



P R I N C I P L E S O F

BUDDHIST TANTRA

Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
IAN COGLAN AND VOULA ZARPANI

Principles of Buddhist Tantra

A COMMENTARY ON CHÖJÉ NGAWANG PALDEN'S

*Illumination of the Tantric Tradition:
The Principles of the Grounds and Paths of the
Four Great Secret Classes of Tantra*



Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché

Translated and edited by
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Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché, circa 1993, Dharamsala, India. Photo by Andrea Antonietti.



Translators' Introduction

Tantra is the hallmark of Tibetan Buddhism. While it is ostensibly an esoteric practice suitable for only a tiny elect, in practical terms, it has come to inform every aspect of the tradition. Images of meditational deities dominate Buddhist temples, and the special protocol of the relationship between vajra master and disciple holds in even nontantric contexts. Tantric empowerments are given regularly to large assemblies. However, many who have received such empowerments have only a dim notion of the practices and vows that are incumbent on a tantric initiate. Thus, there is a great need for clear and reliable information on this complex but fundamental set of practices.

This work contains a translation of *Illumination of the Tantric Tradition: The Principles of the Grounds and Paths of the Four Great Secret Classes of Tantra* by the nineteenth-century Mongolian lama Chöjé Ngawang Palden along with a contemporary commentary on that text by the late Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché (1926–2006) drawn from oral teachings he delivered in California. Ngawang Palden's colloquial style makes this work well suited for an introduction, and in fact his text is frequently used as such in the curriculum of Geluk monasteries. Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché was one of the foremost interpreters of Tibetan tantra teaching in the West, and he served also as a Kālacakra guru to His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The term *tantra* implies a thread connecting the past to the future and thus an unbroken continuum. In the highest sense Buddhist tantra refers to the continuum of the extremely subtle clear-light mind that all beings possess, the methods by which this mind is purified and transformed into the path of enlightenment, and the transmission of the four classes of secret mantra that explain these methods. Buddhist tantra presents a profound reinterpretation of the mode of practice of

the standard Buddhist path. Chöjé Ngawang Palden states:

In general our Master (Śākyamuni Buddha) taught three types of conduct: (1) the nonattachment of the Lesser Vehicle for those who are inclined to lesser practices, (2) the perfections of the Perfection Vehicle for those who are inclined to great and extensive practices, and (3) the dharmas of attachment of the four tantric divisions of secret mantra for those disciples who are fully inclined to profound practices.

The three vehicles are not differentiated by view, for each is fully grounded in the reality of the four ārya, or “noble,” truths, where the third truth—cessation—refers to emptiness and the fourth truth—the path—refers to the means of realizing emptiness, the supreme method for purifying the mind. The three vehicles are instead differentiated by the motivation and inclination of those who enter these vehicles. Those attracted to nonattachment enter the Hearer Vehicle (*Śrāvakayāna*) and engage in limited or select practices to accomplish the enlightenment of a limited number of beings. Those attracted to the perfections enter the Perfection Vehicle (*Pāramitāyāna*) and engage in great and extensive exoteric practices to accomplish highest enlightenment for all beings. Those attracted to profound practices enter the Tantric Vehicle (*Tantrayāna*, or *Vajrayāna*) and utilize afflictive emotions such as attachment in order to swiftly accomplish highest enlightenment at the deepest and subtlest level.

Tantra transforms the naturally occurring, ordinary processes of death, intermediate state, and rebirth into the four buddha bodies (*kāyas*). It uses yogic practices to gain control over the subtle physical body represented by the channels, winds, and drops in order to fully purify the extremely subtle wind and mind, eliminate the two obscurations, and thereby attain enlightenment. Tantra is profound due to its skillful techniques for tapping into the subtle and extremely subtle states that form the basis of sentient existence. These methods are not revealed in the sūtras.

CHÖJÉ NGAWANG PALDEN

Chöjé Ngawang Palden, the author of *Illumination of the Tantric Tradition*, was born in 1797 in the region of Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia, a great monastic center where thousands of monks studied the texts of the three great Tibetan Geluk monasteries. His special qualities were recognized early, and he soon began an intensive program of study. At nineteen he entered Tashi Chöpel College and at thirty-five successfully completed his *kachu* examinations.¹ Three years later, in 1836, he was appointed *chöjé*, or preceptor, of Khuré (Ulaanbaatar), and as preceptor he visited Tibet in 1843 in connection with the death of the Fifth Kalka Rinpoché. Then, in 1847, eleven years after becoming preceptor, he resigned to concentrate on composing texts.

During his life Ngawang Palden composed nearly one hundred works, including *Annotations to the Great Presentation of Tenets* (*Grub mtha' chen mo'i mchan 'grel*), commentaries on the classical Indian treatises *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and *Madhyamakāvatāra*, as well as *Celebration of the Clear Mind* (*Blo gsal dga' ston*), an explanation of the debate manuals of Gomang and Loseling colleges of Drepung Monastery. He composed *Illumination of the Tantric Tradition* in the year of the monkey (1848), when he was fifty-two.

ILLUMINATION OF THE TANTRIC TRADITION

Illumination of the Tantric Tradition explains the basic structure of the tantric path and the way a practitioner of tantra may progress to higher levels of realization within the mantric vehicle. As the title implies this work seeks to shed light on the tradition of tantra. Tibet received the Sanskrit tradition of Indian Buddhism in three parts: the monastic discipline of the Mūlasaravāstivāda sect, the Mahāyāna teachings on bodhisattva activity and the perfection of wisdom,

and the corpus of teachings on tantra, or *secret mantra*. Unlike the other regions where Mahāyāna Buddhism spread, Tibet received the complete transmission of all four classes of secret mantra. The dissemination of the tantric tradition took many centuries—between Buddhism’s advent in Tibet in the eighth century and the disappearance of Buddhism in India in the fourteenth century—and involved both Tibetan scholars and translators traveling to India to train with Indian masters and Indian masters visiting Tibet to teach. After Buddhism’s decline in India, the remote and isolated Tibetan plateau remained a haven and resource for the Indian Buddhist traditions of both sūtra and tantra. But the genius of the Tibetan intellect also supplemented this heritage with its own philosophical and esoteric contributions. The tantric tradition flourished in Tibet until the Communist revolution in China forced many Tibetan masters into exile in India and subsequently into contact with the modern world.

This text is subtitled *The Principles of the Grounds and Paths of the Four Great Secret Classes of Tantra* (*Gsang chen rgyud sde bzhi’i sa lam gyi rnam gzhag*). Therefore it belongs to the *grounds and paths* (*sa lam*) genre, which charts the structure of the path to enlightenment. In general the term *path* refers to a mind of uncontrived renunciation—a genuine and constant aspiration to leave saṃsāra—while *ground* refers to the basis that supports the generation of enlightened qualities. A path begins when we enter one of the three vehicles, whether hearer, bodhisattva, or tantra. From there it leads progressively to higher grounds, or levels, until we attain the ground of enlightenment through that vehicle. This genre of text therefore presents the reader with a map for progressing to enlightenment through the vast and complex terrain of the mind.

Ngawang Palden’s text on the grounds and paths of tantra follows an earlier work of this genre by Yangchen Gawai Lodrö (1740–1827) called *Ford of the Fortunate*, which has been published in English translation as *Paths and Grounds of Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna* (LTWA). In his

work, Ngawang Palden quotes Yangchen Gawai Lodrö and refers to him as “my guru.” While it is evident that Ngawang Palden is influenced by his teacher’s work, it differs both in structure and content. In particular he builds on his forebear’s efforts by adding a major section on Kālacakra. Not long after Ngawang Palden composed his work, Kirti Losang Trinlé (1849–1904) composed another major tantric summary called the *Essence of Nectar*. Kirti Losang Trinlé visited Mongolia several times, and it is possible that the young Kirti Rinpoché met Chöjé Ngawang Palden toward the end of his life. Kirti Losang Trinlé’s seminal work was certainly based on the earlier scholarship of Yangchen Gawai Lodrö and Ngawang Palden.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

Illumination of the Tantric Tradition presents the paths and grounds of the four classes of Buddhist tantra—action, performance, yoga, and highest yoga tantra. These four are distinguished by the degree of attachment they skillfully transform into the path. Respectively, these four degrees are characterized by the attachment induced by observing, smiling at, holding the hand of, and embracing a visualized consort.

The text divides the discussion of the four classes into three parts. The first part addresses the three lower tantras. Highest yoga tantra is then subdivided into two parts: the general highest yoga tantra of the mainstream tantras based on Guhyasamāja, and the specific system of Kālacakra. These two approaches differ in several ways. For instance, the mainstream tantras and Kālacakra present the channels, winds, and drops differently. A practitioner of the mainstream tantras may attain enlightenment in the *bardo*, the intermediate state between rebirths, but such a method is not presented in Kālacakra. Mainstream tantras also speak of *innate bliss*, while Kālacakra presents *immutable great bliss*. Further, the mainstream tantras describe methods for enhancing bliss that

depend on the coarse physical body, while Kālacakra speaks of enhancing bliss by accumulating drops of “bodhicitta” in the central channel while deconstructing the coarse body. Finally, the mainstream tantras present methods for accomplishing an illusory body (*māyākāya*) established from the winds, while Kālacakra speaks of the body of empty form established from the appearance of the deities. Due to such differences, they are presented in two separate sections.

The first part of the text explains action, performance, and yoga tantras in a fourfold sequence. (1) We first become a suitable vessel for entering the practice of the three lower tantras by receiving empowerment, (2) we then guard the vows and commitments related to that tantra, (3) then we cultivate meditation on that deity, and (4) through meditating on the deity we attain *siddhis*, or enhanced faculties. Highest yoga tantra involves four different types of empowerment, but the three lower tantras confer only the so-called vase empowerment.

Deity meditation also differs in the three lower tantras. In action tantra we meditate on absorption with or without recitation. Absorption with recitation—through the *yoga of the six deities*—combines meditation on the deity with recitation of mantras. In absorption without recitation, we cultivate three absorptions, namely *absorption on fire* and *absorption on sound* to generate a stable mind, and *absorption that bestows freedom at the limit of sound* to generate penetrative insight. Both performance and yoga tantras divide deity meditation into yoga with signs and yoga without signs. *Yoga with signs* is deity visualization and mantra recitation without meditation on emptiness. In performance tantra it is practiced by means of what are called the four external and four internal branches, and in yoga tantra on the basis of the four seals. *Yoga without signs* refers to deity visualization and mantra recitation combined with meditation on emptiness.

The second part of the text describes general highest yoga tantra, and this section is also explained according to the fourfold sequence of empowerment, protecting the vows, deity

meditation, and generating siddhis. Empowerment requires the vase, secret, pristine wisdom, and word initiations. Deity meditation is further divided into the generation and completion stages. The generation stage consists of deity yoga, where we generate ourselves as the deity to mature our minds for the completion stage. The completion stage follows the generation stage and consists of meditation to penetrate vital points of the natural body, which is naturally complete in channels, winds, and drops. In mainstream highest yoga tantra, the completion stage has six sections, namely physical isolation, verbal isolation, mental isolation, illusory body, clear light, and union.

The third part, on Kālacakra, repeats this fourfold sequence. Empowerment requires sixteen initiations—seven emulating childhood, four higher and four highest empowerments, plus the vajra-master empowerment. Deity yoga again has both generation and completion stages. The completion stage is sixfold: (1) individual withdrawal and (2) absorption that respectively establish and stabilize the body of the conqueror; (3) vitality exertion and (4) retention that respectively establish and stabilize the speech of the conqueror; and (5) subsequent recollection and (6) concentration that respectively establish and stabilize the mind of the conqueror.

Ngawang Palden's classic work skillfully condenses the profound and subtle meaning of secret mantra. It presents the basic path of the tantric practitioner in the fourfold sequence, and it clarifies many points in the form of debates. It thus provides the scholar or practitioner with a detailed map of the complex arena of tantra's grounds and paths.

THE ORAL COMMENTARY OF KIRTI TSENSHAP RINPOCHÉ

Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché, Losang Jikmé Damchö, presented this oral commentary to *Illumination of the Tantric Tradition* at Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, California, in 2003 and

2004.

Rinpoché was born in Amdo in 1926 and recognized as the reincarnation of the former abbot of Taktsang Lhamo Monastery, Geshé Damchö Phüntso (1851–1925), a Drepung Gomang geshé praised for his understanding of Madhyamaka, or Middle Way, philosophy. After completing his formal education at Taktsang Lhamo, he was appointed abbot of that institution for three years in 1953, and then in 1957 he accompanied Kirti Rinpoché on his journey to Lhasa as his *tsenshap* (*mtshan zhabs*), or debate instructor. He fled Tibet after the failed Tibetan uprising against the Chinese Communist incursion in 1959, staying first at the Buxa refugee camp in West Bengal, then in Dalhousie and Dharamsala in the Himalayan foothills of northern India.

In 1972 he entered solitary retreat above Dharamsala. From time to time Rinpoché would emerge to give and receive instruction and transmissions, including passing the transmission of Butön Rinpoché's [2](#) commentaries and annotations to Kālacakra to the Dalai Lama, as well as the transmission of the *Stainless Light* Kālacakra commentary to Serkhong Rinpoché (1974, 1980), who in turn passed this lineage to the Dalai Lama. He gave this transmission five more times to audiences such as Kirti Rinpoché, Pangnang Rinpoché, Gen Lamrimpa (1983), and Bakula Rinpoché^{[3](#)} (1984). He gave the Zurka Gyatsa^{[4](#)} twice (1984, 1993), as well as the Mitra Gyatsa^{[5](#)} three times (1987, 1990, 1993), the first requested by the Dalai Lama and conferred in Drepung Monastery and the second requested by Lama Zopa Rinpoché.

In 1985 he attended the Kālacakra empowerment by the Dalai Lama in Bodhgaya and at the request of Lama Zopa Rinpoché taught *Kālacakra Six-Session Yoga*—the daily practice commitment for Kālacakra initiates—and Maitreya's *Uttaratantra* to Western students. From that time he continued to teach Tibetan and Western students both in Dharamsala and at various centers around the world. Outside of Dharamsala, he taught primarily under the umbrella of Lama Zopa Rinpoché's

organization, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). From 1989 until he passed away in 2006, he gave the Kālacakra empowerment a total of thirty-six times, including thirty-four times overseas.

Rinpoché based his presentation of Ngawang Palden's work on Kirti Losang Trinlé's *Essence of Nectar*. Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché's previous incarnation was a heart disciple of Kirti Losang Trinlé. Rinpoché also consulted commentaries to the *Essence of Nectar* by three recent scholars of Kirti Monastery, namely Losang Palden, Könchok Tsültrim, and Jikmé Rigpai Lodrö. Both Losang Palden (1881–1944), who composed the *Opening the Eye of the Fortunate*, and Könchok Tsültrim (1892–1972), who composed *Cloud of White Lotus Offerings*, were direct teachers of Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché. The third author Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö (1910–85), who composed the *Great Secret Sun and Moon Maṇḍala*, may or may not have been a direct teacher. Rinpoché considered all three texts to be very important and frequently used them as his own reference. When Rinpoché fled Tibet he brought with him his own copy of *Cloud of White Lotus Offerings* by Könchok Tsültrim. In India he even made a handwritten copy of this text to offer to the Dalai Lama both out of respect for its scholarship and out of fear that the work may be lost in Tibet. In time copies of the other two works were also brought to India, and now all three texts have been published and stand as important sources for those wishing to study these subjects in depth.

Rinpoché provided copies of the three commentaries to the translators and suggested that the root text and commentary be further elaborated and supplemented with notes from these texts. He said, "My wish is to open the door of debate and analysis for those who seek to understand these issues in detail." Rinpoché felt that this would serve those interested in a more detailed presentation while others could simply read the root text and the commentary alone. These annotations therefore act as a second level of commentary to supplement Rinpoché's explanation, adding new information or noting divergent positions by these three scholars on the same point.

The teachings in Vajrapani Institute relied on a translation of the root text initially prepared by Ian Coghlan for the Buddhist Studies Program in Chenrezig Institute, Australia, in 1999. He then completely revised this translation prior to Rinpoché giving his oral commentary at Vajrapani Institute in 2003 and 2004. Voula Zarpani interpreted the teachings the first year, and Venerable Tsewang Dekyong interpreted the second year. Voula transcribed the teachings and then checked the transcripts against previous teachings Rinpoché had given. In accordance with Rinpoché's instructions, annotations were added, and these were further supplemented with charts. The entire work was then checked by Ian. Both translators acknowledge any mistakes in the preparation of this work as their own and request patience from both practitioners and scholars.

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of countless friends in the production of this work. At the center is Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché himself, who provided essential guidance at every level, who suggested how to structure the commentary for the reader, who provided Tibetan reference materials for the annotations, and whose very life was a pure example of Dharma practice. We thank Alak Tsangla, Rinpoché's attendant for nineteen years, who accompanied Rinpoché on his many overseas tours and who provided sustained and invaluable support for the project. We also thank our editor at Wisdom, David Kittelstrom, for his clear, erudite, and insightful suggestions that have greatly improved the work, along with Megan Anderson, who patiently proofread the manuscript, and Laura Cunningham, who skillfully guided it through its final stages.

TECHNICAL NOTE

This text is called *Gsang chen rgyud sde bzhi'i sa lam gyi rnam gzhag rgyud gzhung gsal byed ces bya ba bzhugs* so published by Serjé Geshé Jampa Khedrup and based on woodblocks held

at Gyümé Tantric College.

Bracketed numbers in the root text refer to folio numbers. All Tibetan names are rendered phonetically in accordance with the style sheet prepared by Wisdom Publications. Sanskrit diacritics are used throughout.

Pronunciation of Tibetan phonetics

ph and *th* are aspirated *p* and *t*, as in *pet* and *tip*.

ö is similar to the *eu* in French *seul*.

ü is similar to the *ü* in the German *füllen*.

ai is similar to the *e* in *bet*.

é is similar to the *e* in *prey*.

Pronunciation of Sanskrit

Palatal *ś* and retroflex *ṣ* are similar to the English unvoiced *sh*.

c is an unaspirated *ch* similar to the *ch* in *chill*.

The vowel *ṛ* is similar to the American *r* in *pretty*.

ñ is somewhat similar to a nasalized *ny* in *canyon*.

ṇ is similar to the *ng* in *sing* or *anger*.

In the notes when both Tibetan and Sanskrit are given for technical

terms, the Tibetan is given first.

ILLUMINATION OF THE TANTRIC TRADITION

*The Principles of the Grounds and Paths of the Four
Great Secret Classes of Tantra*

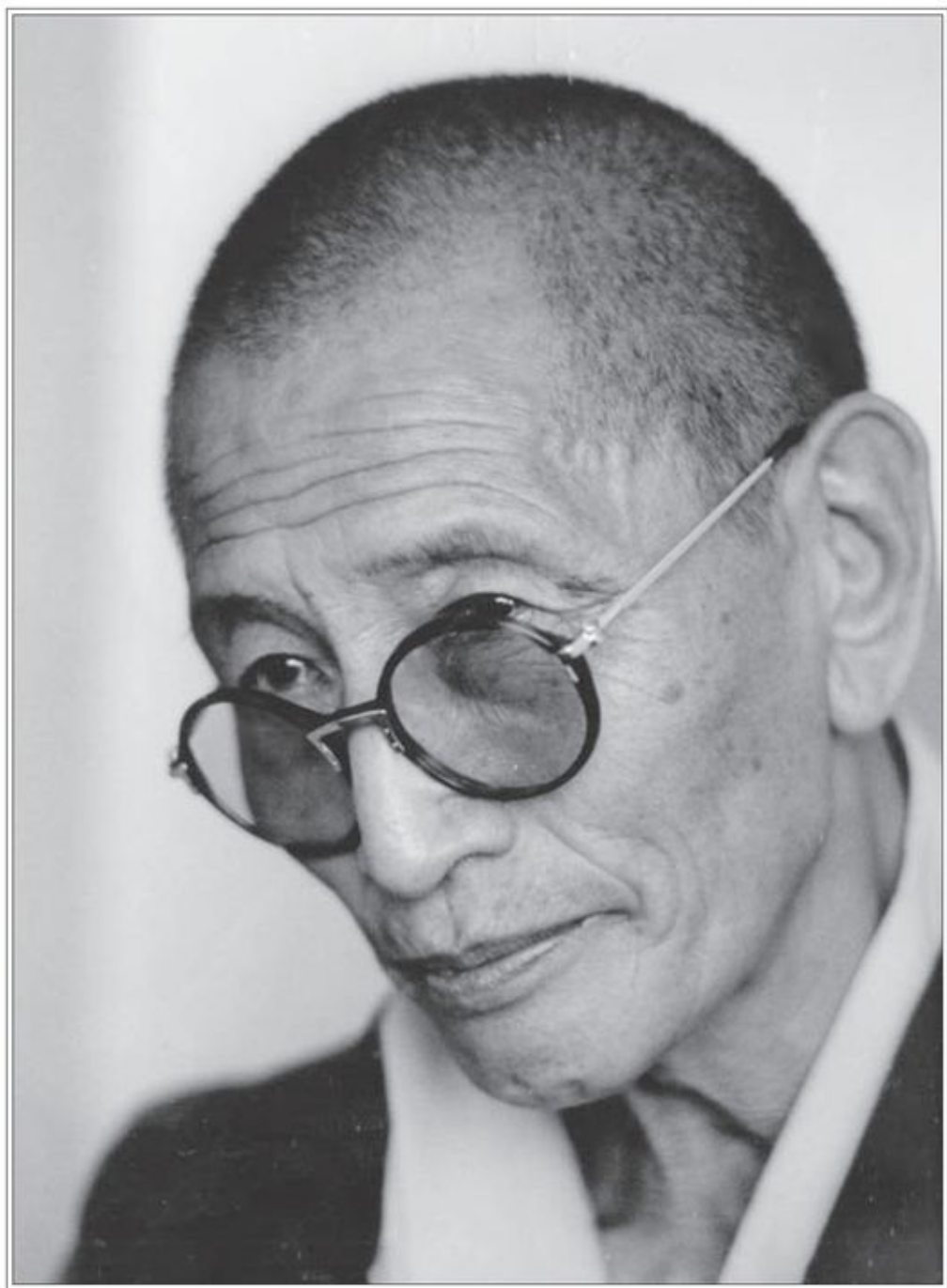


PART I

The Three Lower Tantras



Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoche, circa 1992, Nepal.



ONE

Action Tantra

How to progress on the path of action tantra

This has four divisions:

- 1. How to become a vessel suitable for meditating on the path**
- 2. How to keep the vows and commitments purely after becoming a suitable vessel**
- 3. How to approximate the deity while keeping the commitments**
- 4. How to establish the siddhis having achieved approximation**

How to become a vessel suitable for meditating on the path

First train your mind well in the shared paths according to the *Great Stages of the Path* and the *Condensed Stages of the Path*. Then enter the maṇḍala of any of the three lineages of action tantra and receive empowerment in reliance on a qualified vajra master and in accord with the explanations of the different classes of tantra.

First we are advised to train our mindstream by following the paths shared by sūtra and tantra, and then to find a qualified tantric master. One of the first subjects discussed in the stages of the path (*lamrim*) literature is the way to properly rely on a qualified teacher and the need to examine any potential tantric master fully before requesting tantric empowerment. There are different sets of qualities we should examine before relying on a teacher. The *Guru Pūjā* lists the qualities of teachers of Vinaya (monastic discipline), Mahāyāna, and tantra in three separate verses. Verse 43 emphasizes the importance of moral

discipline and stability in a teacher of Vinaya:[13](#)

We make requests to the elders who maintain Vinaya,
who are born from an array of jewels of extensive study
within the great ocean of ethics that is the source of good
qualities
and who are lords clad in saffron, like the second
appearance of Munīndra.

Verse 44 expresses the qualities of a Mahāyāna teacher
according to the stages of the path:[14](#)

We make requests to spiritual friends of the Supreme
Vehicle,
who possess ten qualities and are qualified to teach
the paths of the sugatas to those who are suitable,
and who as lords of Dharma possess the entire heritage
of the conquerors.

Verse 45 summarizes the qualities of a tantric master:[15](#)

We make requests to the supreme holder of the vajra,
who possesses both sets of ten qualities, including
restraint of the three doors,
great mind, patience, integrity, freedom from pretension
and deceit,
knowledge of mantra and tantra, and skill in composition
and explanation.

A tantric master has “skill in composition and explanation”
since he is expert in explaining and composing tantric texts and
commentaries. Further he should possess a complete
knowledge of the tantric rituals that are specific to each tantra,
such as the complex and unique rituals of Kālacakra.

Thus having trained our minds, found a qualified master, and
requested empowerment, we should then enter the maṇḍala of
any of the lineages of action tantra and receive empowerment.
We should ideally receive empowerment in all three lineages,
but it is said that we may enter the maṇḍala of any one of the

three lineages.¹⁶ Within action tantra the three lineages are (1) the tathāgata, (2) the lotus, and (3) the vajra. Each lineage includes a vast number of deities, and in general Mañjuśrī is regarded as the protector of the tathāgata lineage, Avalokiteśvara the protector of the lotus lineage, and Vajrapāṇi the protector of the vajra lineage. Even so, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi also exist within the other three classes of tantra, namely performance, yoga, and highest yoga tantra.

Types of maṇḍalas

Question: In what maṇḍala is the empowerment bestowed?

Reply: The empowerment may be bestowed in a colored-sand or painted-cloth maṇḍala. For some special beings it is conferred in an absorption maṇḍala.

In general, a suitable candidate may receive empowerment in either (1) a sand maṇḍala made of colored granules or (2) a painted-cloth maṇḍala. Some special beings may receive initiation in (3) an absorption maṇḍala, where empowerment is conferred on the basis of a maṇḍala established through the meditative projection of both the tantric master and the student.

In action [2b] tantra there is no body maṇḍala and so on. Even the terms *body maṇḍala*, *relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala*, *lotus maṇḍala*, and *ultimate-bodhicitta maṇḍala* are not used in the three lower classes of tantra because these four maṇḍalas are features of highest yoga tantra alone.

Thus in action tantra, empowerment can only be bestowed in three types of maṇḍala, namely the (1) sand, (2) painted-cloth, and (3) absorption maṇḍalas. The four other types of maṇḍalas—the body maṇḍala,¹⁷ the relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala, the lotus maṇḍala, and the ultimate-bodhicitta maṇḍala—are not

used in the lower tantras, and even their names are not mentioned. Such maṇḍalas are found only in highest yoga tantra. Thus highest yoga tantra employs seven types of maṇḍala while the lower tantras use only the first three.

The type and number of empowerments

Question: What empowerments are bestowed?

Reply: Only the vase empowerment is bestowed. The three higher empowerments do not exist in the three lower classes of tantra.

The term *empowerment* implies granting permission to engage in certain activities. In secular life as well as in Dharma practice, our level of skill tends to determine our level of authorization, and improvement in skills leads to higher authorization, granting us access to more areas and activities. In general there are three types of empowerment: the maturing causal empowerment, the liberating path empowerment, and the liberated resultant empowerment.

The *maturing causal empowerment* grants permission to practice a particular deity, and this is obtained during the initiation ceremony. At that time, the minds of students are matured by hearing the words of the initiating master as he guides students through the initiation ceremony of that deity.¹⁸ The ritual itself acts as the cause of maturation. Students obtain the *liberating path empowerment* by progressing through the learner paths. By obtaining the wisdom derived from study, the wisdom derived from contemplation, and finally the wisdom derived from meditation on the deity, they obtain, respectively, the path of accumulation, the path of preparation, and the paths of seeing and meditation of this particular tantra. When the students obtain the non-learner path—the path of no-more learning—they obtain the *liberated resultant empowerment* that is the highest level of authorization.

The second issue this verse raises is the number of empowerments received, and again there is a difference

between the three lower tantras and the highest yoga tantra. In highest yoga tantra there are four empowerments—the vase, secret, pristine wisdom, and word empowerments—but in the lower tantras only the vase empowerment is bestowed.

There is a difference in the number of empowerments bestowed in the four classes of tantra. Action tantra has just the water and crown empowerments and the presentation of ritual objects at the end of the ceremony.

In action tantra initiation is conferred by the water and crown empowerments ¹⁹ that are included within the vase empowerment. Tsongkhapa states that in the water empowerment, the water in the vase is generated as the deity, and the empowerment is given on the basis of that blessed water. In the crown empowerment, each of the five facets of the crown is adorned with the emblem of one of the five buddha families, and empowerment is bestowed after invoking the buddhas of the five families, each of whom blesses his respective emblem. These two empowerments are followed by the presentation of certain ritual objects at the end of the ceremony.²⁰ The term *just* emphasizes that only a small number of initiations are given, and this indicates the relative lack of maturity of those taking the initiation.

Performance tantra has just five knowledge empowerments, consisting of the former two plus the vajra, bell, and name empowerments, as well as the presentation of ritual objects at the end.²¹ Yoga tantra has just these plus the vajra-master empowerment, as well as the presentation of ritual objects at the end.

In brief the number of empowerments increases from two empowerments in action tantra, to five in performance tantra, to six in yoga tantra. These six empowerments, collectively called the *vase empowerment*, together constitute the first of

the four empowerments of highest yoga tantra. In other words, if we obtain the water, crown, vajra, bell, name, and vajra-master empowerments, we obtain the vase empowerment.²²

Highest yoga tantra has four empowerments consisting of that empowerment plus the three higher empowerments.

Full initiation into highest yoga tantra requires, in other words, the vase empowerment plus the secret, pristine wisdom, and word empowerments.

Kālacakra as a specific highest yoga tantra has sixteen empowerments—seven emulating childhood, four higher empowerments, four highest empowerments, and the empowerment of the great lord vajra master.

The Kālacakra tantra possesses a unique system of enumerating the empowerments. If empowerment is given according to the system of Śrī Abhayākaragupta, they may be bestowed on the basis of a painted-cloth maṇḍala in which only the four empowerments are received. But when empowerment is obtained on the basis of a sand maṇḍala, there are, according to the instruction of Tsongkhapa, a total of sixteen empowerments. First (1–7) the group of seven empowerments emulating childhood are bestowed, then the four higher empowerments that include (8) the higher vase, (9) the higher secret, (10) the higher pristine-wisdom, and (11) the higher word empowerments, then the four highest empowerments are bestowed, namely (12) the highest vase, (13) the highest secret, (14) the highest pristine-wisdom, and (15) the highest word empowerments, and finally (16) the great lord vajra-master empowerment.

Since the four higher and the four highest empowerments are similar, they can be grouped together. The higher vase empowerment can be grouped with the highest vase empowerment, the higher secret with the highest secret empowerment, and the higher pristine-wisdom empowerment

with both the highest pristine wisdom and the higher word empowerment. The highest word empowerment stands alone. This alternate method of enumeration therefore has twelve components: (1-7) the seven empowerments emulating childhood, (8-10) seven empowerments condensed into three (vase, secret, and pristine wisdom), (11) the highest word empowerment, plus (12) the great lord vajra-master empowerment.

Still, the *Vajra Garland of Maṇḍala Rites* explains that five knowledge empowerments are bestowed in action and performance tantras.

In the standard presentation, only the water and crown empowerments are conferred in action tantra, while performance tantra has those two plus the vajra, bell, and name empowerments. However, Abhayākaragupta in his *Vajra Garland*, which he composed after encountering Vajrayoginī directly and receiving from her a series of empowerments and explanations, states that five knowledge empowerments [23](#) may also be conferred in action tantra. Master Abhayākaragupta therefore implies that we can be initiated into action tantra by attaining either two or five empowerments, but this point requires further investigation. [24](#)

The text now discusses the different types and number of commitments in the different classes of tantra.

How to keep the vows and commitments purely after becoming a suitable vessel

Second, one who is capable of taking prātimokṣa vows should take any of the seven types of prātimokṣa vows—or at least the ethics of abandoning the ten nonvirtuous actions—as the basis of tantric practice.

Both lay and ordained disciples may obtain tantric empowerment, in this case in action tantra. Two types of prātimokṣa vows are open to lay practitioners, namely one-day

vows and lifelong vows, and holding such vows makes lay practitioners suitable bases for this practice. Practitioners who hold neither type of prātimokṣa vow should at least maintain the ethics of abandoning the ten nonvirtuous actions, because a person first becomes a Buddhist by taking refuge and following the Buddha's advice pertaining to refuge, which includes abandoning the ten nonvirtuous actions. Refuge also acts as the basis for either male or female lay practitioners holding either one-day or lifelong vows.

In general there are three types of vows—prātimokṣa, bodhisattva, and tantric vows. The author states that there are seven types of prātimokṣa vows, while Tsongkhapa states there are either seven or eight.²⁵ The eightfold presentation includes (1) the one-day vows that are obtained by either male or female practitioners but enumerated as one category. Vows taken for the duration of a life include (2) male and (3) female lay vows, (4) male and (5) female novice vows, (6) male and (7) female full-ordination vows, and (8) trainee nun vows.

When empowerment is conferred, only bodhisattva vows are taken, because tantric vows are not taken in action and performance tantra. Therefore guard against root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows alone. Nevertheless there are many specific mantra commitments to be protected, which you can understand from authentic tantras quoted in *Mantric Stages*, while the root downfalls may be examined [3a] in the *Central Path to Enlightenment*.

When taking initiations in action and performance tantras, bodhisattva vows are taken,²⁶ and we should be aware of what constitutes a downfall in this class of vows. Though tantric vows are not taken²⁷ and we need not be concerned with tantric downfalls, there are still many specific commitments to be aware of.²⁸ These issues are discussed in the first of the eleven chapters of Tsongkhapa's *Central Path to*

Enlightenment.

Strive to never commit the root downfalls through properly understanding them. If you incur such faults, do not ignore them but purify them through confession. Those incurred during the day should be remedied at night, and those incurred at night should be remedied during the day, as mentioned in *Mantric Stages*.

There are eighteen root bodhisattva downfalls and forty-six secondary downfalls to protect against. They are enumerated in the *Six-Session Guru Yoga* as well as in *Central Path to Enlightenment*. If a downfall does occur, we should confess and purify it immediately or at least at the first opportunity. If a downfall occurs during the day, we should not leave it unconfessed until the next day but rather confess it that night. Similarly if a downfall occurs at night, we should confess it at the first opportunity the following day. It is said that when Atiśa was first traveling to Tibet, he slowed the group's progress by frequently dismounting from his horse to confess and purify even the smallest breach of his vows. We should follow such inspiring examples.

How to approximate the deity while keeping the commitments

The third has two parts:

- 1. Absorption with recitation**
- 2. Absorption not reliant on recitation**

The third part of this section deals with the two ways to approximate the deity. (1) The first is to combine meditation on the deity with recitation of the deity's mantra. (2) The second is to meditate on the deity without mantra recitation. The term *approximation* refers to how we meditate on the path. It is called *approximation* since it functions to "accomplish through approaching," signifying that the actions we engage in draw our mind as close as possible to the enlightened mind of the deity.²⁹ The main type of approximation in the three lower tantras is meditation that identifies our body, speech, and mind

with those of the deity. Mantra recitation is also called approximation, but this is a secondary function of approximation where we recite the mantra of the deity to invoke the deity's blessings.

Absorption with recitation

You generate yourself as a deity by relying on the six deities, inviting the wisdom beings to the place in front of you and making offerings to them and so forth, and reciting mantras without deteriorating the four branches through combining restraint with vitality exertion.

The text briefly lists here the different stages of the practice. In the first stage we generate our own body, speech, and mind as the enlightened body, speech, and mind of the deity. In the second stage we invite the wisdom beings to the space in front of us and present offerings to them and so on.³⁰ In the third stage we engage in mantra recitation through combining restraint with vitality exertion (*prāṇāyāma*). We focus single-pointedly on the focal object, such as the body of the deity, and recite without allowing the four branches to deteriorate. These branches will be explained later.

In the four classes of mantra there are two types of deity generation—self-generation and front-generation. In self-generation, we visualize our ordinary body, speech, and mind as the divine body, speech, and mind of the deity. In front-generation, we visualize the deity facing us in the space in front of us.

The author here explains that self-generation³¹ is accomplished by relying on the six deities: (1) the empty deity, (2) the sound deity, (3) the letter deity, (4) the form deity, (5) the seal deity, and (6) the sign deity.³² This crucial statement implies that when practitioners, especially beginners, engage in such practice, they need an external aid. For example when an old man tries to lift himself up from a chair, he relies partly

on the arm of the chair and partly on the support of a cane. So, too, the self-generation is achieved partly through the mental effort of the practitioner and partly through the words of the ritual that guides the practitioner through the practice of the six deities. For success in this practice, you need to rely on texts that clearly describe the gradual transformation from the first to the sixth deity.

Empty deity

The first is called the *empty deity* to remind us that at the beginning of our practice we must meditate on emptiness.³³ In the *sādhana*, or practice text, this initial process involves meditating on emptiness, reciting either of two Sanskrit mantras depending on the *sādhana* (*oṃ svabhāva śuddha sarva dharmā svabhāva śuddho haṃ* or *oṃ śūnyatā jñāna vajra svabhāva ātmako haṃ*), establishing emptiness as the foundation of the deity, and generating yourself as the deity.

When engaging in deity meditation it is important to distinguish between the definitive deity and the interpretive deity. The definitive, or actual, deity refers to pristine wisdom realizing emptiness. Once the definitive deity has been established, then certain aspects of this pristine wisdom manifest as the interpretive deity—the embodied deity.³⁴ In this process we initially call to mind the suffering of the six types of beings and generate renunciation focusing on their suffering. Then, while maintaining our focus on their suffering, we generate love—wishing that all such beings find happiness—and compassion—wishing that such beings be freed from suffering. In time our renunciation will awaken love and compassion, and from these will arise bodhicitta.

Put another way, meditating on the empty deity refers to developing ultimate bodhicitta, and this must be preceded by the generation of relative bodhicitta. *Relative bodhicitta* is the thought “may I obtain the state of complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings,” and *ultimate bodhicitta* is the realization that all phenomena, or *dharmas*, are empty of

inherent existence. In this way, meditation on the empty deity combines method and wisdom. If we were to meditate on emptiness alone, then wisdom would remain separate from method, and the union of method and wisdom would not arise.

In brief, to arrive at the emptiness meditation that is the basis for generating the deity, we first focus on suffering sentient beings and generate renunciation, then compassion, and then bodhicitta, and finally on that basis we generate the realization of emptiness. In this way we combine method and wisdom through developing the three principal aspects of the path: renunciation, bodhicitta, and correct view. Deity meditation is therefore supported by the three principles of the path.

Sound deity

The *sound deity* is the empty resonance of the deity's mantra. In the *sādhana* of Avalokiteśvara, for example, we first meditate on emptiness. Then the pristine wisdom realizing emptiness focuses on the sound of the mantra of Avalokiteśvara—*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*—which resonates naturally in the space in front of us. The sound of the six syllables of the mantra manifest the pristine wisdom realizing emptiness. This pristine wisdom possessing both the nature of the realization of emptiness and the aspect of resonant sound is the very essence of meditation on the sound deity.^{[35](#)}

Letter deity

The third deity is the *letter deity*, and in this meditation, we see the sounds of the six syllables crystallize, descend, and alight on a lotus base in the aspect of the syllables of the mantra.^{[36](#)}

Form deity

The fourth deity is the *form deity*, the complete form of the deity, such as Avalokiteśvara, with four or one thousand arms, seated on a lotus. Each meditation begins with the contemplation of emptiness that is the non-inherent existence

of dharmas, which is comprehended by correct view. This empty deity then manifests as the sound of the mantra resonating in space in the aspect of the sound deity. The sound deity then appears as the letters of the syllables, such as *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*, that constitute the letter deity. Finally these syllables combine to establish the form deity.³⁷

Seal deity

The fifth deity is the *seal (mudrā) deity*. Following the generation of the deity's form, we bless certain parts of the body using particular hand mudrās while reciting the mantra *oṃ padma udbhāvaye svāhā*. This represents the seal deity.³⁸ Up to this point, we have relied on reciting certain words or reading the sādhana to construct this visualization step by step.

Sign deity

With the sixth deity, the *sign deity*,³⁹ we stop reciting words or looking at the text. We have already established the visualization, but now we need to ascertain the quality of the visualization so that the mind can maintain the focal object, single-pointedly, for as long as desired. *Sign deity* refers to the concentration focused single-pointedly on the sign or image of the visualization that is the basis for cultivating insight into emptiness.

Four branches of recitation

The four branches of recitation are recitation committed while concentrating on and maintaining (1) oneself as the basis, (2) another as the basis, (3) sound as the basis, and (4) mind as the basis:⁴⁰

1. Recitation with oneself as the basis is recitation focusing on oneself possessing the body, speech, and mind of the deity.⁴¹
2. Recitation with another as the basis focuses on the deity that has been invited to the space in front of you.⁴²

3. Recitation with sound as the basis focuses on the resonance of the mantric letters and syllables.^{[43](#)}
4. Recitation with mind as the basis focuses on seeing our own nature as the same as the light or resonance at the heart of the visualized deity.^{[44](#)}

This visualized deity can be either ourself as the deity or the front-generation. In other words, we see the focal object as one in nature with our own mind.

Vitality exertion

The term *vitality exertion* (*prāṇāyāma*) exists in the three lower classes of tantra, in the corpus of the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja, and in Kālacakra, but its meaning is not the same in each.

These differences in meaning will be explained in the relevant parts of the text.

The meaning of *vitality exertion* for the three lower classes of tantra is that *vitality* refers to the wind that circulates through the doors of the senses and so on and through the pores of the body and the head, and *exertion* is the mindfulness aware of distraction when the mind is diverted to other focal objects. Therefore the meaning of restraint through *vitality exertion* is the retention of those winds internally without letting them disperse externally.

According to sūtra, *vitality* (*prāṇa*) or *life force* refers to heat and consciousness, and this is extensively explained by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośa*. Heat and consciousness form the basis of life, and their presence or absence determines whether someone is alive. According to the lower tantras *vitality* refers to wind and its circulation through the doors of the senses. As such, the eye awareness and the wind associated with it circulate through the doors of the eyes. Similarly ear, nose, tongue, and body awareness and their associated winds circulate through the doors of the ears, nose,

tongue, and the skin of the body. Coarser winds also circulate through the various openings of the body, such as the nostrils in the case of inhalation and exhalation or the pores pervading the physical body.⁴⁵ There are also winds that circulate through the anus and genitals.

Exertion (*āyāma*) means effort or control and here refers to mindfulness and nondistractedness.⁴⁶ When both terms are combined as *vitality exertion* (*prāṇāyāma*),⁴⁷ mindfulness and its supportive wind are bound to an internal object, preventing their dispersal or distraction to external objects. In brief, we concentrate the mind on its focal object, such as the deity, and apply effort to stop any tendency to distraction to external objects such as sounds and forms.

Presentation of form and awareness in sūtra and tantra

In the sūtra presentation, form and awareness are mutually exclusive. This is extensively explained in texts such as the *Abhidharmakośa*, which present a threefold classification of functional phenomena as form, awareness, and other.⁴⁸ Awareness itself is further classified into six main minds and fifty-one mental factors in various sūtras, and the different mental factors are explained in *lorig* manuals.⁴⁹

In tantra this issue is treated differently. Here wind and mind are held to be inseparable, and in the same way that a person rides a horse, awareness is said to ride on wind, which is a form. Although this assertion is not clearly presented in the lower tantras, it is a central theme in the completion stage of highest yoga tantra, where there is no mind separate from wind and no wind separate from mind. Thus not only is wind form, but awareness itself is regarded as form in the sense that wind and mind are inseparable.

Another unique feature of tantra is that the union of wind and mind has three different levels of subtlety: (1) coarse wind-mind, (2) subtle wind-mind, and (3) extremely subtle wind-mind. Also even though this union of wind and mind is

indivisible, their individual functions can be distinguished. The function of the mind is to be clear and cognizant, in accordance with the definition of awareness. The fact that an object appears clearly, like a reflection in a mirror, and is cognized, is due to the function of awareness. The function of wind is to facilitate movement of the mind and to carry the mind to various objects. The wind acts as the mount of awareness, and the mind's capacity to move is due to the function of wind. Within the sphere of awareness these functions always coexist.

Absorption not reliant on recitation

Absorption not reliant on recitation is absorption on fire, absorption on sound, and absorption that bestows freedom at the limit of sound.

These three classifications are explained clearly by Tsongkhapa in his *Mantric Stages*. Deity meditation differs in sūtra and tantra. Deity meditation in sūtra involves first inviting the deity to the place in front, like a guest, and then making offerings and requesting blessings to attain our temporary and ultimate aims. Self-generation is not part of sūtra deity meditation.

As explained above, generating ourselves as a deity begins with contemplating the suffering of sentient beings, then generating renunciation, love, compassion, and bodhicitta, and finally meditating on emptiness to seal these realizations. Since the mind comprehending these three principal aspects of the path appears as the divine body, speech, and mind of the deity, they are not separate. In a conventional sense, our current body, speech, and mind are far removed from the enlightened resultant states of the divine body, speech, and mind of the deity. However, in an ultimate sense, they are not distant, because all entities share the same taste of emptiness. As the *Guru Pūjā* states, in the context of blessing the offerings:

In essence they are pristine wisdom, and in aspect the inner offering and various types of offerings.^{[50](#)}

The essence of the offerings is emptiness, and emptiness is

made manifest in the various offering substances. This principle also applies to our body, speech, and mind. Their essence is pristine wisdom realizing emptiness, and we visualize and meditate on them as divine.

A humorous anecdote from Amdo illustrates the importance of correctly understanding this transformation. Once two monks from Tashi Gomang Monastery visited a house in order to perform a ritual. There they met some lay tantric practitioners, who raised the issue of consuming alcohol. "Since you are fully ordained monks, you are not allowed to drink any beer are you? We lay tantric practitioners drink it after transforming it into nectar," commented one of the laymen.

The junior monk, who had little understanding of how substances are transformed into nectar and how self-generation is established, retorted, "There is no problem. We simply visualize ourselves as yaks, and when we drink the beer, we visualize it as water!"

When we understand that our present physical, verbal, and mental bases can be purified, we also understand that attaining the divine body, speech, and mind of an enlightened deity is possible. With that goal, we thereby meditate on the three principal aspects of the path and visualize ourselves as deities. We cultivate this visualization until it fully corresponds to the resultant deity and our body, speech, and mind are blessed by the divine body, speech, and mind. Within that state, stains are purified, and it is this purification that ultimately transforms us into that deity. We must engage in deity meditation with this understanding or our self-generation will not be effective, just as merely saying the words "I am blessing this offering" does not transform it into nectar. Our mistake would be similar to the monk who boasted he could drink beer by visualizing himself as a yak drinking water.

Absorption on fire

In the first of these practices, the absorption on fire, we visualize ourselves as the deity, and at our hearts we visualize

a seed syllable, such as *hrīḥ*, that emits rays of light. These rays are in the nature of light, and we meditate on heat by focusing single-pointedly on this syllable. Meditative absorption on fire is a way to obtain calm abiding by focusing on glowing light.⁵¹

Absorption on sound

In absorption on sound, we visualize a seed syllable surrounded by the syllables of the deity's mantra at the heart of the deity. For Avalokiteśvara, for example, we visualize the seed syllable *hrīḥ* at the deity's heart upon a moon disk. The syllable is encircled at the edge of the disk in a clockwise direction by the six syllables *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*, and we imagine that we can actually hear the sound of the mantra. Meditative absorption on sound is a way to obtain calm abiding by focusing on sound.⁵²

Calm abiding

With our eyes focused on light, our ears focused on mantras, and our minds focused on the deity's form, we develop calm abiding in reliance on the unique methods of tantra.⁵³ In this context, we engage in the path of accumulation of action tantra marked by the cultivation of calm abiding.

You establish calm abiding in the stages up to and including meditative absorption on sound.

Calm abiding⁵⁴ is obtained by focusing on light that includes absorption on fire and through focusing on sound on the level of absorption on sound. "Up to and including" here explicitly includes the stage of meditative absorption on sound.

Absorption bestowing freedom at the limit of sound

From the limit of sound, you meditate on insight.

From the third stage onward, we meditate on emptiness⁵⁵ by focusing on the non-inherent existence of the deity and its

mantra. Having developed meditative absorption that bestows freedom at the limit of sound, we cultivate insight on that basis, and we progress from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation.

Union of calm abiding and insight

If you apply analytical wisdom excessively, you will disrupt the previously developed stability. Therefore you need to alternate analysis and placement until you have successfully united calm abiding with the insight realizing emptiness.

Prior to this union, calm abiding and insight are discrete states susceptible to disruption—too much analysis can undermine stable focus, and overemphasizing stability can undermine analysis. We should proceed, therefore, by alternating analytical meditation and placement meditation until we obtain the union of calm abiding and insight.

When you [3b] obtain insight realizing emptiness, you progress to the path of preparation, and when you perceptually comprehend emptiness, you progress to the path of seeing, just as you do in the Perfection Vehicle.

In action tantra, we progress from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation when we develop fully qualified insight. This means that we realize emptiness by way of a generic image or a generic sound, but emptiness does not appear to us clearly like an object right before our eyes. We progress to the path of seeing when we perceptually or directly comprehend the emptiness of the deity we have been focusing on. This tantric presentation is similar to the progression described in the Perfection Vehicle, where calm abiding is obtained on the path of accumulation, insight is obtained on the path of preparation, and the perceptual comprehension of emptiness is obtained on the path of seeing.

You must first establish the four branches of

recitation and the three absorptions to properly accomplish the limitless feats of the special siddhis that are stated in the action and performance tantras. *Mantric Stages*, however, mentions that they may not be necessary to establish many of the minor siddhis.

On attaining the path of seeing, we begin progressively accomplishing the ten grounds (*bhūmi*). At this time, too, we obtain various *siddhis*, or supernormal powers. In general there are two types of siddhis, common and supreme. The supreme siddhi is the attainment of the state of Vajradhara, the peak attainment of the path. The siddhis called the *eight great attainments* include such powers as speed walking, the sword, and so forth.⁵⁶ These powers may be obtained through the practices of action and performance tantras, through approximation relying on the four branches of recitation, or through approximation without recitation, such as the attainment of calm abiding and insight through meditative absorption on fire, sound, or the limit of sound. Such a combination of concentration and recitation seems to be necessary for obtaining any of the eight major siddhis, but this does not appear to be the case for other more minor siddhis.⁵⁷

How to establish the siddhis having achieved approximation

The fourth has three types of siddhi—supreme, intermediate, and lesser—and there are many ways of categorizing them in three.

The attainment of siddhis,⁵⁸ whether supreme, intermediate, or lesser, depends on whether we assemble the causes necessary to produce them. There are many ways of categorizing siddhis, such as (1) by means of their nature, (2) by means of their signs, (3) by means of their basis, (4) by means of the bestower, and (5) by means of lineage.⁵⁹

(I) *By means of nature*

By means of nature, the supreme siddhis are the knowledge bearer, higher perception, and knowing all the treatises.

There are three examples of siddhis that are supreme by nature. The first is becoming a *knowledge bearer* (*vidyādhara*).⁶⁰ The second is gaining *higher perception* (*abhijñā*), such as the divine eye, or clairvoyance. Though these may manifest to different degrees, any manifestation of higher perception, whether minor or fully developed, is considered a supreme siddhi. The third is *knowing all the treatises*, naturally and spontaneously, without need for study.

The intermediate siddhis are invisibility, extracting the essence, speed walking, and so on.

The siddhis that are intermediate by nature are also illustrated with three examples. The first is *invisibility*, where we can conceal the appearance of our body. The second is *extracting the essence*, the siddhi of the pill.⁶¹ The third is *speed walking*, the capacity to move swiftly after blessing our feet with special mantras.

There is a story involving invisibility. At one time Phadampa Sangyé was traveling in Tibet, and in due course he reached Lhapchi, where the mahāsiddha Milarepa was living. Milarepa was aware of Phadampa Sangyé's approach and manifested as a lotus in Phadampa Sangyé's path. But Phadampa Sangyé ignored him and Milarepa thought, "He cannot see me!" He again manifested as a lotus flower on the path, and once again Phadampa Sangyé ignored him. When he manifested as a lotus for a third time, Phadampa Sangyé announced, "Stop it with these tricks. Assume your normal form so we can meet and talk!"

The lesser siddhis are subduing others, killing, expelling, and so forth.

The siddhis that are lesser by nature endow us with the power

of subduing, killing, and expelling others. Many Indian and Tibetan tantrikas are known to have used wrathful means to prevent harm to the Dharma. Such a qualified practitioner may take the life of someone who is harming the Dharma and then establish a new physical basis for his or her consciousness, ensuring that that person has the chance to enter the path. Though killing is nonvirtuous, establishing a proper basis for their rebirth permits a positive outcome. Ra Lotsāwa employed such extreme measures when he took the lives of thirteen vajra-holders. Later he composed averse about this:

I have taken the lives of thirteen vajra-holders,
but even if I were to go to hell,
I bear no regret,
for I did it for a purpose.

The term *vajra-holder* (*vajradhara*) is an epithet for an ārya and here refers to a tantric practitioner who has attained the path of seeing.

(2) By means of signs

By means of signs, there are three: igniting substances, making them emit smoke, and heating them.

When classifying siddhis by means of external signs, there are three. The supreme siddhi is the capacity to cause the substances of the inner offering to blaze and boil within the skull cup.⁶² The intermediate siddhi is the power to cause the substances of the inner offering to emit smoke. Finally the lesser siddhi is the capacity of a yogi to merely warm up the substances of the inner offering.

(3) By means of basis

By means of basis there are siddhis of body, substances, and resources.

From the point of view of the basis, the supreme siddhi is full

control of one's body and the capacity to manifest a magnificent appearance.⁶³ The intermediate siddhi is the capacity to gain mastery over and use various substances.⁶⁴ The lesser siddhi is the capacity to use and enjoy various extraordinary resources.⁶⁵

(4) By means of the bestower

By means of the bestower, there are mantras of ārya beings, deities, and earth deities.

Siddhis that are supreme from the perspective of the bestower are accomplished by relying on mantras bestowed by the deity we visualize or by ārya beings. Intermediate siddhis are accomplished in reliance on mantras given by worldly deities. Lesser siddhis are accomplished by relying on mantras bestowed by nonhuman beings abiding above the earth.⁶⁶ Through receiving mantras from such beings, we receive extraordinary blessings, and we can gain specific powers through recitating these mantras. For example, it is said that King Aśoka was able to establish thousands of stūpas throughout his empire by reciting the mantras of yakṣas.

(5) By means of lineage

By means of lineage, *Mantric Stages* states:

The actions of pacification, increase, and wrath are achieved respectively by those of the tathāgata lineage, the lotus lineage, and the vajra lineage. This is how the supreme, intermediate, and lesser siddhis are attained.⁶⁷

In action tantra there are three lineages, and we obtain different powers by relying on different lineages. Each of these powers has an internal and an external dimension. The supreme siddhi is *pacification* that is achieved by relying on the

tathāgata lineage.⁶⁸ *External* pacification is the pacification of natural disasters, diseases, and so on. *Internal* pacification is the pacification of intense afflictions, such as attachment, aversion, and confusion, so that the mind is not influenced by them. The intermediate siddhi is *increase* that is achieved by relying on the lotus lineage.⁶⁹ External increase is, for example, an increase in your external resources or wealth. Internal increase may include increase of your merit and lifespan. Such increases can provide excellent conditions for practicing Dharma. The lesser siddhi is *wrath* that is achieved by relying on the vajra lineage.⁷⁰ Internal wrath could be, for example, the subjugation of internal demons. External wrath might include the ability to influence people's minds and direct them to religious activities. Wrathful activities achieve their results both internally and externally through the use of force as opposed to persuasion.

And:

Also each lineage has three siddhis and the three actions of pacification, increase, and wrath. From among these, the lord of each lineage, the consort of each lineage, and the wrathful deities of each lineage, respectively, perform the three actions of pacification and so on.⁷¹

Khedrup Rinpoché's *General Classes of Tantra* and other sources mention that in each lineage, three types of beings may be identified: the lord, the consort, and the wrathful deities. By relying on the lord of the lineage, we perform the actions of pacification considered to be supreme siddhis. By relying on the consort⁷² of a lineage, we perform actions of increase that are considered to be intermediate siddhis. By relying on the wrathful deities of a lineage, we perform actions of wrath that are considered minor siddhis.

These statements alone do not clarify the issue.

Also I have not seen this point clearly explained by later scholars.

We should investigate other sources for further information on this subject.

Clarification of difficult points

One scholar says: There are disciples of action tantra with sharp faculties [4a] who attain enlightenment in one life through accomplishing the siddhi of the knowledge-bearer permitting them to live for many eons.

Reply: This is not stated clearly in *Mantric Stages*. Further *General Classes of Tantra* states:

The action and performance tantras present no system of enlightenment other than that presented in the Perfection [Vehicle] system.^{[73](#)}

This should be analyzed, for if this is true, then that being would attain enlightenment in the supreme buddhafiield called Gaṇḍavyūha.

There is some debate about whether you can attain enlightenment in a single lifetime by relying on the practices of action tantra. Tsongkhapa in his *Mantric Stages* and Khedrup Rinpoché in his *General Classes of Tantra* state that the system of action tantra does not differ from the Perfection Vehicle on this point.^{[74](#)} The author does not take a position on this issue but rather advises the reader to examine this matter further.

TWO

Performance Tantra

How to progress on the path of performance tantra

This has four divisions:

- 1. How to become a suitable vessel**
- 2. How to keep the vows and commitments purely**
- 3. How to approximate the deity**
- 4. How to establish the siddhis**

How to become a suitable vessel

First, you become a vessel suitable to meditate on the path by obtaining empowerment bestowed in the maṇḍala of the essence of great compassion and so on that are mentioned in performance tantra. You must obtain the five knowledge empowerments since you are not permitted to practice if you obtain just the water and crown empowerments. Apart from these distinctions it is similar to action tantra.

Like action tantra, performance tantra is explained in four divisions. It also possesses three lineages: the tathāgata lineage is sourced in the *Vairocana Complete Enlightenment Tantra*, which was widely disseminated in Tibet, and the vajra lineage is sourced in the *Vajrapāṇi Empowerment Tantra*, but the sources of the lotus lineage were not translated into Tibetan.

Initiation into performance tantra, like other types of secret mantra, is conferred within a maṇḍala. In general there are seven types of maṇḍala, whether external such as colored sand and painted cloth, or internal such as the body maṇḍala. But visualization of the maṇḍala alone is not sufficient; we must

also meditate on its emptiness. The *Vairocana Complete Enlightenment Tantra* specifically teaches the maṇḍala of the essence of great compassion.⁷⁵ Since in this context *great compassion* refers to ultimate bodhicitta,⁷⁶ meditation on great compassion is meditation on emptiness, and such meditation constitutes initiation into the maṇḍala of the essence of great compassion.

Performance tantra possesses five types of initiation called the *five knowledge empowerments*: the water, crown, vajra, bell, and name empowerments. Unlike action tantra, which requires just the water and crown initiations, performance tantra requires all five empowerments.

How to keep the vows and commitments purely

Second, the root downfalls are similar to those of action tantra. Other commitments also explained in action tantra are said to be common to both. The *Vairocana Complete Enlightenment Tantra* states:

You must not give up the pure Dharma and bodhicitta, even to save your life, you must not act with avarice or harm sentient beings, and you must maintain the practice of abandoning the ten nonvirtuous actions.

Through initiation into performance tantra we gain the bodhisattva vows—the commitment to guard against the eighteen root and forty-six secondary bodhisattva downfalls. Other commitments must be guarded as well, and the *Vairocana Complete Enlightenment Tantra* refers briefly to some of these commitments. The author suggests that any remaining commitments correspond to those of action tantra.⁷⁷

How to approximate the deity

The third has two parts:

1. **Yoga with signs**
2. **Yoga without signs**

In both action and performance tantras, *yoga with signs* denotes deity meditation that engages relative or conventional appearance either through visualizing our ordinary body, speech, and mind as the body, speech, and mind of a deity, or through visualizing ourselves as inseparable from the nature of the deity we have generated in the space before us. *Sign* refers to relative truth, and *yoga with signs* refers to practices engaging and focusing on relative truths.⁷⁸ Conversely *yoga without signs* engages the non-inherent existence of the deity. It is meditation on the emptiness of the divine body that does not apprehend any relative signs.⁷⁹

Yoga with signs

Yoga with signs consists of recitation of the four external branches and recitation of the four internal branches, engaging in whispered and mental recitation without deteriorating either set of four branches, and engaging in restraint through vitality exertion during mental recitation.

We briefly discussed the four branches of recitation in action tantra. Performance tantra, however, differentiates an external four branches from an internal four branches as reflecting two different approaches to mantra recitation. In the first we engage in verbal or whispered recitation by moving our lips to produce an audible sound. In the second we engage in mental recitation by reciting the mantra only internally, not producing or verbalizing any sound, while engaging in the yoga of restraint through vitality exertion.⁸⁰

Four external branches of recitation

In performance tantra we practice the external branches when we focus single-pointedly either on the divine body or on a seed syllable placed at the heart of the deity. We practice recitation

with *ourselves* as the basis of the deity when we recite the mantra while focusing on a seed syllable in the heart of the deity of the self-generation; we practice recitation with *another* as the basis when we focus on a seed syllable in the heart of the front-generated deity; we practice recitation with *sound* as the basis when we focus on the sound of the mantric syllables either internally or externally; and we practice recitation with the *mind* as the basis when we focus on seeing our mind as one in nature with that sound.

Four internal branches of recitation

A unique feature of performance tantra is to transform meditation on ourselves as the deity into the four internal branches of recitation. To do this we visualize at our heart another miniature deity four finger-widths in height, and in its heart a seed syllable. We imagine that our body, speech, and mind are one in nature with the body, speech, and mind of this deity. When we focus on the sound of the mantric syllable found in the heart of the miniature deity, it is recitation on sound as the basis; when we focus on the sound of that seed syllable in the heart of the miniature deity as one in nature with our mind, it is recitation with mind as the basis; when this sound is not seen as different in nature from ourselves, it is recitation with ourselves as the basis; and when the bodies are seen as separate, it is recitation with another as the basis. [81](#)

Yoga without signs

Yoga without signs consists of attaining a calm abiding [4b] that focuses on the body of the deity and so on, then meditating on emptiness mixed with deity yoga, and then establishing a union of calm abiding and the insight that comprehends emptiness through alternating between analysis and placement.

In the three lower tantras, calm abiding is established during the practice of yoga with signs, while meditation on emptiness

is established during yoga without signs. Similarly, in highest yoga tantra, calm abiding is established in the generation stage, while meditation on emptiness is established in the completion stage.⁸² For example, in self-generation in action tantra, we first generate ourselves as the deity and cultivate calm abiding by focusing on the body of the deity. Once calm abiding is obtained, we generate insight apprehending the emptiness of that divine body through mixing meditation on the emptiness of the divine body with deity yoga. In this process we alternate between placement and analysis by first applying single-pointed focus on the object and then analyzing the emptiness of that object. Ultimately we seek to establish analysis while maintaining stability and stability while applying analysis, thus preventing any disruption to meditation.⁸³

The meaning of yoga with signs and without signs is given in *Mantric Stages*:

Yoga with signs is deity meditation and mantra recitation without meditation on emptiness. Yoga without signs is deity meditation and mantra recitation with meditation on emptiness but not meditation on emptiness alone.⁸⁴

Jé Rinpoché (i.e., Tsongkhapa) observes that yoga without signs is not simply meditation on emptiness but a type of yoga that frequently apprehends the divine body. Yoga without signs therefore focuses on the divine body and meditates on the emptiness of that body while alternating between placement and analysis. If it were meditation on emptiness alone—separate from bodhicitta or any other aspect of method—then it would not act as the union of method and wisdom. But this point is disputed by scholars.

Points of debate

One scholar says: The meaning of yoga with signs is

deity yoga not influenced by the mind realizing emptiness, while yoga without signs is deity yoga influenced by the mind realizing emptiness.

Reply: This should be analyzed, because there *is* yoga with signs that is influenced by the mind realizing emptiness—because it is said that meditation on emptiness exists prior to yoga with signs, and if the mind realizing emptiness at that time is sufficiently strong, the yoga with signs that follows will be influenced by it.

Some assert that yoga with signs is not affected by meditation on emptiness. But meditation on the six deities begins with meditation on the empty deity, and that is yoga without signs apprehending emptiness; meditation on the remaining five deities is yoga with signs. If at the beginning we meditate intensively on emptiness, then the practices that follow will tend to be influenced by that meditation, even though they are classified as method.^{[85](#)} The author then cites Tsongkhapa to show that he has not fabricated this assertion:

***Condensed Stages of the Path* states:**

When wisdom realizing emptiness is strong, it is not contradictory that when you practice generosity, prostrations, circumambulations, and so on, the minds that focus on these actions engage these actions with the force of that wisdom, even though they do not comprehend emptiness. Similarly when bodhicitta is strongly generated at the beginning of the session, it is not contradictory that when (you later) engage in concentration on emptiness, at that time bodhicitta influences that (concentration on emptiness), although it does not manifest.^{[86](#)}

This passage presents two illustrations of the union of method and wisdom. In the first, meditation on emptiness precedes and

influences the practice of method, while in the second bodhicitta precedes and influences wisdom.

How method and wisdom are united in tantra

This is how method and wisdom are conjoined in the sūtra system, but method and wisdom are not conjoined in the mantric system by this means alone. There both the extensive practice of deity yoga and the profound wisdom realizing non-inherent existence are taken to be the inseparable union of method and wisdom by nature simultaneously combined [5a] in a single awareness.

In accordance with the *Condensed Stages of the Path*, if we meditate on bodhicitta at the beginning of a session and then devote the main part of the session to meditation on emptiness, this constitutes method influencing wisdom. Alternatively, if we meditate on emptiness at the beginning of a session and then devote the main part of the session to method, then this constitutes wisdom influencing method. In these cases, method and wisdom influence each other, but they do not manifest at the same time in one mind. This instead is a unique feature of tantra.

Mantric Stages states:

In the resultant phase both the deity basis that is adorned with marks and signs and its supported mind of non-observation abide simultaneously and inseparably. So too in the path phase, both the method—that is, your body appearing to your yogi mind as a tathāgata's body—and the wisdom focusing on the non-inherent existence of the suchness of the mind are by nature necessarily simultaneously and inseparably combined in a single awareness, which is the inseparable

union of method and wisdom.[87](#)

The resultant phase is when we attain buddhahood and our mind perceptually comprehends reality and diversity simultaneously. In the path phase a yogi generates an experience that is similar to the resultant phase, where two processes occur in the mind simultaneously. First a practitioner's own self appears in the aspect of a divine body, speech, and mind; and second his mind comprehends non-inherent existence. This type of yogic awareness is called the *mind of non-observation*. During the path phase this awareness of an ordinary being acts like a double-sided mirror. One side reflects what appears—the deity—and the other reflects what is ascertained—the non-inherent existence of the deity. In other words, a single awareness possesses two objects simultaneously.

And:

Though wisdom realizing the non-inherent existence of its held aspect—the appearance of the deity—is one in nature with the mind of extensive deity yoga, method and wisdom are posited as distinct due to being designated as different isolates that negate wrong (modes of) distinction.[88](#)

When we speak of the union of method and wisdom we employ two distinct terms, *method* and *wisdom*. As names, “method” and “wisdom” constitute two distinct states or isolates (*ldog pa*), but in terms of meaning or nature, they constitute a single awareness. For example a vase and the emptiness of a vase are one in nature but distinct as isolates. The ordinary mind cannot accomplish two functions simultaneously such as perceptually comprehending a vase and the emptiness of that vase. This may be illustrated by one of the seven basic types of mind discussed in *lorig* texts, namely inattentive awareness (*snang la ma nges*), or awareness to which an object appears but is not ascertained. For example we may wonder whether we saw an old friend in a

large crowd. We know we saw a face but cannot decide whether it was our friend's face due to possessing inattentive awareness that apprehends the appearance of a face but does not ascertain the identity of that face. However, in tantra there can be a single awareness that performs two functions simultaneously: apprehending the appearance of an object and ascertaining that object's nature or identity.

The yoga severing the root of saṃsāra

Therefore, in this context, yoga without signs is profound, clear, nondual yoga. It is not merely deity yoga influenced by the mind realizing emptiness, for if it lacked meditation on emptiness it would not be concentration without signs. *General Classes of Tantra* states:

Though they accomplish absorption with signs, they still do not have the direct antidote that severs the root of saṃsāra; for this they need yoga without signs. When they cultivate yoga without signs, they do not meditate on any relative aspect, such as the body of the deity; rather they skillfully cultivate analytical and placement meditation on emptiness based on past advice.[89](#)

The author describes yoga without signs as nondual, profound, clear yoga where *profound* refers to the depth and vastness of the wisdom realizing the non-inherent existence of the divine body, and *clear* refers to the clarity of the appearing object. Then, to establish the need for yoga without signs, he quotes Khedrup Rinpoché's *General Classes of Tantra*, which indicates that yogis who merely establish the clear appearance of the body of the deity cannot harm the ignorance grasping at true existence that is the very root of saṃsāra. They must therefore supplement meditation on the divine body with meditation on its emptiness. The term *saṃsāra* describes the beginningless

cycle of suffering experienced by sentient beings. The root or source of saṃsāra is the ignorance of the way the “I” actually exists, a state that generally remains obscured. In order to sever this root, a yogi must practice yoga without signs, which meditates on the emptiness of the divine body.

And:

Yoga without signs continuously cultivates the mind certain that all dharmas are empty of inherent existence through the logic of being neither truly one nor many, [5b] and so on.⁹⁰

Meditation on emptiness should be performed with intelligence and persistence. We should unremittingly apply the various logical arguments that establish emptiness, such as the reasoning that dharmas are neither truly one nor truly many.⁹¹ By maintaining such a stream of analysis, we develop stable discernment of emptiness, and this in turn influences other aspects of our practice.

When does the basis of emptiness appear?

Someone says: Take yoga without signs; it follows it is not deity yoga because a deity body with a face, arms, and so on does not appear to it—because it is awareness explicitly⁹² realizing emptiness.

Reply: That is not logically necessary⁹³ because you must accept that the subject—a basis that is empty—appears to rational conceptual awareness realizing emptiness—because [Tsongkhapa’s] *Great Commentary to the Madhyamakakārikā* and *Stages of the Path*⁹⁴ state just that.

When Ngawang Palden states “that is not logically necessary,” he asserts that a mind that explicitly comprehends emptiness *can* be deity yoga because relative truth can appear to it—because relative truth can appear to a conceptual awareness

that comprehends emptiness explicitly but not perceptually. So too the basis that is empty appears to inferential awareness, since inferential awareness is a conceptual mind. In other words, the self that is the basis of the emptiness of the self appears to conception that explicitly comprehends the emptiness of a self. But the basis of emptiness does not appear to the yogic perception of a sentient being. This then marks a fundamental difference between a sentient being's perceptual and conceptual modes of realizing emptiness. The source of this assertion is Jé Rinpoché's *Great Commentary to the Madhyamakakārikā* as well as his *Stages of the Path*.

There are different views regarding whether the generic image appears or not to the union of calm abiding and insight.⁹⁵ For example, in the debate manuals of Drepung Losaling, it is said that although the generic image is a focal object, it is not the appearing object. Conversely Sera Jé College holds that the generic image is an appearing object and therefore it does appear.⁹⁶ Losaling manuals state that on the path of seeing, the basis of emptiness appears to the person who is in equipoise but it does not appear to the awareness that perceptually comprehends emptiness. Therefore there is no one mind to which both truths appear but there is a person to whom they both appear. Again it may be said that both appear to self-cognition but not to the mind itself. There is an account in the writings of Jé Rinpoché about a Geshé Sherap Sengé from Narthang Monastery who grasped his upper robe out of fear when he comprehended emptiness perceptually for the first time. This fear was due to the self not appearing when the emptiness of the self appeared. Out of fear of losing the self, he grasped something tangible to reaffirm his existence.

The inferential comprehension of emptiness may also be illustrated by the earlier example of seeing a familiar face in a crowd. Here we are certain that we see a face but uncertain that it is the face of someone we know. Debate may arise as to whether just one awareness arises that is both certain about

the face and uncertain about whether it is our friend's face or whether there are two different minds. Consider another example. Before someone who aspires to be a polo player has learned how to ride a horse, he cannot both ride the horse and hit the ball at the same time since his main focus is to keep his balance. Later, after gaining experience, he can both ride the horse and hit the ball at the same time. But which is his main focus, riding the horse or hitting the ball? Or when he is simultaneously riding the horse and hitting the ball does he possess two minds, one for each function, or does one mind perform both functions?

I personally think that it would be difficult for the basis of that emptiness to appear to the mind of a beginner who comprehends emptiness for the first time. But later, as he or she gains familiarity, the basis of the emptiness would appear. At first only emptiness would be the appearing object, but later the basis of that emptiness would also appear to one part of the mind. As I said, there are different opinions on this issue. Some say that it is the focal object but not the appearing object while some say that it is an object that appears but is not ascertained. We should contemplate these issues at length.

In fear of overstating the point I will not write more, but I refer you to my work *Exposition of the Two Truths*.

Although many sources support the author's statement,^{[97](#)} he refrains from a more detailed explanation and suggests one of his own works for further discussion of these points. Still the central issue is whether the physical form of the deity needs to appear in deity yoga, given the difference between the conceptual comprehension of emptiness where a generic image does appear to the mind, and the perceptual comprehension of emptiness where a generic image does not appear to mind.

In response he says: It follows that the physical form of the deity will appear when such yoga without signs perceptually comprehends emptiness

due to the power of meditation, because your [Ngawang Palden's] thesis is tenable.

The author previously asserted that the conceptual awareness that explicitly comprehends emptiness can be deity yoga since relative truth appears to it. In response the opponent claims that if this assertion were true then it would be logically necessary that the deity would also appear to the mind perceptually realizing emptiness.

Reply: That is not logically necessary. Instead deity yoga is posited due to the continuity of mind, even though the body of the relative deity does not appear to it.

Relative appearances such as the face, arms, and so forth of the deity do not appear to the mind that perceptually comprehends emptiness. Nevertheless, this practice is called *deity yoga* due to the continuity of mind (*rgyud*) of the person involved. To understand this point we need to examine the difference between the meditative equipoise of a learner that perceptually comprehends the two truths sequentially and the equipoise of a non-learner buddha, that perceptually comprehends both truths simultaneously. Further we need to distinguish between the pristine wisdom of equipoise and the person who is in equipoise. For instance, the textbooks of some monastic colleges assert that relative aspects do not appear to a learner's equipoise perceptually realizing emptiness but they do appear to the person who is in equipoise. The term *continuity of mind* here refers to the stream of consciousness of the person who previously cultivated deity yoga with signs, whose consciousness now engages emptiness but who continues to be aware of the deity.

The four types of deity yoga

In general, it is not logically necessary that the physical form of the deity appears to either yoga with signs or yoga without signs because in this

context there are four yogas—deity yoga, empty yoga, wind yoga, and recitation yoga—and because these (four) occur within both yoga with signs and yoga without signs. *Mantric Stages* states:

Action and performance tantras have four significant yogas, namely deity yoga, empty yoga, wind yoga, and recitation yoga. Together relative deity yoga and ultimate deity yoga are the main factors establishing the two bodies. Recitation yoga is a branch invoking the mind of the deity meditated upon and thus it is included as a branch of relative deity yoga. Wind yoga is a branch stabilizing both deity yogas and thus it occurs within both yogas. Therefore the four yogas are subsumed by both yoga with signs [6a] and yoga without signs.⁹⁸

Mantric Stages reveals that, of the four yogas, the two main ones are empty yoga and deity yoga, and they subsume or include the other two. *Empty yoga* here means yoga without signs—the ultimate deity yoga meditating on the emptiness of the deity body. *Deity yoga* here means yoga with signs—relative deity yoga where the body of the deity appears. *Recitation yoga* is subsumed within relative deity yoga. *Wind yoga* acts as a stabilizing factor for both yoga with signs and yoga without signs and is therefore classified in both. We practice the two main yogas, relative and ultimate deity yogas, to obtain, respectively, the resultant form and dharma bodies.⁹⁹ As such, meditation on the appearance of the deity establishes the form body, while meditation on the non-inherent existence of the divine body establishes the dharma body.

YOGA WITH SIGNS	Deity yoga	Relative deity yoga	Includes recitation yoga	Includes wind yoga	Produces form body
YOGA WITHOUT SIGNS	Empty yoga	Ultimate deity yoga	No recitation	Includes wind yoga	Produces dharma body

The difference between empty yoga and deity yoga reflects the difference between the focal object and appearing object of an inferential awareness that explicitly comprehends the emptiness of the divine body. The dharma body is established in dependence on the focal object, and the form body is established in dependence on the appearing object. It also reflects the difference between *profound* and *clear* in Ngawang Palden's description of yoga without signs as "profound, clear, nondual yoga."[100](#) Unless we examine the nature of the appearing and focal objects, we cannot explain how both method and wisdom may exist simultaneously and inseparably with the nature of a single awareness in tantra.

The difference between sutra and tantra in the presentation of method and wisdom is not related to the way emptiness is presented but rather to the way the mind realizing emptiness is explained. And as we progress from the lower tantras to highest yoga tantra, and the presentation of the mind realizing emptiness is gradually refined, more subtle differences become apparent.

How to establish the siddhis

Fourth, it is stated in this tantra that you are established as the knowledge bearer of the sword and so on through relying on external substances such as the sword; you establish the feats of pacification, increase, and so on through meditating on the maṇḍalas of earth, water, fire, and wind within your body; and at the end of

recitation you obtain a vision of a bodhisattva such as Mañjuśrī where he strokes your head, speaks words of encouragement, and you obtain the concentration that never forgets bodhicitta. Many methods of establishing these and other siddhis are stated here and elsewhere.

The author mentions three different ways of attaining siddhis, or attainments. The first relies on external substances such as a sword, the second relies on visualizing various maṇḍalas mapped to our physiology, and the third relies on meeting one of the main deities of the three lineages,^{[101](#)} namely Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi. Therefore in the first we obtain the capacity to fly by relying on the sword.^{[102](#)} In the second we obtain the ability to pacify obstacles, increase our life and merit, and powerfully subjugate others, and wrathfully eliminate obstacles by visualizing maṇḍalas related to the elements in our body. In the third we obtain the special concentration recalling the mind of bodhicitta by meeting the lord of the lineage we have cultivated and by receiving praise and encouragement from him.

THREE

Yoga Tantra

How to progress on the path of yoga tantra

This has four parts:

- 1. How to become a suitable vessel**
- 2. How to keep the vows and commitments purely**
- 3. How to approximate the deity**
- 4. How to establish the siddhis**

How to become a suitable vessel

First, you become a vessel suitable to meditate on the path through obtaining the empowerments conferred in such maṇḍalas as the vajra sphere. Further, there is a difference between those who have received just the student empowerment and hold the bodhisattva vows, and those who have received the complete vajra-master empowerment and hold both the bodhisattva and tantric vows.

The root tantra of yoga tantra, *Compendium of the Reality of All Tathāgatas*, is divided into four chapters: (1) *The Vajra Sphere*, (2) *Victory Over the Three Worlds*, (3) *Taming Reincarnating Beings*, and (4) *Accomplishing the Aim*.^{[103](#)} Each chapter targets a different type of disciple: the first is suitable for those afflicted mainly by attachment, the second is for those afflicted by aversion, the third for those afflicted by confusion, and the fourth is for those who are afflicted by all three equally. Each chapter presents a different maṇḍala with accompanying resident deities within which the disciple is initiated. Students are classified according to these four types and also follow specific empowerment rites and practices in

accordance with them.

These four chapters also present the four lineages of yoga tantra. Thus the *Vajra Sphere* presents the lineage of Vairocana, *Victory Over The Three Worlds* presents the lineage of Akṣobhya, *Taming Reincarnating Beings* presents the lotus lineage, and *Accomplishing the Aim* presents the lineage of Ratnasambhava. The lineage of Ratnasambhava can be further divided in two, namely the jewel lineage through being the *agent* who accomplishes the desired intention and the action lineage through being the *action* of enlightened activities.¹⁰⁴ Thus the lineages in yoga tantra can be enumerated as either four or five.

In action and performance tantras we receive the bodhisattva vows during the initiation ceremony, and in yoga and highest yoga tantras tantric vows¹⁰⁵ may be bestowed at the same time. Those who receive just the five knowledge empowerments, or five student empowerments, take just the bodhisattva vows. Those who receive the vajra-master empowerment in addition to the five student empowerments—and thus receive six empowerments in all—take both bodhisattva and tantric vows.¹⁰⁶

There is debate regarding the nature of the vajra-master empowerment in yoga tantra. Some scholars assert that the vajra-master empowerment exists in the lower tantras, but Tsongkhapa has stated that the actual vajra-master empowerment exists only in highest yoga tantra, and the vajra-master empowerment conferred in the lower tantras, and specifically in yoga tantra, is not a fully qualified vajra-master empowerment.

How to keep the vows and commitments purely

Second, if you are a suitable basis for prātimokṣa, you should accomplish tantra as one possessing the three vows. Therefore you should take the three vows and guard the commitments according to *First Supreme Glory* and *Vajra Peak*.

Lay prātimokṣa vows are the vows held by a lay man or woman for a single day or for life. Lay prātimokṣa vow holders who also hold bodhisattva and tantric vows are examples of laity holding all three classes of vows. The ordained prātimokṣa vows are the novice, trainee, and full-ordination vows held by a monk or nun. Ordainees who hold bodhisattva and tantric vows are examples of ordained beings who hold all three classes of vows. Moreover once tantric vows are taken, lay and ordained students must also practice guru yoga in six sessions every day. The salient points of the vows and commitments¹⁰⁷ of yoga tantra are discussed in the four authoritative texts of this class of tantra, the root tantra: *Compendium of the Reality of All Tathāgatas* that is the condensed root source of yoga tantra; the explanatory tantra: *Vajra Peak*; the compatible tantra: *First Supreme Glory*; and the elaborating tantra: *Purification of Lower Realms*.

How to approximate the deity

The third has two parts:

1. **Yoga with signs**
2. **Yoga without signs**

Yoga with signs

The first has two parts:

1. **Yoga focusing on the basic deity**
2. **Yoga focusing on subtle hand symbols**

The terms *yoga with signs* and *yoga without signs* appear in all three lower classes of tantra. In yoga tantra there are two ways to meditate on yoga with signs: focusing on the basic body of the deity as a coarse focal object or meditating on specific hand symbols or subtle syllables at the heart of the deity as smaller or subtler focal objects.

Yoga focusing on the basic deity

First, by merely obtaining the student

empowerment you possess the specific yoga of the deity where the flower landed.¹⁰⁸ [6b] By obtaining the master empowerment you may engage either in (1) the extensive approximation that meditates with no decline in the three concentrations associated with the great yoga of self-completion, where you can confer empowerment on students and establish yourself as the deity, (2) the medium approximation that includes the rite for generating the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala, or (3) the abbreviated approximation that includes the recitation of 100,000 mantras for each of the great yoga deities.

