form and desire simply cannot be ripening within the foundation consciousness of a being born into the formless realm, since then the formless realm being would have to perceive a physical world of *form*, based on the ripening of those seeds, which is a thorough contradiction. Tsongkhapa then goes on to argue that if even in the realms that have form, all the content of the various environmental vessels and their inhabitants were to appear upon a *single* foundation consciousness, then the fearsome appearances of a hell realm would have to be appearing directly to the perceptions of the gods of the form realm, which is a very uncomfortable consequence from the point of view of Buddhist Abhidharma.

The premise that is taken for granted in the argument is that the appearances of a realm arise from the awakening of karmic tendencies; the *debate* is about whether beings of one realm are able to perceive the sufferings and joys that are actually experienced by beings born into another realm. Tsongkhapa argues that because it is not only our individual habits of behavior but the appearances of our outer worlds themselves which – although “only” appearances – do incite pleasure or pain in us, one must assert that the seeds which ripen into the appearances of the environmental vessel itself are individual to each realm, and *even to each being in each realm*. This is because, if one were actually able to experience the world of another being, then one would have to be experiencing the precise sufferings or joys of that being, too, and then that would mean it was one’s “own” karma ripening into that experience, not just someone else’s. Since no one can experience the fruition of every kind of karma at once, the reason for the individuality of

worlds and personal experiences *is* precisely the difference in how one's own foundation consciousness is configured in that lifetime or that moment.⁹⁰ Tsongkhapa continues:⁹¹

Furthermore, if a hell appeared to the foundation consciousness of a being such as a human, would it appear exactly *in the way* it appears to a hell-being, or not? If the first, then it would follow that *it would not be something that appeared only by the power of the karma of the hell-being*. Suppose you agree. You would be disproven by this quotation [from the *Bodhicāryāvatāra* of Śāntideva]:

Who made the burning iron ground?
From whom came the masses of fire⁹²?
Thus the Able One stated that all of these
come from a sinful mind.

Further, you would have to accept that however the vessel appears to the foundation consciousness of a human, that is how it would also appear to the foundation consciousness of a hell-being. On that point, it is stated:

Insofar as for a craving spirit, an animal, a human, and a god,
a single thing is, according to the members of each class,
different in their minds, we assert that it is never established
as an actual object.

So you would have to cast aside all the scriptural statements that give reasoning *as to why outer objects cannot be established*. Now suppose you say that it does

⁹⁰ See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 10a1-10b1, translated in Appendix Eight (689-690).

⁹¹ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 10b1-11a1 (690-691), emphasis mine.

།གཞན་ཡང་མི་ལྟ་བུའི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དཔུལ་བ་སྣང་བ་དེ་དཔུལ་བ་པ་ལ་ཇི་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ལྟར་སྣང་ངམ་མི་སྣང་། དང་པོ་ལྟར་ན། དཔུལ་སྣང་དེ་དཔུལ་བ་པ་ལོ་ནིའི་
ལས་དབང་གིས་སྣང་བ་དེ་མ་ཡིན་པར་ཐལ་ལོ། །འདོད་ན། ལུགས་བསེགས་ས་གཞི་སུ་ཡིས་བྱས། །མེ[orམོ]ཆོགས་དེ་དག་ཅི་ལས་བྱུང་། །དེས་ན་དེ་དག་ཐམས་
ཅད་ནི། །ཕྱིག་སེམས་བྱུང་བར་བྱབ་པས་གསུངས། །ཞེས་བསམ་གཞིན་དོ། །ཡང་མིའི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་སྣོད་ཇི་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ལྟར་དཔུལ་བའི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་ཡང་སྣང་བ་
ར་ཁས་ལེན་དགོས་ལ། དེ་ལྟ་ན། ཇི་སྐད་བྱ། ཡི་དུགས་བྱུང་འགྲོ་མི་རྣམས་དང་། །ལྷ་རྣམས་ཇི་ལྟར་རིགས་རིགས་སུ། །དངོས་གཅིག་ཡིད་ནི་ཐ་དད་ཕྱིར། །དོན་
མ་གྲུབ་པར་འདོད་པ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་བྱི་རོལ་གྱི་དོན་མ་གྲུབ་པའི་རིགས་པ་གསུངས་པ་རྣམས་མོར་བར་ཡང་འགྱུར་རོ། །གལ་ཏེ་དེ་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་དེ་དག་གི་དབང་ལེ་
ས་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ཡིན་ལ་དེ་དང་ཀུན་གཞིའི་སྣང་བ་གཉིས་མི་གཅིག་གོ་ཞེ་ན། དབང་ལས་ལ་དོན་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཀུན་གཞིའི་གཟུང་ཆ་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཏེ།
དོན་བྱུང་བའི་རྣམ་པར་ལེས་ལ་སྐྱེདོ། །ཞེས་པའི་ལུང་དང་། རྣམ་ལེས་ལྷ་ཡིས་འཛིན་བྱེད་ཅིང་། །ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱིས་བསྟན་ཟིན་ཏོ། །གཉིས་པ་ལྟར་ན། དཔུལ་
བ་པ་ལ་ཇི་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ལྟར་མི་སྣང་ཡང་དཔུལ་སྣང་མཆན་ཉིད་སྣང་བར་འདོད་ན་ཉ་ཅང་ཐལ་བར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། བདེ་འགྲོའི་བདེ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་ཡང་སྣང་བར་འ
གྱུར་རོ།

⁹² Or: “beviens of maidens.” The Tibetan word appears as “me,” “fire” in nearly every instance of this verse I have been able to find in the Tibetan literature; however, Gareth Sparham (1993:62, n5) cites the Bhattacharya, 1960, Sanskrit edition of *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, p. 54, vv. 5.7ab-5.8ab as follows: *taptāyah-kuṭṭīm kena kuto jātās ca tāḥ striyaḥ // pāpa-citta-samudbhūtaṁ tat tat sarvaṁ jagau munih //*, where “*striyaḥ*” would indeed be “maidens,” which would be rendered in Tibetan as “mo” (differing by a single short stroke, easily lost from one edition to another.) Nonetheless, without being able to consult a Sanskrit manuscript, I retain doubts as to whether Bhattacharya’s edition is indeed older than the sources for the eighth century Tibetan translations, because “masses of fire” certainly makes more sense in this extremely famous verse. “Beviens of maidens” would not appear in a hell realm, and temporary as they may be, would still, insofar as they are typically considered as an object of enjoyment, would be a ripening of stained virtue, not the “mind of sin” (*sdig sems*).

appear to those living beings’ senses and consciousnesses in this way, but that this appearance and that of the foundation consciousness are not the same. Yet both what appears to the senses, and what appears to the consciousnesses as the five objects do comprise that part of the foundation consciousness which is ‘beheld.’ I have already finished providing the scriptural support for this, namely, that “Consciousness arises, appearing as objects,” and “the five consciousnesses do the beholding,” and so on.

If you accept the second option [namely, that it would *not* appear in exactly the way it does to a hell-being], yet you still want to say that is *a definitive appearance of hell*, then you have reached a ridiculously untenable consequence. Then all the happiness of the lives of happiness would have to appear [to the hell-being], too.

Thus Tsongkhapa cites both Śāntideva and Asaṅga to prove his point, namely that a foundation consciousness must exist, ripen, and appear, distinctly and individually for each being, in order to preserve two scripturally stated facts: (1) that all the experiences unique to each realm arise from the mind by the power of karma, and (2) that insofar as the karma of beings differs so enormously, one cannot posit outer objects that could ever be held in common between all of them. But this does seem to lead inexorably towards the view that no being can ever quite perceive the world subsumed within the foundation consciousness of another being, even when the two are sharing the same general realm. As Tsongkhapa said earlier in the same *Extensive Commentary*, “At that point [when investigating closely], you cannot say that there is something shared in common.”⁹³

Finally, Tsongkhapa brings us to several more points regarding the nature of foundation consciousness that will be crucial for comparison to his Middle Way view:⁹⁴

What is focused upon directly is an object that appears to the sense organs of one’s own mental stream. Indirectly, whatever is able to appear as an objective field to the six groups [of consciousness] which belong to that basis [i.e., the

⁹³ See Appendix Eight (686).

⁹⁴ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 11a6-11b4 (691-692), emphasis mine.

དངོས་སུ་དཔྱད་པའི་མཐོང་པོ་དེ་ལ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ཡུལ་རྣམས་ཡིན་ལ་བརྒྱུད་ནས་ནི་རྟེན་དེའི་ཚོགས་དྲུག་གི་ཡུལ་དུ་སྒྲུབ་པར་གང་ཅུས་པ་རྟེན་དེའི་ཀླ་གཞིའི་ཡུལ་དུ་འདུག་གོ། འོ་ན་སེམས་ཅན་ཞེས་པའི་འབྲེལ་བར། སེམས་ཅན་ནི་བདག་དང་གཞན་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ལ་དབང་སྟོང་སྒྲུབ་པ་གང་ཡིན་པའོ་ཞེས་པས་གཞོན་དོན་ཞིན། དེ་ནི་ཀླ་གཞི་ལ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་དབང་སྟོང་ལ་བདག་གཞན་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་དབང་སྟོང་ལྟོང་ཞེས་སྟོན་གྱི། ཀླ་གཞི་གཅིག་ལ་བདག་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་སྟོང་ལྟོང་ཞེས་སྒྲུབ་པ་མིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་རང་གི་ཀླ་གཞི་ལ་དངོས་སུ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་སྟོང་དེ་གཞན་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་དབང་སྟོང་མཚན་ཉིད་པ་ཡིན་ན་འགྲོ་བ་རྣམས་རྒྱུད་གཅིག་ཏུ་འབྱུང་ཏེ། ལུས་དང་ལུས་ཅན་གྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་རྣམས་ནི་མཛོན་བཞིན་གྱི་བག་ཆགས་ལས་འབྱུང་ལ་བག་ཆགས་དེ་ཡང་རང་གི་ཀླ་གཞི་ལ་གཞན་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་པས་གཞོན་མི་ཅུས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

person] can also be posited as an objective field of the foundation consciousness of that basis.⁹⁵

Now, suppose you say that this is disproven by the fact that it says, in the commentary upon the term “living being,” that, “A ‘living being’ is whatever appears as the five sense organs to one’s own or others’ mental streams.” Well, this does teach that the sense organs that appear upon a foundation consciousness are called “the five organs of one’s own and others’ mental streams,” but it does not teach that one’s own and others’ five organs appear directly to a *single* foundation consciousness.

If this were not the case, and if the sense organs of another that appeared directly to one’s own foundation consciousness *were* indeed the definitive sense organs that belong to another’s mindstream, then all wanderers would turn out to be a single mental stream.⁹⁶ This is because the cognitions associated with a body [i.e., the five sense organs] and the cognitions of one who has a body [i.e., the afflicted consciousness] arise from the *habitual tendencies for articulate expressions*; and insofar as those tendencies reside in one’s *own* foundation consciousness, they cannot be disproven by the consciousness belonging to another’s mindstream.⁹⁷

That is, because a person’s own mind arises uniquely from the karmic tendencies flowing in that mental stream, no one can (a) get inside another person’s mind directly, or (b) “disprove” the content of another being’s perceptions, just because those may differ from one’s own. If it is karmic tendencies that are shaping the worlds that each of us sees, on what basis can one judge that one person is “right” and another is “wrong” about the “real” world, when there *is* no world except each of the multiple worlds created by the minds and karmic seeds of individual beings?

Here perhaps we touch on some of the most sophisticated ideas of the Mind-Only position, leaving aside for the moment the problems caused when one tries to take the foundation consciousness as something that must itself exist inherently. We shall revisit the term “habitual tendencies for articulate expressions” (*mngon par brjod pa’i bag chags*, Skt. *abhilāpana-vāsana*). It is unique to the Mind-Only system, but may describe something very close to the process known in the Middle Way view as “mere labeling.” Within the Mind-Only system, it refers to the tendencies by which one comes to apply conceptual constructs (*kun brtags*) upon perceived objects; this process is carried out by

⁹⁵ That is, anything one perceives is perceived by the foundation consciousness, whether directly, through the senses, or indirectly, through the conceptualizing mental consciousness.

⁹⁶ That is, the very same sense organs that one person perceived as “my own” would be arising directly as sense organs in someone else’s foundation consciousness; hence everyone would be only one person.

⁹⁷ Cf. Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 57, and 63n11. My translation differs significantly from Sparham’s rendering and footnoted explanation, especially with regard to this last sentence. This is a case where I believe the word “*gnod pa*” must be translated as “disproven,” not “harmed,” or the philosophical import is lost.

the mental consciousness in response to the objects perceived in the foundation consciousness. It is through mistaking the constructs for the *dependent things themselves* that ignorance takes place in this system. But it is also the ripening of these tendencies for calling things “things,” that make a world appear to be “what it is” for ordinary beings.

More and more it seems as though dependent things, though asserted in this system as something established beyond the constructs, must still arise *distinctly* for each living being, based upon that being’s unique configuration of ripening seeds at any given moment. If each being has his or her own foundation consciousness, then each being has a unique universe of “dependent things” that should grow and change through their own nature, as consciousness. Yet the problem arises that it would seem one person’s world of dependent things could never quite “touch” or interact with another’s world, if they were each to exist inherently. Furthermore, since outer objects are never established, even conventionally, the contradiction between what is real for me and what is real for you is never actually resolved. Every being would be living uniquely within the world of their own minds. Will the Middle Way interpretation allow for an emptiness of worlds and interactions ever more gossamer and flexible than this?

Flowing Water and Empty Parts

We return to Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way analysis of the same verse from Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way*, which he had taken up in order to elaborate upon Candrakīrti’s reference to the example of the craving spirit seeing pus.⁹⁸

Now in thinking about this, suppose you say: ‘What those wanderers see is a conventional valid perception. If, upon a single basis, those mutually incompatible things are established with a valid perception, it would be no contradiction for one thing to be both pus and blood and also not pus and blood. Then it would follow that there is no mental stability even towards that which is established with a valid perception.’ Now if you understand the meaning of the scriptures in this way, and set it forth like that, it will indeed turn out that a mind cannot be sure with regard to a valid perception. If you ask, ‘Well, since *that* is inappropriate, how does it work?’ then this is the question of an inquisitive thinker. On the other hand, if, with such an understanding you hold that, ‘This is its meaning,’ and you claim that, ‘There is no mental stability with regard to valid perceptions,’ then there will not be one person who could ever establish that ‘I

⁹⁸ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 169b5-170a2 (340-341), emphasis mine.

འདི་ལ་འདི་སྐྱུ་དུ་འགྲོ་བ་དེ་དག་གི་མཐོང་བ་ནི་ཐ་སྐྱད་པའི་ཚད་མ་ཡིན་ལ། གཞི་གཅིག་མི་མཐུན་པ་དེ་དག་ཏུ་ཚད་མས་གྲུབ་ན་ནག་ཁག་དང་ནལ་ཁག་མ་ཡིན་པ་གཉིས་མི་འགལ་ཞིང་། ཚད་མས་གྲུབ་པ་ལ་ཡང་ཡིད་བརྟན་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་རྟོག་ན། འདི་ལ་གཞུང་དོན་དེ་ལྟར་གོ་བས་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་བཞག་ན་ཚད་མ་ལ་ཡིད་བརྟན་མི་འགྱུར་བར་འགྱུར་ན། དེ་ཡང་མི་རུང་བས་རྗེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་ཞེས་འདི་ན་རྟོག་ལྟར་གྱི་འདི་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་གོ་བ་དེའི་དོན་ཡིན་པར་བརྒྱུད་ནས་ཚད་མས་གྲུབ་པ་ལ་ཡིད་བརྟན་མེད་དོ་ཞེས་སྒྲུ་ན་ནི། དོན་འདི་ཁོ་བོས་འདི་ལྟར་རྟོགས་སོ་ཞེས་པ་གཅིག་གྱུང་གཞག་ཏུ་མེད་ཅིང་། ཚད་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་སྐྱར་པ་འདེབས་པས་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་མི་འཐད་པའོ།

have realized the meaning of this object to be like this.’ Since you would thus discount all valid perceptions, this is unreasonable in the extreme.

Here Tsongkhapa is berating those who would take the example much too lightly to mean that “anything can be anything, because everyone’s perceptions are equally valid, right?” If it were the case that a “single object,” taken in a naïve realist sense, could be validly perceived by different beings in mutually contradictory ways, then this would undermine the very idea of “valid perception” (*tshad ma*, Skt. *pramāṇa*) altogether. Upon what basis could accuracy ever be established, if one person’s perceptions were as good as any other, precisely when one set of “valid” perceptions flies in the face of another?

In contemporary terminology, we might call this approach an unqualified relativism, where any classical metaphysical notion of truth as the conformity of the intellect to the thing (*veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei*)⁹⁹ has been cast aside. There may still be many who think this is the implication of a Buddhist Middle Way view, also. But Tsongkhapa unequivocally rejects the notion that a valid judgment about reality is impossible. Rather than using a logical word for gaining mental certainty (like *sgro ‘dogs gcod pa*, *thag gcod pa*, or *nges shes rnyed pa*), Tsongkhapa uses a term for mental stability (*vid brtan*) that he sometimes uses with respect to the degree of consistency and unwavering steadiness one gains in meditative progress. But the word also refers to that which is trustworthy, or confidence-inspiring. So he is saying that if there is no such thing as valid perception, then no one could ever have the stability of mind that comes from knowing the truth, and having no doubts. When he says that if this were the case, then no one could ever say that he or she had “realized” things to be this way and not another, he is using the term (*rtogs pa*) that is sometimes used for the most exalted realizations discussed in Buddhist discourse regarding the nature of ultimate reality, the existence of Buddhas, and so on. If there were no such thing as valid perception, then Buddhist worldview would collapse. As some might say: “Well, there may be Buddhas for *you*, but not for me, and we have equal rights to our perceptions, because nothing is real anyway.” Or, “You might believe in karma, but it doesn’t exist in my world,” and so on. In Tsongkhapa’s view, such relativism would be the end of Buddhism, whether in

⁹⁹ See, for example, the application of this principle in St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* I, 3, where St. Thomas explains that “the nature of truth is first found in the intellect when the intellect begins to possess something proper to itself, not possessed by the thing outside the soul, yet corresponding to it, so that between the two – intellect and thing – a conformity may be found. In forming the quiddities of things, the intellect merely has a likeness of a thing existing outside the soul, as a sense has a likeness when it receives the species of a sensible thing. But when the intellect begins to judge about the thing it has apprehended, then its judgment is something proper to itself – not something found outside in the thing. *And the judgment is said to be true when it conforms to the external reality.* Moreover, the intellect judges about the thing it has apprehended at the moment when it says that something is or is not. This is the role of ‘the intellect composing and dividing.’” In Saint Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, Vol. 1, translated by R.W. Mulligan, (Chicago: Henry Regneri Co.), 1952, reprint (Albany: Preserving Christian Publications, Inc.), 1993, emphasis mine.

So if you do ask me how it works, to begin I will give an example. Suppose someone touches a ball of steel that is blazing red as it burns with fire, but it is a person who possesses the knowledge mantra for overcoming conflagration. If this person picks up the ball of steel with his hand, the consciousness of the body will bear the tactile sensation of the iron, but for that person, the aspect of a tactile sensation that is extremely hot and burning will not arise. This is due to the condition of the hand being washed, and so on, by the water of reciting the knowledge mantra. But for someone who has not recited a knowledge mantra such as this, the sensation of the ball of iron will arise with an aspect that is extremely hot and burning.

While Tsongkhapa's example may seem obscure to us – explaining the bizarre by means of the magical – the logic at work need not be. Whether or not one accepts the way that special gnostic verbal formulas (*rig sngags*, Skt. *vidyāmantra*) are understood to interact with physical elements in the context of a society where generations after generations of meditators have reached levels of concentration in which they may have gained access to such mental technology is not immediately relevant here. The point is that we do currently have technologies that alter the mode of our interactions with the material world all the time. Though it would change the analogy somewhat, I think a new example will not do it an injustice: Suppose someone had devised a glove with thermal resistant properties so strong that it could resist heat up to hundreds of degrees, but was still thin enough that a person could feel the texture of a rough ball of iron through the thermally resistant fabric. From a technological perspective, this is exactly what the person with the “knowledge mantra” is supposed to be able to do, to alter the thermally resistant

[illegible]

properties of his or her skin. The adept “has something” that the ordinary person does not, just as the person with the “special glove” has something that the normal person does not. An extra condition has arisen from the side of the perceiver.

If one is to compare the perceptions of someone touching a ball of red hot iron with such a glove to those of the person touching *the same ball of iron* without such a glove, the two sets of perceptions will be very different in quality. But there is still no contradiction to say that each person touched the same object. You could still say that the same ball of iron was both cool and hot at the “same time,” but technically this would not be correct. The one “protected” person’s tactile sensation was validly established as the comfortable temperature of cool iron, while the other’s sensation was validly established as blazing hot, perhaps resulting in first degree burns to the skin. But given all these conditions, it would not be hard for us to see that the one person’s valid perception does not directly disprove or discredit the other person’s valid perception, because there were *two* distinct perceptions, even though there was only one object.

The problem is that we usually assume that our perception is a perception of the *real* object, not simply “a perception” from one perspective, and no more. Insofar as both people agree that it was made of iron, that label can be conventionally applied in both cases, but as to whether “it” was hot or cold iron, one must add qualifying terms regarding whose perception established it “from their side” to be one thing or another. If we have followed this closely, we may glimpse immediately what it means in the Middle Way terminology for something not to be established “from its own side,” or “inherently.” Here one must always ask, “To whose perceptions?” before speaking of “what” something is. But notice how this approach has not discounted the notion of valid perception at all. What must be altered is our conception of what it “is” that serves as the single objective basis.

Tsongkhapa goes on to offer a more detailed philosophical model, which may have been unprecedented in Middle Way literature, whether in Tibet or India. (He was clearly not relying on Candrakīrti nor any other Indian commentator here.)¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 170a6-170b5 (341-342), emphasis mine. (To determine whether indeed this is the first instance in Indo-Tibetan literature of this particular approach to parsing the situation would, of course, require much further research, which is not possible for me at this time.)

།དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གཞི་གང་དུ་ཆུ་མུང་འབབ་པའི་གཞི་དེར་ཆུ་མུང་དེའི་ཆ་ཤས་ཤིག་ཡི་དྲགས་ནམས་ལ་སྟོན་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་རྣལ་ཁྱབ་ཏུ་སྦྱིས་པ་དང་། ཆུ་མུང་གི་ཆ་ཤས་གཞན་ཞིག་མི་ལ་སྟོན་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་རྣལ་ཁྱབ་ཏུ་མི་སྦྱང་བའི་བུང་བ་དང་། ལྷས་ཀྱི་ཆུར་སྦྱེ་བ་ན་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཆུ་མུང་གཅིག་གི་ཆ་ཤས་འཕྲིན་པ་ས། ཡི་དྲགས་ཀྱི་མིག་ཤེས་ཚད་མས་བྱུང་བའི་དོན་དང་། མིའི་མིག་ཤེས་ཚད་མས་བྱུང་བའི་དོན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་སོ་སོ་བ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་གཉིས་གཅིག་གིས་བྱུང་བའི་དོན་དེ་ཉིད། ཅིག་ཤོས་ཀྱིས་དེའི་བརྒྱུ་ལྷན་སྦྱུ་བྱུང་བ་ག་ལ་ཡིན། དེ་བཞིན་དུ་བཤེས་སྤྱིངས་ལས། ཡི་དྲགས་ནམས་ལ་སོས་ཀྱི་དུས་སུ་ནི། །ཆུ་བའང་ཆ་ལ་དགུན་ནི་ཉི་མའང་གང་། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་ཡི་དྲགས་ནམས་ལ་སྟོན་ལས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་སོས་ཀྱི་ཆུ་མུང་དེ་གཞི་གང་དུ་ཆུ་མུང་གི་ཆ་ཤས་དང་། དགུན་ཀྱི་ཆེ་ཉི་འོད་ཀྱི་རིག་བྱ་གང་བར་སྦྱེ་ཡང་། ཆུ་ཉིའི་འོད་ཀྱི་སྟེང་ནས་མི་ལ་གང་དྲིའི་ནམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་སྦྱེ་བ་མི་འགལ་ལ། དེ་གཉིས་ནི་ཚད་མ་གཅིག་གིས་ཆ་བར་གཞལ་བའི་རིག་བྱ་ཉིད། ཅིག་ཤོས་ཀྱིས་གང་བར་འཇལ་བ་མིན་ཞིང་། གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཆུ་མུང་གི་འོད་ཀྱི་རིག་བྱར་འཇོག་པའི་ཕྱིར། དངོས་པོ་གཅིག་ཅེས་ཀྱང་གསུངས་པ་

In a similar way, with respect to some basis – upon that basis of a stream of flowing water – one part of the river arises as pus and blood to craving spirits, by the power of their previous karma. Another part of the river arises to humans as water to drink and wash with, but does not appear as pus or blood, by the power of their previous karma. If this takes place, both of these parts are each parts *of a single river*. Therefore, the object established by the valid eye consciousness of the craving spirit and the object established by the valid eye consciousness of the human are two objects. But insofar as they are distinct functioning things, then of those two, how could the very same object that has been established through one [valid perception], then be established by another [valid perception] as its complete opposite? Similarly, the *Friendly Letter* [Nāgārjuna’s *Suhrillekha*] states:

To craving spirits in the springtime
even the moon is hot
and in the winter
even the sun is cold.

Now, for craving spirits, by the power of past karma, even the springtime moonlight has the sensation of being extremely hot, and during the winter, even the sensation of sunlight arises as something cold. This is not contradictory to the fact that for humans, on the basis of the light of the moon and sun, respectively, a sensation arises in the aspect of cold or warmth, respectively. Because, with respect to these two, *it is not as though the very same tactile sensation* that is to be apprehended by one valid perception as hot is then apprehended by another as something cold. There is also no contradiction, because both [sensations] are posited as the tactile sensations *of* the light of a single moon or sun, respectively. Since it states “a single thing,” you might get your hopes up with a rough understanding that has not intimately examined the meaning of the scripture; but I beg you, do not be satisfied with a premature conclusion.

The point is subtle. Tsongkhapa suggests that the way to think of it is as follows. There is a river that exists as an outer object, i.e., not as something subsumed within the personal heap of form belonging to any particular living being. It exists as part of an environmental vessel, whose elemental precursors would in turn have been formed through energetic forces driven by the shared karma of many beings long ago, during an eon of formation. But in the present, karmic forces still have incalculable impact upon individual perceptions of those elements. What is, perhaps for all beings in the desire realm, something perceivable as a stream of what could in language be called “wet and flowing,” nonetheless need not arise equally for all those beings as “water” in the way that humans experience it. Rather, “with respect to some basis” (*gzhi gang du*), due to the presence of multiple living beings, the basis becomes like a field of potentiality, in which

ས་གཞུང་དོན་ཞིབ་ཏུ་སྤྲད་པར་གོ་བ་རགས་ས་རེ་ཤར་བ་ན་དེས་ཆེས་པའི་ཐག་གཅོད་ས་ལྔ་ཞིག

different metaphysical “parts” – like layers of possibility, facets, or aspects – of that field can be actualized into distinct valid perceptions by different beings.¹⁰² But it is, in this case, said to be the individual karmic tendencies present in the mind of each being that provide the critical differentiating factor as to *what* will appear in the mind of each perceiver.

Like a quantum field whose precise location and/or velocity can only be actualized through the introduction of the measurements of an observer, here, the potentiality field of the “river” serving as the basis is actualized into both a valid experience of bloody pus that would burn the tiny throats of craving spirits were they to try to drink it, and a valid experience of fresh, clean drinking water for the humans who go to gather jugs of it from the mountain stream. According to the later analysis of an early Sera Mey textbook writer, Khedrup Tenpa Dargye (*mkhas grub bstan pa dar rgyas*, 1493-1568),¹⁰³ once some of the liquid is taken into the exclusive personal experience of one being, e.g., as a human drinks it, the potential parts that could have been experienced by a craving spirit as bloody pus cease to exist. They are no longer *available* to be perceived otherwise. If yet more beings of different kinds were to be present – for example, gods of the desire realm – the same liquid would arise with yet more potential parts to it, some now to be actualized as a magnificently blissful ambrosia, with properties far exceeding those of the “water” available to humans. For as many beings as there are present to a potentially shared environmental experience, so many “parts” will arise to be partaken of from the single basis. But insofar as some quantity of the basis is consumed or else taken away for the exclusive experience of one or more beings, so the availability of those parts to be perceived as “something else” by the initial participants disappears.

¹⁰² Tsongkhapa is certainly not referring to “physical” parts here in the sense of one gallon of water as opposed to another gallon of water. He uses the ordinary Tibetan word for “parts” (*cha shas*), but only from the context and thinking about the problem metaphysically can one come to an approximation of what he may have meant.

¹⁰³ See Khedrup Tenpa Dargye, *bstan bcos chen po dbu ma 'jug pa'i spyi don rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal gyi dgongs pa gsal bar byed pa'i blo gsal sgron me* (*A Lamp for Those of Clear Minds: An Illumination of the True Thought of the “Illumination of the True Thought”: An Overview Explanation of the Great Classical Commentary, “Entering the Middle Way”*), Sera Mey Library, Serial No. 69, Indraprastha Press (CBT), New Delhi, India, 2009, 385:

What arises in this way occurs insofar as the bowl filled with something wet and flowing is something looked upon in common [by the three types of beings]. But when the craving spirit takes it up in his hand and starts to partake, it no longer arises as something with three distinct identities to it. This is true because at that moment it is something that the craving spirit partakes of exclusively, and the later continuation of its type arises as pus and blood.

དེ་ལྟར་འབྱུང་བ་དེ་ཡང་བརྒྱན་ཞིང་གཤེར་བ་མོར་བ་གང་པོ་དེ་བལྟ་བུ་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། ཡི་དྲགས་ཀྱིས་ལག་ཏུ་སྦངས་ནས་འོངས་སྟོན་བར་བཅམས་པ་དེའི་ཆེན་ཁུང་ཆོས་གསུམ་ལྟན་དུ་སྟེ་བ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེའི་ཆེན་ཡི་དྲགས་ཀྱི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་འོངས་སྟོན་བུ་ཡིན་པས་རིགས་འདྲ་བྱི་མ་ན་གཤག་ཏུ་སྟེ་བ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར།

Cf. Asian Classics Insitute, Course 5, Reading Six, 103, as translated by Geshe Michael Roach, available at: www.acidharma.org/aci/online/_media/text/course5/C5Reading.pdf

The potential algorithm by which to assess reality according to such a theory would have to be complex in the extreme, if applied to every single perception any being could ever have. But the principle is clear: Two incompatible perceptions of “a single thing” are not actually contradictory, insofar as no single *being* is ever having multiple contradictory valid perceptions of the same thing at the same time. Instead, across a range of numerous beings the perceptual experiences are multiple; hence there is no contradiction, just as there was no contradiction for the person with the fireproof glove to touch safely the same iron ball that burned another.

Rather than the difference coming from what is still an outer factor, like a thermally resistant glove, however, Tsongkhapa’s actual examples are all meant to direct us to try to understand what it would mean for a purely inner factor – namely the influence of a karmic tendency – to govern the way that something will be perceived. This is one sense in which the action of karma can be likened to the presence of the cataracts in someone’s eyes. Due to what is a distinctly *personal* condition, the outer world appears differently. But as I mentioned above, the effects of karma in general would be considered much greater and more far-reaching than the effects of the cataracts in a specific case. Because a person with cataracts can still easily discover that he or she is wrong, that there are no functional hairs, that “my vision is blurry,” and so on, the perceptions conditioned by cataracts might still be deemed invalid, or mistaken, even in a conventional sense.¹⁰⁴ According to many Buddhist scriptural descriptions of the lives of certain types of craving spirits, however, when they take up bloody pus to drink, it actually functions as disgusting and toxic pus, not as water. We humans know very well how water functions, and that it is not the same as a mirage. Yet what if when drinking a glass of water we could become aware that it is only due to karmic tendencies – namely, *internal conditions* – that it is arising as clear, cool water for us, and not due to *anything* that could be established inherently from the side of the “liquid”? At that moment I propose that we would have tasted the indivisibility of dependent arising and emptiness in Tsongkhapa’s worldview.

Khedrup Tenpa Dargye, writing a little over a century after Tsongkhapa’s death, explains the role of the karmic tendencies while using an example closely derived from that of Candrakīrti’s river, by referring to a bowl of “wet and flowing” liquid instead. Here Khedrup Tenpa Dargye utilizes the technical term of a simultaneously-acting condition (*lhan cig byed rkyen*, Skt. *sahakaripratyaya*), which is a type of contributing factor often referenced in Buddhist logic, though it is not one of the four conditions described in the *Abhidharmakośa*. The role of a simultaneously-acting condition is not to be confused with that of a simultaneously-emergent cause (*lhan cig ’byung ba’i rgyu*,

¹⁰⁴ See Tsongkhapa’s discussion of a similar point in Appendix Five (225-226), where he specifies (in a distinctly *prāsaṅgika* reading) that the difference between conventionally correct and wrong perceptions is relevant only in relation to the world, not from the perspective of those who have seen ultimate reality directly, namely the āryas.

discussed in Chapter One), since its most common example is different. This condition is explained in terms of the soil, moisture, and sunlight that *contribute* to the growth of a botanical sprout, but which are not the immediate material from which the sprout takes its content, namely the seed. In that case, the seed would be the “proximate cause,” or literally the “cause taken from what is nearby” (*nyer len gyi rgyu*, Skt. *upādānakāraṇa*), which might also be expressed as the “material cause.”¹⁰⁵ Khedrup Tenpa Dargye codifies Tsongkhapa’s creative philosophical solution into the precise language of “proximate cause” and “simultaneous condition,” which is the language used in Geluk monasteries to this day to explain Tsongkhapa’s passage:¹⁰⁶

The bowl filled with wet and flowing liquid arises with three parts to it; but it is not the case that it is simply established from the beginning with three parts to it, or that it remains with three parts to it until it is finally destroyed. This is because one part of the wet and flowing liquid that fills the bowl serves as the proximate cause, while the karma of the craving spirit serves as the simultaneous condition; in dependence upon that, a later continuation of that part arises as pus and blood. Then one part of the wet and flowing liquid that fills the bowl serves as the proximate cause, while the karma of the human serves as the simultaneous condition; in dependence upon that, a later continuation of that part arises as water. One part of the wet and flowing liquid that fills the bowl serves as the proximate cause, while the karma of the god serves as the simultaneous condition; in dependence upon that, a later continuation of that part arises as ambrosia, and so on.

It is interesting to note how this expanded language does correspond, logically, to what Tsongkhapa wrote on the subject, but adds technical labels that Tsongkhapa did not use. Recall that Tsongkhapa’s words were simply this: “In a similar way, with respect to some basis – upon that basis of a stream of flowing water – one part of the river arises as pus and blood to craving spirits, by the power of their previous karma,” and so on. Yet every Gelukpa Geshe who explained this point to me in Tibetan (at least three different Geshe) used the language of “proximate cause” and “simultaneous condition,” even though they

¹⁰⁵ Insofar as a moment of mind can be the “material cause” for the next moment of mind in the case of a matching, immediately-preceding condition, however, this translation may also be problematic if it seems limited to “material” things. Here “materiality” would refer only to the fact that something of a similar type turns into the next moment of a corresponding type of substance. The term “*nyer len*” is the same as what I translated as “close appropriation” in the ninth of the twelve links.

¹⁰⁶ *A Lamp for Those of Clear Minds*, *dbu ma spyi don dgongs gsal sgron me*, 384.

བརྒྱན་ཞིང་གཤེར་བ་རྩ་ལོར་བ་གང་པོ་དེ་ཆམས་གསུམ་ལྟན་དུ་སྟེ་བ་དང་། དེ་ཡང་དང་པོར་གྲུབ་ཅན་ཆམས་གསུམ་ལྟན་དུ་གྲུབ་ཅིང་མཐར་མ་ཞིག་གི་བར་དུ་ཆམས་གསུམ་ལྟན་དུ་གནས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བརྒྱན་ཞིང་གཤེར་བ་རྩ་ལོར་བ་གང་པོ་དེའི་ཆམས་གཅིག་གིས་ཉེར་ལེན་དང་ཡི་དྲགས་ཀྱི་ལས་ཀྱིས་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཀྱི་དུས་ལ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་དེའི་ཆམས་གཅིག་གིས་རིགས་འདྲ་བྱི་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་སྟེ་བ་དང་། དེའི་ཆམས་གཅིག་གིས་ཉེར་ལེན་དང་མེད་ལས་ཀྱིས་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཀྱི་དུས་ལ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་དེའི་ཆམས་གཅིག་གིས་རིགས་འདྲ་བྱི་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་སྟེ་བ་དང་། ཡང་དེའི་ཆམས་གཅིག་གིས་ཉེར་ལེན་དང་ལྟེ་ལས་ཀྱིས་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཀྱི་དུས་ལ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་དེའི་ཆམས་གཅིག་གིས་རིགས་འདྲ་བྱི་མ་བདུན་ཅིར་སྟེ་བ་སོགས་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར།

were not teaching Khedrup Tenpa Dargye's *Overview* (*spyi don*) at the time, but were sometimes referencing a parallel *Overview* by a slightly earlier contemporary of Khedrup Tenpa Dargye, namely Pañchen Sönam Drakpa (*paN chen bsod nams grags pa*, 1478-1554).¹⁰⁷ Though it is clear such language was present in the Geluk explanation by the sixteenth century, it would be difficult to assess exactly whose innovation it was, or whether it was an idea already in place in an “oral” tradition based on Tsongkhapa's own explanations.¹⁰⁸

When I asked two different Geshe on at least two different occasions, however, whether the fact that the basis itself appears *as liquid* to all the types of beings present could also be attributed to karma, they unanimously affirmed that yes, this was due to the shared karma of the various beings (*las thun mong ba red*).¹⁰⁹ What this suggests is that according to the consensus of six hundred years of monastic debate over Tsongkhapa's injunction to consider the point with great care, it is acknowledged that one could keep pushing the analysis to deeper layers of subtlety. That is, if a being in the formless realm were “present,” insofar as that living being would be utterly unable to discern form, not even the “basis” of something appearing as wet and flowing could arise as a proximate cause with which the individual karma of the formless realm being could interact as a condition to produce yet another alternate experience of *liquid*. Rather, nothing would appear at all. This suggests that logically, at least, one might have to allow for the possibility that at a more granular level of analysis, even the appearance of form as something fluid was arising due to the simultaneous conditions of all three types of desire realm beings' ripening karmic tendencies. But in that case what was the basis? Would it be mere spatial location, since formless realm beings are said not even to be able to perceive minute atomic particles (*rdul phran*)? Yet at the highest levels of the formless realm even the capacity to discern spatial location has been obliterated. Then that sheer

¹⁰⁷ This appears to have been Pañchen Sönam Drakpa's *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rgya cher bshad pa dgongs pa rab gsal gyi dgongs pa gsal bar byed pa zab don gsal ba'i sgron me*, pañ chen bsod nams grags pa'i gsung 'bum, vol. *ja*. I have not yet been able to study this *Overview* to check whether Pañchen Sönam Drakpa also uses the language of “proximate cause” and “simultaneous condition” in his explanation of Tsongkhapa's text at this point.

¹⁰⁸ In his early fifteenth-century *Condensed Meaning of “Entering the Middle Way”* (*dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bsdus don*) Gyaltsab Je does not use this language, nor does he treat this example in any detail. See *rje tsong kha pa yab sras kyis mdzad pa'i lta ba'i gsung rtsom phyogs bsdus*, Sera Mey Library, Serial No. 67, Bylakuppe, India, 2008, 335. I have yet to consult other early commentaries on Tsongkhapa's *dbu ma dgongs gsal*.

¹⁰⁹ Various conversations with Geshe Tandrin (Oct. 30th, 2014) and Geshe Ngawang Tenzin (Nov. 19th, 2014 and Dec. 4th, 2014) at Dolma Ling Nunnery, Sidhpur, India. The same idea was expressed in a classroom context by Geshe Tenzin Sönam, December, 2014. See also an excellent discussion of this entire example from the point of view of later Geluk scholarship in Daniel Cozort, 1998, *Unique Tenets of the Middle Way Consequence School* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), 113-123, esp. 122: “An important aspect of our basic ignorance is to conceive of phenomena as though they existed independently of our karma, which actually is the *basic* cause for their very existence.”

locationlessness remains a valid perception for the beings of that realm. Across all realms, then, what is *really* there?

This brief inquiry shows us one method of approaching a Geluk monastic formulation of Tsongkhapa's Middle Way principle that "when you go to look for the thing that gets the name, you will never find it" (*tha snyad btags pa'i btags don btsal ba'i tshe na ma rnyed*). At one level, it might be acknowledged that there is a shared basis that exists as an external object, a "single thing," which even beings of drastically different karmic makeup can perceive in common. The individuality of their respective predispositions, however, divides the object into parts that can be partaken of, each according to his or her unique karmic propensities. But when introducing a being whose current state of karmic ripening does not express even the most basic tendencies for perceiving physical form, or elemental properties, the analysis must "drop down" to a level where not even location in space can be established in common. At that point the absence of definitively located space itself might possibly be designated as the shared basis upon which each being's karmic tendencies project the individuality of their "environmental vessels," that is, their entire worlds. But can a sheer absence serve as a basis? The Middle Way debater must answer: If you look for a real basis "out there," one not appearing from the conditions of shared karma, you will never find that, either.

The Empty Vessel

Now perhaps, at last, we are in a position to consider the emptiness of the formation of a planetary system itself. When Tsongkhapa wrote in the *Exegesis of the "Steps of Exposition"* that "in the beginning, *by force of what arises in reliance and relationship* – that is, the karma of living beings – there in space appears a sign of the vessel that is to come, some gentle winds,"¹¹⁰ we may now begin to intuit the density of the logic that underlies this statement. If in an already-formed world, a single river can be understood to arise as diversely as water, ambrosia, or bloody pus, then might it not make sense, according to this view, that world-creation never took place in any *other* way than as projections upon empty parts?

That is, at every moment throughout beginningless time, every perception of an outer world would have been arising *in dependence upon* the basis of a causal continuity of outer elements, and *in relationship to* the simultaneous condition of a ripening karmic tendency in the mind of a perceiver. But what is happening when the karmic energies of the billions of beings about to inhabit a newly forming desire realm work in concert to bring about the perception of cosmic winds surging forth from a form realm to begin to spin and solidify until a disk hard as diamond has coalesced? For the sentient beings who will inhabit that desire realm during a birth that is still "future" for them, the nascent perceptions regarding the spinning elements might be thought to take place at a deeply

¹¹⁰ See Chapter One, note 59.

unconscious level of their karmic continuum – or else in the clairvoyance of their form realm minds. Yet for a formless realm being, those “disks” are still nowhere to be found, and never will be, as long as the sentient being remains in the formless realm. This possibility alone would suggest that the elemental disks are not inherently existent, because for a being existing at the first level of the formless realm, perceptions of the absolute absence of obstruction through all space would indeed be valid and functional – not a misperception. On the other hand, neither are the elemental disks the mere individual appearances of numerous streams of consciousness, each with their own self-contained defining characteristics, whose worlds might seem to become mutually exclusive to one another, in what would be an extreme consequence of a Mind-Only view. Rather, as Khedrup Tenpa Dargye challenges us to consider:¹¹¹

Now in general the three things like pus and the rest are functioning things that cannot occupy the same place at the same time. But when they are *looked upon* in this way, it is no contradiction that they are not things that mutually obstruct one another’s location. This is true because a four-sided central mountain and a circular central mountain, and so on, are things that would mutually obstruct one another’s location, but nonetheless, within the location of a single central mountain of the world, it is possible for both types of mountains to exist. There are other situations like this. A blazing red ball of iron is hot, but when a hand cast with the mantra of iron touches it, the tactile sensation to be experienced is not the tactile sensation of heat; because it is a tactile sensation of something that is not hot.

Thus Khedrup Tenpa Dargye uses the same example of the blazing iron that was explained by Tsongkhapa, in order to elucidate why it could be the case that something as basic as the shape of the central mountain of a world-system could appear validly in mutually contradictory ways to different beings according to different circumstances. Once one is able to separate the basis from the appearance *to* a sentient being, to distinguish the location in space from the way that space is conceptualized according to someone’s karmic dispositions, the door is open to infinite possibilities for reality.

Perhaps this is one philosophically plausible way to approach the apparent contradictions between an Abhidharma description of the triple-realm system in which human beings are said to live, and the planetary and galactic systems observed by

¹¹¹ *dbu ma spyi don dgongs gsal sgron me*, 396-397. (My translation here necessarily uses extra words to express what are very concise technical terms in Tibetan. Emphasis mine.)

རྒྱལ་ལ་སྐྱེས་པའི་དངོས་པོ་གསུམ་པོ་དེ་སྤྱིར་གོ་ས་འགོག་ཏུ་སྤྱི་དངོས་པོ་ཡིན་ཡང་། དེ་ལྟར་བལྟས་པ་དེའི་ཆོན་གོ་ས་འགོག་གྱེད་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་མ་ཡིན་པ་མི་འགལ་ཏེ། རི་རབ་བྱ་བཞི་དང་། ལྷུ་མ་པོ་ལ་སྐྱེས་པ་པན་ཚུན་གོ་ས་འགོག་ཏུ་སྤྱི་དངོས་པོ་ཡིན་ཡང་། རི་རབ་གཅིག་གི་གོ་ས་ན། དེ་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡོད་པ་སྤྱིད་པ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར། ལྷུ་གས་གོང་དམར་འབར་བ་ཆོན་པ་ཡིན་ཡང་། ལྷུ་གས་ལྷུ་གས་བཏབ་པའི་ལག་བས་རེག་པའི་ཆོན་དེའི་ཚུང་བྱར་གྱུར་པའི་རེག་བྱ་དེ་ཆོན་པའི་རེག་བྱ་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཆོན་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རེག་བྱ་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར།

contemporary scientific methods of inquiry. If, according to Khedrup Tenpa Dargye's logic, a round mountain and a square mountain can occupy the same location – because those are perceptions *to minds*, not objective “rocks” with any nature of their own – then how different would it be, philosophically, to say that a flat earth and a round earth could occupy the same space? It sounds absurd, until one dares to recognize that even the “roundness of an earth” that one has personally circumnavigated is also formed, for the perceiver, by billions of mental images that are stitched together in a certain way. These images are constructed and construed no more or no less than the sensation of “heat” is stitched together by certain vibrations of nerve endings, transmitted to neurons, triggering a sensory consciousness, and so on. Can one really say that the “earth” experienced by a termite is either round or flat? Is the question even relevant? Thus the earth is round for us as soon as we have the tools and experiences and conceptual framework with which to label it validly as such. But if even the shape of space-time can change readily according to the relative perspectives of various observers, who is to say that the so-called “earth” could not arise validly for someone, somewhere, from a totally different perspective, as a maṇḍala of layered elemental disks?

For a contemporary practitioner of the Guhyasamāja tantric system, it would be essential to discover the meaning of this particular emptiness. As we will examine in the chapters to follow, the visualizations of the creation stage practice will build a *new earth* that is indeed correlated to mental images associated with the Abhidharma presentation, yet is also an entirely new creation of its own, with distinct symbolism designed to evoke a pure and perfect world. Thus I would argue that it is not so much a matter of how a practitioner sees the “planet” upon which he or she lives when sitting down to meditate (insofar as that does arise as a valid perception based on centuries of human evidence); the point would be whether such a practitioner would have as much capacity to recognize that *that* world, too, had “not even one atom of inherent existence,” as much as a “classical” Tibetan practitioner might have had with regard to his or her *own* valid vision of a world marked by Buddhist geography in the (merely labeled) “fourteenth century.” For both practitioners would have an equal imperative to be able to dissolve their respective conceptions of an ordinary world, prior to creating a new and sacred one out of the emptiness that remains when all projections from one's own side are withdrawn.

The Empty River of a Mind

It is important at this juncture to step back and take stock of our trajectory. We began with the question of the meaning of illusion in Tsongkhapa's thought, which led us to inquire into the meaning of what it is that is said “not to be there” even though we ordinarily think it is. Formally speaking, this is known as the thing to be refuted. We saw that in Tsongkhapa's presentation in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, at a level of explanation generally acceptable to all schools of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist thought,

Tsongkhapa explained that basic ignorance – the root of suffering – consists of misunderstanding reality in two basic ways: (1) failing to understand the infallible correspondence between karma and its results, or how deeds ripen into worlds of experience, and (2) failing to understand the lack of a self, as that applies to both a person and to all things. We also stressed that throughout Tsongkhapa’s mature thought, the deceptive reality of a world made interdependently through causes and conditions (primarily karmic causes and conditions) and the ultimate reality of emptiness are seen to be inseparable from one another. This is coined in a phrase that appears numerous times in Tsongkhapa’s commentary on Nāgārjuna’s *Root Verses on the Middle Way*, namely “empty-dependent arising” (*stong pa rten ’byung*), indicating that the realization of inextricable interdependence should lead immediately to the realization of emptiness, and vice versa.¹¹²

This is well known, but it has been my hope that through exploring in some detail the question of how entire realms could be thought to arise from consciousness (link three), and how consciousness in turn could be thought to have arisen from karmic traces (link two), we might gain greater insight into what it might mean, in Tsongkhapa’s view, for *every* detail of a perceived reality to be arising in some relationship to the karmic traces coming to fruition within the mental stream of each perceiver. If one could imagine how the effects of karmic conditioning might be so vast as to generate the very fact that one living being sees water while another sees bloody pus in the same exact material location – or one being has valid visionary experience in which he may explore and traverse a four-sided pyramidal Mt. Meru surrounded by twelve continents and subcontinents, while another circumnavigates a planet earth spinning on its round central axis around a sun and bases her valid perceptions on verifiable photographs from outer space – then one might begin to see how a sincere appreciation of the power of karma to shape individual and collective perceptions of even a physical reality might lead directly to an understanding that nothing at all has any nature apart from the mental images projected upon a basis due to these karmic influences. That would lead directly to understanding the lack of a self to phenomena (*chos kyi bdag med*) as well as, of course, the lack of a self to that overarching phenomenon about which we tend to care most, namely the person (*gang zag gi bdag med*). Thus I propose that even these two kinds of ignorance are inextricably related in Tsongkhapa’s thought: Failing to understand karma, one has no chance of understanding selflessness; but understanding selflessness *in terms of karma* is a most subtle and profound way to access what it means for things to lack inherent characteristics.

¹¹² See Tsongkhapa’s *Ocean of Reasoning, An Explanation of “Incisive Wisdom: Root Verses on the Middle Way,” dbu ma rtsa ba’i tshig le’ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba’i rnam bshad rigs pa’i rgya mtsho*, vol. ba, (3-568), *passim*.

Some Mind-Only school proponents, by arguing that outer things have no existence apart from the mind, seem to have emphasized the aspect of karmic ripening to the point that any genuinely shared world of experience virtually disappears upon close examination.¹¹³ Yet the minds that generate those worlds are still conferred special status as really existent.¹¹⁴ A Middle Way position, as explained by Tsongkhapa in the flowing liquid example, should allow for an outer material basis mutually shared between sentient beings. But we may infer, from numerous presentations of Middle Way view in other parts of Tsongkhapa's writings, that he would readily acknowledge that upon ever closer examination, a real basis could never be found, either.¹¹⁵

The question remains: How may we turn the logic of the “river of flowing liquid” example back upon the mind itself, in order to make explicit how a Middle Way view regarding the emptiness of that mind might be understood *in terms of karmic traces*? For if we fail to understand this point, I suggest that we still will not be able to fathom the way that Tsongkhapa sees the practices of Vajrayāna to be able to transform a sentient being's mind from its root.

It is interesting to note that in an earlier section of the *Illumination of the True Thought*, when arguing that potentials existing in the past could never be established through defining characteristics of their own, Tsongkhapa used the same word for “river” (*chu klung*) there as an analogy for the stream (*rgyun*) of causes and results that constitutes the continuity of karmic potentials.¹¹⁶ At that point in the text he was considering a Mind-Only view of inherently existing potentials, but since we saw that he later pointed out that the problem is not with the notion of a stream, but with an

¹¹³ See Appendix Eight (686) and (704-705). I find the latter a particularly subtle explanation of Asaṅga's Mind-Only view as a whole.

¹¹⁴ Admittedly, however, even within this Mind-Only view, the mind, being a changing, dependent thing, is said not to appear as the ultimate object seen by an ārya in the direct perception of emptiness. See Tsongkhapa, *The Essence of Eloquence, drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 6a3-4 (491):

Dependent things are called that which lacks the essential nature of ultimacy, because they do not have the essential nature of being ultimate. This is true insofar as “the ultimate” is that which, when you focus upon it and become accustomed to it, all spiritual obstacles will come to an end; but when you focus upon a dependent thing, and become accustomed to it, it cannot purify your spiritual obstacles [hence it is not ultimate in that sense].

།གཞན་དབང་ནི་དོན་དམ་པའི་ངོ་མོ་ཉིད་དུ་མེད་པས་དོན་དམ་པ་ངོ་མོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། དོན་དམ་པ་ནི་གང་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་གོམས་ན་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཟད་པར་འགྱུར་བ་ཡིན་ན་གཞན་དབང་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་གོམས་པས་སྒྲིབ་པ་དག་པར་བྱེད་མི་རུས་པའི་བྱེད་པོ།

¹¹⁵ See, for example the important discussion of “findability” in Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way*, (London: Curzon), 157.

¹¹⁶ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 163a3-4 (327); the quotation is from Candrakīrti's *Auto-Commentary*:

Like the stream of a river, if causes and results are engaged in relationship to make a stream, then through the continuum of birth and death, remaining completely unbroken, without any space in between, “the moments of traces at all times have something immediate from which to take their existence.”

རྩ་ལྷུང་གི་རྩ་ལྷུང་ལྷུང་ཆགས་པར་རྩ་དང་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྲེལ་པར་འབྲུག་པ་ན། སྟེ་འཆི་བརྒྱད་པས་བར་སྟོང་མེད་པར་རྣམ་པར་མ་ཆད་པར་གནས་པ། འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་སྐད་ཅིག་དུས་གསུམ་པའི་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་ཅན་ལ་བྱ་སྟེ།

inherently existing one, the fact that he inserted this distinctive word for a *river of water* – the same word used in Candrakīrti’s verse regarding the craving spirits’ experience – and a word not usually used when discussing the stream of the mind (either *sems rgyud* or *sems rgyun*), is significant to my reading. That is, it suggests that we may apply the logic of the entire example regarding the empty river of liquid to the stream of potentials propagating themselves within the mind itself.

What would it mean to look upon one’s own mind, or any emotion, thought, or affliction arising within that mind, and to recognize that one’s own perception of that mental event only constitutes “one part” lifted out of the potentiality of an empty basis and labeled due to other contributing conditions? What would it mean to recognize that the content of one’s own thoughts might indeed be perceived differently by someone else, with clairvoyance, or even by oneself, in retrospect on a different occasion, or from a different perspective on a situation? We know well that when someone else hears us speak, or responds to the actions that flow from our mental states, they often seem to be perceiving a thoroughly “different person” from the “me” that we ourselves perceive. According to the “river” example, this would point to the emptiness of the basis: a mind and a body that are being interpreted alternately through the conditioned lenses of different perceivers. But do we ever consider that our own perception of our own minds is also *just one perspective*, no more or less valid than someone else’s? Do we assume that just because we think we have such close access to the content of our own minds, that this means we really *know*, definitively, what is going on there, and that our moment to moment perceptions of ourselves constitute the final word on who we are? Though not yet presented in technical philosophical language, such an attitude might seem a reasonable expression of what it would mean to think that one’s mind exists through definitive characteristics of its own. But once again, it is not as simple as that.

Establishing a Mind that Could Exist Definitively?

To fully understand what is at stake in Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of what it would mean for something to exist through its own defining characteristics, we would have to engage in a thorough analysis of the presentations on valid perception by Dharmakīrti, and the immense history of interpretations of Dharmakīrti’s thought, from both Mind-Only and Sautrāntika perspectives, through the history of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism at least until the time of Tsongkhapa.¹¹⁷ Clearly this is beyond the scope of the

¹¹⁷ For relevant scholarship in this field, see especially Georges B. J. Dreyfus, 1997, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations* (Albany: State University of New York Press); John D. Dunne, 2004, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy* (Boston: Wisdom Publications); and Roger R. Jackson, 1993, *Is Enlightenment Possible?: Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje on Knowledge, Rebirth, No-self and Liberation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications); also Arnold, 2005, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief*; as well as Hopkins, 1999, *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism*; 2002, *Reflections on Reality: The Three Natures and Non-Natures in the Mind-Only School*; and 2005, *Absorption In No External World: 170 Issues in Mind-Only Buddhism*.

current project. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note a brief explanation mentioned by Gyaltsab Je in his own commentary to Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on Valid Perception* (*Pramāṇavārttika*), which, though presented as a possible (though problematic) view of the Sautrāntika position, will be relevant for our subsequent deconstruction here.¹¹⁸ Gyaltsab Je writes:¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Cf. Georges Dreyfus' comments on this same passage in *Recognizing Reality*, 116-119, esp. 493n38. I have translated the preceding section of Gyaltsab Je's text in Appendix Eleven. I am not entirely convinced by Dreyfus' argument (in note 38 on p. 493) that "this passage does not represent [Gyel-tsap's] own position but that of an adversary." Rather, I think the line taunting his opponent for having ingested *datura*, and asking him to wipe his eyes again and again and look, refers to the entire *preceding* section, about the difference between Middle Way and Functionalist interpretations of the key point in Dharmakīrti's system. Nonetheless, I agree that it is clear from the subsequent discussion (which I have not translated) of determinate existence in location, time, and identity, that Gyaltsab Je is not entirely satisfied with the position cited here, either. Perhaps part of the difficulty comes in trying to interpret when Gyaltsab Je is expressing his own position from a Middle Way point of view (which he very rarely mentions in this text) or his "own position" about how to interpret Dharmakīrti properly on the terms presented in the *Pramāṇavārttika* itself. This is an extremely complex and subtle problem, and my treatment of it from what I infer to be Tsongkhapa's perspective (based mostly on the Middle Way commentaries discussed in this dissertation, as well as the passages from Tsongkhapa's oral commentary to the third chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*, translated in Appendix Ten, and discussed in my Chapter Five) still only touches the edge of what is to be analyzed in Tsongkhapa's apparent understanding of Dharmakīrti's system.

Still, since Tsongkhapa does use this very definition of particular clear instances (in most cases equivalent to what Dreyfus calls "specifically characterized phenomena" as opposed to "generally characterized phenomena" or what I will call "abstractions") in an affirmative reference even in the *Steps of Mantra* (explicitly from a Middle Way point of view, see Appendix Nine [714]), I feel confident that Tsongkhapa accepted the notion of something that could remain "unmixed within its own location, at its own time, and with its own essence" as a particular phenomenon, conventionally speaking, even though Tsongkhapa would argue that from a Middle Way point of view it could never be established with its "own-characteristics" (*rang gi mtshan nyid*, Skt. *svalakṣaṇa*) *per se*. For all the hundreds of times Tsongkhapa uses the phrase "existing/being established through its own defining characteristics" as the key thing to be refuted from a Middle Way Consequence point of view, I have not yet found Tsongkhapa define explicitly what he means by that phrase (which may or may not be used in a different way from Candrakīrti's intended meaning of it). Nonetheless, I think that since this is a "thing to be refuted" that Tsongkhapa wants each person to discover for themselves – i.e., to discover exactly what it is one's own ignorance holds to exist that is not there – it makes sense that one must glean the subtle meaning of the phrase from the countless arguments Tsongkhapa uses to refute the possibility of its existence, and not from a formal "definition" of what it would *really* mean to possess a definition, or defining characteristics. This said, I think Tsongkhapa's discussion of the "flowing water" conundrum gives us a strong clue as to what he had in mind. Any view that could not hold the possibility of an existing individual basis that is nonetheless validly perceived in variant ways by different beings according to their respective predispositions, would be a view that wanted the "basis" to possess characteristics of its own. My thanks to a footnote in Thomas Freeman Yarnall, 2003, "The Emptiness that is Form: Developing the body of Buddhahood in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Tantra" (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University), 466n88, for pointing me to this chain of connected references in Dreyfus' study as they pertain to Tsongkhapa's passage in the *Steps of Mantra*.

¹¹⁹ Gyaltsab Je Darma Rinchen, *thar lam gsal byed*, Drepung Loseling Library Society, 2002, 68, 69-70:
 དེ་ནི་འདི་དབྱེད་པར་བྱ་སྟེ། རང་མཚན་ཡིན་ན་ཡུལ་དང་དུས་དང་ངོ་མོ་མ་འདྲེས་པར་གནས་ལ། དེ་རང་མཚན་གྱི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་དོན་ལྟག་ཀྱང་ཡིན་ཞིང་།
 ཡུལ་མ་འདྲེས་པ་ནི་ཤར་ན་གནས་ན་རྒྱུ་ན་གནས་པར་འགལ་བ་དང་། དུས་མ་འདྲེས་པ་ལྷ་ཉི་ཤུམ་ན་གྱི་ཉི་ཤུམ་པར་འགལ་བའི་དོན་དང་། ངོ་མོ་མ་འདྲེས་པ་
 ཁ་མོ་ལོད་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ཡིན་ན་མེད་སྟེ། ལོད་པར་འགལ་བའི་དོན་དུ་སྟོབ་བྱེད་ཅིང་དངོས་པོ་དང་རང་མཚན་དོན་གཅིག་པས་ཉགས་ཡང་དག་ཡིན་ན་དངོས་
 པོ་མིན་པར་འཆད་པར་བྱེད་དོ། ་་་ གཞི་ནས་ཤེས་ལ་རང་མཚན་གྱི་དོན་ཚད་མས་ཁེགས་ན་ངོ་མོ་ཉིད་མེད་པར་སྟོབ་པའི་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུ་གོ་བར་འགྱུར་ལ། ཡུ

Now, analyze this: If something has its own characteristics, then it remains unmixed within its own location, at its own time, and with its own essence. This is the unique meaning of an actual object that has its own characteristics, in terms of its conceptual isolation. An unmixed location means that if something is staying in the east, it would be a contradiction for it to stay in the west. Unmixed time means that if something takes place in the morning, it would be a contradiction for it to take place in the afternoon. Unmixed essence is said to mean that if a functioning thing has many colors, then it would be contradictory for it to exist where there is pale yellow. Since a “functioning thing” and “what has its own characteristics” have the same referent, it is explained that if something is a correct reason [i.e., an unchanging logical entity] then it cannot be a functioning thing.

. . . If with a valid perception you refute the possibility that objects with their own characteristics could exist with respect to the foundation – consciousness – then this will bring you to understand the system of those who claim that there are no essences [i.e. the Middle Way]. But even those who claim there are no essences accept functioning things that are *merely* things unmixed in location, time, or essence. Therefore what it means to be an object with its own characteristics is to be established as an objective field from its own side; something that is *not* merely labeled with concepts.

In the case of a mind, what this implies is that a moment of mind that could be established through its own characteristics would be a discrete entity in time, an instant of consciousness that was unassailable in its identity as something lucid and knowing, existing with its own nature. According to the Mind-Only system, it would also be the prime example of a dependent thing, arising as a result of what came before and as a cause for the consciousness that would come after. It would also be something that existed from its own side, with its own way of abiding (*rang gi ngos nas sdod lugs su grub pa*), not as something merely set forth in dependence upon names and terms (*ming brdas bzhag pa tsam ma yin pa*).¹²⁰ Ironically, according to the Middle Way, inherent

ལ་དང་། ལྷས་དང་། རོ་མོ་མ་འབྲེས་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་ལ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པར་སྒྲུབ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་འདོད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེས་ན་རང་མཚན་གྱི་དོན་ནི་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་མིན་པར་ཡུལ་རང་གི་དངོས་ནས་གྲུབ་པའི་དོན་ནོ།

¹²⁰ We glimpse a definition of precisely what Tsongkhapa thinks the Mind-Only school meant by “established through its own defining characteristics” within Tsongkhapa’s elucidation of the *Sūtra Commenting on the True Intent of the Sūtras* (*mdo sde dgongs ’grel*, Skt. *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*) in *The Essence of Eloquence*, *drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 5a6-5b3 (489-490), when he explains what it means for constructs *not* to exist through such characteristics. There is considerable subtlety to the fact that each school understands definitive existence differently, and even according to different contexts, so this is by no means a complete explanation:

Here the measure of whether something can be taught to exist through its own defining characteristics or not is a matter of whether or not it is set forth in dependence upon names and terms. The fact that something is set forth, however, does not necessitate that it should actually exist. Furthermore, this way

possession of characteristics would, upon deep analysis, actually obviate the possibility of being dependent on causes. But for now, let us still try to imagine a moment of consciousness that really did have a nature of its own.

Although the Mind-Only school acknowledges that it is extremely difficult to gain a direct perception of what would be a unique, particular instance of mind that is unadulterated by the countless conceptual constructs that we habitually overlay upon it, nevertheless it is essential to the view of the Mind-Only school that such a direct and unveiled perception of the mind should be possible, at a certain level of evolution on the path of meditation. Hence not just “anything I think about myself” would be considered an accurate knowledge of the definitive characteristics of mind – not at all – but there would remain in this school the notion that there *is* something there that is really and uniquely my mind, which is ultimately findable and can only be witnessed by a very pure and rarified type of perception. It appears that many proponents of the Mind-Only system claimed that realization of this nondual consciousness would have to be established by a special self-knowing type of reflexive awareness (*rang rig*, Skt. *svasamvitti*), that could perceive awareness itself *in the very moment* it was taking place. This would be necessary because if the awareness of awareness were delayed by even a moment, then it would already be perceiving the previous moment of awareness as a memory, and this would no longer be a direct perception, but a conceptualized one, apprehending its object by means of an abstracted generalization, i.e., a static mental image.

Rather, in order to maintain that there is such a real, functioning, dependent thing as consciousness itself – the lynchpin of their system – proponents of the Mind-Only

of positing it is very different from what the Consequence group means when they say that all existing things are set forth by the power of the conventions of names. Thus these [two] meanings of whether or not something exists through definitive characteristics of its own are not in accord with one another. Now, if there is the kind of grasping to existence through inherent definitive characteristics as explained here [i.e., wrongly thinking that *constructs* exist definitively], then there will also be the kind of grasping to existence through inherent definitive characteristics explained by the Consequence group [i.e., wrongly thinking that when you go to look for the thing that gets the name you will really find it]. But there are a few bases for which there would not be grasping according to the former explanation, even though grasping would still exist according to the latter meaning.

འདིར་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་གྱིས་ཡོད་མེད་བསྟན་ཆོད་ནི་མིང་དང་བདེ་ལ་སྟོན་ནས་བཞག་མ་བཞག་ཡིན་ལ། བཞག་པ་ལ་ཡང་ཡོད་པས་སྤྱད་ཅིང་འཛོག་ལུགས་ཀྱང་ཐལ་འགྱུར་བས་ཡོད་པ་རྣམས་མིང་གི་ཐ་སྟངས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་དང་ཆེས་མི་མཐུན་པས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་གྱིས་ཡོད་མེད་ཀྱི་དོན་ཡང་མི་མཐུན་ནོ། །འོན་ཀྱང་འདིའི་རང་མཆན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པ་ཡོད་ན་ཐལ་འགྱུར་བའི་རང་མཆན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་འཛིན་པ་ཡང་ཡོད་ལ་གཞི་འགའ་ཞིག་སྔ་མ་ལྟར་མི་འཛིན་ཀྱང་བྱི་མ་ལྟར་འཛིན་པ་ནི་ཡོད་དོ།

That is, as I understand this argument, when the Consequence (Skt. *prāsaṅgika*) group says that all things are established in name only, they do not simply mean that everything is mentally constructed *in the way* that the Mind-Only school means it, or that everything is “only constructs” from among the three natures of the Mind-Only system. To say that things are merely established through names and terms (i.e., mental images) in the Consequence sense seems to be a far more subtle proposition. According to the explanation of Sera Mey Geshe Tupten Rinchen (recorded lectures, October 6th, 1998, translated orally into English by Geshe Michael Roach) the difference hangs on the fact that in the Mind-Only system dependent things are findable, even though the constructs made about them cannot be found in the things, while in the Middle Way system, no object of any kind is ultimately findable.

school must posit that there is always a part of awareness that reflexively turns back and observes itself, directly, and utterly without conceptualization. Ordinarily we are not aware of this, but supposedly it is realized by those who perceive reality free of conceptual elaboration, because in order to verify that one saw reality correctly, there must *also* have been a direct perception of the mind doing the perceiving, at the same moment. According to a typical Mind-Only position, this reflexive self-awareness is the only way that we can recall personal experience of any kind, saying, “I saw blue,” and so on. If there were no simultaneous self-awareness, how could we ever remember that “I” was there? But this reflexive awareness must also be free of the false construct that thinks subject and object are of separate substance. Consciousness only has a single substance, but in this case, it is said to have two functions: looking outwards (*kha phyir*) and looking inwards at itself (*kha nang*). As Tsongkhapa writes, commenting upon a passage from the *Commentary on the Two Realities, Satyadvaya-vibhaṅga-kārikā*, by Jñānagarbha:¹²¹

This explains that if the Mind-Only proponents were to be able to establish a dependent thing that was empty of the constructs that consider beholder and beheld to be of different substances, then this dependent thing, this consciousness, would have to be established as a self-awareness that emerges as an awareness that is set apart from ever appearing as two. If such a self-awareness were to be established, then it would know that the basis had no substantially separate beholder and beheld. But if that *basis* were not previously established by the self-awareness, then it would be impossible to establish, by maintaining that basis, that it was empty of constructs.

According to you, the verification of dependent things must be established by a self-awareness that is set apart from ever appearing as two. Thus by saying that self-awareness cannot be established, we refute you. But then, having refuted a self-awareness such as *that*, to go on and claim that we have refuted the practitioner’s *own awareness*, by which each individual practitioner has *himself* been *aware* of reality as it is, or to refute the conventional meaning of the self-awareness by which people in the world say “I am *aware* of *myself*,” is just the talk of fools.

One Middle Way argument as to why that special kind of self-awareness cannot exist, much less establish the inherently existing moments of consciousness it is purported to

¹²¹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 172b2-4 (346), my emphasis:

སེམས་ཅོམ་པས་གཞན་དབང་གཞུང་འཛིན་ཟུག་གཞན་གྱི་ཀླན་བརྟགས་ཀྱིས་སྟོང་པར་བསྐྱབས་པ་ན། ཤེས་པ་གཞན་དབང་ནི་གཉིས་སྒྲིབ་གིས་དབེན་པའི་འོ་མོ་
 རིག་པར་འབྱུང་བའི་རང་རིག་གྲུབ་ན། དེ་ནས་གཞི་དེ་གཞུང་འཛིན་ཟུག་གཞན་དུ་མེད་པ་ཤེས་ཀྱི། དེ་ལྟར་སྟོན་དུ་གཞི་དེ་རང་རིག་གིས་མ་གྲུབ་ན། དེ་གཞིར་བརྟེན་
 ང་ནས་ཀླན་བརྟགས་ཀྱིས་སྟོང་པ་མི་འབྱུབ་པོ་ཞེས་བཤད་དེ། ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་ལྟར་ན་གཞན་དབང་གི་སྐྱུབ་ཀྱིས་གཉིས་སྒྲིབ་དང་བྲལ་པའི་རང་རིག་གིས་གྲུབ་དགོས་པ་ལ།
 ། དེ་མི་འབྱུབ་ཅེས་བཀའ་གྲོ་། དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་རང་རིག་བཀའ་པས་རྣམས་འབྱོར་པ་སོ་སོ་རང་རང་གིས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་རིག་པའི་རང་རིག་བཀའ་པ་དང་། འདྲི་
 ག་རྟེན་པས་ངས་ང་རང་རིག་ཅེས་པའི་ཐ་སྙད་ཀྱི་དོན་གྱི་རང་རིག་བཀའ་པ་ཞེས་ལྟ་བུ་པའི་གཏམ་སོ།

establish is this: As stated by Candrakīrti, echoing Śāntideva,¹²² a single sword cannot cut itself, as the tip of a single finger cannot touch itself, nor a strong man stand on his own shoulders, nor a fire burn up and destroy its own nature of being hot. Likewise, a single moment of awareness, whose nature is to be aware of something, cannot be aware of its own act of knowing, directly, or it would become two states of awareness. (One sword can strike another, a finger touch another, and so on.) But this bifurcation is exactly what the Mind-Only system wishes to avoid.

Strangely, although the Mind-Only school wants to take all outer objects and see them as inseparable from the essence of consciousness itself – thus collapsing the duality we see habitually – the position also demands that the vector of awareness itself be split into two functions in every moment of its existence, thus proposing a reflexivity that is counter-intuitive and impossible to observe in practice (at least according to the Middle Way critique). Nonetheless, Tsongkhapa is careful to point out that it is only this closely defined type of self-awareness, such that it would itself be aware of itself simultaneously¹²³ that is being refuted, not the normal and constant fact that a person is aware of himself, with momentary time-lapse or else with one part of the mind being aware of another part, with no claim to substantial identities. Nor does this argument refute the idea that an ārya who perceives emptiness directly does so only for him- or herself, and that the wisdom of this realization cannot be transmitted to or observed directly by anyone else.¹²⁴

Thus what is being refuted is not the possibility of perceiving the nature of awareness (the experience of which is fundamental to many traditions of Buddhist meditation), but the possibility of one moment of a substantially established awareness having two functions simultaneously. This would mean that at least one part of that awareness was arising from itself, with no other cause to set it in motion; or else a single

¹²² See *byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa*, Toh. 3871, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. *la*, 31b2-3:

Even the protector of the world has said
That mind does not see the mind
How could the blade of a sword ever cut
Itself? In the same way, too, your mind.

འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ནི་མགོན་པོས་ཀྱང་། །སེམས་གྱིས་སེམས་མི་མཐོང་ཞེས་གསུངས། །རལ་གྱི་སྒོ་ནི་རང་ལ་རང་། །རྩི་ལྷུང་མི་གཙོད་དེ་བཞེན་ཡིད།

¹²³ Literally: “*shes pa de kho rang gis kho rang rig pa'i rang rig*,” as Tsongkhapa had specified it in *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 172a6 (345).

¹²⁴ This is another instance where the word “own awareness” – *rang rig* – is used in many scriptures with a different technical sense, i.e. *rang rig pa'i ye shes*. See *drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 24a1 (527), where Tsongkhapa addresses this point with regard to the wisdom that realizes ultimate reality as described in the Mind-Only treatises:

That primordial wisdom, according to this system, is asserted to be self-awareness. But if you wonder, “Wouldn't that mean the primordial wisdom itself becomes an objective field?” this is no problem, because here it refers to that objective field upon which the realization of the meaning of suchness relies.

ཁྱུགས་འདིས་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་རང་རིག་ཏུ་བཞེད་པས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱང་ཡུལ་དུ་འགྱུར་རོ་སྙམ་ན། ཡུལ་གང་ལ་ལྷོས་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གྱི་དོན་རྟོགས་པའི་ཡུལ་དེ་ལ་དགོངས་པས་སྟོན་མེད་དོ།

cause would be having two dissimilar effects, both of which are untenable logical conclusions.¹²⁵

Though I cannot treat all the details of the presentation and refutation of reflexive awareness here, they are crucially important to the success of the Middle Way's debate for the following reason: If even a single moment of consciousness cannot be verified, by a simultaneous direct perception, as the inherently defined dependent thing the Mind-Only school has posited it to be, then there is no recourse left with which to establish the real “dependent things” *on* which constructs are said to be pasted, and which are said to be empty *of* certain wrong constructs about them. If there is no reflexive awareness with which to establish consciousness definitively, the last bastion of definitive existence defended by the Mind-Only viewpoint drops out and the Middle Way position is declared: Nothing has any characteristics of its own. Of course the Mind-Only school has many more rebuttals and counter-arguments, which Tsongkhapa continues to treat at length in both the *Illumination of the True Thought* and in his *Essence of Eloquence*, but it is not essential to elaborate these for the purposes of our broader inquiry here.

Interlude on the Empty River

The practical point for a practitioner, and particularly a practitioner of Vajrayāna, would be that if there is not one shred of a mind that can be established to exist according to its own well-defined characteristics, apart from all the fabricated constructs one may hold about a particular mind, especially about one's own mind, then the so-called “mind” is as unfindable as a basis as was any ultimate basis for the outer river of empty liquid. The mind itself would turn out to be the most important empty river: Sometimes flowing in the blood and pus of gross mental afflictions, sometimes flowing pure and clear with the water of balanced meditation, eventually, perhaps according to the Vajrayāna path, it might flow with the divine ambrosia of simultaneous great bliss.

Although the Mind-Only system offers a magnificent explanation of the possibility of total enlightenment based on the gradual evolution of certain primordial seeds for total purity (also known as buddha-nature), a typical Mind-Only position must still hold that the seeds, whether for good or for ill, and the mind in which they stay,

¹²⁵ See Gyaltzab Je (as included in Je Tsongkhapa's collected works), *Notes on the Eight Difficult Points: A Mnemonic Set Forth According to the Lord's Own Speech, bka' gnad brgyad gyi zin bris rje'i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ba, 9b1-3 (586):

. . . It is also unsuitable to divide them according to the distinctions of a single continuum, cause and effect, etc., because those, too, are disproven insofar as they would be separate substances. If there were two dissimilar functions within a single substance, then they would have to be ultimate functions. So by agreeing to self-awareness, even while you may not accept “birth from itself,” you would end up having to accept it [i.e., because there is no other cause from which the split functions of a so-called “single substance” could come].

རྒྱུ་གཅིག་པ་དང་རྒྱུ་དང་འབྲས་ལུ་སྐྱེ་ནས་ཀྱི་སྒྲོ་ནས་ཀྱང་ཁྱད་པར་དབྱེར་མི་རུང་སྟེ། དེ་དག་ལ་འང་རྒྱས་གཞན་གྱིས་གཞིན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །རྒྱས་གཅིག་ལ་བྱ་བྱེད་མི་འབྲས་བུ་གཉིས་ཡོད་ན། དོན་དམ་པའི་བྱ་བྱེད་དུ་འགྱུར་བས་རང་རིག་ཁས་ལེན་པས་རང་སྤྱེ་མི་འདོད་བཞིན་དུ་འང་། ཁས་ལེན་དགོས་སོ།

really exist as they are at any given moment. Thus a sentient being is still really a sentient being, and a Buddha is really a Buddha. Although one might begin to practice the creation stage on the basis of imagination and the thought of *developing* pure seeds that already reside within one's foundation consciousness, the radical leaps by which the tantric practitioner must shed and transform identity altogether, in an instant, might at a certain point become logically untenable according to the constraints of the Mind-Only system. It seems this was one reason Tsongkhapa cared so much both to present the Mind-Only view correctly, and also to refute the aspects that would lead to logical (and psychological) inconsistency, especially in a tantric context.

In the example of the flowing river, it was suggested that each being only perceives a “part” of reality, but nevertheless it is suggested that there is a totality of reality to be perceived, perhaps from an omniscient perspective. There are also countless localized environments with mutually established outer objects that can indeed be shared in common, in a conventional and functional sense. We have now extended the example to suggest that likewise, I only perceive “a part” of my own mind, but clairvoyant beings might be able to perceive another part from their side, as clearly as another human could see my face. When someone hears me speak, or knows me well, they are also perceiving a “part” of this mind. They only do so as conditioned by *their* tendencies and labels, but one can still validly say that they are engaging with the phenomenon that is “my mind” just as one might say that both the craving spirit and the human see “the same moon.”

According to this Middle Way view, nothing is established from the side of the object – yet still we must posit a basis, in order for the mind and its objects to be equally empty. The objective basis must act as focal condition for any state of knowing mind to arise. Nevertheless, it is the various tendencies ripening in the mental continuum that must act as simultaneous conditions for *how* the ultimately unfindable basis will appear, as a knowable thing, to any given living being. It has frequently been explained that Tsongkhapa's Middle Way position emphasizes that nothing at all can be established apart from conceptual designation, or the valid conventions by which beings of the world – any world – identify things, beings, and experiences as this or that. This is accurate, but the question that is perhaps much more difficult to understand is this: *Does even the conceptual framework in relation to which a living being will perceive anything at all also arise in dependence upon the influence of karmic tendencies and mental seeds?*

Candrakīrti, following Ārya Nāgārjuna, stressed repeatedly in *Entering the Middle Way* that mind and object can only be established in dependence upon one another.¹²⁶ It is one thing to say that one can only label the mind in relation to its object,

¹²⁶ See, for instance, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 171a3-5 (343). This is Tsongkhapa's commentary on Candrakīrti's verse 6:71b, in which he has quoted several verses by Nāgārjuna and then explains as follows. Note that the Tibetan word for “knowing” and “consciousness” throughout this passage is the same: *shes pa*.

and one can only label an object insofar as it is perceived. But what is the force, the *reason*, that one mind will label its objects in one way, and another mind quite differently, whether within a human society, or across realms of sentient beings whose perceptions are categorically and mutually incompatible? It has been my goal to reveal that within Tsongkhapa's interpretation, at least, this mutual interdependence of mind and object might be stated more specifically as follows: The arising of a moment of perceiving mind depends upon the object, but *how* the object is perceived depends upon the coming to fruition of karmic traces. Or more simply: *The mind depends on the object, but how the object is perceived depends on karma.*

If this delicate balance can be understood, we might begin to see how it is that even in a world where “nothing has any nature of its own,” this Middle Way Consequence view would still not turn into the unqualified relativism that falls into nihilism. This is because it remains possible to have valid cognition of the functionality of one's own perceptions, and insofar as these perceptions can be understood to arise “by the force of karma,” what one perceives is never *merely* whatever one wants to make up in the moment. Mere labeling, in Tsongkhapa's Middle Way view, is for the most part not a voluntary exercise. The mind is presented with labels and images to employ long before it ever becomes aware of doing so, and most of the time we would never be aware of the degree to which our minds are doing the labeling with respect to every detail of our experience. But insofar as the consistency of the stream of cause and effect that gives rise to the images that come to our minds at any given moment – in order to bestow *meaning* on our world – is said to be infallible, then there remains unassailable order to reality, even as it is discovered to be infinitely malleable.

According to this logic, if one wished to bring about lasting change and transformation, then precise causes would have to be created through precise action and thought, in order for precise mental images to arise in the future, granting meaning to every detail of experience. This, I will posit, is the key to Tsongkhapa's Vajrayāna philosophy. Furthermore, although Nāgārjuna is known for having declared that he “has

*[In brief, just as there are no knowable things
so there is no mind: Understand the meaning.]*

མདོར་ན་རྩི་ལྟར་ཤེས་བྱ་མེད་དེ་བཞིན། གློ་ཡང་མེད་ཅེས་དོན་འདི་ཤེས་པར་གྱིས། 71b]

. . . If there were no cause to posit that “I knew [it] with this kind of consciousness,” one would not be able to posit a knowable thing as an objective field. If there were no cause to posit that “From this [object] I knew this kind of objective field,” one would also not be able to posit consciousness. Thus, without a knowable thing, there would also be no consciousness, because consciousness and knowable things are posited in [mutual] reliance. Since [Nāgārjuna] says that it is your [i.e. the Buddha's] teaching that neither of them have any nature, it is the intent of the Ārya that for both of them, if in either of the two realities one does not exist, then there is no differentiation as to the existence of the other.

ཤེས་པ་འདི་འདྲ་ཞིག་གིས་ཤེས་ཞེས་འཛིན་ཆུ་མེད་ན། ཤེས་བྱ་ཡུལ་དུ་འཛིན་མི་རུས་སོ། །འདིས་ཡུལ་འདི་འདྲ་ཞིག་ཤེས་ཞེས་འཛིན་ཆུ་མེད་ན་ཤེས་པར་ཡང་འཛིན་མི་རུས་པས། ཤེས་བྱ་དེ་མེད་པར་རྣམས་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་མེད་དོ། །ཤེས་པ་དང་ཤེས་བྱ་ལྟོས་འཛིན་ཡིན་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར། དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་ཁྱོད་དཀྱིས་བསྟན་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས། དེ་གཉིས་ལ་བདེན་གཉིས་གང་དུ་ཡང་གཅིག་མེད་ལ་ཅིག་ཤོས་ཡོད་པའི་རྣམས་དབྱེ་མེད་པ་འབགས་པའི་བཞེད་པའོ།

no thesis,”¹²⁷ nevertheless, in Tsongkhapa’s interpretations at least, the Middle Way does have a position, and openly declares that it is *true* that reality is like this, i.e., empty of inherent nature, and that reality emphatically does not exist in any other way.¹²⁸ It is claimed throughout Buddhist Mahāyāna scriptures that the ultimate state of reality can be realized through the direct valid perceptions of an ārya and so on; these are said to be the direct realizations of emptiness that override anything ever perceived “in the world.” Thus I would posit that even in this Middle Way system the *truth* that all things are empty is indeed meant to be *truth* in a classical sense of the word: To see emptiness is for the mind to be conformed to the way things really are, when subjected to ultimate analysis. To see ultimate reality is to see reality utterly free of conceptual elaboration, which according to the Middle Way, is the way it really is (*de kho na nyid, chos nyid*).

In order to develop my own thesis, namely that when Tsongkhapa refers to infallible interdependence in a Middle Way context he is still primarily referring to the laws of karma and its results, and especially to the way in which the second link of mental traces gives rise to the second half of the third link, namely resultant consciousness, and all the experiences that flow from that, we must once again return to his presentation of the Mind-Only system. Now it will be important to examine at last the specific classes of seeds and tendencies, as well as the meaning of “profound dependent origination,” as sourced primarily from Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way*, in order to understand how Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way modification of that system will still leave intact its central teaching on the ubiquity and power of seeds. Even rejecting the notion of a mind that could exist definitively, Tsongkhapa shows it possible to revise that view without ever discounting the complexity and functionality of the karmic system *as* it is presented there. It is by now evident how vehemently Tsongkhapa, following Candrakīrti, denies specific aspects of the Mind-Only presentation, but I find significant evidence in both earlier and later sections of the *Illumination of the True Thought* that *what is not denied is affirmed*. Thus we may look for details within the presentation on seeds and tendencies in Tsongkhapa’s early *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*

¹²⁷ See Nāgārjuna’s most famous statement of this point in *Ending All Debates, Vigrahavyāvartanīkārikā* (*rtsod pa bzlog pa’i tshig le’ur byas pa*), Toh. 3828, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. tsa, 28a1:

Suppose I had some thesis;
then I would have such a fault.
But since I have no thesis,
I alone am the one with no faults.

ཁག་ཉེ་ངས་དཔེ་བཅས་འགའ་ཡོད། །དེས་ན་ང་ལ་སྒྲིན་དེ་ཡོད། །ང་ལ་དཔེ་བཅས་འགའ་མེད་པས་ན། །ང་ལ་སྒྲིན་མེད་ཁོ་ན་ཡིན།

¹²⁸ See Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality, and Reason*, 26-36 for a clear and insightful analysis of this issue in Tsongkhapa’s readings of the Indian Middle Way philosophers. See also Tsongkhapa’s clear statement of this point in Appendix Fourteen (425):

According to Ārya Nāgārjuna, since one cannot establish either “self” or “lack of self” as existing absolutely, the view that either option could exist absolutely must be refuted. *But this does not cancel the view that things are without a self*. As I have quoted previously from [Nāgārjuna’s] *Ending All Debates*, this is true because: If it were *not* the case that things lack any nature by which they could be established through a nature of their own, then it would follow that things *do* exist through a nature of their own.

and consider them meaningful even in a Middle Way context, excepting only those points that Tsongkhapa has specified, elsewhere in his writings, would turn out to be incompatible with the Middle Way Consequence view.¹²⁹

Seeds and Fragrant Tendencies

In the second main section of his *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, Tsongkhapa begins by defining just what the foundation consciousness is, but this time from the point of view of it being the seeds themselves, as opposed to the subtle consciousness upon which they are said to rest. This brings us to a clear description of just what it would mean to be a “seed” in this specialized sense. Commenting on his own root verses, Tsongkhapa defines “the foundation of all in terms of seeds”:¹³⁰

*The “foundation of all” as the seeds that rest upon it
is the potential deposited by the infuser
into the infusion substrate
just when it is about to stop.*

It is a potential – a seed of virtue, non-virtue, or what is morally unspecified – that is deposited into the infusion substrate by the infuser – namely, the seven groups [of consciousness] – just when any one of the seven groups is itself about to stop [being conscious of something].

That is, any one of a number of types of consciousness can plant a seed (*sa bon*, Skt. *bīja*) whether one of the five sensory consciousnesses, the mental consciousness, or the other “extra” consciousness posited within Mind-Only school treatises, namely the seventh

¹²⁹ Short of reading every page of Tsongkhapa’s works, which is at present impossible, I take as a guide to this reasoning what are well known as the “Eight Difficult Points” on which Tsongkhapa explicitly differentiated the Consequence view from all other schools. These are summarized clearly in Gyaltsab Je’s *Notes on the Eight Difficult Points, A Mnemonic Set Forth According to the Lord’s Own Speech*, *bka’ gnad brgyad gyi zin bris rje’i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa*, rje’i gsung ’bum, vol. *ba* (569-604).

¹³⁰ Tsongkhapa, *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, *kun gzhi’i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 14a1-2 (697).

བཞུགས་པ་ས་བོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞིའི་མཆན་ཉིད་དེ་འཁྲུ་བུ་ཞིན། བཞུགས་པ་ས་བོན་ཀུན་གཞི་ནི། །སློ་བར་བྱེད་པས་བསྟོ་གཞི་ལ། །འགག་ལ་མངོན་དུ་ཕྱོགས་པའི་ཆོ།
།བཞག་པའི་རྒྱས་པའོ། །སློ་བྱེད་ཆོགས་བདུན་གྱི་སློ་གཞི་ལ་རང་ཉིད་འགག་པ་ལ་མངོན་དུ་ཕྱོགས་པའི་ཆོ་དག་མི་དགེ་ལུང་མ་བསྟན་གསུམ་གྱི་སློ་ས་
བོན་བཞག་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་ཞིག་གོ།

Note that editions vary as to *gyis*/*gyi* in both clauses of the latter sentence. See Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 177n4,5. It seems grammatically more comfortable for the first to be *gyis* and the second to be *gyi*, and is on this reading that I have translated it. However, the Tashi Lhunpo block prints show the reverse, with the first as *gyi*, and the second as *gyis*; I would translate this alternative as follows: “[The “seed” foundation of all] is the potential deposited by an infuser – by means of a seed for what is virtue, non-virtue, or morally unspecified – into the substrate of infusion for the seven groups [of consciousness], just when any one of the seven groups is itself about to stop.”

afflictive mind consciousness.¹³¹ All the different types of consciousness work in concert to record experience, from their witness of the most vivid, ethically-charged actions done by oneself or others, to a peripheral notice of the most innocuous details of a subway platform. The point here is that just as each “moment” of consciousness is ceasing (at a rate of thousands per minute), an image of what was appearing in that consciousness is deposited or planted within an “infusion substrate.” This is the instant in which what I have been calling a tendency (*bag chags*, Skt. *vāśana*) is infused into its seed.¹³²

The primary connotation of the Sanskrit term *vāśana* is “the act of perfuming or fumigating, infusing, steeping,”¹³³ and this is exactly the analogical imagery used throughout the literature on this subject. The Tibetan word *bag chags* (pronounced “baak-chaak”) more distinctly gives the impression of the formation (*’chag pa*) of a particular attitude (*bag*) or predisposition for how one will apprehend appearances. One might even use the phrase “made in reserve” to translate *bag chags*, insofar as the English word “reserve” carries a similar double meaning; it can refer both to an affective state, in the sense of a demure maiden being “reserved” (which is also one meaning of “having *bag*” – i.e., *bag yod*) and in the sense of a stored residue, where the Tibetan *bag* can also refer to pieces of dough or grains of flour, or “a little bit” of anything. In a less frequent

¹³¹ Though I will not be treating this seventh consciousness in any detail here, it is essentially equivalent to the ignorance that grasps mistakenly to a self that does not exist. For various theoretical reasons the Mind-Only school must posit it as a consciousness separate from either the mental or foundation consciousnesses.

¹³² The technical terms for tendencies and seeds are often used as virtual synonyms, though as we will see, there are instances where each is used to modify the other, to different effects. Thus, Yaśomitra’s Abhidharma commentary notwithstanding (see Chapter Two, note 139 below), they do not have exactly the same sense in every case, especially when used in compound (as in *bag chags kyi sa bon*, translating Skt. *bhijavāśana*), or when Tsongkhapa refers, from a Middle Way point of view, to a tendency that is not a seed (*sa bon min pa’i bag chags*, see Appendix Five [243]). Nonetheless, based on the direct parallel to Asaṅga’s own definition of *bag chags* (see Chapter Two, note 136 below), Tsongkhapa’s general definition here appears to apply to both the *sa bon* (seeds) to which it refers directly, and to the *bag chags* (tendencies), mentioned throughout the discussion as well. I would conjecture that the differences in the analogical images may count for much, insofar as a “seed” conjures a different function from a “fragrant residue,” and in some cases it appears that “seeds” are understood to carry or transmit the “fragrance.” (See the passage cited at note 135, just below.) There is also a very unique scriptural history to each of the terms, as Nobuyoshi Yamabe’s Sanskrit research has revealed. That is, in addition to the karmic theory presented here, *bīja* (seed) has a long history of positive connotations associated with *gotra* (family lineage) in *tathāgathagarbha* literature (on buddha-nature – cf. Appendix Eight), while in early Yogācāra texts the term *vāśana* (tendency) was always used negatively, as in references to the tendencies for ignorance or for the “destructible view” that grasps to the heaps as real (*’jig tshog la lta ba*, Skt. *satkāyadrṣṭi* – cf. Tsongkhapa’s various references, as cited in Chapter Two, note 148, below, as well as in Appendix Four [178-180], Appendix Five [248-249], and Appendix Six [288-289]). See Nobuyoshi Yamabe, “*Bīja* Theory in *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*” in the *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2 (March 1990), 12-15; as well as “The Idea of *Dhātu-vāda* in Yogacara and *Tathāgata-garbha* Texts” and Matsumoto Shirō and Yamabe Nobuyoshi, 1997, “A Critical Exchange on the Idea of *Dhātu-vāda*” in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism*, edited by Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press), 193-219, as well as forthcoming research presented at the Center for Buddhist Studies Conference on “Conceptuality and Non-Conceptuality in Buddhist Thought,” at the University of California, Berkeley, November 5th, 2016.

¹³³ Monier Williams Online 2011, entry for *vāśana* at www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/webtc5/.

Tibetan usage, the word *bag* can also refer to a scent or a stain,¹³⁴ thus echoing *vāsana* exactly. I suggest one might think of a *bag chags* quite pictorially as a fragrant sachet, or a little packet of information, infused with the “fragrance” or residue of what a particular consciousness observed, which will in turn remain dormant (*bag la nyal ba*) and not clearly observed, but still propagated through time, within the vast super-substrate of the foundation consciousness itself. One might even call it a “disposition-forming infusion.” For simplicity’s sake, however, I have been and will continue to translate the term as “tendency,” or occasionally “habitual tendency,” with all these other layers of meaning implied.

Employing some technical terms for causation that we have examined previously, Tsongkhapa goes on to explain the way that the infusing states of consciousness and the infusion-substrate seed, which appears to carry the fragrant tendency, are mutual causes for one another:¹³⁵

The states of consciousness that engage [their objects] are constantly joined to the foundation consciousness, as each is a mutual result of the other, as well as a mutual cause. Insofar as the engaging types of consciousness revive old seeds, they act as a governing condition for the seed part of the foundation consciousness. Insofar as they plant new seeds, they act as the causal condition for the seeds. . . .

This was explained in terms of how they are cause and effect simultaneously, but when considered in terms of different times, [the types of consciousness that engage in objects] also act to plant seeds that will bring about the ripened part of the foundation consciousness in a future lifetime. Furthermore, since the infuser itself arises and ceases together with its basis, the one *infuses* into the other. For example, since a sesame seed stays nestled together with the sesame flower, then

¹³⁴ See the fifth Old Tibetan Dictionary (*bod yig tshig mdzod chen mo*) entry for “*bag*” at www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/translate.php?dri+ma'am+g.ya (literally, “scent/stain or rust/ dust.”)

¹³⁵ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 14a4–14b4 (697-698):

འཇུག་ཤེས་ནམས་དང་ཀུན་གཞི་གཉིས་ཉིད་ལན་ཚུན་འབྲས་བྱའི་དངོས་དང་རྒྱུའི་དངོས་པོར་རྟག་ཏུ་སྦྲར་ཏེ་འདི་ལྟར་འཇུག་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ནམས་ཀྱིས་ས་བོན་རྟིང་
 བ་གསོ་བའི་[sicབས]་ཀུན་གཞི་ས་བོན་གྱི་ཆའི་བདག་རྒྱུན་བྱེད་ལ། ས་བོན་གསར་བ་འཛོག་པས་དེའི་རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུན་བྱེད་དེ་ . . . [དུས་མཉམ་པའི་རྒྱུ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་དབང་
 ཏུ་བྱས་ནས་དེ་སྐད་བཤད་ཀྱིས་[sicཀྱི]་མི་མཉམ་པའི་དབང་ཏུ་བྱས་ན། ཆེ་ཕྱི་མའི་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ནམས་སྤྱིན་ཆ་འབྲུབ་པའི་ས་བོན་ཡང་འཛོག་པར་བྱེད་དོ། །དེ་ཡང་
 ‘རྟན་དེ་དང་སྟོན་བ་པོ་རང་ཉིད་སྤྱེ་འགག་ལྷན་ཅིག་ཏུ་བྱས་པས་སྟོན་བར་བྱེད་དེ། དཔེར་ན་ཉིལ་དང་སྦྱུང་[sicསྦྱ]་མ། གཉིས་ལྷན་ཅིག་ཏུ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤྱེ་འགག་བྱས་པས་
 ཕྱིས་མེ་ཏོག་དེ་མེད་ཀྱང་ཉིལ་ལ་མེ་ཏོག་གི་ཕྱི་རྗེས་སུ་འཇུག་པ་བཞིན་ལོ། །དེ་སྐད་ཏུ་ཡང་། དེ་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་ནམས་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་ནམས་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ན་
 མ་བ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་རྒྱུན་བྱེད་དེ། མཐོང་བའི་ཆོས་ལ་ས་བོན་ཡོངས་སུ་གསོ་བ་དང་། ཆེ་ཕྱི་མ་ལ་དེ་མཐོང་པར་འབྲུབ་པར་བྱ་བའི་བྱིར་ས་བོན་ཡོངས་སུ་འཛོན་བ་
 འཛོག་པའི་སྟོན་མོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་མཐོང་བའི་ཆོས་ལ་ས་བོན་ཡོངས་སུ་རྒྱས་ན་ཇི་ལྟར་ལྟར་ཀུན་གཞི་ནམས་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་དགོ་བ་དང་མི་དགོ་བ་དང་
 ། ལུང་ཏུ་ས་བསྟན་པ་འབྱུང་བ་དེ་ལྟ་དེ་ལྟར་རང་གི་རྟེན་ལ་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བ་དང་འགག་པས་སྟོན་བར་བྱེད་དོ། །ཞེས་སོ།

later, once it has grown and faded, although there is no flower, the scent of the flower remains suffused within the seed.¹³⁶

As it is also stated: The consciousness that engages in objects creates a condition for the foundation consciousness in two ways: (1) For things that will be seen [in this life], it thoroughly revives the seeds; and (2) in order to be able to actualize them in a future life, it thoroughly maintains the seeds. Therefore, if the seeds for things that will be seen [in this life] expand fully, then just as much as virtue, non-virtue, and what is morally unspecified spring up in dependence upon the foundation consciousness, then precisely so much will they in turn infuse onto their own basis, insofar as they emerge and cease at the very same time.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ My reading of Tsongkhapa's terse grammar in the last two sentences differs from Sparham's (cf. Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 66). I have based my understanding on the expanded language – which Tsongkhapa echoes in abbreviated form – found in the following passage from Asaṅga's *Summary of the Greater Way*. As Sparham points out (ibid., 82n2-3) this text appears to be Tsongkhapa's main source here. See Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theg pa chen po bsdus pa*, Toh. 4048, sde dge bstan 'gyur, sems tsam, vol. *ri*, 6a3-6, italics added:

Suppose you ask: “When you say ‘tendency,’ what is meant by this expression?” *It is the expression of whatever it is that arises together with a corresponding thing, and becomes the very reason for that thing to arise [later] in dependence upon the fact of its having ended [previously].* For example, in the case of sesame seeds, the sesame seeds infused by their flower arise at the same time as the flower, and though [the flower has] ended, the *seeds emerge as the very reason for the flower's scent to arise elsewhere*. Or, the tendencies of desire and the rest, which correspond to behaving in the ways of desire and rest, arise together with desire and the rest, and though [the behavior has] ended, they emerge as the very reason for that state of mind. Or else, the tendencies for listening much, which correspond to all kinds of listening much, arise just as one turns one's attention towards listening. Then, though [the listening has] ended, they emerge as the very reason for its expression in the mind. Just as one who is thoroughly imbued with those tendencies is then called a “dharma-holder,” you should view the foundation consciousness as something that works in a similar way.

ཁག་ཆགས་ཞེས་བརྗོད་པ་འདིའི་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་བ་ནི་ཅི་ཞེ་ན། ཆོས་དེ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བ་དང་། འགག་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་དེ་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཉིད་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་བ་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་ནི་ལ་དག་ལ་མེ་ཉིག་གིས་བསྐྱོས་པ་ནི་ལ་དང་མེ་ཉིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་ཞིང་འགགས་ཀྱང་ནི་ལ་རྣམས་དེའི་དྲི་གཞན་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཉིད་འབྱུང་བ་དང་། འདོད་ཆགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་འདོད་ཆགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་འདོད་ཆགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་ཞིང་འགགས་ཀྱང་སེམས་ནི་དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཉིད་འབྱུང་བ་དང་། མང་དུ་སྤོས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་མང་དུ་སྤོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱང་སྤོས་པ་དེ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་ཞིང་འགགས་ཀྱང་སེམས་ནི་དེ་བརྗོད་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཉིད་འབྱུང་སྟེ། བག་ཆགས་དེས་ཡོངས་སུ་ཟེན་པར་ཆོས་འདྲིན་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལྟར་གཞི་རྒྱས་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ཡང་རྒྱལ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་བལྟ་བར་བྱའོ།

¹³⁷ This passage might seem to be Tsongkhapa's explanation of Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theg bsdus*, Toh. 4048, 6a7-6b2. Though the point is similar, I would hesitate to say it is close enough to be called a paraphrase. Cf. Sparham (1993, 82n3). I would not rule out the possibility of another unidentified reference here, which I have been unable to locate, even after digital search of distinctive phrases within the entire Tengyur. See Asaṅga's pertinent sentence, with its unique import (*theg bsdus*, Toh. 4048, 6b2), my emphasis:

Exactly insofar as the foundation consciousness is the cause for all mentally afflicted phenomena, just so all mentally afflicted phenomena are set forth as the very causal condition for the foundation consciousness itself, *because no other causal condition can be identified*.

དེ་ལྟར་གྱུན་གཞི་རྒྱས་པར་ཤེས་པ་གྱུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས། རྒྱ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ལྟར་གྱུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱང་གྱུན་གཞི་རྒྱས་པར་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱའི་རྒྱུ་ཉིད་དུ་རྒྱས་པར་གཞག་སྟེ། རྒྱའི་རྒྱུ་གཞན་མི་དཔག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

The key analogy here is that of the sesame seed and the sesame flower. It was thought that the scent of the oil stored in the sesame seed had been infused into it during the time that the seed was forming in the presence of the blooming flower, and that this was the source for the scent of the next generation of flowers that would bloom in the plant later grown from that same seed.¹³⁸ Even though this is not accurate according to botanical science, the power of the analogy remains: The mental seed is said to be infused by the fragrant tendency within the “subconscious” foundation consciousness, like a seed emerging from deep within a fading flower, even as the primary consciousness that is observing its proper objects is coming to an end. Both seed and consciousness must exist, even briefly, at the same time, so that the “content” or “information” registered in the consciousness can be transferred to the seed. The seed itself, infused with such fragrance, would then have the capacity to pass on the fragrance to whatever it is that grows from the seed later on.

We might well use a digital analogy now, as the imprint upon the seed would correspond to the configuration of microscopic circuits in which the data of a visual or auditory “file” has been stored, albeit in a different medium from its original expression in waves of light or sound. Once “saved,” insofar as the seed is no longer actively linked with a primary consciousness, it would become an unlinked trace, though this latter terminology appears more germane to Vasubandhu’s texts than those of Asaṅga.¹³⁹ For many technical reasons, much as we saw with the foundation consciousness itself in Chapter One, the seed must itself be deemed ethically neutral, but it can still carry the “data” of the tendency that will, when ripened, appear as the tangible realities that constitute the respective results of virtue, non-virtue, or ethically neutral actions, as these were pictorially recorded within the seed. Thus the unlinked trace is marked, or one might say “etched,” with its ethical charge and the likeness of experiential content. Just as

¹³⁸ See Griffiths’ explanation of the corresponding passage from Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānaśāstra* (quoted in my note 123 above), in Paul J. Griffiths, 1986, *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem* (La Salle, IL: Open Court), 85.

¹³⁹ See Tsongkhapa, *kun gzhi’i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 22a1-3 (713), where he references Yaśomitra’s commentary to Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa* for the following point (to be explained later in this chapter):

“A ‘seed,’ a ‘potential,’ and a ‘tendency,’ all have the same referent. A seed exists nominally, but it does not exist substantially.” Since this [explanation] appears, the honorable brothers [Asaṅga and Vasubandhu] have the same intention. Therefore, this infused seed is a “hold” [*thob pa*, Skt. *prāpti*] that is an unlinked trace, belonging to the heap of traces/factors. This is because it is something produced, but it is neither physical form nor a mental factor.

ས་ཐོན་དང་རྒྱས་པ་དང་བག་ཆགས་ཞེས་བྱ་ནི་དོན་གཅིག་གོ། ས་ཐོན་ནི་བརྟགས་པའི་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་གྱི་རྒྱས་པ་ཡོད་པ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཞེས་འབྲུང་བས་སྐྱེ་མཆེད་དགོངས་པ་གཅིག་གོ། རྟེན་ན་བསྐྱོས་པའི་ས་ཐོན་འདི་ནི། འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་སྤང་བོའི་ཕྱོགས་གཅིག་ལྡན་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཐོབ་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འདུས་བྱས་ཡིན་ལ་གཟུགས་སེམས་བྱུང་གང་ཡང་མིན་པའི་བྱིང་དང་།

Later Tsongkhapa adds (22b4 [714]): “This master [Vasubandhu], the honorable brother, divided functioning things into those that are substantial and those that are nominal. Thus he accepted that unlinked traces are produced things, but he did not want to say that they are substantial.”

སྐྱོབ་དཔོན་འདི་སྐྱེ་མཆེད་དངོས་པོ་ལ་རྒྱས་བརྟགས་གཉིས་སུ་འབྱེད་དེ། ལྡན་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་འདུས་བྱས་སུ་བཞེད་ལ་རྒྱས་སུ་མི་བཞེད་པའི་བྱིང་རོ།།

one cannot see the colors of a photograph, or hear the notes of music, or detect the complex meanings of a book within the semiconductor circuits of the hard disk on which they are saved, nonetheless their content can be stored there in a form that can be accurately reproduced and later accessed, in all its minute details.

How and what one is perceiving in the present moment, then, is said to act as a governing condition (or what I have also termed an environmental condition, equivalent to the wide-ranging acting cause) for the revival, nourishment, or awakening (*gso ba* or *sad pa*) of dormant tendencies, creating the right circumstances for them to come to fruition. But the ripening of those seeds into the experiential triads of object, faculty, and consciousness, in turn allows the new moments of engaging consciousness to become causal conditions (e.g. equal-share causes, ripening causes, and so on)¹⁴⁰ for the creation of new seeds to carry the tendencies. Then, the seeds themselves must also act as causal conditions for their own continuation through time, until they give their proper result.¹⁴¹ There is a further detail in Asaṅga's *Summary of the Greater Way*, not quoted by Tsongkhapa, that I believe pertinent to our understanding of this system as a proposed explanation for the very nature of causality itself. Asaṅga offers a definition for the term *vāśana* (*bag chags*):¹⁴²

Suppose you ask: “When you say ‘tendency,’ what is meant by this expression?” It is the expression for whatever it is *that arises together with a corresponding thing*, and becomes *the very reason for that thing to arise [later]* in dependence upon the fact of its having ended [previously].

According to this explanation, then, the key to causation itself is nothing but a mutual feedback effect between consciousness and the mental images imprinted by experience – which experience was in turn spun forth by previous mental imprints burgeoning into their full display on the screen of a newly created consciousness, moment by moment. It is an explanation of the cycle at a granular level. The possibility for freedom and for

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter One, Figure One, above.

¹⁴¹ In the course of a different argument, Tsongkhapa later quotes Vasubandhu's *Condensed Explanation of the Secret Meaning* (*Vivṛta-guhyārtha-piṇḍa-vyākhyā*, *don gsang ba rnam par phye ba bsdus te bshad pa*, Toh. 4052, sde dge, sems tsam, vol. *ri*, 332a6-7) on this point. See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 22b1-2 (714):

As it says in the *Secret Meaning*: “Since the earlier instance of the seed engages in a stream, it is the causal condition only for a later instance of the seed at a different time. It is not its governing cause, because it is a cause which actualizes something of equal share. It is also not a matching, immediately-preceding condition, because it is not something with the nature of emerging from the mind [i.e., it is not a mental function]. Nor is it a focal condition, because a seed is not something that can be focused upon.”
 དོན་གསལ་དུ་སྟོན་པའི་རྒྱུ་འབྲུག་པས་སྟོན་ཕྱི་མའི་དུས་ཐ་དང་པ་ཁོ་ནའི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུན་ཡིན་ནོ།། བདག་པོའི་རྒྱུན་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་སྐལ་བ་མཉམ་པ་མངོན་པར་འ
 གུབ་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།། མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།། དམིགས་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཡང་མ་
 ཡིན་ཏེ་སྟོན་པ་དམིགས་པ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེས་པ་དང་།

¹⁴² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānaśāṃgraha*, *theg bsdus*, Toh. 4048, 6a3, my emphasis. See Chapter Two, note 136, above for full text.

being able to deliberately re-direct the pattern of karmic cycles through practice, of course, is never obviated, because of the sheer complexity of the array of individual seeds and awarenesses unfolding at any given moment. Thus the sequences or interactions of ripening seeds are never absolutely locked in, as a computer program might be; rather, because seeds are ripening due to the environmental conditions of what consciousness is aware *of* at any given time or place, the possibilities of how and in what combination seeds might ripen are potentially infinite.

Tsongkhapa goes on to explain five qualities that the infusion substrate – namely the seeds themselves – must have in order to serve the function designated by their definition. While we will not treat these in full detail here, they will be significant later, in Chapter Six, when we watch how Tsongkhapa modifies the Mind-Only view of seeds resting in the foundation consciousness, explaining the propagation of karma without positing a foundation consciousness at all. This re-description of the storage mechanism for seeds will in turn be crucial for understanding the possibilities for tantric purification and reconception of an “I” in a Middle Way context. Suffice to say, the five qualities of a candidate for an infusion substrate are that it must be:¹⁴³

- (1) “stable” – i.e., there must be a substrate akin to a physical seed, like sesame, which, unlike sound or lightening, can continue in an unbroken stream;
- (2) “morally neutral” – i.e., the infusion substrate cannot have its own strong “scent” (like that of garlic or sandalwood) but must itself have a mild or neutral fragrance (like a sesame seed) that can in turn receive and be infused with the clear pictures of virtuous and non-virtuous deeds, and of neutral actions/impressions as well;
- (3) “able to be infused” – i.e., specifically, the substrate must itself be a changing thing, in order to be able to receive and propagate information;
- (4) “related to the infuser” – i.e., as we have seen, it must be something which begins and ends in unison with the consciousness that is doing the infusing, otherwise the information could never be passed from one to the other (most importantly, this means that the seeds must be formed within the same mental stream as that of the being who is perceiving); and
- (5) must “serve exclusively as a basis.” Technically, this means that the infusion substrate cannot include any of the always-going mental functions that accompany the foundation consciousness, because these mental functions depend on the primary mind of the foundation consciousness, and would not be suitable to carry the imprints.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 14b4-5 (698) and the commentary that follows:

བསྐྱོད་གཞི་ནི། །བསྐྱེད་པའི་ལུང་མ་བསྐྱེད་བསྐྱོད་བྱ་བ། །སྐྱོད་པར་བྱེད་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་དང་། །མཐའ་གཅིག་ཉེན་དུ་གྱུར་བ་སྟེ། །ཁྱེད་པར་ལྷ་དང་ལྷན་པའོ།

¹⁴⁴ An interesting conundrum arises here, as to whether these always-going mental activities (i.e., contact, feeling, discrimination, mental movement, and attention) in turn infuse their *own* imprints into the

Types of Seeds and Tendencies

With a clearer picture of just what is meant by a seed, here, we may go on to sketch four sets of classifications discussed by Tsongkhapa, following Asaṅga. Then, with a broad picture of just how diverse are the types of seeds and tendencies encompassed by this system, we will focus in upon some key points regarding the first type of tendency, which will shed light on the arguments of this entire chapter. Tsongkhapa first enumerates the “six types of seeds,” which turn out to be three different ways of looking at the first two:¹⁴⁵

1. **Outer**: like seeds of barley or the stem of an *utpala* lotus.
2. **Inner**: namely, the “seed” part of the foundation consciousness itself.
- 3./4. The **Two Indistinct** (i.e., morally unspecified): According to different sources, these are explained to be the pair of **outer** and **inner** seeds insofar as, when analyzed, they cannot be specified as being definitively either something which belongs to the realm of mentally afflicted things or that of totally pure things, or else to either virtue or non-virtue. Thus both outer and inner seeds are “indistinct,” i.e., ethically neutral, as long as they are in the seed form.

Alternatively, the “two” seem to refer to the foundation consciousness as both **cause** and **result**:

- (a) insofar as its seeds act as a cause for mentally afflicted things and insofar as mentally afflicted things spring up as results from that foundation consciousness, and
- (b) insofar as the seeds for totally pure existence reside there, too, and will eventually bring about their results, yet remain “indistinct” insofar as their results are not yet manifest.

5. **Deceptive**: These are the **outer** seeds, insofar as they are only an object of conventional knowledge.

6. **Ultimate**: These are the **inner** seeds, because if one analyzes reality carefully one must accept that they exist. (Note that in *this* school, this means these are the only seeds with

foundation consciousness. This would create a contradiction, because if they could infuse, then the eighth consciousness would be infusing into itself (problematic), but if they did not infuse, then they would turn out to have no cause – since it is axiomatic here that if a state of consciousness arises it must find its cause in a prior seed of a similar type. Tsongkhapa concludes that it is preferable to say that these extremely indistinct, ethically neutral mental activities do not infuse, but still find their cause in the fact that the foundation consciousness *as a whole* has been catapulted into a lifetime through ripening and will engage continuously until death. (See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 15a6-15b3 [699-700].) This problem, of course, will disappear in the Middle Way system where there is no separate foundation consciousness at all and the entire process of seed-planting takes place through the activities of mental consciousness in relation to the basis of designation for a merely labeled, mere “I.” See Chapter Six, “A Mere Basis for All the Seeds.”

¹⁴⁵ See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 15b4-5 (700), and the subsequent commentary:

ཕྱི་དང་ནང་དང་མི་གསལ་བ། །གཉིས་དང་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཉིད་དང་ནི། །དམ་པའི་རྟོན་ཏེ་དེ་དག་ཀུན། །ས་ཐོན་རྣམས་ས་བྱུག་ཏུ་འདོད།

functional efficacy, because in the Mind-Only system, only things that exist ultimately are said to function. The outer seeds are deceptive in that they would appear to give rise to their own results, but again, if one understood the logic of this school, one would eventually be expected to discover that “outer” forms and the perception of those forms are empty of coming from separate seeds. Then one would “have to accept” – *khas len dgos pa'i phyir*¹⁴⁶ – that the inner seeds are the only “real” ones that bring about their results. That is, the inner seeds are the only ones with actual causal efficacy. Outer things only appear to grow from seeds, because the foundation consciousness ripened into such an appearance of growing. This is a unique point of the Mind-Only system, but remains significant when we return to Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way interpretation.)

These are followed by three types of tendencies:¹⁴⁷

1. **Tendencies for creating expressions** – This is the basic capacity for conceptual articulation, for making discrete labels about things, at both a linguistic and pre-linguistic level (to be discussed in detail below).
2. **The tendency for seeing a self** – This is the ongoing tendency that causes one to perceive appearances as “self” and “other,” which is planted by the afflictive mind consciousness, along with its associated mental factors. It is also known as “the tendency for looking upon the destructible collection,” because it is the seed for the destructible view.¹⁴⁸
3. **Tendencies for the link of existence** – “These are the seeds that appear as dying, moving on, and being born into the existence of a realm of happiness or a realm of suffering, planted by the consciousness that engaged in virtue or non-virtue, respectively. . . . This is also called the ripened tendency, because when it ripens completely it turns into the essence of what is ripened.”¹⁴⁹

Then there are two sets with four types of seeds each. This is the first set:¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 16b1 (702).

¹⁴⁷ See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 16b3-4 (702), and subsequent commentary:

གཞན་ཡང་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་། །སྒྲིབ་པའི་ཡན་ལག་བཅས་ཀྱི་ཆགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་པ་།

¹⁴⁸ This is a close paraphrase of *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 17b1-2 (704):

ཉོན་ལྡན་མཚུངས་ལྟར་དང་བཅས་པས་བཞག་པ་བཤད་དང་གཞན་དུ་སྒྲིབ་བའི་རྣམ་རིག་འབྱུང་བའི་ས་བོན་ཏེ། ་་་ །འདི་ལ་འཛིན་ཆོག་པ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་། །ཞེས་གྲུ་བའི་འཛིན་ཆོག་པ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་།

¹⁴⁹ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 17b2-4 (704). See Appendix Eight (704-705) for Tsongkhapa’s more extensive discussion regarding of this type of tendency.

འབྱུག་ལེས་དགོ་བཅས་མི་དགོ་བས་བཞག་པ་སྒྲིབ་པ་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་། །འཛིན་ཆོག་པ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་། ་་་ །འདི་ལ་རྣམ་སྒྲིབ་ཀྱི་བཅས་པ་ལྟར་། །ཞེས་གྲུ་བའི་འཛིན་ཆོག་པ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་།

¹⁵⁰ See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 18b1-2 and 18b6ff. (706):

ཐུན་མོང་ཐུན་མོང་པ་ལྟར་དང་། །ཆོར་དང་བཅས་དང་ཆོར་མེད་དང་། །ས་བོན་རྣམས་བཞི་གནས་དང་ལེན། །འཛིན་ཆོག་པ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་། །མ་ཞེན་པ་དང་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་།

1. **Seeds for what is shared** – “These are the seeds that actualize the world of an environmental vessel atop a foundation consciousness.”¹⁵¹
2. **Seeds for what is unique** – These are the seeds that bring about the world of the inhabitants or “vital essence” of such a vessel.
3. **Seeds for what has feeling** – These are the unique seeds that give rise to the individual sensory fields of the living beings who inhabit a shared vessel.
4. **Seeds for what lacks feeling** – These are the shared seeds that give rise to the non-sentient elements of a physical world that is the shared vessel.

The second set is as follows:¹⁵²

1. **Seeds for what brings on bad situations** – These are the seeds for all the primary afflictions such as attachment and hostility, and for all the secondary afflictions such as anger, resentment, and so on.
2. **Seeds for what is extremely well-trained** – These are the seeds for all the virtues one can do within the (suffering) world.¹⁵³
3. **Seeds for activities that will finish** – These are the “seeds of virtue and non-virtue that have finished ripening into the ripened essence of realms of happiness or misery; because, like cooked food, they will not come back and ripen again.”¹⁵⁴ (One might say these are like seeds for annual plants that will bloom once and then die.)
4. **Seeds for activities that never finish** – These are the seeds of the tendencies for creating expressions (*mngon par brjod pa'i bag chags kyi sa bon*, Skt. *abhilāpana-bīja-vāsana*), which have “arisen from time without beginning: Merely because one is born, and for no other reason, every living being engages in this continuum of myriad elaborations about holding onto things and about the things beheld.”¹⁵⁵ (One might say

¹⁵¹ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 18b2 (706): ཀུན་གཞིའི་རྟེན་གྱི་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཀྱི་འགྲུབ་པའི་ས་བོན་ནོ།

¹⁵² See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 19a1-19b2 (707-708).

¹⁵³ This is the same term (*shin tu sbyangs pa*, Skt. *praśrabdhi*) as is used for the “pliancy” or “extreme agility” of body and mind that is said to take place when approaching the platform of meditation that I will render as “stillness” (*zhi gnas*, Skt. *śamatha*). Perhaps the implications are broader here, but the connection between seeds for the capacity to do virtue, and the extremely stable and serviceable state of body and mind reached at such levels of meditation, is not difficult to imagine. In both contexts, the “extreme training” (*shin sbyangs*) is juxtaposed as the opposite of, or as having overcome, “what brings on bad situations” (*gnas ngan len*, Skt. *dauṣṭhulya*).

¹⁵⁴ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 19a2 (707).

དགོ་མི་དགོ་མི་ས་བོན་བདེ་འགོ་དང་དན་འགོ་འཛིན་སྒྲིན་གྱི་འོ་མོ་རྣམས་ལ་སྒྲིན་ཟེན་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་དེ་ནི་གཡོས་སུ་བྱས་པའི་ཁ་ཟས་དང་འདྲ་བར་སྒྲར་ཡང་རྣམས་ལ་སྒྲིན་པར་མི་འགྲུར་པའི་བྱེད་རྟེན་།

¹⁵⁵ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 19a3 (707).

མངོན་བརྗོད་ཀྱི་བག་ཆགས་ཏེ་དེ་ནི་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་འབྱུང་བའི་བྱེད་རྟེན་། སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་སྤྱི་ཙམ་ནས་ཆེད་དུ་མ་བཟོས་པར་གཟུང་བ་དང་འཛིན་པའི་སྣོད་ས་བ་དུ་མ་རྒྱུད་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་བྱེད་རྟེན་།

these are like bulbs for perennial plants that will come back again and again as long as the conducive conditions are present.)

Now what these last two categories reveal, in particular, is the notion that not all inner seeds are created through particular motivated actions that could properly be called karmic deeds. Nor do all seeds give rise to finite, circumscribed results that could be traced to a particular action. Rather, there are several categories of seeds that clearly refer to *ongoing tendencies* that are said to have existed from time without beginning, and are continually recharged through being expressed and experienced, recorded and never cancelled, through eon after eon of lifetimes. The seeds for the mental afflictions (“what bring on bad situations”), would be one example of such ongoing, unfinished tendencies, although the negative actions motivated by such mental afflictions would in turn plant *inner, ultimate, unique* (and perhaps also *shared*) seeds that will ripen into an individual body and sensory experiences (insofar as they are seeds *for what has feeling*) and also an environment (insofar as they are seeds *for what lacks feeling*). Altogether, it seems these would constitute *tendencies for the link of existence*, that ripen into *activities that will finish*. But the *tendency for seeing a self* would be a case of a seed that will never finish giving rise to its result, that is, as long as it is not turned back through reason and meditative realization. The only tendency explicitly associated with this last category of open-ended seeds, however, is the *tendency for creating expressions*. It is this pivotal type of tendency that deserves further attention, as it provides both the lynchpin for understanding the Mind-Only system, and will offer a doorway for understanding how its ubiquitous function might translate into Middle Way terms within Tsongkhapa’s mature system.¹⁵⁶

As for the first type of tendency: It arises in the aspect of the seeds resting on the foundation consciousness, *as the name and defining characteristics of every existing thing, from form all the way up to omniscience*. In short, *it is the causal condition for the mental consciousness that applies the wide variety of*

¹⁵⁶ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 16b6-17a6 (702-703), emphasis mine.

དེ་ལ་བག་ཆགས་དང་པོ་ནི། ཀུན་གཞིའི་སྒྲིབ་གི་ས་བོན་གཞུགས་ནས་རྣམས་མཁྱེན་གྱི་བར་གྱི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་མིང་དང་མཚན་མའི་རྣམས་པར་འབྱུང་ཞིང་མདོར་ན་
 ར་སྣང་སྣང་ཆོག་པ་འདོགས་པའི་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུ་ནོ། །འདི་ལ་སྒྲོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཞེས་ཀྱང་ཟེར་དེ། ཡིད་ཤེས་ལུས་སྣང་ཆོག་པ་ལ་འཕྲོ་བའི་ས་བོན་ཡིན་པ་
 འི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །མདོར་བཅོམ་དེ་གྱི་བག་ཆགས་ཞེས་ཀྱང་ཟེར་དེ་མིག་མཉམ་ཅེས་དང་། གཞུགས་གཞུགས་ཞེས་པའི་བརྗོད་པའི་རྣམས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ཡིན་
 པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཐེག་ཆེན་བསྟུན་པར། དེ་ལ་ལུས་དང་ལུས་ཅན་དང་ཐ་བ་བོའི་རྣམས་པར་རིག་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དང་། དེས་ཉེ་བར་དབྱེད་པར་བྱ་བའི་རྣམས་པར་
 རིག་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དང་། དེ་ལ་ཉེ་བར་སྒྲིབ་པའི་རྣམས་པར་རིག་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དང་། དུས་དང་གངས་དང་ལུས་དང་ཐ་སྣང་གྱི་རྣམས་པར་རིག་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་མདོར་
 ན་བར་བརྗོད་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ལས་འབྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་མཇེ་ལྟར་བར་ཞེ་ན། ཉེས་པ་མེད་དེ་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ཞེས་སྣང་བརྗོད་པ་ནི་
 ་གཙོ་བོའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ལ། འདིར་བསྟན་པ་ནི། གཞན་དབང་དེ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ས་བོན་ཅན་ཡང་དག་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ཀུན་ཏུ་རྟོག་པས་བསྟུན་པའི་རྣམས་པ་རིག་པ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་
 ་ལ་ཡང་ལུས་ཞེས་པ་ནས་ཐ་སྣང་པའི་བར་གྱི་རྣམས་པར་རིག་པ་ནི་བག་ཆགས་གསུམ་དུ་བྱེད་པ་ན་མདོར་བཅོམ་དེ་གྱི་བག་ཆགས་ལས་འབྱུང་སྟེ། གཞན་གཉིས་ལས་
 མི་འབྱུང་ལ་འདི་དག་ཀྱང་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མདོར་བར་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཆོས་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །སྣམ་དུ་བསམས་སོ། །དེས་ན་མདོར་བཅོམ་དེ་གྱི་བྱ་བའི་དབང་
 དུ་བྱས་ན། དེའི་བག་ཆགས་དེ་འཛོགས་པ་ཡང་ཡིད་ཤེས་འཁོར་བཅས་ཁོ་ནས་འཛོགས་ལ། བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡང་ཐ་སྣང་འདོགས་པའི་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཉིད་བསྐྱེད་དོ།

conventional labels. This is also known as “the tendency for elaboration,” because it is the seed for a mental consciousness that flies out to all sorts of various objects. This “tendency for creating expressions” is also deemed such because it is the seed for the mental consciousness that takes on the aspect of expressing that an eye is an “eye” and form is “form.” Along these lines, the *Summary of the Greater Way* states:¹⁵⁷

In this regard, all those cognitions of a body, one who has a body, and one who eats, and all those cognitions of that which is to be closely examined, and all those cognitions of the act of partaking, and all those cognitions of time and enumeration and objective fields and conventional terminology, these all arise from the seeds of the tendencies for creating expressions.

If you ask how this is to be interpreted, this is no problem. You should think about it as follows: What was expressed just above as the “seed for mental consciousness” was covering its primary sense. The teaching here is that those dependent things [such as those listed in the quotation] “are the cognitions that are subsumed by the total conceptualizations that are *not* the real things that possess the seeds of the foundation consciousness.”¹⁵⁸ In that regard, all those cognitions – from what is called “body” up to the cognitions of “conventional terminology” – arise from the tendencies for creating expressions (among the three types of tendencies). This is because they do not arise from the other two [i.e. the tendency for seeing a self, or the tendency for the link of existence], and because all these are indeed things to be expressed by the mental consciousness. Therefore, when considered in terms of things *to be* expressed, the tendencies for those things are presented as those [expressions], and they are posited only in terms of mental consciousness and its circle [of mental factors]. Furthermore, their production is a creation of the conventionally labeling mental consciousness itself.

That is, the tendencies for creating expressions not only serve as the direct cause for the moments of mental consciousness that label things, but these tendencies create the very cognitions (*rnam par rig pa*, Skt. *viññapti*) that comprehend the real, inexpressible, dependent things as “body,” “eater,” “enjoyment,” “time,” and so on, including all the conceptual categories regarding time and space, matter and identity through which we experience a world. In one sense, the result of the tendencies for creating expressions is not the constructs themselves: As unchanging things, these are static “ideas,” uncaused, existing without reference to time.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, insofar as these *tendencies* have

¹⁵⁷ See Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theg bsdus*, Toh. 4048, 13a5-7.

¹⁵⁸ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theg bsdus*, Toh. 4048, 13a3-4.

¹⁵⁹ See the discussion of “abstractions” in the context of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology in Chapter Five, “The Beheld Aspect Dawns . . .” and in Appendix Ten. Though the textual connotations of “the essential nature of what is constructed” (*kun btags pa’i ngo bo nyid*, Skt. *parikalpita-svabhāva*) in the context of the Mind-Only literature is quite distinct from that of “what is marked by abstracted characteristics” (*spyi mtshan*,

existed in a continuum from time without beginning, they might be thought to “carry” the content of the timeless constructs, such as the mental image of that which can be called, within a certain linguistic structure, “blue.” In the passage Tsongkhapa quotes from Asaṅga, it seems the direct causal result of the tendencies for creating expressions is the act of *thinking* the ideas, not the images of the “ideas” themselves, and this thinking, being an activity of mental consciousness, is thus something *caused* by those tendencies and is therefore in itself a “dependent thing.”¹⁶⁰

Nonetheless, all these functioning things are “subsumed” by the imagined constructs, within whose conceptual content things seem to be frozen in a certain way. But it appears that the constructs themselves are not the states of mind, nor any of the other dependent things that ripen from the foundation consciousness. According to Tsongkhapa’s presentation of the Mind-Only system, then, the great mistake that spins the cycle (in turn driven by the beginningless tendency for seeing a “self”) is that a mistaken state of mind perceives the constructs and thinks that the relationship between the (imagined) constructs and the (real) dependent things is a *relationship* that exists with its own definitive characteristics, whereas in fact it does not and never did.¹⁶¹ It would be

Skt. *sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*) in the epistemological literature, it still appears to me that the *content* of constructed or imagined things would have to dawn before the mind in the aspect of an abstraction. The precise connection between these ideas within the schools of Asaṅga and Dharmakīrti, in particular, remains a question for further inquiry on my part.

¹⁶⁰ Among the three natures of the Mind-Only system. Note that this may be the proper Yogācāra context in which to understand Tsongkhapa’s crucial statement (commenting on Dharmakīrti) to be cited in Chapter Five, note 179, below: “*The proximate cause for an appearance to a conceptual state of mind to dawn in the way that it does is the tendency.*” See Appendix Ten (673), for the immediate epistemological context, and Chapter Five, “By the Power of a Tendency” for my interpretation of statements such as this in light of Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way and Vajrayāna thought.

¹⁶¹ See for example, Tsongkhapa, *The Essence of Eloquence, drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 6a6 (491): “If you knew how to purify obstacles by meditating on the fact that dependent things are empty of constructs. . .” གཞན་དབང་ཀུན་བརྟགས་ཀྱིས་སྤོང་བ་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་བསྐྱོམས་པས་སྤྱི་བ་དག་བར་འགྱུར་བར་ཤེས་པ་ན།

Or, *ibid.*, 11a3-4 (501), my emphasis: “As for the way in which [dependent things] are empty, it is not the way you refute the existence of some other thing, as in the case where some location on the ground is empty of having a pot there; rather, like the way that a person lacks substantial existence, dependent things are empty of being established *according to* the essence of the constructs [made about them.]”

།སྤོང་ལུགས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་བྱུང་ཅིང་། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་གཞན་གཉིས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་དང་གཞན་དབང་ལ་ཀུན་བརྟགས་ཀྱི་རོ་བོར་བྱུང་བས་སྤོང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ།

Or, see *ibid.*, 14b4-5 (508): “The intent [of the *Sūtra on the True Intent*] is to teach its proper disciples that (1) constructs do not exist through their own defining characteristics, (2) that the other two natures are established through their own defining characteristics, and (3) that the final meaning of that which is focused upon by the Path [of Seeing] is the emptiness in which dependent things are empty of constructs.”

་་་ ཀུན་བརྟགས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་བྱུང་ཅིང་། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་གཞན་གཉིས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་དང་གཞན་དབང་ལ་ཀུན་བརྟགས་ཀྱིས་སྤོང་བའི་སྤོང་ཉིད་ལས་ཀྱི་དམིགས་པའི་དོན་དམ་མཐར་ཐུག་ཏུ་དེའི་གདུལ་བྱ་ལ་བསྟན་པར་བཞེད་ནས་ཡིན་ནོ།

Finally, see *ibid.*, 21a6-21b1 (522-523): “Therefore, constructs such as those made about the two kinds of “self” cannot possibly apply to knowable things, but this does not mean that all constructs are impossibilities; thus while it is refuted that [constructs] could exist substantially or ultimately, they are presented as existing nominally or conventionally.”

no problem to generate “expressions,” if we understood that these expressions can never actually encompass the inexpressible object that is substantially inseparable from consciousness itself. But insofar as we think that the constructed expressions apply to the dependent things definitively, or that the objects perceived and the faculties and consciousnesses that perceive them came from different ripening causes,¹⁶² this would be the nature of ignorance in this school. That is, it is the ignorance that both (1) fails to understand the way in which karma ripens into appearances at the granular and universal level, and (2) mistakes what are merely expressions for a supposed “self.”

Thus the tendencies for creating expressions are said to be the causal conditions for instances of mental consciousness, and the way that the mental consciousness labels the *inexpressible* identities (*brjod du med pa'i bdag nyid*)¹⁶³ of the naked dependent things, which were in turn created directly by the ripening of “tendencies for the link of existence,” or else by the individual ethically-charged “seeds for finite experiences,” will in turn catalyze the way in which living beings will act in response to that perceived and conceptualized world. But as we will see in Chapter Five, Tsongkhapa, in the context of commenting upon Dharmakīrti’s epistemological system, declares more than once that it is the inner tendencies which function as the direct cause *for the way in which abstracted mental images will dawn before a conceptual state of mind*.

ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་བདག་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཀུན་བརྟགས་ལྟ་བུ་ལེས་བྱ་ལ་མི་སྲིད་ཀྱང་དེ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ཀུན་བརྟགས་ཐམས་ཅད་མི་སྲིད་པ་མིན་བས་རྒྱས་སུ་ཡོད་པ་དང་དོན་དམ་པར་
ཡོད་པ་དགག་ལ་བརྟགས་ཡོད་དང་ཐ་སྟོན་དུ་ཡོད་པར་གཞག་གོ།

¹⁶² See, for example, *drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 29b6 (538): “[Dharmakīrti’s *Pramānavarttika*] states that the emptiness in which beholder and beheld are empty of being separate substances is the suchness of dependent things.”

་་་གཟུང་འཛིན་རྒྱས་གཞན་གྱིས་སྟོང་པའི་སྟོང་ཉིད་གཞན་དབང་གི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དུ་གསུངས་ཤིང་།

¹⁶³ For a complex use of this phrase in context, see *drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 23a1-5 (525), where Tsongkhapa cites Asaṅga’s *Compendium of Ascertainments* (*Nirṇayasamgraha*, *rnam par gyan la dbab pa bsdu ba, sde dge, sems tsam*, vol. *zi*, Toh. 4038, 32a2; cf. Hopkins, 1999, *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism*, 161 with backnote 404. The translation here is my own.)

Furthermore, as it states in the *Compendium [of Ascertainments]*:

Whatever it is that exists through the identity of being form and the rest – those functioning things that bear the name of form and the rest – which are the object focused upon by the consciousness that remains in the long-term habit of creating expressions: through this identity there is neither substantiality nor ultimacy.

In the same way, there is no essential nature of those things that bear the name of form and the rest; you should understand that whatever is totally constructed from them is something that exists nominally.

Whatever it is that exists through an *inexpressible identity* – those functioning things that bear the name of form and the rest – which are the object focused upon by the consciousness that bears the name of having completely cleared away the long-term habits of creating expressions: you should understand that these exist similarly both as something substantial and as something ultimate.

ཡང་བསྐྱབ་པ་ལས། མཛོན་པར་བརྗོད་པ་ལ་ཡོངས་སུ་གོམས་པའི་མིང་ལ་གནས་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་དམིགས་པ་གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་མིང་ཅན་གྱི་དངོས་པོ་
‘གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་གང་གིས་ཡོད་པ་དེ་ནི་བདག་ཉིད་དེས་རྒྱས་དང་དོན་དམ་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱང་ཡང་མེད་དོ། ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་བས་ན་གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་
མིང་ཅན་གྱི་ཆོས་དེ་དག་གི་དོ་མོ་ཉིད་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་དེས་ཀུན་བརྟགས་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་བརྟགས་པ་ལས་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པར་རིག་པར་བྱའོ། མཛོན་པ་
ར་བརྗོད་པ་ལ་ཡོངས་སུ་གོམས་པ་རྣམ་པར་བསལ་པའི་མིང་ཅན་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་དམིགས་པ་གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་མིང་ཅན་གྱི་དངོས་པོ་བརྗོད་དུ་མེད་
པའི་བདག་ཉིད་གང་གིས་ཡོད་པ་དེ་ནི། རྒྱས་དང་དོན་དམ་པ་གཉི་གར་ཡང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ཡོད་པར་རིག་པར་བྱའོ། ཁྱེད་ཀྱང་གསུངས་སོ།

It is easy to see how that point would stand within a Mind-Only interpretation of Dharmakīrti's epistemology. Within the context of Tsongkhapa's full-fledged interpretation of the Middle Way view of karma, however, I would argue that Tsongkhapa never denies that tendencies are the forces driving the way in which such abstracted mental images dawn. In Middle Way language, then, it is still the tendencies that would determine *how* one will interpret the raw data of nonconceptual perception, and it is such raw data, like the “parts” of the flowing liquid, that constitutes the basis of designation (*gdags gzhi*) for any conventional valid perception. This is simply another way of saying what Tsongkhapa expressed in his analysis of the “flowing river” example, namely that it is by the force of karma that each being perceives what he or she does, in relation to a shared basis of designation. It is through the doorway of this transitive logic, however – and the connection between Tsongkhapa's interpretation of epistemology, seed theory, and the Middle Way notion of dependent designation – that I propose we might come to understand what it means to say that mental abstractions, which are another way of talking about the array of “names and terms” by which the Middle Way says all things are established, are *not* merely “made up in your mind” in the sense of being random or having no basis in karmic continuity. Rather, I believe that within Tsongkhapa's view, it is karmic tendencies that cause a mind to label empty objects in the way that it does, even and especially from a Middle Way perspective.

For the Mind-Only school, if fabricated constructs had no foundation in the dependent things upon which they are pasted, then anything could indeed be called anything, and even the nominal validity of constructs, too, would be “discounted” (*skur 'debs*).¹⁶⁴ But from this Middle Way point of view, if the *arising to consciousness* of “names and terms” were not still deeply embedded in a traceable causal process, then indeed the accusation of having “discounted” cause and effect altogether would become a harsh and unsurmountable criticism of the Middle Way Consequence view. Perhaps, then, this is why the fact that Tsongkhapa's Consequence view emphasizes *unfindability* is so important.

If in a Middle Way context “not existing through defining characteristics” meant that things are merely “set forth through names and terms” *in the way this is understood*

¹⁶⁴ See Tsongkhapa's quotation from Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi* in *drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 17a4-5 (513):

“In the same way, if the mere functioning things (that pertain to the phenomena of form and the rest) were to exist, then it would be appropriate to apply the words of the labels “form,” etc., to them. But if one held that they did not exist, then to non-existent functioning things there would be no applying of labeling words. Yet if you held that there was no basis for labeling, the basis would be non-existent, and then so too would the labels go out of existence.”

།དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གཞུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དངོས་སོ་ཅན་ཡོད་ན་གཞུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཆོས་འདོགས་པའི་ཆེག་ཉེ་བར་གདགས་སུ་བྱང་གི། མེད་དུ་
ཟེན་ན་དངོས་སོ་མེད་པ་ལ་གདགས་པའི་ཆེག་གིས་ཉེ་བར་འདོགས་པ་མེད་དོ། །དེ་ལ་འདོགས་པའི་གཞི་མེད་དུ་ཟེན་ན་ནི་གཞི་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་བས་འདོགས་པ་
ཡང་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ་...

in the Mind-Only system when defining constructs,¹⁶⁵ then indeed it could seem that mere labeling *without* any connection to a substantial basis would become a completely arbitrary exercise, divorced from any meaningful sense of a causal process at all. Nihilism would loom large. But if “not existing through defining characteristics” is explained far more subtly as the fact that when you go to look for the thing that gets the name (i.e., the raw sensory data upon which the mental image is legitimately based), you will never *find* it as a subject of ultimate analysis, this means that as long as one remains at the level of ordinary perceptions, all the interactions of the causal process – specifically dependent origination as we see it described here in Asaṅga’s exposition of the Mahāyāna system at large – remain functionally valid and experientially congruent.

When, however, upon closer and closer examination, one finds that *all* relationships turn out to be mutually established, and impossible even to define apart from the conceptual designations by which the mind can delimit boundaries and differences, qualities and examples, generalities and particulars: the notion of anything existing inherently apart from such conceptual frameworks must dissolve. But this discovery is based on becoming certain that an ultimate substrate for one’s designations is not to be found; it *does not mean* that all the labels were utterly unfounded, for their own context, at their own time. Rather, because there were propensities, or tendencies, or energies prone to draw and fill in the colors of reality in a certain way – from time without beginning – the shape of the conceptual frameworks, though constantly being reworked and redrawn according to the variety of circumstances and interactions between sentient beings, *always had their causes in the tendencies*. But the tendencies in turn were nourished and revived by how one perceived and actively described reality to oneself in any given circumstance. Then the act of assenting to such perceptions, and believing them real, in turn deposits new instances of the tendencies. Thus, although Tsongkhapa will not use the distinctively Mind-Only term of “tendencies for creating expressions” in the course of his Middle Way explanations, I feel confident to posit that the *function* of the tendencies that he does say are the cause for the arising of certain mental images in response to an encounter with a particular basis, must be much the same as is the function of the tendencies for creating expressions within the Mind-Only context. Yet if definitively existing dependent things are in the end found to be unfindable as a real basis for the construction of expressions, then the role of such tendencies for labeling in a certain way must take on an *even more* all-encompassing status within a Middle Way explanation of karma, not less.

In fact, in Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way context, one might intuit that there is no other way for karmic imprints to come to fruition and be experienced – *as* this feeling rather than that, *as* this perceived quality rather than that one – except through the constant presence and coming-to-the-forefront-of-consciousness of the images carried

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter Two, note 120, above.

and projected by tendencies for labeling in a certain way (or “tendencies for creating expressions,” whether or not we give them such a technical term). Such an extrapolation of Tsongkhapa’s logic would give ever greater weight and rich detail to the import of the term “by the power of karma” that we have seen Tsongkhapa use so frequently in the course of Middle Way and even Vajrayāna explanations. Furthermore, it offers crucial grounding to the Vajrayāna practices in which mental seeds are initially generated through empowerment and the imagination, and then nourished deliberately – through choreographed practice on a daily and hourly basis – in order to begin experiencing reality in a new way.

Neither Substantially the Same nor Substantially Different

Tsongkhapa’s *Extensive Commentary* goes on to introduce a heated logical argument regarding whether karmic tendencies and their seeds are of the same substance as or of a different substance than the foundation consciousness itself, upon which they rest. Echoing the conclusion of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, but disagreeing with the interpretation of a later Mind-Only commentator, Tsongkhapa explains at length why it is that tendencies simply cannot be understood to be either really the same as, nor substantially separate from, the foundation consciousness itself. The reason this argument will be important is that it establishes karmic potentials as a somewhat exceptional case across the Abhidharma, Sautrāntika, and Mind-Only systems: They must be understood as functioning things (i.e., not mere imagined constructs) that nonetheless exist *nominally* (*btags yod*, Skt. *prajñaptisat*), not substantially (*rdzas yod*, Skt. *dravyasat*). Though according to the Mind-Only presentation at hand, seeds will indeed be said to possess defining characteristics of their own (or else they could not function and bring their result), they will still be admitted not to exist as a substantial entity in the way that consciousness itself is said to exist. Although such an idea seems to have been accepted as non-contradictory for at least the great exponents of these systems, I would suggest that perhaps this case offers a loophole in the functionalist schools’ view, which will open for us a logical window onto Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way picture of how karma can function without even having a *nature* of its own, much less a substantial identity.

To understand the tenor of Tsongkhapa’s argument, it will be important to keep in mind an explanation of the difference between “substantial” and “nominal” existence offered by Tsongkhapa himself within the *Essence of Eloquence*, where he references a different text by Asaṅga, namely the *Compendium of Ascertainments*, a commentary on the *Sūtra Commenting on the True Intent of the Sūtras*, which makes up part of the *Yogācārabhumī*.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ *drang nges legs bshad snying po*, vol. *pha*, 23a5-23b3 (525-526), my emphasis:

[རྒྱུ་བྱུགས་ཀྱང་བསྐྱེ་བ་ལས། གང་ཅི་ཡང་རུང་སྟེ། དེ་ལས་གཞན་པ་དག་ལ་མེ་ལྷོས་ཤིང་། དེ་ལས་གཞན་པ་དག་ལ་མེ་རྟེན་པར་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་འདོགས་པར་བྱེད་པ་དེ་ནི་མདོར་ན་རྒྱས་སུ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པར་རིག་པར་བྱའོ། །གང་ཅི་ཡང་རུང་སྟེ། དེ་ལས་གཞན་པ་དག་ལ་ལྷོས་ཤིང་། དེ་ལས་གཞན་པ་དག་ལ་བརྟེན་ན

On the subject of “substantial” and “nominal,” the *Compendium* states:¹⁶⁷

Whatever is appropriate, does not rely on things other than itself, and can be designated with its own defining characteristics *without depending on things other than itself*. You should know that this, in brief, is something that exists *substantially*. Whatever is appropriate, relies on things other than itself, and can be designated with its own characteristics *in dependence upon things other than itself*. You should know that this, in brief, is something that exists *nominally*, but does not exist substantially.

Here the example given is that a sentient being, or self, is labeled nominally in dependence upon the heaps. In this system, it is not contradictory for there to be something that (1) exists nominally insofar as it cannot be apprehended without relying upon the fact that you have grasped another thing and indeed must be apprehended through such reliance, and (2) is established through its own defining characteristics, without being established [merely] by the power of conventional terminology. Therefore, they can say without contradiction that *things like the tendencies in the foundation consciousness* exist nominally, while still existing ultimately in the sense explained before [i.e., existing through their own defining characteristics]. But there *is* a contradiction [with existing ultimately] when something exists nominally insofar as it is labeled through names and concepts.

Thus things that exist nominally, or as something labeled, are apprehended through a process of deduction; one has to know something else first in order to establish *what* the thing is. A classic example of a nominally existing thing that is still a functioning, changing thing is the person; all schools at least from the Sautrāntikas onwards accept that a “person” does not exist substantially, but only nominally, since one must know many things in order to label the one conglomerate of them all: “person.” Substantial existence, on the other hand, can be apprehended directly, without relying on any other perception; it is often exemplified by the object of an unmediated perception of the color blue, before one has had any thoughts or made any conceptual mental images about the blue. Similarly, in the Mind-Only school, consciousness itself is considered to be substantial: precisely as established by the unmediated, reflexive, direct, valid perception

ས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་འདོགས་པར་བྱེད་པ་དེ་ནི་མདོར་ན་བཏགས་པའི་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པར་ཟིག་པར་བྱའི་རྒྱུ་སྟེ་ཡོད་པ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཞེས་སྤང་སྟོང་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་
བདག་གས་སེམས་ཅན་དུ་བཏགས་པ་དེའི་དཔེར་མཛད་དོ། །ཆོས་གཞན་བཟུང་བ་ལ་མ་ལྟོས་པར་གཟུང་དུ་མེད་ཅིང་ལྟོས་ནས་གཟུང་དགོས་པའི་བཏགས་ཡོད་ད
ང་ཐ་སྟོན་གྱི་དབང་གིས་མ་བཞག་པར་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱང་ལུགས་འདི་ལ་མི་འགལ་བས་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་བག་ཆགས་ལྟ་བུ་བཏགས་ཡོད་དུ་ག
སུངས་ཀྱང་སྤང་བའདད་པའི་དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ་མི་འགལ་གྱི། མིང་དང་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པའི་བཏགས་ཡོད་དང་ནི་འགལ་ལོ།

¹⁶⁷ Asaṅga, *Nirṇayasamgraha* (*rnam par gtan la dbab pa bsdu ba*), Toh. 4038, sde dge, sems tsam, vol. zhi, 199a7; Cf. Hopkins, 1999, *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism*, 161-162 with backnote 409.

known as self-awareness, which, as we saw, theoretically should not need to rely on anything else in order to apprehend a moment of consciousness.

If, however, the seeds and latent tendencies were thought to be substantially the same as the foundation consciousness, two problems would ensue:¹⁶⁸ (1) The seeds themselves would have to have a perceptible aspect, which is something scriptures have already denied about them. It is a key point in this system that seeds cannot ever be focused upon directly as an object of perception, as long as they are seeds. (2) If all the seeds for all the types of existence a being could ever experience in countless lifetimes were all substantially the same as the foundation *consciousness* itself, then, since a single substance is indifferentiable, in a single moment, upon the continuum of a single foundation consciousness, all the seeds for all five realms of existence would have to manifest simultaneously, without differentiation, in which case all the experiences of pleasure and pain would either be utterly mixed up, or else be imagined to happen all at once, which is absurd.

Tsongkhapa addresses the issue by invoking the logic of Dharmakīrti to make a crucial point about how distinct instances of a general qualitative category are perceived inductively. That is, if one thinks that a term which specifies a subset of a larger class of things can ever be established *substantially*, one has not understood the import of Dharmakīrti's entire system, which explains how functioning things are identified *as* something only through a process of logical exclusion (*gzhan sel*, Skt. *anyāpoha*); i.e., in reliance upon understanding something else first, which is what “nominal” existence means (in this context, at least). For example, if one takes the exclusion of all that is not a tree, in order to apprehend the abstracted image of “tree,” is this substantially the same as or different from the particular species of an Indian “*aśoka* tree”? If the mental image that arises when one excludes “everything that is not a tree” always referred to the real, particular thing that is an *aśoka* tree, then all trees that were not *aśoka* trees would not even be trees (i.e., the exclusion would have been too narrow). Similarly, if a particular karmic seed were thought to be substantially the same as the exclusion of everything that is not foundation consciousness, then either everything that was not that one seed would not be foundation consciousness at all, or all possible seeds would have to be one, at the same time.

On the other hand, if in the classical example an *aśoka* tree were really, substantially *different* from that functioning thing which is designated by “tree,” then an *aśoka* tree could not even be a tree, because it would no longer fit the general class of things that are excluded by “everything that is not a tree,” namely, trees. Likewise, if seeds were substantially different from the foundation consciousness, they would have to exist as some other substance – but what would that be? Tsongkhapa has already

¹⁶⁸ See *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 19b2-21b5 (708-712) for this series of arguments.

established that they could neither be made of physical form (because then seeds could not be sustained through lifetimes in the formless realm), nor could they be made of any of the other seven groups of consciousness (because there are states of meditation where even mental consciousness is thought to be cut off); and in these philosophical systems, physical form and ways of being aware are the only two candidates for substantial entities. Thus if the seeds were established as a substantially different instance of foundation consciousness, then one sentient being would turn out to have two foundation consciousnesses, and would become two mindstreams. Even though the active types of consciousness that engage in objects, along with their linked mental functions, do admittedly introduce variety into a single stream of consciousness all the time, nonetheless all these are said to rely on the foundation consciousness as their stable support; so if there were said to be two *different* stable foundations for a single being's mind – namely, something like (1) a seed consciousness as substantially separate from (2) a foundation consciousness – then the whole Mind-Only system would fall apart.

Tsongkhapa's fierce statement on the matter will take on greater significance when we examine his presentations regarding the formation of mental abstractions and the emptiness of the “person” as a possessor of parts in Chapters Five and Six:¹⁶⁹

As long as one wants a general quality that is excepted from all appearances to be established as a substance, one will be unable to eliminate either problem that comes from conceiving of things as substantially the same or different. Furthermore, having asserted something to be of one substance, if it were no contradiction to go on and assert that the thing had two parts to it, then even the Buddhas could not refute the idea that both components and the thing that possesses components are a single substance.

That is, to understand the nature of logical exclusion is to understand that when the mind identifies one thing as being an instance of, or characteristic of, a more general quality such as “tree” or “foundation consciousness,” one is already dealing in logical entities, not substantial ones. Thus it makes no sense to speak of whether mulberry trees have the same *substance* as trees in general, even though it is true that a mulberry tree is a tree. Similarly, the implication is that seeds and tendencies must be understood as subsets, types, or specific instances, which are characteristic of the quality “foundation consciousness,” but cannot be thought either to have their own substantial entity apart from its stream, nor to be logically identical to the undifferentiated substance of

¹⁶⁹ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 20b3-4 (710). Cf. Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 76. (My translation differs significantly from Sparham's reading, regarding both the grammar and the philosophical import of this point.)

དེ་ན་རིམ་གྱི་ཆུང་གསལ་བ་ནམས་ལས་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་སྤྱི་ཆས་སུ་བྱུང་བར་འདོད་པ་དེ་སྤྱི་དབྱུང་ཆས་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དང་བརྟགས་པའི་སྤྱི་ཆ་གཉིས་པོ་སྤོང་མི་རྒྱས་སོ།
[གཞན་ཡང་ཆས་གཅིག་ཏུ་ཁས་ལྷངས་ནས་ཆ་གཉིས་འདོད་པ་ལ་འགལ་བ་མེད་ན་ཡན་ལག་དང་ཡན་ལག་ཅན་གཉིས་ཆས་གཅིག་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་བྱང་དག
ག་པར་མི་རྒྱས་སོ།]

consciousness itself as it would exist in a given moment of being aware. Being a seed is a particular way of being “foundation consciousness,” just as being an *aśoka* is a particular way of being “tree.”

Even more precisely, Tsongkhapa cites a commentary to Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way*, namely the *Additional Explanation*¹⁷⁰ to say that a tendency is that which “has the nature of the distinguishing feature of a potential” (*nus pa’i khyad par gyi rang bzhin*).¹⁷¹ That is, even in common English usage, a “potential” cannot be thought to have a substantial nature of its own, though we do acknowledge that people and animals and material things do possess potentials or capacities for all sorts of actions that might be actualized in the future. Seeds and tendencies, then, might be thought of as potential energy – a capacity for actualization that has not yet become manifest. It is a way in which we very ordinarily believe that merely “nominal” entities can still bring about a future result, and thus *function*.

In a Middle Way context, Tsongkhapa will use a similar argument – that the heaps of a person, and the possessor of those heaps, cannot be established as being either really the same or really different – as a crucial tool in establishing the emptiness of “I.” He has also written, in a Mind-Only context, that upon deep investigation, the objects of the senses and the faculties themselves “*cannot be expressed as being either the same as or other than consciousness*, because this appearance is already something totally constructed.”¹⁷² Thus the point about something not being findable as either the same as or other than something to which it is intimately related does tend to show that something is merely labeled. But why would it be permissible within Mind-Only logic to insist on making the exception for tendencies in the foundation consciousness; acknowledging them to be a labeled reality, but still holding that they possess inherent defining characteristics, in order to function? Keeping all these things in mind, I would suggest that persistent analysis of this subtle point about the merely nominal – yet still completely functional – nature of seeds, along with their evident capacity to bring about a result, will be essential to understanding Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way arguments regarding how karma works when even time and consciousness are admitted to be empty of defining characteristics of their own.¹⁷³

For the moment, however, this discussion also offers insight into what the Mind-Only proponents may have meant all along in saying that subject and object, beholder and beheld, are empty of having separate substances.¹⁷⁴ If substantiality is defined to mean that one can apprehend the nature of a thing without needing to rely on any other

¹⁷⁰ *Asvabhāva (ngo bo nyid med pa), *Mahāyānasamgrahopanibandhana*, *theg pa chen po bsdus pa’i bshad sbyar*, Toh. 4051, sde dge, sems tsam, *ri*.

¹⁷¹ *kun gzhi’i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 21b4 (712).

¹⁷² See Appendix Eight (704-705).

¹⁷³ See Chapter Six, “A Mere Basis for All the Seeds.”

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter Two, note 161, above.

content, this suggests that from a Mind-Only point of view, one does not need to look to anything *other* than the ripening of a single inner seed or tendency in order to apprehend the substance of both what is appearing as outer form and the state of consciousness that is perceiving it validly. Experientially, an advanced Mind-Only view might involve a vision of reality in which inner and outer appearances seem to arise as uniformly as a single swath of blue color across a clear sky, with no projection of conceptualized distinctions to separate the perceptual array that is arising from a single and undifferentiated cause. To perceive reality nondually in this way – free of the differentiating conceptualizations imputed on reality due to the tendencies for creating expressions – would be what it means to perceive the inexpressible identity of dependent things. It would also mean that one had understood all appearances to be a direct ripening of tendencies, whether from finite seeds related to karmic actions, or from those habitual tendencies that have been present and nourished from time without beginning. But to understand that such inexpressible dependent things are totally and completely empty of existing *as* any of the false constructs that we have about them – i.e. the false constructs that construe such things to exist (1) as a “self,” or (2) as coming from a separate and independent stream of causation outside the mind, or (3) as an outer object composed of partless particles – is to realize emptiness, or what is “completely established” (*yongs grub*, Skt. *pariniṣpanna*) in this school. Thus we glimpse, in a Mind-Only context at least, just how much (1) the process of overcoming the ignorance that misunderstands karma and its results might be intimately related to (2) the process of overcoming the ignorance that grasps to a self.

Cloth Emerging from the Dyeing Vats

In answer to this detailed and technical debate about whether seeds are substantially the same as or separate from the foundation consciousness itself, as well as a related debate as to why the tendencies themselves, as storage units, must be ethically neutral, Tsongkhapa will quote the following passage from Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way* as the last word on the subject:¹⁷⁵

Suppose you ask how tendencies that are neither separate nor diverse can be the cause for the multitude of diverse, separate phenomena. Take this as an example: Cloth that has been treated with the prepared extracts of various plants does not

¹⁷⁵ As quoted in Tsongkhapa, *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, vol. *tsha*, 24a6-24b3 (717-718). (Cf. Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theg bsdus*, Toh. 4048, 6b2-4 for the correction of *snod kyi* to *tshon gyi*, and other minor discrepancies.)

ཁ་བཀ་ཆགས་ཐ་དད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཅིང་སྣ་ཆོགས་མ་ཡིན་ཐ་དད་པ་སྣ་ཆོགས་དག་གི་རྒྱུ་ཇི་ལྟར་བྱུང་ཞེ་ན། དཔེར་ན་ཆེ་གཤམ་གྱི་སྣ་ཆོགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱར་བའི་རས་སྣ་ཆོགས་སུ་མི་སྣང་བ་གང་གི་ཆེ་སྣང་གི་[sic]ཆོན་གྱི་སྣང་དུ་བརྟག་པ་དེའི་ཆེ་རས་ལ་ཆོན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བ་ཐ་དད་པ་རྣམས་ལ་སྣ་ཆོགས་དུ་མ་སྣང་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ཀྱན་གཞི་འདི་རྣམས་པར་གཤམ་པ་བཀ་ཆགས་སྣ་ཆོགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱོས་པ་ཡང་བཀ་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དུས་ན་སྣ་ཆོགས་མ་ཡིན་ཡང་འབྲས་བུ་མངོན་པར་འབྱུང་བ་འཛིན་གྱི་སྣང་དུ་མངོན་པར་འབྱུང་བ་ན་ཆོན་སྣ་ཆོགས་ཆད་མེད་པ་དག་སྟོན་ཏེ། འདི་ནི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་སྤྲོ་བ་མཆོག་ཏུ་ཐབས་འདི་ཉེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བའོ།

appear as being variegated. But when it is thrust into the vats of dye, the variegated appearances of the many different types of colored dye show up on the cloth. In the same way, although the foundation consciousness is infused with a variety of tendencies, as long as they are tendencies, they are not diverse. But when they are made manifest in the dyeing vats that will actualize the result, an immeasurable number of variegated phenomena show up. This is the subtle and supremely profound meaning of dependent origination in the Greater Way.

Though it is difficult to know exactly what type of textile dyeing process Asaṅga had in mind when writing this passage, the general point seems to be as follows. The chemical compounds used to make dye in ancient India were often extracted from the leaves of plants such as the *Indigofera tinctoria*, a source for the potent blue dye known as indigo. Once the extract had been mixed in an alkaline solution, it could be compacted into cakes, which when dry, could be turned into a powder. Once mixed with other chemical compounds that could alter the eventual tinting of the color into shades of blue, violet, and so on, these powders could then be rubbed into a fabric in the shapes of various designs. However, like potter's glaze, or an old-fashioned photographic negative, the chemical structure of the dye at this stage would not yet reveal the colors its chemical potencies were destined to display. Rather, indigo in particular, being what is known as a vat dye, would have to be converted to a deoxidized colorless, yellow, or white "leuco" form in order to be able to bond with the fibers of a fabric at all. After repeated immersions in baths of highly toxic chemicals used to deoxidize the indigo and enable it to bond to the fabric, it would finally be removed from the dyeing vats, and upon exposure to oxygen in the air, gradually convert from yellow to green and eventually display its final shades of blue or purple, depending upon what other substances it had been mixed with when applied to the fabric. What had at one time been a colorless and *apparently* undifferentiated pattern, finally reveals the vivid colors of fabric that might then be sewn into a dazzling saree.

Although the Yeshé Dé (*ye shes sde*, fl. late eighth century) Tibetan translation of Asaṅga's no longer extant Sanskrit *Mahāyānasamgraha* would seem to imply that the fabrics gain their colors *while* being immersed in the vats of dye, not when being removed from them, the analogy still holds, since perhaps Asaṅga was referring to types of dyes other than indigo, where the sequence of color changes would have been different. Interestingly, however, there is an ambiguity which may well be an artifact in the Tibetan, which could allow the middle sentence of the passage quoted above to be translated as, "When it is thrust into the vats of dye, the variegated appearances of the different types of colored dye do *not* show up on the cloth."¹⁷⁶ Though it is clear from instances in numerous commentaries that the Tibetan tradition has for the most part read

¹⁷⁶ Where *sna tshogs du ma ston pa* could plausibly be read either as "many different types are shown," or "are not shown as different types."

the passage in the former way, as translated previously, I still entertain the doubt as to whether the initial vats of dye could be held as an analogy for the foundation consciousness – in which tendencies indeed are undifferentiated and colorless “potentials” – while the second half of the analogy, mentioning specifically the “dyeing vats that will actualize the result,” refers to a final “fixer” type of substance (as in photographic developing), that seals the colors that have already begun to emerge upon exposure to the air.

These interpretive ambiguities aside, the image is magnificent. Seeds and tendencies are like chemical extracts made from the residue left over as awareness of a particular moment of experience is ending; they are rubbed into the fabric of the foundation consciousness, where their distinct variety is invisible, but the potentiality of their pattern has still been drawn or traced. Indeed, as the dyes are bonding to the fabric one might well find philosophical difficulty in determining whether they are substantially “the same or different” from the fabric, even if a chemist might determine the situation otherwise. But when these treated fabrics of the mind are exposed to the “air” (or else the final dyeing vat) of the diverse factors permeating the remainder of a mind-created world – one that is always already unfolding according to the laws of countless other interrelated displays of ripening seeds – the myriad colors that “match” the configurations of past deeds (the powdered dyes rubbed into the mental fabric long ago) appear in all their diversity to new instances of conscious awareness. This, says Asaṅga (and Tsongkhapa quotes him without further comment), is “the subtle and supremely profound meaning of dependent origination in the Greater Way.” Dependent arising as a whole, then, is here declared to be a process that revolves exclusively around the planting and coming to fruition of seeds and tendencies, whether those which have existed from time without beginning and will never wear out by themselves, or those that have been planted through specific motivated actions, whether virtuous, non-virtuous, or ethically neutral.

Mind as Creator

We said near the beginning of this chapter that from the Mahāyāna perspective of both the Mind-Only and Middle Way schools, since there is nothing at all that could be said to sustain itself or its causal processes “out there on its own,” there must be a constant helper to enable even the appearance of causation and growth to take place, whether the growth of a barley seed into its sprout, or the evolution of a planet from the conglomeration of raw elemental forces into advanced forms of life. What, then, is that helper? I have endeavored to demonstrate that in Tsongkhapa’s understanding of the Indian Mahāyāna context, at least, it is always the all-encompassing presence of *mind* that is said to shape and drive the trajectories and appearances of every caused thing, including the physical elements themselves.

At last, then, we are in a position to ask once again, as a philosophical question for our own inquiry: But really, what would it mean to say that mind is the maker of all? It should by now be clear that even in Tsongkhapa's view not all things literally "come from karma" *per se*, insofar as even among seeds and tendencies there are those which never "started" due to a particular action, but have nevertheless been revived through countless instances of mental assent to the images thrown up by habitual tendencies. Still, the main point is that all sentient experience *of things as things* is ineluctably based in the mind. From the perspective of what would make Buddhism a successful soteriological system, for Tsongkhapa this is what matters, because this is where transformation can take place. If there were no robust understanding of mind as creator of every world of personal and collective experience, there would be no chance for transforming every last particle of the suffering worlds of *samsāra* into a world of total purity.

Furthermore, it should be evident that in Tsongkhapa's own view, not everything is "made of" mind, in the sense of there being nothing external (as Mind-Only thinkers have so often seemed to imply, even if Tsongkhapa argues that this was not the most sophisticated intent of the founding authors of that system). However, Tsongkhapa's Middle Way position will still emphatically accept that everything we ever perceive arises within the space *of* our own minds, mediated by the names and mental images through which all things are merely established (*ming brdas btags tsam*). Even from the perspective of contemporary neuroscience, the retina of the eye is never presented with a full-fledged "image."¹⁷⁷ Whether in a philosophical or scientific context, I would argue that it is always the mind that must put parts together and apply a label; only thus is it able to cognize *something*. But why does one person or animal apply one label and another a more or less different label upon collections of perceived parts that ultimately have no possible character from their own side, prior to observation or measurement? According to this Mahāyāna perspective, therein would lie the conditioning power of the habitual propensity, or in more technical language, some form of a *tendency for creating expressions*. Within the rubric just presented, the actualization of such ongoing habits for labeling perceived collections of parts *as* this or that recognizable "thing," would, with respect to a particular moment in time, be driven primarily by the ripening of specific karmic *seeds for finite experiences*, as in the case of a craving spirit validly labeling "pus and blood" where a human validly labels "water." Without the presence of such mental tendencies for tying parts together in a certain way, what presented itself to consciousness was no more than an array of hints regarding sensory experience.

¹⁷⁷ See Antonio Damasio, 1999, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York: Harcourt, 321 (as cited in B. Alan Wallace, "Vacuum States of Consciousness, A Tibetan Buddhist View" presented at the 5th Biennial International Symposium of Science, Technics and Aesthetics: "Space, Time and Beyond," Lucerne, Switzerland, January 19, 2003, 115): "There is no picture of the object being transferred from the object to the retina and from the retina to the brain."

In that example, furthermore, even the *sensory* hints detected by the human would have to have been different from those detected “pre-cognitively,” as it were, by the craving spirit, because the color, texture, smell, and taste of bloody pus are all quite different from the color, texture, and so on, of water. Upon deeper examination, of course, the molecular structure of the respective substances would have to be thoroughly different, also. A drop of pure water and a red blood cell cannot occupy the same location at the same time. But according to Tsongkhapa’s reasoning, the valid perception of “a drop of water” and the valid perception of “a red blood cell” can arise simultaneously for two different beings – beings so different in makeup that they cannot even perceive one another – with respect to a “common basis” that neither being actually has the capacity to perceive, apart from its unique propensities for cognizing parts *as* something. If, theoretically, we are to include the possibility of the existence of living beings whose range of experience lies categorically outside the scope of human or animalian perception, then any notion of an *objectively* verifiable basis recedes into the space of an ever-vanishing possibility. According to the Middle Way, there is no plane of caused phenomena that will ever be experienced in exactly the same way by all living beings across all worlds.¹⁷⁸ So there is no absolutely objective basis. But the idea of an *empty* basis, that serves the function of a basis, remains essential at many levels of practical analysis, in order to prevent both the extreme of nihilism and the notion that valid perception would be rendered meaningless.

It should by now be clear, however, that broadly speaking “karma” works at a level far deeper than the moment to moment mind of actively conscious awareness. This is why I have found it so important to foray into the idea of the foundation consciousness in detail. It offers a model by which to understand the deeply “subconscious” workings of mental seeds, whereby what is invisible to normal consciousness is still working, “we know not how,”¹⁷⁹ to bring its results, sometimes hundreds or millions of years later. The very notion of teleological causation, in which the ethical quality of a deed is in the end defined by the nature of the type of result it will bring to the future continuation of the being who acted, requires a robust theory of mind in order to support the possibility of such long-term continuity.

Further, the notion of an environmental ripening of karmic results within an outer world could never be explained, much less be deemed plausible, within the confines of a physical theory that attributes all causation to the more or less random interactions of mere “blind matter.” If physical events in a shared world are ever to be understood to

¹⁷⁸ Ultimate reality itself, however, as “emptiness,” or the very lack of any such findable basis, would be experienced as exactly the same reality by any and all beings who perceive it directly, free of any trace of conceptuality. It is the plane where all traces of appearances disappear; so there is no “thing” there. Hence emptiness itself remains empty of existing inherently *as* anything. We shall return to this point in Chapter Five. See also Appendix Five (216).

¹⁷⁹ See Mark 4:27 for a Christian echo of this idea.

take place *as a result* of ethically influenced propensities, one must have developed and grappled with a theory of physicality that is rich and malleable enough to allow for the role of consciousness in shaping and directing the very ways in which subatomic particles might appear to us to interact. Potentially, such theories might grow from the current insights of quantum physics, especially insofar as many contemporary physicists acknowledge that reality will reveal itself precisely according to the questions one asks of it.¹⁸⁰ Any discussion of causation is necessarily shaped according to which line of causation one wishes to examine. It is nearly impossible to conceive of examining all possible forms of causation exhaustively with respect even to a “single” event, especially if one is taking into account the myriad mental influences that determine the mode of one’s participation in that event, as we have been examining at length here. Thus it is essential to acknowledge the choices one is making in the very process of asking any question regarding causation, and to further question one’s motivation for framing the questions in such a way. It is clear from the beginning that the Buddhist questions regarding causation are posed from the perspective of a soteriological system, one aimed at identifying and eliminating the causes of suffering above all. Since these are clearly very different questions from those that have driven the scientific paradigm for much of its history, we must not lose track of those differences if we are ever to attempt to compare scientific and Buddhist theories of a material cosmos.¹⁸¹

Also, it may be evident by now that in Tsongkhapa’s particular Buddhist context, one would have to explain the multiplicity of worlds as being created by mind, in a vast and robust sense of the term, just in order to account for why events with far-reaching and even apparently unconnected causes and conditions – especially those which are validly explained as having come about due to the work of many different people, from

¹⁸⁰ See for example, Andrei Linde, 2004, “Inflation, Quantum Cosmology and the Anthropic Principle,” in *Science and Ultimate Reality: Quantum Theory, Cosmology and Complexity, Honoring John Wheeler’s 90th Birthday*, ed. John D. Barrow, Paul C. W. Davies, and C. L. Harper, Jr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 27, accessed at www.andrei-linde.com/articles/inflation-quantum-cosmology-and-the-anthropic-principle-pdf:

Is it possible that consciousness, like space-time, has its own intrinsic degrees of freedom, and that neglecting these will lead to a description of the universe that is fundamentally incomplete? What if our perceptions are as real (or maybe, in a certain sense, are even more real) than material objects? What if my red, my blue, my pain, are really existing objects, not merely reflections of the really existing material world? Is it possible to introduce a ‘space of elements of consciousness,’ and investigate a possibility that consciousness may exist by itself, even in the absence of matter, just like gravitational waves, excitations of space, may exist in the absence of protons and electrons?

Note, that the gravitational waves usually are so small and interact with matter so weakly that we did not find any of them as yet. However, their existence is absolutely crucial for the consistency of our theory, as well as for our understanding of certain astronomical data. Could it be that consciousness is an equally important part of the consistent picture of our world, despite the fact that so far one could safely ignore it in the description of the well studied physical processes? Will it not turn out, with the further development of science, that the study of the universe and the study of consciousness are inseparably linked, and that ultimate progress in the one will be impossible without progress in the other?

¹⁸¹ See B. Alan Wallace, 2007, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press), especially 27-35.

the building of a house to the invention of the internet – could ever plausibly be understood to arise, *for each observer*, as the manifestation of one’s “own” karmic seeds, even if these are said to be shared seeds. That is, we still have not answered the question of what it is that would make me feel drawn to do something towards someone else, insofar as my action towards that person might turn out to be, *for them*, the infallible manifest ripening of “their seed” for a certain experience. How do I become the oxygen for another person’s indigo-dyed fabric, or vice versa? Any theoretical answer to such questions would have to posit a notion of mind that is vast and complex enough to account for the constant interactions between karmically influenced beings that we do indeed experience on a daily basis. It would have to point again and again to the conclusion that, beyond all the individuality of mental streams or unique foundation consciousnesses, the totality of appearing reality *is* at some level unified. For how else could the countless relationships be mutually recorded and maintained?

Outer and Inner as Equally Empty

In Chapter Six, we will explore how Tsongkhapa explains the workings of karma from an explicitly Middle Way viewpoint. For now, in order to draw to a close the whole array of arguments begun from our examination of the verses that Tsongkhapa quoted from Candrakīrti in his *Guhyasamāja* commentary on Nāgabuddhi, we return to the central point that Tsongkhapa saw Candrakīrti to be making in complaint against the stereotype of a Mind-Only view. The first verse that Tsongkhapa quoted from *Entering the Middle Way* (verse 6:86) aims to show, in contradistinction to many non-Buddhist worldviews, that the array of worlds, both the environmental vessels and their inhabitants, come from the mind alone. The second quoted verse (6:89) aims to show that the mind itself has no nature of its own. According to a classical Tibetan approach to doxology, one might say that the first point refutes every view that falls short of a Mind-Only expression of the Mahāyāna; the second quoted verse goes on to refute the Mind-Only perspective itself as being a one-sided view. In the *Illumination of the True Thought*, Tsongkhapa concludes the entire section on the Buddha’s intent in saying that the worlds are “mind only” by commenting on Candrakīrti’s verses 6:91-92a and 93b:¹⁸²

For a person who lives according to the way things are within the framework of the world, the heap of outer physical form and so forth are well known to the

¹⁸² *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 193a4-6 (387) and 194b2-3 (390), my emphasis:

... འཇིག་རྟེན་པ་ཡི་དེ་ཉིད་དེ་རྣམ་གཞག་ལ་གནས་པ་ལ་བྱེ་རྩལ་གྱི་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་ཕུང་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་འཇིག་རྟེན་ལ་གྲགས་ཏེ་ཕུང་པོ་ལྔ་ཆར་ཡོད་ལ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པ་ལེ་ཡོལ་མེད་པར་འདོད་པ་ན་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པ་མཉམ་པར་གཞག་པ་ལ་དེའི་རྩལ་ཕུང་པོ་དེ་ལྔ་འབྱུང་བར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ། །གང་གི་བྱིར་དེ་ལྔ་ཡིན་པ་དེའི་བྱིར་བྱེ་རྩལ་གྱི་གཞུགས་མེད་པར་འདོད་ན་ནི་སེམས་ཡོད་པར་མ་འཛིན་ཅིག ནང་གི་སེམས་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་པ་ཉིད་ཡིན་ནའང་བྱེ་རྩལ་གྱི་གཞུགས་མེད་པར་མ་འཛིན་ཅིག ... བདེན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རིམ་པ་མི་འཇིག་པ་ལ་དོན་དམ་པར་མེད་ཅིང་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་དགོས་པ་དེའི་བྱིར། སྤར་བཤད་པ་དེ་ལྔ་བྱུང་རིམ་པས་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་གདོད་པ་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དུ་མ་སྦྱས་ཤིང་། འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་སྦྱས་པར་རིག་པར་བྱའོ་ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། འདིས་ནི་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་མ་སྦྱས་པ་དོན་དམ་དང་། སྦྱས་པ་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཁས་ལྡན་བར་སྟོན་པས་དགག་བྱ་ལ་ཁྱད་པར་ངེས་པར་སྦྱར་བར་བྱའོ།

world; that is, the five heaps exist. But if you accept that a primordial wisdom can dawn which directly realizes reality as it is, then to the practitioner who remains within balanced meditation – in the face of his or her perceptions – those five heaps will not arise. Since it is like that [i.e., that the five heaps do not appear to an ārya perceiving ultimate reality directly], if you want to say that there is no outer form, *then do not hold that the mind exists*. If you are someone who wants to say the inner mind exists, *then I beg you not to hold that there is no outer form*.

. . . So as not to destroy the order of the two realities, one must assert that things do not exist ultimately while they do exist conventionally. Therefore, this [verse 93b] is saying that you should understand it according to the order that was explained before: From the very beginning, no functioning thing was ever born within reality as it is, while things *are* born within the conventions of the world. Since it teaches here that you should assert the ultimate as the fact that no functioning thing is ever born, and the conventional as the fact that they are born, you must absolutely apply the distinction of the thing to be refuted.

As in many Middle Way texts, here the gold standard perspective from which to talk about how reality exists ultimately is considered to be the direct perception of emptiness in the mind of a realized being, or ārya, whether this is someone reaching the path of seeing for the first time, or a completely enlightened *buddha-ārya* (*sangs rgyas 'phags pa*). Tsongkhapa explains Candrakīrti's point here to be that, from the perspective of that realization of the lack of inherent existence of all things, neither outer physical forms *nor* the inner phenomena of a mind – thoughts, feelings, conditioned consciousness, and so on – will appear.

As we have said, when analyzing reality deeply, with no endpoint to the investigation into “*what is REAL*,” there may come a moment when indeed everything vanishes – *including the perception of having a mind oneself*. Of course this would not mean that the mind has ceased, or else one could never come out of the experience with an indubitable memory. Rather, it would mean that one's analysis of the ultimate nature of phenomena has extended to the mind itself, and recognized it, too, to be free of any defining characteristics of its own. From Tsongkhapa's Middle Way Consequence perspective this does not merely mean that the mind has been identified positively *as* being a construct; here it means that one has gained certainty that any mind existing *apart from* the application of names and mental images that categorize or define it from a certain perspective is *unfindable in principle*.

It does not simply mean one did not look hard enough. Rather, it would have to mean that one became convinced that one had tried all possible angles and there was simply nothing that would stand up to reasoning as a “my mind” that was not always already something designated with a label – whether as a certain type of mental event, as a certain moment in time, as an example of mind possessed by a certain “person” who

was neither exactly the same as nor entirely different from that instance of awareness, and so on. When the grasping to the idea of an object to be posited beyond and behind the name finally falls away, the “mind” one had been looking for – the one that was thought to exist with some inherent characteristic of its own – will seem to disappear. Again, it is not that the merely labeled, conventionally established mind ceased to function; rather it is that the type of mind one falsely thought was there, the supposed definitively existing mind-to-be-refuted, the one the practitioner had been grasping to from time without beginning, even though it had never existed at all, is found to be unfindable, and the imagined object of one’s grasping vanishes, because in good conscience one is no longer capable of falsely projecting it to be real.

At that moment, the appearances of mind and object, of outer and inner, of the five heaps of a person labeled as “me,” would all vanish completely, *insofar* as ordinary awareness, conditioned by ignorance and karmic traces, had heretofore always perceived dependently arising objects in a way that was inextricably intermingled with a false conception of them as inherently existent.¹⁸³ When that false conception is canceled, the “objects” themselves that had been bound up in the conception can no longer be focused upon, as long as the meditation on their ultimate unfindability continues. It is from such a perspective, then, that Candrakīrti, and Tsongkhapa after him, are saying neither outer matter nor inner mind exist. Both are equally empty, and neither can withstand the analysis that treats the ultimate way of existing.

Yet when the meditative equipose focused on emptiness ends (in the mind of an ārya who is not yet a Buddha), the array of appearances that arise on the basis of traces and karmic energies are said to reassert themselves, and the conventionally established appearances that are known equally to a person “of the world” display themselves again in all their variety.¹⁸⁴ At that point, if one is to acknowledge that the inner mind, which arises moment to moment in various ways based upon the ripening of traces, exists, then, says Candrakīrti, one must by all means acknowledge that outer matter exists too, at least in the way it appears to unexamined conventional valid perceptions. Both are equally valid appearances, and both sets of phenomena, outer and inner, have come into being as a result of the ripening of traces, through the twelve links of dependent arising.

Thus, with respect to analysis that treats the ultimate, and within the ultimate reality that is realized thereupon, nothing at all is ever “born,” because no absolute moment of change can ever be found. More subtly, nothing can ever be found that came into being as a real thing, by itself, independently of the labels and mental images imposed upon it by an observer. Even more precisely, nothing can ever be found that

¹⁸³ See Chapter Five, note 38, and the associated discussions in the “Interlude on the Two Realities” and “In a Single State of Consciousness . . . Really?” below.

¹⁸⁴ See the discussion of these topics that appears much earlier in Tsongkhapa’s *Illumination of the True Thought*, as translated in Appendix Five, especially (248-249).

came into being apart from the fact that labels and mental images were arising in the mind of an observer based upon the way in which tendencies within that being's mental stream were coming to maturity and surfacing – hitting the “oxygen” of interaction with countless other ripening seeds and tendencies in a certain merely labeled moment – and forcing themselves into present moment consciousness as the “appropriate” way to label the raw data of experience, which was in turn presenting itself to that mental awareness based on interactions with other sensory data, which in turn was also only perceived through more and more primal levels of labeling action also arising through the power of previously planted potentials.¹⁸⁵ If there *were*, however, an outer changing thing apart from all these layers of labeling – which would have to be going on much faster than the ordinary conscious mind could ever “notice” what is happening – then it should be findable.¹⁸⁶ But, in what may be a roughly parallel logic to that of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle,¹⁸⁷ if something is discovered to be unknowable in principle, we

¹⁸⁵ I will examine, from the perspective of Tsongkhapa's comments on epistemology, the direct relationship between ripening tendencies, and the way the mind labels an empty object, in much greater detail in Chapter Five.

¹⁸⁶ One should keep in mind at any given point in such arguments that at least since since Dharmakīrti, Buddhist logic has considered an existing thing (*yod pa*, Skt. *bhāva*) to be equivalent in referent to a knowable thing (*shes bya*, Skt. *jñeya*). To posit as existing something that is unknowable in principle – even by an omniscient Buddha – is off-limits for post-Dharmakīrtian Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thought. See the third Old Tibetan Dictionary (*bod yig tshig mdzod chen mo*) entry for “*yod pa*” (“existing thing”) at www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/translate.php: *tshad mas dmigs pa ste/ ka bum la sogs pa'i chos rnams blo tshad mas yod par dmigs pa'o/* (“That which can be focused upon by a valid perception; e.g., a pillar, a vase, and all such phenomena are focused upon as being existent by means of a validly perceiving state of mind.”)

¹⁸⁷ See Werner Heisenberg, 1971, “Quantum Mechanics and Kantian Philosophy (1930-1934),” in *Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations* (NY: Harper & Row), 122-123. The idea is expressed quite pertinently in a conversation between Heisenberg and the Kantian philosopher, Grete Hermann:

“All this still fails to provide an answer to my original question,” Grete Hermann said. “I was wondering why our inability to discover the causes of, say, the emission of an electron means that we must stop searching further. Admittedly, you don't forbid this search, but you claim that it is futile since no further determining factors can be found. Indeed, you contend that, if only it is formulated in precise mathematical language, the indeterminacy allows a definite prediction in another experiment. And this, too, you claim is borne out by the results. If you argue like that, you turn uncertainty into a physical reality, with an objective character, while, normally speaking, uncertainty is a synonym for ignorance, and as such something purely subjective.”

Here I [Heisenberg] felt I must once again intervene in the discussion. “With your last remark,” I said, “you have given a very precise description of the most characteristic feature of modern quantum theory. Whenever we try to deduce laws from our study of atomic phenomena, we discover that we no longer correlate objective processes in space and time, but only observational situations. Only for these can we derive empirical laws. The mathematical symbols with which we describe such observational situations represent possibilities rather than facts. One might say that they represent an intermediate stage between the possible and the factual, which can only be called objective in the sense that, say, temperature is called objective by statistical thermodynamics. Our knowledge about what is possible does admittedly enable us to make a few clear predictions, but, as a rule, it only allows us to speculate as to the probability of a future event. Kant could not possibly have foreseen that in an experimental realm so far beyond daily experience we could no longer treat observations as if they referred to ‘*Dinge an sich*’ or ‘objects’; in other words, he could not foresee that atoms are neither things nor objects. . . . [W]e might say that atoms are

should avoid attributing existence to it. If it is unfound, what we always meant when saying “changing thing,” and implicitly assuming it had a nature of its own, is not there. This entire reflection was intended simply as a sketch of the meaning behind Tsongkhapa’s statement above, that “No functioning thing was ever born within reality as it is.”

Then again, with respect to the perceptions of the world, where things grow and change and function with awe-inspiring regularity and consistency – whether in terms of the primeval outer seeds that create the bio-geological world of a shared environment, or those inner seeds explicitly involved with charged ethical action and its consequences – things are of course “born” all the time. Even according to Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way interpretation, outer matter acts constantly as the focal condition for conscious perceptions within the system of the five heaps; thus outer and inner are mutually established. Conventional reality, insofar as it is the expression of the fruition of tendencies planted and revived over and over again, exists. But insofar as it looks real – yet has been seen by the ārya not to be – it is false and illusory with respect to the perceptions of one who has seen reality at an ultimate level. In each case, to take care in saying exactly what is the nature of the thing that does exist, and what would be the nature of what does not exist, is what Tsongkhapa means by applying “the distinction of the thing to be refuted,” as I have explained it briefly here.¹⁸⁸

parts of observational situations, parts that have a high explanatory value in the physical analysis of the phenomena involved.”

¹⁸⁸ Still further detail on these points can be found in a section of the *Illumination of True Thought* immediately preceding the arguments we have examined regarding the meaning of “the word ‘only.’” See *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 188a3-188b1 (377-378), my emphasis:

In this way, since conventional valid perception disproves the idea that there could be no outer objects, you cannot prove that outer objects do not exist. Now you might think: ‘Since the Mind-Only school uses reasoning to refute outer objects insofar as they cannot exist as a collection of partless atoms, they still have not refuted, using that reasoning, the existence of outer objects that would be partless in the sense of having no directions.’

Now they do not say that this is not refuted by valid perception, but even though it is refuted, that still does not mean there cannot be outer objects. Thus you should know that even if you have refuted the idea of moments of consciousness which lack any divisions of time, and even if you have refuted a stream made up of such moments strung together, this still does not refute consciousness.

According to others’ way of seeing, if you refute the possibility of there being something outside that is partless, you must also refute the possibility of sense faculties and a consciousness that could ever be unmistaken towards appearances [i.e., because we tend to think there *are* particles and hence are always mistaken towards appearances]. ‘So,’ you might think, ‘since the senses and consciousness are mistaken, we cannot posit actual objects, so outer objects are refuted.’ But here, although one cannot posit an apprehended object that exists really – because the consciousness and sense faculty are indeed mistaken – nevertheless the true intent is that you can still posit an apprehended object that is false, and you can think that ‘it has acted as a helper.’

That this is also what Āryadeva accepts is shown in the [*Four*] *Hundred Verses*:

To say the one exists and the other does not,

This is not suchness, nor is it so in the world;

because Āryadeva states that to split objects and consciousness so that one exists and the other does not, is not a presentation of either one of the two realities. Therefore, to split them this way is also not what

By now we should be able to grasp more fully what it was that Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa insisted it *must not* mean when the Buddha is depicted in various sūtra passages as stating that all the three realms are made “from mind only.” From this Middle Way point of view, it does not mean that there is no such thing as outer matter in a conventional sense, but it does mean that mind is the *primary force* in creating the worlds. And, writes Candrakīrti, “If you abandoned the mind, then even karma would not exist” (6:89b). Indeed, we have already seen Nāgārjuna write that if one ceases to make *traces*, then the whole cycle of the twelve links would grind to a halt.¹⁸⁹ But now, in light of all we have examined, what might it mean to abandon the *mind* that is both the root and the result of all karmic action?

To abandon the mind, in this context, would have to mean abandoning the conditioned mind that is soaked in ignorance. Again, it cannot mean abandoning the act of awareness altogether, since in Tsongkhapa’s view, at least, Buddhas are eminently *aware*. Experientially, we have said that overcoming ignorance would have to mean overcoming that which causes “craving” to arise based on “feeling” at the transition between the seventh and eighth links of dependent arising. Practically speaking, then, how would deeper and deeper examination of emptiness, as suggested here, lead to a situation where one did not have to reluctantly fight craving, but in which it simply would not arise, because ignorance was not present?

At one level, the exploration of causes and conditions in more and more subtle ways – down to the variety of seeds, tendencies, and how they arise to consciousness in any given moment – might undercut our snap judgments, our thinking that our tendencies for creating names and expressions for things have successfully described what the things *really* are. This is one way in which a Mind-Only view might be so immediately useful. If one began to recognize that the “tendencies for creating expressions” are not just what cause us to call a pot a “pot,” but might constitute the propensities that cause us to perceive and call a planet a “planet,” with such and such “shape,” “mass,” “volume,” and so on, then this might lead to a more flexible view of each experience that can arise in a

Nāgapāda [i.e., Nāgārjuna] accepts.

།དེ་ལྟར་ན་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་པ་ལ་མ་སྟངས་པའི་ཆད་མས་གཞིན་པས་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་པར་སྟུང་མི་རྒྱས་སོ། །འོ་ན་སེམས་ཅན་པས་རྒྱལ་ཆ་མེད་མེད་པས་དེ་བསགས་པའི་
ཕྱི་དོན་འགོག་པའི་རིགས་པས། རྒྱགས་ཀྱི་ཆ་མེད་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་དོན་མི་ཁྱེད་སོ་སྟུང་ན། དེ་དག་ཆད་མས་མ་ཁྱེད་པར་མི་སྟུང་དེ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་པའི་
དགོས་སོ། །འདིས་ནི་ཤེས་པ་དུས་ཀྱི་ཆ་མེད་དང་དེ་འབྱུང་པའི་རྒྱན་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་པས་ཡང་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །གཞན་ཀྱི་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་ནི་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་
པའི་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་པས་འཁྱུང་པའི་དབང་ཤེས་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས། དབང་ཤེས་འཁྱུང་པས་དོན་འཛོགས་མི་རྒྱས་པས་ཕྱི་དོན་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་པས་སྟུང་
པའི་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ་མེད་པས་གཞན་གྱི་བདེན་པ་འཛོགས་མི་རྒྱས་ཀྱང་། གཞན་གྱི་བརྒྱན་པ་ལ་དེ་གོགས་སྟུང་མོང་ལོ་སྟུང་དུ་དགོངས་སོ། །འདི་ཉིད་འབགས་པ་སྟུང་
པ་བཞེད་དེ་བརྒྱ་པ་ལས། གཅིག་ཡོད་གཅིག་མེད་ཅེས་བྱ་བ། དེ་ཉིད་མིན་འདྲིལ་རྟེན་པའང་མིན། །ཞེས་དོན་ཤེས་ཡོད་མེད་འབྱེད་པ་བདེན་གཉིས་གང་གི་ཡང་
རྣམས་གཞན་མིན་པར་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་ལྟར་འབྱེད་པ་སྟུང་ཞབས་ཀྱི་བཞེད་པ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

¹⁸⁹ See the quotation cited at Chapter One, note 155, as well as the last quotation from Nāgārjuna’s *Praise of the Absolute Space of All Things* translated in Appendix Fourteen (427), and a parallel quotation from Āryadeva, translated in Appendix Fifteen (992).

given “day.” Further, since it is the tendency for seeing a “self” that is considered the most problematic – and not necessarily the mere fact of applying labels in general – such analysis could gradually help one to realize that the “self” and “other” in which we believe so firmly do not actually exist in the way they appear to our labeling minds. Understanding emptiness at this level, already one would not feel the same kinds of overestimation or denigration of the properties of people or objects that usually come with insisting upon our labels *as* the reality. Seeing that such projected properties evanesce upon close examination, the object of craving begins to dissolve, and with it the affliction of craving (or disgust) might naturally subside.

Furthermore, what I do not yet find Tsongkhapa saying directly, but that I will infer, is that when one sees something *as* ripening from seeds, one cannot simultaneously believe it to have inherent properties of its own, and it is in this way that afflictions might not even have a chance to take hold. That is, in a Mind-Only view, as we have seen, one description of what is “totally established” (i.e., emptiness), is as the fact that objects are empty of existing as a substance that did not come from the same seed or tendency as the faculty and consciousness perceiving them. But if understanding emptiness is the direct antidote to ignorance, and stopping ignorance is the way to stop craving at link eight, what is it about understanding that phenomena arise from seeds that should instantaneously cancel our afflicted reactions to things?

In one sense, it would seem that such contemplative inquiry might enable the appearance of a thing that existed “out there,” independently of causes generated within our minds – for which we might harm those perceived as “others” in order to either “get” it or to “get away from” it – to dissolve beneath our analytical scrutiny. In addition, we might see that the only way to receive more of a pleasant experience in the future would be to act in such a way that would create or renew the tendencies for such experiences already existing within our minds, while the only way to remove unpleasant experience would be to avoid (or abandon) the karmic motivations and actions that would give rise to or re-energize more of the seeds and tendencies for unpleasant experience. In that light, attempting to alter an “outer world” that is understood to be arising from seeds (every bit as much as the “inner world” is also recognized to be arising from seeds), without *working with seeds*, would be as futile as trying to stop two people in a movie from trying to kill each other by banging on the movie screen.¹⁹⁰ One would have to change the cause of the projection (like going back and refilming the movie) in order to change the appearances that will arise in dependence upon one’s mind, but trying to rearrange appearances without understanding their inner causes only leads to frustration and suffering. Perhaps this is the most practical import of Asaṅga’s teachings on seeds as the

¹⁹⁰ I owe this analogy to Geshe Michael Roach, who used it many times during lectures in New York, c. 2005-2008.

“foundation of all.” I will maintain in Chapter Six that this aspect of that teaching is easily transferable into a Middle Way context.

Indeed, Tsongkhapa never refutes the Mind-Only presentation of seeds as a deceptive causal process; in his mature Middle Way works he only refutes specific aspects of the Mind-Only system, especially *how* it holds the mind to exist, as well as the idea of a foundation consciousness, which he sees to be inextricably intertwined with the idea of a mind that exists inherently. But I think that Tsongkhapa saw it to be precisely through the rigorous exploration of the boundaries between these two views that the deepest meaning of the Middle Way can be glimpsed, or else I doubt he would have spent such great effort in writing his commentaries on these old Indian debates in the way that he did. After all there were few, if any, official “proponents” of the Mind-Only school living in Tibet at his time. Rather, as we see in the passage translated in Appendix Seven (333-338), Tsongkhapa saw the Mind-Only view as having been taught properly by the Buddha, Asaṅga, and many Indian exponents of that system as a specific antidote to certain tendencies within people; hence it is still useful in any age, and perhaps, I might add, there is a “Mind-Only school person” within each of us, one who would first need to discover the mind-boggling possibilities of that view, and then be refuted soundly for having held it too literally.

Furthermore, at the Middle Way level, it is the indefatigable search for “inherent qualities,” any and all of which begin to dissolve and disappear under close scrutiny, that provides a more and more intimate understanding of profound dependent origination – precisely insofar as this refers to the ripening of seeds into the great variety of appearances, in constant relationship to the conditions of the ripening of other seeds, in one’s own and others’ minds, as in the analogy of the dyeing vats. According to Tsongkhapa’s verse in the *Three Principal Paths*,¹⁹¹ it is this dissolving before one’s analytical gaze that should lead to a direct and indivisible understanding of emptiness at the same time. From a tantric perspective, too, we will see that in Tsongkhapa’s view, the deeper one delves into the mysteries of dependent origination, the more beautiful and awe-inspiring deceptive reality should become. In that case, recognizing that the whole process of karmic seed-planting and ripening has no inherent nature apart from the conceptual framework according to which it is viewed, might open up the possibility of transforming one’s lived experience from that of tainted karma to that of infinite divine creativity, within what is potentially a single lifetime’s worth of practice. But those many years of practice would have to sustain a very stable concentration upon a view of reality that is quite contrary to the eons of habitual propensities for seeing in the “ordinary” way.

¹⁹¹ See the citation at Chapter One, note 48:

One day they will no longer alternate, but in a single instant the very fact of seeing infallible reliance and relationship alone will dissolve the confident apprehension with which you were holding to objects; then your analysis of the view is complete.

Thus the creation stage of Vajrayāna is a deliberate process of undoing habitual propensities and replacing them with new ones, until one will no longer have to live from “habit” at all, but in the ever spontaneous, intentionally created world of a Buddha. For, as we will consider in Chapters Five and Six, a Buddha has no karmic “seeds.”

In his Guhyasamāja commentary on Nāgabuddhi’s *Steps of the Exposition*, Tsongkhapa immediately followed his quotation of Candrakīrti’s verses with reference to the “Great Vajradhara” as “the creator of pure living beings, that circle of divine beings.” In order to understand the nature of *that* kind of totally pure mind, the one that is revealed when the karmically conditioned, ignorance-soaked mental consciousness of a sentient being has been “abandoned” – or at least temporarily dissolved into emptiness – we must explore more thoroughly the notion of purity in a tantric context: purity as both emptiness, at the timeless level of ultimate reality, and as a total lack of accumulated defilements, at the level of deceptive reality and as a final attainment to be realized. In order to understand this philosophically, we must look more deeply at Tsongkhapa’s presentation of these “two realities” in a Middle Way Consequence context, his final elucidation of the way karma is propagated without a foundation consciousness, and his groundbreaking notion of the “mere I” – the transformation of which is key to his formal explanations and secret instructions regarding the practice of a tantric sādhana. Penetrating through these topics will reveal Tsongkhapa’s ever more subtle answers to the question of how worlds are created, as well as to those questions regarding the nature of the wisdom that will serve as the antidote to an ignorance that fails to recognize the illusion. These examinations will not come fully, however, until Chapters Five and Six. To lay the groundwork for making progress in any of these questions, we must first explore Tsongkhapa’s overall understanding of what constitutes the Vajrayāna path, and how it differs from the “Way of the Perfections,” which is based in the teachings of the Mahāyāna sūtras alone. This will lead us to inquire into the heart of the theory behind the practice of the creation stage in the Guhyasamāja and other systems of unsurpassed yoga tantra, as Tsongkhapa understood them. Conundrums raised in that context will eventually bring us back to address these particular philosophical questions from the perspective of how they inform and undergird the entire practice of tantra in Tsongkhapa’s thought.

Chapter Three: A Swifter Road

. . . Here is the crucial point for meditating on emptiness with a subject state of mind that is bliss. In the context of the creation stage, it is primarily a mental bliss. Thus, you should place that mental bliss single-pointedly upon the emptiness that you had ascertained previously. If that is interrupted by an appearance of duality, you should focus upon the stages of withdrawal, and place the mind as before.

On that note, here is the crucial point for positing the pride of a divine identity. The mind that thinks “I am” holds two things – the ordinary heaps and “me” – to be one: the referent of a name. Because that mind insists upon believing this to be so, the cycle turns round and round. In parallel fashion, by taking the object that is *emptiness* as the basis of designation, and holding *as a designated thing* the name and the idea of its referent taken as one, you utterly abandon grasping to the idea that things exist as real. This becomes a cause for the *dharmakāya*.

Here is the crucial point for how the beheld aspect dawns as a divine being. The cause for what is beheld is the object, emptiness. The foundation for what is beheld is the incisive wisdom that realizes emptiness. The way the aspect dawns as a divine being is this: In essence it is the primordial wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness itself; the meditation establishes this in the aspect of the divine being and the inconceivable palace.

. . . Here is a crucial point for positing the pride of a divine identity. As before, settle your pride upon indivisible bliss and emptiness. Then, upon that very basis, consider that “I myself am the real Vajradhara,” and that the whole maṇḍala is his emanated creation. Hold that these are not different.

Here is the crucial point for bringing forth clear appearances. Having visualized via the path the whole maṇḍala of beings and the places where they stay, hold your consciousness upon that abstraction, and then draw forth clear appearances from one subtle detail, and then another, and then another.

—Je Tsongkhapa, as recorded by the Dharma Lord Baso: *A Guide to the Creation Stage from Twenty-One Brief Pieces on Guhyasamāja and Such*¹

¹ Tsongkhapa, as recorded and edited by the brothers Khedrup Je (*mkhas grub rje dge legs dpal bzang*, 1385-1438) and Baso Chö Je, a.k.a. Baso Chökyi Gyaltzen (*ba so chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1402-1473); *bskyed rim gyi khrid yig*, in *gsang ba 'dus pa'i yig chung nyer gcig sogs*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha* (as included in the auxiliary volume, *rje'i gsung bka' rgya ma rnams zur du phyungs pa*, alternately listed in other editions as vol. *dza*), 17a4-17b1, 18a4-6 (43-44, 45), emphasis mine.

With these extremely secret instructions spoken “from the holy lips” (*zhal shes*) in private to a small circle of disciples, we are thrust into the heart of the practice of the Vajrayāna creation stage as explained by Tsongkhapa. As expressed in the short introductions to each section of this fascinating text – a compilation of such instructions in twenty-one vignettes – these pointed pieces of advice are intended for a disciple who has already been thoroughly trained in the steps of the path of both sūtra and tantra, and who is already practicing consistently. They are intended for someone to read while in a state of retreat,² as a simple reminder of the “crucial points” to be focused on in meditation, without the distraction of complex textual arguments. Thus they assume an immense amount of knowledge. I place these excerpts here for just that reason: They encapsulate a whole constellation of ideas that lies at the core of what I will call Tsongkhapa’s “theory of tantra.” I will suggest that by delving into the meaning of the terms and following the trail of philosophical references that are etched into these brief lines, we will be able to unpack some key ideas that Tsongkhapa draws consistently from among the heated debates of sūtra-based rational discourse, and carries into the rarified chamber of tantric retreat.

To understand what Tsongkhapa means by “positing the pride of a divine identity” (*nga rgyal 'jog pa*) as a “me” in this context, we will have to trace back through several ideas to understand the “mere ‘I’” (*nga tsam*) as Tsongkhapa explains it in his *Illumination of the True Thought*, as well as in another portion of this present collection of private advice, which includes meditation instructions for discovering the lack of an inherent “self.” This will lead us to explore, at last, a genuinely Middle Way view of karmic ripening, which Tsongkhapa defends repeatedly in his mature works, while denying even a nominal existence to a “foundation consciousness” that could be separate from the basic stream of mental consciousness itself.

To understand the meaning of the “beheld aspect,” or “aspect of what is beheld” (*gzung rnam*, Skt. *grāhyākāra*) – which is here said to dawn in divine form – we must trace this term back to Tsongkhapa’s own explanation of the third chapter of Dharmakīrti’s *Commentary on Valid Perception (Pramāṇavārttika)*, a text that appears in

ཕ ལུལ་ཅན་བདེ་བས་སྟོང་བ་བསྟོམས་པའི་གནད་ནི། བསྐྱེད་ཅིས་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་གཙོ་བོར་ཡིད་བདེ་ཡིན་པས་དེས་སྟོང་བ་སྒྲར་ཅེས་ཟིན་དེ་ལ་ཅེ་གཅིག་ཏུ་འཛོག་
བཤོ། །དེ་ལ་གཉིས་སྒྲར་གི་བར་དུ་ཆོད་ན་སྐྱེད་ཅིས་གྱི་དམིགས་པ་བྱས་ནས་སྒྲར་ལྟར་འཛོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཕ །དེ་ལ་ང་རྒྱལ་འཛོག་པའི་གནད་ནི། ཐ་མལ་གྱི་ཕུང་པོ་
‘དང་ང་གཉིས་’འདོ་སྟུང་པའི་སྟུང་མེད་དོན་གཅིག་ཏུ་བཟུང་ནས་ཞེན་པས་འཁོར་བར་འཁོར་བ་ལྟར། ལུལ་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་ལ་གདགས་གཞིར་བྱས་ནས་བཏགས་ཆོས་
‘སུ་མེད་དོན་གཅིག་ཏུ་བཟུང་བས་བདེན་འཛིན་སྒྲུངས་ནས་ཆོས་སྐྱེད་རྒྱུར་འགྱུར་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཕ །གཟུང་ནས་ལྟར་འཆར་ཚུལ་གྱི་གནད་ནི། གཟུང་རྒྱུ་ནི་ལུལ་སྟོང་
པ་ཉིད་དང་། གཟུང་གཞི་ནི་སྟོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་པོ། །རྟེན་པ་ལྟར་འཆར་ཚུལ་ནི། རོ་བོ་བདེ་སྟོང་དབྱེར་མེད་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཉིད་ཡིན་པ་ལ། རྟེན་པ་ལྟར་
གཞལ་ཡས་ཁང་དུ་བྱུང་བར་བསྟོམས་པའོ། ་ ཕ །ང་རྒྱལ་འཛོག་པའི་གནད་ནི། བདེ་སྟོང་དབྱེར་མེད་ལ་སྒྲར་ལྟར་ང་རྒྱལ་བཞག་ནས་དེ་ཉིད་ལ་རང་ཉིད་རྟོ་རྟེ་འ
ཆར་དངོས་ཡིན་པ་དང་། དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཐམས་ཅད་དེའི་རྟེན་འབྱུང་དུ་བལྟས་ཏེ་ཐ་མེད་དུ་བཟུང་དོ། ཕ །གསལ་སྒྲུང་འདོན་པའི་གནད་ནི། རྟེན་དང་བཞེན་པའི་ད
ཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་གྱིས་གསལ་བཏགས་ནས་ཤེས་པ་སྐྱི་དེ་ལ་བཟུང་སྟེ་ཆལས་སྒྲ་མོ་གཅིག་གིས་རེ་རེ་ནས་གསལ་སྒྲུང་འདོན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །

² As explained to me by the main scripture teacher at Gyutö Tantric Monastery (located near Dharamsala, India), Geshe Khedrup Norsang: Private interview, May 25th, 2015.

the form of lecture notes taken by Khedrup Je Gélek Pelsang (*mkhas grub rje dge legs dpal bzang*, 1385-1438). This will lead us to ask more difficult questions about how to interpret Buddhist principles of epistemology – originally formulated in the context of the Sautrāntika and Mind-Only presentations – in a genuinely Middle Way context. This inquiry will become especially interesting when carried into the context of Vajrayāna, where questions of epistemology are paramount, but often overlooked in contemporary discussions of Buddhist tantric practice. Indeed, we will find Tsongkhapa quoting Dharmakīrti frequently in his central theoretical treatise on Vajrayāna practice, the *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*.

In order to understand the crucial point about bringing forth “clear appearances” (*gsal snang*) – which, along with “divine identity,” constitutes a principal element of the stage of creation – we will grapple with some thorny issues that arise from attempting to read Dharmakīrti’s epistemology in terms of Middle Way philosophy. Since everything that Tsongkhapa writes about tantra is explicitly formulated from the point of view of the Middle Way Consequence position, I believe these questions are crucial to gaining insight into how Tsongkhapa applies his Middle Way view in the practical context of tantric meditation. The discussion will revolve around what it means for something still to be able to “appear clearly” (*gsal bar snang ba*) to a nonconceptual state of mind in a context where the notion of anything existing as a concrete particular with its own characteristics (*rang mtshan*) has been categorically refuted. All of these questions will lead us to focus on the notion of an “abstraction” (*spyi*, Skt. *sāmānya*), and especially the “abstracted image of an actual object” (*don spyi*, Skt. *arthasāmānya*), which is key to both Tsongkhapa’s philosophical description of how karmic tendencies might actually bring their stored information into the light of experience within saṃsāra, as well as to his theory of how creation stage practice works to cut the root of cyclic suffering.

Woven through all these discussions will be the core Middle Way idea of the “two truths,” or what I will render as the “two realities” (*bden gnyis*, Skt. *satyadvaya*): “deceptive” and “ultimate.” I will highlight how these are understood in contradistinction to the way that the same two categories are used to refer to the respective objects of the two types of valid perception in Dharmakīrti’s presentation. Though this is a massive topic, which I will not be able to treat in full, there are certain points that are essential to understanding the structure of the Vajrayāna path as Tsongkhapa presents it. Gaining familiarity with Tsongkhapa’s analysis of the two realities will enable us to grasp the features of meditation by which he distinguishes the Vajrayāna from the Pāramitāyāna (Perfection Vehicle, or Way of the Perfections) in general. Further, it is through an unusual approach to the two realities that we can understand how Tsongkhapa distinguishes the unsurpassed class of Vajrayāna from the three “lower” groups of tantric scriptures and their associated practices. Only with a firm basis in these philosophical

distinctions can we discern what Tsongkhapa means when he describes meditating on emptiness “with a subject state of mind that is bliss.”

Key to understanding Tsongkhapa’s overall vision of how the tantric path functions is the distinction between “conceptual” and “nonconceptual,” which we will explore in the context of epistemology, but also in the context of Tsongkhapa’s explicit instructions for how to meditate upon emptiness within a given session of creation stage practice. This theme will carry over into questions of what is supposed to change during the complete stage.

All these philosophical analyses will lead us to posit what the resultant state of a Buddha might be like, in its two principal aspects of the *dharmakāya* (the enlightened mind) and *rūpakāya* (holy bodies of form). Nonetheless, we will not cease to ask the questions with which we began this inquiry, regarding the fundamental meaning of creation, and the nature of mind – as creative and as creator. An essential question at the heart of Vajrayāna practice becomes: What is the interface between a mind that is creating saṃsāra and a mind that can create perfection from purity?

Although there are practices of the path that are intended to give rise, in a developmental manner, to the “indivisible bliss and emptiness” that will approximate and serve as a cause for manifesting the resultant *dharmakāya*, there lies churning just beneath the surface of the scriptural instructions for tantric practices – and all the rational analysis Tsongkhapa will bring to them – a promise of the wellspring of *already*-manifest divine energy and purity without which all the practices would become mere empty words and images. Not only do we find the tantric literature replete with the presence of realized divine beings – male and female Buddhas and bodhisattvas, *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs*, and so on – who are called upon to grant the power and blessing from which all yogic practice will flow, but the practices themselves are only understood to be possible because of something about the fundamental nature of the practitioner that is pure and open to purity. This would have to be a purity that is present no matter how caught in the web of ignorance and suffering he or she may appear to be at the outset. Although the philosophical notion of this purity is there in the Mahāyāna sūtra literature – especially in the sūtras describing buddha-nature (Skt. *tathāgatagarbha*) favored by the Mind-Only school – it is in the Vajrayāna that the idea is emphatically embraced and actualized as the cornerstone of daily practice, even and especially from the point of view of a Middle Way interpretation.

The description of a fundamental ground that underlies each individual person as well as the whole of reality, without which Vajrayāna practice would be incapable of producing any result at all, comes most clearly in the context of the complete stage. Though I will not be able to treat Tsongkhapa’s extensive presentations of that stage within the scope of the current project, still, the import of those presentations remain constantly in the background of my analysis of Tsongkhapa’s creation stage. In Chapters

Five and Six we will consider possible connections between Tsongkhapa's description of this indwelling ground, in the context of the Guhyasamāja system, and the idea of such a ground that appears in another universe of Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayāna, often known by the name of the Great Perfection, or Dzokchen (*rdzog chen*). Though Tsongkhapa did not write any commentaries on the Great Perfection lineages flourishing in Tibet at his time, it is evident that he received a significant transmission of Great Perfection teachings from Khenchen Hlodrakpa Namkha Gyaltsen (*mkhan chen lho brag pa nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*), c. 1395, as recorded in the *Garland of Supreme Medicinal Nectar: Questions and Answers*.³ We will examine a small portion of this text, and its possible relationship to the whole of Tsongkhapa's thought, at the end of the Epilogue.

In the meantime, we will discover intimations of Tsongkhapa's overarching vision of an immaculate purity at the ground of all being in his descriptions of how to meditate on emptiness during tantric sādhanā practice, even at the stage of creation. We can also see it in his extensive commentaries on the deceptive and ultimate nature of the four Vajrayāna empowerments, though there will not be space to treat those properly here. It is in these instructions for tantric meditation that we glimpse an emptiness that is not merely an absence of a thing that was never there anyway, but an emptiness indivisible from the primordial mind that knows it: a fecund, pregnant ground of infinite creativity, immutable bliss, and inconceivable beauty, even as that which is known is still sheer absence – exactly as described in the Middle Way treatises. It is this interface between emptiness and mind, between absence and the foundation for the possibility of illusory appearance, which will remain at the center of our inquiry.

In order to lay the groundwork for all of this exploration, however, we must turn steadily, throughout this chapter and for most of Chapter Four, to Tsongkhapa's major treatise on the entire structure of the Vajrayāna path, the *Great Book on the Steps of*

³ *zhus lan sman mchog bdus rsti'i phreng ba*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ka (301-326). Translated as "Garland of Supremely Healing Nectars" in Robert Thurman, 1982, *The Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa*, 235-253. See also, Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality, and Reason*, 20 and 192n39. In "Prophetic Histories of Buddhas, Dākinīs and Saints in Tibet," (unpublished manuscript), David Germano points out (echoing Franz-Karl Ehrhard, 1992, *The "Vision" of rDzogs-chen: A Text and its Histories* [Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji], 53ff.) that this text is virtually identical in content to "*The Golden Garland of Ambrosial Dialogue in The Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs*, except the introductory part and the concluding prophecies, which is without doubt where Lhodrak borrowed it from." See the text as included in the collected works of Longchen Rabjam Drimé Özer (klong chen rab 'byams dri med 'od zer, 1308-1363), *zhus len bdud rtsi gser phreng* (*Golden Garland of Nectar: Questions and Answers*), in *snying thig ya bzhi*, TBRC W1KG12048, Vol. 3: 991-1030 (Cazadero, Ca: Yeshe De Text Preservation Project, 1992), for direct comparison of the texts. Note, however, that the *Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro snying thig*), to which this short text belongs, was not actually authored by Longchenpa, either, but represents a prior layer of treasure revelation. For our present purposes, the earliest traceable source of the teaching and prophecy is not as pertinent as the fact that (1) it was transmitted to Tsongkhapa, (2) it represents the milieu of treasure revelations in which Longchenpa was immersed, and (3) it was indeed preserved in Tsongkhapa's collected works, even with the caveat of a long editorial note in the Tashi Hlunpo edition, warning readers not to confuse its message with that of the rest of Tsongkhapa's teachings based on Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. See *zhus lan sman mchog bdus rsti'i phreng ba*, 13a2-13b4 (325-326).

Mantra. If there is any text in which we might find the axioms of his tantric philosophy, it is there, where he most clearly adjudicates innumerable debates over the proper interpretation of tantric scriptures. Over and over again, he sets forth the ideas of various Indian and Tibetan scholars (many of them unnamed, insofar as he vehemently disagrees with them), and proceeds to conclude with his own interpretation as to the purpose and sequence of each detail of the tantric path. While it would be impossible here to transmit the flavor of this massive text, I will select what I see to be the most essential points with respect to the line of questioning I myself have introduced within this current work. By focusing on Tsongkhapa's conclusions and not the debates themselves, I hope to outline the principles to which he repeatedly returns. As described above, these will lead us back into our own foray through the pertinent sūtra-based ideas that remain the cornerstones of Tsongkhapa's tantric thought.

Why Vajrayāna?

At the start of the *Steps of Mantra*,⁴ Tsongkhapa takes his reader through a whirlwind tour of the Buddhist path as a whole, in order to establish what he understands to be the proper place of the Vajrayāna within the scope of all the vehicles taught within the Indian Buddhist tradition. Here he does not attempt to explain in any detail the paths based on Mahāyāna sūtras. He takes this for granted as common knowledge among his readership,⁵ and focuses instead on trying to pinpoint what it is that makes a vehicle (*theg pa*, Skt. *yāna*) distinct. For he wants to establish the number of vehicles as definite, in opposition to explanations that would enable the number of vehicles to proliferate. In considering the opinions of earlier masters, he accepts that there are many differences among paths and persons that are valid, but he considers most of these inessential to what he thinks it means to be a “vehicle.” For Tsongkhapa, then, a vehicle is a way to travel across the metaphorical ocean of saṃsāra, and what distinguishes each vehicle must pertain to *what kind of boat it is, whom it holds, and how it travels to its destination*.

As we embark upon this material, however, it is important to keep in mind what a diverse and controversial body of literature Tsongkhapa is attempting to coordinate in a cohesive fashion. Working with a collection of Indian tantric texts in Tibetan translation that had only been codified into a “canon” within the preceding half-century in Tibet, Tsongkhapa brings his unique perspective, questions, and goals to the table. The plethora

⁴ For a full English translation of this first chapter of the *Steps of Mantra*, cf. Tsong kha pa and Jeffrey Hopkins, 1977, *Tantra in Tibet: The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra* (London: Allen & Unwin). For consistency of style and terminology, however, all translations included in the present writing are my own.

⁵ The *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra* was likely written in 1405, about three years after Tsongkhapa wrote the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment*, which he clearly takes as given throughout his writing of the *Steps of Mantra*. In the *Steps of Mantra*, Tsongkhapa often refers his reader to a more extensive treatment of a particular topic in the “books on the steps of the path.” For example, see *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 42a2 (83). For dating, see Jamyang Shepa, *The String of Wish-Giving Gems*, as quoted and translated in Geshe Michael Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 373.

of Buddhist tantric literature that had appeared in India by the eleventh century had brought very mixed reactions among the Indian Buddhist monastic elite, as well as within Indian society at large.⁶ Questions of how the sometimes shocking and counterintuitive revelations contained within the Buddhist tantras were supposed to connect with older traditions of Buddhism – whether in its earliest strata of mainstream teaching, or in its Mahāyāna forms that were controversial in their own way – seem to have remained without consensus in the great Indian Buddhist monasteries of Nālandā and Vikramaśīla. Then, over the course of a piecemeal history of transmission and translation into Tibetan culture and language from the eighth to twelfth centuries, many Tibetan scholars and practitioners offered unique and often highly creative interpretations of this array of Vajrayāna literature. As mentioned in the Introduction, during his early life Tsongkhapa sought instruction from numerous teachers across all the traditions that were thriving in Tibet at that time. Though he certainly engaged with the diversity of competing perspectives available, he maintains, throughout his works, a driving determination to see all of the Buddha’s teachings coalesce into a single streamlined system. In general, Tsongkhapa allows for great diversity within the scope of what he understands to be the Buddha’s authentic teaching, but does not mince words when it comes to views he considers dangerous or misleading with respect to ultimate spiritual goals, as he understands them. Whether or not we share his views or choices, it is essential to recognize that such a project of meta-integration was his philosophical enterprise, so to speak.

When Tsongkhapa disagrees with the opinions of others, whether Indian or Tibetan authors, we must recall that his interlocutors may not have had in mind the same principles of interpretation as he, yet he judges by his own standards. For better or for worse, this is the way of debate. It is impossible to make a point without taking a stand, and risking either being misunderstood, or misunderstanding your debate partner. If Tsongkhapa seems overly harsh or opinionated at times, we might also recognize the depth of his conviction – apparently based in the specificity of his own experience – that he was *right*. Yet most Buddhist masters have been equally convinced of their own privileged access to the truth, and still the diversity remains. The relationship between such confidence of view, as it is able to be expressed and transmitted in conventional language, and the inexpressibility of the ultimate reality and realization to which Tsongkhapa’s teachings self-consciously point, is a question that should be at the forefront of our own inquiry. In a world where language is admittedly empty of ultimate referent, how can the same person who teaches a view of *emptiness* care so very much about not getting the conceptual expression wrong? Is this incongruous, even

⁶ Davidson, 2002, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, esp. Chaps. 6-7, as well as Wedemeyer, 2013, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, esp. Chap. 6.

hypocritical, or might the very problem offer some insight into what Tsongkhapa himself meant by the indivisibility of deceptive and ultimate realities?

Encompassment vs. Inclusiveness

Tsongkhapa begins the *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra* with a sweeping statement of what it means to be a Buddha. He writes of the Teacher as one *who had considered the ultimate good for himself and others, and was dissatisfied with mere striving after the joys of this life, as well as with the systems taught by his own worldly elders, even though they were indeed trying to alleviate suffering. Thus he sought what was even higher, and beyond this life: He trained in the deeds of the children of all the Victorious Ones, and with the wish to care for others, found the supreme and awe-inspiring state of a Buddha, in which he could, with every breath, become the physician and the nourishment for living beings.*⁷

Tsongkhapa then describes the teaching of just such a Buddha as the only legitimate entryway for those seeking genuine freedom from suffering, making reference to the logic by which Dharmakīrti had worked to establish the Buddhist teaching as the only one (among the Indian systems of his own time) that makes coherent sense. Tsongkhapa exhorts his reader to discover what it would mean to take refuge out of a well-honed interior certainty, and not merely on the basis of citations from Buddhist scriptures. He warns that if one has not gained such certainty, then someone else who does not accept Buddhist scriptures could easily criticize one's own views, and lacking any sure logic to fall back on in defense of Buddhism, one's own faith would be crushed.

The only actual argument for the truth of Buddhist teaching that Tsongkhapa submits in this section is this: If one professes that the cycle of suffering was made by a single cause, or by a being whose nature is unchanging, but one also wants to meditate on a path that will stop the cycle altogether, then how could this make sense? For (a) one would be trying to stop the cycle without being able to stop its cause, and (b) since its cause was supposed to be unchanging, then it could never, under any circumstances, be stopped. Further, insofar as the views of other Indian systems reject the Buddhist teaching on selflessness, such views would, according to Tsongkhapa, contradict one's efforts to reach that which is to be achieved in liberation, namely, release from all the chains of the cycle.⁸

For Tsongkhapa's argument to be persuasive, of course, one would have to have gained some conviction that the teaching on selflessness is *accurate* with respect to the way things exist, and one would also have to distinguish what it means to posit an unchanging creator specifically as the maker of saṃsāra, in contrast to positing a creator of reality as a whole. For in general, Buddhist Vajrayāna does accept that there is

⁷ This represents a close paraphrase of *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 3a1-5 (5).

⁸ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 4b6-5a2 (8-9).

something which serves as the foundation for the totality of existence – as the ground of all that is pure *and* of all that is impure. As indicated in Chapter One, the issue at stake is not whether or not reality is understood to be *grounded* at an ultimate level; the issue is whether or not one posits a singular cause of *suffering* that cannot be stopped no matter how much one practices. If framed in this way, I believe the question might become less one of intractable interreligious disagreement, but rather a question of whether the worlds constituted by cycles of ignorance and karma were ever created as something that exists *really*, and if not, whether their actual causes (posited now in the plural) might indeed be stopped through diligent practice. To frame the question in this way is already to employ a Buddhist paradigm and explanation for suffering. Many traditions would not even describe the problem of suffering in a comparable way. Yet it is this explanation of suffering that Tsongkhapa found to be unique in the teaching of the historical Buddha. Frankly, within his own lifetime, it is unlikely that Tsongkhapa had had any meaningful encounters with living non-Buddhists, even if there were likely some Muslims or members of other Inner Asian traditions living in Lhasa at the time. His references to the other religions of India are taken in the abstract, already filtered through centuries of Buddhist philosophical formulation. From my side, however, I would suggest that if taken delicately, the soteriological principles raised in the remainder of this opening chapter of Tsongkhapa's tantric *magnum opus* might provide formidable subject matter for interreligious dialogue.

That is, if the “Buddha” is defined simply as one who is awake to reality as it is, who is free of all impurities and is replete in all goodness, whose mind is omniscient towards all existing objects, and who can and does appear in countless forms and in countless worlds in order to help living beings, then, from the perspective of one who posits the existence of such a being, what system, whether religious or non-religious, that works for the temporary and ultimate good of living beings could categorically be said *not* to constitute the holy deeds of a Buddha? If a Buddha is said to appear in every time, manner, and place in order to lead beings exactly according to their needs and inclination, then who could say for sure which teaching was ever *not* given by a manifestation of all the Buddhas – *if* it led to virtue and not to non-virtue, to happiness and not to suffering? There is a saying used in Tibetan Geluk monastic debate: “If something is virtue, then it necessarily follows that it is the sacred work of a Buddha” (*dge ba yin na sangs rgyas kyi phrin las yin pas khyab*). But at what sort of view must one have arrived, in order for this very statement to appear to be true, since even “virtues” often seem to be so widely unequal in their motivations and effects? Or what would someone say who categorically denies the existence or even the nomenclature of “Buddhas”? Could such a person even accept such an idea? Then, what to say of the enormous specificity of the *Buddhist* paths, as originally taught in various Indian treatises and gradually diversified throughout so many languages and cultures in this particular world?

Tsongkhapa has begun his argument by saying there is only one authentic entryway: the teaching of the Buddha. He will continue it later on by saying that although there may be a myriad of ways and teachings within the Dharma, in the end there is only one vehicle: that which leads to the perfected state of a Buddha. In the meantime he has entirely set aside the subject of “non-Buddhist” (*mu stegs*, Skt *tīrthika*) paths as being outside his frame of reference. But if one *were* to return and ask just how the all-pervasive Buddhas might have taught virtue to various living beings – perhaps through the frameworks of other religious traditions and soteriologically-oriented systems? – I sincerely wonder how Tsongkhapa might have answered. Since I do not see him address such a question directly, our only avenue would be to extrapolate from the logic of what he does say. Thus I ask my reader to question, throughout the discussion of Buddhist Vajrayāna that will follow: What are the principles at stake? How might these principles be applied in other contemplative contexts? How could consideration of Tsongkhapa’s rigorous logic be of benefit in plumbing the depths of what other systems have intended?

Suffice to say that in Tsongkhapa’s world, logic *could* lead to a right answer and, once found, there could be no turning back for comparison. Life is too short to vacillate; his injunction was for disciples to discover the correct view, learn the instructions for practice and run with them to the goal. From this perspective, there is still value in studying the wide variety of Buddhist paths, even those that do not appear to be directly appropriate for one’s own practice at a given time, in order to be able to teach them to others in the future. But one does not spend time actually practicing paths that will not lead one to the most meaningful ultimate goal, as quickly as possible, according to one’s personal capacity. Thus, for Tsongkhapa, the corpus of teachings to be understood and preserved, though vast, was still limited to a particular constellation of Indian scriptures and their commentaries. Although he presents a path that is meant at its height to encompass all things and to reach all beings in all possible worlds, he is not an inclusivist – much less a relativist – in the sense of accepting any and all well-intended teaching as beneficial. For in Tsongkhapa’s view, it is precisely by seeking to understand the subtleties of the classical Indian Buddhist scriptures that a single person will come to recognize all the details of such scripture as practical advice for how to proceed along the path to the highest goal. It is then that he says “all the scriptures will dawn as private instruction.”⁹

Distinguishing Vehicles

In turning to the overall division between the “greater” and “lesser” vehicles of Buddhism, Tsongkhapa makes a point briefly here that he has argued extensively in his *Illumination of the True Thought*, namely that the highest view of emptiness does exist in

⁹ See the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. pa, 11a6-11b1 (53-54) ff.: གསུང་རབ་ཐམས་ཅད་གནས་པ་གཏུ་འཆར་བ་ནི། ་་་

the scriptural collections traditionally classified in Indian Buddhism as pertaining to the “listeners” and “solitary buddhas.” That is, if one is to say that someone whose motivation is to emerge from suffering individually can in fact reach the state of an *arhat* who has put an end to all mental afflictions, then, following Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa argues that arhats must always have realized the same, ultimate emptiness realized by those of the Middle Way, and never some lesser form of it. This is because, according to this Consequence position, anything that is not the actual direct perception of emptiness would have to entail some subtle grasping to things as things. But if such grasping still occurs, then one would not be able to put an end to mental afflictions, even if one has seen the lack of self to a *person* in some coarser sense. So, with the help of some famous quotations from sūtras accepted by the so-called “lesser vehicle,” which do describe the emptiness and illusory nature of phenomena in ways quite compatible with the scriptures of the Middle Way, Tsongkhapa insists that this highest view of emptiness is taught *implicitly* even in the scriptures associated with the listeners and solitary buddhas. Hence he argues that the distinction between greater and lesser vehicles cannot be made on the basis of view alone.

Rather, Tsongkhapa claims that although meditation on the sixteen aspects of the four realities¹⁰ is not enough to put a final end to the afflictions, nonetheless, sincere meditation on the arising, ceasing, and impermanence of phenomena can lead an individual to understand dependent origination. Such understanding would eventually drive that person to realize the ultimate emptiness of things, including the emptiness of the subtlest parts of a person. Thus, although there are persons for whom the teachings of the scriptural collections belonging to the lesser vehicle *could* take them directly to the state of an arhat, Tsongkhapa argues that the primary disciples of those scriptures are those of weaker faculties, for whom the teachings are simply purifying their mindstreams in preparation for their being able to receive more explicit teachings on the view of emptiness later on. Those of sharp faculties, who, based on those same scriptural collections, are actually able to realize emptiness directly and quickly attain the state of an arhat, would then be the “incidental disciples” of the very scriptures that are understood by their primary followers to present the sole path to liberation.¹¹ It is an interesting conclusion, and one that would likely be shocking and unacceptable to many current followers and practitioners of the Theravāda tradition.

I raise this point mainly because Tsongkhapa will make a similar case regarding the disciples suited to hear the Middle Way view versus those suited to hear the Mind-Only view within the Mahāyāna. He says that the primary disciples for whom the Way of the Perfections was intended are those who can understand the Middle Way view, while

¹⁰ For example, the fact that a phenomenon included within the reality of suffering is impermanent, suffering, “empty,” and without “self.”

¹¹ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 8b2-3 (16).

those attracted to the Mind-Only view are the “incidental or common disciples.”¹² This reveals how unequivocally Tsongkhapa professed the Middle Way view to be supreme, even while he praised the legitimate and necessary place of these other schools of teaching within the structure of the Buddhist paths.

Furthermore, in arguing that the highest view of emptiness must exist even for disciples whose motivation is limited in scope, and that even within the greater vehicle there are significant differences in view, Tsongkhapa is able to affirm that the real distinction between greater and smaller vehicles cannot be one of view but must be one of *method*. That is, what he sees to properly distinguish the Mahāyāna are the practices unique to the motivation of someone who strives to work for the benefit of every living being at once. These include the perfections of giving, bodhisattva morality, patience, and so forth; the cultivation of great compassion, the practices of prayer and dedication of merit, along with the very idea of amassing the two collections of merit and wisdom. Since it is on the basis of method that Tsongkhapa will also distinguish the Vajrayāna as a vehicle of its own even within the shared motivation and view of the Mahāyāna, it is significant to recognize that he is actually making the distinction between each vehicle on the basis of *the mode of practice alone*, and not even with respect to basic motivation, or even primarily with respect to the types of disciples for whom the teachings of a vehicle are directed. This is clear because we have already seen that the types of disciples can vary quite significantly even among those who apply themselves to a particular set of scriptures.

We should not, however, take this distinction between method and view – so basic to Tsongkhapa’s outlook – for granted. In practice, it may be very difficult to distinguish the part of a mind that is “doing” a certain practice and the part of a mind that is “seeing” something in a certain way. In the course of Tsongkhapa’s works, innumerable explanations of the view are framed in the context of instruction on how one should be meditating in order to find or sustain a view. How then, could one maintain that a particular view would be categorically the same even if one were practicing differently? For the very reasons explored in Chapters One and Two – regarding the myriad factors that give rise to just how a living being will experience anything in a particular moment – it may be difficult, even in principle, to isolate a view from the way one arrived at that view, or the way one cultivates it, or the type of person one is, with what motivation, as one holds or acts upon that “view.” Nevertheless, Tsongkhapa will insist repeatedly upon the distinction, and I would be averse to brush it away as impossible to delineate. Perhaps there is significance simply in pondering the difference. I would also suggest that when Tsongkhapa says “view,” in many cases he means the referent of the view, namely ultimate reality itself. If my reading is correct, this would make it easier to understand

¹² See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 9a5-6 (17). This is one of very few references to the “Mind-Only” view within the whole of the *Steps of Mantra*.

how he can mean there to be only “one view” – i.e., one ultimate reality – even with such diverse states of mind entering into it.¹³

Perhaps the most important point to glean here is how Tsongkhapa understands a whole range of diverse teachings to be gushing from a single font of compassionate, enlightened knowledge. It might be difficult to make such an argument from the perspective of the limitations of what one human person can teach within a circumscribed time and place, but it is essential to Tsongkhapa’s view that even the “historical” Buddha, Śākyamuni, had attained an omniscient and omnipresent mind that is open to all of reality in one moment. Such a mind is known as the *dharmakāya*, or what may be translated imperfectly as the “holy body of the dharma.” Of course, being *mind*, it is a “body” only in the metaphorical sense.¹⁴ It is on the basis of such a mind that a Buddha is said to be able to generate an infinite number of physical forms and manifestations; these constitute the *rūpakāya*, or “holy body of form.” Thus there is no incongruity, in Tsongkhapa’s view, to envisioning the Buddha, as a single person, being able to transmit widely diverse systems of teaching that only appeared in the form of concrete and copyable manuscript collections within our historical world during specific periods of time separated by many centuries or millennia. The complex historiographical issue at stake has been treated amply by scholarship,¹⁵ so I will not address it further here. The point is that for Tsongkhapa, a single Buddha could appear in countless different forms.

Though it would step beyond the range of Tsongkhapa’s milieu to say so, I would add that this very logic suggests that the same Buddha can and would appear in forms that are not even identified with historical “Buddhism” as we know it. But if one were to

¹³ For a famous expression of this particular meaning of the unity of “view,” that would have been well known to Tsongkhapa, see the verse cited in Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’-rgyal-mtshan, translated by Jared Rhoton, *A Clear Differentiation of The Three Codes: Essential Distinctions Among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 129, v. 255 (the translation here is my own):

པ་རྩོམ་བྱིན་པའི་སྒྲིམ་བྱུང་ལས། ལྷག་པའི་ལྷ་བ་ཡོད་ན་ནི། ལྷ་དེ་སྒྲིམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་འགྱུར། སྒྲིམ་བྱུང་ཡིན་ན་ཁྱད་པར་མེད།

If there were a view beyond the freedom from elaboration
associated with the Perfections

then it would have to be something that *had* elaboration.

But if there is no elaboration, there can be no distinction.

¹⁴ See Makransky, 1997, *Buddhahood Embodied*, for discussion of the twelve-hundred year history of debates over the interpretation of the doctrine of the “bodies” of a Buddha as expressed in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. See esp. pp. 4-5 and 41-62, for the variety of meanings attributed to both parts of the word *dharmakāya*. Due to this hermeneutical complexity, I prefer to leave this term untranslated. In Tsongkhapa’s thought, it is often equated with the mind of a Buddha and sometimes immediately glossed with the phrase *rgyal ba’i thugs*, or “the holy mind of the Victorious One(s).”

¹⁵ See, for example, Makransky, 2000, “Historical Consciousness as an Offering to the Trans-historical Buddha,” in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, John Makransky and Roger Jackson, eds. (London: RoutledgeCurzon), 111-135. Though I do not entirely agree with Makransky’s perspective here, it would require a monograph in itself for me to respond to this philosophically complex and significant reflection. See also, Christian Wedemeyer, 2013, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, especially 71-102.

go so far as to claim that the Buddha comes *as* a Hindu sage, or *as* a Muslim theologian, or *as* a Jewish prophet, or *as* a Christian saint, and so on, then I wonder how Tsongkhapa might respond, regarding his own claim that the teaching of the Buddha is the sole entryway for those seeking freedom. On the other hand, to express such a thought in concrete terms is highly problematic from the point of view of any of the respective traditions mentioned. Do we remain at an impasse, or continue to listen to yet a deeper level at which revelation might be taking place, prior to the names, identities, and contexts known to humanity?

Tsongkhapa goes on to argue that although there may be great differences in method and apparent goal between the greater and lesser vehicles, still, from the Buddha's perspective, there is only one ultimate goal, and everything he taught was aimed to lead every being there eventually. In that sense, since even those who set out on the path within the “lesser vehicle” will never in the end finish the path with the same goal towards which they thought they were setting out from the beginning, even the so-called lesser vehicle will not become an obstacle for them. In commenting on a series of quotations from the *Sūtra of the White Lotus of the Highest Dharma* (Skt. *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*), Tsongkhapa paraphrases the intent of the Buddha's speech there:¹⁶

The reason I, the Buddha, came into the world is this: So that living beings might gain the primordial wisdom¹⁷ I myself had found. All the paths I taught end in a

¹⁶ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 10a3-10b1 (19-20).

།དེའི་དོན་ནི་སངས་རྒྱལ་འཇིག་རྟེན་དུ་བྱོན་པའི་དགོས་པ་ནི་རང་གིས་བརྟེན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱིས་ཐོབ་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཡིན་པས། ལམ་བསྟན་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་སངས་རྒྱལ་སྤྱི་འབྲེན་པའི་ཐབས་གཅིག་ཏུ་ཐད་གྱི་དེར་བགྱི་བའི་ཐབས་སུ་སྤྱུར་པའི་ཐེག་པ་དམན་པས་སེམས་ཅན་མི་འབྲིང་དོ། །དེས་ན་རང་ཉིད་གོ་པར་གང་ལ་གནས་པའི་སྟོབས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱང་འགོད་དོ། །གལ་ཏེ་བྱང་ཆུབ་བརྟེན་ནས་སེམས་ཅན་འགའ་ཞིག་སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སར་འབྲོ་བའི་ཐབས་སུ་སྤྱུར་པའི་ཐེག་དམན་ལ་བཀོད་ན། ཆོས་ལ་དབེ་མཁུད་བྱེད་པའི་སེར་སྒྲ་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། མཐར་ཐུག་ཐེག་པ་གཅིག་ཡིན་པས་ཐེག་པ་དམན་པ་འི་རིགས་ཅན་དེ་དག་ཀྱང་སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སར་ནི་འབྲིང་དུ་ཡོད་ལ། དེའི་ཐབས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་བཞིན་དུ་དེ་དག་ལ་སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སར་བགྱི་བའི་ཆོས་མི་སྟོན་པར་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེས་པའོ།

¹⁷ In most cases, I use “primordial wisdom” and “primordial knowing” interchangeably to render the Tibetan *ye shes* (Skt. *jñāna*), depending on what seems appropriate to the English grammatical structure in context. (If there are numerous other adjectives with similar import, I do, however, sometimes render *ye shes* simply as “wisdom.”) Though the Sakya Paṇḍita was vehement in his condemnation of Tibetan glosses of *ye shes* as “*gdod ma’i shes pa*,” or “knowing that has existed from a timeless beginning,” I still accept that in context it is a useful way to distinguish *ye shes* from *shes rab* (Skt. *prajñā*), which I generally translate as “incisive wisdom” (except where it is used in the sense of an afflicted mental function, where I will render it as “discernment”). Though I have not found a proper source to defend the following intuition, it seems to me that the “*ye*” (i.e., “primordial,” “timeless”) in *ye shes*, may have been used in earliest Tibetan translations almost as a privative, to indicate knowledge that did *not* make use of a “*rnam pa*” or “aspect,” as in “*rnam par shes pa*” (Skt. *vijñāna*). So in this sense, since it always refers to some form of wisdom realizing emptiness nonconceptually, I would still accept that even in the context of Tsongkhapa's writings (and of course in the context of Tibetan Old Translation literature) *ye shes* almost always refers to a kind of timeless knowing, whether used in the context of sūtra or tantra (even if, in the course of the path, there are definitely moments at which a yogi “enters,” “collects,” or even “gives birth to” such wisdom, within a temporal sequence). Cf. Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’-rgyal-mtshan, translated by Jared Rhoton,

single method to lead them to the state of a Buddha; but I did not lead living beings by any lower vehicle that could not turn into a method to take them there. Therefore, I have set living beings in the place where I am, with the qualities of strength and so on.¹⁸

If, having found enlightenment, I were to set even one living being in a lower vehicle, one that could not become a method for reaching the level of a Buddha, then that would be the stinginess of jealousy that conceals the truth. Since in the end there is only one vehicle, I will eventually lead those of the family of the lesser vehicle to the level of a Buddha. But as for the method: when, intentionally, I did not reveal the Dharma that would conduct them all the way to the level of a Buddha, it is because the method by which I would do so was hidden.

Tsongkhapa continues from here to emphasize that one of the very worst spiritual mistakes one could make – and the most difficult to purify – would be to “reject the Dharma” (*chos spong*) by saying or holding in one’s heart that, within the speech of the Victorious One, there are any distinctions between what is better and what is worse, what is reasonable and what is unreasonable, between what was spoken for the sake of listeners and solitary buddhas and what was spoken for bodhisattvas; or by attempting to adjudicate between what will lead to enlightenment and what will become an obstacle to enlightenment.¹⁹ He says this to clarify that although it would indeed be an obstacle for someone who had *already* conceived the highest wish for enlightenment for the benefit of all to fall back and decide to take a smaller-scope path for only one’s individual liberation instead, the lesser vehicle in itself is in no way an obstacle to highest enlightenment, for those who follow it at the appropriate moment in their spiritual evolution. Nonetheless, with respect to the capacities of particular disciples, Tsongkhapa acknowledges that there are indeed distinctions regarding whether a method taught by the Buddha is complete or not, and regarding the speed with which disciples will be able to reach the final goal. Thus he admits there to be paths which are only branches on the road to enlightenment, and claims these are not the same as the central highway of the Greater Way. He also

2002, *A Clear Differentiation of The Three Codes*, 169 and 172 (see also the Tibetan vv. 556, 558, and vv. 580-582, at pp. 323-325):

The above has been a summary of mistakes in meaning. Now listen, as I shall give a brief analysis of errors in wording. Some interpret . . . *ye shes* (“Gnosis,” *jñāna*) as meaning “original awareness”; . . . While these explanations may seem very fine to ignorant people, the learned will laugh if they see them. Why so? Because they are unacceptable as explanations of Sanskrit terms and because they have been explicated as if they were Tibetan terms, in ignorance of the fact that these terms are Sanskrit. Therefore the learned ought to reject all explanations like these because they are concoctions of Tibet’s simpletons.

¹⁸ Note the strong echoes in this paragraph with two phrases attributed to Jesus. See John 18:37: “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Also, see John 17:24: “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

¹⁹ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 11a2-4 (21). Tsongkhapa is citing the *Sarva-vaidalya-samgraha-sūtra*, *rnam par ‘thag pa thams cad bsdu pa’i mdo*, Toh. 227, sde dge bka’ gyur, mdo sde, vol. *dza*.

quotes the *Chapter of the Truth-Sayer* for a metaphor in which the Dharma of three vehicles is compared to the water of different streams flowing into the single great ocean of Those Gone Thus.²⁰ It might read like a whole theory of religious pluralism, yet here expressed only in terms of the many gateways within Buddhism itself.

Here one can recognize the mounting crescendo with which Tsongkhapa is introducing the Vajra Vehicle, and in particular unsurpassed yoga tantra (Skt. *anuttarayogatantra*), as the path of greatest speed, for the sharpest disciples, which leads most directly to the supreme goal. Surprisingly, however, he will be able to argue that what actually distinguishes the secret Vajrayāna from the Mahāyāna at large is actually *not* speed, nor the capacity of disciples to take desire as the path, nor the view, nor even whether or not the path involves meditative bliss, or relies upon the crucial points of the body. Rather, as before, he says that the one distinction important enough to classify a whole vehicle unto itself is method, but here the content of the method that is unique to the Vajrayāna will take considerable explanation.

Congruency of Path and Result

Tsongkhapa is careful to establish that the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna are exactly the same from the perspective of motivation, the wish to reach the state of a Buddha in order to be able to benefit every living being. He also points out that insofar as the path of the Vajrayāna entails the practice of all six perfections, it includes the whole of the Mahāyāna. Conversely, insofar as the Vajrayāna will ultimately lead to exactly the same unsurpassed state of a Buddha described in the Mahāyāna sūtras,²¹ the Vajrayāna is included in the scope of what the Mahāyāna path promises to reach, and so is not separate from it. Thus any division into two vehicles must come not between the Vajrayāna and the Mahāyāna but only between the Vajrayāna and the *Pāramitāyāna*, insofar as the latter specifically refers to the way of the six perfections as distinct from the secret teachings of tantra. But Tsongkhapa is once again emphatic that within the Vajrayāna or any other vehicle there is “no view beyond what has been set forth in the Middle Way treatises of Ārya Nāgārjuna, which expresses the true thought of all those groups of sūtras of definitive meaning, on the perfection of incisive wisdom, and so forth.”²² Furthermore, he provides examples of how even within the Perfection Vehicle there are disciples who progress with immense speed, or who are able to use objects of desire as the path, or who reach and utilize for the path both the physical and mental bliss of the actual state of

²⁰ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 11a5-11b1-2 (21-22).

²¹ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 15b3-4 (30): “. . . because the goal of both paths is the state of a Buddha who has finished off all faults and completed all good qualities. In this they are exactly the same.”
ལས་གཉིས་ཀའི་ཐོབ་བྱ་ཡང་སྒྲིན་ཀུན་ཟད་དང་ཡོན་ཏན་ཀུན་རྫོགས་ཀྱི་སངས་རྒྱས་སུ་མཆོངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

²² *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 14a2 (27).

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་ཏུ་བྱིན་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ངེས་དོན་གྱི་མདོ་སྡེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དགོངས་པ་འཕགས་པ་ཁྱུ་སྟུབ་ཀྱིས་དབུ་མའི་བསྐྱན་བཅོས་སུ་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པ་ལས་ལྷག་པའི་ལྷ་བ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་དང་།

meditative stillness (*zhi gnas*, Skt. *śamatha*). On the other hand, something that may appear to be distinctive for the Vajrayāna, such as working with the crucial points of the subtle body, is actually a practice unique only to the complete stage of unsurpassed yoga tantra, and is not common to all four classes of tantra. So none of these characteristics usually associated with the Vajrayāna path is either distinctive enough or broad enough to serve as the basis for defining the vehicle itself. Tsongkhapa never even mentions “secrecy” as a factor that might categorically distinguish the Vajra Vehicle, even though he has already explained the meaning of the term when glossing one of the names for the vehicle as being “secret mantra.”²³

In order to explain the proper distinction between vehicles, Tsongkhapa returns to what may be the most famous definition of the wish for enlightenment (Skt. *bodhicitta*), quoted from the *Ornament of Realizations* (Skt. *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*), attributed to Maitreya. “This is what it means to arouse the wish: Desire perfect and complete enlightenment for the sake of benefitting others.”²⁴ Tsongkhapa explains this to mean that the primary goal is helping others; *becoming a Buddha is merely an auxiliary aid to this aim*. Thus the main object of the wish is not to reach enlightenment as one’s personal goal, but rather to help others, by whatever means will benefit most. Tsongkhapa says:²⁵

The Buddha who accomplishes the good of disciples by appearing to them directly is not the dharmakāya, but the two aspects of the holy body of form. Thus one achieves the dharmakāya through the incisive wisdom that realizes the profound, and one achieves the holy body of form through the method that is vast. But since one cannot reach either holy body with a wisdom bereft of method or with a method bereft of wisdom, one must never at any time be separated from either method or wisdom. This is the general tenet of all who belong to the Mahāyāna.

Thus, what should distinguish the Mahāyāna in general is a method that causes one to reach a holy body of form, which will be able to appear to the people who need to see, hear, and relate to a Teacher.

Now in the way of the perfections, one works at the causes – the countless acts of virtue over three or more immeasurable eons – that are said to be able to *ripen* into a

²³ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 12a1 (23):

It is ‘secret’ insofar as it is something private, that is accomplished in a hidden way; and since it is not a perceivable object for anyone who is not a vessel, to such a one it is not shown.

གསང་ཞིང་སྤྲོས་པས་འབྲུག་ལ་སྣོད་མིན་གྱི་ཡུལ་མིན་པས་དེ་ལ་མི་བསྟན་པས་ན་གསང་བའོ།

²⁴ As quoted in *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 15b6 (30): མེས་པས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ནི་གཞན་དོན་ཕྱིར། །ཡང་དག་ཇོགས་པའི་བྱང་ཆུབ་འདོད།

²⁵ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 15b6-16a2 (30-31):

།གདུལ་བྱ་ལ་དངོས་སྤྲོད་ནས་དེ་དག་གི་དོན་སྤྲུབ་པའི་སངས་རྒྱུ་ནི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤྲུ་མིན་གྱི་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྲུ་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལ་ཐབ་མོ་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤྲུ་དང་། རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྲུ་སྤྲུབ་པ་དང་། ཐབས་དང་བྲལ་བའི་ཤེས་རབ་དང་ཤེས་རབ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་སྤྲུ་གཉིས་སྤྲུབ་པར་མི་རྩལ་པས་ཐབས་དང་ཤེས་རབ་ཡ་མ་བྲལ་བ་དགོས་སོ་ཞེས་པ་འདི་ནི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་སྤྱིའི་བྱུང་བའི་མཐའ་འོ།

body blazing in divine beauty with the “signs and marks” of a fully enlightened being. But apart from acts of devotion aimed towards a Buddha who already possesses such exquisite form – including meditative visualization of a Buddha in the space before one’s eyes – the sūtra vehicle does not include any practices that imitate or echo what it will be like when one actually embodies such enlightened form oneself. The holy body of form is approached more like a prize at the end of a long road, but one does not try to look like a Buddha or transcendent bodhisattva before one has actually created the causes – through giving, morality, patience, and so on – that would naturally ripen into such splendor. The Buddha’s glory comes from constant efforts to serve others and to remain in the austerity of deep meditation; his heavenly paradise comes from having given away his arms and legs and eyes to those who asked for them; his beauty comes from not getting angry in the face of those who persecuted him, and so on. The causes for the holy body of form are congruent in *import*, hence never violating the consistency of cause and effect, but not in appearance or aspect.

Nevertheless, the Perfection Vehicle does include a practice that is similar to its result in “aspect” (*rnam pa*), or in nature. This is the meditation on the suchness, or ultimate reality, of all things, completely free of conceptual elaboration, which serves as a direct cause for the dharmakāya. Although, prior to reaching the actual bodhisattva levels of an ārya, one cannot experience a state utterly free of the conceptuality that holds things to have some nature of their own, nonetheless, the sūtra practices of meditative stillness and insight are designed to lead a practitioner closer and closer to such a perfect meditation on emptiness. Once achieved, it is often said that the ārya’s direct perception of emptiness is exactly equivalent to that of a Buddha, as long as the meditation continues. The work of the bodhisattva’s “path of meditation” (*sgom lam*, Skt. *bhāvanamārga*) is to return to and lengthen that meditation again and again, until it becomes the everlasting meditation on ultimate reality that is the dharmakāya. The approaches to the dharmakāya and rūpakāya within the Perfection Vehicle are thus quite distinct and separate: The former is cultivated in deep meditation, while the vast deeds that are understood to cause the latter are primarily performed outside of meditation, in active engagement with other living beings. Yet short of the state of an actual Buddha, it is said that no single state of mind can fully realize ultimate reality and deceptive reality simultaneously. One must continuously alternate, until all defilements are purified.

