



WISDOM ACADEMY

Shamatha and Vipashyana in the Dzogchen Tradition

B. ALAN WALLACE

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Root Text and Commentary

“The Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra”

and

“Essence of Clear Meaning”

*Heart of the Great Perfection: Düdjom Lingpa's Visions of the
Great Perfection, Vol. I*

HEART OF THE GREAT PERFECTION

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The Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra



From the Matrix of Pure Appearances and Primordial Consciousness,
the Quintessence of the Great Mystery of the Mantra[yāna],
the Primordially Pure Absolute Space of Samantabhadrī,
the Spontaneously Actualized Treasury of the Great Perfection

by
Düdjom Lingpa



Dedication [610]

To the supreme Omnipresent Lord of all the buddha families and
maṇḍalas—
to the sugatagarbha—I bow with unwavering faith.

In the equality of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and the path,
the pervasive emptiness of pristine space,
I, the great yogin of the dharmakāya, free of conceptual elaboration,
arose as an apparitional display of primordial consciousness.

The ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha,
free of conceptual elaboration and imbued with the three doors of libera-
tion, is primordially enlightened.
As spontaneously actualized displays of the union of the three kāyas in
absolute space,
the teacher and his circle of disciples appeared, their minds indivisible.

This arose as the splendor of my fine karma, prayers, and merit
and that of some individuals with fortune equal to my own. [611]
Those people who lack the karmic momentum of this path
will get no more from this than from a drawing of food and wealth.
This space treasury of ultimate reality is granted as an inheritance
to people of good fortune.

Phase 1: Taking the Impure Mind as the Path

For the satisfaction of the apparitional display of his circle of disciples,
the supreme teacher, Samantabhadra, Omnipresent Lord Vajra,
declared, “Listen!” to his circle of disciples, who were the nondual display
of his own creative power.

Examine the body, speech, and mind, and among them recognize the one
that is primary as the all-creating sovereign.
The shape and color of the all-creating sovereign,
as well as its origin, location, and destination, are objectless openness. [612]
This is the spontaneous actualization of the essential nature of the path of
cutting through.

Simultaneous individuals enter the path with no basis and no root.
Others should come to rest in space,
and within three weeks they will certainly awaken and enter the path.
Those of the class with inferior faculties
identify stillness and movement,
and by taking the mind as the path, they are led to the absolute space
of pristine awareness.

First is single-pointed unification of the two.
Then by resting without observing, its natural power manifests.
Abide loosely without mindfulness in a vacuous, wide-open clarity.
And resting in a luminous vacuity is called self-illuminating mindfulness.

For everyone the various experiences of bliss, vacuity, and luminosity
become objects of craving and attachment;
and meditative experiences of illnesses and discomfort in the body, speech,
and mind
sporadically arise over time.

Whenever you proudly hope for good things and cling to them,
and fear bad things and reify inflictors of harm,
you have stumbled upon a dangerous juncture that can lead you astray.
The general synthesis that is the sole, vital point of the path
is ascertaining all experiences of pleasure, pain, and indifference
as false impressions of unreal meditative experiences. [613]
By releasing them, without blocking or embracing them,
you bring an end to deviations and losses, and this is the one eye of wisdom.

Those who have become distant from sublime spiritual mentors
should cherish the five topics as the sublimity of the path.
If you strive too hard in practicing single-pointedness,
the power of your mind will decline; and with stagnant mindfulness,
although your body is human, your mind becomes that of an animal.
Some people may stray into delirium;
so devote yourself to a spiritual mentor, without ever being separated
from him.

In short, even if you strive diligently in this phase of these practices
for a long time,
taking the mind as the path

does not bring you even a hair's breadth closer to the paths
of liberation and omniscience,
and your life will certainly have been spent in vain!
So understand this, you fortunate people.

Phase 2: Revealing Your Own Face as the Sharp Vajra of Vipāśyanā

With the manifestation of the sharp vajra of wisdom,
pristine awareness transcends the ethically neutral ground.
Being nothing whatsoever, [the essential nature] transcends all expressions
of speech and thought.
In natural openness, with no modification, negation, or affirmation by
meditation,
it is spontaneously actualized as the sharp vajra of wisdom.
All the qualities of the view, meditation, and conduct, as well as the ground,
path, and fruition, [614]
together with taking refuge, bodhicitta, the six perfections, and the
maṇḍalas of deities and mantras,
are collectively perfected in the sharp vajra.

Sentient beings under the domination of the māras of ignorance and
mental afflictions
are distinguished from the very instant
they experience the perfect enlightenment of omniscience,
and they become fields of merit for sentient beings, including gods.

Phase 3: Revealing the Ground Dharmakāya

The sharp vajra of discerning wisdom
demolishes the mountain of saṃsāra of self-concepts.
Investigate the origin, location, and destination of the name and referent
of that which is grasped as the “I,” which is the root of saṃsāra.
Decisively recognizing it as objectless emptiness
is determining personal identitylessness.

Seek the bases of designation of the names of the self and of objects,
and decisively recognize them as objectless emptiness.
Investigate how all things, starting with partless elementary particles,
are empty in the sense of being devoid of inherent nature.
Then decisively recognize objectless emptiness in the absolute space
of phenomena in the worlds of appearances of this life, the hereafter,
and dreams.

Decisively understand that the karmic relationships of virtue and vice,
as well as the benefit and harm from gods and demons,
are of the nature of objectless openness.

Cut through the basis and root of the origin, location, and destination
of the buddhas and displays of buddhahelds, [615]
and of the appearances, mindsets, and objects of the three realms of
saṃsāra.

Truly recognize everything as being of the nature of objectless emptiness,
without giving this mere lip service.
The space of great emptiness acts as the ground of appearances of saṃsāra.

Decisively establish that space is the ground
of all phenomena in the panoramic sweep of objectless space.
Pristine space is the buddha,
the ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha.

Therefore, realize all phenomena as emptiness.
The experience of the conscious awareness of identitylessness
is the sharp vajra itself, which is the consummation of pristine awareness
that is present in the ground.

Finally, in order to collapse the cave of fixations on hopes and fears,
visualize your body, speech, and mind as the three vajras,
and with the vital points of the pith instructions on the three great
principles,
rove about in haunted places
and make the supreme offering of your cherished body.
By the power of this, the false cave of hopes and fears will collapse.

Phase 4: Determining the Characteristics and Qualities of the Ground

The essential nature of the whole world of appearances is emptiness.
Great emptiness is spontaneously actualized as the essential nature
of the path.

The essential nature of the dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha, [616]
is not modified or altered by either saṃsāra or nirvāṇa.
Free of the extremes of conceptual elaboration, it is imbued with the three
doors of liberation.

It is spontaneously actualized as the five kāyas,
the five buddha families, the five facets of primordial consciousness,

the five buddhahelds, the five male deities, the five female consorts,
 the Three Jewels,
 the Three Roots, the classes, maṇḍalas, empowerments, and worship,
 as the essential nature of mahāyoga.
 The five displays inside the body,
 the purification, transmutation, igniting, and descent of the channels, vital
 energies, and bindus,
 together with the empowerments and four blisses, are all
 spontaneously actualized emanations of the sugatagarbha.
 In short, the dharmakāya, absolute space devoid of signs,
 is bound with names, modes, and signs in accordance with the ways of
 saṃsāra.
 In order to guide disciples who grasp at permanence
 and to counteract six kinds of craving,
 visualizing, purity, and emptiness serve as remedies.
 Therefore, those relative, artificial Dharmas of all the yānas
 are emanated from and reabsorbed into the sugatagarbha,
 like rivers that emerge from and return to the ocean.
 So it is known as the ground Great Perfection.

Regarding tīrthikas, who seek a path while clinging to the extremes of
 eternalism and nihilism;
 those who [wander] in saṃsāra by deluding their mindstreams with cling-
 ing to and reifying appearances and the mind;
 śrāvakas, who take personal identitylessness as the path; [617]
 pratyekabuddhas, whose path apprehends emptiness and the links of
 dependent origination in forward and reverse order;
 Cittamātrins, who view the world of appearances as the mind;
 Mādhyamikas, who apprehend all phenomena as empty;
 followers of kriyā, who primarily emphasize hygiene and cling to realms;
 followers of upāya, who integrate the higher and lower views and conduct;
 followers of yoga, who regard the samayasattva and jñānasattva as auton-
 omously different;
 followers of mahāyoga, who mistakenly view objects as autonomously
 real; and
 the path of anuyoga, in which there is the pretense of actualizing the
 cause and fruition of absolute space and primordial consciousness—
 all the grounds, paths, meditative experiences, and realizations of
 those [yānas]
 are spontaneously actualized facets of the Great Perfection.

Like regarding water taken from the ocean as the entire ocean,
 all yānas are seen as deficient by those who realize the meaning of this.
 In the absolute space of pristine awareness, which is actualized by wisdom
 and primordial consciousness,
 the Buddha Samantabhadra, who is free of relinquishment and attainment,
 is the Great Perfection—the essential nature of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and
 the path.
 Therefore, this is renowned as the path Great Perfection.
 All the causal yānas that have the pretense of being the ground of the
 fruition
 are actualized as the sugatagarbha, Samantabhadra.
 Appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra are naturally liberated, without
 abandoning them,
 as kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness—this is the authentic teach-
 ing of all the jinas.
 All pretentious claims regarding other fruitions are wearisome.
 Therefore, all this is the fruition of all Dharmas—
 the spontaneous actualization of the fruitional Great Perfection.
 Without falling to the extremes of mundane existence or peace, [618]
 the creative power of primordial consciousness that knows [reality as it is]
 and perceives [the full range of phenomena] blazes forth.
 Although the genesis of names is not different,
 for the sake of disciples, it is given conventional names.

*Phase 5: Determining Secret Dualistic Grasping and Revealing
 the Way of Natural Liberation*

Thus, as for the emergence of impure appearances and mindsets
 of saṃsāra,
 from the displays of great original purity,
 subtle self-concepts obscure wisdom and primordial consciousness,
 and due to the subsiding of the inner glow and radiance of the ground into
 the womb,
 the luminosity of its outer radiance, the ethically neutral substrate of
 saṃsāra,
 manifests from immaterial space,
 and the consciousness of grasping at the “I” serves as the basis from which
 appearances and mindsets emerge.
 With mentation alone established as the basis from which appearances
 arise,
 from the movements of the six kinds of conditioned consciousness

manifest indeterminate phenomena, like hallucinations.
 Sporadically, like hair-tips moved by the wind,
 due to the five energies that emanate, vacillate, differentiate, assemble, and
 transform,
 the impure eon is created, abides, and is destroyed and emptied.
 The five sensory consciousnesses give rise to apprehended objects,
 which are apprehended by the roving thoughts of subtle mental
 consciousness.
 In one day, countless subtle eons vanish.
 Completely withdrawing into the domain of mentation, daytime appear-
 ances arise, [619]
 and with their complete withdrawal into the domain of the substrate,
 nighttime appearances arise.
 When you fall asleep, an eon dissolves into the space of awareness.
 The substrate spontaneously actualizes the formless realm;
 afflictive mentation, the form realm;
 and mentation, the desire realm.
 Not even an atom of the three realms possibly exists out there.
 The rūdra of the view of self is the matraṃkaḥ of saṃsāra,
 your body is the desire realm, your speech is the form realm,
 and your mind abides as the four dimensions of the formless realm.
 Flesh, blood, warmth, breath, the white and red bindus, the space of
 awareness,
 the four elements, the sun, moon, and Rāhula are [thus] established.
 Liberated by the power and blessings of the sharp vajra
 of conscious awareness of identitylessness in pure absolute space,
 the quintessences manifest as the kāyas and facets of great primordial
 consciousness.
 Without abandoning saṃsāra, you are liberated as a buddha.
 Without abandoning the view of the self, it is pacified as a display of spon-
 taneous actualization.