These practices include three types of approximation reliant on recitation: extensive, medium, and abbreviated. The extensive approximation relies on three types of concentration: the concentration of initial application, the concentration on the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala, and concentration on the supreme-conqueror activities.¹⁰⁹ Medium approximation relies on an abbreviated method for generating the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala. Abbreviated approximation relies on reciting a set number of the mantras of specific deities.¹¹⁰

Yoga focusing on specific hand symbols

Second, while clearly visualizing yourself as the deity, you hold your mind on the small vajra hand symbol—similar in color to your special deity—at the upper opening of the central channel. When the mind attains stability in this yoga, you should then practice emanation, absorption, and so on.

The focal object becomes subtler as we reduce the size of the hand symbol and place it between our eyebrows, at the upper opening of our central channel. Alternatively, we may take the entire deity as our focal object as long as we reduce it in size and visualize it between our eyebrows. When our mind is able to focus on this small and subtle focal object for an extended

period, we may then begin to emanate and absorb it while visualizing that it is conveyed on rays of light.[111](#)

Yoga without signs

Second, you conclude that the deity in front of you together with the letters of the mantra do not inherently exist, then you develop certainty on that point, then you alternate placement and analysis within the stream of that certainty, and then you establish the union of calm abiding and insight realizing emptiness. When you obtain such insight, you progress to the path of preparation and so on as mentioned previously.

The author now addresses the practice of yoga without signs, which meditates on the emptiness of the divine body.[112](#) On the path of accumulation a practitioner develops calm abiding and placement meditation and employs various reasons to examine and analyze emptiness. When such a being combines placement meditation and analysis within the union of calm abiding and insight[113](#) focusing on emptiness, he attains the path of preparation. This presentation of how we progress to the path of preparation is similar to the presentation found in action and performance tantras.

It is clear that each class of tantra has its own way of approximating the deity. In action tantra we practice meditation on the basis of the four branches of recitation. In performance tantra meditation is performed on the basis of the four internal and the four external branches of recitation. In yoga tantra, this is accomplished on the basis of the four seals: the commitment seal (*samayamudrā*), the dharma seal (*dharmamudrā*), the great seal (*mahāmudrā*), and the action seal (*karmamudrā*).[114](#)

These four seals may each be differentiated at the time of the basis, the path, and the result, making twelve in all. The four seals of the *basis* of purification are the ordinary (1) body, (2)

speech, (3) mind, and (4) activities of the practitioner who aspires to engage in this practice.¹¹⁵ The four seals of the purifying *path*¹¹⁶ are (5) the body with the individual mudrās of the main and secondary deities, (6) the verbal recitation of their mantras, (7) the pride that our own body, speech, mind, and activities are indivisible from those of the deity, and (8) the single-pointed meditation on the hand symbols such as the vajra while generating such pride. The four seals of the *result* are the divine (9) body, (10) speech, (11) mind, and (12) enlightened activities of the resultant state.

In yoga tantra it is very important to ensure that the commitment beings are established as inseparable from the wisdom beings. This process generally involves first visualizing the commitment beings, then inviting the wisdom beings to approach and merge with the commitment beings. We recite the four syllables *jaḥ hūṃ vaṃ hoḥ* that mark four stages in the process: summoning, dissolving, merging, and becoming inseparable. But in yoga tantra the practitioner must meditate in a more elaborate way by incorporating the four seals of the basis, path, and result.

How to establish the siddhis

Fourth, it is said that many siddhis are accomplished through three practices: absorption, recitation, and fire pūjās.¹¹⁷ *Mantric Stages* states that the best siddhis that supreme disciples of yoga tantra may first accomplish are either holding the knowledge mantra of a bodhisattva who apprehends the form of a perfect buddha or obtaining the form of the great seal of their deity's body . . .

As mentioned previously, there are many ways to attain siddhis. It is said that the most excellent of all siddhis is the ability to meet the embodied form of a buddha made possible through the mantra siddhi ¹¹⁸ or alternatively to obtain the seal siddhi called the *siddhi of the great seal of your deity's*

body.[119](#)

. . . and in action and performance tantras, accomplishing the siddhi of the knowledge-bearer is the great siddhi of the body.

In action and performance tantras the knowledge-bearer siddhi allows practitioners to prolong their lifespan. By living for an extremely long time, they greatly extend their capacity to meditate and thus complete all the paths without needing to change their body. The knowledge-bearer siddhi is supreme among the siddhis of the body in the first two classes of tantra, and even in yoga tantra it is cited as one of the supreme siddhis.

How the supreme siddhi is obtained

The *Great Commentary to the Kālacakra* states that practitioners of the three lower tantras accomplish the supreme siddhi in reliance on having previously accomplished worldly siddhis, but in accordance with highest yoga tantra, you may accomplish the supreme siddhi without relying on worldly siddhis by uninterruptedly meditating on the generation and completion stages. [7a]

As noted above, there are two types of siddhis: common and supreme. According to Khedrup Rinpoché's *Great Commentary to the Kālacakra*, the accomplishment of the supreme siddhi in the three lower tantras, namely the attainment of the state of Vajradhara, is preceded by the accomplishment of worldly siddhis, namely the eight common siddhis according to the distinct presentation of lower tantras. This is not necessary in highest yoga tantra.

Also *Mantric Stages* states:

First keep purely the vows and commitments that are the source of the siddhis, then master the practice through striving in yoga with

signs and without signs in four daily sessions, and then you will attain the common and uncommon siddhis. You must understand this delineation of the path in the three lower tantras, for it is inappropriate to assert that you progress on the path by combining wind yoga, recitation yoga, empty yoga, and deity yoga in a single practice.[120](#)

Mantric Stages extensively explains the source of siddhis and how we progress on the path in the three lower tantras. Therefore, first we request empowerment and then we diligently protect the vows and commitments accepted at the time of empowerment. On this basis we strive to practice yoga with signs and yoga without signs in four daily sessions, and as a result we accomplish first the common siddhis and then the supreme siddhi. But this is not the way we progress on the path in highest yoga tantra, where we accomplish the supreme siddhi without first attaining the common siddhis that are themselves dependent on the practice of yoga with signs and yoga without signs.

Why common siddhis must precede the supreme siddhi in the three lower tantras

The reason why you must establish the common siddhis before establishing the supreme siddhi in the paths of the three lower tantras is stated in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (9:1):

The Sage has proclaimed that all these branches are for the purpose of wisdom.

Thus in both systems of the Mahāyāna,[121](#) **the factor of method enhances the wisdom realizing emptiness.**

There are ten chapters in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* on (1) the benefits of bodhicitta, (2) the confession of negativity, (3) the

mode of generating the mind of bodhicitta through ritual, (4) conscientiousness, (5) ethics, (6) patience, (7) effort, (8) concentration, (9) wisdom, and (10) the dedication. The passage cited from the beginning of the ninth chapter not only indicates that the perfections of generosity, ethics, patience, effort, and absorption precede and support the generation of wisdom, it also shows that the first eight chapters support the ninth chapter on wisdom. Just as method supports wisdom in the Perfection Vehicle, so too the common siddhis precede and support the supreme siddhi. Thus method qualifies wisdom in both the sūtra and tantra traditions of the Mahāyāna.

According to the Perfection Vehicle, when you have trained for an incalculable period in limitless distinct forms of generosity and so on, the wisdom realizing emptiness attains the capacity to abandon obscurations to knowledge.

From among the practices of beings of great scope enunciated in the Perfection Vehicle, the root of the path is the generation of bodhicitta. First we generate aspiring bodhicitta and receive vows, then we generate engaging bodhicitta, which reflects that such aspiration alone is not enough and that we need to engage in the practice of the six perfections in accordance with the pledge we have made. Moreover we should practice each perfection according to the various ways it is classified. For example, we should practice the three forms of generosity [122](#) and the specific types of the remaining perfections as well as their various subdivisions. In brief we practice limitless forms of the perfections within the Perfection Vehicle for three countless eons to amass the necessary merit because a wisdom realizing emptiness that is capable of abandoning knowledge obscurations [123](#) must be supported by a vast foundation of merit.

Why this is not necessary in the case of highest yoga tantra

According to highest yoga mantra, the

comprehension of emptiness is strengthened by relying on the point of convergence and coabidance of both bodhicittas through taking desire for the union of the two sexual organs as the path.

Although the two types of bodhicitta are generated in a similar way in the Perfection Vehicle and highest yoga tantra, in highest yoga tantra it is not necessary to accumulate merit for three countless eons to enhance the generation of wisdom. Instead we utilize the desire associated with the union of the two sexual organs. Therefore in the previous two paragraphs the author emphasizes that the essential difference between the practice of the Perfection Vehicle and highest yoga tantra is in their presentation of method. But method alone is insufficient, for Tsongkhapa has stated in the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*:

If we do not possess the wisdom realizing the way
phenomena exist,
we will be unable to sever the root of existence,
despite familiarity with renunciation and bodhicitta.
Strive therefore in the means of realizing dependent
origination.

This verse reveals that even though we may train in the proper method and generate renunciation and bodhicitta, that is not sufficient for us to sever the root of suffering in cyclic existence. The root of suffering is severed only with the understanding of emptiness, and wisdom realizing emptiness is only accomplished by pursuing the method practices. Method is enhanced in the Perfection Vehicle through the practice of the perfections, and in highest yoga tantra by bringing desire into the path. But how is method enhanced in the three lower tantras?

In the three lower tantras it is not said that you should train for an incalculable period in limitless distinct forms of generosity and so on in accordance with the Perfection Vehicle, nor is it said that you

should train in the method of generating the special awareness¹²⁴ realizing emptiness according to highest yoga mantra. Instead you must strengthen the comprehension of emptiness through skill in such methods as attaining many common siddhis and being directly cared for and [7b] blessed by buddhas and higher bodhisattvas.

There are thus three different systems for enhancing the wisdom realizing emptiness: that of the Perfection Vehicle, that of the three lower tantras, and that of highest yoga tantra. The text continues by examining each of these in detail.

Points of debate

Defining the shared path

One scholar says: You cannot state that the disciples of mantra do not need to train in limitless, distinct forms of generosity and so on because training in practices from the awakening mind to the six perfections are shared paths of both Mahāyāna vehicles.

A scholar raises an objection regarding the assertion that the disciples of mantra do not need to train in limitless forms of the six perfections in order to enhance their wisdom. He argues that both the Perfection and the Mantra Vehicles are classified as Great Vehicles and, as such, share common paths. These common paths begin with the generation of the mind of bodhicitta that marks the entrance into the Great Vehicle, and subsequently include training in all six perfections.

Reply: That is not logically necessary because what is shared is merely the awakening mind that is the basis of practice and the coarse body of the path training in the six perfections. But training in limitless, distinct forms of generosity and so forth is different from the path of mantra because this is stated in *Condensed Stages of the Path* and in

Illuminating Lamp.

Ngawang Palden here makes a fine distinction. Of course, the generation of bodhicitta is the foundation upon which any further training in the six perfections is based. First we generate aspiring bodhicitta and then engaging bodhicitta, in which we willingly apply ourselves to the practice of the six perfections according to our pledge. The general, nonspecific training in the six perfections is indeed a shared path, but the extensive and thorough training that continues for three countless eons is not shared. This distinction is mentioned in two of Jé Rinpoché's texts, *Condensed Stages of the Path* and *Lamp Illuminating the Five Levels of Guhyasamāja Tantra*.

The purpose of generating blissful consciousness

One says: It cannot be asserted that the three lower classes of tantra lack the method for generating the special [blissful] awareness realizing emptiness through taking desire as the path because you take the bliss derived from observing, smiling at, holding hands with, and embracing the visualized consort as the path in the three lower classes of tantra—and this is done to generate the special awareness realizing emptiness.

As previously stated, a blissful consciousness is practiced in highest yoga tantra—but not in the three lower tantras—for the purpose of realizing emptiness. Here a scholar contends that the practice of taking the bliss generated from observing, smiling, holding hands, and embracing our visualized consort as the path is found in the lower tantras. Ngawang Palden agrees that we bring the bliss induced by different ways of interacting with our consort into the path according to the class of tantra practiced. The opponent's flaw comes from carrying this point further, stating that such practices are done to enhance the special consciousness realizing emptiness.

Reply: The latter part of the reason is not

established because taking desire as the path to generate the special awareness realizing emptiness is a feature of highest yoga tantra alone—because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

Taking desire for pleasurable objects as the path to generate the special awareness realizing emptiness does not appear in systems other than highest yoga tantra.[125](#)

Quoting *Lamp Illuminating the Five Levels of Guhyasamāja*, the author acknowledges that indeed the generation of a special, blissful consciousness does exist in the three lower tantras, but bliss is not generated there for the same purpose. Different types of disciples generate bliss through different types of activities for a variety of purposes. Thus it is stated:

The three lower tantras were taught for disciples capable of merely taking the bliss of observing, smiling at, or holding hands with the visualized deity as the path. For fortunate beings of the supreme path that are capable of combining great bliss with emptiness through taking the desire of embracing an actual or visualized consort as the path, the highest practice was stated.[126](#)

There are different versions of this passage, as some past translators have altered the order of the words. For example, some have placed the bliss generated by smiling at each other first and the bliss generated through observing each other second, so that verse reads: “for disciples capable of just taking the bliss of smiling at, observing, or holding hands with the visualized deity as the path.”

We can formulate definitions of the four classes of tantra from the perspective of the disciples who practice them. Therefore action tantra may be defined as “a tantra proclaimed for disciples capable of bringing merely the bliss of observing a visualized deity into the path.” Performance tantra is “the tantra proclaimed for disciples capable of bringing merely the bliss of smiling at a visualized deity into the path.” Yoga tantra

is “the tantra proclaimed for disciples capable of bringing merely the bliss of holding hands with a visualized deity into the path.” Highest yoga tantra is “the tantra proclaimed for disciples capable of bringing the bliss of embracing a visualized deity into the path.”¹²⁷ In the three lower tantras the word “merely” occurs in each definition to set the limit of the capacity of each practitioner, but it does not occur in the definition of highest yoga tantra.

We can look at the example of the woodworm to understand how desire is transformed into the path. Woodworms do not enter wood fully grown; they are hatched inside the wood, where they grow by consuming the wood that surrounds them until none is left. The way desire works in tantra is similar. Desire is generated in the first moment, but from the second moment on, this desire is transformed into pristine wisdom realizing emptiness, which gradually exhausts all attachment just like a woodworm consumes the wood in which it was hatched. Another metaphor is the lotus, which grows out of the mud yet remains unsullied by it. Desire is like the mud, but we transform desire into the path, and that path remains pure and unaffected by it.

The importance of studying the lower tantras

We may wonder why we need to study the lower tantras when highest yoga tantra is regarded as the most powerful. By following this presentation, we begin to realize the need for progressive training in tantra so that we may assimilate the different levels of desire and bring them into the path. Though highest yoga tantra is the supreme level of tantra and every practitioner should aspire to engage in it, we enter the practice of highest yoga tantra by relying on the three lower tantras. Further, unless we know how to progress the paths of lower tantras, we cannot fully appreciate why highest yoga tantra is supreme. In brief we need to comprehend the full potential of tantra so that we may maximize our practice.

It is like when we are shopping: we make the best choice when we are aware of the different brands, qualities, functions,

capacities, sizes, and prices of the different products. Likewise, if we want to excel in the study of science at the university level, we must first master the basics in primary and secondary school. Therefore the three lower tantras are important because they support and permit entry to higher practices. Without them we would not fully grasp the supreme value of highest yoga tantra nor be able to fully benefit from it.

Although our objective is to bring desire into the path, we commence our training with the thorough study of sūtra, for sūtra forms the basis of all tantric practice. We therefore study the various texts and commentaries composed by the great Indian and Tibetan masters and gain a clear understanding of their meaning. Upon that foundation we begin to train in tantra through studying the root texts and commentaries of action tantra. Then based on a thorough understanding of action tantra we progress to performance tantra, then yoga tantra, and finally highest yoga tantra. Highest yoga tantra is further divided into father and mother tantras, and we should become acquainted with the root tantras and commentaries and seek advice concerning their meaning. Moreover, each time we study a specific class of tantra, we will be clear about some points but have doubt and confusion about others. Before we move to the next level we should settle any such doubts and uncertainty. In this way each step provides a stable and supportive basis for further study.

The purpose of the three types of bliss

One says: It follows that the three types of bliss derived from observing, smiling, and holding hands do not comprehend emptiness because they are not taken as the path to develop the special awareness realizing emptiness.

Reply: This should be analyzed. Research whether this is clearly stated in the [8a] excellent explanations of the great Jé Rinpoché, even though most of his followers explain that they do function

in this way.

The author suggests that though most followers of Jé Rinpoché affirm that bliss is generated in the lower tantras in order to comprehend emptiness, it is not clear whether this assertion is made in the texts of Jé Rinpoché himself. In his texts he states that bliss is induced, and as a result, consciousness then comprehends emptiness, but he does not clearly state that the blissful consciousness itself comprehends emptiness.

The difference in the speed of the path between the lower tantras and the Perfection Vehicle

Again one: It follows that is no difference in the speed of the paths between the three lower classes of tantra and the Perfection Vehicle because it has not been said that there is a difference in the strength of awareness realizing emptiness depending on whether desire is taken as the path.

There is a difference in the duration of these paths, but this has nothing to do with whether the comprehension of emptiness is qualified by taking desire as the path. Therefore the author gives the following reply:

Reply: That is not logically necessary because *Mantric Stages* states:

The relative swiftness of the three lower classes of tantra when compared to the Perfection Vehicle is due to completing enlightened actions through many skillful methods—such as attaining many common siddhis in dependence on the power of deity yoga and mantra recitation—and due to being directly cared for and blessed by buddhas and great bodhisattvas.[128](#)

This quotation states that the paths of the lower tantras are quicker by means of the common

siddhis and so forth, and it does not state that they are quicker due to possessing an awareness that comprehends emptiness more profoundly through taking desire as the path.

In the lower tantras we practice the deity yoga of generating ourselves as the deity that is quite different from the deity yoga practiced in the Perfection Vehicle that merely involves inviting the deity to appear before us. By combining the deity yoga of self-generation with mantra recitation, we attain many common siddhis that facilitate swift progress on the path. Further, directly meeting buddhas and bodhisattvas, being cared for by them, and receiving their blessings also assists us in completing the path faster. The use of desire, on the other hand, is not stated to be a factor that enhances the comprehension of emptiness.

Do we need to amass merit for three countless eons in the lower tantras?

Again one says: It follows that the paths of the three lower classes of tantra produce enlightenment without relying on accumulating merit and wisdom for three countless eons because these three are distinguished as quicker paths than the Perfection Vehicle.

Reply: That is not logically necessary because although the three lower classes of tantra are nominally quicker paths than the Perfection Vehicle, they are not said to enable enlightenment in a single lifetime or forego the need to accumulate merit and wisdom for countless eons. *Mantric Stages* states:

The feature of highest yoga tantra is that it quickly produces enlightenment without relying on accumulating merit and wisdom for countless eons. Disciples of the three lower classes of tantra rely on entering the two

stages of highest yoga tantra to obtain that feature, since it cannot be obtained by their path alone. Do not assume that the speed [8b] of mantra is characterized only by attaining enlightenment in one life in this age of conflict or attaining enlightenment without relying on accumulating merit and wisdom for countless eons.[129](#)

In the Perfection Vehicle we rely on the extensive accumulation of merit and wisdom for three countless eons to attain enlightenment. The paths of the three lower tantras enable practitioners to complete the path more quickly, but it is a feature of highest yoga tantra alone that the path may be completed within a single lifetime.[130](#)

Is enlightenment possible in one life and one body?

And:

You do not accomplish buddhahood in this life by merely practicing the paths of the three lower classes, for they are not superior to the generation stage of the unique, highest path of mantra.[131](#)

The author uses the term “merely” since we attain the state of Vajradhara in reliance on the paths of the three lower tantras by first accomplishing the siddhi of prolonging our life in the lower tantras and then progressing to the path of highest yoga tantra. Moreover the swiftness of the highest yoga path depends on the capacity of the practitioner to bring desire into the path. Those of least capacity can attain enlightenment in sixteen lifetimes. Those of medium capacity take half that time since they are capable of completing the path in seven or eight lives. Those of supreme capacity are called *jewel-like disciples* who can attain enlightenment in the same lifetime they enter the highest yoga tantra path of accumulation. Examples of such

supreme practitioners include Jetsün Milarepa in the Kagyü tradition and the mahāsiddha Chö Dorjé in the Geluk tradition.

When the great master Atiśa came to Tibet, Tibetans asked him whether it was possible to reach enlightenment in one lifetime without needing to change bodies. Lord Atiśa replied that it is possible to reach enlightenment in one lifetime but not in the same body. Some Tibetans thought that Atiśa did not really comprehend the point of attaining enlightenment in one lifetime without needing to change one's body. But those with a deeper understanding saw that Lord Atiśa was making a fine distinction. Those who follow the paths of the lower tantras can reach enlightenment in one life without changing their body by prolonging their life in dependence upon the common siddhis.

When Atiśa stated that it was not possible to attain enlightenment in the same body, he was referring to the need to establish the illusory body for those practicing the paths of highest yoga tantra. Once the illusory body is attained, it is certain that we will manifest enlightenment in the same lifetime. But Atiśa's point was that the illusory body is a subtle type of body that is different and separate from our ordinary, coarse body. Since enlightenment is attained on the basis of the illusory body, the statement of Lord Atiśa is well founded. Therefore enlightenment is attained in one lifetime, but it is not attained on the basis of one ordinary, coarse body. Instead it is attained on the basis of another, subtler body that exists within the coarser body.

FOUR

Grounds and Paths

How to posit the five paths and ten grounds for the three lower classes of tantra[132](#)

This has three parts:

- 1. How to posit the five paths and ten grounds of action tantra**
- 2. How to posit the five paths and ten grounds of performance tantra**
- 3. How to posit the five paths and ten grounds of yoga tantra**

How to posit the five paths and ten grounds of action tantra
The path of accumulation

First, the path of accumulation of action tantra is “the path that begins *from* obtaining a fully qualified initiation and producing the uncontrived pledge to attain buddhahood through action tantra. It extends *up to but not including* obtaining the insight realizing emptiness derived from meditating on the absorption bestowing freedom at the limit of sound.”

Receiving empowerment in action tantra allows us to study it and obtain instruction on it. At first we are capable of generating only a contrived pledge to attain enlightenment by relying on action tantra. Such a pledge is “contrived” since it is generated only with effort and through generating a suitable motivation. The mind supporting such a pledge is neither stable nor present all the time. By becoming progressively more familiar with this pledge, we require less and less effort to generate it, until it arises effortlessly in an uncontrived manner

and abides stably. When such an uncontrived mind is generated, we enter the first moment of the path of accumulation of action tantra. We complete the path of accumulation and enter the first moment of the path of preparation of action tantra when we attain an insight realizing emptiness that is established through the absorption bestowing freedom at the limit of sound.

Some scholars, such as this author, hold that the entrance to tantra and the entrance to the tantric path of accumulation are distinct. In terms of action tantra, we receive empowerment first and only later enter the path of accumulation when our pledge to attain the state of Vajradhara through relying on this tantra becomes uncontrived. From the perspective of the three types of empowerment—the maturing causal empowerment, the liberating path empowerment, and the liberated resultant empowerment¹³³—the entrance to tantra is marked by receiving the maturing causal empowerment, since it authorizes us to study and listen to the root tantra and its commentaries. Others hold that there is no difference between the entrance to tantra and entrance to the tantric path of accumulation. They posit that the causal empowerment is also the first moment of the tantric path of accumulation.

The second type of empowerment, the liberating path empowerment, covers the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation for these lower classes of tantras. It is called “liberating” since it is the path liberating us from saṃsāra. The third, the liberated resultant empowerment, applies to the path of no-more learning. At this point you have attained your full potential.

Kirti Losang Trinlé has posited as the definition of the maturing causal empowerment “that which empowers us to listen, contemplate, and cultivate the paths of tantra, to accomplish its siddhis, and functions as the entrance to mantra.”¹³⁴ There are three parts to this definition. The first part describes the permission to study, contemplate, and meditate on the tantra; the second part describes the

permission to attain the siddhis; and the third part describes this quality of being the gateway to tantra. This definition can be modified to describe the maturing causal empowerment of action tantra: “that which empowers us to listen, contemplate, and cultivate the paths of action tantra, to accomplish the siddhis of action tantra, and functions as the entrance to action tantra.” By simply substituting the words “performance,” “yoga,” or “highest yoga” for the word “action,” we generate specific definitions for each class of tantra.

The path of preparation

The path of preparation of action tantra is “the path that extends from that insight up to but not including the perceptual realization of emptiness due to cultivating that absorption.”

The second path is the path of preparation. It begins from the attainment of the union of calm abiding and insight realizing emptiness and extends up to, but does not include, the experience of the perceptual realization of emptiness due to cultivating the absorption bestowing freedom at the limit of sound.

The path of seeing

The path of seeing of action tantra is “the path that extends from the perceptual comprehension of emptiness through that absorption up to but not including the generation of the direct antidote to the coarsest of the coarse afflictive objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation.”

The path of seeing begins when the perceptual realization of emptiness is generated by the might of the absorption bestowing freedom at the limit of sound. When active and manifest, it progressively abandons all objects to be abandoned by the path of seeing and extends up to the moment before we generate the first antidote to objects to be abandoned by the

path of meditation.

The path of meditation

The nine objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation are the coarsest of the coarse, the moderately coarse, the subtlest of the coarse, the coarsest of the medium, and so on, up to the subtlest of the subtle. When we are capable of manifesting the direct antidote to the coarsest of the coarse objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation, we enter the path of meditation.

The path of meditation of action tantra is “the path that extends *from* the absorption [bestowing freedom] at the limit of sound that is the direct antidote to the coarsest of the coarse afflictive objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation *up to* the point preceding enlightenment attained through the path of action tantra.”

The path of no-more learning

The path of no-more learning of action tantra is the path establishing buddhahood through this tantric path.

The path of no-more learning of action tantra is the path establishing buddhahood, or the state of Vajradhara. In brief we complete the path to enlightenment through serially progressing through the five paths, where the upper limit of the lower path precisely links with the lower limit of the higher path.[135](#)

Positing the paths of action tantra in ten grounds

The first ground is the path of seeing.[136](#) The second ground exists once you attain the direct antidote to the coarsest of the coarse afflictive objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation. The third ground exists once you attain the direct

antidote to the moderately coarse afflictions. [9a] The fourth ground exists once you attain the direct antidote to the subtlest of the coarse afflictions.[137](#)

The fifth, sixth, and seventh grounds are established respectively by the attainment of the direct antidotes to the three levels of medium affliction. The eighth ground is established by the simultaneous attainment of the direct antidotes to all three levels of subtle affliction. You also abandon the coarsest knowledge obscurations on the eighth ground.

We enter the fifth, sixth, and seventh grounds by respectively generating the direct antidotes to the coarsest medium, the medium medium, and subtlest medium afflictive objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation. We enter the eighth ground by generating the direct antidote to the remaining three obscurations simultaneously: the coarsest of the subtle, the moderately subtle, and the subtlest of the subtle objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation. Further, after abandoning these, we also generate the antidote to the coarsest knowledge obscurations on the eighth ground.

The ninth ground is established by the attainment of the direct antidote to the intermediate level of knowledge obscurations. The tenth ground is established by the attainment of the direct antidote to the subtle level of knowledge obscurations. The direct antidote to the subtlest-subtle level of knowledge obscurations is posited as the pristine wisdom of the final continuum and so on.

We eliminate the subtlest subtle level of knowledge obscurations in our final moment as a sentient being.[138](#) Such subtlest subtle-level knowledge obscurations are imprints.

This must be asserted in accordance with the sūtra system of the Prāsaṅgika school because the Buddha has not explained in any scriptural source

that the method of abandoning both obscurations in the three lower classes of tantra is different from the Perfection Vehicle, and neither is that established by logic.

The mode of abandoning obscurations is posited in accord with the sūtra system of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school and not in accordance with the Svātantrika Mādhyamikas or any other lower system. This view is appropriate since no relevant presentation is found in any authoritative text and this presentation does not contradict logic. Moreover this view does not contradict the thought of Tsongkhapa in his *Mantric Stages*, where he presents the views of great scholars specializing in each class of tantra, such as Buddhaguhya and Paramabodhi, the main sources for action tantra.

The paths of accumulation of performance and yoga tantra

How to posit the five paths and ten grounds of performance tantra and yoga tantra. The paths of accumulation of each of these two tantras are the paths extending from [first] producing the uncontrived pledge to attain enlightenment through either path up to but not including obtaining insight realizing emptiness due to meditating on the yoga without signs of either tantra.

The range of the paths of accumulation of performance and yoga tantras is similar to that of action tantra. Each path of accumulation begins with the generation of the uncontrived mind aspiring to the state of Vajradhara in dependence, respectively, on performance or yoga tantra. Then we enter in turn the practices of yoga with signs and yoga without signs. The end of the path of accumulation in both classes is the moment just prior to attaining the insight that arises from the absorption of yoga without signs.

The four remaining paths of performance and yoga tantra

The paths of preparation of each of these two tantras are the paths extending *from* the yoga without signs that is insight realizing emptiness of each tantra *up to but not including* the perceptual comprehension of emptiness. You can deduce the remaining paths by adapting the preceding definitions of similar type.

The path of preparation begins at the point of termination of the path of accumulation. It starts with the generation of insight due to absorption realizing emptiness, and its range extends to the moment before the perceptual comprehension of emptiness that marks the beginning of the path of seeing. The beginning and end of the remaining paths and grounds may be adapted from the definitions already elucidated for action tantra.

Points of debate

Shared and exclusive tantric paths

One says: Take the paths explained in the Perfection Vehicle—such as love, compassion, and bodhicitta—that exist in the mental continuum of someone on the path of accumulation of the lower tantras: it follows that they are paths of lower tantra because you [Ngawang Palden] assert this method of positing the five paths and the ten grounds of these tantras.

A scholar asserts that there are beings who have entered the paths of accumulation of action, performance, or yoga tantras who possess in their minds various aspects of method such as love, compassion, and bodhicitta, practices first developed in the Perfection Vehicle. Should these methods therefore be classified as tantric paths? The scholar continues:

That is unacceptable because these are not paths of mantra [9b]—because they are not paths exclusive to mantra.

Reply: That is not logically necessary.

The author disagrees. Something need not be a path *exclusive* to tantra to be a tantric path. Tantric paths may be either shared or exclusive, and such practices may be classified as tantric paths through being included among the shared tantric paths.

Paths shared with the Perfection Vehicle

Again this scholar says: Taking that same subject, it follows that they are Perfection Vehicle paths because they are shared Perfection Vehicle paths.

This second point of debate uses logic similar to the first. The proponent refers to the love, compassion, and bodhicitta in the minds of practitioners on the path of accumulation of the three lower tantras, and he asserts that these should be classified as paths of the Perfection Vehicle because they are paths *shared* with the Perfection Vehicle.

Reply: That is not logically necessary because pristine awareness comprehending the sixteen aspects of impermanence and so forth in the mental continuum of a bodhisattva is a shared intermediate-scope path but not an intermediate-scope path and this is similar.

Ngawang Palden answers that indeed they are shared paths of the Perfection Vehicle but they are not paths of the Perfection Vehicle. This reason resembles the previous logic: if something is not an exclusive tantric path, it is not necessarily not a tantric path. Moreover an example from sūtra is applied to support this reason, for the comprehension of impermanence and so forth in the mental continuum of a bodhisattva is classified as a path shared with the practices of intermediate scope beings but it is not classified as an intermediate scope path. Just because a path is shared with the Perfection Vehicle does not automatically make it a Perfection Vehicle or sūtra path. [139](#)

The type of body you need to obtain enlightenment

As to the method for attaining enlightenment in dependence on those paths, a being who newly attains enlightenment through the paths of the Perfection Vehicle and the paths of the three lower tantras must abide in Akaniṣṭha, because this is the system of the Perfection Vehicle.

What physical basis do we need to attain enlightenment dependent on the practices of the Perfection Vehicle or action, performance, or yoga tantras? This is stated in the Perfection Vehicle to be a body residing in the pure field of Akaniṣṭha, the seventeenth and highest level of the form realm.

The way to attain enlightenment in action and performance tantra is similar to the Perfection Vehicle, and this was explained previously.

No new information is revealed regarding the way we attain enlightenment in action and performance tantra; the way we attain enlightenment in yoga tantra is presented separately. In *Mantric Stages*, Tsongkhapa mentions numerous Indian scholars in the field of yoga tantra, and the positions of three such eminent scholars are given here. These three are referred to in Tibetan by the composite term *sha-sangkun*, where *sha* refers to Śākyamitra, *sang* to Buddhaguhya, and *kun* to Ānandagarbha.^{[140](#)} The first two scholars hold the same position, which differs from the position of the third.

The positions of Śākyamitra and Buddhaguhya

In accordance with yoga tantra, both Śākyamitra and Buddhaguhya explain that when Prince Siddhārtha entered equipoise on the supreme limit of the fourth absorption near the Nirañjana River, all the buddhas of the ten directions awoke him by snapping their fingers, inspired him, and escorted

him to Akaniṣṭha. There, after bestowing the crown empowerment, they encouraged him to meditate serially on the five stages of enlightenment, and at the completion of that process, he attained enlightenment as an enjoyment body.

The masters Śākyamitra and Buddhaguhya assert that Prince Siddhārtha, who had the body of a desire-realm being, was escorted to the Akaniṣṭha pure land and there obtained the crown empowerment and meditated on the five stages of enlightenment^{[141](#)} on the basis of his desire-realm body. He then completed the remaining stages of the paths and attained enlightenment with an enjoyment body.^{[142](#)}

Reply: However, we cannot accept this in our system since it is incompatible with the general system of the Mahāyāna. *Mantric Stages* states:

The *Uncommon Secret Tantra* as well as *Stainless Light* specifically state that our Master attained enlightenment before this, and in this world he merely demonstrated the way of attaining enlightenment. Many other mantras also assert that he manifested as an emanation and did not newly attain enlightenment, and the Mantra and the Perfection Vehicles both hold similar positions.^{[143](#)}

These masters accept that Prince Siddhārtha newly attained enlightenment in Akaniṣṭha, for they assert that he was escorted to the Akaniṣṭha pure land with a physical basis of a desire-realm being and attained enlightenment there as an enjoyment body. But this assertion would contradict the general system of the Mahāyāna that Buddha Śākyamuni had attained enlightenment long before he appeared in this world as Prince Siddhārtha and that he merely demonstrated the aspect of attaining enlightenment here. To support this position

the author quotes Jé Rinpoché's *Mantric Stages*, and Jé Rinpoché in turn relies on authoritative texts such as Puṇḍarīka's *Stainless Light* commentary to the Kālacakra tantra and the *Uncommon Secret Tantra*. Jé Rinpoché also holds that this position conforms to statements found in both the Sūtra and Mantra Vehicles.

The position of Ānandagarbha

We must accept the position of Master Ānandagarbha, who explains that the Master accumulated merit for three countless eons [10a] and in his final existence entered equipoise¹⁴⁴ on the supreme limit of the fourth absorption in Akaniṣṭha and was awakened by all the buddhas of the ten directions snapping their fingers and so forth.

Ānandagarbha makes no reference to the events taking place by the Nirañjana River, nor is there mention of possessing a physical basis of the desire realm.¹⁴⁵ The author sources his presentation of Ānandagarbha's position in Jé Rinpoché's *Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages of Guhyasāmaja*.

Illuminating Lamp states:

Now the *Compendium* merely states that when the bodhisattva Siddhārtha was seated near the Bodhi Tree, the tathāgatas inspired him; it does not clearly refer to Akaniṣṭha or the desire realm. *Vajra Peak* explains this to be the Akaniṣṭha field called Ghanavyūha.¹⁴⁶

We have already mentioned that there are four tantras related to yoga tantra. These quotations are taken from the condensed root tantra, *Compendium of the Reality of All Tathāgatas*, and the explanatory tantra, *Vajra Peak*.

Can the path of yoga tantra be added to the end of the

Perfection Vehicle?

One says: This mode of explanation teaches the method of attaining enlightenment that adds the path of yoga tantra only after completing the Perfection Vehicle path.

Reply: This is unacceptable because although highest yoga tantra clearly explains two different ways of attaining enlightenment through differentiating this path from other paths, it is not explained this way in yoga tantra. *Illuminating Lamp* states:

The system of highest yoga tantra explains two systems, namely that of jewel-like disciples who enter this path from the beginning and attain enlightenment in one life, and that of disciples who add the mantric path at the end of the Perfection Vehicle path.

Highest yoga tantra describes two types of practitioners. First are those who enter the tantric path of accumulation from the beginning and achieve enlightenment by following highest yoga tantra without first traversing the sūtra path. Such jewel-like disciples, as they are called, possess definite lineage, since they enter just one vehicle, and they are categorized in four types, the best of which attains enlightenment in one life. Second are those who first enter the Perfection Vehicle and later supplement this path with tantric practices. Such disciples do not possess a definite lineage, since they first enter one vehicle and later enter another vehicle. However, *Illuminating Lamp* does not mention that these two types of disciples exist in yoga tantra.

The system of yoga tantra does not appear to state that you append the previously explained path of yoga on to the path of the Perfection Vehicle, making a distinction between this path and other paths; it also does not clearly identify a method for

attaining enlightenment that is separate from the Perfection Vehicle. I wonder, therefore, whether the explanation that enlightenment is attained through being inspired by the buddhas after completing the ground previously explained, and so on, is the system of this path. This should be well examined.[147](#)

This statement implies that what applies to the Perfection Vehicle in light of highest yoga tantra is not really applicable to yoga tantra. Yoga tantra appears to have its own distinct system, and for that reason Jé Rinpoché suggests this issue should be examined carefully.

Therefore, I wonder whether it shouldn't be asserted—within the system of yoga tantra—that our Master attained enlightenment through entering that path of yoga tantra from the beginning and that to attain enlightenment [10b] by the Perfection Vehicle, it is not necessary to add the path of yoga tantra.

Having quoted the passage from *Illuminating Lamp*, Ngawang Palden concludes that from the perspective of yoga tantra, we may assert that our Master, Śākyamuni Buddha, attained enlightenment by entering the path of yoga tantra from the very beginning without relying on the path of the Perfection Vehicle.

***Explanation of the Two Investigations* explains that the mantric path is added at the end of the Perfection Vehicle.**

Explanation of the Two Investigations is an explanatory text on the root tantra of Hevajra composed by Khedrup Rinpoché. In this work Khedrup Jé states that supplementing the sūtra paths with mantra paths does exist. Still, this possibility is not mentioned within the texts of yoga tantra, according to which Buddha Śākyamuni attained enlightenment by entering the path of yoga tantra from the beginning.

This concludes the presentation of the three lower tantras.

PART 2

Mainstream Highest Yoga Tantra



Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché, December 2005, Tierra del Fuego National Park, Ushuaia, Argentina. Photo by Amy Miller.



FIVE

The Generation Stage

A detailed explanation of highest yoga tantra

The detailed explanation of the way to progress on the path of highest yoga tantra has two parts:

- 1. The system of mainstream highest yoga tantra**
- 2. The system of Kālacakra tantra**

The mainstream system includes the presentation of such tantras as Guhyasamāja, Heruka, and Yamāntaka. From among these, Guhyasamāja is taken as the primary tantra, and this explanation is based on Jé Rinpoché's *Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages of Guhyasamāja*, which deals with the generation and completion stages of this tantra. The system of Kālacakra has its own unique characteristics and is explained separately.

The system of mainstream highest yoga tantra

This has four parts:

- 1. How to become a vessel suitable for meditating on the path**
- 2. How to keep the vows and commitments purely**
- 3. How to practice the path**
- 4. How to manifest the fruits of practice**

The system of highest yoga tantra is also explained through applying four main categories similar to how the three lower tantras were explained. But there is a fundamental difference in the third category regarding the way we practice the path. In the three lower tantras this refers to the practice of yoga with signs and yoga without signs but in highest yoga tantra this refers to the practice of the generation and completion

stages.

How to become a vessel suitable for meditating on the path

You become a vessel suitable for meditating on the path by first entering any suitable maṇḍala of highest yoga tantra explained from within the authentic classes of tantra and elucidated by qualified mahāsiddhas, and then you obtain empowerment.

We may engage in meditating on these tantric paths by entering a suitable maṇḍala of any of the tantras of this class, receiving empowerment, [148](#) and taking certain vows and commitments. Such maṇḍalas and empowerments must be sourced in authentic traditions.

Further, from the perspective of fully practicing of the path, you must obtain the four empowerments.

The four empowerments bestowed in this context are (1) the vase, (2) the secret, (3) the pristine wisdom, and (4) the fourth empowerment. The first qualifies us to practice the generation stage. The remaining three qualify us to perform the completion-stage practices that, respectively, establish the illusory body, clear light, and the state of union.

A master who bestows empowerment should first examine prospective disciples to ascertain whether they are vessels suitable for receiving all or some of these empowerments. [149](#) If after such examination certain disciples are deemed suitable to receive just the vase empowerment [150](#) then this empowerment should be bestowed omitting the latter three initiations, empowering such students to practice the stage of generation. [151](#) Some individuals who do not qualify to receive the vase empowerment may be permitted to enter the maṇḍala without obtaining empowerment. The master must therefore ascertain whether candidates for empowerment qualify for one, some, or all of the empowerments. [152](#)

Types of maṇḍalas

There are three maṇḍalas where you obtain the vase empowerment: (1) the painted-cloth maṇḍala, (2) the colored-sand maṇḍala, and (3) the body maṇḍala. For some special disciples there is also (4) the absorption maṇḍala. Therefore in general there are four maṇḍalas.

It is common in highest yoga tantra for initiation to be conferred in a painted-cloth maṇḍala, in a colored-sand maṇḍala,^{[153](#)} or in a body maṇḍala.^{[154](#)} However, some special disciples, such as experienced meditators capable of visualizing the entire maṇḍala, may receive empowerment within an absorption maṇḍala.^{[155](#)}

It is not suitable to confer empowerment in the body maṇḍala on those who have not obtained initiation previously. Body maṇḍala empowerment is conferred in the Drillbupa system of Heruka, but tantras such as Yamāntaka have no body maṇḍala, and tantras such as Guhyasamāja have a body maṇḍala but empowerment is not conferred there.

There are certain restrictions to conferring empowerment in a body maṇḍala. Firstly disciples must have initially received an empowerment in an external maṇḍala before being initiated in the body maṇḍala. Some highest yoga tantras, such as Yamāntaka, do not possess a body maṇḍala. Some tantras, such as Guhyasamāja, possess a body maṇḍala but it is not employed in the vase initiation. However, the Drillbupa lineage of Heruka is a tantra in which the body maṇḍala is employed during initiation but again only after the students have obtained empowerment in an external maṇḍala of that deity.

It is said that the three higher empowerments are bestowed, respectively, in the relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala, the lotus maṇḍala, and the ultimate-

bodhicitta maṇḍala.

The three remaining empowerments, called *the three higher empowerments*, employ different maṇḍalas. Therefore the secret empowerment¹⁵⁶ is bestowed in the relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala, the pristine-wisdom empowerment¹⁵⁷ is bestowed in the lotus maṇḍala, and the word empowerment¹⁵⁸ is bestowed in the ultimate-bodhicitta maṇḍala.

How to keep the vows and commitments purely

Second, if while meditating on the path you guard the commitments and vows taken at the time of the empowerment, you will establish the actual siddhis. If you fail to guard your vows, however, it is said that though you may strive for eons, you will not establish the siddhis; [11a] even attaining a mere pleasant rebirth will be difficult. Therefore, having understood the advice you were given upon becoming a proper vessel after receiving empowerment, guard the commitments and vows even at the cost of your life. In particular, strive intently to avoid root downfalls and remain untouched by other downfalls. Should they occur nonetheless, restore them by confessing according to the rite. For it is said that if you guard against downfalls having obtained complete empowerment, then even if you do not meditate on the path you will establish the supreme state within seven to sixteen lives. But if you neglect the vows you are meant to guard, you will fall into unpleasant rebirth no matter how hard you strive.

Having received empowerment we must guard our vows and commitments. ¹⁵⁹ Vows include both bodhisattva and tantric vows, and the bodhisattva vows consist of the eighteen root and forty-six secondary downfalls enumerated in the Six-

Session Guru Yoga. The tantric vows consist of fourteen vows common to all buddha lineages, nineteen vows that apply to individual lineages, and the gross infractions.

These may be understood in depth from the *Explanation of the Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* and the explanation of the root downfalls in the *Cluster of Siddhis*.

The bodhisattva vows are clearly presented in Tsongkhapa's *Central Path to Enlightenment*. Further, the way to rely on a tantric master is found in Tsongkhapa's explanation of Aśvaghoṣa's *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion*. More specifically, the root tantric downfalls are elucidated in Tsongkhapa's *Cluster of Siddhis*.[160](#)

How to practice the path

This third section has two parts:

- 1. How to meditate on the two stages**
- 2. The practice of enhancing these two stages**

We practice the path in the three lower tantras by engaging in yoga with and without signs. In yoga with signs we engage in self-generation as the deity. In yoga without signs we first engage in meditation that visualizes the transformation of our body, speech, and mind into the body, speech, and mind of the deity, and then we meditate on the emptiness of the signs of inherent existence of that visualization. Highest yoga tantra employs different terminology, but in general, the types of practices in yoga with signs of the lower tantras are included in the generation stage of highest yoga tantra, and the types of practices in yoga without signs are included in the completion stage of highest yoga tantra.

How to meditate on the two stages

This has two sections:

- 1. How to meditate on the generation stage**

2. How to meditate on the completion stage

How to meditate on the generation stage

Debating the definition of the generation stage

Pañchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltzen states that the generation stage is defined as “a yoga that matures the mental continuum for its resultant completion stage that does not arise from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to meditation but newly investigates any aspect related to the three stages of birth, death, and the intermediate state.”¹⁶¹

There are three parts to this definition. The first part indicates that the generation stage matures the practitioner’s mind for the stage of completion that will follow.¹⁶² The second part shows that the generation stage does not arise from the winds entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central channel by the strength of meditation.¹⁶³ The third part establishes that it is a yoga that meditates on all or any of the three states of ordinary existence—birth, death, and the intermediate state. However, according to *Mantric Stages* this definition is not universally applicable, for it does not include every instance of generation-stage practice. Rather it only applies to the main father tantras, such as Yamāntaka and the system of Guhyasamāja according to Ārya Nāgārjuna.

Reply: I think he means only the main generation stage because it is not logically necessary that the generation stage engages in meditation on any aspect related to birth, death, or the intermediate state.

Ngawang Palden takes issue with Pañchen Rinpoché’s definition of the generation stage because not every practice of the generation stage takes birth, death, or the intermediate state as its object of meditation. He gives two reasons to support his argument:

For instance, yogas following union with a knowledge consort do not meditate on any aspect related to the three stages of birth, death, and the intermediate state. Likewise, meditation on the protection wheel is not meditation on any aspect related to these three.

We may initially meditate on aspects related to birth, death, and the intermediate state but when we engage in union with a knowledge consort or in other subsequent practices, such as the inner offering, we do not necessarily meditate on these three aspects, even though such union is part of the generation stage. The second reason, the meditation that establishes the protection wheel, also does not involve any aspect related to the three stages of birth, death, and the intermediate state.

Although the central practice of the generation stage involves meditation on death, intermediate state, and rebirth, these meditations do not immediately follow one after the other but are interspersed with other practices. In general the sequence of practices of the generation stage are as follows:

- Establishing the field for the accumulation of merit
- Reciting the *svabhāva* mantra
- Meditating on taking death as the path for establishing the dharma body, the first of the three bodies
- Establishing first the common and then the uncommon wheel of protection
- Establishing the maṇḍala that is the basis of purification
- Generating the celestial mansion
- Meditating on taking the intermediate stage as the path for establishing the enjoyment body, the second of the three bodies
- Meditating on taking birth as the path for establishing the emanation body, the third of the three bodies. This involves arising in the aspect of the deity supported by the maṇḍalas of the sun, moon, and so forth. Only at this point have we taken all three ordinary states as paths for establishing the three bodies.

The first reason above refers to union with a knowledge consort, but this does not indicate the initial moment of self-generation as the male deity in union with a consort; that occurs later in the generation stage. For example, in the generation stage of *Guhyasamāja*, we first establish the celestial mansion, then the two main deities in union in the center of the mansion, and then we establish the remaining thirty-two deities thus accomplishing the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala. Then we engage in the activities of the supreme conqueror, visualizing rays of light radiating to the ten directions and so forth. When this is completed, we bless the secret places of the male and female deities, and it is this activity that constitutes union with the knowledge consort. Then we make offerings and continue with mantra recitation. These and other activities, such as blessing the inner offerings and mantra recitation, do not rely on previously meditating on the three stages of death, intermediate state, and rebirth.

The first reason is established because *Explanation of the Graded Presentation* [11b] states:

Those yogas following union with a knowledge consort are activities of a buddha; they are not stages of ordinary existence . . . and so on.[164](#)

Graded Presentation of Guhyasamāja was composed by Nāgabodhi, one of the five main disciples of Nāgārjuna.[165](#) Later Jé Rinpoché composed the *Explanation of the Graded Presentation* as a commentary to Master Nāgabodhi's *Graded Presentation*, and this text mentions instances of yogic practices of the stage of generation that occur after union with a consort.

The second reason is established because that text states:

The protection wheel is merely a branch or preliminary level of the generation stage that is cultivated in accordance with ordinary

existence in the generation stage. Therefore you do not need to take them [the protection wheel meditations] as activities related to the stages of ordinary existence.[166](#)

In the same text the second reason, namely meditation on the protection wheel, is also discussed. Meditation on the protection wheel is not classified as one of the main practices of the generation stage but rather as a preliminary practice that does not need to be combined with meditation on birth, death, and the intermediate state.

Since neither union with a knowledge consort or meditation on the protection wheel are classified as main practices of the stage of generation, our author is presuming that Paṇchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen intended his definition to encompass only the main practices. Such a position is corroborated by the extensive explanation of these points in Paṇchen Rinpoché's *Essence of the Two Stages*, and further reference to the main practices of the generation stage is found in the *Guru Pūjā*, which is also by Paṇchen Rinpoché. Verse 110 discusses meditation on aspects related to the three stages of birth, death, and the intermediate state:

Bless us to purify all stains of ordinary appearance and
conception
through the first-stage yoga that transforms birth, death,
and the intermediate state
into the three bodies of a conqueror,
so that all appearances arise as the body of the deity.

This description of the generation stage only applies to the main generation-stage practices of the principal tantras but not to the preparatory or subsidiary practices that are also included in the generation stage. Further, it does not apply to the generation stage of Kālacakra and its unique practices as explained by Jé Rinpoché.

The three bases, three agents, and three results of the

generation stage Thus, the central practice of the generation stage is to meditate on three significant stages of ordinary existence that relate to the three bodies of a buddha. In ordinary existence an individual experiences the stages of death, intermediate state, and birth uncontrollably, due to the force of karma and affliction. But in the generation stage practitioners first meditate on states resembling ordinary death, intermediate state, and rebirth in order to gain familiarity with this process. Then they link the three ordinary stages with the three resultant bodies through entering paths that purify the three ordinary stages. Therefore ordinary birth, death, and the intermediate state that must be purified are known as *the three bodies of the basis*, the various paths that act as their purifying agents are known as *the three bodies of the path*, and the three bodies of a buddha (namely the dharma body, the enjoyment body, and the emanation body) that are established by these paths are called *the three bodies of the result*. Although the term *body* (*kāya*) is used in the context of the basis and the path, the actual bodies only exist when the resultant state has manifested.

The process of purification relies on meditating on emptiness. Therefore meditation on the emptiness of ordinary death gradually weakens and eliminates the power of karma and affliction to generate uncontrolled death, and ultimately establishes the dharma body. Meditation on the emptiness of the ordinary intermediate state gradually weakens and eliminates the power of karma and affliction to generate the uncontrolled intermediate state, and ultimately establishes the enjoyment body. Meditation on the emptiness of ordinary birth gradually weakens and eliminates the power of karma and affliction to generate uncontrolled birth, and ultimately establishes the emanation body.

Verse 110 of the *Guru Pūjā* describes the three bases that must be purified as “birth, death, and the intermediate state,” the three purified results as “the three bodies of a conqueror,” and the purifying agents as “the first-stage yoga that transforms.” Finally it describes the purpose of this practice is

“to purify all stains of ordinary appearance and conception.”

Further debate on the definition of the generation stage

Someone says: The protection wheel and yogas following union with a knowledge consort are not actual generation-stage practices because the generation stage engages in meditation that takes any of the three bodies as the path, and it is not logically necessary that any path in the mental continuum of someone on the generation stage must be a generation stage [path].

This scholar returns to the initial issue and asserts that meditation on the protection wheel and union with a knowledge consort are not truly generation-stage practices.

Reply: That is not logically necessary.

Our author rejects the logical necessity or pervasion^{[167](#)} expressed in the first reason that practices of the generation stage necessarily engage in meditation on aspects related to death, the intermediate stage, and birth.

However, your reason is established because there are many shared paths of the Perfection Vehicle and the lower tantras in the mental continuum [of someone on the generation stage].

Still the author accepts the second reason offered by the opponent in defense of his first reason. It is indeed true, he says, that there are many paths—such as shared Perfection Vehicle paths or shared lower-tantra paths—in the mental continuum of someone on the generation stage that are not generation-stage paths.

Your first reason is unacceptable because it contradicts the explanation of the outlines of the four branches of approximation, the four yogas, the six branches, and the three concentrations in the general outline summarizing the generation stage.

These may be understood by consulting the extensive presentation in *Mantric Stages*.

The term *outline* implies a framework that ties various elements together to form a coherent presentation. Just as a belt links and holds pieces of clothing together, so too the outline of a sādhana links and unites the various parts of practice into a common framework.

The general outline of the four branches of approximation, which are applied in various sādhanas, are (1) approximation, (2) close accomplishment, (3) accomplishment, and (4) great accomplishment.^{[168](#)}

Jé Rinpoché enumerates the four yogas in the completion stage of the Lūipa system of Heruka that form the outline of the practice in that particular system. The first is *yoga* and it includes the preliminary practices; the second is *subsequent yoga*; the third is *intensive yoga*; and the fourth is *great yoga*, which refers to the concluding practices of the completion stage.^{[169](#)}

The six branches include practices related to the six buddha lineages. In particular they involve visualization of the celestial mansion manifesting as the purified aspects of Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, Amoghasiddhi, and Vajrasattva.^{[170](#)} An example of this outline is found in the commentary to the generation stage of Gyalwa Gyatso by the second Paṇchen Lama, Losang Yeshé.

The next outline is the three types of concentration: (1) the concentration of initial application, (2) the concentration of the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala, and (3) the concentration of the supreme-conqueror activities. The first type of concentration involves a condensed deity practice.^{[171](#)} For example, if we are practicing the generation stage of Guhyasamāja and cannot visualize all thirty-two deities, we must first simplify the practice by meditating only on the principal male and female deities in union. The second type of concentration includes the visualization of all thirty-two deities in their respective places

in the maṇḍala.¹⁷² The third type of concentration includes visualizing the various activities of the deities.¹⁷³ By following the ritual as it appears in the sādhana, the meditator visualizes rays of light emanating from the heart of each of these deities, establishing the well-being of sentient beings, making offerings to buddhas, and finally reabsorbing them into the hearts of the deities from where the rays first emerged.

Jé Rinpoché in his presentation of the generation stage of the Guhyasamāja tantra also provides an outline that includes forty-nine different phases,¹⁷⁴ but that is not mentioned here.

The generation stage is classified in two parts:

- 1. The yoga of coarse single recall**
- 2. The yoga of subtle investigation**

The yoga of coarse single recall

First, the yoga of coarse single recall is equivalent to the coarse generation stage because *Precious Bud of Final Resolution* states:

It is not called *single recall* because it recalls a deity once or recalls just a single deity but because it recalls the deity alone or it recalls oneself and the deity as one.¹⁷⁵ Though in general it engages both subtle and coarse deity meditation, here it refers to deity yoga of the coarse supporting maṇḍala and supported deities . . . [up to] . . . when you train in the generation stage, you first generate concentration possessing clear appearance of coarse objects up till the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala.¹⁷⁶ [12a]

The text mentioned here is one of the four interrelated commentaries of Guhyasamāja tantra, three of which were composed by Jé Rinpoché. The four include the *Root Tantra of Guhyasamāja* (which includes the *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra*)

and Tsongkhapa's *Commentary to the Bright Lamp* (Candrakīrti's explanation of the root tantra). The remaining two treatises are *Annotations to Candrakīrti's Bright Lamp* and the *Precious Bud of Final Resolution* (which is also called *Final Resolution of the Four Interrelated Commentaries*). In these, Jé Rinpoché urges us to distinguish between the coarse and subtle generation stages. In the coarse generation stage we first meditate on the supporting celestial maṇḍala until we gain proficiency, and then we add all the supported deities. We should persist in this meditation until we stabilize the focal object.

The yoga of subtle investigation

The second is equivalent to the subtle generation stage because *Precious Bud of Final Resolution* states:

When you train in the generation stage, you train in conceptual yogas such as meditating on the maṇḍala inside a subtle drop. Although *conceptual* or *contrived yoga* are general names for the generation stage, in this context it is called *subtle yoga*.[177](#)

After we have attained sufficient stability on the coarse focal object, we gradually reduce the size of the visualization of both the celestial mansion and its resident deities to the point where they fit inside a subtle drop the size of a mustard seed. Much training is required to achieve this. The term *subtle yoga* is applied to this particular phase of the generation stage because the size of the visualized focal object is reduced, making it more subtle.

In general, the first stage is called the *generation stage* because it generates the celestial mansion and its resident deities through the process of conception.[178](#) It is also called *contrived yoga* since it fabricates or creates the celestial mansion and its resident deities through causing them to

appear to the mind. The second stage is called the *completion stage* because the basis of practice—the channels, winds, and drops of white and red constituents of womb-born human beings endowed with six constituents¹⁷⁹—are already complete at the time of birth. It is also called *uncontrived yoga* since we do not newly fabricate or create these channels, winds, and drops through yogic practice. Rather the purpose of practice is to bless that which is already complete.

The four levels of practitioners

Question: Do those training in the generation stage progress to more advanced focal objects after they have attained stable meditation on less advanced focal objects—as in the completion stage—or do they meditate on the entire sādhana from beginning to end in a single session?

Reply: There are four types of practitioners differentiated according to when the path is generated in their mental continua:

- 1. Beginners**
- 2. Those attaining some pristine wisdom**
- 3. Those attaining partial control over pristine wisdom**
- 4. Those attaining perfect control over pristine wisdom**

The author answers this question by referring to the four categories of practitioners, posited according to how they meditate and the objects they focus on. In brief beginners are those meditating for the first time on the stage of generation. Those attaining some pristine wisdom are slightly more advanced. Those attaining partial control over pristine wisdom include advanced practitioners of the generation stage and beginners with respect to the completion stage. Those attaining perfect control over pristine wisdom are advanced practitioners of the completion stage.

You must understand the different presentations of how long and in what way they meditate.

1. Beginners

The first, a beginner, must fully meditate on all the generation-stage rites in the sādhana. Further, all practitioners *from* those first meditating on the generation stage *up to but not including* those capable of generating the clear appearance of all aspects of the coarse maṇḍala in an instant are called beginners.

When beginners first meditate on the generation stage, they should follow the sādhana carefully and engage all the aspects of the practice as described. They are further advised to focus on the entire maṇḍala and its resident deities at a coarse level that is neither too detailed nor too small. Still, in the early stages, they will not be able to generate nor maintain the visualization. Once practitioners gain the capacity to hold the full visualization of the coarse focal objects for a moment, they progress to the next level.

2. Those attaining some pristine wisdom

Those attaining some pristine wisdom are those who when visualizing the celestial mansion and all the coarse deities arranged within it are capable of generating the clear and stable appearance of all the main and secondary limbs instantly, but are not yet capable of doing that for the deities of the bases—Kṣitigarbha and so on.

At this level practitioners still rely on reciting the words of the sādhana, but from time to time they are also capable of briefly holding the visualization of the entire maṇḍala and its resident deities. When they visualize the resident deities, they are capable of visualizing both their main and secondary limbs. For example, when visualizing the hands of a certain deity, they also see all of the fingers, or when visualizing the head they not

only see the face in general but the eyes and so on as well.

The sādhanā of Yamāntaka contains descriptions of how the bases—the five sense faculties and the mental sense faculty—are generated as deities. For example, the eye sense base is generated as Kṣitigarbha, the ear sense base as Vajrapāṇi, the nose sense base as Ākāśagarbha, the tongue sense base as Avalokiteśvara, the body sense base Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin, and the mind sense base as Samantabhadra. Practitioners of this level are still not capable of instantly visualizing the sense bases as deities; when they do attain this ability they move on to the next level.

There is a difference in the mode of meditation between beginners and those attaining some pristine wisdom. Beginners must visualize the entire supporting maṇḍala and supported deities slowly and in stages. Those attaining some pristine wisdom recall the coarse aspects instantly but then they must visualize the subtle aspects, [12b] such as the deities of the bases, in stages.

3. Those attaining partial control over pristine wisdom

Those attaining partial control over pristine wisdom includes all the practitioners *from* those capable of instantly generating clear and stable appearance of not only the coarse visualization but all the main and secondary limbs of the subtle deities of the bases *up to but not including* those capable of attaining perfect control.

Those attaining partial control over pristine wisdom are not only capable of visualizing the entire maṇḍala and its resident deities instantly, but they are also able to visualize the secondary, subtle deities existing within the bodies of the main deities. Moreover their visualization of the subtle deities is complete, since it includes the full detail of their main and secondary limbs. Despite such impressive powers of

visualization, they have not yet attained the fourth level.

It is said that this person practices both the generation and completion stages. Moreover those who attain this level need not distinguish meditative sessions from post-sessions, for such practitioners are permitted to perform a single self-generation for each day. Having generated such a realization of themselves as the deity, they do not need to perform the self-generation again.

In the first two levels, it is important that meditation sessions are kept brief so that the mind does not become fatigued. It is for this reason that the day is divided into meditative sessions when deity yoga is practiced and post-sessions when it is not. This approach specifically counters the tendency of the mind to experience mental laxity or excitation during meditation sessions. However, once we attain partial control over pristine wisdom, we no longer need to divide the day in this way nor engage in multiple sessions to newly generate ourselves as the deity. Rather it is sufficient to generate ourselves as the deity once and maintain that visualization throughout the entire day.

Therefore *Mantric Stages* states:

You do not complete the stage of generation merely by reaching this point. You must complete the stage of generation first and then meditate on the stage of completion.[180](#)

There are three phases of the practice of the generation stage: (1) initially establishing the fully qualified stage of generation, then (2) stabilizing that which has been established, and finally (3) completing that which has been stabilized. Here stability is defined as the ability to maintain calm abiding focusing on the maṇḍala and resident deities uninterruptedly for a period of four hours, without experiencing mental laxity or excitation. Such stability is accomplished by the practitioner consciously setting his intention to meditate for that period and then arising from calm abiding after four hours due to the force of

that initial intention. Completion is defined as the ability to maintain such meditation for a period of months or years, according to our wish. However, those on the third level who attain partial control over pristine wisdom have not yet completed the generation stage, far less the practice of completion.

4. Those attaining perfect control over pristine wisdom

It is said that some who attain partial control over pristine wisdom are on the completion stage while those who attain perfect control over pristine wisdom reside on the higher levels of the completion stage.

Those who attain partial control over pristine wisdom include advanced practitioners of the generation stage and practitioners of the early stages of the completion stage. Those who attain perfect control over pristine wisdom include practitioners of the advanced stages of completion.[181](#)

Abandoning ordinary appearance and conception

The specific objects to be abandoned on the generation stage are ordinary appearance and conception.

The *Guru Pūjā* states that the specific objects of abandonment of the generation stage, called *the first-stage yoga*, are the “stains of ordinary appearance and conception.” The pure appearance of divine objects counters the tendency for objects to *appear* as ordinary. Holding the pure appearance of divine objects counters the tendency to *conceive* objects as ordinary.[182](#)

The term *abandonment* is not applied here in the way it is to objects to be abandoned by the path of seeing or to afflictions that must be eliminated from the root and abandoned completely. Here the term *abandonment* indicates that we replace ordinary appearance with divine appearance, and we

replace the mind that conceives objects as ordinary with the mind that conceives objects as the pure aspect of the divine.[183](#)

Ordinary appearance is not the appearance of the environment and its inhabitants to sense awareness but rather the ordinary appearance of the environment and its inhabitants to mental awareness. The antidote to this ordinary appearance is the pure appearance of the supporting maṇḍala and supported deities. The antidote to the conception of objects as ordinary is meditating on the pride of the pure supported deity and its supporting maṇḍala.

At this point a distinction is made between what appears to and what is apprehended by either sense awareness or mental awareness. Ordinary appearance is not defined by what appears to a sensory awareness—eye consciousness, ear consciousness, and so on—but by what appears to ordinary mental awareness. Ordinary conception is not defined by what appears to mental awareness but by the way these images are apprehended by conception.

Moreover ordinary appearance consists of the environment, including the landscape, mountains, and so on, appearing as ordinary states to mental awareness, while the antidote countering ordinary appearance is the appearance of the environment as the maṇḍala of the celestial mansion of the deity established by pristine wisdom. Ordinary conception conceives the inhabitants of this environment, including ourselves, to be ordinary, while the antidote to that is conceiving the beings that inhabit the maṇḍala as pure. The ultimate justification for visualizing them as pure is that at the time of the result, the pristine wisdom realizing emptiness arises in the aspect of a deity.

There are two aspects to this practice: clear appearance and divine pride. *Clear appearance* refers to the clear appearance of divine attributes to our mental awareness. *Divine pride* is

not the affliction of pride but the thought identifying oneself as a deity that must be cultivated as the antidote to holding things to be ordinary.¹⁸⁴ It therefore takes the appearance of the divine being arising in our mind and identifies that appearance as ourself with the thought “I am this.”¹⁸⁵ That in brief is the antidote to conceiving objects as ordinary.

Further, it is stated that divine pride is the main practice and meditation on appearance is a secondary branch of it.

From these two aspects of deity yoga, the main practice that counters the conception of things as ordinary is the cultivation of divine pride. Clear appearance is considered a supportive condition for that.

How ordinary appearance is stopped

When equipoise in deity yoga is cultivated intently, other appearing objects do not affect eye awareness and so on, for it is said:

Consciousness that is attracted to something lacks the ability to apprehend other objects.¹⁸⁶

Here the author quotes the *Pramāṇavārttika* by Master Dharmakīrti. This passage explains that when mental awareness is attracted to a specific conceived object such as the appearance of the deity, sense awareness such as eye consciousness loses its ability to apprehend sensory objects, resulting in those objects appearing to but not being ascertained by sense awareness.

Thus, when mental awareness strongly engages its object, the capacity of the immediate condition¹⁸⁷ to generate eye awareness and so on degenerates. For a time [13a] sense awareness may not be generated, but the generation stage does not stop

appearance to sense awareness.

The author provides a clear explanation of this point. He indicates that due to strongly meditating on deity yoga in the generation stage, the function of sense awareness may temporarily decline, but it does not disappear since ordinary appearance may still arise for sense awareness occasionally. Thus meditation on deity yoga in the generation stage does not result in the complete annihilation of ordinary appearance to sense awareness.

Mantric Stages states:

Therefore, your purpose is accomplished when you obtain the capacity to stop ordinary appearance to mental awareness through causing exalted objects to appear. Though fuctional phenomena do not transform into deities, you accomplish your purpose when uncontrived divine pride is generated.[188](#)

The generation of exalted appearance is accomplished when we can stop ordinary appearance to our mental awareness, though not necessarily to our sense awareness. The crucial factor in stopping ordinary appearance is to rely on special or exalted appearance, namely the appearance of the pure aspect of the deities. This implies that the primary function of the generation stage is to suppress ordinary appearance and conception and not necessarily to transform ourselves into the deity. The term *fuctional phenomena* can equally apply to external things such as the surrounding environment as well as to internal things such the visualized deities, including oneself and other beings generated as deities. Although we have not really become divine, we still cultivate the uncontrived pride that identifies ourselves as the essence of wisdom realizing emptiness manifesting as a deity.

Analytical and placement meditation

When meditating on clear appearance from among

both clear appearance and divine pride, analytical meditation predominates since you need to practice analysis by frequently visualizing the various aspects of the supported deities and the supporting maṇḍala. After establishing clarity on those aspects, you practice both since you must generate divine pride thinking: “I am actually this deity.”

The practice of clear appearance and divine pride involve both analytical and placement meditation. In the generation of clear appearance, analytical meditation is predominant, for when we cultivate clear appearance, we must become familiar with all the details of the maṇḍala. Such familiarity arises through repeatedly analyzing the celestial mansion and its resident deities. In this respect the protector Maitreya has said that anything can be mastered through repeated contemplation.

Once clear appearance is established, practitioners must then cultivate divine pride. When cultivating divine pride, placement meditation is predominant, for we need to focus on the clear appearance of the maṇḍala and resident deities and firmly establish the pride contemplating “I am this.” Since this process must be repeated for the various aspects of the maṇḍala, both placement and analytical meditation are required.

The importance of calm abiding and insight

Also it is said that clear appearance is generated without your needing to first establish calm abiding focused on it, it is generated even if you do not become familiar with each deity in stages, and it is generated without your needing to become familiar with the meaning of reality.

The author now discusses some finer points. First, we do not need to establish calm abiding that focuses on the divine palace and its resident deities before developing clear appearance. In other words, although we may obtain calm abiding before obtaining clear appearance, they need not be generated in this

order. Second, we may develop clear appearance even if we do not cultivate familiarity with each of the deities in stages. Although initially we may be able to hold some coarse aspects of the appearing maṇḍala, it is possible that clear appearance may arise when the mind's capacity to retain more detail increases. Third, although meditation on the meaning of reality, or emptiness, is necessary more generally, it is not the main practice when generating clear appearance.

Indeed the mere frequent cultivation of attention focused on these aspects generates clear appearance, but it does not secure its stable abidance. You must secure stable abidance of clear appearance to stop ordinary appearance and conception.

Practitioners who generate attention focused on the various aspects of the maṇḍala on a regular basis will, in time, generate clear appearance. Such regular generation of clear appearance, however, does not itself ensure the continuous and stable abidance of clear appearance. This indicates that the process of overcoming ordinary appearance and conception has two stages—generating clear appearance and then stabilizing it. In other words, you need to establish calm abiding to stabilize clear appearance.

In the Sūtra Vehicle calm abiding is established through serially progressing through the nine stages of mental placement. At first the mind cannot hold the focal object for long and there is no stable abidance, but through familiarity, the capacity to hold the focal object is strengthened, the period that the object is held is increased, and stable abidance is gradually attained. In sūtra also it is insufficient to merely generate clear appearance of the focal object; we must develop progressively higher levels of stability.

The yoga of the subtle drop

Calm abiding is definitely established in the generation stage and achieved through the yoga of

the subtle drop.

In highest yoga tantra, we must cultivate calm abiding in the generation stage. In the three lower tantras, we establish calm abiding in dependence on yoga with signs.

In sūtra-level practice, before developing calm abiding, we first identify which of the three afflictions—attachment, hatred, or delusion—dominates our mind and then apply the appropriate antidote to counter it. Unless we reduce the potency of the dominant affliction when first developing calm abiding, it will disrupt our practice. Therefore we must apply the appropriate antidote, whether one affliction is dominant or all three root afflictions are equally strong.

Having first reduced the influence of manifest afflictions, we then choose a focal object. First the object's size is important. Although a large focal object may seem easier to visualize in the beginning, it may prove difficult to reduce later. Conversely, an overly small focal object may be difficult to hold in the beginning. The size of the focal object is ultimately determined by the constitution and predisposition of the individual practitioner, but as a general rule, it is said we should begin with one about four finger-widths in height. The process is similar to that of a thangka painter who must decide the size of the main figure in his painting in relation to the dimensions of the surrounding landscape. If we keep changing the size of our focal object at the outset, the mind cannot achieve stable abidance.

Once the mind has attained stability on that object, the size of the focal object may be reduced. The process of reducing the size of the focal object is mentioned in sūtra, but it is emphasized in tantra. Stability may be attained on a coarse focal object, but actual calm abiding is cultivated on a much smaller and finer focal object during the phase of the subtle drop.

Meditations involving the subtle drop and their purpose

Beginners and those attaining some pristine

wisdom hold the mind on a subtle hand symbol or drop at the upper and lower opening. Those who have attained partial control over pristine wisdom and above meditate on the complete supporting maṇḍala and supported deities inside a hand symbol or subtle drop.

The yoga of the subtle drop involves meditation on a drop the size of a mustard seed placed either at the upper or lower opening of the central channel. The drop contains within it the complete celestial mansion and its resident deities in their correct proportions. Since this visualization is an advanced practice, it is only found on higher levels of the generation stage, and it is not practiced by those on the first two levels—beginners and those attaining some pristine wisdom. This passage implies that while calm abiding may be achieved by focusing on a coarse focal object in sūtra, tantric practitioners on the third and fourth levels of the generation stage and the completion stage must adopt a subtle focal object to achieve calm abiding.

Further, those on the first two levels mainly engage in meditation on the subtle drop for the purpose of countering mental laxity and excitation in realization meditation.[189](#)

The yoga of meditating on a subtle drop also exists on the first two levels of the generation stage, namely for beginners and those who attain some pristine wisdom, but it is engaged to counter the mental laxity and excitation that must be eliminated in order to attain calm abiding.

It is said that establishing the stabilization of mind contracted to a subtle drop is achieved from [13b] the third level.

One on the third level of the generation stage who has attained partial control over pristine wisdom is able to maintain stable focus on the supporting maṇḍala and supported deities existing

within a subtle drop.[190](#)

Calm abiding is not established on the level of beginners. However, when they forcefully hold the mind on subtle letters, subtle drops, and so on at the upper or lower openings, the navel, or heart, this acts as a condition for the winds to gradually gather internally due to sustained meditation on the focal basis.

Beginners do not obtain calm abiding, but in order to establish calm abiding they practice yoga focusing on a syllable or drop in the cakras at the upper and lower openings of the central channel, at the navel, or at the heart. This technique is a means for establishing calm abiding that is unique to tantra and not found in sūtra. Further, it utilizes the principle that wherever the mind focuses, the winds that support that mind also gather because the mind and its supportive winds move together. Moreover, once coarser levels of wind that support coarser levels of mind have subsided, a subtler mind that is supported by subtle wind is able to robustly hold the subtle drop at specific sites in the body. Such meditation has the potency to cause the winds to abide internally.[191](#)

A unique method for developing concentration

Though the focal objects of analytical meditation are numerous or conflated, this system of establishing concentration is different from that explained in the Perfection Vehicle and the lower classes of tantra. In this system you can quickly stop mental excitation when meditating on the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala and so on due to progressively taming the winds.

Highest yoga tantra employs the technique of inducing the winds to abide internally in order to prevent excitation when meditating on the many focal objects of the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala and so on. This method is not found in the Perfection

Vehicle or the three lower tantras. Such practices are based on the presentation of three levels of wind and mind found in highest yoga tantra: coarse wind-mind, subtle wind-mind, and extremely subtle wind-mind. In the generation stage, practitioners utilize subtle levels of wind-mind in order to perfect concentration by taming the winds. In the completion stage, practitioners incorporate the extremely subtle wind-mind in their practice since the extremely subtle wind acts as the substantial cause of the form body of Buddha Vajradhara, and the extremely subtle mind acts as the substantial cause of the dharma body of Buddha Vajradhara.

There are five types of fundamental wind: (1) the life-sustaining wind, (2) the equally abiding wind, (3) the ascending wind, (4) the downward-voiding wind, and (5) the pervading wind. The fundamental life-sustaining wind possesses coarser and subtler aspects. The subtler aspect has existed from beginningless time as we have coursed through saṃsāra, and it will continue until we reach buddhahood, for it acts as the substantial cause of the form bodies of a buddha. In particular the extremely subtle life-sustaining wind has an array of five colors that gives rise to a buddha's emanation body and a resonant tone that gives rise to a buddha's enjoyment body. Associated with the extremely subtle life-sustaining wind is the extremely subtle mind—by nature pristine wisdom realizing emptiness—which establishes a buddha's dharma body. The emptiness of the five colors, the resonant tone, and pristine wisdom establishes a buddha's nature body.

In Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Path*, we find an exhaustive presentation of the method establishing calm abiding and insight in the context of sūtra. Yet, a presentation of the *simultaneous* attainment of these two is not to be found anywhere in the Sūtra Vehicle or in the lower classes of tantra, as far as I am aware. It is a unique feature of highest yoga tantra—and the deeper meaning of the assertion in the root text—that this method for developing concentration is different from any other.^{[192](#)}

Though you attain actual calm abiding in the Perfection Vehicle and the lower tantras, it is said that the component of stability declines if analysis is applied too strongly. However, even before obtaining calm abiding in this system, you can attain stable abidance when analytical meditation cultivates and integrates numerous objects.

The point is further clarified here by stressing the unique characteristics and potency of the extremely subtle wind and mind.

The range of the coarse and subtle generation stage

It is said that the coarse generation stage is completed when you reach the third level, and meditation on the subtle generation stage occurs after attaining mental stability through contracting the maṇḍala in drop yoga. It is said that calm abiding is obtained when you attain stability on the subtle drop at the upper opening.

We complete the coarse generation stage when we have fully trained in the levels of a beginner and attain some pristine wisdom. We begin the subtle generation stage when we enter the level of partial control over pristine wisdom and engage in meditation on the subtle drop. We establish calm abiding when stability is attained by focusing on the subtle drop at the opening of the central channel between the eyebrows.

Then you attain the peerless concentration uniting calm abiding and insight through the wisdom of individual investigation repeatedly emitting and reabsorbing its object, and the generation stage is completed when such yoga stabilizes. *Mantric Stages* states that this presentation conforms with both systems of Guhyasamāja.

After attaining calm abiding, we then attain the union of calm abiding and insight. The generation stage is completed when

this realization achieves stability in accordance with the two traditions of the Guhyasamāja mentioned in *Mantric Stages*. The first is the tradition of Ārya Nāgārjuna that asserts thirty-two deities, with Akṣobhya as the main deity from among the six buddha lineages, and the second is the tradition of Ācārya Jñānapāda that asserts nineteen deities, with Mañjuśrī as the main deity.

Points of debate

When is calm abiding attained?

One scholar says: Calm abiding is attained when you complete the subtle generation stage.

Reply: But this statement does not teach when it is newly obtained. Understand the method of obtaining stability and the point of completion of the coarse and subtle generation stages through such training by consulting the *Principles of Grounds and Paths* of my guru, Yangchen Gawai Lodrö.

There are three levels in each of the coarse and subtle phases of the generation stage—initial attainment, obtainment of stability, and final completion.^{[193](#)} Although this text does not clearly explain when these levels are obtained, this information may be found in *Ford of the Fortunate*, Yangchen Gawai Lodrö's work on the grounds and paths of Guhyasamāja tantra.^{[194](#)} Gawai Lodrö was also called Akya Yongzin since he was the tutor of Akya Rinpoché in Kumbum Monastery.

This explanation of obtaining stability [14a] and the point of completion are formulated in accordance with Pañchen Chögyen's clear presentation of Khedrup Rinpoché's thought.

The source of Gawai Lodrö's presentation is the writings of Khedrup Rinpoché, and most probably *General Classes of Tantra*. The thought of Khedrup Rinpoché is then clarified by Pañchen Lama Chökyi Gyaltsen. Gawai Lodrö, Pañchen

Chögyen, and Khedrup Rinpoché all state that there are three distinct levels to the coarse and subtle generation stage—initial attainment, obtaining stability, and final completion. However, these three levels remain contentious because other important authors do not posit them.

Still, there is a basis for further analysis because *Mantric Stages* states:

Both systems of Guhyasamāja posit that you complete the generation stage when you attain stability in such yoga.[195](#)

And *Illuminating Lamp* states:

Beginner’s concentration is the yoga of the first stage, and abiding in that is stabilizing that or completing that.[196](#)

Also *Analysis of the Four Interrelated Commentaries* states just that. However, except for these explanations, it does not appear that the terms *stability* and *completion* are clearly differentiated.

In the works of Jé Rinpoché, the terms *stability* and *completion* seem to be used interchangeably.

Is meditation on emptiness required during the three concentrations?

Here one says: It follows that the three concentrations, such as the concentration of initial application and so on, do not need to cultivate emptiness because the method of meditating on the appearance of the deity circle is explained as the main practice in the initial stages, apart from a few exceptions such as purification through pristine wisdom, or special resolution subsumed within clear light.

The three types of concentration discussed here are (1) the concentration of initial application, (2) the concentration of the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala, and (3) the concentration of the supreme-conqueror activities. The argument raised is that practitioners who cultivate them do not need to meditate on emptiness because in general the main practice on this level involves cultivating the clear appearance of the deities. Cases such as training in pristine wisdom or training in the special resolution, which are subsumed within clear light, are exceptions, for they are instances of meditation on emptiness.

Reply: That is not logically necessary because in the context of the three concentrations, the clear, profound, nondual yoga that ascertains the meaning of non-inherent existence by taking the deities as its focal object must be cultivated.

The author replies that although practitioners may focus on the clear appearance of the deities, this does not mean that they do not meditate on emptiness. As such what *appears* to their concentration is the appearance of the deity's form, while what is *ascertained* by their concentration is the non-inherent existence of these deities. In the words of the author we cultivate "clear, profound, nondual yoga" where *clear* refers the clear appearance of the focal object—the maṇḍala and resident deities—while *profound* refers the emptiness of the maṇḍala. The author further quotes a passage from *Mantric Stages* to support his answer.

***Mantric Stages* states:**

Śrīdhānyavajra¹⁹⁷ explained that in general the three concentrations function as minds possessing the aspect of the deity circle and also as yogas engaging the reality of selflessness; this was also the opinion of Jñānapāda.¹⁹⁸

Thus all three types of concentration combine two types of

yoga: (1) a mind possessing the appearance of deity maṇḍala along with (2) the pristine wisdom of selflessness. The Indian master Śrīdhānyavajra and the Tibetan master Jñānapāda are both well-known proponents of this view.

Indeed in the first stage you mainly meditate on the appearance of the deity circle, yet you train in everything arising as an illusion through powerfully ascertaining the non-inherent existence of all dharmas. Thus after meditating on the deity circle, [14b] the mind takes the deities as its focal object and ascertains non-inherent existence as its aspect. Such profound, clear, nondual yoga or realization meditation engages emptiness as its ascertained apprehended object while accessing its apprehended aspect,¹⁹⁹ namely the appearance of the supporting maṇḍala and supported deities.

The main practice in the generation stage is visualization of the deity circle; meditation on emptiness is secondary. In the completion stage this order is reversed. In other words the appearing image²⁰⁰ is dominant in the generation stage while the ascertained image²⁰¹ is dominant in the completion stage. Meditation on the appearing image engages the relative truth of the maṇḍala deities, and meditation on the ascertained image engages the ultimate truth of the deities; these two images are cultivated together. This is extensively explained in the *Mantric Stages*.

Why is yoga realizing emptiness superior in tantra?

The profound, clear, nondual yoga in the continuum of a practitioner of the generation stage and the yoga without signs of the lower tantras are more powerful than the path realizing emptiness in the Perfection Vehicle because in tantra method and wisdom are one in nature.

