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DEATH, SLEEP, AND ORGASM: GATEWAYS TO THE
MIND OF CLEAR LIGHT

Background

Buddhism began gradually to be introduced to Tibet in the seventh century C. E., more than a thousand years after Sh kyamuni Buddha's passing away (*circa* 483 B. C.).¹ The form Buddhism took in Tibet was greatly influenced by the highly developed systemization of the religion that was present in India through the twelfth century (and even later). The geographic proximity and relatively undeveloped culture of Tibet provided conditions for extensive transfer of scholastic commentaries and systems of practice, which came to have great influence throughout a vast region stretching from Kalmuck Mongolian areas in Europe where the Volga River empties into the Caspian Sea, Outer and Inner Mongolia, and the Buriat Republic of Siberia as well as Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and Ladakh. The sources for my discussion are drawn primarily from two of the four major orders of Tibetan Buddhism:

- the old order called Nying-ma-ba,² which reached its full development in the fourteenth century with the scholar-yogi Long-chen-rap-jam³

- a highly scholastic order called Ge-luk-ba,⁴ founded by the fourteenth century scholar-yogi Dzung-ka-ba.⁵

Long-chen-rap-jam was born in 1308 Dö-drong⁶ in south central Tibet, received ordination at Sam-yay⁷ Monastery, and studied the doctrines of both the old and new schools. A great scholar, he became abbot of Sam-yay Monastery early in his life but retired from that position to live in the mountains. Receiving the full corpus of the teachings of the Old Translation School of Nying-ma, he wrote prolifically, and even when he was exiled for a decade to Bhutan for his closeness with the opponents of the ruling power, he established and restored monasteries.⁸

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Īzong-ka-bā was born in 1357 in the northeastern province of Tibet called Am-do,⁹ now included by the occupying Chinese Communists not in the Tibetan Autonomous Region but in Ch'ing-hai Province. He studied the new and old schools extensively, and developed his own tradition called Ge-luk-bā. Īzong-ka-bā and his followers established a system of education centered especially in large universities, eventually in three areas of Tibet but primarily in Hla-sā, the capital, which in some ways was for the Tibet cultural region what Rome is for the Catholic Church. For five centuries, young men came from all over the Tibetan cultural region to these large Tibetan universities to study (I say “men” because women were, for the most part, excluded from the scholastic culture). Until the Communist takeovers, these students usually returned to their own countries after completing their degrees.

My presentation on the mind of clear light is largely from standard Īying-ma-bā and Ge-luk-bā perspectives on the two basic forms of what Tibetan tradition accepts as Shākyamuni Buddha's teaching—the Sūtra Vehicle and the Tantra Vehicle, also called the Vajra Vehicle.¹⁰

Clear Light

There is a famous Buddhist maxim that the nature of the mind is clear light and the defilements are superficial. In the later 1960's and early 1970's, one of my Tibetan teachers used to repeat this dictum to me whenever he could find a chance. It conveys and inculcates a basic perspective of the culture. The *locus classicus* of the maxim is a famous statement by the seventh century Indian pandit Dharmak rti in his *Commentary on (Dignāga's) "Compilation [of Teachings] on Valid Cognition"*. Dharmakīrti says:¹¹

The nature of the mind is clear light.
The defilements are adventitious.

“Defilements” are afflictive attitudes such as lust, hatred, pride, enmity, jealousy, laziness, miserliness, and belligerence; they are not in the nature of the mind but are, so to speak, peripheral or on the surface. That defilements are “adventitious” does not mean that they are “uncaused”. It means that they are not endemic to the mind; counter-productive attitudes do not subsist in the warp and woof of

the mind.

Lust, hatred, and ignorance do not subsist in the very nature of the mind—the nature of the mind is clear light. Consequently, lust, hatred, and ignorance can be removed from the mind without destroying the mind. The mind will be left, like space when clouds disappear, or like a crystal washed of dirt, or like water purified of pollution. Defilements are suitable to be removed, ready to be eliminated.