*Phase 6: Teachings on the Essential Points of Practice and Their Key
 Distinctions*

Having established as your witness the ground of being, absolute space, as
 the true buddha,
 by generating the power of pure prayers,
 make a commitment to omniscient buddhahood.
 At all times supremely cherish the practice of the essential points of the pith
 instructions [620]

on practicing for death and on immersion and withdrawal.

The manifestation of the substrate as absolute space is the dharmakāya,
Samantabhadra.

The manifestation of the absolute space of mental consciousness is great
wisdom.

The manifestation of the ultimate nature of the mind is the supreme path of
pristine awareness.

The manifestation of conditioned consciousness blazes forth as the creative
power of primordial consciousness.

The manifestation of the essential nature of sentient beings is buddhahood
itself.

The extinction of impure appearances and mindsets is actual liberation.

When understanding arrives at the ultimate nature, realization is certain.

After making such distinctions, so that you are not confused regarding the
essential points,

it is supremely important to focus your practice on these essential points.

Thus, with the wisdom of truly realizing the nature of being
of the Great Perfection through actualizing the nature of existence,
focus on unifying your view, meditation, and conduct.

Phase 7: How to Follow the Path of the Great Clear Light,

Direct Crossing Over

Liberation is swiftly achieved by devoting yourself to the pinnacle of paths,
the swift path, the essential Dharma,

filled with blessings of clairvoyance, extrasensory perception, and miracu-
lous power,

the path of direct crossing over to the city of the great transference.

These are practical instructions on forcefully transferring the residual
appearances

of the emergence of objects to the initial consciousness

to the space of awareness of the quintessences. [621]

The initial consciousness emerges as a vision of the clear light,
manifesting as a sight for the eye of wisdom.

Visions emerge and progress as the great clear light.

Take satisfaction in the mudrā of pristine awareness ripening as the vital
essence.

With the extinction of appearances and mindsets, you cross over into the
absolute space of ultimate reality,

and you awaken as the great transference youthful vase kāya.

The signs of this, like space dissolving into space,
 are that there are no limits to your lifespan, duration, and dimensions,
 and three kinds of liberation occur as the quintessence of the rainbow body.
 Due to various, indeterminate good and bad visionary experiences,
 joys and sorrows arise over the course of time.
 Without hope or fear, transfer them all into absolute space.
 Individuals who do not reach the culmination of the path like that
 realize the vital points of the view and meditation, like a swallow entering
 its nest;
 identify the transitional phase of dying, like a lovely young woman gazing
 at her reflection;
 recognize the nature of existence, like meeting someone you have known
 before;
 merge the clear light into absolute space, like a child crawling onto its
 mother's lap;
 practice continuously, like repairing a broken irrigation canal;
 block the entrance to the womb, like being released from a foul prison; and
 so on.
 Recognize the supreme importance of these six analogies and their vital
 points. [622]
 By this it is possible that you will be liberated or find relief.

Phase 8: How to Dwell in the Ground of Being

Ultimately, in the fruition of liberation,
 the ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha,
 is spontaneously actualized as the dharmakāya, the primordial protector.
 That which is to be achieved is the youthful vase kāya.
 Those of superior faculties actualize this in one lifetime;
 those of middling and inferior faculties find pristine relief in the splendor
 of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness
 and dwell in the grounds of the five buddhafiels.
 You appear in all ways as the glory and protector of disciples,
 like the moon and its various reflections in water.
 Until the radiant circle of disciples dissolves into absolute space,
 the primordial consciousness of absolute space is continuously displayed.

This visionary experience arose as an illusory display of the primordial consciousness of Traktung Dūdjom Pawo. After some time it was earnestly requested by the hermetic disciples Pema Tashi, Orgyen Dorjé, Rikpé

Nyugu, and Lodrö Wangpo. Since this was meaningful, may the virtue that results from it dredge the three realms of saṃsāra from their depths.

Virtue, virtue, virtue—sarva maṅgalam!

Essence of Clear Meaning

A Short Commentary on the *Sharp Vajra of
Conscious Awareness Tantra*

by
Pema Tashi



[340] From the crown of my head I beseech the Dharma king, the great treasure revealer, the regent of Padmasambhava,⁴⁷ who truly sees the meaning of the Great Perfection of unmodified conscious awareness and is skilled in disseminating it to others: May I never be separated from you until I reach great enlightenment!

THIS [TREATISE] is a uniquely marvelous sign that the time is ripe for meditative experiences and realizations due to the training of many previous generations in the unsurpassed Early Translation school, the Nyingma tradition, which is the essential Dharma of the swift path to buddhahood in one lifetime.

Here I shall present to the best of my ability a concise commentary on the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*, a synthesis of the quintessence of the great mystery of the Mantra[yāna], [341] which correctly reveals the nature of cutting through to original purity and the path of direct crossing over to spontaneous actualization. This includes three sections: (I) the meaning of the title, (II) the meaning of the text, and (III) the colophon.

I. The Meaning of the Title

This section has four parts: (A) the title, (B) the explanation of the meaning of the title, (C) how the title was chosen, and (D) the reason for that choice.

A. The Title

**Here is presented the Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra:
From the Matrix of Pure Appearances and Primordial Consciousness,
the Quintessence of the Great Mystery of the Mantra[yāna],
the Primordially Pure Absolute Space of Samantabhadri,
the Spontaneously Actualized Treasury of the Great Perfection**

B. The Explanation of the Meaning of the Title

This section has two parts: (1) the basis from which it arises and (2) the title of the Dharma that arises from it.

47. This refers to Dūdjom Lingpa, who is Pema Tashi's root guru.

1. *The Basis from Which It Arises*

By the power of familiarization with the profound path of the stages of generation and completion, however objects appear, they all arise solely as **pure appearances**. [342] When it fully expands, the creative power of the subject that apprehends these appearances—the **primordial consciousness** that knows reality as it is and perceives the full range of phenomena—becomes the means for achieving the supreme and common siddhis.⁴⁸ Since entrances to the path of skillful means and wisdom limitlessly arise from it, it is said to be **from the matrix**. The meaning of *matrix* is that it connects many things. In short, all the collections of Dharmas that emerge from the creative power of the wisdom that arises from meditation are called *the matrix of pure appearances and primordial consciousness*.

2. *The Title of the Dharma That Arises from It*

When the nature of existence is apprehended within itself, it transcends words and concepts, so the presentation of the bodhisattva grounds and paths and so on cannot be applied to it. [343] However, in dependence upon the way it appears to disciples, the conventions of the ground, path, and fruition are used. In accordance with that, the union of the **primordially pure** essential nature of ultimate reality, the pristinely pure **absolute space**⁴⁹ of Samantabhadri, which is immutable throughout the three times, with the **spontaneously actualized** clear light totally encompasses all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, without blending them together. Therefore this is the **Great Perfection**. Since it is the basis from which all the qualities of the paths and fruition emerge, it is like a **treasury**, and this is the tantra of the ground. The subject that arises in accordance with the object, the absolute space of phenomena, [344] is your own self-aware primordial **consciousness**, or pristine **awareness**, and this is the tantra of the authentic path. The manifestation of its symbols in the form of names, words, and letters is that which designates the tantra of the path.

Its three divisions include tantras that manifest as sounds,⁵⁰ tantras that are

48. See *siddhis*, *eight* in glossary.

49. Tib. *dbying*s; Skt. *dhātu*. This term as it appears here and in many other instances in Dzokchen literature is an abbreviation of *dharmadhātu*, or the “absolute space of phenomena.” This does not refer to space in the reified, Newtonian sense, but rather to an ultimate dimension of space out of which all manifestations of relative space-time and mass-energy emerge, in which they are present, and into which they eventually dissolve. Likewise, all manifestations of relative states of consciousness and mental processes emerge as displays of primordial consciousness, which has always been indivisible from the absolute space of phenomena.

50. Tib. *sgar snang ba'i rgyud*. Tantras manifesting as sounds are view transmission or both view and symbolic transmission.

uttered as sounds,⁵¹ and symbolic tantras.⁵² Their essential nature is wisdom, and they are imbued with the seven vajra qualities.⁵³ Due to familiarization with realization, reified appearances, together with their habitual propensities, are pierced and demolished, so it is called **the Sharp Vajra. Tantra** has the meaning of constant presence, without interruption, so it is said that *tantra* refers to a continuum. Moreover, the tantra of the ground, the *sugatagarbha*, is constantly present from the time of being a sentient being up to buddhahood. The *Sublime Continuum (Uttaratantra)* states, “It is immutable ultimate reality, which will be in the future as it was in the past.”⁵⁴

Its two divisions include the ground as the essence of the nature of existence and the delusive, imputed ground. This [tantra] reveals the former explicitly and the latter implicitly. The path unites the ground and the fruition, so it is a tantra. As for its classification, between skillful means and liberation, it is the latter. The path dispels adventitious obscurations, and it manifests the essential nature of indivisibility of the ground and the fruition, so it is the fruitional path. Its two divisions include the *dharmakāya* for your own sake [345] and the *rūpakāya* for the sake of others. This dharma synthesizes the **quintessence** of the definitive sūtras and collections of tantras that constitute the **great mystery of the Mantra[yāna]**. It is said that it is **presented here**, for this is the case.

C. How the Title Was Chosen

In general, among the many ways of designating a title, in this case the title was chosen in reference to the meaning.

D. The Reason for That Choice

This is obvious.

II. The Meaning of the Text

This section has two parts: (A) the homage as a branch of the text as a whole and (B) the actual explanation of the meaning of the tantra.

51. Tib. *sgrar grags pa'i rgyud*. Tantras uttered as sounds consist of the oral transmission of great masters.

52. Tib. *brdar gyur pa'i rgyud*. Symbolic tantras have been made into symbols.

53. The seven vajra qualities are invulnerability, indestructibility, reality, incorruptibility, stability, total unobstructability, and invincibility.

54. Tib. *Rgyud bla ma*; Skt. *Uttaratantra*. Treatise by Asaṅga, attributed to Maitreya.

A. The Homage as a Branch of the Text as a Whole

To the supreme Omnipresent Lord of all the buddha families
and maṇḍalas—
to the sugatagarbha—I bow with unwavering faith.

The sugatagarbha is the basis of emanation of all the **buddha families**, for it is the nature of the enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities of all the *jinas* of the three times. While ultimate reality is one, for the sake of disciples it merely appears as distinct manifestations, so it is the **Omnipresent Lord of all the maṇḍalas** of peaceful, enriching, powerful, and wrathful deities. Because it appears as the progenitor of all the buddhas, it is even more **supreme** than the buddhas. To sustain the stream of nonmeditation in which your own face manifests as the unique revealer of the Great Perfection—the primordial protector Samantabhadra, pristine awareness, **the sugatagarbha**—is to **bow with unwavering faith**. [346] The realization of subject and object as nondual is the homage of encountering the ultimate view. The purpose of the homage is that by perfecting the accumulations, obstacles will be pacified, the treatise will be completed, your wisdom will be perfected, and you will realize yourself as sublime.