The lower tantras discuss *nondual pristine wisdom of the clear and profound* while highest yoga tantra talks about *nondual pristine wisdom of bliss and emptiness*. This is not merely a difference in the terms. In the lower tantras, *clear* refers to the appearing image—the celestial mansion and its resident deities—that appears clearly to nondual yoga, while *profound* refers to the ascertained image—the profound emptiness of the maṇḍala and its resident deities—that is comprehended by that nondual pristine wisdom. In highest yoga tantra, however, the term *bliss and emptiness* refers to the method of great bliss induced by love and compassion, which acts as an “object-possessor”—that is, a subject—ascertaining emptiness.

The author explains that such nondual yoga in the mind of someone practicing either the generation stage of highest yoga tantra or the yoga without signs of the lower tantras is stronger than the path realizing emptiness in the Perfection Vehicle. This superiority is because, in tantra, method and wisdom have the same essential nature. The author then supports this assertion by quoting the Khedrup Jé’s *Ocean of Siddhis of the Generation Stage of Guhyasamāja*.

The *Ocean of Siddhis of the Generation Stage* states:

The mind that focuses on the maṇḍala circle and meditates on its non-inherent existence generates both the accumulation of merit (by means of focusing on the maṇḍala circle) and the accumulation of pristine wisdom (by means of apprehending its non-inherent existence).[202](#)

There are two maṇḍala circles, namely (1) the circle of the supported deities of the maṇḍala and (2) the circle of the celestial mansion supporting these deities, and we focus on either of these circles and amass the two types of accumulation. The phrase “by means of” appears twice in this passage and indicates that different parts of the mind perform

these two functions of accumulating merit and pristine wisdom. Merit is amassed through engaging the appearing image—either circle. Pristine wisdom is amassed through engaging the ascertained or apprehended object—their emptiness.

And:

The mind ascertaining non-inherent existence through taking the deity circle as its focal object is one hundred times more powerful as an antidote to grasping at true existence than the mind ascertaining the non-true existence of, say, a sprout. [203](#)

This statement refers to a mind practicing the generation stage of highest yoga tantra, which focuses on the maṇḍala circle, but it can equally be applied to a mind practicing yoga without signs in the three lower tantras. Moreover tantric yogas on the emptiness of the maṇḍala circle are said to be far more effective antidotes to grasping at true existence than the contemplations described in sūtra-level texts on the emptiness of other objects, such as sprouts. This is because the particular focal objects adopted in tantra permit practitioners to simultaneously establish the two types of accumulation—merit is accumulated through the focal object, pristine wisdom through the ascertained object. The mind that simultaneously establishes both accumulations is a strong antidote to grasping at true existence.

Meditation on the deity circle and meditation on its emptiness both contribute to overcoming grasping at true existence. When we establish ourself as the central deity within the deity circle, we meditate on the various cakras within our divine body; due to that focus, the winds also proceed to our cakras, and such practices gradually purify our winds and mind. Meditating in this way eventually establishes the twin bodies of a buddha, the form body and the dharma body. Meditation on the emptiness of a sprout does not have such power.

The etymology of the generation stage, its method of cultivation, the attributes of its different deities, and each mahāsiddha's distinct manner of explaining them should be understood from *Mantric Stages* alone, since they are not clearly explained in other texts.

Various scholars have sought to explain different issues related to the generation stage, such as its etymology, its different levels, the way we should meditate on its different deities, and so on, but their explanations do not compare to Jé Rinpoché's *Mantric Stages*. *Mantric Stages* presents an explanation of the etymology of *contrived yoga* and *uncontrived yoga* of the generation and completion stages that surpasses the writings of others, for example. This is true for many other issues as well. Thus we should rely on *Mantric Stages* as the foremost authority on these topics.

SIX

The Completion Stage

How to meditate on the completion stage

This has two parts:

- 1. Explaining some classifications of the completion stage of the Ārya system**
- 2. Teaching in brief the completion stage of other highest yoga tantras**

Now Ngawang Palden presents the completion stage, [204](#) which has five levels according to the Guhyasamāja system of Ārya Nāgārjuna. There is no significant difference in the presentation of the completion stage between the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja and other mainstream tantras, but their terminology is often different. The Kālacakra tantra, which does have significant differences, is presented in a separate section.

Explaining some classifications of the completion stage of the Ārya system

The first has two sections:

- 1. Analyzing the definition**
- 2. The meaning of each classification**

The author first presents the definitions, but I think it will be easier to begin by first enumerating the five levels of the completion stage. The *Guru Pūjā* succinctly discusses the generation and completion stages, and we have already examined verse 110, which deals with the generation stage. The presentation of the completion stage in verse 111 lists the last three levels of the five levels of the completion stage

explicitly but not the first two:

Bless us to manifest in this life the path
of the union of clear light and the illusory body
that arises when you, our protector, place your feet
at the center of the central channel within the eight
petals of our hearts.

This passage explicitly states the third stage (the illusory body), the fourth stage (clear light), and the fifth stage (the union of both), though they are listed in reverse order. The two stages not mentioned are *vajra recitation* and *observing the mind*. Könchok Tsültrim in his *Cloud of White Lotus Offerings* lists all five stages in the order they are practiced:

The five stages are vajra recitation, observing the mind, illusory body, clear light, and union. [205](#)

In the completion stage, we need to practice physical isolation, verbal isolation, and mental isolation; these are also called the stages of vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind. Within the five stages, physical and verbal isolation occur during the stage of vajra recitation, and mental isolation occurs in the stage of observing the mind. The way we practice observing the mind is mentioned in the last two lines of the *Guru Pūjā* verse above. We visualize the cakṛa at our heart with eight petals, at the center of which is the central channel, and at whose center is the extremely subtle wind-mind. We contemplate that this mind abides indivisibly from the pristine wisdom of our root teacher in the aspect of the deity, who is at the very center of our heart cakṛa.

Jé Rinpoché states in *Mantric Stages* that there is (1) the completion stage of the nature of the physical-isolation vajra body, (2) the completion stage of the nature of the verbal-isolation vajra speech, and (3) the completion stage of the nature of the mental-isolation vajra mind. Further there is the completion stage of the nature of the two truths, namely (4) the completion stage of the relative-truth illusory body and (5) the completion stage of the ultimate-truth clear light. Finally there

is (6) the completion stage of the union of the two truths. The present text also follows the presentation of the completion stage in six levels.[206](#)

The specific bases that are purified in highest yoga tantra

Both the Perfection Vehicle and the Tantric Vehicle assert three essential phases of practice: basis, path, and result. The common basis of both sūtra and tantra are the two levels of truth. The common path of both sūtra and tantra is the combination of method and wisdom. The common result of both sūtra and tantra is the two resultant bodies—the form body and dharma body.

Highest yoga tantra also has a basis unique to tantra. Although in general *basis* may refer to relative truth such as the illusory body or ultimate truth such as clear light, this is not what is meant here. Rather the term refers to the subtle wind and mind and the presentation of the channels and cakras.[207](#) From among the many thousands of channels in the human body, the central, right, and left channels are the three root channels, from which all remaining channels branch. The channel wheels, or cakras, form at points where the main channels cross. Similarly, though various winds circulate through the channels, the winds coursing through the central, right, and left channels are most important.

As mentioned previously, there are three levels of wind-mind: coarse, subtle, and extremely subtle. Each level has specific instances. (1) The coarse wind is found within the human body, which is called the *body of the elements* since it is composed of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. A practitioner of the completion stage must purify the body of the elements.[208](#) The coarse mind is the five types of awareness arising via the five gateways of sense perception—eye awareness, ear awareness, nose awareness, taste awareness, and tactile awareness.[209](#) (2) The subtle body is the entire network of larger and smaller channels along with their winds and white and red drops that exist within the basis of the

coarse body.²¹⁰ The subtle mind is the mental awareness and its retinue of eighty natural conceptions that are present during the experience of white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment.²¹¹ (3) The extremely subtle wind refers to winds that act as the mount of the four empties.²¹² The extremely subtle mind²¹³ is the mind that is one in nature with the extremely subtle wind.

Analyzing the definition

Paṇchen Chögyen states that the definition of the completion stage is “the yoga in the mental continuum of a learner derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to meditation.”²¹⁴ [15a] But I think this definition refers to the general completion stage of highest yoga tantra.

The author made a similar point when presenting the definition of the generation stage posited by Paṇchen Chögyen. Such definitions apply in general to highest yoga tantras such as the two systems of Guhyasamāja, but they cannot be applied to all highest yoga tantras, and in particular they cannot be applied to the completion stage of Kālacakra.

It is not logically necessary that completion stage yogas are derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel, because in the Kālacakra system both individual withdrawal and absorption precede the winds entering the central channel.

Individual withdrawal and absorption are meant to cause the winds to enter the central channel, a process that occurs naturally at the time of death. In the death process, first the coarse wind-mind dissolves, meaning the four elements weaken and coarse sense awareness supported by them subsides. Then the subtle wind-mind dissolves and the inner visions of white

appearance, red increase, and so on appear. Then the extremely subtle wind-mind manifests, enters the bardo, and takes a new rebirth through the force of karma and afflictions.

In the completion stage we strive to make the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel through the power of meditation, in a way similar to how they dissolve in natural death, so that what finally remains is just the extremely subtle wind that is the mount of the extremely subtle mind. When the extremely subtle mind becomes manifest, it has the power to comprehend emptiness if it is made to engage emptiness, and such realization eliminates the two types of obscuration and generates the two resultant bodies.

The author concludes that this definition does not apply to Kālacakra tantra, for the winds do not enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel during the practice of individual withdrawal and absorption, for in Kālacakra these two practices necessarily precede these three phases. A further distinction is that the mainstream tantras assert that the completion stage possesses five levels while Kālacakra asserts six levels. However, the six levels of Kālacakra are subsumed by the five levels of the completion stage of the Guhyasamāja tantra.²¹⁵ In Tibetan these six levels are often listed in three pairs.²¹⁶

Some debate on the definition of the completion stage

One says: It follows that it is not logically necessary that yoga in the mental continuum of a learner derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to meditation constitutes completion-stage practice.

The author has already shown that completion-stage practices are not necessarily derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel because individual withdrawal and absorption in Kālacakra do not follow this sequence. On this basis an opponent denies that a yoga derived

from the winds entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central channel is necessarily a completion-stage practice. He then posits reasons for this:

This is because a generation-stage practice with such qualities exists. For yogas with such qualities exist in the mental continua of practitioners of the generation stage because the four joys derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel exist in their mental continua.

Reply: That is not logically necessary.

Just because the four joys exist in the mental continuum of a practitioner of the generation stage does not make them generation-stage practices, says the author.

The reason is established because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

One who has completed the subtle generation stage might possibly cause the winds to enter the central channel (*avadhūtī*). And, through knowledge of the technique of converting union with an external consort into vitality exertion, he may generate the four joys through dissolving the winds in the central channel in dependence on that. However, if these two do occur during the generation stage, they must nonetheless be posited as paths of the completion stage. As the *Oral Transmission* explains, such innate states that arise during the empowerment before meditating on the path are included in the completion stage.^{[217](#)}

One who is still on the generation stage may experience entry of the winds in the central channel, giving rise to the four joys, but such an experience is still considered part of the completion stage. This passage also indicates that such experience is rare; it may occur in some individuals, but it is

certainly not common. The experience of the four joys may arise at the end of the generation stage due to the constitution of a practitioner who possesses a unique arrangement of channels or elements or who experiences the joys by relying on an external consort. Still, according to *Illuminating Lamp*, the practitioner belongs to the generation stage while his experience belongs to the completion stage. It is even possible that one who has not yet entered the path may experience the four joys through the winds dissolving in the central channel when receiving empowerment. I think the *Oral Transmission* referred to here is a text by Jñānapāda on the completion stage of Guhyasamāja.

Your assertion is unacceptable because, though the path derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel exists in the mental continuum of one on the generation stage, it arises due to completing the generation stage and through union with an external consort. However, he does not transfer to the completion stage, since this path does not arise due to meditating on the special method of penetrating vital points in the body.

The author does not argue that such paths do not occur in the generation stage, but he seeks to distinguish the means by which the winds are caused to dissolve in the central channel. In this instance one on the generation stage may cause the winds to dissolve through relying on a consort and through completing the generation stage. If, however, we are asked whether such paths in the mental continuum of a practitioner on the generation stage were the completion stage, then we must answer that they are not the completion stage, for this would contradict the definition of the completion stage that affirms that the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to meditation. Care must be taken when addressing this issue, for such paths may be said to be completion-stage paths while the individual experiencing them

has not yet transferred to the completion stage. This issue is not completely settled so the debate continues:

One says: Take such a path; [15b] it follows it belongs to the completion stage because the previously quoted text states that it is a completion-stage path.

Reply: Though it is a realization typical of the completion stage, it is said to be either (1) a path that belongs to neither the generation nor the completion stage or (2) a completion-stage path existing in the mental continuum of one on the generation stage. This should be analyzed.

The author responds to this assertion by stating that such paths do not belong to the completion stage but are instead paths that are realizations typical of the completion stage. He suggests two ways of interpreting them. First we may hold them to be paths that are neither the generation stage nor the completion stage. Alternately we may hold them to be a completion-stage path existing in the mindstream of a practitioner of the generation stage. This issue is not settled easily and requires careful analysis, especially if we need to respond to questions on this issue.

The meaning of each classification

This has two parts:

- 1. The enumeration and definitive order of the five levels**
- 2. The meaning of each**

This part of the text establishes that there are five levels in the completion stage and that these levels include all the practices of the completion stage. Moreover we do not require more levels of practice to attain enlightenment, and we cannot attain enlightenment with fewer. Their order is definite since the later levels rely on earlier levels of practice for their manifestation.

(1) The first level is vajra recitation, and this includes physical

and verbal isolation. (2) The second level is observing the mind and includes mental isolation. (3) The third level is the illusory body and includes two phases, namely the impure and the pure illusory bodies. (4) The fourth level is clear light and includes three phases, namely semblant clear light, actual clear light, and clear light of the final continuum. The term *final continuum* refers to the last moment in the continuum of a sentient being before the first moment of buddhahood. (5) The fifth level is union and includes two phases, namely the union of a learner and the union of a non-learner.

The enumeration and definitive order of the five levels

First you require common and uncommon paths to establish the final goal, but you do not require other paths not included here.

The ultimate object of attainment is the state of Buddha Vajradhara. In order to achieve this, we must rely on certain common and uncommon paths.

To establish non-learner's union as explained in the general highest yoga tantras, you must first establish learner's union combining both the actual clear light and pure illusory body.

Non-learner's union is the state of Buddha Vajradhara, and prior to attaining this we must establish learner's union. This is the union of actual clear light—from either semblant or actual clear light—and the pure illusory body—from either the impure or pure illusory body.

To establish learner's union you must first establish the pure illusory body, because if the pure illusory body is not first established it is impossible to obtain such union.

In order to attain the learner's union of a pure illusory body and the actual clear light, we must first attain the pure illusory body. Therefore unless the pure illusory body has been

established, we cannot accomplish the learner's union. The learner's union also has two aspects: realization and abandonment.

To obtain mere union you do not need to first establish the pure illusory body because the pure illusory body and ordinary union are necessarily obtained simultaneously. To obtain the pure illusory body you must first establish the actual clear light because the pure illusory body is derived from its substantial cause, the extremely subtle fundamental wind that is the mount of actual clear light.

The obtainment of actual clear light necessarily precedes the pure illusory body. Actual clear light is a mind of pristine wisdom mounted on the extremely subtle fundamental wind that is one in nature with it. Since the fundamental wind that acts as the mount of actual clear light acts as the substantial cause of the pure illusory body, it must precede the establishment of the pure illusory body.

To obtain actual clear light you must first establish the accumulation of merit and wisdom for three countless eons or its equivalent, the illusory body of the third level.

The obtainment of actual clear light mounted on its fundamental wind must be preceded by the accumulation of merit and wisdom for three countless eons in accordance with the Perfection Vehicle. This period of accumulation may even extend up to twelve countless eons, depending on the capacity of the person. Alternately a practitioner may establish the impure illusory body that is equivalent to accumulating merit and wisdom for three to twelve countless eons. There are two types of illusory body, impure and pure. The impure illusory body arises first and is called the *illusory body of the third level*. The illusory body that arises after the third level is the pure illusory body.

Many of these levels are subdivided into two phases. Thus

from the two types of illusory body, the impure illusory body is attained first and the pure illusory body follows. Similarly, from the two types of clear light, semblant clear light is attained first and actual clear light follows. In terms of union, learner's union is attained first and non-learner's follows. Again within learner's union, learner's union of realization is attained first and then learner's union of abandonment follows.

For if either of those two are not first established, then the actual clear light that possesses the capacity to quickly exhaust the extremely subtle obscurations cannot manifest, and such obscurations cannot be abandoned by other paths.

It is only after the illusory body of the third level has been obtained that the actual clear light capable of quickly abandoning extremely subtle knowledge obscurations may manifest. A practitioner does not possess the capacity to abandon subtle obscurations prior to the attainment of the actual clear light.

To obtain the illusory body of the third level you must first establish actual mental isolation or an equivalent completion-stage practice.

Obtainment of the illusory body of the third level, or the impure illusory body, must be preceded by the final mental isolation that is by nature semblant clear light. This is also known as the *level of observing the mind*. Alternatively it must be preceded by a completion-stage practice equivalent to it.

For if due to such meditation on the completion stage, you do not first dissolve [16a] all karmic winds in the indestructible drop at the heart according to the stages of death, you cannot obtain an illusory body conforming precisely with the intermediate state.

At the time of ordinary death we experience entry, abidance, and dissolution of the winds in the central channel due to the power of karma and affliction. Although these experiences are

not the results of one's practice, they are still realizations typical of the completion stage. At the time of practicing the path and perfecting the completion stage, we cause the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind to dissolve due to the power of meditation. We thus experience the visions of white appearance, red increase, black near-attainment, and clear light that are similar to the visions that arise naturally at death. As we advance in our meditation we are able to cause the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the indestructible drop within the central channel.

To obtain actual mental isolation or an equivalent completion-stage practice you must first establish the completion-stage practice of verbal isolation that is a branch of vitality exertion called *vajra recitation* or an equivalent practice.

As mentioned, the latter paths manifest in dependence on earlier paths. Thus the illusory body is obtained after mental isolation, and mental isolation is obtained after verbal isolation. Verbal isolation has different levels, and the text specifies that actual mental isolation must be preceded by the stage of verbal isolation known as *vajra-recitation vitality exertion*.^{[218](#)} This is necessary because the aim of one's practice is to loosen and release the knots affecting the main channels.

In the presentation of the basis of purification in tantra there are four main cakras: the crown, throat, heart, and navel cakras. There are six if we include those of the forehead and secret place. The central channel passes through the center of these cakras, while the right and left channels constrict it by forming knots at points along its length. Channel knots are found in all of the cakras and are formed by the three main channels.

Some say that the right and left channels are coiled around the central channel and are intertwined like rope coiled to form knots. Others say that the channels are not intertwined but rather the right and left channels press against the walls of the central channel, reducing its diameter so that the free flow of

winds in the central channel is no longer possible.

It is said that for some individuals, the winds flow in the central channel for a few minutes after birth, but soon afterward this flow stops. For most people, however, the winds do not flow in the central channel during ordinary existence, and it is only at the time of death that the winds enter the central channel automatically due to the force of karma and affliction. Still here we are primarily concerned with yogic practices that cause the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel consciously, according to one's wish.

In general it is said that the winds flowing in the right channel—the channel through which mainly blood circulates—are associated with the sun. The winds flowing in the left channel—the channel through which mainly semen circulates—are associated with the moon. Due to this association, when a sun or moon eclipse occurs externally, the related channels are affected. During an eclipse the right or left channels that tightly restrict the central channel slightly relax, permitting a limited flow of wind in the central channel.

Practitioners are advised to intensify their practice on such days. A lunar eclipse typically coincides with the fifteenth day of the Tibetan calendar while a solar eclipse occurs on the twenty-ninth or the thirtieth day. It is said that due to the flow of wind in the central channel during a day of lunar eclipse, the merit of a single virtuous act is multiplied 100,000 times, while during a solar eclipse it is multiplied 700,000 times. Jé Rinpoché has commented that this phenomenon may occur in some individuals, but it is not a general experience. Therefore practitioners are advised to examine carefully the flow of their winds during the days of eclipse. If a practitioner is actually affected, he or she should be able to detect a change in his or her wind flow.

For you cannot generate actual mental isolation or an equivalent completion-stage practice without completely releasing the channel knots at the heart by such a completion-stage practice.

Our aim is to loosen the knots at the various sites along the central channel, but the channel knots at the heart are the most difficult to undo.²¹⁹ However, unless they are loosened by the yogas of verbal isolation, we will not be successful in generating actual mental isolation.

To completely loosen the channel knots at the heart through such yoga in easy steps, you must first establish actual physical isolation or a completion-stage practice of similar type.

Again the successful obtainment of verbal isolation must be preceded by physical isolation. As such the order of generation of the three isolations is to first establish physical isolation, then verbal isolation, then mental isolation.

For it is more difficult to loosen the channel knots at the heart than the other channel knots, and it is easier to gather the winds in other places than to gather them at the heart.

Even though the channel knots at the heart are more difficult to undo compared to the knots in other sites, once the knots formed by the right and left channels are loosened, the winds are able to gather in the central channel. A practitioner therefore causes the channel knots at the forehead, throat, navel, and secret place to loosen through the force of meditation permitting some flow of winds in the central channel. This also permits the extremely subtle mind to engage and comprehend emptiness, even if the channel knots at the heart are not yet released.

To fully generate such a completion-stage practice in your mental continuum, you must first cultivate the coarse and subtle generation stages in four daily sessions; for this definitely matures the mental continuum so that you may generate complete comprehension of the completion stage . .

.

The completion stage consists of five levels that must be generated in the prescribed order. This is preceded by the generation stage and the serial development of the coarse and subtle levels of generation. We first develop familiarity with the practices of the coarse generation stage in four daily sessions, and then we progress to the subtle level and then the completion stage. Although this text states that we must complete the generation stage before meditating on completion-stage practices, many past masters advise that we may meditate on the completion stage while still on the generation stage. But this does not mean that one on the generation stage is practicing both the generation and the completion stages at the same time; rather such a practitioner is establishing imprints of the completion stage while still perfecting the generation stage. Thus while we are advised to cultivate the generation stage in four daily sessions, we may dedicate the first three sessions to generation-stage practices while dedicating the fourth to becoming familiar with the completion stage.

. . . and you must obtain the pure empowerment in its entirety and properly protect the commitments and vows.

The foundation of all the practices of the generation and completion stages is the obtainment of the four types of empowerment and the protection of our vows and commitments.

To fulfill the definition of being a vessel protecting the commitments and vows, you must train in the stages of the shared path of the practices of the two bodhicittas and their branches.

The basis qualifying us to guard the vows and commitments taken at the time of the empowerment is both ultimate and relative bodhicitta. This is an important point that is emphasized during the empowerment ceremony. Again we become a qualified basis to hold the two types of bodhicitta by

properly training in the shared stages of sūtra practice that are subsumed in the three principal aspects of the path.

Practices that enhance, and such practices that are exemplified by external vitality exertion, are understood to be fixed in number for all paths, and fixed in their order.

With this statement the section of the text explaining the definitive number and order of practices that make up the completion stage is completed. The author has shown that the completion stage consists of five levels. More levels are not required, for these five include all the practices of the completion stage. Fewer levels are not feasible, for otherwise the entire range of practices necessary for attaining enlightenment would not be included. The order of the five levels is also fixed for one relies on earlier levels to generate the later levels.

Points of debate

Exceptions to this order in Kālacakra

Now the author introduces some debates about issues raised. The first issue deals with the nature of tantric union, the last of the five levels of the completion stage. It has two divisions, the union of a learner and the union of a non-learner. Here the union of a non-learner refers to the stage of Buddha Vajradhara.

One says: To obtain non-learner's union you must first obtain learner's union combining both the clear light and the illusory body because that is how it is explained in mainstream highest yoga tantras.

Reply: That is not logically necessary, [16b] but the reason is easily established.

It is not logically necessary that non-learner's union must be preceded by yoga combining the illusory body and clear light, though that is logically necessary for mainstream highest yoga tantras.

Your assertion is unacceptable because it is said that to obtain non-learner's union in the Kālacakra system you must first establish the branch of concentration combining both the body of empty form and immutable great bliss, and it is not said that you must first establish union combining both clear light and the illusory body.

Again an example from the practices of the Kālacakra tantra is given to disprove the assertion of the opponent. Although the terms *illusory body* and *clear light* are used in mainstream highest yoga tantras, they are not found in the Kālacakra system. Thus non-learner's union is not obtained in the Kālacakra system in dependence on a learner's union combining the illusory body and clear light. Rather it is obtained in dependence on a learner's union combining the body of empty form and immutable great bliss—the practice of the yoga of concentration, the sixth level of the completion stage of Kālacakra.

However, this debate is formulated as a subject of investigation for those with analytical wisdom, and it is not to be taken as a final position.

The author concludes that this debate is an aid to analysis and does not present a final position on the issue. If we attain the state of a non-learner through following Kālacakra tantra, we will obtain the union of the body of empty form and supreme, immutable bliss. Conversely if we attain the state of a non-learner through following the paths of other mainstream tantras, we will obtain the union of the illusory body and clear light. Thus we cannot hold that *union* solely refers to a combination of the illusory body and clear light as a final position in this debate. Such debates are raised to develop and sharpen our analytical skills.

Practitioners who are not of definite tantric lineage

One says: It would follow that to obtain the actual

clear light you must first obtain the impure illusory body because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

A person who perceptually engages clear light must have previously generated the illusory body.[220](#)

Reply: That is not logically necessary because this is explained as the way those of definite highest yoga tantra lineage progress on the path.

“Those of definite highest yoga tantra lineage” are practitioners who do not enter other vehicles or classes of tantra before entering the tantric path of accumulation of highest yoga tantra. If we are such a practitioner, we will necessarily first obtain the illusory body and then the actual clear light. But those who are not of definite highest yoga tantra lineage will not necessarily obtain the illusory body before obtaining clear light.

Your assertion is unacceptable because that being belonging to the same mental continuum as our Master did not first establish the impure illusory body before obtaining the actual clear light. As *Illuminating Lamp* states:

Those who are conferred the last two empowerments without being previously conferred the vase and the secret empowerment, and those who generate the last two levels without having previously generated the illusory body of the third level and below, should be understood as exceptions.[221](#)

Here “exceptions” refers to those who do not enter the tantric path of accumulation from the very beginning of their path. An example of such a being is Buddha Śākyamuni, who entered the tantric path in the end of his final existence as a sentient being. Although he attained enlightenment by relying on the

tantric path, he is not a person of definite tantric lineage. This passage from *Illuminating Lamp* also indicates that when Prince Siddhārtha entered the tantric path, he did not need to receive the first two empowerments—the vase and secret initiations—but was bestowed just the last two empowerments—the pristine wisdom and word initiations. Moreover he did not need to train in the practices of the generation stage nor the first three levels of the completion stage. But such cases should be recognized as rare.

These two debates establish exceptions to the standard presentation of the order of the levels. The first exception is that of practitioners of Kālacakra tantra who attain a non-learner union that does not combine the illusory body and clear light. The second exception is that of beings, such as Śākyamuni, who obtain the actual clear light without previously obtaining the impure illusory body.

Practitioners of mother tantras

One says: To obtain the impure illusory body, you must first establish mental isolation because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

The wind and mind that are the basis for establishing any such illusory body . . . are the mind generating the three types of pristine wisdom of mental isolation and the wind that is its mount. Therefore mental isolation must precede the illusory body.[222](#)

Reply: That is not logically necessary because the statement that mental isolation must precede the illusory body and that vajra-recitation verbal isolation[223](#) **must precede mental isolation is [17a] made from the perspective of how a disciple of Guhyasamāja tantra in particular progresses on the path.**

It is clear from the answer given by the author that the

requisite order of the levels of the path that has been explained so far reflects the sequence of practices in Guhyasamāja tantra.

It does not necessarily describe the way disciples of mother tantra progress on the path. For, as *Illuminating Lamp* states:

The yoga of caṇḍālī is an alternative to the winds of vajra recitation inducing mental isolation. The four joys, which are great bliss derived from the winds penetrating and dissolving in the central channel dependent on cultivating caṇḍālī, are an alternative to mental isolation. These two occur in Yoginī tantra.[224](#)

The author now makes a distinction between the practices of father tantras such as Guhyasamāja and mother tantras such as Vajrayoginī and their different presentations of the five levels. The descriptions of the five levels in Guhyasamāja tantra do not necessarily apply to the mother tantras. The author also quotes a passage from Jé Rinpoché's *Illuminating Lamp* that introduces the terms *caṇḍālī* and *four joys*, which describe alternate levels of practice in mother tantra. The practice of caṇḍālī—sometimes referred to as “inner heat” or by the Tibetan word *tumo*—can loosen cakra knots, induce movement of the winds above and below the heart, generate heat, initiate the melting of substances, induce bliss through their descent, and cause the subtle mind to engage emptiness.

An alternative to practices inducing mental isolation, caṇḍālī may be likened to electricity. Just as electricity can be used for heating or cooling, material construction or deconstruction, so too caṇḍālī can be used for heating the body, but here it is used for meditation on emptiness.

How paths of various tantras relate to each other

Therefore when Yangchen Galo states in his *Principles of Grounds and Paths* that other highest

yoga tantra paths are subsumed in nature within the five levels of Guhyasamāja, he does not state they actually are those levels. He meant only that they are subsumed through serving a similar function.

Yangchen Gawai Lodrö states in his *Ford of the Fortunate* that the paths of tantras other than the Guhyasamāja are subsumed within the five stages of the Guhyasamāja due to their nature but not through actually being those levels. Therefore certain completion-stage paths of the mother tantras, or those of the Lūipa and Drilbupa systems of Heruka, or those of the Red, Black, and Terrifying Yamāntaka, and even some of the six practices of the completion stage of Kālacakra tantra, may be subsumed within the five levels of the Guhyasamāja completion stage, but only as possessing similar functions and thus serving as viable alternative practices.

SEVEN

Physical Isolation

The meaning of each of the six levels of the completion stage

When you classify the completion stage of the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja, there are said to be six levels: (1) physical isolation, (2) verbal isolation, (3) mental isolation, (4) illusory body, (5) clear light, and (6) union. This does not contradict saying there are five levels, or four levels, or six branches of application, since these are alternate classifications.

The text continues with the actual enumeration of the levels of the completion stage and its possible variations. The completion stage is described as the phase of the three isolations and the two truths. If the three types of isolation are enumerated individually, there are six levels in the completion stage. If physical isolation is combined with verbal isolation under the name *vajra recitation*, then the six levels are reduced to five. It is also possible to subsume the six yogas of the completion stage of Kālacakra tantra within these levels.

If the meaning of each is explained briefly, there are two parts:

- 1. Concentrations pertaining to the three isolations**
- 2. Concentrations pertaining to the two truths**

Concentrations pertaining to the three isolations

The first has three divisions:

- 1. Physical isolation that is concentration producing the vajra body**

2. **Verbal isolation that is concentration producing the vajra speech**
3. **Mental isolation that is concentration producing the vajra mind**

The completion-stage concentrations pertaining to the three isolations refers to concentrations producing the three vajras. We attain the vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind of the resultant state of Buddha Vajradhara through first meditating on corresponding causal states in the generation stage. Then, in order to arise as the divine body of Guhyasamāja with his consort, we must isolate—or separate—ourselves from the ordinary appearances and conceptions of our body. This is achieved by meditating on the emptiness of the ordinary body as it appears conventionally, and such yoga is called *physical isolation*.

Similarly, in order to obtain the vajra speech of the resultant state of Guhyasamāja, we must isolate, or separate, ourselves from the appearances and conceptions of our speech as ordinary by meditating on verbal isolation. Finally, to obtain the vajra mind of the resultant enlightened state we must isolate, or separate, ourselves from the appearances and conceptions of our mind as ordinary by practicing mental isolation. This explains the use of the term *isolation*.

Physical isolation that is concentration producing the vajra body

The nature of completion-stage physical isolation is “a completion-stage practice generated by a yogi who has completed the coarse and subtle levels of the generation stage of this system. It begins *from* the generation of pristine wisdom of the empties derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to meditating on the subtle drop at the lower opening. It extends *up to but not including* the generation of pristine wisdom derived from the dissolution of the upper

and lower winds [17b] in the central channel at the heart.”

The definition of physical isolation describes the thresholds of the practice from its generation to its conclusion. It begins when a yogi is capable of generating the pristine wisdom of the four empties through causing the winds to properly enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel through focusing on a drop at the lower opening.²²⁵ This location applies especially to Guhyasamāja tantra. Alternately, those who follow Heruka tantra focus on the navel, while those practicing Kālacakra tantra focus between the eyebrows. The differences in the practices should be seen not as contradictory but as reflecting the varying needs, predispositions, constitutions, and so on of different practitioners.

When the winds dissolve naturally in the central channel at the time of death, the minds of white appearance, red increase, black near-attainment, and clear light serially manifest. A practitioner of completion-stage yoga uses meditation to achieve this dissolution of winds and its resultant manifestation of the four empties. He or she utilizes the fact that each of the four minds is associated with its respective wind, that each instance of wind-mind is progressively more subtle than the former, and that these four in general are more subtle than the five sense awarenesses and their respective supportive winds. Then, due to meditation, the first empty appears when the mind of white appearance and its associated conceptions and winds dissolve, the second empty appears when the mind of red increase and its associated conceptions and winds dissolve, and so on.

This process continues until all four empties appear and the extremely subtle mind alone remains. Practitioners familiar with emptiness use this opportunity to meditate on emptiness. Physical isolation extends to the point of being able to cause the upper and lower winds to dissolve in the central channel at the level of the heart. But once this point is reached, the practitioner progresses to the level of verbal isolation.

Physical isolation is classified in two types:

- 1. Individual withdrawal in post-equipose, where all functional phenomena such as objects, sense faculties, and so forth appear as the manifestation of bliss and emptiness**
- 2. Absorption where the deities appear as the manifestation of bliss and emptiness**

There are two types of physical isolation, one that occurs during post-equipose when not engaged in meditation and one that occurs during equipose when engaged in meditation.

Although individual withdrawal [226](#) is listed as part of physical isolation, the term is used differently in the Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra systems. In the Guhyasamāja system each of the sense consciousnesses individually engages its respective object. Since the sense consciousnesses are drawn to their respective objects, it may be said that they withdraw there. Still each of these objects appears to be inherently existent to the sense consciousness that naturally engages it.

Individual withdrawal in post-equipose

In the first, individual withdrawal, everything that appears is sealed by the recollection of the bliss and emptiness of equipose.

During equipose, or meditation, we focus on the appearance of the maṇḍala and its resident deities and ascertain their emptiness. Due to having meditated in this way in equipose, we may later recall their emptiness in post-equipose, when not in meditation. Through such recollection, we are able to seal everything with bliss and emptiness.

For when you have completed the analysis of view, you know that emptiness is the essence of that object which is the empty basis, and that object is the representation of that emptiness. This knowledge is common to both sūtra and tantra.

It is important to note that such knowledge arises when the

analysis of the view has been completed. Prior to this the correct view may not manifest, and even if it does arise briefly, it lacks stability, and what first appears to be correct view may prove to be false after analysis. But when we have properly completed the analysis of view after repeated meditation, we establish fully qualified, stable, correct view within our mental continuum. At that time, emptiness is comprehended to be indivisible from the basis that is empty, and this empty basis is comprehended as a manifestation of emptiness.^{[227](#)} This is succinctly stated in the *Heart Sūtra*: “Form is empty, emptiness is form.” In this example “form” is a specific basis of emptiness, and the emptiness of form is the nature of form indivisible from that form. This presentation is common to both sūtra and tantra.

Here, due to your conviction that bliss and emptiness possess the same taste, objects are established by the power of conviction to be the appearance of bliss just as they are established as the appearance of emptiness.

It is important to emphasize that at this point everything depends on the power of our resolution and conviction. Although things do not actually appear as the manifestation of bliss and emptiness, still the meditator steadily and resolutely holds the thought “they are manifestations of bliss and emptiness.”^{[228](#)}

For when practicing the path of great bliss, it is imperative that whatever appears fans the flames of bliss, through the power of cultivating that conviction.

The author suggests that the reason for this is that for one who is familiar with this conviction, any appearance may serve to increase the experience of bliss. And this ability is absolutely necessary for those who train to take all appearances as a path of great bliss.

Absorption where the deities appear

Absorption has five types:

- 1. Investigation that meditates in a coarse way on the bodies of the deities, which are objects of indivisible bliss and emptiness**
- 2. Analysis that meditates on them in a detailed way**
- 3. Mental bliss concordant with [229](#) the pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness**
- 4. The bliss of pliancy concordant with that mind**
- 5. The concentration of single-pointed mind**

In general such information on absorption is found in the sūtra presentation of calm abiding. [230](#) *Absorption* by nature is the mental factor of concentration included within the fifty-one mental factors listed in Abhidharma. From the five types of absorption, *investigation* and *analysis* are two mental factors that assist in the development of concentration; *joy* and *bliss* are by nature feeling; while *single-pointed concentration* is the very nature of absorption itself.

Investigation that meditates in a coarse way

Here *investigation* is a type of meditation that focuses on the bodies of the deities and examines them in a coarse way. As such the deities are observed in a general manner without distinguishing their main and secondary limbs. [231](#)

Analysis that meditates in a detailed way

Analysis is a type of meditation that focuses on the bodies of the deities in greater detail. It observes the head, arms, and other limbs of the deities, as well as their postures, expressions, and so on. Thus it examines its focal object in more detail than investigation.

Mental bliss and the bliss of pliancy

Both *joy* and *bliss* are by nature the mental factor of feeling.

Although they are similar in being feeling, they occur in the retinue of, or accompany, different main minds. As such they constitute two types of bliss. The first type accompanies mental awareness and is called *joy*.²³² The second accompanies physical awareness and is called *bliss of pliancy*.²³³

Here *joy* specifically refers to the mental bliss that is concordant with the pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness. In other words by focusing on the deities and ascertaining their non-inherent existence, the pristine wisdom of emptiness that is indivisible with bliss manifests. The mental feeling of bliss that is concordant with that pristine wisdom is known as the feeling of joy that accompanies pristine wisdom. Mental joy and the bliss of pliancy are also associated with calm abiding, which arises after progressing through the nine stages of mental placement. Such joy that is concordant with the pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness is the mental joy that arises in the mind after the ninth mental placement has been achieved.

The progress of the mind through the nine stages of mental placement is also likened to an elephant being led along an ascending path by a monk holding a lasso in his left hand and an iron hook in his right. The elephant represents the mind, the lasso represents mindfulness, and the iron hook represents introspection. The taming of the elephant as it progresses along the path represents the taming of the mind as it progresses along the nine stages. The color of the elephant is black in the beginning when untamed, and this gradually changes to white when the monk is able to mount it. When the elephant is fully tamed the monk is depicted as flying, and this represents the attainment of the ninth mental placement when mental joy is experienced. Physical pliancy that is experienced as unprecedented physical bliss is induced due to the attainment of such mental joy and is present when the practitioner attains calm abiding.

Single-pointed concentration

When concentration is developed fully, we have complete control over the mind, and it is possible to remain single-pointed on our focal object effortlessly. This is the fifth type of absorption, known as *single-pointed concentration*.^{[234](#)}

The three states of individual withdrawal, investigation, and analysis are the physical isolation of post-equipose; the three states of joy, bliss, and concentration are the physical isolation of equipose meditating on the ultimate deity.

The author now refines the descriptions of physical isolation presented so far. Therefore (1) individual withdrawal plus (2–3) the first two of the five types of physical isolation are said to occur during post-equipose. The remaining three types of physical isolation—(4) joy, (5) the bliss of pliancy, and (6) concentration—occur during equipose. Since the first three occur during post-equipose they are classified as meditation on the relative deity, while the remaining three that occur during equipose are classified as meditation on the ultimate deity. Thus physical isolation is held to possess six different types.

The four lineages

Physical isolation is classified into:

- 1. The physical isolation of one hundred pure lineages**
- 2. The physical isolation of just five lineages**
- 3. The physical isolation of three secret lineages**
- 4. The physical isolation of one extremely secret lineage**

This fourfold classification indicates that physical isolation may be practiced with varying degrees of elaboration. Therefore those who desire to practice in a detailed way may practice the one hundred pure lineages, those who wish to abbreviate this practice may practice five lineages^{[235](#)} or three,^{[236](#)} and those who seek an extremely abbreviated practice may engage just a

single lineage.²³⁷ Conversely, those engaging in the extremely contracted practice of a single lineage may practice in a more elaborate way by expanding to three, five, or one hundred lineages.

Physical isolation of one hundred pure lineages

Firstly, the hundred lineages consist of the twenty coarse phenomena, namely (1-5) the five aggregates, (6-9) the four elements, (10-15) the six bases such as the eyes and so on, and (16-20) the five objects such as form, sound, and so on, which are differentiated into five aspects each and meditated on as (1-5) the five tathāgatas, (6-9) the four consorts, [18a] (10-15) the six bodhisattvas such as Kṣitigarbha and so on, and (16-20) the five goddesses such as Rūpavajrā and so forth, for each of the five lineages.

The practice of one hundred lineages relies on the twenty coarse phenomena : the five aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, formation, and consciousness; the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind; the six bases of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; and the five types of objects—forms, sounds, aromas, flavors, and tactile objects.

The twenty coarse phenomena also form part of a larger classification that includes the five types of pristine wisdom. The five types of pristine wisdom occur at the time of the basis, path, and result and are associated with the five aggregates. As such (1) mirror-like pristine wisdom is associated with the form aggregate. (2) The pristine wisdom of equality is associated with the feeling aggregate and equalizes or balances feelings that can instigate strong like or dislike. (3) The pristine wisdom of individual analysis is associated with the discrimination aggregate. It is discrimination that allows us to individually recognize and separate different entities. It is like the white canvas of a painter that clearly reveals all the strokes of color, blue, red, yellow, and so forth. The whiteness of the neutral

medium allows us to distinguish individual colors. (4) The pristine wisdom accomplishing activities is associated with the aggregate of formation. Finally (5) the pristine wisdom of the sphere of dharma is associated with the consciousness aggregate. In general awareness is classified as either main minds or mental factors and each possesses many levels of subtlety. But in this context consciousness refers to the main mind that comprehends the emptiness that pervades all phenomena. Such emptiness is considered to be the mother of all phenomena since all phenomena are manifestations of emptiness. However, this use of the term “mother” differs from how it is applied to the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in the Perfection Vehicle.

The twenty coarse phenomena are purified at the time of the path when a practitioner meditates on their emptiness and then visualizes them as the five male tathāgatas, the four female tathāgatas, the six male bodhisattvas, and the five female bodhisattvas. Such meditation permits a practitioner to stop ordinary appearance and conception in relation to his or her body. By seeing each part of the body as a deity, the practitioner substitutes ordinary appearance and conception with pure appearance and conception. *Mantric Stages* states that by stopping ordinary appearance and conception we actually abandon true appearance and grasping at the true appearance of dharmas. Seeing our physical body as divine acts to bless the body. This blessing combined with purification establishes the twenty coarse phenomena as actual deities at the time of the result.

In the practice of physical isolation of one hundred pure lineages, each of the twenty deities is further subdivided into five, making a total of one hundred. When practicing the *Guru Pūjā*, we establish our lama in the aspect of Guru Vajradhara, the main figure of the field of accumulation, while the thirty-two deities of Guhyasamāja are visualized within his body:

Your five pure aggregates are the five sugatas,
your four constituents the four consorts,
your bases, channels, sinews, and joints

are actually bodhisattvas.

According to this verse, each of the five aggregates is associated with one of the five male tathāgatas. Therefore (1) Akṣobhya is the purifying agent of the aggregate of consciousness, (2) Vairocana is the purifying agent of the aggregate of form, (3) Ratnasambhava is the purifying agent of the aggregate of feeling, (4) Amitābha is the purifying agent of the aggregate of discrimination, and (5) Amoghasiddhi is the purifying agent of the aggregate of formation.

The four elements are associated with the four female tathāgatas. The four elements are often expanded into the six constituents, which includes space, but this is not done here. Therefore (1) Locanā is the purifying agent of the earth element, (2) Māmakī is the purifying agent of the water element, (3) Pāṇḍaravāsini is the purifying agent of the fire element, and (4) Tārā is the purifying agent of the wind element. In the Guhyasamāja tantra, Akṣobhya is coupled with Dharmadhātuvajrī while the remaining four male buddhas are coupled with the above four female deities.

The aggregates and elements should be understood at the time of the basis and path but meditated on in the aspect of deities of the resultant state. “The time of the basis” refers to the aggregates and the four elements existing in our body at the time prior to entering a path. “The time of the path” refers to the aggregates and elements from the time that we have attained the path. The sense bases are associated with the six male bodhisattvas. Thus the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind at the time of the basis and path are visualized in the aspect of the resultant male bodhisattvas who act as their agents of purification. From the normal list of eight bodhisattvas, Mañjuśrī and Maitreya are omitted leaving six who correspond to the six bases, namely Kṣitigarbha, Vajrapāṇi, Ākāśagarbha, Avalokiteśvara, Sarvanīvaṇaṣkambin, and Samantabhadra. [238](#)

The objects held by sense awareness are forms, sounds, aromas, flavors, and tactile objects. When these five impure

sense objects existing at the time of the basis are completely purified by pristine wisdom at the time of the path, they attain their resultant aspects of the five female bodhisattvas, namely Rūpavajrā, Śabdavajrā, Gandhavajrā, Rasavajrā, and Sparsāvajrā. The aim of this practice is to isolate or separate ourselves from ordinary appearances and conceptions of the twenty coarse phenomena, and replace them with the pure appearances and conceptions of the deities.²³⁹

Moreover each list of twenty is repeated for the five buddha lineages of Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi.²⁴⁰ We meditate by starting with the aggregate of consciousness that is purified by Akṣobhya and visualized as Akṣobhya. Then we visualize the aggregate of consciousness as Vairocana, and then as Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi respectively. This process is then applied to the remaining aggregates. Then we repeat the process with the four elements, first visualizing the element earth as Akṣobhya, then as Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi, and likewise for the remaining elements. Then we apply the same process respectively to the six bases and the five objects. By again subdividing each group into method represented by the five male buddhas and wisdom represented by the five female buddhas, the practice of physical isolation would involve two hundred pure lineages.

The *Guru Pūjā* describes the generation of the main figure of the field of accumulation as Lama Losang Thupwang Dorjechang according to the Akṣobhya system of Guhyasamāja that includes thirty-two deities. Still the *Root Tantra of Guhyasamāja* does not mention all of these thirty-two deities. The author makes this point in the following paragraph:

From the thirty-two deities, the ten wrathful ones plus Maitreya and Samantabhadra are not mentioned here since they are not clearly and explicitly stated in the *Root Tantra*. However, in general there are thirty-two deities of physical isolation because the complete thirty-two deities

are stated in the context of physical isolation and implicitly explained in the introduction. This is understood from the *Annotations*.

The author observes that though the total number of deities presented in this system is thirty-two, not all are mentioned in the *Root Tantra* and the *sādhana*. Disciples of sharp intellectual faculty, however, understand the number of deities to be thirty-two when studying the *Root Tantra*. Still the full list of deities is stated in the *Explanatory Tantra* that complements the *Root Tantra* for the sake of those of medium or dull intellectual faculty. In brief the omission of specific deities does not necessarily mean they are not included in a particular system. This issue is clarified in Tsongkhapa's *Annotations* to the four commentaries.

Investigation and analysis in the various lineages

The next paragraph discusses in greater detail the essential nature of the practice of physical isolation. It was mentioned earlier that physical isolation at the time of post-equipoise is meditation on relative deities while physical isolation at the time of equipoise is meditation on the ultimate deities. These issues are now raised in relation to the physical isolation of the one hundred pure lineages:

I wonder whether the hundred pure lineages shouldn't be primarily classified as analysis because individual withdrawal does not meditate on deities with faces and hands; the three states of joy, bliss, and concentration possess ultimate objects; and investigation prefers the five lineages through condensing the bases of purification to five or Vajradhara alone, without associating the twenty coarse phenomena with each of the twenty deities.

The author asserts that the practice of the hundred lineages primarily consists of fine analysis rather than coarse investigation even though some practices belong to other categories. He then posits reasons why the other categories of

physical isolation are not the main practice. Firstly individual withdrawal is not the main practice since it is a type of meditation where we see the deities in their entirety without focusing on specific limbs and so on, such as the head, legs, and arms. Joy, bliss, and concentration are not main practices for they meditate on the ultimate nature of the deities since they occur at the time of equipoise. Finally investigation is not the main practice since it does not associate the twenty coarse phenomena with the twenty deities because it condenses the bases of purification into five, or even one lineage.

For, as Gyaltsap Jé's *Notes on the Five Stages* states:

Investigation prefers the aspect of Vajradhara alone, while analysis is detailed contemplation that associates each deity with their individual object and sense faculty.[241](#)

To support his assertion, the author quotes a passage from Gyaltsap Rinpoché's *Notes on the Five Stages* that distinguishes investigation and analysis. It is obvious from this passage that the nature of investigation is narrower while the nature of analysis is much more detailed since it associates the twenty bases, such as the five objects, the six sense faculties, and so on, with the twenty deities.

The *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* states:

The three secret states are investigation...[242](#)

***Illuminating Lamp* states:**

Investigation means investigating the five lineages divided into three groups of five for each of the three secret states, namely the sense faculties, sense objects, and sense awarenesses.[243](#)

The *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* and Jé Rinpoché's *Illuminating Lamp* present investigation as having three or five subdivisions

of lineages, while Gyaltsap Jé's *Notes on the Five Stages* states that investigation pertains to a single lineage. The *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* refers to material found in the fourteenth chapter of the *Root Tantra of Guhyasamāja*, which is not considered to be in the main part of the *Root Tantra*.

Therefore *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning* states:

The branch of investigation investigates the nature of the deities. The branch of analysis analyses in detail the face, hands, and so on.[244](#)

Finally the author quotes a text composed by Paṇchen Chögyen called *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning*, which is a commentary to the five stages of Guhyasamāja. It defines investigation as a type of meditation that apprehends the nature of the deities, while analysis is a type of meditation apprehending the face, arms, and other limbs of the deity.

This should be analyzed.

Different scholars have defined investigation and analysis in different ways, and it is not easy to conclusively present the final meaning of each term. Therefore we should be prepared to examine this issue further.

Meditation on subtle objects

Meditation on a subtle object is a means of gathering the winds. Melting the substances through gathering the winds is a method of generating bliss. Through these you establish the four joys and the four empties.

When we meditate on the completion stage, we may either meditate in a general and nonspecific way on the deities and the celestial mansion, or we may meditate through focusing on

a subtle drop at either the upper or lower opening of the central channel. This passage refers to the second type, where we focus on a subtle drop or a subtle hand symbol at a specific site within the body, causing the winds to gather, the substances to melt, and the four joys and four empties to arise.

A yogi who has completed the coarse and subtle generation stages of this system through meditating on the subtle drop at the lower opening causes the [18b] winds to gather where the mind is held. This is due to the key point that the wind and mind share the same point of engagement.

When a yogi training in the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja completes both the coarse and subtle generation stages, he then enters meditation on the completion stage. His focal object is a subtle drop inside the lower opening of the central channel. Since the mind is always accompanied by its supporting wind and they possess the same object and place of engagement,²⁴⁵ when the yogi concentrates single-pointedly on the subtle drop at the lower opening, its supporting winds also proceed there. For those training in the system of Heruka, the subtle drop is visualized in the central channel at the navel. For those training in the system of Kālacakra, it is visualized at the upper opening of the central channel, between the eyebrows.

In dependence upon that, the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel, and the four empties together with their signs arise.

As winds from the upper and lower parts of the body gather at the focal site, they enter the central channel. Proper and fully qualified entrance of the winds at this location is followed by their proper and fully qualified abiding and dissolution. The sign of the winds entering the central channel is that the flow of winds through both nostrils equalizes. The sign of the winds abiding in the central channel is that the movement of wind through both nostrils stops. Regarding the signs of the winds

dissolving in the central channel, first the visions of a mirage, smoke, fireflies, and butter lamp arise when the coarse elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and consciousness dissolve. Then the visions of white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment arise when the eighty natural conceptions dissolve.

When the subtle winds supporting these subtle minds dissolve, the four empties occur naturally. It is beneficial for those who have realized emptiness to direct their minds to emptiness at this point in order to generate the pristine wisdom of the four empties. From prior familiarity they will recall emptiness easily. Ordinary beings unfamiliar with emptiness, however, will experience merely a vacuity or absence and nothing more. Others say emptiness will appear to their minds but they will not ascertain it.

When the winds enter the central channel, the downward-voiding wind reverses in the central channel, igniting the caṇḍālī. This causes the white substance to melt and the stream of bodhicitta to descend and drip, and from this the four descending and ascending joys are generated.

As the winds enter the central channel, the downward-voiding wind that normally flows downward reverses its flow, causing the fire of caṇḍālī to ignite. This causes the white substance to melt and descend, producing the four descending and four ascending joys respectively.[246](#)

Presentation of winds

Of the five main winds, the (1) life-sustaining and (2) equally abiding winds are considered more important, while the (3) ascending, (4) downward-voiding, and (5) pervading winds are considered less important. The life-sustaining wind has two types, coarse and subtle. The subtle life-sustaining wind has existed from beginningless time and will continue until we reach the state of enlightenment.[247](#) The coarse life-sustaining

wind dissolves into the subtle life-sustaining wind at the time of death. The function of both the coarse and subtle life-sustaining wind is to support and sustain life and consciousness.

At the time of conception, the consciousness of the bardo being enters the ovum, the red substance received from the mother, which has been fertilized by the sperm, the white substance received from the father. Then, as the fetus develops, the five main winds are established in the first five months of fetal development. The coarse life-sustaining wind is established in the first month, and the remaining four main winds are serially established in the next four months. The five secondary winds are progressively established in the remaining four and a half months. The secondary winds are the moving wind, fully moving wind, correctly moving wind, intensely moving wind, and definitely moving wind.^{[248](#)} By the time the five secondary winds are established, the fetus is fully developed in the womb.^{[249](#)}

The functions of the main winds

Each of the five main winds possesses a specific function both at the time of the basis, when an ordinary individual has not yet entered the path, and at the time of the path itself. (1) In general the life-sustaining wind functions to lead other winds to the doors of the senses and performs other life-related activities such as sustaining and prolonging life. (2) The equally abiding wind is established during the second month and functions together with the life-sustaining wind. When solid or liquid substances are consumed, this wind separates the subtle substances that are necessary for our well-being from substances that should be discarded from the body and distributes them throughout the body. (3) The ascending wind enables the upward movement of wind when breathing or vocalizing. This particular wind is also involved in eating and drinking. (4) The downward-voiding wind is responsible for evacuating substances such as urine and excrement through

the lower part of the body. (5) The pervading wind is responsible for the proper distribution of winds and the white and red substances so that they pervade the entire body. It also aids physical movement, such as coming and going and so forth. These are the individual functions of the five main winds at the time of the basis.[250](#)

The four joys

Further, it is stated in the *Vajra Garland [Explanatory Tantra]* that when bodhicitta descends from the crown to the throat, from there to the heart, from there to the navel, and from there to the secret place, the four joys are generated.

The practice of caṇḍālī involves first visualizing the syllable *āḥ* and activating the winds at the navel cakra. This causes the internal fire to ignite within the central channel at the navel, and when the flames reach the heart it releases the channel knots at the heart. This causes the white bodhicitta to melt and descend from its seat at the crown like melted butter. This in turn causes the flames to flare even more, and as the melted bodhicitta drips from the crown to the throat, the practitioner experiences the bliss called *joy*. The melted bodhicitta then descends from the throat to the heart, where a second level of bliss called *supreme joy* is experienced. Then it descends to the navel, inducing even greater bliss called *special joy*. Then it descends until it reaches the sex organ, where it generates the highest level of bliss, *innate joy*.

The last type of joy is called *innate* because it is innate in those who are born from the womb and endowed with the six substances inherited from their parents. It is also called *innate* to indicate that it is not fabricated. A practitioner should direct this naturally occurring joy toward emptiness for such joy is extremely potent. Such practice is called *bringing bliss into the path*, where the first three types of joy are considered steps leading to innate joy.[251](#) The methods of generating such joy

are discussed in various texts such as the *Vajra Garland Explanatory Tantra*, and in other texts composed by Ārya Nāgārjuna.

Also *Drop of the Great Seal* states that in accordance with the descent of white bodhicitta, sixteen joys are derived by classifying each of four such joys into four parts each.

Further, each of the joys mentioned above is subdivided into four types from the perspective of the descent of white bodhicitta, resulting in sixteen types of joy.[252](#)

And in accordance with the decent of the red drops there are twelve joys through classifying them as three each. This is the method of the four descending joys.

To understand the descent of white and red bodhicitta, first consider the way the consciousness of the bardo being is trapped within the fertilized ovum containing the white substance received from the father and the red substance received from the mother. The fertilized ovum, or seed, is the site where the heart of the fetus forms. As the fetus develops, both white and red substances, but a greater part of white substance, separate from the substances at the heart, evolving “upward” to form the sites of the throat and crown cakras. Similarly both white and red substances, but a greater part of red substance, separate from the substances at the heart, evolving “downward” to form the sites of the navel and secret-place cakras. In an adult sixteen types of joy are generated when white substance is caused to descend from the crown to the secret place, while twelve types of joy are generated when red bodhicitta descends.[253](#)

The four ascending joys are generated through bodhicitta moving from the secret place to the navel, from there to the heart, and so forth, and the method of generating the sixteen and twelve joys is

similar.

There are also the four ascending joys that are divided similarly into sixteen or twelve parts. When the melted bodhicitta progresses to the tip of the secret organ, it is not released but rather its flow is reversed. The bodhicitta then moves from the secret organ to the navel, from the navel to the heart, from the heart to the throat, and from the throat to the crown. Each time the bodhicitta reaches a specific cakṛa, a specific ascending joy is generated. These four ascending joys are also subdivided into sixteen and twelve respectively.

The difference in superiority between descending and ascending joys

It is said that the ascending joys are far superior to the descending joys and all the ascending joys must be innate joy. Drilbupa's *Explanation of the Five Stages* also states that at times the bliss of the first three descending joys is innate bliss.

In general, the ascending joys are considered superior to the descending joys.^{[254](#)} Further, the mahāsiddha Drilbupa, who is known for his commentaries to mother tantra, has said that the first three descending joys may also be innate joy. It is possible, though rare, for some practitioners to experience all descending joys at the level of innate joy since the way the channels form and the quality of the drops differs slightly from person to person. This statement found in *Explanation of the Five Stages* occurs in Jé Rinpoché's *Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages*.

Variations in the generation of the four joys

It is not logically necessary that all means of generating the four joys accord with the previous explanation of the stages of descent of bodhicitta because it is said that the four joys are generated from the convergence of melted bodhicitta in the

heart from above and below, once caṇḍālī is ignited by vajra recitation.

The Five Stages explains a means of generating of the four joys that is applicable in most cases. Still there are exceptions, such as the possibility mentioned above that all four descending joys are described as innate joy. Also there are other ways of generating the four joys that differ from the standard presentation, such as generating the four joys in verbal isolation through drawing bodhicitta to the heart when vajra recitation has ignited the heat of caṇḍālī.

There are many issues requiring analysis, but these will be explained in brief in the context of mental isolation.

We have now seen different classifications and ways of generating the four joys, but the extensive literature on this subject covers many other issues. The purpose of this text is to give an overview of the entire tantric path, and for this reason the author cannot pursue all the relevant issues nor review all the relevant sources. Still these points are important, and the author will discuss them in brief in the context of mental isolation. Serious students should investigate in depth all the source materials.

Relation between the four joys and the four empties

In general the four joys are not posited as the four empties [19a] since it is said that some beings generate the four joys without dissolving the winds in the central channel.

The standard mode of generating the four joys begins with the entering, abiding, and dissolving of the winds in the central channel, then the melting and descending of bodhicitta, and finally the serial generation of the four joys. Yet, there are exceptions, for some individuals generate the four joys without causing the winds to dissolve in the central channel.

Nevertheless, the four joys are generated in the nature of the four empties because many scholars explain this point in accordance with *Drop of the Great Seal*, which states that the four joys are the four empties.

Different assertions regarding the generation of the four empties

In this context Muniśrī explained that the four empties are serially generated when the bodhicitta reaches the root of the jewel, the neck of the jewel, the center of the jewel, and the tip of the jewel. *Illuminating Lamp* states this to be a serious departure from the standard presentation.

The *Root Tantra of Guhyasamāja* explains that the four joys are generated as melted bodhicitta descends from the crown to the throat, then to the heart, the navel, and the secret place. Yet scholars such as the Indian master Muniśrī state that the four joys are generated from the movement of bodhicitta along the secret organ. He identifies four points of the jewel—the base, neck, center, and tip—and describes the serial generation of the four joys as the bodhicitta reaches these points. Jé Rinpoché states in *Illuminating Lamp* that this is a major departure from the standard presentation.

Jé Rinpoché has frequently stated that those who assert that all pristine wisdom of the four empties is the four joys derived entirely from bodhicitta descending from the crown to the secret place and ascending back to the crown have not yet comprehended the important points of this system.

It has been emphasized many times that the four joys will not always be associated with the four empties, nor will the four joys always be generated in a linear fashion through bodhicitta descending from the crown to the secret place and ascending again to the crown. Since there are many exceptions, we cannot assert that the four joys are the four empties nor that

they are always generated in that particular order.

Uniting bliss with emptiness

Thus when you are able to generate innate bliss during descent and ascent, you should meditate in equipoise on the emptiness that is the lack of inherent existence through uniting the object and subject.

The aim of our practice is to generate innate bliss realizing emptiness. Therefore we seek to generate a type of awareness—namely the intense bliss of innate joy—that comprehends the object emptiness. Such innate bliss is not fabricated and possesses the nature of extremely subtle wind-mind. When we enter equipoise on emptiness, we direct this extremely subtle awareness to engage emptiness, and in post-equipoise we recall this blissful ascertainment of emptiness.

When you arise from equipoise due to the movement of winds, you recall the bliss and emptiness of equipoise, and you seal whatever appears with that. If you restrain inappropriate attention, all appearing objects arise as bliss. After that, sense awareness withdraws from its objects when the winds engaging objects through the doors of the senses reabsorb due to the increase of bliss. Therefore, as stated before, bliss is generated through the winds dissolving.

There are five types of consciousness associated with the sense faculties. When bliss is ignited, the winds withdraw inward and sense awareness withdraws from the sense faculties. Once coarse sense consciousness withdraws, the very subtle wind and mind manifest naturally. Winds that withdraw inward eventually remain and dissolve in the central channel. This dissolution of winds results in the generation of genuine bliss.

Etymology

Regarding the etymology of the term *physical isolation*, the physical basis of isolation is the twenty coarse objects and so on, what is isolated is ordinary appearance and conception, and the purpose of isolation is to meditate on those as the appearance of bliss and [19b] emptiness or as deities.

These twenty coarse phenomena were explained in the context of the hundred lineages. Since the twenty coarse phenomena are a condition for ordinary appearance and conception, we should “isolate” them, so that by stopping ordinary appearance and conception we may generate the nature of pure appearance and pure conception. The twenty coarse phenomena exist prior to entering the path, but they also continue, from the moment we enter the tantric path of accumulation until we reach the tantric path of no-more learning. When they are purified at the time of the result, they become the five buddha lineages. Knowing that their purified nature is the different buddha lineages, we meditate on them as having that aspect. This is how the etymology, cause, and meaning of physical isolation are explained.

Physical isolation does not necessarily fully conform to this etymology, and that which fully conforms with the etymology of physical isolation is not necessarily physical isolation because from the stage of verbal isolation on, you meditate on everything that appears as sealed by bliss and emptiness.

Verbal isolation conforms with the etymology of physical isolation but it is not physical isolation. But it is not logically necessary for something that conforms with the etymology of a specific state to be that state and vice versa. For example a synonym of the lotus is “water-born,” and the etymology of water-born is that which is born in water. But there are many types of lotuses that are not born in water, and there are many things born in water that are not lotuses.

EIGHT

Verbal Isolation

Verbal isolation that is concentration producing the vajra speech

The nature of the second stage in the sixfold division of the completion stage of the Ārya system is “the completion-stage practice that begins *from* the generation of the pristine wisdom of [white] appearance derived from causing the upper and lower winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel at the heart due to a yogi of this system meditating on a mantra drop at the point of the heart. It extends *up to but not including* the generation of the pristine wisdom of [white] appearance derived from causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the indestructible drop at the heart due to meditation that completely releases the channel knots at the heart.”

The definition of the vajra speech of verbal isolation is given by delineating when it begins and ends.^{[255](#)} A yogi who has meditated on physical isolation places his attention on the *point of the heart* that is at the center of the heart cakra and focuses on a *mantra drop*, a drop containing mantric syllables. Through meditating on the mantra drop he causes the winds from the upper and lower parts of his body to gather at his heart. Then he causes these winds to properly enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel at his heart, thereby generating the pristine wisdom of white appearance. This marks the beginning of verbal isolation that continues up until, but not including, the capacity to cause the proper entry, abidance, and

dissolution of the winds in the indestructible drop at the heart that gives rise to the pristine wisdom of white appearance. A yogi cannot accomplish this until he has completely released the channel knots at the heart; when that point is reached, he transfers to the next level.

In terms of the coarse and subtle bodies, while the coarse physical elements are classified as the coarse body, speech is classified as the subtle body, since the root of speech is wind. The practice of verbal isolation depends on the principle that mind and its supporting wind necessarily exist in the same location. Therefore, when the mind focuses on the central channel at the center of the heart, the wind that supports it is also established there.

Vitality exertion and vajra recitation

Calling this level *verbal isolation* or *vajra recitation* is misleading because it includes three yogas of vitality exertion, and neither the yoga of vitality exertion meditating on the mantra drop nor the substance drop are either verbal isolation or vajra recitation.

The level of verbal isolation or vajra recitation includes the three practices of vitality exertion:^{[256](#)} (1) meditation on the light drop^{[257](#)} at the base of the nose, between the eyebrows at the upper opening of the central channel, (2) meditation on the mantra drop^{[258](#)} at the center of the heart, and (3) meditation on the substance drop^{[259](#)} at the tip of secret place. However, since only the yoga of the light drop is actual verbal isolation and vajra recitation, it is misleading to call all three yogas *verbal isolation* or *vajra recitation*.

Illuminating Lamp states:

Calling this *verbal isolation* or *vajra recitation* is misleading for the general name for this level in the *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* is

vitality exertion, the third of the six levels.[260](#)

The author here quotes a passage from Tsongkhapa's *Illuminating Lamp* that refers to this misleading name.

One says: Take both meditation on the mantra drop and meditation on the substance drop—they are neither verbal isolation nor vajra recitation because verbal isolation or vajra recitation must be yogas of vitality exertion meditating on the light drop at the base of the nose.

Now the author presents a debate to clarify the nature of the yogas of vitality exertion that meditate on, respectively, the mantra drop at the center of the heart and the substance drop at the tip of the secret organ. The proponent in this debate asserts that neither is verbal isolation or vajra recitation because verbal isolation must be the yoga of vitality exertion meditating on the light drop at the upper end of the central channel.

The basis of verbal isolation

For the speech that is the basis for achieving isolation is the winds arising, entering, and abiding in natural recitation.

It is important to identify the basis for achieving isolation in verbal isolation just as it is in physical isolation. In physical isolation it is the coarse elements of the body that appear and are conceived as ordinary. In verbal isolation the basis upon which isolation is established is the three phases or actions of the winds arising, entering, and abiding at specific locations of the body.

And the object of negation that one is to be isolated from is conceiving those three winds to be different from the tones of the three letters. And the purpose of isolation is indivisibly uniting the three tones of the winds arising, entering, and abiding and the

tones of the three letters. And this is done via vajra recitation.

In vajra recitation the three syllables refer to *om*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*. The tone of the syllable *hūṃ* corresponds to the winds arising, where the term *arising* indicates that the winds leave their usual location or seat and begin to move to a different location. The tone of the syllable *om* corresponds to the winds “entering,” or returning after moving. The tone of the syllable *āḥ* corresponds to the winds temporarily abiding in a specific location without moving. Therefore the tone of the syllables *hūṃ*, *om*, and *āḥ* correspond to the winds arising, entering, and abiding.

Vajra recitation also means repetition and the act of reproducing. Therefore in mantra recitation the sound of the mantra is repeated, or reproduced, continuously. Breathing is also a rhythmic movement of wind with three repeated phases: (1) the exhalation of wind from the nostrils, (2) the inhalation of wind, (3) a short period where the wind abides before it is again exhaled. Vajra recitation is the natural, uncontrived occurrence of the rising, entering, and abiding of the winds. The word *vajra* in vajra recitation conveys not only the meaning of something that cannot be destroyed by others but also something that exists naturally, from the beginning.

If we meditate on seeing the rising, entering, and abiding of the winds to be indivisible from the tone or vibration of the letters *hūṃ*, *om*, and *āḥ*, in due course we will see that each of the winds possesses that specific nature. Then whenever the winds arise, enter, or abide in a specific location, they do so with the sound of the relevant syllable. Moreover this process blesses the winds as they rise, enter, and abide in specific locations, since these three syllables are the essence of the mantras of all deities and they carry the blessings of vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind. [261](#)

The three phases of the winds entering, remaining, exiting, and then reentering, remaining, reexiting, and so forth occurs naturally and continuously, without any specific effort. The

practitioner comprehends this natural repetition of the phases of winds to be indivisible from the nature of the deity. The deity as well as the mantra syllables have the nature of pristine wisdom realizing emptiness. For example the tone of the winds arising is visualized as pristine wisdom realizing emptiness manifesting in the aspect of the sound *hūṃ*. Similarly the tone of the winds entering is visualized as pristine wisdom realizing emptiness manifesting in the aspect of the sound *oṃ*, and the tone of the winds abiding is visualized as pristine wisdom realizing emptiness manifesting as the sound *āḥ*. This is how the practice of verbal isolation isolates the practitioner from the conception that sound and recitation are ordinary. In this process we meditate on many objects that possess the same nature. This is similar to the offerings described in the *Guru Pūjā* that possess different aspects while in essence they are pristine wisdom realizing emptiness and possess the function of generating bliss through the senses.

Illuminating Lamp states:

The recitation that is by nature the indivisible union [20a] of the three letters of the three vajras and the three tones of the three phases of the winds is called *vajra recitation*.[262](#)

This passage from *Illuminating Lamp* supports the author's view. Moreover we may adjust the order of the phases of the winds to match the syllables. Therefore if we prefer the order of the syllables as *oṃ aḥ hūṃ*, then we contemplate the phases of the winds as entering, abiding, and arising.

Debate on vitality exertion and vajra recitation

One says: It follows that this type of explanation is unacceptable because the three yogas of vitality exertion explained in the *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* are included in the level of vajra-recitation verbal isolation.

Reply: That is not logically necessary because that included in the level of vajra-recitation verbal isolation does not have to be actual verbal recitation.

The author agrees with the statement of the *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* that the three yogas of vitality exertion are included in vajra-recitation verbal isolation but disagrees that it disqualifies this mode of explanation, since what is included within vajra recitation does not have to be actual vajra recitation.

***Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* states:**

There are three yogas of vitality exertion meditating on the three points explained in *Bright Lamp*. Two yogas are vitality exertion but not actual verbal isolation and vajra recitation. However, they are named after the main practice of vitality exertion since that includes both.[263](#)

Later Guhyasamāja Tantra states that there are three yogas of vitality exertion and these are explained in Candrakīrti's commentary to the *Root Tantra of Guhyasamāja* called *Bright Lamp*. The three yogas referred to are (1) yoga meditating on alight drop at the upper opening of the central channel, (2) yoga meditating on the mantra drop at the center of the heart cakra, and (3) yoga meditating on a substance drop at the tip of the jewel. Only the yoga of the light drop is fully qualified vajra-recitation verbal isolation, and in that sense it is considered to be the main practice among the three. The other two yogas of the mantra and substance drop are not actual vajra-recitation verbal isolation, but they are still classified as verbal isolation.

One says: It follows that the yoga of vitality exertion is not necessarily vajra-recitation verbal isolation because Tathāgathavajra explains that all yogas that gather the winds into the central channel by meditating on letters, drops, and so on at important

points at the body are vitality exertion. Likewise, Jé Rinpoché explains that all meditation on the letters and drops at the cakras are methods for gathering the winds in the central channel and extensively praises this amazing, excellent explanation of vitality exertion.

The Indian scholar Tathāgatavajra states that there are many types of vitality exertion, since any yoga that focuses on a subtle drop or syllable placed at the cakras formed by the central, right, and left channel and gathers the winds into the central channel is referred to as *vitality exertion*. [264](#) Therefore the term *vitality exertion* refers not only to the actual, main practice of verbal isolation but to a broad range of similar secondary yogas. This mode of presentation is praised as very skillful.

The different levels of practice of vitality exertion

There are different levels of meditation in the three vitality exertions. During physical isolation you meditate on the mantra drop at the point of the heart to gather the winds in the central channel, though you cannot gather the winds in the central channel at the heart. Then through cultivating that for a long time you first generate pristine wisdom of the four empties and then progress to the level of vitality exertion called *vajra-recitation verbal isolation*. Since this state precedes mental isolation, [20b] it is not actual mental isolation even though it may be called mental isolation.

There are three types of dissolution of winds related to the central channel. First, it is possible that winds dissolve in the channels contiguous to the central channel. Such dissolution may induce experiences similar to the dissolution of winds in the central channel, but practitioners should be able to differentiate them. Second, it is possible that the winds

dissolve in the central channel in general, and third, it is possible that they dissolve in the central channel at the heart. From among these three types of wind dissolution, the last is the most difficult to achieve. Again a practitioner should be able to distinguish between winds dissolving in the central channel in general and dissolving in the central channel at the heart.

The mantra and light drops

During physical isolation practitioners engage in meditation on the mantra drop to gather the winds in the central channel. And though this practice involves focusing on a drop at the center of the heart cakra,²⁶⁵ they are merely able to dissolve the winds in the central channel in general and not specifically at the heart. As practitioners develop greater familiarity with this yoga, they generate pristine wisdom of the four empties and then transfer to the yoga of vitality exertion at the level of verbal isolation. Such vitality-exertion yoga is also designated as “mental isolation,” although it is not actual mental isolation. The reason establishing this is given by Jé Rinpoché in his *Illuminating Lamp*.

Illuminating Lamp states:

Through properly understanding the point of meditating on the indestructible drop²⁶⁶ at the heart and cultivating such meditation for a long time, you first generate the pristine wisdom of the four empties. Since this state precedes mental isolation, it is not actual mental isolation though it may be called that.²⁶⁷

Thus gathering and dissolving the winds in the central channel through meditating on the mantra drop as the means of gathering the winds at the heart is dissolution of the winds in the central channel near the indestructible drop at the heart,

but it is not dissolution of winds in the actual indestructible drop. To dissolve the winds in the actual indestructible drop you must loosen the channel knots there. To do that you meditate on vajra recitation indivisibly uniting the tone of the three phases of the winds arising, entering, and abiding with the tone of the three letters, in other words vitality exertion meditating on the light drop at the tip of the upper opening of the forehead.

When discussing the dissolution of the winds in the central channel at the heart, we must distinguish between dissolving the winds in the central channel and dissolving them in the indestructible drop at the core of the central channel. Causing the winds to dissolve in the actual indestructible drop relies on loosening the channel knots at the heart through engaging in vajra recitation that unites the tone of the letters *hūṃ*, *oṃ*, and *āḥ* with the tone of the winds arising, entering, and abiding. Vajra recitation is performed while we focus on the light drop at the upper opening of the central channel. [268](#)

You clear the channel knots by inserting winds into them, just as you clear a blocked hollow bamboo stem by inserting a long stick into it.

This meditation for loosening the knots that block the central channel is likened to inserting a long stick into a blocked bamboo stem. Although the inside of a bamboo stem is largely hollow, solid membranes at the joints divide the stem into separate sections and prevent the flow of air through the stem. Inserting a long stick into the stem pierces the membranes, permitting the unobstructed flow of air. So, too, by meditating on the light drop at the upper opening of the central channel, we loosen the knots blocking the upper part of the central channel, gradually permitting the unobstructed flow of wind down the central channel to the heart.

Three misconceptions regarding indivisibility with the three

syllables

Though wind and mantra are indivisibly united, the tones of the three phases of the wind arising, entering, and abiding are not to be taken as the same as (1) the three written letters, (2) external speech expressed as words, or (3) the external tones visualized as the expression of words when not expressed as words.

It has been explained that winds arising from their seats to flow to other locations is indivisible from the tone of the syllable *hūṃ*, winds entering their normal seats from other locations is indivisible from the tone of the syllable *oṃ*, and winds abiding in their normal seats is indivisible from the tone of the syllable *āḥ*. But how is this indivisibility to be understood? The text presents three assertions regarding such indivisibility that should be rejected as mistaken.

(1) The first mistaken position is to think that the syllables *hūṃ*, *oṃ*, and *āḥ* should be visualized as written on their respective seats when the winds arise, enter, and abide there.

(2) The second mistaken position is to take the arising, entering, and abiding of the winds to be indivisible from the external, verbal pronunciation of the syllables *hūṃ*, *oṃ*, and *āḥ*.

(3) The third mistaken position is to take the tone to be indivisible from the mental recitation of the three syllables. Thus the resonance of the three phases of the flow of winds should not be identified with the form of the letters nor with their verbal or mental recitation.

Having defined three positions that should be rejected as mistaken, the author then explains the actual meaning of vajra recitation.

The method of vajra recitation in this context is to recognize that when winds move in the channels, their resonance is like the tones of the three syllables, and to direct the mind without distraction to just that.

The actual meaning of vajra recitation refers to single-pointed concentration that comprehends the sound that resonates when the winds flow in the channels to be similar to the tones of the syllables *hūṃ*, *oṃ*, *āḥ*.

Classifications of vajra recitation

Having explained the nature of vajra recitation, the author then presents the different types of vajra recitation from the perspective of the winds involved, the syllables involved, and the state we seek to establish.

When vajra recitation as the object of recitation is classified by means of the winds, then there are two types—main and secondary vajra recitation—and these two have, respectively, four and five divisions.

Just as the winds may be classified as main and secondary winds, we may also classify vajra recitation as main and secondary vajra recitation. Moreover, main vajra recitation may be further classified in four from the perspective of the main winds utilized in vajra recitation, excluding the pervading wind. So, too, secondary vajra recitation may be classified in five from the perspective of the secondary winds utilized in vajra recitation.

If they are classified by means of the mantra recited, [21a] then there are two, namely vajra recitation of the two letters *hūṃ* and *ho*, and vajra recitation of the three letters *oṃ*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*.

Vajra recitation may also be classified from the perspective of the mantra recited. The author has already made reference to vajra recitation utilizing the three syllables *oṃ*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*. But vajra recitation may also be accomplished on the basis of the two syllables *hūṃ* and *ho*. When studying verbal isolation it is useful to remember the meaning of the term *mantra*. In Sanskrit, *man* refers to “the mind” and *tra* refers to “that which protects,” and together they mean “that which protects the mind.” In this context mantra refers to protecting the mind

from ordinary appearances and conceptions. Once the mind is protected in this way, it can be visualized as the deity.

In everyday life, forms appear to eye awareness, sounds appear to ear awareness, aromas appear to nose awareness, flavors appear to tongue awareness, tactile objects appear to body awareness, and finally the thought “ordinary objects appear to their relevant senses” appears to mental awareness. Yet the mind should be protected from such ordinary appearances and conceptions. Instead of thinking, “an ordinary form appeared to my eye awareness,” the practitioner should think, “the deity appeared to my eye awareness” and so forth. The mind is therefore protected by substituting ordinary appearances and conceptions with divine appearances and conceptions. This constitutes the definitive meaning of mantra, while the actual syllables *oṃ*, *āḥ*, *hūṃ*, and so forth constitute the interpretive meaning of mantra. In other words the definitive meaning of mantra is pristine wisdom realizing emptiness, and this pristine wisdom manifests as the tones of the syllables *oṃ*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*.

There are three occasions when completion stage practitioners perform vajra recitation, for it is said that (1) they perform vajra recitation to establish the feats of pacification, increase, power, or wrath, through utilizing the four main winds,

If a practitioner of the completion stage seeks to establish the four feats, he will achieve them by relying on the four main winds^{[269](#)} but not on the pervading wind.^{[270](#)}

(2) they perform vajra recitation to establish the five higher perceptions of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, through serially utilizing the five secondary winds—the moving wind and so forth,

Similarly, if a practitioner of the completion stage seeks to establish higher perception, he or she will achieve that by relying on the five secondary winds.^{[271](#)} Vajra recitation using the moving wind establishes higher perception related to the

eyes. Vajra recitation using the fully moving wind establishes higher perception related to the ears. Vajra recitation using the correctly moving wind establishes higher perception related to the nose. Vajra recitation using the intensely moving wind establishes higher perception related to the tongue. And vajra recitation using the definitely moving wind establishes higher perception related to the body.

(3) they perform vajra recitation to establish the empties of mental isolation after first establishing physical isolation, through initially using the four main winds and then having attained mastery over them, using the five secondary winds.

Another reason a completion-stage practitioner relies on vajra recitation is to establish pristine wisdom of the empties at the level of mental isolation. When this is the goal of our practice, we must first rely on the main winds; then later, when some experience has been gained, we rely on the secondary winds.[272](#)

The substance drop

Meditation on the substance drop at the tip of the secret organ has two types: (1) retention of the drop of bodhicitta produced from the union of yourself and an action seal at the meeting point of both lower openings of the central channel,[273](#) without releasing it, . . .

In the first type we practice with an actual action consort—an “action seal” (*karmamudrā*)—by focusing on the drop of bodhicitta remaining at the point where the two sexual organs meet, without releasing it. The use of an actual consort indicates that the practitioner has already reached a high level of realization.

. . . and (2) meditation focusing on the drop at the meeting point of the two lower openings of the

central channels of oneself and a wisdom seal.

In the second case, the only difference is that we enter union with an imagined, wisdom consort, while the focal location and object remain the same.[274](#)

It is necessary to meditate in this way because if the two former types of vitality exertion cannot gather the winds in the central channel at the heart, then it is achieved by meditation on the substance drop, since this promotes the gathering of the winds at the heart.

If we cannot gather the winds in the heart by other types of meditation, meditation on the light and mantra drops may achieve this. Further, once the winds have been gathered in the heart, it is said that meditation on the substance drops is able to increase the strength and speed of that gathering. This explains why we need to meditate on the substance drop.[275](#)

Vitality exertion where you are conjoined with either seal occurs twice, namely before and after the completion of vajra recitation. The method of gathering the winds in the central channel should be understood from *Illuminating Lamp*.