These negative states are obstructive attitudes preventing liberation from the painful round of repeated birth, aging, sickness, and death called cyclic existence. The root problem is the ignorance that conceives phenomena to exist more concretely than they actually do. Ignorance here is both a lack of knowledge of the truth and an active superimposition of an over-concretized status, an overly solid sense of existence. This misconception leads to other unhealthy attitudes—pride, enmity, belligerence, miserliness, laziness, lust, hatred, and so forth. All of these depend on ignorance. Without ignorance, they cannot exist.

These self-destructive attitudes are called afflictions¹² because they distort the mind. Consider the distortion of the face that anger brings. Lust and hatred bring trouble and are foundations of many other afflictive emotions, but ignorance is the basic bondage, the root distortion. From it, and entirely dependent upon it, the other distortions of the mental system arise, seeming to be in the fabric of the mind but actually not. Seeming to be necessary but not. Seeming such that if they were removed, the mind also would be removed, that the only way to get beyond them would be to cease to live.

But this is held to be opposite to the fact, since the defining nature of mind is that which luminous and cognitive.¹³ No matter how fouled the mind may be by these afflictive attitudes, there is a core of luminosity, a basis of radiance, that exists throughout it. The oil in a sesame seed is prevalent throughout the shell of the seed—it is not that it is in one part and not in another; it is everywhere throughout the seed. Similarly, a luminous, cognitive nature exists throughout the mind, no matter how dark, heavy, and dumb it might be at times. Think of the sky that is present throughout dark clouds and will reappear when the clouds dissipate. First imagine the sky; then fill it with clouds; now while the clouds are still there, concentrate on the sky that is present throughout them; then let the clouds slowly dissipate into that sky. Whether the clouds are there or not, the sky is still there. In the same way, think of a crystal that is covered with

caked-on mud and will re-appear when the mud is cleaned off. Again, think of water that is within pollution and will re-appear when the pollution is removed—for me this is harder to imagine since the pollution seems to occupy completely the place where the water is, but if that were so, the pollution could not be removed. Using the experience gained with respect to sky and clouds, apply that felt understanding to water and pollution. Then apply it to the mind and the disturbing factors of afflictive emotions. In this way, the three metaphors are intended to provide an introduction to the clear light nature of the mind; they are meant to be imagined, to be reflected on, to be ruminated, and to be felt in order to provide an avenue for noticing and experiencing that even in the midst of grossly afflictive states the luminous basis of mind is still accessible.

As the current Dalai Lama says:¹⁴

Naturally pure from the start and endowed with a spontaneous nature, the mind-vajra is the basis of all the phenomena occurring in cyclic existence and nirvana. Even while one is still a sentient being and despite the generation of a great many good and bad conceptions such as manifest desire, hatred, and bewilderment, the mind-vajra itself is free from the pollutions of these defilements. Water may be extremely dirty; yet its nature remains just clear--its nature is not polluted by dirt. Similarly, no matter what afflictive emotions are generated as the sport of this mind-vajra and no matter how powerful they are, the basic mind itself, the basis of the appearance of such artifice, remains unaffected by defilement, beginninglessly good, all-good.¹⁵

The clear light nature of the mind is described in Tibetan commentaries on certain Tantras as the fundamental, innate mind of clear light.¹⁶ (Tantras are texts of the Buddha's word that include practice of deity yoga, imagination of oneself in compassionate and wise ideal form.) The mind of clear light is fundamental in the sense that its continuum exists forever—that is to say, while one is afflicted and while unafflicted. It has no beginning and no end in time. The mind of clear light is described as the “all-good”. It is also called the basis-of-all¹⁷ in that it is the basis of all the phenomena both of cyclic existence and of nirvana. It may seem surprising that a system emphasizing suffering as much as Buddhism does should also have a doctrine of a basic goodness or fundamental purity of the mind, but such a foundation is needed for the radical transformation of the

condition of suffering into a state of freedom.

As the Dalai Lama says:¹⁸

Just as the entity of even dirty water is not polluted by filth, so the nature of the fundamental innate mind of clear light is not polluted by defilements. Thus, the mind of clear light of an impure sentient being is not polluted by afflictive emotions; it is the Buddha nature, which is the “substance” that is transformed into a Buddha’s Wisdom Truth Body. Hence, Buddhahood is not to be sought from the outside. Since this is the case, as long as you do not understand that the fundamental innate mind of clear light is your nature, you are a sentient being, and when you have final understanding that it is your nature, you are a Buddha.