B. The Actual Explanation of the Meaning of the Tantra

This section has three parts: (1) the account of the cause that gave rise to the tantra, (2) the discussion of the contributing conditions, and (3) the resultant comprehension of the actual meaning of the tantra.

1. The Account of the Cause That Gave Rise to the Tantra

This section has four parts: (a) how the appearances of phenomena dissolved into the absolute space of phenomena, (b) how the nature of existence of ultimate reality manifested, (c) how spontaneously actualized appearances arose as the teacher and his circle of disciples, and (d) the addendum of the qualities of disciples.

a. How the Appearances of Phenomena Dissolved into the Absolute Space of Phenomena

In the equality of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and the path,
the pervasive emptiness of pristine space,
I, the great yogin of the dharmakāya, free of conceptual
elaboration,
arose as an apparitional display of primordial consciousness.

Due to the power of sublime qualities acquired over many lifetimes, all phenomena included among **saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and the path**, as they delusively appear to ignorance, subsided into the **equality** of the originally pure primordial ground, absolute space, the **pervasive emptiness of pristine space**. After some time, I limitlessly pervaded that mode of existence, and I directly fathomed its essential nature by taking as the path the ultimate meaning of cutting through to original purity.

b. How the Nature of Existence of Ultimate Reality Manifested

When I, **the great yogin**, as the original Buddha Samantabhadra, [347] or **the dharmakāya, free of conceptual elaboration**, emerged as an appearance from that ground, without deludedly succumbing to appearances as other, I recognized ultimate reality as my own great face. Consequently, I took as the path the appearances of the radiance of pristine awareness and directly perceived the ultimate path of direct crossing over to spontaneous actualization. In the one **primordial consciousness** of the essential nature of great purity there **arose an apparitional display** of a buddhafield, the teacher, and his vast circle of disciples. Here is how they appeared.

c. How Spontaneously Actualized Appearances Arose as the Teacher and His Circle of Disciples

The ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha,
free of conceptual elaboration and imbued with the three doors
of liberation, is **primordially enlightened**.
As spontaneously actualized displays of the union of the three
kāyas in absolute space,
the teacher and his circle of disciples appeared, their minds
indivisible.

Because the original **ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha**, is free of the eight extremes of **conceptual elaboration**⁵⁵ and is **imbued with the three doors of liberation**,⁵⁶ it is **primordially enlightened**. It is enlightened as the progenitor of all the buddhas, and its unimpeded, **spontaneously actualized**, natural radiance is the *sambhogakāya* Samantabhadra, the Lake-Born Vajra [Padmasambhava]. Its creative **displays** variously appeared as *nirmāṇakāyas*, including the Bodhisattva Vajra of Pristine Awareness. **In the**

55. The eight extremes of conceptual elaboration are origination and cessation, existence and nonexistence, going and coming, and unity and diversity.

56. The three doors of liberation are emptiness, signlessness, and desirelessness.

absolute space of the union of the three *kāyas*, the teacher and his circle of disciples appeared as displays whose minds were indivisible. In dependence upon their appearance, I easily apprehended and fathomed this profound Dharma. Wherever the teacher and his circle of disciples assemble, [348] the meaning of the tantra certainly emerges. So to classify this discourse in terms of common and uncommon teachings, it is the latter.

d. The Addendum of the Qualities of Disciples

This arose as the splendor of my fine karma, prayers, and merit and that of some individuals with fortune equal to my own. Those people who lack the karmic momentum of this path will get no more from this than from a drawing of food and wealth. This space treasury of ultimate reality is granted as an inheritance to people of good fortune.

This sublime entrance to the nonconceptual primordial consciousness of the minds of all the jinas of the three times **arose as the splendor of the fine karma, prayers, and merit** acquired over the course of many previous lifetimes by me, a *vidyādhara*, **and that of some other individuals with fortune equal to my own.** Those people who lack the karmic momentum of having followed **this path** will either not encounter this path, or if they do, they will not be attracted to it. Even if they are slightly drawn to it and they apply themselves to teaching and listening, due to their poor wisdom and faltering enthusiasm, they **will get no more from this than** if they had encountered **a drawing of food and wealth.** If they memorize it, they will not retain the words; if they ponder it, they will fail to understand it; and if they meditate, it will not arise in their mindstreams.

Therefore, **this inexhaustible space treasury of ultimate reality is granted as an inheritance** or bestowed by the self-emergent Padmasambhava **to people of good fortune** endowed with faith, enthusiasm, and wisdom. He implied with this statement that in the future it is possible that many people will achieve liberation in dependence upon this path. [349]

Phase 1: Taking the Impure Mind as the Path

2. The Discussion of the Contributing Conditions

**For the satisfaction of the apparitional display of his circle of disciples,
the supreme teacher, Samantabhadra, Omnipresent Lord Vajra,
declared, “Listen!” to his circle of disciples, who were the
nondual display of his own creative power.**

THE TOPIC OF discussion is the request to explain the meaning of the tantra, for this is the condition that contributed to the emergence of the teaching. In this case, as a result of the natural sound of ultimate reality arousing the circle of disciples to make the request, the meaning of the tantra was ready to emerge in accordance with the minds of disciples of the future. **For the satisfaction of his circle of disciples, who were an apparitional display of primordial consciousness, the self-appearing, supreme teacher who surpasses other buddhas, Samantabhadra, Omnipresent Lord, the great Vajradhara, declared, “Listen!”** Having caught their attention, the teacher spoke **to his emanated circle of disciples, who were the nondual display of his own creative power.** Among common and uncommon teachings, these were the latter, for the minds of the teacher and of his circle of disciples were indivisible, which is to say that the teacher exhorted and taught himself, and not anyone else.

The four related aspects of the significance of this section are (a) the subject of this tantra, namely the pristine awareness that is present in the ground dharmakāya, (b) the significance of gaining realization by hearing and reflecting upon the words of this tantra, (c) the essential significance of gaining liberation either in this life or in the intermediate period⁵⁷ by

57. Tib. *bar do*. In contexts such as this, the “intermediate period” refers to the interval between death and one’s next rebirth, which includes two of the six transitional phases, namely the transitional phase of ultimate reality and the transitional phase of becoming.

practicing the realized meaning [350] with unflagging enthusiasm, and (d) the interdependent relationship among these aspects. These four aspects are characteristics of an authentic tantra or treatise.

3. The Resultant Comprehension of the Actual Meaning of the Tantra

This section has three parts: (a) the path of cutting through to original purity, (b) the path of direct crossing over to spontaneous actualization, and (c) the manner in which the indivisible nature of the ground and the fruition is actualized.

a. The Path of Cutting Through to Original Purity

This section has three parts: (i) identifying the creator of all phenomena as the mind, (ii) establishing the mind as baseless and rootless, and (iii) how individuals with specific faculties may enter the path.

i. Identifying the Creator of All Phenomena as the Mind

**Examine the body, speech, and mind, and among them
recognize the one that is primary as the all-creating sovereign.**

Here is the way to **examine** the agent, or **sovereign**, that **creates all** phenomena as the mind, which is **primary among the body, speech, and mind**. During the daytime, nighttime, and the intermediate period, due to the mind's self-grasping, the body and speech appear to the mind. Over the course of a lifetime, it is the mind that experiences joy and sorrow. Finally, when the body and mind separate, the body remains as a corpse. When the speech disappears without a trace, the mind follows after karma and is the agent that wanders in saṃsāra. From one perspective, for those three reasons, among them **recognize** the mind as primary. From another perspective, none of those three is anything other than the mind; [351] therefore, by ascertaining them as the mind alone, among them recognize the mind as primary. The former perspective is determined in accordance with their conventional mode of appearances, while the latter perspective is determined in accordance with their conventional mode of existence.

To further explain of the latter perspective, Mahāpaṇḍita Nāropa's treatise *Synthesis of the View* states:

All phenomena that appear and come into being
have no existence apart from the self-aware mind,
for it causes them to appear and be clear,

just like the experience of your own awareness.
 If they were not the mind,
 they would be unrelated to the mind and would not appear at all.
 Determine relative truth⁵⁸ in that way.

To the deluded mind, the body and mind appear as if they were different, but in terms of their mode of existence, they directly appear to nonconceptual consciousness and are clearly experienced. This indicates that they exist not as something material but simply as the natural illumination of your own awareness, like consciousness that experiences joy and sorrow. If they were not the mind but were instead matter, like light and darkness, they could never interact with each other, so they could never appear at all. For these reasons, the body, speech, and all other appearing phenomena are established as the mind.

ii. Establishing the Mind as Baseless and Rootless

**The shape and color of the all-creating sovereign,
 as well as its origin, location, and destination, are objectless
 openness.
 This is the spontaneous actualization of the essential nature of
 the path of cutting through. [352]**

By examining in that way whether the mind that is the **all-creating sovereign** of the body, speech, and mind—or of all phenomena—is really existent or really nonexistent, the mind is found to have no basis or root, so it is not established as having any **shape** or **color**. The five elements and five [sensory] objects appear like objects of the mind, and your own body appears as its base. But if all these are investigated from an ultimate perspective, they are found to be like space, not truly established as either one thing or many. Ascertaining **the origin, location, and destination** [of the mind] as **objectless openness is the spontaneous actualization of the essential nature of the path of cutting through**. This is not something freshly achieved, but is simply the knowledge of the mode of being of the nature of existence.

58. Tib. *kun rdzob bden pa*; Skt. *saṃvṛtisatya*. Lit. “totally obscurational truth,” such provisional, conventional truths appear in a manner contrary to their mode of existence and thereby obscure the nature of ultimate truth (Tib. *don dam bden pa*; Skt. *paramārthasatya*).

iii. How Individuals with Specific Faculties May Enter the Path

This section has two parts: (A') how individuals of superior faculties enter the path and (B') how individuals of middling and inferior faculties enter the path.

A' How Individuals of Superior Faculties Enter the Path

**Simultaneous individuals enter the path with no basis and no root.
Others should come to rest in space,
and within three weeks they will certainly awaken and enter
the path.**

Simply by determining the ultimate nature of the mind as having **no basis and no root**, individuals with superior faculties, who are of the **simultaneous** class,⁵⁹ identify the vast, unimpeded consciousness that remains after discerning wisdom has naturally vanished. Since this is primordial consciousness, which transcends the mind, they **enter the authentic path**. [353]

B' How Individuals of Middling and Inferior Faculties Enter the Path

This section has two parts: (1') how individuals of middling faculties enter the path and (2') how individuals of inferior faculties enter the path.

1' How Individuals of Middling Faculties Enter the Path

The first of these two kinds of individuals, namely, **others** who do not have the fortune to identify primordial consciousness in that way, should retire to a solitary place, practice guru yoga, and take the four empowerments.⁶⁰ Then they should meditate on the domain of **space**,⁶¹ a pebble, a stick, or such things as a Buddha image or seed syllable, or at their heart they may visualize

59. Tib. *gcig car ba'i rigs can*. In this context, this refers to the class of individuals who receive teachings on the Great Perfection and simultaneously gain realization of the view.