The practice of the substance drop involving union with an actual or visualized consort may be performed at different times, and here the author states that it may be practiced before or even after the completion of vajra recitation. Details on how this practice gathers the winds into the central channel may be found in Tsongkhapa's *Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages of Guhyasamāja Tantra*.

Points of debate

Dissolution of winds at the heart

One says: To dissolve the winds at the heart you must loosen the channel knots at the heart.

Reply: That is unacceptable because dissolution of

the winds at the heart occurs without dissolution of the winds in the central channel at the heart, for when the winds dissolve internally, it is not logically necessary that they dissolve in the central channel.

Here the author makes the distinction between the winds dissolving in the vicinity of the heart *near* the central channel and dissolving precisely in the central channel at the indestructible drop at the heart. The indestructible drop contains the extremely subtle wind and mind. To clarify the issue further the author quotes a passage from the *Illuminating Lamp*.

For as it says in *Illuminating Lamp*:

As explained earlier, [21b] when there are definite signs of the winds entering the central channel, and the winds abide internally for a long time by their own force, and if there is dissolution where the four empties appear as explained, then this occurs through dissolution of the winds in the central channel.[276](#)

There are times when the winds enter the heart, and there are times when they enter the central channel at the heart in particular. This second type of entry is accompanied by certain signs.[277](#) Following that, the winds abide in the central channel and finally dissolve[278](#) through their own force, naturally and without having been forced to do so in a contrived manner, and the four empties appear as described in the texts.

Though internal dissolution occurs at other times, on such occasions the empties do not arise as explained, since they do not involve dissolution in the central channel.

At other times, winds might enter the heart but not the central channel, and in such cases the four empties do not occur as

described in the texts. In some cases the practitioner may cause the winds to enter the heart through his or her own intense effort and not through the winds entering the heart naturally by their own power. As a result the winds may enter the heart but they do not remain long; they exit the heart fairly quickly. Although such events may be described as “entry of the winds in the heart,” it is not fully qualified entry, and it is not accompanied by the usual signs of the dissolution of the elements and the appearance of the four empties.

Dissolution of winds in the central channel at the heart

One says: To dissolve the winds in the central channel at the heart you must loosen the channel knots at the heart because the winds cannot penetrate the central channel at the heart without the channel knots at the heart being loosened.

Reply: The reason is not established . . .

In other words, Ngawang Palden asserts that it is possible for the winds to enter the central channel at the heart even when the knots at the heart have not been loosened.

. . . because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

To dissolve the winds in the actual indestructible drop at the heart, you must loosen the channel knots at the heart. Prior to that, dissolution of winds in the central channel by means of gathering them at the heart is dissolution *near* to the central channel but not dissolution *in* it. Similarly, though you may insert the winds into the central channel, the winds cannot move from the central channel at the site of the channel knots. [279](#)

The indestructible drop is the seat of the extremely subtle wind and mind that exist in the very core of the heart cakra. In order

for the winds to enter the indestructible drop, the knots formed by the right and left channels at that level must be loosened. Prior to that the winds may gather in the heart, but they do not enter the indestructible drop; the winds may approach it but they do not enter it. Also at that time, although the winds might gather inside the central channel, they will not be able to flow inside the central channel due to the presence of restricting knots.

Dissolution of winds in the indestructible drop at the heart

One says: This method of explanation is unacceptable, because the explanation that “to dissolve the winds into the indestructible drop at the heart you must loosen the channel knots, and to dissolve the winds in the central channel at the heart you do not need to loosen the channel knots” is given from the perspective of the channel knot at the center of the heart, but to dissolve the winds in the central channel at the heart, you must loosen the channel knots above and below the heart . . .

The author raises a further distinction. Previously he mentioned the dissolution of winds in the vicinity of the central channel at the heart, and then dissolution of winds in the central channel at the heart. Still, even though the winds dissolve in the central channel at the heart, they do not necessarily dissolve in the indestructible drop at the heart. Such dissolution in the indestructible drop within the central channel at the heart is the most difficult type of dissolution.

. . . because the *Grounds and Paths* of Yangchen Galo states:

The channel knots above and below the heart are loosened in dependence on performing vajra recitation, where the individual tones of the three phases of the winds arising, entering, and abiding manifest as the tones of

the three syllables, and when you generate the pristine wisdom of appearance from the dissolution of the upper and lower winds in the central channel at the heart, you shift from physical to verbal isolation.[280](#)

Reply: This should be analyzed...

The author does not offer a definitive answer on this point but rather suggests that this issue be investigated further.

Shifting from physical to verbal isolation

. . . because when shifting [22a] from physical isolation to the level of verbal isolation, you do not need to meditate on vajra recitation. This is because (1) vitality exertion meditating on the mantra drop must precede vajra recitation, and (2) you shift from physical isolation to the level of verbal isolation [when meditating on the mantra drop].

(1) The first part of the reason is established because the *Third Chapter* states:

Through stabilizing the precious state, there is progress. Through not stabilizing it, there is no progress.

***Bright Lamp* states this when explaining the meaning of “final” in the text.**

This quotation is from the third chapter of the *Root Tantra of Guhyasamāja*. The “precious state” mentioned here refers to the practice of the mantra drop[281](#) and “progress” refers to the entry, exit, and flow of winds that is natural with vajra recitation in general. This is also discussed in Candrakīrti’s *Bright Lamp*. Vajra recitation is a practice found in many levels, for it can be performed by beginners, by those on the generation stage, by those of the completion stage who have not yet established its final meaning, and finally, at its highest level, by practitioners of the completion stage. Other texts that

may be quoted to support the reason that vitality exertion meditating on the mantra drop must precede vajra recitation are Jé Rinpoché's four interrelated commentaries on Guhyasamāja.

Here vajra recitation is explained to be “final” because *Analysis of the Four Interrelated Commentaries on Guhyasamāja* states:

This vajra recitation is vajra recitation generating union, and therefore it is said to be final by means of function. Alternately, it is explained as final by considering just the performance of vajra recitation, which at the time of union is similar to that at the time of verbal isolation.[282](#)

The first part of the reason is established with these two quotations. Moreover in the second quotation, the time of union is mentioned. There are two types of union, namely the union of a learner and the union of a non-learner. Learner union again has two types, namely (a) the union of abandonment and (b) the union of realization where union of abandonment is attained first. This passage therefore states that the function of vajra recitation is to generate union irrespective of whether it is the first or second type. Alternatively, verbal recitation performed at the time of union is similar to verbal recitation performed at the time of verbal isolation. In other words, despite being practiced at different times and existing at different levels, vajra recitation itself is not union. Also final vajra recitation of the completion stage is not the ultimate state of union.

(2) The second part of the reason is established because the pristine wisdom of the four empties derived from penetrating the vital point at the heart at the time of physical isolation does not exist.

Here the author states that the practice of vitality exertion meditating on the mantra drop occurs prior to vajra recitation

when we shift from physical isolation to the level of verbal isolation. The actual pristine wisdom of the empties may manifest when the winds penetrate the heart at the time of the three isolations. But if such fully qualified pristine wisdom of the empties arises, then we have already shifted from physical to verbal isolation because such an experience does not exist in the context of physical isolation. When we shift from physical to verbal isolation, we do not need to engage in vajra recitation because prior to vajra recitation, we must meditate on the mantra drop, and it is at this time that we actually shift from physical to verbal isolation. Thus the point is established that shifting from physical to verbal isolation occurs prior to meditating on the actual vajra recitation.

This is sufficient detail.

The author has presented the level of verbal isolation in sufficient detail, and from this point on he will continue with the presentation of the next level: mental isolation, the third type of isolation.

NINE

Mental Isolation

Mental isolation that is concentration producing the vajra mind

The nature of the level of mental isolation is “a completion-stage practice that begins *from* the generation of the pristine wisdom of appearance derived from dissolving the winds in the indestructible drop at the heart. It arises through completely loosening the channel knots at the heart in dependence on the internal condition of contracting the winds through vajra recitation and absorption and the external condition of vitality exertion utilizing a seal. It extends *up to but not including* the attainment of the impure illusory body.”

As a general rule, physical isolation deals with the coarse body while verbal isolation deals with subtle body of drops, winds, and channels. Since both can be included in vajra recitation, the stages of completion may be enumerated as five and not six. The advantage of this classification is that it allows all elements of the body, whether coarse or subtle, to be treated similarly. A practitioner at this level relies on both internal and external conditions to achieve the complete release of the channel knots at the heart. The two internal conditions that facilitate the contraction of winds are vajra recitation and absorption, and the external condition is the practice of vitality exertion utilizing a consort, or action seal.

Contracting the winds

There are two ways to contract the winds when relying on a sādhana: gradual and instantaneous. In gradual contraction,

we first visualize the elaborate celestial mansion of the main deity and the entourage. Contraction begins when the celestial mansion is dissolved into the entourage, and then all the deities of the entourage dissolve into the central deity, male and female. Next the consort dissolves into the main deity, and then the main deity dissolves progressively from his head and feet into the *hūṃ* syllable at his heart. This syllable also dissolves as the lower vowel marker of the syllable dissolves into the root letter and that in turn dissolves into the drop and then into the *nāda* at the head of the syllable. The gradual contraction resembles the way our breath gradually disappears from a mirror. In instantaneous contraction, the mansion and deities dissolve instantly. This resembles the disappearance of a rainbow, where all colors vanish from the sky at the same time.

Contraction, whether gradual or instantaneous, is one of the internal conditions that loosen the channel knots at the heart. Moreover, it eliminates conventional appearance and is similar to the way the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika school eliminates the appearance of subtle objects of negation, in other words where *an object established by its own characteristics* is negated to allow the emptiness of that object to appear. If a practitioner keeps this similarity in mind while performing the contraction of the deities, I think that this becomes a kind of preliminary practice inducing comprehension of emptiness—in addition to loosening the channel knots. Once the channel knots at the heart are completely released, the winds enter and dissolve into the indestructible drop. Due to the winds dissolving in this particular location, the pristine wisdom of white appearance and so forth dawns. This marks the beginning of the level of mental isolation that extends up to the attainment of the impure illusory body.

Attainment of the impure illusory body is referred to as the third of the five levels of completion stage when we enumerate vajra recitation as the first level and observing the mind as the second. Alternately, if we begin from the stage of generation and count the three isolations as distinct levels, then mental isolation is fourth and the impure illusory body becomes the

fifth level.

Although *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning* states that you perform vajra recitation focusing on the pervading wind in order to newly generate mental isolation, that is not stated clearly in *Illuminating Lamp* and so on. Therefore seek the origin of that statement.

It was mentioned above that vajra recitation is performed by relying on four of the five main winds, excluding the pervading wind. However, Paṇchen Losang Chögyen mentions in the *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning* that vajra recitation involving the pervading wind should be performed in order to newly attain mental isolation,^{[283](#)} but such a statement is not found in Jé Rinpoché's *Illuminating Lamp*. Therefore the author urges us to investigate the origin of this statement. I think this exhortation is characteristic of Ngawang Palden, who grounds his presentation in the writings of Tsongkhapa whenever possible, and if he finds nothing there, he then examines the writings of Tsongkhapa's disciples Khedrup Jé and Gyaltsap Jé. In general he does not rely on other texts, such as the manuals used in Ganden or Drepüing Losaling colleges.

The action seal (karmamudrā)

After this initial point of investigation, the author presents the position of five scholars regarding the need to rely on an action seal—an actual consort. A single response is given for the first four debates while a separate answer is given to the fifth.

The first debate: Relying on an action seal in order to generate the three types of pristine wisdom

A scholar asserts: To generate the three types of pristine wisdom of mental isolation, you must depend on an action seal, for this is the intention of *The Five Stages*, which states:

From among all illusory bodies, [22b] the

female is the best illusory body.

The classification of the three types of pristine wisdom is clearly illustrated from that.

The point discussed here is the need to rely on an action seal to generate white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment at the time of mental isolation. This is supported by a statement in Ārya Nāgārjuna's *Five Stages* and further by *Khedrup Jé's Notes*:

***Khedrup Jé's Notes* states:**

The three internal conditions are the three vitality exertions and especially vajra recitation, and the external condition is stated in *The Five Stages* from "From among all illusory bodies" up to "is clearly illustrated from that." Thus you can generate the pristine wisdom of mental isolation in dependence on those external and internal conditions through vitality exertion utilizing a seal.[284](#)

In Khedrup Rinpoché's *Notes*, this particular passage from *The Five Stages* is quoted in order to support the fact that the external condition is the action consort.

And:

Verbal isolation begins *from* first meditating on verbal isolation and extends *up to but not including* any appearance of the four empties through releasing all of the remaining channel knots at the heart without exception. To release all the remaining knots at the heart without exception, you must apply both the external and internal methods explained previously.[285](#)

Although enough knots have been released to allow the four empties to manifest, there are still knots at the heart that have not been completely released. The four empties that manifest

from the first time that we meditate on verbal isolation up to the point of the total release of all knots at the heart are classified as verbal isolation. The four include: the empty, very empty, great empty, and all empty, and these are applied respectively to white appearance, red increase, black near-attainment, and clear light. Further, the two methods required for releasing the remaining knots at the heart are the previously mentioned internal and external conditions. Finally, the passages cited here illustrate the necessity of relying on an actual, external consort.

The second debate: Relying on an action seal during final mental isolation

A scholar asserts: It is the intention of *The Five Stages* that you must rely on an action seal to generate the three types of pristine wisdom of final mental isolation; but this does not apply to ordinary mental isolation, because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

To fully generate the three types of pristine wisdom of mental isolation that establish the basis of the illusory body, you need an external seal. [286](#)

The Five Stages teaches that in order to generate the pristine wisdom of final mental isolation, we must rely on an external seal. Here final mental isolation is identified as the semblant clear light from among semblant clear light, actual clear light, and clear light of the final continuum.

Jé Rinpoché states in his *Notes on the Difficult Points of Guhyasamāja*:

He who trains his mental continuum in the common paths, properly matures it through empowerment and fully purifies it by protecting the vows, then completes the yoga of single recall and attains the concentrations producing the three vajras, and finally enters

the path of the two truths of the illusory body and clear light that are the proximate causes of manifesting both the dharma and form bodies in this life, he will discover great bliss due to a pure seal.[287](#)

The stages of the path are here clearly stated by Jé Rinpoché. Initially we train in the common paths, then mature our mental continuum through receiving empowerment and completely purify it by protecting the vows and commitments. Then we enter the generation stage and complete the yoga of single recall. Then we enter the practices of the completion stage and attain physical isolation that is concentration producing the vajra body, verbal isolation that is concentration producing the vajra speech, and mental isolation that is concentration producing the vajra mind. Then we attain the relative illusory body and the ultimate clear light that are named after the two levels of truth. Once the pure illusory body has been established, the practitioner will certainly attain enlightenment in that life through manifesting the form and dharma bodies of a buddha. The practitioner who enters this path should utilize a consort, or “pure seal.”

This is logically necessary because the name of the three isolations is applied to concentrations producing the three vajras of the completion stage and not to concentrations producing the three vajras [23a] of the generation stage. This is because they (alone) are said to be the cause of buddhahood in this life.

Although concentrations producing the vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind actually refer to physical, verbal, and mental isolation of the completion stage, similar concentrations may also be found in the mental continuum of a practitioner on the generation stage. Nevertheless, the three types of vajra concentration that establish enlightenment in a single lifetime can only be practices of the completion stage, and to generate

them we need to rely on an actual consort.

The third debate: Relying on an action seal in order to expedite the remaining phases of the completion stage

A scholar asserts: This text does not teach the minimum threshold where reliance on an action seal becomes indispensable for attaining buddhahood in this life; rather it teaches the threshold where it becomes appropriate to engage in activities that enhance the completion stage. To utilize a seal, you must have obtained mental isolation, for *Illuminating Lamp* states just that.

This scholar's position is that we must have attained mental isolation in order to use an action seal, or actual consort, for the purpose of enhancing the completion stage. In other words, once a practitioner has reached the high realizations of mental isolation, he then relies on an actual consort in order to expedite progress on the remaining phases of the completion stage. But mental isolation is not stated as the minimum qualification we must have to rely on a consort for the purpose of reaching enlightenment in that lifetime.

The fourth debate: Relying on an action seal to attain enlightenment in this life

A scholar asserts: The minimum threshold where you must definitely rely on an action seal to attain enlightenment in this life is attainment of the isolations, because *Commentary to the Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom* states:

In this context the statement that the action seal and the three empties are certainly indispensable is made with the intention that fully generating the three empties of mental isolation capable of establishing the illusory body definitely relies on an action seal. Without it, though you may generate the three

pristine wisdoms complete in some characteristics of mental isolation, you will be unable to generate them complete in all characteristics.[288](#)

Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom—one of the explanatory texts on the *Root Tantra of Guhyasamāja*—and its commentary is quoted here in order to establish the necessity of relying on a seal in order to generate the three empties[289](#) of mental isolation and the illusory body that is derived from that.

I wonder whether these assertions reflect Jé Rinpoché's intention. I raise them merely to stimulate analysis, since their resolution is difficult.

The author concludes the first four debates by saying that scholars have different views on these issues and he has presented them for the sake of further investigation.

The fifth debate: Relying on an action seal from the early stages

A scholar asserts: It is unacceptable to state that the threshold where you must rely on an action seal is from the obtainment of mental isolation because (1) there are fully qualified persons who receive the actual third empowerment before they meditate on the two stages and (2) *Secret Attainment* states that if a beginner were to abandon the method of an external seal, he could not accomplish the innate bliss of the four joys by any other method.

This scholar makes the point that it is not correct to set mental isolation as the level we need to attain before we can rely on an action consort for two reasons. The first is because there are qualified individuals who receive the third empowerment in reliance on an action seal prior to engaging in any practices of the generation or completion stage. The second reason is found in a quotation from *Secret Attainment* stating that if a beginner

were to abandon union with an action seal, there would be no other way to generate the four joys.

Reply: That is not logically necessary because the first reason is merely a possibility and not definite, and the second reason explains that you must rely on an action seal to insert the winds into the central channel at the time of the generation stage.

The author replies that those reasons do not prove the thesis.²⁹⁰ Regarding the first reason, it is indeed possible to state that qualified practitioners engage in union with an action seal from the time of the third empowerment, but it is certainly not the case that every practitioner would or should receive the third empowerment in such a way. The second reason that advocates that we can only generate the four joys through relying on an action seal pertains to the generation stage.²⁹¹

The advantages and disadvantages of an external seal

A seal addresses multiple needs, [23b] such as the need for a special maturing agent of the roots of virtue that generate comprehension of the completion stage by cultivating the bliss and emptiness of the generation stage, and the need to easily facilitate the gathering of winds and so forth when meditating on the means to penetrate the vital points of the body of the generation stage. But it is stated that a seal complete in all qualities is extremely rare.

Though relying on an external seal may address various purposes and accomplish different goals, a fully qualified consort²⁹² is rare and extremely difficult to find. Not only are proper consorts hard to find, but also practitioners who are fully qualified to engage in such practices are equally rare. In most cases, the qualities of the male and female practitioner do not match. Often when the consort is qualified, the practitioner

is not, and vice versa. It is very rare to find a pair of fully qualified practitioners.

It is said that if you do not practice properly, there is the great fault of falling to evil migrations. Therefore, it is best to complete the coarse and subtle levels of the generation stage with a pristine wisdom consort alone because such a path is capable of generating mental isolation, and these faults do not occur if you rely on an action seal after attaining mental isolation. Since it is difficult to find fully qualified practitioners and consorts, engaging in consort practice can be dangerous and result in falling to lower rebirths. But such potential dangers do not detract from the general benefits of consort practice. There are three types of seal,^{[293](#)} namely (1) the action seal,^{[294](#)} (2) the pristine wisdom seal,^{[295](#)} and (3) the great seal. Since there is potential danger in relying on an action seal, you may utilize a pristine wisdom seal—that is, a visualized consort rather than actual, physical consort—during the coarse and subtle generation stages. When you attain mental isolation in reliance on a pristine wisdom seal, the dangers and disadvantages involved in utilizing an actual seal do not arise. Thus, this is a much safer practice.

Examples of great practitioners

The fact that the author presents many different views on this issue indicates the importance and seriousness of consort practice. For example, though Tsongkhapa had attained a high level of realization he chose not to utilize a physical consort. There were two reasons for this. First, despite possessing a high level of attainment, he realized that if he took a physical consort as a monk, this would attract criticism from the general community. Second, if he utilized an action seal, some disciples may cite his example to justify their own use of a physical

consort, or exaggerate or lie about their attainments in order to pursue this practice.

Tsongkhapa had two options, either to rely on a wisdom seal or a great seal. Either method first requires the dissolution of the coarse elements, winds, and minds and a practitioner may achieve this in two ways. He may rely on completion-stage practices where a practitioner initially utilizes an action seal to invoke the experience of great bliss and then continues with a wisdom seal. Alternately he may wait until death, when the coarse elements dissolve naturally and the extremely subtle wind and mind manifest. By relying on a wisdom seal and not an action seal, the practitioner leaves behind a body composed of coarse aggregates capable of producing relics to benefit students. Some advanced beings who see a specific benefit for their students give instructions that their bodies should not be cremated. Others like Milarepa made sure that their remains were cremated. Thus Tsongkhapa fulfilled various purposes by choosing to pass away in this manner. As Khedrup Rinpoché stated in one of the prayers he composed in praise of Tsongkhapa:

May I be able to manifest the supreme siddhi by
manifesting the enjoyment body as a substitute for the
intermediate state.

When untrained beings experience death, their elements dissolve due to natural causes, and then they experience the end-of-life phases of white appearance, red increase, black near-attainment, and clear light, without linking this process to the completion stage. However, when Tsongkhapa attained paranirvāṇa, he first experienced the dissolution of the elements and then the manifestation of subtle mind, but due to his meditation, instead of passing into the intermediate state he attained the illusory body. He left his coarse physical body for the sake of disciples while attaining enlightenment in the intermediate state and manifesting the enjoyment body. Some biographies state that after passing into paranirvāṇa, Tsongkhapa manifested as Drakpa Gönpö—or Kīrtinātha in

Sanskrit—and displayed the conduct of a mahāsiddha, such as taking an action seal.

Although many mahāsiddhas such as Tilopa and Drilbupa have taken physical consorts, due to their high level of realization they cannot be compared to ordinary beings. It is very difficult for any of us to accurately judge the level of realization of another person and decide with certainty that it is appropriate or not for them to take a consort. Śākyamuni noted that someone who has attained the level of a buddha can recognize the level of another being, but ordinary individuals cannot recognize each other's level. Since we cannot see the level of another's attainment, we depend on valid treatises to guide us in these issues.

Entry, abidance, and dissolution of winds in the central channel
The text continues by discussing the entering, abiding, and dissolving of the winds in the central channel.

The sign of the winds entering the central channel due to meditating on gathering the winds is when the movement of breath from each nostril attains equal strength.

Normally the winds of the right and left channel circulate with different relative strengths through the nostrils. At times the winds of the right channel flow stronger than those of the left channel, and at times the opposite occurs. When fully qualified entry of winds in the central channel occurs, the winds of the right and left channel move through the nostrils with equal strength. Not only is the relative strength of their movement equal, but their movement in general is coordinated. Thus if the winds of the right channel move, then the winds of the left channel also move, and if the winds of one channel are not in motion, then the winds of the other channel will also remain still. The manifestation of uniformity in the movement of winds should be interpreted as a definite sign of the winds having entered the central channel.

The sign of the winds abiding is that the movement from the nostrils ceases.

The manifestation of the signs of fully qualified entry of the winds into the central channel, however, does not guarantee that the winds abide there. It is possible that the winds might briefly enter the central channel but then instantly exit and not remain. The sign of the winds abiding in the central channel is that any movement of winds through the nostrils is completely halted. If the flow of the winds through the nostrils is interrupted temporarily only to resume and be interrupted again, then these are signs that complete and fully qualified abiding of the winds in the central channel has not yet been achieved.

Although the movement from the nostrils is stopped and the winds abide internally, if they do not dissolve, it is said that the body may also deteriorate.

Once the winds have entered and abide with stability in the central channel, it is important that they also dissolve there. Although the signs of fully qualified abiding may manifest, there is no guarantee that the winds will also dissolve. If this happens, it is said that the winds weaken, causing the body to deteriorate.

Signs of the dissolution of the elements

The sign of dissolution of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind as the former dissolves into the latter is the serial dawning of the appearance of a mirage, smoke, and fireflies in space. When wind begins to dissolve into appearance, an appearance like a burning butter lamp dawns.

The fully qualified dissolution of the winds in the central channel following their fully qualified entrance and abidance is marked by the inner signs of the dissolution of the four elements. When the earth element dissolves in the water element (1) a mirage-like appearance arises; when the water

element dissolves in the fire element (2) a smoke-like appearance arises; when the fire element dissolves in the wind element (3) an appearance resembling that of fireflies arises; and when the wind element dissolves in space or consciousness (4) an appearance similar to the light of a butter lamp arises. The four visions appear to mental awareness and not sense awareness.

The method of applying the dissolution of the twenty-five coarse phenomena to those should be understood from *Explanation of the Graded Presentation and Final Resolution of the Four Interrelated Commentaries*.

Here the dissolution of the four elements is briefly mentioned, yet a more detailed explanation of the dissolution of the twenty-five coarse phenomena can be found in Jé Rinpoché's *Explanation of the Graded Presentation of Guhyasamāja* and in his *Precious Bud of Final Resolution*, which is an analysis of difficult points within his four interrelated commentaries.^{[296](#)} Following the dissolution of the four elements and the four internal visions related to them, we experience (5) the dawning of white appearance, (6) red increase, (7) black near-attainment, and (8) clear light. Thus in total there are eight, including four visions and four types of awareness to which these visions appear. A practitioner should train to recognize them and their proper sequence and also train to induce them through the power of meditation.

There are three assertions regarding these signs, namely that (1) they illustrate an increase in clarity from the former to the latter, (2) they measure the stability of the awareness possessing those signs, or (3) they arise with an appearance similar to a mirage and so on. From among them the latter is best.

Although in some cases the serial appearance of visions and signs is said to indicate a progressive increase in clarity or

stability, the best explanation is that they simply mark the dawning of internal visions that are similar to a mirage and so on.

Visions of appearance, increase, and near-attainment

When the natural conceptions along with their winds dissolve into white appearance, an appearance like moonlight pervading a vacuous autumn sky dawns. When [24a] white appearance with its winds dissolves into the red increase, an appearance like sunlight pervading the sky dawns. When red increase with its winds dissolves into near-attainment, an appearance like thick darkness pervading the sky dawns. When near-attainment with its winds dissolves into clear light, it is said that an appearance like the natural color of the sky free from the three polluting conditions dawns.

After the first series of four visions appears to mental awareness, the four minds of white appearance, red increase, black near-attainment, and clear light serially manifest. When appearance manifests we experience a white vision similar to the whiteness of the moon illuminating the autumn sky.^{[297](#)} When increase manifests we experience a red vision similar to the red hue of the sun lighting up the sky.^{[298](#)} When near-attainment manifests we experience a black vision similar to the darkness pervading the sky when the sun has set and the moon has not risen.^{[299](#)} In the next phase of clear light, the vision that appears is that of a sky free from the polluting conditions of moonlight, sunlight, or darkness.

During the time of the white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment, the eighty natural conceptions subside. Although this text does not enumerate these natural conceptions, other texts dealing with the tantric grounds and paths, such as *Mantric Stages* by Tsongkhapa, enumerate them fully.^{[300](#)} In brief, thirty-three natural conceptions subside

during white appearance, forty subside during increase, and seven subside during near-attainment.³⁰¹ During the phase of the initial dissolution of the four elements, coarse winds and mind dissolve. In the latter phase, the subtle minds of the eighty natural conceptions, and the winds that act as their mounts, dissolve.

Till this point in the text the author has examined how the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel, how the four signs of the dissolution of the elements first appear, and then how the four signs of appearance, increase, near-attainment, and clear light manifest. It is important that we recognize these signs so that we may quickly review the entire sequence of their appearance in our mind and keep track of what signs have already appeared and what signs will follow. It is exactly this type of training that can be of great benefit at the time of death. Although these events take place naturally at the time of death due to the power of karma and afflictions, we seek to develop completion-stage yoga that is capable of inducing the four signs and the four types of consciousness characterized by these signs.

Terminology

Terms such as *earth dissolving into water* and so on or *earth subsiding, water subsiding*, and so forth are used. However, the meaning of *earth dissolving into water* is said to be that the potency of the earth element in your body to act as the support of consciousness subsides and then that potency transfers to water. This explanation should be similarly applied up to *fire dissolving into wind*.

Different terms are used to describe the gradual decay of the power of the elements, such as *subsiding, dissolving*, and others. These indicate the decline in the potency or capacity of a certain element to act as the support of consciousness rather than the literal dissolution of one element into another. As one element dissolves the potency of the next element becomes

evident. Thus “earth dissolves into water” should not be taken literally but understood to describe the loss of potency of the element of earth.

***Wind dissolving* is said to be that the potency of the wind that directly moves the natural conceptions and acts as the mount of consciousness subsides, and its potency transfers to the wind of appearance. But it is impossible that all winds dissolve.**

We should make the distinction between the dissolution of all coarse and subtle winds and the dissolution of certain winds whose specific function is to act as the mount of the natural conceptions. The term *wind dissolving into appearance* refers to the dissolution of this particular group of winds rather than the complete dissolution of all winds.

***Also the natural conceptions dissolving into appearance* indicates the decay of the power of the natural conceptions to hold their objects. Further you should understand that the four empties dissolve through the former dissolving into the latter.**

The term *dissolving* describes how a specific potency subsides or declines in different circumstances and indicates not only what happens to the elements but also to the natural conceptions as well as the four empties. We should be able to identify the processes of actual dissolution and the dissolution similar to actual dissolution, which may occur before entering the path—that is, at the time of the basis—or at the time of the path itself.

States similar to actual dissolution

Explanation of the Stages of Actual Enlightenment states:

Indeed states similar to the earth dissolving into water and so on occur at the time of the

basis during sexual union, when going to sleep, when fainting, and so on. They occur at the time of the path when first taking the third empowerment up to vajra recitation. The actual states occur at the time of the basis during death, and they occur at the time of the path from the commencement of mental isolation.[302](#)

States similar to the dissolution of the elements occur for ordinary beings during sexual intercourse, when entering sleep, or when falling unconscious or fainting. They can also occur for beings on the path during the actual third empowerment, the pristine-wisdom empowerment, the empowerment ritual, as well as the stages preceding vajra recitation. Although actual dissolution of the elements does not occur at such times, states similar to fully qualified dissolution can manifest.

Actual dissolution of the elements occurs naturally at the time of death when, due to the power of karma and afflictions, earth dissolves into water and so on up to the dawn of the mind of the clear light of death. This is the first instance of actual dissolution, the one that occurs at the time of the basis. The second instance occurs at the time of the path and may manifest at any stage after entering mental isolation. The specific source of this information is Jé Rinpoché's *Explanation of the Stages of Actual Enlightenment*, which is a commentary to Āryadeva's *Instruction on the Stages of Actual Enlightenment* (*Abhibodhikramopadeśa*).

Signs indicating the beginning of the process

Also the signs that arise from penetrating the vital points in the body are the signs of (1) the winds beginning to move inwardly after reversing their strong external movement from the doors of the sense faculties, (2) the winds subsiding to some extent, and (3) the winds entering the central

channel to some extent, and so on. [24b] *Illuminating Lamp* states that there are many levels of specific signs of reversal and subsiding after establishing higher levels of the path.

The penetration of vital points in the body is achieved through meditation that induces pliability and flexibility of our channels, winds, and drops. This allows us to work with the winds as well as the white and red drops inside our central channel during the completion stage, to finally penetrate specific points due to our meditation and cause specific signs to appear. In general, the winds exit freely through the doors of the senses, proceed to external objects, and thereby facilitate the mind's engagement of its objects. For example, the wind that acts as the mount of eye awareness proceeds externally from the eye sense faculty to the physical form it observes, allowing eye awareness to access that form. This function of movement is a characteristic of the wind. Once these objects are accessed, they are held by the eye awareness. This function of engaging and holding an object is an attribute of awareness.

The author here describes the initial stages of gaining control of the doors of the senses and the flow of winds. In this process we reverse the external flow of a small number of winds so that they move inwardly toward the central channel and enter the central channel to some degree. The signs that occur should be interpreted as marking the beginning of a gradual process where the flow of winds is not instantly and completely reversed and redirected toward the central channel. Moreover *Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages* states that we progress on the completion stage as the reversal, subsidence, and insertion of the winds into the central channel gradually increases in strength till all three have been fully activated.

Points of debate

Are the three states commencing from mental isolation actual states?

One says: It follows that any of the three states of

white appearance, red increase, or near-attainment during mental isolation must be actual states, because their actual states commence from mental isolation.

Reply: That is not logically necessary, because even though it is said that actual states commence from mental isolation, it is not said that any of the three types of pristine wisdom of mental isolation must be actual states.

For although *Ornament of Realization* states that the signs of irreversibility occur from the Mahāyāna path of preparation on, it is not necessary that a practitioner of the Mahāyāna path of preparation attains the signs of irreversibility.

Ngawang Palden questions the logical necessity implied in the opponent's syllogism because although it is possible that the actual states of appearance, increase, and near-attainment begin from the level of mental isolation, it is not logically necessary that all instances of dissolution occurring during mental isolation are fully qualified states.

Also your assertion is unacceptable because, at the time of the path, all the karmic winds³⁰³ must dissolve in the indestructible drop at the heart as they do during the stages of death when actual white appearance, red increase, and near-attainment arise. In addition, many who are incapable of fully gathering the pervading winds to the heart nonetheless obtain mental isolation.

The author then rejects the opponent's assertion that the three states must be actual states. Ngawang Palden asserts that for a practitioner to manifest fully qualified states he or she must cause all the winds, including the pervading wind, to dissolve in the indestructible drop at the heart. But many practitioners at this level cannot fully dissolve all karmic winds because they cannot fully dissolve the pervading wind.

Are the three derived from dissolution actual states?

One says: Any of the three states of white appearance, red increase, or near-attainment occurring during mental isolation must be actual states because any of the three states of white appearance, red increase, or near-attainment derived from the dissolution of the winds in the central channel at the heart must be actual states. For it says in *Illuminating Lamp*:

At the time of death they fully appear. At the time of sleep only semblant states appear, since the movement of winds from the nostrils is not reversed. At the time of the path, the winds dissolve through entering the central channel at the heart, and the actual states fully appear. When dissolution occurs at other sites, the full measure does not appear.[**304**](#)

The quote from Jé Rinpoché's text deals with the various times that appearance, increase, and near-attainment manifest. As such, fully qualified states manifest at the time of death, but at the time of sleep only states resembling actual states appear. At the time of the path, fully qualified states appear through the dissolution of the winds in the central channel at the heart. But dissolution in other locations produces states merely similar to actual dissolution and lacking the full measure of the actual state.

Reply: You should investigate this matter [25a] because *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning* states:

The three empties associated with such states at the time of the basis appear as actual states at the time of death and as semblant states at the time of sleep. The actual states appear at

the time of the path when you have attained final mental isolation, but prior to that similar states appear.[305](#)

The quotation from Paṇchen Lama Losang Chögyen's text indicates that the actual states do not occur in ordinary mental isolation[306](#) but on the level of final mental isolation[307](#) and that the states occurring prior to that are not actual states.

And it appears that it is commenting on the meaning of the text of *Illuminating Lamp*. Khedrup Jé's Notes states that those occurring at the time of physical isolation and soon:

are the four actual empties, but they are not the four empties of mental isolation.[308](#)

This passage reveals that the four empties occurring in earlier stages such as during physical isolation and so on are actual states of the four empties. But even though the states occurring during physical isolation are fully qualified, they are not the four empties of mental isolation.

Do these pristine wisdoms combine bliss and emptiness?

One says: The three types of pristine wisdom at the time of the path must be pristine wisdoms of bliss and emptiness.

Reply: This is unacceptable because if the three types of pristine wisdom do not combine bliss and emptiness, it is said that the three states of white, red, and black appearance alone will dawn. Also meditation on uncommon bliss alone is praised as an amazing concentration, and it is said that bliss and emptiness cannot be applied in the unconscious state of near-attainment. These should be understood in detail from *Illuminating Lamp*.

The author does not agree that appearance, increase, and near-attainment at the time of the path must be pristine wisdom

combining bliss and emptiness. But if they do not combine these two, we will experience mere ordinary states of white, red, and black appearance.³⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the cultivation of the uncommon, blissful awareness on its own that is delinked from the aspect of emptiness is highly praised. And it is also understood that the stage of black near-attainment cannot utilize emptiness and bliss. But these issues are discussed extensively in *Illuminating Lamp*.

Are the four joys the four empties of mental isolation?

One says: None of the four descending and ascending joys are the four empties of mental isolation because *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning* states:

During mental isolation, the four joys of the reverse order that are by nature clear light are not posited as distinct from the four joys of the forward order³¹⁰ that gather winds and bodhicitta from the upper and lower body, because if they were posited in that way, then bodhicitta must be posited in separate stages from the heart, and if that were so, the winds would move.³¹¹

Although this is stated in *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning*, the author does not agree that the issue is settled because Jé Rinpoché contradicts this assertion in his *Illuminating Lamp*, his *Collected Works*, and in his presentation of the system of mahāsiddha Lūpa in *Cluster of Siddhis*.

Reply: This should be examined because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

If you are capable of generating the empties from the stages of dissolution that gather the winds and bodhicitta at the heart, then you are capable of both activating the descending and

ascending joys and inducing the special empties from separate external stages, having gathered them at the heart.[312](#)

In the first text Jé Rinpoché distinguishes between those who are capable of generating the empties from the stages of dissolution by gathering winds and bodhicitta at the heart and those who are not capable of this. Those possessing this capacity can then induce the ascending and descending joys or the special empties from separate stages outside the heart.

Can the three appearances be posited as innate joy?

And *Cluster of Siddhis* states:

It is explained that white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment of the reverse order[313](#) **cannot be pristine wisdom of clear light, but the other three joys of the reverse order are posited as innate. So, too, the three states of white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment of the forward order are posited as the three joys, but they are not posited as innate joy. However, there are times when the three descending joys of the forward order are posited as innate joy.**[314](#)

Mahāsiddha Lūipa states that it is possible that the three descending joys of the forward order are classified as innate joy, but this is not always so.

But these statements alone do not appear to clarify the issue.

Since the quotations from *Illuminating Lamp* and *Cluster of Siddhis* do not fully settle the issue, the author assembles quotes from various texts in Jé Rinpoché's collected works.

The abbreviated advice recorded in Jé Rinpoché's

***Collected Works* states:**

Without the winds arising, the four ascending joys occur at the conclusion of the four descending joys, and the four descending joys occur at the conclusion of the four ascending joys, following in succession.

And:

The four descending joys that occur without arising from the ascending joys are greater in bliss than the former ascending joys, and these four must be posited as innate joy. The four descending joys generated after arising from the ascending joys are greater than the former, but there is no certainty that these four are innate joy.

And:

Through the strength of meditation joining bliss and emptiness at the time of innate ascending joy, the former winds do not arise, and some of the coarse pervading winds, not previously gathered, gather. Through that they enter, abide, and dissolve, inducing the four descending and ascending joys.

Since Jé Rinpoché stated that these points are extremely difficult to comprehend, those with intelligence should analyze them in detail.

The author does not offer a final opinion on these matters. He cites Jé Rinpoché as evidence of the difficulty in reaching a final conclusion and urges us to engage in further analysis. The issues explained in the context of the three isolations in general require prolonged investigation, but those raised in mental isolation are particularly challenging. This therefore completes the first part of the completion stage dealing with the three isolations, namely physical isolation, which produces vajra

body, verbal isolation, which produces vajra speech, and mental isolation, which produces vajra mind. From this point on the author presents the second phase of the completion stage dealing with the illusory body and clear light, which are here named after the two truths.

TEN

Relative Illusory Body

Concentrations pertaining to the two truths

This has two subdivisions:

- 1. Completion stage of the individual two truths**
- 2. Completion stage of the indivisible two truths**

In the context of the individual two truths, the illusory body and clear light are examined as individual, separate states, while in the context of the indivisible two truths, the indivisible union of the illusory body and clear light is presented.

Completion stage of the individual two truths

The first has two subdivisions:

- 1. Completion stage of the relative illusory body**
- 2. Completion stage of ultimate clear light**

There are paths common to both sūtra and tantra, paths common to all the different classes of tantra, as well as uncommon paths—paths found exclusively in highest yoga tantra. The uncommon method and wisdom of highest yoga tantra is the illusory body and clear light of the completion stage, which together produce the resultant state of Buddha Vajradhara.

Completion stage of the relative illusory body

First, the nature of the level of the illusory body is “a completion-stage practice that begins *from* when the actual body of the deity adorned with signs and marks is established due to its cooperative condition—the semblant clear light of final mental

isolation and its substantial cause—the fundamental wind that serve as its mount; and manifests at the same time that near-attainment of the reverse order is established by the winds moving from semblant clear light of final mental isolation. It extends *up to but not including* the generation of the proximate causes that are the means of achieving actual clear light.”

We first obtain the impure illusory body and then later the pure illusory body through training in physical isolation, verbal isolation, and mental isolation. Mental isolation itself possesses many levels, but the last stage of mental isolation manifesting prior to the obtainment of the illusory body is called *final mental isolation*. This refers to the *semblant clear light* of final mental isolation from among the three types of clear light: (1) semblant clear light, (2) actual clear light, and (3) clear light of the final continuum. Up to this point, white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment of the forward process have already occurred. When the wind acting as the mount of semblant clear light of final mental isolation³¹⁵ moves, the visions of the reverse order begin. Therefore, from this state of semblant clear light, first near-attainment of the reverse order manifests, followed by red increase, and then white appearance of the reverse order.

To understand how the mind engages emptiness at this level, it is useful to examine how the paths are posited in relation to the two stages. The generation stage corresponds to the small, medium, and great levels of the path of accumulation. The three levels of physical, verbal, and mental isolation of the completion stage correspond to the first three levels of the path of preparation—heat, peak, and patience. Semblant clear light of final mental isolation corresponds to the level of supreme dharma, the final phase of the path of preparation, where emptiness is still comprehended by means of a generic image. Thus the impure illusory body is attained at the level of supreme dharma of the path of preparation through semblant

clear light acting as its cooperative condition and the winds supporting semblant clear light acting as its substantial cause. Moreover, the level of the impure illusory body extends to the point of generating the causes that establish the actual clear light.

Special characteristics of the illusory body

Attainment of the illusory body demonstrates a high level of attainment, one that is not only difficult to achieve but also difficult to comprehend. [316](#) Even cultivating a coarse understanding of the illusory body generates a great benefit said to be similar to attaining the first bodhisattva ground since it places special imprints on the mind.[317](#) In order to manifest the illusory body, we must be able to differentiate the subtle body from the coarse body. Once the illusory body is established, it is certain that we will attain enlightenment on that very basis. However, as previously mentioned, it is not possible to attain enlightenment in one life and one body, because we cannot attain enlightenment if the coarse body that exists prior to establishing the illusory body is not discarded. Alternatively we may posit that enlightenment is attained in one life and one body if we define that body as the subtle body that has separated from the coarse body.

Once the illusory body has been attained, the practitioner has miraculous powers. As such the illusory body may manifest as inanimate objects such as trees, stones, bridges, fruit, and so forth. For example, it is said that Ārya Nāgārjuna was the friend of a Śātavāhana king whose son impatiently sought the throne. When the prince heard that the life of his father was karmically linked to the life of Nāgārjuna, he went to Nāgārjuna and pleaded with him to pass away so that the king would also die, allowing him to become king. Nāgārjuna accepted his request and reflected on possible karmic conditions that would give rise to his death. He remembered that in a past life he stood on a blade of grass that severed the body of a worm. The prince took a blade of grass and severed

the ārya's neck, separating the head from the body, and Nāgārjuna entered parinirvāṇa. It is said that his head and body assumed the aspect of stone and are ever so slowly approaching each other. To ordinary beings they appear as stone, but in reality they are the illusory body. When they finally reunite, Nāgārjuna will revive and again spread the teachings in the noble land of India.

A debate partner of the previous incarnation of Denma Lochö Rinpoché once stated that the celestial mansions of Yamāntaka or Guhyasamāja are actually illusory bodies. But though we may take the celestial mansions to be the illusory body, they are not the agent who manifested the illusory body. A further example is the great yogi Pawo Phamthingpa, who entered meditation in a cave at Machi in Amdo, near the Tibetan-Chinese border.^{[318](#)} Later the opening of the cave collapsed, blocking access to the cave for many years. When the cave was finally reopened, a stone image resembling the form of Heruka with consort was found inside. It is said that this stone is the illusory body attained by the yogi Phamthingpa through meditating on Heruka Cakrasaṃvara. The cave and its stone image became a place of pilgrimage and offerings of gold. Later there are also accounts of the cave being burned by fire and access restricted under Chinese occupation. Both the masters Thukten Losang Chökyi Nyima and his student Gungthang(pa) Könchok Tenpai Drönmé mention in their collected works that the stone image is an illusory body and worthy of respect.

Prior to establishing the illusory body, you must be able to separate both the coarse and subtle bodies. There are two methods:

- 1. Separating the subtle and coarse bodies through meditation**
- 2. Separating the subtle and coarse bodies through karma and affliction**

In order to manifest the illusory body, the yogi must be able to differentiate the subtle body from the coarse body, since the

illusory body is a type of subtle body. Separation of the two bodies occurs in two ways: the subtle body separates from the coarse body either (1) due to the power of meditation or (2) naturally at the time of death through the power of karma and affliction. A practitioner of mental isolation may experience the separation of the coarse and subtle bodies by either means. If this differentiation is not induced by meditation while the yogi is alive, it will occur at the time of death.

Separation of the subtle and coarse bodies through karma and affliction

A person who has obtained mental isolation but has not performed any of the three types of conduct generates the clear light of death in the nature of the semblant clear light of final mental isolation. This is accomplished through meditating on contracting the winds by both absorption and vajra recitation in a process that imitates the contraction of winds at the time of death by karma and affliction. Such a person assumes the aspect of the illusory body of the third stage as a substitute for taking a bardo body and assumes the aspect of the emanation body as a substitute for taking a birth existence. He attains enlightenment on that basis through meditating on the remaining stages.

Through the yogas of vajra recitation and absorption, the winds gradually dissolve, and the clear light of death is generated in the nature of semblant clear light of final mental isolation. Then, instead of arising in a bardo body, we arise as an impure illusory body of the third level. Following that, instead of taking rebirth by entering another birth existence, the practitioner establishes the emanation body and completes the two remaining stages of the path—the stage of clear light and the stage of union—on the basis of that body.

Separation of the subtle and coarse bodies through meditation

Separation of both the subtle and coarse bodies due to meditation is separation by the yogas of transference of consciousness and insertion of consciousness . . .

If the separation of the coarse and subtle bodies is induced by meditation, the yogi will practice either the transference or insertion of consciousness.[319](#)

. . . through having previously trained in applying the winds in vase breathing and so on and repeatedly focusing on consciousness mounted on the wind issuing from the heart. He separates the two bodies in this life without requiring the three types of conduct through cultivating the concentration of mental isolation,

In order to separate the subtle body from the coarse body, we do not need to engage in the three types of conduct: conduct with elaboration, conduct without elaboration, and conduct completely free of elaboration.[320](#)

but since it is extremely difficult for the separated body to arise as an illusory body in the actual state of Vajradhara, it is said that you must definitely engage in any of the three conducts.

It is possible to separate the two bodies by relying on the practices of transference of consciousness or insertion of consciousness without engaging in any of the three types of conduct. However, since it is very difficult to generate the separated subtle body in the aspect of Buddha Vajradhara without engaging in the three types of conduct, we should engage in them.

Sentient beings have both a coarse, temporary body and mind and a more subtle, fundamental body and mind. As long as the coarse body performs actions such as moving, for that long the physical aspects of the fundamental body do not manifest.

Sentient beings possess levels of body and mind of varying subtlety. In general they have a coarse mind-body, a subtle mind-body, and an extremely subtle mind-body. While the coarse body and mind are manifest and active, the subtler levels of mind-body remain inactive in what resembles a latent state.

If through dissolving all of the coarse winds without exception in the indestructible drop at the heart you stop the coarse body from performing actions of moving and so on, the fundamental body arises in its physical aspect and engages in the actions of coming and going.

When all coarse winds have dissolved into the indestructible drop at the heart, the connection between the subtle and coarse bodies is severed, resulting in the deactivation of the coarse body and the activation of the subtle body. The subtle body can rise either inside or outside the coarse body, and from that point it is considered to be active. While the coarse and fundamental bodies and minds are connected, both cannot be active at the same time. But once they are separated, the subtle body may arise and engage in various actions.

The simultaneous existence of coarse and subtle awareness

Although both coarse and subtle mental consciousness exist simultaneously in the mental continua of sentient beings, this does not contradict sūtra. Nor is there the erroneous consequence of having two mental continua, because for as long as the coarse mind functions to hold its focal object and aspect, for that long the subtle mind does not hold its focal object and aspect. But when the subtle mind holds its focal object and aspect, the coarse mind ceases and does not exist. This is stated in *Khedrup Jé Notes*, but since in debate it is difficult to posit awareness that lacks an object, this must be analyzed.

Since sentient beings possess both coarse and subtle mental awarenesses, it is important to accept that these two exist simultaneously. Yet this assertion of the simultaneous existence of two types of awareness does not imply that there are two distinct mindstreams existing simultaneously ; thus there is no contradiction with sūtra. This is because although two types of awareness are present simultaneously, they are not active simultaneously. When the coarse mind engages certain objects, the subtle mind remains inactive in a latent state, without engaging any object and vice versa. Thus there is no time when both the coarse and subtle minds actively hold the aspects of their focal objects.

Although this presentation does not contradict sūtra, it is difficult to defend in debate, because the definition of awareness is “that which is clear and cognizant.” Awareness therefore must possess clarity and cognizance of its object, and thus hold or apprehend its object, whether it is coarse or subtle. But if we assert that one awareness is active while the other is inactive, this implies that the inactive awareness does not hold its object, and this would contradict its definition as awareness.

This also relates to the debate regarding whether prātimokṣa vows exist in the mindstream of a monk coursing in ārya equipoise on emptiness. According to the Vaibhāṣika school, vows are posited as form, whereas the Prāsaṅgika school asserts that vows are awareness. If vows are posited as awareness, then such awareness must have an object. But if this awareness is not manifest, then it is difficult to posit the vows, since the imprints of the vows are not actual vows. Similarly, this subtle awareness discussed here must also have an object. According to the debate manuals of the Gomang College of Drepung Monastery, it is not logically necessary that when awareness exists it must be manifest, for the existence of the mere imprints of awareness permit us to assert that awareness exists. According to Drepung’s Loseling College, if awareness exists, then it must be manifest. In debate we have to give an answer according to the debate manuals we are

studying, but each position has its potential strengths and dangers.

Another interesting case to examine is the state of the coarse and subtle awareness of a medium while channeling a deity. At the time of channeling, we have to accept that the deity's awareness becomes manifest on the physical basis of the medium. In this case there are two mental continua; the first is the medium's and the second that of the deity. Both the coarse and subtle awarenesses of the medium are inactive while channeling. The medium, in a state of trance, is technically unconscious. This is not easy to explain, because if the medium has awareness, this awareness must hold an object, which does not seem to be the case at that time. I tend to think that both coarse and subtle awareness of the medium must be in a latent state during channeling. Again, this debate presents unique challenges.

Points of debate

The first debate: The illusory body arises internally

One says: The impure illusory body established in this life only arises internally, because it abides only in the central channel at the heart . . .

The first position is that the illusory body must initially arise inside the body of coarse aggregates, because it abides only inside the central channel at the heart. To support this position the scholar quotes *Khedrup Jé's Notes*.

. . . because *Khedrup Jé's Notes* states:

Though the impure illusory body established in this life is separated from the coarse body, it is not separated spatially because it does not have the capacity for that. [321](#)

Khedrup Rinpoché states that although the impure illusory body and the body of physical aggregates are separated by their degree of subtlety, they are not separated in location. The impure illusory body is established in the same place as the

coarse physical body, for it is established inside it.

And:

Though that impure illusory body abides in the place of the indestructible drop inside the central channel at the heart, it is not necessarily small just because it abides in a small place; this illusory body, as a pristine wisdom body, is unobstructed.[322](#) [27a]

Although the two bodies are differentiated in terms of subtlety, the dimensions of the impure illusory body are not limited to the dimensions of the indestructible drop. Since it is not a physical body but rather a body of pristine wisdom, it is physically unobstructed and not limited in terms of its physical dimension. This therefore encapsulates the view advocated in the writings of Khedrup Rinpoché, according to which the impure illusory body arises exclusively inside the body of physical aggregates.

The second debate: The illusory body arises externally

One says: When the illusory body is first established, it must arise outside of the coarse body because *Illuminating Lamp* states:

When this body of union is first established, it is established in a different place than the former body.[323](#)

Jé Rinpoché's *Illuminating Lamp* is quoted here to establish that the body of union must be established in a different place than the coarse body. Yet this passage does not state clearly that the subtle body *abides* in a separate location, it merely states that it is *established* in a separate location.

And:

The enjoyment body is first established in a separate place from the former body, and even the

mode of holding the emanation body that enters the former body should be understood as previously explained.[324](#)

And:

The mode of establishing the impure and pure illusory bodies are explained to be similar.[325](#)

This therefore encapsulates the second position, according to which the impure illusory body is established outside of the coarse body.

The third debate: It arises either internally or externally, according to one's wish

The author then introduces the view of Paṇchen Lama Losang Chögyen, which differs from the previous two:

One says: When the illusory body is first established, it may arise either inside or outside the body depending on that yogi wishing it to be established either inside or outside the body, because that text states:

When the illusory body is established from the fundamental body of the winds and mind of mental isolation, it arises either outside or inside the body, according to the yogi's wish, through separating from the coarse body.[326](#)

Ngawang Palden here cites Paṇchen Losang Chögyen's *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning*.

That is logically necessary because he clearly stated it from the perspective of the impure illusory body: he states "is established . . . from the winds of mental isolation." It is also clear that he did not state it from the perspective of having already established that body: he did not state "when it was already established" but rather "when it is

established.”

If the past tense of the verb *establish* (*'grub*) were used, the statement that the location of the illusory body is determined according to the wish of the yogi would have to be applied not to the time that it is newly established but to a later time.

Reply: Analyze which of these three assertions is the final intention of Jé Rinpoché.

Ngawang Palden has presented three different positions regarding where the impure illusory body arises in relation to the coarse body. Without suggesting a resolution, he encourages us to investigate this issue further until we ascertain Jé Rinpoché's final position.

When is the relation between the coarse and subtle bodies severed?

Also, you cannot accept any explanation that asserts that the impure illusory body obtained in this life cannot abide separately from the coarse body because (1) it contradicts the previous quote of *Illuminating Lamp*—and (2) it does not accord with the intention of Khedrup Jé. The second reason is established because *Great Commentary to the Kālacakra* states:

Even though the fundamental body arises as an impure illusory body, as long as [27b] the relationship between the supporting coarse body and the supported fundamental body is not severed, the subtle body will continue, but it cannot remain when the coarse body is abandoned. Still, as long as you abide in equipoise in illusion-like concentration, the subtle body can abide in that place through not abandoning the coarse body. But if you cannot abide in that equipoise, then at that time you should practice the advice of merging

with the emanation body, since the illusory body will enter the coarse body by its own force.[327](#)

The *Great Commentary to the Kālacakra* was composed by Khedrup Rinpoché. The passage quoted here states that as long as the coarse and the subtle bodies are still related, the subtle body cannot exist separately. Once the connection is severed, however, it is possible for it to abide on its own. Nevertheless, during equipoise it can abandon the coarse body and abide in a separate location, but if we are not able to remain in equipoise on emptiness, the illusory body will reenter the coarse body naturally, on its own. In such cases we should apply the advice of merging the illusory body with the emanation body.

A further reason is that when union is attained, the relationship between the supporting coarse body and the supported subtle body that are projected by former karma is severed by the strength of meditation. Therefore, according to your desire, you may either completely abandon the coarse body or retain it for the sake of your disciples.

Similarly, when the state of union is attained, we can either abandon the coarse body or keep it, according to our wish. At that time the karmic connection between the coarse and subtle bodies has been severed due to the strength of our meditation, such that we need not remain connected to the coarse body. We may still choose to do so, however, for the sake of our disciples.

The illusory body that attains enlightenment in the bardo may completely forgo having a coarse body, since it severs the relationship between the coarse supporting body and the supported body by the strength of exhausting former projecting karma. However, though the impure illusory body that attains enlightenment in this life severs the coarse relationship between the coarse supporting body

and the subtle supported body that are projected by karma, the subtle relationship is not severed. Until the actual clear light is generated, you are unable to fully discard the coarse, former body.

In brief, the illusory body that will attain enlightenment in the bardo has severed its relation with the coarse physical body and can discard it, yet it has not severed its connection with the subtle body. The fact that its connection with the subtle body is not completely severed at this point is supported by the following statement:

When the body of union is obtained, the relationship between the coarse supporting body and the subtle supported body projected by karma is completely severed. The being who attains enlightenment in one life also attains enlightenment through changing bodies. This is stated in the *Compendium of Practices* and *Bright Lamp* and explained in *Explanation of the Graded Presentation* and so on.

It is only at the time of union that the connection between both the coarse and subtle bodies is completely severed. At that point the practitioner attaining enlightenment in one life will have to change his coarse body. This view is presented in Āryadeva's *Lamp of the Compendium of Practices*, Candrakīrti's *Bright Lamp*, and Jé Rinpoché's *Explanation of the Graded Presentation of Guhyasamāja*.

Objection: A jewel-like disciple does not attain enlightenment in one life and one body, because when he obtains union he must change his former coarse body.

Reply: That is not logically necessary, because in changing his coarse body he does not need to discard it.
[28a]

A scholar asserts that the idea that a jewel-like disciple attains enlightenment in one life and one body is incorrect because the

coarse body must be changed in that process. The author replies that the fact that the jewel-like disciple has to change the coarse body does not mean that he cannot attain enlightenment in one life and one body because *changing* our body does not necessarily mean *discarding* our body. [328](#)

Moreover, in the notes composed by my guru Yangchen Galo to the statements of Shingsa Rinpoché, it is stated that when the former Pañchen Lama conferred the empowerment of Guhyasamāja at Drak Yerpa to the monks of Gyütö, he stated that the Tibetans had asked Atiśa whether attaining enlightenment in one body and one life were possible. To this Atiśa replied that attaining enlightenment in one life was possible but attaining enlightenment in one body was not possible. The Tibetans held that Atiśa made this statement without sufficient consideration, but since this was a statement of Atiśa, who comprehended the salient points of mantra, it was taken to be perfectly true. But Pañchen Lama explained that the Tibetans did not understand Atiśa's comment. This should be analyzed.

The Third Pañchen Lama, Palden Yeshé (1738–80), related this anecdote when conferring the Guhyasamāja empowerment. There is no dispute as to whether a jewel-like disciple attains enlightenment in one lifetime, but debate arises as to whether enlightenment is attained on the basis of a single body. It is clear that the body of coarse aggregates must be exchanged for a subtle body, but the old coarse body may then be retained or discarded according to the yogi's wish. This process involves more than one body, since an exchange of bodies takes place. Therefore, it may be inferred that enlightenment is not attained in a single body.

The dissolution of the impure illusory body

Question: Why must the impure illusory body dissolve when the actual clear light is generated?

It is said that when a yogi attains the actual clear light, the impure illusory body associated with the semblant clear light must be annihilated.

Reply: *Khedrup Jé's Notes* states:

When the actual clear light first dawns, the winds that are the mount of the pristine wisdom of semblant clear light become extremely subtle, and due to that the impure illusory body also condenses and dissolves into clear light.[329](#)

The winds acting as the mount for the pristine wisdom of semblant clear light are the substantial cause for establishing the impure illusory body.

However, both the semblant clear light of the final mental isolation and the actual clear light are fundamental minds, and both of the winds that are their mounts are similar in being fundamental winds. Therefore you must analyze how a coarse and subtle difference could exist.

Although both the semblant clear light of final mental isolation and the actual clear light are similar in being extremely subtle fundamental minds, there is a difference in their being conceptual and nonconceptual. Since all coarse and subtle conceptions together with their winds must dissolve at the time of actual clear light, the illusory body must also dissolve, for the winds that are the mount of conception and act as its direct substantial cause dissolve.

The semblant clear light of final mental isolation and the actual clear light are fundamental types of mind and as such do not differ in one being coarser than the other. The same is true for

the winds acting as their mounts. Nevertheless they do differ. Semblant clear light is a conceptual mind, while the actual clear light that acts as the cause of the pure illusory body is a nonconceptual mind since it comprehends emptiness perceptually.

The twelve examples illustrating the nature of the illusory body

***Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom* gives twelve examples [28b]—an illusory person, the moon in water, and so on—to illustrate the illusory body.**

The illusory body is not a material body made of flesh and blood. By nature it consists of extremely subtle wind and extremely subtle mind. The extremely subtle mind acts as its cooperative condition, while the extremely subtle wind acts as its substantial cause.

When it is generated as the body of Vajradhara from mere winds and mind:

(1) It is like an illusory person since it is nothing but mere wind and mind, though it is complete in all the main and secondary limbs.

When such a body that is merely made of wind and mind is established, it is like an illusory person. It is like a person since it is complete in the five main limbs of the head, the two arms and the two legs, together with all their secondary limbs such as fingers, toes, and so forth. Moreover it is illusory since it is not composed of coarse material particles but subtle wind and mind instead.

(2) It is like the reflection of the moon in water since it pervades everywhere.

Although the moon is actually in the sky, the form of the moon can be found everywhere since it may be reflected in a number of surfaces—the glass of a window, a body of water, and so forth. The illusory body is similar in that it pervades wherever there are trainees.

(3) It is like the shadow of a human body or a phantom since it lacks flesh, bones, and so forth.

It is like the shadow of the body that possesses its shape but lacks the material substance of flesh and blood.

(4) It is like a mirage since it moves constantly.

A mirage appears to be water shimmering on hot sand. Since the illusory body also appears to be moving rather than being still, it is said to be like a mirage.

(5) It is a body established from mere wind and mind, like a dream body separated from the coarse body in a dream.

There are different types of coarse and subtle dream bodies, including the bodies of ghosts. The illusory body is similar to these.[330](#)

(6) It is like an echo since it appears to others though it belongs in the same mental continuum as the maturation body.[331](#)

The illusory body and the coarse body of a being of this world belong to the same mental continuum. They are like the sound initially produced and the echo of this sound that belong to the same continuum of sound.

(7) It is like the city of gandharvas since it is the supporting and supported maṇḍala of that body.

Gandharvas are intermediate beings that in general cannot utilize coarse form except for aromas. Such beings gather and simultaneously establish their cities wherever there is an empty, hollow space. It is said that as soon as we turn up an empty offering bowl, the syllables *oṃ āḥ hūṃ* should be pronounced to stop gandharvas congregating inside them. Another way to avoid this is to make sure that offering bowls that are turned up do not remain completely empty, by pouring some water from the first bowl to the remaining ones. The illusory body is said to be like a city of gandharvas since the

celestial mansion and the residing deities are established simultaneously.

(8) It is like an apparition since it is one but appears as many.

The illusory body is similar to an apparition or a magical display since a single illusory body can appear as many deities.

(9) It is like a rainbow since the five colors of the body appear unobstructed and unmixed.

The illusory body is like a rainbow since the five colors of the illusory body are unimpeded by coarse form and maintain their separate identity, just like the five colors of a rainbow.

(10) It is like lightning in the midst of clouds since it abides inside the aggregates of the maturation body.

As lightning occurs among the clouds and flashes momentarily before disappearing, so too the illusory body abides in the midst of the coarse aggregates and instantly emerges from them.

(11) It is like a bubble erupting in extremely clear water since it arises suddenly from within an empty state.

The waves appearing on the surface of the sea are by nature water but assume a different shape. The nature of the sea and the waves is the same, but their form and aspect are different. Just as waves form in the sea out of water, the illusory body arises out of an empty state.

(12) It is like the appearance of a reflection of Vajradhara in a mirror since it is complete in all main and secondary limbs.

The last example is that of being like a reflection of Vajradhara in a mirror. An illusory body is like an image in a mirror since it manifests instantly complete in every aspect.

***Illuminating Lamp* states:**

These examples illustrate the learner's illusory body. When used to illustrate the non-learner's illusory body, the sixth and the tenth examples are appropriate.[332](#)

These twelve examples are applicable to the illusory body of a learner. But from among these examples, it is said that the sixth and tenth examples—the echo and lightning—best illustrate the illusory body of a non-learner.

I wonder whether this means that in the context of the sixth and the tenth examples, which illustrate the illusory body that has discarded the maturation body, these examples are applied to the emanated body that replaces the maturation body?

Up to the point that the non-learner's state of Vajradhara is attained, the yogi does not sever the connection with the coarse body composed of maturational aggregates. But once the state of Vajradhara is attained, the connection with the coarse body is severed, and the old, coarse body is discarded. Therefore it seems that the sixth and tenth examples are applied to the emanated body that replaces the maturation body.

From among the twelve examples, the example of the dream body is best. The other examples merely indicate that an illusory body is definitely generated when those examples are properly applied to the meaning illustrated. But the illusory body illustrated by those examples is not generated in the nature of the path, [29a] whereas that illustrated by the dream body is. For the three dream states of preparation, actual dream, and conclusion illustrate the three states of preparation, actual illusory body, and conclusion; the other examples do not do this.

The example of the dream body is said to be the most accurate example because the dream body is something that can actually be generated in the nature of the path, which is not the case for the other eleven examples. While asleep, we can identify three phases associated with the rising of the dream body. The first is the preparatory phase that is the time of the initial intention to rise in such a body. The second is the actual phase of having arisen in a dream body, and the third is the final phase of concluding such activity. These three phases of the dream body can also illustrate the three phases of the illusory body.

Likewise, the three empties preceding the illusory body are illustrated by the three empties of sleep, the illusory body is illustrated by the dream body, and the illusory body acting as an emanation body is illustrated by the dream body separating from the coarse body and reentering the coarse body.

The similarities between the dream body and the illusory body are not exhausted by the similarity of their phases. Further, the three empties preceding the illusory body illustrate the three empties preceding the dream body, and the dream body in general illustrates the illusory body. During sleep, the dream body arises and separates from the coarse body that remains inactive and asleep. Once the dream body separates from the coarse body, it may travel to distant places and engage in various activities before returning and reentering the coarse body. This is like the yogi who has manifested the illusory body adopting the emanation body.

The ninefold mixing

The instruction of the nine rounds of mixing related to the illusory body should be understood from *Illuminating Lamp*.

The nine rounds of mixing related to the illusory body are not explained in this text, and the author suggests that we consult

Illuminating Lamp. Here “mixing” refers to merging what is mundane with what is pure in order to achieve a pure and uncontaminated state. The nine mixings consist of three sets of three mixings: (1–3) three that mix death with the dharma body, (4–6) three that mix the bardo with the enjoyment body, and (7–9) three that mix birth with the emanation body.³³³ In each set of three, the first two exist at the time of the basis, while the third exists at the time of the path. The three deaths are (1) normal death, (2) the empty state of sleep before the dream body arises, and (3) the four empties in the completion stage. The three bardos are (4) the bardo of existence, (5) the bardo of dreams, and (6) the bardo of the path—the illusory body. The three births are (7) birth in the womb by the bardo of existence, (8) birth when waking due to the bardo of dreams reentering the coarse aggregates, and (9) birth in the coarse aggregates by the illusory body.

The ultimate purpose of the nine mixings is to accomplish the three mixings at the time of the path. It is stated in the secret biography of Tsongkhapa that even though Butön Rinpoché did not actually meet Tsongkhapa, he had visions of Tsongkhapa seated on a throne holding the root text of *Guhyasamāja*. He placed the texts three times on the head of Butön and advised him to learn and propagate the nine mixings according to the ultimate intention of Lotrak Mawa, a guru of Jé Rinpoché.

Benefits

Also *Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom* states that a benefit similar to completing the generation stage arises from merely generating a special resolution after properly understanding the meaning of the illusory body. For according to the commentary to that tantra:

You do not need to complete the other paths of this vehicle, just the concentration of great bliss of the illusory body alone. But you do not need to even manifest this, since you obtain a

benefit similar to completing the generation stage on the ground of a beginner by merely generating the special resolution to attain the illusory body through properly understanding it. Not only that, you will come to train in the grounds of the definite lineage of this path through attaining irreversibility in this vehicle.

There are great benefits in understanding the way we should meditate to generate the illusory body. Tsongkhapa states in *Commentary to the Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom* that if we properly understand the method of generating the illusory body and generate the resolution to achieve it, then the benefit equals that of completing the generation stage. Of course the benefits of achieving the actual state are obvious. Further, if this point is understood, it is said that we attain irreversibility in abiding in the Tantric Vehicle, and that in life after life we will enter and follow these paths. Such special imprints are placed in the mind.

Those with intelligence who see such benefit generate the three types of pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness. They take selflessness as their meditative object, the meaning of which has been fully settled, and engage it with great bliss induced by skillfully penetrating the points of the external and internal body. As explained before, they attain certainty that the basis for establishing any vajra body is the fundamental body of mere wind and mind, and they generate stable resolution in this method of establishing the illusory body from the mere wind and mind of the empties through frequently contemplating [29b] this utterly wondrous process.

Since this state brings such great benefits, those who understand its value should have conviction in the way that the view is comprehended by blissful awareness and how these two

become indivisible. Further they should cultivate comprehension on how mere wind and mind establish the vajra body. The term *vajra body* is an alternative term for the illusory body, which may also be referred to as the *body of a buddha*. Moreover the term *fundamental* refers to the extremely subtle wind and mind that are primordial states; they do not arise adventitiously but have existed continuously since the beginningless beginning.

Also *Stages of Self-Blessing* states:

The method of mental engagement is difficult to find even in the discourses. This means that if you find the correct instruction on the illusory body and become familiar with it starting now, you will lay down specific imprints for establishing the state of Vajrasattva as the rainbow illusory body even though you have not established the illusory body; this is extremely profound.

This method of mental engagement is meditating on all that appears after generating the innate joy that is stated in the Vajrayoginī tantra to be of the same taste. If you know how to assimilate this practice, it is an utterly amazing state.

Āryadeva's *Stages of Self-Blessing* records the immeasurable value and rarity of the illusory body and the knowledge of how it is attained. Let alone actually achieving the illusory body, even finding a presentation of this state and becoming familiar with it is precious due to the particular imprints it places on the mind. The instructions on the illusory body are fully revealed in detail in father tantra, in the Guhyasamāja tantra in particular, while among mother tantras Vajrayoginī offers an abbreviated presentation. The yogi must first generate the pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness to establish the illusory body.

To generate great bliss we should cultivate the four types of

joy through relying on the yogas of caṇḍālī and so on that are explained in mother tantra. Again the main presentations of great bliss and clear light exist in mother tantra. Therefore we rely on both father and mother tantras as sources for practicing the illusory body and clear light. We attain an amazing synthesis of valid advice by uniting these streams of instruction.

**I prostrate to the bodies of those beings
who have innate great bliss.
From my heart I go for refuge to those beings
who have illusion-like concentration.**

Ārya Śāntideva reveals some of the qualities of those who generate bodhicitta in the first chapter of the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

I prostrate to the bodies of those beings
in whom the sacred precious mind is born.
From my heart I go for refuge to those sources of joy,
who bring happiness even to those who harm them.[334](#)

The author prostrates to those who generate bodhicitta and possess extraordinary qualities. In general when an ordinary person is benefited by another he is pleased, but when harmed by another he considers that person an enemy. Yet a bodhisattva receives and returns great benefit under all circumstances, whether superficially benefited or harmed by another. Such beings are worthy of homage. The author concludes this chapter on the illusory body by paraphrasing this verse; “great bliss” here refers to the practices of mother tantra and “illusion-like concentration” refers to the illusory body of father tantra.

ELEVEN

Ultimate Clear Light

Completion stage of ultimate clear light

The clear light of the fourth level follows the impure illusory body of the third level. [335](#)

The nature of the clear light of the fourth stage is “the completion-stage practice that extends *from the proximate causes—the means for manifesting actual clear light—up to but not including the attainment of union.*”

The clear light manifesting immediately before the attainment of the illusory body is *semblant clear light*, but the clear light presented here is *actual clear light*. There is also a third type called *clear light of the final continuum*. The author presents the nature of actual clear light by delineating its range. Therefore the level of actual clear light begins when the means for establishing the actual clear light are assembled and it continues until the attainment of learner’s union. [336](#)

Cluster of Siddhis states:

The stage prior to being able to directly generate the illusory body through properly releasing the channel knots is subsumed within mental isolation. The stage from being able to directly generate the illusory body up to purifying it is subsumed within the stage of self-blessing. Manifesting the meaning of reality and the proximate causes that are the means for attaining it are called, respectively, the *stage of clear light* and the *stage of actual*

enlightenment.[337](#)

This statement is similar.

The author relies on Jé Rinpoché's *Cluster of the Siddhis* as the source for establishing the nature of actual clear light. Mental isolation precedes the establishment of the illusory body, and the stage of the illusory body itself extends from the time of its establishment until the time of its purification. The "stage of self-blessing" refers to the illusory body. Then we manifest the meaning of reality or emptiness and establish the direct cause of clear light that is itself included in the stage of clear light.

External and internal enlightenment

The clear light of the fourth stage is explained as external enlightenment manifesting at dawn and transcending the three external states of the moon, sun, and evening darkness. It is explained as internal enlightenment due to being completely empty clear light through the dissolution of the three internal states of appearance, increase, and near-attainment.

External enlightenment takes place at dawn on the day of the full moon. Buddha Śākyamuni manifested enlightenment at the dawn of the day of the full moon of the fourth Tibetan month known as Sakadawa (*vaiśākha*). So too we may refer to the actual clear light as *external enlightenment*[338](#) manifesting at the dawn of the full moon day that transcends the sun, moon, and darkness of the sky. Further, it is called *internal enlightenment*[339](#) from the perspective of being the allempty state transcending the white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment that follow the dissolution of the elements.

The three types of appearance that occur naturally through the dissolution of the elements for ordinary people are

generated by the yogi's meditation, and such appearances are again dissolved serially due to the strength of the yogi's meditation. The purpose of such yoga is to generate the experience of the empty state of clear light at dawn.

Attainment [30a] of actual clear light of the fourth level, innate great bliss perceptually realizing emptiness, the highest yoga tantra path of seeing, and the first ground of that path are simultaneous.

During actual clear light four events occur at the same time: (1) the initial generation of the clear light of the fourth level, (2) the innate bliss that perceptually comprehends emptiness, (3) the attainment of the highest yoga tantra path of seeing, and (4) the attainment of the first ground of the path of highest yoga tantra. [340](#)

If clear light is classified by mode of expression there are two:

- 1. Object clear light**
- 2. Subject clear light**

Object clear light

First: object clear light is equivalent to emptiness.

When clear light is examined it may be differentiated in two types: object clear light and subject clear light. Object clear light refers to the object of the wisdom that realizes emptiness, and this is synonymous with emptiness.

Subject clear light

Second, coarse mental awareness realizing emptiness is, for example, the shared general meaning of clear light in the Perfection Vehicle and the three lower tantras. The bliss of melting that comprehends emptiness is, for example, the shared general meaning of clear light in the generation stage.

The words explaining the meaning of tantra may possess four different levels: (1) word meaning, (2) general meaning, (3) hidden meaning, and (4) final meaning. Similarly the general speech of the Buddha may be interpreted on many different levels according to the occasion and the audience. In *Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī* the meaning of the single syllable *a* uttered by the Buddha is discussed from the perspective of its interpretive meaning, its definitive meaning, its final meaning, and whether its meaning is directly understood or indirectly understood. For example, Buddha Śākyamuni uttered the words “Come here” when he first met Maudgalyāyana, and these words were interpreted by Maudgalyāyana, who was already well trained in the meaning of impermanence, to mean “Do not remain in saṃsāra, which is impermanent and unsatisfactory; come here to the state of nirvāṇa.” Others interpreted the same words to mean that he should approach the Buddha.

In this context *subject clear light* is said to have both a general and a hidden meaning. The general meaning consists of a shared meaning applied to a specific object. As such the comprehension of emptiness by the coarse awareness of sūtra and the three lower classes of tantra is said to be the shared meaning of subject clear light.^{[341](#)} Similarly, the comprehension of emptiness by awareness of the three lower classes of tantra is the shared meaning of the clear light of tantra.

“The bliss of melting that comprehends emptiness” refers to the bliss generated by the descent of melted bodhicitta from the crown. It arises after the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel by penetrating various locations of the body at the time of the completion stage. Such blissful consciousness realizing emptiness is a clear light shared with the generation stage, since it can also be found in the mental continuum of a practitioner of the generation stage. Thus, there are two basic instances of the general meaning of clear light: that common to sūtra and the three lower classes of tantra, and that common to both the generation and completion

stages of highest yoga tantra.

The hidden meaning of clear light

The hidden meaning of clear light is semblant clear light of mental isolation that comprehends emptiness; because appearance is a hidden state of mind and it is semblant clear light.

The hidden meaning of clear light has three types—the semblant clear light of mental isolation, of verbal isolation, and of the illusory body. The nature of *hidden meaning* may be understood by analogy to the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts. For example, the words of the *Extensive, Medium, and Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* explicitly and directly teach emptiness. But these words also teach a hidden meaning, namely the method for realizing emptiness, which is understood as implicit by those of sharp intellectual faculty. Other texts, such as Maitreya's *Ornament of Realization*, teach this method explicitly.

Another example of a hidden meaning is the practice of bringing attachment into the path. Attachment is treated differently in sūtra and tantra. Disciples drawn to the sūtra path are not capable of bringing attachment into the path and are not suitable candidates for receiving direct teachings on such practices. Therefore, the topic of bringing attachment into the path is a hidden meaning in sūtra. But for those disciples capable of following the mantric path, this topic is taught in a different manner.

Semblant clear light subsumed within the stages of physical isolation, verbal isolation, and the illusory body is also the hidden meaning of clear light because the *Commentary to the Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom* states that vajra recitation and physical isolation are subsumed within the hidden meaning; it considers the statement that hidden meaning has three types to be the main presentation.

The author presents three types of hidden meaning of clear light: (1) semblant clear light subsumed within physical isolation, (2) semblant clear light subsumed within verbal isolation, and (3) semblant clear light subsumed within the illusory body.³⁴² Though they do not constitute fully qualified semblant clear light, they are called *semblant clear light* and taken as the hidden meaning of semblant clear light. This is supported by a statement found in Tsongkhapa's *Commentary to the Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom* classifying vajra recitation and verbal isolation within the category of hidden meaning.

The final meaning of clear light

Actual clear light is the final meaning of clear light because the final meaning is not taken to be the final progression on the path; rather it is taken to be the final comprehension of reality by innate bliss.

From among the four levels of explanation, the final meaning is the last meaning explained. There are different ways to understand the term *final meaning*, but the author makes clear that it does not refer to the attainment of a final or ultimate level of the path. Rather, it is the comprehension of emptiness through a subtle, intensely blissful awareness.

Word meaning of clear light

The word meaning of clear light can also be posited because both the word meaning and the general meaning have different modes of explanation that do not exclude each other. *Commentary to the Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom* states:

The means of explaining these two is different since the meaning revealed by the word meaning is not suitable for both types of people, and the meaning revealed by the

**general meaning may be clarified through
[30b] giving the word meaning.**[343](#)

In terms of clear light we may posit all four levels of explanation. For example, the meaning of the syllables that comprise the term *clear light* may be explained differently from the overall meaning of the term, but this does not mean that the two explanations contradict each other.

That is, the words *clear* and *light* describe light rays that are clear and radiating, but the general, hidden, and final meanings of *clear light* have to do with emptiness and consciousness realizing emptiness.

The “both types of people” referred to in this passage should be understood as the two types of audience members present at a discourse given by a buddha: the general audience and the trained audience. A buddha gives general advice to the first type but specific and detailed advice to the second type. For example, when the Dalai Lama addresses audiences composed of Buddhists and non-Buddhists, he tends to give general advice suitable for a mixed gathering. But when addressing a Buddhist audience, His Holiness adjusts the style and subject matter of his presentation to match the expertise of those present.

The mode of practice of those not of definite tantric lineage

The author so far has discussed the training of those of definite highest yoga tantra lineage, who from the beginning of their practice enter the Buddhist tantric path and progress uninterruptedly through the five paths of tantra. Yet there are others of definite sūtra lineage, who from the beginning of their practice enter the Buddhist sūtra path and progress in that path until they attain the tenth ground. Such individuals who are not of definite tantric lineage may enter the tantric path at the level of the actual clear light.

The method of inducing this stage after completing other paths exists because a bodhisattva in his final existence who progresses to the tenth ground by the

paths of the Perfection Vehicle and the three lower tantras, who abides in equipoise in immutable concentration in Akaniṣṭha, is awakened by the sound of buddhas of the ten directions snapping their fingers.

Buddha Śākyamuni in his last existence as a bodhisattva is an example of one who is not of definite tantric lineage. He first trained in the Perfection Vehicle and progressed to the tenth ground before manifesting the actual clear light of the fourth stage. This implies that he did not engage in the practices of the completion stage such as the stage of vajra recitation, observing the mind, and the illusory body of the third stage. In this passage “this stage” refers to the clear light of the fourth stage; “after completing other paths” refers to practitioners who have entered the sūtra paths and completed the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and abide on the tenth ground of the path of meditation.

They motivate him by saying “You cannot become enlightened through this concentration alone; you must manifest clear light.” They summon Devaputṛī Tilottamā and at midnight confer the actual third empowerment that demonstrates actual clear light after progressing through appearance, increase, and near-attainment. In the first part of dawn, they confer the fourth empowerment after bestowing instruction on clear light and union. At midday he manifests actual clear light and arises in the body of learner’s union. Then, in the third part of dawn just when the sun rises, he manifests non-learner’s union.

A practitioner at this level is then urged by the buddhas to complete the remainder of the path by entering tantra.³⁴⁴ The actual pristine-wisdom empowerment is bestowed in reliance on a consort illustrating clear light³⁴⁵ at midnight during the first part of the pre-dawn period extending to around 1

A.M. [346](#) Then the fourth empowerment is bestowed in the second part of pre-dawn around 2 A.M., and the practitioner manifests the state of a learner's union. Finally the non-learner's state of union is manifested in the last part of pre-dawn around 3 A.M.

This method of explanation is stated in Yangchen Gawai Lodrö's *Principles of Grounds and Paths*. To confirm this understanding, *Illuminating Lamp* states:

At midnight the guru demonstrates clear light by conferring the actual empowerment dependent on an action seal. Then at dawn, he bestows instruction on how to meditate on clear light and after that how to establish union. Then the student attains actual clear light and after that he establishes union. [347](#)

This information is found in Yangchen Gawai Lodrö's *Ford of the Fortunate* and is supported by a quotation from Jé Rinpoché's *Illuminating Lamp*. In the above passage, the first union that is established after clear light refers to the union of a learner, while the second union that is attained after actual clear light is the union of a non-learner.

Still, you should analyze whether this text explains the mode of progress on the path of those of definite highest yoga tantra lineage from the beginning.