And:

The fundamental innate mind of clear light abides in or pervades the heart of all sentient beings. It also is the final essence and creator of all environments and beings, the basis of emanation of all of cyclic existence and nirvana. For, all phenomena--environments and beings--are the sport or artifice of the fundamental innate mind of clear light, called the basis-of-all....It also is the “progenitor of all the sentient” in that it is what produces all pure and impure sentience, the final basis of designation of all persons.

The *Hevajra Tantra* says:

Sentient beings are just Buddhas,
But they are defiled by adventitious stains.
When those are removed, they are Buddhas.

And:

Buddhas are not to be found elsewhere
In any of the realms of the world.
Just sentient beings are just complete Buddhas.
Buddhas are not demonstrable elsewhere.
This is called “cyclic existence”;
This is just nirvana.
Due to obscuration, it has the form of cyclic existence;
Without obscuration, cyclic existence is just pure.

The difference between bondage and liberation depends upon whether one knows one's own nature or not.

The most detailed description of the levels of mind is said to be found in Highest Yoga Tantras such as the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* which divides consciousnesses into the gross, the subtle, and the very subtle.¹⁹ The **gross level of mind** is constituted by sensory consciousnesses:

- the eye consciousness that apprehends colors and shapes
- the ear consciousness that apprehends sounds
- the nose consciousness that apprehends odors
- the tongue consciousness that apprehends tastes
- the body consciousness that apprehends tactile objects.

In Buddhist presentations, these five are not just sensations known by another, separate consciousness, but are five individual consciousnesses that have specific spheres of activity—colors and shapes, sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile objects. These five sense consciousnesses are the grossest level of mind.

More subtle than the sense consciousnesses but still within the gross level of mind is the conceptual, mental consciousness—the mind of thoughts and emotions. In the *Guhyasamāja* system, these conceptions are detailed as of eighty types, divided into three classes.

- The first group of thirty-three is composed of emotions, feelings, and drives that have a strong movement of energy²⁰ to their objects. Included in this group are fear, attachment, hunger, thirst, shame, compassion, acquisitiveness, and jealousy.
- The second group of forty conceptions have a medium movement of energy to their objects; among them are joy, amazement, excitement, desiring to embrace, generosity, desiring to kiss, desiring to suck, pride, enthusiasm, vehemence, flirtation, wishing to donate, heroism, deceit, tightness, viciousness, non-gentleness, and crookedness.
- The third group of seven conceptions involve a weak movement of energy to their objects—forgetfulness, catatonia, depression, laziness, doubt, error as in apprehending water in a mirage, and equal desire and hatred.

The three groups represent, on the ordinary level of consciousness, increasingly less dualistic perception. Though the difference between the first two groups is hard to determine, the third group of mental states obviously is strongly withdrawn.

When these three groups of conceptual minds weaken and

cease, subtler levels of mind manifest during uncontrolled processes as in fainting, going to sleep, ending a dream, experiencing orgasm, sneezing, and dying.²¹ In these states, the currents of energy that drive the various levels of gross consciousness withdraw and temporarily cease, resulting in a series of eight altered levels of mind. First there are four preliminary levels of the withdrawal of the energies that drive usual consciousness and then four dramatic levels of deeper mind.

1 First, one has a visual experience of seeing an appearance like a mirage.

2 Then, as the withdrawal continues, one sees an appearance like billowing smoke or like thin smoke spread throughout a room.

3 Then one sees an appearance like fireflies or like sparks within smoke.

4 Then one sees an appearance like a sputtering candle²² when little wax is left which culminates in an appearance of a steady candle flame.

The culmination of this series of four visions sets the stage for the withdrawal and temporary cessation of all eighty conceptual consciousnesses,²³ whereupon a more dramatic phase of four profound states begins.

Subtle levels of mind that are at the core of all experience now manifest.