60. The four empowerments are (1) the vase, or water, empowerment, (2) the secret, or crown, empowerment, (3) the wisdom–primordial-consciousness, or vajra, empowerment, and (4) the word, or bell, empowerment.

61. Sera Khandro in *Garland for the Delight of the Fortunate* says, “As for external space, all phenomena included in the vast outer physical worlds; the multitudes of inner, animate sentient inhabitants; the well-displayed intervening appearances of the five senses; your own body, aggregates, elements, and sense bases; and all the appearances and mindsets of ordinary sentient beings are external space.” See GD 87.

a radiant orb of five-colored light. By sustaining their attention and **resting** in meditative equipoise, **within three weeks** they will see with the eye of wisdom the primordial nature of existence. Then **they will certainly awaken and enter the path** of the Great Perfection.

2' How Individuals of Inferior Faculties Enter the Path

This section has two parts: (a') taking aspects of the mind as the path and (b') taking the essential nature as the path.

a' Taking Aspects of the Mind as the Path

This section has three parts: (i') the teaching, (ii') the explanation, and (iii') the synthesis.

i' The Teaching

**Those of the class with inferior faculties
identify stillness and movement,
and by taking the mind as the path, they are led to the absolute
space of pristine awareness.**

Those of the class with inferior faculties, not having the fortune to **identify** [primordial consciousness] in that way, first recognize the difference between **stillness** with respect to consciousness and the **movement** of thoughts. **And**, by first **taking the aspects of the mind as the path**, finally **they are led to the absolute space of pristine awareness**.

ii' The Elaborate Explanation of How This Occurs

This section has four parts: (A") mindfulness of the essential nature of the path, [354] (B") specific meditative experiences to be purified, (C") the essential nature of that which is to be abandoned and its remedy, and (D") how never to be separated from the experience of the path instructions.

A" Mindfulness of the Essential Nature of the Path

**First is single-pointed unification of the two.
Then by resting without observing, its natural power manifests.
Abide loosely without mindfulness in a vacuous, wide-open
clarity.
And resting in a luminous vacuity is called self-illuminating
mindfulness.**

According to the teachings, there are four types of mindfulness of the essential nature of the path. The **first** entails distinguishing between stillness and movement, and by the power of familiarizing yourself with their different appearances, there is *single-pointed mindfulness* of the **unification of the two**. **Then**, even while **resting without** strenuously **observing** them like before, as **its natural power manifests**, there is *manifest mindfulness*. **Abiding loosely without mindfulness in a vacuous, wide-open clarity**, a spacious vacuity, constitutes lying down on a bed that is devoid of mindfulness, which is the *substrate*.⁶² Once coarse mindfulness has subsided, **resting in a luminous vacuity is called self-illuminating mindfulness**, or the *substrate consciousness*.

The former two kinds of mindfulness [single-pointed mindfulness and manifest mindfulness] directly perceive whatever creative displays arise, while during the latter two [the absence of mindfulness and self-illuminating mindfulness], apart from abiding solely in dependence upon a subtle mode of apprehension, all radiant appearances and creative displays of thoughts cease, so there is only nonconceptuality. These kinds of mindfulness are aroused by the path, and since they descend to the two types of substrate,⁶³ they are called the *substrates of descent*. [355] Some teachers regard the first as the “one taste” and the second as “freedom from conceptual elaboration.”⁶⁴

62. Tib. *kun gzhi*; Skt. *ālaya*. The vacuous space of the mind as it is directly perceived by the substrate consciousness (Tib. *kun gzhi rnam shes*; Skt. *ālayavijñāna*).

63. The two types of substrate are the actual substrate (corresponding to the absence of mindfulness) and the temporarily luminous substrate (corresponding to self-illuminating mindfulness). The former is a mindless vacuity, like the sky at dusk, covered over by darkness, while the latter makes it possible for thoughts to appear, just as a polished mirror reflects a face. By letting the temporarily luminous substrate consciousness rest in the pristine nature of emptiness, the assemblies of roving thoughts cease, causing a radiant vacuity to appear. This corresponds to the second type of substrate.

64. Here the “first” refers to the experience of the actual substrate, and the “second” refers to the temporarily luminous substrate. The four sequential yogas of the Mahāmudrā tradition are single-pointedness, freedom from conceptual elaboration, one taste, and nonmeditation. The dissolution of the coarse mind into the substrate consciousness, culminating in the experience of self-illuminating mindfulness, signifies the achievement of śamatha, or the threshold (Tib. *nyer bsdogs*; Skt. *sāmantaka*) of the first *dhyāna*. But some teachers mistake this for the much deeper realizations of pristine awareness that occur in the third and second yogas of Mahāmudrā. For a detailed explanation of how the four yogas of Mahāmudrā relate to the stages of practice of Dzokchen, see chapters 10 and 11 of Karma Chagmé, *Naked Awareness: Practical Teachings on the Union of Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen*, commentary by Gyatrul Rinpoche, trans. B. Alan Wallace (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000).

Others claim it is ethically neutral, but whatever they call it, you have arrived at the essential nature of the mind.⁶⁵

B" Specific Meditative Experiences to Be Purified

**For everyone the various experiences of bliss, vacuity, and
luminosity
become objects of craving and attachment;
and meditative experiences of illnesses and discomfort in the
body, speech, and mind
sporadically arise over time.**

Occasionally on this path, due to being bound by the coarse and subtle grasping of mindfulness, there certainly arise **various experiences for everyone**, such as **bliss** like the warmth of a fire, **luminosity** like the breaking of the dawn, and **vacuity**, or nonconceptuality, like an ocean unmoved by waves. However, if you don't know that these deceptive meditative experiences are not to be believed or trusted, and if you fixate on them as the highest virtues such that they **become objects of craving and attachment**, they will become nothing more than causes of rebirth in the three realms of mundane existence. Therefore, even if you cultivate them for a long time, you will not rise above saṃsāra. Moreover, from your guru's teachings, you must thoroughly understand how outer upheavals of apparitions of gods and demons, inner upheavals of physical illnesses, and secret upheavals of various joys and sorrows and so on **sporadically arise over time** as various **meditative experiences of illnesses and discomfort in the body, speech, and mind**. [356]

C" Recognizing the Essential Nature of That Which Is to Be Abandoned and Its Direct Remedy as the Foremost Path

This section has two parts: (1") recognizing the essential nature of that which is to be abandoned and (2") presenting the direct remedy as the foremost path.

1" Recognizing the Essential Nature of That Which Is to Be Abandoned

**Whenever you proudly hope for good things and cling to them,
and fear bad things and reify inflictors of harm,
you have stumbled upon a dangerous juncture that can lead
you astray.**

65. These two sentences compare with VE 47.

Whenever you have fallen under the influence of **proudly hoping for and clinging to things** that seem to be **good**, such as material gain, respect, and renown, **and fearing things** that seem to be **bad**, such as misconduct, abuse, and slander by your enemies—this makes for misery and suffering. In short, insofar as you **reify all gods and inflictors of harm** and all joys and sorrows, **you have stumbled upon a dangerous, obstructive juncture that can lead you astray**. Thinking “I will be unable to ascend to the supreme city of great liberation,” take this to heart. Whatever good and bad experiences, joys and sorrows, and so on arise, there is no need to counteract them, for mere appearances cannot bind you, as Ācārya Āryadeva wrote:

These are mere appearances and are not to be blocked.
Instead, stop reifying them.

The real root of the thing to be terminated is the mind that reifies appearances. Outwardly, everything that appears as demons, malevolent spirits, and deceptive māras arises from nothing other than this root. [357] Consequently, without subduing it, you can subdue all the outward demons and malevolent spirits one by one, yet never subdue them all.

2" Presenting the Direct Remedy as the Foremost Path

The general synthesis that is the sole, vital point of the path is ascertaining all experiences of pleasure, pain, and indifference as false impressions of unreal meditative experiences. By releasing them, without blocking or embracing them, you bring an end to deviations and losses, and this is the one eye of wisdom.

The general synthesis that is the remedy for all that is to be abandoned and the sole, vital point of all paths is ascertaining that even though all good and bad experiences of pleasure, pain, and indifference appear, they are unreal, delusive appearances, nothing more than false impressions of unreal meditative experiences. By releasing them as being of one taste, without blocking the bad or embracing the good, adverse circumstances will arise as the path and obstructive conditions will arise as aids. In so doing, you bring an end to the adversities of deviations, losses, and mistakes. The felicity of the wisdom of unmistakably seeing the profound meaning of the nature of existence is indispensable for entering the path, so this is like the one eye. A more elaborate explanation will be presented below on how every-

thing that appears consists of delusive appearances that are not established as real.

This is the true path praised by the jinas for realizing the meaning of inactivity and nonexertion, but for this to occur, you must first familiarize yourself with [358] the union of śamatha entailing a meditative object and vipaśyanā entailing investigation and analysis. Novices should practice śamatha from the phase of single-pointedness until the experience of conscious awareness, as well as vipaśyanā, which is implicitly taught here, without letting them become disunited from each other. So here they are taught sequentially.

*D" How Never to Be Separated from the Experience of the Pith
Instructions*

Those who have become distant from sublime spiritual mentors
should cherish the five topics as the sublimity of the path.
If you strive too hard in practicing single-pointedness,
the power of your mind will decline; and with stagnant
mindfulness,
although your body is human, your mind becomes that of an
animal.
Some people may stray into delirium;
so devote yourself to a spiritual mentor, without ever being
separated from him.

Those who have become distant from sublime spiritual mentors who reveal the path may not know how to distinguish between what is and is not the path or how to cut through their uncertainties and false assumptions. So the previously presented **five topics** of stillness and movement and the four kinds of mindfulness⁶⁶ are **the sublimity of the path**. You should know that they are indispensable when first venturing into practice, and you must **cherish** this knowledge by gaining the firm certainty of sound understanding.

Some regard the practice that is merely preliminary as being the ultimate nature of existence and strive only **in the practice of single-pointedness**. Or, without knowing how to apply the appropriate degree of effort in accordance with the state of their own mindstreams, like blocking a water canal, they regard the mere single-pointed awareness of stopping thoughts as the

66. These five topics are the ability to recognize the difference between stillness with respect to consciousness and the movement of thoughts, followed by the four kinds of mindfulness: single-pointed mindfulness, manifest mindfulness, the absence of mindfulness, and self-illuminating mindfulness.

[359] highest view and meditation. Then, **if they strive much too hard** in the practice, the functioning of the channels and elements—for those people who are dominant in the water element or earth element—causes the analytical **power of their minds to decline**. Their **mindfulness then becomes stagnant**, and **though their body is human, their mind becomes that of an animal** by becoming stupid and turgid. With this in mind, Mañjughoṣa Sakya Paṇchen wrote:

Striving only in meditation, without study,
leads to taking rebirth as an animal.