The explanation found in Yangchen Gawai Lodrö's text is from the perspective of the Guhyasamāja tantra. The passage from *Illuminating Lamp* is supported by Jé Rinpoché's *Mantric Stages*. Both describe the way practitioners not of definite tantric lineage progress. But it is important to investigate the issue further with respect to practitioners who are of definite highest yoga tantra lineage.

Khedrup Jé's *Explanation of the Two Investigations*

contradicts this mode of explanation:

When the actual third empowerment is conferred on a bodhisattva in his final existence as a sentient being, [31a] he can generate complete and fully qualified great bliss dependent on an action seal while maintaining his prior perceptual comprehension of emptiness without degeneration. Therefore when the actual third empowerment is conferred, the winds serially dissolve in dependence on vitality exertion with an action seal and three empties manifest. When the fourth empty manifests, pristine wisdom of great bliss perceptually comprehends emptiness. This pristine wisdom is actual clear light, and when he arises in the reverse process from that clear light, motivated by the instruction he previously received on actual clear light when the empowerment was conferred, he arises with a body in divine embrace ornamented with marks and signs and derived from extremely subtle wind and mind.[348](#)

Khedrup Rinpoché's commentary to the Hevajra tantra presents a different view, for he states that the clear light manifested during the pristine-wisdom empowerment is actual clear light. Prior to conferring the empowerment the vajra master instructs the candidate to set his or her motivation and reflect: "After arising from the clear light of the forward order of appearance, increase, near-attainment, and clear light, I will arise in the body of a buddha."

This explains that the clear light at the time of the empowerment is the actual clear light and you arise from that in a body of union. *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning* appears to be in agreement with

this.

Pañchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltzen's *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning* seems to agree with Khedrup Jé's presentation.

These presentations seem to rely on *Illuminating Lamp*:

There are two empowerments, because conferring the third empowerment also signifies conferring the fourth empowerment. Before conferring the third empowerment, the three states of appearance, increase, and near-attainment occur. Then through near-attainment entering clear light, the actual innate state manifests from correct subtle dualistic appearance.[349](#)

The source of the previous two statements appears to be a passage from *Illuminating Lamp*, but its words are ambiguous. For example, the text states that conferring the third empowerment *signifies* conferring the fourth empowerment and that conferring the third empowerment alone is sufficient as it also signifies the fourth empowerment.

Again it may imply that after the third empowerment is conferred the fourth empowerment is conferred because the third merely *signifies* or predicts the fourth empowerment. Still, the passage explicitly mentions two empowerments, namely the third and the fourth. Moreover the three types of awareness of white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment occur before the third empowerment is bestowed, and after near-attainment the candidate finally enters clear light.

According to the latter mode of explanation, the four instructions on clear light are bestowed prior to conferring the third empowerment. You must accept that the fourth empowerment is conferred after obtaining union since it is unsuitable to confer

it before the third empowerment. Therefore *Explanation of the Stages of Actual Enlightenment* states:

The order of practice is to confer the fourth empowerment immediately after conferring the third empowerment. [31b] If that is not so, then it would be erroneous to explain that the means of arising in the body of union is like a fish arising from water, prior to conferring the fourth empowerment.[**350**](#)

The latter mode of explanation refers to the passage from *Illuminating Lamp* asserting that all four instructions are given before the third empowerment is bestowed. The first instruction concerns bestowing the third empowerment. The second instruction concerns bestowing the fourth empowerment, which is inferred from the statement that the third also signifies the fourth empowerment. The third and fourth instructions concerning conferring the third and fourth empowerments arise due to interpreting that statement in a different way. Moreover, it is unsuitable to confer the fourth empowerment before conferring the third, as this would contradict the prescribed order. Logically, the fourth empowerment must be conferred after the yogi has attained the state of learner's union, for it must be conferred in post-equipoise, and this is the first instance of post-equipoise available to the yogi after his attainment of actual clear light.

Since the statements made here are not easy to comprehend, the author then quotes Jé Rinpoché's *Explanation of the Stages of Actual Enlightenment*. In this passage Jé Rinpoché discusses the sequence of events from the perspective of practice. As such there is no gap between conferring the third and fourth empowerments. If this were not so and the fourth empowerment were not conferred immediately after the third, then instruction concerning how to arise in the body of union would have been given at the wrong time. I personally interpret this quotation to mean that the sequence of events in terms of

practice and the rite of empowerment are not necessarily the same.

I think that this statement is contradictory. Those with intelligence must analyze all previous thoughts of Jé Rinpoché, since it appears that those like myself, who are confused and dull, have difficulty settling this issue.

The author concedes the difficulty of sorting out the various statements on this subject. Therefore, we must compare and analyze the three different quotations taken from Jé Rinpoché's texts. The first statement is "conferring the third empowerment also signifies conferring the fourth"; the second is "the four instructions on clear light are bestowed prior to conferring the third empowerment"; and the third is "the order of practice is to confer the fourth empowerment immediately after conferring the third empowerment." It is indeed difficult to find the ultimate meaning of Jé Rinpoché's thought without intelligently analyzing his writings, for though these statements do not necessarily contradict each other, the meaning of some is more apparent than others.

The first statement asserts that bestowing the third empowerment signifies bestowing the fourth. But the third *signifying* the fourth does not mean the third *is* the fourth. The fourth empowerment is also called the *word empowerment*. It is conferred after the student is advised that he or she must rely on the first three empowerments in their correct order because later empowerments cannot be conferred without first receiving former empowerments; the state of learner's union is attained sequentially by following the stages of the path in order. The fourth empowerment is obtained in dependence on this explanation being given and understood by the student.

It is said that apart from the words of the rite used to confer the third empowerment, there is no separate rite required for conferring the fourth empowerment. This again is a sensitive statement. The obtainment of equipoise engaging actual clear light is necessary for the fourth empowerment. But there are

grounds for asserting that a candidate must emerge from equipoise to post-equipoise to obtain the fourth empowerment. Alternately the fourth empowerment must occur immediately after near-attainment without passing into post-equipoise. The actual manner in which this is possible is difficult to understand. Again the assertion that the fourth empowerment is conferred immediately after the third empowerment implies that there is no separate rite for conferring the fourth empowerment. If indeed a separate rite were needed, then the fourth empowerment would have to be bestowed during post-equipoise.

If a discerning scholar such as Jé Rinpoché appears hesitant to state a final position on this issue, it is indicative of the degree of subtle analysis required to penetrate this matter. It should be no surprise that we continue to harbor lingering doubts. But even though we may not yet discern the final meaning of these issues, the mere fact of thinking about them and discussing them places exceptional imprints on our minds.

One says: The explanation that the fourth stage is the proximate cause for manifesting actual clear light is untenable. The third stage exists in the continuum of one about to attain the actual clear light, because the impure illusory body in his or her continuum is the third stage; that [stage] is the impure illusory body.

Reply: Either that is not logically necessary or it should otherwise be examined.

When the author responds “that is not logically necessary,” he means that although the impure illusory body might exist in the mindstream of a practitioner about to attain the actual clear light, it does not logically follow that the third stage exists in the mindstream of such a practitioner. This is because a practitioner not of definite highest yoga tantra lineage would have attained the tenth sūtra ground prior to transferring to clear light in the Tantra Vehicle without having actualized the illusory body. Therefore we should examine whether this

statement is true for those of definite tantric lineage as well as those who are not of definite tantric lineage.

TWELVE

Learner's Union

Completion stage of the indivisible two truths

The nature of learner's union, or the completion stage of the indivisible two truths, is "the completion-stage practice that begins *from* a yogi rising in the pure illusory body. It manifests when the wind begins to move from the actual clear light of the fourth stage in dependence on its substantial cause—the wind that is the mount of that clear light—and its cooperative condition—the mind of clear light. It extends *up to but not including* actual clear light at the upper limit of the learner ground."

The previous section presented the two truths individually. Now the author discusses the two truths as an indivisible union known as *learner's union*. The nature of learner's union is a phase of the completion stage that begins with the yogi rising in a pure illusory body and extends up to the actual clear light at the upper limit of the learner ground. The pure illusory body is established from the actual clear light of the fourth stage and the wind that acts as its mount. The mind of actual clear light is the cooperative condition of the pure illusory body, while the wind that is the mount of that mind is its substantial cause. This body is established when the winds stir slightly from the state of actual clear light.^{[351](#)} The upper limit of this phase is the actual clear light at the upper limit of the learner's path. In sūtra this would be described by the term *clear light of the final continuum*.

Arising in the near-attainment of the reverse order from the actual clear light of the fourth stage, obtaining the pure illusory body, obtaining the

union of abandonment, abandoning afflictive obscurations, transferring to the second ground, and obtaining the path of meditation occur at the same time.

At this stage of practice, as we arise from our meditative equipoise on actual clear light of the path of seeing, various qualities are obtained simultaneously:

- arising in near-attainment of the reverse order
- obtaining the pure illusory body
- obtaining the union of abandonment³⁵²
- abandoning the afflictive obscurations from among the two kinds of obscurations
- transferring to the second of the ten grounds
- obtaining the path of meditation from among the five paths³⁵³

This is presented from the perspective of those of definite highest yoga mantra lineage. We must assert that the clear light and so on that occur at the end of the other paths is pristine wisdom of the tenth ground, and I tend to think that learner's union is not classified in the nine grounds of the path of meditation.

The simultaneous occurrence of these six events pertains to those who possess definite highest yoga tantra lineage. Those who do not possess definite lineage experience the manifestation of clear light as pristine wisdom of the tenth ground after progressing through the nine levels of the path of meditation, since these are states present in the mindstreams of beings in their last existence as sentient beings. The path of meditation of highest yoga tantra extends from the obtainment of learner's union up to the obtainment of the non-learner's union. This includes the remaining nine grounds obtained during the path of meditation.³⁵⁴

Abandoning afflictions

Innate afflictions are abandoned by the clear light of the fourth stage, while *Illuminating Lamp* states that they are abandoned [32a] when first obtaining learner's union.

Those of definite tantric lineage abandon innate afflictions that are actual latent imprints of afflictions by the fourth stage of general highest yoga tantra—clear light. However, there are different ways of debating and explaining this particular point.

Are clear light and near-attainment uninterrupted and liberated paths?

One says: Actual clear light of the fourth stage is the uninterrupted path that is the direct antidote to the afflictions, and the near-attainment of the reverse order is the liberated path.

Another criticizes this by saying : Take such a near-attainment; it follows it is awareness of emptiness in which dualistic appearances subside because it is the liberated path. However this is unacceptable because it is conception—because it is any of the three states of appearance, increase, or near-attainment. Therefore, in accordance with the explanation in other texts, these states cannot be designated as uninterrupted or liberated paths.

An *uninterrupted path* is a mind that directly and uninterruptedly counters a specific level of obscuration, and a *liberated path* is a mind arising after that uninterrupted path, which experiences complete freedom from that obscuration. The first scholar asserts that the actual clear light is an uninterrupted path acting as the direct antidote to the afflictions, while near-attainment of the reverse order is the liberated path that immediately follows the uninterrupted path. The second scholar criticizes this statement. For him if near-attainment of the reverse order were a liberated path, then it

would not be a dualistic mind, yet for him such near-attainment is dualistic since he asserts it must be a conceptual mind. He suggests that the terms *uninterrupted* and *liberated* commonly applied in the path of seeing are not appropriate in this context. Actual clear light and near-attainment of the reverse order are not actual uninterrupted and liberated paths, even though they may bear some similarity to those two paths. A third scholar now presents commentarial support for the case that these two should be designated as uninterrupted and liberated paths.

Another says: Those two must and should be designated as uninterrupted and liberated paths because *Khedrup Jé's Notes* states:

If they are here designated as uninterrupted and liberated paths as they are in other contexts, then it is not contradictory that clear light is posited as the uninterrupted path since it endures for only a brief duration, and the liberated path is posited when near-attainment of the reverse order arises. [355](#)

Therefore, though both the clear light of the fourth stage and the near-attainment arising from that are similar in perceptually realizing emptiness, they are different in their mode of holding objects or in their tightness and looseness.

It is evident that there is no real distinction in subtlety between clear light of the fourth level and the near-attainment that follows. Though they both comprehend emptiness perceptually, they differ in the degree of tightness or looseness with which they engage their object.

One says: Those two may either be designated or not designated as uninterrupted and liberated paths. When those two paths are explained from another perspective, they do not need to be associated with the same lineage...

A fourth scholar asserts that clear light and near-attainment may be analyzed from the perspective of whether they exist in the mindstream of an individual of definite tantric lineage or not. The terms *uninterrupted* and *liberated* that are applied to clear light and near-attainment in the mental continuum of one possessing definite tantric lineage may not necessarily be used in that way in the mental continuum of one not possessing definite lineage.

. . . because when those two paths are explained from another perspective, they may be coarse awareness with no difference in subtlety, and you may posit both as awareness of emptiness in which dualistic appearance subsides since they exist in the same substantial continuum. And when those two paths are explained from another perspective, they are not similar, since there is a difference in subtlety of both clear light and near-attainment, [32a] and there is also a difference in their individual substantial continua.

For this scholar, such designations do not apply equally for both types of individuals, because for those of definite tantric lineage both of these minds are coarse. If clear light and near-attainment exist in the same substantial continuum, both may be posited as minds in which dualistic appearance has subsided. But if clear light and near-attainment occur in separate substantial continua rather than serially arising in the same substantial continuum, then these two minds are not similar.

The clear light and near-attainment of those beings are different in subtlety because the former is a fundamental mind and the latter that relies on it is slightly coarser. This is so because it is not logically necessary that any of the three states of appearance, increase, and near-attainment are fundamental minds and because if a fundamental mind becomes a non-fundamental mind it can no

longer be called an innate mind.

These two types of mind differ whether posited in the same substantial continuum or in different substantial continua. And the degree and type of differences vary according to whether we are talking about individuals of definite tantric lineage or individuals not of definite tantric lineage. “Clear light and near-attainment of those beings” in the present context refers to those possessing definite tantric lineage.

In general, this scholar asserts that for beings of definite tantric lineage, there is a difference in subtlety between the clear light of the fourth stage and the near-attainment of the reverse order. Clear light is an extremely subtle, fundamental mind associated with extremely subtle wind. In comparison, near-attainment is slightly coarser, since appearance, increase, and near-attainment are conceptual minds and therefore cannot be classified as fundamental minds. Near-attainment cannot be posited as an innate mind, since near-attainment is coarser than the innate state of clear light that precedes it.

Reply: You should examine just what should be accepted here.

The author has presented four different positions and their supporting arguments. But the point in question is not easily resolved and continues to stimulate discussion and debate. Ngawang Palden again urges us to investigate further and develop a clear understanding of how these two types of mind are viewed by informed scholars.

What is the duration of clear light?

Again one says:

***Illuminating Lamp* states: “When such clear light manifests, it is not for a brief period because such equipoise can be sustained for a long time.”[356](#)**

To facilitate an understanding of this, the

***Transmission and the Condensed Five Stages* are quoted explaining that pristine wisdom is experienced for eight hours, or from one day up to an eon or a thousand eons. But if it were really like that, you wouldn't need to obtain union at dawn after actual clear light has manifested. Or in the final analysis, if [such a statement] merely teaches the potency of the path, then you should analyze how this helps you understand that the actual clear light is not brief.**

Khedrup Jé previously noted that clear light does not last long when he stated, "it endures briefly, for a short duration." However, Jé Rinpoché asserts that clear light endures for an extended period of time and not for a single moment. Other texts that support this view include the *Oral Transmission* composed by the master Buddhajñānapāda and the *Condensed Five Stages* of Nāropa. Both explain that the minimum duration of clear light is eight hours to one day, but it may also manifest for an eon or a thousand eons. If clear light were to endure for an eon it would contradict the statement that enlightenment is attained at dawn, shortly after manifesting clear light. But if clear light endures for the minimum duration of eight hours, there is no necessary contradiction.

The union of abandonment and the union of realization

It is said that the pure illusory body and the union of abandonment are attained simultaneously. One who has attained the pure illusory body attains the union of realization whenever he reenters the actual clear light. The twenty-one or twenty-three types of union should be known from the commentary to *The Five Stages* called the *Jewel Treasure of Union*.

Regarding the state of the learner's union, there are two types: the union of abandonment and the union of realization.^{[357](#)} The union of abandonment is attained first and is concurrent with

the attainment of the pure illusory body. The union of realization follows as we reenter the state of actual clear light.^{[358](#)} The different names and types of the state of union can be found in Pañchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen's *Jewel Treasure of Union*.^{[359](#)}

Paths and grounds

Highest yoga tantras and their commentaries explain the enumeration of the grounds as ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and so on. You should understand the difference between the actual and nominal grounds from *Illuminating Lamp*; these are also extensively explained in [33a] Yangchen Galo's *Grounds and Paths*.

In highest yoga tantra five paths are posited. But the grounds range in number from ten to fourteen.^{[360](#)} When analyzing the number of grounds, we must differentiate between actual grounds and nominal grounds—grounds that are merely designated as such.^{[361](#)}

Regarding the actual five paths and ten grounds of highest mantra, *Illuminating Lamp* states:

The path of accumulation extends *from* the common paths *up to but not including* the capacity to directly induce the empties through dissolving the winds in the central channel by the strength of meditation. The path of preparation extends *from* the capacity to do that *up to but not including* the illusory body perceptually realizing thatness (*tathātā*) through bliss. The joyous ground of the path of seeing extends *from* actual clear light *up to but not including* the attainment of union. The nine grounds of the path of meditation extend *from* learner's union *up to but not including*

attainment of non-learner's union.[362](#)

In brief, *Illuminating Lamp* allows us to posit the five paths of highest yoga tantra in the following way:

(1) The path of accumulation of highest yoga tantra extends from cultivating the three principal aspects of the path presented in sūtra, training in the generation stage, and training in the completion stage up to the point of generating the empties through dissolving the winds in the central channel through meditation.[363](#)

(2) The path of preparation of highest yoga tantra extends from the capacity to induce the four empties by causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel through meditation up to the capacity to establish the illusory body realizing emptiness through bliss.

(3) The path of seeing, or the “joyous ground,” of highest yoga tantra extends from the obtainment of actual clear light up to the obtainment of union.[364](#)

(4) The path of meditation of highest yoga tantra extends from the obtainment of learner's union up to the obtainment of the non-learner's union. This includes the remaining nine grounds obtained during the path of meditation.

(5) The path of no-more learning of highest yoga tantra is marked by the obtainment of non-learner's union.[365](#)

The union of bliss and emptiness

***Short Letter of Advice* states:**

In the context of the subtle drop of physical isolation, unification occurs only when bliss is invoked, and in dependence on that, you recall emptiness that has already been ascertained.[366](#)

If it is asserted in accordance with this statement that you do not unify bliss and emptiness when you first generate the pristine wisdom of appearance

during physical isolation, then you may wonder whether insight realizing emptiness is obtained from that.

Jé Rinpoché states in his *Short Letter of Advice* that in the context of the subtle drop, only bliss is generated, and in dependence on that we recall previously ascertained emptiness. This then is how bliss and emptiness are unified in the context of the subtle drop of physical isolation. If that is so then we may wonder whether insight realizing emptiness is generated by that bliss or not.

The abandonment of knowledge obscurations

A scholar says: With *Festival of Yogic Play* as my source, I assert that the nine rounds of the path of meditation of the learner's union serially abandon knowledge obscurations through dividing them into nine rounds.

The path of meditation includes nine grounds, beginning with the second ground. Some scholars assert that the nine grounds of the path of meditation serially abandon the nine rounds of knowledge obscurations.

Reply: This is untenable because dividing knowledge obscurations into nine rounds reflects the Svātantrika and Cittamatra systems, which assert that grasping at a self of dharma is a knowledge obscuration, but this is not asserted in the Prāsaṅgika system.

This classification is valid from the point of view of the Cittamatra and the Madhyamaka Svātantrika schools but not for the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika school.

Both the illusory body that corresponds to the accumulation of merit for three countless eons by other paths and the innate bliss that perceptually comprehends reality greatly excel other paths.

The Sūtra Vehicle says we must accumulate merit for three countless eons, but in the Tantric Vehicle attaining the illusory body generates the same amount of merit. Another unique and profound feature of tantra is the path of great bliss perceptually realizing emptiness. Both these tantric paths are far superior to any sūtra path.[367](#)

Therefore it is asserted that one session of equipoise in actual clear light abandons innate afflictions that are said to be abandoned in seven stages by other Mahāyāna paths. [33b] But it cannot be asserted that this path requires nine rounds to abandon knowledge obscurations that can be abandoned in four stages by other Mahāyāna paths.

There are two views regarding the abandonment of knowledge obscurations. Unlike the scholars of the Cittamatra and the Madhyamaka Svātantrika schools, who assert that knowledge obscurations are divided into nine levels and abandoned in nine rounds, Prāsaṅgika scholars assert the simultaneous abandonment of all knowledge obscurations.[368](#) Those who hold that knowledge obscurations are abandoned simultaneously assert that due to the intense potency of clear light, a single session of equipoise engaging clear light is sufficient to abandon all knowledge obscurations. Moreover this single session is relatively brief, and any discussion of four or even nine rounds of abandonment is meaningless. Less potent Mahāyāna sūtra-level paths abandon knowledge obscurations in just four or nine rounds in order to achieve the same level of abandonment as a single session of tantra. This is similar to a strong explosive causing as much destruction as four or nine smaller bombs. If we could destroy the target with one bomb, why would we bother serially exploding four or nine bombs to achieve the same result?

Thus either learner's union is divided into nine grounds and you would begin to abandon knowledge

obscurations from the eighth ground, or you must assert that actual clear light at the end of the learner's ground³⁶⁹ simultaneously abandons the three rounds of great, medium, and small knowledge obscurations. Even so it is not that learner's union cannot be divided into nine grounds, because one who has attained union progressively increases the power of the pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness in dependence on the three types of conduct, and such union possesses many qualities that are enhanced progressively and so on.

The three types of conduct mentioned refer to (1) conduct with elaboration, (2) conduct without elaboration, and (3) conduct completely free of elaboration. These three are discussed in chapter 14 below.

The author thus has completed the presentation of the general principles of the completion stage according to Ārya Nāgārjuna's system of Guhyasamāja, including the five levels of the completion stage, the three types of isolation, and the two truths.

THIRTEEN

Alternate Systems of Highest Yoga Tantra

Teaching in brief the completion stage of other highest yoga tantras During the life of Tsongkhapa, both the Upper and Lower Tantric Colleges were established in Lhasa. Jé Rinpoché would observe the tradition of spending summer retreat at Tölong, just west of Lhasa near some hot springs. There he would teach six commentaries to the monks of the Upper Tantric College and eight commentaries to the monks of the Lower Tantric College, who came especially for this event. Also monks of two tantric colleges in Tsang, Segyü and Ensagyü, attended the teachings at Tölong. But then hostilities broke out between Tsang and Central Tibet, and for some years those teachings did not take place and the tradition lapsed.

In general, from among the eight great commentaries to the completion stage of the Lower Tantric College, the five stages of the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja have been explained while the six practices of Kālacakra will be briefly explained later.

These eight great systems are enumerated in the following way in this text:

1. The Guhyasamāja system of Ārya Nāgārjuna
2. The system of Kālacakra
3. The Guhyasamāja system of Master Jñānapāda
4. The Heruka system of Mahāsiddha Lūipa, which is a mother tantra
5. The Heruka system of Mahāsiddha Drilbupa
6. The system of the four blessings of the Great Circle of Vajrapāṇi
7. The completion stage common to the Red, Black, and

Terrifying Yamāntaka

8. The six Dharmas of Nāropa

The list of the six systems taught in the Upper Tantric College is derived from the previous list of eight by omitting numbers 6 and 8. Since the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja has been presented and the system of Kālacakra will be explained in a separate chapter at the end, the author continues here by introducing the third system, the Guhyasamāja system of Jñānapāda. This system is also known as the system of the four drops, or the four joys.

The four drops, or four joys, of the Guhyasamāja system of Jñānapāda meditate on:

1. **The indestructible drop at the heart**
2. **The secret drop at the jewel**
3. **The emanated drop at the upper opening**
4. **The special indestructible drop at the heart.**

The last is also called the *drop of reality*.

These four are completion-stage practices from the perspective of the four joys in that order.

These completion-stage meditations are structured from the perspective of the four joys explained in the Guhyasamāja system of Ārya Nāgārjuna.

The first two practices train in drop yoga. The third is vajra recitation.

The first two practices—meditation on the indestructible drop at the heart and the secret drop at the jewel—correspond to the yoga of the drops in the system of Ārya Nāgārjuna. The third meditation—on the drop at the upper opening of the central channel—corresponds to the yoga of vajra recitation in the Ārya system.

It is said that the yogi trains in wind yoga, making the winds and drops flexible; and through repeatedly meditating on condensing them into clear light in the forward system and remanifesting them in the reverse system, he establishes the pure

pristine wisdom body of nondual profound clarity, and its subsequent continuum achieves the resultant state.

The author briefly describes the type of training in this system and the manner of establishing the pure illusory body, here called the “pure pristine wisdom body.” The results that are attained are the dharma and form bodies of Buddha Vajradhara. Although slightly different terminology is used in this system, the phases of practice are similar to the five levels of the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja.

There is the great yoga of the Lūipa system of Heruka and the Drilbupa system of Heruka’s five stages of the completion stage:

- 1. The stage of self-blessing**
- 2. The stage of the multicolored vajra**
- 3. The stage of filling the jewel**
- 4. The stage of Jalandhāra**
- 5. The inconceivable stage**

The great yoga of the completion stage of Lūipa is not a completion-stage practice that is cultivated immediately after gaining stability on the generation stage, since it corresponds to the inconceivable stage of this system, and it is said that you must initially meditate on either the four stages of Drilbupa or the stage of mantra of the Kṛṣṇācārya system and so on.

There are three ways of practicing Heruka tantra, namely the systems of Lūipa, Drilbupa, and Kṛṣṇācārya. Lūipa was an Indian mahāsiddha who abandoned all types of mundane activity and meditated intensely by the sea. Lūipa means “fish belly,” for it is said that he survived on the guts that local fishermen would discard when cleaning the fish. Although not mentioned in this text, the completion stage of the Lūipa system has four yogic stages:

- 1. The stage of yoga**
- 2. The stage of subsequent yoga**

3. The stage of intense yoga

4. The stage of great yoga

Three yogas precede the fourth stage of great yoga, which corresponds to the inconceivable stage of the system of Drillbupa. The fourth stage is not practiced the moment we attain some stability on the generation stage, for it is not a yoga of the preliminary levels of the completion stage. Instead it must be preceded by the first three yogas of this system—the stages of yoga, subsequent yoga, and intense yoga. Alternately it may be preceded by the first four yogas of the Drillbupa system—the stages of self-blessing, the multicolored vajra, filling the jewel, and Jalandhāra—or by the stage of mantra of the Kṛṣṇācārya system.

It is said that the first four stages thoroughly tame the channels, winds, and drops. During the inconceivable stage, the environment and inhabitants serially dissolve into clear light, the nondual pristine wisdom body is established through the power of frequently practicing the yoga of arising from that, and its subsequent continuum achieves the resultant state.

We meditate on the first four stages of the system of Drillbupa because they have the power to tame the channels, winds, and drops. Then, having attained flexibility, we may start practicing the inconceivable stage, during which the environment and its inhabitants are purified and condensed into clear light. After attaining familiarity with this yoga, we then rise in the illusory body called the *body of pristine wisdom*, and finally we attain the resultant two bodies of Buddha Vajradhara.

This should be understood from both *Cluster of Siddhis Elucidating the Completion Stage of the Lūipa System* and *Opening the Eye to View the Hidden Meaning: Elucidating the Five Stages of Drillbupa*.

We may obtain further explanation of the two systems of

Heruka, namely the Lūipa and the Drillbupa systems, in these two works by Jé Rinpoché.

Alternative systems of classification for the completion stage of Heruka Tantra

Apart from the Lūipa and Drillbupa systems, six other systems present the completion stage of Heruka tantra.

It is said that there are six different systems of the completion stage of Heruka:

1. The six branches of practice conforming with Kālacakra explained in accordance with the commentary to the first part of the Heruka tantra

This commentary on the Heruka tantra was composed by the mahāsiddha Chögyen^{[370](#)} and presents the structure of the completion stage in a similar way to the Kālacakra tantra with six completion-stage yogas.

2. One of the two systems of the six practices of the lineage explained by Anupamarakṣita

Mahāsiddha Anupamarakṣita also classified the completion stage of Heruka tantra in six yogas.

3. A system called the five stages occurs in the *Abbreviated Tantra*^{[371](#)}

This presentation of the completion stage of Heruka is structured in five levels and applies the terminology of the Guhyasamāja tantra. Each of the three systems so far mentioned employs terminology from other tantras. The remaining three present the completion stage of the Heruka tantra without references to other tantras.

4. The five stages of Drillbupa

5. The fourth stage

6. The completion stage of great yoga

The first of these three clearly employs the Drilbupa system while the last is associated with the Lūipa system.

The system of Vajrapāṇi

There are four blessings in the *Completion Stage of the Great Circle*:

- 1. Blessing of body**
- 2. Blessing of speech**
- 3. Blessing of mind**
- 4. Blessing of reality**

Within the *Completion Stage of the Great Circle*, the completion stage is divided into four stages called the *four blessings*.

The system of Yamāntaka

There are four yogas in the three aspects of Red, Black, [34b] and Terrifying Yamāntaka:

- 1. Mantra yoga**
- 2. Commitment yoga**
- 3. Form yoga**
- 4. Pure pristine wisdom yoga**

Yamāntaka tantra has three lineages: Red Yamāntaka, Black Yamāntaka, and Terrifying Yamāntaka. The structure of the completion stage is common to all three systems. *Form yoga* corresponds to the level of illusory body in Guhyasamāja tantra. For this reason the illusory body itself is also called *form yoga*.[372](#)

The system of the six Dharmas of Nāropa

I assume the six Dharmas of Nāropa to be:

- 1. The yoga of caṇḍālī**
- 2. The four joys**
- 3. The illusory body**

4. Clear light

5. Union

6. Transference and insertion of consciousness

The six Dharmas of Nāropa represent the completion stage of mother tantra. There are at least two ways of enumerating the practices included in this structure. The method presented here subsumes seven Dharmas in six by counting transference of consciousness and insertion of consciousness as the sixth yoga.

However, this should be analyzed since most scholars do not separately enumerate the four joys and union but do separately enumerate the intermediate state, and transference and insertion of consciousness.

The usual enumeration of the six Dharmas of Nāropa does not include the four joys and union. Rather it includes the intermediate state and transference and insertion of consciousness. [373](#)

It is well known that the eight great commentaries of the Lower Tantric College are:

- 1. The five stages of the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja**
- 2. The four drops of the system of Jñānapāda**
- 3. The four blessings of the Great Circle**
- 4. The three yogas of Red, Black, and Terrifying Yamāntaka**
- 5. The great yogas of Lūipa**
- 6. The five yogas of Drilbupa**
- 7. The six shared practices of Nāropa**
- 8. The six branches of practice of Kālacakra**

The six practices of Nāropa are called “shared” because they are shared with mother tantras. Having presented these eight different systems of other tantras, it is important to keep in mind that Guhyasamāja tantra, with its standard presentation of a completion stage structured in five stages, is the root and

standard reference for other tantras, despite the use of different terminology. Since it is said that all tantras can be subsumed within the Guhyasamāja tantra, the yogas included in the structure of other tantras may be subsumed within the structure of Guhyasamāja tantra, either in terms of their nature, in terms of their function, or in terms of being substitute levels.

Systems not included here are the method of practice subsumed within the paths of the three completion-stage empowerments of Hevajra explained in the instruction of the mahāsiddha Virūpa, and many other completion-stage practices explained by authentic mahāsiddhas such as the mahāsiddhas Ḍombipa and Durjayacandra, who revealed the stages of the spring drop and so on and the destruction of color and so forth.

This list of the eight systems for the completion stage is not exhaustive, for at least two completion-stage systems have not been mentioned. The first is the Hevajra tantra as presented by the mahāsiddha Virūpa,^{[374](#)} which includes all practices in the three empowerments. This is found in the Path and Its Fruits, or Lamdré, of the glorious Sakya system. Second, the mahāsiddhas Ḍombipa and Durjayacandra have also offered a different presentation of completion-stage practices that include yogas of the spring drop and the stage of the destruction of color and so forth.

Common aspects

It is also said that after students have attained stability in generation-stage practices, all completion-stage practices of general highest yoga tantra, with the exception of the completion stage of Kālacakra, are explained by valid masters to: establish flexibility of the channels, winds, and drops; then to condense the environment and its

inhabitants into clear light by either of the two types of absorption; then to establish the pristine wisdom body of union by frequently entering and arising from that; and then its subsequent continuum achieves the resultant state.

In brief the practices of all tantric systems, apart from the Kālacakra tantra, may be summarized in a few fundamental practices, just as the rivers from different countries may flow into the same sea. Once stability on the generation stage has been established, our main aim is to make the winds, channels, and drops flexible. Then we train in condensing the environment and its inhabitants into clear light by applying either of the two practices to gather the winds and induce the phases of entering, abiding, and dissolving in vajra recitation. From there we establish the illusory body and the learner's union, followed by the attainment of the resultant bodies of Buddha Vajradhara. These basic, common steps are followed in all but the Kālacakra tantra.

However, valid masters individually explain these systems according to how they are stated in the individual tantras, since there are many ways to establish flexibility of the winds and drops.

Despite their common practices, we should remember that there are different focal points when we train to make the winds, channels, and drops flexible. At times a meditator may be instructed to practice by focusing on the upper opening of the central channel while at other times he may be advised to focus on the navel or the lower opening of the central channel. Various scholars have clarified the differences that appear in different tantras and how they reflect differences in the constitution of different types of disciples.

Although there are many different ways to establish flexibility of the winds and drops, by this specific method the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel, caṇḍālī is ignited, the bodhicitta

melts, and the pristine wisdom of the resultant four joys or four empties is generated from that. Then through cultivating the substantial continuum of the pristine wisdom of innate joy or clear light, you generate the substantial cause of the dharma body and the completion-stage paths that correspond to the birth, death, and intermediate states. Thus, from the wind and mind of the clear light that correspond to the stage of death, you establish the illusory body that corresponds to the intermediate state, and through that acting as the substantial cause of the form body, you attain buddhahood.

Despite the differences of focal objects recorded in various tantras, the main purpose of the completion stage is to cause the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel, then to cause bodhicitta to melt either by the practice of caṇḍālī or some other method, then to generate the four joys in the nature of the four empties, then establish the substantial cause of the dharma body by cultivating and increasing innate joy or clear light. The practitioner meditates on taking the three ordinary states of death, intermediate state, and rebirth as paths for establishing the three bodies at an imaginary level during the generation stage. But in the completion stage the practitioner engages the three phases in an actual sense. Therefore the wind and mind of the clear light corresponding to death establish the illusory body corresponding to the intermediate state, and this acts as the substantial cause for establishing the form body. Thus having established the two bodies, we attain buddhahood.

If you understand this, then you will attain a definite conviction in the many authentic texts of the completion stage, and you will come to understand that though these texts do not teach the same thing, their intention is not contradictory.

It is important to understand that although the main point of the practice is the same, there is great variation in the methods

employed and presented. We need to acknowledge this variation and develop a flexible approach that tolerates different presentations rather than seeing the advice of disparate systems as contradictory.

FOURTEEN

Enhancing and Manifesting Results

*The practice of enhancing these two stages*³⁷⁵

In general our Master [Śākyamuni Buddha] taught three types of conduct: (1) nonattachment, for those of the Lesser Vehicle, who are resolute in lesser practices, (2) the perfections, for those of the Perfection Vehicle, who are resolute in the great and extensive practices, and (3) the dharmas of attachment, for those disciples of the four tantras of secret mantra, who are fully resolute in the profound practices.³⁷⁶

The author now addresses the issue of conduct. In order to suit the predisposition and mentality of trainees of the Lesser Vehicle, Śākyamuni Buddha taught the practice of nonattachment. These practices are taught in the Sūtra scriptural basket, and from among the three root afflictions, they mainly counter the affliction of attachment. The aim of these practices is to gradually reduce the presence of attachment until it is eliminated. For those drawn to extensive practices, the Buddha taught the extensive, medium, and condensed perfection of wisdom texts that present the ten grounds and the six perfections and the Abhidharma scriptural basket. Both styles of teachings are classified as sūtra-level teachings. Śākyamuni Buddha taught the most profound instruction to those capable of transforming attachment and so on. Such disciples therefore received teachings from the four classes of tantra, which elucidate the methods of bringing

attachment into the path, anger into the path,³⁷⁷ and the dream body into the path by cultivating the clear light of sleep.

In the present context the conduct taught is that of attachment. Further, disciples of the three lower tantras take as their path the attachment that focuses on the five objects visualized as goddesses in front of themselves. They do not take as their path the attachment of union with an action seal and visualized goddess.

There are two different ways of bringing attachment into the path. In the three lower tantras practitioners meditate on seeing the five objects of form, sound, and so forth as female deities. But this is the extent of their capacity to bring attachment into the path.

In highest yoga tantra, disciples take as their path the attachment that desires union with an action seal or a pristine wisdom seal so that they may enhance the bodhicitta in their body that is the cause of generating strong innate great bliss [35b] as the special awareness realizing emptiness.

In highest yoga tantra, practitioners are capable of bringing the attachment to union with an actual or visualized consort into the path.³⁷⁸ Since practitioners have different mental capacities, there are different types of seals as well. Those with the sharpest mental capacity engage a pristine wisdom seal while those of lesser capacity engage action seals.

The generation and transformation of attachment

When engaged in practices to transform attachment or anger, only the first moment is actual attachment or anger. From the second moment on it is transformed into pristine wisdom realizing emptiness, and therefore it no longer possesses the nature of attachment or anger.³⁷⁹

The method of generating the special awareness

realizing emptiness by that means is stated in *Illuminating Lamp*:

By means of penetrating the vital points of the external and internal body, bodhicitta melts. From that a special internal tactile object is generated, and by taking that as your focal condition, you generate a special blissful feeling concordant with physical awareness. Through that acting as the immediate condition, a mental awareness is generated possessing the nature of excellent bliss. And when that mental awareness recalls the meaning of reality that was previously ascertained, it becomes the union of bliss and emptiness.[380](#)

There are two types of blissful feelings: physical and mental. Physical awareness experiencing blissful physical feeling acts as the immediate condition generating blissful mental awareness. For example, if a man sets a goal with the expectation of a certain result, he experiences happiness when he gets word of a favorable outcome, and when he returns home he announces, "I heard such good news today!" If we examine the sequence of events, first ear consciousness apprehends the sound of the words, then mental consciousness apprehends the meaning of the words and he rejoices. First blissful physical feeling gives rise to blissful mental feeling, and when coarse modes of bliss are stopped, bliss is generated in the aspect of subtle wind and mind. This blissful subtle awareness is a mental factor concordant with its main mind. When it comprehends emptiness, it is said to comprehend emptiness in a superior way, and when it abandons obscurations, it abandons them in a superior way.

This passage states that from that substance melting, a special physical, internal tactile object is generated, then a feeling of bliss that is physical

awareness focusing on that internal object, then its immediate result, which is a mental feeling of bliss concordant with meditation on emptiness. Again *Illuminating Lamp* states:

Regarding the order of generating sensory and mental bliss, Dharmakīrti³⁸¹ states:

When [physical] attachment [or aversion] increases [or decreases], enhanced [mental feeling] is generated from bliss and suffering. Even balancing the constituents and so on leads to [a blissful] internal state.³⁸²

And:

Awareness generated from a special internal state transforms [other states].³⁸³

This should be understood through logic.

The author now refers to a passage from Jé Rinpoché's *Illuminating Lamp* that cites Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇvārttika*. Dharmakīrti notes that sensory bliss is generated from contact with pleasant and attractive objects, such as forms, sounds, aromas, flavors, and tactile objects. We as humans tend to seek pleasurable objects and avoid unpleasant objects and situations. The longer we remain in contact with attractive objects, the more our contaminated pleasure increases, for each instance of contaminated physical bliss generates further contaminated mental bliss. Once the external and internal elements of earth, water, fire, and wind attain equilibrium, our health and body are also balanced. This in turn induces contaminated physical bliss, which then induces contaminated mental bliss.

The term *internal state* refers to mental awareness that experiences the relative balance of the internal elements and so on. Such mental awareness experiences a comfortable and blissful state when the elements are balanced. First physical bliss is generated through contact with external objects, and its

origin is external. In reliance on external sensory bliss, mental awareness also experiences bliss, and this internal state acts as the special consciousness of bliss. When the elements are disturbed, individuals tend to experience physical as well as mental discomfort. Being unhappy they tend to speak unpleasantly, but those who are physically and mentally comfortable tend to act pleasantly.

Therefore, understand that sense awareness generated in the nature of bliss is the immediate condition of mental awareness generated in the nature of great bliss.[384](#)

The statement that the bliss of melting meditates on emptiness should be understood in dependence on the detailed examination of the logic of the *Pramāṇavārttika*.

Different types of conduct

The author continues by presenting the classifications of conduct. In general, conduct can be classified in various ways according to its nature, its support, and the time it is practiced.

Here, if conduct is classified by nature, there are three types:

- 1. Conduct with elaboration**
- 2. Conduct without elaboration**
- 3. Conduct completely free of elaboration**

Conduct without elaboration has three parts: extensive, medium, and abbreviated. Both the former and latter practices are not classified in three. [36a]

From the perspective of its nature, conduct can be classified as conduct with elaboration, without elaboration, and completely free of elaboration. Although conduct without elaboration has three subdivisions—extensive, medium, and abbreviated^{[385](#)}—conduct with elaboration and conduct completely free of elaboration do not have such subdivisions. These categories

will be explained in due course.

If classified by means of support, there are two types: conduct of the generation stage and conduct of the completion stage. And each has three divisions: conduct with elaboration, conduct without elaboration, and conduct completely free of elaboration.

Conduct is divided into conduct of the generation stage as well as the completion stage, and each stage is differentiated according to the standard presentation of the three types of conduct.

If classified by means of time it has two divisions:

- 1. Conduct at the time of the empowerment to create suitable vessels**
- 2. Conduct at the time of meditating on the path**

Regarding the time of conduct, there are two main occasions: conduct during the rite of empowerment and conduct at the time of the path itself.

Conduct at the time of meditating on the path

The latter has two types:

- 1. Conduct to obtain a path not previously obtained**
- 2. Conduct to enhance that already obtained**

Conduct at the time of the path can be practiced either to induce and newly attain levels we have not attained before or to enhance the benefits of levels previously attained.

The first extends from first meditating on the generation stage up to but not including obtaining non-learner's union.

Those practicing the three types of conduct to obtain new levels not achieved before include those on the path of accumulation who seek to obtain the path of preparation, those on the path of preparation seeking to obtain the path of seeing,

or those on the path of seeing seeking to obtain the path of meditation. In the context of tantra such paths begin from the stage of generation and continue till the obtainment of non-learner's union.

The second, conduct to enhance that already obtained, has no more than four types:

1. Conduct establishing the common siddhis having completed the generation stage

The first refers to the conduct of a practitioner on the tantric path of accumulation who has completed the generation stage and who engages in the three types of conduct to enhance that already obtained and establish the common siddhis.

2. Conduct establishing the illusory body having obtained mental isolation

The second refers to the conduct of a practitioner who has completed the generation stage, physical isolation, and verbal isolation and who engages in the three types of conduct to enhance previously obtained levels during mental isolation to attain the impure illusory body.

3. Engaging in conduct to obtain the body of pristine wisdom purified by clear light having already obtained the illusory body

The third refers to the conduct of a practitioner who has obtained the impure illusory body and who engages in the three types of conduct to obtain the pure illusory body, also called the *body of pristine wisdom*.

4. Engaging in conduct to obtain non-learner's union having already obtained learner's union

The fourth is the conduct of a practitioner who has obtained learner's union and who engages in the three types of conduct to obtain non-learner's union.

Thus, a person ready to enhance the generation

stage must have completed the coarse and subtle generation stage. A person ready to enhance the completion stage must have obtained mental isolation.

Though generation-stage practitioners establish many common siddhis without engaging in such conduct, they engage in such conduct as the means of quickly and easily establishing ultimate common siddhis and many others.

There are practitioners who may obtain some common siddhis but have not obtained the best or most potent of these siddhis. Again, there are others who have some of the common siddhis but wish to attain many more. Such practitioners may therefore engage in these practices to establish these siddhis easily and swiftly.

The need to rely on a seal

Conduct to enhance the completion stage is for the purpose of attaining enlightenment in one life because there is no attainment of buddhahood in one life without practicing any of the three types of conduct. For you can generate the three types of pristine wisdom [36b] through completing wind yoga, but you cannot generate actual mental isolation without joining with an external consort. And though you can gather the winds by the might of penetrating the points in the internal body and melt bodhicitta through igniting caṇḍālī, it is said that you obtain great enhancement in those by means of a seal, and from that you greatly improve your comprehension of reality. This is because meditation on reality that combines attachment to a seal and its associated branches of conduct after you have attained full potency to penetrate the points of the internal body is the meaning of enhancing the completion stage.

The author states that a practitioner needs to enhance the completion stage in order to attain buddhahood in one lifetime, and to commence such practices he or she must have attained mental isolation. Moreover, unless we rely on union with a seal, we cannot attain enlightenment in one lifetime, for the swiftness of our progress is guaranteed by this method alone. When we are capable of completing wind yoga, we are capable of manifesting the pristine wisdom of appearance, increase, and near-attainment, and to induce the actual pristine wisdom of mental isolation, we must engage an external consort. We also utilize an external consort when we are capable of gathering the winds and bodhicitta by penetrating certain points of the body to enhance our comprehension of emptiness. The author raises these points to establish the need for relying on an external seal once we have attained certain levels on the path.

Conduct with elaboration

Conduct with elaboration is conduct that is elaborated through wearing masks and costumes similar to the action seal, making gestures, responding to gestures, and so on.

Conduct with elaboration in the completion stage involves the use of masks and costumes similar to a performance in theater. Further, the practitioner uses certain gestures, and the consort responds accordingly with her own gestures, as a means of communication.^{[386](#)} These gestures resemble those used for communicating with the *ḍākinīs*.

Conduct without elaboration

Conduct without elaboration is the conduct of wearing masks and costumes similar to the action seal but without the elaboration of making gestures and responding to gestures and so forth.

Conduct without elaboration utilizes masks and costumes, but

we do not interact with the consort by way of gestures and responding to gestures.

Conduct completely free of elaboration

The meaning of conduct completely free of elaboration is conduct that abandons all external elaboration and meditates solely on the pristine wisdom of bliss and emptiness through merging union with a pristine wisdom seal and the cultivation of the clear light of sleep.

Conduct completely free of elaboration is free from the use of masks, costumes, and gestures, since it is not a practice utilizing an external consort. Here the practitioner uses a visualized consort called a *pristine wisdom seal* and cultivates the clear light of sleep. A practitioner of conduct completely free of elaboration may appear to be asleep for long periods of time, such as in the story of Śāntideva.[387](#)

Further classification of the three types of conduct

The three conducts are classified in this way in terms of action and so on, but when classified by means of meditation and contemplation, then (1) conduct with elaboration is the conduct of practitioners of the generation stage, (2) conduct without elaboration is the conduct of practitioners of the completion stage who have not obtained actual clear light, and (3) conduct completely free of elaboration is the conduct of practitioners who have obtained learner's union. That is because they are, respectively, (1) conduct greatly elaborating, (2) slightly elaborating, and (3) never elaborating the apprehension of signs. These three are conduct related, respectively, to (1) the general meaning, (2) the hidden meaning, and (3) the final meaning. [37a]

Until this point the author has classified conduct by means of nature, support, and time. Now he classifies conduct in a fourth way—from the perspective of the type of meditation that is performed during the generation and completion stages. Compared with the type of meditation practiced at the stage of completion, the conduct of the generation stage is classified as conduct with elaboration. Within the completion stage, meditation performed prior to the level of actual clear light is classified as conduct without elaboration, while meditation performed at the level of learner’s union is classified as conduct completely free of elaboration.

This classification assists the yogi in countering the tendency to see any type of internal or external conduct as truly established. “Apprehending signs” refers to grasping at the signs or characteristics of true existence. Conduct with elaboration, without elaboration, and completely free of elaboration correspond to three different levels of grasping at true existence. [388](#) Greatly elaborating, slightly elaborating, and never elaborating correspond respectively to the general, hidden, and ultimate meaning.

Practitioners on both stages engage in such conduct, but if they do not quickly generate their respective result, then the method of producing the essence of these two stages, according to *Illuminating Lamp*, should be understood from the tenth chapter of *Commentary to the Guhyasamāja Tantra* and from Nāropa’s *Commentary to the Later Guhyasamāja Tantra*.

Ngawang Palden has explained various techniques that may quickly induce the results of the two stages of practice. But he advises the reader that if results are not established swiftly, we should rely on Nāgārjuna’s *Commentary to the Guhyasamāja Tantra* and Nāropa’s *Commentary to the Later Guhyasamāja Tantra*.

How to manifest the fruits of practice

Having presented the way to meditate on the path, the text then deals with the way that results are manifested. This includes the ultimate result of buddhahood as well as the results of establishing the various siddhis.

The results of such paths have three aspects:

- 1. Buddhahood is best.**
- 2. The eight great siddhis are medium.**
- 3. The enlightened activities of pacification, increase, power, and wrath are the least.**

If the latter two are combined as common siddhis, then there would be two classifications, namely supreme and common siddhis.

In terms of the actualized results, the attainment of enlightenment in the aspect of Buddha Vajradhara is the pinnacle of all attainments and the supreme of all siddhis. Prior to that, the common siddhis must be established as preliminary aids to attaining that ultimate state. The eight great siddhis such as invisibility, speed walking, the sword, and so on are considered to be a medium level of attainment.³⁸⁹ Performing the activities of pacification, increase, power, and wrath for the sake of sentient beings is considered to be the lowest level of siddhi. The eight great siddhis and the four types of activity are classified as common siddhis, while the attainment of buddhahood is classified as the supreme siddhi. This twofold classification encompasses all types of siddhis.

The term *siddhi* means “actual attainment” and refers to the attainment of supreme or common states. A person who is a siddha possessing actual attainment must be an ārya with perceptual realization of emptiness. Further, fortunate beings endowed with good karma may directly see the siddhis performed by another being. For example, after the Buddha manifested the supreme siddhi of enlightenment, he was engaged in debate by a group of non-Buddhists in Śrāvastī who then lost the debate. Had they been able to see that Śākyamuni was an enlightened being, they would not have challenged him.³⁹⁰

Attainment of buddhahood

Also the method of attaining buddhahood has three aspects:

- 1. Attaining buddhahood in this life**
- 2. Attaining buddhahood in the intermediate state**
- 3. Attaining buddhahood after a series of births**

These three are similar in training in the common paths, attaining pure empowerment, and protecting the commitments and vows.

Disciples are classified in three or five³⁹¹ types according to their capacities. Of the three types, the first is the *jewel-like* disciples who are supreme trainees capable of attaining enlightenment in one life. The second type do not attain the supreme siddhi on the basis of the human body while alive but attain enlightenment in the intermediate state as the practitioner passes into paranirvāṇa. It is mentioned in various prayers that Jé Rinpoché was such a disciple. The third type attain enlightenment after several rebirths, at most sixteen.

Disciples of all three types must train in the common sūtra paths, the essence of which is renunciation, bodhicitta, and correct view. Similarly, they must enter the tantric path by obtaining pure empowerment and guard their vows and commitments.

Attaining buddhahood in this life

They are different in that the first is capable of training in the conduct of the two stages, and if the illusory body is attained, he is certain to attain buddhahood in that life.

Someone who attains enlightenment in one lifetime must enter and complete the practice of both the generation and completion stages, including their relevant types of conduct. But once the illusory body is attained, it is certain that

enlightenment will be attained in that life.

Attaining buddhahood in the intermediate state

If someone has obtained all levels from the generation stage up to mental isolation but does not engage in any of the three types of conduct, he generates the clear light of death in the nature of the semblant clear light of final mental isolation and then arises in an illusory body as a substitute for the intermediate state; on that basis he cultivates the remaining paths and attains buddhahood.

The second type is a practitioner who manifests enlightenment in the intermediate state. To do this he must have completed the practices of the generation stage and have progressed to the level of mental isolation in the completion stage. If that disciple had engaged in the practice of any of the different types of conduct, he would have attained enlightenment in that very lifetime. By not practicing them he generates clear light in the nature of final semblant clear light at death. Due to that, all his remaining winds and minds gather internally, but instead of transferring to the intermediate state, he arises in the illusory body, completes the remaining paths, and attains buddhahood.

This explains why many highly realized lamas may remain in the state of pure mind (*thugs dam*) after passing into parinirvāṇa. Whether or not this state will occur, as well as the duration of such a state, depends entirely on the lama's individual intentions and needs. For some lamas there is no need to enter such a state. Some lamas remain in this state for a few hours, some may remain for a few weeks, while others abide for months. During this time there are no signs of decay of the old body, such as deterioration of the flesh or an unpleasant odor.

Attaining buddhahood after a series of births

These are practitioners who obtain empowerment

but merely protect the commitments and vows without intense meditation on the path and obtain levels up to verbal isolation but do not obtain mental isolation. Though they do not attain buddhahood in this life or in the intermediate state, they will definitely attain buddhahood from within seven to sixteen lives.

Lastly, those who will attain enlightenment after a series of births are disciples who have received empowerment and have kept their vows and commitments pure. Such practitioners may not have entered the path or engaged in serious meditation, yet they continue to place imprints on their minds. Others who have entered the path progress up to the stage of verbal isolation. Such practitioners will attain enlightenment neither in that life nor in the intermediate state, but they will attain enlightenment after a minimum of seven and a maximum of sixteen lives.

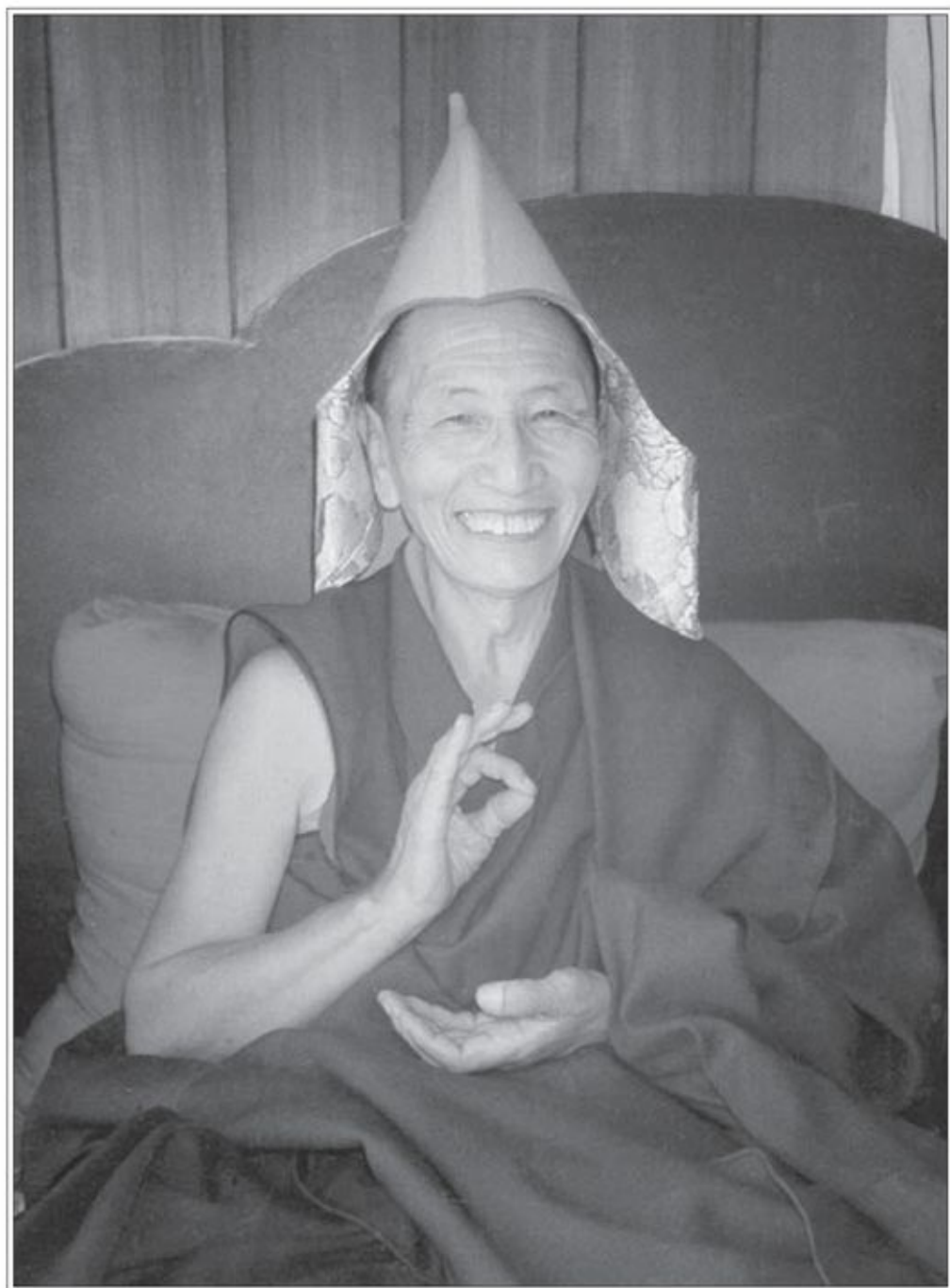
This completes the presentation of the mainstream tantras. The remaining part of the text presents the practices included in the system of Kālacakra tantra.

PART 3

Kālacakra Tantra



Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoche, circa 1993, Kirti Monastery, McLeod Ganj, India. Photo by Alak Tsangla.



FIFTEEN

Practitioners

The system of Kālacakra

The mode of progressing on the path of the Kālacakra system has four parts:

- 1. How to become a vessel suitable for the path**
- 2. How to keep the vows and commitments purely**
- 3. How to meditate on the path**
- 4. How to manifest the result**

This presentation is similar to those given earlier in the text.

How to become a vessel suitable for the path

First you purify your mental continuum through the common path, then you become a vessel suitable to practice the two stages by obtaining the seven empowerments emulating childhood, the higher, the highest, and the great lord vajra-master empowerments.

Empowerments may be explained in accordance with the common presentation or in accordance with a specific presentation relevant only to a particular tantra. Abhayākaragupta's *Vajra Garland* presents the empowerments of Kālacakra tantra in accordance with the common presentation of all highest yoga tantras. Thus the student receives the vase, secret, pristine wisdom, and word empowerments. Here empowerment is presented in accordance with the unique qualities of the Kālacakra tantra, where empowerment is conferred in a sand maṇḍala.

The appropriate type of maṇḍala

The maṇḍala that the student enters is the colored-sand maṇḍala alone. Nāropa states in his *Abbreviated Commentary to the Empowerments* that one drawn on cloth is unsuitable.

It is important to determine the maṇḍala in which the candidate is initiated. The *Root and Condensed Tantra*, the *Stainless Light Commentary*, and other authoritative texts such as *Abbreviated Commentary to the Empowerments* composed by the great Nāropa, state that empowerment should be bestowed in a colored-sand maṇḍala and not a painted-cloth maṇḍala. Conversely the great Indian mahāsiddha Abhayākaragupta stated in his *Vajra Garland*—where he explains the rites of forty-two initiations—that Kālacakra empowerment may be bestowed in a painted-cloth maṇḍala. A number of scholars criticized him, saying he did not really know or understand the system of Kālacakra. Yet *Vajra Garland* was composed by Abhayākaragupta after he encountered Vajrayoginī and received empowerments and commentaries directly from her. Vajrayoginī instructed the mahāsiddha to compose a text that included all her instructions. Initially he was skeptical that any text he composed would be blessed with success, but Vajrayoginī reassured him by stating, “Just compose this text; don’t worry about its success. I will ensure that this text is endowed with my blessings.” Those who defended the mahāsiddha maintained that to say he didn’t understand the Kālacakra system was tantamount to stating Vajrayoginī herself did not understand the Kālacakra system, since she was the source of Abhayākaragupta’s tradition.

The writings of Abhayākaragupta are known by the generic name *Vajra Garland*. These comprise three volumes called the Three Garlands, namely *Garland of Empowerments*, which explains the rites of initiation, *Garland of Perfected Yoga*, explaining the sādhanas, and *Garland of the Rays of the Sun*, which explains fire pūjā rituals. Jetsün Rendawa, the teacher of Tsongkhapa, criticized Abhayākaragupta’s understanding of

the perfection of wisdom. Still Tsongkhapa relied on the three sections of *Vajra Garland* as an authoritative source when he composed *Mantric Stages*, acknowledging that Abhayākaragupta has been criticized by various scholars.

When instruction is given to construct a colored-sand maṇḍala, we should be aware that this is for the sake of the merit of the disciples. Traditionally sand maṇḍalas were constructed of pulverized precious and semiprecious stones. Since the merit accumulated corresponded to the number of particles within the maṇḍala, it provided an excellent opportunity for members of the community to accumulate merit by sponsoring the necessary materials. When the ritual is completed and the maṇḍala dismantled, the grains of precious substance that formed the maṇḍala and were blessed as the celestial mansion and the resident deities are collected and poured into water, and the blessing carried by each particle spreads throughout the world.

This process therefore ensures that not only humans but also nāgas, animals, and other beings are also blessed by the grains that formed the maṇḍala. Since the colored-sand maṇḍala must be dismantled when the rite is completed, empowerment is always given on the basis of a newly constructed maṇḍala. But when a colored-sand maṇḍala is constructed for exhibition in a museum for example, this rule does not apply, as the maṇḍala has not been constructed for the purpose of bestowing empowerment.

Exceptional cases

Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti stated that brahman rishis such as Sūryaratha were conferred empowerment in a maṇḍala created by the mind, but this is a special case. You should analyze whether empowerment may be conferred on fully qualified students—who have abandoned all—in an absorption maṇḍala.

When Buddha Śākyamuni bestowed the empowerment of Kālacakra, he also proclaimed the *Root Tantra* of Kālacakra,

which formed a very elaborate and extensive system. At that time the Buddha gave the following prophesy to the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara: “Six hundred years from now you will manifest among the kalkī kings and respectively summarize the *Root Tantra* and compose a commentary to it.” These prophesies were fulfilled when Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti, who was an emanation of Mañjuśrī, composed the *Condensed Kālacakra*

Tantra.³⁹² Kalkī Puṇḍarīka, who was an emanation of Avalokiteśvara and succeeded Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti, composed *Stainless Light* as a commentary to the *Condensed Tantra*.

As noted above, the maṇḍalas most commonly employed for initiation are colored sand and painted cloth, while mentally invoked maṇḍalas are rare and not listed as an option in many tantras. In the *Condensed Tantra*, Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti mentions that rishis such as Sūryaratha were initiated in a mentally invoked maṇḍala. But this statement reveals the exception rather than the rule, for both the initiating master, Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti, and the initiate disciples were exceptional beings. So, too, meditators who have fully renounced worldly activities and lack the materials to construct a maṇḍala yet possess the capacity to enter absorption and visualize the maṇḍala and resident deities are potential candidates for attaining empowerment in an absorption maṇḍala.

A brief history of Kālacakra in Śambhala

Buddha Śākyamuni bestowed the Kālacakra empowerment after manifesting in the aspect of glorious Kālacakra at Śrī Dhānyakaṭaka, in South India. The empowerment was requested by King Sucandra of Śambhala, an emanation of Vajrapāṇi, together with the ninety-six vassal kings of Śambhala. After bestowing the empowerment, the Buddha proclaimed the *Root Kālacakra Tantra (Paramādibuddha)*, which was later compiled by King Sucandra. King Sucandra and his entourage returned to Śambhala, where he erected a Kālacakra maṇḍala made of precious substances, bestowed the empowerment to the residents of Śambhala, and composed a

60,000-line explanation to the *Root Tantra* called the *Extensive Commentary*. After three years he passed into parinirvāṇa and was succeeded by a lineage of six Dharma kings. Each of these kings reigned for one hundred years, bestowed Kālacakra empowerment, and taught the *Root Tantra*. They were followed by the lineage of kalkī kings.

It was during this lineage that the prophecy of Buddha Śākyamuni concerning the composition of the *Condensed Tantra* and *Stainless Light* was fulfilled. The *Root Tantra* was directly spoken by the Buddha, while the *Condensed Tantra* is said have arisen through the blessing of the Buddha and therefore is also classified as the speech of the Buddha and included in the Kangyur canon of scriptures. Although the *Root Tantra* was originally proclaimed in India and subsequently taken to Śambhala, it was never reintroduced to India, while the *Condensed Tantra* and *Stainless Light* were composed in Śambhala and later taken to Tibet, where they were translated into Tibetan.

The role of Rishi Sūryaratha

When the lineage of the six Dharma kings ended, the lineage of the kalkī kings began with Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti. At that time thirty-five million rishis were resident in Śambhala and followed the views and rituals of the Sāṃkhya tradition; prominent among them was Sūryaratha. Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti announced that he would bestow the Kālacakra empowerment; he invited the rishis to participate, and if they did not want to receive this initiation, he said they should leave Śambhala. They declined his offer and announced their intention to leave Śambhala and return to India, from where their customs and philosophy had originated.

The rishis departed from the king's palace in the center of Śambhala and passed through numerous villages before reaching the outer ring of mountains that formed the natural physical border of Śambhala. There they entered a forest. Then King Mañjuśrīkīrti entered a specific meditative absorption that caused them to become disoriented. The rishis wandered

aimlessly for three days before realizing that they could not find their way out. After a brief discussion they conferred all authority on Sūryaratha to guide them. But then an emanation of King Mañjuśrīkīrti appeared among them and skillfully led them back to the king's palace. Upon arriving there the rishis prompted Sūryaratha to request the king to bestow the Kālacakra empowerment and to compose a condensed version of the *Root Tantra*, for it was too vast for them to grasp.

In response to their request the king composed the *Condensed Tantra*, and on the full moon of the third month of the Tibetan calendar, which is auspicious for the Kālacakra tantra, he bestowed the empowerment. By initiating this vast congregation in the system of Kālacakra, the king ensured that the residents of Śambhala were unified under the same caste or lineage. From that time on the title *kalkī*, meaning “endowed with lineage,” was appended to the name of the king and his descendants. According to tradition all thirty-five million rishis who were initiated then manifested the supreme attainment on the full moon of the following month.

The full moon of the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar commemorates Buddha Śākyamuni's birth, enlightenment, and parinirvāṇa. The fact that just one month had passed from the time they were initiated until the time they manifested the ultimate result of buddhahood indicates that the rishis were actually highly advanced practitioners close to enlightenment. Externally, however, they appeared as outsiders not interested in receiving Kālacakra empowerment who engaged in the theater of becoming lost in a forest before making an official request to receive empowerment and teachings.

Kalkī Mañjuśrīkīrti composed the *Condensed Tantra* specifically to meet the needs of the rishis who were attracted to Sāṃkhya philosophy and desired an abbreviated explanation of the *Root Tantra*. Therefore this presentation of Kālacakra uses the Sāṃkhya terminology and philosophy familiar to these students. For instance, the twenty-five dharmas asserted by Sāṃkhyas are represented by the twelve arms on each side of the body of Kālacakra plus his main body itself. This has

provoked Indian and Tibetan scholars to assert that the *Condensed Tantra* is not a genuine teaching of the Buddha but a treatise corrupted by non-Buddhist elements.

However, many Tibetan scholars, such as Bütön Rinpoché, Tsongkhapa, Gyaltsap Jé, and Khedrup Jé, fully accepted it as an authentic tantra despite the differences in terminology and modes of practice that mean only a general concordance can be drawn between many Kālacakra practices and those of other mainstream tantras. The secret biography of Tsongkhapa reveals that he experienced a direct vision of Kālacakra, who praised his understanding of the Kālacakra system as equal to that of Sucandrabhadra. Khedrup Jé dedicated four volumes of his Collected Works to explaining Kālacakra and defending its authenticity. Still many Tibetans, such as Chomden Rikpai Raldri, Jetsün Rendawa, and the Kāśmirī Paṇchen Śākyaśrī, questioned its authenticity.

The number and types of empowerment

As we saw above, when both the vajra master and initiates are highly realized and the means to construct a physical maṇḍala are not available, an absorption maṇḍala may be used, but this is an exceptional circumstance, since there is no direct reference to this type of maṇḍala in the contents of the Kālacakra tantra.

When the great Kālacakra empowerment is conferred within a sand maṇḍala, the ritual may take up to five days to accommodate all sixteen empowerments. The sixteen empowerments may be classified in various ways, but the most common presentation is (1-7) the seven empowerments emulating childhood,³⁹³ (8-11) the four higher empowerments, (12-15) the four highest empowerments, and (16) the vajra-master empowerment. With the four higher and the four highest empowerments, the students receive, respectively, the vase, secret, pristine wisdom, and word empowerments.³⁹⁴ Due to these similarities in the names, the number of empowerments can be presented in different ways.

Seven empowerments emulating childhood

The first seven empowerments are bestowed in different locations as the student is led in front of the different faces of Bhagavan Kālacakra. Two empowerments are bestowed in front of the north, south, and east face of Kālacakra. A single empowerment is conferred in front of his west face. These empowerments correspond to significant events during childhood, such as the first bath, the ears being pierced, the ears being adorned with earrings, hair being tied in a topknot, being introduced to speech, laughter, and so on.

Regarding what empowerment is conferred, the seven empowerments emulating childhood are dharmas similar to a newborn child being washed by the mother, then the child's ears being pierced, ornaments attached, the hair being tied on top of the head, laughing, and so on. Thus when the students face the [white] body-face³⁹⁵ of Kālacakra in the north, they arise as vajra-body deities, and inside the accomplishing maṇḍala the four mothers confer (1) the water empowerment, and the five tathāgatas confer (2) the crown empowerment.

The five tathāgatas and their four consorts bestow the first two empowerments in the north when the students stand in front of the white face of Kālacakra. The students generate themselves as vajra-body deities and receive the water and crown initiations.

When the students face the red speech-face of Kālacakra in the south, they arise as vajra-speech deities, and the ten śāktis confer (3) the silk-ribbon empowerment, and the main male and female deity confer (4) the vajra and bell empowerment.

When the students face the red face of Kālacakra in the south, they generate themselves as vajra-speech deities and receive the silk-ribbon empowerment from the eight śakti goddesses

that abide in the cardinal and ordinal directions and the two śaktis residing inside the two principal deities. In total there are ten śaktis in the maṇḍala, corresponding to the ten perfections. Then the students receive the vajra and bell empowerment from Kālacakra and his consort, Viśvamātā. In other systems the vajra and the bell are conferred as separate empowerments but in the system of Kālacakra they are combined in one empowerment.

When the students face the black mind-face of Kālacakra in the east, they arise as vajra-mind deities, the male and female bodhisattvas confer (5) the ritual empowerment, and [38a] the male and female wrathful deities confer (6) the name empowerment.

When the students face the black face of Kālacakra in the east, they generate themselves as vajra-mind deities and receive a ring bearing a vajra to be worn on the thumb as a symbol of the ritual empowerment bestowed by the six male and six female bodhisattvas of the maṇḍala. Then the eight male and eight female wrathful deities confer the name empowerment by offering bracelets. Four male and four female wrathful deities reside by the four doors of the mind maṇḍala,^{[396](#)} and the remaining four male and four female wrathful deities reside by the four doors of the body maṇḍala.

When the students face the yellow pristine wisdom-face of Kālacakra in the west, they arise as vajra pristine-wisdom deities, and Vajrasattva and his consort confer (7) the permission empowerment, which is the seventh.

The last empowerment is the permission empowerment bestowed by Vajrasattva and his consort when the students face the yellow face of Kālacakra in the west and generate themselves as vajra pristine-wisdom deities.^{[397](#)}

Supplementary rites

Some rites follow the first set of seven empowerments.

Supplementary rites has two parts:

1. Branch

2. Main

First, branch supplementary rites are giving a mirror, eye medicine, and so on.

Additional activities include ritually offering the student eye medicine, a mirror, and a bow and arrow. [398](#)

Second, the main supplementary rite is the master empowerment that confers three things—the vajra and bell, the seal, and the commitments compatible with yoga tantra. This includes practices of yoga tantra and below, and *Mantric Stages* states that this is not the master empowerment taught in highest yoga tantra.

In the general system of tantra, the students are bestowed the five common empowerments and the uncommon empowerment of the vajra master. The empowerment of the vajra master prepares the students to act as vajra masters in the future. For that reason, the students are given the vajra symbolizing the commitment of mind, the bell symbolizing the commitment of speech, and the seal symbolizing the commitment of the body, which authorizes the students to generate themselves as Vajrasattva. Yet the master empowerment given here is not the actual vajra-master empowerment given in highest yoga tantra. Rather it belongs to the system of yoga tantra and authorizes the student to act as a teacher of the three lower tantras. These three commitments are not bestowed in the action and performance tantra and are only found in yoga tantra and highest yoga tantra. The actual vajra-master empowerment is the sixteenth empowerment in the system of Kālacakra known as the *lord vajra-master empowerment*. It is only when this empowerment is received that the student is authorized to teach the Kālacakra tantra.

The seven empowerments, such as the water

empowerment and so on, are not designated as *vase empowerments* but called *water empowerments*, since they follow the water ritual.

In the context of the first seven empowerments in Kālacakra, the term *vase empowerment* is not used. Instead they are called *water empowerments*, for they follow the pattern of blessing by water in that the seven conclude with a final ritual empowerment in which the ritual objects are blessed by water. This terminology is consistent with the *Condensed Tantra* and *Stainless Light*.

The vase empowerments

The vase empowerment of the higher empowerment and the vase empowerment of the highest empowerment are conferred by the bliss derived from touching and embracing, respectively, one or nine seal goddesses bearing vases containing white liquid. These are master empowerments, and though similar in being master empowerments of general highest yoga tantra, they are distinguished in terms of their seals and called “empowerments obtained in the maṇḍala of the body of the knowledge consort.”

Although the higher vase empowerment and the highest vase empowerment may be grouped together when enumerating the Kālacakra empowerments, we should be aware that despite their similarities, they are not exactly the same. Their difference lies in the fact that in the higher vase empowerment, the blessing is granted by a single knowledge woman (*mudrā*), while in the highest vase empowerment, the blessing is granted by nine knowledge women. When empowerment is bestowed on the basis of a sand maṇḍala, there are ten vases in total, each carried by a different monk. Here vases are used in the empowerments, and they are called “vase empowerments.” But they are also referred to as “empowerments obtained in the maṇḍala of the body of the knowledge consort.”

The secret empowerments

Both secret empowerments are conferred through experiencing the taste of the secret substance derived from the guru entering union with one or nine knowledge consorts and cultivating bliss generated from the lotus of one or nine knowledge consorts respectively. They are called “empowerments obtained in the lotus maṇḍala.”

Similarly in the case of the higher and highest secret empowerments, there is a difference in the number of knowledge consorts involved.

During the secret empowerment the teacher enters union with one or nine seals respectively, indicating that there is a difference in the number of secret places to be blessed. These two empowerments are collectively called “empowerments obtained in the lotus maṇḍala.”

The wisdom empowerments

Both wisdom empowerments are conferred through the bliss of melting the substance, through the student entering union with one or nine knowledge consorts respectively. They are called “empowerments obtained in the maṇḍala of relative bodhicitta.”

In the higher wisdom empowerment and the highest wisdom empowerment, the student enters union with, respectively, one or nine knowledge consorts. The common term for these two empowerments is “empowerments obtained in the maṇḍala of relative bodhicitta.”

**One says: This is not the order explained in general highest yoga tantra, for here the order of the maṇḍalas where both this and the secret empowerment are obtained have been reversed.
[38b]**

An objection is raised concerning the order of empowerments. In general within highest yoga tantras, reliance on the relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala precedes reliance on the lotus maṇḍala; in the Kālacakra tantra the order is reversed.

Apart from the difference in there being one or nine knowledge consorts and a slight difference in the system of identification of each of the four joys, the two vase empowerments and so on are similar.

In general there are many points in common between the vase, secret, and wisdom empowerments of the higher and highest empowerments, and it is this similarity that enables them to be combined.

The fourth empowerment

In the fourth, or word empowerment, the same rule of similarity does not apply, for the higher fourth empowerment is considered to be the interpretative word empowerment, while the highest fourth empowerment is the definitive word empowerment.

The two fourth empowerments are different because the higher fourth empowerment, called the *relative* fourth empowerment, is the innate joy of bodhicitta abiding in the jewel without external emission. *Mantric Stages* states:

This is explained in the maṇḍala rites of other mantras as the third empowerment, for though you may obtain this empowerment you are not yet empowered to listen to the complete tantra since you have not obtained the fourth empowerment. When you obtain this within the corpus of Kālacakra, you become a vessel suitable to listen to the complete tantra. However, if you do not obtain the highest empowerment, you cannot be a teacher of the complete tantra.[**399**](#)

This is yet another difference between the general highest yoga tantra system and the system of the Kālacakra. Once the fourth empowerment has been bestowed in the general system, students who have obtained it are authorized not only to study but also to teach and propagate the tantra, whereas in the Kālacakra system it is important to specify which level of the fourth empowerment we have obtained.

The highest fourth empowerment is the indivisible essential union of (1) the male and female deities' bodies of empty form adorned with marks and signs and (2) the mind of supreme, immutable great bliss that engages the single taste of emptiness. This is called the *transcendent* or *ultimate* fourth empowerment.

We should note that in this explanation the term *illusory body* is replaced by the term *body of empty form*. The definitive fourth empowerment therefore is a mind blessed with the understanding that the aspect appearing to the mind is the bodies of empty form of the male and female deities adorned with marks and signs, while the aspect ascertained by the mind is the emptiness of these bodies of empty form. The mind ascertaining the single taste of the emptiness of empty form possesses the nature of immutable, great bliss. The highest fourth empowerment is also known as the *transcendent fourth empowerment* and the *ultimate fourth empowerment*. The empowerment is obtained as the master explains the nature of the mind that while focusing on an appearing object, ascertains its emptiness. In dependence on the teacher's words, the student generates some understanding of the nature of that mind in which the appearing aspect and the ascertained aspect are indivisible. When the student generates this type of understanding along with the thought "I have received the blessing," he or she obtains the highest fourth empowerment.

The system of conferring the fourth empowerment through words, making you a suitable vessel to practice this tantra, is similar to the general

system.

The lord vajra-master empowerment

The empowerment of the great lord vajra master is conferred outside the rites of the seven empowerments, in accordance with the maṇḍala rite.

The sixteenth empowerment, called the *lord vajra master*, is conferred according to the maṇḍala rite and does not require a separate explanation. In general we should understand that all sixteen empowerments may be included in the four categories of empowerment—vase, secret, pristine wisdom, and word.

SIXTEEN

Vows

How to keep the vows and commitments purely

Guard yourself against the fourteen root downfalls and so on. Although seven of the fourteen downfalls of general mantra—the first, second, fifth, sixth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth—are not explicitly described as root downfalls in Kālacakra, you should nonetheless guard against them.

Fourteen root downfalls are explained in the mainstream tantras, such as Heruka and Yamāntaka. Although seven of these root downfalls are not explicitly mentioned in the Kālacakra system, still we should know them and guard against them. Thus when examining the set of fourteen root downfalls of the Kālacakra system, we should keep in mind that seven are exclusive to Kālacakra tantra. In that sense we can refer to seven general and seven specific vows.

The standard fourteen root downfalls are enumerated in the long version of the *Six-Session Guru Yoga* as well as in the *Kālacakra Six-Session Guru Yoga* composed by Paṇchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen:

At the cost of my life I will guard against the fourteen root infractions:

Scorning and deriding my lama,
despising the precepts,
revealing the faults of vajra brothers and sisters,
abandoning love,
giving up aspiring and engaging bodhicitta,
deriding the Dharma of sūtra and mantra,
proclaiming the secrets to the unripened,

despising my own aggregates,
abandoning emptiness,
relying on poisonous friends,
not recollecting the view,
uprooting the attitude of those who have faith,
not observing the commitments,
and belittling women.[400](#)

Here the seven root downfalls specific to the Kālacakra system are identified:

The first downfall explained in Kālacakra is disturbing the mind of the vajra master. The second is breaking the lama's instructions. The fifth is the emission [39a] of jasmine-like bodhicitta.

In the general enumeration, “emission of the jasmine-like bodhicitta” appears as “giving up aspiring and engaging bodhicitta.” The term *bodhicitta* may be understood at various levels. In the nontantric explanation there are relative and ultimate bodhicitta, as well as aspiring and engaging bodhicitta. Yet the term can also be applied physically as well as mentally. When bodhicitta refers to the bodily fluids, guarding this vow is interpreted as guarding against the emission of semen, euphemistically called *jasmine-like bodhicitta*. Tsongkhapa has explained the three sets of vows in detail in his *Explanation of Root Downfalls*.[401](#) There he explains that the vow does not refer to accidental emission of semen but rather to the situation where we do not recognize this as a mistake and, being attached to the act, cause it to occur again in the future. Although this is referred to as the fifth downfall here, it is the third of the seven downfalls specific to Kālacakra tantra.

The sixth is disparaging the emptiness of both the Mantra and Perfection Vehicles through holding one to be superior and the other inferior.

This refers to the attitude of some who hold that the emptiness

presented in sūtra is qualitatively different, or inferior, or less potent, than the emptiness presented in tantra. In reality emptiness as an object is exactly the same in the sūtra and tantra presentations. Still, they differ in their presentation of the mind that comprehends emptiness. In sūtra the mind realizing emptiness is relatively coarse, while in tantra the mind realizing emptiness is much more subtle. This is the fourth of the seven specific downfalls.

The tenth is relying on illusory love, which is love whose deeper reality is not compatible with its surface appearance. In its depths it holds to poisonous thoughts while appearing as love superficially. Dārikapa explains this point differently.

The tenth root downfall of the general system is called “relying on poisonous friends.” This corresponds with the fifth specific downfall, which speaks of deceptive, illusory love. In this “love,” a person harboring negative thoughts speaks in a pleasant and loving manner in order to cheat and deceive. We should, in general, always be ready to identify poisonous thoughts that appear in our minds and try to eliminate them by contemplating their shortcomings. This in turn will ensure that our speech is more reflective of our thoughts. This does not mean that we should just say whatever appears in our minds. If we become aware of anger arising in our minds when involved in a conversation, we should maintain polite conversation while immediately applying potent antidotes to that anger. If this is not possible, we should at least stay aware of our internal situation and as much as possible maintain a polite and civilized manner. The point of this downfall is only that we should not pretend to be loving in pursuit of personal gain.

Recognizing that the other person is also susceptible to anger, we strongly contemplate the disadvantages of anger and thereby prevent ourselves from becoming upset with the other person. When our anger becomes apparent, it disturbs in three ways: (1) through physical aggression, (2) through verbal

aggression, and (3) through holding grudges, which is a kind of mental aggression. Reducing the amount of anger we project by modifying our facial expressions and speech decreases negativity and problematic situations. Conversely, expressing our aggression increases negative situations. Tsongkhapa, in his *Explanation of Root Downfalls*, says that the master Dārikapa explains this downfall differently—as making a show of religious rectitude while furtively engaging in unwholesome behavior.