5 The first subtle level of consciousness to manifest is the mind of vivid white appearance. All of the eighty conceptions have withdrawn and one's consciousness itself turns into an omnipresent, huge, vivid white vastness. It is described as like a clear sky filled with moonlight not the moon shining in empty space but space filled with white light. All conceptuality has stopped, and nothing appears except this slightly dualistic vivid white appearance, which is one's consciousness itself.

6 Then, the energy that supports that level of consciousness retracts such that the mind of vivid white appearance no longer can manifest, whereupon a more subtle mind emerges. One's own consciousness appears as an omnipresent, huge, vivid red or orange vastness. It is called "increase".²⁴ It is compared to a clear sky filled with sunlight, not the sun shining in the sky but space filled with red or orange light. One's consciousness itself has turned into this even less dualistic vivid red or orange appearance; nothing else appears.

7 When this mind loses its support through further withdrawal of the energy that is its foundation, a still more subtle mind of vivid black

appearance dawns. One's own consciousness appears as an omnipresent, huge, black, thick darkness. It is called "near-attainment"²⁵ because one is close to manifesting the mind of clear light. The mind of black vastness is compared to a moonless, very dark sky just after dusk when no stars are seen. One's consciousness itself has turned into this still less dualistic, vivid black appearance; nothing else appears. During the first part of this phase of utter blackness, one remains conscious but then, in a second phase, one swoons into unconsciousness in even thicker darkness.

8 Then, when the mind of black appearance ceases, the **extremely subtle level of mind** dawns. The three "pollutants"²⁶—that is to say, the white, red/orange, and black appearances—are entirely cleared away, and the mind of clear light manifests. Free of the white, orange, and black appearances, one's own consciousness *is* the clear light. Called the "fundamental innate mind of clear light", it is the most subtle, profound, and powerful level of consciousness. It is compared to the sky's own natural cast which can be seen at dawn before sunrise at which time the sky is devoid of moonlight, sunlight, or darkness.

The fundamental innate mind of clear light is the basis of all minds and all appearances. About this level of mind the Dalai Lama says:²⁷

In the Highest Yoga Tantra system of the New Translation Schools, the fundamental mind which serves as the basis of all the phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvana is posited as the ultimate truth or nature of phenomena (*dharmatā, chos nyid*); it is also sometimes called the "clear light" (*ābhāsvarā, 'od gsal*) and uncompounded (*asa'skrta, 'dus ma byas*). In Nying-ma it is called the "mind-vajra"; this is not the mind that is contrasted with basic knowledge in the division into basic knowledge (*rig pa*) and mind (*sems*) but the factor of mere luminosity and knowing, basic knowledge itself. This is the final root of all minds, forever indestructible, immutable, and of unbreakable continuum like a vajra [or diamond]. Just as the New Translation Schools posit a beginningless and endless fundamental mind, so Nying-ma posits a mind-vajra which has no beginning or end and proceeds without interruption through the effect stage of Buddhahood. It is considered "permanent" in the sense of abiding forever and thus is presented as a permanent mind. It is permanent not in the sense of not disintegrating moment by moment but in the sense that its continuum is not interrupted--this being analogous to the

statement in Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realization* (*abhisamayāla'kāra, mngon rtogs rgyan*) that a Buddha's exalted activities are considered permanent in that they are inexhaustible. It is also non-produced in the sense that it is not adventitiously and newly produced by causes and conditions [since its continuum has always existed].

Because the more subtle levels of consciousness are considered to be more powerful and thus more effective in realizing the truth, the systems of Highest Yoga Tantra seek to manifest the mind of clear light by way of various techniques.

One of these techniques is blissful orgasm because, according to the psychology of Highest Yoga Tantra, orgasm involves the ceasing of the grosser levels of consciousness and manifestation of the more subtle levels, as do going to sleep, ending a dream, sneezing, fainting, and dying. In intense orgasm, the mind withdraws from the diverse objects of the other senses and is focused, eventually exclusively, on sexual bliss. Ordinary, distracted mind paying attention to a multitude of objects vanishes. The intention in using a blissful, orgasmic mind in the spiritual path is to manifest the most subtle level of consciousness, the mind of clear light, and use its greater power and hence effectiveness to realize the true nature of mind, stripped of its distractions and peripheral manifestations.