Some people with a fire constitution or with an air constitution⁶⁷ **may stray** off the path as their minds become muddled due to **delirium**, fainting, and so on. **So cut through your false assumptions by devoting yourself to a sublime spiritual mentor** who knows how to teach the essential points of this path correctly, **without ever being separated from him**. Even if you lack such good fortune [of meeting a qualified spiritual mentor], it is indispensable that you, without falling into indolence, properly seek out and familiarize yourself with the pith instructions of the vidyādhara of the past who have achieved siddhis by way of this path.

iii' The Synthesis

**In short, even if you strive diligently in this phase of these
practices for a long time,
taking the mind as the path
does not bring you even a hair's breadth closer to the paths
of liberation and omniscience,
and your life will certainly have been spent in vain!
So understand this, you fortunate people.**

In short, [360] these practices, from śamatha to luminous, cognizant con-

67. People with a fire constitution characteristically have the capacity to initiate projects and carry them through to completion. They have intuition and enthusiasm, make inspired undertakings, and take joy in their work and accomplishments; but they are easily agitated, irritable, impetuous, unstable, restless, intolerant, garrulous, and prone to insomnia. People with an air constitution characteristically have the ability to change negative situations into positive ones, and they have curiosity and flexibility of intellect; but they have little stability or contentment, they are fickle, jittery, unfocused, anxious, flighty, and emotionally unstable, and they have difficulty accepting things as they are.

sciousness and the substrate consciousness, as taught previously, constitute the **phase of taking the aspects of the mind as the path**. But as long as it is divorced from the vipāśyanā of knowing the nature of existence, this **does not bring you even a hair's breadth closer to the path of liberation** from the suffering of mundane existence **and the path of omniscience** that liberates from the two extremes.⁶⁸ Thus, **even if you strive diligently in these practices for a long time**, this does nothing more than perpetuate saṃsāra. **So understand how your life will certainly have been spent in vain!** With these words he offered compassionate advice to **fortunate people** who are following this path.

However, whether or not you have identified pristine awareness within yourself, you who become muddled due to distraction and sloth should first mount your discursive mind, which is like a cripple, onto your vital energy,⁶⁹ which is like a blind, wild steed. By tethering [your mind] with meditative experience and sustained attention so that you can meditate uninterrupted, eventually all coarse and subtle obsessive thoughts will seem to be purified—and uncontrived, primordially present consciousness will manifest. When you alight upon the great nonmeditation of pristine awareness, [361] it is easy to connect with the guru's introduction to pristine awareness. Given how very important it is for disciples not to stray onto false paths, this needs to be clearly taught, as was implied in the preceding passage.

This concludes the synthesis of this phase, revealed in the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*.

68. In this context the two extremes are the extreme of mundane existence, or saṃsāra, and of peace, or nirvāṇa.

69. The Tibetan term here is *rlung*, which may refer to the vital energies or to the air element. Within the body, the air element primarily refers to the breath, and one way of your mind riding the steed of the vital energies on the pathways of the channels is the practice of vase breathing. Alternatively, this passage may be interpreted as referring simply to mindfulness of breathing, which is an especially effective method for cultivating sustained attention, leading to the subsiding of all coarse and subtle obsessive thoughts.

Phase 2: Revealing Your Own Face as the Sharp Vajra of Vipāśyanā

b' Taking the Essential Nature as the Path

THIS SECTION has two parts: (i') the path pristine awareness, free of conceptual elaboration and (ii') the ground pristine awareness, the great freedom from extremes.

i' The Path Pristine Awareness, Free of Conceptual Elaboration

This section has two parts: (A") the teaching and (B") the explanation.

A" The Teaching

With the manifestation of the sharp vajra of wisdom,

For all sentient beings—without any distinctions of their being good or bad—primordially present, supreme **wisdom is the sharp vajra**, which is indivisible from emptiness. In the past it was obscured by ignorance, but in this phase, by the power of sublime pith instructions, it **manifests** and is seen, as if waking up from sleep.

B" The Elaborate Explanation

This section has four parts: (1") the six distinctions of pristine awareness, separate from the mind, (2") the essential nature of resting in the innate nature, (3") how to perfect the qualities of the path and fruition, and (4") the greatness of individuals who realize this. [362]

1" The Six Distinctions of Pristine Awareness, Separate from the Mind

pristine awareness transcends the ethically neutral ground.

The **pristine awareness** that knows and identifies with great, pervasive wisdom the ethically neutral state—the ground of confusion for sentient beings,

which becomes neither good nor bad—from the first instant has the distinction of **transcending the ethically neutral ground**. This distinction is explicitly presented, while the other five distinctions are implied, as follows.

At that time, appearances unimpededly arise in the domain of pristine awareness, and without reification or dualistic grasping, pristine awareness is imbued with the power of wisdom that realizes identitylessness. This is the distinction of transcending dualistic grasping. In the very instant that the eye of wisdom and primordial consciousness opens, there is the distinction of pristine awareness being separate from the mind. It holds within itself the radiance of both kinds of primordial consciousness⁷⁰ that master the essential nature and the natural radiance of that innate nature, so it has the distinction of natural liberation within itself. Without entering into the intellect or analysis, pristine awareness holds its own ground within itself, so it has the distinction of not relying upon objects or contributing conditions. Awareness that is free of such beliefs has mastery over great, natural liberation, so it has the distinction of abiding in its own ground and of buddhahood. Thus it is explained.

In general, [363] these are said to be characteristics of the path pristine awareness, but they are mere facsimiles. The actual characteristics are present only in the experience of the ground pristine awareness, with its great liberation from extremes, as stated in the teachings on severance:⁷¹

Meditating on outer manifestations of appearing objects over
there in their own place,
on the inner “I,” or “self,” over here in its own place,
and on a mere vacuity in between
is how water turns into ice.
Note that few achieve liberation [in that way].⁷²

70. The two aspects of primordial consciousness are knowing the nature of existence and perceiving the full range of phenomena. They correspond to knowing the essential nature of pristine awareness and perceiving all the manifestations of its natural radiance.

71. Tib. *gcod*. Severance is a meditative practice of imaginatively offering up your entire being as a means to realizing the empty nature of all phenomena, severing all clinging to the appearances of the three realms, and realizing that all gods and demons are none other than your own appearances.

72. Tib. *gcod kbrid kyi skabs*. This quote is from *The Profound Heart Essence of Saraha*, translated in Dudjom Lingpa and Pema Lungtok Gyatso, *Dudjom Lingpa's Chöd and An Ambrosia Ocean of Sublime Explanations*, trans. Lama Chönam and Sangye Khandro (Ashland, OR: Berotsana Publications, 2014), 457.

2" The Essential Nature of Resting in the Innate Nature

Being nothing whatsoever, [the essential nature] transcends all expressions of speech and thought.

In natural openness, with no modification, negation, or affirmation by meditation, it is spontaneously actualized as the sharp vajra of wisdom.

The essential nature of unimpeded pristine awareness does not fall to either extreme of existence or nonexistence, so it is **nothing whatsoever**. Since all movement of words and thoughts ceases, **it transcends all expressions of speech and thought**. Abiding in **natural openness**—self-illuminating, free of any reified object, and **with no modification, negation, or affirmation by any view or meditation**—is the **sharp vajra of wisdom**, the experience of the **spontaneously actualized** essential nature.

At this time, due to the unimpeded creative power of pristine awareness, all appearances manifest, and the thoughts of a sentient being, for instance, disperse one by one as they dissolve, nondual with their objects, such that not even a single one remains. They are not the thoughts of a sentient being, either. [364] Mentation shifts to wisdom, the creative expressions [of the mind] shift to primordial consciousness, and stability is achieved in this, which is like water clear of sediment. So this is very important to know. If you do not identify this path—and on this basis realize the dharmakāya, primordial consciousness that is present in the ground of being—you can't avoid being propelled into the form and formless realms, and you won't achieve omniscient enlightenment. Therefore, when you identify this, if you practice single-pointedly without falling back into an ethically neutral state, finally the creative power of discerning primordial consciousness will blaze forth, and you will authentically experience ultimate reality, the nature of existence of suchness. In this way you will become enlightened as Samantabhadra, the original, primordial ground dharmakāya.

3" How to Perfect the Qualities of the Path and Fruition

All the qualities of the view, meditation, and conduct, as well as the ground, path, and fruition, together with taking refuge, bodhicitta, the six perfections, and the maṇḍalas of deities and mantras, are collectively perfected in the sharp vajra.

If you truly realize the nature of existence and gradually engage in meditative equipoise and postmeditative practice, great waves of accumulations of merit and knowledge will be simultaneously perfected in the following ways: With a **view** that has no viewpoint, **meditation** that has no mode of apprehension, and supreme **conduct** that is without modification, the view, meditation, and conduct are perfected. The **ground** of great primordial liberation, [365] the **path** of great natural rest, and the **fruition** of great natural liberation are merely nominal divisions, for they are of one essential nature. So **all the qualities** of the ground, path, and fruition are perfected.

The originally pure essential nature of the dharmakāya, the spontaneously actualized manifest nature of the saṃbhogakāya, and the all-pervasive compassion of the nirmāṇakāya are the perfection of the three kāyas. Self-emergent pristine awareness is the essential nature of the Three Jewels, so this is truly **taking refuge** in the nature of existence. Since it liberates into the equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, it perfects ultimate **bodhicitta**. Nongrasping is generosity, nonconfusion is ethical discipline, nonchanging is patience, nonstriving is enthusiasm, nonmeditation is meditation, and nonerring is wisdom. So **the six perfections** are simultaneously perfected. Take the dharmakāya Samantabhadra as your guru; unify all the myriad peaceful and wrathful jinas and devote yourself to their essence as your personal deity; and nondually synthesize the dākinīs of the absolute space of primordial consciousness in the space of Samantabhadrī, which is absolute space itself, and enter her womb. So **the maṇḍalas of deities and mantras**—which are all the maṇḍalas without exception—are **collectively perfected in the sharp vajra**, in the essential nature of pristine awareness devoid of activity. Therefore, this is of profound significance and is very potent. [366]

4" The Greatness of Individuals Who Realize This

Sentient beings under the domination of the māras of ignorance
and mental afflictions
are distinguished from the very instant
they experience the perfect enlightenment of omniscience,
and they become fields of merit for sentient beings, including
gods.

This is how pathetic sentient beings under the domination of the māras of karma and mental afflictions in the dark gloom of ignorance in the terrifying prison of saṃsāra are distinguished and ennobled—such that their mindstreams are no longer as they were before—from the very instant that

they encounter their own face as the pristine awareness of the nature of existence. From that time forward, **they experience only the perfect enlightenment of omniscience**, without ever reverting to inferior or false paths. In the meantime, **they become sublime fields for sentient beings, including gods**, to accumulate **merit**. This concludes the second phase of the *Sharp Vajra*.

Phase 3: Revealing the Ground Dharmakāya

ii' Directly Identifying Within Yourself the Ground Pristine Awareness, the Great Freedom from Extremes

THIS SECTION has six parts: (A") the nature of the pure ground, (B") the genesis of conventional names, (C") the process of delusion in impure saṃsāra, (D") prayers for swiftly realizing and experiencing the meaning of the tantra, (E") devotion to the pith instructions for the moment of death and so forth if you have not earnestly devoted yourself to the tenet system in this lifetime, and (F") unique teachings of the Great Perfection on key distinctions. [367]

A" The Nature of the Pure Ground

This section has two parts: (1") how the delusive appearances of saṃsāra do not in fact exist and (2") the explanation of the nondelusive essential nature, the primordial ground, as the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness.