Here then, we come to the crux of what will distinguish the Vajra Vehicle. Across all four classes of Buddhist tantra there are practices that involve “taking the result as the path” with respect to the holy body of form. Such practices specifically create causes that attempt to approximate the same *aspect*, or nature, as the resultant state, even long before all the virtue has been collected that will be able to actualize that state as a reality. Tsongkhapa has already explained the meaning of the Vajrayāna as the “Result Vehicle” insofar as it takes “as the path” the four things that are said to characterize the final result

in terms of the glorified body of experience, or *sambhogakāya*. These are a totally pure (1) environment, (2) body, (3) objects of experience, and (4) holy deeds.²⁶ In this way Tsongkhapa repeatedly refers to the Vajra Vehicle as the path that “travels right here” (*'dir bgrod pa*), anticipating its result as though already actual, as opposed to the Perfection Vehicle, which “travels by means of this” (*'dis bgrod pa*), planting causes along the way. Note, however, that this distinction is made only with respect to the causes and result pertaining to the holy body of form, since the Perfection Vehicle *does* already have a path which is similar in aspect to the resultant dharmakāya. However, the Perfection Vehicle is never referred to as a “resultant vehicle” for that reason, nor does Tsongkhapa indicate such a meaning. He only points out that the Perfection Vehicle does have a congruent path for the dharmakāya, even though it lacks one for the rūpakāya.

What would it mean, then, in the Vajrayāna, to take the result as the path? Might it not be hubris, or fantasy, or escapism, or simply failing to go out and do the deeds in the world that one needs to do to help others, all the while just sitting in meditation imagining you are already a Buddha doing so? Tsongkhapa's hypothetical interlocutors did not seem to pose such questions; his opponents had different concerns, and, in Tsongkhapa's opinion, other unbalanced views that he saw the need to correct. Nonetheless, I hope that analysis of his answers to those pre-fifteenth century objections might also help to address our modern ones – the conundrums that come up in the minds of so many contemporary students of Vajrayāna, whether Tibetan or non-Tibetan.

The Vajra of Indivisibility

Such doubts about a practice of imagining oneself as a Buddha might indeed be valid if reality were exactly as it appears. But as we worked to unravel in the first two chapters, if the currently appearing reality is not the only one, and if one's own identity does not exist with any inherent characteristics, then perhaps there would be the possibility of entering another reality, where one might believe, even for a short time, that something completely different was “already true,” not only as some far-off imagined result. This is one reason why, according to Tsongkhapa's analysis, within all four classes of tantra, there is no practice for reaching a divine being that is not grounded in a meditation on emptiness. For it is only in authentically discovering for oneself what is *not* there, that the metaphysical space is revealed in which the divine Buddha can manifest. If the meditation on emptiness is deep enough, then the appearance of a divine being that follows will seem all the more real, precisely as it is understood not to be *inherently* real. Yet the divine being is neither more nor less real than the ordinary person the practitioner used to be. Nonetheless, there are questions that must arise regarding the respective degree of reality or imagination that should be accorded to different levels of practice and realization, even within the “resultant path.” These we will engage further on, but for

²⁶ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 13a4-6 (23).

now, we turn to Tsongkhapa's argument, based in Indian tantric scriptures, for the key feature that distinguishes the whole of Vajrayāna practice from the path of the perfections alone. He says it is a "path that has an aspect congruent to the holy body of form" (*gzugs sku dang rnam par mthun pa'i lam*).

Tsongkhapa resorts to his entire arsenal of Indian scriptures to prove the point. He quotes everything from the explanatory tantra for the Hevajra cycle known as the *Vajra Tent Tantra* (*Vajrapañjara-tantra*), to a work by the Guhyasamāja master Buddha-śrī-jñāna-pāda (to whom Tsongkhapa refers simply as Jñānapāda) called *Engaging upon the Practice of Reaching Self* (*Ātma-sādhana-avatāra*), to works by Śāntipa, Abhyakāra(gupta), Śrīdhara, and the great adept Mi-thub zla-ba (*Ajayacandra?). He then goes on to quote the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha-tantra* as well as Buddhaguhya, the principal commentator on the *Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi-tantra*, to show that the same intent can be found across all four classes of tantra. The primary idea that all these citations hold in common is this: Each result requires its proper cause, and a result without a cause specific to it is impossible. Meditation on emptiness alone will not bring the result of the holy body of form, while meditation on a body of form without meditation on emptiness, will not result in Buddhahood. This is because, in either case, the necessary variety of causes is not complete. Meditation on emptiness combined with another method, such as practice of the first five perfections, will bring enlightenment, but only after a very long time. However, meditation on both emptiness and the holy form of a divine being is said to bring about total enlightenment with great speed.²⁷

Although Vajrayāna practice may appear at times to be entirely absorbed in ritual performance, recitation, and meditation upon both emptiness and form – sometimes leaving no apparent opportunity for the full-time yogi to engage in the classically "visible" bodhisattva deeds serving other people – the thrust of the scriptural tradition cited by Tsongkhapa is as follows. Through this extraordinary method, one can reach much more rapidly a state where one might create and emanate infinite numbers of physical bodies to go and help people exactly as needed. One might say it is like dedicating the intense time in training to become a surgeon, so that one can be of greater benefit than if one had no medical skills, or like setting aside a number of years to plan, organize, and steadily create a very efficient network of global NGOs with millions of trained workers involved, in order to be more effective than a single volunteer working in the field. The Vajrayāna practitioner aims to gain as quickly as possible both (1) a mind that will understand people's problems perfectly and know the most efficient salve for them, as well as (2) a limitless phalanx of able bodies, all emanated from a single source, that can go out and do the work of teaching and healing others.

²⁷ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 16b2-25a4 (32-49), esp. 22a4-22b1 (43-44) for the range of points stated here.

Here in this context, then, the key to great speed is supposed to be that one works *simultaneously* on both of the necessary causes for enlightenment: (1) the ultimate understanding of how reality works and (2) the energy of compassion turned into forms that can actually enact what wisdom envisions. This is one way that Tsongkhapa interprets what the first chapter of the *Vajra Tent Tantra* calls “the binding that is the method of bliss” (*bde’ ba’i thab kyi sdom pa ste*). Although this notion of “binding” has many different connotations within the Hevajra and other tantric systems,²⁸ Tsongkhapa writes that here it means that method, which is the appearance of a circle of divine beings, and the true nature *of* that method, realized by the incisive wisdom realizing emptiness, are inseparable. Then, “bliss” (or in this case, “ease”) means one has no need to rely on austere hardships.²⁹ He has already shown that indivisibility is the primary significance of the word *vajra*, in the sense of a diamond that is so difficult to cut.³⁰ It is through taking on the divine identity of a Buddha – right now – that one should be able to reach enlightenment much faster than in the path of the perfections (where one would continue to retain a limited sense of identity while performing bodhisattva deeds for many eons).

Still, why would it be of such benefit to imagine oneself *looking* like a Buddha in a paradise, surrounded by exquisite divine beings, if the way one would have to appear to help people, animals, and other beings of the six realms would be in forms *they* can see and relate to easily, not in a rarified form of light that is invisible to all but highly realized bodhisattvas? Continuing to comment on the *Vajra Tent Tantra*, Tsongkhapa poses the question thus: “Now in order to reach the holy body of form, why does one have to practice the yoga that takes firm hold of the pride of a Buddha, having the aspect of a maṇḍala and its circle of beings?”³¹ The answer, he says, comes in the quoted verse:³²

The Teacher has thirty-two marks;
the Lord is endowed with eighty signs.
Thus from this method comes the goal:
“Method” is to have the form of our Teacher.

Tsongkhapa explains that the “goal” (literally, the thing to be proven or accomplished, the *bsgrub bya*), is the holy body of form, and the reason (*gtan tshigs*) that proves or accomplishes it, is being adorned with the signs and marks. Thus one must reach (*bsgrub*)

²⁸ For example, in Tibetan this word for “binding” (*sdom pa*), which can also mean “vow,” is the word used to translate the name of the principal divine being depicted in the *Sambhara-tantra*, namely Cakrasaṃvara (Tib. ‘*khor lo sdom pa*).

²⁹ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 17b4-5 (34).

³⁰ See Introduction, note 3.

³¹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 17b6-18a1 (34-35):

ཁོ་ན་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལ་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ད་རྒྱལ་འཆང་བའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དགོས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཅི་ཡིན་སྙམ་ན།

³² As quoted in *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 16b5 (32):

སྟོན་པ་སྤུལ་ཅུ་ཙག་ཉིས་མཚན། ཁང་འབདག་དཔེ་བྱ་བ་རྒྱུད་ཅུར་ལྟན། རེ་བྱིར་ཐབས་དེས་བསྐྱབ་བྱ་སྟེ། ཐབས་ནི་སྟོན་པའི་གཟུགས་ཅན་ནོ།

the result of having the form of the Teacher through that very method, which is itself to take on the form, or aspect, of the Teacher.³³

If being the Buddha is inextricably joined to what it is to appear as the Buddha, one becomes the Buddha who already *is* by learning to appear to oneself and others *as* that Teacher. As taught in the *Ornament of Realizations* and many other Mahāyāna sūtra sources as well, the signs and marks are supposed to be the physical expression of the infinite and unfathomable good qualities of the Buddha. To “become” such a person, then, one becomes all that the person is, including how that person looks.

Perhaps this is one reason why the practice of devotion to a teacher – viewed as inseparable from the Buddha – becomes so important in Vajrayāna. One is becoming *someone else* who is already enlightened, and this requires relinquishing all ideas about who one was in one’s “own” ordinary form and body. The array of Buddhist tantras describe both male and female Buddhas who sometimes appear in unconventional forms – aspects that bear no resemblance to the historical form of Śākyamuni Buddha, the mendicant monk. But in practicing any one of those tantric sādhanas (*sgrub thabs*, or methods for *reaching / proving / accomplishing* the Buddha one will become, as glossed in the sentences above), one commits to learning how to appear in precisely the form in which the Buddha appeared when teaching that particular tantric system. One might say the practitioner does not otherwise get to “choose” what he or she will look like as a Buddha, any more than, once one has fallen in love, one gets to change the specific features of a beloved’s face. Ideally, one falls in love with a *person*, and associates the form as the expression of who the person is. Likewise, once committing to – or falling into divine love with – the Teacher in the form of the Buddha who transmitted that particular sādhana, one strives to become the Beloved / Teacher / Buddha *in that form*.³⁴ We see again and again that Tsongkhapa’s descriptions of the complete stage, and especially the final moments before enlightenment, always specify that one appears in the form or aspect of the divine being upon whom one has been meditating all along.³⁵ As to

³³ This is a close paraphrase of *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 18a1-2 (35):

སྟོན་པ་ཞེས་སྐབས་ཀྱི་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་ལོ་ཞེས་པས་བསྐྱེད་བྱ་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་དམའ་ཆོད་དཔེས་བརྒྱན་པ་ཡིན་པ་གཏན་ཆོག་གསུ་བྱས་ནས། འབྲས་བུ་སྟོན་པ་
དེའི་གཞུགས་ཅན་ནམ་ནམ་ཅན་གྱི་ཐབས་དེས་བསྐྱེད་དགོས་སོ་ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།

³⁴ For two vivid examples of Tsongkhapa’s own expression of such devotion to the Buddha in a feminine form experienced as the “Beloved” (*brtse ba’i lha mo*), see Appendix Eighteen. According to biographical accounts, Tsongkhapa performed intensive retreat practices focused on Sarasvatī, the female embodiment of enlightened wisdom (and the counterpart of Mañjuśrī, widely known to be Tsongkhapa’s primary teacher) c. 1380-1381. Since he was also said to have studied Sanskrit and poetic composition at about the same time, it seems likely these two praises were written during that period of his life (i.e., early twenties). See Geshe Michael Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 322-323, as well as the “Prayer to Sarasvatī” and other instances of such mystical poetry in Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa and Gavin Kilty, 2001, *The Splendor of an Autumn Moon: The Devotional Verse of Tsongkhapa* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 21.

³⁵ Tsongkhapa finishes this very section of the *Steps of Mantra* with the following statement [*sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 18b3-5 (36)]:

whether every practitioner who ever becomes a Buddha in the form, say, of Vajradhara or else Heruka Cakrasaṃvara or Vajra Bhairava, will become the same Heruka who already was, or else will be a new and different Heruka; whether all who become enlightened will be the same Vajradhara, or else different Vajradharas, is a complex one, which must remain unanswerable at this point.

According to the immense diversity of Tsongkhapa's own commentaries on different tantric systems, it is apparent that he and many in his lineage, down to the present day, would devote thousands of hours to meditation on at least several *different* forms of the Buddha, respectively. So my point is not at all to suggest that the Buddha looks only one way. Rather, practically speaking, in order to reach single-pointed concentration on a clear appearance (to be discussed in Chapter Four), it is imperative that the practitioner be free of doubts as to how the appearance should arise in visualization, consistently, every time. Although the Buddha can appear in any way at all, in order to be encountered, it is necessary that the Buddha appear in *some* way.³⁶ From the practitioner's perspective, this means caring deeply about the details. Like a skilled artist, the yogi paints the mental image over and over again.³⁷ Then, joining that aesthetic

Many Tibetan lamas have applied the teaching on the yoga of a maṇḍala and the circle of divine beings only to the first stage [of creation], but this is a fault of having failed to differentiate the greater and lesser set covered by the yoga of the divine being and the creation stage, respectively. Thus you must hold that this yoga applies in the context of both stages. The idea that just the meditation on emptiness accomplishes both holy bodies is tremendous grounds for wrong ideas regarding how the yoga of the divine being reaches the supreme goal. So, having clearly severed doubts about this, one must definitely meditate on the yoga of the divine being as a cause for the holy body of form.

འདིར་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོའི་ལྷ་ལྷོ་རྣམས་འབྱོར་བ་ལྟན་པ་དེ་རིམ་པ་དང་པོ་ཁོ་ན་ལ་བོད་ཀྱི་ཐུ་མ་མང་པོས་སྦྱར་བ་ནི་ལྷ་ལྷོ་རྣམས་འབྱོར་དང་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གཉིས་
གྱི་རྒྱ་ཆེ་ཆུང་མ་བྱེད་པའི་སྦྱོན་ཡིན་པས་རིམ་པ་གཉིས་ཀའི་སྦྱབ་སྲུ་གཟུང་དགོས་སོ། །མཆོག་སྦྱབ་པ་ལ་ལྷ་ལྷོ་རྣམས་འབྱོར་འདོད་པའི་ལོག་ཏོག་གི་གཞི་ཆེ་བ་ནི་
སྦྱོར་ཉིད་བསྐྱོམས་པ་ཉིད་སྦྱོབ་གཉིས་ཀའི་སྦྱབ་བྱེད་དུ་འཛིན་པ་འདི་ཡིན་ལ། །དེའི་དོགས་པ་གསལ་བར་བཅད་ནས་གཟུགས་སྦྱུའི་རྒྱར་ལྷ་ལྷོ་རྣམས་འབྱོར་དེས་བར་
སྦྱོར་དགོས་པར་ . . . །

In the *Guide to the Complete Stage* in the aforementioned *Twenty-One Brief Pieces on Guhyasamāja and Such* (gsang ba 'dus pa'i yig chung nyer gcig sogs, vol. bka' rgya ma, 19a2-3 [47]), Baso Chö Je cites Tsongkhapa as having taught as well:

Since one meditates on the stage of creation as the ripening factor for the complete stage, then, at all times, from the stage of the body-set-apart up until the union of the two, if one arises as Vajradhara, it is necessary to rise up in a totally complete mandala with all the beings and the places where they stay.

བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ནི་རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱི་སྦྱོན་བྱེད་དུ་བསྐྱོམས་པ་ཡིན་པས། ལུས་དཔེན་ནས་བཟུང་སྟེ་རྒྱང་འཇུག་གི་བར་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་རང་རྩི་ཆེ་འཆང་དུ་ལངས་པ་ན། ཉེན་ད
ང་བརྟེན་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཐམས་ཅད་ཡོངས་རྫོགས་སུ་ལྷང་དགོས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །

³⁶ My thanks to Prof. David Germano for expressing this idea so succinctly. Conversation, Dec. 21st, 2016.

³⁷ See Tsongkhapa's own reference to this metaphor in his famous verses that begin:

I etch your ravishing form with the paintbrush of my concentration:

Body slender, like the vine in youth

Burgeoning visage, stealing the beauty of the moon

Eyes of a blue lily, lips of crimson red

Lady who carries a garland of flowers, swelling in blooms of goodness,

You emanate yourself in myriad forms: immersed in the bliss of passion

I make offering with the bliss of these divine women of the sensory pleasures

That all in the maṇḍala may take their delight. . . .

vision with the emotional components of faith, loving admiration, and devotion, the practitioner allows the vision to take on a life of its own – much as the actor might create a character who can then speak, dance, and appear to others. Yet here, because the practitioner believes the divine being invoked through meditation and ritual performance to exist already, as an already-enlightened Buddha who is distinct from oneself, the practice ideally engages the whole person at the level of a *relationship* with the divine Other. Such dimensions of tantric performance penetrate one’s lived experience much more deeply than if one thought the visualization was “merely imagined.”

In A Single State of Consciousness

Turning to a quotation from the *Ātmasādhanaṅvatāra* (*Engaging upon the Practice of Reaching Self*) written by the Guhyasamāja master Buddhāśrījñānapāda, whom I will henceforth call “Jñānapāda,”³⁸ Tsongkhapa comments regarding a similar point, but in greater philosophical detail.³⁹

ཉིང་འཛིན་མིར་གྱིས་བྲིས་པའི་སྒྲིན་ལེགས་གཟུགས། །འཁྲི་མེད་གཞོན་ནུ་བཞིན་དུ་ལུས་སྤྲ་ཞིང་། །བཞིན་རས་རྒྱས་པས་རྒྱ་བའི་མཛེས་པ་འཕྲོག། །ལྷན་ལ་སྒྲིན་པོ་
འི་མིག་ཅན་མཚུ་སྒྲིས་དམར། །སྤེལ་ལེགས་མེ་ཉླ་སྤེང་བ་འཛིན་མཛད་མ། །འདོད་པའི་བདེ་ལ་ཆགས་པ་མང་སྤྱུལ་ཏེ། །དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་པ་རྣམས་དབྱེས་པ་བསྐྱེ
ད་པའི་བྱིར། །ཉེར་སྤྲོད་ལྷ་མོའི་བདེ་བས་མཆོད་པར་བྱ།

Known as *The Paintbrush of Concentration* (*ting 'dzin pir legs ma*) these verses appear in Tsongkhapa’s collected works in a set of instructions for *Making Offerings to Cakrasamvara, along with Prayers of Dedication and Verses of Auspiciousness* (*'khor lo bde mchog gi mchod 'bul smon lam bkra shis dang bcas pa*), vol. *kha* (*thor bu*), 266b5-267a1 (746-747). There are alternate lines to be inserted for each of the objects of the senses (this one relating to the offering of “flowers”), along with corresponding mantras and hand mudrās.

³⁸ This appears to be the Buddhajñānapāda who was a disciple of Haribhadra, which would date him to the late eighth century (according to Tāranātha, during the reign of Dharmapāla, c. 770-810 or 775-812 CE). See David S. Ruegg, 1981, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 101-102 with n320, n323 and n324. According to Ruegg (102), Buddhajñānapāda “was a representative of Śāntarakṣita’s Yogācāra-Madhyamaka school. He seems to have been the author of a Pañjikā on the Saṃcayagāthās and, perhaps of the Mahāyānalakṣaṇasamuccaya. At the same time he was an important master of the Vajrayāna and the founder of the Jñānapāda lineage of the Guhyasamāja tradition.” This figure is to be distinguished from the later Buddhāśrījñāna who “was invited to Tibet in 1200” by Khro phu lo tsa ba byams pa’i dpal, and wrote commentaries on Madhyamaka and the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (Ruegg, 117 with footnotes 379 and 380).

³⁹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 19b3-5 (38-39), emphasis mine:

།འདིས་ནི་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐབས་དང་བུལ་བའི་སྤྲོད་ཉེད་བསྐྱེས་པས་དྲི་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཐད་པར་བྱེད་རུས་ཀྱང་། སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་དོན་སྦྱབ་པ་མི་འབྱུང་ཞེས་
སྤྲོད་པ་མིན་ལ། སྤྲོད་ཉེད་སྐྱོན་པ་དང་བུལ་བའི་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐབས་ཅན་ལ་གོམས་པས་ཀྱང་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་དོན་སྦྱབ་པའི་གཟུགས་སྤྲོད་པ་རུས་ཀྱང་དྲི་མ་
ཐམས་ཅད་ཐད་པར་བའི་ཆོས་སྤྲོད་པ་མི་འཛོལ་ཅེས་སྤྲོད་པ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཆོས་སྤྲོད་པ་གཟུགས་སྤྲོད་པ་གཉིས་གཅིག་ཐོབ་ནས་གཅིག་ཡོད་མ་ཐོབ་པ་མི་སྤྲོད་པའི་བྱིར་ཏེ།
དེ་གཉིས་ནི་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐབས་ཅན་གཅིག་ལ་འག་ལས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་པ་འཛོལ་པ་ཅན་ཡིན་པས་ནས་ཡང་མི་འབྲེལ་བའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ཡང་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་རིན་པོ་ཆེས་འཕང
ས་པའི་སྤྲོད་ཉེད་ཉླགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ནི་བདག་དུ་འཛིན་པའི་དྲི་མ་མཐའ་དག་དག་བྱེད་ཡིན་པས། དག་པ་གཉིས་ལྷན་ཀྱི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤྲོད་ཉེད་ཐོབ་པ་ཡིན་པའི་རྒྱ་
ཡིན་ཡང་། གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྲོད་པ་ལྷན་ཅིག་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐབས་ཅན་པས་ཀྱང་གཟུགས་སྤྲོད་ཉེད་ཐོབ་པ་ཡིན་པའི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ཡང་ཆོས་སྤྲོ
དེ་ཡང་ལྷན་ཅིག་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐབས་ཅན་འབད་ན་དངོས་པོའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉེད་ལ་དྲི་མ་ཆེ་བའི་གོམས་པར་བུས་ཀྱང་འཁོར་པ་ལས་བཞུགས་པ་ཅ
མ་སྤྲོད་ཀྱི། དྲི་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཐད་པར་བའི་ཆོས་སྤྲོད་པ་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་རུས་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། སྤྲོད་ཉེད་ཉླགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ལ་མ་འབད་ན་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐབས་ཅན་ཅན་འབད་
ཀྱང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྲོད་པ་གཟུགས་པར་མི་རུས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ལྷན་འབངས་སུ་རྒྱས་པའི་སྐབས་ཀྱི་དྲི་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཐད་པར་ནི་སྤྲོད་ཉེད་བསྐྱེས་པའི་ལག་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་

Here it is not as though [Jñānapāda] is teaching that, ‘By meditating on emptiness bereft of a vast method, you can put an end to all impurities, but you will not be able to achieve the benefit of all living beings,’ and it is not as though he is teaching that, ‘If you simply habituate yourself to a vast method that is bereft of meditation on emptiness, you will be able to achieve the holy body of form for the benefit of all living beings, but you will not reach the dharmakāya that has finished off all impurities.’ That is because it is impossible to reach the dharmakāya without reaching the holy body of form, or vice versa. *Each of these two depends upon a single collection of causes, but since the relationship is definitive, there is never a case where one is bereft of the other.*

Thus an incisive wisdom realizing emptiness that is propelled by the precious wish for enlightenment is what cleans away every last impurity of grasping to a self. In this way it is the unique cause for the dharmakāya that has the two purities, and also the simultaneous condition for the holy body of form. In the same way, all the vast methods are the unique causes for the holy body of form, but they are also simultaneous conditions for the dharmakāya.

If you do not make efforts in the vast methods, and if you only habituate yourself to the suchness of functioning things, it is possible that you may cross beyond the cycle, but you will not be able to encounter the dharmakāya that has finished off all impurities. If you do not make efforts in the incisive wisdom that realizes emptiness, you might make efforts in the vast methods alone, but you will not be able to encounter the holy body of form.

In this way, the utter exhaustion of impurities once one is a Buddha is the handprint of having meditated on emptiness, while becoming the nourishment for every wanderer without exception must be the handprint of the vast methods. For example, it is like the way that there are three conditions necessary for an eye consciousness beholding the color blue to arise: It may be true that it is the result of all three, but (1) the handprint of the sense faculty is the fact that it beholds *form* and does not engage in other objective fields such as sound and the rest; (2) the handprint of the immediately-preceding cause is the fact it arises in the essence of *experience*, and (3) the handprint of the focal condition is the fact that it arises in the aspect of *blue*.

Thus we encounter Tsongkhapa employing the same logic we saw him defend against the infringements of the Mind-Only school, regarding the triad of conditions necessary for sensory perception, in order to demonstrate a sublime point about the distinct dimensions

ལ། འགྲོ་བ་མ་ལུས་པའི་གསེས་སུ་འགྱུར་བ་ནི་ཐབས་ཀྱི་ཆེ་བའི་ལག་ཟུངས་སུ་བྱ་དགོས་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན་ཕྱོད་པོ་འཛིན་པའི་མིག་གི་ཤེས་པ་སྐྱེ་བ་ལ་རྒྱུན་གསུམ་ཆར་
དགོས་པ་ས། གསུམ་ཀའི་འབྲས་བུ་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་གཞུགས་ལ་འཛིན་གྱི་སྒྲ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལྟུང་གཞན་ལ་མི་འཇུག་པ་ནི་དབང་པོའི་ལག་ཟུངས་དང་། རྒྱུར་བའི་འོ་སྔ་
ར་སྐྱེས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་རྒྱུན་དང་། ཕྱོད་པོའི་ནམ་པ་ཅན་བྱ་སྐྱེས་པ་དམིགས་རྒྱུན་གྱི་ལག་ཟུངས་ཡིན་པ་དང་འབྲེལ།

of Buddhahood and their proper causes and conditions. He wants to explain in simple terms what it means for there to be something that is in one sense a single result – the indivisible unity of Buddhahood itself – but which nonetheless carries the traces, imprints, or here, literally, the “handprints” (*lag rjes*) of distinct conditions. As we have seen, the eye faculty acts as a governing condition (*bdag rkyen*) so that the sensory content arises as something seen, as opposed to something heard or smelled. The matching, immediately preceding condition (*mtshungs pa de ma thag rkyen*) is the previous moment of awareness that turns into another moment of consciousness, so that when sensory data is encountered, it can be experienced by a mind. The focal condition (*dmigs rkyen*) must also be there in order for the next moment of consciousness to arise as “blue” – otherwise it could arise as anything at all. (This was the same point Tsongkhapa made in the *Illumination of the True Thought* regarding the examples of the blind man dreaming, the person with cataracts, the audience at a dramatic performance, and so on.) Nonetheless, there is a single result, which can be called “the eye consciousness that beholds the color blue.” Here, then, the analogy is that within the result of being a complete Buddha, there is no case at all where one could reach the total purity of the dharmakāya – free of mental afflictions and omniscient towards all objects – without ever having generated a body of form at all, and there is never a case where one could reach the ability to dwell perfectly in the glorious body (*sambhogakāya*) while emanating countless forms (*nirmāṇakāya*), without having already been purified of all obstacles to peace and omniscience. Nonetheless, there are distinct conditions for each aspect of the result, and if any one of these conditions is lacking, the total result will not arise. Thus the act of taking on form is absolutely integral to enlightenment itself.⁴⁰

Although this idea may be obvious from study of the *kāya* system presented in the *Ornament of Realizations*, and so many other Mahāyāna sources, clearly there were enough teachers in Tsongkhapa’s own time in Tibet who were insisting that one could reach enlightenment in a tantric context solely through meditation on emptiness – or else solely through mantras and visualizations but without meditating on emptiness – that he saw it necessary to prove the inalienable importance of balance from numerous Indian sources. He returns to this theme in greater detail when discussing the necessity of both

⁴⁰ A basic doctrinal point to be recognized here is that an arhat of the lower way is said to reach a mind free of afflictions, but lacking the wish to liberate all living beings, the arhat has not yet been able to purify the obstacles to omniscience. Thus an arhat does not attain the dharmakāya. It is the vast wish for enlightenment that serves as a necessary condition for the obstacles to knowing all things to be removed, and it is the attainment of that omniscient dharmakāya, which (according to various treatises of the Perfection Vehicle) is said to be the immediate cause for the attainment of the holy bodies of form. So one gains the mind of a Buddha by wanting to help all beings, and it is the all-knowing nature of that mind that directly enables one to attain the forms that can actually appear and thus be of service. But one could not attain the innumerable forms without the omniscience and one could not attain the omniscience without *wanting* to be able to help others in limitless ways by appearing to them. This logic, common to the Indian Mahāyāna tradition, especially as explained in Asaṅga’s *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, is likely informing Tsongkhapa’s interpretation here.

stages within unsurpassed yoga tantra. For now, in the following passage, Tsongkhapa penetrates more deeply into the meaning of a path “congruent in aspect,” which in turn provides clues as to his understanding of what it means to be a Buddha.⁴¹

The meaning [of another quotation from Jñānapāda] is this: The methods explained as giving and the rest [of the perfections], which are stated to be the *unsurpassed method*, or the *unexcelled method*, are not actually so in that way, because they do not include meditation on a path that is congruent with the aspect in which a Buddha’s holy body actually manifests. In fact, one only becomes habituated to a path that is entirely different in aspect from its result. *This proves that if there is no meditation on a path that is congruent in its aspect with the holy body of form, then it is not an unexcelled method for reaching the state of a Buddha.* The same text⁴² states, “That result that has as its identity the profound and the vast, which are of the very essence of its own identity, is something to be achieved through its very own nature.”

Now in general, with respect to the result to be reached, the profound has the identity of the dharmakāya, and the vast is something with the identity of being bedecked with the signs and marks. Furthermore, the holy mind abides in equal taste with the suchness of all things, and never in any way rises from that place.

⁴¹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 20b1-21b1 (40-42), emphasis mine:

།དེའི་དོན་ནི་སྤྱོད་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་སུ་བཤད་པ་དེ་རྣམས་ལྷན་མེད་པའམ་གོང་ན་མེད་པའི་ཐབས་སུ་གསུངས་པ་དེ་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སངས་རྒྱུ་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་མཛོན་དུ་
གྱུར་བ་དང་རྣམ་པ་རྩེས་སུ་མཐུན་པའི་ལམ་སྒྲོམ་པ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཏེ། འབྲས་བུ་དང་རྣམ་པ་ཡི་མི་འབྲས་པའི་ལམ་ཅམ་ཞིག་གོམས་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཞེས་པ་
འོ། །གཞུགས་སྤྱོད་དང་རྣམ་པ་མཐུན་པའི་ལམ་སྒྲོམ་པ་མེད་ན་སངས་རྒྱུ་ཀྱི་ཐབས་གོང་ན་མེད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་སྤྱད་པ་ནི། དེ་ཉིད་ལས་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་གི་
ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཐབས་དང་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་གྱི་འབྲས་བུ་ནི་རང་གི་རང་བཞིན་ལས་བསྐྱུ་བ་པར་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་ལ། ཞེས་པའོ། །དེ་ལ་སྤྱིར་ཐོབ་པར་བྱ་བའི་འབྲས་
ས་བུ་ནི་ཐབས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་དང་། རྒྱ་ཆེ་བ་མཚན་དཔེས་སྤྱོད་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་ཞིག་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་ཐུགས་ཚུལ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དང་རོ་མཉམ་
མ་པར་ཞུགས་ནས་དེ་ལས་ནས་ཡང་ལྷང་བ་མེད་པ་དང་། དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དུས་སྤྱོད་མཚན་དང་དཔེ་བྱད་འབར་བས་བརྒྱན་པ་ནས་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་འགྱུར་བ་མི་སྟོན་པར་
བཞུགས་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཀྱང་རོ་བོ་དབྱེད་མེད་པ་སྟེ་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་དེ་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཐབས་དང་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་
དེ་དང་མཐུན་པ་ཞིག་དགོས་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན་རྒྱལ་བའི་ཐུགས་ཚུལ་སྤྱོད་པ་ན་ནལ་འབྱོར་པས་ད་ལྟ་ནས་རང་གི་སེམས་དངོས་པོའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་བཞག་
ནས་རྒྱལ་བའི་ཐུགས་དང་རྣམ་པ་རྩེས་སུ་མཐུན་པའི་ལམ་སྒྲོམ་པ་བཞེན་དུ། གཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་ན་ནལ་འབྱོར་པས་ད་ལྟ་ནས་མཚན་དཔེའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་སྤྱང་བའི་སྤྱོད་
དང་རྣམ་པ་རྩེས་སུ་མཐུན་པའི་ལམ་སྒྲོམ་པ་དགོས་ཏེ། འདི་གཉིས་ནི་བྱེད་ན་བྱེད་མཉམས་དང་འཛོག་ན་འཛོག་མཉམས་དུ་ཀུན་ནས་མཚུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ལ་དགོངས་
ནས་བདག་སྤྱོད་པ་ལས། དེ་བས་ན་བདག་མེད་པ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཡང་ཐ་མི་དད་པ་ཉིད་དུ་བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱའོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་འདིའི་ཐུགས་
ཀྱི་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བ་ནི་ལྷའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ལ་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐུགས་ནི་འོག་ནས་བཤད་པར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་རང་གི་རང་བཞིན་ལས་སྤྱོད་པ་ཞེས་
གསུངས་སོ། །འབྲས་བུའི་སྤྱོད་པས་སྤྱོད་པ་མཚན་དཔེས་སྤྱོད་དང་དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་དམིགས་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་དབྱེད་མེད་དུས་གཅིག་ཏུ་གནས་
པ་བཞེན་དུ། ལམ་གྱི་སྤྱོད་པས་སྤྱོད་པ་ཡང་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པའི་ཡིད་དོན་རང་གི་སྤྱོད་དེ་བཞེན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྤྱིའི་རྣམ་པར་སྤྱང་བའི་ཐབས་དང་། དེའི་ཆེ་རང་གི་སེམས་ཚུ་
ས་ཀྱི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་གཉིས་ཤེས་པ་གཅིག་གི་ངོ་བོར་དབྱེད་མེད་པ་དུས་གཅིག་ཏུ་ཚོགས་པའི་ཐབས་ཤེས་དབྱེད་མེད་
དུ་བྱ་དགོས་ཏེ། འདི་གཉིས་དུས་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྤྱོད་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལ་གོམས་པར་བྱས་པས་མཐར་གཉིས་སུ་མེད་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཉིད་གསུལ་བྱ་བ་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་
ར་བའི་གོ་འཕང་འགྲུབ་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

⁴² Throughout these passages Tsongkhapa is referring to Buddhaśrījñāna’s *Engaging in the Practice of Reaching Oneself, Ātmasādhānāvātāra, bdag sgrub pa la ’jug pa*, Toh. 1860, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *di*, 52a7-62a7.

At the very same time, the holy body, adorned with the blazing signs and marks abides without ever showing any mutability of any kind. Both of these are inseparable in essence. This is the meaning of the phrase, “which are of the very essence of its own identity.”

In this way, there must be something that is congruent with both the method and the incisive wisdom to be achieved. For example, if he is to achieve the holy mind of a Victorious One, the dharmakāya, the yogi must, from this moment onwards, rest his own mind in the meaning of the suchness of functioning things, and thus meditate on a path that is congruent in aspect with the holy mind of the Victorious Ones. In the same way, if one is to achieve the holy body of form, one must – with one’s own body – meditate on a path that is congruent in aspect with the holy body, appearing in the aspect of the signs and marks. This is because, with respect to these two, if one does them, one must do them equally, and if they are posited, they must be posited equally. Thus they match in every way.

Speaking to the same intent, *Reaching Oneself* states: “Therefore, in the same way as with selflessness, you should meditate on the essence of the vast as something that is not different.” The “vast” in this system is to practice the yoga of the divine being, and this system of the vast will be explained below. It is reaching the goal in this kind of way that was spoken as, “achieved through its very own nature.”

At the time of the result, the support, which is a body adorned with the signs and marks, and that which rests upon it, the holy mind that has no focal object, remain simultaneously with an essence that is indivisible, one from the other. At the time of the path, also, one must make method and wisdom inseparable: the method by which one’s own body appears to the mind of the practitioner in the aspect of One Gone Thus, and at the same time, the incisive wisdom by which one’s own mind focuses upon a lack of inherent nature, the suchness of things. *These two are gathered together simultaneously as the indivisible essence of a single state of consciousness.* One must make these two indivisible because it is precisely through becoming accustomed to the yoga that unites these two within a single moment that one achieves the state where, in the end, *the indivisible primordial knowing itself appears to disciples in a holy body of form.*

Jñānapāda has used phrases that might sound very much as though he is speaking of something with an inherent nature – indeed the title of his text begins with a form of the word *ātman*, or self. Nonetheless, to read his text from the beginning suggests that he is writing from the point of view of Middle Way philosophy,⁴³ and that when he uses

⁴³ Geshe Khedrup Norsang told me that Jñānapāda was a Mind-Only philosopher (Sera Monastery, February 4th, 2015, 1h06m), but according to Ruegg (see Chapter Three, note 38, just above) he was trained within the hybrid school of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, traced to Śāntarakṣita. It would require much further research into this Jñānapāda’s collected works within the Tengyur (both sūtra and tantra) to determine the

phrases like “the very essence of its own identity” (*bdag nyid kyi rang gi ngo bo nyid*) and “achieved through its very own nature” (*rang gi rang bzhin las bsgrub par*), he means them in such a way that they might point to the ultimate “nature” as emptiness itself, inseparable from the wisdom that realizes it.

Nonetheless, as Tsongkhapa explains, Jñānapāda’s point here seems to be that although the primordial knowing that realizes emptiness, which is the dharmakāya, and the glorious body adorned in the signs and marks, which is the rupakāya, are indeed different in identity – in what defines them – they are nonetheless inseparable in essence: they are a single entity. One might say that this essence is simply the fact that they have no inherent nature – the essence shared by all existing things – but then the statement would collapse into the simple fact that all things, whether pure or impure, from the gravel in my shoe up to omniscience itself, lack any inherent characteristics of their own. From a Middle Way point of view, we knew this already. But here Jñānapāda and Tsongkhapa are speaking of the identity of Buddhahood itself, which indeed has very clearly defined characteristics, which, though not “inherent,” are still emphatically *not* the same as the merely labeled characteristics of a non-conscious stone or the merely labeled characteristics of the mind of a person enraged with jealousy and about to kill someone. Thus, it would appear that Jñānapāda is still speaking of a positive essence that is held in common between both the profound and the vast. To achieve such a goal “through its very own nature” means to meditate on a path that has something similar in aspect to what will be reached or realized in the end.⁴⁴

What is most difficult to fathom is how these two unique conditions for the two holy bodies of a Buddha might be gathered together as a “single state of consciousness” (*shes pa gcig*) in the mind of the practitioner. Tsongkhapa says that one must practice uniting these two sides of reality as the truly “unsurpassed method” for achieving the union of those two that is the goal. But in saying so, he also makes a powerful statement about Buddhahood itself: It is simply the indivisible primordial knowing that realizes emptiness, which appears to disciples in a holy body of form. In this sense, the incarnate

degree to which his treatises reflect a “Mind-Only” or “Middle Way” view across a variety of contexts. See also, Makransky, 1997, *Buddhahood Embodied*, 259-263, for discussion of this same Buddhajñānapāda’s exegesis of the eighth chapter of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* in a thoroughly Yogācāra context.

⁴⁴ In a private session of instruction with Geshe Khedrup Norsang, at Sera Monastery, January 17th, 2015, I questioned the meaning of “*rang gi rang bzhin*,” (“its very own nature”) here, and he answered that this was *not* the “own nature” used in the Middle Way context, as something to be refuted, regarding the fact that things are not established “through their own nature.” Rather, he said it referred simply to the “its own” that is the incisive wisdom realizing emptiness, and the “nature” that is method, being of one essence. That is, as I understand it, the goal is achieved through the nature of the method whose nature is wisdom, as one indivisible reality. From my transcript of the recording (52m16s-52m36s):

འདི་རང་གི་རང་བཞིན་ལས་སྐྱུ་བ་ཟེར་རང་གི་ཟེར་ཡག་འདི་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་དེ་ཅེས། དེའི་རང་བཞིན་ཟེར་ཡག་འདི་ཐབས་དེ་ཅེས། རོ་ཤོ་གཅིག་གིས་ཐབས་ཤེས་ལས་རོ་ཤོ་གཅིག་པ་རེད་མ་གཏོགས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྐྱུ་བ་མེད་ཟེར་ཡག་འདིའི་རང་བཞིན་དེ་མ་རེད། འདི་ནང་དེ་ཁག་ཁག་རེད་ཟེར། སྐབས་ཁག་ཁག་རེད།

appearance in a body of form *is* of the same essence as the single divine nature, which includes all the qualities of goodness that flow from ultimate wisdom.

As we will see, in the systems of unsurpassed yoga tantra, the “indivisibility” referred to in the phrase “indivisible primordial knowing” (*gnyis su med pa'i ye shes*) refers specifically to the indivisibility of great bliss and emptiness. But “great bliss,” in that context, describes the experience of the wish for enlightenment manifest at every level of one’s being, from the subtlest physical energies to the most vivid timeless consciousness.⁴⁵ Thus, using slightly different terminology, one might say that if

⁴⁵ For a precise discussion of this point, see Tsongkhapa, *The Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp on the Five Stages* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), vol. ja, 54b5-55b2 (110-112), emphasis mine. (For alternative translation cf. Gavin Kilty, 2013, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*, 107-108):

Accordingly, the bliss that is referred to in the “joining of bliss and emptiness” is the simultaneously-born ecstasy. This first arises when the winds from the channel of taste and the solitary channel are inserted into the *avadhūtī* [central channel], thereby causing the inner fire to blaze. The *bodhicitta* melts, and the bliss arises from this. But this bliss and the blisses explained previously [e.g. the bliss of pliancy when reaching meditative stillness, the bliss of an ārya on the first bodhisattva level, the bliss that comes from practices of breath control in the three lower tantras, and so on] are similar only in that they are “bliss.” The meaning, however, is completely different, and in order not to mistake them you must divide them out separately. Here in this [vajra] vehicle, it is also called “the compassion that takes no focal object.” The *Clusters of Advices* states, “*Method* is the great compassion that takes no focal object, that which work for the good of wanderers, which has the nature of simultaneously-born great bliss.” There are many other similar statements. . . . Now, suppose you wonder, how is it that one joins this bliss that is compassion-without-an-object indivisibly with emptiness? The Glorious *Sambhūta* states:

The very nature that is without elaboration
Is known everywhere as “incisive wisdom,” and
What works for the good of living beings without exception,
Like a wish-fulfilling jewel, is compassion itself.
The incisive wisdom that remains without any focal object
And the great non-objective compassion itself
Come together simultaneously in the mind
Like the sky in the sky.

The meaning of this is explained in *Setting Forth and Establishing the Aspects of Method and Wisdom*:

If you separate consciousness and knowable things
And through practice thoroughly investigate:
Nothing has any nature of its own.
This itself is said to be incisive wisdom.
The passionate attachment to living beings
That is compassion for the ocean of suffering, without exception,
And for anything that may emerge from the causes of suffering,
Is known as “desire.”

Thus the ascertainment of the lack of nature, by investigating once you have differentiated physical form from mind, is explained to be incisive wisdom, and the *simultaneously-born bliss – the tremendous passion that arises for the good of living beings, by whatever means – is explained as compassion*. . . .

[The same text states] that these are joined together like water mixed with milk.

།དེ་ལྟར་ན་བདེ་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་བར་གསུངས་པའི་བདེ་བ་ནི་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྤྱེས་པའི་དགའ་བ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཐོག་མར་སྤྱེས་པ་ནི་རྩ་གི་རྒྱུ་ཨ་བ་རྒྱ་ཉིད་པའི་དབང་གི་ས་གཏུམ་མོ་སྤར་བས་བྱང་མེས་ས་བཞུགས་པ་ལས་སྤྱེ་ལ། དེའི་བདེ་བ་དང་སྤར་བའདད་པའི་བདེ་བ་རྣམས་བདེ་བ་ཅམ་དུ་མཚུངས་ཀྱང་། དོན་ཤིན་ཏུ་བྱང་ཆེ་བས་མ་འཁྲུལ་བར་སོ་སོར་བྱེད་པར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལ་ནི་ཐེག་པ་འདིར་དམིགས་པ་མེད་པའི་སྤྱོད་རྩེ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་གསུངས་ཏེ། མན་དག་སྤྱེ་མ་ལས། ཐབས་ནི་དམིགས་པ་མེད་པའི་སྤྱོད་རྩེ་ཆེན་པོ་འགོ་བའི་དོན་བྱེད་པ་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྤྱེས་པའི་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་རང་བཞིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་དེ་ལྟར་གསུངས་པ་མང་ངོ་། ་་་ འོ་ན་དམིགས་

primordial knowing and this unsurpassed yoga form of vast method are of “one essence,” *then the knowing that sees reality as it is, is perfect love.*⁴⁶ Conversely, any state of mind that is not the total embodiment of such divine love, *is not seeing correctly.*

Hence, since the wish for enlightenment that appears in holy forms is said to be of the same essence as the wisdom that sees reality as it is, according to this view it is *love* that sees the totality of truth, and not otherwise. So, returning to issues we have explored from the beginning, although all things are said to be empty of inherent nature, here it is not as though all apparent natures are equivalent, or as though just any view of reality is equally valid in the long run. Rather, I have already suggested that the broadest Buddhist teaching on the nature of ignorance and suffering directly implies that it is *misperception* that creates all pain. One might extrapolate from this that if there were perfect correct perception, this would be the source of all joy. But, now, from Tsongkhapa’s unsurpassed Vajrayāna perspective, we glimpse that the knowing which perceives reality-as-it-is does not perceive a mere blank absence, but is a wisdom inseparable from the great bliss that is defined as unbridled love for all beings.⁴⁷ When reality is perceived correctly from the point of view of unsurpassed yoga tantra, in a state of mind that is the effulgence of *this* kind of love, corresponding to a very special configuration of extremely subtle energies, then the essence of reality itself (i.e. emptiness) would be said to arise *as* great bliss.⁴⁸

མེད་ཀྱི་སྤྱིང་ཐེའི་བདེ་བ་དང་སྤྱོད་པ་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་སྦྱོར་ཚུལ་ཐེ་ལྷ་ལོན་སྤྱོད་ན། དེ་ནི་དབལ་ལ་སྤྱོད་པ་ལས། སྦྱོས་པ་མེད་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཉིད། །ཤེས་རབ་
ཅེས་ནི་རབ་དུ་གྲགས། །ཡིད་བཞིན་ཐོར་ལྷ་མ་ལུས་པའི། །མེས་ཅན་ཐོན་ཐེད་སྤྱིང་ཐེ་ཉིད། །དམིགས་མེད་གནས་སུ་ཤེས་རབ་དང་། །དམིགས་མེད་སྤྱིང་ཐེ་
ཆེན་པོ་ཉིད། །སྤྱོད་པ་ལྷན་ཅིག་གཅིག་གྱུར་པ། །ནམ་མཁའ་ནམ་མཁའ་ཐེ་ལྷོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་། དེའི་དོན་ཐབས་ཤེས་གཏན་ལ་དབབ་པ་གྲུབ་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་།
། །ཤེས་པ་ཤེས་བྱར་རབ་བྱེ་སྟེ། །སྦྱོར་བས་ཡོངས་སུ་བརྟགས་ན་ནི། །ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ཉིད། །ཤེས་རབ་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་ནི་བཟོད། །མ་ལུས་སྤྱུག་བསྐྱེད་
ཀྱི་མཆོད་དང་། །སྤྱུག་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལས་འདོན་གང་ཡིན། །སྤྱིང་ཐེ་མེས་ཅན་ཐོན་པ་ཆགས་པ། །འདོད་ཆགས་ཞེས་ནི་བྱ་བར་གྲགས། །ཞེས་གསུངས་དང་མེས་ཅན་
སོར་བྱ་ནས་བརྟགས་པས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་ངེས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་དང་། །ཐབས་གང་ལས་འགོ་བའི་དོན་འབྱུང་བའི་ཆགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྦྱེས་པའི་བདེ་བ་ལ་
སྤྱིང་ཐེ་བཞད་ནས། ་་་ །ཞེས་ཆུ་དང་འོ་མ་འདྲེས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་སྦྱོར་བར་གསུངས་པ་ལྷར་བྱེད་པའོ།

⁴⁶ I intend here the Tibetan word *brtse ba* (“love” or “affection,” often used as a synonym for *snying rje* “compassion”), which is famously cited as one of the three primary qualities of a Buddha: knowledge, love, and power (*mkhyen brtse nus*). Thus I mean “love” here in the most highly evolved sense, implying the great compassion of a Buddha, who works eternally for the benefit of all, unconditionally. This is congruent with the meaning of the English word “love” when used in the sense of the Greek *agápē* or the Latin *caritas*, depicting selfless divine love or charity. Nevertheless, it is significant to notice how the Vajrayāna literature will sometimes unify the notion of altruistic compassion with the Buddhist words for the mental affliction of “desire” (*dod chags*) or “passionate attachment” (*chags pa*), as is evident in the previous footnote. Hence it is as though one were using the Greek *eros* or Latin *amor* to depict the love of God, which is not an unfamiliar trope in mystical literature across many traditions. See the canonical use of the Tibetan word *brtse ba* as a synonym for bodhicitta in Appendix Seventeen (456).

⁴⁷ See Chapter Three, note 45, just above.

⁴⁸ We will explore in the Epilogue whether Tsongkhapa’s understanding of the wisdom of indivisible great bliss and emptiness might at a certain point be logically comparable to the famous trifold definition used within the Great Perfection tradition, where the extremely subtle clear light mind, or pristine awareness (*rig pa*), is said to have “an essence that is empty,” “a nature that is luminous,” and to be “all-pervasive great compassion” (*ngo bo stong pa rang bzhin gsal ba thugs rje kun khyab*). This is indeed the triad upon which the *Garland of Supreme Medicinal Nectar* (and its prototype from Longchenpa, the *Golden Garland of Nectar*) is based. See *zhus lan sman mchog bdus rsti’i phreng ba*, vol. ka, esp. 2b3-5a6 (305-309).

But if genuinely indivisible, then once again this implies: *Not to perceive great bliss, is not to be seeing correctly*. This is a conclusion that would be difficult to reach in terms of Mahāyāna sūtra-based literature alone. However, I think it is an unavoidable conclusion if one examines carefully the logic Tsongkhapa is presenting here on what it is that distinguishes tantric method, even in general. We will see that it is essential for a practitioner to be able to reach such a conclusion even in order to practice that unique method, namely, to be able to view oneself and all beings as divine and all environments as being, *in actuality*, the sacred maṇḍala. There are many more philosophical hoops we would have to jump through before reaching a full understanding of that view and its cognitive feasibility, but perhaps this reflection offers a preview.

Meanwhile, Tsongkhapa continues to elaborate on what he sees in Jñānapāda's text, in order to strike a crucial point about what he thinks all Vajrayāna practice must entail. Tsongkhapa uses precise epistemological terminology here, to which we will return in Chapter Five.⁴⁹

The very incisive wisdom that realizes that the beheld aspect lacks any inherent nature of appearing in the aspect of a divine being, has the same essence as what is vast, the mind yoked to the reality⁵⁰ of the divine being. Nonetheless, they are posited separately as method and wisdom. This is posited by force of the convention of different isolations of identity, which rely on different facets of a thing.

In this way, *insofar as it is what stands in opposition to any state of mind that holds to the meaning of suchness in a totally backwards way*, it is posited as incisive wisdom. This is because it is the supreme state of conscious knowing, that which knows the ultimate, the final end of all things to be known. *Insofar as it is the opposite of any lack of being able to reach the result*, Buddhahood, it is posited as method. This is because the method of the Buddha is the ability to reach being a Buddha.

⁴⁹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. ga, 21b4-22a4 (42-43), emphasis mine:

།གཟུང་ནས་ལྷའི་ནས་པར་སྤང་བའི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་ཏེ་གྲགས་ཀྱི་ཤེས་རབ་དེ་ཉིད་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བ་ལྷའི་ནས་འབྱོར་གྱི་སེམས་དང་ངོ་མོ་གཅིག་ཡིན་ཡང་ཐབས་ཤེས་ཐ་དད་དུ་
འཛོག་པ་ནི། ཡོག་ས་ཐ་དད་ལ་ལྷའི་སྤྲོས་པའི་ལྷོག་པ་ཐ་དད་པའི་ཐ་སྤྲད་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་ཡིན་ཏེ། འདི་ལྟར་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་སེམས་བྱིན་ཅི་ཡོག་དུ་འཛོན་པ་ལས་
བསྐྱོག་པའི་ཆ་ནས་ཤེས་རབ་དུ་འཛོག་སྟེ། ཤེས་བྱའི་མཐར་ཐུག་པ་དོན་དམ་པ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཤེས་པ་མཆོག་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །རང་གི་འབྲས་བུ་སངས་རྒྱས་སྐུ་
པའི་རྣམ་པ་མེད་པ་ལས་ཡོག་པའི་ཆ་ནས་ཐབས་སུ་འཛོག་སྟེ། སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཐབས་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་སྐུ་བ་ར་རྣམ་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། ་་་ །འདིར་ཐབས་ཤེས་
'སུ་འཛོག་པའི་ཚུལ་སྤྱི་འགོ་ལྟར་གསུངས་ཀྱང་ཐབས་ཤེས་སུ་འཛོག་པའི་གཞི་ནི་སྤྲུགས་ཀྱི་ཐབས་ཤེས་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་ཡིན་ཏོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་གཟུང་ཆ་ལྷའི་འཁོར་ལོ་
ར་སྤང་བས་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྐུ་སྐུ་བ་ཅིང་རང་བཞིན་སྟོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐུ་སྐུ་བ་པའི་ཐབས་ཤེས་གཉིས་མེད་དུ་སྦྱོར་བ་ནི་སྤྲུགས་ནས་གསུངས་པའི་ཐབས་
ཤེས་དང་ནལ་འབྱོར་ནས་ཀྱི་གཙོ་བོ་དེ་དོན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

⁵⁰ I use here a very literal rendering of the Tibetan word for *yoga*: *rnal 'byor* ("joined to reality"). This important sentence may also be read as: "The very incisive wisdom that realizes that the beheld aspect lacks any inherent nature of appearing in the aspect of a divine being, has the same essence as what is vast, the mind of the yoga of the divine being."

. . . Here, the way of positing method and wisdom is the same as the way it is done in general, but the *basis* upon which method and wisdom are posited is the extraordinary form of method and wisdom pertaining to mantra. In this way, insofar as the part that is beheld appears as the circle of divine beings, one achieves the holy body of form, and insofar as one realizes its nature as emptiness, one achieves the dharmakāya. You should understand this indivisible joining of method and wisdom to be the primary meaning of all the method and wisdom, as well as of all the yogas, spoken in the context of mantra.

There are two pivotal terms within this argument that are drawn directly from the philosophy of Dharmakīrti, and will be key to discussions throughout the remainder of this dissertation. One is the “beheld aspect” (*gzungs rnam*) and the other is an “isolation of identity” (*ldog pa*). Briefly, the “aspect of what is beheld” simply means that which is grasped, or apprehended, by a state of knowing consciousness. It is what appears to consciousness. We have already seen part of this term many times in the context of the Mind-Only school, as what is “beheld.” So the “aspect” of what is beheld essentially means that something is appearing *as though* it belonged to an objective field, or is arising with the guise of being something other or outside the consciousness that beholds it. The Mind-Only school, of course, has said that there is something we habitually misunderstand every time something arises as “beheld,” insofar as we think that what is beheld arose from a different seed, tendency, or substantial source from the “beholding” state of mind that perceives it. I have never seen Tsongkhapa refute this tenet of the Mind-Only school, but only the conclusion often drawn from it in that context, namely that therefore there should be no objective focal condition at all that could have given rise to the beheld aspect. As we just saw in the analysis of the perception of the color blue, Tsongkhapa always maintains that there must be *something* arising as a focal condition in order to make sense of the triad of perception, even if that basis remains ultimately unestablished. Hence Tsongkhapa seems to accept Dharmakīrti’s epistemological system at a level that does not require a refutation of outer objects. Tsongkhapa makes use of that system again and again in the context of his Vajrayāna commentaries, proving that he was willing to turn towards Dharmakīrti as an irrefutably reliable source even when teaching explicitly from the perspective of what Tsongkhapa himself saw to be the highest view, namely the Middle Way Consequence.

In this present context, then, simply using the term “beheld aspect” does not necessarily imply that one is misunderstanding how beholder and beheld arise. Here, it seems Tsongkhapa is indicating how, within the subject-object pair of a state of mind that is beholding *emptiness*, the “beheld aspect” is emptiness itself. If the aspect of what is beheld were actually arising *as* the lack of self-nature to objects, then this would automatically undercut all grasping based in misunderstanding how a beheld aspect appears. (At a deeper level, such incisive knowing must be related to an understanding of

how the beheld aspect is dawning due to the power of a tendency, or else a congruent cause of some kind. We shall treat this point in detail in Chapter Five.) That is, *one is beholding the fact that the beheld has no nature of its own*: This is “incisive wisdom,” and pulls the rug out from any thought of grasping to beholder and beheld as being inherently separate or distant from one another. Prior to the direct perception of emptiness, there will still be veils of conceptuality that perceive beholder and beheld as “two” – even while meditating on emptiness through a practice of insight – but again and again Tsongkhapa insists this is alright, and indeed is a necessary stage of progress.⁵¹ It has to be that way, because at the beginning one has no other state of mind with which to work through those veils layer by layer, and to progress from a state of dualistic grasping towards a state of wisdom that will actually perceive “nondually,” free of any trace of beholder and beheld appearing as separate.⁵² In the early stages of practice, it is enough to recognize that if one can understand something about how what is beheld does not have characteristics of its own – even while understanding that *with* a conceptual state of mind that still habitually sees the object of analysis to some nature, even while analyzing its emptiness – this will slowly and deliberately work to erode every trace of a mind that holds to objects in that way.

In the current context of a Vajrayāna practice of inseparable *method* and wisdom, however, such a classic practice of “insight” (*lhag mthong*, Skt. *vipaśyanā*) takes on a sublime twist. In this case, the *object* of the meditation that has reached or is working towards the unshakeable clarity and stability of actual meditative stillness, consists of the “yoga of the divine being.” In general, this means one is meditating on a great array of visualized images, including that of a heavenly realm organized as a maṇḍala, inhabited by divine beings, with the central divinity placed in the spatial and metaphysical location where the practitioner experiences “me.” So *what is appearing* is the divine being, or by extension, any detail of the sacred environment or its circle of divine inhabitants. But at the same time, that which appears is understood – through incisive wisdom – to lack any inherent characteristics. Thus a single state of knowing perceives, as its beheld aspect, the magnificent array of colors, shapes, sounds (of mantra and/or music), and even smells and tastes of the myriad offering substances, and simultaneously perceives all these appearances to be empty. On the other hand, the object beheld by the wisdom perceiving emptiness – even with conceptual veils – is still *emptiness*. Then it is understood that this emptiness, this utter lack of inherent nature that is open to becoming anything, is now appearing *as* the physical attributes of the maṇḍala, the divine beings who populate it, the

⁵¹ See Tsongkhapa’s arguments from the perspective of sūtra and tantra, respectively, in Appendices Fourteen and Fifteen.

⁵² Again, this point, so germane to Mind-Only discourse, still applies in the context of Middle Way. See Appendix Seven, “Two Strategies for a Cure” (333-338) for one place in which Tsongkhapa draws the line between these two schools with respect to how they overcome the flawed tendencies to believe appearances exist in a way they do not.

offering substances, one's own form as the central enlightened being, the secret words uttered, and so on. It is in this way that a single state of consciousness, which is only one reality, can arise simultaneously as method and wisdom. *This* is the practice that Tsongkhapa insists does not exist in the vehicle of the perfections alone.

Tsongkhapa goes on to explain that this single thing – the state of mind meditating on appearances and the emptiness of those appearances simultaneously – can still be posited in two distinct ways, *as* method and *as* wisdom. The technical term that he uses for this is “isolation of identity,” which also figures centrally in Dharmakīrti's system. In this context, such an isolation refers to what it is that appears to a conceptual state of mind as the opposite of all that it is not. More simply, it refers to the conceptual “outline” or “silhouette” of what is left over once one has excluded everything else. According to Dharmakīrti's system, the “aspect of what is beheld” by a conceptual state of mind always dawns as the generalized mental image, or abstraction, of an object. This abstraction is arrived at by cancelling all that is not the thing, so that what appears to a conceptual state of mind is necessarily arrived at through a negation. This means that the beheld aspect is an abstracted idea, and always something static, or unchanging, which performs no function. In Dharmakīrti's system, the abstracted image is *not* a functioning thing, but it represents the functioning thing. Without this act of abstraction, logical thought could not function, the process of language would be impossible, and one could never reach a certain conclusion about anything through deductive reasoning. Hence for Dharmakīrti, the isolation of identity that appears to a conceptual state of mind as an abstracted image of an object (*don spyi*) is the doorway to perceiving real things correctly, and is essential not only to productive practical thought, but to the reasoning that provides certainty to a practitioner pursuing the spiritual path. We will return to this idea in detail once discussing the interrelationship between karmic tendencies, isolations of identity, and abstracted images. I will posit that it is herein, amidst the painstaking logic of perceptual theory, that we might elicit a crucial point within Tsongkhapa's thought, regarding the way that thorough-going transformation should take place through Vajrayāna meditation.

For now, it will suffice to recognize the two ways in which Tsongkhapa posits method and wisdom, respectively, as being the opposite of something they are not. This demonstrates that they are conceptually distinct, even while they both refer to the same reality, entity, or functioning thing, namely, the single state of consciousness.⁵³ Insofar as

⁵³ A classic logical term for this situation is “same essence, different isolation” (*ngo bo gcig ldog pa tha dad*). A typical example would be the fact that a given particular sound (like the real-time sound of someone calling your name) is both “a changing thing,” and “something that is heard.” It is “a changing thing” insofar as it is the opposite of all unchanging things, and “something that is heard” insofar as it is *not* something seen, smelled, tasted, touched, or merely thought of. These are two conceptual “isolations,” or *ldog pa*, but they refer to a single thing: the actual, particular sound that reaches someone's ears in a specific time and place. Tsongkhapa is applying exactly the same idea to the single instance of

that state of mind is the *opposite* of ignorance, it can be isolated, conceptually, as “incisive wisdom.” Insofar as the state of mind is the *opposite* of being unable to reach Buddhahood, it can be isolated as “method.” But it remains a single state of mind. This is what I think Tsongkhapa really means by method and wisdom being of “one essence.” In this context, at least, “essence” (*ngo bo*) seems to refer to the concrete reality of the thing and not yet another abstracted quality. So the state of mind – which ultimately has no nature – and thus in a sense *is* emptiness, nonetheless can be said to have a single concrete (but not inherent) “nature of its own” (*rang gi rang bzhin*) in which wisdom and method are united. But here, according to Tsongkhapa, “method” and “wisdom” are understood as mere conceptual labels based on two different filtering systems.

To attempt to understand what Tsongkhapa is doing in these mere six and a half lines of Tibetan text is a significant meditation on emptiness in itself. Once one is hard-pressed to determine whether it is even accurate to say that what constitutes the “one essence” is the state of mind – because once labeled, “mind,” too, would have to be yet another mere conceptual isolate from all that is not that state of mind – one has begun to see how the state of mind itself is empty of inherent characteristics. The aspect of the beheld object dissolves and the analytical mind implodes. This is the moment of insight, and when the immediately-preceding condition of consciousness has already been soaked in the meditation on divine appearances, the insight will arise as bliss. Hence the emptiness, the bliss, and the wisdom understanding them, are all inseparable.

Across all four classes of tantra, Tsongkhapa uses Jñānapāda’s explanation to refer to the practices relating to a divine being as “the indivisibility of clarity and the profound” (*zab gsal gnyis med*). Clarity refers to the vivid appearances of the divine world, while the profound is the realization that these appearances lack any inherent characteristics. Tsongkhapa says, however, that the definitive teaching on “great bliss,” and the specific methods utilized to realize it are unique to the unsurpassed class of tantra, and only manifest in their full form during the complete stage. Thus when Tsongkhapa refers here to the “extraordinary form of method and wisdom pertaining to mantra,” he is at this point referring only to the broader category of the “indivisibility of clarity and the profound.”⁵⁴ Later, we will touch on the differences between the yoga of the divine being as it is presented in the lower three classes of tantra versus how it appears in the “two stages” proper to the unsurpassed class, but first we must turn to understand the fundamental distinction between those classes as Tsongkhapa sees it. He divides them according to the capacity of the disciples for whom they were taught.

consciousness that perceives both the appearance of a divine being and the emptiness of that appearance simultaneously.

⁵⁴ As Tsongkhapa states further on (*sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 23b5 [46]): “The creation of oneself in the aspect of a divine being is similar in all the classes of tantra, so the reason one must meditate thus is the same in all cases.” རང་ཉིད་ལྷ་འི་ནས་པར་སྐྱེད་པའི་རྒྱུ་ལྷ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལ་འདྲ་སྟེ་དེ་ལྷ་ར་སྟོན་དགོས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་མཚུངས་པའི་བྱིང་རོ།

The Path of Passion

After thoroughly trouncing a series of ideas that must have been present among Tibetans in his day,⁵⁵ regarding the reasons for there being four different groups of tantric scriptures, Tsongkhapa presents his own view, based on two canonical tantric sources and their commentaries, as follows:⁵⁶

The distinction between different disciples can be made in two senses: (1) There are four different ways in which they take the passion for objects of desire into the path, and (2) there are four levels of higher and lower capacities for giving birth in their mindstreams to the emptiness and the yoga of a divine being that they take into the path, through whatever method. Regarding the first, the third section of the Sixth Examination within *The Kiss* [*Samputa*] states:

In the four aspects of laughing, gazing,
holding hands, and the embrace of the two:
In the manner of the silkworm,
the four tantras abide.

The Second Examination states something with a meaning similar to this. In the *Clusters of Advices* [*Śri-samputa-tantra-rāja-tīkāmāyamañjarī*] this is explained as referring to the continuum [i.e., *tantra*] of the path, whereas it does not explain it as referring to the continuum of the scriptures.⁵⁷ But in the first *Cluster* on the Seventh Examination it *is* explained as referring to the continuum of the scriptures, and furthermore, in his commentary to *The Kiss*, Vīravajra explains it as referring to the four classes of tantra. In the eleventh chapter of the tantra,

⁵⁵ These are introduced with Tsongkhapa's standard phrase, “*bod kyi bla ma kha cig*,” or “As some Tibetan teachers say. . .”

⁵⁶ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 35b4-36a3 (70-71):

།གདུལ་བྱ་མི་འདྲ་བའི་ཁྱད་པར་དེ་ལྟར་འོང་བ་ཡང་སྒོ་གཉིས་ནས་ཡིན་ཏེ་འདོད་ཡོན་ལ་ཆགས་པ་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་ཚུལ་མི་འདྲ་བ་བཞི་ཡོད་པ་དང་། གང་གི་སྒོ་ནས་
དེ་ལྟར་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་པའི་སྒོར་ལ་དང་ལྟའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་རྒྱུད་ལ་སྤྱེ་བའི་རྩམ་པ་མཆོག་དཔལ་ན་བཞི་ཡོད་པའི་དབང་གིས་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལ་དང་པོ་ནི། ལ་སྒྲོར་གྱི་བརྟག་
པ་དུག་པའི་རབ་བྱེད་གསུམ་པ་ལས། རྒྱུད་དང་ལྟ་དང་ལག་བཅངས་དང་། །གཉིས་གཉིས་འཁྱུད་དང་རྣམ་པ་བཞི། །སྤྱན་བུའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་རྒྱུད་བཞིར་གནས། །ཞེ་
ས་གསུངས་ཤིང་བརྟག་གཉིས་ལས་ཀྱང་འདི་དང་དོན་འདྲ་བར་གསུངས་སོ། །འདི་མན་ངག་སྟེ་མར་ལས་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ལ་བཤད་ཅིང་གཞུང་གི་རྒྱུད་ལ་མ་བཤད་ཀྱང་།
བརྟག་པ་བདུན་པའི་རབ་བྱེད་དང་པོའི་སྟེ་མར་གཞུང་གི་རྒྱུད་ལ་ཡང་བཤད་ལ། དཔལ་པོ་རྩི་རྩེས་ཀྱང་ལ་སྒྲོར་གྱི་འགྲེལ་བར་རྒྱུད་སྟེ་བཞི་ལ་བཤད་དོ། །རྩི་རྩེ་
པོ་རྒྱན་གྱི་རྒྱུད་གྱི་བཅུ་གཉིས་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་ཐབས་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་འདོད་ཆགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བ་མང་དུ་གསུངས་པའི་མཐར། འདི་ནི་གཉིས་པོ་འཁྱུད་པ་ཡིས། །རྒྱུད་
ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བ་བསྟན་པའོ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ནི་ལག་བཅངས་དང་། །རྒྱུད་དང་བཟུངས་པས་ཤེས་པར་བྱ། །ཞེས་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་ལ་གསུངས་པས་རྒྱུད་སྟེ་བཞིའི་དབྱེ་བ་བ་
སྟན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

⁵⁷ Both the Tibetan and Sanskrit words for *tantra* (Tib. *rgyud*) can refer to “the wire or string of a lute,” but more generally to “a row, number, series, troop,” and by extension, any unbroken continuum, whether of the mind or a lineage of scriptural transmission, i.e., the “tantras” as manuscripts. See the Monier-Williams 2011 entry for “*tantra*” at: www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/webtc5/. See also the first Tibetan dictionary entry for “*rgyud*” (573) at www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/translate.php: “*snga phyi bar mi 'chad pa'i dkus gcig gam star gcig* . . .” or “A string or row in which there is no break between what comes before and after.” Note, however, that the Tibetan word *rgyud* translates both the Sanskrit *tantra* and *saṃtāna*, leaving room for even further double *entendres* in Tibetan usage.

Adorning the Vajra Essence, at the end of a statement regarding the many divisions of the tantras of desire, which belong to the tantras of method, it states:

The divisions of the tantras are taught
in terms of how the two embrace:
In the same way, you should know them
in terms of holding hands, laughing, and gazing.

Since it is speaking of the tantras that are the means of expression, this teaches the division between the four classes of tantras.

The first quotation is from the main explanatory tantra in the Hevajra cycle, known in Tibetan as *kha sbyor* (or literally, “the joining of mouths,” though this is not an exact translation of *Samputa*, which in the formal Tibetan translation of the title of the tantra is rendered *yang dag par sbyor ba*, i.e. “perfectly joined.” The latter may in turn refer to an alternate spelling of the title: *Sambhūta*). The last quotation is taken from what appears to be a lesser known explanatory tantra in the cycle of Guhyasamāja.⁵⁸ Tsongkhapa cites two different chapters of the famous Indian commentary on the Hevajra Tantra, the *Clusters of Advices*, in order to decipher whether these four aspects are referring primarily to the continuum of the path – which would be the continuum of a disciple’s *mind* – or to the scriptural continuum, which would be the variety of tantric scriptures themselves. He then turns to an eleventh century Indian master, Vīravajra,⁵⁹ to adjudicate the discrepancy, and seems to be satisfied that these four images do indeed refer to the four classes of scriptures, supported further by his quotation from a tantra from a different system, i.e., *Adorning the Vajra Essence*. The latter uses the same set of four terms to divide the tantras. It is as though Tsongkhapa was using a “search function” for those four terms (“laughing, gazing,” and so on) within his memorized database – or else had an edition of the Kangyur and Tengyur in front of him and had indeed read it all systematically – or both.

Though it is complex to describe in brief, this little argument is typical of Tsongkhapa’s method throughout his major tantric commentaries. He will raise a question and then present a diversity of “wrong” answers. He attempts to disprove these either insofar as they can be shown to be internally inconsistent, or insofar as they contradict a major accepted scriptural source. Then he presents his own view, quoting small passages plucked from massive Indian commentaries in order to make just the point he wants to make. As a debater, it is a masterful strategy: His opponent would have to

⁵⁸ *Śrī-vajra-hṛdayālaṃkāra* (*rdo rje snying po rgyan gyi rgyud*), Toh. 451, sde dge bka’ ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *cha*. Note: This may also be the *Vajramāṇḍalālaṃkāra-tantra* (*rdo rje snying po rgyan gyi rgyud*), Toh. 490, rgyud, vol. *tha*, which does not appear in all editions of the Tibetan Kangyur.

⁵⁹ See Cyrus Stearns, 2002, *Luminous Lives, The Story of the Early Masters of the Lam’bras Tradition in Tibet* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 56, for this identification of *dpa’ bo rdo rje*. The commentary to which Tsongkhapa refers appears to be *rgyud thams cad kyi gleng gzhi dang gsang chen dpal ku tu kha sbyor las byung ba’i rgya cher bshad pa rin po che’i phreng ba*, Toh. 1199, rgyud, vol. *ja*.

know all the scriptures that Tsongkhapa does, and more, and be able to pick out yet further points in order to counter the argument with any weight. There were likely other Tibetan masters in his day who had as much scripture memorized as Tsongkhapa, but then Tsongkhapa often “anticipates” their counter-argument with yet a final installment, in which logic is usually his last word. While it would be laborious and unnecessary to follow all these arguments here, suffice to say that it is often in Tsongkhapa’s short explanations of the quotations he has chosen to support his own position that we find the nuggets of Tsongkhapa’s own thought – as in his lucid interpretation of Jñānapāda via terms and ideas from Dharmakīrti, examined just above. The reader learns to identify the keywords by which Tsongkhapa marks his own interpretation, and especially his heartfelt exhortations to the practitioner to understand a point clearly and not be led astray by what he has just endeavored to show is muddled thinking.

What then, is the point here? Based on these quotations, Tsongkhapa explains that one can in fact name each of the four types of tantra according to the way each class of scriptures teaches a disciple to take desire as the path. Thus they are the tantras of laughing, the tantras of gazing, the tantras of holding hands or embracing, and the tantras in which the two are joined. These terms then characterize the *mode* in which each of the yogas pertaining to a particular divine being is presented within the scriptures of each class.⁶⁰ Tsongkhapa later argues, with numerous quotations from various tantras, that the arrangement and demeanor of the divine beings visualized in the maṇḍalas associated with the major Buddhas and bodhisattvas of each tantric cycle, are designed to evoke these four different levels at which sexual desire is typically expressed by wanderers born within the desire realm. But initially, Tsongkhapa explains the main purpose for introducing the objects of desire into the practice of Vajrayāna meditation at all:⁶¹

⁶⁰ There is, of course, much ambiguity as to whether there were ever precisely four “classes” of tantras in India in any case, since there are certainly more than four different types of names applied to tantras in their extant titles. Some tantras were indeed characterized by later generations as belonging to one or another “class,” though at the time when there is evidence for that particular “lower” tantra having first appeared, there were not yet even two or three identifiable “classes” in evidence, much less four. Thus the doxographical questions necessarily come from the point of view of hindsight, but in this case it appears it is not only Tibetan hindsight, but Indian as well, since Tsongkhapa is able to quote the relatively late Hevajra cycle and its commentaries plausibly on this point. Since it is my purpose to examine the internal logic of Tsongkhapa’s theory, and not to critique it from the perspective of historical data that was not within his purview, I must leave this important and complex question as a mere footnote here. Nevertheless, it is clear even from Tsongkhapa’s own commentary to his selected quotations that he is well aware that the classificatory names of tantras are not consistent throughout the literature, so that, for example, he will at one point say, “The ‘performance tantra’ referred to here is ‘yoga tantra.’” See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 40a3 (79): འདིའི་སྟོན་རྒྱུད་ནི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་རྒྱུད་ཡིན་ནོ།

⁶¹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 36a5-36b3 (71-72):

ལྷའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་གྱི་སྟོན་ལེན་པ་ལ་གྱི་ལམ་ཁྱད་ཀྱིས་འབྱོར་བའི་ཚུལ་ནི་ཐབས་ཤེས་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་འདོད་པའི་ལྷ་ཡལ་ཡུམ་མཉམ་པར་སྟོར་བའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ལྷའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ཉེ། ཟུང་མེད་ལ་ལམ་གྱི་ཁྱད་པར་མང་དུ་ཡོད་ཀྱང་གཉིས་སྟོར་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ཅེས་དེའི་སྟོན་མིང་འདོགས་མཛད་ཅིང་། རྒྱུད་རང་ནས་ཀྱང་གཉིས་སྟོར་གྱི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་བཤད་པ་ཡིན་ཏུ་མང་ངོ་། །དེའི་སྟོན་ཆགས་པ་ལས་དུ་བྱས་པས་བྱང་རྒྱུ་གྱི་སེམས་གཉིས་གྱི་འཕྲོད་འདུའི་གནད་ལ་བརྟེན་ན

The way that one reaches the supremely distinguished path of incisive wisdom via the yoga of a divine being is through an extraordinary form of method and wisdom: A yoga in which the divine beings appear in the aspect of gods of the desire realm, Father and Mother in union. In the unsurpassed class there are many distinguishing features of the path, but it is given the name “the tantra in which the two are joined” in this sense. Even within the tantras themselves there are very many explanations about having an aspect where the two are joined.

Through this means, by taking passion into the path, that passion turns into a supremely distinguished realization of emptiness, in reliance upon the crucial point by which the two bodhicittas [i.e., the subtle forms of the red and white elements] meet and gather together.

Since they lack an extraordinary method for taking passion into the path such as this one, the three lower classes of tantra do not mention the component of “the kiss” among the seven components [of complete enlightenment]. But in that way, since they do take into the path the joy that comes from laughing, gazing, and holding hands, or embracing, then in general, [one can say that] there is simply a way to take passion for the objects of the senses into the path, and that’s all.

That is, if as even Śāntideva says, all the branches of method were taught for the sake of attaining wisdom, so too, here, the extraordinary path of method within the Vajrayāna is expressly designed for the purpose of reaching an extraordinarily powerful kind of wisdom – one that is inseparable from the means that brought one to it, as explained above. But throughout all four classes of tantra, it is crucial to recognize that the state of mind that beholds the appearance of a divine being must be a mind of *joy*. This is intimately connected with the fact that the appearance itself is a direct expression of great compassion, as mentioned before. Ordinary beings of the desire realm are said to be born here precisely insofar as the beginningless karmic tendencies to feel desire for contact with the objects of the senses have become manifest in that lifetime. Thus Tsongkhapa understands the strategy of many Buddhist tantras to be this: One should teach those beings to use the driving energy of desire, and the temporary experiences of joy that come from experiencing the objects of that desire, as the fuel for entering into and maintaining a meditation on indivisible wisdom that must be sustained for thousands of hours in order to reach the actual dharmakāya and holy bodies of form.

In general, it may be easier to gain single-pointed concentration on an object to which one is fundamentally attracted than upon one that is neutral or unpleasant. There are certainly recommended objects of meditation within the sūtra vehicles that are either

ས་སྐྱོང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རྟོགས་པ་ཁྱད་ཞུགས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཆགས་པ་ལམ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཐབས་ཁྱད་པར་བ་དང་བྲལ་བས་རྒྱུད་སྡེ་འོག་མ་གསུམ་དུ་ཡན་ལག་བདུན་གྱི་ནང་གི་ཁ་སྐྱོར་གྱི་ཡན་ལག་མ་གསུངས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟ་ནའང་རྫོད་པ་དང་ལྟ་བུ་དང་ལག་བཅངས་སམ་འཁྱུད་པ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་དགའ་བ་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་པ་ཡོད་པས་སྤྱིར་འདོད་ཡོན་ལ་ཆགས་པ་ལམ་བྱེད་ཅམ་ཞིག་ནི་ཡོད་རོ།

neutral (such as the mindfulness of breathing), or overtly unpleasant (such as the visualization of the earth covered in skeletons), which are still seen to bring genuine benefit to the practitioner. Yet the tantras acknowledge that in the long run, a being born into the desire realm might have a much easier time reaching and sustaining a meditation at the level of actual stillness, from which to gain deeper and deeper insight into emptiness, if the object is one of immense and lasting attraction. It will be most powerful and meaningful if the object of meditation is a form of the divine person who is supremely attractive, insofar as he or she is understood to embody the goal that grants ultimate purpose to one's life, namely, enlightenment itself.

Clearly, however, it cannot only be about attraction to an image of divine bliss in exquisite and glorified form. For the tantric maṇḍalas in all four classes do also include dreadful and wrathful figures, who are also seen as forms of divine wisdom and method. Especially in the unsurpassed class, the maṇḍalas include objects of meditation that are designed to trigger powerful aversion, fear, or repulsion in the practitioner, precisely so that the yogi may work to overcome and transform precisely these kinds of habitual reactions to what are realized to be, in fact, empty images and symbols. Thus it may be true that the yogi is always working with the energy of desire, but not only desire to that which is overtly attractive. Rather, in many cases it seems one is meant to be working at the level of the raw energy that keeps living beings chained to cyclic existence, whether its objects appear to be pleasant *or* unpleasant. What is it about this desire, or basic thirst, that is so powerful? Tsongkhapa does not address this question at what we might call a psychological level. But he has addressed extensively, in such works as the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, the nature of the mental afflictions as the engine of saṃsāra.

In this particular overview of the tantric path, Tsongkhapa simply takes it for granted that there *are* beings of the desire realm, who by definition have manifest tendencies for desire, and that among those there is a very select group who have the capacity to “take that desire into the path.” That is, there are those who have enough renunciation, compassion, and discipline not to get caught up in the objects of desire as ordinary objects of desire, but who instead have the capacity to take engagement with those objects as a repeated catalyst for entering into a meditation on their ultimate reality or emptiness. They are the kinds of disciples for whom a taste or glimpse of awesome beauty leads their minds to vast thoughts of love and service, and not down into the gutter of selfishness or nonvirtue. Later Tsongkhapa explains:⁶²

⁶² *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 38a6-38b4 (75-76), emphasis mine:

རྫོགས་ཐེག་པ་ལ་མོས་པ་དང་དེའི་ལས་ཀྱི་ཆ་འགའ་ཞིག་སྒོམ་པ་ལ་ངེས་པ་མེད་ཀྱང་། ཐོག་མར་ཐེག་པ་དེ་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་གདུལ་བྱའི་གཙོ་བོ་ནི་འདོད་ཁམས་པ་ཡི་ན་ལ། དེ་ཡང་སྤྱིར་རིག་མའི་འདོད་ཡོན་ལ་ཆགས་པ་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་གི་སྒོ་ནས་བྱང་ཆུབ་འཆོལ་པ་ལ་མོས་པ་འོ། །འདི་ཡང་ལྷ་མེད་དུ་ནི་དངོས་དང་བསྒོམས་པའི་རིག་མ་གཉིས་ཀ་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་རྫོད་པ་སོགས་ཀྱི་ཆོགས་པ་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་པ་གསུངས་ལ། རྒྱུད་ལྷོ་ལོག་མ་གསུམ་ལ་ནི། བསྒོམ་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རིག་མ་ཁོ་ནའི་འདོད་ཡོན་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་དགའ་བ་ལས་བྱེད་ཡིན་ནོ། །དབང་བོ་གཉིས་སྦྱར་བསྒོམ་པ་ཙམ་ཡང་རྣལ་འབྱོར་རྒྱུད་ལ་འང་མི་རུང་བས་དེ་ལས་གཞན་པ་

It is not definite that someone who has faith and attraction to the Vajrayāna is also meditating on some or any part of that path. Nonetheless, at the beginning, the principal disciples who enter this vehicle belong to the desire realm, and in general, they are beings *who are attracted to the idea of striving for enlightenment just simply by means of taking, as the path, passion for the objects of desire associated with a Lady of Pristine Awareness.*

Furthermore, in the unsurpassed class, it is said that one takes as the path the whole set of laughing, and so on, in relation to both an actual Lady of Pristine Awareness, and one who exists in meditation. But in the lower three classes of tantra, one only takes as the path the joy of focusing upon the objects of desire associated with a “wisdom” Lady of Pristine Awareness [i.e., one who exists only in meditation]. Even the meditation on the joining of the two organs would not be appropriate in yoga tantra, so it is the joy of focusing upon the sensations of touch that come from embrace and holding of hands that do not involve such joining, which one takes as the path in yoga tantra. It is the joy that arises on the basis of focusing on objects other than the sensation of touch – namely laughter and gazing – that one takes as the path in the action and performance tantras.

One might well say that it is devotion to and love for the divine qualities of the beings depicted in the tantras of each class that will in the end drive the desires of the disciples to be purified into a single-pointed longing for the qualities of a Buddha. On the other hand, it is the understanding of emptiness that will cancel, over and over again, the tendencies to reification that make *ignorant* desire so dangerous as the eighth link of dependent origination. As we have seen, all the sūtra paths aim to cut off the wheel of suffering life by canceling the craving that is triggered in response to misunderstanding the nature of feeling that comes from contact. But here the attempt is to place oneself deliberately and repeatedly into a situation depicting the most idealized form of one’s desires for contact, via any one of the senses, and then, with full awareness, stop the tape, as it were, and insert the incisive wisdom realizing emptiness at the very moment ignorance would otherwise have kicked in. One then replays the tape of “desire” over and over and over again until the tendencies for seeing it in a wrong way have been step-by-step devoured. As Tsongkhapa explains, citing Vīravajra’s commentary on the quotation from *The Kiss* cited above:⁶³

འི་ལག་བཅངས་སམ་འཁྱུད་པའི་རེག་བྱ་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་དགའ་བ་ལས་བྱེད་ཀྱིས་འབྱོར་རྒྱུད་ལ་སྦྱར་ལ། རེག་བྱ་ལས་གཞན་གྲོག་པ་དང་ལྟ་བུའི་དམིགས་པ་ལ་བ
རྟེན་ནས་བྱུང་བའི་དགའ་བ་ལས་བྱེད་བྱ་སྦྱོར་ལ་སྦྱར་རོ།

⁶³ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 38a3-5 (75), emphasis mine:

དཔའ་བོ་དྭ་ཇེའི་ཁ་སྦྱར་གྱི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། གྲོག་དང་ལྟ་བུའི་ལག་བཅངས་དང་། །ཞེས་སྟོས་ཏེ་གྲོག་པའི་སྦྱེད་སྦྱེད་དུ་བདེ་བ་རྟོག་མེད་སྦྱེ་བའས། གཞུགས་ལ་ལྟ་བ་
དང་རེག་བྱ་ལག་བཅངས་དང་གཉིས་གཉིས་འཁྱུད་པ་དང་རེག་བྱ་ལས་བདེ་བ་རྟོག་པ་མེད་པ་སྦྱེ་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །སྤྱིན་བུའི་རྩལ་གྱིས་ཞེས་པ་ནི་ཟག་མེད་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་
པོ་སྦྱང་བའི་ཆེག་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྤྱིན་བུ་ཤིང་ལས་སྦྱེས་ནས་ཤིང་ཉིད་ཟ་བ་བཞིན་དུ་བདེ་བ་ལས་སྦྱེས་པའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་སྦྱང་ཉིད་དུ་བསྟོམ་པར་བྱའོ། །ཞེས་བཤད་པ་ལྟ་

“When it says ‘laughing, gazing, holding hands, and . . .’ this means that upon the sounds of laughter, a nonconceptual bliss arises, and upon gazing at form, or at the touch of holding hands or embracing one another, a nonconceptual bliss arises. ‘In the manner of the silkworm,’ is a phrase indicating the emptiness of immaculate great bliss. *Just as a silkworm is born from a tree but then eats that very tree, you should meditate upon the concentration born from bliss as being emptiness itself.*”

One might gradually glean from Tsongkhapa’s arguments and citations that there is something about the affliction of *desire* – and the physical and mental bliss it longs for – that might be transformed in such a way that it can lead to the perfect qualities of a Buddha in a way that other mental afflictions are not suited to do. That is, although all mental afflictions must ultimately be transformed through the path(s) of tantra, for someone who can turn desire into the path it is considered to be *better* the stronger and more powerful the desire, as long as one can maintain the depth of meditation on emptiness to transform it consistently.⁶⁴ One would not say the same for ignorance or hatred, however. Tsongkhapa states clearly, in opposition to the wrong idea that those who follow the performance class do so because they have a lot of hatred (and as such are followers of Viṣṇu): Since anyone who enters the path of Vajrayāna must first and foremost be a disciple of the Buddha, and have generated extremely powerful compassion through the shared motivation of the Mahāyāna, and furthermore since those disciples of the unsurpassed class would have such intense great compassion that they generate the wish to become enlightened as quickly as possible, then how could it make sense that the primary disciples for whom any class of tantra was taught would be those with an excess of hatred?⁶⁵

Therefore those practices, especially of the unsurpassed class, which work precisely to overcome and transform the other root afflictions – such as hatred or ignorance – are never cited as the primary distinguishing feature of that class of tantra. If the distinguishing feature of the Vajrayāna in general is the yoga of the divine being, then it is the different levels of passion for forms of the divine being, as well as the varying

ར་རྟོ།

⁶⁴ On this point, see *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 38a2-3 (75):

When a disciple has meager powers, he or she cannot take immense passion into the path. With this in mind, this statement that one gradually takes a small amount of passion into the path, by stages, will be explained in this way: Once one has gained stability in the yoga of the divine being, and found deep concentration on emptiness, then one can focus on a female divine being of one’s own lineage, such as the Lady of Eyes, and so on, and make [the passion] manifest.

།འདུལ་བྱ་སྟོབས་རྒྱུ་བས་ཆགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་མི་ནུས་པ་ལ་དགོངས་ནས་ཆགས་པ་རྒྱུ་རེས་ནས་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་འདི་ནི་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་བ་ལྟེན་ལྷའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་བརྟན་པར་སོང་ཞིང་སྟོང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཉིང་རེ་འཛིན་རྟེན་པ་ན་རང་གི་རིགས་གང་ཡིན་པའི་ལྷ་མོ་སྤྱན་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་བྱེད་པར་སངས་ཀྱི།

⁶⁵ See *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 35b1-2 (70).

abilities to generate and work with that passion, which differentiate the classes of tantric scriptures and the disciples for whom they were intended.

Tsongkhapa acknowledges that the classification system he has described thus far is made entirely from the point of view of the unsurpassed class, but also provides a rationale that appears in scriptures from the yoga and performance tantras.⁶⁶ According to this rubric, the primary disciples of the action class (i.e. *kriyā tantra*) bring forth the indivisibility of clarity and the profound with a greater emphasis on outer actions such as purificatory bathing, preparing physical offerings and drawn maṇḍalas, and doing recited practices in conjunction with choreographed hand signs (or *mudras*), with a lesser emphasis on meditation. Though, as Tsongkhapa's whole chapter on this class of tantra reveals, the meditative practices associated with these action tantras are still extensive, exacting, and if done properly, are aimed to bring forth states of actual meditative stillness and insight much faster than reliance on sūtra methods alone. The disciples of the performance class (i.e. *caryā tantra*) have equal attraction to outer actions and inner meditation, and so these tantras bring relatively more emphasis on the time spent in meditation, and the achievement of insight through the yoga "without signs." The disciples of the *yoga tantra* class are said to have progressively more interest in meditation alone, and find excessive outer ritual activity to be a distraction, so one finds more and more detailed meditative practices here, introducing even subtler components, such as the visualization of complete figures of Buddhas placed inside one's body, a practice that could be seen to anticipate the practice of the "body maṇḍala" in the unsurpassed yogas. Then, disciples of the unsurpassed class (i.e., *anuttarayoga tantra*) are said to be those who do not need to rely on outer practices at all, and who have the capacity to bring forth inner yogas in a way that has "nothing higher" (*gong na med pa*). Tsongkhapa admits that this classification is not exact, since there are various exceptions within the teachings of the tantras themselves, and because there are also disciples who can be deeply attracted to a path for which they actually do not have the meditative capacity.

That is, one might feel great longing for a practice that only consists of interior meditation with no "unnecessary" rituals, but actually be at a point in one's development where it is essential to rely on the ripening power of those rituals, otherwise one will simply not yet have the capacity to reach the deep states of meditation to which one aspires.⁶⁷ This is essential to Tsongkhapa's concept of a practice that acts to "ripen" one's mindstream. Then there is the fact that practically speaking, to observe current practice in a Tibetan tantric monastery within Tsongkhapa's tradition, it often seems as though sādhanas belonging to the unsurpassed class are practiced with every bit as much outer

⁶⁶ For what follows see *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 38b5-40a3 (76-79), as well as Chapters 2-4 in general.

⁶⁷ See Tsongkhapa's quotation from the *Lantern on the Three Methods* (*tshul gsum sgron me*), regarding this point at *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 39a6-39b3 (77-78).

ritual and recitation as those of the action or performance class. Perhaps this is because it is understood that there is a progression of *training* which must take place in any given practitioner, regardless of which path he or she will ultimately be suited to follow within an entire lifetime. I cannot digress here to examine what might be the social and communal functions of such monastic ritual performance, even of those tantric cycles that are classified as entirely “inner.” Still, it is significant to note that in practice, an observer who knew nothing of the verbal content of the recitation might have no idea what class of tantric ritual was being performed, based on the outer appearances alone, because indeed at times the rituals of the unsurpassed class require the most elaborate use of costume, accoutrement, sacred music, and so on. Understanding the meaning of the words, however, one could not help but recognize that there are vast differences in the way that the visualizations, offerings, mantras, and so on, are invoked. The recitations pertaining to action and performance tantras (such as Tāra or Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya) can seem quite low-key and gentle in comparison to the great clashes of cymbals, bells, and high-pitch energy of the chants and mantras directed to the unsurpassed maṇḍalas of Cakrasaṃvara, Guhyasamāja, or Vajra Bhairava. Roughly speaking, it is clear that the four classes of tantra do work at radically different levels of a person’s psycho-physical makeup, but the line or ratio between “inner” and “outer” practice is not always so clear.

Furthermore, it is important to note that throughout his writings on tantra of the unsurpassed class, again and again Tsongkhapa will in effect rely only on a simple bifurcation: “the unsurpassed” vs. “the three lower classes of tantra.” He does spend great care in his chapters on each of the three lower tantras, respectively – especially in describing the rituals of the action class – in order to present the sequence and demands of those practices precisely. But he also does not hesitate to group all three together as one when comparing them to the unsurpassed yogas. This is because there is something about the unsurpassed class that presents methods so unique and so powerful, that it is considered to be the only kind of tantric method able to bring a disciple to enlightenment in one lifetime *of a degenerate era*, that is, a human lifetime of only eighty to a hundred years or so. Though I will attempt to explain Tsongkhapa’s repeated references to the distinction between the unsurpassed and the three lower tantras where necessary, I will not be able to go into any detail on those latter practices here. It is crucial to keep in mind, however, what a significant number of commentaries Tsongkhapa did write on practices associated with the three lower tantras, even apart from his general treatment in this *Great Book on the Stages of Secret Mantra*. He clearly cared deeply to preserve and spread those teachings accurately in Tibet for those disciples to whom they were most appropriate, even if he readily acknowledged them not to be the very highest or fastest methods. Here, then, I will turn to the question of what it is in the methods of the unsurpassed yoga that Tsongkhapa sees to provide the crucial factor of speed.

What Makes a Yoga Unsurpassed?

To address this question we return to a portion of a passage quoted above, at which Tsongkhapa says that the way to reach the extraordinary form of wisdom unique to the unsurpassed class is through a “yoga in which the divine beings appear *in the aspect of* gods of the desire realm, Father and Mother in union.”⁶⁸ That is, the form in which the Buddha is said to have appeared and taught the tantras associated with unsurpassed yoga is, with only a few exceptions,⁶⁹ that of both a male and a female divine figure wrapped face to face in ecstatic embrace. The disciple, through practice, is meant to embody and identify with the form depicted in that particular tantric transmission, and if doing so wholeheartedly, it is expected that the disciple should begin to experience the passionate desire evoked by the imagery indicated.⁷⁰ But insofar as that desire is supposed to be elicited deliberately, within the full context of a Mahāyāna path, and especially within the context of the specific teachings on how to perform the tantric ritual and visualization, while the disciple is at the same time working to keep a rigorous array of tantric vows commanding meticulous discipline of body, speech, and thought, one might imagine the practice to look more like a specialized laboratory experiment in catalyzing and transmuting basic human energies than like the desire triggered in a teenage couple inspired by what they saw in a movie.

Due to the immense skill and concentration required to perform an unsurpassed yoga sādhanā properly at all, much less to be able to enter the profound meditation on emptiness that Tsongkhapa repeatedly insists is the *sine qua non* of any such practice, an even better analogy might be as follows. Consider the passionate embrace of two professional dancers embodying Romeo and Juliet, where each pirouette *en pointe* and soaring partnered lift must be precisely timed to an orchestral score, and placed at exact marks on a stage to coordinate with lights and scenery (and avoid the pits), so there is little room left for “personal feelings” in the midst of creating the abstracted perfection of

⁶⁸ See Chapter Three, note 61, above. Emphasis added.

⁶⁹ For example, the solitary figure of Ekavīra Vajra Bhairava, or that of Vajrayoginī, or Tāra Cintāmaṇi. Each of these specialized subsets of major *anuttarayogatantra* systems nonetheless vividly incorporate images or energies of face-to-face embrace at some point in the complete cycle of their associated initiations and practices.

⁷⁰ It is significant to note that through the history of the Geluk tradition, at least, following the strict example of Tsongkhapa himself, there have surely been thousands of monks over the centuries who have spent their entire lives keeping properly their vows of celibacy (many having become monks as children), and still meditating extensively on the sādhanas of unsurpassed yoga. This would suggest that in theory, at least, it is possible to generate the appropriate level of passion and bliss required for the creation stage practice, and a large portion of the complete stage, without ever having had an actual encounter with a woman in that lifetime. According to this tradition’s philosophical understanding of inborn tendencies, this would make sense: Even visualized images alone can trigger deep and instinctive natural responses without ever having had an actual manifest experience in that particular human life. We will return to this point when treating Tsongkhapa’s description of how the beginningless seeds for the tendencies for sexual desire open in the first place, during an early stage of human evolution on a particular planet.

the ballet romance. Or else some moments in a *sādhana* might better be likened to the same lifts and pirouettes, performed later, in the tomb scene, when Juliet is presumed dead and Romeo takes his choreographed, heart-broken passion to the ballerina in the state of her deep, dreamless sleep.⁷¹ The energy of divine union evoked in an unsurpassed yoga *sādhana* is meant to be associated directly with an experience and transformation of the death process, while generating a radically open-hearted compassion for the totality of suffering experienced throughout space and time. Thus desire is constantly and consistently raised, only to be evaporated into the dissolution of all attachment. Indeed any subtle movement of body or mind is meant to cease altogether.

In the same passage quoted above, Tsongkhapa went on to specify that such passion taken into the path would transform into “a supremely distinguished realization of emptiness, in reliance upon the crucial point by which the two *bodhicittas* meet and gather together.” It is clear that he is referring here to *bodhicitta* (“the wish for enlightenment”) as a code word for the subtle forms of the red and white elements that are said to comprise the most basic physical substrate from which a human body is formed. More subtle than cells or molecules – or even than any composite of what we would scientifically designate as measurable physical matter (i.e., fermions with mass) – the red and white elements are nonetheless considered to have form that can be identified with a location in space. Hence, within a Buddhist context, they are physical, and not mental (*gzugs* as opposed to *sems*). Though I cannot treat this topic in detail here, suffice to say that the deepest reason for daring to engage with the kind of desire associated with full union between male and female bodies is considered to be the way that this act naturally elicits shifts within the energetic system of the subtle body. If understood and meditated upon properly, Tsongkhapa says repeatedly that such energetic changes can become a doorway to realizations that would otherwise be possible only during the dissolution of the actual death process. Or else they are realizations that would only come about after three countless eons of a *bodhisattva*’s meditation that was *not* aimed at engaging those energies directly.

That is, according to explanations found in treatises on the complete stage, the only way to reach enlightenment within a single lifetime is to access the very most subtle energies of life, as well as the primordial wisdom of clear light that is directly and naturally associated with those energies. Yet this clear light consciousness is ordinarily hidden from experience due to ignorance and the constant oscillations of coarser energies driven by karma and the mental afflictions. It is said that such a natural experience of

⁷¹ See *Romeo and Juliet*, choreography by Kenneth MacMillan, performed by The Royal Ballet, featuring Alessandra Ferri and Wayne Eagling, Kultur Video, 2005. For a beautiful and thought-provoking exploration of the themes of genuine human and romantic love within and in tension with the practice of Vajrayāna partnership (albeit in a different Tibetan lineage and milieu from that of Tsongkhapa), see Sarah Jacoby, 2014, *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (NY: Columbia University Press).

clear light awareness does dawn momentarily in the course of any death process, but a mind veiled with ignorance will have no capacity to recognize it. Thus it is “thrown” by previous karma into a subsequent experience of ripened consciousness along with a body and world projected accordingly. A mind trained by the path might well have capacity to recognize this clear light, but it is a very risky moment at which to attempt to reach an insight into ultimate reality that one has never been able to accomplish while alive. Perhaps it would be like a mathematician trying to solve the most complex mathematical problem, one which he had never been able to solve during a stellar career at the top of the field, at the very moment when all his bodily processes had collapsed, elements were oozing spontaneously, and his mental processes were collapsing and he was going brain dead: “Okay, now discover what you could not manage to fathom before.”

According to Tsongkhapa and many other Tibetan interpreters, the logic of the unsurpassed yoga tantras is that, if one can practice a method that will simulate the collapse of both coarse and subtle energies into what is known as the central channel, and specifically into the indestructible orb at the very center of the channel wheel of the heart, then one has a far better chance of being able to train the movements of subtle winds and mind with quiet consistency, thousands of times over, until the process of dissolution – while still alive – is gentle, smooth and easy. Then one can begin to use the definitive form of that “supremely distinguished path of incisive wisdom,” which unites wisdom and method in a single state of awareness, to bring forth the actual holy body of form, even in advance of reaching total enlightenment.

The key point, however, is that there are only a very few experiences within the whole of suffering existence that are able to approximate the dissolution of winds and mind as these occur at death. Most of these experiences are highly unstable, superficial, and very brief, such as sneezing or fainting, or else so habitually clouded with ignorance, like sleep, that it would be very difficult to access the deepest levels of dissolution through that method alone. Thus Tsongkhapa says⁷² that *human* sexuality has the potential for creating the one stable configuration of elements, energies, and intelligent awareness that can be used for generating the great bliss that comes when winds and mind dissolve into the indestructible orb. Citing Asaṅga’s *Levels of Yogic Practice*, Tsongkhapa argues that not even the kind of desirous union experienced by pleasure beings of the god realms, much less the copulation of animals, is able to bring about such a stable basis for generating such great bliss.

There are many kinds of bliss, and all can potentially be transformed into the path, through meditating on the emptiness of that bliss. This can take place once it has been viewed *as* an expression of the compassion-driven Mahāyāna wish for enlightenment, appearing in the form of a divine being and a celestial palace. But the theory here is that

⁷² For details and scriptural references on this point, see Tsongkhapa, *An Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* (*rnam gzhag rim pa’i rnam bshad*), vol. *cha*, 18a5-18b6 (37-38), and the discussion below.

there is one kind of bliss that surpasses all others, because it is directly related to the movement of energetic winds towards and into the pathway of the central channel. This can become stable due to the melting of the subtle red and white orbs, which are in turn associated with the fluids secreted by male and female bodies during union. If that energy could be harnessed, and cultivated carefully in meditation, through thousands of controlled repetitions of the particular sequence of movements of energy usually triggered by human sexual desire, then, within a matter of years or decades – not eons – one might be able to bring forth the complete dissolution of winds and mind into the heart. It would be very difficult to understand the reasoning for all the visualizations of the creation stage in unsurpassed tantra without at least a glimpse of this as its end-goal. The purpose is to set up an extremely consistent trigger-response within the mind, elements, and energetic system of the practitioner, in order to plant the seeds for being able to use those energies in their full capacity in the complete stage.

According to this reading, it is not that the tantras are trying to say there is anything inherently “sexy” about divinity, much less that Buddhas should ever be considered to have afflicted desire. Rather, Tsongkhapa states clearly:⁷³

When it says here [in the twenty-fifth cluster from the *Clusters of Advices*] that the divine beings “gaze,” or else when it refers to laughing and the rest: The one who is gazing is the divine being. But if you wonder what it is they are doing with all that gazing and so on, it is this: They “make clear the passion for incisive wisdom and method.” That is, male and female divine beings dwelling in passion for one another *create a symbol*.

Furthermore, since it is impossible for the Maker of Appearances [Vairocana], the Lady of Eyes [Locana], and the rest of the divine beings to have passionate attachment, here it must apply to the *practitioner* who is holding firmly to that divine being and to the pride of his or her divine identity. This is because the necessity for disciples of all the classes of tantra to take the passion of gazing and so forth into the path *is something temporary*, according to the context of the moment. If one were not to apply *to the disciple* the statements in the action, performance, and the rest [of the tantras], which say that male and female divine beings gaze upon one another, and so on, then one would have failed to recognize the distinction of the disciple in this way.

⁷³ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 37a25 (73), emphasis mine:

།དེ་ལ་ལྷ་རྣམས་ལྷ་བའོ་ཞེས་སྐྱར་བ་ནི་ཞོད་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་ལྷ་བ་པོ་ནི་ལྷ་ལ་བྱའོ། །ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེས་ཅི་ཞིག་བྱེད་སྟུང་ན། ཤེས་རབ་དང་ཐ
བས་དག་གི་རྒྱུ་སྤྲུལ་ཆགས་པ་གསལ་བར་བྱེད་པ་ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་ལྷ་པོ་སོ་པན་ཚུན་དུ་ཆགས་པ་མཚན་པར་བྱེད་པའོ། །དེ་ཡང་རྣམ་སྐྱར་དང་སྐྱུན་མ་སོགས་ཀྱི་
ལྷ་ལ་ཆགས་པ་མི་སྲིད་པས་འདིར་ནི་ལྷ་དེ་དང་དེའི་ང་རྒྱལ་འཆང་བའི་སྐབ་པ་པོ་ལ་བྱ་དགོས་ཏེ། རྒྱུད་སྤེལ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གདུལ་བྱས་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཆགས་པ་ལ
མ་དུ་བྱ་དགོས་པ་སྐབས་ཀྱི་དོན་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། བྱ་སྤྱོད་སོགས་ནས་ལྷ་པོ་སོ་པན་ཚུན་དུ་ལྷ་བ་སོགས་ཡོད་པར་གསུངས་པ་གདུལ་བྱ་ལ་མ་སྐྱར་ན་དེ་དག་
གི་སློན་ནས་གདུལ་བྱའི་བྱིར་བར་ངོས་མི་ཟེན་པའི་བྱིར་དོ།

All the tantras were taught for the sake of the beings who would practice them, to elicit and transform *their* particular habitual propensities in the most meaningful and efficient way possible. This point is central to Tsongkhapa's understanding of tantric method.

Why Did the Buddha Come to Earth as a Human?

Tsongkhapa treats the ideas I have outlined above – regarding the telos for the yoga of envisioning divine beings in passionate union – in much greater detail as part of a fascinating argument within the Guhyasamāja commentary that we touched upon in Chapter Two, the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition.”* The question that has been raised is as follows: In the course of the Guhyasamāja sādhana practice, specifically, one envisions recapitulating the stages of birth, death, the intermediate state, and rebirth of a human being of the Rose-Apple Land (*'dzam bu gling*, Skt. *jambudvīpa*). In Buddhist Abhidharma cosmology this refers to the “southern continent” (of the four major continents surrounding the central mountain, as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Two). From our contemporary point of view, however, this term would seem to apply to the whole of our planet as we know it, since all humans with the kind of lives we have are said to live on the southern continent.⁷⁴ Tsongkhapa raises the problem that if (as one does specifically through the stages of the Guhyasamāja practice), one is attempting to purify the karmic tendencies for all four types of birth, then why is it one only meditates on the stages of birth, and so on, associated with a human being of the Rose-Apple Land? Furthermore, why is it that the bodhisattva with only one lifetime left to go decided to come and realize final enlightenment in *this* world, as a human like us, if his purpose was to lead all beings everywhere to enlightenment?

If, through a path that is similar in aspect to its result, one is to emulate the exact stages by which the very Buddha who taught the Guhyasamāja tantra became enlightened, and to meditate on a form that is similar in aspect to the holy body of that Buddha, it becomes a very important question to understand why *this* form is so important, and not another. If the mind of a Buddha, the dharmakāya, is infinite consciousness unbounded by space or time, on what grounds could one believe that the Buddha's *own* glorious form, as perceived by the Buddha himself and by highly realized bodhisattvas, should have arms and legs and a head that so closely resemble our own? Why is there something about enlightened form that is so intimately connected with human form – albeit in a transfigured way, with all the signs and marks – that it should necessitate the practitioner planting seeds by visualizing a Buddha *like that*?⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Therefore, when reading the rather fanciful word, Rose-Apple Land, I hope my reader will be able to think of it as “planet Earth.” Nonetheless, I wish to preserve the language of the text without adding a Sanskrit word that makes it seem foreign, or a term like “southern continent” which would seem to limit it to only a part of our planet as we conceive of it now, which is not the intent at all.

⁷⁵ This question may seem to apply particularly to the Guhyasamāja practice, where, although appearing with three faces and six arms, the central and surrounding figures still do look recognizably “human.” It

Following the logic of Nāgabuddhi's text closely, Tsongkhapa explains what it means for humans of the Rose-Apple Land, unlike those "humans" of the other three continents described in Buddhist cosmology, to be "those at the level of karma" (*las kyi sa pa*). Essentially this means that humans here, unlike those of other "continents," can experience a wide variety of karmic fruits within a single lifetime, and can even experience the fruits of actions done earlier in a particular lifetime later in that same lifetime. So we encounter the whole gamut of experiences, from ecstatic joy to heartbreaking disappointment, physical illness, and unexpected, untimely death. It is the ups and downs which help us to be able to develop renunciation, but we are also prone to a terrible array of manifest mental afflictions and nasty attitudes. At the end of this presentation of typical human life as we know it, Tsongkhapa concludes.⁷⁶

Suppose you wonder: 'Isn't it contradictory that, if [human beings of the Rose-Apple Land] have so many problems, the Buddha should become enlightened upon that kind of body as a basis?' Well, they do have those problems, "but nonetheless," with a mere nod of the head, they understand the whole meaning of one's words, and they are extremely sharp in their powers of faith and the rest, and they are competitive and bold. Therefore, all those bodhisattvas staying in the Heaven of Joy, with only one lifetime left to go, are born into a holy body in the midst of the dwelling places of the people of the Rose-Apple Land. It is upon that

may seem not to apply to other unsurpassed yoga tantra practices, such as that of Vajra Bhairava, where the central emanation body is decidedly not even supposed to look like a human. However, if one is to consider the "wisdom being" (Skt. *jñānasattva*) by which one creates the causes for the actual glorified body, or *sambhogakāya*, it is significant to note that in every tantric system this wisdom being – whether identified as Vajradhara, Mañjuśrī, Vajrayoginī, or otherwise – takes a human form, with one face and two arms, whether solitary, or male and female joined. I have not yet seen Tsongkhapa treat this question directly – i.e., the fact that the visualized emanation forms (Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*) are often so completely unlike anything that could or would be seen by ordinary disciples, whereas the wisdom beings are quite recognizably "human" – but what follows is my own partial conjecture on the point. It is the wisdom being who represents the singular undying body of a Buddha in paradise: It is this which symbolizes the form in which the Buddha actually became enlightened, with all the signs and marks. It is this *form* which was born as a human of our world (even if the final stages of enlightenment were not exactly enacted at the level of a flesh and bone body). For once the undying vajra body was achieved, the Buddha still stood up and taught with the flesh and bone body into which he had been born. So when meditating on a form similar in aspect to the result, the practitioner is in the end meditating on the form of the *wisdom being*, as becomes eminently clear in the complete stage. The sometimes wild and bizarre forms of the creation stage emanation bodies fulfill a great variety of other purposes for ripening the disciple's mind. The question of "how" and "where" the Buddha "actually" became enlightened is a complex one across many sources, differing between sūtras and various tantras, and cannot be encompassed with the rough argument presented here. Again, I am limiting myself to what I find in Tsongkhapa's explanations within specific contexts, and do not pretend to provide a comprehensive treatment of any point.

⁷⁶ *An Exegesis of the "Steps of Exposition" (rnam gzhag rim pa'i rnam bshad)*, vol. *cha*, 16a1-3 (33). (The phrase "but nonetheless" is being glossed from Nāgabuddhi's root text.):

དེ་ལྟར་སྒྲིན་མང་པོ་ཅན་ཡིན་ན་དེའི་རྟེན་ལ་འཆང་བྱ་བར་འགལ་ལམ་སྤྲུལ་ན་སྒྲིན་དེ་དག་ཡོད་པ་འོན་ཀྱང་ཆོག་གི་མགོ་སྒྲོམ་པ་ས་དོན་རྫོགས་པར་གོ་བ་དང་ད
ད་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དབང་པོ་རྣམས་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྩོད་པ་དང་སྤྲིན་ཞིང་རྩལ་ལོད་པ་སྟེ། དེས་ན་བྱང་སེམས་སྟེ་བ་གཅིག་གིས་ཐོགས་པ་དགའ་ལྷན་ན་བཞུགས་པ་རྣམས་
འཛམ་གྱི་ཁྱིམ་གྱི་སྟེ་བའི་གནས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དབུས་སུ་སྤྲུལ་འབྱུངས་ཤིང་རྟེན་དེ་ལ་སངས་རྒྱུས་ནས་མི་རྣམས་ལ་ཆོས་སྒྲིན་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

Later in the argument, Tsongkhapa elaborates the point most relevant to our previous questions, supporting it in the end with the same set of quotations he used in the *Stages of Mantra*. It is significant to see how much further he takes the ideas here:⁷⁷

Suppose you say: ‘Since Buddhas also reach enlightenment on the basis of a body in the Heaven Below None, the statement that “all Buddhas of the past, present, and future reach enlightenment on the basis of a human body” does not establish what it is meant to, or even should it establish something, it is not an appropriate proof. This is because, if one were to create the divine beings through meditation on [the maṇḍala of] sheer conviction and through the four yogas [of the Guhyasamāja sādhana], for the simple reason that a bodhisattva such as the Holy White Pinnacle⁷⁸ became enlightened on the basis of a body in the Rose-Apple Land, then this would in no way compel one to see the *necessity* of meditating on something that is congruent with the stages by which a human being of the Rose-Apple Land is born.’

That is, claims the interlocutor, there may have been at least *one* bodhisattva who became enlightened in a human body on our planet – i.e. the Buddha Śākyamuni – but that does not prove the statement made by Nāgabuddhi, that every Buddha there ever was or will be reaches enlightenment from a human body. For indeed, there are cases described in scripture where bodhisattvas reach enlightenment directly from the Heaven Below None (*'og min*, Skt. *akaniṣṭha*). Even if one were simply trying to emulate the way that the Buddha Śākyamuni himself reached enlightenment, that would not really be enough

མིར་བཤད་པ་དེ་ལྟར་གསུངས་པ་མ་ན་འདས་པ་དང་མ་འོངས་པ་དང་དུང་བའི་སངས་རྒྱུ་ཐམས་ཅད་མི་ཡི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མིང་པོར་ཞུགས་པ་སྟེ་སྤྲུང་
ས་ཏེ་ཐམས་ཅད་མཆོག་པའི་དོན་གྲུབ་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལང་བ་རྩེས་པ་དང་ལྷན་པར་འཕྱུར་རྒྱུ་། རྒྱ་མཚོན་དེས་ན་འཛིན་པ་མྱེད་པའི་མིང་མིང་མིང་པ་སྟེ་པའི་རིམ་པ་དང་མ་ཐུ
ན་པར་བརྟེན་པ་ལྟ་བུ་མྱེད་པའི་རིམ་པ་འདིར་བཞུག་ནོ། །གཤམ་ཏེ་མོག་མིན་གྱི་རྟེན་པ་འདས་སངས་རྒྱུ་འཁོར་རྒྱ་བ་ཡིན་པའི་མྱེད་དུས་གསུམ་གྱི་སངས་རྒྱུ་ཐམ
ས་ཅད་མིང་རྟེན་པ་འཁོར་རྒྱ་པའི་གཏན་ཆེགས་འདི་མ་གྲུབ་པ་གྲུབ་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ཀྱང་སྦྱུ་བ་ལྟར་དུ་མི་རུང་སྟེ། དཔེ་རྫོང་དམ་པ་ཏེ་ག་དཀར་པོ་ལྟ་བུའི་བླ་པའི་སེམས་དེ་འཛ
མ་པ་མྱེད་པའི་རྟེན་པ་འཁོར་རྒྱ་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་གྱིས་ལྟོས་དང་རྒྱལ་འཕྱོར་པའི་ཉིད་དེང་འཛིན་གྱིས་བརྟེན་པ་ལྟ་བུ་མྱེད་པ་ན་འཛིན་པ་མྱེད་པའི་མིང་མིང་མིང་པ་སྟེ་
པའི་རིམ་པ་དང་ཐམས་ཅད་སྟེ་མ་དགོས་པ་ལ་ཅེ་ཡང་མི་བན་པའི་མྱེད་རོ་ཆེན།

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reason to convince one that, in order to reach an enlightened form like his, one would also have to meditate on a path that was congruent in aspect to the stages of his *birth*, before he was even a complete Buddha. That is, why would a path congruent in aspect to the result have to go back and retrace all the qualities of the being that Siddhārtha Gautama was before he actually became the Buddha? What is it about the basis of a human body like ours that is so integral to reaching total enlightenment that someone trying to complete the path very quickly would find it imperative to meditate on the nature of human birth as something potentially sacred and thus able to be purified? Tsongkhapa responds:⁷⁹

But there is no problem here, because the statement that all Buddhas of the past, present, and future become enlightened on the basis of a human body is not made in terms of Buddhas in general, *but rather in terms of all those who become enlightened in the desire realm*. Also, the creation of the divine beings here is not in terms of meditation on the path of mantra in general, but rather comes under the category of those persons who are “like-a-jewel,” the primary disciples for whom the great yoga tantras were intended, *those who will in that very life reach an enlightenment arising from mantra, by meditating on the two stages of the path* [of an unsurpassed yoga tantra]. That body which is the basis will definitely be one that has desire.

⁷⁹ *rnam gzahag rim pa'i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 17a5-18a4 (35-37), emphasis mine:

དེའི་སྐྱོན་མེད་དེ་དུས་གསུམ་གྱི་སངས་རྒྱུ་རྣམས་མིའི་རྟེན་ལ་འཛངས་ཀྱི་བར་གསུངས་པ་ནི་སངས་རྒྱུ་ལྷུ་འདྲེ་དབང་དུ་མཛད་པ་མིན་གྱི་འདོད་པའི་ཁམས་སུ་འཛངས་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་མཛད་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། བརྟེན་པ་ལྷ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡང་འདིར་ལྷ་གསུམ་གྱི་ལམ་སྐོམ་པ་སྤྱིའི་དབང་དུ་མ་གྱུས་ཀྱི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱ་དུ་གྲུལ་བྱའི་གཙོ་བོ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལྷ་བྱའི་གང་ཟག་ཆོ་དེ་ལ་ལམ་རིམ་པ་གཉིས་བསྐྱོམས་ནས་ལྷ་གསུམ་ནས་འབྱུང་བ་བཞིན་འཛངས་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་མཛད་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། རྟེན་དེ་ཡང་འདོད་པའི་རྟེན་ཅན་པར་ངེས་པའི་བྱིར་དོ། །འདོད་པའི་རྟེན་ཅན་པ་ཡིན་པར་ཅིས་ཤེས་སྟེ་ན། རྟོན་སྤྱིང་པོ་རྒྱ་ཁྱི་རྒྱུད་ལས་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གངས་མང་དུ་གསུངས་པའི་མཐར། འདི་ནི་གཉིས་པོ་འབྱུང་པ་ཡིས། །རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བ་བསྟན་པའོ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ནི་ལག་བཅངས་དང་། །ཞོ་ད་དང་བལྟས་པས་ཤེས་པར་བྱ། །ཞེས་དང་། དཔལ་ལྷོ་རྩེ་འདི་བརྟག་པ་དུག་པ་ལས། །ཞོད་དང་བལྟས་དང་ལག་བཅངས་དང་། །གཉིས་གཉིས་འབྱུང་དང་རྣམ་པ་བཞི། །སྤྱིར་བྱའི་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་རྒྱུད་བཞིར་གནས། །ཞེས་ཞོད་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་འདོད་ཆགས་རིགས་བཞི་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་པ་ལ་རྒྱུད་ལྷེ་བཞིར་གསུངས་ཤིང་འདོད་ཆགས་པ་དེ་དག་ཀྱང་མཛད་ལས། །གཉིས་གཉིས་འབྱུང་དང་ལག་བཅངས་དང་། །ཞོད་དང་བལྟས་པས་འཕྲིག་པ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་འཕྲིག་པའི་འདོད་ཆགས་སུ་གསུངས་པས་རྒྱུད་ལྷེ་བཞི་གང་གི་ཡང་གྲུལ་བྱའི་གཙོ་བོ་འདོད་ཁམས་པར་ཁ་ཅིག་འཛད་ཀྱང་། འདིར་ནི་གཞན་གསུམ་རེ་ཤིག་བཞག་ལ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གྲུལ་བྱ་བཤད་དེ། དེ་ཡང་ལམ་དེ་ལ་སོས་པ་དང་ཉམས་སུ་ལེན་པ་ཅན་ལ་ངེས་པ་མེད་ཀྱི་གང་གི་དབང་དུ་མཛད་ནས་རྒྱུད་དེ་གསུངས་པའི་གྲུལ་བྱའི་གཙོ་བོའོ། །དེ་ནི་དབང་པོ་གཉིས་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ཆགས་པའི་སྐྱོན་པོ་འདོད་ཡོན་ལས་དུ་བྱེད་ཀྱིས་པའི་འདོད་ཁམས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་དཔལ་ལེ་ཤེས་རྟོན་ཀྱང་ལས་བཅུས་པའི་རྒྱུད་ལས། ལྷ་གསུམ་དང་བྱག་རྒྱུ་སྤྱོད་པར་འདུས་བྱས་པའི་རྟོན་དང་བརྒྱ་མཉམ་པར་སྤྱོད་པ་མེད་པར་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་གསུམ་ཉེ་བར་མཆོན་པར་མི་རུས་སོ། །རྟག་དང་ལིང་ག་ཡང་དག་པར་སྤྱོད་མི་རུས་པ་དེས་ནི་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་ཉིང་འཛིན་མི་རྟེན་དོ། །ཞེས་དང་། གང་རྟོན་དང་བརྒྱ་མཉམ་པར་སྤྱོད་པའི་བདེ་བས་རང་བཞིན་སྤང་བ་ཡང་དག་པར་ཉེ་བར་མཆོན་པར་བྱེད་པ་དེ་ནི་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་གོ་འཕང་ལ་གནས་པར་འགྱུར་དོ། །ཞེས་དང་། འདུས་པའི་ཙ་རྒྱུད་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཆེ་སྟོན་པས་འདོད་ཆགས་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱལ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་ཉིང་འཛིན་ལ་སྤྱོམས་པར་ཞུགས་ནས་བསྟན་པའི་དོན་ལ་མདོ་བསྟེ་ལས། རི་ལྷར་བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་ཀྱིས་བྱང་རྒྱལ་གྱི་གོ་འཕང་ནི་འདོད་ཆགས་ལས་སྤྱེ་བར་འགྱུར་བར་རབ་ཏུ་བསྟན་པར་བྱ་བའི་བྱིར་ལེའུ་དང་པོར་འདོད་ཆགས་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་ཉིང་འཛིན་ལ་སྤྱོམས་པར་འཇུག་པར་མཛད་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། སྤྱེ་བཞིན་པ་ལ་གནས་པས་དང་སྤྱོད་པ་བྱ་སྤྱེ་འདོད་ཆགས་ལ་སྤྱོད་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་འདོད་པས་ཐར་པ་རབ་ཏུ་བསྟན་པར་བྱ་བའི་བྱིར།

Suppose you wonder what it means to be a basis that has desire. In the *Tantra Adorning the Vajra Essence*, at the end of a thorough enumeration of the great yoga tantras, it states:

The divisions of the tantras are taught
in terms of how the two embrace:
In the same way, you should know them
in terms of holding hands, laughing, and gazing.

The Sixth Examination within the glorious *Sambhuta*[sic] states:

In the four aspects of laughing, gazing,
holding hands, and the embrace of the two:
In the manner of the silkworm,
the four tantras abide.

It is stated in all four classes of tantra that one can take the four types of desire – laughing and the rest – into the path, and furthermore, the *Abhidharmakośa* says of that desire: “Through the embrace of the two and holding hands, laughing and gazing – this is sex.” Thus it is stated to be sexual desire, and so some explain the primary disciples of all four classes of tantra to be of the desire realm. Here, however, setting aside for the moment the other three, these are described as the disciples of the great yoga tantras. It is not specified as to whether they merely have enthusiasm for that path, or else practice it, but it is stated in terms of who the primary disciples are for whom the tantra was spoken.

These are those of the desire realm who have the ability to take the objects of desire as the path, through a passion for the joining of the two organs. As it is stated in the glorious *Compendium of Vajra Primordial Wisdom Tantra*:⁸⁰ “When there is no actual union of vajra and lotus – preceded by mantra and mudra – one will not be able to approximate the three states of consciousness. If one is unable to join, perfectly, the *bhaga* and *liṅga*, then one will not find the concentration of great bliss.” Also: “Whoever approximates, perfectly, the natural appearances due to the bliss that comes from the union of vajra and lotus, this one comes to abide in the state of great bliss.”

When revealing the root tantra of the Guhyasamāja, the Teacher entered the meditative concentration known as “The Great Passionate Means.” As for the meaning of that teaching, *Mixed with the Sūtras*⁸¹ states: “Just as the Blessed One, in order to demonstrate vividly how the state of enlightenment is born from

⁸⁰ *Jñānavajrasamuccaya-tantra* (ye shes rdo rje kun las btus pa'i rgyud), Toh. 447, sde dge bka' 'gyur, rgyud, vol. ca.

⁸¹ Nagārjuna, *Śrī-guhyasamāja-mahāyoga-tantrapāda-krama-sādhana-sūtra-melāpaka-nāma* (rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i bskyed pa'i rim pa bsgom pa'i thabs mdo dang bsres pa), Toh. 1797, sde dge bstan 'gyur, rgyud, vol. ngi.

passion, entered the meditative concentration known as ‘The Great Passionate Means’ in the first chapter [of the root tantra], so too, while abiding in what has just been created, you should perform the First Joining, in order to demonstrate vividly how liberation comes from the desire of all those living beings who act with passion.”

With these latter quotations – the first two from an explanatory tantra of the Guhyasamāja system, and the third from one of the major Guhyasamāja commentaries attributed to Nāgarjuna – Tsongkhapa affirms in no uncertain terms that reliance on a human form to reach enlightenment from the desire realm, within a single, brief lifetime of a degenerate era, via unsurpassed yoga tantra, is intimately connected with the human capacity to generate a certain level of high, sustained bliss, through the joining of male and female organs. The “vajra and lotus,” as well as “*bhaga* and *līṅga*,” are traditional tantric code words for these organs, apparently utilized in order never to refer to such things in an ordinary or crude way. Indeed, this passage – where Tsongkhapa quotes Vasubandhu for a suitably technical Abhidharma definition of “sex” – is likely the only time I have ever seen a very ordinary Tibetan word for intercourse (*'khrig pa*) appear in a tantric text within Tsongkhapa’s lineage.⁸² Though I cannot speak for other lineages, much less the Sanskrit tradition as a whole, it is clear that Tsongkhapa and the major authors that followed after him were careful never to use an ordinary term in the context of the kind of sacred, ecstatic union in which the divine beings of the maṇḍala appear to be engaged, or for any of the practices in which advanced yogins might be instructed to take part at the appropriate time. We will treat at length the central imperative within unsurpassed yoga to overcome “ordinary view” with respect to *all* appearances, but the stakes are particularly high with the appearance of male and female energy. That is, if it were true that the proper joining of the subtlest male and female energies – as expressed outwardly in the joining of physical bodies – were an act that had the capacity to propel both

⁸² Furthermore, I can say with confidence that the oft-used English combination phrases “tantric sex” and “sexual yoga” do not translate any Tibetan term I know of in the range of tantric literature used by Tsongkhapa, including his extensive quotations from the Tengyur. In Tsongkhapa’s glosses, Tibetan colloquial words for “sex” are never mixed with technical terms taken from New Translation tantric scriptures. These technical terms are usually taken from specialized vocabulary for advanced states of balanced meditative equipoise, such *snyoms ’jug* (Skt. *samāpatti*) and its variants, or else include the previously mentioned “joining of mouths” (*kha sbyor*, translating Skt. *samputa/sambhūta*), which indicates face-to-face embrace, or simply *sbyor ba*: “joined.” Since any such practice done devoid of an explicit meditation on emptiness would not constitute an unsurpassed yoga tantra practice at all (and indeed would constitute a failure in tantric vows), the textual tradition cited by Tsongkhapa very literally treats such yoga as “meditation” of the most exacting kind. What Tsongkhapa has done here is simply to indicate that the type of desire being used as a basis does correspond to the type of desire defined by Vasubandhu as “sexual desire.” By the time it is meant to be used in the context of an unsurpassed yoga meditation, however, it seems the desire is supposed to have been so transformed that “sex” would no longer be an appropriate label to apply to the act which follows upon that energy – whether elicited through visualized or actual union. I ask my reader to keep in mind the ontological difficulties associated with this, and every point regarding “transformation,” throughout the discussions of emptiness in Chapters Five and Six.

partners⁸³ into an approximation of “the three states of consciousness,”⁸⁴ *without actually dying*, then this would be an act which had the potential to bring not just the partners, but countless living beings to enlightenment. But the risk would still be extremely great, since of course, done at the wrong time, with the wrong motivation, or even without a highly trained state of concentration on movements of energy more subtle than atoms, the practice could instead lead to rebirth in the lower realms, as numerous texts of this genre will tirelessly repeat. Ecstatic union, whether actual or imagined, is the form of human bliss most closely connected to the pathway of the central channel, yet only if one is trained to meditate on it in that way.

The Demon of Desire and the Daunting Challenge of Transformation

But wait. Is this madness? The literature of the great contemplative traditions of the world, especially those focused on a monastic way of life, is replete with warnings against the allure and terrible pitfalls of bringing sexual thoughts or fantasies, much less

⁸³ Tsongkhapa makes explicit reference to the female partner in a later section of the same argument. See *rnam gzhag rim pa'i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 19a3-19b2 (39-40):

Now it appears that most of the Indian treatises on the sādhanas of the [Guhyasamāja] tantra are taught in terms of a male practitioner, but it is not the case that a female body is not a suitable basis. As it is stated in the thirteenth chapter of the [root] tantra:

Always strive for the object of your desire:
the great Lady of Pristine Awareness,
the Lady of Eyes and the rest;
It is by relying on what you desire –
through all that you long to experience –
that you will reach your goals.

Its commentary, the *Illuminating Lamp*, states further: “The enlightenment born from desire is not only accomplished by men alone: It is also accomplished by women. It is in order to teach this point that it refers to ‘the great Lady of Pristine Awareness’ and the rest.”

Now “the great Lady of Pristine Awareness” is a well-trained mudra. “The Lady of Eyes and the rest” are the four types of women, the Lady of the Lotus and so on. “What you desire” refers to the five objective fields, and the commentary explains the meaning to be this: By striving with your whole heart always to meditate on them as something totally pure, you train in experiencing the object of your desire as bliss. Insofar as you can do this, you will reach the state of Vajradhara. With respect to a similar goal, it is clear in the *Source of Vows*, the *Four Seats*, the *Prophecy*, and so on, that one requires a woman complete in all the definitive characteristics. The distinguishing feature of this system of liberation is also explained in the commentary to the first chapter of the *Vajra Dākinī*.

ཁྱེད་ལ་ཡང་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་གཞུང་པལ་མོ་ཆེར་སྐྱེས་པའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ནས་བསྟན་པ་མང་བར་སྦང་ན་ཡང་བྱད་མེད་རྟེན་དུ་མི་རུང་བ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་རྒྱུད་
ཀྱི་ལེའུ་བཅུ་གསུམ་པ་ལས། རིག་པ་ཆེན་མོ་སྐྱེན་ལ་སོགས། རྟག་ཏུ་འདོད་པའི་དོན་བཅོན་པ། འདོད་པའི་ཡོངས་སྤྱོད་དག་གིས་ནི། རི་ལྷར་འདོད་པ་བསྟེན་ན་
འབྲུབ། ཅེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་དེའི་འགྲེལ་པ་སྟོན་གསལ་ལས་ཀྱང་། འདོད་ཆགས་ལས་སྐྱེས་པའི་བྱང་རྒྱུ་ནི་སྐྱེས་པ་འབའ་ཞིག་གིས་བསྐྱབ་པར་མ་ཟད་ཀྱི་བྱད་
མེད་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་སྐྱབ་པར་བྱེད་དོ་ཞེས་བསྟན་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་རིག་པ་ཆེན་མོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་གསུངས་ཏེ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་སོ། ཁྱེད་ལ་རིག་པ་ཆེན་མོ་ནི་
ལེགས་པར་བསྐྱབས་པའི་བྲུག་རྒྱུ་ལོ། སྐྱེན་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནི་བསྐྱེད་པ་སོགས་པའི་བྱད་མེད་བཞི་ལོ། འདོད་པ་ནི་ཡུལ་ལྷ་དང་དེའི་དོན་ནི་དེ་རྣམས་པར་དག་པ་སྟེ་
དེ་ལ་རྟག་ཏུ་སྐྱོས་པ་ལྷར་ལེན་པ་ལ་བཅོན་པས་རི་ལྷར་བདེ་བར་འདོད་པའི་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐྱབས་ན་རྟོ་རྩེ་འཆང་གི་གོ་འཕང་འབྲུབ་པར་འགྲེལ་པར་བཤད་པས་སོབ་བྱ་
འདུལ་། རྟེན་ནི་སྐྱོས་འབྱུང་དང་གདན་བཞི་དང་ཞལ་ལུང་ལ་སོགས་པར་གསུངས་པའི་མཆན་ཉིད་དེ་རྣམས་ཆང་བའི་བྱད་མེད་དགོས་པར་གསལ་ལོ། འདི་ལི་
གྲོལ་ལུགས་ཀྱི་བྱད་པར་ནི་རྟོ་རྩེ་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་ལེའུ་དང་པོའི་འགྲེལ་པར་ཡང་བཤད་དོ།

⁸⁴ These are the stages of dissolution that immediately precede the dawning of clear light mind.

sexual passion, autoeroticism, or fluid emissions into the spiritual life. Monastics know well that a life of abstinence can actually increase the power and intensity of sexual energy and urges, and so it is of the utmost importance to receive good advice and close monitoring from a spiritual guide on how to avoid, sublimate, or else forcefully banish such desires altogether.⁸⁵ It is often considered challenge enough for a monk, nun, or celibate priest to abandon and eschew sexual desire entirely, but to deliberately introduce visualization of the act of union, no matter how sacred, spiritualized or sincerely motivated one's attitude might be: Would this not turn out to be just plain catastrophic for the monastic, at any age?

I cannot enter here into a discussion of the rich topic of “demons” across religious literature of all kinds, but suffice to say that lust, gluttony, and fornication are considered spiritual demons from a Buddhist point of view every bit as much as from a Christian, Jewish, or Muslim one. Indeed one of the four basic demons (*bdud*, Skt. *māra*) that the Buddha is said to have conquered entirely is known as the “son of a [desire realm] god” (*lha'i bu*), and the personified identity of this demon represents all those seductions to sense pleasures that lead one away from the path. The first of the four root monastic vows for both men and women in the Mūlasarvāstivāda monastic ordination lineage common to all Tibetan Buddhism is to abstain from sexual activity of every kind. Then, a host of secondary vows place careful parameters around both male and female activities in order to avoid and prevent situations that could bring the monk or nun into close proximity with temptation, or what in Roman Catholic ethical teaching would be known as the “near occasion of sin.” At a more granular level, the second of the forty-six secondary offenses, or “bad deeds,” that work against the vow of a bodhisattva, and this one specifically against the practice of the perfection of giving, explicitly states that it is a downfall simply to allow thoughts of desire to continue. In his *Highway to Enlightenment*, Tsongkhapa comments on this offense:⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See, for example, that great father of Christian monasticism in Europe, John Cassian, condemning the danger of sexual passions for the life of prayer in Boniface Ramsey, 2000, *John Cassian, The Institutes*, Ancient Christian Writers 58 (New York: Newman Press), esp. Book VI on “The Spirit of Fornication,” 151-166. See also Jeremy Driscoll, 2003, *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, Ancient Christian Writers 59 (New York: Newman Press), esp. 11-13 on “The Eight Principal Evil Thoughts and Their Order.” There are many more examples in the history of Christian literature that would echo the practical knowledge behind this injunction.

⁸⁶ *Highway to Enlightenment: An Explanation of the Ethical Discipline of Bodhisattvas* (*byang chub sems dpa'i tshul khrims kyi rnam bshad byang chub gzhung lam*), vol. ka, 70a4-70b1 (673-674), emphasis mine: གཉིས་པ་སེར་ལྷའི་གཉེན་སྒོ་ཉམས་པ་ནི། འདོད་པའི་སེམས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སྤྱུ་འཇུག་ཅེས་པ་སྟེ་འདོད་པ་ཆེ་བ་དང་ཆོག་མི་ཤེས་པ་དང་རྟོན་བཀྲའ་ལ་ཆགས་པ་གསུམ་མས་བཞི་གང་རུང་བྱུང་བའི་རྗེས་སྤྱུ་འཇུག་པ་སྟེ་དང་དུ་ལེན་པར་བྱེད་ཅིང་འགོག་པར་མི་བྱེད་ན་ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་གྱི་ཉེས་བྱས་ཏེ་འདི་ལ་ལྷུང་བ་བྱུང་ན་ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་པ་མེད་དོ། །སེམས་དེ་དག་དགག་པའི་བྱིར་དུ་འདུན་པ་བསྐྱེད་ཅིང་འབད་པས་བརྩོན་འགྲུས་རྩོམ་ལ་དེའི་གཉེན་སྒོ་ཡོངས་སྤྱོད་པས་དེའི་གོགས་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་བརྒྱུག་ཀྱང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཤས་ཆེ་བའི་བྱིར་དེས་ཟེལ་གྱིས་མནན་ནས་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་སྦྱོད་པ་ལ་བཅས་པ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཉེས་པ་མེད་ཀྱི་སྦྱོན་ལེ་མེད་པ་ནི་མིན་ནོ།

The second [offense] is a degeneration of the antidote to avarice: “Continuing to engage in a mental state of desire.” This refers to continuing to engage once any one of these three (or four) has arisen: great desire, feeling unsatisfied, or having attachment to material gain and honor. This means that if you take it up and do not stop it, it is a bad deed with a mental affliction; but in this case, if the downfall does occur, it never lacks the mentally afflicted component.

In order to stop those states of mind, you generate an aspiration and begin to make effort through striving to hold on firmly to their antidotes. Thus you remain in what opposes them. But although you may indeed block them, nonetheless, since these are naturally very powerful afflictions, you engage in behavior over and over again because you were outshined by them. Such *behavior* is not the bad deed that is in contradiction with your vow, but it is not as though it was never a fault in any way.

Though this “mental” form of the offense appears to refer mainly to one’s attachment to getting things – whether material things or emotional adulation – the term “great desire” (*’dod pa che ba*) would certainly include sexual desire (*’khrig pa’i ’dod chags*), as defined above by Vasubandhu. Thus even from the point of view of training as a bodhisattva – who may be a layperson – it would act against the cultivation of one’s attitude of wanting to *give* constantly to all living beings without partiality, if one were to allow thoughts of “what I want” and “what will make me happy” (whether emotionally or sensually) to continue unchecked. Thus Tsongkhapa can affirm that in this particular case, there is no lesser form of the bad deed that somehow lacked the mental affliction, simply because the continuation of the mental affliction *is* the bad deed, if one has made no efforts to stop it. Thus it is easy to see that fantasies about objects of the senses would come under the heading of what is prohibited by this precept.

On the other hand, Tsongkhapa acknowledges that there are some deeds which will inevitably be *motivated* by inordinate desire, but which, in themselves, might not constitute downfalls against the bodhisattva vow. That is, for example, eating too much, or else buying unnecessary clothing and the like, might be motivated by having lost a battle with overpowering desire. However, these actions in themselves might not harm one’s basic bodhisattva intention, as long as one has made sincere efforts to stop or curb the attitudes of lust, gluttony, avarice, or possessiveness, somewhere along the line. As long as one is sincerely engaged in the mental war with afflictions, one is still striving in the direction of becoming more like a real bodhisattva.⁸⁷ But to engage in harmful actions

⁸⁷ The types of actions of body and speech that *do* directly damage the wish for enlightenment are many, and these are enumerated among the rest of the root and secondary downfalls. However, there are several downfalls such as this one, that relate solely to a situation of failing to put a stop to a mental affliction like desire, anger, malice or laziness. I have chosen to highlight this downfall because of its reference to allowing a *mental state of desire* to continue, which, it might seem, would actually become *necessary* in

motivated by desire would still often come under the heading of any of the ten basic non-virtues, including stealing, sexual misconduct, idle speech, and so on. So it is not as though such behavior “was never a fault in any way.”

Further in the secondary offenses against the bodhisattva vow, one finds the failure to try to put a stop to the five obstacles to meditative concentration, including “longing for the objects of desire,” as well as “agitation”⁸⁸ and “regret.” Tsongkhapa glosses the latter as referring to a feeling of yearning for and missing all the fun times and loved ones that have been left behind⁸⁹ now that one is applying oneself to meditation. The distraction that takes one’s mind off its chosen object towards an imagined or remembered object of attraction – whether a person or a sense pleasure – is considered one of the foremost obstacles to developing unwavering stability in meditation. So how could actively imagining what is for many people the most tantalizing and agitating form of human experience, ever be an aid to reaching the most exalted states of meditative stillness and penetrating insight?

The most complex and controversial of the secondary offenses to the bodhisattva vow states that “doing a non-virtue out of compassion is not a non-virtue.”⁹⁰ Not only that, but according to this precept it is a bad deed to *fail* to do the non-virtue at hand, when the collection of extreme conditions that call upon a mature and upright bodhisattva to do so are complete. When commenting upon this secondary offense, Tsongkhapa makes several more points that I see to be relevant to our present discussion. Tsongkhapa relies on several Indian commentaries to say that an advanced bodhisattva who is a layperson may be allowed to do any one of the seven non-virtues of body or speech with an explicit motivation of compassion, when many other strict conditions are in place as well. However, a bodhisattva who is a monk may never, under any circumstances, engage in sexual activity (literally “impure behavior,” *mi tshang par spyod pa*), because this will constitute the first “defeat” and he would lose his monks’ vows altogether.

The question arises why there might be circumstances where a monk could be allowed to “take life,” “take what is not given,” or “speak falsely,” out of compassion, but not in *that* event also be breaking one of his four primary monastic vows. Tsongkhapa’s answer is this: There is never a case where one can engage in sexual activity and not break the first monastic vow, whereas there are cases where one might possibly kill, steal or speak falsely, but with precise virtuous motivation, and so not commit the “defeats” that correspond to those deeds. Thus it does not matter what one’s motivation is: Engaging in sexual activity will shatter the monastic vow, whereas in the

order to sustain Vajrayāna practices that take desire as the path. But I will argue that the contradiction is not as straightforward as that.

⁸⁸ Tib. *rgod pa*. This is the same word translated as “laughter” in the quotations from tantras cited above.

⁸⁹ See *byang chub gzhung lam*, vol. ka, 104b6-105a1 (702-703).

⁹⁰ *byang chub gzhung lam*, vol. ka, 75b3 (684): ལྷོང་བརྟེན་བཅས་ན་མི་དགེ་མེད།

rare cases where engaging in other actions that would usually be non-virtuous, with a motivation and skillful means with which to bring benefit, will not actually break the corresponding vows, but rather create great virtue instead.⁹¹ Even in the exceptional case of the great bodhisattva *layperson* who takes pity on a woman near to death and grants her pleasure out of great compassion (viewing her without desire, as if a close relative), there is no mention of it being a sacred practice of transformation. “Impure behavior,” i.e., sexual intercourse, is simply that natural thing which human beings crave; a lay bodhisattva might collect virtue by offering it out of tremendous compassion and in a case where it will bring incomparable benefit, but a monk must never do so. As Tsongkhapa interprets Śāntideva’s *Compendium of the Training* (*Śikṣāsamuccaya*):⁹²

In general, “pure behavior” [Skt. *brahmacarya*] itself is the supreme way to accomplish others’ benefit, and to cast it off gives no exceptional benefit. But in particular, if one has become a foundation for the root downfalls from [the vows of] individual liberation [Skt. *pratimokṣa*], and there comes a time when one sees that there will be some exceptional benefit for a living being, and one does so by giving up the training, this is permitted for a householder, but for a renunciate monk it is not permitted. If this were not the case, and it were permitted for a renunciate monk, then “giving up the training” would be rendered meaningless.

In all those cases, sex is just sex, regarded typically as a somewhat necessary evil, a symptom of the desire that keeps the wheel of saṃsāra turning, even as it does admittedly bring fortunate beings into a world where they have the rare and precious opportunity to reach enlightenment. But the “impure behavior” itself is never glorified, even in the context of culturally acceptable marriage, and for serious practitioners who have “taken up the training” of abstinence, it is to be avoided at all costs. How then, are we to make sense of the leap from these clear parameters on physical behavior that appear in both monastic and lay Buddhist precepts with respect to sexuality – as well as the delicate injunctions meant to curb the mental poison of desire at the level of the bodhisattva vow – all the way to the unsurpassed class of tantra, where the practitioner seems to be instructed and even bidden to spend thousands of hours gaining single-pointed concentration on images deliberately designed to evoke the most primal passions known to human beings of this Rose-Apple Land we call “Earth”?

This is by no means an easy question, and I do not believe it is solved in Tsongkhapa’s thought simply by invoking the clear separation between the “three sets of

⁹¹ See entire discussion of this point at *byang chub gzhang lam*, vol. ka, 76a1-76b5 (685-686) and ff.

⁹² *byang chub gzhang lam*, vol. ka, 76b4-5 (686):

ལྷིང་ཆངས་སྤྱད་ཉིད་གཞན་དོན་སྤྱོད་པའི་མཆོག་ཡིན་པས་དེ་བཏང་བ་ལ་གཞན་གྱི་དོན་སྤྱོད་པ་མེད་ལ་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་སོ་ཐར་གྱི་རྩ་ལྷུང་གི་གཞི་ལ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་སེམས་ཅན་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་དོན་སྤྱོད་པ་མེད་པའི་ཆེ་བསྐྱབ་པ་བྱུང་ནས་བྱེད་པས་ཁྱིམ་པ་ལ་གནང་བ་ཡིན་གྱི་རབ་བྱུང་ལ་གནང་བ་མིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟ་མིན་པར་རབ་བྱུང་ལ་གནང་ན་བསྐྱབ་པ་འབྱུང་བའི་དོན་མེད་དོ།

vows” as mentioned in the *Vajraśekhara Tantra* and made famous in Tibet by the Sakya Paṇḍita’s scathing examination and critique on the topic.⁹³ Tsongkhapa does of course admit that there are a few cases where higher vows must outweigh or override lower ones in cases of apparent contradiction. Nevertheless, after carefully enumerating the parameters regarding the classical example where a bodhisattva would have to relinquish certain fine points of the monastic precepts (such as not keeping a bolt of cloth for more than ten or thirty days) in order to serve the greater good of living beings,⁹⁴ Tsongkhapa states in no uncertain terms:⁹⁵

If you do not understand these divisions, then with regard to all the shared rules of individual liberation, you will declare, “Well, *we* are bodhisattvas, and *we* are practitioners of secret mantra, so we are beyond those, and what is more, we are purified by what is higher.” Then you will go carefree. But if you possess the higher two sets of vows, when any exceptional bad deed that is in contradiction with the rules of the bodhisattvas arises, then according to what is taught here, you have created a transgression that goes against the vows of mantra. Insofar as it is stated, “Anything that goes beyond the two sets of rules, without necessity, becomes a transgression that is naturally wrong,” how can those who pretend to be of the Greater Way, but without guarding either of the two sets of vows, have any basis at all for claiming such a thing? Therefore, since they pollute the teaching of the Teacher with the sewage of evil ideas, any of you who wish to be a good person should cast them away like poison.

In numerous places Tsongkhapa emphasizes that anyone who enters the tantric path must, in the course of empowerment itself, take on the complete set of precepts associated with the bodhisattva vow, and in the course of the tantric vows themselves, recommit to keeping all the precepts of individual liberation to which he or she may already be committed, including a general promise to avoid the ten non-virtues. So there is no one who can claim to be a practitioner of secret mantra without also bearing full commitment to all the bodhisattva vows, as well as some form of the morality of individual liberation, whether as a layperson or a monastic.

⁹³ See Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’-rgyal-mtshan, *A Clear Differentiation of The Three Codes*, 23-24 and 34n74.

⁹⁴ See *byang chub gzhung lam*, vol. ka, 73b6-75b2 (680-684).

⁹⁵ *byang chub gzhung lam*, vol. ka, 75a3-6 (683):

ཏེ་ལྷ་བུའི་རྣམ་དཔེ་མི་ཤེས་པར་སོ་ཐར་གྱི་བཅས་པ་ཐུན་མོང་བ་རྣམས་ལ་ཁོ་ལོ་ཅག་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དབའའོ་གསང་སྤྲུལ་ས་པོ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་དག་ལས་འདས་གྱང་གོང་མས་འདག་གོ་ཞེས་སྒྲིབ་བཀའ་ཡངས་སུ་འཇུག་པ་ནི། སྒྲོམ་པ་གོང་མ་གཉིས་དང་ཐུན་མོང་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བཅས་པ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཉེས་པ་ལྷག་པོ་ཞིག་བྱུང་བར་འདྲིར་བསྟན་ལ་སྤྲུལ་གྱི་སྒྲོམ་པ་དང་འགལ་བའི་སྒྲོམ་པོ་སྦྱེད་པར། སྒྲོམ་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་བཅས་པ་ལས། དགོས་པ་མེད་པར་འདའ་བ་རྣམས། །ཁ་ན་མ་ཐོ་སྒྲོམ་འགྱུར་ཏེ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ན། སྒྲོམ་པ་གཉིས་གང་ཡང་སྤྱང་བའི་ཐེག་ཆེན་སར་ཁས་འཆེ་བ་རྣམས་ལ་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་སྒྲིབ་པའི་གཞི་ཅས་ཡང་གལ་ཡོད། དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་དག་ནི་སྒྲོན་པའི་བསྟན་པ་ངན་རྟོག་གི་བཙོག་ཆུས་སྒྲོད་པ་ཡིན་པས་བདག་ལེགས་སུ་འདོད་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་དྲག་ལྷར་སྤང་བར་བྱའོ།

Considering all these fine points, I think that for Tsongkhapa, the shocking question of “taking desire as the path” must be addressed at an even deeper level, where one does not simply accept that the rules “differ” according to different systems of teaching, but rather seeks to penetrate and unravel the reality of deeds and thoughts and names themselves, *to the point where there is no contradiction*. That is, my sense is that in Tsongkhapa’s view, there would never be a case where a tantric practice would force one to *transgress* a bodhisattva vow. Rather, one would have to understand the tantric practice so well as to see that there was simply nothing there that was not in keeping with all the details of the bodhisattva precepts, and if it seemed there was something that had to be transgressed in order to practice the tantric yoga, one had not yet understood the fullness of the transformation required in order to do so properly. Thus for Tsongkhapa, unsurpassed yoga tantra is about *transformation*, not transgression. This point cannot be stressed enough.

In his *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, Tsongkhapa famously describes the first great significance of meditating on the whole of the shared path as follows: “You realize that all the teachings are without contradiction.” He elaborates:⁹⁶

If, because you see some minor places in which the things that are permitted or forbidden are not the same, and then hold [the two vehicles] to be entirely contradictory, like hot and cold, it is clear that this is an extremely crude idea. In this way, except for a few instances where there are exceptions in what is permitted and forbidden, all the scriptures are in great accord with one another. Thus in order to engage at higher and higher levels within such things as the three vehicles and the five paths, one must have in their entirety the types of good qualities belonging to the lower vehicles and paths. . . . Therefore in reliance upon the sacred Protector, you will gain a stable certainty regarding the way in which all the scriptures turn into the requisite conditions for a single person to reach enlightenment. What you can practice now, you will take into your experience, and what you cannot actually engage with you will not reject just because you

⁹⁶ *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 10b1-11a6 (52-53):

འདི་དག་ལ་གནད་བཀག་མི་འདྲ་བའི་ཆ་ཐན་ཐུན་མཐོང་ནས་ཆ་གང་ལྟར་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་འགལ་བར་འཛིན་པ་ནི་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ཏུ་རྩིང་བར་གསལ་ཡོད། དེ་ལྟར་ན་དེ་མིགས་བསལ་ཅན་གྱི་གནད་བཀག་འགའ་ཤེས་གཏོགས་པ་གསུང་བར་ནམས་ཡིན་ཏུ་མཐུན་པས་ཐེག་པ་གསུམ་མཐ་ལས་ལྷ་ལྷ་བྱ་གོང་མ་གོང་མར་འབྲུག་པ་ན་ཐེག་པ་དང་ལས་འོག་མ་འོག་མའི་ཡོན་ཏན་གྱི་རིགས་ཆར་བ་དགོས་སོ། . . . དེའི་ཕྱིར་དམ་པའི་མགོན་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་གསུང་བར་ཐམས་ཅད་གང་ཐག་གཅིག་འཆང་རྒྱ་བའི་ཆ་རྒྱུ་དུ་འགྱུར་བའི་ཚུལ་ལ་ངེས་པ་བརྟན་པར་བྱས་ལ། ད་ལྟ་ཉམས་སྤྱོད་ལོངས་པ་ནམས་ཉམས་སྤྱོད་ཞིང་དངོས་སྤྱོད་ལྷོག་པ་རྩལ་པ་ནམས་ཀྱི་རང་ཉིད་གྱིས་འབྲུག་པ་རྩལ་པ་རྒྱ་མཚན་དུ་བྱས་ནས་མི་སྤང་བར། དེ་དག་ལ་དངོས་སྤྱོད་ལྷོག་པ་གློ་ནས་ཉམས་སྤྱོད་པ་ཞིག་ནས་ཞིག་ན་འོང་སྤྱོད་དུ་བསམས་ནས་དེའི་རྒྱུར་ཆོགས་བསག་པ་དང་སྤྱི་བ་སྤྱང་བ་དང་སྤྱོད་ལས་གདལ་བར་བྱའོ། དེས་ནི་རིང་པོ་མི་ཐོགས་པར་སྤྱོད་མཐུ་ཐེ་ཆེ་ཆེར་སོང་སྟེ་དེ་དག་ཐམས་ཅད་ཉམས་སྤྱོད་ལེན་རྩལ་བར་ཡང་འགྱུར་རོ། . . . དེ་ལྟར་ན་གདམས་ངག་འདིས་མདོ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་གནད་ཐམས་ཅད་གང་ཐག་གཅིག་འཆང་རྒྱ་བའི་ལས་དུ་བསྐྱས་ནས་འཁྲིད་པས་ན་འདི་ནི་བསྟན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་འགལ་མེད་དུ་རྟོགས་པའི་ཆེ་བ་དང་ལྷན་ནོ།

yourself cannot go there. By thinking of those things as something to be practiced through actually engaging with them, then you will think, “Someday it will come,” and will collect the causes by gathering goodness, purifying obscurations, and making prayers. Then it will not be long before the inner force of your mind grows greater and greater, and you will be able to practice all of those things. . . . In this way, through this special instruction, all the crucial points of sūtra and mantra are consolidated into the path to enlightenment for a single person. If you are guided in this way, then this will have the great significance of enabling you to realize that all the teachings are without contradiction.

* * *

I would posit that the key to understanding Tsongkhapa’s insight into the utter lack of contradiction between the great diversity of Buddhist teachings – in particular between those taught in the Mahāyāna sūtras and those taught in the tantras – lies mainly in his own finely drawn out understanding of the Middle Way view of emptiness. The apparent contradictions that we have raised here should drive our own inquiry even deeper into questions about the identity of any “action,” “affliction,” “motivation,” “person,” “object,” “sense faculty,” and so on – the very array of components that make a complete path of action “what” it is. For by taking into account the complexity of Tsongkhapa’s thought with regard to all these details, we might begin to see what it is that thoroughgoing transformation would actually have to entail.

Some Reflections on the Transformative Power of Love

What is the precise set of conceptions that would be necessary for a practitioner to raise the *energy* that Tsongkhapa has readily defined to be sexual desire, yet still *not* be allowing “great desire” to go on, as an afflicted state of mind? What stability of motivation, as well as certainty of the divine presence, would be necessary for an experience of intimate energetic union – whether imagined in meditation or, for a layperson, practiced with an actual partner – to be so utterly different from human intercourse that it would simply not merit the application of common names such as “impure behavior” or “sex”? What is more, what elements of wisdom would have to be present so that it would not create anything like the same kind of karmic imprints that ordinary human intercourse would do? What is the level of emptiness one would have to understand in order for such practice to be even conceivable, much less realizable, without falling into any one of the million pitfalls made available through the mere introduction of passionate desire into a spiritual path?

For the moment, I will suggest the following considerations: In order for there not to be any contradiction between the vows of individual liberation, the bodhisattva vows, and tantric practice (without having to beat around the bush with hordes of technical exceptions), one would have to begin by recognizing that even in a sādhana practice of

unsurpassed yoga tantra, as well as in the sādhanas of the lower tantras, the mental state of desire – qua “affliction” – still cannot be allowed to “continue.” The tantric imperative to *transform* the afflicted state of mind, moment by moment, is as high or higher than was the imperative to cancel or turn it back, within the sūtra vehicle. Once one grasps the complexity of Tsongkhapa’s instructions for creation stage practice, I would dare to say that this is not mere sublimation; it must be thoroughgoing existential and ontological overhaul. Perhaps this is what it would mean for a practice to *devour* the affliction – like the silkworm eating the tree. Hence one goal in all the vehicles is the same: To end the mental afflictions. Once again, it is only the means and the scope of motivation that differs. To discern the unsurpassed way, however, one would have to reach a view of emptiness in which the afflictions themselves could be recognized as being empty, even of possessing the nature of being an “affliction” from their own side.

Further, one might consider what would occur if the act of union were genuinely imagined to be taking place between two divine beings – enlightened Buddhas. In this case the joining of male and female is intended as a symbol for the indivisibility of wisdom and method within a single state of consciousness. *That* is ultimately what Tsongkhapa has said the divine beings “create a symbol” for, by their appearance in union. Once one has learned to conceive of oneself authentically in a divine identity (another seemingly impossible leap), there would be no justification whatsoever in self-directed thoughts of desire. These, too, must be devoured by the wish for enlightenment, even as they are devoured by understanding emptiness – whichever works faster. But perhaps most importantly, when the divine Beloved who has been invited into the sacred realm of the maṇḍala is simultaneously understood to be the Buddha Jewel – the supreme source of one’s existential Refuge beyond life and death – then this should work quite naturally to guarantee that any stray thought of selfish desire will automatically be stopped in its tracks, as soon as one recalls *who it is* whom one loves. When the practice of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound has become stable, across all the visualizations of a creation stage sādhana, then everything is supposed to arise as the expression of great compassion and limitless love for all living beings. The Lover, the Beloved, and the Love are all bodhicitta, the wish for enlightenment.⁹⁷ At that point, afflictive desire has been utterly transformed.

⁹⁷ When commenting upon a passage much later in Tsongkhapa’s *Steps of Mantra* (see *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 389b6 [778]) regarding creation stage meditation on a subtle orb, “drop,” or “*thig le*,” at the lower tip of the central channel, Geshe Khedrup Norsang emphasized the following two points within the same hour. (Private instruction, February 3rd, 2015, 2m56s-3m30s):

When we say “*tiglé*,” this is not merely the red and white drops from our mother and father. Because essentially it is something that is wind and mind, and its aspect is the aspect of an orb. So it is something like that. Its essence is wind and mind, our own wind and mind, and its aspect is that of an orb. “Subtle” means it is very, very small. For example, it is like what we Tibetans have — the *maṇi* pills for peace and happiness. So that is the size. So what you are meditating on is something like that. On that basis, it is said that you reach meditative stillness.

Finally, study of the theory pertaining to the complete stage would reveal that the movement of energy and elements that takes place in ordinary human intercourse is a mere shadow of a shadow of what the yogi is supposed to experience at the levels that immediately precede manifesting the indwelling, fundamental mind of clear light. That is, although human intercourse is said to be one instance in ordinary life when the central channel naturally does open for a brief moment, that ordinary form of bliss is not at all what is referred to by the term “great bliss” or “simultaneously arisen bliss.” At the level of the subtle body, it might be said that every physical bliss involves a slight opening of channels at their outer tips, from the taste of chocolate, to the sound of a symphony, to the sight of the intense colors at the heart of a flower, to the scent of night jasmine, to the touch of a lover.⁹⁸ More deeply, it would be the mental state of sincere love for another being that has the capacity to begin to open the knots formed by the channels at the core of the subtle body, and the expression of intimate love for another human being is considered to have the capacity to open the channels, for a very brief time, in the most vivid way that most people are ever able to experience. But when one introduces the unconditional and impartial love for *all* living beings across countless worlds, and comes

ཐིག་ལེ་ཟེར་དུས་ང་རང་ཚོ་ལོ་མོ་བཅི་ཐིག་ལེ་དཀར་དམར་དེ་ཙམ་མི་ཡིན་པ། ད་གང་ཕྱིར་ངོ་མོ་རྒྱུང་དང་སེམས་ཡིན་པ་ལ་དེ་འདྲས་རྣམས་པ་ཐིག་ལེ་རྣམས་པ་ཟེར།
 དེ་འདྲས་གཅིག་ཡིན་པ་ད། ངོ་མོ་རྒྱུང་སེམས་རང་གི་རྒྱུང་སེམས་ཡིན་པ་རྣམས་པ་ཐིག་ལེ་རྣམས་པ། ཨོ་དེ་འདྲས་ཅིག་པ་མོ་རྒྱུང་རྒྱུང་རྒྱུང་། གང་ཕྱིར་དཔེས་ང་
 རང་ཚོ་མོད་པ་བཅི་ཞི་བདེ་མ་ཉི་ལེ་བྱ་འདུག་ག། ཨོ་དེ་འདྲས་ཀྱི་ཆེ་རྒྱུང་ཙམ། དེ་འདྲས་ཅིག་སྒོམ་ཡག་ཡིན་པ་རེད། ད་དེ་ལ་བརྟན་ནས་ཨ་ནི་ཨོ་ལགས་སོ་ག
 ང་ཕྱིར་དེ་ཞི་གནས་འགྲུབ་ཡག་རེད་ཟེར།

(Again in more detail at 35m12s-36m12s):

Now in the system of mantra, in terms of something like what we call the “red and white drops,” some people say they are the ordinary drops of fluid, or that they appear as those elements. But he says it’s not like that at all. So first you invite all Buddhas from the ten directions – you visualize all Those Who Have Gone Thus – and they melt into the aspect of nectar. Then they descend down through all the channels and ligaments of your own body, and so that is what is called a “drop.” But apart from that, if we think of it as the form of our ordinary drops, that will just create grasping to ordinary appearances, and will be a cause for desire and attachment. So except for that, one doesn’t go there. So here it says, “melts into bodhicitta”; “the light draws in all the Buddhas and they melt into bodhicitta.” So it is like that. So it is blessing, in the form of nectar, right? Its essence is all the Buddhas, yes? Its essence is the Lama, all Buddhas, and its aspect – so what’s that? Its aspect is the orb. So it’s like that.

ད་སྐྱགས་ཀྱི་ལུགས་ལ་ཐིག་ལེ་དཀར་དམར་ཟེར་ཡག་འདྲ་པོ་དེ་ཚོ་ཟེར་འོང་དུ་མི་འགའ་ཤས་ཀྱི་ཟེར་དུ་ང་རང་ཚོ་མི་ཐ་མལ་པ་བཅི་ཁྱ་བ་ཐིག་ལེ་དེ་ཁམས་དེ་ཡི
 ན་པ་སྒྲུབ་བཤར་གྱི་འདུག་ག། ཨོ་དེ་རེད་ཡོད་མ་རེད་ཟེར། ཨ་ལེ་དང་པོ་ཕྱོགས་བརྒྱ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱུན་དྲངས་ཕྱོགས་བརྒྱ་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་ག
 སལ་དུ་བྱེད་པ་སྒྱུར་དྲངས། ཨ་ནི་བདུད་རྩི་རྣམས་པ་ལ་ཁྱ་ནས། དེ་རང་གི་ལུས་ལ་ཨ་ནི་རྩ་རྒྱས་ལ་མར་བབས་པ་དེ་ལ་ཐིག་ལེ་ཟེར་འདི་མིང་བཏགས་པ་རེད་ཟེར།
 མ་གཏོགས་ང་རང་ཚོ་ཐ་མལ་པ་བཅི་ཐིག་ལེ་བཅི་གཟུགས་འདྲ་དེ་འདྲས་བསམ་སྒོ་གཏོང་དེ་ན་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྒྲུབ་ཞེན་བྱེད་ཡག་དང་འདོད་ཆགས་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱ་ལ་
 མ་གཏོགས་འཕྲོ་བཅི་མ་རེད་པ། དེ་ད་ལྟ་དེ་བྱང་སེམས་སུ་ཁྱ་བ་ཟེར་འདི། འོད་ཟེར་གྱིས་སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས་བཀལ་བ་བྱང་སེམས་སུ་ཁྱ་བ་ཟེར་ནས། ཨོ་དེ་འདྲ
 ས་རེད། ད་ཕྱིར་བརྒྱབ་བདུད་རྩི་བཅི་གཟུགས་འདྲ་རེད་པ་ད། ངོ་མོ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐམས་ཅད་རེད་ད། ངོ་མོ་སྒྲ་མ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཡིན་པ་ལ་རྣམས་པ་དེ་ནས་
 ག་རེད་ཟེར་ན་ཐིག་ལེ་རྣམས་པ་རེད་པ། ཨོ་དེ་འདྲས་རེད།

⁹⁸ This natural phenomenon is taken very seriously “into the path” through the Guhyasamāja practice of visualizing divine beings at the doorways of each of the sense faculties, and making outer offerings to those male and female bodhisattvas with *mantra* and *mudra*. It would be worthwhile to draw comparison in future between the understanding underlying such practices and the notion of the “spiritual senses” through the history of Christian mysticism.

to see oneself and the Beloved as Buddhas whose sole purpose is to become the protector and refuge for all of those beings, then love has been magnified to infinity.

It is only *this* kind of sustained love, held in an unwavering state of meditation, that would, according to the theory of the complete stage, have the capacity to open not only the channels, but the knots around the center of the heart, and finally allow the subtle winds and mind to penetrate the indestructible orb. Now there are practices of winds, channels, and orbs that are said to be “free of passion.” That is, there are other means to access one’s own subtle body than the imagining of divine bodies in union. The main point is that it is the channels that must be opened and the winds that must be trained, by a great variety of means. But because sexuality is so basic to the makeup of human beings like ourselves, born into the Rose-Apple Land of the desire realm, it is also considered essential to have a method to purify the deeply ingrained karmic tendencies that make us experience the union of bodies as something like an “impure behavior” in the first place. For it is such impure behavior that typically becomes the breeding ground for a host of afflictions such as desire, jealousy, anger, greed, dissatisfaction, and the rest, along with the other negative actions that ensue from them.

The fact of winds entering or moving through channels is not considered to be such a rarity in itself; indeed winds are said to collect in the channel wheel of the heart every time we fall into dreamless sleep. One might say that winds entering certain places in the subtle body is like entering a room – the room can either be brightly lit or dark.⁹⁹ Ordinarily, when winds enter the central channel, it is “dark” in there, whether in sleep, orgasm, or death. Hence no realization ensues. When merely reaching a state of actual meditative stillness, winds may even dissolve somewhat, so that the typical signs of dissolution begin.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the mind is now wide awake, clear, and stable, but this does not necessarily mean one understands the ultimate *nature* of what appears at the basic

⁹⁹ I am grateful to B. Alan Wallace for this analogy, given in lecture, Santa Barbara, January 12th, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ See Tsongkhapa’s treatise on the practices that have come to be known in English as the “Six Yogas of Naropa”: *Having the Three Beliefs: The Steps for Teaching the Profound Path by Way of the Six Dharmas of Nāropa* (*zab lam na’ ro chos drug gi sgo nas ‘khrid pa’i rim pa yid ches gsum ldan*), vol. 1a, 27b6-28a2 (56-57), where Tsongkhapa is referring to the inner signs of mirage, smoke, fireflies, and so on, that arise as winds enter the central channel. Note that the “method that is not like that one” to which he refers, would be a sūtra-based meditation for attaining nonconceptual stillness (i.e. *zhi gnas*, Skt. *śamatha*):

According to a crucial point regarding the degree to which the winds have withdrawn, [the signs] will be more or less, and since according to how stable or unstable [the meditation] may be, they may come in various ways, so there is no certainty at all how they will appear. These signs of smoke and the rest can arise due to a special method of holding the mind, which you do in order to gather the life-wind into the central channel, or they can also arise when you sustain your mind in a state where it has been placed nonconceptually, according to a method that is not like that one. So you must carefully distinguish between the two.

ཆུང་འདྲ་ལུ་ཆེ་ཆུང་སོགས་ཀྱི་གནད་ཀྱིས་ཆུ་ཆེ་ཆུང་དང་། བརྟན་མི་བརྟན་སོགས་སྒྲ་ཚོགས་ཤིག་འོང་བས་མཐའ་ཅིག་ཏུ་མ་དེས་སོ། །དུ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་འདི་
རྣམས་ལ་སོག་དབུ་མར་སྦྱད་པའི་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་བརྟན་པར་ཅན་གྱི་སེམས་འདྲིན་དང་། དེ་ལྟ་བུ་མིན་པའི་སེམས་མི་རྟོག་པར་འཇོག་པ་བསྐྱེད་པ་རྣམས་ལ་འདྲ་བ་
གཉིས་ཡོད་པ་ཀྱང་བར་བྱེད་དགོས་སོ།

levels of consciousness that manifest at that time. That would require extraordinary insight, but according to Tsongkhapa, such a union of stillness and insight found on the basis of sūtra methods alone, even though it does have a correlate shift within the subtle body, is still no comparison to the experience of someone who has reached the realizations of the complete stage.

Thus the person who has meditated on and reached stability in the stages of creation and completion has become ripe not only to experience the location (inside the channels and orbs), and understand its ultimate nature (emptiness), but has also prepared to dwell in the great bliss that is the result of the infinite motivation for having entered that “room” in the first place. Here is where training to access the indivisible great bliss and realization of emptiness that comes from deliberately dissolving winds into crucial points within the subtle body could eventually generate a state of mental and physical experience that is said to be unmatched even by the realization of an ārya bodhisattva traveling via the sūtra path alone.¹⁰¹ Hence, although the simple movements of winds may be a natural process, what comes about on the basis of sustained practice based on that natural movement is not considered to be ordinary at all. This would be an even deeper level of existential transformation, involving not only conceptions regarding an action, but the physical substances and highly tangible movements of energy themselves. In terms of the analogy of who it is and how he or she enters a “room,” it is the preparation that counts most, and will utterly change the nature of the experience of entry, residence, and dissolution, when it comes.

Becoming Human to Become Divine

We will not be able to discuss such complete stage practices in the present writing, but my purpose here was simply to address what it is that Tsongkhapa repeatedly insists should distinguish unsurpassed yoga tantra from the other three classes. This led us to examine the meaning of depicting and meditating upon divine beings joined in the appearance of passionate union within maṇḍalic worlds. We saw that the *symbol* of such union is meant to catalyze in the practitioner certain desires, along with the movements of energy that accompany such desire. The purpose was first, so that the practitioner might “devour” the affliction of attachment by meditating on its emptiness, bringing forth instead an extraordinary state of mind imbued with an approximation of great bliss, and secondly, so that the practitioner can eventually train those energies to enter the central channel, in order to bring forth deeper realizations, once manifesting the indwelling, primordial mind of clear light. It is this latter state of mind that constitutes the real great bliss; every state of consciousness prior to that is a mere approximation and preparation for it. But this inquiry also led us to the question of why one would meditate on a form

¹⁰¹ For an extensive discussion of this point, see Tsongkhapa, *The Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp on the Five Stages* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), vol. ja, 52a5-55a2 (105-111), and as translated in Gavin Kilty, 2013, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*, 104-107.

that is congruent in aspect with the Buddha, as part of a practice that recapitulates *all* the stages of what it is to be human like us, from birth onwards. I would encapsulate the implications of Tsongkhapa's more extensive argument as follows: One meditates on a holy body of form in order to have a method that is congruent in aspect with a resultant body that will actually be able to carry out the deeds of Buddhas, and help living beings everywhere by teaching according to their needs. But why does one meditate on a body of form that is congruent with that of humans from the *first* eon in the Rose-Apple Land?

The preliminary answer is that this is because that particular Land is where the Buddha became enlightened. But *why* did he, or why do “all” Buddhas of the past, present, and future, who do become enlightened in the desire realm, actually become enlightened in a place just like this? This is because it happens to be the types of human beings who live here who are most suited to travel the path to enlightenment, and in particular, who are the *only* type of being suited to practice unsurpassed yoga tantra in order to reach enlightenment in one lifetime. This is because they alone can generate the bliss that comes from the joining of male and female organs, and, through the subtle forms of the gross elements that are secreted – the “bodhicitta that is like the *kunda*”¹⁰² – that bliss can last long enough and become stable enough to serve as the basis for a state of *concentration* during which the subtle consciousness and energies dissolve into the central channel, and eventually into the indestructible orb at the heart.

Thus, one can say that the Buddha took on our human form for that final lifetime in which he would reach enlightenment, because *we* are the ones who are most suited to receive the teaching for how to reach enlightenment in that way. But in the Guhyasamāja system, at least, one meditates on a form of the Buddha that looks like a perfected version of ourselves, in order to achieve most quickly the form of an actual Buddha whose body looks like that of a glorified human being, so that we might in turn appear in a form familiar and accessible to the very types of beings who are most ripe to follow such a path.¹⁰³ So the Buddha came as a *human* because humans were the most suitable vessels

¹⁰² This Sanskrit term, *kunda*, never translated into Tibetan, refers to the flower *Jasminum multiflorum*, or Indian jasmine, which is known for its pure white color. Thus it is a code word for the subtle white element.

¹⁰³ For a very important detail regarding what *type* of cause the meditation on an aspect congruent to the holy body of form actually creates, see Tsongkhapa's clarification that the causes one creates through such meditation are not “ripening causes” (*rnam smin gyi rgyu*). These would be analogous to the causes that propel a rebirth in higher or lower realms of saṃsāra, where the cause does not always “look like” the result at all, even though they are similar as far as being virtue or nonvirtue and their respective results. Rather, these are “causes congruent in type” (*rigs mthun gyi rgyu*) that will indeed produce a result similar in aspect to the cause, and without which the result could never come about. But Tsongkhapa argues that it is not as though attaining the holy form body of a Buddha is like taking “rebirth” due to projecting ripening causes (*sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 26a2-6 [51], emphasis mine):

At that point, for a beginner who is entering the path of mantra in order to reach enlightenment in one lifetime, it was never stated from the perspective of the path of mantra that from the moment of *birth* one had to have a body adorned with the signs and marks. Since indeed one does not have them, one cannot posit [nonexistent] signs and marks of that [ordinary] body to be the cause for the signs and marks of the holy body of form. Thus one must establish a cause for the signs and marks that is *congruent in type*, by

to become Buddhas in one lifetime.¹⁰⁴ Then, humans meditate on being like a Buddha who has human form so as to be able to help future humans reach that same enlightenment in one lifetime. So it works both ways, but is not illogically circular. The pivotal point is the profound capacity of the human form for generating a stable state of bliss, which provides the doorway to realizing the great bliss that is ultimate divine compassion.

Further, the reason the Guhyasamāja practitioner meditates on the exquisite form of a body of light, as the human body was said to be during the *first* eon, before we devolved into our current coarse state, is in order to realize once again that this is the kind of paradisiacal form human beings still have the potential to embody, even insofar as being human, much less becoming Buddhas. This was the kind of form that the Buddha took – as the princely Vajradhara, blazing in sapphire light – in order to teach the path of passion in the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*.¹⁰⁵ Tsongkhapa concludes the argument (in his *Exegesis of the “Exposition”*):¹⁰⁶

meditating on them anew during that lifetime. Moreover, anything other than a yoga of the divine being would not make sense [as such a congruent cause].

Once one puts it like that, how could the following two cases be the same: (1) the fact that when one achieves the body of a wanderer in a pleasant realm or of a wanderer in a realm of misery, at the time of the cause, one did not have to collect a cause *with that aspect*, and (2) the fact that one *does* require a cause that is congruent in aspect before one can achieve the holy body of form of a Buddha?

So there is no place to catch us up in our position when we do not accept that “it is necessary to meditate on a path with the aspect of a *ripening cause* in order to take birth in a holy body of form,” while we do accept that “it is necessary to have a cause *congruent in type* that is congruent with the signs and marks of a Buddha before one can achieve such signs and marks.”

།དེའི་ཆེ་ཆེ་གཅིག་ལ་འཆང་རྒྱ་བ་ལྷག་པའི་ལས་དང་པོ་བ་དེ་ལ། དང་པོར་སྦྱིས་ཅན་ནས་ལུས་ལ་མཆན་དཔེས་བརྒྱན་བ་ཞིག་དགོས་པར་ལྷག་ནས་ནས་མ་གསུངས་ཤིང་། ཡོད་པ་ཡང་མིན་པས་ལུས་ཀྱི་མཆན་དཔེས་གཞུགས་སྦྱིའི་མཆན་དཔེའི་རྒྱ་བྱེད་བ་གཞག་ཏུ་མེད་པས། ཆེ་དེ་ལ་གསར་དུ་བསྐྱོམས་ནས་མཆན་དཔེའི་རིགས་མཐུན་གྱི་རྒྱ་ཅིག་བསྐྱབ་དགོས་ལ། དེ་ཡང་ལྷའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ལས་གཞན་དུ་འཐད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བྱས་ན་བདེ་འགྲོ་དང་དན་འགྲོའི་ལུས་འགྲུབ་པ་ལ་རྒྱའི་སྐབས་སུ་དེའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱ་བསག་མི་དགོས་པ་དང་། སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་གཞུགས་སྦྱེ་འགྲུབ་པའི་སྦྱོར་ལྟ་དེ་དང་རྣམ་པ་རྗེས་སུ་མཐུན་པའི་རྒྱ་དགོས་པ་གཉིས་ཇི་ལྟར་མཆངས། ཁོ་ཤོ་ཅག་གིས་གཞུགས་སྦྱར་སྦྱེ་བ་ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་རྒྱར་དེའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ལམ་སྐོམ་དགོས་ཞེས་འདོད་པ་མིན་གྱི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་མཆན་དཔེ་འགྲུབ་པའི་སྦྱོར་ལྟ་དེ་དང་རྗེས་སུ་མཐུན་པའི་རིགས་མཐུན་གྱི་རྒྱ་དགོས་སོ་ཞེས་འདོད་པ་ཡིན་པས་གྲན་ཀའི་གནས་མེད་དོ།

¹⁰⁴ For what might be a significant, though by no means simple, theological comparison, cf. St. Athanasius (c.296—c.373CE), *On the Incarnation of the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), for the idea that “through the Incarnation of the Word the Mind whence all things proceed has been declared,” and that the Word of God, “indeed, assumed humanity so that we might become God.” (Ch. 8, 54.) See also Ch. 3, 15-16: “The Savior of us all, the Word of God, in His great love took to Himself a body and moved as Man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, halfway. He became Himself an object for the senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works which He, the Word of God, did in the body. . . . There were thus two things which the Savior did for us by becoming Man. He banished death from us and made us anew; and, invisible and imperceptible as in Himself He is, He became visible through His works and revealed Himself as the Word of the Father, the Ruler and King of the whole creation. . . . He sanctified the body by being in it.”

Accessed November 27th, 2016 at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ For what may be an even more controversial topic of potential dialogue, cf. Corinthians 15:45, 49: “Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. . . . Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

In this way, all those who become enlightened on the basis of desire accomplish it through having as a basis a body of the Rose-Apple Land. Thus, all who will be enlightened in that same life through the path of mantra are enlightened on the basis of desire, and so they achieve it on the basis of a body of the Rose-Apple Land. For this reason, it is on *that* basis that one proves that the congruent object to be meditated upon – the one that is congruent with the formation of the inhabitants of a world – is a meditation on something that is congruent with the stages by which the life of a human being on the Rose-Apple Land unfolds.

Fall from Paradise

It should by now be clear that meditation on the creation stage of unsurpassed yoga tantra focuses on objects of concentration that are “congruent” according to two different orientations: Facing towards the result, one meditates on what is congruent in

In the Guhyasamāja context one might borrow this language to say of Vajradhara: The last Adam (i.e., the one who teaches total enlightenment) became a life-giving spirit so that humans like ourselves might become what the “first Adam” (i.e., humans of the first eon) *might* have become, were it not for ignorance and beginningless karmic tendencies for misperception.

¹⁰⁶ *rnam gzhaḡ rim pa'i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 19b2-3 (40):

།དེ་ལྟར་ན་འདོད་པའི་རྟེན་ལ་འཆང་བྱ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་འཛུལ་བུ་གླིང་པའི་རྟེན་ཅན་དུ་བསྐྱབས་པས་ནི་སྤྲུགས་ཀྱི་ལམ་གྱིས་ཆེ་དེ་ལ་འཆང་བྱ་བ་ནམས་ཀྱང་འདོད་པའི་རྟེན་ལ་འཆང་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་པས་འཛུལ་བུ་གླིང་པའི་རྟེན་ཅན་དུ་འགྲུབ་ལ། དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་གྱིས་རྟེན་དེས་བཅུད་ཆགས་པ་དང་ཆོས་མཐུན་པར་བསྐྱོམ་པར་བྱ་བའི་མཐུན་ལུལ་ཡང་འཛུལ་བུ་གླིང་པའི་མིའི་སྲིད་པ་འགྲུབ་པའི་རིམ་བ་དང་མཐུན་པར་སྐྱོམ་པ་འགྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

In what is a significant summary of theoretical problems raised with respect to this point, Tsongkhapa goes on to say (19b6-20a4 [40-41]):

It remains to be explained: (1) In what way the system of mantra does or does not accept whether – insofar as the Buddhahood that is reached in one lifetime through the path of mantra is reached on the basis of a human body – it is even possible for someone to achieve Buddhahood on the basis of having a body in the Heaven Below None; (2) the difference between the way in which the enlightened holy bodies of dharma and of form are reached anew on the basis of the body of a human of the desire realm, and that of a divine being of the Heaven Below None, respectively; and (3) how one becomes enlightened on the basis of a human body.

I will also explain how it is not in contradiction with the two statements from the *Integration of Practices* that someone who has achieved the complete stage, but has not done the Practices, becomes enlightened when the time of life is up, without taking up another birth as a wanderer. I will also explain how – since it is stated in both the *Integration of Practices* and in the *Illuminating Lamp* that, although it is done *from* the body that is the basis for becoming enlightened in one lifetime, one becomes enlightened by exchanging it for another body – one first achieves the path on the basis of a human body, but in the end, when achieving the result, one exchanges that basis for another body. But since these and other things as well appear to be explained at the appropriate time only in the treatises on the complete stage, I will explain them in that context.

།སྤྲུགས་ཀྱི་ལམ་གྱིས་ཆེ་གཅིག་ལ་བསྐྱབ་པར་བྱ་བའི་སངས་རྒྱས་དེ་མིའི་རྟེན་ལ་སྐྱབ་ན་ཡོག་མིན་གྱི་རྟེན་ཅན་གྱིས་རྟེན་དེ་ལ་ཐོབ་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་སྤྲུགས་ཀྱི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་འདོད་མི་འདོད་དང་ཡོག་མིན་གྱི་ལྟ་དང་འདོད་པའི་མིའི་རྟེན་ལ་གསར་དུ་འཆང་བྱ་བའི་ཆོས་དང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱུ་འགྲུབ་པའི་བྱད་པར་དང་། མིའི་རྟེན་ལ་འཆང་བྱ་བ་བཤད་པ་དང་། རྫོགས་རིམ་ཐོབ་ནས་སྤྱོད་པ་བྱེད་པ་མ་བྱུང་བར་ཆེད་དུས་བྱས་པ་དེ་འགྲོ་བ་གཞན་དུ་སྐྱེ་བ་མ་གྲངས་པར་འཆང་བྱ་བར་སྤྱོད་བསྐྱུས་ས་ལས་གསུངས་པ་གཉིས་མི་འགལ་བའི་ཚུལ་དང་། ཆེ་གཅིག་ལ་འཆང་བྱ་བའི་རྟེན་དེས་ཀྱང་ལུས་བརྩེས་ནས་འཆང་བྱ་བར་སྤྱོད་བསྐྱུས་དང་སྤྱོད་གསལ་ལས་གསུངས་པས་དེ་ལྟ་ཡིན་ན་དང་ཐོར་མིའི་རྟེན་ལ་ལམ་སྐྱབ་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་མཐར་འགྲུབ་བྱ་འཛོལ་བ་ན་ལུས་རྟེན་དེ་བརྩེ་ཚུལ་ཇི་ལྟར་བྱེད་པ་སོགས་ནི། རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱི་གཞུང་འཆད་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་བབ་པར་སྤྲོད་བསམ་དེར་བཤད་པར་བྱའོ། །

aspect with the Buddha who is yet to be; but facing towards the ordinary basis to be purified, one meditates on specialized images that are meant to be congruent with certain basic events and components of our original conditions as human beings. As we saw in Chapter Two, the basis to be purified reaches all the way back to the creation of a physical world system at the beginning of an eon of formation. More specifically, it includes the stages of life, death, the intermediate state, and rebirth of a human being of the first eon; because this is the kind of life in which the Buddha demonstrates the path of desire. But it will be significant to recognize how different from our current human existence the human life of the first eon is supposed to have been. Tsongkhapa comments on the following passage from Nāgabuddhi's root text:¹⁰⁷

In this regard, human beings of the first eon are adorned with all the qualities of Buddhas, and have a body with the nature of mind, marked with all the major and minor limbs. Their faculties are perfect and complete, and they have a body of luminous clear complexion. They fly in the sky by their own inner force; they are long-lived and partake of rapture. Their bodies have the nature of wisdom; but they do not understand the concentration on things being “like an illusion,” and since they do not understand this, by force of the tendencies for misunderstanding that existed from time without beginning, they are gradually outshined by all the karma and mental afflictions that spring from their own minds.

After explaining that “adorned with all the qualities of Buddhas” means that these humans of the first eon had signs and marks approximating those of Buddhas, Tsongkhapa goes on to cite Indian commentaries to the *Abhidharmakośa* and Vinaya literature in order to elaborate on the rest of these splendid characteristics attributed to the first humans. Tsongkhapa continues:¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Nāgabuddhi, *Steps of Exposition for the Method of Reaching the Gathering* (*Samājasādhana-vyavasthali*), Toh. 1809, sde dge, rgyud, vol. *ngi*, 123a1-3:

།དེ་ལ་བསྐྱལ་བ་དང་པོ་མེ་རྒྱལ་སངས་རྒྱུ་གི་ཡོན་ཏན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱན་ཅིང་ཡིད་གི་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་ལུས་ཅན་ཡན་ལག་དང་ཉིད་ལག་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ས་མཚན་ལ། དབང་པོ་མ་ཆང་བ་མེད་ཅིང་མ་རྒྱལ་བ་མེད་ལ། ཁ་དོག་གསལ་བའི་ལུས་ཅན། རང་གི་མཐུས་ནས་མཁར་འཁྱོ་བ། ཆེ་མིང་ཞིང་དགའ་བ་ལ་རྒྱུད་ལ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ལུས་ཅན་ཡིན་ཡང་དེ་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་སྦྱ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་མི་ཤེས་ཤིང་མ་ཤེས་པས་ན་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པའི་དུས་ནས་མི་ཤེས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱན་གྱི་སྟོབས་ལས་རིམ་གྱིས་རང་གི་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་མངོན་པར་ཟེལ་གྱིས་མཚན་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

¹⁰⁸ Tsongkhapa, *rnam gzhag rim pa'i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 21a3-21b2 (43-44), emphasis mine:

།དེ་ལྟར་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ལུས་ཅན་ཉི་འབྱུང་བའི་ལུས་རགས་པ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་གཞུགས་ཁམས་པའི་ལྷའི་ལུས་དང་འདྲ་བའི་ལུས་ཁྲད་པར་ཅན་ཐོབ་པ་ཡིན་ཡང་རང་གི་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱིས་མངོན་པར་ཟེལ་གྱིས་གཞོན་པ་སྟེ་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་འགྱུར་རོ། །རྒྱ་གང་གི་དབང་གིས་དེ་ལྟར་འགྱུར་བ་ནི། ཐོག་མ་མེད་པའི་དུས་ནས་བྱུང་བའི་དེ་ཁོན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་མོངས་པའི་མི་ཤེས་པ་གཅིག་ནས་གཅིག་ཏུ་བརྒྱུད་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་སྟོབས་ལས་ལས་ཉོན་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་འགྱུར་རོ། །འདི་ལ་སྦྱ་ལུས་དང་ཆ་འདྲ་བའི་ལུས་ཡོད་ཀྱང་སྦྱ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་ཐོབ་པས་མི་ཤེས་ཤིང་བསྟོམས་པས་ཁོང་དུ་རྒྱུད་དེ་དེས་ན་སྲིད་པར་འབྱུང་བ་ཡིན་ཉི་མོས་འབྱུང་ལས། སྦྱ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན། །རབ་ཏུ་མི་ཤེས་མི་རྒྱལ་ནི། ཐོག་མེད་དུས་ཅན་ཉོན་མོངས་ཀྱི། །བག་ཆགས་རབ་ཏུ་བསགས་བྱས་ལ། །དེ་ནས་སྟོན་བྱས་ལས་ཀྱིས་ནི། སྟེ་དང་འཆི་བ་ཡང་དག་འབྱུང་ཞེས་སོ། །དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ལུས་བྱུང་བ་དེ་ནས་དེ་དག་གིས་རིམ་གྱིས་བ

Similarly, “bodies having the nature of wisdom” means they have gained an extraordinary body like that of the gods of the form realm, without any coarse body made of elements. Nevertheless, “outshined by all the karma and mental afflictions that spring from their own minds,” they are overpowered by these two. As for the cause by which it came to be this way: They have come under the power of karma and afflictions by force of *a tendency for the misunderstanding that is confused about the meaning of suchness*, which has arisen in a continuum, from one moment to the next, from time without beginning.

Now they do have a body that is in part similar to an illusory body, but they have no knowledge – by means of having heard about it or contemplated upon it – of the concentration on things as being “like an illusion.” They have not internalized any such understanding through meditation, either, so they wander aimlessly through existence. As the *Source of Vows* [Skt. *Samvarodaya*] states:

All those people who do not know at all
the concentration “Like an Illusion”
have continued to collect the tendencies
for mental affliction
that exist from time without beginning.
Then from karma previously done
come precisely birth and death.

They do reach a body such as that one, but then due to those [i.e., karma and the mental afflictions], it is as though they gradually break down, bit by bit. Their light fades, and so on, and thus they abandon that body with the nature of mind, with all its good qualities that were explained before. From the continuum of mental afflictions, they gradually come to bear a coarse body with the identity of an ordinary human being, having the marks of a male or female.

Thus, echoing Nāgabuddhi’s language regarding the Guhyasamāja presentation, Tsongkhapa has quoted a tantra from the cycle of Cakrasaṃvara to explain further how the cycle of suffering perpetuates itself. We gain a picture of human beings who came fresh into a new eon with an abundance of virtuous karma; so much goodness, in fact, that they looked like Buddhas, emitted their own light, could fly without apparatus, and took pure bliss as their sustenance, with no need for material food. Yet they lacked the one thing necessary, the wisdom that would be able understand the *nature* of the illusion – the nature of that very body they already possessed, which was so much like the illusory vajra body of a fully enlightened Buddha. Rather, they were driven by karmic tendencies for ignorance and the other mental afflictions that had been present from time without beginning. (Recall, for example, the “tendency for seeing a self,” the “seeds for

རྒྱན་ནས་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་བ་ལྟར་རང་གི་འོད་རླབས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྒྲོ་ནས་ཡིད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་ལུས་སྒར་བཤད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ཅན་དེ་སྤངས་ཏེ་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་
འི་རྒྱན་གྱིས་ངེས་གྱིས་ཐ་མལ་པའི་མིའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་པོ་མའི་མཆན་མ་ཅན་རགས་པའི་ལུས་ཡོངས་སུ་འཛིན་ནི།

what brings on bad situations,” and the “seeds for activities that never finish,” discussed in Tsongkhapa’s *Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*.) Thus they were still prone to give in to the tendencies for desire, greed, jealousy, and so on that would gradually erode every good thing they had.

Later in the same commentary, again basing his argument upon Abhidharma and Vinaya literature, Tsongkhapa explains in much greater detail what this progressive degeneration of the first-era humans is like.¹⁰⁹ At first just one light-bodied person is overcome with desire, and takes upon a finger the sweet, ambrosial, amber-colored foam that floats atop the ocean formed from the golden rain, which is said to be like the cream from boiled milk that has cooled. Others follow suit, but because they have eaten food made from the physical elements, their bodies become solid and heavy, and they no longer glow from inner light. Since the land is left in darkness, a sun and moon have to appear over the land, and along with them the stars, day and night, the phases of the moon, and so on. Those who are moderate in their partaking of the ambrosia retain good complexions, but those who eat more start looking poorly; so the former contrive some kind of pride and start mocking the others for being ugly. This becomes a cause for the ambrosia (literally, “vital essence of the earth”) to be exhausted. It is replaced by a thicker, sweet paste that must be compounded, but more bigotry ensues, the food disappears, and agriculture begins. At first seeds sprout with no toil necessary; rice has no casings or husks, and what is reaped during the day grows back at night and vice versa. But since the food made from this rice is now quite coarse, humans must develop a digestive tract and pathways for excretion. Along the way they differentiate into having male and female organs.

Then, “by the power of a habit for inappropriate thinking that was there from time without beginning, a man and woman look at one another and the thought of desire for each other ensues.”¹¹⁰ Thus are the names “man” and “woman” spread through the world. When other people see them in the act, they get a bad reputation, so human beings start building houses to cover their shameful acts of concupiscence. Then some lazy people decide to collect enough rice for both day and night, but then others collect enough for two days, and then three, and then enough for seven days all at once. Some others see that and gather enough for a fortnight and a month, so that what has been harvested will not grow back naturally, and the grains acquire hard shells and husks. People eventually organize to establish a king, and it is the descendants of that king who form the Śākya clan from which Siddhārtha Gautama was born. Thus Tsongkhapa ties the story together

¹⁰⁹ See *nam gzhag rim pa'i nam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 32b2–33b5 (66–68) for what is paraphrased throughout this and the following paragraph.

¹¹⁰ *nam gzhag rim pa'i nam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 33a4–5 (67):

དེ་ནས་ཐོན་ཐོག་ས་མེད་པ་ནས་རྩལ་མིན་ཡིད་བྱེད་ལ་གོས་ས་འདི་དབང་གིས་ཐོ་ཐོ་གཅིག་ལ་གཅིག་ལྟ་ཞིང་པན་རྩལ་ཆགས་པའི་སེམས་སྒྲུའོ།

to indicate that *this* is the very human race into whose existence the one who would become Śākyamuni Buddha had entered.

It is the explicit purpose of the Guhyasamāja sādhana to provide the practitioner with a method by which to address all of these karmic tendencies in particular, and one by one to unravel the vicious cycle by which our human world came to be the way it is. As I have indicated before, this unsurpassed practice of transformation would only make sense within the context of a worldview in which one saw the physical world, and the entire chain of events – stretching across millions of years – that led to present circumstances as they appear to us, to be arising from the ripening of seeds and the assertion of tendencies. If, through the power of the mind, karmic tendencies can be altered, then so can the patterns that create the history of a world as it is now. If the world and all the beings in it had natures of their own, and everything is “just the way it is,” then what one person visualizes in meditation would probably be quite useless for changing anything on a large scale. But the premise of the entire path¹¹¹ is that by deliberately, methodically, and repeatedly rewiring the circuitry of mental patterns that create, *for each of us*, a whole world, as well as the lives and lifestyles of its inhabitants, one plants the seeds to experience, not a world just like that of the first eon, but rather a new paradise that is beyond the cycle of suffering altogether, because ignorance is no longer present. From that perspective, one would have the capacity to teach others to do the same, until there is no one left to project a suffering world.

For contemporary practitioners, it might become imperative to ask whether it is necessary to accept such a story about the history of humanity at a literal level in order to practice Guhyasamāja successfully at all. As I mentioned previously, in the context of the story about the formation of the disks of the elements and the four continents, it seems clear that Tsongkhapa himself did take these accounts literally, and saw no reason to debate them, except to point out slight discrepancies between what different pieces of Indian literature had to say about fine details. Tsongkhapa’s extensive analyses of “literal vs. figurative,” or “definitive vs. interpretable meaning,” all relate, in a sūtra context, to the philosophical understanding of *emptiness*, and in a Vajrayāna context, to the interpretation of secret phrases within the root tantras as applied to different levels of practitioners. Points relating to Abhidharma and Vinaya accounts of “what happened” do not fall within either category, and since Tsongkhapa never explicitly refutes them, I think it is safe to assume he took them literally, as a valid representation of events that took place within deceptive reality due to the collectively ripening karma of a particular set of living beings, and which could be observed objectively by the omniscience of the

¹¹¹ That is, as presented here in Tsongkhapa’s Guhyasamāja commentary, though the logic would be similar in his explanation of the other unsurpassed yoga tantra systems. This is evident from his comparative treatment of all these systems in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of the *Steps of Mantra*.

Buddha.¹¹² Nonetheless, insofar as scientific observations regarding the history of a planet and the beings on it arise as valid perceptions from within a particular frame of reference and measurement, contemporary practitioners often find themselves caught between two untenable options: (1) rejecting the testimony of the Buddha's word as found in sūtras, or (2) denying the body of scientific observations that have proven themselves thoroughly trustworthy and functional for everything from landing on the moon to cellular communications to successful brain surgery.¹¹³

This is an immensely complex conundrum, which I cannot treat properly here, but I invite my reader to question how Tsongkhapa himself might have addressed it, based on the logic of emptiness as he presents it. My own consideration is as follows: If the main philosophical point is that *every* world system comes into being based on the collectively ripening karma of the living beings to be born there, then who is to say that our own particular experience of a round earth among eight (or nine) planets circling an average star, and so on, is not simply the result of myriad collective causes that enable the human and other sentient beings on this planet to observe matter and energy configured in a certain way? Quantum cosmology has plenty to say about the variability of the valid data that will arise depending upon the perspective from which one takes a measurement. Add the intricacies of a Middle Way view of emptiness *as related to* karmic tendencies, and the possibilities for how to “view” a world within the range of validly functional perceptions become virtually infinite – constrained only by the conceptual framework in which one is habitually inclined to pose a question. Once a framework is established, however, meaningful and binding answers do come, which is why the relationship between actions and their consequences can be infallible, valid perceptions relative to a certain form of life can be reliable, and so forth.

Thus I would ask what the preceding story about the gradual degeneration of human beings, from a status like to that of “angels” (to use a decidedly Abrahamic term) down to that of humans as we know ourselves, might tell us about the way that mental afflictions unfold, and the kind of deeds and conflicts that typically ensue. In this sense, the story may well be familiar enough to contemporary ways of thinking, and yet still have the capacity to lend unfamiliar mythological perspective. Further, in terms of the specific details of the Guhyasamāja sādhana, since the most important step is to dissolve the whole of one's ordinary view of a world and its inhabitants in the first place, I would suggest that it is still the meditation on the emptiness of *one's own* world that would be most significant for the rest of one's practice. This would apply regardless of how one may think one's own world came to be, whether at the level of human history or of the

¹¹² See Appendix Twelve for one instance of Tsongkhapa's analysis of how Buddhas perceive the deceptive realities experienced by sentient beings.

¹¹³ I am grateful to B. Alan Wallace for highlighting this dichotomy of mutually untenable options; personal communication, February 4th, 2016. He also discussed a similar point during a retreat lecture at the Lama Tzong Khapa Institute, Tuscany, Italy, April 19th, 2016.

history of a cosmos. So I imagine Tsongkhapa would ask contemporary practitioners to consider carefully the causes and conditions, conceptual frameworks, and karmic tendencies they might believe to have produced *their* world, as they currently experience it, and to ascertain the emptiness of those. As he frequently states in a Middle Way context, there is no use in coming up with an artificial “object to be refuted,” and then saying it never existed anyway.¹¹⁴ Rather, every practitioner must come to recognize what it is that he or she personally holds to be a valid perception, detect how he or she holds that to exist inherently, and then excise the latter until the substantial appearance of the former dissolves. So it might be of far more use, at times, for a contemporary practitioner to meditate on dissolving a projected history of a planet with tectonic plates, protozoa, dinosaurs, and primates, than of a world with four symmetrical continents, eight subcontinents, and “first eon” humans made of light who fly and have no need for solid food.

Nevertheless, it is still essential to Tsongkhapa’s theory that one be able to see a relationship between each object of meditation in the *sādhana*, and each of those components of one’s current experience with which they are supposed to be congruent. If one can do this, then the intended function of those objects of meditation would not have been lost. But if one did not understand that the *reason* one is supposed to meditate on the members of the *maṇḍala* as having bodies of light is because they are meant to be congruent with the object to be purified (namely human beings of the first eon), and that the *reason* one is meditating on something that is congruent with human beings of the first eon is because the Buddha came as a later descendent of such beings in order to show the path to enlightenment in a single lifetime even of a degenerate era, then the connection between the congruent object to be purified, and the pure object that is congruent with it would have disappeared. Then one would have no idea why one was spending all this time meditating on such things anyway. It is the latter situation that Tsongkhapa would lament as missing the crucial point, and therefore the soteriological value, of the main part of the creation stage practice itself.

So, while I would suggest that at the level of tantric transformation, it is the logic of emptiness that is paramount, it also seems that it would be necessary to retain within the range of one’s worldview the possibility that the tendencies for being “human” might already include tendencies for appearing as a body of light, free of coarse organs or the need for coarse food. For according to Tsongkhapa’s theory, it is insofar as one can access, rekindle, and transform such tendencies through extensive meditation on a form congruent with humans of the first eon, that one should be able to plant the requisite seeds for being able to meditate on the subtle channels, winds, and orbs at the level of the complete stage. Regardless of how we, personally, are convinced the world came to be the way it is now, I think the main challenge that Tsongkhapa’s use of the *Abhidharma*

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Appendix Seven (336).

accounts in the context of Guhyasamāja commentary presents to the serious contemporary practitioner, is to consider whether it is possible that everything *he or she actually experiences* might have come about as the result of an evolution driven by ripening seeds for tendencies that were held within the mental streams of a community of living beings from time without beginning. For Vajrayāna practice to make sense, it is the seeds of any individual practitioner that must be examined, revealed, and purified, even if we possess valid evidence to think that “our” world came about rather differently from the world described in the Abhidharma presentation. If it is true that the appearance of worlds does indeed arise from mental seeds, then it would be quite possible for a “single world” to be that of Mt. Meru and the four continents from one perspective, and to be that of a globe circling a magnetic axis from another, with no contradiction. It would be just like the example of the flowing liquid that is validly pus and validly water, when appearing to different valid perceivers. As we will see in Chapter Five, regarding Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way presentation of time, history is no more or less empty than objects, and so the same arguments could be applied to the empty nature of a “past,” too.

* * *

To add to the complexity of the situation, there is a strange ambiguity throughout Nāgabuddhi’s text, wherein he uses high tantric phrases that would usually refer to the pure realm of enlightened beings, in order to refer to processes experienced within the mindstreams of what are at present sentient beings. It is as though he is prodding his reader with the idea that even these experiences of birth, death and the intermediate state were somehow already something pure, the dance of an enlightened mind. But Tsongkhapa is more careful to distinguish between the original condition and the enlightened result, as we already saw in the passage quoted near the beginning of Chapter Two: “Later on [in Nāgabuddhi’s text], the mind of the intermediate state will also be called the lord of consciousness, *the vajra of holy mind*. Yet it would not make sense to explain these two – the lord of consciousness and Vajradhara – as though they were one and the same.”¹¹⁵ For Tsongkhapa, of course, the stained mental consciousness that is the creator of suffering worlds is significantly different from the utterly pure consciousness that is the holy mind of Vajradhara, creator of enlightened maṇḍalas. Nonetheless, because there is something in common with respect to the fundamental nature of mind, the former can be purified into the latter by means of the path. Eventually Tsongkhapa clarifies:¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See Chapter Two, note 9.

¹¹⁶ *rnam gzhaḡ rim pa’i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 22a4-22b4 (45-46), emphasis mine:

ལྷན་བསྟན་པ་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་བསྐྱལ་བ་དང་པོའི་མིའི་སེམས་ལྷགས་རྩོད་ཤིང་ཞེས་ཅ་སྟེན་བྱ་བའི་གཞི་དེས་སེམས་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་སྒྲུང་བ་རྒྱུད་གི་བཞུགས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཤེས་བས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་རིས་ནས་འཛིག་ཏེན་གཞན་དུ་འཆེ་འཕོའོ། སེམས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་མི་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱ་ནི་ལམ་ཕྱེན་ཅེ་མ་ལོག་པ་སྟོན་པའི་དགེ་བའི་བཤེས་གཉེན་དང་བྲལ་བས་ཡིན་ཏོ། །སྟོང་བསྟན་ལས་ཀྱང་། དེ་ལྟར་འདི་དག་ནི་ལུས་དང་རག་དང་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཉེས་པར་སྟོང་བའོ་ཞེས་མི་ཤེས་ཤིང་།

As shown before, the mind of such a human being of the first eon – the *basis* for applying the term “vajra of holy mind” – knows nothing about its very own nature: that nature of the mind itself which appears with the nature of riding upon winds as its mount. Thus, from the status of a sentient being, one dies and moves on to another [suffering] world.

The cause for not understanding the nature of the mind is this: One is bereft of a virtuous spiritual friend who can teach the unmistakable path. As it states in the *Integration of Practices*:¹¹⁷ “In this way one does not know that ‘these are the harmful behaviors of body, speech, and mind.’ And, not knowing one’s very own nature, which appears with the nature of riding upon winds as its mount, one says with false pretense: ‘This is *my* body and *my* speech and *my* mind.’ From this movement of the mind towards ‘I,’ one does all the virtuous and non-virtuous actions, and it becomes the supreme method for inclining oneself towards the realms of happiness and misery.”

Not knowing the suchness that is the lack of a self, one amasses karma by the power of the mental afflictions that grasp onto a “self” and “that which belongs to a self,” and one goes on to wander aimlessly. *These are the stages of entry into the cycle according to the statements of both the systems of mantra and of definitions* [i.e. of sūtra philosophy]. Therefore, the view of selflessness, which is the knife that cuts the grasping to a self that is the root of aimless wandering in existence, is the same in both paths. Hence even in the path of mantra, the essence of the teaching is the incisive wisdom that sets forth the suchness that is the lack of a self. You must grasp the essential meaning that is never bereft of this incisive wisdom.

Thus Tsongkhapa himself acknowledges that the nature of mind itself, riding upon very subtle winds as its mount, is already a worthy basis for the term “vajra of holy mind” (which in the Guhyasamāja system refers to the mind of all the Buddhas Gone Thus, past, present, and future). It is the failure to recognize this that is being explained here as the fundamental problem, but in the process it becomes clear that Tsongkhapa does accept that there is something in the continuum of mind, something that has always been there,

‘རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་སྒྲུང་བ་རྒྱུད་གི་བཞུགས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་མཁའ་ཉམས་ནས་ངའི་ལུས་དང་ངའི་དག་དང་ངའི་སེམས་ཡིན་ནོ་ཞེས་རྫོམས་པ་དང་རང་སེམས་པ་ས་ལས་དགེ་བ་དང་མི་དགེ་བ་ནམས་བྱས་ནས་བདེ་འཛོལ་དང་དྲན་མཚོག་ཏུ་གཞིལ་བར་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་སེམས་ཀྱི་བདག་མེད་པའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མཁའ་ཉམས་པ་ར་བདག་དང་བདག་གི་བར་འབྲུང་བའི་ཉོན་མོངས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་ལས་བསགས་ནས་འཁོར་བར་འབྱུངས་པར་གསུངས་པ་འདི་ལྟར་དང་མཚན་ཉིད་གཉིས་ཀའི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་འཁོར་བའི་འཇུག་རིས་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེས་ན་སྤྱི་པར་འབྱུངས་པའི་ཅུ་བ་བདག་འཛིན་གཙོད་བྱེད་ཀྱི་བདག་མེད་པའི་ལྷ་བ་ནི་ལས་གཉིས་ཀའ་འདྲ་བས་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ལས་ལ་ཡང་བསྟན་པའི་སྤྱི་པར་བདག་མེད་པའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཙོད་ལ་ཐེབས་པའི་ལས་རབ་དང་མ་བྲལ་བ་སྤྱི་པར་ཐོད་དོན་དུ་གཟུང་བར་བྱའོ། །

¹¹⁷ This translates Tsongkhapa’s abbreviation (*spyod bsdus*) for a text attributed to Āryadeva, whose full title is *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*, *spyod pa bsdus pa’i sgron ma*, Toh. 1803, sde dge, rgyud, vol. *ngi*. For a complete translation and critical edition of this important text in the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja commentary, see Christian Wedemeyer, 2007, *Āryadeva’s Lamp that Integrates the Practices*.

which is a suitable basis to be labeled, even now, as the fully-realized Vajradhara, creator of sacred worlds. As to just *how* Tsongkhapa understands that to be the case, in a tantric context, we will explore throughout Chapters Five and Six.

Tsongkhapa has expressed here in no uncertain terms what is one of his signature points, that the content of the wisdom to be gained is identical from the sūtra vehicle to that of tantra. But once again, what is it about the tantric *method* that is thought to be able to accomplish so quickly the vast changes that must take place in a being's mindstream in order for the two holy bodies of a Buddha to become fully manifest? What could transform the seeds so fast?

The Real Factor of Speed

At last we are in a position to understand what is claimed to be the distinguishing factor that makes the unsurpassed class of tantra *alone* such a fast path, capable of condensing the work of three or more countless eons down to a single human lifetime of the degenerate era.¹¹⁸ Early in the *Steps of Mantra*, Tsongkhapa makes the following distinction between the classes:¹¹⁹

The distinguishing factor of speed with respect to the lower three classes of tantra and the vehicle of the perfections, respectively, is this: On the basis of the inner force of recitations and the yoga of a divine being, one gains many shared attainments, and through being taken directly under the wing of all the Buddhas and great bodhisattvas, one is blessed, and so forth. So through many skillful means one can complete the activities of enlightenment.

The distinguishing factor of speed with respect to the unsurpassed class is this: Even the creation stage has many profound points that do not exist in the lower classes of tantra, while the complete stage has the supreme profound points. I will explain these later on. But the distinguishing factor of speed, namely, that one reaches enlightenment without having to rely on the passage of countless eons, is a distinguishing feature of the unsurpassed class. *When the disciples of the lower classes of tantra achieve enlightenment that way it is because they relied upon*

¹¹⁸ The “degenerate era” is said to come about precisely through such individual and social vicissitudes as described in the account above, which, with wars, illness, malnutrition, and the rest, gradually bring human beings' average life spans down to less than one hundred years.

¹¹⁹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 29a2-29b1 (57-58):

རྒྱུད་ལྷོ་ལོག་མ་གསུམ་དང་པར་བྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པའི་སྤྱུར་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ལྷའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དང་བརྒྱུས་པའི་མཐུ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཐུན་མོང་གི་དངོས་གྲུབ་མང་པོ་དང་སངས་རྒྱས་དང་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔལ་ཆེན་པོ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་དངོས་སུ་རྩིས་སུ་བཟུངས་ནས་བྱིན་གྱིས་རྒྱོབ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཐབས་མཁས་མང་པོས་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་རྫོགས་པར་བྱང་བ་ཡིན་ལ། རྒྱ་མེད་ཀྱི་སྤྱུར་བྱེད་ནི། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ལ་ཡང་རྒྱུད་ལྷོ་ལོག་མ་ལ་མེད་པའི་ཐབས་གནས་མང་ལ། རྫོགས་རིམ་ལ་ནི་མཆོག་ཏུ་སྤྱུར་པའི་ཐབས་གནས་དག་ཡོད་དེ་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །བསྐྱེད་པ་གངས་མེད་འདུལ་བ་ལ་མ་བརྟོས་པར་འཆང་བྱ་བའི་སྤྱུར་བྱེད་ནི་རྒྱ་མེད་ཀྱི་ལྷའི་ཆོས་ཡིན་པས། རྒྱུད་ལྷོ་ལོག་མའི་གདུལ་བྱས་དེ་ལྟར་འཛོལ་བ་ཡང་རྒྱ་མེད་ཀྱི་རིམ་གཉིས་ལ་ཞུགས་པ་ལ་བརྟོས་ཀྱི་རང་གི་ལམ་ཅན་གྱིས་མི་ཆོག་གོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱུར་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་ཅོད་དུས་ཀྱི་ཆེ་གཅིག་ལ་འཆང་བྱ་བའོམ་བསྐྱེད་པ་གངས་མེད་ལ་མ་བརྟོས་པར་འཆང་བྱ་བ་ཁོ་ནར་མི་གཟུང་ངོ།

entrance into the two stages of the unsurpassed class, but not because they relied on their own path alone. Therefore, one should not hold the fact one can reach enlightenment in one lifetime of the eon of strife, or without having to rely on countless eons, to be the sole distinguishing factor of speed for *all* of the Mantrayāna.

The difference that needs to be understood here is fundamental to the way that the unsurpassed yoga practices function, as opposed to those belonging to the three lower classes of tantra. The action, performance, and yoga tantras offer a great variety of methods by which to bring a practitioner very efficiently to a state in which actual meditative stillness and the realizations of emptiness known as insight are joined in a single state of mind.¹²⁰ We have noted how this is supposed to take place, insofar as such meditations are inextricably linked with practices of devotion included within the yoga of a divine being. Through meditation on the “indivisibility of clarity and the profound,” the practitioner should be able to bring forth unshakeable mental stability while focusing on extremely virtuous objects, and is eventually expected to combine the meditation on various aspects of the divine being with the simultaneous realization of emptiness, within “a single state of consciousness,” as described above.¹²¹ As Tsongkhapa mentions here, the practitioner also works to gain “shared attainments,” or powers such as clairvoyance, clear audience, invisibility, and so on, through the force of extensive mantra recitation, fire offerings, and other ritual practices directed towards developing an ever more intimate relationship with and embodiment of the central divine being of the maṇḍala. But as detailed study of these practices of the lower tantras would reveal, they are all aimed towards developing the seeds for entering the pure realm of a Buddha. It is a path focused entirely on emulating the result, through practices that are “congruent in aspect” to that which is to be achieved. Tsongkhapa insists that a human being striving primarily in any of the three lower tantras cannot expect to reach enlightenment within that single human lifetime based on that path alone. Rather, he or she is planting seeds to be reborn in a pure realm wherein he or she may complete the path to total enlightenment on the basis of a very long lifespan in such a heavenly realm.

On the other hand, the unsurpassed yoga tantras, while including all of these same types of practices aimed at approaching a divine being and emulating the result, also provide a path that is congruent in aspect to the events, circumstances, and elements of what is still *impure* – the stages of afflicted life that we already experience now. The purpose here is to transform, through meditating on something which is similar to it, that

¹²⁰ See Appendix Fourteen for Tsongkhapa’s most comprehensive analysis of this “union” in a sūtra context.

¹²¹ See Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa and Jeffrey Hopkins, 1987, *The Yoga of Tibet: The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra 2 and 3*, for English translation of Tsongkhapa’s chapters on action and performance tantra, respectively, esp. 104-114, 160-171, and 189-203 (on the difference between the yogas with and without signs).

in our ordinary existence which is to be thoroughly purified. This object of meditation, which is congruent (*chos mthun*) to something in our experience that is parallel to it (*mthun yul*), then acts as that which purifies (*sbyong byed*) the basis to be purified (*sbyang gzhi*).¹²² It is through this kind of practice – unique to the two stages of unsurpassed yoga – that one aims to purify the seeds for the countless tendencies that project saṃsāra.

In particular, according to Guhyasamāja theory, it is as though one has to “trace back” all the way to the destruction of a previous world-system and the formation of the physical structure of the current desire realm, in order to purify one’s mental seeds for the whole kit-and-caboodle of human evolution, as encapsulated in the life cycle of a human being of the Rose-Apple Land. One is not just purifying mental afflictions and latent karmic seeds by meditating on a divine world that is manifestly pure, as one does in the lower tantric systems. Here one purifies ongoing afflictions, as well as the worlds and bodies *already* created from past karma, by meditating on processes that are similar to, or that directly parallel, the very processes that are ordinarily experienced as blatant suffering. So the maṇḍalic images offered within the unsurpassed yogas, which are still intended to be congruent to the divine result, here often take the form of images that more directly echo the *impure* appearances of saṃsāra than one’s idealizations of what divine beauty might look like. Perhaps the purpose is to show the practitioner that ultimately “beauty” is no more inherently divine than “ugliness,” royal garb no more divine than nakedness, faces with a serene aspect no more inherently a representation of the invisible wisdom of the deity than those twisted in wrath or passion, a crystal palace no more inherently suitable as a divine abode than a charnel ground strewn with skulls and half-eaten carcasses. Once one can meditate on all things as the manifestation of the wisdom of indivisible great bliss and emptiness, then all things might arise as pure, regardless of the “appearance.”

Although this idea is so familiar to anyone trained in unsurpassed yogas as to seem obvious, it is important to step back and recognize how outlandish it is within the

¹²² It is not quite as simple as this, however, for if something is a “congruent object” it does not necessarily follow that it is the actual “basis to be purified.” For example, within the Guhyasamāja practice, the “basis to be purified” actually refers to the birth, death, and intermediate states that would arise due to their causes within the mindstream of a particular practitioner. The “congruent object,” technically speaking, refers to the birth, death, and intermediate state of a human being of the first eon in the Rose-Apple Land, for the reasons explained heretofore. The life cycle of a human being of the first eon is long past, so it cannot be purified now; but by meditating on *images* from the life cycle of such a primordial human being, in the land to which the Buddha came, one can purify the seeds that would otherwise have produced future births, deaths, and intermediate states for the individual practitioner, so that the three holy bodies of a Buddha are made manifest in their place. For this precise explanation see the later Gendenpa author mentioned in Chapter Two, Pañchen Sönam Drakpa (*paṇ chen bsod nams grags pa*, 1478-1554): *rgyud thams cad kyi rgyal po dpal gsang ba ‘dus pa’i bskyed rim gyi rnam gzhas mkhas pa’i yid ‘phrog* (*Captivating the Hearts of Scholars: An Exposition of the Creation Stage of that King of Tantras, the Glorious Guhyasamāja*), in the *Mdo sngags rab ‘byams pa paṇ chen bsod nams grags pa’i gsung ’bum*, vol. *tha* (Drepung Loseling Library Society, Mundgod, India, 2013), 51-52.

scope of Buddhist thought. The lower three classes of tantra do indeed utilize the path of desire in order to purify, through a path congruent with it, the main affliction that ordinarily drives rebirth in the cycle. But if even those tantric paths still do not attempt to go back and meditate on ordinary, karmically-driven experiences that would seem irredeemably profane for someone aimed at the purity of enlightenment, what is it that changes from the perspective of a yogin on the path of unsurpassed yoga, which supposedly enables him or her to face the gamut of “impurity” head on? As we just saw, Tsongkhapa states repeatedly that the highest view of emptiness across all the vehicles and tantric classes is exactly the same, but I would propose that with careful examination it becomes clear that *what one actively applies it to* differs drastically. This difference has a massive effect on the kinds of transformations that become available to the practitioner, and hence how quickly the most deeply ingrained negative tendencies can be replaced.

That is, it is one thing to recognize, from a sūtra perspective, that a person and what belongs to a person are empty of “self” or inherent nature, thus eliminating grasping and enabling the bodhisattva to collect immense amounts of merit from practice of the perfections done from the perspective of incisive wisdom. It is another thing to unite, in a single state of consciousness, such incisive wisdom with the method of appearing as a divine being within a magnificent pure realm, taking the result as the path. It is yet another thing to direct the meditation on emptiness towards the very processes of affliction and karmically-driven life cycles themselves, and, in recognizing every aspect of them to *lack the very nature of being inherently impure*, to transform “under one’s own feet” as it were, one’s experience of the very world and body that was already ripened from karma.

Much later in the *Steps of Mantra*, when explaining the way to develop meditative visual clarity with respect to an entire maṇḍala during the stage of creation, Tsongkhapa encapsulates some of these ideas, in order to justify his strong injunction not to skip any steps of the ritual.¹²³

Now in general, the purpose of the creation stage is not *only* to transfer one’s pride, while focusing upon oneself as the divine being, and to transform appearances into something extraordinary. Because if it were only that, then all three lower classes of tantra would turn out to be complete in all the crucial points

¹²³ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 383a3-383b1 (765-766):

ལྷིང་བསྐྱེད་རིས་ཀྱི་དགོས་པ་རང་ལ་ལྷ་དཔེ་གསལ་བ་ན་ང་རྒྱལ་དང་སྤང་བ་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་དུ་འཛོམས་པ་ཙམ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ཙམ་ཡིན་ན་རྒྱུད་སྡེ་འོག་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་ཡང་བསྐྱེད་རིས་ཀྱི་གནད་རྫོགས་པ་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་ཞིང་ལྷ་གཅིག་གིས་ཀྱང་ཆོག་པས་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་སྒྲོམ་པ་དོན་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་བྱིར་རོ། ། དེའི་བྱིར་རྒྱུར་གཞི་ཐ་མལ་གྱི་སྒྲོན་བཅུད་སྦྱང་བའི་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་དོན་མཁས་གྲུབ་ཀྱིས་བཀའ་བའི་ཆ་ཆར་ཞིག་བསྒྲོམས་པས་སྦྱང་གཞི་དང་སྦྱང་བྱེད་ཀྱི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་དུ་མ་ཞིག་འབྲིག་ནས་རྫོགས་རིས་ཀྱི་རྟེན་པ་ལུས་དུ་བྱུང་བ་རྣམས་སྦྱེ་བའི་དགོ་ཅ་རྣམས་ཡོངས་སུ་སྒྲིན་པར་འགྱུར་བས་ན་རྒྱུད་སྒྲིན་པར་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་ནི། དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་ཐུན་བཞིན་སྒྲོམ་པ་ལ་ཡོད་པས་སྦྱབ་ཐབས་ཆང་བ་ལ་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་བསྐྱབ་པའི་གསལ་ལ་ར་ཆར་བ་དགོས་སོ།

of the creation stage, and then, since it would be sufficient to meditate with just *one* divine being, meditating on the circle of beings in a maṇḍala would be rendered meaningless.

Therefore, one meditates on a maṇḍala of beings and the places where they stay, which purify the basis to be purified – an ordinary vessel and its inhabitants. This is the meaning of tantra, complete in all its parts, as elucidated by accomplished masters. Thus assembling many extraordinary dependent relationships between the basis to be purified and that which purifies it, one thoroughly ripens all the roots of virtue that will give rise to the magnificent realizations of the complete stage. This capacity for ripening one's mental continuum comes through meditating on the circle of beings in the maṇḍala during four sessions [each day]. So a complete clear appearance is required, one that comes from training over and over again in the whole of the accomplishment practice [*sgrub thabs*, Skt. *sādhana*].

If the extraordinary ripening power of the creation stage proper (which is exclusive to the unsurpassed tantras) comes specifically from all those parts of the *sādhana* practice associated with transforming ordinary death, intermediate state, and rebirth into the path, what is it about such practices that enable one to purify the mindstream so fast? In an immediate sense, one might say that it is the fact a practitioner is forced – by the relentless and sometimes shocking content of the yogas themselves – to apply a profound understanding of emptiness to every object and person encountered in one's day to day existence. It is through such practices that one works to experience what is arising *right now* as already being an expression of the enlightened realm, rather than thinking that actual purity is only something to be realized in the future, through the ripening of causes that are congruent in aspect to the hoped-for result. It also means that when one meets *this* death, even if the practices of the path are not yet finished, one will have gained the propensities to experience death itself as entry into the holy mind of a Buddha, the intermediate state as though it were the glorified body, and rebirth as a facsimile of the holy body of emanation.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ If successful, even if one is still propelled by karma into another rebirth within the cycle, such practice is said to bring one very quickly into the circumstances in which to practice the actual stage of what-is-complete. See Tsongkhapa's *Prayer of the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i smon lam*), vol. *kha* (*thor bu*), 264a6-264b2 (741-742):

*If I cannot discover the concentration
that will reach what is supreme
in this life or the intermediate,
then at the moment of death
may I be able to mix the four appearances
of emptiness during the stages of death
in the original condition with the four
kinds of emptiness of the path.*

Again, it is not that practitioners of the lower tantras do not have access to the same Middle Way view of emptiness – for Tsongkhapa has insisted that they do, as do even the realized arhats of the Listener Vehicle – but rather that the *methods* taught in the lower tantras do not yet dare the practitioner to apply that view of emptiness with an explicit aim at transforming, before one’s very eyes, what has *already ripened* as an impure appearance. It is not that the lower tantras do not have practices of transformation – for they do – but they begin those practices by presenting a basis for transformation that is as “clean” as possible from the beginning. Whether through bathing practices that attempt to make the practitioner feel physically purified before even starting to meditate on the fact this body and mind have no nature of their own, or through the presentation of a *torma* offering cake that is made solely of the “white” substances (ghee, flour, milk, and so on) to begin with; in the lower tantras one meditates on the emptiness of the very best that one can muster within a suffering realm.

Within the unsurpassed yogas, one is challenged again and again, whether through visualization or through actually gathering traditionally “impure” substances for use in ritual, to reach down into the pit of what has ripened through negative karma, and to meditate on the emptiness of *that*, too. For if the emptiness is the same, and the mind is strong enough, then purity should be able to arise out of shit or bloody meat every bit as much as it can out of clarified butter. For insofar as they are created by karma and mental afflictions, both are equally impure; insofar as both are empty of any nature at all, both can arise as pure. But all these statements deserve serious philosophical examination.¹²⁵

For although the union of meditative stillness and insight reached through the path of the lower tantras should eventually realize exactly the same philosophical view of emptiness as that required by the unsurpassed tantras, it seems that Tsongkhapa recognized that if one did not have a very sophisticated conceptual understanding of emptiness from the outset, then the practices of unsurpassed yoga would either elicit unsurmountable doubts from a highly conscientious practitioner, or else push a more rebellious type over the edge into wrong views and unruly behavior. I would conjecture that *this* is one reason he cared so much to present a balanced Middle Way view perfectly, even in the context of sūtra training, because by that time in Tibet (as in

*When I reach the intermediate state,
may I mix it with the concentration on the illusion
and when taking birth again,
may I hold it to be a glorified body
taking birth as a holy emanation.
So may I take birth while conceiving
of my birthplace as a holy place, supreme.*

གཤམ་ཏེ་འདི་དང་བར་དོར་མཆོག་འབྲུག་པའི། ཉིང་འཛིན་མ་རྟེན་འཆི་བའི་དུས་བྱེད་ན། གཤམ་ཡི་འཆི་རིམ་སྟོང་པ་ནམ་པ་བཞི། །ལམ་གྱི་སྟོང་པ་བཞི་དང་བསྐྱེ་བུ་ས་ཤོག །བར་དོ་བྱུང་ཆེ་སྦྱ་མའི་ཉིང་འཛིན་དང་། །བསྐྱེ་བར་བྱེད་ཅིང་སྦྱེ་བ་ལེན་པའི་ཆོ། །ལོངས་སྦྱས་སྦྱས་སྦྱུང་སྦྱེ་བ་འཛིན་པ་བཞིན། །སྦྱེ་གནས་མཆོག་ཏུ་བསམ་བཞིན་སྦྱེ་བར་ཤོག

¹²⁵ See Chapter Six.

Tibetan culture now), it seems most everyone in monastic circles was already interested in receiving unsurpassed yoga empowerments anyway, whether they were fully prepared or spiritually suited to practice them or not.

Taking overtly impure objects as the basis of meditation on emptiness and as the basis for transformation may, for a diligent practitioner, force the issue and accelerate the integration of one's conceptual understanding of emptiness into the practice of method very effectively. But according to Tsongkhapa's repeated analysis, merely contrived practices of imagined transformation are still not what bring one to the final result of enlightenment. Rather, they are the "ripening factors" that, like the sun, bring the seeds planted during empowerment to sprout up like young plants, until one is ready to practice the actual path of liberation that belongs only to the complete stage. When arguing for the necessity of both stages, Tsongkhapa cites a scriptural example of the boat.¹²⁶

For example, if someone who wants to partake of the good things, such as food and drink, that are at a place on the other side of the water, cannot partake of them due to the obstacle presented by the waterway, he goes to the far shore by relying on a boat. In the same way, if, for someone who longs to partake of the enjoyments of the complete stage, the power to partake does not arise, due to the obstacle presented *by the waterway of believing in ordinary appearances*, he goes to the shore that is opposite to such insistent belief in ordinary appearances, by relying on the boat of creation stage.

Just as there is the method of the boat for going to the far shore, but there will be another method necessary in order to partake of the food and drink, so too creation stage is what ripens the mental stream to give birth to complete stage, but there is another method – the yogas of the winds and orbs, and so on – for the enjoyment of emptiness and the holy body of a divine being in complete stage. This teaches both the necessity of going to the final end of creation stage, and the fact that it is not enough to travel with no more than creation stage.

Therefore, although they [i.e., the practices of the higher and lower tantras] are similar just insofar as, in the yoga of generating the divine being, the holy body of the divine being is created from the methods of letters, accoutrement, a moon and so on, *the capacity to set up an extraordinary dependent relationship to ripen one's mental stream for giving birth to the yogas of inner fire and of orbs, and so on, which are symbolized by way of those methods, does not exist in what is not the unsurpassed*. Since something like this *is* stated to exist in the creation stage, the lower groups of tantra do not have a "creation stage."

Thus for Tsongkhapa, the real key to the extreme swiftness of the unsurpassed path is that the creation stage is designed intentionally from the point of view of the precise array of

¹²⁶ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 371a3-371b4 (741-742), emphasis mine. See Appendix Nine.

seeds it plants and ripens for the sake of the complete stage. But as we will examine in Chapters Five and Six, the complete stage aims entirely towards manifesting what is known as the “the indwelling mind of simultaneously-born clear light” (*gnyug sems lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal*). According to the theory of the “very subtle winds and mind,” once this fundamental nature of mind is made manifest, *this* is the real source of all creative power, and it is this mind from which an entirely new world and body can actually be brought forth. From the perspective of the yogi who has reached the fourth level of the complete stage, the only reality that actually has the capacity to purify any and all things is the primordial knowing that dawns from the indwelling mind of clear light. This is the direct perception of emptiness, experienced not merely with an ordinary, subtle mind of meditative stillness, but on the basis of the extremely subtle winds and mind that usually dwell hidden and dormant within the indestructible orb at the center of the heart cakra, as long as a person is alive. If one can access this primordial mind then one has realized the place from which a totally pure body and world could properly be emanated. Once realized and actualized, this indeed would be the holy mind of the Great Vajradhara, “the Creator of pure living beings, that circle of divine beings.”¹²⁷

If ordinary death is defined by the dissolution of the indestructible orb of conscious energy (which is “indestructible” only as long as a sentient being remains *within* a particular lifetime), but the yogi has learned to dissolve all the winds upon which moments of consciousness ride into that indestructible orb and knows how to come out again into an incorruptible illusory body – then where is there anymore “death”? All this remains to be examined, but suffice to say for now that the real factor of speed in the unsurpassed class – the potential for reaching enlightenment without dying first – is in its primary sense connected to the progressive realizations of the *actual* clear light and *pure* illusory body that come at the fourth and fifth levels of the complete stage. But insofar as the stage of creation is designed precisely as a ripening factor for those realizations, whereas the yogas of a divine being found in the lower three classes of tantra are not so designed, even the meditations of the creation stage are imbued with the anticipation and imaginative approximation of the experience of great bliss that will only come in its full form when the subtle winds are dissolving within the heart cakra.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ See the passage cited at Chapter Two, note 9.

¹²⁸ See *Having the Three Beliefs* (*vid ches gsum ldan*), vol. *ta*, 11b5-12a1 (24-25), emphasis mine:

In this vehicle, the imperative to seal whatever *appears* as being the circle of divine beings, all *experiences* as being great bliss, and all *conceptual thought* as being without a start, arises from the first stage [i.e. the creation stage]. Although the great bliss of the complete stage, which comes from inserting the life [wind] into the *dhuti* [i.e. central channel] does not yet exist at this point, nonetheless, since you have found an extremely stable clear appearance of the Mother and Father – as though they were real – you should understand that there are many kinds of great bliss *belonging to the creation stage*, which arise from the meditative union of method and wisdom in that way, and from placing the letter *phet* to prevent the bodhicitta from moving outwards.

Imagining, within a sacred ritual context, with vast motivation, and with immense discipline, the highest kind of bliss known in human experience, insofar as it is related, even superficially, to the opening of the central channel, is meant to plant seeds for being able to experience the actual, profound opening of all the knots in that channel, especially those around the heart, during the complete stage. Thus, because the context and methods are so different, even the mind with which one reaches the union of meditative stillness and insight focused on the clear appearance of maṇḍala during the creation stage, cannot be a state of mind with exactly the same quality as the meditative stillness and insight reached by a practitioner of the three lower tantras, much less a practitioner of the Perfection Vehicle alone.¹²⁹ If we could understand, even theoretically, these differences in meditative experience, and the methods used to reach them, then we would have gone a long way to understanding the difference between at least three of the six different meanings of “illusion” to be discussed in the Epilogue. To understand what is unique about the nature of “illusion” within the first stage of unsurpassed yoga, however, we must begin our foray into the heart of this stage of creation.

ཐེག་པ་འདི་ལ་གང་སྐྱོད་ལོ་འཁོར་ལོ་དང་། ཉམས་སྤྱོད་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོ། རྟོག་པ་སྤྱོད་མེད་ཀྱིས་རྒྱས་འདེབས་པ་ཅིག་དགོས་པ་ཡང་རིམ་པ་དང་པོ་ནས་འབྱུང་ལ།
སྟོན་རྒྱ་ཁྱིམ་རྩུབ་པ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་རྫོགས་རིམ་པའི་བདེ་ཆེན་སྐབས་འདིར་མེད་ཀྱང་། ཡབ་ཡུམ་དངོས་ལྟ་བུའི་གསལ་སྤང་ཤིན་ཏུ་བརྟན་པ་རྟེན་པས། དེ་འབྲེལ་འདི་
ཐབས་ཤེས་མཉམ་པར་སྦྱར་ཞིང་། བཞུགས་གསུང་བྱེད་ཀྱི་སེམས་བྱིར་འཕོ་བ་བཀག་པ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པའི་བདེ་ཆེན་དུ་མ་ཞིག་འབྱུང་བ་ཤེས་དགོས་སོ།

¹²⁹ See, for example, *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 386b4-6 (772), in a passage regarding meditation on a subtle orb while still in the creation stage:

Therefore, if you hold your mind forcefully upon a syllable or a subtle orb and such, at the upper and lower doors [of the central channel], or at the navel, or the heart, and so on, due to the crucial points of the location at which you meditate, and the basis upon which you are focusing, gradually the winds will remain on the inside. Then, that creates a condition whereby your meditation may be mixed with many objects of analysis, but nevertheless, by the inner force of the fact that the winds are gradually being tamed, you can quickly stop the agitation and the like that was in your meditation previously. So this is quite different from the methods for reaching concentration explained in other scriptural treatises.

དེས་ན་སྤྱོད་འོག་གི་སྒྲ་སྟོན་གཉིས་སམ་ལྟེ་བ་འམ་སྤྱོད་ཁ་སྟགས་སུ་ཡི་གེ་དང་ཐེག་ལེ་བླ་མོ་སྟགས་ལ་སེམས་བཅན་ཐབས་སུ་བཟུངས་ན་སྟོན་པའི་གནས་དང་དེ་
སྟགས་རྟེན་གྱི་གནད་ཀྱིས་རིམ་གྱིས་རྒྱང་ནང་དུ་གནས་པའི་རྒྱུ་བྱེད་པས་དབྱེད་སྟོན་གྱི་དམིགས་པ་མང་པོ་དང་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱང་། རྒྱང་རིམ་གྱིས་དུལ་པའི་མཐུས་སྟོན་
མ་པ་སྤྱོད་མེད་པ་སྟགས་སུ་དུ་དགག་ཅུས་པས་གཞུང་གཞན་ནས་བཤད་པས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་སྦྱབ་ལུགས་དང་མི་འདྲའོ།

Chapter Four: Entering a Divine World

. . . The “stage of what is created,” the “stage of what is constructed,” and the “contrived yoga,” are names for the first stage. The “stage of what is complete,” the “stage of what is not constructed,” and the “yoga of what is real,” are names for the second stage. The three terms – “created” and so forth – refer to the fact that what is created and constructed by a state of mind, is contrived. Thus the counterpart to that is what is already completed, or established, without being constructed by a state of mind.

Now then, suppose you wonder, “What is the meaning of this ‘being established’ or ‘not being established’ by force of being contrived through a state of mind?” It is true that in dependence upon the methods proper to the context of each stage, the two are similar in making complete the holy body of a divine being, but the way in which they do so is not the same. Thus, a practitioner of the creation stage makes him or herself into the complete holy body of a divine being through various methods: the letters of the vowels and consonants, the moon and sun that arise from them, the seed syllables, the accoutrement, and so forth. But these are created by the mind and merely imagined. A practitioner of the complete stage rises up in the holy body of a divine being, which is like an illusion, from nothing more than winds and mind, by the power of having made manifest the primordial knowing of the three states of appearance, proliferation, and [near-]attainment, by the inner force of winds made fit for work and of the white and red bodhicitta, which are the real things symbolized by the letters of the vowels and consonants, the moon and the sun, and so on.

Therefore, for a creation stage practitioner, the method for completing the holy body is still contrived by a state of mind, so the holy body of a divine being that arises from that method is also contrived. The method for completing the holy body of a divine being for a complete stage practitioner – the yoga of channels, winds, orbs, and so on – is not contrived. So the emptiness made manifest from that method, and the holy body of a divine being that rises up at its end, *are not imagined by the mind*.

With this intent, the *Integration of Practices* states: “From the time one is a practitioner of the stage of what-is-created onwards, up until the final end of the stage of the body that is totally set apart, what is meant by the three vajras and so on is merely a sheer conviction towards their definition. Therefore, even the body that is totally set apart does not have the form of a divine being.” This is saying that until one has achieved the body of illusion, in the context of the creation stage and of the three stages of what is set apart, *there is no holy body of a divine being other than that which is merely believed in by the mind*. Therefore, the holy body of the three stages “set apart” is merely included within the sources regarding the complete stage, but it is not an actual holy body of primordial knowing.

Suppose you think to yourself: “If that is the case, and it is only from the methods of the complete stage – the yogas of winds and orbs, and so on, that are the real thing

symbolized by the letters and so forth – that one can create the holy body of a divine being, but from the method of letters and accoutrement, the moon and sun, and so on, the creation of the holy body of the divine being is contrived, then why should one do that at all?” But it is not like that. *If you do not become accustomed to the contrived method, you will not be able to complete the uncontrived method.* Therefore, if you do not become accustomed to what arises from method – even though it is still contrived – you will not be able to make manifest what arises from the uncontrived method.

—Je Tsongkhapa, *The Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*¹

This passage is from the finale of Tsongkhapa’s decisive argument, constituting the whole of Chapter Eleven of the *Steps of Mantra*, as to why one must practice both of the two stages of unsurpassed yoga tantra. Critical sections of that argument are translated in Appendix Nine, but for now I quote this passage because it raises important questions that will remain themes throughout the rest of our inquiry. Tsongkhapa makes a clear distinction here between that which is contrived, or merely constructed by the mind, and that which exists in actuality, and is able to perform a function in the shared world of actual interpersonal relationships, without having to be imagined by the practitioner or anyone else. Indeed, Tsongkhapa presents this distinction as the defining difference between the first stage of “creation,” and the second stage, which I would sometimes translate, according to this very passage, as the “stage of what-is-complete.” After refuting a number of possible definitions suggested by others, Tsongkhapa follows clues that he finds in the writings of the Indian tantric masters, Virupa, Dombi Heruka, and Śāntipa, to say that the names of the two stages must refer primarily to the content of the path subsumed by each one. Roughly speaking, the “stage of what-is-created,” then, refers to all those practices where one must make something up newly in the mind, in order to have an object upon which to meditate. In English one might even call it “disciplined imagination” or “scripted make-believe.”

In contrast to this, the “stage of what-is-complete” refers to all those practices that take as their basis, or cause, the components of the subtle body that are already possessed in their entirety by a human being of this world, from the time of birth. That is, according to general Buddhist tantric theory, every human being born from a womb with the “six elements”² also has a subtle body comprised of (1) the energetic movements of inner wind, (2) the regular pathways, or channels, through which they move, and (3) the red and white drops, or orbs, that bear the most refined form of the coarser elements. It is this subtle body which is said to be already “complete” insofar as one is born as a human being, and does not arise as the result of practice or meditation. In this sense, Tsongkhapa

¹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 370a2-371a2 (739-741), emphasis added. See Appendix Nine for Tibetan.

² Tib. *mngal skyes khams drug ldan pa*. In this context, the six are bone, marrow, semen, flesh, blood, and skin, although according to other explanations the six elements are more commonly: earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness.

can say that the method comprised of the “yoga of channels, winds, orbs, and so on – is not contrived.” The objects upon which one meditates do not have to be created by the mind; they are already there.³

On the other hand, according to what Tsongkhapa quotes from Āryadeva’s *Integration of Practices*, the holy body of a divine being that rises up from the meditation on clear light emptiness can only be said to be “complete,” in the sense of being uncontrived, and not merely made up by the mind, at the final end of the stage of the body-set-apart (*lus dben*).⁴ In this sense, although this level is usually described in the context of treatises on the second stage – and is indeed achieved precisely through working with the channels, winds, and subtle orbs of the energetic body that is “already complete” – one cannot say that the holy body of a divine being is *actually formed* from such subtle winds and mind, until the first time the yogi rises up in an impure body of illusion, after the final end of the stage of a transcendent mind (*sems dben*, or mind-set-apart). From then onwards, though, both the emptiness realized and the holy body of the divine being who arises are said to appear due to a radical shift in the configuration and pathways of energy within this subtle body. At this point something “REAL” is happening, that no longer relies on the imagination.

Although this difference between imagination and actuality is crucial to understanding Tsongkhapa’s vision of how the yogas of the two stages are supposed to function – and indeed how the one leads into the other, according to the analogy of the

³ As explained to me by Geshe Khedrup Norsang, Sera Monastery, January 31st, 2015 (1h14m40s, ff.):

The word “complete,” means the object of focus of the stage of what-is-complete; the cause for its meditations – the object of focus – are the three of the channels, winds, and orbs. So those are established in us. In the original condition they are naturally present. They are something already established there.

For someone born from a womb with the six elements, channels, winds, and orbs are already there.

རྣམས་ཟེར་ཡག་འདི། རྣམས་རིམ་གྱི་དམིགས་པ། རྣམས་རིམ་གྱི་སྒྲོམ་རྒྱ། དམིགས་པ། ཅ་རྒྱུད་ཐིག་ལེ་གསུམ་རེད། ཡོ་དེ་རང་རྩོལ་གྱིས་ གཞི་ལ་རང་གཞི་ས་སྤྱུ་གྱིས་ གྱུ་གྱུ་མ་ཡོར་རེད་ཟེར། མངལ་སྦྱིས་ཁམས་བྱུག་ལྟ་བུ་དེ་ལ་ཅ་རྒྱུད་ཐིག་ལེ་གསུམ་ཡོད་ཡོད་པ་རེད་པ།

⁴ We saw that Tsongkhapa glosses this, however, to mean the final end of *all three* stages “set apart,” which would imply the final end of the stage of the mind-set-apart, or transcendent mind (*sems dben*). It may be that he interprets Āryadeva to have meant that the final end of the process during which the body is totally set apart (*lus rnam par dben pa’i thar thug*) does not actually come until the final end of the stage of the mind-set-apart (*sems dben thar thug*), which comes just before the first manifestation of the impure illusory body (*ma dag pa’i sgyu lus*). The array of debates that arise on the subject of how to interpret the exact defining junctures between each of the parts of the stages of creation and completion are complex (especially because the various names are not always used in the same way across the Indian Guhyasamāja literature, but for many theoretical reasons as well). They continue to be argued hotly to this day with the tantric monastic colleges of the Geluk lineage (which I witnessed both in class and in the debate courtyard at Gyutö Monastery in Sidhbari, India, March-May, 2015). The details of such debates are beyond the scope of this dissertation, so I must limit myself to pointing out the textual problem, without being able to examine it fully here. Āryadeva’s words notwithstanding, it is clear from Tsongkhapa’s *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp on the Five Stages* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), as well as his *Ultimate Private Advice* (partially translated in Appendix Seventeen) that he is consistent in his assertion that the *actual* holy body of a divine being does not arise until the first instance of the impure illusory body, at the stage of Blessing Oneself (*bdag byin rlabs*), which cannot come until after the final end of the stage of the mind-set-apart.

boat quoted previously – still, it should raise philosophical red flags for a diligent student of the Consequence school of the Middle Way. How can one maintain a difference between what is merely constructed, or imagined, by the mind (*blos brtags pa*) and what is actually there (*don dngos po'i gnas tshul*) within a philosophical context in which it has been explicitly stated countless times that what is imagined and what is real are both acknowledged to lack inherent existence? Would this not contradict the idea that *all* existing things are said to be “merely labeled by conceptions” (*rtog pas btags tsam*)?

It must be noted here that the Tibetan term used for the constructing, or imagining, that takes place in the creation stage, matches part of the term used for what I translated as “totally constructed things” (*kun brtags*, Skt. *parikalpita*) within the context of the Mind-Only school. The word used throughout the Consequence school literature for what is merely “labeled,” or merely “imputed,” is a near homophone, differs only slightly in spelling (*btags*), and is often introduced as a variant for “constructed” (*brtags*) across block print editions, making “merely constructed by the mind” into “merely imputed by the mind.” So although there *is* a denotative difference, it seems that even the Tibetan scribes and likely many of the debaters screaming out syllogisms on the debate ground for the last thousand years were not always quite sure which of the two words they were using for *blos brtags/btags pa*, i.e., “made up/imputed by the mind.” So I think the issue must be raised, even while acknowledging that such terms can be used with significantly different valences across different contexts.

It is my conviction that Tsongkhapa would not have used the phrase “*not imagined by the mind*” without a very clear decision as to what this means ontologically, insofar as even the illusory body of the complete stage must be empty of inherent existence. Since the illusory body is supposed to be something realized by a mind that has, through its deeper and deeper realization of the clear light, transcended “conceptions” (*rtog pa*), could this imply there might be a level of functioning reality that is *not* “merely labeled with conceptions” (*rtog pas btags tsam*)? But insofar as, prior to the fifth stage of the “union of the two,” the yogi still has not perfectly united his/her experience of the two realities – deceptive and ultimate – I would be very hesitant to think of introducing an “exception” into the Consequence school language in order to explain what Tsongkhapa himself does not say.⁵ Through careful exploration of a range

⁵ According to logic that Tsongkhapa discusses in his *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), even once emerging from the actual clear light into the initial “union of the two still in training” (*slob pa'i zung 'jug*), it seems there would still be the subtle conceptuality of appearances arising for that advanced yogi – who is by then both an ārya and an arhat. Thus, within Tsongkhapa's thought, it would be inappropriate to say that prior to the elimination of the final obstacles to omniscience (*shes sgrub*), the yogi's mind is uninterruptedly free of even the subtlest conceptuality. So if conceptual projection is still present, the statement that all three realms are made of nothing but conceptions would seem to hold. But this issue remains to be analyzed. See *rim lnga gsal sgron*, vol. *ja*, 303a4-303b1 (607-608):

If these [verses from Nāgārjuna's *Five Stages* regarding the fact that various conceptualizations of duality are abandoned at the fifth stage] were to be applied to the abandonment in which *all* conceptual thought

of texts, I believe that a provisional explanation might be inferred, but first we must delve at length into the many philosophical problems raised by the very process of “construction” and “contrivance” (*bcos ma*) within the stage of creation, before the conceptual material for such an analysis (of realizations that are supposed to be nonconceptual) might even become available to us. Thus I will turn first to an explanation of the fundamental principles of creation stage meditation, as Tsongkhapa explains them, before returning to analyze – from the perspective of Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way philosophy – some of the difficult issues raised along the way.

The Poison of Taking Things for Granted

From the start of Tsongkhapa’s chapter on the creation stage itself, we are thrown into the heart of a view so far-reaching in its implications that its significance within the scope of Buddhist thought should not be underestimated. No longer are we presented with the cold fact of a world in which all thoughts, all actions, even physical matter, and the cosmic environment itself are made from nothing but the limitless ramifications of karmic traces and the suffering they etch onto a blank slate of empty reality. No longer are we faced solely with the hopeless ignorance of living beings who spin problem upon problem for themselves because every action is tainted with a grasping to things as though they were good or pure, when in fact they are declared to be fleeting, tainted, having the nature of suffering, empty of substance, and utterly without natural identity, or self. It is not that these basic tenets of Buddhist sūtric thought are ever negated, nor fundamentally contradicted, but the core message of the tantric view turns the whole presentation on its head. Here, reality is suffering not because it *is* that way, but because living beings fail to see that in fact, it was *always, already totally pure*: the immaculate emanation of the creative power of divine wisdom.

Tsongkhapa does not address the apparent dissonance directly; perhaps according to his axiom that internalized understanding of the whole path will enable one to “realize that all the teachings are without contradiction,” he expects his perspicacious students to inquire until they figure out for themselves how sūtra and tantra could be thoroughly compatible in view. I would suggest, however, that one by one, the logic of Tsongkhapa’s teachings on how to practice unsurpassed yoga tantra are leading such a student into a perspective so tangibly different from the tenor of the sūtra presentations, that the

of any kind is finished off, then, since this is not achieved until one achieves the union of the two with no more training [i.e. total Buddhahood], it would not be appropriate to the union of the two still in training. Therefore, the nondual primordial wisdom that has abandoned all the conceptual thoughts *that insistently believe in things as real* – along with their seeds – is the “union of the two” here.