The pleasure of orgasm is so intense that the mind becomes totally fascinated and entranced with pleasure such that both the usual conceptual mind and the appearances that accompany it melt away, leaving the innermost mind in its pristine state. In orgasm, the phenomena of ordinary life that are so concrete and solid that they seem to have their own independent existence melt into the expanse of the reality behind appearances.

Through consciously experiencing this process, one can realize that ordinary appearances and afflictive emotions are over-concretized. In this way sex can become a spiritual practice through which the exaggerated status of afflictive emotions is subsumed in the source state. Nevertheless, due to the fact that all of the usual conceptual minds cease temporarily during intense sex, many experience these states as a dimming of the mind into an emotional state that is withdrawn to the point of uselessness. Some even manifest a dread of orgasm and, if they still seek sexuality, advocate sexual pleasure devoid of orgasm. The state of orgasm is viewed by such persons as hopelessly stupid, not only incapable to realizing the

truth but fundamentally opposed to the truth.

However, this Buddhist system holds that conceptual over-concretization of objects generates attachment to superficial, unreal exaggerations. This attachment, in turn, fosters an inability to sustain the basic, blissful state that undermines emotionally imbedded self-deceptions. The suggestion is that ordinary conscious life is concerned with only the gross or superficial, without heed of more subtle states that are the foundation of both consciousness and appearance. We know neither the origin of consciousness nor the basis into which it returns.

It is said that ordinary beings are so identified with superficial states that the transition to deeper states involves even fear of annihilation; when the deeper states begin to manifest and the superficial levels collapse, we panic, fearing that we will be wiped out and, due to this fear, swoon unconsciously. As the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Mongolian scholar Nga-wang-kay-drup²⁸ says in his *Presentation of Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth*,²⁹ at the time of the clear light of death ordinary beings generate the fright that they will be annihilated.³⁰ Similarly, the emergence of the foundational state in orgasm is so drastically different from ordinary consciousness that it is usually experienced as a dimming of the mind, as with going to sleep.

The fact that the mind of clear light—which is so awesome when it newly manifests—is one's own final nature suggests that the otherness and fear associated with its manifestation are not part of *its* nature but are due to the shallowness of untrained beings. The strangeness of our own nature is a function of misconception, specifically our mistaken sense that what are actually distortions of mind subsist in the nature of mind. We identify with these distortions such that when basic consciousness starts to manifest in orgasm, or in going to sleep, ending a dream, fainting, or dying, we are unable to remain with the experience. The more we identify with distorted attitudes, the greater the fear of the foundational state.

This Buddhist system asserts that in fully conscious orgasm the mind can experience its own fundamental reality devoid of grosser attitudes, such that the truth can be fully manifest. Unfamiliarity with our own innermost being causes its implications to be missed in unconsciousness and causes many persons to separate off such a deeply affective state—creating a chasm between emotions and rationality. However, this system holds that in fully pleasurable orgasm there need not be a drowning in a dimming of insight; the

state can be a means of seeing what is the basis of phenomena—that into which all appearances dissolve and thus the foundation of appearance, the basis behind appearances. By utilizing this subtle level of mind, the power of realizing the superficiality of afflictive emotions is enhanced such that it is more effective in overcoming what prevents liberation from the round of rebirth and all its suffering.

When the sense of pleasure is powerful, one's consciousness is totally involved with that pleasure and thus completely withdrawn and the subtler levels of consciousness can manifest, at which point the nature of the mind can be apprehended and held by someone who is accustomed to watching the mind. Thus, learning how to apprehend the clear light nature of grosser levels of mind is crucial, such as by watching that from which it arises, where it abides, and that in which it ceases. Also, the tradition holds that only the most compassionate are capable of using sexual bliss in the spiritual path; it clearly posits a connection between the capacity of compassion and the capacity to use sexual bliss in the path. Thus, the practice of universal compassion is essential to being able to manifest such a deep state.