The eleventh is the thought to forego immutable bliss out of doubt and hesitation, thinking it is beyond your ordinary experience.

The sixth specific downfall refers to a person doubting the supremacy of immutable bliss, one who, attached to mundane activities, relinquishes any effort to obtain it. Bliss itself refers to a particular feeling, of which there are two basic types: (1) bliss that deteriorates and (2) bliss that is immutable, which arises through stabilizing the first type of bliss. We may doubt whether immutable bliss is possible if it is outside our ordinary experience. We may think, “In general bliss is possible and I enjoy it, but *immutable* bliss—well, I’m just not even sure it is possible.”

The twelfth is criticizing yogis who are pure sentient beings. These downfalls should be understood in detail from *Explanation of Root Downfalls*.

The seventh specific downfall is openly criticizing yogis who are pure practitioners. This arises from having overly rigid ideas about what is proper behavior for a yogi and not being able to distinguish between external behavior and internal practice.

A clear presentation of the general and specific vows, including alternative interpretations and specific thresholds for when a vow is transgressed, may be found in Tsongkhapa’s *Explanation of Root Downfalls*.

Commitments related to the buddha lineages

Once we have reflected on the tantric root infractions, we then recollect certain types of conduct that we should guard against. These are related to the six buddha lineages. In general there are five buddha lineages: (1) the vajra lineage of Akṣobhya, (2) the jewel lineage of Ratnasambhava, (3) the wheel lineage of Vairocana, (4) the lotus lineage of Amitābha, and (5) the sword lineage of Amoghasiddhi. The sixth lineage of Kālacakra is identified as the lineage of Vajrasattva. Also in general there are nineteen commitments related to the buddha lineages, but here the enumeration is different.

The commitments of each of the lineages is explained in Kālacakra. In the vajra lineage, there are four, namely holding the vajra, bell, seal, and lama.

Holding the vajra refers to guarding the mind commitment. *Holding the bell* refers to guarding the speech commitment. *Holding the seal* refers to guarding ourself as the deity as we assume the body commitment. *Holding the lama* refers to recognizing our lama as a vajra master.

In the jewel lineage there are ten objects of generosity, since it is stated:

Jewels, iron, copper, oxen, horses, elephants, daughters, wealth, a desirable wife, and your own flesh are the ten objects of generosity.

In the general system the commitment of the jewel lineage of Ratnasambhava is practicing the four types of generosity, that is, giving material things, Dharma, freedom from fear, and love. Here the explanation is different, for the ten offerings we should be prepared to give include objects such as precious jewels and minerals, animals, as well as one's own daughter or spouse—and even one's own flesh. These days most people do not possess cattle, horses, and elephants, and therefore such offerings are impractical. Still the spirit of this commitment is

to be willing to offer whatever valuable things we may possess in order to overcome stinginess and miserliness. This is particularly important for wealthy people who possess many of the items mentioned and who gain great benefit from giving away such objects instead of holding on to them.

In the wheel lineage you rely on the five meats and five nectars, and you guard the sense faculties.

There are six commitments of the wheel lineage of Vairocana to be protected. The first three concern ethics and are (1) the ethics of restraining from negative conduct, (2) the ethics of gathering virtue, and (3) the ethics establishing the well-being of sentient beings. (4-6) The remaining three concern going for refuge to the Three Jewels. As practitioners we are also committed to rely on the five meats and five nectars and guard our sense faculties by means of meditative absorption. The five meats and five nectars are used in the inner offering and include the meat of an ox, horse, dog, elephant, and human, and the five nectars include urine, feces, blood, semen, and marrow. Although such substances in general are considered impure, since they are blessed and purified prior to being utilized in the Mantra Vehicle, we change our perception of them. The essence of this practice is to train ourselves to see substances as pure that may be gross or repulsive in their natural state. This process is similar to soldiers who are trained to use and maintain weapons they may initially regard as repulsive.

There are different traditions regarding the use of the five meats and the five nectars. For instance within the Nyingma tradition, actual meat and nectar are used, but in the Geluk tradition, they are replaced by different types of medicinal substances in the form of nectar pills. Yogis with high realizations who have the ability to transform such meats and nectars actually use all these substances without incurring any negative consequence. Even when employing actual substances, their realizations prevent them from entering the realm of blood sacrifice and so on. However, practitioners who

have not reached this level should use substitutes to avoid the possibility of incurring negative actions. Finally, in the case of the sense faculties, we should guard them against nonvirtue.

In the lotus lineage you protect the vow of the pure practice of non-emission.

In accord with the general commitments, the three commitments of the lotus lineage of Amitābha are to uphold the teachings of the three vehicles and the four classes of tantra. In this passage only one commitment is mentioned, namely the pure practice of stopping the emission of semen. More specifically this refers to stopping the emission of semen when we are attached to the experience, avoiding classifying this experience as supreme bliss, and avoiding seeing such action to be without fault. Therefore this precept should not be taken as prohibiting any emission of semen at all. Instead we should avoid seeing the emission of semen as supreme bliss.

In the sword lineage you make offerings to the Three Jewels and so on.

In the sword lineage of Amoghasiddhi, the general commitments are keeping all vows and commitments related to the buddha families and making internal, external, and secret offerings. In the context of the Kālacakra tantra, the single commitment mentioned is that of making offerings to the Three Jewels.

In the single vajra lineage generating the conqueror, it is said that you generate the siddhi of the great seal (*mahāmudrā*) of the state of emptiness and compassion.

The single vajra lineage generating the conqueror is the vajra lineage of Vajrasattva, the sixth lineage unique to Kālacakra tantra. In the completion stage we meditate on the body of empty form with a consciousness of great bliss that ascertains the emptiness of empty form. This type of meditation is identified as the “siddhi of the great seal of emptiness and compassion” and constitutes the commitment of the vajra

lineage.

The twenty-five types of conduct

After the enumeration of the general and individual commitments of the buddha lineages, the author then presents the twenty-five types of negative conduct to avoid. These are different from the twenty-five types of conduct found in Heruka tantra. The twenty-five types of conduct are divided in five groups that each contain five types of actions.

You should avoid the twenty-five types of conduct, such as the five negativities: (1) killing, (2) taking what is not given, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) lying, and (5) drinking alcohol; . . .

The first group includes the first four of the ten nonvirtuous actions plus a fifth, consuming intoxicants.

. . . the five secondary negativities: (6) gambling and playing dice and board games, (7) eating flesh impure in three ways, (8) uttering idle, ill-considered words, (9) making offerings to one's deceased ancestors, and (10) killing animals as a blood sacrifice; . . .

The second group includes secondary negativities. The first is various types of gambling, including dice and board games.

The second is eating impure flesh, but this does not refer to eating meat in general. In the Vinaya "impure flesh" refers to meat that should be rejected if we (1) see, (2) hear, or (3) suspect that the animal has been killed specifically for ourselves. Thus if we are invited to someone's house and see, hear, or suspect that the meat that is served comes from an animal specifically killed for us, then we should decline to eat it. But if we go to a restaurant where the meat served is not derived from an animal specifically killed for our purpose, then it is not considered impure.

The third is speaking senselessly. For example, if we suspect another of being a thief and openly accuse that person of

stealing without proper consideration or grounds for our assertions, then we could greatly harm another. We should therefore examine well any situation and think before speaking.

The fourth is making offerings to our ancestors, such as offering flowers, light, food, and so forth to the grave of the deceased, thinking that the person is present at the site. Although it is appropriate to organize prayers and make offerings to the Three Jewels in order to commemorate their death, it is unacceptable to make offerings thinking that the deceased are present because this would merely constitute making offerings to ghosts. There are places in India where people propitiate ghosts and spirits and make offerings to them. These spirits are often quite possessive and may harm others who take their offerings. So, too, if we seek to make offerings to our deceased parents as if they were present, we may effectively be making offerings to spirits and we could be harmed. Spirits may masquerade as the parents of those who propitiate deceased relatives, speaking in their voices and requesting offerings. To avoid such situations, we should not make offerings to deceased relatives.

The fifth is killing animals and making sacrificial offerings of their blood.

. . . the five types of killing: killing (11) cattle (12) children, (13) women, and (14) men and (15) destroying the bases of (buddha's) body, speech, and mind; . . .

The third group includes the five types of killing, such as killing cattle, children, women, and men, as well as destroying statues, scriptures, and stupas that represent the body, speech, and mind of a buddha.

. . . the five hostile attitudes: (16) lacking faith in the Buddha and the pure Dharma, (17) resenting friends, (18) resenting rulers, (19) resenting the Saṅgha, and (20) deceiving those who trust you; . . .

The fourth group includes five types of wrong thoughts. The

first is lack of faith in the Buddha and the Dharma. The second is to resent and deceive friends. The third is to disrespect the rulers of one's country. This doesn't mean that we cannot criticize a member of the government for something wrong or illegal they might have done. It is important to have a valid reason when criticizing another rather than making empty accusations due to our negative state of mind. The fourth is resentment and lack of respect for the Saṅgha, and the fifth is deceiving those who trust us.

. . . and the five desires: attachment to (21) form, (22) sound, (23) aroma, (24) flavor, and (25) tactile objects.

The last group includes the five types of attachment, which are classified according to their respective objects.

Moreover I think that you should also guard the commitments explained in other systems of mantra.

The author suggests that Kālacakra disciples should also know and guard the tantric commitments that are not explicitly mentioned in the Kālacakra corpus.

Heaviness of negativity

The categorization of infractions as root downfalls, as gross infractions, and as transgressions of the twenty-five types of conduct indicates the relative heaviness of the shortcomings that would occur if we were not to guard against them. The negative karma associated with a root downfall is very heavy. For a gross infraction, the negative karma is lighter, and it is lighter still for transgressions of any of the twenty-five types of conduct. Negativities not explicitly mentioned in these three categories possess even less fault, but that does not mean we should not guard against them. It is similar to the laws that rule our secular societies. Some laws prohibit serious offenses and others define misdemeanors; other behaviors are not illegal but are nonetheless seen as social offenses. Individuals have many laws and rules they must uphold.

Such explanations may initially deter us from taking vows or commitments. Yet even if we do not take vows, we will still accumulate negative karma by behaving in ways that are naturally negative. For example, if you have not taken any vows against killing and stealing and you engage in killing or stealing, you still accumulate negative karma and break the law. Moreover, for a full infraction to occur, there must be four factors present, making it more difficult to commit a fullfledged transgression. When only two such factors are present it is no longer categorized as a root downfall but as a gross infraction. When only one factor is present, the infraction is considered to be a fault. The presence of all four factors⁴⁰² applies to root vows, not to secondary vows and commitments.

SEVENTEEN

The Generation Stage

The unique features of the generation stage of Kālacakra

In the general system of tantra the practice of the generation stage focuses on the purification of birth, death, and the intermediate state through a purifying path that results in the three bodies of a buddha, the purified aspect of these three. The Kālacakra system does not purify the intermediate state, saying that taking birth in the intermediate state is similar to taking birth in one's next rebirth⁴⁰³ and therefore purification of birth also purifies the intermediate state. Kālacakra tantra emphasizes instead the purification of external and internal bases.⁴⁰⁴

In the mainstream tantras the completion stage is practiced in five stages. In the Kālacakra system the unique feature of the completion stage is engagement in six practices, which are introduced in chapter 19. The aim of the six practices is to remove the four types of obscurations and negativities, namely (1-3) coarse obscurations and negativities of the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner, as well as (4) the subtle combined obscurations and negativities of body, speech, and mind. The four types of empowerment also correspond to these four types of negativities and obscurations to be removed. The *Guru Pūjā* states:

By the force of making three requests in this way,
nectar of white, red, and dark blue light radiates
from the abodes of body, speech, and mind of our guru,
serially and instantly manifesting,
and serially and instantly dissolving into our own three
abodes.

Our four obscurations are purified. We obtain the four initiations
and the four bodies. The root and lineage gurus
are pleased and bless us by dissolving into us.

Obscurations are typically subsumed within afflictive and knowledge obscurations, but in Kālacakra obscurations exist in dependence on four types of drops. The aim of our practice is to remove obscurations related to the four drops and obtain the four vajras in dependence on these drops. This is stated in the *Kālacakra Six-Session Guru Yoga*:

Guru Kālacakra, please bestow completely the initiations.
Bless me into magnificence
so that the defilements of the four types may be purified
and so that I may attain the four bodies.

Here the “defilements of the four types” are obscurations dependent on the four types of drops. This will be explained in detail below.

How to meditate on the path

This has two parts:

- 1. How to meditate on the generation stage**
- 2. How to meditate on the completion stage**

In general the path is explained in terms of the basis to be purified, the means of purifying, and the result of purification. Kālacakra also conforms with this presentation and defines the basis to be purified as external and internal Kālacakra.

How to meditate on the generation stage

External Kālacakra is your external environment, and internal Kālacakra is your channels, winds, and drops. These two are the basis to be purified. The purifier is the alternate Kālacakra, which is capable of completely purifying both the internal and external bases, including your body, speech, and

mind, and the mind maṇḍala and so on.

Kālacakra tantra consists of the original *Root Tantra* and the *Condensed Tantra*. *Stainless Light* is a commentary to the *Condensed Tantra* and has five parts. The first two parts—the *External World* and the *Inner World of Sentient Beings*—are also known collectively as the “basis of purification.” The first part describes the external world—the natural world and its inhabitants and the workings of the cosmos—while the second presents the subtle body of humans, including their channels, winds, and drops. The remaining three parts, the so-called “alternate Kālacakra,” are *Initiations*, *Methods of Accomplishment*, and *Pristine Wisdom*. The third part presents initiations, which we must receive to be authorized to meditate on the generation and completion stages. The fourth part is on the generation-stage practices, and the fifth presents the completion-stage practices and the final purified result of Kālacakra.

There is a close relation between the internal and external Kālacakra. The channels, winds, and drops that constitute internal Kālacakra are closely associated with the five natural constituents present in the external environment—earth, water, fire, wind, and space. Moreover the external elements influence the internal elements. For example, when we are abiding in the heat of summer, the fire element is dominant and our body experiences heat internally. Similarly, in winter, the external environment is cold and we experience the absence of the internal element of heat.

Appropriate types of sādhana

When practicing the generation stage, we may rely on the extensive, medium, or abbreviated sādhana. In the extensive sādhana the body, speech, and mind maṇḍalas are presented in full detail. In the medium sādhana the mind maṇḍala is presented in full detail but not the speech and body maṇḍalas. The short sādhana involves five or more deities. Such sādhana have the capacity to purify the bases of purification and

prepare the practitioner for the completion stage.

You must meditate on the generation stage, which definitely matures the root of virtue and fully generates the six branches of the completion stage. To do that, you need a maṇḍala of five or more deities.

As mentioned, while the completion stage of the Guhyasamāja and other mainstream tantras are presented in five stages, the completion stage of the Kālacakra consists of six stages, or yogas. Practice of these requires that we first mature our mindstream through training in the generation stage, and during the generation stage we should meditate on a maṇḍala with a minimum of five deities. Meditation on fewer than five deities would not possess sufficient purifying power to qualify as a generation-stage practice.

It is said that instantaneous generation, solitary deity practices, and so on are methods for establishing various feats—pacification and so forth—once you have completed deity yoga. However, they do not mature the mind sufficiently to allow full generation of the completion stage.

Though we may practice the solitary form of deities, such as solitary-hero Yamāntaka or solitary-heroine Vajrayoginī, or instantaneous generation of the two central deities and so on, such practices will only establish the activities of pacification, increase, power, and wrath; they are not powerful enough to mature the mental continuum so that we may practice the completion stage in its entirety.^{[405](#)} But other factors may change this. In Vajrayoginī, although the deity appears alone, the body maṇḍala of Vajrayoginī includes thirty-seven deities. In solitary-hero Yamāntaka the central deity possesses thirty-four arms and nine faces, and we also contemplate the exalted body, speech, and mind that cover crucial points of the completion stage. There is also a nine-deity sādhana of Yamāntaka. Such instances are uncommon.

The nine-deity sādhanā that is practiced in the six-session guru yoga of Kālacakra includes the two main deities and the eight śāktis without explicitly describing the celestial mansion. It is thus thought to be insufficient to fully mature the mindstream for the cultivation of the completion stage, and from that perspective it is similar to the solitary-hero and the instantaneously generated Kālacakra. Although the nine-deity sādhanā is sufficient for engaging in the short approximation retreat, it is questionable whether it has the power to prepare the mind sufficiently to practice the entire completion stage. It is generally considered to be a means for establishing the body of empty form but not the remaining stages of the completion stage.

Another abbreviated sādhanā that includes five deities was composed by the First Paṇchen Lama, Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen. In this work the śāktis are not counted separately, as they are manifestations of Viśvamātā, while Kālacakra is generated in the aspect of Akṣobhya and surrounded by the remaining four buddha families. Although the presence of the five buddha families acts as a purifying agent for the five aggregates, this sādhanā cannot fully mature our mental continuum, just as other types of abbreviated sādhanā cannot. This again illustrates Ngawang Palden's assertion that the generation-stage sādhanā must involve a maṇḍala of five or more deities in order to mature the mind in preparation for entering the six branches of the completion stage.

The structure of the generation stage

This includes the four branches of approximation and accomplishment:

- 1. Approximation of the vajra body**
- 2. Near accomplishment of vajra speech**
- 3. Accomplishment of vajra mind**
- 4. Great accomplishment of vajra pristine wisdom**

All sādhanas, whether elaborate or condensed, possess a

similar structure, since all sādhanas include either the four branches of approximation and accomplishment or equivalent practices to establish the four vajras mentioned here.

Again there are four types of enlightenment:

- 1. Attaining actual enlightenment in one moment**
- 2. Attaining actual enlightenment in five aspects**
- 3. Attaining actual enlightenment in twenty aspects**
- 4. Attaining actual enlightenment in the net of illusory emanation**

Another element that must be present in all sādhanas is the four types of enlightenment. In other words every sādhana that presents the complete practice of the generation stage must include three parts: (1) the four branches of approximation and accomplishment, (2) the four vajras, and (3) the four types of enlightenment.

These should be understood from other sources.

Since the present text offers a mere enumeration of these points, the author recommends consulting other sources for more information. For example, we can rely on *Principles of the Generation Stage* composed by Detri Rinpoché Thupten Nyima, which includes the complete maṇḍalas of body, speech, and mind. Sādhanas relying on the mind-maṇḍala deities or the five deities' sādhanas also provide information on the structure of the generation stage. Further *Grounds and Paths of Kālacakra Tantra* composed by the Mongolian lama Losang Tayang presents additional information. Losang Tayang is also known for a condensed sādhana of Guhyasamāja. There is a very elaborate explanation of the generation stage written by Jonang Tāranātha called *Explanation of the Generation Stage of Kālacakra*. In the Geluk tradition we rely extensively on the work of Gyaltsap Rinpoché called *How to Practice the Two Stages of Kālacakra*.

EIGHTEEN

The Vajra Body of the Completion Stage

The author now supplements his brief presentation of the generation stage with a detailed presentation of the completion stage of Kālacakra tantra.

How to meditate on the completion stage

This has two parts:

- 1. The vajra body, where the vital points are penetrated**
- 2. The six branches of practice, which penetrate the vital points**

Practice of the completion stage requires that we become familiar with the presentation of the subtle vajra body, including the channels, winds, and drops, which must be purified. Many practices of the completion stage involve focusing upon and penetrating points in the vajra body.

The vajra body, where the vital points are penetrated

The first has three aspects, namely channels, winds, and drops.

Channels

All humans born from the womb possess a body composed of the six constituents endowed with the principal and secondary channels (*nāḍī*). Various winds (*vāyu*) circulate within these channels, and each wind supports a specific type of awareness. Drops (*bindu*) composed of white and red substances derived from the original sperm and ovum of the parents are located at different points in the channels. When the bardo being enters the zygote it obtains a physical base that will reflect the

physical characteristics of its parents, but its mind reflects the characteristics of the mind of the bardo being and so on. In the presentation of the vajra body, it is said that the embryo experiences rudimentary development of the channels, winds, and drops in the first month of life, but this then rapidly increases till they are fully developed.

As “subtle” matter, the channels, winds, and drops cannot be perceived by the eyes, nor are they apparent if the body is dissected. Their existence and location only become apparent through meditation. Personally, I think that the life-channel (*avadhūtī*) may be found in the spinal cord, but apart from that it is very difficult to pinpoint the exact location of any channel. Moreover it is said that the layout of channels differs slightly from men to women because the shapes of their bodies are different. Further, though both men and women possess white and red drops, white drops are dominant in males while red drops are dominant in females, giving rise to physical differences such as the tone of the voice. But apart from these small variations, the presentation of channels, winds, and drops is said to apply equally to males and females.

The right channel, left channel, and central channel above the navel are called respectively the *channel of the sun*, the *channel of the moon*, and the *channel of eclipse*. It is said that they are associated with the constituents of fire, water, and space; the colors white, red, and green; and the main avenues of the flow of blood, semen, and wind.

The vajra body contains a complicated array of channels. There are three principal channels, namely the central channel called *avadhūtī* in Sanskrit, the channel to its right called *rasanā*, and the channel to its left called *lalanā*. In Kālacakra tantra the segments of the channels located above the navel are designated differently from the segments of the same channels located below the navel. Therefore the upper segments of the right, left, and central channels are called the *channel of the sun*, the *channel of the moon*, and the *channel of eclipse* (*rāhu*),

respectively.

In terms of constituents, the right channel is associated with fire, the left channel with water, and the central channel is associated with space. In terms of color, the right channel is red, the left channel is white, and the central channel may be either green or blue. Though a mixture of blood, semen, and wind flows continuously in all three channels, the flow of the specific constituents is stronger in one channel than others. Therefore, since the flow of blood is predominant in the right channel, it is said to be the main avenue for blood. Similarly the left channel is said to be the main avenue for semen, and the central channel is the main avenue for wind.

The continuation of those three below the navel are called, respectively, the *orange channel*, the *sheep channel*, and the *fire at the end of the eon channel*. It is said that they are associated with the constituents of earth, wind, and pristine wisdom; the colors yellow, black, and blue; and the main avenues for the flow of feces, urine, and semen. These are called the *six great channels*.

These three main channels continue from below the navel to the secret place, but their names, colors, and association with constituents all change in the lower half of the body. The lower half of the right channel is called the *orange channel*, the lower half of the left channel is called the *sheep channel*, and the lower half of the central channel is called the *fire at the end of the eon (kālāgni) channel*. In terms of constituents, the right channel below the navel is associated with the constituent of earth, the left with the constituent of wind, and the central with the constituent of pristine wisdom. This reflects the existence of six constituents in the Kālacakra tantra, along with six aggregates, which are calculated by adding the aggregate of pristine wisdom to the standard five aggregates.

In terms of colors, the right channel below the navel is yellow, the left is black, and the central is blue. In terms of constituents, the right channel is the main avenue for feces, the

left channel is the main avenue for urine, and the central channel is the main avenue for semen. As before, although a mixture of all three constituents flows in all three channels, a specific constituent is dominant in each channel. The three segments of the main channels above and the three below the navel are known collectively as the *six great channels*.[406](#)

Cakras

The six cakras are (1) the crown cakra with four channel petals, (2) the forehead cakra with sixteen petals, (3) the throat cakra with thirty-two petals, (4) the heart cakra with eight petals, (5) the navel cakra with sixty-four petals, and (6) the secret-place cakra with thirty-two petals.[407](#)

The presentation of the cakras is slightly different in the Kālacakra system. Although the mainstream tantras that follow the system of Guhyasamāja mention a total of eight cakras, consisting of five main and three secondary cakras, the Kālacakra tantra enumerates six cakras.

Winds

The ten winds are (1) life-sustaining wind, (2) equally abiding wind, (3) ascending wind, (4) pervading wind, (5) *nāga* wind, (6) turtle wind, (7) lizard wind, (8) *devadatta* wind, (9) *dhanamjaya* wind, (10) downward-voiding wind. However, the designations “main” and “secondary” are not applied to them.

The ten winds are also taught in the mainstream tantras, where they are further classified as main and secondary winds, but such terminology is not applied in Kālacakra. Therefore the life-sustaining, equally abiding, ascending, downward-voiding, and pervading winds that are normally classified as main winds in the Guhyasamāja system are not classified as main winds in the Kālacakra system.

Other tantras explain that at the time of the basis, the pervading wind does not move and nor do the winds move in the central channel except during the death process. But this tantra explains that both move.

Another difference concerns the movement of winds at particular times and locations. Although the general system of highest yoga tantra asserts that winds do not move in the central channel during ordinary existence, the Kālacakra system asserts they do. Further although the general system asserts that the pervading wind is active only at the time of death for ordinary beings, the Kālacakra system states that the pervading wind is active and moves outside the death process.

The first five winds are respectively explained as the constituents of space, wind, fire, water, and earth, and the latter five are respectively explained as the constituents of wind, fire, water, earth, and pristine wisdom.

The life-sustaining wind is associated with the constituent of space, the equally abiding wind with the constituent of wind, the ascending wind with the constituent of fire, the pervading wind with the constituent of water, and the *nāga* wind with the constituent of earth. The turtle wind is associated with the constituent of wind, the lizard wind with the constituent of fire, the *devadatta* wind with the constituent of water, the *dhanamjaya* wind with the constituent of earth, and the downward-voiding wind with the constituent of pristine wisdom.

In the space above and below the channel knot at the heart, the life-sustaining wind associated with space and the downward-voiding wind associated with pristine wisdom are respectively generated and abide. In the eastern and southeastern channel petals of the heart, both the equally abiding wind and the turtle wind associated with wind are

generated and abide. In the southern and southwestern channel petals, both the ascending wind and the lizard wind associated with fire are generated and abide. In the northern and northeastern channel petals, both the pervading wind and the *devadatta* wind associated with water are generated and abide. In the western and [40b] northwestern channel petals, both the *nāga* wind and the *dhanamjaya* wind associated with earth are generated and abide.

The Kālacakra system does not significantly differ from the general system in its presentation of when the ten winds are generated. The Guhyasamāja tantra explains that the five main winds are established in the first five months of embryonic development, while the five secondary winds are established, respectively, in the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and the last days of the ninth month. Still they differ in their presentation of where the winds are initially generated and abide. Ngawang Palden here describes the locations in terms of the channel knot formed by the three main channels at the heart. The life-sustaining wind associated with the constituent of space is initially generated and abides above that channel knot, while the downward-voiding wind associated with the constituent of pristine wisdom is generated and abides below that channel knot. The remaining eight winds are generated and abide in the main and intermediate directions of the eight channel petals of the heart cakra.

The order of their generation follows the particular order of the generation of the eight śāktis, combining two clockwise and two counterclockwise movements. This order is also followed when offering a maṇḍala or generating deities.[408](#)

When they move, each of them divides into many winds, moving to pervade the channel petals within the body.

Once these winds are established, they begin to move by

separating into many secondary streams that pervade the entire body.⁴⁰⁹ The author does not give a detailed explanation of this process, but extensive explanations of the formation of channels in the twenty-four locations of the body and their subsequent division into 21,000 channels may be found in other works.⁴¹⁰

We should also recognize that the movement of winds and flow of drops depends on the condition of channels. Channels may be crooked, lacking in strength, or blocked by various knots that restrict the flow of winds and create an unequal distribution of drops, which induces feelings of discomfort and lack of balance. But by meditating on the correct location of the channels, performing the special exercises explained in the six Dharmas of Nāropa, and engaging in physical exercises, such as haṭhayoga, that promote physical pliancy and flexibility, we may restore the channels and establish the correct flow of winds and distribution of drops. When channels, winds, and drops attain their optimum state, the body is healthy and balanced. For example, when our blood pressure is too high or low, we generally sense a degree of physical imbalance, and from a yogic perspective this imbalance is related to an excess or lack of red drops.

Although there is a close connection between the body and its subtle channels, this doesn't mean that the channels will necessarily be affected by the state of the body. Minor physical injury will not necessarily harm the channels or the flow of winds and drops. But a major injury may damage or even sever a channel, which in turn will affect the flow of winds and the distribution of drops. Practitioners who are capable of practicing the completion stage are able to heal and improve the state of their channels, as they remove knots and blockages and strengthen the channels. Further we should understand that generating strong emotions of attachment, hatred, confusion, and so on disturbs the winds and affects the channels in our bodies. Anger, for instance, is awareness supported by a specific type of agitated wind that also disturbs

the channels through which it flows.

Drops

The drops of white and red substances circulate within the main and secondary channels. They are classified according to when they are generated and by the locations where they are generated and abide. Drops are generated on four occasions: (1) when we are awake, (2) when we are dreaming, (3) when we are in a deep, dreamless sleep, and (4) when we engage in sexual intercourse. The drops are generated at four locations in the upper body and four locations in the lower body. Since the drops are carried by the winds, these locations are defined in relation to the movement of winds.

The four types of drops abide respectively at the four locations of the (1) crown, (2) throat, (3) heart, and (4) navel when generated at the time of (1) waking, (2) dreaming, (3) deep sleep, and (4) sexual union. The four types of drops also abide respectively at (1) the navel, (2) the secret place, (3) the middle part of the jewel, and (4) the tip of the jewel at those four times.

At these four times, the drops as well as the winds may be located above or below the navel. For example when awake the upper winds gather at the crown carrying with them some of the drops, while other drops are carried to the navel by the lower winds. When dreaming all upper winds gather at the throat while all lower winds gather at the secret place. During deep sleep all upper winds gather at the heart while all lower winds gather at the middle part of the jewel. During sexual intercourse all upper winds gather at the navel while all lower winds gather at the tip of the jewel. The drops gather at locations in the upper and lower parts of the body carried by the winds.

The secret place, the middle part of the jewel, and the tip of the jewel should be visualized as a three-tier maṇḍala, where the secret place corresponds to the broad base, the middle part

of the jewel to the middle tier, and the tip of the jewel to the upper tier of smallest dimension. These three layers are formed by the thirty-two channels of the cakra of the secret place arranged in three layers. This is a pattern found in all cakras, as the main channels subdivide a number of times and the secondary channels are arranged in different layers.

It is said that the two distinct imprints generating the waking state and the fourth state exist within one drop; they do not form distinct drops.

Drops from both the upper and lower parts of the body exist at the navel. But even though two distinct latent imprints are found in the navel, they do not form two distinct drops. Rather the latencies generating the waking state and sexual intercourse are both found within the same drop.

The four types of drops are called, respectively, the drops of (1) exalted body, (2) exalted speech, (3) exalted mind, and (4) exalted pristine wisdom, or the drops of (1) body, (2) speech, (3) mind, and (4) pristine wisdom.

Upper and lower drops capable of generating the waking state are called *exalted body drops*, those generating the dream state are called *exalted speech drops*, those generating deep sleep are called *exalted mind drops*, and those generating sexual intercourse are called *exalted pristine wisdom drops*. Alternatively, they are known as body, speech, mind, and pristine-wisdom drops.

When awake

When awake, the upper winds gather at the crown and the lower winds gather at the navel, thus generating the mere appearance of objects and the appearance of impure objects.

More specifically, when we wake from sleep, the upper winds gather at the crown, causing the mere appearance of objects to

the five types of sense awareness. Thus eye awareness becomes aware of forms, ear awareness becomes aware of sounds, nose awareness becomes aware of aromas, tongue awareness becomes aware of tastes, and tactile awareness becomes aware of various tactile objects. Simultaneously, the lower winds gather at the navel, causing the appearance of impure objects. When such objects are generated, the impression that they are unpleasant and cause suffering is also generated in the mind, and they are seen as unattractive.

The assertion that drops gathering at the crown enables sense awareness to perceive sense data in Kālacakra conforms at least in part to the scientific presentation of brain function, where sensory perception correlates with regions within the brain where sensory signals are received and interpreted. For instance for sight it is the primary visual cortex, for sound it is the primary auditory cortex, and so on. The purification of obscurations with the drops produced while we are awake plants latent imprints for obtaining the vajra body of the fruitional state.

When dreaming

When dreaming, the upper winds gather at the throat and the lower winds gather at secret place, thus generating mere sound and mistaken speech.

When we are dreaming, the upper winds gather at our throats and the lower winds gather at our secret places, and this causes the appearance of sound as well as speech, and it accounts as well for such phenomena as talking in our sleep. Although the text describes speech in dreams as “mistaken speech,” it is not always so, for speech during dreams may be valid. The purification of obscurations with the drops produced while dreaming plants latent imprints for obtaining the vajra speech of the fruitional state.

When in deep sleep

When in deep sleep, the upper winds gather at the

heart and the lower winds gather in the middle part of the jewel, thus generating nonconceptuality and unclarity.

When we are sleeping deeply, our upper winds gather at our hearts while our lower winds gather at the middle part of the jewel, which for a woman is inverted. Since we are not dreaming in this state and nothing appears to our sense awareness, our minds do not generate conception and remain in an unclear, unconscious state.^{[411](#)} The purification of afflictive and knowledge obscurations with the drops produced while we are sleeping deeply plants latent imprints for obtaining the vajra mind in the fruitional state.

When in sexual union

When males and females engage in union, the upper winds gather at the navel and the lower winds gather at the tip of the jewel, thus generating bliss and emission of semen.

When engaging in sexual intercourse, the upper winds gather at the navel and the lower winds gather at the tip of the jewel. They also carry the white substance to the tip of the jewel, generating a sensation of bliss and the experience of emission. Once afflictive and knowledge obscurations that are associated with this state are purified, the vajra pristine wisdom and nature body of a buddha are obtained.

Purifying the four obscurations

Having eliminated those states capable of generating (1) the appearance of impure objects, (2) mistaken speech, (3) unclarity, and (4) the emission of semen, by taking (1) mere appearance, (2) mere sound, (3) nonconceptuality, and (4) bliss as the path, they are transformed into (1) empty form, (2) indestructible sound, (3) nonconceptual pristine wisdom, and (4) immutable great bliss,

[41a] which progressively develop into the vajra (1) body, (2) speech, (3) mind, and (4) pristine wisdom of a buddha.

We should train in purifying the bases to be purified—namely the appearance of impure objects generated when awake, mistaken speech generated when dreaming, the lack of clarity generated in dreamless sleep, and the emission of semen generated during intercourse—by taking mere appearance, mere sound, nonconceptuality, and bliss as their purifying paths. We may then transform the initial impure states into, respectively, empty form, indestructible sound, nonconceptual pristine wisdom realizing emptiness, and unchanging great bliss. This will guarantee the establishment of the four vajras and the four bodies of a buddha,^{[412](#)} respectively, as (1) the vajra body that is the body of empty form, (2) the vajra speech, (3) the vajra mind, and (4) the vajra pristine wisdom of glorious Kālacakra. If we do not make an effort to transform these states, they will perpetuate our cyclic existence and reinforce our afflictive and knowledge obscurations. Knowing the great power of these four occasions, we should make an intense effort to transform all impure states through the proper paths.^{[413](#)}

In this system, all obscurations are subsumed within four types, and these drops are explained to be instances of obscuration with the thought that the extremely subtle wind and mind abiding within these drops are the bases upon which the imprints of obscuration are imprinted.

All obscurations are included within afflictive and knowledge obscurations in general, and in the Kālacakra system, they are all subsumed within four types of obscuration.^{[414](#)} Such obscurations exist in dependence of the four types of drops, but the drops themselves do not obscure. Rather the obscurations refer to the latent imprints of obscuration imprinted on the extremely subtle wind and mind existing within these

drops.[415](#)

The nature of these drops is a globule that is composed of a mixture of red and white substances and is the size of a mere mustard seed.

The nature of these drops is physical. They are made up of a mixture of semen and blood, and their size is similar to that of a mustard seed.

The general system of highest yoga tantra involves entering a skillful path that eliminates the capacity of the extremely subtle wind and mind existing at the time of the basis to generate the impure environment and inhabitants, transforming them instead into the form and dharma bodies.

The subtle wind and subtle mind exist within these drops, which act as their bases. Moreover, as mentioned previously, the subtle wind and mind exist inseparably and can only be differentiated by their function. In sūtra, impermanent substance is divided into three mutually exclusive categories—form, awareness, and nonconcordant composites.[416](#) But in highest yoga tantra, extremely subtle wind may be posited as the common basis of form and awareness. From the perspective of being wind, it is subtle form, and from the perspective of being indivisible from extremely subtle mind, it is awareness.

The extremely subtle wind and mind present in ordinary existence have the power to generate an impure environment inhabited by impure beings, because they carry the imprints of many obscurations and past negative acts. By training in a path that cultivates the emptiness of these subtle states, we gain the power to purify them. In time, purified subtle wind becomes the substantial cause establishing the form body of a buddha that, in the mainstream tantras, is known as the *illusory body* and in Kālacakra tantra is known as the *body of empty form*. Similarly, purified subtle mind becomes the substantial cause for establishing the pristine-wisdom dharma body. In other

words, the purified appearance of objects becomes the form body, and the purified awareness associated with these appearances becomes the dharma body of a buddha.

The feature of this system is entry into a path that eliminates the capacity of the four types of drops to generate impure states and that acts as the cause of the four vajra bodies.

The distinctive feature of the Kālacakra system is that it purifies the potency of the four drops to generate the four impure states. We purify their potency by meditating on their emptiness, and as a result we obtain the four vajras.[417](#)

NINETEEN

The Six Branches of Practice of the Completion Stage

Having presented the vajra body and the process of purification, the author continues by presenting the structure of the completion-stage practices.

The six branches of practice that penetrate the vital points

There are six branches—individual withdrawal, absorption, and so on.

The six branches of the completion stage are clearly enumerated in one of the dedication verses of the *Kālacakra Six-Session Guru Yoga*:

May I become familiar with the six branches of yoga:
the two virtues in the beginning—individual withdrawal
and absorption,
the two virtues in the middle—vitality exertion and
retention,
the two virtues at the end—subsequent recollection and
concentration.

The function of the six branches

Question: Why are six branches posited in the completion stage?

Reply: There are definitely six branches because there are three objects of obtainment—the body, speech, and mind of a buddha—and it takes six completion-stage branches to establish them. (1) Individual withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*) and (2) absorption (*dhyāna*) establish the body of a conqueror through establishing empty form not previously established and stabilizing that which

has been established. (3) Vitality exertion (*praṇāyāmā*) and (4) retention (*dhāraṇā*) establish the speech of a conqueror by providing control over the winds at the root of speech. (5) Subsequent recollection (*anusmṛti*) and (6) concentration (*samādhi*) establish the mind of the conqueror, since the first is the proximate cause of immutable bliss and the second is the nature of immutable bliss.

The completion stage is structured in six branches that establish the body, speech, and mind of a buddha. The two virtues in the beginning establish the body of a buddha, the two virtues in the middle establish the speech of a buddha, while the two virtues at the end establish the mind of a buddha. Although two yogas are included in each of the three groups of virtue, each performs a separate function. (1) The yoga of individual withdrawal newly establishes the appearance of the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and his consort, Viśvamātā. (2) The yoga of absorption then stabilizes these forms so that their appearance does not change. (3) The yoga of vitality exertion establishes the speech of Kālacakra by gaining control of the winds. Normally the winds of the right and left channel freely circulate, but the yoga of vitality exertion causes these winds to directly approach the central channel, similar to placing a thread in the eye of a needle. (4) Once the winds begin to enter the central channel, the yoga of retention draws them inside the central channel, similar to pulling a thread through the eye of the needle. Once the winds are drawn into the central channel, they are stabilized. (5) The yoga of subsequent recollection induces the pristine wisdom of great bliss realizing emptiness. (6) The yoga of concentration stabilizes such pristine wisdom once it has arisen in the mind. Through the complementary functions of the last two yogas, the mind of glorious Kālacakra is established. [418](#)

These pairs of subdivisions are called, respectively, the *concentration of vajra body*, the *concentration*

of vajra speech, and the concentration of vajra mind.

The yogas of individual withdrawal and absorption are two virtues in the beginning of the practice, the yogas of vitality exertion and retention are two virtues in the middle, and the yogas of subsequent recollection and concentration are two virtues at the end. They are collectively called the *concentration of vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind*.

Mantric Stages states:

The simultaneous union of the three special vajra concentrations of a learner arises after obtaining the branch of concentration.[419](#)
[41b]

Proper establishment of the six branches depends on generating them in their correct order. Therefore individual withdrawal must be established first to act as the basis for the development of absorption and so forth. Once the last branch, concentration, has been established, we may generate the union of all six practices as the union of the three vajras. This process is similar to first cultivating fully qualified calm abiding and insight before generating the simultaneous union of calm abiding and insight. From within a state of calm abiding, a practitioner examines whether insight is established, and from within a state of insight, he or she examines whether calm abiding is established. When each mode of examination first establishes the other, the union of calm abiding and insight is newly accomplished.

The first two branches of (1) individual withdrawal and (2) absorption establish and stabilize the bodies of empty form. The second two branches of (3) vitality exertion and (4) retention cause the entry and stable abiding of winds and vitality (*prāṇa*) in the central channel. In this context *vitality* and *mind* are equivalent, and their mount is wind. In dependence on their mount, mind and vitality are capable of moving to external objects and reentering the body. Their

mount is the life-sustaining wind that actually facilitates the external and internal movement of vitality through the nostrils, and brings vitality or life force from both the *rasanā* and *lalanā* into the central channel in a process similar to threading a needle. (5) Subsequent recollection establishes the awareness recollecting the non-inherent existence of the body of the deity. (6) Concentration stabilizes bliss realizing emptiness in dependence on recollection. In the Guhyasamāja system, physical, verbal, and mental isolation establish the vajra body, speech, and mind, while in Kālacakra the concentrations of vajra body, speech, and mind establish, respectively, the three vajras.

The certainty of their order

Regarding the certainty of their order, the final, indivisible bliss and emptiness that is the object to be obtained in this system is different from the indivisible bliss and emptiness explained in other texts, because this emptiness is the body of the male and female deity of empty form, and this bliss is supreme, immutable great bliss.

The recollection of the feeling of bliss generated in the fifth branch, subsequent recollection, acts as the direct cause for establishing the feeling of bliss obtained in the final branch of concentration. Although indivisible bliss and emptiness is mentioned in many tantric texts, that obtained through the practice of the Kālacakra system is different from that obtained through the paths of other tantras. In general this term describes an awareness that ascertains emptiness while possessing the nature of a blissful feeling. But in the Kālacakra system it does not merely possess the nature of a blissful feeling; it must also be bliss that is unchanging or immutable. This additional feature of immutability differentiates the indivisible bliss and emptiness of the Kālacakra system from all other systems.

There is also a difference in the way that emptiness is

understood in the term “indivisible bliss and emptiness.” In general a practitioner first generates renunciation and bodhicitta, and the mind of bodhicitta is generated as a blissful awareness comprehending emptiness. Then the pristine wisdom realizing emptiness that unites the three principles of the path—that is, renunciation, bodhicitta, and emptiness—appears as the body of the deity, in a process common to all tantras. In the general system of highest yoga tantra, the form body is established from extremely subtle wind, and the dharma body is established from the extremely subtle mind that is indivisible from that wind. But in Kālacakra the bodies of the principal deity and his consort appear to the mind realizing emptiness. This appearance of the bodies of the deities to the mind meditating on emptiness is called *body of empty form*, and this is posited as the body of the deity.

The union of such bliss and emptiness must be established by causes that are compatible with it. As such the branch of concentration capable of uniting these two occurs when your mind obtains—based on your attachment to the female deity appearing in the union of the male and female desire deities of empty form—immutable bliss that engages reality. This is stated in *Mantric Stages*.

This union of bliss and emptiness is established by compatible causes. The “I” is recognized as the extremely subtle wind and mind realizing emptiness that appears as the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā. When the aspect of the female consort appears, we generate attachment toward her, and this mind that desires the female consort remains absorbed in the emptiness of inherent existence of the bodies of empty form. In this way the awareness that is attached to the consort and experiences great bliss is united with the object of emptiness during the branch of concentration. The authoritative source given for this explanation is Tsongkhapa’s *Mantric Stages*.

To generate that, you rely on subsequent

recollection, because the branch of concentration of immutable bliss is the innate joy generated from the bodhicitta melted by caṇḍālī during subsequent recollection, descending from the crown to the jewel without external emission.

The last branch of concentration is established in dependence on the fifth branch of subsequent recollection. During subsequent recollection the meditator practices caṇḍālī and causes the substance of bodhicitta to melt. This melted bodhicitta gradually descends from the crown of the head to the tip of the sexual organ, without emission. Since it is retained, it generates innate joy, or bliss, and this innate bliss is the immutable, great bliss that is linked with empty form in the branch of concentration.

Also it is stated that during subsequent recollection the appearance as the deities of empty form that are not fabricated occurs.

The focal object of your meditation is a drop whose nature is extremely subtle wind. The drop is blue in color, corresponding to the color of the main body of Kālacakra. It is the size of a mustard seed. This focal object is held between the eyebrows, and during the branch of subsequent recollection, the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā appear inside this drop without being fabricated or contrived. Images of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā that appear at earlier stages are fabricated. Through visualizing their form over a long period, you develop great familiarity with them, and now they appear naturally, without any conscious effort. To induce the appearance of such bodies of empty form, the winds of the right and left channels must be made to abide stably in the central channel.

Such subsequent recollection relies on retention holding the winds without movement in the central channel, because the substances must melt after practicing caṇḍālī due to the force of that retention.

Subsequent recollection relies on having previously practiced

the branch of retention.

Also retention relies on inserting the winds of the right and left channels into the central channel by the yoga of vitality exertion, for if they are not inserted into the central channel, you cannot hold them within the central channel.

Similarly the branch of retention relies on the practice of the previous branch of vitality exertion.

Insertion of the winds of the right and left channels into the central channel relies on individual withdrawal and absorption purifying the central channel, because if you do not make the winds pliable, you cannot insert the winds into the central channel.

Vitality exertion must be preceded by absorption, and absorption must be preceded by the branch of individual withdrawal. These lines of the text clearly indicate that in order to practice any of the six branches successfully, we must have mastered the immediately preceding branch.

***Mantric Stages* states:**

Knowledge of the purification of the central channel arises when the winds of the left and right channels begin to move into the central channel by their own force. This is due to [42a] your making the winds somewhat pliable by establishing the eleven signs through individual withdrawal and stabilizing them through absorption. From that stage the winds of the right and left channels proceed to the vital points if you have engaged in prior preparation to stop their movement. Prior to that they will not proceed there even though you may try to make them do so. Therefore the first two branches precede meditation on

vitality exertion.[420](#)

During the phase of individual withdrawal, the practitioner experiences eleven signs, which may arise in the standard order for some practitioners or randomly for others. Once these eleven signs have been experienced in individual withdrawal, they are stabilized in the following phase of absorption. Absorption also establishes a degree of flexibility of the winds. When this is achieved the winds coursing through the right and left channels start to gather at the vital points of the central channel naturally and with little effort. This occurs through having previously trained in stopping the movement of winds of the right and left channels. But the results of such practice will manifest during the yoga of absorption and above only after the necessary training has been completed and not during individual withdrawal. This explains why the first two yogas of individual withdrawal and absorption are necessarily preliminary stages for the practice of the third yoga of vitality exertion.

Do the first two branches conform to the definition of the completion stage?

One says: It would follow that the eleven signs manifesting during individual withdrawal and absorption are not signs of the winds dissolving in the central channel because individual absorption and withdrawal of this system precede the winds being inserted into the central channel. But such an assertion is unacceptable because many commentaries on the six branches explain that they are signs of the winds dissolving in the central channel.

The eleven signs manifest in different ways during the six practices of the completion stage. During individual withdrawal and absorption, the eleven signs are neither clear nor stable, in vitality exertion and retention they manifest more clearly and

more stably, and in subsequent recollection and concentration they are clear and stable. A scholar asserts that the eleven signs dawning during the first two yogas of the completion stage are not generated due to the winds entering the central channel, for these two stages precede the winds entering the central channel. Thus the first two yogas are not actual realizations of the completion stage, since a completion-stage yoga must cause the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to the power of meditation. This is the definition of the completion stage in the mainstream tantras.

Reply: I don't think that is logically necessary because even though many commentaries explain it that way, *Mantric Stages* and *Illuminating Lamp* state that they precede insertion of the winds in the central channel.

The mainstream tantras explain that we must first cause the winds of the right and left channels to enter the central channel. Then we must develop the capacity to fully insert the winds in the central channel. This is not an occasional or random entry of the winds but a stable and repeated entry or insertion of winds achieved by the power of meditation. Once a practitioner has established fully qualified entry, he similarly develops the capacity to make the winds fully abide and fully dissolve in the central channel through meditation. When he achieves this, he first enters the completion stage. Any practice that fails to cause the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to meditation does not belong to the completion stage but to the generation stage.

However, the general definition of the completion stage does not necessarily apply to the system of Kālacakra. Previously Ngawang Palden quoted the definition of the completion stage given by Paṇchen Chökyi Gyaltzen and noted that it did not conform with the stages of individual withdrawal and absorption of Kālacakra. Therefore the assertion of the scholar here does not hold.

***Mantric Stages* states:**

Even the insertion of the winds of the right and left (channels) into the central channel relies on the purification of the central channel through individual withdrawal and absorption.[421](#)

The author supports his position by quoting *Mantric Stages*, which states that at the level of individual withdrawal and absorption, we are not yet able to cause the winds to enter in the central channel. During the first two yogas we are still training to do that, so in effect we purify the central channel as a preparation for the winds entering the central channel at a later stage.

And *Illuminating Lamp* states very clearly:

The signs such as the mirage and so on that are stated in Kālacakra in the context of individual withdrawal are the signs at the time of beginning to reverse the winds of the sense faculties attracted to ordinary objects and reabsorbing them internally.[422](#)

Similarly, Tsongkhapa's *Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages of Guhyasamāja* states that the signs that arise during individual withdrawal are caused by stopping the winds from engaging the external objects of the senses. When that is achieved we are close to causing the winds to enter the central channel. Therefore the signs at this level indicate that we are close to causing the winds to enter the central channel, but they are not signs of having achieved such entry. This point is important, since it makes the distinction between nearing a specific phase and the actual accomplishment of that phase. *Illuminating Lamp* continues:

The four signs—the mirage and so on—that appear during mental isolation and so forth are signs appearing at the conclusion of the four empties, but to experience them, it has been explained many

times that you must dissolve the winds after inserting them in the central channel. Due to that, you see the aspects of the moon, sun, and eclipse during individual withdrawal, but they are not equivalent to the moonlight of the four empties and so on.[423](#)

Illuminating Lamp then compares the four signs appearing at the end of mental isolation in the mainstream tantras with the signs appearing in the initial phase of the completion stage of Kālacakra. It was stated previously that in the completion stage of the mainstream highest yoga tantras, the sign of the winds fully entering the central channel is that the breath flowing through both nostrils during inhalation and exhalation equalizes. Normally if the winds flow strongly through one nostril, they flow weakly, if at all, through the other nostril. The sign of the winds fully abiding in the central channel is that all movement of winds through the nostrils stops.

When a practitioner achieves calm abiding in sūtra, breathing through the nostrils also stops, but since the sūtra mind of calm abiding is relatively coarse, there is still some movement of winds in the area of the navel. When calm abiding is achieved in tantra, all movement of winds, including those at the navel, stops as the meditator focuses on the body of the deity during the completion stage. The sign of the winds fully dissolving in the central channel is the appearance of the four visions—the mirage, smoke, fireflies, and lamp flame that arise due to the dissolution of the four elements, similar to the time of death. Thus in the mainstream tantras the signs arise only after the yogi inserts the winds into the central channel, but in Kālacakra the signs do not arise in the same way.

The concise meaning is that both (1) individual withdrawal and (2) absorption purify the central channel by establishing the form that is the cause of the vajra body. (3) Vitality exertion [42b] inserts the winds of both the right and left channels into the purified central channel. (4) Retention holds

the inserted winds in the central channel without external or internal movement. (5) Subsequent recollection establishes immutable bliss by meditating on any of the three seals⁴²⁴ in dependence on the retained winds, and holding the descending melted bodhicitta without allowing it to be externally dispersed. (6) Concentration exhausts all material aggregates and so on after enhancing immutable bliss to its fullest through attachment to the great seal, which takes the form established by individual withdrawal and absorption as the body of empty form of the male and female deities.

Mantric Stages states that this obtainment of the body of union of both (1) the vajra body, which is an empty form body, and (2) the mind as immutable bliss always in equipoise on the reality of phenomena is the essence of the condensed points of the three texts of the Bodhisattva Corpus.⁴²⁵

These last two paragraphs summarize the order and function of the six branches of the completion stage of the Kālacakra tantra.

Cultivating the appearance of empty forms

The method of generating the appearance of empty form—smoke and so on—during individual withdrawal is to meditate when awake on the drop that is generated in the center of your forehead cakra by directing your focus there. When you awaken the power to reveal various objects within that drop, different empty forms appear there.

The meditation of directing your focus there, according to *Words of Advice*,⁴²⁶ is to firmly restrain your body and, in the complete darkness of night with eyes halfclosed by raising the lower and lowering the upper lids, visualize an empty space

between the eyebrows and single-pointedly meditate on that.

This passage is explained in the sections below.

Posture

We assume the seven-point posture of Vairocana, where the body is *restrained* in seven ways: (1) the legs are placed in the full-lotus position, (2) the hands are placed one above the other with the thumbs touching just below at the level of the navel, (3) the back is straight and erect, (4) the shoulders are relaxed and even, (5) the eyes are directed upward, (6) the tongue is lightly pressed against the upper pallet, and (7) the teeth and lips remain in their natural position so that the mouth is neither tightly closed nor wide open.

Focal object and location

Once we have assumed the Vairocana position, we visualize the three main channels and their upper openings. The upper opening of the central channel is located between the eyebrows, while the upper opening of the right and left channels are located in the right and left nostrils, for those channels arch downward once they reach eyebrow level. Then we direct our eyes toward the center of the forehead cakra (*ājñācakra*), which is located between the eyebrows. Our eyelids are half closed, with the upper eyelids half lowered and the lower eyelids half raised so they do not meet, and a small gap remains between them. Our eyes are turned upward to assist the mind focusing on that location.^{[427](#)} For example, when someone says “look over there,” not only do our eyes focus there but also our mind focuses there. In general, wherever the eyes focus, the mind will focus as well.

This type of concentration is known as the threefold single-pointed concentration of mind, wind, and eyes, since all three focus simultaneously on the same object. Such concentration occurs in all tantric meditations, although the focal object varies. For example, in *Guhyasamāja* it is the secret place, in

Heruka it is the navel, and in Kālacakra it is between the eyebrows. In accordance with the root tantra and its commentaries, Tsongkhapa and his two spiritual sons interpret this location to be the empty space existing within the central channel at the forehead *cakra*, while the Jonang tradition interprets this space to be external to the body.[428](#)

Empty forms

Inside this space, our own extremely subtle wind and mind appear in the aspect of the empty forms of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā. Such detailed appearances do not dawn easily, so when we initially attempt this practice, we focus on our wind and mind appearing as a tiny blue sphere the size of a mustard seed. Once concentration has been established on this blue drop, we then meditate on the appearance of the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā until they become clearly visible inside the drop.

By meditating in that way, the four night signs appear, which are like (1) smoke, (2) a mirage, (3) fireflies in space, and (4) a burning butter lamp. Then the six day signs appear, which are like (5) the fire at the end of the eon, (6) the moon, (7) the sun, (8) an eclipse, (9) lightning, and (10) a blue drop. [43a]

Various signs manifest when we are absorbed in the appearance of the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā. Such signs appear due to directing our attention to the opening of the central channel, where the drop at the time of waking is generated between the eyebrows. This drop has the power to give rise to the appearance of many different objects, which is why it is permissible to visualize the upper opening of the central channel at the crown instead of the forehead for some practices, such as the transference of consciousness (*phowa*). During the practice of *phowa* we visualize the feet of Buddha Amitābha in the space above the head and project our consciousness to the heart of Amitābha,

and for such practice it is appropriate to visualize the upper opening of the central channel at the crown. The forehead and crown are two of nine openings in the body: (1) the crown, (2) the forehead, (3-4) the eyes, (5-6) the nostrils, (7-8) the ears, and (9-10) the two lower openings.

In the Kālacakra tantra the focal location is the area between the eyebrows. Although the night signs are mentioned first, in reality we begin by cultivating daytime yoga,^{[429](#)} and once the six day signs have manifested, we then cultivate nighttime yoga until all four night signs have appeared. When cultivating daytime yoga we should meditate in an open and high place such as a mountain. The visualizations are small to begin with and are progressively reduced from there. If we were to attempt such a visualization inside an ordinary room, we would feel claustrophobic, and so an open and expansive locale is crucial. In the morning we face west to avoid directly facing the sun, and when meditating in the afternoon we face east. At all times we should turn our backs to the sun to avoid damaging our eyes. When we cultivate nighttime yoga, we should meditate in a darkened house that has no roof.

Visions of night yoga

As we've seen, the first vision to appear in the mind during night yoga is that of (1) smoke, followed by (2) a mirage, (3) fireflies, and (4) a burning butter lamp. In the mainstream tantras, in accordance with the order of dissolution of the elements, the mirage appears first followed by smoke, but in Kālacakra this order is reversed. Thus in Kālacakra the vision of smoke is associated with the dissolution of the earth element, the vision of the mirage is associated with the dissolution of the water element, while the visions of fireflies and a butter lamp remain associated with the dissolution of the elements of fire and wind, respectively.^{[430](#)}

The absorption of the elements is induced by practices of the completion stage to manifest the extremely subtle wind and mind, for without the coarser winds and minds dissolving, the

extremely subtle wind and mind cannot manifest nor function. This point illustrates the difference between Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra. As we've noted, in the general system of Guhyasamāja, the completion stage is generally posited as the yoga where the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to meditation. But in Kālacakra the completion stage is divided into six practices, the first of which is the yoga of individual withdrawal, which precedes the dissolving of the winds in the central channel.

Visions of daytime yoga

In the practice of daytime yoga, the focal location and object are the same as in nighttime yoga. In other words we focus on our own wind and mind appearing as the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā inside a tiny drop located within the central channel at the forehead cakra. While cultivating this meditation six signs appear. The first sign to manifest is (1) bright orange Kālāgni, then (2) the sign of the moon, and (3) the sign of the sun. The fourth sign is (4) the eclipse, which is a vision of darkness or a blue hue. This is followed by the sign of (5) lightning and then (6) a blue drop.

It is said that the four night signs appear when you first cultivate night yoga, they may appear when you cultivate day yoga, and the six day signs may also appear to supreme practitioners during night yoga. It is also said that the enjoyment body possessing five certainties appears in the aspect of the main deity embracing the female deity in the center of the blue drop of the tenth sign, within a black outline the width of a hair.

Once the tenth sign of the blue drop appears, we experience the vision of Kālacakra in union with Viśvamātā. The dimensions of their tiny bodies of empty form do not exceed the width of a single hair. This is the eleventh sign.

In the mainstream tantras there is a presentation of the impure and pure illusory bodies, but in Kālacakra there is no

parallel transformation of an impure body into a pure body.⁴³¹ Instead there is a progressive development of the clarity, stability, and subtlety of the bodies of empty form. Therefore the clarity, stability, and subtlety of the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā increase as a yogi develops day and night yogas and experiences their relevant signs during individual withdrawal. During the next phase, absorption, these signs become clearer and more stable. During the following phase of vitality exertion, where the right and left winds are brought into the central channel, the signs become even more clear and stable and subtle. However, from the very beginning, we must apply whatever understanding of emptiness of inherent existence we have to these signs. Once the body of empty form has been fully established, it performs functions similar to those of the illusory body.

The five certainties of the enjoyment body

The five certainties are (1) the certainty of time, for it exists at the final completion of the tenth sign; (2) the certainty of abode, for it exists in the central channel; (3) the certainty of nature, for it is established only as the appearance of your mind and not as an accumulation of particles; (4) the certainty of body, for it exists as the body of Vajrasattva; and (5) the certainty of aspect, for it is seen in the aspect of the male deity embracing the female deity.

The definition of the *enjoyment body* is “the ultimate body endowed with the five certainties.” The five certainties are explained differently in tantra and sūtra. In sūtra the certainty of *time* refers to the certainty that the enjoyment body will abide till the end of cyclic existence. The certainty of *abode* refers to the enjoyment body abiding in the Akaniṣṭha pure land. The certainty of *entourage* is that it will be accompanied by ārya bodhisattavas. The certainty of *Dharma* is that it will teach Mahāyāna Dharma. And the certainty of *body* is that it

will be a body endowed with the complete set of marks and signs.

In tantra the certainty of *time* specifies that the enjoyment body will arise only after the tenth sign has been fully experienced. This implies that all signs must have arisen in a fully qualified manner. The certainty of *abode* specifies that the enjoyment body abides in the central channel. The certainty of *nature* is that this body is established as the mere appearance of our own subtle mind and is not established from material particles. Although such empty-form bodies are initially generated during individual withdrawal and absorption, they are gradually clarified and stabilized during the remaining four phases. The certainty of *body* refers to the body of Vajrasattva, but this body has the nature of Kālacakra; as such it does not appear in the white color and form of Vajrasattva but rather as the blue body and form of Kālacakra. The final certainty—of *aspect*—refers to the enjoyment body appearing as the empty-form bodies of the male and female deities embraced in sexual union. It is also said that the color of the winds establishes the form body and the tone of the winds establishes the enjoyment body. But this refers to the coarse enjoyment body.

The five certainties explained here are the actual attributes of the resultant enjoyment body, but when the practitioner is still on the level of individual withdrawal and absorption, the five certainties are merely visualized.⁴³² Such visualization is necessary, for it acts as a cause for the actual attainment of these characteristics when the result is actualized.

Thus individual withdrawal establishes the eleven signs and the branch of absorption stabilizes them. When the winds become somewhat pliable, the winds of the right and left channels begin to proceed to the central channel by their own force, and the potency of individual withdrawal and absorption is exhausted.

The visualization of the appearance of such an enjoyment body is first generated during individual withdrawal, and that

appearance is later stabilized during absorption.⁴³³ Such practices transform the winds, which become more pliable, and they naturally and effortlessly begin to enter the central channel. Once this level is attained, the potential and benefit of the first two yogas has been fully actualized. To progress further we must then engage in vitality exertion.

Vitality exertion

From that stage you must meditate on vitality exertion. You insert the winds into the central channel through stopping the movement of the winds of the right and left channels. The vajra recitation of indivisible wind and mantra and the yoga of vase breathing together cause the life-sustaining wind and the downward-voiding wind to join in the central channel. When the insertion of winds in the central channel becomes stable, the potency of vitality exertion is exhausted.

Once the practice of the first two yogas has been completed, we then enter the practice of the two middle virtues. First we engage in vitality exertion with practices such as vajra recitation and vase breathing. The purpose of these practices is to stop the movement of winds through the right and left channels and make them enter the central channel.

The yoga of vajra recitation is a practice that indivisibly unites the wind and mantra in the central channel.⁴³⁴ The yoga of vase breathing unites the upper life-sustaining wind with the lower downward-voiding wind in the central channel by pushing the first down and drawing the second up. These two practices⁴³⁵ ensure the proper entry of winds into the central channel, and when such entry is continuous, the yoga of vitality exertion is complete.⁴³⁶ To progress further we must enter the next yoga.

Retention

Then you must meditate on retention to establish stable abiding of the winds in the central channel. This is the retention that is beyond the scope of vitality exertion.

Whatever has been established through the yoga of vitality exertion must be stabilized. As previously mentioned, causing the winds to enter in the central channel is similar to threading a needle. Although vitality exertion brings the winds into the central channel, it is important to also stabilize their presence there. For example, although we may successfully thread a needle, the thread may again slip out of the needle's eye; similarly, though we may insert the winds into the central channel successfully, they may again escape. Therefore we practice retention after vitality exertion to keep the winds from escaping.⁴³⁷ This pattern is also common to the first two yogas, where that which is successfully established by the first yoga is stabilized by the second.

Two virtues at the end

The winds are inserted in the central channel, and having been inserted, they abide there. Then by the force of caṇḍālī yoga of subsequent recollection, caṇḍālī is ignited, the substances melt and descend to the tip of the jewel without external emission, and [43b] innate immutable bliss is established.

The winds are inserted into the central channel, and once inserted they are stabilized. Then we cultivate the final two yogas, beginning with subsequent recollection. The purpose of subsequent recollection is to establish immutable bliss through cultivating the yoga of caṇḍālī, or “inner heat” (*gtum mo*). The heat generated by this practice causes the white substance to melt and slowly descend to the tip of the jewel, where it is retained and external emission prevented.⁴³⁸ This in turn induces the experience of immutable bliss, which itself must be stabilized. Stability is achieved through the final yoga, that of

concentration, or *samādhi*.[439](#)

Further, the first moment of immutable bliss is generated from holding one drop of white substance at the tip of the jewel without movement; that consumes one part of the material body and exhausts one karmic wind.

Immutable bliss is initially generated by holding a drop of white substance at the tip of your jewel during the branch of concentration. This first moment of immutable bliss is then followed by similar subsequent moments of immutable bliss. Each moment of immutable bliss has the power to consume one part of the physical body and exhaust or stop one impure karmic wind. The use of the verb “consume” here is best understood by analogy to alchemy. When the elixir that transforms base metal into gold comes in contact with the base metal, it consumes the base metal completely and transforms it into gold. As more moments of immutable bliss are generated, they are retained and gradually fill the entire secret place. When these drops are initially retained and accumulated, we actually count each of them as part of training; but as familiarity develops, these events occur naturally on their own, and we no longer need to count.

Attaining the twelve grounds

By this method 3,600 individual white-substance drops are stably and serially accumulated in each of the six abodes: (1) from the tip of the jewel up to the cakra of the secret place, (2) from there to the navel, (3) from there to the heart, (4) from there to the throat, (5) from there to the forehead, and (6) from there to the crown.

Once our secret place is completely filled with 3,600 drops of white substance, then 3,600 drops gradually fill each of our cakras, including the navel, the heart, the throat, the forehead, and finally the crown, while we maintain the generation of

immutable bliss. At the same time, an equal number of drops of red substance are accumulated downward from the crown to the tip of our jewel. In this way the six cakras become completely filled with red and white drops, and this is another unique characteristic of the Kālacakra tantra. In other mainstream tantras the white and red drops pervade the whole body as they spread through the network of main and secondary channels. In the Kālacakra system all red and white substances are collected in the central channel and serially accumulate from above and below.

Also that number of moments of immutable bliss are serially generated, that number of karmic winds are stopped, that number of particles of the material body are exhausted, and through that, two grounds manifest for each.

As 3,600 drops of white substance are retained in each cakra, 3,600 moments of immutable bliss are generated, 3,600 material parts of the body are consumed, 3,600 impure karmic winds are stopped, and two grounds are completed. Since two grounds are completed every time a cakra is filled, and since there are six cakras, in total twelve grounds are actualized. The first ten grounds are learner grounds, while the eleventh and twelfth are the grounds of no-more learners.⁴⁴⁰ Once all the cakras have been filled with white and red drops, all parts of the material body have been consumed, and all karmic winds stopped, we then abide in a rainbow body, completely free of material particles. The *nature* of this body is pristine wisdom realizing emptiness, while its *aspect* is that of the empty-form bodies of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā. This is similar to the alchemical process by which a base metal is gradually transformed into gold by an elixir.

For, through stably amassing 1,800 drops of white substance from the tip of the jewel to halfway to the cakra of the secret place, 1,800 moments of immutable bliss are serially generated, 1,800

karmic winds and 1,800 material particles of the body are exhausted, and the first ground called Joyous manifests. You must assert that the last moment of that bliss is the path of seeing and the previous moment is the path of preparation.

Thus 1,800 drops are required to fill half the cakra. The first 1,800 white drops are accumulated from the tip of the jewel and fill only half the secret cakra. The first ground called Joyous is attained when this number of drops has been accumulated. The 1,799th drop generates the 1,799th moment of bliss, and that is recognized as the path of preparation.[441](#) When the 1,800th drop generates the 1,800th moment of bliss, the path of seeing is generated.[442](#)

Then 1,800 moments of immutable bliss are serially generated from amassing 1,800 drops of white substance from halfway to the cakra of the secret place up to the full measure of the cakra of the secret place. Generation of the last moment of that bliss and attainment of the second ground, called Stainless, is simultaneous. So, too, when drops of the white substance fill half and fully fill the navel cakra, bliss [44a] is generated as before, karmic winds and part of the material body are exhausted, and through that the third and fourth grounds are obtained; higher grounds are obtained in a similar way.

Then a further set of 1,800 drops are generated and retained, filling the entire secret cakra. Once this is achieved, the second ground is actualized. This pattern is followed for each of the cakras, where first half the cakra is filled, completing one ground, and then the remaining half is filled, completing the next ground. Each time 1,800 drops are generated, the same number of moments of immutable bliss are experienced, the same number of parts of the material body are exhausted, and the same number of karmic winds stopped.[443](#)

It is said that when 21,600 drops of white substance are amassed upward from the tip of the jewel to the crown cakra, then 21,600 drops of red substance are amassed downward from the crown to the tip of the jewel.

As the white drops accumulate upward in the central channel, the red drops accumulate downward simultaneously. When the process is completed, a total of 21,600 drops each of white and red substances are accumulated.

Exhaustion of material substances

By retaining the white and red substances without emission, 21,600 moments of immutable bliss are fully experienced, and both the white and red substances are destroyed.

As these drops are serially accumulated and retained in the central channel, an equal number of moments of immutable bliss are generated, and each moment of immutable bliss exhausts a part of the material body. As a result even the drops of white and red substances are consumed. The author then cites Tsongkhapa to support his assertion.

Mantric Stages states:

When you fully experience immutable bliss by retaining bodhicitta in the body without emission, you exhaust all material substances, and not even semen remains . . . and so you establish the vajra body of empty form that is like a rainbow and not like a jug full of milk.[444](#)

It is clear from this quotation that the result of this process is the establishment of rainbow body, whose essence is pristine wisdom realizing emptiness and whose aspect is the particular body of the deity. Such a body is free of any material particles.[445](#) Although the meditator has filled the central

channel with 21,600 red and white drops, he does not establish a material body that is like a bottle filled with milk.

Comparing the two major systems

In this context Gyalwa Gendün Gyatso raises a doubt by stating:

Is the immutable bliss of the system of Kālacakra far superior to the innate bliss of the general highest yoga tantra, or is there no difference? If the first is true, then you must enter the path of the Kālacakra once you have completed the general path of highest yoga tantra. If the second is true, why is it not sufficient to obtain fully qualified innate bliss in reliance on an action or pristine wisdom seal, such that you need to establish immutable bliss in dependence on a seal of empty form? What is the relation between them?[**446**](#)

Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī speaks of the differences between the completion-stage practices of the Guhyasamāja, Heruka, and Yamāntaka tantras, on the one hand, which present a union of clear light and the illusory body, and Kālacakra tantra on the other, which presents a union of mahāmudrā clear light and the body of empty form. Kalkī Puṇḍarīka, who composed *Stainless Light*, stated that *Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī* should therefore be included in the core bibliography of Kālacakra, together with the *Root Tantra* and the *Condensed Tantra*. The Second Dalai Lama Gendün Gyatso, who succeeded Gendün Drup and preceded Sönam Gyatso, composed *Commentary to Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī*. In his work he examines the differences between the general system of highest yoga tantra and Kālacakra, raising questions that do not have clear answers in the tantras and their commentaries. Ngawang Palden here addresses these

questions.

The first question concerns the relative superiority between the *immutable great bliss* of the Kālacakra and the *innate bliss* of the mainstream tantras. If the immutable great bliss in the Kālacakra system is supreme, then having completed our training in the paths of the mainstream tantras, we should then enter the Kālacakra path. If there is no difference, then we must explain why different types of consorts are relied upon. In the Kālacakra system disciples with the least capacity rely on an action seal—an actual consort—those of medium capacity rely on a pristine wisdom seal, and those with supreme capacity rely on the great seal (*mahāmudrā*) of empty form.

A possible response: There is no qualitative difference between the innate bliss of the general highest tantra and the immutable bliss of this system. [44b] These two paths are generated with a capacity to quickly exhaust both types of obscurations, but they have two different causes. That is, both systems are similar in their need to increase the jasmine-like bodhicitta that is the basis of that bliss in order to generate a far greater strength of bliss, but they have two different causes for increasing bodhicitta.

Although the author does not offer a definitive answer to settle this issue, he suggests that there is no difference in quality between innate bliss and immutable bliss. Both types of bliss act to purify the knowledge and afflictive obscurations. Although both systems are similar in relying on bodhicitta to induce bliss, they have different methods for increasing bodhicitta and the intensity of bliss.

According to Kālacakra, it is stated that a far greater strength of bliss is generated in dependence on progressively amassing jasmine-like bodhicitta, which is the basis of bliss, within the path of the central channel without dispersing it, and that must be established in dependence on a seal of empty

form, for action and pristine wisdom seals are not permitted. According to the general highest yoga tantra, to increase jasmine-like bodhicitta, you must depend on the body that possesses sense faculties, since the body is the root of bodhicitta. Thus you engage in any of the three types of conduct.

Enhancing bodhicitta is the cause of increasing bliss in all systems. In Guhyasamāja, Heruka, and Yamāntaka, increase of bodhicitta is achieved by relying on the body, since the coarse physical body is the source of bodhicitta. The use of “depend” here indicates that the body is the cause or “root” of bodhicitta. This resembles the need to increase our blood pressure if our blood pressure drops, where such increase is established in reliance on the physical body, the source of blood. In this context increasing bodhicitta in the body relies on the three practices of conduct with elaboration, conduct without elaboration, and conduct completely free of elaboration, according to our predisposition and preference, as previously explained.[447](#)

The body of empty form and illusory body

Further Gyalwa Rinpoché raises doubt by stating:

Is there a difference between on the one hand the body of empty form during subsequent recollection and the body of empty form during the branch of concentration, and on the other hand the illusory bodies of the third and fifth stages explained in other tantras?

The Second Dalai Lama raises a further question regarding possible differences between the body of empty form established during the fifth and sixth yogas of subsequent recollection and concentration, and the impure and pure illusory bodies established during the third and fifth levels of the completion stage of mainstream tantras.

If there is a difference, how could you accept that

the two bodies at the time of the path that act as substantial causes of the two form bodies are superior or inferior and so on, for it has been emphatically stated that the fundamental wind that is the mount of clear light acts as the substantial cause of the form body of a buddha?

If there is qualitative difference between the body of empty form and the illusory body, then since these act as the substantial causes of the form bodies of a buddha in each system, it would follow that the resultant form body established in the Kālacakra system and that established in the system of the mainstream tantras must also be qualitatively different.

If there is no difference, then you must assert that the body of empty form is established from the fundamental wind, but no authentic master has explained this. It is stated that the basis for establishing the body of empty form is the appearance of Kālacakra and consort that dawns during individual withdrawal and is established by the latter branches progressively purifying it. Therefore it must be demonstrated from actual sources, with clear reasoning, whether it is established from the fundamental wind during individual withdrawal or, if not established initially from the fundamental wind, it is established from a state similar to this during the path and they merge.[448](#)

If there is no difference between the bodies of empty form and the illusory bodies, then we must conclude that the body of empty form is also established by the fundamental wind. Yet not a single author or scholar of the Kālacakra system has stated this. Instead it is clearly explained that the body of empty form is established by the appearance of the two main deities that is gradually clarified. The appearance of the male and female deities first occurs during individual withdrawal.

Therefore the question really is whether these initial appearances are established out of fundamental wind from the beginning or whether they are established by something else but eventually their nature transforms into fundamental wind. As such the Kālacakra tantra's body of empty form and the illusory body of the mainstream tantras would ultimately merge. However, before adopting either position, we should cite authoritative sources and apply valid logic that clearly support this position.

Since it is difficult to present a definitive answer based on authoritative sources and clear reasoning, we may pose a question to those possessing the eye of Dharma: *Great Commentary to the Kālacakra* and *Notes on the Six Practices* are in frequent agreement that yogis actually arise in the body of empty form of Kālacakra and consort during subsequent recollection, . . .

Khedrup Rinpoché's *Commentary* and Tsongkhapa's *Notes on the Six Practices* agree on many points; in particular they both state that the yogi practicing the fifth yoga of subsequent recollection may arise from his or her coarse body in the body of Kālacakra and consort. Yet Tsongkhapa's *Mantric Stages* takes a slightly different position.

. . . but *Mantric Stages* states:

The progressive transformation of empty forms of smoke and so on and the appearance as the male in union with the female desire deity of empty form during the six branches are the specific direct cause of the resultant vajra body. But the actual body that merely appears in that way is not the body of empty form, because its material substance has not been consumed.[449](#)

In *Mantric Stages* Tsongkhapa explains how the resultant vajra body of Kālacakra is established through the dawning and

gradual refinement of the appearance of empty forms, such as the eleven signs of smoke and so on, from the initial stage of individual withdrawal to the final stage of concentration. In that sense the dawning and refinement of these appearances acts as the specific direct cause of the resultant vajra body. But any appearance of the bodies of the deities that occurs during those stages is not qualified as a properly established body of empty form. Prior to that point they merely appear to the mind. Once all the material particles have been consumed, these appearances completely mix with our mind, like milk mixed with water.

Since you must destroy the body composed of subtlest particles to establish that body, you exhaust that material substance by retaining bodhicitta in the body without emission, like an elixir transforming iron into gold.

This states that you must exhaust material substance in order to establish the actual body of empty form.

The reason given for this is that the resultant vajra body is established only after all material substances of the ordinary coarse body have been exhausted. This is achieved by increasing and retaining the drops of bodhicitta within the body. This has an effect similar to applying an elixir to transform base metal into gold, as it results in transforming all the material particles of the body.

How are these two statements not contradictory?

It appears that the passage quoted from the *Commentary* and *Notes* contradicts the passage from *Mantric Stages*, since the first states that the yogi is able to actually rise in the body of Kālacakra with consort in the fifth stage of subsequent recollection while the later states that this is possible only after all material particles have been consumed. Yet if we understand the analogy of the gold-transforming elixir, there is

no contradiction.

From what point is the actual body of empty form of the deity established?

From the passages quoted above it appears that the yogi is able to rise in a body of Kālacakra in union with his consort during the fifth yoga of subsequent recollection, while the actual body of empty form of Kālacakra in union with his consort is established during the sixth branch of concentration. The author raises this question in order to clarify when the actual body of empty form arises.

Regarding the transformation of fundamental wind

Moreover, Gyalwa Rinpoché's commentary to *Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī* asks whether, since the mind of extremely subtle clear light is generated in the nature of supreme immutable bliss, the time would arise when the fundamental wind indivisible in nature from that clear light would also transform into the body of empty form?

In the Second Dalai Lama's *Commentary to Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī*, he states that the mind of mahāmudrā clear light is transformed into the nature of supreme immutable bliss. Since this extremely subtle mind is indivisible from extremely subtle wind, then when the mind is transformed into bliss, the wind must also transform into the body of empty form. The author, therefore, again poses the question of when does this transformation take place.

Reply: How could someone such as myself convincingly settle the issue, since I am not aware of any authentic source and reasoning? I have noted this here in hope of provoking intelligent beings to analyze the issue.

The author states that it is not easy to give a definitive answer to these questions since there is no logic or scriptural evidence

within the corpus of Kālacakra nor in the writings of Tsongkhapa or Khedrup Rinpoché that fully supports any of these positions. Therefore the author states that these issues are raised merely to encourage further debate and analysis.

So far the method of receiving empowerment in the Kālacakra tantra and the way to meditate on the path have been explained. The remainder of this text deals with the way that enlightenment is achieved in the system of the Kālacakra.

TWENTY

Manifesting Results

How to manifest the result

Many students first develop familiarity with mainstream tantras such as Guhyasamāja, Yamāntaka, Vajrayoginī, or Heruka, and then, when they hear of the differences between these tantras and Kālacakra, they may think that it is too late or too time-consuming to practice Kālacakra. But devoting time to meditating on Kālacakra possesses the great benefit of placing imprints of this practice on our mind; different aspects of Kālacakra practice may also supplement our existing practice. The main difference is that in the mainstream tantras the illusory body is established from wind, while in Kālacakra the body of empty form is established from the appearance of deities. But I don't see these systems as contradictory. For example, when I leave Delhi to come to California, I may take the eastern or western route, but the final destination is the same. There is no difference in superiority nor swiftness by which results are obtained, for the speed depends on the student.

The time it will take a disciple to manifest this final result will depend on the presence of conducive conditions and, in particular, on his or her mental capacities. Those of supreme capacity can attain enlightenment within the same lifetime that the path of accumulation is obtained. This is commonly known as "obtaining enlightenment in one lifetime," and it is a feature unique to the highest yoga tantras. It is said by some that those training in any of the three lower classes of tantra may attain enlightenment in one lifetime if they obtain the siddhi of the knowledge-bearer permitting them to live for many eons. In that extended life they accumulate merit and wisdom

equivalent to that accumulated over three countless eons on the Perfection Vehicle before entering highest yoga tantra and attaining buddhahood.

Another important stage in Kālacakra is the obtainment of the fully qualified body of empty form. Once this is obtained, it is certain that the disciple will attain enlightenment in that very life. So, too, in the Guhyasamāja, Yamāntaka, or Heruka systems, those who obtain a fully qualified illusory body will certainly attain enlightenment in that life. Since the body of empty form is considered equal to the illusory body, the mode of enlightenment in the case of supreme trainees is similar in the Kālacakra and the mainstream tantras.

The supreme practitioner attains enlightenment in the very life he enters the Kālacakra path, the least practitioner at the end of a succession of lives. But there is no intermediate system of attaining enlightenment in the bardo, because there is no cultivation of a path of purification separate from death and birth during the generation and completion stages.

In the mainstream tantras we may achieve enlightenment in the bardo if we do not obtain it in the same lifetime we enter the path. The Kālacakra system, however, does not describe enlightenment in the intermediate state. Therefore, if we do not attain enlightenment in a single life, we will need to take rebirth as a human to complete the remaining stages of the path. It is crucial to obtain a human body since it is a body naturally endowed with the six constituents, including the white and red substances. We progress through the twelve grounds by accumulating drops of white substance from the secret place upward and drops of red substance from the crown downward and stopping the karmic winds. However, the body of the intermediate state is not a basis that facilitates such practices, since it is not naturally endowed with the red and white substances.

Mainstream tantras present paths that purify birth via the

emanation body, death via the dharma body, and the intermediate state via the enjoyment body, irrespective of whether we are practicing the generation or the completion stage. The Kālacakra system, however, does not present a separate path that purifies the intermediate state via the enjoyment body. Instead birth and death in the intermediate state is considered to be the same as ordinary birth and death. When ordinary birth and death are purified, then birth and death in the intermediate state are purified simultaneously.

Connection between the coarse and subtle bodies

There are two different traditions explaining the way highest yoga tantra paths establish buddhahood. Establishing buddhahood within the maturation aggregates without consuming them is the general tradition of highest yoga tantra.

The attainment of buddhahood relies on the connection between the coarse and subtle bodies. For practitioners of general highest yoga tantras, the illusory body is the subtle body that is established alongside the coarse body of the maturational aggregates. These two bodies are closely connected, and in many cases we are able to perform enlightened activities for the benefit of sentient beings without severing the connection between the coarse and subtle bodies.