1" How the Delusive Appearances of Saṃsāra Do Not In Fact Exist

This is how, from the time that dualistic thoughts arise, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa seem to be different, while never wavering from the expanse of the ground of being. The *Reverberation of Sound Root Tantra* states:

If you do not recognize as your own essential nature
the root that is the indivisible, sole cause,
this is the beginning of saṃsāra.

By determining that all phenomena of saṃsāra are included among subjects and objects, you will swiftly sever the life force of delusion. Here is how to determine the nature of subjects and objects: By first determining this on a coarse level and then on a subtle level, the very subtle level will be easy to realize. With this in mind, here are teachings on the three divisions of outer, inner, and secret subjects and objects: First, to determine the nature of outer subjects and objects, there are three sections: (a") determining the

identitylessness of subjective persons, (b") determining the identitylessness of objective phenomena, and (c") fundamentally recognizing them as one emptiness. [368]

a" Determining the Identitylessness of Subjective Persons

This section has two parts: (i") the teaching and (ii") the explanation.

i" The Teaching

**The sharp vajra of discerning wisdom
demolishes the mountain of saṃsāra of self-concepts.**

The sharp vajra of primordial consciousness that arises from the power of **discerning wisdom** utterly **demolishes the** mighty, towering **mountain of saṃsāra** of habitual propensities that stem from our beginningless habituation to **self-concepts**.

ii" The Explanation

This section has two parts: (A'") recognizing self-concepts as the root of mundane existence and (B'") recognizing their emptiness by their mere appearance.

A'"" Recognizing Self-Concepts as the Root of Mundane Existence

**Investigate the origin, location, and destination of the name and referent
of that which is grasped as the "I," which is the root of saṃsāra.**

Here is **the root of** wandering in **saṃsāra**: Due to the continuum of consciousness of **grasping at the "I"** while there is no "I" in the expanse of the ground of being, all appearances and mindsets fleetingly emerge, even though they do not exist. Why? It is in the nature of things that whenever the thought of grasping at the "I" is present, both appearances and mindsets naturally arise. Scriptural sources and reasoning authentically demonstrate that if there is no grasping at the "I," appearances and mindsets do not occur either. So the thought of grasping at the "I" where there is no "I" is indubitably ascertained as the root of mundane existence.

B''' Recognizing Their Emptiness by Their Mere Appearance

**Decisively recognizing it as objectless emptiness
is determining personal identitylessness.**

Here is how such a self is found to be empty by **investigating its origin, location, and destination**, as well as [369] its **name and referent**: All possible appearances first arose from the self, so their origin is empty of being anywhere else. Once they have arisen, they are present in the domain of the self, so they are empty of being located anywhere else. Finally, they disappear together with the self, so they are empty of any other destination.

In a similar fashion, here is how the reality of the basis of designation of the name *self* is unestablished: Between the body and mind, neither the self nor its name is established as the body. Each body part has its own name, so it is not given the name *self*. The collection of all its components may be called a *collection* or a *body*, but this does not bear the name *self*. The mind, which has no basis or root, is designated as *mind*, but it does not bear the name *self*. So the basis of designation of the self is empty, which means that neither the self nor its name exists.

Moreover, there is no self that is established as something other than the body and mind. If the self did exist, it should appear and therefore be observable, but it isn't. So the self is not established as anything real or substantial. In summary, since the basis of designation of its name is not established for the self, neither the self nor its name exists. [370] Since the self is not established as substantially real, its basis of designation is not established as real either. Since it doesn't exist, the name imputed to it is nothing more than an expression. Therefore, in reality, the so-called self is nothing more than an appearance and a designation in dependence upon the body and mind. When it is **decisively recognized as objectless emptiness, personal identitylessness is determined.**

b'' Determining the Identitylessness of Objective Phenomena

This section has four parts: (i'') seeking the bases of designation of names, (ii'') destroying grasping at the permanence of things, (iii'') combating the faults of benefit and harm, and (iv'') collapsing the false cave⁷³ of hopes and fears.

73. Tib. *rdzun phug rdib*. Lit. "collapse of the false cave," which is one's false shelter in delusional hopes and fears.

i" Seeking the Bases of Designation of Names

**Seek the bases of designation of the names of the self and of objects,
and decisively recognize them as objectless emptiness.**

By discerningly seeking the bases of designation of the names of the subjective **self and of** all that appears as **objects** to this self, such as the five aggregates and the five sensory objects that seem to be “mine,” **decisively recognize them as objectless emptiness**, since all names are nothing more than interdependent imputations, and their bases of designation are not established as inherently real.

ii" Destroying Grasping At the Permanence of Things

**Investigate how all things, starting with partless elementary particles,
are empty in the sense of being devoid of inherent nature.
Then decisively recognize objectless emptiness in the absolute space
of phenomena in the worlds of appearances of this life, the hereafter, and dreams.**

In terms of appearances, **all things** seem to be absolutely existent, real, and permanent; but if they are investigated, [371] all coarse phenomena are found to be nothing more than mere appearances arising in dependence upon configurations of numerous elementary particles. Not a single coarse phenomenon is established as being inherently real. Even elementary particles are nothing more than appearances arising in dependence upon assemblies of their component features. Not a single **elementary particle** is established as being inherently real, so in reality they are **partless**. By **investigating how they are empty in the sense of being devoid of inherent nature** from the very moment they appear, all phenomena are found to be nothing more than mere clear appearances, and there is nothing that corresponds to your habitual awareness of desires and fears. In terms of **worlds of appearances of this life, the hereafter, and dreams**, the phenomena of the physical world, the appearances of its sentient inhabitants, and all appearances to the five physical senses are to be **decisively recognized as objectless emptiness in absolute space**.

To expand on this phase, if all phenomena were in fact established as truly existent and were not mere delusive appearances, they would certainly have

to be replete with all the seven vajra qualities—that is, they would be invulnerable, indestructible, real, incorruptible, stable, totally unobstructable, and totally invincible. But they do not have even one of these qualities, for it is evident that they are not established as real and are nothing more than mere delusive appearances, like those in a dream. The assertion that space is replete with all these qualities [372] is premised on the crucial point that emptiness is not established as existing by its own characteristics. Bearing this in mind, it is imperative to realize the immutable mode of existence of ultimate reality. This is not taught in order to depict space as being permanent and truly existent versus the elements and their emergent properties as not being permanent or truly existent.

Here is a summary of all the teachings presenting many reasons that refute the misconception that daytime appearances are left behind when you are asleep at night: If the delusive mode of appearances is thought to be compelling, daytime appearances are asserted to linger on during the nighttime, because deluded people feel their perceptions are infallible. If the conventional nature of existence is thought to be compelling, conventional valid cognition invalidates the notion that they linger on, for valid cognition establishes that all daytime appearances vanish and nighttime appearances freshly emerge. It is certain that the fact that they do not linger on is unmis-taken, as the *King of Samādhi Sūtra* (*Samādhirāja Sūtra*) states:

The visual, auditory, and olfactory senses are not valid cognitions,
nor are the gustatory, tactile, or mental.
If these senses were valid,
who would need the path of the *āryas*?

This is said because that which is perceived by ordinary, childish people is delusive, not valid. [373] The teachings counteract such delusive perceptions while showing how the teachings on conventional, relative truth are unmis-taken. This illustrates all such reasonings, so if no such distinction is made, I think it would be difficult to be released from the knots of uncertainty.

iii" Combating the Faults of Benefit and Harm

Decisively understand that the karmic relationships of virtue
and vice, as well as the benefit and harm from gods and demons,
are of the nature of objectless openness.

If the karmic relationships of virtue and vice, as well as the benefit and harm from gods and demons, are investigated with regard to the absolute

space of phenomena, which is the nature of pristine space, all virtue and vice that is accumulated by way of the body, speech, and mind is found not to exist anywhere. If it all disappears into **the nature** of nothingness—the **openness of objectless** emptiness—then all causal virtues and vices and resultant joys and sorrows are nothing more than mere appearances of performing actions and experiencing their consequences. Even if you think they benefit or harm your mind or body, since both objects and subjects are established as being no more real than dreams, all mental activities of virtue and vice and all joys and sorrows are merely experiential appearances. Therefore, **decisively understand** all actions, joys, and sorrows as having no physical or substantially real existence. This verse indicates that both virtue and vice, as well as the phenomena of benefit and harm by gods and demons, are of the nature of one emptiness that is the ground of being. [374]

Until these delusive appearances dissolve into the absolute space of phenomena, whatever coarse or subtle positive and negative actions you commit will add to your rebirths in this world of saṃsāra until their fully matured results are exhausted. So eternal well-being will certainly not be achieved. The reason why it is necessary to determine the nature of virtue is that the principal path for achieving the states of liberation and omniscience is wisdom, as Śāntideva wrote:

The Sage taught this entire tenet system
for the sake of wisdom;
therefore, with the desire to ward off suffering,
one should develop wisdom.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, when foolish people who are drawn to experiences involving craving meditate on emptiness, this doesn't satisfy their craving, and so they lose confidence and trust. Because this doesn't involve any striving or modification, they think it is a waste of time, and so they apply themselves to prostrations, circumambulations, and so on. This verse is to help them understand that this meditation is superior to those methods. Moreover, some people who take pride in being contemplatives marginalize the view, which is the essential nature of meditation, and meditate only on the luminosity and emptiness of the mind. This is taught so that such people may know not to devote their lives solely to the practice of physical and verbal virtues, [375] but to practice by integrating the view and meditation.

By determining the nature of evil, you find that the essential nature of all

74. Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, trans. Vesna A. Wallace and B. Alan Wallace (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), 115.

obscurations is ignorance of your own nature. Understand that this cannot be purified merely by virtuous physical and verbal practices, but only by cultivating awareness of your own face—the nature of existence. Then you must have conviction in the authentic path, renounce the nine kinds of activity,⁷⁵ and apply yourself [to the practice] until you die.

If you investigate the protective gods and harmful demons, you find that the five objective elements along with such things as mountains, stones, and houses do not give rise to gods or demons. These are not their dwelling places after they have arisen, and there is nowhere they go in the end. Why? Because they are not established as existing in reality—they are all your own appearances, like delusive phenomena in a dream. It is impossible for them to help or harm you, for they are not physical entities that help or harm physical entities. If gods and demons were physical, they should be observable, but they are not. [376] And nonphysical things cannot help or harm physical things, any more than the horn of a hare can inflict a wound. In short, however they appear—as physical or nonphysical—authoritative treatises and reasoning establish that they are nothing but your own appearances.

In general, although there are references to many types of gods and demons, the gods referred to in this context are those dwelling as mundane gods, not supramundane ones, and the demons referred to are mundane demons dwelling in *samsāra*. Therefore, come to a decisive understanding that all gods and demons, as well as all the help and harm that is attributed to them, are objectless, empty displays that are delusive, false impressions of individual sentient beings.