Also, without desire, the involvement in the bliss consciousness would be minimal, and thus Highest Yoga Tantra makes use of the arts of love-making to enhance the process. This may seem to be contrary to the Buddhist aim to pass beyond afflictive desire, from the process detailed above, but it can be seen that desire is then being used to generate bliss, and a blissfully withdrawn consciousness is being used to realize a status of phenomena, which undermines afflictive emotions. Using an ancient example, the First Pa-chen Lama, *Lo-sang-chö-gyi-gyel-tsen*,³¹ compares the process to a worm's being born from moist wood and then eating the wood. In this example (formulated at a time when it was assumed that a worm or bug was generated only from wood and heat), the wood is afflictive desire; the worm is the blissful consciousness; and the consumption of the wood is the blissful consciousness's destruction of afflictive desire through realizing emptiness. As the First Pa-chen Lama, *Lo-sang-chö-gyi-gyel-tsen*, says:³²

A wood-engendered insect is born from wood but consumes it completely. In the same way, a great bliss is generated in dependence on a causal motivation that is the desire of gazing, smiling, holding hands or embracing, or union of the two organs. The wisdom of undifferentiable bliss and emptiness, which is this great bliss generated undifferentiably with a mind

cognizing emptiness at the same time, consumes completely the afflictive emotions—desire, ignorance, and so forth.

Through desirous activities such as gazing at a loved one, or smiling, holding hands, embracing, or engaging in sexual union, a pleasurable consciousness is produced; it is used to realize the truth that afflictive emotions are peripheral and that the nature of the mind is clear light, whereby afflictive desire itself is undermined. The pleasurable consciousness is generated simultaneously with a wisdom consciousness, and thus the two are indivisibly fused.

The usage of desire in the spiritual path is explicitly for the sake of providing opportunities for wisdom, for direct experience of the fact that afflictive emotions, no matter how ingrained they may seem, do not subsist in the nature of the mind. The difficulty of using an orgasmic consciousness to realize anything indicates that it would take a person of considerable spiritual development to be able to utilize such a subtle state in the path. Indeed, these levels usually are not even noticed, never mind utilized, in common copulation, but they are not completely unnoticed—there are reasons why most beings like sex so much.

The aim of sexual yoga is, therefore, not mere repetition of an attractive state but revelation of the basic reality underlying appearances. Nevertheless, to experience the union of bliss and emptiness, sexual pleasure has to be developed in fullness, and to do this it is necessary to implement techniques for extending the experience of pleasure; otherwise, a valuable opportunity is lost in the ephemerality of orgasm. The twentieth century Tibetan intellectual, Gedün Chöpel,³³ who traveled to India and wrote his own *Treatise on Passion*³⁴ based mainly but not exclusively on the *Kāma Sūtra*, advocates the usage of sexual pleasure to open oneself to the profound, fundamental state at the core of all consciousness. As he says:

The small child of intelligence swoons in the deep sphere of passion.

The busy mind falls into the hole of a worm.

By drawing the imaginations of attachment downwards

Beings should observe the suchness of pleasure.

Wishing to mix in the ocean of the bliss of the peaceful expanse

This wave of magician's illusions separated off

By perceiving the non-dual as dual, subject and object,

Does one not feel the movement and igniting of the coalesced!

Phenomena that are over-concretized such that they seem to have their own independent existence are burnt away in the expanse of the reality behind appearances:

If one really considers the fact that the one billion worlds of this world system
 Are suddenly swallowed into a gigantic asteroid devoid of perception or feeling,
 One understands that the realm of great bliss
 Is that in which all appearances dissolve.

Gedün Chöpel also speaks of deities that are present in the body during sex:

At the time of pleasure the god and goddess giving rise to bliss actually dwell in the bodies of the male and the female. Therefore, it is said that what would be obstacles to one's life if done [under usual circumstances] are conquered, and power, brilliance, and youth blaze forth. The perception of ugliness and dirtiness is stopped, and one is freed from conceptions of fear and shame. The deeds of body, speech, and mind become pure, and it is said that one arrives in a place of extreme pleasure.

The question is *how* to sustain sexual pleasure so that its spiritual value is not lost and the experience turns into an unconscious dimming of mind. Through techniques of strengthening and lengthening sexual pleasure, both mind and body become bathed in bliss, opening the possibility of realizing the nature of the fundamental state.