Establishing buddhahood through consuming the maturation aggregates by a skillful (path) is the tradition of Kālacakra.

In the Kālacakra system, the coarse body of maturational or resultant aggregates is gradually consumed or exhausted, just as iron is consumed by an alchemist's elixir.

The second method is as before: to accumulate upward the 21,600 white substance drops and accumulate downward the 21,600 red substance drops in the central channel, and through that to serially generate the 21,600 moments of immutable

bliss and serially exhaust the 21,600 karmic winds and the 21,600 material substances.

Each moment of immutable bliss possesses the nature of extremely subtle wind-mind, where bliss is identified as both wind and mind. The yogi appears in the aspect of the body of empty form of Kālacakra in union with his consort, which is in essence blissful pristine wisdom realizing emptiness. That appearance is the aspect of method that establishes the form body. The mind taking this appearance as its object is the extremely subtle wind-mind realizing emptiness, which is the aspect of wisdom that establishes the pristine wisdom dharma body (*jñāna dharmakāya*).

Most manuals agree that in sūtra, the relative and ultimate truths that constitute the appearing object and the apprehended object of a mind realizing emptiness do not appear simultaneously to the mind of an ordinary person. However, in highest yoga tantra both the relative truth that is the appearing object of the mind realizing emptiness and ultimate truth or emptiness that is the apprehended object may appear simultaneously.

The state of union

You manifest the state of Vajradhara: a union possessing the seven attributes of embrace⁴⁵⁰ that combines the nature of the vajra body of empty form, appearing as the main deity embracing his consort, with the supreme immutable great bliss perceiving all dharmas simultaneously. You produce billions of emanation bodies in mundane realms without end to tame disciples in whatever way is most skillful. [46a]

The state of union that is established combines the pure body of empty form of the deities in embrace and the pure mind that is the clear light comprehending all dharmas. We attain the state of Vajradhara qualified by the union of exalted body,

speech, and mind and the seven features of embrace, where the four bodies and the four vajras are also obtained simultaneously. Once this state is manifested, we project countless emanations into immeasurable realms to establish the well-being of sentient beings.

Thus the Mongolian master Ngawang Palden Chöjé has presented the grounds and paths of four classes of tantra, including the systems of the mainstream tantras, such as Guhyasamāja, Heruka, and Yamāntaka, as well as the system of Kālacakra.

Concluding verses

Having completed the main presentation, the author now adds some concluding verses. The first verse deals with the amazing qualities of the unified teachings of sūtra and tantra:

This Meru-like system of the Sage—which is composed of the many precious elements of the Perfection Vehicle, raised high in the tiered peaks of the four classes of tantra, and adorned with the sun and moon unifying the two truths—is truly extraordinary.

Buddha Śākyamuni taught the stages of the path of the Perfection Vehicle, which are like a foundation of all other practices. The four classes of tantra were taught on the basis of this foundation. Finally, the union of the exalted body and mind—or alternatively the union of two truths—was later taught on the basis of this general understanding of tantra. In the mainstream tantric systems the pure body of this union is the illusory body and the pure mind is the clear light. In the Kālacakra system the pure body is the body of empty form and the pure mind is the actual clear light. This path of highest yoga tantra, and in particular the path of union, is truly extraordinary.

The next verse praises Tsongkhapa:

**May this newly risen moon of pleasant advice
freshly**

**produced
from churning the great ocean of Losang Drakpa's
fine
explanation
adorn the tip of the sword of analysis
wielded by bodhisattvas with unbiased intelligence.**

The writings of the author are rooted in the teachings of Tsongkhapa, whose complete teachings on sūtra and tantra fill eighteen volumes.

The next verse acknowledges possible mistakes:

**However, the depth of this ocean of the classes of
tantra is limitless,
while my mind is confused and I lack training.
Therefore, for whatever mistakes I may have made
in my explanation,
I sincerely confess before the lamas and deities.**

With this verse the author asks for forbearance for mistakes he may have made in his explanation, as when it does not accord with the teachings of the Buddha or the writings of Tsongkhapa. In this verse the author displays humility in order to counteract pride.

Dedication

The dedication has two parts: a general dedication of virtue and then a personal dedication.

**By the very white virtue of my efforts here
may the darkness of the minds of all reincarnating
beings be destroyed and
having removed all the pain of cyclic existence and
solitary peace
may gardens of jasmine flowers of the three bodies
flourish.**

This verse is the general dedication of the virtues that were accrued in composing this text. The author offers these good actions toward the benefit of all sentient beings.

**As for myself, in all my future lifetimes may I attain
a good basis,
and may I be cared for by pure protectors.
Taking flight with the two wings of the noble paths
of sūtra and tantra,
may I reach the jewel island of union.**

Then he includes a personal dedication, where he offers the virtue that he has generated through the actions of his body, speech, and mind toward again entering the grounds and paths of such practices, under the guidance of excellent teachers, in life after life. In particular, he requests that he may practice the unified path of sūtra and tantra, like a bird who soars in the sky supported by both wings, and quickly attain the state of Vajradhara.

Colophon

Traditionally the name of the author appears at the end of the Tibetan text, along with some information concerning his place of origin and study. The author Ngawang Palden was born in Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar, here called Kalkakuré (*khal kha khu re*). Ulaanbaatar during the author's time was a great monastic center, and thousands of Mongolian monks were also studying at the main and secondary monastic colleges within Tibet. Each of the monastic colleges at the three main Geluk institutions of Drepung, Sera, and Ganden has its own specific textbooks and debate manuals, and these were all available in Ulaanbaatar in the past.

This text, called *Illumination of the Tantric Tradition: The Principles of the Grounds and Paths of the Four Great Secret Classes of Tantra*, was composed after frequent requests for such a text by Losang Tenzin, holder of the degree of the Ten Difficult Subjects, who is compassionate and richly

endowed with the wealth of extensive study in the monastic colleges of Kalkakuré.

With my crown supporting the dust of the feet of all the lamas, scholars, and siddhas who have acted as my spiritual friends, may this composition of the venerable Ngawang Palden, an illusory incarnation possessing much study and knowledge, be of benefit to the teachings and to reincarnating beings.

APPENDIX

Tables

TABLE 1. ATTRIBUTES OF THE FIVE KNOWLEDGE EMPOWERMENTS (CO, 217)

Empowerment	Student aspect	Empowering substance	Aggregate blessed	Affliction purified	Liberated resultant state actualized
Water	Akṣobhya	Vase water	Consciousness	Aversion	Pristine wisdom of the sphere of Dharma
Crown	Ratnasambhava	Crown	Feeling	Pride	Pristine wisdom of equanimity
Vajra	Amitābha	Vajra	Discrimination	Desire	Pristine wisdom of individual analysis
Bell	Amogāsiddhi	Bell	Formation	Jealousy	Pristine wisdom accomplishing action
Name	Valrocana		Form	Confusion	Mirror-like pristine wisdom

TABLE 2. FIVE OR SIX LEVELS OF THE COMPLETION STAGE OF GUHYASAMĀJA

Completion stage of the three isolations	Vajra body	(1) Physical isolation	(1) Vajra recitation
	Vajra speech	(2) Verbal isolation	
	Vajra mind	(3) Mental isolation	(2) Observing the mind
Completion stage of the two truths	Relative truth illusory body	(4) Illusory body	(3) Illusory body
	Ultimate truth clear light	(5) Clear light	(4) Clear light
	Union	(6) Union	(5) Union

TABLE 3. COMPARISON OF KĀLACAKRA COMPLETION STAGE TO GUHYASAMĀJA (SM, 180) (CO, 291)

Kālacakra tantra	Guhyasamāja tantra
(1) Individual withdrawal	Physical isolation
(2) Absorption	
(3) Vitality exertion	Verbal isolation
(4) Retention	Clear light
(5) Subsequent recollection	Visions of the reverse order from clear light
(6) Concentration	Union

TABLE 4. RANGE OF THE FIVE PATHS ACCORDING TO THE ĀRYA SYSTEM OF GUHYASAMĀJA

Path	Level
(1)	Receiving empowerment. training in the

Accumulation		common paths and the generation stage
(2) Preparation		Generating the pristine wisdom of bliss and emptiness
	Heat	Physical isolation
	Peak	Verbal isolation
	Patience	Mental isolation
	Supreme dharma	Impure illusory body
(3) Seeing		Actual clear light
(4) Meditation		Union of realization
(5) No-more learning		Vajradhara state of non-learner's union

TABLE 5. HOW THE SEVEN EMPOWERMENTS EMULATING CHILDHOOD ARE BESTOWED IN THE KĀLACAKRA SYSTEM

Face of Kālacakra	Student aspect	Empowerment	Initiating deities	Initiating substance
Northern white face	Vajra body deities	1. Water	Four tathāgatis	Vase water
		2. Crown	Five tathāgatas	Crown
Southern red face	Vajra speech deities	3. Silk ribbon	Ten śaktis	Silk ribbons
		4. Vajra and bell	Kālacakra and Viśvamātā	Vajra and bell
Eastern black face	Vajra mind deities	5. Ritual	Six pairs of male and female bodhisattvas	Vajra thumb-ring
		6. Name	Eight pairs of male and female wrathful deities	Bracelets
Western yellow face	Vajra pristine wisdom deities	7. Permission	Vajrasattva and consort	Various symbols

TABLE 6. THE SIX GREAT CHANNELS IN THE KĀLACAKRA SYSTEM

Location	Characteristic	Left (lalana)	Central (avadhūti)	Right (rasana)
Above the navel	Name	Channel of the moon	Channel of eclipse (<i>nāhu</i>)	Channel of the sun
	Constituent	Water	Space	Fire
	Color	White	Green/blue	Red
	Substance	Semen	Wind	Blood
Below the navel	Name	Sheep channel	Channel of the fire at the end of the eon (<i>kālāgni</i>)	Orange channel
	Constituent	Wind	Pristine wisdom	Earth
	Color	Black	Blue	Yellow
	Substance	Urine	Semen	Feces

TABLE 7. TEN WINDS OF THE KĀLACAKRA SYSTEM

Wind	Association with the constituents	Location in the channel knot at the
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		heart
(1) Life-sustaining	Space	Above
(2) Downward-voiding	Pristine wisdom	Below
(3) Equally abiding	Wind	East
(4) Turtle	Wind	Southeast
(5) Ascending	Fire	South
(6) Lizard	Fire	Southwest
(7) Pervading	Water	North
(8) Devadatta	Water	Northeast
(9) Nāga	Earth	West
(10) Dhanamjaya	Earth	Northwest

TABLE 8. SIGNS OF ENTERING, ABIDING, AND DISSOLVING OF WINDS IN THE CENTRAL CHANNEL DURING THE DAY AND NIGHT YOGAS OF INDIVIDUAL WITHDRAWAL (CO, 451-52)

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Entrance, abidance, and dissolution of winds	Signs	Phase of individual withdrawal
Entrance of winds in the central channel	Equal movement of wind through the nostrils	
Abidance of winds in the central channel	Breathing through the nostrils stops	
Dissolution of turtle wind in the central channel	(1) Internal sign of smoke	Four night signs
Dissolution of lizard wind	(2) Internal sign of mirage	
Dissolution of <i>devadattawind</i>	(3) Internal sign of fireflies	
Dissolution of <i>dhanamjaya</i> wind	(4) Internal sign of butter lamp	
Dissolution of equally abiding wind	(1) Internal sign of a large butter lamp / orange	Six day signs
Dissolution of ascending wind	(2) Internal sign of moon light	

Dissolution of pervading wind	(3) Internal sign of sunlight	
Dissolution of <i>nāga</i> wind	(4) Internal sign of eclipse	
Dissolution of upper life-sustaining wind	(5) Internal sign of white lightning	
Dissolution of lower downward-voiding wind	(6) Internal sign of blue drop inside which the body of empty form of Vajrasattva with five certainties appears	

TABLE 9. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ILLUSORY BODY AND BODY OF EMPTY FORM (CO, 464–66)

(1) Difference of basis	The illusory body of Guhyasamāja is established from a preexisting basis from the fundamental wind	The body of empty form of Kālacakra is newly established with emptiness as its substantial cause
(2) Difference of site	It arises at the heart	It arises at the navel
(3) Difference in post-equipose	Once established it continues during post-equipose	Once established it does not continue during post-equipose

(4) Difference of place of arising	It may arise internally or externally as appropriate	It arises internally
(5) Difference of union	Union combines the illusory body and clear light	Union combines the pristine wisdom of bliss and empty form

Notes

ABBREVIATIONS

OE *Opening the Eye of the Fortunate* by Losang Palden

CO *Cloud of White Lotus Offerings* by Könchok Tsültrim

SM *Great Secret Sun and Moon Maṇḍala* by Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö

[1](#) *Kachu* refers to the ten difficult topics (*dka' bcu*). The *kachu* degree, like the *geshé* degree, is bestowed after successful completion of the study of the five basic topics and their commentaries.

[2](#) Butön Rinchen Drup (Bu ston rin chen grub; 1290–1364) was a prolific scholar and a central figure in the promulgation of Kālacakra practice in Tibet. Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), founder of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism, received training in Kālacakra practice from Butön's direct disciples.

[3](#) Bakula Rinpoché (1917–2003) was born into a royal family of the Indian region of Ladakh and recognized by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama as a reincarnation of Bakula Arhat, one of the Sixteen Arhats. As a monk he served as a Member of Parliament in India representing Ladakh, as head of the Minority Commission, and as Indian ambassador to Mongolia. He worked tirelessly to serve the welfare of others and to preserve the Buddhist tradition.

[4](#) The *Zurka Gyatsa* (*zur bka' brgya rtsa'i rjes gnang*) is a cycle of tantric permissions sourced in the Buddhist scriptures.

[5](#) The *Mitra Gyatsa* (*mi tra rgya rtsa, mi tra'i bka' dbang*) is a cycle of tantric empowerments originating from the great siddha Mitra (*grub chen mi tra*).

[6](#) *Sumati* is Sanskrit for Losang, the personal name of Tsongkhapa.

[7](#) In other words, gods, antigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and the denizens of the hells.

[8](#) The five spiritual sons of Nāgārjuna were Nāgabodhi, Buddhapālita, Āryadeva, Bhavaviveka, and Candrakīrti.

[9](#) See also pages 99, 131, 275, 277, 280.

[10](#) “Secret mantra” here, and “mantra” as used below, are synonyms for tantra.

[11](#) According to Buddhist cosmology, Jambudvīpa (“Black Plum Island”) is the land where we humans live.

[12](#) Others place Udhyāna in the Swat Valley in Pakistan or elsewhere in India.

[13](#) The ten qualities of a lama stated in the Vinaya include (1) possessing stability and (2) possessing knowledge, (3) living in an ordinary body, (4) living naturally in that place, possessing (5) compassion, (6) patience, and (7) a pure inner circle, (8) benefiting others through Dharma, (9) benefiting others with material things, and (10) giving timely instruction. Jé Könchok Jikmé Wangpo, *List of Dharma Terms*, p. 143.

[14](#) A qualified Mahāyāna master is: (1) tamed through the higher training of discipline, (2) pacified through the higher training of concentration, (3) fully pacified through the higher training of wisdom, (4) rich in the quality of transmissions, and possesses (5) comprehension of emptiness, (6) more qualities than the student, (7) skillful speech, (8) affection, (9) diligence, and (10) freedom from weariness or regret. Jé Könchok Jikmé Wangpo, *List of Dharma Terms*, pp. 143–44.

[15](#) The ten activities of a vajra master are: (1) performing gathering and dispersing, (2) conferring the four empowerments, (3) uniting students with protectors and separating them from those who cause harm, (4) offering *tormas* (ritual offering cakes), (5) performing vajra recitation, (6) establishing a wrathful aspect, (7) performing consecrations, (8) establishing maṇḍalas, (9) presenting offerings and making praises, and (10) performing self-entry in the maṇḍalas and conferring permission. Jé Könchok Jikmé Wangpo, *List of Dharma Terms*, p. 144.

[16](#) In conformity with the *Mantric Stages*, Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 161): “If you obtain empowerment in the first lineage, you are empowered to practice the remaining lineages. But to enter approximation retreat on either of the later lineages, you must definitely obtain empowerment in that lineage.”

[17](#) Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché notes that when empowerment is conferred on the basis of a body maṇḍala, both the master and student should be able to meditate on the entire celestial mansion and its resident deities as existing within their own

bodies.

[18](#) Losang Palden explains (OE, 186): “The definition of the maturing causal empowerment of action tantra is the positive state obtained in dependence on an actiontantra maṇḍala, which empowers you to explain and listen to texts as well as meditate on the path of action tantra. It is classified in two: the vajra-student empowerment and the vajra-master empowerment. The vajra-student empowerment includes the water and crown empowerments, or the five knowledge empowerments. The vajra-master empowerment includes the permission to explain Dharma, the seven royal emblems, and the eight auspicious substances.”

[19](#) Könchok Tsültrim asserts (CO, 161): “First do the rituals concerning the location, preparation, and entry into the maṇḍala. Then, obtaining the water and crown empowerments makes you a vessel suitable for studying, contemplating, and meditating upon the paths with and without signs. It also grants you a special capacity for accomplishing the two bodies at the time of the path and the result. You cannot practice deity meditation or bestow empowerment on others if you do not obtain empowerment but merely receive the permission (*rjes gnang*) and so forth.”

[20](#) This part of the ritual is a type of empowerment bestowed by displaying *tsakali* cards bearing pictures of deities, maṇḍalas, the seven precious royal emblems, the eight auspicious signs, and the eight auspicious substances.

[21](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 186–87): “The definition of the maturing causal empowerment of performance tantra is the positive qualities obtained in dependence on a performance-tantra maṇḍala, which makes you a vessel suitable for that practice. It is nominally classified in two, namely the student empowerment and the master empowerment. The student empowerment has five types—the water, crown, vajra, bell, and name empowerments. Four empowerments authorize you to be a master who teaches performance tantra: (1) permission to explain Dharma, (2) vajra ritual, (3) prophecy, and (4) breath.” See [table 1](#).

[22](#) In order to clarify the difference between the six empowerments bestowed in the lower tantras and the six possessing the same name that are bestowed in the highest yoga tantra, Könchok Tsültrim quotes Abhayākaragupta (CO, 161–62): “The five knowledge empowerments have similar names to the five knowledge empowerments of the highest yoga tantra, but their meaning is different. Here [in the lower tantras] empowerment is conferred by taking the water of the vase to be inseparable from the stream of nectar descending from the body of the deity. In highest yoga tantra, empowerment is conferred by taking the water of the vase to be inseparable from the bodhicitta that has melted due to the fire of great attachment between the male and female deities.” Losang Palden notes that Pañchen Sönam Drakpa’s *Overview of Buddhist Tantra* also makes this point (OE, 190).

[23](#) Losang Palden (OE, 188) cites Abhayākaragupta, who states in *Vajra Garland* that they: “...are called *knowledge empowerments* because they establish potent antidotes to ignorance. They empower you to listen, explain, and practice the mantras of action and performance tantras.”

[24](#) Losang Palden notes (OE, 188): “Jé Rinpoché and his two sons do not differentiate [action and performance tantra] in that way, and they say that even if there were no more than the first two, there would be no [fault of] omission, and it would also be acceptable to add the latter three.”

[25](#) The difference being the addition of the one-day vow.

[26](#) Some students may not be qualified to take bodhisattva vows. Pañchen Sönam Drakpa states: “In all classes of tantra, up until the fourth, it is said that those who take bodhisattva vows but cannot keep them—or those who cannot even take them—may only be permitted to see the face of the deity or at most enter the maṇḍala, but the details of the maṇḍala and its secrets must not be revealed to them. Also it is not permitted to grant such beings the knowledge empowerment, which is reserved for those capable of holding and protecting the bodhisattva vows.” *Overview of Buddhist Tantra*, p. 32.

[27](#) Losang Palden explains (OE, 195): “Those who just obtain

empowerment in action and performance tantras guard the common bodhisattva vows but not the uncommon tantric vows, because action and performance tantras possess the common knowledge empowerments but not the uncommon vajra-master empowerment.”

[28](#) Losang Palden notes (OE, 195): “The definition of commitments taught here is the virtuous action associated with the intention to practice without transgressing the precepts set by the conqueror Vajradhara for action and performance tantras. They are classified in two types: commitments to train in the states to be adopted and commitments to abandon incompatible states.” There are fourteen commitments in action tantra: possessing (1–3) faith in the Three Jewels, (4) faith in mantra, (5) regard for the Mahāyāna, (6) respect for teachers and Dharma friends, (7) not hating other past and future deities, (8) not failing to make offerings on four days each month, (9) not worshipping *tīrthika* and non-Buddhist doctrines, (10) offering food and drink to unexpected guests, (11) not giving up your love for sentient beings, (12) increasing your accumulation of merit, (13) exerting yourself in recitation, (14) keeping other commitments.” *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*, p. 183. Kirti Tsenshap Rinpoché adds that the four days of the month refer to the tenth, fifteenth, twenty-fifth, and thirtieth day of the Tibetan month. See also Tsongkha-pa, *Yoga of Tibet*, pp. 70–74.

[29](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 190) that such practices are called *approximation* since they “...establish the proximity of yourself and the deity.”

[30](#) According to Losang Palden (OE, 204–5): “There are preliminaries establishing favorable conditions, such as prostrating, offering your virtue, meditating on refuge, and so forth; and there are preliminaries dispelling unfavorable conditions, various means of protecting yourself, your abode, your clothes, seat, and so forth.” Similarly Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 163): “Displaying the general mudrās of the three lineages, offering your virtue to the victors and their children, meditating on bodhicitta, externally washing and cleaning your

body after blessing the earth and water, internally taking up your seat after dispatching interferences, and reciting mantras, performing mudrās, and setting boundaries to protect yourself and your abode are preliminaries conforming with sūtra. These are equivalent to constructing the merit field and the wheel of protection in highest yoga tantra and yoga tantra.”

[31](#) Könchok Tsültrim discusses self-generation in action tantra (CO, 165–66): “Don’t assume that there is no self-generation in action tantra, thinking that most of its disciples acquire the siddhis through the front-generation without practicing self-generation. Masters Asaṅga, Nāgārjuna, and so on, quoting the *Vidāraṇa Tantra*, have stated that meditation on the main deity is untenable without self-generation.” The role of the pristine wisdom deities is also mentioned by Paṇchen Sönam Drakpa: “In this class of tantra, however, the pristine wisdom deities do not enter the commitment deity.” *Overview of Buddhist Tantra*, p. 32. Further, Losang Palden describes the practice of deity yoga in action tantra (OE, 210–11): “Since deity yoga is the main method for establishing the siddhis, the mind mainly holds the clear visualization of yourself as the deity, but from time to time you also mentally engage visualized deities similar to yourself out in front as the basis for accumulating merit.”

[32](#) Könchok Tsültrim comments (CO, 165): “The ritual of generating the six deities parallels the fivefold enlightenment of the higher tantras.” The fivefold enlightenment refers to deity meditation in the generation stage and includes enlightenment (1) from the moon, (2) from the sun, (3) from a seed, (4) from a hand symbol (*phyag mtshan*), and (5) from completing the body.

[33](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 164): “It is called the *empty deity* since it is a branch of deity meditation wherein you focus on emptiness.”

[34](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 164): “The empty deity consists of the accumulation of a pristine wisdom that meditates on the indivisibility of the reality of yourself and the deity by recalling the view that you established earlier through logic.”

[35](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 165): “The sound deity is that held by mind; it arises from within an empty state. It has the nature of the deity and the aspect of the mantra resonating in space.”

[36](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 165): “The letter deity is that held by mind; it arises on the moon maṇḍala of your mind in the space in front. It has the nature of the deity and the aspect of the deity’s mantra written in gold and so on.”

[37](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 165): “Light radiates from the mantric letters, fulfilling the highest potential of sentient beings and making offerings to the conquerors. The light then returns and is reabsorbed [into the letters], and from their total transformation you generate the body of the deity. This is the form deity.”

[38](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 165): “The seal deity is the contact and blessing of various parts of the body, such as the crown of the deity, with the general mudrās of the three lineages. This parallels the blessing of the sense bases in the higher tantras.”

[39](#) Könchok Tsültrim explains (CO, 165): “The sign deity is establishing pride and clear appearance of the deity through focusing single-pointedly on the deity and the mantra.”

[40](#) Könchok Tsültrim offers an etymological explanation (CO, 166): “‘As the basis’... means that the practice is done while maintaining uninterrupted focus on it.” Similarly, Losang Palden states (OE, 211): “The mind enters and abides in the focal object. It is a conceptual mind with a continuous focus.”

[41](#) This type of meditation is described by Könchok Tsültrim (CO, 164): “You must generate yourself as the deity from the perspective of the complete set of the yogas of six deities.”

[42](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 166): “Making offerings and paying homage with praise to the pristine wisdom deities that have been invited in the space in front is practicing with another as the basis. It is permissible to practice it even if you have not generated the commitment beings.”

[43](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 166): “Focusing on the array of the mantra garland on the moon disc is practicing with

sound as the basis.”

[44](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 166): “Meditating on your own mind in the aspect of a moon disc at the heart of the deity generated in front is practicing with mind as the basis.”

[45](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 168): “Wind moving through the doors of the senses and the opening of the pores is vitality.”

[46](#) The conceptual nature of exertion is mentioned by Könchok Tsültrim (CO, 168): “Remembering other objects is exertion.” Similarly, Losang Palden states (OE, 210): “Conception that is mindful of scattering to other focal objects is exertion.”

[47](#) Könchok Tsültrim states that vitality exertion is differentiated by need, time, and mode of meditation (CO, 168): “There is difference in need, because here it is for the purpose of establishing calm abiding, while in highest yoga tantra it is for the purpose of inducing semblant and actual clear light from the winds entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central channel. There is a difference in time because here it occurs during yoga with signs, while in highest yoga tantra it occurs during the completion stage. There is difference in mode of meditation, because here it merely unites *prāṇāyāma* (*rlung sbyor*) and deity yoga, while in highest yoga tantra you must meditate on penetrating the vital points in the body. Vitality exertion is necessary, for you need to stop ordinary appearance and conception and stabilize your focus on the deity. To do that you need to stop mental scattering, and if you seize the wind that acts as the mount of the mind, the mind itself will be controlled.” The actual technique for binding vitality with exertion is described by Losang Palden (OE, 210): “First you examine how the body and its vital points exist, then you draw down the upper winds and draw up the lower winds. You draw within the natural moving breath and non-equipoise mind. You focus on the body of the deity with pride and clear appearance. For how long should you practice? If spontaneous conditions do not exist, continue to practice until you are able to generate divine pride and clear appearance in all activities, without exertion.”

[48](#) Functional phenomena (*dnegos po*) or impermanent entities

(*mi rtag pa*) are classified in three divisions: form (*gzugs*), awareness (*shes pa*), and other or nonconcordant composites (*ldan min 'du byed*)—conditioned, impermanent entities that are neither form nor awareness.

[49](#) *Blo rig*, the subject of the nature and constituents of mind.

[50](#) *Ngo bo ye shes la rnam pa nang mchod dang mchod rdzas so so'i rnam pa*. Pañchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen, *Bla ma mchod pa*, p. 50.

[51](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 236): “Upon a moon disk in the heart of you clearly appearing as the deity is a tongue of clear flame free of wind, like that of a butter lamp with a fine tip. You contemplate that within that flame is pristine wisdom where reality and your mind abide one in taste, unaffected by dualistic appearance but appearing in aspect as the tone of the sound of the mantra like the clear sound of a bell. Finally you focus on just fire and sound, apply restraint through vitality exertion, and engage in equipoise on the tone of the sound as if listening to an external sound.” Könchok Tsültrim explains absorption on fire slightly differently (CO, 169): “Absorption on fire is the vitality exertion that binds your mind—a mind that has the nature of the single taste of the sphere of Dharma and sits within the center of red flame, like a butter lamp, upon a moon disk in the heart of you clearly appearing as the deity—to the aspect of the resonant sound of the mantra through focusing on it by means of listening to it. The external sign of accomplishment is lack of hunger and thirst. The internal sign is generating special concentration reliant on a pleasant sensation of warmth due to focusing on fire and *prāṇāyāma*.”

[52](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 236): “It is necessary to meditate on absorption on sound in order to strengthen previously established verbal and mental recitation and to quickly establish the abidance of mind.” Further, the same text states (OE, 237): “It is necessary to meditate on absorption on sound since it is the yoga establishing blissful, clear, nonconceptual calm abiding. The measure of having accomplished this yoga is when the ear perceptually hears the sound of the letters of the mantra through the letters appearing clearly and

simultaneously and not sequentially, and the mind abides without moving from this for the duration of the session.” This practice is also described by Tsongkhapa in *Mantric Stages*: “...the sounds of the letters appear uninterruptedly and without fluctuation whereby they are like the continual arising of the external sounds of a bell being rung. You should concentrate on those sounds without adhering to their true existence. Contemplate a fire burning like the tongue of flame of a butter lamp, at the heart of your body visualized as the deity, and think that the series of sounds described above abides there. Because it lacks the harm of heat and so forth, it is ‘quiescent.’ Since it is ‘free from words’ whispered or mentally repeated, it lacks those two types of recitation...one’s own mind appears in the aspect of the tones of the mantra dwelling in the midst of the fire.” *Yoga of Tibet*, pp. 156–58. However, Könchok Tsültrim presents this point differently when he states (CO, 169–70): “In the heart of you clearly appearing as the deity is a moon disk upon which is a miniature version of the deity in whose heart is a red flame like that of a butter lamp. Absorption on sound is meditation single-pointedly focusing on your mind as the tone of mantra within that flame.”

[53](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 170–71): “The paths practiced in this context are subsumed in three, namely (1) divine body that is the great seal, (2) divine speech that is the mantra, and (3) divine mind that is meditation on suchness. The first is meditation on the six deities. The second is the two recitations focusing on ordinary sound and form and the four that focus primarily on the absorption on fire and the sound of the mantra of the absorption on sound. The third is absorption on the limit of sound that is signless. You establish clear appearance through cultivating absorption possessing various aspects such as the coarse aspect of the divine body, the subtle aspect of the mantra, and the extremely subtle aspect of suchness and so on. You establish the factor of mental abidance through single-pointed concentration on these progressively subtler focal objects from the six deities up to absorption on sound. Moreover the means of generating the bliss of mental pliancy

and so on is similar to the common vehicle.” For more information on how to proceed from whispered to mental recitation see also *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 146. Also Losang Palden describes how later stages rely on earlier stages (OE, 243): “You first master pride and clear appearance focusing on the divine body. Then you strive to obtain stable desire-realm concentration that abides single-pointedly for an entire session without being interrupted by laxity or excitation. Then you train in mantra where one initially engages in verbal recitation, then mental recitation focusing on the form of the letters. Then you engage in coarser verbal recitation and subtler mental recitation focusing on sound. When you obtain stable desire-realm absorption abiding without distraction to other objects for a session lasting three hours, you begin to train in absorption not reliant on recitation. You train respectively in absorption on fire and absorption on sound. When you obtain stable mental abidance that is a single-pointed desire-realm mind focusing on fire and the tone of sound that lasts for four hours, you establish extremely stable calm abiding focusing on the very subtle tone of the sound alone.”

[54](#) Losang Palden (OE, 240) clarifies that actual calm abiding is obtained during absorption on sound.

[55](#) This meditation on emptiness constitutes the practice of absorption that bestows freedom at the limit of sound. Losang Palden states (OE, 248): “The reason for calling it *absorption that bestows freedom at the limit of sound* is because [you engage] emptiness at the limit of absorption on sound, and it is absorption primarily bestowing freedom as the dharma body by meditating on emptiness. It ranges from the great path of accumulation until the final moment as a sentient being [i.e., the final moment before attaining buddhahood].” Tsongkhapa offers a more detailed explanation of the practice: “Realization of emptiness was cultivated earlier, and a sense of it was maintained throughout all the subsequent yogas. However, here the yoga is not merely conjoined with the force of emptiness yoga. Rather the mind of deity yoga actually realizes emptiness. Also, here emptiness is the main object, rather than

a divine form, mantra letter, or sound.” *Yoga of Tibet*, pp. 160–61. Könchok Tsültrim explains why this practice is also known as *yoga without signs* (CO, 172): “It is called *yoga without signs* since it is a path that manifests concentration as the union of calm abiding and insight equally and single-pointedly cultivating both analytical and placement meditation on the final mode of abidance that is both selflessness of persons and selflessness of phenomena; and it mainly meditates on what is empty even though it is related to deity yoga of what appears.” On the same subject Losang Palden (OE, 248) states: “It is called a *path without signs* because it is a path of the lower classes of tantra mainly meditating on the empty state free of the signs of true existence from among both what appears and what is empty.”

[56](#) The eight common siddhis are respectively the siddhis of the sword (*ral gri*), pills (*ril bu*), eye medicine (*mig sman*), speed walking (*rkang mgyogs*), extracting the essence (*bcu len*), flying (*mkha’ spyod*), invisibility (*mi snang*), and hidden treasures (*sa ’og*).

[57](#) Tsongkhapa states: “[For minor feats] it is very much all right even if you have not cultivated the concentration of the three principles [abiding in fire, in sound, and bestowing liberation at the end of sound]. Therefore [insistence] on cultivating the concentrations of the three principles and on using all three objects of observation of repetition [the form of the letters in the heart of the deity in front and in one’s own heart as well as the sounds] for [achieving] these [minor feats] is a case of not distinguishing when they are needed.” *Yoga of Tibet*, pp. 178–79.

[58](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 252–53): “The sign of having attained siddhis is pleasant dreams, such as dreams of the Three Jewels, your deity, bodhisattvas, saṅgha, mountains, oxen, waterfalls, jewels, receiving clothes, and so forth.” For more on positive and negative signs, see *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 178.

[59](#) For more on the season, time, place, and posture appropriate for different types of siddhis, see *Yoga of Tibet*, pp. 174–75.

[60](#) Tsongkhapa states: “Knowledge bearing is the supreme siddhi of being able to proceed to a pure land with one’s usual body.” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 175.

[61](#) The practice of extracting the essence (*chu len*) is described by Tsongkhapa as: “Taking the essence is the medium siddhi of empowering a pill so that all nourishment can be derived from it.” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 175.

[62](#) The inner offering (*nang mchod*) generally consists of ten impure substances: the five meats (*sha lnga*), including the meat of a human, cow, dog, elephant, and horse, and the five nectars (*bdud rtsi lnga*), which includes feces, urine, blood, flesh, and sperm that are transformed into nectar. The skull cup (*kapāla*) is a ritual bowl for holding the inner offering. At the time of the Indian mahāsiddhas, it would have been made from an actual skull, but these days it is typically cast metal.

[63](#) *Siddhis of the body* refers to physical enhancements such as freedom from disease, youthful appearance, and so on. See *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 176. Further Losang Palden states (OE, 252): “The physical siddhi of having gained a golden radiance is supreme.”

[64](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 252): “Siddhis of substance, such as the sword, are intermediate.” Tsongkhapa states: “The feat of sword is used for flying to lands of Knowledge Bearers where tantric practice is maintained.” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 42. In the same text, page 176, it also says that *siddhis of substances* means “using substances such as leaves, swords, and so forth, for gaining feats.”

[65](#) *Siddhis of resources* means “changing ordinary resources into marvelous ones.” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 176.

[66](#) Nonhuman beings abiding above the earth are *yakṣas* (nature spirits), *gandharvas* (celestial musicians), and so on. In this case Losang Palden (OE, 252) states that the knowledge is bestowed by *yakṣas*.

[67](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 75a.

[68](#) Tsongkhapa states: “Pacification activities include pacifying untimely death, illnesses, epidemics, harmers, and contagion.” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 174.

[69](#) Tsongkhapa states: “Increasing activities include increasing the lifespan, youth, magnificence, power, qualities, and desired objects.” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 174.

[70](#) Tsongkhapa states that wrathful activities “include killing, expelling, [confusing], and so forth [of harmful beings].” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 174.

[71](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 76b.

[72](#) There are three consorts: Locanā is the consort of Mañjuśrī in the tathāgata lineage. Pāṇḍaravāsīnī is the consort of Avalokiteśvara in the lotus lineage. Māmākī is the consort of Vajrapāṇi in the vajra lineage.

[73](#) Khedrup Jé, *Collected Works*, vol. *ba*, 4a.

[74](#) According to the explanation of the Perfection Vehicle, a bodhisattva amasses both merit and pristine wisdom. The accumulation of merit results in being able to take rebirth in a pure land and attain enlightenment after receiving teachings there.

[75](#) This is a type of absorption maṇḍala.

[76](#) As seen in the previous chapter, *ultimate bodhicitta* is a synonym for the perceptual realization of emptiness, as compared to *relative bodhicitta*, the aspiration to become a buddha in order to save all beings.

[77](#) For a more extensive presentation, see *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 184.

[78](#) Tsongkhapa states: “Yoga with signs refers to deity meditation and repetition devoid of meditation on emptiness [in the sense that although it may be conjoined with the *force* of realising emptiness, the mind of deity yoga itself is not realising emptiness or is not conjoined with the mind of special insight actually realising it].” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 185. Losang Palden states (OE, 259): “By definition, yoga with signs is a path of any of the three lower tantras that mainly cultivates calm abiding focused on appearances...it exists on the path of accumulation alone.”

[79](#) Tsongkhapa states: “Yoga without signs refers to deity meditation and repetition involving meditation on emptiness [in the sense that the mind of deity yoga itself realises emptiness

or, in other words, the wisdom consciousness itself appears in the form of a deity] and does not refer to meditation on emptiness alone.” *Yoga of Tibet*, p. 185–86. Losang Palden states (OE, 259–60): “By definition, yoga without signs is a path of the three lower tantras that mainly cultivates insight focusing on the empty state of suchness...it ranges from the great path of accumulation to the final moment of a sentient being,” in other words, the last moment of the Mahāyāna path of meditation.

[80](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 269): “In external and internal recitation, you meditate by progressively increasing the subtlety of the focal object, and through developing great skill in concentration, you complete the path with signs that is characterized by exceptional pliancy.”

[81](#) For an alternate explanation, see Losang Palden (OE, 266–67).

[82](#) While yoga with and without signs loosely correspond to the generation and completion stages of highest yoga tantra, there are fundamental differences. Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 163–64): “Action and performance tantra include yoga with and without signs but do not have a generation stage because, apart from meditation that is compatible with the four resultant pure states (such as your abode being the celestial mansion), they do not have a meditation compatible with the aspects of birth, death, and the intermediate state. Likewise, they have no completion stage because they do not produce bliss from the winds entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central channel, they have no deity body derived from that, and so on...”

[83](#) Regarding the way you serially generate calm abiding and insight focused on emptiness, Losang Palden states (OE, 271): “...first you cultivate a discernment comprehending non-true existence through logic, and then you enhance it through analytical and placement meditation. You then establish a calm abiding qualified by stable pliancy that is derived from the powerful placement that arises following the conclusion of analysis. Then through repeated familiarity with this state, you will have stable concentration despite frequent analysis when

abiding in single-pointed placement. This is the union of calm abiding and insight.”

[84](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 79a.

[85](#) Practices of method, as opposed to wisdom, focus on objects other than emptiness.

[86](#) Tsongkhapa, *Great Stages of the Path*, Collected Works, vol. *pa*, 227b.

[87](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 20a.

[88](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 20a–b.

[89](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, vol. *ba*, 62a.

[90](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, vol. *ba*, 65a.

[91](#) The “neither-one-nor-many reasoning” (*gcig du bral gyi gtan tshigs*) argues that dharmas (or existent entities) are either one or many but neither truly one nor truly many. There are no dharmas that are truly one since all dharmas are made of parts, and there are no dharmas that are truly many since there are none that are truly one.

[92](#) Explicitly (*vastuta; dngos su*). The term “explicitly” here means that realization or comprehension occurs through the object appearing to awareness.

[93](#) Literally: “There is no logical pervasion (*ma khyab*).” Here it means that it is not logically certain that a deity does not appear to awareness explicitly realizing emptiness.

[94](#) Statements directly or indirectly supporting Ngawang Palden’s assertion may be found across the range of lamrim works composed by Tsongkhapa.

[95](#) A generic image is an image accessed by conception that allows conceptual awareness to conceive its object. For example the conception of a vase accesses the generic image of a vase—the appearing object (*snang yul*)—in order to apprehend the vase—the apprehended object (*’dzin stangs kyi yul*). The generic image is permanent since it is an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag*) and therefore not a cause of conception. The conception of a vase is mistaken awareness since it is mistaken to its main appearing object, that is, the generic image, since it mistakes the generic image to be the object itself.

[96](#) A focal object (*dmigs yul*) is the object that the mind purposefully focuses upon or targets. For example sound is the focal object of inference comprehending sound is impermanent; and sentient beings are the focal object of compassion. An appearing object (*snang yul*) is that which appears to mind. For example a vase appears to sense awareness apprehending a vase; or the generic image of a vase appears to the conception of a vase.

[97](#) Könchok Tsültrim supports Ngawang Palden's assertion that awareness explicitly realizing emptiness may be deity yoga when he states (CO, 177–78): "...because it possesses branches of relative yoga, it is included in yoga with signs—and because it possesses branches of ultimate yoga, it is included in yoga without signs." He then glosses Khedrup's and Jé Tsongkhapa's positions: "Omniscient Khedrup Rinpoché posits the two yogas from the perspective of whether they are yogas qualified by emptiness. *General Presentation of the Classes of Tantra Captivating the Minds of the Fortunate* (*Spyi rnam skal bzang yid 'phrog*) defines yoga with signs as deity yoga not qualified by discernment realizing emptiness. Yoga without signs is yoga ascertaining emptiness as its ascertained object and to which the deity maṇḍala appears as its appearing object. The second Conqueror [Jé Rinpoché] states that deity meditation and recitation not associated with meditation on emptiness and deity meditation and recitation associated with meditation on emptiness are, respectively, yoga with signs and yoga without signs. Other texts state that yoga without signs of the lower tantras must comprehend the view [of emptiness] while yoga with signs is correct assumption that is resolute in the view [of emptiness], but I wonder whether the statements of Jé Rinpoché have depended on them."

[98](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 84b.

[99](#) Losang Palden offers a simple formula (OE, 281): "Relative deity yoga and its branches are subsumed in yoga with signs. Ultimate deity yoga and its branches are subsumed in yoga without signs." Könchok Tsültrim adds (CO, 177): "Empty yoga is the ultimate truth that is the main cause establishing the

dharma body... deity yoga is the relative truth that is the main cause establishing the form body.”

[100](#) Here “profound” is associated with the focal object, and “appearance” is associated with the appearing object of conceptual deity yoga realizing the emptiness of the deity.

[101](#) The three lineages or families (*rigs gsum*) of the tantric system and their lords are: the tathāgata lineage and its lord, Mañjuśrī, the lotus lineage and its lord, Avalokiteśvara, and the vajra lineage and its lord, Vajrapāṇi.

[102](#) The siddhi of the sword is explained in various ways. For instance, Geshe Thubten Loden says it is the ability to travel unimpededly to places such as the land of the ḍākinīs (*Ocean of Indivisible Method and Wisdom*, p. 87), while Elizabeth English states that it is invincibility (*Vajrayoginī*, p. 180). In both sources, flying is listed as a separate siddhi. English differentiates between *khaḍga* (sword) and *khaḍgavidyādharaḥ* (sword magician) siddhis. It is the latter that appears to be mentioned here in the root text.

[103](#) In Tibetan the four chapters are: *rdor dbying*, *kham s gsum rnam rgyal*, *’gro ’dul*, and *don grub kyi dum bu*. See Könchok Tsültrim (CO, 179–80).

[104](#) The lineage of Akṣobhya refers to the vajra lineage; the lineage of Amitābha refers to the lotus lineage; the lineage of Ratnasambhava refers to the jewel lineage; the lineage of Amoghasiddhi refers to the action lineage; and the lineage of Vairocana refers to the tathāgata lineage or buddha lineage (OE, 291).

[105](#) Losang Palden adds (OE, 286): “In yoga tantra there are vows to be protected that are different from those in action and performance tantras because you must maintain tantric vows of the five lineages. The nature of the general and specific commitments of the five lineages is similar to those of highest yoga tantra, but there are also some differences.”

[106](#) Losang Palden observes (OE, 286): “Those who merely enter the maṇḍala do not take any of the bodhisattva and tantric vows. Those who take the five knowledge empowerments must maintain the bodhisattva vows. Those

who take the vajra-master empowerment must also take the tantric vows. Although there is no difference in the bodhisattva vows [between yoga and highest yoga tantra], there are slight differences in the tantric vows.”

[107](#) Fourteen commitments are related to the yoga tantra: (1–3) taking refuge in the Three Jewels are the three commitments related to the tathāgata lineage; (4–6) the commitment of holding vajra mudrā, bell mudrā, and master mudrā are the three commitments related to the vajra lineage; (7–10) generosity that bestows Dharma, material things, fearlessness, and love are the four commitments related to the jewel lineage; (11–13) holding the external action tantra, the inner yoga tantra, and the Dharma of the three vehicles are the three commitments of the lotus lineage; and (14) striving to make offerings is the commitment of the action lineage.” *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*, p. 161.

[108](#) This refers to an element of the empowerment ceremony where the initiate drops a flower petal onto a diagram containing colors representing the various deity families. Where the flower lands determines the deity family or lineage one should cultivate to accomplish this practice.

[109](#) Concentration of initial application (*dang po sbyor ba'i ting nge 'dzin*), concentration on the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala (*dkyil 'khor rgyal mchog gi ting nge 'dzin*), and concentration on the supreme-conqueror activities (*las rgyal mchog gi ting nge 'dzin*) are three general yogas of the generation stage of yoga tantra and above. They will be explained in detail below.

[110](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 182): “Beings who obtain the master empowerment engage in extensive approximation that applies the three concentrations of great complete yoga without deterioration to accomplish the deity and confer empowerment; they engage in medium approximation with the abbreviated rite for generating the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala; [they engage in abbreviated approximation] by practicing 100,000 recitations of each of the deities of great yoga.” Losang Palden adds (OE, 309–10): “...whichever approximation you cultivate, you must establish divine pride

with clear appearance and the factor of stability, for if you lack either, the purpose of deity yoga will not be accomplished. The method by which you establish divine pride and clear appearance is to strongly cultivate the focal object and aspect without distraction in the four sessions of deity yoga that applies the three concentrations and so forth. You need to meditate until you obtain stable pride reflecting: 'I am the actual deity clearly appearing as if I am actually seeing it.' You accomplish the factor of single-pointed stability while focusing on the subtle hand symbols."

[111](#) Könchok Tsültrim adds (CO, 187): "You draw a subtle vajra hand symbol the size of a mere mustard seed from the heart and place it at the upper opening of the central channel. While maintaining stable recollection of it, you meditate single-pointedly on it without mental excitation or laxity, and establish calm abiding qualified by the special bliss of physical and mental pliancy. Without moving from that calm abiding, one part of the mind emits subtle vajra implements that permeate all of space and then reabsorbs these vajras via the upper opening and so on. Thus you train the mind in concentration that equalizes analysis and placement meditation." Losang Palden describes the method of emitting them (OE, 321–22): "First they pervade your own body, then they pervade the whole town, the three realms, the billionfold world system, and so forth, as far as you wish." He also mentions the purpose accomplished: "The need for establishing calm abiding focusing on a subtle object is threefold. If you obtain special flexibility or control over mental placement (1) you enhance your control over all types of meditation, such as meditating on the body of the deity; (2) you easily establish whatever siddhi you seek to establish; and (3) you fulfill the need for obtaining calm abiding mentioned in other sources."

[112](#) The four lineages possess different methods of meditating on emptiness. Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 188): "Both the *Condensed Root Tantra* and the explanatory *Vajra Peak* explain how to meditate on yoga without signs, for they state those of the tathāgata lineage, vajra lineage, jewel lineage, and lotus

lineage respectively engage four different ways of meditating on suchness: the heart-essence (*snying po*), the *dhāraṇī* mantra, the secret mantra, and the knowledge mantra. The first visualize themselves as Vairocana and place the heart-essence in the heart of a deity similar to themselves existing in front. Those who accomplish the second visualize themselves as Vajrasattva and arrange *dhāraṇī* mantras in vajras permeating space. Those who accomplish the jewel lineage visualize themselves as Ratnasambhava and arrange secret mantras in the empty space in front. Those who accomplish the lotus lineage visualize themselves as Lokeśvara and arrange knowledge mantras in lotuses pervading space. Then having accomplished the root focal basis, they resolve that the focal bases and all dharmas lack true existence through applying logic—such as dependent origination, the king of reasons—and generate complete certainty regarding its meaning.” And (CO, 189): “The great lord Atiśa stated that the pristine wisdom of indivisible method and wisdom is the ultimate heart-essence of the deity. It is the *heart-essence* from the perspective of invocation, it is the *dhāraṇī mantra* due to generating mindfulness that does not forget bodhicitta and so on, it is the *secret mantra* due to possessing inconceivable might, and it is the *knowledge mantra* due to generating pristine cognition that is special wisdom.”

[113](#) Losang Palden also comments (OE, 326): “If analysis predominates and placement weakens, engage in placement at the end of analysis and attain calm abiding focusing on emptiness. Then, through analysis, induce immutable pliancy due to the strength of analysis. When the factor of single-pointed abidance and the clarity of ascertainment attain equal strength, you obtain the nonconceptual bliss and clarity that is the union of calm abiding and insight. This is the meaning of meditating on yoga without signs in four [daily] sessions.”

[114](#) Könchok Tsültrim and Losang Palden list the four mudrās in a different order; Rinpoché here follows Losang Palden.

[115](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 183): “From the perspective of the main deity, the *mahāmudrā*, *samayamudrā*,

dharmamudrā, and *karmamudrā* are respectively the body, speech, mind, and activities. From the perspective of the four empowerments suitable for different disciples, they are respectively attachment, aversion, confusion, and pride. From the perspective of the four lineages, they are respectively earth, water, fire, and wind. They are together posited as the four seals of the basis of purification.”

[116](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 298): “*Samayamudrā* is accomplished when you generate profound and clear nondual pristine wisdom derived from meditation that is qualified by special pliancy in your mental continuum. *Dharmamudrā* is accomplished when you obtain the capacity to produce the sound of the mantra through the tone of the [internal] winds. *Mahāmudrā* is accomplished when you obtain the signs of seeing and touching the deity’s body visualized as yourself. *Karmamudrā* is accomplished when you can perform the four types of activities merely by emitting and reabsorbing (subtle objects).”

[117](#) Losang Palden briefly describes these three. Regarding absorption he states (OE, 329): “The siddhi of absorption is accomplished by the yogi on whom the wisdom beings have descended within the maṇḍala, who seeks to apply the siddhi of hidden treasures and so forth”; regarding recitation (OE, 330): “To accomplish the siddhi of recitation you first perform approximation and then engage in recitation and meditation in four sessions [a day] in front of an image of your deity. Finally you engage in recitation at night and attain the siddhi of the form of your deity. Similarly through maintaining the *samayamudrā*, engaging in recitations in four sessions, and finally engaging in recitation at night, you attain the siddhi of the blazing seal. Through maintaining that mudrā and by its support alone, you are able to fly...”; regarding fire pūjās (OE, 331): “The siddhi of fire pūjās is accomplished by meditating until the signs of accomplishing the actions of pacification, increase, power, and wrath occur.”

[118](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 330): “You contemplate that the form bearing the knowledge mantra is on a moon disk, and you

meditate on this until you can touch or see it. Then the wisdom being comes and bestows the siddhi of bearing the knowledge mantra.”

[119](#) Losang Palden observes (OE, 330): “Generate yourself as any of the five tathāgatas and meditate until seen by yourself or others [in that form]. You then become a knowledge mantra bearer holding the form of a complete buddha. If you meditate until you also attain the signs of the five tathāgata lineages and so on, you receive the siddhi of the great seal of your deity’s body.”

[120](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 104a.

[121](#) This refers to sūtra and tantra rather than to the Mind Only (*cittamatra*) and Middle Way (*madhyamaka*) schools.

[122](#) The three types of generosity are generosity of material things, generosity of Dharma, and generosity of fearlessness.

[123](#) Knowledge obscurations are the obscurations to omniscience, the residue of our past negative karmas that remains even after liberation, acting as a barrier to full buddhahood.

[124](#) Special awareness or special object possessor (*yul can khyad par can*) occurs in highest yoga tantra. “Special” refers to bliss and “object possessor” refers to awareness that possesses a specific object, here referring to emptiness.

[125](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 283a.

[126](#) Kirti Losang Trinlé, *Essence of Nectar*, vol. 1, p. 28.

[127](#) Losang Palden (OE, 161–62) uses the terms *observing tantra*, *smiling tantra*, *handholding tantra*, and *conjoining tantra* to refer to the four classes of tantra.

[128](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 27a.

[129](#) Ibid.

[130](#) See also Tsongkha-pa, *Yoga of Tibet*, pp. 207–12, the chapter entitled “The Need for Common Feats.”

[131](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 438b.

[132](#) This heading was announced at the end of the introductory chapter. Together, the five paths and the ten grounds chart the progress of a Buddhist practitioner through the stages of realization. The five *paths* (*lam*; Skt. *marga*) begin with the

path of accumulation, continue through the paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation, and culminate in the path of no-more learning. At the path of seeing, the practitioner has his or her first perception of emptiness within meditative equipoise and thereby changes from an ordinary being into an *ārya*. The ten *grounds*, or levels (*sa*; Skt. *bhūmi*), begin at the path of seeing, proceed primarily through the path of meditation, and are coterminous with the path of no-more learning. The paths and grounds proceed somewhat differently in the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna systems.

[133](#) These were explained in chapter 1.

[134](#) Kirti Losang Trinlé, *Essence of Nectar*, vol. 1, p. 44.

[135](#) Yoga without signs facilitates progress through the five paths. Losang Palden notes (OE, 270): “Yoga without signs is practiced to newly establish insight realizing emptiness, and once established it is cultivated during the paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation.”

[136](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 276): “On the path of seeing, imputed grasping at true existence is abandoned.”

[137](#) Losang Palden notes (OE, 276–77): “Innate grasping at true existence is divided into seven categories that are abandoned from the second to the eighth grounds. Knowledge obscurations are divided into four and are abandoned from the second part of the eighth ground.”

[138](#) Losang Palden states (OE, 253): “If you divide the subtle knowledge obscurations into coarse and subtle, the uninterrupted path at the beginning of the tenth ground abandons the coarser of the subtle knowledge abandonments. The uninterrupted path of the final continuum abandons the subtlest of the subtle knowledge abandonments.” Further (OE, 278): “When you attain the liberated path induced from the uninterrupted path of the final continuum, you attain the *all-luminous* ground because it occurs at the same time as attaining the four bodies of a buddha.”

[139](#) The implied convention is that higher paths take precedence over lower paths. Therefore a shared Perfection Vehicle path may be a Tantric Vehicle path but not a Perfection

Vehicle path; a shared Hīnayāna path may be a Perfection Vehicle path but not a Hīnayāna path. A shared Perfection Vehicle path is influenced by Tantric Vehicle methods, and this disqualifies it as a Perfection Vehicle path; a shared Hīnayāna path is affected by Mahāyāna methods, and this disqualifies it as a Hīnayāna path.

[140](#) *Sha* is an abbreviation of Shākya Shenyen (Śākyamitra); *sang* is an abbreviation of Sangyé Sangwa (Buddhaguhya); and *kun* is an abbreviation of Kunga Nyingpo (Ānandagarbha).

[141](#) Yangchen Gawai Lodrö states: “*Fivefold enlightenment* refers to the method of meditating on the body of a deity during the stage of generation. It involves the mode of enlightenment from the moon, enlightenment from the sun, enlightenment from the seed [syllable], enlightenment from the hand symbol and enlightenment from the complete body [of the deity].” Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, *Paths and Grounds of Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna*, pp. 31–32.

[142](#) Losang Palden offers another view to this debate (OE, 333): “Another says: Although these two masters [Śākyamitra and Buddhaguhya] accept that Prince Siddhārtha attained enlightenment in that life, they do not accept that he attained enlightenment on that physical basis of the desire realm because he left his maturational body on the banks of the Nirañjana river and proceeded to Akaniṣṭha field in his mental body and attained enlightenment in that field and on that basis.” And (OE, 334): “...after he attained enlightenment he returned to the human world and reentered his maturational body left on the bank of the Nirañjana river. Having arisen he then manifested the way of subduing the māras, attaining complete enlightenment and so forth.”

[143](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 438a.

[144](#) *Snyom ’jug, samāpatti*.

[145](#) Losang Palden states that according to Śākyamitra and Buddhaguhya (OE, 335–36): “...the tenth-ground bodhisattva entered the great of the great fourth absorption that is also known as *the absolute limit of the fourth absorption*, or *immutable concentration*, or *concentration pervading space*,

on the bank of the Nirañjana River. This should be understood as a concentration pervading space in the context of sūtra. Master Ānandagarbha asserts that the tenth-ground bodhisattva went to the Akaniṣṭha field and there entered the concentration pervading space. He was subsequently awakened from that concentration by the buddhas of the ten directions, bestowed the crown empowerment, and by meditating on the fivefold process of enlightenment according to yoga tantra, attained enlightenment in the complete enjoyment body of Vairocana. After attaining enlightenment he returned to the human world, took birth as the son of King Śuddhodāna, and manifested the twelve deeds.”

[146](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 255a.

[147](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 259b–260a.

[148](#) Kōnchok Tsültrim states (CO, 195): “You must obtain empowerment because it is empowerment that enables you to explain the meaning of tantra or secret mantra to others; because it makes you a suitable vessel for studying, contemplating, and meditating on that tantra; and because it is the root of all siddhis, common and supreme. Even if you meditate with a correct understanding of the meaning of the tantra, it is impossible to attain the supreme siddhi if you have not first obtained a pure empowerment. And even if a minor siddhi is attained, neither master nor disciple will be able to close the doors to the lower realms. Therefore you must obtain empowerment.”

[149](#) The scholar Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 14): “The student who is suitable to receive full empowerment is defined as one possessing all or most of the following characteristics: faith and respect in the lama, continuous practice of virtue, freedom from deceit and pretension, many transmissions received, the aspiration to liberate sentient beings, and appropriate lineage and form. A student who is not suitable to receive full empowerment is defined as one who is not capable of guarding either the tantric vows or the bodhisattva vows or who cannot maintain both sets of vows simultaneously.”

[150](#) Regarding the vase empowerment, Kōnchok Tsültrim

states (CO, 216): “In the lower tantras it is not clearly written that the water, crown, vajra, bell, and name empowerments are conferred by means of nectar flowing from the bodies of the deities and that nectar is inseparable from the vase water.

According to the explicit root text, the causal vase empowerment in highest yoga tantra is that which mainly purifies the coarse physical stains, empowers you to meditate on the generation stage, and plants the seeds for the resultant vajra body. When classified it has nine or eleven types.”

Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö presents a full enumeration (SM, 77): “When classified there are either six, nine, or eleven empowerments. The six are: (1) the water empowerment of Akṣobhya, (2) the crown empowerment of Ratnasambhava, (3) the vajra empowerment of Amitābha, (4) the bell empowerment of Amoghasiddhi, (5) the name empowerment of Vairocana, and (6) the uncommon vajra-master empowerment. The first five of these constitute the *five (common) knowledge empowerments*. The nine are (1) the flower garland empowerment, (2–6) the five knowledge empowerments, (7) the mirror empowerment, (8) the master empowerment, and (9) the subsequent permission. The eleven are: (1–5) the five knowledge empowerments, (6) the mantra empowerment, (7) the empowerment of the vajra rites, (8) the empowerment of the rites of conduct, (9) the empowerment of giving prediction and encouragement, (10) the master empowerment, and (11) the empowerment of the final ritual objects.” For the characteristics of the five knowledge empowerments, see [table 1](#).

[151](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 9): “If you have only obtained the knowledge empowerments [the water, crown, vajra, bell, and name empowerments], you are not authorized to study, explain, or practice the yogas of father and mother tantra... and the *Compendium* states: ‘If you teach the path to someone like this, Vajrasattva, who previously resided in your heart, will depart and his vows and commitments will decline.’”

[152](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 198): “You need not examine whether students are suitable vessels if they are merely

entering the maṇḍala, for it is permissible to show the face of the deity to those who are not capable of holding either type of vow. For those capable of guarding only the bodhisattva vows, you must bestow only the five knowledge empowerments of disciples. For those capable of guarding the tantric vows as well, you must also bestow the master empowerment that confers the three commitments.” Also, Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 9): “When leading students into the maṇḍala and showing them the faces of the deities, it is said that you may bestow from the flower garland empowerment up to the fourth empowerment. If they have not received any of the previous empowerments, it is not suitable to bestow on them the fourth empowerment. To make such students suitable vessels for receiving completion-stage empowerments—the secret empowerment and so forth—they must have already been made vessels suitable for the generation stage.”

[153](#) Paṇchen Sönam Drakpa states: “The maṇḍala of colored powders is best when the empowerments are to be bestowed upon a complete novice because, with respect to the vajra guru, it is said that “he should be skilled in the art of drawing the maṇḍala,” and with respect to the disciple, such a maṇḍala prepared of various substances provides many opportunities for practicing generosity through making offerings. Therefore this type of maṇḍala is most helpful in maturing the disciple as a suitable vessel for higher religious practice.” *Overview of Buddhist Tantra*, p. 69.

[154](#) Paṇchen Sönam Drakpa states: “Regarding the practice of the body maṇḍala, Ghaṇṭapāda says that the basis of this is ‘...the nature of sentient beings. There is no maṇḍala of practice other than this.’ This refers to the practitioner’s own body. Of all bodies, however, the body of the vajra master is the most excellent basis. It is by the vajra master that the disciple is invited to enter into the maṇḍala for the practice of the retinue of the deities of the body, and it is by him that the empowerment is conferred. The disciple enters the maṇḍala by meditating on the deities arising from the guru. The meaning here is clarified by Ghaṇṭapāda, who says, ‘In the first instance,

it is the vajra master who is the three spheres of activity, and then the disciple meditates on himself as being that.”

Overview of Buddhist Tantra, p. 76.

[155](#) Pañchen Sönam Drakpa states: “It is explained in chapter 17 of the *Secret Assembly Tantra* as well as in the *Vajra Garland of Maṇḍala Rituals* that the maṇḍala of meditative stabilization is used only when the master has strong deity yoga, the disciple has very sharp faculties, and the colored powders and other materials necessary for the drawing of a visible maṇḍala cannot be obtained. This type is not for general use.” *Overview of Buddhist Tantra*, p. 68. Further: “Regarding the maṇḍala of meditative stabilization, practicing this is similar to the meditation of generating oneself as the deity.”

Overview of Buddhist Tantra, p. 76.

[156](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 78): “The secret empowerment is defined as the one of the four empowerments that, typically, purifies coarse verbal stains, empowers one to establish the illusory body from mere wind and mind, places the imprint of vajra speech, and establishes the special capacity to accomplish the enjoyment body.”

[157](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 78): “The pristine-wisdom empowerment is defined as the one of the four empowerments that, typically, purifies coarse mental obscurations, empowers one to meditate on the clear-light mahāmudrā of the fourth stage, places the imprint of vajra mind, and establishes the special capacity to accomplish the dharma body.”

[158](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 78): “The fourth empowerment, the word empowerment, is defined as the one of the four empowerments that, typically, purifies the stains of all three doors and their imprints, empowers one to meditate on the union of the indivisible two truths of the completion stage, places the imprint of the union of body and mind, and establishes the special capacity to actualize union as the body of Vajradhara.”

[159](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 198): “Vows (*sdom*) are types of mind that restrain you from holding what is appropriate to be inappropriate and what is inappropriate to be

appropriate. Commitments (*dam tshig*) guard against transgressing the prescribed limits.” Also, Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 82): “There is a difference between vows and commitments. Commitments stop you from not engaging in required practices such as not being separated from pure appearance and conception. Vows stop you from engaging in inappropriate action of the three doors such as the root and secondary downfalls. In brief, the master Śāntipa has stated that commitments stop you from not doing what you should do while vows stop you from doing what you should not do. Here these two are depicted as opposites, but they do not actually exclude each other. For if something is a tantric vow, it is necessarily both a vow and a commitment, but if something is a commitment, it is not necessarily a vow. This is because the commitments of the action and performance tantras are not vows; vows must be taken through the ritual of tantric vows while commitments are obtained by merely accepting them. There are nineteen commitments of the five buddha lineages—six for the Vairocana lineage, four each for the Akṣobhya and Ratnasambhava lineages, three for the lineage of Amitābha, and two for the lineage of Amoghasiddhi. Regarding vows, there are the fourteen root downfalls, and eight gross infractions that are the general commitments of the five lineages and so on.”

[160](#) Each of these three texts by Tsongkhapa is available in English translation. See, respectively, Tatz, *Asaṅga’s Chapter on Ethics*; Tsongkhapa, *Fulfillment of All Hopes*; and Tsongkhapa, *Tantric Ethics*. The more extensive name of the latter work in Tibetan is the *Cluster of Siddhis Explaining the Ethics of Secret Mantra* and thus different from the *Cluster of Siddhis Elucidating the Completion Stage of the Lūipa System* listed under Tsongkhapa in the bibliography of *Tibetan-Language Works*.

[161](#) *Sun Illuminating the Profound Meaning*, Collected Works, vol. *kha*, 8b.

[162](#) Kōnchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 243): “Both the yogas of channels, winds, and drops and the completion stage derived

from penetrating the points [of the body] are uncontrived yogas. Prior to that you must meditate on the contrived generation stage, fabricating seeds, hand symbols, and so on as method and the self-generation of the deity arising from them. The deity is like a ship traveling to the far shore, because it is the maturing agent of the completion stage.” Further, the same text states: “The generation stage acts as the maturing agent of the completion stage because the basis of purification of both stages is birth, death, and the bardo. Moreover the completion stage abandons ordinary appearance and conception regarding these three and possesses the capacity to directly transform these three into the three bodies. The generation stage newly conceives the three bodies to be compatible in aspect to birth, death, and the bardo and suppresses the ordinary appearance and conception of these three. The imprint of frequently meditating in that way matures as the completion stage” (CO, 267).

[163](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 118): “In the generation stage there is entrance, abidance, and dissolution of the winds in the central channel due to a mudrā [consort] and so forth, but this does not occur due to the strength of your meditation.”

[164](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *cha*, 50b.

[165](#) See note 8. There is debate regarding whether, from among the five disciples, Candrakīrti was a direct disciple of Nāgārjuna and actually met him. One tradition asserts that there were two Nāgārjunas—Nāgārjuna the Elder and Nāgārjuna the Younger or Nāgārjuna the Madhyamika and Nāgārjuna the tantrika—and Candrakīrti met the latter not the former. Another tradition asserts that there was just one Nāgārjuna who lived to the age of seven hundred years by relying on special miraculous siddhis. He even blessed his body so that it could continue to abide, and it may still be seen at Śrīparvata in Andhra Pradesh in South India.

[166](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *cha*, 50a.

[167](#) The implied syllogism is: Take the protection wheel and yogas following union with a knowledge consort (subject). They are not actual generation-stage practices (predicate). This is

because the generation stage must engage in meditation that takes any of the three bodies as the path (reason).

[168](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 131): “It is *approximation* because the awareness (lit., ‘object-possessor’) that is ultimate bodhicitta approaches or approximates emptiness and focuses on it through being one in taste with it. It is *close accomplishment* because the object close to that is the pristine wisdom body of complete enjoyment established from mere wind and mind, and that which is close to that is established as the mantric body of the complete enjoyment body. It is *accomplishment* because it establishes your three doors to be inseparable from the three vajras and establishes them as the three levels of being. And it is *great accomplishment* because it is the branch accomplishing the great purpose of others.” Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 262): “*Approximation* is bodhicitta focusing on emptiness. *Close accomplishment* is meditation on mahāmudrā that is the body arising from the sun and so on. *Accomplishment* is generating the three levels of being. *Great accomplishment* is activities of the supreme conqueror.”

[169](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 262): “In the practice of Yamāntaka, *yoga* is holding the causal vajra, *subsequent yoga* is holding the resultant vajra, *intensive yoga* is the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala, and *great yoga* is the concluding practices.”

[170](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 132): “The outline of the six branches taught in the *Seven Pavilions of Mother Tantra* (*Margyud gur gyi bdun pa*) consists of (1) the branch of Vairocana involving generation of the celestial mansion, (2) the branch of Vajrasattva concerning attachment, (3) the branch of Akṣobhya that involves conferring empowerment, (4) the branch of Amitābha that involves tasting nectar, (5) the branch of Amoghasiddhi involving making offerings, and (6) the branch of Ratnasambhava involving the offering of praise.”

[171](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö remarks (SM, 129): “From the perspective of the Ārya system of Guhyasamāja there are three types of concentration. The first is called the *concentration of*

initial application because it is concentration applying indivisible method and wisdom initially, or prior to emanating the maṇḍala deities.” Also Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 261): “Concentration of initial application precedes the blessing of the secret place.”

[172](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 129): “It is *concentration of the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala* because it is concentration that fully establishes the maṇḍala. The maṇḍala deities are emanated from the bodhicitta of the central male and female deities and then arranged in their individual abodes.” Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 261): “Concentration of the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala occurs from generating the support and supported (maṇḍalas) in the secret place of the consort up to arranging the deities in the external maṇḍala.”

[173](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 129–30): “It is *concentration of the supreme-conqueror activities* because all practices from the subtle drop up to establishing boundless activities are concentrations meditating on the enlightened activities of the body, speech, and mind of a buddha.” Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 261): “Concentration of the supreme-conqueror activities is establishing boundless activities such as pacification and so on through completing verbal recitation and mental recitation.”

[174](#) In addition Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states that there are forty-nine mentioned in a text called *Vajra Rosary Mantra (Rgyud rdor phreng)* (SM, 132): “...there are thirty-three regarding the concentration of initial application, six regarding the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala, and ten regarding supreme-conqueror activities.”

[175](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö asserts that this passage indicates that *single recall* is: “...cultivating clear appearance and pride as the deity” (SM, 145).

[176](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ca*, 48b.

[177](#) *Ibid.*

[178](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 118–19): “The etymology of the *generation stage* in accordance with *Mantric Stages* is that it is called *generation* because you are generated by mind or

imputed by mind as the body of a deity by means of mantra, signs, and so on. It is a *stage* because it is an aspect, part, or state, as Śāntipa explains in his *Pearl Rosary*, a commentary to the Hevajra tantra. It is not, however, a stage in time.”

[179](#) The six constituents mentioned here are the three constituents inherited from the father—bones, marrow, and semen—and the three inherited from the mother—skin, flesh, and blood.

[180](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 330a.

[181](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 264): “Attaining perfect control over pristine wisdom refers to the capacity to complete your own purpose and the purpose of sentient beings through absorption alone, and this is only achieved on the completion stage.”

[182](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö gives more detail (SM, 140): “By meditating on the appearance of the supporting celestial mansion and the supported deities, ordinary appearance is stopped, and by meditating on the definitive apprehended object—‘I am Akṣobhya’ or ‘I am Vairocana’ and so on—ordinary conception is stopped...”

[183](#) Könchok Tsültrim mentions (CO, 262–63): “The main object of abandonment of the generation stage is both the appearance and conception of the supporting and supported maṇḍalas as ordinary that exist for mental awareness but not for sense awareness. How are they abandoned? Both the objects previously mentioned and the appearance and conception of the impure environment and its inhabitants are not abandoned in the generation stage by means of mundane and transcendent paths. Instead, when the yogi attains clarity on the supporting and supported maṇḍalas, he stops [impure] appearances to his mind by replacing such appearances with pure appearances and conceptions. He enters the nature of pure appearance and conception gradually, through long familiarity with stopping [impure appearances] in that way.” The particular use of the term *abandonment* in this context is discussed by Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö (SM, 142): “*The Radiance of the Sāla Flower* (*Spos me’i snang ba*) [unidentified] explains

that ordinary appearances and conception are not abandoned in the usual sense. It is labeled *abandonment* merely because these are the main obstacles to meditating on the pure environment and its inhabitants. Our peerlessly kind Yongdzin Paṇḍita Mañjuśrī [unidentified] posits them as the main abandonments of the generation stage even though they are not actually obscurations. He states that they are posited as such from the perspective of impeding pure appearance and conception. The method of abandoning them is to visualize pure appearance and conception that merely stops impure appearance and conception. But this does not act as a method for abandoning obscurations.”

[184](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 140–41): “Stopping ordinary pride and transforming it into divine pride happens when you discard the contrived apprehension that ‘I am Akṣobhya’ or ‘I am Vairocana,’ and develop the genuine thought that ‘I abide as the actual deity.’”

[185](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 257–58): “It is indeed vital to correctly identify the basis of imputation of the I when positing it. Some say that it is holding that the mere I imputed in reliance on the aggregates is the body of the deity. This is unacceptable because this is a misconception, similar to the mind holding a rope to be a snake. Others, focusing on their resultant buddhahood, say that [divine pride] is holding this to be the body of the deity. This is unacceptable, too, since it does not help stop the present ordinary appearances and conception. So then, having either instantaneously or gradually dissolved all ordinary appearances, such as the aggregates and so forth, your mind becomes the nature of great bliss. Then through focusing on just that pristine wisdom that is one in taste with the dharma body of clear light engaging emptiness, you reflect ‘I am the dharma body.’ And just that [dharma body] has the aspect of the form body, and you reflect ‘I am this [form body].’ This is said to be the opinion of Jé Rinpoché and his two spiritual sons.”

[186](#) Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika*, 111b.

[187](#) The immediate condition (*de ma thag rkyen*) is any

awareness that acts as the substantial cause of the awareness that arises immediately after it. More specifically it is the main, direct generator of the stream of clear experiential cognition.

[188](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 326b.

[189](#) Realization meditation (*mngon rtogs sgom*) is a term describing meditation on the generation stage in general.

[190](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 265): “It is said that the first two levels possess merely the yoga of a drop at the upper and lower opening of the central channel. The third level possesses yoga meditating on the supporting and supported maṇḍalas inside a subtle drop. That is called *the yoga comprehending the subtle*.” Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 145): “On the first two levels you meditate on the antidote to laxity and excitation but this is not the main meditation. On the third level you meditate to establish calm abiding, and this is the main meditation. On the first two levels you meditate on the mere drop, while from the third level on you meditate on the maṇḍala within it.” Further, the same text states (SM, 146): “When laxity occurs while focusing on the drop at the heart you should count ten inhalations and exhalations while emitting and reabsorbing (the drop). When excitation occurs you should direct your focus to the drop and meditate single-pointedly until you pacify that excitation. On the third level, you should take the subtle drop as your main object. For the purpose of establishing calm abiding, you should meditate on the complete supporting and supported maṇḍalas inside the subtle drop or inside a subtle hand symbol. Until you attain signs of stability in this practice, you must train in emitting and reabsorbing these objects.”

[191](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 265): “When you attain stability on the subtle drop, you abide by frequently practicing emission and reabsorption of hand symbols, light rays, and so on. And in dependence on the point of the focal basis, you cause the mind to abide internally. You quickly establish calm abiding qualified by physical and mental pliancy and insight through analytical wisdom that meditates on emission and reabsorption and so on.” Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 147):

“When the wisdom of analytical meditation engages in frequent emission and reabsorption, it is similar to what is described in other texts as cultivating insight focusing on diversity. It is stated in *Mantric Stages* that by practicing this you attain the excellent concentration that is the union of calm abiding and insight.”

[192](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 147): “It is said that calm abiding and insight are established at the same time in this system by the might of attaining flexibility and completely subduing the winds and mind in dependence on the drop yoga previously explained.” Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 265–66): “From the ground of a beginner, you condition the wind to abide internally through the uniform engagement of wind and mind due to strongly holding the mind on the subtle drop at the upper or lower opening or at the navel, heart, and so on. You are able to stop excitation by the power of taming the wind. You attain stable abidance by frequently mixing analytical and placement meditation. Thus, by the power of taming both wind and mind, you establish calm abiding and insight at the same time. This presentation relies explicitly on *Mantric Stages*... In general, both sūtra and tantra assert that the union of calm abiding and insight is attained at the same time as the transition to the path of preparation. Here those with intelligence should analyze this point, since there are many ways of asserting the tantric path of accumulation and the sūtra paths of preparation within Kālacakra and other systems.”

[193](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 266–67): “*Initial attainment* in the generation stage arises when you attain the visualization of the coarse maṇḍala of the supreme-conqueror maṇḍala as it is without omission or addition, you meditate without interruption on the object of meditation without laxity or excitation, and you generate the initial uncontrived experience of clear appearance and supreme pride through that meditation. *Obtainment of stability* in the generation stage arises when you maintain supreme pride and clear appearance from the beginning to the end of the session by meditating on

coarse and subtle yoga in that way, and you are capable of abiding for four hours, without laxity and excitation, in the clear appearance of the coarse and subtle aspects of the maṇḍala. The *final completion* of the coarse and subtle generation stage arises when you are able to engage in meditative equipoise in that way for as long as you desire—a month, a year, whatever.”

[194](#) Yangchen Gawai Lodrö states: “While visualizing the residence and the resident maṇḍalas in stages, whenever a genuine experience of the spontaneous pride of the deity along with the clear appearance of the maṇḍalas arise precisely in accordance with the size determined by one’s motivation, a realization of the generation stage has dawned initially. Accordingly, someone on this level is a person of the generation stage.

“One could lay out separate criteria [as follows] for the accomplishment of stability in and completion of the coarse [yoga] and the subtle [yoga] of the generation stage. If, while visualizing the coarse residence and resident maṇḍalas, they appear instantaneously and lucidly, with no confusion of their coarse and subtle parts, and can be maintained for one sixth of the day, free of laxity and excitement, one has achieved stability in the coarse generation stage. If the same can be done for as long as one wishes, for a month or a year, one has completed the coarse generation stage. The criteria for the accomplishment of stability in—and completion of—the subtle generation stage are as follows: If, when the maṇḍala and its residents are visualized within a subtle drop to the size of a mustard seed, they appear instantaneously and lucidly with no confusion of their coarse and subtle parts and can be maintained as before (for one-sixth of the day, free of laxity or excitement), one has achieved stability in the subtle generation stage. If the same thing can be done for as long as one wishes, as mentioned before, one has completed the subtle generation stage.” Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, *Paths and Grounds of the Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna*, p. 48.

[195](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 338b.

[196](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 39a.

[197](#) Śrīdhānyavajra is more commonly known by his Tibetan name: Paldré Dorjé (*dpal 'bras rdo rje*).

[198](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 347b.

[199](#) The apprehended aspect (*bzung rnam*) in general refers to an object of awareness as distinct from the apprehending aspect (*'dzin rnam*) that refers to the subject or awareness itself.

[200](#) The appearing image (*snang ngor*) refers in general to the appearing object (*snang yul*).

[201](#) The ascertained image (*nges ngor*) refers in general to the apprehended object (*'dzin stang gi yul*).

[202](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, vol. *pa*, 43a.

[203](#) Ibid.

[204](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 154): “The etymology of *completion stage* is the *stage* of engaging in meditation that penetrates the vital points in the channels, winds, and drops of the body that is *complete* through being merely established without relying on mental imputation...Equivalent terms include *non-investigative stage*, *true yoga*, and *the yoga of the second stage*.”

[205](#) CO, 290.

[206](#) In *Ford of the Fortunate* (p. 62), Yangchen Gawai Lodrö observes: “The *Five Stages* [Nāgārjuna] and the *Graded Presentation* [Nāgabodhi] present five levels by including physical isolation in verbal isolation and commencing enumeration from verbal isolation. The first chapter of *Bright Lamp* [Candrakīrti] even presents four levels—such as the level of focusing on the mind and so on—by including the first two levels in mental isolation. But these are mere differences in classification, and there is no contradiction. The *Later Guhyasamāja Tantra* states that the completion stage has six branches, such as individual withdrawal and so on. Further, both individual withdrawal (*sor sdud*) of the six branches and absorption (*bsam gtan*) are included in physical isolation, vitality exertion (*srog rtsol*) is included in verbal isolation, retention (*'dzin pa*) is included in clear light, and both

subsequent recollection (*rjes dran*) and concentration (*ting nge 'dzin*) are included in union.” See also Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, *Paths and Grounds of Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna*, p. 52. See [table 2](#) for the enumeration of the levels of the completion stage.

[207](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 269): “You should properly understand the way the channels, winds, and drops—the three aspects of the essential basis—abide; the way to establish the three paths—the illusory body, clear light, and their union; and their result, namely the four bodies. This is the pith essence of all teachings, and it should be known as the nectar of the intention of all conquerors.” The same text further states (CO, 274–75): “You must understand the way the actual basis abides because the extremely subtle wind is the basis for establishing the form body, the extremely subtle mind is the basis for establishing the dharma body, and the fact that these two are one in nature is the basis for establishing union.”

[208](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 270): “The body composed of the elements or element derivatives is coarse.” Similarly Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 157): “In this context the coarse body is the body derived from maturational causes; that part of the five aggregates that is a solid body of flesh and bones that possesses the six constituents of womb birth.” The six constituents of womb birth are bones, marrow, and semen derived from the father and skin, flesh, and blood derived from the mother.

[209](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 270): “Consciousness of the five gateways is coarse mind.”

[210](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 157): “The abiding channels, the moving winds, the red and white drops of bodhicitta, the dream body, and the body of the intermediate state are posited as the subtle body.”

[211](#) Könchok Tsültrim asserts (CO, 270): “Subtle mind is the root and branch afflictions, the eighty natural conceptions, and the minds and mental factors concordant with them.”

[212](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 157): “The wind upon which the minds of the four empties are mounted is the

fundamental wind.”

[213](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 157): “The fundamental mind that becomes manifest at the time of death due to the power of karma and possesses the nature of the four empties is the extremely subtle mind”; and later (SM, 158): “For example, the coarse mind is like heavily polluted water, the subtle mind is like unclear water, and the extremely subtle mind is like water in its natural state free of pollution and contamination.” Könchok Tsültrim also observes (CO, 270): “The subtlety of mind depends on the subtlety of the object appearing to it.”

[214](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 153): “It is necessary to state *due to meditation* because although both—(1) near-attainment that manifests at the time of death and (2) pristine wisdom that manifests when the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to relying on a consort in the generation stage—manifest due to winds entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central channel, they do not do so due to meditation. It is necessary to state *yoga of a learner* because although the pristine wisdom of innate great bliss at the time of the result is derived due to meditation, it is not the yoga of a learner.”

[215](#) See [table 3](#).

[216](#) The first pair is individual withdrawal (*sor sdud*) and absorption (*bsam gtan*) contracted to *individual absorption* (*sor bsam*). The second pair is vitality exertion (*srog rtsol*) and retention (*’dzin pa*) contracted to *vitality retention* (*srog ’dzin*). The third pair is subsequent recollection (*rjes dran*) and concentration (*ting nge ’dzin*) contracted to *subsequent concentration* (*rjes dran ting nge ’dzin*).

[217](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 291b.

[218](#) Vitality exertion that is vajra recitation.

[219](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 323): “Since the channel knots at the heart are formed earlier and the knots at other cakras are formed later, the knots at the heart are more difficult to undo. Also in other cakras, the right and left channels form one knot each, while at the heart they form three knots each.”