རྟོག་པ་གང་ཡིན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཟད་པར་སྤངས་པ་ལ་བྱེད་ན་མི་སྣོལ་པའི་རྩང་འཇུག་མ་ཐོབ་བར་དུ་དེ་མི་འཛོལ་པས་སྣོལ་པའི་རྩང་འཇུག་ལ་དེ་མི་འགྲིག་གོ། དེས་ན་གང་ཟག་དང་ཚོས་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་བདེན་པར་ཞེན་པའི་རྟོག་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ས་ལོན་དང་བཅས་པ་སྤངས་པའི་གཉིས་སུ་མེད་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ནི་འདིར་རྩང་འཇུག་གོ།
See also Tsongkhapa’s reference translated in Appendix Nine (716): “since even the subsequent wisdom of all bodhisattva āryas also has dual appearance . . .”

beginner might be hard-pressed to maintain, as Tsongkhapa insists, that the “view” of emptiness is exactly the same across all vehicles.

First, the instruction to combine the discerning realization of emptiness within the very same state of mind that perceives a divine manifestation of absolute compassion, challenged the student to consider that ultimate reality – emptiness – is at some level inseparable from ultimate love.⁶ Now, the declaration that the root of saṃsāra is the failure to recognize that all things are already the creative emanation of the enlightened wisdom of all Buddhas, will challenge Tsongkhapa’s student to wonder, not only whether the cycle of suffering was ever “really real” in the first place, but whether there might exist yet another plane of appearances, one that is still free of existing inherently, but which is nonetheless a more genuine expression of what all things *would* look like, if one could perceive reality correctly at every level. Later, within the teachings on the complete stage, the practitioner will be challenged yet again, this time to consider whether the extremely subtle mind and the winds of life upon which it rides, which reside together at the core of his or her being, have not always already existed as that enlightened mind and energy at the heart of all worlds. For this extremely subtle wind and mind is defined as that which creates the condition for the possibility of all appearances, whether or not these were perceived “correctly,” or as “pure,” by surface layers of a limited consciousness that were configured only by the vagaries of scattered energies and karmic traces.

As we examine each of these perspectives, I challenge my own readers to consider whether such views can indeed be seen as compatible with the teachings of the Middle Way expressed by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. I would propose that if we can find a state of mind in which the absolute negations of Nāgārjuna’s four-fold reasonings not only do not negate, but become the unassailable support for an unabashedly mystical vision of a divine reality hidden only from the eyes of all of us who insist on thinking that things are “just normal,” then we would have begun to penetrate the nucleus of

⁶ The idea does appear in the Mahāyāna teaching, based upon the *Ornament of Realizations* (*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*), that “ultimate bodhicitta” is the direct perception of emptiness. In that context, however, it is still assumed that one cannot conceptualize “living beings” within that specialized state of mind, and so any meditation on the wish for enlightenment at the deceptive level will not simultaneously be able to ascertain the emptiness of the meditator, the love, and the beings who are its object. Even in a tantric context, the debate does arise (as I heard during monastic classes with Geshe Khedrup Norsang at Gyutö Monastery, especially March 31st, 2015) as to whether it is actually possible to perceive emptiness *in a direct way* (*dnogs su rtogs*) at the very moment one is meditating on the holy form of a divine being, insofar as something is still *appearing*, deceptively (*kun rdzob dang tshogs pa*). A tentative solution to this problem lies within the explanation of the progressive stages of tantric meditation, and the gradual movement from conceptuality to nonconceptuality, to be discussed below. In any case, I believe that the very theory that one should be able to meditate with the “mind that realizes emptiness appearing as a divine being,” (*stong nyid rtogs pa’i blo lha’i rnam par shar ba*) within a single state of consciousness, suggests a perspective on the nature of ultimate reality itself that is different enough in tone from the general Mahāyāna presentation to warrant recognition of the sea change in perspective that takes place. See the extended analysis of these points in Chapter Five, “Creating Appearances,” with its subsections.

Tsongkhapa's own tantric worldview.

Tsongkhapa begins by explaining the unique diagnosis for the root of suffering as he understands it to be presented in the unsurpassed system, in the context of both the stage of creation and that preliminary part of the second stage, the body-set-apart.⁷

The unique thing to be abandoned in the context of creation stage is (1) the appearance of a world and the beings that rest upon that world as being ordinary, and (2) the pride that insists on believing that this world and its inhabitants are ordinary. As the fourteenth chapter of the *Tent* states:

In order to crush the aspect of “normality”
it is proclaimed that one meditate on what is perfect.

The *Integration of Practices* states:

Furthermore, it is taught that the same heaps, domains and sensory fields – which have dwelt with an ordinary sense of pride from time without beginning – indeed have the very essence of being made from the extremely subtle particles of All Those Who Have Gone Thus.

What this is saying is that it is taught in the tantras that one should meditate on the heaps and so on *as being Buddhas, as an antidote to the fact they have remained with an ordinary sense of pride from time without beginning*. This is stated in the context of the stage of the body-set-apart, but this and the unique thing to be abandoned by the stage of creation are similar.

Creating the appearance of an extraordinary world and beings, and then meditating on it – in order to overcome this kind of appearance and the insistent belief in it – does not exist for those who practice just in the way of the perfections, and so it is a distinguishing feature that belongs to the way of mantra alone. The antidote for both ordinary appearances and the insistent belief in them is said to be the creation stage in which you meditate on the world as the inconceivable palace and the beings who reside there as divine. Thus, (1) through becoming accustomed to the appearance of a world dawning as the inconceivable

⁷ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 375a3-375b3 (749-750), emphasis mine:

བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱི་སྒྲིབ་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སྤང་བྱ་ནི་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པ་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྤང་བ་དང་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པ་ཐ་མལ་པར་ཞེན་པའི་ད་རྒྱལ་ཡིན་ཏེ་གྲུང་གི་བཅུ་བཞི་
བ་ལས། ཐ་མལ་རྣམས་པ་གཞོན་དོན་དུ། ཡང་དག་བསྐྱེད་པ་རབ་བསྐྱུགས་ཀྱི། ཞེས་དང་སྤྱོད་བསྐྱུགས་ལས། ཡང་འདི་ལྟར་ཕུང་པོ་དང་ཁམས་སྒྲེ་མཆེད་རྣམས་ཀྱི་
ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་ཐ་མལ་པའི་ད་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་གནས་པ་རྣམས་ནི། འདི་ལྟར་དེ་བཞེན་གཤེགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་ཕྱ་རབ་ལས་བསྐྱུབས་པའི་དོ་མོ་ཉིད་དུ་བསྐྱེད་
ན་ཏེ། ཞེས་ཕུང་མོགས་ལ་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་ཐ་མལ་པའི་ད་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་གནས་པའི་གཉེན་པོར་ཕུང་པོ་སོགས་སངས་རྒྱུ་སྒྲོམ་པར་རྒྱུད་དུ་བསྐྱེད་པར་གསུང་
ས་སོ། འདི་ལྟས་དཔེར་གྱི་སྐབས་ཡིན་ཡང་དེ་དང་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སྤང་བྱ་གཉིས་འདྲའོ། འདི་འདྲ་བའི་སྤང་བཞེན་བསྐྱེད་པའི་དོན་དུ་
རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པ་ལ་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་གྱི་སྤང་བ་བསྐྱེད་ནས་སྒྲོམ་པ་པར་བྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་པ་ལ་མེད་པས་སྐྱགས་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་ཁོ་ནའི་ཁྱད་ཆོས་སོ། ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྤང་བཞེན་
ན་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཉེན་པོར་རྟེན་གཞལ་ཡས་ཁང་དང་བརྟེན་པ་ལྷ་སྒྲོམ་པའི་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གསུངས་པས་རྟེན་གཞལ་ཡས་ཁང་དང་བརྟེན་པ་ལྷ་ར་འཆར་བའི་སྤང་བ་གོ་
མས་པས་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྤང་བ་དང་། མི་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རྣམས་སྤང་དོ་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ངེས་པའི་འཛིན་སྤངས་གོམས་པས་ཐ་མལ་པའི་ད་རྒྱལ་བསྐྱེད་པར་བྱའོ།

palace and of beings dawning as divine, you overcome ordinary appearances, and (2) through becoming accustomed to a way of beholding in which you ascertain with the thoughts: “It is the Unshakeable One,” or “It is the Maker of Appearances,” and so forth, you overcome ordinary pride.

* * *

Throughout the teachings of Buddhism there are many “things to be abandoned”; primarily the ignorance that grasps to a supposed self, but also the eighty-four thousand varieties of mental afflictions. Within the system of tantra, and in particular that of unsurpassed yoga, Tsongkhapa identifies a “unique form of the thing to be abandoned” (*thun mong ma yin pa'i spang bya*). This has two parts. One is the fact that things appear to us as though they are ordinary, as though they are just there, and that's just the way it is. The second part is that, when things appear to us that way, we accept it, we believe it, and indeed it is so believable to us, that we are ready to insist,⁸ defend, and write millions of pages of treatises over the course of human history to attempt to explain how things came to be just the way they are – naturally, of their own accord. Note that Tsongkhapa directly equates the insistent belief that things are ordinary with the affliction of *pride*, which typically leads to the belief that “*I* am more important,” “*my* views are right,” and eventually, “what I think is best.”

I should also note that although Tsongkhapa does not address this point specifically, it seems that in the context of this unique presentation, to acknowledge that things do come from causes would not in any way diminish or cast doubt upon the belief that they are ordinary. Indeed one can say things come from causes and conditions all the time – even in the complex Buddhist sense of the twelve links of dependent origination – and still think this is a perfectly normal and natural process upon which the world is based. Recognizing this distinction may highlight what it is that makes this a *unique* form of the wrong view to be abandoned, one that is not even explained in the Middle Way treatises, much less those representing other schools of sūtra-based Buddhist philosophy.

Sera Je Hlarampa Geshe Khedrup Norsang explained the idea of grasping to ordinary appearances very succinctly as follows. I attempt to quote him as verbatim as a translation of colloquial speech will allow, because I think it may still be surprising to some readers that precisely such a phrasing would be spoken by someone who has been

⁸ This preceding string of meanings is encapsulated in the single Tibetan word “*zhen pa*,” which is sometimes translated as “grasping” or “attachment,” but is quite distinct in its use from the other Tibetan words even more commonly used for those states of mind (i.e. “*'dzin pa*” and “*chags pa*” or “*'dod chags*”). Thus I have chosen to render “*zhen pa*” in most cases as “insistent belief” or sometimes just “belief,” with the implication that it is a firmly held belief in something *that is in fact not true*. There are of course other more technical Tibetan words with the valence of “belief” (e.g. *yid ches*, *mos pa*, even *dad pa*) but these are generally used in a positive sense, as in believing in something that *is* true, and beneficial, but for which one does not yet have either a direct or deductive valid perception. I expect it will be obvious from the context when I am instead using “belief” or “insistent belief” for this pejorative connotation of “*zhen pa*.”

steeped in the tradition of Tsongkhapa for his entire life:⁹

So if you ask what that problem is, it is both things appearing as ordinary and the belief in them. What are these? It's like this: If I look at the tree over there, “appearing as ordinary” means that tree is something that appears as if it is just there by itself, something everyday, an ordinary thing.

“Believing it is ordinary” means that we do not understand a thought such as, that it is the own-appearance of primordial wisdom, or that it is something like the dance of emptiness, something with the essence of indwelling, simultaneously-born primordial wisdom. We think it is just something ordinary, and that's all. Like for example, that the tree came from the earth there, and is nothing but a product of cultivation. Isn't it? So, but that is the problem.

By saying that it is a problem, or fault, or something wrong, that it does not occur to us to think that the eucalyptus trees swaying outside the window on a blazing hot day in South India – with the sounds of motorcycles and utility trucks banging and beeping along the monastery roads lined with cow dung and human garbage – are the divine dance of emptiness, the expression of the primordial knowing of the clear light, is to imply directly that in fact, if we could see and think correctly, we would recognize that the trees, the breeze, the sounds, the feces, the compost piles of mud-caked plastic wrappers that will take an eon to decay, *all of it*, is, at some level not apparent to us now, an expression of the wisdom of great bliss and emptiness. Even if we recognize the beauty of something like the trees in a conventional sense, while thinking that they just came from the earth, from their causes and conditions such as soil, and water, and sunlight, and hence are something perfectly normal and everyday; according to this unique presentation we have just committed the principal fault that will enable the cycle of suffering to continue unabated.

Just waking up in the morning and taking for granted that the room is there and I have a body and yesterday I did such-and-such, and today I will do such-and-such, because the world is there and I'm functioning in it, is already ignorance from a Middle Way point of view. For all those thoughts are soaked in thinking that things exist inherently from their own side. But to add that it is a fault – indeed the primary fault – to *fail* to think that all these “things” are the spontaneous, pure emanation of the glory of the

⁹ Geshe Khedrup Norsang became a monk around the age of eleven in the Khams region of Tibet, and gradually reached the status of a respected master teacher at one of the two tantric colleges of the Geluk tradition, Gyutö Monastery. The following is from a private teaching he gave to me at Sera Monastery, February 1st, 2015 (38m20s); italics represent his emphasis:

སྐྱོན་དེ་ག་རེ་རེ་དེ་ཅེས་ན། ར་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ་དང་ཞེན་བ་གཉིས་དེ་རེ་དེ་ཅེས་། དག་རེ་རེ་དེ་ཅེས་ན། དེ་འདས་དེ་པར་བཟུས་པས་དཔེ་སྣང་དེ་བཟུས་པས་བྱས་ན་
 ར་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ་ཅེས་ན་ཁོ་རང་ཤིང་སྣང་བ་དང་དགའ་བ་དེ་ག་རང་ཁོ་ཉིད་པ་ཅིག་དངོས་པོ་ར་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ་ཅིག་ ར་མལ་པའི་ཞེན་བ་ཅེས་ན་དེ་ག་རང་ཁོ་རང་
 ཅིག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རང་སྣང་དང་སྣང་བ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཐོས་ཡིན་པ་དང་གཞུག་མ་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྤྱེས་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཡིན་པ་འདྲ་པོ་དེ་འདས་ཁད་བསམ་སྒྲོ་གོ་བཞི་
 མི་འདུག་ང་རང་ཚོ། ཁོ་ར་མལ་དེ་ག་རང་དཔེ་ཤིང་སྣང་བ་ཆ་དེས་ན་ཡག་བྱས་དེ་ཅོག་སོ་ནམས་གཏོག་ཡོད་མ་རེད་པ། དེ་ཡིན་དུ་དེ་སྐྱོན་རེད།

divine wisdom realizing emptiness, takes it a significant step further. For it implies, as I have already suggested, that there is a way things *are*, which is more than just “emptiness.” It suggests, as does the very word “simultaneously-born primordial wisdom” (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*) that there is no emptiness without a knowing of it, and that the knowing of it can be pervaded by great bliss, which is ultimate compassion. It also suggests that this trinity of emptiness, wisdom, and love is the source from which all things actually do arise, if only we could see correctly. Such a vision is unmistakably there in Tsongkhapa's tantric writings, but it will take time to develop the details of this logic from his Guhyasamāja-based thought. Meanwhile, Geshe Norsang continued:¹⁰

For example, it's like everyone's attachment out there; when they see an object that is a clear particular, it's because they believe it's ordinary that it appears ordinary . . . no, first it appears as ordinary. Then because it appears ordinary you believe it to be ordinary. On the basis of believing it is ordinary then the afflictions – desire and hatred – they come along too. Then, probably, if you think something is a pure appearance, if you see it as having the nature of the indwelling, simultaneously-born, indivisible wisdom of bliss and emptiness, as having the nature of emptiness, that will counteract your attachment, right? Therefore, they say that both ordinary appearances and believing them to be that way are problems for us.

Then, maybe, *most* of the things that cause us the feeling of suffering come from those two: things appearing as ordinary and our believing them to be that way. They are related to the feeling of suffering. What is related to the feeling of happiness is seeing good things as lovely, as *pure*. They create a feeling of happiness. So, in that sense, when we pay attention to a moment of feeling joy, the appearance of it being ordinary and the belief in that are something to be stopped.

Thus, according to this explanation, there is an important distinction between the fact that things appear as though they just are that way, coming from their own side and their own

¹⁰ Geshe Khedrup Norsang, February 1st, 2015 (39m07s ff.), italics represent Geshe Norsang's own verbal emphasis:

དཔེར་ན་བརྒྱུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་སྐོམ་མེད་ཆགས་པ་བྱས་ཅད་འདྲ་སོགས་ལ་བ་བྱས་ཅད་གི་ཡུལ་མཐོང་ཆགས་པ་བྱས་ཅད་གི་ཡུལ་གྱིས་མཐོང་བ་ལ་ཐ་མལ་པའི་ཞེན་པ་
ཡིན་ཅད་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ་དེ་བྱེད་ . . . དང་སོ་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ། ཐ་མལ་པ་དེ་སྣང་འོང་དུ་ཐ་མལ་པའི་ཞེན། ཐ་མལ་པའི་ཞེན་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཨ་ནི་ཉོན་མོངས་
འདོད་ཆགས་དང་ཨ་ནི་སྣང་དེ་ཚོ་འབྲེལ་འོང་འདུག་ག། ཐལ་ཆེར་ལ་དག་པའི་སྣང་བ་ཅིག་བསམ་སྒྲོ་སྒྲོང་བ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་ཡིན་པ་གཉེན་མ་ལྟག་མ་ལྟན་ཅིག་བདེ་
སྒྲོང་གཉིས་མེད་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་ཡིན་པ་ཅིག་མཐོང་སོང་ན་དེ་ལ་ཆགས་པ་བརྟེན་གྱི་རེད་བ། དེ་ཡིན་དུ་གང་ལ་ང་རང་ཚོ་ལ་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ་ཞེན་པ་གཉིས་
ས་དེ་སྒྲོན་རེད་ཟེར་གྱི་ཡོད་བ་རེད། དེ་ནས་གཅིག་བྱས་ནས་ཡང་ང་རང་ཚོ་ཚོར་བ་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱུལ་བྱེད་ཡག་མང་ཆེ་བ་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ་དང་ཞེན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་
བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཡོད་བ་རེད། ཚོར་བ་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱུལ་འབྲེལ་ཡག་ ཚོར་བ་བདེ་བ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་དེ་དཔལ་འབྱོར་དེ་ཡི་དུ་འོང་བ་དག་པ་དེ་འདྲས་མཐོང་བ་དེ་ནས་ཚོར་བ་བདེ་
བ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཡོད་བ་རེད། དེ་ཡིན་ཅད་དེ་འདྲས་ཀྱི་ཆ་ནས་ཚོར་བ་དག་འདྲས་ལ་དོ་སྣང་བྱེད་པའི་ཆ་ནས་ཡང་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྣང་བ་ཞེན་པ་གཉིས་དེ་དག་གི་དགོས་ཡུལ་ཅི
ག་རེད་ཟེར།

causes, in a natural world that is just “out there,” and the fact that we “take them to be that way,” or believe that their appearance is correct, and insist it to be so, and so on. Geshe Norsang connected the second moment, the *taking* of things for granted, to the arising of mental afflictions. In contrast, he suggested that when we actually do think that something is pure, when we believe it to come from a divine side of reality in which everything is perfectly understood to be empty, then we ourselves will be much less likely to develop afflictions towards it – even if it bears immense attraction for us, the irresistible attraction of divinity itself.

In this moment, I think Geshe Norsang was indicating a key way to understand how the path of desire is supposed to work; how it acts to block, cancel, or stop attachment, rather than increasing it. If one can even imagine what the wisdom of emptiness would be like, and then imagine how that appears, it would be difficult, in the same moment, to conceive of the very same thing one has posited as an expression of emptiness, also to have some inherent nature to which one would grasp in an afflicted way. The conception of what something *is* would totally contradict an affliction that could only arise on the basis of having thought of it as being something else in the first place.

Geshe Norsang went on to suggest that when we experience suffering, or I would add, *depression*, it usually occurs quite directly because we took things for granted as being normal, humdrum, business as usual. On the other hand, when we do have the opportunity to experience genuine pleasure, it usually comes about because we were able to conceive of something as special, even if for only a very short time. So perhaps the experience of joy is fundamentally related to conceiving of something as pure, even if one is misunderstanding the nature of the purity. Again, this would suggest another reasoning behind the path of passion: If one can pay strong attention to the moments of joy that one already experiences, and note the conception of the extraordinary that is implicit in such moments, and then, in reverse, begin to *practice* cultivating the conception of things as extraordinary, it might afford one more and more moments of joy. If, in turn, one knew how to conceive of each moment of joy or bliss as being the expression of what is ultimately pure – indivisible wisdom itself – then this would direct one’s mind towards contemplating the divine source of the joy. As mentioned just above, this would act to cancel the possibility of afflicted thoughts towards what has already been understood as the epitome of freedom from affliction, and defined as the very lack of self-nature itself.

Geshe Norsang went on to explain the connection between taking things for granted and belief in things as real:¹¹

¹¹ Geshe Khedrup Norsang, February 1st, 2015 (40m05s ff.):

So that's how it is. In this way, for us, for the most part, the main things that appear as ordinary – when those appearances arise, they come with the appearance of being real. They appear as though they are established as real, as the thing we refute – being established through a nature of their own. When the belief that they are ordinary comes along, you arrive at believing they really exist that way. This is grasping to things as real. So believing things to be ordinary and believing them to be real are related to one another. Our insistent belief that grasps to things as real is related both to the appearance of things as ordinary and to their appearance as being real. Now, they are related to grasping at things as real, and that grasping to things as real is the step that is the root of the cycle. Because it is the root of the cycle, there follows a relationship to all the mental afflictions and their tendencies.

Thus, as will appear somewhat later in Tsongkhapa's text, there is understood to be an explicit relationship between the tendency to see things as though they *really* are the way they appear, from their own side, through their own nature, their own unique way of being, and so on, and the tendency to think the same things are “just normal.” To understand this point, it will be important to taste the meaningful distinction between these two states of mind, and also their inextricable relationship. If I think something is real, why should I think it could ever have been any different? If I think the world exists from its own side, why shouldn't I think that this is what “nature” means, and assume that things just sprang up of their own accord, according to “natural laws”? Perhaps they followed a causal chain, but why should there be any need to posit a transcendent source, much less a divine “wisdom” or omniscient “creator”? One might question whether the premise of scientific materialism is in some sense based in such an assumption that what is natural is normal, and what is normal is real, insofar as a typical position of scientific materialism presumes that the laws and processes by which the entire history of the universe has unfolded may be inferred solely from experimental observation of and mathematical interpretation of physical processes, with the axiom that one need look no further for a metaphysical source or explanation for what is directly or deductively evident to scientific inquiry. For if something is naturally one way, how else could it be?

Now, one might object that a scientist, or artist, or historian, or anyone else who contemplates the panoply of phenomena with awe, and with the recognition of radical contingency – even while explicitly holding to a view that posits matter and energy as the

མོ་ད་འདུག་ཅ་བྱས་ནས། མོ་དེ་འབྲས་བྱེད་དུ་ཨ་ནི་དང་རང་ཆོ་ལ་ཡག་མང་ཆེ་བ་ཡག་ཅ་མཁ་པའི་སྣང་བ་དེ་གཙོ་བོ་དངོས་པོ་ཅ་མཁ་པའི་སྣང་བ་སྣང་བ་དེ་འོང་
 དུ་གང་ལ་བདེན་སྣང་དེ་འོང་དེ་ཡོད་བ་རེད། དགག་བྱ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བ་བཟུང་བ་དེ་བདེན་བྱུང་གི་སྣང་བ་དེ། ཅ་མཁ་པའི་ཞེན་འོང་དུས་བདེན་ཞེན་ལ་སླེབ་འོང་དུ
 ས། བདེན་པ་འཛིན་པ་འདི། དེ་ཡིན་དུ་ཅ་མཁ་པའི་ཞེན་པ་དང་བདེན་ཞེན་གཉིས་དེ་འབྲེལ་དེ་ཡོད་བ་རེད། ང་རང་ཆོ་བདེན་འཛིན་གྱི་ཞེན་པ་འདི། ཅ་མཁ་པའི་སྣ
 ང་བ་དང་བདེན་སྣང་གཉིས་དེ་ནས་འབྲེལ་དེ་ཡོད་བ་རེད། ད་བདེན་འཛིན་དང་འབྲེལ་འོང་དུ་བདེན་འཛིན་དེ་འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བ་ཅིས་ལ། འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བ་ཡིན་ཅང་དེ
 ཉོན་མོངས་བག་ཆགས་གང་ག་ལ་འབྲེལ་འོང་འདུག་ག།

sole basis of phenomena – still might not be holding to things as “ordinary” in the sense Tsongkhapa intends. It is not for me to say or know how one or another person’s individual attitudes or approaches to reality may or may not match the principles Tsongkhapa and his followers describe; I only ask my readers to think about it for themselves. What is the relationship between thinking that things can *really* come from *their own* causes with a *nature* of their own – not bestowed upon them through the power of an observing and creative consciousness – and thinking that “What you see is what you get”; “That’s just the way things are”; “Well, that’s life”; or “According to the laws of nature, we know that such-and-such must always be the case . . .,” and so on? Furthermore, what is the relationship between such standard twenty-first century linguistic expressions and the mounting tidal wave of depression that besets itself upon our contemporary generations, globally? What might this have to do with Geshe Norsang’s statement: “Then, maybe, *most* of the things that cause us the feeling of suffering come from those two: things appearing as ordinary and our believing them to be that way. . .”?

To suggest that (1) the assumption that things “are just the way they are,” and (2) the state of mind that takes appearances for granted, together comprise the bottom rung of the ladder by which all suffering comes into being (*’khor ba’i rtsa ba rim pa*), should take our consideration of Buddhist thought to a new level. If the root of the cycle of suffering is merely the ignorance that fails to understand things as empty, then potentially one could posit a realization that breaks through that ignorance to understand how one’s own mind is projecting things, without there needing to be any Buddhas already in existence. One might posit the possibility of reaching realization of emptiness, even the nirvāṇa in which mental afflictions have ceased, without reliance on a teacher, must less requiring a “transcendent” level of being. Even in the Mahāyāna, one might posit that between a world of suffering and the blissful paradise of a Buddha, neither one is a more *accurate* representation of ultimate reality than the other, because both sets of appearances are equally empty of inherent nature. One might go on to think: “It’s just that all beings would eventually prefer happiness to agony, so one works on the causes to bring all beings to a place where they might ‘label’ an empty reality as bliss rather than as suffering. But from its own side reality is neither one.”¹² To say, however, that the root of suffering – the grasping that holds things as though they were inherently real – is inextricably connected to the failure to see that things *actually* arise as the pure emanation of transcendent wisdom, demands a view that at all places and in all times, the wisdom of an omniscient Buddha already exists.

From the perspective of Tsongkhapa’s Vajrayāna, especially his understanding of the unsurpassed yogas, there is no place for a reality in which there was ever a time when

¹² Such explanations abound among many contemporary non-Tibetan practitioners I have known, and I would say they are not entirely inaccurate to the Mahāyāna, according to some interpretations.

the dharmakāya was not. We will explore in detail the meaning of “primordial wisdom,” or “timeless knowing” (both translations for *ye shes*), and “indwelling mind” (*gnyug sems*) later on, but suffice to say for now that the premise stating that belief in ordinary appearances is a wrong view to be abandoned suggests that at some level, the indivisible wisdom of bliss and emptiness is always already at work, beyond time, even when “we” cannot see it yet. According to this Vajrayāna view, one is always *mistaken* until one sees all phenomena as the creation of omniscient wisdom.

The objection might still be raised that it is not that beings and environments are *really* already sacred maṇḍalas inhabited by divine beings; rather, at the level of creation stage one is simply instructed to imagine things that way, because the practice plants good seeds for the future. There may be some validity to this, but it is not the overall message that I read across Tsongkhapa’s injunctions, and as we will see, from the perspective of the realizations of the illusory body during the complete stage, it would be untenable to maintain that what is realized then had not already been the case even before it was realized.¹³ At this point I simply offer a passage from Tsongkhapa’s famous commentary to the Six Dharmas of Nāropa, known as *Having the Three Beliefs*:¹⁴

Then, when you arise from meditative equipoise, if you look upon whatever appears within your environment, or if you look at the beings around you, you will see them as divine beings and an inconceivable palace. When such a stable concentration comes, in which things appear in that way, and with that essential nature, you will come to be counted among those who have “been purified of believing in ordinary appearances by means of the creation stage.”

On this point, the *Source of Vows* states:

The three realms are in nature the inconceivable palace
and the beings who crave life are residents of the maṇḍala

Āryadeva also states: “Understand that all these various things are the sacred

¹³ Tsongkhapa makes this point explicitly with respect to emptiness itself. See his commentary to a passage from the Hevajra root tantra in *Having the Three Beliefs* (*vid ches gsum ldan*), vol. *ta*, 12b3-4 (26):

As for this lack of being established by nature, or through its very essence, and this “not arising naturally”: It is not as though previously something was not empty and then you established it anew [as being empty] through scripture and reasoning. Rather, it was like that primordially, from the very beginning, and now you are recognizing it to be the case. This is what the phrase “from the very beginning” teaches.

།དེ་འདྲ་བའི་རང་བཞིན་ནས་རོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་མེད་པ་དང་། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མ་སྐྱེས་པ་དེ་ཡང་སྤང་མི་སྤོང་བ་ཅིག་གསར་དུ་ལུང་རིགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱབས་པ་མི་ན་གྱི། ཡེ་གདོད་མ་ནས་དེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་པ་ལ་ཡིན་པར་རོལ་པར་བྱེད་པ་ནི། གདོད་ནས་ཞེས་པས་སྟོན་ནོ།

¹⁴ *vid ches gsum ldan*, vol. *ta*, 11b2-5 (24):

།དེ་ནས་མཉམ་གཞག་ལས་ལངས་ཏེ། སྤྲོད་བཅུད་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་གང་ལར་ལ་སྤྲོད་པ་གཞུགས་པས་ཁང་དུ་བཞུགས་པ་ན། དེ་དང་དེའི་རོ་བོར་འཆར་བའི་ཉིད་ལ་འཛིན་བརྟན་ན་པོ་འབྱུང་བས། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱིས་མ་མཐའ་གྱི་སྤང་བཞིན་སྤངས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གྲངས་སུ་འགྲོ་འོ། །འདི་ཡང་སྤྲོས་པ་འབྱུང་བ་ལས། ཁམས་གསུམ་རང་བཞིན་གཞན་ལ་ཡས་ཁང་། སྤྲོ་ཆགས་རྣམས་ནི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་པ། ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་། འཕགས་པ་ལྟས་ཀྱང་། སྤྲོ་ཆགས་འདི་རྣམས་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་འཁོར་ལོར་ཤེས་པར་གྱིས་དང་མེས་སྤྲོད་ཅི་ལ་འབྱུང་། ཞེས་བཤད་དོ། རྩལ་འདི་ཡང་རིམ་བཤེས་ཀྱི་སྤྲོ་ཆགས་སུ་འབྱུང་དོ།

world of the maṇḍala, and then, O, my mind, how you could ever be mistaken about anything again?” Such a practice, furthermore, comes during both of the stages.

* * *

Two Antidotes Precisely Aimed

In pondering the potential applicability of these ideas to our own situations, it would be especially important to recall that the tendency to take things for granted to which Tsongkhapa refers is not simply a matter of one’s general attitude or intellectual choices. The diagnosis applies to the moment-to-moment consciousness of every ordinary person, regardless of his or her chosen belief system. From Tsongkhapa’s point of view, the diagnosis would apply to the devout monk praying fervently before a statue as much as to someone who actively subscribes to worldviews of scientific materialism, physicalism, or reductionism.¹⁵ Just as there is said to be an “inborn grasping to self” (*bdag ’dzin lhan skyes*) that has nothing to do with learned views, Tsongkhapa treats the tendency to believe that things are normal as an inborn tendency that can be undone only through thousands of hours of deliberate practice and sustained meditation on its direct antidotes. It is not simply a matter of choosing to believe that things have a source in immaculate wisdom, or having faith in a realm where all things are pure, though these inclinations would of course be necessary prerequisites to the decision to engage in such tantric practices. Beyond even a hard-won faith in what is not readily seen, the idea behind the creation stage is that *something must be done, now, to counteract a tendency functioning in the background of every perception one ever has*. It must be a practice that is drastic and all-pervasive, so as to infiltrate each aspect of one’s “normal” life, turning every trace of those appearances and one’s implicit and habitual belief in them upside down. Geshe Khedrup Norsang continued:¹⁶

Therefore, in the system of mantra, both ordinary appearances and the belief in them absolutely must be stopped. These are said to be the unique form of the thing to be abandoned. So briefly, at the time of the creation stage, there are two things to be abandoned and two antidotes. The thing that stops ordinary appearances is clear appearances. Ordinary appearances are the problem. Pure appearances, or clear appearances – the purity of the appearance of a divine being

¹⁵ When speaking on such topics before a class of such present-day monks at Gyutö Monastery, Geshe Norsang only applied the teaching to “us,” (*bdag cag, nga tsho*) and not to any groups deemed as other.

¹⁶ Geshe Khedrup Norsang, February 1st, 2015 (40m40s ff.):

དེ་ཡིན་ཅང་སྤྲུག་གི་ལུགས་ལ་ཡག་ཅ་མཁ་པའི་སྤང་བ་དང་ཞེན་བ་གཉིས་དེ་ངེས་པར་དུ་བཀག་དགོས་ཤིང་ཟེར། ཨོ་ད་འདུག་ཅ་བྱས་ནས། ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སྤང་བ་དེ་ཤིང་ཟེར། མདོར་བསྡུས་ན་སྤང་བ་བྱེད་ཅིས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་སྤང་བ་བྱེད་ཅིས་གཉིས་པོ་གཉིས། ཅ་མཁ་པའི་སྤང་བ་དེ་དགོག་བྱེད་དེ་གསལ་སྤང་བ། ཅ་མཁ་པའི་སྤང་བ་དེ་སྤྱོད། དག་པའི་སྤང་བ་དེ་གསལ་སྤང་བ་དེ་བཤེད་བ། དག་པ་ལྟའི་སྤང་བ་དེ་གཉིས་པོ། དེ་དགོག་བྱེད། ཅ་མཁ་པའི་ཞེན་བ་དེ་སྤྱོད། ལྷའི་ལྷའི་ར་རྒྱལ་དེ་གཉིས་པོ། དེ་ཡིན་ཅང་སྤྱོད་དེ་ལ་ཅ་མཁ་པའི་སྤང་བ་ཞེན་གཉིས། གཉིས་པོ་དེ་ལ་ལྷ་སྤྲུག་གསལ་སྤང་ར་རྒྱལ་གཉིས། ཨོ་འདུག་ཅ་བྱས།

– that is the antidote. That is what stops it. Then, *believing* in ordinary appearances is the problem. The pride of the divine being is the antidote. So there are two problems: ordinary appearances and the belief in them. The two antidotes are the clear appearance of the holy body of a divine being and the pride. So that’s how it is.

Thus, since “taking things for granted” is a two-step process, involving both appearance and belief in it, the theory is that there must be a two-pronged antidote, one that first replaces what is appearing to the mind, and then actively reorients the state of mind with which one apprehends appearances *as* something. In the second step, one would have to learn how to *identify* appearances differently, and this is considered to be the direct antidote to the ordinary identification system, held from beginningless time, which is associated with the affliction of pride, and the way living beings habitually grasp to “me” and “mine.”

As we have already indicated, the prerequisite to establishing, or creating, a new world of appearances is to meditate on the emptiness of what was appearing before. One would have to be able to approximate a perception of emptiness by which the world of ordinary appearances *to which one was grasping* vanishes in the face of one’s perceptions, even for a moment, in order to be able to intuit that there is a “blank slate” of empty reality from which a new world of appearances might legitimately arise. One must also be able to glimpse that any trace of a “me” that could be the object of grasping – an “I” that had been thought to exist naturally as itself, with an identity of its own – has vanished before the perceptions of incisive wisdom.

From that emptiness, or absence, of an inherently existing world and inhabitants, the appearances of a new world and inhabitants are to be created. For the mind of incisive wisdom that begins to recognize its own lack of existing inherently *as* this or *as* that, never ceased to function, never “disappeared” into the emptiness it was perceiving. Thus the stream of awareness is never broken, and with training, a mind can learn to trigger a point at which, from dwelling in meditation upon the absence, a spark of new creativity can begin, due to an intention one set at the beginning.¹⁷ From there, one begins to actively envision the shapes, colors and intricate details of a celestial mansion and pure

¹⁷ See, for example, *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 408a5-408b1 (815-816):

. . . As the accomplished master Ḍoṃbipa says:

Meditating on the aspect of the emptiness of any nature
the yogi must recall again what was prayed before.

This explains that once you have entered into emptiness, then you arise by recalling the prayers you have made before. The sādhana of Saroruha, the Hevajra sādhana of Ghantapāda, and so forth, say it in the same way.

ཐུབ་ཐོབ་ཤིང་བེ་པས། རང་བཞིན་སྣང་པ་ཉིད་དུ་ནཱ་སྣོན་སྣོན་གྱི་ནི། །ནཱ་འཕྱོར་པས་ནི་སྣོན་ལས་རྗེས་སུ་བློན་པར་བྱ། །ཞེས་སྣང་ཉིད་ལ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་སྣོན་ལས་རྗེས་སུ་བློན་པས་ལྷ་བར་བཤད་པའི་བྱིར་དང་མཚོ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་ཐབས་དང་དེའི་བྱ་པའི་གྱི་རྩོད་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་ཐབས་སོགས་ལས་ཀྱང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གསུངས་པ་འདི་བྱིར་རོ།

beings made of light, formulating the conception and the conviction that these are all actual enlightened beings.

Among those enlightened beings, one, or else a male and female couple joined as one, remains at the center. Upon the visualized image of this one, the label “I” is applied – but clearly, it is not the old “me,” for it has nothing to do with the karmically-laden “I” that was dissolved into emptiness before. The pure being who arises now is meant to be an expression of a divine “I AM” (. . . *de nga’o*, Skt. *–ātmako’ham*), not a human one, and ideally, the practitioner who learns to play the part properly has a deep enough understanding of emptiness not to let old habits of thinking “I” get in the way. It is of course not easy to learn to play the role of a divine being, and the practitioner must rehearse the part well, and for a long time, before the gestures and costume and speech patterns, and most importantly the vast, compassionate actions of the central divine being become “second nature” – or even, eventually, the *only* nature one would think to inhabit.

At the stage of creation, then, much is indeed left to mere imagination, for it is understood that the seeds are not yet ripe for a real divine world to appear spontaneously out of emptiness, or in a way that is not contrived by conceptual thought. But traditionally the imagination is not left free to wander, either, as this would tend to make meditative stability very difficult or impossible to reach. As we know, imagination left to its own devices can too easily fall into the clutches of mental afflictions: craving, aversion, and indecision as to what (a limited) “I” would want a divine world to look like. For the beginner, the imagination must be trained; hence in most creation stage practices of unsurpassed yoga tantra, the imagination of the novice is closely guided by a script of instructions, known as the *sādhana*.

With this preliminary explanation, we may return to portions of the passage from Tsongkhapa quoted in the previous section:¹⁸

The *Integration of Practices* states:

Furthermore, it is taught that the same heaps, domains and sensory fields – which have dwelt with an ordinary sense of pride from time without beginning – indeed have the very essence of being made from the extremely subtle particles of All Those Who Have Gone Thus.

What this is saying is that it is taught in the tantras that one should meditate on the heaps and so on *as being Buddhas, as an antidote to the fact they have remained with an ordinary sense of pride from time without beginning*. . . .

According to what Tsongkhapa cites here from Āryadeva’s *Integration of Practices*, the practitioner of unsurpassed yoga is directed to envision the five heaps, the domains of sense, and so on, as being actually formed from “the extremely subtle particles” of

¹⁸ See Chapter Four, note 7.

Buddhas, or All Those Who Have Gone Thus (Skt. *sarvatathāgata*). Within the Guhyasamāja system this involves detailed visualizations of a gathering of thirty-two divine beings (the “Secret Gathering,” which would be one translation for “*guhyasamāja*”), whose identities are named and described in order to map them onto the heaps, domains, sensory fields, joints, ligaments, and so forth. Here, rather than simply meditating on the fact these parts have no inherent nature, as one would in a sūtra context, one actively attributes to them a *new* nature: the identity of these male and female Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and fierce protectors. Even though the precise appearance of each image must arise uniquely from the imaginative storehouse of the individual practitioner, the colors, shapes, and dramatic sequence of images can still be very closely guided by a descriptive recitation text, such as those that Tsongkhapa approved for his immediate disciples.¹⁹

In itself, the visualization is aimed at training the mind to experience appearances differently, but it is the identification with those extraordinary appearances – “I am that” – which Tsongkhapa will call the primary practice. The seminal point is that from time without beginning, the mind is said to have latched onto appearances not only in a way that makes them seem to come from their own side, naturally, and therefore inevitably, but in a way that the mind then fastens a “pride” to that, a sense of identity, a sense of “me”: i.e., “This is me,” and “These are my heaps.” Thus one might say that basic grasping to a self “freezes” the impression of what appears; then, taking it to be ordinary reinforces that further, and appears to reassure us that it is normal for things to be real. But what this theory proposes is that *this* is the moment of tragedy, for it is on this basis that the rest of the mental afflictions arise, as described, for example, in the twelve links, when misunderstanding the nature of a feeling of contact produces craving, and so on.

In Tsongkhapa’s *Steps of the Path* presentation on how the mental afflictions develop, we witness the central role that pride has to play in the unfolding of the cycle of suffering. It is not one of the famous “three poisons” (ignorance, desire, and disliking), but in Tsongkhapa’s presentation it does take on an importance close to that of the “fatal flaw” or “first deadly sin” as described in other traditions.²⁰ So it is and should be jarring

¹⁹ See for example the close relationship between Tsongkhapa’s detailed instructions for how to meditate on a Guhyasamāja sādhana, *The Steps of Pure Yoga: A Method for Reaching the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*dpal gsang ba ’dus pa’i sgrub thabs rnal ’byor dag pa’i rim pa*), vol. *ja* (691-754), which, according to the colophon and style was clearly written by Tsongkhapa himself, and the *Supplement for Verbal Recitation of the Ritual for the Maṇḍala of the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*dpal gsang ba ’dus pa’i dkyil ’khor gyi cho ga’i ngag ’don lhan thabs*), vol. *cha* (629-663), written down “according to what was spoken by . . . the Precious Master Lobsang Drakpa himself” by “the disciple named Drakpa Gyaltsen” (18a5). There are several other recitation “supplements” like it, such as the one recorded by Khedrup Je Gelek Pel Zangpo (*dpal gsang pa ’dus pa’i sgrub thabs kyi lhan thabs*), in *rje’i gsung ’bum*, vol. *na* (20-51). The recitation text currently used by the monks at Gyutö Monastery is based upon a slight evolution of these “supplements” over the generations, but most of the language still bears an extremely close resemblance to Tsongkhapa’s wording in the *Steps of Pure Yoga*.

²⁰ See *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 152a2-3 (335):

Pride is this: On the basis of the view of the destructible collection, the mind gets puffed up insofar as it

at first to see the practice of asserting a “divine pride” praised as the most important part of the creation stage. It is important to note that the Tibetan word for pride is *nga rgyal* (“nga gyel”), which literally means “I am king,” or “I am victorious.” One might easily see how this applies to the ordinary false sense of pride that arises when grasping to a self causes one to assert “me” as opposed to and better than “other,” and so on. But one also might be able to intuit how, within a Buddhist context, the only kind of being truly worthy of such an assertion of royal identity would be the Buddha: “I am king,” or “I am victorious” over the mental afflictions and the whole of suffering existence.

Furthermore, from a Buddhist point of view, the only kind of mind that is legitimately exalted above all else is the omniscient wisdom of a Buddha. Thus, if the mind of a sentient being still struggling along on the path could pull the rug out from under all habitual identification with a limited and falsely conceited “me,” and instead place the association that forms the bond of a merely labeled identity delicately upon the ocean of divine wisdom appearing in the form of a celestial being, then, at last, the “pride” of an identity would be appropriately designated upon that which is worthy of praise and exaltation. But it would have nothing to do with “me” in the ordinary sense. Then, theoretically, for as long as one could associate fully even with an *imagined* “character” identity of the Buddha, in place of the habitual character identity of a karmically-driven “me,” one would be able to short-circuit the way that karma was being planted and perpetuated within the mindstream of the one who is still a sentient being.

Thus, in a way that is similar to the transformation of the basic mental affliction of desire through the “path of passion,” the practice of identification with a divine being is intended to slice through, undercut, and utterly “overcome ordinary pride.” It is also important to recognize that as one becomes accustomed to Tsongkhapa’s use of the term pride in the tantric context, the meaning actually changes. Grammatically, he uses it much more often in the sense of an “identification” of *this* appearance *as this* enlightened

focuses on what is high or low, good or bad, and it engages itself in the aspect of being higher.

།ད་ཀྱི་ལ་ནི། འཇིག་ལྷ་ལ་བརྟེན་ཏེ་བྱིའམ་ནང་གི་མཛོ་དམན་དང་བཟང་ངན་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་སེམས་ཁེངས་པ་སྟེ། མཛོ་བའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་ཏུ་འབྱུག་པ་འོ།

The discussion of how the afflictions develop continues at *ibid.*, 152b4-153a4 (336-337), including:

Insofar as you hold to a self through the view of the destructible collection, you cut a distinction between the importance of yourself vs. that of others, and having made that division, you are attached to what pertains to you and you feel antipathy towards that which pertains to ‘other.’ Furthermore, focusing on yourself, you get puffed up, and you hold that very self to be either unchanging, or else utterly non-existent, and you hold those views of self, as well as the wrong behaviors associated with them, to be supreme.

།དེ་ཡང་འཇིག་ལྷ་ས་བདག་ཏུ་བརྟེན་བ་ན་རང་གཞན་སོ་སོ་བར་རིས་སྤྱ་གཙོད་པར་བྱེད་ལ། དེ་ལྟར་བཅད་ནས་རང་གི་སྤྱོགས་ལ་ཆགས་པ་དང་གཞན་གྱི་སྤྱོགས་ལ་ཞེ་སྤང་འབྱུང་ཞིང་བདག་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་ཁེངས་པ་ཡང་སྟེ། བདག་དེ་ཉིད་ལ་རྟག་ཆད་ཏུ་འཛིན་ཅིང་བདག་ཏུ་ལྟ་བ་སོགས་དང་དེ་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་ལ་མཛོག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པ་སྟེ་འོ།

See also, Jowita Kramer, 2013, “A Study of the *Samskāra* Section of Vasubandhu’s *Pañcaskandhaka*,” 1005-1006 and 1015-1017 for an excellent summation of the definitions of pride found in the *Pañcaskandhaka*, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, *Yogācārabhūmi*, and *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, respectively.

being, and rarely in the explicit sense of exaltation. Through practice, one learns to place the mere empty label of “I” upon the image of what is visualized to be a real enlightened being, with all the extraordinary qualities of a Buddha. But in doing so, one is canceling all the afflicted ways of being “I,” and in their place, learning to abide within, inhabit, and gradually believe oneself incorporated into the inconceivable body of the divine “I AM,” which holds no reified object whatsoever. In the course of a *sādhana*, this is understood to be the very same divine being towards whom one has already expressed one’s faith and reverence in the process of a practice of devotion to the enlightened Teacher, envisioned in the form of the divine being who is the center of the *maṇḍala*.²¹ Simply speaking, to imagine taking on the identity of the Buddha is to imagine becoming what one believes one’s Teacher already is. So, taking into account the full scope of Tsongkhapa’s instructions for Vajrayāna practice, I would posit that, done properly, the act of transferring one’s entire sense of identity to that of the divine “I AM” would be the most profound act of humility that a human being can perform. For you do not even get to be human any more. You give up your very identity – and all the limited likes and dislikes that went along with it – in service of an infinitely higher reason for existing at all, as a pure awareness who says “I.”

It remains for us to examine at length the philosophical grounding that would be necessary to practice this step of identification with divinity authentically, in Tsongkhapa’s view. For now, however, we continue with his initial exposition of the two antidotes to the unique problems to be abandoned.²²

Here is what it means to reverse ordinary pride and transfer it to the pride of a divine being. For example, when primordial knowing has thoroughly come upon you, you will have cast aside the way you used to hold yourself to be this or that, and it turns into a thought of “I am this divinity.” During the course of that

²¹ See (as one of many examples of this principle) *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 404a6-404b1 (807-808):

Thus it says that one should gather goodness in relation to the field for gathering goodness, and here, furthermore, the Teacher is explained to be the field for gathering goodness. The commentary to the *Tent* and many other books explain that the Teacher and the central figure of the *maṇḍala* are not different from one another.

ཁྱེས་ཚོགས་ཞིང་ལ་ཚོགས་བསག་པར་གསུངས་ཤིང་དེར་སྒྲ་མ་ཡང་ཚོགས་ཞིང་དུ་བཤད་པ་ལ་སྒྲ་མ་དང་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་གཙོ་བོ་མ་མེད་དུ་བྱེད་པ་གྲུང་འགྲེལ་ལ་ལོགས་པ་མང་སོས་བཤད་ཅིང་ . . .

²² *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 375b3-376a3 (750-751):

ཁ་མལ་བའི་དང་རྒྱལ་ལོག་ནས་ལྷའི་དང་རྒྱལ་དུ་འཕྱོས་བ་ནི། དཔེར་ན། ཡེ་ཤེས་ལེགས་པར་མེད་པས་བ་ན་སྤར་གྱི་རང་ཉིད་གང་ཡིན་པའི་འཛིན་སྤངས་དེ་དོར་ནས་ལྷ་ཡིན་ནོ་སྤངས་པའི་བསམ་པ་འགྱུར་འཁྲོ་བ་བཞིན་དུ་མི་བསྐྱོད་པ་དང་རྣམ་སྤངས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤངས་པའི་བསམ་པ་བཅས་མ་དེ་འགྱུར་ནས་ལྷའི་དང་རྒྱལ་དུ་འཕྱོས་བ་ལ་བྱའོ། །འདི་ལ་ཁ་ཅིག་ལ་ལྷའི་དང་རྒྱལ་མ་བཅས་པ་སྤྱེ་ཡང་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་སྤངས་བ་གསལ་སོ་མེད་པ་དང་ཁ་ཅིག་ལ་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་སྤངས་བ་གསལ་སོ་ཡོད་ཀྱང་བཅས་མིན་གྱི་དང་རྒྱལ་མེད་པ་དང་ཁ་ཅིག་ལ་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡོད་པ་དང་གཉིས་ཀ་མེད་པ་སྟེ་སྤྱི་བཞི་ཡོད་པར་སྤང་ངོ། །མདོ་བསྟེ་ལས། དེ་ལྷར་ལས་དང་སོ་བ་རྣམས་རབ་ཏུ་འཇུག་པའི་དམ་ཆེག་དང་སྟོན་པ་དང་དབང་བསྐྱར་བ་ཐོབ་པས་མ་མལ་བའི་དང་རྒྱལ་དང་བྲལ་བས་ཐུན་བཞིར་ལྷའི་རྣམ་འཛོམས་སྟོན་པས། ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་གཞུང་གཞན་ལས་ཀྱང་ཁ་མལ་བའི་དང་རྒྱལ་བསལ་བ་ཞེས་མང་དུ་གསུངས་པས་ཁ་མལ་བའི་དང་རྒྱལ་གྱི་གཉིན་སོར་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་བའི་དང་རྒྱལ་སྟོན་པ་ནི་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་ལ། ཁ་མལ་བའི་སྤངས་བ་བསྐྱོག་པའི་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་སྤངས་བ་བྱེད་པར་ཅན་སྟོན་པ་ནི། དེའི་ཡན་ལག་གོ།

transformation, the contrived thoughts of “It is the Unshakeable One,” or “It is the Maker of Appearances,” and so forth, begin to change, and are to be transferred over into the pride of a divine being.

In this regard, for some, an uncontrived divine pride arises, but there is no clarity in the appearance of a world and beings. For some, there is the clarity of an appearing world and beings, but there is not the uncontrived pride. For some there are both, and for some there are neither, so it appears that there can be all four possibilities.

As *Mixed with the Sūtras* states: “In this way beginners who have entered thoroughly and received the empowerment and vows and commitments meditate on a yoga of the divine being in four sessions, free of ordinary pride.” Many other sacred treatises as well state that one must “clear away ordinary pride.” Hence the antidote for ordinary pride is meditating with the pride of a maṇḍala – a world and its beings. This is the main thing, while meditating in particular on the appearances of a world and its beings, in order to overcome ordinary appearances, is the auxiliary branch.

From the outset, then, Tsongkhapa explains *divine* pride from the perspective of someone who has experienced the descent of primordial knowing (*ye shes babs pa*), and tasted the indwelling mind of clear light, whether through an extraordinary breakthrough during empowerment, or more likely after a long time, through diligent and unbroken practice of the two stages. For someone who has even once gained an authentic glimpse of the lack of a “me” that could bear any nature of its own, and furthermore tasted, with full awareness, the great bliss of winds dissolving into the area of the heart, much less the indestructible drop, there would be an irrefutable understanding, however brief or limited, of the nature of the “primordial knowing” that is the real identity of any one of the divine beings visualized in a maṇḍala. Only that indwelling mind of clear light could serve as a valid basis for positing immaculate purity, and the beings of the sacred world are simply expressions of that primordial wisdom.

If one says, or thinks, “It is the Unshakeable One” (i.e., Akṣobhya) and understands the meanings behind the symbolism of each of the five Buddhas Gone Thus,²³ then one knows that this is an identification with a completely purified heap of

²³ I will not be able to treat these symbolisms, nor the extensive details associated with the Guhyasamāja practice in particular, here. Some of this general content is well known to scholarship, and need not be repeated here, while the details of mantra and accoutrement explained by Tsongkhapa in his Guhyasamāja works are so specific to the practice as to be out of place for our philosophical inquiry at hand. For an excellent overview of comparable material, see, for example, Daniel Cozort, 2005, *Highest Yoga Tantra* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), as well as Master Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, 1995, translated by Tenzin Dorjee, *Paths and Grounds of Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna, With Commentary by Geshe Losang Tsephel* (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives). See also: Roger Wright, 2010, *The Guhyasamāja Piṇḍikṛta-sādhana and Its Context*.

consciousness that (a) already exists where Buddhas are, (b) is a future result for one's own mindstream with which one is identifying in advance, and (c) is a present and ever-accessible possibility if one has penetrated deeply enough into the pure ground of awareness itself, i.e., one's own indwelling mind of clear light. Without such understandings in place, identification with a mere mental picture of a sapphire-colored Buddha with six arms would not even be a properly contrived divine pride, much less an uncontrived one.²⁴ Further, if one's ordinary pride had not first been severed through accurate meditation on selflessness, the whole practice could turn rancid indeed. We will return in Chapter Six to examine how Tsongkhapa might have understood the valid basis upon which a practitioner might affirm purity at all.

In any case, as Tsongkhapa repeats again and again, one must become accustomed to any preliminary breakthrough experience over a long time in order for it to become stable and uncontrived. Still, I believe his point above is that even the initial, contrived identification with the deity, which *must* be the practice of the beginner, is still in theory based on the actual experience of an advanced yogi.²⁵ Through empowerment, or transmission of energy through a lineage, the intent is that through faith and logical understanding, the disciple might begin to participate in what the teacher, or the teacher's teacher, or the teacher's teacher's teacher, has already realized in actuality. But even if an authentic experience does take place within the charged ritual environment of an empowerment ceremony, it is the consistency of practice that follows which will determine whether the “seeds” planted at that special time can ripen to maturity. I will not be able to treat the rich topic of Vajrayāna empowerment here, but it is crucial to keep in mind how indispensable both the idea of proper empowerment and the keeping of vows and daily commitments remain throughout Tsongkhapa's vision of how tantra works.²⁶

²⁴ See Tsongkhapa's explanation later in the *Steps of Mantra*, translated in Appendix Nine (767-768).

²⁵ See, for example, Tsongkhapa's comment when explaining the *Om śūnyatā* mantra (to be discussed here in Chapter Six) in his *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* (*rnam gzhag rim pa'i rnam bshad*), vol. *cha*, 86b2-5 (174), emphasis mine:

The meaning of this mantra when meditating through mere conviction during the “enlightenment from the actual nature of the way things are” belonging to the first stage is, as it says [in the tantric Nāgārjuna's *Abbreviated Practice*, the *Pinḍīkṛtasādhana*], “explained to be the dharmakāya,” which comes at the very end of the process by which the heaps and so on dissolve, according to the stages of death, *during the complete stage*. From this statement that one manifests the clear light, dharmakāya, you should also understand what the statements – such as that during the first stage one creates the “Original Protector,” and that he turns into the emanation body, and so on – *will come to mean during the complete stage*.
 འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་ལས་བྱུང་ཆུབ་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་མོས་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་སྒྲོམ་པའི་ཐུགས་དེའི་དོན་རྒྱུགས་རིམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་འཆི་བའི་རིམ་པ་བཞིན་དུ་བྱུང་
 མོས་པ་ཐེག་པའི་མཐའ་། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེད་ཡང་བཤད་པ་ཡིན། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ཆོས་སྐྱེད་ཀྱི་གསལ་མཛོན་དུ་བྱེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་འདིས་རིམ་པ་དང་མོར་དང་
 བའི་མགོན་པོ་བསྐྱེད་པ་དང་དེ་སྐུལ་སྐུར་བསྐུར་བ་མོགས་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་རྒྱུགས་རིམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་རྗེ་ལྷ་ར་འགྲུར་བཤེས་པར་བྱ་དགོས་སོ།

²⁶ The two works most relevant to such discussion would be Tsongkhapa's *Illumination of the Very Nature of the Meaning of Empowerment: A Ritual for the Guhyasamāja Maṇḍala of Akṣobhyavajra* (*dpal gsang ba 'dus pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga dbang gi don gyi de nyid rab tu gsal ba*), vol. *ca* (which to my knowledge remains untranslated) as well as the *Golden Harvest of Attainments: An Explanation of the Ethical Discipline of Secret Mantra* (*gsang sngags kyi tshul khrims kyi rnam bshad dngos grub kyi snye*

During this initial presentation, however, Tsongkhapa is primarily concerned to explain the philosophical theory for how the two antidotes function.²⁷

The thing to be abandoned, ordinary appearances, is not the vessel and its inhabitants that appear to the sensory consciousnesses. Rather, it is the ordinary vessel and inhabitants that appear to the *mental consciousness*. As for the way that both this and ordinary pride are stopped through the creation stage, it would be meaningless if at this point the seeds were to be abandoned in the way that they are abandoned via a path beyond the world. It is also not as though the seeds are abandoned in their manifest form, through being suppressed, as they are abandoned via a worldly path.²⁸

ma), vol. ka. The latter has been translated in Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa and Gareth Sparham, 2005, *Tantric Ethics: An Explanation of the Precepts for Buddhist Vajrayāna Practice* (Boston: Wisdom Publications).

²⁷ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. ga, 376a3-377a2 (751-753), emphasis mine:

ལྷན་བྱེད་ཐ་མཐུ་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ནི། དབང་པོའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་སྒྲུང་བའི་སྒྲིབ་བཅུད་མིན་གྱི་ཡིད་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ཐ་མཐུ་གྱི་སྒྲིབ་བཅུད་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་དང་ཐ་མཐུ་པའི་ད་ལྟའི་གཉིས་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱིས་འགོག་ཚུལ་ནི། འཇིག་རྟེན་ལས་འདས་པའི་ལམ་གྱིས་སྒྲོང་བ་ལྟར་ས་པོན་སྒྲོང་བ་སྐབས་འདིར་འོང་དོན་མེད་ལ། འཇིག་རྟེན་པའི་ལམ་གྱིས་སྒྲོང་བ་ལྟར་ས་པོན་ཉམས་སྒྲིབ་ནས་མངོན་གྲུང་སྒྲོང་བ་ཡང་མིན་ནོ། །འོན་ཏེ་ལྟར་འགོག་སྒྲུབ་ན། སྒྲོ་བུར་བའི་འགལ་ཆེན་གཞན་མེད་པ་ན་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་དགྱིལ་འཁོར་དེ་དང་དེའི་ད་ལྟའི་བཟུངས་པའི་ཆེ་སྒྲར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་ད་ལྟའི་དུ་འཕོ་རྒྱས་པ་དང་དགྱིལ་འཁོར་གཉིས་གསལ་བཏབ་པའི་ཆེ་གསལ་གང་བཏབ་པ་བཞེན་དུ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་སྒྲུབ་ནས་ཡིད་པོའི་ཐ་མཐུ་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་བསྐྱོག་པའི་ཚུལ་དེས་ཐ་མཐུ་པའི་སྒྲུང་ཞེན་གཉིས་སྒྲོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འདི་ཡང་ཅུང་ཟད་པའི་བར་དུ་སྒྲོག་རྒྱས་པས་མི་ཆོག་གི་ཤིན་ཏུ་བརྟན་པ་ཅིག་དགོས་སོ། །འདི་འདྲའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་སྒྲོན་དུ་བསྐྱེན་པ་ལས་སུ་རུང་བར་བྱས་པའི་རྗེ་རྒྱུ་བ་དཔོན་ན་རྣམས་ལ་ནི། ས་ཆོག་གི་བགཏགས་ལ་བཀའ་སྒྲོ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཆེ། དེ་དཔལ་ལྷན་རྗེ་རྗེ་འཆང་། ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱིས་རང་ཉིད་རྗེ་རྗེ་འཆང་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ད་ལྟའི་བྱེད་པ་ན་དེ་དང་དེའི་ད་ལྟའི་བཅོས་མིན་སྒྲུབ་པ་དེ་ལྟར་བྱ་མིན་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ནི། ཆོག་ཙམ་གྱི་ད་ལྟའི་དུ་འཕོ་བས་སྒྲོན་དུ་བསྐྱེན་པ་གལ་ཆེ་བར་གསུངས་སོ། །ཆོག་ཙམ་མིན་པའི་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་གྱི་ད་ལྟའི་དང་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡང་དང་པོར་ཆོག་ཙམ་གྱི་བཅོས་མའི་ད་ལྟའི་དང་སྒྲུང་བ་སྒྲོམ་པ་གོམས་པ་ལས་སྒྲུབ་དགོས་པས་ཐོག་མར་དེ་ལ་འབད་དོ། །གོམས་པ་ཆེ་བས་ལྷའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལ་མཉམས་པར་བཞག་པ་ན་མིག་གི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་གཞན་མི་འཆར་བ་ནི། ཡིད་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་དོན་དེ་ལ་རྗེས་སུ་ཞུགས་དགས་པས་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཤེས་པ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་དེ་མ་ཐག་ཆེན་གྱི་རྒྱས་པ་ཉམས་པས་དེ་དག་རེ་ཤིག་མ་སྒྲུབ་པས་ཁ་དོག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་གཞན་མ་ཤར་བ་ཡིན་གྱི་སྒྲུང་བ་དེ་དག་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱིས་བཀག་པ་མིན་ཏེ། རིགས་པའི་རྒྱལ་པོས། རྣམ་ཤེས་དོན་གཞན་ཆགས་པ་ཡིས། རྒྱས་མེད་དོན་གཞན་མི་འཛིན་ཕྱིར། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་བཞེན་ནོ། །དེས་ན་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་གྱི་སྒྲུང་བས་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དོར་ཐ་མཐུ་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་འགོག་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་ཐོབ་ན་དེས་དགོས་པ་འབྱུང་བོ།

²⁸ That is, “a path beyond the world” refers to the direct perception of emptiness by an ārya. Since within Tsongkhapa’s presentation of Guhyasamāja one is not said to reach the path of seeing until the clear light of the fourth stage of the complete stage, it would be “meaningless” if one expected the practices of the creation stage alone to eliminate the afflictions of self-grasping and belief in ordinary appearances, along with their seeds, in the categorical way that an “uninterrupted path” of the direct perception of emptiness would do. On the other hand, it is not as though the seeds for those afflictions are merely suppressed temporarily, due to a deep state of concentration on something else, as would be the case in the “worldly” meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms.

When I asked Geshe Khedrup Norsang (February 1st, 2015, 59m15s) whether someone who had already reached the state of an ārya via a sūtra path would still need to meditate on the creation stage in order to overcome belief in ordinary appearances, he said that because the bodhisattva ārya’s meditation on emptiness would already be so stable, it would be “very easy,” and such a person “would not need to meditate on creation stage” (*bskyed rim sgom dgos kyi ma red*). He went on to mention that there are scriptures that describe how a bodhisattva ārya of the tenth level can enter the path of unsurpassed tantra

Suppose you wonder, then, ‘How are they stopped?’ If there is no other opposing condition that comes up suddenly, when you are apprehending the maṇḍala of a world and beings, along with its pride, you are able to transfer your pride as explained before. When you visualize the two maṇḍalas [of beings and their world] clearly, *then whatever you visualize, even as you do so, an extremely clear appearance of it arises*. Then the appearance of ordinariness to the mind is overcome, and by this means, both ordinary appearances and the insistent belief in them are overcome. For this, it is not enough just to be able to overcome them every once in a while, but it is something that must become extremely stable.

For those Vajra Masters who have become fit for the work by using these methods to perform an “approach retreat” beforehand, then, when they command the obstructing spirits and so forth during a consecration ritual for a site, and they speak, “I am the glorious Vajradhara,” and so on, and thus affirm the pride of Vajradhara and so on, a Holder of the Vajra and the pride of his identity arise without contrivance. But for those who are not like that, their pride will be in mere words, so it is said to be of great importance to perform the approach retreat in advance.

Still, an extraordinary pride and appearances that are not mere words must arise from one’s having become accustomed to meditating on appearances and pride that *were* at first contrived from mere words. So from the beginning you must strive at that.

If, from immense familiarity, you settle in balanced meditation upon the yoga of a divine being, no other appearance will dawn before the consciousness of the eye and so forth. Because the mental consciousness has engaged with that object so intensely, the power of the immediately-preceding condition for the arising of the

directly through the complete stage, at the point of realizing the actual clear light, indicating that such a person would not need to meditate on the creation stage at all.

On the other hand, when I asked a few days later (February 4th, 2015, 1h11m40s) whether, due to the close relationship between grasping to a self and belief in ordinary appearances, someone who had powerful incisive wisdom realizing emptiness via the sūtra path would automatically be able to stop belief in ordinary appearances, even without receiving tantric empowerment, his reply was that such a person would only be able to stop the belief in ordinary appearances that is *related to* grasping to things as real (*bden ’dzin dang ’brel ba’i tha mal snang zhen de bkag thub kyi red ba*), but that such a person would not be able to stop the unique belief in ordinary appearances to be abandoned by the Mantrayāna (*sngags kyi thun mong ma yin pa’i spang bya tha mal snang zhen de bkag thub kyi ma red zer*), because it would not arise automatically for such a person to see his heap of form as the Buddha Vairocana, his feelings as the Buddha Ratnasambhava, and so on. This would specifically require the experience of empowerment to plant those unique seeds; otherwise reality would not automatically dawn as divine beings in a maṇḍala (*gang snang tha’i rnam pa shar gyi ma red*).

I leave it to the analysis of my reader whether these two answers are contradictory, or whether they leave room for the difference between a sūtra practitioner who has merely reached very good meditation on emptiness and an ārya bodhisattva of the tenth level. (I had not specified “an ārya” during the second question, though I wish I had, to be able to draw an exact parallel between the logic of the two answers.)

consciousness of the eye and so forth will decline. Since, for the time being, those do not arise, other appearances such as colors and so forth do not dawn, but it is not as though those appearances were something stopped *by* the creation stage. It is as the King of Reasoning says:

Through attachment to another object
the consciousness loses power;
because it no longer grasps the other object.

Therefore, if, through extraordinary appearances, you gain the ability to stop the *appearance of ordinarieness to the mental consciousness*, you have achieved its purpose. Even if you do not experience the divinity as a real, functioning being, if uncontrived pride in the divine identity arises, you have achieved its purpose.

* * *

What Tsongkhapa is proposing is that if, through extensive repetition, one can reach the point where a vivid vision of the maṇḍala and its divine inhabitants arises consistently every time one enters meditation, and one can remain in balanced meditation focused upon that vision for extended periods of time, then there will, during that time, simply be no opportunity for ordinary appearances to arise. The way the visualization of “clear” or “pure” appearances is meant to work upon the mind, however, is somewhat more complex than it may sound from such a brief description. First, it is important to note Tsongkhapa’s statement that the ordinary appearances which are to be abandoned are not the colors, sounds, textures, and so on, that appear directly to the sensory consciousnesses. This is reasonable insofar as the physical senses cannot make a judgment as to “what” something is; they simply take in sensory data proper to that sense faculty. It is only the mind that can distinguish ontologically between a “vase” and a “tree,” and it is only the mind that has the capacity to make qualitative distinctions such as “ordinary” vs. “special,” or “mundane” vs. “sacred.” Thus even at the level of *appearances*, and not yet the insistent belief in them, it is the state of the mental consciousness that must be addressed, and not necessarily that of the physical senses.

This is an extremely important point to note for those practitioners who may have been working at a creation stage sādhaṇa for many years, even within intensive retreat environments, and still wonder why, outside of meditation, trees and mountains and rivers, even highways and garbage dumps, still appear to the senses with all their solidity, such that the mind could so easily take them to be “ordinary.” Tsongkhapa is making it very clear in this passage that one should not expect the result of creation stage meditation to be that eventually one gets up from the cushion and only the pure images of the maṇḍala appear to the *senses* and nothing else. On the contrary, as long as one dwells in the heaps produced by karma, ordinary appearances produced by past karmic dispositions will continue to arise as objects of the sensory faculties. Rather, it is the *mental judgment* that “this is ordinary” which is supposed to diminish gradually, as well

as the identification with that judgment, which firmly believes it to be true, and which is a kind of pride. While still at the stage of creation, and without having begun to transform reality at the fundamental level of very subtle winds and mind, one would simply not yet have the capacity to modify the basic constitution of one's body or physical environment as it appears to the senses.²⁹

Nonetheless, Tsongkhapa invokes the reasoning of Dharmakīrti, as he does frequently in his creation stage treatises, to say that as a phenomenon incidental to the condition of single-pointed meditation on the creation stage, ordinary sights and sounds will in fact stop appearing to the sense faculties, during the periods of deep meditation. This is due to the fact that, even in everyday life, when one is intensely concentrated on one thing, the other sense faculties lose their power to pick up data. For example, by force of intense mental concentration on the visual field of a computer screen and the mental content related to it, I might fail to hear the words of a conversation taking place just outside in the hallway. The technical term that Tsongkhapa employs to explain this phenomenon is the “immediately-preceding condition,” one of the “four conditions” we examined in Chapter One.³⁰ That is, sense consciousnesses are understood to continue in a stream just like the mental consciousness; but when attention paid to the auditory field severely declines, the capacity for one moment of auditory consciousness to give rise to the next moment of such consciousness is weakened, until one is not aware of “hearing” anything at all, even if the physical faculty remains unblocked and undamaged. This is a regular phenomenon of deep meditation described in many Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources, but the reason Tsongkhapa references it here is to say that *this* decline in ordinary appearances is not what is stopped by the specific content of the creation stage meditations, either. It is more like a side-effect, and would have happened if one gained single-pointedness approaching meditative stillness with respect to any object, even one not related to a tantric sādhana. This does not mean it is not important, for Tsongkhapa insists numerous times that one must reach definitive meditative stillness – in which the sense faculties would be completely withdrawn – during the period of the creation stage. But it is not the meaning of overcoming ordinary appearances.

²⁹ Although certain “worldly” accomplishments, such as clairvoyance and other extra-sensory powers are indeed said to come later in the development of the creation stage alone, these would still not be the same as the capacity to literally “create” a new body and a new world made of nothing more than winds and mind, as the yogi who has reached both the approximate and actual clear light would be said to have the ability to do.

³⁰ For a precise statement of this principle, see Tsongkhapa's *Commentary on the Chapter on Direct Perception* [from Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*] *Rendered by the Dharma Lord Khedrup According to the Speech of the Lord* [Tsongkhapa] (*mngon gsum le'u'i tlkka rje'i gsung bzhin mkhas grub chos rjes mdzad pa*), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *ma*, 4b1 (610), also cited in Appendix Ten:

As for the pair of the sense faculty and the mental consciousness: The directly perceiving sense faculty must act as an immediately-preceding condition, and give rise to the directly perceiving mental consciousness. Thus it is taught according to the sequence of cause and effect.

[དབང་ཡིད་གཉིས་པོ་ནི། དབང་མཛོན་དེ་མ་ཐག་རྒྱུ་དུ་བྱས་པ་ལས་ཡིད་མཛོན་སྡེ་དགོས་པས་རྒྱ་ལྗས་ཀྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞིན་བསྐྱེད་པའོ།]

Rather, Tsongkhapa says one has achieved the purpose of visualizing the maṇḍala if, whether during or in-between formal meditation sessions, the appearance to the mental consciousness that “this is a normal house,” “this is my normal body,” and so on, does not arise. By sheer habituation to thousands of hours of active visualization, one is able to generate, or create, an appearance to the mental consciousness that is vivid and extremely clear. Tsongkhapa even states further on that during the very advanced periods of creation stage, the line between meditation sessions and break periods virtually disappears, because one is able to project the vision of the entire maṇḍala instantly, with all its exquisite details and radiant beings, at any time.³¹ Thus it is the capacity to enter, more and more readily, that alternative world and the way it appears to mental consciousness, that will eventually stop, or cancel, the appearances of things *as* ordinary. Because there are, in addition, many practices aimed at transforming one’s apprehension of outer substances, one would have furthermore created the propensity to “see” one thing via the senses, but effectively label it as something else. Through a well-honed alternative habit of canceling the appearance of something as being ordinary, and replacing that mental view with a conception of something as pure, as an offering, as being made of crystal light and vivid color, one gradually learns to reverse the tendencies to see colors and shapes and then think them normal, to hear sounds and think them annoying, to taste a taste and crave more for “myself,” and so on.

The images appearing to the senses when one is not in a deep state of meditation may not yet have changed, but the *way in which one apprehends* things has begun to change drastically. According to Tsongkhapa, this total overhaul of one’s perceptions will not become stable until one has done the scripted visualizations so consistently and reached such a meditative clarity that the intensely lucid vision of sacred appearances can arise instantaneously. Then the inconceivable palace and its divine inhabitants appear as clearly and spontaneously if they were actually present. A vague idea or hazy image will not be strong enough to counteract the habit for ordinary perception that we have held from time without beginning. Rather, the ramparts and crystalline walls of the heavenly palace would appear as, or more, clearly than the walls of one’s meditation hut, and the sacred beings would seem as real as if a friend had just walked into the room. Nonetheless, he admits repeatedly that one must still start out at a level where there is only the thought or conviction that things are other than they ordinarily appear; if one

³¹ See, for example, *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 381a1-2 (761), in reference to the third stage of the creation stage, when one has “gained some small power in primordial wisdom” (*ye shes la cung zad dbang thob pa*):

Once you have reached this point, it is stated that it is not necessary to make a separation between individual sessions and break periods. So, it is permissible not to do the meditation by starting the realization practice [i.e., *sādhana*] all over again from the beginning many times every day; rather you create it anew every once in a while.

།འདིར་སྒྲེབ་ནས་ཐུན་མཆམས་སོ་སོར་གཙོད་མི་དགོས་པར་གསུངས་པས་ཉིན་ཞག་རེ་ལ་མངོན་རྟོགས་གསར་དུ་མགོ་བཙུགས་ནས་སྒྲོམ་པ་མང་པོ་མི་བྱེད་པར་སྐྱེད་ཐབས་རེས་ཆག་གོ།

demanded perfect visualization the first time one would never be able to start, much less begin to make progress.³²

All this was meant to address the mere *appearances* of things as commonplace. What Tsongkhapa considers even more important is that one be able to identify *as* divine, and *as* “me,” the extraordinary clear appearance visualized in place of the appearance of one’s ordinary body. Tsongkhapa takes as an example the situation of a practitioner who is called upon to assume the role of a ritual master in a ceremony to consecrate a place in preparation for an empowerment, the building of a temple or stupa, or other major ritual activity. In such a ceremony, the leader is expected to invite and exhort members of the unseen world of local spirits, protectors, and so on. But a mere human being has no power to command the spirit world; it is only from the perspective of believing that a real Buddha is present, one who can with infinite compassion make offerings to and command with authority a host of beings *who are not unseen from the Buddha’s perspective*, that the ritual would make sense.³³ The words, actions and special mantras of the ritual text are provided in order to guide those human practitioners who do not yet actually understand how to communicate directly with the spirit world; it is acknowledged that one need not *actually* be a Buddha yet in order to perform the ritual successfully and make peace with the spirits inhabiting the site to be consecrated. Yet Tsongkhapa chides anyone who might attempt to perform such a ritual without having first made concerted efforts at creation stage practice in solitude.³⁴

Indeed, one of the transgressions of Vajrayāna ethical code is stated to involve attempting to perform such outer maṇḍalic activity without first having begun to purify one’s mind through one or more “approach” retreats. This classical form of a tantric retreat usually involves recitation of the mantra of a central divinity one hundred thousand or more times, but for Tsongkhapa, the main point is the meditative practice of clear appearances and divine identification that should take place during such a retreat, not merely the repetition of mantras. If one has not prepared the mind through countless repeated attempts to understand what it means to identify sincerely and purely with the divine being, then just to proclaim, “I am glorious Vajradhara,” in front of other people, much less a spirit world, would be, at best, preposterous and laughable; at worst, a

³² For Tsongkhapa’s crucial instruction on how to meditate in order to bring about clear appearances, see *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 381b5-383a3, translated in Appendix Nine (762-765).

³³ For a very interesting echo of this principle, expressed with respect to Christ Jesus in the previously quoted work by St. Athanasius, cf. *On the Incarnation of the Word*, Chapter 3, section 18: “Invisible in Himself, He is known from the works of creation; so also, when His Godhead is veiled in human nature, His bodily acts still declare Him to be not man only, but the Power and Word of God. To speak authoritatively to evil spirits, for instance, and to drive them out, is not human but divine; and who could see Him curing all the diseases to which mankind is prone, and still deem Him mere man and not also God?”

³⁴ In explaining this passage, Geshe Norsang himself laughed at the hypocritical introduction of ordinary pride into tantric ritual. Sera Monastery, February 1st, 2015, 1h1m22-25s.

treacherous invocation of ordinary pride turned into megalomania.

Difficult as it might be to approximate authentic identification with the body, speech, and thoughts of divinity, Tsongkhapa reassures his reader by invoking a principle that we will continue to examine as one of the central themes of his tantric philosophy: the movement from the contrived to the uncontrived, from the conceptual to the nonconceptual. He acknowledges that indeed, everyone must start from a place where both the description of the appearances of a maṇḍala and its inhabitants, and the declaration of one's own identity within it, are mere words. Nevertheless, if the motivation is pure, and the practice diligent and consistent, that artificial identification, which one hardly believes oneself, will gradually become stronger, more believable, and more grounded in the compassionate actions that speak the divine identity louder than any words. Then, even if one does not yet experience oneself as the *actual* divine being which by definition cannot come until the complete stage, still, there can at the stage of creation arise a stable and uncontrived identification with the divine being upon whom one meditates. With this, Tsongkhapa says, one has achieved the purpose of the creation stage, in beginning to sever the root of *believing* in an ordinary “me” and “mine.”

Cutting the Root of Saṃsāra

That was only the introduction. There are many serious philosophical issues to be raised with respect to these two central creation stage practices of visualizing clear appearances and inhabiting a divine identity. Tsongkhapa takes up one important line of debate somewhat later in his chapter on the creation stage, when addressing the question of whether it is permissible, or else necessary, to meditate on emptiness during that first stage. This question may seem extraneous from the point of view of a six-hundred-year Geluk tradition in which meditation on emptiness has “of course” been taught as central to any sādhana. But the presence of the opposing views against which Tsongkhapa argues³⁵ suggests that there were at least some, if not many, in his milieu who questioned whether meditation on emptiness should not better be left to the stage of completion alone. Since his ensuing discussion encapsulates many of the issues I have wished to address across this entire thesis, I will treat it at length. Tsongkhapa states the problem and response as follows:³⁶

³⁵ See, for example, the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* (*rnam gzhaḡ rim pa'i rnam bshad*), vol. *cha*, 8b6-9a1 (18-19). Tsongkhapa's answer to this query will be discussed in the section below, “*With No Functioning Things . . .*” See Chapter Five, note 7, for Tibetan text.

Suppose you ask: “Now, even if I have not found this view of emptiness – the absence upon which one meditates as being something congruent with space – is it okay if I just bring to mind the simple withdrawal of all appearances of vessels and their inhabitants? Or must I at this point recall the meaning of a view I have found?” Here you must certainly do the latter; because, as it states in *Mixed with the Sūtras*: “According to the meaning of the verse that goes, ‘There being no things is the reality of the meditation . . .,’ one meditates on the nature of emptiness.”

³⁶ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 398b1-3 (796):

Now, suppose you wonder: “Since during the first stage one only meditates on the side of appearances – on a circle of diving beings – and since one must meditate on emptiness primarily during the second stage, is it permissible to do so from there [i.e., from the creation stage], or not?” I will explain. You absolutely must meditate on emptiness during the first stage, because the first stage is what ripens the mental continuum, the method that grows the total and complete realizations of the complete stage, and if you do not meditate on emptiness, then you will not be able to achieve that kind of ripening.

Tsongkhapa then proceeds to give five more reasons why it is necessary.³⁷

- (1) In the Mantrayāna, according to many tantric scriptures, before one creates the circle of divine beings on the side of appearances, one utters the “*bhāva*” mantra and so forth. They say that you meditate on the meaning of this mantra, the ultimate meaning of the lack of a self, and that you must do so at the very start.
- (2) During the first stage, since you must take all three holy bodies into the path, you take the dharmakāya into the path, and for that you must meditate on emptiness.
- (3) Since you must purify all three bases to be purified – birth, death, and the intermediate state – in order to purify death you must meditate on emptiness.
- (4) The fact that you must perform all the yogas of beings and the places where they stay from the perspective of their being like an illusion is something stated more than once in countless tantras and classical commentaries.³⁸

འོན་པེ་མ་དང་པོའི་སྐབས་སུ་སྒྲུབ་ཕྱོགས་ལྟའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ཙམ་ཞིག་བསྐྱོན་ནས་སྟོང་ཉིད་རིམ་པ་གཉིས་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་གཙོ་བོར་བསྐྱོན་དགོས་པས་དེས་ཆོག་གས་མི་ཆོག་སྟེ་ན། བཤད་བར་བྱ་སྟེ་རིམ་པ་དང་པོའི་སྐབས་སུ་སྟོང་ཉིད་སྐྱོན་པ་ནི་ཡིན་ཏུ་དགོས་ཉེ་རིམ་པ་དང་པོ་ནི་ཆོག་པའི་གྲི་ཆོག་པ་ཡོངས་ཆོག་སྟེ་བའི་ཐབས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་མྱིན་བྱེད་ཡིན་ལ་སྟོང་ཉིད་མ་བསྐྱོན་ན་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་མྱིན་པ་སྟུབ་མི་རུས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དོ།

³⁷ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 398b3-6, 399a4-6 (796-797):

།ཐུགས་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པར་ནི་རྒྱུད་ལྟེ་དུ་མ་ནས་སྒྲུབ་ཕྱོགས་ལྟའི་འཁོར་ལོ་སྟོང་པའི་ཕྱ་རལ་ཏུ་བླ་མ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཐུགས་བརྟེན་ནས་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་དོན་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་དམ་པ་སྐྱོན་པར་གསུངས་པས་ཐོག་མ་ནས་བྱ་དགོས་པར་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། རིམ་པ་དང་པོའི་སྐབས་སུ་སྟུག་གསུམ་ཀ་ལམ་དུ་བྱ་དགོས་པས་ཆོས་སྟུ་ལ་མ་བྱེད་ལ་སྟོང་ཉིད་སྐྱོན་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་སྒྲུབ་གཞི་སྟེ་འཆི་བར་དོ་གསུམ་ཀ་སྒྲུབ་དགོས་པས་འཆི་བ་སྟོང་བ་ལ་སྟོང་ཉིད་སྐྱོན་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྟུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་རང་ནས་བྱ་དགོས་པར་རྒྱུད་དང་བསྟན་བཅོས་མཐའ་ཡས་པ་ལས་ལན་གཅིག་པ་ཡིན་པར་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དོ། ་་་ །ཁྱད་བར་དུ་ལམ་འདིར་ནི་ལྟ་བུ་རྟེན་ནས་རྒྱན་ལྟ་བུ་དན་པར་མ་བྱས་ན་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་དམ་ཆོག་ཉམས་པར་འགྱུར་བར་རྣམ་ལྟོས་མཐའ་གཉིས་སེལ་བ་ལས་གསུངས་ཤིང་རྩ་རྒྱུད་བརྩམས་པའི་ལམ་ཀྱང་། །མིང་སོགས་བྲལ་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ལ། །དེར་རྟོག་པ་ནི་བརྩ་གཅིག་ལ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་བྱས་ཀྱང་ཆོག་པ་ཙམ་མིན་གྱི་མ་བྱས་ན་ཉེས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

³⁸ As a support for this fourth reason, Tsongkhapa cites an extremely important quotation from the *Pañcakrama* attributed to the tantric Nāgārjuna (*rim pa lnga pa*, Toh. 1802, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *ngi*). As cited in *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 398b6-399a4 (796-797):

Furthermore, the *Five Stages* states:

When reciting mantra, joining with a mudrā
conceiving of a maṇḍala and the like
when making fire offerings, or dispatching the *torma*,

. . . (5) Especially, within this path, if, having found the view, you do not recall it continuously, your commitments relating to the holy mind will be damaged. Jñānaśrī says this in *Clearing Away the Two Extremes*, and among the fourteen root downfalls it states further:

With regard to all things
that are free of names and the rest,
to conceive of them [with names]
is the Eleventh.

So it is not just permissible to meditate on emptiness, but if you do *not* do so, you have created an infraction.

There are at least three Sanskrit mantras that classically appear throughout Buddhist Vajrayāna literature to invoke the state of mind that meditates on the emptiness of all phenomena, and the indivisibility of method and wisdom.³⁹ We will examine, in the next chapter, Tsongkhapa's exquisite elucidation of the *Oṃ śūnyatā* mantra (which he claims is equivalent in meaning to the other mantras of its type). We will also examine the pivotal four-line verse from the Guhyasamāja root tantra that is recited during the meditation on the emptiness of all worlds and their inhabitants, prior to the initial creation of the maṇḍala and its inhabitants.

For now, it is sufficient to mention that during the very *first* meditation on

always do so as if an illusion.
Whether the actions of peace,
of prosperity or likewise power,
whether fierce actions or summons and the like:
Let them all be the same as Indra's bow [i.e., a rainbow].
Whether you enjoy a graceful pose
rely on song, music, and the like
or engage fully in the arts of skill:
Do so like a moon in the water.
Whether you engage in form or sound
or likewise scent, taste or touch
with the eye and all the rest:
Examine it closely, just like an illusion.
What need is there to say much here?
Whatever a yogi of the Vajra Way
might set before his sights:
It is said to be only illusion.

།དེ་ལྟར་ཡང་རིས་ལྡན་པས། སྤྲུགས་དང་བྱུག་ཀྱི་ལྷོ་བ་དང་། དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ལ་སོགས་ནས་རྟོག་དང་། སྤྱིན་པེག་གཏོར་མའི་བྱ་བ་ཀུན། རྟག་ཏུ་སྦྱ་མ་བཞིན་
བྱ་བ། ཞི་བ་དང་ནི་རྒྱས་པ་ལམ། དེ་བཞིན་དབང་དང་མཛོན་སྦྱོང་དང་། དཀྱུག་སོགས་གང་ཡང་བྱ་བ་ཀུན། དབང་བོའི་གཞུང་མཚུངས་པར་བྱ། སྤྲུག་སོ
གས་ཉེ་བར་སྦྱོང་བ་དང་། ལྷ་དང་རོལ་མོ་སོགས་སྟེན་དང་། སྦྱ་ཅལ་རྣམས་ལ་རབ་འཇུག་པ། རྩ་རྒྱ་བཞིན་བྱ་བ་ཀུན་བྱ། གཞུགས་དང་སྦྱ་དང་དེ་བཞིན་བྱ།
རོ་དང་རེག་བྱ་ཉིད་དག་ལ། མིག་ལ་སོགས་པ་རབ་འཇུག་པ། སྦྱ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་ཉེ་བར་བརྟག། འདིར་ནི་མང་བྱ་བ་འདྲ་ཅི་དགོས། རྫོ་རྩེ་ཐེག་པར་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པས།
།དེ་ཉིད་གང་གང་དམིགས་བྱ་བ། དེ་དེ་སྦྱ་མ་ཁོ་ནར་གསུངས། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།

³⁹ The mantras beginning with *Oṃ svabhāva*, *Oṃ śūnyatā*, and *Oṃ yoga śuddha*, respectively.

emptiness, which comes prior to creating the circle of protection in the Guhyasamāja sādhana, it is the *Oṃ svabhāva* mantra that is uttered (the same mantra that Tsongkhapa says here must come “at the very start”). In his instructions for how to actually meditate on the Guhyasamāja sādhana, a text called the *Steps of Pure Yoga*, Tsongkhapa prefaces this mantra with the following philosophical statement, whose meaning I have attempted to elucidate in advance from the start of Chapter One:⁴⁰

Then, meditate on the emptiness that is the fact that the essential nature, the causes, and the results of all phenomena are empty of being established through any characteristics of their own. In order to clear away every appearance of things being ordinary, utter, “*Oṃ svabhāva śuddha . . .*”

There, in his direct script for practice,⁴¹ Tsongkhapa expects his reader already to know the meaning of things lacking “any characteristics of their own,” and I believe he stated it this way in order to remind the practitioner that it had to be a Middle Way Consequence view of emptiness, and none other, on which one should be meditating.⁴² He also assumes that his reader should understand the connection between recalling that emptiness and the ability to clear away all traces of ordinary appearances. In the *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*, he explains that connection explicitly, by citing a passage from Jñānapāda, the same author upon whom he relied (three hundred and eighty folios earlier) in order to present the basic idea that within a single state of realization, the wisdom perceiving emptiness could dawn as a divine being. We should note that Tsongkhapa’s main concern then shifts subtly, from a justification of why one definitely has to meditate on emptiness *as sheer absence* (in order to fulfill the requirements of creation stage), to a defense of how it is that the main meditation *on pure appearances* in itself acts to sever the root of suffering. He sees the need to argue how this could be the case even though it involves an appearance, and not only an absence.⁴³

⁴⁰ *The Steps of Pure Yoga: A Method for Reaching the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa), vol. ja, 4b2-3 (698):

དེ་ནས་ཚུལ་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་རྒྱ་ལྟུང་གསུམ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་སྟོང་པའི་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་དུ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཉེ་བཞུགས་ཏེ་ཐ་མཐའ་ཀྱི་སྟོང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་བསལ་ལ། ཨོྃ་སྭ་
ལྷ་བཤུ་རྩ་སྐྱེ་སྟེ་སྭ་ལྷ་བཤུད་རྩེ་ཉི། ཞེས་བརྗོད་དོ།

⁴¹ The first sentence quoted here, as well as, of course, the Sanskrit mantra, is part of the contemporary recitation text for the long Guhyasamāja sādhana chanted regularly in the Geluk tantric monasteries, and would be recited up to four times every day by someone performing an approximation retreat, as a preface to meditating on the protection circle.

⁴² The Tibetan grammar is extremely clear in expressing that this is a specification of “which” kind of emptiness. A more literal (if more awkward) translation would be: “. . . the emptiness that is empty of the essence, causes, and results of all things being established through any characteristics of their own.”

⁴³ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. ga, 399a6-400a4 (797-799), emphasis mine:

འཛིན་པ་དང་མཐོང་སྒྲུབ་སྤྱི་ལུ་འཛིན་གྱི་འཛིན་མཐོང་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སྟོང་བ་དང་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་པར་སྟོང་ལུགས་
དང་དེས་སྤྱིད་པའི་སྤྱུག་བསྟུན་གྱི་རྩ་བ་བདག་འཛིན་འགོག་ལུགས་ནི། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཞབས་ལུགས་གསལ་ཏེ་སྟོང་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱན་བཟང་ལས། ཐ་མཐའ་[sicམཐའ་]རྩམ་རྟོག་
རྒྱུ་ལས་གཞན་པ་ཡི། འཛིན་པའི་སྤྱུག་བསྟུན་གཞན་ཅིང་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། འཛིན་རྩམ་པ་འགལ་བར་གྱུར་པའི་སེམས། འཛིན་ཅི་མཛོན་སྤྱི་ལུ་རྟོགས་པར་འ

The way to join, indivisibly, during the first stage, the appearances that have the aspect of the circle of the maṇḍala, and the incisive wisdom that realizes the meaning of selflessness, as well as the way to use that to stop the grasping to a self that is the root of the suffering of cyclic existence, are clear in the system of Jñānapāda. The *Samantabhadra Sādhana* states:

Apart from the stream of conceptions that things are normal
there is no other suffering of existence at all.

You will come to realize directly
the state of mind that is opposed in aspect to it:

To that which has the very identity of
the profound and also the vast,
conceptual fabrication will not appear.

The doubt that this passage severs is explained in the commentary by Thagana. Someone has been thinking: ‘Earlier you worked hard to explain extensively the way to meditate on the yoga of a divine being, but if all this is aimed at liberation from the cycle, then by meditating on this first stage of yours, one will not be freed from the cycle; because there is no meditation on the lack of a self.’ In answer to this opponent, these treatises teach how the first stage is opposed to the root of the cycle.

Vitapāda states further: “In order to summarize the whole discussion, [Jñānapāda] says that the inconceivable nature of the circle of the maṇḍala he had described previously is itself the antidote to the sufferings of cyclic existence.” This is in agreement with all the other commentaries on the system of Jñānapāda.

Here, regarding the meaning of “the conceptions that things are normal,” some Tibetans and Indians have explained that these are merely the conceptions that it is commonplace for things to appear in a way that is not an appearance in the aspect of divine beings. But this is not at all what Jñānapāda wants to say. As his

གྲུང་། ཁབ་ཅིང་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བ་ཡི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན། གང་ཡིན་དེར་ནི་ཀུན་རྟོག་སྣང་མི་འགྱུར། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། འདིས་དོགས་པ་གང་གཅོད་པ་ནི། དེའི་འགྲེལ་བར་
ཐ་ག་ནས། སྣང་ལྟེན་རྣམས་འབྱོར་སྒྲིམ་པའི་ཚུལ་རྒྱས་པར་བཤད་པ་ལ་འབད་བ་བྱས་པ་འདི་ཐམས་ཅད་འཁོར་བ་ལས་གྲོལ་བའི་ཆེད་ཡིན་ན་ཁྱེད་གྱི་རིམ་བུ་དང་པོ་
འི་ལམ་འདི་བསྐྱོམས་པས་འཁོར་བ་ལས་གྲོལ་བར་མི་འགྱུར་ཉེ་བདག་མེད་སྒྲིམ་པ་མི་འདུག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་སྟུང་དུ་བསམས་ནས་རྟོག་པའི་ལན་དུ་གཞུང་དེ་དག་གི་
ས་རིམ་བུ་དང་པོ་འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བ་དང་འགལ་ལུགས་སྟོན་པར་བཤད་དོ། སྒྲན་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་། དེ་ནི་རབ་ཏུ་བྱེད་པ་མདོར་བསྟུན་ནས་བསྟན་པའི་ཕྱིར་གོང་དུ་
གསུངས་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་བསམ་གྱིས་མི་ཁྲབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་དེ་ཉིད་སྲིད་པའི་སྟུག་བསྟུལ་གྱི་གཉེན་པོར་གསུངས་པ། ཞེས་གསུངས་ཉེ་ཡོ་ཤེས་ཞི་
བས་ལུགས་ཀྱི་འགྲེལ་བ་གཞན་རྣམས་དང་ཡང་འདྲའོ། འདིར་ཐ་མལ་གྱི་རྣམ་རྟོག་ཅེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་ནི་ཐོད་དང་རྒྱ་གར་པ་ཁ་ཅིག་གིས་ལྟེན་རྣམས་པར་མི་སྟོང་
ར་བའི་སྣང་བ་རང་དགའ་བའི་རྟོག་པ་ཅན་ལ་འཆད་པ་ནི། ཡོ་ཤེས་ཞབས་ཀྱི་བཞེད་པ་གཏན་མ་ཡིན་ཉེ་འདིའི་འགྲེལ་བར་ཐ་ག་ནས། ཐ་མལ་པའི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་
ནི་བདག་དང་བདག་གིར་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པའོ། ཞེས་དང་བཞེད་རྒྱ་ལྟ་བུ་པའི་འགྲེལ་བར་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་། འདིར་ཐ་མལ་པའི་ཀུན་རྟོག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་བདག་
དང་བདག་གི་དང་གཞུང་བ་དང་འཛིན་པའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ཀྱི་བརྟོན་པ་ལ་བྱ་བར་བཤད་ན་སྲིད་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་གྱི་སྟུག་བསྟུལ་ཞེས་བྱ་བར་ཉེ་བར་གདག་
ས་པས་སྲིད་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་གྱི་སྟུག་བསྟུལ་གྱི་རྒྱུའི་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་ནོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་ཐ་ཆེན་གྱི་ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་དཔལ་འབྱས་རྗེ་ཆེ་དང་སྒྲན་ཞབས་དང་ཀུན་རྟོག་
བཟང་པོ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་བདག་འཛིན་ལ་གསལ་བར་བཤད་ལ་སྐབས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་སོ།

commentator Thagana states: “The conceptual thoughts that things are normal are the conceptual thoughts of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’”

In his *Commentary to the Four Hundred and Fifty Verses*, Śāntipa⁴⁴ states further:

Here, the phrase ‘the conceptual fabrication of things as normal,’ refers to the mental expression of things in the aspect of ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ ‘beholder’ and ‘beheld.’ If one explains it this way, then, insofar as it is being termed ‘the suffering that is the very identity of cyclic existence,’ it is the *primary cause* for the suffering that is the very identity of cyclic existence. This is my final word on the matter.

You should also understand from the context that Śrīphalavajra, Vitapāda and Samantabhadra all clearly explain this in terms of grasping to a self, as well.

Thus Tsongkhapa must call upon five of Jñānapāda’s Indian commentators (Thagana, Śrīphalavajra, Vitapāda, Śāntipa, and Ācārya Samantabhadra⁴⁵), in order to draw out what he understands to be the meaning of the dense verse from Jñānapāda’s *Samantabhadra Sādhana*⁴⁶ (which represents an alternative Guhyasamāja system to that which follows the tantric Nāgārjuna’s *Abbreviated Practice*, the *Pinḍīkṛtasādhana*). The commentators agree that the logic of the verse comes in response to a doubt posed by an implicit questioner, who claims that if the creation stage is thoroughly preoccupied with meditation on appearances – even pure appearances – then this will still be useless in overcoming the root of suffering, because that root is grasping to a self, and without explicit meditation on emptiness as *absence*, one will never be able to overcome self-

⁴⁴ This mahāsiddha (twelfth in the list of eighty-four), to whom Tsongkhapa refers frequently, is also known as Ratnākaraśānti, and it is by that name that his works are listed in the Tengyur. The “*Four Hundred and Fifty Verses*” refers to the *Śrī-Guhyasamāja-maṇḍalavidhi* of *Dīpaṃkarabhadra (*mar me mdzad bzang po*), Toh. 1865, rgyud, vol. *di*. Ratnākaraśānti’s commentary to it is the *Commentary to the Ritual of the Glorious Guhyasamāja Maṇḍala* (*Śrī-Guhyasamājamāṇḍalavidhi-ṭīkā*, *dpal gsang ba ‘dus pa’i dkyil ‘khor gyi cho ga’i ‘grel pa*), Toh. 1871, rgyud, vol. *ni*. Tsongkhapa’s *Notes Granted on the Commentary to the Four Hundred and Fifty Verses* also appears in his collected works (vol. *ja*).

⁴⁵ It is still not entirely clear to me whether the “Samantabhadra” mentioned in the last sentence of this quotation from Tsongkhapa is the author of the Guhyasamāja commentary in the Tengyur called *yan lag bzhi pa’i sgrub thabs kyi rgya cher bshad pa snying po snye ma* (Toh. 1869, sde dge, rgyud, vol. *ni*), cited in the colophon as “*slob dpon dpal kun tu bzang po*,” or whether Tsongkhapa is referring to the Buddha at the center of the *Samantabhadra Sādhana* itself. More likely it is the former, since when referring to the *Samantabhadra Sādhana* he consistently names the author as *ye shes zhabs*, i.e., Jñānapāda. The works of Thagana, Śrīphalavajra (*dpal ‘bras rdo rje*), Vitapāda (*sman zhabs*) and Ācārya Śrī Samantabhadra mentioned here, which comment upon the Jñānapāda tradition of Guhyasamāja practice, all appear in sde dge, rgyud, vols. *di*, *ni*, and *pi*, Toh. 1866-1870, 1872-1878, and 1880. In particular, the commentaries on the *Samantabhadra-nāma-sādhana*, and its twin work, the *Caturāṅga-sādhanaṃ-Samantabhadrī-nāma*, are Toh. 1867, 1868, 1869, and 1872, and 1873. It is perhaps worthwhile to recognize just how many texts Tsongkhapa draws together to make his argument regarding the interpretation of a single verse.

⁴⁶ Buddhajñāna, *Samantabhadra-nāma-sādhana* (*kun tu bzang po zhes bya ba’i sgrub pa’i thabs*), Toh. 1855, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *di*, 35b6, which is very near to the end of the text. This verse and what follows it seem to offer Jñānapāda’s own philosophical reflections on all the instructions for practice that have come before.

grasping. But Vitapāda understands Jñānapāda to mean that *it is the inconceivable nature of the maṇḍala itself that provides the antidote*. The key to the argument comes in Thagana's clarification that in this case "the conceptions that things are normal" refer specifically to thoughts generated by self-grasping, i.e., the conceptions of "me" and "what belongs to me."⁴⁷ Tsongkhapa uses this point to refute an idea held by "some Tibetans and Indians," namely, that "ordinary conceptions" simply refer to the fact that we do not normally see celestial palaces and divine beings walking around in them.

This deserves consideration: If "believing in ordinary appearances," or the alternative phrase used here, "conceptions of the ordinary"⁴⁸ (*tha mal gyi rnam rtog*), simply meant that we do not usually see divine worlds, then it would have no philosophical content at all, and would simply be a pleonastic statement of fact; because we do not ordinarily see what is not ordinary, right? But Tsongkhapa is adamant that this is not what Jñānapāda means. Rather, if, as we have already seen above, belief in ordinary appearances is understood as a direct extension of the state of mind that grasps to things as real – or as *really* self and other, me and mine, beholder and beheld – then an antidote that addresses belief in ordinary appearances at its root *might simultaneously be able to cut the root of the cycle of suffering itself*.

Here, via this group of Indian commentators, Tsongkhapa reads Jñānapāda to be drawing the link between ordinary view and self-grasping so tightly as to make it seem that they are virtually the same. The quotation from Śāntipa indicates that when Jñānapāda writes that "Apart from the stream of conceptions that things are normal, there is no other suffering of existence at all," he is using the phrase "suffering of existence" as a kind of synecdoche to refer to the *primary cause* for the suffering of existence. Thus he is saying, in effect, 'There is no other cause for suffering at all than thinking things are normal.'

This potentially shocking statement is perhaps a Vajrayāna way of pressing the perennial religious question: "Who or what do you believe in?" It gives a whole new perspective on the questions with which we began in Chapter One: "Who or what made the world?" If to think that the world, and all that is in it, was made by causes that are not transcendent . . . enlightened . . . sublime . . . is the *mistake*, then the antidote is to learn to believe that all appearances (including "oneself") are the creation of the immaculate wisdom of clear light. This is what would become evident if one could perceive the sacred world of the maṇḍala all the time.

Nevertheless, it appears that in Tsongkhapa's Buddhist Vajrayāna context one must usually make the statement as a double negative: "It is a mistake to think that things

⁴⁷ The latter refers primarily to one's five heaps, and only by extension to outer physical objects, people, pets, land, wealth, and so on. See Appendix Four (177-181) for a direct sūtra explanation of this idea.

⁴⁸ I am using "normal" and "ordinary" interchangeably here for the same Tibetan word: *tha mal*.

are not created by clear light wisdom.” This is because it would still be very delicate to say categorically (although there are many tantric texts where it is framed thus), “All things *are* created by the wisdom of Buddhas,” because the existence of the experience of suffering would still manifestly indicate that this is not the case.⁴⁹ If suffering existence is created by ignorance, then it is not created by wisdom, as we have amply shown. But to state that it is a function of ignorance to fail to see divine creativity at work, and that this failure to recognize what is true (at the level of unveiled and enlightened perceptions), is the primary cause of all suffering, neither denies the heinous “reality” of the experience of suffering, nor belittles the all-pervasive action of creative divine wisdom. I wonder if there is any possible relationship between this insight and St. Augustine’s doctrine of the metaphysical non-being of evil.⁵⁰

For now, we return to Tsongkhapa’s own direct gloss of Jñānapāda’s verse:⁵¹

Therefore, as for grasping to a self: Since *the conception of things as normal* is the root of the suffering of cyclic existence, it is designated as ‘*the suffering of cyclic existence*.’⁵²

⁴⁹ As we saw Tsongkhapa write in the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition,”* as quoted in Chapter Two (note 9):

. . . Yet it would not make sense to explain these two – the lord of consciousness and Vajradhara – as though they were one and the same. Furthermore, to explain that the living beings of the suffering cycle were created by Vajradhara is not the meaning. . . .

⁵⁰ See St. Augustine, *The Augustine Catechism, The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, translated by Bruce Harbert (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999) #11, 41:

For what else is that which is called evil but a removal of good? . . . In the same way all evils that affect the mind are removals of natural goods: when they are cured they are not moved to somewhere else, but when they are no longer in the mind once it has been restored to health, they will be nowhere.

See also, St. Augustine, “Against the Letter of the Manichees,” translated by Richard Stothert, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979) First Series, vol. 4, 147:

For who can doubt that the whole of that which is called evil is nothing else than corruption? Different evils may, indeed, be called by different names; but that which is the evil of all things in which any evil is perceptible is corruption. So the corruption of an educated mind is ignorance; the corruption of the prudent mind is imprudence; the corruption of the just mind, injustice; the corruption of the brave mind, cowardice; the corruption of a calm, peaceful mind, cupidity, fear, sorrow, pride. Again, in a living body, the corruption of health is pain and disease; the corruption of strength is exhaustion; the corruption of rest is toil . . . Enough has been said to show that corruption does harm only as displacing the natural condition; and so, that corruption is not nature, but against nature. And if corruption is the only evil to be found anywhere, and if corruption is not nature, no nature is evil.

⁵¹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 400a4-400b1 (799-800). (Underlining is mine, in order to convey the Tibetan rhythmic structure, while italics indicate words glossed from Jñānapāda’s verse):

ཤེས་ན་བདག་འཛིན་ནི། ར་མཁས་གྱི་རྣམ་རྟོག་སྤྱིད་པའི་སྤྱུག་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ར་བ་ཡིན་པས་སྤྱིད་པའི་སྤྱུག་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་བཅའ་ལ་སོ། ཤེས་པ་ལག་པ་ལའི་སེམས་ནི། དཀྱི་ལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སེམས་ལ་འགྲེལ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱིས་བཤད་ལ་འགྲེལ་ལུགས་ནི་རྣམ་པ་ལག་པ་བསྟེ། འཛིན་སྤངས་གཉིས་དངོས་སྤྱུ་འགྲེལ་བ་དགོས་སོ། འཁོར་ལོའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སེམས་དེ་ཡང་སྟོན་པ་སོ་རང་གིས་མཛོད་སྤྱུ་དུ་རྟོགས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། ཤེས་པ་ལག་པ་ལའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་སྤྱུ་བཅས་ཀྱི་ན་བཟང་ལས། ཟབ་ཅིང་ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱིས་སྟོན་ཏེ་འཁོར་ལོའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སེམས་དེ་སྤྱི་པའི་དུས་ན་ར་མཁས་གྱི་རྣམ་རྟོག་དེ་མི་སྤང་བའི་དོན་ནོ།

⁵² The grammar of this sentence in the Tibetan strongly suggests that both “grasping to a self” and “the conception of things as normal” (as quoted directly from Jñānapāda’s verse) are the referents of the

As for the state of mind which is opposed to it: It is that mind which has the aspect of the circle of a maṇḍala. All the commentaries explain that

the way in which it is opposed is with an *aspect* that is incompatible; the two ways of holding to an object must be directly opposed to one another. Furthermore, that mind which has the aspect of a maṇḍala is something the meditator himself *will realize directly*.

As for the reason they are incompatible, the words of the *Samantabhadra Sādhana* that begin with “*the profound and . . .*” reveal the following meaning: When a state of mind with the aspect of the maṇḍala arises, *the conception of things as ordinary does not appear*.

Thus Tsongkhapa states clearly that the meditation in which the beings and dwelling-places of a sacred world are appearing to the mind is the direct antidote, not only to things *appearing* as everyday, but to the root of saṃsāra which is grasping to a self. He says that the state of mind perceiving what it understands to be “sacred” and “holy” stands in direct contradiction to the misconceptions. I think such English words represent

predicate, “designated as ‘the suffering of cyclic existence.’” But Tsongkhapa does not refer to them as two different things, “both” being designated as such, either. (*des na bdag ‘dzin ni, tha mal gyi rnam rtog srid pa’i sdug bsngal gyi rtsa ba yin pas srid pa’i sdug bsngal du biags so,*) Considering these passages, as well as the statements of Geshe Norsang cited above in Chapter Four, note 28, I would wager to posit, in Tibetan debate style, that from Jñānapāda’s tantric point of view, there must be only “three possibilities” (*mu gsum*) between the main thing to be abandoned as explained in a sūtra context, i.e., “grasping to a self”/“grasping to things as real” (*bdag ‘dzin / bden ‘dzin*), and the unique thing to be abandoned from a tantric perspective, namely “the insistent belief in ordinary appearances” (*tha mal snang zhen*).

That is, it appears that: (1) There are many things which are grasping to a self that are also believing things to be ordinary, because they are “the conceptions of things as ordinary” that Jñānapāda’s lineage and Tsongkhapa hold to be the root of suffering. (2) There is at least one example of something that is believing things to be ordinary, but *not* necessarily grasping to a self, because it is the valid perception of the stained heaps as a deceptive reality produced by karma and mental afflictions, which would arise in the post-meditation state of mind of a bodhisattva ārya (on any one of the first seven levels) who has not yet entered the unsurpassed yoga of the Vajrayāna (and thus been taught to view those heaps as being, in essence, the five Buddhas, and so on). (3) There is something which is neither believing things to be ordinary, nor grasping to a self, because it is the mind of the yoga of the divine being, or some form of the indivisible primordial wisdom of clarity and the profound, all the way up to the omniscience of a Buddha. But it appears that, from a Vajrayāna perspective, at least, there is no fourth possibility, namely something that is grasping to a self but *not* belief in ordinary appearances, because, according to the argument Tsongkhapa presents here, by canceling the belief in ordinary appearances one automatically cancels the two kinds of grasping to a self (i.e., of things and of persons).

Nonetheless, from a strictly sūtra perspective, since belief in ordinary appearances is not mentioned in that context at all, there would of course be something *described* as grasping to a self, which is not explicitly belief in things as ordinary, because there is simply no mention of it being a fault to recognize the empty heaps as an ordinary deceptive appearance produced by karma and the afflictions. Indeed that is what is stated countless times to be the case. But on the debate ground at Gyutö Monastery, I doubt one could survive defending the position that there “are” four possible relationships between the two ideas, because one would have to switch between sūtric and tantric perspectives mid-stream in order to defend all four, and this is quite taboo in Geluk debate tradition. This is a point to be investigated further, for I have not yet seen any such argument presented explicitly within the relevant literature, even within later Geluk commentaries. But this lack of seeing, of course, is no guarantee it is not there.

the visceral impact that *lha'i dkyil 'khor*, or “maṇḍala of divine beings,” would have in Tibetan. Being opposed through “an aspect that is incompatible” is technical language used frequently in a sūtra context for the way that the incisive wisdom of the individual conceptual analysis (*so sor rtog pa'i shes rab*) stands in direct contradiction to the ignorance that grasps to a self. So Tsongkhapa, via the Indian commentators, is invoking this language to say that here, even the meditation on vivid *appearances* is having the same or very similar effect as what straightforward analysis of the *lack* of inherent nature of a person and the parts of a person would be intended to have in a sūtra context.

The way it works here, however, is that rather than inveterately analyzing why the arm and liver and blood and bone that appear to one's perceptions do not *really* exist the way they insist on appearing, day after day, one instead cancels the state of mind to which ordinary things appear by focusing as completely as possible on the pure appearances of an imagined maṇḍala and its inhabitants, including a body of light envisioned in the place where the meditator used to be. But it cannot be the entire point of the practice that ordinary things do not appear just because one is concentrating on something else. As we saw above, the diminished power of the sense faculties is a perfectly mundane phenomenon. After all, we could go to an engrossing movie and not actively perceive our ordinary bodies for a while, but that would not necessarily be of any use in overcoming the *tendency* to see things as ordinary once we emerge from the theatre. Tsongkhapa turns again to Śāntipa to address a distinctly Buddhist rendition of this potential confusion:⁵³

[Someone objects]: “At the moment that state of mind arises, you might not see grasping to a self, but still, you cannot put a stop to self-grasping with that mind; otherwise you would also be able to turn back self-grasping even by meditating on the sensory field of limitless space.”⁵⁴ In response to this, Śāntipa says, “The state of mind with the aspect of the maṇḍala engages *once it has cleared away all conceptions that are untrue*. Thus it is not just a matter of two things not being

⁵³ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 400b1-401a2 (800-801), emphasis mine:

།དེ་སྒྲིམ་པའི་ཆེ་བདག་འཛིན་མ་མཐོང་བས་དེས་དེ་འགོག་མི་རུས་ཏེ་ནམ་མཁའ་མཐའ་ཡས་སྒྲིམ་ཆེད་བསྒྲིམས་པས་ཀྱང་ལྷོག་པར་འགྱུར་རེ་ཞེས་པའི་ལན་དུ།
འལྟེ་པས། དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་ནམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སེམས་ནི། མི་བདེན་པའི་ནམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་བསལ་བ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ཡང་ལྷན་ཅིག་མི་
སྣང་བ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་དང་། ནམ་མཁའ་མཐའ་ཡས་སྒྲིམ་ཆེད་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནི། བདག་མེད་པའི་ནམ་པར་འཇུག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་དེ་བདག་ཏུ་ལྟ་བ་ལ་
ས་མི་ལྷོག་པའི་ཕྱིར་དེའི་རྒྱ་ཅན་སྤྱག་བསྐྱེད་ཡང་ལྷོག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ཡང་འདི་ན་སྒྲིམ་སྒྲིམ་རྒྱུད་པའི་རྒྱ་བ་དང་འཆེ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནི། སྤྱག་བསྐྱེད་
གྱི་བདེན་པའོ། །དེའི་རྒྱར་གྱུར་པ་བདག་ཏུ་ལྟ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནི་ཀྱན་འབྱུང་གི་བདེན་པའོ། །དེའི་གཉེན་མོར་གྱུར་པ་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་ནི་ལམ་གྱི་བདེན་
པའོ། །སྤྱག་བསྐྱེད་འབྱུང་བ་ཡིན་ཏུ་མེད་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་སེམས་གྱི་རྒྱན་གྱི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཅན་གནས་ཡོངས་སུ་གྱུར་པ་ནི། འགོག་པའི་བདེན་པ་སྟེ་འདི་ནི་འདིར་དོ་
ན་དམ་པའོ། །ཞེས་ནམ་མཁའ་མཐའ་ཡས་ནི་བདག་མེད་ལ་སྒྲིམ་སྤྱོད་པས་དེ་བསྒྲིམས་པས་བདག་འཛིན་ལ་མི་གཞོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་བསྒྲིམས་ཀྱང་སྤྱིད་པ་ལ་
ས་མི་གྲོལ་བ་དང་། འཁོར་ལོའི་ནམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སེམས་ནི་བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པའི་ཡུལ་བཀག་པའི་བདག་མེད་ལ་འཇུག་པས་དེས་བདག་འཛིན་ལྷོག་རུས་པའི་རྒྱལ་ལེ་
གས་པར་བྱེ་ནས་གསུངས་སོ།

⁵⁴ This refers to the formless realm absorption in which it is said that nothing appears to the mental faculty but infinite space.

able to appear together at the same time.”

He also says, “States of mind such as the sensory field of limitless space do not engage in the aspect of selflessness; because they do not turn back the view of a self. So they also do not turn back the suffering that has such a view as its cause. Moreover, the old age and death that run in a chain from lifetime to lifetime are the reality of suffering. The view of a self, and so on, that serve as their causes are the reality of the source. The antidote to all this, the circle of the maṇḍala, is the reality of the path. *Completely transforming what bears the defining characteristics of a mental stream, in order to obliterate suffering and its source,* is the reality of cessation. Here, these are the ultimate meanings.”

Thus Śāntipa states that since limitless space does not turn the mind towards selflessness, when you meditate upon it, it will not damage grasping to a self. Although you may meditate upon it, it will not free you from cyclic existence. But since the mind with the aspect of a maṇḍala engages in the selflessness that *negates the objective field you would have grasped onto as a self*, it is able to turn back self-grasping. Thus he carefully differentiates between these two techniques.

In this way, Tsongkhapa cites Śāntipa to show even more explicitly that not only does a state of mind soaked in the appearances of the sacred world block out or cancel ordinary appearances, but it is meant to actively oppose the very tendency for them to arise in the future. This is because the prerequisite for authentic Vajrayāna meditation on the maṇḍala is that one has, through preliminary meditation on emptiness, first cleared way all the false conceptions that were grasping to appearances as being “truly” ordinary.

Śāntipa went on to present a uniquely tantric version of the four realities seen by an ārya. His articulation of the reality of cessation suggests yet another way of understanding how the practice of identifying with a divine being would sever the root of self-grasping. If the mindstream of a sentient being is itself defined by the habitual act of identifying that continuum of mental events as “me,” then to completely transform the definition of “who” a mindstream is, might have the capacity to “obliterate suffering and its source,” if and only if the new identity and the way the label is applied are chosen and practiced *very* carefully. If we can keep it in mind, this particular argument from Śāntipa will lend added gravity to the arguments Tsongkhapa invokes later in the *Steps of Mantra*, when explaining the actual meditation on emptiness that must precede the creation of a maṇḍalic world of appearances. Meanwhile, because Tsongkhapa’s subsequent explanation at this point in the text is so rich, and so emblematic of his technique for interweaving sūtra philosophy and tantric theory within a single argument, I will quote it without interruption, offering comments in annotated form that are

nonetheless essential to our later analysis.⁵⁵

Furthermore, the incisive wisdom that realizes selflessness destroys grasping to a self insofar as it has an aspect that is incompatible with it.⁵⁶ This destruction takes

⁵⁵ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 401a2-402b5 (801-804), emphasis mine:

ཁདག་འཛིན་བདག་མེད་རྟོགས་པའི་མེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་རྣམ་པ་འགལ་བའི་སྣོན་ནས་འཛིན་པ་ཡང་ཕྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་གི་སྣོན་ཡིན་མེད་ཀྱི་སྣོན་ནས་ཡིན་པ་དེ་སྐྱབ་པ་ཡང་རྒྱ
བ་རྟེན་ཆད་མ་ཡོད་མེད་ལ་ཐུག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་རིགས་པའི་དབང་ལུག་གིས། དེ་དག་གང་ཡང་ཆད་མ་ཡོད། དེ་ནི་གཞན་ལ་གཞོན་ཕྱིན་འགྱུར། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་དང་
འདྲའོ། རྟོགས་ལྷན་མཁས་པ་ལ་སྐྱེ་བའི་དོགས་པའི་གནས་འཛིན་བའི་རྩ་བ་བདག་འཛིན་དང་རྣམ་པ་འགལ་བའི་བདག་མེད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུ་མེད་ན་འཁོར་བ་ལས་ཐོལ་
ཕྱིན་ཀྱི་ལམ་གྱི་སྤྲོད་པོ་སྟོར་བར་རྩྱ་བའི་དང་འདྲིའི་ལན་བྱས་ཚུལ་འདི་རྣམས་རིམ་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ལ་དགོས་པ་ཡིན་པར་ཤེས་རབ་ཅན་གྱིས་ཤེས་པར་བྱས་ཤིག
དེ་འདྲ་བའི་སྣོན་ནས་གཞོན་བྱ་གཞོན་ཕྱིན་ཏེ་ལན་ཅིག་མཐོང་བ་དེ་ནི་གཉིན་པོ་གོས་པར་བྱས་ན་དེའི་གོས་པ་མེ་ལྷར་འབེལ་བ་བཞིན་ནི་མཐུན་ཕྱགས་རིམ་གྱི
ས་འགག་གསུམ་མཐར་རྩ་བ་ནས་འབྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་སྐྱབ་ཐབས་ཀྱན་བཟང་ལས། གང་ཞིག་གང་དང་མི་མཐུན་པ་དག་ཏུ། ལན་ཅིག་འགྱུར་བའང་དེ་བཞིན་རྒྱས་འགྱུ
ར་བར། མཐོང་དང་བསྐྱབས་པ་རྣམས་པར་འབེལ་བ་དག། རང་གི་མི་མཐུན་ཤིན་ཏུ་འགག་པར་བྱེད། ཅེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་རྣམ་འབྲེལ་ལས། འཕྱི་བ་དང་ཕྱི་བ་ལྷང་རྟེན
པ་ཀྱང། མི་མཐུན་ཕྱོགས་དང་བཅས་ཉིད་ཕྱིར། དེ་གོས་པ་པ་ལས་བདག་འགྱུར་བས། ལ་ལར་ཐག་པ་ཟད་པར་འགྱུར། ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་ནོ། འདི
ར་ཤེས་པས་གནས་ལྷར་མི་ལྷོག་པ་རྣམས་འབྲེལ་གྱི་འཆོ་བ་མེད་དང་ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱབས་ཤིང་དཔལ་འབྱས་དོ་རྟེན། བདག་ཡོད་ན་ནི་གཞན་ཏེ་ཤེས། ཞེས་
སོགས་ཀྱིས་འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བ་བདག་འཛིན་ཏེ་བསྐྱབས་པ་སྐྱབ་ཐབས་ཀྱན་བཟང་གི་ལྟ་བུ་གཏན་འབེབས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་ཐ་ག་ན་དང་དཔལ་འབྱས་དོ་རྟེན་རྣམས་འབྲེ
ལ་གྱི་ལུང་མང་དུ་བྱངས་ནས་ལྟ་བུ་གཏན་ལ་པལ་ཅིང་། ཐུགས་ཀྱི་བརྟེན་གཞན་མང་པོས་ཀྱང་རྣམ་འབྲེལ་གྱི་ལུང་ལྷངས་སུ་བྱས་ནས་བསྐྱབས་པ་མང་བས་རིག
ས་པའི་དབང་ལུག་རྣམས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཞུང་རྣམས་སྤྱིར་ནང་རིག་གི་སྐབས་དང་ལྷང་པར་དུ་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་དོན་མེད་དོ་སྟོན་དུ་ལྟ་ཞིང་དེ་སྐད་གཞན་ལ་སྐྱབ་པ་ནི
། རིགས་པའི་ལམ་དུ་འོྱུ་བའི་སྣོན་ཉམས་ཆུང་དུས་གཏིང་དཔག་པར་དགའ་བའི་སྣོན་གྱི་འཇུག་པའི་ལམ་ནས་བྱངས་པའི་ཕྱི་མེད་པའི་རིགས་པའི་རྣམ་གཞག
མ་ཐུགས་པ་ཡིན་པས་ལུང་དོན་རིགས་པ་ལྷ་མོས་འབྲེད་པར་རུས་པའི་མཁས་པའི་མཐུན་སར་དབྱེད་བར་མི་རུས་པའི་བལ་ཅོལ་ལོ། འཁོར་ལོའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་
མེས་པ་བདག་མེད་པའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་ཞུགས་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དེ་ནི། ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་གསུམ་གཤེས་སྤྱི་འཁྱོར་དཔལ་འབྱས་དོ་རྟེན་པ་འགྲང་པ་ལྷར་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཞབས་ཀྱི་འ
ང་དགོངས་པ་ཡིན་པས་རིམ་པ་དང་པོའི་སྐབས་སུ་སྤྲོད་ཕྱགས་ལྷའི་འཁོར་ལོ་གཙོ་བོར་སྟོན་པ་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་འེས་པ་
ལུགས་དག་དངས་ནས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྐྱབ་པ་བཞིན་དུ་འཆར་བ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཅིང་། ལྷའི་འཁོར་ལོ་བསྟོམས་པའི་འོག་ཏུ་དམིགས་པ་ལྷ་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་རྣམ་པ་རང་བཞི
ན་མེད་པའི་དོན་དེས་པའི་སྣོན་པའི་ཀྱི་འཛིན་སྐབས་སྟོང་ཉིད་ལ་ཞུགས་ཤིང་གཞུང་རྣམས་རྟེན་དང་བཞིན་པའི་ལྷའི་རྣམ་པར་འགྲང་པའི་ཐབ་གསལ་གཉིས་མེད་ཀྱི་
རྣམ་འབྱོར་ཡང་མཐོན་རྟོགས་སྟོན་པའི་ཀྱིས་བྱའོ། རྟོན་གྱི་དབང་འདི་གཟིགས་ནས། ཀྱི་རྟོར་རྩ་རྒྱུད་ལས། བསྐྱེད་པའི་རིམ་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་གྱིས། བརྟུལ་ཞུག
ས་ཅན་གྱིས་སྟོན་པ་བསྟོན། སྟོན་པ་མི་ལམ་ལྷར་བྱས་ནས། སྟོན་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་སྟོན་པའི་བྱ། ཞེས་དང་། དེའི་བཤད་རྒྱུད་གྲུབ་ལས་ཀྱང་། དཔེར་ན་རྩ་ནང་
ཁྲ་བ་ནི། གྲོགས་དག་བདེན་མིན་རྒྱུ་པའང་ཡིན། དེ་བཞིན་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་འཁོར་ལོ་འདིར། དྲུངས་ཞིང་གསལ་བའི་རང་བཞིན་ནོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། དེས་ན་
སྟོང་ཉིད་སྟོན་པ་ནི། རིམ་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་དགོས་པས་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་འདྲེན་ཉིད་གང་སྟོན་ཐམས་ཅད་རྟོགས་པའི་ལུ་ལྷའི་སྐྱེ་བུ་རྩ་བའི་སྐྱེ་བུ་རྩ་བའི་སྐྱེ་བུ་རྩ་བའི་སྐྱེ་བུ་
བའམ་ནས་མཁའ་འཛུགས་བཞིན་སྤྲོད་པ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་སྐྱེ་བུ་དང་འདྲ་བའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཡང་འོང་བས་དེ་དང་བདག་ཕྱིན་
ཀྱིས་བསྐྱབ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ལུས་ཀྱང་ཕྱིན་དགོས་ཏེ། སྟོང་བསྐྱབ་ལས། གང་མདོ་སྤེའི་ཚུལ་ལ་ཞུགས་པ་དང་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རིམ་པ་ལ་གནས་པའི་སྟོན་པ་པོ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་
ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྐྱབ་པ་ལྷ་བྱ་དང་མི་ལམ་ལྷ་བྱ་དང་གཞུགས་བརྟན་ལྷ་བྱའོ་ཞེས་དཔེར་བཞིན་ཅིང་ལྷག་པར་མོས་ཀྱང་དེ་རྣམས་དཔེས་བདག་ལ་ཕྱིན་གྱིས་སྟོན་པ་
འི་མན་དག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཅན་གྱིས་ཡིད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་ལྷའི་སྐྱེ་བུ་རྣམས་པར་འགྱུར་བཤེས་པར་འགྱུར་ལོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། དེ་ལྷར་འེས་པ་སྟོང་ཉིད་ལ་བྱངས་
ཤིང་གཞུང་རྣམས་ལྷར་འགྲུབ་པའི་ཐབ་གསལ་གཉིས་མེད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་བཤད་པ་འདི་ཉིད་རྒྱ་གར་པའི་བྱུ་ཆེན་དག་གིས་ཀྱང་ལྷངས་སུ་བྱས་
ནས་བཤད་དེ།

⁵⁶ It is worthwhile to note here a distinction made by the revered Gendenpa scholar, Panchen Sonam Drakpa (1478-1554), between this kind of path, which overcomes what is to be abandoned through “a path with an aspect that is incompatible” (*rnam pa ‘gal ba’i lam*) and the kind of purification that takes place when taking the three holy bodies as the path, i.e., “the path of an aspect that is congruent” (*rnam pa mthun pa’i lam*) with each of the bases to be purified, namely, birth, death, and the intermediate state. Panchen Sonam Drakpa emphasizes that in both the systems of sūtra and tantra, when using a path with an aspect that is incompatible to purify the mind of defilements, there is, both “before” and “after,” still a *mind* there that was once defiled and is later clean. But in the case of the basis to be purified when taking the three holy bodies as the path – namely, the practitioner’s own future birth, death, and intermediate states – “it is

place insofar as something is or is not a totally backwards state of mind, and in proving it, it is a matter of whether or not one has come up against a solid, reliable valid perception. It is as the Lord of Reasoning⁵⁷ states:

When you have a valid perception towards something
it turns into the refutation of something else.

If you do not have a view of selflessness that is incompatible in aspect with that grasping to a self which is the root of bondage – a view that is grounds for raising doubts in a person who is learned and wise – then you will lose the essence of the path that frees you from the cycle. Since this debate and the ways to answer it are necessary in both the stages, I implore those of you possessed of intelligence to understand it.

If by this means you can see even one time how the thing to be disproven is disproven, and then become accustomed to that antidote, then, even as that familiarity increases, the entire category of things that are incompatible with the antidote will gradually be negated. In the end, that which was to be disproven will be ripped out from its root.

As the *Samantabhadra Sādhana* states:

Suppose that even once they become incompatible with it:
You progress and extend it from there,
Seeing and training, they increase
And that which is incompatible
Will be utterly negated.

This is the meaning of the *Commentary on Valid Perception* when it states:

impossible for there to be anything which is at once a definitive instance of birth, death, or an intermediate state, and *also* something free of defilements.” (*skye shi bar do gsum mtshan nyid pa yang yin dri ma dang bral ba yang yin pa'i gzhi mthun pa mi srid pa'i phyir*.) That is, once birth, death, and the intermediate state are purified, they will no longer occur. The three holy bodies of a Buddha that do have an aspect congruent with those three could still never be “a definitive instance” of the experiences of cyclic existence, whereas the mind of a Buddha is still properly speaking, “mind,” since it still bears the characteristics of being “lucid and aware” (albeit in a merely labeled way). (For this whole argument, see *bskyed rim gyi rnam gzhag mkhas pa'i yid 'phrog*, in paṇ chen bsod nams grags pa'i gsung 'bum, vol. *tha* [Drepung Loseling Library Society, Mundgod, India: 2013], 51-52.) For further studies of these rich topics, it will be important to keep in mind the significant distinction between paths “congruent” and those “incompatible” in aspect, for they function in very different ways. But according to this logic, a single practice of a Guhyasamāja sādhana, for example, should be effecting both simultaneously: It is purifying the mind of grasping to a self and grasping to ordinary appearances, and that mind will continue to exist when the purification is done. At the same time, the practice is purifying the basis of ordinary birth, and so on, through a path that will eventually eradicate birth and death entirely, “replacing” all tendencies for those suffering experiences with the perfected result of the three holy bodies of a Buddha. For a fuller discussion of this idea, see “Transforming Death, Transition, and Rebirth,” in Chapter Six, below.

⁵⁷ That is, Dharmakīrti. See *Pramāṇavārttika-kārika* (*tshad ma rnam 'grel*), Toh. 4210, sde dge, vol. *ce*, 143a5-6.

That which will diminish, and the outstanding basis, too:⁵⁸
 Since they are themselves incompatible, together –
 From familiarity one transforms,
 and bit by bit stains will be finished off, too.

On this point, Śāntipa used the verse from the *Commentary on Valid Perception* that begins, “Without being harmed and . . .” to establish that there is an irreversible transformation, and Śrīphalavajra proved that the root of the cycle is grasping to a self with “If there were a self, then you know as other,” and so on.⁵⁹ When setting forth the view of the *Samantabhadra Sādhana*, Thagana and Śrīphalavajra quoted from the *Commentary on Valid Perception* many times to establish the view. Then many other paṇḍits of the Mantrayāna thought it was excessive to take quotations from the *Commentary on Valid Perception* as a source to prove these things, and they thought that the two treatises of the Lord of Reasoning were texts belonging to the general context of inner knowledge [i.e. Buddhism], but were irrelevant in the particular context of Mantrayāna. They viewed it this way, and said so to others. But since those of small minds who tread along the path of reasoning do not comprehend the presentation of flawless logic drawn from a path by which those of intelligence enter into the profound points, so difficult to fathom, this is mere senseless babble that cannot be emitted in the presence of masters who are able to tease out the fine points of logic in the meaning of a scripture.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ This appears to be a reference to a theory regarding the foundation consciousness and how the seeds for stained phenomena will diminish, while the seeds for what is totally pure may increase. See my discussion of this idea as it appears in Tsongkhapa’s *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, in “Using Seeds to Put an End to Seeds,” below. See *tshad ma rnam ‘grel*, Toh. 4210, sde dge, vol. ce, 103a2, for the verse in context.

⁵⁹ The verses referenced can be found at *tshad ma rnam ‘grel*, Toh. 4210, sde dge, vol. ce, 103a2-3 and 116a1-2, respectively. (It would be too complex to attempt to explain them in their respective contexts here):

འཆེ་བ་མེད་དང་ཡང་དག་དོན། རི་མོ་ཉིད་ལ་ཕྱིན་ལོག་གིས། འབད་དུ་ཐེན་ཡང་མི་བསྐྱོག་སྟེ། མཐོ་ནི་དེ་ཕྱིགས་འཛིན་ཕྱིར་རོ། བདག་ཡོད་ན་ནི་གཞན་དུ་ཤི། བདག་གཞན་ཆ་ལས་འཛིན་དང་སྤང་། འདི་དག་དང་ནི་ཡོངས་འབྲེལ་ལས། ཉེས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར།

⁶⁰ In explaining this passage (Sera Monastery, February 4th, 2015, 1h06m) Geshe Norsang commented that Jñānapāda and his commentators were all part of the Mind-Only school in their philosophy, and so explained the lack of a self according to Mind-Only school principles, not the total lack of inherent nature described from the Middle Way Consequence point of view. I would add that the fact Tsongkhapa relies so heavily on their tantric philosophy, and goes to such lengths to defend their use of Dharmakīrti (even though the views presented in Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika* are largely either Cittamātrīn or Sautrāntika) shows once again how much Tsongkhapa honored those views, even in the context of his own *prāsaṅgika* presentation of Vajrayāna. As mentioned in Chapter Three, notes 38 and 43, above, even if Jñānapāda was indeed a disciple of Haribhadra, and hence a follower of the hybrid Yogācāra-Madhyamaka school, it would still take further research into Jñānapāda’s corpus to determine whether there were any clear traces of what might be called a *prāsaṅgika* view in his presentations. If not, this would suggest the degree to which Tsongkhapa is creating an innovative synthesis of Jñānapāda’s principles of the “yoga of indivisibility of clarity and the profound,” and the fact that it is *the lack of inherent nature* which the incisive wisdom realizes, and not a form of emptiness as described in a Mind-Only context. See

The yoga by which one enters into the suchness that is the lack of a self, with a mind that has the aspect of a maṇḍala, is common to all three concentrations.⁶¹ This is as it is explained by Śrīphalavajra, and it is also the intent of Jñānapāda. So it may be true that during the first stage, one meditates primarily upon the side of appearances – a circle of divine beings – but one gains a very powerful ascertainment of what it means for nothing to have a nature of its own, and building on that, one trains oneself to see *how everything dawns as though it were an illusion*.⁶² Then, after one has meditated on the circle of divine beings, while focusing on the divine being as an object of focus, *the mind that ascertains the meaning of the fact that the aspect lacks inherent nature – that confident apprehension – enters into emptiness*,⁶³ and *the beheld aspect dawns in the aspect of divine beings and the places where they stay*.⁶⁴ This yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound is, furthermore, that with which you meditate on each part of the practice for gaining realizations.

From the viewpoint of this ultimate import, the root tantra of Hevajra states:

The yogi of the creation stage
meditates on elaboration, with austerities.
Taking the elaboration to be like a dream,
eliminate elaboration by means of elaboration.

Its explanatory tantra, the *Tent*, states further:

For instance a moon in the water

Tsongkhapa's famous sentence (cited in Chapter Three, note 49, above): "The very incisive wisdom that realizes that the beheld aspect lacks any inherent nature of appearing in the aspect of a divine being, has the same essence as what is vast, the mind yoked to the reality of the divine being." The fact Jñānapāda used the language of "beheld aspect" denotes a Mind-Only approach, while Tsongkhapa's addition of "lacks any inherent nature" is distinctly Middle Way Consequence language. See my attempted interpretation of Tsongkhapa's views *vis.* Dharmakīrti's system in Chapter Five, below.

⁶¹ Tib. *ting nge 'dzin gsum*. From context it is clear that these "three concentrations" refer to one classic way of dividing up the meditations of the Guhyasamāja sādhanā. There are at least four different systems for dividing the Guhyasamāja sādhanā, which Tsongkhapa explains on numerous occasions.

⁶² Tib. *sgyu ma bzhin du 'char ba la bslab*. What follows here is a key passage by which to understand how Tsongkhapa understands the meaning of "like an illusion" at the level of creation stage.

⁶³ Tib. *nges shes kyi 'dzin stangs stong nyid la zhugs*. Note that the first half of this is virtually the same phrase that appears in the *Three Principal Paths*:

One day they will no longer alternate, but in a single instant
the very fact of seeing infallible reliance and relationship alone
will dissolve the *confident apprehension* with which you were
holding to objects; then your analysis of the view is complete.

(See Chapter One, note 48, above: "*nges shes yul gyi 'dzin stangs kun zhig na, de tshe lta ba'i dpyad pa rdzogs pa lags*,".) I do not think the parallel phrasing to be a mere coincidence, for I believe Tsongkhapa is intentionally describing the tantric version of that verse in this extremely important passage. I will elaborate on the connection just below.

⁶⁴ Tib. *gzung rnam rten dang brten pa'i lha'i rnam par shar ba*. This and what is nearly the same phrase at the end of this passage are two classic instances of the phrase that lies at the heart of Tsongkhapa's tantric philosophy. See the discussion in Chapter Three, "In A Single State of Consciousness," above.

is a collaboration of conditions, neither true nor false.
 In the same way here, the circle of the maṇḍala
 has the nature of being luminous and crystal clear.

Therefore, since meditation on emptiness is necessary during both the stages, it is not the case that, within the Mantrayāna, whenever you meditate on emptiness, it is the complete stage. *The yoga in which the holy body of a divine being appears like a moon in the water, or a rainbow in the sky, similar to an illusion that has no nature of its own, most definitely comes as well at the stage of creation.* Thus you must distinguish between that and the illusory body of Granting Blessing to Oneself. As it states in the *Integration of Practices*:

Whoever has entered the ways of the scriptural collections of sūtra, or else all those meditators who remain in the stage of creation, may talk about the examples by saying, “All things are like an illusion, and like a dream, and like a reflected image,” and they may have sheer conviction for them. But for them, those examples will not turn into an understanding of the private advice for Granting Blessing to Oneself, that is, how to become the complete holy body of a divine being whose nature is mind, from nothing more than primordial knowing.

Jñānapāda explains how ascertaining in this way leads one to emptiness and he also explains the yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound in which *the beheld aspect dawns as the divine being*.⁶⁵ This very explanation is, furthermore, what the mahāsiddhas of India take as their source.

* * *

A Window onto Tsongkhapa's Language

With these passages in mind, we might now hear anew the penultimate verse from Tsongkhapa's most concise summary of the steps to enlightenment, the *Three Principal Paths*:⁶⁶

Moreover, appearances **clear away** the existence extreme
 while emptiness clears away the extreme of non-existence;
 and when you understand how emptiness **dawns** in cause and effect,
 then you will never be stolen off by extreme views.

This verse has been traditionally interpreted as revealing Tsongkhapa's own most sophisticated understanding of the Middle Way, in which it is not only the study of

⁶⁵ Tib. *gzung rnam lhar shar ba*.

⁶⁶ See Chapter One, note 48, above, for the full citation. Emphasis mine: *gzhan yang snang bas yod mtha' sel ba dang, stong bas med mtha' sel zhing stong pa nyid, rgyu dang 'bras bur 'char ba'i tshul shes na, mthar 'dzin lta bas 'phrog par mi 'gyur ro,*)

emptiness that shows things not to be real, and the study of cause and effect that stops one from falling into nihilistic thinking, but it is also, and more profoundly, true the other way around: Penetrating deeply enough into the nature of appearances and the infinite intricacies of dependent origination, one sees clearly that nothing could ever have had a nature of its own. Thus appearances themselves gradually reveal that nothing *really* exists in the way that it appears. This is emptiness. Realizing that there could be no emptiness *of* anything if there were no existing things, and that emptiness itself is the flip-side of infallible cause and effect, one cannot think of emptiness without it directly implying the existence of things. So understanding emptiness makes it impossible to think that nothing exists at all, or that “cause and effect do not matter.”

But what would happen if we read this verse again in terms of Tsongkhapa’s Vajrayāna, and specifically the two creation stage practices designed as the two antidotes for (a) things appearing as ordinary and (b) our taking them as ordinary? According to the theory just presented in Tsongkhapa’s analysis, it is the visualization of *clear appearances that clears away* ordinary appearances. It has become evident that Tsongkhapa accepted the close, inseparable relationship between the appearance of things as ordinary and the appearance of things as being real from their own side. So I do not think it too much of an interpolation to say that meditation on clear appearances clears away “the existence extreme” – i.e., thinking things exist exactly the way they appear.

Then, we have seen that it is identification with the divine being – who is in essence the wisdom of clear light, emptiness – which is meant to clear away *belief* in what appears as ordinary. At a very practical level, we know that the malaise of nihilism, whenever it raises its specter within society, has a tendency to lead to the depression of thinking “there’s nothing you can do about it.” So even if nihilism does not lead to free-wheeling abnegation of morality, it can lead to the despair of a world in which nothing really matters. So I would dare to say that in its most extreme form, believing that nothing exists, or that cause and effect are meaningless, is related to the suffering of thinking that everything is just too excruciatingly mundane – and there is no hope for any other kind of existence than the one we have, because “God is dead,” and so on. In Tsongkhapa’s Vajrayāna, however, it is the identification with the primordial wisdom realizing *emptiness that clears away* belief in mere ordinariness – and “the extreme of non-existence” – in a single stroke.

Even without engaging in the practices, it may be possible to imagine how meditating for thousands of hours on intensely clear, brilliant appearances might act as an antidote to things appearing to the mental consciousness as normal. One would become so habituated to envisioning a purer reality beyond what appears to the senses, that even what appears to the senses in one’s world of karmic ripening would no longer “appear” to the mind as normal. Everything would take on the vibrating splendor of a maṇḍala.

Further, the very practice of constant visualization can reveal how it is that the mind “creates” its apprehension of all appearances anyway, shaping the parameters of space and time, color and texture, by which to assimilate every speck of data that may come through the physical sense faculties. But as the “creative” mind gains more and more insight into this lack of inherent nature of all that appears, it might also become easier to recognize even “everyday” appearances, not just as something filtered through the conceptual fabrication of a limited mind, but even, quite directly, as the expression of the indivisible wisdom that understands their very createdness.

The second part, however, may be more challenging: Why should the “divine pride” of identification with a transcendent way of being clear away the habit of “believing things to be ordinary in the way they appear”? If one had begun to see, through constant visualization of clear appearances, how “the mind” – one’s own mind – was creating all appearances anyway, for better or for worse, one might begin to recognize the possibility, the potentiality, for creating pure appearances everywhere, from within the depths of one’s “own” mind, that is, in the final sense, from the indwelling, primordial mind of clear light. If, further, one had learned to identify that this “I” is indeed the Buddha’s own mind – the dharmakāya – creating the appearances of all things, then in any situation, even far from one’s meditation hut, in the messiness of a world of beings who still find themselves driven by karma and the afflictions, one might see the infinite possibility for experiencing the sacred through the active effort to transform each moment into goodness. For one has begun to see, and deliberately *believe*, that the very mind in which all appearances appear is inseparable from the mind of all the Buddhas. So even if karmically-driven appearances still arise, one might recognize that one does not *have to take* things just as they appear, because one has realized the capacity to envision a new appearance . . . and so the insistent belief that things are *really* normal dissolves. With it vanishes the depression that thinks “there’s nothing you can do about it.”

Rather, one would have learned to identify with the divine freedom of the primordial mind of clear light, in whom all things are created, whether within the cycle or beyond it.⁶⁷ If one sees that a “mere I,” which has no inherent nature, and is now merely labeled upon the primordial mind of clear light, has in fact “created” the appearance, then one simply cannot grasp to it being “just there by itself,” much less “ordinary.” At some level (though not a perfect parallel in every way) one might still say that this is the wisdom of emptiness clearing away the belief that “that’s just the way it is and there’s no hope” – a kind of nihilism.

At an even deeper level, as we must explore in the next chapter, changing the contact point at which the label of a “mere I” touches down upon a referent, repeatedly disengages the mind from its beginningless karmic patterns of projecting and believing.

⁶⁷ See Chapters Five and Six for discussions of Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of this idea, which appears in one form or another across all schools of Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayāna.

At the level of the complete stage, we should also inquire: What might be the energetic correspondence for this? How would such realizations cause the subtle inner winds to flow differently? How do even the contrived thoughts of such things during the stage of creation create the conditions for those subtle energies to be able to enter the central channel in actuality, later, when all the inner and outer factors of meditation and ripening are in place?

By identifying with the divine being – who is manifestly *not* anything you thought you were by ordinary standards – it forces you to let go of the “I” to which you were grasping. According to Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of Jñānapāda *et al*, it is this that cuts the root of the cycle, grasping to a self. We have seen evidence that for Tsongkhapa, the “conceptions of things as normal” are simply a manifestation of the tendency to grasp to things as being inherently real. In this way, drawing together Tsongkhapa’s pivotal phrases across sūtric and tantric explanations, we might now intuit a new level at which to read the latter half of this verse from the *Three Principal Paths: See how emptiness dawns as the divine being, and you will never be stolen off by extreme views*.⁶⁸

There is also a technicality to be noted about the language of the two problems and their two antidotes, which might lend further insight into what is supposed to take place at the granular level. Within the Mind-Only perception theory that is still largely the basis for Tsongkhapa’s language in interpreting Jñānapāda, it should be recognized that “appearances” (*snang ba*) are experienced by a mind in the form of a “beheld aspect” (*gzung rnam*). Then, the term I have translated here as “insistently believing in” (*zhen pa*) can also be an alternative word for “holding,” or “grasping,” as in the “aspect of the beholder,” (*’dzin rnam*) or the subject state of mind. In this sense, the division between “appearances” and “how you take them” is simply the division between a beheld aspect of an object and the subjective aspect of a beholder, or even the *mode* of beholding (*’dzin stangs*). Thus the two antidotes address the two poles of what is still experienced in the practitioner as dualistic perception. In working on visualizing clear appearances, one is actively planting the seeds for new tendencies to dawn in the mode of appearances, as a “beheld aspect.” So one is transforming what is beheld. Then, in training to identify the subject state of mind as the indivisible primordial wisdom of great bliss and emptiness, one is transforming the mode of beholding, from one that grasps (*zhen/’dzin*) to things as real/ordinary, to one that *acts to identify* the beheld aspect as divine, holy, special.

Thus, in a tantric context, I read Tsongkhapa using the term “pride” in this precise sense to refer to the *way in which one takes an appearance*. Ordinary pride is just that which, based on seeing the heaps and parts of a person as a real “me,” becomes inflated

⁶⁸ Compare to the passage cited in the previous section at note 55, and discussed at notes 63 and 64: “. . . the mind that ascertains the meaning of the fact that the aspect lacks inherent nature – that confident apprehension – enters into *emptiness*, and the beheld aspect dawns in the aspect of divine beings and the places where they stay.”

with a sense of superiority.⁶⁹ But divine pride, then, serves as a radical reorientation of how the subject state of mind takes the appearance, so that instead of an “ordinary-me-holder” one becomes a “Vajra Holder” (*rdo rje 'dzin pa/rdo rje 'chang*, Skt. *vajradhara*) who is the pristine subject state of mind of indivisible primordial knowing.⁷⁰ I would posit that to understand “divine pride and clear appearances” in this way might have significance for later comparison of Tsongkhapa’s teachings with the methods taught for sustaining the aspect of pristine subjective awareness (*rig cha bskyang ba*) in the Great Perfection systems of the Old Translation School.

With immense practice, objects will begin to appear (to the mind, if not to the senses) *as* the divine maṇḍala, and the practitioner has also learned to *take* it thus – so “pride” in this context is primarily the identification of that divine milieu (to borrow a phrase from Père Teilhard de Chardin). Tsongkhapa has made clear that it is not as though everything has to appear to the senses as the specific details of the maṇḍala one was visualizing. Rather, at the stage of creation, it is a matter of retraining the *mind* to take things *as* divine, *as* being crystal clear and extremely vivid, regardless of the sense data. For once one understands what a dominant role the mental consciousness has to play in our perceptions of anything we “think” is coming through the senses, we can recognize that most of the action is taking place at the mental level, and that is where change can be made. What remains to be examined is this: What is the relationship between training so that the *appearance to mental consciousness* will dawn as something extraordinary, and training so that a different *abstracted image* (*don spyi*) will dawn before the mind as the representation of sense data, based on an entirely new set of karmic tendencies while still on the path? For this crucial point we will need to enter into Tsongkhapa’s understanding of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology.

It also remains for us to examine the philosophical import of “training in how everything dawns as though it were an illusion,” as Tsongkhapa indicates it above, specifically within the context of the stage of creation. For now, I will simply suggest that, as distinct from Mind-Only and Middle Way views, respectively, we might make the following comparison: No longer does recognizing the illusion only mean that one recognizes appearances to be ‘empty of *not* appearing to me based only upon how a karmic tendency dawns as the beheld aspect of a beholding mind.’ Nor does it mean only that what arises is ‘empty of *not* having any nature of its own apart from how it is labeled

⁶⁹ See Tsongkhapa’s explanation cited in this Chapter Four, note 20, above.

⁷⁰ This is not a traditional gloss of “*rdo rje 'dzin pa*” that I have seen in any Tibetan text, but is still an idea that I wish to explore, whether or not it can be found in the literature. It might further be noted, regarding the discussions in Chapter Three above, that in the word “Vajrayāna,” the “vajra” refers primarily to indivisibility, and the “vehicle” that takes one to the destination is actually the continuum of the mind (*rgyud*), which, through practice, becomes indivisibly (a) the appearance of the entire maṇḍala with all its divine beings and the places where they stay, and (b) the wisdom perceiving the emptiness of that appearance. Thus the vehicle (*yāna*) that takes one most quickly to the goal of the Mahāyāna wish for enlightenment is that very state of mind which is indivisible, i.e. “vajra.”

in the moment, based on tendencies.’ But now, whether in meditation or while perceiving the objects of the senses outside of meditation, all appearances to the mental consciousness are understood to be ‘empty of *not* having the nature of the divine beings of a maṇḍala and the sacred places where they stay – as created by the mind of primordial knowing that realizes the lack of inherent nature of all that appears.’ To recognize the illusion, then, is simply to acknowledge that nonetheless, through the assembly of extraordinary conditions, things appear. At the level of creation stage, the appearances of the maṇḍala are now manifestly like the illusions we know in daily life – whether rainbows, reflections of the moon in water, or a lucid dream.

Further, it must be clarified that to understand the heaps, and so on, as being “made of” Buddhas does not imply that they do not *also* come from karma and the mental afflictions. For insofar as the very view that validly perceives them as ordinary does still arise from the reality of the source of suffering, it is based in a constant misunderstanding. But the emptiness, in the Middle Way sense, of each perception at every level means that these two versions of a single deceptive reality are not contradictory. For logically, it is just like the diverse valid perceptions of the flowing stream as water or as pus, and so on, according to the karma of the perceiver. Only here, the tantric practitioner has been cultivating seeds to perceive ritually transformed substances, and eventually the subtle elements of his or her own body, not as the “nectar” of gods within saṃsāra, but rather as the “deathless nectar of primordial wisdom” (*yeshe kyi bdud rtsi*, Skt. *jñāna-amṛta*).

Thus I would argue that, once realized, the latter type of valid perception would not be “just one more possibility” among the various perspectives of myriad sentient beings. As we saw in the quotation from *Having the Three Beliefs* above,⁷¹ Tsongkhapa’s language, interpreting his Indian tantric sources, repeatedly suggests that in his view, the indivisible wisdom of great bliss that realizes the emptiness of the heaps would, in its aftermath, reveal how all the various parts of a person should and do in fact appear to a state of primordial wisdom arising from the clear light. There is no doubt that in Tsongkhapa’s world that would indeed be a *privileged point of view*. Thus it is not as though all perspectives are equally valid – when those of sentient beings are expressly coming from a place of fundamental “ignorance” and those of the yogi-in-training are explicitly on the way towards the totally correct view⁷² of a Buddha. The appearances are still “empty,” but at this point they would be empty of *not* being divinely created.⁷³ This

⁷¹ See the quotation cited at Chapter Four, note 14.

⁷² Tib. *tshad ma gyur pa*. I mean this here in the sense used in the opening lines of Dignāga’s *Compendium of Valid Perception*, *Pramāṇa-samuccaya*, *tshad ma kun las btus pa*, Toh. 4203, sde dge, *tshad ma*, vol. *ce*: “I bow down to the *One who turned correct*, Who brings benefit to wanderers, to the Teacher, Who has Gone to Bliss, to the Protector . . .” ཚད་མར་གྱུར་པ་འཕྲོ་ལ་པན་བཞེད་པ། རྟོན་པ་བདེ་གཤེགས་རྟོན་པ་བྱུག་འཆམ་ནས།

⁷³ It is important to note, however, that there is a difference between a “unique thing to be abandoned” and a “unique thing to be refuted.” The former is considered to be an existing thing, but one which hurts us; the

would be true because the enlightened one who is, from a tantric perspective, said to perceive effortlessly that all beings and the places where they stay are, at some level, sacred, is one who is said to see all of reality correctly, at both the ultimate and the deceptive levels, simultaneously.⁷⁴

latter, if logically refuted, was never there at all. Belief in ordinary appearances exists; but insofar as it is proven to be wrong, and its object successfully refuted, this would imply that “ordinary appearances” never existed at all. This is an exact parallel in logic to the familiar Geluk statement in a sūtra context, that grasping to a self exists, but the supposed self to which it grasps never existed at all (i.e., *med rgyu'i bdag*). From what I have read of Tsongkhapa’s thought on the subject, it certainly seems that, were he pressed to it, he would apply here the same logic he uses in the sūtra context: If the insistent belief is proven (by incisive wisdom) to be wrong, then the object to which belief in ordinary appearances holds cannot exist at all, *not even conventionally*. Applying the distinction of the thing to be refuted, however, this would have to be modified to: “There was never anything at all that had a nature of being ordinary *from its own side*, though admittedly, things did appear that way, falsely, to ignorant states of mind.”

Thus, it is not as though the practice of creation stage is simply striving to see a “divine world *that was always there anyway*.” This would smack of self-existent thinking in Tsongkhapa’s view. So I would say that, yes, the practitioner is indeed creating something *new* (something unprecedented within his or her particular mental continuum, perhaps) in order to see a sacred world, but in order for that to be *believable* (in the good sense) there must be the conviction that it is the *kind* of world one “would have seen” if there had never been the grasping to the two non-existent kinds of self in the first place. Thus (as opposed to the views of Dölpopa and others – See Cyrus Stearns, 2010, *The Buddha from Dölpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen*, Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, esp. 85-110 and 169-179), Tsongkhapa would have to insist that *the sacred world is not there inherently*. But once one does see it, it would have to be a result of having understood reality as it is (even at a conceptual level, to begin), and then having created a new reality out of that wisdom. In this way, one could still maintain that perceptions of ordinary suffering are valid, insofar as they do indeed arise from causes based in a misperception, though they cannot withstand ultimate analysis. The appearances of the maṇḍala cannot withstand ultimate analysis, either, but the practitioner knew that already, because it was out of such understanding that they were created in the first place. This, incidentally, is how the maṇḍala dawns as an illusion.

Thus, understanding what is to be refuted (*dgag bya*) in the sūtra sense opens the space for one to create what will overcome the state of mind to be abandoned (*thun mong ma yin pa'i spang bya*) in the tantric sense. Furthermore, if one has eliminated the unique thing to be refuted by the Consequence view, then, for the duration of that meditation on emptiness, there is simply no appearance remaining upon which to pin the label of “ordinary.” Afterwards, through sustained meditation on the maṇḍala, if one thus cancels the appearance of “ordinary” things in a more and more consistent way, there would be nothing left upon which to project “real existence,” because at every step you saw the mind create it, and know it to be an illusion. So it seems that in practice it could work both ways: Refuting the thing to be refuted helps one to abandon the thing to be abandoned, and *vice versa*.

⁷⁴ For one of Tsongkhapa’s clearest treatments of the knowledge of a Buddha, from a sūtra perspective, see Appendix Twelve. I do not think that a Vajrayāna presentation would contradict this, only perhaps add the fact just as the Buddha’s signs and marks appear from the Buddha’s own side (yet still without having any nature of their own), so too, *from the Buddha’s perspective*, there is a pure appearance of all living beings as already enlightened Buddhas and of all worlds as sacred maṇḍalas, even though this would have to exist in parallel to what the Buddha’s omniscience *knows* as the subjective state of those beings whose minds are still contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance. I have not yet been able to discover an explicit philosophical statement such as this regarding “what the Buddha sees” within one of Tsongkhapa’s Vajrayāna commentaries, though the collection of passages referenced in Chapter One, note 4, regarding what the yogi sees after reaching the illusory body, may be a strong clue. See Appendix Seventeen (461) for reference to one particular way in which such a yogi “sees it to be like this: as though all wanderers had themselves achieved the body of illusion.”

Chapter Five: Emptiness in the Guhyasamāja Sādhana

*wherever emptiness is fitting
there everything will be fitting
wherever emptiness is not fitting
there nothing will be fitting*

—Ārya Nāgārjuna, *Incisive Wisdom: Root Verses on the Middle Way*, 24.14¹

Seeking the Ground of Wisdom

We have now come to a crucial juncture in the structure of this dissertation. Having presented what I understand to be some major points in Tsongkhapa’s theory of creation stage practice, the scene is set for us to return to analyze both some major problems already mentioned, and others still to be raised, placing Tsongkhapa’s own philosophical insights from several of his sūtra-based works in dialogue with his tantric commentaries. Within the structure of Tsongkhapa’s chapter on the creation stage in the *Steps of Mantra*, after the argument on the necessity of emptiness meditation Tsongkhapa goes on to present the stages of how to meditate on a sādhana in detail. Because the *Steps of Mantra* is still a broad presentation, attempting to cover all the types of sādhanas simultaneously – primarily from the systems of Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara, Vajra Bhairava, and Hevajra – the character of that presentation is still quite different from the intricate exegetical detail of Tsongkhapa’s commentary on Nāgabuddhi’s exposition of the Guhyasamāja sādhana that appears in his *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition.”* Nevertheless, it is still in the *Steps of Mantra* that we find Tsongkhapa’s most extensive philosophical explanation of the central mantra that is uttered in nearly all unsurpassed yoga sādhanas at the culmination of the imagined dissolution into the wisdom of clear light: *Om śūnyatā jñāna . . .*² It is in this explanation that I believe we find Tsongkhapa’s clearest answers to the question of what “divine pride” should actually mean, and how it might be meditated upon with utmost honesty, even long in advance of gaining the actual realizations that the words of the mantra are meant to invoke.

¹ Nāgārjuna, *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba’i shes rab*), Toh. 3824, 15a4:

གང་ལ་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་རུང་བ། རྟོག་པ་མཐུག་པའི་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་རུང་བ། རྟོག་པ་མཐུག་པའི་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་རུང་བ། རྟོག་པ་མཐུག་པའི་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་རུང་བ།

² There is a highly esoteric and symbolic explanation of this mantra that comes at the very end of the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition,”* which relates the six words of the mantra to the six *tathāgatas* and the inner winds, based on the root and explanatory tantras of the Guhyasamāja system, as well as Nāgabuddhi’s root text. However, since this is not essential to our present philosophical purposes, and deserves a completely different kind of elucidation in its own right, I will not include that treatment here. See *rnam gzhag rim pa’i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 86b5-89b2 (174-180). I will, however, compare points from the brief explanation of the literal meaning of the mantra that precedes it (*ibid.*, 85b3-86b5 [172-174]) to the parallel explanation in the *Steps of Mantra*, later in this chapter.

Within the course of the Guhyasamāja sādhana that Tsongkhapa teaches in both the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* and the *Steps of Pure Yoga*,³ however, there are two very important periods of meditation on emptiness that precede this culminating dissolution of the central figure. For the first, we have already mentioned the *Om svabhāva* mantra that is uttered prior to creating the circle of protection as a preliminary to the main sādhana, along with Tsongkhapa’s philosophical commentary on it, which appears within the recitation text itself.⁴ The principal purpose of the protection circle is to clear away all inner and outer obstacles to successful completion of the practice. In order to create such a vision, which must already arise within a secret world, one must, as Tsongkhapa says, “clear away every appearance of things being ordinary.” One does this by meditating on the fact things “are empty of being established through any characteristics of their own,” and uttering the mantra to seal that meaning in one’s mind.

With No Functioning Things . . .

The second instance of explicit meditation on the emptiness of all phenomena comes immediately *after* one has envisioned all potential obstacles being disarmed and/or chased away, and after one has visualized the magnificent, formidable walls of protection. This meditation is in turn sealed by a verse quoted directly from the Guhyasamāja root tantra, which begins, “With no functioning things, there is no meditation . . .” (*ngos po med pas sgom pa med*).⁵ Tsongkhapa then writes, almost incidentally, that the meditation on emptiness in which the previously visualized walls of protection, as well as all vessels of worlds and their inhabitants enter into the clear light, is not only the “ground of primordial wisdom” (*ye shes kyi sa*), but the ultimate protection circle.⁶ What is it about understanding that all worlds and all beings are, ultimately, the indivisible subject and object that comprise the mind-of-clear-light-realizing-emptiness, which could serve as the ultimate protection from all harm, all evil forces, and all obstacles to liberation? I leave that to my reader to discern from what follows, but suffice to say that in a sense, this entire dissertation was conceived as an extended commentary on this one verse.

Near the beginning of his *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition,”* Tsongkhapa mentions only briefly how to meditate on the meaning of this verse. I will quote this section just below. His more extensive explanation appears, however, in the massive *Further Commentary in the Form of Annotations*, on (the tantric) Candrakīrti’s

³ This is a sādhana based upon Nāgārjuna’s *Abbreviated Practice*, the *Pinḍīkṛtasādhana* (*sgrub pa’i thabs mdor byas pa*, Toh. 1796, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, vol. *ngi*), on which Nāgabuddhi’s *Steps of the Exposition* is also a commentary.

⁴ See Chapter Four, note 40, above.

⁵ As quoted in the *Steps of Pure Yoga* (*dpal gsang ba ’dus pa’i sgrub thabs rnal ’byor dag pa’i rim pa*), vol. *ja*, 8b5 (706). See Appendix One for the full verse, commentary, and references.

⁶ See *rnal ’byor dag pa’i rim pa*, vol. *ja*, 9a1 (707). རྫོག་པོ་འཇུག་གི་འཇུག་པོ་འཇུག་པོ་

Illuminating Lamp (Pradīpodyotana), which is a word for word commentary on the Guhyasamāja root tantra. I have included this passage as Appendix One, since the style of that commentary is so intricate, that in order to grasp the impact of Tsongkhapa's exegetical pyrotechnics there, it should be read in full. The passage which follows here, however, from the *Exegesis of the "Steps of Exposition,"* actually precedes all that I have cited, since Chapter One, about the re-creation of a universe from the disks of wind, and so on. Since I thought it necessary for readers to understand first the broader context of Tsongkhapa's worldview – in terms of karma, seeds, tendencies, and emptiness in both a Mind-Only and Middle Way sense, as well as his approach to highest yoga tantra itself – I have waited until now to present the actual meditation on this emptiness.⁷

Suppose you ask: "Now, even if I have not found this view of emptiness – the absence upon which one meditates as being something congruent with space – is it okay if I just bring to mind the simple withdrawal of all appearances of vessels and their inhabitants? Or must I at this point recall the meaning of a view I have found?" Here you must certainly do the latter; because, as it states in *Mixed with the Sūtras*: "According to the meaning of the verse that goes, 'The lack of functioning things is the actual meditation . . .',⁸ one meditates on the nature of

⁷ *rnam gzhag rim pa'i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 8b6-9b1 (18-20), emphasis mine:

འདི་ན་སྒྲིབ་ཞིག་པའི་ནས་མཁའ་དང་ཆོས་མཐུན་པར་སྒྲིབ་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པ་འདི་སྒྲིབ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་བ་མ་རྟེན་ཀྱང་སྒྲིབ་བཅུད་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་པ་རྣམས་ཉེ་བར་བསྐྱུས་པ་ཅམ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པས་ཆོག་གས་ལྷ་བ་རྟེན་པའི་དོན་སྐབས་དེར་བྱ་བ་དགོས་ཤིང་། འདི་ལ་ནི་ཀྱི་མ་དེས་པར་དགོས་ཏེ་མདོ་བསྐྱེད་ལས། དངོས་པོ་མེད་པར་སྒྲིབ་པའི་དངོས། །ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་གསུངས་པའི་ཆོག་གས་སུ་བཅད་པའི་དོན་གྱིས་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲིབ་པོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ཆོག་གས་བཅད་དེའི་དོན་ནི་སྒྲིབ་པ་གསལ་ལས་ཚུལ་བཞེར་བཤད་པའི་ཡིག་དོན་དང་སྤྱི་དོན་གཉིས་འདིར་སྐབས་སུ་བབ་ཅིང་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱང་སྒྲིབ་པ་པོ་དང་བསྒྲིབ་པར་བྱ་བ་དང་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་འཁོར་གསུམ་མི་དཔེགས་པ་དང་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཉིད་དང་མཚན་མ་མེད་པ་དང་སྒྲིབ་པ་མེད་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པ་གསུམ་ལ་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རྟོ། །འདི་ཡང་འཁོར་གསུམ་པ་དང་དོ་བོ་རྒྱ་འབྱས་གསུམ་ལ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བའི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ལ་དེས་པ་རྟེན་པ་དགོས་ཀྱི་གསུམ་ཚན་དེ་དག་གི་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཞེས་ཅམ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱས་པས་འཁོར་གསུམ་མི་དཔེགས་པ་དང་རྣམ་ཐར་སྒྲིབ་པ་གྱི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་དུ་འགྱུར་ན་ཏ་ཅང་ཐལ་ལོ། །དེས་ན་སྤིང་གསུམ་སོགས་ལ་དོན་དམ་པར་རམ་བ་དེན་པར་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པ་འཁོར་པའི་ཅ་བ་ཡིན་པས་དེའི་གཉེན་པོར་དོན་དམ་པར་མ་བྱུང་བར་གསུངས་ཏེ་མདོར་བྱས་ལས། དམ་པའི་དོན་དུ་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས། །སྤིང་གསུམ་དངོས་པོ་མེད་པར་བསྒྲིབ། །ཞེས་སྐབས་འདིར་གསུངས་པས་ན་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་བ་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པར་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ལྷར་ཆོས་རྣམས་དོན་དམ་པར་ཅིར་ཡང་མ་བྱུང་བར་དེས་པའི་མེགས་པའི་ཤེས་པའི་དོན་གང་དུ་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཡིན་ལུགས་ལ་དེར་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཅམ་ཡང་ལྷོག་པས་ན་སྒྲིབ་པ་སོགས་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཉེ་བར་ཞི་བ་ཡང་མི་སྒྲིབ་པ་མིན་ནོ། །གཞུང་གཞན་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་ཡང་སྤྱི་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤྱགས་དོན་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལ་ལྷ་བ་རྟེན་དགོས་པ་ནི་འདི་དང་འབྲེལ་ཡིན་ཏེ་དཔལ་སྐྱུ་ཉིད་རབ་བྱེད་དང་པོ་ལས། དང་པོ་སྒྲིབ་ཉིད་རྣམས་བསམ་པས། །ལུས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རི་མ་བཟུ། །གཟུགས་ཁམས་ཞེས་བྱ་སྒྲིབ་པ་སྟེ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ནི་སྒྲིབ་ཡང་བྱ། །ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱིས་ཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་སྒྲིབ་པར་གཏན་ལ་པལ་ནས་བསྒྲིབ་པར་གསུངས་ཤིང་། རྗེ་མེ་གདན་བཞེད་ལེའུ་གསུམ་པར་ཡང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གསུངས་ལ། སྐྱུ་ཉིད་བཟུགས་པ་གསུམ་པའི་རབ་བྱེད་བཞི་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། དེ་ནས་བསམ་གཏན་གྱི་ཁྱད་པར་གནས་ནས་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་བདག་མེད་པ་ཉིད་དུ་བལྟ་བར་བྱ་སྟེ་བྱི་དང་ནང་གི་དངོས་པོ་འདི་དག་སེམས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བཞག་པ་སྟེ་སེམས་མ་གཏོགས་པ་གཞན་ན་མེད་པས་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་གཏོད་མ་ནས་སྟེ་བཞེད་པའི་བྱིར་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་རྣམ་པར་དག་པའོ་ཞེས་ཡིད་ལ་བརྟེན་ལ། །ཞེས་གསལ་བར་གསུངས་སོ། །བཅུད་རྣམས་དཔྱལ་བ་ནས་ཤིང་པ་བཞིན་དུ་འཛིག་པ་དང་སྒྲིབ་རྣམས་ཉེ་བར་བསྐྱུ་གྱིས་འཛིག་པའི་ཤིང་པ་ལ་ནི་ཆོས་མཐུན་སྒྲིབ་པའི་དགོས་པས་མ་གསུངས་སོ།

⁸ This renders an alternative Tibetan translation of the first half-stanza of the same Sanskrit verse from Chapter Two of the Guhyasamāja root tantra, cited in Appendix One: *abhāve bhāvanābhāvo*. In Tibetan editions of Nāgārjuna's *Mixed with the Sūtras* (*Sūtra-melāpaka*), the citation of this verse is translated as: *dngos po med par sgom pa'i dngos*, which apparently reads the locative of *abhāve* literally, and breaks the first half-verse into: *abhāve bhāvanā bhāvo*. Cf. Roger Wright, 2010, *The Guhyasamāja Piṇḍikṛta-sādhana*

emptiness.” As for the meaning of that verse, of the four methods explained in the *Illuminating Lamp*, here it is both the meaning of the words and the general meaning⁹ that are appropriate to the occasion. Those two, furthermore, are said to refer (1) to the fact that the three spheres – the meditator, that upon which one meditates, and the meditation – having no nature, are imperceptible, and (2) to the three doors of (a) emptiness, (b) the lack of characteristics, and (c) the lack of aspirations.

Moreover, one must find with certainty the “having no nature” which is the fact that those three spheres, and the triad of essence, cause, and result, do not exist through any characteristics of their own. But if just bringing to mind the *mere pacification of the appearance* of those sets of three were to become the “imperceptibility of the three spheres” and the “concentration on the three doors to liberation,” that would be an exceedingly absurd consequence indeed. Therefore, since holding that the three realms of cyclic existence, and so on, exist ultimately, or really, is the root of the cycle of suffering, its antidote is said to be the fact that things are not established ultimately. As it says in the *Abbreviated Practice*:

Meditate upon the fact that in the ultimate sense, all things that function – the three realms of existence – have no actual function.

Since this is stated at this juncture, you must definitely ascertain the view of emptiness. In this way, the meaning of the consciousness that ascertains with reason that nothing is in any way established ultimately *turns even the mere appearance back into the way things actually exist*, which is *not to be established as anything*. Thus it is not as though you do *not* meditate as well on the total pacification of all appearances of the vessel and so forth.

In the context of other texts, too, the necessity of finding the view in order to meditate on the meaning of the *svabhāva* mantra, and so forth, is similar to what it is here. In the first section of the glorious *Samputa* it states:

First contemplate all kinds of emptiness;
this will wash away the stains
of beings with a body.

and Its Context, M.A. Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 77n180. In the Rinchen Zangpo Tibetan translation of Nāgārjuna’s *Pinḍikṛtasādhana* (Toh. 1796, sde dge bstan ’gyur, vol. *ngi*), the first line is rendered, *dnegos po med la sgom pa’i dngos*, which again reads the Sanskrit locative, but within a different Tibetan particle. Wright cites Louis de la Vallée Poussin’s 1896 Sanskrit edition as *abhāvabhāvanā bhāvo*. I have also seen a handwritten manuscript edition of the root tantra (from Ulaan Baatar) with *dnegos po med pa’i sgom pa med*, as well as many quotations in Geluk literature with variants including *dnegos po med pa bsgom pa med*, and several other permutations of these possibilities. The latter three lines of the verse, however, are very consistent in their spelling and grammar – perhaps because they have been quoted less. For it is usually just the first line that is quoted, with the remainder implied.

⁹ See Appendix One, for the first two of all four sets of verse commentary translated there.

That known as the ‘form realm’ is empty;
in the same way speak the words . . .

Thus it sets forth the eighteen domains as empty, and then tells one to meditate. The third chapter of the *Four Vajra Seats* expresses something similar, and the fourth section of the third examination in the *Samputa* states clearly as well:

Then, remaining in a special state of meditative concentration, look upon all things as being the very lack of a self itself, and mentally recite: *Outer and inner functioning things are set forth by the mind itself; apart from the mind there is nothing else. Thus, since all things are from the very beginning without any starting, they are utterly pure of having any nature.*

It is never stated, however, that one does *not* need to apply this as that which is congruent to the stages by which all inhabitants – from the hells on upwards – progressively die away, and by which the vessel is destroyed by the seven suns.

Thus Tsongkhapa expresses the epitome of what it means to apply – or join – an element of meditation within the context of the path to something that is congruent with it, or parallel to it, within the original condition of cyclic experience. As Geshe Khedrup Norsang explained at length to an advanced class of monks at Gyutö Monastery,¹⁰ this “ground” of the wisdom perceiving emptiness provides the empty space in which the maṇḍala can be created. With physical space, if something is in the way, another object will be prevented from occupying that space due to the material density of the first object. At the moment of the creation of a world-system, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, if there were not the totally empty space above the gathering disk of wind, the other disks of the elements, and indeed the whole physical construct of a desire realm could not form above it.

Likewise, in “metaphysical” space, if a world is populated with real objects, and if the minds of living beings were really to possess their own characteristic natures, then to try to dis-place that metaphysical space with another real world – one populated with objects and identities that stand in incompatible contrast to what the meditator had perceived before – would be logically impossible, not to mention psychologically quite uncomfortable. But as I have suggested already, the creation of a maṇḍalic world is not intended to produce insurmountable cognitive dissonance within the meditator. Rather, according to Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of his various Indian sources, the sequence of steps is meant to follow a smooth and completely logical pattern, if the minutiae are understood well.

Tsongkhapa had begun by explaining the process by which the karma that keeps each class of beings living in their respective realms is exhausted. According to this

¹⁰ Gyutö Monastery, Lecture, March 30th, 2015, 32min ff.

process, beings are either reborn into higher and higher levels of the form and formless realms, because they were spontaneously attracted to worldly meditation and practiced it while human, or else they are reborn into the lower realms of other world-systems that are not in the midst of an eon of destruction. Geshe Norsang commented here on how there is an extremely subtle relationship between living beings and their environments, so that once there are no longer any sentient beings living in a particular environment, then that environment will begin to decay.¹¹ From a contemporary ecological perspective, this point has become quite obvious. We see well how if all the insect and animal life of a particular ecosystem is wiped out, then the plants and micro-organisms will quickly be affected. The picture here is that if, *for karmic reasons*, all the sentient beings of a particular world were to very gradually evacuate, then eventually the non-sentient physical environment – both plants and minerals – would deteriorate. In Buddhist time, this is said to take place over the course of many millions of years. In the end, seven suns rise, each hotter than the last, to gradually incinerate the entire planet, until not even a trace of ash remains.

What does this picture of cosmic catastrophe have to do with a four-times daily meditation on the subtle lack of inherent characteristics at the metaphysical level? Judging from Tsongkhapa's comments, it seems there were would-be tantric meditators in his own time who understood that one was supposed to meditate on some kind of vacuum in which all objects appearing to the physical and mental faculties would vanish, but since they thought the real place for meditation on philosophical emptiness was only in the complete stage, they did not see the need to have any sophisticated view of emptiness at this point, when merely setting the scene for visualization of a maṇḍala.¹² Tsongkhapa objects vehemently, as we already saw him do in the *Steps of Mantra*, when defending the necessity of meditation on emptiness during the creation stage. He cites both the author of *Mixed with the Sūtras* (who is known to him as Ārya Nāgārjuna) and the author of the *Illuminating Lamp* (known to him as Candrakīrti),¹³ to prove that one must meditate on emptiness with philosophical rigor at this point, in order to effect the necessary vanishing of appearances. He goes on to quote the *Samputa-tantra* from the Hevajra cycle, as well as the mother tantra known as the *Four Seats* (*Śrī-catuhpīṭha-tantra*), to indicate that this is emphasized across numerous tantric *root texts*, and is not just a demand peculiar to the “Ārya tradition” of Guhyasamāja commentary.

¹¹ Gyutö Monastery, Lecture, March 30th, 2015, 27m30s ff.

¹² Indeed, the speed at which such sādhana are recited, even in a formal tantric ritual at a Geluk monastery today, would seem to leave little time for more than a momentary recollection of a view that might have been learned or discovered at another time (whether in study, or on a debate ground). Nevertheless, the instruction I heard given by Geshe Norsang clearly indicated that the teaching still passed on to those monks as the *intent* of the sādhana practice, is to spend “no small amount of time” meditating until one has made some meaningful progress in analytical insight at this juncture in the sādhana practice. For this reference to Tsongkhapa's own injunction, see the final paragraphs of Appendix Two.

¹³ See my discussion in the Introduction (under “Two Traditions”) of the authorship of these Guhyasamāja works that make up the “Ārya tradition” (*phags lugs*).

According to the *Illuminating Lamp*, which is the tantric Candrakīrti's verse commentary to the Guhyasamāja root tantra, there are two triads, the contemplation of which should lead one into the proper metaphysical dissolution of the three realms. These are two classical rubrics by which to understand emptiness, even from within the Middle Way treatises of sūtra philosophy. The first is known as the “three spheres” or “three wheels” (*'khor gsum*), consisting of an agent, the object of an action, and the activity itself. Such a triad appears and is deconstructed in numerous ways throughout Nāgārjuna's *Root Verses on Incisive Wisdom*, and is treated at length in Tsongkhapa's commentary on that text, the *Ocean of Reasoning*.¹⁴

The name of the second triad – the “three doors of liberation” – is more particular to Vajrayāna literature, though the idea of the emptiness of essence, causes, and results of course pervades Middle Way reasoning as well, especially Candrakīrti's *Entering the Middle Way*, and Tsongkhapa's commentary upon it.¹⁵ These three are coded within tantric literature respectively as “the three doors of (1) emptiness, (2) the lack of characteristics, and (3) the lack of aspirations.” Though Tsongkhapa does not explain these in any detail here, he does give one added clue to the language of the “three doors of liberation” during his exegesis of the *Oṃ śūnyatā* mantra, within the *Stages of Mantra*. There he states clearly that the meaning of the emptiness of both causes and results “can be subsumed under what is ultimately only ever the absence of an essence.”¹⁶ So although one may glean new perspectives from thinking about how causes cannot exist in themselves (apart from looking in retrospect from a result), and how results cannot exist really (apart from a concept of future becoming present, looking back at the past); in the end, causes and results are empty only because there are no real *things* – including mental events – that could ever have begun or ended *as anything* in the first place.

In both the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* and in the *Steps of Mantra*, Tsongkhapa is primarily concerned with proving, from scriptural passages, the necessity of understanding the four-line verse in a certain way, and explaining how it is that the meditator should take that meaning into a meditative experience. But as for the philosophical references, it is actually in the four-tiered verse commentary from the *Further Commentary in the Form of Annotations*, as well as in the corresponding

¹⁴ See *dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, vol. *ba*, and Tsongkhapa, Jay Garfield and Ngawang Samten, 2006, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press), *passim*.

¹⁵ See Appendix Five (esp. 257-264) and Appendix Six for extensive excerpts from Tsongkhapa's treatment of Candrakīrti's refutation of “birth from another,” which constitutes more than a third of the whole of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, as well as of Tsongkhapa's *Illumination of the True Thought*. See also, the discussion of the same key phrase, “no functioning things,” as it appears in the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, at the start of Appendix Seven.

¹⁶ See Appendix Two, under the explanation headed [1] at (812).

discussion in his *Jeweled Pen*,¹⁷ that we find Tsongkhapa’s most thorough exegesis of the Guhyasamāja verse. While I refer my reader to Appendix One for the intricate way in which Tsongkhapa weaves his own commentary into his direct quotation of Candrakīrti’s *Illuminating Lamp* (impossible to render perfectly in English), I will cover the main points here.

*With no functioning things, there is no meditation
To have something upon which to meditate, is not the meditation
Thus, with functioning things and things with no function
The meditation has nothing upon which to focus*¹⁸

An initial reading of the grammar of the most common Tibetan translation of this verse¹⁹ (*dngos po med pas sgom pa med . . .*), might lead one to translate it into English quite differently than I have done here. Read at face value, it would look something more like:

*Since there are no things, there is no meditation
To have something to meditate upon, is not meditation
Therefore, since real things have no reality
The meditation has nothing upon which to focus*

It would read like a classical Nāgārjunian or *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*-style enigmatic statement about emptiness, where you say nothing exists but are supposed to understand that somehow this is not the whole story. For those steeped in the Tibetan traditions of the Great Seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*) or else of the Great Perfection, it might read, further, like yet another Indian scriptural source for the idea of “non-meditation” (*sgom med*), a name for the fourth stage of advanced yogic practice in the Great Seal tradition,²⁰ and a term also used in many pith instructions of the Great Perfection.²¹ Nevertheless, according to Tsongkhapa’s close reading of Candrakīrti’s commentary, he actually sees the verse as a *refutation* of four extremes that would constitute wrong views about emptiness. Therefore each of those views “would not be” the proper meditation.

¹⁷ See *The Jeweled Pen: A Critical Analysis of Difficult Points in “The Lamp of Illumination,” an Extensive Explanation of the King of Secret Teachings, the Glorious Guhyasamāja (rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal gsang ba ‘dus pa’i rgy ches bshad pa sgron ma gsal ba’i dka’ ba’i gnas kyi mtha’ gcod rin chen myu gu)*, vol. ca, 71b6-75b2 (208-216). After reviewing some philosophical points made more thoroughly elsewhere in his Middle Way writings, Tsongkhapa then focuses this analysis on the context of the verse in the whole of the second chapter of the root tantra, which is on the meaning of ultimate bodhicitta. Unfortunately, I will not be able to treat this text properly in the context of the current dissertation, and so will leave it as a mere reference for the reader’s further investigation.

¹⁸ See Appendix One, note 2.

¹⁹ Though there are many variants. See Chapter Five, note 8, above.

²⁰ For further reading, see, for example, Karma chags med, *et al*, 2000, *Naked Awareness: Practical Instructions on the Union of Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen by Karma Chagmé; with commentary by Gyatrul Rinpoche*, translated by B. Alan Wallace (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), 252-259.

²¹ See, for example, Bdud ’joms gling pa, 2015, “Buddhahood Without Meditation,” in *Dūdjom Lingpa’s Visions of the Great Perfection*, translated by B. Alan Wallace; edited by Dion Blundell, vol. 2 (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications), 7-43.

Tsongkhapa explains that when you engage in an analysis that seeks out the ultimate way in which things exist, if in the process you find that nothing at all can be established independently as itself, and this leads you to think that nothing exists at all in the slightest way, then you have fallen into the extreme of non-existence, and this is not the correct meditation. That is, because *everything* would seem to have fallen out of existence, there would be nothing at all left as a basis for establishing emptiness. There would be nothing there to be empty *of* one's wrong ideas about it, so there would be no meditation on emptiness, either.

On the other hand, if, out of fear that such a meditation on the fact that things lack natures of their own would turn out to mean that nothing could perform any functions, and out of fear that the three spheres of action, object, and agent would be rendered unreasonable, you then dig in your heels and decide that things must have inherent natures after all; then this, too, would not be the meditation. Tsongkhapa invokes Nāgarjuna's famous statement from the Twenty-Fourth Chapter of the *Root Verses on the Middle Way*, that if the path to liberation really existed with its own nature, then it would *always* have existed that way, and there would be nothing to grow, cultivate, meditate on, or become habituated to. It is crucial to note here that the Sanskrit word for “meditation,” *bhāvanā*, has all these connotations at once. If things *had* inherent natures, then it would become unreasonable for there to be a meditator, meditation, and so on; but not the other way around. This argument, and the second line of the four-line Tibetan verse, counters the second extreme: thinking that if things exist, then they must exist really.

The third line first lists a word for existing or functioning things, and then a word for the negation of those things, each in close succession, with no clear grammatical liaison, in either Tibetan or the Sanskrit. It is glossed as countering the third extreme, by which one might hypothetically think that things both do and do not exist with natures of their own. Tsongkhapa notes that there is no philosophical school that actually holds this position; rather, it is included for the sake of completeness to eliminate the four extremes that are meant to cover all possibilities. He also notes that implicit in the rejection of holding two opposites simultaneously is the rejection of the fourth wrong view, which would try to say that things *neither* do, nor do not, exist through natures of their own. That would just be sophistry, and no one could seriously hold such a view without making a ridicule of logic.

If one gains a clear understanding of these four extremes, then, an understanding so clear that each possibility can show up instantaneously while reciting the lines of the verse, then in the silence immediately following, one's mind might be left to rest in the true “center” (*dbus*) where there is no wavering from the Middle Way. From the manner in which Geshe Norsang emphasized this word, pronounced *ū* (center, or middle), it seemed as though he thought that would be the doorway through which to enter a deep meditation based upon reciting the verse. It is a center in which one rests once one has

seen that things do not exist by nature, but they do exist conventionally (*rang bzhin gyis ma grub pa, tha snyad du yod pa*). Insofar as the logic of the Consequence group assumes that someone can only discover the correct view by realizing the absurd consequence of holding any extreme view, then interpreting the verse as the negation of the four extremes *would* accord with classical Nāgārjunian techniques, but in exactly the opposite sense from a face-value reading of the grammar, which might seem to imply nothing exists at all. In English, since one has the opportunity to add the implication of conditional tenses and so on, one also has to choose one meaning or the other in order to render it grammatically. But the ambiguity of the Sanskrit, and the fact of so many extant alternative translations of the first line into Tibetan, any one of which still leaves ambiguity from an English-language point of view, may be key to the verse's power as a kind of mantra, in both Sanskrit and Tibetan. If translating it for recitation of Tsongkhapa's Guhyasamāja sādhanā into English, then, I might well choose my second translation, into which the meanings of Candrakīrti's gloss could still be read, though not without some effort and habituation.

Within the first gloss there has still been only a hint at what the emptiness of the three spheres would actually involve. It has mostly consisted of a refutation of what it cannot mean, intended to draw one into the empty still-point that is left when the four-fold refutation is finished. Within Candrakīrti's commentary, this was just the first of four levels of meaning within the complex rubric of Guhyasamāja scriptural interpretation,²² the “meaning of the letters.” It is within the second level, the “general” or “shared” meaning (shared across the sūtra Mahāyāna as well as all the classes of Vajrayāna), that Tsongkhapa is able to draw out a more discursive philosophical intent. This time he relates it directly to the code names of each of the “three doors of liberation.”

As for the door of “emptiness,” which Tsongkhapa glosses in several places to mean the emptiness of *essence*, this is explained here in terms of a classical argument on the lack of anything being really one or many (*gcig du bral*). Very briefly, the logic goes like this: With respect to every existing thing, whether physical objects, moments of consciousness, or even unproduced things, like space, there can be a division into parts. Physical objects can be divided into upper and lower parts, as well as according to the four lateral quadrants. Consciousness can be divided into moments across time, and unproduced space, apprehended only as an absence of obstruction, can also be divided into directions. Space can also be identified as a location *in relation to* the existence of the changing objects that do or do not occupy it at certain times. But if any one of those existing things were to be established as *real*, then it would have to exist in exactly the

²² For a detailed analysis of these four levels of meaning in English-language scholarship see John Campbell, 2009, “Vajra Hermeneutics,” esp. 148-159; David Kittay, 2011, “Interpreting the *Vajra Rosary: Truth and Method* Meets Wisdom and Method,” PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, esp. 337-392; and Alexander Berzin, “The Six Alternatives and Four Modes,” at <http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/vajrayana/tantra-advanced/what-is-guhyasamaja-practice#the-six-alternatives-and-four-modes>.

way it appears. Further, if both parts and what possesses the parts (or the “whole”) were to be real in this way, then there would either have to be two separate real essences, or there would really have to be only one thing. Taken to their logical ends, both options turn out to be absurd. Either one gets the picture of a whole floating out there somewhere separate from its parts, or one must imagine the whole of a person’s body, for example, existing *in toto* within each fingernail; because “each part must really be the whole . . .”

What this implies, of course, is not only that parts depend on the whole, and the whole depends on the parts, but that both parts and whole are identified through a process of labeling, of being conceptualized by an observer. As to *why* different observers label differently, and as to exactly how things can exist as established only by concepts and still function, there is still much more to be said. But for now it is sufficient to see how this most famous “proof” of emptiness is enough to show that it is impossible for things to exist in the way they appear to unexamined perceptions, namely, to exist as a real whole with real parts. Upon examination, neither could ever be discovered, so the original “object” must not really exist in the way it appeared, and so is illusory. Tsongkhapa takes this as the pith of the Middle Way Consequence viewpoint. It seems the rest of the intricate arguments and debates with the other schools are intended to keep one from falling into eighty-four thousand other justifications and subtle wrong views which might hold out that *something*, at *some* level of sub-atomic particles or instants of consciousness, might still be a real whole, apart from *someone’s* conceptualization of it as such.²³

Candrakīrti’s commentary goes on at this point to interpret the first line of the verse as meaning that if one has realized the emptiness of all produced and unproduced things in this way, but then proceeds to cling to the *emptiness* itself, then this would be “no meditation” on emptiness. Tsongkhapa glosses this “insistent belief” as the belief that

²³ It will be extremely important to keep in mind, regarding our later discussion of conceptual vs. nonconceptual states of mind, that it does not exactly work the other way around. That is, although Tsongkhapa’s Consequence view holds that nothing can be *established* apart from being set forth through a conceptual state of mind, things are not proven to be empty *because*, or only because, they can positively be shown to be established by conceptual states of mind. I would argue this insofar as there are countless things said to be perceived by advanced meditators (even those who have not reached transcendent paths by realizing emptiness directly) through mostly nonconceptual states of mind, *that are still empty*, even though they are not being actively conceptualized by a discursive consciousness at those moments. Furthermore, for ārya bodhisattvas of the eighth level and higher, for whom things no longer even *appear* as being real, those things are not being conceptualized as real, and even between periods of the most profound meditative equipoise on emptiness, when objects still appear as illusions, it seems object could still appear to a nonconceptual visual consciousness, and so on, without further elaboration by a discursive mind. So it seems (as we see from Tsongkhapa’s points in the *Steps of Mantra*, Appendices Nine and Fifteen), that there can be appearances not actively conceptualized in association with any *word*, which are nonetheless empty, for the very reason that “inherent characteristics could never be found.” Thus emptiness is always proven according to what something is not, and though everything conceptualized *is* empty, there are countless things perceived without conceptualization, which are nonetheless empty, and always have been, regardless of how or by whom they were perceived. See also, Appendix Twelve, on the omniscience of a Buddha, and the discussion at the end of this chapter.

emptiness itself is real from its own side.²⁴ The reason this is stated to be “a view from which there is no hope for recovery,” is, according to Geshe Norsang, that if a view of emptiness is the one antidote to the false thought that takes things to be real, then if one were to apply to that very antidote the same grasping to things as real that had been the problem in the first place, then one has no antidotes left. It would be like applying water to a fire when water turned out to have the nature of fire.²⁵ Or as in Nāgārjuna’s famous analogy to a snake taken by the wrong end,²⁶ here it would be as though one had added poison to the only antidote one possessed for having ingested poison, so one would then, indeed, become “incurable.”

Following Candrakīrti closely, Tsongkhapa then connects the word “characteristics,” in the door of liberation known as “the lack of characteristics,” to the false notion that causes and effects could exist really, i.e., through characteristics of their own. How can we think of the past, or of some event that we have experienced, without grasping the signs and characteristics of which memories are made?²⁷ But we still think they are the “real past.” Or how could we hope for the future without holding to an idea of some person (“me”) about whom one has these hopes and these fears, all projected images about what “will or might happen”?

The term “aspirations,” then, is connected specifically to the state of mind that grasps at results that could ever come about as something not labeled by the mind. It is clear, then, that although the term for the third door of liberation, “the lack of aspirations” – or even, “no prayers” – might sound as though it means there is nothing to hope for, rather, it means there is nothing to hope for *that could come about all by itself*, without being labeled by a state of mind. As we will see from Tsongkhapa’s intricate connection between karmic activity and the way that labels *do* arise before the conceptualizing mind, this understanding would seem to make genuine prayer – along with the actions to support and create the virtue necessary to see it realized – all the more imperative. That is, if they are the aspirations of a mind that understands how perceptions of empty objects actually do come about, through profound dependent arising, then indeed the act of casting those aspirations into the future, without grasping to them in a way that

²⁴ I do not see this as a case of Tsongkhapa reading too much into Candrakīrti’s words, in terms of the “distinction of the thing to be refuted.” I think one must keep in mind again and again that from Tsongkhapa’s perspective, he *was* interpreting the same author whose verses on *Entering the Middle Way* he had interpreted in his *Illumination of the True Thought*. So regardless of the historical circumstances that may have led to the attribution of these tantric commentaries to the authorship of the famous Middle Way philosophers – and whether or not that is “objectively” plausible – *for Tsongkhapa*, it was one seamless reading from the sūtric to tantric contexts, and this is critical to understanding his overall paradigm of interpretation.

²⁵ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, Class in “Guhyasamāja Creation Stage” (*gsang ‘dus bskyed rim gyi ‘dzin grwa*), March 31st, 2015, 13m45s ff.

²⁶ *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Chapter Twenty-Four.

²⁷ This was a point emphasized by Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, “Creation Stage,” March 31st, 2015, 20m12s ff.

misunderstands the nature of cause and effect as empty, would be a most powerful way to shape the “merely labeled” future. Tsongkhapa does not say this here, but I think it is implied by the whole context of his thought, and his vision of tantric causation in particular.

The Vanishing of Appearances

Now we may return to the question of how such a meditation is distinct within the context of this unsurpassed yoga sādhana of the Guhyasamāja, and specifically how it could create a state of experience congruent to the evacuation of a world-system during an eon of destruction. How is this supposed to be different from a sūtra form of analytical meditation on insight, as described by Tsongkhapa in his Steps on the Path literature?

Once again, it seems this question can only be answered from the point of view of how creation stage is designed to directly anticipate and ripen the causes for realizations that will only come fully during the complete stage. As I have heard several Geluk Geshe, including His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, mention on more than one occasion,²⁸ there is one crucial difference in the way that a yogi of the second stage realizes emptiness directly from the way that an ārya bodhisattva following the sūtra path alone will realize emptiness directly. According to Tsongkhapa’s interpretation, it is not the objective field – the emptiness – that differs, but rather the quality of the state of mind that realizes it.

Within the sūtra vehicles, it is widely agreed that a meditator can realize emptiness directly from any level of meditative stability that is at or above the “access concentration” to the first meditative concentration of the form realm. This preparatory stage of concentration is known as “no lack of time” (*bsam gtan dang po nyer sdogs mi lcog med*). Any state of meditation not yet at this level of stillness will not have the stability with which to realize emptiness directly. While there are indeed supposed to be very high levels of formless realm meditative absorption from which it would be nearly impossible to realize emptiness directly for the *first* time, because it is not possible to perform analysis there in order to trigger the direct perception, still, it is acknowledged that accomplished practitioners might eventually realize emptiness from any level of meditative absorption.²⁹

While all these states of meditative equipoise can be considered “subtle” from the point of view of having transcended all sensory activity, much less the ordinary cravings

²⁸ This includes references by Geshe Tenzin Sönam during a class on the *Illumination of the True Thought* at Dolma Ling Nunnery, Sidhpur, India; a conversation to clarify the point with Geshe Ngawang Tenzin at Dolma Ling on December 4th, 2014; mention during several teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala and in Mungod, Sept-Dec 2014; and innumerable references to the point by Geshe Khedrup Norsang, Jan-June 2015.

²⁹ See Leah Zahler, 2009, *Study and Practice of Meditation*, esp. 187 ff., 236, and 271.

and afflictions particular to the desire realm,³⁰ they are still functioning from the perspective of a mental stream that has not been dissolved into the fundamental, ground awareness from which all manifestations of conditioned consciousness spring. They are very stable meditations that are nonetheless based within the stream of ripened, conditioned consciousness that corresponds to the particular lifetime of a sentient being, whether embodied in a heap of form, or not. So when an ārya realizes emptiness directly from the platform of any one of the sūtra practices, the subject state of mind that realizes the emptiness would still be that of a sentient being, albeit a sentient being temporarily purified of any manifest mental affliction or mistaken mode of perception.³¹ Thus, *compared to* the states of mind cultivated within the complete stage, all states of meditation described in literature associated with the sūtra vehicles would, from Tsongkhapa's unsurpassed yoga tantra perspective, be said to utilize a "coarse state of mind" (*blo rags pa*). According to this explanation, sūtra forms of meditation are not attempting to, nor do they directly access the subtle states of mind (*blo phra mo*) which manifest when inner winds are dissolving within the central channel, nor the *extremely* subtle mind of clear light that manifests in the original condition only after a death process is complete. According to complete stage presentations of the tantras associated with the New Translation Schools within Tibet, that mind of clear light is dormant as long as ordinary coarse energies and mental states are active; thus it cannot be accessed without practices deliberately aimed at activating it, by bringing coarse energies to dissolve within the central channel. Not even states of meditative concentration as deep, withdrawn, and "subtle" as those of the form and formless realm concentrations and absorptions are designed to direct the winds into the central channel, and particularly into the indestructible drop at the heart.³²

³⁰ It was Geshe Ngawang Tenzin (private interview at Dolma Ling, Dec 4th, 2014, 4m20s ff.) who pointed out to me this distinction as to the two different ways in which the word "subtle" might be used to analyze the issue. Compared to our ordinary coarse states of consciousness, he affirmed that the various levels of meditative stabilization within the sūtra vehicles are indeed subtle, and become more subtle, all the way up to the highest level of the formless realm. But none of these are the same as the states of *extremely* subtle winds and mind that the practices of unsurpassed yoga tantra seek to make manifest. Geshe Ngawang Tenzin emphasized that from the perspective of both sūtric and tantric vehicles, however, during the realization of emptiness the *object*, namely, emptiness, is indeed "subtle." See also, Geshe Gedün Lodrö, 1992, *Walking Through Walls: A Presentation of Tibetan Meditation*, translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins, co-edited by Leah Zahler and Anne Klein (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), 244-247, for a corresponding discussion of these issues.

³¹ See Tsongkhapa's discussion of some high-level permutations of this idea at Appendix Five (289-290).

³² See Chapter Three, note 100, above, as well as the following point, also from Tsongkhapa's *Having the Three Beliefs* (*vid ches gsum ldan*), vol. *ta*, 18b3-6 (38), emphasis mine:

Now in general, before any of the complete stages within unsurpassed yoga, it is absolutely essential to have a special method for inserting the winds from the [right-hand] channel of taste and the [left-hand] solitary channel into the central channel. In that regard, there are many different systems, according to each of the great adepts who relied on different classes of tantra, respectively. Here, one gathers the life-wind into the *dhūtī* [central channel] through exercising the life-wind of the small "a" – the inner fire that relies upon the circle of emanation [i.e., the navel chakra]. Therefore, one must sustain the great seal [Skt.

As we have begun to see, it is only the practices of the complete stage that are designed to access and awaken the extremely subtle winds and primordially indwelling mind of clear light. This is insofar as they attempt, within a *human* body, to open and penetrate a central channel that was formed while in the mother’s womb, in order to bring winds and consciousness to collapse and dissolve into the indestructible drop at the heart. As Geshe Norsang mentioned in this regard, it is not even automatic for the mind of clear light to be of the nature of great bliss. That is, if worldly gods and other beings who have taken “spontaneous birth,” do meditate deliberately in order to manifest a subtle mind in this sense, the clear light will dawn, but it will not be of the nature of bliss.³³ This is because they lack the ability to sustain the winds at a crucial point long enough for subtle elements to melt and for winds to turn inwards and enter a central channel,³⁴ thus they do not have the capacity to generate the “great bliss” unique to unsurpassed yoga tantra. Thus the bliss must be generated separately, through the practices of the complete stage, for which, as we saw in the last chapter, only human beings of a world like our own are said to be perfectly suited.

Once generated, however, the advanced yogi is supposed to be able to enter a very stable meditation involving a subject state of mind of great bliss, *with which* to then meditate upon emptiness. This is known as “joining bliss to emptiness” (*bde stong sbyar ba*). Once one has an understanding of emptiness, and then generates bliss through some

mahāmudrā] of the simultaneously-born primordial wisdom that arises at the culmination of the four forms of rapture that come from inserting the life-wind into the *dhūtī*. But if you do not rely upon the profound path of a method such as this, then a stable level of meditation that is blissful, clear, and nonconceptual, which has been sustained for a long time through the mindfulness and introspection of a concentration that simply has no conceptual thoughts, is shared between all the greater and lesser vehicles, as well as between the vehicles of mantra and of the perfections. So it is extremely important for you to distinguish those two, without mixing them up.

དེ་ལ་སྤྱིར་རྣམ་འབྱོར་བླ་མེད་གྱི་རྒྱུ་ལ་འཛིན་པའི་རྣམས་ལ་སྤྱོད་དུ་ རོ་རྒྱུད་གི་རྒྱུད་དབྱེ་མར་འཛུགས་པའི་ཐབས་ཀྱི་ཐབས་ཅན་ཅིག་མེད་མི་རུང་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ལ་ཡང་རྒྱུ་
ད་སྡེ་ས་སེ་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་གྲུབ་འདིར་ནི་ལྷོ་བ་སྤྱུལ་པའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་གཏུམ་མོ། ཨ་ཐུང་གི་སྤྱོད་ཚུལ་གྱི་སྤྱོད་ནས། སྤྱོད་རྒྱུ་ཀྱིར་སྤྱད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། དེས་ན་
སྤྱོད་རྒྱུ་ཀྱིར་བཅུད་པ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་དགའ་བཞིའི་མཐར་སྐྱེས་པའི་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་གྱི་བྱུག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱོད་བ་དགོས་ཀྱི། དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཐབས་ལས་ཐབས་མོ་ལ་ས་
བརྟེན་བས། སེམས་ཅིར་ཡང་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་དུན་ཤེས་གྱིས་རིང་དུ་བསྐྱུངས་པའི་བདེ་གསལ་མི་རྟོག་པའི་སེམས་གནས་བརྟན་པོ་ནི། ཐེག་པ་ཆེ་རྒྱུད་
ར་སྤྱུགས་དང་པར་ཕྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་ཀུན་གྱི་བྱན་མོང་བ་ཡིན་པས། དེ་གཉིས་མ་འབྲས་པར་བྱེད་བཞིན་ཏུ་གལ་ཆེན་

This is potentially a very complex issue, about which there are many varying explanations across different schools within Tibet, and even disagreements in interpretation within Tsongkhapa’s direct lineage. The only point I am trying to establish here is one that Geluk teachers do repeat consistently, namely, that “in the sūtra system one realizes emptiness with a coarse state of mind while in unsurpassed yoga tantra one realizes it with a subtle state of mind.” I cannot hope to explore fully, within this present dissertation, the range of literature involved, nor the immense ramifications any one interpretation might hold with respect to approaching actual meditative practices.

³³ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, Class in “Levels and Paths of Mantra” (*sngags kyi sa lam gyi ‘dzin grwa*), March 31st, 51m30s ff.

³⁴ See also *rnam gzbag rim pa’i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 18b2-3 (38), where Tsongkhapa cites the “main part of the *Levels*” (*sa’i dngos gzhi*, i.e., the *Yogācārabhūmi*) on the idea that gods of the desire realm might join in sexual union, but no fluid will be emitted, because the winds at the door of the channel are very weak.

other method (whether visualizations at the stage of creation, or through working with crucial points of the subtle body during the complete stage), one is then in turn meant to apply the understanding of emptiness to the experience of bliss. Then the subject state of mind (*yul can*) remains immersed in an experience of bliss, while the objective field (*yul*) is the same simple absence of inherent characteristics that one had come to understand in a sūtra Middle Way Consequence sense. As we saw in the previous chapter, this indivisible union of bliss and emptiness is what Tsongkhapa has said lends the primary distinguishing factor of speed to the unsurpassed yogas. As explained by the later Geluk commentator, Pañchen Sönam Drakpa (*pañ chen bsod nams grags pa*, 1478-1554), when commenting upon this very juncture in the Guhyasamāja sādhana, the reason joining bliss to emptiness is so important here is this: “Within the unsurpassed vehicle, if one is to be able to reach the state of a Buddha within a single lifetime, *one must be able to cut off dual appearance* through the indivisible wisdom of bliss and emptiness.”³⁵

Now dual appearance (*gnyis snang*) is a difficult phrase that has been much used and yet is potentially much misunderstood in this present context, especially since within Euro-American discourses “dualism” and “nondual” have numerous other connotations drawn from a wide variety of non-Buddhist philosophical contexts. Within this particular Tibetan Buddhist discourse, however, it appears to be a phrase drawn from Mind-Only school thought, where, as we have seen, “appearing as two” means precisely that subject and object appear as though they are separate substances, and as though they did not arise from the ripening of the same karmic seed. I have never seen Tsongkhapa iterate any *other* definition of the term from a Middle Way point of view, and insofar as the term is used ubiquitously in Vajrayāna texts, it may well be that it was drawn from tantric explanation originating among Mind-Only practitioners (i.e., *yogācārins*), such as those in the school of Jñānapāda. Though there is some question as to whether, in Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way interpretation, he can still say that outer objects arise from the *exact same* karmic seed as the sensory consciousness that perceives them,³⁶ it is nonetheless clear that he accepts the Mind-Only school presentation of karma for the most part, excluding only those aspects which become specifically incompatible with the Middle Way Consequence view. Thus it seems that for Tsongkhapa, “dual appearance” simply means the appearance that things exist on their own, as separate from an observer, without being merely labeled, and as though they had natures of their own, not fundamentally created by the mind.³⁷ It would be tantamount to the *appearance* of things existing as real, as opposed to the insistent belief that they are such.

³⁵ Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, *bskyed rim gyi rnam gzhas mkhas pa'i yid 'phrog*, 28, emphasis mine.

³⁶ Since he does maintain that there must be a nominal causal process by which the outer object triggers the consciousness of it. See Chapter Four, note 30, above.

³⁷ See Appendix Seven, “Two Strategies for a Cure” (333-338) for a difficult, but extremely concise comparison of how Tsongkhapa understands the Mind-Only and Middle Way schools to refute their respective expressions of the object to be refuted, and their reasons for doing so. This argument influences

Nonetheless, as we see Tsongkhapa state clearly in his Middle Way works, *all that appears* to a mistaken state of consciousness is that which appears directly to sensory consciousnesses that are infected by the mistaken state of mind that grasps to things as real.³⁸ Thus, in general, when the reasoning consciousness that ascertains the fact that

my conjecture that Tsongkhapa can use the term “dual appearance” in a tantric context and simply replace the Mind-Only object of refutation with a Middle Way object of refutation, and intend that it would still come out to the vanishing of “dual appearance.” Nonetheless, we see (at the end of the passage quoted in Appendix Seven) that Tsongkhapa does not think that even a “correct” interpretation of the Mind-Only position has the capacity to bring a practitioner all the way to this definitive view of emptiness, much less the “mixed-up” positions that he criticizes for having no soteriological capacity whatsoever.

³⁸ See Appendix Twelve (494), to be discussed below. See also, for a particularly detailed example, this crucial passage from the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 449b6-451a1 (930-933), emphasis added. (Cf. Cutler *et al.*, 2004, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. III, 255-257.) Tsongkhapa is glossing a passage from Candrakīrti’s commentary on the *Root Verses on the Middle Way* of Nāgārjuna, known as *Clear Words* (*Mūlamadhyamaka-vṛtti-prasannapadā*, *dbu ma rtsa ba’i ‘grel pa tshig gsal ba*, Toh. 3860, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, dbu ma, vol. ‘a, 9b3-6.) The topic is the refutation of Bhāvaviveka’s position that an understanding of the Middle Way can be instilled in someone for the first time via an “independent line of reasoning” (*rang rgyud*, Skt. *svatantra*). Here, however, Candrakīrti is arguing that, since it is impossible even to establish a subject of debate – namely, a “thing with properties” (*chos can*, Skt. *dharmin*) – that could be apprehended by an ordinary person with an unmistaken consciousness, it is impossible to establish with certainty a common locus of argument for both parties, namely (1) the ārya who is trying to convey the meaning of suchness, and (2) the ordinary person who has not yet realized it:

If you wonder what kind of thing it is that has properties, one’s functioning thing is found only by what is totally wrong, that is, contaminated by ignorance. It is an actual object established only by the conventional consciousness of an eye consciousness and so on. The way in which it is agreed upon is this: The refutation of a birth that could exist ultimately relies upon the thing with properties *as* that which is to be proven. At that point, or therefore, if it is established as that alone [i.e., as the thing with properties], it would be contradictory for it to rely upon that [i.e., upon being proven]. Now it may be that you agree with this, but suppose you wonder: What would follow from it?

Rather, it is *not* established as that alone, and it is inappropriate for form and the rest, which are, moreover, not the meaning of suchness, to be the actual object found by an unmistaken consciousness. Thus, since they are found by a conventional consciousness – a subject state of mind that holds what is false – it, too, is a mistake contaminated by ignorance.

Therefore, the actual object found by an unmistaken consciousness does not appear to a mistaken consciousness, and the actual object that appears to a mistaken consciousness is not found by an unmistaken consciousness. This is because insofar as what is totally wrong – a mistaken consciousness – and what is correct – an unmistaken consciousness – are mutually exclusive with respect to their respective objective fields, they are separate when engaging with their objective fields.

This is the meaning of the statement that “What is totally wrong and what is correct are themselves separate.” The lines from “When” to “how could you ever focus?” explain the same idea. In this regard, “what is totally wrong” are the conventional consciousnesses of the eye and the rest, which are contaminated by ignorance. As for the statement, “they grasp that which does not exist as though it did exist”: Even while, with respect to form, sound, and the rest, there is no characteristic established through any essence of its very own, the sense consciousnesses grasp such a thing as though it were there.

Since what is held by a nonconceptual consciousness must pertain only to an appearance, form and the rest appear as having characteristics of their own.

“At that point, how could you ever focus upon even a part of the actual object that does exist?” The meaning of this statement is this: Since it appears in that way, even while it does not have characteristics of its own, how could even the subtlest actual object existing through characteristics of its own ever be established by those consciousnesses?

The example for something that appears, even as it has no actual object established through any characteristics of its own, is said to be “like hairs and the rest.” Since the sense consciousnesses to which

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of a single object, when the one is refuted, the other ceases to appear, for as long as the period of deep meditation on the ultimate nature of things continues.³⁹

This much is already the case for sūtra meditation on emptiness, as Tsongkhapa describes it across his Middle Way treatises. But according to Geshe Norsang’s explanation of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa’s text, there is something about the process of making manifest a subtle state of mind in the unsurpassed yoga sense that automatically causes the appearances of deceptive reality to begin to withdraw.⁴⁰ Although he did not explain exactly why at the time, I would posit that it is because, insofar as one engages in practices that train the inner winds to withdraw, and insofar as the deceptive appearances associated with the sensory consciousness are “riding” on those winds, then as the winds withdraw and dissolve, they carry the deceptive appearances with them and dissolve those too, very quickly. This is an idea that will only make sense from the point of view of the unique complete stage explanation of how states of consciousness are indivisible from the currents of energy that “carry” them to and from their correlated sense faculties. This is discussed only in Tsongkhapa’s complete stage texts,⁴¹ but I introduce it here, simply because I do not see any other explanation for why the addition of creation stage practices aimed at generating an approximation of great bliss (which in its full form arises only when winds-carrying-consciousness are actually dissolving inside the central channel) would cause dual appearances to withdraw so much faster or more thoroughly than straightforward insight meditation on emptiness alone.

Nonetheless, it must be recalled that during the early periods of creation stage, the practitioner is still only meant to *imagine* something, and understanding the meaning of the various mantras and associated visualizations, then, is the primary method for burning certain patterns of experience and understanding into the mental continuum, long before any actual dissolutions of coarse mind into subtle mind are taking place. From a creation stage point of view, then, Tsongkhapa could say, in his previously quoted commentary to the verse beginning “With no functioning things,” from the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”*: “In this way, the meaning of the consciousness that ascertains with reason that nothing is in any way established ultimately *turns even the mere appearance back into the way things actually exist*, which is *not to be established as anything*. Thus it is not as though you do *not* meditate as well on the total pacification of all appearances of the vessel and so forth.” According to this explanation, and numerous passages that we find in Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way commentaries,⁴² it might even seem that the sūtra-

³⁹ See Appendix Five (243) for a detailed discussion (from a sūtra perspective) of the alternation between periods of deep meditation and periods between sessions, when even for high bodhisattvas, dual appearances continue to arise.

⁴⁰ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, “Creation Stage Class,” March 31st, 2015, 23min. ff.

⁴¹ See, for example, Appendix Seventeen (463).

⁴² See Appendix Five (247-251). See also, for example, the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (byang chub lam rim che ba), vol. pa, 418a6-418b2 (867-868):

based understanding of emptiness alone would be enough to cause the vanishing, or pacification, of all deceptive appearances. But it is clear from the context of his Vajrayāna commentaries that Tsongkhapa would still insist that this meditation should be imbued with an approximation of the state of mind that is the foundation of all unsurpassed yoga, namely, that indivisible primordial knowing in which a subject state of mind that is soaked in bliss perceives emptiness.⁴³

This is certainly how the later tradition has interpreted it. For example, in Pañchen Sönam Drakpa's presentation of creation stage (which follows Tsongkhapa's *Exegesis of the "Steps of Exposition"* closely), he states explicitly that one should meditate "even here in accordance with the meaning of the *śūnyatā* mantra."⁴⁴ Meanwhile, in Tsongkhapa's explanation of that very *śūnyatā* mantra, he states, "In the same way, for all the mantras that indicate emptiness, such as '*svabhāva śuddha*,' and so forth, although the words may be different, you should recall the meaning according to the explanations given above."⁴⁵ Although translated into Tibetan rather than kept in Sanskrit, the four-line verse specific to the Guhyasamāja tantra can clearly be counted among "the mantras that indicate emptiness." So I think this is one reason why the tradition, carried all the way to Geshe Norsang's oral instruction in 2015, can offer parallel commentary for how

When you have become accustomed to this very view that realizes the lack of inherent nature, then in the face of a realization that makes that meaning directly manifest, all mistaken appearances – which appear as though they have natures, even though they do not – are turned back. Then, through the consciousness that makes the very nature of things directly manifest, that which has the properties of things – like form and the rest – becomes imperceptible. Thus, since this very nature of things and that which has the properties of things cannot both exist together in the face of this state of mind, in order to posit the very nature of a thing and that which has the properties of a thing, you must posit them from the perspective of another state of mind, one that is conventional.

།གང་གི་ཆེ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་རྟོགས་པའི་ལྷ་བ་དེ་ཉིད་གོམས་པས་དོན་དེ་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པའི་དོར་ནི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་རྣམ་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་འཇུག་པ་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་ཅན་གྱི་དེ་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་བྱས་པའི་ཤེས་པས་ཆོས་ཅན་གཟུགས་སྒྲིགས་དེ་མི་དམིགས་པས། དེ་ལྷ་བའི་ཆོས་ཉིད་དང་ཆོས་ཅན་གཉིས་སྒྲོ་དེའི་དོན་མེད་པས་དེ་གཉིས་ཆོས་ཉིད་དང་ཆོས་ཅན་དུ་འཛོག་པ་ནི་མ་སྟོང་པའི་སྒྲོ་གཞན་ཞིག་གི་དོས་ནས་བཞག་དགོས་སོ།

⁴³ For an example of how Tsongkhapa describes that practice in its actual form during the complete stage see the *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp (rim lnga gsal sgron)*, vol. ja, 55b5-56a2 (112-113), emphasis mine:

Suppose you wonder how [to unite bliss and emptiness]. The subjective state of consciousness arises in the essential nature of simultaneous bliss. Then you join that with the objective field: the emptiness that is the object of a correct realization of its meaning. That joining itself is what it means to "join bliss and emptiness indivisibly." Moreover, when it is the actual simultaneous [bliss], both subject and object become of a single taste, like milk poured into water. *At that point even subtle dual appearance is purified.* But until the actual simultaneous [bliss] has arisen, since you have not realized suchness directly, you must engage with suchness via the mental attention of conviction. *Therefore you only have conviction towards the "single taste."*

།འོན་ཅི་ལྷ་བ་བྱེད་སྟུང་ན། ལུལ་ཅན་ཤེས་པ་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྦྲེས་པའི་བདེ་བའི་དོར་བྱ་སྦྲེས་པ་དེས། ལུལ་སྟོང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་བྱིན་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པར་རྟོགས་པའི་ལུལ་ལྷ་བ་ཅན་དུ་སྦྲེས་པ་ཉིད་བདེ་སྟོང་དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་སྦྲེས་བཤོ། །དེ་ཡང་དོན་གྱི་ལྷན་སྦྲེས་ཀྱི་དུས་སུ་ལུལ་ལྷ་བ་ཅན་གཉིས་འོ་མ་ཆུ་ལ་ཞུགས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་རྩོག་ཅིག་དུ་བྱུར་ནས་གཉིས་སྒྲུབ་ཐ་མོ་ཡང་དག་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དོན་གྱི་ལྷན་སྦྲེས་མ་སྦྲེས་པའི་གོང་དུ་ནི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་མ་རྟོགས་པས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་མོས་པ་ཡིད་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ས་འཇུག་དགོས་པའི་བྱིར་རྩོག་ཅིག་པར་མོས་པ་ཅམ་སོ།

⁴⁴ Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, *bskyed rim gyi rnam gzhas mkhas pa'i yid 'phrog*, 28.

⁴⁵ See Appendix Two (814).

to meditate on the four-line verse as it does for how to meditate on the *śūnyatā* and *svabhāva* mantras, even though their relative functions within the sequence of the Guhyasamāja sādhana appear to be quite distinct.

When describing the automatic withdrawal of appearances that takes place when one manifests a subtle state of mind, Geshe Norsang told the monks that on the one hand this is an emptiness that is the withdrawal of appearances, and on the other hand it is an emptiness that is the lack of anything being established through inherent nature. These are not separate from one another, nor is it *merely* a withdrawal of appearances, as we saw Tsongkhapa ridicule. “But,” said Geshe Norsang,⁴⁶

for someone who possesses the objective field understood by the view of things having no nature, then as soon as appearances have withdrawn, immediately that person can face head on into the emptiness. So that emptiness is the one that comes just from cancelling the object to be refuted, being established by nature. Now, when meditating, if you ask what it is, it has the identity of being indivisible from bliss. Great bliss. Oh, so it is a primordial consciousness realizing emptiness, right? It is indivisible from the essence of the primordial consciousness⁴⁷ of great bliss. It is one state of mind meditating on emptiness, right? So it is said to be inseparable in essence from the primordial consciousness of bliss and emptiness. Once you have made it to be of the essence of bliss, then you must meditate on emptiness with the extremely subtle mind. It is not merely a coarse state of mind.

Thus in this case it is not only the absence of deceptive appearances revealing ultimate reality as an objective field to the wisdom of insight, but now the subject state of mind that is the clear light, made into the nature of great bliss, perceives that sheer absence into which all appearances of duality have vanished *as* the lack of inherent nature of all things. Based on deductions made across several texts, this is what I take Tsongkhapa to

⁴⁶ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, “Creation Stage Class,” March 31st, 2015, 23m58s-24m37s: ལྷ་བ་བསྐྱུས་པའི་སྣང་ཉིད་ཡིན་ན་རེད། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་པའི་སྣང་ཉིད་ཡིན་ན་རེད། དེ་གཉིས་སོ་སོར་དཔྱད་པ་མ་རེད་ཅེག། ལྷ་བ་བསྐྱུས་པ་ཙམ་སྣང་ཉིད་དམ་རེད། ཡིན་ན་ཡང་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་བལྟ་བའི་གོ་ཡུལ་ཡུལ་ལྡན་མཁན་གཅིག་གིས་ལྷ་བ་བསྐྱུས་འོང་དུ་སྣང་ཉིད་ལ་ལམ་སང་ནས་ཁ་ཕྱགས་ཐུབ་ཀྱི་རེད། ཨོ་དེ་ལྷ་བ་དེ་ནས་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་གྲུབ་པའི་དགག་བྱ་བཀག་ཙམ་གྱིས་སྣང་ཉིད་དེ། ད་སྐོམ་དུས་ག་རེ་ཟེར་ན་བདེ་བ་དང་དབྱེར་མི་བྱེད་པའི་བདག་ཉིད། བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོ། ཨོ་སྣང་ཉིད་ཆོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཅིག་ཡོད་པ་རེད་ཅེག། ཨོ་དེ་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་ངོ་མོ་དབྱེར་མི་བྱེད་པ། སྣང་ཉིད་སྐོམ་པའི་སྣང་གཅིག་འདུག་ག་དེ་བདེ་སྣང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་ངོ་མོ་དབྱེར་མི་བྱེད་པ་ཟེར། བདེ་བའི་ངོ་མོ་བྱས་ནས། ཤེན་ཏུ་སྤྱོད་པའི་སྣང་ཉིད་སྐོམ་པ་དེ་དགོས་རེད། སྣང་གསལ་པ་ཙམ་མ་ཡིན་པ།

⁴⁷ This is one of a growing number of places where it will seem essential to me to use the word “consciousness” for the “*shes*” in “*ye shes*” rather than “wisdom” or “knowing,” since it seems here specifically to be describing the kind of consciousness that it is; a consciousness soaked in the experience of limitless, timeless great bliss.

mean when he writes, within his actual instructions on how to meditate on the Guhyasamāja sādhana, immediately after quoting the four-line verse discussed above:⁴⁸

Saying this, think that since all vessels and their inhabitants ultimately lack any essence, they are of the nature of the emptiness, the lack of characteristics, and the lack of aspirations, which are in turn the imperceptibility of the triad of a meditation, anything to be meditated upon, or a meditator. Then the circles of protection, as well as all vessels and their inhabitants, *enter into clear light*.

By explicitly using the term “clear light,” Tsongkhapa indicates that from the very beginning of the main part of the sādhana – long before the phase of “transforming death as the path” – one should be developing the sheer conviction that all appearances have vanished, not only into the absence of what is refuted with reasoning, but into an emptiness that is inseparably joined with *mind*. As we will see many times, the clear light itself is said to have two aspects which are indivisible from one another: the objective field, which is emptiness, and the perceiving state of mind, which is a primordial state of knowing. But this particular form of primordial wisdom simply cannot operate at the coarse levels of a sentient being’s mind. Rather, that towards which one is meant to have sheer conviction at this point is that it should be the completely pure ground awareness – the clear light mind of the Buddha⁴⁹ – who is perceiving emptiness, not merely the mind of a sentient being.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa*, vol. ja, 8b5-9a1 (706-707), emphasis mine.

ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་འཕྲུལ་ཐམས་ཅད་དོན་དམ་པར་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པས། མྱོས་པ་དང་བསྐྱོས་པར་བྱ་བ་དང་མྱོས་པ་ལོ་གསུམ་མི་དམིགས་པའི་སྣང་བ་ཉིད་དང་མཚན་མ་མེད་པ་དང་མྱོན་པ་མེད་པའི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་བསམས་ལ། སྤང་བའོར་དང་སྣང་བའོར་ཐམས་ཅད་འོད་གསལ་དུ་གཞུག་པར་བྱའོ།

⁴⁹ As Geshe Norsang commented while describing the basis for generating great compassion towards all living beings who do not understand their own nature (Sera Monastery, February 5th, 2015, 35m58s): “Now in general, all living beings are themselves Buddhas. If you ask how: Our indwelling, simultaneously-arising primordial consciousness is by nature utterly set apart from adventitious stains. That’s the point.”

སྤྱིར་གཏང་བྱས་ན་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་སངས་རྒྱས་རང་རེད། ག་རེ་ཟེར་ན་རང་གི་གཞུག་མའི་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྤྱིས་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྤྱོད་བའི་རྒྱུ་མས་དཔེན་པར་རེད་ལ། དེ་དོན་དག།

⁵⁰ See Tsongkhapa’s phrase in Appendix Two (811), to be discussed below (emphasis added here):

Therefore, the sound for the primordial knowing of emptiness indicates that one’s realization of emptiness consists of a subject state of mind that beholds an abstraction. Nonetheless, this is a *sheer conviction towards the defining characteristics of the very nature of the reality, as it will be in the end*.

Based on the aforementioned insistence by the tradition that even Sūtrayāna āryas who perceive emptiness directly do not do so with the extremely subtle mind, I would have to conjecture that the term “*ye shes*” (“primordial knowing”) is not being used in exactly the same sense there, when it refers to the “primordial wisdom which directly realizes reality as it is” (*de kho na nyid mngon sum du rtogs pa'i ye shes*) or the “primordial wisdom of the meditative equipoise of an ārya” (*phags pa'i mnyam gzhas ye shes*), insofar as, within the strictly sūtra context, these do not refer to an extremely subtle state of knowing manifested within the “indwelling mind of simultaneously-arising clear light” (*gnyug sems lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*). Whether the word *ye shes/jñāna* should still be translated as something like “primordial wisdom” in those Sūtrayāna contexts should be a point of continued discussion and debate, for which I, personally, have not yet come to a conclusion.

Furthermore, in Tsongkhapa's previously quoted commentary from the *Exegesis*, after insisting so heavily upon the need for analytical meditation on emptiness, he concluded with an interesting double negative: "It is never stated, however, that one does *not* need to apply this as that which is congruent to the stages by which all inhabitants – from the hells on upwards – progressively die away, and by which the vessel is destroyed by the seven suns." Thus, even as he has explained how it is understanding the lack of inherent existence that should enable the vanishing of all deceptive worlds and their inhabitants (as opposed to merely imagining that everything disappears, the way any child might do by closing her eyes tightly enough),⁵¹ he does still return to the original parallel made between this meditation and the incineration of a world system at the end of an eon. Based upon what Geshe Norsang said about the intimate connection between beings' karma and the survival of their environments, and what we have been developing as the foundation for these meditations since the beginning of this dissertation, I would suggest we reflect further upon the idea that if in a world-system there is not enough merit shared among the sentient beings there to keep the environment going, then gradually the world itself deteriorates and eventually "ceases to exist." Then, one might consider the vanishing of "dual appearance" in the sense that, since appearances are without characteristics of their own, were there not the karmic traces constantly being activated to drive the way in which various living beings label all things, then nothing would appear at all, even conventionally. In this way one might begin to grasp the crucial link implied between the two meditations.

Creating Appearances

We have seen Tsongkhapa suggest that "for all the mantras that indicate emptiness . . . although the words may be different" the meaning is essentially the same, particularly as he describes it in relationship to the *śūnyatā* mantra within the *Steps of Mantra*. Nonetheless, insofar as each mantra appears at different places within the "story" that is the Guhyasamāja sādhana, the emphasis of each dissolution of appearances is still distinct. The *svabhāva* mantra that preceded the building of the protection circles was aimed at recognizing the emptiness of all essences, causes, and results, insofar as failing to understand the lack of inherent characteristics of all events and beings would be what enables things to appear as obstacles or demons for us. Out of that emptiness arose Vajradhara, the totally completed Buddha, seen in the location where the practitioner was, for the first time. So in a sense all the meanings of the sādhana had to be fully encapsulated within the practitioner in advance, even just to create the circle of protection that would allow one to start the main sādhana in peace. Yet before that, one already had to arise as the central figure of Unshakeable in order to bless the offerings and invite the entire maṇḍala – seen as inseparable from the essence of one's Teacher – as a field in

⁵¹ See Appendix Fifteen (991-992), where I later found a tantric passage making the same analogy, one which Tsongkhapa quotes very near the end of the *Steps of Mantra*.

which to create merit. So as we saw in Tsongkhapa's general instructions for generating divine pride and clear appearances, at a certain point the beginner practitioner would have to acquiesce to taking on an identity he or she might not yet understand at all, just in order to be able to begin the entire sequence of practices that are meant to take him or her eventually to the place where a genuine understanding could dawn; on the basis of which Vajradhara himself might actually arise, rather than a human practitioner's imaginary imitation of what a Buddha might be like.

Nonetheless, once practiced consistently for some time, the sequence of dissolutions and re-appearances into ever new iterations of the divine world are designed to take the practitioner into deeper and deeper layers of dissolution, which in turn are meant to manifest ever clearer re-emergence into pure appearances, and to make possible ever more authentic realizations of the believability of the identification with Vajradhara's totally pure and omniscient identity. To this overall intent, then, the second major dissolution, sparked by recitation of the four-line verse on "no functioning things," takes as its primary object of emptiness "all vessels and their inhabitants." This is in order to create the space – both physical and metaphysical – for a new world to arise. Insofar as that new world will be inhabited, it is not enough to meditate on the emptiness of outer physical objects alone, though sometimes those, in their very tangibility and massiveness, might seem the hardest nut to crack. Hence, in addition to the focus on the dissolution of the appearances of outer objects, including whole planets, there is the necessity, too, of turning inwards to realize the emptiness of the personal triad of meditator, the object, and the meditation itself, which in turn could be applied to all other sentient beings.

Pañchen Sönam Drakpa adds one point in his commentary at this juncture which we will not be able to appreciate fully until grappling with the details of the *śūnyatā* mantra, and Tsongkhapa's commentary upon that. This is the fact that the meditator must be able (1) to focus upon the emptiness that is simultaneously the *withdrawal* of all appearances and the *refutation* that they ever could have existed as real; (2) know it to be indivisible from the nature of great bliss; and finally, (3) identify that clear light mind in which subject and object are indivisible from one another, as *me*.⁵² It is essential to be able to recognize that divine identification at this juncture, precisely because the entire visualization of the maṇḍala should arise out of that state of primordial wisdom; and if one does not believe that the *source* of the images which will appear is the clear light mind of the Buddha, then one will be carried right back into thinking they are all merely the conceptual fabrications of a sentient being at play. But if the latter thought does indeed creep in, then the images themselves – mere shapes and colors – will never have the power to bless and transform one's inner energies upon the dissolution that is meant to follow. Of equal importance, one would never believe that the light emitted from the central figure of this initial maṇḍala would have the power to grant Vajrayāna

⁵² Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, *bskyed rim gyi rnam gzhas mkhas pa'i yid 'phrog*, 28.

empowerment to every living being, which purifies them of all negative karma, and brings each and every one of them to the state of a Buddha, as the words of Tsongkhapa's sādhana – closely paraphrasing words from the Guhyasamāja root tantra itself – proclaim to be happening.⁵³ There are several reasons why this is called the “maṇḍala of sheer conviction” (*lhag mos kyi dkyil 'khor*), but I think the necessity of this particular kind of faith on the part of the practitioner may be one reason for its name – even though, at the beginner level, ordinary thoughts are still able to arise amidst the recitation and meditation. We will explore a more technical reason for the name in the context of epistemology, below.

Before we are ready to enter into Tsongkhapa's analysis of that *śūnyatā* mantra, and what I see to be its relationship to his sūtra explanations of the mere “I,” however, there are several more philosophical issues that should arise surrounding the maṇḍalic creation that comes between the dissolution of “all vessels and their inhabitants” and the dissolution of the central figure of that created maṇḍala of sheer conviction into clear light. By the time that third major dissolution comes, the thirty-one surrounding figures of the maṇḍala will have become inseparable from the heaps, the elements, the sense faculties, the sensory fields, the joints, vessels, and the crucial points of the limbs, all belonging to the central Vajradhara. That is a dissolution which is meant specifically to mirror the death process in the original condition, and commences the meditative sequence by which the practitioner takes death, the intermediate state, and rebirth into the three holy bodies on the path, according to the notion of congruent objects. While the dissolution of all worlds and beings into clear light emptiness parallels and purifies the images of a cosmic destruction that took place in the past, the dissolution of all the winds and faculties of a divinized human body is meant to parallel and thus purify the tendencies for experiencing one's own personal, future death.

In order to reach that point of personal dissolution, however, a vast number of individual images, colors, objects, names, beings, identities, and associations must be “created” – by sheer conviction – at first through the recitation of words, and eventually through clear visualization, in order for the divine story that is the sādhana to take place. All this, meanwhile, is aimed at paralleling and purifying the latent tendencies for ever again acting out the beleaguered story of the human beings of a first eon, as discussed above. This period of the sādhana, then, is a prime example of a meditation in which one should be exploring and developing the central tantric yoga that Tsongkhapa described in both the first and the twelfth chapter of his *Steps of Mantra*, where the *beheld aspect of the state of mind realizing emptiness dawns as a divine being*. This would be a place

⁵³ See *dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa*, vol. ja, 12b4-6 (714).

where the practitioner should especially recall the lines from Tsongkhapa's analysis of Jñānapāda's system, quoted above, where he says:⁵⁴

Then, after one has meditated on the circle of divine beings, while focusing on the divine being as an object of focus, *the mind that ascertains the meaning of the fact that the aspect lacks inherent nature – that confident apprehension – enters into emptiness, and the beheld aspect dawns in the aspect of divine beings and the places where they stay.* This yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound is, furthermore, that with which you meditate on each part of the practice for gaining realizations.

Indeed, while the meditation on the four-line verse above withdrew the appearances of all *ordinary* worlds and their inhabitants, as well as the protection circles, which provide something of a liminal space, into clear light, the dissolution of the maṇḍala of sheer conviction will be withdrawing a *divine* world – about which one should never have thought it had any nature of its own – into clear light. But this raises a major question, one which has instigated no end of discussion in Geluk monasteries over the centuries, namely, how can one perceive emptiness and appearances at the same time, with the same state of mind, if, as we have just examined, realizing emptiness *causes* the vanishing of the very appearance upon which you were focusing?

In order to understand this complex issue, and the reason it is considered so important – and can still be debated hotly at Gyutö Monastery today – we should ideally have a rich understanding of Tsongkhapa's presentation on the two realities, deceptive and ultimate. I have already been taking this presentation as an implicit background to all I have said about deceptive and ultimate realities throughout this dissertation so far. Now, however, it becomes imperative that I refer my reader to Appendix Five, and the entire array of arguments and explanations I have translated there, which I will have no opportunity to treat properly otherwise. Here, however, I will offer an overview of what is at stake, in relation to the issues immediately at hand.

Interlude on the Two Realities

There are many extant presentations of these two realities (*bden gnyis*, Skt. *satyadvaya*) already available in English, where they are more frequently translated as the “two truths.”⁵⁵ Since a survey or evaluation of this literature and its diversity across

⁵⁴ See the long quotation cited at Chapter Four, note 55.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Tsongkhapa, Jay Garfield and Ngawang Samten, 2006, *Ocean of Reasoning*; Jeffrey Hopkins and Kevin Vose, 2008, *Tsong-kha-pa's Final Exposition of Wisdom* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications); George B. J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock, 2002, *The Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction: What Difference Does A Difference Make?* (Boston: Wisdom Publications); Dreyfus, Garfield, Guy Newland, Mark Siderits, *et al.* (“The Cowherds”), 2011, *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press); Elizabeth Napper, 1989, *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness: A Tibetan Buddhist interpretation of Mādhyamika Philosophy Emphasizing the*

different schools and cultural traditions of Buddhism is clearly not my topic here, in writing succinctly about these two, I will limit myself specifically to the presentations made by Tsongkhapa, following Candrakīrti's *Entering the Middle Way* and *Clear Words*,⁵⁶ which appear in his *Illumination of the True Thought*, as well as in his *Ocean of Reasoning* and both the *Great* and *Briefer Steps on the Path*.

The first point to make is that the two realities are indivisible from one another; indeed one might almost say they are the same reality seen through two different lenses. Indeed, Tsongkhapa interprets quotations from Śāntideva and Nāgārjuna⁵⁷ to say that the two realities are actually just *two different conceptual isolates* for what is in fact a single essence, like the way that “sound” is both “something made” and “something unchanging.” We should recall that this is the same philosophical trope Tsongkhapa used to describe how method and wisdom could be combined within a single state of consciousness that is of only a single essence. Thus any single thing can be said to have both an ultimate reality and a deceptive reality, depending upon how it is viewed.

Nonetheless, Tsongkhapa insists that it would be very inappropriate to think that just one single essence, such as that of a sprout, is seen by āryas *as* ultimate and by ordinary beings *as* deceptive.⁵⁸ Rather, with respect to one basis, the flawless vision that

Compatibility of Emptiness and Conventional Phenomena (Boston: Wisdom Publications); Cozort, 1998, *Unique Tenets of the Middle Way Consequence School*, and so on.

The reason I translate them as “realities” rather than “truths” – and indeed the reason I have chosen to translate “*bden pa*” as “real” rather than “true” or “truth” in most cases throughout this dissertation – is subtle, for it might generally be agreed that in both Tibetan and Sanskrit the word in question can mean both. Nonetheless, the English “truth” generally refers to a quality of a statement or expression; whether it is true or false *with respect to* a supposed reality, which stands beyond and untouched by the statement (although the statement does of course affect the minds of those who apprehend it). While it is the purpose of the teaching on the “two realities” in Middle Way Buddhism to call into question the whole way that we think about truth and falsehood with respect to a perceived world; still, grammatically speaking, in most cases it appears to me that the term is referring to what would be considered to be the objective pole, even though that “reality” is admittedly discussed insofar as it is “found” or “not found” by various types of apprehending minds. So the term is never devoid of the notion of interaction with perceivers, but still it primarily refers to the objective pole of what in English we would call “reality” and the way it either does or does not appear, while it is not primarily referring, in these instances, to true or false statements about that reality. In colloquial Tibetan speech, of course, when “*bden pa red*” refers to what someone has said, then it should be translated as, “It’s true.” But in the context of both the “two realities” and the “four realities seen by āryas” (*phags pa’i bden bzhi*), it is not statements that are indicated, but rather whole sectors of reality, i.e., what *exists*. Even when I use the term “false,” then, in this context it is used more in the sense that images can be deceptive based on various circumstances coming together, than it is used in the way that people can speak a deliberate falsehood. (Though here, too, the term is exactly the same in Tibetan: *rdzun pa*.) I leave it to my reader to judge whether the term “reality” draws out the meaning of these central Buddhist ideas in fresh ways not generally accessed by the now-familiar “two truths.”

⁵⁶ *Mūlamadhyamaka-vṛtti-prasannapadā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba’i ‘grel pa tshig gsal ba*), Toh. 3860, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, dbu ma, vol. ‘a.

⁵⁷ See Appendix Five (219). Nāgārjuna’s *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa* appears in the Tantra section of the Tengyur, specifically among the Guhyasamāja works associated with the “Ārya system.” Nevertheless, Tsongkhapa quotes it several times within his *Illumination on the True Thought* as a representation of the Middle Way thought of the Ārya Nāgārjuna, clearly without doubt as to whether it is one and the same author.

⁵⁸ See Appendix Five (216).

is the immaculate wisdom of the meditative equipoise of an ārya *discovers* the reality of a thing that *is* ultimate, and the clouded vision of ordinary beings *takes* the deceptive appearance of a thing *to be* real.⁵⁹ It is a subtle difference in language, but this second description allows for the fact that since the “single essence” was never established through any nature of its own in the first place, it is no problem for it to be divided into two essences, according to the perspective of the viewer. The logic is reminiscent, perhaps, of how Tsongkhapa handled the problem of diverse beings viewing a single stream of “flowing liquid” or of different people touching a burning hot ball of steel. One cannot say that there are contradictory valid perceptions *of* a single thing, but one can say that with respect to one thing, it is divided into parts, and each part is viewed validly according to the propensity of the viewer. Here, however, the division is not being made among myriad deceptive appearances that depend on the karma of respective viewers, but is rather a fundamental bifurcation of reality into: (1) that which is seen by the wisdom that has investigated the way something exists ultimately, and (2) that which is seen by a conventionally established valid perception, which has not engaged in such penetrating analysis into *how* something exists.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Thus, as Tsongkhapa insists many times, the word “real” is not even being used in quite the same way with respect to each. See, for example, the *Briefer Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*), vol. *pha*, 197a2 (395):

Therefore, the meaning of the word “reality” in deceptive *reality*, which is reality from the perspective of grasping-to-things-as-real, is not the same as the word “reality” in ultimate *reality*.

།དེས་ན་གྲུབ་ཚྭ་བདེན་པའི་བདེན་པ་ནི་བདེན་པ་འདྲིན་གྱི་རྩེ་བདེན་པ་དང་། དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་སྒྲ་དོན་མི་འདྲའོ།

⁶⁰ See the *Briefer Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*), vol. *pha*, 199b1-6 (400), emphasis mine:

Therefore, all instances in which something is posited as existing conventionally are cases in which something is set forth as existing by the power of conventional names. But we do not accept that *whatever* is set forth by their power exists conventionally.

We accept that things are merely set forth by the power of conventions, but it is *not at all* the case that the word “merely” either (1) cuts off the possibility of something being an actual object that is not the convention of a subject state of mind, or (2) cuts off the possibility that such a posited actual object could be established through a valid perception.

Insofar as one is not satisfied with positing something by the power of conventional designation in this way, if one were to look for *how* an actual object exists – which is not merely designated, but is the *referent* of the designation – and if, finding that, one were to posit it as existent, while not finding it, one were to posit it as non-existent; this is not our system. But since we assert that *if* one were to search according to that system, and having searched, something findable were to arise, that then this would turn out to be “established as real”; we do not accept that anything can be found to exist, even conventionally, once one has analyzed in that way.

Since things are posited *from that dividing line of whether or not you are analyzing the very nature of existence* [i.e., “suchness”], if anything were to be established through characteristics of its own, then an actual object that was not merely set forth by the power of the conventions of a subject state of mind would turn out to exist through its own essence. Seeing this, [Candrakīrti] does not accept that anything could exist through a nature of its own, or through characteristics of its own, or through a very essence of its own, even conventionally. I have already explained this extensively elsewhere.

།དེས་ན་ཐ་སྐད་དུ་ཡོད་པར་འཛོལ་བ་རྣམས་མིང་གི་ཐ་སྐད་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་ཡོད་པར་བཞག་པ་ཡིན་ཡང་དེའི་དབང་གིས་གང་བཞག་ཐམས་ཅད་ཐ་སྐད་དུ་ཡོད་པར་མི་འདོད་ལ། ཐ་སྐད་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་དུ་འདོད་ཀྱང་ཙམ་གྱི་སྒྲ་ནི་ཡུལ་ཅན་གྱི་ཐ་སྐད་མིན་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་པ་གཙོན་པ་དང་། འཛོལ་བའི་དོན་དེ་ཆད་པས་བྱུང་བ་གཙོན་པ་གཙན་མིན་ཏེ། འདི་ལྟར་ཐ་སྐད་བཏགས་པའི་དབང་གིས་འཛོལ་པས་མཆིས་པར་དེ་ཙམ་མིན་པའི་བཏགས་དོན་དོན་ལ་རི་ལྟར་ཡོད་བཙལ་།

The two realities are defined, then, according to the “eyes” with which each is found, respectively. Candrakīrti teaches this through an analogy to which Tsongkhapa refers again and again in several other works when explaining this particular point.⁶¹ Suppose someone has cataracts, or some other eye disease, which causes him to see an appearance of what look to be “hairs” floating in front of his vision all the time. He may or may not know this appearance is caused by an inner defect, but still, he cannot voluntarily get rid of the appearance. It is there, and it functions to look like hairs, even though, if the person really went to look for the hairs, to touch them or to use a comb on them, he would never be able to find the real hairs, because they had never existed at all. Then consider a person with clear vision looking into the same space of air, what Tsongkhapa calls the same “basis.” No hairs appear, because they were never really there at all, but this still does not invalidate the fact that something like a hair was *appearing* to the person with cataracts.⁶²

To understand the analogy, we must recall verse 6:71 of Candrakīrti’s *Entering the Middle Way*, which prompted Tsongkhapa’s discussion of the “flowing water”:⁶³

The same as one with vision affected by cataracts

A craving spirit perceives a river of flowing water as pus.

I said in the ensuing discussion there that the analogy of cataracts to karma was not perfect, insofar as the inner force of karma would produce all the associated conditions that allow one to interact with “real hairs” as functioning things, which one can comb and

ནས་རྟོག་པ་ཡོད་པར་འཛོག་ལ། མ་རྟོག་ན་མེད་པར་འཛོག་པ་ལྟར་ལུགས་འདིས་མི་བྱེད་ཀྱི། ཚེལ་ལུགས་དེས་བཙལ་ནས་རྟོག་རྒྱ་བྱུང་ན་བདེན་གྲུབ་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བ་
ར་བཞེད་པས་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་དབྱེད་ནས་ཡོད་པར་རྟོག་པ་མ་སྟོན་དུ་ཡང་མི་འདོད་ལ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་དབྱེད་མ་དབྱེད་ཀྱི་ས་མཆོམས་ཀྱང་དེ་ནས་འཛོག་པས་རང་གི་
མཆོན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཡོད་ན་ལུས་ཅན་གྱི་མ་སྟོན་གྱི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་མེན་པའི་དོན་རང་གི་ངོ་མོས་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་བར་གཞིགས་ནས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་
སམ། རང་གི་མཆོན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་སམ། རང་གི་ངོ་མོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མ་སྟོན་དུ་ཡང་མི་བཞེད་དེ་རྒྱས་པར་གཞན་དུ་བཤད་ཅིན་ཏོ།

⁶¹ See, for example, *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 197b3-4 (396), emphasis mine:

Furthermore, the way in which [this primordial knowing] discovers the way things are is this: If the eyes of someone with cataracts see hairs floating around in mid-air, the eyes of someone without cataracts does not even see the appearance of falling hairs upon that basis. In the same way, according to the way in which the immaculate wisdom of the meditative equipoise of āryas still in training, as well as of those who have finished off every last tendency for ignorance, sees the very suchness of that very same thing – which all those who are adversely affected by the cataracts of ignorance have focused upon as being the essence of heaps and so on – then, like the eyes of someone without cataracts, *that wisdom does not see even the subtlest dual appearance*. Whatever nature it is that it gazes upon in this way, *is ultimate reality*. །ཡང་དེས་ཇི་ལྟར་རྟོག་པའི་ཚུལ་ནི་རབ་རིབ་ཅན་གྱི་མིག་གིས་བར་སྟངས་གི་གཞིར་སྒྲིག་འདྲ་པར་མཐོང་བ་ན་རབ་རིབ་མེད་པའི་མིག་གིས་གཞི་དེར་སྒྲིག་འ
ཇོག་པའི་སྟངས་བཙལ་ཡང་མ་མཐོང་བ་བཞིན་དུ་མ་རིག་པའི་རབ་རིབ་ཀྱིས་གཞོད་པ་བྱས་པ་ན་མས་ཀྱིས་ལུང་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རང་གི་ངོ་མོ་དཔེ་མིགས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་མ་
རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་མ་ལུས་པར་ཟད་པ་དང་། འཕགས་པ་སྟོབ་པའི་མཉམ་གཞག་ཟག་མེད་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཞིགས་ཚུལ་གྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ན་རབ་
རིབ་མེད་པའི་མིག་བཞིན་དུ་གཉིས་སྟངས་སྟོང་པ་མ་གཞིགས་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་རང་བཞིན་གང་གིས་གཞིགས་པ་ནི་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་སྟེ།

⁶² See Appendix Ten (645) for a particularly meaningful distinction on this point, from within the presentation of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology, which nevertheless does not represent a Middle Way view. I will explore further on how I understand Tsongkhapa to integrate these points within his Middle Way view.

⁶³ See Chapter Two, note 82.

tie up in a knot, and so on, whereas cataracts only produce appearances that can later be shown to be “false,” even by the person who is himself affected by cataracts. Nevertheless, I said that the primary point of the analogy seemed to be that in both cases – that of karmic tendencies in general and that of cataracts as a specific analogy – it is due to some unique condition within a particular living being that she perceives the illusory things she does, as outer form, appearing directly to a sense consciousness, and not due to some inherent characteristics of an actual object.

In this present context, when taking the analogy of cataracts as a means to explain the division between the two realities, the analogy becomes even tighter, and may help to justify why Tsongkhapa, following Candrakīrti, does not accept the division into “correct” and “wrong” deceptive realities asserted by those Middle Way philosophers whom he, following centuries of Tibetan commentarial tradition before him, designated as belonging to the Middle Way group that affirms independent reasoning (*rang rgyud pa*, Skt. *svātantrika*).⁶⁴ According to Candrakīrti’s use of the analogy, both in his auto-commentary to *Entering the Middle Way* and in *Clear Words*,⁶⁵ it becomes most pertinent when describing how it is that reality is seen by those who encounter the ultimate meaning (*don dam pa*, Skt. *pāramārtha*) directly, and thus become “āryas,” as opposed to “ordinary individuals” who have not yet seen that reality directly. For someone who sees the very nature of reality as it is, or “suchness” (*de kho na nyid*, Skt. *tathatā*), then, *as for someone whose eyes are free of cataracts*, the “hairs” simply do not appear. But now, the illusory “hairs” analogize the entire panoply of illusory appearances that were brought about, not by a defect in the physical eye, but by the defect in the mental eye that is the tendency to see and believe that things are real. The point is that if someone were to be completely freed from all tendencies for grasping to things as real, the very *appearances* – triggered by the karmic tendencies that are the parallel to the condition of the cataracts – would cease to arise, without in any way denigrating the “basis” that was, for both types of beings, simply “the space in mid-air” (*bar snang gi gzhi*).⁶⁶

It is clear to me, from numerous passages cited here, and especially from the section in the *Ocean of Reasoning* to be discussed below, that when Tsongkhapa glosses what it is that produced the faulty vision, in this case it is not “karma” in general (as it was when he elaborated upon the “flowing water” example), nor even “karmic seeds” or “karmic tendencies,” in general. Rather, in these contexts Tsongkhapa nearly always specifies some variation of the “tendencies for ignorance” or the “tendencies for grasping to things as real,” the “cataracts of ignorance,” or else the “elaboration of what is to be refuted.” This is a crucial point, for as Tsongkhapa often emphasizes, when an ārya sees

⁶⁴ This is a point that is not immediately essential to our discussion, and so I will refrain from introducing it properly here. Nevertheless, see Appendix Five (225), as well as George Dreyfus and Sara McClintock, 2002, *The Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction*.