If this is not determined, from the very moment the aggregates that are grasped as “mine” are established as real, just as there are continuous appearances of the six classes of sentient beings—for as long as there is mental grasping and immersion in the confusion of the object of perception and the perceiver, the object of meditation and the meditator, and so on—there are bound to occur outer, inner, and secret upheavals. By regarding them as demonic, you turn away from the authentic path and go astray. In your meditation on deities in the stage of generation practice, if you falsely regard them as autonomous, this conceptually turns them into demons. In this way demons are forcefully conjured up, becoming *māras* for your life force. By placing your hopes in gods and fearing demons, [377] your thoughts arise as enemies, leading to a never-ending stream of illnesses, joys, and sorrows. Recognizing all gods and demons as your own appearances, like illusions and dreams, is the essential nature of severance, and this is an especially profound

75. See *activity, nine kinds of* in glossary.

teaching on severing thoughts of grasping at gods and demons. So it is particularly indispensable for those who practice severance.

iv" Collapsing the False Cave of Hopes and Fears

Cut through the basis and root of the origin, location, and
 destination
 of the buddhas and displays of buddhafields,
 and of the appearances, mindsets, and objects of the three realms
 of saṃsāra.
 Truly recognize everything as being of the nature of objectless
 emptiness, without giving this mere lip service.

If you investigate this intelligently, since every object is devoid of a basis and root, the pure objects of hope, the vast and numerous beautiful **displays** of pure **buddhas** and **buddhafields** imbued with bountiful sublime qualities, should not be regarded as anything other than the appearances of individual sentient beings. The *Inner Essence Tantra* states, “Displays of the buddhas as objects are paths of illusion.” The *Sublime Continuum* (*Uttaratantra*) states:

Just as the physical reflection of the King of the Gods appears
 in the pure ground of lapis lazuli,
 so does the physical reflection of the Lord of Sages
 appear in the pure ground of the minds of sentient beings.

The dharmakāya of the buddhas is none other than the primordial ground of being, the sugatagarbha, [378] so it appears like reflections of the moon in the vessels of the minds of individual disciples in accordance with their self-grasping. Likewise, impure objects, including the **appearances of the three realms of saṃsāra** of the vast physical world, its numerous **sentient inhabitants**, and all the well-displayed appearances of the five sensory **objects**, are your own delusive appearances—mere dreams. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life* states:

Who devised the floor of heated iron?
 And from where have those flames come?
 The Sage declared that all of that
 has arisen from the evil mind.⁷⁶

76. Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, 48.

If you investigate this with awareness, you find that the initial **origin** from which they arise, the **location** where they then exist, and the final **destination** to which they go are all nonexistent. Moreover, by **cutting through the basis** that supports them as well as the **root** that generates them, they are found to be like reflections, so they are nothing more than illusions to your own mind, having no existence as autonomous objects. Therefore, **without giving this mere lip service**, on the basis of reality **truly recognize** this by gaining real certainty, free of doubt, as to how **everything is of one taste in the nature of objectless emptiness**.

c" Fundamentally Recognizing Them as One Emptiness

This section has two parts: (i") the short summary and (ii") the elaborate explanation. [379]

i" The Short Summary

The space of great emptiness acts as the ground of appearances of saṃsāra.

Now, we do not think that there is anything called the *sugatagarbha* apart from the true realization and recognition of the nature of existence of the **space of great emptiness** that appears during the daytime, the nighttime, and the intermediate period. With this in mind Machik Lapdrön said, "The Buddha is the mind; the mind is space," and Siddha Bagompa said, "Fathom this space! If it is realized as objectless, the great nail of nonmeditation is struck." Therefore, since we do not assert the existence of any buddhas apart from the ultimate reality of the mind or the existence of the ultimate reality of the mind apart from space, when this space is not realized, it **acts as the ground of appearances of saṃsāra**.

ii" The Elaborate Explanation

This section has three parts: (A'") identifying the absolute space of phenomena as that which is to be realized, (B'") subjective primordial consciousness that arises in accordance with that, and (C'") pith instructions on dispelling obstacles and enhancing practice.

A' Identifying the Absolute Space of Phenomena as That Which Is to Be Realized

Decisively establish that space is the ground of all phenomena in the panoramic sweep of objectless space.

**Pristine space is the buddha,
the ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha.**

Thus, by **decisively** understanding the essential nature of **all phenomena in the panoramic sweep of [380] empty, objectless space**, this space is **established as the ground** of appearances of all of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Moreover, the essential nature of **space** is not immateriality devoid of faults and virtues, but is rather established as **primordially pristine** purity, free of faults and contamination, of the nature of clear light. This is the nature of existence and **is the true buddha**, and it is called *the ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha*, as stated in the *Two Segments*:

Sentient beings are themselves buddhas,
but they are temporarily obscured by contaminations;
when these are dispelled, they are buddhas.

Some people claim that even though the essential nature of the minds of sentient beings may be regarded as the Buddha, the ultimate reality of the mind and space are not the same. The assertion in all the sūtras and tantras that the mind is groundless and rootless like space suggests a distinction between the reality and the metaphor. That claim is made from the perspective of the ways things appear in the conventional mode of appearance. However, the position here is primarily from the perspective of their conventional mode of existence, so there is no contradiction. In short, for all phenomena that are asserted to be your own appearances, no ground for their emergence can be found other than space, so there is no alternative but to affirm that space and the ultimate reality of the mind are nondual. [381]

B''' Subjective Primordial Consciousness That Arises in Accordance with That

**Therefore, realize all phenomena as emptiness.
The experience of the conscious awareness of identitylessness
is the sharp vajra itself, which is the consummation of pristine
awareness that is present in the ground.**

Therefore, the conscious awareness of realizing identitylessness—consisting of the continuous ascertainment that realizes the essential nature of all phenomena as ultimate reality, which is the nature of empty space—is the sharp vajra itself. The direct experience of the nature of space by great, omniscient

wisdom is **the consummation of the dharmakāya, pristine awareness that is present in the ground.** This shows that identitylessness is the ultimate topic to be investigated with wisdom, so there is nothing better than this to enhance practice.

C''' Pith Instructions on Dispelling Obstacles and Enhancing Practice

Finally, in order to collapse the cave of fixations on hopes and fears,
visualize your body, speech, and mind as the three vajras,
and with the vital points of the pith instructions on the three
great principles,
rove about in haunted places
and make the supreme offering of your cherished body.
By the power of this, the false cave of hopes and fears will
collapse.

In that way, those who come to the **final** investigation of the view directly **collapse the false cave of fixations on hopes and fears.** In order to forcefully cut the ties of cherishing the body, which is the source of all faults and problems, **visualize your body, speech, and mind as the** nature of the primordial present **three vajras**, such that the physical world and its sentient inhabitants are none other than your own appearances. **The three great principles** are the initial suppression, interim suppression, and final suppression. Endowed with the vital points of the pith instructions on the profound meaning of severance, regard your body as a corpse, your awareness as the corpse-bearer, [382] craving as the rope, **haunted places** as charnel grounds, and gods and demons as vultures. Although there are outwardly no demons, in order to forcefully arouse the inner demons of obsessive thoughts, **rove about** by yourself, with no companions, in terrifying, dangerous places such as mountain caves, charnel grounds, abandoned houses, rocky caverns, rivers, and lakes. Imbued with the spirit of emptiness and compassion, **make the supreme offering of your cherished body.** By the power of taking this as your principal activity, due to the gradual occurrence of upheavals, apparitions, the endpoint, and the severance point, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa will be realized as your own appearances. Then **the false cave of hopes and fears will collapse**, and without abandoning the four mārās, they will be liberated right where they are.

This concludes the third phase of the *Sharp Vajra*, namely, revealing the dharmakāya.

Phase 4: Determining the Characteristics and Qualities of the Ground

2" An Explanation of the Characteristics of the Nondelusive Essential Nature, the Kāyas, and Facets of Primordial Consciousness

THIS SECTION has two parts: (a") the teaching and (b") the explanation.

a" The Teaching

**The essential nature of the whole world of appearances is
emptiness.**

**Great emptiness is spontaneously actualized as the essential
nature of the path.**

Thus, **the essential nature of the whole world of appearances** is ascertained with pristine awareness as **emptiness**, and this **great emptiness** is **primordially spontaneously actualized as the essential nature of the path**. This is like waking up to the nature of existence within yourself, [383] or like the dawn breaking, for it is not modified with effort.

b" The Explanation

This section has three parts: (i") the ground Great Perfection of existence, (ii") the path Great Perfection of realization, and (iii") the fruitional Great Perfection of actualization.

i" The Ground Great Perfection of Existence

This section has three parts: (A'") the actual characteristics of the ground, (B'") the context of skillful means and wisdom, and (C'") the summary of their meaning.

A'"" The Actual Characteristics of the Ground

**The essential nature of the dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha,
is not modified or altered by either saṃsāra or nirvāṇa.**

Free of the extremes of conceptual elaboration, it is imbued with
the three doors of liberation.

It is spontaneously actualized as the five kāyas,
the five buddha families, the five facets of primordial
consciousness,

The essential nature of all knowable phenomena is the dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha, which is not modified or altered by the faults or virtues of either saṃsāra or nirvāṇa. It is free of the extremes of conceptual elaboration and is imbued with the three doors of liberation. It is primordially present in a fourfold nature as the five kāyas, the five buddha families, the five facets of primordial consciousness, and so forth:

(1) This ground sugatagarbha neither enhances nor is enhanced by all the facets of primordial consciousness and qualities of the domain of buddhahood, for it has no object.

(2) This ground sugatagarbha has not arisen with a beginning, end, or interim, it does not so arise, and it will not so arise, so it is free of the extreme of birth. Since it never becomes nonexistent, [384] it is free of the extreme of cessation. Since it does not fall to the extreme of existence and substantiality and has not been seen, is not seen, and will not be seen, even with the eyes of the jinas, it is free of the extreme of permanence. Since it does not fall to the extreme of nonexistence or nothingness and is established as the ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, it is free of the extreme of annihilation. Since there is no place or agent from where it first came, it is free of the extreme of coming. Since it transcends going to any place or being an agent in the three times, it is free of the extreme of going. Since it is of one taste as the essential nature of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, it is free of the extreme of diversity.⁷⁷

(3) Since it is not ascertained as having any partiality and does not fall to any extreme, it is the door of liberation of emptiness. Since it cannot be indicated by words, analogies, or referents, it is the door of liberation of signlessness. Since liberation is achieved by way of confidence in yourself, and since there is not the slightest desire for liberation resulting from anything else, it is the door of liberation of desirelessness.

(4) Here there are four subdivisions:

(a) As for the five kāyas, all phenomena [dharmas] of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are naturally present in the sugatagarbha, so [385] it is called *dharmā*. Since

77. The *Enlightened View of Samantabhadra* completes this set of the eight extremes of conceptual elaboration with this final one: Because all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa arise distinctly and not merged together, it is free of the extreme of unity. See VS 536.

phenomena are assembled or aggregated, without being mixed together in terms of appearances, it is called *kāya*.⁷⁸ Since the spontaneously actualized kāyas and displays of primordial consciousness are naturally *perfected* as *enjoyments*, it is called the *saṃbhogakāya*.⁷⁹ Since it is *variously emanated* as nothing other than itself and is naturally present, it is called the *nirmāṇakāya*.⁸⁰ Since the three kāyas are in *essence* of one taste and are *naturally* present, it is called the *svabhāvikakāya*.⁸¹ Since it does not move or change in the three times, it is *immutable*. It is invulnerable to all mental afflictions and habitual propensities. It is indestructible by all objects and circumstances. Since it is originally pure by its own essential nature, it is real. Since it cannot be contaminated by faults or virtues or by anything good or bad, it is incorruptible. Since it does not move or change in the three times, it is stable. Since it can penetrate everything, including even subtle cognitive obscurations, it is unobstructable. Since it cannot be transformed by anything, it is invincible. Since it is imbued with these seven qualities, it is a *vajra*. Since all the facets of primordial consciousness and sublime qualities are naturally perfected, it is a *kāya*.⁸²

(b) As for the five buddha families, the originally pure ground of being is the buddha family. The ground of being is unconquerable and indestructible, so it is the vajra family. In the ground of being, primordial consciousness is perfect, so it is the jewel family. [386] The great bliss of the ground of being is the lotus family. The spontaneously actualized perfection of the ground of being is the karma family.