[220](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 80b.

[221](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 258b.

[222](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 80b.

[223](#) Verbal isolation that is vajra recitation.

[224](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 241b.

[225](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 186): “A yogi who has consummated the coarse and subtle generation stage should meditate knowing the following four points: the posture of the body, the time of clear cognition, the location of the focal object, and the nature of the winds. When one meditates single-pointedly by focusing on either a subtle drop or a hand symbol in the central channel of the jewel, the winds will gather there through the wind and mind sharing the same focal point.”

[226](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 189): “Regarding the meaning of *individual withdrawal*, the term *individual* is *prati* in Sanskrit and here refers to ‘repetition’ or ‘frequent engagement,’ and *withdrawal* refers to ‘appropriating.’

Therefore it appropriates as its utilized object the five objects engaged by the five sense faculties—form and so on—sealed by bliss and emptiness, and views anything that appears as the nature of bliss and emptiness.”

[227](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 299–300): “During post-equipose whatever appears is empty; whatever is empty is bliss; and whatever is bliss arises as the body of the deity. Whatever appears, arises as an empty state due to experiencing the (correct) view. Whatever appears, arises as bliss due to the strong conviction (*mos pa*) that all is in the nature of bliss, through recalling the union of bliss and emptiness one experienced during equipose. That ‘various states that are merely imputed by conception arise at that time’ is one taste appearing as many, and that ‘all these states arise as bliss and emptiness’ is many appearing as one taste.”

[228](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 302): “Due to meditating on subtle yoga, the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel, and bodhicitta descends in your central channel generating the special bliss of contact. Taking this as a focal condition (*dmigs rkyen*) generates the physical feeling of

bliss. Then, taking this as an immediate condition (*de ma thag rkyen*) generates the mental feeling of bliss. Although both this pristine wisdom and emptiness are not established like water poured into water, they are indivisibly conjoined through strong conviction during single-pointed equipoise.”

[229](#) Minds and mental factors that are concordant (*mtshungs ldan*) possess five factors in common: they share the same focal object (*dmigs*), aspect (*rnam pa*), duration (*dus*), support (*rten*), and similar substance (*rdzas*).

[230](#) Tantra has a specific presentation of absorption. Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 302): “Absorption is yoga that views desirable objects and so on as deities through the might of individual withdrawal.”

[231](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 189): “Investigation engages in coarse investigation reflecting: ‘The five sense faculties, the five objects, and the five types of sense awareness possess the nature or state of the five buddha lineages.’”

[232](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 302): “Mental bliss realizing emptiness through the pristine wisdom of great bliss is the branch of joy.”

[233](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 303): “That which induces mental and physical flexibility concordant with that joy is the branch of the bliss of pliancy.”

[234](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 190): “The four empties related to joy and bliss, and especially semblant clear light that stops the appearance of a separation between object and subject, are posited as the branch of single-pointedness.”

[235](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 295): “Physical isolation of the five lineages reduces [the hundred lineages] to the five constituents of earth, water, fire, wind, and consciousness, differentiating them according to substance.”

[236](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 295): “The physical isolation of the three secret lineages condenses [the five lineages] to the three vajras.”

[237](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 295): “The physical isolation of the single lineage of Vajradhara is the ultimate convergence of [the three lineages].”

[238](#) Könchok Tsültrim presents a slightly different list (CO, 295): “The eye sense base is purified by Kṣitigarbha, the ear sense base is purified by Vajrapāṇi, the nose sense base is purified by Ākāśagarbha, the tongue sense base is purified by Avalokiteśvara, the body sense base is purified by Sarvanīvaṇaviṣkambin, and the mental sense base subsumed by white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment, is purified by Mañjuśrī.”

[239](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 294): “The basis that one seeks to be isolated from is the body as a collection of particles of flesh, sinews, and so on and the mind as a collection of prior and subsequent moments of awareness. Being isolated from that is being isolated from ordinary appearances and conceptions. The meaning of *isolation* is when a yogi in post-equipose, having arisen from an equipose where everything was sealed with bliss and emptiness, is isolated from ordinary appearances and conceptions, since whatever appears is empty, whatever is empty is bliss, and bliss arises as the deity.”

[240](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 296): “The physical isolation of the one hundred pure lineages is posited by dividing each of the twenty dharmas into five, such as the Vairocana of the Vairocana, the Ratnasambhava of the Vairocana, and so forth, and similarly the five of Ratnasambhava and so forth.”

[241](#) Passage not found.

[242](#) Passage not found.

[243](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 98a.

[244](#) Paṇchen Losang Chögyen, Collected Works, vol. *kha*, 24a.

[245](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 311): “Although awareness possesses the capacity to hold an object by its own strength, it does not possess the capacity to move by its own strength. Wind is the opposite since it possesses the capacity to move to an object but lacks the capacity to hold it. But since wind and mind coalesced in a single state move to the object and hold it, wind is said to act as the mount of mind. It is like a lame person with eyes relying on a blind person with legs to move from place to place.”

[246](#) Könchok Tsültrim also notes (CO, 299): “In general, a yogi

who has completed the coarse and subtle generation stage has the capacity to cause bodhicitta to descend from the crown to the jewel [male organ] by relying on a wisdom seal, the capacity to block the opening of the jewel with the syllable *phat* through stable concentration, the capacity to generate the four joys, and the capacity to meditate on the aggregates and so on as deities by means of conjoining bliss and emptiness. But since he cannot dissolve the winds by drawing them into the central channel through penetrating the points of the body, the main difference between deity yoga of physical isolation and the generation stage must be posited from this perspective.”

[247](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 306): “There is a difference between the extremely subtle life-sustaining wind and the life-sustaining wind associated with the five protectors, because the former abides in the central channel within the channel knots at the heart, while the latter does not abide there but abides in general at the heart on a coarser level.” Regarding the name equivalents of the subtle life-sustaining wind, the same text states (CO, 307): “The extremely subtle life-sustaining wind is also called the *indestructible wind* because it is not destroyed by any condition. It is called the *clear-light wind* because once the coarse wind and mind dissolve in it, the clear light of the basis, the path, and the result arise. It is called the *innate wind* because it abides inseparably from the extremely subtle wind and mind.”

[248](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 201): “The moving wind supports seeing form ... the fully moving wind supports hearing sound... the correctly moving wind supports sensing aroma... the intensely moving wind supports experiencing taste... the definitely moving wind supports experiencing tactile objects.”

[249](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 312): “Although these ten winds are formed in the womb they do not move at that stage. After birth nine winds move during waking hours. During sleep, only the four main winds move; the secondary winds do not.”

[250](#) At the time of the result, the five winds correlate with the five buddha families (CO, 307): the life-sustaining wind with Akṣobhya; the equally abiding wind with Amogasiddhi; the

ascending wind with Amitābha; the downward-voiding wind with Ratnasambhava; and the pervading wind with Vairocana.

[251](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 187): “The mere melting of substances through igniting caṇḍālī at the navel and the secret place arises from both meditating and not meditating on the path. But here we need to recognize the innate bliss of the melted bodhicitta arising from the winds entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central channel due to meditation, and to recognize the four descending joys arising due to the winds dissolving in the central channel and bodhicitta melting and progressing to the tip of the jewel, and the four ascending joys arising due to bodhicitta being drawn to the crown in the reverse order.”

[252](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 298–99): “Each of the four sections from the crown and so on are further divided into four parts each. Each part has a separate component of white bliss, making sixteen parts, such as the joy of joy and so on.”

[253](#) Könchok Tsültrim further observes (CO, 299): “The four sections are divided into three parts. Each part has a separate component of great, medium, or small red bliss, making twelve types of joy to be experienced.”

[254](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 188): “The reason why the ascending joys are superior to the descending joys is because any of the four ascending joys are necessarily innate joy, for having loosened the knots at the heart cakṛa one cannot fully generate the four ascending joys until bodhicitta of the reverse order stabilizes at the crown.” Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 301): “Since descending joy is not established as innate descending joy at the secret place until bodhicitta ascends—and since ascending innate joy does not completely arise until bodhicitta is stabilized at the crown—ascending joy is said to be supreme. However, due to that, until one loosens the root knot at the heart, one cannot accomplish ascending joy but only an inferior substitute.”

[255](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 194): “The order of yogas of physical and verbal isolation is definite because physical isolation must precede concentration engaging the

vajra speech of verbal isolation that is the particular mantra recitation of a completion-stage practitioner. That follows because if a practitioner of vajra recitation at the level of verbal isolation does not establish concentration by engaging the vajra body of physical isolation, the practice of vajra recitation will not be effective, just as a practitioner of the generation stage must practice deity yoga before engaging in recitation.”

[256](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 215–16): “There are two ways to explain the term *vitality exertion*: (1) vitality exertion that prolongs one’s vitality or lifespan by meditating on the three yogas of vitality exertion or (2) exertion to move vital energies or winds in the left and right channels so they enter the central channel. The first presentation follows because the name equivalent of *exertion* is *ayāma* (in Sanskrit), which means ‘striving,’ ‘stopping,’ or ‘prolonging,’ and here it is explained in accordance with the latter.”

[257](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 319): “Meditation on the light drop is performing vajra recitation at the upper opening having applied the tone of the three syllables to the wind drop.”

[258](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 319): “Meditation on the mantra drop is meditating on the short syllable *a* at the center of the heart.”

[259](#) Könchok Tsültrim further states (CO, 319): “Meditation on the substance drop is meditation on the wind drop—by nature the five wisdoms and five substances at the time of the basis—at the secret place of oneself and one’s consort.”

[260](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 81a.

[261](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 316): “The common function of the three syllables is to purify, transform, and increase the offering substances and so forth, and they also function to produce the bodies of living beings and so on since the winds possessing these tones exist in their bodies. The uncommon function of the three syllables is that a generation-stage practitioner applies them to bless the three doors of action, and from them the deity is generated and the four actions accomplished; a completion-stage practitioner quickly

establishes common and supreme siddhis and the three bodies due to practicing vajra recitation that links the tone of the three syllables to the tone of the winds rising, entering, and abiding. These three syllables are the essence of all mantras because they have the power to establish the siddhis of all mantras.”

[262](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 155a.

[263](#) Passage not found.

[264](#) See Tathāgatavajra, *Viśeṣadyota*. Dergé Tengyur, Toh 1510, rgyud, vol. *zha*, 285r–308v.

[265](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 207): “The way to meditate on the mantra drop at the heart is to meditate on either the syllable *hūṃ* or the short syllable *a* that represents indestructible wind and mind encapsulated in the center of the drop of white and red substances the size of a mustard seed within the central channel (*dhūtī*) inside the heart cakṛa of oneself clearly visualized as the great secret Vajradhara of physical isolation.”

[266](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states that there are different indestructible drops (SM, 206): “There are the drops of red and white substance that are not destroyed for as long as one lives in this life, and there are the extremely subtle life-sustaining wind and mind that are not destroyed for as long as space remains. These share a single nature.”

[267](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 166a.

[268](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 208): “The method of engaging in vitality exertion that meditates on the light drop at the upper opening of the forehead, or the conventional upper opening, is vajra recitation that meditates on light composed of five colors derived from the three letters associated with the indestructible drop at the center of the heart, which takes the tone of those winds arising, entering, and abiding as the tone of the three syllables by nature the three vajras and mentally listens to it.” He also notes: “...the drop that is meditated upon at the upper opening of the central channel located in the forehead is called the *wind drop* and the *light drop*” (SM, 209).

[269](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 201): “Through practicing

vajra recitation with the main winds, you establish the common enlightened activities such as pacification and so forth—you establish the illusory body through invoking the four uncommon empties and the subtle wind—and you manifest the state of a buddha in one life in dependence on that.”

[270](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö describes the purpose of relying on the pervading wind (SM, 201): “Through vajra recitation with the pervading wind, you experience the clear light in order to attain supreme enlightenment in the intermediate state.”

[271](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 201): “Through performing vajra recitation with the secondary winds, you attain the five types of higher perception, and this assists in creating great bliss in relation to any object that appears.”

[272](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 326–27): “The measure of completing your training in the coarse winds is that the tones of the winds arising, entering, and abiding appear as the tones of the three letters, and you clearly see their individual abodes, their coarseness or subtlety, and their heaviness or lightness. The measure of completing your training in the subtle winds is that the winds of the three empties can enter your body and your winds can supplement and mix with the three empties. The measure of restraining or obtaining control over the winds of earth, water, fire, and wind is, respectively, flying in the sky, not being affected by cold, not being affected by heat, and not being provoked by fierce opponents.”

[273](#) The meeting of the single lower opening of the male deity and the single lower opening of the female consort.

[274](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes that the method of relying on a wisdom consort is (SM, 209): “meditating on the physical form of the wind drop, by nature the five pristine wisdoms and the five constituents at the time of the basis, at the point where the lower opening of one’s central channel meets that of the wisdom consort.”

[275](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö mentions that meditation on the light and mantra drops (SM, 209) “...gathers winds at the heart that could not be gathered before and loosens knots at the heart that were difficult to open,” while meditation on the substance

drop “...in this context, makes the clear light appear through fully enhancing the process of gathering of winds at the heart and completely releasing the knots at the heart.” Additionally Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 328): “Since one is not capable of igniting the fire of caṇḍālī by the other main or secondary winds, one performs vajra recitation with the downward-voiding wind at the lower opening and through that one ignites caṇḍālī.”

[276](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 170b.

[277](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 325): “There are five or eight signs that occur due to a yogi engaging in vajra-recitation meditation on the mantra drop. When earth, water, fire, and wind dissolve into consciousness, four signs serially occur that are like (1) a mirage, (2) smoke, (3) fireflies, and (4) a butter lamp. If (5) appearance, (6) increase, (7) near-attainment, and (8) clear light are enumerated as one and added to the previous four, there are five signs. Otherwise, if separately enumerated there are eight.”

[278](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 327): “After abiding they must also dissolve. When the winds start moving together intermittently, that is mere entry. But when this happens repeatedly, the channel knots at the heart loosen greatly and relax. Then you must become familiar over a long period with each of the fully qualified phases of entering, abiding, and dissolving, for it is not that you move from one phase to the next in the way that ripples of water immediately succeed each other.” Also Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 215): “Cultivating vajra recitation that equally engages rising, entering, and abiding in time leads to ever longer abiding and shorter rising and entry, until finally there is only abiding.”

[279](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 170b.

[280](#) Yangchen Gawai Lodrö, *Ford of the Fortunate*, p. 63.

[281](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 320): “After the mantra drop has been stabilized, you need to meditate on the vitality exertion of the light drop at the upper opening of the forehead.”

[282](#) Tsongkhapa, *Precious Bud of Final Resolution*, *Collected*

Works, vol. *ca*, 75b.

[283](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 341): “The internal conditions inducing the realization of the final mental isolation are vajra recitation focusing on the pervading wind and meditation on the yogas of gradual and instantaneous dissolution.” The same quotation is found in the *Sun and Moon Maṇḍala*, p. 231. Further, Gawai Lodrö states: “By relying upon an internal condition of the Vajra Recitation of the pervading wind and an external condition of the Vitality and Exertion of a consort, channel knots at the heart are completely untied. Due to this a part of the pervading wind along with the primary and secondary winds dissolves into the indestructible drop at the heart, which produces the wisdom of appearance.” Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, *Paths and Grounds of the Guhyasamaja*, p. 56.

[284](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, Sku ’bum edition, vol. 13, 26a.

[285](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, Sku ’bum edition, vol. 13, 26b.

[286](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 198a.

[287](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *cha*, 576.

[288](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ca*, 31a.

[289](#) Könchok Tsültrim glosses the meaning of the three empties (CO, 332): “...*empty* refers to being empty of winds acting as the mount of conception; *very empty* refers to being empty of the winds acting as the mount of appearance; and *great empty* refers to being empty of the winds acting as the mount of increase.”

[290](#) For a reason to prove a thesis it must possess three modes: position property (*phyogs chos*), forward pervasion (*rjes khyab*), and reverse pervasion (*ldog khyab*). Here the author asserts that the forward pervasion is not established.

[291](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 341): “The need for and mode of reliance on an action seal during empowerment, the generation stage, and physical isolation is different. These are for the purpose of inducing the four joys of the reverse order from the crown to the secret place. But [in mental isolation] it is for the purpose of generating the four empties of mental

isolation in the nature of the four joys in the heart similar to the death process.” Also Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö mentions that an action seal is required in mental isolation (SM, 231) “...for generating the three empties of dissolution in the nature of the four joys as they occur at the time of death.”

[292](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 342): “There are four action seals in terms of their qualities: (1) the lotus possessor, (2) the conch possessor, (3) the elephant possessor, and (4) the deer possessor. There are three in terms of their nature: (1) the instantaneously born, (2) the field-born, and (3) the mantra-born, who are posited respectively as the seal abiding in the realization of union, the seal abiding typically in the three isolations and the illusory body, and the seal abiding in the realization of the generation stage.”

[293](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 233): “The definition of a seal in this context is typically a consort relied upon by the yogi to generate the pristine wisdom of bliss and emptiness.”

[294](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 233): “The definition of an action seal is a consort who is either mantra-born, field-born, or instantaneously born, who took rebirth through the power of karma, and who is skilled in actions generating bliss,” and (SM, 231): “The need for the action seal is established, in that if that action seal demonstrates innate bliss just once, you may later rely on a pristine wisdom seal to generate it.”

[295](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 233): “The definition of a pristine wisdom seal is typically a seal newly fabricated by the mind of the yogi or one that merely appears to pristine wisdom.”

[296](#) See page 107.

[297](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 332): “The definition of appearance of the forward order is mental awareness that is one of the three empties of the forward order—derived from the dissolution of [coarse levels of] conception and its supportive winds in your mental continuum—that stops coarse dualistic appearance except for the appearance of empty vacuity like moonlight pervading the vast autumn night sky.”

[298](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 333): “The definition of

increase of the forward order is mental awareness that is one of the three empties of the forward order—derived from the dissolution of [the mind of white] appearance and its supportive winds in your mental continuum—that stops coarse dualistic appearance except for the appearance of empty vacuity like sunlight pervading the vast autumn sky.”

[299](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 333): “The definition of near-attainment of the forward order is mental awareness that is one of the three empties of the forward order—derived from the dissolution of [the mind of red] increase and its supportive winds in your mental continuum—that stops coarse dualistic appearance except for the appearance of empty vacuity like thick darkness pervading the vast autumn sky.”

[300](#) See *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth* by Lati Rinpoché, translated by Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1981), pp. 38–42.

[301](#) Könchok Tsültrim gives more detail of the threefold division of eighty natural conceptions (CO, 338–39): “In the first group of thirty-three the movement of the winds is stronger; in the second group of forty the movement of winds is of medium strength; in the third group of seven the movement of winds is weaker. Through such reasoning one gains the impression that the winds that specifically produce the three appearances are strong, medium, or weak.”

[302](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *cha*, 10a–b.

[303](#) Karmic winds refer to subtle winds that course through the channels of the body propelled by one’s previous karma.

[304](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 185b.

[305](#) Pañchen Losang Chögyen, *Collected Works*, vol. *kha*, 46b.

[306](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 340–41): “There are two stages in the generation of mental isolation, namely initial mental isolation and final mental isolation. The first induces the initial realization of mental isolation from the point where one is capable of gathering the four root winds in the indestructible drop through fully releasing the channel knots at the heart due to vajra recitation.”

[307](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes that one requires both internal

and external conditions to induce realization of final mental isolation (CO, 341): “...the internal condition exists because one must meditate on vajra recitation focusing on the pervading wind and the yogas of gradual and instantaneous contraction of the winds. The external condition exists because *Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom Tantra* states that one must join with an action seal in order to induce this realization.”

[308](#) Khedrup Jé, *Collected Works*, Sku 'bum edition, vol. 13, 25b.

[309](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 339): “There is fault if the three appearances are not influenced by the skillful means of the path because natural conceptions not influenced by the path will be generated; from them the view of the mind-body as the self and other afflictions will be generated; from them various karmas will be accumulated; and from them you will be associated with suffering in saṃsāra. There is benefit in generating the three appearances in the nature of the path because from them semblant and actual clear light will arise and the dharma body of clear light will be established, and from its wind the form body will be established.”

[310](#) In general the four joys of the forward order refer to the four descending joys and the four joys of the reverse order refer to the four ascending joys.

[311](#) Paṇchen Losang Chögyen, *Collected Works*, vol. *kha*, 50a.

[312](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 199b.

[313](#) The forward order of the three pristine wisdoms is white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment and their reverse order is black near-attainment, red increase, and white appearance.

[314](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ta*, 49b.

[315](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 347): “Sentient beings possess the basis for establishing the illusory body naturally because it is the extremely subtle, indestructible, life-sustaining wind.”

[316](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 346): “From among the two special attributes of the swift path of highest yoga tantra—namely the indivisible bliss and emptiness on the one hand and

the illusory body on the other—the second is very difficult to comprehend. Therefore when you come to understand the illusory body, you are said to have amassed merit equal to completing the coarse and subtle generation stage. This is stated in *Compendium of Vajra Pristine Wisdom Tantra*.”

[317](#) A practitioner generates understanding of the relative illusory body through instruction, and one suitable to be conferred instruction requires special qualities. Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 344): “...one who receives instruction on the relative illusory body must possess attributes that include (1) having completed the generation stage, (2) having experienced the three isolations of vajra yoga of body, speech, and mind, (3) possessing wisdom adept in the four classes of tantra, and (4) possessing stable resolution in the completion stage of the individual and indivisible two truths.” And also (CO, 345): “Unless you receive points of instruction for directly establishing the illusory body during final mental isolation, you cannot possibly attain the supreme siddhi. If you establish the illusory body, you will attain enlightenment in that life.”

[318](#) *Pham mthing pa* (Ngag gi dbang phyug grags pa, Vāgīśvarakīrti), an eleventh-century Nepalese pandit who died on his return from a pilgrimage to Wutai Shan, and whose remains are preserved at Lojiatun near Lanzhou in Gansu. See Roerich, *Blue Annals*, pp. 227, 381.

[319](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 347–48): “When establishing the illusory body, you must be capable of *separating* the coarse and subtle bodies through causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel through meditation and *withdrawing* the function of the coarse body and mind, because even establishing the bardo of the basis requires separation of the coarse and subtle bodies. There are three ways to separate them: (1) transference of consciousness, (2) insertion of consciousness, and (3) vajra recitation. In the first two, only the divine body that is a mental image is established when the body of wind and mind separates. The latter directly establishes the illusory body from the wind and mind of mental isolation that engages vajra recitation. This is the supreme method.”

[320](#) These three conducts are discussed in the text below, starting on page 289.

[321](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, Sku 'bum edition, vol. 13, 33b.

[322](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, Sku 'bum edition, vol. 13, 34a.

[323](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 274b.

[324](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 275a.

[325](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 214a.

[326](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 57b.

[327](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, vol. *kha*, 134a.

[328](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 346–47): “Sentient being have two bodies: a body of coarse elements and a more subtle, fundamental body. The first is received at birth and discarded at death like salt in water. The fundamental body that is the basis for establishing the illusory body is not received or discarded at that time. It is like wetness in water.”

[329](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, Sku 'bum edition, vol. 13, 34b.

[330](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 347): “The fundamental person must also be posited by taking the collection of mere wind and mind as the basis of imputation, for there are instances during the time of the basis when this mere collection of subtle wind and mind possessing main and secondary limbs [arms, fingers, and so on] arises, such as the special dream body and the body of the intermediate state.”

[331](#) The maturation body is the state between birth and death that experiences the maturation of various types of happiness and suffering due to the past accumulation of virtuous and negative karma.

[332](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 216b.

[333](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 358): “...the mixing of the dharma body, enjoyment body, and emanation body are so named due to their relation to death, bardo, and birth of the basis and path. They are subsumed in three, or nine if individually classified. There are the three mixings of the dharma body: (1) the death of sleep, (2) the death of the basis,

and (3) the death of the clear light of the path; the three mixings of the enjoyment body: (4) the bardo of dreams, (5) the bardo of the basis, and (6) the bardo of the impure and pure illusory body; and the three mixings of the emanation body: (7) the emanation body of waking, (8) the birth emanation body of the basis, and (9) the coarse emanation body of the illusory body. *Illuminating Lamp* states that once you have the capacity to induce the four empties in the waking state, you enter the empties of sleep, and this occurs at the time of the three isolations for a yogi meditating on the instruction of sleep. Therefore, you must practice as a yogi according to the level of your realization, whether high or low.” See also Jikmé Rigpa Lodro (SM, 258–59).

[334](#) *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 1:36.

[335](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 359): “The illusory body must precede the clear light of the fourth level, but this order is not for the purpose of perceptually realizing emptiness or abandoning the afflictive obscurations, because hearer and solitary buddha arhats possess these qualities. Also it is not for the purpose of abandoning the coarse knowledge obscurations, because a practitioner of the tenth ground of the sūtra path in his last existence is capable of doing that. The certainty of the order of the illusory body preceding the clear light is due to the need to enhance the capacity of the clear light to simultaneously abandon both of the two obscurations; the illusory body replaces three countless eons of the sūtra-level practice, and so once the illusory body is established, there is no separate accumulation of merit since everything is combined in equipoise.”

[336](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 260): “The means for generating and manifesting clear light is that one who has attained the illusory body cultivates both instantaneous and serial yogas and meditates on the three levels of being that correspond to body, speech, and mind, both in equipoise and post-equipoise. Finally, through viewing the guru as excelling the buddha, engaging in actions that delight him over a long period, and pleasing him through making external, internal,

and secret offerings, the candidate approaches the attainment of actual clear light. The sequence is: at midnight the candidate directly receives the third empowerment of pristine wisdom; at dawn he or she praises and makes requests to the guru, who bestows instruction, whereby the fourth level of actual clear light manifests and the extremely subtle meaning of reality is perceptually comprehended with innate bliss.”

[337](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ta*, 52a.

[338](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 361): “When clear light manifests in accordance with your guru’s instruction, external enlightenment is posited as the unique state of dawn that transcends the three states of external moon, sun, and darkness, which are appearing images of the three empties.”

Also Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 261): “*External enlightenment* refers to the unique manifestation of clear light in the special time of dawn free of the faults of the moon, sun, and darkness, which pollute the external sky.”

[339](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 361–62): “*Internal enlightenment* is the unique state—manifesting during transcendence of the three states of appearance, increase, and near-attainment—that takes emptiness as its ascertained image.” Also Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 261): “*Internal enlightenment* refers to the unique manifestation of clear light at the time of transcending the paths of whiteness, redness, and blackness of appearance, increase, and near-attainment, which are faults polluting inner yoga.”

[340](#) Könchok Tsültrim gives a slightly different list (CO, 363): “At that time the realizational mind and its associated winds stop and transform into perception, innate bliss perceptually comprehends emptiness, one obtains the path of seeing and the first ground of highest yoga tantra, and the uninterrupted path acting as the direct antidote of imputed and innate grasping at true existence and its seeds arises ...”

[341](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 364): “Subject clear light has two types: the general meaning of clear light and the hidden meaning of clear light. The first has three types, namely (1) comprehension of emptiness by the coarse pristine wisdom

of sūtra, (2) comprehension of emptiness by the bliss meditating on deity yoga of the three lower tantras, and (3) comprehension of emptiness by the bliss of melting in the generation stage; together these constitute the shared general meaning of clear light.”

[342](#) Könchok Tsültrim presents four types of hidden meaning of clear light (CO, 364): “...the clear light of mental isolation, the clear light of vajra recitation, the clear light of physical isolation, and the semblant clear light establishing the level of the illusory body.”

[343](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ca*, 38a.

[344](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 366): “The actual clear light of the fourth level must arise at the end of the tenth sūtra ground because conception will not be completely stopped without dissolving all karmic winds without exception, and the three paths of the first level, the three lower tantras, and the Perfection Vehicle cannot abandon subtle dualistic appearance of the three appearances... Until the existence of mistaken dualistic appearance during the three appearances, their imprints, and subtle knowledge obscurations are purified, conception will not be completely stopped. That follows because to completely stop them one must obtain final learner actual clear light in dependence on both an external seal and internal skillful vitality exertion, and these do not exist on paths other than highest yoga tantra. Therefore, when a practitioner in his last existence reaches the tenth ground of the sūtra path, he must enter the tantric path from the fourth-level clear light because abandoning subtle knowledge obscurations and establishing a pure body from uncontaminated winds relies on manifesting actual clear light.”

[345](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 265): “As Śākyamuni sat under the bodhi tree, the buddhas bestowed the third empowerment of pristine wisdom at midnight, and then he generated the actual clear light. This empowerment acted as the substitute for conduct.”

[346](#) Midnight (*mtshan phyed*) or “half the night” indicates a midpoint in the period of darkness that potentially extends

from midnight to 1 A.M.

[347](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 247a.

[348](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, vol. *cha*, 22a.

[349](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 258a.

[350](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *cha*, 6b.

[351](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 369–70): “As the yogi begins to rise from actual clear light that is the direct antidote to the afflictive obscurations, he attains near-attainment of the reverse order. Simultaneously he rises in the pure illusory body that is like a vajra body generated (1) by the winds acting as the mount of clear light like five rays of light acting as its substantial cause and (2) by that mind acting as its cooperative condition. This is the initial attainment of the indivisible union of the two truths.”

[352](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 370): “It is called the *union of abandonment* since it is the union of both the abandonment that abandons afflictive obscurations and the pure illusory body.”

[353](#) Könchok Tsültrim mentions that when the indivisible union of the two truths is obtained (CO, 370): “...many special qualities are obtained simultaneously. (1) One obtains the liberated path that has abandoned afflictive obscurations. (2) The person possessing that mental continuum becomes an arhat. (3) One obtains the actual vajra body that continues uninterruptedly as long as saṃsāra remains. (4) One equals the quality of abandonment of a being on the eighth ground. (5) One comes to possess arrays of pure fields and bodies pervading the three times in the breadth of a single hair.” Also Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes that when one initially obtains the body of union (SM, 266–67) “...simultaneously at that time (1) one obtains near-attainment of the reverse order from the actual clear light, (2) one stops actual clear light, (3) one obtains the union of abandonment that fully abandons afflictive obscurations, (4) one obtains the union of a learner, (5) the person possessing the liberated path that has abandoned the afflictive obscurations in his mental continuum becomes an arhat, (6) one transfers to the second ground, (7) one attains

the Mahāyāna path of meditation, and (8) one obtains the actual vajra body that continues uninterruptedly as long as saṃsāra remains.”

[354](#) See page 270.

[355](#) Khedrup Jé, Collected Works, Sku 'bum edition, vol. 13, 47b.

[356](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 273b.

[357](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 375): “...the method of positing abandonment and realization as the two branches of union is that the first is subsequent recollection and the latter is the branch of concentration. The first is the subsequent recollection of appearance, increase, and near-attainment in the mental continuum, and the second is pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness.”

[358](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 370): “When a yogi who has attained the union of such abandonment manifests actual clear light due to the winds entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central channel for the purpose of comprehending reality, he subsequently combines the illusory body and clear light as one in order to attain the initial union of realization that is the main element of learner’s union.” Also Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 267): “The initial union of realization is attained when a yogi who has attained the union of abandonment first rises in post-equipoise after having serially experienced the signs of the mirage and so on from near-attainment of the reverse order and then reenters actual clear light in single-pointed equipoise on emptiness. That yogi obtains the union of realization that is the main union of the pure form of the illusory body with the pure mind of actual clear light; it is the single nature of body and mind.”

[359](#) See also Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, *Paths and Grounds of Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna*, pp. 91–92, for the full list of the different types of union.

[360](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 277–78): “The reason why the consummation of the coarse and subtle generation stage that matures the mental continuum is applied to the newly attained eighth ground is because a practitioner who has

consummated the coarse and subtle generation stage and sees the environment and its inhabitants as the play of purity attains the special ability to establish the field in which he will attain enlightenment. This is similar to the way that a practitioner of the Perfection Vehicle at the eighth ground prepares such of a pure field. The reason why physical and verbal isolation are applied as dharmas compatible with the ninth ground is because the attainment of control over the root winds of speech in the context of verbal isolation is similar to the attainment of individual, perfect knowledge of pure speech teaching Dharma on the ninth ground of the Perfection Vehicle. The reason why mental isolation and the illusory body are applied as dharmas compatible with the first part of the tenth ground is because the attainment of the body of the deity from very subtle wind and mind and the attainment of empowerment (directly) from the buddhas in the context of mental isolation and the illusory body are similar to the capacity of one on the tenth ground of the Perfection Vehicle to purify the physical latencies and obtain the empowerment of great light from the buddhas. The reason why the clear light and the learner's union are applied to the middle and end part of the tenth ground is due to the supreme potency of the clear light of the fourth level to abandon the knowledge obscurations and to the fact that one does not need to train newly in other paths in the context of the learner's union. This is similar to the heightened capacity of one at the limit of the tenth ground of the Perfection Vehicle, who has completed the accumulations, to abandon knowledge obscurations."

[361](#) See Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, *Paths and Grounds of Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna*, pp. 107–24, for more information.

[362](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 267b.

[363](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 278): "The period of the highest yoga tantra path of accumulation is posited as the period from generating some initial experience of training in the generation stage after obtaining empowerment and training in the common paths up to, but not including, the

capacity to directly induce bliss and emptiness through dissolving winds in the central channel through meditation.”

[364](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 278): “The range of the path of seeing of this system is from obtaining actual clear light up to, but not including, obtaining the union of realization as the main union. It is necessarily called the *joyous first ground*.”

[365](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 279): “The path of no-more learning of this system is the ground of Vajradhara’s non-learner union uniting both pure body and mind; it is equivalent to the completely radiant ground that is the eleventh ground of the Perfection Vehicle.” See also [table 4](#).

[366](#) Passage not found.

[367](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 360–61): “In general in the system of the Mahāyāna the wisdom realizing emptiness is enhanced by the vastness of the method engaged by an individual. In particular one fully completes both accumulations when the object possessor of great innate bliss is utilized because the clear light of that state constitutes the accumulation of pristine wisdom and the wind that is one in nature with it constitutes the accumulation of merit. Further proofs exist because when the illusory body enters clear light, the subtle wind associated with it becomes uncontaminated wind and acts as the substantial cause of the form body, the mind associated with it becomes uncontaminated mind and the substantial cause of the dharma body, and by precisely cultivating that path one quickly abandons subtle knowledge obscurations...Through the illusory being cultivating that equipoise over a long period, no separate motivation is required to accumulate merit in post-equipoise, but those on the eighth ground of the sūtra path require such motivation.”

[368](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 384–85): “There are two systems—(1) serial abandonment, where nine levels of great, medium, and small pristine wisdom of indivisible bliss and emptiness of the path of meditation that has attained the learner’s union serially abandon nine rounds of the knowledge obscurations, and (2) simultaneous abandonment—because Gyütö College asserts nine rounds of antidotes to objects to be

abandoned... and Gyümé College asserts that final learner clear light abandons them all simultaneously.”

[369](#) The *learner's ground* is any type of realization acting as the supportive ground of resultant positive qualities that exists in the mental continuum of one who has entered the path but has not yet completed the final path.

[370](#) He is also known as Dawa Sangpo (Zla ba bzang po) and regarded as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi.

[371](#) The *Abbreviated Tantra* is not yet identified.

[372](#) The Thirteenth Dalai Lama states that mantra yoga is body and speech isolations combined, commitment yoga is mind isolation, form yoga is the impure and pure phases of the illusory body, and wisdom yoga is semblant and actual clear light. “A Brief Guide to the Buddhist Tantras,” in Glenn Mullin, trans. and ed., *The Dalai Lamas on Tantra* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2006), p. 54.

[373](#) These days, the six are mostly given as caṇḍālī (*gtum mo*), illusory body, dream yoga, clear light, intermediate state (*bar do*), and transference of consciousness. Insertion of consciousness into another body (*grong 'jug*) is included in transference of consciousness (*'pho ba*).

[374](#) Tibetans generally pronounce his name as Birwapa (Bir ba pa). He is the siddha who inspired the Sakya lineage.

[375](#) This heading was first introduced on page 99.

[376](#) The enumeration is from Āryadeva's *Lamp of the Compendium of Practices*, P2668, vol. *gi*, 311a7-b1.

[377](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 268–69): “Though it is impossible that afflictions become the path, yogis have the special capacity to bring afflictions into the path. That follows because, just as they bring both attachment and hatred into the path, delusion also is designated as something they bring into the path, due to being concordant with the other afflictions. There is no explicit allowance for delusion in the way both attachment and hatred are permitted, but since both attachment and hatred are concordant with afflictive delusion we infer that permission for delusion follows on from permission for attachment and hatred.”

[378](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 268): “You need to engage in the three types of conduct, because to generate the pristine wisdom of great bliss of the mantric path, you must use internal and external desire objects to increase bodhicitta and, by increasing bodhicitta, induce the bliss of melting.”

[379](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 377): “How does pristine wisdom of bliss and emptiness generated from attachment abandon attachment? It does not abandon attachment by applying a mode of apprehension that directly excludes the object of attachment, like meditation on ugliness. Instead, by exhausting grasping at true existence, which is the cause of attachment and hatred, attachment that is its result is exhausted. It is like a worm born in wood that eats the wood.”

[380](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 283a.

[381](#) Literally, “the lord of reasoning” (*rigs pa’i dbang phyug*).

[382](#) Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika*, p. 110a.

[383](#) Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika*, p. 110b.

[384](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ja*, 283b.

[385](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 271): “The difference between extensive, medium, and abbreviated conduct is because the action consort is classified by enumerating (1) all deities of the maṇḍala, (2) five deities, or (3) one.”

[386](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 271): “The method of practicing conduct with elaboration is to visualize, in a place free of commotion, a three-story mansion with a kitchen on the ground floor, musical instruments on the middle floor, and a maṇḍala and seats of deities drawn with colored water on the upper floor. One practices gestures and their responses to prevent distraction from one’s coursing in bliss and emptiness, whether in equipoise and post-equipoise, with harmonious companions and action seals while wearing masks, costumes, and so on.” Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 379): “Conduct with elaboration is the elaborate practice of gestures and responses to gestures with action seals while wearing masks, costumes, and so on.”

[387](#) The reference to Śāntideva here is a well-known story about Śāntideva’s monastic colleagues believing he was a poor

practitioner because all he appeared to do was eat, defecate, and sleep. Könchok Tsültrim describes the practice in more detail (CO, 353): “The reason why a yogi meditating on the clear light of sleep remains in deep sleep for a long period is because, during sleep, the twenty-five coarse phenomena along with appearance and increase dissolve in stages and contract into the great empty, or near-attainment. Then, after gathering into the heart, the practitioner enters deep sleep for a long period.”

[388](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 377–78): “Why does the *Root Tantra* state that the generation-stage practitioner is with elaboration, the illusory body practitioner is without elaboration, and the practitioner of union is completely free of elaboration? This is stated from the perspective of the extent of elaboration of grasping at true existence.”

[389](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 380): “The eight great siddhis according to *That Requested by the Four Devis* are (1–2) the siddhis of the pill and eye-medicine, (3–4) the siddhis below the earth and the sword, (5–6) the siddhis of flying in the sky and invisibility, and (7–8) the siddhis of deathlessness and destroying illness.”

[390](#) This event was commemorated by the great Prayer Festival in Lhasa inaugurated by Tsongkhapa. Every day during the Prayer Festival, the disciplinarian announces the events that are commemorated that day to remind the participants of the sequence of miracles that took place. Accounts of miracles that were performed may be found in the writings of Paṇchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen and in such works as the *Sūtra of the Wise and Foolish*.

[391](#) The five types are utpala-like, white lotus-like, lotus-like, sandalwood-like, and jewel-like.

[392](#) The *Condensed Kālacakra Tantra* (*Laghutantra*) is popularly called the *Kālacakra Tantra*, but to avoid confusion, it is here referred to as the *Condensed Tantra*.

[393](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states that the seven empowerments emulating childhood (SM, 313): “...empower one to meditate on the generation stage and to establish the four types of activities

and the common siddhis, such as the eight great siddhis and so forth.”

[394](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 313): “The four supreme empowerments empower one to meditate on the four practices [to generate the four vajras] of the completion stage through the four empowerments of the vase, secret, pristine wisdom, and fourth empowerment of the higher and highest levels, through differentiating one or nine knowledge consorts, and planting the seeds for obtaining the four vajras of body, speech, mind, and pristine wisdom.”

[395](#) The body-face (*sku'i zhal*), speech-face (*gsung gi zhal*), mind-face (*thugs kyi zhal*), and pristine wisdom face (*ye shes kyi zhal*) of the principal deity refer to the four countenances of the deity that face the four cardinal directions—north, south, east, and west, respectively.

[396](#) Kālacakra posits three maṇḍalas—the body maṇḍala, the speech maṇḍala, and the mind maṇḍala, which also contains the wheel of great bliss. They correlate with the external universe, the celestial mansion, and the practitioner’s body. See Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 285–89.

[397](#) See [table 5](#).

[398](#) Kirti Losang Trinlé states (*Garland of Nectar Drops*, 266): “The eye medicine represents pristine wisdom comprehending emptiness, the eyes being opened, and higher perception of the divine eye [clairvoyance] being established. The mirror represents emptiness being comprehended by means of a generic image [i.e., conceptually]. The bow and arrow represents emptiness being comprehended perceptually [without a generic image].” Also see Gyatso, *Kālachakra Tantra: Rite of Initiation* (Boston: Wisdom, 1989), pp. 339–42.

[399](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 275b.

[400](#) See Tenzin Gyatso, *Kālachakra Tantra: Rite of Initiation*, pp. 360–63, 429.

[401](#) Translated into English by Gareth Sparham in Tsongkhapa, *Tantric Ethics* (Boston: Wisdom, 2005).

[402](#) The four factors (*las kyi yan lag bzhi*) are the basis (*gzhi*),

motivation (*kun slong*), preparation (*sbyor ba*), and completion (*mthar thug*).

[403](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 432): “In [Kālacakra] there is no separate practice for bringing the intermediate state (*bardo*) into the path that generates the enjoyment body, but the intermediate state is included within the stages of the basis to be purified: *bardo*, birth, and death, because the yoga purifying birth and death purifies the ordinary *bardo*. That follows because the systems teaching enlightenment in the *bardo* require that the substantial cause of the form body exists in an unbroken stream, but in [Kālacakra] the body of empty form exists in meditative equipoise prior to obtaining the stage of subsequent recollection, and that stream is broken in post-equipoise. Also, once you have obtained subsequent recollection, you will definitely attain enlightenment in that life, so it is meaningless to proceed to the *bardo*.”

[404](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 316): “You need to suppress the appearance and conception that the environment and its inhabitants are ordinary because you must establish the clear appearance of the nondual profound state as the supported and supporting maṇḍala.” Könchok Tsültrim states that by meditating in this way on the generation stage (CO, 430–31): “...(1) you purify the bases to be purified, including the impure environment and its inhabitants, the aggregates, realms, bases, and so forth, (2) you mature the root of virtue of the six branches of practice of the completion stage, (3) you suppress ordinary appearance and conception, which are objects to be abandoned, and (4) you establish clear appearance and pride of the nondual clear and profound state. This is the essence of the first stage.”

[405](#) Losel Gyatso also raises this issue in search of clarification when he states (*Festival of Amusement*, 387): “How can the statement that the generation stage that matures the mind for the completion stage must have at least five deities and our statement, that the generation stage of solitary Yamāntaka that matures the mind for the completion stage is complete in all points, not be contradictory?”

[406](#) See [table 6](#).

[407](#) Channel petals (*rtsa 'dab*) refer to smaller channels that separate from the central channel at six sites along the central channel—the crown, forehead, throat, heart, navel, and secret place—like spokes on a wheel.

[408](#) See [table 7](#).

[409](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 437): “When the winds move, they course in all the root abodes of the body, pervading the body from the crown to the soles of the feet, like water coursing in irrigation channels.”

[410](#) The flow of winds through the petals of the four cakras and the movement of winds through the nostrils is described in Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 185–93.

[411](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 323): “Prolonged periods of deep sleep impair memory.”

[412](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö observes (SM, 324): “Through purifying the mistaken appearance arising as various objects in relation to the drop of the waking state, mere appearance arises as the form body of a buddha appearing as various empty forms. Through purifying various types of mistaken speech arising in relation to the drop of dreaming, mere expression arises as the enjoyment body of a buddha appearing as indestructible speech. Through purifying the obscuration of unclear mind in relation to the drop of deep sleep, mere nonconceptual mind arises as the nonconceptual dharma body that is the mind of nonconceptual, uncontaminated pristine wisdom. Through abandoning the bliss of ordinary emission in relation to the drop of the fourth, then mere bliss arises as supreme pristine wisdom, which is great immutable bliss.”

[413](#) See [table 8](#).

[414](#) The four obscurations are the appearance of impure objects generated when awake, mistaken speech generated when dreaming, the lack of clarity generated in dreamless sleep, and the emission of semen generated during intercourse.

[415](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 441): “Since these drops are material, how can they be called instances of obscurations?”

There is no error, since each contains extremely subtle wind and mind. Obscurations impregnate or exist latently in the material drop, which as bases are imprinted with the obscurations accumulated from beginningless time. Afflictive and knowledge obscurations grow out of them.”

[416](#) Nonconcordant composites (*ldan min 'du byed*) refers to impermanent entities that are neither form nor awareness or, more specifically, not concordant with awareness.

[417](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 324): “What do the six purifying branches of the completion stage purify? Individual withdrawal, absorption, and one part of subsequent recollection purify waking obscurations. Vitality exertion and retention purify dream obscurations. Part of subsequent recollection and concentration purify obscurations of deep sleep and those related to drops of the fourth.” Further, the same text states (SM, 324–25): “What result is established through purifying those obscurations? The four bodies of emanation, enjoyment, dharma, and pristine wisdom as well as the vajras of exalted body, speech, mind, and pristine wisdom are established. The general system of highest yoga tantra eliminates the capacity of the extremely subtle wind and mind at the time of the basis to generate the impure environment and its inhabitants and transforms them into the dharma and form bodies through a path marked by skillful means. The special feature of this system is to purify the impure states generated by the four drops through a cause that brings about the four vajras.”

[418](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 435–36): “Each of the six practices of the completion stage focuses on a specific location when penetrating special centers. In the context of the two branches of individual withdrawal and absorption, you focus on the crown cakras. In the context of the two branches of vitality exertion and subsequent recollection, you focus on the navel cakras. In the context of the branch of retention, you focus on all six cakras. In the context of the branch of concentration, there is penetration in the upper and lower openings of the central channel.”

[419](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 394b.

[420](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ga*, 395b.

[421](#) Ibid.

[422](#) Tsongkhapa, Collected Works, vol. *ja*, 222a.

[423](#) Ibid.

[424](#) That is, the action seal (an external consort), the pristine wisdom seal (a visualized consort), or the great seal (ultimate reality).

[425](#) “Bodhisattva Corpus” (*byang chub sems dpa’i skor*) refers to three seminal tantric commentaries: (1) *Vimalaprabhā* by Kalkī Puṇḍarīka, (2) *Hevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā* by Vajragarbha, and (3) *Lakṣābhīdhānāduddhṛtalaghutantrapīṇḍārthavivarāṇa* by Vajrapāṇi. See John Newman, *The Wheel of Time: A Brief History* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1991).

[426](#) *Khrid yig*. This work has not been identified.

[427](#) Kōnchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 451): “With eyes half closed (upper lids lowered and lower lids raised) and directed upward, then the eyes, mind, and wind engage in single-pointed equipoise and without distraction on the space at the upper opening of the central channel between the eyebrows. Through gazing in this way, first the winds of the eyes become inactive and withdraw inwardly, then the winds of the other sense faculties also become inactive. When the senses sever their connection with their objects, various signs appear that are neither outside the body nor within the winds of the central channel.. .”

[428](#) See also the sections on the actual placement of the mind, assertions of previous Tibetan masters, the assertion of Tsongkhapa, and the proof of its validity in Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 421–30.

[429](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 332): “You have to meditate on day yoga in order to enhance night yoga because except for those two possessing a mere difference in location, the focal object, aspect, and so on are the same.” Khedrup Norsang Gyatso states: “Previous lamas have said that a year consists of the sun’s northward and southward passages, a month consist of two periods of waxing and waning, and a day

consists of daytime and nighttime, and that those are reasons for the division into day and night yogas. Our own position is that both day and night yogas are necessary to ensure that whenever the meditation is performed, in daytime or in darkness, all desired signs are made manifest. In nighttime meditation the empty-form signs are easier to manifest and to ascertain than in daytime meditation. Therefore it is taught that the night yoga is performed first and followed by the day yoga. The reason for the difference in the degree of difficulty in manifesting the signs is explained as follows. When the eyes are positioned and the meditation object is held during the day, the winds of the eyes are not rigid, and it is not possible to banish an ever-present grayish appearance. This makes it difficult for empty forms to arise. In darkness this grayish appearance is not there, and this makes it easier for empty forms to appear.” *Ornament of Stainless Light*, p. 410.

[430](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 451–52): “When the yoga of individual withdrawal gathers the vitality wind (*prāṇa*) at the upper opening of the central channel, then the flow and strength of the winds through the nostrils equalizes—signifying entry—and the movement of winds through the nostrils stops—signifying abiding. The sign of dissolution arises through connecting the sign and its basis. Therefore an internal sign similar to smoke arises when the turtle wind dissolves, the sign of mirage arises when the lizard wind dissolves, the sign of fireflies arises when the *devadatta* wind dissolves, the sign of a butter lamp arises when the *dhanamjaya* wind dissolves, the sign of a large butter lamp arises when the equally abiding wind dissolves, the sign of moonlight arises when the ascending wind dissolves, the sign of sunlight arises when the pervading wind dissolves, the sign of the eclipse arises when the *nāga* wind dissolves, and the sign of the white light of lightning arises when the upper life-sustaining wind dissolves. When the lower downward-voiding wind dissolves, the sign of a blue drop the size of a mustard seed appears internally, and then inside that drop appears the body of empty form of Vajrasattva with consort, the width of a mere hair, radiating

light and possessing the five certainties.”

[431](#) See [table 9](#).

[432](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 452): “This is not the actual enjoyment body, because ordinary beings cannot directly see [the actual enjoyment body].”

[433](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 335–36): “By meditating [on individual withdrawal] in that location, in that position, with that focal object and aspect, various empty forms arise, lacking [the five] certainties, either inside or outside the drop of empty form. These transform into the bodies of Kālacakra and consort and dissolve one by one until they finally condense into one central body of empty form. The cultivation of [divine] pride and clear appearance with regard to that body is the actual practice of absorption. The measure of perfecting the yoga of absorption is being able to develop pride, thinking, ‘I am this body of empty form,’ and you attain the signs of seeing and touching.” See also Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 411–60.

[434](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 338): “The (focal) location, gaze, and the binding of the body are as before. You establish pride in the state of condensed empty form and your wind and mind being indivisible. Then by means of the deities’ bodies in the aspect of the mantra syllables and the winds in the aspect of the garland string, you train in vajra recitation by listening to the emergence of the tone *om* as the winds enter the central channel through the forehead, the tone *hūṃ* as the winds abide, and the tone *āḥ* as the winds again arise at the forehead.” See Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 438–94.

[435](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 456): “In vitality exertion there are two practices: vajra recitation, which meditates through focusing on the winds in the central channel without actually having stopped the movement of winds in the right and left channels, and vase breathing, which meditates once the movement of winds in the central channel has been stopped.”

[436](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 339): “Vitality exertion in this system is equivalent to verbal isolation in

Guhyasamāja...which occurs during the peak stage of the path of preparation.”

[437](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö notes (SM, 339–40): “The measure of attaining stability in the yoga of retention is when you can directly establish the bodies of Kālacakra and consort in the drop in the center of the navel channel wheel, which you do through cultivating the union of bliss and emptiness from the four ascending and descending joys and from the descent of bodhicitta through igniting caṇḍālī at the navel.” See also Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 513–22.

[438](#) Jikmé Rikpai Lodrö states (SM, 342): “The method of meditating on subsequent recollection is to meditate as before on the six cakras and specifically on the indivisibility of wind-mind, bodhicitta, and empty forms at the center of the navel cakra. When you arise from that, you arise in a body of the male and female deities with the eight śaktis. Then, in single-pointed equipoise, you induce the ten signs, such as smoke, until finally the male and female deities and the eight śaktis directly arise in the center of the black outline. The signs of completing that process are that the fire of caṇḍālī pervades your body internally and externally, immeasurable light of five different colors radiates from your pores, and you unite with the seal of empty form equal to the particles of Mount Meru.” See Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 523–52.

[439](#) Könchok Tsültrim notes (CO, 466): “It is called *concentration* since it is the yoga of single-pointed equipoise on the supreme, immutable bliss of the union of the empty forms of the male and female deities established during subsequent recollection.” See Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, pp. 553–84.

[440](#) Könchok Tsültrim observes (CO, 468): “The method of dividing the grounds is that the first is the ground of Resolute Conduct, then there are nine ārya learner grounds, then the mere tenth ground, and then the special tenth ground, making twelve.”

[441](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 468): “The first of the twelve grounds is the ground of Resolute Conduct, which is completed when half the secret cakra has been filled with white bodhicitta and you progress through five stages from Patience to Supreme Dharma. Since this is a ground of ordinary beings, karmic winds and their seeds are not abandoned.”

[442](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 469): “You should understand that the first moment of [the branch of] concentration, which fills the secret cakra half full, is the path of preparation, and the last moment is the path of seeing.”

[443](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 469–70): “Then urged by the four tathāgatīs—Locanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍaravāsini, and Tārā—the internal empty forms of the male and female deities enter union in the center of the navel, heart, throat, and forehead cakras, respectively. This causes 1,800 drops of white and red substances to accumulate upward and downward.”

[444](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 44a.

[445](#) Könchok Tsültrim states (CO, 470–71): “When red substance completely fills the secret cakra and white substance completely fills the crown cakra, you fully obtain 21,600 moments of immutable bliss. When the crown is completely filled, you (1) attain 21,600 instances of the single essence of body and mind combining both pristine wisdom perceptually realizing emptiness and the empty form of Kālacakra, (2) you attain 21,600 instances of freedom from all objects of abandonment and their imprints, and (3) you attain 21,600 qualities relying on that abandonment. Through stopping 21,600 winds of the time of the basis by stopping 21,600 karmic winds, the yogi severs the relationship between both the body of empty form and the old aggregates. Until the crown cakra has been completely filled with semen, semen and bliss are related to each other as the support and that supported. But when filled that relationship ceases. When immutable bliss is accomplished from holding semen without release, all material constituents are exhausted. When you obtain the twelfth path of the special tenth ground, you exhaust all material dharmas, and the old aggregates disappear just as a

rainbow vanishes.”

[446](#) Gendün Gyatso, *Commentary to Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī*, p. 14.

[447](#) See pages 298–92.

[448](#) Gendün Gyatso, *Commentary to Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī*, pp. 15–16. Ngawang Palden has paraphrased and rearranged the words of Gendün Gyatso in order to present his argument.

[449](#) Tsongkhapa, *Collected Works*, vol. *ga*, 393b.

[450](#) The seven attributes of embrace (*kha sbyor yan lag bdun*) are (1) the attribute of being the complete enjoyment body, (2) the attribute of embrace, (3) the attribute of being great bliss, (4) the attribute of being without essence, (5) the attribute of being completely filled with compassion, (6) the attribute of being an unbroken stream, (7) the attribute of not ceasing.

Glossary

absorption (*bsam gtan, dhyāna*). In general this refers to four levels of meditative concentration that correspond to the four levels of the form realm. In Kālacakra it also refers to the second of the six branches of the completion stage: the yoga of absorption that stabilizes the appearance of the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā so that their appearance does not change.

absorption maṇḍala (*bsam gtan gyi dkyil 'khor*). An internal maṇḍala established by the meditation of the master and student in order to confer empowerment.

absorption with recitation (*bzlas brjod dang bcas pa'i bsam gtan*). A yoga that combines meditation on the deity with recitation of the deity's mantra.

absorption not reliant on recitation (*bzlas brjod la ma ltos pa'i bsam gtan*). A yoga that meditates on the deity without mantra recitation. It has three types: (1) absorption on fire, (2) absorption on sound, and (3) absorption that bestows freedom at the limit of sound.

action seal (*las rgya*). External physical consort.

action tantra (*bya rgyud*). The first of the four classes of tantra that was proclaimed for disciples merely capable of bringing the bliss of observing a visualized deity into the path. Entry to this tantra requires just two vase empowerments, namely the water and crown empowerments.

approximation (*bsnyen pa*). Meditation that establishes the proximity of yourself and the deity by functioning to draw your mind as close as possible to the enlightened mind of the deity.

bell empowerment (*dril bu'i dbang*). A type of vase empowerment conferred in performance, yoga, and highest yoga tantra.

black near-attainment (*nyer thob nag lam pa*). A subtle mind that experiences a vision of darkness. Black near-attainment naturally manifests at the third stage of the dissolution of

subtle mind at death, or it may be induced through meditation on the tantric path. Black near-attainment of the forward order is followed by clear light. Black near-attainment of the reverse order is preceded by clear light.

body maṇḍala (*lus kyi dkyil 'khor*). An internal maṇḍala employed exclusively in highest yoga tantra.

body of empty form (*stong pa'i gzugs*). In Kālacakra the body of empty form or the vajra body refers to the bodies of the principal deity and consort that appear to the mind realizing emptiness. Such bodies are established by individual withdrawal and stabilized by absorption.

cakra (*'khor lo*). Subtle form possessing the shape of a rimless wheel with spokes extending outward like stems at points along the central channel where it is constricted by the right and left channels. There are six main cakras, namely (1) the crown cakra, (2) the throat cakra, (3) the heart cakra, and (4) the navel cakra, plus (5) the forehead cakra, and (6) the secret place.

calm abiding (*zhi gnas, śamatha*). Continuous single-pointed concentration that is generally obtained during yoga with signs in the three lower tantras and the generation stage in highest yoga tantra. Calm abiding is established through serially progressing through the nine stages of mental placement.

caṇḍālī (*gtum mo*). The fire of caṇḍālī is a completion-stage practice that incinerates impure constituents through igniting the blazing heat of bliss of a short *a* syllable at the navel cakra for the purpose of quickly generating innate pristine wisdom. Sometimes rendered as “inner heat,” it is well known as the first of the six Dharmas of Nāropa.

channels (*rtsa, nāḍī*). In the three tantric categories of channels, winds, and drops, the channels are the intricate network of passageways that comprise the body's subtle physiology. The channels pervade the body like nerves; they contain winds and drops. In Guhyasamāja there are three main channels: the central channel (*rtsa dbu ma, avadhūtī*), the right channel (*rtsa ro ma, rasanā*), and the left channel (*rtsa rkyang ma, lalanā*). In Kālacakra the three main channels are divided

in six segments: the central channel above the navel is called the *eclipse channel* (*dbu ma'm sgra can gyir rtsa, rāhu*), while the central channel below the navel is called the *channel of the fire at the end of the eon* (*dus me, kālāgni*). The left channel above the navel is called the *moon channel* (*zla ba, candra*) and moves to the right side below the navel where it is called the *sheep channel* (*lug, meṣa*). The right channel above the navel is called the *sun channel* (*nyi ma, surya*) and moves to the left side below the navel, where it is called the *orange channel* (*dmar ser can ma, piṅgalā*).

channel knots (*rtsa mdud*). Knots or constrictions that prevent the flow of subtle winds in the channels.

clear appearance (*gsal snang*). The clear appearance of divine identity and its attributes to mental awareness.

clear light (*'od gsal*). In general it refers to an extremely subtle mind that experiences a vision of clear light. Clear light naturally manifests with the dissolution of black near-attainment of the forward order at the time of death, where it is called the clear light of death. It may also be induced through meditation on the tantric path. For instance in Guhyasamāja it is the fourth of the five levels or fifth of the six levels of the completion stage, where it refers to subtle blissful awareness that comprehends emptiness. It has two types, namely subject clear light and object clear light; or three types: (1) semblant clear light, (2) actual clear light, and (3) clear light of the final continuum.

concentration (*ting nge 'dzin, samādhi*). In sūtra teachings, it is one of the five object-ascertaining mental factors that functions to engage its object single-pointedly. In Kālacakra, it is the sixth of the six branches of the completion stage. The yoga of concentration stabilizes the pristine wisdom of great bliss realizing emptiness once it has arisen in the mind.

colored-sand maṇḍala (*rdul tshon gyi dkyil 'khor*). An external maṇḍala made of colored particles where empowerment is conferred. It is utilized in all four classes of tantra.

commitment being (*dam tshig pa, samayasattva*). A visualized

deity that may appear in front of oneself. A deity into which wisdom beings dissolve.

completion stage (*rdzogs rim*). The stage or part of highest yoga tantra following the generation stage where one engages in meditation to penetrate vital points of the body that is naturally complete in channels, winds, drops, and so on.

completion stage of Guhyasamāja in five levels (*'dus pa'i rim lnga*). The five levels are: (1) vajra recitation that includes physical and verbal isolation, (2) observing the mind that includes mental isolation, (3) the illusory body that includes the impure and the pure illusory bodies, (4) clear light that includes semblant clear light, actual clear light, and clear light of the final continuum, and (5) union that includes learner and non-learner union. The completion stage may also be classified in six levels, namely (1) physical isolation, (2) verbal isolation, (3) mental isolation, (4) illusory body, (5) clear light, and (6) union.

completion stage of Kālacakra in six branches (*dus 'khor gyi sbyor ba yan lag drug*). The six branches or yogas of the completion stage of Kālacakra tantra are: (1) Individual withdrawal and (2) absorption that establish the body of the conqueror through respectively establishing empty form not previously established and stabilizing that which has been established; (3) vitality exertion and (4) retention that establish the speech of the conqueror by obtaining control over the winds at the root of speech; and (5) subsequent recollection and (6) concentration that establish the mind of the conqueror by respectively being the proximate cause of immutable bliss and the nature of immutable bliss.

conduct (*spyod pa, seva*). Here *conduct* refers to the specific way one engages in spiritual practice. There are three types of conduct: (1) conduct with elaboration, (2) conduct without elaboration, and (3) conduct completely free of elaboration.

crown empowerment (*cod pan gyi dbang*). A type of vase empowerment conferred in all four classes of tantra where empowerment is bestowed after invoking the buddhas of the five families, who bless their respective emblem on their

segment of the crown.

definitive deity (*nges don gyi lha*). Pristine wisdom realizing emptiness.

deity (*yi dam*). Deities with the status of buddhas or bodhisattvas who are explicitly cultivated in tantra.

dharma (*chos*). With a capital *D*, refers to the liberating teachings of the Buddha. With a lowercase *d*, refers to any existent entity.

dharma body (*chos sku*). A body of the buddha manifesting for the purpose of oneself. It has two types—the nature body and the pristine wisdom dharma body.

divine pride (*lha'i nga rgyal*). Non-afflictive pride that identifies oneself as a deity and is cultivated as the antidote to holding things to be ordinary.

drops (*thig le, bindu*). In the three tantric categories of channels, winds, and drops, drops are the essence or seeds of bliss that abide as various types of limpid residue within the channels. In general there are two types: white drops and red drops.

eighty natural conceptions (*rang bzhin rtog pa brgyas bcu*). Thirty-three natural conceptions are generated when the winds supporting preconception subside. Forty natural conceptions are generated when the winds supporting white appearance subside. Seven natural conceptions are generated when the winds supporting red increase subside.

empowerment (*dbang*). That which fully matures the mental continuum through planting special seeds of the four resultant bodies. There are four main empowerments: (1) vase, (2) secret, (3) pristine wisdom, and (4) word.

empties. See four empties

excitation (*rgod pa*). One of the twenty branch afflictions from among the fifty-one mental factors. It is a mental factor associated with attachment that disturbs or agitates the mind through engaging attractive objects, thereby obstructing the attainment of calm abiding.

external seal (*phyi'i phyag rgya*). A physical consort.

female seal (*phyag rgya ma*): A consort who assists the male

yogin gather and dissolve winds in the central channel and to generate pristine wisdom. This secret consort (*gsangs yum*) is also called a knowledge consort (*rig ma*) or wisdom consort (*shes rab ma*).

form body (*gzugs sku, rūpakāya*). A body of the buddha manifesting for the purpose of others. There are two types, namely the enjoyment body and the emanation body.

form deity (*gzugs kyi lha*). The fourth of the six deities of action tantra consisting of the yoga of generating and meditating on the form of the visualized deity.

four empties (*stong pa bzhi*): In this context, an *empty* means a type of extremely subtle mind that is mounted on or supported by an extremely subtle wind. The four empties are the (1) empty, (2) very empty, (3) great empty, and (4) all empty, which are serially generated with the dissolution of the winds in the central channel giving rise to the four visions of (1) white appearance, (2) red increase, (3) black near-attainment, and (4) clear light. They are associated with the generation of the four joys.

four external and four internal branches of recitation (*phyi'i yan lag bzhi'i dang nang gi yan lag bzhi'i bzlas brjod*). The four branches of external recitation consist of recitation (1) with oneself as the basis of the deity, (2) with another as the basis of the deity, (3) with sound as the basis, and (4) with mind as the basis. The four branches of internal recitation are just those four branches performed on the basis of a miniature deity four finger-widths in height visualized at our heart.

four joys (*dga' ba bzhi*). Joy here means a sensation of bliss induced through the dissolution of winds. The four joys are serially generated with the dissolution of the winds in the central channel, causing bodhicitta to melt and descend from the crown, to the throat, to the navel, and to the secret area giving rise to (1) joy, (2) supreme joy, (3) special joy, and (4) innate joy, respectively.

front-generation (*mdun bskyed*). One of the two types of deity generation utilized in the four classes of mantra where one invites a specific deity to the place in front like a guest and

makes offerings and requests blessings.

Geluk (*dge lugs*). The Tibetan Buddhist tradition founded by Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) based on the earlier Kadam tradition of Atiśa Dīpaṃkara.

generation stage (*bskyed rim*). A stage or part of highest yoga tantra where one generates oneself as the deity to mature the mind for the completion stage. There are two types: coarse generation stage and subtle generation stage.

geshé (*dge bshes*). The title conferred on a Tibetan Buddhist monk who has successfully completed the study of the five topics: Abhidharma, Vinaya, Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa, Prajñāpāramitā.

higher supreme empowerments (*mchog dbang gong ma*). The three empowerments exclusive to highest yoga tantra: (1) secret empowerment, (2) pristine-wisdom empowerment, and (3) the word empowerment.

highest yoga tantra (*bla na med pa rnal 'byor gyi rgyud, anuttarayogatantra*). The fourth and highest of the four classes of tantra that is proclaimed for disciples capable of bringing the bliss of (sexually) embracing a visualized deity into the path. Entry to this tantra requires four empowerments, namely the vase, secret, pristine wisdom, and word empowerments.

illusory body (*sgyu lus, māyakāya*). In Guhyasamāja, the third of five levels or the fourth of six levels of the completion stage; a body that lacks objective reality but appears in various ways. There are two types of illusory body: (1) the impure illusory body that arises first and is called the *illusory body of the third level* and (2) the pure illusory body that arises after the third level.

imprints (*bag chags, vāsanā*). Factors imprinted on consciousness that are the dormant potency derived from the internal mind's familiarity with external positive, negative, and neutral objects.

individual withdrawal (*sor sdud*). In Guhyasamāja this forms the first part of physical isolation and refers to the process of the mind in post-equipoise withdrawing to objects that are sealed by bliss and emptiness. In Kālacakra it is the first of the

six branches of the completion stage. The yoga of individual withdrawal newly establishes the appearance of the bodies of empty form of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā.

inherent existence (*rang bzhin gyi yod pa, svabhāvasat*). Existence by way of an essential nature that appears to inhere in an object.

insight (*lhag mthong, vipaśyanā*). Wisdom comprehending its apprehended object that is generally obtained during yoga without signs in the three lower tantras and the completion stage in highest yoga tantra.

interpretive deity (*drang don gyi lha*). The embodied deity.

isolation (*dben*). In everyday life, ordinary beings experience their mind and environment as polluted in some way and as self-existent. Tantric practice involves “isolating” or separating oneself from these appearances and conceptions so that one can instead experience oneself and one’s surroundings as pure—seeing oneself as the deity and one’s surroundings as the deity’s palace and retinue and seeing all appearances as empty of intrinsic existence. There are three types: physical, verbal, and mental isolation.

karmic wind (*las kyi rlung*). A subtle wind-energy propelled by one’s previous karma that courses through the channels of the body.

knowledge consort (*rig ma*). A female seal who is relied on by a yogi in the practice of mantra.

knowledge empowerment (*rig pa’i dbang lnga*). There are five knowledge empowerments that serve as entry to performance tantra. They are categorized as vase empowerments and consist of the water, crown, vajra, bell, and name empowerments.

knowledge obscurations (*shes sgrib*). These are obscurations, such as imprints of ignorance, that mainly obstruct the obtainment of omniscience.

laxity (*bying ba*). Laxity, or mental laxity, is a type of awareness—virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral—that lacks clarity on its focal object and obstructs the attainment of calm abiding.

learner's path (*slob lam*). The path of a being still training to develop wisdom and to abandon objects to be abandoned. It includes the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation.

learner's union (*slob pa'i zung 'jug*). Union that exists in the mental continuum of a learner. There are two types, namely (1) the union of abandonment that is attained first and is concurrent with the learner obtaining the pure illusory body, and (2) the union of realization that follows as a learner reenters the state of actual clear light.

letter deity (*yi ge'i lha*). The second of the six deities of action tantra where a practitioner meditates on the seed syllables of the mantra.

liberated path (*rnam grol lam*). That realization arising at the conclusion of the uninterrupted path—its cause—after the uninterrupted path has completely eliminated specific obscurations to the path. This typically refers to the realization of emptiness after it has liberated a person from a specific level of grasping at true existence.

liberated resultant empowerment (*grol pa 'bras bu'i dbang*). This refers to the non-learner path. When learners obtain the non-learner path they obtain the liberated resultant empowerment that is the highest level of empowerment.

liberating path empowerment (*grol byed lam gyi dbang*). This refers to the learner path. Learners obtain the liberating path empowerment through progressively obtaining the learner paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation of a particular tantra.

lotus maṇḍala (*bha ga'i dkyil 'khor*). An internal maṇḍala employed exclusively in highest yoga tantra.

Madhyamaka philosophy (*dbu ma lta ba*). The view that avoids all extremes. Though all Buddhist schools assert a path that avoids extremes, here it specifically refers to the Mahāyāna view that asserts entities neither exist inherently nor are nonexistent.

maṇḍala (*dkyil 'khor*). The abode of the deity. There are seven types: (1) colored-sand maṇḍala, (2) painted-cloth maṇḍala, (3)

absorption maṇḍala, (4) body maṇḍala, (5) relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala, (6) lotus maṇḍala, and (7) ultimate-bodhicitta maṇḍala. The first three are used in the three lower tantras and the latter four are used exclusively in highest yoga tantra.

maturation body (*rnam smin gyi lus*). The being who experiences the maturation of various types of positive and negative feeling—from conception till death—due to the past accumulation of virtuous and nonvirtuous karma.

maturing causal empowerment (*smin byed rgyu'i dbang*). This is the empowerment that grants students permission to listen to instruction on—as well as meditate on—the path of a specific tantra.

mental isolation (*sems dben*). In Guhyasamāja, the second of the five levels or the third of the six levels of the completion stage. It corresponds to the level of observing the mind. To obtain the vajra mind of the resultant state of Guhyasamāja, one must must cultivate mental isolation in order to isolate or separate oneself from the appearance and conception of one's mind being ordinary.

mixing (*bsre ba*). *Mixing* refers to merging mundane states with pure states in order to achieve pure, uncontaminated states. There are nine types.

mudrā (*phyag rgya*). *See* seal

name empowerment (*ming gi dbang*). A type of vase empowerment conferred in performance, yoga, and highest yoga tantra.

non-learner (*mi slob pa*). One who has attained the path of no-more learning, the highest of the five paths.

non-learner's union (*mi slob pa'i zung 'jug*). Union that exists in the mental continuum of a non-learner who has attained the state of Vajradhara.

observing the mind (*sems la dmigs pa*). In Guhyasamāja, the second of the five levels of the completion stage. It corresponds to mental isolation and is associated with the stage of semblant clear light.

painted-cloth maṇḍala (*ras bris kyi dkyil 'khor*). An external maṇḍala where empowerment is conferred in all four classes of

tantra.

penetrating vital points (*gnad du bsnun pa*). This refers to penetrating vital points of the vajra body after engaging in practices to make the channels, drops, and winds flexible. In general a meditator penetrates the vital points in the vajra body—the ten doors of entry to the central channel—by causing the winds to enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel due to the power of meditation.

performance tantra (*spyod rygud*). The second of the four classes of tantra that is proclaimed for disciples merely capable of bringing the bliss of smiling at a visualized deity into the path. Entry to this tantra requires five knowledge empowerments, namely the water, crown, vajra, bell, and name initiations.

physical isolation (*lus dben*). In Guhyasamāja, the first of the six levels of the completion stage. To obtain the vajra body of the resultant state of Guhyasamāja, one must must cultivate physical isolation in order to isolate or separate oneself from the appearance and conception of one's body being ordinary. There are four types, namely the physical isolation of (1) one hundred pure lineages, (2) five lineages, (3) three secret lineages, and (4) one extremely secret lineage.

pristine wisdom (*ye shes, jñāna*). A type of exalted knowledge or gnosis. In general there are five types: (1) mirror-like pristine wisdom associated with the form aggregate, (2) the pristine wisdom of equality associated with the feeling aggregate, (3) the pristine wisdom of individual analysis associated with the discrimination aggregate, (4) pristine wisdom accomplishing activities associated with the aggregate of formation, and (5) the pristine wisdom of the sphere of dharma associated with the consciousness aggregate.

pristine-wisdom empowerment (*shes rab ye shes kyi dbang*). In highest yoga tantra, the second of the three higher supreme empowerments. It is conferred in the female seal maṇḍala, purifies stains of mind, empowers one to meditate on the path of the completion stage, and places imprints on the mental continuum for obtaining the dharma body of resultant vajra

mind.

pristine wisdom seal (*ye rgya, jñānamudrā*). Internal visualized consort.

protection wheel (*srung 'khor*). A circle or boundary (*maṇḍala*) that is visualized to surround the meditator and protect from interferences.

realization meditation (*mngon rtogs sgom*). Meditation on the generation stage in general.

red increase (*mched pa dmar lam pa*). A subtle mind that experiences a vision of radiant red appearance. Red increase naturally manifests at the second stage of the dissolution of subtle mind at death or it may be induced through meditation on the tantric path. Red increase of the forward order is followed by black near-attainment. Red increase of the reverse order is preceded by black near-attainment.

relative bodhicitta. The continuous, effortless, uncontrived aspiration to obtain the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala (*kun rdzob byang chub sems kyi dkyi 'khor*). In highest yoga tantra, an internal maṇḍala employed in conferring the secret empowerment.

renunciation (*nges 'byung*). The continuous, effortless, uncontrived aspiration to escape from cyclic existence.

retention (*'dzin pa*). The fourth of the six branches of the Kālacakra completion stage. Once the winds begin to enter the central channel, the yoga of retention draws them inside the central channel, where they are stabilized.

sādhana (*sgrub thabs*). The means or ritual by which you establish your meditational deity.

seal (*phyag rgya, mudrā*). A symbolic representation manifesting as a gesture, consort, posture, reality, sign, axiom, commitment, ornament, and so on. In yoga tantra, there are four seals (*phyag rgya bzhi*), namely (1) the commitment seal (*samayamudrā*), (2) the dharma seal (*dharmamudrā*), (3) the great seal (*mahāmudrā*), and (4) the action seal (*karmamudrā*), which is a consort.

secret empowerment (*gsang ba'i dbang*). In highest yoga

tantra, the first of the three higher supreme empowerments. It is conferred in the relative-bodhicitta maṇḍala, purifies stains of speech, empowers one to meditate on the path of channel and wind yoga, and places imprints on the mental continuum for obtaining the enjoyment body of resultant vajra speech.

self-blessing (*bdag byin brlab*). The rites for purifying one's impure aggregates, bases, and realms and blessing them as the three vajras.

self-generation (*mdun bskyed*). One of the two types of deity generation utilized in the four classes of mantra, in which one visualizes one's own body, speech, and mind as the divine body, speech, and mind of the deity.

siddhi (*dngos grub*). The attainment of a special capacity to accomplish a desired result in dependence on the advice of a preceptor. There are two types—supreme and common. The supreme siddhi refers to enlightenment itself while common siddhis are generally categorized in eight types, namely the siddhi of (1) the sword, (2) pills, (3) eye medicine, (4) fleet footedness, (5) extracting the essence, (6) flying, (7) invisibility, and (8) penetrating the ground.

sign deity (*mtshan ma'i lha*). In action tantra, the sixth of the six deities. *Sign deity* refers to the yoga of meditating on the sign of the deity in all one's actions.

six-branch yoga of Kālacakra. See completion stage of Kālacakra in six branches

sound deity (*sgra'i lha*). The third of the six deities of action tantra. Sound deity refers to the yoga meditating on the tone of the mantra and light emanating from it.

subsequent recollection (*rjes su dran pa*). The fifth of the six branches of the Kālacakra completion stage. The yoga of subsequent recollection induces the pristine wisdom of great bliss realizing emptiness.

substantial continuum (*rgyun*). In general this refers to energy or substance that maintains an uninterrupted stream moment by moment.

supreme-conqueror maṇḍala (*dkyil 'khor rgyal mchog*). A maṇḍala in which supreme-conqueror activities such as

pacification and so on are manifested.

ultimate bodhicitta (*don dam sems bskyed*). The realization that dharmas are empty of inherent existence.

ultimate-bodhicitta maṇḍala (*don dam byang chub kyi sems kyi dkyil 'khor*). An internal maṇḍala employed in conferring the word empowerment in highest yoga tantra.

uninterrupted path (*bar chad med lam, ānantaryamārga*). That which directly opposes specific obscurations to the path and unobstructedly produces the pristine wisdom liberated from those specific obscurations—the liberated path—as its result. This typically refers to the realization of emptiness before it has liberated a person from a specific level of grasping at true existence.

union (*gzung 'jug, yuganaddha*). In Guhyasamāja, the fifth of the five levels or sixth of the six levels of the completion stage. It refers to the union of method that is great innate bliss and wisdom that realizes emptiness. There are two types: (1) learner's union and (2) non-learner's union.

vajra empowerment (*rdo rje'i dbang*). A type of vase empowerment conferred in performance, yoga, and highest yoga tantra in which a vajra is placed in the hands and one is conferred a secret name and so on.

vajra-master empowerment (*rdo rje slob dpon gyi dbang*). An empowerment conferred in yoga tantra and highest yoga tantra.

vajra recitation (*rdo rje bzlas pa*). In Guhyasamāja, vajra recitation is the first of the five levels of the completion stage. It corresponds to the stages of physical isolation and verbal isolation, though it refers specifically to the practice of vitality exertion that is meditation on the light drop at the base of the nose. In Kālacakra—along with vase meditation—it is one of the two practices of vitality exertion. It indivisibly unites wind and mantra in the central channel.

vase empowerment (*bum dbang*). An empowerment common to all four classes of tantra. It is conferred in a colored-sand or painted-cloth maṇḍala and so on, purifies stains of the body, empowers one to meditate on the path of deity yoga or the

generation stage, and places latent imprints on the mental continuum for obtaining the emanation body of the resultant vajra body. The vase empowerment consists of the water and crown empowerments in action tantra; the five knowledge empowerments in performance tantra; the five knowledge empowerments plus the vajra-master empowerment in yoga tantra; and up to eleven vase empowerments in general highest yoga tantra. In Kālacakra, the seven empowerments such as the water empowerment and so on are designated as water empowerments and not vase empowerments.

verbal isolation (*ngag dben*). In Guhyasamāja, the second of the six levels of the completion stage. To obtain the vajra speech of the resultant state of Guhyasamāja, one must cultivate verbal isolation in order to isolate or separate oneself from the appearance and conception of one's speech being ordinary.

vitality exertion (*srog srol, prāṇāyāma*). In Guhyasamāja, *vitality exertion* refers to yogic exertion to move vital energies or winds in the left and right channels so they enter the central channel. In Kālacakra, it is the third of the six branches of the completion stage. The yoga of vitality exertion establishes the speech of Kālacakra by gaining control over the winds and causing the winds of the right and left channel that normally freely circulate to directly approach the central channel.

water empowerment (*chu yi dbang*). A type of vase empowerment conferred in all four classes of tantra in which the water in the vase is generated as the deity and the empowerment is given on the basis of that blessed water.

white appearance (*snang ba dkar lam pa*). A subtle mind that experiences a vision of radiant white appearance. White appearance naturally manifests at the first stage of the dissolution of subtle mind at death or it may be induced through meditation on the tantric path. White appearance of the forward order is followed by red increase. White appearance of the reverse order is preceded by red increase.

winds (*rlung*). In the three tantric categories of channels, winds, and drops, winds are the energy-winds that circulate in

the body's subtle network of channels. There are ten winds explained in Guhyasamāja: the five main winds: (1) the life-sustaining wind, (2) the equally abiding wind, (3) the ascending wind, (4) the downward-voiding wind, and (5) the pervading wind; plus the five secondary winds: (6) the moving wind, (7) fully moving wind, (8) correctly moving wind, (9) intensely moving wind, and (10) definitely moving wind. There are ten winds explained in Kālacakra: (1) life-sustaining wind, (2) equally abiding wind, (3) ascending wind, (4) pervading wind, (5) nāga wind, (6) turtle wind, (7) lizard wind, (8) *devadatta* wind, (9) *dhanamjaya* wind, and (10) downward-voiding wind. See also karmic wind

wisdom beings (*ye shes sems dpa', jñānasattva*). A visualized deity that may appear in front of oneself. A deity that dissolves into the commitment being.

word empowerment (*tshig dbang*). The third of the three higher supreme empowerments exclusive to highest yoga tantra. It is conferred in the ultimate-bodhicitta maṇḍala, purifies stains of body, speech, and mind, empowers one to meditate on the path of great completion, and places latent imprints on the mental continuum for obtaining the nature body of resultant vajra pristine wisdom.

yoga of the six deities (*lha drugnal 'byor*). Yogic practices engaging the six deities of action tantra: (1) empty deity, (2) letter deity, (3) sound deity, (4) form deity, (5) seal deity, (6) sign deity.

yoga of the subtle drop (*phra thig gi rnal 'byor*). This is meditation on a drop the size of a mustard seed, placed either at the upper or lower opening of the central channel, that contains within it the complete celestial mansion and its resident deities in their correct proportions.

yoga tantra (*rnal 'byor rygud*). The third of the four classes of tantra, proclaimed for disciples capable of bringing the bliss of merely holding hands with a visualized deity into the path. Entry to this tantra requires six empowerments, namely the five knowledge empowerments and the vajra-master empowerment that are classed as vase empowerments.

yoga with signs (*mtshan bcas rnal 'byor*). Deity meditation that engages relative appearance either through visualizing one's body, speech, and mind as a divine body, speech, and mind or visualizing oneself as inseparable from the nature of the deity generated in the space in front.

yoga without signs (*mtshan med rnal 'byor*). Deity meditation that engages the non-inherent existence of the deity. It is meditation on the emptiness of the divine body.

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