⁶⁵ See Appendix Five (246) and (247).

⁶⁶ See the Tibetan in Chapter Five, note 62, just above.

ultimate reality directly for the first time, or even the many subsequent times still prior to reaching total Buddhahood, it is by no means the case that all karmic tendencies have ceased to exist. Thus it is not as though the cataracts of *karma* are being removed, so that what was seen due to that karma is not longer seen. Rather, if all is to disappear, it would seem that the appearances projected specifically by those karmic tendencies for seeing the myriad variety of objects would have to be temporarily *suspended* by force of the wisdom that has finally shown the tendencies for *ignorance* to be false and ungrounded.

This is an extremely complex topic, but throughout Tsongkhapa's analysis we have begun to see that there is an intimate connection between the entire array of karmic traces and their associated ripened experiences, and the tendencies for ignorance that lie at their root. Thus there is something about the reasoning consciousness that discovers the root of the mistake – that finds inherently established objects to be categorically unfindable – which, upon temporarily removing the scales of ignorance from one's spiritual eye, causes *all* appearances to disappear, even if the causes for the appearances themselves were the countless karmically-based causes and conditions that are still distinct from ignorance itself. There may be a corresponding explanation of this phenomenon from the point of view of the dissolution of subtle energetic winds into the indestructible orb at the heart.

As we saw in the discussion of “Seeds and Fragrant Tendencies,” Tsongkhapa had in his lifetime given ample descriptions of a wide variety of karmic propensities that are not strictly “the tendency for seeing a self” or some variation of this fundamental tendency for ignorance. I have shown that according to Tsongkhapa, it is “by the power of karma” that each being perceives the respective parts of outer objects precisely in the way that each of them does. However, according to this use of the cataracts analogy to indicate ultimate reality, it seems that when the “cataracts of ignorance” are even temporarily peeled away, then for as long as that direct perception of ultimate reality continues, *no other kind of karma can ripen into its respective appearances, either*. Perhaps this type of experience is what is ideally intended when it is stated that “all vessels and their inhabitants” should disappear during a sādhana – even though the karma will certainly assert itself for everything to appear again, once the practitioner still in training arises from the meditation session.

According to what I have seen most clearly stated in one passage from the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* (cited above in Chapter Five, note 38), since for non-Buddhas even the *appearances* to sense consciousnesses – which are apprehended nonconceptually – “appear as having characteristics of their own,” this means that everything that appears as a result of ripening karmic seeds is inextricably intermingled with the appearance of existing exactly as it appears, that is, *as real*, established from its own side, and so on. As Tsongkhapa quotes there, from Candrakīrti's *Clear Words*: “At that point, how could you ever focus upon even a part of the actual object that does

exist?” Tsongkhapa glosses this to mean that since it is appearing, even though it has no characteristics of its own, it would be impossible to focus upon even the subtlest part of it that did have characteristics of its own. But when analyzing in this way, looking for something – anything – that could be established as existing in the way it appears, and step by step not finding any such thing, there would come a moment when there is nothing left to appear *as if* it had characteristics. This is because the appearance arose right along with the appearance of existing inherently. It was the tendencies for ignorance that created the very appearance of “dual appearance.” Once the false projection of inherent existence is completely cancelled, however, the *object* disappears – even though it still *could* have been established by a conventional consciousness, if one had not been analyzing.⁶⁷ It is said that only Buddhas can look at conventionally established appearances without becoming mistaken towards them – and hence without those appearances having to disappear in order for them to be understood perfectly. We will examine this issue shortly, and its profound implications for the Vajrayāna practices we have been investigating.

Meanwhile, we return to a basic presentation of the two realities. Explaining Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa describes ultimate reality as that which is found through the distinct type of wisdom that an ārya experiences during meditative equipoise, which “encounters things as they are.”⁶⁸ It is the very wisdom that has the capacity to cancel, or refute, the grasping that would think something is established *as real*, in the very moment that the conditions arose for something to be established. In no way does it cancel the possibility of things arising through dependent origination – for there could be no emptiness if there were nothing arising to *be* empty of being established inherently – but because this wisdom has come to understand the interdependence of causes and conditions so perfectly, it can no longer focus upon things as things, insofar as they would appear to be individual, concrete, self-established entities. Thus the ultimate reality that is found is itself empty; it cannot be established independently from the interdependent reality *of* which it is the emptiness. Nonetheless, it is what remains trustworthy (*mi slu ba*) in the face of the incisive wisdom that investigates how things exist, ultimately.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See Chapter Five, note 42, above, emphasis added: “Thus, since this very nature of things and that which has the properties of things cannot both exist together in the face of this state of mind, in order to posit the very nature of a thing and that which has the properties of a thing, you must posit them *from the perspective of another state of mind, one that is conventional*.”

⁶⁸ See Appendix Five (216).

⁶⁹ See Appendix Five (244-245):

“The ‘ultimate’ of all Buddhas is the nature itself, and moreover, because it is trustworthiness itself, it is ultimate reality. That is something of which each one of them is aware individually.” . . . [W]e accept the teaching that the reality of ultimate reality is not established as real, but from the perspective of the holy gaze that sees suchness, *what remains trustworthy* is explained as the meaning of *reality*.

Deceptive reality, on the other hand, is that which is:⁷⁰

. . . found to exist by force of the falsehood seen by all those individuals in whom the eye of the mind is entirely covered by the film of the cataracts of ignorance. As for the object that is seen by these children: Even as it appears to be established through characteristics of its own, it is not something that exists with its own essence.

Based on this, and a later passage⁷¹ that presents this second reality in more detail, I have, through much deliberation, decided upon this translation of “deceptive” for the Tibetan *kun rdzob* (Skt. *saṃvṛti*). The basic meaning of the Tibetan word “*rdzob pa*” is either to add something on top of something else (*snon pa*), or else to cover or obscure it (*sgrib pa*). Thus, while the full term has often been rendered in English “relative truth,” there is nothing about the Tibetan word (or the Sanskrit *saṃvṛti*, spelled with only one “t”)⁷² that means “relative.” While it has sometimes been translated as “obscurational” or “concealing truth,” I also find these problematic because, upon close reading of the passages I am presenting here, it is clear that it is not the “reality” that is understood to be doing the concealing, but rather the ignorance.

Read according to Tsongkhapa’s gloss of Candrakīrti’s verse 6:28 (and its auto-commentary), I would venture to say that a more precise rendering of the term *kun rdzob bden pa* would have to be something as evocative but utterly unwieldy as: “seen-through-an-obscuring-veil-reality”; “that-which-you-see-through-the-veil-of-ignorance-reality”; or even, “that-which-you-think-is-real-because-your-vision-is-clouded-by-the-veil-of-ignorance-reality.” It is crucial to recognize that in this case it is not the *reality* that is cloaked; rather, as in the analogy of the cataracts, it is the *vision* of an ordinary individual that is cloaked. Thus the reality is, from our perspective, “obscured” or “seen-through-a-veil,” but nonetheless it persists in appearing all too clearly to us, as the everyday things of our respective worlds.⁷³ I think it would be further misleading if, by translating it as “obscured reality,” one were led to think that the reality was that which is obscured or covered, because the reality that is said to be *hidden* from our ordinary perceptions is actually ultimate reality. On the other hand, if one says “obscuring,” “obscurational,” or

⁷⁰ See Appendix Five (217).

⁷¹ See Appendix Five (230), especially: “With this [Candrakīrti is saying that] since it places a veil over, or confuses, sentient beings with respect to their view of the nature in which things abide, this ‘delusion,’ or ignorance, has the identity of that which places a veil over the sight of the nature of how things are; it pastes upon things whose essences do not exist by nature the concocted idea that they do exist by nature; thus it is ‘deceptive.’”

⁷² See Monier Williams Online 2011 for *saṃvṛti*: “closure; covering, concealing, keeping secret; dissimulation, hypocrisy; obstruction.”

⁷³ See Tsongkhapa’s comment translated in Appendix Five (217): “In terms of finding deceptive reality, the one who finds it is said to be an ordinary individual. Here the intent is that the classical example of ‘deceptive’ is *primarily all those outer and inner working things that are seen as a result of ignorance*. But this does not mean that the conventional valid perceptions in the mindstream of an ārya do not find all those working things.”

even “concealing reality,” it might make it seem as if it were the functioning things of that reality which are doing the obscuring, whereas it is clear from Candrakīrti’s explanation that he saw it to be just one phenomenon, ignorance itself, that is doing the obscuring. It is *ignorance* that is said here to lie between our perceptual consciousness and that which is to be perceived correctly, not all the functioning things that one does still perceive through the veil of that ignorance, and then goes on to misinterpret as being “real” from their own side.

Thus I settle for the imperfect, but perhaps most effective, “deceptive reality”; where the implication is certainly not that it is “reality’s fault,” but rather, again, the fault of ignorance that makes the objects seem to be real, with characteristics of their own, whereas in fact they lack any such inherent properties. But, like a *trompe l’oeil* that “deceives the eye,” in ordinary parlance, there can be things that are deceptive without being malicious or intentionally deceitful. Depth, distance, weather, or mountains can all be deceptive, simply insofar as they appear one way, but on further investigation turn out to be another way. As we have begun to see, that is exactly the meaning Tsongkhapa understands for deceptive reality throughout the Indian Middle Way literature he takes as his sources. So I intend the word *deceptive* in this passive sense of something that, through no fault of its own – but due to a mistake on the part of the perceiver – ends up “causing” the perceiver to misperceive what was there. But we would hardly attribute blame to a mist-enclosed mountain peak, or to the sun obscured by clouds, or to the objects in a rear-view mirror that are “closer than they appear,” just because we cannot see them properly. So it is with the reality that is deceptive (*kun rdzob*⁷⁴ *kyi bden pa*, Skt. *saṃvṛti-satya*). For as we will see, by the end of the path, it is precisely this deceptive reality that is said to be utterly sanctified and glorified in the illusory body of a Buddha.

Tsongkhapa also points out that deceptive reality is deceptive for those who are deceived (i.e., the spiritually immature “children,” ordinary individuals, or non-āryas),⁷⁵ but for those who have overcome even the seeds for believing in things as inherently real, the appearances are then “merely deceptive.”⁷⁶ At that point it might be more comfortable for us if appearances were referred to as “merely illusory” rather than “merely deceptive,” since they are no longer fooling the perceiver, who is at this point an eighth-level bodhisattva or an arhat among the listeners and solitary realizers. However, the

⁷⁴ See Tibetan Translation Tool Tibetan Dictionaries for *kun rdzob*: “*yang dag pa’i gnas lugs sgrib par byed pa’am ’gebs pa lta bur byed pa’i dngos po rdzun pa rnams*” (“All false things that do something like cover, or veil, the correct way in which things abide.”)

⁷⁵ See Appendix Five (230): “The ‘reality’ in this ‘deceptive reality’ is identified as ‘deceptive’ posited with respect to whoever is deceived, but the reality is not identified as ‘deceptive/totally concealing’ in general.”

⁷⁶ See Appendix Five (231-235), especially: “As for those things that turn out to be contrived from the perspective of the three types of persons (insofar as those things are ‘fabricated’ according to the conception of them as being *unreal*); since what is ‘deceptive’ from the perspective of those persons is *unreal*, it is called ‘merely deceptive.’”

word that is still used consistently is “*kun rdzob*” (“totally concealing/deceptive”) and not the word for illusion (*sgyu ma*), which has all its own proper contexts and analogies. Terminology aside, Tsongkhapa’s analysis suggests that for such highly realized beings, the appearances that are no longer taken to be real are experienced as a mere dance of illusion, while the only “reality” for that kind of person is the ultimate reality, with which, by then, they rest so frequently in direct communion, whenever they enter meditative equipoise.

Thus, although Tsongkhapa has agreed with the verses he quoted from both Śāntideva and Nāgārjuna to say that ultimate and deceptive realities are but two aspects of what is a single essence, he also insists that each of the two realities is discovered with respect to a *different basis*. That is, the basis for the clear vision of the ārya is the “perfect meaning” (*yang dag pa'i don*), that which was never established as real and never appeared to be established as real. On the other hand, the basis for the conventional valid perceptions of ordinary individuals and āryas still in training who are not in a state of meditative equipoise, consists of “false knowable things” (*shes bya rdzun pa*),⁷⁷ such as the outer and inner functioning things of everyday experience. Of course, ordinary beings need not recognize what they see to be false, in order for it to *be* false, just as spectators at a movie do not need to realize that what they see is false in order for it to be false. They can interact with deceptive reality all the time without having any idea that they are deceived. Indeed, this is what Candrakīrti implies is happening to most of us. In order for an object of experience even to be established *as* deceptive reality, then, it must be recognized by someone who has discovered the Middle Way view, even if they have not yet realized it directly.

This is the sense, then, in which the two bases of the two perceptions – one the ultimate valid perception of an ārya, finding ultimate reality; the other the conventional valid perception of an ordinary being finding deceptive reality – are not the same. The first basis is the perfect meaning itself, the fact that nothing is established by itself. The second basis is what is false, or *deceptive*, what appears as though real even though it is not. How are these but two sides of the same coin? The ultimate reality is the fact that the deceptive appearance was never, and never will be, established as real. It is the absolute absence of the object of insistent belief (which never could have existed anyway), within the conventionally established appearance (which does exist as a dependent arising).

Tsongkhapa states much later that from the perspective of the Buddhas, there is only one *reality*, the ultimate reality, because that is all that is trustworthy and of ultimate meaning (*don dam pa*) in the face of a Buddha’s primordial wisdom. Nonetheless, he says that “if all things *were* established through characteristics of their own, then traces would not be established as false, or misleading subject matter. Since in that case there

⁷⁷ See Appendix Five (217-218) for these terms and the discussion the follows here.

would be no deceptive reality, *then* it would turn out that there would not be two realities.”⁷⁸ The point here is that if functioning things were not false, or misleading, and instead really did exist with their own properties, in the way they appear, then they would be ultimate, and there would only be one kind of reality, since then everything would be trustworthy, and would exist exactly in the way it appears. But since there are in fact two very distinct bases for valid perception, one basis which is trustworthy and one which is not, then there are actually two completely different ways of being “real”: one that is worthy of the name (for it exists as it appears, and still has no inherent characteristics – *it is emptiness*), and one that appears to be real even though it is not, yet can still be established “deceptively” (*kun rdzob tu*) or “conventionally” (*tha snyad du*), and thus has the provisional “reality” of being the basis for being misunderstood. If there were no basis for the mistake – if what is deceptive did not even *exist* – then there could be neither the mistake, nor the ultimate reality that is the lack of what the mistake thought was there in the basis.

This immensely complex but crucial point is one reason why Tsongkhapa insists so strongly throughout his works that deceptive reality *is* established conventionally, and never vanishes completely, *in the sense of ceasing to exist*. Rather, because nothing ever did have characteristics of its own, the direct realization of emptiness still does not destroy anything that was there – because there was nothing *really* there in the first place, to be somehow swept away later by a realization of emptiness.⁷⁹ The realization of emptiness only reveals the way things always were, without inherent essence; but because that is how they always did exist, that realization does not damage their functioning at all. Thus the ārya can emerge from meditative equipoise into the continued unfolding of his or her karmic traces still at work. Then, when the ārya becomes a Buddha, it will be the result of illusory causes bringing about their illusory results.

Though sorely incomplete, this introduction to the topic of the two realities should be enough, however, to have prepared us to analyze the issue at hand within the Guhyasamāja sādhana, namely, how to meditate on the maṇḍala of sheer conviction *as* a world of appearances, with a state of mind that is still supposed to remain in the continuous realization of emptiness that was incited by reflection upon the four-line verse. For according to the sūtra vehicle, from which all this philosophy has been drawn, such a feat would be impossible for all but a Buddha.

In a Single State of Consciousness . . . Really?

As we indicated while examining the different vehicles in Chapter Three, it is basic to Tsongkhapa’s understanding of the sūtra vehicle of the six perfections that while it is necessary to prepare both the collection of wisdom and the collection of merit in

⁷⁸ See Appendix Five (266).

⁷⁹ See Appendix Five (261-264).

order to complete the two goals of Buddhahood, one cannot engage in practices that will work towards both collections simultaneously. What we have said here about the two realities might clarify why, from his point of view, this should be so. While in meditation on the ultimate lack of characteristics to all things, one is in a mode of negation; everything that arises must instantly dissolve before the penetrating gaze of incisive wisdom that analyzes the ultimate way in which anything exists. As Tsongkhapa obliquely defined the object of the primordial wisdom that realizes the ultimate: “. . . if something is found, or shown to be established, by that primordial knowing, then if there springs a cause for something to be established, the wisdom in turn refutes the grasping that thinks, ‘It is established as real.’”⁸⁰ In the aftermath of such meditations, one may practice the vast virtues of a bodhisattva while “concentrating on how things appear like illusions” (*sgyu ma lta bu’i ting nge ’dzin*), but one cannot possibly realize emptiness in a direct way during such periods, because such realization would instantly cancel the very interaction with the deceptively established appearances through which one was creating virtue, whether in relationship to conventionally established “sentient beings,” “teachers,” “holy sites,” “sacred images,” “scriptures,” “teachings,” and so forth. So one must alternate between the states of mind that find the ultimate, even by way of conceptual analysis, and those that provisionally find what is deceptive, in order to work with and gradually transform it.

Then, here in the Vajrayāna vehicle, Tsongkhapa has established the idea – based mainly on the writings of Jñānapāda and his followers, as well as several key quotations from tantras in the Hevajra cycle⁸¹ – that one can instead collect the two collections with unprecedented speed, because one can do the work of both within a single state of consciousness. No longer having to oscillate between periods of meditation on emptiness and periods of the aftermath in which one engages in bodhisattva activities, one can build up vast stores of virtue by visualizing the paradise and infinite compassionate activities of an already-enlightened Buddha, without ever leaving off the meditation on emptiness from which one built the maṇḍala in the first place. That is the theory we have already treated at length.

But is it possible? If indeed the view of emptiness does not change from sūtra to tantra, as Tsongkhapa insists over and over again, then should not the same rule apply, that when one meditates on the emptiness of a deceptive object, *it disappears*? The vanishing of dual appearance with which one started the main sādhana (by reciting the four-line verse and sinking into a meditation on its meaning, in which no reified object could appear) certainly carried over the sūtra logic without modification, only *adding* to it the notion of an extraordinary subject state of extremely subtle mind, turned into the

⁸⁰ See Appendix Five (216).

⁸¹ See the long quotation cited in Chapter Four, note 55, as well as the passages cited in Chapter Three, notes 39, 41, and 49.

nature of great bliss. What is meant to happen, then, when, as it states in Nāgārjuna’s *Abbreviated Practice*,⁸²

There in the midst of absolute space
from the seeds of *yam* and the two letters *hūṅ*
meditate on a disk of wind
perfectly adorned with two vajra rods?

As the absolute stillness and vacuity of the space of emptiness is broken by the first appearance of the letters *yam* and *hūṅ* (or, as in Tsongkhapa’s specifications, by the reappearance of the common protection circles as well as the inverted pyramid and the lotus, in the center of which the same letters will appear), what happens to the mind that was immersed in the realization of emptiness? How does it not begin to grasp to things as real, the instant anything appears – even if knowingly created by the imagination, or else by sheer conviction towards the divine creativity of the indwelling mind of clear light?

When Pañchen Sönam Drakpa finishes his own brief discussion of the points we explored above in the section on “Cutting the Root of Saṃsāra,” he says that since the indivisibility of clarity and the profound, practiced during both the stages, is the unsurpassed distinguishing factor that makes this Vajrayāna vehicle so profound, “it is entirely different from the explanations in the Perfection Vehicle, where, to the mind which realizes that a sprout lacks reality, the subject of argument – the sprout – does not appear.”⁸³ Geshe Norsang raised extensive debates with his students in regard to this point, and a similar one that comes up with respect to the yogas “with signs” and “without signs” within the class of performance tantra, mentioning authors ranging from Tsongkhapa to Khedrup Je to Pañchen Lobzang Chukyi Gyaltsen (*paN chen blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1570-1662), Yangchen Gaway Lodrö (*dbyangs can dga’ ba’i blo gros*, 1740-1827), and Khalka Ngawang Pelden Chö Je (*khal kha ngag dbang dpal ldan chos rje*, b. 1806).⁸⁴ He included differences in philosophical textbook traditions from Sera to Drepung Gomang colleges (i.e. the views of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa versus those of Ngawang Pelden Chö Je), and drew the discussion across sūtra and tantra all the way to stories of a recent debating conference (*bgro gleng*) held among prominent Geluk

⁸² Nāgārjuna, *Pinḍikṛtasādhana* (*sgrub pa’i thabs mdor byas pa*), Toh. 1796, sde dge, vol. *ngi*, 2b5: རྣམ་མཁའ་དབྱིངས་ཀྱི་དབུས་གནས་པར། རྒྱུ་གཉིས་ས་བོན་ཡི་ལས་བྱུང། རྩོམ་གཉིས་དང་ཡང་དག་ལྷན། རྒྱུང་གི་དབྱིལ་འཁོར་བསྐྱོས་པར་བྱ།

⁸³ Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, *bskyed rim gyi rnam gzahag mkhas pa’i yid ‘phrog*, 30: བར་བྱིན་ཐེག་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཐེག་པར་བྱ་བའི་རྒྱལ་མཚན་ཅན་བྱ་བའི་སྤང་བར་བཤད་པ་སོགས་དང་ཡི་མི་འདྲའོ།

⁸⁴ I take these dates from a Gyutö Library publication edited by the same Geshe Khedrup Norsang, even though they do not in every case match the dates given in recent bibliographical data for these figures. It would take further research to determine the reason for the difference in calculations or sources, but they only differ by a few years, and it is inconsequential for my anecdotal point here. See *gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa’i sa lam gyi rnam gzahag gces btus* (“Compendium of Cherished Presentations on the Levels and Paths of the Vajra Vehicle of Secret Mantra”), *gsang chen stod rgyud*, vol. 8 (Sidhbari, Dharamshala, India: Gyutö Library, 2014), xi-xii.

Geshes on tantric subjects in late 2014.⁸⁵ Before a small class of monks who were reviewing the *Steps of Mantra* in preparation for their final exams for the tantric Ngak-rampa (*sngags rams pa*) degree, the Abbot of Gyutö Monastery, Jhado Tulku Rinpoche, also raised the difficulty of how to interpret the actual meaning of joining clarity and the profound within a single state of consciousness, insisting, as had Geshe Norsang, that it was something the monks should consider deeply in order to see that there is no contradiction.⁸⁶ Suffice to say, it is no minor issue within the inner circles of Geluk tantric education, and there is no clear consensus among the illustrious lineage of tantric exegetes mentioned above, as to exactly how to resolve it conceptually.

In order to instigate the difficulties, Geshe Norsang began by pointing out that even within the sūtra vehicle it is not *always* the case that when one meditates on the emptiness of something like a sprout, the object disappears. In fact, during most periods of analytical meditation, one may gain insight into how it is that the object does not exist in the way that it appears, but still, the subject of argument, or the thing with properties (*chos can*, Skt. *dharmin*) persists in appearing, because the deepest mental causes for projecting dual appearance have not yet been overcome. In both the *Briefer Steps of the Path* and in the *Ocean of Reasoning*, as well as tangentially within the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*,⁸⁷ Tsongkhapa treats the notion, developed in some Indian Middle Way commentaries later associated with the Independent Reasoning group, that there are two types of ultimate reality: a “classifiable ultimate” (*rnam grangs pa’i don dam*), which is also a “nominal ultimate” (*don dam btags pa ba*) or a “concordant ultimate” (*mtshun pa’i don dam*); and an “unclassifiable ultimate” (*rnam grangs ma yin pa’i don dam*), which is the actual ultimate reality (*don dam bden pa dngos*), or the definitive ultimate (*don dam mtshan nyid pa*).

In the case of a classifiable, or concordant ultimate, the object analyzed by reason still appears as a basis. With something like a sprout, when one refutes, for example, that it could ever have grown, or arisen, through characteristics of its own, one is refuting certain wrong ideas about it, but since the negation can only be made *in relation to* positing the sprout as a subject of argument, the “sprout” need not disappear when one recognizes that *it* could not have grown from causes that had any nature of their own. The reasoning consciousness that realizes the truth of the negation does perceive an absence, but it is an absence that refers back to something that is still appearing, namely the

⁸⁵ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, March 24th, March 31st, and April 8th, 2015. Based on a conversation with Kongpo Geshe Jampa Kunga at Sera Monastery on January 12th, 2015, I have reason to believe that Geshe Khedrup Norsang himself was one of the main speakers at that conference, though I do not currently have further information on its dates or location.

⁸⁶ Jhado Tulku (*bya do sprul sku*), Gyutö Monastery, April 28th, 2015.

⁸⁷ See *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 203b6-206b6 (408-414); *rigs pa’i rgya mtsho*, vol. *ba*, 246b1-247a6 (494-495) (translated here in Appendix Twelve) and *lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 370a2-370b2 (771-772) (mentioned as part of a larger historical discussion of conflicting interpretations), as well as 418a6-418b3 (867-868) (partially translated above, Chapter Five, note 42).

deceptive reality of the sprout. Thus, in this case, although the emptiness realized is a simple negation (*med dgag*, Skt. *prasajya-pratiṣedha*: i.e., “there is no growing through any nature of its own, period”), the total result of the reasoning is a negation that suggests something else, or an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag*, Skt. *paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*), because in the end one’s mind returns to *the sprout*.

Although Tsongkhapa acknowledges that the emptiness understood through such an affirming negation is still classifiable as – or able to be categorized as – “ultimate reality,” the state of mind encountering it has not yet fully realized ultimate reality, because all elaborations of dual appearance have not yet been cut off. As Geshe Norsang explained, if the reasoning consciousness which deduces that something like a sprout is not established through any nature of its own is still compatible with an appearance, then what is realized is a classifiable ultimate. But it is not *actually* ultimate reality, because in this case what is appearing to the state of mind that ascertains emptiness comes in tandem with what is deceptive. So the subject of argument, the sprout, still appears.⁸⁸

This point is relevant here because it represents a thread of interpretation within the Geluk tradition – based squarely in Tsongkhapa’s own explanations of the two kinds of ultimate – which can argue that Pañchen Sönam Drakpa’s position cited above is not always the case. That is, even within the sūtra vehicle, when understanding with deductive reasoning that something such as a sprout or a person does not exist as real, it is *not* necessarily the case that the subject of argument disappears. Otherwise everyone would realize emptiness directly the first time they ever grasped the meaning of a logical argument for it, which of course is not the case.

Thus the notion of a classifiable or concordant ultimate might seem to give a perfect explanation for what is supposed to be happening during the yoga of a divine being, also, when something still *appears* to a state of mind realizing emptiness. After all, one might have to accept that the mind meditating on the circle of divine beings is a mind realizing an affirming negation. For implied in the very cancellation of what is to be refuted is something else: the appearance of the circle of divine beings. Whenever the cancellation of something to be refuted does automatically imply something else, what is realized cannot dawn before the mind in the aspect of a simple negation.⁸⁹ So it seems

⁸⁸ A close paraphrase of Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, March 31st, 2015, 1h00m20s ff. Literally:

ལྷ་ལྷ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ལྷ་བྱ་དེ་ལྷ་ལྷ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་པ་རྟོགས་པའི་རིགས་ཤེས་རྗེས་དཔག་དེ་ལ་སྤང་ཚུལ་ལ་མཐུན་ན་རྣམ་གྲངས་བའི་དོན་དམ་ཡིན་ཟེ
| རྣམ་གྲངས་བའི་དོན་དམ་ཡིན་པ་ག་རེ་རེད་ཟེར་ན་དོན་དམ་དངོས་གནས་དེ་གསུང་གི་ཡོད་པ་མ་རེད་ག་རེ་རེད་ཟེར་ན་དེ་སྟོན་དེ་བཞིན་སྤང་ངོར་ལ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་དང་
ཆོག་གསུང་ཡོད་པ་རེད་ཟེ | དེ་ཡིན་ཅང་ཆོས་ཅན་ལྷ་ལྷ་དང་སྤང་དེ་ཡོད་པ་རེད་ད། མདོར་བསྟུན་ན།

⁸⁹ Paraphrasing Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, April 8th, 2015, 1m40s ff. Literally:

དེ་འདྲས་ཀྱི་ལྷ་འཁྱོར་དེ་སྟོང་ཉིད་ངེས་དེ་ཡོད་ཡིན་ཅང་ནས་དགག་བྱ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་བཅད་པའི་ཤུགས་དེ་ལ་ལྷ་འཁྱོར་ལོ་དེ་འཕེན་འགྲོ་བཞིན་མི་འདུ
ག་གས། དགག་བྱ་བཀག་ཤུགས་དེ་ཆོས་ཅན་སྤྱོད་པར་བྱ་འགྲོ་འདུག་ག་དགག་བྱ་བཀག་ཤུགས་དེ་ཆོས་ཅན་སྤྱོད་པར་བྱ་སོང་ན་ནི་དེ་མེད་དགག་གི་རྣམ་པ་ཅ
ན་འཆར་གྱི་མི་འདུག

one would have to posit that the type of negation realized by the mind to which the maṇḍala appears is an affirming negation, not a simple negation.⁹⁰ Although a Geluk debater might balk at this, citing the objection that for Tsongkhapa, the understanding of emptiness *always* has to come in the form of a simple negation, one could point – as did Geshe Norsang – to Tsongkhapa’s explanations of a concordant or classifiable ultimate as a way out.⁹¹

Yet if it were that straightforward, then why did the famed Pañchen Sönam Drakpa Rinpoche – the only Gelukpa monk in history to be appointed abbot of all three major Geluk monasteries as well as Ganden throne-holder and master of Gyutö tantric college all within one lifetime⁹² – write that the unsurpassed distinguishing factor of the Vajrayāna vehicle, namely the yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound, “is *entirely different* from the explanations in the Perfection Vehicle, where, to the mind which realizes that a sprout lacks reality, the subject of argument – the sprout – does not appear”? Again and again Geshe Norsang challenged his class of Gyutö monks whether the mind of someone meditating on the yoga of a divine being could actually be realizing emptiness or not. Because if it was, then it would have to realize it in the form of a simple negation, a sheer absence of what is refuted. But if that were the case, it could not be perceiving any appearances. Yet if it were to be perceiving appearances, then that mind would have to be mixed with deceptive reality, which would mean it was realizing an affirming negation, which would not be pure meditation on emptiness any more. So (and here I interpolate), if this is exactly what it would be like to meditate on the emptiness of the sprout as a concordant ultimate, how can you say the mind of Vajrayāna yoga is unique? Since the analytical logic carried over is the same, the same problems seem to be arising as they would in a sūtra context, where one can either be meditating on method or

⁹⁰ One might even say, though Geshe Norsang did not raise this point in the debate, that since the unique form of the thing to be abandoned is belief in ordinary appearances, and since the non-existent object to which such belief grasps is a world and beings that are inherently ordinary, the negation which refutes that would automatically *imply* the appearance of a world of divine beings and their dwelling-places. This would indeed be an affirming negation. Nonetheless, the example of the object to be refuted that Geshe Norsang used consistently during this discussion was simply “something established through a nature of its own,” so I will not venture to elaborate on this idea, since the issue is difficult enough as it is. See my related comment in Chapter Four, note 73, above.

⁹¹ See Appendix Twelve (494), emphasis added:

On the other hand, regarding the emptiness that is an affirming negation, which refutes an ultimate arising and so on that could exist *on top of* the heaps and person, those bases for being empty must appear to an eye consciousness and so forth that are conventionally valid perceptions of a directly manifest appearance. Thus, in the face of a state of mind that sees something directly, *that [object] dawns together with the appearance of being dual, while it will not dawn without the appearance of being dual*. Therefore, this is a nominal ultimate, while it is a definitive instance of what is deceptive.

⁹² See <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Panchen-Sonam-Drakpa/1637>. This sort of praise for a major authority, offered even as one questions his position, is a typical tactic used in traditional debate.

wisdom, but not both at the same time. To attempt a more literal rendering, the debate went something like this (with rejoinders from the monks omitted):⁹³

O-la-so, consider the yoga in which one meditates on the maṇḍala of sheer conviction, the beings and the places where they stay. Are you telling me it is in direct contradiction to the mode of apprehension that grasps to things as real?

Yes? Because on the one hand it is in direct contradiction to the mode of apprehension that grasps to things as real, and on the other hand, there are also deceptive appearances in it.

So does emptiness appear directly to the yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound, to the one to whom the maṇḍala of beings and the places where they stay appears?

Yaah, then it must be the case that he realizes them both directly at the same time. Because (1) he realizes the circle of divine beings, which is deceptive reality, and (2) he also realizes ultimate reality, from the perspective of ascertaining that there is no inherent nature.

Don't you have to accept something like that?

(Various contradictory responses from the monks)

Oh, so to such a person, is it an affirming negation that dawns? Or is it a simple negation that dawns?

With a few more debating tactics, Geshe Norsang convinced the monks that they really had nowhere else to go: For they would end up either denying that the yogi actually realizes emptiness,⁹⁴ or they would be denying that the maṇḍala and its divine beings appear, and either answer would contradict Tsongkhapa's classic dictum that “*the mind that ascertains the meaning of the fact that the aspect lacks inherent nature – that confident apprehension – enters into emptiness, and the beheld aspect dawns in the*

⁹³ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, March 31st, 2015, 1h03m26s ff.

མ་ལགས་སོ་ལྷག་མོད་གྱི་རྟེན་དང་བརྟན་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་སྒོམ་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ཚུལ་ཅན། བདེན་འཛིན་དང་འཛིན་སྐྱངས་གྱི་དངོས་འགལ་ཡིན་པར་ཐལ། བདེན་འཛིན་དང་འཛིན་སྐྱངས་གྱི་དངོས་འགལ་ཡང་ཡིན་དང་དེ་ལ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་གྱི་སྐྱང་བ་ཡང་ཡོད། རྟེན་བརྟན་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་སྐྱང་མཁན་གྱི་ཐབ་གསལ་གཉིས་མེད་གྱི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དེ་ལ་སྟོང་ཉིད་དངོས་སུ་སྐྱང་བ་རེད་པས། དེ་བཅིས་དེ་གཉིས་ཅིག་ཅར་དུ་དངོས་སུ་རྟོགས་པ་ཡིན་པར་ཐལ། ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་ལྟའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ཡང་རྟོགས། རྟོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་ཤེས་པར་བཞེན་མེད་པ་དེ་ཡང་རྟོགས་པའི་ཕྱིར། དེ་འདྲའི་ཅིག་ཁས་གྱིས་ལེན་གྱི་མི་འདུག་ག། བྱས་ཅང་གང་ཐག་དེ་ལ་མ་ཡིན་དགག་ཤར་གྱི་རེད་དམ་མེད་དགག་ཤར་གྱི་རེད།

⁹⁴ The operative word up to this point was “*ngos su*,” which can mean actually or directly, not “*mngon sum*” which would imply the direct realization of emptiness of an ārya. It does not seem the direct realization is necessarily what was at stake, for there are texts that imply one “actually” realizes emptiness (*ngos su*) through meditation on higher insight, without yet realizing it *directly* as an ārya, in which all traces of dual appearance have vanished. But this, too, is a complex point for which I have no clear answer.

aspect of divine beings and the places where they stay.” Geshe Norsang went on to strike a crucial point, namely:⁹⁵

In the future, that mind of indivisible clarity and the profound will make manifest the actual clear light. When that happens, it will go into the essence of what is directly manifest. At that point, it follows that one will realize suchness *directly*.⁹⁶

That is, even in this system of unsurpassed yoga tantra, it is acknowledged that there is a vast difference between the way one realizes emptiness during the creation stage – when combining the understanding with the deceptive appearances of the visualized maṇḍala – and the way one realizes it directly, when indeed, all traces of subtle dual appearance must recede completely. Geshe Norsang went on to quote passages from Tsongkhapa’s commentaries to both the Guhyasamāja⁹⁷ and the Kālacakra tantras, to prove that when the yogi enters into the actual clear light of the fourth stage, or into the first moment of immutable great bliss, then whatever form of a divine being has been appearing – whether an impure illusory body, or a holy body of empty form – must disappear, because there simply cannot be any deceptive appearances during that experience, when the mind of clear light is immersed in the actual ultimate meaning, like “water poured into water” (*don dam chu la chu bzhag pa nang bzhin*).

Perhaps this succeeds in proving that the mind of creation stage was still in the mode of deductive reasoning, realizing emptiness by means of an abstraction of its meaning (*don spyi*), which could allow for the deceptive appearances associated with an affirming negation. But has it taken us any further in understanding Pañchen Sönam Drakpa Rinpoche’s point? How is perceiving the divine being with a mind realizing emptiness during creation stage any different from seeing a sprout while understanding that it did not either grow from itself or from something really other than itself? One provisional answer offered by Geshe Norsang, after the debate had quieted down, was that when Tsongkhapa says “a single state of mind” (*blo gcig*), he must mean a “single understanding” (*go ba gcig*). According to the language Geshe Norsang had been using throughout, I interpret this to mean that it would leave room for two distinct perspectives to be entertained by the same state of mind; one to which the maṇḍala *appears* (*snang*

⁹⁵ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, March 31st, 2015, 1h05m42s ff.

ཟབ་གསལ་གཉིས་མེད་གྱི་སྒྲོ་དེ་མ་འདས་པར་དོན་གྱི་འོད་གསལ་མཛོན་དུ་བྱེད་འོད་དུས་མཛོན་སུས་གྱི་འོ་མར་འགྲོ་བ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར། དེའི་ཆེ་དེ་ཉིད་མཛོན་སུས་དུ་རྟོགས་པར་ཟུམ།

⁹⁶ Here the word was “*mngon sum*,” suggesting to me that for Geshe Norsang, there was a difference in connotation, since the “fourth stage” actual clear light “*don gyi ‘od gsal*” is accepted within the Guhyasamāja system to be a direct perception of emptiness, and equivalent to the sūtra path of seeing (*mithong lam*, Skt. *darśana-mārga*).

⁹⁷ Geshe Norsang mentioned the *rgyud ‘grel chen mo’i le’u drug pa*, which I assume may either refer to Tsongkhapa’s “*Further Commentary in the Form of Annotations*,” on Candrakīrti’s Guhyasamāja commentary, the *Illuminating Lamp*, or else to the *Great Commentary* on the sixth chapter of the *Kālacakra Tantra*, i.e., *Immaculate Light* (*dri med ‘od*, Skt. *Vimalaprabhā*). I have not yet had opportunity to find the reference within either of these vast works.

ngor) and another which ascertains the maṇḍala *as* lacking inherent nature (*nges ngor*). But even Geshe Norsang sounded as though he was taking a break from the strict logic in order to suggest his more experiential opinion at that point: “As for me . . .” (*nga rang byas na . . .*).⁹⁸

Just over a week later, after the whole monastery had suspended classes while holding an intensive five-day accomplishment practice in the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala, finishing with a dramatic fire offering (which happened to coincide with Easter Monday in the Christian calendar that year), Geshe Norsang picked up the debate again with an even more profound analysis of what might be this “beheld aspect” that “dawns in the aspect of divine beings and the places where they stay.” To understand *that* point, however, and what I see to be its vast implications for Tsongkhapa’s tantric thought as a whole, we will need to make references to Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology, which will initiate the cascade of interrelated ideas that will carry us to the end of this chapter. First, however, I would like to offer my own interpretation of the issue described here, based on my own reading of the passage from the *Ocean of Reasoning* in which Tsongkhapa explains the concordant versus the actual ultimate.

Freedom from Elaboration and Intimations of Omniscience

In both his *Briefer Stages of the Path*, and in the *Ocean of Reasoning*,⁹⁹ Tsongkhapa raises the question of this classification of ultimate reality in close connection with a debate around the omniscience of Buddhas. The question at hand is whether, given all that Ārya Nāgarjuna and Candrakīrti have said in their Middle Way treatises about the two realities, mistaken states of mind, and so on, it is still possible to posit the omniscience by which a Buddha is said to know all things in their variety (*ji snyed pa mkhyen pa’i ye shes*). That is, it is perhaps easier to imagine that the Buddha knows all things as they actually exist (*ji lta ba*) – i.e., in their ultimate reality – insofar as that is the same for all, and knowing things in that way would simply be the culmination of the same kind of primordial wisdom perceiving emptiness that āryas have been entering during meditative equipoise all along, since reaching the first bodhisattva level. But if Buddhas were to see the manifest worlds and beings in their variety – insofar as these are *created* by the stained karmic dispositions of sentient beings, and insofar as they always appear to those beings as though they were established in a way in which they do not actually exist – then how could a Buddha ever look upon such appearances without somehow entering into the kinds of mistaken states of mind in which living beings themselves are trapped?

⁹⁸ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, March 31st, 2015, 1h6m38s ff.

⁹⁹ See *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 203b6-206b6 (408-414) and *rigs pa’i rgya mtsho*, vol. *ba*, 246b1-247a6 (494-495), translated here in Appendix Twelve.

Or, put another way, how can divine knowledge see what mere mortals experience, when the causes for such stained, illusory experiences have been stated again and again to be nothing but the seeds for ignorance within the minds of the perceivers? Would the Buddha have to assume the “cataracts” of ignorance in order for the myriad worlds even to appear? Or would the Buddha remain isolated in an everlasting meditation on ultimate reality, unable to perceive or conceptualize the suffering that beings endure, because the causes for experiencing such suffering no longer exist within the Buddha’s consciousness? Since Tsongkhapa finds all these options are untenable with respect to certain quotations from sūtras, he suggests another solution.

In the *Ocean of Reasoning*, following Candrakīrti (and here Candrakīrti’s quotation of the *Tathāgata-mahākaruṇā-nirdeśa-sūtra*)¹⁰⁰ Tsongkhapa first defends the doctrinal position that Buddhas *do* indeed see the entire variety of existing things and living beings, infinitely exceeding the scope of what can be seen by any non-Buddhas who happen to be gifted with clairvoyance. Furthermore, Tsongkhapa affirms that living beings “are known insofar as they appear, and it is not that they do not appear.”¹⁰¹ To explain, Tsongkhapa makes a basic distinction among all appearing things, dividing them into: (1) those that are *not* contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance, such as the glorious signs and marks with which the form body of a Buddha is said to be adorned, and (2) those that *are* contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance, such as the impure vessels and their inhabitants.¹⁰² The first category directly affirms the possibility of “deceptive” appearances that are nevertheless not caused by ignorance and the twelve links of dependent origination within saṃsāra. As indicated in Chapter Three, they are said to be caused, rather, by the collection of stainless virtues created by a bodhisattva while on the path.

Tsongkhapa goes on to illustrate a point that will be the reverse of what he ultimately needs to prove about the way a Buddha sees, but it seems he raises it in order to show an inverse parallel. Imagine someone who has the extraordinary virtue to live in a place and time where an actual Buddha is walking the earth. Those glorious signs and

¹⁰⁰ For a study focused in part on this sūtra, and its importance for canonical foundation for the manifold types of knowledge and activities attributed to Buddhas, see Ulrich Pagel, 2007, “The *Dhāraṇīs* of *Mahāvīryapatti* #748: Origin and Formation,” in *Buddhist Studies Review* 24(2): 151-191.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix Twelve (491).

¹⁰² It is important to recognize here that these two categories correspond directly to the “two *realms of living beings*” and to the “two *worlds*, which are pure and impure vessels,” mentioned in Tsongkhapa’s *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition.”* (See the end of the quotation cited at Chapter Two, note 9, which precipitated our entire discussion of worlds being made from mind.) Those terms were raised there precisely with regard to the portion of the Guhyasamāja practice where one would envision both pure and impure vessels and their inhabitants from the perspective of Vajradhara as the “Creator of pure living beings,” who is nonetheless said to “*send forth*” both kinds of worlds and beings when creating the maṇḍala of sheer conviction. Thus I do not think it inappropriate to be taking this passage from the *Ocean of Reasoning* as a potential philosophical tool with which to understand that step in Tsongkhapa’s reading of the Guhyasamāja sādhana.

marks may well appear to the sentient beings who encounter the Buddha – whether as disciples, bystanders, or outright enemies – but they will appear *as filtered* by the tendencies for ignorance within the mind of the perceiver. Tsongkhapa states clearly that to such observers, the signs and marks will appear as though they were established through characteristics of their own, because to such beings *everything* appears that way, but of course it is not the case that they actually were, because nothing can be. Furthermore, even as the “objective field,” namely, the holy body of the Buddha, cannot possibly have arisen due to the tendencies for ignorance, in this case the causes for the subject state of mind to perceive that form must still be bound up in such stained tendencies. So, one might indeed say, the sentient being sees the light of the divine body, “through a glass, darkly,”¹⁰³ even while a Buddha is manifest on earth.

Tsongkhapa adds a point that might be shocking to someone who assumes that language referring to “one’s own side” must always be equivalent to saying that something is established as real, in the way refuted by the Middle Way Consequence position. Rather, here it seems he must be using the language simply in the sense of where the causes are located, whether in one being’s mind or another. Thus he can say:¹⁰⁴

This is because the signs and marks are not things that appear to that subject state of mind *only* from the perspective of the way in which they appear to other persons [i.e., non-Buddhas]; rather, they are things that appear in the way that they do from [a Buddha’s] own side.

Thus Tsongkhapa is reiterating that the causes for the signs and marks lie within the mental continuum of the Buddha, from his or her “own side,” but the causes for the *way* in which that appearance will arise in the subject state of mind of a sentient being, do lie within the ignorance-soaked mind of the sentient being. Incidentally, I find this statement

¹⁰³ 1 Corinthians 13:12, King James Version: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix Twelve (492). The referents of the pronouns are very clear from context in the Tibetan, but I interpolate here for clarity’s sake. Note that the Tibetan here is *rang ngos nas de ltar snang ba yin pa’i phyir* (“because they are things that appear in the way that they do from his/her own side”), and not something like *rang ngos nas grub pa* (“established from their own side”), which would indeed indicate something to be refuted in this Middle Way Consequence context. One could equally well translate the phrase “*rang ngos nas*” as “from his/her own perspective,” but I use “own side” because this will be familiar to many readers as a philosophically potent phrase. At a deeper level, I believe Tsongkhapa’s distinction would be this: *Appearances* can never be established “from their own side” apart from a perceiver, but perceivers (including Buddhas) can have different perspectives from which they establish appearances conventionally. Since the meaning here is that the appearance appears that way from the side of the Buddha (and not from the side of the appearance), there is an indication of causality from that direction, but no indication of inherent existence, or being established *really* as it appears, or anything of the like. The signs and marks of a Buddha are as unfindable and empty – because arising in dependence and relationship – as any other phenomena, as the *Diamond-Cutter Sūtra* so famously indicates. See the discussion of the “*mtshan phun sum tshogs pa*” (consummate signs) and the “*mtshan sum cu rtsa gnyis*” (thirty-two signs) that runs throughout much of the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, Toh. 16, bka’ ’gyur, vol. ka, 223a-233b.

to be a resounding refutation of an idea I have heard voiced by some non-Tibetans who hear about emptiness, and mere designation, and somehow come around to the conclusion that even Buddhas are their own projection, thus landing in the idea that “because everything is empty, I created Buddhas.” There are numerous places in Tsongkhapa’s works where he refers to the virtue collected and the deeds done by the Buddha in countless previous lives,¹⁰⁵ but nowhere else have I seen an analysis as precise as this one regarding the respective contributions from each party in the actual act of a sentient being perceiving a Buddha. This statement makes eminently clear that Tsongkhapa did not think Buddhas’ forms were *merely* a projection of sentient beings’ stained minds. He asserts that they do have their sublime qualities, caused from the side of their own mindstreams, over the course of countless eons. This is a point of tremendous relevance for anyone trying to visualize Buddhas according to the instructions in a sādhana text. It is one thing to think these are just wishful projections of human aesthetic fantasy; quite another to believe that there are Buddhas who *have* the thirty-two signs and eighty marks, even though an ordinary being not born while a classical emanation body of a Buddha walked the earth would likely never have seen such a being, apart from the stylized depictions of Buddhist art. I think even Tsongkhapa would have agreed that artistic depictions are in part a product of human culture, and thus heavily influenced by the tendencies for ignorance and the various seeds for imperfect seeing in the minds of artists through the centuries. But his statements here suggest that he thinks there *is* such a thing as seeing the appearance of a Buddha as a Buddha appears to him/herself, once the tendencies for ignorance are removed altogether. For Buddhas would see one another “face to face,” knowing one another exactly as they know themselves. Tsongkhapa offers a kind of mystical hope with such an affirmation, a hope that I suggest would have to be there in order for any of the creation stage visualizations to make sense.

Now for the opposite perspective, that is, how a Buddha perceives all those things that have been created by stained causes, which lie only within the minds of sentient beings, and which therefore *exist*, and so must be an object of the Buddhas’ omniscience.¹⁰⁶

If actual objects contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance appear to the primordial wisdom of a Buddha that knows things in their variety, then they appear to the Buddha only insofar as they appear to persons who have the

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 160a3-5 (243) and *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 55b2-3 (112) as cited in Chapter One, note 135, above. Cf. Cutler *et al.*, 2000, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. I, 214: “If you have not accumulated the karma that is the cause for an experience of happiness or suffering, you will in no way experience the happiness or suffering that is its effect. Those who enjoy the fruits of the innumerable collections amassed by the Teacher need not have accumulated all of the causes of these effects, but they do need to accumulate a portion.”

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix Twelve (492).

contaminations of ignorance. But without relying on the way they appear to others, they are not appearances from the Buddha's own side. Therefore, the form, sound, and the rest, which are not established through any characteristics of their own, but appear as though they are, are something *which are known by the Buddha from the perspective of the way in which they appear to those who have ignorance*. But since, without relying upon the way in which they appear to those persons, they are *not* something that could ever be known according to a way they appear from the Buddha's own side, there is no sense in which the Buddha becomes mistaken due to their appearance.

In this way, from the perspective of the knowledge of things in their variety, all functioning things appear as illusions – as false in the sense that they are without self – and have an essence which lacks any nature; but they do not appear as real. If they are to appear to that primordial wisdom insofar as they do appear to those with ignorance, however, *then they merely dawn as the appearance of being real that appears to those other persons*.

The inverse parallel for which Tsongkhapa argues is this: Sentient beings can see the signs and marks of a Buddha under very special circumstances (whether precise historical moments or through meditative achievement), based on the fact that they were caused by the Buddha's infinite virtues, albeit seriously filtered through the limited subjective perspective of the sentient being's own mind. Yet even if sentient beings did not perceive them, the signs and marks would still exist as an illusory divine appearance, because the Buddha has created them. On the other hand, a Buddha, by virtue of the primordial wisdom that knows all things, does see what appears to sentient beings contaminated by ignorance, but if the ignorance of those beings were to cease, and those appearances were no longer to appear *to the sentient beings*, as happens temporarily for āryas in the direct perception of emptiness, there is nothing that would make those things appear to the Buddha, because the causes for such appearances do not exist in the Buddha. Thus “they are not appearances from the Buddha's own side.”¹⁰⁷

Since, unlike the signs and marks, the appearances that arise due to ignorance have no reason to appear to the Buddha apart from the fact they do appear adventitiously to the minds of sentient beings, the Buddha could never become mistaken towards those appearances, insofar as the Buddha knows perfectly that they have no characteristics of their own. That is, it is not as though the Buddhas possess the karma that is creating those appearances. Thus sentient beings can glimpse the form bodies of Buddhas, but become mistaken about how they exist, while Buddhas see the myriad worlds and bodies of sentient beings, without ever becoming mistaken about how they exist. Once *all* the

¹⁰⁷ See the corresponding, and philosophically more difficult, discussion of this idea in the *Illumination of the True Thought*, Appendix Five (247-251), esp. note 11. Though I cannot treat these passages directly here, they involve points that deserve much further analysis.

causes for those suffering worlds to arise, which dwell in *all* the beings’ mental streams, have been utterly exhausted, the worlds vanish, as at the end of an eon of destruction. At that point there is nothing from the Buddha’s side that would act to keep them in existence; because the Buddha does not create suffering worlds. It is an eschatological vision the depths of which we have barely begun to explore.

How is this to help us, though, in understanding the mind to be cultivated when visualizing the maṇḍala of sheer conviction? Note, first of all, that in the *Ocean of Reasoning* Tsongkhapa progresses straight from his conclusion of this argument into a discussion of the divisions of ultimate reality, including the point about a “concordant ultimate.” In the *Brief Steps of the Path*, also, the more extensive discussion of the two kinds of ultimate follows upon yet a more detailed version of the debate about a Buddha’s omniscience, which had in turn followed the basic explanation of what ultimate reality is.¹⁰⁸ So it is clear that Tsongkhapa saw the issues to be intimately related insofar as they continually grapple with what it means for ultimate reality to be the only *reality* worthy of the name, and yet for the wisdom of Buddhas that knows things in their variety still to perceive the appearances that are deceptive to everyone else, but not to Buddhas.¹⁰⁹ There is something about the wisdom of Buddhas that is supposed to be able to see both ultimate reality and myriad appearances (which are for them neither “deceptive” nor seemingly established as “real”) with two different types of primordial wisdom that are still “of a single essence,” even as the dharmakāya and the holy bodies of form are “of a single essence,” but not identical.¹¹⁰

* * *

How, then, might the “single state of consciousness,” with which Tsongkhapa instructs the practitioner to meditate on the yoga of a divine being, be intended to *anticipate* – as a practice that explicitly takes the result as the path – this very unity of vision that Tsongkhapa defends as the way in which all Buddhas see?

In order to taste this, we would need to understand a point that Tsongkhapa makes when describing the *actual* ultimate, as opposed to the concordant or classifiable ultimate discussed above. Tsongkhapa quotes the *Light of the Middle Way*¹¹¹ to say that “the

¹⁰⁸ See *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 199b6-203b6 (400-408).

¹⁰⁹ As we see in the *Illumination of the True Thought*, Tsongkhapa holds that even bodhisattvas at the “pure levels” bear the tendencies for ignorance, which still make things appear deceptively between sessions of meditative equipoise, even after those bodhisattvas have finished off the afflictive tendencies to *believe* that those appearances are real. Only for Buddhas is there “no alternation between a state of meditative equipoise and an aftermath in which there either do or do not exist the conceptualization of appearances.” See Appendix Five (243), and the entire discussion translated from (233-244).

¹¹⁰ See Appendix Twelve (493).

¹¹¹ See Appendix Twelve (494), and note 6. This work is attributed to the Indian paṇḍit, Kamalaśīla, who is famed for having come to Tibet and who was known as representing the “great Middle Way” (*dbu ma chen po*, Skt. *mahāmādhama*), a system of interpretation that included many elements known to later Tibetans as “*svātantrika*” (i.e. referring to “those who follow independent reasoning”). Though in the *Great Book on*

actual ultimate is beyond every elaboration.” Now the phrases “beyond elaboration” (*spros pa las ’das pa*) and “free of elaboration” (*sprod ’bral*) – like “dual appearance” and “no meditation” – have many meanings in various contexts across the history of Buddhism. Tsongkhapa gives a specific explanation here that he clearly knew would be at odds with the opinions of some of his contemporary readers. Whether one accepts it or not, however, I believe it may have profound ramifications, not only for the question of “how a Buddha sees,” but also for those who wish to understand what kind of vision a yogi training within Tsongkhapa’s lineage should be cultivating during the creation stage itself. Tsongkhapa explains:¹¹²

Now here, “elaboration” is not merely the elaboration of something refuted by a reason; rather it is the elaboration of *appearances* as well. As for how it is “beyond” that, from the perspective of the gaze that sees suchness directly, it means that all elaborations of dual appearance vanish. But do not think that means there are no elaborations of appearance.

That is, Tsongkhapa makes a fine distinction between “elaborations of dual appearance,” and just “elaborations of appearance.” We have seen that in his thought, “elaborations of dual appearance,” refer particularly to the appearances which, from the moment they arise, already *appear to be real*, due to the influence of the tendencies for the ignorance that grasps to things as real. (This is parallel to the idea explained earlier, that things can still *appear* as ordinary, even when one is learning how not to take them as such.) So far we have also seen that for everyone short of Buddhas, it is impossible to separate these two. If the elaborations of dual appearance should vanish due to perfect analysis which treats the ultimate, then it has certainly seemed that appearances in general – even those that can be conventionally established by a conventionally valid perception – must disappear also. But here Tsongkhapa’s language clearly suggests that there could be such a thing as an elaboration of appearance, which was not automatically an elaboration of dual appearance. This would imply there could be an appearance that never appeared to have a nature of its own, and which was never taken as such by one who perceived it. This sounds very much like the way the objects of a Buddha’s omniscience have just been said to appear, *to Buddhas*. But it also suggests that even when all elaborations of

the Steps of the Path Tsongkhapa seems highly critical of some views drawn from this “great Middle Way” system, he certainly treats Kamalaśīla as a most respected authority on both meditation and view throughout his *Steps of the Path* writings. Furthermore, in both *Ocean of Reasoning* and the *Briefer Steps of the Path*, when quoting both Jñānagarbha and Kamalaśīla for points about the two kinds of ultimate, Tsongkhapa certainly seems to accept what they say. So, with these caveats, I take what follows to be Tsongkhapa’s own view, though I recognize there could be some grounds for debate about this.

¹¹² See Appendix Twelve (494).

dual appearance have vanished, this does not necessitate an absolute absence of appearance, in principle.¹¹³

The reason Tsongkhapa gives for this assertion above, which seems to be a direct interpretation of what he thinks Kamalaśīla means, and may or may not represent Tsongkhapa's own opinion, is that if appearances, “full stop,” were to end completely, then this would undermine the fact that the two realities were always inseparable from one another. The way Tsongkhapa expresses this is to say that since the pair of “the very nature of the thing” (*chos nyid*, Skt. *dharmatā*), and “the elaboration that appears to have the properties of a thing” (*chos can snang ba'i spros pa*) have always been inseparable, it would be impossible to have an ultimate reality (which here is the same as *chos nyid*) that was not the ultimate reality of a subject matter, or a thing with properties (*chos can*, Skt. *dharmin*). So if the fact of appearances were to be eliminated altogether, there would be no ultimate reality, either. But if such nondual elaborations of mere appearance can and must remain, might this indicate the kind of “appearances” seen by a Buddha?

Tsongkhapa goes on to say that “the mere cutting off of the elaboration of what is to be refuted by a reason – the lack of self to things that are the heaps and the lack of self to a person – is the meaning of what is found by the immaculate wisdom that knows *how* things exist.” That is, the wisdom of Buddhas and āryas that understands how things exist ultimately, simply cuts off the elaborations of dual appearance that made one think things had reality from their own side. Since in this case the elaborations that made the heaps and the person seem to be real are completely pacified or put to rest, what is realized is the actual ultimate reality, a simple absence. But does that mean that what is realized is a blank nothing?

Tsongkhapa addresses this point a little bit later in the discussion, just after explaining the concordant ultimate. He directly criticizes anyone who thinks that meditation on emptiness means the total absence of anything at all, and then challenges any reader to think again if they thought they knew what a “simple negation” meant.¹¹⁴

For some who take immense joy and delight in saying that “an ārya's wisdom of meditative equipoise realizes the freedom from elaboration that has simply eliminated elaboration,” it is intolerable to say that “the ārya encounters the *negation* that lacks any elaboration.” But this is the fault of a mind that wants to say a “simple negation” is a total absence of everything, like the horns of a rabbit, without realizing that the meaning of a simple negation refers to that which has

¹¹³ Nevertheless, I must infer that it is still only Buddhas who would be capable of perceiving such appearances that had never arisen as “dual appearance,” since, once again, even bodhisattvas at the pure levels – eighth level and higher – are said to be affected by the tendencies for perceiving dual appearance, as long as they are not in meditative equipoise focused on ultimate reality. See Chapter Five, note 110, just above, and Appendix Six (288-289).

¹¹⁴ Appendix Twelve (495).

simply eliminated *what was to be refuted*: Because if nothing at all has been established, this stands in contradiction to being a simple negation.¹¹⁵

With this passage, hidden deep in the midst of his classical commentary to the *Root Verses of the Middle Way*, I would suggest that Tsongkhapa grants a tantalizing clue to the problem of how to meditate on the yogas of creation stage. If one understands that a simple negation does not mean one's mind has to go utterly blank, but only that something which was never there anyway is denied, then there is the possibility that to Buddhas *appearances* – but not dual appearances – still appear, while the primordial wisdom of emptiness simultaneously rests in knowledge of the fact that none of these appearances has any nature. From the perspective of the wisdom of emptiness, this would still be a simple negation, not an affirming negation. When focusing *only* on that particular absence, to the point that all traces of dual appearance disappear, what is known would be the actual ultimate, the knowledge of how things exist. But from the perspective of affirming a basis of refutation as an appearance, it would still be an affirming negation, and therefore a concordant ultimate, the knowledge of the variety of things. After commenting on a verse from Jñānagarbha's *Commentary on the Two Realities*, regarding the logic leading to such a concordant ultimate, Tsongkhapa makes the blazing statement that:¹¹⁶

It is with this reasoning that you should understand, as classifiable within the category of “ultimate,” all those objective fields encountered with the meaning of being “like an illusion” – which is an affirming negation – by the primordial wisdom of Buddhas that knows things in their variety, and by the aftermath wisdom of lower āryas.

Thus Tsongkhapa explicitly indicates that the meditation on illusion is not the result of a simple negation, insofar as it does focus precisely *on* appearances. But insofar as the omniscience of Buddhas that knows things in their variety, as well as the wisdom of lower āryas when they are not in meditative equipoise, does not hold those appearances to be real, they can still be classified as perceiving the “ultimate,” albeit in conjunction with an appearance that would be deceptive for beings who do not understand. The difference that Tsongkhapa does not explain here, but has made clear many times in other works,¹¹⁷ between that omniscience of Buddhas and the “aftermath wisdom of lower

¹¹⁵ Cf. Jay Garfield and Ngawang Samten, 2006, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 496. Tsongkhapa's final phrase is *cir yang ma grub na med dgag yin par 'gal ba'i phyir ro*, which is a technical turn of phrase in logic that means it is contradictory for there to be one thing that is both (a) nothing at all, and (b) a simple negation. That is, more loosely translated: “not to establish anything at all as existing is not what it means to be a simple negation.” Since Tsongkhapa does not use the existential verb “to be” (*yod pa*), I do not think the point is that, as Garfield and Samten translate it: “But if nothing existed, it would be contradictory to say that there are external negations.” Although this statement does express Tsongkhapa's point of view in general, I do not think it is the particular import of what he is saying here.

¹¹⁶ Appendix Twelve (495).

¹¹⁷ See again Appendix Five (243) and the entire discussion translated from (233-244).

āryas,” is that Buddhas do not have to alternate between the two types of primordial wisdom, whereas lower āryas can only focus on the simple absence or the illusory affirmation of an appearing basis, but not both at once.

What the Vajrayāna practice of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound demands, however, is that from the moment the maṇḍala begins to appear, one should imagine and anticipate what it would be like to view mere appearances without *ever* having grasped to them as being real. It will be impossible, of course, for a beginner yogi, who has not yet even reached meditative stillness, much less advanced realizations of emptiness involving the thorough withdrawal of dual appearance, to actually visualize anything without the conceptual elaborations that conceive appearances to be “dual” (i.e., “real”) being triggered. But insofar as the beginner yogi still witnessed him or herself “create” the appearances, this would go a long way to cancelling the thought that such appearances have any inherent nature of their own. Perhaps this is one way to interpret Jñānapāda’s statement from the *Samantabhadra Sādhana*, that

To that which has the very identity of
the profound and also the vast,
conceptual fabrication will not appear.¹¹⁸

But it does not necessarily mean that appearances will not appear.

Nonetheless, Geshe Norsang repeated many times¹¹⁹ that the yoga of indivisibility of clarity and the profound *cannot* be a practice that simply aims to parallel the aftermath wisdom of āryas, in which things appear “like an illusion” – simply because then there would be no distinguishing feature of speed within the tantric vehicle, by which one could work towards both collections simultaneously, in a single state of consciousness. I would add that then it would seem āryas of the sūtra vehicles would automatically be practicing creation stage whenever they recognize the illusion, even without having received the specific empowerments and instructions on how to abandon the unique thing to be abandoned, and so on.¹²⁰

Taking all of these complex arguments into account, then, I will posit that the primary way in which the yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound is, as Paṇchen Sönam Drakpa stated, “entirely different” from first realizing the emptiness of a thing with properties, such as a sprout, in deep meditation, and then practicing seeing things as illusory when arising from meditation, is that in this sūtra sequence, *there was already an object appearing in the first place*, forced upon one’s perceptions due to causes bound up within the cycle of suffering. In that case, one cancels the way in which it was appearing by understanding how it does not actually exist, and then when it

¹¹⁸ See the quotation cited above at Chapter Four, note 43.

¹¹⁹ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, especially March 24th, 2015.

¹²⁰ Nevertheless, see the intricate possibilities discussed in Chapter Four, note 28, above.

appears again, due to the inveterate ripening of karmic seeds for a non-Buddha, one recalls how it could not really exist in the way that it appears, and so it arises like an illusion – like a rainbow, a reflection, an echo, and so on.

In the case of building the Guhyasamāja or any other tantric maṇḍala, however, from the outset, the maṇḍala is not something that was already appearing due to past karma. Rather, the step of canceling ordinary, karmically-driven appearances had to have happened *already*, before it could even appear the first time. So, for that reason alone, the maṇḍala is *not* like a sprout of barley. The canceling of what was just “given” to one’s perceptions took place at the “ground of primordial wisdom,” during which one did indeed meditate on the vanishing of all dual appearances, instigated by understanding the meaning of the four-line verse. What comes afterwards, then, does not arise from ordinary past karma, but should be arising from one’s best approximation of the extremely subtle mind of clear light, indivisible from the nature of great bliss; and the appearances created from such a subtle consciousness simply will not have the same quality as the “ordinary” outer objects and parts of a person that are the usual suspects for analysis within the sūtra Middle Way. Because of the way one was set up to experience “appearances” within the tantric sādhana in the first place, the pure appearances should automatically begin to arise out of that foundational meditation on emptiness, which was indeed based upon a simple negation, with the natural *appearance* of being “like an illusion” – like a moon in water, and so on¹²¹ – and with no pretense of *ever* having had a nature of their own. After all, the yogi watched them be created day after day, through year after year of diligent practice. Once they begin to appear “automatically,” it is now by force of meditation, not just by force of ancient karmic tendencies planted within the cycle of the twelve links.

Thus I would extrapolate from Tsongkhapa’s logic that a Vajrayāna sādhana *is* in one sense designed to create the best approximation of how an ārya would see appearances between sessions, but more audaciously, it is designed to anticipate directly how a Buddha is supposed to see all things, without ever needing to leave off the perfect perception of ultimate reality in order to focus upon mere appearances. For as Tsongkhapa said, the two forms of a Buddha’s primordial wisdom are of a single essence. Working to approximate such a state of knowing, then, even long before the extremely subtle mind has been made manifest in actuality, the yogi would be forced to contemplate ever more deeply the indivisibility of the two realities.¹²² For if it is possible for a Buddha

¹²¹ See the quotation from the *Tent* cited in Chapter Four, note 55.

¹²² See an extremely concise expression of this idea in the writing of Lozang Do-ngak Chökyi Gyatso Chok (*blo bzang mdo sngags chos kyi rgya mtsho mchog*, 1903–1957) “A Jeweled Mirror of Pure Appearances: Establishing the Unity of the Views of the Old and New Translation Schools of the Secret Mantrayāna,” in B. Alan Wallace (forthcoming, 2018), *Open Mind* (emphasis added):

When determining the ultimate, [Candrakīrti] refutes the object of negation, namely the possibility of anything being established from its own side. *So then there is no deceptive thing left over with*

to perceive appearances without ever mistaking them to be real, then it seems it might be possible for ultimate reality, the only reality a Buddha ever sees, to *appear*, without ever compromising the fact it is the absolute absence of inherent nature. Perhaps this is what Tsongkhapa is pointing to when he insists again and again that a simple negation does not lead to an emptiness that is totally cut off.¹²³ For once again, deceptive reality is only posited as “deceptive” from the point of view of those who are deceived, and who think it to be “real” in the sense of inherently established. But for those who see the creative process perfectly, burgeoning from the effulgence of primordial consciousness, there will never be a hint of thinking things came about in any other way than from this spontaneous overflow of primordial knowing. According to these arguments, this would be the case for Buddhas, but I believe it is what Tsongkhapa most sincerely wanted even the beginner yogi to try to imagine, when meditating on the yoga of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound during “each part of the practice for gaining realizations.”¹²⁴

The Beheld Aspect Dawns . . .

Thus we may return to Geshe Norsang’s follow-up explanation, which came after the whole monastery had been engaged in intensive ritual practice for a week, while all regular classes and debate sessions were cancelled. As though taking his listeners down through the layers of cognitive thought to the place where sheer consciousness meets sheer appearance, he asked:¹²⁵

Now, if the circle of divine beings is to appear, then what is the *basis* from which that circle will appear? As in some kind of subject with properties, a cause for its being realized? If someone is meditating on the yoga of a divine being – if someone is meditating on the indivisibility of clarity and the profound – then within that yoga of the divine being, as for what has the aspect of a divine being,

characteristics of its own—as the Svātantrikas would have it. When positing what is deceptive, he posits the presentation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as being a labeled existence, designated solely by the names of what are merely labeled, mere appearances. Therefore, since the object of negation has been refuted directly, *there is no extra ultimate anywhere else*. In this sense, saying “the two realities are indivisible” splits off even from the main avenue of the middle way, which establishes what is to be established absolutely, through reasoning that is autonomous [i.e., *svātantrika*] in a conventional way. This proves Candrakīrti’s intended view to be unique.

¹²³ See Appendix Seven, “Two Strategies for a Cure” (333-338). Though, unfortunately, I will not be able to treat this important argument directly here, I believe the distinctions Tsongkhapa draws in this passage are essential to further understanding of what he means about “simple negations,” especially with respect to the view of “other emptiness,” which remains such a sensitive point in Tibetan inter-sectarian understanding to this day. See the forthcoming work cited in the previous note for several provoking essays on the relationship between the views of Tsongkhapa and Longchenpa, Rongzom, *et al.*

¹²⁴ See once again the long quotation cited above in Chapter Four, note 55.

¹²⁵ Geshe Norsang, Gyutō Monastery, April 8th, 2m18s ff.:

ད་ལྟའི་འཁོར་ལོ་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་ན་ལྟའི་འཁོར་ལོ་དེ་གང་ལས་སྤང་བའི་གཞི་དེ་ག་རེ་རེད། རྟོགས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་ཅན་འདྲ་ལོ་དེ། ད་རང་ཉིད་ལྟའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་སྟོན་མཁན་ཅི་ག་ཡིན་ན་ཟབ་གསལ་གཉིས་མེད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་སྟོན་མཁན་ཅི་ག་ཡིན་ན་དེ་ལྟའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དེའི་ལྟའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་དེ་སྤང་བའི་གཞི་དེ་ག་རེ་རེད། རྟོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་གཟུང་རྣམ་ལྟར་ཤར་བ་ཟེར་དུས་གཟུང་རྣམ་དེ་ག་རེད་བཞག་ཟེར།

what is the *basis* for its appearance? When we say that the beheld aspect of the realization of emptiness dawns as a divine being, what is that *beheld aspect*?

Referring to the suggestions of the various learned Geshes at the 2014 debating conference (*bgro gleng*), he went on to reflect upon what this *aspect* must be.¹²⁶

An aspect that dawns before consciousness . . . That *aspect* – when we say that the beheld aspect of the realization of emptiness dawns as a divine being, the part that dawns before consciousness in the aspect of an object – that unlinked trace – just that aspect of a divine being; is there cause for something to be produced from it or not? Is it the cause for being seen?

If that aspect is an aspect that dawns before a conceptual state of mind, due just to its mere appearance, then perhaps, apart from being something like form that is designated by a concept, it will not be able to *dawn*, right?

If you are going to connect it to the aspect of *consciousness*, though, then with an aspect of consciousness, how are you going to recognize it? There was someone who said it is an aspect that is a likeness to something, *in between* the subject state of mind and the objective field. . . .

He went on to explain that within a Middle Way context, when someone like Bhāvaviveka interprets the lines in the *Journey to Lāṅka Sūtra* where it is stated that “There are no appearances on the outside,”¹²⁷ it means that “in between” the subject and object there is an aspect that is like a stain, or like something vibrating between the two. But then some say an aspect such as that cannot establish anything. Offering the spectrum of options for what an “aspect” could be, Geshe Norsang then mentioned an idea held by the Vaibhāṣika schools, of an aspect “over there.” That in turn is rejected by others, but just what is it that is rejected? He concluded by saying that most proponents would say that what is at stake must be the aspect that exists on *this* side, upon consciousness. To explain.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, April 8th, 3m02s ff.:

ཤེས་པ་ལ་ཤར་བའི་རྣམ་པ་དེ། . . . རྣམ་པ་དེ་སྟོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་གཟུང་རྣམ་ལྟར་ཤར་བའི་ལུས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤར་བའི་ཆ་ལྟར་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་དེ་
དེ་ག་རང་ལྟའི་རྣམ་པ་ལས་བསྐྱེད་རྒྱ་ཡོད་དང་མེད། དེ་ལྟ་རྒྱ་ཡོད་པ་རེད་དམ། རྣམ་པ་དེ་རྟོག་པ་ལ་ཤར་བའི་རྣམ་པ་ཡིན་ན་ནི་སྤང་བ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ཡིན་ན་ནི་ལམ་
ཆེར་རྟོག་བཀྲགས་གི་གཟུགས་འདྲ་ཅིག་མ་གཏོགས་འཆར་ཐུབ་ཀྱི་མ་རེད་པ། ཤེས་པའི་རྣམ་པ་ལ་སྤར་བ་ཡིན་ན་ནི་ཤེས་པའི་རྣམ་པ་ལ་ཡག་ད་གང་འདྲས་ཅིག་
ངོས་འཛིན་ཐེར་ན་ལུས་དང་ལུས་ཅན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་བར་དུ་ལག་རང་འདྲ་ཅིག་གི་འདྲ་རྣམ་ཐེར་མཁན་ཅིག་

¹²⁷ See *Journey to Lāṅka Sūtra*, *Laṅkāvatāra Mahāyānasūtra* (*lang kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo*), Toh. 107: “*phyi rol snang ba yod med de*, . . .” This verse is repeated as a refrain at least twice in the sūtra.

¹²⁸ Geshe Norsang, Gyutö Monastery, April 8th, 4m56s-5m32s:

སྐབས་འདྲིར་ད་ལྟ་སྟོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་གཟུང་རྣམ་ལྟར་ཤར་བའི་ཡག་འདི་དག་ཟུང་རྣམ་ཐེར་འོང་དུས་ཤེས་པ་ཁོ་རང་ཡིན་པ་རེད། ད་ཡིན་ལུས་དེ། ཤེས་པ་ཁོ་རང་
ར་སྤང་བའི་གཞི་དེ། ཡིན་ན་ཡང་ཤེས་པ་ཁོ་རང་རེད་དེ་ཁོ་རང་བཞིན་ལག་གི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་ཤར་སྤངས་འདྲ་པོ་དེ་བསམ་སྒྲོ་ཅིག་མ་གཏང་ན་ཤེས་པ་ཁོ་རང་གསལ་
ལ་བའི་རིག་ཆ་དེ་གཟུགས་ཅན་གྱི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་ཤར་སྤངས་ཅིག་ད་བཤད་དགོས་པ་རེད་པ། དེ་འཆད་འོང་དུས་ཤེས་པ་ཁོ་རང་ལ་ད་ལྟར་སྤང་བ་འདྲ་པོ་ཅིག་ ལྟ་སྤང་
ར་བས་སྤང་བ་འདྲའོ། ཡང་ན་སྟོང་ཉིད་སྤང་བས་སྤང་བ་འདྲའོ། དེ་འདྲའི་ཅིག་སྤང་ཆ་འདྲ་པོ་ཅིག་མ་གཏང་ན་ཤར་མི་ཐུབ་མཁན་གསུང་འདྲུག་ག།

Now, in this context, in the saying that the beheld aspect of the realization of emptiness dawns as a divine being, when we say “beheld aspect,” it is consciousness itself – in terms of what object it is. Consciousness itself is the basis of the appearance. Consciousness itself is it, but if you don’t think about how that is going to dawn in the aspect of a face and arms – one has to explain the way in which the *aware* part of the clarity dawns in the aspect of something that has form, right?

When you have explained that, then, consciousness itself, it is as if it appears as the divine being. As if it appears through the divinity appearing. Also, as if it appears through emptiness appearing. So it’s like that. If something like an appearing part didn’t dawn, then it would be like saying it couldn’t dawn, right?

* * *

To understand what is at stake, here, in what was altogether just three minutes of Geshe Norsang’s speech, one would need to understand the scope of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology, as well as the extensive interpretive literature on the subject written by Tsongkhapa’s immediate disciples, which had most likely been studied for years, as part of monastic curriculum, by nearly all the monks in attendance at this tantric class on the Guhyasamāja creation stage. While I cannot treat that body of literature properly here, I will try to illuminate just a few essential points, taking as my principal source a somewhat lesser-known and heretofore untranslated text, the *Commentary on the “Chapter on Direct Perception,”* recorded by Khedrup Je as lecture notes from teachings ostensibly given by Tsongkhapa himself.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ That is, the *Commentary on the “Chapter on Direct Perception,”* *Rendered by the Dharma Lord Khedrup According to the Speech of the Lord [Tsongkhapa]* (*mngon gsum le’u’i tlkka rje’i gsung bzhin mkhas grub chos rjes mdzad pa*), rje’i gsung ’bum, vol. *ma* (603-806). See Appendix Ten, note 1, for further references. It appears there is only one directly authored work by Tsongkhapa on the subject of valid perception (*pramāṇa*): *Clearing Away the Darkness of the Mind for Those of Sincere Aspirations: Entryway to the Seven Treatises*, *sde bdun la ’jug pa’i sgo don gnyer yid kyi mun sel*, vol. *tsha* (811-860), which appears to be an early composition, immediately following upon the *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, within Tsongkhapa’s collected works. (There is possibly a second directly authored work, *Primer on the Path of Valid Perception, Authored by the Great Tsongkhapa, King of the Dharma*, *tshad ma’i lam bsgrigs chos kyi rgyal po tsong kha pa chen pos mdzad pa*, which does not appear at all in the Tashi Lhunpo wood-block edition, but does appear in vol. *ma* (904-937) of the bound printed edition of Tsongkhapa’s collected works [*’jam mgon bla ma tsong kha pa chen po’i gsung ’bum*] published in Delhi, India in the late twentieth century, and available in many monastery libraries, though there is no publication information printed in this 13-volume edition. The added colophon of this work, by the third throneholder of the Ganden lineage, acknowledges, however, that since there is no original colophon [*mdzad byang*] by Tsongkhapa himself, the authorship has been questioned; nevertheless, the redactor offers his assurance that the work is authentic.) There are two sets of lecture notes, however, always included in Tsongkhapa’s collected works, which are said to be based on Tsongkhapa’s oral teachings on the “Chapter on Direct Perception” from Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika*, one by Gyaltsab Je (*rgyal tshab rjes rje’i drung du gsan pa’i mngon sum le’u’i brjed byang*, vol. *ba*, 631-740) and the more extensive one by Khedrub Je, cited above. It is this latter text that I have found to be a key source for what may reasonably be taken as Tsongkhapa’s own positions on particular points within Dharmakīrti’s system, most

In asking what *basis* it could be from which the divine maṇḍala dawns, Geshe Norsang was raising the problem of just what kind of existing thing that “beheld aspect” could be. Is it a changing thing or unchanging? Is it of the substance of consciousness, or is it an unlinked trace? Does it act as a cause or is it just a mere label? In order for these questions to be meaningful, one would have to slip into the milieu of the arguments Dharmakīrti presents in his *Commentary on Valid Perception*, many of which are expressed from the point of view of the Sautrāntika school, and sometimes, apparently, from a Mind-Only perspective, also. It is a milieu in which it makes sense to differentiate between a substance of consciousness, which is considered to be a changing thing, performing its own functions, and the merely labeled abstractions, which provide the *objective fields* beheld by conceptual thought (*rtog pa'i gzung yul*),¹³⁰ but which perform no function of their own. It is difficult to discuss anything within this epistemological context without taking as given Dharmakīrti's stated distinction between things marked by their own characteristics, which are the proper objects of direct perception, and things marked by abstracted characteristics, which are the proper objects of deductive perception. This distinction would inevitably seem to involve holding that there are indeed objects established through their own characteristics, or which possess their own qualities, and are thus “ultimate reality” in the Sautrāntika sense. But is this not anathema in the Middle Way? As we have begun to see, however, it is not uncharacteristic of Tsongkhapa himself to take Dharmakīrti as his authority for issues of *tantric* epistemology, and so likewise, it should be no surprise that Geshe Norsang was referencing epistemological issues that span all four of the classical Indian Buddhist “schools,” just in order to explain a core Vajrayāna idea that all the monks present would have agreed would eventually have to be understood in Middle Way Consequence terms.

Turning to Tsongkhapa's recorded *Commentary on the “Chapter on Direct Perception,”* I propose that we will see an immensely lucid presentation of the structure needed to understand the issue at hand. The verses at the start of the third chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* argue that there is a definite way of dividing apprehended things into two categories, determined in correspondence to just two kinds of valid perceptions. Direct valid perceptions apprehend things marked by their own-characteristics (*rang mtshan*, Skt. *svalakṣaṇa*).¹³¹ On the other hand, deductive valid

relevant to my issues of concern in this dissertation. See Appendix Ten for a carefully selected series of translated excerpts.

¹³⁰ The “beheld objective field” (*gzung yul*) is not to be confused with the “beheld aspect” (*gzung rnam*).

¹³¹ The latter is a term that refers to the very stuff that is thought to exist through qualities of its own. Apparently, in Tsongkhapa's reading, it turns the verbal phrase “established through characteristics of its own” into an abbreviated noun, which is why I will sometimes use the phrase “own-characteristics” as a rough equivalent of this Tibetan linguistic turn, though in Sanskrit it is clear that the noun “defining characteristic” was the primary term. For discussion of how Tsongkhapa may indeed have read the verbal phrase into Candrakīrti's use of what in Sanskrit is a noun, *svalakṣaṇa*, see Arnold, 2005, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief*, 267n54 and Chapter Two, note 18, above.

perceptions apprehend what is marked by abstracted characteristics (*spyi mtshan*, Skt. *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), or what can also be termed “general qualities” or “universal types.”¹³²

Briefly, what is supposed to be going on is that a conceptual state of mind – that which is associated with deductive perception – cannot access the “thing itself,” as it is in its concrete particulars, but rather “takes as its beheld objective field”¹³³ an abstracted likeness of a particular object, a likeness that can be evoked through the utterance of a sound, which has in turn been associated with the abstracted mental idea of an actual object (*don spyi*, Skt. *arthasāmānya*). Such abstracted mental pictures are the doorway through which conceptual thought accesses, or encounters, its actual objects (*don*, Skt. *artha*), but they are not themselves those objects. An “abstraction of an object” might be understood as a fixed mental image that indicates a general quality. Then, individual, particular objects are recognized to be characteristic *of* that quality, in the way that “a kettle” or “this kettle” is characteristic of the abstracted features of “kettle” or even “kettle-ness,” i.e., the quality of being “kettle.” The abstracted quality of “kettle” can never become more or less “kettle,” and can never be destroyed, even when the kettle one uses for boiling water can indeed rust, or be scratched, or lose its handle, or be shattered, melted, and so on. Then the remaining pieces of glass or metal will no longer bear the quality “kettle,” but the mental idea of “kettle” cannot be destroyed, as long as the *potential for thinking and recognizing it* remains present within a mental stream. This, incidentally, is the kind of potential to which the “tendencies for creating expressions” discussed in the Mind-Only school seem to refer.

Once one understands the difference between mental abstractions – the tools of logical thinking – and the actual, functioning objects to which they refer in the world, it can be maintained within this system that abstractions are unchanging things, which perform no function, never had a beginning, and are never destroyed. They are accessed through negation, through the process of elimination by which one identifies “kettle” as being different from everything else that is not “kettle.” Abstractions are “merely deceptive,” and though they are often mistaken for the actual objects to which they refer, they cannot withstand analysis; for ultimately, there is nothing *there*.

Such phrases should sound familiar, but it is important to understand the distinct context in which these terms are being used within Dharmakīrti’s writing and reportage of Sautrāntika views. For there, as a counterpart to such “deceptive” abstractions, there is indeed an “ultimate reality”; yet in the Sautrāntika presentation, this ultimate reality does *not* refer to emptiness, but rather to the unique particulars themselves, “marked by their own-characteristics, which can perform functions,” and which “are explained to be established as real, existing through their own natural way of being, established through

¹³² See Appendix Ten (646) for Tsongkhapa’s definition of what it means to be an “abstraction.”

¹³³ See Appendix Ten (611).

their own essence, in a way that can withstand analysis, without relying upon being labeled through a conceptual state of mind.”¹³⁴

Clearly, from Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way Consequence point of view, “own-characteristics” constitute the very thing to be refuted, the thing that is said never to have existed at all. Several times in his recorded “oral” commentary on Dharmakīrti, Tsongkhapa states explicitly, and not unsurprisingly, that the Consequence group does not accept that things marked with their own-characteristics could exist, “even conventionally.”¹³⁵ Nevertheless, and this is a point with which we shall have to grapple in order to understand Tsongkhapa’s explanations of how the visualizations of creation stage are meant to evolve, “Both the Independent and Consequence groups of the Middle Way agree that valid perceptions can be definitely categorized into just two types: direct and deductive.”¹³⁶ That is, the Consequence position can accept that conventionally there *are* both direct and deductive types of valid perception, but it cannot accept the respective objects of those two fundamental types of perceptions *in exactly the way* that Dharmakīrti has presented them.

If not things marked by their “own-characteristics,” what then, in Tsongkhapa’s view, constitutes the object of direct valid perceptions experienced by the sensory consciousnesses (*dbang po’i mngon sum*, Skt. *indriya-pratyakṣa*)? That is, what constitutes the raw data of pre-conceptual colors, sounds, tastes, and so on, that have not yet been labeled with a conceptual state of mind? Does he deny the possibility of nonconceptual sensory or mental experience?¹³⁷ Or must he say that abstractions perform functions?¹³⁸ Since Dharmakīrti’s reported system is so intricately woven around the idea of “own-characteristics,” it might seem this one massive exception would make the original parallel structure so lopsided as to collapse the system, like a broken swing set. But clearly Tsongkhapa saw no contradiction in continuing to embrace every detail of the epistemological system, minus that one ever-present assertion regarding unique particulars being marked by their own characteristics.¹³⁹ The very lack of explicit explanation within Tsongkhapa’s writings on how else he might “alter” Dharmakīrti’s system from a Middle Way perspective, tells me he did not see it as a problem. After all, when he saw something as a problem to be explained within the Consequence view, he wrote on it repeatedly in his major treatises.

¹³⁴ See Appendix Ten (632).

¹³⁵ See Appendix Ten (638-639) and (641).

¹³⁶ Appendix Ten (641).

¹³⁷ We have emphatic evidence from the *Steps of Mantra* that this is *not* what Tsongkhapa wants to do. See Appendix Nine (714-716).

¹³⁸ If one properly understands what liminal space these cyphers of reality occupy within Dharmakīrti’s thought, it is hard to imagine Tsongkhapa accepting such an idea, just so. But we shall have far more to examine on this point. However, cf. Georges Dreyfus, 1997, *Recognizing Reality*, esp. 117-124, for the way he understands later Geluk tradition to have interpreted this issue.

¹³⁹ See Gyaltsab Je’s elucidation of this in Appendix Eleven, under the “third point.”

I challenge my reader to consider, then, throughout all that follows, how this synthesis might be cognitively feasible. I propose it will be key, not only for *not* misunderstanding Tsongkhapa's Middle Way system, but especially for understanding the details of how a yogi is to progress through the two stages. For if one were to think that everything were somehow "just made of abstractions," and still to maintain that abstractions are unchanging and nonfunctional, then nothing Tsongkhapa says about nonconceptual states of creation stage meditation, much less the inner workings of subtle winds and mind, would make sense. I would propose that it is *not* that the system collapses into "just abstractions," accessed only by conceptual, deductive perceptions. If indeed *only* unchanging abstractions existed, then there could not even be a functioning mind to know them, conceptually. If *only* deductive perceptions existed, then there would be no such thing as the direct nonconceptual perception of clear appearances, whether in meditation, dreams, or daily life, not to speak of the fact there could be no direct yogic perception of emptiness. Rather, it is clear that even in Tsongkhapa's Middle Way view, there must exist such things as direct sensory perceptions of deceptive objects. It also seems Tsongkhapa must maintain that there are indeed changing, functioning things, to which unchanging abstractions lend access, via the actions of the ever-changing flow of conceptual thought, as in Dharmakīrti's system; but, nevertheless, *when one goes to look for the characteristics of such functioning things, one will never find them.*¹⁴⁰ Returning to this Middle Way dictum shows why it would be a tremendous mistake to reify abstractions as though "that's all there really is." For then one would quickly fall into the extreme view of thinking everything had stopped.¹⁴¹

It is not that one says functioning things are really nothing but the ideas we have about them; rather, it is that when you go to look for a functioning thing stripped of all ideas about it, you will find an ultimate reality, but it will be an emptiness, not a thing with characteristics of its own. Thus all *characteristics* are only imputed through conceptual thought. But somehow things still function, even when we are not thinking

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter Five, note 61, above:

Insofar as one is not satisfied with positing something by the power of conventional designation in this way, if one were to look for *how* an actual object exists – which is not merely designated, but is the *referent* of the designation – and if, finding that, one were to posit it as existent, while not finding it, one were to posit it as non-existent; this is not our system. But since we assert that *if* one were to search according to that system, and having searched, something findable were to arise, that then this would turn out to be "established as real"; we do not accept that anything can be found to exist, even conventionally, once one has analyzed in that way.

¹⁴¹ I have not yet found Tsongkhapa addressing this idea directly, but see Gyaltsab Je's statement in Appendix Eleven, under the "third point":

If, by refuting their being established through their own characteristics, you were to refute their performing a function, this would be nothing but the view that everything has stopped.

Since I myself have struggled with this particular point for over fourteen years, what I express here is a critique of a particular chain of logic that has arisen in my own mind, with which I have been dissatisfied over and over again. I hope it may be of use to others who face the same conundrum in wondering whether Dharmakīrti's epistemological system "collapses" when transferred to the Middle Way.

about them. This is the mystery of profound dependent arising in Tsongkhapa’s Consequence view, and I have tried to show that for him it must be intimately related to the deep functioning of karma, which remains utterly hidden to the surface levels of “conceptual thought.”¹⁴² But how is it that karma determines or *causes* us to label empty objects in the way that we do – so that “kettle” can function as a kettle when the corresponding abstract quality depicting “kettle” arises before consciousness – if the kettle has no characteristics of being “kettle” at all from its own side? This is the question with which anyone who wishes to understand the depths of Tsongkhapa’s soteriological theory must continue to wrestle.

Thus I would propose that the Middle Way modification of Dharmakīrti’s thought must maintain a much more delicate balance than simply the collapse of a world of functioning things marked by their “own-characteristics” into a world marked only by abstractions. One must account for how it is that deceptive objects, merely labeled by the mind, can still appear to perform their functions perfectly – and how it is that this is the only way anything ever did perform a function. To begin, one would need to understand how abstractions are, even in Dharmakīrti’s milieu, “neither the same nor separate” in substance from consciousness itself.¹⁴³ We encountered this principle before, in terms of tendencies being neither substantially the same nor separate from “foundation consciousness” in the Mind-Only school,¹⁴⁴ but here, a distinct version of the analysis becomes crucial to understand what Geshe Norsang was suggesting about the “beheld aspect,” in the first place.

When Geshe Norsang asked whether the unlinked trace that dawns before consciousness in the aspect of a divine being is able to produce anything, specifically whether it is able to *produce* the seeing of it, he may have been referring to the principle that abstractions cannot properly be the *causes* for the perception of them, since they are unchanging. Unlinked traces (*ldan min ’du byed*), on the other hand, are generally

¹⁴² See for example, Tsongkhapa’s expression of wonder in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, *lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 468b6-469a2 (968-969):

After that, if you see that although it has no nature like that, this cannot deny the conventional chariot, then you will think: *Éma-o!* This illusion of a chariot and the like, made by the magician of karma and the mental afflictions, is marvelous in the extreme; because in that way each thing arises from its own causes and conditions without the slightest bit of confusion, even as each thing has not the slightest bit of nature established through an essence of its own. You will also come to find certainty in the meaning of what arises in dependence and relationship, that there is no starting by nature.

དེའི་རྗེས་སུ་དེ་ལྟར་རང་བཞིན་མེད་ཀྱང་ཤིང་ནའི་ཐ་སྟེན་བསྟོན་མི་རྒྱུས་པར་མཐོང་བ་ན། ཨེ་མའོ་ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་སྒྲུ་མ་མཁན་གྱིས་བྱས་པའི་ཤིང་རྟ་ལ་
སོགས་པའི་སྒྲུ་མ་འདི་ནི་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཡ་མཚན་ཏེ། འདི་ལྟར་རང་རང་གི་རྒྱ་དང་རྒྱུན་ལས་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མ་འཛོལ་བར་འབྱུང་ལ། རང་རང་གི་དོ་མོས་གྲུབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་
ན་ཡང་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་སྒྲུབ་དུ་རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བའི་དོན་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལ་ངེས་པ་རྟེན་པར་འབྱུང་བའི་བྱིར་རོ།

¹⁴³ See the lengthy and difficult discussion of this point excerpted in Appendix Ten (645-669).

¹⁴⁴ See the section in Chapter Two, “Neither Substantially the Same nor Substantially Different,” above.

considered to be changing things, but as we saw many times in Chapters One and Two, they are neither mental nor physical. So how could they *appear* as form?¹⁴⁵

In recounting one interpretation of a debate taking place in Dharmakīrti's text (*Pramāṇavārttika*, verse 3:5) Tsongkhapa rejects the notion that one could ever see – or as Geshe Norsang said, “recognize” – a causal relationship “between (1) the appearance, as form, to a conceptual state of mind, of what has been abstracted, and (2) the mind which beholds that appearance.”¹⁴⁶ That is, a conceptual state of mind beholds, as its objective field, the image of an abstraction, which appears, like a mental picture, *as* the form it represents, even though it is not in fact the same as that outer form. But insofar as abstractions are the medium through which the conceptual mind thinks about anything, how could the mind ever focus upon the abstraction itself as a *cause* for the state of mind in which it arises? The very question almost defies thought, because it cannot be pictured. Thus, while one can indeed watch the way that objects of the five physical senses provide focal conditions, or causes, for sensory consciousness of them to arise, one can never focus on an abstraction “acting” as a causal condition for consciousness of it to arise.

Therefore, says Tsongkhapa, “here, because that relationship *cannot be focused upon*, the performing of a function that is the mere generation, by abstracted characteristics, of the consciousness that beholds them, is still not the *ability* to perform a function.”¹⁴⁷ Hence abstractions are understood as negations – arrived at through the process of elimination of all that an object is not – without any functional efficacy of their own. How, then, even in a Middle Way sense, could one turn it around to think that since everything is merely labeled, then everything is “just” unchanging abstractions? Rather, the operative term is that everything is merely labeled and merely established *through* conceptual states of mind (*rtog pas bzhas tsam*), not that the conceptual states of mind doing the labeling are themselves nothing but unchanging labels, or that the functioning objects to which conceptual labels refer *are* nothing but unchanging abstractions.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Note Tsongkhapa's reference to a “wrong idea” about names and characteristics being unlinked traces separate from consciousness, in Appendix Ten (651). It seems he rejects the suggestion that names and characteristics could be unlinked traces, insofar as, in this context, it would imply they are of a substance separate from consciousness itself. We saw in Chapter Two, however, that in another place Tsongkhapa seemed to accept (within a Mind-Only framework), that tendencies (*bag chags*) are a kind of unlinked trace, which are nonetheless neither substantially the same as or separate from consciousness. Thus I cannot be sure of all that Geshe Norsang was implying behind his momentary reference to the term, cited above in Chapter Five, note 127. See also Chapter Two, note 139.

¹⁴⁶ Appendix Ten (641).

¹⁴⁷ Appendix Ten (641).

¹⁴⁸ See again the passage from the *Brief Steps of the Path* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*), vol. *pha*, 199b1-6 (400), cited in Chapter Five, note 61 above:

Therefore, all instances in which something is posited as existing conventionally are cases in which something is set forth as existing by the power of conventional names. But we do not accept that *whatever* is set forth by their power exists conventionally. We accept that things are merely set forth by the power of conventions, but it is *not at all* the case that the word “merely” either (1) cuts off the possibility of something being an actual object [*don*] that is not the convention of a subject state of mind,

Then, once again, one would fall into the extreme view of thinking everything had stopped. But when you go to look for the state of mind, or the outer object, that has characteristics of its own . . . you will never *find* anything that is not at some level established through yet another series of labels aimed at capturing what cannot be captured.

It was precisely in the context of explaining this argument that Tsongkhapa inserted his own distinction between the views of the functionalists, who declare that if what were merely labeled by the mind could bring about a result, “then it would propel one to the absurd consequence that everything would have to be able to bring about everything else,” and the Middle Way position:¹⁴⁹

On the other hand, for the Middle Way, what propels us to the absurd consequence that everything would bring about everything else, would be if something could produce a result through its own essence, *without* relying upon being set forth by a mind. Both the Independent and Consequence groups of the Middle Way agree that valid perceptions can be definitely categorized into just two types: direct and deductive. But as an exception from the Independent group, the Consequence group *does not accept the idea* that what is apprehended can be definitely enumerated into the two categories of “own-characteristics” and “abstracted characteristics.”

Note that Tsongkhapa says the Consequence position rejects the definite enumeration altogether; it is not that the rejection of “own-characteristics” collapses back into a declaration that everything *is* just “abstracted characteristics.” Nevertheless, he does say that nothing could produce a result “without relying upon being set forth by a mind.” Thus, in the Middle Way, all functioning things are indeed *deceptive*, but now it should be clear that this is not meant in exactly the same sense that the Sautrāntikas seem to have meant by “merely deceptive”; since for the Sautrāntikas all merely deceptive things are unchanging, whereas in the Consequence view, things that are merely *set forth* through conceptual states of mind must of course perform their functions, according to inextricable inter-relationships that can be established conventionally. This does not necessarily imply, however, that one should conceive of abstracted labels performing functions, for this would contradict the very idea of what “abstraction” has meant all along. Rather, it implies that there is nothing there to be found, which could ever perform functions on its own, without the action of a mind labeling, imputing, and drawing pictures of essences upon the blank canvas of emptiness. But the question should remain, if neither outer objects nor mind itself are ever found to exist substantially, would it be possible for consciousness *itself* to consist of the moment to moment projection of mere

or (2) cuts off the possibility that such a posited actual object could be established through a valid perception.

¹⁴⁹ Appendix Ten (641).

labels that nonetheless appear to function smoothly as “mind” – like the sixty-plus frames per second in a movie?

By the Power of a Tendency

After rejecting the possibility of an “aspect” that was some kind of outer form, as the Vaibhāṣika are said to have asserted, and of an “aspect” that somehow lies between consciousness and its object, like some kind of vibrating hologram or translucent veil, Geshe Norsang settled on the possibility of a beheld aspect on “this side,” one that is of the nature of consciousness itself. Though he was not referring at the time to Dharmakīrti, much less to this particular commentary of Tsongkhapa’s, Geshe Norsang – or even the Geshe who had participated in the 2014 debate conference on Vajrayāna – may well have had the sequence of arguments at the start of the third chapter of the *Commentary on Valid Perception* in mind, for if one follows Tsongkhapa’s commentary from the point about abstractions not acting as causes for consciousness, only a few pages later one comes upon a crucial discussion of beheld aspects, and how they *are* said to be caused. It is this point, I believe, that serves as a hidden key to how Tsongkhapa might have thought the practices of creation stage should act to transform one’s immediate perceptions, and eventually one’s experience of a whole world.

Returning to the proverbial example of the appearance of something like a hair to someone with cataracts, Tsongkhapa distinguishes carefully between (1) “what appears as a hair to a conceptual state of mind” – which is an abstraction; (2) “what appears as a hair to a mistaken sense consciousness” – which in Dharmakīrti’s system would be the object of direct sensory perception, with its own-characteristics; and (3) *the hair* that appears to a mistaken sense consciousness – which does not exist at all, and which in a Middle Way context would be an example of the thing to be refuted.¹⁵⁰ Thus one can see the difference, even in the case of a mistaken consciousness, between the direct appearance to the nonconceptual eye consciousness of some wavy lines in the visual field, and what appears before the conceptual state of mind that conceives of it “as a hair.” This point furnishes a preparatory example for the discussion of “clear appearances” here in Dharmakīrti’s third chapter, on direct perception.

The topic is of course relevant to our ongoing inquiry into the nature of the vision of “clear appearances” that is one of the primary goals of creation stage practice, but it is crucial to recognize that here, the term *gsal ba* (pronounced “selwa,” literally meaning “clear,” or “luminous”), refers simply to the individual instances of things, i.e., what in other philosophical language might be called “unique particulars.”¹⁵¹ An abstraction is based upon what is similar between many individual examples of things, which are the *gsal ba*, or what I will term the “clear instances.” Within this epistemological context, it

¹⁵⁰ See Appendix Ten (645).

¹⁵¹ See Dan Arnold, 2005, *Brahmins, Buddhists, and Belief*, 24 and *passim*.

becomes evident that the phrase *gsal snang*, which I have translated so far as “clear appearance,” is actually an abbreviation of *gsal bar snang ba*: “to appear *as* a clear instance,” i.e., as a unique particular.

A clear appearance, then, in Dharmakīrti’s thought, is necessarily the object of a direct, nonconceptual perception, unmixed in time and location, even if it is mistaken (as in the case of the cataracts).¹⁵² In this case, Tsongkhapa has said that the clear appearance of “what appears as a hair to a mistaken sense consciousness” has its own-characteristics as the dark wavy line in space. From a Middle Way perspective, of course, those absolute particular attributes could never be found, and hence cannot be posited, even conventionally. But since, from a tantric perspective, it is indubitable that Tsongkhapa accepts the existence of clear appearances that *are* perceived nonconceptually, we must keep questioning what it would mean for something to be the “appearance of a clear instance of something” (*gsal bar snang ba*), and yet still to be acknowledged to lack characteristics of its own.

The problem that has arisen within Dharmakīrti’s textual debate is this. When something like a hair appears as a clear instance to the consciousness of someone with cataracts, insofar as this mistaken appearance is readily acknowledged, even by the Sautrāntikas, *not* to exist as an outer object, then it must arise as the substance of consciousness itself, right? But then the abstraction that appears before the conceptual state of mind as “the opposite of all that is not a hair” would also have to be of the substance of consciousness, right? Then the abstraction would have to be something with its own-characteristics, since in this system, whether it is viewed as being Sautrāntika or Mind-Only, consciousness always has its own-characteristics. But then the balance of the system would collapse the *other* way. That is, abstractions would turn out to be just one more set of substantial things with their own-characteristics. Khedrup Je reports Tsongkhapa’s explanation to alleviate the problem as follows:¹⁵³

With respect to this, there are two parts: The very substance of the conceptual state of mind that beholds a form – that beheld aspect which arises, *by the power of a tendency*, in the aspect of something like the opposite of all that is not that form – is of the substance of consciousness. Thus it is something that exists with its own-characteristics. Because it is accepted to be that way, and since it is not an abstraction, there is no fault of a contradiction.

¹⁵² See Appendix Nine (714), where in the *Steps of Mantra*, Tsongkhapa cites Dharmakīrti to establish that: “. . . it is contradictory for one thing both to appear with extreme clarity and for it to be conceptual. . . . If one could not achieve nonconceptuality through the extremely clear and delineated appearance of a thing that is *unmixed in the time and location of its existence*, then it would turn out that we have in no way refuted the non-Buddhist assertion that the sense consciousnesses are all conceptual.” See also the ensuing discussion at (715): “Therefore, clear appearance comes with respect to the object to which you become accustomed; it is much the same whether you are getting used to something real or something unreal.”

¹⁵³ See Appendix Ten (645), emphasis mine.

On the other hand, as for the appearance of the opposite of all that is not the clear instances of form *to* the conceptual state of mind that beholds form; since it is an *abstraction of the very essence of the actual object*¹⁵⁴ – that is, an abstraction of the very essence of the objective field beheld by the conceptual state of mind – it is not something that exists with characteristics of its own.

Thus, just as Tsongkhapa had distinguished “what appears as a hair to a conceptual state of mind” (an abstraction) from “what appears as a hair to a mistaken sense consciousness” (a clear instance), here he carefully divides the part of a conceptual state of mind that is simply *consciousness* – the changing, functioning flow – from the unchanging abstraction that appears within it. Even more importantly, for our purposes, he explicitly states that the reason the beheld aspect, which is of the substance of consciousness, arises in the way that it does, is due to the *power of a tendency (bag chags kyi dbang gis)*. That is, as we saw in the Mind-Only system,¹⁵⁵ it is the ripening and breaking open of karmic tendencies that are understood to provide the causal condition for each moment of consciousness to arise in the way that it does.¹⁵⁶

Tsongkhapa explains the “beheld aspect” of a conceptual state of mind, then, to consist of what appears to consciousness “in the aspect of something like the opposite of all that is not” the particular outer form that is the referent, or actual object, of the deductive perceptual act. Nevertheless, the beheld aspect is to be distinguished from the beheld objective field; for, as a way of being aware, the “aspect” is part of consciousness itself, while the objective field beheld by the conceptual state of mind is the abstraction, which in turn *refers to* an actual object. But what actually *appears* as a mental picture to the conceptual state of mind (*rtog pa'i snang yul*) is the abstraction of the actual object (*don spyi*). It is as though the unchanging abstracted image rides upon that part of the flow of consciousness which is termed the “beheld aspect” of consciousness, so that it can in turn be “seen by” the aspect of consciousness which does the beholding (*'dzin rnam* or *'dzin cha*).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ This glosses a phrase from Dharmakīrti's *Pramānavārttika*, verse 3:11: “*don gyi ngo bo nyid kyi spyi*.”

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter Two, “Seeds and Fragrant Tendencies,” especially the passage cited at note 157.

¹⁵⁶ Tsongkhapa is interpreting Dharmakīrti here, and since there is affirmation of “own-characteristics” it is clear he is provisionally taking on the view of the “school” in which this chapter of the *Commentary on Valid Perception* is ostensibly taught. But we must take note that Tsongkhapa reported upon his own teacher – or else Khedrup Je reported upon Tsongkhapa – as saying that the “measure of what was actually being taught by the Master [Dharmakīrti]” is the true thought of the Middle Way position. (See Appendix Ten [638], and note 7.) So if the only “exception” that Tsongkhapa takes to the epistemological system is indeed the notion that the objects of direct perceptions have characteristics of their own, I think we may take this current statement about the power of the tendency to represent Tsongkhapa's own view, even from a Middle Way perspective. Once again, he takes no explicit exception to it, whereas when he does wish to note differences between the schools, that does appear explicitly in this record of the oral teaching.

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix Ten (654): “With respect to this, that very part of a conceptual state of mind which points externally towards an objective field is the *beheld aspect* of a conceptual state of mind. What is inner, the sheer clarity and cognizance of experience, is the *part that beholds*.”

It appears to me that this is exactly the idea Geshe Norsang was referring to when he expressed his preference for describing the “beheld aspect” as the type of aspect that belongs to “*this* side, existing on top of consciousness” (*tshur shes pa’i steng du yod pa*), and said that “Consciousness itself is the basis of the appearance.” It is important to recognize that the Tibetan term for “aspect” (*rnam pa*) has a similar double valence to the English word, in that it can refer to a part or division of something, and it can also refer to the form or shape of something. Here, it becomes more and more evident to me that it must refer to a *part* of consciousness, because what *appears* to a conceptual state of mind (*rtog pa’i snang yul*) is repeatedly stated to be the abstracted image of an object (*don spyi*). So it is the unchanging picture that appears, but the part of the mind upon which it appears is the “beheld aspect.” Nevertheless, since Tsongkhapa, following Dharmakīrti, has just proven at length that the abstraction is not of a separate substance from consciousness, nor of the same substance, either, it is also no problem for him to speak of the beheld aspect of consciousness arising “in the aspect [i.e. shape] of something like the opposite of all that is not that form,” which is what it means to experience a mental image of a perceived visual object arising in the mind, as we do all the time in daily life.

If we are to apply Tsongkhapa’s explanation, found here within the context of Dharmakīrti’s system, to the case of the mind of the yoga of a divine being, however, it must be recognized that in *that* case, the actual object that is initially supposed to be realized is *emptiness*. Insofar as Tsongkhapa readily acknowledges that the incisive wisdom realizing emptiness in the context of the creation stage must still be a deductive perception, which works by means of an abstraction of its object, namely an abstraction of *emptiness*, this realization is conceptual.¹⁵⁸ Thus it seems that a state of mind realizing emptiness deductively could likewise be analyzed in terms of the two parts described above: (1) the beheld aspect which arises by the power of a tendency, and is of the nature of consciousness, and (2) the abstraction of the beheld objective field, i.e., emptiness.

In this case, when realizing emptiness, as opposed to observing a ritual vase, the abstraction would consist of a mental image of the simple absence realized, not “as the opposite of all that it is not” (which would be an affirming negation), but rather through the logical elimination of the thing to be refuted (which is a simple negation). But if the changing, mental phenomenon that is the beheld aspect of consciousness, in which the unchanging mental abstraction of the meaning of emptiness is beheld as an objective field, should in turn begin to *appear as* the exquisite colors and forms of a divine being with face and arms, there must indeed be a prior cause for consciousness to appear to consciousness in those particular ways, with all the sublime characteristics of the maṇḍala. For at the moment of dissolution within the sādhana meditation, the appearing objective field (*snang yul*) is still sheer *emptiness* (*snang ba stong sang*). If the part of the continuum of mind that is the beheld aspect is ever to “turn into” the appearance of holy

¹⁵⁸ See Appendix Fifteen (930) and (989).

beings, there must be some form of causal *tendency* at work, a seed planted in the past that can ripen in the present, in order for consciousness to unfold into the display of that form: consciousness appearing to consciousness as a maṇḍala. But is it a *karmic* tendency?

Herein, I believe, is a key to the subtle workings of creation stage, and the way it is intended to systematically transform the ordinary functioning of the karmic tendencies that are said to have produced every perception we have ever had, from time without beginning. For in the early stages of practice, and indeed for a long time, even with diligent repetition, the forms, names, character attributes and unique identities of each of the divine beings in the Guhyasamāja maṇḍala are called upon precisely through the words of the sādhana and their associated mental images, either based on sacred art one has seen in the past, or arising out of the depths of one’s spiritual imagination; often a mix of both. Initially, these mental images, since they do not appear clearly before the mind in all their blazing details at first,¹⁵⁹ are indeed “abstractions of actual objects” as described above: Each divine being appears as an “*abstraction of the very essence . . . of the objective field beheld by the conceptual state of mind.*” Now, in one sense, the “very essence” of each divine appearance is understood, or ascertained (*nges ngor*), to be ultimate reality, emptiness itself. But the conventionally established essence of the basis that is arising in such forms is still *consciousness*, in its beheld aspect. The distinct characteristics of each divinity, encompassing all the marvelous qualities of an enlightened being, also constitute the conventionally established essence of the actual referent of the visualized image. It is with respect to those enlightened qualities, and their symbolic appearance in colors and shapes, that the initial mental picture that arises in the mind of the practitioner is a mere abstraction, and a mere foretaste of the fullness of the “clear appearance” that is to come.

Over time, however, Tsongkhapa asserts repeatedly in the *Steps of Mantra* that the colors, shapes and myriad details of the maṇḍala and its divine inhabitants will eventually appear very clearly to the mind of the practitioner, as clearly as would visual objects to a nonconceptual visual consciousness.¹⁶⁰ Thus he insists that the circle of divine beings will eventually appear lucidly to a *nonconceptual* consciousness. Once again, if one were to take Tsongkhapa’s assertion that the Middle Way cannot accept the existence of anything with characteristics of its own to mean that nothing short of ultimate reality could be the object of a direct, nonconceptual perception, it is clear this

¹⁵⁹ See Appendix Ten (630), for a relevant point about abstractions (emphasis added):

. . . Something apprehended can be ascertained: (1) As something that can arise as an object of the mind in its complete essence, merely from the governing condition of a sound that expresses meaning [i.e., an abstraction]; or (2) As something that cannot arise as an object of the mind in its complete essence from that [sound] alone [i.e., something with its own-characteristics]. *Note that for a thing to arise in its complete essence, it is not necessary for all the distinctive features of the essence, whatever they may be, to arise.*

¹⁶⁰ See Appendix Nine (714-716).

would constitute a deep misunderstanding of Tsongkhapa’s thought. But if something can be perceived without conceptualization, *and* it lacks any characteristics of its own, *what is it* that is perceived, free of the conceptual overlay of an abstracted image?

Within the *Steps of Mantra*, Tsongkhapa acknowledges that when he says “nonconceptual” at this point, he does not mean *completely* nonconceptual, as in being free of every trace of the mistaken conceptualization of dual appearance. Rather, he specifically means the nonconceptuality that is “free of the conceptual state of mind that grasps the meaning of a sound,”¹⁶¹ that is, the conceptual state of mind that connects an abstracted image of an actual object with an abstracted image of a sound, i.e., a word. Thus a nonconceptual consciousness is not “talking to itself” about who or what it is seeing. It simply gazes upon what is appearing automatically, without mental commentary or explicit identification. This kind of nonconceptuality is one of the three classic attributes of a state of meditative stillness (the other two being bliss and luminosity), but it does not mean that the mind which has reached such a state of profound inner quiet is no longer able to engage in analysis at all. For indeed, the practice of joining meditative stillness and insight requires that such a mind still be able to analyze conceptually, without losing its stillness.¹⁶²

I would conjecture that if an advanced creation stage practitioner is still to be able to *identify* any one of the divine beings by name or attribute, then it must still be possible for a conceptual state of mind to be present alongside the nonconceptual state of mind that gazes upon the clear appearances, which now arise without imaginative effort. But the fact that the appearances can arise spontaneously, and can be apprehended as clear instances, does not in the least suggest that they are not *empty*, that they would require characteristics of their own, or that they are not still emanations of the mind perceiving them. On the contrary, the clear appearance of the maṇḍala is intended to be the prime example of illusion for a practitioner at that stage. This must mean that they still do not exist in the way that they appear, since by now the visualized divine beings do appear to be so very REAL. At this point, however, the practitioner should have cultivated such a deep understanding of emptiness as not to be fooled by the appearances.¹⁶³

I see in Tsongkhapa’s thought a deep similarity between the way the clear appearances of such cultivated maṇḍalic images might arise, insofar as they are illusory

¹⁶¹ Appendix Nine (716).

¹⁶² See the entire discussion translated in Appendix Fourteen.

¹⁶³ See again Tsongkhapa’s classic formulation cited in Chapter Four, note 55, above (with adjusted emphasis): “Then, after one has meditated on the circle of divine beings, while focusing on the divine being as an object of focus, the mind that ascertains the meaning of the fact that the aspect lacks inherent nature – *that confident apprehension* – enters into emptiness, and the beheld aspect dawns in the aspect of divine beings and the places where they stay.” The “confident apprehension” (*nges shes kyi ‘dzin stang*) literally means the “manner in which the ascertaining consciousness beholds” its object. Thus the subject state of mind takes what it perceives to be empty of existing in the way it appears, even while the beheld aspect of consciousness is still appearing as the divine world.

appearances that appear only to the *mental consciousness*, but free of overt conceptual designation, and the way images can appear very clearly in a dream. The following passage from Tsongkhapa's commentary on Dharmakīrti may offer further insight, then, into how Tsongkhapa might have deemed this extraordinary maṇḍalic case of "clear appearances" to exist, from an epistemological perspective.¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, during the period of a dream, there is *both conceptual and nonconceptual consciousness*. With respect to a conceptual state of mind there is (1) the *beheld aspect*, which is the substance of consciousness, and (2) the *beheld objective field*, the meaning of a sound,¹⁶⁵ which performs no function. In this way it is similar to the period in which one is awake. The objective field that appears clearly to a nonconceptual state of mind, furthermore, is similar to what appears clearly as a hair to a mistaken sense consciousness when awake.

With respect to this, that very part of a conceptual state of mind which points externally towards an objective field is the *beheld aspect* of a conceptual state of mind. What is inner, the sheer clarity and cognizance of experience, is the *part that beholds*. The beheld part of the conceptual state of mind itself, dawns as something like a vase *due to the power of a tendency*. Thus it is known as "the beheld aspect of the conceptual state of mind that beholds a vase."

Thus Tsongkhapa draws a close connection between the way that the images of a dream, though not "correct," even conventionally, are nonetheless clear appearances to a nonconceptual mental consciousness, and the way that what appears to be a hair can arise as a clear appearance to the mistaken eye consciousness of someone with cataracts when awake. Recall that when discussing the sūtra-based meditation during which one visualizes the earth covered with skeletons, Tsongkhapa stated in the *Illumination of the True Thought* that insofar as the skeletons appear only to mental consciousness, they must be posited as belonging to the sensory field of mental objects, not that of outer visual objects. But still, they appear clearly in the way that an image reflected in a mirror does.¹⁶⁶ Based on what I have seen thus far across Tsongkhapa's writings, it seems one must posit that during the stage of creation, at least, the perceptions of the appearing images of the divine beings of the maṇḍala are in a sense "incorrect" (*log pa*) insofar as those divine beings are not yet appearing via the physical senses of the practitioner as actual beings in the outer world. After all, they are still "only imagined."

Nevertheless, based on what I have observed above regarding the existence of the signs and marks from the side of Buddhas; and all that I do not have space to include here about Tsongkhapa's instructions on how to visualize the Buddha, even in a sūtra

¹⁶⁴ See Appendix Ten (654); further emphasis added here.

¹⁶⁵ Tib. *sgra don*, Skt. *śabdārtha*. See Appendix Ten (651), note 9, for a brief explanation of this term.

¹⁶⁶ See the quotation cited in Chapter Two, note 83, and the discussion in "Skeletons and Performances" and "Reflections and Rivers."

meditation;¹⁶⁷ as well as all that Tsongkhapa has said about asserting the divine identity of everything that is visualized from the very beginning of creation stage;¹⁶⁸ I think it is essential to recognize that for him, the way in which the nonconceptual consciousness might be said to be mistaken towards the clear appearances of the maṇḍala is quite different from the way it is mistaken with respect to an ordinary dream, or to black wavy lines in a damaged visual field. For, from the beginning, the abstracted images of the divine beings have been *conceived* with respect to what is understood to be their referent: Buddhas who actually exist, and have revealed the tantric scriptures to human beings.¹⁶⁹ Once those divine images begin to appear clearly to the nonconceptual mental consciousness of the practitioner, although this is certainly not the same as meeting an actual form body of a Buddha (i.e., a complete outer person who would *not* disappear as soon as the meditation was over), still, insofar as the practitioner has been cultivating a deep, simultaneous understanding of the emptiness of the appearances all along, the practitioner should not be as completely mistaken with respect to how the appearances exist, as would a non-lucid dreamer in a dream.

Furthermore, if those members of the maṇḍala do actually exist in buddha fields somewhere, and if the practitioner had properly invited the “wisdom beings” (*ye shes sems pa*, Skt. *jñānasattva*) to enter the visualizations as prescribed in the sādhanas, then the conceptual state of mind identifying *this* clear appearance *as* such-and-such Buddha or bodhisattva, would have reason to believe it was not totally mistaken with respect to its intended object, sometimes known as the “engaged objective field” (*’jug yul*). For the logic of the sādhana ritual has provided grounds upon which to believe that an actual Buddha is present. Yet insofar as the yogi has not yet perceived emptiness directly, and insofar as the yogi does not yet have the capacity to meet an actual Buddha face-to-face, the engaging state of mind would not be totally correct, either. This is a point of significant interest, which unfortunately I will not be able to explore fully here.¹⁷⁰ The most important thing to recognize for now is that there is theoretical precedent, even in the Sautrāntika system, for an appearance to be apprehended nonconceptually, which is still understood not to exist in the way it appears, and hence is deemed the object of a

¹⁶⁷ See B. Alan Wallace, 2005, *Balancing the Mind: A Tibetan Buddhist Approach to Refining Attention* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion), 150, quoting Tsongkhapa’s *Brief Stages of the Path*: “Furthermore, do not relate to the basis of meditation in its aspect as a painting, a statue, and so on; rather, practice seeing it in the aspect of the actual Buddha.” See also Dr. Wallace’s comments, 153. Cf. Cutler *et al.*, 2004, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. III, 44, for the same point.

¹⁶⁸ See especially Appendix Nine (767-768).

¹⁶⁹ This is not the place to engage in an evaluation of that statement from the point of view of non-Buddhist, non-Vajrayāna sensibilities. Once again, my purpose here is to analyze what I understand Tsongkhapa to have thought and believed about these things, and to understand the logic of what it is he would have imparted to his disciples, whether in the early fifteenth century or in the present, through the legacy of his lineage and writings. See the Introduction for my brief discussion about stories regarding the origin of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*.

¹⁷⁰ For a fascinating exploration, attributed to Tsongkhapa’s voice, of how to discern the authenticity of a vision of a divine being, see Appendix Thirteen.

mistaken sensory or mental consciousness. So nonconceptual consciousness does not always have to be unmistaken about what appears to it, and does not always have to engage something that is considered to be marked by its own-characteristics. Hence in the Middle Way adjustment of Dharmakīrti's system, it could still be considered possible for something to appear to a nonconceptual consciousness, without violating the principle that every consciousness short of the direct perception of emptiness is, in some sense, mistaken, because infected with the subtle conceptual elaboration that grasps to things as real. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the practices of the creation stage work actively to undo that grasping, right in the face of clear appearances, teaching the mind to recognize them as illusions, that the mind itself watched itself create. So it would be more like very refined *lucid* dreaming – about a paradise.

* * *

Meanwhile, when Geshe Norsang referred to the fact that “one has to explain the way in which the *aware* part of the clarity [*gsal ba'i rig cha*] dawns in the aspect of something that has form” he may have been pointing to the kind of distinction Tsongkhapa made between the part of consciousness, the beheld aspect, that refers outwards to its intended object, and subjective pole, the part that beholds (*'dzin cha*), which is “the sheer clarity and cognizance of experience” (*myong ba gsal rig tsam*). However, Geshe Norsang seemed to imply that it was the “aware part” (*rig cha*), or the knowing aspect of *cognizance* itself, that would dawn as the exquisite face and arms of the divine being. But how can the very act of knowing turn into an appearance that is an object of knowing? This mysterious point, which Geshe Norsang posited not from a Mind-Only point of view, but apparently from the Middle Way perspective of Tsongkhapa's tantric exegesis, might eventually direct us towards an entirely different way of thinking about Tsongkhapa's explanations of the practices of creation stage, from the perspective of the teachings found in the Great Perfection tradition.

While I will not be able to treat this idea fully here, it is significant for us to begin wondering what it might mean for the “sheer clarity and cognizance of experience” itself to dawn as the forms of divine beings, since there can be no *real* bifurcation between a subjective and objective pole within consciousness anyway, even and especially from a Middle Way perspective. Since the subject state of mind elicited from the initial dissolution of ordinary appearances was already supposed to make manifest an approximation of extremely subtle winds and mind, and since the mind of clear light was meant to take on the essential nature of great bliss before any appearances were to arise at all, we must remember that theoretically, the stream of consciousness that creates the maṇḍala is emphatically *not* supposed to be identified with the ordinary stream of conditioned consciousness belonging to the sentient being who sat down to practice; even though, at the beginning stages, this may well appear to the practitioner to be what is happening.

Rather, a Guhyasamāja sādhanā is intended to be a rehearsal for what will happen when the extremely subtle mind of clear light, in the nature of great bliss, displays itself in the form of a pure illusory body, and builds worlds and a heavenly retinue made of nothing more than subtle winds and mind. Viewed from the perspective of the nonduality of the primordially knowing consciousness and its object, the ultimate reality of the indwelling mind of clear light can legitimately be understood even in a Guhyasamāja context to form a single, indivisible basis from which appearances may dawn.¹⁷¹ According to the terminology used across innumerable texts in the Great Perfection tradition, it is the creative expressions of this fundamental pristine awareness (*rig pa'i rtsal*) that are understood to build pure worlds and enlightened bodies of form.¹⁷² Thus I would suggest at this point that our argument has led us deep into a point of contact between Tsongkhapa's tradition and that of the Great Perfection – even at the level of creation stage – that is rarely recognized or elaborated upon, historically.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ See Geshe Norsang's comments cited above (Chapter Five, note 129): "When you have explained that, then, consciousness itself, it is as if it appears as the divine being. As if it appears through the divinity appearing. Also, as if it appears through emptiness appearing. So it's like that." I should note that these phrases come out in translation as something long and quite formal. But when he spoke the Tibetan in sentence fragments, it was as if he was whispering some secret lines of poetry. In rough phonetics: "*de che ong du shépa kho rang la, da, hlar nangwa dra-o chih; hla nangwé nangwa dra-o; yang na tong-nyi nangwé nangwa dra-o; dén-draay-zhi*." See also Chapter Six, note 95, for Tsongkhapa's image of the "sky joining with the sky," or "the Great Seal in which the mind and clear light embrace one another."

¹⁷² See for example, Jé Tsültrim Zangpo (*rje tshul 'khriims bzang po*, 1884–1957) "An Ornament of the Enlightened View of Samantabhadra: Secret Guidance Nakedly Granted to Dispel All Misconceptions Regarding the View of the Clear Light Great Perfection" in B. Alan Wallace (forthcoming, 2018), *Open Mind*:

Due to a failure to recognize pristine awareness, primordial consciousness that is present in the ground, the various appearances of phenomena of samsāra arise. If that primordial consciousness is recognized, the various pure appearances of nirvāṇa arise. [76] So in reality, there are no phenomena that do not emerge from the nature of existence of the ground, self-emergent primordial consciousness [*ye shes*]. So not only are all the inner pure and impure minds and mental processes creative expressions of pristine awareness, the outer phenomena that appear to the mind also arise from the nature of that ground. So the primordial consciousness that is the union of appearances and emptiness, or the union of original purity and spontaneous actualization, which rests in the ground as explained previously, inseparably abides in its own place, in the center of the very lucid channel of light. But the rays, or cognizance, of that pristine awareness, primordial consciousness, pervade over and across all good and bad configurations of thoughts, which are its creative expressions.

¹⁷³ Nonetheless, the potential relationship between the Guhyasamāja teachings on the clear light and the teachings of the Great Perfection on pristine awareness (*rig pa*) is something that His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has suggested for many years. See for example, this passage from His Holiness' talk on the "Union of the Old and New Translation Schools" in *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, translated by Jeffrey Hopkins, co-edited by Elizabeth Napper (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), 1984, p. 223. (Cf. the audio recordings of this same talk, item #6 at <http://uma-tibet.org/edu/dltours/dltours.php>):

With respect to identifying the clear light in the Great Perfection: When, for instance, one hears a noise, between the time of hearing it and conceptualizing it as such and such, there is a type of mind devoid of conceptuality but nevertheless not like sleep or meditative stabilization, in which the object is a reflection of this entity [i.e. essence] of mere luminosity and knowing. It is at such a point that the basic entity of the mind is identified. Those training in philosophy in the New Translation Schools who frequently repeat the definition of consciousness [as] "that which is luminous and knowing" need to identify it in experience. It is not sufficient merely to mouth definitions, division, and illustrations; experience is

* * *

For now we must return, however, to the question of how one might progress from Tsongkhapa's explanation of how *karmic* tendencies cause consciousness to dawn in a certain way, to an understanding of how the practice of creation stage might create new tendencies – no longer embedded in the karmic cycle? – for subtle or very subtle consciousness to dawn in the form of a divine world and its inhabitants. To unravel the layers of this question, for which everything I have written thus far has been preparation, I will turn to a pointed explanation offered by Geshe Ngawang Tenzin, one of the teachers with whom I studied for several months at Dolma Ling Nunnery, near Dharamsala. I had asked him specifically about the connection between karmic tendencies, understood as changing, unlinked traces, and the unchanging abstracted images that enable individual beings to see empty objects in the way that they do. The conversation was already deeply embedded in the intricacies of the “flowing water” example, discussed here in Chapter Two. His answer, in part, was as follows:¹⁷⁴

It is through the potential of this tendency that the appearance of the abstracted image of an object dawns – to consciousness, that is. At the moment the tendency awakens; for example, when the tendency for seeing the form of a vase awakens, one sees the conceptualized form. . . . Therefore, that appearance appears due to the power of the tendency. If you ask how it is that it appears by the power of the tendency, there is one sense in which, within that tendency, there is a potential for the appearing objective field. But you cannot point to just *how* the potential exists. With respect to that potential, when it meets with the conditions for appearing, it will come to appear. . . .

necessary, and for this the Great Perfection is extremely valuable. It introduces one to the actuality of this entity of mere luminosity and knowing.

Since I heard Geshe Khedrup Norsang refer on more than one occasion to the teachings of the Great Perfection (as well as to the specific teachings of the Kagyu and Sakya schools on questions of the ultimate nature of the mind in the Great Seal/Mahāmudra tradition), I wonder if his insistence on getting to the heart of the issue around the yoga of indivisibility of clarity and the profound was in part motivated by his study of other traditions. But since I never had opportunity to ask him further about this in person, I must leave this possible influence to conjecture for now.

¹⁷⁴ Geshe Ngawang Tenzin, private interview at Dolma Ling Nunnery, Sidhpur, India, Dec. 4th, 2014, 28m40s ff.:

བག་ཆགས་འདི་བཟུངས་པའི་དབང་གིས་དོན་སྤྱི་ལྟར་བ་འདི་ཤར་གྱི་རེད། ཤེས་པ་ལ། བག་ཆགས་འདིའི་སངས་རྒྱུད་འདི་དཔེར་ན་བྱམ་པ་གཟུགས་མཛོང་ཡག་གི་བག་ཆགས་དེ་སངས་རྒྱུད་འདི་ཉོག་པའི་གཟུགས་མཛོང་གི་རེད། . . . བྱམ་པ་འདི་གིས་སྤྱང་བ་དེ་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་སྤྱང་གི་ཡོད་པ་རེད། བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་གང་འདྲས་བྱམ་ནས་སྤྱང་གི་ཡོད་པ་རེད་ཟེར་ན་བག་ཆགས་དེ་ལ་དེ་སྤྱང་ཡུལ་གྱི་བྱམ་པ་ཞིག་གི་ཡོད་པ་ཚུགས། བྱམ་པ་དེ་ལ་གང་འདྲས་ཡོད་ལ་སྤྱོད་པ་ཀྱི་ཡོད་པ་མ་རེད། བྱམ་པ་དེ་ལ་དེ་སྤྱང་ཡག་གི་རྒྱུ་མཛོང་སྤྱང་ཡོད་པའི་ཡོད་པ་རེད། . . . བྱམ་པ་དེ་ལ་ལྟན་ཅིག་བྱེད་ཆེན་གང་འདྲས་ཐང་ན་ཨ་ནི་བག་ཆགས་དེ་ཆེགས་སངས་ཤེས་པ་བག་ཆགས་དེ་རྩལ་གཅིག་ཤེས་པའི་རྩོ་མོ་བཤད་ནས་ཤེས་པ་དེ་གཟུགས་རྟོག་ཤེས་པ་བཤད་འགྲོ་བཟུངས་ཡོད་པ་རེད། དེ་འདྲས་གཟུགས་རྟོག་ཤེས་པ་དེ་ལ་ཁོ་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ཅེས་གཟུགས་སྤྱང་བ་དེ་ག་རང་གཟུགས་དོན་སྤྱི་སྤྱང་འགྲོ་བཟུངས་ཡོད་པ་རེད། ཡིན་ཅེས་དེ་གང་ག་བག་ཆགས་དེ་བཟུངས་ཆེན་ཤེས་ནས་ཡོད་པའི་ཡོད་པ་རེད།

As for how the potential meets with simultaneously-acting conditions, when that tendency awakens, insofar as the tendency is explained to be of one substance with consciousness – of the essence of consciousness – that consciousness can go on to be explained as the consciousness which conceptualizes form. In this way, with respect to that consciousness which conceptualizes form, because it is a conceptual state of mind, the appearance of form – exactly that – will come to appear as an abstraction of the actual object of form. Therefore, all of this can be understood to come about through the condition of the tendency.

Thus Geshe Ngawang Tenzin was saying, exactly as did Tsongkhapa in Khedrup Je's record of his lectures, that it is by the power of a tendency that an abstracted image dawns before consciousness. But as for how the causal process enables an *unchanging* thing to arise and remain before consciousness for any given period of time, one must enter upon a more granular explanation.

Geshe Ngawang Tenzin said that the tendency itself carries a potential for the “appearing objective field”; I knew from many other monastic classes and debates that the appearing objective field of a conceptual state of mind (*rtog pa'i snang yul*) is consistently said to be the abstracted image (*don spyi*), as in the perfect mental picture of “vase.” Though one cannot point to just how the potential exists, nonetheless, when it encounters the proper conditions, it will break open and give rise to the appearance that it has carried all along *in potentia*. One should recall here the analogy of the cloth emerging from the dyeing vats. I am still surprised that Geshe Ngawang Tenzin said here that the potential is “of one substance with consciousness,” since we had just established in our conversation that it was an unlinked trace. But since he was speaking of the tendency *as* it is awakening, or coming to fruition, he may have meant the very *consciousness* to which the tendency gives rise, as in the transition from link two to link three in the twelve links. In the case of a conceptual consciousness, however, the tendency has given rise to a state of consciousness that is able to conceive of visual form and the rest *in a certain way*. So when form appears to that consciousness, it will appear under the guise of a particular abstracted image of form, which could never have “come from” the outer object, but was always a product of consciousness – and before that, the tendency – in the first place.

This point could lead us to a more subtle understanding of what Tsongkhapa might have had in mind when explaining how diverse sentient beings perceive radically different objects upon a single basis. Geshe Ngawang Tenzin affirmed that in the case of widely divergent karmic propensities, it is not that one being suffers from a temporary obscuration of a sense faculty that results in a mistaken consciousness, while another being has undamaged faculties. This is how one determines “correct” and “mistaken” perceptions within the world, with respect to beings with very similar karma, like humans

with or without cataracts.¹⁷⁵ But, as we saw in Chapter Two, in the case of the craving spirit, the human, and the worldly god, each is said to have a *valid* perception. In this case, because of the greatly differing karmic tendencies arising in the mind of each, a drastically different “abstraction of the actual object” comes to mind when each encounters the ostensibly singular basis. Identified through the conceptual process of exclusion, the “opposite of all that is not blood and pus,” the “opposite of all that is not water,” and the “opposite of all that is not ambrosia,” arise as *completely different mental images*. Even according to Dharmakīrti’s system, those abstractions are all that any being ever perceives when engaging the object via a conceptual state of mind. Nonetheless, in the Sautrāntika and the Mind-Only school, one would still have to posit either an actual object (*don*) or a dependent thing (*gzhan dbang*) with its own-characteristics, in order for the respective deductive valid perceptions to have any basis for arbitration.

In Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way, however, insofar as objects with their own-characteristics can never be found, even conventionally, then the governing power of the tendency, through which the conceptual state of mind comes into being, becomes infinitely greater, even all-encompassing. For from this point of view, there is nothing else to determine “how” something will appear, apart from the abstracted image that dawns before the conceptual consciousness that comes into being due to the ripening tendency; because not one atom or moment of mind can be determined from its own side. Thus it is the joint event of a changing beheld aspect of consciousness, and the unchanging abstracted image that appears upon it, which must determine *how* anything will appear to a living being at any given moment.

Tsongkhapa has said that for a conceptual state of mind, the beheld objective field consists of the non-functioning abstraction, while the arising of the beheld aspect, which is of the substance of consciousness, is caused by the tendency, from moment to moment. Thus at a certain point it might become difficult to say whether what we commonly think of as “mental images” – as in the form that appears before the mind’s eye – refers to the unchanging, timeless abstractions of actual objects or to the way that the beheld aspect of consciousness appears in time. I am inclined to say that “mental images” in general refer to the abstractions of objects, since these are explained to be pictorial, e.g., “the appearance of the opposite of all that is not the clear instances of form to the conceptual state of mind that beholds form.” Although we have reiterated that they are unchanging, such abstractions might still appear before consciousness in such fast succession, as discrete pictures regarding such a wide variety of supposed referents, that it might indeed be possible for them to create the kaleidoscopic video effect of our whole world, in virtual perceptions.

¹⁷⁵ See Tsongkhapa’s acknowledgment of this point, and its contrast to what “mistaken” means from a Middle Way point of view, in Appendix Five (223-224).

Consciousness, insofar as it is conceived as something that performs a function, is understood to change moment to moment; this is why the beheld aspect can be said to have been *caused* by the ripening of a tendency, whereas as the abstracted mental images themselves are not caused. Nevertheless, in order to be perceived, they must dawn within consciousness, as though riding upon some kind of changing medium in which the static pictures may be perceived, with the semblance of unfolding in time.¹⁷⁶ As a very crude image to capture the relationship between the flow of consciousness and the discrete mental images, one might imagine a conveyor belt with billions of tiny framed photographs placed on it, which, once one moves the conveyor belt fast enough, might look like a seamless film-strip. But of course the ripening mind provides a multi-dimensional virtual reality in all directions, and without a break. From what I understand to be Tsongkhapa's Middle Way view, then, there is no other way for deceptive appearances to be established, than as such appearances to the mind (*blo'i snang cha tsam*), merely projected outwards by a conceptual state of mind (*rtog pas phar btags tsam*),¹⁷⁷ whose dawning is caused directly by the ripening of karmic tendencies.¹⁷⁸

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Here we gain the opportunity for an even deeper insight into why the dissolution of ordinary vessels and inhabitants in the sādhana meditation does not involve *destroying*

¹⁷⁶ The more thoroughly one understands the arguments, even within a Sautrāntika context, for why abstractions can be “neither the same nor separate” in substance from consciousness itself, the more I would suggest that the distinction between “beheld aspect” and “beheld objective field,” both appearing as the same “image,” becomes logically unproblematic. See Appendix Ten (645-669).

¹⁷⁷ The latter is a common phrase that I heard used many times from Geshe Norsang and from the Geshe teaching classes in Middle Way at Dolma Ling, but in particular, both phrases cited here were used by Geshe Ngawang Tenzin, December 4th, 2014, 49m12s ff.

¹⁷⁸ See Tsongkhapa's clear statement of this while explicating Dharmakīrti's system, without explicit modification from a Middle Way viewpoint, in Appendix Ten (673):

The proximate cause for an appearance to a conceptual state of mind to dawn in the way that it does is the tendency. Once that has finished asserting itself, due to the fact that whatever vase or cloth one may encounter, they are two different things, they appear to the conceptual state of mind *as two abstractions* that appear as though they have two different substances. Thus they are just closely labeled as having different substances.

From a Middle Way point of view, even with the notion of discrete images arising in infinitesimal succession, there is no problem of the “view that everything has stopped,” because neither those images – nor the state of consciousness that “carries” them – has an inherent nature of being *either* changing or unchanging. It is at this point in the analysis that one would have to enter into the depths of Tsongkhapa's arguments in the *Illumination of the True Thought*, regarding the refutation of “birth from itself” (*bdag skyes dgog pa*) and “birth from another” (*gzhan skyes dgog pa*), when either is taken to exist as real. But nonetheless, “growth,” “causation,” and “change,” can all be established deceptively (*kun rdzob tu*), which, based on what we have said here, would mean *through the application of an abstracted image based on the ripening of a tendency*. So it would be the unfolding of tendencies themselves that cause one to label even such basic substructures as time, change, and causation in the way that one does. Understanding this point is deeply related to the emptiness of time, a topic upon which we will have reason to touch only briefly in the section in Chapter Six on “A Mere Basis for All the Seeds.” Though my translation remains incomplete on this topic, see also some essential points at Appendix Five (257-258), (268) and (270-273).

anything, but only seeing the way all appearances always existed. As Tsongkhapa writes in the *Illumination of the True Thought*:¹⁷⁹

Suppose those natures that were established by an essence of their very own – through their own characteristics of form, feelings, and the rest – were to grow in dependence upon causes and conditions. Then at the very moment when a yogi directly realizes that all things are empty of being established by nature, he would have to realize emptiness in a manner of discounting the natures of those functioning things.

Now the state of meditative equipoise should not be able to focus on form and the rest, but if those were established through characteristics of their own, then the meditative equipoise would *have* to be able to focus on them. But since they are in fact imperceptible, then at that very moment all those functioning things would go into non-existence. But if they did not exist, then it would be the case that all those functioning things had existed prior to the meditative equipoise, but then ceased to exist later; that is, they would have been annihilated.

Therefore, since the meditative equipoise itself would have to be the cause of that kind of destruction, then just as a hammer and such is the cause for the destruction of a vase and the like, the seeing of emptiness would turn into the cause that destroys the nature of functioning things, and which discounts them. But this would not make sense; therefore, the establishment of functioning things through characteristics of their own does not exist. So do not, at any time or under any circumstances, accept the idea of growing by nature.

The point of the argument is this: If lacking any nature only meant the lack of beholder and beheld being separate, as the Mind-Only school seems to have interpreted the radical statements of the Buddha’s “second turning of the wheel” to mean, then appearances could still exist with their own characteristics, and something would have to be destroyed when all elaboration of dual appearance is withdrawn. But if no characteristics existed on their own in the first place, then when one withdraws even the subtlest projection of characteristics that were thought to exist as real – i.e., as something other than abstracted images dawning before the mind due to the ripening of tendencies – then nothing that was really there is ever destroyed. Nevertheless, what was only deceptively there, the projection of billions upon billions of abstracted images, does disappear. Since one was analyzing *how* things really exist, one sees their ultimate reality, but this in no way discounts the deceptive appearances that never came about in any other way than this interaction of profound dependent arising, where all is “labeled in dependence” (*rten nas btags pa*)¹⁸⁰ upon ripening tendencies.

¹⁷⁹ See this and the ensuing discussion in Appendix Five (261-262) ff.

¹⁸⁰ See the famous verse from Nāgārjuna cited at Chapter One, note 109:

Suppose, according to this logic, that realizing emptiness requires understanding precisely the profound dependent arising by which the beheld aspect of consciousness dawns in the form of myriad abstracted images due to the ripening of karmic tendencies, as a Middle Way extension of Asaṅga’s analogy of the dyeing vats. I would suggest that a practitioner who meditates directly on how the beheld aspect of the consciousness realizing *emptiness* dawns as the divine being, could then, by *seeing* those quintessential mental images, combined with faith in the reality of the signs and marks from the side of those Buddhas, and by watching how the practice *gradually ripens* into spontaneously arising clear appearances, potentially realize the indivisibility of the two realities in every moment of an ongoing meditation. This may be something of what Geshe Norsang meant by “a single understanding.”

If in the Middle Way all things are said to be established only through conceptual designation, we must return, however, to the problem of vivid and clear appearances to a nonconceptual consciousness within an ordinary person who has not yet seen emptiness directly. Here I think we might return to the analogy of the dream, or the cataracts, where of course there can be a nonconceptual appearance either to the mental consciousness or to the mistaken sense consciousness, but it need not be real. In the case of dreams it is obvious: Where else could the images have come from but one’s own mind? So although Tsongkhapa does not say so explicitly, and although Dharmakīrti focuses on the fact that *abstractions* are “deceptive” precisely because they are contaminated by the influence of karmic tendencies,¹⁸¹ it is clear that the direct objects of the nonconceptual sensory and mental consciousnesses are in many cases said to ripen from the various types of karmic seeds as well. So it is not as though nonconceptual appearances do not also ripen from tendencies. When the human, the craving spirit, and the god look upon what appears to each at the nonconceptual level, that also is due to the power of karma,¹⁸² but it is not necessarily due to the tendencies for creating expressions.

Whatever arises in reliance and relationship, that we explain to be emptiness.

This is labeled in dependence: that itself is the middle way.

¹⁸¹ See Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā* (*tshad ma rnam ‘grel gyi tshig le’ur byas pa*), Toh. 4210, sde dge, mdo ‘grel, vol. *ce*, 119b5, emphasis mine:

Because, to the mind of an abstraction

what lacks any essence is seen through the abstraction itself

and because it is mistaken towards its actual object,

or because we accept as an abstraction what does not exist,

and because it is also *contaminated*

and because, within it, the actual object is not directly there

it is not something that bears an essence.

འདྲི་མེད་ཅན་གྱི་སྒྲིལ་། གྲིཉ་དུ་ནི་མཐོང་བྱེད་དང་། རྟོན་ལ་འཁྲུག་བཤམ་མེད་པ་ནི། གྱིར་འདོད་དེ་ཡང་བསྐྱད་བྱེད་དང་། དེ་ནི་དུ་ནི་དོན་དངོས་སྟེ། མེད་བྱེད་དོན་ཅན་མ་ཡིན།

¹⁸² Geshe Ngawang Tenzin affirmed this in answer to my repeated questioning to clarify the point: Dec. 4th, 2014. He also acknowledged that from the Consequence point of view, there is no single basis that can be established in common (49m57s ff.): གཞི་མཐུན་གྱི་གཞི་གཅིག་ཡོད་པ་མ་རེད།

The primary issue at hand so far had been to understand how tendencies cause different beings to conceptualize that basic raw data of experience in different ways. Yet insofar as Tsongkhapa admits even the subtlest projections of dual appearance to involve a kind of conceptuality caused specifically by the tendencies for ignorance, there is in his Middle Way no nonconceptual direct perception short of the yogic direct perception of emptiness that is not said to be contaminated by *that* conceptual elaboration.¹⁸³ Thus I do not see it as a problem to assume that even in dreams, Tsongkhapa would have said, from a Middle Way point of view, that the objective field that appears clearly to the “nonconceptual” consciousness, which “is similar to what appears clearly as a hair to a mistaken sense consciousness when awake,” also arises “due to the power of a tendency.” Perhaps, however, it would have to be a different kind of tendency from the type that causes one to interpret appearances, first through an abstracted image, and then by joining that abstracted image to a conceptually designated word. The distinction might be illuminated by the difference, within Asaṅga’s presentation of the Mind-Only system,

¹⁸³ According to later epistemological analysis within the Geluk tradition, it is generally accepted, too, that it is no fundamental contradiction for a certain state of mind to be both a direct valid perception (*mngon sum gyi tshad ma*) and to involve conceptuality. See, for example, a contemporary monastic primer on subjects of epistemology, by Shākya Gejong Lobzang Gyatso (*shAkya'i dge sbyong blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 20th century), *blo rigs nyer mkho kun btus* (“*Compendium of Crucial Ideas in the Classification of States of Mind*”), Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Dharamsala, 1998, 149:

If you ask whether, in this system, it is not contradictory for something to be both a direct valid perception and a conceptual state of mind, [we say] it is not contradictory. The lower philosophical schools connect what is direct to the subject state of mind: It acts within the naked part of the objective field, without being mixed with an abstracted image of the actual object. In that case, when they say “direct,” it would be contradictory to set it alongside this [i.e., a conceptual state of mind]. But in our system, we connect what is direct to the objective field: When that objective field is directly manifest, or is realized by force of experience, we say it is a direct valid perception. This is true because we accept that all conscious memories within the mental continuum of an ordinary being that are not misleading, are both (1) direct valid perceptions and (2) conceptual states of mind.

Now, there is a major distinction between realizing such an objective field (a) *with* a direct perception and realizing it (b) *directly*. Something like a direct sensory perception realizes such an objective field clearly, without being mixed with an abstracted image of the actual object. This both realizes its objective field *directly* and realizes its objective field *with* a direct perception. But all conscious memories of what took place earlier realize their objective field *with* a direct perception, but they do not realize it *directly*. So you should understand that there are three possible combinations [i.e., (a) and (b), neither (a) nor (b), and (a) but not (b)]. But there is no case where one could realize something *directly* but not realize it *with* a direct perception, as that would be a fourth combination, which is excluded here].

ལུགས་འདིར་མངོན་སུམ་གྱི་ཆད་མ་དང་། རྟོག་པ་མི་འགལ་ལམ་ཞེ་ན་མི་འགལ་ཏེ། གྲུབ་མཐའ་འོག་མས་མངོན་སུམ་ཡུལ་ཅན་ལ་སྦྲར་ཏེ། རྟོན་སྤྱི་དང་མ་འབྲེས་
བར་ཡུལ་ཟེན་ཆར་དུ་སྦྱོང་བས་ན། མངོན་སུམ་ཞེས་བརྗོད་པས་འདི་དང་གྲུང་བསྐྱེགས་ན་འགལ་ཡང་། འདིར་མངོན་སུམ་ཡུལ་ལ་སྦྲར་ཏེ། ཡུལ་དེ་རང་ལ་མངོན་
ཁྱུང་དུའམ་སྤྱིང་སྦྱོབས་ཀྱིས་རྟོགས་པས་ན་མངོན་སུམ་གྱི་ཆད་མ་ཞེས་བརྗོད་ཏོ། །ཐ་མལ་བའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་བློ་ཤེས་མི་སྦྱ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་མངོན་སུམ་གྱི་ཆད་མ་དང་།
རྟོག་པ་གཉིས་ཀར་བཞེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །འོན་ཀྱང་ཡུལ་དེ་མངོན་སུམ་གྱིས་རྟོགས་པ་དང་། མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པ་ལ་བྱུང་བར་ཆེ་སྟེ། དབང་ལོ་མངོན་སུམ་
'ལྷ་བྱ་ཡུལ་དེ་རྟོན་སྤྱི་དང་མ་འབྲེས་བར་གསལ་བར་རྟོགས་པ་རྣམས་ནི། ཡུལ་དེ་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པ་དང་། མངོན་སུམ་གྱིས་རྟོགས་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཡིན་ལ། སྤྱི་
ར་གྱི་བློ་ཤེས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཡུལ་དེ་མངོན་སུམ་གྱིས་རྟོགས་ཀྱང་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་མ་རྟོགས་པས། སྤྱི་གསུམ་ཡོད་པར་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

between tendencies for creating expressions, on the one hand, and the tendencies for the link of existence on the other.¹⁸⁴

Furthermore, with respect to creation stage practice, Tsongkhapa states explicitly that it is due to repeated familiarization with abstracted images that the nonconceptual state of mind can arise.¹⁸⁵ Thus there is no doubt but that he sees this kind of meditative nonconceptuality to be something that is cultivated through the planting of consistent causes through practice, very much like the deliberate planting of karmic tendencies, with a powerful virtuous intention and basis for action. Nonetheless, as we have begun to see, there is a great difference in the way that ordinary karma is planted and ripens, and the way that the repeated, deliberate actions of tantric practice, ideally imbued with ever-increasing insight into emptiness, are designed to create causes within the mental stream. This difference has much to do with what we have already said about the ideal basis upon which the mind of the sādhana should imagine itself to unfold, namely the indivisible wisdom of bliss and emptiness. In order to understand the depths of that difference, however, we must forge into Tsongkhapa's commentary on the next major mantra of the Guhyasamāja sādhana, which is also included within nearly every other unsurpassed yoga sādhana. This commentary will drive us back into the fundamental question of *who* it is that arises as a divine being, and how this practice might begin to undercut the beginningless cycle of stained karma altogether.

¹⁸⁴ The latter is in turn expressed through both the “seeds for what is shared” and “the seeds for what is unique.” See Chapter Two, “Types of Seeds and Tendencies.”

¹⁸⁵ See especially Tsongkhapa's refutation of counter-arguments to this principle in Appendix Nine (716): Suppose you want to say that through familiarization with something in a conceptual way, the objective field towards which your habituation was directed will arise as a clear appearance. . . . If it were impossible for a mind free of conceptuality to be born from the conceptual state of mind to which duality appears, then, since every state of mind – up until one achieves the state of an ārya – does conceptualize dual appearance, it would turn out to be impossible for the totally nonconceptual wisdom of an ārya ever to be born from the paths of accumulation and preparation. See also the whole of Appendix Fifteen.

Chapter Six: Purity and a Basis for Purity

. . . Here is the crucial point for positing the pride of a divine identity. The mind that thinks “I am” holds two things – the ordinary heaps and “me” – to be one: the referent of a name. Because that mind insists upon believing this to be so, the cycle turns round and round. In parallel fashion, by taking the object that is *emptiness* as the basis of designation, and holding *as a designated thing* the name and the idea of its referent taken as one, you utterly abandon grasping to the idea that things exist as real. This becomes a cause for the holy body of truth, the dharmakāya.

—From *A Guide to the Creation Stage*¹

What Can You Do With an Empty “I”?

If there is absolutely nothing that can be established apart from the way it appears to a state of consciousness, based upon a tendency to perceive in a certain way, then with Tsongkhapa’s Guhyasamāja sādhana, the “ground of wisdom” simply reveals the infinite potential that is there, if all our tendencies to see a world and beings as ordinary were to be utterly swept away. But what is to arise in its place? I have suggested that it is implicit in Tsongkhapa’s view that the stage of creation is designed to create new tendencies, deliberately, in order to enable the practitioner to begin to see an entirely different kind of world dawn upon the limitless possibility that is the clear light mind. If these tendencies are not simply to be one more set of *karmic* potentials, however, which would spin the cycle into yet new worlds of temporary pleasures and suffering, they must be planted with the continual understanding of their nature – as empty, arising like an illusion. This is what Tsongkhapa seems to think the yoga is meant to do, where clarity and the profound are joined within a single state of consciousness.

If we note, further, how he understands tendencies to be planted precisely through the consciousness of a particular abstracted image *in the moment a deed is finishing*,² then it may make more sense how it is that tendencies should manifest again, or come to fruition, through causing consciousness to appear in a certain way, or to take on a particular “beheld aspect,” in the future. To be able to observe such a process as it is happening – while planting the tendencies to see divine beings in a certain form, with

¹ See Chapter Three, note 1, above.

² See Chapter Two, “Seeds and Fragrant Tendencies,” as well as this passage from Appendix Eight (719): Congruent-cause seeds and ripening seeds are both sown newly, for the following reasons, respectively: Congruent-cause seeds are formed when the foundation consciousness starts and stops at the same time as an engaging consciousness of virtue, non-virtue, or ethical neutrality, so that seeds are planted which will in the future establish an engaging consciousness that is of a similar type. Ripening seeds become manifest as the ripening virtue and non-virtue that project [a new lifetime], so they must be planted.

particular attributes, and so on, through the specificity and regularity of a *sādhana* ritual – would give the tantric practitioner unprecedented opportunity to understand the process of dependent origination at a granular level. Indeed, watching the *maṇḍala* appear as a moment to moment creative effulgence of clear light consciousness, the practitioner might even begin to realize that “it was always that way,” even when the appearances upon the beheld aspect of consciousness were generated by *karmic* tendencies, catapulted by ignorance. For it is affirmed in a *Guhyasamāja* complete stage context that the fundamental ground of consciousness was, and is, always the same.

In one sense, such an interpretation of the yoga of indivisibility might not be as far from a Mind-Only school worldview as one might have thought. Indeed, it seems that the main Indian author upon whom Tsongkhapa relies as his authority for this idea – Jñānapāda – was writing primarily from within a Mind-Only milieu.³ But we must recall once again that the main idea Tsongkhapa rejects from some classical presentations of the Mind-Only viewpoint is that there could be moments of consciousness established with their own characteristics. It was based upon this idea that some Mind-Only proponents could alternatively propose (1) a foundation consciousness separate from the six groups of consciousness, (2) a reflexive awareness that would serve as a self-verifying valid perception, and/or (3) a stream of consciousness with its own-characteristics that could project whole worlds of experience, yet with nothing established outside itself. But once he has squarely refuted what he and Candrakīrti see to be the problematic aspects of each of these ideas, it is clear that the central point is never rejected, and is emphatically affirmed. This point, as we saw in Chapter Two, is that all things are and always were being *created* from continuous streams of mental awareness. Based upon understanding the way that mental habituations have always given rise to the very appearances, as well as to the abstracted conceptualizations about them, that constitute reality for any given perceiver, Tsongkhapa’s ideal tantric yogi would learn to recreate his or her entire appearing universe from that flow of awareness, by creating the causes that will, once ripened, allow the beheld aspect of consciousness to dawn as the consistently arising mental images of pure and sacred worlds.

We have focused thus far primarily on the beheld aspect that refers outwardly, pertaining to perceived objects, worlds, and other beings. But who is it who plants the tendencies? How would a radical re-visioning of what it means to be “I” undercut the way that cyclic karmic tendencies were ever planted in the first place? How does one prevent the mental seeds planted during *sādhana* practice from becoming one more set of worldly tendencies, which might temporarily enable one to be reborn into a delightful pleasure realm, but would utterly fail at enabling one to serve all living beings?

³ Near the very end of the *Steps of Mantra*, Tsongkhapa does, however, explicitly attribute to Jñānapāda a viewpoint that is tantamount to the Middle Way. This may be explained by the historical attribution of his school as that of the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka. See Chapter Three, note 43, and also Appendix Fifteen (988).

Finding answers to such questions within Tsongkhapa's thought will once again require spanning his sūtric and tantric works. First we will examine his most extensive commentary to the *Om śūnyatā* mantra, to discover his explicit presentation of the ideal practice: who it is who *should* arise as the central figure of a maṇḍala. Then we will turn to Tsongkhapa's most succinct philosophical presentation of the mere "I" in a Middle Way context, supplemented by a pith instruction for meditation found within the *Twenty-One Brief Pieces on Guhyasamāja*.

Om Śūnyatā Jñāna Vajra . . .

As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Five, the *Om śūnyatā* mantra appears in nearly all sādhanas of the unsurpassed class of tantra, and Tsongkhapa's commentary in the *Steps of Mantra* treats it in this shared context. In some sādhana practices, especially abbreviated ones, it can be recited to accompany the very first dissolution of ordinary worlds and beings. Within the Guhyasamāja sādhana specifically, however, we have noted that the main instance⁴ of this mantra occurs *after* the maṇḍala of sheer conviction has already been created and visualized in all its minute detail, according to the principles of the yoga of indivisibility examined extensively above.

Incidentally, we are now in a better position to understand why it is called the maṇḍala of sheer conviction, since the term "sheer conviction" (*lhag par mos pa*), also appears as a technical term in Tsongkhapa's oral commentary to Dharmakīrti, where he cites its use in the Tibetan translation of the work of one of Dharmakīrti's early Indian commentators, Sūryagupta.⁵ Although the terse references to the surrounding argument are difficult to penetrate, it seems the meaning of the term is closely associated with the sense in which the Middle Way can posit the process of cause and effect only as something deceptive, established through extrapolation from conceptual abstractions, but impossible to be established directly as the actual nature of things as they are. I have no direct evidence that the term is being used in exactly the same way within the Guhyasamāja practice, but it would make sense, according to all we have said, that the

⁴ Within the Guhyasamāja system, this is also the mantra uttered to clear ritual substances into emptiness, rather than the mantra more commonly used for this purpose in other tantric systems, namely the *Om svabhāva śuddha* mantra. Thus, if performing an extended ritual, in which inner and outer offering substances, as well as *torma* (*gtor ma*) cakes, are blessed and offered in advance of creating the protection circle, the *Om śūnyatā* mantra would have been uttered several times already, long before reaching the climactic dissolution that accompanies "taking death as the path." Though the meaning is the same in every case, the primary referent of those initial utterances remains the physical substances that will be transformed into pure substances of offering, whereas the primary referent of the climactic dissolution of the central figure is the heaps, elements, sensory fields, and sense faculties of the practitioner, already envisaged, by sheer conviction, as Vajradhara. It is this latter dissolution to which I refer throughout this section, as the "main instance" of the *Om śūnyatā* mantra in the Guhyasamāja practice.

⁵ See Appendix Ten (637-638), especially: "... Sūryagupta explains: Here you should accept that *all those presentations from sheer conviction are established only in a deceptive way*; because (1) these seeds and sprouts, etc., cannot be posited through a valid perception that could establish them as the suchness of things, and because (2) they are posited through the valid perception of seeing."

envisioned maṇḍala, insofar as it is initially arising to the mind of the beginner yogi *only* through abstracted images based on the utterance of words, is a maṇḍala of sheer conviction insofar as it is acknowledged to be a merely deceptive illusory appearance, verified only by the fact one believes it to be there.⁶

More specifically within a tantric context, however, it was explained by Geshe Norsang to be a maṇḍala of sheer conviction insofar as all the images of the divine beings are meant to appear instantaneously, in their complete form,⁷ without one's going through the process of envisioning a seed syllable transforming into an accoutrement, and so on, before the full divine body appears. In one sense, this instantaneous appearance is meant to be congruent with the “miraculous” or spontaneous birth of the humans belonging to the first eon, whose bodies were made of light, and so on.⁸ In another sense, however, I would conjecture that since there *will* be a very extensive process of creating the central figure as an emanation body, and since each one of the thirty-two divine beings *will* be created from their respective seed syllables and accoutrement much later in the sādhana, the maṇḍala of sheer conviction serves a very specific purpose as a precursor to all of these extensive practices to come.

That is, once the practitioner has envisioned – or rather, once one believes that Vajradhara himself has enacted – the purification of all beings through granting empowerment and bringing them to the state of a Buddha, each of the divine beings of the outer maṇḍala of sheer conviction comes to take their place at one of the crucial points of the luminous divine body of the central figure. Each divine being is meant to symbolize, or correspond to, one of the respective components of a human being of the first eon. But the experience of dissolution that will ensue parallels the gradual decline and deactivation of the power of each of these components in the death process of a human belonging to our *current* age. In order to transform the seeds for that familiar experience, however, the dissolution process must be catalyzed by the transcendent blessing of each of the divine beings whom the practitioner now believes to be coursing through the inner channels of his or her being. This is a unique feature of the way in which the Guhyasamāja system enacts the “stages of withdrawal” (*bsdus rim*), and if it is to be practiced as an auspicious seed for creating actual experiences of the dissolution of the subtle winds during the complete stage,⁹ one must not be imagining the mere collapse

⁶ Cf. Appendix Ten (637): “With this sheer conviction, one posits that undamaged seeds and the like have the ability to produce sprouts and the like. Therefore, the sheer conviction itself is the verification for all presentations.”

⁷ Cf. Appendix Ten (630): “Note that for a thing to arise in its complete essence, it is not necessary for all the distinctive features of the essence, whatever they may be, to arise.”

⁸ See Chapter Three, “Fall from Paradise,” above.

⁹ See the quotation cited at Chapter Three, note 123, above (with new emphasis): “Thus *assembling many extraordinary dependent relationships* between the basis to be purified and that which purifies it, one thoroughly ripens all the roots of virtue that will give rise to the magnificent realizations of the complete stage.” See also a similar idea cited at Chapter Three, note 126: “. . . the capacity to set up *an extraordinary*

of ordinary elements. Then it would be no different from a sūtra contemplation of the death process, in which one imagines the gradual death and decay of one's body in a meditation similar to that involving the skeletons, mentioned in Chapter Two.

The conception of the divine beings dissolving one by one into clear light within one's body must be present in order to gradually *transform* one's habitual tendencies for experiencing the dying process as a terrifying agony into tendencies for experiencing the dissolution into clear light as something sacred, beautiful, and extraordinary. But if there were no divine beings present in the first place, one would have no basis upon which to imagine the dissolution process of a divine body; so the maṇḍala of sheer conviction must have come first, in order for there even to be a sacred body *with which* to “take death as the path to the dharmakāya.” A mere human being cannot die and become the dharmakāya – but when a form body of Vajradhara dissolves into the clear light, the dharmakāya would by all means manifest. This is a logic I have not heard explained just so, but which I extrapolate as representing the thinking of Tsongkhapa's tradition, based on many different sources, both oral and textual.

At the culmination of this dissolution,¹⁰ the practitioner utters: *Oṃ śūnyatā jñāna vajra svabhāva ātmako 'ham*. In his instructions for sādhana practice, Tsongkhapa adds:¹¹

Saying this, formulate your pride by thinking, ‘I am what has entered into clear light: the heaps and so forth, which are of the essence of the five families. By meditating in congruence with the way that humans of the first eon gradually become ordinary, and the way that the heaps and so forth gradually dissolve and make manifest the clear light of death, this is the yoga that takes death into the dharmakāya. It is the suchness of entering the ultimate maṇḍala, and it is also called *enlightenment from the actual nature of the way things are*.’

Regarding the same mantra, in his *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* Tsongkhapa glosses Nāgabuddhi with the following instruction, which encapsulates what I attempted to explain throughout the preceding chapter:¹²

dependent relationship to ripen one's mental stream for giving birth to the yogas of inner fire and of orbs, and so on, which are symbolized by way of those methods, does not exist in what is not the unsurpassed.”

¹⁰ Since this is an extremely precise and secret aspect of the Guhyasamāja practice, it would not be appropriate for me to describe it in further detail here. For some further details on the general process and logic of such practices, however, see dByangs can dga' ba'i blo gros, Lati Rinbochay, Jeffrey Hopkins, and Elizabeth Napper, 1985, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications).

¹¹ *dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa*, vol. ja, 13b1-3:

ཞེས་བརྗོད་དེ་རིགས་ལྔའི་དོ་སྤོང་སྤངས་སྤྱོད་གསལ་དུ་ཞུགས་པ་དེ་དངོས་སྤྱོད་པའི་རྒྱལ་བུའོ།། འདི་ནི་བསྐྱལ་བ་དང་སྤོང་མེ་རིམ་གྱིས་ཐ་མལ་པར་གྱུར་ཏེ། སྤངས་སྤྱོད་པའི་རིམ་གྱིས་ཐེན་ནས། འཆི་བའི་དོད་གསལ་མཛོད་དུ་བྱས་པ་དང་རྗེས་སུ་མཐུན་པར་སྒྲོམ་པས་འཆི་བ་ཆོས་སྐྱར་འབྱེར་བའི་ནལ་འབྱོར་ཏེ། རྣ་དམ་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ལ་འབྱུག་པའི་དེ་ཉིད་དང་། དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ལས་བྱང་ཆུབ་པ་ཞེས་གྲུབ་ཏེ།།

¹² See Appendix Two (173).

The way to manifest the clear light is this: Once you have *completely withdrawn* the *beholder*, that is, conditioned consciousness [*rnam shes*], and once even the subtle dual appearance – in which the objective field that is the ultimate, and the subject state of mind that is pristine awareness [*rig pa*], seem to be two – is purified, one remains indivisibly, like water poured into water.

We would need to look at Tsongkhapa’s record of the transmission of Great Perfection teachings that he received from Khenchen Hlodrakpa in order to justify further my reading of the word *rig pa* in this passage in the specialized sense of a “pristine awareness” that is utterly beyond ordinary knowing, as that term is used in the Great Perfection tradition. But insofar as Tsongkhapa is explicitly describing a state in which even the subtle elaborations of dual appearance between a subject and object have subsided, the conditioned consciousness, or literally, “aspect-knower” (*rnam shes*, which Tsongkhapa uses as a gloss for Nāgabuddhi’s *’dzin pa*, or “beholder”), has been completely withdrawn (*nye bar bsdus*). Indeed, that every last trace of mental consciousness, which knows through a beheld aspect, should at this point have been dissolved into clear light, is clear from a symbolic correspondence to the dissolution of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī within the *sādhana* recitation. Thus I think it significant that Tsongkhapa uses the term *rig pa* to describe this non-dual awareness, which remains indivisible from ultimate reality, “like water poured into water.”

Though Tsongkhapa goes on to a brief gloss of each word of the mantra there in the *Exegesis*, I will now turn instead to the more extensive explanation that appears in the *Steps of Mantra*. To understand the references here, we must keep in mind all that has been said about the “three doors of liberation” in the context of the four-line verse, described previously; for the meaning here is exactly the same.¹³ Tsongkhapa explains:¹⁴

So in this regard, *śūnyatā* means emptiness: the fact that insofar as all things are bereft of a nature, of causes, or results, they are empty of those things.

Then, *jñāna* is the state of mind that is of the same taste as the emptiness that is (1) emptiness, is (2) without characteristics, and is (3) without aspirations.

The word *vajra* means the diamond that is nothing but the objective field which is emptiness, and the subjective state of mind that is primordial knowing, indivisible from one another. It is “diamond” because it is unable to be split by anything that is incompatible with it, because it cannot be destroyed by anything incompatible with it, and because it has no beginning and no end. Just as the absolute space of all things has no beginning and no end, *so the mind that focuses upon it is designated with the same language*; because insofar as it focuses upon the actual nature of the way things are, it is something that has its aspect.

¹³ See Chapter Five, “*With No Functioning Things . . .*,” above.

¹⁴ Appendix Two (810-811).

Ātmaka is identity and *aḥam* means “I am.” So it is saying that “whatever identity is pure of having any nature at all, that itself am I.”

¹⁵ See Tsongkhapa's comment later in the passage, translated at Appendix Two (815): "All the meditations that I will explain below hold the pride of the holy body of form, but that which is beheld by the pride of that identity must come forth by the inner force of having made manifest the dharmakāya. It is for that purpose that one meditates on emptiness." See also at (816): "Furthermore, one withdraws all appearances into clear light, in order for them to be divinized. By the inner force of creating a fierce certainty of the view in advance, later all the meditations on the side of appearances will dawn like an illusion."

As for what it is that will dawn in the aspect of a divine being, if you wonder whether it is one's individual coarse heaps that will dawn as the divinity – not at all. If you wonder whether it is coarse consciousness that will dawn as the divinity – that's not it at all. If you wonder whether it is the "I" that is designated upon the coarse heaps which will dawn as the divine being – not at all. All those have been purified into sheer emptiness.

If you ask what it is, then, what ascertains emptiness—Once you have ascertained a representation of emptiness, there is a state of mind whose way of beholding has entered into emptiness, right? Something that has not gone into emptiness. O, *yaah*, that. The very mind that ascertains emptiness, to be brief, dawns in the aspect of the divine being. Therefore—that very mind that ascertains emptiness still exists, right? It—the aspect of the divinity is also just an appearance. Now when someone says, “You cannot combine those in a single state of mind”—this is the most difficult point. Because it is something unique to the system of mantra . . .”

ལྷེའི་ཀླུ་པ་ལ་ཤར་རྒྱ་དེ་མོ་མོ་ལུང་པོ་རྒྱལ་པ་དེ་ལྷུང་ལ་ཡག་ཤར་ཤོང་དུ་ཤེད་པ་ས་ཟེར་ན་དེ་མ་ཤེད། ཀླུ་པེས་རྒྱལ་པ་དེ་ལ་ཡག་ལྷུང་ལ་ཤར་ཤོང་དུ་ཟེར་དེ།
 མ་ཤེད། ལུང་པོ་རྒྱལ་པ་ལ་གདགས་པའི་ར་དེ་ཡག་ལྷུང་ལ་ཤར་ཤེད་པ་ས་ཟེར་ན་དེ་མ་ཤེད། དེ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལྷོང་སང་ལྷོང་བ་ཤེད། དག་ཤེད་ཟེར་ན་ལྷོང་ཉིད་དེ་
 ས་པའི་ལྷོང་ཉིད་དཔེ་རིས་ནས་ལྷོང་ཉིད་ལ་བརྟེན་ལྷུང་ས་ལྷག་ས་ལྷག་ལྷེ་ལྷག་ཅིག་ཡོད་པ་ཤེད་ལ། ལྷོང་ཉིད་ལ་བལྟེད་ས་ཡིན་མ་ཁུ། མོ་དེ་ཡག་ལྷོང་ཉིད་
 དེས་པའི་ལྷོ་ཁོ་རང་ཡག་མདོར་བལྟས་ན་ལྷེའི་ཀླུ་པ་ལ་ཤར་བ་ཤེད། དེ་ཡིན་ཅེང་ན་ལྷོང་ཉིད་དེས་པའི་ལྷོ་ཁོ་རང་ཡོད་ཡོད་པ་ཤེད་ལ། ཁོ་རང་ལྷེའི་ཀླུ་པ་དེ་ལ་
 ད་ལྷོང་བ་ཅས་གཟིམ་ཤེད། ད་དེ་ལྷོ་གཟིམ་ལྷོར་མི་བརྟུག་ཟེར་ཡག་པདྲི་དཀར་ལས་ཁག་པོས་གཟིམ་སྐྱལ་ལྷུག་མི་ལྷུག་མི་ལྷུག་མོངས་མ་ཡིན་བ་གཟིམ་ཡིན་ཅེང་ན་
 ས་ །

symbolically depicted in the form of a multipronged shape that bears some resemblance to the molecular structure of carbon atoms once they have coalesced to make a diamond crystal.¹⁷ The Tibetan word that translates *vajra*, “dorjé” (*rdo rje*), literally means “lord of stone,” again indicating that which is hardest and cannot be split or destroyed by anything unlike itself.¹⁸

Though the unbreakable *vajra* is often, even in *sūtra* contexts, the symbol for the indestructibility of emptiness itself, as the ultimate reality, in this case, it indicates the way in which the primordial consciousness (*jñāna*) that knows emptiness can be “designated with the same language,” and thus can *also* be understood as indestructible, with no beginning and no end. This point, too, would be crucial to raise in discussions attempting to overcome a longstanding breach between Old and New Translation schools. For although Tsongkhapa would usually insist that the mind perceiving emptiness is, like all states of mind, a conditioned and changing phenomenon, here he is openly acknowledging that it can be designated with the same language as the unconditioned ultimate reality with which it is indivisibly united.

Thus, although from the practitioner’s point of view, such a state of knowing had a beginning, and until total enlightenment is reached, each state of meditative equipoise will also have an end, Tsongkhapa seems to acknowledge here that there is nevertheless a sense in which the primordial wisdom knowing emptiness never began and will never end. This might be understood insofar as it is the wisdom that splits apart the very conceptions upon which the idea and experience of “time” or “change” are based. Thus, whenever it is actualized, or realized, such wisdom can be designated as timeless. This could also be another way of rendering the *ye* in *ye shes*, or the very lack of the conditioning prefix *vi-* in *jñāna*. The mind that has removed even all appearances of “mind” from itself has severed the illusions of conditionality, and rests in the ultimate nature where even the idea of change cannot appear. I expect that once identified, one could recognize more and more resonances between instances of Tsongkhapa’s language such as these, and the language of the Great Perfection tradition, where pristine

¹⁷ Compare, for example the images found at <http://www.chemguide.co.uk/atoms/structures/giantcov.html> and <http://www.himalayanart.org/items/74820>. The typical five-pointed *vajra* used in Tibetan ritual (a central rod surrounded by two sets of four-pointed crystal structures) does not exactly match the more complex tetrahedral bonding structure of diamond, but viewed from certain angles, one can imagine how the ritual shape may have evolved to evoke the crystal structure of diamond, which has transfixed human eyes and hearts across diverse cultures for thousands of years.

¹⁸ The actual Tibetan word for a physical diamond stone is *rdo rje pha lam*, not *rdo rje*, which is why I have left *vajra* untranslated throughout. Also, since the term has such different symbolic resonances in this religious context from the English word “diamond,” which has its own symbolic layers, I think the use of a foreign word helps to leave the mystery of “*vajra*” intact. Since this particular commentary is explaining the symbolic meaning directly, however, I have chosen to translate the instances where Tsongkhapa uses the Tibetan word *rdo rje* here as “diamond,” so as to distinguish those from the places where he used a Tibetan phoneticization of the Sanskrit “*vajra*” itself. Apart from passages commenting upon this mantra, however, all other instances of “*vajra*” in my translation render the Tibetan *rdo rje*.

awareness itself, which is equated both to the clear light and to primordial knowing, is said to be unconditioned and ultimate reality.¹⁹ Though there is no place for me to engage these ideas properly here, a step by step analysis of such passages might be of use in understanding and resolving apparent conflicts between Tsongkhapa's views, and those of the lineages flowing especially from his Old Translation School predecessor, Longchen Rabjampa (*klong chen rab 'byams pa*, 1308-1363).²⁰

¹⁹ See His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 1984, "Union of the Old and New Translation Schools" in *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, translated by Jeffrey Hopkins, esp. 211:

In Nying-ma, the mind-vajra is posited as the ultimate truth. This ultimate truth is not posited from the viewpoint of being an object found by a consciousness distinguishing emptiness as in the Middle Way School; rather, it is the fundamental mind of clear light which has no beginning and no end, the basis of all the phenomena of cyclic existence and of nirvana. It has a nature of being the Truth Body [i.e., dharmakāya] of the effect stage of Buddhahood. Being beyond all adventitious phenomena, it is called the ultimate truth. The sport, manifestations, or coarse forms of it are conventional truths.

See also the immediately preceding section of the audio recordings of this same talk (September 14th, 1979, Part Two: 21m15s-24m05s), where His Holiness was describing the "view of the Great Perfection" (*rdzog pa chen po'i lta ba*), which is the "indivisibility of awareness and emptiness," whose essence is original purity and whose nature is spontaneous actualization, which manifests its radiance (*mdangs*) without impediment. It is this to which the name "ultimate reality" is applied (in the Great Perfection system). He said it is similar to the "ultimate state of mind" (*blo don dam*) described in Asaṅga's *Madhyāntavibhaṅga*, and to the "ultimate clear light complete stage" within the Guhyasamāja, as well as to the way the name "concordant ultimate" is applied to a state of mind perceiving the ultimate, within the treatises of the Svātantrikas. He went on to say (according to my translation, emphasis corresponds to that of His Holiness' speech):

Here, what is explained as "ultimate reality" is not what is set forth insofar as it is the definitive meaning ascertained by reasoning that examines the final mode [of existence]. Here, what is explained as "ultimate reality" is the *subject* state of mind, the clear light. That very subject state of mind, the clear light, which realizes emptiness, is the indwelling, simultaneously-born mind, which ever continues in a stream that is without beginning, and without end, and is unchanging as a stream. It is like the foundation of all that is in the cycle and beyond it. Insofar as it is the final nature of all that is in the cycle and beyond it, it is called "ultimate reality." Everything that is not that, being what dawns *as the radiance* of the indwelling, simultaneously-born, clear light, insofar as it is adventitious, is called "deceptive reality."

འདིར་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་འཆད་ཡག་འདི་འདིར་མཐར་ཐུག་དབྱེད་པའི་རིགས་པའི་ངེས་དོན་ཡིན་པའི་ཆ་ནས་བཞག་གི་མ་ཟེད། འདིར་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་ཟེར་ནས་འཆད་ཡག་འདི་ཡུལ་ཅན་འོད་གསལ། མྱོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་སྒོ་ཡུལ་ཅན་འོད་གསལ་དེ་ཉིད་གཉུག་མ་ལྷན་གཅིག་སྒྲིམ་པའི་སེམས་གཏན་དུ་བ་རྒྱན་གྱི་ཐོག་མ་མེད་ལྷན་མཐར་མཐའ་མེད་ལྷན་མཐར་གཅིག་གི་རྒྱན་གིས་རྟག་པ། འཁོར་འདས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གཞི་ལྷ་སྒྲ། འཁོར་འདས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་མཐར་ཐུག་པ་འདི་ཡིན་པའི་ཆ་ནས་དེ་ལ་ཡག་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་ཟེད། དེ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ཆོས་འདི་ཆང་མ་ལོག་གཉུག་མ་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྒྲིམ་པའི་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་མདངས་སུ་ཤར་ལྷན་མཐར་སྒོ་བུར་པའི་ཆ་ནས་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་ཟེད།

²⁰ See for example, a representative passage from Longchenpa's *Precious Treasury of the Absolute Space of Phenomena* (*chos dbyings rin po che'i mdzod*) as quoted and translated in "A Jeweled Mirror of Pure Appearances: Establishing the Unity of the Views of the Old and New Translation Schools of Secret Mantrayāna," in B. Alan Wallace (forthcoming, 2018), *Open Mind*:

In the essential nature of pristine bodhicitta
there is no observed object or phenomenon of observation.
There is not even an atom of what is observed or the observation.
There is no mind that meditates and not the slightest object of meditation.
There is neither practice nor anything to be practiced; they are nondual.

[174] . . . Regarding the primordially present kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness,
there are no composite phenomena, nor cause and effect that emerge from adventitious conditions.
If these existed, there would be no self-emergent primordial consciousness.

* * *

The next word in the mantra, *svabhāva* (“nature”), raises for us the major theme of this chapter: what it means to be *pure*, both ultimately and at the level of deceptive appearances, too. Tsongkhapa covers both meanings, here, by turning the very word “nature” on its head. This is the word, whether in Sanskrit or Tibetan, which usually indicates what it is that all things *lack*, from a Middle Way perspective. Within Dharmakīrti’s report of Sautrāntika epistemology, for something to possess a nature or quality from its own side would mean that it is the object of a direct valid perception, which validates it to be just as it appears, free of conceptual overlay.²¹ But in Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way interpretation, where nothing can be established as possessing any quality apart from the conceptual imputation of an observer, the only “nature” that can be found is the fact that an object has no nature. From the point of view of this realization of emptiness, the one nature all things do have would be the nature they do not have.

In expressing this idea, apparently following the explanation of the Indian commentator Śāntipa, Tsongkhapa uses a special turn of phrase, saying that the nature of the aforementioned *śūnyatā jñāna vajra*, or the knowledge-of-emptiness diamond, “is itself *utterly pure of having any nature*.” That is, he uses a classical term for purity (*rnam dag*, Skt. *viśuddha*) to refer, not to a lack of defilements, *per se*, but to the lack of having any nature at all. It is almost as though, were anything to possess a nature from its own side, this would be an indelible kind of defilement. It is only in the second part of his gloss that he explains this very nature that is pure of having any nature to be “bereft of any adventitious stains.”

Implicitly, Tsongkhapa is referring here to two kinds of buddha-nature, or more precisely, two ways in which one belongs to the “family lineage of the Buddhas” (*sangs rgyas kyi rigs*, Skt. *buddha-gotra*). These are typically known as “natural purity” (*rang bzhin rnam dag*) and “purity of what is adventitious” (*glo bur rnam dag*).²² According to

Because of compositeness there is destructibility, and
the phrase *unconditioned spontaneous actualization* indicates some contamination somewhere.
Thus, in the essential nature of ultimate space
there is a transcendence of causality and the ten kinds of nature do not exist.
The genuine, ultimate nature of the mind is without effort or accomplishment.
Seek the knowledge that pacifies all conceptual elaborations of existence and nonexistence.

²¹ See Appendix Ten (612-615).

²² See Appendix Eight (718-722) for a sophisticated analysis of issues surrounding these ideas from Tsongkhapa’s *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*. (“Naturally-abiding family lineage” [*rang bzhin du gnas pa’i rigs*] there, is an expanded form of a Tibetan phrase that corresponds to the same idea as “natural purity,” here, though of course the words differ. Likewise, the “family lineage that blossoms” [*rgyas pa’i rigs*] is roughly equivalent to the “purity of what is adventitious” mentioned here.) See also Appendix Six (299-302), for an indication of Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way interpretation of these ideas, when not positing a foundation consciousness. While I cannot begin to treat the rich and complex history surrounding these terms here, they will return in the remaining arguments of this chapter.

Tsongkhapa's school, the former is typically said to be the innate purity that all things and beings possess, simply by virtue of the fact that they possess no inherent nature and are empty, while the latter is typically understood to be the achieved or fully "blossomed" lineage, realized only through the practices and gradual attainments of the path. In the current context Tsongkhapa states, however, and will continue to emphasize further on, that the nature of this knowledge-of-emptiness diamond is not only the lack of inherent characteristics that all things possess, but refers *also* to the completely actualized wisdom of a Buddha, as it will be at the time of the final result. So it is not simply reference to a potential, here, but to a fully actualized purity.

Although the word for purity (Skt. *śuddha*) does not appear in this mantra, it seems as though Tsongkhapa, following Śāntipa, is reading the word *svabhāva* ("nature") exactly as he would in the *Om svabhāva śuddha* mantra, where the practitioner explicitly identifies with the purity that is the natural purity of all existing things. Thus even here in the *Om śūnyatā* mantra, that word "nature" is read implicitly as "pure nature."²³

What would it mean, however, to identify with such absolute purity, not only as an ultimate, existential fact of Middle Way emptiness, but as the final purity of a Buddha, whose *body*, *speech*, and *mind*, even as deceptive realities, are free of all adventitious stains, ranging from the most basic tendencies for ignorance, to every last trace of karmic action? Would such an identification not be affirming something that is not actually true of "oneself"? Tsongkhapa explains the last two words of the mantra to mean, "whatever identity is pure of having any nature at all, that itself am I." In answer to our many qualms raised in Chapters Three and Four, this phrase indicates what Tsongkhapa holds to be the one pure foundation of divine pride, the only authentic basis upon which to label a divinized "I." It is the *empty* basis upon which the wisdom realizing emptiness gazes, and not anything that has the deceptive characteristics of being this or that person in the world. With an inversion of meaning that parallels the previous use of "nature," this is now the *identity*, or that which has the very character (*bdag nyid*, Skt. *ātmaka*), *of having no identity*.

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that if this terminology as cited here (in the *Steps of Mantra*) indeed represents Śāntipa's explanation, and we already saw (in Chapter Four) that Śāntipa belonged to the school of Jñānapāda, and if this was indeed a school of tantric exegesis based in Yogācāra-Madhyamaka philosophy, then it is all the more pertinent that we should find classical phrases associated with teachings on buddha-nature in this explanation. Textual verification of all these associations remains the task of future research.

²³ Note again that Tsongkhapa will say in this same commentary (Appendix Two [814]) that the inner meaning of all such mantras is equivalent:

Śāntipa says, "You should understand the meaning of the words that come in the other mantras of blessing – ' . . . *vajra svabhāva ātmako'ham*' – in the same way as this." In the same way, for all the mantras that indicate emptiness, such as *svabhāva śuddha*," and so forth, although the words may be different, you should recall the meaning according to the explanations given above.

From a Middle Way perspective, this much might be familiar, as a recognition of the ultimate lack of a self to the person, but what Tsongkhapa will say next indicates that once again, in this tantric context it means more than that.²⁴

Therefore, the sound for the primordial knowing of emptiness indicates that one's realization of emptiness consists of a subjective state of mind holding an abstraction. Nonetheless, this is a sheer conviction towards the defining characteristics of the actual nature of the thing, *as they are in the end*. The sound for diamond further expresses a *conviction towards the final, utter purity*, and the word for nature, too, *refers to the time that will come in the end*, to an utterly pure nature with nothing beyond it.

Thus Tsongkhapa affirms simultaneously the limited perspective of the practitioner and that absolute goal *towards which* he or she is to cultivate the sheer conviction that it is already accomplished. This short passage may communicate the heart of what Tsongkhapa means by “taking the result as the path.” He expresses it, once again, with reference to Dharmakīrti's terminology. Tsongkhapa acknowledges the initial duality of a conceptual state of mind, a subject (*yul can*) holding an abstraction (*spyi*) as its object. Thus the realization of emptiness is still filtered by an abstraction of what it means to be empty of inherent nature; it is not a direct perception of the unclassifiable ultimate. But insofar as such a conceptual state of mind can be correctly oriented towards representative abstractions of what it is that defines the actual nature of the thing (*chos nyid*) – which is beyond characteristics – it can plant an entirely new kind of tendency, one that should eventually ripen into direct communion with ultimate reality itself.

Thus the mantric sound *jñāna* here, in a sense, covers the entire span of wisdom, from its nascent beginnings to its final fruition, yet always *oriented* towards that final fruition. Likewise, Tsongkhapa says that the words *vajra* and *svabhāva* refer to the final utter purity, i.e., that of a Buddha, with nothing left over (*lhag po med*) to purify, or still to be actualized. So in classic buddha-nature terminology, the practitioner can take refuge in the fact that he or she is already empty of inherent nature, while developing sheer conviction towards the future fact of being free of all adventitious defilements as well. But that future fact is being taken as already true, in characteristic Vajrayāna fashion.

It becomes clear, however, that the genuinely indivisible *vajra*-mind which Tsongkhapa has described thus far must in fact refer only to what will be realized as the actual clear light. According to the five stages system of Guhyasamāja interpretation, this will not become fully manifest until the fourth stage of the complete stage. Nonetheless, it is that towards which one must have sheer conviction from the very beginning of the creation stage. It is in this sense that one might come to believe, upon the authentic basis of understanding the meaning of clear light wisdom, that the fully enlightened Buddha is

²⁴ See Appendix Two (811), new emphasis added.

already here.²⁵ It is from this dharmakāya mind of the Buddha, which is *śūnyatā jñāna vajra*, that the practitioner must believe all further transformations of divine form to emerge. As we have seen, for Tsongkhapa the emptiness is the beheld aspect of the knowing, while it is the luminously aware part (*gsal ba'i rig cha*) of the indivisible clear light mind that dawns as the divine being and the maṇḍala. So it is the clear light mind that serves as the basis for all pure appearances. But insofar as that is a mind that was *always* at the foundation of one's existence, as sheer clarity and awareness, it is also held to be the foundation for all the appearances of saṃsāra.²⁶

We have perhaps come full circle, then, in beginning to understand what was implied in Tsongkhapa's explanation, near the beginning of his *Exegesis of the "Steps of Exposition,"* of Great Vajradhara as the "creator of pure living beings," and the "lord of consciousness" as "that which creates the mind of all *beings-with-a-mind*, that is, impure living beings."²⁷ Great Vajradhara indicates the completely pure clear light mind knowing emptiness, indivisible from great bliss. Tsongkhapa had stated explicitly that the lord of consciousness, or the stream of mental consciousness that continues from lifetime to lifetime, does create all the worlds of saṃsāra, but he was very uncomfortable equating

²⁵ In this way, too, I would argue that Tsongkhapa's view here (as opposed to what is expressed in his sūtra writings on the *Steps of the Path*), appears to be not so far from the Great Perfection tradition of affirming that the indwelling mind of pristine awareness (*rig pa*), is always present and active, from the beginning of the path, and not only something to be achieved or realized far in the future. The precise method of practice by which to actualize that clear light awareness does of course differ significantly between the two traditions, but I suggest that there is room for much further consideration as to what it would actually entail to practice a creation stage sādhanā according to Tsongkhapa's instructions here, believing fully that what may appear to be not-yet-actual is, in a very authentic sense, already present.

²⁶ Though the theory for this point is more readily apparent in Tsongkhapa's works on the complete stage, it is evident even in his one-line gloss of a mantra that appears later in the Guhyasamāja sādhanā, when taking the intermediate state as the path (*The Stages of Pure Yoga*, *dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa*, vol. ja, 13b6-14a1 [716-717]):

Make firm the pride that 'I am nothing but the winds and mind that are the root of all the phenomena of vessels and their inhabitants – appearing as a moon.' This is the suchness of meditative equipoise on primordial consciousness alone.

སྒྲིབ་བཅུད་ཀྱི་ཚེས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྩ་བ་རྒྱུད་སེམས་ཅམ་ལྷ་བར་སྤང་བ་དེ་རལ་སྤྲུམ་དུ་རྒྱལ་བ་ཏན་པར་བྱ་བ་ནི། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཅམ་ལ་སྤྲུམ་ས་པར་འཇུག་པའི་དེ་ཉིད་
ནི།

See also, Appendix Six (302), to be discussed below in the section, "Using Seeds to Put an End to Seeds." This is explained from a sūtra perspective, where there would of course be no mention of the extremely subtle mind of clear light, but rather here it is the stream of "mental consciousness" that is understood to form the basic continuum of creative awareness:

Therefore, since he [Nāgārjuna] does not accept a foundation consciousness that could be separate in essence from mental consciousness, the mention of "foundation of all" means this: In general, the *mere fact that mind is aware and clear is set forth as the "foundation of all,"* and in particular, this is set forth as the mental consciousness. This is true (1) because in answer to the refutation of the idea that just mind in general could exist by nature, this [being aware and clear] is how it is suitable for mind to perform activities, while not existing really; (2) because the mind that grasps hold of a birth in cyclic existence is the mental consciousness; and (3) *because mental consciousness is the foundation of all afflicted existence and all that is totally pure.*

²⁷ See Chapter Two, "The Creator of Worlds," especially note 8, and the quotation cited at note 9.

the two types of mind, even though Nāgabuddhi's text could have been interpreted that way. Thus in Tsongkhapa's milieu – as in the practice of “dividing mind from pristine awareness” (*sems rig shan phyed*) in the Great Perfection tradition – one must still distinguish the continuum of coarse mental consciousness from the primordially indwelling mind of simultaneously-born clear light. The former can be “subtle” in states of deep sleep, death, or meditative equipoise, but is still not the same as the “extremely subtle” mind. It is the former that is said to create “these three realms” of saṃsāra from nothing more than conceptual thought, while it is the latter that is described as creating pure worlds from the effulgences of nothing more than extremely subtle winds and mind. Nevertheless, the latter, clear light mind, is still the fundamental ground for the very possibility of the former, mental consciousness, to exist. So although pure awareness, which by definition “knows” the way all things actually exist, never created ignorance nor the worlds formed on the basis of the twelve links, the living beings who create and experience those worlds are still always already grounded in the same primordial mind of absolute purity. But such primordial awareness must be *realized* in order for the illusions that constitute the impure worlds to fall away.²⁸

Recalling Tsongkhapa's discussion of this distinction between the two kinds of consciousness near the start of his *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* lends poignancy to the fact that very near the end of the same lengthy *Exegesis*, most of which I have not treated here, Tsongkhapa translates the whole *śūnyatā* mantra as follows:²⁹

Thus it means: “I am the identity which has the nature of the diamond that is the primordial knowing of emptiness.” This is because the mind, which for that yogi

²⁸ See Appendix Seventeen for an introduction to these distinctions in Tsongkhapa's work on the Five Stages. Further, though it is not the main topic of this present writing, it should be pointed out that an idea such as this could form a particularly unique basis for great compassion within the unsurpassed class of Vajrayāna, where everything is explained from the point of view of the extremely subtle mind of indivisible wisdom that is to be realized at the stage of the “actual clear light.” As mentioned above in the section on the Buddhas' omniscience, in Tsongkhapa's view the dharmakāya mind sees the suffering perceptions of living beings, even as it knows perfectly the stuff of which those beings are made at the most primordial and subtle level, “if only they had eyes” to recognize who they are. Furthermore, because it transcends all conceptual designation, there is no ultimate basis upon which to separate “my clear light” from “your clear light” or “his clear light,” and so on. Even Tsongkhapa's phrase, *sems can rnam kyi gnyug ma'i lus*, might be translated as either “the primordially indwelling body of each living being,” or as “the primordially indwelling body of every living being,” according to context. See Appendix Seventeen (462) and (465). It would seem, then, that once made manifest, the ground awareness is equal towards all and in all, yet for each one who experiences, it is “one's own” (*rang gi rig pa*). So the realized Buddha could love all that is – whether worlds or the illusory appearances of individual sentient beings – as expressions of the same fundamental mind, and would have compassion upon all as not separate from that mind, neither one nor many. Understanding such ideas at their depth in the course of future interreligious dialogue, may offer new perspective for theological interpretations of the classical Christian injunctions to “love one another as I have loved you,” (John 15:12) and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

²⁹ See Appendix Two (173).

is the principal basis for conventional designation as a self, has experienced itself to be indivisible from the actual nature of the way things are.³⁰

When the mental consciousness that is the foundation of suffering worlds recognizes its true nature as emptiness, and when in the process all coarser forms of mental consciousness dissolve, revealing only the extremely subtle mind of clear light, which is deeper than any form of the “mental consciousness” that spun saṃsāra’s worlds, this pristine awareness is indivisible from its emptiness, and is the valid basis for being identified as Great Vajradhara, the creator of pure worlds.

Yet in actual practice, this cannot happen all at once. Reassuringly, perhaps, Tsongkhapa makes the following point in his *Steps of Mantra*:³¹

When, with the incisive wisdom of individual analysis you set forth the fact that nothing at all in the cycle or beyond it is established ultimately, you might not undo the fact that the objective field appearing to that state of mind has an appearance of duality. Nevertheless, since you have turned back the appearance of duality that *the actual object presents to the ascertaining consciousness*, it is not necessary to focus on anything else in order to thoroughly pacify the appearance of duality.

Thus he acknowledges that, try as one might to understand emptiness perfectly, the beginner will not be able to achieve the complete withdrawal of elaboration associated with the unclassifiable, or actual ultimate reality, much less the manifestation of the extremely subtle mind associated specifically with the complete stage of unsurpassed yoga tantra. If that *were* possible, then stages would be unnecessary, and one would leap

³⁰ It is worthwhile to compare this with Tsongkhapa’s own instruction for meditation on “the ultimate divine being” (*don dam pa’i lha*) within the sādhanas of action tantra. According to Geshe Norsang, the principal difference between the meditation that follows and that of the unsurpassed tantras is the step of transforming the subject state of mind into the experience of great bliss, as described previously. Philosophically, however, the principle is the same. See the *Steps of Mantra* (*sngags rim chen mo*), vol. *ga*, 61b5-62a2 (122-123):

In this way, my own suchness is ultimately bereft of all elaboration. In just the same way the suchness of the divine being is also like that. Thus those two are inseparable, like water and milk. Through that very door of appearances in which there is no conceptualization of an aspect, the pride of identification is formed in which both myself and the divine being are made one. When there are no appearances, this turns into an extremely certain awareness. For as long as that lasts, remain in a firm state of concentration. This is the ultimate divine being.

Thus you meditate on the emptiness that is empty of any kind of a “self” to a person or to things. This is the same crucial point as in other classes of tantra, where one utters the *svabhāva* mantra, and so forth, and meditates on its meaning, before meditating on the divine being.

།དེ་ལྟར་བདག་གི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དོན་དམ་པར་སྒྲིམ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བལ་པ་ཇི་ལྟར་ཡིན་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ལྟའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱང་དེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་པས་དེ་གཉིས་ལྷ་དང་འོ་མ་འདྲེས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་དབྱེར་མེད་པར་རྒྱུ་ལ་མེད་པའི་སྒྲིག་པའི་སྒྲིག་དུ་བདག་དང་ལྷ་གཉིས་གཅིག་པར་རྒྱུ་བྱས་ཏེ། སྒྲུང་བ་མེད་པར་རང་གིས་རིག་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ངེས་པར་ལྷར་པ་དེ་སྤྱིད་དུ་བསམས་གཏན་བྱ་སྟེ་དོན་དམ་པའི་ལྷ་འོ། །དེ་ལྟར་གང་ཐག་དང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་མཐའ་དག་གིས་སྒྲིང་པའི་སྒྲིང་པ་ཉིད་སྒྲིམ་པ་ནི། ལྷ་སྟེ་གཞན་ནས་ལྷ་སྒྲིམ་པའི་སྒྲིང་དུ་སྒྲིམ་པ་སོགས་པའི་སྒྲིག་པ་བརྗོད་ནས་དེའི་དོན་སྒྲིམ་པ་དང་གནད་གཅིག་གོ།

³¹ See Appendix Two (814).

straightaway to the direct perception of emptiness, experienced with a subject state of mind dissolved nondually into the actual clear light. But the gradual path orientation of the whole Guhyasamāja system would never promise such an outcome. Tsongkhapa does imply, however, that it is this very act of turning back the way one was *holding* to the appearance, which, in turn, makes the object gradually stop *appearing* as though it came from something other than a ripening tendency within consciousness, or as though it had some nature of its own.³² It seems this two-step process would parallel the process of overcoming first the insistent belief in, and then eventually even the appearance, to mental consciousness, of things as ordinary.

* * *

Philosophically, however, it remains for us to ask exactly how it could be that the one kind of purity, the lack of nature we already have, could lead to the other kind of purity, the utter freedom from adventitious defilements. For if we have “always had” the lack of inherent nature, it does not seem to have helped us much, as long as we are still trapped in the cycle of suffering. These are vast questions within the Mahāyāna sūtra literature associated with the “third turning of the wheel,” especially those scriptures that deal directly with buddha-nature and the idea of the foundation consciousness. From the point of view of our own inquiry, regarding how the meditations of creation stage are designed to prepare the practitioner for the complete stage, however, the issue at hand might be narrowed. Specifically, I would suggest it comes down to the question of how it is that the practices of re-envisioning death, the intermediate state, and rebirth as the embodiments and actions of an already-enlightened Buddha might work to purify (*sbyong ba*) the basis to be purified, namely one’s own potential future death, and so on, within saṃsāra. What is it about the fact that death and the rest never had a nature of their own, which could mean that as deceptive experiences they might be purified within a very short period of intensive practice, i.e., just one, or a few, human lifetimes, rather than three or more countless eons, as promised by the sūtra Mahāyāna path?

I have suggested roughly that in Tsongkhapa’s thought, this process has something to do with transforming the tendencies and mental imprints that drive one to label empty appearances in the way that one does. I would say, more precisely now, that in this system defilements and karmic tendencies can only be purified, in the sense of eliminated, because they were already pure of having any inherent nature in the first

³² See Appendix Seven, “Two Strategies for a Cure” (333-338) for further discussion of the relationship between these two formulations of the object to be refuted. Cf., also, the tenth verse of the *Three Principal Paths* (cited in Chapter One, note 48):

Suppose you see the infallible cause and effect
of every existing thing, whether of the suffering cycle
or beyond, and the point of contact upon which you were focusing
as an object entirely dissolves; then you are someone who has entered
the path that pleases the enlightened ones.

place. Once the practitioner realizes the inveterate experiences of life and death to be nothing more than the ephemeral, deceptive projections of abstracted mental images, the manifest natures of suffering existence might become much easier to dissolve. The more one understands Tsongkhapa's point about the beheld aspect of consciousness dawning by the power of a karmic tendency, the more the onus falls upon the mind, and the mind alone, to transform how it perceives; because the only kind of defilements one ever had, anyway, consist of the mind appearing to the mind in a certain way. Yet from Tsongkhapa's Middle Way point of view, not even ignorance, mental afflictions, or karmic traces have any characteristics of their own. So, if the mind can somehow see through the way it appears to itself, the dust and ashes of countless defilements could eventually vanish into the thin air of the clear light mind. But if empty, why have such karmic traces continued to ripen so persistently? If in the Middle Way there is no foundation consciousness, then where is one to seek out the seeds and tendencies, that they might be faced, cleaned, and transformed?

Before we can even address these questions properly from Tsongkhapa's point of view, however, we must examine the philosophical idea that throbs at the heart of his entire explanation of the *Om śūnyatā* mantra above. What is this "principal basis for conventional designation as a self" that Tsongkhapa affirms to be the mind of the yogi? Understanding that, how could a tantric practice that changes the basis of designation for a self ever begin to transform *the very way that karma ripens* upon that "I"?

* * *

A Mere "I"

In order to understand more deeply Tsongkhapa's oft-repeated point about shifting the way in which one designates the "I" upon a basis in order for a divine being to arise, we must explore three interrelated ideas that are central to Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Candrakīrti's Middle Way. These are: (1) the mere "I," which *does* exist, and how it might be recognized experientially; (2) the way in which karma is planted upon that mere "I," without needing to posit a separate foundation consciousness as a home for all the seeds; and, as a logical justification for this position, (3) the emptiness of time, involving the idea that something which has ended still has merely-labeled causal efficacy, even "after" the event is over. These three points will in turn help us to understand how Tsongkhapa could explain the idea of buddha-nature in a strictly Middle Way sense, thus reinterpreting the intended meaning of sayings in the scriptures usually associated with the third turning of the wheel of Dharma.

For what I believe to be Tsongkhapa's foundational reference to the mere "I," we turn to a series of passages near the beginning of his commentary to the sixth chapter of Candrakīrti's *Entering the Middle Way*, in which Tsongkhapa is treating the core Middle

Way idea of how “all things are posited by the power of conceptual thought.”³³ Following Candrakīrti’s commentary to Āryadeva’s *Four Hundred Verses*,³⁴ Tsongkhapa introduces the classical example of the rope and the snake. Briefly, the illustration refers to a situation such as the following: You are walking at twilight on a narrow pathway in tropical India, and faintly see the shape of some long coiled thing, with a mottled color, just at the edge of your next intended step. Fear grips at your throat, and you teeter backwards, off-balance, as human instinct does everything possible to prevent you from stepping in that direction. Once recovering from the near-fall, heart pounding, you tentatively peer closer, and feel ridiculous. It was just a coil of piled rope, with no head, no fangs, and not the least bit of a threat. With this in mind, we can understand Tsongkhapa’s analysis of what happened during the initial phase of false imputation.³⁵

At that moment, there is not even the slightest reason for positing, with respect to the rope as a whole, nor with respect to any of its parts, that it is a prime example of what it means to be a snake. Thus its “snake” is merely labeled with a concept.

Similarly, if in dependence upon the heaps, the thought, “I am” arises, *there is not even the slightest reason for positing upon the heaps* – whether considered as a gathering of the stream of earlier and later moments, or else as the gathering of a single moment and its parts – *that they are a prime example of what it means to be “I.”*

This correlation with the illustration brings home vividly what it means for something to be “merely labeled” in this Middle Way sense. It means there is absolutely nothing there in the basis that makes it right or necessary for one to label it in the way one does, just as there is nothing there in the rope that is, from its own side, what it means to be a snake. To understand how this is applied to the “I,” however, without going overboard and thinking one does not exist at all, one must pay close attention to the fact that Tsongkhapa says, “whether considered as a gathering of the stream of earlier and later moments, or else as the gathering of a single moment and its parts.” Once again, this means that one could never *find* any one particular instance of the many physical and mental components that make up a person, which is itself “what it means to be ‘I.’” Nor could one find a quintessential example of that “I” in the collection of all the parts together, *if they had never been labeled that way*. It is just like the fact that the coiled rope as a whole is not a snake, nor can it make you afraid, until you think of it as “snake.”

Tsongkhapa goes on to make two important clarifications in this section, though, which are essential to the way our interpretation will unfold. First, when explaining a verse from Nāgārjuna’s *Garland of Precious Jewels*, Tsongkhapa states that, “In this

³³ See Appendix Four (172) ff.

³⁴ *Bodhisattva-yogācāra-catuhśataka-tīka*, *byang chub sems dpa’i rnal ’byor spyod pa bzhi brgya pa’i rgya cher ’grel pa*, Toh. 3865, dbu ma, vol. ya. See Appendix Four (173) and note 3.

³⁵ Appendix Four (174).

way, *it is not that we do not accept the person*, but we also do not want to say that a foundation consciousness or the like is the person.”³⁶ Thus he is laying the groundwork for an argument he will take up later on, namely, how it is that there can still be a person who performs all the functions we associate with what it means to be a person, precisely through being “merely labeled” in the way described here. But he does not accept any proposed entity, such as a foundation consciousness, which would be posited *à priori* as having characteristics of its own. For then that would necessitate some form of a person who existed beyond the mere label, and according to his interpretation of the Middle Way, this is impossible.

Lest we think there is no difference between ropes and snakes, or between calling someone by their proper name or mistaking them for someone else, however, Tsongkhapa also clarifies:³⁷

On the one hand, there is a part of the way in which everything such as a vase is “set forth through concepts” that is similar to what happens when one designates a “snake” upon a rope. But things such as a vase are completely different from the rope’s snake in terms of whether they exist or not, and whether they can perform a function or not; because they are not at all the same in terms of whether one definitely *has to* apply such a conventional term, and whether or not there is damage done to the process of making conventions.

When one recognizes that the snake one had labeled upon the rope never existed at all, there is the instant relief that the rope will not turn out to function in the way a poisonous cobra would have done. Recognizing that there is nothing in the parts of a person that are what it means to be “me” from their own side, might not carry the same immediate relief, however, insofar as karmic forces and shared human conventions still compel one to apply that label habitually, and insofar as those heaps will continue to function, and suffer pain, and feel emotions, and so on, as long as the seeds for such karmic cycles have not been completely eradicated. But according to Middle Way thought in general, understanding the point about the rope and the snake *is* the first step to relinquishing the grasping to a “me” that was never there anyway, a “me” that would have already existed within the heaps, really, apart from any labeling process.³⁸

³⁶ Appendix Four (174).

³⁷ Appendix Four (175).

³⁸ It should be pointed out that according to a further Middle Way Consequence-style analysis of the example, there is nothing in the rope that is a prime example of “rope,” either. But in light of Tsongkhapa’s practical observations here about the way that even conventionally established things do perform their functions, one should not start picking up rattlesnakes as if they were ropes. Nevertheless, when at a certain point a very advanced meditator can see clearly that there is nothing in a snake that is “snake” apart from one’s conceptions, either, then indeed fear of a “real snake” might be overcome, too. I would argue in contemporary parlance, however, that the understanding of this emptiness would have to go down layer by layer, to the level of one’s conceptions regarding the chemical structure that constitutes “poison” or not, and all its relevant effects at the molecular level. Furthermore, to overcome the valid basis of fear entirely,

In distinguishing between, on the one hand, the two kinds of grasping to a self, and on the other hand, two forms of the inborn, or naturally-arising view of the destructible collection, Tsongkhapa cites a verse from much later in Candrakīrti's root text (6:150) to say that the so-called “destructible view” (*jig lta*, Skt. *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) that grasps to a self must focus not just upon the heaps, but on the self that does exist, the “self that is labeled in dependence.”³⁹ Therefore, Tsongkhapa says the destructible view “must focus just upon the mere ‘I’ and the mere person that arise as an object of focus from the mere thought, ‘I am.’”⁴⁰

That is, the two kinds of grasping to a self, with respect to persons and things, focus upon something that does not exist at all. That is, they grasp to “an *essence* of anything that could exist without relying upon another thing (such as the subject state of mind that conceptualizes a convention), or a *nature* that was not set forth by the power of such a state of mind . . .”⁴¹ But there are also two kinds of destructible view; one which

one would have to have the ability to shift the karmic tendencies ripening moment to moment in one's mind, by the force of which one validly labels that as “poison,” and its interaction with “blood” and so on, as well. For that kind of transformation one would have to be a yogi with the capacity to concentrate with unshakeable stability, and to effect a change in the process of karmically-driven identification of the beheld aspect, down to the subtlest vibrations of atomic and subatomic particles. According to the Guhyasamāja system, one would likely only gain such abilities during the complete stage, or else along with the “accomplishments” (Skt. *siddhi*) gained at the final end of creation stage. While I cannot begin to treat the subject of “actual” tantric transformation at that level, I hope what I have said philosophically so far can begin to lay the groundwork for the kind of future inquiry that would be necessary in order to make sense of the repeated scriptural references to the yogic transformation of physical substances in a way that takes those claims seriously.

³⁹ Appendix Four (178), and note 6. See also Tsongkhapa's reference to this view of Candrakīrti's in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), vol. *pa*, 475a6-475b3 (981-982):

Now if you wonder whether the mere gathering of all the heaps together is a self, this is unreasonable; because, insofar as it is stated that something is designated as a self *in dependence upon* the five heaps, it would not make sense for the basis of designation to *be* the designation. On this point *Entering the Middle Way* [v. 6:135] says:

The sūtras state that it is in dependence upon the heaps;

Therefore just the gathering of the heaps is not a self.

On the other hand, if the mere collection of the heaps were a self, then there would be the problem that action and actor would be the same. This is stated in the root text of *Entering the Middle Way* and its commentary: Those who say that each of the heaps is what is taken on by a self, must also say that all five of the heaps are what is taken on. But if it were like that, then it would have to turn out that the collection of all the heaps is what is taken on. The collection is the *basis of designation of a self*, but it is not a self.

From this statement, it is clear that one must also accept the stream of the heaps to be like that, too.

ཁོ་ན་སྤང་པོ་འདུས་པ་ཙམ་བདག་ཡིན་ནམ་སྤྲུལ་ན་དེ་ཡང་མི་རིགས་ཏེ། སྤང་པོ་ལྷ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནམ་བདག་ཏུ་འདོགས་པར་གསུངས་པས་ན། གང་གས་གཞི་བཏགས་ཆོས་སྤྲུལ་མི་འཐད་པའི་བྱེད་རྩོ། །དེ་ཡང་འཇུག་པ་ལས། མདོ་ལས་སྤང་པོ་བརྟེན་ནམ་ཡིན་གསུངས་པ། །དེ་བྱེད་སྤང་པོ་འདུས་ཙམ་བདག་མ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་སོ། །གཞན་ཡང་སྤང་པོ་ཆོགས་ཙམ་བདག་ཡིན་ན་ལས་དང་བྱེད་པ་པོ་གཅིག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བའི་སྟོན། འཇུག་པ་ཙམ་འགྲེལ་དུ་གསུངས་ཏེ། སྤང་པོ་རེ་རེ་ནམ་བདག་གི་ཉེ་བར་སྒྲུབ་འདོད་པས་ནི་སྤང་པོ་ལྷ་ཉེ་བར་སྒྲུབ་པར་བྱ་བར་འདོད་དགོས་ལ། དེ་ལྷ་ན་སྤང་པོ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཆོགས་པ་ཡང་ཉེ་བར་སྒྲུབ་འགྱུར་དགོས་པའི་བྱེད་རྩོ། །ཆོགས་པ་བདག་གི་གང་གས་གཞི་ཡིན་གྱི། བདག་མ་ཡིན་པར་གསུངས་པ་འདིས་སྤང་པོ་འདི་རྒྱན་ལ་ཡང་དེ་ལྷར་འདོད་དགོས་པར་གསལ་ལོ།

⁴⁰ Appendix Four (178).

⁴¹ Appendix Four (177).

pertains to oneself, or “I,” and one which pertains to “what is mine.” Tsongkhapa’s point, with respect to the first, is that the inborn view that looks upon the destructible collection (*’jig tshogs*) and then spontaneously and instinctively grasps to a self must first look upon something that *does* exist, conventionally, in order that it should then construct an object of false grasping with respect to that valid appearance. So Tsongkhapa takes the “inborn view of the destructible collection that grasps to a self” (*bdag ’dzin gyi ’jig lta lhan skyes*) as a subset of the “grasping to a self of persons.” That is, it is a view that can arise only with respect to oneself, as opposed to another person. This view must have some way of looking upon the whole of a merely labeled person that *does* exist, in order to get something fundamentally wrong about the way it views that “me.” “Thus,” says Tsongkhapa, “the object upon which the inborn view of the destructible collection focuses must arise from within the state of mind that thinks ‘I am.’”⁴²

To help us understand these difficult points as they appear within the *Illumination of the True Thought* (for the details of which I must refer my reader to Appendix Four), I will here turn instead to a different section of the *Twenty-One Brief Pieces on Guhyasamāja*, also a record of private meditation advice from Je Tsongkhapa, as written down by Baso Chö Je and Khedrup Je. This *Brief Piece on the View* provides extremely concise tips for how to meditate on stillness and insight in a classical sūtra sense. Nonetheless, insofar as it does appear as part of an anthology explicitly devoted to the practice of Guhyasamāja, it does not seem out of place to read it as direct instruction for how to recognize, experientially, the difference between the mere “I” and the misguided mode of grasping, precisely *as preparation for* meditating on the Guhyasamāja sādhanā. Thus I think it could help us to understand what was meant in “the crucial point for positing the pride of a divine identity.” According to the practical instruction:⁴³

To begin, here is the way that a measure of the thing to be refuted actually dawns. Initially, look for how the mere “I” dawns within the naturally-arising mind. Then, once you have ascertained that, look for how that mere “I” appears to the mind that thinks “I am.” From that appearance, how is it that this mind which thinks “I am” grasps onto that “I”? You must rely on the antidote that differentiates these two modes of appearing in sequence: (1) how the appearance

⁴² Appendix Four (178). To clarify the two sets, it seems Tsongkhapa wants to say that the inborn grasping to a self and the inborn destructible view that grasps to a self differ insofar as the former focuses on something that does not exist at all, whereas the latter constructs and insistently believes in something that doesn’t exist at all, *while still focusing on the “me” that does exist*. In terms of the inborn destructible view that grasps to what is “mine,” however, Tsongkhapa insists that it does not focus on my eyes, my ears, and so on (for then it would be tantamount to grasping to a self in things). Rather, as I interpret Tsongkhapa’s subtle Tibetan here, this view grasps at the “*very fact of belonging to me*” (*nga yi ba nyid*) as something that should have characteristics of its own, as opposed to just grasping at “*what is mine*” (as having characteristics of its own). For the latter would indeed just be “grasping to a self in things,” and Tsongkhapa clearly implies that this and the inborn destructible view of what is mine are mutually exclusive (*gal ba*), i.e., something that is one cannot also be the other.

⁴³ See Appendix Three (37-38).

dawns *prior* to the act of grasping, and then (2) how the insistent belief dawns.

Baso Chö Je, echoing the voice of Tsongkhapa,⁴⁴ tells his reader to look for how the mere “I” simply shows up within the state of mind that is inborn, spontaneous, unaffected, or naturally-arising (all possible translations for *blo lhan skyes* in this context). Since this section of the text immediately follows a short section on attaining meditative stillness, I think it safe to assume that what Baso Je means here is the basic state of the continuum of mental consciousness, once it has settled into a balanced meditative equipoise. He is not indicating any extraordinary state of subtle or extremely subtle mind, as might be elicited through advanced Guhyasamāja practices, nor any of the higher states of concentration or absorption in form or formless realm meditation. Thus the term *lhan skyes* (roughly equivalent in valence to the Skt. *sahaja*), though an abbreviation of the same term that I have translated as “simultaneously-born” when referring to the primordially indwelling mind of clear light (*gnyug sems lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal*), seems here to have quite a different connotation. As in colloquial Tibetan, it simply means natural or connate, i.e., the kind of mind you were born with.

When resting in that state, free of distraction or dullness, with the very sharp mental acuity honed through any of the practices for attaining stillness – a state typically characterized by bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality – one is to watch carefully for the first shimmer of “I” breaking through the stillness. Baso Je distinguishes between the way that such an “I” appears, and the mind to which it appears: the mind that thinks the thought, “I am.” Then one should detect, very quietly, and without disturbing the stability of the meditation, how the mind that thinks “I,” apparently in response to having observed an “I” that appears, begins to grasp onto that “I” as real. Note the same pattern we have seen, from the appearance of and the insistent belief in things as ordinary, to the appearance of and the belief in things as real, now echoed here in the appearance of, the conceiving of, and then the grasping to, “I.”

Baso Je continues by asking his reader to look as though from another corner of the mind, and to check whether there is a sequence to how the “I” dawns with respect to the appearance of the heaps. To understand what is implied here, one must be aware that full meditative stillness would consist of a state of mind in which all the functions of the physical senses as well as extraneous thought patterns had been suspended, so that when the author speaks of the heaps “dawning,” I think he is referring to a sensation of “re-entering” or “re-forming” a body and sense perceptions, a sensation that is well-documented by advanced meditators.⁴⁵ So it seems Baso Je is asking the meditator just to

⁴⁴ Apparently as related through Baso’s elder brother, Khedrup Je. See the colophon: Appendix Three (40).

⁴⁵ See Tsongkhapa’s *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. *pha*, 162a2 (325): “When you rise from that [meditative equipoise], an experience will dawn in which it seems as though your body has suddenly come into being.” དེ་ལས་ལངས་པ་ན་ལུས་སྒོ་བྱུར་བྱུར་པ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཉམས་འཆར་རྟོ། (Cf. Wallace, 2005, *Balancing the Mind*, 207.) See also Geshe Gedün Lodrö, 1992, *Walking Through Walls*, 251-252, for an explanation of the same idea.

look carefully, without overt conceptual analysis, to notice what happens. Did the heaps come first, and then the “I” drop down on them later? Or was the “I” there first, all alone, after which the thoughts, memories, body, and so on, came along later? Was the “I” sitting in the middle with body, feelings, discrimination, and the rest circled all around it? Was it inextricably mixed with them? Or is the “I” a delineated form, with its own color and shape, hovering in the sky by itself? Baso Je’s point – saying that none of these would be a “pure way of dawning” (*’char tshul rnam dag*)⁴⁶ – seems to be that if you can look carefully enough, without disturbing or adding any conceptual overlay, it will become clear that none of these ideas conveys what actually takes place when one thinks, “I am.” That is, they are not “pure,” because they are not what happens. It may also indicate that the “I” never dawns absolutely, from its own side, or all by itself.

Offering a description of what one should eventually perceive clearly, Baso Je continues:⁴⁷

Thus, that “I” dawns within this naturally-arising mind as though it had no objective field whatsoever to rely upon, as something vividly sparkling from its own side. That very “I” comes as a naked convention, like something concrete, resplendent in potential, glistening, as though it could dawn affixed to anything at all. But that appearance abides only briefly, not dawning for more than an instant. Furthermore, it dawns as though it were a memory of something that had already been established previously, along with that state of mind.

The language is tantalizing. It suggests a moment of perception in which one might notice the sheer freedom of a “naked convention,” which as yet has nothing to which it is affixed, but yet still has an energy to it, a possibility for meaning. In one sense, it seems almost like a floating placeholder, with no owner and no referent, yet even as it dawns, it seems like a faint memory of something that was already there, and must have been there as long as the mind was aware. ‘For it’s my mind, right?’ But in that very instant the grasping has taken place. The infinite potential of the naked convention crashes down to particularity, to fuse with *these* heaps and *this* identity, as though it had always been that way. Baso Je says it can appear either as though this “I” is really something separate from the heaps, or as though it is really the same as the heaps, but either way, this is where the analytical meditation that follows must show that *neither* possibility makes sense logically.

I will not elaborate here on those methods of analysis, for these have been treated extensively in prior scholarship on the classic Middle Way four-fold examination of a

⁴⁶ Appendix Three (38).

⁴⁷ Appendix Three (38).

“self” with respect to the heaps.⁴⁸ The crucial point for our current inquiry is to imagine the moment at which the thought “I” has not yet been branded, nor yet joined to the heaps as their appropriate label. For Baso Je says that as soon as one thinks “I go,” “I stay,” or “I am doing this,” the *insistent belief* has already set in. It is impossible for an ordinary being to think “I” without thinking of it as an I that exists with a nature of its own, either the same as, separate from, or somewhere in the midst of the parts of me, even though none of these options will prove tenable upon rigorous analysis. The point is that the mere label, “I,” does dawn as a valid name for the heaps, and the designated referent of that label, what is simply *me*,⁴⁹ does exist. But as soon as the mind thinks that the connection between the name and its referent was already there from before, was always like that, and was really there before I noticed, one has grasped on to a kind of “I” that never could have existed in *that* way, and the conventional valid perception of a mere “I” has slipped into a mistaken kind of grasping to a self, which in this case is known as the view of the destructible collection.

What if we were to interpret this situation in terms of Tsongkhapa’s epistemological analysis of a beheld aspect dawning by the power of a tendency? Might the practitioner learn to notice that even the way that a mere “I” appears to the stream of mental consciousness at any given moment is propelled by a karmic tendency for the mind to appear to itself *in that way*? How might one understand the process by which the ordinary mind is conceptualizing itself to itself, moment by moment, as soon as it tries to say or think anything about “what” or “who” it is? Is there a process of conceptual isolation taking place when one identifies each moment of awareness in retrospect, with a split-second delay? That is, in Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way, where it is clearly refuted that awareness could ever be aware of itself within a single instant, just as a sword cannot cut itself, any awareness of the mind itself must always be looking into the immediate past, as though watching its flow in a rear-view mirror.⁵⁰ But watching in this way, one might observe that those conceptualizations of “me,” whose beheld objective fields consist of abstracted images of “me,” are repeatedly isolating this appearance of a “me” and of a “my mind,” “my hand,” and so forth, as the opposite of all that each is not. As we have seen, however, Tsongkhapa acknowledges that what appears to a conceptual state of mind always appears in dependence upon the way that ingrained karmic tendencies force one to perceive.⁵¹ This would apply even to the appearance of one’s own mind to itself.

⁴⁸ For one of Tsongkhapa’s extensive treatments of these arguments in English translation, see Cutler *et al.*, 2004, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. III, 289-308. See also, Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2002, *Self, Reality and Reason*, 82-106. See also Appendix Three (39-40).

⁴⁹ Please note that Tsongkhapa’s Tibetan phrase, *nga tsam*, could equally be translated as “a mere ‘I,’” “simply me,” “just me,” “no more than me” and so on.

⁵⁰ See Chapter Two, “Establishing a Mind that Could Exist Definitively?” I owe the analogy of a “rear-view mirror” to an explanation given by B. Alan Wallace.

⁵¹ As quoted in Chapter Five, note 179 above, and Appendix Ten (673): “*The proximate cause for an appearance to a conceptual state of mind to dawn in the way that it does is the tendency.*”

Based on all we have explored in Tsongkhapa's thought thus far, it follows that in this view, one might not even have the capacity to label an experience of being aware as "awareness," much less a collection of thoughts as "my mind," unless the energy of a karmic trace were ripening to reveal it as such to present-moment consciousness.⁵² But the present moment of conditioned consciousness would never even have arisen as the capacity to be aware, or to label in the way that it does, unless the energy of a trace were there to *cause* it to be aware in a certain way.⁵³ Thus it would seem the capacity of traces to create the phenomenon of awareness itself is much deeper than the surface-level process of conceptual labeling. Nonetheless, once one goes to look for "what" such a mind is, it cannot be established as anything except through labels. But the way these labels will arise before the mind is in turn driven by the traces and tendencies that supply idealized, abstracted pictures of "mind."

At an even deeper level, however, we have already indicated that according to the Vajrayāna teachings found in both the New Translation systems of unsurpassed yoga tantra, especially the Guhyasamāja, and in the Great Perfection system of the Old Translation schools, there is said to be a level of pristine, indwelling, primordial awareness that knows reality directly, free of traces or karmic conditioning. Thus, free of traces, the ground awareness is still aware, and absolutely still. This would be the clear light, primordial wisdom. But then what would it mean to actively designate the sparkling, empty, potential label of "I" upon a basis that is completely different from that of the five coarse heaps of a human being?⁵⁴ What would it mean to let the naked

⁵² See Chapter Two, "The Empty River of a Mind," above. What I say here attempts a more subtle version of the argument I was inaugurating there. See also the relationship between the second and third links of dependent arising, referenced throughout.

⁵³ See, for example, Chapter Two, "What is Meant by Mind-Only?" (cited at note 33), where Tsongkhapa glosses Candrakīrti's commentary: "In the same *Sūtra of the Ten Levels*, it is stated that consciousness is the result of both ignorance and traces, but it does not say that it is established through defining characteristics of its own." See also, Chapter Two, "Types of Seeds and Tendencies" (cited at note 157), where Tsongkhapa defines the "tendency for creating expressions" as follows (emphasis modified): "It arises in the aspect of the seeds resting on the foundation consciousness, as the name and defining characteristics of every existing thing, from form all the way up to omniscience. In short, *it is the causal condition* for the mental consciousness that applies the wide variety of conventional labels." See also, Appendix Eight (730), where in a Mind-Only context Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of the term "foundation-of-all" (*kun gzhi*): "In particular, the meaning of 'foundation-of-all' in terms of the *seed* foundation-of-all is this: Because it is subsumed by the seven collections [of consciousness], or because it is *the causal condition* for all mental afflictions, all karma, and all mentally afflicted things that have begun; those are all its result." We will soon examine the fact that Tsongkhapa can re-interpret this home for all the seeds in terms of the mere "I," so the idea that the collection of seeds serves as the causal condition for the rest does not diminish in Tsongkhapa's Middle Way context. On the contrary, it is only affirmed more emphatically. (See Appendix Six.)

⁵⁴ See again, Geshe Norsang's emphatic statement as quoted in Chapter Six, note 16, above:

As for what it is that will dawn in the aspect of a divine being, if you wonder whether it is one's individual coarse heaps that will dawn as the divinity – not at all. If you wonder whether it is coarse consciousness that will dawn as the divinity – that's not it at all. If you wonder whether it is the "I" that is designated upon the coarse heaps which will dawn as the divine being – not at all. All those have been purified into sheer emptiness.

convention of “I” drop down instead upon the referent that is nothing but *sūnyatā jñāna vajra* – the extremely subtle, indivisible, primordial wisdom that knows emptiness in the state of great bliss that is absolute compassion? Such a revision of the very process of identification *should* be shocking to the mind of a beginner, who can do little more than recite the mantra and try to understand the way its meaning was explained. For this reason, even recitation of a *sādhana* might initially have the capacity to pull the rug out from under some layers of that habitual belief in the way “I” appears to the naturally-arising mind, as described above. By understanding clearly, in the course of the meditation and verbal declaration, that one is creating a new conceptual composite – of “a name and the idea of its referent”⁵⁵ taken as one” – the practitioner begins to short-circuit the process of habitual identification with an “I” that was always taken to be real. Thus, writes Baso Je, “you utterly abandon grasping to the idea that things exist as real.”⁵⁶

A Mere Basis for All the Seeds

This may be good for shock value at the beginning, but how can changing the referent of the mere label of an “I” during a *sādhana* practice actually change anything, as soon as one gets up from the cushion and goes back to business as usual? Will not the stream of karma projecting the former “me” continue to ripen as before? To address this question, we must turn to the way Tsongkhapa uses this same idea of the mere “I” to explain the basis for the infusion of karmic tendencies, in the absence of a foundation consciousness. Only by understanding what he sees to be the role of such a conventionally labeled “I,” *as the very basis for the continuity of karmic cause and effect*, might we come to understand how the practice of simply “transferring one’s pride,” or consciously altering the referent of the label, over and over again, could not only create powerful *new* tendencies on the swift road to enlightenment, but also begin to purify the “storehouse” of past karma at lightning speed.

Within the *Illumination of the True Thought*, after Tsongkhapa has refuted, with numerous arguments, the possibility of anything existing through characteristics of its own, he goes on to interpret Candrakīrti (*Entering the Middle Way*, vv. 6:38b-6:44) as extolling two great advantages to this unique Consequence view, where one refutes that a *real* birth from another could be possible either ultimately or deceptively. The first advantage is treated briefly, namely, that one can easily “eliminate the views of things being either unchanging or cut off.” The second advantage, however, becomes a major

⁵⁵ Tib. *ming don*, where *don* may be read as an abbreviation for *don spyi*, as in the parallel phrase, *sgra don*. See Appendix Ten (651), note 9.

⁵⁶ See Chapter Three, note 1, and as repeated at the beginning of this chapter.

topic in itself, and this is the idea, as Tsongkhapa puts it, that “the relationship between karma and its results makes even more sense.”⁵⁷

As Tsongkhapa understands Candrakīrti, it is the very fact of refuting inherent characteristics that obviates any need to posit a foundation consciousness. But in order to understand why this is so, one must grasp a crucial point unique to what Tsongkhapa calls “this way of interpreting the treatises of the Ārya,”⁵⁸ or what he terms more generally the “Middle Way Consequence system.” This point regards the ontological status of a past event. Tsongkhapa states in many places that according to the Sautrāntikas, the Mind-Only school, and the Independent Reasoning interpretation of the Middle Way, “if something is a functioning thing, then it must be of the present, and if something is past or future, it must not be a functioning thing.”⁵⁹ That is, only currently existing things can be said to perform functions; things which have ended, which *are no more*, can no longer perform functions, while things which have not yet come, do not exist, and so cannot perform functions, either.⁶⁰ The Vaibhāṣikas, on the other hand, do assert a somewhat counterintuitive way in which something like a sprout can exist at a time when the sprout is past, and at a time when the sprout has not yet come, but this is still based in holding that the sprout must possess characteristics of its own.

All of these functionalist schools face some kind of challenge in explaining how a karmic deed which is past, which was finished long ago, can nonetheless give rise to what Buddhist scriptures have always referred to as *its own result* far into the future. As Tsongkhapa explains in the *Illumination*, if the deed itself were to remain for the whole period, spanning from the time when the virtuous or non-virtuous action was performed to the time at which the karmic result was experienced, then it would have to be unchanging, and in that case it could never give rise to a result. Since, in order to give rise to a result, the deed must be a changing thing that had an end, but once ended, it is no longer a functioning thing, there must be something else to carry the imprint of the deed until it gives rise to its actual result, right? As Tsongkhapa explains in very succinct form here, this is the logic that inspired the whole array of theories about a foundation-of-all consciousness, unlinked traces, “holds” (*thob pa*, Skt. *prāpti*), and the general idea of tendencies infused into a stream of consciousness.⁶¹ All these should be familiar by now, but the argument here is that each of these ideas is based in a more or less subtle grasping to the idea of a *real* deed, that began through a nature of its own, ended through a nature of its own, and then needs something else that could exist with a nature of its own, in

⁵⁷ See Appendix Five (277-278).

⁵⁸ See Appendix Six (279).

⁵⁹ From Tsongkhapa’s *Commentary on the Chapter on Direct Perception*, Appendix Ten (657).

⁶⁰ This should sound reasonable according to common sense, but we have probably noticed by now that from Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way Consequence point of view, we had better think twice about “common sense.” For this approach to the Middle Way, that does not merely affirm commonsense epistemology or ordinary language practices, see my comments in the Introduction, “Primary Goals.”

⁶¹ See Appendix Six (282-283).

order to carry the causal efficacy of the deed through moments of time that are also posited with their own characteristics of starting, staying, and stopping.

Tsongkhapa cites Candrakīrti, who in turn cited a single verse from the seventeenth chapter of Nāgārjuna's *Root Verses on the Middle Way* as the reasoning to overturn all these "fabricated" ideas:⁶²

Since the deed had no starting
and because it has no nature; therefore
that which never began
will never be lost.

The meaning is this: Since there is no existence through an inherent nature, there is no starting through an identity of its own. Therefore, *since it is impossible for a deed to end through any nature of its own*, it makes no sense to hold that after the deed was done, it ended through a nature of its own, and then go on to fabricate an idea about it "not being lost."

It may be easy to parrot the Consequence mantra about "no nature of its own," but what, in the context of all we have examined, would it mean for something never *really* to have ended? Our first conclusion might suggest that all of past time is equally present, like an infinite tsunami of past events always about to pounce on us. But if ignorance is as all-pervasive as the Buddhist tradition says it is, whatever our initial interpretation of this idea might be, it would probably be laden with self-existent thinking as well. Rather, as usual, the point is much more sophisticated.

Of course things would still begin and end deceptively, according to conventional designation, but again the point would be that the *source of the conventions is always the mind*. So it seems there *is* a sense, here, in which the whole of past time is stored in the mind, and in which there is no other past but the one held in memory, at deep layers of consciousness not readily apparent to us every moment. But this would have to apply equally to the present and the future, too, so that the very way in which events seem to be arising to us as a "real now," is also merely a function of perceiving them that way, as we have repeated many times. Nevertheless, there must still be a causality at work – beyond our merely "imagining" it – for as this very section of Tsongkhapa's commentary aims to show, recognizing things as merely labeled does not undermine their causal efficacy, but rather emphasizes all the more how it is that causes give rise to their results infallibly, even without our thinking about it, much less wanting it to be that way, e.g., when we would really prefer for a particular deed never to bring about its negative consequence.

When the Mind-Only interlocutor complains that the problem is still not solved, Tsongkhapa refers back to Candrakīrti's pivotal verse 6:39 to assert simply that "*it is from the destruction of the destroyed deed that one establishes the arising of the later*

⁶² See Appendix Six (284).

result. So no other answer is stated.”⁶³ This forces one to reexamine the central issue, namely how it is that the Consequence view does assert what is past to have functionality in the present, without having to posit anything extra as a medium – whether a foundation consciousness or karmic tendencies that somehow propagate all by themselves. Tsongkhapa first explains the Functionalists’ perspective, showing that their main philosophical obstacle to positing past things is that once the parts of a destroyed object have been dispersed, and do not go on to form some other thing that could incorporate all those same parts, in a continuum, there is no longer any basis upon which to identify a functioning thing. If one were to look for “the prime example of what it means to be that destroyed thing” (*zhig pa de’i mtshan gzhi*), one could not find it, either as an object of the senses, or as a collection of parts. So how could it perform a function, if it is nowhere to be found?

One must keep in mind that this is exactly the logic that seems to stop those of a functionalist bent from accepting that merely labeled things can perform functions. For of course merely labeled things cannot ultimately be found anywhere, either. But in explaining his understanding of Candrakīrti’s view, Tsongkhapa reveals more clearly than ever how he sees it to be suitable for something merely labeled to perform a function. Note that he directly echoes the language he used when comparing the positing of a person to the labeling of a snake upon a rope. Here he extrapolates the analogy one step further, to the non-entity of a destroyed thing.⁶⁴

For example, neither Upagupta’s five heaps individually, nor the collection of all of them, nor some single thing that is separate in essence from either of those, provides any reason to be posited as a prime example of what it means to be Upagupta. Upagupta, furthermore, is not suitable to be the prime example of what it means to be any of those three. Still, there is no contradiction that what is labeled as Upagupta on the basis of his heaps, is a functioning thing.

In the same way, the destroyed thing does not exist either as a prime example of what it means to be the functioning thing that was destroyed, or as a functioning thing that is of the same type as that thing was. Nonetheless, *because it arose in dependence upon the functioning thing that was destroyed*, it is a functioning thing.

That is, to put it in what may be more accessible language, none of John’s parts is John, and *John* is not John’s mind, or arm, or feelings, or the rest. But there is no problem in

⁶³ Appendix Six (285). See, also, my interpolation at (283) of a very unwieldy translation of this verse, which I have rendered simply in order that its words could fit recognizably into my translation of Tsongkhapa’s commentary to follow.

⁶⁴ Appendix Six (286). “Upagupta” is the name of a legendary early Buddhist figure, but is being used here generically, as in several other places in Tsongkhapa’s writing, simply to indicate an individual, as we might use the name “John” or “Michael.”

saying truthfully, in a merely labeled way, that John walks, or John speaks, and so on. Here then, is the key: “The deed you did when you were sixteen” is not the same as the doing of the action, when it was still a present moment experience, nor is it a continuum of that exact deed, done over and over again in a row, as though to keep the energy moving through time. Nonetheless, because “the deed you did when you were sixteen” arose in dependence upon the fact something was actually done, and upon the fact you perceived yourself doing it, the idea or memory of that deed *still functions*, and can still bring about its karmic result, even far, far into the future.

Tsongkhapa further supports his interpretation by citing Candrakīrti’s use, in *Clear Words*, of the *Sūtra on the Ten Levels* to show that death is both an effect and a cause. It is an effect of having been born and a cause for future ignorance, hence indirectly, a cause for future rebirths. In the same way, then, the very ending of a deed is enough to establish the arising of its result. Because time itself does not exist inherently, that result does not have to be immediate in order for it to be labeled, legitimately, as the result *of that deed*. If a past thing is established conventionally as a functioning thing, then it can function even now, just as John can act now or at any time, precisely insofar as he is a conceptual designation. Dead people can still affect us now, too. Indeed, we talk all the time about how people, events, and things in the past have affected us, whether it was the bread I ate this morning, which was surely no longer “bread” by the time its component particles spread “nourishment” into my veins, or the lecture I went to years ago, which was surely over by the time I started considering it something that had changed my way of thinking, and so on.⁶⁵

Significantly, Tsongkhapa points out here that although one perceives the idea of a destroyed thing as the result of a negation, it need not be a simple negation, as those of the other schools say it must be. Rather, because “it propels you to think of the functioning thing that was eliminated by it,”⁶⁶ it is an affirming negation, and what it affirms is the fact that the functioning thing that was the cause of there being “a functioning thing that had ended” can still by all means bring about its result, in an illusory way.⁶⁷ From a Nāgārjunian perspective, this is the only way cause and effect ever

⁶⁵ See also Cozort, 1998, *Unique Tenets of the Middle Way Consequence School*, 181-229 and 471-474, for a detailed discussion of this entire topic from the perspective of later Geluk scholarship. (Note that Cozort translates *zhig pa* as “disintegratedness” in place of what I am calling “a destroyed thing.”)

⁶⁶ Appendix Six (287).

⁶⁷ I refer my reader here to an earlier passage in the *Illumination*, Appendix Five (273), emphasis added: An empty – that is, false – thing, such as a reflection and the like (i.e., an echo and so on), is born in reliance – that is, in dependence – upon a collection of causes and conditions, such as a mirror and a face, or a rocky cave and an emitted sound. Even in the world people would not say it is not like this, i.e., it is generally said to be so. Just as is well-known in the world, the eye consciousness, and so on, is born with the aspect of the reflection, and so on, from the empty – that is, the false – reflection, and so on. Accordingly, a consciousness whose aspect is false is born from the false reflection. In the same way, even as all functioning things are empty of existing through characteristics of their own, *from those empty causes are by all means born their empty results*.

could have taken place, through a process of designation in both directions, where only with the fact of the effect can one validly label something else as a cause, and only with the appearance of an absence can one identify that there was an ending, and only in relationship to another cause can one say there was a beginning, but never in an absolute way.

* * *

What, then, of seeds and tendencies? Is it still necessary to posit them, too? It is evident from Tsongkhapa's immediately following section in the *Illumination* that he does indeed continue to posit tendencies from a Middle Way perspective. I would add, furthermore, that it could only be through the idea of karmic tendencies, which continue to grow and gain momentum through a merely labeled progression of time, that the second principle of karma could be maintained, namely that karma *expands* between the time of the action and the time at which it brings about its result. Tsongkhapa clearly accepts that there is a continuum between the original karmic cause and its eventual result, but insists that such a continuity does not need to be sustained in some separate consciousness, supposed to exist just for that purpose. It seems the main reason the foundation consciousness is so antithetical to this Consequence interpretation is this: To invent the idea of such a consciousness presupposes that one sees the need for an inherently established place for tendencies to stay and grow. But if one accepts that it is simply the stream of mental consciousness that is the locus of all the labeling activity, and if it is that mental consciousness which holds all merely labeled things in existence anyway, there is no need to posit any other type of consciousness beyond it.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Except, it might seem, for the extremely subtle clear light. However, that teaching only exists from a Vajrayāna perspective and I think Tsongkhapa would argue further that even the clear light is not of a fundamentally different *stream* from mental consciousness; it is simply an extremely subtle form of it. See Chapter Six, notes 90 and 91, below, as well as Appendix Seventeen (463), emphasis added:

On the other hand, the body of nothing more than winds and mind is like the wetness of water; since at any and all times it is, without mistake, the body of a living being, it is a primordially indwelling body. As for the extremely subtle winds that engage inseparably from the essential nature of consciousness, it is stated in the *Integration of Practices* that these can be blended with consciousness, like mixing butter into butter. So they exist even in the formless realm, because it is stated many times in the *Revelation of the True Intent* (*Samdhividyākaraṇa-tantra*) and in the *String of Diamonds* (*Vajramālābhīdhāna-tantra*) that the very identity of all wanderers in all three realms is that of winds and mind.

... When a yogi who has come to the final end of the vajra recitation and the mind-set-apart sees a light in the aspect of five colors, its defining characteristic is different from that of the mental function that is movement of the mind. It is called the *wind of clear light*, entirely free of the coarse winds that flow through the nostrils, and so forth.

Now it true that the sense consciousnesses also engage while blended with winds. But the mind that is explained to be the primordially indwelling body of a living being is mental consciousness itself.

Acknowledging, however, that even within Candrakīrti's view there is still the need for a basis upon which tendencies can be infused (*sgo ba'i gzhi*) and from which they can grow to maturity before bringing their ripened result, Tsongkhapa explains:⁶⁹

Just as those who agree to a foundation consciousness say that the home of the tendencies is the foundation consciousness, which serves as the basis for what is focused upon by the afflictive mind when it says "I am," so in the same way, according to this system, what is focused upon by the naturally-arising state of mind that merely thinks "I am," is understood to be the infusion substrate for the tendencies.

Now, when the commentary to *Entering the Middle Way* says that the stream of the mind is the basis for the tendencies, how is that so? The mere "I" itself is the continuum labeled in dependence upon the mind, consciousness; thus it is also called "the continuum of the mind." Insofar as it is called the "continuum" of similar instances of the mind itself, that, too, becomes the infusion substrate for intermittent tendencies.

Thus all the threads we have been weaving come together at last. In what seems to be an original formulation for expressing Candrakīrti's meaning,⁷⁰ Tsongkhapa states clearly that the *object focused upon by the inborn mind that thinks "I am"* serves the very purpose that has thus far been served by the "foundation consciousness" in all prior presentations on karma, seeds, and tendencies. He even draws a direct connection between the process described in the Mind-Only school presentation of eight consciousnesses, whereby the seventh, the afflictive mind, looks upon the foundation consciousness and mistakes it for a real self, saying "I am," and the very process that we have seen described from a Middle Way point of view in Baso Je's text on meditative inquiry.⁷¹ We have already noted that the basis for the mere "I" is not exactly the same as the collection of heaps. Rather, "what is focused upon by the naturally-arising state of mind that merely thinks 'I am,'" is already the totality of the heaps *being thought of in a certain way*, as "me." Someone else looking at the same collection of thoughts, feelings, body, and the rest would not call it "me."

Thus Tsongkhapa can say that the "mere 'I' itself is the continuum labeled in dependence upon the mind; thus it is also called 'the continuum of the mind.'"

⁶⁹ Appendix Six (288).

⁷⁰ It should be noted that the phrase "mere I" (*nga tsam*) does not appear anywhere in the Tibetan translation of Candrakīrti's root text or auto-commentary to *Entering the Middle Way*. Though I have not yet been able to research whether examples of it appear in earlier Tibetan literature, it appears to me to be a turn of phrase coined by Tsongkhapa himself. Of course it is used extensively in the literature of the Geluk tradition following after him.

⁷¹ Thus I find it even more plausible that Baso Je's text represents a teaching that was originally from Tsongkhapa's lips, since Tsongkhapa himself is using exactly the same language in his personally authored *Illumination*, here, and it is not language one finds in Candrakīrti's explanation, *per se*.

⁷² See, for example, *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. *pa*, 472a6-472b5 (975-976), for a passage that is of tremendous relevance for our present discussion, though I will not be able to examine the implications of the obscure analogy here. (Cf. Cutler *et al.*, 2004, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. III, 294-295, and note 590.) Nonetheless I encourage my reader to ponder it, especially the source quotation from Āryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*. (It seems the pigeon's feet correspond to the deeds of a past life, while the footprints correspond to the memories of an advanced meditator who has gained the ability to see past lives. But it also seems the analogy might be applied to the way that past karmic events bring their results to become manifest across lifetimes, without ever "touching" those later lifetimes directly.) In response to the objection that since, across multiple lifetimes, the person who experienced something and the person who recalls it are not the same, it is as though they are of two different mental continua, and so it would not make sense to remember previous experience, or to partake of the fruit of previously collected karma, Tsongkhapa replies:

Reject all thoughts of cause and result as really itself or really other. There is only the changing stream of traces, clarified into particulars by the distinguishing features of the causes. If the traces are there, then it is reasonable for the labeled self that has taken them on to say, 'I remember that lifetime.' No functioning thing exists through characteristics of its own: With respect to all those things, it is not unreasonable for conditions to come together, bearing that sort of aspect, and for them to turn into something else. Therefore, thoroughly examine the inconceivable distinguishing features of functioning things that have causes never established through characteristics of their own. In this way, it may be true that one can see the footprints of a white pigeon sitting on top of an extremely thick thatched roof within all the vessels of yogurt placed inside the house, as they are congealing, but it is absolutely impossible for its feet to have landed there.

སྤྱིན་མེད་དེ། འདིར་ནི་རྒྱུད་གཅིག་ཡིན་པ་མི་འགས་ལ། གཞན་གྱི་ཤུགས་མ་རྒྱུད་གཅིག་པ་མི་རུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེའང་ན། ཞེས་པ་གང་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཁང་པ་ན་གན་
 ས་པའི་ཚོག་ཅུ་མས་བྱས་པའི་སྤྱིང་ན་གནས་པའི་ཤུག་རོན་སྤྱི་ཤོའི་རྒྱང་པ་ཞོའི་རྒྱུད་དུ་མ་ཞུགས་ཀྱང་དེའི་རྒྱང་ཆེས་དེར་དམིགས་པ་བཞེན་དུ། མེ་འདིའི་གང་ཟག་
 གིས་སྤྱི་པ་སྤྱི་མའི་དུས་སུ་མི་ཕྱིན་ཀྱང་སྤྱི་ཕྱིར་བ་རྣམས་འདིར་བྱ་བར་ཡང་མི་འགས་ཏེ། བཞི་བརྒྱ་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། རྒྱུད་དང་འབྲས་བྱ་དག་དེ་ཉིད་དང་ག་
 ཞན་ཉིད་དུ་རྟོག་པ་སྤངས་ཤིང་། རྒྱུའི་ཁྱད་པར་གྱིས་གསལ་བར་གྲུབ་པ་འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་མི་རྟག་པ་ཁོ་རྒྱང་ཡོད་ན་ནི། དེའི་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་ཅན་བདགས་བར་ཡོད་
 པའི་བདག་གིས་སྤྱི་བ་ཆེས་སུ་བྱ་ན་ནོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བར་རིགས་སོ། །དངོས་སོ་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་གྱིས་མ་བྱུབ་པ་སྟེ། དེ་རྣམས་ལ་རྣམ་པ་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་རྒྱུ་ཉེ་བར་
 ལྷགས་པ་ཡོད་པ་དང་། གཞན་དུ་འཕྲུར་བ་ཉིད་མི་རིགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་དངོས་སོ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་གྱིས་མ་བྱུབ་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཅན་བྱ་བའི་ཁྱད་པར་བསམ་གྱི་
 ས་མི་ཁྱབ་པ་ཡོད་ས་སུ་བརྟག་པར་བྱའོ། །འདི་ལྟར་འདས་བཞེན་དུ་ཞོའི་རྒྱུད་ཁང་པའི་ནང་ན་གནས་པ་དག་ལ་རྣ་མོག་ཆེས་མང་པོས་གཡོགས་པའི་སྤྱིང་ན་གནས་
 པའི་ཤུག་རོན་སྤྱི་ཤོའི་རྒྱང་ཆེས་དམིགས་སོང་གི། དེའི་རྒྱང་པ་ཞུགས་པ་ནི་ཅི་ཅས་ཀྱང་སྤྱིད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ།

basis for conventional designation as a self,”⁷³ is still the mind. Thus Tsongkhapa intimates a magnificent layered structure, with a complex interaction of bases of designation and the labels drawn upon them.

The mere “I” can be labeled in dependence upon a particular set of heaps taken on at birth, but primarily it is labeled upon the continuum of the mind that passes from birth to birth. Thus it can refer roughly to the whole continuum of a person. But insofar as this merely labeled composite is now taken to be all that is necessary to posit a basis for the infusion of karmic tendencies, one might say that karma is merely labeled upon the mere “I.” There would be a sense, then, in which karmic seeds – or the traces we have mentioned since the beginning – are, figuratively speaking, *etched* into the nebulous referent of the naked convention that is a mere “I.” “My karma” (*bdag gi las, rang gi las, nga’i las*), then, would consist of all the countless labels with which I have named myself, over the course of a history that has no beginning. “I did this”; “I saw that”; “When I did that I wanted this”; “I regret having said that”; and so on, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Then, the “mere I” is the referent of the designation “I,” in the spontaneously arising thought, “I am . . .”; but according to this explanation, that “mere I” itself is what is infused with the traces of everything “I” have ever done, thought, or spoken. So in another sense – even as my karma consists of all the labels by which I have ever known myself – “I am” nothing but the totality of my infused karmic traces and tendencies, and the heaps to which they give rise. (My) karma is me, and I am (my) karma. The heaps upon which that mere “I” is labeled would in turn be generated from the way certain karmic traces infused within this idea of “me” are creating “my mind” and causing it to label “the heaps I took on” – in juxtaposition to my world, and so on – at any given moment.