The practice of sexual yoga is, to my knowledge, always explained in terms of heterosexual sex, in which a consort of the opposite sex³⁵ is used. The reason given concerns the structure of channels or nerves in the respective sexual organs, and thus insertion refers not just to insertion in the vagina but to contact with special nerve centers in the vagina that are lacking in the anus. Thus, colorful drawings of male and female deities in sexual union decorate the walls of temples—not those of same-sex couples. However, the type of sexual yoga that Gedün Chöpel describes has its foundations in the doctrine—found in the Old Translation School of *Nying-ma*³⁶—that the blissful mind of clear light pervades all experience and is accessible within any state. This is the theoretical underpinning of his

advice to extend the intense state of sexual bliss in order to explore the fundamental state of bliss. It seems to me that this type of sexual yoga *can* be done with same-sex or other-sex partners and *should* be done with whatever type is more evocative of intense feeling on all levels.

The ultimate goal is not just to experience this basal state into which phenomena have dissolved but also to perceive all the various phenomena of the world *within* the mind of clear light, without exaggerating their status into being independent. One is seeking to perceive interdependence without an overlay of divisive concretization. The true nature of things does not negate phenomena; it negates only the exaggerated status of inherent existence and hence is compatible with love and compassion, which are enhanced through recognizing the connectedness of persons and of other phenomena. Within such a perspective, truly effective altruism is possible since the faculty of judgment is not clouded by afflictive emotions such as anger and belligerence. The final state is not abstracted away from phenomena but is an appreciation of connectedness and embodiment. All phenomena are seen as manifestations of the mind of clear light, still having individuality but not exaggerated into being autonomous. Viewed in this perspective, the mind of orgasm as experienced in sexual yoga is a means of linking to others, promoting intimacy and relationality, and is not an abstraction of oneself away from others into an auto-hypnotic withdrawal although it might seem so at first.

To summarize: The innermost level of consciousness is the fundamental innate mind of clear light, which is identified as the eighth in a series of increasingly subtle experiences that occur frequently but unconsciously in ordinary life. These deeper levels of mind manifest during the process of dying, going to sleep, ending a dream, fainting, sneezing, and orgasm in forward order:

- 1 mirage
- 2 smoke
- 3 fireflies
- 4 flame of a lamp
- 5 vivid white mind-sky
- 6 vivid red or orange mind-sky
- 7 vivid black mind-sky
- 8 clear light.

These eight also manifest in reverse order when taking rebirth, waking, starting to dream, ending a fainting spell, ending a sneeze, and ending orgasm:

- 1 clear light
- 2 vivid black mind-sky
- 3 vivid red or orange mind-sky
- 4 vivid white mind-sky
- 5 flame of a lamp
- 6 fireflies
- 7 smoke
- 8 mirage.

These states of increasing subtlety during death, orgasm, going to sleep, ending a dream, and so forth and of increasing grossness during rebirth, post-orgasm, awakening, beginning a dream, and so forth indicate levels of mind on which every conscious moment is built. From the perspective of this system of psychology, we spend our lives in the midst of thousands of small deaths and rebirths.

The aim of this type of practice is to realize the basic entity of the mind so that the source of the afflictive emotions can be experienced. Concentration on the luminous and cognitive nature of the mind gradually can cause the afflictive emotions to return into their source state. As the Dalai Lama says:³⁷

What draws us into suffering—an untamed mind—is not external but within our own mental continuums. For it is through the appearance of afflictive emotions in our minds that we are drawn into various faulty actions. From the naturally pure sphere of the true nature of the mind these conceptions dawn, and through their force we engage in faulty actions leading to suffering. We need, with great awareness and care, to cause these conceptions to be extinguished back into the sphere of the nature of the mind, like clouds that gather in the sky and then dissolve back into sphere of the sky. Thereby the faulty actions that arise from them will also cease. As Mi-la-re-ba (*Mi-la-ras-pa*) says, “...whether arising, arising within space itself, or dissolving, dissolving back into space.” We need to know the status of things well, understanding what is erroneous and what is not and becoming able to dissolve these conceptions back into the sphere of reality.