According to this view, then, how tightly bound up with the mere thought “I am” is the very substrate in which all the karmic fragrances remain. How inextricably bound up with a misunderstanding of that “I,” arising in the split-second after the mere “I” appears, is the manner in which every deed is performed, observed, and remembered. In this light, how then, might a radical altering of the referent upon which I say “I,” completely restructure and reorient the energy of the entire collection of seeds and tendencies, even those already planted, which have not yet given rise to their result?

I suggested in Chapter Two that the five qualities Tsongkhapa enumerates for a suitable candidate for an infusion substrate, which in that case was the “seed foundation consciousness” itself, would also apply to the mere “I,” as described here. That is, the referent of the mere thought “I am,” is (1) “stable,” insofar as it continues in an unbroken stream; is (2) “morally neutral,” in that it does not have a “strong scent” or ethical

⁷³ See Appendix Two (173), and Chapter Six, note 29, above; new emphasis added.

character in itself; is (3) “able to be infused,” insofar as it is a constantly changing thing, precisely as a merely labeled thing; is (4) “related to the infuser,” so much so that it is the constant object of any state of consciousness that can even subliminally think the thought “I did . . .”; and (5) it can “serve exclusively as a basis,” insofar as it is not explicitly consciousness itself, but rather a merely labeled entity posited primarily *with respect to* the stream of consciousness.⁷⁴

Thus we may consider that in Tsongkhapa’s view it is the deep memory or the merely labeled idea of the karmic deed that *is* the karma and brings its result. At the same time, it is that upon which the idea of a person is labeled that serves as the continuity upon which the traced memory of the karma continues. Logically speaking, the fact there is always something here called “me” means there is always something here that can be labeled as having been the one who did the deed, even in a “past life.” But then, if one were to start labeling “me” upon the indivisible wisdom of bliss and emptiness . . . now *there* is a basis for “me” that would have the power to purify every last memory of deeds still associated with the same continuity. Just as every past deed was etched onto a me that was held in a certain way, now, potentially, every experience of a sādhana practice is *etched anew* onto the same mental continuum – but now as the divine art that the wisdom perceiving emptiness paints within the sky of indivisible bliss.

It is not that past deeds are obliterated just by the mere fact of labeling “me” as someone else; otherwise karma would disappear from lifetime to lifetime. Rather, it seems the crucial point is that the primordially pure and sacred basis upon which the Vajrayāna practitioner is now deliberately labeling “me” is itself the one antidote capable of quickly burning away all the ideas and traces that are the karmic memories of “what I did.” This may be in part because, according to many Mahāyāna sūtra explanations of the purification of past karma, it is the understanding of emptiness that is said to disempower past seeds, gradually, to the point that they will be incapable of giving rise to their respective results. Here, however, what catalyzes the process even more rapidly would be the fact that the wisdom of emptiness, which purifies karma, is now being identified as “me.” How could any seed whose only home was an ordinary conception of me-taken-to-be-real, withstand the burning laser light of the wisdom that reveals that “me” *to have been unreal*, and thus incinerates every trace of the grasping that held onto that me, and perpetuated it as the repository of all the seeds? When that old me is utterly deconstructed, and there is no longer any grasping identification with it, where else is there for those merely labeled seeds to stay, and upon whom would they ever ripen?

Tsongkhapa has said that there is nothing about Upagupta’s heaps that are the prime example of what it means to be Upagupta. So, too, there is nothing about the indivisible primordial wisdom realizing emptiness that is a prime example of what it

⁷⁴ Cf. Chapter Two, “Seeds and Fragrant Tendencies,” note 132. See also Tsongkhapa’s subtle but very important argument with respect to the “limit cases” for positing a person in Appendix Six (289-290).

means to be “me,” either. But according to the very wisdom that realizes such emptiness, there is absolutely nothing to stop a primordial knowing consciousness from labeling itself, an empty basis, as a “me.” Indeed, with time and habituation, Tsongkhapa has assured his reader that the identity of a fully completed Buddha will appear quite naturally as an appropriate application of an empty label.⁷⁵ On the other hand, it is not as though the primordial mind of clear light is *not* part of what was always “just me,” either; because according to Tsongkhapa’s presentation of the five stages in the Guhyasamāja system, the extremely subtle winds and mind were *always* the final basis of designation for the mere “I” that goes from life to life.⁷⁶ But it is only through such an intensive practice of actively transferring one’s identification to that most subtle layer of the basis for designating “me,” that one would discover, affirm, and become habituated to such a recognition of who, at some profound level, “I always was”: a completely pure mind of clear light, the potential for the fully actualized dharmakāya of all the Buddhas.

Using Seeds to Put an End to Seeds

In his *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, Tsongkhapa cited Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way* at length in order to illustrate a famous analogy regarding the relationship between what is pure and what is defiled, in the context of the teachings on buddha-nature, or more precisely, the naturally-abiding family lineage (*rang bzhin du gnas pa’i rigs*) of all Those Gone Thus. Though we have long been dwelling in philosophical territory that refutes the existence of a foundation consciousness described in that way, still, I find Asaṅga’s analogy potent for the ideas we are grappling with now. Since we have clues from Tsongkhapa’s *Illumination of the True Thought* as to how he himself wanted to re-interpret even the explicit scriptural references to a foundation consciousness, and since we have seen that he continues to revere Asaṅga as a realized master whose Mind-Only presentation has a deeper intent that needs to be interpreted, I will turn to that analogy now, in order that we might elicit from it a decisively tantric interpretation. This, I hope, will in turn shed light on all that we have explored thus far, and offer a brief rubric by which to understand what I have dared to term Tsongkhapa’s “philosophy of tantra.”

In the context of his discussion of the two types of “family lineage” – both that which has dwelt naturally without a beginning, and that which must come to maturity through the conditions of listening to, contemplating, and meditating upon the teachings – Tsongkhapa has established a point that we might hear differently now, from a Middle Way perspective. He says:⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See Appendix Nine (767-768) as well as the quotation cited at Chapter Four, note 27.

⁷⁶ See Appendix Seventeen (455) as well as the entire discussion from (459-465).

⁷⁷ Appendix Eight (721), emphasis added.

The blossoming family lineage *is posited upon* that naturally-abiding family lineage itself, which, when meeting with the conditions of (1) another’s words and (2) the inner condition of paying attention properly, comes to maturity through listening, contemplation, and meditation, and thus becomes a potential that has the inner force to bring its result.

If we can now recognize that upon which seeds are planted as that about which one merely says, “I,” then in this case the seeds of the buddha-nature that is coming to fruition must be planted upon an “I” that is in turn posited as the totally pure or immaculate seed (*zag med kyi sa bon*, Skt. *anāsrava-bīja*).⁷⁸ Asaṅga describes this immaculate seed, also known as the “tendency for listening,” as the “congruent cause for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things.”⁷⁹ All these terms refer to a naturally-abiding family lineage that in a Vajrayāna context would seem to be identical to the extremely subtle mind of clear light.⁸⁰ In the Mind-Only context, of course, there is no discussion of altering the referent of a merely labeled “I,” but rather there is the problem of how a totally pure seed can remain within and flourish from the platform of a foundation consciousness that is itself ripened from seeds that are all fundamentally tainted by ignorance. Tsongkhapa summarizes Asaṅga’s solution to the apparent problem as follows:⁸¹

Thus, since the immaculate seed that stays in the ripened consciousness is the antidote to that foundation consciousness, it *is not* the foundation consciousness. Further, being nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating, many, many times, the totally pure seeds flourish and the seeds for afflicted things diminish.

It is like the way that a swan, without focusing upon the milk and water as separate, can draw up the milk all together, and leave the water clear. In the same way, although the seeds cannot be focused upon as being separate from the foundation consciousness, the seeds for afflicted things diminish and those on the totally pure side blossom, and transform, making manifest the three holy bodies.

⁷⁸ See also Appendix Eight (722): “Therefore, that seed itself, insofar as it remains by the very nature of things, is posited as the naturally-abiding family lineage, but insofar as it rises up completely through conditions, it is posited as the blossoming family lineage.”

⁷⁹ Appendix Eight (726).

⁸⁰ Though I have not yet seen Tsongkhapa use these two terms together in the same text – as they are taken from such diverse portions of the canonical sources – I find it plausible that he could have accepted them as equivalent. Indeed, His Holiness the Dalai Lama compared them directly at the very end of his 1979 talk, recorded as the “Union of the Old and New Translation Schools” in *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, translated by J. Hopkins, 224 (cf. 11m20s-13m16s of Part Three of the audio recording):

The substance of all these clear paths comes down to the fundamental innate mind of clear light. Even the sūtras which serve as the basis for Maitreya’s commentary in his *Sublime Continuum of the Great Vehicle* have this same fundamental mind as the basis of their thought in their discussion of the Buddha nature, or essence of a One Gone Thus (*Tathāgatagarbha*, *de bzhin gzhegs pa’i snying po*), although the full mode of its practice is not described as it is in the systems of Highest Yoga Tantra.

⁸¹ Appendix Eight (725).

The image, common to much Indian lore, is of a swan or goose who is able to approach a vessel in which water and milk are evenly mixed together, and easily draw up only the milk, while leaving just the clear water in the vessel. Here, it seems the water is analogous to the totally pure seed, which apparently resides together with the “milky” seeds for afflicted existence, clouded by ignorance, all within a single vessel, or foundation consciousness. Through the process of listening to teachings, thinking hard about them, putting them into practice, and eventually realizing deep and unshakeable meditation upon their meaning, the yogi-swan draws out the seeds for afflicted things, while the crystal clear water of the immaculate seed remains, spreads, flourishes, and brings its final result of Buddhahood.

It is central to Asaṅga’s argument that although the immaculate seed *is not* the same as or actually part of the foundation consciousness, because in fact it will serve as its antidote, nonetheless: “In dependence upon the enlightenment of all Buddhas, that which serves as the tendency for listening *engages at the place* where the ripened consciousness engages, in such a way that they are gathered together simultaneously. It is like milk and water.”⁸² I let Asaṅga’s poetic crescendo speak for itself.⁸³

Because [the seeds for the dharmakāya] are the antidote for the foundation-of-all consciousness, and because they are not of the very essence of the foundation-of-all consciousness, they can be subsumed within it. Because they are in the world, but are the congruent cause for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things, which is beyond the world, they turn into the seeds for the mind that transcends the world.

Although the mind that transcends the world has not yet emerged fully, it is the antidote for being completely tethered by mental afflictions, and it is the antidote against going to the realms of misery, and it is the antidote that causes all bad deeds to go away. It follows upon having encountered Buddhas and bodhisattvas. . . . It is not the foundation-of-all consciousness, but rather is subsumed within the body of total liberation and within the holy body of the Dharma. Insofar as the slight, medium, and great [tendencies for listening] flourish step by step, just so much the ripened consciousness diminishes, and transforms. *The ripened consciousness that has all the seeds transforms in every way, until it has no more seeds. It has in every way abandoned them.*

* * *

⁸² See the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, as quoted in Appendix Eight (726), emphasis added. See also Chapter Six, note 30, above, where Tsongkhapa uses this same analogy, in describing the action tantra meditation on the “ultimate divine being,” to refer to the way the suchness of the practitioner and the suchness of the divine being are mixed inseparably “like water and milk.” Though Tsongkhapa never mentions separating the two there, I still think it significant to reflect on this parallel use of the analogy in a tantric context.

⁸³ See Appendix Eight (726-727) for the remainder of the quotation.

How might we read this in Tsongkhapa's Vajrayāna context, where not only is there no foundation consciousness, but the "congruent cause for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things" would be understood as the extremely subtle continuum of clear light mind – which does indeed "engage together" with the coarse continuum of mental consciousness that is ripened from ignorance and traces, but is not the same as it, because it is its antidote? How would it change the vision of the process by which the afflicted seeds diminish and the pure seeds increase, when the home for all the seeds is not a foundation consciousness that at any given moment has characteristics of its own as being "really" impure (even though it hides a seed for something pure abiding within it), but rather is the ever-empty object of a perception that merely thinks "I am"?

In order for us to glimpse an answer to these questions I must first cite two clear transformations in meaning offered by Tsongkhapa within his *Illumination of the True Thought*. First, Tsongkhapa makes a determined claim that when commenting upon the *Sublime Continuum of the Greater Way* (*Mahāyānottaratantra*, attributed to the bodhisattva Maitreya), Asaṅga had always intended it to be understood within the Middle Way view. Thus, Tsongkhapa insists that when, in Asaṅga's commentary to the *Sublime Continuum*, he uses the same sūtra quotation that he himself had used within his *Summary of the Greater Way* to establish the existence of the foundation consciousness, there (within the *Explanation of the Sublime Continuum*) Asaṅga means it instead to refer to *emptiness*, and not to some kind of eighth consciousness. Beginning with a quotation from Asaṅga *Explanation of the Sublime Continuum*, which cites a verse from the no longer extant *Abhidharma-sūtra* that also appears in Asaṅga's *Summary of the Greater Way*, the commentary to follow is Tsongkhapa's.⁸⁴

It is said that the realm of Those Gone Thus is established in all living beings as their heart-essence, but it is not understood by those living beings. As it is stated:

A realm that existed from time without beginning
is the place where all things abide:
Since it exists, all living beings have attained it
and those gone beyond, too.

Since this is cited as a proof that sentient beings have the family lineage of the actual nature of reality, this is in accord with the way that this master explains the basis of the deeper intent behind the idea of "foundation consciousness" to be *emptiness*. Thus he wishes to say that a foundation consciousness that could be separate in essence from the six groups of consciousness was spoken in front of some disciples, due to a pressing need.

⁸⁴ See Appendix Six (299-300) for the context and citations.

Since Tsongkhapa cites this argument from Asaṅga in the midst of his larger commentary on Candrakīrti's true thought / deeper intent (*dgongs pa*), I cannot be certain whether, when Tsongkhapa says "this master" here, he actually means Asaṅga or Candrakīrti, for it seems both would be correct readings. In any case, it is clear from the entire context that this indeed represents Tsongkhapa's *own* opinion on the matter, and it is the way that the Geluk tradition has for the most part interpreted the idea of buddha-nature ever since. That is, from a Geluk Middle Way point of view, the naturally-abiding family lineage, or natural purity, refers to the simple fact that a person lacks any inherent nature; it is considered to be the same as what I mentioned above with respect to the word *svabhāva*, which Tsongkhapa glossed within the *Oṃ śūnyatā* mantra as meaning "utterly pure of having any nature."⁸⁵

Nevertheless, only a few pages later in the *Illumination*, Tsongkhapa is examining a passage from Nāgārjuna's *Guhyasamāja Commentary on the Wish for Enlightenment*,⁸⁶ where there is reference to a "foundation of all," which Tsongkhapa is also determined to prove cannot refer to a consciousness that is separate from the main six groups of consciousness. Citing Nāgārjuna's statement within this tantric text, parallel to the view attributed to the Middle Way Nāgārjuna at other places within the *Illumination*,⁸⁷ that both "inner" mind and its "outer" objects must be equally empty, Tsongkhapa insists that this master cannot have intended, in his mention of a "foundation of all," that "there should be consciousness with nothing outside it."⁸⁸ Tsongkhapa continues:⁸⁹

Therefore, since [Nāgārjuna] does not accept a foundation consciousness that could be separate in essence from mental consciousness, the mention of "foundation of all" means this: *In general, the mere fact that mind is aware and clear is set forth as the "foundation of all," and in particular, this is set forth as the mental consciousness.*

⁸⁵ See also, Appendix Six (296), where Tsongkhapa specifically describes Candrakīrti's view:

Since this teaches that [the Buddha] asserted a foundation consciousness in front of certain disciples, due to a pressing need, in our system, we teach that it is something that has a deeper intent. The basis of the deeper intent, about which something was stated to someone out of deeper intent, *is the emptiness that is empty of being established through a nature of its own*. This alone was intended, and you should be aware that the word "foundation-of-all consciousness" indicates this. In this regard, it is stated to be a "foundation-of-all" because all functioning things follow upon that nature.

⁸⁶ *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa*; see Chapter Five, note 58, and Appendix Five (219), note 3.

⁸⁷ See Chapter Two, note 188. My point here is that whether or not one accepts the work of "Nāgārjuna" that appears in the *Guhyasamāja* portion of the tantric section of the *Tengyur* to be the work of the same author as that of the *Root Verses on the Middle Way*, and so on, it is interesting to me that within a purely sūtra-based work, Tsongkhapa can find this author of the *Commentary on the Wish for Enlightenment* making exactly the same point that the Āryadeva author of the *Four Hundred Verses* made, and which Tsongkhapa explained the Candrakīrti author of *Entering the Middle Way* to have taken as representing the true thought of "Nāgārjuna." Once again, one would make a parody of the tight logic at work within Tsongkhapa's commentaries if trying too hard to distinguish two Nāgārjunas, two Āryadevas, and two Candrakīrtis.

⁸⁸ Appendix Six (301).

⁸⁹ Appendix Six (302).

This is true (1) because as a follow-up to the refutation that just mind in general could ever exist by nature, this [being aware and clear] is how it is suitable for mind to perform activities, while not existing really; (2) because the mind that grasps hold of a birth in cyclic existence is the mental consciousness; and (3) *because mental consciousness is the foundation of all afflicted existence and all that is totally pure.*

In this passage, then, Tsongkhapa seems to be proposing the view that the foundation of all (*kun gzhi*, with ambiguity as to whether it is always an abbreviation for *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*, “foundation-of-all consciousness,” here) is simply intended as an epithet for mental consciousness, understood as the foundation and creator of all things, both “afflicted existence and all that is totally pure.” Again, there is significance to the fact that Tsongkhapa specifies here the basic defining characteristics of mind, as a deceptive reality, to be awareness, or the capacity to know, and clarity, or luminosity. These are the most basic illusory qualities that enable mind to perform its functions, even “while not existing really.” But from a Vajrayāna point of view, these are also the sheer qualities that exist at the extremely subtle level of mind that is clear light, although in a dormant or potential sense. So once again, we see the possibility for a tight connection between the “foundation of all” interpreted from a Middle Way point of view in terms of buddha-nature, as *emptiness*, and the “foundation of all” interpreted in terms of the basic characteristics of *mind*, which, depending upon how it is oriented, can become the creator of either saṃsāra or nirvāṇa.

Returning to Asaṅga’s analogy of water and milk in the *Summary of the Greater Way*, how might we now read the juxtaposition of a “foundation-of-all consciousness,” and an “immaculate seed”? From a Vajrayāna point of view, as we have seen Tsongkhapa elaborate thus far, there are indeed two kinds of consciousness, which might seem to engage at the same locus, “in such a way that they are gathered together simultaneously.” There is the extremely subtle mind of clear light, which has dwelt in a continuum from time without beginning, though dormant, except for a brief instant at the culmination of death, each time a sentient being dies. Even at that moment, however, it is stated repeatedly across Tibetan tantric traditions that although the clear light appears, someone not trained to recognize it, who does not understand emptiness, will not be able to apprehend or understand anything about the totally pure appearance that manifests from the depths of their own mental continuum.⁹⁰ Beset by the tendencies for the link of

⁹⁰ See, for example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “Union of the Old and New Translation Schools” in *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, 217. See also Appendix Seventeen (459-461). Tsongkhapa’s most detailed exposition of the process of death, intermediate state, and rebirth, from the point of view of the subtle winds and mind, as the basis for complete stage practice, appears in the first part of his four-part commentary on Nāgārjuna’s *Five Stages*, called the *Notes on the Stage of Vajra Recitation* (*rdo rje bzlas pa'i rim pa'i zin bris*), vol. *cha*, 7b5-33b1 (208-260). (There is no commentary on the fifth stage of this text, and the commentary on the fourth stage finishes abruptly, leading me to conjecture that these texts were

existence, the mind will grasp to something as real, trigger a seed for a ripened result, and quickly be catapulted into the intermediate state, hurtling towards a new rebirth. But nonetheless, that continuum of clear light consciousness is said to continue in an unbroken stream, hidden and dormant, yet untouchably pure.⁹¹ When fully realized from

written in the last year of Tsongkhapa's life.) It remains a future project to translate and explicate this rich material. It is worthwhile to note, however, that while Tsongkhapa's sources here (particularly the Guhyasamāja explanatory tantra, *Vajramālābhīdhāna*), make frequent reference to the “foundation of all,” Tsongkhapa uses various exegetical techniques to argue (1) that this word does not mean the same thing as it does in other contexts, (2) that it need not (and does not) refer to a consciousness that is not subsumed within the six groups of consciousness, and (3) that insofar as it is singled out from mental consciousness conceptually, it refers to the karmic tendencies themselves. Tsongkhapa also states (13a1-2 [215]):

In this system, the consciousness that experiences the clear light of death in the original condition is precisely that which, through something of its same type, makes manifest the clear light during the path; because it *is* mental consciousness. So the “foundation of all” and “afflictive mind” are similar to other instances merely in name, but not at all in meaning.

ལུགས་འདི་གཞི་དུས་ཀྱི་འཆི་བའི་འོད་གསལ་ཉམས་སུ་མྱོང་བའི་ཤེས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རིགས་ཀྱིས་ལས་དུས་སུ་འོད་གསལ་མངོན་དུ་བྱེད་ལ། དེ་ནི་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར། འཆི་སེམས་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེས་ན་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་ཉོན་ཡིད་ནི་མིང་ཙམ་གཞན་དང་འདྲ་འདོན་ནི་གཏན་མི་འདྲ་ལོ།

I think Tsongkhapa's position here is entirely congruent with what he suggests in the *Illumination of the True Thought* (see Appendix Six [301]), when seeming at first to agree with his interlocutor about the possibility of a foundation consciousness that is like an illusion: “If you accept a foundation consciousness such as that, then it would amount to saying nothing more than that the tendencies of the foundation consciousness, once ripened, appear as form, sound, and the rest. *But* if you had to accept that this meant there was no such thing as outer objects, then . . .” that is where the problem would arise.

See also Gareth Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 20-21 and 34n50 for reference to a similar position expressed in Tsongkhapa's *Commentary on the “Compendium of Vajra Primordial Wisdom,” An Explanatory Tantra of the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i bshad pa'i rgyud ye shes rdo rje kun las btus pa'i Tikka*). I hesitate to accept Sparham's conclusion, however, that Tsongkhapa was at that point cross-referencing his particular refutation of foundation consciousness in the *Illumination of the True Thought*, and that therefore the *Commentary on the “Compendium of Vajra Primordial Wisdom”* would be “one of his last works,” post-dating even the *Illumination* (in 1418). This is because Jamyang Shepa clearly states (based on many earlier biographical sources) that the *Commentary on the “Compendium”* was composed in 1410 (the year of the tiger). (See Geshe Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 392.) In any case, it is clear that even by 1410 Tsongkhapa had long since been *teaching* a refutation of foundation consciousness, and may rather have been referring to the arguments “already explained” in his *Ocean of Reasoning* (composed c. 1406-7). See also Chapter One, note 77, above.

⁹¹ See Appendix Seventeen (462-465). See also Tsongkhapa's concise definition in his *Notes on the Five Stages Encapsulated* (*rim lnga bsdus pa'i zin bris*), vol. *cha*, 2b2-5 (508), emphasis added:

The original condition of the body at a coarse level is the basis for the arising of the sacred world and the divine body its inhabitants: just the heaps, elements, and sensory fields. The subtle [original condition] consists of the sequence in which the channels are formed, their definite number, and how they are placed, as well as how the winds flow within them, how the white and red orbs are emitted and withdrawn in reliance upon those [winds and channels], and so on. The extremely subtle [original condition] consists of the extremely subtle winds of the clear light, which are impossible to separate from mind. The coarse way that the mind exists consists of the eighty conceptual fabrications about natures; the subtle way consists of the three appearances at the time of the original condition, and the *extremely subtle [mind] is the clear light of the original condition*.

ལུས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་རགས་པ་རྟེན་བརྟེན་པའི་སྒྲ་སྒྲུང་འཆར་བའི་གཞི་ལུས་ཀྱི་ཕུང་ཁམས་སྐྱེ་མཆེད་ཙམ་དང་། སྤ་བ་རྩ་ཇི་ལྟར་སྐྱེ་བའི་གོ་རིམ་དང་། གངས་པེ་ས་དང་། གནས་རྒྱལ་དང་། དེའི་ནང་ནས་རྒྱུད་ཇི་ལྟར་སྐྱེ་བའི་རྒྱལ་དང་། དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཐེག་ལེ་དཀར་དམར་གྱི་འདུ་འཕྲོད་བྱེད་རྒྱལ་སོགས་སོ། །ཤིན་ཏུ་སྤ་བ་ནི། སེམས་དང་འབྲལ་དུ་མི་རུང་བའི་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྤ་བ་ལོ། །སེམས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་རགས་པ་ནི། རང་བཞིན་བརྒྱད་ཅུའི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་རྣམས་དང་། སྤ་བ་ནི་གཞི་དུས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུང་བ་གསུམ་དང་། ཤིན་ཏུ་སྤ་བ་ནི་གཞིའི་འོད་གསལ་ལོ།

the perspective of complete stage meditation, however, this clear light mind turns into the indivisible primordial wisdom realizing emptiness. Though I have never seen Tsongkhapa relate the indwelling mind of clear light directly to the idea of buddha-nature, or to the naturally-abiding family lineage, still, insofar as he advocates what he reads to be Asaṅga and Candrakīrti's intent, namely that the foundation-of-all be interpreted as *emptiness*, and since a few pages later Tsongkhapa accepts as Nāgārjuna's intent the idea of a mental consciousness that is "the foundation of all afflicted existence and all that is totally pure," I do not think it a stretch to conjecture that Tsongkhapa would have accepted the extremely subtle continuum of clear light mind as the tantric equivalent to Asaṅga's immaculate seed or tendency for listening, which is "the congruent cause for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things."

Meanwhile, there is still the ordinary stream of mental consciousness "that grasps hold of a birth in cyclic existence" and remains the foundation of all afflicted experience. Analogically this would act as the "foundation of all," and the infusion substrate for all the seeds, insofar as it is, in Tsongkhapa's mature view, the primary basis of designation for a mere "I." Then, reading the "foundation-of-all consciousness" as this continuum of conditioned mental consciousness upon which the mere "I" is primarily posited, we might read at a new level the commentary Tsongkhapa quotes from Asvabhāva's *Additional Explanation*.⁹²

"The phrase, 'In dependence upon the enlightenment had by all the Buddhas,' means that the primordial wisdom which is without stain and without obstruction, and the Dharma that is taught – the groups of sūtras and so on – is the home of the tendency for listening, while the foundation-of-all consciousness is not. Nonetheless, they engage together. Furthermore, the locus of flourishing is something like listening to the Dharma that is taught, but the locus that is the basis, is the foundation of all."

Within the rarified context of creation stage, then, one might read the "congruent causes for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things" not only as the tendencies for listening to Mahāyāna Dharma, but as the tendencies for being able to hear, contemplate, and meditate upon a sādhana of unsurpassed yoga tantra, as in Śāntipa's unique explanation of the four realities, quoted above.⁹³ "The antidote to all this, the circle of the maṇḍala, is the reality of the path. *Completely transforming what bears the defining characteristics of a mental stream, in order to obliterate suffering and its source*, is the reality of cessation." It is interesting to see how this language of "completely

See also Khedrup Je Gelek Pel Zangpo, *Clarification of the Five Stages (rim lnga'i gsal byed mkhas grub rjes snga rting zin bris su stsal ba rnams phyogs gcig tu sdebs pa)* mkhas grub rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha*, 24b1-26a4 (366-369) for important clarification on debates raised by Tsongkhapa and others in this context.

⁹² Appendix Eight (728).

⁹³ See citation at Chapter Four, note 53, above.

transforming what bears the defining characteristics of a mental stream” echoes Asaṅga’s mention of how, “insofar as the slight, medium, and great [tendencies for listening] flourish step by step, just so much the ripened consciousness diminishes, and transforms.” Yet we have now seen that in Tsongkhapa’s tantric context, to “transform what bears the defining characteristics of a mental stream” would mean to completely alter the basis upon which one labels “I am.”

Gradually, through thousands and thousands of *sādhana*s, the practitioner plants new tendencies within conditioned consciousness, stabilizing the visualizations, breaking through ordinary appearances, and familiarizing the conditioned mind with a conceptual understanding about an unconditioned vajra mind that cannot yet be perceived directly, but which the conditioned mind still believes, through sheer conviction, to be the ultimate basis of designation for the mere thought, “I am” – *svabhāva ātmako’haṃ*. Although we have seen one sense in which the “foundation of all” might be interpreted as the clear light mind, insofar as that is the very most subtle basis of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, it seems to me philosophically essential that one does not “plant seeds” in the clear light mind, *per se*, since all seeds planted with a conceptual mind still belong to the realm of conditioned mind, and will be involved in the cycle of karmic ripening within the stream of mental consciousness. Thus, even when entertaining the sheer conviction that the vajra-wisdom-realizing-emptiness is now the final basis of designation for the thought “I am,” in actuality one would have to accept that the seeds planted while thinking that thought conceptually are still planted in “me,” a mere “me” in which a vast quantity of karmic seeds and tendencies for viewing “myself” in an ordinary way are still lurking and manifesting constantly. Nevertheless, the more consistent and intensive the *sādhana* practice, the more swiftly the practitioner could watch the lived content of the totality of what it means to be “me” begin to change, as the creation stage practice itself begins to act as the swan who drinks up the milk of ancient seeds planted in an ordinary idea of “me,” to leave behind the clear, pure water of clear light mind, identified as *dharmakāya*.

In the transition to the complete stage, the yogi would eventually gain a “critical mass” of momentum from the *extra*-ordinary karmic seeds of virtue associated with all the practices of the creation stage, enabling him or her to break through, as it were, to the genuinely primordial consciousness of clear light. This “breakthrough” would have to occur both at the level of very subtle shifts in energy, or the fine vibration of inner winds entering the central channel, and at the level of mind, where the primordial wisdom becomes clearer and clearer, with fewer and fewer veils of conceptual elaboration. By the stage of the actual clear light, and the pure illusory body that manifests from it, the nonconceptual mind would have become so powerful that it would seem the process should be less and less about how seeds or tendencies cause a beheld aspect to appear in terms of a certain abstraction, but more and more about how raw illusory appearances

dawn before nonconceptual consciousness.⁹⁴ So causation through the ripening of seeds within consciousness would still be taking place, but it would no longer be inveterately bound up with conceptuality. The process of karmic ripening would also become vividly clear to the yogi as it is happening.

Thus, philosophically speaking, I propose that the heart of Tsongkhapa's vision for the creation stage might be described as follows. Through repeated practice, one plants completely new kinds of seeds and tendencies in relation to an "I" posited upon the vajra knowledge of emptiness, rather than upon an ordinary conception of "me." These powerful seeds bring their congruent results by causing the beheld aspect of consciousness to dawn as the divine beings of the maṇḍala and the sacred places where they stay. Since what appears to consciousness and the way one interprets it constitute what will be "reality" for that observer, and insofar as nothing exists inherently, that appearance is what it means *to be real*, in a deceptive way, the world in which one lives and moves increasingly takes on the aspect of a pure and sacred world, spontaneously dawning in the nature of an illusion. At first the images arise only through abstractions of objects – mediated by words and generalized pictures of "divine beings" – but eventually, as Tsongkhapa insists repeatedly, the divine beings will appear to nonconceptual consciousness, as vividly as in a dream. This, as I have argued, is still due to the power of ripening tendencies, though the discursively conceptual component diminishes, especially in proportion to the depth and stability of the meditative equipoise.

Eventually, according to Tsongkhapa's explication of various Indian commentators' theories of the complete stage, the trained yogi will gain the capacity to draw all the energetic winds associated with the basic forms of misconception into the indestructible orb at the heart.⁹⁵ This takes place through the unfolding of deliberate

⁹⁴ See Appendices Fifteen-Seventeen for examples of Tsongkhapa's discussions of such topics.

⁹⁵ See, for example, the following passages from the *Notes on the Stage of Vajra Recitation* (*rdo rje bzlas pa'i rim pa'i zin bris*), vol. *cha*, 37b6-38a3 (268-269) and 40a6-40b4 (273-274), whose profound significance and context remain to be treated in a separate monograph:

Thus the main winds that give rise to conceptual thought are the life wind and the downward-clearing wind. These flow from the [left-side] solitary channel of the holy body and from the [right-side] taste channel of holy speech. But since the winds that flow in the central channel are winds that are free of conceptual thought, the central channel is superior to the other two. Whenever a yogi achieves the ability to insert the winds into the central channel by force of yoga, then that yogi has the ability to accomplish the good of living beings; and when the winds that have entered there remain there, one is victorious over the one-hundred-and-eight winds. This is something that yogis who are children, at the level of the creation stage, cannot understand. But the clear light of manifest enlightenment – that occurs in an instant – is achieved by inserting the winds into the central channel. This is what [the verses from the *Vajramālābhīdhāna-tantra*] are saying is "stated in this tantra" [i.e. the *Guhyasamāja-tantra*].

. . . It adds that through the yoga of winds set forth here, suffering existence will be turned back. As for how it is stopped: Through the practice of vajra recitation, all the winds and mind "seek after" the simultaneously-born wind, the indestructible orb. That is, they go there and enter into it. All the winds and mind remain in the place where the simultaneously-born wind abides; that is, they dissolve, and abandon every activity of engaging with outer objective fields. But in this way, it is not as though there is

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have discussed, Buddhas perceive what sentient beings perceive, but not due to any karmic tendencies arising within their own holy mind of dharmakāya.⁹⁸ Through an immensely complex series of practices for transforming every level of perception, the tantric yogi has used the process of ripening entirely new kinds of sacred seeds upon an empty designation of “I,” in order, eventually, to put an end to the very cycle of planting and ripening karmic seeds, forever. Thus I would suggest that the process of Vajrayāna practice – as an accelerated and high-intensity version of all Mahāyāna practice – is a process of “using seeds to put an end to seeds.” As Asaṅga wrote: “The ripened consciousness that has all the seeds transforms in every way, *until it has no more seeds*. It has in every way abandoned them.”

Transforming Death, Transition, and Rebirth . . .

Asaṅga has said that all the seeds transform (*gnas gyur* – literally, “shift state”), and we have always heard that tantra is about transformation; but what would it mean to say, in a philosophically sophisticated way, according to Tsongkhapa’s rigorous standards, that something on the afflicted side of things had actually *transformed* into something pure? At this point I would argue that, conventionally speaking, it is not as though something whose manifest nature is impure “turns out to have been” really pure, nor “is” it pure, as long as it remains in that deceptive nature. Tibetans are fond of making stark examples: shit is not gold, nor is suffering bliss. To say “white is black and black is white,” in Tibetan idiom, is to be a liar, not a fancy tantric yogi. Nonetheless, it should be clear by now what it would mean to say that *the emptiness of what is impure was always pure*. I think I represent Tsongkhapa’s tradition properly if I say that it is only at that level that transformation can take place, and only at that level that even *saṃsāra* can meaningfully be said to be of the same taste (*ro gcig*) as *nirvāṇa*.

In this context, then, what would it mean to transform death, the intermediate state and rebirth? As Paṇchen Sönam Drakpa argues clearly, it is impossible for there to be something that bears the characteristics of what we ordinarily mean by any one of those three, and that is also free from defilements, i.e., pure.⁹⁹ Therefore, he argues that in this specific case, purifying death and the rest cannot be the same as what it means to purify a mental stream, i.e., where something that goes on in a continuum was at one point defiled, and through the path of meditation, at a later time became free of defilements. Rather, what it means to be born, to die, and to be hurtled through a transitional process, includes the dependently designated defining characteristic that these experiences were in

infinite store of a Buddha’s virtue “continues,” through what appears to sentient beings to be time, in order to bring its fruits for their sake. It seems to me, however, that Tsongkhapa would never point to a place where the action of congruent causes ceases to function.

⁹⁸ See the section on “Freedom from Elaboration and Intimations of Omniscience,” above in Chapter Five.

⁹⁹ Paṇchen Sönam Drakpa, *bskyed rim gyi rnam gzhas mkhas pa'i yid 'phrog*, 51-52:

སྤྱི་ལོ་བར་དོ་གསུམ་མཚན་ཉིད་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་ཏེ་མ་དང་བྲལ་བ་ཡང་ཡིན་པའི་གཞི་མཐུན་པ་མི་སྲིད་པའི་བྱིར།

fact caused by defilements. So from a strict philosophical point of view, there is nothing that is validly labeled “dying” that could at some point properly be said to be “a pure kind of dying,” and still be *death*.

Pañchen Sönam Drakpa goes on to say that to purify (*sbyong ba*) death and the rest is not like the way one gradually makes manifest something that has been covered – as in the way one purifies, or cultivates (*sbyong ba*) the seeds of the naturally-abiding family lineage – because death and the rest are already manifest. They do not need any help to become what they are; they have been happening already from time without beginning. But “purifying death” is also not like the way one purifies grasping to a self, through a mode of apprehension that is in direct contradiction to it; because, as we have seen since Chapter Three, death and the rest are purified only through a path that is *congruent* with them. Thus, as Geshe Norsang argued,¹⁰⁰ death and the rest of the triadic cycle are only purified in someone’s mental stream when they *cease to exist*. To transform death in the proper sense is to put an end to it, forever. This, of course, is fully in accord with the sūtra vision of Nāgārjuna cited in Chapter One, where he said in the *Root Verses on Incisive Wisdom* that:

The root of the cycle is making traces

Therefore the wise ones *make no trace* . . .

It is the only way to end completely

those heaps of suffering life.¹⁰¹

Here, however, in unsurpassed yoga tantra, the meditation on emptiness that is designed to cut the root of the cycle (which indeed involves “a mode of apprehension that contradicts self-grasping”)¹⁰² is repeatedly conjoined with the meditation in which one directly identifies the emptiness of “me” with the fullness of the completely realized dharmakāya. Thus, even as one is canceling the seeds for ever dying and being reborn again, one is simultaneously planting seeds that will become congruent causes for experiencing the perfectly pure mind of a Buddha, *instead of death*.

Pañchen Sönam Drakpa reiterates what I have pointed out several times in Tsongkhapa’s writings, namely, that during the creation stage, by meditating on the holy mind and the two types of form bodies belonging to a Buddha – insofar as the ordinary triad of cyclic experiences bear some resemblance to these – one purifies, or trains, the mind by developing the conviction that when something like death comes, “I will see it *as* the dharmakāya.” But that is not the final purification, because that alone cannot eliminate death. That cessation will only come during the complete stage, when at the fourth and fifth stages one achieves the actual clear light (corresponding to *dharmakāya*), the pure illusory body (what will be the *sambhogakāya*), and the ability to emanate other

¹⁰⁰ Gyutö Monastery, April 14th, 2014.

¹⁰¹ See citation at Chapter One, note 155.

¹⁰² *bdag ‘dzin dang ‘dzin stangs ‘gal ba*, as used by Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, *mkhas pa’i yid ‘phrog*, 52, though it is a phrase that appears frequently in Tsongkhapa’s writings.

form bodies (*nirmāṇakāya*). Though still part of the path, these aspects of what it is to be a Buddha are achieved in advance, and the pure body of illusion will then go on in an unbroken stream until total Buddhahood is reached. So, according to Guhyasamāja presentations, there is a point even before the final goal when it could properly be said that one will never die again, because the pure illusory body of the fifth stage is said to be indestructible, i.e., a vajra body.

This analysis regards process, but to return to our question of ontology, what is it about the *emptiness* of death, that, being pure of any essence, could enable it to be purified, in the sense of being eliminated, and thus be transformed into the mind of a Buddha? How could this be the case in the sense that what would have been death is *replaced* by a sublime and everlasting state of existence, instead of one's ever dying again? All these things may seem impossible, even ridiculous, to us now, because the concrete reality of human death is so blatantly inescapable. Indeed, it is a fundamental teaching of Buddhism, as well, that everyone dies and that even highly accomplished saints will never stay around in our world forever. But philosophically, I would suggest that our only doorway into understanding how a developmental process could bring about changes in a mindstream, so that something which was already manifest could be prevented from occurring ever again, is to look once again at the metaphysical emptiness of "death": the fact that it never had any *inherent* characteristics of being what we thought it was or experienced it to be in the first place, if it is true that living beings have already experienced it countless times before.

Hence the one kind of purity, which Tsongkhapa described in his commentary to the *Oṃ śūnyatā* mantra, leads to the very possibility of the other kind of purification, which would eliminate the future prospect of death and the rest by demolishing the seeds for ever experiencing them again. That is, if the necessity of dying had characteristics from its own side, then it would always have to be that way, and no practice of the path would be able to do anything about it. But, as Nāgārjuna's logic would go, if that were the case, then dying would have to be unchanging, and then it could never *happen*, either. If, on the other hand, death is a mere label upon a complex series of processes, each intimately conditioned by the ripening and interrelationship between innumerable seeds and tendencies unfolding in a mental stream – which cause the very experience of severing the connection with certain aggregates of matter and energy called a "body" – then if the seeds for experiencing those processes in a certain way can be altered, or *re-habituated*, there is hope for a complete transformation of the pattern, replacing the cycle of death and rebirth with an immortal body and limitless divine life. If there were absolutely intransigent outer forces causing every death and suffering birth, then there would be nothing that practice of the path could do to help. But if the characteristics of birth, death, and the intermediate state had never come from anything other than the way those processes appeared to a mind, based on past actions and predispositions, then there

would be hope, and legitimate reason to practice a path. Likewise, one could never become a totally pure Buddha by eliminating defilements that had a nature of their own. Rather, in this view it is only because the defilements are fundamentally pure of ever existing with any nature that they could eventually be removed, through radical re-habitation, until “all the seeds are transformed.”

For a vivid example of the way that Tsongkhapa himself applies the arguments for emptiness to the very process of death, transition, and rebirth, I will turn briefly to a sūtra passage upon which he comments in the *Illumination of the True Thought*, just after finishing the presentation of how karma is infused into the mere “I,” as discussed previously. Tsongkhapa points to this passage, from the *Sūtra on Traveling Through Cyclic Existence (Bhavasamkrānti-sūtra)* as being the scriptural source for Candrakīrti’s analogy regarding the way that karma can bring about its effects while being completely illusory. My purpose here is not to examine that example, about a dreamer who wakes up and burns with desire for the woman he encountered in his dream,¹⁰³ but rather to take the latter portion of the sūtra passage itself as a vivid illustration of the emptiness of death, transition, and rebirth. Tsongkhapa certainly takes it that way in his commentary, but, being a work on the Middle Way, he of course does not apply it to a tantric context as I will do here. Hence I am admittedly taking the thread of commentary one step further, but in a way that I think is in keeping with Tsongkhapa’s thought. To quote just the sūtra, as it appears in the *Illumination*:¹⁰⁴

(293) That first moment of consciousness emerges as a stream of mind that is of the same share as what was manifest just before [the last life] ended, which will become ripened experience for [the new birth].

O, great king, in this regard, there is no thing at all that consists of moving from this world to another world over there, yet moving on from death and manifesting birth still exist.

O, great king, in this regard, whatever is the ending of the last moment of consciousness, that is called, “moving on from death.” Whatever is the emergence of the first moment of consciousness, that is called, “birth.”

O, great king, when the last moment of consciousness has ended, still, one does not go anywhere. When the consciousness emerges that is included in a birth, still, there is nowhere from which one has come. If you ask why this is so, it is because *they are set apart from any nature*.

O, great king, in this regard, the last moment of consciousness is empty of any last moment of consciousness. Moving on from death is empty of moving on from death. Karma is empty of karma. The first moment of consciousness is empty of any first moment of consciousness. Birth is empty of birth; yet it is evident that no karma is ever lost.

¹⁰³ See Appendix Six (290-292).

¹⁰⁴ Appendix Six (293).

Tsongkhapa interprets the entire passage as meaning that although dying, moving on, and being born with the stream of karmic imprints that one carried over from a previous life all take place conventionally, none of these exists ultimately. He takes the phrase “they are set apart from any nature,” as adding “the distinction of the thing to be refuted,”¹⁰⁵ and the final phrase “no karma is ever lost,” as affirming that karma and its results still work. But in the context of all we have examined, what might this mean, experientially, for the tantric practitioner?

To engage in a thought experiment: If, based on the sequence of visualized dissolutions that precede the *Oṃ śūnyatā* mantra, the creation stage meditator gradually gains more and more profound experiences of simulating the death process, so that some foretaste of the visions of a mirage, smoke, fireflies, and so on, begin to come, it would seem that at some point, no matter how seasoned the meditator, fear would begin to arise: “I am dying!” That is the point when all the previously honed analytical meditation must be available to draw upon in an instant, so that the meditator might understand vividly that this “death,” is only a name. But at that level, it is not about words any more, either, but about the mostly deeply ingrained mental images – tendencies for abstracting a nonconceptual perception in a certain way, even if bereft of language – that trigger the mortal fear of losing “me.”

If, by understanding instantaneously that this “me” is nothing but a label, that the losing is nothing but a contrived image, and the “dying” nothing but another shift in mental states and subtle energies, one might have gone a long way towards releasing the grasping that would cause craving and appropriation to be triggered as the eighth and ninth links. But in the sūtra literature, one does not usually see reference to someone reaching the ārya path for the first time *while dying*. The collapse of the mind is too extreme, too inescapably terrifying, for the kind of sublime, stable meditation that the sūtra vehicles describe as ideal for reaching the path of seeing. It is in this difference that we might gain some further insight into what it means for the unsurpassed yogas to utilize “extremely subtle mind” to perceive emptiness. The tantric yogi is in training to be able to maintain the clarity and perfect stability of the state of mind required to reach an ārya path, even while and after the coarse and subtle elements of the body have dissolved, and both the coarse and subtle layers of consciousness with which one had engaged with every mental process during this life – including dreamless sleep – are imploding upon themselves. One is attempting to perceive emptiness directly with the kind of mind one usually only experiences for a split second when already dead. It cannot be an easy task.

Nevertheless, if, through the methodical, gentle progress of the sādhaṇa, meditating first for a short time, then longer and longer on certain portions, until the contrived experiences become more and more realistic, one is able to become quite

¹⁰⁵ Appendix Six (294).

accustomed to that dissolution process, even that vivid experience might lose any taste of “fear.” Then indeed the practitioner would see that dissolution into the very subtle mind of clear light had no *inherent* nature of being terrifying. If, furthermore, one was completely immersed in the sheer conviction that this was in fact an experience of divine beings dancing through and blessing the inner pathways of one’s body-made-of-light, dissolving into a sacred center of all reality from which every living being would be saved; then indeed, what would there be to dread or loathe in such processes? Piece by piece, image by image, one would be whittling away at every aspect of what it had meant to “die,” so that one might be hard-pressed to find a valid basis any more for the “death” label that still carries its own complex conventional meaning within the cycle of suffering existence. But once again, until one could reach the actual realizations of the complete stage, sheer conviction would not be enough to stop the validly labeled “death process” from happening to the practitioner eventually, which would once again cause this set of heaps to collapse. So it is a fine but crucial line between believing death is transformed – because you *see* “it” differently – and having actually transformed death, because *it is not going to happen any more*, and arising from the clear light in a vajra body instead. The latter is vastly more difficult to attain than the former.

Concluding Reflections

What *can* you do with an empty “I”? Based on all we have examined within Tsongkhapa’s thought, it would seem that if one genuinely gained a worldview in which (1) all appearances are understood to be constructed from billions of images arising on the basis of past habituations, and in which, (2) because nothing possesses any characteristics from its own side, so with diligent practice, understanding, and vast motivation, one could methodically plant and cultivate the seeds to experience an entirely different kind of reality, and show others how to do the same; then (3) the possibilities for what “I” – labeled upon the primordial wisdom of clear light – might become, are indeed limitless.

Nonetheless, it is not as though we, in our current state of clouded and limited vision, could fathom exactly what kinds of seeds to plant. From the earliest strata of Buddhist teaching, it is said that the Buddha taught the details of ethical code (*’dul ba*, Skt. *vinaya*) because he had gained direct insight into the workings of karma that no ordinary being could see. Thus he could both prohibit and prescribe certain sets of actions with the “prediction” or “specification” (*lung bstan*) of what kinds of results those actions would bring.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, insofar as the various traditions of Vajrayāna practitioners in

¹⁰⁶ See the passage from Gyalwa Gendun Drup, on the *ripened result*, cited in Chapter One, note 132, especially: “Since there are some causes and results that are just so, then in order to divide them, [the Buddha] specified what arises from virtue and what from non-virtue. Since there are also some things which develop specifically from concentration, so in order to divide them he specified – not what arises in simultaneity with or just after something finishes – but what will happen much later.”

Tibet did accept and continue to accept that the written root and explanatory tantras represent the word of an enlightened Buddha, their proponents often remain adamant that it is not as though one can just make up one's own sādhanas, based on the kind of seeds "I" want to plant. Because, without omniscient foresight, such a personal fabrication would more likely end up creating seeds for future lives in saṃsāra than for any enlightened state that could transcend it. Of course there is still immense flexibility and diversity in the way that different lineages have interpreted the sādhanas and instructions for practice that entered Tibet over the course of at least six centuries.¹⁰⁷ I cannot begin to treat the diversity of this subject here. Nonetheless, it is clear from Tsongkhapa's approach to tantric commentary in general, as is evident in the *Steps of Mantra*, and Guhyasamāja commentary in particular, as is evident from the *Exegesis*, and so on, that he held there to be an extremely precise calibration of images and practices that had to be meditated upon just so, or else the instruction would be rendered incapable of bringing about its intended effect.

This is perhaps the most important reason why Tsongkhapa cared so much about "getting the interpretation right" with respect to his Indian sources, and why he would go to such great lengths of rational argument and scriptural quotation to prove each point. *He did not want the practices to be rendered ineffectual* because they had been practiced improperly, at any step of the way. The judge of "improper," in this case would be a pragmatic one: Did the practice lead to its intended result? If not, it could be seen in retrospect to have failed to plant and cultivate the proper causes with all their attendant conditions, and was in effect "wrong." As to *how* Tsongkhapa was so sure he knew the correct interpretation (i.e., the functional interpretation) better than those with whom he disagreed, is a different question, beyond the scope of this inquiry. Yet even with all the analysis included thus far, I have still only been able to give the slightest indication of Tsongkhapa's exegetical method, much less his level of spiritual insight. To read his tantric commentaries in full is to see that he was as thorough as in his better-known works of sūtra philosophy, if not more so, in quoting as many Indian sources as he could to support his arguments. Perhaps an analogy will suffice: When doing microsurgery on the innermost patterning of habitual code at the depths of the mental continuum, one had better know how to rewire the circuits properly, or else one might finish with a quite terrifying, or else meaningless, result.

¹⁰⁷ For a historical study of some portions of this process of the importation of Vajrayāna from India, see Ronald Davidson, 2005, *Tibetan Renaissance*, as well as Cyrus Stearns, 2002, *Luminous Lives*. This is not to mention the vast tradition of treasure (*gter ma*) revelations in the Nyingma lineage, which often include entirely new sādhanas based on the individual pure visions of treasure revealers. Amidst a wealth of scholarship on that subject, see, for example, Janet Gyatso, 1996, "Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury: The *gTer ma* Literature," in Cabezón and Jackson, eds., *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion), 147-169, as well as Bdud 'joms gling pa, 2015, *Düdjom Lingpa's Visions of the Great Perfection*, translated by B. Alan Wallace; edited by Dion Blundell, vols. 1-3 (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications).

I would conjecture that this is one reason why reliance upon authority, whether the personal tutelage of a guru, the scriptural lineage of teachings attributed to masters of the past, or the divine lineage of blessings believed to flow directly from enlightened beings themselves, is considered to be so indispensable to the tantric tradition, especially as Tsongkhapa understood it. Again, this point raises many questions that I will not be able to treat here – regarding the efficacy of ritual and empowerment, the nature of the guru-disciple relationship, Tsongkhapa’s approach to different modes of faith, the reception history of tantric scriptures, and so on – but I hope that the logic of emptiness and mental images as presented in these chapters might provide contemporary scholars with yet a new layer of philosophical grounding upon which to ponder such questions in a Vajrayāna context.

* * *

Within the sequence of the Guhyasamāja sādhana itself, we left off with the dissolution of the central figure into clear light, and the meaning of the *Om śūnyatā* mantra. I could continue from there, to follow the detailed descriptions appearing in both the *Steps of Pure Yoga* and in the *Exegesis of the “Steps of Exposition”* to attempt to explore the Guhyasamāja meditations on taking the intermediate state as the path to the glorified body and rebirth as a path to the emanation body. This would require explicating Tsongkhapa’s interpretation of each and every basis to be purified, the content of the meditations that purify them, the meanings symbolized by each visualization, and so on. But to do so properly would also constitute an entirely different study, even as it would require going into material that is held to be strictly secret by the tradition. That is, while it is at times considered appropriate to discuss the theory of Vajrayāna practice even outside the context of practice,¹⁰⁸ the details of sādhana visualizations and the meaning symbolized by them are something that Geshe Khedrup Norsang and many other teachers have insisted should be taught only to those who have received empowerment and intend to put that knowledge into actual practice. So, out of respect for Geshe Norsang’s wishes, as well as Tsongkhapa’s repeated injunctions within his writings, I will not treat that material here.

Rather, my goal all along has been to discover the general *theory* behind the way that any single one, or all, of the “transformations” would work. At this point it seems we have explored most of the major philosophical points that would be necessary for a practitioner to begin to make sense, conceptually at least, of what must take place in order for anything that initially appears one way to be validly apprehended in another way, through the steps of ritual and meditation. As indicated above, regarding the most deeply ingrained and perhaps most difficult deceptive reality to transform, namely

¹⁰⁸ For example, the Abbot of Gyutö Monastery, Jhado Rinpoche, understood my intent to write on the “theory” (*mtha’ grub*) of tantra in Tsongkhapa’s thought, and readily encouraged it, even for a work that would be available to the public. Personal interview, April 16th, 2015.

“death,” so in all cases, in order to transform something, one must first be able to dissolve its appearance into emptiness, by meditating on the meaning of any one of the “emptiness” mantras we have examined so far.

Then, in most cases, the emergence of a new reality begins with the utterance and visualization of a sacred syllable. While the tantric theory and details behind these syllables are immensely complex, I would suggest that philosophically, there may be a significant connection between the epistemological theory of Dharmakīrti, regarding the way that all conceptual apprehension is mediated through abstracted images, and the tantric idea that one could actually create *new* objects out of nothing more than meaningful sound. This might be possible because abstractions of objects (*don spyi*) are so often identified, in those living beings who have the capacity for language, with an abstracted sound (*sgra spyi*). Thus, for one who knows the word and the image as a closely associated pair – “the meaning of a sound” (*sgra don*) – then just hearing or thinking the word can instantly conjure the image. Practically speaking, this is exactly how the recitation of *sādhana*s comes to function, as the visual or other sensory images one has “worked on” over and over again in the imagination, arise with greater and greater ease upon verbal or mental utterance of the word. For images of maṇḍalic forms and beings that one has never actually seen, however, this can be a slow process, and requires intense concentration. In that case one is trying to generate and become habituated to seeds that have never yet ripened into direct experiences within one’s mindstream, whereas in our ordinary lives, experiences would be dawning from the renewed triggering of tendencies whose corresponding “realities” we have experienced countless times previously within the cycle of existence. So once again, creating the maṇḍala out of words and images should not be an easy process. Nevertheless, it is precisely the process through which Tsongkhapa says that a nonconceptual direct perception of clear appearances will eventually come about.¹⁰⁹

There is yet another explanation regarding the intimate union between sound and the images-that-become-reality, which could be derived from the teachings on the subtle winds and the practices of the vajra recitation in the complete stage. However, due to the immense subtlety of the topic and the length of textual inquiry it would require to explore fully, I will not be able to enter into it properly in the present dissertation. For the moment, from the perspective of creation stage, I can say that Vajrayāna visualizations work consistently with our most basic, root images for interpreting space, time, and identity. As each vision begins to appear “out of emptiness,” one generates raw spatial images such as “round,” “square,” or “triangular,” carefully identifies directions, shapes,

¹⁰⁹ See especially the last excerpt of private advice quoted at the beginning of Chapter Three: “Having visualized via the path the whole maṇḍala of beings and the places where they stay, hold your consciousness upon that abstraction, and then draw forth clear appearances from one subtle detail, and then another, and then another.” See also the many explanations of clear appearances quoted in Chapter Four, “Two Antidotes Precisely Aimed,” especially the passage cited at note 32.

colors, and so on, and joins them all to temporal images of sequence, rhythm, and repose. Utilizing a Middle Way critique of the Sautrāntika views reported by Dharmakīrti, if one cannot ever find the “real” concrete particular – an actual object that could possess its *own* characteristics of location, time, and unique identity from its own side – then one might recognize that it was always the mind that creates the very categories of space, time, and identity, in and through which to identify anything at all. As the practitioner progressively builds the spatial dimensions of a perfect maṇḍala and begins to dwell within such an explicitly mind-created world, he or she begins to recognize how the mind had been doing that all along in the “ordinary” world, too. But now one is deliberately creating the new patterns, and also generating a new “me” to step into them.

In visualizing the divine beings of the Guhyasamāja maṇḍala, one runs the full gamut of moods and expressions, painting tones of masculinity, femininity, power, gentleness, wrath, and passionate love. If observing carefully, one would notice that it is as though all the puzzle pieces of basic human experience are there, but now arrayed in perfect order and heightened idealization. Then there are the fresh associations to be made, as one identifies impersonal aspects of experience – such as the six sense faculties, or the elemental constituents of physical matter – with various individual divine beings, both male and female. One is challenged, through habituation, to come to recognize such qualities displayed within one’s “ordinary” daily experiences as well (for example, when “seeing” “fire”), so that those experiences no longer arise as ordinary. When seeing fire becomes the interaction of a pair of male and female bodhisattvas who embody the eye faculty and the field of visual objects, respectively, and the fire itself is the dance of a female Buddha Gone Thus, while the mind that cognizes the experience is the bodhisattva of wisdom himself, Mañjuśrī, one should hardly think it is “just the stovetop flame” any more.

All these transformations would rely constantly, once again, on recollection of the fact that neither the sense faculties nor the objective fields, neither the heaps, nor the elements, nor the limbs, nor the ligaments had any characteristics from their own side in the first place. Once the meditator has gained certainty in apprehending this emptiness, it becomes possible to imagine, then believe, and eventually realize with philosophical certainty what *could have been* the case all along, namely, that one’s body and mind were made of divine beings. After all, as Tsongkhapa quoted the *Integration of Practices*: “Furthermore, it is taught that the same heaps, domains and sensory fields – which have dwelt with an ordinary sense of pride from time without beginning – indeed have the very essence of being made from the extremely subtle particles of All Those Who Have Gone Thus.”¹¹⁰ With practice and habituation to the right kinds of mental images, there is the philosophical possibility that every interaction of sense and sense object might be validly perceived as the ecstatic union of male and female bodhisattvas generating a holy bliss

¹¹⁰ See citation at Chapter Four, note 7.

that will become the nectar of wisdom to bless every living being. But if such an illusory appearance were ever to be validly established as a deceptive reality, it would also be essential to understand that this is only possible because what are merely labeled “sense faculties,” and so forth, were never *really* one thing or another from their own side. It was always “just images”; but once one comes to realize that the production of all images from the depths of the capacity to be aware was always a sacred creation, because grounded in the primordially pure clear light mind, then perhaps one might reach the point where there is no turning back. The yogi thinks: If it appears, then it had a source in what is ultimately pure, so, directed by the right intention and habituation, it *can* actually arise as something totally pure. At that point the realization of a “transformation” has begun to take place. But if even a single instant of grasping occurs, everything goes right back to the cycle of suffering. So as long as the realizations are conceptually generated, there is room for error and backsliding.

* * *

In light of all the philosophical principles discussed so far, these visualizations draw upon what may be our most primal seeds for seeing things as a world, and redirect them to the active creation of a perfectly pure and ordered world, whose sole purpose for existing would be to bring joy and liberation living beings. As we saw in Tsongkhapa’s *Exegesis*, deep and consistent habituation to these idealized images is designed to purify our memories of past eons and our tendencies ever to repeat the patterns of a “fall from paradise,” while they also work to erode the tendencies that would bring about a future death, transition, and suffering rebirth. Because time is empty – because the past never *really* ended – all images of past karmic actions are potentially available to be actively meditated upon at any moment, in an effort to transform the traced memory of past deeds before they can ever ripen. Thus, according to this view, at a certain level of meditative equipoise, one could look upon the history of an entire great eon within an instant, and understand how it might be purified from the level of its root images. Why else would there be any value in applying the meditation on emptiness to the congruent object of a long-past eon of cosmic destruction? During the period of creation stage, one would probably not see major changes in one’s outer environment when getting up from the cushion or emerging from retreat, but it might seem plausible, according to Tsongkhapa’s explanation, that one could gain confidence that such cosmically-oriented practice is planting the precisely calibrated seeds to become, as rapidly as possible, a Buddha who sees all time in a single instant.

Thus, with disciplined imagination grounded in the approximation of primordial wisdom, the yogi “plays” at creating a world where all things are possible, simply by the power of thought. He or she knows very well that it is not yet real, but learns to believe that it will be, because all things come from seeds. In this case, it would be like a rehearsal process in which one trusts that no effort is wasted, because one day the

performance will be witnessed by others; or one day the rabbit will become REAL. Furthermore, the setup of Tsongkhapa's Guhyasamāja sādhanā drives the practitioner to recognize that the mind of primordial wisdom is not restricted only to cleansing the tendencies associated with a singular personal history coagulated around a limited "I." Rather, the practitioner, while imagining what divine wisdom could do, must begin to gain the sheer conviction that one can work to purify the karmic tendencies and afflictions of other beings, too. This is why the subsequent sections of the Guhyasamāja sādhanā in particular, and all sādhanās in general, are designed to enable the practitioner to envision acting out all the great deeds of Buddhas, in split-seconds of imagined transformation that are limitless in scope. For example, what would it mean to send out from one's heart infinite emanations of the Buddha Amitābha and believe that *instantaneously* every living being is freed from every trace of the mental affliction of desire, and becomes that very Buddha of Infinite Light?¹¹¹ Again, if time is indeed empty in the Nāgārjunian sense, there might be philosophical justification in imagining the spiritual evolution of other sentient beings, from existence in the lowest hells, through all the stages of the path, until they reach the state of Vajradhara, or Amitābha, or any of the other five Buddhas, within a few seconds of "sādhanā-time." The creation stage yogi is learning to dwell and act in a time beyond the karmically-driven unfolding of ordinary, individual time.

Then, what would it be like to send emanations from one's heart in thirty-two different ways, specific to each divine being in the maṇḍala, purifying the affliction, or sense faculty, or particular situation of fear or obstacles that each divine being is meant to purify, respectively? What would it be like to do so tens or hundreds of thousands of times for each divine being, accompanied by specific mantras that call upon each divine name, until the practitioner's entire being vibrates constantly with the determined intention to purify – first into emptiness and then arising anew as something perfect – the tendencies in the mindstreams of every being there ever was, is, or will be?

These latter practices are designed solely to plant powerful positive seeds, and they consist of holy actions that no longer correspond "congruently" to any particular ordinary experience that needs purification within the practitioner's own mindstream. Rather, they are aimed entirely towards collecting the virtue, for the sake of others, that will be incorporated into the collection of merit that produces a Buddha's glorified body of experience, along with a paradise and its four purities.¹¹² It is this glorified body, as well as the emanation bodies that flow from it, that are, at the time of the result, supposed to become efficacious in carrying out such deeds for living beings, in actuality. But as practices, these would represent a type of forward-facing congruent cause that, though

¹¹¹ See *The Steps of Pure Yoga* (*rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa*), vol. ja, 20b4 (730) and 21a2-6 (731).

¹¹² See Chapter Three, "Congruency of Path and Result," above (and note 26) where these four are described by Tsongkhapa as: A totally pure (1) environment, (2) body, (3) objects of experience, and (4) holy deeds.

planted within the mindstream of someone who is not yet an ārya, might still be directed towards a fruition that will utterly transcend the karmic cycles of ripening “seeds.” For once the critical mass of virtue is reached, Buddhas’ activities and experiences are said to continue spontaneously (*lhun gyis grub pa*), out of the infinite creative possibilities of clear light mind, with no need to wait for seeds to “ripen,” nor any danger that they might “wear out.”

* * *

In conclusion, then, I think there is a crucially important inter-religious echo in the fact that, when uttering the *Om śūnyatā* mantra, one is simultaneously dissolving any prior identification of “self,” and also associating this with the experience of death. How might this resonate with the famous lines from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans?¹¹³

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . For if we have been united with him *in a death like his*, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our *old self was crucified with him* so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. . . . But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, *will never die again*; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Of course I cannot begin to unravel the possible resonances between what it would mean for a Christian to emulate the death of Jesus, with the hope of joining in a “resurrection like his,” and what it would mean for a Guhyasamāja yogi to practice envisioning and experiencing the “death” of Vajradhara in the idealized form of a human being of the first eon, in order one day to rise up in a holy body of illusion, rather than ever entering the intermediate state. In the context of the Guhyasamāja practice, one would in fact never say that Vajradhara dies; rather, in practicing the dissolution of Vajradhara into clear light, one aims to preclude ever again seeing death as something ordinary, with the goal that in the complete stage, one will actually experience that clear light and illusory body, without ever dying. So the idealized image is drastically different from that of Christ crucified and risen. Nevertheless, I would argue that insofar as the act immediately preceding that dissolution into clear light is that of Vajradhara granting empowerment to every living being, purifying them of all sins and obscurations, and bringing them to the state of Vajrasattva-Vajradhara, the motivation would seem very much in tune with the Christian explanation of Christ’s motivation while dying on the cross.

Likewise, it would be quite appropriate to say, within a Guhyasamāja context, that in the series of symbolic transformations that follow the *Om śūnyatā* mantra, one is

¹¹³ Cf. Romans 6:3-11, emphasis added.

indeed enacting “rebirth” as a new “I,” based on having “died to the old image of self.” That new “I,” moreover, would without doubt aim to be someone who has died to sin and is learning how to enter into the activities, motivations, and wisdom of divine life.

To review the philosophical steps that Tsongkhapa has provided for us: In the original condition, the mere “I” is designated upon the heaps, while karma is posited or planted upon the mere “I.” But if one changes the basis of designation for the mind that thinks “I am,” the nature of the label, and the way it affects the mind from moment to moment, will change completely. When the very idea of the “me” that was labeled upon the coarse heaps vanishes, then the karmic seeds would indeed “have no place to stay.” When the infusion substrate is also just an idea, and the idea changes – consistently and indelibly – there is no longer anything onto which the old traces/seeds/tendencies might lodge. Thus such a divine identification would be designed to effect the purification of past karma at warp speed. Further, the more deeply the practitioner can enter into the extremely subtle mind, then the purification of seeds, through the purification of *identity* itself, would be taking place from a vantage point of a consciousness that is not conditioned by, or does not belong to, any particular lifetime at all. When the seeds are not even identified as “mine” any more, then they could be all the more easily disarmed.

Because past deeds never *really* ended, they can affect the present; but because they never really began either, they also have no inherent nature of staying. In the ordinary course of things, driven by ignorance, they “by all means bring about their illusory results,”¹¹⁴ but when one has radically altered the structure by which karmic ripening was taking place, this complete shift in the labeling process might indeed so damage the intermittent seeds that they will never be able to bring their full result, and the beginningless tendencies for ignorance will no longer have the fuel to be revived into active form.¹¹⁵ I ask my reader to ponder whether there might be some logical parallel in religious thinking between (1) the idea of being utterly purified of sin through spiritual entry into the death of Jesus Christ, leading to union, through him, with “the mind of God,” and (2) the idea of a rapid purification of the traces of saṃsāra enacted through actual entry into the indwelling mind of clear light – identified with the essence of Vajradhara – with a wish to save all beings.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ See Appendix Five (273) as cited in Chapter Six, note 67, above.

¹¹⁵ See the passage cited at Chapter Two, note 135, as well as the discussion of the “revival” of tendencies in Appendix Eight (718-720). See also Appendix Six (289), for a brief citation from Candrakīrti’s commentary to *Entering the Middle Way*, regarding how tendencies for ignorance remain like the residue of a scent, even after the actual seeds for those tendencies have been finished off. From a sūtra perspective, Tsongkhapa holds that those subtle tendencies that are not seeds (*sa bon ma yin pa’i bag chags*) are not eliminated until the final obscurations to omniscience are removed.

¹¹⁶ See the quotation cited at Chapter Six, note 95, above, especially: “Whenever a yogi achieves the ability to insert the winds into the central channel by force of yoga, then that yogi has the ability to accomplish the good of living beings. . . . This is something that yogis who are children, at the level of the creation stage, cannot understand.”

* * *

While there are, as indicated here, so very many rich topics that I will not be able to treat properly at this present writing, there are still a few major issues that I have raised previously, which must provide the guideposts for our remaining, albeit limited, inquiry into the complete stage. These issues revolve around the overarching question of illusion, as well as the bridge between conceptuality and nonconceptuality in Tsongkhapa's thought. We have thus far gone a long way towards being able to articulate the nature of illusion, in Tsongkhapa's vision, from the perspective of the sūtra Middle Way, the lower three classes of tantra, and the creation stage of unsurpassed yoga. It remains, however, for us to explore what it is that Tsongkhapa maintains to be categorically distinctive about the meaning of the holy body of illusion, first reached just after the level of the mind-set-apart, and its relationship to the extremely subtle inner winds. It also remains for us to return to the question I posed at the beginning of Chapter Four, regarding how it could be that the realizations of the complete stage, including the illusory body, involve deceptive realities that, while empty of inherent nature, are nonetheless "not imagined" or "not constructed by the mind." This will force us to question the possible limits of the Middle Way dictum that all things in the three realms are established only through being "merely labeled by conceptual states of mind," and point towards Tsongkhapa's most explicit statements, in both a sūtric and tantric context, of how conceptual meditation should lead directly to nonconceptual realizations.

I will suggest, finally, that there is something about the language of inner winds, as it appears in Guhyasamāja literature on the complete stage, which offers yet a new way of understanding the basis for genuinely shared outer worlds of experience, as well as for understanding the difference between "actual" and "imagined" in a milieu where *all* appearances are still understood to be "like an illusion." While I will not attempt to treat the five stages of Guhyasamāja in any sequential or comprehensive manner, I will focus just on those excerpts from Tsongkhapa's commentaries that provide clues regarding these particular questions. I ask my reader to keep in mind, however, that more than in any other context, the texts pertaining to the complete stage are oriented towards advanced practice, and much of what they discuss is barely accessible to us conceptually, insofar as we have not gained the realizations of each preceding stage. Nonetheless, even in the discussion of nonconceptuality, as long as words are used, there are conceptual landmarks from which to take our bearings, and so I do not think the inquiry entirely futile at this level. Indeed, this is the conceptual approach taken towards these topics when they are studied and debated by monks in the Geluk tantric monasteries, many of whom may still lack any experience in genuine meditation practice: for the discussion itself plants a seed.

Epilogue: A World Made From Winds

*Therefore whatever arises in dependence
has, from the very beginning, been naturally
set apart from any nature.
Still, appearing as though they had a nature
all these things were said
to be like an illusion.*

—Je Tsongkhapa, *In Praise of Dependent Origination*¹

Tsongkhapa's Principles of Interpretation

In the course of reading Tsongkhapa's *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*, I have identified at least five principles that Tsongkhapa applies consistently in his arguments regarding the interpretation of Indian Buddhist tantric scriptures and commentaries. These themes should be familiar by now, so I will review them here as a way to summarize observations I have made since Chapter Three. These guiding principles are as follows:

1. Many methods: customized for different people at different points in the path
2. A singular view
3. The importance of form: whether outer matter or a divine body
4. The necessity of both stages: creation and completion, based on an idea of
 - the necessity of congruent causes and
 - the necessity of stability and proper sequence
5. The indispensable progression from conceptuality to nonconceptuality

1. Many methods: We saw in Tsongkhapa's initial discussion of the vehicles by which to travel the path to enlightenment that he acknowledges great diversity among types of practitioners. He emphasizes that the Buddha taught many paths so that there would always be *some* method available that can attune most productively with the karmic tendencies that are strongest in a person's mindstream at any given point in time. With respect to the Vajrayāna in particular, Tsongkhapa rejoices in the array of methods designed to coordinate with people's relative inclination for outer or inner practices, as well as with their respective capacity to take the energy of passionate desire as the path. Tsongkhapa takes care to present the methods pertaining to the three lower classes of tantra in all their detail, in an effort to preserve those practices as well as the practices of the unsurpassed tantra. While he certainly praised some paths for being faster or more

¹ *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba gsung ba'i sgo nas bstod pa*, vol. *kha (thor bu)*, 16b3-4 (246):
དེ་ཕྱིར་བརྟེན་ནས་འབྱུང་བ་གང་། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ནི་གདོད་མ་ནས། རྣམ་པར་དབེན་ཡང་དེར་སྤང་བས། འདི་ཀླན་སྤྱོད་མ་བཞིན་དུ་གསུངས།

powerful than others, he never belittles paths designed for those who might not be suited to the most advanced practices. On the contrary, he occasionally chides his contemporaries for not appreciating how demanding and effective those preparatory paths can be.

2. *A singular view*: As we have seen, Tsongkhapa consistently argues that the differences between these various Buddhist paths lie in method, not in view. While this is a difficult issue – and many Tibetan authors have disagreed with Tsongkhapa on such points – I will reiterate my suggestion that Tsongkhapa’s distinction might be easier to digest if in these instances we take his use of the term “view” to refer primarily to the nature of the object of that view, not the way in which the knowing of it arises. For the manner of knowing will be inextricably bound up with the method one took to get there, and this fact is what Tsongkhapa acknowledges throughout with reference to “method.” I think that what he means, primarily, is that the differences among entire categories of practices will always lie in *how*, not in *what* one will ultimately see. Considered this way, it becomes an assertion that there is only one ultimate reality, free of all conceptual elaboration, and that every view which sees it correctly will in the end be the same view; at least with respect to its object, if not with respect to all the concomitant factors that make the seer who he or she is at that time. One might even say that all of Tsongkhapa’s teachings on the view – in a book such as the *Illumination of the True Thought* – belong to the category of method, insofar as they are designed to lead a disciple to understand that which is to be viewed. If listening or reading, contemplating, and meditating all constitute method, however, where does “view” remain distinct? Practically speaking, the borders between the two are still uncertain. But recall that in a Vajrayāna context, Tsongkhapa himself aimed to show how method and view could be identified as two conceptual isolates of a single state of mind.

3. *The importance of form*: Tsongkhapa’s thought shows a consistent thread of concern for preserving the reality of outer form that can function within a shared world. We saw in Chapter Two his many arguments for a Middle Way perspective that could honor that functionality, and in Chapter Three we saw how that emphasis is tied to the very purpose of reaching enlightenment: the ability to *appear* to others in order to help them. If there were no outer form, there could be no holy body of form, and then Buddhas could never teach. The paramount importance of outer form is a point that remains essential to Tsongkhapa’s understanding of the indivisibility of the two realities, all the way to the end of the Guhyasamāja complete stage.

4. *The necessity of both stages*: I have included in Appendix Nine what I see to be the most salient passages in Tsongkhapa’s extensive argument for why, within unsurpassed yoga tantra, practice of both stages is necessary for reaching the results promised by the tantric scriptures of that class. In brief, Tsongkhapa’s logic is as follows. If one only practiced the creation stage, satisfied with the rituals, maṇḍalas, mantras, and

visualizations – even reaching the shared attainments of supernormal abilities that are supposed to result from such practices – this would still be insufficient to free one from saṃsāra. His reason is that, even were one to have found a satisfactory intellectual understanding of what it means for things and persons to lack a self, there would be in the creation stage alone no antidote powerful enough to overcome the inborn form of grasping to a self. That is, if one follows the path of unsurpassed yoga tantra, as opposed to that of other classes of tantra or else a sūtra-based path, the primary means to reach the *direct* realization of emptiness come in the complete stage, culminating in the actual clear light of the fourth stage. While it would not be impossible to reach a direct realization of emptiness through the union of stillness and insight during the creation stage, this would not have all the powerful, accelerating qualities of the actual clear light, and would be tantamount to a path of the lower tantras, which Tsongkhapa insists cannot lead to enlightenment in a single lifetime. Thus, based on his understanding of the distinguishing feature of speed within unsurpassed yoga alone, he argues that the complete stage is indispensable for bringing about the subtlest transformations of one's mind *and* body that would make such a swift path possible.

On the other hand, if one were to practice only the complete stage, meditating on the yogas designed to move the subtle winds into the central channel, without thorough practice of the creation stage, Tsongkhapa argues that the congruent causes for the holy body of form would not be complete, and therefore the contributing conditions for the dharmakāya would not be complete, either. Thus Tsongkhapa suggests that it is through the extensive visualizations of the creation stage that one actually plants and cultivates the seeds for experiencing the form body of a Buddha, along with the environment and retinue of a Buddha's paradise. Although he agrees that none of those things can be actualized until the complete stage, Tsongkhapa is of the opinion that one must plant the seeds through the imagination first, or else the subtle body practices that focus on the energies and elements of a human body will not be sufficient to bring about the particular results of Buddhahood.

Using the example of a boat that is needed to take one across the river of one's habitual belief in ordinary appearances, Tsongkhapa sees the creation stage as the necessary rite of passage that teaches one to envision oneself *as* a sacred being whose body is a suitable basis for the practice of the complete stage. For although the raw materials used for such meditations are indeed what the human body already contains, if one's way of seeing and identifying with that body has not already been transformed by a stable realization of extraordinary clear appearances and divine pride, then the complete stage practices would just be working with an ordinary body, and that would not bring its intended result either. Tsongkhapa acknowledges that if someone meditates on the winds

and orbs “even when the creation stage is still not stable, it is not that some approximation of the good qualities won’t arise.” But he adds the warning:²

However, since they will not arise for such a person *in the same way as they do for someone whose mindstream has been ripened by the first stage*, if you abandon the first stage, and then see that an approximation of the good qualities of the winds and inner fire and so forth have arisen, and then get all wrapped up in that, you will have mixed up the crucial points of the path, and this will not work.

From yet another point of view, Tsongkhapa rejects the idea, prevalent in some lineages during his time, that the complete stage is no more than a meditation on emptiness that comes at the end of a creation stage *sādhana*. He says that to combine simple meditation on emptiness with a yoga of a divine being would be no different from the lower classes of tantra, and if one further dispensed with the *sādhana* part, it would be no different from a *sūtra* meditation on emptiness.

Thus, step by step, addressing every permutation of objections, Tsongkhapa defends practice of the full creation stage, in which one never leaves off the daily sessions until one has reached meditative stability with a perfect clear vision of the entire *maṇḍala*. According to this ideal, one would not even begin practice of the inner body yogas unique to the complete stage until one had attained meditative stillness focused on minute visualizations inside a subtle orb, replete with intricate detail, that are particular to the *creation* stage. He even adds a cryptic double negative, saying that if, while still practicing the creation stage, one were to add along the way a supplementary practice of inner fire, “this would be a lesser version of the thing to be refuted.” When I asked Geshe Norsang for clarification of this, he said it meant it was okay. Yet considering the great emphasis that some contemporary Tibetan teachers have placed on the practice of inner fire, even for relative beginners on the path, it is interesting to recognize the very conservative view expressed by Tsongkhapa here. On the other hand, once a practitioner *has* reached the “final end” of the creation stage, able to remain in a state of flawless concentration for at least four hours at a time, Tsongkhapa defends practice of the complete stage, in all its details, including the yogas of channels, winds, and orbs.

In aggregate, these arguments reveal the way of thinking that still undergirds many Gelukpa teachers’ presentation of unsurpassed yoga tantra within our current generation. Since typical Kagyu and Nyingma approaches would continue to differ in their interpretations regarding many of the points raised here, I think Tsongkhapa’s arguments must be considered and weighed carefully in light of many other factors. It must be kept in mind that while all these Tibetan lineages do agree on many fundamental points about the nature of the original condition and what it is that the path must effect to transform it, they often disagree deeply in their perspectives on what practices are most

² See Appendix Nine (747).

important, for how long, and with what emphasis. I cannot treat these rich issues here, but will simply suggest that in order to understand what Tsongkhapa is actually refuting, one must be able to take great care in identifying the likely position of each of his projected interlocutors. In many or most cases, one might be able to see how the view expressed by a contemporary proponent of a different lineage would not actually match the view that Tsongkhapa was refuting in the early fifteenth century. But one would have to understand each respective system very well in order to make the comparisons effectively. The very complexity of this task is one reason I have avoided raising the actual issues upon which later Tibetans criticized or opposed Tsongkhapa, because even to understand, much less unravel the misunderstandings between, historical proponents of such opposing views on Vajrayāna practice would require many other studies in their own right.³

From Conceptuality to Nonconceptuality

5. *The indispensable progression:* Amidst Tsongkhapa's continual insistence on the necessity of all causes and conditions being complete, of not mixing up the sequence of steps, and of continuing indefatigably until meditative stability is reached, there is one theme that I would highlight further here, namely his view of how one progresses from conceptual to nonconceptual meditation, with respect to both emptiness and appearances. In Appendices Fourteen and Fifteen, respectively, I have translated a series of passages that deserve close comparison, as Tsongkhapa can be found making a very similar argument, in the contexts of both sūtra and tantra, regarding the way that conceptual analysis leads to nonconceptual realization of emptiness. Towards the end of his *Briefer Steps on the Path to Enlightenment*,⁴ Tsongkhapa quotes from the *Chapter on Kāśyapa* (the forty-third chapter of the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*) to show the Buddha giving an analogy for how the one leads to the other. The Buddha tells Kāśyapa that it is like the way that two sticks rubbed together will start a fire, but once the fire has begun, it will burn away the very sticks that started it. Likewise, although the understanding of emptiness must begin through the contrived effort of conceptual analysis, in the end the fire of incisive wisdom will burn away all traces of conceptual thought. Tsongkhapa makes reference to the same analogy towards the very end of his *Steps of Mantra*, amidst numerous other explanations cited from tantric texts.⁵ It is of the utmost importance to him to impress upon his readers that once having reached the pinnacle of simultaneous bliss through the practice of inner

³ For now I will include the following oft-cited quotation from His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, as it appears in *The Meaning of Life*, 1992, translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins (Boston: Wisdom), 99:

As is said in an oral transmission by the great lama Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, when the great Nyingmapa adept Longchen Rabjam gives a presentation of the ground, path, and fruit, he does so mainly from the perspective of the enlightened state of a Buddha, whereas the Sakyapa presentation is mainly from the perspective of the spiritual experience of a yogi on the path, and the Gelukpa presentation is mainly from the perspective of how phenomena appear to ordinary sentient beings. His statement appears to be worthy of considerable reflection; through it many misunderstandings can be removed.

⁴ See Appendix Fourteen (423).

⁵ See Appendix Fifteen (991).

fire, one must be able to apply conceptual analysis to the understanding of emptiness, or else even the practices of the complete stage will not bring liberation.

The idea of using conceptuality to put an end to conceptuality parallels the idea expressed in a quotation from the root tantra of Hevajra, cited here at the start of Chapter One, and also within Tsongkhapa's discussion of the indivisibility of clarity and the profound, in Chapter Four:

The yogi of the creation stage
meditates on elaboration, with austerities.
Taking the elaboration to be like a dream,
eliminate elaboration by means of elaboration.

The context in which Tsongkhapa cited this quotation was focused more, however, on how to view the side of appearances as being like an illusion. The primary referent of the “elaboration” on which one meditates, here, is the circle of the maṇḍala and its divine inhabitants. But in both cases – whether the conceptuality of the individual analysis investigating the lack of a self, or the conceptual elaboration of an imaginatively created maṇḍala – the conceptual elaboration to which one aims to put an end is the elaboration of dual appearance. It was immediately following that quotation from the *Hevajra Tantra* that Tsongkhapa made reference to the significant difference between the way one meditates on illusion during the creation stage and the way one meditates on it during the practice of Blessing Oneself (*bdag byin rlabs*, Skt. *svādhiṣṭhāna*), deep into the complete stage. Before we can turn to that difference – as a foreshadowing for future research – I must return to a theoretical problem that remains unsolved.

I raised at the beginning of Chapter Four the question of how Tsongkhapa could maintain, within a Middle Way view, his strong distinction between the content of creation stage meditations being merely contrived by the mind, as opposed to the divine illusory body that rises up during the complete stage, from the stage of Blessing Oneself onwards, not being imagined or constructed by the mind. We have seen Tsongkhapa discuss the ideal progression of the creation stage, by which one starts out with the coarse conceptualization of joining a word to an image, and then gradually gains the ability to visualize the beings of the maṇḍala so vividly that they appear spontaneously to a nonconceptual mental consciousness, like the images in a dream. According to Tsongkhapa's presentations, however, there is no doubt that even by the final end of creation stage these images are still *produced*, or created by the mind. Another person walking into the yogi's room during a session would not be able to see or touch the maṇḍala that appears so clearly to the meditator, and when the yogi is not actively meditating on the visualization, the images would disappear and the yogi could still engage with the physical world ripened from karma that surrounds him or her. These constitute traditional criteria by which to identify what is only “made up in the mind,” no matter how vivid or stable it might be.

Thus it should be evident that within Tsongkhapa's worldview it is easy to make the distinction between the still-malleable world of the imagination and the more concrete physical reality that is the result of fully-ripened karma, without violating in the least his explanations of the Middle Way dictum that all things are merely set forth through names and images. His defense of outer matter already challenged us to see how things could be established only through mere labels, yet still function validly far beyond our capacity to make up whatever we want to about them. But the question of nonconceptual mental appearances – as well as the question of nonconceptual sensory perceptions – both of which Tsongkhapa defends adamantly,⁶ suggests a conclusion that I have never seen him express directly.

My conjecture is that although saying that things are merely established through conceptions is such a common Middle Way formulation, still, *being conceptually established is not what proves universally that things are empty*; because there are many examples of things appearing to nonconceptual consciousness that are not actively being set forth through conceptual designation in the moment that they appear. Yet upon investigation, such things would still be found to lack characteristics of their own. Rather, the demonstrations for emptiness all involve showing that it would be impossible to establish anything *as* anything without conceptualization, but that does not imply the inverse, namely that something appearing purely to a nonconceptual consciousness must not be empty. For if that were the case, it would lead to a consequence that resembles the aspect of Dharmakīrti's system rejected by Tsongkhapa, namely the existence of an ultimate reality that bears characteristics of its own.

Further, Tsongkhapa reiterates frequently that there are numerous types of conceptualization, and one must be very careful to recognize which one is being ruled out whenever using a term like “nonconceptual.”⁷ In the oft-cited case of prelingual children

⁶ This point occurs within the very section of the *Steps of Mantra* where Tsongkhapa argues for the necessity and legitimacy of the creation stage. See Appendix Nine (715-716), especially:

Suppose you want to say that through familiarization with something in a conceptual way, the objective field towards which your habituation was directed will arise as a clear appearance. Since this actual object is established free of concepts, if you don't want to call it “nonconceptual,” then that is merely a debate about a name. But suppose you think: “If the object appears clearly, it may be so that it is free of the conceptual state of mind that grasps the meaning of a sound, but since it is not free of the conceptualization of appearances as dual, it *is* conceptual.” If it were impossible for a mind free of conceptuality to be born from the conceptual state of mind to which duality appears, then, since every state of mind – up until one achieves the state of an ārya – does conceptualize dual appearance, it would turn out to be impossible for the totally nonconceptual wisdom of an ārya ever to be born from the paths of accumulation and preparation.

⁷ See Appendix Four (181), Appendix Fourteen (422-423), and Appendix Fifteen (995) for explicit references to the idea that Middle Way reasoning only refutes certain kinds of incorrect conceptual thought; it does not show all conceptual thought to be harmful or without purpose. As Tsongkhapa says in the *Brief Steps on the Path* (Appendix Fourteen, 422-423):

Thus it makes no sense to hold that whatever conceptual thoughts are used to sustain analysis are necessarily conceptual thoughts by which one would grasp to “signs,” i.e., thinking that things exist as real. Therefore it makes no sense to stop them. This is because, as I have demonstrated many times

– or else the countless instances of animals and other living beings who have no capacity for language – this does not diminish in the least Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way assertion that nothing can be established for such beings except through mental designation. Though I have not yet found Tsongkhapa making the distinction, some teachers explain the phrase “name and term” (*ming brda*) as differentiating between concepts that involve the meaning of a word, and those abstracted mental images that have no explicit linguistic component. In the case of nonlinguistic living beings, then, *all* nonconceptual valid perceptions would be “free of the conceptual state of mind that grasps the meaning of a sound,” as specified by Tsongkhapa’s hypothetical interlocutor here in the *Steps of Mantra*. But they would not be free of the subtle forms of nonlinguistic conceptuality that identify the functionality of objects according to a living being’s individual karmic tendencies, and which hold appearances to be real and separate from the perceiver, i.e., *dual*. No wonder Tsongkhapa says, with reference to the arising of a clear appearance, “Since this actual object is established free of concepts, if you don’t want to call it ‘nonconceptual,’ then that is merely a debate about a name.” But he never suggests that such an object, “established free of concepts” would not be empty of inherent characteristics. My sense is that by that point in his life, Tsongkhapa was recognizing the emptiness of appearances at a level so much deeper than whether or not things are being actively labeled with mental or verbal *words*, that it was not even an issue for him to wonder whether saying that something arises nonconceptually might suggest that its identity is not “merely designated by a conceptual state of mind” in the Middle Way Consequence sense. For if we return to the question of *causation*, it is clear that all such appearances would have to be caused, and for that reason alone Tsongkhapa would establish them as empty of defining characteristics.

The type of conceptualization that Tsongkhapa does repeatedly acknowledge to be all-pervasive within *samsāra* is the conceptualization of dual appearance, which he says occurs for every living being not immersed in the direct perception of emptiness. That is, if I read Tsongkhapa’s position correctly here, even a yogi who has reached the union of the two still in training will experience dual appearance while walking around in an outer body, even though that high-level *ārya bodhisattva* will have abandoned “all the conceptual thoughts *that insistently believe in things as real* – along with their seeds.”⁸

On the other hand, a close reading of Tsongkhapa’s arguments, mentioned above, regarding how one will gradually reach a direct perception of emptiness *via* a path of conceptual analysis, reveals that Tsongkhapa consistently uses the term “abstracted image” (*don spyi*) with reference to the way that a tantric meditator perceives emptiness

before, the conceptual thoughts which hold that things exist as real are only one kind of conceptual thought. If you believe that *anything* which is held by conceptual thought must be crushed with reasoning, then this means you have fallen into the fault of discounting what actually exists, by denying with your reasoning something that is too broad.

⁸ See the quotation translated in Chapter Four, note 5.

prior to the actual clear light.⁹ So he acknowledges that even a yogi who has reached the complete stage, and is entering into the dissolutions of the mind-set-apart that serve as the immediate cause for the first instance of an actual illusory body, “analyzes the meaning of suchness by means of an abstracted image.” Thus he says that such a realization of selflessness “is also not totally nonconceptual, either.”¹⁰ Now it is true that in Tsongkhapa’s description, conceptual analysis of emptiness requires abstract thinking in a way that mere placement meditation upon a clear appearance does not,¹¹ but still, it would seem to me that if the yogi must still have a veil of conceptuality within his or her profound experience of the approximate clear light, then what need is there to say that the mind of the yogi who arises from that into the “deceptive reality complete stage” of the impure illusory body¹² would still have traces of conceptual thought as well? For indeed, such a yogi is still supposed to be able to engage in thoroughly conceptual pursuits like teaching, writing books, engaging in conversations, and so on, between sessions.¹³

What all this suggests to me is that the distinction Tsongkhapa makes between creation stage and complete stage, between the holy body of a divine being that is merely contrived by the mind and the illusory body that is uncontrived, is primarily *not* a distinction between whether or not a verbally or discursively conceptual state of mind is active or not; because the stillness meditation of the creation stage yogi might at times be quite free of discursive thought, and because the yogi who has fully realized the actual, impure illusory body might at times be fully engaged in conceptual analysis, creative productivity, and interaction with other people that requires discursive thinking.

Where then does the difference lie? I would suggest that we might begin to locate our answer back in Tsongkhapa’s arguments against the supposed Mind-Only school opponent who was framed as saying that, since the appearance of an outer object is coming from the *same* seed as does the sense faculty and the sense consciousness, it is no

⁹ See Appendix Fifteen (930) and (989).

¹⁰ Appendix Fifteen (989).

¹¹ See Appendix Fourteen (433), where Tsongkhapa is discussing the union of stillness and insight in a sūtra context, but I think the logic he uses would hold for unsurpassed yoga as well. (It is interesting to note that the passage he is glossing here, from the *Instructions on the Perfection of Wisdom*, is by Ratnākaraśānti, the same person as Śāntipa, the author of several Guhyasamāja commentaries in the Jñānapāda tradition, upon whom Tsongkhapa relied consistently in his exposition of the union of clarity and the profound):

Here, “without interruption” means that once you have finished analytical meditation, you do not then have to settle your mind into nonconceptuality, but rather that the analytical meditation itself ushers you into nonconceptuality. “Experiences both” means that your mind experiences both (1) the stillness of focusing upon a reflected image nonconceptually, and (2) the insight that focuses upon the reflected image while thinking about it conceptually.

¹² The “impure” illusory body is distinguished from the “pure” illusory body insofar as the former arises based upon the approximate clear light, which is still experienced by means of subtle conceptuality, whereas the latter arises following the actual clear light, which is a direct perception of emptiness.

¹³ See Tsongkhapa’s point to this effect in *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp, rim lnga gsal sgron*, vol. ja, 304b6-305a5 (610-611), and as translated in Gavin Kilty, 2013, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*, 500-501. The passage itself raises other issues too complex for me to cite it out of context here.

more the case that there should be a world of outer matter during the waking state than there is during dreams. But Tsongkhapa defended the difference between the type of form belonging within the sensory field of mental objects (*chos kyi skye mched du gtogs pa'i gzugs*) and the sensory field of outer form.¹⁴ Outer form must remain available to be perceived by multiple spectators, even when the individual karma of beings will drastically shape their personal experience of a “single object.”

Meanwhile, at the level of the complete stage, all explanations of the original condition, which serves as the “ground” for practice of the path, begin to turn on the idea of the subtle and very subtle inner winds, or energies. There is a unique explanation of how the “winds of karma” (*las rlung*) carry the potency of ripening seeds to the various sense faculties, including the mental faculty, enabling those karmic potentialities (*nus pa*) to produce every kind of conceptual and nonconceptual experience. Insofar as the winds are said to act as the vehicle, or mount (*bzhon pa*) for each thought, karmic tendency, mental affliction, movement of the mind, and so on,¹⁵ one can begin to imagine all the actions of the mind described in the sūtra context now being acted out as though within a subtle physical space subsumed by the energetic field of a living being’s body, and also beyond into the shared world of the “vessel.”

I have wondered whether one way of explaining the difference between waking and dreaming from a complete stage point of view would be to say that the five coarse sense faculties require entirely different sets of *inner winds* than does the mental consciousness alone, and that these require the ripening of distinct karmic seeds riding upon them in order to give rise to their proper types of sensory experiences. Tsongkhapa offers clear explanations, based on a diverse body of Guhyasamāja complete stage literature, of how the extremely subtle inner winds are in this context said to be the root or even creator of all things, whether within the cycle of suffering or beyond it.¹⁶ This

¹⁴ See Chapter Two, “Dreams,” and “Reflections and Rivers,” esp. the passage cited at note 84.

¹⁵ As explained to me by Geshe Ngawang Tenzin, Dec. 4th, 2014, by Geshe Khedrup Norsang, April 9th, 2015, and as indicated by Tsongkhapa in *The Ultimate Private Advice: Blessing Oneself*. See Appendix Seventeen (463). There is far more rich material in this regard throughout Tsongkhapa’s *Notes on the Stage of Vajra Recitation*, which deserves a separate study.

¹⁶ See the *Notes on the Stage of Vajra Recitation* (*rdo rje bzlas pa'i rim pa'i zin bris*), vol. *cha*, 33a4-33b1 (259-260), emphasis added:

Thus when the *Revelation of the True Intent* (*Samdhivijākarāṇa-tantra*) states that the short “a” is all-pervading, and the cause for all speech, it does not *only* mean that it stands as the life-force of verbal expressions. Rather, that which it represents, the simultaneously-born wind and mind that remain within the heart, *are the root of all that is in the cycle and all that is beyond it*. Herein lies the meaning of consciousness, the gathering together of wind and mind. This is true because the combination of the three mantras that appears in that tantra is said not to be an outer mantra, but rather to be an inner mantra: the entry and abiding of winds. Therefore, you should understand that the short “a,” which is explained to be its root, is the indestructible orb. The lines from the *Revelation of the True Intent* – that are not quoted in the *Fives Stages*, but are in the *Integration of Practices*, which go from, “As long as the world is constructed” up to “the seeds are explained in the same way” – reveal that *winds create everything*.

distinctive Guhyasamāja view, which has its counterpart in the Kālacakra system, would in turn suggest that the collective karma of living beings also expresses itself in the form of fluctuating energies, so that “winds,” at progressively coarser levels of vibration, would form the foundation of all the outer elements that make up the vessel of a shared environment, as well.¹⁷ Based on the discussion in Chapters One and Two, we can imagine how the hidden meaning¹⁸ within a Guhyasamāja interpretation might still coordinate with an Abhidharma presentation of the stages of world formation, where everything was indeed said to begin from a disk of outer wind. While I cannot explore the depth of this material now, the single point that I wish to make is that the notion of subtle energy moving through space, which is ultimately inseparable from consciousness, may provide a key way in which Guhyasamāja complete stage literature is able to explain the *basis* for shared worlds. A visual image that is merely imagined in meditation is associated with the movements of certain kinds of energies unique to the meditator, for as long as the meditation lasts. But those mental images are not riding upon, or supported by, the coarser configurations of the “great elements,” i.e., formations of solidity, liquidity, or else thermal and kinetic energies. So visualizations alone do not create a physical body in space, unless the meditator has actually attained the capacity to manipulate the outer elements, which is a different topic altogether.¹⁹

What is it that changes, then, by the end of the stage of the mind-set-apart, when the yogi is able to arise for the first time in an impure illusory body? This is a vast topic, which would deserve another study as long as this present one. But my conjecture, based in part upon the explanations given by Geshe Norsang, is as follows: (1) that an *actual* illusory body means one that has accessed and put to entirely new use the extremely subtle winds already dwelling within the human body, while (2) it still does *not* mean that such an illusory body is made of coarse physical elements. But (3) it does mean that such a body can act effectively in a shared world, and (4) that it does not disappear when one stops actively thinking about it. To understand this we would need to look at Tsongkhapa’s explanation of “illusion” in this context, a topic to which we will return in the next section.

For now it is sufficient to conclude from this foray that when attempting to understand how Tsongkhapa interprets statements such as, “These three realms are mere

།དེས་ན་དགོངས་པ་ལུང་སྟོན་གྱིས་ཨ་ཐུང་དག་ཀྱན་གྱི་རྒྱ་དང་ཁུབ་བྱེད་དུ་གསུངས་པ་ནི་དག་ཆོག་གི་སྟོན་ཏུ་ཞུགས་པ་ཙམ་མིན་གྱི། དེས་མཆོན་པའི་དོན་ལྟན་སྟེས་གྱི་རྒྱང་སེམས་སྟོང་ག་ན་གནས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་འཁོར་འདས་ཀྱན་གྱི་ཙམ་དང་། དེར་རྒྱང་སེམས་འདུ་བཤེས་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྒྱུད་དེ་ལས་སྟེགས་གསུམ་བུའི་པ་ནི་བྱེད་སྟེགས་ལ་མི་བྱེད་པར་ནང་གི་སྟེགས་རྒྱང་འཇུག་གནས་ལ་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་དེའི་ཙམ་བར་བཤད་པའི་ཨ་ཐུང་ནི་མི་ཤིགས་པའི་ཐིག་ལེ་ཡིན་པར་ཤེས་སོ། །སྟོན་བསྟུས་སུ་རིམ་ལྔར་མ་རྒྱངས་པའི་དགོངས་པ་ལུང་སྟོན་གྱི་གཞུང་། རི་སྟོང་འཇིག་རྟེན་བརྟགས་པ་དང་། ཞེས་པ་ནས། ས་བོན་ལྷ་བྱུང་བཤད་པ་ཡིན། ཞེས་པའི་བར་གྱིས་རྒྱང་གིས་ཐམས་ཅད་བསྐྱེད་པར་བསྟན་ནོ།

¹⁷ See Appendix Seventeen (466).

¹⁸ That is, the “*sbas pa'i don*.” See Appendix One (183-184) for an example of this level of interpretation.

¹⁹ See B. Alan Wallace, 2005, *Balancing the Mind*, 267-268, for a brief discussion of this issue.

designation,” or, “In all the three realms, mind and mental functions are not real, but totally conceptual,”²⁰ it is essential to recognize that the so-called labeling process must occur at a level far more profound than we usually associate with the active, conscious, verbally conceptual mind. Otherwise, many contradictions would ensue within Tsongkhapa’s thought when examined across diverse contexts. Overall, my study of Tsongkhapa leads me to conclude that for him, the scope of what it means to be attributed to karmic *causation* must reach farther and deeper than what can be fathomed as the surface mental process of moment to moment conceptualization based on a ripening tendency. For the latter would only relate to one category of tendencies as described in Asaṅga’s *Summary of the Greater Way*, namely the tendency for creating expressions. But if all things within saṃsāra are to arise from dependent origination in the way we have examined throughout, then the power of karmic seeds must be able to create events occurring in time and space sometimes far removed from the orbit of an individual living being’s readily perceived energetic field. What would it entail to say that an event taking place on the other side of the planet is still being created, in part, by the force of my own karmic seeds – producing images that ride on winds whose energetic pathways originate within my own heart? It is in response to such difficult questions that I find Asaṅga’s presentation of the many types of seeds and tendencies, along with Tsongkhapa’s explication of them, so compelling. On the other hand, if we are to comprehend what would make the theory of the Guhyasamāja complete stage so tantalizing as a path to total enlightenment – and the cancelling of all karma – we would need to understand how withdrawal of the winds of karma into the indestructible orb at the heart might result in an entirely new kind of “body,” even while still on the path.

How the Sacred World Dawns as an Illusion

I wrote in Chapter One that by the end of this dissertation, we would be able to look back at no less than six distinct types of illusion that Tsongkhapa identifies from the perspective of a yogi who has reached the realizations of the complete stage. Tsongkhapa emphasizes these distinctions several times across his tantric works, and we have already seen in Chapter Four the crucial quotation from the *Integration of Practices* that he takes as a primary source for the idea:²¹

Whoever has entered the ways of the scriptural collections of sūtra, or else all those meditators who remain in the stage of creation, may talk about the examples by saying, “All things are like an illusion, and like a dream, and like a reflected image,” and they may have sheer conviction for them. But for them, those examples will not turn into an understanding of the private advice for Granting

²⁰ See the former quotation from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, Appendix Seven (334), and the latter from *Separating the Middle from the Extremes* (attributed to Maitreya), Appendix Nine (716).

²¹ See the long citation from the *Steps of Mantra* at Chapter Four, note 55. Tsongkhapa also quotes this in his *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), vol. ja, 236b4-6 (474).

Blessing to Oneself, that is, how to become the complete holy body of a divine being whose nature is mind, from nothing more than primordial knowing.

In order to understand what it is that changes at the stage of Blessing Oneself (another name for the stage at which a Guhyasamāja practitioner attains the actual illusory body for the first time), we should review briefly the other meanings of illusion from which Tsongkhapa will distinguish it.

(1) Tsongkhapa explains what he considers to be the basic meaning of illusion – in the Middle Way sense – with immense clarity in two parallel passages that appear in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* and in *Having the Three Beliefs*, respectively. Since the presentations are not identical, I encourage my reader to study the slight differences, as translated in Appendix Sixteen. The basic point is that in order to establish the illusion – where the way a thing appears and the way it actually exists do not match – two conditions must be present. There must be the undeniable fact of an appearance presenting itself to a valid conventional consciousness (whether sensory or mental, but in this case the primary example is of a valid sensory perception). Then there must be the certainty, which can only arise before a mental consciousness, that what appears cannot possibly, and never did, exist in the way it appears, namely, as having a nature of its own. The combination of both factors establishes the appearance as being like an illusion, false, and hence also deceptive reality. Within the way of the perfections, the main practice becomes an alternation between periods of deep meditative equipoise, during which one is immersed in the “sky-like emptiness” of a sheer absence of the thing refuted, and periods of the aftermath, in which one reflects on how virtuous activities bring about their effects, yet without inherent characteristics anywhere.

Much later in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*,²² Tsongkhapa makes an important but difficult point regarding what does *not* constitute meditation on the illusion in a Middle Way sense. He describes several types of phenomena that are apparently common to meditators who have reached stable states of meditative stillness, whether or not they have also engaged in analytical meditation on emptiness. According to his description, such practitioners might have experiences in which all outer objects seem to evanesce upon observation, like fine smoke or a rainbow. Although such phenomena, which arise due to the power of intense concentration alone, may make reality start to *feel* illusory, Tsongkhapa insists that this could be dangerously misleading, because if such persons have not applied rational analysis, then they might think they have discovered the meaning of Middle Way illusion, but actually missed the point. For without specifically directed reasoning, he argues, one would be liable to hold that the gossamer appearances themselves *do* have a nature. This is similar to something Tsongkhapa suggests in *Having*

²² See Appendix Sixteen (1055-1057).

*the Three Beliefs*²³ and other places, regarding the way that an old man familiar with mirrors *knows* that there is no face there in the mirror, but would still think that the reflection has the nature of being a reflection. Thus Tsongkhapa is careful to say that merely lacking the quality of hardness or opacity does not constitute the meaning of illusion, nor does the mere fact of not being as it appears. The key distinction, as always, is what it means for something to lack characteristics of its own, and that is why I have attempted to work through that idea in such extensive detail throughout this dissertation.

(2) The second level of understanding the illusion would come within the three lower classes of tantra, where the prime example of the undeniable appearance that one recognizes to be illusory no longer consists of the ordinary objects of one's outer world, seen between sessions, but the vivid appearances of the divine beings and their sacred world, as visualized during periods of meditation. This is in many ways similar to the next level of illusion, but as I mentioned in Chapter Three, the main distinction Tsongkhapa makes between the meditation on the indivisibility of clarity and the profound that occurs in the lower three classes of tantra, and the way it occurs in the creation stage of unsurpassed yoga tantra seems to be the simulation or anticipation of the great bliss that is unique to the complete stage of unsurpassed yoga.

(3) The third level of illusion comes during the creation stage, as we have examined throughout Chapters Four through Six. Here, because the unique thing to be abandoned is the appearance of things as ordinary, what one refutes about the way things undeniably appear is that they should *really* be ordinary in the way they seem. Thus the objects, environments, and people one sees each day might still appear to make up the normal world we knew before, but once one has been meditating intensively on a sacred world, the seed has been planted to wonder whether the outer world presenting itself to the sense faculties is any different. When, due to the stability of one's concentration on the maṇḍala during meditation sessions, the outer world of the senses begins to appear naturally to the mental consciousness as though it, too, might be part of the sacred world, then, not only are appearances dawning as the maṇḍala, but the maṇḍala is dawning as an illusion: because by that time one *knows* it is neither one way nor the other from its own side. Meanwhile, during sessions, Tsongkhapa says that there is “an extremely stable concentration on the appearance of an unobstructed diaphany, just like a rainbow, that is crystal clear and intensely luminous.”²⁴ This is then joined to a view of emptiness. Nevertheless, even when one can view one's own body as that of a divine being in this illusory way, Tsongkhapa insists repeatedly that this is *not* the meaning of the “illusory body” found at the stage of Blessing Oneself.

²³ See *Having the Three Beliefs* (*vid ches gsum ldan*), vol. *ta*, 40b5-41a4 (82-83).

²⁴ See the *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), vol. *ja*, 237a4-5 (475), as part of the larger passage translated below.

(4) Within this present writing, I cannot treat the first three landmarks of the complete stage, namely the three stages set-apart (*dben pa gsum*). In each of these stages, relating to the body, speech, and mind, respectively, the practitioner engages in practices designed to draw the inner winds to enter, stay, and dissolve within the central channel of the subtle body. These practices gradually release the knots formed around the central channel by the side channels, in which the winds that carry afflictive thoughts usually flow. As these knots are released, especially around the heart, the winds are able to enter more deeply, stay longer, and finally dissolve into the indestructible orb at the very center of the heart. The stages are named thus because at each level, the practitioner is supposed to be “set apart,” or isolated, from certain misperceptions about body, speech, and mind, so that what was believed through sheer conviction during the creation stage now becomes a manifest and undeniable appearance of purity and divine identity. At the beginning of the complete stage, when the winds start to enter the central channel and bring on the progressive dissolution of the power of the elements, this is also supposed to lead to the first authentic experiences of simultaneous great bliss. After describing some of the practices of inner fire designed to produce such an experience (within the Six Dharmas of Nāropa here, rather than the Guhyasamāja *per se*), and also reviewing the crucial points of the view as shared with the Middle Way, Tsongkhapa reiterates the practice of looking upon all that appears as being the maṇḍala, but adds the factor of the great bliss that the practitioner has actually begun to taste, not merely imagine:²⁵

Then practice viewing them as the dance of indivisible bliss and emptiness. If you can do that, three things will come to you in sequence: *Whatever appears is the divine body, the divine body is an illusion, and the illusion dawns with the taste of great bliss*. If once again you can discover great bliss during your meditation sessions, recall the view of the emptiness that you have ascertained so well. Then settle single-pointedly upon that, and a nonconceptual state will occur. Alternate between your sessions of meditation and aftermath in this way.

The primary difference, then, is that now the entry of the inner winds into the central channel begins to bring on *spontaneous* experiences of the divine beings of the maṇḍala, which do not depend upon one’s having visualized them. In this sense the experiences do start to be uncontrived, as they arise automatically (*rang shugs kyis*),²⁶ based upon a very special state of the inner winds, and no longer have to arise based upon scripted or even habitual use of the imagination. As a topic for future research – which methodologically may require contemplative inquiry, as opposed to textual research or philosophical speculation – I wonder what this phenomenon would tell us about the meaning of the “central channel” and what takes place when subtle energies begin to flow there. Why would a significant change in the physical patterns of energy flow within one’s body

²⁵ See the continuation of the same section of *Having the Three Beliefs*, in Appendix Sixteen (75).

²⁶ See Appendix Sixteen (67).

cause spontaneous visions of divine beings? What would this tell us about how configurations of subtle energy linked with consciousness might “produce” the appearances of our worlds? I have translated in Appendix Thirteen some brief reflections attributed to Tsongkhapa on how to evaluate the nature and source of visions that might arise due to such special conditions of the inner winds. But the phenomenological questions raised there are far beyond the scope of what I can examine here.

Yet according to Tsongkhapa, even at this stage, neither the visions of divine beings outside oneself, nor the sacred body that one validly experiences oneself to have, is yet the “actual” holy body of a divine being. As I verified in conversation with Geshe Norsang,²⁷ Tsongkhapa’s reasoning seems to be that one has not yet accessed the *extremely* subtle winds and mind that otherwise lie dormant within the indestructible orb at the heart. For this one must reach the final end of the stage of the mind-set-apart, when at last the life-holding winds dissolve into the indestructible orb, bringing about what is known as the approximate clear light.

(5) It is only upon arising from that approximate clear light that the “impure illusory body” can arise. The verses from Nāgārjuna’s *Five Stages* that were quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this dissertation serve as a primary source for Tsongkhapa’s commentary on the stage of Blessing Oneself, translated here in Appendix Seventeen. The pivotal verses are as follows:²⁸

The one who is perfectly endowed with the winds
Of the three states of consciousness, comes back again,
Rising in the body of a yogi;
The “body of illusion” is explained with respect to that.

Therefore in this way every wandering being
Is said here to be “like an illusion.”
The one who remains in the concentration
“Like an illusion,” sees all to be like this.

The three states of consciousness refer to three types of primordial wisdom realizing emptiness, which dawn as the winds upon which mental consciousness rides progressively withdraw into the indestructible orb. Through such a thorough dissolution of the power of the life-holding wind, the extremely subtle winds are able to manifest, revealing a vision of a vast sky that is likened to the clear light of dawn. Though not yet a direct perception of emptiness, this is supposed to be close to it, still utilizing an abstracted image to perceive emptiness, yet associated with a very subtle frequency of otherwise nonconceptual consciousness. At this level, winds and mind are said to be of

²⁷ At Gyutö Monastery, private interview, April 9th, 2015.

²⁸ Nāgārjuna, *Pañcakrama, rim pa lnga pa*, Toh. 1802, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *ngi*, 52b4-5:
[རེ་ཉིད་རྒྱུད་དང་ཡང་དག་ལྟན། །རྣམ་ཤེས་གསུམ་སྟོ་སྒྲར་ཡང་ནི། །རྣམ་འབྱོར་པ་ཡི་ལུས་སུ་འབྱུང་། །སྤྱོ་མའི་ལུས་ཞེས་དེ་ལ་བཤད། །དེ་བས་འདི་ལྟར་འགྲོ་བ་
ཀུན། །སྤྱོ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་འདིར་བཤད་དེ། །སྤྱོ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཉིད་འཛིན་གནས། །ཐམས་ཅད་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་མཐོང་།

the same essence. In the *Ultimate Private Advice*, Tsongkhapa explains at some length what it means for there to be a primordially indwelling body of a living being, which serves as the basis for the illusory body to arise.²⁹ He uses the analogy of water, saying that while the coarse physical bodies that living beings take on and discard from lifetime to lifetime are like the heat of water, which can be gained or lost, the primordially indwelling body (*gnyug ma'i lus*) is like the wetness of water. It has always been there as the defining property of the mindstream for as long as it continues, without beginning and without end. It is on the basis of this inseparable union of winds and mind that the trained yogi is then able to arise again in a new body. Thus the illusory body is not based upon the coarse body that grew in the womb of one's mother; rather it is actually fashioned from these most subtle winds and mind, in the form of the divine being upon whom one had been meditating all along. Only now, however, can that divine body be *real*, because only now is it generated from what is the essence of every divine being: the extremely subtle winds and mind of primordial wisdom that were awakened due to the dissolution at the final end of the stage of the mind-set-apart.

This new body of illusion is analogized in various ways to the classical examples of illusion in our ordinary world of experience, such as a dream, an image in a mirror, a water bubble, or a trick of the eye. These are the familiar examples from sūtra sources, yet, as Tsongkhapa explains his *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp on the Five Stages*, they have an entirely different referent now than they did in the sūtra context. Glossing Āryadeva's statement from the *Integration of Practices*, Tsongkhapa expresses the point I have been developing so far:³⁰

Here then it states that those who *talk about all things being like an illusion*, and who, thinking about the meaning, develop a *conviction* for it, still *will not understand* what it means to Bless Oneself. This refutes any notion that those who have reached a definitive conclusion in their understanding of the meaning of

²⁹ See Appendix Seventeen (461-465).

³⁰ *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp (rim lnga gsal sgron)*, vol. ja, 236b6 – 237b3 (474-476):

དེ་ལ་མདོ་སྡེ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་ཞུགས་པས་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་བརྟེན་ཅིང་། དོན་ཡོད་[sic ཡིད་]ལ་བྱེད་པས་མོས་པར་བྱས་ཀྱང་། ལྷ་ལུས་བདག་གི་
ན་བརྒྱབས་མེ་ཤེས་པར་གསུངས་པས་ནི། གཏུགས་ནས་བཤད་པའི་བརྒྱན་པ་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་དོན་ལུ་ཐག་ཆོད་པར་གོ་ཞིང་། དེ་བསྐྱོན་པས་བདེན་ཞེན་དང་བྲལ་བ་
ནམས་སྐྱེ་ལུས་སུ་རྟོག་པ་བཀག་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་འདྲ་བ་དེ་ཡང་སྤྱི་དོན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་མའི་ཉིང་རེ་འཛིན་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་། སྤྱི་དོན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་ལུས་རིམ་པ་གསུམ་པ་དང་། མ་
ཐར་ཐུག་གི་སྐྱེ་མའི་སྐྱེ་རིམ་པ་ལྟ་བུར་བཤད་པའི་དོན་མེད་དོ། རྒྱུད་རིམ་སྐྱོན་པ་པོ་ནམས་ཀྱིས་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་མོས་ཀྱང་། དེས་ཀྱང་སྐྱེ་ལུས་བ་
དག་གི་ན་བརྒྱབས་ཀྱི་མན་ངག་མེ་ཤེས་པར་གསུངས་པས། ལྷའི་སྐྱེ་སྣང་ལ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་གནས་པའི་ཞེན་མེད་སྐྱེ་ལུས་བདག་གི་ན་བརྒྱབ་ཏུ་རྟོག་
པ་ཡང་བཀག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། ལྷ་མེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་རིམ་དུ་རྣངས་ལ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བ་འཇམ་ཚེན་བཞིན་དུ་ཐོགས་པ་མེད་པར་སྣང་བའི་ཉིང་རེ་འཛིན་ཤིན་ཏུ་བརྟན་པ་དང་
། དེའི་ཆེ་སྣང་བ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུར་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་བདེན་ཞེན་དང་བྲལ་བ་དུ་ས་ཞིག་འབྱུང་ཡང་། དེ་ཙམ་གྱིས་བདག་གི་ན་བརྒྱབ་སྐྱེ་ལུས་ཀྱི་མན་ངག་མེ་ཤེས་ཙམ་གྱི་
ས་ལྷའི་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུགས་པར་འགྱུར་བ་མེ་ཤེས་པར་གསུངས་པ་ལས་ན། རྒྱུད་ལྟོགས་མ་གསུམ་དུ་དེའི་གདམས་ངག་མི་རྟོག་པ་ལྟ་སྐྱོས་ཀྱང་ཅི་དགོས། ... རྟོག་ལྷའི་
སྐྱེ་སྐྱོན་པ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་བརྒྱན་པ་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཉོགས་པ་དང་། དེ་ལྷའི་སྐྱེ་དང་འབྲེལ་བར་བསྐྱོས་པའི་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པའི་ལྷ་སྐྱེ་དང་། དེར་མ་ཐད་རྟོགས་རིམ་པའི་བ་
དེ་བ་ཆེན་པོ་རྟོག་པའི་དབུགས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་ཀྱི་ལྷའི་སྐྱེ་ཡང་། བདག་གི་ན་བརྒྱབས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་ལུ་མིན་པར་བརྟན་ནས།

“like an illusion” – in the sense of things being false, as explained in the Middle Way – and who have, through meditating on it, arrived at a place free of grasping to things as real, have thus been introduced to the illusory body.

Now it may be true that something like that is the general meaning of the concentration on illusion, but it does not have the sense explained to be the hidden meaning of the illusory body of the third stage, nor that of the final holy body of illusion that is explained to be the fifth stage.

Those who are meditating on creation stage may believe that all things are like an illusion. However, by stating that those meditators still do not understand the private advice for the illusory body of Blessing Oneself, [Āryadeva] also refutes the supposition that to dwell without grasping in the idea that the holy body of a divine being is appearing, yet without any nature of its own, is what it means to gain introduction to the illusory body of Blessing Oneself.

In the creation stage of the unsurpassed [tantras] there are many examples of an extremely stable concentration on the appearance of an unobstructed diaphany, just like a rainbow, that is crystal clear and intensely luminous. At the same time, such concentration is free of grasping to things as real, insofar as it is connected to the view of emptiness. But it was stated that with such a concentration alone one would still not understand the private advice for Granting Blessing to Oneself as an illusory body, that is, how to become the complete holy body of a divine being whose nature is mind, from nothing more than primordial wisdom. If this is true, then what need is there to speak of how one will not find such instructions in the scriptural collections of the three lower classes of tantra?

. . . Thus this point teaches that none of the following is the illusory body of Blessing Oneself: neither a realization that things are like an illusion, in the sense of being false, lacking any meditation on the holy body of a divine being; nor the divine body in the context of the creation stage, realized when meditating on this in connection with such a holy body. Not only that, but not even the divine body in the context of the three stages set-apart, where one has found the great bliss of the complete stage, is the illusory body of Blessing Oneself.

The implication is that this illusory body simply cannot be reached by either logic or imagination: It has to be realized, as a completely personal experience, on the basis of profound understanding and transformation of the flow of inner winds. All the preparation is absolutely necessary, but prior to the final end of the mind-set-apart, perhaps it is something like trying to rehearse somersaults, pikes, and twists at an Olympic pool in preparation for skydiving from an airplane. You just cannot conceive of what it will be like until you are actually in free fall for tens of thousands of feet.

Within his *Ultimate Private Advice*, Tsongkhapa states clearly what he thinks the analogy to illusion should mean here:³¹

Even as the sacred face, arms, and so forth of a holy body of illusion are not established as a body that obstructs other things in space, still, this body made of nothing more than winds and mind is something that *appears* to be established as a body that obstructs other things. This is why it is called an “illusory body.”

It would be worthwhile to keep in mind at this point what Tsongkhapa refuted, in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*, about illusion *not* just meaning that things seem to be dissolving before one’s touch. There, the problem was that due to a certain level of meditative clarity, things were actually appearing to be gossamer and evanescent, but one had little or no understanding of their metaphysical emptiness. Here, the point is that an illusory body attained through accessing the most subtle winds and mind actually does look to the yogi like something physical, obstructing other things with a definite location in space, and able to move with arms and legs and so on. Yet the yogi who has reached such a body knows first-hand the ultimate ground from which it arose, and understands that the appearance is in fact nothing but a dance of winds and mind, sculpted spontaneously in space. This too, I think, is what Tsongkhapa means by an uncontrived yoga: the holy body of illusion is there to stay, whether or not the yogi is actively thinking about it. In that sense it is like a coarse physical body,³² yet it is not visible to ordinary sight.³³

Echoing language we have examined in numerous contexts, Tsongkhapa states explicitly that this effulgence of primordially indwelling winds and mind is what the yogi now takes as the basis for applying the label “me.” Furthermore, when arising from such a meditation, the yogi begins to recognize all other living beings for what they are, also, at the most subtle level: a configuration and an emanation of extremely subtle winds and mind. So, says Nāgārjuna, according to Tsongkhapa’s gloss:³⁴ “The one who achieves the concentration, ‘like an illusion,’ sees it to be like this: as though all wanderers had themselves achieved the body of illusion.” Although other living beings cannot see the body of illusion that the yogi has attained, the yogi in turn comprehends all beings to be, at root, made of nothing more than winds and mind, even though they still appear to be solid in space. Thus both conditions for an “illusion” are complete.

(6) There is one final meaning of illusion that Tsongkhapa referenced in the passage from the *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp* above, namely, the “final holy body of illusion that is explained to be the fifth stage.” This is what will be reached after the dissolution into clear light is perfected – a direct perception of ultimate reality, the complete vanishing of

³¹ See Appendix Seventeen (465).

³² See Appendix Seventeen (463).

³³ See the *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), vol. *ja*, 305a1-5 (611).

³⁴ See Appendix Seventeen (461).

dual appearance, with no trace of conceptual thought. Though I cannot enter upon this subject here, suffice to say that this will be called the illusory body of the union of the two, when the yogi emerges into what is at last true indivisibility between emptiness and appearances, ultimate reality and deceptive reality.

At this point, perhaps, we might intuit that even the deceptive in “deceptive reality” would have transformed its meaning. For by that time, it would follow that for the yogi, all of deceptive reality is experienced *as* a manifestation of extremely subtle winds and mind.³⁵ For a yogi of the fifth stage, who has become both an ārya and an arhat as a result of a single session of entering the actual clear light, there is no longer any deception in the sense of being fooled, even though dual appearances would still arise intermittently until the state of total Buddhahood is reached.³⁶ Rather it seems the word is used in order to echo the sūtra presentations of the two realities and to recall the meaning of things not being as they appear; it may also be retained in order to show the very transformation of its meaning in this advanced tantric context. For the referent of illusion here is no mere magic show or *trompe l’oeil*, but the magnificent display of the completely pure, most subtle winds of primordial wisdom from which all mind and matter can be created anew. It is a sacred illusion.

Clear Light as Creator

I asked in Chapter One whether, when Tsongkhapa refers to the indivisibility of dependent arising and emptiness, he seems to consider the set of “cause and effect” equivalent to the set of “karma and its effects.” I also asked whether Nāgārjuna, in declaring that, “Whatever arises in reliance and relationship, that we explain to be emptiness,” seems to have considered the set of dependent origination to be equivalent to the set of the twelve links of dependent origination, or whether, in writing of dependent designation with respect to Buddhas themselves, he seems to have considered *pratītyasamutpāda* a term that could also apply to cause and effect, as well as verbal designation, beyond the cycle of suffering.

Through the course of this long and variegated study, I hope that my provisional conclusion has become evident. When referring to all things subsumed within saṃsāra, it seems that for Tsongkhapa, at least, the term dependent origination does primarily refer to the twelve links, and among those, the relationship between the first two links of ignorance and karmic traces is paramount. Thus, while of course he acknowledges and refers to many varieties of causes and conditions throughout his writings, nearly every

³⁵ See Appendix Seventeen (471), as well as (466):

Thus, with respect to the worlds that are inhabitants, the primordially indwelling body that belongs to each of them, which is nothing more than winds and mind, serves as the referent of “illusory body.” With respect to the vessels and inhabitants that are shared in common, the fact that these are the emanation of both winds and mind serves as the meaning of “illusion.”

³⁶ See *rim lnga gsal sgron*, vol. *ja*, 303b1-2 (608), as well as the passage in Chapter Four, note 5, above.

process seems to come back to some reference to the multifaceted category of karmic action, along with its imprints, traces, tendencies, seeds, and in the end, its effects. At the root of karma, however, is the mind, as we have seen Tsongkhapa argue across many genres, relying upon Candrakīrti, Nāgabuddhi, and others as well. I have also suggested, through a preliminary analysis of Tsongkhapa's approach to Dharmakīrti's epistemology, how Tsongkhapa might have understood karmic processes to wield intimate influence over the moments of conceptual labeling that constitute such a large part of our daily experience. I have proposed that Tsongkhapa's theory of creation stage practice might be summarized in terms of the use and transformation of that process of moment to moment labeling, once the referents of all names are understood to be empty. I have questioned, too, how this theory itself might need to be altered once the practitioner reaches deeper and deeper states of nonconceptual meditation, and must begin to transform reality at a layer more fundamental than the verbal or even pictorial abstractions that dawn before surface layers of consciousness. I have now begun to suggest that this layer would involve the subtle and especially the extremely subtle inner winds, which Tsongkhapa understands as providing the fundamental energetic support not only for consciousness, but for all outer matter as well.

Meanwhile, in the course of examining Tsongkhapa's writings on the creation stage, we repeatedly encountered references to the indwelling mind of clear light, that which provides the valid basis for every tantric act of identification with a ground of absolute purity. At the extremely subtle level of mind, this is a ground that was never stained by karma, and never will be. Inseparable from the energy of primordially indwelling winds, Tsongkhapa states that this “simultaneously-born wind and mind that remain within the heart, *are the root of all that is in the cycle and all that is beyond it.*”³⁷

Though at this point I can only foreshadow what a future study of Tsongkhapa's writings on the complete stage would need to include, it should be clear that Tsongkhapa does envision a rich and dynamic form of causation beyond saṃsāra. It goes without saying that the extremely subtle winds and mind have no nature of their own. When this level of energy-mind is perceived directly, this is what it means to manifest the clear light mind perceiving emptiness directly, utterly free of conceptual elaboration or dual appearance. Still, Tsongkhapa understands this clear light mind to have causal efficacy, indeed as the ultimate creative force. While in one sense it is inseparable from the mental consciousness that creates saṃsāra – what Nāgabuddhi called the “lord of consciousness” – Tsongkhapa also states that this extremely subtle form of the energy of being aware is not the same as the “mental function that is movement of the mind.”³⁸ That is, once

³⁷ See the Epilogue, note 16, above.

³⁸ Tib. *sems byung sems pa*; what would in Sanskrit be *caitta-cetanā*. See Appendix Seventeen (463):

When a yogi who has come to the final end of the vajra recitation and the mind-set-apart sees a light in the aspect of five colors, its defining characteristic is different from that of the mental function that is

realized in all its purity, the action of the extremely subtle mind, which is now manifest as primordial knowing, *does not create karma*. This is because such a state of mind, understanding all appearances perfectly as illusion in the highest sense, will never surge forward, fuse with an object, or make a trace. It is pure *awareness*, the antithesis of “unawareness,” or ignorance.

The practices of the complete stage are designed specifically to withdraw the movements and fluctuations (*g.yo 'gul*) of all the karmic winds that usually vibrate constantly throughout the body of a living being, giving rise to every form of experience through the doors of the senses. Thus the mental counterpart to a physical withdrawal of such winds is supposed to be a forceful cancellation of the activities of karma, which lasts as long as the winds can remain dissolved inside the central channel. As Tsongkhapa glosses a verse from Nāgārjuna’s *Five Stages*:³⁹

Since the joining of wind to mind is an action of movement, when there is no movement, the conceptualizations of “nature” do not arise. But due to the conceptualizations that arise from winds and mind, mental afflictions and karma accumulate.

This refers to the activities of the inner karmic winds and the level of mind associated with what are in Guhyasamāja literature known as the eighty misconceptions (*kun rtog brgyad bcu*) that regard things as having natures. But once these subtle winds and mind have dissolved back into the extremely subtle, such misconceptions cannot occur. At that point, it would also be impossible to project “saṃsāra” any longer. Herein we might glimpse the energetic correlate to the “vanishing of appearances” to which I gave so much analytical attention in Chapter Five. From the point of view of the Nāgārjuna who is author of the Middle Way treatises, if one could remove the action of karmic traces, then nothing that was saṃsāra will appear. Here, insofar as the action of karma is associated with a subtle physical correlate, the theory expressed by the Nāgārjuna who is author of the *Five Stages* is that if one could literally stop the *movements* of karmic winds as they occur outside the central channel, thus withdrawing those winds, along with the thoughts that ride upon them, back into their source, the indestructible orb, then likewise, nothing that was saṃsāra will appear.

In this regard, however, a difficult question may arise. If, according to the realization of a yogi who has reached the illusory body, all beings are simply the coarse manifestations of indwelling wind and mind, and all physical things are actually the emanations of such wind and mind, then at root, all of deceptive reality could be viewed as a vibrating mass of more or less subtle energy, inseparable from consciousness. But

movement of the mind. It is called the *wind of clear light*, entirely free of the coarse winds that flow through the nostrils, and so forth.

³⁹ See Appendix Seventeen (460).

then, when in certain visualizations common to practices of both the creation and complete stages, the yogi sees light flying out from his or her heart, touching all beings and worlds, melting them into light, and step by step withdrawing such worlds and beings back into the indestructible orb at the heart, if by the stage of the impure illusory body onwards, what was merely imagined before is now becoming *real*, does this mean that all the winds and mind in all worlds would “actually” withdraw into the yogi’s heart? Does entry into the actual clear light mean that all worlds have in fact vanished into emptiness? What then would happen to the rest of us? Would this not constitute the misunderstanding refuted by Candrakīrti, where one might think that realizing emptiness causes the annihilation of things?⁴⁰ I had opportunity to ask Geshe Khedrup Norsang a version of these questions, taking them to their logical end, and found his answer an important clarification. When referring specifically to the winds that make up the physical matter of the yogi’s body, or else the winds that form the basis of environments created by shared karma, he said:⁴¹

Those are not withdrawn. The winds that come in relation to each person’s karma, the winds that turn the cycle of saṃsāra, the winds related to each one’s mind and karma; those are withdrawn. The winds associated with the eighty misconceptions are withdrawn, but the outer ones, the shared ones; those are not withdrawn. Only the *unique* ones.

When I asked specifically about the visualization, he said, “That doesn’t take place. The visualization, yes. But if it were so, if there were anyone in the past who had finished withdrawing all the winds, then we wouldn’t exist.” I find that this answer, along with our shared laughter at the absurd consequence of the alternative, further confirms the idea that in Tsongkhapa’s tantric view it is the existence of winds, at any level, that can ensure the continued existence of a shared world, even as one or another practitioner might enter a state of consciousness in which all the winds associated with the active *perception* of such a world, as a dual appearance, have been dissolved. As Geshe Norsang said many times, when a yogi has entered the actual clear light, his or her body is like that of a corpse, unmoving, and without breath. But in this particular system, as opposed to certain practices associated with later stages of the Great Perfection, it is not as though the physical molecules that composed the coarse body of past karma are deliberately disintegrated into light as a sign of inner realization. When a Guhyasamāja practitioner reaches the actual clear light, nothing will appear to him or her, but it is not as though anything outside has ceased to exist. What has ceased are the yogi’s own misconceptions

⁴⁰ See Appendix Five (261-264), and discussion in Chapter Five, “Interlude on the Two Realities.”

⁴¹ At Gyutö Monastery, private interview, April 13th, 2015, 3m25s-3m42s:

དེ་ཚོ་བསྐྱུས་ཀྱི་མ་རེད། སོ་སོ་སོ་སོ་བསྐྱུས་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་ཡོང་མཁན་གྱི་རྒྱུ་འཁོར་བ་སྐོར་ཡག་གི་སོ་སོ་འཕྲེལ་དང་སེམས་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་ཡོང་བ་བཞི་རྒྱུ་
དེ་བསྐྱུས། ་་་ རྣམ་ཉིད་བརྒྱུད་བརྩེ་བཞི་རྒྱུ་དེ་བསྐྱུས་བ་ཕྱིར་རོལ་དེ་བསྐྱུས་ཀྱི་མ་རེད། ལྷན་སྐྱོང་བ་དེ་ཚོ་མ་བསྐྱུས་བ་ལྷན་སྐྱོང་མ་ཡིན་པ། ་་་ [གསལ་འདེ
བས་འདི། འགྲོ་བཞི་མ་རེད། དམིགས་བ་དེ་ཡོང་བ་རེད། དེ་ཡིན་ན་དེ་སྤྱོད་མ་རྒྱུ་བསྐྱུས་ཆར་ལྷན་མཁན་མི་གང་ཆད་བྱུང་བ་ཡིན་ན་ང་ཚོ་ཡོང་བ་མ་རེད།

and karmic tendencies, along with the winds upon which they rode. The yogi has also ruptured the lifelong relationship between the primordially indwelling body and the physical body born of karma, without actually dying.⁴² But the motionless outer body can still appear to others.

As we have seen, however, the story does not end there. Once the yogi has manifested the actual clear light, completely free of conceptuality, he or she is able to arise in a pure illusory body, which Tsongkhapa affirms will continue in an unbroken stream through enlightenment.⁴³ By definition, this indestructible vajra body will never die again, nor even be dissolved into the clear light again, for the task of the yogi now is to master the union of emptiness and appearances within this pure illusory body. Such a body is certainly beyond saṃsāra, yet the yogi is still able to engage with objects, people and environments in the world ripened from previous karma, precisely in order to help them, and also in order to train in the highly esoteric Practices (*spyod pa*, Skt. *caryā*) that are designed to finish off the last obstacles to omniscience. Within such a liminal space it would seem difficult to continue to apply many of the explanations we have engaged here regarding how mental images dawn based on karmic tendencies. For such a yogi has already put an end to all mistaken tendencies for seeing or believing things to be real, and would be constantly immersed in the concentration on the illusion as described above, where he or she sees that all beings are made of nothing more than winds and mind, and all environments are simply the emanations of such primordial wisdom. “Mental images” are arising, certainly, and conceptual thoughts that are not mistaken may indeed continue to function, but it would seem that such a yogi understands intimately how all things are arising based on subtle shifts of energy emerging as light, color, sound, taste, and so on. Such a yogi might also be able to see the karma of other beings arising in a similar way – as a dance of winds – no matter how painful such experiences might seem to the person who does not understand what is happening. This would be yet a new level at which to examine Tsongkhapa’s reflection on the omniscience of Buddhas, and how they are supposed to see the suffering of living beings without becoming mistaken towards it.⁴⁴

⁴² See Appendix Seventeen (464).

⁴³ See for example, the *Thoroughly Illuminating Lamp* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*), vol. ja, 304a5 (609):

“Without transference” indicates that once you have attained this holy body, the continuation of its type will never be broken. This means you have achieved the definitive vajrakāya. “Immaculate and so on,” means that you have abandoned all mental afflictions. [Candrakīrti’s] *Illuminating Lamp* states that at the stage of no more training, there is no continuing on from the clear light into the three states of emptiness of the reverse order. Here, however, since it is being explained in the context of rising up from the reverse order, one must add that this is the union of the two still in training.

འཇོ་བ་མེད་པ་ནི་སྐྱེད་ཐོབ་ནས་རིགས་འདྲ་མི་འཆད་པར་སྟོན་ཏེ། རྗེ་ཆེན་ལྷ་མཆན་ཉིད་པ་ཐོབ་པ་འོ། །ཟག་པ་མེད་པ་སོགས་ནི་ཉོན་མོངས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྦངས་པ་འོ། །མི་སྦྱོབ་པ་ལ་འདོད་གསལ་ལས་ལུགས་སྒྲིག་ཏུ་སྟོང་པ་གསུམ་དུ་འོང་བ་མེད་པར་སྟོན་གསལ་ལས་གསུངས་ཤིང་། འདིར་ལུགས་སྒྲིག་ཏུ་ལངས་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་བཤད་པས་སྦྱོབ་པའི་བྱང་འདུག་ལ་སྦྱར་རོ།

⁴⁴ Translated in Appendix Twelve and discussed in Chapter Five.

Tsongkhapa and many authors of his lineage repeatedly make the distinction between the way that processes of the original condition (such as the superficial dissolution of elements when falling asleep, or else the total dissolution into the clear light of death) occur “by force of karma,” as opposed to the way they will occur for the yogi “by force of meditation” (*bsgoms stobs kyis*). I think this may offer a clue as to how it is that causation is thought to be “carried,” as it were, once the yogi has more and more thoroughly learned to withdraw the very winds upon which the causal influences of old karma ride. The sheer habituation of meditation, and especially the virtuoso tuning of the inner winds, insofar as it is governed less and less by the traces of ignorance, can no longer be driven by “karma” *per se*. Yet a causal continuity is without doubt established over time, so that practice brings its fruits, while the virtue of tremendous acts of service in the outer world can continue to fuel the energy required for the inner practices. Tsongkhapa does not write about the functioning of karma in these contexts; those explanations remain confined to treatises designed for training disciples in the shared steps of the path, teaching the basic principles of how to avoid misdeeds and cultivate virtues. But I do not think it an idle reflection to consider just how every last trace of karma might be unraveled in the course of such an explicitly gradual path. At the very least, it is still *mind* – at ever more refined levels – that is creating all things, until, rather than an abstraction dawning before a conceptual state of mind by the power of a karmic tendency, it is the illusory vajra body that dawns before primordial consciousness, entirely free of conceptualization, by force of the sheer continuity of meditation. Without ever violating the principles of Tsongkhapa’s Middle Way, perhaps we glimpse what it would mean for the divine identity that the practitioner had long since believed in, one day, to become REAL.

Emptiness, Clarity, and Compassion

I have suggested intermittently that I am convinced there is more similarity between Tsongkhapa’s views and those expressed within the tradition of the Great Perfection than many might think, or indeed than many have seemed to think over the past six hundred years of Tibetan history. While exploration of this idea would of course require a separate study, I wish to end here with yet another unfinished seed for what is to come. In the *Garland of Supreme Medicinal Nectar: Questions and Answers*, the Nyingma master known as Khenchen Hlodrakpa Namkha Gyaltsen calls himself Karmavajra (*las kyi rdo rje*, a term often used for a servant or ritual assistant in a tantric ceremony), and acts as intermediary for a transmission that is supposed to be taking place between the tantric Buddha Vajrapāṇi and Je Tsongkhapa, who is here called by a Sanskrit rendering of his famed monastic name, Lobsang (“Excellent Mind”). The text explains that Vajrapāṇi remains invisible, while Khenchen Hlodrakpa – who can hear the divine voice – is commissioned to transmit the teaching to Tsongkhapa. Historically, what is of further interest is that the content of the main part of the text is nearly identical

In quoting excerpts from its initial presentation of the pitfalls to be avoided with respect to the view (within the triad of view, meditation, and conduct), I wish to draw my reader's attention to the way in which the terms here, which are classically associated with the Great Perfection tradition, might echo terms we have been encountering consistently within Tsongkhapa's own tantric writings:⁴⁶

I, the Vajra Servant, humbly asked, “What is the essence of the clear light?”

⁴⁵ See Chapter Three, note 3, above.

ལས་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད། མ་ཉེ་རྩ་དུ་སྤྱི་ལ་དཔེ་གསལ་ཆོག་པའི་ཀམས་ན་པར་སྒྲིལ། ཡལ་ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོའི་དགོངས་པ། ཡམས་ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོའི་སྤྲིང་གཏམ། དོན་འཛིན་པ་
བདག་གི་གསལ་ཆོག་ཐེག་པའི་ཡང་ཅེ། ལྷན་མཆོག་ཆེན་པོའི་སྤྱུལ་པ་ལ་མེམས་ཉིད་འོད་གསལ་ཀྱི་ཅན་ཆོད་གསུང་། ལས་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད་བདག་གིས་ལུས་པ། འོད་གསལ་
ལས་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད་ལྷ་ཡུལ་གསལ་ལུས་པས། ལས་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད་འོད་གསལ་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད་བཞིན་སྤྲུགས་ཆེ་གསུམ་དུ་དབྱས་གསུང་། འོད་མོའི་གོལ་ལུགས་ནི། སྤྱིར་རོ་
པོ་ཞེས་བྲ་བ་སྟེ། རང་གི་རིག་པའི་གནས་ལུགས་ཅིར་ཡང་བྱུང་བ་མེད་པའི་སྤྲོད་གསལ་དུ་ཡོ་གདོད་མ་ནས། ད་ལྟའི་གོལ་པ་བཅོས་སྤྱད་དང་བྲལ་བ་འདི་ཀ་ལྟར་
འོད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་གའི་སྤྲོད་དུ་མི་འོག་པར་གང་ཟག་གིས་སྤོང་ཉིད་དུ་བསྐྱོན་པས་པས། སྤོང་འཛིན་གྱི་སྤོང་པ་ཡལ་བས། སྤོང་པ་བྱང་[sicརྒྱང་orབྱང་]ཆད་བྱ་
བར་གོལ་པ་ཡིན་གསུངས། འོད་ལས་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད་སྤོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་ཟེར་བ་མང་བར་གང་བསྟེ། དོན་དམ་པའི་གནས་ལུགས་རྟོགས་པ་ཅུང་བར་གང་བ། འོད་རབ་ཞི
ན་གྱི་གོལ་ས་ནི། རིག་པ་སྤོང་པའི་རང་མདངས་སྤྱད་པའི་གོལ་ས་གསལ་པ་འདི་ལ། སྤྱུ་ལ་ཞལ་བུག་དང་། ཡོ་གོལ་པ་ཁ་དོག་གསལ། མཆོག་མའི་རིགས་ཅན་དུ་
བྱུང་བ་མེད་དེ། སྤོང་པའི་རང་མདངས་གསལ་པའི་ཆ་ཅས་དུ་གསལ་སྤོང་དཔྲེར་མེད་དུ་བཞུགས་པ་ལ་གང་ཟག་གིས་གསལ་སྤོང་དཔྲེར་མེད་རྒྱང་འཇུག་ཏུ་མ་གཤི
ས་པས། རིག་པ་སྤོང་པར་གོལ་པ་བྲུ་བ་ཡིན་གསུངས། འོད་ལས་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད་འོད་གསལ་ཆེན་ཟེར་བ་མང་བར་གང་བསྟེ། གསལ་སྤོང་རྒྱང་འཇུག་ཏུ་འོྱངས་པ་ཅུང་
བར་གང་བ། ལས་ཀྱི་དོན་མེད་སྤྲུགས་ཆེ་བ་ འོད་གོལ་ལུགས་ནི། རིག་པ་སྤོང་གསལ་གྱི་རང་མདངས་མི་འཆར་དགུ་འཆར་གྱི་རྣམ་རྟོག་འདི། རི་ལྟར་ཤར་གྱང་རིག་
སྤོང་ལས་མ་འདས་ཏེ། གང་ཟག་གིས་དེ་ལྟར་མ་གོ་བས། རིག་པ་སྤོང་པར་གོལ་པ་བྲུ་བ་ཡིན་གསུངས།

without being rid of the mind that grasps to emptiness, this is said to be the pitfall of making emptiness totally cut off. . . . O Vajra Servant, there are many who say, ‘I have realized emptiness,’ but there are few who have realized the ultimate way that reality abides.

“. . . The way one goes wrong about its *nature* is this. Regarding the natural radiance of empty, pristine awareness, which becomes clearly luminous as primordial wisdom and the holy bodies, the holy bodies are not established with face or arms, and the primordial wisdom is not established as the type of thing that has color or signs. Rather, the natural radiance of emptiness remains as inseparable emptiness-and-clarity simply within the aspect of clarity.⁴⁷ But when someone does not understand this inseparable union of the pair of emptiness and clarity, this is said to be the pitfall of confusing pristine awareness with appearances. . . . O Vajra Servant, there are many who say, ‘I have already grasped the clear light,’ but there are few who have trained in the union of the pair of emptiness and clarity.

“O Vajra Servant, the way one goes wrong . . . with respect to compassion is this. When, with the conception that the natural radiance of clarity and empty pristine awareness either does not dawn at all, or else dawns as everything, someone does not understand that whatever dawns cannot go beyond awareness and emptiness, this is said to be the pitfall of confusing pristine awareness with emptiness.”

Although the practices associated with the “uppermost pinnacle of the vehicles” known as the Great Perfection differ significantly in approach from the practices of the two stages of unsurpassed yoga tantra, I would suggest that even from Tsongkhapa’s perspective, the view of reality in its original condition, or ground, does not differ. Within Tsongkhapa’s milieu, it is as though one must reach almost the end of the path before reality starts to reveal itself to be the way that the Great Perfection teachings on the view say that it always was, from the beginningless beginning. Within Tsongkhapa’s Guhyasamāja literature in particular, however, I think we have seen all the elements necessary to support a Great Perfection view: (1) There is the fact that within the mind of clear light, the experience of emptiness is never cut off from its being the emptiness *of* a basis, in this case the emptiness of the extremely subtle awareness itself. (2) There is the idea that awareness itself has a luminous aspect, and this can manifest as the vividly clear appearances of the maṇḍala; yet once such clear appearances are arising, not from the contrived use of the imagination at the level of coarse mind, but from the natural radiance of the extremely subtle wind of clear light, appearing in rays of five colors, an illusory body can arise that is never established *as* anything. Being formed of nothing more than winds and mind, it must not be confused with the ordinary appearances born of karmic winds; yet for the yogi who has realized it, all appearances, *because* they are empty of

⁴⁷ Tib. *gsal ba'i cha*. This would refer to the aspect of the clarity, or luminosity, of consciousness itself, as opposed to its aspect of awareness, or cognizance. See Geshe Norsang’s use of an expanded form combining both of these terms in Chapter Five, note 129.

any nature, can be seen as an expression of its radiance. (3) There is the union of the pair of ultimate and deceptive realities – clear light and illusory body – that is the last of the five stages of Guhyasamāja. As I have shown, for Tsongkhapa the experience of this indivisibility, once winds have entered the central channel, is always one of great bliss, which is a synonym for “the compassion that takes no focal object.”⁴⁸ The idea that the primordial union of the two realities – the fact that they were never separate – could be characterized as *compassion*, is one that we have not even begun to fathom here. Yet I reiterate my suggestion from Chapter Three (“In a Single State of Consciousness”) that if the nature of the wisdom that sees reality correctly is of the same essence as great compassion, then the converse should also be true, namely, that any state of mind not pervaded by great compassion *is not seeing correctly*.

Perhaps this is related to the idea expressed in the revealed treasure text above, namely, that the fact that nothing at all can appear which falls beyond the scope of the union of emptiness and pristine awareness *is* all-pervasive compassion. From a theistic point of view it may be a shocking way to talk about the creativity of divine love, but perhaps it is one way to express such a theological intuition without falling prone to any of the extremes of grasping to things as real. There is awareness; it is not established as anything at all; it creates all things; nothing falls beyond its creative power; yet appearances are not really it, nor is it really appearances. But the fact that nothing in the most unbearable depths of suffering existence is beyond the reach of the absolute purity that dissolves all pain by severing the misconception that is its root, is all-pervasive compassion. The fact that the indivisible unity of pure awareness and emptiness can display itself as countless emanations to reveal its truth to living beings, is also all-pervasive compassion. But the existential idea being expressed here is that the fact of the all-pervasive dharmakāya and the fact of its innumerable displays are not separate. I think Tsongkhapa would agree.

* * *

Where does this leave us, then? There is of course much work that remains in the study of Tsongkhapa. Thousands of pages of his tantric material have not yet been translated into English, and the scholarly study of his detailed teachings on the theory of the complete stage has only just begun. Two different translations of but a single one of Tsongkhapa’s ten major commentaries on the Guhyasamāja system have been published,⁴⁹ but apart from this, few of Tsongkhapa’s other tantric commentaries – whether on Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara, Vajrabhairava, Kālacakra or a host of other

⁴⁸ Tib. *dmigs pa med pa'i snying rje*. See Chapter Three, note 45.

⁴⁹ See Gavin Kilty, 2013, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*, and Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, Robert A. F. Thurman, and Thomas F. Yarnall, 2010, *Brilliant Illumination of the Lamp of the Five Stages (Rim lnga rab tu gsal ba'i sgron me): Practical Instruction in the King of Tantras, the Glorious Esoteric Community*. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies.

maṇḍalas in all four classes of tantra – have been released in translation.⁵⁰ In further exploration of this material, I think it will be important to pay close attention to Tsongkhapa's comparative interpretations of how the complete stage practices are supposed to function within the systems of Mother and Father tantras, respectively.

Throughout such texts, there remains an ever uncertain relationship between the apparently normative instructions for practice, and the forms that such practices have actually taken within the minds and bodies of innumerable monks and yogis over the last six hundred years within Tsongkhapa's lineage. While such phenomenological research is perhaps impossible to perform upon persons of the past, there is still much rich historical material that could help us to understand further how Tsongkhapa might have passed on his most advanced and private teachings to his close disciples. As I had opportunity to witness first-hand, the "heard lineage" of Ganden (*dga' ldan snyan brgyud*)⁵¹ is still being taught to small groups within the tantric monasteries, and it is herein that one can find specific references to the practice of the Great Seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*) within Tsongkhapa's vision of the swiftest path to enlightenment in a single lifetime. Further study in all these areas may continue to reveal a much more balanced picture of Tsongkhapa, not only as the monastic reformer and master rationalist scholar that he surely was, but as a tantric yogi who seems to have spent much of his life immersed in visionary experiences of divine beings and transcendent meditations on the primordial purity of indivisible bliss and emptiness. The many layers of his biographies, especially as they evolved over the centuries, still deserve careful attention, and a proper intellectual biography of Tsongkhapa still begs to be written.⁵² I hope that the image of Tsongkhapa's tantric thought that I have drawn here might provide some of the crucial elements that will be necessary if any kaleidoscopic picture of his contribution to the history of religious thought is to do justice to his vast work.

⁵⁰ For recent work, see, for example, David B. Gray (forthcoming, 2017), *Tsong Khapa's Illumination of the Hidden Meaning: Mandala, Mantra, and the Cult of the Yoginīs: A Study and Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-24 of the sbas don kun sel*. American Institute of Buddhist Studies.

⁵¹ See Janice Dean Willis, 1995, *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), for a beautiful study of the life stories of several of the major figures in the early lineage of yogis following Tsongkhapa.

⁵² See the mandate offered by David Ruegg, 2010, *Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle*, 380-381, where he writes, in an article first published in 2004 ("The Indian and Indic in Tibetan Cultural History") that the "appropriateness and justification" of describing Tsongkhapa with terms such as "a reformer, an innovator (to the extent perhaps of even having been something of a maverick), and a conservative traditionalist . . . will of course be the task for a full-scale intellectual biography – in Tibetan terms principally a *nang gi rnam thar* – of this master."

Appendix One – On “No Functioning Things”

*abhāve bhāvanābhāvo bhāvanā naiva bhāvanā
iti bhāvo na bhāvaḥ syād bhāvanā nopalabhyate*¹

།དངོས་པོ་མེད་པས་སྒྲུབ་པ་མེད། །བསྒྲུབ་པར་བྱ་བ་སྒྲུབ་པ་མེད།

།དེ་ལྟར་དངོས་པོ་དངོས་མེད་པས། །སྒྲུབ་པ་དམིགས་སུ་མེད་པའོ།

With no functioning things, there is no meditation

To have something upon which to meditate, is not the meditation

Thus, with functioning things and things with no function

*The meditation has nothing upon which to focus*²

From Je Tsongkhapa’s *Further Commentary in the Form of Annotations*:³

ལྷ་བརྟན་པ་སྒྲུབ་དང་གཞི་བཟུང་གི་ཡི་དངོས་པོ་ལ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་དབྱེད་པའི་རིགས་པས་དབྱེད་པ་ན་གཞི་དེ་དག་གང་ཡང་རིགས་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་མ་རྟོག་པ་ན་སྒྲུབ་བརྟན་དེ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་དེ་ནི་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་པར་མཐོང་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་

¹ See Yukei Matsunaga, 1978, *The Guhyasamāja Tantra: A New Critical Edition* (Osaka: Toho Shuppan), Ch.II, v.3, p.9.

² As quoted in Tsongkhapa, *The Steps of Pure Yoga: A Method for Reaching the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa*), vol. ja, 8b5 (706). There are myriad ways to translate this verse, and indeed it was translated in at least three different ways from Sanskrit into Tibetan across the canonical Guhyasamāja literature in the Kangyur and Tengyur (see Chapter Five, note 8). For my translation of the root verse (from *this* version of the Tibetan), I have followed Tsongkhapa's commentary here, which is in turn based upon the Tibetan translation of Candrakīrti's *Illuminating Lamp* (*Pradīpodyotana-nāma-ṭīkā*, *sgron ma gsal bar byed pa zhes bya ba'i rgya cher bshad pa*, Toh. 1785, sde dge bstan 'gyur, rgyud, vol. ha) that Tsongkhapa quotes directly embedded within this text, rendered in larger print (bold in the translation). I have found it impossible to render in English a complete grammatically comprehensible version of the *Illuminating Lamp* while also translating Tsongkhapa's commentary. It should be noted, however, that this is the way that Tsongkhapa's gloss commentary is actually written: One can read the larger print straight through and it is an exact, grammatically complete, rendition of Candrakīrti's text. Indeed, when receiving the oral transmission for this text (as the traditional Geluk “*grel pa bzhi sbrag*,” the “four commentaries interlaced”) from Jhado Rinpoche, Abbot of Gyutö Tantric Monastery, in May, 2015, this is how the text was read; first the whole section just in the “large print” root text, and then the whole section over again as Tsongkhapa's commentary, followed finally by the “*ka rtags*” or “*ka, kha, and ga*” marking the “annotations” (*mchan*) or what I have rendered here as footnotes. Although the main Tibetan translator of Candrakīrti's text was Rinchen Zangpo (rin chen bzang po) these annotations often make reference to the alternative Tibetan translations by Nakpo (nag po) and Gü-Hlétsé ('gos lhas btsas).

³ “*The Further Commentary in the Form of Annotations that Break Open the Exact Meaning of the Words in “The Illuminating Lamp,” that Extensive Commentary on the King of All Secret Teachings, the Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*rgyud thams cad kyi rgyal po dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i rgya cher bshad pa sgron ma gsal ba'i tshig don ji bzhin 'byed pa'i mchan gyi yang 'grel*), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. nga, 90b2-93b6 (180-186). All footnotes to follow within this Appendix are part of Tsongkhapa's own text [hence, to avoid confusion, I have refrained from adding explanatory footnotes of my own, and only added partial sentences in brackets where necessary]. They are handled differently in different Tibetan editions, but stylistically they are clearly set apart in the form of “the further annotations.” I have placed the “*ka, kha, and ga*” notes in my edition of the Tibetan text at the exact location to which they refer, though they were not always placed that way in the Tashi Lhunpo *pecha* edition, which used dotted lines to indicate the appropriate reference instead.

ན་ཉིད་སྒྲོམ་པ་ ཡིན་ན་ནི། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ སྒྲོམ་པ་མེད་པ་སྟེ་ མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟར་ན་ནི་ བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱ་བ་ ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་ མེད་པ་
ར་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱ་བ་སྒྲོམ་པ་མེན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། གང་ ཡང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་ན་
། བསྒྲོམ་བྱ་བསྒྲོམ་བྱེད་སོགས་ཀྱི་བྱ་བྱེད་མི་འཐད་པར་མཐོང་སྟེ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་དོན་ ཡོད་པར་ བཟུང་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་
སྒྲོམ་པ་ ར་འདོད་པའི་སྒྲོམ་ དེ་ཡང་ དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ སྒྲོམ་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་ན། བ
སྒྲོམ་པར་བྱ་བ་ སོགས་ཀྱི་བྱ་བྱེད་ དང་བྲལ་བ་ ར་འགྱུར་བ་ ས་ ཅུ་ཞེ་ལས། ལམ་ལ་རང་བཞིན་ཡོད་ན་ནི། །སྒྲོམ་པ་འཐད་པར་
མི་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ལམ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་ན་བསྒྲོམ་པ་ ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པས་སོ། ། །དེ་གཉིས་ནི་འདོད་མཁ
ན་དངོས་སུ་ཡོད་པ་འགོག་པའོ། །

(180) When you analyze with the reasoning that analyzes suchness with respect to the **functioning things of foundations** (that is, vessels) **and what moves upon them** (that is, inhabitants): If you cannot find any such basis with a reasoning consciousness, and you see that **the identity of all** those vessels and their inhabitants **does not exist** in the slightest way, and **if this were** meditating on suchness, then **there would be no** (that is, this would not be the) **meditation** on suchness; **because** in this way, it would turn out that **there would be nothing** in the least **upon which to meditate. As for the statement that, “To have something upon which to meditate, is not the meditation”**: That meditation in which you accept that this is the **meditation** on suchness – having seen that if **whatever** exists through its own nature did not exist in the slightest way, the actions and actors of what is to be meditated upon, the meditator, and so on would not make sense, and thus holding that objects established through inherent nature do **exist** – **furthermore, is not the meditation** on suchness. The reason for this is that if all things were established by their very essence, it would turn out that **what is to be meditated upon**, and so forth, would **lack** its actions and actors. As the *Root Verses on Wisdom* states:

If the path had a nature of its own,
it would make no sense to meditate on it.

If the path existed with a nature of its own, **then** the meditation **would not exist**.⁴

དེ་ལྟར་ཞེས་པ་ནི་དངོས་པོ་མེད་པ་དང་དངོས་པོ་ རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ ཡོད་པར་འདོད་པའི་དོན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ དང་ལྷན་
པ་ སྟེ། ཆོགས་པ་ གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ འདྲ་བའི་དོན་ ཉི་དངོས་པོ་ སྟེ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་གཏན་ མེད་པ་ཉིད་དེ། རྩོགས་གཉི་གའི་གཅིག་
ཡིན་པ་ དང་ ཅིག་ཞོས་ཡིན་པ་ འགལ་ བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །འདི་ནི་དངོས་སུ་འདོད་མཁན་མེད་ཀྱང་ལོག་རྟོག་གི་མཐའ་བཅད་ནས་འགོག་
པའོ། །གཉིས་ཡིན་གྱི་ཕྱང་གསུམ་བཀག་པ་དེས་ནི། གཉིས་མ་ཡིན་གྱི་ཕྱང་གསུམ་འགོག་པ་ཡང་གོ་བར་རྒྱས་པས་དངོས་སུ་མ་གསུ
ངས་སོ་ལོ། །ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྣང་[sicསྣང་]བཤད་པའི་མཐའ་བཞི་དང་བྲལ་བ་ དེ་བས་ན་ གང་ བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱ་བ་དང་། ག
ང་གིས་ སྒྲོམ་པ་པོ་དང་། ཇི་ལྟར་ བསྒྲོམ་པ་ གསུམ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ དམིགས་སུ་མེད་པ་སྟེ། རྒྱུ་པ་བཞི་པའི་དངོ
ས་ཀྱི་དོན་ཆོག་གི་རྒྱས་པས་གང་ཐོན་པ་བཤད་པའི་ ཡི་གའི་དོན་ཏོ། །

(181) **As for the word “Thus”**: Something that could possess both of the objects that

⁴ These two arguments constitute the refutation of proponents who actually exist.

have been asserted as (1) the existence of functioning things that are established through their own nature and (2) the non-existence of functioning things; that is, whatever object such that it is a collection of both – **this functioning thing is itself something that does not exist** at all, with any sort of identity, because it is **contradictory for** one thing to be both itself and its opposite in **two directions at once**. (This position does not have an actual proponent, but is refuted in order to cut off the extreme of wrong ideas. From this refutation that there could be a third option that was both, one can also understand the refutation of a third option that was neither, so it is not stated directly.)

Since all things are free of the four extremes just explained, the triad of whatever **there is to be meditated upon**, whoever is **the meditator**, and how one **meditates, cannot be focused upon** as existing through any nature. **This is the meaning of the letters**, explained as whatever emerges from the potency of the words, in the actual meaning of the four lines.

ལྟ་སྒྲིབ་ཀྱི་དང་ལ་སོགས་པ་ས་བསྐྱུས་པ་ཕྱོགས་བཞིའི་ཆ་བྱུག་དང་ཤེས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ནི་རང་གི་སྒྲིབ་རབ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཆ་དང་
འདུས་མ་བྱས། གཞན་ལ་ཡང་ཡུལ་དུས་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་ཆ་དུ་མ་འདྲེ་བས་འབྲེད་རྒྱས་ལ། དེའི་ཆེ་དེ་རྣམས་བདེན་ན་རང་རང་གི་
ཆ་རྣམས་དང་ཆ་ཅན་གཉིས། བདེན་པའི་དོ་སོ་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གང་རུང་ལས་མི་འདའ་བ་དང་། བདེན་པའི་གཅིག་ཏུ་གྲུབ་ན་ཐ་དད་
ཡེ་མེད་པའི་གཅིག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བ་དང་། བདེན་པའི་ཐ་དད་ཡིན་ན་འབྲེལ་མེད་དུ་འགྱུར་བའི་རིགས་པས་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་བདེན་གྱི་
བ་རྣམས་བར་བསལ་ནས། དེ་ནས་འདུས་བྱས་དང་འདུས་མ་བྱས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་གཞན་རྣམས་ནི་མི་བདེན་ཀྱང་དེ་རྣམས་བདེ་
ན་པས་སྒྲིབ་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པ་ནི་བདེན་པ་འོ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཡང་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་སྒྲིབ་པ་ནི་མེད་པ་སྟེ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་.....དེ། དེ་ནི་སྒྲིབ་
པ་ཉིད་ལ་བདེན་པར་མངོན་པར་ཞེན་པའི་ལྟ་བ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ན་གསོར་མི་རུང་བའི་ལྟ་བར་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

Through divisions into many parts related to time and location: One can divide out the six parts of **above and below** and the four directions subsumed by “**and so on**,” and one can divide consciousness into the three parts of its earlier, later, and intermediate moments, and one can even divide what is unproduced. At that point, if those things were real, then they and what belongs to them, i.e., the pair of the possessor of the parts and the parts, could not transcend having either one real essence or separate real essences. If they were established as a real unity, then it would have to be something that was never, ever separate. But if they were really separate, it would turn out that there was no relationship possible.

Through this reasoning, one **completely clears away** the idea of real existence with respect to **all things**. But to meditate by thinking that “although **all other produced and unproduced things** are not real, **still**, the **emptiness** that is the fact they are empty of reality, **that’s real**”; in this case **there would be no** (that is, this would not be the) **meditation** on suchness, **because that would be a view that insists on believing in emptiness** as real. This has been stated to be a view from which there is no hope for recovery.

།རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་མཚན་མ་ལ་བདེན་པར་ཞེན་པ་བསྒྲོག་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱ་བ་སྒྲོམ་པ་མིན། ཞེས་བྱ་བ་གསུངས་ཏེ། གང་ཡང་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་སུའི་རྣམས་པ་ལ་བདེན་པར་མངོན་པར་ཞེན་ནས་སྒྲོམ་ན། དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱང་རིགས་པ་མ་

མྱེད་ཀྱི་ཉེན་པོ་ལྟོ་བའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ལྷའི་སྐྱེ་ཅན་ཞིག་སྒྲོམ་པ་ར་འདོད་པ་དེ་ཡང་མི་རིགས་
 ཏེ། སྐྱེ་ལུས་དེ་ནི་དབྱང་འོད་གསལ་པ་བསྒྲོམས་པ་ས་ནམ་པར་དག་པ་ར་བྱ་དགོས་པ་འི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །¹ ཉེན་པོ་སྐྱེ་མ་ག
 ཉིས་ཀྱི་མྱེད་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་ལུས་འོད་གསལ་དུ་བརྟག་པའི་འོད་གསལ་བསྐྱན་དགོས་པར་བསྐྱན་པས། མང་པོ་ལ་རྫོགས་རིམ་པའི་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ཀྱི་
 བདེ་སྣང་སྦྲར་བ་ལ། འོད་གསལ་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་གྲགས་པས་མི་ཆོག་གི། སྐྱེ་ལུས་འོད་གསལ་དུ་བརྟག་པའི་བདེ་སྣང་སྦྲར་བའི་འོད་ག
 སལ་དགོས་པར་བསྐྱན་ནོ། ། བཤད་མ་ཐག་པ་དེ་ལྟར་ན་ཀྱང་རྫོགས་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་སྐྱེ་མའི་ལུས་ཅན་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་ནི་གོམས་
 པར་བྱ་བའི་དངོས་པོ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྒར་བཤད་པའི་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་པ་སྟེ། གཉིས་ཀ་ཆོགས་པ་བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱ་ད
 གོས་པ་འི་ཕྱིར་རོ། ། རྒྱ་མཚན་དེ་བས་ན་སྒར་ཀྱི་དེ་གཉིས་ཅན་ལ་བསྒྲོམ་པ་སྟེ། བདེན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུ་སྟེ་ནམ་པ
 ར་བསྒྲོམ་པ་ནི་དམིགས་སུ་མེད་དེ། དེ་གཉིས་བསྒྲོམ་པ་མི་དམིགས་པ་ཡིན་པས་སོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་བར་དུ་སྟེ། ཐ་ཆོག་གོ
 །དེ་ལྟར་རྒྱུ་པ་བཞིས། མེམས་དམིགས་ཀྱི་བདེ་སྣང་དང། སྐྱེ་མའི་སྐྱེ་གཉིས་ཁྱད་པར་གྱི་གཞིར་བབྱང་ནས་ལམ་དེ་ཅན་ཞིག་ལ་གོམ
 ས་པར་བྱ་བ་འགོག་པའི་ཕྱིར། ཁྱད་གཞི་སྤྲས་དོན་ཡིན་པས་སྤྲས་པའོ། ། ཉེན་པོ་གསུངས་ཀྱི་དགག་བྱ་སྤྲས་པ་དང་འབྲེལ་བས་སྤྲ
 ས་པར་འཆད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་མི་རིགས་སོ། །

(184) Similarly, on top of what has been said, suppose you wonder, “Is it sufficient if one becomes accustomed just to the illusory body?” Then, on top of what has been said, **in order to prevent** training just in the illusory body – **the reality that is deceptive** – alone, **it states, “To have something upon which to meditate, is not the meditation.”**

On the **one** hand, on top of what has been said, to accept just a **meditation on the holy body of a divine being that is like an illusion, with the identity of deceptive reality** and that alone, **is unreasonable; because** one must still **completely purify** that illusory body **with meditation on the clear light.**⁶

Immediately following this explanation: **In the same way, just that functioning thing which is deceptive reality** – the illusory body – **is not the functioning thing** to which you become accustomed, **because** you must meditate on the collection of both of **the two realities, indivisibly**, as explained before. **For that reason, a meditation** on just those two explained before – **is a meditation on something resembling** (that is, on the aspect of) **the two realities, and it has nothing upon which to focus. Since** a meditation on those two **cannot be focused upon, everything up to that statement** is the final word. This is because these four lines hold as their distinguishing basis both the bliss and emptiness of focusing-upon-the-mind, and the holy body of illusion, and then they go on

⁶ *With this it teaches that on top of the previous two, one must add the clear light of the illusory body that has entered into the clear light. Thus, the joining of the simultaneously-born bliss and emptiness of the complete stage, which has become well-known to many as the primordial wisdom of clear light, is not sufficient. Rather, this teaches that one requires the clear light that joins the bliss and emptiness which come from the illusory body entering into the clear light.*

to refute the idea that one should become accustomed just to that path alone. Since this distinguishing basis is a hidden object, it is **the hidden** [meaning].⁷

༥ འོན་ཀྱང་མ་འོང་གསལ་དུ་དག་པའི་དོན་དམ་དང་། སྒར་བཤད་པའི་ཀྱན་ཇོབ་སྐྱུ་ལུས་ཙམ་ཞིག་རེས་འཛོག་ཏུ་བསྐྱོམས་པས་ཆོག་གཤམ་སྒྲུབ་ན། དེས་མི་ཆོག་པར་རྟེན་པ་བཞིས་སྟོན་པ་ལ། སྐྱུ་ལུས་ དངོས་པོ་མེད་པ་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་ འོང་གསལ་དུ་དག་པ་ ལ་ ཉི་ཟུང་འབྲུག་གི་ཉིང་རེ་འཛོན་ སྟོམ་པ་མེད་པ་སྟེ། འོང་གསལ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་ནི་ གཞོན་མ་ནས་དག་པའི་ དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ ང་རོ་གཅིག་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པའི་ ཕྱིར་རོ། །གང་ སྒར་བཤད་པའི་ ཀྱན་ཇོབ་གྱི་བདེན་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་དུ་སྟོམ་པ་དེ་ཡང་ ཟུང་འབྲུག་ བསྐྱོམ་པར་བྱ་བ་ སྟེ། ཕྱིད་པ་ མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྒར་བཤད་པའི་སྐྱུ་མའི་སྐྱུ་དེ་ནི་ མི་བདེན་པ་ །ཉམས་གཤིས། མི་བདེན་ པ་ཉིད་གྱི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཏེ། རྣམ་པ་འདིས་ཞེས་བསྐྱར་བ་བདེའོ། ། སྟེ། རིགས་འབྲུག་མི་འཆད་པར་འབྲུག་པའི་རྩི་རྩེའི་སྐྱུ་མིན་ པས་མི་བརྟན་པ་ ཉིད་ གྱི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །འདིས་ནི་དོན་གྱི་འོང་གསལ་གྱི་རྒྱུ་མེས་ཙམ་ལས་བསྐྱབས་པའི་སྐྱུ་མིན་ན་རྩི་རྩེའི་སྐྱུ་དངོས་ མིན་པར་བརྟན་པས་ཟུང་འབྲུག་གི་སྐྱུ་མའི་སྐྱུ་ལ་སྐྱུ་དེ་དགོས་པར་བརྟན་ནོ་་་་་་དོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་ དེ་ལྟར་ཏེ་གོང་དུ་བཤད་ པའི་རྣམ་པ་འདིས་ སྒར་བཤད་པའི་ བདེན་པ་གཉིས་གྱི་བདག་ཉིད་གྱི་དངོས་པོ་ ཙམ་ཞིག་སོ་སོར་ བསྐྱོམ་པར་བྱ་བར་ མི་འགྱུར་ པ་སྟེ། དེ་ཙམ་ཞིག་གོམས་པས་མི་ཆོག་སྟེ་་་་་་ཏེ།

(185) Now, suppose you wonder: Is it sufficient if one meditates by alternating between an ultimate that is the illusion purified in the clear light, and a deceptive that is just an illusory body, as explained before?

The four lines teach that this is not enough. The illusory body that is purified **in** the clear light that is **ultimate reality, without any functioning thing, has no meditation**, i.e., concentration of the union of the two; **because** that primordial wisdom of clear light is of a single taste with suchness, **which has been pure from the very beginning. Whatever meditation has the identity of deceptive reality** as described before, **that is not** the action which has **something upon which to meditate** – i.e., the union of the two.

This is because the holy body of illusion described before is **unreal**,⁸ that is, it is instability **itself**, since it is not the holy vajra body that continues in an unbroken stream of the same type. Insofar as this is not the holy body achieved from nothing more than the winds and mind of the actual clear light, this teaches that it is not the actual, functioning, holy vajra body. Thus it teaches that for the holy body of illusion that belongs to the union of the two, one needs *that* holy body. Thus, **from this aspect** explained before **in these words**, just **the functioning things with the identity of each of the two realities** alone, **will not turn into something upon which to meditate**. That is, it is not sufficient just to become accustomed to those alone.

།བདེན་པ་གཉིས་ ཏེ། ཀྱན་ཇོབ་དག་པའི་སྐྱུ་མའི་ལུས་དང་། དོན་དམ་པ་དོན་གྱི་འོང་གསལ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་གཉིས་ གཉིས་སུ་མེད་པ་ ར་ ཏེ། སྒར་བཤད་ཕྱི་མ་གྲགས་སུ་རེས་འཛོག་མིན་པར་དུས་གཅིག་གི་ཆེ་རོ་བོ་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྐྱོར་བའི་ཟུང་འབྲུག་རང་རྒྱུད་ལ་ མཐོང་

⁷ The explanation that, “it is hidden because what is stated here is related to a refuted object that is hidden,” is extremely unreasonable.

⁸ For this word, the translation “. . . because it is unreality itself. Thus, from this aspect . . .” is better.

བ་ཅམ་གྱིས་ ཉེ་དེ་ཉིད་གྱིས་ཆེ་འདིར་ཤེས་སྒྲིབ་ལས་ གྲོལ་བར་འགྱུར་བའི་བྱིར་རོ། ། རྒྱུ་ལས་འདིར་བཞག་པའི་བྱང་འཇུག་གྱེད་མི་ཤེས་ན་ཆེ་གཅིག་གིས་སངས་རྒྱུས་མི་འགྲུབ་པར་བསྟན་ཏོ། ། དེ་བས་ན་སྒྲོམ་པ་སོ་དང་། སྒྲོམ་པ་དང་། བསྒྲོམ་པ་ར་བྱ་བའོ། ཞེས་འདི་ལྟར་ འཁོར་གསུམ་དུ་བདེན་པར་ མཛོན་པར་ཞེན་པ་ འེ་བདེན་འཛིན་ བེ། ཟུང་དུ་སྦྱོར་བས་འཇུག་པ་ འེ་རིམ་པ་ ལྷ་པ་ རྟོགས་པ་ སྟེ། ཐོབ་པ་ རྣམས་ལ། དམིགས་སུ་མེད་དེ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏོ། ། རྒྱུ་འདི་ལ་ནི་འཕགས་པ་ཡ་བ་སྤྲས་ཀྱི་ལུགས་གྱིས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་འཛིན་ཉོན་མོངས་སུ་འཛོག་པ་དང་། དེ་སྒྲོབ་པའི་བྱང་འཇུག་ཐོབ་ནས་སྤངས་པ་སྦྱོད་བསྟུས་ཀྱི་དགོངས་བར་ཤེས་དགོས་སོ། ། འགྲེལ་བའི་བཞག་པ་འདི་དག་གིས་ནི་འདུས་པ་ནས་རིམ་བུ་མ་གསུམ་གསུངས་པ་ལ་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རིམ་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྟེར་བ་ཡིན་ནའང་། ལྷ་མ་ཁ་ཅིག་གིས་སེམས་ཅམ་འགོག་པ་སོགས་དང་། ཁ་ཅིག་གིས་རིམ་པ་གོང་མ་རྣམས་སུ་འོག་མ་རྣམས་མི་སྒྲོམ་པ་ལ་སྦྱར་ཉེ་བཞག་པས་བྱས་པ་མ་ཐོན་པ་འདུག་པས། སྒྲོན་གསལ་ལ་ནི་ཆོག་དོན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བྱས་པ་ཐོན་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གཤམ་ཆེ་བར་སྒྲུང་ངོ། ། ཞེས་བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་དོ་རྗེ་འཆང་ཆེན་པོས་གསུངས་ཏེ། མཐར་ཐུག་པའོ། །

(186) **The two realities**, that is, (1) the deceptive, pure body of illusion, and (2) the ultimate, the primordial wisdom of the actual clear light, **are not divisible into two**. This is **because**, without alternating between a former holy body and a latter holy mind, but rather **just by seeing** within one’s own mental continuum the union of the two joined together at the very same moment, by that itself one **will be freed** from the obstacles to omniscience in this very life.⁹

In this way, for those who achieve the realization of the fifth stage, which engages from the perspective of what is joined as a pair, the grasping-to-things-as-real that insists on believing that the three spheres of “the meditator, the meditation, and that upon which one meditates” are real, cannot be focused upon, that is, it does not exist.¹⁰ This is what the Blessed, Transcendent, Victorious One, Vajradhara, has stated, and it is the final ultimate [meaning].

⁹ By saying this, [Candrakīrti] teaches that if one does not understand how to generate the union of the two as explained here, one will not become a Buddha in a single lifetime.

¹⁰ In this regard, one must understand how the system of the Āryas, father and son, posits grasping to a self of things to be a mental affliction, and how it is the true intent of the Integration of Practices that once one reaches the union of the two while still in training, one abandons this. The explanations in these commentaries grant a tremendous and unique way of ascertaining the words spoken in the Guhyasamāja about the last three stages. But since from the explanations of those (1) who say, of the earlier section, that it is a refutation of the Mind-Only school, etc., and of those (2) who apply the meaning that during the higher stages one does not meditate on the lower stages, the potency does not emerge, it appears it is extremely important, with respect to the Illuminating Lamp, that the potency of all the meanings of the words should emerge.

Appendix Two: The *Om Śūnyatā* Mantra

An Excerpt from Je Tsongkhapa's *Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*¹

ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་ནི། ལུ་ན་ཏུ་ལ་སོགས་པའམ་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤྲུགས་དོན་སྒྲོམ་པའོ། །འདིར་སྤྲུགས་པས་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ལྟ་བུའི་བྱ་བས་དམ་དུ་བཅིངས་པ་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་ཀྱི་མ་གཉི་སྤྲུག་གི་སྤྲུན་པ་གང་གིས་སེམས་ཅན་འདི་དག་མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་ཡིན་ཡང་། བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་རྟོགས་པར་མ་རྒྱུར་ན་འདི་དག་གིས་རང་གི་རང་བཞིན་རྟོགས་པར་བྱའོ་སྤྲུམ་དུ་བསམས་ལ་དོན་དམ་པའི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་བསྒྲོམ་སྟེ། ཀྱན་བཟང་ལས། སྙིང་རྗེས་འཇིག་རྟེན་འདི་ནི་མ་ལུས་པ། །ལྟ་བུའི་བྱ་བས་བཅིངས་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་ནི། །ཡང་དག་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་ནི་མཉམ་མེད་པ། །སྤྲུགས་པས་ཚོ་ག་འདི་ལྟར་བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱ། །ཞེས་སོ།

The practice for gathering the collection of wisdom is this:

(810) To meditate on the meaning of the “*śūnyatā* . . .” or the “*svabhāva* . . .” mantras. Here, the practitioner of mantra looks upon all those sentient beings who are tightly bound within the web of views and thinks, “*Kyé-ma!* How awful! All these living beings have the nature of existing beyond grief, yet due to the darkness of delusion, we ourselves do not realize this identity. So with this I must realize my own nature.” Then the practitioner meditates on the ultimate wish for enlightenment. As the *Samantabhadra Sādhana* states:

With compassion look upon these of the world
who, without exception, are bound by the web of views
The perfect wish for enlightenment is without equal
The practitioner of mantra declares:
I will meditate thus upon the ritual.

།དེ་ལ་ལུ་ཏུ་ནི། སྙིང་པ་ཉིད་དེ་ཚོས་རྣམས་རང་བཞིན་དང་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་བྱ་དང་བྲལ་བས་དེ་དག་གིས་སྙིང་པའོ། །རྫོ་ན་ནི། སྙིང་ཉིད་དང་མཚན་མེད་དང་སྒྲོན་མེད་ཀྱི་སྙིང་ཉིད་དེ་དང་རོ་གཅིག་པའི་སེམས་སོ། །བརྗེ་ནི། ཡུལ་སྙིང་ཉིད་དང་ཡུལ་ཅན་ཡེ་ཤེས་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་པ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ནི་རྗེ་སྙིང་མེ་མཐུན་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱིས་མི་བྱེད་པའི་བྱིར་དང་མི་མཐུན་ཕྱོགས་འཛོམས་པའི་བྱིར་དང་ཐོག་མ་དང་མ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །ཚོས་དབྱིངས་ཐོག་མཐའ་མེད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་དེ་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་སེམས་ལ་ཡང་དེ་སྐད་ཅེས་བཏགས་ཏེ་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ལ་དམིགས་པས་དེའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །སྤྱོད་པ་ནི། རང་བཞིན་སྟེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་ཉིད་སྒྲོ་བུར་བའི་དེ་མ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པས་སོ། །ལྷན་ཀ་ནི། བདག་ཉིད་དང་ཨ་ཉི་ནི་འཛོམས་པ་སྟེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་དག་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ཉིད་འཛོམས་པའོ།

So in this regard, *śūnyatā* means emptiness: the fact that insofar as all things are bereft of a nature, of causes, or results, they are empty of those things.

Then, *jñāna* is the state of mind that is of the same taste as the emptiness that is (1) emptiness, is (2) without characteristics, and is (3) without aspirations.

¹ *sngags rim chen mo*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ga, 405a6-408b5 (809-816), emphasis mine. Page numbers in parentheses correspond to the Tashi Lhunpo blockprint edition (place roughly so as not to interrupt the flow of text).

The word *vajra* means the diamond that is nothing but the objective field which is emptiness, and the subjective state of mind that is primordial knowing, indivisible from one another. It is “diamond” because it is unable to be split by anything that is incompatible with it, because it cannot be destroyed by anything incompatible with it, and because it has no beginning and no end. Just as the absolute space of all things has no beginning and no end, *so the mind that focuses upon it is designated with the same language*; because insofar as it focuses upon the actual nature of the way things are, it is something that has its aspect.

Then, *svabhāva* means nature: insofar as it is itself *utterly pure of having any nature*, and remains in the nature that is *bereft of any adventitious stains*.

(811) *Ātmaka* is identity and *aham* means “I am.” So it is saying that “whatever identity is pure of having any nature at all, that itself am I.”

།དེ་བས་ན་སྣང་ཉིད་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་གྱི་སྤྲུལ་ནི། རང་གིས་སྣང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པ་སྤྱིའི་ཡུལ་ཅན་ཡིན་ཡང་ཆོས་ཉིད་གྱི་རང་གི་མཆོན་ཉིད་གྱི་མ་
ཐར་ཐུག་པར་ལྷག་པར་མོས་པ་ཡིན་ལ་རྟོ་རྟེན་སྤྲུལ་ནི་དེ་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མཐར་ཐུག་པར་མོས་ཤིང་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་སྤྲུལ་ནི། མཐར་
ཐུག་པའི་དུས་ན་ཡང་རང་བཞིན་རྣམ་དག་ལ་ལྷག་པོ་མེད་པ་དང་བདག་ཉིད་དང་བའི་སྤྲུལ་ནི། རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་དེ་རང་ལ་རང་བཞིན་
གྱིས་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་ཉིད་དུ་གྲུབ་པར་སྟོན་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་འཁྱེད་པའི་བཞེད་པ་བཀོད་པའོ། །མི་ཡིག་ལ་ལྷ་དང་ལྷ་དང་མ་ཡིག་གསུམ་ཡོད་
པ་རང་གི་ལུས་ངག་ཡིད་གསུམ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་གསུམ་གྱི་སྣང་ཉིད་སྤྱིར་རྟོ་རྟེན་གཅིག་པའི་རོ་བོར་བདག་ཉིད་འཛོག་པའོ། །ཀུན་བཟང་ལས་
ཀྲུང་། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་དང་བལ་བྱིར་སྟོང་པ་སྟེ། །དེ་བཞིན་རྒྱ་དང་བལ་བས་མཆོན་མ་མེད། །རྟོག་པ་རྣམས་དང་བལ་བྱིར་དངོས་པོ་ནི། །མ་
ལུས་སྟོན་པ་ལས་ནི་དེས་བར་གྲོལ། །ཞེས་རྣམ་ཐར་གསུམ་བཤད་པའི་མཐར་ཐུང་གྱི་སྤྲུལ་བརྗོད་དེ་ཆོགས་བཅད་དེས་སྤྲུལ་དེའི་
དོན་བསྟན་པའོ།

Therefore, the sound for the primordial knowing of emptiness indicates that one’s realization of emptiness consists of a subjective state of mind holding an abstraction. Nonetheless, this is a sheer conviction towards the defining characteristics of the actual nature of the thing, as they are in the end.

The sound for diamond further expresses a conviction towards the final, utter purity, and the word for nature, too, refers to the time that will come in the end, to an utterly pure nature with nothing beyond it.

The sounds for identity and “I” indicate that this utter purity is established with respect to myself in a way that is utterly pure of having any nature.

This presents the intended explanation of *Śāntipa*.

The syllable *om* consists of the three syllables of *ā* and *u* and *ma*, and these are the three of one’s own body, speech, and mind. Further, one posits them with the identity of having an essence in which the emptiness of those three is of a single taste with compassion.

It also states in the *Samantabhadra* [*Sādhana*]:

Because they are bereft of an essence itself, they are empty
And likewise because bereft of causes, they lack characteristics
Because bereft of all conceptions, all things
without exception, are without doubt free from aspirations.

After explaining the three doors of liberation, he teaches, with this verse, the meaning of the mantra uttered previously.

ཁྱུ་ཐུ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྒྲགས་དོན་སྒྲོམ་པ་འདི་ལ་རྣམ་ཐར་སྒོ་གསུམ་གྱི་དོན་སྒྲོམ་པ་ཡོད་ཚུལ་ནི། སྒྲན་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་སྟོང་ཉིད་དང་མཆོན་མེད་དང་སྒྲོན་མེད་གསུམ་བརྗོད་པ་སྤྱི་དབང་གིས་ཐ་དད་དུ་བཞག་གི། དོན་དམ་པར་ངོ་བོས་སྟོང་པ་ཁོ་ནར་གཞན་གཉིས་འདུས་པར་གསུངས་པ་ནི། བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་ཆོགས་ལས། རང་བཞིན་མེད་པས་སྟོང་ལ་སྟོང་པ་ནི། ཡིན་དང་མཆོན་མས་ཅི་ཞིག་བྱེད་པར་འགྱུར། མཆོན་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལོག་པར་གྱུར་པའི་བྱིར། མཁས་པ་ཅི་བྱིར་སྒྲོན་ལས་འདེབས་པར་འགྱུར། ཞེས་མགོན་པོ་སྐུ་སྐུབ་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་པ་དང་མཐུན་པས་གསུམ་བཤད་ཀྱང་སྟོང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཉིད་དུ་གཞན་གཉིས་འདུས་སོ། དེ་ཡང་གཅིག་དང་དུ་བྲལ་གྱི་རིགས་པས་ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པའི་དོན་ལ་སྒྲན་ཞབས་དང་དཔལ་འབྱས་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་བཤད་པས། ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་སྐུ་སྐུབ་ཀྱི་སྐུ་སྐུ་ཡིན་ལ་ཡུལ་ཅན་ནི་རྣམ་པོ། དེ་ཉིད་མ་རིག་པའི་དབང་གིས་ཡུལ་ཡུལ་ཅན་སོ་སོར་འབྱེད་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་ལོག་ནས་ཆུ་ལ་ཆུ་བཞག་སྟེ་ལྟར་དེ་མི་བྱེད་པར་སོང་བ་ན་བཟློ། འཕེས་པ་དེས་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་དེ་མེད་སྒྲོས་བྲལ་རྟོགས་པ་གསར་དུ་བསྐྱེད་དགོས་ཀྱང་ཡུལ་དང་ཡུལ་ཅན་གཉིས་དེ་ཁོ་ནར་སོ་སོར་དབྱེ་བར་མི་རྒྱས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་རྣམ་དག་འབྱས་བྱ་དང་རྒྱ་དུས་ལ་ཁྱད་པར་མེད་པར་ཡོད་པ་ནི་སྐྱེ་བའོ། དེ་བདག་ཉིད་ལ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གནས་ཤིང་རང་ཡང་དེ་ལས་ལོགས་ཤིག་ན་མེད་པ་ནི་ལྷན་ཀ་དང་ཨ་ཉི་གི་དོན་ནོ།

(812) [1] Here is the way in which there can be a meditation on the meaning of the three doors of liberation, when meditating on the meaning of the “*śūnyatā*. . .” mantra. Vitapāda sets forth separately the words expressing the three of emptiness, the lack of characteristics, and the lack of aspirations, respectively. But the fact that the other two can be subsumed under what is ultimately only ever the absence of an essence is stated in the *Collection of Enlightenment*:

Since it lacks a nature it is empty
and being empty, what could it ever make with characteristics?
Because it is the opposite of every kind of characteristic,
why would anyone in the know extend a prayer of aspiration?

Since this is in accord with what the Protector Nāgārjuna has said, although they may be explained as three, the other two are subsumed within the liberation of emptiness itself.

Moreover, Vitapāda and Śrīphalavajra explain the meaning of saying that all things lack a nature of their own in terms of the reasoning that shows things to be neither one nor many.

So in this context, one recalls a view that is absolutely certain about the meaning of all things lacking a nature of their own. The object that is recalled is *śūnyatā* and the subject state of mind is *jñāna*.

Through the force of ignorance, that very object and subject are split up as separate. But by undoing one’s ability to divide them thus, one experiences them as undivided, like water poured into water. This is *vajra*.

With that state of knowing consciousness one must create anew the realization of the indivisible nature of all things, free of elaboration; but nevertheless, whether at the time of the cause or at the time of the result, there is no difference at all regarding the utterly pure nature, in which it can only be the case that object and subject cannot be divided into

two. The existence of this fact is *svabhāva*.

(813) The meaning of *ātmaka* is to abide naturally in that identity and the meaning of *aham* is the fact that, furthermore, one does not exist as anything apart from that identity.

།དེ་ནི་རྣམ་ཐར་གསུམ་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲུལ་དོན་དུ་བཤད་པ་ཡིན་ལ་ཡང་ན་དོན་རྩེ་གསུམ་གྱི་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲུལ་བཤད་དེ། ཨོྃ་ནི་སྤྱོད་ཤིང་། སྤྱོད་ཉིད་ཡེ་ཤེས་དོན་རྩེ་རང་བཞིན་ཞེས་པ་འདིས་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲུལ་དོན་རྩེ་བསྟན་ཏེ་སྤོ། །རང་བཞིན་པ་གསུང་དོན་རྩེ་འདོག་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་བདག་ནི་རྣམ་སྤྲུལ་མེད་པས་ཆོག་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

That is the explanation of the mantra in terms of the three [doors to] liberation.

[2] Furthermore, there is a way to explain the mantra in terms of the three vajras. *Om* is the vajra of the holy body. Saying that “the primordial wisdom of emptiness has the nature of diamond” indicates the vajra of holy mind. This is easy [to understand]. The reason that saying “I am” is posited as the vajra of holy speech is this: Since I myself am without substance, it is merely something designated with a word.

།ཡང་ན་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲུལ་དོན་རྩེ་གསུམ་ལྟར་བཤད་དེ་ཨོྃ་གྱིས་མེ་མོང་ལྟ་བུའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སོ། །སྤྱོད་ཉིད་གྱིས་མཉམ་པ་ཉིད་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སོ། །ཡེ་ཤེས་གྱིས་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སོ། །དོན་རྩེ་བྱ་བ་སྤྲུབ་པའོ། །རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྣམ་དག་ཡེ་ཤེས་སོ། །ཐ་མ་གཉིས་གྱིས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྟའི་བདག་ཉིད་དོན་རྩེ་འདོག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་རོ་བོར་བདག་ཉིད་ངེས་པར་སྟོན་པའོ། །བཤད་པ་དེ་གཉིས་ནི་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲུལ་དོན་སྤྱོད་ཉིད་ལ་གཏུགས་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྟེང་ནས་ལྟོག་པ་སོ་སོར་བྱེ་བས་གོ་བར་ཟད་དོ།

[3] Furthermore, there is an explanation of the meaning of the mantra in terms of the five families. “*Om*” indicates the mirror-like primordial wisdom. “Emptiness” indicates the primordial wisdom of total equality. “Primordial wisdom” indicates the primordial wisdom that examines individually. “Diamond” indicates accomplishing actions. “Nature” indicates the primordial wisdom of total and utter purity. The last two indicate definitively that the *identity* of the five primordial wisdoms is the essence of the Great Holder of the Diamond [i.e., Mahā-Vajradhara].

These [latter] two explanations can be understood as dividing out different conceptual isolations upon the *primordial wisdom* that encounters the *emptiness* in the first meaning of the mantra.

།བཤད་པ་གསུམ་པོ་དེ་ཡང་རྒྱད་རྣམས་སྤྱོད་པའི་ལྟར་འདས་ཉིད་གྱིས་གསུངས་པ་མན་སྟེར་གསལ་བར་བྱས་པར་བཤད་དོ། །ཁ་སྤྱོད་དང་གདན་བཞེ་ལས་འདིའི་སྐབས་སུ། དང་པོར་སྤྱོད་ཉིད་རྣམ་བསམས་པས། །ལུས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བྱི་མ་བཟུ། །ཞེས་སོགས་གྱིས་ཁ་མས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་གཏན་ལ་དབབ་པར་གསུངས་ཤིང་རྒྱ་གཞུང་གི་བསྟན་བཅོས་དུ་མ་ལས་ཀྱང་བདག་མེད་པའི་ལྟ་བ་སྐབས་འདིར་བསྟན་པས་ན། སྤྱ་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲུལ་དོན་སེམས་པ་ན་རང་བཞིན་མེད་ཏོགས་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བ་མེད་པའི་གཉིས་སྤྲུལ་རགས་པ་འཇའ་ཡལ་བ་བཞིན་སྟོམ་པ་འདིའི་དོན་དུ་འདོད་པ་ནི་རྒྱད་དང་ཆད་ལྡན་གྱི་གཞུང་གང་གི་ཡང་དགོངས་པ་མིན་ནོ།

That all three explanations are the word of the Blessed, Transcendent, Victorious One himself, as spoken in all the tantras, is explained clearly in the *Clusters of Advices*. In the *Kiss* and the *Four Seats* it is stated in this context:

First, by contemplating the aspect of emptiness,
all those with a body wash away stains.

(814) These statements set forth the fact that the eighteen domains [of sense] have no

nature, and what is more, the commentaries in many Indian classical texts teach the view of selflessness in this context. So, considering the meaning of the various “*svabhāva*” mantras, as for those who want to say that the meaning of this meditation is that the coarse form of dual appearance fades like a rainbow, without involving any view that realizes the absence of inherent nature, this is not the intent of any tantra or accurate treatise at all.

།ཤུནྱི་བས། གྱིན་གྱིས་བཤྲོབ་པའི་སྤྲུགས་གཞན་དག་ལ་ཡང་བཟླ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལྷན་གྱོན་ཉི་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་སྤྱིའི་དོན་འདི་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་
འོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཤུནྱི་ལ་སོགས་པ་སྟོང་ཉིད་སྟོན་པའི་སྤྲུགས་རྣམས་ལ་ཆེག་མི་འབྲེལ་དོན་སྤར་བ་ཤད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་
བན་པར་བྱའོ། །ཤུནྱི་བ་དང་སྤྲུག་ཞབས་ལ་སོགས་པ་མང་སོས་སྤྲུགས་འདི་བཟླ་བྱེད་དང་གྱིན་གྱིས་ཆོབ་བྱེད་དུ་བཤད་པས་སྤྲུགས་
དོན་སྟོན་དུ་གསལ་བཀྲལ་བའི་འོག་དུ་སྤྲུགས་དེས་གྱིན་གྱིས་བཤྲོབ་པར་བྱའོ། །སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་འཁོར་འདས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་
ཐམས་ཅད་དོན་དམ་པར་མ་གྲུབ་པར་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པའི་ཆེ་ཆོ་དེའི་སྤྲང་ཡུལ་དུ་གཉིས་སྤང་མི་ལྷོག་ཀྱང་དེས་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དོན་གཉིས་སྤང་
ལྷོག་པས་གཉིས་སྤང་ཉི་བར་ཞི་བའི་དམིགས་པ་ཟུར་བ་ཡང་མི་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་མཐའ་གཉིས་དང་བྲལ་བ་རང་བཞི
ན་མེད་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཅན་སྟོས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བྲལ་བའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་སོ་སྤྲུམ་དུ་དེས་པར་བྱེད་པས། གང་ཆེ་དངོས་དང་
དངོས་མེད་པ། ཆོ་ཡི་མཐུན་ན་མི་གནས་པ། དེ་ཆེ་རྣམ་པ་གཞན་མེད་པས། དམིགས་པ་མེད་པར་རབ་དུ་ཞི། །ཞེས་སྟོན་འཇུག་ལ་
ས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་མི་དམིགས་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་ལ་རབ་དུ་གཞུག་གོ།

Śāntipa says, “You should understand the meaning of the words that come in the other mantras of blessing – ‘. . . *vajra svabhāva ātmako ’ham*’ – in the same way as this.” In the same way, for all the mantras that indicate emptiness, such as *svabhāva śuddha*,” and so forth, although the words may be different, you should recall the meaning according to the explanations given above. Śāntipa, Vitapāda, and many others explain these mantras as “making firm” and “granting blessing.”

So, once you have first clearly brought to mind the meaning of the mantra, then afterwards you should use the mantra to grant blessing. When, with the incisive wisdom of individual analysis you set forth the fact that nothing at all in the cycle or beyond it is established ultimately, you might not undo the fact that the objective field appearing to that state of mind has an appearance of duality. Nevertheless, since you have turned back the appearance of duality that *the actual object presents to the ascertaining consciousness*, it is not necessary to focus on anything else in order to thoroughly pacify the appearance of duality.

Thus, you think with certainty that, “All existing things are free of the two extremes, are defined by the very characteristic of lacking any nature, and are the absolute realm of phenomena, which is free of all elaboration.”

(815) As it states in the *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*:²

When neither functioning things nor the lack of functioning things
can remain before the mind,
then without any other aspect appearing,
all is total peace, with nothing at all to see.

With that certainty, then, all things enter thoroughly into the emptiness that has as its

² See *byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa*, *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, Chapter 9, v. 34.

identity nothing at all to focus upon.

འདི་ན་འདིར་སྤྲོད་ཉིད་སྒྲིམ་པའི་དགོས་པ་གང་ཡིན་སྐྱེས་ན། དག་ནག་གི་སྐྱབ་ཐབས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་ཁ་བྱེ་བ་ལས། སྤར་གྱི་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱི་
 ཆོག་པ་དང་བྱིས་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཆོག་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་གཙོ་བོ་སྤྲེད་པར་གསུངས་ལ། ཀ་མ་ལ་དཀྱི་ཏས་བགལ་བ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་མཆོག་ཏུ་བ
 འད་དོ། རྟེན་གྱི་དགོས་པ་ཕྱོགས་རེ་བ་ཡིན་མེད་ཀྱང་གཙོ་བོའི་དགོས་པ་ནི་འོག་ནས་འཆད་པ་ལྟར་སྒྲིམ་པ་ནམས་གཟུགས་སྤྱིའི་
 ང་རྒྱལ་འཛིན་པ་ཡིན་ལ་དེའི་ང་རྒྱལ་གཟུང་བ་ཡང་ཆོས་སྐྱེས་མཛོན་དུ་བྱས་པའི་མཐུས་བྱ་དགོས་པ་དེའི་དོན་དུ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བྱུང་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་བྱི་
 བས། རང་བཞིན་སྤྲོད་པ་ཉིད་དུ་ནམས་སྒྲིམ་སྤྲོད་ཀྱི་ནི། རྒྱལ་འབྱོར་པས་ནི་སྤྲོད་ལམ་རྗེས་སུ་བྱེད་པར་བྱ། ཞེས་སྤྲོད་ཉིད་ལ་ཞུགས་པ་
 བ་སྤྲོད་ཀྱི་སྤྲོད་ལམ་རྗེས་སུ་བྱེད་པས་ལྷང་བར་བཤད་པའི་བྱིར་དང་མཆོག་སྤྱིམ་ཀྱི་སྐྱབ་ཐབས་དང་བྱིལ་བྱ་བའི་གྱི་རྟོར་གྱི་སྐྱབ་ཐབས་སོ
 གས་ལས་ཀྱང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། གཞན་ཡང་སྤང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་འོད་གསལ་དུ་བསྐྱེད་ཏེ། ལྟར་བྱ་བའི་བྱིར་དང་སྤྲོད་
 དུ་ལྟ་བུ་གསལ་བྱ་གི་རེས་པ་བསྤྲེད་པའི་མཐུས་རྗེས་སུ་སྤང་ཕྱོགས་སྒྲིམ་པ་ནམས་སྐྱེས་ལྟ་བུར་འཆར་བ་སོགས་ཀྱི་དགོས་པ་ཡང་
 ཡོད་དོ། སྤྲོད་ཉིད་དུ་ཞུགས་པའི་སྤང་མེད་ནི། རྒྱལ་བར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་དེ་ལས་བསྐྱེད་འཁོར་སྒྲིམ་པའི་སྤང་བར་ལངས་པ་ནི
 ། དག་པ་འཛིན་ཉེན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་གྱི་རྟོར་གྱི་སྐྱབ་ཐབས་འཁྲལ་སྤོང་ལས་བཤད་པའི་བསྐྱེད་འཁོར་ནི། མཆོན་པ་ཙམ་
 ཡིན་པས་རྟེན་དང་བཞེན་པའི་སྤང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་གཉིས་སུ་མེད་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་གཟུང་བ་དེ་དང་དེར་ཤར་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཙན་དུ་སོས་
 པར་བྱ་བའི་དོན་ཏེ་འདི་གལ་ཆེད། རྟེན་ན་འདིར་སྤྲོད་ཉིད་སྒྲིམ་པ་ལ་དགོས་པ་མང་བས་ཡུན་ཏ་ཅང་བྱུང་བ་མིན་པའི་རེས་པ་བྲག་པོ་
 རྟེན་ཀྱི་བར་དུ་བསྒྲིམ་པར་བྱའོ།

Now, if you wonder why one has to meditate on emptiness: The Kṛṣṇa-Yamāri sādhanā, *Blossoming Kumuda*, states that it is in order to create the principal figure, both from the collection of merit that came earlier, and the collection of wisdom that came later. Kamalarakṣita explains it to be the supreme protection against obstacles. Now admittedly these are only partial reasons, so here is the main reason it is necessary: All the meditations that I will explain below hold the pride of the holy body of form, but that which is beheld by the pride of that identity must come forth by the inner force of having made manifest the *dharmakāya*. It is for that purpose that one meditates on emptiness.

This is true because, as the accomplished master Ḍoṃbipa says:

Meditating on the aspect of the emptiness of any nature
 the yogi must recall again what was prayed before.

This explains that once you have entered into emptiness, then you arise by recalling the prayers you have made before. The sādhanā of Saroruha, the Hevajra sādhanā of Ghantapāda, and so forth, say it in the same way.

(816) Furthermore, one withdraws all appearances into clear light, in order for them to be divinized. By the inner force of creating a fierce certainty of the view in advance, later all the meditations on the side of appearances will dawn like an illusion. These and other necessary reasons are there, too.

Now, all of the following are merely approximated: (1) the lack of appearances that have entered into emptiness, (2) the totally nonconceptual primordial wisdom and the act of arising from that into the appearance of the meditation on the protection circle, as well as (3) the protection circle described in the Hevajra sādhanā, *Eliminating Mistakes*, as having the nature of pure primordial wisdom that is still of the world.

So, the meaning of that towards which one has conviction – that all the appearance of the

Therefore, since there are a very many reasons that one has to meditate on emptiness here, you should meditate for no small amount of time, but rather until you have found a fierce certainty.

✱ ✱ ✱

༥༥ རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྷོ་ནུ་ཨ་ཉི་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་བར་རོ། །འོད་གསལ་མཛོན་དུ་བྱས་ཆུ་པ་ནི་འཛིན་པ་སྟེ་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཉེ་བར་བསྐྱུས་ནས་བྱེད་དེ་ཡུ་ལ་དོན་དམ་དང་ཡུལ་ཅན་རིག་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཉིས་སྤང་སྤོ་ཡང་དག་ནས་ཆུ་པ་ཆུ་བཞག་པ་ལྟར་དབྱེད་མི་བྱེད་བར་ཞུགས་པའོ། །

རྒྱལ་པོ་དོན་ཡང་དེ་ཡིན་ཏེ་ཤུ་ཅུ་རྒྱ་ནི་སྟོང་ཉིད་དང་རྩྭ་ན་ནི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་མཛོ་ནི་དོ་རྩེ་དང་སྤྲ་སྤྲ་བ་ནི་རང་བཞིན་དང་། ལྷ་ཉ་མ་གོ་ནི་བདག་ཉིད་དང་ཨ་ཉི་ནི་རའོ་ཞེས་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་པས་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དོ་རྩེའི་རང་བཞིན་ཀྱི་བདག་ཉིད་ནི་རའོ་ཞེས་པ་སྟེ་རྣམ་འཁྱོད་ར་པ་དེའི་བདག་ཏུ་ཐ་སྐྱོད་གང་གསལ་པའི་གཞིའི་གཅོ་པོ་མེས་པ་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་དང་དབྱེད་མེད་བར་སྤང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

།དཔེ་ནི་དབུ་མའི་གཞུང་ནས་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་ཕུ་ཐག་ཚད་པའི་གོ་བ་རྟེན་ནས་དེ་ནས་རིམ་བ་དང་པོ་ནས་བསྐྱོམས་པའི་མཐར་ཇོགས་རིམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་དེ་ལྟར་བྱུང་བ་ཡིན་གྱི། དེས་དོན་གྱི་ལྟ་བཅོས་བསམ་གྱིས་གཏན་ལ་མཐབ་ནས་ལེགས་པར་ར་མ་རྟེན་དཔལ་རྟེན་གྱང་ལྷགས་གྱི་ལམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་དེ་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་མ་བསྐྱོམས་བར་ལྟ་སྟུ་དང་རྒྱུང་ངམ་ཐིག་ལེ་སོགས་གྱི་ལམ་བསྐྱོམས་བསམ་གཉིས་སྤང་རགས་པ་ལོག་པའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་སྟེ་པ་བ་དང་མི་གཅིག་གོ། དབུ་མ་ནས་བཤད་པའི་རྟོང་ཉིང་སྟོམ་པར་འདྲ་ཡང་ས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐིམ་པའི་རིམ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བསྐྱེད་ནས་འོད་གསལ་མཛད་དུ་ཕྱེད་པ་ནི་འདི་དག་གི་བྱང་ཆོས་སོ།

³ *rnam gzhaḡ rim pa'i rnam bshad*, vol. *cha*, 86a2-86b4 (173-174).

path of mantra.

(174) Although it is similar to meditating on emptiness as explained in the Middle Way, the distinguishing feature of this meditation here is that one manifests the clear light once having given birth to the realizations that progress as earth and the rest [of the elements] dissolve.

།རིམ་པ་དང་པོའི་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ལས་བྱང་ཚུབ་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་མོས་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་སྒོམ་པའི་ལྷགས་དེའི་དོན་རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་འ
ཆེ་བའི་རིམ་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ཕྱང་སོགས་ཐེམ་པའི་མཐར། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱར་ཡང་བཤད་པ་ཡིན། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ཆོས་སྐྱའོད་གསལ་མངོ
ན་དུ་བྱེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་འདིས་རིམ་པ་དང་པོར་དང་པོའི་མགོན་པོ་བསྐྱེད་པ་དང་དེ་སྤྱལ་སྐྱར་བསྐྱར་བ་སོགས་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་རྫོག
ས་རིམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་དེ་ལྟར་འགྱུར་བ་ཞེས་པར་བྱ་དགོས་སོ།

The meaning of this mantra when meditating through mere conviction during the “enlightenment from the actual nature of the way things are” belonging to the first stage is, as it is stated [in Ārya Nāgārjuna’s *Abbreviated Practice*, the *Pinḍīkṛtasādhana*], “explained to be the *dharmakāya*,” which comes at the very end of the process by which the heaps and so on dissolve, according to the stages of death, during the complete stage. From this statement that one manifests the clear light, *dharmakāya*, you should also understand what the statements – such as that during the first stage one creates the “Original Protector,” and that he turns into the emanation body, and so on – will come to mean during the complete stage.

Appendix Three: A Brief Piece on the View

An Excerpt from *Twenty-One Brief Pieces on the Guhyasamāja and Such*¹

||བཞི་པ་ལྟ་བུ་འདི་ཡིག་རྒྱུ་ལ་གསུམ། ཞི་གནས་དང་། ལྷག་མཐོང་དང་། ཞི་ལྷག་བྱུང་འབྲེལ་ལོ། །དང་པོ་ལ། ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་
བྱིང་རྒྱུ་བཅན་ཐབས་སུ་གཅོད་པའི་མན་དག་ནི། ལྷག་གནས་བྱུ་རྒྱུ་ལྷན་པའི་སྐྱུ་བ་འཛིན། །དེ་དཔོན་བཤེས་གཉེན་མཆོག་གི་ཞ
བས་བརྟན་ནས། ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་བརྟན་ཞལ་གྱི་གདམས་པ་མཆོག་ལེགས་པར་བཞོད་ལ་སྤང་མས་གྲོགས་མཛོད་ཅིག་དེ་ལ་ཞི་གནས
ཀྱི་མཆོན་ཉིད་དང་། ལྷག་གནས་བརྟན་པའི་རིམ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་མཐའ་དག་པར་བྱང་རྒྱུ་ལས་གྱི་རིམ་པར་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་ལ། འ
དིར་ནི་དེ་དག་གི་སྐབས་སུ་མེད་དུ་མི་རུང་བའི་ཞལ་ཤེས་དག་གི་བར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ཡང་ཞི་ལྷག་གི་སྐབས་སུ་བྱིང་རྒྱུ་གཅོད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ག
ལ་ཆེ་བས། བྱིང་རྒྱུ་བཅན་ཐབས་སུ་སེལ་ཚུལ་ནི། བྱིང་རྒྱུ་ཤེས་རྒྱུ་ཞིང་ལན་རེ་ཅམ་ལས་མི་འབྱུང་ན། སྐབས་གཞན་ནས་འབྱུང་
བ་ལྟར་བྱུ་ཤེས་བསྟན་ཚུལ་ལ་མཁས་པས་སེལ་ལ། བྱིང་རྒྱུ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཤེས་ཆེ་ཞིང་ཡང་ཡང་འབྱུང་བ་ལ་ནི་འདི་ལྟར་བྱིང་བ་དང་རྒྱག
ས་པ་ཡང་ཡང་བྱུང་ན། རང་གི་སེམས་དང་ནམ་མཁའ་སྟོང་གསལ་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་བསྐྱེད་ནས་སེམས་གཞུང་བ་དང་། སེམས་ག
སལ་ལ་དྲངས་ཤིང་དམིགས་པ་ལ་འདོད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པ་གཉིས་འོང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །རྒྱུང་པ་ནི་རྒྱུང་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ནང་དུ་བཟུང་བས་
སེམས་ཀྱང་གནས་ཤིང་། རིག་པ་དྲངས་སྟོགས་བྱེད་པ་འོང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །བྱིང་རྒྱུ་བཅན་ཐབས་སུ་གཅོད་པའི་ཞལ་ཤེས་སོ། །གང་ལ་
འཛིག་པའི་དམིགས་པ་དང་། རི་ལྟར་འཛིག་པའི་ཚུལ་དང་། དམིགས་པ་བསྟོམས་པས་སྤོང་བ་སྦྱེ་ཚུལ་དང་། བྱིང་རྒྱུ་ཐ་རགས་ཀྱི་ད
བྱེ་བ་དང་། རྒྱུ་པར་རྣམས་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་དགོས་སོ།

(36) Here is the fourth, *A Brief Piece on the View*. There are three parts: on stillness, on insight, and on the uniting of stillness and insight. Here is the first, the private instruction for cutting off dullness and agitation by forceful means, when practicing stillness.

*Bearing the oars of awareness, within the great ship of proper abiding
I press my head to the feet of the supreme captain, my spiritual friend.
This is the highest instruction from his holy lips,
the refined essence of his very heart.
May the Lady Protectors come to my aid, that I may set it forth properly.*

(37) In this regard, you should come to know the definition of stillness and all the steps of how to rely upon the collection of causes and so forth, as they are presented in their entirety within the steps of the path to enlightenment. Here I will write the advice from the teacher's holy lips, regarding what is absolutely indispensable during those periods of practice. Thus, when practicing stillness, since it is extremely important to cut off dullness and agitation, here is the way to use a forceful method to clear away dullness and agitation.

If dullness and agitation do not occur more than occasionally, and with meager strength,

¹ “A Brief Piece on the View,” *lta ba'i yig chung*, from *gsang ba 'dus pa'i yig chung nyer gcig sogs*, as recorded and edited by the brothers Khedrup Je (mkhas grub rje dge legs dpal bzang, 1385-1438) and Baso Chö Je, a.k.a. Baso Chökyi Gyaltsen (ba so chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1402-1473), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha*, 13b5-16b2 (36-42), emphasis mine.

(2) For agitation, you should do a practice with the inner winds. Then, holding the winds within, you should also place the mind at rest, and the dross will be filtered off from the pristine purity of your awareness. This is a personal instruction for cutting off dullness and agitation by forceful means, learned from the holy lips [of our teacher, Je Tsongkhapa].

[illegible]

To begin, here is the way that a measure of the thing to be refuted actually dawns. Initially, look for how the mere “I” dawns within the naturally-arising mind. Then, once you have ascertained that, look for how that mere “I” appears to the mind that thinks “I am.”

Here is the way to look: Without losing the mind that thinks “I am,” you must look as though from a corner, with another part of your mind. If you look in this way, [you see that] (1) if the heaps were to either to dawn, or not to dawn, at the very beginning; (2) if, though they may dawn, they dawn with that “I” residing in the midst of the heaps; (3) if the “I” dawns as something other than the heaps, or does not dawn at all – like a blank emptiness with nothing there; or (4) if the “I” dawns with something like the aspect of a color or form; then none of these would be a pure way of dawning.

།དེས་ན་སྒྲོ་ལྷན་སྒྲིམ་འདི་ལ་ང་དེ་ལྷལ་གང་ལ་ཡང་བཏྲོས་པ་མེད་པ་འདྲ་བའི་རང་ངོས་ནས་ལྷང་དེ་བ་ཅིག་འཆར་ལ། དེ་ཉིད་ཐ་སྙད་ཏེ
 ང་དེ་བ་དང་། མོ་བ་མོ་བ་དང་། ལྷན་ལྷང་དེ་བ་དང་། ལས་མེ་དང་། གང་ལ་སྒྲུབ་ཡང་འཆར་བ་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་འོང་ངོ་། །སྒྲུབ་བ་དེ་ཡང་
 ལྷན་ཐུང་བས་བྲང་ཅམ་དེ་མི་འཆར་རོ། །དེ་ཡང་སྒྲོ་དེ་དང་མཉམ་དུ་སྒྲོན་ནས་གྲུབ་གྲུབ་བ་ཅིག་བྲན་བ་ལྷར་དུ་འཆར་རོ། །འཆར་ཚུལ་
 དེ་ལ་ཡང་ཐུང་མོ་དང་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འཆར་ཚུལ་འབྱུང་ངོ་། །དེ་ཡང་ང་ན་ཞེས་བ་དང་། ངའི་ལག་བ་ན་ཞེས་བ་ལྷ་བྱའོ།
 །ལྷན་སྒྲིམ་གྱི་སྒྲུབ་བ་དེ་མ་དོར་བར་ང་བྱ་བ་བྱེད་དོ། །ཞེས་བ་ལྷ་བྱའི་རང་ཞེན་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ངོ་སྤྱོད་པའི་སྒྲོ་ནི། ང་འགྲོ་ང་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་པ་
 རྣམས་སོ། །དེ་ལྷར་འཆར་ཚུལ་དེས་ནས་དེ་ལྷར་གྲུབ་ན་ཐུང་མོ་དང་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་དང་གང་རུང་ལས་མི་འདའ་བའི་ཚུལ་དང་། ག
 ཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གཉིས་ཀ་ལ་གཞིན་བ་འོང་བའི་ཚུལ་བསམ་བ་སྟེ། ང་སྒྲུབ་བ་དེ་ལྷར་གྲུབ་བ་མི་འདུག་པར་ལྷང་གིས་དེས་བ་ན། དེས་ཤེ
 ས་ལྷང་ལྷང་བ་བར་མ་ཆད་དུ་སྒྲོང་བ་ནི་སྒྲོང་ཚུལ་གྱི་གནད་དམ་པའོ། །དེའི་ཆེ་ཡང་དགག་བྱ་གསར་དུ་གསལ་བཏབ་ནས་དེ་ལྷར་དུ་མི
 ད་མོད་སྤྱོད་དུ་བྱེད་པ་མིན་ཏེ། དང་མོར་དགག་བྱ་གསལ་བཏབ་ནས། དེ་ལྷར་མེད་པར་དེས་བ་ལྷང་གིས་སྒྲིམ་པའི་མེད་དགག་དེ་ཉིད་
 ལ་ཅེ་གཅིག་དུ་འཛོག་པའོ།

Thus, that “I” dawns within this naturally-arising mind as though it had no objective field whatsoever to rely upon, as something vividly sparkling from its own side. That very “I” comes as a naked convention, like something concrete, resplendent in potential, glistening, as though it could dawn affixed to anything at all. But that appearance abides only briefly, not dawning for more than an instant. Furthermore, it dawns as though it were a memory of something that had already been established previously, along with that state of mind.

This mode of dawning can arise both as though the mode of dawning were the same as the heaps and as though it were separate from the heaps. Moreover, it is like saying, “Suppose I . . .” or “If my hand . . .”

Without leaving off the appearance of the naturally-arising mind, to say something like, “I am doing something,” is to insist upon believing in the “I.”

(39) This mind that thinks “I am,” is what thinks all the thoughts like, “I go” and “I stay.” Thus, having ascertained the way it dawns, if it were to be established accordingly, you would have to think about how it could not get away from being either the same as or different from the heaps. You would also have to think about how both being the same and being different would eventually be disproven. If you ascertain vividly how that appearance of “I” cannot be established in the way it appears, then you should sustain that vivid and distinct ascertainment without a break. This is the sacred crucial point about the method for sustaining what you have understood.

At that point, it is not that you picture *anew* the thing to be denied, and then think to yourself that it does not exist in that way. Rather, having first pictured the thing to be denied, and then ascertaining that it does not exist in that way, you should place your mind single-pointedly on what has arisen so vividly – that sheer absence of what is refuted.

།དེ་ལ་གནད་བཞེར་བྱས་ནས། དང་མོ་དགག་བྱ་དེས་པ། གཉིས་པ་བྲུབ་པ་དེས་པ། གསུམ་པ་ཆོས་དེས་པ། བཞེ་པ་བསྐྱབ་བྱ་དེས་པ་
 དང་བཞི་ཡིན་ལ། ཆད་མ་བཞེར་བྱས་ན། དགག་བྱའི་འཆར་ཚུལ་དེས་པའི་ཆད་མ། གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གང་རུང་དེས་པའི་ཆད་མ། གཅི
 ག་ཏུ་མ་གྲུབ་པར་དེས་པའི་ཆད་མ། ཐ་དད་དུ་མ་གྲུབ་པར་དེས་པའི་ཆད་མ་དང་བཞིའོ། །དེ་ལ་སོགས་འདོན་པ་ནི། མཉམ་རྗེས་གྱི་སྒྲོང་

ཚུལ་གཉིས་ལ་མཁས་པས་འདོན་བ་ཡིན། གཤགས་སེལ་ལ་གནད་དང་སྒྲིལ་ཆད་མ་དེས་ན་མི་འགྱུར་ཡང་། བདག་ཆད་ཀྱིས་དོགས་པའི་
འཛིགས་པ་ནི། རྗེས་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་སྦྱོན་མེད་འདི་གས་སེལ་རྒྱས་སོ། །སྟོང་ཉིད་རྒྱུ་ཆད་དུ་བསྟོམས་ན་བདེན་གྲུབ་ཀྱི་ཉག་ལྟ་བུ་བསྟོམས་
ས་པར་འགྱུར་བས་སྟོང་དང་བསྟེན་ནས་དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་བསྟོམས་སོ།

To put this into four crucial points, they are as follows: (1) ascertaining the thing to be denied, (2) ascertaining that this covers all possibilities, (3) ascertaining the thing at hand, (4) ascertaining what is to be proven about it. To put it into four valid perceptions, they are: (1) the valid perception which ascertains how the thing to be denied dawns, (2) the valid perception which ascertains that it would either have to be the same as or separate from [the heaps], (3) the valid perception which ascertains that it cannot be established as one, and (4) the valid perception which ascertains that it cannot be established as something separate.

The way to enhance this practice quickly is through mastery of the ways to sustain it both during periods of meditative equipoise and during the periods following meditation.

In order to clear away obstacles: Even when an ascertainment of the first valid perception has not yet arisen, you can clear away the fear that may come from doubting whether one's self has been cut off, with the fact that there is no problem with the appearances that come after meditation. If you have been meditating on an emptiness that is a total nihilism, this will turn into a meditation on the view that things are unchanging because established as real. Therefore, [to avoid this] you should meditate on the inseparability of the emptiness mixed with your mind.

།ང་ཡི་བའི་འཆར་ཚུལ་ནི། ང་ཡི་འོ་སྟམ་དུ་སྟོ་སྟེ་འདིའི་འཆར་ཚུལ་ང་ཡི་འོ་སྟམ་དུ་བསམས་ན། སྟོ་དེ་དང་མཉམ་དུ་ཡིང་ཆད་དུ་ཆར་ཆ
ར་བ་འབྲེལ་བ་ཞིག་འཆར་ལ། དེ་ཉིད་སྤང་བ་ལྟར་དུ་གྲུབ་ན་མིག་ན་སོགས་དང་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གང་རུང་དུ་གྲུབ་པར་དེས་ལ། གཅིག་
ཏུ་གྲུབ་ན་ཐ་དད་གཉན་མེད་དུ་འགྱུར་བས། མིག་གིས་ཀྱང་སྟོ་ཐོས་པར་འགྱུར་བ་དང་། རྩ་བས་ཀྱང་གཟུགས་མཐོང་བ་སོགས་སུ་འགྱུ
ར་རོ། །ཐ་དད་དུ་གྲུབ་ན་ངའི་སྟམ་པའི་སྟོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡུལ་ལ་འོངས་སྟོང་བ་དང་། ང་ཡི་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བདེ་བ་བསྐྱུབ་བྱ་མིན་པར་འགྱུར་
བས་དེ་ལྟར་དེས་པ་བྲངས་ནས་སྟོང་ཚུལ་སྤང་བ་ལྟར་བྱེད་བ་ཡིན་ནོ།

(40) The way that “mine” dawns is as follows: If you contemplate the thought, “my. . .” – the way that the general state of mind which thinks “my . . .” dawns – it dawns as though each part were dawning together with that mind, like the strips of a tattered silk flag. If it were established according to the way it appears, one would ascertain the eyes, ears, and so on, as being either the same as or different from that very mind [which thinks, “my eyes,” etc.].

If they were established as being one, then they could not be different in any way at all. Hence the eye would turn out to hear sounds and the ear would see forms, and so on. If they were established as separate, then that very state of mind which thinks “my . . .” would partake of the objects of experience, and pleasure would not be something to be achieved by all the things that are mine. In this way, once you have drawn out certainty, you sustain what you have understood according to the methods described previously.

།དེ་ནས་ཤེས་པའི་འཆར་ཚུལ་ལ་བལྟས་ཏེ། དེ་ལ་ཡུལ་རང་དབང་དུ་སྟོང་བ་འབྲེལ་བའི་ཚུགས་སྐབས་ཏུ་འཆར་རོ། །དེའི་དེས་པ་འཛིན་ཚུལ་
དང་། སྟོང་ཚུལ། མཉམ་རྗེས་སོགས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྤང་དང་འབྲེལ། །དེ་ནས་རང་རྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱུས་པའི་ཕུང་སྒྲིལ་སྟེང་དུ་གཉན་ལ་པབ་སྟེ

‘བསྐྱོམ་མོ། །དེ་ནས་གང་ཟག་གཞན་དང་། རྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་མ་བསྐྱུས་པའི་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤྲེང་དུ་བསྐྱོམ་མོ། །དེའི་འཆར་ཚུལ་ནི། ཀ་བ་
ལྟ་བུ་དེ་སྤར་ནས་བྱུང་བྱུང་བ་འབྲེལ་བ་བརྟན་ཚུགས་པའི་རྣམ་པར་འཆར་རོ། །ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཡོད་པར་བཤད་པ་ནི་མིང་ཅན་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་ཡི
ན་ལ། དེགས་པས་མེད་པར་བསྐྱུབ་པ་ནི། གློ་མ་དེག་པས་ཡུལ་རྣམས་རང་དབང་དུ་བཟུང་བ་ལྟར་དུ་མེད་པར་བསྐྱུབ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཙོང་
ཁ་བ་ཡི་རིང་ལུགས་གསལ་མཛད་ཆོས་ཀྱི་ཐེ། །མཁས་བྱུང་ལེགས་བཤད་འོད་དཀར་རྒྱས་པ་དེས། །གང་གི་གློ་སྤྲོད་བསལ་བའི་མཐུ
ས་བྱུང་བ། །ཞལ་ཤེས་གནད་ཀྱི་ཐེམས་ཡིག་གིས་བ་འདིས། །འགྲོ་བའི་སྤྲིང་གི་སྤྲོད་པ་སེལ་གྱུར་ཅིག་ འདི་གཉིས་གཅུང་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་བ
འི་ཐེན་གྱིས།

Then, look upon the way that consciousness dawns. It dawns as though it partakes of the objects of experience through its own power, like something able to stand on its own. The way to draw out certainty, to sustain that certainty, and to practice during both sessions of meditation and following meditation, are all as before.

Then, you should meditate on what is set forth upon the heaps that are subsumed under one’s own mental stream. Following that, you should meditate upon [the heaps that are subsumed under] another person’s [mental stream], and all existing things that are not subsumed within a mental stream.

The way these dawn is this: Things like a pillar dawn in the aspect of something that stands with stability, as though they were established as something that had already been established previously.

The explanation of how these do exist conventionally, is that they are existing things in name only, but through reason, they are established as not existing. This is the proof that all objects held by a mind of ignorance to have some power of their own, do not exist in that way.

*By spreading the white light of this good explanation
made by the Lord of Dharma, Khedrub,
to clarify the longstanding tradition of Tsongkhapa,
may whatever inner force may come
from clearing away the darkness from my mind –
by my writing this memorial account
of the crucial points from the holy lips of the master –
may the darkness in the heart of living beings be cleared away.*

(41) These two sections were written as notes by the Younger Brother Dharma King [i.e. Baso Chökyi Gyeltsen].

གསུམ་པ་ནི་ལྷག་ཟུང་འབྲེལ་གྱི་སྐབས་འདིར། དབུ་མའི་ལྟ་བ་བསྐྱོམ་ཚུལ་ལ་ལྟ་སྟེ། ཐེག་པ་གཞན་གྱི་ཡུལ་ཅན་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་གྱི་དེ་ཁོ་
ན་ཉིད་བསྐྱོམ་ཚུལ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་ནས་བསྐྱོམ་ཚུལ། ཞི་གནས་དངོས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ལྷག་མཛོང་དངོས་བསྐྱོམ་ཚུལ་
། ཞི་གནས་རྗེས་མཐུན་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ལྷག་མཛོང་རྗེས་མཐུན་པ་བསྐྱོམ་ཚུལ། ལས་དང་པོ་པས་ལྟ་བ་ལ་སྤྱོད་པ་འདོན་པའི་བསྐྱོམ་ཚུ
ལ་ལོ། །དང་པོ་ནི། ལུགས་འདི་ར་དེ། ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་མཉམ་པར་འཛོག་པའི་ཆེ། དབུད་བསྐྱོམ་འཛོག་པའི་ཞར་ལ་དེས་པའི་ལྟ་བ་འཛོན་
སྤངས་ལ་མ་འཛོག་ཅིག་གཉིས་པའི་ཆེ། དབུད་དོན་དེས་པའི་ཆེ་ཡུལ་ཡུལ་ཅན་གཉིས་རོ་གཅིག་ཏུ་དེས་ཀྱང་། ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྤང་ཆ་ཡུ
ལ་དུ་མ་བྱེད་ཅིག་གསུམ་པའི་ཆེ། དབུད་དོན་དེས་པ་དང་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཏུ་ཤིན་སྤངས་གཉིས་ཐོབ་པས་གནས་པ་འབྲེན་ཅིང་། གནས་པའི་ང
ང་ནས་སོ་སོར་དཔྱད་རྒྱས་པས་མཉམ་གཞག་ན་གནས་པ་དང་། ཇི་ལྟ་བུའི་དོན་སོ་སོར་འབྱེད་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་གཉིས་བྱུང་འབྲེལ་དུ་ཡོད

‘མ་ཆ་སོ་སོར་བྱེད་པར་མཛོད་ཅིག་བཞི་པའི་ཆེ། དབྱུང་དོན་ངེས་པ་ན་གནས་ཆ་འབྲེན་པ་ནི་གནས་སྲ་གྲུབ་པའི་མཐུ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་། དེ་ག་
ཙོ་སོར་མི་འཛིན་པར་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་དབྱུང་ནས་དབྱུང་དོན་ལ་ངེས་ཤེས་དང་། དབྱུང་མཐར་འཛོག་པ་གཉིས་མཉམ་སོར་བསྐྱབ་པ་མ་
ཛོད་ཅིག་ལྷ་པའི་ཆེ། ཟློང་བ་ཐོན་པའི་རིག་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ངེས་ཅོང་ཡོངས་གཙོད་ཀྱི་ངེས་པ་དགག་པར་གྱིས་ཤིག་འདི་མཁས་གྲུབ་རྗེའི་ཐེན་ཐེས།

Here is the third section. In this context, the uniting of stillness and insight includes five ways to meditate on the view of the Middle Way: (1) the way to meditate on suchness with the extraordinary subject state of mind particular to the other vehicle [i.e. Vajrayāna], (2) the way to meditate once you have realized suchness directly, (3) the way to meditate on actual insight on the basis of an actual state of meditative stillness, (4) the way to meditate on an approximation of insight on the basis of an approximation of meditative stillness, and (5) the way to meditate as a beginner, to bring forth an experience of the view.

(1) In that system,² when placed in meditative equipoise upon suchness, aside from incidental analytical meditation, do not place [your mind] in the mode of grasping a view you have ascertained.

(2) When you have ascertained the meaning of the analysis, become certain that the subject state of mind and its object are of a single taste, but do not turn the appearing aspect of the very nature of the reality into an object.

(3) Once you can achieve pliancy at the very same moment that you ascertain the meaning of the analysis, take that to stillness. From a place of stillness, insofar as you can analyze things individually, there will be a uniting of both the stillness and the incisive wisdom that divides out the individual meaning of things as they are. You should distinguish these two parts one by one.

(42) (4) If you ascertain the meaning of the analysis, taking this into the aspect of stillness has the inner force to achieve meditative stillness. But without holding that as primary, you should analyze again and again, and gain an confident apprehension of the meaning of the analysis; then at the end of the analysis, rest in placement meditation. Then accomplish both [meditative stillness and insight] at the same time.

(5) In the face of the certainty gained by the conscious awareness that emerges from experience, cancel the certainty you used to have in determining what things are.

(This section was written as notes by Khedrup Je.)

² That is, within Vajrayāna meditation.

Appendix Four: Mere Conceptions and a Mere “I”

Excerpts from Je Tsongkhapa’s *Illumination of the True Thought*¹

གཉིས་པ་ནི། [དབུ་མ་ཐལ་འགྱུར་བའི་ལུགས་ཀྱི་བདེན་འཛིན་ངོས་གཟུང་བ།]
 ལུགས་འདི་ལ་ཚོས་རྣམས་རྟོག་པའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་འཛོག་ཚུལ་ཤེས་ན། དེ་ལས་བསྐྱོག་སྟེ་འཛིན་པའི་བདེན་འཛིན་བདེ་
 ལྷག་ཏུ་ཤེས་པར་འགྱུར་བས། འདི་ལ་གཉིས། ཚོས་རྣམས་རྟོག་པའི་དབང་གིས་འཛོག་ཚུལ་དང་།
 དེ་ལས་བསྐྱོག་སྟེ་འཛིན་པའི་བདེན་འཛིན་བསྟན་བཤོ།

(172) Here is the second part: [Recognizing the “grasping to things as real” of the Middle Way Consequence System.] In this system, if you understand the way that all things are merely established through the power of conceptions, it will be very easy for you to understand the grasping to things as real that grasps to its opposite.² For this there are two parts: (1) How all things are posited by the power of conceptual thought, and (2) The presentation of the grasping to things as real that grasps to its opposite.

[དང་པོ་ནི། [ཚོས་རྣམས་རྟོག་པའི་དབང་གིས་འཛོག་ཚུལ།]

ཉེ་བར་འཁོར་གྱིས་ཞུས་པ་ལས། ལྷ་ཚོགས་ཡིད་དགའ་མེ་རྟོག་ཁ་བྱེ་ཞིང་། །གསེར་གྱི་ཁང་མཚོག་འབར་བ་ཡིད་འོང་བ། །འདི་ན་དེ་
 ལའང་བྱེད་པ་འགའ་མེད་དེ། །དེ་དག་རྟོག་པའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་ཡིན། །རྟོག་པའི་དབང་གིས་འཛོག་རྟོག་རྣམས་བྟན་ཏེ། །ཞེས་ཚོ

¹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ma, 85b4-90b2 (172-182), emphasis mine throughout. Please note: These translations from the *Illumination of the True Thought* (in Appendices Four through Seven) remain a work in progress. Not only are they heavily excerpted, based only upon my own particular philosophical priorities for the purpose of this present dissertation, but work that would still remain to perfect them includes the following: (1) To render in bold every phrase cited exactly from Candrakīrti's auto-commentary (*Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya*) within Tsongkhapa's tight glosses, (2) to include and translate all the root verses from the Tibetan editions of *Madhyamakāvatāra* (including comparison, where possible, to the partial Sanskrit edition of Chapter 6, rendered by Li Xuezhong in China Tibetology, No. 1, March 2012, 1-16), and (3) to cite every quotation from sūtras and other Indian canonical works. At this stage, I have simply tried to render the philosophical content of Tsongkhapa's own commentary accurately, which serves my purpose in excerpting from this monumental work here. For a full translation, see Geshe Thubten Jinpa, *Clear Elucidation of the Intent: A Thorough Exposition of "Entering the Middle Way"*, Library of Tibetan Classics, vol. 19, forthcoming. I have, however, had no access to Geshe Thubten Jinpa's manuscript during my work, and this translation is entirely my own, guided in a few passages by Geshe Michael Roach's translation in Asian Classics Institute Course Five, Reading Five, available at <http://www.acidharma.org/aci/online/onlineformal.html>. I also received instruction on numerous portions of this text from Geshe Tenzin Sönam at Dolma Ling Nunnery (Sidhpur, H.P., India), where I attended three graded levels of Middle Way classes concurrently from Oct–Dec, 2014. Numbers in parentheses indicate page numbers from the Tashi Lhunpo block print edition I have used throughout, and are placed roughly as guideposts at the beginning of paragraphs so as not to interrupt the flow of translated text. I have been greatly aided by the outline (*sa bcad*), footnotes, and interpolated root verses provided in the Sera Mey Library, 2011, two volume edition of Tsongkhapa's text: *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rgya cher bshad pa dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba*, edited by Téwo Geshe Ngawang Yönten (the bo dge bshes nga dbang yon tan) and Gelrong Geshe Tubten Kunkyen (rgal rong dge bshes thub bstan kun mkhyen), *et al.* All errors remain my own.

² For this translation of “*bden 'dzin*” see Appendix Five, note 2.

ས་རྒྱལ་སྟོན་པའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པར་གསུངས་ཏེ། ཚེས་ཐམས་ཅད་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་དང་རྟོག་པའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པར་གསུངས་པ་གཞན་ཡང་མང་ངོ། །རིགས་པ་དྲུག་ཅུ་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། འཛིག་རྟོན་མ་རིག་རྟོན་ཅན་དུ། །གང་ཕྱིར་རྟོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱལ་གསུངས། །དེ་ཡི་ཕྱིར་ན་འཛིག་རྟོན་འདི། །རྒྱལ་རྟོག་ཡིན་ཞེས་ཅིས་མི་འཐད། །ཅེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་འགྲེལ་པར་འཛིག་རྟོན་རྒྱལ་ས་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་མ་གྲུབ་པ་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་དུ་བཤད་ཅིང་།

Here is the first part: [How all things are posited by the power of conceptual thought.] The *Sūtra Requested by Upāli* states:

All kinds of flowers bursting open, pleasing to the mind,
The supreme golden palace blazing in loveliness –
These have no one else who made them:
They are set forth by force of conceptual thought.
The world was conceived by the power of conceptions.

This states that all phenomena are established by force of conceptual thought. There are many other statements as well that all things are merely labeled by conceptions or set forth by the power of conceptual thought.

[Ārya Nāgārjuna’s] *Sixty Verses on Reasoning* states, too:

The world has ignorance as its condition.
Since this is something the Buddha spoke,
how could it ever be unreasonable
to say that this world
is a fabrication of the mind?

In its commentary, this is explained to mean that all worlds – not existing through any essence of their own – are merely labeled through conceptual thought.

བརྒྱུ་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། རྟོག་པ་མེད་པར་འདོད་ཆགས་ལ། །སོགས་ལ་ཡོད་ཉིད་ཡོད་མིན་ན། །ཡང་དག་དོན་དང་རྟོག་པ་ཞེས། །མྱོ་དང་ལྷན་པ་སྤྱུ་ཞིག་འཛིན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་དེའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། རྟོག་པ་ཡོད་པ་ཁོ་ནས་ཡོད་པ་ཉིད་དང་། རྟོག་པ་མེད་པར་ཡོད་པ་ཉིད་མེད་པ་དེ་དག་ནི། གོར་མ་ཆག་པར་ཐག་པ་བསྟོགས་པ་ལ་བཏགས་པའི་སྤྱུ་ལྟར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་མ་གྲུབ་པར་ངེས་སོ།

(173) [Āryadeva’s *Four*] *Hundred Verses*³ states further:

If, without conceptual thought, desire and
the rest cannot even exist,
then who with a mind would ever hold
to what is known as ‘the real object
and its concept’?

Its commentary [by Candrakīrti] says, “What exists only through the existence of concepts, and what cannot exist without concepts, is, beyond any doubt, certainly not established through any essence of its own, like the “snake” that is designated upon a pile

³ As indicated by the Tibetan footnotes in the Sera Mey Library 2011 Edition here (Vol. I, 197n26-28), this is Āryadeva’s *Catuhśataka-sāstra-kārikā* (*bstan bcos bzhi brgya pa zhes bya ba’i tshig le’ur byas pa*), Toh. 3846, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. *tsha* (and not the “*Hundred Verses*” of Ārya Nāgārjuna). Thus its commentary, cited several times in this section, is Candrakīrti’s *Bodhisattva-yogācāra-catuhśataka-ṭika* (*byang chub sems dpa’i rnal ’byor spyod pa bzhi brgya pa’i rgya cher ’grel pa*), Toh. 3865, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. *ya*.

ཁྲིམ་གསུངས་ཏེ་ཡང་དག་དོན་ནི་རང་གི་རོམ་ས་ཡུལ་པའོ། རྟོག་པའི་དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ཏེ་སྤྱེ་བའོ། །འབྲེལ་པ་དེར་ཆགས་སོགས་ནམས་
 ཐག་པ་ལ་སྤྱལ་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ལྟར་གསུངས་པ་ནི་མཆོན་པ་ཅམ་སྟེ། ཆོས་གཞན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་ཐག་པ་ལ་སྤྱལ་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ལྟར་རྟོ་
 ག་པས་བཞག་པར་འཆད་པའོ། །དེ་ལ་ཁ་ཤོད་མདོག་དང་འབྲེལ་ལུགས་སྤྱལ་དང་འདྲ་ཞིང་། ལུལ་མི་གསལ་བར་སྒྲར་བ་ན་ཐག་པ་ལ་
 འདི་སྤྱལ་ལོ་སྤུམ་པ་འབྱུང་ངོ། །དེའི་ཆེ་ཐག་པ་ལ་ཐག་པའི་ཆོགས་པ་དང་ཆ་ལས་སྤྱལ་གྱི་མཆོན་གཞིར་འཛོག་རྒྱ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་པ་
 ས། དེའི་སྤྱལ་ནི་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ཅམ་སོ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་སྤྱང་པོ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་འདོ་སྤུམ་པ་འབྱུང་བ་ན། སྤྱང་པོའི་སྟེང་ནས་སྤྱིའི་
 རྒྱུན་གྱི་ཆོགས་པ་དང་། དུས་གཅིག་པའི་ཆོགས་པ་དང་དེའི་ཆ་ལས་དེའི་མཆོན་གཞིར་འཛོག་རྒྱ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་དེ་རྒྱས་པར་འོག་
 ས་འཆད་དེ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་དང་སྤྱང་པོའི་ཆ་དང་ཆ་ཅན་ལས་རོམ་ཐ་དད་པའི་དེའི་གཞིར་འཛོག་རྒྱ་ཡང་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་པས། ར་དེ་ནི་རྟོ་
 ག་པས་སྤྱང་པོ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བཞག་པ་ཅམ་ཡིན་གྱི། རང་གི་རོམ་ས་ཡུལ་པ་མེད་ངོ།

(174) At that moment, there is not even the slightest reason for positing, with respect to the rope as a whole, nor with respect to any of its parts, that it is a prime example of what it means to be a snake. Thus its “snake” is merely labeled with a concept.

I will explain this in detail below. For that reason, and since there is not even the slightest reason for holding to a basis that is different in essence either from the parts that are the heaps, or from that which possesses the parts, this “I” is merely set forth with a concept, in dependence upon the heaps. But it is not established through any essence of its own.

།འདིནི་རིན་ཆེན་འཕྲེང་བ་ལས་ཀྱང་གསུངས་ཏེ། རྒྱུ་ས་བྱ་ས་མིན་ཚུ་མ་ཡིན། །མེ་མིན་རྒྱུང་མིན་ནམ་མཁའ་མིན། །རྣམ་ཤེས་མ་ཡིན་
ཀུན་མིན་ན།།དེ་ལས་གཞན་ན་རྒྱུ་ས་བྱ་གང་། །ཞེས་སོ། །དེ་ལ་རྒྱུ་ས་བྱ་ནི་གང་ཟག་དང་སེམས་ཅན་དང་དང་བདག་གོ། །ས་མིན་ན་
ས་རྣམ་ཤེས་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བར་གྱིས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ཁམས་བྱུག་གི་ཆོལས་དང་། ཀུན་མིན་གྱིས་ཁམས་ཀྱི་ཆོགས་བ་གང་ཡང་གང་ཟག་
་ཏུ་འཛོག་པ་བཀག་ག་གོ། ཆོག་ཐ་མས་ཁམས་ལས་ངོ་མོ་ཐ་དང་བ་གང་ཟག་ཏུ་འཛོག་པ་བཀག་ག་གོ། དེ་ལྟ་ནའང་གང་ཟག་ཁམས་མི་ལེན་པ་
ནི་མིན་ལ། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་སོགས་གང་ཟག་ཏུ་བཞེད་པ་ཡང་མིན་པས།
འབྲེལ་བ་མཛད་པས་བཀའ་བ་ལྟར་འཕགས་པ་ཡང་བཞེད་དོ།

If someone is not earth, nor water,
nor fire, nor wind, nor space,
nor consciousness, nor all of them together, then

apart from these, what someone could there be?

Here, “someone” means “person” and “living being” and “I” and a “self.” From “not earth” up to “nor consciousness,” it refutes the possibility of positing the parts that are the six domains of a living being as a person. With “nor all of them together,” it refutes the possibility of positing the collection of domains as a person. With the last line, it refutes that one could posit as a person something with an essence that was different from that of the domains.

In this way, *it is not that we do not accept the person*, but we also do not want to say that a foundation consciousness or the like is the person. According to what is explained in the commentary,⁴ this is also what the Ārya meant.

།གང་ཟག་ཏོག་པས་བཞག་ལུགས་དེ་ལྟར་ཤེས་ན། ཚེས་གཞན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་ཏོག་པས་བཞག་ལུགས་དེ་དང་འདྲ་སྟེ། ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་
གྱི་རྒྱལ་ལོ་ལས། རི་ལྟར་ཁྱོད་གྱིས་བདག་གི་འདུལ་ཤེས་ནི། །ཤེས་པ་དེ་བཞིན་ཀྱན་ལ་སྒོས་སྦྲར་བྱ། །ཞེས་དང་། འཕགས་པ་སྦྱད་པ་ལ་
ས་ཀྱང་། བདག་རིམ་དེ་དེ་འདྲར་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཤེས། །སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་རིམ་དེ་འདྲར་ཚེས་ཀྱན་ཤེས། །ཞེས་གསུང་
ས་ཤིང་། རིན་ཆེན་འཕྲེང་བ་ལས་ཀྱང་། སྦྱིས་བྱ་ཁམས་བྱུག་འདུས་པའི་བྱིར། །ཡང་དག་མ་ཡིན་རྒྱུ་བར། །དེ་བཞིན་ཁམས་ནི་རེ་
ཡང་། །འདུས་བྱིར་ཡང་དག་ཉིད་དུ་མིན། །ཞེས་གསལ་བར་གསུངས་སོ།

(175) If you understand this way in which the person is set forth through concepts, the way in which all other things are set forth through concepts is similar to it. The *King of Concentrations* states:

Insofar as you have the thought of ‘self’,
then you will apply it to everything
with your mind, in accordance
with that consciousness.

The *Summary of the Exalted [Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra]* states: “In the way that you understand yourself, so you will know all living beings. In the way you know all living beings, so you will know all things.”

The *Garland of Precious Jewels* continues clearly:

Because someone is a collection of six domains,
that being is not absolute. In the same way,
since each of those domains is itself also a collection,
neither could any of them be absolute.

།རྒྱུ་ལ་དང་པོའི་དོན་ནི་སྦྱིས་བྱ་ཁམས་བྱུག་འདུས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བཏགས་པའི་བྱིར་ཞེས་པའོ། །རྒྱུ་ལ་གསུམ་པ་དང་བཞི་པའི་དོན་
ནི་ཆ་དང་ཆ་ཅན་མེད་པ་མི་སྲིད་པས། །ཁམས་རེ་རེ་ཡང་རང་གི་ཆ་དུ་མ་འདུས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བཏགས་པའི་བྱིར། །ཡང་དག་ཏུ་སྟེ་ར་
ང་གི་ངོ་མོས་གྲུབ་པ་མིན་པའོ། །དེ་ཡང་ཆ་ཤས་འདུས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བཏགས་པ་ཡིན་ན། ཆ་ཤས་དང་ཆ་ཅན་དེ་དེའི་གཞིར་འཛིན་
ཏུ་མི་རུང་ལ། །དེ་གཞིས་ལས་ངོ་མོས་དང་པོ་ཡང་དེའི་གཞིར་མི་སྲིད་པའོ།

The meaning of the first line is, “Because someone is labeled in dependence upon the collection of six domains . . .” The meaning of the third and fourth lines is that, since it is

⁴ See Ajitamitra, *Ratnāvalī-tīkā* (*rin po che'i phreng ba'i rgya cher bshad pa*), Toh. 4159, sde dge bstan 'gyur, spring yig, vol. ge, 126b-165b.

།འཁུམ་པ་ལ་མོགས་པ་རྣམས་རྟོག་པམ་བཞག་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ཆ་དེ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཐག་པ་ལ་སྐྱལ་དུ་བཏགས་པ་དང་འབྲ་བ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་། ལུས་མོ་
 གས་རྣམས་དང་ཐག་པའི་སྐྱལ་གཉིས་ཡོད་མེད་དང་བྲ་བ་བྱེད་པར་རུས་མི་རུས་མོགས་ནི་གཏན་མི་འདྲ་སྟེ། དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཐ་སྟངས་
 བར་བྱ་དགོས་མི་དགོས་དང་། ཐ་སྟངས་བྱེད་པ་ལ་གཞོད་པ་ཡོད་མེད་མོགས་རྣམ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་མི་མཚུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དོ། །རྟོག་པས་
 བཞག་པ་དེ་ལ་རང་རང་གི་བྲ་བྱེད་འཐད་པ་ནི། ཆོག་དང་དོན་གྱི་འབྲེལ་མཛད་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས། སངས་རྒྱལ་བསྐྱངས་དང་ཞི་བ་ལྷ་
 དང་སྟོབ་དཔོན་འདི་གསུམ་གྱིས་འཕགས་པ་ཡལ་སྤས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་ལུགས་སུ་ཁོང་མ་ཡིན་པའོ། །དབུ་མའི་ལྷ་བ་མཐར་ཐུག་པའི་
 །དཀའ་ས་ཡང་འདི་ཉིད་དོ།

(176) That it should be perfectly suitable for things which are set forth with concepts to perform their respective functions, is, among all the commentaries written on the verses and meanings, the unique system of commentary on the ārya father and son [i.e., Ārya Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva], which is shared by Buddhapālita, Śāntideva, and this present master [Candrakīrti].

།དེ་ལྟར་བྱས་ན་འོན་ཆེན་འཕྲེང་བ་ལས། གཟུགས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་མིང་ཙམ་བྱིང། །ནམ་མཁའ་ཡང་ནི་མིང་ཙམ་སོ། །འབྲུང་མེད་གཟུགས་
 །ལྟ་གཤམ་ཡོད། །དེ་ཕྱིར་མིང་ཙམ་ཉིད་ཀྱང་མེད། །ཚོར་དང་འདུ་ཤེས་འདུ་བྱེད་དང་། །ནམ་ཤེས་འབྲུང་བ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། །བདག་བཞིན་དུ་
 །ནི་བསམ་བྱ་སྟེ། །དེ་ཕྱིར་ཁམས་བྱག་བདག་མེད་དོ། །ཞེས་དང་། ར་སྣང་གདགས་པ་མ་གཏོགས་པར། །གང་ཞིག་ཡོད་དམ་མེད་འཇུ་
 །ར་བའི། །འཇིག་རྟེན་དོན་དུ་ཅི་ཞིག་ཡོད། །ཅེས་དོན་དམ་པར་མིང་ཙམ་ཡང་མེད་པ་དང་། ར་སྣང་དུ་མིང་གི་ར་སྣང་གིས་བཞ
 །ག་པ་ཙམ་མ་གཏོགས་པ་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་མིང་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་དུ་གནས་སོ། །

Since functioning things that have form are merely named,
then furthermore space is only a name.
How could you ever see a form that had no elements?
Hence even the mere name itself does not exist.⁵

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Think also upon feelings, discrimination, factors and consciousness, as being just like the elements, or just like a self: Thus are all the six domains without a self.

Also:

Apart from the application of a convention,
what world could there ever be
that in reality either did or did not exist?

Thus it states that ultimately there is not even the mere name, and conventionally, apart from being set forth by force of a conventional name, there is nothing at all. This is what it means to remain merely labeled with a name.

།དེ་རྣམས་ལེགས་པར་ཤེས་ན་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་བརྟེན་ནས་གཞག་དགོས་པ་དང་། བརྟེན་ནས་བཏགས་པ་དང་བརྟེན་ནས་སྐྱེས་པ་ཉིད་
ཀྱིས་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་བྱུབ་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། ཐ་སྙད་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་མིན་པའི་རང་དབང་བའི་ངོ་བོ་མེད་པ་དང་། ཆོས་གང་
ཡོད་པར་འཛིག་ནའང་བཏགས་དོན་མ་བཅའ་བར་འཛིག་པ་རྣམས་ལེགས་པར་ཤེས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

If you understand all these points well, then you will also come to understand (1) the necessity for setting forth all things in dependence, (2) that it is due to the very fact that things are labeled in dependence, and are born in dependence, that they cannot be established through an essence of their own, (3) that they do not have an essence through any power of their own that is not set forth by force of another convention, and (4) that whatever thing you may posit as existing, it is posited insofar as you have not begun to seek out the real referent of the label.

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། །དེ་ལས་བརྗོད་སྟེ་འཛིན་པའི་བདེན་འཛིན་བསྟན་པའོ། །སྤར་བཤད་པའི་མིང་གི་ཐ་སྙད་ཀྱི་དབང་ཅམ་གྱིས་བཞག་པ་མི
ན་པའི་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པ་ནི། བདེན་པ་དང་དོན་དམ་པར་དང་ཡང་དག་ཏུ་བྱུབ་པ་དང་། རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་དང་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ད
ང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པ་སྟན་སྐྱེས་ཡིན་ལ། དེས་བཟུང་བའི་ཞེན་ཡུལ་ནི་བརྟག་པ་མཐའ་བཟུང་གི་བདེན་ཆད་དོ། །དགག་
བྱ་ལ་དོན་དམ་གྱི་བྱུང་པར་སྐྱར་བའི་དོན་དམ་ལ་ཚུལ་གཉིས་ཤེས་དགོས་པ་ནི་འདིར་ཡང་འདྲ་ལ། དབུ་མ་རང་རྒྱུད་པ་རྣམས་བདེན་པ་
སོགས་གསུམ་དུ་བྱུབ་པ་ཤེས་བྱ་ལ་མི་སྲིད་པར་བཞེད་ཀྱང་། རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་བྱུབ་པ་སོགས་གསུམ་ནི་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཡོད་པར་བཞེད་དེ།
དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཐ་བ་རེ་ཞིག་ལ་བདེ་ལྷག་ཏུ་རྟོགས་མི་རུས་པ་རྣམས། དེ་ལ་བགྱི་བའི་ཐབས་ལ་མཁས་པ་ཆེན་པོར་མཐོང་ངོ།

(177) Here is the second part: [i.e., The presentation of grasping to things as real that grasps to its opposite.] To hold that things exist *without* being established merely by the power of conventional names, as explained above, is the inborn grasping that thinks things exist through a nature of their own, or through characteristics of their own, or through an essence of their own, or that they are established absolutely, or ultimately, or as real. The object of insistent belief that is held by this [inborn grasping], is a measure of reality that has been grasped at the extremes of analysis.

།དེ་ལྟར་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཡུལ་ཅན་ཐ་སྙད་ཀྱི་རྟོག་པ་གཞན་ལ་རག་མ་ལས་པ་སྟེ། དེའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་མིན་པའི་རང་བཞིན་
དེ་ཉིད་ལ་དགག་བྱའི་བདག་ཅེས་བྱ་ལ། དེ་ཉིད་བྱུང་གཞི་གང་ཟག་གི་སྟེང་དུ་མེད་པ་ནི་གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་མེད་དང་། མིག་སྟོ་སོགས་

literature show most quotations of this verse following Tsongkhapa, as does His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama when quoting and teaching on this verse (e.g., Pelden Lhamo Jénang, Drepung Monastery, December 29th, 2014.)

ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤྲེང་དུ་མེད་པ་ནི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་མེད་དུ་གསུངས་པས། རང་བཞིན་དེ་གང་ཟག་དང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤྲེང་དུ་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པ་ནི་བདག་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འཛིན་པར་བྱགས་ཀྱིས་རྟོགས་ཏེ།

In this way, an *essence* of anything that could exist without relying upon another thing (such as the subject state of mind that conceptualizes a convention), or a *nature* that was not set forth by the power of such a state of mind: Just that would constitute a “self” that is to be refuted.

The fact that such a thing does *not* exist upon the distinguishing basis of a person, is the “lack of self to a person.” The fact it does not exist upon the phenomena that are the eye, nose, and so on, is said to be the “lack of self to things.”

That one *holds* there to be a nature which should exist upon a person and things, is understood implicitly from the phrase “the grasping to two kinds of self.”

བརྒྱ་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། དེ་ལ་བདག་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་གང་ཞིག་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གཞན་ལ་རག་མ་ལས་པའི་ངོ་བོ་རང་བཞིན་ཏེ། དེ་མེད་པ་ནི་བདག་མེད་པའོ། །དེ་ནི་ཆོས་དང་གང་ཟག་གི་དབྱེ་བས་གཉིས་སུ་རྟོགས་ཏེ། ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་མེད་པ་དང་གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་མེད་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །ཞེས་པ་ལྟར་སྟེ། འདི་ཉིད་ལས་ཀྱང་། ཆོས་དང་གང་ཟག་དབྱེ་བས་རྣམ་གཉིས་གསུངས། ཞེས་བདག་མེད་གཉིས་དག་ག་བྱའི་སློན་ནས་མ་བྱེ་བར་གཞི་ཆོས་ཅན་གྱིས་འབྱེད་པར་བཤད་དོ།

As it states in the commentary to the [Four] Hundred Verses:

In this regard, what is called a “self” would be a nature, or essence, that did not rely on something *other* than the functioning things themselves. The fact this does not exist is the lack of a self. One realizes it in two ways, through a division into things and persons: i.e., the “lack of self to things” and the “lack of self to persons.”

(178) The same text states: “It is stated to have two aspects, divided according to things and persons.”

Thus the two types of selflessness are not divided in terms of what is to be refuted, but are explained to be divided according to the *basis* that is the subject of debate.

།བདག་འཛིན་གྱི་འཛིན་ལྟ་ལྟན་སྟེས་ལ་ནི་རྩ་བར་བུང་བོ་དམིགས་པ་ཡིན་པ་བཀག་ཅིང་། འགྲེལ་པར་བརྟེན་ནས་བཏགས་པའི་བདག་དམིགས་པར་གསུངས་པས། རའོ་སྟམ་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་སྟེ་བའི་དམིགས་པའི་ར་ཙམ་དང་། གང་ཟག་ཙམ་ཞིག་ལ་དམིགས་པར་བྱའོ། །རྣམ་པ་ནི་རང་འགྲེལ་ལས། རང་འཛིན་པས་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བདག་ཡོད་དོ་སྟམ་དུ་ཉེ་བར་བཏགས་ནས། འདི་ཉིད་དུ་བདེན་པར་མངོན་པར་ཞེན་ཅིང་། ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་དེ་བདེན་པར་བྱུང་བར་འཛིན་པའོ། །གཞན་ཡང་རང་འགྲེལ་ལས། དེ་ལ་འཛིན་ཆོགས་ལ་ལྟ་བ་ནི་དང་དཔེ་སྟམ་པ་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་རྣམ་པར་ཞུགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་འཛིན་ལྟ་ལྟན་སྟེས་ཀྱི་དམིགས་པ་ལ་རའོ་སྟམ་པའི་སློང་དང་གིས་སྟེ་བ་དགོས་པས། རྒྱུད་གཞན་གྱི་གང་ཟག་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བར་འཛིན་པའི་ལྟན་སྟེས་གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་འཛིན་ལྟན་སྟེས་ཡིན་ཀྱང་འཛིན་ལྟ་ལྟན་སྟེས་མིན་ནོ། །དང་དང་དཔེ་སྟམ་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཞུགས་ཞེས་པས་ནི་ར་ཙམ་དང་དཔེ་བ་ཙམ་འཛིན་སྟངས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པའི་ཡུལ་དུ་སྟོན་པ་མིན་གྱི། དེ་གཉིས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བར་འཛིན་པའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་དུ་སྟོན་པའོ།

Regarding the inborn view of the destructible collection that grasps to a self, the root text⁶ denies that it focuses upon the heaps, and the commentary says that it focuses upon the self that is labeled in dependence.

Therefore, it must focus just upon the mere “I” and the mere person that arise as an object of focus from the mere thought, “I am.”

Its aspect is this: The auto-commentary says, “By grasping to ‘me,’ one constructs something by thinking, of a self that does not exist, ‘It exists.’ Then one insistently believes this very thing to exist as real, and . . .” So one grasps to that ‘me’ as being established as real.

Furthermore, the auto-commentary states: “In this regard, the view that looks upon the destructible collection is an afflicted form of discernment [*shes rab*] that engages in the aspect of such thoughts as ‘I’ and ‘mine.’”

Thus, the object upon which the inborn view of the destructible collection focuses must arise from within the state of mind that thinks “I am.”

The inborn grasping to the idea that the person belonging to another’s mindstream must exist through its own characteristics, is an inborn grasping to a self of persons, but it is not the inborn destructible view.

When [Candrakīrti] says, “engages with the aspect of such thoughts as ‘I’ and ‘mine,’” he is not indicating the objective fields that appear in the aspect of a mere “I” and a mere mine to the mode of apprehension that takes them in. Rather, he indicates that which bears the aspect of those two, *insofar as they are grasped in such a way that they should exist through characteristics of their own*.

།བདག་གི་ར་འཛིན་པའི་འཛིན་ལྟ་སྟེན་གྱི་དཔེགས་པ་ནི། ར་ཡི་བ་ཉིད་ཡིན་གྱི། ར་བ་གི་མིག་སོགས་དཔེགས་པར་མི་བརྒྱུད་འོ། །
རྣམ་པ་ནི་དཔེགས་པ་དེ་ལ་དཔེགས་ནས་ར་ཡི་བ་ར་བ་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་འཛིན་པ་འོ། །འོ་ན་བདག་གི་འདི་ཞེས་ཞེས་པའི་ར་
ར་འབྲེལ་ལས། འདི་ནི་བདག་གི་འོ་སྟེན་དུ་ར་འཛིན་པའི་ཡུལ་ལས་གཞན་པའི་དངོས་སོའི་རྣམ་པ་མ་ལུས་པ་ལ་མཛོན་པར་ཞེན་པ་ཡི་
ན་ནོ། །ཞེས་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གཞི་ལ་དཔེགས་ནས་འདི་ནི་བདག་གི་ཡིན་ནོ་སྟེན་དུ་ཞེན་པ་བདག་གི་ར་འཛིན་པར་བཤད་པ་ཇི་ལྟར་
ཡིན་སྟེན་ན། དེ་ནི་མིག་སོགས་རྣམས་བདག་གི་བར་མཛོད་ནས་བདག་གི་བ་ལ་བདེན་པར་མཛོད་པར་ཞེན་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་གྱི། བདག་
གི་བའི་མཚན་གཞི་མིག་སོགས་དཔེགས་པར་སྟོན་པ་མིན་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟར་མ་ཡིན་ན་འཛིན་ལྟ་དང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་འཛིན་གཉིས་མི་འགལ་
པར་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར་འོ།

⁶ The editors of the Sera Mey Library 2011 Edition point out that this “root text” is Candrakīrti’s v. 6:150:

Thus the foundation for grasping to a “me” does not come from a functioning thing.

Nor is it something other than the heaps, nor is it the essence of the heaps.

The heaps are not a foundation, nor is this [“me”] a possessor of the heaps.

This [“me”] is established in dependence upon the heaps.

དེ་ཕྱིར་ར་འཛིན་རྟེན་ནི་དངོས་སོས་མིན། །ཕུང་ལས་གཞན་མིན་ཕུང་སོའི་དོན་མིན། །ཕུང་སོ་རྟེན་མིན་འདི་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་མིན། འདི་ནི་ཕུང་སོ་རྣམས་བརྟེན་གྲུབ་པ་
ར་འགྱུར།

I would suggest that Tsongkhapa’s reference could also include *Madhyamakāvatāra*, v. 6:135:

The sūtras state that it is in dependence upon the heaps;

Therefore just the gathering of the heaps is not a self.

མདོ་ལས་ཕུང་སོ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཡིན་གསུངས་པ། །དེ་ཕྱིར་ཕུང་སོ་འདུས་ཅན་བདག་མ་ཡིན། See Chapter Six, note 39.

(179) The object upon which the inborn destructible view that grasps to “mine” focuses is the very fact of “belonging to me,” but it is not grasped through focusing upon my eyes, and so forth.

Its aspect is this: By focusing on that object of focus, I hold the fact of “belonging to me” to exist through characteristics of its own.

Now, regarding the line, “Saying, ‘This that belongs to me’ . . . ,”⁷ the auto-commentary states: “As for ‘This,’ it refers to the insistent belief one has with respect to every single kind of functioning thing *other* than what serves as the object of one’s grasping to a ‘me,’ by thinking, ‘It is mine.’”

Thus it is explained to be the grasping to what is mine that insistent believes in the thought, “This here, it belongs to me,” while focusing on the basis of the eyes, and so on.

Suppose you ask how this works. The meaning is this: After seeing that those things, the eye and so forth, belong to me, one insistent believes that they are *truly* mine. But the teaching is not that [the inborn destructible view] focuses on the eye and so forth that are the prime example of what is mine.

If it were not like this, then it would turn out not to be contradictory for something to be both the destructible view, and the grasping to a self of things [i.e., whereas in fact, there is nothing that is both].

ཁོས་ཀྱི་བདག་འཛིན་ལྟན་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་དཔེགས་པ་ནི། རང་གཞན་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གཟུགས་སྤང་སོགས་དང་། མིག་ན་སོགས་དང་། རྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་མ་བསྐྱས་པའི་སྣོད་ལ་སོགས་པའོ། །ནམ་པ་ནི་ལྷ་ར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་རོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བདག་གཉིས་སུ་འཛིན་པ་དེ་ནི་འཁོར་བར་འཆིང་བའི་མ་རིག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྣོད་ཉིད་བདུན་ཅུ་བ་ལས། རྒྱུད་དང་རྒྱུ་ལས་སྤྱོད་དངོས་ནམས། །ཡང་དག་པར་ནི་རྟོག་པ་གང་། །དེ་ནི་སྣོད་པས་མ་རིག་གསུངས། །དེ་ལས་ཡང་ལག་བཅུ་གཉིས་འབྱུང་། །ཞེས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དངོས་སོ་ལ་དཔེགས་ནས་ཡང་དག་ཏུ་གྲུབ་པར་འཛིན་པ་འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བའི་མ་རིག་པར་གསུངས་ཏེ། ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་འཛིན་དེ་ལས་གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་འཛིན་གྱི་མ་རིག་པ་འབྱུང་བས། དེ་ལས་བཅུ་གཉིས་འབྱུང་བར་བཤད་རོ། །མ་རིག་པ་དེ་ལྟོག་པ་ལ་དེས་རི་ལྟར་བསྐྱུང་བས་སྣོད་པ་དང་། རི་ལྟར་བསྐྱུང་བའི་བདག་མེད་པར་མཐོང་བ་དགོས་ཏེ། སྣོད་ཉིད་བདུན་ཅུ་བ་ལས། །ཡང་དག་མཐོང་བྱིང་དངོས་སྣོད་བར། །ལེགས་ཤེས་མ་རིག་མི་འབྱུང་བ། །དེ་ནི་མ་རིག་འགག་པ་ཡིན། །དེ་བྱིང་ཡན་ལག་བཅུ་གཉིས་འགག་ཏེ་མ་དང་། ཆོས་དབྱིངས་བསྣོད་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། བདག་དང་བདག་གི་ཞེས་འཛིན་པས། །རི་སྤྱི་བྱི་རོལ་རྣམ་པར་གསུངས་པ། །བདག་མེད་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་མཐོང་ན། །སྤྱི་པའི་ས་སོན་འགག་པར་འགྱུར། །ཞེས་དང་། མཆོག་ཏུ་སེམས་ནི་སྣོད་བྱེད་པའི། །ཆོས་ནི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་དང་།

The object upon which the inborn grasping to a self of things focuses is this: The heap of form, etc., and the eyes, ears, etc., belonging to my own and others’ mental streams, as well as the vessels, and so on, that are not subsumed by any mental stream.

Its aspect is as explained before [i.e., one holds the object of focus to exist through characteristics of its own].

In this way, grasping to the two kinds of self is the ignorance that binds one to the cycle.

⁷ See Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatāra*, v. 3:

དང་པོར་འཛིན་བདག་ལ་ཞེན་གྱུར་ཞིང་། །བདག་གི་འདི་ཞེས་དངོས་ལ་ཆགས་བསྐྱེད་པ། །ཐོ་རྒྱན་འབྱན་ལྟར་རང་དབང་མེད་པ་ཡི། །འགྲོ་ལ་སྤྱིང་རྒྱུར་གང་དེ་ལ་འབྱུང་།

As it says in [Ārya Nāgārjuna’s] *Seventy Verses on Emptiness*:

Whatever conceives all things born
from causes and conditions to be absolute
that the Teacher has stated to be ignorance.
From this the twelve links ensue.

(180) Thus it states that, after focusing on all functioning things, if one holds them to exist absolutely, this is the ignorance that is the root of the cycle. From that grasping to a self of things comes the ignorance of grasping to a self of persons, and from that ensues the twelve.

In order to turn back that ignorance, one must see how those things are empty of that to which ignorance holds, and one must see how the self to which it holds does not exist.

The *Seventy Verses on Emptiness* states:

Because one sees perfectly, and understands well
that they are empty of function
ignorance will not arise.
This is the stopping of ignorance.
Thus the twelve links will stop.

[Ārya Nāgārjuna’s] *Praise of the Absolute Realm of Things* states further:

Since you grasp to self and what is mine,
for as long as you see that the two kinds of self
are imputed from without and do not exist
then the seeds for cyclic existence will be stopped.

It also states:

The supreme state of mind
is the thing that acts to purify:
the lack of any nature.

བཞི་བརྒྱ་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། ཡུལ་ལ་བདག་མེད་མཛོང་ན་ནི། །སྲིད་པའི་ས་བོན་འགག་པར་འགྱུར། །ཞེས་དང་། དེ་བྱིར་ཉོན་མོངས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་། །གཏི་མུག་བཅོམ་པས་བཅོམ་པར་འགྱུར། །རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་པར་འབྲུང་བ་ནི། །མཛོང་ན་གཏི་མུག་འབྲུང་མི་འགྱུར། །དེ་བྱིར་འབད་པ་ཀྱན་གྱིས་འདིར། །གཏམ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་བསྐྱད་པར་བྱ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟར་གསུངས་པའི་གཏི་མུག་ནི་དུག་གསུམ་གྱི་ཡ་གྲུལ་གྱི་གཏི་མུག་ངོས་འཛིན་པའི་སྐབས་ཡིན་པས། །ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་གྱི་མ་དེག་པ་ཡིན་ཞིང་། མ་དེག་པ་དེ་ལྷོག་པ་ལ་སྟོང་པ་རྟེན་འབྱུང་གི་དོན་དུ་འར་བའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཟབ་མའི་དོན་རྟོགས་དགོས་པར་གསུངས་སོ། །

[Āryadeva’s] *Four Hundred Verses* states, moreover:

If you see that the object has no self
the seeds for cyclic existence will be stopped.

Also:

Therefore, since delusion is destroyed,
all the mental afflictions will also be destroyed.
If you see what arises in reliance and relationship,

delusion cannot arise. Therefore, with all your strength,
make efforts at telling only this story.

As for the delusion mentioned here: Since this is a context in which to identify that delusion as one among the three poisons, it is the afflicted kind of ignorance.

(181) In order to turn back that ignorance, it says that one must realize the meaning of profound dependent relationship, when emptiness dawns as the meaning of dependent origination.

།འགྲོལ་མ་མཛད་པས་ཀྱང་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པ་ཡིས་བདག་ནི་འགྲོལ་པར་བྱེད། །ཅེས་བདག་འཛིན་གྱི་ཡུལ་སྟན་སྤང་བའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་བདག་
མེད་ཉོགས་དགོས་པར་གསུངས་སོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་འཛིན་གྱི་ཡུལ་སྟན་སྤང་བར་དེར་ཡུལ་ལ་ཡིད་པར་འགྲོ་བ་ཚུར་བསྐྱུས་པ་ཙ
མ་བྱས་ཀྱང་། དེས་ནི་བདག་མེད་ལ་ཞུགས་པར་འཛོགས་མི་རྒྱས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་ཡིད་ཡུལ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ན་དམིགས་པ་
དེ་བདེན་པར་འཛིན་པ་ཅིག་དང་། བདེན་མེད་དུ་འཛིན་པ་ཅིག་དང་། དེ་གཉིས་གང་གིས་ཀྱང་ཁྱད་པར་དུ་མ་བྱས་པར་འཛིན་པ་ཅིག་ད
ང་གསུམ་ཡོད་པས། བདེན་མེད་དུ་མ་བཟུང་ཡང་བདེན་པར་འཛིན་མི་དགོས་པ་བཞིན་དུ། བདག་གཉིས་ལ་མ་ཞུགས་ཀྱང་བདག་མེད་
གཉིས་ལ་ཞུགས་མི་དགོས་ཏེ། རྫོ་སྤང་པོ་གསུམ་པ་ལ་གནས་པ་མཐའ་ཡས་པ་ཅིག་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

Those who wrote the commentaries say further, “The yogi puts a stop to self.” So it says one must realize selflessness through this method of eliminating the object to which self-grasping holds. Therefore, without eliminating the object of self-grasping, your mind might just wander to and fro around that object, but that way you will not be able to place your mind so that it sinks into selflessness.

The reason for this is that when your mind engages with an object, there is (1) a part that holds that focal object as being true, (2) another part that holds it as something without true existence, and (3) yet another part that holds it without making any distinction between these two. So just as, even when you are not holding it to lack true existence, it does not necessarily follow that you are holding it to be true, so, too, although you may not be engaging with the two kinds of self, it is not necessary that you have entered into the two kinds of selflessness. *This is because there are infinite ways for the mind to remain in something else that is a third option.*

།བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱང་རང་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་སྤྱིང་དུ་ངོས་བཟུང་ནས། རང་གང་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་གཞི་དེ་ཉིད་ཇི་ལྟར་བཟུང་བ་ལྟར་དུ་མེད་པ
ར་གཏན་ལ་འབབ་དགོས་ཀྱི། དེ་ལྟ་མིན་པར་ཁ་བྱིར་ལྟའི་དགག་སྒྲུབ་ནི། རྒྱན་མ་ནགས་ལ་སོང་བའི་རྗེས་སྤང་ལ་རྩད་གཅོད་པ་དང་འ
བྲལ་པས་གཞན་དུ་མི་འགྲོའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བདེན་འཛིན་ལེགས་པར་ངོས་ཟིན་ན། བདག་འཛིན་གཉིས་མིན་པའི་རྟོག་པ་དུ་མ་ཅིག་ཡོད་པ་ལེ
ས་པར་འགྱུར་བས། རྟོག་པས་གང་བཟུང་གི་ཡུལ་ཐམས་ཅད་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་དབྱེད་པའི་རིགས་པས་འགྲོག་པར་འདོད་པའི་འོག་རྟོག་
ཐམས་ཅད་ལྟོག་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །འདི་དག་ལས་བརྒྱུས་པའི་བཤད་དགོས་པ་མང་དུ་ཡོད་ནའང་། འགའ་ཞིག་ནི་གཞན་མང་སོར་བཤ
ད་ཟིན་ལ། འགའ་ཞིག་ནི་འོག་ཏུ་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་བས་འདིར་མ་སྟོས་སོ།།

The two types of grasping to a self, furthermore, are recognized upon one’s own mindstream. You must set forth, with respect to the basis towards which you make your mistake, how that itself does not exist in the way you hold it to exist. But if you try to refute or prove something which is not that, something you look to outside yourself, then it is like doing a sleuth investigation for the lost thief *after* he has escaped into the forest. So you will not get to the crucial point.

If you can properly identify your grasping to things as real in this way, you will come to understand that there are very many kinds of conceptual thoughts that are not either of the two types of grasping to a self. Then you will turn back all those wrong ideas which assert that whatever object at all might be held by a conceptual state of mind is refuted by the reasoning which examines suchness.

(182) There is much that must be explained, taking this as a start, but since I have already explained some of it thoroughly elsewhere, and since I will explain some of it below, I will not go on about it here.

Appendix Five: Ultimate and Deceptive in the Middle Way

Excerpts from the *Illumination of the True Thought*¹

གཉིས་པ་ནི། གང་ཞིག་གསུང་རབ་ཀྱི་དོན་བྱིན་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པར་མ་ཉོག་པའི་དུས་ལོ་བདེན་པའི་མཛུགས་ཀྱི་བཀའ་ཆགས་བཞག་པ་སྤྱིན་པ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་དངོས་སོ་ལ་བདེན་པར་མཛོན་པར་ཞེན་པ་ཡུན་རིང་མོ་ནས་འདྲིས་པའི་མཛུགས་དང་བྲལ་བ་སྟེ། འབྲལ་བར་བྱེད་པའི་ཐབས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་ཚུལ་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་མོས་པ་དང་བྲལ་བ། འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་གཞོན་པའི་ཚོལ་ཐབས་ཉེ་སྤྱོད་བཞུགས་པ་བཞིན་པ་འདི་ནི། འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་བྱུང་ཚུལ་མང་པོ་ཞིག་མ་བཤད་པར་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་གཞོན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཐབས་བསྐྱོག་པ་རེ་རུས་པས། ཡུལ་འདི་འབྲལ་བ་ཞིག་ལ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱིས་གཞོན་དོ་ཞེས་དེའི་གཞོན་ཡུལ་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་དང་། ཡུལ་འདི་འབྲལ་བ་ལ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱིས་མི་གཞོན་དོ་ཞེས་མི་གཞོན་པའི་ཡུལ་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་བསྟན་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ལ་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་དབྱེ་བསྟན་པ་ལྟར་དུ་འགྲོ་བ་དགོས་པ་ལ་ལྟ། བདེན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་རྣམ་གཞག་སྐབས་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་སྦྱར་བ། བདེན་གཉིས་སོ་སོའི་དོ་བོ་བཤད་པ། བཀའ་པ་ལ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱིས་གཞོན་པ་ལ་གཞོན་བྱེད་བསྟན་པ། འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱིས་གཞོན་པའི་གཞོན་ཚུལ་བསྟན་པའོ།

(214) Here is the second part [of a later section: Presenting our reply, namely, that our argument – that things are not born through characteristics of their own – is not disproven by what is well-known to the world].

(215) Suppose, first of all, that you have not perfectly realized the meaning of the scriptures, and secondly, that you are bereft of the process of listening, over and over again, to the way in which things lack any nature, the method that would make you bereft of – that is, which would separate you from – that friend with whom you have been intimate for a very long time, i.e., the insistent belief in functioning things as real.² You insistently believe in reality with respect to the functioning things that arise from the ripening of tendencies for grasping to functioning things as real, which have been planted in a cycle from time without beginning.

Without explaining many times how things do arise in the world, it will be impossible to take such a person – who relies on the gibberish (that is, the senseless babble), about “disproof from the world” – and turn him or her back from this senseless babble about the

¹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 106b6-138b3 (214-278). See Appendix Four, note 1, for further comments.

² “*bden ’dzin gyi bag chags bzhag pa smin pa las byung ba’i dngos po la bden par mngon par zhen pa*”: I take this phrase, closely paralleled to a phrase in Candrakīrti’s auto-commentary (*dbu ma la ’jug pa’i bshad pa*, *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, sde dge, *dbu ma*, vol. *’a*, Toh. 3862, 253a3), as the source for my expanded translation of “*bden ’dzin*” throughout, as “grasping to things as real.” I think this is more accurate to its actual meaning in Tsongkhapa’s thought than would be a more common translation, such as “grasping to true existence,” or “grasping to truth.” Please note, too, how throughout these passages the term “*bden pa*” is being used much more in the sense of whether a thing is or is not established *ontologically*, as real, whereas the epistemological question of “truth” relates much more to the complex use of the terms “deceptive” (*kun rdzob*, Skt. *saṃvṛti*, literally, “totally concealing,” see discussion in Chapter Four for my translation choice here), and “ultimate” (*don dam*, Skt. *paramārtha*, literally, “highest meaning”). Note, too, how the entire discussion that follows here would be rendered non-sensical if one were to conflate “*tha snyad*” (“convention”) with “*kun rdzob*” and use a phrase such as “conventional truth,” or “conventional reality” for *kun rdzob bden pa* (Skt. *saṃvṛti-satya*, with only one “t” in *saṃvṛti*).

disproof from the world.

Thus we must point out with respect to *this* kind of object, that it is a distinctive object that *is* disproven, when one says, “It is disproven by the world,” and we must point out with respect to *that* kind of object, that it is the distinctive object that is *not* disproven, when one says, “It is not disproven by the world.”

Since we must preface this by showing the division of the two realities, on this there are five points: (1) The general presentation of the two realities, (2) Specifying the meaning in this context, (3) Explaining the essence of each of the two realities, (4) Showing what disproves the disproof given by those in the world in response to the refutation [of birth from another], and (5) Showing the way in which what *is* disproven by the world is disproven.

།དང་པོ་ལ་བཞི། བདེན་གཉིས་སུ་དབྱེ་བས་ཆོས་རྣམས་ལ་ངོ་བོ་གཉིས་གཉིས་ཡོད་པར་བརྟེན་པ། བདེན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་གཞག་གཞན་བསྟན་པ། འདྲི་ཤིང་ལ་ལྟོས་ཏེ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བ་བཤད་པ། ཞེན་ཡུལ་ལ་འཁྲུལ་བའི་ཞེན་ཡུལ་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཡང་མེད་པར་བསྟན་པའོ། །དང་པོ་ནི། འདི་ན་བདེན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཕྱིན་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པ་མཐུན་པའི་བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་འདུ་བྱེད་སེམས་པ་སོགས་ནང་དང་སྤྱུ་གྲུ་སོགས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཀྱན་ཏེ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་རྣམས་པ་གཉིས་ནི་འདི་ན་བར་འགྱུར་བར་ཉེ་བར་བསྟན་ཏེ། དེ་གང་ཞེ་ན། ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པའི་ངོ་བོ་དང་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པའི་ངོ་བོ་འོ། །འདིས་ནི་སྤྱུ་གྲུ་ལྟ་བུ་གཅིག་གི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཡང་བྱེ་ན་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། དོན་དམ་པའི་ངོ་བོ་གཉིས་ཡོད་པར་སྟོན་ཀྱི་སྤྱུ་གྲུའི་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ཉིད་སོ་སྟེ་དང་འཕགས་པ་ལ་བལྟོས་ནས་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་སུ་བསྟན་པ་གཏན་མིན་འོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བྱས་ན་ངོ་བོ་མེད་པའི་ཆོས་མི་སྲིད་པས། གཞི་གྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་ན་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་ལས་མི་འདལ་ལ། ངོ་བོ་ཡོད་པ་ཁས་ལེན་ཀྱང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་ངོ་བོ་མེད་པ་མི་འགལ་ལོ།

For the first there are four sections: (1) Expressing that insofar as reality is divided into two, for each and every phenomenon there are two essences, (2) Pointing out another presentation of the two realities, (3) Explaining the category of “deceptive,” in reliance upon the world, and (4) Showing that the object of insistent belief towards which you are mistaken when you insist on believing in it, does not exist, even conventionally.

Here is the first. In this respect, all those Blessed, Transcendent, Victorious Ones who know perfectly the essence of each of the two realities, have shown carefully how for all, i.e., every, functioning thing – both inner things such as traces, movements of the mind, and so on, and outer things, such as a sprout and the like – one comes to grasp *the essence of each according to two aspects*. If you ask what these are, they are the essence of a reality that is deceptive and the essence of a reality that is ultimate.

(216) From this it teaches that with respect to the essence of a single thing, such as a sprout, one can divide it so there are two essences: one that it is deceptive, and one ultimate. But it is *not at all* the case that some single essence of a sprout is itself taught to have two realities, in the sense that one relies on [the perceptions of] ordinary beings, and one relies on āryas.

Put like this, since it is impossible for there to be an existing thing that does not have an essence, if a basis is established, then without transgressing the fact that an essence is either one or many, one accepts that it has an essence, but it is no contradiction that there is no essence established by nature.

།དེ་ལ་སྤྱ་གྲུ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དངོས་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་དོན་དམ་པ་ནི། ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་མཛོན་སྤྱ་དུ་མཐོང་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་བྱང་པར་
 ཀྱི་ཡུལ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བདག་གི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འདི་ནི་ངོ་བོ་གཉིས་བཤད་པའི་
 གཅིག་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་བྱང་པར་ཞེས་པ་ནི་འཕགས་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་གང་ཡིན་གྱིས་རྟོག་པ་མིན་པར་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་བྱང་པར་ཏེ་བྱེ་བྲག་
 པ་ཞིག་ལ་བྱེད་དེ། དེ་ཡང་རི་ལྟ་བུ་འཇུག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་རྟོག་པའོ། །ཡེ་ཤེས་དེས་རྟོག་པའམ་བྱུང་བར་བསྟན་པ་ནི་དེས་བྱུང་བྱུ་ཞི
 ག་བྱུང་ན་བདེན་བྱུང་བོ་ཞེས་འཛིན་པ་དགག་པའི་བྱིར། རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་འཕགས་པ
 འི་མཉམ་གཞག་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་གཞལ་ན། བདེན་བྱུང་བུ་འགྱུར་བས་དེ་ཤེས་བྱ་མ་ཡིན་པ་སྟོབ་དཔོན་འདིའི་ལྷགས་
 །སྤྱ་བ་ནི། ལྷགས་འདིས་མཉམ་གཞག་གིས་རྟོག་ཀྱང་བདེན་པར་མ་བྱུང་བར་བཤད་པའི་དོན་ཡེ་མ་རྟོགས་བཞིན་དུ་མཁས་པའི་ལུ
 གས་ཉམས་སུ་འབྱུག་པའོ།

The ultimate essence of a functioning thing such as a sprout is the objective field of a distinct type of primordial wisdom, the wisdom of all those who see the perfect meaning directly. Through this very objective field, one finds its own essence, but that is not established through any identity of its own. This is one of the two essences explained.

This “distinct type of primordial wisdom” means that this is not what is found by just any wisdom of an ārya. Rather, it is done with respect to a distinct type of primordial wisdom, that is, a specific instance of it. That, furthermore, is what is found by the primordial wisdom which encounters things as they are.

This is true because, if something is found, or shown to be established, by that primordial knowing, then if there springs a cause for something to be established, the wisdom in turn refutes the grasping that thinks, “It is established as real.”

Since [Candrakīrti] says, “that is not established through its own identity,” those who claim that the statement, ‘If one were to comprehend ultimate reality with the wisdom of an ārya’s meditative equipoise, then it would turn out to be established as real, so it cannot be a knowable thing,’ represents this master’s system, have completely failed to realize the meaning of the explanation given in this system, namely, that [ultimate reality] is *found* through the meditative equipoise, but it is not established as real. Thus they corrupt the system of the sage.

།དོན་དམ་ལས་གཞན་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ནི། སོ་སོ་སྤྱོ་བོ་མ་རིག་པའི་རབ་རིབ་ཀྱི་མིང་ཉོག་གིས་སྟོའི་མིག་མ་ལུས་པར་ཁེབས་པ་རྣ
 མས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱན་པ་མཐོང་བའི་སྟོབས་ལས་བདག་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཡོད་པ་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བྱིས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་མཐོང་བའི་ཡུལ་དུ་རང་གི་མཚན་
 ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བར་སྤང་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཡོད་པ་ནི་མིན་ཏེ་ངོ་བོ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཅིག་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་རྟོག་པ་
 ལ་རྟོག་མཁན་འཕགས་པར་གསུངས་པ་ནི་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་དགོངས་ཀྱིས། སོ་སོ་སྤྱོ་བོ་དབྱུ་མའི་ལྟ་བུ་རྒྱན་ལྷན་གྱིས་ཀྱང་མི་རྟོག་པ་
 ར་བཞེད་པ་མིན་ནོ། །ཀྱན་རྫོབ་རྟོག་པ་ལ་རྟོག་མཁན་སོ་སྤྱོ་རང་དགའ་བ་ལ་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་། ཀྱན་རྫོབ་པའི་མཚན་གཞི་ཕྱི་ནང་གི་དངོ
 ས་སོ་རྣམས་མ་རིག་པའི་གཞན་དབང་གིས་མཐོང་བའི་གཙོ་བོ་ལ་དགོངས་ཀྱི། འཕགས་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐ་སྙད་པའི་ཚད་མས་དངོས་སོ་དེ་
 རྣམས་མི་རྟོག་པར་བཞེད་པ་མིན་ནོ།

(217) What is something *other* than the ultimate, the deceptive essence, is the essence of something that is found to exist by force of the falsehood seen by all those individuals in whom the eye of the mind is entirely covered by the film of the cataracts of ignorance. As for the object that is seen by these children: Even as it appears to be established through characteristics of its own, it is not something that exists with its own essence. This is one

of the two essences.

Thus, in terms of discovering ultimate reality, the one who finds it is said to be an ārya. The intent is that this is the primary case, but it does not mean that an individual who possesses the Middle Way view within his or her mindstream does not find it.

In terms of finding deceptive reality, the one who finds it is said to be an ordinary individual. Here the intent is that the classical example of “deceptive” is *primarily all those outer and inner functioning things that are seen as a result of ignorance*. But this does not mean that the conventional valid perceptions in the mindstream of an ārya do not find all those working things.

། གུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པའི་མཚན་གཞི་བྱས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྙེད་པ་དབྱ་མའི་ལྟ་བུ་མ་རྙེད་པ་ལ་ཡང་ཡོད་མོད་ཀྱང་། གཞི་དེ་གུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་པར་ཆད་མས་རྙེད་པ་ལ་ནི། སྡོན་དུ་དབྱ་མའི་ལྟ་བུ་རྙེད་པ་ཅིག་ངེས་པར་དགོས་ཏེ། གཞི་དེ་གུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པར་བྱས་ན་བརྩན་པར་འགྱུར་དགོས་ཤིང་། བརྩན་པར་དངོས་སུ་འགྱུར་པ་ལ་གཞི་དེ་ལ་སྡོན་དུ་བདེན་བྱས་ཆད་མས་ཁེགས་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། ། དེས་ན་བརྩན་པ་མཐོང་བའི་སྟོབས་ལས་ཞེས་པ་ནི། གང་ཟག་རང་དགའ་བ་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བརྩན་པ་མཐོང་ཡང་དེ་དག་གིས་བརྩན་པར་འགྱུར་མི་དགོས་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན་སྤྱི་མའི་ལྟ་བུ་མོ་བས་སྤྱི་མའི་རྟ་གྲང་མཐོང་བ་ན་བརྩན་པ་མཐོང་ཡང་། སྤང་བ་དེ་བརྩན་པར་འགྱུར་མི་དགོས་པ་བཞིན་རོ། ། དེས་ན་གུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པར་འཛོག་བྱེད་བརྩན་པ་མཐོང་བས་རྙེད་པའི་དོན་ནི། ཤེས་བྱ་བརྩན་པ་སྤྱི་བའི་དོན་འཇལ་བ་འི་ཐ་སྙད་པའི་ཆད་མས་རྙེད་པའོ།

Now it is true that there are also those who find the classical examples of deceptive reality, such as a vase and so forth, but do not find the Middle Way view. Nevertheless, someone who discovers, with a valid perception, that such a basis *is* deceptive reality, must certainly be someone who has previously discovered the Middle Way view. For if one is to establish that basis as deceptive reality, one must establish it to be false, and in order to establish it directly as false, one must first have eliminated, with a valid perception, the possibility of its being established as real.

(218) Therefore, when it says it is “by force of the falsehood seen,” it means that all those ordinary people see falsehood, but it is not necessary for them to establish it *as* false. For example, it is like the fact that if the spectators at a magic show see illusory horses and cows, they “see falsehood,” but it is not necessary for them to establish that appearance as false.

Therefore, the meaning of that which posits deceptive reality, that which is found through seeing falsehood, is this: It is found by the conventional valid perception that encounters knowable things that are false – objects that deceive you.

། སྤང་བ་ཤད་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ནམ་ངོ་མོ་དེ་གཉིས་ལས་ཀྱང་། ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་མཐོང་བ་སྟེ་འཇལ་བའི་རིགས་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་རྙེད་པའི་ཡུལ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི། དེ་ཉིད་དེ་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་སྟེ། འདི་ནི་རབ་རིབ་མཐུ་ཡིས་ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་བཤད་པར་བྱའོ། ། ཤེས་བྱ་བརྩན་པ་མཐོང་བ་ཐ་སྙད་པའི་ཆད་མས་རྙེད་པ་ནི་གུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པར་སྟོན་པས་གསུངས་ཏེ། དོན་དམ་པ་དང་གུན་རྫོབ་རྙེད་པའི་གཞི་གཉིས་སོ་སོར་གསུངས་ཀྱི་གཅིག་ལ་རྙེད་ཚུལ་གཉིས་བྱུང་བ་མེན་རོ།

Of the two essences or natures that were explained before: Ultimate reality is that very thing which is the object discovered by the rational state of knowing that sees, or encounters, the perfect meaning. This will be explained at the point where it says, “by the

inner force of cataracts,” etc.

That which is found by a conventional perception that sees false knowable things, is indicated as deceptive reality. The two bases for finding what is ultimate and what is deceptive, respectively, are mentioned one by one. *So it is not as though two modes of discovery arise with respect to a single basis.*

* * *

། བྱེ་བའི་དོན་ལ་ཡང་མི་འདྲ་བ་དུ་མ་ཞིག་འདུག་ཀྱང་། འདིར་ནི་གཉིས་ཀ་ལ་ངོ་བོ་ཡོད་ལ། དེ་ལ་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གང་ཡང་མིན་
བ་མི་སྲིད་པའི་བྱེར་དང་། ཚུལ་ཅན་རྣམས་བདེན་སྟོང་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་ན་བདེན་གྲུབ་ཏུ་འགྱུར་པའི་བྱེར། ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ལ་ལྡོག་པ་ཐ་ད
ད་པ་བྱས་པ་དང་མི་རྟག་པ་ལྟ་བུ་སྟེ། བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་འབྲེལ་ལས། ཀུན་རྫོབ་ལས་ནི་ཐ་དད་པར། །དེ་ཉིད་དམིགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། །ཀུ
ན་རྫོབ་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་དུ་བཤད། །སྟོང་ཉིད་ཁོ་ན་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཡིན། མེད་ན་མི་འབྱུང་ངེས་པའི་བྱེར། །བྱས་དང་མི་རྟག་དག་བཞིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་
གསུངས་སོ། །ཀར་པ་དང་སོ་བཞིའི་དོན་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་པར་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ཏེ། ཀུན་རྫོབ་པ་རྣམས་བདེན་པས་
སྟོང་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱེར་དང་། བདེན་སྟོང་ཉིད་ཀྱང་གཞི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ལ་འཛིག་པའི་བྱེར་ཞེས་པའོ། །དེ་ནས་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་དང་
མེད་ན་མི་འབྱུང་བའི་འབྲེལ་པ་ངེས་ལ། དེ་ཡང་བདག་གཅིག་པའི་འབྲེལ་པ་ཡིན་པས་བྱས་མི་རྟག་བཞིན་དུ་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་པར་བསྟན་ནོ།
། །བྱེ་བ་སོ་སོའི་ངོས་འཛིན་ནི་སྒར་ཚད་མ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་རྟེན་པ་སོ་སོའི་མཚན་ཉིད་དུ་བཤད་པ་བཞིན་ནོ།

[Here is the second section: Pointing out another presentation of the two realities.]

. . . (219) As for the meaning of the division [into two realities], there are many different meanings, but here [in Śāntideva’s *Compendium of Trainings*, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*] both have an essence. Now in this regard, (1) since it is impossible for there to be neither one essence nor separate essences, and (2) since, for anything with properties, were it to have an essence separate from that of being empty of reality, it would turn out to be established as real, then, *for a single essence, there are two conceptual isolates*, like “being made” and “being changing” [for “sound” as the classical example of a subject of debate].

As [Ārya Nāgārjuna’s] *Commentary on the Wish for Enlightenment*³ says: “

You cannot focus on any suchness
that is different from what is deceptive;
the deceptive is explained to be empty.
Emptiness alone is what is deceptive;
because it is certain that if the one did not exist
the other could not arise.

It is like the pair of ‘being made’ and ‘being changing.’

The meaning of the first four lines is this: There is no suchness that could have an essence separate from that of what is deceptive, because (1) all deceptive things are empty of reality, and because (2) the lack of reality itself is posited upon the basis of what is deceptive.

(220) Then, both are like that, and it is definite that they have a relationship such that, if one did not exist, the other would not arise. Since this, moreover, is a relationship in

³ *Bodhicitta-vivaraṇa* (*byang chub sems kyi ‘grel pa*), Toh. 1800-1801, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, rgyud, vol. *ngi*.

which there is a single identity, *they are taught to have a single essence*, like “being made” and “being changing.” The recognition of each division is found by means of two valid perceptions, as [explained] before, according to the explanation of their respective definitions.

* * *

[གསུམ་པ་ནི། ཀུན་རྫོབ་ལ་ཡུལ་ཡུལ་ཅན་གཉིས་ལས་ཐོག་མར་འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས་ཡུལ་ཅན་ལ་ཡང་དག་པ་དང་ལོག་པ་གཉིས་སུ་སྟོན་པ་ནི། ཤེས་བྱ་ལ་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་སུ་བྱེ་བར་མ་ཟད་བརྒྱན་པ་མཐོང་པའི་ཡུལ་ཅན་ལ་ཡང་། ཡང་དག་པ་དང་ལོག་པ་གཉིས་སུ་འདོད་དེ། དབང་པོ་གསལ་བ་སྟེ་འཕྲལ་གྱི་འཁྲལ་རྒྱས་མ་བསྐྱད་པའི་དབང་པོ་དང་། དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་ཤེས་པ་དང་། དབང་པོ་སྟོན་ལྡན་ཏེ་འཕྲལ་གྱི་འཁྲལ་རྒྱས་མ་བསྐྱད་པའི་ཡུལ་ཅན་གཉིས་སོ། །དེ་ལ་སྟོན་དང་ལྡན་པའི་དབང་པོ་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ནི། དབང་པོ་ལགས་པར་གྱུར་པ་སྟེ་འཕྲལ་གྱི་འཁྲལ་རྒྱས་མ་བསྐྱད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས། ལོག་པའི་ཤེས་པར་འདོད་ཅིང་། སྤྲ་མ་ནི་ཡུལ་བྱིན་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པ་འཛིན་པར་འདོད་དོ། །ཁྱད་པར་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱང་དབྱ་མའི་ཕྱགས་མེན་གྱི་འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཡུལ་ཅན་ལ་བྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་མ་ལོག་གཉིས་སུ་བྱེ་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། ཡུལ་ཡང་ཡིན་པར་སྟོན་པ་ནི། འཕྲལ་གྱི་འཁྲལ་རྒྱུའི་གཞོད་པ་མེད་པར་དབང་པོ་དུག་གི་ཤེས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གཟུང་བར་བྱ་བའི་དོན་གང་ཞིག་འཛིག་རྟེན་གྱིས་རྟོགས་པ་དེ་ནི། འཛིག་རྟེན་ཉིད་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ལས་བདེན་པ་སྟེ་ཡང་དག་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། འཕགས་པ་ལ་བལྟོས་ནས་ཡུལ་དེ་དག་བདེན་པ་དང་ཡང་དག་པར་འཛིག་པ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འཕགས་པ་ཞེས་པ་དང་དབྱ་མའི་ཕྱགས་ཞེས་པ་ནི་འདིར་དོན་འབྲེལ།

. . . (223) Here is the third section: [Explaining the category of “deceptive,” in reliance upon the world.] In terms of what is deceptive, there is both the object and the subject state of mind. At the beginning, it is taught that when relying upon worldly consciousness, there is both a correct and wrong subject state of mind. As for this teaching, not only does it divide knowable things into two realities, but also with respect to the subject states of mind that see falsehood, it accepts that there are two: those that are correct and those that are wrong. “Clear faculties” are those sense faculties that are not contaminated by temporary causes for mistake, along with the states of consciousness that depend on them. “Flawed faculties” are those subject states of mind that are contaminated by temporary causes for mistake.

Now, as for those states of consciousness which are contaminated by flawed sense powers, they are asserted to be wrong states of consciousness in reliance upon those states which are *not* contaminated by temporary causes for mistake, i.e., “better faculties.” So it is asserted that these better faculties grasp objects in a way that is not totally wrong. This division into two, however, *is not the view of the Middle Way*, but relies instead upon states of consciousness that belong to the world.

(224) Just as we can divide subjects into those that are totally wrong and those that are not totally wrong, this is also taught with regard to objects. An object that is (a) something which is beheld by a consciousness associated with one of the six sense faculties that is not damaged by temporary causes for mistake, and (b) is something realized by someone of the world, is real only with respect to the world itself. Thus it is “correct.” However, when relying upon the āryas, such an object cannot be categorized as either “real” or “correct.” Here, “the āryas” and “the system of the Middle Way” have a similar meaning.

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།དེ་ལྟར་ན་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་ཞུགས་པའི་བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མ་རིག་པ་ལ་སོགས་པས་བསྐྱད་པའི་གཞོད་པ་ནི་འདིར་གཞོད་པའི་རྒྱུ་མི་གཟུང་གི། སྒར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་འཕྲུལ་གྱི་དབང་སོ་ལ་གཞོད་པའི་འཁྲུལ་རྒྱ་ནམས་གཟུང་ངོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བྱའི་གཞོད་པ་མེད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་རྒྱག་གིས་གཟུང་པའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པའི་དོན་དང་། དེ་ལས་བརྒྱུག་པའི་དོན་ལ་ཡང་དག་དང་ལོག་པར་འཛིན་པ་ནི་འཛིན་ཉེན་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ཁོ་ན་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་དག་རི་ལྟར་སྒྲུང་བ་ལྟར་གྱི་དོན་ཏུ་ཡོད་པ་ལ་འཛིན་ཉེན་པའི་ཤེས་པས་གཞོད་པ་མེད་པ་དང་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །འཕགས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས་ནི་ཡང་ལོག་གཉིས་སུ་མེད་དེ། རི་ལྟར་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་ལ་སོགས་སྒྲུང་བ་ལྟར་གྱི་དོན་ཏུ་མེད་པ་བཞིན་དུ། མ་རིག་པ་དང་ལྡན་པ་ནམས་ལ་སྔོན་སོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུབ་པར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡང་། སྒྲུང་བ་ལྟར་གྱི་དོན་ཏུ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཤེས་པ་དེ་གཉིས་ལ་འཁྲུལ་མ་འཁྲུལ་ཡང་དབྱེར་མེད་དོ།

. . . (225) In this way, the contaminating damage done by the ignorance of the two kinds of grasping to a self, and so on, into which one has fallen since time without beginning, is not held to be the cause of the damage referred to here. Rather, it is held to be all the causes for mistakes that damage the faculties temporarily, as explained before.

The deceptive objects beheld by the six types of consciousness that are not damaged in that way, and the objects held by what is opposed to that, are posited as correct and wrong, respectively. But this relies only upon consciousness within the world, because the existence of things that are in actuality the way they appear accords with whether or not the worldly consciousness is damaged.

When relying upon the āryas, there is no division into correct and wrong. This is because, just as a reflection and such appear, but are not that way in actuality, likewise, to anyone with ignorance, blue and the like appear to be established through characteristics of their own, but are not really as they appear. Therefore, with respect to those two states of consciousness [i.e. damaged or undamaged], there is no separation between mistaken and unmistaken.

།བདག་འཛིན་ལྟན་སྤྱིས་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བཟུང་པའི་དོན་ལྟ་བུ་ནི། གཞོད་པ་མེད་པའི་དབང་སོས་བཟུང་བ་ཞེས་པ་ཡིན་ལ། འཛིན་ཉེན་པའི་བསམ་པ་རང་དགའ་བ་ལ་བལྟོས་ནས་ཡང་དག་པའམ་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་ཐ་སྙད་ཏུ་ཡང་མེད་དོ།

. . . (226) As for the objects held by the two kinds of inborn self-grasping, these are said to be held by undamaged faculties. For in reliance upon the everyday thoughts of people in the world, it may be that such things are correct or true, *but in fact they do not exist, even conventionally*.

* * *

།དེ་ལྟར་ན་ཐ་སྙད་ཏུ་ཡོད་པ་ལ་ནི་ཆད་མས་བྱུབ་པ་ཞིག་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཞེན་ཡུལ་ནམས་ཐ་སྙད་ཏུ་ཡང་མེད་ཀྱང་སྒྲུང་ཡུལ་ལ་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་མི་བཞེད་དོ། །ད་ལྟ་གཟུགས་སྤྱོ་སོགས་ལྟ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུབ་པར་དབང་ཤེས་ལ་སྒྲུང་བ་ནི། མ་རིག་པས་བསྐྱད་པ་ཡིན་པས་ཤེས་པ་དེ་དང་། གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་དང་བྲག་ཆ་སོགས་སྒྲུང་པའི་དབང་ཤེས་ནམས་ལ། བྲ་རགས་ཙམ་མ་གཏོགས་པ་སྒྲུང་ཡུལ་ལ་ལ་འཁྲུལ་མ་འཁྲུལ་ལ་ཁྱད་པར་མེད་ཅིང་། སྔོ་སོགས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུབ་པ་དང་། གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་བྱད་བཞིན་ཏུ་ཡོད་པ་ནི་སྲིད་ཀྱང་། བྱད་བཞིན་ཏུ་མེད་པའི་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་ཡོད་པ་བཞིན་དུ། རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུབ་པ་མིན་ཀྱང་སྔོ་སོགས་ཡོད་དགོས་ལ། དེ་ཡང་གྱི་རོལ་གྱི་དོན་ཏུ་ཡོད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་ཡང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོ་མཆེད་ཏུ་བཞེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འོག་ནས་གཟུགས་བརྒྱ

ན་གྱིས་དེ་སྒྲུང་བའི་དབང་ཤེས་སྒྲིད་པར་ཡང་གསུངས་སོ། །ཚུལ་དེ་དག་ནི་མིག་ལ་ཏྲ་སྒྲུང་དུ་སྒྲུང་བའི་སྒྲུ་མ་དང་བྲག་ཆ་སོགས་ལ་ཡ
ང་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་སྟེ། ལྷགས་དམ་ས་འདི་ཡི་རྣམ་བཞག་སྒྲུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའོ། །

[Here is the fourth section: Showing that the object of insistent belief towards which you are mistaken when you insist on believing in it, does not exist, even conventionally.]

. . . (228) Thus, if something is to exist conventionally, it must be established by a valid perception. Now, all those objects of insistent belief do not exist *even conventionally*, but we do not assert the same thing regarding the appearing objects.

Right now, form, sound, and the rest of the five appear to each sense consciousness as though they were established through characteristics of their own. Since such consciousnesses are contaminated with ignorance, there is no difference between those and the sense consciousnesses to which a reflection, an echo and the like appear, in terms of mistaking or not mistaking the object that appears – apart from a matter of the relative subtlety or coarseness of the mistake. Although it is impossible for blue and the like to be established through characteristics of their own, and it is also impossible for a reflection to exist as a face, *a reflection in which there is no face does exist*.

In the same way, although they are not established through characteristics of their own, blue and the like must exist. Moreover, even as we want to assert that there are actual outer objects, we also want to say that a reflection belongs to the gateway of form. It will indeed be stated below that a reflected image gives rise to the sense consciousness of its appearance.

You should understand the illusion that appears to the eyes as a horse or a cow, as well as an echo and the rest, in the same way. This is a unique presentation of this sacred system.

* * *

གཉིས་པ་ནི། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ཐ་སྒྲུང་བའི་ཤེས་པས་མི་འཛོག་པ་དེའི་བྱིར། གཞན་སྒྲེ་འགོག་པ་ནི་འཇིག་རྟེན་པའི་ལྷ་བ་ཁོ་ན་ལ་ག
ནས་ནས་མི་བྱེད་ཀྱི། འཕགས་པའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་གཟིགས་པ་ཁས་སྒྲངས་ནས་དོན་དམ་པར་འགོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

. . . (229) Here is the second part [Specifying the meaning in this context].

Since the meaning of suchness is not established through a conventional state of consciousness, the refutation of birth from another is not something that rests within the viewpoint of those in the world alone. Rather, it is a refutation of something that could exist ultimately, based on accepting the idea of an ārya's vision of suchness.

དོན་དམ་པར་གཞན་སྒྲེ་བཀག་པ་ལ་འཇིག་རྟེན་པའི་ངོར་གཞན་སྒྲེ་བྱུང་ཏུ་ཚུགས་ཀྱང་མི་གཞོད་དོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་པ་རོལ་སོ་ནི་དམ་པ་མཁའ
ས་ས་དག་གིས་བཞད་གད་དུ་བྱ་བར་འོས་སོ།

. . . It may be so that while birth from another that is refuted ultimately, still, from the perspective of the world, birth from another is established. But this is no disproof [of our position]. Therefore, those opponents are worthy of the laughter that comes from these holy masters.

།གསུམ་པ་ལ་གཉིས། ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་བཤད་པ་དང་། དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་བཤད་པའོ། །དང་སོ་ལ་གསུམ། ཀུན་རྫོབ་པ་གང་
གི་ངོར་བདེན་པ་གང་གི་ངོར་མི་བདེན་པ་དང་། ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཅམ་དེ་གང་ཟག་གསུམ་ལ་སྒྲུང་བ་དང་མི་སྒྲུང་བའི་ཚུལ་དང་། མོ་སྒྲེ་དང་འཕ

གས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ཏེ་དོན་དམ་པ་དང་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་འགྱུར་ཚུལ་ལོ། །དང་པོ་ལ་གཉིས། དངོས་ཀྱི་དོན་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་གཞག་ཐུན་
མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་བཤད་པའོ།

For the third part [explaining the essence of each of the two realities], there are two sections: (1) The explanation of deceptive reality, and (2) The explanation of ultimate reality.

For the first there are three parts: (1) With respect to what is deceptive: For whom is it reality and for whom is it not real? (2) How what is “merely deceptive” appears and does not appear to the three types of persons. (3) How something becomes ultimate or deceptive in reliance upon ordinary individuals and āryas, respectively.

For the first there are two sections: (1) The actual meaning, and (2) An explanation of the unique presentation of mental afflictions.

།གཉི་མུག་རང་བཞིན་སྤྱི་བ་ཕྱིར་ཀུན་རྫོབ་སྟེ། །དེས་གང་བཅོས་མ་བདེན་པར་སྣང་དེ་ནི།
།ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་ཞེས་ཐུབ་པ་དེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། །བཅོས་མར་གྱུར་པའི་དངོས་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་འོ།། ༡༩།

[Since ignorance covers the nature, it deceives,
That, by it, contrived, appears as real
That is “deceptive reality,” so the Able One said;
Those things that turn out to be contrived exist “deceptively.” v.28⁴]

།དང་པོ་ནི། འདིས་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་དངོས་པོ་ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སྤྱི་བ་པ་སྟེ་མོངས་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ན་གཉི་མུ
ག་སྟེ། མ་རིག་ག་དངོས་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པར་སྟོན་འདོགས་པར་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ལུག
ས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་མཐོང་བ་ལ་སྤྱི་བ་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པོ། །འདི་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་ཞེས་པའི་བདེན་པ། ཀུན་རྫོབ་པ་གང
་གི་ངོར་འཛོག་པའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ངོས་འཛིན་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། ཀུན་རྫོབ་པ་སྤྱི་ངོས་འཛིན་པ་མིན་ནོ། །ངོས་འཛིན་དེ་ཡང་ལང་ཀར་གཤེགས་པ་
ལས། དངོས་རྣམས་སྟེ་བ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ། །དམ་པའི་དོན་དུ་རང་བཞིན་མེད། །རང་བཞིན་མེད་ལ་འཇུག་པ་གང་། །དེ་ནི་ཡང་དག་ཀུན་རྫོ
བ་འདོད། །ཅེས་དོན་དམ་པར་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ལ་རང་བཞིན་ཡོད་པར་འཇུག་པའི་སྟོན་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པ་ཡིན་པར་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་ནོ། །
ཀུན་རྫོབ་དེ་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་སྐད་དོད་སྤྱི་བ་བྱེད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པས་སྤྱི་བ་བྱེད་དོ།

(230) Here is the first. With this [Candrakīrti is saying that] since it places a veil over, or confuses, sentient beings with respect to their view of the nature in which things abide, this “delusion,” or ignorance, has the identity of that which places a veil over the sight of the nature of how things are; it pastes upon things whose essences do not exist by nature the concocted idea that they do exist by nature; thus it is “deceptive.”

The “reality” in this “deceptive reality” is identified as “deceptive” posited with respect to whoever is deceived, but the reality is not identified as “deceptive/totally concealing” in general. As for this identification, the *Journey to Lanka* states:

⁴ To offer an alternative translation:

Since ignorance covers the nature, it obscures
Whatever is contrived by it appears as real
That is “obscuring reality,” so the Able One said,
Those things that become contrived are obscuring.

See, however, Chapter Four, “Interlude on the Two Realities,” for my own critique of why I think “obscuring reality” is a problematic translation for *kun rdzob bden pa* across many contexts.

All things are born deceptively;
 in the ultimate sense, they have no nature.
 That which has no nature, towards which one is mistaken
 that we accept as deceptive [about the] correct.”⁵

The meaning of this statement is that ultimately, things have no nature, but the mind that mistakes them for having such a nature is deceived/totally concealed. As for “deceptive,” since it can also be taken as “that which veils” – which is an alternate translation for the original Sanskrit word rendered “deceptive” [i.e. *samvṛti*] – it is “what veils.”

།དེས་གང་ལ་སློབ་ན་ཡང་དག་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་འདོད་ཅེས་པས་ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་ལ་སློབ་པས་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་བས་སློབ་བྱེད་དུ་འདོད་ཅེས་པ་སྟེ།
 ཡང་ལོག་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས་ཡང་དག་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་བ་སྟོན་པ་མིན་ནོ། །ཀར་བ་དང་སོས་བསྟན་པའི་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་དང་། ཀར་བ་བྱི་མ་གཉིས་
 ཀྱིས་བསྟན་པའི་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་གཉིས་གཅིག་དུ་མི་བྱ་སྟེ། དང་སོ་ནི། རང་གིས་དངོས་སོ་རྣམས་སྟེ་བ་སོགས་སུ་གང་དུ་ཁས་ལེན་པའི་ཀྱང་
 ཚོལ་ཡིན་ལ། བྱི་མ་ནི་དངོས་སོ་རྣམས་གང་གི་དོར་བདེན་པའི་བདེན་འཛིན་གྱི་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །ཀྱང་ཚོལ་བདེན་འཛིན་དེའི་
 མཐུས་སྟོན་སོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་གང་ཞིག་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མེད་བཞིན་དུ་དེར་སྒྲུབ་བར་བཅོས་པའི་བཅོས་མ་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ལ་
 བདེན་པར་སྒྲུབ་བ་དེ་ནི། སྒྲུབ་བཤད་པའི་འཛིན་ཉེན་གྱི་བྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་གི་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་བ་དེའི་དོར་བདེན་པས་འཛིན་ཉེན་གྱི་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་གྱི་བ་
 དེན་པ་ཞེས་སྒྲུབ་པ་དེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། གསུངས་ཚུལ་ནི་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་མདོ་དེར་གསུངས་པའོ། །གང་ཟག་གསུམ་སོ་གང་གི་དོར་མི་བདེན་པའི་
 རྟོག་པས་བཅོས་པས་བཅོས་མར་གྱུར་པའི་དངོས་སོ་ནི་དེའི་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་པའི་དོར་མི་བདེན་པས་ཀྱང་ཚོལ་ཅམ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

As for “that” towards which one is veiled “by it,” “we accept as deceptive [about the] correct.” Thus, since it obscures the correct meaning, “we accept” it to be deceptive, or that which veils. This phrase does *not* indicate the “correct deceptive” among the two of “correct” and “wrong.”

The “deceptive” taught by the first line [of this verse quoted from the *Journey to Lanka*] and the “deceptive” taught by the last two lines are not the same. For the first is the “deceptive” we do assert about all functioning things, with respect to their birth, etc. The latter is the “deceptive” of grasping to things as being real, to a reality from the perspective of those things.

(231) By the inner force of that grasping to a reality in what it deceptive [*kun rdzob bden 'dzin*], what is, on the one hand, blue and the rest – even as it has no existence through characteristics of its own – appears as though it did. It is “contrived” in that it is contrived as having such an appearance, and appears as real to sentient beings. Since it is real for those of the world who are deceived by what is totally wrong, as explained before, it is said to be “the reality of what is the deception of the world.” This was spoken by the Able One; and the way in which it was spoken is what was spoken in that sūtra [i.e., the *Journey to Lanka*].

⁵ To offer another alternative translation, still with the caveats discussed in Chapter Four:

The “reality” in this “veiling reality” is identified as “veiling” posited with respect to whoever is veiled, but [the reality] is not identified as “veiled” in general. As for this identification, the *Journey to Lanka* states:

All things arise in a veiled way;
 in the ultimate sense, they have no nature.
 That which has no nature, towards which one is mistaken
 that we accept as veiling the correct.

As for those things that turn out to be contrived from the perspective of the three types of persons (insofar as those things are “fabricated” according to the conception of them as being *unreal*); since what is “deceptive” from the perspective of those persons is unreal, it is called “merely deceptive.”

ཁྱེན་འབྱུང་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་དང་བྲག་ཆ་སོགས་ཅུང་ཟད་ཅིག་ནི་བརྒྱན་ཡང་མ་དེག་པ་དང་ལྷན་པ་རྣམས་ལ་སྤང་ལ། སྤྱོད་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལེ་གཟུགས་དང་སེམས་དང་ཆོར་བ་སོགས་ཅུང་ཟད་ཅིག་ནི་བདེན་པར་སྤང་སྟེ། ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཡིན་ལུགས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་ནི་མ་དེག་པ་དང་ལྷན་པ་རྣམས་ལ་རྣམས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་མི་སྤང་ངོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་རང་བཞིན་དེ་དང་གང་ཞིག་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཏུ་ཡང་བརྒྱན་པ་ནི་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་བཤད་ན་ཅུང་ཟད་ཅིག་ཅེས་པ་ནི། ནག་ཆོའི་འགྱུར་ལས་འགའ་ཞིག་ཏུ་བསྐྱར་བ་ལྟ་རབ་དེའོ། །གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་སོགས་བརྒྱན་ཡང་སྤང་བ་ནི་བརྒྱན་པར་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ནི་བྱད་བཞིན་དུ་སྤང་བ་དང་དེས་སྤོང་བ་གཉིས་ཆོགས་པའི་བརྒྱན་པ་ཡིན་པས་དེའི་བདེན་སྤོང་ནི་བྱད་བཞིན་དུ་བདེན་པས་སྤོང་བ་ཡིན་གྱི། གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་བདེན་སྤོང་གི་དོན་མེད་དོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་བྱད་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྤོང་པར་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་། གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་འཛིན་པའི་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དོར་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་འགའ་བ་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ཡིན་པས་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

“That which is dependently arisen – such as a reflected image, an echo, and so forth – that small part appears to all those who have ignorance, even though it is false. Meanwhile, the small part that includes the form of the color blue and such, mind and feelings, etc., appears as real. But the nature” of the way all things exist “does not appear in any way at all to those who have ignorance. Therefore, neither that nature, nor what is deceptive and also false, is a reality of what is deceptive.”⁶

To explain the meaning of this passage, the phrase “small part” is, according to the translation of Nak-Tso, “in some cases,” which is more comfortable.

That a reflected image and such appear, even though they are false, means they appear *as* false. But in that case, the combination of (1) what appears as a face and (2) its being empty of that face, is false. Thus its being empty of reality is being empty of reality *as a face*. But there is no sense here of its being empty of a reality in which the reflected image exists through characteristics of its own.

(232) Therefore, one can establish the reflected image as being empty of a face, but this does not stand in the slightest contradiction to its being “real” from the perspective of the deceptive [state of mind] that holds a reflection to exist through characteristics of its own. Since it is that kind of functioning thing, it is a “reality of what is deceptive.”

ཁྲེས་ན་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་མིན་པར་གསུངས་པ་ནི། བརྟེན་པ་བྱང་བའི་འཛིན་ཉེན་གྱི་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དོར་བྱད་བཞིན་གྱི་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་ལྟ་བུ་དེ། བྱད་བཞིན་ཡིན་པ་དེ་བརྒྱན་པས་དེ་ལ་སྤོང་པའི་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་མིན་པ་ལ་དགོངས་གྱི། མཐོང་བ་བརྒྱན་པའི་ཀྱན་ཆོས་བདེན་པར་གསུངས། ཞེས་པས་བཤད་པའི་ཀྱན་ཆོས་བདེན་པར་མི་འཛོགས་པ་གཞན་པ་ཡིན། དེ་ལྟ་མ་ཡིན་པར་ཀྱན་ཆོས་ཏུ་བདེན་པར་མེད་ན་ཀྱན་ཆོས་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་པར་འགའ་ན། རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཡང་མེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་དང་། བདེན་གྲུབ་འགགས་པ་དང་བདེན་མེད་སྐྱབ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་བྱེད་པའི་རྣམ་གཞག་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་འགའ་བར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེའི་ཕྱི

⁶ See Candrakīrti's auto-commentary, *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, (*dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa*), sde dge, dbu ma, vol. 'a, Toh. 3862, 254b6-7.

ར་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་སོགས་འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་ཤེས་པ་རང་དགའ་བས་ཀྱང་འབྲུལ་བར་ཤེས་པའི་ཡུལ་རྣམས་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་མིན་གྱི་ཀྱ
ན་རྫོབ་ཙམ་སོ། །ཞེས་ཟེར་བ་ནི་བདེན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གངས་ངེས་དང་། འཛིག་རྟེན་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་པའི་བདེན་བརྒྱན་དང་། དབྱ་མ་བས་འཛིག་
པའི་བདེན་བརྒྱན་ལ་གོ་བ་མ་ཆགས་པའི་གཏམ་དུ་སྤང་རྒྱུ་ཡིན།

Now as for this saying that a reflection “is not a reality of what is deceptive”: From the perspective of what is deceptive in the world, for someone familiar with the idea, something like the reflected image of a face is a face, falsely so. Since it is falsely a face, it is not deceptive *reality* with respect to that falsehood. This is the intent of the statement, but how could one *not* still posit it as the deceptive reality explained in the line, “The deception that is false seeing is stated to be a reality”⁷?

Were that not to be the case, i.e., if there were *nothing* that was real in a deceptive way, it would stand in contradiction to being deceptive *reality*. If that were so, then (1) the statement that being established through characteristics of its own does not exist, even conventionally, (2) the refutation of things being established as real, and (3) the proof that things lack reality, would all turn out to contradict the entire presentation that things *do* work conventionally.

Therefore, the claim that, “All those objects of mistaken consciousness, even those that are mistaken according to ordinary consciousness in the world, such as reflections and so forth, are not deceptive reality, but rather ‘merely deceptive,’” appears to be a tale told by those who fail to understand (1) the definite enumeration of the two realities, (2) reality and falsehood that rely upon the world, and (3) the reality and falsehood posited by those of the Middle Way.

།རང་བཞིན་ནི་མ་རིག་པ་དང་ལྡན་པ་ལ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་མི་སྤང་རྒྱུ་འཛིག་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་། མ་རིག་པ་མ་སྤངས་པའི་འཕགས་པས་དེ་ཁོ་
ན་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པར་བཞེད་པས་ན། མ་རིག་པས་བསྐྱད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་དགོངས་ལ། འཕགས་པ་སློབ་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་ཡེ་
ཤེས་དང་། སོ་སྤྱེད་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བ་རྣམས། མ་རིག་པ་དང་དེའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱད་པ་ཡིན་པས་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་མི་སྤང་ཡང་།
སྤྱིར་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་སྤང་བར་འདོད་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་རེ་ཞིག་སྲིད་པའི་ཡན་ལག་གིས་བསྐྱུས་པས་ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་གྱི་མ་རིག་
པའི་དབང་གིས། ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་རྣམ་པར་གཞག་གོ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་ནི། ཆོས་རྣམས་བདེན་པར་འཛིན་པའི་མ་རིག་པ་གང་
ཟག་དང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་འཛིན་དུ་གྲགས་པ་ནི་ཡན་ལག་བརྒྱ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མ་རིག་པར་བཞེད་པས་ཤེས་སྤྱི་བ་ཏུ་མི་བཞེད་དོ། །མ་རིག་པ་
བདེན་འཛིན་དེའི་དབང་གིས་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་འཛིག་ཅེས་པ་ནི། བདེན་པ་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་པ་གང་གི་དོར་འཛིག་པའི་འཛིག་ཚུལ་སྟོན་པ་
ཡིན་གྱི། ཀྱན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱམ་སྤྱུ་སོགས་བདེན་འཛིན་དེས་འཛིག་ཅེས་པ་མིན་ཏེ། བདེན་འཛིན་དེས་བཞག་པ་ནི་རང་གི་
ས་མ་སྤྱད་དུ་ཡང་མི་སྲིད་པར་བཞེད་པའི་བྱིར་རྒྱུ། དེས་ན་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་ཞེས་པའི་བྱུར་གྱི་བདེན་པ་གང་གི་དོར་འཛིག་པའི་ཀྱ
ན་རྫོབ་དང་། བྱམ་སོགས་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་ཡོད་པར་འཛིག་པའི་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་རྣམས་མིང་མཚུངས་པས། དོན་ཡང་གཅིག་ཏུ་འབྲུལ་པ་མང་དུ་བྱ
ང་སྤང་བས་ལེགས་པར་བྱེད་པར་བྱའོ།

As for the statement that “the nature” “does not appear to anyone who has ignorance”:

(233) Since [Candrakīrti] wants this to include āryas who have not abandoned ignorance, but who do realize suchness directly, it must refer to a consciousness contaminated by

⁷ Or, according to the Dégé Tengyur edition of Candrakīrti’s auto-commentary (v. 6.23, 253a5): “False seeing is stated to be deceptive reality.” །མཛོང་བ་བརྒྱན་པ་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པར་གསུངས།

ignorance. The subsequent wisdom⁸ of āryas still in training, as well as the view of suchness belonging to ordinary individuals, is contaminated by ignorance and its tendencies. Thus [“the nature”] does not appear directly, but in general we must affirm that ultimately reality appears.

Where [Candrakīrti] states, ‘In this way, for the time being, deceptive reality is presented according to the ignorance that is a mental affliction, and which is subsumed by the links of cyclic existence,’ the ignorance that holds all things to be real is well-known as the grasping to a self of things and of persons. This is asserted to be the ignorance of the twelve links, but it is not asserted to be an obscuration towards [omniscient] knowing.

The statement that deceptive reality is posited according to the ignorance which grasps to things as real teaches a way to posit it that does so from the perspective of what is real for one who is deceived. But it is not saying that it is posited in terms of what *grasping-to-things-as-real* posits about the vase, the cloth, and so on, which are deceptive reality; because we have asserted that what is set forth by grasping-to-things-as-real is impossible, even conventionally.

Therefore, since the names are the same for that “deceptive” which is posited from the perspective of the extra word “reality” in the phrase “reality of what is deceptive,” and the “deceptive” that posits a vase and so on to exist “deceptively,” and since it appears that there are many case where the meaning is mistaken to be the identical, you must distinguish them very carefully.

འོ་ན་བྱུང་སོགས་འདི་ནམས་སངས་མ་རྒྱས་པའི་གང་ཟག་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་ངོར་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་ནམ། གང་ཟག་འགའ་ཞིག་གི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་ངོར་མི་བདེན་པ་ཡང་ཡོད་ཅེ་ན། ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པར་འཛོག་པའི་གཟུགས་སྤྱོ་སོགས་དེ་ཡང་། ཉན་རང་དང་བྱང་སེམས་ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་གྱི་མ་རིག་པ་སྤངས་པ། འདུ་བྱེད་གཟུགས་བརྟན་སོགས་དང་འདྲ་བར་གཟེགས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ནི། བཅོས་མའི་རང་བཞིན་ཡིན་གྱི་བདེན་པ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བདེན་པར་མཛོན་པར་རྫོམ་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་བཤད་ན། གང་གི་ངོར་མི་བདེན་པའི་གང་ཟག་ནི་གསུམ་སྟེ། ཉན་རང་དང་བྱང་སེམས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་ཉན་རང་དང་བྱང་སེམས་གང་ཡིན་ལ་མི་བྱེད་པས་བྱུང་བ་རྫོས་པ་ནི། འདུས་བྱས་ཐམས་ཅད་གཟུགས་བརྟན་བཞིན་དུ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟོང་ཡང་དེར་སྤང་བར་མཛོན་སུམ་དུ་ཉོགས་པ་ནི་བྱུང་བར་གཅིག་གོ། །དེ་ཙམ་ནི་བྱང་སེམས་ས་བདུན་པ་བ་མན་ཆད་དང་། ཉན་རང་འཕགས་པ་སྟོབ་པ་རྣམས་ལའང་ཡོད་པས་དེ་གཅད་པའི་བྱིར་དུ། གང་ཟག་གསུམ་པ་ལ་མ་རིག་པ་སྤངས་པ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་དག་པ་སའི་བྱང་སེམས་དང་། ཉན་རང་དག་བཅོས་པ་གཉིས་ལ་བྱ་སྟེ་དེ་གསུམ་གྱི་ངོར་མི་བདེན་པའོ།

Now suppose you ask: “Are all these things, such as a vase and so forth, real in the face of what is deceptive for all persons who have not yet reached enlightenment? Or are there yet some persons for whom the deceptive is not real?”

(234) Regarding the forms, sounds and so forth that are posited as deceptive reality: “Furthermore, for all those listeners, solitary buddhas, and bodhisattvas who have abandoned the ignorance that is a mental affliction, and who look upon karmic traces as being like reflections and such, these have a contrived nature, but they are not real, because there is no conceit that thinks they should be real.”

⁸ Tib. *rjes thob kyi ye shes*, Skt. *prṣṭhalabdha-jñāna*. That is, in this context, the period of conceptual understanding that follows a direct perception of emptiness.

To explain the meaning of this passage: There are three types of persons from whose perspective these things are not real – listeners, solitary buddhas, and bodhisattvas. Moreover, since [Candrakīrti] did not say *which* listeners, solitary buddhas, and bodhisattvas, we must articulate some distinctions.

One distinction is the fact that these persons realize directly that, even as all produced things are empty of any nature, like reflections, they appear as though they had some nature. Now even bodhisattvas up to and including the seventh level, as well as all āryas among the listeners and solitary buddhas, do realize just that. In order to exclude them, he says it is the three types of persons “who have abandoned ignorance.” So it refers to bodhisattvas on the pure levels, and arhats among the listeners and solitary buddhas. From the perspective of *those* three, these are not real.

།གང་ཞིག་མི་བདེན་པ་ནི་དེ་ཡང་ཞེས་པ་ཕྱི་ནང་གི་ཚོས་རྣམས་སོ། །མི་བདེན་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་བདེན་པར་སྒྲོམ་པ་སྟེ་བདེན་ཞེན་མེད་
པའི་ཕྱིར་ཏེ། བདེན་འཛིན་གྱི་མ་རིག་པ་བདེན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེས་ན་ཕྱི་ནང་གི་ཚོས་རྣམས་གང་ཟག་གསུམ་པོ་དེའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་འོར་བུ་
ན་པར་མ་གྲུབ་པར་སྐྱབ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་འགྲེལ་བས་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་འོར་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་མིན་པར་ཡི་མ་བསྐྱབས་པར་བདེན་པ་མི
ན་ཞེས་བསྐྱབས་པ་ལ། ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་མིན་པར་བསྐྱབས་པར་འཛིན་པ་ནི། ཏ་ཅང་ཡང་སྒྲོའི་འབྲུག་པ་ཅིངས་པས་སྒྲོབ་དཔོན་གྱི་ད
གོངས་པ་རང་གི་སྒྲོའི་འོ་མས་སྒྲགས་ནས་འཆད་པའི་ལུགས་དན་པའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་སྐྱབ་པ་ཡང་གང་ཟག་དེ་གསུམ་ལ་མིན་གྱི། དེ་གསུམ་
ཀྱི་འོར་བུ་བདེན་པ་མིན་པ་གང་ཟག་གཞན་བདག་ཅག་རྣམས་ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སྐྱབ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །གང་ཟག་དེ་གསུམ་མིན་པའི་འོག་མ་རྣམས་ལ་ནི་
ལྟན་སྟེས་ཀྱི་བདེན་འཛིན་ཡོད་པས། དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་གང་ཡིན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འོར་གང་ཡང་བདེན་པར་མ་གྲུབ་པར་སྐྱབ་པ་ལྟུང་
སོ།

On the one hand, what is “not real” – when [Candrakīrti] says “Furthermore, [. . .] these” – are all outer and inner phenomena. The reason they are not real, is because there is no conceit of them as being real, that is, no insistent belief that they are real. This is because the ignorance that grasps to things as real has been finished off. Therefore, the three types of persons are those who prove that in the face of what is deceptive about all outer and inner phenomena, they are not established as real.

Since this is the way in which [Candrakīrti] interprets it, as for those who have claimed to prove that, “Insofar as it is not deceptive reality from the perspective of all of those persons, it was never *in any way* established to be such, so it is not reality,” and then hold that they have proven it is not deceptive reality; this is an extremely crude way of engaging the mind with such things. Thus it is a lousy system expounded by polluting the true intent of the master with the putrid stains of one’s own mind.

(235) Now it is not established in this way for those three types of persons, but what is not real from the perspective of those three is still established for other persons, like the rest of us. All those who are not those three types of persons, and who are below them, still have the inborn grasping-to-things-as-real. Thus, in the face of all that is deceptive for us, we *cannot* prove that it does not exist as real in any way whatsoever.

།སྤར་བཤད་པ་དེ་ལྟ་མིན་པར་དེ་དག་གི་འོར་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་མིན་པ་བསྐྱབ་ན་ནི། མིན་ཏུ་མ་འགྲེལ་བའི་སྐྱབ་བྱེད་དུ་འགྱུར་ཏེ།
སྒྲོའི་འོར་གཞི་དེ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པར་འབྲུབ་པ་ལ་གཞི་དེ་བརྟན་པར་འབྲུབ་དགོས་པས་དེ་ལ་བདེན་ཞེན་མེད་པ་རྒྱ་མཚན་དུ་འགོད་
པ་ནི་བཤད་གང་གྱི་གནས་སོ། །སྒྲོའི་འོར་གཞི་དེ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པར་འབྲུབ་པ་ལ་གཞི་དེ་བརྟན་པར་འབྲུབ་དགོས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་

། ལུས་སོགས་ལ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་ཞེས་པའི་ཆོག་ཐུང་གི་བདེན་པ་འཛོགས་པ་ན་སྒོ་དང་དོན་གཉིས་ལས། དོན་ལ་བདེན་པར་མི་འཛོགས་པར། བདེན་འཛོགས་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་དུ་བདེན་པར་གཞག་དགོས་པར་མཐོང་བ་ན། བྱད་པར་དེ་མ་སྦྱར་ན་བདེན་པར་མི་འགྲུབ་ཅིང་བརྒྱན་པ་ཡིན་པར་མཐོང་དགོས་པའི་གནད་གིས་ཡིན་ནོ།

If it were not the way it was just explained, and if one could prove that from such a perspective [as ours] it was not a *reality* of what is deceptive, the reason given for the proof would turn out to be totally unrelated. For a basis to be established as deceptive reality from the perspective of that mind [like our own], that basis must be established as false. But then if you were to submit as a reason for this, that “there was no insistent belief that it was real,” this would be grounds for laughter.

The reason the basis must be established as false, in order for that basis to be established as deceptive reality from the perspective of that mind, is this: Suppose one posits the extra word “reality” in the phrase “deceptive reality,” with respect to a vase and so forth. Between the two of mind and object, (1) while not positing reality on the object, (2) if you saw that you must set forth [the state of mind of] grasping-to-things-as-real as being a *reality* with the very essence of being *deceptive*, then even if you did not add that explicit distinction, you would have to see that [the basis] was both (1) not established as real, and (2) that it was false.⁹ The reason derives from this crucial point.

* * *

. . . [Here is the second part from above: How what is “merely deceptive” appears and does not appear to the three types of persons.] . . .

། ཉོན་མོངས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ལ་བག་ཆགས་སུ་བཞག་པ་ཅིག་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་མེན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གཉིས་ལས་ཤེས་སྒྲིབ་ཏུ་འཛོགས་པ་ནི་བྱི་མ་སྟེ། ཉོན་མོངས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཟད་པས་བདེན་འཛོགས་མི་སྟེ་ཡང་། བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྟན་པས་སྦྱང་ཡུལ་ལ་འཁྱུང་བའི་སྒོ་སྟེང་བཞོ། །སངས་སྐུ་འཕགས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ནི་ཤེས་སྒྲིབ་ཀྱི་མ་དེག་པ་མ་སྦྱངས་པས། རྗེས་སྟོན་གྱི་སྦྱང་བཅས་ཀྱི་རྟོག་པ་དང་། མཉམ་གཞག་ཏུ་སྦྱང་མེད་དུ་འགྱུར་བའི་རེས་འཛོགས་ཡོད་ལ། སངས་སྐུ་འཕགས་ཀྱིས་ནི་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་པ་དང་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པའི་རྣམ་པ་མངོན་པར་ཉེ་མངོན་དུ་གྱུར་པར་རྫོགས་པར་ཉེ་མ་ལུས་པར། །བྱང་ཆུབ་པ་སྟེ་རྟོགས་པའི་བྱིར་སེམས་དང་སེམས་བྱུང་གི་རྣམ་རྟོག་གི་རྒྱ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་གཏན་འོག་པས། མཉམ་གཞག་དང་རྗེས་སྟོན་གྱི་སྦྱང་བའི་རྟོག་པ་ཡོད་མེད་རེས་འཛོགས་པ་མེད་དོ།

. . . (243) One kind [of tendency] is set forth as a tendency with respect to the seeds for mental afflictions, and the second kind consists of tendencies that are not seeds for the mental afflictions. It is the latter that are posited as obscurations towards omniscience. Since all the seeds of mental afflictions have been finished off, grasping-to-things-as-real cannot arise, but since one is still contaminated by its tendency, it gives birth to a mind which is mistaken towards appearing objective fields.

Since those āryas who are not Buddhas have not abandoned the ignorance which is an obscuration towards omniscience, there is an alternation between conceptual states of mind occurring in the aftermath,¹⁰ which include appearances, and the lack of

⁹ That is, insofar as it “fools” the state of mind perceiving it, to look *as though* it were established really.

¹⁰ Tib. *rjes thob*. See Appendix Five, note 8, above. The more complex phrasing here begs a different English translation.

appearances that takes place during meditative equipoise. But Buddhas are “manifestly” – that is, actually – “completely” – that is, without exception – “enlightened” – that is, realized – towards the ultimate and deceptive “aspects of all existing things.” Therefore, since they have “forever turned back” all the “fluctuations of conceptual states of mind and mental functions,” there is no alternation between a state of meditative equipoise and an aftermath in which there either do or do not exist the conceptualization of appearances.

།གཏན་ཞེས་པའི་ཆོག་གིས་འཕགས་པ་གཞན་ལ་མཉམ་གཞག་ཏུ་ལོག་པ་ནི་རེས་འགའ་བར་སྟོན་ལ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་མཉམ་ཇེས་རེས་འཛོག་པ་ཡོད་དོ། །དེས་ན་ཤེས་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་མ་རིག་པ་སྟོད་པའི་ཕྱིར། ཞེས་པ་ནི་སྤང་བ་ཡོད་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་མིན་གྱི། མཉམ་ཇེས་སུ་སྤང་བ་ཡོད་མེད་རེས་འཛོག་ཏུ་འབྱུང་བའི་སྤྱབ་བྱེད་དོ། །སེམས་དང་སེམས་བྱུང་གི་རྒྱ་བ་ནི་རྣམ་རྟོག་ལ་བཞེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཆོག་གསལ་ལས། རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་ནི་སེམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་བ་ཡིན་ན་དེ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དེ་ནི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ལོ། །རི་སྐད་དུ་མདོ་ལས། རོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་གང་ཞེ་ན། གང་ལ་སེམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་བ་ཡང་མེད་ན། ཡི་གེ་རྣམས་ལྟ་སྟོས་ཀྱང་ཅི་དགོས་ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། །ཞེས་བཤད་དོ།

The word “forever” indicates that for other āryas, what is turned back during meditative equipoise is temporary. Therefore, they have the alternation between meditative equipoise and aftermath. The idea expressed as ‘thus, because they act with the ignorance of the obscuration towards omniscience,’ is *not the reason why appearances exist*. Rather, it is the way to establish why the alternation arises between an equipoise and an aftermath in which appearances do or do not exist.

[Candrakīrti] wants to apply ‘fluctuations of mind and mental functions’ to conceptual states of mind. As he says in *Clear Words* [*Prasannapadā*]: “If conceptual thoughts are the fluctuations of mind, then, since it is free of those, suchness has no conceptual thoughts.”

As the [*Ākṣayamati-nirdeśa*] sūtra explains: “What is ultimate reality? If it is that in which there are absolutely no fluctuations of mind, then what need is there for words? So it is stated.”

།གསུམ་པ་ནི། དེ་ལ་སོ་སོའི་སྤྱོད་པོ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ཉིད་དེ། འཕགས་པ་སྤང་བ་དང་བཅས་པའི་སྟོད་ལུལ་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཙམ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་རང་བཞིན་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་པའོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་སྤྱི་མཐོང་དོན་ནི། སོ་སྤྱོད་པོ་དོན་དམ་པར་གྲུབ་པར་བརྒྱུད་པའི་བྱམ་སོགས་དེ་ཉིད། །སྤང་བཤད་པའི་འཕགས་པ་གསུམ་མཉམ་གཞག་ལས་ལངས་པ་འི་ཇེས་ཐོབ་སྤང་བ་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པར་བསྟན་པས། དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ངོར་བདེན་པ་ཙམ་གཅོད་ཀྱི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་པ་མི་གཅོད་ཅིང་། སོ་སྤྱོད་པོ་སོགས་ལ་དོན་དམ་དུ་གྲུབ་པར་འཛིན་པའི་ཞེན་ལུལ་འཕགས་པ་ལ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བར་སྟོན་པ་མིན་ཏེ་དེ་མི་སྤྱིད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

(244) Here is the third part: [How something becomes ultimate or deceptive in reliance upon ordinary individuals and āryas, respectively.]

“In this regard, the very thing that is ultimate for ordinary individuals, is the ‘merely deceptive’ of those āryas who take as their objective field that which has appearances. But whatever is its nature, emptiness; that is their ultimate.”

As for the meaning of the first part, it teaches that the “very thing” – the vase and so on

that is grasped by ordinary individuals as though it were established ultimately – is the ‘merely deceptive’ of those three types of āryas explained before, who have appearances during the aftermath, when they rise up from meditative equipoise. From their perspective, just the “reality” part is eliminated, but they do not eliminate the fact it is deceptive reality. But this does not teach that the object which ordinary individuals insist on believing in, the object of the grasping that thinks, with respect to a vase and so on, that they are established ultimately, turns out to exist deceptively for āryas; because it is impossible for *that* object to exist.

།གཞུང་ཕྱི་མའི་དོན་ནི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཆོས་ཉིད་འཕགས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་པར་སྟོན་པས་བྱམ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གཞི་གཅིག་ཉིད། སོ་སྤྱེ་ལ་སྟོས་ནས་ཀུན་རྫོབ་དང་། འཕགས་པ་ལ་སྟོས་ནས་དོན་དམ་མོ། །ཞེས་གཞུང་ལས་ཕྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་ཏུ་བརྒྱུ་གསུ་སྤྱོད་པ་ནི། སྟོ་གང་གི་ངོར་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པར་སོང་བ་དེའི་ངོར་བདེན་པ་ཞེགས་དགོས་པ་མ་ཤེས་པའི་གཏམ་མོ།

As for the meaning of the latter part of the quotation, it teaches that the very reality itself, the nature *of* what is deceptive – dependent relationship – is what is ultimate for all āryas. Thus that claim of those who get the scripture completely backwards, saying, “Just one single basis of a vase and so forth, and that itself, is for ordinary individuals deceptive, and for āryas, ultimate,” is a tale that comes from failing to understand that the ‘reality’ part was refuted from the perspective of those whose minds had come to experience it *as* deceptive reality.

།སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་པ་ནི་རང་བཞིན་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཞིང་། དེ་ཡང་སྤྱོད་པ་མེད་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ནི་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་སོ་སོ་རང་གིས་རིག་པར་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། །རང་བཞིན་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཞིང་ཞེས་པའི་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་ཅིངས་གཟུང་ཡིན་ལ། དེས་གང་གཙོད་པ་ནི་འཕགས་པ་གཞན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་ནི་མཉམ་གཞན་ཏུ་སྤང་མེད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་དང་། རྗེས་ཐོབ་ཏུ་སྤང་བཅས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་འཛོག་པ་ལྟ་བུའི་རེས་འཛོག་མིན་པར། དུས་ཉུག་ཏུ་རང་བཞིན་ལ་མཉམ་པར་བཞག་པའི་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཞེས་པའོ། །དེ་ཡང་ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱི་དོན་ནི་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པའི་བདེན་པ་དེ་བདེན་གྱུ་མ་ཡིན་པར་བསྟན་པར་བཞེད་ནས། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཞིགས་པའི་ངོར་སྤྱོད་པ་མེད་པར་གནས་པ་བདེན་པའི་དོན་དུ་བཤད་དོ།

“The ‘ultimate’ of all Buddhas is the nature itself, and moreover, because it is trustworthiness itself, it is ultimate reality. That is something of which each one of them is aware individually.”

(245) The word “itself” in the phrase “is the nature itself,” specifies something definitively. As for what it eliminates, this is saying that it is not something alternating – such as the ultimate reality of other āryas, in which one posits a nature without appearances during meditative equipoise and a nature that has appearances during the aftermath periods – but rather is at all times the very thing that is meditative equipoise upon the nature.

The meaning of the words “moreover,” and so on, is that we accept the teaching that the reality of ultimate reality is not established as real, but from the perspective of the holy gaze that sees suchness, *what remains trustworthy* is explained as the meaning of *reality*.

།གཉིས་པ་ལ་གཉིས། རྩ་བའི་ཆོག་དོན་བཤད་པ་དང་། དེ་ལ་རྩོད་པ་སྤང་བའོ། །དང་བོ་ནི། དེ་ནི་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་བསྟན་པར་འདོད་པས། དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་དེ་ནི་སྤྱོད་པ་མེད་ཏུ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། སྤྱོད་ཅིངས་སུ་འབྲང་བའི་ཤེས་པའི་ཡུལ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཕྱིར།

དངོས་སུ་བསྟན་པར་མི་རྒྱས་པས་ཉན་འདོད་པ་རྣམས་ལ་དེའི་རང་བཞིན་གསལ་བར་བྱ་བའི་བྱིར་དུ་སོ་སྟེ་རང་གིས་སྤྱོད་བའི་དཔེ་བ
འདད་པ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་ཤེས་བརྗེད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་མིན་པའི་དོན་ནི་དངོས་སུ་བསྟན་པར་མི་རྒྱས་པས་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ཏེ། དེ་ཡང་
ནག་ཆེད་འགྲུལ་ལས་མཛོན་སུམ་དུ་བསྟན་པར་མི་རྒྱས་ཞེས་འབྱུང་བཤོ།

For the second section [the explanation of ultimate reality], there are two parts: (1) Explaining the meaning of the root verse, and (2) Eliminating a rebuttal to it.

Here is the first. [Candrakīrti's auto-commentary] states that, since we wish to point out the reality that is ultimate, but since that ultimate reality is inexpressible in words, and for the very reason that it is not an object to be understood by following after those words, one cannot teach it in a direct way. Thus, in order to make its nature clear to those who wish to listen, I will explain an example according to the experience of ordinary individuals.

For the statement that “one cannot teach it in a direct way” this meaning that is not an object understood through expressions, it appears in Nak-Tso's translation that “one cannot teach it directly.”

།དེའི་དོན་ནི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་གཞན་ལས་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་བ་མིན་པར་གསུངས་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ཆོག་གསལ་ལས། ཇི་ལྟར་རབ་རིབ་ཅན་
དག་གིས་སྤྲུལ་པ་སོགས་པའི་ངོ་བོ་བྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་པ་མཐོང་བ་ན། རབ་རིབ་མེད་པས་བསྟན་དུ་བྱེད་ཀྱང་། རབ་རིབ་མེད་པ་ལྟར་སྤྲུལ་
དཔེ་སོགས་པ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་མ་མཐོང་བའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས། རྟོགས་པར་བྱ་བ་ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་པ་བཞིན་རྟོགས་པར་མི་རྒྱས་ཀྱི། ཞེས་རབ་རིབ་
ཅན་ལ་རབ་རིབ་མེད་པས་སྤྲུལ་པེད་དེ་ཞེས་བསྟན་ཀྱང་། རབ་རིབ་མེད་པས་མཐོང་བ་འདྲ་བའི་སྤྲུལ་པེད་པ་མི་རྟོགས་པར་གསུང
ས་པས། ཉན་པ་པོས་དེ་ལྟར་མ་རྟོགས་ཀྱང་སྤྲུལ་པེད་པ་མི་རྟོགས་པ་མིན་ནོ། །དེ་དཔེར་བྱས་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་བསྟན་པ་ནམ་རིག་པ
འི་རབ་རིབ་ཀྱི་བསྟན་པ་དང་བྲལ་བས་མཐོང་བ་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་མི་རྟོགས་ཀྱང་། སྤྱིར་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མི་རྟོགས་པ་མིན་པར་བཞེད་པས་ན། དོ
ན་དམ་བཤེན་པ་ནི་ཟབ་མའི་དོན་ཅན་གྱི་ངེས་དོན་གྱི་ལུང་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་སྟོན་པའི་དག་གིས་བརྗེད་མི་རྒྱས་པ་དང་། དེའི་རྗེས་སུ་འབྲང་
བའི་སྒྲོས་ཀྱང་རྟོགས་མི་རྒྱས་པ་མིན་ཏེ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ཤེས་བརྗེད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་མིན་པར་གསུངས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་ཡང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་
ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

This is what this means. On the saying that “the meaning of suchness is not something that can be known from another,” the commentary *Clear Words* says:

(246) “Insofar as those with cataracts see essences that are totally wrong – hair and such – it may be that those without cataracts have finished giving their teaching, but still, those with cataracts will not be able to realize the thing that is to be realized, in the way that it actually exists, in the way that those without cataracts do, i.e., by simply not seeing the essence of hair and such. Nevertheless . . .”

Because this passage states that, although those without cataracts might explain to those with cataracts that “There are no hairs,” the latter will not realize the lack of hairs in the same way that this fact is seen by those without cataracts; the listener will not realize it *like that*, but it is not that the lack of hairs is unrealizable.

In teaching suchness by furnishing this example, it shows that it cannot be realized in the way that it is seen by one who is free of the contamination of the cataracts of ignorance, but in general, it asserts that *suchness is not unrealizable*.

Therefore, it is not the case that ultimate reality cannot be expressed through the

scriptures of definitive meaning about the profound, or through the speech which teaches them, nor is it the case that one cannot realize ultimate reality through the state of mind which follows upon receiving these. You should understand all the sayings about “the meaning of suchness not being something which can be known or expressed” in the same way.

* * *

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། གལ་ཏེ་རབ་རིབ་མེད་པའི་མིག་གིས་སྒྲ་ཤད་དུ་སྒྲ་བ་ཙམ་ཡང་མ་མཐོང་བ་བཞིན་དུ། སངས་རྒྱུ་ཀྱིས་མ་རིག་པས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་སྒྲོ་ལ་སྒྲ་བའི་ཕུང་སོགས་ཀྱི་རྫོབ་པ་མ་གཟིགས་ན། དེ་རྣམས་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། ཡོད་ན་ནི་སངས་རྒྱུ་ཀྱིས་གཟིགས་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཕུང་སོགས་ཀྱི་རྫོབ་པ་རྣམས་མེད་ན་ནི་སངས་རྒྱུ་ཐོབ་པ་ཡང་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དང་པོར་སེམས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་གང་ཟག་ནི་མ་རིག་པས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཙན་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེ་ན།

. . . (247) Here is the second part: [Eliminating a rebuttal]. Suppose you say: “Just as someone with eyes that have no cataracts does not see even a mere appearance of something as a hair, if the Buddha does not see the deception of heaps and so forth that appear to a mind contaminated by ignorance, all those things would turn out not to exist; because if they did exist, they would have to be seen by the Buddha. But if all those deceptions such as the heaps and so forth do not exist, then it would turn out that there is no one to achieve Buddhahood; because the person who first gives birth to the wish, is someone contaminated by ignorance.”

སྒྲོ་ན་འདི་མེད་ཚུལ་བཤད་ན། སངས་རྒྱུ་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་ཤེས་བྱ་མཆོད་ཚུལ་ནི་གཉིས་ཏེ། དོན་དམ་བདན་པའི་ཤེས་བྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་མཆོད་ཚུལ་དང་། ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདན་པའི་ཤེས་བྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་མཆོད་ཚུལ་ལོ། །དེ་ལ་དང་པོ་ནི། ཕུང་སོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པའི་སྒྲ་བ་རྣམས་མ་གཟིགས་པའི་ཚུལ་ཀྱིས། དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མཆོད་པའོ། །གཉིས་པ་ནི། མི་སྒྲ་ཡང་ཉོགས་པའི་ཤུགས་ཉོགས་སངས་རྒྱུ་ལ་གཞག་དུ་མི་རུང་བའི་ཕྱིར། སྒྲ་ནས་མཆོད་དགོས་པས་རི་སྟེང་བ་མཆོད་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེའི་ངོར། ཡུལ་དང་ཡུལ་ཙན་གཉིས་སུ་སྒྲ་བའི་ཚུལ་ཀྱིས་མཆོད་པའོ།

(248) To explain how this problem does not exist, there are two ways in which the primordial wisdom of a Buddha knows knowable things: (1) the way of knowing all things to be known that is ultimate reality, and (2) the way of knowing all things to be known that is deceptive reality.

As for the first: By way of not seeing all deceptive appearances, such as the heaps and so forth, one knows the suchness of all these things.

As for the second: Since it would be inappropriate to posit that a Buddha realizes implicitly what does not appear, and since the Buddha must know through appearance, then from the perspective of the primordial wisdom that knows as many things as there are, it knows them in the manner of subject and object appearing as two.

།སངས་རྒྱུ་ཀྱི་རི་སྟེང་བ་མཆོད་པ་དེ་མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་ནས་ཕུང་སོགས་སྒྲ་བ་མིན་ཡང་། གང་ཟག་གཞན་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་མ་རིག་པས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལ་སྒྲ་བ་སངས་རྒྱུ་ལ་སྒྲ་བ་དགོས་ཏེ། སྒྲ་བ་དེ་མེད་པར་མི་རུང་ལ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་དེ་ཡོད་ན་ནི་སྟེང་བ་མཆོད་པས་དམིགས་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །རབ་རིབ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་མིག་ཤེས་ལ། རབ་རིབ་ཙན་ལ་སྒྲ་བའི་སྒྲ་ཤད་དུ་སྒྲ་བ་མེད་ཡང་། སྒྲ་བ་དེ་མེད་མི་དགོས་པས་སངས་རྒྱུ་དང་མི་འབྲུའོ། །གཉིས་སྒྲ་འབྲུལ་པའི་བག་ཆགས་མ་ཟད་ཀྱི་བར་དུ་རི་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། རི་སྟེང་བ་

མངོན་སུམ་དུ་འཇལ་བ་གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྒྲེ་མི་རུས་པས། མཉམ་རྗེས་རེས་འཛོག་ཏུ་འཇལ་དགོས་པས་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ག
 ཅིག་གི་སྒྲིང་ནས་དེ་གཉིས་འཇལ་བ་མི་འོང་ངོ་། །འབྲུལ་པའི་བག་ཆགས་མ་ལུས་པ་སྤངས་པ་ན། ཡེ་ཤེས་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་རེ་རེའི་སྒྲིང་དུ་
 ཡང་ཡེ་ཤེས་གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྒྲེ་བ་རྒྱུན་མི་ཆད་པས། རུས་གཅིག་ཏུ་ཤེས་བྱ་གཉིས་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་འཇལ་མི་འཇལ་གྱི་རེས་འཛོ
 ག་མི་དགོས་སོ། །དེས་ན། མཉམ་པའི་སྐད་ཅིག་གཅིག་གིས་ཀྱང་། །ཤེས་བྱའི་དགྲིལ་འཁོར་ཀྱན་ཐུབ་ཅན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་
 མི་འགལ་ལོ།

To that primordial wisdom which knows as many things as there are, the heaps and so forth do not appear due to contamination by the tendencies for ignorance. Nevertheless, what appears to the consciousness contaminated by ignorance which belongs to *other* persons, must appear to the Buddha; because it would be inappropriate for that appearance not to exist, and if that deception exists, it must be an object focused upon by the knowledge that knows as many things as there are.

To an eye consciousness free of cataracts, the appearance as a hair that appears to someone with cataracts does not exist, but since this does not in turn necessitate that the *appearance* does not exist, the case is dissimilar from that of a Buddha.¹¹

(249) Until the tendencies for mistaking appearances as dual are finished off, the two direct encounters – with things just as they are and with as many things as there are – cannot arise with the same essence. Thus, since one must encounter them by alternating between equipoise and aftermath, it will not come about that one meets them both upon a single instant of primordial knowing.

Once one has entirely abandoned, without exception, the tendencies for being mistaken, then upon each single instant of primordial wisdom, both types of primordial wisdom arise in an unbroken stream, with a single essence. Thus, it is not necessary to alternate between meeting or not meeting the two types of knowable things directly at one time.

Hence there is no contradiction with the statement,¹²

Within a single instant of knowledge

You have the all-pervasive maṇḍala of knowable things.

།ཡེ་ཤེས་གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ཡིན་ཀྱང་ཡུལ་གཉིས་ལ་ལྟོས་པའི་མཉམ་རྗེས་མི་འབྲེལ་གཉིས་འོང་བ་ལ་འགལ་བ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་པ་
 བློ། སངས་རྒྱུས་བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་ཉག་གཅིག་གི་བྱང་ཚུལ་སུ་འདུག་པ་ལ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མཉམ་རྗེས་གཅིག་སྤྱོད་སངས་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་མཉམ་
 རྗེས་དུ་བྱས་ནས། རི་སྒྲིང་པ་མཉམ་པ་སངས་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུད་ལ་མེད་པར་གདུལ་བྱའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱུས་ཞེས། སངས་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་རི་
 སྒྲིང་པ་མཉམ་པ་ལ་སྐྱར་བ་འདེབས་པ་དང་། ཁ་ཅིག་རི་ལྟ་བུ་མཉམ་པ་ཡང་སངས་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུད་ལ་མེད་ཅེས་ཡེ་ཤེས་གཉིས་ཀ
 ལ་སྐྱར་བ་འདེབས་པར་སྒྲུང་ངོ་། །འདིའི་ལྷག་མ་འགལ་ཞིག་འབྲས་བུའི་སྐྱབས་སུ་བཞག་པར་བྱའོ།

The two types of primordial wisdom have a single essence, but the two ways of knowing come to differ with respect to the two types of objects. The fact that there is in this not the slightest bit of contradiction, remains the distinguishing feature of the Blessed,

¹¹ That is, it is unique to the case of a Buddha's omniscience, that if something is not known, then it must not exist.

¹² According to the Sera Mey Library 2011 Edition (Vol. I, 288n32), this is from *Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhaṅgavṛtti (bden pa gnyis rnam par 'byed pa'i 'grel pa)*, Toh. 3882, dbu ma, vol. sa.

Transcendent, Victorious One, the Buddha alone.

So, having made the mode of a Buddha's knowledge solely into the way that suchness is known, and to say that the knowledge of as many things as there are does not exist in the holy mental stream of a Buddha, but rather is subsumed entirely by the mindstreams of disciples, is to disparage the Buddha's knowledge of as many things as there are. Then, for someone to say that even the knowledge of things just as they are does not exist in the mental stream of a Buddha, appears to disparage both kinds of primordial wisdom. I will explain a little more about this in the context of explaining the result.

ཁ་ལ་ཉེ་གཉིས་སྒྲུབ་ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱལ་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལྷ་བྱུང་རང་བཞིན་ནི་མཐོང་བ་མེད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནམ། དེས་ན་ཇི་ལྟར་སངས་རྒྱུས་དེ་དག་གིས་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་གཟིགས་ཤེས་ན། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་གཟིགས་ལོར་གཉིས་སྒྲུབ་རྒྱལ་བས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་མི་གཟིགས་པ་ནི་བདེན་མོད་ཀྱི། འོན་ཀྱང་མ་གཟིགས་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་དེ་དག་གིས་གཟིགས་སོ་ཞེས་བརྗོད་དོ། །འདི་ཚུད་པའི་ལན་དུ་འགྲོ་ཚུལ་ནི། ཇི་ལྟར་བ་མཐུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེས་ཕྱར་སོགས་ཀྱི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་གཟིགས་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། ཕྱར་སོགས་རྣམས་གཟིགས་ལོ་དེར་མ་གྲུབ་པ་དེ་དག་གི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། ཕྱར་སོགས་མ་གཟིགས་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་དེ་དག་གི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཟིགས་དགོས་པའི་བྱིར་ཉེ། རང་འགྲུལ་ལས། དེས་ཐོ་བྱས་པ་ཅན་ལ་མ་རེག་པར་རང་བཞིན་འབའ་ཞིག་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་མཐོང་བས། དེ་ཉིད་ཐུགས་སྒྲུབ་པའི་བྱིར་སངས་རྒྱུས་ཞེས་བརྗོད་དོ། །ཞེས་སངས་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་མཐུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་ཚོས་ཅན་ལ་མ་རེག་པར་ཚོས་ཉིད་འབའ་ཞིག་ཐུགས་སྒྲུབ་པར་གསུངས་ཉེ་ཕྱར་སོགས་མ་གཟིགས་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་དེ་དག་གི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཟིགས་པར་གསུངས་པ་དང་དོན་གཅིག་གོ། མཐོང་བ་མེད་པ་ནི་མཐོང་བ་དམ་པའི་ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་ཡང་། ཅི་ཡང་མི་མཐོང་བ་མཐོང་བར་མི་བཞེད་ཀྱི། །ཕྱར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་སྒྲོས་པ་མ་མཐོང་བ་ནི་སྒྲོས་བྲལ་མཐོང་བར་འཛོག་པས། མཐོང་མ་མཐོང་གཞི་གཅིག་ལ་བྱེད་པ་མིན་ནོ།

Suppose you say: “When all appearances of duality vanish, isn’t the nature of that kind of aspect ‘a lack of seeing’? So how do those Buddhas see ultimate reality?”

(250) Since, from the perspective of a Buddha dual appearances vanish, it may be true that a Buddha does not see in the manner of duality, but it is stated that they “see in the manner of not seeing.”

The way to answer the debate is this: [They “see in the manner of not seeing”] (1) because the primordial wisdom that knows things just as they are sees directly the suchness of the heaps and such, (2) because, from the perspective of that seeing, the heaps and so on are not established, so it is their suchness [that is seen], and (3) because a Buddha must see their suchness in the manner of not seeing heaps and the rest.

The auto-commentary states, “Not touching things that have any function, by making directly manifest the nature and that alone, and because they take suchness into their holy heart, they are called ‘Buddha.’”

The primordial wisdom of a Buddha which knows the ultimate, is said not to touch that which *has* properties, but to take into its holy heart the very nature of the thing and that alone. This has the same meaning as the statement that [Buddhas see] in the manner of not seeing the heaps and so on, by seeing their suchness.

The statement, “This lack of seeing is the sacred seeing,” is not intended to mean that one sees by not seeing anything at all. Rather, as explained before, not seeing elaboration is posited as *seeing* the freedom from elaboration. Thus the basis of what is seen and not

seen is not a single basis.¹³

།དེ་ལྟར་ཡང་སྤྱད་པ་ལས། གཞུགས་རྣམས་མི་མཐོང་ཚེ་བ་དག་ཀྱང་མི་མཐོང་ཞིང་། །འདུལ་ཤེས་མཐོང་བ་མེད་ལ་སེམས་པ་མི་མཐོང་ཞིང་། །གང་ལ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་དང་སེམས་ཡིད་མཐོང་མེད་པ། །འདི་ནི་ཆོས་མཐོང་ཡིན་ཞེས་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པས་བསྟན། །ནམ་མཁའ་མཐོང་ཞེས་སེམས་ཅན་ཆོག་ཏུ་རབ་བཟོད་པ། །ནམ་མཁའ་ཇི་ལྟར་མཐོང་སྟེ་དེས་འདི་བཞག་པར་གྱིས། །དེ་ལྟར་ཆོས་མཐོང་བ་ཡང་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པས་བསྟན། །མཐོང་བ་དཔེ་གཞན་གྱིས་ནི་བསྟན་པར་རྒྱས་མ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་མི་མཐོང་བ་བྱུང་པོ་ལྟ་དང་། མཐོང་བ་ནི་ཆོས་ཞེས་གསུངས་ལ། དེ་ནི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ཏེ། སྤྱི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་མཐོང་བ་དེས་ཆོས་མཐོང་ངོ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། །དེ་ཡང་དཔེར་ན་ནམ་མཁའ་ནི་ཐོགས་པའི་རིག་བྱ་བཅད་ཅམ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་མཐོང་ངམ་རྟོགས་པ་ནི་དགག་བྱ་སྤྱི་བ་ཐོགས་ཡོད་ན་དཔེགས་སྤྱི་བ་ལས་མ་མཐོང་བ་ལ་བྱེད་པ་དང་འབྲས་སྟེ། དེར་ཡང་མཐོང་བའི་ནམ་མཁའ་དང་མ་མཐོང་བ་ནི་སྤྱི་བ་ཐོགས་སོ། །དཔེ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་མཐོང་བ་མིན་པར་སྟོན་པོ་མཐོང་བ་བཞིན་དུ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མཐོང་བ་ནི་རྟེན་པ་ཐ་མས་བཀག་གོ།

In this way the *Summary [of the Exalted Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra]* states:

They do not see form, nor do they see feelings,
There is no seeing of discrimination, nor sight of mental movement,
No sight of consciousness in anyone, nor mind, nor thought.
'This is seeing things,' taught the One Gone Thus:
'Living beings express in words: "I see space."
Just as you see space, in that way should you investigate this:
In just that way do I see things,' taught the One Gone Thus.
'I cannot describe seeing with any other example than this.'

It says that what is not seen are the five heaps, but what is seen are things. That is the meaning of suchness, as it is said, "Whoever sees dependent origination, sees things in that way."

(251) Furthermore, for example, space is just the absence of tangible obstruction. To see or realize that: If there were some obstruction in the way – the thing to be eliminated – one would not see what was meant to be focused upon. So it is like that. In that case, there is the space you see, and there is what you don't see, namely, the obstruction in the way. According to that example, as for the kind of seeing that it is not, the last line of the verse refutes the idea that seeing suchness could be like seeing blue.

* * *

. . . [From the second part of an even earlier division: Rejecting the disproof that even according to the conventions of the world there is no birth from another.] . . .

།དེ་ལྟར་འཛིན་རྟེན་གྱི་ཐ་སྟོན་ལ་གཞན་སྟེ་མེད་ཀྱང་། གཞན་སྟེ་ཡོད་པ་འཛིན་རྟེན་གྱི་མཐོང་བས་འགོག་རྒྱས་པ་མིན་ཏེ། རྒྱ་འབྲས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ངོ་ཐོ་ཐ་དང་པ་འགོག་པ་ནི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་དཔྱད་པའི་རིགས་པ་ལ་ངེས་པར་སྟོན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་བྱུང་མཐའ་སྟོན་པ་གཞན་གྱིས་གཞན་སྟེ་ཁས་སྤངས་པའི་དོན་ནི། རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་གྱིས་བྱུང་པའི་གཞན་སྟེ་ཡིན་གྱི། ངོ་ཐོ་གཞན་དུ་བྱུང་པ་ཅམ་མ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཅམ་འཛིན་རྟེན་གྱི་ངོར་མ་བྱུང་པ་ཡང་མིན་ནོ།

. . . (257) So even according to the conventions of the world, there is no birth from another, but since the fact of things coming from other things is something that people in

¹³ That is, the basis of what is seen is suchness, whereas the basis of what is not seen is elaboration.

the world do see, they cannot refute it; because the refutation of a cause and effect that could have essences which were different from one another through a nature of their own is something that must definitely rely upon the reasoning that examines suchness.

Therefore, when the other philosophical schools accept birth from another, the meaning is as follows: This is a birth from another *that would be established through characteristics of its own*, but not merely a birth from another where something would be established with another essence. For it is also not the case that from the perspective of the world, just this is not established.¹⁴

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ཞེས་མ་རིག་པས་འདུ་བྱེད་སྐྱེད་པ་སོགས་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་ཡིན་གྱི་དོན་དམ་པར་མ་ཡིན་པར་གསུངས་སོ། །ཅི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་ནམ་པར་གཞག་པ་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་ནམ་ཞེས་པའི་ལན་དུ། རྒྱུན་ཉིད་འདི་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བྱུང་པར་ཁས་ལེན་གྱི། ཕྱོགས་བཞི་ཁས་སྐྱོང་ས་པའི་སློན་ནས་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཞེས་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་རྒྱུན་འདི་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་འདི་འབྱུང་གི་སྐྱེ་བ་ཁས་ལེན་པ་ལ་ཡང་། ཕྱོགས་བཞིའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ཁས་མི་ལེན་པ་གསལ་བར་གསུངས་པས། ལྷགས་འདི་ལ་གཞན་སྐྱེ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་མི་འགོག་ཅེས་པ་ནི། ལྷགས་འདི་ལེགས་པར་མ་རྟོགས་པའི་བཤད་པའོ།

. . . (258) By saying that ignorance creates traces, and so on, this [passage from *Clear Words*] clearly states that it occurs deceptively, but not ultimately. “In answer to the question, ‘How is it to be expressed in the presentation of what is deceptive?’: We accept that it is established deceptively, merely from this very condition, but this is not an assertion by means of the four options.” *This clearly states that although we accept the kind of birth in which this arises in dependence upon that condition, deceptively, we do not accept a birth through any of the four options.*¹⁵ Thus the explanation that, “In this system birth from another is not refuted deceptively,” is one that does not properly realize the meaning of this system.

* * *

ཁ་ཞི་པ་ལ་གཉིས། རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་པ་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་པ་དགག་པ་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་བཀག་པ་ལ་ཚུད་པ་སྤང་པའོ། །དང་མོ་ལ་གསུམ། འཕགས་པའི་མཉམ་གཞག་དངོས་པོའི་འཛིག་རྒྱུར་ཐལ་བས་དགག། ཐ་སྙད་བདེན་པ་རིགས་པས་དབྱེད་བཞེད་དུ་ཐལ་བས་དགག། དོན་དམ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་མི་ཁྲིགས་པར་ཐལ་བས་དགག་པའོ།

. . . (261) For the fourth part [of yet an earlier division: Showing that birth/growing through a nature of its own never had any existence at all], there are two sections: (1) Refuting the assertion that anything could be established through characteristics of its own, and (2) Eliminating a rebuttal to the refutation.

For the first there are three parts: (1) Refuting [existence through inherent characteristics] insofar as it would lead to the consequence that the meditative equipoise of an ārya would become a cause for the destruction of functioning things, (2) Refuting existence through

¹⁴ That is, because in the world, conventionally, things do come from causes that have a different essence from their effects. In earlier sections, Tsongkhapa has acknowledged many times that there is no problem with this kind of conventional, or merely designated, “birth from another.”

¹⁵ That is, a *real* birth from oneself, birth from something other, birth from both, or birth from neither, where the cause, the effect, and the growing itself are all being thought of as being established through inherent characteristics.

inherent characteristics insofar as it would lead to the consequence that conventional realities¹⁶ would be able to withstand analysis through reasoning, and (3) Refuting existence through inherent characteristics insofar as it would lead to the consequence that growing ultimately would not be refuted.

།དང་པོ་ནི། རི་ལྷ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཆོས་འགའ་ཡང་སྐྱེ་བ་མེད་དོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་འདི་ནི་གདོན་མི་ཐ་བར་ཁས་སྐྱོང་བར་བྱ་དགོས་སོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྷ་རྟོན་འདི་དེས་པར་ཁས་སྐྱོང་དགོས་ཞེས་སྒྲ་བར་རིགས་ཀྱི། འདི་ལ་ཁས་ལེན་གཞག་ཏུ་མི་རུང་ངོ་ཞེས་བསྒྲིག་སྟེ་སྒྲ་བར་མི་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལྷ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་གལ་ཏེ་གཟུགས་དང་ཆོར་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་དེ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བའི་རང་བཞིན། རྒྱ་དང་རྒྱུན་ལ་བརྟན་ནས་སྐྱེ་བར་འགྱུར་ན་ནི། རྣམ་འབྱོར་པས་ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བས་སྟོང་པར་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པའི་ཆོ། དངོས་པོའི་རང་བཞིན་དེ་ལ་སྐྱར་བ་བཏབ་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། མཉམ་གཞག་གིས་གཟུགས་སོགས་རྣམས་མ་དམིགས་བ་དགོས་ལ། དེ་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་ན་མཉམ་གཞག་གིས་དམིགས་དགོས་པ་ལས་མ་དམིགས་པའི་ཕྱིར། དེའི་ཆོ་དངོས་པོ་དེ་རྣམས་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་མེད་ན་ནི་དངོས་པོ་དེ་རྣམས་མཉམ་གཞག་གི་སྤར་ཡོད་པ་ཕྱིས་མེད་པའི་འཇིག་པ་སྟེ་ཞིག་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་ལྷ་རྟོན་པ་ལ་མཉམ་གཞག་ཉིད་རྒྱུར་འགྲོ་དགོས་པས། ཐོ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱམ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་འཇིག་རྒྱ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་མཐོང་བ་ཡང་དངོས་པོའི་རང་བཞིན་འཇིག་པ་དང་དེ་ལ་སྐྱར་བའི་རྒྱུར་འགྱུར་བ་ཞིག་ན། དེ་ནི་རིགས་པ་ཡང་མིན་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་ནི་ཡོད་པ་མིན་པས། དུས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཆོ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྐྱེ་བ་ཁས་སྐྱོང་བར་མི་བྱའོ།

Here is the first. As [Candrakīrti] says, “You must without doubt accept the statement that ‘anything that had a nature of its own could never be born.’” To claim that one must definitely accept this meaning is reasonable, but do not claim its opposite, i.e., “With respect to this it is inappropriate to assert anything at all.” For it is not like that.

Suppose those natures that were established by an essence of their very own – through their own characteristics of form, feelings, and the rest – were to grow in dependence upon causes and conditions. Then at the very moment when a yogi directly realizes that all things are empty of being established by nature, he would have to realize emptiness in a manner of discounting the natures of those functioning things.

Now the state of meditative equipoise should not be able to focus on form and the rest, but if those were established through characteristics of their own, then the meditative equipoise would *have* to be able to focus on them. But since they are in fact imperceptible, then at that very moment all those functioning things would go into non-existence. But if they did not exist, then it would be the case that all those functioning things had existed prior to the meditative equipoise, but then ceased to exist later; that is, they would have been annihilated.

(262) Therefore, since the meditative equipoise itself would have to be the cause of that kind of destruction, then just as a hammer and such is the cause for the destruction of a vase and the like, the seeing of emptiness would turn into the cause that destroys the nature of functioning things, and which discounts them. But this would not make sense; therefore, the establishment of functioning things through characteristics of their own

¹⁶ Note that this is one place where Tsongkhapa actually *does* use that term “conventional reality” (*tha snyad bden pa*), and it should be evident from the associated section below that the terms cannot be confused, or the point of the argument would disappear.

does not exist. So do not, at any time or under any circumstances, accept the idea of growing by nature.

འདི་ལ་དབུ་མ་པ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ཁས་ལེན་པ་རྣམས། རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་བདེན་གྲུབ་ཏུ་མི་འགྲོ་བར་འདོད་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་གྱིས། གཞུགས་སོགས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་ན་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་གཞིགས་པས་དམིགས་མི་དགོས་སོ། །ཞེས་སྒྲུ་མོད་ཀྱང་། དེ་ཙམ་ནས་བདེན་གྲུབ་ཡིན་པར་སྒྲུ་ཡང་བཤད་ཅིང་། སྒྲུ་ཡང་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་རིགས་པས་ཉེས་བ་སྤོང་མི་རུས་སོ། །

On this point, all those of the Middle Way who accept the idea of growing through inherent characteristics might try to claim that, “If form and the rest are established through characteristics of their own, that doesn’t mean they have to be perceptible to the direct vision of suchness,” by giving the reason that, “They are established through characteristics of their own, but that doesn’t mean they are established as real.” Nevertheless, it was explained before that with that alone they would *have* to be established as real, and I cannot eliminate their fault by explaining the reasons all over again.

།འདིར་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། དཀོན་བཅེགས་ལས་འོད་སྤངས་གཞན་ཡང་དབུ་མའི་ལམ་ཆོས་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་དག་པར་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ནི། གང་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་གྱིས་ཆོས་རྣམས་སྟོང་བར་མི་བྱེད་དེ། ཆོས་རྣམས་ཉིད་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་དང་། ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་། མཚན་མེད་དང་སྟོན་མེད་དང་མངོན་པར་འདུ་བ་མེད་པ་དང་། མ་སྐྱེས་པ་དང་མ་བྱུང་བ་ལ་ཡང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གསུངས་པ་བྲངས་ཏེ། ཆོས་རྣམས་ལ་རང་མཚན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཡོད་ན། ཆོས་དེ་རྣམས་རང་ངོས་ནས་སྟོང་བར་མ་སོང་བས་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཉིད་སྟོང་པ་དང་ཞེས་པ་མི་འཐད་ལ། རང་ངོས་ནས་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མ་བཀག་པར། གཞན་ཞིག་གིས་སྟོང་པའི་སྟོན་སྟོང་བར་བསྟན་དགོས་པས། སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་གྱིས་ཆོས་རྣམས་སྟོང་བར་མི་བྱེད་ཅེས་པ་དང་འགལ་བས་དབུ་མའི་ལམ་གྱིས་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་ལ་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ན། ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་ངོས་ནས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་སྟོང་བར་སྟོན་པ་ཡིན་པར་བསྟན་ནོ། །མདོ་འདིས་ནི་རྣམ་རིག་པས་གཞན་དབང་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་མི་སྟོང་བ་དང་། དེ་གཞུང་འཛོན་ཇས་ཐ་དད་པ་མེད་པས་སྟོང་ཞེས་པ་ཡང་བཀག་ལ། བརྒྱ་བ་ལས། སྟོང་མིན་སྟོང་ལྷན་མཐོང་མིན་ཏེ། །སྤང་འདས་བདག་གིར་གྱུར་ཅིག་ཅེས། ལོག་ལྷས་སྤང་ནི་འདའ་བར། །དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་རྣམས་གྱིས་གསུངས། །ཞེས་དང་། ཅུ་ཤེ་ལས་ཀྱང་། སྟོང་ཉིད་ལྟ་བུ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི། །དེས་པར་འབྲིན་པར་རྒྱལ་བས་གསུངས། །གང་དག་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་ལྟ་བུ། །དེ་དག་བསྐྱབ་ཏུ་མེད་པར་གསུངས། །ཞེས་པས་ཀྱང་སྤྱི་མདོའི་དོན་དེ་ཉིད་འཆད་དོ། །

Here the commentary quotes the *Ratnakūṭa*: “Moreover, Kāśyapa, as for the middle path, which perfectly examines all things individually, it does not *make* all things empty with some kind of emptiness. All things themselves are emptiness, and . . .”

(263) [Candrakīrti] further quotes the same pattern with the lack of signs, the lack of aspirations, the lack of anything to make manifest, the fact of not being born, and of not arising. If things had natures that were established through characteristics of their own, those things would not be empty from their own side, and so it would not make sense to say that “All things themselves are empty, and . . .”

So, without refuting the possibility of something existing through its very own essence, from its own side, one would have to teach that things are empty by way of their being empty *of something else*. But that would then contradict the statement that “it does not *make* all things empty with emptiness.” So it indicates that if with the middle path one analyzed individually the nature of all things, this would show them to be empty of being

established through any nature *from their own side*.

This sūtra also refutes the Awareness-Only position that “dependent things are not empty of being established through characteristics of their own, while they are empty insofar as beholder and beheld are not of separate substance.” As the *Four Hundred Verses* states:

One does not see something
that is not empty to have emptiness:
One who says, ‘I will go beyond grief,’
because of wrong view,
will never go beyond grief.
This has been stated by all Those Gone Thus.

The *Root Verses on Wisdom* states:

All views of emptiness
must certainly be ripped out,
say the Victorious Ones.
Whatever is a view of emptiness,
it is said has nothing to prove.

These explain the meaning of that very sūtra quoted previously.

ཁོས་རྣམས་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་སྤྲོད་ཞེས་པའི་བསམ་དོན་ཡང་དེ་ཉིད་ཡིན་གྱི། བྱམ་པ་བྱམ་པས་མི་སྤྲོད་བར་བདེན་པས་སྤྲོད་པ་ནི། གཞན་སྤྲོད་ཡིན་པས་བྱམ་པ་བྱམ་པས་སྤྲོད་པ་ནི་རང་སྤྲོད་ཡིན་ཅོ་ཞེས་སྤྲོད་པ་ནི་གཏན་ནས་མི་རིགས་ཏེ། བྱམ་པ་བྱམ་པས་སྤྲོད་ན་བྱམ་པ་ལ་བྱམ་པ་མེད་དགོས་ན། རང་ལ་རང་མེད་ན་གཞན་སྤྲོད་པ་ཡང་མེད་པས་བྱམ་པ་གཏན་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།
ཤེད་ཆེ་དངོས་པོ་གཞན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་དེ་དང་འབྲེལ་བས།
དེ་ལྟར་སྤྲོད་པ་ཡང་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། འདིས་སྤྲོད་པ་དང་འདིས་མི་སྤྲོད་ཞེས་པའི་རྣམ་གཞག་གང་ཡང་མི་སྤྲོད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །
དེ་འབྲེལ་བའི་སྤྲོད་པ་དེ་ཁ་ཅིག་ཡང་དག་ཏུ་སྤྲོད་པ། གཞན་དག་ཆད་སྤྲོད་དུ་འདོད་པ་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡང་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་རྟག་ཆད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་དང་བྲལ་བར་བྱུང་བ་བྱུང་སྤྲོད་ཀྱིས་ལན་ཅིག་མ་ཡིན་པར་བསྐྱབས་པ་ལས་བྱེ་རོལ་ཏུ་གྱུར་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཁྱད་པར་དུ་ཀྱན་རྩེ་བ་བདེན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཁོ་རང་ཁོ་རང་གིས་སྤྲོད་པར་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་དགོས་ཟེར་ནས། དེ་ཆད་སྤྲོད་དུ་འདོད་པ་ནི་མི་རིགས་པ་ཁོ་ན་སྟེ། བྱམ་པ་མཐའ་བཞི་སོ་སྤྲོད་པ་ཡང་ཆད་སྤྲོད་པ་ཡིན་པར་ཤེས་ནས། དེ་རང་གི་རྒྱུད་ལ་སྤྲོད་པར་བྱེད་པ་སྤྲོད་པ་ཡང་མེད་པའི་བྱེད་རོ།

If you wish to say that “All things are empty of their own essence,” then this is the same as above. But it makes no sense at all to claim that, “For a vase to be empty of being real, while not being empty of a vase, is what it means to be ‘empty of other’; so, for a vase to be empty of a vase is what it means to be ‘empty of itself.’”¹⁷

(264) If a vase were empty of a vase, and if that meant there could be no vase where the vase is, and if where I am there is no me, then who else is there? No one. It would follow that there is absolutely no vase at all. At that point, since all other functioning things would be the same, the person making the claim would also cease to exist, and then this very presentation, which states that things are empty of this and not empty of that, would also become entirely impossible.

¹⁷ This argument constitutes one of Tsongkhapa’s many refutations of the view known as “emptiness of other” (*gzhan stong*). See the further argument translated in Appendix Seven, as well as Cyrus Stearns, 2010, and Jeffrey Hopkins, 1999, 2002, 2005, and 2007.

Those perfect exponents of such an emptiness, then, as well as those others who would like to say that emptiness is a total cutting off, go completely outside the fold of what was proven by the Victorious Ones and their Sons, on not only one occasion, namely, that what arises in dependence and relationship is utterly free from the extremes of being either unchanging or cut off. In particular, it is simply illogical (a) to claim that it is necessary to set forth all deceptive reality in terms of “that thing being empty of itself” and then (b) to assert that this is an emptiness in which everything is cut off. Because, who amidst the four philosophical schools, once understanding a view to be one in which everything is cut off, acted to produce that view in his own mindstream? No one.

།དེས་ན་དགག་གཞི་དེ་དགག་བྱའི་ངོ་མོར་མེད་པ་དང་། གཞི་དེ་དགག་བྱས་སྟོང་ཚུལ་ཡང་ཡིན་པས་སྟོང་པར་འདྲ་བཞིན་དུ། ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་སྟོང་པ་ནི་རང་གི་ངོ་མོས་སྟོང་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ལས་གཞན་པའི་སྟོང་ཚུལ་རྣམས་རང་གི་ངོ་མོས་སྟོང་པ་མིན་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི། སྟོང་ཚུལ་སྤྲ་མཚད་མས་གྲུབ་ཟིན་གྱིད་པ་མ་ཉམས་པའི་རིང་ལ། གྲུབ་མཐས་གཞི་དེ་བདེན་པའམ་དེ་འདྲ་དུ་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པའི་སྟོང་འདོགས་སྟེ་མི་སྲིད་ལ། བྱེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དོན་ཚད་མས་གྲུབ་ཅིང་གྱིད་པ་མ་ཉམས་ཀྱང་། གྲུབ་མཐས་བདེན་པའམ་བདེན་པའི་དོན་དུ་སྟོང་འདོགས་པ་མི་འགལ་བའོ།

Therefore, the basis of refutation does not exist as the essence of what is refuted, and that basis is also the way to be empty of what is refuted. So it is like being empty. Similarly, the fact that every existing object is empty of being established through characteristics of its own is the meaning of “being empty of its own essence.”

But the reason that any *other* way of being empty is not what it means to be “empty of its own essence” is this: If you have established the former way of being empty with a valid perception, and that perception does not deteriorate over a long time, it will be impossible for you to develop a mode of concocting, through the influence of tenet systems, in which you hold that the basis is real or that it really exists as an object. But if you establish the meaning of any of the latter [views] with a valid perception, then even if it does not deteriorate, there will be no contradiction to your concocting tenets about things existing as real or as a real object.

* * *

. . . [From the second part: Refuting existence through inherent characteristics insofar as it would lead to the consequence that conventional realities would be able to withstand analysis through reasoning.]

།དེ་དག་གི་དོན་ནི་རང་གིས་ཁས་ལེན་པའི་བདེན་པའི་དོན་ནི་མི་སྟོབ་པ་ཡིན་པས། མི་སྟོབ་པའི་བདེན་པ་ཁོ་ནར་འགྱུར་བས་དེ་འདྲར་བདེན་པ་མེད་ཅེས་གསུངས་སོ། །དོན་དམ་པར་ནི་ཞེས་པ་ནི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཞིགས་པའི་ངོར་ནི། ཀུན་རྫོབ་དང་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་མེད་དེ། དེའི་ངོར་ནི་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་ཉག་གཅིག་ཏུ་གསུངས་པའི་བྱེར་ཞེས་བའོ། །བདེན་པ་དམ་པ་ནི་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་འོ། །ཡེ་ཤེས་དེའི་ངོར་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་མེད་པ་ནི་སྟོབ་པའི་ཆོས་ཅན་དུ་གསུངས་པས་ཤེས་སོ། །དོན་བསྟུན་ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་ན་འདྲུ་གྱིད་རྣམས་བརྟན་པ་སྟོབ་པའི་ཆོས་ཅན་དུ་མི་འགྱུར་པས། ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱེར་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་ལ། རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མེད་པའི་ཐྱོགས་ལ་ནི། ཀུན་རྫོབ་དང་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཡོད་ཅེས་པའི་དོན་ནོ།

. . . (265) The meaning of [Candrakīrti's] point is this: Since the meaning of the “reality” I accept is that it should not be misleading, then since such a thing would turn out to be

nothing but a trustworthy¹⁸ reality, then that, in this case, “would be true.”

(266) “Ultimately” means “from the perspective of the vision of suchness.” From that perspective, there are not two realities, one deceptive and one ultimate; because from that perspective, it is said that there is *only* ultimate reality. The highest reality is the reality of ultimate meaning. So from the perspective of that primordial wisdom, the non-existence of deceptive reality is understood insofar as that is said to be a misleading subject matter.

In brief, if all things *were* established through characteristics of their own, then traces would not be established as false, or misleading subject matter. Since in that case there would be no deceptive reality, *then* it would turn out that there would not be two realities. But from the point of view where nothing is established through characteristics of its own, then both deceptive and ultimate realities exist.

ཁག་ཏེ་མྱེར་གྱི་ལུང་གིས་མཐུན་པར་གསུངས་པས་འདུས་བྱས་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཚན་
ཉིད་གྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་། མཐུན་པར་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནམ་སྟེ་ན། དེའི་བདེན་པ་ནི་མདོ་ཉི
ད་ལས་མི་སྟོང་པའི་ཆོས་ཅན་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་མི་སྟོང་པའི་དོན་དུ་བཤད་ཀྱི། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་བདེན་པ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འདུ་བྱེ
ད་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་བརྟན་པ་སྟོང་པའི་ཆོས་ཅན་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་ཀྱང་སྔ་མའི་བདེན་པ་མི་སྟོང་པའི་དོན་དུ་ཤེས་སོ།

Suppose you wonder: “According to the previous quotation, only nirvāṇa is real, but since all other traces are said to be false, produced things may not be established through characteristics of their own, but isn’t nirvāṇa, ultimate reality, established through its own characteristics?”

Since *that* reality is stated by the same sūtra¹⁹ to be a subject matter that is not misleading, it is explained to be trustworthy meaning, but it is not a reality established through any nature of its own. Yet the statement that all traces are false, or misleading subject matter, is understood *in terms of* the meaning of the former reality, which is not misleading.

ཁྲིགས་པ་བྱུག་ཅུ་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། འདུས་བྱས་ལོག་པར་སྒྲུབ་ནས་བྱིས་པ་སྟོང་པའི་བདེན་དུ། མཐུན་པར་དོན་དམ་པ་
ས་དེ་ལྟར་སྒྲུབ་ནས་མི་སྟོང་པས་མཐུན་པར་བདེན་པ་དང་། གཞན་རྣམས་མི་བདེན་པར་གསུངས་པར་བཤད་པས། བདེན་མི་བདེན་གཉི
ས་སུ་བྱེ་བ་ནི་སྟོང་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་པར་གཤོག་མི་ཟ་བར་འདོད་པར་བྱའོ། ཁྲིགས་པ་བྱུག་ཅུ་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་འདས་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཅུ་
བདེན་པར་གསུངས་པ་ནི། མཐུན་པར་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པར་ཡོད་པ་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་པའི་རོར་འཛོག་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་གྱི། ཐ་སྙད་དུ་དེ་བདེན་
པར་བཞེད་པ་མིན་ནོ། དེ་ལྟར་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་ནི་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་ལ་འབྲུག་པའི་ཐམས་ཅད་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར། བདག་དང་གཞན་ལ
ས་སྟོང་པ་མ་དབྱེད་པར་འཛིག་ཏེན་པའི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་ཐ་སྙད་བྱེད་པ་བཞིན་དུ། དབྱེ་མ་པས་ཀྱང་ཁས་ལེན་པར་བྱེད་དོ།

The commentary to the *Sixty Verses on Reasoning* states, moreover: “Just as produced things fool children by appearing as what they are not, since nirvāṇa is ultimate, and appears that way, it does not mislead.”

¹⁸ Tib. *mi slu ba*. In this section both “trustworthy” and “not misleading” translate two instances of this same Tibetan privative, which could also be rendered: “not deceiving.” It is the same term which I render as “infallible” when used with reference to the consistent correspondence between karmic cause and effect.

¹⁹ According to the footnote provided at this point in the Sera Mey Library 2011 Edition (vol. I, 307n68), this refers to an unidentified “sūtra” passage quoted in Candrakīrti’s *Clear Words* (*Mūlamadhyamaka-vṛtti-prasannapadā*, Toh. 3860, bstan bsdur ma, dbu ma, vol. ‘a, 196, line 6).

(267) Thus, by explaining the statement that nirvāṇa is real, while everything else is not real, you must without doubt accept that the division between what is real and what is not real as the meaning of what is misleading and what is not misleading.

The statement from the commentary to the *Sixty Verses on Reasoning* that, “nirvāṇa is real deceptively” is what is meant when the fact that nirvāṇa is ultimate reality is posited *from the perspective of what is deceptive*. But the point is not that it is real in a conventional way.²⁰ Accordingly, since deceptive reality is a method for entering ultimate reality, then when not analyzing “birth from itself or another,” the Middle Way proponent can accept what is done conventionally just as those of the world do.

མ་སྒྲིབ་གདགས་པས་མ་ཆེས་པར་སྒྲུ་གྱི་སྒྲེལ་པ་ལྟ་བུ་ལ། དེ་ལྟར་བཏགས་པའི་བཏགས་དོན་བདག་གས་གཞན་ལས་སྒྲེལ་ཆེ་ལ་
བ་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་དཔྱོད་པར་འཛིག་གོ། དེའི་བྱིར་འཛིག་རྟེན་གྱི་མ་སྒྲིབ་ཀྱིས་གང་ནས་འོངས་གང་དུ་འགྲོ་ཞེས་པ་དང་། བྱི་དང་ན
ང་གང་ན་ཡོད་ཅེས་སོགས་ཀྱི་དཔྱད་པ་རྣམས་དང་གཏན་མི་འབྲ་བ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

. . . (268) Not satisfied with the application of conventions, when, with respect to something like saying that “a sprout grows” one seeks out whether the object of a label labeled in that way grows from itself or something other, one has embarked upon an analysis of suchness. Therefore, you should understand that this is completely different from the analysis where, by worldly conventions, one asks, “From did it come, and where does it go?” or, “Is it inside or outside?”

* * *

. . . [From the third part: Refuting existence through inherent characteristics insofar as it would lead to the consequence that growing ultimately would not be refuted.]

།དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་དཔྱོད་པའི་རིགས་པས་མ་སྒྲིབ་དུ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་སྒྲེལ་བ་མི་ཞེགས་ན། དོན་དམ་པར་གྲུབ་པའི་སྒྲེལ་བ་ལ
ང་མི་ཞེགས་པར་བཞེད་པ་ནི་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཅམ་ནས་བདེན་གྲུབ་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བས།
དེ་ལ་མ་སྒྲིབ་དུ་ཞེས་སྒྲུར་མ་སྒྲུར་འབྲ་བར་བཞེད་པའོ།

. . . (270) If, through reasoning that investigates suchness, one does not refute the idea of birth/growing through inherent characteristics, one will also not have refuted growth that could be established ultimately. Insofar as one wants to say this, since merely being established through inherent characteristics would turn into being established as real, it is the same whether or not one adds the caveat “conventionally.”

* * *

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། གལ་ཏེ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་སྒྲེལ་བ་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་ཅར་དུ་ཡང་མེད་ན། གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་མེད་
པར་འགྱུར་ལ། དེ་ལྟར་གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ངོ་བོ་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་འཛིག་རྟེན་དུ་དམིགས་པར་མི་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟར་
ཡིན་ན་རི་བོང་གི་རྩ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་སྒྲུབ་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། རྒྱ་མཆན་ཀུན་ནས་མཚུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ་ནི་
ན། དེའི་ལན་བཤད་པ། དངོས་སོ་སྟོང་པ་སྟེ་བརྒྱན་པ་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་དང་ལ་སོགས་པས་སྒྲུབ་རྒྱན་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས། མེ་ལོང་དང་བྲ
ད་བཞིན་དང་ཐག་ལུག་དང་། སྒྲ་སྒྲུང་བ་སོགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་གྱི་ཆོགས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་པ་སྟེ་བཞེན་ནས་སྒྲེལ་བ་འཛིག་རྟེན་ན་མ་གཟུགས་པ་ཡང་

²⁰ See Appendix Five, note 15, above.

མིན་ཏེ་གསལ་སོ། །རི་ལྟ་འདིག་རྟེན་ལ་གསལ་བ་དེར་ནི་གཞུགས་བརྟན་ལ་སོགས་པ་སྟོང་བ་སྟེ་བརྟན་བ་ལས། མིག་ལ་སོགས་པ་
འཛིན་པ་གཞུགས་བརྟན་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེ་ཡི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་སྐྱེ་བར་འགྱུར་བ་ལྟར། བརྟན་པའི་གཞུགས་བརྟན་ལས་བརྟན་པའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅ
ན་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་སྐྱེ་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། དངོས་སོ་ཐམས་ཅད་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་སྟོང་ནའང་།
དེས་སྟོང་པའི་རྒྱ་དག་ལས་དེས་སྟོང་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་རབ་ཏུ་སྐྱེ་བར་འགྱུར་རོ།

. . . (272) Here is the second section: [Eliminating a rebuttal to the refutation.]

Suppose someone were to say, ‘What if a coming into being that was established through characteristics of its own did not exist in either of the two realities? Then form and the rest would all turn out not to exist. Similarly, the essences of form and the rest could never become something for the eye consciousness and the rest to focus upon in the world. If this were not so, then even the horns of a rabbit and such could appear to the eye consciousness and the rest, because the reason is entirely the same.’

(273) Here we explain our answer: An empty – that is, false – thing, such as a reflection and the like (i.e., an echo and so on), is born in reliance – that is, in dependence – upon a collection of causes and conditions, such as a mirror and a face, or a rocky cave and an emitted sound. Even in the world people would not say it is not like this, i.e., it is generally said to be so.

Just as is well-known in the world, the eye consciousness, and so on, is born with the aspect of the reflection, and so on, from the empty – that is, the false – reflection, and so on. Accordingly, a consciousness whose aspect is false is born from the false reflection. In the same way, even as all functioning things are empty of existing through characteristics of their own, from those empty causes are by all means born their empty results.

།འདིར་གཞུགས་བརྟན་ལས་ནི་དེ་འདིན་པའི་མིག་ཤེས་སྐྱེ་བར་གསལ་བས། གཞུགས་བརྟན་དངོས་སོ་ཡིན་ཞིང་ཤེས་པ་དང་ངོ་སོ་ཐ
དད་པས་ནི། བྱེ་རྩལ་གྱི་དོན་ཡིན་ལ་དེ་ཡང་མིག་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དམིགས་རྟེན་ཡིན་པས། གཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་མཆེད་དུ་བཞེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྒྱ་གཉི
ས་དང་སྐྱ་ཤད་དུ་སྣང་བ་དང་སྐྱ་མ་སོགས་དང་། སྐྱ་བརྟན་སོགས་ལ་ཡང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་དབང་ཤེས་འཁྲུལ་བ་
ལ་སྣང་བའི་བྱད་དང་རྒྱ་གཉིས་དང་སྐྱ་ཤད་སོགས་ནི། དབང་སོ་ལ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་གཞི་དུ་མེད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་སྣང་བའི་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉི
ད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་དང་འབྲའོ། །བྱད་བཞིན་སོགས་མི་སྲིད་ཀྱང་དེར་སྣང་བ་ནི་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མི་སྲིད་ཀྱང་དེར་སྣང་བ་དང
འབྲའོ། །གཞུགས་བརྟན་དང་སྐྱ་བརྟན་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནི་གཞུགས་དང་སྐྱ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་འབྲ་བས། དེས་ན་གཞུགས་སོགས་ལྟ་བུ་རབ
ཞིན་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་བྱེ་རྩལ་ཏུ་མི་འཛོག་ཀྱང་དེར་སྣང་བའི་གཞུགས་སོགས་བྱེ་རྩལ་ཏུ་འཛོག་པ་བཞིན་དུ། གཞུགས་བརྟན་སོགས་བྱད་བ
ཞིན་ཡིན་པ་སོགས་བྱེ་རྩལ་ཏུ་མི་འཛོག་ཀྱང་། གཞུགས་བརྟན་སོགས་བྱེ་རྩལ་ཏུ་འཛོག་སྟེ་དེ་གཉིས་བྱེ་རྩལ་ཏུ་འཛོག་མི་འཛོག་མཚུང
ས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

Here, the statement that, from a reflected image is born the eye consciousness that beholds it means to say the following: A reflection is a functioning thing, which is separate in essence from consciousness. So it is an outer object, and furthermore it is the focal condition for the eye consciousness. Thus it is explained to be the gateway of form. You should understand this in the same way for illusions and such, and for what appears as two moons, or as a hair, and for echoes and the like.

Accordingly, the face, the two moons, or the hair, etc., which appear to a mistaken sense

consciousness, are similar to something with characteristics of its own appearing to the five consciousnesses of sense faculties that are not harmed by temporary conditions.

(274) It is *impossible* for the face and the rest to exist, but it appears as though they do. This is similar to the fact that it is impossible for something to exist through characteristics of its own, but it appears as though it does.

The reflection, the echo, and the rest are similar to form, sound, and the rest. Thus the five of a form and the rest which could exist by nature cannot be posited as outer, but they are posited as an outer form and the rest which *appear* as though they do exist by nature. In the same way, a reflection and the like that *is* a face and the like cannot be posited as outer, but a reflection and the like can be posited as outer. The two situations are the same in whether they can be posited as outer or not.

ཀླུ་གསལ་བརྒྱན་བྱང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟོང་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་བརྒྱན་པ་ནི། སྟོང་ཉིད་སྟོན་པའི་ལུང་རིགས་གང་ལ་ཡང་སྟོ་ཁ་མ་སྟོགས་པའི་འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་ཆུན་པོ་བརྟུང་ཐམས་ཅད་གྱིས་འགྲུབ་པས། དེ་ལྟར་རྟོགས་པ་དེ་རིགས་ཤེས་རགས་པ་ཅིག་ཏུ་འདོད་པ་ནི་མི་རིགས་པ་ཁོ་ན་ལོ། ཀླུ་གསལ་ཉི་དེ་ལྟར་ནི་ཀླུ་གསལ་བརྒྱན་བརྒྱན་པར་གྲགས་པ་དེ་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་། དབུ་མ་པས་བཞག་པའི་བརྒྱན་པར་མི་འགྲུབ་པས། སྟོ་མ་དེ་བྱེ་མའི་དཔེར་ངེ་ལྟར་འགྲུབ་ཞེ་ན། སྐབས་འདིར་ཀླུ་གསལ་བརྒྱན་སོགས་དཔེར་བཞོད་པ་ནི་འཛིག་རྟེན་པས་གྲུབ་ཟིན་དཔེར་འགོད་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། དབུ་མ་པས་བརྒྱན་པར་བཞག་པ་གྲུབ་ཟིན་པ་ཅིག་དཔེར་འགོད་པ་མིན་ནོ།

The falsehood in which a reflection is merely empty of a face is something that can be established by any grown-up of the world who is familiar with the idea, who has not turned his or her mind in any way towards the scriptures and reasonings that teach emptiness. So those who want to say that this realization is a rough version of a reasoning consciousness are being entirely unreasonable.

Suppose you say, “Okay, although you may have established a reflection as false in the way that is well-known, you will not have established it to be false in the way the Middle Way proponents present it. How does the former turn into an example of the latter?”

In this context, the reflection and such that have been set forth as an example are indeed given as an example of what the world has already established. But they are not set forth as an example of what those of the Middle Way have already presented as false.

ཁྱེད་ཡང་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་སྟངས་པའི་ཀླུ་གསལ་བརྒྱན་ལྟ་བུ་དེ་ལ་སྟངས་པའི་སྟེང་ནས་ཆ་འདི་ཙམ་ཞིག་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་སྟངས་ལ། འདི་ཙམ་ཞིག་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་མི་སྟངས་འོ་ཞེས་ནམ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་དབྱེ་མི་རུས་ལ། བྱང་བཞིན་གྱི་གང་སྟངས་གི་ཆ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནས་སྟངས་བ་ལྟར་དུ་ཡོད་པ་ས་སྟོང་ཡང་། རང་གི་རྒྱུ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྟེ་བ་མི་འགལ་བ་དཔེར་བྱས་ནས་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་སྟོན་པོ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་སྟངས་བ་ལྟར་ཡང་། སྟོན་པོ་འདི་སྟེང་ནས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་སྟངས་མི་སྟངས་གི་ཆ་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་པར་སྟངས་ལ། དེ་ལྟར་སྟངས་བ་ཡང་གང་སྟངས་གི་ཆ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནས་སྟངས་བ་ལྟར་དུ་ཡོད་པས་སྟོང་ཡང་། རང་གི་རྒྱུས་བསྐྱེད་པ་དང་རང་གིས་འབྲས་བྱ་བསྐྱེད་པ་མི་འགལ་བར་སྟུབ་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བྱང་བཞིན་གྱི་ཀླུ་གསལ་བརྒྱན་ལ་དེར་གང་སྟངས་གི་ཆ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནས་སྟངས་བ་ལྟར་དུ་མེད་ཀྱང་ཀླུ་གསལ་བརྒྱན་མེད་པར་མི་འགྲོ་བ་ཞིག་འཛིག་ཤེས་ན། སྟོན་པོ་ལ་ཡང་རང་མཚན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་སྟངས་པའི་ཆ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནས་སྟངས་བ་ལྟར་གྱི་དོན་དུ་མེད་ཀྱང་། སྟོན་པོ་ཡོད་པར་དེས་པར་འཛིག་རུས་པ་ཞིག་འོང་ངོ་། ཞིབ་མོའི་སྟོན་ཀླུ་གསལ་སོགས་ཀྱི་སྟེང་ནས་འདི་འགོག་འདི་མི་འགོག་ཅེས་པ་འི་ནམ་པ་གཉིས་ཀླུ་གསལ་བརྒྱན་གྱི་དཔེ་སྟེང་ནས་བྱེད་པ་ནི། དབུ་མའི་ལྟ་བ་སྟེད་པ་ལ་མེད་མི་རུང་དུ་དགོས་པས་ཆེས་སྟོ་མི་ཉན་ནོ།

Moreover, with something like a reflection that appears as a face, there is absolutely no

way you can make a distinction, upon the appearance, between ‘just this one part that appears as a face’ and ‘just this one that does not appear as a face.’ It is empty of existing according to the way it comes to appear – from *all* the parts of what appears as ‘face’ – but there is no contradiction for it to arise in dependence upon its causes.

(275) Having given the example, then, in the same way, although blue appears as though it had characteristics of its own, upon that blue, it appears as though the two parts – which respectively do and do not appear as though they exist by nature – are inseparable. It appears that way, yet it is empty of existing according to the way it comes to appear – from *all* the parts of what appears – but there is no contradiction to establish it as being produced from its causes, or as giving rise to its result.

Upon the reflected image of a face, there is nothing that exists according to the way it appears, from all the parts of what appears, but that does not mean there is no reflection. If you know how to posit this, then you will be someone who can posit with certainty, with respect to blue as well, that there is no real object that exists according to its appearance, but blue exists.

To be able to divide, with a finely-tuned state of mind, upon the example of the reflection, the two aspects of what is refuted and what is not refuted upon form and the rest, is an indispensable requirement for finding the Middle Way view. So do not listen to those who are easily satisfied.

།དེས་ན་འགྲེལ་བ་ལས་ཀྱང་གཟུགས་བརྒྱན་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་སུ་རྣམ་པར་བཞག་པ་ཡང་། ཤེས་བཞིན་དུ་མཁས་པ་སྤྱི་
ཞིག་གཟུགས་དང་ཚོར་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་སུ་ལས་ཐ་དད་པ་མེད་པར་གནས་པ་རྣམས་ཡོད་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཏུ་དམིགས་པས།
རང་བཞིན་དང་བཅས་པ་ངེས་པར་བྱེད། དེའི་བྱིར་ཡོད་པར་དམིགས་ཀྱང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྦྱོར་བ་མེད་དོ། །ཞེས་ཡོད་ཙམ་དང་རང་བཞི
ན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་དང་། སྤར་སྦྱོར་བར་བསྟན་ལ་འདིར་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྦྱོར་བ་མེད་པར་བསྟན་པས། སྦྱོར་བ་དང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྦྱོར་བ་གཉིས
་སོ་སོར་འབྱེད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་གསུངས་སོ།

On this the auto-commentary also states: “One presents a reflected image as being a cause and having results that lack any nature, but what master would deliberately focus upon the mere existence of a [heap of] form, feelings, etc. – which remains in a way that is inseparable from its causes or results – and then ascertain that as possessing a nature of its own? Therefore, one can focus upon it as an existing thing, but it does not grow through any nature of its own.”

(276) Thus [Candrakīrti] clearly differentiates between merely existing, and existing through a nature, and since previously he demonstrated growth, while here he teaches that there is no growth by nature, there is clearly a difference between growth and growth by nature.

།དེ་དག་མ་བྱེད་ན་དངོས་སོ་ཡོད་བྱིན་ཆད་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་ཡོད་པ་དང་། རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་མེད་བྱིན་ཆད་ཡེ་མེད་དུ་སོང་ནས་སྦྱོར་འདོགས་
དང་སྦྱར་འདེབས་ཀྱི་མཐའ་གཉིས་ལས་མི་འདའ་སྟེ། བརྒྱ་པའི་འགྲེལ་བ་ལས། དངོས་སོ་དངོས་སོ་ཡོད་པར་སྦྱོར་བའི་ལྟར་ན་ནི་ཇི་སྟེ་དེ་
དངོས་སོ་དེའི་ཡོད་པ་ཉིད་ཡིན་པ་དེ་སྟེ་དེ་དེ་དེ་སྟེ། དེ་ལྟར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཡང་ཡིན་པ་ཉིད་ལ། གང་གི་ཆེ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་དང་བྲལ་བ་དེའི་ཆེ་དེ་
ལ་དངོས་སོ་དེ་རྣམས་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར། བོར་བྱའི་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་བས་གཉིས་སུ་སྦྱོར་བ་ལས་མ་འདས་པའི་བྱིར། འདིའི་མཛོན་པ་
ར་འདོད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་འགྲིག་དཀའ་བར་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་སོ།

If you do not differentiate between these, you will never go beyond the two extremes of concocting and discounting, by thinking that if something exists then it must exist through its own essence and that if it does not exist through its own essence then it must not exist at all.

As the commentary to the *Four Hundred Verses* states: “According to those who profess that functioning things exist as functioning things, as long as a functioning thing *is* its own very existence, then for so long will its own essence also exist itself. Whenever it lacks its own essence, then that functioning thing will in no way exist. Therefore, since it would be like the horns of a donkey, one does not transcend professing one thing or another. Thus it will be difficult to accord with all their closely held beliefs.”

།དེས་ན་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་མེད་པས་ཡོད་མཐའ་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་། དེ་ཉིད་ལ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་རྒྱ་འབྲས་འཛོག་ཀྱས་པས་མེད་མཐའ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་གྲོལ་བ་ནི་སློབ་དཔོན་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལྟར་བཞུགས་ཀྱིས་འཕགས་པའི་དགོངས་པ་བཀའ་བའི་བྱད་ཆོས་སུ་སྤང་བས། ཡོད་པ་གཉིས་དང་མེད་པ་གཉིས་བྱེད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གཤམ་ཆེད། །གཟུགས་བརྟན་གྱི་དཔེས་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་པ་ནི། ཡབ་སྲས་མཇུག་པ་ལས། མེ་ལོང་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཡོངས་དག་ལ། །རྗེ་ལྷ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ཡི། །གཟུགས་བརྟན་སྤང་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། །སྒྲིན་པ་ཆོས་ན་མས་ཤེས་པར་གྱིས། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། བརྟན་པའི་དཔེ་གཞན་ནམས་གྱི་དཔེ་དོན་སྦྱར་ཚུལ་ཡང་སྤང་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་གྱིས་ཤིག

Therefore, it appears that the distinguishing feature of the way that both Master Buddhapālita and the Venerable Candrakīrti interpreted the true intent of the Ārya [Nāgārjuna] is that the lack of inherent essence frees one from all extremes of existence, and the ability to posit, with respect to that very thing, causes and results which have no nature, frees one from all extremes of non-existence. Thus, to be able to distinguish the two kinds of existence and the two kinds of non-existence is of the utmost importance.

The way of presenting it through the example of a reflection is stated in the *Sūtra of the Meeting of the Father and the Son*:

Just as a reflected image lacking any nature of its own
appears in a mirror that is totally clean,
so you should understand the forest of all things.

(277) I entreat you to understand the way to apply the meaning of all the other examples of falsehood in the same way as before.

* * *

ལྷ་པ་ལ་གཉིས། ཉག་ཆད་གྱི་ལྷ་བ་སྤང་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་དང་། ལས་འབྲས་གྱི་འབྲེལ་བ་ཆེས་འཐད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ནོ།

For the fifth part [of an earlier division: i.e., Pointing out the advantage that one can refute birth through inherent nature in either of the two realities], there are two: (1) The advantage that it is easy to eliminate the views of things being either unchanging or cut off, and (2) The advantage that the relationship between karma and its results makes even more sense.

།འདིར་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་བྱུང་པ་མ་བཀག་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྤང་བའི་བདག་མེད་མི་རྟོགས་པས། ཤིན་ཏུ་སྤང་བའི་ཉག་ཆད་གྱི་ལྷ་བ་རྒྱུད་ལ་མི་སྦྱེ་བ་ཡང་བྱ་དགའ་བས། ཉག་ཆད་གྱི་ལྷ་བ་མ་ལུས་པར་སྤོང་བ་ནི། དགག་བྱ་དེ་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་བཀག་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ནོ། །དེ་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་ཡོད་པ་ཞིགས་ན་དོན་དམ་ལ་སྟོས་པའི་ཉག་ཆད་གྱི་ལྷ་བར་མི་ལུང་བར་མ་ཟད། ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ལ་སྟོས་ནས་ཉག་ཆད་གྱི་ལྷ་

བའི་བློ་མས་མི་གོས་བས་ན། ཉག་ཆད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བ་སྤང་སྤྱོད་བའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ཡོད་དོ།

[Here is the first.] . . . (278) If you do not refute the possibility of existing deceptively through inherent characteristics, you will not realize the extremely subtle lack of a self. Then it will be difficult for extremely subtle views of things being either unchanging or cut off *not* to arise in one's mindstream. So here, the advantage of refuting the thing to be refuted, *as something deceptive*, is that you abandon every last view of things being either unchanging or cut off. If you have refuted that such [inherent characteristics] could exist deceptively, then not only will you not fall into the views that things are unchanging or cut off in reliance upon the ultimate, but you will not be sullied by the stench of views that things are unchanging or cut off in reliance upon what is deceptive, either. So this is the advantage of easily abandoning the views of being unchanging or cut off.

Appendix Six: Action and Its Results in the Consequence View

Continued excerpts from the *Illumination of the True Thought*¹

།གཉིས་པ་ལ་གསུམ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བ་མི་འདོད་པ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་སོགས་ཁས་ཐུང་མི་དགོས་པར་བསྟན་པ་དང་། ལས་འགགས་པ་ལས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྲུང་བའི་དཔེ་བསྟན་པ་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་བསྟན་པ་ལ་ཚུད་པ་སྤང་བའོ། །དང་སོ་ལ་གསུམ། མཚན་སྒྲིབ་གྱི་གཞུང་བཤད་པ་དང་། ཅ་བའི་ཆོག་དོན་བཤད་པ་དང་། དེ་ལས་འཕྲོས་པའི་དོན་བཤད་པའོ།

(278) For the second part [The advantage that the relationship between karma and its results makes even more sense], there are three sections: (1) Showing that when you do not accept the possibility of things being established by nature, there is no need to assert a foundation consciousness and such, (2) Showing an example in which a result arises after an action has stopped, and (3) Eliminating the rebuttal to that demonstration.

For the first there are three: (1) Explaining the transitional passage [from Candrakīrti's auto-commentary], (2) Explaining the meaning of the root verses, and (3) Explaining the meaning of what can be extrapolated from that.

* * *

།འཕགས་པའི་གཞུང་འགྲེལ་ཚུལ་ལ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་བྱུང་བ་རྣམས་མེད་ཀྱང་། བྱ་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་བཞག་པས་ཆོག་པའི་འགྲེལ་ཚུལ་གྱི་ལུགས་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་འདི་ལ་བཞེན་ནས། རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་བྱུང་མཐའ་འགྲེལ་བྱེད་གཞན་དང་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་མང་དུ་ཡོད་དེ། དེ་གང་ཞེ་ན་རེ་ཞིག་གཙོ་བོ་རྣམས་བརྗོད་ན། ཆོགས་དྲག་ལས་ངོ་མོ་ཐ་དང་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་དང་། རང་རིག་འགོག་ལུགས་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། རང་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་བས་བྱིར་སྐྱོལ་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ལ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བ་སྤྱོད་པ་ཁས་མི་ལེན་པ་གསུམ་དང་། ཤེས་པ་ཁས་ལེན་པ་བཞིན་དུ་བྱི་རོལ་གྱི་དོན་ཡང་ཁས་ཐུང་དགོས་པ་དང་། ཉན་རང་ལ་དངོས་སོ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་རྟོགས་པ་ཡོད་པ་དང་། ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་འཛིན་ཉོན་མོངས་སུ་འཛོག་པ་དང་། ཞིག་པ་དངོས་སོ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་གྱིས་དུས་གསུམ་གྱི་འཛོག་ཚུལ་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་སོགས་ཡིན་ནོ།

[Here is the first.] . . . (279) According to this way of interpreting the treatises of the Ārya [Nāgārjuna], there is not even a particle of existence with characteristics of its own, but nevertheless it is fine to posit all the doing of actions. This is a unique method of interpretation, and on its basis, there are many other unique interpretations of pure philosophical tenets. If you ask what these are, then for the moment I will just mention the main ones:

There is a unique way of refuting (1) a foundation consciousness whose essence would be different from the six groups [of consciousness] and (2) reflexive awareness. (3) We do not accept that an autonomous line of reasoning can produce a view of suchness in the mindstream of an opponent. Then, (4) even as one accepts consciousness, so too must one accept outer objects; (5) listeners and solitary buddhas do gain a realization of the lack of inherent nature of functioning things; (6) grasping to a self in things is posited as

¹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 138b3-150b3 (278-302). See Appendix Four, note 1.

a mental affliction; (7) a destroyed thing is a functioning thing; and (8) for that reason, there is a unique way of positing past, present, and future time; and so on.

* * *

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། དངོས་པོ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱས་པ་མེད་པར་འདོད་པའི་ཕྱོགས་ལ། གུན་གཞི་སོགས་ཁས་མ་སྒྲངས་ཀྱང་ལས་འབྲས་ཀྱི་
འབྲེལ་པ་འཐད་ཚུལ་རིམ་ལྔ་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། ལས་དང་དེའི་འབྲས་བྱའི་བར་དུ་ཡུན་རིང་པོར་ཆོད་པའི་དགེ་མི་དགེའི་ལས་ལས་ཀྱང་། བདེ་
བ་དང་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེད་སོགས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱུང་བ་ནི་རང་གི་སྤྱི་པ་གོང་ལོག་ཐམས་ཅད་འདོད་ལ། དེ་ལ་ལས་དེ་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱེན་པའི་སྤྱི་
ལོགས་བར་དུ་གནས་ན་ནི་ཉག་པར་འགྱུར་ལ། ཉག་པས་དོན་བྱེད་པར་མི་རྣམས་པས་ལས་ལས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱུང་བའི་འབྲེལ་པ་མི་འཐད་
དོ། །ལས་དེ་བྱས་པའི་སྐད་ཅིག་གཉིས་པར་ཞིག་ན་ནི། མཚམས་དེ་ནས་འབྲས་བྱ་དངོས་སུ་འབྱེན་པའི་སྤྱི་ལོགས་ཀྱི་བར་དུ་ལས་དེ་
མེད་ལ། ལས་ཞིག་པ་ཡང་དངོས་པོར་མེད་པས་ལས་ལས་འབྲས་བྱ་རིམ་ལྔ་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར་ ་ ་

. . . (281) Here is the second part [explaining the meaning of the root verses]. Suppose you say: “From the point of view of those who say that functioning things do not exist by nature, one does not assert a foundation consciousness and such; but how can the relationship between deeds and their results make sense?”

All of our schools, both higher and lower, accept that from virtuous and non-virtuous deeds, which are separated from their results by very long time, still come happiness, suffering, and other such results.

(282) But in this regard, if that deed remained for the whole period until just before it issued its result, it would turn out to be unchanging. Since an unchanging thing cannot do anything, the notion of a relationship in which a result sprang up from a karmic deed would be nonsense.

If in the second moment, after a deed was done, that deed were destroyed, then from that juncture up until just before it directly issued a result, that deed would not exist. Since a destroyed deed cannot also be a functioning thing, how could a result ever come from a deed?

ཞེས་བརྗོད་པའི་ལན་དུ། ལས་བྱས་པའི་སྐད་ཅིག་གཉིས་པར་འགགས་ཟེན་པའི་སྤྱི་ལོགས་ཀྱི་ལས་འགག་པ་ལ་མངོན་དུ་ཕྱོགས་པའི་
ཆོ། ལས་ཀྱི་རྣམས་པ་གཞག་པར་བྱ་བའི་བྱིར་ཁ་ཅིག་གུན་གཞི་རྣམས་པར་ཤེས་པ་རྟོག་པར་བྱེད་ལ། ཁ་ཅིག་གི་ལོན་གྱི་དཔང་རྒྱ་སྤྱོད་དེའི་
ཡི་གེ་དང་འབྲེལ་པའི་ལས་གཉིས་ལས་དོན་གཞན་པ། རྒྱུ་མི་ཐ་བ་ཞེས་པ་ལྟར་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་དུ་གྱུར་པ་ཞིག་འདོད་དོ། །ཁ་ཅིག་ནི་ལས་
གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཐོབ་པ་ཞེས་པ་དེ་གཉིས་ལས་དོན་གཞན་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་ལྟར་མིན་ཞིག་རྟོག་པར་བྱེད་དོ། །ཁ་ཅིག་ནི་ལས་ཀྱི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་
བསྐྱོས་པའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུན་རྟོག་པར་བྱེད་ལ། དེའི་བྱིར་ལས་འགགས་ཀྱང་ལས་ཀྱིས་བྱས་ཡུན་རིང་པོར་ནས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱེན་པ་མི་འ
གལ་བར་འདོད་དེ། ལས་ཀྱིས་གུན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་འདོགས་པས་བག་ཆགས་དེ་ལས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་རིགས་འབྲས་བརྒྱུད་
པས་མཐར་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱེན་པས་དང་པོའི་ལས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་བརྒྱུད་པ་ལས་འབྱུང་བར་འདོད་པའོ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གཞན་གསུམ་པ་ཡང་
ཤེས་པར་བྱཏོ།

In answer to this problem, (1) some have conceived the idea of a foundation-of-all consciousness, in order for the potency of a deed to be planted somewhere at the very moment when the deed is approaching its end – in the moment immediately preceding that subsequent moment just after the deed has finished being done. (2) Some have asserted something that turns into an unlinked trace, known as “not being lost,” which is

other than the two kinds of deeds [virtue or non-virtue], and is like the document drawn up as the record for a loan. (3) Others have conceived the idea of something unlinked, which is other than the two kinds of deeds, known as a “hold” [Skt. *prāpti*].

(4) Still others have conceived the idea of a stream of consciousness infused by the tendencies of deeds. Thus they assert that it is no contradiction for a deed which has ended, nonetheless to issue forth its result a very long time afterwards. Since the deed plants tendencies in the foundation consciousness, the result is from those *tendencies*, but since they form a continuum of the same type, and since at the end they issue forth their result, one can accept that it *is* the result of the original deed, emerging indirectly from the continuum. You should understand the other three positions in a similar way.

།དེའི་དང་པོ་ནི་སེམས་ཅམ་པ་འགའ་ཞིག་གོ། །གཉིས་པ་ནི་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་སྦྲ་བ་ཡིན་པར་སྦྱར་རས་གཟིགས་བརྒྱལ་ཞུགས་ཀྱིས་བཤད་དེ།
ཁ་ཆེ་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་སྦྲ་བ་ལས་གཞན་པ་ཞིག་གོ། །གསུམ་པ་ཡང་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་སྦྲ་བའི་ནང་ཆེན་གཅིག་གོ། །བཞི་པ་ལ་གསལ་ཁ་སྤྱང་ཡང་
མཛོད་འགྲེལ་གྱི་གནས་དགུ་པ་དང་བསྦྱར་ན་མདོ་སྤེ་བ་དང་ཁ་ཆེ་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་སྦྲ་བའི་ཡང་འདོད་པ་ཡིན་པ་འདྲའོ། །ཁ་ཆེ་བས་ཐོབ་པ་ཁ
ས་ལེན་ཀྱང་ཐོབ་བྱའི་ཆོས་ལས་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ཐོབ་པ་སྦྱེད་པར་མི་འདོད་ལ་འདིར་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་འདོད་པ་ཅིག་སྟེ་གང་གི་ལྟར་ན་ཞེས་པའི་དོ
ན་ནོ།

(283) The first is the view of some Mind-Only proponents. Avalokitavrata explains the second to be a view of the Vaibhāṣikas, but it is a different group from the Kashmiri Vaibhāṣikas. The third is also the view of one of the Vaibhāṣika groups. It is not clear who holds the fourth view, but insofar as it is in accord with the ninth chapter of the commentary to the *Abhidharmakośa*, it seems to be another assertion of the Sautrāntikas and the Kashmiri Vaibhāṣikas. The Kashmiris do accept “holds,” but they do not accept that what is “held” – i.e., the two kinds of deeds – produce the “hold.” So that is why [Candrakīrti] says here, “according to someone,” that is, one who does accept that [the two kinds of deeds produce the “hold”] in this way.

།གང་སྤྱིར་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་དེ་མི་འགག་པ། །དེ་སྤྱིར་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ཀྱང་འདི་ནུས་སྤྱིར།
།ལ་ལར་ལས་འགགས་ཡུན་རིང་ལོན་ལས་ཀྱང་། །འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་དག་འབྱུང་བར་རིག་པར་གྱིས། ༣༩།
[Since that does not stop by nature
therefore, although there is no foundation of all, this is able, thus
in some, from deeds stopped, matured for a very long time:
still, you should know that a perfect result arises. v. 39]

།དབྱུ་མ་ཐལ་འགྱུར་བ་གང་གི་ལྟར་ན། ལས་རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་སྦྱེས་པ་དེའི་ལྟར་ན་ནི། གང་གི་སྤྱིར་ལས་དེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཉེ
མི་འགག་པ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མ་འགགས་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་འབྲས་བུ་འབྱུང་བ་མི་འགལ་བ་དེའི་སྤྱིར་ཀུན་གཞི་སོགས་ཁས་མ་སྤྱངས་ཀྱང་།
ལས་ལས་འབྲས་བུ་འདི་འབྱུང་བར་ནུས་པའི་སྤྱིར། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ལ་ལར་ལས་གཉིས་བྱས་པ་འགགས་ནས་ཡུན་རིང་པོ་བསྐྱལ་
བ་མང་པོ་ལོན་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། ལས་ལས་འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་དག་པ་སྟེ་རྒྱུ་ལ་འབྲས་བུ་མི་འཁྲལ་བར་འབྱུང་བར་རིག་པར་གྱིས་ཤིག

According to someone of the Middle Way Consequence view: “A deed did not occur through its own identity, so,” **since that deed does not stop by nature** – that is, it did not stop by nature – indeed, there is no contradiction for a result to arise from it. **Therefore, although** we do not accept the **foundation of all** and the like, **this result is able** to arise from a deed. **Thus in some** sentient beings’ mindstreams the two kind of **deeds** have **stopped** being done. Then **for a very long time** – for many eons – they **matured** and

still from the deed a **perfect result arises**, that is, with respect to the cause an unmistakable result arises. This **you should know**.

དེ་ལྟར་ན་ཕྱོགས་འདི་ལ་ནི་ལས་དང་འབྲས་བྱའི་འབྲེལ་བ་ཆེས་ཤིན་ཏུ་འཐད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་ནམས་ཀྱི་དོན་ནི་སྤར་བཞིན་བཅད་པ་
འི་ལན་སྤྱོད་པ་ལོ་བཞི་གས་ཀྱང་། ལས་ལ་སྤྱོད་བ་དང་འགག་བ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་ཁས་ལེན་ཞིང་། ལས་བྱས་པའི་འོག་ཏུ་འ
གགས་པ་དེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བར་འདོད་དོ། །དེ་ལ་སློབ་དཔོན་འདིས་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་འགགས་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་ཀུན་གཞི་སོགས་ཁས་ལེན
པས་སྤྱོད་མེད་ཅེས་ལན་འདེབས་པ་མི་རིགས་ཏེ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བའི་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་ལས་སྤྱོད་བ་དང་འགགས་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ་ཞེ
ས་འགོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

In this way, from this point of view, “the relationship between deeds and their effects becomes even more thoroughly reasonable.” The meaning of this is that all four of the former proponents who gave an answer to the problem assert that with respect to a deed, both its arising and its stopping are established through characteristics of their own. Then, after the deed is done, they accept that its having ended is something established through a nature of its own.

(284) In this regard, this master [Candrakīrti] refutes them by saying that their response, namely, “that the ending is indeed like that, but since we accept the foundation consciousness and so on, this is no problem,” is unreasonable; because the starting and ending of a deed, which could ever have been established through a nature of their own, do not exist.

ལན་འདེབས་རྒྱལ་དེ་ཉིད་འཐགས་པའི་བཞེད་པ་ཡིན་པར་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ། གང་བྱིར་ལས་ནི་སྤྱོད་བ་མེད། །འདི་ལྟར་རང་བཞིན་མེད་དེའི་བྱི
ར། གང་བྱིར་དེ་ནི་མ་སྤྱོད་པ། །དེ་བྱིར་རྒྱུད་ཟར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་ཅུ་ཤར་གསུངས་པ་བྲངས་ཏེ། ལས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བ་མེད་
པའི་བྱིར་རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་སྤྱོད་བ་མེད་དོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་ལས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་འགག་པ་མི་སྤྱོད་པའི་བྱིར། ལས་བྱས་པའི་འོག་ཏུ་འ
གགས་པ་དེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བར་བཟུང་ནས་རྒྱུད་མི་ཟ་བར་རྟོག་པ་རིགས་པ་མིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་པའི་དོན་ནོ། །རིགས་པ་དེ་ནི་རྒྱུད་མི
ཟ་བ་འགོག་པ་ལ་གསུངས་ཀྱང་གཞན་གསུམ་འགོག་པ་ལ་ཡང་ཁྱད་པར་མེད་དེ་རྒྱ་མཆན་ཀུན་ནས་མཆུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

In order to teach that just this way of answering is what the Ārya intended, [Candrakīrti] quotes the *Root Verses on Wisdom*:

Since the deed had no starting
and because it has no nature; therefore
that which never began
will never be lost.

The meaning is this: Since there is no existence through an inherent nature, there is no starting through an identity of its own. Therefore, *since it is impossible for a deed to end through any nature of its own*, it makes no sense to hold that after the deed was done, it ended through a nature of its own, and then go on to fabricate an idea about it “not being lost.”

This reasoning is stated in order to refute the idea of “not being lost,” but there is no difference in the way you would refute the other three positions, because the reason is entirely the same.

ཡང་མདོ་ལས། མི་ཡི་ཆོ་ཚད་ལོ་བརྒྱ་སྟེ། །དེ་སྤྱིད་འཆོ་ཞེས་བཞེད་མོད་ཀྱི། །ལོ་ལ་སྤང་པོར་སྤངས་པ་མེད། །སྤྱོད་པ་དེ་ཡང་དེ་དང་

མཚུངས། །ཟད་པ་མེད་ཅེས་གང་སྒྲིམ་དང་། །ལས་ཟད་ཅེས་ནི་གང་སྒྲིམ་པ། །སྟོང་པའི་ཚུལ་དུ་ཟད་པ་མེད། །ཐ་སྙད་ཚུལ་དུ་ཟད་པར་
བསྟན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་བྲངས་ཏེ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་ཟད་པའམ་འགག་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། དེ་གཉིས་ཐ་སྙད་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་བཞ
ག་པའི་ཁྲུངས་སོ། །ནག་ཚེའི་འགྱུར་ལས། འོ་རྣམས་ཕྱང་ཐོར་སྒྲུངས་པ་ནི། །མེད་པ་དེ་བཞིན་ཡང་དག་པར། །ཚོགས་པ་འདི་ཡང་བ
ལྷ་བར་བྱ། །ཞེས་འབྲུང་ངོ། །དེ་རྣམས་ནི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཏེ་མི་འགག་པ་ཞེས་དགག་བྱ་ལ་ཁྲུང་པར་སྒྱུར་པའི་སྟེང་ནས་བཤད་པའོ།

Furthermore, [Candrakīrti] quotes from a sūtra:²

A human life is a hundred years;
you might say that ‘one lives that long,’
but of years there is no piling them into a heap.
Achieving something, too, is just the same.
Whenever it is said, ‘there is no exhaustion,’
and whenever it is said, ‘the deed is exhausted:
In the manner of emptiness there is no exhaustion, and
In the manner of convention we teach it as exhausted.

This is the scriptural source for the fact that there is no exhaustion, or ending, established through a nature of its own, and also the source for positing those two by force of conventions.

In Nak-Tso’s translation it appears thus:

Just as there is no piling of all the years into a heap,
so, too, you should look upon this that is perfectly collected.

(285) All of this can be explained after having applied the distinction of the thing to be refuted, as “not ending” *through a nature of its own*.

།གསུམ་པ་ལ་གཉིས། འགག་པ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མེད་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཁས་མི་ལེན་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་དུ་འགོ་ཚུལ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་ཁས་མི་ལ
ན་ཀྱང་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་གཞི་འཛོག་པའོ།

For the third part [i.e., explaining the meaning of what can be extrapolated from that] there are two: (1) How one goes from the fact there is no stopping that could occur by nature, to the reason for not accepting a foundation consciousness, and (2) How to posit a basis for the tendencies, even as one does not accept a foundation consciousness.

།དང་པོ་ནི། གལ་ཏེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་འགག་པ་མེད་ཀྱང་རང་གི་ལུགས་ལ་ཡང་ལ་ལར་ལས་འགགས་ཞེས་དང་། འགགས་ཤི
ང་རང་བཞིན་ཡོད་མིན་པའི། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པས། ཐ་སྙད་ཚུལ་དུ་ཟད་པར་བསྟན། །ཞེས་པ་ལྟར་ལས་བྱས་པའི་འོག་དུ་ལས་དེ་འགག
ས་པ་ནི་འདོད་དགོས་ལ། དེའི་ཆེ་འགགས་པ་ནི་དངོས་པོར་མེད་ཅིང་ལས་འབྲས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་པའི་རྟེན་དུ་ཀུན་གཞི་སོགས་ཀྱང་མི་འདོད་
ན། ལས་འགགས་ནས་ཡུན་རིང་དུ་འོན་པ་ལས། འབྲས་བྱ་འབྲུང་པ་མི་འཐད་པར་བརྟན་པ་སོ་ན་གནས་པས། སྒར་གྱི་ལན་དེ་དག་གི
ས་མི་ཚོག་གོ་ཞེ་ན།

Here is the first. Suppose you say: “Although there is no stopping that could occur through a nature of its own, in our system, too, according to what is said [in the root verses 39 and 40] – that ‘in some, from deeds stopped . . .’ and ‘stopped and without any

² *Pitāputrasamāgamana-sūtra*, “The Sūtra of the Meeting of the Father and the Son” (*yab sras mjal ba’i mdo*), from the *Ratnakūṭa*, sde dge bka’ ‘gyur, dkon brtsegs, vol. *nga*, 51 line 2.

nature . . .’ – we must assert that after a deed has been done, that action stops. This is just as it was stated [in the previously quoted *Sūtra of the Meeting of the Father and the Son*]: ‘In the manner of convention we teach it as exhausted.’ At that point, what has stopped cannot exist as a functioning thing; but if we do not then agree to a foundation consciousness, etc., which serves as the basis for the relationship between deeds and their results, then the objection remains as before, that it makes no sense for a result to arise from ‘deeds that have stopped and then matured for a long time.’ So those previous answers are not sufficient.”

སྒྲིན་མེད་དེ། གང་ཕྱིར་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་དེ་མི་འགག་པ། དེ་ཕྱིར་ཞེས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་ལས་ཞིག་པའི་ཞིག་པ་ལས་ཕྱིས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་སུ་འབྱུང་བ་འབྲས་པས་ལན་ཟུང་བ་མ་གསུངས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་དངོས་པོ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་འདོད་པའི་ཕྱོགས་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ། ཞིག་པ་དངོས་པོར་མི་རུང་ལ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་པར་འདོད་པའི་དབྱེ་ཕྱོགས་ལ་ཞིག་པ་དངོས་པོར་གྲུབ་པའི་གནད་དོ། །ལུགས་དང་པོ་ལ་ནི། ལྷ་གྲུ་ལྷ་གྲུའི་དངོས་པོ་ཅིག་ཞིག་པ་ན། ལྷ་གྲུའི་ཆ་ཤས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་ལོག་ལ། ལྷ་གྲུ་ལས་གཞན་པ་སུ་མ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དངོས་པོ་གཞན་གང་ཡང་མ་ཐོབ་པས། ཞིག་པ་དེ་དངོས་པོ་གཏན་མིན་པར་འདོད་དེ། སྒྲིན་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་སྐྱེ་མ་ཆེད་རེ་རེ་བའི་དངོས་པོ་དང་། སུམ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རང་གི་ཆ་ཤས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་ཆོགས་པ་གང་ཡང་ཞིག་པ་དེའི་མཚན་གཞིར་མི་རུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་དངོས་པོ་མིན་ནོ་སྟུམ་པའོ།

But this is no problem. For the very reason stated [in verse 39] – “Since that does not stop by nature / therefore . . .” – *it is from the destruction of the destroyed deed that one establishes the arising of the later result*. So no other answer is stated. This, moreover, constitutes the crucial point that, for all those who assert functioning things to exist by nature, it is not suitable for what is destroyed to be a functioning thing, but for those of the Middle Way, who affirm that things do not exist by nature, *what is destroyed is established as a functioning thing*.

(286) According to the first way of looking at it, if a functioning thing such as a sprout is destroyed, then once all the functioning things that were the parts of the sprout revert [to what they were as component parts], and do not go on to form another functioning thing such as a vase or the like – i.e., something other than a sprout – then they assert that what was destroyed is in no way a functioning thing.

They think that, “Because it is unsuitable for either (1) a functioning thing that would belong to one of the gateways, such as blue and the rest, or (2) a functioning thing that is a collection of its parts, such as a vase and the like, to be the prime example of what it means to be that destroyed thing, it cannot be a functioning thing.”

།ལུགས་ཕྱི་མ་ལ་ནི། དཔེར་ན་ཉེར་སྤྲས་ཀྱི་སྤང་པོ་ལྷ་རེ་རེ་བ་དང་ཆོགས་པ་གཉིས་ཀ་དང་། དེ་གཉིས་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དང་བ་གཅིག་ཉེར་སྤྲས་ཀྱི་མཚན་གཞིར་འདོག་རྒྱ་མེད་ཅིང་། ཉེར་སྤྲས་ཀྱང་དེ་གསུམ་གྱི་མཚན་གཞིར་མི་རུང་ལ། རང་གི་སྤང་པོ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཉེར་སྤྲས་སུ་བཏགས་པ་དངོས་པོ་ཡིན་པར་མི་འགལ་བ་བཞིན་དུ། ཞིག་པ་ཡང་ཞིག་རྒྱུའི་དངོས་པོ་དང་། དེ་དང་རིགས་མཐུན་པའི་དངོས་པོ་གང་ཡང་མཚན་གཞིར་མེད་ཀྱང་། ཞིག་རྒྱུའི་དངོས་པོ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྐྱེས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དངོས་པོ་འོ།

Here is the latter way of looking at it. For example, neither Upagupta’s five heaps individually, nor the collection of all of them, nor some single thing that is separate in essence from either of those, provides any reason to be posited as a prime example of what it means to be Upagupta. Upagupta, furthermore, is not suitable to be the prime

example of what it means to be any of those three. Still, there is no contradiction that what is labeled as Upagupta on the basis of his heaps, is a functioning thing.

In the same way, the destroyed thing does not exist either as a prime example of what it means to be the functioning thing that was destroyed, or as a functioning thing that is of the same type as that thing was. Nonetheless, *because it arose in dependence upon the functioning thing that was destroyed*, it is a functioning thing.

དེ་སྐབས་ལ་ལུང་རིགས་གཉིས་ཆོག་གསལ་ལས་གསུངས་པའི་དང་པོ་ནི། ས་བཅུ་བ་ལས། སྟེ་བའི་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་ཀ་ཤི་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་སྟེ། ཤི་བ་ནི་གང་ཤི་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་དེ་ཞིག་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་སྟེ་བའི་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་སྟེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་དང་། ཡང་དེ་ཉིད་ལས་འཆེ་བ་ཡང་བྱ་བ་གཉིས་སུ་ཉེ་བར་གནས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་འདྲ་བྱེད་འཇིག་པར་ཡང་བྱེད་པ་དང་། ཡོངས་སུ་མི་ཤེས་པ་རྒྱུན་མི་འཆད་པའི་རྒྱ་ཡང་འབྱེན་པའོ། །ཞེས་འཆེ་བས་བྱ་བ་གཉིས་བྱེད་པར་གསུངས་ཏེ། ཤི་བ་རྒྱུས་བྱེད་པ་དང་། ཤི་བས་མ་རིག་པ་སྟེད་པར་ཡང་གསུངས་པས། ཞིག་པ་ལ་སྟེད་པའི་རྒྱ་ཡོད་པ་དང་། ཞིག་པས་འབྲས་བྱ་སྟེད་ལུས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འདི་ནི་རྒྱུན་གྱི་ཞིག་པ་ཡིན་ཡང་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་དང་པོ་དུ་ས་གཉིས་པར་ཞིག་པ་ལ་ཡང་འབྲས་ལ། སྐད་ཅིག་མ་དང་པོ་དུ་ས་གཉིས་པར་ཞིག་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཡང་བསྐྱེད་པོ། དེས་ན་སེམས་ཅན་སྟེས་པ་དང་ཤི་བ་གཉིས་དང་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་གཉིས་པར་མི་སྟོད་པ་དང་། སྐད་ཅིག་མ་གཉིས་པར་མ་བསྐྱད་པ་རྣམས་ལ་དངོས་པོར་འཇོག་མི་འཇོག་དང་། རྒྱས་སྟེད་མི་སྟེད་ཀུན་ནས་མཚུངས་སོ།

In order to prove this through both scripture and reasoning, the first quotation [that Candrakīrti employs] in *Clear Words* is from the *Ten Levels*: “From the condition of birth comes old age and death.” Death means the sentient being who has died. This is something destroyed, but it states that the death was produced from the condition of birth. From the same [sūtra], “Dying, furthermore, remains with two actions: Traces are still disintegrating, and total misunderstanding is still issuing forth causes in an unbroken stream.”

(287) This is saying that in dying, two actions are effected. Death was made from a cause, and it also states that from death, ignorance is produced. *Thus, in what is destroyed, there is the cause for its production, and from what is destroyed, there is the capacity to produce a result.*

This refers to what is destroyed in a stream, but it is also similar to what happens when a first moment is at a second time destroyed. So it also demonstrates that the first moment is the cause for the destruction that takes place at the second time.

Therefore, for both a born sentient being and a dead sentient being, for what does not remain at a second moment, and for what at a second moment has not remained: whether or not one posits it as a functioning thing, and whether or not it was produced from causes, is entirely the same.

འདི་ལ་དགོངས་ནས་རྩ་ཤི་ལས། དངོས་དང་དངོས་མེད་འདུས་བྱས་ཡིན། ཞེས་དང་། རིགས་པ་བྱུག་ཅུ་བ་ལས་ཀྱང་། རྒྱ་ཟད་ཉིད་ལ་ས་ཞི་བ་ནི། ཟད་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་དམིགས་པ་སྟེ། ཞེས་རྒྱ་གུ་སོགས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་དང་། དེ་ཞིག་པ་དེའི་དངོས་པོར་མེད་པ་གཉིས་ཀ་འདུས་བྱས་དང་། སྐྱུ་ལྟ་བུའི་རྒྱ་ཟད་པ་ནི་མར་མེ་ལྟ་བུའི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཟད་པའི་རྒྱུ་གསུངས་པས། འཕགས་པའི་བཞེད་པར་གཞོན་མི་ཐ་བར་འདོད་པར་བྱའོ། །སྐད་ཅིག་དང་པོ་དུ་ས་གཉིས་པར་ཞིག་པ་ནི་དངོས་སུ་དགག་བྱ་བཅད་ནས་རྟོགས་དགོས་པས། དགག་པ་ནི་ཡིན་ལ་མེད་དགག་ནི་མ་ཡིན་པས་མ་ཡིན་དགག་སྟེ། ཞིག་རྒྱ་དེ་བཅད་པ་ཅམ་མིན་གྱི་དེ་བཅད་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ཞིག་འཕངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །རྒྱ་བ་བྱེད་ལྷག་པ་ནི་རྒྱས་པར་རྩ་ཤིའི་རྒྱ་ལས་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། འདི་ནི་ལྷགས་འདིའི་རིགས་པ་སྤྱི་ལ་དོན་ཆེ་བ་ཅིག་ཏུ་འདུག་གོ།

To this idea the *Root Verses on Wisdom* says: “Both functioning things and those without function are produced things,” and the *Sixty Verses on Reasoning* also states:

From the very exhaustion of the cause comes peace,
which is what is focused upon when we say, ‘exhausted’: . . .

So both (1) functioning things such as a sprout, and (2) the lack of functioning of what was destroyed, are produced things. Since it says an exhausted cause, such as that of oil, is the cause of the exhaustion of the result, such as the flame of a butter lamp, you must without doubt accept that this is the Ārya’s intent.

Since one must realize “the first moment that is destroyed at a second time” through the direct elimination of something that is refuted, this is a negation. But since it is not a negation that is a simple absence, it must be a negation in which one thing is not something else. This is because that cause of destruction is not merely something that eliminates; rather, it propels you to think of the functioning thing that was eliminated by it.

You should understand the remaining proofs from the extensive explanations in my commentary to the *Root Verses on Wisdom*. This is a subtle reasoning of this system that has vast ramifications.

གཉིས་པ་ནི། གལ་ཏེ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཁས་མི་ལེན་ཀྱང་དགེ་མི་དགེའི་བག་ཆགས་འཛོགས་དང་། བག་ཆགས་དེ་སྤྲིན་པ་ལས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱུང་བར་འདོད་དགོས་ཏེ། འཇུག་འགྲེལ་ལས། རྩོག་མ་མེད་པའི་འཁོར་བར་དངོས་པོའི་བག་ཆགས་བཞག་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་སྤྲིན་པ། དངོས་པོ་ལ་མཛོན་པར་ཞེན་པ། ཞེས་དང་། དེ་འབྲས་བ་གཞན་ཡང་མང་དུ་འབྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ཡང་བག་ཆགས་འཛོགས་པའི་གཞི་མེད་པར་མི་རུང་བས་གཞི་དེ་གང་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། ཇི་ལྟར་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཁས་ལེན་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལྟར་ན། ཉོན་ཡིད་ཀྱིས་ངོ་སྤྲོད་དུ་བཞུགས་པའི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་གནས་སུ་འདོད་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ལུགས་འདིས་ཀྱང་ངོ་སྤྲོད་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་སྒོ་ལྟན་སྤྲེས་ཀྱི་དམིགས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་བག་ཆགས་སྒོ་བའི་གཞིར་བཞེད་དོ། །འོ་ན་འཇུག་འགྲེལ་ལས། སེམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུན་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་གཞིར་གསུངས་པ་ཇི་ལྟར་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། ང་ཙམ་དེ་ཉིད་སེམས་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བཏགས་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཡིན་པས། སེམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་ཅེས་ཀྱང་བྱ་ལ། སེམས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རིགས་འབྲེལ་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཅེས་པ་ལྟར་ན། དེ་ཡང་རེས་འགའ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་སྒོ་བའི་གཞིར་འབྱུར་རོ།

(288) Here is the second part: [How to posit a basis for the tendencies, even as one does not accept a foundation consciousness].³

Suppose you say: “Even though you do not agree to a foundation consciousness, you still have to accept the idea that tendencies of virtue and non-virtue are deposited, and that results emerge from the ripening of those tendencies. As it states in the commentary to *Entering the Middle Way*: ‘Within the cycle that has no beginning, the tendencies for functioning things are planted and thoroughly ripen. Then one strongly insists on believing in functioning things . . .’⁴ There are many other similar passages. Furthermore, since it would be inappropriate if there were no basis for depositing tendencies, what sort of basis is it?”

³ Note that this section has no corresponding verse in Candrakīrti’s root text. It appears to be Tsongkhapa’s unique interpretation, even though he cites Candrakīrti’s auto-commentary for a parallel idea in terms of the “continuum of the mind.” Nonetheless, the language of the “mere I” appears to be Tsongkhapa’s own.

⁴ See Tsongkhapa’s paraphrased commentary on this passage at the very beginning of Appendix Five.

Just as those who agree to a foundation consciousness say that the home of the tendencies is the foundation consciousness, which serves as the basis for what is focused upon by the afflictive mind when it says “I am,” so in the same way, according to this system, what is focused upon by the naturally-arising state of mind that merely thinks “I am,” is understood to be the infusion substrate for the tendencies.

Now, when the commentary to *Entering the Middle Way* says that the stream of the mind is the basis for the tendencies, how is that so? The mere “I” itself is the continuum labeled in dependence upon the mind, consciousness; thus it is also called “the continuum of the mind.” Insofar as it is called the “continuum” of similar instances of the mind itself, that, too, becomes the infusion substrate for intermittent tendencies.

ཁ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ཚུལ་ནི། འབྲུག་འགྲེལ་ལས། གང་གིས་སེམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་འབག་པར་བྱེད་ཅིང་སྒོ་བར་བྱེད་ལ། རྗེས་སུ་བཞོན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ནི་བག་ཆགས་ཏེ། ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་སྤར་ཐུག་པ་དང་། གོམས་པ་དང་རྩ་བ་དང་བག་ཆགས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་རྣམ་གངས་དག་གོ། དེ་ནི་ཟག་པ་མེད་པའི་ལས་ཀྱིས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྤངས་སུ་བྱེད་ཀྱང་། ཉན་མོས་དང་རང་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་སྤང་བར་མི་རུས་ཏེ། ཉིལ་མར་དང་མེ་ཉྱལ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བསལ་དུ་བྱེད་ཀྱང་། ལུས་པ་དང་སྤྲུམ་བུ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་དེ་དང་ཐུང་བས་ཡོན་ཏན་པ་མོ་དམིགས་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། དཔེ་མི་དགའི་བག་ཆགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གཞན་ལ་ཡང་གཞི་གཉིས་སུ་འགྱུར་བ་མི་ལྟར་རིགས་པར་སྤྱར་རོ།

As for how it is with tendencies for ignorance, the commentary to *Entering the Middle Way* states:

Whatever it is that defiles⁵ the continuum of the mind, and travels along with it after making infusions into it, that is a *tendency*. This is also known as “the threshold of mental afflictions,” “a habit,” “a root,” or “a tendency.”

(289) “These are finished off when the mental afflictions are abandoned through an immaculate path, but they cannot be abandoned by listeners and solitary buddhas. It is like the way that you might have finished cleaning away sesame oil or flowers from a vase or cloth, etc., but because *the one was in close contact with the other*, one can detect the subtle qualities [of the scent of the oil or flowers].

As for other types of tendencies, such as the tendencies of virtue and non-virtue, one must add how it could be reasonable for the basis to become two.⁶

ཁོ་ན་མཐོང་ལས་བར་ཆད་མེད་ལས་ཀྱི་དུས་སུ་དེའི་སྤང་བྱ་མཐོང་སྤང་མེད་མོད་ཀྱང་། སྒོམ་སྤང་གི་བག་ལ་ཉལ་ཡོད་དགོས་ལ། དེའི་ཆེ་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་པ་ནི་གཉིས་སྤང་འབྲུལ་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་མ་བསྐྱད་པའི་ཟག་མེད་ཡིན་པས། དེའི་ངོ་བོར་བག་ལ་ཉལ་དེ་གནས་པ་

⁵ Note that the Tibetan word here, *'bag par byed*, is a verbal cognate of the word for tendencies: *bag chags*. It is as though Candrakīrti is saying that the fragrance of a tendency is what stains or pollutes the mental continuum.

⁶ See the five necessary qualities of a substrate for the infusion of tendencies, in Chapter Two, “Seeds and Fragrances.” It would be worthwhile to explore, in further analysis, how Tsongkhapa might understand this “mere I” to fulfill all the qualities of an infusion substrate that he discussed in his early *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*, including the “neutrality” necessary to receive seeds of both virtue and non-virtue without becoming two separate bases. I think this is the problem Tsongkhapa is referring to here, but it is not entirely clear what his answer would be in this context, since he seems to be saying that it *would* be reasonable for there to be two bases; which is uncomfortable given everything else he has said on the subject.

མི་རིགས་ལ། དབང་ཤེས་ཀྱང་དེའི་རྟེན་དུ་མེད་ཅིང་གཟུགས་ཀྱང་དེའི་རྟེན་དུ་མི་རིགས་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡང་མི་འདོད་པས་དེའི་རྟེན་མེད་
པར་འགྱུར་རོ་སྟེན་མེད་དེ་དེའི་ཆོང་ཙམ་ཞིག་སྒྲིམ་སྤང་གི་བག་ལ་ཉལ་གྱི་རྟེན་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཉེ། སྤང་གཉེན་གཞན་ལ་ཡང་དེ་
བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

Now suppose you wonder: “It may be so that at the time of the uninterrupted path of seeing, that which was to be abandoned by the path of seeing does not exist; but there must still be the dormant tendencies that are abandoned by the path of meditation. But at that time, the mental consciousness is immaculate, for it is not contaminated by the tendencies for mistaking appearances as being dual. So it would not make sense for them to remain dormant within the essence of that mental consciousness. The sense consciousnesses cannot serve as their basis, and it would also not make sense for physical form to be their basis. Since you also do not accept a foundation consciousness, it would turn out they do not have a basis at all.”

But this is no problem, because at that point, a “mere I” is the basis of the dormant tendencies that are abandoned by the path of meditation. You should understand the other things to be abandoned and their antidotes in the same fashion.

ཤུགས་འདིའི་གང་ཟག་གི་འཛོག་ཚུལ་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཤེས་ན་ནམ་མཁའ་དང་རྣམ་ཤེས་མཐའ་ཡས་དང་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པ་གསུམ་དུ་
སྒྲིམ་པའི་འབགས་པའི་རྒྱུ་ལ། འཛིག་རྟེན་ལས་འདས་པ་ཟག་མེད་གྱི་སེམས་མངོན་དུ་གྱུར་པ་ན། འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་སེམས་གཞན་མེད་
པས་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་འགྲོ་བ་ལྟོག་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་པ་དང་། སྤིང་ཅེ་རྒྱུས་པའི་འབགས་པ་ལ་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པའི་སར་གཏོགས་པའི་ཟ་
ག་མེད་གྱི་སེམས་མངོན་དུ་གྱུར་པ་ན། སྤིང་ཅེ་དང་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པ་གཉིས་ཀའི་སས་བསྐྱུས་པའི་འགྲོ་བ་ལྟོག་པར་འགྱུར་ཉེ། ཟག་མེད་
གྱི་སེམས་དེའི་གནས་ནི་འགྲོ་བ་དེ་གཉིས་དང་། ལྷ་དན་ལས་འདས་པའི་འགྲོ་བར་མི་རུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་རིགས་པ་རྣ་
མས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་མི་གཞོད་པར་མངོན་ཉེ། ཟག་བཅས་དང་ཟག་མེད་གྱི་སེམས་གང་ཡང་འགྲོ་བ་དེ་དག་གི་མཆོག་གཞིར་མ་བཞག་ཀྱང་འ
གྲོ་བ་བཞག་པས་ཆོག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

If you understand the unique way in which this system posits the person, then it appears that neither of the following reasonings would be able to undermine it:

(1) “If, in the mental continuum of an ārya born into any of the three [formless realms] of limitless space, limitless consciousness, or nothing-at-all, an immaculate mind beyond the world were to become manifest, then since there would be no other mind within the world, then it would turn out that the wandering being would cease to exist”; or

(290) (2) “If, for an ārya born at the peak of cyclic existence, an immaculate state of mind included within the level of nothing-at-all were to become manifest, then the wandering being who had been subsumed under both the levels of the peak of cyclic existence and nothing-at-all would cease to exist, because the place where that immaculate mind stays would not be appropriate to either of those two kinds of wanderers, nor to a wanderer who had reached nirvāṇa.”

These reasonings cannot undermine this system because, although neither a mind with impurities, nor an immaculate mind, can be set forth as the prime example of what it means to be one of those wandering beings; nonetheless, it is alright that they be set forth as wandering beings.

ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་སྒྲིག་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་ལམ་མ་ཞུགས་དང་སྒྲོལ་བ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱི་འགྲོ་བའི་ངོ་བོ་མ་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲུབ་མ་བསྟན་གྱི་དབང་དུ་མཛད་པའོ། །ལན་
 དེ་དག་གྲང་བདག་འབྲེལ་བས་ལུགས་ཆེན་སོ་རྣམས་ལ་རང་སྟོབས་ཀྱིས་བརྗོད་པར་གཤམ་ཅུས། འོན་ཀྱང་མགོན་སོ་སྟུ་སྟུབ་གྱི་དགོངས་
 བ་ཇི་ལྟ་བ་བཞིན་དུ་རྒྱུགས་པར་འཛོག་ཤེས་པའི་ཤིང་རྩ་ཆེན་སོ་དག་གི་ལུགས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་རྣམས་ལ་དཔགས་
 ར་ཀྱན་གཞི་སྒྲིབ་པའི་རིགས་པ་ལྟག་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་ལུགས་འདི་ལ་མི་གཞོད་པར་མཛོན་ཏེ།
 སྟོ་སྟོས་ཆེ་ཞིང་ཞིབ་ལ་རྩོ་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཅད་གཅད་པར་བྱའོ།

From the point of view of the former position, the essence of wanderers who have not entered a path and the essence of those still in training is presented in terms of what is *non-obscuring and morally neutral*.

In reply, how is someone like me to say anything to those great systems, by my own strength? Nonetheless, in dependence upon the systems of those great innovators who knew how to posit things thoroughly, and just in accordance with the true intent of our Protector, Nāgārjuna, I have spoken. If one examines all of this, then it appears that even all the rest of the reasonings used to establish the foundation consciousness cannot undermine this system. Those of great intellect and who are sharp in fine inquiry should cut it from the root.

ཁག་ཉིས་པ་ནི། སྒྲར་ལས་འགགས་པ་ལས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱུང་བར་བཤད་པའི་དོན་དེ་ཉིད་དཔེའི་སྟོན་པ་བཤད་པ། མི་ལས་ན་བྱུང་མེད་བ་
 ཟང་མོ་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་དག་མཐོང་ནས་ནི། དེ་ནས་གཉིད་སང་གྲང་སང་པའི་ཆེན་ཡང་སྟེ་སོ་སྟུན་སོ་ལ་ད་ལྟ་འགགས་ཤིང་མེད་པ་
 ལ་དམིགས་ནས་ཆགས་པ་དྲག་སོ་སྟེ་བར་འགྱུར་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མིན་པའི་ལས་འགགས་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་ནི། ལས་
 ཀྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱུང་བ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་ལས་ཞིག་པ་ལས་འབྲས་བྱ་འབྱུང་བར་བསྟན་ནོ།

Here is the second section: [showing an example in which a result arises after an action has stopped]. “Now I will explain through an example” the same meaning which was explained before, that a result emerges from a deed that has ended. After seeing the pure object of a fine woman, focused upon while dreaming, then, though he wakes from sleep, and even while awake, intense desire will grow in a foolish man as he focuses upon what is now ended and non-existent.

(291) In the same way, even from ended deeds that did not exist through any nature, the emerging results of deeds do exist. Thus [Candrakīrti] teaches that from destroyed deeds results emerge.

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དེ་ནས་དུས་གཞན་ཅི་ཙམ་ཞིག་ན་འཆི་བའི་དུས་དང་ཆོད་ཉེ་བར་གནས་པའི་ཆོ། དེ་དང་སྐལ་བ་འབྲེལ་བའི་ལས་དེའི་ཆེ་འཕེན་བྱེད་ཟད་
 ར་ས། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཐ་མ་འགག་པའི་ཆེ་འདི་ལྟ་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་ཉལ་ཉལ་བ་ལས་སང་པའི་མིའི་ཡུལ་གྱི་བྱུང་མེད་བཟང་མོ་ལྟ་བུར་ཡི
 ད་ལས་དེ་ཉིད་ལ་མཛོན་དུ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ།

. . . (292) [Quoting from the *Sūtra on Traveling Through Cyclic Existence*,⁷ which Tsongkhapa takes as the source for Candrakīrti’s example . . .] Then, “at some other time, when on the verge of death and about to take stock, at the moment when the karma that has been of the same share as this one has exhausted its power to project; at the point

⁷ *Bhavasamkrānti-sūtra (srid pa ‘pho ba’i mdo)*, Toh. 226, sde dge bka’ ‘gyur, mdo sde, vol. dza.

when the last moment of consciousness is ending, it is like this: One turns towards that very thing, for example, like the way a mind inclines towards the fine woman who was the objective field of a person waking from sleep.”

སྐལ་པ་འདྲ་བ་སྟེ་ཕུང་པོ་རིགས་མཐུན་ཆེ་འདིར་གནས་པའི་ལས་ཟད་ནས། ཆེ་འདིའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཐ་མ་འགག་པའི་ཆེ། ཆགས་ལྡན་སང་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་ཆི་ལས་གྱི་མཛེས་མ་བྲན་ཏེ། ཡིད་དེ་ལ་ཕྱོགས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་འཆི་ཁའི་ཆེ་ཆེ་བྱི་མར་གང་སྤྲིན་པའི་ལས་གྱི་རྣམ་པ་སང་པའི་ལས་དེ་ལ་ཡིད་ཕྱོགས་པར་འགྱུར་གྱི་བྲན་པ་མིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཐ་མ་འགག་ཅིང་། སྐྱེ་བའི་ཆར་གཏོགས་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་པོ་ཡང་ན་ནི་ལྷ་དག་གི་ནང་དུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནས། ཡང་ན་ནི་ཡི་དྲགས་རྣམས་སུ་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར་རོ། །ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་བར་དང་། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་ཐ་མ་འགག་པ་ནི་ཆེ་འདིའི་འོ།

“Of the same share” means the heaps of a consistent type. When the karma for remaining in this life is exhausted, at the point when the last moment of consciousness of this life is ending: In the same way that, just after a man with desire awakens, he recalls the beautiful lady of his dreams, and is inclined towards that state of mind, so too, at the moment of death, in the next life, one’s mind will turn towards the karma associated with the awakened potentials of whatever karma has ripened. But one does not recall the deeds.

In this way, the last moment of consciousness ends, and the first moment of consciousness included within the [new] birth, will emerge “among the gods,” up to “or as a craving spirit.” So it is stated, and the “ending of the last” refers to that of this life.

།དེ་ནས་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་པོ་དེ་འགགས་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་གང་ལ་རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པ་སྤྱིང་བར་འགྱུར་བར་མངོན་པ་དེ་དང་སྐལ་པ་འདྲ་བའི་སེམས་གྱི་རྒྱུན་འབྱུང་ངོ་། །རྒྱལ་པོ་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་ལ་ཆོས་གང་ཡང་འདིག་ཏེན་འདི་ནས་འདིག་ཏེན་པ་རོལ་ཏུ་འཕོ་བ་ཡང་མེད་ལ། འཆི་འཕོ་བ་དང་སྐྱེ་བར་མངོན་པ་ཡང་ཡོད་དེ། རྒྱལ་པོ་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་ལ་གང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཐ་མ་འགགས་པ་དེ་ནི་འཆི་འཕོ་བ་ཞེས་བྱ། གང་ན་མ་ཐར་ཤེས་པ་དང་པོ་འབྱུང་བ་དེ་ནི་སྐྱེ་བ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །རྒྱལ་པོ་ཆེན་པོ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཐ་མ་འགགས་པའི་ཆེ་ཡང་གང་དུ་ཡང་མི་འགྲོ་འོ། །རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཆར་གཏོགས་པ་འབྱུང་བའི་ཆེ་ཡང་གང་ནས་ཀྱང་འོང་བ་མེད་དོ། །དེའི་ཅིའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེ་ན། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་དབེན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །རྒྱལ་པོ་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་ལ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཐ་མ་ནི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཐ་མས་སྟོང་ངོ་། །འཆི་འཕོ་ནི་འཆི་འཕོ་བས་སྟོང་ངོ་། །ལས་ནི་ལས་གྱིས་སྟོང་ངོ་། །རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་པོ་ནི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་པོས་སྟོང་ངོ་། །སྐྱེ་བ་ནི་སྐྱེ་བས་སྟོང་ལ་ལས་རྣམས་ཆུད་མི་ཐ་བར་ཡང་མངོན་ནོ།

... (293) Then [continuing from the *Sūtra on Traveling Through Cyclic Existence*]:

That first moment of consciousness emerges as a stream of mind that is of the same share as what was manifest just before [the last life] ended, which will become ripened experience for [the new birth].

O, great king, in this regard, there is no thing at all that consists of moving from this world to another world over there, yet moving on from death and manifesting birth still exist.

O, great king, in this regard, whatever is the ending of the last moment of consciousness, that is called, “moving on from death.” Whatever is the emergence of the first moment of consciousness, that is called, “birth.”

O, great king, when the last moment of consciousness has ended, still, one does not go anywhere. When the consciousness emerges that is included in a birth, still,

there is nowhere from which one has come. If you ask why this is so, it is because *they are set apart from any nature*.

O, great king, in this regard, the last moment of consciousness is empty of any last moment of consciousness. Moving on from death is empty of moving on from death. Karma is empty of karma. The first moment of consciousness is empty of any first moment of consciousness. Birth is empty of birth; yet it is evident that no karma is ever lost.

ཁེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་སྒྲིལ་དུ་ཉིང་མཆམས་སྐྱར་བའི་ཕྱིན་ལས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བུ་བདེ་སྤྱད་ཅིག་སྟོང་བས། དེ་སྟོང་བའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་སྒྲིལ་སེམས་དང་པོ་ལས་སྒྲིལ་བ་དང་། འཆི་འཕོ་བ་དང་སྒྲིལ་བ་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཡོད་ལ། རྟོན་དམ་པར་མེད་པ་དང་དེའི་རྒྱ་མཆན་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་དཔེ་ན་ཞེས་བ་ནི། དགག་བྱ་ལ་བྱད་པར་སྐྱར་བ་སྟེ་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཐ་མ་སོགས་རང་རང་གིས་སྟོང་པར་གསུངས་པ་ལ་སྐྱར་བར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བསྟན་པ་ན་ལས་འབྲས་ཡོད་པ་མིན་པར་བཟུང་གིས་དོགས་ནས་ལས་རྣམས་རྒྱུད་མི་ཐ་བར་གསུངས་སོ།

(294) So it is said. Since, in a birth within cyclic existence, one experiences as happiness or suffering the result of previous karma, which you took with you across the border of life and death, the stream of consciousness that experiences those things was born from the first moment of mind in this birth. Then, even as moving on from death, as well as birth, exist conventionally, they do not exist ultimately.

The statement that the reason for this is that “they are set apart from any nature,” adds the distinction of the thing to be refuted, so you should also add it to the statements that the last moment of consciousness, and so on, are each empty of what they are. Insofar as it is taught this way, then, for fear of holding that karma and its results might not exist, one states that “no karma is ever lost.”

* * *

གཉིས་པ་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་གསུངས་པའི་ལུང་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཚུད་པ་སྤང་བའོ། །ལ་གསུམ། ལུང་འགལ་སྟོང་བའི་ཆོག་དོན་དངོས། ཡིད་ཤེས་ལས་ངོ་མོ་ཐ་དད་པའི་ཀྱན་གཞི་བཤད་མ་བཤད་ཀྱི་ཚུལ། དགོངས་པའི་དབང་གིས་གསུངས་པའི་དཔེ་བསྟན་པའོ།

. . . (296) For the second section [of “eliminating a rebuttal,” i.e., that this would be in contradiction with scriptures that say there is a foundation consciousness], there are three parts: (1) The meaning of the actual words that dispel the idea that this is in contradiction with scripture, (2) The ways of explaining it that either do or do not say a foundation consciousness is of an essence different from the mental consciousness, and (3) Pointing out an example stated by force of a deeper intent.

* * *

འདིས་ནི་དགོས་པའི་དབང་གིས་ཀྱན་གཞི་གདུལ་བྱའི་ངོར་ཁས་ལེན་པར་བསྟན་པས། རང་གི་ལུགས་ལ་དགོངས་པ་ཅན་དུ་སྟོན་པ་ན་ །གང་ལ་དགོངས་ནས་གསུངས་པའི་དགོངས་གཞི་ནི། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བྱུང་པས་སྟོང་པའི་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་ཁོ་ན་ལ་དགོངས་ནས། ཀྱན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱས་བསྟན་པར་རིག་པར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལ་ཀྱན་གཞིར་གསུང་བ་ནི། རང་བཞིན་དེ་ནི་དངོས་པོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་ཞུགས་པའི་བྱུང་རོ།

. . . [From the first part, on the meaning of the actual words that dispel the idea that this is in contradiction with scripture:] Since this teaches that [the Buddha] asserted a foundation consciousness in front of certain disciples, due to a pressing need, in our

system, we teach that it is something that has a deeper intent. The basis of the deeper intent, about which something was stated to someone out of deeper intent, is the emptiness that is empty of being established through a nature of its own.

This alone was intended, and you should be aware that the word “foundation-of-all consciousness” indicates this. In this regard, it is stated to be a “foundation-of-all” because all functioning things follow upon that nature.

* * *

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། ཤེར་བྱིན་འབྲས་པ་སོགས་མང་པོར་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་གངས་སྟོན་པ་ན། རྣམ་ཤེས་ཆོགས་བྱུག་བཤད་ཀྱི་དེ་ལས་མང་བ་མ་
བཤད་པའི་མདོ་སྡེ་དུ་མ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པས། མདོ་སྡེ་ལས་ཀྱང་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་བཞག་མ་བཞག་གི་རྩ་བ་གཉིས་བཀའ་སྡུལ་པ་བཞིན་དུ། རྩ་
བཅུན་བྱམས་པས་གང་དེ་དག་གི་དོན་རྣམ་པར་འགྲེལ་བ་ན། དབུས་མཐའ་དང་མདོ་སྡེ་རྒྱན་དང་། ཆོས་ཉིད་རྣམ་འབྲེད་དུ་ཀུན་གཞི་ན
མ་པར་བཞག་པ་དང་བྱི་རོལ་མེད་པའི་སྟོགས་བཤད་ལ། མདོན་ཆོགས་རྒྱན་དང་། རྒྱུད་སྒྲ་མ་ལས་ཀྱང་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་རྣམ་པར་མ་བཞ
ག་པ་དང་བྱི་རོལ་མ་བཀག་པའི་སྟོགས་བཤད་དོ།

. . . (299) Here is the second part: [on the ways of explaining it that either do or do not say a foundation consciousness is of an essence different from the mental consciousness.]

In many scriptures, including the *Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines*, when teaching the enumeration of consciousness, it is explained that there are six groups of consciousness, but it is not explained that there are any more than that. Since there are many groups of sūtra like this, there are both groups of sūtra in which the Buddha sets forth a foundation-of-all consciousness and those in which he does not.

In a similar way, Lord Maitreya, too, when commenting upon the meaning of these things, in the *Ornament of the Sūtras (Sūtrālaṃkāra)*, and in *Dividing Things from the Actual Nature of All Things (Dharma-dharmadhātu-vibhaṅga)*, he sets forth a foundation-of-all consciousness and explains the perspective from which there is nothing outside; but in the *Ornament of Realizations (Abhisamayālaṃkāra)* and in the *Sublime Continuum (Uttaratantra)*, he does not set forth a foundation-of-all consciousness, and he explains the perspective from which one does not reject outer objects.

སྟོབ་དཔོན་ཆེན་པོ་སོགས་མེད་ཀྱིས་གང་རྒྱུད་སྒྲ་མའི་དགོངས་པ་རྣམ་རིག་ཅན་གྱི་སྟགས་སུ་ཡེ་མ་བཤད་པར། དབུ་མའི་སྟགས་སུ་བ
ཤད་ལ། ཐེག་བསྟན་སུ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྟབ་བྱེད་དུ་བྲངས་པའི་ཆོས་མདོན་པའི་ལུང་། རྒྱུད་སྒྲ་མའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། སེམས་ཅན
ལ་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་ཁམས་གྲུབ་པ་སྟོང་པོར་གྱུར་བ་ཡོད་མོད་ཀྱི། སེམས་ཅན་དེ་དག་གིས་ཤེས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་
སོ། །དེ་སྐད་དུ། ཐོག་མ་མེད་པའི་དུས་ཀྱི་ཁམས། །ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་གནས་ཡིན་ཏེ། །དེ་ཡོད་པས་ན་འགྲོ་ཀུན་དང་། །ལྷ་དང་འད
ས་པའང་ཐོབ་པ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་སེམས་ཅན་ལ་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རིགས་ཡོད་པའི་སྟབ་བྱེད་དུ་བྲངས་པས། སྟོབ་དཔོན་འདིས་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེ
ས་ཀྱི་དགོངས་གཞི་སྟོང་ཉིད་དུ་བཤད་པ་དང་མཐུན་པའི་བྱིར། ཆོགས་བྱུག་ལས་ངོ་མོ་ཐ་དད་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་གདུལ་བྱ་འགའ་ཞིག་གི་ངོ
ར། དགོས་པའི་དབང་གིས་གསུངས་པར་བཞེད་དོ།

The great master, Asaṅga, moreover, *never* explained the true intent of the *Sublime Continuum* according to the system of Awareness-Only, but rather explained it according to the Middle Way. To this end, in his commentary to the *Sublime Continuum*, [Asaṅga] takes the quotation from the *Abhidharma Sūtra* that he used as proof for the foundation-

of-all consciousness in his *Summary of the Greater Way (Mahāyāna-saṃgraha)*, as follows:⁸

It is said that the realm of Those Gone Thus is established in all living beings as their heart-essence, but it is not understood by those living beings. As it is stated:⁹

A realm that existed from time without beginning
is the place where all things abide:
Since it exists, all living beings have attained it
and those gone beyond, too.

(300) Since this is cited as a proof that sentient beings have the family lineage of the actual nature of reality, this is in accord with the way that this master explains the basis of the deeper intent behind the idea of “foundation consciousness” to be *emptiness*.

Thus he wishes to say that a foundation consciousness that could be separate in essence from the six groups of consciousness was spoken in front of some disciples, due to a pressing need.

* * *

ཁག་ཏེ་ཀུན་གཞི་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བར་ཁས་མི་ལེན་ཀྱང་། ཚོགས་རྒྱལ་ལས་ངོ་མོ་ཐ་དང་སའི་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུ་ཀུན་བྱང་གི་ཚོགས་ཀུན་གྱི་ས་མོན་ཐམས་ཅད་བ་ཁས་ལེན་ནོ་སྟུམ་ན། དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཁས་ལེན་ན་ཀུན་གཞིའི་བག་ཆགས་སྒྲིན་བ་ལས་གཟུགས་སྒྱུ་མོགས་སྒྱུ་སྒྲང་བ་ཅན་དུ་ཟད་ཀྱི། ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་དོན་མེད་བར་ཁས་སྒྲུང་དགོས་ན། དེ་ཉིད་ལས། ཤེས་བསམ་ཤེས་བྱ་ཉོགས་བ་སྟེ། ཤེས་བྱ་མེད་བར་ཤེས་བ་མེད། ཤེ་ལྟ་ན་ནི་རིག་བྱ་དང་། རིག་བྱེད་མེད་ཅེས་ཅིས་མི་འདོད། ཅེས་ཕྱིའི་ཤེས་བྱ་དང་ནང་གི་ཤེས་བ་གཉིས་ཡོད་མེད་མཚུངས་པས་གཅིག་མེད་ན་ཅིག་ཤོས་མེད་བར་གསུངས་ལ། འདི་ནི་གཞུང་འདིར་དོན་ཤེས་གཉིས་དོན་དམ་དུ་མེད་མཉམ་དང་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་ཡོད་མཉམ་ཡིན་པས། བདེན་གཉིས་གང་དུ་ཡང་དེ་གཉིས་ལ་ཡོད་མེད་ཀྱི་བྱུང་བར་འབྱེད་བ་མི་འཐད་བར་གསུངས་བ་དང་བྱུང་མེད་པས་ན། ཕྱི་རོལ་མེད་བའི་ཤེས་བ་ཡོད་བ་སྟོབ་དཔོན་གྱི་བཞེད་བ་མིན་ནོ།

. . . (301) Suppose you think: “Although I do not accept a foundation consciousness that could be established through characteristics of its own, I do accept a place for all the

⁸ Cf. Asaṅga, *Mahāyānottaratantra-śāstra-vyākhyā*, *theḡ pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos rnam par bshad pa (Explanation of the Sublime Continuum)*, Toh. 4025, sde dge, sem tsam, vol. *phi*, 111b6-7. Note that the Dégé Tengyur edition reads: “*sems can la de bzhin gshegs pa'i kham*s ‘*grub pa'i snying por gyur pa yod mod kyi . . .*” (instead of Tsongkhapa’s quoted “*grub pa snying por*”) which would change the translation of the first sentence to something like, “It is said that ‘the realm of Those Gone Thus exists in all living beings as the heart-essence of what will be established, but it is not understood by those living beings . . .’” This structure actually makes more sense in the context of the *Uttaratantra* commentary, where Asaṅga is explaining “the realm of Those Gone Thus” as a *cause*. But the wording of Tsongkhapa’s quotation is consistent across the editions I have consulted, and accords with the way he will want to interpret it, as an unchanging emptiness; though the Tibetan grammar is a bit uncomfortable. I doubt there was an intentional alteration, but it would require addition research to discover whether Tsongkhapa’s version exists in any other editions of the Tengyur.

⁹ Cf. the use of this same verse, attributed to the “*Abhidharma-sūtra*” in Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *theḡ pa chen po bsdus pa*, Toh. 4048, sde dge, sems tsam, vol. *ri*, 2a7. The original source of this verse quotation, cited as the “*Abhidharma-sūtra*” (*chos mngon pa'i mdo*) is no longer extant. See John Makeham, 2014, *Transforming Consciousness: Yogācāra Thought in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 369n71: “*Abhidharma-sūtra (Apīdamo jing . . .)* is quoted in Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānasamgraha*. Although it has never been found in any extant Buddhist canon, it is regarded as one of the foundational scriptures in the Yogācāra School.”

seeds of every existing thing – both of that which is afflicted existence and that which is totally pure – that is separate in essence from the six groups of consciousness and that is like an illusion.”

If you accept a foundation consciousness such as that, then it would amount to saying nothing more than that the tendencies of the foundation consciousness, once ripened, appear as form, sound, and the rest.

But if you had to accept that this meant there was no such thing as outer objects, then the same text [Nāgārjuna’s *Commentary on the Wish for Enlightenment*] states:

Knowable things are realized by consciousness;
where there is nothing to be known
there is no consciousness.
Put that way, who would not accept
that ‘there are no things of which one is aware
nor any awareness to know them’?

This is saying that since outer knowable things and inner consciousness must be the same in existing or not existing, if one does not exist, then the other cannot exist. Since in this scripture both objects and consciousness are equal in not existing ultimately and in existing conventionally, it would not make sense to cut a distinction between the two in terms of whether or not they exist according to either of the two realities. As there is no difference between these two sets of ideas, presented in the same scripture, it cannot be the intent of the master [Nāgārjuna] that there should be consciousness with nothing outside it.

།དེའི་ཕྱི་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་པ་ལས་ངོ་མོ་ཐ་དང་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་མི་བཞེད་པས་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ནི། སྤྱིར་སེམས་རིག་ཅིང་གསལ་
ཙམ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞིར་བཞག་པ་དང་། བྱད་པར་བྱ་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སེམས་སྤྱི་ཙམ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་བཀག་པའི་ལན་དུ།
སེམས་བདེན་པར་མེད་པ་ལ་བྱ་བྱེད་རུང་བའི་ཚུལ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། སྤྱིར་པར་སྤྱེ་བ་འཛིན་པའི་སེམས་ཡིད་ཤེས་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ད
ང་། ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་དང་རྣམ་བྱང་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གཞི་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

(302) Therefore, since he does not accept a foundation consciousness that could be separate in essence from mental consciousness, the mention of “foundation of all” means this: *In general, the mere fact that mind is aware and clear is set forth as the “foundation of all,” and in particular, this is set forth as the mental consciousness.*

This is true (1) because as a follow-up to the refutation that just mind in general could ever exist by nature, this [being aware and clear] is how it is suitable for mind to perform activities, while not existing really; (2) because the mind that grasps hold of a birth in cyclic existence is the mental consciousness; and (3) *because mental consciousness is the foundation of all afflicted existence and all that is totally pure.*

Appendix Seven: Two Strategies for a Cure

Excerpts from the *Illumination of the True Thought*¹

ཁོ་ན་འགྲེལ་བར་སེམས་ཅམ་པའི་འདོད་པ་བརྗོད་པ་ན། བྱི་རོལ་མེད་ཅེས་པ་མང་དུ་གསུངས་ཤིང་། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལས་ཐ་དད་པ་ར་གྱུར་བའི་གཟུང་བ་ནི་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ཞེས། གཟུགས་སོགས་ཀྱི་གཟུང་བ་མེད་པ་ལ་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལས་ཐ་དད་པའི་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལས་སྒྲིལ་བ་དང་། དབང་སོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་མིག་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་རྟོགས་ཞེས་པའི་འགྲེལ་བ་ལས། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལས་ཐ་དད་པའི་མིག་གི་དབང་སོ་ནི་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་དགག་བྱ་ལ་བྱུང་བར་སྐར་ལྷ་ར་སྐར་བ་བཞིན་སེམས་ཅམ་གྱི་སྐྱབས་སུ་འདོད་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་ནམ། འོན་ཏེ་གཟུགས་སོགས་ལྔ་དང་དབང་སོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་ལྔ་མེད་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་མ་སྐར་བར་ཁས་ཐུང་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་སྐྱེས་ན། འགྲེལ་བ་འདིར་བྱ་དཔལ་སྐར་མ་སྐར་གཉིས་ཀ་འདུག་ཀྱང་། སྐྱེ་བ་འགོག་པ་ལ་དགག་བྱ་ལ་བྱུང་བར་སྐར་བ་མང་དུ་བྱུང་ན། མ་བྱུང་བའི་སྐྱབས་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་ཡང་དེ་འབྱུང་བ་བཞིན་བྱ། འདིར་ཡང་དེ་ལྟར་བྱ་སྟེ།

(307) Now in the *Commentary* [i.e., Candrakīrti's *Auto-Commentary*], when expressing what the Mind-Only school believes, it is stated many times that “nothing outer exists,” and that “a beheld thing that could ever be of a separate substance from consciousness does not have the slightest bit of existence.” With respect to a lack of something beheld that could be form and the rest, the distinction is stated that specifies it to be “x as separate from consciousness.” The *Commentary* for the line [from verse 6:62], “*Is experienced as something called an ‘eye,’ a sense faculty having form,*” states that, “a sense faculty of the eye that is separate from consciousness has no existence.” Thus [Candrakīrti] applies a distinction to the thing being refuted, as before.

But suppose you think, “Is there reason to believe it was this way for the Mind-Only philosophers themselves? Or is there reason to affirm the statement that, ‘The five of visual form, [sound, smell,] and the rest, along with the five physical sense faculties, do not exist,’ *without* applying such a distinction?”

(308) In this *Commentary* there are both, i.e., cases in which the distinction is applied and those in which it is not applied. Nevertheless, insofar as there are many instances where he applies a distinction to the thing being refuted with respect to refuting ‘growing,’ in every case where it is not applied, he still carries it along [implicitly]. Similarly, here too, one should do the same thing.

འདིར་ཕྱོགས་སྔ་མ་བརྗོད་པའི་གཞུང་ཐེག་བསྐྱས་སུ། ཅིའི་བྱིར་ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ན། དབང་སོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། ལུས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པའི་གནས་སུ་གྱུར་པའི་བྱིར་ཉེ། འདི་ལྟར་ཆེ་འཇིག་པར་རྗེས་སུ་འཇུག་གི་བར་དུ་དེས་དབང་སོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་ལྔ་སོ་དག་མ་ཞེག་པར་ཉེ་བར་བཟུང་བ་དང་། ཞེས་དང་། སྐར་མོང་ནི་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ས་སོན་གང་ཡིན་པའོ། །སྐར་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་སོ་སོ་རང་གི་སྐྱེ་མཆེད་ཀྱི་ས་སོན་གང་ཡིན་པའོ། །སྐར་མོང་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་ཆོར་བ་མེད་པ་འབྱུང་བའི་ས་སོན་ནོ། །ཞེས་ཀུན་གཞིའི་སྐྱེད་གི་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ས་སོན་ཆོར་བ་མེད་པའི་དངོས་པོའི་ས་སོན་དུ་གསུངས་པ་དང་།

¹ *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, vol. *ma*, 153a4-168b1 (307-338), emphasis mine. See Appendix Four, note 1.

It is also expressed according to the former position in that authoritative book, [Asaṅga's] *Summary of the Greater Way*: “Suppose you ask why it is called the ‘appropriated consciousness.’ This is because it is the cause for all the physical sense faculties, and because it is the place from which each and every body is immediately appropriated. In this way, as long as one continues to engage in a lifetime, the group of five physical sense faculties are not destroyed; they are closely held.” Also, “Whatever seeds there are for the vessel of the world are shared in common. Whatever seeds are for one’s individual sensory fields are not shared in common; they are unique. Whatever is in common are the seeds for the elements that lack feeling.” This states that the seeds for the vessel of the world that rest upon the foundation consciousness are the seeds for functional things that lack feeling.

བསྐྱེད་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གསུངས་ཤིང་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་མདོ་འགྲེལ་དུ། གུན་གཞི་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རྟེན་གྱིས་མིང་གཞུགས་འབྲུབ་པར་བཤད་པའི་མིང་ཕྱང་ལོ་ལྷག་མ་བཞི་དང་། གཞུགས་འབྲུང་བ་འབྲུང་འགྱུར་གྱི་གཞུགས་ལ་འཆད་ཅིང་། དེ་འདྲ་དེ་གཞུགས་མེད་ན་མེད་ཀྱང་ཁ་མས་གཞན་གཉིས་ན་ཡོད་པར་བཤད་པ་སོགས་སེམས་ཅམ་གྱི་ལུགས་ལ་གཞུགས་ཁས་ལེན་པ་མཐའ་ཡས་པ་ཞིག་སྤང་ངོ་། །དེ་ལྟ་མ་ཡིན་ན་སེམས་ཅམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་གཞུགས་ཕྱང་གི་སྟེང་ནས། དེ་ལྟར་གཞུགས་སྤྱོད་སོགས་ཐ་སྙད་མཛད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ། གསར་དུ་མ་བཅོས་པ་ཐ་སྙད་བཏགས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཐ་སྙད་བྱེད་དུ་མི་རུང་བ་ཁོ་ནར་འགྱུར་བར་སྤང་ལ། དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཐ་སྙད་བྱར་མི་རུང་བར་མཐོང་ཡང་ད་དུང་བྱུང་མཐའ་འདི་ལེགས་སོ་ཞེས་པ་ནི་འཕགས་ལུལ་གྱི་སངས་རྒྱུ་བ་སུ་ལ་ཡང་མི་སྤང་ངོ་།

The *Summary* [Yogācāryabhūmi-viniścayasamgraha] states it in the same way, while the *Commentary to the Sūtra on Dependent Origination* [by Vasubandhu] explains that from the condition of all the foundation consciousnesses name and form are actualized. Here “name” refers to the remaining four heaps, and “form” is explained to be the form of the elements and things made from the elements. Similarly, there is the explanation that, although there is none in the formless [realm], nevertheless [form] exists in the other two realms, and so on. So it appears that in the Mind-Only tradition there are countless people who affirm the existence of form.

If this were not the case, then in the context of Mind-Only, it appears that, for anyone who applied the conventional terms of “form,” “sound,” and so on, atop the heap of form, then to apply such a conventional label (one that was not made up out of whole cloth) could only ever be an *inappropriate* application of a convention.

(309) Who among the Buddhists of the Land of the Āryas [i.e., India] would ever see that such a convention was inappropriate, and yet still say, “This is a good philosophy”? It appears no one would.

།ཤེས་བྱ་ནང་གིར་སྤྱོད་པ་ཞེས་པའི་མིང་དོན་ཀྱང་ཤེས་བྱ་ནི་གཞུགས་སྤྱོད་སོགས་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཕྱི་རོལ་ཏུ་མི་འདོད་ཀྱི་ནང་ཤེས་པའི་དངོས་པོར་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་ཟེར་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །གལ་ཏེ་སེམས་ཅམ་པས་གཞུགས་སྤྱོད་སོགས་ཁས་ལེན་ན། དེ་ཕྱི་རོལ་ཡིན་པ་འགོག་པ་མིང་ཅམ་ལ་ཚུད་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། ཕྱི་རོལ་ཏུ་སྤྱང་བའི་གཞུགས་སོགས་འདི་ཉིད་ལ་ཕྱི་རོལ་ཏུ་འཛོག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེ་ན།འདི་དང་དབྱེ་མ་པས་གཞུགས་སོགས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་བཀག་ནས་གཞུགས་སོགས་འཛོག་པ་ལ། རང་མཚན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བར་སྤྱང་བའི་གཞུགས་སོགས་འདི་ཉིད་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བར་འཛོག་པའི་ཕྱིར། དེ་ཡོད་མེད་ལ་ཚུད་པ་མིང་མེད།ལ་ཚུད་པའི་ཞེས་པ་དང་འདྲ་སྟེ། བྱུང་མཐའ་འགཉིས་ཀའི་དཀའ་གནས་ཆེན་པོར་སྤང་བས། དབྱེ་མའི་ཚུལ་དཀའ་བར་མ་ཟད་སེམས་ཅམ་པའི་ལུགས་འདི་ལ་ཡང་། ཕྱི་རོལ་བཀག་

ན་གཟུགས་སོགས་ཀྱང་མེད་པར་འགྲོ་ཞིང་། གཟུགས་སོགས་བཞག་ན་ཕྱི་རོལ་ཡང་བཞག་དགོས་པར་མཐོང་བར་འདུག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །འདི་དག་དཀའ་མོད་ཀྱང་མངས་བས་འཛིགས་ནས་མ་གྲིས་སོ།

Furthermore, in the meaning of the name “Those who profess things to be known as inner,” the “things to be known” are form, sound, and the rest. One may not accept that these are outer, but then one should be called, “One who professes what is inner, consciousness, to be the functional thing.” Suppose you say, ‘If Mind-Only philosophers do affirm form, sound, and the rest, then to refute them as being outer would become a debate in name only. Because the form and the rest that appear as outer are themselves what are posited as outer.’

Both these [Mind-Only persons] and the Middle Way philosophers only posit form and the rest *after* refuting a form and the rest that could ever be established through defining characteristics of their own. This is because it is the very “form and the rest” that *appear* to exist through their own defining characteristics that are posited as existing through their own defining characteristics. It is like the saying: “To debate about whether or not they exist is to debate about a name.”²

Since this appears to be a great point of difficulty in both philosophical systems, not only is the method of the Middle Way difficult, but this tradition of Mind-Only is too. If you refute what is outer, then form and the rest have to go out of existence, too. If you establish form and the rest, you will see that you have to establish them as outer, too. This is difficult, but out of fear of saying too much, I will not write about it further.

།གང་གི་ཕྱིར་གསུང་རབ་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་བཞག་པ་ནི་སྤར་བཤད་པ་འདི་ཡིན་པར་གྲགས་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་རོ་སོ་གང་ཡིན་པ་འདི་ནི་གདོན་མི་ཟ་བར་ཁས་སྒྲུང་བར་བྱ་སྟེ། གང་གི་ཕྱིར་གསུང་འཛིན་གྱི་དངོས་སོ་བཏགས་པར་ཡོད་པ་སྟེ། རྩས་ཐ་དད་དུ་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པ་སོགས་ཀྱི་རྟོག་པའི་བྱ་བ་མ་ལུས་པའི་རྒྱ་སྟེ་གཞིར་འགྱུར་བར་འདོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཐག་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཅན་གྱི་སྒྲུབ་དུ་འཁྲུལ་བ་ནི་ཐག་པ་མེད་པའི་གཞིར་མི་སྟེ་ལ། བུམ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཅན་གྱི་འཁྲུལ་བ་ནི་ས་ལ་སོགས་པ་མེད་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐོགས་སུ་སྟེ་བར་མི་འགྱུར་བ་བཞིན་དུ། ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་དོན་མེད་ན་སྟོན་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཕྱི་རོལ་དུ་འཁྲུལ་བའི་རྟོག་པ་འཁྲུལ་གཞི་ཇི་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་གི་རྒྱ་ཅན་དུ་འགྱུར། དེའི་ཕྱིར་གདོན་མི་ཟ་བར་ཕྱི་རོལ་དུ་འཁྲུལ་བའི་རྟོག་པའི་རྒྱ་གཟུང་འཛིན་རྩས་ཐ་དད་པ་གཉིས་སུ་སྤང་བའི་མ་དག་གཞན་དབང་ཁས་སྒྲུང་དགོས་ཏེ། སྤང་གཞི་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱན་བྱང་གི་འཆིང་ཕྱོལ་གཉིས་ཀའི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

(310) Since what I explained before is what is set forth in the classical texts, I will expound it here: Therefore, whatever essence is established through its own nature as being something dependent on others, without a doubt you must affirm that it exists. Here

² Most Tibetan carvings have *ming* here, but apparently the *zhöl* edition reads *med la rtsod pa*, in which case the saying would have to be: “To debate about whether or not they exist is to debate about something that does not exist.” Although Tsongkhapa does use the phrase “debate about a name” elsewhere in his writings, here I find the alternative version to be a more intriguing reading, since the point is that for both schools, an outer object that could ever exist through its own defining characteristics is a non-existent construct, an object to be refuted. Thus to argue about whether *that* kind of outer object exists or not is a debate about nothing – for those who understand. But it seems Tsongkhapa thinks that many historical proponents of the Mind-Only position did not understand this central distinction of their own “school.” Nonetheless, even if it were to be a “debate about a name,” the point would be much the same, because for both schools, though in different ways, “outer matter” is something that could only exist as a construct.

is why: Since functioning things that are beheld and that do the beholding exist [only] nominally, [you must affirm the dependent things] in order to accept that there is something which will act as the foundation [of nominal things], as the cause for the entire web of conceptions that hold them to be of separate substances, and so on.

If there were no rope as a basis, the mistaking it for a snake that has the rope as its reason would not arise. Furthermore, the mistakes that have a pot, and so on, for their reason, will not come about when facing the sky that has no earth in it, and so on. If there were no outer objects, what sort of cause could there be for the basis of the mistaken conceptions that are mistaken towards the outer – blue and the like? Therefore, without doubt, one must accept the impure dependent things, which appear as though they were two (i.e., as a beholding and a thing beheld that were of separate substances) and which are the cause for the conceptions that are mistaken towards what is outer, because that basis for appearances is the cause for both the chains of what is afflicted and the freedom of what is pure.

།དབྱ་སེམས་གང་གི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་དེ་ལྟ་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ལ་སྣང་ཞིང་། སྣང་བ་ལྟར་དུ་བདེན་པར་ཞེན་པའི་ཞེན་གཞི་དེ། ཞེན་ལུ་ལ་དེས་སྟོང་པར་བསྟན་བ་ཅིག་ཡོད་ན། སྟོང་ཉིད་དེ་རྟོགས་པ་ལས་དུ་འབྱོ་བ་ཡིན་གྱི། སེམས་ཅན་རང་དགའ་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བདེན་པར་ཞེན་པའི་ཞེན་ལུ་ལ་སྟན་པུང་བའི་སྟོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པ་ལས་དུ་མི་བྱེད་པར་སྟོང་བ་གཞན་ཞིག་བདེན་པར་སྟོབ་པ་ནི། མོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་ཞུགས་པའི་བདེན་ཞེན་ཟ་རགས་གང་གི་ཡང་གཉེན་མོར་མི་འབྱོ་བས་ངལ་བ་འབྲས་མེད་དོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་གཉིས་སུ་སྣང་བའི་གཞན་དབང་གང་ལ་གཟུང་འཛིན་ཇས་ཐ་དད་པ་སྣང་བ་བཞིན་དུ་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པའི་ཞེན་ལུ་ལ་གྱི་ཀྱན་བརྟགས་གང་མེད་པ་དེ་ནི། གཞི་དེ་དགག་བྱ་དེས་སྟོང་པར་ཡང་དག་པར་ཇེས་སུ་མཐོང་ལ། སྟོང་གཞི་དང་སྟོང་བ་གང་ཞིག་འདིར་ལྷག་མར་ལུས་པར་གྱུར་བ་དེ། འདི་ན་བདེན་པར་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་ཡང་དག་པ་ཇི་ལྟར་བཞིན་དུ་རབ་ཏུ་ཤེས་པས་འདི་ནི་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ཀྱང་ལེགས་པར་གཟུང་བར་འགྱུར་དོ།

According to both the Middle Way and Mind-Only systems, it appears like this to every living being. The basis for insisting – that which you insist must truly be the way it appears to be – is empty of the very object you insist upon. If there is to be a teaching that shows this, then it is one that will take you along a path to realizing that emptiness. But if living beings, acting of their own accord, do not turn a realization of emptiness into a path – a realization that uproots the very object of insistence that you insist is real – then you will “prove” some other emptiness to be true. Since it will never go to act as an antidote to either the gross or subtle forms of insisting on things as real – in which you have been submerged since time without beginning – your exhaustion will bear no fruit.

(311) Therefore, “that upon which,” means that the dependent things – which appear as two – appear as having a beholder and a thing beheld that are of separate substances. The mental construct of the object you insist upon – which holds things to exist in the way they appear – “is what is not.” You go on to see perfectly that this basis is empty of that thing which is refuted. Here in this basis of emptiness, and in this, the emptiness, there is something left over. This exists as real. Understanding this precisely, you come to grasp well the meaning of emptiness.³

³ This last explanation, of course, still voices the views of the Mind-Only school.

།གཞན་དབང་དེ་ནི་ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་གཞུང་བ་མེད་པར་རང་གི་བག་ཆགས་ཁོ་ན་ལས་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར་ལ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་དང་འདི
འི་ལུགས་ཀྱི་དོན་དམ་པར་སྤྱོད་གཏེ་སྤྱོད་པ་ཀུན་ཏེ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་མིན་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་དུ་ཡོད་དེ། ཕྱི་ནང་གི་མངོན་པར་བ
རྫོང་བ་ནི་དངོས་སྤྱི་མ་བརྟགས་པའི་རྣམ་པ་འཛིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །མདོར་ན་གཞན་དབང་ལ་བྱུང་བར་གསུམ་ཡོད་དེ། ཕྱི་རོལ་མེད་པར་
འབྱུང་བ་དང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་དང་། དོན་དམ་པར་སྤྱོད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ་ཅིག་[sicགཅིག]གི་ཡུལ་མ་ཡིན་པའོ། །བརྟགས་པར་ཡོད་པ
འི་རྒྱ་ནི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པའི་དངོས་པོའི་ཁོངས་སྤྱི་འདུ་བས་དེ་ནི་བྱུང་བར་གསུམ་པོ་ལས་ཐ་མི་དད་དོ།

Those dependent things, insofar as they *lack an outer thing that is held*, come into being only from tendencies [*bag chags*, Skt. *vāsanā*]. They [the dependent things] *exist* through their own nature, and they *exist* ultimately according to this school, i.e., *with a nature* that is *not the object* of all, or every, *elaboration* that could ever be made about them in words and concepts. This is because one beholds an aspect that is not directly construed by outer or inner manifest expressions. In brief, dependent things have three distinguishing characteristics. (1) They arise without anything outer, (2) they exist through their own nature, and (3) they are all emanated ultimately, but are not an objective field [of constructing states of mind].⁴

(312) That they are the cause of constructed things, insofar as this comes under the [second] heading of their being functioning things that exist by their own nature, is not separate from these three points.

* * *

།འདིར་མི་ལས་ན་སྤྱང་བའི་སྒྲུང་པོ་ཆེ་མེད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ཡུལ་ཅན་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་མེད་པར་སྟོན་པ་ནི་མིན་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་ཤེ
ས་པ་མེད་པར་སྟོན་པ་ལ་དེས་པར་འདོད་དགོས་ཏེ། སྤྱར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་སེམས་ཅམ་པས་ཕྱི་རོལ་མེད་པའི་གཞན་དབང་ཁས་སྒྲུངས་པ
ནི། གཞན་དབང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། དགག་པ་འདི་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་དོན་བསྟར། མདོར་ན་རྗེ་ལྟར་ཤེས་བྱ་མེད་དེ་
བཞིན། །སྒྲོ་ཡང་མེད། ཅེས་པའི་འགྲེལ་བར་ཤེས་བྱའི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་སྒྲོ་ཡང་རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་སྦྱེས་པར་རིག་པར་བྱའོ། །ཞེ
ས་གསལ་བར་གསུངས་ཤིང་། གཞན་ཡང་རྩ་འགྲེལ་གཉིས་སྤྱི་འདི་འབྲེལ་རིགས་འགོག་པའི་ཆོ། དགག་བྱ་ལ་བྱུང་བར་སྤྱར་བ་དུ་མ་ཞི
ག་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། སྤྱར་ཡང་དེ་ལས་བདག་ཉིད་ཆེན་པོས་སེམས། །མ་རིག་ལས་ལས་སྦྱེས་པར་ཅི་ཕྱིར་གསུངས། ཞེས་མ་རིག་
པས་འདུ་བྱེད་འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱིས་རྣམ་ཤེས་སྦྱེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་རང་གི་འདུགས་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ན། རྣམ་ཤེས་མེད་པ་འདིའི་ལུགས་སྤྱི་
བ་ལ་ནི་རྟོག་ལྡན་ལ་དོགས་པའི་གནས་མེད་དོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཤེས་བྱ་དང་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ཡོད་མེད་མགོ་མཚུངས་མཛད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་དག
ག་བྱའི་བྱུང་བར་གྱི་སྟེང་ནས་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

. . . (313) Here the teaching is *not* that, just as the elephant that appears in a dream does not exist, so in the same way the subject state of consciousness also does not exist. Rather, you must definitely accept that the teaching is that consciousness *established by its own nature* does not exist. This is because, as explained before, the dependent things

⁴ Or, “they are emanated ultimately; not as the object of one” since “*no cog*” may be a long-term wood-block carving error for “*gcig*,” which would have been the correct parallel word as it appears in Candrakīrti’s *rang ’grel*. This reading would seem to contradict Tsongkhapa’s gloss of Candrakīrti’s own “*spros pa thams cad* [all] *kyi yul ma yin pa’i rang bzhin can yang yin te*” just previously, however. See Candrakīrti, *Auto-Commentary to Entering the Middle Way*, *dbu ma la ’jug pa’i bshad pa*, *Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya*, sde dge bstan ‘gyur, dbu ma, vol. ‘a, Toh. 3862, 264a4: [1] *shes bya med par rang gi bag chags kho na las ’byung ba dang* [2] *yod pa nyid dang* [3] *spros pa’o, .gcig gi yul ma yin pa nyid do*,

asserted by those Mind-Only proponents who assert dependent things that are not outer are dependent things established through a nature of their own.