The systems of religious education found in the Tibetan cultural region are aimed at overcoming this fear of one’s own most basic nature, which has within it a source of sustenance beyond the dualism of subject and object.

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NOTES

¹ This paper is drawn from my book, *Sex, Orgasm, and the Mind of Clear Light* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Press, 1998).

² *rmying ma pa*.

³ *klong chen rab 'byams*, 1308-63.

⁴ *dge lugs pa*.

⁵ *tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*, 1357-1419.

⁶ *stod grong*.

⁷ *bsam yas*.

⁸ For a short biography of Long-chen-bā, see Tarthang Tulku, "A History of the Buddhist Dharma", ed. Judith Robertson and Deborah Black, *Crystal Mirror*, vol. V (Emeryville, Calif: Dharma Publishing), 254-260.

⁹ *a mdo*.

¹⁰ *rdo rje theg pa, vajray na*.

¹¹ *tshad ma nam 'grel, pram avarttika*, chap. II:

sems kyī rang bzhin 'od gsal te//

dri ma mams ni blo bur ba//

Varanasi: Pleasure of Elegant Sayings, 1974), Vol.17, 63.11. The Sanskrit is:

prabhāsvaramida' citta' prakṛtyāgantatro malāḥ .

See Swami Dwarikadas Shastri, *Pramā'avarttika of Āchārya Dharmakīrti* (Varanasi Bauddha Bharati, 1968), Vol.3, 73.1.

¹² *nyon mongs, kleśa*.

¹³ *gsal zhing rig pa*.

¹⁴ The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1984), 212.

¹⁵ *samantabhadra, kun tu bzang po*.

¹⁶ *gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems*.

¹⁷ *kun gzhi, ālaya*.

¹⁸ In Tenzin Gyatso and Jeffrey Hopkins, *The Kālachakra Tantra: Rite of Initiation for the Stage of Generation* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1985; second rev. edition, Boston 1989), 272. The next three citations are drawn from the same, 272-273.

¹⁹ The material on the levels of consciousness is drawn from Lati Rinbochay's and my translation of a text by Yang-jen-ga-way-lo-drö (*dbyangs can dga' ba'i blo gros*); see our *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Rider and Co., 1979; rpt. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1980).

²⁰ Literally, wind or air (*rlung, prā'a*).

²¹ The similarity between orgasm and death in terms of seeming self-extinction is frequently noticed in "Western" literature, Shakespeare being the most prominent.

²² Literally, a butter-lamp.

²³ The three sets of conceptions correspond to the three subtle minds that appear serially after conceptions cease, but it is not that the three sets of conceptions cease serially; rather, they disappear together, resulting in the gradual dawning of the three subtler levels of mind.

²⁴ *mched pa*.

²⁵ *nyer 'thob*.

²⁶ *bslod byed*.

²⁷ The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, 210-211.

²⁸ *ngag dbang mkhas grub*, 1779-1838. Also known as *kyai rdo mkhan po*.

²⁹ *skye shi bar do'i nam bzhag*, Collected Works (Leh: S. Tashigangpa, 1973), Vol. 1, 466.2. Cited in Lati Rinbochay and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Rider, 1979), 47.

³⁰ The fear-inspiring aspect of its manifestation accords with the often described awesomeness and sense of otherness that much of world culture associates with types of profound religious experience.

³¹ *blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1567?-1662.

³² *Presentation of the General Teaching and the Four Tantra Sets*, Collected Works, vol. IV, 17b.5-18a.1.

³³ *dge 'dun chos 'phel*; 1905-1951.

³⁴ See Gedün Chöpel, *Tibetan Arts of Passion*, translated and introduced by Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1992), from which I have drawn some of the material in this article.

³⁵ The female is called “mother” (*yum*), and the male is called “father” (*yab*). The terms are rich with suggestions (never made explicit in the tradition) of copulating with one’s parent; it would seem that for heterosexuals this would be with the parent of the opposite sex, and for homosexuals, with the parent of the same sex.

³⁶ *mnying ma*.

³⁷ The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, 134.