If we are to summarize the meaning of these refutations, it is clearly stated in the commentary to the lines, “*In brief, just as there are no knowable things so there is no mind,*” that, “you should understand that a *mind* that takes the aspect of *knowable things* cannot come into being through its own identity.” Furthermore, this is true because, in both the root text and commentary, whenever there is a refutation with this kind of logic, there are many places where the distinction of the thing to be refuted is applied.

(314) Also, in the lines “*But once again from that, why would the Great Being ever have stated, that mind is born from ignorance and karma?*” it is stated that from ignorance comes traces, and from traces consciousness is born. Since this is also our own system, those with discerning minds should have no place for doubts as to whether perhaps we in this system claim that there is no consciousness at all. Thus you should know that in every case where the existence or non-existence of knowing and that which is known have equal status, that this takes place on top of a distinction regarding what is to be refuted.

* * *

ཇི་ལྟར་ཁྱོད་གྱི་སང་པའི་ཆོངས་མི་ལམ་གྱི་དུས་སྟུ་མཐོང་སྟུ་མཐོང་ཡུལ་ཅན་གྱི་བླ་བ་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ཡིད་ཡོད་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། མི་ལམ་གྱི་ཆོངས་པའི་མཐོང་སྟུ་མཐོང་ཡུལ་སྤྱི་ལོ་ཉེ་ཡུལ་ལ་ཡང་བླ་བ་ཡོད་པས། ཡུལ་ཡང་ཡོད་པའམ་ཡང་ན་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱང་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ནོ་ཞེས་ཁས་སྐྱབས་བར་བྱའོ།

. . . (314) Just as, when you awake, the subjective memory that thinks, “During my dream I saw . . .” does exist, so its thinking mind should exist also. In the same way, since the memory of its outer likeness, i.e., its object (the experience of an object that thinks, “During my dream, I saw *this* . . .”), exists, so either the object should also exist, or else the consciousness should not exist. You would have to accept this.

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ཁདི་ལྟར་ཇི་ལྟར་ཁྱོད་གྱི་ལྟར་ན་བྱེ་རྩེ་གྱི་ཡུལ་དེ་དོན་མི་ལམ་དུ་མ་སྟེས་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། ཡིད་གྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟེས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཉེའི་ཕྱིར་ཇི་ལྟར་སང་པའི་ཆོངས་གཟུགས་མཐོང་བ་ན། མིག་དང་གཟུགས་དང་ཡིད་གསུམ་སོ་འདུས་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། མི་ལམ་དུ་ཡང་ཡུལ་ཡོངས་སྟུ་གཅོད་པ་ན་གསུམ་འདུས་པར་སྒོས་དམིགས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཇི་ལྟར་མི་ལམ་དེར་མིག་དང་མིག་གི་ཡུལ་གཟུགས་གཉིས་མེད་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་སེམས་མིག་གི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱང་ཡོད་པ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་པས། མི་ལམ་གྱི་མིག་གཟུགས་ཡིད་གསུམ་སོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་ནི་བརྒྱན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། གསུམ་སོ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་རྩ་བ་སོགས་མིག་གི་གསུམ་གྱི་ལྷག་མ་གསུམ་སོ་འང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟེས་པ་མེད་དོ།

. . . (316) In this way, if it were as you say, then just as in a dream an outer object can never start, then in the same way, a mental consciousness could never start by its own nature, either. Therefore, just as when you are awake, if you see a physical form, there is a gathering together of eye, and form, and consciousness, so in the same way, even in a dream, if you are able to determine an object, then it is focused upon by a mind that comes from the gathering together of the triad. Insofar as in that dream there is neither eye, nor form that is an object of the eye, then the mind produced by the two – an eye

consciousness – does not exist either. *Thus all the triads of eye, form, and mind belonging to a dream are utterly false.* Like these three, the ear and so on (the rest of the triads following after the triad of the eye), also cannot start through any nature of their own.

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མི་ལམ་ན་དེ་དག་མེད་ཀྱང་དེ་དག་གི་ནམ་པར་སྤང་བས་བརྟན་པ་དང་། ཡིད་ཀྱི་གསུམ་ནི་མི་ལམ་ན་ཡོད་ཀྱང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མེད་བཞིན་དུ་དེར་སྤང་བས་བརྟན་པ་ལོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་མི་ལམ་ན་དབང་ཤེས་ཡོད་པ་སྟོབ་དཔོན་འདིའི་ལུགས་སྟུ་བྱས་ནས་དེ་ལ་དགག་པ་བྱེད་པ་ནི། རྩོམ་གྱི་འབྲུག་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཅིང་བས། རྩོགས་སྤེའི་ནམ་མཁའ་ས་པ་ལ་དགག་པའི་ཉི་མ་ཤར་བ་ཡིན་ཞེས་གྲགས་པ་བཞིན་ཡིན་པས། རྒྱང་རིང་དུ་དོར་བར་བྱ་སྟེ་བོད་ཀྱི་མཁས་པར་རྫོམ་པ་འགྲའ་ཞིག་ལ། འདི་འདྲ་བའི་གྲུབ་མཐའ་ལ་མཁས་པའི་དབང་སོ་སེམས་དཔའ་ཆེན་པོ་ཡིན། རོ་ཤེས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལུགས་རགས་པའང་མ་གོ་བར། དེ་རྣམས་བསོད་ནམས་མ་ཡིན་པ་རྒྱན་ལྷན་དུ་གསོག་པའི་ཞིང་དུ་གཟུང་ནས། སེམས་ཅན་དུ་མ་ཞིག་བསོད་ནམས་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་སྟོར་བར་སྤང་བས་བག་ཡོད་པར་བྱོས་ཤིག།

. . . (317) These [triads pertaining to the five physical senses] do not exist in a dream, but insofar as there is an appearance in their aspect, they are false. The triad pertaining to the mind does exist in a dream, but insofar as it does not exist through its own nature, while still appearing to do so, it is also false.

Therefore, for someone to make it out as though this Master’s [i.e. Candrakīrti’s] system holds the sense faculties and consciousnesses to exist in a dream, and then for such a person to go on and make a refutation of that, is an extremely crude way to engage with intelligence. It is like going around saying that, “In the camp of our opponent’s position, where night has not yet lifted, the refuted sun is rising.” So you should cast such ideas far away from you. To some Tibetans who have the pretention of learning, to be a big scholar who comprehends a philosophical conclusion such as this, is what it means to be a great bodhisattva. But without even a coarse understanding of the systems of recognition, it appears that they who possess little merit are being held up as the field in which many living beings continuously collect merit. But then those living beings will be continuously connected to those without merit; so be careful.

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།དེའི་ཕྱིར་འཇིག་རྟེན་འདི་ན་རི་ལྟར་མི་ཤེས་པའི་གཉིད་ཡོད་ཀྱང་། དེ་ལས་ཐ་དད་པའི་ཐ་མལ་པའི་གཉིད་དང་བྲལ་བས་སད་པ་འགྲའ་ཞིག་ལ། རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་གྱིས་མ་སྟེས་ཀྱང་མ་རིག་པའི་གཉིད་གྱིས་མི་ལམ་མི་བཞིན་པས་དམིགས་པའི་རོར། །གསུམ་ཆར་ཡང་ཡོད་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་རི་མིན་དུ་གཉིད་དང་མ་བྲལ་བ་མ་སད་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་། དེ་མིན་དུ་དེ་ལ་སྟེ་དེའི་རོར་ཡུལ་དབང་རྣམས་ཤེས་གསུམ་པོ་ཡང་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །གཉིད་སད་པར་གྱུར་པ་ན། མི་ལམ་གྱི་གསུམ་ཆར་ཡོད་པ་མིན་པ་ལྟར། གཉི་སྟག་གི་གཉིད་ཟད་པ་སྟེ་མ་ལུས་པར་བྱངས་སྤང་བ་ལས། ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་མཛད་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས་ལ་ནི། གསུམ་ཆར་ཡང་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་སྟེ་རོ་ལ་མེད་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་མེད་དོ། །དེ་ཡང་རི་ལྟར་གཟིགས་པའི་རོར་ནི་གསུམ་པོ་མི་སྤང་ལ། རི་སྟེང་པ་གཟིགས་པའི་རོར་ནི་ཡུལ་ཅན་རང་ཉིད་མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གྱིས་བསྟན་པའི་དབང་གིས་སྤང་བ་མེད་ཀྱང་། གང་ཟག་གཞན་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་བསྟན་པའི་དབང་གིས་སྤང་བ་རྣམས། དེ་ལ་སྤང་བའི་སྟོན་སངས་རྒྱས་ལ་སྤང་ནས་མཐེན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

. . . (320) Therefore, insofar as in this world there is a sleep of not-knowing, then to the perceptions of those who are in the waking state (being free of the ordinary sleep that is distinct from this ignorance), although things cannot grow through any essence of their own, nevertheless, the perceptual triads still exist, since the dream dreamed by the sleep

of ignorance is still going on. In the same way, as long as one is not free of that sleep, or does not wake from that sleep, so long, to those dreamers, the triad of objects, faculties, and consciousness will exist.

Just as, for one who wakes from sleep, the triads from the dream have no existence, so for all those Buddhas, who have finished off, or torn out from its root, the sleep of delusion, and have made manifest the absolute space of phenomena, since the triads have no existence, there is also no “consciousness with nothing outside.”

(321) Furthermore, to the holy gaze that sees how things exist, the triads do not appear, but to the holy gaze that sees things in their variety – although for that subject state of mind itself, nothing appears by the power of being contaminated by the tendencies of ignorance – nonetheless, all those things that appear by the power of the contaminated consciousness of other persons, insofar as they appear to that holy gaze, appear to the Buddha, and this is divine knowledge.

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མིག་གི་དབང་པོ་རབ་རིབ་དང་བཅས་པ་ལ་སྒྲོ་གང་གིས་རབ་རིབ་ཀྱི་མཐུ་ལས་སྐྱེ་ཤང་རྣམས་གང་མཐོང་བ་ན། གང་ཟག་དེའི་སྒྲོ་ཡི་མཐོང་བ་ལ་ལྟོས་ན་ནི། མིག་ཤེས་དང་སྐྱེ་བ་ཤང་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་སྟེ་སྐྱེ་ཤང་དུ་སྤང་བའི་ཡུལ་གཉིས་ཆར་ཡང་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དོན་གསལ་མཐོང་བ་སྟེ་རབ་རིབ་མེད་པའི་མིག་གིས་མཐོང་བ་ལ་ལྟོས་ན་ནི་སྐྱེ་ཤང་དུ་སྤང་བ་དང་། དེ་སྤང་བའི་ཤེས་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འདུ་བ་སྟེ་མ་སྐྱེས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྤང་བ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡུལ་ཡང་མེད་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡོད་པ་དེས་བར་དཀའ་བའི་བྱེད་རོ། །འདི་ནི་གདོན་མི་ཟ་བར་དེ་ལྟར་དེས་པ་ར་འདོད་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟར་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་གལ་ཏེ་རབ་རིབ་ཅན་ལ་ཤེས་བྱ་སྐྱེ་ཤང་མེད་པར་སྐྱེ་ཤང་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་སྒྲོ་སྐྱེ་བ་ཡོད་ན་གང་དུ་རབ་རིབ་ཅན་གྱིས་སྐྱེ་ཤང་དེ་མཐོང་བའི་ཡུལ་དེར་མིག་ནི་རྗེས་སུ་འབྲེལ་བ་སྟེ་གཏང་པའི་རབ་རིབ་མེད་པ་ལའང་རབ་རིབ་ཅན་དང་འབྲས་བུ་སྐྱེ་ཤང་མཐོང་བའི་སྒྲོ་སྐྱེ་བར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། ཡུལ་མེད་པར་མཚུངས་པའི་བྱེད་རོ།

. . . (321) Suppose someone whose eye *faculty has cataracts* in turn has a *mind* that sees *hairs*, by the inner force of those cataracts. If one were to *rely* upon *what is seen* by that person’s *mind*, then *both* the eye consciousness and the mental aspect of the hairs – that is, the objective field appearing as hairs – would have to exist. Nevertheless, *what is seen clearly as an actual object* – that is, if we are to rely upon what is *seen* by the eyes of someone without cataracts, then *both* the appearance as hairs and the consciousness of such appearance – would be *false*, that is, neither would ever start. This is because it is difficult to ascertain a state of consciousness as existing without its having even the mere appearance of an objective field. You must without a doubt accept that it is definitely like this.

But *suppose someone says* that this is not the case. Suppose a *mind* established through a nature of its own with the aspect of hairs were to come into being for someone with cataracts, even though there are *no hairs to be known*. Then *even to someone without cataracts*, the *eye that followed upon* (or was directed towards) the *objective field* seen as a *hair* by someone with cataracts, would have to give rise to a *mind* that saw *hairs*, just like the person with cataracts. Because they would be exactly the same in not having an objective field.

།འདི་ནི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་གཞན་ལས་སྐྱེ་ན། གཞན་ཡིན་ཆད་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་སྐྱེ་བར་འཁེན་པ་བཞིན་དུ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ཅིག་སྐྱེ་ན། ཡུལ་སྐྱེ་ཤང་མེད་པར་མཚུངས་པ་ལ། རབ་རིབ་ཅན་ལ་དེ་མཐོང་བ་སྐྱེ་ལ། རབ་རིབ་མེད་པ་ལ་དེ་མཐོང་བ་མི་

སྐྱེ་བ་མི་འཐད་དེ། ཤེས་པ་དེ་རབ་རིབ་ལ་མི་ལྟོས་པར་འབྱུང་བ་ལ་འབྱེད་མེད་དུ་འགྲོ་བའི་བྱིར་རྟོ། །རབ་རིབ་མེད་པ་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཤིང་
དུ་སྐྱེད་བའི་སྐྱེ་བ་དེ་ལྟ་མ་ཡིན་པ་དེའི་བྱིར་བྱི་རོལ་མེད་པར་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་ཤེས་པ་དེ་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ནོ།

(322) Now if there were a case of something being “born from another” that was established through its own nature, then that forces us into the conclusion that it would be born from everything that can be validly perceived as “other.” In a similar way, if a state of consciousness existing through its own nature were to begin, insofar as the two are exactly the same in not having any hairs as an objective field, then even as such a sight would arise to the person with cataracts, it would not make sense for that sight *not* to arise to someone without cataracts. Because insofar as that consciousness would have the capacity to come forth even without relying on the *cataracts*, it would turn out not to be related to them at all. Since a mind with the appearance of hairs does *not* arise in this way for someone without cataracts, consciousness established through its own nature, with nothing outside itself, does not exist.⁵

* * *

ཁྱིམ་གྱི་སྐྱེ་བ་རང་བྱས་གང་ཞིག་ལས། རྟོ་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་ཀླན་ནས་སྐྱེ་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། རང་གི་རྣམ་ཤེས་རྟེན་གྱི་བྱས་དེ་ལ། རྟེན་པོ་གསལ་
ཟུགས་ཅན་མིག་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་རྟོགས།⁶² མིག་གི་སྐྱེ་བ་རང་ཤེས་པ་སྐྱེ་བའི་རང་གི་བྱས་པ་བག་ཆགས་གང་ཞིག་ཀླན་གཞི་ལ།
རྣམ་ཤེས་གཞན་གྱིས་རང་འགག་བཞིན་པ་ན། དེ་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་འཛོག་པར་བྱེད་ལ། དེ་སྤྱིན་པ་ལས་དུས་ཤིས་སྤྲུལ་པའི་རྣམ་པའི་རྟེན་སྤྱི་
བྱེད་པའི་མིག་གི་རྣམ་ཤེས་སྐྱེ་བར་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། རང་གི་སྤྱི་མིག་གི་རྣམ་ཤེས་དེ་བྱས་པའི་སྐྱེད་ཅིག་བར་མེད་པ་གང་ཞིག་ལས་སྐྱེ་བའི་
བྱས་པའི་སྐྱེད་ཅིག་བར་མེད་པ་རྟེན་དུ་གྱུར་པ་དེ་ལ། གཉི་མུག་གིས་འཛིན་རྟེན་རྣམས་དབང་པོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་མིག་ཡིན་ནོ་སྟེ་དུ་རྟོགས་
ས་ཀྱི། རྣམ་ཤེས་ལས་ཐ་དད་པའི་མིག་དབང་ནི་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ནོ། རྟེན་བཞིན་དུ་དབང་པོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་ལྟག་མ་ལ་ཡང་སྐྱེད་བར་བྱའོ།

[The eye-mind's birth comes to be
from its potential, just following an instance.
It's thought to be “the physical faculty of an eye”
upon the basis, the potential of its consciousness. (6:62)]

. . . (329) The *mind* of the eye, that is, *its own potential*, or tendency, that *is born* as consciousness, was placed in the foundation consciousness *just following* the moment when another *instance* of consciousness was ending. Once it ripened, at a later time it *came to be born* as an eye consciousness that takes after the appearance of the former instance [of consciousness]. “Consider the instant of the *potential* that serves as the immediate *basis* for the instant of *its own* – that is, the eye’s – *consciousness*; consider the instant of potential from which the eye consciousness will arise immediately. All those in the world, because of delusion, *think* that ‘This is *the physical sense faculty of an eye*,’ but in fact there is no eye faculty separate from consciousness.” This applies in the same way to the rest of the physical sense faculties.

རྟོ་མ་ཐག་ཤེས་སྐྱེ་བའི་རྒྱ་བག་ཆགས་ནི་དེའི་རྒྱའི་རྟེན་ཡིན་ལ། མིག་གི་དབང་པོ་ནི་མིག་ཤེས་ཀྱི་བདག་པོའི་རྟེན་ནོ། རྟེན་པོ་མིག་དང་
བར་མིག་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དངོས་རྒྱར་བསྟན་པ་ནི། མིག་ཤེས་སྐྱེ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་སྤྱིན་པའི་སྐྱབས་ལ་དགོངས་ཀྱི་མིག་དབང་གང་ཡིན་ལ་མིན་
ནོ། རྟེན་ཡང་དབྱས་མཐའ་ལས། རྟོན་དང་སེམས་ཅན་བདག་རྣམས་ཤིག་སྐྱེད་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི། རབ་ཏུ་སྐྱེ་བའི་རྟོན་མེད། ཅེས་

⁵ See Chapter Two, “Cataracts and Empty Potentials” and “A Blind Man Dreaming” for discussion of and excerpts from the intervening passages here.

དོན་གཟུགས་སོགས་དང་། སེམས་ཅན་དབང་པོ་ལྟ་བུ་སྣང་བའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་སྤྱོད། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཡིན་ལ་སྟོབ་
 དཔོན་སྟོབ་བརྟན་གྱིས་ཀྱང་དབང་པོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀུན་གཞིའི་དམིགས་པར་བཤད་པས། སེམས་ཅན་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཁས་ལེན་པ་ན་
 མས་གྱིས་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དབང་པོ་གཟུགས་ཅན་དུ་སྣང་བ་མིག་དབང་སོགས་སུ་འདོད་དོ། །རྣམ་ཤེས་ལས་ཐ་དད་པའི་མིག་དབང་སོགས་
 ས་མེད་པར་བསྟན་ནས། གཟུགས་ཀྱང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལས་དོན་གཞན་པ་མེད་པར་བསྟན་པའི་བྱིར་སྤྲུས་པ། །འདི་ན་དབང་པོ་ལས་
 བྱང་རྣམ་པར་རིག་བྱི་གཟུང་མེད་པར་རང་གི་ས་བོན་ལས། །སྟོ་སོགས་སྣང་ཉིད་འབྱུང་བར་མ་ཉོགས་ནས། །སྟེ་བོས་བྱི་རོལ་གཟུང་བ
 ར་སེམས་ཁས་ལེན།⁶³༽

Now in this case, the tendency that is the cause for the birth of the eye consciousness is its causal condition, and the eye faculty is its governing condition.

(330) As for the teaching that the eye faculty is the direct cause for the eye consciousness, the true intent of this teaching is as it is presented here, in this context, where a tendency is ripening into an eye consciousness. The teaching does not refer to just any kind of eye faculty at all. Furthermore, *Separating the Middle from the Extremes* [Madhyānta-vibhāga] states:

*Objects, living beings, and a self;
 the consciousness that appears, communicating
 brings them to birth: there are no objects.*

Here “objects” refers to form and the rest, and “living beings” means that consciousness appearing as the five sense faculties “is born.” This is the foundation consciousness, but according to Master Sthiramati, the physical faculties are explained to be the focal object of the foundation consciousness. Therefore, those members of the Mind-Only school who assert a foundation consciousness believe that the eye faculty and so on are what appear to the foundation consciousness as physical faculties. Thus, they teach that an eye faculty, and so on, that could ever be separate from consciousness, do not exist. They go on to teach that form, such that it could ever be an object that was other than consciousness, also does not exist. In order to do so, they say:

*[According to these, being aware comes from senses
 without an outer beheld, from their own seeds
 blue and so on come to appear, but not realizing this
 people assert a mind that holds outer things. (6:63)]*

འདིག་རྟེན་འདི་ན་དབང་པོ་ལྟ་བུ་སྣང་བའི་རྣམ་པར་རིག་པ་ལ། སྟོན་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་བྱི་རོལ་གྱི་གཟུང་བ་མེད་པར་རྣམ་ཤེས་རང་
 གི་ས་བོན་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བཞག་པ་སྟོན་པ་ལས། སྟོ་སོགས་སུ་སྣང་བ་ཉིད་འབྱུང་བར་མ་ཉོགས་ནས། སྟེ་བོས་སེམས་སྟོ་སོགས་སུ་སྣང་
 བ་ལ་བྱི་རོལ་གྱི་གཟུང་བར་ཁས་ལེན་པ་སྟེ་མཛོན་པར་ཞེན་ནོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལས་དོན་གཞན་པའི་བྱི་རོལ་མེད་དོ།

According to these of the world, the five types of being aware come from the five sense faculties. But without there being anything outside that is beheld, such as the color blue and so on, consciousness plants its own seeds in the foundation consciousness. These seeds ripen, and come to appear as the color blue and so on. Not realizing this, people assert, that is, they insist on believing, that a mind appearing as blue and the rest is, rather, something that holds outer things. Therefore, there are no outer objects that could be other than consciousness.

* * *

།གསུམ་པ་ནི། དེ་ལྟར་སེམས་ཙམ་པའི་ལུགས་བཀག་པ་ལ་རིགས་པས་མི་གཞིད་པར་ས་ཟད། ལུང་གིས་གཞིད་པ་སྲིད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ།
གང་གི་ཕྱིར་ཡང་དག་པར་རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱུ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ནི། རང་གི་ལུགས་ལ་གསུང་རབ་འགར་ཡང་དངོས་པོ་བདེན་པར་ཡོ
ད་ཅེས་མ་བསྟན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེ་ཡང་ལང་ཀར་གཤེགས་པ་ལས། སྲིད་པ་གསུམ་ནི་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་དངོས་པོ་མེད
། །བཏགས་པ་དངོས་པོའི་ངོ་བོར་ནི། རྟོག་གི་བ་དག་རྟོག་པར་འགྱུར། རང་བཞིན་མེད་ཅིང་རྣམ་རིག་མེད། རྟུན་གཞི་མེད་ཅིང་དངོ
ས་མེད་ན། བྱིས་པ་ངན་པ་རྟོག་གི་བ། རོ་དང་འབྲ་བས་འདི་དག་བཏགས། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།

(333) Here is the third part [of another section: Showing that the refutation of the Mind-Only system is not disproven by scripture].

(334) In this way, not only is the refutation of Mind-Only system not disproven by reasoning, it is also impossible to disprove that refutation with scripture. This is because the perfectly completed Buddhas have never taught, in any scripture that accords with their own views, that functioning things really exist. On this point the *Journey to Lañka* (*Laṅkāvatāra*) states:

*These three realms are mere designation;
Essentially there are no functioning things
The essence of things is designation
so those caught in concepts turn to concepts
Without nature, without consciousness
without a foundation of all, and without function:
Naughty children, caught in concepts
since you are like a corpse, investigate!*

།ཀར་བ་དང་པོས་སྲིད་གསུམ་ཚྲོས་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་དུ་ཡོད་པར་བསྟན་ལ། ཀར་བ་གཉིས་པས་ནི་དེའི་དོན་བསྟན་ཏེ། དེ་ཡང་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་
ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་དངོས་པོ་མེད་པར་བསྟན་པས། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་གྱི་དངོས་པོ་ཡེ་མེད་མེན་ཞེས་པའོ། དེ་ལྟར་ཚྲོས་བ
ཏགས་པ་ཙམ་ལ་རོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་དངོས་པོར་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་མ་རྟེན་པའི་རྟོག་གི་བས་འདོད་དོ་ཞེས་པ་ནི། བཏགས་པ་ཞེ
ས་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་སྟོན་ལོ། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མེད་པར་སྤྱིར་བསྟན་པ་སྟེ། འེ་བྲག་ཏུ་འེ་སྟེ་སྟོན་པ་ནི།

The first line teaches that the three states of existence are merely designated by the mind, and the second two lines reveal its meaning. Thus, since it teaches that there are no functioning things that could be established essentially, it is a lack of being established essentially, but not a total absence of functioning things. In this way, it says that those caught in concepts want what are merely designated by the mind to be functioning things that are established essentially; so they do not find the meaning of suchness. This is taught with the two utterances of “designation.” This is the general teaching on not being established essentially, but here we will teach it in particular instances.

རྩ་བ་ཞེས་པ་རང་བཞིན་དང་གཟུགས་གཉིས་ཀ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ལས་འདིར་གཟུགས་ཙམ་ལ་བྱ་སྟེ། རྣམ་རིག་ཅེས་པའི་རྒྱ་སྟོབས་ཀྱིས་སོ
། །དངོས་མེད་ཅེས་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ནི་ཤེས་པ་དང་གཟུགས་ཙམ་གྱི་དངོས་པོ་མེད་པར་བསྟན་ཟེན་པས། འདིར་ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཡིན་ལ་དེ་ཡང་ད
ངོས་པོ་བདེན་པ་བཀག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་དང་། དངོས་པོར་མེད་པ་གཞན་རྣམས་ལ་བྱའོ། རོ་དང་འབྲ་ཚུལ་ནི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དཔྱད་རྒྱས་པའི་སེ
མས་མེད་པའོ། །ལུང་དེས་ནི་ཁམས་གསུམ་གྱི་གཞན་དབང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་པ་བཀག་གོ།

The [Sanskrit] term “*rūpa*” covers both nature and form, but of the two, here it applies to that which has physical form. This is by virtue of the fact that it is paired opposite “conscious awareness.” Since it has already taught that there are no functioning things that possess either consciousness or form, the functioning things that are “without function” here do have an “essence,” but it is an essence that refutes *real* functioning. You can apply this to all the other instances [where it says] “there are no functioning things.”

The way in which one is “like a corpse” is that one does not have a mind which is able to analyze suchness. With this scriptural citation, we refute those who want the dependent things of the three realms to exist through a nature of their own.

གཤམ་ཏེ་ལུང་དེ་དག་གིས་གཅིག་གཞན་དབང་ལ་ཅིག་ཤོས་ཀྱན་བརྟགས་གཟུང་འཛིན་ཇས་ཐ་དད་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་སྟོང་བ་བསྟན་པས་
མི་གཞི་དོ་སྟུང་ན། དེ་འདྲ་དེ་ནི་ཡང་དག་པའི་སྟོང་ཉིད་དུ་རིགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྒོ་གྲོས་ཆེན་པོ་གཅིག་ལ་གཅིག་མེད་པའི་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་
ནི་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཐ་ལལ་ཡིན་ཞོ་ཞེས་ལང་ཀར་གཤེགས་པ་ལས་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །བ་ལང་ནི་རྟ་ཡིན་པས་སྟོང་པའི་
བྱིར་ཡོད་པ་མེན་ཞོ་ཞེས་བརྗོད་པ་ནི་རིགས་པ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པའི་བྱིར། །ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བརྗོད་
པར་བྱའོ་ཞེས་འགྲེལ་བར་གསུངས་སོ། །བདག་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཞེས་པ་ལ་ནག་ཆོས་རང་གི་བདག་ཉིད་ཡོད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ་ཞེས་བསྟན་པ་ལེགས་
ས་སོ།

(335) Suppose you think that this scripture does not disprove the teaching that what is on the one hand a dependent thing, is on the other hand empty of existing essentially *according to the construct which thinks the beholder and the beheld are of separate substance*. But something like this is not reasoning with respect to the most correct emptiness. Because the *Journey to Lanka* states: “O, Great Intellect, the emptiness where one thing lacks another thing is the most vulgar of all emptinesses.”

[Candrakīrti’s] commentary states, “You should articulate such things as the following. ‘Furthermore, it does not make sense to say, “Since a cow is empty of being a horse, it is not something that exists”; because it *does* exist with its own identity.’”

As for the words “with its own identity,” Nak-Tso’s translation is better: “. . . because its own identity exists.”

།གཅིག་ལ་ཅིག་ཤོས་མེད་པའི་སྟོང་བ་འདི་དཔེར་བརྗོད་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་འགྱུར་ཚུལ་ནི། བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་ཀྱིས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་དཔེན་
པའི་སྟོང་ཉིད་གསུངས་པ་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་གཟུགས་སོགས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་ལ་བདེན་པར་གྲུབ་པར་འཛིན་པའི་མ་
ངོན་ཞེན་བསྐྱོག་པའི་བྱིར་དུ་ཡིན་པ་ལ། དེ་ལ་གཟུགས་སོགས་སྟུང་བའི་གཞན་དབང་འདི་ཉིད་བདེན་པར་མ་གྲུབ་པར་བསྟན་དགོས་
པ་ལ། དེ་ལྟར་མི་སྟོན་པར་གཞན་དབང་འདི་གཟུང་འཛིན་ཇས་ཐ་དད་པར་མི་བདེན་ཞོ་ཞེས་བསྟན་པ་ན། བ་ལང་མེད་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་དུ་
བ་ལང་ལྟར་[sicརྟར་]མེད་ཅེས་ཟེར་བ་དང་འདྲ་ལོ།

Here is the way the example expressed is similar to the case where one thing is empty of another thing – *insofar as the thing of which it is empty does not exist*.

The Blessed, Transcendent, Victorious One spoke of an emptiness that is set apart⁶ from

⁶ Tib. *rang bzhin gyis dben pa'i stong nyid*: Note that this is the same term (*dben pa*) for “set apart” that appears in the three stages “set-apart” belonging to the stage-of-what-is-complete. The meaning has a

any self-nature in order to stop the grasping thought – which living beings have stubbornly insisted upon since time without beginning – that functioning things like form and the rest are established as real. In that regard, it was necessary to teach that these very dependent things – which appear as form and the rest – are not established as real.

But not teaching it in that way, if he were to teach that “*these* dependent things⁷ are not real as the separate substances of a beholder and what is beheld,” then it would be like claiming, as to the reason why a cow does not exist, that it is because “a cow that is a horse does not exist.”

།དེས་ན་དབུ་མེས་སུ་ཡི་ལུགས་ལ་ཡང་མེས་ཅན་རྣམས་གང་ལ་མངོན་པར་ཞེན་པའི་གཞི། ཕྱི་ནང་གི་ཆོས་སུ་སྤང་བ་འདི་དག་ལ་
བྱེད་པ་ལ་ནི་མི་འབྲ་བ་མེད་ལ། དེ་རྣམས་སྟོང་པར་སྟོན་པ་ནི་གཞི་དེ་ལ་མངོན་ཞེན་སྟོན་པའི་ཕྱིར་དུ་ཡིན་པ་ཡང་འབྲ་མེད་ཀྱང་། ཞེན་
ཚུལ་ལ་མི་མཐུན་ཏེ་མེས་ཅན་པས་ནི་གཟུང་འཛིན་གཉིས་ཕྱི་ནང་དུ་རྒྱུང་སྤང་བ་ལ་སྤང་བ་ལྟར་དུ། གཟུང་འཛིན་རྣམས་ཐ་ད་
ད་དུ་ཞེན་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་གཉེན་པོར་སྤང་བ་གཞན་དབང་པའི་ཆོས་ཅན་དུ་བརྒྱུང་ནས། གཟུང་འཛིན་རྣམས་ཐ་ད་དུ་ཡོད་པ་འགོག་པ་
ཡོན་པས་དགག་གཞི་དེ་དགག་བྱ་དེ་ཡིན་པ་འགོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

(336) Now, whether we are in the system of the Middle Way, or in that of the Mind-Only, there is no dissimilarity at all as to what is done with respect to the basis that all living beings stubbornly insist upon – what appears as outer and inner phenomena. There is also similarity in the teaching that all these are empty, in that it was given in order to stop living beings from stubbornly insisting upon something with respect to that basis. *But the way of insisting is not the same.*

To those of the Mind-Only, insofar as the pair of what is beheld and the one who beholds, outer and inner, appear to be distant and cut off from one another, the insistence is that the beholder and beheld are of separate substances, just as they appear. As an antidote to that, by taking the appearances of dependent things as a subject matter, one refutes the existence of a beholder and beheld that could be of separate substances. Therefore one refutes that (a) *this* basis of refutation is (b) *that* thing to be refuted.

།དབུ་མ་པ་ལྟར་ན་ཞེན་ཚུལ་ནི་སྤང་བ་ལ་ཐ་སྟོན་པའི་སྟོན་པ་མེན་པའི་བདེན་གྲུབ་དུ་ཞེན་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་གཉེན་པོར་སྤང་བ་འ
དི་ཆོས་ཅན་དུ་བརྒྱུང་ནས། དེ་འབྲ་བའི་བདེན་པར་མེད་ཅེས་འགོག་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་དགག་གཞི་དེ་དགག་བྱ་ཡིན་པ་འགོག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། མེས་
ས་ཅན་གྱིས་ཞེན་པ་ན་གཞི་དེ་ལ་དགག་བྱ་དེ་དོན་གཞན་དུ་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པ་མིན་པར། གཞི་དེ་དགག་བྱ་དེའི་ངོ་མོར་ཞེན་པའི་ཕྱིར་
དང་། སྟོང་པ་ཡང་ཇི་ལྟར་ཞེན་པ་དེ་ལྟར་དུ་ཡོད་པས་སྟོང་པར་བསྟན་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

To someone of the Middle Way, the mode of insistence is that appearances can be established as real, not as something set up by conventional thought. As an antidote to that, one takes these appearances as a subject matter, and makes refutation by saying, “Something like these *that could* exist as real, does not exist.”

Here then, one refutes that (a) this basis of refutation is (b) the thing to be refuted.

Because in this case, living beings’ insistence is not that they hold some *other* object of refutation to exist *here in this basis*; rather they insist that this basis *is* the essence of what

definite correlate, since there, too, one is “set apart” from certain incorrect thoughts about the body, speech, and mind, respectively, that are a unique form of grasping to an idea of self-nature. See Chapter Six.

⁷ As if they existed . . .

is to be refuted.

This is also the case, because it is necessary to point out the *absence* as the fact that something is empty of existing in the way you insist on believing it to exist.

།དེའི་བྱིར་ད་ལྟར་གྱི་སྒྲུང་གཞི་རྣམས་བདེན་པས་སྟོང་པ་ཆད་སྟོང་དུ་བྱས་ཏེ། འདི་དག་པོར་ནས་སྒྲུང་བ་གཞན་ཅིག་ལ་སྟོང་གཞིར་བྱས་ཏེ། དགག་བྱ་དེ་ཡིན་པས་སྟོང་པར་མི་སྟོན་པར་དངོས་པོ་ཡོད་པས་སྟོང་པར་སྟོན་པ་ནི། །དབུ་སེམས་སྤྱིའི་ཡང་ལུགས་མིན་ལ། མེས་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པའི་མངོན་ཞེན་ལ་དེ་འབྲས་པའི་དགག་བྱ་འཛིན་པའི་སྒྲོ་འདུག་མི་འདུག་ཀྱང་ཁ་ནང་དུ་ལོག་ལ་རྟོགས་ཤིག་དེས་ན་དཔལ་ལྷན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་གྲགས་པས། འདི་ལའང་རྗེས་སྤྱོད་པ་ཡོད། །དེས་ན་ངན་པའི་སྤྲོན་པས་བྱུང་། །ཅེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། འདི་འབྲས་བུ་རྣམས་ཤིན་ཏུ་བདོ་བའི་དུས་སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་དཔྱད་ཅན་གྱིས་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

Therefore, those⁸ who turn the fact that our everyday basis of appearances is empty of being real into an emptiness that is “cut off,” and then, casting that aside, make some *other* appearance into the basis for emptiness, do not teach that things are empty of being that which is refuted, but rather teach that functioning things are empty of being there at all. This is neither the system of the Middle Way nor that of the Mind-Only.

So I ask you to look deep inside and realize for yourselves whether or not this is the kind of thought with which, from time without beginning, the mindstreams of living beings have stubbornly insisted upon grasping to the thing that is refuted.

(337) Thus the Glorious Dharmakīrti has said:

This one, too, has those who will parrot after him
Thus the darkness of negativity pervades . . .

Those with capacity for analysis should understand that those like this will appear in extremely degenerate times.

།འདིར་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། ཡབ་སྲས་མངལ་བའི་མདོ་ལས་དབང་པོ་ཉེར་གཉིས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པ་བྲངས་པ་ལས། འདི་ལྟར་མིང་དུ་གདགས་པར་བས་གྱི། རྟོན་དམ་པར་ནི་མིག་དང་དབང་པོ་མི་དམིགས་སོ། །ཞེས་པ་དང་། དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་གྱིས་དམིགས་སྤྱོད་མ་མཆེས་པ་སྟེ། ཞེས་ཆོས་རྣམས་མིང་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ཅན་དུ་ཐད་ཀྱི་རྟོན་དམ་པར་དང་། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་གྱིས་མ་མཆེས་པར་གསུངས་པས། དགག་བྱ་ལ་བྱུང་པར་སྟོང་པ་ལ་དེ་གཉིས་རྣམས་གངས་པ་དང་། རང་གི་རྣམ་གཞག་འཛོག་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་མིང་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ཅན་གྱིས་བྱེད་པར་གསུངས་ཤིང་། མི་ལམ་ན་དགའ་ཅད་བྱེད་པའི་ཡུལ་དེ་རྣམས་མི་ལམ་ན་ཡང་དེས་དེ་དག་མ་རྟོན་ན་པར་པའི་ཆེ་ལྷ་ཅེ་སྟོན་ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་དེ་འབྲས་པའི་མེས་མེ་ལམ་གྱི་མི་དང་། སད་དུས་ཀྱི་མི་ལ་མི་ཡིན་མིན་བྱུང་པར་མེད་ཅེས་སྒྲུབ་ནི། ཤིན་ཏུ་མི་འཐད་དེ་དགའ་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་དེ་རྣམས་མི་ལམ་གྱི་དུས་སྤྱོད་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་དེ་དག་ཏུ་མ་རྟོན་པར་གསུངས་ཤིང་། སད་དུས་སྤྱོད་དེ་དག་རྟོན་པ་གཞག་དགོས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེས་ན་མི་ལམ་དུ་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དབང་ཤེས་ཡོད་པ་འདིའི་ལུགས་སྤྱོད་པ་ནི་ནོར་བུ་ཆེན་པོར་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ན་སེམས་ཅན་པ་དེས་དོན་མཐར་ཐུག་པ་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཅལ་མེད་པར་བྱུང་པའི་མཐར་སྐྱར་བ་འདི་བསལ་བར་བྱ་བ་ཁོ་ནའོ།

On this point [Candrakīrti's] commentary cites the enumeration presenting the lack of inherent nature to the twenty-two faculties from the *Sūtra of the Meeting of the Father*

⁸ Though he never mentions them by name, it is likely that Tsongkhapa is referring here to the famous Jonang teacher Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (1292–1361) and his followers. See Cyrus Stearns, 2010, *The Buddha from Dölpo*, for details on the history of this long-standing Tibetan debate.

and the Son. It is stated that in this way, they are designated with names, but ultimately, the eye and the faculties cannot be focused upon. In the same way, no existing thing can be focused upon in its very essence.

Thus it states that all things are merely labeled with names, and no more, but ultimately, and by their very essence, they are not there. It lists these two in order to apply the distinction of the thing denied, and in every case when setting forth our own position, it is said that things are made through merely tacking on a name.

It is stated that if even in a dream one cannot find the dreamed objects of one's romance, what need is there to say that one will not be able to find them when awake? What is more, for those who claim that there is no difference between a person in a dream and a person during the waking state in terms of whether he or she is a person or not, this is nonsense in the extreme. For it is stated that during the dream state, you will never find the living beings who assist in making your romance, *but we must posit that during the waking state you can find them*.

Therefore, you should know that those who claim that according to this system the eye consciousness and the rest of the sense consciousnesses do exist in a dream, have made a great mistake.

(338) Thus, insofar as the Mind-Only proponents lack the virtuoso capacity of the incisive wisdom that realizes the final definitive meaning, this mixing together of philosophical tenets is only something to be cleared away.

Appendix Eight: Immaculate Seeds in Foundation Consciousness

Excerpts from Tsongkhapa's *Extensive Commentary on Foundation Consciousness*¹

ཁོ་ན་གཟུང་བྱ་གཅིག་ཉིད་རྣམ་ཤེས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཟུང་ཆར་འགྱུར་ལ། འདོད་ན་ཤེས་པ་ལ་གང་སྒྲུབ་བ་དེའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཤེས་པ་གཉིས་ཟླ་གཅིག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བས་ན་གཟུང་ཆ་ཐུན་མོང་བ་མི་སྲིད་དོན་ཞེས། སྒྲིན་མེད་དེ་ཤེས་པ་ལ་གང་སྒྲུབ་བ་དེའི་བདག་ཉིད་དམ། དེ་ལས་གཅིག་ཐ་དད་གང་དུ་ཡང་མ་གྲུབ་ཅེས་པ་ནི་རྣམ་པར་དབྱེད་པ་ན་ཡིན་གྱི་དེའི་ཆེ་ནི་ཐུན་མོང་བ་ཁས་མི་ལེན་ལ། མ་བརྟགས་མ་དབྱེད་པའི་ངོ་ན་གཟུང་ཆ་ཐུན་མོང་བ་འདོད་ཀྱང་དེ་ཤེས་པའི་བདག་ཉིད་དུ་མི་འདོད་དེ་གཞན་དུ་ན་ཕུང་པོ་ལྗེའི་རྣམ་གཞག་འདེགས་པ་དང་། སྒྲ་ཤད་དང་། དུང་གི་མེར་སོ་སོགས་དང་། མི་ལམ་གྱི་ཡུལ་རྣམས་ཟླ་བ་སྤྱོད་པར་འགྱུར་བ་དང་། གཟུགས་སྒྲ་སོགས་སྤྱོད་པའི་ངོ་སོར་ཐལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

(686) [If each living being's foundation consciousness and the objects appearing in it are unique to that being, then]: Suppose you say, 'A single held object would turn out to be the "beheld" part of two consciousnesses. If you agree to that, then, since whatever appears to consciousness has the essence of consciousness, then the two consciousnesses would have to be one substance. Then it would be impossible to have a "beheld" part that was "shared" in common between the two.'

But this is no problem. If you investigate carefully, then it is indeed true that "Whatever appears to consciousness has its essence," or, "It cannot be established as either the same or different from consciousness." *At that point, you cannot say that there is something shared in common.* But if you don't examine and don't investigate, you can agree that there is a "beheld" part which is shared in common, and furthermore that it does *not* have the nature of consciousness. If it were otherwise, then that would destroy the presentation of the five heaps, and hairs [that are seen as a result of faulty vision] and the "yellow color" of a conch, etc., and the things seen in dreams would all have to be established as substantial. It would also follow that form, sound, and the rest would have the essential nature of [merely personal] *experiences*.

* * *

ཁམས་འོག་མ་གཉིས་ལ་འདར་ཀྱན་གཞི་གཅིག་ལ་སྒྲོད་བརྩུད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྲུབ་ན་གཟུགས་ཁམས་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་འདར་ལྷགས་བསྐྱེགས་འབར་བ་སོགས་དཔྱལ་བའི་སྒྲུབ་བ་རྣམས་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར་རོ། འདོད་ན་དེ་དག་ལ་སྤྱུག་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་གདུང་བ་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དེ་དག་གི་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་སྤྱོད་གི་དཔྱལ་སྒྲུབ་མཚན་ཉིད་པ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ས་བོན་སད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། ཁ་གྲུབ་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དཔྱལ་སྒྲུབ་དེ་ཀྱན་གཞི་ལ་དངོས་སྤྱུང་ལ་དེ་ཡང་བག་ཆགས་སད་པ་ལ་བཞུགས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། ཁ་ངེས་པ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་ས་བོན་གྱི་མཐུས་དེ་དག་དངོས་སྤྱུང་ན་པན་གཞོད་དུ་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན་མི་ལམ་གྱི་དུས་སྤྱོད་དུ་འོང་མི་འོང་གི་ཡུལ་སྒྲུབ་བས་པན་གཞོད་དུ་འགྱུར་བ་བཞིན་རོ།

. . . (689) If even in the lower two realms [i.e. of form and desire] all the substances of the vessels and inhabitants appeared upon a single foundation consciousness, then all the

¹ *kun gzhi'i rgya cher bshad pa*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *tsha*, 8b (686), 10a1-10b1 (689-690), 17b4-18a5 (704-705), and 24b4-30b2 (718-730). For the last, cf. Sparham, 1993, *Ocean of Eloquence*, 87-95.

appearances of a hell realm – the iron blazing in flames and so on – would arise even for the gods of the form realm. If you agree to this, then it would follow that the gods would be tormented by all that suffering, too, because it would mean that the seeds that appear as the definitive appearances of a hell would have opened upon their foundation consciousness, also. You cannot say that this is inconclusive, because those appearances of a hell that appear directly on a foundation consciousness also rely upon the awakening of tendencies.

You also cannot say that it is not certain: *If by the inner force of seeds those things appear directly, then they will turn into harm or benefit.* For example, it is like the way that, during a dream, the pleasant or unpleasant objects that appear can turn into benefit or harm for you. In a vessel shared by wanderers of compatible type, there are two kinds of karma: that which turns into appearances and that which turns into behavior. Since this vessel is established through both kinds of karma, they can turn into both benefit and harm.

།འགྲོ་བ་རིགས་མཐུན་པའི་སྣོད་ནི་སྣང་འགྱུར་དང་སྣོད་འགྱུར་གཉིས་ཀའི་ལས་ལས་གྲུབ་པས་ཐན་གཞོན་དུ་འགྱུར་ཡང་རིགས་མི་མཐུན་གྱི་སྣོད་ནམས་སྣང་འགྱུར་གྱི་ལས་ལས་གྲུབ་ལ་སྣོད་འགྱུར་གྱི་ལས་ལས་མ་གྲུབ་པས་ཐན་གཞོན་དུ་མི་འགྱུར་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བརྗོད་པར་མི་རུས་ཏེ། གཞུགས་སྤྱོད་མཉམ་གྱི་ཡུལ་འགའ་ཞིག་རིགས་མཐུན་པའི་འགྲོ་བ་འགའ་ཞིག་ལ་ཡང་ཁ་ཅིག་ལ་ཐན་པར་མཐོང་ལ་ཁ་ཅིག་ལ་གཞོན་པར་མཐོང་བའི་བྱེད་དང་། ཐན་གཤེས་པ་ལ་གཞུགས་སྤྱོད་པ་ཙམ་ལས་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་སྣོད་ཀྱང་མི་འདོད་པས་ན་ཡིད་དུ་འོང་བ་དང་ཡིད་དུ་མི་འོང་བ་རང་མཚན་པར་སྣང་བའི་ཡུལ་སྣང་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ཐན་གཞོན་དུ་འགྱུར་གྱི་སྣོད་འགྱུར་ལ་མི་བཟོས་ཏེ། ད་པེར་ན་སྤྱི་མའི་གཤིན་རྗེ་ལ་གཤིན་རྗེ་རང་མཚན་པར་སྣང་བ་ན་འདིགས་པ་བསྐྱེད་པ་དང་། སྤྱི་མའི་ན་ཚུང་ལ་ན་ཚུང་རང་མཚན་པར་སྣང་བ་ན་དེ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ཆགས་པ་བསྐྱེད་པ་བཞིན་ནོ།

You may try to say: “Vessels including incompatible types of beings are established by karma that turns into appearances, but they are not established by karma that turns into behavior; therefore that [vessel] will not turn into benefit or harm,” but you cannot express it like that. Because even among beings of a compatible type, some will see visible form, sound, and the rest of the objects as beneficial and some will see them as harmful. Also, since we [in the Mind-Only school] do not accept the idea of any “vessel” apart from that which appears as form to inner consciousness, objects that appear to have their own characteristics of being pleasant or unpleasant turn into benefit or harm *merely by appearing* as such. But they do not rely upon one’s behavioral habits.

(690) For example, it is like the fact that an illusory Lord of Death, if he appears to be a Lord of Death with his own characteristics, will generate fear, and an illusory maiden, if she appears to be a maiden with her own characteristics, will generate attachment.

* * *

།དབང་པོ་དང་དོན་འདི་དག་ལ་འདིར་ནམས་པར་རིག་པ་ཞེས་པ་དེ་དག་ཤེས་རིག་གི་ངོ་མོར་གྱུར་པས་དེ་སྐད་བརྗོད་པ་ཡིན་ནམ་ཞེ་ན། མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འོ་ན་རྩ་ལྷ་བྱ་ཞེ་ན། དབང་པོ་ལྷ་དང་གཞུགས་སྤྱོད་མཉམ་གྱི་ཡུལ་སྣང་པར་འདི་དག་ལ་དབྱེད་པ་ན་བྱི་རོལ་ལྷ་བྱར་ཀྱན་ཏུ་ཆད་པར་སྣང་ལ་དེའི་ཆེ་ནི་དེ་དག་ཤེས་པའི་ངོ་མོར་མི་འདོད་དེ་འདིགས་ཏེ་ན་གཤམ་པ་དང་མ་དག་པའི་སྣོད་ལ་རྩ་ལྷ་སྣང་བ་ལྷར་ནམ་གཞག་བྱེད་དོ། །བརྟགས་ཤིང་དབྱེད་པ་ན་དེ་ལྷར་སྣང་བ་དེ་ཤེས་པ་དང་དེ་ཉིད་དང་གཞན་དུ་བརྗོད་དུ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་ཀྱན་བརྟགས་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེས་ན་དོན་དུ་སྣང་བར་ནི་དམིགས་ལ་སྤྱུ་སྟེགས་ལྷར་གྱི་བདག་དང་གཙོ་བོ་སོགས་དང་། རང་སྤྱེ་འོག་མ་ལྷར་གྱི་

རྒྱལ་ཐུན་དུ་བཏགས་པ་རྣམས་ནི་མ་གྲུབ་ཏུ་དེ་དག་སྣང་བར་མི་རིགས་ལ་གཟུང་འཛིན་རིགས་པས་ཞེགས་ཀྱང་མྱོང་བ་རྒྱས་སུ་དམིགས་པ་པའི་བྱིར་ནང་གི་ཤེས་པ་ཉིད་དེ་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ཡིན་ཞིང་དེ་ལ་ཡིད་གྱིས་སྒྲོ་བཏགས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་སྐད་དུ་ཡང་ཐེག་ཆེན་བསྟན་པར། རྣམ་པར་རིག་པ་འདི་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཁམས་དང་འགྲོ་བ་དང་སྐྱེ་གནས་ཐམས་ཅད་བསྟན་པ་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་གིས་མཆན་ཉིད་ཡང་དག་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ཀྱན་ཏུ་རྟོག་པ་བསྟན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །རྣམ་པར་རིག་པ་འདི་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་རིག་པ་ཅམ་ཉིད་ཡང་དག་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ཀྱན་ཏུ་རྟོག་པས་བསྟན་པ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། རྣམ་པའི་དོན་སྣང་པའི་གནས་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་དོ། །དེ་ལ་ཀྱན་བཏགས་པའི་མཆན་ཉིད་གང་ཞེ་ན། གང་དོན་མེད་ཀྱང་རྣམ་པར་རིག་པ་ཅམ་དེ་དོན་ཉིད་དུ་སྣང་བའོ། །ཡོངས་སུ་གྲུབ་པའི་མཆན་ཉིད་གང་ཞེ་ན། གང་གཞན་གྱི་དབང་གིས་མཆན་ཉིད་དེ་ལ་དོན་གྱི་མཆན་ཉིད་དེ་གཏན་མེད་པ་ཉིད་དོ། །ཞེས་དང་།

. . . (704) Now suppose you ask whether here the faculties and objects are called cognitions insofar as they are of the essence of conscious awareness. This is not the case. Suppose you ask how that is so: If you examine the five faculties and what appears as physical form, sound, and the rest, they will appear to have been annihilated as anything like outer objects. But at that point you do not assert that *they* [i.e., the five objects and five faculties themselves] have the nature of consciousness. Rather, you set them forth according to the way they appear to an impure mind, and as they are well known in the world. But if you examine and investigate, the way these things appear *cannot be expressed as being either the same as or other than consciousness*, because this appearance is already something totally constructed.²

(705) Thus what appears as an actual object is something that cannot be established as something to focus upon, just like the “Self,” “Primal One,” or the like, of the non-Buddhists, or the designation of subtle particles made by our own lower schools. It is against reason for such a thing to appear, but once you have refuted beholder and beheld with reason, *experience can be focused on as substantial*. Therefore, inner consciousness itself appears as such, and then it is pasted upon by the thinking mind. As it says in the *Summary of the Great Way*:³

These cognitions subsume the realms and wandering beings and places of birth; they display the totally constructed concepts that are not the pure definitive marks of dependent things. The definitive mark of dependent things is that they are (1) all these cognitions, insofar as they are *not* subsumed by the totally constructed concepts that are not purely just cognition itself, and (2) dependent things are whatever that locus may be that appears *as* the objects of error. If you ask for the definition of what is “totally constructed,” it is this: It is whatever is not an [outer] object, but being just cognition, appears as if it were an object itself. If you ask for the definition of what is “completely established,” it is this: It is the utter non-existence of the definitive marks of an actual object there within the definitive marks of a thing that is dependent on others.

* * *

བག་ཆགས་འཛིན་ཚུལ་ལ། རྣམ་འབྱོར་སྤྱོད་པའི་སྒོ་བ་དཔོན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ལུགས་གསུམ་མོ། །གང་ཞེ་ན། སྒོ་བྱེད་ལ་མི་བཟླས་པར་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གནས་པར་འདོད་པ་དང་། སྒོ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་སྒོ་བ་མེད་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པ་དང་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པ་སྒོ་བྱེད་ཀྱིས་གསོ་བར་འདོད་པ་ད

² Note that words for “investigate” and “constructed” are spelled the same way in Tibetan: *brtags*.

³ Cf. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *the g bsdus*, Toh. 4048, sde dge, vol. *ri*, 13b1-3.

ང་། ཚས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གནས་པ་གསོ་བ་དང་། སྒྲིན་མེད་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པར་འདོད་པའི་ལུགས་གསུམ་དོན་གསར་དུ་བཀོད་ནས་པན་ཚུ
ན་སྒྲིན་བརྗོད་པ་དང་། དེའི་འགལ་སྔོང་རྒྱས་པར་བྱས་ཤིང་ལུགས་དང་པོ་འཐད་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཁས་ལྷངས་ཀྱང་འདིར་ནི་ཕྱོགས་གསུམ་པ་
བཟང་ངོ།།

(718) Among the masters of Yogācāra, there were three systems regarding how tendencies are sown. If you ask what they are, here are the three as set forth in the *Secret Meaning [Guhyārtha]*⁴: (1) those who assert that tendencies remain by the very nature of things, without relying upon an infuser; (2) those who assert that tendencies are sown anew by an infuser that has no forerunner, and that newly sown tendencies can also be revived by an infuser; and (3) those who assert that tendencies remaining by the very nature of things are revived, and who also assert that there are tendencies which are sown newly, without forerunner. The various proponents criticize one another, and their contradictions are cast away extensively [in that text]. One can accept that the first position inclines towards being reasonable, but here, it is the third position that is most excellent.

དེ་ཡང་ཟག་མེད་ཀྱིས་བོན་དང་། རྒྱ་མཐུན་ཀྱིས་བོན་དང་། རྣམ་སྒྲིན་ཀྱིས་བོན་གསུམ་དུ་བྱས་ནས་དབྱེད་པར་བྱའོ།། དེ་ལ་དང་པོ་ནི
'རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པའི་རིགས་ཡིན་པས་ཚས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གནས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བྱང་སར། དེ་ལ་རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པའི་རིགས་ནི། བྱང
'རྒྱུ་མེད་སྤྱད་པ་དང་ཚས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུ་མཆེད་དུ་གྱི་བྱང་པར་གང་ཡིན་པ་སྟེ་དེ་ནི་གཅིག་ནས་གཅིག་ཏུ་རྒྱུད་འོངས་པ་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་བའི་དུ
ས་ཅན་ཚས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཐོབ་པ་དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་ནི་ཞེས་འབྱུང་བའི་བྱིར་ངོ།། རྒྱ་མཐུན་དང་རྣམ་སྒྲིན་ཀྱིས་བོན་གཉིས་ནི། རིམ་པ་བཞིན་འ
རྒྱལ་ཤེས་དགེ་མེད་ལྷུང་མ་བསྟན་རྣམས་ཀྱིན་གཞི་དང་། སྒྲེ་འགག་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཏུ་བྱས་པས་མ་འོངས་པ་ན་འརྒྱལ་ཤེས་རིགས་འབྲེ་འ
བྱུང་བའི་ས་བོན་འཛོག་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། རྣམ་སྒྲིན་འཕེན་བྱེད་དགེ་བའམ་མི་དགེ་བ་མཛོན་གྱུར་དུ་སྒྲེས་པས་རྣམ་སྒྲིན་ཀྱིས་བོན་གཞག་
དགོས་པའི་བྱིར་དེ་གཉིས་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པའོ།།

Furthermore, we should examine (1) immaculate seeds, (2) seeds congruent with their causes, and (3) ripening seeds.

(719) As for the first type, they are of the naturally-abiding family lineage. Thus they remain by the very nature of things. This is true because the statement appears in the *Bodhisattva Levels* that, “The naturally-abiding family lineage is whatever is the distinguishing feature of the six gateways of a bodhisattva. This is something achieved by the very nature of things, from time without beginning, coming forth in a stream from one to the next to the next.”

Congruent-cause seeds and ripening seeds are both sown newly, for the following reasons, respectively: Congruent-cause seeds are formed when the foundation consciousness starts and stops at the same time as an engaging consciousness of virtue, non-virtue, or ethical neutrality, so that seeds are planted which will in the future establish an engaging consciousness that is of a similar type. Ripening seeds become manifest as the ripening virtue and non-virtue that project [a new lifetime], so they must be planted.

འདི་ནི་རེ་ཞིག་འཛོག་བྱེད་ལ་བལྟས་མ་བལྟས་ལ་ཚས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གནས་པ་དང་། གསར་དུ་བཞག་པའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།། ཐོག་

⁴ Vasubandhu, *Vivṛta-guhyārtha-piṇḍa-vyākhyā* (*don gsang ba rnam par phye ba bsduṣ te bshad pa*), Toh. 4052, sde dge, mdo ‘grel, vol. ri.

མ་ཡོད་མེད་ལ་བྱེད་ན། རིགས་ནི་ཐོག་མ་ཡང་མེད་ལ་འཛོག་བྱེད་ལ་ཡང་མ་བཟོས་པ་ཡིན་ཅིང་། ཕྱི་མ་གཉིས་ལ་ནི་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡོད་དེ།
འདི་ལྟར་རྒྱ་མཐུན་གྱི་ས་བོན་གསར་དུ་སྒྲིབ་མཁན་དེ་ཡང་རྒྱ་མཐུན་གྱི་ས་བོན་སྔ་མ་ཞིག་ལས་འབྱུང་བ་ས་བོན་དེ་ཡང་རྒྱ་མཐུན་འཛོ
ག་བྱེད་དེའི་སྔ་མ་ཞིག་གིས་གཞག་དགོས་པས་ཐོག་མ་མེད་དོ། རྒྱ་མཐུན་གྱི་བྱེད་པར་འགའ་ཞིག་ལ་ཡང་ཐོག་མ་མེད་ན་ད་ལྟ་སྤྱི་ས་
འི་སེམས་དགེ་མེ་དགོས་མ་འོངས་པ་ན་རིགས་མཐུན་འབྱུང་བའི་ས་བོན་མ་བཞག་པར་འབྱུང་བ་དང་། རྣམ་སྤྱིན་གྱི་ས་བོན་ལ་ཐོག་མ་
ཡོད་ན་འཁོར་བ་ལ་ཐོག་མ་ཡོད་པར་འབྱུང་ལ། བྱེད་པར་འགའ་ཞིག་ལ་ཡང་ཐོག་མ་མེད་ན་བསོད་ནམས་དང་བསོད་ནམས་མ་ཡིན་པ
འི་ལས་འབྲལ་དུ་སྤྱད་པས་རྣམ་སྤྱིན་གྱི་བག་ཆགས་མ་བཞག་པར་འབྱུང་རོ།

This was presented in terms of whether those [seeds] which remain by the very nature of things and those which are sown newly either do or do not rely on a sower at a certain point in time.

If instead we are to consider it in terms of whether or not they have a beginning, it is like this: Those of the family lineage have no beginning and also do not rely upon anyone to plant them.

The latter two [congruent-cause and ripening seeds], exist in both ways. Thus the congruent-cause seed that is being newly infused does arise from a previous seed that was its congruent cause. That seed is also what plants a congruent cause. Since it must in turn have been sown by its own forerunner, there is no beginning. But in another sense, if the *distinctive* characteristic of congruent-cause seeds were the fact that they are without beginning, then it would turn out that a mind of virtue or non-virtue that is born in the present would not plant a seed that will establish something of its same type in the future.

(720) If ripening seeds had a beginning, then it would turn out that the cycle of suffering had a beginning. But if the *distinctive* characteristic [of ripening seeds] were that they had no beginning, then it would turn out that short-term karmic behavior that either has or lacks merit would not plant a tendency for ripening.

གང་ཡང་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཚུང་དུ་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པ་དེ་ཕྱི་ཐོས་པས་གསོ་ན་རྒྱ་མཐུན་དང་ཟག་མེད་གྱི་ས་བོན་གསར་པ་གསོ་བ
ར་འབྱུང་ཅིང་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཆོས་ཉིད་གྱིས་གནས་ན་འགྲོ་བ་ཀུན་ཐར་པའི་རིགས་སད་པར་ཐལ་ཏེ། དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཐོས་པའི་བག
ཆགས་ནི་བསྐྱབས་པའི་རིགས་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ནི། དབྱུང་དགོས་པ་ཞིག་སྟེ། འདི་ལྟར་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ནི་འ
ཛོག་བྱེད་གྱིས་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པ་མིན་ལ་ཐོས་བསམ་སྒྲོམ་གསུམ་གྱིས་ཀྱང་དེ་བརྟན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་གོ། གཞན་དུ་རང་བཞིན་
དུ་གནས་པར་མི་འབྱུང་རོ། དེའི་བྱིར་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གསར་དུ་ཐོས་པས་བཞག་པ་ནི་མེད་ལ་ཆོས་ཉིད་གྱིས་གནས་པའི་བག་ཆ
ག་ཙམ་ནི་བསྐྱབས་པའི་རིགས་མ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པས་རིགས་སད་པར་ཐལ་བ་ཅི་ཞིག་དགོས།

In any case, we should analyze the following idea: “If the slight tendencies for listening are sown newly, and then later they are revived through listening, then both new congruent-cause and *new* immaculate seeds will have been revived. But if tendencies for listening remain by the very nature of things, then it would follow that all wanderers would have awakened to the family lineage of liberation, because those kinds of tendencies for listening are of the type that is achieved.”

Thus, tendencies for listening are *not* sown newly by a sower, but rather they are merely something that *comes to maturity* through listening, contemplating, and meditating. Otherwise, they would not be something that dwells by nature. Therefore, since there are

no tendencies for listening that are sown by listening anew, they are simply tendencies that remain by the very nature of things. Since they are *not* the type of thing that is achieved, how could the mere fact of their existence lead to the automatic consequence that the lineage had been awakened?

འདིར་རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པ་དང་རྒྱས་པའི་རིགས་གང་ཞེ་ན། རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པའི་རིགས་ནི་འཛོག་བྱེད་ལ་མ་བཟོས་པར་ངོ་མོ་
 ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གནས་པ་ཟག་པ་མེད་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན། གཞན་གྱི་སྤྲ་དང་ཚུལ་བཞིན་ཡིད་བྱེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱན་དང་ཐད་ན་ཐོས་པ་དང་བ
 སམ་པ་དང་སྒྲོམ་པ་འཕེལ་བར་འགྱུར་བའི་གནས་སུ་གྱུར་བ་ཞིག་གོ། ཅིའི་བྱིར་རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པའི་རིགས་ཞེས་བྱ་ཞེ་ན། འཛོག་
 བྱེད་ཀྱིས་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པ་མིན་པར་གདོད་མ་ནས་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གནས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། ཅིའི་བྱིར་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཞེ་བྱ་ཞེ་ན།
 སངས་རྒྱས་དང་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་རྣམས་དང་ཐད་ན་ཐོས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་རྒྱ་མཐུན་པ་གསུང་རབ་ཡན་
 ལག་བཅུ་གཉིས་ལྟ་བུ་རྣམས་ཐོས་པའི་གནས་སུ་གྱུར་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། ཅིའི་བྱིར་སྤྲེམ་ཆེད་དུ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་ཞེ་ན། རང་ཉིད་གང་གི་
 རྒྱུད་ལ་ལྷན་པའི་དེའི་སྤྲེམ་ཆེད་དུ་གཞན་ལས་ཁྱད་པ་དུ་བྱེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། རྒྱས་པའི་རིགས་ནི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པའི་རིགས་དེ་
 ཉིད་གཞན་གྱི་སྤྲ་དང་ནང་གི་ཚུལ་བཞིན་ཡིད་བྱེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱན་དང་ཐད་ན་ཐོས་བསམ་བསྒྲོམ་གསུམ་གྱིས་བརྟན་པར་བྱས་པས་རྒྱས་པ་མ
 ཟུ་ཅན་དུ་སོང་བ་ཉིད་ལ་འཛོག་སྟེ། འདི་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡང་རྣམ་སྤྲིན་གྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལ་གནས་པའི་ས་བོན་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། ཟག་མེད་ཀྱི་
 ས་བོན་དེ་ཡང་ཐོས་བསམ་སྒྲོམ་གསུམ་གྱིས་བརྟན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ཙམ་མིན་གྱི་གསར་དུ་བཞག་པ་མིན་པར་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། བ
 ཟུབ་པའི་རིགས་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ནི་མི་གནས་ལ་གསར་དུ་རིགས་འཛོག་པ་ཡང་མི་འདོད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

Here, then, what is the naturally-abiding family lineage and what is the blossoming family lineage? The naturally-abiding family lineage refers to *the seed for all immaculate things, which does not rely upon a sower, and which remains by its very essence*. It is the place from which, if one meets with the conditions of (1) another’s words and (2) paying attention properly, then listening, contemplation, and meditation can flourish.

Why is it called the “naturally-abiding family lineage”? This is because it is not sown newly by a sower, and has been there from the outset, by the very nature of things.

(721) Why is it called the “tendency for listening”? This is because it is the place from which, once you have met with Buddhas and bodhisattvas, you listen to things like the teachings on the twelve links, which are the congruent causes for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things.

Why does it have “the distinguishing feature of the six gateways”? This is because, whatever constitutes the six gateways belonging to one’s own mental stream distinguishes it from that of others.

The blossoming family lineage is posited upon that naturally-abiding family lineage itself, which, when meeting with the conditions of (1) another’s words and (2) the inner condition of paying attention properly, comes to maturity through listening, contemplation, and meditation, and thus becomes a potential that has the inner force to bring its result.

All this is true (1) because both of these are seeds that remain in the ripened consciousness; (2) because it is said that the immaculate seed is not just what comes to maturity through listening, contemplation, and meditation, but is also not something sown newly; and (3) because something of the type that is achieved does not remain by the very nature of things, and we also do not accept that the family lineage is planted anew.

* * *

དེས་ན་ས་བོན་དེ་ཉིད་ཆོས་ཉིད་གིས་གནས་པའི་ཆ་ནས་རང་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་པའི་རིགས་སུ་འཛོག་ལ་རྒྱུན་གྱིས་ཡང་དག་སྒྲངས་པའི་
ཆ་ནས་རྒྱས་པའི་རིགས་སུ་འཛོག་གོ།

. . . (722) Therefore, that seed itself, insofar as it remains by the very nature of things, is posited as the naturally-abiding family lineage, but insofar as it rises up completely through conditions, it is posited as the blossoming family lineage.

* * *

དེ་ལྟར་ནས་སྒྲིན་གྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལ་གནས་པའི་ཟག་མེད་གྱི་ས་བོན་དེ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་གཉེན་པོ་ཡིན་པས། ཀུན་གཞི་མ་ཡིན་དང་། རྩོམ་བས
མ་སྒྲིམ་གསུམ་གྱིས་ལན་མང་དུ་གསོས་བཏབ་པས་རྣམ་བྱང་གི་ས་བོན་འཕེལ་ཀུན་ཉོན་གྱི་ས་བོན་འགྲིམས་ནས། རང་བས་འོ་མ་དང་
རྩ་མ་དད་དུ་མི་དམིགས་པ་འོ་མ་རིལ་གྱིས་སྒྲངས་ནས་རྩ་གསལ་བར་འགྱུར་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ས་བོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་མ་དད་དུ་མི་ད
མིགས་པར་འཕྲུག་ཀྱང་ཀུན་ཉོན་གྱི་ས་བོན་འགྲིམས་རྣམ་བྱང་གི་ཕྱོགས་རྣམས་རྒྱས་ནས་གནས་གྱུར་ཏེ་སྤྱོད་གསུམ་མངོན་དུ་འགྱུར་བ་
ཡིན་ཏེ།

. . . (725) Thus, since the immaculate seed that stays in the ripened consciousness is the antidote to that foundation consciousness, it is *not* the foundation consciousness. Further, being nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating, many, many times, the totally pure seeds flourish and the seeds for afflicted things diminish.

It is like the way that a swan, without focusing upon the milk and water as separate, can draw up the milk all together, and leave the water clear. In the same way, although the seeds cannot be focused upon as being separate from the foundation consciousness, the seeds for afflicted things diminish and those on the totally pure side blossom, and transform, making manifest the three holy bodies.

ཐེག་ཆེན་བསྐྱུས་པར། དེ་ལྟ་མ་ཡིན་ན་[དེ་ལྟ་བས་ན་]འཛིག་ཉེན་ལས་འདས་པའི་རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བ། ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་པ་རྣམ་པར་སྒྲི
ན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་མེད་ན་མི་རུང་སྟེ། དེ་ལ་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གྱིས་ནི་དེའི་ས་བོན་ཡོངས་སུ་འཛོན་པར་མི་རིགས་པའི་བྱིར་
རོ། །གལ་ཏེ་ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་པ་རྣམ་པར་སྒྲིན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ན། དེའི་གཉེན་པོ་འཛིག་ཉེ
ན་ལས་འདས་པའི་སེམས་གྱི་ས་བོན་དུ་རྩི་ལྟར་རུང་། འཛིག་ཉེན་ལས་འདས་པའི་སེམས་ནི་མ་འདྲེས་པས་དེ་བས་ན་དེའི་བག་ཆགས་
ནི་མེད་པ་ཉིད་དོ། །བག་ཆགས་དེ་མེད་ན་ས་བོན་དེ་གང་ལས་འབྱུང་བ་བརྗོད་དགོས་སོ་ཞེ་ན། ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྣམ་པར་དག་
པའི་རྒྱ་མཐུན་པ་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གྱི་ས་བོན་ལས་དེ་འབྱུང་ངོ་། །ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ཡང་ཅི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་
ཤེས་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཡིན་ནས། འོན་ཏེ་མ་ཡིན། གལ་ཏེ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཡིན་ན་ནི། རི་ལྟར་དེའི་གཉེན་པོའི་ས་བོ
ན་དུ་རུང་། ཅི་སྟེ་དེ་ཡི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་ན་ནི། དེས་ན་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་[sicས་]ས་བོན་དེ་ཡི་གནས་རི་ཞིག་ཡིན་པར་བརྟ་ཞེ་
ན། སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བྱང་རྒྱུ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་སུ་གྱུར་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་གནས་གང་ལ་འཕྲུག་པ་དེ་ལྟར་ཅིག་འ
དུས་པའི་རྩིས་གྱིས་རྣམ་པར་སྒྲིན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་འཕྲུག་སྟེ། འོ་མ་དང་རྩ་བཞིན་ནོ།

As it states in the *Summary of the Greater Way*,⁵ if it were not like that, and:

if the total purity that is beyond the world did not exist in the ripened consciousness that has *all* the seeds, then this would not be suitable, because it

⁵ Cf. *Mahāyānasamgraha (the gbsdus)*, Toh. 4048, sde dge, vol. *ri*, 10b1-11a6.

would not make sense for the tendencies for listening to retain their own seeds.

Suppose someone says: ‘If that which has all the seeds, the ripened consciousness, is the cause for all that is mentally afflicted, then how could it be suitable for it to exist as the seed for a mind beyond the world, which is its antidote?’

Insofar as the mind beyond the world is unmingled, its tendency would not exist at all. But if its tendency did not exist, then you’d have to ask: ‘From what does that seed arise?’

(726) *It arises from the seed of the tendency for listening, which is the congruent cause for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things.* But then, whatever that tendency for listening may be, is it of the very essence of the foundation-of-all consciousness, or is it not?

Suppose you say the following: ‘If it were of the very essence of the foundation-of-all consciousness, how could it be suitable for it to exist as the seed for its antidote? But if they were not of its very essence, then what could you ever look upon as being the home of the seed of the tendency for listening?’

In dependence upon the enlightenment of all Buddhas, that which serves as the tendency for listening engages at the place where the ripened consciousness engages, in such a way that they are gathered together simultaneously. It is like milk and water.

།དེ་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེའི་གཉེན་པོའི་ས་བོན་ཉིད་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ལ་བག་ཆགས་རྒྱུ་དུ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བ
ག་ཆགས་འབྲིང་བོར་འགྱུར་རོ། །བག་ཆགས་འབྲིང་བོ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བག་ཆགས་ཆེན་པོར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། རྩོམ་པ་དང་བསམ་པ་དང་བསྐྱོ
མ་པ་ལན་མང་དུ་བྱ་བ་དང་ལྡན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ལ་ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་རྒྱུ་དུ་དང་འབྲིང་དང་ཆེན་པོ་ཡང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱའི་ས་བོན་དུ་ལྟ
ས་ཏེ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་གཉེན་པོ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་རོ་བོ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་པས་བསྐྱུས་པ།[sic]པ་དང་།
། འཛིག་རྟེན་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་འཛིག་རྟེན་ལས་འདས་པའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་རྒྱ་མཐུན་པ་ཡིན་པས། འཛིག་རྟེན་ལ
ས་འདས་པའི་སེམས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་དུ་འགྱུར་བའོ། །དེ་ནི་འཛིག་རྟེན་ལས་འདས་པའི་སེམས་མ་བྱུང་དུ་ཟིན་ཀྱང་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་[sic]པས་
།ཀུན་ནས་དགྱིས་པའི་གཉེན་པོ་དང་། བན་སོང་དུ་འགྲོ་བའི་གཉེན་པོ་དང་། ཉེས་པར་བྱས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དེངས་པར་བྱེད་པའི་གཉེན་པོ་
ཡིན་ནོ། །སངས་རྒྱས་དང་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་དང་ཟད་པའི་རྗེས་སུ་མཐུན་པའོ། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ལས་དང་བོ་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་
འཛིག་རྟེན་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱར་བསྐྱུས་པ་དང་། ཉན་ཐོས་དང་རང་སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་གྲོལ་བའི་ལུས་སུ་བསྐྱུས་པར་
ཡང་བལྟའོ། །དེ་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་མ་ཡིན་གྱི། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུ་དང་རྣམ་པར་གྲོལ་བའི་ལུས་སུ་བསྐྱུས་པ་སྟེ། རྒྱུ་དུ་དང་འབྲིང་
པོ་དང་ཆེན་པོ་ཇི་ལྟ་ཇི་ལྟར་རིམ་གྱིས་འཁོལ་བ་སྟེ་དེ་ལྟ་དེ་ལྟར་རྣམ་པར་སྤྲིན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་འབྲི་ཞིང་གནས་ཀྱང་འགྱུར་རོ
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But this *is not* the foundation-of-all consciousness, because it is the very seed of its antidote. In dependence upon a slight tendency, they become medium tendencies. In dependence upon medium tendencies, they become great tendencies; because they are endowed with having listened, contemplated, and meditated many, many times. You can look upon those slight, medium, and great tendencies for listening as being the seeds for the holy body of the Dharma [i.e., *dharmakāya*].

Because they are the antidote for the foundation-of-all consciousness, and because they are not of the very essence of the foundation-of-all consciousness, they can be subsumed within it. Because they are in the world, but are the congruent cause for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things, which is beyond the world, they turn into the seeds for the mind that transcends the world.

(727) Although the mind that transcends the world has not yet emerged fully, it is the antidote for being completely tethered by mental afflictions, and it is the antidote against going to the realms of misery, and it is the antidote that causes all bad deeds to go away. It follows upon having encountered Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattvas who are just starting out are still in the world, but you should view them as being subsumed within the holy body of the Dharma, and you should also see them as being subsumed within the totally liberated body of listeners and solitary realizers.

It is not the foundation-of-all consciousness, but rather is subsumed within the body of total liberation and within the holy body of the Dharma. Insofar as the slight, medium, and great flourish step by step, just so much the ripened consciousness diminishes, and transforms.

[གནས་ནམས་[sicནམ་ས་]ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་གྱུར་བ་ནམ་པར་སླིན་པའི་ནམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ས་སོན་ཐམས་ཅད་པ་ཡང་ས་སོན་མེད་པར་གྱུར་བ་དང་། རྣམ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་སྤངས་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཡང་ངེ་ལྟར་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་རྒྱ་དང་འོ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་ལྷན་ཅིག་དུ་གནས་པ་རྣམ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་འགྲིབ་པར་འགྱུར་ཞེ་ན། ངང་པས་རྒྱ་ལས་འོ་མ་འཐུངས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་འདོད་ཆགས་དང་བྲལ་བ་ན། མཉམ་པར་གཞག་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སའི་བག་ཆགས་འགྲིབས་ཏེ་མཉམ་པར་གཞག་པའི་སའི་བག་ཆགས་འཁེལ་ཏེ་གནས་གྱུར་བ་བཞིན་ནོ། ཞེས་སོ། །

The ripened consciousness that has all the seeds transforms in every way, until it has no more seeds. It has in every way abandoned them. But suppose you ask: 'How is it that the one in every way diminishes, when the foundation-of-all consciousness, and that which is not the foundation-of-all consciousness, are staying together like water and milk?'

It is like the way a swan drinks milk from water. It is also like the transformation by which, if one is free of worldly desire, the tendencies for levels that are not meditation diminish, while the tendencies for levels that are meditation flourish and increase.

ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་རྒྱ་མཐུན་པ་དང་། སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཞེས་པ་དང་། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་དང་། རྣམ་པར་ཐོལ་བའི་ལུས་ཀྱི་ཁྱད་པར་དང་། གནས་གྱུར་ལ་དཔེ་གཉིས་སྟོས་པ་ཞེ་ན། དང་པོ་ནི། བཤད་སྒྲུར་ལས། སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་སྟོན་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་དང་བྲལ་བ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེའི་རྒྱ་མཐུན་ནི་བསྟན་པའི་ཆོས་ཏེ་དེ་རྒྱ་ལས་བྱུང་བར་གྱུར་ན་འདྲ་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་མཉམ་པར་ནི་ཐོས་པའོ། །དེའི་བག་ཆགས་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་འཛིག་རྟེན་ལས་འདས་པ་ཐག་པ་མེད་པའི་སེམས་ཀྱི་ས་སོན་ཏེ། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་མཐུན་པ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེས་སོ། །གཉིས་པ་ནི། དེ་ཉིད་ལས། སངས་རྒྱས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བྱང་ཆུབ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཤེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མ་མེད་ཅིང་ཐོགས་པ་མེད་པ་མདོའི་སྤེལ་སོགས་པ་བསྟན་པའི་ཆོས་

། ཐོས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་གནས་ཡིན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་ནི་འབྲུག་གོ་ཞེས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་འ
ཕེལ་བའི་གནས་བསྟན་པའི་ཆོས་ཐོས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་ལ་རྟེན་པའི་གནས་ཀུན་གཞིའོ།

(728) What is the “congruent cause for the extremely pure, absolute space of all things,” and “in dependence upon the enlightenment of the Buddhas”? What is the difference between “the holy body of the Dharma,” and “the body of total liberation”? What are the two examples of transformation?

For the first, the *Additional Explanation* [Upanibandhana]⁶ says: “The extremely pure, absolute space of all things of all Buddhas, is entirely free of adventitious defilements, and its congruent cause is the Dharma Teaching, because [the extremely pure, absolute space] is similar to something that emerges from a cause. Hearing that is ‘listening.’ Its tendency is the seed for the immaculate mind that is beyond the world, because the foundation-of-all consciousness is not congruent.”

For the second, the same text states: “The phrase, ‘In dependence upon the enlightenment had by all the Buddhas,’ means that the primordial wisdom which is without stain and without obstruction, and the Dharma that is taught – the groups of sūtras and so on – is the home of the tendency for listening, while the foundation-of-all consciousness is not. Nonetheless, they engage together. Furthermore, the locus of flourishing is something like listening to the Dharma that is taught, but the locus that is the basis, is the foundation of all.”

། གསུམ་པ་ནི། དེ་ཉིད་ལས། དེ་ལ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་དང་རྣམ་པར་ཐོལ་བའི་ལུས་ཀྱི་བྱང་པར་ནི་འདི་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྣམ་པར་ཐོལ་བ་ནི་ཉོན་མོངས་
པའི་བཅིངས་པ་དང་བྲལ་བ་ཙམ་དུ་ཟད་དེ། དཔེར་ན་ཐོང་མི་ཞིག་ལྷགས་སྒྲོག་ལ་སོགས་པས་བཅིངས་པ་དང་བྲལ་བ་ཙམ་ན་སྦྱག་བསྡུ
ལ་དེ་ལོག་པ་འབྲས་བུ་ཙམ་དུ་ཟད་ཀྱི་དེ་ལས་ལྷག་པའི་དབང་བླག་གི་བྱང་པར་དང་ལྷན་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལྟ་བུ་འོ། །ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་ནི་ཉོན་མོང
ས་པ་དང་ཤེས་བྱའི་སྤྱི་བ་ལས་རྣམ་པར་ཐོལ་བ་སྟོབས་དང་མི་འཛིགས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ངོ་མཆར་གྱི་ཡོན་ཏན་དུ་མས་བརྒྱན་པ་འབྱོ
ར་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གནས་ཇི་ལྟར་འདོད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲོད་པས་རང་དབང་མཆོག་ཐོབ་པ་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་བྱུང་བོའི་བྱ་བཅིངས་པ་དང་བྲལ
མ་ཐག་ཏུ་སྤྱི་ལོ་ནས་དབང་བསྐྱར་བ་དང་། དབང་བླག་ཕྱན་སུམ་ཆོགས་པ་མཆོག་དང་ལྷན་པ་ལྟ་བུ་འོ། །ཞེས་སོ། །བཞི་པ་ནི། ངང་པའི
དཔེ་ནི་འཛིག་རྟེན་ན་གྲགས་པ་ཡིན་ལ། ཆགས་བྲལ་གྱི་དཔེ་ནི་བསྟན་བཅོས་ལ་གྲགས་པའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་པར་མངོན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བྱ
ས་ན་མཁས་པ་ཁ་ཅིག་ཟག་མེད་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ཀུན་གཞིར་འདོད་པ་ནི་བཅིངས་པར་མངོན་ཏེ་ལུང་འདི་ལས་བྱེ་རོལ་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

For the third, it says in the same text:

Here is the difference between the holy body of the Dharma, and the body of total liberation: That which is totally liberated is simply rid of the chains of mental afflictions, and that’s it. For example, if a villager is just rid of the chains of iron shackles and so forth, the result is just the reversal of that suffering, period. But it does not include anything more than that, such as having the distinction of a Lord.

(729) The holy body of the Dharma is totally liberated from both the obscurations of mental afflictions and those regarding knowable things. It is adorned with strength, fearlessness, and so on – the many marvelous good qualities. It is the locus of all fortune: As much as you may want, you partake of, and so one has

⁶ *Asvabhāva (ngo bo nyid med pa), *Mahāyānasamgrahopānibandhana*, *theg pa chen po bsdu pa'i bshad sbyar*, Toh. 4051, sems tsam, mdo 'grel, vol. ri.

autonomously achieved the highest thing. For example, the very moment that a prince is rid of his chains, he is anointed from the crown of his head, and he is endowed with what is highest, the entire collection of all that it means to be a Lord.

As for the fourth point: The example of the swan is well-known in the world, but it is evident that the example of being without desire comes under the heading of what is well-known in scriptural teachings.

Hence if some scholar wants to say that the immaculate seed is *in* the foundation consciousness, it is evident that this is crude, because it would fall outside of what is stated in these citations.

* * *

སྤྱིར་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་འབྲུང་བའི་དོན་ནི་འདིར་ཆོས་ཀྱན་སྦྱོར་བའི་བྱིར་ཡིན་ལ་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་ཀུན་གཞི་ས་བོན་གྱི་ཆ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་བ་ནི།
 ཆོག་ལས་བདུན་གྱིས་བསྐྱས་པ་འཇམ། ཉོན་མོངས་ས་དང་ལས་དང་སྦྱེ་བའི་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཆོས་ནས་གྱི་རྒྱུའི་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་ད
 ག་འདིའི་འབྲས་བུར་འདིར་སྦྱོར་བའཇམ། ཡང་ན་ཀུན་གཞི་དེ་ཉིད་ཆོས་དེ་དག་གི་རྒྱུའི་དངོས་པོར་འདིར་སྦྱོར་བའི་བྱིར་ན་ཀུན་གཞི་ལོ།
 ཀུན་གཞི་ནས་སྤྱིན་གྱི་ཆ་ནི་འགྲོ་བ་ལྔའི་སེམས་ཅན་ཀུན་འདིར་ཉོན་ཡིད་གྱིས་བདག་ཏུ་སྦྱོར་བའི་བྱིར་ཀུན་གཞི་ལོ།

. . . (730) In general, the meaning of “foundation-of-all” is, here, because “it is connected to all things.” In particular, the meaning of “foundation-of-all” in terms of the *seed* foundation-of-all is this: Because it is subsumed by the seven collections [of consciousness], or *because it is the causal condition for all mental afflictions, all karma, and all mentally afflicted things that have begun; those are all its result.* Thus they are connected to it.

Or else, the foundation-of-all itself, being the functioning reality that is the cause of all those things, is connected to them; hence it is the “foundation-of-all.” In terms of the *ripened* foundation-of-all, all five types of wandering sentient beings connect a self to it, via the afflictive mind. Hence it is the “foundation-of-all.”

Appendix Nine: The Necessity of Both Stages

Excerpts from Chapter Eleven of *The Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*¹

[From the section on refuting the view that one could reach enlightenment via the creation stage alone, without the complete stage:]

ཀྱེ་ལྟེ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་སྟེན་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་བདག་མེད་པའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཚོགས་པའི་ལྟ་བུ་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་སྟུང་ན། དེ་ནི་མི་རིགས་ཏེ་
ཁྱེད་བདག་མེད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུ་སྟོན་པ་མི་འདོད་ན་དེ་ཙམ་གྱིས་འཆང་བྱ་བའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་མི་རྫོགས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་ན་བསྐྱེད་
ད་རིམ་ལ་ཡང་རྟན་བརྟེན་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་གོ་བ་རྟེན་པར་བྱས་ནས་དེ་མ་བསྟོམས་ཀྱང་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་རྫོགས་པར་འགྱུར་
རོ། ཀྱེ་ལྟེ་ལྟ་བུ་སྟོན་པ་ནི། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་ལོག་ཏེ་གཞིག་བསྟོན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཡིན་ན་ལྟ་བུ་མ་མོར་བ་རྟེན་པ་དེའི་རྒྱུད་ལ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་
དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་ལོག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པའི་ལོག་ཏེ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེ་ན། འདི་ནི་ཀུན་བཏགས་ཀྱི་ལོག་ཏེ་གཞིག་དང་ལྟན་སྟེན་ཀྱི་ལོག་ཏེ་གཞིག་
གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཁྱད་མ་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཆད་མས་བྱངས་པའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུ་འདི་བྱེད་པ་ཇི་སྟེན་མ་ཉམས་པ་དེ་སྟེན་དུ་དེ་ལ་གྲུབ་མཐས་
བཏགས་པའི་ལོག་ཏེ་གཞིག་མེད་མོད་ཀྱང་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་ཞུགས་པ་གྲུབ་མཐས་སྟོབས་ལ་མ་ལྟོས་པའི་ལྟན་སྟེན་ཀྱི་བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་
ན་པ་ནི་ལྟོག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་ན་གནས་ལུགས་གོ་བའི་ལྟ་བུ་རྟེན་མ་ཐག་ཏུ་མཐོང་སྤང་དང་སྟོན་སྤང་ཐམས་ཅད་སྤངས་པར་
འགྱུར་བས་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ཡང་བསྟོན་པ་དགོས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

. . . (708) Suppose you think: This [practice of the creation stage] *is* relying upon the collection of wisdom, because it has the view that realizes the suchness that is the lack of a self. But this unreasonable; because if you do not accept the need to *meditate* on that view of selflessness, then with just that [view] alone, you will not be able complete the collection of wisdom that will bring you to enlightenment.

If it were not like that, then with the creation stage also, if you were to find an *understanding* of the maṇḍala of beings and the places where they stay, but not then meditate upon it, you would never complete the collection of merit, either.

Suppose you give the following reason. “As for meditating on the view, since this is done in order to overcome wrong ideas about the meaning of suchness, then in the mental continuum of someone who has found the unmistakable view, there will simply be no wrong ideas that hold to the meaning of suchness in a totally backwards way.”

But here you have failed to make a distinction between totally fabricated wrong ideas and inborn wrong ideas. It may be so that, once you have a view of suchness derived from a valid perception, then as long as that view does not deteriorate, you will not have wrong ideas fabricated from philosophical positions. But you will not have reversed the grasping to a self that has remained inborn within you from time without beginning, the one that

¹ Tsongkhapa, *sngags rim chen mo*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ga, 354b1-374b4 (708-748), emphasis mine. Cf. Tsong kha pa, Thomas F. Yarnall, and Robert A. F. Thurman, 2013, *Great Treatise on the Stages of Mantra (sngags rim chen mo): (Critical elucidation of the key instructions in all the secret stages of the path of the victorious universal lord, Great Vajradhara): Chapters XI-XII, the Creation Stage* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies), Chap. XI. My reading of the text, based on oral explanation from Geshe Khedrup Norsang, differs significantly from Yarnall's in many places, hence my efforts to render my own translations of all passages quoted from the *Steps of Mantra*, throughout the dissertation.

does not rely upon your mind being influenced by philosophical tenets. If this were not the case, then as soon as you discovered a view that comprehends the way things really are, you would have abandoned all those things to be abandoned by the path of seeing, as well as those to be abandoned by the path of habituation. But then you wouldn't need to meditate on the stage of creation, either.

།དེས་ན་སྒྲིབ་པ་དེ་དག་སྤོང་བ་ལ་བདག་མེད་པ་གོ་བ་ཙམ་གྱིས་མི་ཚོག་གི་ལྟ་བུ་བས་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པའི་བདག་མེད་ཀྱི་དོན་བསྟོམས་ན་ས་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་བྱ་དགོས་སོ། །དབུ་མ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གཞུང་ནས་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་པ་ན་རང་གཞན་གྱི་སྡེ་པ་ཕྱོགས་སྒར་བྱས་ནས་འགོག་པ་ནི་བྱུང་མཐའ་སྤྱོད་ལོག་རྟོག་ཙམ་འགོག་པ་མིན་ནོ། །འོ་ན་ཅི་ཞེ་ན། ཐར་པ་ལ་གོགས་བྱེད་པ་ནི་བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པ་ལྟན་སྤྱིས་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཏེ་བྱུང་མཐའ་བཏགས་པའི་ཀྱན་བཏགས་ཁོ་ནས་གོགས་བྱེད་ན་བྱུང་མཐའ་སྤྱོད་པ་བསྐྱར་བ་རྣམས་ལ་ཐར་པའི་གོགས་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་བྱེད་རོ། །བདག་འཛིན་ལྟན་སྤྱིས་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་འགོག་པ་ན་དངོས་པོར་སྤྱོད་པའི་བྱུང་མཐའ་དག་དགག་དགོས་ཏེ་དེ་དག་གི་བྱུང་མཐའ་ནི་དེ་ཡོད་པར་སྤྱོད་པས་སོ། །དེས་ན་དབུ་མ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གཞུང་ནས་རང་གཞན་གྱི་སྡེ་པ་དངོས་པོར་སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་འདོད་པ་འགོག་པ་ནི་བདག་འཛིན་ལྟན་སྤྱིས་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་འགོག་པའི་ཡན་ལག་ཡིན་པས། དེ་དག་ནས་བདག་མེད་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པ་ཡང་བདག་འཛིན་ལྟན་སྤྱིས་ཀྱི་འཛིན་སྤངས་སུ་བྱུང་བའི་བདག་མེད་ཡིན་པས་ལྟ་བུ་དེ་རྟེན་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་བདག་འཛིན་དེ་མི་ལྟོག་གྲང་གོམས་པར་བྱས་ན་ལྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

(709) Therefore, in order to abandon the obscurations, it is not enough just to understand the lack of a self. Rather, after meditating on the meaning of the selflessness you have set forth for yourself through the view, you must make it *direct*. In the sacred treatises of the Middle Way and so forth, when the meaning of selflessness is set forth, the refutation of an opponent's view taken from our own or other systems is not merely a refutation of the wrong views of those who profess philosophical tenets.

What is it then? What creates an obstacle to liberation is the inborn grasping to a self itself. If it were only the totally fabricated grasping – fabricated from philosophical positions – that created such an obstacle, then it would turn out that those whose minds had not been influenced by such tenets would have no obstacles to liberation.

Now if you refute the existence of the objective field to which the inborn self-grasping grasps, then you have automatically refuted all the tenets of those who profess functioning things; because those philosophical positions establish things as existing.

Therefore, the refutations of the assertions made by those – in both our own and others' systems – who profess functioning things, which are presented in the sacred treatises of the Middle Way and so forth, are just an auxiliary branch of the refutation of that objective field to which the inborn self-grasping holds.

Thus when those scriptures set forth the lack of a self, it is a selflessness that rips out the way you were holding to a self according to the inborn self-grasping. Hence, just discovering that view will not turn back that self-grasping, but nonetheless, once you have become accustomed to that, it will turn it back.

* * *

[From the section on the actual refutation of the opposite view, that one could reach enlightenment via the complete stage alone, without the creation stage:]

སྒྲོམ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བྲལ་བའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་གཉིས་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཉེར་ལེན་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་ཡི
ན་མོད་ཀྱང་དེ་འབའ་ཞིག་ལ་གོམས་པར་བྱས་ན་ནི་ཡུན་ཅི་ཙམ་ཞིག་འདོད་ཀྱང་རབ་ཀྱི་མཐར་ཐུག་པར་འགྲོ་མི་རུས་ཏེ། ཐབས་ཀྱི་ཡན
ལག་དང་བྲལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཉེ་དཔེར་ན་ས་བོན་སྤྱུ་གུའི་ཉེར་ལེན་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་ཚུ་ལྟ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྒྱུ་དང་བྲལ་ན་སྤྱུ་གུ་སྐྱེད་མི་རུས་
པ་བཞིན་ནོ།

. . . (713) The incisive knowing that realizes suchness, free of all elaboration, is indeed the proximate cause for the indivisible, primordial wisdom of a Buddha.

(714) Nonetheless, if one were only to become accustomed to that alone, then no matter how long you may want to stay there, it cannot take you to the highest ultimate goal, because it is bereft of the component of method. For example, it is like the fact that a seed may well be the proximate cause for a sprout, but without the conditions of water, fertilizer, and so forth, it cannot give rise to a sprout.

།དེས་ན་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་མཐར་ཐུག་པར་འགྲོ་བ་ཐབས་ལ་རག་ལས་ཤིང་ཐབས་རབ་ཀྱི་མཐར་ཐུག་པར་འགྲོ་བ་ཤེ
ས་རབ་ལ་ལྟོས་པ་ནི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་པ་སྤྱིའི་ལུགས་ཡིན་ལ་ཁྱད་པར་དུ་སྤྱགས་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པའི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་སྤྱོད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི
'རྣམ་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ལམ་སྟོང་ཉིད་དང་ལྷན་ནས་འབྱོར་སྒྲུབ་དགོས་པ་སྣང་ཡང་མང་དུ་བཤད་ཟིན་ཏོ། །གཞན་ཡང་རྟོག་པ་གོམས་པས་རྟོག
'བྲལ་དུ་འགྲོ་མི་སྲིད་ན་རྟོག་པ་གོམས་པས་གོམས་ཡུལ་གསལ་བར་སྒྲུབ་པ་མི་སྲིད་དགོས་ཏེ། ཡུལ་དེ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་སྒྲུབ་བ་དང་
དེ་ལ་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་པ་གཉིས་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཉེ་རིགས་པའི་དབང་ལྷག་གིས། རྣམ་རྟོག་རྗེས་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ། །དོན་གསལ་སྒྲུབ་བ་ཅན་
མ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་རོ། །ཡུལ་དུས་མ་འབྲེས་བར་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་སྒྲུབ་པས་རྟོག་བྲལ་དུ་སྤྱོད་མི་རུས་ན་སྤྱུ་གུ་སྐྱེད་
'དབང་པོའི་ཤེས་པ་རྣམས་རྟོག་པར་འདོད་པ་གཏན་མི་ཁེགས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

Thus whether or not the incisive knowing that realizes emptiness will go on to the highest ultimate goal depends on method, and whether or not method will go on to the highest ultimate goal relies on incisive knowing. This is the general system of the Mahāyāna, but in particular, according to the system of the Mantrayāna, one must meditate on the deep practices of emptiness and of divine beings as causes for the two holy bodies, insofar as they are paths that bear the aspect of those two results, respectively. This has already been explained many times.

Furthermore, if through becoming accustomed conceptually it were impossible to go on to nonconceptuality, then it would have to be impossible, through getting used to concepts, for an object with which you have become familiar to appear clearly. That is because it is contradictory for one thing both to appear with extreme clarity and for it to be conceptual. As the Lord of Reasoning [Dharmakīrti] has stated:²

Something that follows along in connection to concepts
is never the object that has a clear appearance.

If one could not achieve nonconceptuality through the extremely clear and delineated appearance of a thing that is *unmixed in the time and location of its existence*, then it would turn out that we have in no way refuted the non-Buddhist assertion that the sense consciousnesses are all conceptual.

² Cf. Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavarttika-kārikā* (*tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le'ur byas pa*), Toh. 4210, sde dge, mdo 'grel, vol. ce, 129a5, where it appears as: །རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་དང་རྗེས་འབྲེས་ནི། །དོན་གསལ་སྒྲུབ་བ་ཅན་མ་ཡིན།

ཁྱོག་པ་གོམས་པས་གསལ་སྒྲུང་མི་འབྱུང་ན་ནི། ཆགས་ལྡན་གྱིས་ཆགས་ལུལ་ཡང་ཡང་ཡིད་ལ་བྱས་པ་ན་དེའི་རྣམ་པ་གསལ་བར་མ་
 ཐོང་ནས་དེ་ལ་རེག་པར་ཚུལ་བ་སོགས་བྱེད་པ་དང་། འདྲེ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྒྲག་པའི་ཡིད་ཅན་གྱིས་ཡང་ཡང་དེ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱས་པ་
 ན་དེ་དང་དེའི་རྣམ་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་ཤར་བ་སོགས་མི་སྲིད་དོ་ཞེས་སྒྲུར་བ་གདབ་དགོས་ལ་རེགས་པའི་རྒྱལ་སོས། མི་སྒྲག་ཟད་པ་
 ར་ས་ལ་སོགས། །ཡང་དག་མིན་པའང་བསྟོམས་པ་ཡི། །སྟོབས་ཀྱིས་སྒྲུལ་བ་རྟོག་མེད་དང་། །གསལ་བར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཅན་དུ་གསུངས། །
 ཞེས་གསུང་རབ་ལས་འབྱུང་བར་བཤད་པའི་བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པའི་གསུང་ཡང་སྒྲུངས་པར་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། ཟར་པ་མི་སྲིད་པར་འདོད་པ་
 འི་བྱི་རོལ་པ་ལ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་མཛོད་སྤུངས་འབྱུང་བུ་དུ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་རྟགས་ཀྱི་ཁྲབ་པ་དེས་པའི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པའི་དཔེ་བྱི་རོལ་པས་ཀྱང་མི་བ་
 སྟོན་པ་ལ་བསྟོན་པ་ཉིང་བས་གཞན་སྟེ་ལ་འཕགས་པའི་གང་ཟག་སོགས་ཡོད་པར་སྒྲུབ་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཅ་བ་བཅད་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་ནོ།

(715) If through becoming accustomed conceptually a clear appearance will not arise, then you would have to discount what actually happens by saying that these and similar situations would be impossible: that when someone overcome with desire thinks again and again upon the object of his desire, he will see its aspect clearly, so much so that he will try to touch it and so on, or that when someone has such terror of flesh-eating spirits and the like, if he thinks about them over and over again, they and their aspect will dawn with extreme clarity. As the King of Reasoning writes:

It is stated that by force
 of meditating even on what is not real –
 on what is unpleasant, the whole earth
 decayed and so forth –
 then you will [see]³ a display that is
 nonconceptual and clearly appearing.

So you would also be rejecting the word of Those Gone To Bliss, as it is explained in the sacred treatises. Furthermore, with respect to those non-Buddhists who assert that there is no liberation, you would be denying the example that serves as the very basis for ascertaining the necessity of the reason that proves it is possible for a yogic direct perception to arise – even though they themselves do not deny this example. Thus you would also be cutting at its root the proof that can demonstrate to other groups the existence of persons such as the ārya and so forth.⁴

།དེས་ན་གོམས་ལུལ་ལ་གསལ་སྒྲུང་འོང་བ་ལ་ནི་ཡང་དག་པ་དང་ལོག་པའི་དོན་གང་གོམས་ཀྱང་འདྲ་སྟེ་གོམས་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་རྗེས་སུ་བྱེད་
 བ་ལ་དགོངས་ནས་རེགས་པའི་དབང་ལྷན་གིས། དེ་བྱིར་ཡང་དག་ཡང་དག་མིན། །གང་གང་ཤིན་ཏུ་གོམས་གྱུར་པ། །གོམས་པ་ཡོང་
 ས་སུ་རྟོགས་པ་ན། །དེ་གསལ་མི་རྟོག་སྟོ་འབྲས་ཙན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ལ། །ཀུན་སྟོན་གྱི་བཅུ་གཅིག་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། །དངོས་པོ་གང་དང་
 གང་གིས་ནི། །མི་རྣམས་ཡིད་ནི་ཡང་དག་སྟོར། །དེ་ཡིས་དེ་ཡི་དངོས་འགྱུར་ཏེ། །སྒྲ་ཆོགས་གཟུགས་ཅན་ནོར་བུ་འདྲ། །ཞེས་གསུང་
 ས་སོ།

Therefore, clear appearance comes with respect to the object to which you become

³ My interpolation is based on the verse as it appears in the sde dge edition of the *Pramāṇavarttika-kārikā* (*tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le 'ur byas pa*), Toh. 4210, vol. ce, 129a6:

།མི་གཙང་ཟད་པར་ས་ལ་སོགས། །ཡང་དག་མིན་པའང་བསྟོམས་པ་ཡི། །སྟོབས་ཀྱིས་སྒྲུལ་བ་རྟོག་མེད་དང་། །གསལ་བར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཅན་དུ་མཛོང་།

⁴ Cf. Thomas Yarnall, 2013, *Great Treatise on the Stages of Mantra*, 100. My reading of the Tibetan grammar, here, differs significantly from that of Yarnall, and so this translation provides a completely different meaning, which I believe is crucial to Tsongkhapa's point.

accustomed; it is much the same whether you are getting used to something real or something unreal. That the clear appearance follows upon the mere fact of familiarization itself is the true intent of these scriptures. As the Lord of Reasoning states:

Therefore whether real or unreal
whatever you become so very familiar with
will, when familiarization is complete
result in a nonconceptual mind, to which it is clear.

The eleventh chapter of *The Activities [of the Yoginīs]* further states:

To whatever thing a person may apply his or her mind,
perfectly; from such application the thing will come into being –
things with every variety of form, like a jewel.

།གཤམ་ཉེ་རྟོག་པ་གོམས་པས་གོམས་ཡུལ་ལ་གསལ་སྤང་འབྱུང་བ་འདོད་ན་ནི་རྟོག་བྲལ་གྱི་དོན་གྲུབ་པས་དེ་ལ་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཐ་སྟེན་མི་
བྱེད་ན་མིང་ཅམ་ལ་ཙོད་པའོ། །གཤམ་ཉེ་ཡུལ་གསལ་བར་སྤང་ན་སྤྲོད་འཛིན་པའི་རྟོག་བྲལ་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་གཉིས་སུ་སྤང་བའི་རྟོག་པ་
དང་མ་བྲལ་བས་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ་སྟུམ་ན། གཉིས་སྤང་གི་རྟོག་པ་ལས་རྟོག་བྲལ་གྱི་སྒོ་སྒྲེ་མི་སྲིད་ན་འཕགས་པའི་གོ་འཕང་མ་ཐོབ་ཚུན་
ཆད་གྱི་སྒོ་ཐམས་ཅད་གཉིས་སྤང་གི་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་པས། ཆོགས་སྦྱར་གྱི་ལམ་ལས་འཕགས་པའི་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྒྲེ་བ་མི་
སྲིད་པར་འགྱུར་ཉེ་དབྱུས་མཐའ་ལས། ཡང་དག་མ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་རྟོག་ནི། །སེམས་དང་སེམས་འབྱུང་ཁམས་གསུམ་པ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་
འི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །བྱང་སེམས་འཕགས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་ཐོབ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ་ཡང་གཉིས་སྤང་ཡོད་པས་དེ་དག་ཀྱང་འཆང་རྒྱ་བའི་ལམ་མ་ཡི་
ན་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

(716) Suppose you want to say that through familiarization with something in a conceptual way, the objective field towards which your habituation was directed will arise as a clear appearance. Since this actual object is established free of concepts, if you don't want to call it “nonconceptual,” then that is merely a debate about a name.

But suppose you think: “If the object appears clearly, it may be so that it is free of the conceptual state of mind that grasps the meaning of a sound, but since it is not free of the conceptualization of appearances as dual, it *is* conceptual.”

If it were impossible for a mind free of conceptuality to be born from the conceptual state of mind to which duality appears, then, since every state of mind – up until one achieves the state of an ārya – does conceptualize dual appearance, it would turn out to be impossible for the totally nonconceptual wisdom of an ārya ever to be born from the paths of accumulation and preparation. As it says in *Separating the Middle from the Extremes* [Maitreya's *Madhyāntavibhāṅga*]: “In all the three realms, mind and mental functions are not real, but totally conceptual.”

Furthermore, since even the subsequent wisdom of all bodhisattva āryas also has dual appearance, then that, too, would not be a path that could purify and magnify one into Buddhahood.

།མི་མཐུན་པའི་རྒྱལ་ས་འབྲས་བུ་མི་མཐུན་པ་མི་འབྱུང་ཞེས་པའི་རྒྱལ་ས་མཐུན་ལུགས་ཀྱང་འབྲས་བུ་མི་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ན་རྒྱལ་ཡང་མི་རྟོ་
ག་པ་ཅིག་ཐོན་དུ་ངེས་པར་འགྲོ་བ་ལ་འདོད་ན་ནི་འཁོར་བ་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་མི་རྟོག་པ་ཡོད་པར་ཁས་སྒྲུང་དགོས་སོ། །སངས་རྒྱས་
གྱི་མི་རྟོག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱར་ལམ་དུས་སུ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་མི་རྟོག་པ་ཐོན་དུ་འགྲོ་དགོས་པས་བསྐྱེད་ངེས་སྟོམ་པའི་སྒོས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་

མ་ཉོགས་པས་འགོག་གོ་སྒྲུབ་ན། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཉོགས་པའི་སྒོ་མེད་པར་འདོད་ན་ནི་ཡིན་ཏུ་མི་རིགས་ཏེ་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་ངོ།

Suppose you want to assert that, insofar as the common presentation of cause and effect says that “A result that is incompatible from its cause will not arise,” so too, if a result is nonconceptual, then a cause that is also nonconceptual must definitely precede it. Then you would also have to accept that nonconceptual states of mind have existed throughout the cycle of suffering, without beginning.

Suppose you think that: “Since a nonconceptual realization of suchness must precede the nonconceptual wisdom of a Buddha during the time of the path, as its cause, then, since the mind that meditates on the stage of creation does not realize suchness, [creation stage] is refuted.”

But if you want to say that there is no state of mind realizing suchness during the period of the creation stage, this is unreasonable in the extreme. I will explain later on.

ཁོཅ་ཀྱང་སྣང་ཚོགས་ཁ་དོག་དང་དབྱིབས་གྱི་ནམ་པ་ཅན་སྒོམ་པའི་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱིས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མ་ཉོགས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་གྱིས་མཚོག་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ཐབས་སུ་མི་འགྱུར་ན་སྟོང་ཉིད་མ་ཉོགས་པའི་འཆད་རྒྱ་བའི་ཐབས་མི་སྲིད་པར་འགྱུར་བས་ཏ་ཅང་ཐལ་ལོ། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱི་ས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་མི་འགྲུབ་པར་སྒྲིབ་ནི་དགོ་པའི་སེམས་ཅེ་གཅིག་པ་ཅིག་བྱུང་ན་ཡུན་རིང་ཐུང་གང་ཡིན་ཀྱང་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་ཅམ་ཞིག་མི་འགྲུབ་པར་འདོད་པ་ནི་མི་རིགས་ལ་ཞི་གནས་མི་འགྲུབ་པ་ལ་བྱེད་ན་ནི་རྒྱ་མཚན་དེས་འཆད་རྒྱ་བའི་ལ་མ་ཡིན་པ་འགོག་པ་ཡིན་ཏུ་འཁུལ་ཏེ། བྱམས་པ་དང་སྤྱིང་རྗེ་དང་བྱང་ཆུབ་གྱི་སེམས་ལ་ནམ་པ་དུ་མར་དབྱེད་ནས་སྟོང་བ་བཞིན་ཏེ་དེ་འབྲེལ་ན་མང་ངོ། ཁོཅ་ཀྱང་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་སྒོམ་པ་ལ་སོ་སོར་ཉོག་པས་དབྱེད་ནས་སྟོང་བས་མ་ཁྲབ་པས་དཔྱེད་པ་དང་འཛིག་པའི་སྒོ་མ་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡོད་དེ་འདི་དང་གསལ་སྣང་སྐྱེས་པ་རིང་དུ་གནས་པའི་ཚུལ་ནི་འོག་ཏུ་བཤད་པར་བྱའོ།

(717) Now, if it were the case that the creation stage – in which you meditate on the appearance side of things, in the aspect of colors and shapes – did not realize suchness, and for that reason could not become a method for the supreme attainment, then indeed, since it is impossible for there to be a method for reaching Buddhahood that does not realize emptiness, this would be an absurd unwanted consequence.

But as for those who say that one cannot achieve concentration through the stage of creation: Since concentration exists any time a single-pointed virtuous state of mind comes into being, whether it remains for a duration that is long or short, if you assert that one cannot achieve just a state of concentration, this makes no sense. But if you say one cannot reach meditative stillness [this way], and that for that reason it is refuted as being a path to Buddhahood, this is a terrible mistake. For there are many ways in which one analyzes and then sustains [a conclusion], with respect to love, compassion, and the wish for enlightenment, and there are a very many other cases like this.

(718) Further, among the meditations of creation stage, those in which one analyzes and then sustains [a conclusion] do not cover them all. Thus there are both analytical and placement meditations. I will explain below the way in which these – as well as clear appearances – arise, and then remain for a long time.

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ཞེས་སོགས་གསུངས་པས་མ་བཅོས་པའི་རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྟན་པོ་མ་རྟེན་བར་དུ་བཅོས་མ་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱི་དགོས་ལ་དེ་ནས་
འཛོག་པའི་ཁྲངས་ཡིན་གྱི་མཆོག་སྐྱབ་པའི་ལས་དང་པོ་བས་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་སྒོམ་མི་དགོས་པའི་ཁྲངས་སུ་འདོད་པ་ནི་མུན་སྐྱེལ་ལོ། །གཞི
ངས་ཀྱི་དཔེས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་ཏེ་རྒྱའི་པ་རོལ་ནས་འཛོག་ཀྱང་དེར་སྐྱབས་སྐྱེལ་སྤྱོད་པར་བསྐྱེན་དགོས་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། །རྫོགས་རིམ་ཡང་
སྟོང་བ་དང་ལྷའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པ་ལྟར་བཅོས་ནས་བྱ་མི་དགོས་པར་མ་བཅོས་པར་རྣམས་པའི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྟན་པོ་ཡིན་གྱི་རྒྱང་
དང་གཏུམ་མོའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཅམ་ཞིག་སྒོམ་པ་ལ་རྫོགས་རིམ་པར་ཐ་སྙད་འདོགས་པ་ལྟ་བུས་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་འཛོག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ།
རྒྱལ་བའི་དངོས་ཉིད་རིག་ལ་མིན། ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་ནོ།

. . . (718) This [quotation from the fiftieth chapter of the *Vajradāka Tantra*] is cited as a source insofar as it is true that as long as one has not found a stable realization of the uncontrived complete stage, one must practice the contrived stage of creation. But to take it as a source in order to say that a beginner who will achieve the supreme goal does not need to meditate on the creation stage is a ridiculous shot in the dark. You should understand it according to the example of the boat; where even though it will be set aside once you are on the other side of the water, you must definitely rely upon it in order to get there.

(719) At the complete stage, one does not have to practice emptiness and the yoga of the divine being in the contrived way that that a creation stage practitioner would, because the realizations that enable one to do so in an uncontrived way are stable. But someone who just meditates on the yogas of the winds and inner fire, and so is given the name of a “complete stage practitioner” cannot set aside the stage of creation. This is the meaning of the line, “He has no knowledge of the actual state of the Victorious One.”

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ལས་དང་པོ་བས་རྫོགས་རིམ་སྒོམ་པ་མེད་པར་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་སྒོམ་པ་ལ་དགོས་པ་མེད་དེ་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྐྱེས་པའི་དོན་ནི་རྫོགས་
ས་རིམ་གྱི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཞེས་རྒྱ་མཆོན་བཀོད་ནས་ཁྲུས་པའི་ལན་དུ། ཁྱོད་རྫོགས་རིམ་ལ་དད་པའི་ཤུགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་
ད་རིམ་ལས་ཉམས་སོ་ཞེས་གསུངས་ནས་བསྐྱེད་རྫོགས་གཉིས་མེ་ཏྲག་དང་དཔེ་རིམ་བཞིན་དུ་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པར་བསྐྱབས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་
ཐུགས་དངོས་པོའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་ཁྲུགས་པ་ནི། རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱིས་སྐྱབ་པ་ལ་ལུས་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱར་གནས་པ་ནི། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱིས་སྐྱབ་ཅི་
ང་སྐྱེ་ནི་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་རྟེན་ཡིན་པ་ལ་དགོངས་ནས་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པར་གསུངས་ཏེ་ལམ་དུས་སུ་ཡང་དེ་དང་རྗེས་སུ་མཐུན་པའི་རྟེན་དང་བ
རྟེན་པ་ཡོད་དོ།

. . . (720) Suppose you were to give this as a rationale: “A beginner who is not meditating on the complete stage has no need to meditate on the stage of creation, because the meaning of simultaneously-born great bliss is the yoga of the complete stage.”

Here is the [Blessed One’s] reply: “You, by force of your faith in the stage of what is complete, have fallen away from the stage of creation.” Then he goes on to demonstrate that the pair of creation and completion are a support and what rests upon it, like a flower and its scent.

(721) Furthermore, entry into the suchness that is the reality of the holy mind is accomplished through the complete stage. But staying in the holy body of form that is a *body*, is accomplished through the stage of creation. This holy body is the support for the holy mind. Since this is the [Blessed One’s] intent, then, when saying they are “a support

and what rests upon it,” it means that at the time of the path, also, there is a support and what rests upon it that are congruent with those [results].

།གང་ཟག་རབ་ཆེ་འདི་ལ་འཆང་རྒྱ་བ་ལ་ཡང་ལས་དང་པོ་པའི་སྐབས་ཤིག་མི་འདོད་ན་ནི་རྒྱ་ནག་གི་མཁན་པོ་ལྷར་གདུལ་བྱ་ནམས་ཅི་ག་ཅར་བར་འདོད་དགོས་ལ། ལས་དང་པོ་པའི་སྐབས་ཤིག་འདོད་ན་ནི་དེ་འཆང་རྒྱ་བ་ལ་རིམ་བ་དང་པོ་མི་དགོས་པར་འདོད་པ་སྔགས་ཀྱི་གཞུང་མཐའ་དག་དང་འགལ་ལོ། །སྟེ་བ་སྔ་མ་མང་པོར་སྔགས་ལ་སྤངས་སྤངས་པའི་གང་ཟག་ལ་གང་ཟག་རབ་ཏུ་བྱས་ནས་དེ་ལ་རིམ་བ་དང་པོ་ནས་འབྲིན་མི་དགོས་པར་སྟེ་ནི་སྐབས་ལས་ཉམས་པའི་གཏམ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འདིར་སྔགས་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་ལས་དང་པོ་ལ་ལ་མ་རིམ་གྱིས་བསྐྱོད་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་རིམ་བ་དང་པོ་དགོས་མི་དགོས་དཔྱད་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་གང་ཟག་ལ་ནི་རྫོགས་རིམ་མང་པོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་བཞག་ནས་ཁྲིད་པས་ཆོག་པའི་སྐབས་ཀྱང་སྤྱིར་བཏོན་ཕྱིར་རོ། །འདི་ནི་འཆང་རྒྱ་བ་ལ་ཆོགས་ལམ་ནས་བསྐྱོད་དགོས་མི་དགོས་དཔྱད་པ་ནས་དང་པོ་ཐོབ་ནས་ཆོགས་ལམ་ནས་བསྐྱོད་མི་དགོས་སོ་ཞེས་སྟེ་བ་དང་འདྲའོ།

With regard to a superlative person who will become enlightened in this lifetime, if you do not want to accept a beginner’s period, then, like the sage from China, you would have to accept that all such disciples are people who get there all at once. If you do accept a beginner’s period, then to assert that the first stage is not necessary for reaching enlightenment, is to stand in contradiction to the whole panoply of scriptures on mantra.

If you say that for a person who has trained over and over again in mantra in previous lifetimes, and thus become a superlative person, it is not necessary to lead him or her from the first stage, then this is a mere fairytale that has fallen out of the appropriate context. Because here, the analysis is about whether or not it is necessary for someone *entering* the path of mantra as a beginner, when traveling the stages of the path, to practice the first stage [of creation]. It is also inappropriate to say because for a superlative person such as that, who has already been established in a great deal of the complete stage, it is possible for there to be situations where it *is* permissible to lead him or her from that point onwards.

This would be like saying – when analyzing whether or not it is necessary to travel to enlightenment via the path of accumulation – that someone who had reached the first bodhisattva level does not have to travel via the path of accumulation.

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།མདོར་ན་རིམ་བ་དང་པོ་འཆང་རྒྱ་བ་ལ་རིམ་བར་དགོས་པའི་ལམ་མིན་པར་སྟེ་ནི་འོག་མ་གསུམ་ལ་པར་བྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་དང་བུ་ན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སྔགས་ཀྱི་ལམ་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་དོ་ཞེས་རྟུན་ཕྱེ་གསུམ་དང་ཆུ་མེད་ཀྱི་རྟུན་གྱི་གཞུང་པལ་མོ་ཆེ་ལ་སྟུར་བ་འདེབས་པ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་སྔགས་བ་དེ་ནི་ངོ་མཆར་རོ།

. . . (722) In brief, if you claim that the first stage is not a path that is definitely necessary to reach enlightenment, then you are also saying that there is nothing at all in the lower three groups of tantra to distinguish the path of mantra as being unique from the way of the perfections, and you are denigrating the vast majority of the scriptures of the three groups of tantra as well as those of unsurpassed tantra. A practitioner of mantra such as this should be ashamed of himself.

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[From the section on eliminating a rebuttal regarding Tsongkhapa's refutation of the view that one could reach enlightenment via the complete stage alone, without the creation stage:]

།དེས་ན་གཏན་ཆེགས་ཀྱི་དོན་ནི། འབྲེལ་ཆེན་ཉིད་ལས་སྐྱད་ཅིག་གང་ལ་གཙོ་བོ་སྒྲོམ་བའི་སྐྱད་ཅིག་དེ་ལ་ཤར་གྱི་ལྷ་ལ་སོགས་པ་སྒྲོམ་བ་མེད་པར་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་གཡས་ཞལ་འདིའོ་སྒྲོམ་དུ་སྒྲོམ་བའི་དུས་སུ་གཡོན་ཞལ་འདིའོ་སྒྲོམ་དུ་སྒྲོམ་བ་མེད་པར་སྟོན་པ་ཡིན་གྱི་གཡས་ཞལ་སྒྲུང་བའི་སྒྲོ་ལ་གཡོན་ཞལ་ལ་སོགས་པ་མི་སྒྲུང་བར་སྟོན་པ་མིན་ཏེ་རིགས་པའི་དབང་སྒྲུག་གིས། རྟོག་གཉིས་གཅིག་ཅར་མཐོང་བ་མེད། ཅེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་རྟོག་པ་གཉིས་གཅིག་ཅར་མི་སྐྱེ་ལ་རྟོག་པ་གཅིག་ལ་གཟུང་ནས་མི་འདྲ་བ་གཉིས་སྒྲུང་བ་མཐོང་སྒྲུམ་གྱིས་འབྲུབ་པའི་བྱིར་ཏེ་ཁ་བོ་ལ་རྟོག་པའི་སྒྲོ་བཞིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལྷ་མ་ཡིན་ན་སྒྲུབ་སྒྲུང་བ་ན་ཤངས་སྒྲུང་བ་འགལ་ཞིང་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་དབུས་སྒྲུང་བ་ན་མཐའ་གཉིས་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡང་འགལ་དགོས་པས་རྟོག་པ་ལ་གང་ཡང་སྒྲུང་བ་མེད་པར་འབྱུང་རོ།

. . . (729) So the meaning of the reasoning is this: As it says in the *Great Commentary* itself, in any given moment, at the moment that you are meditating on the principal figure, you are not meditating on the divine being in the east, and so on. In this way, it teaches that at the time that you meditate on the thought, “The right face is this,” there is no meditation on the thought, “The left face is this.” Nonetheless, it does not teach that the left face and so on do not appear to that state of mind to which the right face is appearing. As the Lord of Reasoning has said: “One does not see with two conceptual states of mind at once.”

Two conceptual states of mind cannot arise at once, but that two different beheld aspects can appear to a single conceptual state of mind is proven by direct perception. It is like the state of mind that conceptualizes something multicolored. If it were not like that, then when an eye appears it would contradict the appearance of a nose, and when the center of an eye appears, it would have to contradict the appearance of the two sides of the eye, and so it would turn out that nothing at all could appear to a conceptual state of mind.

* * *

།ཞེས་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱིས་ཞིང་དག་པར་བྱས་པ་ལ་དམིགས་མེད་སྤྱིར་རྗེ་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་རྫོགས་རིམ་བསྒྲོམས་པས་འབྲས་བུ་བདེ་སྒྲུག་ཏུ་སྐྱེ་བར་བཤད་པས་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་སྟོན་དུ་འགྲོ་དགོས་པའི་ཁྱད་པ་སོ། །དེ་ལྷ་མ་ན་རྟོག་པ་ཡང་གང་རུང་རུང་མིན་ལ་མི་རྟོག་པ་ཡང་ཅི་ཡང་མི་སེམས་པ་ཅམ་ལ་མི་ཟེར་གྱི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་གཉིས་སུ་མེད་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱར་བདག་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མཆན་མར་མི་རྟོག་པ་བདག་མེད་ཀྱི་དེ་ཉིད་རིག་པའི་ལས་སྟོན་དུ་འགྲོ་དགོས་པས་རིགས་མཐུན་གྱི་རྒྱ་དགོས་ཞེས་པའི་དོན་ནོ།

. . . (732) This [quotation from Vajragarbha's commentary to the *Hevajra Tantra*] is the scriptural source for the fact that creation stage must come first, insofar as it explains that once one has purified the field through the creation stage, then, through meditation on the complete stage – which is the *great bliss that is compassion without any focal object* – the fruit will arise easily. In this way, it is not saying that any conceptual thought at all is inappropriate, or that nonconceptuality means not bringing anything to mind at all.

(733) Rather, the meaning is that, as a cause for the nondual wisdom of a Buddha, a path that knows the suchness of the lack of a self – a path that does *not conceptualize* two types of “self” as having characteristics – must come as a prerequisite, and so “there must be a cause of similar type.”

* * *

།དེས་ན་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རིམ་པ་དང་བརྟགས་པའི་རིམ་པ་དང་བཅོས་མའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་རིམ་པ་དང་པོའི་མིང་ཡིན་ལ། རྫོགས་པ་
པའི་རིམ་པ་དང་མ་བརྟགས་པའི་རིམ་པ་དང་རྣམ་མའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ནི་རིམ་པ་གཉིས་པའི་མིང་དོ། །བསྐྱེད་པ་སོགས་གསུམ་ནི་སྒོས་བསྐྱེ
ད་ཅིང་བརྟགས་པ་བཅོས་པ་ཡིན་པས་དེའི་སྒྲིམ་བྱངས་པ་ན་རྫོགས་པ་ནི་སྒོས་བརྟགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་པར་རྫོགས་པ་འཕམ་བྱུང་བའོ།

. . . (739) The “stage of what is created,” the “stage of what is constructed,” and the “contrived yoga,” are names for the first stage. The “stage of what is complete,” the “stage of what is not constructed,” and the “yoga of what is real,” are names for the second stage. The three terms – “created” and so forth – refer to the fact that what is created and constructed by a state of mind, is contrived. Thus the counterpart to that is what is already completed, or established, without being constructed by a state of mind.

།འོ་ན་སྒོས་བཅོས་པའི་དབང་གིས་བྱུང་མ་བྱུང་འདིའི་དོན་གང་ཡིན་སྟུང་ན། འདི་ལ་རིམ་པ་རང་གི་སྐྱབས་ཀྱི་ཐབས་རེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་
ལྷའི་སྐྱར་རྫོགས་པར་བྱེད་པ་འདྲ་མོད་ཀྱང་བྱེད་ཚུལ་མི་འདྲ་སྟེ། འདི་ལྟར་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པས་ནི། དབྱངས་གསལ་གྱི་ཡི་གེ་དང་དེ་ལས་བྱ
ང་བའི་སྒྲ་ནི་དང་ས་སོགས་ཀྱི་ཡི་གེ་དང་ཕྱག་མཆན་སོགས་ཀྱི་ཐབས་ལས་རང་ཉིད་ལྷའི་སྐྱར་རྫོགས་པར་བྱེད་དེ་སྒོས་བསྐྱེད་ཅིང་བརྟག
ས་པ་ཅམ་མོ། །རྫོགས་རིམ་པས་ནི། དབྱངས་གསལ་གྱི་ཡི་གེ་དང་སྒྲ་ནི་སོགས་ཀྱིས་མཆོན་པའི་དོན་བྱང་སེམས་དཀར་དམར་དང་སྒྲ
ང་ལས་སྤྱ་རླུང་བའི་མཐུས་སྤང་མཆེད་ཐོབ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་མངོན་དུ་བྱས་པར་དབང་གིས་སྒྲིང་སེམས་ཅམ་ལས་སྐྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ལྷའི་
སྐྱར་ལྟར་བ་ཡིན་པས་སྒོས་མ་བརྟགས་ཤིང་མ་བཅོས་པར་ལྷའི་སྐྱར་རྫོགས་པའོ།

Now then, suppose you wonder, “What is the meaning of this ‘being established’ or ‘not being established’ by force of being contrived through a state of mind?” It is true that in dependence upon the methods proper to the context of each stage, the two are similar in making complete the holy body of a divine being, but the way in which they do so is not the same. Thus, a practitioner of the creation stage makes him or herself into the complete holy body of a divine being through various methods: the letters of the vowels and consonants, the moon and sun that arise from them, the seed syllables, the accoutrement, and so forth. But these are created by the mind and merely imagined.

(740) A practitioner of the complete stage rises up in the holy body of a divine being, which is like an illusion, from nothing more than winds and mind, by the power of having made manifest the primordial knowing of the three states of appearance, proliferation, and [near-]attainment, by the inner force of winds made fit for work and of the white and red bodhicitta, which are the real things symbolized by the letters of the vowels and consonants, the moon and the sun, and so on.

།དེས་ན་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པའི་སྐྱར་རྫོགས་པའི་ཐབས་ཀྱང་སྒོས་བཅོས་པ་ཡིན་ལ་ཐབས་དེ་ལས་བྱང་བའི་ལྷ་སྐྱུ་ཡང་བཅོས་མའོ། །རྫོགས་རིམ་
པའི་ལྷ་སྐྱུ་རྫོགས་པའི་ཐབས་ཅ་སྒྲིང་ཐེག་ལའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་སྒོས་མ་བཅོས་པ་ཡིན་ལ་ཐབས་དེས་སྟོང་བ་ཉིད་མངོན་དུ་
བྱས་པ་དང་དེའི་མཐར་ལྷའི་སྐྱར་ལངས་པ་ཡང་སྒོས་མ་བརྟགས་པའོ། །དེ་ལ་དགོངས་ནས་སྟོང་བ་སྐྱུས་ལས། བསྐྱེད་པའི་རིམ་པ་ནས་
བཅམས་ཏེ་ལུས་རྣམ་པར་དབེན་པའི་མཐར་ཐུག་པའི་བར་དུ་རྩོུ་ཞེ་གསུམ་ལ་སོགས་པས་ཀྱང་མཆན་ཉིད་ལ་ལྷག་པར་མོས་པ་ཅམ་ལ
གས་ཏེ་དེ་བས་ན་ལུས་རྣམ་པར་དབེན་པ་ལ་ཡང་ལྷའི་གཟུགས་མེད་དེ། ཞེས་སྐྱུ་ལུས་མ་ཐོབ་པའི་གོང་དབེན་གསུམ་དང་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་
ཀྱི་སྐྱབས་སྤྱ་སྒོས་མོས་པ་ཅམ་གྱི་ལྷ་སྐྱུ་ལས་གཞན་མེད་པར་གསུངས་ལ་དེ་བས་ན་དབེན་གསུམ་གྱི་ལྷ་སྐྱུ་ནི། རྫོགས་རིམ་པའི་ཁྱེད་སྤངས་
སྤྱ་འདུ་བ་ཅམ་ཡིན་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱ་དངོས་མིན་ལོ།

Therefore, for a creation stage practitioner, the method for completing the holy body is still contrived by a state of mind, so the holy body of a divine being that arises from that method is also contrived. The method for completing the holy body of a divine being for a complete stage practitioner – the yoga of channels, winds, orbs, and so on – is not contrived. So the emptiness made manifest from that method, and the holy body of a divine being that rises up at its end, *are not imagined by the mind*.

With this intent, the *Integration of Practices* states: “From the time one is a practitioner of the stage of what is created onwards, up until the final end of the stage of the body that is totally set apart, what is meant by the three vajras and so on is merely a sheer conviction towards their definition. Therefore, even the body that is totally set apart does not have the form of a divine being.” This is saying that until one has achieved the body of illusion, in the context of the creation stage and of the three stages of what is set apart, *there is no holy body of a divine being other than that which is merely believed in by the mind*. Therefore, the holy body of the three stages “set apart” is merely included within the sources regarding the complete stage, but it is not an actual holy body of primordial knowing.

།གལ་ཏེ་དེ་ལྟ་ཡིན་ན་ཡི་གེ་ལ་སོགས་པས་མཚོན་པའི་དོན་རྒྱུ་དང་ཐེག་ལའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱི་ཐབས་ཁོ་ན་ས་ལྟའི་སྤྱོད་པར་བྱའི་ཡི་གེ་དང་བྲག་མཚན་དང་རྩེ་ཉི་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་ལྟའི་སྤྱོད་པར་བྱེད་པའི་བཅོས་མས་ཅི་ཞིག་བྱ་སྤྱོད་ན། དེ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་ཐབས་བཅོས་མ་ལ་གོམས་པར་མ་བྱས་པར་མ་བཅོས་པའི་ཐབས་རྫོགས་པར་བྱ་མི་རུས་ལ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཐབས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་ཡང་བཅོས་མ་ལ་གོམས་པར་མ་བྱས་པར་མ་བཅོས་པའི་ཐབས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་མཛོན་དུ་བྱ་བར་མི་རུས་སོ།

(741) Suppose you think to yourself: “If that is the case, and it is only from the methods of the complete stage – the yogas of winds and orbs, and so on, that are the real thing symbolized by the letters and so forth – that one can create the holy body of a divine being, but from the method of letters and accoutrement, the moon and sun, and so on, the creation of the holy body of the divine being is contrived, then why should one do that at all?” But it is not like that. *If you do not become accustomed to the contrived method, you will not be able to complete the uncontrived method*. Therefore, if you do not become accustomed to what arises from method – even though it is still contrived – you will not be able to make manifest what arises from the uncontrived method.

* * *

་་་ དཔེར་ན་རྩའི་པ་རོལ་གྱི་གནས་གཅིག་ན་བཟའ་བཏུང་གི་འོངས་སྤྱོད་སྤྱད་པར་འདོད་པ་འགའ་ཞིག་རྩས་པར་བཅད་ནས་འོངས་སྤྱོད་པར་མ་རུས་པ་ན་གཞིངས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་པར་འགྲམ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པར་བྱེད་པ་བཞིན་དུ། རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱི་འོངས་སྤྱོད་ལ་འོངས་སྤྱོད་པར་འདོད་པ་ཡང་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྤང་ཞེན་གྱི་རྩས་པར་བཅད་ནས་འོངས་སྤྱོད་པའི་དབང་མ་བྱུང་བ་ན་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་གྱི་གཞིངས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཐ་མལ་གྱི་སྤང་ཞེན་ལོག་པའི་འགྲམ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པར་བྱེད་དོ། །རྩེ་ལྟར་གཞིངས་པར་འགྲམ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པའི་ཐབས་ཡིན་གྱི་བཟའ་བཏུང་གི་འོངས་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཐབས་གཞན་ཞིག་དགོས་པ་ལྟར་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ཡང་རྫོགས་རིམ་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་རྒྱུད་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཡིན་གྱི་རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་དང་ལྟ་སྤྱོད་འོངས་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ཐབས་རྒྱུད་དང་ཐེག་ལའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ལ་སོགས་པ་གཞན་ཅིག་དགོས་སོ། །འདིས་ནི་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པར་བྱ་དགོས་པ་དང་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ཅན་གྱིས་མི་ཚོགས་གཉིས་ཀ་བསྟན་ནོ།

... (741) For example, if someone who wants to partake of the good things, such as food and drink, that are at a place on the other side of the water, cannot partake of them due to

the obstacle presented by the waterway, he goes to the far shore by relying on a boat. In the same way, if, for someone who longs to partake of the enjoyments of the complete stage, the power to partake does not arise, due to the obstacle presented *by the waterway of believing in ordinary appearances*, he goes to the shore that is opposite to such insistent belief in ordinary appearances, by relying on the boat of creation stage.

Just as there is the method of the boat for going to the far shore, but there will be another method necessary in order to partake of the food and drink, so too creation stage is what ripens the mental stream to give birth to complete stage, but there is another method – the yogas of the winds and orbs, and so on – for the enjoyment of emptiness and the holy body of a divine being in complete stage. This teaches both the necessity of going to the final end of creation stage, and the fact that it is not enough to travel with no more than creation stage.

།དེས་ན་སྒྲིབ་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ལ་ཡི་གེ་དང་ཕྱག་མཆན་དང་རྒྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཐབས་ལས་ལྷན་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པར་འ
བྱེད་པར་ཐབས་དེ་དག་གི་སྒྲིབ་པ་དེ་དག་གི་མཆོན་དོན་གཏུམ་མོ་དང་ཐེག་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་ལ་སོགས་པ་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལ་རྒྱུད་སྒྲིབ་པར་བྱེད་པའི
ཉེན་འབྲེལ་བྱུང་པར་ཙམ་སྒྲིབ་པར་བྱས་པ་ནི་རྒྱ་མེད་མིན་པ་ལ་མེད་ཅིང་། དེ་འབྲེལ་ཞིག་ལ་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་དུ་གསུངས་པས་ན་རྒྱུད་སྒྲིབ་པ་
མ་རྒྱུས་ལ་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་དག་གི་ཙམ་པའི་རྒྱུད་ལ་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཡོད་ན་རྗེ་རྗེའི་ཆེག་དེ་ལ་བྱུང་ངེས་ཀྱི་བཤད་པ་
གཉིས་ཀྱང་བྱུང་ཡོད་པས་བསྐྱེད་རྒྱུས་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་དགོས་ཏེ། འདི་ནི་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྗེ་རྗེ་ཀུན་ལས་བཏུས་ཀྱི་བཤད་སྟེལ་སྒྲིབ་
ན་མེ་གསལ་བ་ལས་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

(742) Therefore, although they [i.e., the practices of the higher and lower tantras] are similar just insofar as, in the yoga of generating the divine being, the holy body of the divine being is created from the methods of letters, accoutrement, a moon and so on, *the capacity to set up an extraordinary dependent relationship to ripen one's mental stream for giving birth to the yogas of inner fire and of orbs, and so on, which are symbolized by way of those methods, does not exist in what is not the unsurpassed*. Since something like this is stated to exist in the creation stage, the lower groups of tantra do not have a “creation stage.”

If there were a teaching on the creation stage in their root tantras, there would also have to be two explanations for each of their vajra verses, both a definitive and an interpretable meaning, and in that case you would have to accept that there would be both a creation and a complete stage. This is to be understood from the clarifying lamp on the tradition of explanation in the *Compendium of Vajra Primordial Wisdom* [*Jñānavajrasamuccaya-tantra*].

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[From the section on ascertaining the definite sequence of the two stages:]

།དེ་ལ་ལས་ཀྱི་གོ་རིམ་འདི་ཤིན་ཏུ་གནད་ཆེ་བར་མཐོང་སྟེ་འདི་ལེགས་པོར་མ་ཟེན་པར་འབྲུགས་ན་ཅི་ཙམ་འབད་ཀྱང་གཏན་མི་སྒྲིབ་པ
མ། ཡང་ན་དེ་དངོས་མིན་པར་དེ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་ཞིག་བྱུང་བ་ལ་འབྲུལ་ནས་དུས་འདའ་ལ། གོ་རིམ་མ་འབྲུགས་ན་གང་བསྒྲོམས་གནད་དུ་འ
བྱོ་བས་ཐད་ཀ་དེའི་ལས་ཡང་སྒྲུབ་དུ་སྒྲིབ་པ་དེའི་མཐུས་གོང་མ་ཡང་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

. . . (747) So, you must see that this proper sequence of the path is a point of the utmost importance. If you are not well-versed in it, and get it all mixed up, no matter how much

you may make efforts, stability will not grow. Furthermore, when something that is not authentic – but that is a facsimile of what is authentic – arises, you will mistake it and pass away your time there. But if you do not get the proper sequence mixed up, whatever you meditate upon will go to the crucial point, and its path will quickly arise right before you. By this inner force, what lies higher will also grow with extreme speed.

། སྤྱིར་ལས་དང་པོ་བས་སྒྲོམ་པར་མི་རྒྱས་པ་དང་རྒྱས་པའི་རྫོགས་རིམ་གཉིས་སྒྲུང་བའི་བྱི་མ་ནི་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་མི་བརྟན་ཡང་བསྒྲོམས་ན་
རྗེས་མཐུན་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་མི་སྐྱེ་བ་མ་ཡིན་མོད་ཀྱང་། རིམ་པ་དང་པོས་རྒྱུད་སླིན་པར་བྱས་པ་ལ་སྐྱེ་བ་འདྲ་བ་དེ་དག་ལ་མི་སྐྱེ་བས་རིམ་
པ་དང་པོ་དོར་ནས་རྒྱུད་དང་གཏུམ་མོ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་རྗེས་མཐུན་པ་སྐྱེ་བར་མཐོང་ནས་དེ་དག་ལ་འཕྲིལ་ན་ལམ་གྱི་གནད་འ
ཕྱག་པས་མི་རུང་ངོ་། །འོན་ཀྱང་རིམ་པ་དང་པོ་མ་བརྟན་བར་དུ་དེ་ལ་གཙོ་བོར་སྒྲོམ་པའི་ཁོག་ནས་རྒྱུད་དང་གཏུམ་མོ་སོགས་སྐབས་
གྱི་དགོས་པ་དང་བསྐྱེད་ནས་ཞར་ལ་ཉམས་སྲུ་ལེན་ན་ནི། དགག་བྱ་རྒྱུད་བར་མངོན་ནི།

In general, it appears that there are two types of complete stage: that which cannot and that which can be meditated upon by beginners. In terms of the latter, if you meditate [on that complete stage] even when the creation stage is still not stable, it is not that some approximation of the good qualities won't arise. However, since they will not arise for such a person *in the same way as they do for someone whose mindstream has been ripened by the first stage*, if you abandon the first stage, and then see that an approximation of the good qualities of the winds and inner fire and so forth have arisen, and then get all wrapped up in that, you will have mixed up the crucial points of the path, and this will not work.

(748) Now, if for as long as the first stage is not yet stable, you make it your main meditation, and from within that context, you practice incidentally with the winds and inner fire and so on, in accordance with the needs of the appropriate moment, it is evident that this would be a lesser version of the thing to be refuted.

། སྔོང་ཉིད་སྒྲོམ་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ནི། པར་བྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་དང་ཐུན་མོང་བ་ཡིན་ཞིང་ལྷའི་ནལ་འབྱོར་དང་སྤེལ་ནས་སྒྲོམ་པ་ཡང་རྒྱུད་སྤྱེ་འོག་
མ་གསུམ་ཀ་ལ་ཡོད་ཀྱང་དེ་དག་ལ་རྫོགས་རིམ་མེད་པས་སྔོང་ཉིད་སྒྲོམ་པ་ཙམ་ལ་རྫོགས་རིམ་སྒྲོམ་པར་འདོད་པ་ནི་ཉ་ཅང་ཡང་ནམ་
པར་མ་བརྟགས་པའོ། །དེས་ན་རིམ་པ་དང་པོའི་སྐབས་སྲུ་ཡང་སྔོང་བ་ཉིད་སྒྲོམ་པ་ནི་འོན་ཏེ་ཡང་དགོས་སོ།

Just the meditation on emptiness itself is shared with the way of the perfections. If you combine that with a yoga of the divine being and meditate, that is there in all three of the lower groups of tantra. But since those do not have a complete stage, if you want to say that just the meditation on emptiness is meditating on the complete stage, this is absurd, and comes from a total lack of examination. Therefore, in the context of the first stage, one absolutely must meditate on emptiness as well.

* * *

Excerpts from Chapter Twelve of *The Steps of Mantra*⁵

ཁེམ་པ་དང་པོ་འདི་ལ་གསལ་སྒྲིབ་ལུགས་ཅིག་དང་དེ་བརྟན་པར་བྱེད་པའི་གནས་པ་སྐྱབ་ལུགས་ཅིག་ལྟེ་གཉིས་སོ་སོར་ཤེས་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ལ་སྐྱེར་ཡུལ་གྱི་རྣམ་པ་གསལ་བར་སྒྲིབ་པ་ནི་ཡུལ་དེ་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱས་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་འབྲུབ་པས་གོམས་པ་ཅེས་གྱི་རྗེས་སུ་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་རིགས་པའི་དབང་ཕྱག་གིས། འདོད་འཛིགས་སྤང་ན་གྱིས་བརྟུན་དང་། །རྟན་པོ་མི་སོགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱར་བས། །མདུན་ན་གནས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ནི། །ཡང་དག་མིན་པ་མཐོང་བར་འབྱུང་། །ཞེས་ཆགས་ལྟན་གྱིས་ཆགས་ཡུལ་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱས་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡུལ་དེ་མདུན་ན་ཡོད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་མཐོང་སྐྱེས་དུ་མཐོང་བར་གསུངས་སོ། །དེས་ན་གསལ་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལ་སྒྲིབ་པ་སྒྲིབ་པ་སྐྱབ་དགོས་པ་ཡང་མིན་ལ་ཆ་རེ་རེ་ནས་མ་གྲོམས་ན་མི་སྐྱེ་བ་ཡང་མིན་ནོ། །གསལ་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལ་ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་གོམས་པ་ཡང་མི་དགོས་ཏེ་བྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་ལོག་གི་དོན་གང་ཡིན་ཡང་གོམས་པར་བྱས་ན་གསལ་སྒྲིབ་པ་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིན་ཏེ་རིགས་པའི་དབང་ཕྱག་གིས། དེ་བྱིར་ཡང་དག་ཡང་དག་ །གང་གང་ཤིན་ཏུ་གོམས་སྒྱུར་བ། །གོམས་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་རྫོགས་པ་ན། །དེ་གསལ་མི་རྟོག་ལྟོ་འབྲས་ཅན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་རྒྱུད་ལས་ཀྱང་ཡིད་དངོས་སོ་གང་དང་གང་ལ་སྐྱར་བ་དེ་དང་དེའི་རྣམ་པར་འབྱུར་བ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྟོག་དུའི་དཔེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་སྒྲར་བྲངས་ཟིན་ཏོ།

. . . (762) In this first stage, one needs to know, individually, both the way to bring forth clear appearances and the way to accomplish the stillness that will make them stable. Now in general, the clear appearance of the aspect of an object is reached by the very act of bringing that object to mind over and over again. Thus it is something that follows upon habituation alone. As the Lord of Reasoning states:

Conceited with desire, fear, or grief,
Or tainted by a thief, a dream, and the like;
You will see what is not real
As though before your very eyes.

(763) By the very act of bringing an object of desire to mind over and over again, someone overcome with desire will see that object directly, *as though it were right in front of him*. Therefore, for clear appearances to occur, it is not necessary to achieve stillness in advance. It is also not the case that it will not occur if one does not familiarize oneself with each and every part. For clear appearances to occur it is also *not* necessary for one to familiarize oneself with an actual object that is real. For it is the nature of things that whatever you habituate yourself to – whether it is something that is correct or something that is wrong – clear appearances will arise. As the Lord of Reasoning states:

Therefore whether real or unreal,
Whatever you become so very familiar with
Will, when familiarization is complete
Result in a nonconceptual mind, to which it is clear.

The tantras also state, as I have already quoted previously, that whatever functioning thing you attach your mind to, your mind will take on its aspect, according to the example of a crystal jewel.

⁵ Tsongkhapa, *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 381b5-383a3 (762-765) and 384a1-384b1 (767-768), emphasis mine.

།དེ་ལ་ལས་དང་མོ་པས་ནི། སྒྲོར་བ་ཚོགས་བསག་ནས་བཟུངས་སྟེ་ཉེ་བར་བསྐྱབ་པའི་བར་ནམས་སྒྲོམ་པ་ན་རེ་རེ་ནས་ཞིབ་ཏུ་གསལ་བ་
 ཉལ་ནས་སྒྲོམ་པ་དང་ནམས་པ་ཤར་བ་ཙམ་མིན་པར་སྒྲོམ་པའི་འཛིན་སྐྱབས་ལུགས་ཅན་བསྐྱེད་ནས་བྱ་སྟེ། རྣམ་པ་གསལ་བ་དང་ང་
 རྒྱལ་འཛིན་པ་གཉིས་ཀ་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དང་མོ་ནི་ལྷར་རིགས་པར་བྱས་བྱུང་བཅད་ནས་དེའི་མགོ་ནས་མཐུག་གི་བར་དུ་སེམས་
 བྱིང་བ་དང་འཕྲོ་ཚོད་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་མི་བཏང་བར་བསྒྲོམ་བྱ་གང་ཡིན་གྱི་སྒྲོ་དེ་ཉིད་བར་མ་ཆད་པར་འཐུག་པ་ལ་འབད་པ་ཆེན་པོས་བསྐྱབ་
 ལ་རྩེ་རིང་རྩེ་རིང་དུ་བཏང་ནས་མཐར་ཐུན་རེ་རེའི་མགོ་ནས་མཐུག་གི་བར་དུ་བྱིང་བ་དང་འཕྲོ་ཚོད་ཀྱིས་བར་གཅོད་མི་ལུས་པར་སོང་
 སོང་དུ་བསྐྱབ་པོ།

Therefore when a beginner meditates on everything from the initial practice of collecting merit all the way up to the total withdrawal, he or she should visualize each and every thing in fine detail and then meditate. But it is not enough just for the aspects of each thing to dawn; one must meditate once having given birth to an extremely powerful certainty about the way the mind is holding to these objects. This is because these two are necessary: both the clarity of the aspects and holding to the pride of identity.

(764) At first, you should break it up into appropriate sections, and meditate from the start to finish of a section without letting the mind be overcome by dullness or agitated scattering. Train by making great efforts at engaging, without interruption, the mind of whatever it is you are meditating upon. Gradually you will be able to go longer and longer, and eventually you will find that you cannot be interrupted by dullness or agitated scattering from the start to finish of each session. Train until that is your experience.

།དེའི་སྐབས་སུ་དུས་རིང་པོར་མ་བསྒྲོམས་པས་སྒྲོམ་མཐུ་ཆེ་བར་མ་སོང་བའི་རིང་ལ་པལ་ཆེར་གསལ་བར་མི་མཐོང་བ་ཡིན་ཡང་མོས་
 པ་གཙོ་ཆེ་བས་ལྷག་པར་མོས་པའི་སྒྲོ་ནས་བསྒྲོམ་དགོས་ཏེ། བཞི་བརྒྱ་ལྔ་བརྒྱ་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། རྣམ་འབྱོར་གསུམ་པོ་འདི་ནམས་
 ལྷག་པར་མོས་པ་གཙོ་བོར་གྱུར་པ་ཡིན་གྱི་མཐོང་བ་གཙོ་བོ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་དུས་ཅུང་ཟད་དམ་ཅུང་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་བས་ན་ལྷག་པར་མོ
 ས་པ་ཞེས་སྒྲོས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། །སྤང་བ་དང་ང་རྒྱལ་གཉིས་ཀ་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་དབྱེད་ནས་བ
 སྐྱབས་པས་རིམ་གྱིས་སྐྱེས་པ་དགོས་ཀྱི་ཉམས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྒྲོ་བྱུང་དུ་བྱུང་བ་ལ་ཡིད་བརྟན་མི་བྱ་སྟེ། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ལས་སུ་བྱུང་བ་ནི་
 རང་གིས་གསལ་གང་བཏབ་འཆར་ལ་མ་བཏབ་པ་མི་འཆར་བ་དང་། རི་ཙམ་ཞིག་གསལ་བཏབ་པ་དེའི་ཆད་ལས་མ་འདས་པ་འཆར་བ་
 དགོས་པ་ལ་ཉམས་འདེས་པ་ལ་ནི། ད་ལྟ་བུའི་ཆད་ལ་པལ་ན་དབྱེད་མི་བཟོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

During that period [as a beginner], since you have not been meditating for a long time, then for as long as you have not yet experienced an increase in the inner power of your mind, it is likely that you will not see clearly [what you are visualizing]. Nonetheless, since it is the conviction that is primary, you must meditate through sheer conviction. As it stated in the commentary to the *Four Hundred and Fifty Verses*: “These three yogas are all done primarily from sheer conviction, but seeing is not the main thing, because the time is little, or brief. Therefore, ‘sheer conviction’ means to say it.”

Since both the appearances and the pride of identity are sustained through an incisive wisdom that analyzes concepts individually, they must arise gradually. *So do not place your trust in what arises suddenly on the basis of meditative experiences.* Because if you think that “becoming fit for the work through creation stage” requires that whatever you visualize will appear, and that if you don’t visualize it won’t appear, and that just as much as you visualize it, it will not appear beyond that extent, and thus you get it all mixed up with meditative experiences – to set such a standard will not withstand analysis.

།དེས་ན་ཚུལ་འདི་ལྟར་བསྐྱོམ་མོ་སྟུང་བའི་འཕེན་པ་སྟོན་དུ་བཏང་ནས་གསོལ་བ་ཏུ་བཞག་ཆད་དེ་ལས་ཆད་ལྷག་མེད་པར་འཆར་ཐུབ་ན་
སྐྱོམ་པ་ལས་སུ་བྱུང་བ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཡང་ཐོག་མ་ནས་ཆད་ལ་པལ་གྱིན་བྱས་ཀྱང་གནད་དུ་མི་འགྲོ་བས་སྐྱོ་གོམས་པ་ཆེར་སོང་བ་ན་དེ་
ལྟར་བྱ་སྟེ་ད་རྒྱལ་ལ་ཡང་དེའི་རིགས་པ་སྦྱར་རོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བྱ་དགོས་པ་ཡང་དཔེར་ན་མི་ཏྲག་པ་དང་སྟོང་ཇེ་སོགས་སྐྱོམ་པ་ལ་ཡང་རང་
རང་གི་དཔེགས་རྣམ་ལ་དྲིལ་ནས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལས་རིམ་གྱིས་སྦྱོར་བའི་སྟོང་བ་ཡིན་ན་ནམ་འདོད་པའི་ཆེ་དཔེགས་རྣམ་གསལ་བཏབ་
ནས་བསྐྱོམས་པ་ན་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱས་ལ། ཉམས་དང་འབྲེས་ནས་སྐྱོ་བྱུང་དེ་དག་གི་བསམ་པ་ལྷགས་ཅན་སྟེ་བཞི། རང་ནམ་འདོད་དུ་བསྐྱེད་
དཔེ་མེད་པ་དང་འབྲེས།

(765) Therefore, if you preface by projecting the thought: “I will meditate in this way,” and then visualize, then if according to that standard everything can appear without excess or omission, then your meditation is “fit for the work.”

Nonetheless, if from the beginning you work while setting such a standard, you will not be able to get at the crucial point. So, if through habituating the mind your experience increases, you should continue like that, and also affix your pride of identity to what is proper. Indeed you must do it this way.

For example, it is like the fact that when you meditate on impermanence, compassion, and so on, you sum up each object of focus and then sustain it, gradually giving rise to experiences. Then, whenever you wish to picture your object of focus and meditate on it, you are able to generate it. But if you get it all mixed up with experiences, then suddenly and unexpectedly, very powerful thoughts of those things will arise, but you will have no ability to generate them whenever you wish.

* * *

སྐབས་འདི་རྣམས་འབྲས་བུའི་སྐབས་ཀྱི་ཞིང་དང་འཁོར་དང་སྟོན་པ་སོགས་ཀྱི་ད་རྒྱལ་ལས་བྱ་བྱེད་པ་དང་སངས་རྒྱུས་རྗེས་སུ་བྲན་པའི་
མཆོག་ཏུ་གསུངས་པས། རྣམ་སྣང་དང་མི་བསྟོད་པ་སོགས་ལ་སྦྱ་མདོག་དང་ཞལ་བྱག་སོགས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་ཅམ་ཞིག་བྲན་པ་དང་དེ་ཅམ་
ཀྱི་ད་རྒྱལ་བྱེད་པ་མིན་གྱི་སྦྱོར་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཟད་པ་དང་ཡོན་ཏན་ཀྱང་ལ་མངའ་བརྟེས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱུས་དངོས་སུ་མོས་པ་བྱ་དགོས་སོ་
། །དེ་ལྟར་གོམས་པས་བྱུང་བར་ཅན་གྱི་སྣང་བ་དང་ད་རྒྱལ་གཉིས་གཞུང་གོམས་པས་འདོན་པ་བཞིན་དུ་རང་གི་རང་གིས་འཇུག་པ་ཅི་
ག་དགོས་ཏེ་སྟེ་ཉིག་ཐེང་བ་ལས། དངོས་བྱུང་ནི། སེམས་བརྟན་པ་སྟེ་བདག་ཉིད་སྟེ་རྣམ་པར་སྣང་བ་དང་དེའི་ད་རྒྱལ་བདག་ལ་ཉི་མ་
རེ་རེ་ཞིང་རང་གི་རང་གིས་འཇུག་པ་དེ་ཐོབ་པའོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།

... (767) It is stated that, to have the pride that all these things, right now, are the realm, the retinue, the Teacher, and so on, at the time of the result, is the supreme way of taking pride as the path, and the supreme way of recalling the Buddha. Thus it is not as though you just recall that the Maker of Appearances, the Unshakeable One, and so on, have the appearance of this hue, and this face and arms, and so on, or that you take on the pride of being just that. Rather, *you must have the conviction that you are the real Buddha*, who has put an end to all obscurations and found mastery over all good qualities.

Through becoming accustomed to this, both the extraordinary appearances and the pride must be something in which you engage automatically – like reciting a scripture with which you are very familiar. As it states in the *String of Pearls*: “Attainment means achieving a stable mind, and a stable mind is this: Every day, and automatically, I myself

enter into the appearance of the divine being's own aspect, and engage with the identity of the divine being's pride."

།དེ་བས་ན་གཉིས་ཀ་བསྐྱོམས་པས་བྱམ་ཆེ་བ་རེའི་མགོ་ནས་མཐུག་གི་བར་དུ་ཁྱད་པར་ཅན་གྱི་སྤང་བ་དང་རྒྱལ་དུ་འཕོས་པའི་དབང་གིས་ཐ་མལ་པའི་སྤང་ཞེན་འགོག་ཀྱས་པ་ཐོབ་ན་དེ་ཙམ་ནས་སེམས་བརྟན་པར་གཞག་དགོས་ཏེ་ལུས་སེམས་ལ་སློབ་བྱར་བའི་འགལ་སྤྱི་ན་མེད་པའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་པའོ། །དེ་ལ་ནི་རང་སྤྱད་ཤོལ་སྤུངས་པའི་རིགས་འབྲུག་མ་ཆད་དུ་མི་དགོས་ཀྱི་བཙུགས་མིན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་དང་པོར་བསྐྱེད་པ་དེའི་བྱེད་པས་ཐ་མལ་པའི་རྒྱལ་འགོག་ཀྱས་པས་ཆོག་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་འགལ་ཞིག་ལ་མི་མ་ཡིན་བབས་པ་ན་དང་མི་མ་ཡིན་དེ་ཡིན་ཅོ་སྤུངས་པའི་རྟོག་པ་མེད་པར་ཡིད་གཞན་དུ་གཡེངས་པ་ན་ཡང་དེའི་བྱེད་པ་མ་ཉམས་པའི་རིང་ལ་སྤར་གྱི་མི་དེ་ཡིན་སྤུངས་པའི་འདུ་ཤེས་མི་སྤྱི་བ་བཞིན་ནོ།

Therefore, by meditating on both, from the beginning to end of each major session, by force of extraordinary appearances and transferring your pride, you will gain the ability to stop your belief in ordinary appearances. If you can do so, then just from there, you must make your mind stable. This comes insofar as your body and mind do not encounter temporary unfavorable conditions.

In this regard, it is not necessary to have a thought of the type: "I am this divine being" going on in an unbroken stream. Rather, once you have generated an uncontrived pride at the beginning, doing this is enough to be able to stop ordinary pride.

(768) For example, it is like the following case: If someone is possessed by a non-human spirit, then even without the conceptual thought, "I am this non-human spirit," and even if the mind is distracted to something else, then still, as long as that occurrence has not been destroyed, the previous conception that "I am such-and-such a human" will not arise.

Appendix Ten: Selected Points of Perception Theory

Excerpts from the *Commentary on the “Chapter on Direct Perception”*¹

རང་མཚན་དང་སྤྱི་མཚན་གྱི་ཡུལ་ཅན་དུ་དངོས་སུ་གསུངས་པ་དེ་ནི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་གྱི་དབང་དུ་མཛད་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའང་མངོན་སུམ་ཆད་མ་རང་མཚན་སྤྱང་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱས་ནས་གང་ལ་ཆད་མར་སོང་སའི་གཞལ་བྱ་ནི་རང་ལ་མངོན་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་དོན་དང་། རྗེས་དཔག་ཆད་མ་སྤྱི་མཚན་གཟུང་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱས་ནས་གང་ལ་ཆད་མར་སོང་སའི་གཞལ་བྱ་ནི་རང་ལ་སྒྲོག་ཏུ་གྱུར་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་པས། གཟུང་ཡུལ་གྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ན་རང་སྤྱི་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པ་དང་། གང་ལ་ཆད་མར་སོང་སའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ན་མངོན་སྒྲོག་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པས་ཆད་མ་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པ་ཡིན་

. . . (611) This speaks directly of the subject state of mind that corresponds (1) to things marked by their own characteristics and that which corresponds (2) to things marked by abstracted characteristics, respectively. This is understood in terms of the respective objective fields that they behold.

Moreover, a direct valid perception takes as its appearing objective field what is marked by its own characteristics. Then, that which is apprehended, at the site of the one who experiences it validly, is the actual object that becomes manifest to the experiencer.

A deductive valid perception takes as its beheld objective field what is marked by abstracted (or generalized) characteristics. Then, that which is apprehended, at the site of the one who experiences it validly, is an actual object that remains hidden from the experiencer.

Therefore, one ascertains (1) things marked by their own characteristics and (2) things marked by abstracted characteristics, respectively, in terms of beheld objective fields. In terms of the site at which valid perception is experienced, they are ascertained as either manifest or hidden reality. In this way one ascertains the types of valid perception as two.

¹ Tsongkhapa's *Commentary on the “Chapter on Direct Perception,”* Rendered by the Dharma Lord Khedrup According to the Speech of the Lord [Tsongkhapa] (*mngon gsum le'u'i tlkka rje'i gsung bzhin mkhas grub chos rjes mdzad pa*), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ma, 5a4-365 (611-673), emphases mine. This is an extremely terse and difficult text, comprising a close commentary to the third chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramānavārttika*. It does indeed have the quality of lecture notes, perhaps taken during an extended teaching by Tsongkhapa, including many debates and some brief digressions (for instance, on the presentation of the three times). I have, once again, only selected the passages or statements I thought directly relevant to the philosophical issues discussed in this present dissertation, and have made little or no attempt to represent the overall structure of the arguments, or the way in which they render close commentary to Dharmakīrti's verses. To my knowledge no part of this text has previously been translated into English. For extensive discussion of many of these issues in Dharmakīrti's thought, however, see Georges Dreyfus, 1997, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations* (Albany: State University of New York Press); Roger R. Jackson and Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen, 1993, *Is Enlightenment Possible?: Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje on Knowledge, Rebirth, No-Self and Liberation* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications); and John Dunne, 2004, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy* (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 2006, “Realizing the Unreal: Dharmakīrti's Theory of Yogic Perception” (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34/6: 497–519), and 2011, “Key Features of Dharmakīrti's Apoha Theory,” in *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, ed. M. Siderits, et al (New York: Columbia University Press).

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དེའང་རྗེས་དཔག་ཆད་མས་རང་གང་ལ་དངོས་ཀྱིས་ཆད་མར་སོང་བའི་གཞལ་བྱ་དེའི་དོན་སྤྱི་སྤང་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱས་ནས་གཞལ་བྱ་དེ་འཇལ་གྱི། དེ་ཉིད་སྤང་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱེད་མི་རྒྱས་པ་དང་། མངོན་སུམ་ཆད་མར་གང་ལ་དངོས་ཀྱི་ཆད་མར་སོང་བའི་གཞལ་བྱ་དེ་རང་གི་སྤང་ཡུལ་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་རང་མཆན་ཡིན་པས་བྱུང་བའི་དོན་ཡིན་ཞིང་། དེའི་སྤང་ཡུལ་ཡིན་ན་དེ་ལ་མངོན་གྱུར་ཡིན་དགོས་པར་ལྟ་དབང་སྒྲོའི་འབྲེལ་བར་གཞལ་ལན་དང་བཅས་པས་གཏན་ལ་པལ་བའི་ཚུལ་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་ལ། ཤེས་པ་དེ་ལ་མངོན་གྱུར་ཡིན་ན། ཤེས་པ་དེ་ལ་རང་གི་གཞལ་བྱ་མངོན་གྱུར་ཡིན་མི་དགོས་སོ།

. . . (612) Thus a deductive valid perception takes an abstraction of its actual object as its appearing objective field. This is an abstraction of that which is apprehended, which was actually experienced by a valid perception. Taken in this way, the deductive valid perception *encounters* that which is to be apprehended, but cannot turn that very thing itself into its appearing objective field.

As for direct valid perception, it means that if what was apprehended was experienced by an actual valid perception, then it is necessarily an actual object marked by its own characteristics, which became the appearing objective field of that direct valid perception. If something is the appearing objective field of that [direct perception], then it must be manifest for it.

In Devendrabuddhi's commentary² things are explained in the manner of setting them forth along with the answers to the opponent: So, if something is manifest for that consciousness, it is not necessarily the case that it is manifest for that consciousness *as something which it has apprehended*.

* * *

དེ་ལྟ་ནའང་རྗེས་དཔག་ནི་ཡོངས་སུ་བཅད་པར་བྱ་བའི་གཞལ་བྱ་རང་མཆན་གྱི་འཛོལ་སྤང་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱེད་མི་རྒྱས་པར། དེའི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ལས་གཞན་པའི་སྤྱིའི་ངོ་བོ་སྤང་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱས་ནས་སྤང་བཏགས་གཅིག་ཏུ་འབྲེལ་བའི་སྒྲོ་ནས་གཞལ་བྱ་ཡོངས་སུ་གཅོད་ཅིང་། མངོན་སུམ་ཆད་མས་རང་གིས་དངོས་སུ་གཅོད་པའི་གཞལ་བྱ་རང་མཆན་དེའི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་པ་བཞིན་སྤང་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱས་པའི་སྒྲོ་ནས་གཞལ་བྱ་ཡོངས་སུ་གཅོད་པས། ཆད་མ་གཉིས་ལ་གཟུང་ཡུལ་གྱི་དབྱེ་བ་དེ་ལྟར་སོ་སོར་ངེས་པ་དེའི་བྱིར་གཟུང་ཡུལ་གྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ནས་གཞལ་བྱ་རང་སྤྱི་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པར་བཤད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

. . . (615) In this way, a deductive perception cannot make that which is apprehended – that which is to be discerned – into an appearing objective field which *also* has the very essence of what is marked by its own characteristics. Therefore it takes as its appearing objective field what has the essence of an abstraction, which is something other than the essence of what is apprehended. In that way the deductive perception discerns what is apprehended *by way of mistaking the appearance and the designation as if they were one*.

A direct perception cuts through directly to that which it apprehends. By taking as its appearing objective field the essence of what has its own characteristics, in exactly the

² This is the *Commentary on Difficult Points in the Commentary on Valid Perception*, *Pramāṇavarttika-ṭīkā* (*tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi dka' 'grel*), Toh. 4217, sde dge bstan 'gyur, mdo 'grel, vol. *che*. The author's name, which is Tibetan is usually mentioned as *lha dbang blo*, is cited variously by different scholars in Sanskrit as *Devendrabuddhi, *Devendrabodhi, or *Devendramati.

way that it abides, it discerns what is to be apprehended.

Thus, it is explained that since the two types of valid perception are ascertained according to a division between their beheld objective fields, it is in terms of the beheld objective field that one ascertains what is apprehended as “own-characteristics” or “abstracted characteristics,” respectively.

* * *

།དེས་ན་གཞལ་བྱ་ཆོས་ཅན། རང་སྤྱི་གཉིས་སུ་གངས་ངེས་ཏེ། རང་ཉིད་ངོ་བོས་གྲུབ་པའི་དབང་གིས་སྒྲོའི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་དུ་འགྱུར་བ་མ་
ཡིན་པར་འབྲེལ་བ་ཐུན་མོང་བར་སྤང་བའི་རྟོག་པས་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་དུ་གྲུབ་པ་དང་། རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་གྲུབ་པའི་དབང་གིས་མི་འབྲེལ་བ་སྟེ་ཐུན་
མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའམ་མ་འབྲེལ་པར་གསལ་བར་སྤང་བའི་སྒྲོའི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་དུ་འགྱུར་བ་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེས་པའི་དོན་ཏེ། ཉིད་ནི་
ངེས་གཟུང་ངོ་། །རྟགས་གཉིས་པ་ལ། སྤྱི་དངོས་ཡུལ་ཡིན་པ་དང་མིན་པ་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེས་མི་བྱ་སྟེ། སྤྱི་དངོས་ཡུལ་མ་
ཡིན་པ་གཞི་མ་གྲུབ་པའི་ཕྱིར་ངོ་། །དན་དམ་པར་སྤྱི་ཡུལ་ཡིན་པ་དང་ཡུལ་མིན་པ་ཞེས་གྲང་མི་བྱ་སྟེ། དོན་དམ་པར་སྤྱི་ཡུལ་ཡིན་
པ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ངོ་། །དེས་ན་རྫོང་བྱེད་སྤྱིའི་བདག་ཆེན་ཙམ་ལས་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་རྫོགས་པར་སྒྲོའི་ཡུལ་དུ་འཆར་རྒྱས་པ་དང་། དེ་ཙམ་ལ་
ས་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་རྫོགས་པར་སྒྲོ་ཡུལ་དུ་འཆར་རྒྱས་པ་མིན་པའི་གཞལ་བྱ་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། །ངོ་བོ་རྫོགས་པར་འཆར་
པ་ལ་ངོ་བོའི་བྱེད་ཆོས་གང་ཡིན་ཐམས་ཅད་འཆར་མི་དགོས་སོ།

. . . (630) Therefore, consider anything to be apprehended.

It is definitely categorized as either “own-characteristics” or “abstracted characteristics.”

This is because it can be ascertained as one of the following two:

(1) As something that is *not* an objective field beheld by the mind by force of its being established through its very own essence, but rather that is established merely by setting forth the conceptualization of an appearance shared in common, a likeness; or,

(2) As something that becomes an objective field beheld by the mind, which appears clearly in a way that is unique, or unmixed; and which is unlike anything else by force of being established through its own essence.

It is according to this very meaning that one can ascertain the definite count [of the types of apprehended things].

For the second reason,³ do not say, “Because it can be ascertained as something that either is or is not the actual objective field of a sound”; because something that is not the actual objective field of a sound cannot even be established as a basis. Also, do not say, “It either is or is not the objective field of a sound, *ultimately*”; because ultimately, there is nothing that is the objective field of a sound.

All told, then, you should say that it is because something apprehended can be ascertained:

(1) As something that can arise as an object of the mind in its complete essence, merely from the governing condition of a sound that expresses meaning; or

(2) As something that cannot arise as an object of the mind in its complete essence from

³ Of four reasons given by Dharmakīrti, in the first four verses of his *Commentary on Valid Perception*, Chapter Three, as to why there is a definite count for the two kinds of valid perceptions.

that [sound] alone. Note that for a thing to arise in its complete essence, it is not necessary for all the distinctive features of the essence, whatever they may be, to arise.

* * *

... ལུལ་ལས་གཞན་བརྟེན་དང་ཚིག་པ་དང་ཡིད་བྱེད་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཡོད་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་རང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་སྒོ་ནི་ཡོད་པ་དང་
| ཞེས་དང་ཡང་རྒྱ་མཚན་གཞན་ནི་ཡོད་ན་ཡང་སྒོ་ནི་མེད་ཅེས་སྤྱར་བའི་དོན་ལུལ་མ་གཏོགས་པ་རྒྱ་མཚན་གཞན་དབང་སོ་དང་ཡིད་
བྱེད་སོགས་ཡོད་ནའང་ལུལ་རང་གི་དངོས་པོའི་སྤྲོད་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ངོས་ནས་བྱུང་བ་མེད་ན་རང་རྟོགས་པའི་སྒོ་སྒྲིབ་མེད་པ་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་
པའི་ཕྱར་ཞེས་པའི་དོན་དུ་འཆད་དོ།

. . . (631) [For the third reason . . . the root text means that:] By the mere presence of causes other than the objective field – such as terms, effort, paying attention, etc. – there can be a mind that realizes it [i.e., abstracted characteristics].

But on the other hand, when [the root text] adds that even if other causes are present, the mind will not be there, the meaning is this: Even if other causes apart from the objective field – such as the sense faculty, paying attention, etc. – are present, if there is no objective field that is established from the side of its own natural way of being as a functioning thing, then a mind that realizes it [i.e., own-characteristics] cannot arise.

This is explained to be the meaning of the reason why [that which is apprehended] can be ascertained as being of two types.

* * *

| ཉགས་གསུམ་སོ་འདི་དང་། སྤར་དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་མི་རྒྱས་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པའི་ཉགས་བཤད་པ་དང་བཞི་སོ་གང་རུང་གཅིག་གིས་ཀྱང་རང་
ང་སྤྱི་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པར་འབྱུང་བ་ལ་ཉགས་བཞི་བཤད་ནས་དགོས་པ་ཅི་ཡོད་ཅེ་ན། ཉགས་དང་སོས་ནི་གཞལ་བྱ་རང་གི་ངོ་སོ་ལ་རི
གས་པ་གཉིས་སོ་དེར་གངས་ངེས་བྱས་ནས། དེ་ལྟར་གཉིས་ཡོད་པའི་ནང་ནས། དོན་བྱེད་མི་རྒྱས་པའི་གཞལ་བྱ་ཡིན་ན་རང་བཞིན་འ
དེས་འཛིན་གྱི་རྟོག་པས་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པར་འདྲ་ཞེས་པས་བསྟན་ཅིང་། རྟོག་པས་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་ཚོས་ནི་སྤྱད་བྱེད་ལས་པ་ལ་རང་
གི་ངོ་སོ་རྟོགས་པར་འཆར་བྱུང་བར་སྤྲིའི་ལུལ་དང་ཞེས་པས་བསྟན་ལ། དེ་འདྲ་བ་ནི་ལུལ་རང་གི་ངོ་སོས་དབྱེད་བཟོད་དུ་བྱུང་བའི་སྤྲོད་
ལུགས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་སྒོ་ལ་མི་སྤང་གི་བརྟེན་དང་ཡིད་བྱེད་སོགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་གཞན་ཡོད་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་སྒོ་ལ་སྤང་བར། རྒྱ་མཚན་གཞན་ནི་ཡོ
ད་པ་ན། |སྒོ་ནི་ཡོད་ཅེས་པས་བསྟན་ཏེ།

. . . Any one of these three reasons, along with the reason explained before, in which one ascertains [apprehended things] as being of two types according to whether they are able to perform an actual function or not – making four altogether – would be enough to establish with certainty the two categories of “own-characteristics” and “abstracted characteristics.” So what need is there to explain it in terms of four reasons?

The first reason did establish the definite count according to the two types of essences that apprehended things have.

(632) Then, from among those two, it is taught that if what is apprehended cannot perform a function, then (1) insofar as it is merely set forth through a conceptual state of mind that holds a mixed nature, it is a likeness.⁴ Then it teaches that this thing, which is

⁴ Tib. *yin par 'dra* – “‘dra,” “likeness,” is the same word as in the first part of the first reason above, and it is the word from Dharmakīrti’s root verse: “‘dra dang mi ‘dra nyi phyir dang . . .”

merely set forth through a conceptual state of mind, (2) is able to dawn in its complete essence to the consciousness that arose from [hearing] a sound. So it is the objective field of a sound. The likeness does not appear to the mind by force of a natural way of being established through its own essence, in a way that can withstand analysis, but rather appears to the mind (3) by the mere existence of other causes, such as terms, paying attention, and so on. So this is what is taught through [Dharmakīrti's root verse]:

When other causes exist
then the mind exists . . .

དེ་ལྟར་དོན་བྱེད་མི་རྒྱས་པ་སོགས་ཆོས་བཞི་པོ་དེ་སྤྱི་མཆན་གྱི་བྱང་པར་གྱི་ཆོས་དང་། བསྐྱོག་པ་དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་སོགས་ཆོས་བཞི་པོ་རང་མཆན་གྱི་བྱང་པར་གྱི་ཆོས་སུ་བཤད་པ་དེས་སྤྱི་མཆན་རྣམས་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཅམ་དང་། ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཅམ་ནི་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ཅམ་ཡིན་གྱི། རྟོག་པས་བཞག་པ་ལ་མ་བཟླས་པར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་བྱུབ་པའི་སྤྱད་ལུགས་སུ་མེད་པ་དང་། རང་མཆན་དང་དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་རྣམས་ནི་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ལ་མ་བཟླས་པར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་བྱུབ་པའི་དབྱེད་བཟོད་ཀྱི་སྤྱད་ལུགས་སུ་ཡོད་པའི་བདེན་བྱུང་ཏུ་བཤད་པའི་སྒྲིན་ནས་མདོ་སྤྱེ་པའི་བྱུབ་མཐའ་བྱུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་དོན་དམ་དང་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་དོན་ལྡོག་གསལ་བར་བཤད་ནས།

In this way, it explains the distinguishing features of what is marked by abstracted characteristics to be the four things including “not being able to perform a function,” and so forth. The distinguishing features of what is marked by its own-characteristics are the four things that are their opposites, including “being able to perform a function,” and so on.

Thus all abstracted characteristics are merely deceptive, and “merely deceptive” means something is merely labeled with a conceptual state of mind, but does *not* exist through a natural way of being established through an essence of its own, one which does not rely on being labeled with a conceptual state of mind.

All things marked by their own-characteristics, which can perform functions, are explained to be established as real, existing through their own natural way of being, established through their own essence, in a way that can withstand analysis, without relying upon being labeled through a conceptual state of mind. In this way, it explains clearly the conceptual isolations of the meanings of ultimate and deceptive, respectively, *according to the unique philosophical position of the Sautrāntikas*.

* * *

དོན་ནི་འབྲས་སུ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་བྱེད་པ་ནི་བསྐྱེད་པའོ། །དོན་བྱེད་པ་དེའི་རྒྱས་གང་སྟེ། རང་ཉེ་བས་སྐྱེད་པར་བྱེད་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ། དེ་འདྲར་ཉེ། བསྐྱེད་བཅོས་འདྲར་དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན། དངོས་སོར་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱིས་དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་ལ་དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པས་བྱུང་བ་དང་། དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ་དང་དངོས་སོར་ཡོད་པ་དོན་གཅིག་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་བཤད་དོ། །འོན་ཀྱང་འདྲར་ཞེས་པ་མདོ་སྤྱེ་པའི་བྱུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བདེན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་གཞག་སྟོན་པའི་སྐབས་འདྲར་ཞེས་བཤད་ན་ལེགས་སོ། །དེ་ལ་དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་དངོས་སུ་སྒྲིས་པས་གཞན་གསུམ་མཆོན་པ་ཡིན་པས། དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་སོགས་བཞི་དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ་དང་དེ་དག་ལས་གཞན་དོན་བྱེད་མི་རྒྱས་པའི་ཆོས་ལ་སོགས་པ་བཞི་ནི་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཅམ་དུ་ཡོད་པར་ཉེ། དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ་དེ་དག་ཁོ་ན་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཡིན་པར་བཤད་ཅིང་། ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཅམ་དུ་ཡོད་པ་དེ་དག་ཁོ་ན་སྤྱིའི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཡིན་པར་བཤད་དོ་ཞེས་ངས་གཟུང་སྟོང་སོ་ཅན་དུ་བཤད་པར་བྱའོ།

. . . (634) [In the phrase “perform a function” (literally, “doing a purpose”),] “purpose” is

a “result,” and doing that is to produce it. “Whatever has the ability” to perform that function, is whatever, through being close to it, acts to produce [the result].

“That, here” means, here in this classical treatise, it “exists ultimately;” i.e., it is asserted to exist as a functioning thing. Thus it explains clearly that if something can perform a function then it necessarily exists ultimately, and that existing ultimately and existing as a functioning thing have the same referent. However, if you explain that the word “here” means “here in the context of the unique Sautrāntika presentation of the two realities,” that would be best.

In this regard, insofar as one directly states, “being able to perform a function,” the other three are represented. So “being able to perform a function,” and the rest – making four – exist ultimately, and what is other than those, namely the four things including “not able to perform a function,” and so on, exist as merely deceptive.

Thus, those things that exist ultimately, and only those, are explained to be marked by their own-characteristics, and those things that exist as merely deceptive, and those alone, are explained to be marked by abstracted characteristics. You should explain this as being the heart of the definite identification.

* * *

དོན་དམ་བདེན་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ལ་མ་བཟོས་པར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་དབྱེད་བཟོད་དུ་གྱུབ་པ། གུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་སྒྲ་རྟོག་གིས་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་དུ་གྱུབ་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

. . . (635) You should explain the definition of ultimate reality [*here*] to be “that which is established through its own essence, in a way that can withstand analysis, without relying upon being labeled through a conceptual state of mind,” and the definition of deceptive reality is “that whose essence is established merely as something set forth through sounds and conceptualizations.”

* * *

འདི་ལས་འཕྲོས་པའི་ཚིག་ལན་འདི་དག་གི་འཆད་ཚུལ་ལ། མྱོལ་དཔོན་རྒྱན་མཁན་པོ་ལྟར་ན། དོན་དམ་དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་གང་། །དེ་འདི་ར་དོན་དམ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན། །ཞེས་སྒྲས་བ་དེའང་གྲུབ་མཐའ་སྒྲ་བ་གཞན་གྱི་ལུགས་རེ་ཞིག་གཞན་ངོར་ཁས་སྦངས་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་གྱི་ཡང་དག་པར་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རིགས་པས་དབྱེད་ན་བདེན་པར་གྱུབ་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེས་འཆད་ཅིང་། དེ་བསྒྲུབ་པ་ལ་སྐབས་འདིར་རྟག་པ་དང་མི་རྟག་པའི་ཕྱོགས་གང་གིས་ཀྱང་དོན་དམ་པར་དོན་བྱེད་པ་འགོག་པ་དང་། དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པ་དང་ཤེས་བྱ་འཕྲིན་ལྷན་པ་དང་མེད་པའི་ཕྱོགས་གང་གིས་ཀྱང་དོན་དམ་པར་དོན་བྱེད་པ་འགོག་པ་རྒྱས་པར་བཤད་ཟིན་པ་ན་རྒྱན་ལས། དེ་འཕྲིན་ན་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་བུའི་དངོས་པོ་ནི་མེད་དོ། །དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཕྱིར་གཤེད་ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱས་མེད་ན། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་དེའི་དོན་ནི་སྒར་དོན་དམ་དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་འགོག་པའི་རིགས་པ་མང་དུ་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་ན་དོན་དམ་པར་རྒྱ་འབྲས་མེད་དོ། །གཤེད་དོན་དམ་པར་རྒྱ་འབྲས་མེད་ན་གྱི་ནང་གི་དངོས་པོ་ཐམས་ཅད་འབྲས་བུ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལ་རྒྱས་པ་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ་ཞེ་ན། ཞེས་པའོ།

. . . (636) As for the way to explain the debates and responses that spin off from this: According to the master scholar [who wrote the] *Ornament*,⁵ the declaration of the lines,

⁵ Tib. *slob dpon rgyan mkhan po*. It is likely that Je Tsongkhapa/Khedrup Je is referring throughout to the author of the commentary called the *Ornament to the Commentary on Valid Perception*,

Whatever performs an ultimate function
That, here, is ultimate existence,

is merely a temporary assertion from the alternative perspective of the system of another philosophical school, but it is not correct; because if one analyzes with reasoning, there is not a single functioning thing that could be established as real. In order to prove this [the author of the *Ornament*] says that in this context, whether things are changing or unchanging, “performing a function ultimately” is refuted, and in the same way, whether things are consciousness or something to be known, whether existing or nonexistent, “performing a function ultimately” is refuted extensively.

(637) When this explanation is finished, the *Ornament* states: “Therefore, there are no functioning things that are either causes or results. For that very reason [the root text] says, ‘Suppose nothing had any ability . . .’”

The meaning of this is that, just as previously he explained many reasonings as to why “the ability to perform a function ultimately” is refuted, now likewise, ultimately cause and effect do not exist. So “suppose” you say that ultimately there were no cause or effect, then “no” outer or inner functioning things would “have any ability” to produce a result.

ཉི་མ་སྤྲོས་པའི་འགྲེལ་པར་ཡང་། ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱས་པ་མེད་ཅེ་ན། ཞེས་བཏོན་ནས་འཆད་ཚུལ་སྤར་ལྟར་བྱེད་དོ། རྩོད་པ་འདི་ནི་དབྱེ་མ་
པས་མ་སྤྲོས་ཀྱི། དངོས་པོ་བདེན་པར་མེད་ན་གཏན་མེད་དུ་འགྲོ་དགོས་སྟེ་པའི་དངོས་སྤྲོས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་བྱུང་ན་གནས་པ་གཞན་ཞིག་གིས་
སོ། དེ་ལ་ལན་དུ་རང་ཉིད་དབྱེ་མ་པས། ས་སོན་སོགས་ནི་ཐུག་སོགས་ལ། རྒྱས་མཐོང་། ཞེས་སྤྲོས་ཏེ། དེའི་དོན་ནི་མཐོང་བའི་དོན་
རྟོགས་པ་ལ་བྱས་ནས། རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་བུའི་དངོས་པོ་འདི་དག་བདག་གིས་མཐོང་ངོ་སྟེ་ལྟ་བུ་སྤྲོས་པར་སོས་པ་གཞོན་མེད་ཀྱི་ས་སོན་སོ་
གས་སྟུ་གུ་སོགས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལ་རྒྱས་པ་དང་ལྷན་པར་འཛོག་པའི་ཕྱིར་དོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་ལྟ་བུ་སྤྲོས་པར་སོས་པ་ཉིད་རྒྱས་པར་བཞག་པ་ཐམས་ཅ
ད་ཀྱི་སྤྲོས་བྱེད་དོ། ཞེས་འཆད་དོ།

Sūryagupta’s commentary,⁶ moreover, citing the line, “Suppose you say nothing had any ability . . .” explains it in the same way as above. Then he explains that this debate is *not* raised by those of the Middle Way, but rather is raised by another nonpartisan group, among those who profess functioning things by thinking that if functioning things are not real, then they must not exist at all.

In answer to them, we ourselves, of the Middle Way, reply,

We can see that seeds and the like
have the ability for sprouts and the like; . . .

The meaning is this: Having comprehended the actual object of what is seen, one thinks, “I have seen the functioning things that are causes and results.” With this sheer conviction, one posits that undamaged seeds and the like have the ability to produce

Pramāṇavārttikālamkāra (*tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi rgyan*), Toh. 4221, sde dge, mdo 'grel, vols. *te-the*, whose author is listed in the Tengyur as *shes rab 'byung gnas sbas pa* (*Prajñāsambhavagupta), though that name never appears in our present text.

⁶ This would be the *Pramāṇavārttika-vṛtti* (Toh. 4224, sde dge, mdo 'grel, vol. *pe*), or more likely the *Pramāṇavārttika-ṭīkāyam ṭṛīyaparivarta* (*tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi 'grel pa las le'u gsum pa*), Toh. 4225, vol. *phe*, which is specifically on the third chapter. The author is *nyi ma sbas pa* (*Sūryagupta).

sprouts and the like. Therefore, the sheer conviction itself is the verification for all presentations.

ཁ་ལ་ཉེ་དེ་ཀུན་རྒྱུ་། འདོད་ན་ཇི་ལྟར་དེ་ལྟར་འགྲུག། ཞེས་བཏོན་ནས་འདིར་བརྗོད་པ་ལྷག་པར་མོས་པ་ཉིད་འཛིག་གྲེན་ཡིན་ན། ལྷག་པར་མོས་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་བཞག་པ་དེ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀུན་རྒྱུ་ལྟར་བེད་ཁོར་འདོད་པར་བྱ་སྟེ། ས་བོན་དང་སྤྱུ་གུ་སོགས་འདི་དག་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དུ་གྲུབ་པའི་ཆད་མས་འཛིག་དུ་མེད་ཅིང་མཛོང་བའི་ཆད་མས་འཛིག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེ་ལྟར་གལ་ཉེ་འཛིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཀུན་རྒྱུ་ཙམ་དུ་གྲུབ་པར་འདོད་ན་འཛིག་རྟེན་ན་ཇི་ལྟར་མི་སྤྱུ་བ་དེ་ལྟར་འགྲུག་པ་འཐད་དོ། ཞེས་འཆད་དེ། གལ་ཉེ་ཞེས་སོགས་ཀྱང་རང་གཞུང་དུ་བྱས་ནས་ཕྱོགས་སྒྲ་མར་མི་བྱེད་བའོ། སློབ་དཔོན་ཉི་མ་སྤྱི་པ་འདུག་དེ་ལྟར་འཆད་དོ། དེ་ལྟར་ནའང་སློབ་དཔོན་གྱིས་དངོས་སུ་བསྟན་ཆོད་ཀྱི་དགོངས་པ་ནི་ལྷ་དབང་སློབ་འཆད་ཚུལ་ལྟར་མཛོན་ནོ་ཞེས་བདག་གི་རྗེ་ཐམས་ཅད་མཁྱེན་པ་གསུང་ངོ།

(638) Then, citing the lines,

. . . Suppose you say that is deceptive:

Then how would it ever become in that way?

Sūryagupta explains: Here you should accept that *all those presentations from sheer conviction are established only in a deceptive way*; because (1) these seeds and sprouts, etc., cannot be posited through a valid perception that could establish them as the suchness of things, and because (2) they are posited through the valid perception of seeing. In this way, “suppose you say” they are established merely as what is “deceptive” in the world, “then how” – in the world – “would it ever” make sense for it to “become in that way” *something that was not misleading*?

This takes “Suppose . . .” and the rest to be our own position, and not the position of an opponent. This is also the way that Sūryagupta explains it. My omniscient Lord⁷ stated that it is evident that, according to Devendrabuddhi’s way of explaining it, too, this is the true thought that is a measure of what was actually being taught by the Master [Dharmakīrti].

དེའང་དབྱ་མ་ཐལ་རང་གཉི་གས་བདེན་པར་གྲུབ་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ཐ་སྙད་དུའང་མི་འདོད་ཀྱང་། རང་རྒྱུད་པ་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཆོད་ནིའི་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་འདོད་ཅིང་། ཐལ་འགྲུར་བས་དངོས་པོ་རང་གི་མཆོད་ནིའི་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཐ་སྙད་དུའང་ཁས་མི་ལེན་ལ། རང་རྒྱུད་པ་ས་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་སློབ་བཞག་པ་ལ་བཟོས་པའི་དབང་གིས་གྲུབ་པ་མ་ཡིན་པར་ཡུལ་གྱི་རང་གི་སྤྱོད་ལུགས་ཁོ་ནས་གྲུབ་ན་བདེན་པར་གྲུབ་པར་འགྲུར་བ་དང་། དངོས་པོ་རང་གི་ངོ་མོས་ཀྱང་གྲུབ་པ་དང་སློབ་པ་ལ་བཟོས་པའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་གཉིས་གཡིན་པ་མི་འགལ་བར་བཞེད་དོ།

Now neither the Independent [Reasoning] nor the Consequence groups of the Middle Way accept functioning things that could be established as real, even conventionally. But those of the Independent group do accept that all functioning things are established through characteristics of their own, while those of the Consequence group *do not accept functioning things that could be established through characteristics of their own, even conventionally*.

⁷ It seems this is the voice of Khedrub Je referring to what was said by Tsongkhapa. It is possible, but less likely, that Tsongkhapa had made reference here to the view of one of his own teachers, perhaps the Sakya Rendawa. It would require much further research for me to decipher the exact lineage of views, here. See Dreyfus, 1997, esp. 23-27.

Those of the Independent group assert that, were functioning things to be established *only* through their own natural way of being, as an objective field that was *not* established by force of relying upon a state of mind to set them forth, then they would be established as real. But they also do not see it as contradictory that (1) functioning things are indeed established through their own essence, while (2) they are set forth by force of relying upon a state of mind.

།དེའི་བྱིར་ཞི་འཕྲོ་ཡན་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་པོ་རང་གི་རྩ་བའི་བཞེད་པ་དབྱ་མར་གནས་པ་དང་། རྣམ་འགྲེལ་ངེས་ཀྱི་གཞན་སེལ་དང་རྟགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་པའི་རིགས་པ་པལ་ཆེ་བ་དབྱ་མ་བ་དང་ཐུན་མོང་གི་རིགས་པར་བཞེད་པ་ཡིན་ལ། རྒྱ་ནང་དེ་མི་སྤྱོད་པ་སོགས་ཀྱང་དབྱ་མ་པས་རང་མཚན་ཁས་ལེན་པ་མི་འགལ་བའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ནས་རྣམ་འགྲེལ་གྱི་རང་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བ་དབྱ་མར་འགྲེལ་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཐལ་འགྱུར་བ་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་འང་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་མ་གྲུབ་པར་མིང་དང་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པས་རང་མཚན་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་འང་མ་གྲུབ་པར་བཞེད་དོ།

(639) Therefore, Śāntarakṣita and his spiritual son [Kamalaśīla] maintain that root view of the author of the seven works [on reasoning, i.e., Dharmakīrti] resides in the Middle Way, and that, for the most part, the reasonings set forth in the *Commentary on Valid Perception* and in the *Ascertainment of Valid Perception (Pramāṇaviniscaya)* regarding “exclusion of other” and logical forms, etc., are reasonings in harmony with the Middle Way. The [author of the] *Ornament*, along with Sūryagupta and the rest, insofar as they do not see it as a contradiction for the Middle Way to accept “own-characteristics,” comment according to the idea that the view held by the system of the *Commentary on Valid Perception* itself is a Middle Way view.

But the Consequence group asserts that since no existing thing can be established through its own essence, even conventionally, existing things are merely labeled through names and concepts; therefore, they assert that things marked with their own-characteristics *do not exist, even conventionally*.

།དེས་ན་ལྟ་དབང་སྒྲིའི་འགྲེལ་པའི་ལྷགས་ལ། གལ་ཏེ་ཐམས་ཅད་རྣམས་མེད་ན། །ཞེས་པའི་ཕྱོགས་སྤྱོད་པ་འདི་སྤྱིར་དབྱ་མ་བ་གཉི་ག་དང་། རྒྱ་བར་རང་མཚན་དོན་བྱེད་རྣམས་པ་མེད་པར་འདོད་པའི་ཐལ་འགྱུར་བ་ཕྱོགས་སྤྱོད་པ་པོར་བྱས་ནས་དེ་ལ་ལན་འདེབས་པར་བྱེད་དོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་འགྲེལ་པ་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་ཕྱོགས་སྤྱོད་པའི་གཞུང་འདིའི་སྤྱོད་པ་འཆད་པ་ན་སྤྱོད་པ་ནི་གང་གི་གང་ལ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ནི་དེའི་མཚན་ཉིད་དུ་མི་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན་རྩ་ལ་རྩ་ཅན་ཉིད་ལྟ་བུ་འོ། །རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་དུ་འདོད་པ་ལའང་དོན་བྱེད་རྣམས་པ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་ཁྱབ་པར་བྱེད་པ་མི་དམིགས་པའི་ཞེས་བཤད་དོ།

Now, according to Devendrabuddhi’s system of commentary, this opponent’s line: “Suppose nothing had any ability . . .” is in general the claim of both groups of the Middle Way, and in particular, is the claim of the Consequence group – which asserts that “own-characteristics” with the ability to perform a function do not exist – posing as the opponent. So the reply is offered in return.

Therefore, in this very commentary, since one explains this argument of the opponent to be the argument of this scripture’s position, then the argument is explained as follows: What does not exist for, or in, something, cannot become its defining characteristic. For example, it would be like the very possession of horns, for a horse. For someone who already accepts inherent characteristics, moreover, nothing can be focused upon to produce a logical necessity for the statement that “the ability to perform a function does

not exist.”

།དེ་ལྟར་གཤམ་ཏེ་སྒྲོ་ལ་མ་བརྟོས་པར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་དོན་བྱེད་པའི་སྒྲོ་ནས་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པར་འཛིན་པ་མི་འཐད་དེ། དངོས་སོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་སྒྲོ་བཏགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་པར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་དོན་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་མི་སྲིད་པའོ་ཞེན། ། ཞེས་པའི་དོན་རྟོ། །དེའི་ལན་ནི་ཏགས་མ་གྲུབ་སྟེ། ས་བོན་སོགས་ནི་སྤྲུ་གྲུ་སོགས་ལ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་དང་ལྡན་པར་མངོན་སུམ་གྱིས་མཐོང་བའི་བྱིར། ཞེས་པ་སྟེ། མངོན་སུམ་གྱིས་དངོས་སུ་མཐོང་བའི་དོན་རྟོག་བཏགས་སུ་ངེ་ལྟར་འགྱུར་སྒྲུབ་པའོ། །གཤམ་ཏེ་མངོན་སུམ་གྱིས་འབྲས་བུ་བསྐྱེད་པར་མཐོང་བའི་དོན་དེ་ཀྱན་རྩལ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་ཙམ་གྱི་སྒྲོ་ནས་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་འཛིན་ན་ཁྲབ་ཆེས་སོ་ཞེན། རི་ལྟར་དེ་ལྟར་འགྱུར་ཞེས་པས་ལན་སྟོན་པ་ནི་སྒྲོ་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ན་ཅི་ལྟར་མངོན་སུམ་མ་འཁྲུལ་བའི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་དེ་ལྟར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། མིང་རི་ལྟར་འདོགས་ལ་རང་གི་དོན་དམ་པར་གྲུབ་པའི་དོན་ཁས་སྒྲངས་པར་སོང་ངོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་དོན་རྟོ། །དོན་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པ་ལ་དོན་དམ་པར་གྲུབ་པ་དང་མ་གྲུབ་པའི་དབྱེ་བ་གཉིས་འདོད་པ་དག་གིས་ནི་གཞུང་འདི་དག་རྒྱུང་རིང་དུ་སྤངས་སོ།

Accordingly, the meaning is as follows. “Suppose” someone says: It makes no sense to posit something as ultimate reality by way of the fact that it performs a function through its own essence, without relying upon a state of mind;

(640) Because “no” functioning “thing,” when not pasted upon with labels, “has any ability” to perform a function through an essence of its own, and so a definition of ultimate reality is impossible.

The answer is this. Your reason is wrong: Because one “can see” with a direct perception that “seeds and the like have the ability” to produce “sprouts and the like.” One says this while wondering, *“How could the actual object of what one actually sees with a direct perception ever turn into what is designated with a concept?”*

“Suppose you say”: Since the actual object that you see, produced as result of direct perception, “is deceptive,” if you were to posit ultimate characteristics by way of that alone, then that would be a case of covering too much.

“Then how would it ever become in that way” indicates the answer, which means: If it were merely pasted upon with labels, “then how would it ever become” the beheld objective field of an unmistaken direct perception “in that way”? For you would have agreed, with respect to whatever way in which the name was applied, that this was the actual object established through its own ultimate meaning.

Those who want to say that there are two divisions in the ability to perform a function, one that is established ultimately and one that is not so established, have cast all of these sacred treatises far, far away.

།ཀྱན་རྩལ་པའི་དངོས་སོ་ཀྱན་ལ་འང་མངོན་སུམ་གྱིས་དོན་བྱེད་པར་མཐོང་བ་དེ་ཡོད་པས་དེ་དག་ལ་འགཤམ་བ་ཅི་ཞིག་ཡོད་ཅེན། དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཞི་མཐུན་ལ་འདི་པའི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་གཞོད་པ་ཙན་གྱི་ཆད་མ་བསྟན་རྒྱ་མ་བྱུང་ན། ས་བོན་སོགས་ནི་སྤྲུ་གྲུ་སོགས་ལ། ཞེས་སོགས་སྤྲུ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཆོག་ཙན་དུ་འགྱུར་བས། འདི་པ་རང་གི་ལུགས་ཀྱི་གཞོད་པ་ཙན་གྱི་ཆད་མ་སྟོན་པ་འདི་ཡིན་ཏེ།

Suppose you ask how there is any contradiction in the fact that, with respect to all deceptive functioning things, one does see with a direct perception that they perform functions.

According to this system, upon the basis that is shared in common between those two [i.e., being deceptive and being seen directly], nothing arises to indicate a valid

perception with the capacity to disprove [anything else]. Since all statements that “seeds and the like [have the ability to produce] sprouts and the like,” would turn out to be mere words, the indication – given by the system of this treatise – of a valid perception with the capacity to disprove, is as follows:

གཞུགས་ཀྱིས་རང་འཛིན་མིག་ཤེས་བསྐྱེད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་རྟོག་པ་ལ་གཞུགས་སྣང་བས་ཀྱང་རང་འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱས་པར་ཐལ། དེ་གཉིས་ཀ་སྒྲོ་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་ལས་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མ་གྲུབ་པར་མཚུངས་པའི་བྱེད། འདོད་པར་རྟུས་པ་མིན་ཏེ། སྤྱིའི་མཆོན་ཉིད་དུ་གྱུར་པ་རྟོག་པ་ལ་གཞུགས་སུ་སྣང་བ་དེ་དང་། དེ་འཛིན་གྱི་སྒྲོ་རྟོག་པ་ལ་རྗེས་སུ་འགོ་ལྷོག་གི་རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་པ་ཆད་མས་མ་མཐོང་བའི་བྱེད། དེས་ན་མིག་སོགས་དབང་སོ་དང་གཞུགས་སོགས་ཡུལ་ལྷ་དང་སྒྲོ་དབང་ཤེས་ལྷ་བཞིན་དུ་དོན་སྤྱི་དང་རྟོག་པ་འང་རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་འགོ་ལྷོག་དམིགས་དགོས་པ་ལས་མི་དམིགས་པའི་བྱེད་སྤྱི་མཆོན་གྱིས་རང་འཛིན་ཤེས་པ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་དོན་བྱེད་པར་རྟུས་པ་འང་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

(641) Are you saying that even as form produces the eye consciousness that beholds it, then, since form also appears to a conceptual state of mind, it would *also* have the ability to produce the conceptual state of mind that beholds it? Because both are exactly the same in being no more than something pasted on as labels; they are not established through the least bit of any essence of their own.

But you cannot agree to this, because you could never see, with a valid perception, the relationship between cause and effect in the process that follows upon conceptualization: between (1) the appearance, as form, to a conceptual state of mind, of what has been abstracted, and (2) the mind which beholds that appearance.

Then, just as one can focus upon a process of cause and effect between the sense faculties of the eye, etc., the five objective fields of form, etc., and the five types of mind that are sensory consciousness, one would also have to be able to focus upon the process of cause and effect between the abstraction of an object and the conceptual state of mind that follows upon it. But here, because that relationship *cannot be focused upon*, the performing of a function that is the mere generation, by abstracted characteristics, of the consciousness that beholds them, is still not the *ability* to perform a function.

།དེའང་མདོ་སྡེ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ལུགས་ལ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་པ་སྒྲོས་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་དོན་བྱེད་རྟུས་ན་ཐམས་ཅད་གྱིས་དོན་བྱེད་རྟུས་དགོས་པར་ཏ་ཅང་ཐལ་བ་འཕེན་ལ། དབྱ་མ་པས་སྒྲོས་བཞག་པ་ལ་མ་བཟོས་པར་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་དོན་བྱེད་ན་ཐམས་ཅད་གྱིས་དོན་བྱེད་པར་ཏ་ཅང་ཐལ་བ་འཕེན་པ་ཡིན་ཞིང་། དབྱ་མ་ཐལ་རང་གཉིས་ཀས་ཆད་མ་མཐོན་རྗེས་གཉིས་སུ་གངས་ངེས་པར་འདོད་ཀྱང་། གཞལ་བྱ་རང་སྤྱི་གཉིས་སུ་ངེས་པར་རང་རྒྱུད་པ་མ་གཏོགས་ཐལ་འབྱུར་བ་ཁས་མི་ལེན་ནོ།

Now in the system of the Sautrāntikas and the like, if it were possible for what is deceptive, what is merely labeled by the mind, to bring about a result, then it would propel one to the absurd consequence that everything would have to be able to bring about everything else.

On the other hand, for the Middle Way, what propels us to the absurd consequence that everything would bring about everything else, would be if something could produce a result through its own essence, *without* relying upon being set forth by a mind.

Both the Independent and Consequence groups of the Middle Way agree that valid perceptions can be definitely categorized into just two types: direct and deductive. But as

an exception from the Independent group, the Consequence group *does not accept the idea* that what is apprehended can be definitely enumerated into the two categories of “own-characteristics” and “abstracted characteristics.”

* * *

རྟོག་པ་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཤད་དུ་སྒྲུང་བ་དང་། དབང་ཤེས་འཁྱུལ་བ་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཤད་དུ་སྒྲུང་བ་དང་། དབང་ཤེས་འཁྱུལ་བ་ལ་སྒྲུང་བའི་སྐྱེ་ཤད་རྣམས་ཀྱི་
 རྒྱད་པར་ལེགས་པར་མ་བྱེད་པའི་དོགས་པ་ལ། རིམ་པ་བཞིན་སྤྱི་མཆན་དང་རང་མཆན་དང་། ཤེས་བྱ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རྒྱད་པར་བྱེ་ནས་དོ་
 གས་པ་སྤངས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །གསལ་བར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཉིད། ཤེས་པའི་ངོ་བོའི་དོན་ཉིད་བྱིར། ཞེས་པ་དང་། རྟོག་པ་ལ་སྒྲུང་བ་སྤྱིར་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ།
 གལ་ཏེ་དབང་ཤེས་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཤད་གསལ་བར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཤེས་པའི་རྣམས་ཡིན་ན། གཟུགས་འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་ལ་གཟུགས་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ལོག་པ་
 ར་སྒྲུང་བའི་སྤྱི་ནི་རྟོག་པའི་ཤེས་པའི་སྤྱི་ནི་ངོ་བོའི་དོན་གྱིས་རྣམས་སུ་ཁས་ལེན་དགོས་ཤིང་། དེ་ལྟར་ན་སྤྱི་དེ་རང་མཆན་དུ་ཐལ་བར་འགྱུ་
 ར་རོ། །ཞེན་དེ་ལ་ཆ་གཉིས་ཡོད་དེ།

. . . (645) To address the doubt that comes from not distinguishing properly between (1) what appears as a hair to a conceptual state of mind, (2) what appears as a hair to a mistaken sense consciousness, and (3) *the hair* that appears to a mistaken sense consciousness, you can distinguish them as follows:

The first has abstracted characteristics, the second has its own-characteristics, and the third is *not a knowable thing*.

In terms of the lines, “. . . since the very thing that appears as a clear instance / is the very meaning of its essence, which is consciousness,” and the saying that “what appears to conceptual states of mind is the abstraction,” suppose someone says:

“If the appearance of a hair as a clear instance to the sense consciousness were of the substance of consciousness, then it would be necessary to assert as substantial, through the meaning of its essence, the abstraction which appears to the conceptual state of mind beholding a form as the opposite of all that is not that form – i.e., the abstraction belonging to the conceptualizing consciousness. Similarly, that abstraction would turn out to be something with its own characteristics.” With respect to this, there are two parts:

གཟུགས་འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་རང་གི་རྣམས་ཉིད་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་གཟུགས་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ལོག་པ་ལྟ་བུའི་རྣམས་པར་སྤྱོད་པ་འདི་གཟུང་
 རྣམ་དེ་ནི་ཤེས་པའི་རྣམས་ཡིན་པས་རང་མཆན་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ལྟར་འདོད་པའི་བྱིར་སྤྱི་མཆན་མ་ཡིན་པས་འགལ་བའི་སྤྱོད་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ལ།
 ། གཟུགས་འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་ལ་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་གསལ་བར་རྣམས་གཟུགས་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ལོག་པར་སྒྲུང་བ་ནི་དོན་ཉིད་རྟོག་པའི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་གྱི་
 ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་ཡིན་པས་རང་མཆན་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

The very substance of the conceptual state of mind that beholds a form – that beheld aspect which arises, *by the power of a tendency*, in the aspect of something like the opposite of all that is not that form – is of the substance of consciousness. Thus it is something that exists with its own characteristics. Because it is accepted to be that way, and since it is not an abstraction, there is no fault of a contradiction.

On the other hand, as for the appearance of the opposite of all that is not the clear instances of form *to* the conceptual state of mind that beholds form; since it is an *abstraction of the very essence of the actual object* – that is, an abstraction of the very essence of the objective field beheld by the conceptual state of mind – it is not something

that exists with characteristics of its own.

།རྩི་ལྷ་སྤྱི་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། དེ་ཉིད་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པའི་སྤྱི་ཡིན་ཡང་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་གསལ་བ་ཀྱན་ལ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་མཚུངས་པར་རྩིས་སུ་འ
 མོ་བའི་སྤྱི་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། གཞུགས་ཀྱི་གསལ་བ་དེ་རྣམས་གཞུགས་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ལོག་པར་རང་རྒྱུ་ལས་སྤྱིས་པའི་སྒོ་ནས་དབ
 ང་ཤེས་ལ་དེ་ལྷ་སྤྱི་བ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས། དབང་ཤེས་དེས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རྟོག་པ་ལ་འདང་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་གསལ་བ་རྣམས་གཞུགས་མ་ཡིན་པ་
 ལས་ལོག་པར་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཀྱན་ལ་ངོ་བོ་མཚུངས་པའི་སྤྱི་ཡིན་པའི་རྒྱུ་མཚན། དེ་ལྷོག་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཞེས་སྤྱིར་
 གྲུང་བྱུང་རོ།

Suppose you ask: In what way is it an abstraction?

(646) “It is an abstraction [*spyi*] insofar as it is a general quality [*spyi*] labeled through conceptualization of that very thing, and insofar as it is a universal type [*spyi*] that follows upon the way in which all those clear instances of form are the same in their essence.

It is an abstraction insofar as all those clear instances of form appear to the sense consciousness, by means of having arisen from their own causes, as though the opposite of all that is not form. Then, in dependence upon appearing in that way, the clear instances of form appear as the opposite of all that is not form to the conceptual state of mind produced by that sense consciousness.”

It is also suitable if you add, “The reason it is an abstraction of the way in which an essence is the same with respect to all [things which are characteristic of it], is that it depends upon an isolation of identity.”

།གཞི་གཅིག་ཉིད་བཟོས་ས་སོ་སོ་ལ་བཟོས་ནས་རང་མཚན་དང་སྤྱི་མཚན་གཉིས་ག་ཡིན་པར་འཆད་པ་ནི་སྤྱན་སྤྱུལ་དུ་ཤེས་སྤྱི་ལ་གཞུ
 ང་རྣམ་གྱི་ཆ་རང་མཚན་ཡིན་ལ། གཞུང་རྣམ་ལ་ཕྱི་རོལ་དུ་བཏགས་པའི་ཆ་སྤྱི་ཡིན་ཞེས་གཞུང་འདིའི་དོན་དུ་འཆད་པ་ནི་རྟོག་པ་ཆེན་པོ
 སྟེ། རྟོག་པ་རང་གི་གཞུང་རྣམ་ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་གཞུགས་སུ་སྒོ་བཏགས་པ་གཞི་གྲུབ་པར་ཡང་སྤྱི་བ་པའི་ནུ་དཀའ་ཞིང་། གྲུབ་དུ་ཆུག་ཀྱང་
 ། དེ་ལྷ་སྤྱི་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་གསལ་བ་ཀྱན་ལ་རྩིས་སུ་འམོ་བའི་ཕྱིར་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཉེ། གཞུགས་ཡིན་ན། དེ་ཡིན་པར་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

The explanation that both (1) things which exist with their own characteristics, and (2) things marked by abstracted characteristics, rely upon a single basis in two different ways is a fabricated shot in the dark that may be easy to understand. But to explain the meaning of this sacred treatise by saying that the part that is the beheld aspect is what has its own characteristics, while the part that is labeled as external upon that beheld aspect is the abstraction, is a tremendous error.

The beheld aspect of a conceptual state of mind – the aspect which has had the idea of its being external form pasted upon it – may be established as a basis, but it is extremely difficult to establish it as such. But even were you to establish it, since it is something that *follows upon* all the clear instances of form that are alike, it cannot be the same thing as they are. This is true because, if something is form, it mutually excludes “being form.”

* * *

སྤྱི་ཤད་འཛག་སྤང་གི་དབང་ཤེས་ལ་སྤྱི་ཤད་དུ་སྤང་བ་དབང་ཤེས་དེའི་སྤང་ཡུལ་དང་། དབང་ཤེས་དེའི་རྩིས་སུ་བཤད་པ་ལྷ་སྤྱི་མེ་ལོང་ན
 ང་གི་བྱད་བཞིན་གྱི་གཞུགས་བརྟན་སྤང་བའི་དབང་ཤེས་ལ་འདང་འདྲའམ་ཞེ་ན་མེ་ལོང་ནང་གི་བྱད་བཞིན་གྱི་གཞུགས་བརྟན་མཐོང་བའི་བ

ནང་བྱང་གི་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་མེ་མོང་ནང་གི་བྱང་བཞིན་གྱི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་སྤང་ཡང་གཟུགས་བརྟན་དུ་མི་སྤང་ཞིང་། བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་སྤང་ལ་
 རྟོག་པས་གཟུགས་བརྟན་དུ་འཛིན་གྱི་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་མི་འཛིན་ཅིང་། བཟང་ལ་མ་བྱང་བས་ནི་རྟོག་པས་ཀྱང་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་འཛིན་ལ། དེ་
 དག་གི་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་བྱང་བཞིན་གྱི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་སྤང་བའི་སྤང་བ་དེ་མིག་ཤེས་དེའི་སྤང་ཡུལ་དང་ཤེས་པའི་ཟུང་ཡིན་
 གྱི་ཕྱི་རོལ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

. . . (647) Suppose you ask: Is the object that appears as a hair to a sensory consciousness of the appearance of a fallen hair – that is, its appearing object – similar to what appears to a sensory consciousness of the appearance of the reflection of a face in a mirror, which is explained to be of the very substance of that sense consciousness?

The reflection of a face in a mirror appears to the eye consciousness of someone trained in the idea, who sees the reflection of a face in a mirror, but it does not appear *as* a reflection. By conceptualizing it as something that appears as a face, one holds it to be a reflection, but then one does not hold it to be a face.

Someone who is not trained in the idea⁸ holds it to be a face even when conceptualizing it. To the eye consciousness of such a being, the appearance of the reflection of a face, which is appearing *as* a face, is the appearing object of that eye consciousness, and it is of the substance of consciousness, but it is not anything external.

ཁོ་ན་སྔ་འཛིན་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་སྔོན་པོར་སྤང་བའདུག་ཤེས་པའི་ཟུང་ཡིན་ནམ་ཞེ་ན། མི་མཚུངས་ཏེ། སྔ་འཛིན་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་སྔོན་པོར་སྤང་
 བ་སྔོན་པོ་མ་ཡིན་ཞིང་། མེ་མོང་ནང་གི་བྱང་བཞིན་གྱི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་མཚོང་བའི་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་སྤང་བ་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་མ་གྱ
 བ་པས་མིག་ཤེས་དེ་གཉིས་ལ་སྤང་ཡུལ་ལ་འབྲུལ་མ་འབྲུལ་གྱི་བྱང་བར་བྱང་བ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །ཚུལ་འདི་ནི་མདོ་སྤེལ་བ་དང་དབྱེ་མ་
 ཐལ་འགྲུར་བའི་ཕྱི་རོལ་ཁས་ལེན་ཚུལ་གྱི་བྱང་བར་ཁོང་དུ་ཚུད་པ་ལ་ཤེས་དགོས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

Now, suppose you ask: Is what appears as blue to an eye consciousness beholding blue also of the substance of consciousness?

The situations are not the same. What appears as blue to an eye consciousness beholding blue is blue. But since what appears as a face to an eye consciousness seeing the reflection of a face in a mirror cannot be established as such, *there is the distinction of whether or not each of those two eye consciousnesses is mistaken towards their respective appearing objects*. It is in this way that you must understand, deep within yourself, the distinction in the way the Sautrāntikas and those of the Middle Way Consequence group assert the existence of outer objects.

* * *

གཟུགས་བརྟན་བའི་དོན་དུ་མིག་དབང་སོགས་འབྲས་བུ་སྟེ་དགོས་པ་དང་བཅས་པ་ཉིད་གྱི་ཕྱིར་སྤྱོད་ཚུལ་ཤེས་པའི་སྤང་ཡུལ་ཡིན་ན། གཟུ
 གས་གྱི་རོལ་མི་འཐད་དོ།

. . . (648) For the very reason that the eye faculty and such have a result – that is, they have a purpose – which is *to look at form*; then if something is the appearing objective field of a *conceptual* state of mind that arose due to a sound, it makes no sense for it to be something with the essence of form.

⁸ That is, someone like a small child.

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།དེས་ན་རང་འཛིན་རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་ངོ་དང་ཞེན་ངོ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས་རང་འཛིན་རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་ངོ་ཙམ་གྱི་ཚུལ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་
ཡུལ་གྱི་མཆན་ཉིད་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

. . . (650) Therefore, between what appears to the conceptual state of mind beholding it, and what that conceptual state of mind insistently believes to be there, you should understand “that thing which is just what appears to the conceptual state of mind beholding it” to be the definition of the appearing object of a conceptual state of mind.

* * *

རང་སྣེ་མང་པོས་བཀུར་བ་ཁ་ཅིག་ན་རེ། གཟུགས་འཛིན་རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་བ་དབང་ཤེས་ལ་གཟུགས་སུ་སྣང་བ་དང་དོན་མི་གཅིག་པ་དེ་ལྟ་
ར་འགྱུར་མོད་ཀྱི། འོན་ཀྱང་སྒྲ་དོན་རང་མཆན་མེད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ལྷན་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་མིང་དང་མཆན་མ་རང་འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་
ལས་རྩས་ཐ་དད་པ་དེ་ཉིད་སྒྲ་དོན་དུ་བྱས་ནས་བརྗོད་པ་ཡིན་ལོ། །ཞེས་ཟེར་རོ། །དེའང་རྟོག་པ་ལ་སྣང་བའི་སྒྲ་སྒྱི་དང་དོན་སྒྱི་ལ་མིང་ད
ང་མཆན་མའི་ཐ་སྙད་བྱས་པ་ཙམ་མོ།

. . . (651) Someone praised by many from our own scriptural systems suggests:

“‘What appears to the conceptual state of mind that beholds form’ and ‘what appears as form to the sense consciousness’ do not have the same referent. It may turn out to be that way, but it is not that the meaning of a sound⁹ does not have characteristics of its own. The name and characteristics, which are unlinked traces, are of a different substance from that of the conceptual state of mind which beholds them. They themselves are what is expressed once they have been taken as the meaning of a sound.”

Moreover, in this case it would merely be what has been formed as a convention, combining a name and characteristics, involving both (1) the abstracted idea of a sound, and (2) the abstracted idea of an object, each of which appear to a conceptual state of mind.

།དེ་འགོག་པ་ནི། འཆད་ཉན་དོན་གསུམ་གང་དང་འབྲེལ་བརྟགས་པ་ནི་གང་གི་རྩས་ཡིན་བརྟགས་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའང་སྒྲ་དོན་དེ་རྩས་སུ་
གྱུར་ན་དེ་གཞིར་ཁ་ཚོན་ཆོད་དགོས་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱི། དེ་ལས་གཞན་དུ་ཐ་དད་བཀག་ན་ཞེགས་པའི་འབྲེལ་བ་ཙམ་གྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་པ་མ་ཡི
ན་ཏེ། དེ་ཡིན་ན་གང་དང་འབྲེལ་ཙམ་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ནམ། འཆད་པ་པོའི་སྒྲ་ཁོ་ན་དང་འབྲེལ་ལས་ཞེས་སོགས་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན།

Here is the refutation of that position. The examination of what it is that is in relationship to the triad of (1) an explanation, (2) listening to it, and (3) its meaning, is an examination of what kind of substance that is. But if you were to establish that meaning of a sound as

⁹ Tib. *sgra don*: From its use in other contexts, this appears to be an abbreviation for “*sgra dang don spyi* ‘dres pa,” or “the combination of the abstracted idea of a sound and the abstracted idea of its actual object.” Cf. *blo rigs nyer mkho kun btus* (“*Compendium of Crucial Ideas in the Classification of States of Mind*”), Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Dharamsala, 1998, 152-3. Nonetheless, as the term is developed and analyzed here, it appears that since in English, the word “meaning” (which often just translates “*don*,” Skt. *artha*) already suggests the abstraction of many particulars into an idea (*don spyi*, Skt. *ārthasāmānya*), it is sufficient in this case for the expanded term which is implied in that second syllable: “the abstraction of an actual object/referent.” Since it is obvious that here the “sound” is meant in the sense of a “word” – not an uttered sound as a particular in time and space, but the *idea* of a sound by which it can be recognized in linguistic speech – then I think that “the meaning of a sound,” actually does transmit most of the intent of this thick phrase: *sgra don*, Skt. *śabdārtha*.

substantial, you would have to make a final decision about it as a basis. On the other hand, if you were to refute the possibility of its being something separate, the relationship cannot come under the heading of being merely a relationship of refutation. If it did, then is the conceptual state of mind just related to something, or is it a conceptual state of mind “related solely to the mind of the person explaining” and so on?

དང་པོ་ལྟར་ན་དོན་ལ་འབྲུག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་བའི་ཐལ་བ་འཐད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རང་ཉིད་རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་བ་སྤྱོད་ན་བྱུང་བ་ལ་ཐལ་བ་དེ་
ལྟར་བསྟོན་ན་རྗེ་ལྟར་སྤྱོད་པ་སོམས་ཤིག། རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་བ་རྟོག་པ་དང་མ་འབྲེལ་བར་འདོད་དམ་ཅི་ཁོ་ན་ཞེས་བརྗོད་ནས་འདི་ན་བརྟག་
པའི་མཐའ་བཞི་པོ་དེར་ཁ་ཆོན་ན་ཆོད་ན་པ་རོལ་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་འདི་བ་རྗེ་ལྟར་འཐད། ཆོད་ན་རང་ལ་འད་རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་བ་འཆད་པ་པོའི་སྒོ་
ཁོ་ན་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་བརྗོད་དམ་ཞེས་སོགས་ནིས་ན་རྗེ་ལྟར་སྤྱོད་པ་བརྗོད་ཅིག། དེ་བཞིན་བྱུང་བྱུང་གཏོགས་མ་གཏོགས་ལ་འད་ཁ་ཆོན་ཆོ
ད་མ་ཆོད་ཚུལ་འདི་ལྟར་བསམ་བར་བྱའོ།

If the first, it does not make sense to conclude that “then one will never engage with the actual object.” If in this way you prevent the consequence to the assertion that *what appears to a conceptual state of mind is itself the meaning of a sound*, then think about it: What else is there to say?

Suppose you express your question thus: “Am I to accept that what appears to a conceptual state of mind is not related to the conceptual state of mind? Or why solely?” If you have not reached a final decision with respect to the four extremes of examination, then how could it make sense to ask someone outside about it in that way?

(652) But if you have made a decision, then if you ask, “Is one to say that what is the appearance of a concept for oneself as well, is related *solely* to the mind of the person giving an explanation?,” then tell me: What else is there to say? In this way you should also think over whether or not it is included within a particular mental continuum; and in this way you either will or will not reach a final decision.

།རང་ལུགས་ལ་བྱམ་འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་ལ་བྱམ་མ་ཡིན་ལས་ལོག་པར་སྣང་བ་རྟོག་པ་དེའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཡང་དེ་སྤྱོད་ན་བྱུང་བས་བརྗོད་
པས་དོན་ལ་མི་འབྲུག་པའི་སྒྲིན་མེད་ལ། འཆད་ཉན་བྱེད་པའི་སྒྲིན་ཐས་སྤྱོད་ན་བྱུང་བ་སྒྲིན་དེ་འབྲུང་བའི་བྱེད་པར་ཡོད་ལ། འཆད་
པ་པོའི་སྒྲིན་བདག་ཉིད་ཡིན་ན་འཆད་པ་པོ་ཁོ་ནའི་སྒྲིན་བདག་ཉིད་ཡིན་མི་དགོས་པ་ནི་ཤེས་སྤྱོད། །བརྟག་པ་དང་པོ་གཉིས་ལྟར་འདོད་
ན། བྱམ་སྤྱོད་པས་དོན་བྱམ་པ་ལ་འབྲུག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་བར་ཐལ། དེས་བྱམ་པ་མ་བརྗོད་པའི་ཕྱིར། རྟགས་མ་བྱལ་ན། དེའི་སྤྱོད་ན་སྒྲིན་ཐ
ས་ཡིན་པས་བྱལ་བ་བྱད། ཅས་པའི་དོན་ཏེ་དེས་ནི་རྟོག་པའི་གཟུང་ནས་བྱི་རོལ་ཏུ་བརྟགས་པའི་ཆ་སྤྱོད་པ་བརྗོད་ཀྱི་རང་མཆོན་སྤྱོད་པ་བརྗོ
ད་པ་མི་སྤྱོད་དོ་ཞེས་སྤྱོད་པ་དག་ལེགས་པར་བཀག་གོ།

According to our own system, the appearance of the opposite of all that is not the vase to the conceptual state of mind beholding a vase has the identity of that conceptual state of mind. But insofar as it is expressed as the meaning of a sound, there is no problem about its not engaging the actual object.

If the *substance* of the mind of the person listening to an explanation were taken to be that of the meaning of a sound, this problem would arise, but there is a distinction between the two cases. If something has the identity of the mind of the person explaining, it need not mean that it has the identity of the mind of the explainer *alone*. This is easy to understand.

Suppose you accept the first two proposals. “Are you saying that from the sound, ‘vase,’ you cannot engage with the actual object that is a vase? Because from that you cannot express a vase. If you say this reason is wrong, then that blows away your necessity that the meaning of a sound is of the substance of a mind.”

The point is this: “From that” means that the beheld aspect of the conceptual state of mind, the part labeled as being external, is expressed through a sound, but it is impossible to express through a sound what exists with its own-characteristics.

All these statements refute well [the position that the meaning of a sound has the substance of consciousness.]

ཁིང་སོགས་ལ་བྱི་རོལ་ཏུ་འབྲས་བུ་ལྟུང་ན་རེས་འགའ་དོན་ལ་འབྲུག་ཏུ་ཆུག་ཀྱང་རེས་འགའ་མིང་སོགས་ལ་འང་འབྲུག་པར་འགྱུར་བ་དང་། རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་བ་སྤྱོད་ན་ཡིན་ཀྱང་སྣང་བརྟགས་གཅིག་ཏུ་འབྲུག་ནས་འབྲུག་པས་དོན་ལ་འབྲུག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་བའི་སྤྱོད་ན་མཚུངས་ལ། བྱི་བྱི་རོལ་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་སྣང་བ་མི་འདོད་པས་དེ་ལྟར་མི་རུང་བ་དང་། རྣམ་པར་སྣང་བ་ཁས་ལེན་ན་འང་རྣམ་ཤེས་རྟོག་པ་ལ་ས་ཇས་ཐ་དད་པའི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་ཡོད་པ་ནི་སྤྱོད་བྱེད་ཆད་མ་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་པར་ཐལ། དེ་ཡིན་ན་རྟོག་པ་རྣམས་རང་གི་གཟུང་དོན་གྱི་སྟོབས་ལས་བསྐྱེད་དགོས་པ་ལས། རྟོག་པ་རྣམས་རང་གི་གཟུང་དོན་པན་བྱེད་ཏུ་ཡོད་པ་ལོག་ན་རང་སྤྱི་བ་ལྟོག་པའི་འབྲེལ་བ་བྱུང་བ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

(1) Since names and such have a similarity to what is external, if one makes a mistake, although one may at times engage in the actual object, sometimes one will end up engaging instead in the names and such. (2) Then, although what appears to a conceptual state of mind is the meaning of a sound, insofar as one engages by mistaking the appearance and the imputation as one, one will end up not engaging in the actual object. But these two problems are not the same.

If you are someone who does not accept the possibility of appearances that are in the aspect of outer things, it is inappropriate to put it this way. However, if you do accept appearance in such aspects, then you must be saying that the existing, beheld objective field, which would be of a different substance from that of the conceptual consciousness, is not something that has a valid state of mind to establish it.

(653) Because if it were, then *all* conceptual states of mind would have to be produced by force of actual objects that they behold. *There is no way to establish a relationship such that, for all conceptual states of mind, if they were not propelled into existence by an actual beheld object, then they could not arise.*

ཁོ་ཆོག་དོན་རེ་རེ་ནས་མ་བཤད་པ་དག་ནི་གོ་སྤྱོད་ཞིང་དག་དོན་ལོགས་སུ་བཤད་པ་ལས་རྟོགས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །སྤྱོད་བྱེད་མེད་པ་མ་གྱུར་སྟེ། ཤེས་པ་གྲུག་གཟུང་དོན་དང་ལྡན་པས་བྱིར་ཞེ་ན། དེའི་ལན་ནི་སྤྱོད་སོགས་མིན་གྱི་བར་ཉེ། འོ་ན་མི་ལས་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་སྤྱོད་སོགས་སུ་སྣང་བ་དེ་གང་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། མི་ལས་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ལྷན་ལ་སྤྱོད་སོར་སྣང་བ་དེ་སྣང་མཁན་ཤེས་པ་དེའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཉེ། དེ་བྱི་རོལ་དོན་ཏུ་བྱུང་ན་གཞི་དེར་དམིགས་རུང་གི་ལྷན་ལ་སྤྱོད་སོ་ཡོད་དགོས་ཤིང་། དེ་ཡོད་ན་རུང་ཡུལ་དེར་གནས་པའི་གཉིད་མ་ལོག་པའི་སྤྱོད་སུ་དབང་སོ་མ་ཉམས་པས་ཡིད་གཏད་ན་གཞི་དེར་ལྷན་ལ་སྤྱོད་སོ་ཤེས་དགོས་པ་ལས་མི་ཤེས་ཤིང་། མི་ལས་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་རང་ཉིད་ཁོ་ནའི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་ཏུ་གྱུར་ནས་སྣང་བའི་བྱིར་རོ།

The meaning of those verses that I have not explained individually is easy to understand, and can be discovered from the meaning of speech explained elsewhere.

Suppose you say that it is not true that there is nothing with which to establish [the relationship of necessity], because it is necessarily the case that all states of consciousness have an actual beheld object. (The answer to this goes as far as “not blue and the rest.”)

Now suppose you ask: What is it that appears as blue and so forth to consciousness during a dream? The appearance of a blue water lily¹⁰ to consciousness during a dream has the identity of the consciousness that is appearing as it.

This is true because, if it were to be established as an outer object, then upon that basis there would have to be a blue water lily that was suitable to be focused upon. But if that were to exist, if a person who was not sleeping and who had undamaged faculties were to turn his mind towards that suitable objective field, he would have to be conscious of a blue water lily upon that basis. But instead he does not perceive such a thing, and it appears only as the object beheld by the consciousness in a dream.

འདིར་ལྷའི་འགྲེལ་པར་མདོན་སྟུང་རང་གིས་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱུའི་བྱེད་རྩོ། །ཞེས་འབྱུང་སྟེ། མི་ལམ་གསལ་སྣང་གི་རྟོག་མེད་ལོག་ཤེས་མངོན་སྟུང་དུ་བཞེད་པའི་གོ་སྐབས་མེད་མཆི། ཡི་གེ་མ་དག་པ་ཡིན་ནམ་བཞག་པར་བྱའོ། །གཞུང་འདི་ལ་བཞེན་ནས་དོན་སྤྱི་ཤེས་པར་སྦྱར་བ་ནི། རྟོག་པའི་སྣང་ཡུལ་འཆད་ཉན་བྱེད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ཡིན་ན་སྦྱ་ལས་དོན་ལ་འབྲུག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་བའི་ཐལ་བ་གོང་དུ་འཕངས་མ་ཐག་པ་བྲན་པ་ལ་མ་བཞག་པའི་ཆོག་བྱུང་རྒྱལ་དུ་སྦྱས་པར་བྱེད་འོ། །

On this point Devendrabuddhi's commentary states that, “It is because the direct perception itself is the cause of consciousness.” But then there is no place for him to affirm the dream as being a direct, nonconceptual, mistaken consciousness of a clear appearance. You should examine whether perhaps the manuscript is corrupt here.

On the basis of this sacred treatise, as for those who claim that abstractions of objects are consciousness: If the appearing objective field of a conceptual state of mind were the *consciousness* of the one who listens to an explanation, it would follow that one could never engage in an object by means of a sound. (This is the consequence to which we were thrown previously, so this is a spontaneous statement for an unsettled memory.)

རིགས་པ་དེས་ནི་མིང་སོགས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་པ་ལས་རྒྱས་ཐ་དང་མིན་པར་བརྟེན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེའང་མི་ལམ་གྱི་གནས་སྐབས་དང་ཤེས་པ་རྟོག་པ་དང་རྟོག་མེད་གཉིས་ཡོད་པའི་རྟོག་པ་ལ་གཞུང་རྣམ་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱས་དང་གཞུང་ཡུལ་སྦྱ་དོན་དངོས་མེད་ཀྱི་ཆ་གཉིས་ཡོད་པ་སང་པའི་གནས་སྐབས་དང་འབྲེལ། རྟོག་མེད་ལ་ཡུལ་གསལ་བར་སྣང་བའང་སང་པའི་ཆོད་བང་ཤེས་འབྲུལ་པ་ལ་སྦྱ་ཤད་དུ་གསལ་བར་སྦྱར་བ་དང་འབྲེལ། །དེ་ལ་རྟོག་པ་རང་ཉིད་ཁ་བྱི་རོལ་དུ་ཡུལ་ལ་ཕྱོགས་པའི་ཆ་ནི་རྟོག་པའི་གཞུང་རྣམ་དང་། བྱང་ཕྱོད་པ་གསལ་རིག་ཅ་མ་ནི་འཛིན་ཆ་ཡིན་ལ། རྟོག་པ་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་གཞུང་ཆ་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་བྱམ་པ་ལྟ་བུར་ཤར་བ་ནི་བྱམ་འཛིན་རྟོག་པའི་གཞུང་རྣམ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

(654) According to this reasoning, it is expressed that names and the rest are also not of a *separate* substance from consciousness.

Furthermore, during the period of a dream, there is both conceptual and nonconceptual consciousness. With respect to a conceptual state of mind there is (1) the *beheld aspect*, which is the substance of consciousness, and (2) the *beheld objective field*, the meaning

¹⁰ The text uses the Sanskrit word, *utpala*, which generally refers to the species *nymphaea caerulea*.

of a sound, which performs no function. In this way it is similar to the period in which one is awake.

The objective field that appears clearly to a nonconceptual state of mind, furthermore, is similar to what appears clearly as a hair to a mistaken sense consciousness when awake.

With respect to this, that very part of a conceptual state of mind which points externally towards an objective field is the *beheld aspect* of a conceptual state of mind. What is inner, the sheer clarity and cognizance of experience, is the *part that beholds*.

The beheld part of the conceptual state of mind itself, dawns as something like a vase *due to the power of a tendency*. Thus it is known as “the beheld aspect of the conceptual state of mind that beholds a vase.”

ཁོགས་མེད་ཕྱིར་ན་སྔོ་སོགས་མིན། ཞེས་པའི་ཕྱི་འགྲེལ་དུ་ལྷན་དབྱེད་པ་མཛད་པའི་དོན་འདི་ཡིན་ཏེ་མི་ལམ་ན་སྔོ་སོགས་སུ་སྤང་བ་
སྔོ་སོགས་མིན་པ་ལྟར། མི་ལམ་གྱི་ལུས་ལོགས་སུ་ཆད་པ་ལྟར་སྤང་བའི་ལུས་དེའང་སྤང་བ་ལྟར་དངོས་པོ་ལོགས་སུ་བྱུང་བའི་ལུས་
མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ཡིན་ན་མལ་ན་གནས་པའི་ལུས་ལ་དབྱེགས་འབྱུང་རྒྱུ་མེད་པར་ཐལ་བ་དང་། དེ་ཉིད་ཤི་བའི་ལུས་དང་མཚུངས་པར་ཐ
ལ་བ་དང་། མལ་གྱི་ལུས་དེ་ལ་མཆོན་བསྟན་ནས་བསད་པས་སོག་གཙོད་གྱི་ལས་ལམ་མི་རྫོགས་པར་ཐལ་བས་སོ། །ཁྱབ་སྟེ། སྟེས་
བྱ་གཅིག་ལ་དུས་གཅིག་ཏུ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཐ་དད་པ་གཉིས་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའོ།
།འདི་ལྟར་ཤེས་ན་པན་པའི་སྐབས་མང་བར་ཡོད་པས་བཤད་དོ།

Here is the meaning of the analysis given by Devendrabuddhi in his latter commentary for the line, “Because unobstructing, they are not blue and the rest.”

In a dream, just as what appears as blue and the rest are not blue and the rest, so the body of a dream – that body which appears as though it had split off separately – *is not a body established as a separate functioning thing in the way that it appears*. If it were, it would follow that the body lying on the bed would have no inhalation or exhalation of breath, and it would be just the same as the body of a dead person, and if someone were to stab the body on the bed with a weapon and kill him, it would follow that the karmic path of severing life would be incomplete.

(655) That is necessarily so, because in one person there cannot be two different streams of consciousness at the same time. If you understand it this way, there are many other situations to which the explanation can be applied.

།ལྟ་དབང་སྟོས་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཞེས་སོགས་ཤེས་པ་ཀུན་གཟུང་དོན་དང་ལྷན་པས་ཁྱབ་པ་འགོག་པའི་རིགས་པའི་རྣམ་གྲངས་གཞ
ན་བསྟན་པ་ལ་འཆད་པ་ལྟར་བྱ་སྟེ། འདིའི་དོན་རྟེན་གྱི་དཔལ་ཆེ་བས། མིག་སོགས་གཟུང་དོན་དང་ལྷན་པར་རྒྱ་མཚན་གང་གིས་འདོད
འིས་ནས། གཟུང་དོན་དང་ལྷན་ཏེ། གཟུང་དོན་གྱིས་རྣམ་པ་གཏད་པའི་སྟོན་པ་ན་འདོགས་པའི་རྣམ་པ་མཐོང་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེ་ན། གཞན
མིང་སོགས་ལ་རྟོག་པ་ཆོས་ཅན། གཟུང་དོན་མེད་པ་ཅན་དུ་ཐལ། གཟུང་དོན་གྱིས་པན་པའི་རྣམ་པ་མ་མཐོང་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེས་འཆད་དོ།

Devendrabuddhi explains “Eyes and the rest,” as showing the other sets of reasoning used to refute the notion that it is necessarily the case that all states of consciousness possess an actual beheld object.¹¹ Accordingly, most Indian commentators explain the meaning

¹¹ Tib. *gzung don*. This is not to be confused with the “beheld objective field” (*gzung yul*). As the following argument aims to show, all states of consciousness do have the latter, a beheld objective field, but not necessarily the former, i.e., an actual beheld object.

thus. Suppose we ask [the opponent]: For what reason can you assert that eyes and the rest possess an actual beheld object?

[He responds:] They have an actual beheld object; because one can see the capacity with which the actual beheld object renders assistance, by transmitting itself through an aspect.

On the other hand, consider the concepts regarding names and the rest. It must be that they don't have an actual beheld object; because one does not see an actual beheld object having any capacity to render assistance.

ཁོ་ན་མིག་ཤེས་ཚུལ་ཅན། སྒྲ་ཡུལ་ཅན་དུ་ཐལ། རང་གི་སྒྲ་ཡུལ་གྱིས་རང་འབྲེན་ཆུང་པ་གཏད་པའི་སྒྲོན་པ་ཐན་འདོགས་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་མཐོང་བའི་བྱིར་ཞེས་པ་ལ་ཁྲབ་པ་ཡོད་དམ་ཅེད། མེད་ན་མ་དེས་པ་བསྟན་རྒྱ་ཅི་ཞིག་ཡོད། ཡོད་ན་ཉོག་པ་ཚུལ་ཅན། སྒྲ་ཡུལ་མེད་པ་ཅན་དུ་ཐལ། སྒྲ་ཡུལ་གྱིས་རང་འབྲེན་ཆུང་པ་གཏད་པའི་སྒྲོན་པ་རང་ལ་ཐན་འདོགས་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་མ་ཐོང་བའི་བྱིར་ཞེས་བཟོད་ན་ཅི་སྒྲ་སྟོམས་ཤིག་དེས་ན་གཞུགས་སོགས་མིག་ཤེས་སོགས་ཀྱི་གཞུང་དོན་ཡིན་པར་འཇོག་གིས་འཇོག་ཅེས་དེས་པ་ལ་ཐལ་པ་འཕངས་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། སྒྲ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་མཚན་དེས་པའི་ཁྲབ་པ་ལ་འཕངས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འཆད་ཉན་དོན་གསུམ་གང་དང་ཡང་འབྲེན་པ་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐུན་མིན་འདུ་བྱེད་སྒྲ་དོན་ཡིན་ནའང་སྒྲ་ལས་དོན་ལ་འཇུག་པར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ།

Well then, “Consider the eye consciousness. It must have an appearing objective field; because one can see the capacity by which its own appearing objective field renders assistance by transmitting itself through an aspect that bears similarity to it.”

Now is this statement a necessity or not? If you say it is not necessarily the case [that it must have an appearing objective field]: What reason is there to show such a lack of certainty?

If you say it is necessarily the case, and we respond – “Consider a conceptual state of mind. I suppose it must be something that doesn't have an appearing objective field; because you *don't see* the capacity by which the appearing objective field renders assistance to it by transmitting itself through an aspect that bears similarity to it” – Then think about it: What is there to say?¹²

Therefore, this is the consequence to which we are driven in response to the question, “Whatsoever is it that posits form and the rest to be the actual beheld objects of the eye consciousness and the rest?” But it does not drive us to the necessity that was questioned when asking for a reason that could prove their point.

Further, if an unlinked trace that has no relationship to any one of the three – explainer, listener, or actual object – were the meaning of a sound, it could never come about that one engaged in an actual object due to a sound.

* * *

¹² The logic of the argument seems to be something like this: Just because you cannot see the power by which something appearing transmits itself through an aspect, doesn't mean it does not do so, as can be understood from the fact we never *see* what appears to a conceptual state of mind convert itself into something perceptible by the conceptual state of mind. But it can be inferred that it must do so. So every state of consciousness does have an appearing objective field, but not necessarily an actual beheld object, to which it would refer in an outer world. This is the logical doorway to the possibility that thoroughly functional states of consciousness, along with what appears to them, can arise based on causes *other* than the existence of a real, concrete object with its own characteristics.

འདིར་དུས་གསུམ་གྱི་ནུས་པར་བཞག་པ་མདོར་བསྡུས་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་སྟེ། དེའང་བྱེ་བྲག་སྟེ་བ་ནུས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རེ་
 རེའང་དུས་གསུམ་དུ་འཛོག་པས་སྟེ་གུ་མ་འོངས་པ་དང་སྟེ་གུ་འདས་པའི་དུས་སྟེ་འདྲ་གུ་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་དེ། དངོས་སོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་
 ཚུལ་དེ་ལྟར་ཁས་ལེན་ནོ། །དེའི་ནང་གསེས་གྱི་འདོད་པ་མི་འདྲ་བའི་ཚུལ་ནུས་པ་ནི་གཞན་དུ་བཤད་ཐེན་ཏོ། །དབྱེ་མ་ཐལ་འགྱུར་བའི་ལུ
 གས་ལ་འདས་མ་འོངས་དངོས་སོར་བཞེད་ཀྱང་བྱེ་བྲག་སྟེ་བའི་འདོད་པ་དང་དངོས་སོར་འདོད་ཚུལ་གཏན་མི་མཚུངས་ཤིང་དབྱེ་མ་རང་
 རྒྱུད་པ་དང་མདོ་སེམས་གཉིས་ནི་དངོས་སོ་ཡིན་ན་དེ་ལྟར་བ་ཡིན་པས་ཁྲུབ་པ་དང་། འདས་མ་འོངས་ཡིན་ན་དངོས་སོ་མ་ཡིན་པས་ཁྲུ
 བ་པར་འདོད་དོ།

. . . (656) Here I will give just an abbreviated presentation of the three times [i.e., past, present, and future]. Now the Vaibhāṣikas assert that since a sprout and the like can be posited in each of the three times, at the time when a sprout is future and at the time when a sprout is past, the sprout is still an existing thing. This is the way in which they assert functionality with respect to all things. I have already explained elsewhere the various different ways in which their various sub-schools assert these things.

(657) In the Middle Way Consequence system, they do affirm past and future functioning things, but this is completely different from the Vaibhāṣikas' assertions, and the way in which they accept functioning things.

The Independent group of the Middle Way, as well as both the Sautrāntika and Mind-Only schools, assert that if something is a functioning thing, then it must be of the present, and if something is past or future, it must not be a functioning thing.

དེའང་སྟེ་གུ་ལྟ་བུའི་དངོས་སོ་གཅིག་ཞིག་པ་ན་སྟེ་གུའི་ཆལས་གྱི་དངོས་སོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་འགགས་ལ་འགགས་པ་དེས་སྟེ་གུ་མ་ཡིན་པ་
 ་བྱམ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དངོས་སོ་གང་ཡང་མ་ཐོབ་ཅིང་། འདས་མ་འོངས་གཉི་ག་ལའང་དགག་བྱ་ནུས་པར་བཅད་ཙམ་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རང་
 གེ་ངོ་མོ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་གྲུབ་པ་མེད་པས་དེའི་ཕྱིར་འདས་མ་འོངས་ཡིན་ན་དངོས་སོར་མ་གྲུབ་པས་ཁྲུབ་སོ་སྟེ་མ་དུ་བསམ་མོ། །དེ་ལ་ཐལ
 ་འགྱུར་བ་ལྟར་ན་བྱམ་པའི་ཞིག་པ་དང་བྱམ་པའི་མ་སྟེས་པ་སོགས་མ་ཡིན་དགག་ཡིན་པར་བཞེད་ཅིང་། མདོ་སེམས་རང་རྒྱུད་པ་གསུ
 མ་མེད་དགག་ཏུ་བཞེད་དོ།

Now, if a functioning thing like a sprout is destroyed, they think that all the functioning things that were parts of the sprout, having ended, do not go on from that ending to achieve some other functioning thing that is not a sprout, such as a vase. Then, since neither past nor future are established with the slightest bit of an essence that was not simply eliminated as what was to be refuted, if something is “past” or “future,” it necessarily follows that it is not established as a functioning thing.

In this regard, those of the Consequence group want to say that the destruction of a vase, the not-having-arisen of a vase, and so on, are negations that affirm something else, but the Sautrāntikas, Mind-Only, and Independent proponents want to say that those are simple negations. . . .

* * *

།དེ་ལྟར་སྟེ་གསལ་རྣམས་གཅིག་ཐ་དད་གང་དུའང་མ་གྲུབ་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་རྟོག་པའི་གཟུང་ཡུལ་གྱི་སྟེ་དེ་ནི་རྣམས་སྟེ་གྲུབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་
 པར་གྲུབ་སོ།

. . . (669) In this way, since an abstraction and a clear instance cannot be established as

being substantially either the same or different, *the abstraction that is the beheld objective field of a conceptual state of mind is proven to be without any nature of being established as a substance.*

* * *

རིགས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་རྣམས་ལ་མཐོང་ནས་བྱེད་པ་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་གཅིག་ཏུ་ཞེན་པ་གང་དེ་འབྱུང་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་སྤྱི་ཚོ་སྣང་ཡུལ་ལ་འབྱུང་ཚུལ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་ཆུ་མོ་བཟང་ལ་བྱང་བས་རང་གི་བཞིན་ལ་བྱི་མས་བགོས་མ་བགོས་ཏོག་པའི་བྱིར་དུ་མ་ལོང་ལ་བལྟ་བ་ན། མེ་ལོང་གི་ནང་གི་བྱང་བཞིན་གྱི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་བྱང་བཞིན་དུ་སྣང་ཞིང་། སྣང་བ་དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བྱང་བཞིན་ལ་ཏོག་པར་བྱེད་ཀྱི། གཟུགས་བརྟན་དེ་ཉིད་བྱང་བཞིན་ལོ་སྟེན་དུ་ཞེན་པར་མི་བྱེད་དོ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་བྱམ་འཛིན་ཏོག་པ་ལ་རིགས་ཀྱི་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་རྣམས་པ་བྱམ་པའི་སྣང་བ་དེ་ཉིད་ཤར་བ་ན། སྣང་བ་དེ་ནི་བྱམ་པའི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་ཡིན་ཞིང་། དེ་སྣང་བའི་སྟོན་ནས་བྱམ་པའོ་སྟེན་དུ་ཞེན་པར་བྱེད་ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་དེ་ཉིད་བྱམ་པའོ་སྟེན་དུ་ཞེན་པའི་ཞེན་ཚུལ་མེད་པར་ནི་རང་ཉིད་ལ་ཁ་ནང་དུ་བྱོགས་ནས་བལྟས་པས་གསལ་བར་འགྱུར་དོ། །དེ་ལྟ་མ་ཡིན་པར་སྣང་བ་དེ་ཉིད་བྱམ་པར་ཞེན་ན། བྱམ་འཛིན་ཏོག་པ་ཆོས་ཅན། ཞེན་སྣང་སྤྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་གི་སྟོར་ཐལ། རང་གི་སྣང་བ་བྱམ་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་བྱམ་པར་ཞེན་པའི་སྟོན་པའི་བྱིར། འདོད་ན་ཞེན་ཡུལ་ལ་འབྱུང་པའི་ལོག་ཤེས་སུ་ཐལ་ལོ།

. . . (670) “Whatever [state of mind] insists on believing that something – insofar as it appears in the essence of its type – is the same as the outer object, is mistaken.” According to this explanation, you should understand how the mind of an abstraction is mistaken towards its *appearing objective field*.

For example, if an old man who is trained in the idea looks in a mirror to see whether or not there is dirt on his face,¹³ the image of his face in the mirror appears as a face, and upon the basis of that appearance, he can conceive of a face, but he does not insist on believing that “the image itself is my face.”

In the same way, if the appearance of a vase – which takes on the essence of its type – itself dawns to the conceptual state of mind beholding the vase, that appearance *is* the image of a vase, and insofar as it appears, one does insist on believing that “it is a vase.”

(671) But here there is no manner of insistent grasping by which one insists that “this *appearance itself* is a vase.” If you look inside yourself, this will become clear.

When it is not like that, and when you insist that the *appearance itself* is the vase, then: Consider the conceptual state of mind that beholds a vase; it must be a mind with a totally wrong way of insisting; because it is a mind that insists on believing that its appearance – something that is not a vase – is a vase. If you accept that, then it must follow that it is a misperception that is mistaken towards the *objective field of its insistent belief*.

།མེད་དགག་གི་གཞན་སེལ་བའི་སྤྱི་དངོས་མེད་དུ་བསྐྱབ་པ་ནི། བྱམ་པའི་དོན་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ནི་མེད་དགག་གི་གཞན་སེལ་བའི་སྤྱི་གང་ཡིན་པ་གཞན་བྱམ་པ་ཡིན་ལས་ལྡོག་པ་སྟེ་རྣམ་པར་བཅད་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཅན་བྱམ་སྤྱི་འདི་དག་གིས་ཤུགས་ལ་གང་བརྟོད་པ་དེ་ལ་རང་

¹³ Tib. *rang gi bzhin*, which is an expanded form of the word for “nature,” or “nature of its own.” So there might be a pun here, as though the old man is looking to see if there is dirt “on his nature.” In many other contexts, of course, Tsongkhapa uses versions of this analogy to demonstrate exactly how it is that things lack the “nature” that would be parallel to the “face” in the mirror. The potential pun is readily apparent in the Tibetan, especially when *byad bzhin* (lit. “shape likeness”) is contracted to *bzhin* (“likeness”). So *rang gi bzhin* literally just means, “likeness to him-/itself,” hence the more general translation: “nature of its own.”

གི་ངོ་བོ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་དེ། དགག་བྱ་བ་ཅད་ཙམ་གྱི་ཆར་ཟད་པའི་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་

Here is the proof that an abstraction which excludes other things through a sheer absence of what is refuted, has no functionality:

From all those actual objects that are vases, whatever is an abstraction that excludes other things through a sheer absence of what is refuted; what remains isolated when everything else that is not the vase has been canceled; what has the defining characteristic of resulting from thorough elimination; and whatever is expressed implicitly by the sound “vase”; is not established in the slightest way through any essence of its own; because [any such essence] is instantly exhausted at the mere elimination of what it to be refuted.

། རྫོའི་གཞན་སེལ་པའི་སྤྱིའི་ཡུལ་ཅན་འབྲུལ་པར་བསྟན་པ་ནི། . . . །དེ་ལྟར་ན་བྱམ་པའི་སྤྱི་རྫོའ་བྱམ་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ལོག་པའི་དངོས་པོར་སྒྲུབ་པ་དེ་དངོས་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་མེད་པ་ཅན་ཡིན་ཀྱང་དེ་ལ་དོན་དུ་འབྲུལ་ནས་འབྲུག་པའི་སྒྲུབ་པ་དེ་ཉིད་སྤྱི་ཡིན་པར་ཁོ་བོ་ཅག་འདོད་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེའང་དངོས་པོར་རིགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འབྲུལ་པའི་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བརྟན་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་། རྫོའི་དེ་འབྲུལ་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དོན་བྱམ་གསལ་རྫས་ཐ་དད་པ་དུ་མ་དག་ལ་སྤྱི་སྟེ་རིགས་གཅིག་པ་ཉིད་དུ་ནི་རང་བཞིན་འདྲེས་པ་ལྟ་བུར་མཐོང་པའི་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་། ཞེས་པ་ལྟ་བུར་རྫོའི་འགྲེལ་པའི་དོན་ནོ།

Here is the demonstration that the subject state of mind of an abstraction which excludes other things mentally, is mistaken: . . .

. . . (672) In this way, the abstraction of a vase – what appears to the mind as a functioning thing that is the opposite of all that is not a vase – is something that does not have the essence of a functioning thing. Nonetheless, *once one has mistaken it for the actual object, the very appearance of what one has engaged with is itself the abstraction.* This we ourselves accept.

Furthermore, the meaning of Devendrabuddhi’s commentary is this: “It is not of the class of functioning things, because it is false by virtue of the mistaken appearance itself. That mind is mistaken, because it sees what is an abstraction with respect to many clear instances of actual objects that are vases, each with different substances, as though they were of one single type, as something like a mixed nature.”

། རྫོའི་དེ་གཟུང་ཡུལ་རྟུན་པར་སྒྲུབ་པ་ནི། སྤྱི་རྫོའི་སྒྲུབ་པ་དེའང་ཆོས་ཅན། བདེན་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྟན་པའི་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་དུ་ན་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་དོན་དངོས་སུ་མེད་པའི་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་། དེས་ན་བདེན་པའི་ངོ་བོ་མེད་པའི་རང་གི་གསལ་བ་དང་རྫས་གཅིག་ཐ་དད་གང་རུང་དུ་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་བར་ཁས་ལེན་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

As for how the beheld objective field of that mind is proven to be false: “Consider what appears in the mind of an abstraction; it is not something with a real essence; (1) *because it is merely an appearance contaminated by tendencies*, and (2) because in its suchness, there are in actuality no actual objects that exist as they appear. Therefore, since it has no real essence, one cannot accept it as something to be expressed as a substance, whether one which is substantially the same as, or different from, its clear instances.”

། ཞེས་བྱེ་བྲག་པ་སྤྱི་གསལ་རྫས་གཞན་དུ་འདོད་པ་ལྟར་ཡང་ཁས་མི་ལེན་ལ། བྱངས་ཅན་པ་ལྟར་རྫས་གཅིག་ཏུ་འང་ཁས་མི་ལེན་ཞེས་རང་གི་འདོད་པ་བརྗོད་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་གྱི་རྫས་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གང་དུ་འང་བརྗོད་བྱ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བདེན་པའི་ངོ་བོ་མེད་པའི་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་ཞེས་པའི་རྟུགས་བཞོད་པར་བྱས་ན་མི་ལེགས་ཏེ། བདེན་པའི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་དེ། གསལ་བ་དང་རྫས་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དད་གང་དུ་འང་མ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་

ཕྱིར། ཞེས་བཞོན་མ་ཐག་པའང་འདིར་དེ་ལྟར་བཞོན་ནས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་རྟགས་ཡང་དག་ཏུ་ཁས་ལེན་དུ་བྱུང་ན། དབུ་མ་པའི་སྐབས་སུའང་
བདེན་མེད་ཀྱི་རྟགས་ཀྱིས་བདེན་པའི་གཅིག་ཏུ་བྲལ་སྐྱབ་པའི་རྟགས་ཡང་དག་ཀྱང་ཁས་ལེན་དགོས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

Thus we do not assert, with the [non-Buddhist school of the] Vaiśeṣikas, that abstractions and clear instances are of different substances, nor do we assert, with the Sāṃkhyas, that they are of a single substance. This is just an expression of our own position, but it is no good to provide a reason by saying: “It cannot be expressed as either substantially the same or different; because it has no real essence.” For if, just following that you say, “It has no real nature, because it cannot be established as either substantially the same or different from its clear instances,” and if it were appropriate to accept both as perfect reasons, then you would have to accept that even in the context of the Middle Way, it would be a perfect reason to prove that things are bereft of being established as either a real one or a real many, just because you gave the reason that, “they are not real.”

།དེ་ལ་ཙོད་པ་སྒྲིང་བ་ནི། གཤམ་ཉི་ལུ་སྤྱི་དེ་ལུ་གསལ་དང་ཐུས་གཅིག་ཐ་དང་གང་དུའང་མེད་དུ་རྒྱུག་ཀྱང་། ལྷན་བུའི་སྤྱི་ལྟ་བུ་འགའ་
ཞིག་ལས་ཐུས་ཐ་དང་དུ་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་དངོས་པོར་འདོད་དོ་ཞེ་ན། རང་གི་གསལ་བ་དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་ལས་ཐུས་གཅིག་ཐ་དང་
གང་ཡང་མིན་ན་དངོས་པོར་མི་འཐད་པར་ཐལ། དངོས་པོ་རྣམས་ནི་ཇི་ལྟར་ཡང་སྟེ་དངོས་པོ་གང་ལ་བཞུགས་ནས་ཀྱང་ཐུས་དེ་ཉིད་དང་
གཞན་དུ་བརྗོད་བྱ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་པས་ཁྲབ་པའི་ཕྱིར། ལུ་པའི་སྤྱི་དང་ལྷན་བུའི་སྤྱི་ཐུས་གཞན་དུ་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ་བ་མིན་ཀྱང་རྟོ་
ག་པ་ལ་ཐུས་ཐ་དང་པ་ལྟ་བུར་སྤང་བའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཡོད་དོ། །རྟོག་པ་ལ་སྤང་བ་དེ་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་ཉེར་ལེན་གྱི་རྒྱ་བག་ཆགས་འདྲིལ་བྱེ་
ད་མཐར་གང་ལ་ཐུག་པའི་ལུ་པའི་སྤྱི་ལྷན་བུ་གཉིས་ཐ་དང་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་གྱིས་རྟོག་པ་ལ་སྤྱི་དེ་གཉིས་ཐུས་ཐ་དང་པ་ལྟ་བུར་སྤང་ནས་ཐུས་ཐ་ད་
དུ་ཉི་བར་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར།

(673) Here is the elimination of a rebuttal. Suppose you say: “It may be so that the abstraction of a vase does not exist either as substantially the same as or different from a clear instance of a vase, but since it *can* be expressed as substantially different from something like the abstraction of a cloth, we accept it to be a functioning thing.”

So you must be saying that it would not make sense for it to be a functioning thing if it were neither substantially the same or different from the clear instances of *all* functioning things; because, “How,” then, “could all functioning things . . . ?” – that is, no matter what functioning thing you relied upon, it would necessarily follow that it “would not be” something that “could be expressed” either as other, or as “that very,” substance.

The abstraction of a vase and the abstraction of a cloth are not things that can be expressed as *other* substances, but there is still the fact that they *appear* as though they were different substances to a conceptual state of mind.

The proximate cause for an appearance to a conceptual state of mind to dawn in the way that it does is the tendency. Once that has finished asserting itself, due to the fact that whatever vase or cloth one may encounter, they are two different things, they appear to the conceptual state of mind *as two abstractions* that appear as though they have two different substances. Thus they are just closely labeled as having different substances.

Appendix Eleven: A Difficult Point from Gyaltsab Je

An Excerpt from *Lamp on the Path to Freedom: A Detailed Explanation of the “Commentary on Valid Perception”*¹

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། དཔེར་བརྗོད་ན། རྟོག་པ་ལ་བྱམ་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ལོག་པར་སྒྲུང་བ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་བཀག་པ་ན་རང་གི་
མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པའི་བྱམ་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ལོག་པར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡང་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་འདྲོག་མི་ཤེས་པར་འགྱུར་ལ། བྱམ་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་
ལས་ལོག་པར་སྒྲུང་བའི་རང་མཚན་ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱབ་པ་ན་རྟོག་པ་ལ་བྱམ་པ་མ་ཡིན་པར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡང་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མི་
ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་ཤིང་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་ཁས་ལེན་དགོས་ལ་རྟོག་པས་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་དུ་འདྲོག་མི་ཤེས་པར་འགྱུར།

Here is the second point [of a critical analysis of the brief teaching explaining the presentation of ultimate and deceptive, by way of eliminating the idea that the relationship between the subject matter and the reason cannot be established by a reason of nature: Recognizing the main point that is so difficult to realize regarding why the doubt has arisen]. To give an example:

If you were to refute that the appearance, to a conceptual state of mind, of the opposite of all that is not a vase could ever be established through its own characteristics, then you would also have refuted anything that could appear *as* the opposite of all that is not a vase-established-through-its-own-characteristics. Thus you would not know how to posit it.

If you were to establish that the inherent characteristics of what is appearing as the opposite of all that is not the vase *do* exist, then you would also not have refuted that what appears to the conceptual state of mind – which is not the vase – could ever be established through its own characteristics. Then you would have to agree that it was established through its own characteristics; but then you would not know how to posit it as being merely labeled by a conceptual state of mind.

སྤྱི་མཚན་དངོས་པོ་ཡིན་པ་བཀག་ན། དངོས་པོ་ཉིད་ཀྱང་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་ཆད་མས་སྐྱབ་མི་ཤེས་པར་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། དངོས་པོ་ཁས་སྒྲུང་ས་ན་
སྤྱི་མཚན་ཡང་དངོས་པོར་ཁས་ལེན་དགོས་པ་ཀྱན་རྗེས་ཙམ་དུ་ཡོད་པ་དང་དོན་དམ་དུ་ཡོད་པའི་ཆོས་གཉིས་གཅིག་ཆད་མར་བཟུང་ན་
ས་ཅིག་ཤོས་སྤྱན་འབྱེན་པའི་འགལ་འདྲུ་འབའ་ཞིག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བ་འདི། གཞུང་ལུགས་འདིའི་རྟོགས་དཀའ་བའི་གནས་ཀྱི་གཙོ་བོ་དམ་པ་
ཡིན་ནོ།

If you refute the idea that what is marked by abstracted characteristics could ever *be* the functioning thing, you would have also refuted functioning things themselves. Then you would not know how to establish them with a valid perception. If you agree that there are functioning things, then you have to accept what is marked by abstracted characteristics *as* the functioning thing.

With respect to these two things – those that exist as merely deceptive and those that exist

¹ rgyal tshab rje dar ma rin chen, *tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le 'ur byas pa rnam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, rgyal tshab rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha*, Drepung Loseling Library Society Edition, 2002, 66-68. Cf. Dreyfus, 1997, 116-119, esp. his Chapter 5, endnote 38, p. 493.

ultimately – when holding one with a valid perception, it could only be contradictory for the other to be annihilated. This is the sacred, principal point of this system, so difficult to realize.

ཁོ་མཉམས་པ་རང་མཚན་ཉིད་ལེ་ཡུལ་དུ་ཁས་ཐུངས་ན་སྒྲིབ་འཕྲུག་ཏུ་སོང་ནས་ཆད་མ་གཞན་དོན་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་བ་དང་སྒྲིབ་དང་ཉམས་ལ་སོགས་པ་སེལ་འཕྲུག་ཏུ་ཁས་ཐུངས་ན། དེ་དག་རང་མཚན་ལ་ཡེ་མ་རེག་པར་འཕྲུག་ཚུལ་ནམས་སྒྲོམ་པ་ཙམ་འབའ་ཞིག་གོ་སྒྲིབ་པའི་ལོག་ཉིད་ནམས་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར་རོ།

Not realizing this, all these wrong ideas would ensue: You would think that if you were to accept that things marked by their own characteristics are the objective field of conceptual states of mind, then if they are accessed by engaging in a proof that establishes something positively, the other kind of valid perception² would be rendered meaningless. You would also think that if you accept that sounds and reasons and so forth engage through exclusion, then they could never ever touch the things marked by their own characteristics. Then you would think that all these ways to engage [an object] are nothing but preposterous assumptions.

ཁོ་དོར་ན་ཉིད་པས་བཏགས་ཙམ་གྱི་ཆོས་ལ་ཆད་མའི་གཞལ་བྱ་སྒྲིབ་མེད་རང་མཚན་དང་མཚུངས་པར་འདོག་མི་ཤེས་ན། སྒྲིབ་ལུགས་དམ་པ་འདིའི་གཞན་ལེགས་པར་ཉིད་པ་མི་སྤྲོད་ཅིང་། ཁྱད་པར་ཐ་སྙད་ཙམ་དུ་ཡོད་པའི་ཀླན་རྩིབ་ཀྱི་དོན་མི་ཉིད་པས་པར་འགྱུར་ལ། དེ་ཉིད་དང་དོན་གྲེད་རྒྱས་པའི་གཞི་མཐུན་ཁས་ཐུངས་ན་ལུགས་འདིའི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་དོན་དམ་གྱི་ཚུལ་མི་ཉིད་པས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། རྗེ་སྐད་བཤད་པའི་ཡུལ་གྱི་གནས་ལུགས་དང་། སྒྲིབ་འཕྲུག་ཚུལ་གྱི་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པ་མི་ཉིད་པས་པ། གཞན་སེལ་དང་སེལ་བས་འཕྲུག་ཚུལ་གྱི་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པ་མི་ཉིད་པས་པ་བྱས་པ་ཡིན་པས། འདིར་གཞན་སེལ་གྱི་ནམ་གཞན་རྒྱས་པར་མཛད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

In short, if you do not understand how to posit, with respect to a thing that is merely labeled with a conceptual state of mind, that the thing apprehended by a valid perception is without fault, and *is the same* as what is marked by its own characteristics, then in general, it will be impossible for you to realize well the crucial points of this sacred system, and especially, you will not realize the meaning of something deceptive, that exists by mere convention. If you hold that what is deceptive and what performs a function have a shared basis, then you will not realize the unique way of being “ultimate” in this system.

Since you have not realized the way an objective field actually abides, as it is explained here, and since you have not realized how a mind engages in a way that is not wrong, and since you have not realized how the exclusion of everything else, and the way of engaging through exclusion, are not wrong, here we will make an extensive presentation of the “exclusion of other things.”

ཁག་སྒྲིབ་པ་ནི། ལུགས་གཞན་ནས་དབང་ཤེས་ལ་གཟུགས་སྒྲིབ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བར་སྒྲིབ་ཞིང་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལྟར་དེ་དག་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་མ་ཞེགས་ན། དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་མི་ཉིད་པ་ཤིང་། དེ་མཉམས་ན་གཟུགས་སྒྲིབ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཀླན་རྩིབ་བདེན་པར་མི་ཉིད་པ་ལ། རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བྱུང་བ་ཞེགས་པས་དོན་གྲེད་རྒྱས་པ་ཞེགས་ན། ཆད་ལྟ་འབའ་ཞིག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བས། གཟུགས་སྒྲིབ་ལ་སོགས་པར་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྒྲིབ་པ་དོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་བྱ་བ་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པའི་གཟུགས་སྒྲིབ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཀླན་རྩིབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པར་ནམ་པར་བཞག་པ་མཛད་དོ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་དང་དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ་སོགས་འབྲས་ལ། གཟུགས་

² That is, a deductive valid perception reached through the negation of excluding all that a thing is not.

ས་སྒྲ་སོགས་དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཞེས་ན་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པར་མི་འགྲུབ་པས། དེ་དག་བདེན་པས་སྒྲོང་བའི་རིགས་པའི་རྣམ་གཞག་རྒྱས་པར་མཛད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དཔེ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ལུགས་འདིར་ནི་དངོས་པོ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་བཞག་པ་མ་གཏོགས་བཀག་པ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་ཅིང་། རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་ན་འབྲས་སུ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་བྱ་བ་མི་རུང་བའི་ཚུལ་འབའ་ཞིག་ཅུང་ཤུ་བཏོན་ན་ནས་འཆད་པར་མཛད་དོ།

Here is the third point [expressing it through the example of the other system]. In the other system,³ form, sound, etc., appear to the sense consciousnesses as though they were established through their own characteristics, but if you do not refute their being established through their own characteristics – that is, if you do not refute that they could exist the way they appear – then you will not realize ultimate reality. If you do not realize that, you will not realize form, sound, and the rest as deceptive reality. If, by refuting their being established through their own characteristics, you were to refute their performing a function, this would be nothing but the view that everything has stopped. Thus [in that system], they set forth as the ultimate reality the fact that form, sound, and the rest are empty of any nature of their own, and they set forth as deceptive reality the form, sound, and the rest that *can* act to bring about a result.

Since existing through its own nature and existing ultimately, etc., are all the same, if you have not refuted that form, sound, and the rest could ever exist ultimately, you will not have established them as deceptive reality. Thus they set forth extensively the reasonings why those are empty of existing as real.

According to the example [described just above], in this system [of Dharmakīrti] – except for the presentation of functioning things having characteristics of their own – *they have nothing whatsoever to refute*. The only thing that they explain as having to be skillfully extracted, is the manner in which “if something is not established through its own characteristics, it would be unsuitable for bringing about a result.”

ཡང་སྤྱི་མཆན་རྟོག་པ་ལ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་སྤང་ཞིང་། སྤང་བ་ལྟར་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མ་ཞེས་ན། དེ་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་མི་འགྲུབ་པས་དེ་འགོག་པའི་རྣམ་གཞག་རྒྱས་པར་འཆད་ཅིང་། རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་པས། དེས་འབྲས་སུ་མི་སྐྱེད་པའི་ཚུལ་རྒྱས་པར་སྟོན་བཞེད་ནས། གང་ཕྱིར་དངོས་ཀྱན་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཞེས་སོགས་གསུངས་ཤིང་། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་ལུགས་ཅིག་ཤོས་དང་སྤྱན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱུང་བར་བསྟན་བཞེད་ནས་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་དང་མཚུངས་པར་ས་སྒྲ་སྟོར་དང་དབྱིག་གཉེན་དང་སྒྲོ་བཏན་གྱི་གཞུང་ལས་ཀྱང་འདི་ཁོ་ན་ལྟར་གསལ་བས་ལུགས་དེ་གཉིས་སོ་སོར་འབྱེད་ན་མཁས་པར་འགྱུར་གྱི། གཅིག་ཏུ་བསྐྱེད་སྐྱེད་བྱེད་ན་གཉིས་ཀ་མ་རྟོགས་པའི་རྟགས་ཡང་དག་ཡིན་པས། གྱེ་ཤེས་པ་རྒྱུང་བ་དག་དུ་ར་ཟོས་པ་མིན་ནས་མིག་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་བྱེས་ལ་སྟོས་ཤིག།

Furthermore, things marked with abstracted characteristics appear to conceptual states of mind as though they were established through their own characteristics, and if one does not refute their being established through their own characteristics in the way they appear, then they could not be established as deceptive. Thus [Dharmakīrti] explains extensively the presentation on how to refute that, and, wishing to show extensively how, insofar as things are not established through their own characteristics, they do not

³ That is, the Middle Way Consequence view.

produce results, he states: ⁴

Because all functioning things by their own nature
[rest in their own essences, each to their own] . . .

This “by their own nature” is shown in a way that is distinctive and not shared with that complementary system.

Since in the cycle of sacred treatises on the *Levels* [i.e., Asaṅga’s five treatises], and in the works of Vasubandhu and Sthiramati, things are delineated in a way that is like this system alone, you must become a master of how to divide the two systems from one another. If you speak in such a way as to mix them up as one, this is a perfect reason for not realizing either of them. Thus, O, you of small intelligence, have you perhaps ingested some *datura*⁵? I beg you to wipe your eyes again and again and then look.

དེ་ནི་འདི་དབྱུང་པར་བྱ་སྟེ། རང་མཚན་ཡིན་ན་ཡུལ་དང་དུས་དང་ངོ་མོ་མ་འདྲེས་པར་གནས་ལ། དེ་རང་མཚན་གྱི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་
འཇོག་ཐོག་གྲང་ཡིན་ཞིང་། ཡུལ་མ་འདྲེས་པ་ནི། འཇར་ན་གནས་ན་ཐུབ་ན་གནས་པར་འགལ་བ་དང་། དུས་མ་འདྲེས་པ་སྔ་དྲོ་སྟེས་ན་
སྔ་དྲོ་སྟེས་པར་འགལ་བའི་དོན་དང་། ངོ་མོ་མ་འདྲེས་པ། ཁ་མོ་ལ་ཡོད་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ཡིན་ན་སེར་སྐྱ་ལ་ཡོད་པར་འགལ་བའི་དོན་དུ་སྟོང་
བར་བྱེད་ཅིང་དངོས་པོ་དང་རང་མཚན་དོན་གཅིག་པས་རྟགས་ཡང་དག་ཡིན་ན་དངོས་པོ་མིན་པར་འཆད་པར་བྱེད་དོ།

Now, analyze this: If something has its own characteristics, then it remains unmixed within its own location, at its own time, and with its own essence. This is the unique meaning of an actual object that has its own characteristics, in terms of its conceptual isolation. An unmixed location means that if something is staying in the east, it would be a contradiction for it to stay in the west. Unmixed time means that if something takes place in the morning, it would be a contradiction for it to take place in the afternoon. Unmixed essence is said to mean that if a functioning thing has many colors, then it would be contradictory for it to exist where there is pale yellow. Since a “functioning thing” and “what has its own characteristics” have the same referent, it is explained that if something is a correct reason [i.e., an unchanging logical entity] then it cannot be a functioning thing.

⁴ See Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavarttika-kārikā* (*tshad ma rnam ‘grel*), Toh. 4210, sde dge, mdo ‘grel, vol. ce, 96a: གཤམ་གྱི་དངོས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས། རང་རང་ངོ་མོ་ལ་གནས་ཀྱིས།

⁵ A highly toxic hallucinogenic plant long known to Indian culture.

Appendix Twelve: On the Nature of the Buddhas' Omniscience

An Excerpt from Je Tsongkhapa's *Ocean of Reasoning, An Explanation of "Incisive Wisdom: Root Verses on the Middle Way"*.¹

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། ལུགས་འདི་ལ་སངས་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་སང་ཇི་སྟེང་པ་མཐེན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་འདོད་དམ་མི་འདོད། གཉིས་པ་ལྟར་ན། འབྲུག་པ་ལ་ས། ལྟོབས་བཅུ་འཐེན་ཚུལ་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་མི་འཐད་ལ། སངས་རྒྱུས་ཐམས་ཅད་མཐེན་པར་ཁས་སྐྱབ་དུ་མི་བྱང་བས་རང་གི་ལྟོན་པ་ལ་སྐྱར་བ་བཏབ་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དང་པོ་ལྟར་ན། གྲེས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་བཞིན་དུ་དེར་སྒྲུང་བ་མེད་ན་ནི་འགའ་ཡང་འཁྲུལ་བར་མི་འགྱུར་བས་ཡོད་དོ། །དེའི་ཆེ་དེ་རྣམས་སངས་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་ཇི་སྟེང་པ་མཐེན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ་སྒྲུང་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཇི་སྟེང་སྒྲུང་བ་ལྟར་གྱི་དོན་དུ་མེད་པས་འཁྲུལ་བར་འགྱུར་རོ་སྟུམ་ན། དེ་ལ་ཇི་སྟེང་བཤད་པའི་སྟོན་དུ་འགྱུར་བས་ཕྱོགས་གཉིས་པ་ནི་མི་འདོད་དོ།

(491) Here is the second part [eliminating an argument that the gaze that sees all things in their variety would not make sense]. In this system, do you accept or do you not accept the primordial wisdom that knows all things in their variety?

If the latter, then the statement in *Entering the Middle Way* about the “way in which the ten powers are known” would also not make sense. Since then it would be inappropriate to affirm that a Buddha knows all things, you would end up denigrating our Teacher.

If the former, suppose you think: “If there were no such appearances – of what appears to the spiritually immature *as though* it were established through characteristics of its own, even though it is not – then this [omniscient knowledge] would exist without ever becoming mistaken in any way. But then all those things would have to appear to the primordial wisdom of a Buddha that knows things in their variety. If it were like that, however, then since nothing exists in actuality according to the way it appears, wouldn’t that [knowledge] turn out to be mistaken?”

Thus, since it would turn into the problem explained in these words, we do not accept the second position, either.

།དེ་ཡང་འབྲུག་འགྲེལ་དུ་མདོ་བྲངས་པ་ལས། ཡང་གིང་རྟའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ཅན་གྱི་ས་ཕྱོགས་ན་སྒྲུང་བར་མ་གྱུར་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་གང་དག་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་ལ་སྒྲུང་བར་གྱུར་པ་དེ་དག་ནི་ཆེས་མང་གི། ལྟོང་གསུམ་གྱི་སྟོང་ཆེན་པོའི་འཛིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཁམས་ཀྱི་ལྟ་དང་མི་རྣམས་ནི་དེ་ལྟ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་ཕྱི་རོལ་པའི་བྲང་སྟོང་མདོན་གེས་ལྟ་དང་ལྟན་པ་དང་ཉན་རང་དང་བྱང་སེམས་ལ། ཤིང་རྟའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ཅན་གྱི་ས་ཕྱོགས་ན་མི་སྒྲུང་བ་སངས་རྒྱུས་ལ་སྒྲུང་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་ཆེས་མང་བར་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་སྒྲུང་ནས་མཐེན་པ་ཡིན་གྱི་མི་སྒྲུང་བ་མིན་ནོ།

¹ *dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ba, 245a1-247a6 (491-495), emphasis mine. Cf. Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, Jay Garfield and Ngawang Samten, 2006, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press), 493-496.

Now, in a sūtra quoted in the commentary to *Entering the Middle Way*, it says:²

Even those sentient beings who do not appear within the space of ground covered by the wheel of a chariot, appear to Those Gone Thus. Those are exceedingly many, but the humans and gods of the realms of the worlds of a billion-fold great galaxy are not like that.

It is saying that what does not appear – to those non-Buddhist sages with the five kinds of clairvoyance, or to the listeners, or bodhisattvas – within the space of ground covered by the wheel of a chariot, are the exceedingly many living beings who do appear to Buddhas. *So they are known insofar as they appear, and it is not that they do not appear.*

།སྤང་བའི་ཡུལ་ཡང་མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་མ་བསྐྱད་པའི་ཇི་སྟོན་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་མཆན་དཔེ་སྟོན་པ་དང་། མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱད་པའི་ཇི་སྟོན་པ་མ་དག་པའི་སྟོན་བཅུད་ལ་སྟོན་པ་གཉིས་སོ། །དེའི་དང་སོ་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་སར་ལྷོག་པའི་དོན་མེད་ལ་གཉིས་པ་ནི་ས་དེར་རྒྱ་ལོག་པས་ལྷོག་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །སྤང་ཚུལ་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་མཆན་དཔེ་མ་རིག་པ་མ་སྤངས་པའི་གང་ཟག་ལ་སྤང་བ་ན་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་བྱུབ་བཞིན་དུ་དེར་སྤང་བ་ནི། ཡུལ་དེ་མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་བྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་མཆན་གྱིས་མིན་གྱི་ཡུལ་ཅན་དེ་མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱད་པའི་དབང་གིས་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ནི་གང་ཟག་གཞན་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་སྤང་བ་ཅས་ཀྱི་ངོས་ནས་ཡུལ་ཅན་དེ་ལ་སྤང་བ་མིན་པར་རང་ངོས་ནས་དེ་ལྟར་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

As for the appearing objective field, the variety of things are of two types: (1) those that are not contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance, namely, the signs and marks of a Buddha, and (2) those that are contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance, namely, the impure vessels and their inhabitants, and so on.

(492) As for the first, at the level of a Buddha there is no sense of their being excluded, and as for the second, since at that level of a Buddha their causes have been undone, they are excluded.

As for the way they appear, if the signs and marks of a Buddha appear to a person who has not abandoned ignorance, then even though the signs and marks are not established through any characteristics of their own, they appear as though they were.

That *objective field* is not something that has arisen due to the power of the tendencies for ignorance, but the *subject state of mind* appears due to the power of being contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance.

This is because the signs and marks are not things that appear to that subject state of mind *only* from the perspective of the way in which they appear to other persons [i.e., non-Buddhas]; rather, they are things that appear in the way that they do from [a Buddha's] own side.

།སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཇི་སྟོན་པ་མཐུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ་མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱད་པའི་དོན་སྤང་བ་ན། མ་རིག་པའི་བསྐྱད་པ་ཡོད་པའི་གང་ཟག་ལ་དེ་དག་སྤང་བ་ཁོ་ནའི་སྟོན་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་ལ་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་གྱི། གཞན་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་སྤང་བ་ལ་མ་ལྟོས་པར་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་རང་ངོས་ནས་སྤང་བ་མིན་ནོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་གཟུགས་སྤྲ་སྟོན་པ་རང་གི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་བྱུབ་བཞིན་དུ་དེར་སྤང་བ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་མཐུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ་མ་རིག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱད་པའི་དབང་གིས་སྤང་བ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

² Jay Garfield and Ngawang Samten identify this as the *Tathāgatamahākaraṇīrdeśa-sūtra* (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying rje chen po nges par bstan pa'i mdo*, Toh. 147, sde dge bka' 'gyur, mdo sde, vol. *pa*), 199a. See Garfield and Samten, 2006, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 493.

ན་པ་ལ་ཡང་མ་རིག་པ་དང་ལྡན་པ་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་སྒྲུབ་བའི་ངོས་ནས་ཡིན་གྱི། གང་ཟག་དེ་ལ་དེར་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལ་མ་ལྟོས་པར་སངས་རྒྱས་རང་གི་ངོས་ནས་དེ་ལྟར་སྒྲུབ་བའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་མཐུན་པ་མིན་པས་དེ་སྒྲུབ་པས་འབྲུལ་བར་འགྱུར་བའི་དོན་མེད་དོ།

If actual objects contaminated by the tendencies for ignorance appear to the primordial wisdom of a Buddha that knows things in their variety, then they appear to the Buddha only insofar as they appear to persons who have the contaminations of ignorance. But without relying on the way they appear to others, they are not appearances from the Buddha's own side.

Therefore, the form, sound, and the rest, which are not established through any characteristics of their own, but appear as though they are, are something *which are known by the Buddha from the perspective of the way in which they appear to those who have ignorance*. But since, without relying upon the way in which they appear to those persons, they are *not* something that could ever be known according to a way they appear from the Buddha's own side, there is no sense in which the Buddha becomes mistaken due to their appearance.

།དེ་ལྟར་ན་རི་སྟེང་པ་མཐུན་པའི་རང་ངོས་ནས་ནི། དངོས་པོ་ཐམས་ཅད་བདག་མེད་པ་དང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མེད་པའི་ངོ་བོར་བརྟན་པ་སྒྱུ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་གི་བདེན་པར་མི་སྒྲུབ་ལ། མ་རིག་པ་དང་ལྡན་པ་རྣམས་ལ་སྒྲུབ་བའི་ཆ་ནས་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་ལ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ན་གང་ཟག་གཞན་དེ་ལ་བདེན་པར་སྒྲུབ་བར་ཤར་བ་ཙམ་མོ།

In this way, from the perspective of the knowledge of things in their variety, all functioning things appear as illusions – as false in the sense that they are without self – and have an essence which lacks any nature; but they do not appear as real. If they are to appear to that primordial wisdom insofar as they do appear to those with ignorance, however, *then they merely dawn as the appearance of being real that appears to those other persons*.

།རིགས་པ་བྱུག་ཅུ་བ་ལས་ཀྱང་། དངོས་ལ་མཁས་པ་རྣམས་གྱིས་ནི། །དངོས་པོ་མི་རྟག་སྒྱུ་བའི་ཆོས། །གསོག་དང་སྟོང་བ་བདག་མེད་པ། །རྣམ་པར་དབེན་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་མཐོང་། །གནས་མེད་དམིགས་པ་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། །རྩ་བ་མེད་ཅིང་གནས་པ་མེད། །མ་རིག་རྒྱ་ལས་ཤིན་ཏུ་བྱུང་། །རྩ་བའི་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་པོ་མེད། །དེ་ཐའི་གོང་ཁྲུང་འབྲུག་སྟེ། །ཆོངས་པའི་གོང་ཁྲུང་མི་བཟད་པ། །འགོ་བ་སྒྱུ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་།

(493) The *Sixty Verses on Reasoning*³ states, moreover:

Those who are wise with respect to what is
See functioning things as changing, misleading things;
Without self, empty, unreal,
And totally set apart.

What has nowhere to stay cannot be perceived.
Without root and without abode;
Sprung entirely from ignorance as their cause
[Utterly devoid of beginning, middle, or end.]⁴

³ *Yuktiṣāṣṭhikākārikā (rigs pa drug cu pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa)*, Toh. 3825, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. tsa, 21a7-21b1.

Like the plantain tree, they have no core;
 Like a city of ghosts,
 Or the unbearable cities of the insane,
 Wanderers appear like an illusion.

ཁེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་ཆེགས་བཅད་ཕྱི་མ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མཆོམས་སྟོར་དུ་འཕགས་པ་མཛད་པ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་རྣམས་ཁོ་ནས་དེ་ལྟར་གཟིགས་
 པ་འབའ་ཞིག་ཏུ་མ་ཟད་ཀྱི་སྟོབ་དཔོན་ཡང་རང་གི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་ནས་ཀྱང་དེ་ལྟར་རྟོགས་པར་གསུངས་པས། ཆེགས་བཅད་དང་པོ་ལྟ་
 ར་གཟིགས་པ་ནི་མཛད་པ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པའི་འཕགས་པའི་གཟིགས་ཚུལ་ལོ། རྗེ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་རྗེ་སྟེད་པ་མཐུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱང་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་མི་
 དད་པས་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་གཅིག་གིས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་བྱ་ཀྱན་ལ་བྱུང་བར་བཤད་པ་དང་ཡང་མི་འགལ་ཏེ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆོས་སྟུང་གཟུ་
 གས་སྟུ་གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ཡིན་ཀྱང་དེ་གཉིས་པན་ཚུན་ཡིན་མི་དགོས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ཡེ་ཤེས་གཉིས་ཀྱང་དེ་དང་འབྲེལ།

In the bridge to the latter two stanzas, not only are things gazed upon in this way by those, and those alone, who have entirely completed the activities of āryas; rather, it is stated that even this master [Nāgārjuna], in reliance upon his own understanding, has realized things in this way. The gaze that sees according to the first stanza is the manner in which āryas see who have entirely completed their activities.

Since the primordial wisdom that knows (1) how things exist and (2) the variety in which they exist is, furthermore, inseparable in essence, this also does not contradict the explanation that all knowable things are covered by the single primordial wisdom of a Buddha.

The *dharmakāya* of primordial wisdom and the holy body of form are both of a single essence; nonetheless, just as they need not be mutually identical, the two forms of primordial wisdom also exist in a similar way.

ཁགསུམ་པ་ནི། རོན་དམ་པའི་བདེན་པ་ལ་རྒྱས་པར་དབྱེ་ན་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་བཅུ་བྱུག་དང་། འབྲིང་དུ་བྱེ་ན་དངོས་པོ་དང་དངོས་མེད་དང་རང་
 དང་གཞན་གྱི་ངོ་བོ་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་དེ་བཞི་དང་། བསྐྱུས་ན་གང་ཟག་དང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བདག་མེད་གཉིས་སུ་འཇུག་པར་གསུངས་སོ། ཁགུང་ག་
 ཞན་ལས་ནི། རོན་དམ་པ་ལ་རོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་དངོས་དང་མཐུན་པའི་རོན་དམ་པ་གཉིས་བཤད་དེ། བདེན་གཉིས་ལས། སྟེ་ལ་སོགས་
 པ་བཀག་པ་ཡང་། ཡང་དག་པ་དང་མཐུན་པའི་ཕྱིར། རོན་དམ་ཡིན་པར་ཁོ་བོ་འདོད། ཁེས་དང་དབྱུ་མ་སྒྲུང་བ་ལས་ཀྱང་། དེ་ལྟར་སྟེ་
 པ་མེད་པ་འདི་ཡང་རོན་དམ་དང་མཐུན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོན་དམ་པ་ཞེས་བྱའི་དངོས་སུ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དངོས་སུ་ནི་རོན་དམ་པ་སྟོས་པ་ཐམས་
 ཅད་ལས་འདས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། ཁེས་གསུངས་སོ།

Here is the third part [of an earlier section: An explanation of the divisions of ultimate reality]. If we are to make extensive divisions within ultimate reality, there would be the eighteen kinds of emptiness, and if a medium division, then there are four kinds: the essential emptiness of functioning things and of those with no function, of oneself and of other. In briefest form, it is said that one can engage in the two kinds of lack of a self, that of persons and that of things.

(494) According to another treatise, it is explained that within the ultimate there is the

⁴ རོག་མ་དབྱུས་མཐའ་རྣམས་པར་སྒྲུངས། This line does not appear in Tsongkhapa's quotation, but is in the root text. Given the incomplete middle stanza, it is difficult to tell exactly which lines Tsongkhapa is referring to when he comments below, "In the bridge to the latter two stanzas . . ."

actual ultimate reality and a concordant ultimate. It states in the *Two Realities*:⁵

Refutation of arising and the rest, moreover,
since in accord with what is correct
we assert to be an ultimate.

The *Light of the Middle Way*⁶ states too:

In this way, since the lack of arising is also in accord with the ultimate, it is called, “ultimate,” though it is not actually so; because the actual ultimate is beyond every elaboration.

།དེ་ལ་སྒྲོས་པ་ནི་འདིར་ཉགས་ཀྱི་དགག་བྱའི་སྒྲོས་པ་ཙམ་མ་ཡིན་གྱི་སྤང་བའི་སྒྲོས་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ལས་འདས་པའི་ཚུལ་ནི་དེ་ཁོ་
ན་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་གཟིགས་པའི་འོང་གཉིས་སྤང་གི་སྒྲོས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱབ་པ་ལ་བྱའི། སྤང་བའི་སྒྲོས་པ་མེད་པ་ལ་མི་བྱ་སྟེ་གཞན་
དུ་ན་ཆོས་ཉིད་དང་ཆོས་ཅན་སྤང་བའི་སྒྲོས་པ་གཉིས་ཡ་མི་འབྲལ་བས་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་མི་སྲིད་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་
ཕྱང་པའི་ཆོས་དང་གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་མེད་ཉགས་ཀྱི་དགག་བྱའི་སྒྲོས་པ་བཅད་ཙམ་ནི་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་མ་མཁུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཟག་པ་མེད་པས་རྟེ
ད་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་འོང་གཉིས་སྤང་གི་སྒྲོས་པ་ཡང་ཞི་བ་ཡིན་པས་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པའོ།

Now here, “elaboration” is not merely the elaboration of something refuted by a reason; rather it is the elaboration of *appearances* as well. As for how it is “beyond” that, from the perspective of the gaze that sees suchness directly, it means that all elaborations of dual appearance vanish. But do not think that means there are no elaborations of appearance. Because if it were otherwise, since the pair of the very nature of the thing and the elaboration that appears to have the properties of a thing, have always been inseparable, it would turn out that ultimate reality is impossible.

Therefore, the mere cutting off of the elaboration of what is to be refuted by a reason – the lack of self to things that are the heaps and the lack of self to a person – is the meaning of what is found by the immaculate wisdom that knows *how* things exist. Thus from that perspective, since elaborations of dual appearance with respect to the heaps and a person are also put to rest, it is ultimate reality.

།འོན་ཀྱང་དོན་དམ་པའི་སྒྲེ་བ་སོགས་ཕྱང་པོ་དང་གང་ཟག་གི་སྟེང་དུ་བཀག་པའི་མ་ཡིན་དགག་གི་སྟོང་པ་ནི་སྟོང་གཞི་དེ་དག་མངོན་སུ
མ་དུ་སྤང་བའི་ཐ་སྟངས་འདི་ཆད་མ་མིག་ཤེས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་སྤང་དགོས་པས། རང་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་མཐོང་བའི་སྟོང་པའི་གཉིས་སྤང་དང་
བཅས་པར་འཆར་གྱི་གཉིས་སྤང་དང་བྲལ་བར་མི་འཆར་བས་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པས་བ་ཀྱན་རྫོབ་མཆན་ཉིད་པའོ།

On the other hand, regarding the emptiness that is an affirming negation, which refutes an ultimate arising and so on that could exist *on top of* the heaps and person, those bases for being empty must appear to an eye consciousness and so forth that are conventionally valid perceptions of a directly manifest appearance.

Thus, in the face of a state of mind that sees something directly, that [object] dawns together with the appearance of being dual, while it will not dawn without the appearance of being dual. Therefore, this is a nominal ultimate, while it is a definitive instance of

⁵ *Jñānagarbha (Tib. *ye shes snying po*), *Verses Distinguishing the Two Realities*, *Satyadvaya-vibhaṅga-kārikā* (*bden pa gnyis rnam par 'byed pa'i tshig le'u byas pa*), Toh. 3881, sde dge bstan 'gyur, dbu ma, vol. sa.

⁶ Kamalaśīla, *Madhyamakāloka* (*dbu ma snang ba*), Toh. 3887, sde dge, dbu ma, vol. sa.

what is deceptive.

།བདེན་གཉིས་རང་འགྲེལ་ལས་ཀྱང་། ཡང་དག་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དངོས་པོ་སྣང་བ་ན་མི་སྣང་བས་ལོག་པའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཡིན་པ་བཞིན་སྟེ། ཡང་དག་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བཞག་པ་ཡང་དགག་གཞིའི་དངོས་པོ་སྣང་བའི་ཆོ་ལ་མི་སྣང་བས་ལོག་པའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་འགྱུར་རོ་ཞེས་པའི་ལན་སྟེ། དངོས་པོ་མེད་པོ་དང་ཐ་མི་དད་པའི་བྱིར་མི་སྣང་བ་མ་ཡིན་ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། ཉགས་ཀྱི་དགག་བྱ་བཅད་ཅམ་གྱི་སྟོས་པ་མེད་པར་དགག་པ་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་དངོས་སུ་མི་སྣང་བས་དེ་མིན་གྱི། མ་ཡིན་དགག་ནི་དགག་གཞིའི་དངོས་པོ་གང་ལ་སྣང་བ་དེ་ལ་སྣང་བར་བཞེད་པའི་ལུགས་སོ།

(495) The auto-commentary to the *Two Realities*⁷ states, furthermore: “[Someone says:] If functioning things appear with an absolute arising and the rest, then when those do not appear, they are ‘wrong deceptives.’ In the same way, when an absolute arising and the rest are refuted, moreover, the functioning thing that was the *basis* of refutation does not appear to the appearing state of mind. Thus it would turn out to have been a ‘wrong deceptive.’” In answer to this, it states, “Since inseparable from the essence of the functioning thing, it is not that it does not appear.”

Insofar as it lacks those elaborations that were simply cut off – what was to be refuted by a reason – what was refuted does not actually appear to the consciousness of the eye and so forth. So it is not *that*, but this is the way we do affirm, *as an appearance*, what appears to whomever the functioning thing that was the basis of refutation does appear, with respect to a negation that affirms something else.

།རིགས་པ་འདིས་སངས་རྒྱུ་གྱི་རྗེ་སྟེང་བ་མཐུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་འཕགས་པ་འོག་མའི་རྗེས་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་མ་ཡིན་དགག་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་དོན་འཇལ་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་རྣམ་གྲངས་པའི་དོན་དམ་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །གང་དག་འཕགས་པའི་མཉམ་གཞག་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་སྟོས་པ་རྣམ་པར་བཅད་ཅམ་གྱི་སྟོས་བྲལ་ཉོགས་སོ་ཞེས་བྱས་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་རངས་ཤིང་དགའ་ལ། སྟོས་པ་མེད་པར་དགག་པ་འཇལ་ལོ་ཞེས་བྱས་ན་མི་བཟོད་པ་ནི། དགག་བྱ་རྣམ་པར་བཅད་པ་ཅམ་ཞིག་མེད་དགག་གི་དོན་ཡིན་པ་མ་ཉོགས་པར་མེད་དགག་ཐམས་ཅད་རི་བོང་རྟ་དང་འབྲ་བའི་ཅང་མེད་དུ་འདོད་པའི་སྟོའི་སྟོན་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཅིར་ཡང་མ་བྱུ་ན་མེད་དགག་ཡིན་པར་འགལ་བའི་བྱིར་རོ།

It is with this reasoning that you should understand, as classifiable within the category of “ultimate,” all those objective fields encountered with the meaning of being “like an illusion” – which is an affirming negation – by the primordial wisdom of Buddhas that knows things in their variety, and by the aftermath wisdom of lower āryas.

For some who take immense joy and delight in saying that “an ārya’s wisdom of meditative equipoise realizes the freedom from elaboration that has simply eliminated elaboration,” it is intolerable to say that “the ārya encounters the *negation* that lacks any elaboration.”

But this is the fault of a mind that wants to say a “simple negation” is a total absence of everything, like the horns of a rabbit, without realizing that the meaning of a simple negation refers to that which has simply eliminated *what was to be refuted*. Because if nothing at all has been established, this stands in contradiction to being a simple negation.

⁷ *Satyadvayavibhaṅgavṛtti* (*bden pa gnyis rnam par 'byed pa'i 'grel pa*), Toh. 3882, dpe bsdur ma, bstan 'gyur, dbu ma, vol. *sa*.

Appendix Thirteen: On Discernment of Visions

An Excerpt from *Twenty-One Brief Pieces on the Guhyasamāja and Such*¹

||བཙུ་བྱ་ག་མ་གསུམ་རིགས་དབྱེད་ཡིག་ཚུང་ལ། བསྐྱུ་རྒྱུ་གཉིས་ལས། དང་པོ་ནི། རྗེ་བཙུན་དམ་པ་རྣམས་ལ་བྱ་ག་འཆལ་ལོ།
 |རྣམ་གསུམ་རིགས་དབྱེད་གདམས་པ་ནི། བསྐྱོམས་པས་ལྷ་རང་གི་ཞལ་མཐོང་བ་དང་། ཅ་ནང་དུ་རྒྱུ་ཞུགས་ནས་ལྷ་མཐོང་བ་དང་།
 གདོན་གྱིས་སྤྱལ་ནས་ལྷ་ལྷའི་གཟུགས་མཐོང་བ་དང་། རིགས་གསུམ་འབྱུང་བས་གང་ཡིན་བརྟག་པ་ནི། ལུས་གནད་རྗེ་རྗེའི་སྤྱིལ་གྱུང་ལ་
 ག་པ་མཉམ་གཞག་སོགས་རྣམ་སྣང་གི་ཆོས་བདུན་ལེགས་པར་བྱས་ཏེ། སྤྱིན་མཆམས་ཀྱི་ཁྲོ་བོའི་སྤྱན་དབུས་མ་ཡོད་པ། དབུ་མའི་ཡ་
 ར་སྤྱིལ་བྱ་ག་པའི་ཐད་དུ་མིག་གཉིས་བྱེན་དུ་ལྷ་སྤངས་གཅིག་ཏུ་བྱེད་ཏེ་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཐད་ནས་ལྷ་མཐོང་བ་དེ་ལ་བལྟས་པས། དོན་གྱི་ལྷ་
 ཡིན་ན་རང་གིས་ལྷ་དེ་ལ་ཆེས་ཆེར་བལྟས་པས་རྗེ་གསལ་དུ་འགྲོ་ལ། ཅ་རྒྱུང་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ལྷ་མཐོང་བ་ཡིན་ན་བལྟས་པས་བལྟས་པ་
 དེ་ག་རང་དུ་གནས་ཏེ་འགྱུར་ལྷོག་མི་ཐོངས་པ་ཞིག་འོང་། གདོན་གྱིས་སྤྱལ་པའི་ལྷ་གཟུགས་ཡིན་ན་བལྟས་པ་དང་གཏད་མེད་དུ་ཡལ་
 རས་འགྲོ་བ་ཡིན། (འདི་མཁས་གྲུབ་རྗེའི་ཟེན་བྲིས་ཡིན།)||

(121) Here is the sixteenth, *A Brief Piece on Differentiating the Three Types*. Between (1) the abbreviated and (2) the expanded presentation, here is the first:

I bow down to all sacred lords. As for the private advice about differentiating the three types, these are: (1) to see the divinity's own face through meditation, (2) to see a divine being because the winds have entered inside the channel, and (3) to see the form of a divinity that was emanated by a demon.

Here is the way to examine which of the three types has arisen: Once you have properly seated your body in the posture of Vairocana – with its seven characteristics, such as the legs being crossed in the vajra pose, the hands resting in equipoise, and so on – then, with the central divine eye of wrath placed between your eyebrows, draw your two eyes together in a single upward gaze, directly in front of the upper opening of the central channel. Then look upon the divine being that you see right in front of your two eyes.

If it is a real divinity, then the more you look upon this divine being, the clearer the divinity will become.

(122) If you are seeing the divinity in dependence upon the winds and channels, then due to your intent gaze, what you look upon will remain exactly as it was, and will become such that it will never leave you.

If it is the form of a divine being emanated by a demon, then as you gaze intently, then it will fade away into something you can no longer focus upon. (These are Khedrup Je's notes.)

¹ “A Brief Piece on Differentiating the Three Aspects,” *rnam gsum rigs dbye'i yig chung*, from *gsang ba 'dus pa'i yig chung nyer gcig sogs*, as recorded and edited by the brothers Khedrup Je and Baso Chö Je, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha* (as included in the auxiliary volume, *rje'i gsung bka' rgya ma rnams zur du phyungs pa*, alternately listed in other editions as vol. *dza*), 56a3-57a5 (121-123), emphasis mine.

།གཉིས་པ་རྒྱས་པ་ནི། ལམ་བསྐྱོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ་རང་རྒྱུད་ལ་ལྷས་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པ་དང་། བསྐྱོན་པའི་ཉམས་སྤང་དང་།
། བཞགས་ཀྱི་བར་ཆད་ཀྱི་མཆན་མ་གསུམ་གྱི་རིགས་འདི་ལྟར་དབྱེ་བར་བྱ་སྟེ། ལྷ་བསྐྱོན་པ་དང་བརྒྱས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་དེ་
བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྐྱེ་གསུང་གསུགས་ཀྱི་མཆན་མ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱུང་ན། ཅ་ལྷ་མ་རྒྱ་འདི་ཡར་སྤྲོད་གི་སྤྱིན་མཆན་མ་གྱི་དཀྱིལ་དབུ
ས་ཁོ་བོ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་སྤྱན་དབུས་མ་འོང་ས་དེར་རག་དུང་གི་ལ་ལྷར་གདངས་པ་ལ། མིག་གཉིས་འདི་ལྟེ་རྒྱ་འདི་ཡར་སྤྲོད་ནས་མཆན་མ་གད
ཡིན་པ་དེ་ལ་བལྟས་པ་དང་། དམིགས་པ་བསྐྱོན་པ་འདི་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ཉམས་ཡིན་ན་སྤར་ལས་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་ཞིང་སྤྱི་ལ་འོད་དང་ལྷན་པ
ར་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་ལ་མ་ཆགས་པར་སྤྱི་ལ་ལྷ་བྱུང་རྒྱས་བཏབ་ལ་སྐྱོམ། འོད་ཟེར་སྤྲོ་ལྷ་འཕྲོ་ཞིང་སྤར་ལྷར་དུ་གནས་ན་ལྷས་རང་རྒྱུད་བྱིན
གྱིས་རྒྱོབ་པའི་ཉགས་ཡིན་པས་རྩོ་རྩེ་བཏུ་བའི་སྤྱགས་དང་ཕྱག་རྒྱས་སྤྱི་དེ་རང་ལ་བསྐྱེམ་ཞིང་གསོལ་བ་བཏབ།

Here is the second part, the expanded presentation. At any time when you are meditating on the path, you should be able to differentiate these three types of signs: (1) when it is that a divine being is blessing your mindstream, (2) when it is that you are experiencing a vision in meditation, (3) and when it is an obstacle from an obstructing spirit.

When you are meditating on a divine being, reciting [mantras] and so forth, if the signs, etc., of the holy body, speech, and mind of Those Gone Thus should arise, then you should draw your two eyes together towards the upper tip of the *āvadhūtī*² channel, to the center of the swirl between your eyebrows, at the place where the central [third] eye of all wrathful divinities comes, at the flared opening that is like the mouth of a long trumpet. From the upper tip of the *āvadhūtī*, look upon what ever signs have arisen, and if it is an experience coming by force of your having meditated on a particular object, then it will become much clearer than it was before, and it will come to have a brilliant sheen, like that of light on oil.

Without breaking the experience, seal it by meditating on how it is like an illusion. If light rays of the five colors fly outwards, and if it remains as before, this is the sign that the divine being has blessed your mindstream. So, with the mantra that gathers together the [three] vajras, and with the sealing gesture, dissolve the holy body into yourself and make supplications.

དེ་ལ་བལྟས་པས་སྤྱི་རྩེ་གསུམ་པའི་མཆན་མ་མེ་འོད་ཉམས་ཤིང་སྤར་གྱི་དེ་ཡལ་ནས་འཕྲོ་བར་སྤང་ན་བཞགས་ཀྱི་བར་ཆད་ཀྱི་མཆན་མ་
ཡིན་པས་སྤང་འཁོར་གུན་མོང་བ་དང་གུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་བསྐྱོན་ཞིང་། མཆན་མ་དམ་དུ་བཅད་ལ་ཆོས་རྒྱུད་ལ་གཏོར་མ་བྱུལ། བསྐྱེད་
བཞགས་མང་དུ་བྱས་ལ། དགེ་སྦྱོར་སྤར་ལས་ཀྱང་འབྱུར་དུ་གཏོང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །སྤར་ཡང་ཡང་ཡང་འོང་ན་སྤར་ལྷར་བྱས་ལ་བལྟས་པ
ས་ཡལ་འཕྲོ་བའི་འགོ་ཚུལ་པ་ན། རང་གི་སྤྱིང་ག་ནས་ཁོ་བོ་གཤིན་རྩེ་གཤེད་འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་ཟ་བར་བྱས་པ་སྤྱི་ལས་མེ་འོད་འཕྲོ་བ
འི་གྱི་གྲག་དང་ཐོད་པ་འཇིན་པ་དུ་མ་སྤྱིས་ཏེ་ཆར་བབས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་དེ་ལ་བསྐྱེམ་པས་བྱ་སྤྱོ་མེས་ཆེག་པ་ལྷར་བསྐྱེགས་པར་བསམས་
ལ་ཆར་བཅད། ཁོ་བོ་རྣམས་རང་ལ་བཏུ། སྤར་ལྷར་སྤང་འཁོར་བསྐྱོན་ཞིང་དགེ་སྦྱོར་ལ་རྩེལ་བར་བྱའོ། །དགེ་སྦྱོར་གང་གི་སྐབས་སུ་
ར་མེད་དུ་མི་རུང་བའི་ཞལ་གྱི་གདམས་པའོ།

If, when you gaze upon it, the signs of a complete holy body deteriorate into firelight, and if what appeared before goes on to fade away, this is the sign of an obstacle from an obstructing spirit.

² This is a Sanskrit name for the central channel that is traditionally left untranslated in Tibetan texts, hence I retain the Sanskrit here, too. It refers to the channel that has “shaken off the two” (i.e., the two side channels).

(123) So you should meditate on the shared and unique circles of protection, and after consolidating your boundaries, offer a *torma* cake to the Dharma Protectors. Once you have made up for omissions and made confession many times over, recommit yourself to the practice of virtue more vigorously than before.

If this happens over and over again, then as you are gazing intently, as before, then just as it is about to disappear, from your heart send out many wrathful forms of the Slayer of the Lord of Death (Yamāri), the One who can devour all three worlds, with firelight flying out from his holy body, holding a chopknife and a skullcup: Like a shower of rain, dissolve them into that [false vision], and like a bird's feather catching fire, think that it is burned up until there is nothing left. Withdraw all the wrathful ones back into yourself. Meditate on the protection circle as before, and apply yourself to the practice of virtue. This is the private advice from the holy lips of the master, that the practice of virtue is indispensable at any and all times.

།སྐྱུ་མཆོད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཟིན་ཟིས་གཉིས་སྒྲུང་ཡང་བྱི་མ་གསལ་ལ་རྒྱས་པར་སྒྲུང་བས་བཀོད་དོ། །མཆོན་མ་སྔོན་མ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འོས་འཛིན་ལ་སྐྱ་བྱི་མི་འབྲུ་བར་སྒྲུང་ཡང་བྱི་མ་བཅན་ནོ།།

These two [parts] appear to be the notes of both holy brothers [Khedrup Je and Baso Je, respectively], but since the latter appears to be an expanded clarification, it has been placed here. In terms of recognizing the first two signs, it appears the former and latter [explanations] are dissimilar, but the last is the most formidable.

An Excerpt from the *Garland of Supreme Medicinal Nectar: Questions and Answers*³

གོང་དུ་བསྟན་པའི་ཡི་དམ་ལྟ་སྒྲུང་དུ་ཞལ་གཟིགས། གཟིགས་ལུགས་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ། རབ་དངོས་སུ་ཞལ་གཟིགས། འབྲིང་ཉམས་ལ་གཟིགས། ཐ་མ་ཆེ་ལམ་དུ་ཞལ་གཟིགས་བཤོ། །ཡི་དམ་ལྟ་ཞལ་གཟིགས་པའི་སྔོན་ལ་ཆོ་འབྲུལ་གདུག་རྩལ་ཆེ་བར་འབྱུང་ངོ། །བདུད་ཆེ་རིགས་ཉིད་ཡི་དམ་དུ་སྒྲུལ་ནས་འབྱུང་། དེ་ལ་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་བརྟན་པ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་པ་སྒྱུན་བྲངས་ནས་དེ་ལ་བསྐྱེམས་པ་ས། ཡི་དམ་ཡིན་ན་གཟི་བཞིན་ཆེར་བསྐྱེད་འོང་། བདུད་ཡིན་ན་ཡལ་ཉེ་འགོ། དེ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྲལ་བ་འདུག་ན་འང་། དེ་དལ་དེ་ཀ་གོ་བདེ་བ་དང་སྤྲོ་བར་བྱུང་། ཇི་ཙམ་དུ་ཡི་དམ་ལྟའི་ཞལ་གཟིགས་ཀྱང་སྔོན་དགའ་མི་འཆོལ། དེ་བྱས་ན་བདུད་ཀྱིས་འབྱུང་བ་འདུག་གསུང་།

(323) [Khenchen Hlodrakpa, in the voice of Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of Secrets, replied, in response to the continued questioning of Je Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa himself:]

You will quickly see the holy faces of your personal divine beings, as prophesied above.

(324) Now there are three types to the way in which you might see. The best is to see the holy face directly. Middling is to see through a meditative experience. The least is to see the holy face in a dream.

³ *zhus lan sman mchog bdus rsti'i phreng ba*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. ka 12a6-12b3 (323-324). Based on the similarity of the "three types" (*rnam pa gsum*) I would conjecture that this teaching that Tsongkhapa received from the Khenchen Hlodrakpa may have been the source of Tsongkhapa's own personal transmission to his disciples Khedrup Je and Baso Je, as recorded in the previous excerpt.

Before you ever see the holy face of your personal divine being, there will be a great and terrifying display of magic. It will come from someone who is of the very class of a great demon, emanating as if your personal divinity.

From a stable state of concentration, you yourself should invite the wisdom beings and dissolve them into that emanation. If it is indeed your personal divinity, he/she will rise up in ever greater glory. If it is a demon, it will fade away and disappear.

On these subjects, there are an inconceivable many things, but on my part, just that much is readily understood and comes easily. Just so much as you see the holy face of your personal divine being, be exceedingly glad; but do not seek after such things. If you do, then you will be carried away by demons.

Thus he spoke.

Appendix Fourteen: On the Union of Stillness and Insight

An Excerpt from Je Tsongkhapa's *Briefer Steps of the Path to Enlightenment*¹

[གསུམ་པ་ནི། ཞི་གནས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྣུག་མཐོང་སྒྲོམ་ཚུལ་དངོས་བསྟན་པ།]

(421) Here is the third part: [Actually teaching how to meditate on insight, while relying upon meditative stillness.]

བདག་མེད་པའི་ལྟ་བུ་མ་རྟོག་ན་སྒྲོམ་ལུགས་གང་བྱས་ཀྱང་སྒྲོམ་དེ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་གནས་པ་མིན་པས། ལྟ་བུ་དེ་རྟོག་དགོས་ལ། ལྟ་བུའི་གོ་བ་ཡོང་ཀྱང་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་སྒྲོམ་པའི་ཆེ་ལྟ་བུ་བྲན་ཏེ། དེའི་སྤྱིང་དུ་བཞག་ནས་མ་བསྒྲོམས་ན་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་བསྒྲོམས་པར་མི་འགྱུར་བས། ལྟ་བུའི་དབྱེད་པ་ཆར་རེ་སྒྲོན་དུ་བཏང་བའི་མཐར་ཡིད་ལ་ཅི་ཡང་མི་སེམས་པར་འཛོག་པ་ཡང་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་སྒྲོང་བ་མིན་ནོ། ། ལྟ་བུ་བྲན་ནས་དེའི་སྤྱིང་དུ་བཞག་པ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ལ་གོམས་པ་ཡང་སྤར་གྱི་ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིང་ཚུལ་ཉིད་དུ་ཟད་པས། དེ་ལས་བྱུར་པའི་སྣུག་མཐོང་སྒྲིང་ཚུལ་བཤད་པའི་གཞུང་གི་དོན་མིན་ནོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་སྤར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་སོ་སོར་དབྱེད་ནས་བསྐྱུང་བར་བྱའོ།

If you do not find the view which perceives the lack of a self, then no matter what kind of meditation you undertake, that meditation will not rest in the meaning of suchness. Therefore, you must find this view. But even if you come to understand this view, when it comes time to meditate upon suchness, if you do not recall that view, or if you do not meditate having first settled yourself upon that view as a foundation, then you will not be meditating upon suchness. Then, if, after each session in which you begin by analyzing the view, you just fix yourself in a state of not thinking at all, this is not what it means to sustain yourself in suchness.

Or else, if you simply get used to recalling the view, and then settling down in a session based just upon that, this is nothing but the practice of sustaining stillness as I finished explaining it earlier. It is not, however, the import of the scriptures which explain how to sustain insight while balanced on the edge of stillness. Therefore, you should maintain this insight through analyzing individually, and with incisive wisdom, the meaning of the lack of a self, as it was explained before.

[དབྱེད་པའི་སྒྲོམ་གཅིག་བྱས་ན་འདས་སྤྱིང་པའི་ཞི་གནས་ཉམས་པར་འགྱུར་བས། ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་རྟ་ལ་བསྒྲུན་ནས་དབྱེད་དེ་སྒྲོང་བ་དང་། བར་བར་དུ་འཛོག་སྒྲོམ་སྤེལ་མར་བྱའོ། །དེ་ཡང་དབྱེད་སྒྲོམ་མངས་པས་གནས་ཆ་རྒྱུད་དུ་སོང་ན་འཛོག་སྒྲོམ་མང་དུ་བྱས་ལ་གནས་ཆ་སོར་གཞུག་འཛོག་སྒྲོམ་མངས་པས་དབྱེད་སྤྱིང་མི་འདོད་པ་དང་། དབྱེད་ཀྱང་འགྲོ་མི་ཉན་པར་སེམས་གནས་ཆ་ལ་རྟེལ་རྟེལ་འགྲོ་ན་དབྱེད་སྒྲོམ་མང་དུ་བྱས་ཏེ་ཞི་སྣུག་གཉིས་ཆ་མཉམ་གྱིན་བསྒྲོམས་ན་སྒྲོབས་ཆེ་བས་དེ་ལྟར་བྱ་སྟེ། སྒྲོམ་རིམ་ཐ་མ་ལས། ཡང་གང་གི་ཆེ་སྣུག་མཐོང་བསྒྲོམས་པས་ཤེས་རབ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཤས་ཆེ་བར་གྱུར་པ་དེའི་ཆེ་ཞི་གནས་རྒྱུད་པའི་ཕྱིར། མར་མེ་རྒྱུད་ལ་བཞག་པ་བཞིན་དུ་སེམས་གཡོ་བས། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་མི་མཐོང་བར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེའི་ཆེ་ཞི་གནས་བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱའོ། །ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་ཤས་ཆེ་ན་ཡང་གཉིད་ཀྱིས་ལོག་པའི་མི་བཞིན་དུ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་མཐོང་བར་མི་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ན་དེའི་ཆེ་འདས་

¹ The [Briefer] Steps of the Path to Enlightenment (byang chub lam gyi rim pa, a.k.a. lam rim chung ngu/ lam rim 'bring), rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. pha, 210a4-216b4 (421-434), emphasis mine.

ཞེས་རབ་བསྒྲོམ་པར་བྱའོ། ཞེས་སོ།

(422) If you practice only analytical meditation, the stillness you developed previously will decline. Thus you should sustain analysis while mounted on the horse of stillness, and continue to alternate with periods of placement meditation.

Furthermore, if, by doing more and more analytical meditation, the aspect of your stillness lessens, then you should refresh this stillness by doing placement meditation again and again. But if you do too much placement meditation, you will become averse to analysis, and even when you do analyze, it will be of no use. If it happens that you get entirely wrapped up in the aspect of stillness, then you should do a lot of analytical meditation. If you can meditate in this way, all the while balancing the aspects of stillness and insight, then your practice will gain great force.

As it says in the final volume of the *Stages of Meditation* [Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanakrama*],

. . . This is because, when one has meditated upon insight, and wisdom has become incredibly sharp, then at the same time, the stillness decreases. Like a butter lamp placed in the wind, the mind keeps on moving, and thus it cannot see suchness very clearly. Therefore, at that point, one must meditate on stillness. But if the stillness takes over, then, like a person falling backward with sleep, one will not be able to see suchness very clearly. In a similar way, when this takes place, one should meditate with incisive wisdom.

།དེ་ལྟར་དབྱུང་ནས་སྒྲིང་བ་ལ་རྟོག་པ་གང་ཡིན་ཐམས་ཅད་བདེན་པར་འཛིན་པའི་མཆན་འཛིན་དུ་བརྒྱང་ནས་འགོག་པ་ནི་མི་འཐད་དེ།
བདེན་འཛིན་གྱི་རྟོག་པ་ནི་རྟོག་པའི་ཕྱོགས་གཅིག་ཙམ་ཡིན་པར་སྒྲུབ་མང་དུ་བསྐྱབས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །རྟོག་པས་གང་དུ་བརྒྱང་བ་ལ་རིག་
ས་པའི་གཞོད་ས་འབབ་པར་མཐོང་བ་ནི། རིགས་པའི་དགག་བྱ་ཐལ་ཆེས་པའི་སྐྱར་འདེབས་ཡིན་ཞིང་། ལུང་གི་དོན་ཡང་མིན་པར་བསྐྱ་
བས་ལ། ཆོས་ཅན་གཞན་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་མི་འདོད་ཀྱང་ཆོས་ཉིད་ལ་སྒྲོས་གང་དུ་བརྒྱང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་བདེན་ཞེན་གྱི་མཆན་འཛིན་ནོ་སྟེ་སྟེ་
དེ་ཡང་འཛིན་ཚུལ་ཉེས་པའི་སྒྲིན་ཡིན་གྱི། གང་བརྒྱང་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་མིན་ཏེ། ཚུར་མཐོང་གྲོལ་བ་དོན་གཉིས་གྱིས་ལུང་རིགས་ཀྱི་སྒོ་དུ་
མ་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཅད་གཞོད་དགོས་པར་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

Thus it makes no sense to hold that whatever conceptual thoughts are used to sustain analysis are necessarily conceptual thoughts by which one would grasp to “signs,” i.e., thinking that things exist as real. Therefore it makes no sense to stop them. This is because, as I have demonstrated many times before, the conceptual thoughts which hold that things exist as real are only one kind of conceptual thought.

(423) If you believe that *anything* which is held by conceptual thought must be crushed with reasoning, then this means you have fallen into the fault of discounting what actually exists, by denying with your reasoning something that is too broad. I have demonstrated that this is not the meaning of the scriptures.

Now you may think, “Oh, it is not like that with regard to other sorts of things with properties, but with regard to things as they are, whatever way in which it is held by the intellect must involve a grasping to signs in the form of the insistent belief that things are real.”

Indeed, the mode of grasping has the fault of being a bad deed, but not everything which is held by the intellect has that problem. This is proven by the fact that it is stated thus:

“Those people who still think things are coming at them, but who strive for liberation, must rip into suchness through many doors of scripture and reasoning.”

།འདིར་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་སྒྲིམ་པ་ནི་མི་རྟོག་པ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཡིན་ན། སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ལས་ནི་དེ་མི་སྐྱེ་སྟེ། ལྷ་འབྲས་གཉིས་རྩེས་སུ་མཐུན་
དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ་སྟུམ་ན། འདི་ལ་ནི་བཙམ་ལྷན་འདས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ལན་གསལ་བར་གསུངས་ཏེ། འོད་སྤངས་ལེུ་ལས། འོད་སྤངས།
འདི་ལྟ་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་ཤིང་གཉིས་རྒྱུད་གིས་བྱུང་བ་དེ་ལས་མེ་འབྱུང་སྟེ། བྱུང་ནས་ཤིང་གཉིས་སྟེག་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། འོད་སྤངས་ཡང་དག
པར་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ཡོད་ན་འཕགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་དབང་པོ་སྐྱེ་སྟེ། དེ་སྐྱེས་པས་ཡང་དག་པར་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་དེ་ཉིད་སྟེག་པར་བྱེ
ད་དོ། ཞེས་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ལས་འཕགས་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་སྐྱེ་བར་གསུངས་ལ།

In this case, you may think: “If one meditates on suchness in order to give rise to nonconceptuality, then it follows that this state cannot arise from the individual conceptual analysis, since cause and effect must be similar in nature.” On this point, the Blessed One himself has spoken a clear answer. As it says in the *Chapter on Kāśyapa* [the forty-third chapter of the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*],

O Kāśyapa, it is like this: If, for example, one were to take two sticks and rub them together, with wind, then fire would spring up from them. Once the fire has come, the two sticks burn away. In the same way, O Kāśyapa, if there is perfect individual conceptual analysis, the power of an ārya’s incisive wisdom will arise. When it has arisen, it burns away that perfect individual conceptual analysis itself.

Thus he states that the incisive wisdom of an ārya grows from the individual conceptual analysis.

སྒྲིམ་པའི་བར་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། དེས་དེ་ལྟར་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་རྣམ་པར་དཔྱད་དེ་གང་གི་ཆེ་རྒྱལ་འབྱོར་པས་དངོས་པོ་གང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་དོན་
དམ་པར་ངེས་པར་མི་འཛིན་པ་དེའི་ཆེ་རྒྱལ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཉིང་ངེ་འཛིན་ལ་འབྲུག་གོ། ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱང་
རྟོགས་སོ། །གང་ཞིག་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་དངོས་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་སོ་སོར་བརྟགས་ནས་མི་སྒྲིམ་གྱི། ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་སྤངས་པ་ཙམ་
འབའ་ཞིག་སྒྲིམ་པར་བྱེད་པ་དེའི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་ནས་ཡང་མི་སྒྲིམ་ཅིང་། ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ཉིད་ནས་ཡང་རྟོགས་པར་མི་འགྱུར་ཏེ། ཤེ
ས་རབ་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །འདི་ལྟར་ཡང་དག་པར་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ཉིད་ལས་ཡང་དག་པ་རྩི་ལྟ་བུ་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པའི་མེ་བྱུང་
ན་གཙུབ་ཤིང་གཙུབ་སའི་མེ་བཞིན་དུ་རྟོག་པའི་ཤིང་སྟེག་གོ། ཞེས་བཙམ་ལྷན་འདས་ཀྱིས་བཀའ་སྤྱད་ཏེ། ཞེས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་ན
ཟག་བཅས་ལས་ཟག་མེད་འབྱུང་བ་དང་། འཛིག་རྟེན་པ་ལས་འཛིག་རྟེན་ལས་འདས་པ་དང་། སེམས་ཅན་ལས་སངས་རྒྱས་དང་། སོ་
སྐྱེ་ལས་འཕགས་པ་འབྱུང་བ་སོགས་མི་སྤྲིད་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། ལྷ་འབྲས་གཉིས་མི་འབྲས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

As it says in the middle volume of the *Stages of Meditation*:

For this reason, when a yogi investigates thoroughly, with incisive wisdom, he finds that he cannot definitely ascertain any functioning thing that is ultimately itself. Not holding anything, at that moment the yogi enters a totally nonconceptual concentration. He realizes precisely that nothing has any essence.

(424) If someone does not meditate after analyzing, individually and with incisive wisdom, the very essence of functioning things, but rather completely abandons bringing anything to mind and just meditates, this will never overcome his conceptual thought. Nor will he ever realize the lack of essence itself, because there is no light of incisive wisdom. Thus, from perfect individual conceptual analysis itself comes the fire of knowing what is, perfectly, as it is. If that arises, it

burns the stick of concepts like the fire which comes from rubbing sticks together. This was declared by the Blessed One.

If it were not like this, then the stainless could never arise from the stained, that which is beyond the world could never arise from the world, Buddhas could never arise from living beings, āryas could never spring from ordinary people. Because in each of those pairs, cause and effect are dissimilar.

།བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་འགྲུབ་ལས། གང་དུ་ནམ་ཞོག་སྒྲུབ་པ། །དེར་ནི་སྟོང་ཉིད་ག་ལ་ཡོད། །བརྟག་བྱ་ཞོག་བྱེད་ནམ་པའི་སེམས།
།དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་ནམས་ཀྱིས་མ་གཟིགས། །གང་ན་བརྟག་བྱ་ཞོག་བྱེད་ཡོད། །དེར་ནི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན།

In the *Commentary on the Wish for Enlightenment* it is said,

Wherever conceptual thought appears
How could there be emptiness?
The mind which thinks,
Or has something to think about,
Is not seen by any of Those Gone Thus.
If there is thinking, or something thought,
There is no enlightenment there.

ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ནི་བརྟག་བྱ་དང་ཞོག་བྱེད་དུ་བདེན་པར་འཛིན་པ་ལ་བྱང་ཆུབ་འཕྲོལ་པ་མེད་པར་སྟོན་གྱི། སོ་སོར་ཞོག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་
འགོག་པ་དང་། བརྟག་བྱ་དང་ཞོག་བྱེད་ཙམ་འགོག་ན། གཞུང་དེར་སོ་སོར་ཞོག་པའི་དབྱེད་པའི་སྟོང་མས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་
པ་དང་འགལ་ཞིང་། དེ་གཉིས་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་མ་གཟིགས་ན་མེད་པར་འགྲུབ་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །ཡང་དེ་ཉིད་ལས། སྟེ་མེད་དང་ནི་སྟོང་ཉི
ད་དང་། །བདག་མེད་ཅེས་བྱར་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད། །བདག་ཉིད་དམན་པར་གང་སྟོམ་པ། །དེ་དེ་སྟོམ་པར་བྱེད་པ་མིན། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ཡང་
རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟེ་པ་མེད་པའི་སྟོང་ཉིད་བདག་མེད་ལ་དམིགས་ནས་སྟོམ་པ་མི་འགོག་གི། །དེ་དག་ཏུ་བདེན་པར་བརྒྱབ་པའི་བདག་ཉིད
དམན་པ་སྟེ། སྟེད་པའི་སྟོང་ཉིད་སྟོམ་པ་འགོག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ།

Here [Ārya Nāgārjuna] teaches that if one grasps to things as real by thinking conceptually or by having things to analyze, then one cannot achieve enlightenment. However, if one were to put a stop to the incisive wisdom of the individual analysis, or if one were simply to cancel conceptualization and that which is conceived, then one would contradict the scriptures that establish that one reaches suchness through the many doors of individual conceptual analysis. If neither of those two [i.e., conceptualization and that which is conceived] were seen by the Buddhas, then it would follow that they do not exist at all.

(425) As it states in the same work:

Without starting, emptiness, and without self,
are words used for emptiness.
But meditation on anything less,
is not meditating on *that*.

This statement means that one does not put a stop to meditation that focuses upon the lack of a self – the emptiness that is the lack of anything starting through a nature of its own. But an inferior meditation on emptiness – one which is lesser because it holds onto that lack as being real – is something which must be stopped.

འཇིག་རྟེན་ལས་འདས་པར་བསྟོད་པ་ལས། ཀྱན་རྟོག་ཐམས་ཅད་བསལ་བའི་བྱིར། རྟོང་ཉིད་བདུད་ཅི་སྟོན་མཛད་ན། གང་ཞིག་དེ་ལ་
ཞེན་གྱུར་པ། དེ་ཉིད་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྤང། ཅེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་རོ། དེ་བཞིན་དུ་རིན་ཆེན་ཐེང་བ་ལས་ཀྱང། དེ་ལྟར་བདག་དང་བ
དག་མེད་པ། ཡང་དག་ཅི་བཞིན་དམིགས་སུ་མེད། བདག་དང་བདག་མེད་ལྟ་བུ་དག དེ་བྱིར་ཐུབ་པ་ཆེན་པོས་བསྟོན། ཅེས་གསུངས
པ་ཡང་བདག་དང་བདག་མེད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཡང་དག་པར་མ་གྱུབ་པས། དེ་གཉིས་ཡང་དག་པར་ཡོད་པར་ལྟ་བུ་བསྟོན་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། བདག་
མེད་པར་ལྟ་བུ་མི་འགྲོག་སྟེ། སྤར་ཅོད་སྟོན་བྲངས་པ་ལྟར་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྱུབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ན། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྱུ
བ་པ་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་བྱིར་རོ།

It is just as it says in the *Praise of the One Who Has Gone Beyond the World*:

You revealed the nectar of emptiness
in order to clear away every kind
of conceptualizing thought.
But if anyone were to clutch to *that*
You would reproach him severely.

Similarly, it says in the *String of Jewels* [Ratnāvalī]:

Thus there is nothing to focus upon
in *self* or *lack of a self*, purely just so.
For this reason the Great Able One overcame
Views of either self or lack of self.

According to Ārya Nāgārjuna, since one cannot establish either “self” or “lack of self” as existing absolutely, the view that either option could exist absolutely must be refuted. *But this does not cancel the view that things are without a self.*

As I have quoted previously from [Nāgārjuna’s] *Ending All Debates*, this is true because: If it were *not* the case that things lack any nature by which they could be established through a nature of their own, then it would follow that things *do* exist through a nature of their own.

དེ་དག་ནི་སྤྱད་པ་ལས། སྤང་འདི་སྟོང་ཞེས་རྟོག་ནའང་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ནི། མཆན་མ་ལ་སྟོང་སྟེ་མེད་གནས་ལ་དང་མ་ཡིན།
ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་དང་། ཡུམ་ཆེན་མོ་ལས་གཟུགས་སྟོང་བ་དང་བདག་མེད་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་སྟོན་ན་མཆན་མ་ལ་སྟོང་གྱི། ཤེས་རབ་གྱི་པ་
རོལ་ཏུ་བྱིན་པ་ལ་མི་སྟོད་དོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དོན་ཡང་སྟོང་ཉིད་སོགས་བདེན་པར་བརྟུང་བ་ལ་བྱ་སྟེ། དེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་ན། སྟེ་
མེད་གནས་ལ་དང་མ་ཡིན། ཞེས་བའང་མི་རིགས་ཏེ། དེ་ལ་དང་པ་ཡང་མཆན་མ་ལ་སྟོང་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་བྱིར་དང་། མདོ་དེ་ཉིད་ལས་
ཆོས་རྣམས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་ཡོངས་སུ་ཤེས་གྱུར་པ། འདི་ནི་ཤེས་རབ་པ་རོལ་བྱིན་མཆོག་སྟོད་པ་ཡིན། ཞེས་དང་། གང་ཆེ་འདྲ
ས་བྱས་འདྲས་མ་བྱས་དང་དཀར་ནག་ཆོས། ཤེས་རབ་རྣམས་པར་བཞུགས་ཏེ་ཐུག་ཅིང་མི་དམིགས་ཆོ། འཇིག་རྟེན་དག་ན་ཤེས་རབ་པ
རོལ་བྱིན་གྲངས་འགྲོ་ཞེས་དང་།

On this point, it says in the *Summary* [of the *Exalted Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*]:

If a bodhisattva conceives of the thought: “These heaps are empty,”
he or she is acting with signs. This is not what it means
to have faith in the place that has no starting.

The *Great Mother* [Sūtra] says:

If you act with things called “form that is empty”
or “lack of a self,” then this is acting with signs.
But it is not acting with the perfection of incisive wisdom.

(426) Suppose you say that the meaning of all these quotations is that one *should* hold emptiness and the like to exist as real, because if one did not do so, then one would have no faith in the place which has no starting. But this is unreasonable, because to have faith in that place would automatically mean you are acting with signs. As it says in that same sūtra:

When you have thoroughly understood that
nothing at all has any nature of its own,
then this is the activity of the supreme
perfection of “incisive knowing” [i.e., “wisdom”].

Also:

When with incisive wisdom you have destroyed both things produced
and those unproduced, as well as things either white or black,
until not even one atom remains upon which to focus,
if this purifies the world, then it can be classified
as the perfection of incisive wisdom.

ཏིང་འཛིན་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལས་ཀྱང་། གལ་ཏེ་ཆོས་ལ་བདག་མེད་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་། སོ་སོར་བརྟགས་ནས་གང་ཞིག་དེ་སྟོན་པ། །འབྲས་བུ་ཟུང་ན་
'འདས་འཛོལ་རྒྱ་དེ་ཡིན། །རྒྱ་གཞན་གང་ཡིན་དེས་ནི་ཞིང་མི་འགྱུར། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་དང་། །ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་དུ་བྱིན་པའི་སྟོང་པོ་
ལས་ཀྱང་། །ཤུ་རིའི་བྱས། བྱང་སེམས་ཤེར་བྱིན་ཟབ་མོ་ལ་སྟོང་པར་འདོད་པས། རི་ལྟར་བསྐྱབ་པར་བྱ། ཞེས་བྲིས་པའི་ལན་དུ་སྟུན་ར་
ས་གཞིགས་ཀྱིས། བྱང་པོ་ལྷ་པོ་དེ་དག་ཀྱང་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟོང་པར་རྟོགས་པར་ཡང་དག་པར་རྗེས་སུ་བལྟའོ། ཞེས་སོགས་མང་དུ་ག་
སྟངས་པ་དང་འགལ་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

As it says in the *King of Concentrations* [Samadhirāja Sūtra]:

If you investigate one by one the lack of a self to things,
and, having analyzed, you meditate on what you discovered:
This is a cause for attaining the result beyond all grief;
nothing else can bring you to this peace.

Then, in the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom*, when Śāriputra asks how he should train, as someone who wants to act in the profound perfection of a bodhisattva’s wisdom, Avalokiteśvara answers:

You must look upon these five heaps as being totally and completely empty of
any nature of their own.

[If you hold that previous position] then you would end up contradicting these and many
other scriptural passages.

།དེས་ན་ཆོས་དབྱིངས་བསྟོད་པ་ལས། མཆོག་ཏུ་སེམས་ནི་སྟོང་བྱེད་པའི། །ཆོས་ནི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ཡིན། ཞེས་དང་། བདག་དང་བ
དག་གི་ཞེས་འཛིན་པས། །རི་སྟོང་བྱི་རོལ་རྟོགས་བརྟགས་པ། །བདག་མེད་རྟོགས་པ་གཉིས་མཐོང་ན། །སྟོང་པའི་ས་བོན་འགག་པར་འགྱུར་
། ཞེས་དང་། འབྲས་བུ་ལས་ཀྱང་། དེ་བྱིར་བདག་དང་བདག་གི་སྟོང་ལྟ་པས། །རྟོག་འཕྲོར་པ་དེ་རྟོགས་པར་ཐོལ་བར་འགྱུར། ཞེས་གསུ

ངས་སྐྱུང་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་སྟེ་བདག་མེད་པ་དང་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་ངེས་པའི་རྒྱན་བསྐྱེད་བར་བྱའོ།

Furthermore, it states in [Ārya Nāgārjuna’s] *Praise of the Absolute Space of All Things*,²

The highest state of mind, that thing which washes you clean,
is the fact things lack of any nature of their own.

Also:

As long as you hold to a “me” and a “mine,”
(427) so long will you impute an outer world.
But if you see the two ways in which no self exists,
then the seeds for cyclic existence will grind to a stop.

As it says in [Candrakīrti’s] *Entering the Middle Way*:

For this reason, seeing “me” and “mine” as empty,
the yogi becomes totally free.

You should come to understand it according to these statements, and then sustain continuously the certainty that there is no self and that there is no inherent nature.

།འདིར་སྒྲོམ་རིམ་དང་པོ་ལས། རྣམ་པར་མི་ཉོག་པར་འབྱུག་པའི་གཟུངས་ལས། ཡིད་ལ་མི་བྱེད་པས་གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་མཚན་
མ་སྤོང་ངོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ཡང་ཤེས་རབ་གྱིས་བརྟགས་ན་མི་དཔྱགས་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་དེར་ཡིད་ལ་མི་བྱེད་པར་ད
གོངས་གྱི། ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་མེད་པ་ཙམ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། འདུཤེས་མེད་པའི་སྟོམས་པར་འབྱུག་པ་ལྟར་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པའི་དུས་ནས། གཟུགས་
ས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་མཛོན་པར་ཞེན་པ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་སྤངས་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་སྤོང་པ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

On this point, it says in the first *Stages of Meditation*,

Wherever it is said: “After entering into nonconceptuality and retaining that state, you will no longer think things over, and thus you will abandon the signs of form and the rest,” the intent of the phrase “not thinking things over,” is that whenever you analyze something with incisive wisdom, it disappears. But this doesn’t mean that you are simply not thinking at all. Nor does it mean that just by abandoning thinking, as in the meditative absorption of “no discrimination,” you could abandon the insistent belief in form and the rest that you have had since time without beginning.

ཞེས་གསུང་རབ་ལས་ཡིད་ལ་མི་བྱེད་པ་བསྟོམས་པས་མཚན་འཛིན་སྤོང་བར་གསུངས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་། ཚུལ་བཞིན་དུ་དབྱེད་པའི་ཤེས་
རབ་གྱིས་བརྟགས་ནས་བདེན་འཛིན་གྱི་དཔྱགས་གཏད་རྒྱལ་ཙམ་ཡང་མི་དཔྱགས་པར་ཉོག་པ་པའི་དོན་ལ་མཉམ་པར་འཛོག་པ་ལ་ད
གོངས་པར་གསུངས་ལ། སྒྲོམ་རིམ་བར་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། སེམས་གང་ཡིན་པ་དེ་ཡང་བཙལ་ན་སྤོང་བར་ཉོག་པ་སོ། །སེམས་གང་གིས་ཉོ
གས་པ་དེ་ཡང་ངོ་མོ་ཉིད་ཀྱང་དུ་བཙལ་ན་སྤོང་བར་ཉོག་པ་ཉི་དེ་ལྟར་ཉོག་པས་མཚན་མ་མེད་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལ་འབྱུག་གོ། ཞེས་འ
བྱུང་ངོ།

So, with regard to all the statements in scripture where it says that “by meditating without thinking, one abandons holding to signs,” the true intent is this: Once one has followed the method of investigating with analytical wisdom, and not one atom of that upon which grasping-to-things-as-real had been focusing any longer appears, then one settles into

² *Dharmadhātustava (chos kyi dbyings su bstod pa)*, Toh. 1118, sde dge, bstod tshogs, vol. ka.

balanced meditation on the meaning of this realization. Furthermore, the middle volume of the *Stages of Meditation* states:

Whatever the mind may be, when you seek it out, realize it as empty. Whatever state of mind you do the realizing with, when you thoroughly seek out its very essence, you will realize it as empty. Realizing in this way, you enter upon the yoga of no signs.

འདིས་ནི་ཡོངས་སུ་རྟོག་པ་སྟོན་ཏེ་གཏོང་བ་ཉིད་མཚན་མ་མེད་པ་ཉིད་ལ་འབྲུག་པར་བསྟན་ཏེ། ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་སྟོང་བ་ཙམ་
དང་། ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་དངོས་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མི་དཔྱད་པ་རྣམས་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་ཉིད་ཏེ་འབྲུག་མི་སྲིད་པར་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་བསྟན་པ་ཡིན་
པོ། ཞེས་དགོན་མཚན་གྱིན་ལས་དེ་ལྟར་གསུངས་པ་དེས། སྟོན་ཏེ་རྟོག་པ་བཞིན་ཏེ་དཔྱད་པས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བ་བརྟེན་པ་མེད་ན་དེ་
ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་ལ་མི་རྟོག་པར་འབྲུག་པ་མི་སྲིད་པར་གསུངས་པ་དང་།

(428) This teaches that one should enter upon signlessness itself only after doing a thorough analysis beforehand. It shows with extreme clarity that, with nothing but the total lack of thinking, or without analyzing the very essence of functioning things with incisive wisdom, it is impossible to enter into total nonconceptuality. After stating things like this, the *Clouds of Jewels* [*Ratnamegha Sūtra*] says that, if you do not discover the view of suchness by following the method of analysis beforehand, then it will be impossible to enter into a nonconceptual state with regard to the meaning of suchness.

སྟོན་པ་རིམ་ཐ་མ་ལས། བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྱུང་བ་དང་སྟོང་ལས་འདས་པ་སོགས་གསུངས་པ་དེར་ནི་ཟབ་མོའི་དོན་ཐོས་པ་དང་སེམས་པ་ཙམ་
ཀྱིས་རྟོགས་པར་རྟོག་པ་དགག་པའི་བྱིར། དེ་རྣམས་འཕགས་པའི་སོ་སོ་རང་གིས་རིག་པར་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་པས། གཞན་གྱིས་བསམ་མི་བྱ
བ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པར་སྟོན་པ་དང་། ཡང་ཟབ་མོའི་དོན་ལ་བདེན་པར་བཟུང་ནས་རྟོག་པ་བཞིན་པ་ཡིན་པར་སེམས་པ་དགག་པའི་བྱིར་གསུ
ངས་ཀྱི། སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་རྟོག་པ་བཞིན་ཏེ་དཔྱད་པ་འགོག་པ་མིན་པ་དང་། དེ་འགོག་ན་རིགས་པ་དང་ལུང་ཤིན་ཏུ་མང་
པོ་དང་འགལ་བར་གསུངས་པ་དང་། དེ་རྣམས་པར་རྟོག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཏེ་བྱིན་ཀྱང་རྟོག་པ་བཞིན་པ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཡིན་པའི་
བྱིར། རྣམས་པར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར་བས་ན། ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་འདོད་པས་དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་པར་བྱའོ།

It says in the last volume of the *Stages of Meditation*:

Those scriptural statements about it being “inconceivable” and “beyond the mind” are meant to prevent the false presumption that one could realize the meaning of the profound just by listening or thinking about it. Because these profound things are to be known by each ārya, *within his or her own mind*, it is taught that they are “inconceivable,” and so forth, *by someone else*. Those phrases were stated in order to prevent the inappropriate thoughts that come from holding the meaning of the profound to exist as real.

However, they are not said to stop one from carrying out appropriate investigation using the incisive wisdom of the individual analysis. If they were to stop that, then these sayings would be in contradiction to reasoning and very many authoritative scriptures. Although such investigation is of the very essence of conceptuality, it is also of the very essence of the appropriate method of thinking things over. Because it will turn into a thoroughly nonconceptual understanding, if you long for such understanding, then you should rely upon that method.

ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས། རྒྱ་ནག་གི་མཁན་པོས་ལུང་རིགས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པའི་ལྟ་བུ་མ་རྟེན་ཀྱང་། ཅི་
ཡང་ཡིད་ལ་མི་བྱེད་པར་མཉམ་པར་བཞག་པས། དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། ཞེས་སྤྱོད་པ་འགོག་པའི་ཚུལ་རྣམས་ཤེས་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་
གལ་ཆེན་། སློམ་ཚུལ་དེ་དག་ནི་ལམ་རིམ་གྱི་གདམས་ངག་སྤྱི་མ་རྣམས་ལས་ཀྱང་འབྱུང་སྟེ། བོ་རྟ་བའི་བེའུ་བུམ་ལས། ཁ་ཅིག་ཐོས་
བསམ་དུས་ན་རིགས་པས། རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་གཏན་ལ་ཐབ་པ། སློམ་དུས་མི་རྟོག་འབའ་ཞིག་སློམ་ཟེར། དེ་ལྟར་ན་ནི་འབྲེལ་མེད་སྟོང་
འཁྱེད། འོགས་སུ་བསློམས་ཕྱིར་གཉེན་པོར་མི་འགྱུར། དེ་ལྟར་བསམ་ན་སློམ་དུས་ཉིད་ནའང་། གཅིག་དང་དུ་བཅས་ཉིད་འབྲེལ་ལ་སོག
ས། གང་ལ་གོམས་པས་སོ་སོར་བརྟག་ཅིང་། ཅུང་ཟད་མི་རྟོག་ཉིད་དུའང་གནས་བྱ། དེ་ལྟར་བསློམས་ན་ཉོན་མོངས་གཉེན་པོ། ལྟ་
གཅིག་རྗེས་སུ་འབྲང་བར་འདོད་ཅིང་། ལ་ཐོས་ཕྱིན་ལུགས་སྟོང་པར་འདོད་པས། ཤེས་རབ་སློམ་པའི་ལུགས་ནི་དེ་ཡིན། དེ་ཡང་ག
ང་ཟག་བདག་མེད་གོམས་པས། དེ་ནས་དེ་ལྟར་རྗེས་སུ་འབྱུག་བྱ། ཞེས་འབྱུང་བ་ལྟར་རོ།

(429) All these scriptural statements refute the sayings of those learned monks from China, who claimed that, “You will never find the view that sets forth suchness by relying on scriptures and reasoning; it is by settling into balanced meditation, without thinking of anything at all, that you will realize suchness.” It is extremely important for you to understand the refutation of this idea.

Moreover, these methods of meditation are taken from all the early instructions for the steps on the path. It comes from Geshe Potowa’s *Spiritual Nursery* as follows:

Some claim that when listening and reflecting, one should by reasoning
set forth the lack of inherent nature
but when meditating there should just be no concepts.
Like that though, it is an irrelevant emptiness.
Because wrong, the meditation will never act as an antidote.
Therefore, even when you meditate,
analyze individually “the One and the Many” or “Dependence and Relationship”
or whichever reasoning you are familiar with.
Then stay for just a little in that place without any thoughts.
If you meditate like that it will be an antidote to the mental afflictions.
If you wish to follow after a divine being
and if you also wish to practice according to the Perfections,
then this is the way to meditate on incisive wisdom.
Then by getting used to the fact there is no self to a person,
you can go ahead and follow after in that way.

འདི་ཡང་རྫོགས་སྟོང་ཉིད་གང་གིས་རྟོགས་ཤིང་། དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པས་ལུང་བསྟན་ཅིང་། རྟོགས་ཉིད་བདེན་པ་གཞིགས་པ་ཡི། རྒྱ་སྤྱོད་སློབ་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་པས། དེ་ལས་བརྒྱུད་པའི་མན་ངག་གིས། རྟོགས་ཉིད་བདེན་པ་རྟོགས་པར་འགྱུར། ཞེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་། དེའི་
འཁྱེད་ཚུལ་ཡང་རྫོགས་དབྱུ་མའི་གདམས་ངག་ཏུ་གསུངས་པ་དང་། སློབ་དཔོན་ཀ་མ་ལ་གྱི་ལའི་དགོངས་པ་གཉིས་འབྲང་བར་སྤྱོད་བརྒྱ
ས་སུ་བཏང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། དེ་ལྟར་སྤྱོད་མཐོང་སྟོང་པ་ལ་སྟོར་བའི་རྟོག་བསྟན་པ་དང་། ཐུན་གྱི་དངོས་གཞི་དང་། ཐུན་རྗེས་དང་། ཐུ
ན་མཚམས་སུ་རི་ལྟར་བྱ་དང་། ཁྱད་པར་དུ་བྱིང་མོད་དང་བཅས་པར་སྟོང་ཚུལ་རྣམས་སྤྱི་མ་བཞིན་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

On this, furthermore, the Lord [Atiśa] says,

If you ask, “By whom is emptiness realized?”
It is by the one who was prophesied by the One Gone Thus:

By using the practical instructions passed down in a line from them, you will realize the truth of things as they are.

(430) Thus you should understand all the methods of sustaining insight as explained previously: You should know how to rely upon the six preparatory practices, how to carry out the actual session and the conclusion to each session, how to proceed between sessions, and especially how to guard your practice so that it is free of both agitation and dullness.

Here is the fourth section [from an earlier division]: The measure of whether you have achieved insight through your meditation.

Now here, if you achieve stillness and it has not declined in quality, then insofar as the pliancy that follows from stillness is also there, this is not merely having “pliancy.” You may wonder, “What is it, then?” When have been doing analytical meditation, if by its own force this automatically brings on the experience of pliancy, then it will turn into insight. It is the same whether you are focusing upon the qualities of things, as many as they may be, or upon the nature of things, in the way that they actually are.

³ In the section on stillness, not translated here. See B. Alan Wallace, 2005, *Balancing the Mind*, 198-203.

As it says in the *Sūtra Commenting on the True Intent* [*Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*],

O Blessed One, what do you call this, when a bodhisattva has contemplated something well, and turns it over and over in his mind, so that it appears to his concentration like an object in a mirror – so long as he has not yet gained extreme pliancy of body and mind?

O Maitreya, this is not insight. You must call it a conviction that approximates insight and is linked with it.

(431) The *Instructions on the Perfection of Wisdom* [*Prajñā-Pāramitā Upadeśa*, by Ratnākaraśānti] says,

Thus, once you have achieved extreme pliancy of body and mind, and you remain in it, you should analyze, one by one, those things which you have been contemplating, whose meaning you gaze upon intently, like objects in a mirror within your concentration. As long as extreme pliancy of body and mind have not arisen, this is a mental attention which approximates insight. Once these have arisen, then it is insight.

།འཁོར་སྤངས་རང་སྤྱོད་ཀྱིས་འདྲེན་སྤངས་ན་སེམས་ཅེ་གཅིག་པ་ཡང་འདྲེན་རྒྱས་པས་ན། སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པའི་དབྱང་སྒྲོམ་གྱིས་རང་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་ཀྱིས་ཞི་གནས་འདྲེན་པ་འདི་ནི་སྤྱོད་དུ་ཞི་གནས་སྤངས་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་རྟོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཞི་གནས་ལེགས་པར་བྱས་པ་ཞིག་གིས་དབྱང་སྒྲོམ་བྱས་པས་ཀྱང་ཞི་གནས་ཆེས་ལྷུང་དུ་བྱུང་བར་འགྲོ་བས་ན། སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པའི་དབྱང་སྒྲོམ་བྱས་ན་གནས་ཆ་རྒྱུད་དུ་འགྲོའོ་སྤྱོད་དུ་མི་གཟུང་ངོ།

Since it can automatically bring on pliancy, and furthermore, because it is able to bring on a single-pointed state of mind, the individual analysis brings you to stillness by force of its own analytical meditation. This power comes by virtue of having attained stillness previously. Therefore, when someone who has properly achieved stillness does analytical meditation, it amplifies the stillness in an extraordinary manner. So you should never hold the position that, “Oh, if I do analytical meditation, then the aspect of stillness in my meditation will deteriorate.”⁴

།གསུམ་པ་ཞི་ལྷག་བྱུང་དུ་འབྲེལ་ཚུལ་ནི། དེ་གཉིས་སྤངས་པའི་ཆད་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབས་སུ་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་ཞི་ལྷག་གཉིས་མ་ཐོབ་ན་བྱུང་དུ་སྒྲེལ་རྒྱུ་མི་འོང་བས། རྒྱུད་འབྲེལ་ལ་ནི་དེ་གཉིས་ངེས་པར་ཐོབ་དགོས་སོ། །འདི་ཡང་ནམ་ལྷག་མཐོང་ཐོབ་པའི་ཐོག་མ་ནས་རྒྱུད་འབྲེལ་ཐོབ་པར་འགྱུར་བས། དེའི་རྒྱུ་ནི་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ཞི་གནས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་དབྱང་སྒྲོམ་བྱས་པའི་མཐུས། སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་གནས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབས་སུ་བཤད་པ་བཞིན་དུ། མཛོན་པར་འདུ་བྱེད་པ་མེད་པར་རང་གི་རང་གིས་འཇུག་པའི་ཡིད་བྱེད་ཐོབ་པ་ན་རྒྱུད་འབྲེལ་དུ་འགྲོ་སྟེ།

Here is the third [major division]: How to unite the pair of stillness and insight.

If you have not attained each of the two – stillness and insight – according to the measure of achievement as I have explained it for those two, respectively, then you will not have what it takes to put them together as a pair. Thus it is absolutely necessary for you to achieve each of the two in order to have a *pair* to unite.

Now, since you can start to achieve the union of the pair from the time that you achieve

⁴ See Appendix Sixteen, *byang chub lam rim che ba* (1055-1057) for a passage that immediately follows the passage exactly parallel to this one, in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*.

insight, the way to do it is as follows:

(432) By the inner force of having done analytical meditation on the basis of the stillness you gained previously, then, as I explained it before in the section on stillness,⁵ you achieve a mental attention that engages of its own accord, without the manifest action of fusing and forming a trace.⁶ If you can achieve this, then it will go on to be the union of the pair.

ཉན་ས་ལས། དེ་ལ་ཅི་ཙམ་གྱིས་ན་ཞི་གནས་དང་ལྷག་མཐོང་འདྲེས་པར་གྱུར་ཅིང་མཉམ་པར་བྱུང་བ་དང་། གང་གིས་ན་བྱུང་བ་དེ་ལ་འདྲེས་པར་འདྲེས་པའི་ལམ་ཞེས་བྱ་ཞེ་ན། སྤྲོས་པ། སེམས་གནས་པ་རྣམས་པ་དགུ་པོ་དག་ལས། འདི་ལྟ་སྟེ། མཉམ་པར་བཞག་པའི་རྣམས་པ་དགུ་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་ཐོབ་པར་གྱུར་ཅིང་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་ཡོངས་སུ་གྲུབ་པ་དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ལྷག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཚོས་རྣམས་པར་འབྱེད་པ་ལ་རབ་ཏུ་བརྩོན་པར་བྱེད་དེ། དེའི་ཆེ་ན་ཆོས་རྣམས་པར་འབྱེད་པ་དེའི་ལམ་རང་གི་རང་གིས་འདྲེས་པར་དང་ཚུལ་པ་མེད་པར་འདྲེས་པར་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་ལམ་རིམ་ལྟ་བུ་བཞེད་ཏུ་མཐོང་པར་འབྱེད་པ་མེད་པས་ལྷག་མཐོང་ཡོངས་སུ་དག་པ་དང་། ཡོངས་སུ་བྱུང་བ་དང་། ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་སོང་བ་དང་། ཉམས་བདེ་བས་ཡོངས་སུ་བློན་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དེའི་ཕྱིར། དེའི་ཞི་གནས་དང་ལྷག་མཐོང་གཉིས་འདྲེས་པར་གྱུར་ཅིང་མཉམ་པར་འདྲེས་པ་དང་། ཞི་གནས་དང་ལྷག་མཐོང་བྱུང་བའི་ལམ་ཞེས་བྱ་ཏོ།

As it says in the *Listeners' Levels* [Asaṅga's *Śrāvakabhūmi*],

Now suppose someone asks, “Just how are stillness and insight mixed together, or balanced equally as a pair? Why is it called a path of entry into the union of a pair?”

It is said that you reach it from the nine levels of mental stillness. You will go on to achieve the ninth level – “balanced meditation” – and you gain total concentration. On that basis, you will make tremendous efforts at higher incisive wisdom – thoroughly distinguishing existing things.

At that point, the mind will begin to engage of its own accord, and without any effort, in the path of thoroughly distinguishing existing things. Because a proper path of stillness just like this lacks the manifest action of fusing and forming a trace, the insight will be totally pure, will be totally clean, will come in the aftermath of stillness, and will be suffused with an experience of bliss. It is in this way that the two of stillness and insight are mixed together and balanced equally, and this is called the path of entry into the union of the pair of stillness and insight.

ཞེས་དང་། སྒྲོམ་རིམ་ཐ་མ་ལས་ཀྱང་། རི་སྟེ་གང་གི་ཆེ་བྱིང་བ་དང་ཚོད་པ་ལས་དབེན་པའི་ཕྱིར། མཉམ་པར་ཞུགས་ཤིང་རང་གི་རང་གིས་འདྲེས་པས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་སེམས་ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བ་བྱུང་བར་གྱུར་པ་དེའི་ཆེ། ཚུལ་པ་སྒྲོད་པས་བཏང་སྟོམས་སུ་བྱ་སྟེ། དེའི་ཆེ་ཞི་གནས་དང་ལྷག་མཐོང་བྱུང་བའི་ལམ་གྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་པར་རིག་པར་བྱ་ཏོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ཏེ།
ལྷག་མཐོང་མཚན་ཉིད་པ་ཐོབ་པའི་མཚམས་ནས་ཡིན་ནོ།

The last volume of the *Stages of Meditation* states,

⁵ See B. Alan Wallace, 2005, *Balancing the Mind*, 203-211.

⁶ *mngon par 'du byed pa med par*: See the analysis of this term at Chapter One, “Traces and the End of Traces,” above.

At a certain point, because you have transcended both agitation and dullness, your mind will rest evenly in balanced meditation, and engage of its own accord. Thus your mind will become extremely clear with regard to suchness, and at that time, you can relax your effort, settling into a state of equanimity. You should understand that at this point you have attained the path of the union of the pair of stillness and insight.

(433) According to these statements, this comes about once you have crossed the threshold of achieving the definitive form of insight.

ཤེས་མཐོང་མཐོང་ལས་ཀྱང་། དེའི་འོག་ཏུ་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་དང་བཅས་པའི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་དེ་ཉིད་ལ་དམིགས་ཏེ། སེམས་དེ་ཉིད་ལ་གང་གི་ཆེ་རྒྱུ་མི་འཆད་པ་དང་བར་མ་ཆད་པའི་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་གཉིས་ཀ་ཉམས་སུ་སྦྱང་བ་དེའི་ཆེ་ཞི་གནས་དང་ལྷག་མཐོང་རྒྱུ་དུ་འབྲེལ་བའི་ལམ་ཞེས་བཞུགས་ཏེ། དེ་ལ་ཞི་གནས་དང་ལྷག་མཐོང་གི་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་ལ་འབྲེལ་བ་ནི་ལྷན་སྟེ་པན་ཚུན་བཅའ་མཐུན་ལ་རྟུག་པའོ། ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་བར་མ་ཆད་པ་ནི་དབྱེད་སྒྲོམ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་འཕྲོ་བཞག་ནས། མི་རྟོག་པར་གཞག་མི་དགོས་པར་དབྱེད་སྒྲོམ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མི་རྟོག་པ་འབྲེན་པའོ། གཉིས་ཀ་ཉམས་སུ་སྦྱང་བ་ནི་མི་རྟོག་པའི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་ཞི་གནས་དང་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་དང་བཅས་པའི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་ལྷག་མཐོང་གཉིས་ཀ་ཉམས་སུ་སྦྱང་བའོ།

Meanwhile, the *Instructions on the Perfection of Wisdom* says,

. . . From then on, you will focus on that reflected image in a conceptual way. But at a certain point, that state of mind will go on contemplating in an unbroken stream, without interruption. When it thus experiences both, it is called the path of the union of the pair of stillness and insight. Stillness and insight are the “pair”; the “union” means being imbued with, or engaging in an object while being mutually bound to one another.

Here, “without interruption” means that once you have finished analytical meditation, you do not then have to settle your mind into nonconceptuality, but rather that the analytical meditation itself ushers you into nonconceptuality. “Experiences both” means that your mind experiences both (1) the stillness of focusing upon a reflected image nonconceptually, and (2) the insight that focuses upon the reflected image while thinking about it conceptually.

རྒྱུ་གྱིས་ཞེས་པ་ནི་དབྱེད་པའི་ལྷག་མཐོང་དང་དབྱེད་པའི་གནས་པའི་ཞི་གནས་གཉིས་དུས་གཅིག་ཏུ་མི་འབྲེལ་བའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ཀྱི། དབྱེད་སྒྲོམ་གྱིས་ཞི་གནས་དངོས་བྲངས་པའི་ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་དུས་སུ་ནི། རི་ལྷ་བ་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་ཆོས་རབ་ཏུ་རྣམ་འབྱེད་ཀྱི་ལྷག་མཐོང་དང་རི་ལྷ་བ་ལ་རྟུག་པར་གནས་པའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་གྱི་ཞི་གནས་གཉིས་མཚུངས་ལྷན་དུ་འཇུག་གོ། དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཆེ་ནི་ཞི་གནས་གཉིས་འབྲེས་པ་སྟེ་མཉམ་པར་འཇུག་པའོ། དེ་ལ་ནི་སྒྲོམ་རྒྱུ་གི་རྟོགས་པ་ཐོབ་དགོས་པས། རྒྱུ་མི་གཡོ་བར་གནས་པའི་སྟེ་རྣམ་པར་ཉེན་རྒྱུ་འཕྲོ་བ་བཞིན་དུ་གནས་ཆ་བརྟན་པོའི་མི་རྟོག་པའི་རྟེན་པའི་ངང་ནས་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་སོ་སོར་དབྱེད་པ་ས་ཆོག་པའི་གཉིས་ཆོགས་ལ་ཞི་གནས་རྟེན་པར་འཛིན་ན་མ་གཏོགས་པ་ཞི་གནས་དངོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་འབྲེལ་གྱི་དོན་མེད་དོ།

“In a stream” refers to the fact that the analytical insight, and the stillness which rests at the end of analysis, do not occur at exactly the same time, but that, when you are in the stillness that actually comes about by the power of analysis, you are engaging in a way that simultaneously links (1) the insight that thoroughly investigates, as they are, the existing things upon which it focuses, and (2) the stillness that rests steadily in single-

pointed concentration upon things as they are.

(434) When you reach a point like this, stillness and insight are mixed together, or equally balanced. This is required for one to be able to attain the realizations born from meditation. Now, when you analyze individually what it means for things to lack a self, from within a state that does not destroy the measure of a nonconceptuality that has a stable aspect of stillness, like a small fish darting here and there over motionless water, this “collects” the two in a way that is permissible. However, apart from positing this as an approximation of stillness-and-insight, it lacks the meaning of the union of the pair of actual stillness and actual insight.

།དེ་ལྟར་ནི་ལྷག་ཟུང་དུ་འབྲེལ་བའི་རྒྱལ་ནི། གཞུང་ཁྲངས་མ་དེ་དག་ནས་འབྱུང་བ་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་ཡི། དེ་ལས་གཞན་དུ་སྒྲོ་བཏགས་ནས་འཆད་བ་ལ་ཡིད་བརྟན་བར་མི་བྱའོ། །བྱང་རྒྱལ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པའི་རིགས་པའི་མཐའ་གཙོད་དང་། ཤེས་བྱེད་ཀྱིས་ལུང་དང་། སྒྲོ་མ་པའི་རྒྱལ་རྒྱས་པར་ནི། ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱས་བ་ལས་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

As for how to unite the pair of stillness and insight like this, you should learn it as it comes down from the authentic and reliable treatises, but you should not put your trust in superfluous explanations that are alternatives to these scriptures. You should learn the extensive logical examination of the steps of the path to enlightenment, the scriptural passages that elicit knowledge, and the expanded explanation of how to meditate, all in my longer book on the steps of the path.

Appendix Fifteen: Conceptuality and Nonconceptuality

An Excerpt from Chapter Thirteen of *The Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*¹

ཁོ་མོ་ན་བདག་འཛིན་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་ཁ་མ་གྱི་བའི་བདག་མེད་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པ་འདོད་པ་ནི་མཁས་པའི་བཞད་གད་ཀྱི་གནས་ཡིན་པས་སོ་སོ་སྤྱོ་བོ་ལ་བདག་མེད་སྟོན་གྱུར་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་ཆེ་བདག་མེད་དོན་སྤྱིའི་སྟོན་པ་དེས་པ་ཡང་མི་འདོད་ན་ལས་དེས་བདག་འཛིན་ལ་ཅི་གཞི་དུ་སོམས་ཤིག། ཐེག་ཆེན་གྱི་སྟོང་ལམ་ཆོས་མཆོག་ཆེན་པོ་པས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་དོན། དོན་སྤྱིའི་སྟོན་པ་དེས་པ་ཁས་ལེན་ཞིང་དུ་ལྷའི་ལས་དང་སོ་པས་བདག་མེད་པའི་དེས་ཤེས་ཀྱི་འཛིན་སྟངས་བསྐྱེད་ནས་བསྟོམས་ན་རྟོག་པའི་འཛིན་སྟངས་སུ་སོང་བས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་སྟོམ་པ་མིན་ནོ་ཞེས་སྟེ་བ་ནི། སེམས་རྣམ་དུ་མི་གནས་པའི་གཏམ་སོ། །གལ་ཏེ་དབྱུ་མ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གཞུང་ནས་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དོན་གཉིས་སྤང་ཐམས་ཅད་དག་ནས་འགྲོ་བར་བཤད་ལ། རྒྱུད་དང་འགྲེལ་པ་འདིར་མི་རྟོག་བསྟོམ་པའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་གྱི་དོན་སྟོང་ཆོགས་པའི་སྟོང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་འཆར་བར་གསུངས་པས་དེ་དག་འགལ་ལོ་སྟུང་ན། དེ་ཡང་འཐད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་སྟོང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་དང་དེ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པར་རྟོགས་པའི་ཤེས་པ་གཉིས་དོ་སོ་དབྱེར་མེད་ཡིན་པས་ཡུལ་ཡུལ་ཅན་སོ་སོ་བར་སྤང་བ་ནི་སྤང་ཚུལ་དང་ཡིན་ཚུལ་རྗེ་ལྟ་བུ་བཞིན་མཐུན་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

(930) In brief, the assertion that something which has not in the least diminished grasping to a self is the direct realization of selflessness is the laughing stock of the wise. Thus, for ordinary individuals, selflessness is a hidden object, so at that point, if one does not accept that they ascertain the lack of a self by means of an abstracted image, I beg you to consider just how that path would do any damage to self-grasping.

The claim of those who both (1) assert that someone who has reached the great stage of Highest Dharma on the path of preparation in the Greater Way ascertains what it means to lack any nature by means of an abstracted image, and (2) say that “if someone who is currently a beginner [in practicing Kālacakra tantra] generates a confident mode of apprehension that ascertains the lack of a self, and meditates upon it, then if he or she is experiencing a conceptual mode of apprehension, this is not meditation on suchness,” is a fable that has no basis in the way the mind works.

Suppose you think: “In the treatises of the Middle Way and such, it is explained that all appearances of duality are purified in the face of nonconceptual primordial wisdom, but here in the [Kālacakra] tantra and commentaries it states that in the face of the concentration that meditates nonconceptually, appearances of the various empty forms do dawn. So those must be contradictory.” But this does not make sense. Since those appearances of empty forms and the consciousness that realizes them to lack any nature are inseparable in essence, the way that a subject state of mind and its objective field appear to be separate is not quite congruent with the way they actually exist.

ཁོ་མོ་ན་སོ་སོ་སྤྱོ་བོའི་ས་ལ་ཡུལ་སྤང་དང་ཤེས་པ་དེ་གཉིས་ལོགས་ཤིག་ན་སོ་སོར་སྤང་བས་ཤེས་པ་དང་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སོ་སོ་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ཅན་ཡིན་ལ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་དོན་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་རྟོགས་པ་ན་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ཞིག་ནས་རོ་མཉམ་དུ་འགྲོ་བ་ཡིན་ཏེ་ལེན་ལྷ་པའི་འགྲེལ་ཆེན་ལས། སྤྱོ་བ་དང་འཛིན་པ་མེད་པའི་རང་གི་སེམས་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་དེ་ལ་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྣམ་པར་བསྟེན་པའོ། །རང་གི་སེམས་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་

¹ *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. ga, 465b2-466b2 (930-932), emphasis mine.

བ་ལ་རོ་མཉམ་བ་གཅིག་ཏུ་གྱུར་བ་སྟེ་ཤེས་པ་དང་ཤེས་བྱའི་འབྲེལ་བ་ས་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་གསལ་བར་གསུངས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་འཕགས་པའི་མི་རྟོག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཤེས་ངོ་དེ་ན་སྟོང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྤང་བ་མི་འཆར་བ་ཡིན་ཀྱི་དེའི་དུས་ན་སྟོང་གཟུགས་མེད་པ་མིན་ཏེ་དཔེར་ན་གསང་འདུས་པའི་ལུགས་ལ། ཡང་དག་མཐའ་ལས་ལངས་ནས་ནི། །གཉིས་མེད་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཐོབ་པར་འགྱུར་ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་ཟུང་འདུག་གི་སྐྱེ་འང་འཆོན་ལྟ་བུ་དང་ཐུགས་འོད་གསལ་དུ་ཞུགས་པ་གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་གཉིས་སུ་དབྱེར་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ལ་འོད་གསལ་དུ་ཞུགས་པའི་ཤེས་ངོ་དེར་སྤང་བ་གསུམ་ནས་བར་དག་པར་བཤད་པས་གཉིས་སྤང་མེད་ཀྱང་དེ་དུས་སུ་སྐྱེའི་སྤང་བ་མི་ལྟོག་པ་བཞིན་ནོ།

(931) Therefore, insofar as at the level of an ordinary individual, consciousness and the appearance of an objective field appear to be separate from one another, the knowing consciousness and that which is known are individuals that have a relationship. But when one realizes directly what it means to lack any nature, any such “relationship” is destroyed, and they go on to be of equal taste.

As the *Great Commentary on the Fifth Chapter* states clearly: “Primordial wisdom is entirely mixed together with those appearances of one’s own mind that are without birth or destruction. It becomes of a single, equal taste with the appearances of one’s own mind, and it is not through any *relationship* between knowing consciousness and that which is known.” Moreover, in the face of the consciousness of an ārya’s nonconceptual primordial wisdom, the appearances of empty forms do not dawn. Nevertheless, it is not the case that those empty forms do not exist at that time.

For example, it is like the fact that in the system of Guhyasamāja, when one rises from the “perfect end” [that is, the actual clear light], it is stated that one achieves nondual primordial wisdom. Thus the pair of (1) the holy body of the union of the two, which is like a rainbow, and (2) the holy mind that has entered into clear light, are inseparable in essence. Still, in the face of the consciousness that has entered into clear light, since it is explained that there the three appearances have been completely purified, there is no dual appearance, but at that time it is not as though the appearance of the holy body has been turned back.

།དེ་ལྟ་མ་ཡིན་ན་སྟོང་གཟུགས་དམིགས་བཅས་དང་མི་འགྱུར་བའི་བདེ་བ་དམིགས་མེད་དུ་གསུངས་པ་མི་རིགས་ཏེ་སྤྲ་ཆོགས་པའི་སྤང་བ་ཡོད་པས་དམིགས་བཅས་སུ་གསུངས་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱེར་དང་འཕགས་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་མི་འགྱུར་བའི་བདེ་བའི་སྟོན་ཡང་སྤྲ་ཆོགས་པའི་སྤང་བ་འཆར་དགོས་པའི་བྱེར་རོ། །དེས་ན་མི་རྟོག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ངོ་ན་མེད་པ་དང་དེའི་དུས་ན་ཡོད་པ་གཉིས་མི་འགལ་བར་ཤེས་པར་བྱོས་ཤིག །འདི་དག་ལ་ལོག་ཏེ་གཤིན་ཏུ་མང་པོ་སྤང་བས་རྒྱུད་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་ཁུངས་ནས་བཞུགས་ལན་ཞིབ་མོས་གཏན་ལ་དབབ་དགོས་པར་སྤང་ནའང་མངས་པས་འཛིགས་ནས་དེ་ཙམ་ལས་མ་སྟོས་སོ།

(932) If it were not like this, then the scriptural statement that the empty forms involve an object of focus while the immutable bliss has no focal object would be unreasonable. This is because, insofar as the various appearances do exist, they are said to involve an object of focus, and also because, before immutable bliss can arise in the mental continuum of an ārya, the various appearances *must* dawn.

Thus you should come to understand how there is no contradiction in the fact that (1) in the face of nonconceptual primordial wisdom, there are no appearances, while (2) at that time, they do exist. Since it appears that there are very many wrong ideas in this regard, it seems one must set forth objections and responses in fine detail, quoting all the scriptural sources in the tantras and commentaries. Yet for fear of saying too much, I will not

elaborate further than just this.

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Excerpts from Chapter Fourteen of *The Great Book on the Steps of Mantra*²

།གསུམ་པ་ནི། དེ་ལྟར་ཅ་རྒྱུ་དང་ཐིག་ལེའི་ཆགས་ཚུལ་གྱི་གནད་ཤེས་ནས་དེ་དག་ལ་གནད་དུ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ནུས་འགྱུར་གྱིས་རྒྱུ་དང་ཐིག་ལེ་ལས་རྒྱུ་དུ་བྱ་བར་རྒྱས་པ་ན་ཁམས་དབབ་སྒྲོག་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་དགའ་བཞིའི་ཉིང་འཛིན་བདེ་གསལ་མི་རྟོག་པས་བརྒྱན་པ་སྦྱིད་རྒྱས་མོད་ཀྱང་། དེ་ཙམ་ཞིག་སྒྲོམ་པ་མིན་གྱི་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་གཏན་ལ་ཕབ་པའི་ལྟ་བ་ནམ་པར་དག་པ་བསྦྱིད་པ་དེ་ཐབས་དེ་དག་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྦྱིང་དགོས་ཏེ། གཞན་དུ་ན་དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ཉིང་འཛིན་གྱིས་སྤིང་བ་ལས་ཀླལ་བར་མི་རྒྱས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

(984) Here is the third part: [How to meditate on emptiness on the basis of having struck crucial points in the channels and winds.] Once you understand in this way the crucial points about how the channels, winds, and orbs are formed, and if you have the ability to make those winds and orbs fit for work through the yogas that strike crucial points, then, based on having reversed the flow of the elements, you might have gained the ability to generate a concentration on the four kinds of ecstasy – a concentration adorned with bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality. Nevertheless, the meditation is not just on that alone. Rather, you must generate a pure view that sets forth the meaning of selflessness, and then sustain it in reliance upon those methods. Otherwise, you will not be able to cross beyond cyclic existence with such a concentration.

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་་་ ཡེ་ཤེས་ཞབས་གྱིས་ཀྱང་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་ཀྱན་བཟང་དང་བདག་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ཐབས་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ནམས་སུ་གཅིག་དང་དུ་བྲལ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རིགས་པས་དབྱུ་མ་ནས་འབྱུང་བ་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲགས་སུ་ཡང་གཏན་ལ་ཕབ་པོ། །རྒྱུད་སྤེལ་གསུམ་ནས་ཀྱང་ཚུལ་དེ་ལྟར་རྒྱུད་ལ་སྦྱིད་པ་སྒྲུབ་མང་དུ་བརྒྱུད་ཅིན་ཏོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་དོ་རྗེ་ཐེག་པ་པས་བདག་མེད་པའི་ལྟ་བའི་གོ་བ་རྒྱུད་ལ་སྦྱིད་པ་ནི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་བཞིན་དུ་བྱ་དགོས་སོ། །ལྟ་བ་དེས་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ཁོང་དུ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱང་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པ་གཉིས་གྱིས་བསྐྱེད་པས་ཡུལ་དེ་ལ་ཡུལ་ཅན་དེ་ལྟ་བུ་བཞིག་པ་བཞིན་དུ་རོ་མཉམ་དུ་འཇུག་མི་རྒྱས་པར་གཉིས་སྒྲུབ་གིས་སོ་སོ་བར་རིང་དུ་རྒྱུང་ཆད་པར་བྱེད་པས་དེས་ན་གཏུམ་མོའི་མེས་བྱང་སེམས་བཞུས་པ་ཕྱིར་མ་འཕོས་པར་བཟུང་བ་ན་དེའི་མཐུས་གཉིས་སྒྲུབ་རགས་པ་རྣམས་བསྐྱེད་ནས་ཞི་བར་འགྱུར་ལ། དེའི་ཆེ་ལྟ་བ་བྲན་པར་བྱས་ནས་ལྟ་ཐོག་ཏུ་བཞིག་ནས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ན་ཤེས་རབ་དེ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་ལ་རེ་ཉེར་སོང་ནས་ཡུལ་དང་ཡུལ་ཅན་རོ་གཅིག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བ་ཡིན་ནོ།

. . . (988) Jñānapāda, too, in his *Samantabhadra Sādhana* and in his *Engaging in the Practice of Reaching Oneself*, set forth the view, with reasonings such as that of things being neither one nor many, in the context of mantra just as it comes in the Middle Way. I have already said many times before how, in the lower three classes of tantra, also, one gives rise to the view within one's mental continuum in this way. Therefore, Vajrayāna practitioners must generate an understanding of the view of selflessness within their mental continua just as in the vehicle of definitions [i.e., the sūtra vehicles].

Based on that view, you might have gained certainty within yourself about the suchness of all things, but since you have been contaminated by the two kinds of grasping to a self since time without beginning, your subject state of mind will not be able to enter into that

² *sngags rim chen mo*, vol. *ga*, 492b3-498a6 (984-995), emphasis mine.

objective field in the sense of their being of equal taste, like water poured into water.

Insofar as the appearance of duality will make it seem as though they are separate – far away and cut off from one another – therefore, if you can prevent the bodhicitta that was melted by the heat of inner fire from slipping outwards, then, by its inner force, the coarse form of dual appearance will withdraw and be pacified. At that point, once you have recalled the view, if you can remain intent upon the view and sustain it, that incisive wisdom will come closer and closer to suchness, and the subjective mind and the objective field will come to be of a single taste.

༡༥༥ །དེ་ཡང་བདག་མེད་ལ་མོ་ཁ་ཕྱགས་ན་བདག་མེད་དཔ་གནས་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་དོན་སྐྱོམ་པར་མི་འགྱུར་ལ་མོ་ཁ་ཕྱགས་ན་ནི་མོདོན་གྱིས་
དང་སྐྱོག་གྱུར་ཀྱི་སྐྱོན་ལ་ཕྱགས་པ་གཉིས་ལས་མི་འདོད། །སོ་སོ་སྐྱེ་ཤོས་བདག་མེད་མདོན་གྱུར་དུ་རྟོགས་པར་སྨྲ་བ་ནི་གཟུ་ལུས་ཡིན་
པས་སྐྱོག་གྱུར་རོ། །དེའི་ཆེ་དེ་དག་གིས་བདག་མེད་རྟོགས་པ་ནི་དོན་སྐྱེའི་སྐྱོན་ས་རྟོགས་དགོས་པས་སོ་སོ་སྐྱེ་ཤོས་རྟོག་བྱལ་གྱི་ཤིས་
པས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་སྐྱོམ་པར་འདོད་པ་འཐད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ཡང་མི་རྟོག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་འཐུན་པའི་རྒྱ་དཔ་པ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉི་
དཔ་མ་འུགས་པའི་རྟོག་པ་ཡང་མིན་ལ་བདག་མེད་པའི་དོན་ལ་དོན་སྐྱེའི་སྐྱོན་ས་དཔྱད་པས་ན་ཅིར་ཡང་མི་རྟོག་པ་ཡང་མིན་ནོ།

(989) Now here, if your mind cannot face head on into selflessness, then it will not turn into a meditation on the meaning of the lack of a self, or the way things actually abide. But if you do face head on into it, then it cannot escape the two options of being either a manifest reality or a hidden reality for you. Since the claim that ordinary individuals realize selflessness as something directly manifest is a pretentious fabrication, it must be something hidden.

At that point, since their realization of selflessness must be realized by means of an abstracted image, it makes no sense to assert that ordinary individuals meditate on suchness with a consciousness that is free of conceptuality. Moreover, insofar as it is a sacred congruent cause for nonconceptual primordial wisdom, it is also not the kind of conceptual state of mind that does *not* enter into suchness. But since it analyzes the meaning of suchness by means of an abstracted image, it is also not totally nonconceptual, either.

།གཤམ་འདུས་ཀྱི་འགྲེལ་བ་སྟེན་པའི་མེ་རྟོག་ལས། ཡང་དག་པ་ལ་མོ་མོར་རྟོག་པ་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཞིང་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ན། ཁིའི་ཕྱིར་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་སྐྱེད་པ་དང་ཆེས་ལུ་མཐུན་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཕྱིར་རྟོ། ཁིའི་ཕྱིར་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་ལ་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རྟོ། རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་ཉིད་ལས་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་སྐྱེ་བ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། གྲུས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་དེ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རྟོ། རང་བཞིན་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་སྐྱེ་བ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་དེ་ནི་དེའི་གཉེན་པོ་ཉིད་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རྟོ། ཁོན་ཀྱང་ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་ཉིད་ལ་མཉམ་པར་འཛུགས་པའི་མོ་མོར་རྟོག་པ་རྣམས་ཏེ། སྒྲོམ་པའི་ཆེས་ལུ་འགྲོ་བ་ས་འབད་རྩོལ་མེད་པར་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་སྒྲོམ་པ་མེད་པ་ལ་སེམས་མཉམ་པར་བཞག་པར་འགྱུར་རྟོ། ཉེ་ལ་སྒྲོམ་པ་མེད་པའི་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

The Guhyasamāja commentary called *A Double Handful of Flowers* (*Kusumāñjali-guhyasamāja-nibandha*, by Ratnākaraśānti/Śāntipa) explains:

The individual conceptualization of the correct is not totally conceptual thought, and it is also not totally nonconceptual. If you ask why it is not totally conceptual thought, this is because it gives rise to what is totally nonconceptual, and is the

congruent approximation of it. If you ask why it is not totally nonconceptual thought, this is because it conceptualizes the correct meaning. Nonconceptuality is not born from nonconceptuality itself, because the spiritually immature do not have it yet. But it is also not born from what is naturally conceptual thought, because it is its antidote.³

(990) Now, since all those individual conceptualizations that remain in balanced meditation upon the correct meaning follow upon meditation, then, without any effort, the mind will come to rest in meditative equipoise upon the absolute space of all things, free of elaboration. This is called the totally nonconceptual primordial wisdom, free of elaboration.

།དེ་སྐད་དུ་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པར་འཇུག་པའི་གཟུངས་ལས། དེ་ཡང་ཡང་དག་པར་སྦྱར་བ་དེ་བསྟེན་པས་རྗེས་སུ་འགྲོ་ལོ། །བསྟོམས་པས་པས་རྗེས་སུ་འགྲོ་ལོ། །མང་དུ་བྱས་པས་རྗེས་སུ་འགྲོ་ལོ། །ཡང་དག་པའི་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པས་རྗེས་སུ་འགྲོ་བས་ན་མངོན་པར་འདུ་བྱེད་པ་མེད་ཅིང་ལྷན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་དབྱིངས་ལ་རེག་སྟེ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་དང་། ཚད་མ་རྣམ་པར་དེས་པ་ལས་ཀྱང་། བསམ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་གྱི་ཤེས་རབ་ལ་གོམས་པར་བྱས་ན་དོན་དམས་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་འབྱུང་པས་དབེན་པ་བྱེད་པ་མེད་པ་འཇིག་པ་མེད་པ་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་བྱེད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ་ཞེས་བཤད་དོ། །དེ་བས་ན་བཙུན་ལྷན་འདས་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་པའི་ཡང་དག་པ་ལ་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་ཉིད་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་བྱང་ཆུབ་རྟོགས་པར་འདོད་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བསྟེན་པར་བྱའོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་གྲུབ་པའི་མཐའ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཞེས་མི་རྟོག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུར་མི་རྟོག་པ་རེགས་མཐུན་དགོས་ན་བྱས་པ་ལ་དེ་མེད་པའི་གཞི་དཔེ་བཞུགས་ཅིང་བསམ་བྱུང་གི་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་གོམས་པ་ལས་མི་རྟོག་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྟེ་བར་ཚོས་ཀྱི་གཤགས་པས་བསྐྱབས་པ་ཡང་བྱངས་ནས་ཤེས་པས་བཤད་དོ། །མན་ངག་སྟེ་མ་ལས་ཀྱང་སོ་སོར་རྟོག་པ་རྟོག་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་མི་རྟོག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་མཐུན་པར་བཤད་དེ་རྗེས་སུ་མཐུན་པ་ནི་དེའི་ཉེར་ལེན་གྱི་རྒྱུ་ལོ།

As it is also said:

From the power of retention that engages nonconceptually, also comes perfect application, and this follows through reliance upon that. It follows after meditation. It follows after having done something many, many times. Since it follows after perfect mental attention, it lacks the manifest action of fusing and forming a trace. Since it is spontaneously actualized, it touches the realm of total nonconceptuality.

The *Ascertainment of Valid Perception*⁴ states, moreover:

It is explained that if you become familiar with the incisive wisdom that is of the nature of contemplation, then it will turn into a primordial consciousness that makes the ultimate directly manifest, that is set apart from being mistaken, stainless, and without fear. In this way, the Blessed One stated that those who wish to realize the totally nonconceptual enlightenment should rely precisely upon the individual conceptualization of what is correct. This is the final proof.

Thus Śāntipa explains, by quoting further proofs from Dharmakīrti, that (1) if as a cause for nonconceptual primordial wisdom one required something of the same class of nonconceptuality, this is disproven by the fact that the spiritually immature would lack

³ Compare to Appendix Eight (725-726).

⁴ Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniscaya* (*tshad ma rnam par nges pa*), Toh. 4211, sde dge, tshad ma, vol. *ce*.

།དེས་ན་སྤྲུག་གི་གདུལ་བྱ་དང་པར་བྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པའི་གདུལ་བྱ་ལ་འཁོར་བར་འཆིང་བའི་རྒྱ་སོ་སོ་བ་མེད་ལ་འཆིང་བྱེད་གི་གཙོ་བོ་བ
དག་འཛིན་ཡང་བརློག་ཕྱོགས་བདག་མེད་བཟུང་བའི་སློ་ནས་སྤྲུག་དགོས་ཏེ་རིགས་པའི་རྒྱལ་པོས། འདི་ཡུལ་སྤྲུག་མེད་པར་ནི། །
དེ་སློང་བར་ནི་རྒྱས་མ་ཡིན། །ཡོན་ཏན་སློན་དང་རྗེས་འབྲེལ་བའི། །འདོད་དེ་དང་སྤངས་སོགས་སློང་བ་ནི། །དེ་དག་ཡུལ་ལ་མ་མཐོང་བ
ས། །ཡིན་གྱི་བྱི་ཚུལ་དག་གིས་མིན། །ཞེས་དང་འཕགས་པ་ལྟས། །ཡུལ་ལ་བདག་མེད་མཐོང་ན་ནི། །སྲིད་པའི་ས་པོན་འགག་པར་འ
གྱུར། །ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།

Therefore, since the cause for bondage in the cycle is no different for the disciples of mantra than it is for the disciples of the way of the perfections, they must reverse the primary chain of bondage, which is grasping to a self, by means of maintaining its opposite, the lack of a self. As the Lord of Reasoning states:⁷

Without discrediting the objective field
you will not be able to abandon it.
In order to abandon flawed qualities
and what follows upon them –
desire, aversion, and the rest –
it is by not seeing them as objects
and not by any outer means.

Āryadeva states, too:

If you see that objective fields have no self
the seeds for cyclic existence will grind to a stop.

* * *

།དེ་འདྲ་བའི་ལོག་ཏོག་ནི་དབྱེ་མའི་ཉགས་ཀྱི་དགག་བྱ་རི་ལྟར་ཡིན་མ་བྱེད་པས་ཏོག་པའི་འཛིན་སྤངས་ཐམས་ཅད་བདེན་འཛིན་དུ་འདོ
ད་པའི་ལུགས་ཡིན་ལ་དེ་དགག་པ་ནི། རྒྱས་པར་གཞན་དུ་བརྗོད་ཟིན་ཏོ།

. . . (995) All these sorts of wrong ideas come from failing to divide out precisely what it is that Middle Way reasoning refutes. They belong to a system in which one asserts that *all* conceptual modes of apprehension consist of grasping to things as real. I have already refuted such a system extensively elsewhere.⁸

⁷ See Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavarttika-kārikā* (*tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le 'ur byas pa*), Toh. 4210, sde dge, mdo 'grel, vol. ce, 116a3.

⁸ See, for example, Appendix Four (181), and Appendix Fourteen (423). Regarding the latter, however, it is not clear to me whether the *Briefer Steps of the Path* had already been written by the time Tsongkhapa wrote the *Steps of Mantra*, since in the *Briefer Steps of the Path*, *byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, vol. pha, 210a3-4 (421), he refers to an argument regarding Vajrayāna that he made extensively within the *Steps of Mantra*, and it usually seems as though the *Briefer Steps of the Path* is a redaction of the greater one, and refers to it – see the end of Appendix Fourteen (434). Nonetheless, this is a point to be investigated further, through numerous examples of such cross-referencing. My current hypothesis is that the sequence was (1) *Great Steps of the Path*, (2) *Steps of Mantra*, and (3) *Briefer Steps of the Path*. So it is likely that Tsongkhapa's actual reference above was to his treatment of this point in the *Great Steps of the Path*, and not to that unique section of the *Briefer Steps*. Clear biographical references indicate, however, that Tsongkhapa did not compose the *Illumination of the True Thought* until much later, in 1418, making that one of his last complete works. See Geshe Michael Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 405.

Appendix Sixteen: Like an Illusion

Excerpts from Je Tsongkhapa's *Great Book on the Steps of the Path*¹

ཁའི་བ་དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་གང་ཟག་སྐྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་འཆར་བའི་ཚུལ་ནི། སྐྱུ་མའི་དོན་ལ་གཉིས་གསུངས་ཏེ། དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་སྐྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་གསུངས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡོད་པ་ཙམ་དུ་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་བདེན་པ་ཁེགས་པ་ལ་བྱས་བ་དང་། གཞུགས་སོགས་ལ་སྐྱུ་མར་གསུངས་པ་རང་གི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟོང་བཞིན་དུ་གཞུགས་སོགས་སུ་སྒྲུབ་བའི་སྒྲུབ་པ་སྐྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུ་གཉིས་ལས། འདིར་ནི་བྱི་མ་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་བྱི་མ་ལ་སྐྱུ་མའི་སྐྱུ་མའི་དོན་ཡང་ཡོད་ལ། སྐྱུ་མ་ལ་བྱི་མའི་སྐྱུ་མའི་དོན་ཡོད་པའི་ངེས་པ་མེད་དོ།

(983) Here is the fourth part: How, in reliance upon that [refutation of a self that could either be the same as or different from the heaps], the person dawns as an illusion.

The meaning of illusion is said to be two: (1) as in the statement that ultimate reality is like an illusion, where it is established as simply existing, but one does so insofar as reality has been refuted, and (2) where form and the rest are said to be illusions, insofar as, even while they are empty of any nature of their own, the appearance of appearing as form and the rest is like an illusion. Here we will discuss the latter sense.² Moreover, within the latter, the former meaning of illusion is also present, but within the former, one cannot ascertain whether the latter meaning of illusion is present.

བྱི་མ་དེའི་འགྲུབ་ལུགས་ནི་སྒྲུབ་བ་འཛིན་པ་དང་སྟོང་པ་ངེས་པའི་སྟོན་གཉིས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་འགྲུབ་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན། སྐྱུ་མའི་རྟ་གྲང་སྒྲུབ་པ་མིག་གི་ཤེས་པས་མཐོང་བ་དང་། སྒྲུབ་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་རྟ་གྲང་མེད་པར་ཡིད་གྱི་ཤེས་པས་ངེས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་རྟ་གྲང་དུ་སྒྲུབ་བ་དེ་སྐྱུ་མའམ་བརྟེན་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བར་ངེས་པ་སྟེ་བ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། གང་ཟག་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐ་སྙད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་དུ་མེད་པར་སྒྲུབ་བ་དང་། དེ་ནི་དར་གི་རོ་བོས་གྲུབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟོང་བར་རིགས་ཤེས་གྱིས་ངེས་པ་གཉིས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་གང་ཟག་དེ་སྐྱུ་མའམ་བརྟེན་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བར་ངེས་པ་སྟེ་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འདི་ལ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཡོད་པར་རིགས་ཤེས་གྱིས་མི་འགྲུབ་ལ། རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟོང་བར་ཐ་སྙད་པའི་ཆད་མས་མི་འགྲུབ་པས་རང་བཞིན་ཡོད་མེད་ཆོལ་བའི་རིགས་པའི་ཤེས་པ་དང་གཞུགས་སོགས་ཡོད་པར་འཛིན་པའི་ཐ་སྙད་པའི་སྟོན་གཉིས་དགོས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་དེ་ཡིན་ནོ།

Here is the way to establish the latter. It is established on the basis of both the beholding of an appearance, and the mind that ascertains an emptiness. For example, the appearance of an illusory horse or cow is seen by the eye consciousness, and the fact that there is no horse or cow that exists in the way it appears is ascertained by the mental consciousness. In dependence upon that, the certainty arises that what appears as a horse or cow is an illusory, or false, appearance.

In the same way, it cannot be denied that a person and so forth appears to a conventional consciousness. Further, a reasoning consciousness ascertains that that same appearance is empty of a nature that could be established through an essence of its own. In dependence upon both, the certainty arises that such a person is an illusory, or false, appearance.

¹ *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment* (byang chub lam rim che ba), vol. pa, 476a2-477a2 (983-985), and 512a3-513a4 (1055-1057).

² Cf. *Having the Three Beliefs, yid ches gsum ldan*, 36a1-2 (73), translated below.

(984) In this regard, the existence of the appearance is not established by the reasoning consciousness, and the fact it is empty of any nature of its own is not established with a conventional valid perception. This is the reason one must have both the reasoning consciousness that seeks out whether or not a nature exists, as well as a conventional state of mind that beholds the existence of form and the rest.

།དེས་ན་གཟུགས་སོགས་སྒྱུ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་འཆར་དུ་མ་འདོད་ན་དེ་དག་འཛིན་པའི་ཐ་སྟངས་པའི་སྒྲོ་ངང་གིས་ཡོད་པས་དེ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཐབས་ལ་འབད་མི་དགོས་པས། དེ་རྣམས་ལ་རང་བཞིན་ཡོད་མེད་དཔྱད་པའི་རིགས་པས་མང་དུ་དབྱད་ནས་རང་བཞིན་ཞིགས་པ་ལ་ངེས་པ་བྲག་པོ་བསྐྱེད་ནས། དེ་ནས་སྒྲུང་བཤར་བ་ལ་བལྟས་ན་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་འཆར་བ་ཡིན་གྱི། སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་སྒྲོང་པ་ལོགས་སུ་གཏན་ལ་འབེབས་ཚུལ་མེད་དོ། །རིགས་པའི་ཤེས་པས་ཆོས་ཅན་སྒྲུང་བ་ལ་སྐྱེ་འགག་སོགས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་རྣམས་པར་བཅད་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་སྒྲོང་པ་ལ་ནམ་མཁའ་ལྟ་བུའི་སྒྲོང་ཉིད་དང་། དེ་ནས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྒྲོང་ཡང་རང་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲུང་བའི་གཟུགས་སོགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུང་བ་འཆར་བ་ལ་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་སྒྲོང་ཉིད་ཅེས་སྟོན་གྱི་མཁས་པ་རྣམས་གསུང་ངོ།

Therefore, if you do not yet accept that form and the rest dawn in the way that illusions do, since the conventional state of mind that beholds them exists automatically, there is no need to strive in methods to produce that state of mind. So, once you have analyzed many times with reasoning that investigates whether or not they have a nature, and then you produce a powerful certainty that such a nature has been refuted, *then*, if you observe the dawning of an appearance, it will dawn in the way that an illusion does. But there is no other, separate, means of setting forth the emptiness of what is like an illusion.

Wise scholars of the past have stated that the emptiness which merely eliminates, by means of a reasoning consciousness, with respect to the appearance of some subject matter, the possibility of its arising, stopping, and so on, having a nature, is the “emptiness that is like space.” They have also stated that the dawning of appearances of form and the rest – which appear to have a nature even as they are empty of any such nature – is the “emptiness that is like an illusion.”

།དེ་བཞིན་དུ་བྲག་སྒྲོང་བ་བརྒྱས་བརྗོད་སོགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲོང་ཕྱོགས་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ན་ཡང་། སྟོན་དུ་དེ་དག་རང་བཞིན་ཡོད་མེད་དཔྱད་པའི་རིགས་པས་རྣམས་པར་དབྱད་ནས་རང་བཞིན་དགག་ལ། དེའི་ངེས་པའི་ཕྱིས་ཟིན་པར་བྱས་ནས་དེ་དག་ལ་ཞུགས་པས་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་འཆར་བ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཐབས་དེ་དག་བྱཏོ། །འདིའི་གནད་ཤེས་ན་མཉམ་གཞིག་དུ་ནམ་མཁའ་ལྟ་བུའི་སྒྲོང་ཉིད་བསྒྲོམས་པས། དེའི་སྟོབས་ཀྱིས་རྗེས་སོབ་དུ་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་སྒྲོང་ཉིད་འཆར་བའི་ཚུལ་རྣམས་ཞིགས་པར་ཤེས་པར་འགྱུར་ངོ།

Similarly, if you are to engage in the side of activities such as prostration, circumambulations, recitations of mantra, and so on, then, before you do so, you should analyze with reasoning whether or not those activities have a nature. Once you have refuted any nature by eliminating such a possibility, then, retaining the measure of that certainty, you should engage in such activities. Thus you may train in seeing them dawn as illusions, and perform them from that place.

(985) If you understand this crucial point, then, by force of meditating on the sky-like emptiness during your periods of meditative equipoise, then, in the periods of aftermath, you will come to understand very well all the ways in which the emptiness that is like an illusion dawns.

* * *

། རི་ལྷ་བ་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་འཛོམས་སྒྲིལ་དང་དབྱེད་སྒྲིལ་བྱེད་པའི་ལྷ་ག་མཐོང་བསྒྲིལ་བར་འགྲོ་མི་འགྲོའི་ཆད་ནི་བདག་མེད་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་
 ལྷ་བ་གང་ཡང་རུང་བ་ལ་མ་ནོར་བའི་གོ་བ་རྣམས་པར་དག་པ་རྙེད་ནས་དེ་ལ་དམིགས་ཏེ་བསྒྲིལ་བ་ཡིན་མིན་གྱིས་འབྲེད་དགོས་ཀྱི། གཞ
 ར་གང་གིས་ཀྱང་འབྲེད་པར་མི་རུས་སོ། ། རི་འབྲས་འབྲེད་པར་མི་རུས་སྣམ་ན། བསྒྲིལ་བས་ཡུལ་ཡུལ་ཅན་གཉིས་སུ་སྤང་བའི་སྤང་
 བ་རགས་པ་རྣམས་འགགས་ནས། རྣམ་མཁའ་གཡའ་དག་པ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སེམས་རིག་ཅིང་གསལ་ལ་དྲངས་པའི་བྱེད་པར་དང་ལྷན་པ་མར་
 མེ་རྒྱང་གིས་མ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ལྷ་བ་རིང་དུ་གནས་པ་དང་། ཕྱི་དང་ནང་གི་ཡུལ་སྤང་རྣམས་ཡིད་ངོ་ན་འཇའ་ཚོན་ནས་དུ་བ་སྤབ་མའི་རྣམས་པ་
 འབྲས་བར་འཆར་ཞིང་དེ་ལ་རིང་དུ་གནས་པ་དང་། ཡིད་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ངོ་ན་བཟུང་བའི་ཡུལ་དུ་གང་འཆར་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་སེམས་ཀྱིས་གཏད་
 པ་ན་གཏད་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མི་བཟོད་པར་ཞིག་ནས་དག་འགྲོ་ཞིང་། དེ་ཡང་དང་པོར་གཟུགས་སྤྲུལ་སོགས་པའི་ཕྱི་ངོས་ཀྱི་དོན་རགས་པ་
 ལ་དེ་ལྟར་འཆར་ལ། གོམས་ན་མཐར་ཡུལ་ཅན་རིག་པ་དང་སྤྱིང་བ་ལའང་སྤར་གྱི་རིགས་པའི་རྣམས་པ་དེ་བུད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་འགྲོ་ཞིང་དེ་
 ལའང་སེམས་ཀྱིས་གཏད་པ་ན་གཏད་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མི་བཟོད་པར་འཇུག་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱུང་ཡང་། དེས་ནི་གཉིས་མེད་ཀྱི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ནིང་
 རྟོགས་པའི་ལྷ་བ་རྙེད་པ་དང་སྤང་བ་བན་བྱུན་ཤར་བ་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་དབྱེད་པ་ནས་བཤད་པའི་སྤྲུལ་ལྷ་བ་བྱུང་དོན་རྟོགས་པར་ཅུང་ཟད་ཀྱང་
 འཛོམས་པར་མི་རུས་ཏེ། ལྷ་བ་ལ་སྒྲོ་ཁ་མ་ཕྱོགས་པས་ཀྱང་གནས་ཆ་རིང་དུ་བསྐྱེད་པར་ན། དེ་ལྷ་བ་འཆར་བ་དུ་མ་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

. . . (1055) The measure of whether or not your analytical meditation and placement meditation focused upon the way things really exist will turn into a meditation on *insight* must be divided according to whether or not you have found a pure understanding that is unmistakable in its view regarding either of the two kinds of selflessness, and whether or not you can meditate by focusing upon this. But it cannot be divided by any other measure.

Suppose you think it cannot be divided thus. Well, any of the following experiences might happen to you: (1) Due to your meditation, all the coarse appearances of subject and object being dual might cease, and you might remain for a long time like a butter lamp unmoved by wind, with your mind and awareness crystal clear like a sky free of dust. (2) All outer and inner appearances of objects might dawn before your mental awareness as though with the aspect of fine smoke or a rainbow, and you might remain like that for a long time. (3) It might occur that whenever you turn your mind towards anything that dawns as an objective field held by your mental consciousness, it is unbearable to focus upon that even the slightest bit, and so it disintegrates and disappears.

(1056) (4) Or, first, coarse outer objects such as form, sound, and the rest, dawn in this way, but then, once you become used to them, in the end, your subject state of awareness, as well as what is experienced – the aspects of the kinds of things they were before – are expelled as if from a bellows. In this respect, if you direct your mind, it becomes unbearable to focus even the slightest bit, and so on.

All these things might take place, but on that basis you cannot establish in the least that you have either found the view that realizes the suchness of nonduality, or realized the meaning that is explained in the Middle Way as being “like an illusion,” even though appearances may be dawning as evanescent, disappearing wisps. This is because, even without turning your mind towards the view, if you sustain the aspect of stillness for a long time, many such things will indeed dawn.

། འདི་ལྟར་སྤྲུལ་ལྷ་བ་བྱུང་དོན་ནི་སྤར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་རང་གི་ངོ་མོས་གྲུབ་པ་མེད་པར་ཐག་གཅོད་པའི་རིགས་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ངེས་པ་དང་སྤང་བ་
 བསྐྱེད་དུ་མེད་པར་ཐ་སྙད་པའི་ཆད་མས་གྲུབ་པ་གཉིས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་འཆར་དགོས་ལ། ཡིད་ངོ་ན་གཟུགས་སོགས་རྣམས་འཇའ་ཚོན་

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Excerpts from Je Tsongkhapa's *Having the Three Beliefs*³

ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཐོག་ཟེལ་གྱིས་མཉན་ནས་རོ་སྟོམས་པར་བྱེད་པ་ལ་ནི། དབུ་མའི་ལྷ་བ་ཕུ་ཐག་ཚེད་པའི་སྟོང་པ་དང་། ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ཀྱི་བདེ་ཆེན་གཉིས་སྒྲུབ་ནས། མཉམ་གཞན་ཏུ་སྟོམ་བ་ཉིད་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ལེགས་པར་ཤེས་ནས་བསྐྱེད་སྒྲུབ་ན། དེ་ལས་ལངས་པའི་རྗེས་ཀྱི་ཆོ། མཉམ་གཞན་གྱི་ཤུགས་ཀྱིས་གང་སྒྲུབ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྲུ་མར་འཆར་བ་དང་། རིམ་བཤུ་བའི་དབུ་མ་ནས་རྗེས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་སུ། གང་སྒྲུབ་ལྷའི་འཁོར་ལོར་འབྱེད་པའི་ལམ་འབྱེད་གོམས་པའི་གནད་ཀྱིས། ལྷ་སྐྱེས་ལ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ཡང་བྱུང་དུ་མ་སྐྱེད་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱང་། དེར་རང་ཤུགས་ཀྱིས་འཆར་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

(67) In order to overpower and even out one's conceptual thoughts of liking and disliking, the main thing is to remain in a deep state of meditative equipoise, once you have joined the emptiness about which you gained certainty through a Middle Way view with a simultaneously-born great bliss.

This is because, if you can understand this well and sustain it, then, after you arise from that meditation, by force of the meditation itself, whatever appears will dawn as illusion. Then, *even without training separately* in the crucial points to which you became accustomed during the first stage – where, after a meditation session you consider whatever appears to be the mandala of a divine being, and, taking that as the path, you see that the divine bodies appear, yet without any nature – now, all this takes place *automatically*.

* * *

ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་རྣམས་ཅད་སྒྲུ་མ་དང་མི་ལམ་བཞིན་དུ་གསུངས་པའི་སྒྲུ་མ་ལྷ་བུའི་དོན་ནི་གཉིས་ཏེ། དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་སྒྲུ་མ་ལྷ་བུར་གསུངས་པ་ལྷ་བུ་ཡོད་ཅན་དུ་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་བདེན་པ་ཁེགས་པ་ལ་བྱས་པ་དང་། སྟོང་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་སྒྲུ་མ་ལྷ་བུ་གཉིས་ལས། འདིར་ནི་ཕྱི་མ་ལོ། །འདི་ལ་ནི་དེར་སྒྲུབ་བ་དང་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལྷར་གྱི་དོན་ཡོད་པས་སྟོང་པ་གཉིས་དགོས་ཀྱི། རི་མོང་གི་རྒྱ་དང་མོ་གཤམ་གྱི་བྱ་ལྷར་སྒྲུབ་བ་ཅན་དུ་ཡང་གཏན་མེད་པ་དང་། སྒྲུབ་པ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལྷར་གྱི་དོན་ཡོད་པས་སྟོང་པར་མི་འཆར་ན་ཡང་། སྒྲུབ་པ་སྒྲུ་མ་ལྷ་བུའི་དོན་སྟོང་ལ་མི་འཆར་རོ། །དེས་ན་སྒྲུ་མའི་དཔེ་དང་འབྲེལ་བར་ཆོས་གཞན་རྣམས་ཤེས་པར་བྱེད་ཚུལ་ནི། དཔེར་ན་སྒྲུ་མ་མཁའ་གྱིས་སྐྱེས་པའི་སྒྲུ་མ་དེ། ཉ་སྒྲུབ་གིས་གདོད་མ་ནས་སྟོང་ཡང་ཉ་སྒྲུབ་དུ་སྒྲུབ་བ་བསྟོན་མི་རུས་པར་འཆར་བ་བཞིན་དུ། གང་ཐག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱང་ཡུལ་སྟེང་ནས། རང་གིས་རོ་བོས་གྲུབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གདོད་མ་ནས་སྟོང་ཡང་དེར་གྲུབ་པར་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལ་བསྟོན་མི་རུས་པར་ཤེས་པའོ།

. . . (73) As for the meaning of “like an illusion” in the statements that all things are like an illusion, or like a dream, there are two senses:⁴ (1) as in the statement that ultimate reality is like an illusion, where it is established as simply existing, but one does so insofar as reality has been refuted, and (2) where, even while empty, the appearance of appearances is like an illusion. Here we will discuss the latter sense.⁵

³ *Having the Three Beliefs: The Steps for Teaching the Profound Path by Way of the Six Dharmas of Nāropa (zab lam na' ro chos drug gi sgo nas 'khrid pa'i rim pa yid ches gsum ldan)*, vol. 1a, 33a4-6 (67) and 36a1-37a3 (73-75).

⁴ Cf. Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa and Glenn H. Mullin, 1996, *Tsongkhapa's Six Yogas of Naropa* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), 173-175. My reading differs on several significant points.

⁵ This paragraph parallels what appears almost verbatim in the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment*, translated just above. Cf. *byang chub lam rim che ba*, vol. pa, 476a2-3 (983).

In this regard, since there is both the appearance and the referent that it appears to be, there have to be two ways in which it is empty. But when, like the horns of a rabbit or the son of a barren woman, there is not even any appearance at all, the meaning of appearing like an illusion does not arise before the mind. On the other hand, were something to both appear *and* have a referent for the way it appears, then it would not arise as empty, so the meaning of appearing like an illusion would not arise before the mind, either.

Therefore, the way to understand how all other existing things are similar to the examples of illusion is as follows. For example, regarding the illusion produced by an illusionist, it was from its inception empty of being either a horse or a cow, but it dawns in such a way that it cannot be denied that it appears as a horse or a cow. In the same way, you should understand that with respect to the objective field of any existing thing, such as a person, it was from its inception empty of any nature that could be established through its own essence, but nonetheless it cannot be denied that it appears as though it were established that way.

།དེ་ལྟར་ལྟ་དང་མི་ལ་སོགས་པར་སྒྲུབ་བའི་གང་ཟག་དང་། གཟུགས་སྒྲུ་སོགས་སུ་སྒྲུབ་བའི་ཆོས་སུ་འཛོག་པས། གང་ཟག་དང་ཆོས་
རྣམས་ལ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་གྲུབ་པའི་རང་བཞིན་རྒྱལ་ཙམ་ཡང་མེད་ཀྱང་། ལས་སོགས་པོ་སོགས་དང་། བལྟ་བ་དང་མཉན་པར་བྱ་བ་སོག
ས་ཉེན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་བྱ་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་འཐད་དོ། །བྱ་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་འཐད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཆད་སྒྲུབ་མིན་ལ། ཆོས་རྣམས་གདོད་མ་ནས་དེ
'ལྟར་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལ་སྒྲུབ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན་པས། སྒྲོས་བྱས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་པའང་མིན་ཞིང་། ཤེས་བྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་དེ་ལྟར་འདོད་པས་ཉི་ཆེ་བའི་
སྒྲུབ་པའང་མིན་པས། དེ་བསྒྲོམས་པས་བདེན་འཛིན་གྱི་མངོན་ཞེན་མཐའ་དག་གི་གཉེན་པར་ཡང་འགྲོའོ། །ཟབ་མོའི་དོན་དེ་སྒྲོ་གང་གི
ས་ཀྱང་ཡུལ་དུ་མི་རུང་བ་མིན་གྱི། ཡང་དག་པའི་ལྟ་བས་གཏན་ལ་ཐབས་བ་དང་། ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་སྒྲོམ་པའི་བསྒྲོམས་པས་ཡུལ་དུ་
བྱེད་རྒྱས་པས། ལས་དུས་སུ་ཉམས་སུ་ལེན་མི་རུས་བ་དང་། རིག་རྒྱ་དང་རྟོགས་རྒྱ་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཡང་མིན་ནོ།

In this way, the appearance of divine beings, humans, and so forth, appear to be people, and what appears as forms, sounds, and so forth, can be posited as phenomena. So persons and things do not have even an atom of a nature that could be established through its own essence, but the collector of karma, and so forth, as well as the actions of looking, listening, and so on – all the actions of dependent relationship – make sense.

Since all actions make sense, this is not an emptiness that is cut off. Moreover, as all things have been empty this way from the very beginning, this is simply the understanding that they are empty. So it is also not an emptiness made up by your mind.

(74) Since we accept that all knowable things are like this, it is also not a trivial emptiness. So by meditating on this, it will go on to become the antidote for every last insistent belief that grasps to things as real.

But it is also not the case that this profound meaning cannot be an objective field for any state of mind whatsoever. Rather, you can set it forth with correct view, and by meditating on the correct meaning, it can become an objective field for you. It is also not an emptiness that you cannot practice while still on the path, nor is it an emptiness of which you cannot be aware or that you cannot realize.

།མདོར་ན་ངའི་སྒྲུལ་དུ་འཛིན་པའི་གཞི་གང་ཟག་ལ། སྤང་པོ་དང་རང་བཞིན་ཅིག་ཐ་དད་གང་དུ་གྲུབ་སྒྲུལ་དུ་བརྟགས་པའི་སྒྲོ་ནས། གང་
ཟག་ལ་རང་བཞིན་རྩང་ཟད་ཀྱང་མེད་དོ་སྒྲུལ་པའི་ངེས་པ་བརྟན་པོ་བྱ་སྟེ། སྒྲོང་སྒྲོགས་ལ་དེ་འདྲ་བ་མང་དུ་སྦྱང་། དེ་ནས་གང་ཟག་གི་ཐ་

སྤྲོད་བསྟོན་མི་ཁྱས་པར་སྤང་བ་ནམས། མྱོའི་ཡུལ་དུ་འཆར་དུ་གཞུག་ལ། དེ་ལས་གསོག་པ་སོ་དང་། འབྲས་བུ་སྤྲོད་བ་སོར་འཛོག་པའི་
 རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་ནམས་ཡིད་ལ་བྱ་ཞིང་། རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ལ་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་འཐད་པའི་འཐད་ལུགས་ནམས་ལ་ངེས་པ་རྟེན་བར་བྱའོ
 ། །དེ་གཉིས་འགལ་བར་སྤང་བའི་ཆེན་གཞུགས་བརྟན་སོགས་དཔེར་སྤངས་ནས། མི་འགལ་བའི་ཚུལ་བསམ་སྟེ། འདི་ལྟར་བྱད་བཞིན་
 གྱི་གཞུགས་བརྟན་ནི་མིག་སྒྲ་སོགས་གང་དུ་སྤང་བས་སྟོང་ཡང་། བྱད་དང་མེ་ལོང་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྟེ་བ་དང་། རྟེན་དེ་དག་འགལ་ཞིག་ལོ་
 ག་པའི་ཆེ་འཛིག་པ་གཉིས་བསྟོན་མི་ཁྱས་པར་གཞི་མཐུན་དུ་འདུ་བ་བཞིན་དུ། གང་ཟག་ལ་ཡང་རང་བཞིན་རྩལ་ཙམ་མེད་ཀྱང་། ལས་
 གསོག་པ་སོ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་སྤྲོད་བ་སོ་དང་། སྟོན་གྱི་ལས་ཉོན་སོགས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སྟེ་བ་ཡང་མི་འགལ་ལོ་སྟམ་དུ་སྤྲོད་འོ།

In brief, upon the person that is the basis for holding the thought, “I am,” examine whether the heaps and their nature could be established either as one thing or as different things. Through such investigation, stabilize the certainty wherein you think, “There is not even the slightest nature to a person.”⁶ Train thus a great deal in the side of emptiness. Then, all those appearances that cannot be denied as having the convention of a person must continue to arise as the objective field of the mind. Turn your mind then to the side of dependent relationships, which posit a collector of karma and an experiencer of results. Then you will find certainty about how it is that all the dependent relationships make sense with respect to what lacks any nature.

Whenever these two seem to be contradictory, think about how there is no contradiction by taking up the example of a reflected image, and so on. In this way, the reflection of a face is empty of the eyes, nose, and so forth, that appear in the way they do. Nonetheless, in dependence upon the face and the mirror, the reflection is born, and when those conditions are altered, it is destroyed. Neither birth nor destruction can be denied, and they are united upon a single shared basis. In the same way, there is not even an atom of nature to a person, but it is no contradiction for there to be a collector of karma and an experiencer of results, or for birth to occur in dependence upon previous actions, mental afflictions, and so forth. Train in this way of thinking.

།དེ་ལ་ངེས་པ་བརྟན་པ་ན་སྟོང་གཞུག་ལས་ཁང་དང་། བཅུད་ནམས་ལྟ་དང་ལྟ་མོར་ལྟ་བ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་བདེ་སྟོང་དབྱེར་མེད་གྱི་
 རྟེན་འབྲེལ་དུ་ལྟ་བ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་བོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བྱས་ན་གང་སྤང་སྟེ་སྟེ། ལྟ་སྟེ་སྟེ་སྟེ། ལྟ་མ་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་རོང་ཤར་བའི་ཤེས་བྱ་སྟམ་རིམ་
 མོ། །སྤང་ཡང་མཉམ་གཞག་ཏུ་བདེ་ཆེན་རྟེན་པ་ན། སྟོང་ཉིད་ལེགས་པར་ངེས་པའི་ལྟ་བ་བྲན་པར་བྱས་ལ། དེའི་སྟེང་དུ་རྟེ་གཅིག་ཏུ་བ
 ཞག་སྟེ་མི་རྟོག་པ་བསྟེད་དེ། དེ་ལྟར་མཉམ་རྗེས་སྟེལ་མ་བྱའོ།

(75) When you have a stable certainty about this, then practice looking upon your environmental vessel as an inconceivable palace, and all of its inhabitants as male and female divine beings. Then practice viewing them as the dance of indivisible bliss and emptiness. If you can do that, three things will come to you in sequence: *Whatever appears is the divine body, the divine body is an illusion, and the illusion dawns with the taste of great bliss.* If once again you can discover great bliss during your meditation sessions, recall the view of the emptiness that you have ascertained so well. Then settle single-pointedly upon that, and a nonconceptual state will occur. Alternate between your sessions of meditation and aftermath in this way.

⁶ Cf. *The Great Book on the Steps of the Path (byang chub lam rim che ba)*, vol. pa, 479a2-479b1 (989-990) for what is again an identical passage, from *gang zag la rang bzhin cung zad* up to *mi 'gal lo snyam du sbyang* (from “stabilize the certainty” to “this way of thinking”).

Appendix Seventeen: No More Than Winds and Mind

Excerpts from Je Tsongkhapa's *Ultimate Private Advice: Blessing Oneself*¹

།རྗེ་བཙུན་དམ་པ་དམིགས་པ་མེད་པའི་སྤྲུགས་རྗེ་ཆེན་པོ་དང་ལྷན་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཞབས་ལ་དུས་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་གུས་པས་བྱག་འཆལ་ལོ།
།རྒྱལ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཁུན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཐམས་ཅད་གཅིག་ཏུ་བསྐྱུས་པའི་ངོ་བོ་བཙེམ་ལྷན་འདས་འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་དང་། དབང་
སྤྲུག་བརྒྱད་དང་ལྷན་པའི་དོ་རྗེ་འཆར་ཆེན་པོ་མགོན་པོ་ལྷ་སྤྲུབ་ཡབ་སྤྲུབ་ཀྱི་ཞབས་ལ་གུས་པ་ཆེན་པོས་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆིའོ།

(454) I bow down with reverence, at all times, to the feet of all those Holy Ones who possess the vast heart of compassion that takes no object as its focus. I take refuge with great reverence at the feet of the Blessed One, Mañjughoṣa, who is the essence of the omniscient, primordial wisdom of all the Victorious Ones wrapped into one, and at the feet of that Great Vajradhara, endowed with the eight powers, who is our Protector Nāgārjuna – the spiritual father together with his sons.

།མན་ངག་གི་མཐར་སྤྲུག་རང་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པའི་རིམ་པ་ལ་གསུམ། མཆན་གྱི་དོན། གཞུང་གྱི་དོན། མཐུག་གི་དོན་ནོ།

There are three sections to the ultimate private advice on the Stage of Blessing Oneself. These are 1) the meaning of the name, 2) the meaning of the text, and 3) the meaning of the conclusion.

།དང་པོ་ནི། སྤྱི་རང་ངོ་། །ཨ་རྟེན་ནི་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པའོ། །ཀ་མ་ནི་རིམ་པའོ། །འདི་ལ་ལཱྭས། བདག་ནི་འོད་གསལ་ཏེ་དངོས་
པོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་ཡིན་པས་སོ། །དེ་ལས་སྤྱི་མའི་སྤྱུ་གང་དུ་འཛིན་པ་ནི་བདག་ལ་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པའོ། །ཡང་ན་བདག་ནི་དོ་
རྗེ་འཆར་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤྱོད། །དེ་ཉིད་ལ་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པ་ནི་སྤྱི་མ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དཔེ་དང་སྤྱར་པའོ། །ཞེས་འཆད་དེ། སྤྱི་མ་ལྷར་
ན་བདག་ལ་ནི་བདག་ལས་ཞེས་པ་དང་། བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པ་ནི་དེས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་ལ། བྱི་མ་ལྷར་ན་བདག་ལ་སྤྱི་མའི་དཔེ་དོན་
སྤྱར་པའི་དོན་ཏེ། །རྒྱད་གཞན་ལས་ཀྱང་བདག་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པ་ཞེས་མང་དུ་འབྱུང་ལ་དཔེ་དོན་ཡང་མང་དུ་ཡོད་ནའང་འདིར་ནི་བད་
ག་ཅེས་པ་ནི་ངོ་སྤྲོད་པའི་ཐ་སྙད་འདོགས་པའི་གདགས་གཞིར་གྱུར་པའི་ལུས་སམ་སྤྱོད། །དེ་ལ་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པ་ནི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཙམ་
གྱིས་སྤྱི་མ་ལྷ་བུའི་ལྷའི་སྤྱུར་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྤྱོད་བསྐྱུས་ལས། རང་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པའི་མན་ངག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཙམ་གྱིས་ཡིད་ཀྱི་རང་བ་
ཞིན་གྱི་ལྷའི་སྤྱི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ལས་པར་འབྱུང་བ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་ངོ།

As for the first, *sva* means “oneself,” *adhiṣṭhāna* means “blessing,” and *krama* means “stage.” Lakṣmī explains it thus:²

¹ *man ngag gi mthar thug bdag byin rlabs*, rje'i gsung 'bum, vol. *cha*, 1a1-10a4 (454-470). This is a commentary on the “Third Stage” of a pivotal Guhyasamāja text attributed to Nāgārjuna: *Pañcakrama, rim pa lnga pa*, Toh. 1802, sde dge bstan 'gyur, rgyud, vol. *ngi*, 51b6-53b7, as translated into Tibetan by Ācārya Śraddhākaravarma and Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo (*rin chen bzang po*). I have also consulted the Tibetan *bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* critical edition (vol. 18: 145-150), but in many cases it seems Tsongkhapa is working from yet a different translation. In turn, Tsongkhapa frequently compares his unidentified edition to the translation by Chag Lotsawa (*chag lo tsa' ba*).

² Cf. Lakṣmī, *Pañcakramavṛttārthavivocana, rim pa lnga'i 'grel pa'i don gsal bar byed pa* (*Clarification of the Meaning of the Commentary to the Five Stages*), Toh. 1842, sde dge bstan 'gyur, rgyud, vol. *chi*, 188a4-6. Even if Tsongkhapa was looking at a different Tibetan translation, it seems this is a close paraphrase, not a direct quotation.

(455) “Self” is the clear light, insofar as it is the nature of every functioning thing. Whenever one takes hold of the holy body of illusion from this, one has given blessing to the self. Alternatively, “self” is the holy body of Vajradhara and the rest. To bless this is to connect it with the examples of an illusion, and so forth.

According to the former explanation, the meaning of “to oneself” is said to be “from oneself,” and “to grant blessing” means “to generate from it.” According to the latter explanation, the meaning is that one connects the meaning of the examples of illusion to oneself. But the phrase “blessing oneself” also comes up frequently in other tantras, and there are many more meanings to it.

Here, however, “self” means the body – or holy body – that serves as the basis upon which one applies a conventional label with the thought, “I am.” “To give blessing to it” is to generate the holy body of a divine being, which is like an illusion, through nothing more than primordial wisdom. This is true because the *Integration of Practices* refers to “the private advice for Granting Blessing to Oneself, that is, how to become the complete holy body of a divine being whose nature is mind, from nothing more than primordial wisdom.”

* * *

།གཉིས་པ་ནི། ཉེན་ལྷག་མ་འདྲན་པ་སྟེ་ཕྱག་འཆམ་ནས་བདག་གིས་བཤད་པར་བྱའོ། །ཞེས་སྒྲུང་རོ། །གང་ན་རང་གིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པ་
འེ་རིམ་པའོ། །ཀུན་སྒྲོང་གང་གིས་ན། བཅེ་བས་ཞེས་ཉེ། རིམ་པ་འདི་ལ་བཅེ་བ་ཁོ་ན་ཅ་བའི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ཉེ། གཞན་དུ་ན་སེམས་དམིགས་
གྱི་རིམ་པ་ལ་ཞུགས་པས་སྒྲུང་ཡང་ལྟའི་སྒྱུ་འཛིན་པ་དགོས་པ་མེད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དགོས་པ་ནི། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་དོན་དང་ཆད་པའི་ཕྱོག་
ས་སྒྲུང་བ་དང་། སྟོན་གྱི་སྟོན་ལས་འབྲས་བྱ་དང་ལྡན་པ་སྟེ། དེ་ནི་བཅེ་བས་བཤད་དོ་ཞེས་ཟེར་རོ། །དེ་ནི་འགྲིག་པར་མི་སྒྲུང་སྟེ། འདི་
ནི་རིམ་པ་འདི་བཤད་པའི་ཀུན་སྒྲོང་ཡིན་གྱི་སྒྱུ་མའི་སྒྲུང་ལྡན་པའི་ཀུན་སྒྲོང་མིན་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། སེམས་དམིགས་ཅན་གྱིས་གྲོལ་བ་མི་
ཐོབ་པས་རང་དོན་ལའང་སྒྱུ་མའི་སྒྱུ་བསྐྱབ་དགོས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

. . . (456) Here is the second part [the commitment to compose the work]. The grammatical particle in the verse that indicates there is more to come means, “now that I have made obeisance, I will explain.” *What* [Nāgārjuna] will explain is the Stage of Blessing Oneself. *By what motivation*, he says, is “out of love.” That is, the root cause for this stage is love alone. [Lakṣmī] claims³ that,

This is because otherwise there would be no imperative to come back and take hold of the holy body of a divine being after having entered into the stage focused on the mind [i.e., the mind-set-apart]. This imperative is (1) for the sake of living beings, (2) in order to avoid the extreme of being cut off, and (3) as the result of former prayers. Therefore “I will explain it out of love.”

Yet this does not seem quite right, because, (1) although love is indeed the motivation for *explaining* this stage, it is not the motivation for standing up in the holy body of illusion, and (2) since one cannot achieve liberation solely through [the stage] focused upon the mind, it is imperative that one must attain the holy body of illusion even just for one’s own benefit.

³ Again, this appears either as a close paraphrase or a quotation of a different translation. Cf. Lakṣmī, *Pañcakramavṛttāṛthavivocana*, 244b7-245a2.

* * *

།བཞི་པ་ནི། འགོ་ཀུན་རང་དབང་མེད་པ་སྟེ། །ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་གཞི་དུས་ཀྱི་འོད་གསལ་ལས་གཞི་དུས་ཀྱི་སྒྱུ་ལུས་འགྲུབ་ཚུལ་སྟོན་ཏེ།
ལས་དུས་ཀྱི་སྒྱུ་མའི་སྒྱུ་སྒྲུབ་པ་ནི་སྒྲུང་གཞི་རིམ་བ་བཞིན་དུ་བསྒྲུབ་དགོས་པས་དེའི་ཡན་ལག་དུ་སྟོན་པའོ། །འགོ་བ་ཀུན་འཆི་བའི་འོད་
གསལ་གྱི་གཞན་དབང་ཅན་ཡིན་པས་རང་དབང་དུ་མི་འབྱུང་ལ། དེའང་ཞི་བའི་འོད་གསལ་ལས་བར་དོའི་ལུས་གྲུབ་པའོ། །སེམས་ག
ང་གིས་ནི་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་ཐབས་དང་བྲལ་བ་ལ་དེ་འཁོར་བའི་བར་དོ་རང་དགའ་བར་འགྱུར་ལ་ཐབས་དང་ལྡན་ན་སྒྱུ་མའི་སྒྱུར་འགྱུར་བ
ར་སྟོན་ནོ།

. . . (459) Here is fourth point [the actual explanation of the Stage of Blessing Oneself]. The four lines that begin, “No wandering being has any autonomy . . .”⁴ teach how it is that one reaches the illusory body of the original condition when coming out of the clear light of the original condition. Since, in order to achieve the holy body of illusion at the time of the path, one needs to have attained the precise basis for purification already, this is taught as an auxiliary branch.

(460) Since every wandering being is subject to the power of another – the clear light of dying – no one arises through any power of one’s own. Moreover, from the clear light of death one attains the body of the intermediate state. The four lines that begin, “From such a mind . . .” teach that those who lack a method usually become a being of the intermediate state within the cycle, whereas if one had a method, one could become a holy body of illusion.

།སྒྲེ་གི་གཅིག་ནས་གཅིག་དུ་བརྒྱུད་དེ་འཁོར་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་ནི་སེམས་དང་རྒྱུང་ཅན་གྱི་གཟུགས་ཏེ། རང་བཞིན་ལ་གཞག་གི་དེ་ལས་
ལོགས་ན་སྒྲེ་གི་བྱེད་མཁན་མེད་པར་སྟོན་པ་ནི། འདིར་ནི་ཞེས་པ་བཞིའོ། །སེམས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་རྣམ་གནས་ས། །ཉིད་ནི་འཁོར་བར་
ཤེས་བར་བྱ། །ཞེས་སྒྲུང་རོ། །སེམས་རྒྱུང་གི་སྦྱར་བ་སྟེ་གཡོ་བའི་བྱ་བས་གཡོས་པ་མེད་པར་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་རྟོག་པ་རྣམས་མི་སྒྲེ་ལ།
རྒྱུང་སེམས་ལས་སྒྲེས་པའི་རྟོག་པས་ཉོན་མོངས་དང་ལས་བསགས་ཏེ་འཁོར་བ་ནི། རྒྱུང་གི་སྦྱར་བ་ཞེས་པ་བཞིའོ། །འཁོར་བའི་ངང་ཚུ
ལ་དེ་ལྟར་གནས་པ་དེ་ཐབས་མཁས་པ་ལ་སྒྱུ་མའི་སྒྱུར་འགྱུར་ཚུལ་ནི། རྒྱུང་དང་ཡང་དག་ལྡན་པ་ཡི། །ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་སྟོན་ཏེ།

The four lines beginning, “Here . . .” teach that the living beings of the cycle who travel in a stream from one birth and death to the next have a form that is made of nothing more than winds and mind. They are posited with respect to such a nature, but apart from this, there is no one who is born or dies. Thus [Nāgārjuna] adds,

Know this itself to be the cycle:
To remain in the nature of a mind.

Since the joining of wind to mind is an action of movement, when there is no movement, the conceptualizations of “nature” do not arise. But due to the conceptualizations that arise from winds and mind, mental afflictions and karma accumulate. That is, the “cycle” is explained by the four lines that begin, “When there is no joining of wind . . .”

That is how one remains in the cycle. But the way to use skillful means to turn that into a holy body of illusion is taught with the four lines that begin, “The one who is perfectly endowed with the winds . . .”

⁴ This entire section glosses the verses translated in the third epigraph to this dissertation, p. iv.

སྒྲུབ་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་སེམས་དབེན་སྒྲོང་བ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་མཐར་ལུགས་ལྟོག་གི་སྒྲུབ་བ་གསུམ་རྒྱུད་དང་ལྟན་པ་དེ། རྣམ་
འབྱོར་པས་གསར་དུ་ཐོབ་པའི་ལུས་སུ་འབྱུང་བ་ལ་ནི་སྒྱུ་མའི་ལུས་སམ་སྒྱུ་མའི་སྒྱུ་ཞེས་བརྗོད་དོ། །སྒྲུབ་ཡང་ཞེས་པ་ནི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པ་
དེ་ཆེ་སྒྲུ་མར་ཤི་བའི་འོད་གསལ་ལས་རྣམ་ཤེས་གསུམ་རྒྱུད་དང་བཅས་པ་ལས་བྱུབ་པའི་ལུས་ཤིག་སྒྲུབ་ཐོབ་པར་མ་ཟད་ཅེས་པའི་དོན་
ལོ། །སེམས་དབེན་ཐོབ་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པས་ངོ་སྤྲོད་དུ་ཐ་སྐྱོད་འདོགས་པའི་གདགས་གཞིར་གྱུར་པའི་རང་གི་ལུས་རྒྱུད་སེམས་ཅམ་
ལ་བསྐྱུབ་པ་དེ་བས་ན། འདི་ལྟར་འགྲོ་བ་ཀུན་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་སྒྲུ་ན་མེད་པའི་དོན་ཆེ་ཐེག་པ་འདིར་བཤད་དེ། ཞེས་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་སྒྱུ་མ་
བཞིན་དུ་ཐེག་པ་འདིར་གསུངས་པའི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སྒྱུ་མའི་དོན་ནི་འགྲོ་བ་རྣམས་རྒྱུད་སེམས་ཀྱི་ལུས་སུ་སྒྲོན་པ་འདི་ཡིན་ཞེས་
པའོ། །སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་བྱུབ་པས་ནི་འགྲོ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་རང་གིས་ཐོབ་པའི་སྒྱུ་མའི་ལུས་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ཡང་མཐོང་ངོ།

As explained before, after having given birth to the primordial wisdom of the three kinds of emptiness at the end of the stage of the mind-set-apart, there is someone endowed with the winds of the three appearances of the reverse order. This yogi then arises in a body that is attained anew. This is called the “body of illusion,” or the holy body of illusion.

(461) Now the phrase “comes back again” means “not merely to that which was attained before,” namely, the body that was formed out of the three states of awareness, along with their winds, after the clear light of death of the yogi’s previous life. The “my body” that is the basis upon which the yogi who has attained the stage of the mind-set-apart will apply the term when he or she thinks, “me,” is now something made of nothing more than winds and mind.

When it says, “Therefore in this way every wandering being is said here” – in the unsurpassed Vajrayāna – “to be ‘like an illusion,’” it means that, “For every living being to be similar to an illusion has the unique meaning of illusion spoken of here in this vehicle, namely, that all those wanderers show themselves in a body of winds and mind.” The one who achieves the concentration, “like an illusion,” sees it to be like this: as though all wanderers had themselves achieved the body of illusion.

།རིས་ལྟའི་འགྲེལ་བྱེད་ཀུན་གྱིས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་བཞིན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་བ་སྐབས་འདིའི་སྒྱུ་མའི་དོན་དུ་བཤད་པས་ནི་འདིར་བཤད་པའི་སྒྱུ་ལུས་
ཀྱི་དོན་གཏན་ནས་མི་རྟོག་པས། སྒྲོད་བསྐྱུས་སུ་འང་པར་བྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པའི་སྒྱུ་མ་དང་། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པས་ལྟའི་སྒྱུ་སྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་བཏྲ་བ་ན་
མས་གྱིས་བདག་ལ་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་པའི་དོན་མི་ཤེས་པར་གསུངས་སོ། །དེས་ན་སྒྱུར་འགྲོ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱུད་སེམས་ཅམ་ལས་བྱུབ་
པའི་སྒྱུ་མའི་ལུས་ཅན་དང་། འདྲ་བར་དུ་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་གྱི་སྒྲོབས་གྱིས་རྒྱུད་སེམས་ཅམ་ལས་བྱུབ་པའི་རང་གི་ལུས་སྒྱུ་
མའི་སྒྱུར་སྒྱུབ་ལུགས་ཤེས་པ་ནི་གནད་ཀྱི་དོན་དུ་སྒྲུང་ངོ།

Now any of those commentators on the Five Stages who explain the meaning of illusion in this context to be “appearing even though it has no nature” have absolutely failed to discover the meaning of the body of illusion as it is explained here. Indeed, it is stated in the *Integration of Practices* that all those who look upon things to be “like the illusion” of the way of the perfections, or who, as practitioners of the creation stage, view things to be “like the illusion” of the holy body of a divine being, do not understand the meaning of Granting Blessing to Oneself.

Thus it appears that the meaning of the crucial point here is that one understand, in general, how it is that every wanderer has a body of illusion, made of nothing more than winds and mind, and in particular, how it is that a yogi, by the power of concentration, can attain a holy body of illusion that will now be his or her own body, made of nothing

more than winds and mind.

འདྲིན་འབྱུང་བ་དང་འབྱུང་འགྲུར་རགས་པའི་ལུས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུས་འདི་རྣམས་རྒྱུ་མཉམས་ཅན་ལས་གྲུབ་ཅེས་པ་ནི་ལྟར་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། བཤད་པར་བྱ་སྟེ། འདི་ལ་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུས་རྣམས་རྒྱུ་མཉམས་ཅན་ལས་གྲུབ་པའི་ཞེས་པའི་ལུས་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུས་གང་ཡིན་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་མི་ཟེར་གྱི་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་མེད་ཆ་བ་དང་རྒྱུ་མཉམས་ཅན་གྱི་དུག་གི་གཉུག་མའི་མཆོན་ཉིད་དམ་ཅུ་སྟེ་འདི་རང་བཞིན་ཞེས་བརྗོད་པ་ལྟར། སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་ནི་རྒྱུ་མཉམས་ཅན་ཞིག་ཡིན་གྱི་རང་དག་འབད་ལུས་མིན་ནོ།

Well then, you might say, all the bodies of embodied beings that are made of the coarse elements and formations of those elements must also be “made of nothing more than winds and mind.” How can that be?

(462) I will explain. In this regard, “all the bodies of living beings” – the bodies that are said to be “made of nothing more than winds and mind” – does not refer to just any body a living being happens to have. Rather, it refers to the *primordially indwelling body* of each living being.

Now, when speaking of the heat of fire and the wetness of water, we call it the “primordially indwelling characteristic” or the “conventional nature.” Similarly, the primordially indwelling body of every living being is one made of nothing more than winds and mind. But that is not the commonplace body.

འདི་འདྲ་གྱི་རྩ་བ་ཀྱི་དོན་བཞག་ནས་སྒྲུབ་པ་མིན་ཏེ། གཟུགས་དང་སེམས་གཉིས་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་སུ་ཡོད་མེད་མཚུངས་པས་ཁྱད་པར་དུ་མི་རུས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། འོན་ཀྱང་གཟུགས་རགས་པའི་ལུས་ནི་གཟུགས་མེད་ཁམས་སུ་མེད་ཀྱང་དེའི་སེམས་ཅན་ལ་ལུས་གཞག་དགོས་པས་འབྲུལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་མིན་ནོ། གཟུགས་ཅན་གྱི་ཁམས་ནའང་། བྱད་བཞིན་དང་རྒྱུ་མཉམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུས་ཀྱང་། མེར་མེར་སྤོལ་སོགས་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་མེད་ཀྱང་། དེར་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུས་ཡོད་པས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་མིན་ཏེ། འབྱུང་བ་རགས་པའི་ལུས་གཞན་ཡང་བར་སྤིང་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་མེད་པས་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་མིན་པར་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་ལོ།

This, moreover, is not established by refuting outer objects, because both form and mind are equal in terms of either existing or not existing as either of the two realities. So you cannot make the distinction that way.

Well, you might say, bodies of coarse form do not exist in the formless realm, so, since it would be a mistake if you had to posit a body for such living beings, such bodies of coarse form cannot be the primordially indwelling body.

Meanwhile, in the realms that do have form, there are bodies with faces, arms, legs, and so forth, but those do not exist during the various stages of embryonic development. Since at that point there is still the body of a living being, however, this cannot be the primordially indwelling body of a living being, either.

Moreover, since bodies composed of the coarse elements do not exist during the intermediate state, you should understand that they are not the primordially indwelling body.

དེས་ན་འབྱུང་བ་འབྱུང་འགྲུར་གྱི་ལུས་དང་འགྲོ་བ་སོ་སོའི་ལུས་དང་རྟན་གཞི་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ལུས་ནི་རྒྱུ་མཉམས་ཅན་ལས་འགྲུབ་པ་

ཡིན་གྱི་གཉུག་མ་བ་མིན་པས་གནས་སྐབས་སུ་འདུག་པའི་ཡིན་ལ། རྒྱུ་མེས་ཙམ་གྱི་ལུས་ནི་རྒྱུ་ལོར་བ་ལྟར་དུས་ནས་ཡང་
མེས་ཙམ་གྱི་ལུས་ལ་མི་འཁྲུག་བས་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་སོ།

Therefore, a body formed from the elements and what is made from the elements, the body of an individual wandering being, or a body which experiences youth, old age, and so forth, exists only for a time, like the heat of water. Because any such body is not continuously, primordially indwelling, it is only a body of the moment, and one can be separated from it.

(463) On the other hand, the body of nothing more than winds and mind is like the wetness of water; since at any and all times it is, without mistake, the body of a living being, it is a primordially indwelling body.

ཤེས་པ་དང་རྩོལ་དེའི་མེད་དུ་འབྱུག་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་ཏུ་ཐ་བ་ནི་མར་ལ་མར་བཞག་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པ་དང་འབྲེར་བར་སྦྱོད་བསྟུ
ས་ལས་གསུངས་པས། གཞུགས་མེད་ནའང་ཡོད་དེ། དགོངས་པ་ལུང་སྟོན་དང་རྩོལ་མེད་མེད་པར་ཁམས་གསུམ་གྱི་འགྲོ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱུ
མེས་ཀྱི་བདག་ཉིད་དུ་ལན་དུ་མར་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ནི་དབང་པོའི་གཞུགས་ཀྱང་མིན་ལ་དབང་པོ་ལྡེ་སྦྱོད་ལུལ་དུ་འདུག་མི་སྟ
ང་ཞིང་། ཡིད་རང་དགའ་བའི་ལུལ་དུ་གཞུགས་སུ་སྒྲུང་བའང་མིན་པས་གཞུགས་མེད་ཁམས་གཞུགས་ཀྱི་འདུ་ཤེས་ལས་འདས་པར་ག
སུངས་པ་དང་མི་འགལ་སོ།

As for the extremely subtle winds that engage inseparably from the essential nature of consciousness, it is stated in the *Integration of Practices* that these can be blended with consciousness, like mixing butter into butter. So they exist even in the formless realm, because it is stated many times in *The Revelation of the True Intent* (*Sandhividyākaraṇa-tantra*) and in *The String of Diamonds* (*Vajramālābhīdhāna-tantra*) that the very identity of all wanderers in all three realms is that of winds and mind.

Since these [extremely subtle winds] are not the physical form of a sense faculty, nor do they appear as the experiential field of any of the five sense faculties, and since they also do not appear as form in the objective field of an ordinary mental consciousness, this does not contradict the statement that those of the formless realm are beyond the capacity to discriminate form.

ཁག་ཏེ་རྒྱུ་དེ་རྣམས་གཡོས་པའི་བྱ་བ་བྱེད་པ་ཙམ་ལ་ཟེར་ན་ནི་མེས་སུ་རྒྱུ་མེས་པ་ལ་རྒྱུ་གི་མིང་གིས་འདོགས་པ་ཟད་པས་
རྒྱུ་མིན་ལ་དེ་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ན་ནི་མཆོན་ཉིད་བརྟོག་སོ་ཞེ་ན། རྩོར་བརྒྱས་དང་མེས་སུ་དབེན་མཐར་བྱིན་པའི་རྣ
ལ་འབྱོར་པས་འདྲ་ཟེར་ལྡེ་རྣམས་པ་ཙམ་དུ་མཐོང་བས་ན་མེས་སུ་རྒྱུ་མེས་པ་ལས་མཆོན་ཉིད་ཟ་དད་ལ། ལྷ་བྱག་གི་སྟོན་སྟུ་བ་སོ
གས་ཀྱི་རགས་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བྲལ་བ་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་རྒྱུ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པའོ། །དབང་ཤེས་ཀྱང་རྒྱུ་དང་འབྲེས་ནས་འབྱུག་
མོད་ཀྱང་། མེས་ཙམ་གྱི་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་སུ་བཞག་པའི་མེས་ཙམ་ནི་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་པ་ཉིད་ཡིན་ཏེ། དབང་ཤེས་ནི་གཉིད་འབྱུག་ལ་སོག
ས་པའི་སྐབས་དུ་མར་ལོག་ཀྱང་མེས་ཙམ་གྱི་ལུས་མི་ལྡོག་པས། གཞུགས་ཙན་རགས་པའི་ལུས་དང་འབྲེས།

Suppose you claim that this “wind” is simply that which enables consciousness to move. Then, you say, “since the name of ‘wind’ is used up in its application to the mental function that is movement of the mind, then if this were some other kind of wind, apart from what is ‘not-wind,’ you have to give me a definition for it.”

When a yogi who has come to the final end of the vajra recitation and the mind-set-apart sees a light in the aspect of five colors, its defining characteristic is different from that of

the mental function that is movement of the mind. It is called the *wind of clear light*, entirely free of the coarse winds that flow through the nostrils, and so forth.

Now it true that the sense consciousnesses also engage while blended with winds. But the mind that is explained to be the primordially indwelling body of a living being is mental consciousness itself. The sense consciousnesses are turned inwards on many occasions, such as during deep sleep, but this does not stop the body of a living being from existing. So in that sense, [the mind that is explained to be the primordially indwelling body] is similar to a body of coarse physical form.

།དེས་ན་འབྱུང་བ་ཤིན་ཏུ་རགས་པའི་ལུས་དང་ལྗན་པའི་སྐབས་སུ་འདྲ་མཉམས་ཅན་དེའི་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་ནི་རྒྱང་དང་ཡིད་གྱེས་པ་ད
བྱེར་མེད་དུ་འཇུག་པའི་རྒྱང་མཉམས་ཅན་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་དང་རགས་པའི་ལུས་གཉིས་ཉེན་བཞེན་པའི་འབྲེལ་པའང་གནས་སྐབས་འགའ་ཞི
ག་ཅུ་ཡིན་གྱི་གཉུག་མ་པ་མིན་ནོ། །གཞན་ཡང་རྣམ་ཤེས་གཞན་གྱི་ཐོང་དུ་འཇུག་པའི་རྒྱས་པ་ཐོབ་པས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་ཅན་གྱི་སྟོབས་
གྱིས་དེ་གཉིས་གྱི་ཉེན་དང་བཞེན་པའི་འབྲེལ་པ་གཞིག་རྒྱས་ལ། བསད་གསོ་རྒྱས་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པས་ཀྱང་དེ་གཉིས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་གྱི་
སྟོབས་གྱིས་དབྱེས་བར་རྒྱས་ཀྱང་རྒྱང་མཉམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུས་ནི་མི་ལྟོག་ནོ།

(464) Therefore, at those times when a living being has a body of very coarse elements, the primordially indwelling body of such a being is nothing more than the winds and mind that engage inseparably *as* winds and mental consciousness. But the relationship between those [winds and mind] and the coarse body – in which one relies upon the other – is only temporary, and so the *relationship* is not a primordially indwelling one.

Furthermore, once one has achieved the ability to enter the city of another's consciousness, one can destroy the relationship between those two – that of a basis and what rests upon it – through nothing more than the power of one's concentration. A yogi who can revive the dead is also able to rip those two apart, by no more than the power of his or her concentration. Nevertheless, the body made of nothing more than winds and mind has not ceased.

།མཉམས་དབེན་མཐར་ཐྱིན་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་པས་ཀྱང་། རྣམ་སྟོན་གྱི་ལུས་དང་མཉམས་གཉིས་ཉེན་དང་བཞེན་པར་སྟོན་གྱི་ལས་གྱིས་འཕ
ངས་པའི་འབྲེལ་པ་རགས་པ་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་གྱི་སྟོབས་གྱིས་འགོག་རྒྱས་ཏེ། འཆི་བའི་དུས་ཀྱི་ཐེམ་རིམ་བཞིན་དུ་ས་རྩ་ལ་ཐེམ་པ་སོགས་
གྱི་ཐེམ་རིམ་གྱི་སྟོན་སྟོང་པ་གསུམ་མངོན་དུ་བྱེད་རྒྱས་པའི་བྱིར་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་ཐེམ་པའི་རིམ་པ་ནི་རྣམ་ཤེས་གྱི་ཉེད་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱས་པ
རགས་པ་ལྟོག་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིར་རོ། །དེའི་བྱིར་ཤི་བའི་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་མཐར་རྣམ་སྟོན་གྱི་ལུས་ལས་འོགས་སུ་བར་དོའི་ལུས་འབྲུབ་པ་
བཞིན་དུ། སྟོང་པ་གསུམ་གྱི་མཐར་རྣམ་སྟོན་གྱི་ལུས་ལས་འོགས་སུ་རྒྱང་མཉམས་ཅན་ལས་བྱུབ་པའི་སྐྱུ་མའི་སྐྱུ་འབྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།

Not only that, but a practitioner who has reached the final end of the mind-set-apart can, by no more than the power of concentration, cancel the coarse relationship – of a basis and what rests upon it – that exists between the body of karmic ripening and the mind, and which was projected by previous deeds. This is because the yogi can bring forth the three forms of emptiness by going through the progressive dissolution of earth melting into water, and so forth, which is like the stages of dissolution that take place at the time of death. This is also true because these stages of dissolution stop the coarse ability [of the elements] to act as a basis for consciousness.

For this reason, just as one achieves the body of the intermediate state by separating from the body of karmic ripening at the end of the clear light of death, so one achieves the holy

body of illusion, made of nothing more than winds and mind, by separating from the body of karmic ripening at the end of the three forms of emptiness.

ཁ་ལ་ཉེ་འབད་པ་དེ་དག་གིས་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་རྒྱུ་སེམས་ཅན་ལས་གྲུབ་ཏུ་རྒྱག་ཀྱང་དེ་ལ་སྐྱུ་མ་ཞེས་ཟེར་བའི་
སྐྱུ་མ་དང་འདྲ་བའི་འདྲ་ལུགས་གང་ཡིན་ཟེར་ན། དེ་ལ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་སྟོང་བཞིན་དུ་དེར་སྤང་བའི་ལྷ་སྐྱུ་སྐྱུ་མ་ལྟ་བུའི་དོན་
ལ་ངེས་པ་བརྟན་བཞིན། རིམ་བཤང་བོའི་སྐབས་སྟེད་ཟེན་བས་འདིར་ཡང་དེ་གཞིར་བཞག་ཏུ་ཡོད་མོད་ཀྱང་སྐྱུ་ལུས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུ་མའི་དོན་མིན་
ནོ། །འོ་ན་གང་ཞེ་ན། སྐྱུ་མའི་སྐྱུའི་ཞལ་ཕྱག་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐོགས་བཅས་ཀྱི་ལུས་སུ་མ་གྲུབ་བཞིན་དུ། ཐོགས་བཅས་ཀྱི་ལུས་སུ་གྲུབ་པ་
ལྟར་སྤང་བའི་རྒྱུ་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་ལུས་ཡིན་པས་སྐྱུ་མའི་ལུས་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

(465) Suppose you ask: Now it may be so that through such efforts the primordially indwelling body of every living being is attained from nothing more than winds and mind – but when it is said to be “illusory,” in what way is it similar to an illusion?

In this regard, during the first stage, one finds stable certainty about the meaning of “like an illusion,” where a divine body appears even as it is empty of being established through any nature. Then that also provides a necessary foundation here, but it is not the meaning of the illusion of an illusory body.

What is that, then? Even as the sacred face, arms, and so forth of a holy body of illusion are not established as a body that obstructs other things in space, still, this body made of nothing more than winds and mind is something that *appears* to be established as a body that obstructs other things. This is why it is called an “illusory body.”

ཁྱེད་ལྟ་རགས་པའི་གཟུགས་སེམས་ཀྱི་ལུས་དང་ལྡན་མོད་ཀྱང་། རྫོས་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་ཀྱི་ཕྱོགས་བརྒྱུད་ནས་འགྲོ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་དེའི་ངོ་
བོར་བལྟ་ཞིང་། དེའང་རྒྱུ་འོད་ཟེར་ལྡེ་ལས་གྲུབ་པའི་འཇའ་ཆོན་ལྟ་བུའི་དོན་ཅེ་ཅེ་འཆང་གི་སྐར་བལྟ་བའོ། །ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་ཚུལ་གཏམ་ཅན་
ཡང་སྟེད་དཀའ་བའི་དོན་འདི་སྐྱུ་ལུས་མ་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་འདིའི་གདམས་ངག་ཕྱིན་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པ་སྟེད་ན། ད་ལྟ་ནས་གོམས་པས་ནམ་ཞིག་ན་སྐྱུ་
མའི་སྐྱུ་འཇའ་ལུས་དོན་ཅེ་སེམས་དཔའི་གོ་འཕང་འབྱུང་བའི་བག་ཆགས་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་འཛིག་བྱེད་དུ་སྤང་བས། ཤིན་ཏུ་ངོ་མཆར་
བའི་གནས་སོ། །ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་ཚུལ་འདི་ཉིད་ནས་འབྱོར་མའི་རྒྱུད་ནས་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ཀྱི་དགའ་བ་སྐྱེས་པའི་འོག་ཏུ་གང་སྤང་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་
རོ་མཉམ་གྱི་དེ་ཉིད་བསྐྱོན་པར་གསུངས་པ་དང་སྤྱེལ་ཤིང་ན་ཆེས་ཤིན་ཏུ་ངོ་མཆར་བའི་གནས་སོ།

Right now, it is true that you have a body consisting of a mind and coarse physical form. But by turning your mind towards the idea of a primordially indwelling body, you can view that as being the essential nature of every wandering being. Furthermore, you can view that as being the holy body of Vajradhara, like a rainbow made of winds that are light rays of five colors.

This way of thinking – even just to speak of it – is difficult to find. But even though you have not yet achieved the illusory body, suppose you discover these unadulterated oral instructions on its meaning. If you can familiarize yourself with it from this moment onwards, then it appears you will plant an extraordinary tendency that will enable you, at a certain time in the future, to reach the state of Vajrasattva, the rainbow body, the holy body of illusion. Thus these instructions are something truly marvelous to behold.

(466) This very way of thinking is stated in the Yoginī tantras to be something upon which one should meditate after giving rise to simultaneous ecstasy: where one looks upon anything that appears as having the actual nature of a single taste. If you can

understand how to connect these two ideas, it is something even more marvelous to behold.

།གང་ལ་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྐྱེས་པའི་བདེ་བ་ཆེ། །སྐྱེས་པ་དེ་ཡི་སྐྱེ་ལ་ཕྱག་འཆའ་ཏེ། །གང་ལ་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྷ་བྱའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན། །སྐྱེས་པ་དེ་ལ་སྤོང་
ནས་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆི། །སྤྱོད་པ་བསྐྱུས་པ་དཔལ་མཆོག་སྐབ་ཤིང་གིས། །རིམ་གསུམ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་མཆོ་བསྐྱབས་པ་ལས། །བྱུང་བའི་ག
དམས་ངག་བདུད་ཅིའི་བུམ་པ་འདིས། །འདིག་རྟེན་མཐའ་དག་འཆི་མེད་ཉེར་ཐོབ་ཤོག།

*I bow down to the holy body of anyone in whom
the simultaneously-born great bliss has arisen:
I take refuge from the depths of my heart in anyone
for whom the concentration that is like an illusion has arisen.*

*With the supreme, glorious churning stick of the Integration of Practices
and with this vessel of ambrosia – the advice that emerges once one has
reached the ocean of the hidden waters of the third stage –
may every last world approach the state of deathlessness.⁵*

གཟུགས་དང་ཞེས་པ་ནས། ཐམས་ཅད་སྐྱེ་མ་ལས་གཞན་མིན། །ཞེས་པའི་བར་གྱིས་ནི། བྱང་པོ་ལྷ་དང་ཁམས་བཞི་དང་། དབང་པོ་དང་
‘ཡུལ་རྣམས་སྐྱེ་མ་ལས་གཞན་མིན་བར་བསྟན་ཏོ། །འདིར་འགྲུར་རྟེང་ལས། །ཤེས་པ་ལྷ་པོ་འདི་དག་སྟེ། །ཕྱི་དང་ནང་དུ་རྣམ་ཐེ་བ། །ཞེ
ས་བསྐྱར་བ་ལེགས་སོ། །ཤེས་པ་ལྷ་ནི་དབང་ཤེས་ལྷ་ལ་བྱ་བའམ་ཡང་ན་ཡི་ཤེས་ལྷ་ཞེས་པ་ལྟར་རོ། །སྤྱར་རྒྱུ་སེམས་གཉིས་རྣམ་འ
བྱོར་པའི་ལུས་སུ་བྱུང་བ་ལ་སྐྱེ་མའི་སྐྱར་བསྟན་ཞིང་། དེ་རྒྱ་མཚན་དུ་བྱས་ནས་འགྲོ་བ་ཀུན་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྷ་བྱུང་ཐེག་པ་འདིར་གསུངས་སོ་ཞེ
ས་བཤད་པས། བཅུད་ཀྱི་འཛིག་རྟེན་གྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ན་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གཉུག་མའི་ལུས་རྒྱུ་སེམས་ཅན་ཞིག་ཡིན་པ་སྐྱེ་མའི་ལུས་ཀྱི་དོ
ན་དུ་བྱ་ལ། སྟོད་བཅུད་ཐུན་མོང་པའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ན་རྒྱུ་སེམས་གཉིས་ཅན་གྱི་རྣམ་འབྱུང་དུ་གྲུར་པ་སྐྱེ་མའི་དོན་དུ་བྱའོ།

The verses that go from “Form and . . .” to “Nothing is anything but illusion,” teach that the five heaps, the four elements, the sense faculties and all objective fields are nothing but illusion. Here the old translation is better: “These five consciousnesses, the divisions of outer and inner . . .” In this way the five consciousnesses might refer either to the five sense consciousnesses or else to the five facets of primordial wisdom.

These verses explain what was said before, namely that the pair of winds and mind that emerge as the body of a yogi reveal themselves as a holy body of illusion, and the verses offer as a reason what is said here in this vehicle, namely, that all wanderers are like an illusion.

Thus, with respect to the worlds that are inhabitants, the primordially indwelling body that belongs to each of them, which is nothing more than winds and mind, serves as the referent of “illusory body.” With respect to the vessels and inhabitants that are shared in common, the fact that these are the emanation of both winds and mind serves as the meaning of “illusion.”

།མེ་ལོང་ནང་གི་ཞེས་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ནི་སྐྱེ་མའི་སྐྱའི་ཡན་ལག་དང་ཉིང་ལག་རྣམས་ཡོངས་སུ་རྫོགས་པ་སོགས་དཔེ་དཔེ་ཤེས་པར་བྱེད
ལ། དེ་ནས་གཅིག་གིས་ནི་སྐྱེ་དའི་ཁ་དོག་རྣམས་འཇའ་བཞིན་དུ་དང་། དེ་ནས་གཅིག་གིས་ནི་སྐྱེ་དའི་སྤང་བ་གདུལ་བྱ་ལ་གང་འདུལ་

⁵ These verses seem to be Tsongkhapa’s own composition, a spontaneous prayer placed in the middle of his commentary.

གྱིས་སྟོན་པ་མཁའ་ལྷ་མོ་བཞུགས་ཏེ་དཔེ་གཙོ་ལོ་གསུམ་མོ། །དཔེ་དང་པོ་རྒྱས་པར་འཆད་པ་ནི། མེ་ལོང་རི་མ་མེད་པ་ལ། ཞེས་
པ་བརྒྱད་གྱིས་ནི། རྩོམ་ཆེ་འཆང་གི་སྐུའི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་མེ་ལོང་ལ་ཤར་བ་སྟོན་མ་ལ་བསྟན་ནས་དཔེ་སྟོན་ནས་རང་གི་གྱིས་བརྟན་པ་
དེས་པར་བྱེད་པའོ། །འདི་ལ་ཆག་གིས། དངོས་དང་དངོས་མིན་ལས་ཐོབ་པའོ། །རྩོམ་མེས་དཔེ་ལེགས་གྱིས་པ། རྩམ་པ་ཀུན་གྱི་
མཆོག་ལྷན་ཞིང་། །སྐུ་ཉི་ལྟ་བུ་བས་མེ་ལོང་པའོ། །གཟུགས་བརྟན་གསལ་བར་སྟངས་བཞུགས། །སྟོན་པ་བཟང་པོ་དེ་ལ་བསྟན། །ཞེས་བསྟུང་
པ་བཅུ་ལོ། །ཀླང་པ་དང་པོས་སྐུ་དེ་ཉག་ཆད་གཉིས་ལས་ཐོབ་པ་དང་། གསུམ་པས་མཆོག་གི་ཆ་ཐམས་ཅད་རྩོགས་པ་ཤེས་པར་བྱེད་དེ་
། ཤ་དང་རྩས་པ་སོགས་མེད་པའང་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

(467) The two lines that begin with “[The reflection] in a mirror . . .” enable you to understand the holy body of illusion, complete with its major and minor limbs, and so on, in terms of this example. Then, one line teaches that the colors of that holy body are like a rainbow, and the next line indicates that the appearance of that body, which reveals itself according to the needs of disciples, shows itself like a moon in water. These are the three primary examples.

The next eight lines, beginning with “In a stainless mirror . . .,” give an expanded explanation of the first example. One should enable disciples to ascertain Blessing Oneself by showing them an image of the holy body of Vajradhara dawning in a mirror. Here, Chak’s translation is more comfortable:

Show to excellent disciples the clear appearance
Of this reflected image, a holy body upon which
One could never tire of gazing:
An exquisite painting of Vajrasattva
Free from either functioning or not
Endowed with the highest of every kind of form.

The fifth⁶ line states that the holy body is free from the extremes of being unchanging or cut off, and the sixth⁷ line teaches that all aspects of the [Buddha’s] signs are complete. You should also understand that it has no flesh or bone, or the like.

།སྐུ་འདི་དཔེ་གཞན་གྱིས་དེས་པར་བྱེད་པ་ལའང་མཁའ་ལྷ་མོ་ཤར་བའི་སར་ཁྲིད་ནས་སྟོན་པ་དང་། འཇམ་ཤར་བའི་སར་ཁྲིད་ནས་སྟོན་པ་དེ་
གོས་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་པ་དེ་དག་དཔེར་བཞག་ནས་ཆོག་གིས་བཤད་པས་ཆོག་པ་བཞུགས་ཏེ། གཟུགས་བརྟན་གྱི་དཔེས་སྟོན་པ་ལའང་སྟོན་བསྟུང་
ས་ལས། རི་ལྷར་རས་རིས་མེ་ལོང་གི་ནང་དུ་ཉེ་བར་སྟངས་བཞུགས་ཏེ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་འཆད་པའི་ཆེ་དཔེ་དོན་སྟོན་པ་ཅན་ཡིན་
གྱི། གྱིས་སྐུའི་གཟུགས་བརྟན་མེ་ལོང་ལ་ཤར་བ་མཐོང་བའི་སར་བཞག་པར་བསྟན་ནས་མ་བསྟོམས་ན་འདིའི་གདམས་ངག་ཆད་པའི་
སྟོན་མེད་དོ།

With the other examples, in order to bring about certainty, it is not necessary to lead disciples to a place where the moon is appearing in water, or to a place where a rainbow is actually appearing in order to teach it to them, but rather it is enough for the teacher to set forth the example by explaining it in words.

(468) Regarding the way to reveal this holy body through the example of a reflected image, the *Integration of Practices* states, moreover: “Just as a canvas painting appears in

⁶ Tsongkhapa is referring to the “first” line in the Tibetan sequence of this verse.

⁷ That is, the “third” in the Tibetan.

a mirror, so too . . .” Thus, the moment when you explain it is the moment when the meaning is joined to its example, and just then. So even if they have not meditated after having actually looked at a place where they could *see* the reflected image of a painted sacred figure in a mirror, there would be no fault of having truncated the advice.

།གང་ཟག་ཁ་ཅིག་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་མ་བྱས་ན་རྡོ་རྗེ་འཆང་གི་སྐུ་བསྐྱེད་པ་མི་གསལ་བས་དེ་གསལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་དུ་དེ་ལྟར་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ནའང་།
གཞུང་གི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ཤ་ཐིག་གི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་མཐར་ཕྱིན་ནས་དབེན་གསུམ་འབྱོངས་པ་ཞིག་གིས་མན་ངག་འདི་བསྐྱེད་པ་
ཡིན་པས། དེ་ལ་ནི་ལྟ་སྐྱེ་ཆེ་ཆུང་གང་བསྐྱེད་ཡང་མི་གསལ་བའང་མེད་ལ། ལྟ་སྐྱེ་སྤང་ལ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་ཙམ་ནི་རིམ་པ་དང་པོ་ནས་
ཆེད་ཟིན་པས་དེ་སྟོན་པ་མིན་ནོ། །འདི་ཡང་སྐུ་ལུས་ཀྱི་གནད་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་མ་ཆེད་པའི་སྟོན་ནི། །འགྲེལ་བ་རྣམས་ནས་ཀྱང་དཔེ་
དོན་སྦྱར་བ་ཙམ་གྱི་དོན་དུ་བཤད་པས་དཔེ་གཞན་རྣམས་དང་འབྲེལ།

Now for some people, if you do not do it that way, then, since their meditation on the holy body of Vajradhara is unclear, they can meditate in that way in order to make it clearer. But according to the system of the main treatises, the person who meditates on this private advice is someone who has reached the final end of the yoga of the subtle orb in the creation stage, and who has been purified by the three stages set-apart. So for such a person, there is no lack of clarity, whether he or she meditates on a divine body that is large or small. On the other hand, such a person has already discovered, from the first stage onwards, what it means for the divine body to appear yet simply lack any nature. So this is not what you are teaching such a person.

Here, moreover, since the fault of failing to discover the unique crucial point of the illusory body is explained in all the commentaries in terms of connecting the example to its referent, and no more than that, it is similar to all the other examples.

།དེ་ནས་སྐུ་མར་བསྟན་པའི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས། འདི་ཉིད་རིམ་བར་མཆོན་པ་སྟེ། །ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་སྐུ་མ་ཉིད། །ལོངས་སྤྱོད་རྫོགས་པའི་
སྐུ་ཡང་དེ། །དེ་ཉིད་ཅི་ཟེའི་སེམས་ཅན་གྱིས། །རྡོ་རྗེའི་སྐུ་ཡང་དེ་ཉིད་ཡིན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། སྐུ་མ་དང་གཟུགས་བརྟན་ལ་སོགས་པ་
འི་དཔེ་དུ་མས་མཆོན་པའི་སྐུ་མའི་སྐུ་ནི། སྤང་མཆེད་ཐོབ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མཐར་ཆུང་སེམས་ཙམ་ལས་རྡོ་རྗེ་འཆང་གི་སྐུར་བསྐྱེད་
པ་འདི་ཉིད་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ལ་ནི་སྐུ་བས་འདིར་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པ་དང་། ལོངས་སྤྱོད་དང་བར་དོའི་སེམས་ཅན་དང་རྡོ་རྗེའི་སྐུ་ཞེས་པའི་ན་
མ་གངས་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འདི་ནི་སེམས་དབེན་དང་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་རྫོགས་རིམ་གྱིས་འཆི་བའི་རིམ་པ་བཞིན་དུ་སྟོན་པ་སྤྱད་
པའི་རིམ་པ་ཤེས་ན། དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མཐར་ཆུང་སེམས་ཙམ་གྱི་སྐུར་ཡངས་པ་དེ་བར་དོ་རྡོ་རྗེ་བ་བཞིན་དུ་འདུག་སྐུ་དུ་ཤེས་ནས་དེ་ལ་ཅི་
ཟེའི་སེམས་ཅན་ཟེར་བའི་རྒྱ་མཆན་ཤེས་ལ། འཆི་བ་ཆོས་སྐུར་འཆར་བཤེས་པའི་རྒྱ་མཆན་གྱིས་སྐུ་དེ་ལ་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་བཤད་པའི་དོན་
ཡང་ཤེས་ཤིང་། འཆི་རིམ་བཞིན་དུ་སྟོན་པ་བསྟན་པའི་འོད་གསལ་དོན་དམ་དུ་ཤེས་པས་སྐུ་དེ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་བདེན་པར་ཡང་ཤེས་ནས་
། བདེན་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་སྦྱར་བའི་སྦྱར་རྒྱ་གཉིས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །རྡོ་རྗེའི་སྐུ་ནི་གང་ཐོབ་ན་ནམ་མཁའ་ཅི་སྤྱད་བར་སྐུའི་རིག་
ས་འདྲ་མི་འཆད་པར་བཞུགས་པའི་དོན་ཏེ། མ་དག་པའི་སྐུ་མ་ལ་ནི་རིམ་མཐུན་པའི་མཆན་ཉིད་ཆང་ལ། དག་པའི་སྐུ་མའི་སྐུ་ཐོབ་ནས་
ནི་མཆན་ཉིད་དེ་ཀུན་ཆང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ།

Then [Nāgārjuna’s text continues]:

The defining characteristics of what is taught to be an illusion
Definitely represents the following:
Deceptive reality, the illusion itself,
And the holy body, too, complete in all enjoyments.

The same becomes a smell-eating sentient being.
The vajra body, too, is exactly the same.

The holy body of illusion represented by the many examples – of an illusion, a reflection, and so on – is exactly the same as what is generated as the holy body of Vajradhara from nothing more than the winds and mind that come after the primordial wisdom of appearance, proliferation, and near-attainment. In this context here, this is stated with the enumeration of (1) deceptive reality, (2) the glorified enjoyment body, (3) a sentient being of the intermediate state, and (4) the vajra body.

(469) If you understand, through the complete stage of the mind-set-apart and that of the clear light, the stages by which elaboration is withdrawn, as in the stages of dying, then you will understand how, at the end of both, one arises in a holy body made of nothing more than winds and mind, and how this is just the same as the intermediate state. Understanding this, you will know the reason why you can call that a “smell-eating sentient being.”

Because you understand how death dawns as the dharmakāya, you will also know why that holy body is explained to be the glorified enjoyment body. By understanding as ultimate the clear light that is the withdrawal of elaborations – as in the stages of dying – you will also understand how that holy body is deceptive reality. Then you will understand two reasons for the two realities to be joined inseparably.

The meaning of the vajra body is that whoever achieves it will remain in an unbroken continuation of the same type of holy body, for as long as space remains. The impure illusion is complete in characteristics that are an approximation of this, while, once you have achieved the pure holy body of illusion, those characteristics are entirely complete.

དང་ལྷན་གདུག་པའི་མཐོང་མཐོང་གི་དཔེ་སྤྲུལ་གྱི་གནད་དེས་པར་བྱེད་པ་ནི་སྤྱོད་བསྐྱུ་ལས་གསུངས་ལ། དེ་མ་ཤེས་ན་འཕགས་སྐྱོར་གྱི་གཞུང་གང་དུའང་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གསལ་བར་བཤད་པ་མེད་པས། སྤྲུལ་གྱི་གནད་མི་རྟོག་པས་དེའི་དོན་གདོན་མི་ཐ་བར་བཅའ་བར་བྱའོ། །དོ་རྩེ་སེམས་དཔའ་རང་ཉིད་དེ། །ཞེས་པ་དུག་གིས་ནི། གཙོ་མོར་སྤྲུལ་ལས་ཐོབ་པའི་གང་ཐག་གིས་རང་ཉིད་དོ་རྩེ་སེམས་དཔའ་བཟླ་བ་དང་དེ་ཉིད་བསྐྱུ་བ་ཅིང་དེ་ཉིད་མཆོད་པར་བཟླས་ལ། དེ་མ་ཐོབ་པས་ཀྱང་སྐྱར་དེ་དང་རྩེ་སྤྲུལ་མཐུན་པའི་མོས་པ་བྱ་བའང་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

It is stated in the *Integration of Practices* that at this point one should enable such a person to ascertain the crucial point of the illusory body through the example of a dream, but if one does not know that – since in the [other] treatises of the Ārya tradition it is not clearly explained in that way – one would not find the crucial point of the illusory body. So you should without doubt seek out its meaning there.

(470) The six lines that begin “As Vajrasattva himself . . .” primarily teach that a person who has attained the illusory body views himself as being Vajrasattva, reaches Vajrasattva, and makes offerings to him. But even if one has not attained this, again one should understand how to exercise conviction towards something that approximates it.

དེ་ནས་སྤྲུལ་གསུངས་དང་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་སྤྲུལ་གསུངས་དང་བྱུང་དུ་འབྱོར་དང་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་གཏོར་མའི་བྱ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྤྲུལ་པ་བཞིན་དུ་བྱ་བར་གསུངས་པའང་གཙོ་མོར་དོན་སྤྱར་བཤད་པ་བཞིན་ཡིན་ལ། བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པས་དེ་དག་བྱེད་པའང་འདིས་སྟོན་དུ་བྱུང་བས་དེ་ལ་སྤྱོད་ན་སྤྱོད་དོན་གྱི་སྤྲུལ་གསུངས་དང་སྐྱར་རོ། །སེམས་དཔའ་ན་མན་ཆད་ཀྱི་རྩེ་གསུངས་རིམ་པ་ལ་ནི་སྤྲུལ་གྱི་གོ་བ་ཙམ་གྱི་ཡིད་བྱེད་དང་སྐྱར་ཏེ།

འོག་མ་རྣམས་ལ་འང་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། །ཞི་བ་དང་ནི་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་ཞི་རྒྱས་སོགས་ཀྱི་ལས་བསྐྱབ་པ་རྣམས་འཇའ་ཚོན་བཞིན་དུ་བར་གསུངས་སོ། །དེ་ནས། སྒྲིག་སོགས་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་ཉམས་དགུ་དང་སྒྲུ་དང་རོལ་མོ་དང་གར་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་འདྲི་བའི་སྒྲུ་ཅལ་རེ་བཞི་སོགས་ལ་འཇུག་པའང་ཚུ་རྒྱ་བཞིན་དུ་བར་བསྐྱར་རྟོ།

Then, the four lines that begin “When reciting mantra, . . .” state that one should do all the actions relating to mantra, mudrā, maṇḍala, fire offering, and *torma* while acting as though an illusion. The primary meaning is as before, but since creation stage practitioners also do these things, and since it is appropriate to teach them this, when connecting it to that context, you can join it to illusion in its general meaning.⁸ For all complete stage practitioners up to and including those of the mind-set-apart, you can connect it to a way of thinking that simply understands what the illusory body means. You should also understand [how to connect it to] all the lower [classes of tantra].

The four lines that begin “Whether the actions of peace, . . .” say that when actualizing the activities of peace, prosperity, and the rest, you should do so like a rainbow. Then, the four lines beginning “Whether you enjoy a graceful pose . . .” teach that when you engage in the nine dramatic expressions, in song, music, dance, and the like, and in the sixty-four arts of pleasure, you should do so like a moon in water.

།དེ་ནས་གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་དབང་པོ་ཡུལ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྲུ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་བརྟག་པར་གསུངས་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟར་དཔེ་སོ་སོར་སྐྱར་བའང་ངེས་པ་མིན་ཀྱི་པན་ཚུན་མཚོན་པའི་དོན་རྟོ། །དེ་ནས་འདིར་ནི་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་གང་དམིགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྲུ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་ལྟ་བར་གསུངས་པ་དང་། དེ་ནས་གང་གིས་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་དེ་ལྟར་བལྟ་བ་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་པར་གསུངས་ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། དེ་ནི་རྫོ་རྩེ་མཁའ་འགྲོ་ལས་གསུངས་སོ། །མཐོང་བ་ཉིད་དང་ཞེས་པ་བཞིས་དེ་ཁོ་ནར་དམིགས་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། ཀྱན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་སྒྲུ་མ་ལྟ་བུར་དཔེ་མིགས་པར་གསུངས་ཞེས་བཤད་དོ། །འདི་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་དབུ་མ་དང་ཐུན་མོང་བའི་སྒྲུ་མའི་དོན་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ནི་གཞིར་བཞག་ཏུ་གོ་བར་བྱའོ།

Then the four lines beginning with “Whether you engage in form . . .” state that whenever you engage in the objective fields of the senses, you should examine them as you would an illusion. When connecting to each of the examples in this way, it is not meant to be definitive, but rather there is a sense in which each symbolizes the other. Then, the four lines beginning with “What need is there to say much here? . . .” state that whatever one may focus upon, one should look upon it as an illusion. Then the four lines beginning with “Whoever . . .” state that to look in this way is said to be the primary thing. This is [also] stated in the *Vajradāka Tantra*.

(471) The four lines beginning with “Seeing itself and . . .” are explained to state that in suchness, these things are without anything to focus upon, but deceptively, they can be focused upon as being like illusions. For all of these, you should take the way of thinking about the meaning of illusion that is shared with the Middle Way as your foundational understanding.

⁸ That is, according to Candrakīrti’s explanations of the four levels of interpretation of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, this is the meaning “that is shared by both the way of the perfections and that of mantra, and within mantra, by both the higher and lower classes, and within the higher, among both the stages.” See Appendix One (182). See also Chapter Four, note 38 for the verses upon which Tsongkhapa is commenting here.

།དབང་པོ་གང་དང་གང་ལས་འགྱུར། །འགྲོ་བ་དེ་དེའི་རང་བཞིན་དུ། །མཉམ་པར་མ་བཞག་སྟོར་བ་ཡིས། །སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱན་དང་མཉམ་
པར་སྟོར། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ། མཐོང་ཐོས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གང་ཤར་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྱུ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་བཟོ་བར་སྒྲུབ་གསུངས་མོད་ཀྱང་། འདི་
ནི་རྒྱུད་སེམས་ཙམ་གྱི་ལུས་དང་། རྒྱུད་སེམས་ཙམ་གྱི་རྣམ་འབྲུལ་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱན་གྱི་བདག་ཉིད་དོན་རྒྱུ་འཆ
ང་དང་མཉམ་པར་སྟོར་བ་སྟེ་དེ་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མི་བྱེད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བཟོ་བའོ།

Then it states:

Transform your senses into the path
And without settling into meditative equipoise
Practice joining the nature of wandering beings
And you will join in union with all Buddhas.

Now it is true that it was said before that one should view all that one sees, hears, and so on – anything and everything that arises – as being like an illusion. But here, by coming to understand that they are bodies of no more than winds and mind, and the emanations of no more than winds and mind, you join them in union with the identity of all Buddhas, Vajradhara. Then you look upon them both as being one indivisible holy body. . . .

Appendix Eighteen: In Praise of Sarasvatī

Je Tsongkhapa's *Invitation, Praise and Supplication, to the Divine Lady of Song*¹

||ཨོ་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་གྱུར་ཅིག། རྒྱ་འཛིན་དཀར་པོའི་སྒྲོག་འཕྲེང་བ་བ་ཅན། མཁའ་ཡི་མཛེས་བྱེད་འབྲུ་བའི་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་མ། ཁྱིམ་མེད་ན་
 རྒྱུ་དབྱུ་ན་འཛོ་སྒྲིག་མཁན། རིང་ནས་བཅེ་བའི་ལྷ་མོ་ད་རྒྱུར་བྱོན། བསྐྱའི་བཞིན་ལ་གཡོ་ལྷན་བྱང་བའི་མིག་མཛོན་མཐིང་རལ་
 བའི་ཅེ་ན་འོད་དཀར་ཅན། རོལ་སྒྲིག་གར་གྱིས་འགྱུར་བའི་དབྱངས་ཅན་མ། ད་དྲུང་བདག་ལ་དག་གི་དབང་ལྷག་སྟོལ། རོལ་ཅེད་ག་
 ར་གྱི་ཉམས་ལྷན་རི་དྲགས་མིག་མིག་གིས་ལྷ་བས་མི་རོམས་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་མ། མ་ལྷར་བཅེ་བ་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་བདག་གི་དག་དབང་ལྷ་
 མོ་ཉིད་དང་མཚུངས་བར་མཛོད། སྟོན་རྒྱ་རྒྱས་པའི་དཔལ་ལས་ལྷག་བར་མཛོད། ཆངས་དབྱངས་སྟན་པའི་གདངས་ཀྱང་ཟེལ་གྱིས་
 གཞོན། ཟབ་ཡངས་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་འཛིན་ལྷར་དཔག་དཀར་བ། དབྱངས་ཅན་ལྷ་མོའི་སྒྲིག་གསུང་ཐུགས་ལ་འདྲད། ཅེས་སྒྲུ་དབྱངས་ལྷ་མ་སྟན་
 དངས་ནས་བསྟོད་ཅིང་གསོལ་བ་གདབ་པ་ཡུལ་བྱང་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་སྟན་དངགས་མཁན་སྒོ་བཟང་གྲགས་པའི་དཔལ་གྱིས་སྐྱར་བའོ།

Om. May there be joy and goodness.

*Please come at once,
 O, Divine Lady,
 Beloved from afar*

*O Graceful One,
 Dancing amidst a crowd
 Of heaven's maidens*

*Lady who steals my heart,
 Set like a jewel to adorn
 The Sky itself*

*Wearing a spray
 Of lightning filaments
 Shot through the ivory clouds.*

*Eyes black as bees
 quivering within
 Your lotus face*

*White light blazing
 from atop your
 sapphire locks*

*O Yangchenma,²
 poised in your
 dance of exquisite line*

I beg You now,

¹ *sgra dbyangs lha mo spyang drangs nas bstod cing gsol ba gtab pa*, vol. *kha* (thor bu), 55b1-5 (324). My translation of the first verse is inspired by that of Geshe Michael Roach, 2008, *King of the Dharma*, 282.

² This renders the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit name, Sarasvatī.

*Grant me the
Power to Speak.
Eyes of a deer
bashful in its dance –
I could never tire
of gazing upon you,
O Lady who steals my heart!
You who love me
as my own Mother,
Please make my words
the same as yours,
O Divine Lady of Speech.
Beauty surpassing
the glory of the waxing
autumn moon
Outshining in radiance
even the poetry
of the Pure One
Vast depths
hard to fathom
as the lower reaches
of the sea
I throw myself
at the feet of the holy
body, speech, and mind
Of Sarasvatī, Divine Lady of Song.*

This is an invitation, followed by praise and supplication, of the Divine Lady of Song, composed by that Master of Poetic Arts from the northern lands, Glorious Lobsang Drakpa himself.

* * *

Je Tsongkhapa's Praise of Sarasvatī, the Divine Lady of Song, Set in Verse³

||མི་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་གྱུར་ཅིག། སྤྲོ་དབངས་ལྷ་མོ་དབངས་ཅན་མ་ལ་བྱུག་འཆའ་ལོ། མར་གད་ལྷ་བ་འབྲིལ་འབྲེལ་མཆོ་འགྲམ་དུ། བ
སིལ་ཐེར་བྱེད་པའི་སྤྲེང་ན་གེ་ལ་ཤེའི། མདངས་ཀྱིས་རབ་མཛེས་ཅོག་བུའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་འབྱེད། རྒྱུད་མང་སྟོན་པའི་སྤྲོ་ཡིས་རོལ་དེར་འ
བྱེད།

Om. May there be joy and goodness.

I throw myself at the feet of Sarasvatī, Divine Lady of Sweet Sound.

An emerald melted, and I was enveloped by its viscous lake.
At its edge floats the maker of moonbeams,
And upon it she drapes her limbs of grace,
Radiant, exquisite, shining like Kailash.
I pay homage to her music,
Sounding from the many-strings of blue.

||ཐོར་ཚུགས་མེ་ཉྱག་དཀར་པོའི་ཐེང་བ་ཡིས། མཛེས་བར་བྱས་པའི་ཅེ་མོར་རྒྱ་བས་སྤྱད། མཐོན་མཐིང་དབུ་སྤྲེལ་ཐར་བུས་སྤྲོ་སྟོན་ཁེ
བས། ཆངས་པའི་བུ་མོ་གཞན་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་མ་ཁྱོད། ལྷ་ཡི་ལམ་ལ་རྒྱ་སྐར་བདག་པོ་འཇ། བསྐྱེད་མཆོ་ལ་ངང་མོ་ཅེན་པ་བཞེན། རབ
ཡངས་རྩྭ་གྲལ་སེམས་ཀྱི་དགའ་ཆའ་དེར། རིང་དུ་གནས་ཏེ་སྟོབས་བ་མཆོག་སྟོལ་མཛོད།

A string of white flowers bedecks her crown of hair;
The moon adorns its tip with loveliness
Sapphire streamers upon her hair
Cascade to veil her holy body.
Another daughter of the Pure One,
O, You who steal my heart

You are as the conductor of the
Dancing stars on the highway of the gods,
Or the swan who frolics on the lotus pond –
Vast, vast expanse
Mind free of troubles
From your garden there
I beg You, come from afar
To grant the flash of confidence, supreme.

||སུ་འཛིན་དཀར་པོའི་ཅེ་ལ་སྟོན་དུས་ཀྱི། སྤྲིན་བལ་མཆན་མའི་རྒྱ་འོད་ལྷུང་བ་ལྟར། གསལ་མཛེས་ཆེས་དཀར་ལྷ་བས་མི་ངོམས་པ
འི། ཁྱོད་སྤྲོ་འའི་རྒྱ་མཆོ་མཐོང་བའི་ཆོ། རྣམ་དག་ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་སུ་སྤྱུག་གོས་ཀྱིས་སྐྱབས། ལུང་དང་རིགས་པའི་འདབ་གཉིས་བསྐྱེ
ད་པ་ཡིས། རྒྱ་ཆེན་ཤེས་བུའི་མཁའ་ལ་རྣམ་རོལ་བ། རྒྱོ་གསལ་དང་བའི་ཡིད་དེ་དགའ་བས་ཐོགས།

When I saw your holy body,
That ocean of milk,
I could never tire of gazing

³ *sgra dbyangs lha mo dbyangs can ma la bstod pa'i tshigs su bcad pa*, vol. *kha (thor bu)*, 55b5-57a3 (324-327).

Upon the white light,
So very exquisite,
Clear as the rays
Of a moon free of clouds
One autumn night
As it fell over the ivory peak
Of earth-firm mountain king;

As I saw your holy body wrapped
In the loveliest garments
Of perfect pure morality,
The two petals of scripture and reasoning
Swaying in their dance amidst
the vast sky of all things known:
My mind made crystal clear
Was stolen off with joy.

|རབ་བརྗེད་ཉི་མའི་གངས་ཀྱིས་ལྷ་ཡི་ལམ། |རབ་མཛེས་ཐོར་ཅོག་བྱས་ནས་བྱུར་མིག་གིས། |རབ་སྙན་རྒྱུད་མང་སྟོག་ལ་ལྷ་བྱེད་ན།
|རབ་དཀར་ལྷ་མོ་ཁྱོད་དང་མཚུངས་པར་འབྱུང། |མཉེན་སྙུག་བྱག་གི་འདྲུ་བྱེད་བསྐྱར་བ་དང། |ལྷ་ཐུལ་སྙུན་གྱི་བྱུར་མིག་གཡོ་བ་གཉི
ས། |རབ་མཛེས་མི་མང་དོགས་སུ་བཀོད་བྱས་ནས། |གདངས་སྙན་སྒྲ་ཡིས་ན་པའི་དགའ་སྟོན་འབྱེད།

Perhaps if I were to look,
With a sidelong glance
While sounding a melodious lute,
And made my topknot from the
Highway of the gods, adorned with the
Dazzling glory of the glaciers atop Kailash,
I might become like You,
O divine lady of purest white!

Your delicate, supple hands turn the notes,
And your blue-lily eyes dance off to the side;
With both, you place your exquisite lute at a slant
And perform a festival for the ears with the sound
Of your sonata.

|འོད་འབར་གསེར་གྱི་རྩ་ཆས་སྙན་ལལ་གཉིས། |འོད་སྟོང་ལྷན་པས་བརྗོད་ཆེལ་ལ་བཞིན། |རྩམ་དག་ཆེམས་གྱི་ཐེང་བས་ཞལ་གྱི་དོག
ས། |རྩམ་བཟ་རྒྱ་སྐར་ཐེང་བས་མཁའ་ལ་བཞིན། |བྲི་མེད་ཤེལ་གྱི་ས་འཛིན་དོས་དག་ལ། |དབང་པོའི་གཞུ་ཡིས་ཀུན་ནས་བཟ་བ་བཞི
ན། |མཛེས་སྙུག་སྒྲ་ཡི་ཆལས་མ་ལུས་པ། |ཡིད་འཛིན་རྒྱན་རྩམས་ཀུན་གྱིས་ལྷ་མ་ཐེར་བྱུང།

Like a lotus garden, your two earlobes bear
The thousand rays of your golden earrings
Blazing in light.

As the sky is adorned by garlands of the
Various dancing stars,
So a garland of pure white teeth adorns

The entrance to your holy face.

Just as Indra's bow⁴

Upon the pure face of a stainless

Crystal mountain

Turns it to utter splendor,

In the same way, all the parts of your

Marvelous holy body are glorified

By jewels that enchant the mind.

|ཨིནྱ་རྩེལ་གྱི་མདོག་ལྷ་ར་བ་ལྷོ་བའི། |རྒྱ་འཕྱང་གོས་ཀྱི་ཐེང་བས་གངས་ཀྱི་རི། |ཀུན་ནས་མཛེས་པ་དེ་བཞིན་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་སྒྱ། |རྒྱུད་མ
ང་སྟོན་པོས་གཡོན་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་ན་མཛེས། |དྲུག་ལྷག་བརྩ་ཡི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ཐེང་བ་ཅན། |སྟེང་གི་ཚུ་སྟེས་དབུས་ན་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་སྒྱ། |མཁའ་གོ
ས་དཀར་གསལ་དྲིལ་ན་མདངས་མཛེས་བའི། |ཡིད་ཡོད་སྟོག་ཐེང་གཞོན་ནུ་འགྲུ་བ་བཞིན།

Just as the snow mountains

Are made beautiful by their clothing –

Rows of deep blue trees, like the

Color of *indranīla* sapphire –

So Your holy body is

Beautified upon its left

By your many-strings of blue.

More than six, with filaments

For ten melodious notes,

Your holy body brings

The lotus at the center of my heart

To quiver like a youth –

Just as smashing filaments of lightning

Bring an exquisite glow to the center of

That brilliant white clothing of the sky.

|གང་གསུང་དེ་བལ་ཆ་ཡི་ཆ་གས་ཅན། |གང་གི་ན་བའི་ལམ་དུ་ལྷང་ཅན་གྱིས། |གང་གི་སྟེང་བའི་སྟོ་ཡི་མེ་ཤེས་པ། |གང་གིས་གཙོ
ད་མཛད་ཁྱོད་གསུང་ཆངས་བའི་དབྱངས། |ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ཡི་ཡོངས་འདྲེའི་ཤིང་བཞིན་དུ། |གང་ལ་གང་ཞིག་འདོད་པའི་འབྲས་སྟེང་ཞིང་། |
སྟིང་ལ་སྟིང་བའི་བར་དུ་རབ་བཅེ་བ། |ཀུན་ལ་ཀུན་ནས་སྟེང་མཛད་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་ཐུགས།

When just the merest fraction of a fraction

Of your stainless, holy speech

Merely falls upon the pathway of someone's ears,

By whatever force it cuts away

Whatever ignorance was there

Obscuring the mind:

Your holy speech is the song of the Pure One.

As is the Meeting Tree of the gods,

For the assembly of the gods,

Your holy mind, free of any obstacle

⁴ That is, a rainbow.

Towards anything at all
Gives away every fruit one could ever wish for
And loves us so very, very much
For as long as existence may exist.

ཉེས་ཅད་སྐྱེ་གངས་རི་ལྷ་བྱར་དཀར། ཡིད་འཕྲོག་གསུང་ནི་འབྲུག་གི་དབྱངས་ལྟར་བརྟེན། སྒྲོས་བྲལ་བྲུགས་ནི་མཁའ་བཞིན་ག་
ཡོ་བ་མེད། དག་ལེགས་གཏེར་ཆེན་ཁྱོད་གྱིས་བདག་སྐྱོངས་ཤིག སྤྲོ་ཆད་ཉི་མའི་འོད་ཀྱི་གོས་བཟང་བགོས། སྤེབ་སྦྱར་བར་རིམ་བ
ཞི་ཡི་སྐྱར་གསུང་བཅུངས། སྤྲོ་དངགས་ལོར་བུའི་ཅོག་གི་ཐོད་གྱིས་མཛེས། མངོན་བརྟེན་གཟེ་ལྷན་རི་དབང་ལྷ་མོ་དེ། མཁས་མཆོ
ག་སྐྱེད་བར་སྦྱང་གིས་ཡོངས་བཟུང་བས། ཚུམ་འཆད་ཚོད་པའི་ཆུབས་འཕེང་བརྒྱ་གཡོ་བའི། བདག་ཡིད་རོལ་མཆོའི་འཛིང་དེའི་དབ
ལ་བསྐྱེད་ནས། དང་བའི་ཚུ་གཏེར་ཆེ་དེར་རིང་བུ་རོལ། རབ་དང་ལྷགས་ལྷན་གདུང་བའི་ང་རོ་ཡིས། བསྐྱེད་པའི་མོད་ལ་རེ་བ་རྫོག
ས་མཛད་མ། སྤྲོ་དབྱངས་ལྷ་མོ་ཆེ་རབས་ཐམས་ཅད་བུ། བདག་གི་སྤྲོ་ལ་འབྲལ་བ་མེད་གུར་ཅིག

Your holy body, which has finished off every fault,
Is white as the mountains of fresh snow.

Your heart-stealing holy speech,
Is glorious as the song of dragon's thunder.

Your holy mind, free of elaboration,
Is unmoving like the sky.

O great treasury of virtue and goodness,
I beg You, please, to protect me.

You are clothed with the fine clothing
That is the light of the sun and moon:
The subjects of language and logic.

You are bound with the waistband
Of the four levels of grammatical science,
And your headress is adorned with
The jewels of poetics.

O Divine Lady, Queen of the Mountains,
Endowed with the glory of perfect verbal expression

Since you are upheld by a thousand *nāga* kings, supreme among scholars,
Please uplift from the depths of this ocean-mind of mine,
The shining powers of its potential
Stirred by a string of a hundred blessings to
Compose, explain, and debate.

Then may you dance for a long, long time
In the vast vessel of its clarified waters.

O Lady who fulfills all my wildest hopes
In the very moment of my praising you –
By the roar of my anguished cry,
Extreme in its force and longing,

Divine Lady of Song,
In all my lifetimes,
May the depths of my heart
Never be separated from you!

།དེ་ལྟར་ཉམས་དང་འགྲུར་བའི་རོ་མཆོག་ལྟན། །དོ་མཚར་རྒྱན་མང་མདངས་ཀྱིས་མཛེས་གྲུར་པའི། །བསྟོད་ཆེག་བདུད་ཅིའི་རྒྱན་དེ་སྟ
ན་དངགས་ཀྱི། །རིང་ནས་འདྲིས་པ་ཁོ་ནའི་དགའ་སྟོན་ཡིན། །ཚུལ་ལྷགས་འདི་ནི་ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་ཞོར་གྱིས་འབྱོར། །རང་ཚུལ་བཟང་པོའི་
རང་ཆད་དཔོན་པོ་ཡིས། །ལྷག་བསམ་དག་པས་ལྷག་པར་བསྐྱལ་བའི་དོར། །སྟན་དངགས་གཞུང་བཞིན་སྟན་པའི་དག་གིས་སྦྱས།

Thus, this stream of nectar,
Verses of praise made beautiful
By the glow of many fabulous jewels
Endowed with the supreme taste of
Experience and dramatic expressions,
Is a festival that comes only from
Long acquaintance with the arts of poetry.

This tradition is rich in the wealth
Of ethical discipline.
A master at taking stock
Of the excellent way
Things really are,

Was called forth in his
Exceedingly pure motivation,
By exceedingly intense requests,
And I have spoken in the words
Of poetry, according to the treatises
On poetic composition.

།སྤྱ་དབངས་ལྟ་མོ་དབངས་ཅན་མ་ལ་བསྟོད་པའི་ཆེགས་སུ་བཅད་པ་ཡུལ་བྱང་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་སྟན་དངགས་མཁན་གྱོ་བཟང་གྲགས་པའི་དཔལ་གྱིས་བྲ་
ཡུལ་དུ་ཆོས་བར་ལ་བྱོན་པའི་ཆེ་སྒར་བའོ། །

This *Praise of Sarasvatī, the Divine Lady of Song, Set in Verse*, was composed by that Master of Poetic Arts from the northern lands, Glorious Lobsang Drakpa, in his workplace, at a moment between Dharma activities.

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mngon gsum le'u'i tIkka rje'i gsung bzhin mkhas grub chos rjes mdzad pa. (Commentary on the "Chapter on Direct Perception," Rendered by the Dharma Lord Khedrup According to the Speech of the Lord [Tsongkhapa]). vol. *ma*. (c. 1410 or later, at Ganden: "'brog ri bo che dge ldan rnam par rgyal ba'i gling du sbar ba'o")

rgyal tshab rjes rje'i drung du gsan pa'i mngon sum le'u'i brjed byang. (Notes for Recalling the "Chapter on Direct Perception," made by Gyaltzab Je as he studied the subject at the feet of Je Tsongkhapa). vol. *ba*.

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dpal gsang ba 'dus pa mi skyod rdo rje'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga dbang gi don de nyid rab tu gsal ba. (Illumination of the Very Nature of the Meaning of Empowerment: A Ritual for the Guhyasamāja Maṇḍala of Akṣobhyavajra). vol. *ca* (Written at the retreat hermitage of Olka: 'ol kha'i dben gnas bsam gtan gling, perhaps between 1393-1396)

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rje btsun 'jam pa'i rdo rje'i sgrub thabs 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyi dgongs pa gsal ba. (Elucidating the True Thought of Mañjuśrī: A Method for Reaching the Lord Mañjuvājra). vol. *nya.* (Written at Ganden Monastery, likely between 1410 and 1418.)

rdo rje bzlas pa'i rim pa'i zin bris. (Notes on the Stage of Vajra Recitation). vol. *cha.* (Likely between 1409-1419)

dgongs pa bla na med pa'i rim pa'i zin bris. (Notes on the Stage of the Unsurpassable Thought). vol. *cha.* (Likely between 1409-1419)

man ngag gi mthar thug bdag byin rlabs. (The Ultimate Private Advice: Blessing Oneself). vol. *cha.* (Likely between 1409-1419)

man mgag gi mthar thug mngon par byang chub pa'i rim pa'i bshad pa. (The Ultimate Private Advice: The Step of Manifest Enlightenment). (Between 1409-1419, likely very late. There is no commentary on the fifth part of the root text, and this one finishes abruptly.)

zab lam na' ro chos drug gi sgo nas 'khrid pa'i rim pa yid ches gsum ldan. (Having the Three Beliefs: The Steps for Teaching the Profound Path by Way of the Six Dharmas of Nāropa). vol. *ta.* (Written at Ganden Monastery, sometime between 1410 and 1418.)

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rgyud thams cad kyi rgyal po dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i rtsa ba'i rgyud, sgron ma rab tu gsal bar byed pa'i rgya cher bshad pas 'chad pa'i sa bcad bsdu don. (The Condensed Meaning: An Outline Explaining the Root Tantra of the King of All Secret Teachings, the Glorious Guhyasamāja, in terms of its Extensive Commentary, "The Illuminating Lamp"). vol. *ca.* (c. 1414)

rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i rgya cher bshad pa sgron ma gsal ba'i dka' ba'i gnad kyi mtha' gcod rin chen myu gu. (The Jeweled Pen: A Critical Analysis of Difficult Points in "The Lamp of Illumination," an Extensive Explanation of the King of Secret Teachings, the Glorious Guhyasamāja). vol. *ca.* (c. 1414)

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corresponding *Five Stages in a Single Sitting*, above, c. 1410. I know of no other so obviously incomplete work by Tsongkhapa, however.)

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² Asian Classics Input Project.

Digital texts available at http://www.asianclassics.org/downloads_direct.html

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chos kyi rgyal po tsong kha pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa thub bstan mdzes pa'i rgyan gcig ngo mtsar nor bu'i 'phreng ba. Recently known as *rnam thar chen mo* (***The Great Biography***, though this name may also be given to Khedrup Je's *Entry Point for the Faithful*, cited below). ACIP S0191, 635 pp. plus 7 pp. list of errata.

³ See Geshe Michael Roach, 2008, *The King of the Dharma*, 430 and *passim* for details on this text.

⁴ Literally, the “eighth day of the eighth month of the rabbit year,” *yos lo zla ba brgyad pa'i tshes brgyad*, which, given the window between Tsongkhapa's passing and that of Jampel Gyatso, would have to be the water-rabbit year, 1423-24.)

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⁵ Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center. Scan of text available at <https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=W4CZ34261>.

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⁶ I include primarily those works directly referenced in the passages translated herein, using the abbreviated titles, with an English rendition only where I have already translated it in context. The bibliography for a complete edition of Tsongkhapa's *Steps of Mantra* alone would have to include scores more works than cited here, much less the rest of Tsongkhapa's books. All catalog data listed here is based on the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC). For further references, see the bibliographies in Garfield, 2006, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 587-589, Hopkins, 1999, *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism*, 475-477, Kilty, 2012, *A Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages*, 617-620, and Wedemeyer, 2007, *Āryadeva's Lamp*, 781-786.

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