(c) As for the five facets of primordial consciousness, the essential nature of the ground, all-pervasive emptiness, is the primordial consciousness of the absolute space of phenomena. Its self-illuminating nature is mirror-like primordial consciousness. The purity and equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is the primordial consciousness of equality. The unimpeded luminosity of the qualities of primordial consciousness is discerning primordial

78. This etymologizes “dharmakāya” (Tib. *chos kyi sku*): dharma (*chos*) kāya (*sku*).

79. This etymologizes “saṃbhogakāya” (Tib. *longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku*): enjoyments (*longs spyod*) perfected (*rdzogs pa*) kāya (*sku*).

80. This etymologizes “nirmāṇakāya” (Tib. *sprul pa'i sku*): variously emanated (*sprul pa*) kāya (*sku*).

81. This etymologizes “svabhāvikakāya” (Tib. *ngo bo nyid kyi sku*): essence, naturally (*ngo bo nyid*) kāya (*sku*).

82. This etymologizes “immutable vajrakāya” (Tib. *mi 'gyur rdo rje'i sku*): immutable (*mi 'gyur*) vajra (*rdo rje*) kāya (*sku*).

consciousness. Original, primordial freedom is the primordial consciousness of accomplishment.

(d) As for the five *ḍākinī*s, the emptiness of the absolute space of the ground is the buddha *ḍākinī*. The freedom from faults is the vajra *ḍākinī*. The spontaneous actualization of sublime qualities is the jewel *ḍākinī*. The freedom from attachment is the lotus *ḍākinī*. The spontaneous actualization of perfection is the karma *ḍākinī*. Their natural perfection in the ground itself is the real characteristic of the ultimate ground of being. By gradually realizing this nature of existence in accordance with your faculties, as described previously, and familiarizing yourself with this path of practice without reliance upon anything else, liberation is actualized in this lifetime or in the intermediate period.

B''' The Context of Skillful Means and Wisdom

This section has three parts: (1''') the context of skillful means, (2''') the context of wisdom, and (3''') their purpose and the presentation of them.

1''' The Context of Skillful Means

the five buddhafi elds, the five male deities, the five female
consorts, the Three Jewels,
the Three Roots, the classes, maṇḍalas, empowerments, and
worship,
as the essential nature of mahāyoga. [387]

These relative, effortful paths are taught for the sake of those who do not fathom the ultimate, effortless path, or who have no confidence in it even if they do fathom it. In accordance with the basis of saṃsāra, which is to be purified, the purifiers are **the five buddhafi elds**, the five kāyas with their faces, hands, and marks, the five buddha families, **the five male deities, the five female consorts, the Three Jewels, the Three Roots**,⁸³ the pacifying, enriching, powerful, and wrathful **classes** [of deities] and **maṇḍalas**, the four **empowerments, worship**, accomplishment, applications of the activities, and so on. All such presentations of the path of secret mantra *mahāyoga* are evaluated and established merely as aspects of the ground sugatagarbha. So the sugatagarbha is **spontaneously actualized as the essential nature of all the paths of mahāyoga**.

83. The Three Roots are the guru, the root of blessings; the personal deity (Tib. *yi dam*; Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*), the root of siddhis; and the *ḍākinī*, the root of enlightened activities.

2nd The Context of Wisdom

The five displays inside the body,
the purification, transmutation, igniting, and descent of the
channels, vital energies, and bindus,
together with the empowerments and four blisses, are all
spontaneously actualized emanations of the sugatagarbha.

The displays inside the city of the body, or the vajra aggregate—including the five cakras of channels, the three stationary channels, including the *avadhūti*, *lalanā*, and *rasanā*, the moving vital energies, and the displays of the bindus of bodhicitta—are purified and transmuted by the paths of skillful means of vase breathing, *adhisāra*, [388] the igniting and descent of *caṇḍālī*, the four empowerments, and the paths, together with the four blisses. Although none of them are established as ultimately real, for practical reasons they are emanated and presented as spontaneously actualized qualities of the sugatagarbha. So this is also the essential nature of all the paths of secret mantra *anuyoga*.

3rd Their Purpose and Their Presentation

In short, the dharmakāya, absolute space devoid of signs,
is bound with names, modes, and signs in accordance with the
ways of saṃsāra.
In order to guide disciples who grasp at permanence
and to counteract six kinds of craving,
visualizing, purity, and emptiness serve as remedies.

In short, the dharmakāya, absolute space devoid of signs, in accordance with the ways of saṃsāra, is bound with names, modes, and signs, including the directions, buddhafields, male deities, female consorts, and attendants, together with their circle of spiritual sons. Teachings about them as if they actually existed are in order to guide disciples who reify and grasp at the permanence of the physical world and its sentient inhabitants, and they counteract six kinds of craving for places, self, others, clothing, ornaments, and seats. Visualizing aspects of deities, recalling purity, and the emptiness of inherent nature of appearing phenomena serve as remedies for the impure, delusive appearances of saṃsāra. These are cases of signs being used to counteract signs, just as the pain of fire causes you to avoid getting burned. Those impure, delusive appearances are then transformed into displays of

pure deities of primordial consciousness, [389] and by stabilizing them, liberation is achieved as a saṃbhogakāya in the intermediate period.

C''' The Summary

**Therefore, those relative, artificial Dharmas of all the yānas
are emanated from and reabsorbed into the sugatagarbha,
like rivers that emerge from and return to the ocean.
So it is known as the ground Great Perfection.**

Therefore, out of temporary necessity, the teachings on the **relative, artificial Dharmas** of the stage of generation and the presentations of the path of the stage of completion—as well as the whole inconceivable range of **yānas**—are initially **emanated from the sugatagarbha** and finally are **reabsorbed** by identifying their nature and directly experiencing confidence in it. This is **like all the rivers of the world first emerging from the great ocean and finally returning to it**. In summary, even when the delusive appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra have withdrawn into the ethically neutral ground, all the displays of the kāyas, facets of primordial consciousness, and sublime qualities are self-emergent and perfectly present within that inner glow, without becoming nonexistent. **So it is known** among all scholars and adepts as **the ground Great Perfection**.

ii'' The Path Great Perfection of Realization

This section has two parts: (A''') the perfection of the presentations of the yānas up to anuyoga in the path of the Great Perfection and [390] (B''') unmistakable teachings on the path of the Great Perfection itself.

A''' The Perfection of the Presentations of the Yānas up to Anuyoga in the Path of the Great Perfection

This section has two parts: (1''') the elaborate explanation and (2''') the summary.

1''' The Elaborate Explanation

**Regarding tīrthikas, who seek a path while clinging to the
extremes of eternalism and nihilism;
those who [wander] in saṃsāra by deluding their mindstreams
with clinging to and reifying appearances and the mind;
śrāvakas, who take personal identitylessness as the path;**

pratyekabuddhas, whose path apprehends emptiness and the
 links of dependent origination in forward and reverse order;
 Cittamātrins, who view the world of appearances as the mind;
 Mādhyamikas, who apprehend all phenomena as empty;
 followers of *kriyā*, who primarily emphasize hygiene and cling to
 realms;
 followers of *upāya*, who integrate the higher and lower views and
 conduct;
 followers of *yoga*, who regard the *samayasattva* and *jñānasattva*
 as autonomously different;
 followers of *mahāyoga*, who mistakenly view objects as
 autonomously real; and
 the path of *anuyoga*, in which there is the pretense of actualizing
 the cause and fruition of absolute space and primordial
 consciousness—

With the actualization of the *dharmakāya*, pristine awareness that is present in
 the ground, since ultimate reality does not fall to the extreme of eternalism or
 nihilism, this perfects the minds of *tīrthikas*, who seek a path while clinging
 to the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. By letting the mind and appear-
 ances rest in their own state without modification, this perfects the minds
 and appearances of ordinary sentient beings, who cling to and reify appear-
 ances and the mind and whose deluded mindstreams consequently wander
 in *samsāra*. By directly, effortlessly seeing the reality of identitylessness, this
 perfects the *Śrāvakayāna*, in which personal identitylessness is taken as
 the path. By realizing all appearances and mindsets as being of the nature of
 dependently related events, this perfects the *Pratyekabuddhayāna*, by which
 you primarily apprehend the links of dependent origination in forward and
 reverse order and the sheer luminosity and emptiness of the mind. By deci-
 sively understanding all appearances as being none other than the mind, this
 perfects the *Cittamātrayāna*, by which you view the world of appearances as
 the mind. By realizing the meaning of both kinds of identitylessness, this per-
 fects the *Madhyamakayāna*, by which you [391] apprehend all phenomena
 as empty. By realizing emptiness, which purifies causes and conditions, this
 perfects the *Kriyāyāna*, which primarily emphasizes practices of purification
 and hygiene in terms of the view and conduct, and which clings to the sub-
 stantial existence of pure deities who dwell in external realms. By realizing
 the perfect nature of the nonduality of the view and conduct, this perfects
 the *Upāyayāna*, which integrates the higher and lower views and conduct.
 By realizing the primacy of the view, this perfects the *Yogayāna*, by which
 you regard yourself, as the *samayasattva*, and the deity, as the *jñānasattva*,

as **autonomously different**. By realizing the nonduality of the deity and your own mind, this perfects the **Mahāyogayāna**, by which you **mistakenly view** pure deities and buddhafields as **objects** existing with their own characteristics and as **autonomously real**. By realizing the nondual nature of absolute space and primordial consciousness, this perfects the **Anuyogayāna**, in which you purify the **causal** impure channels, bindus, and vital energies as pure displays of **absolute space**, resulting in the **pretense of actualizing the fruition of primordial consciousness**.

Moreover, by realizing the absence of waxing and waning and of movement and change in ultimate reality, the view of eternalism is perfected, and by realizing it as baseless and rootless, the view of nihilism is perfected. Since the mind has no referent object and is without modification or alteration, as in the case of ordinary people, this perfects their appearances. All the qualities of the paths and fruitions from the Śrāvakayāna Vaibhāṣika up to anuyoga [392] are simultaneously perfected in the manifestation of the dharmakāya, pristine awareness that is present in the ground, so this is established as the perfection of the qualities of the paths and fruitions of all the yānas. The reason is that regardless of the yāna that you first enter, the ultimate fruition cannot be achieved without devoting yourself to the path of the Great Perfection. So all the qualities of those paths and fruitions are encompassed within the path of the Great Perfection, with the higher incorporating the lower.

2''' The Summary

**all the grounds, paths, meditative experiences, and realizations
of those [yānas]
are spontaneously actualized facets of the Great Perfection.
Like regarding water taken from the ocean as the entire ocean,
all yānas are seen as deficient by those who realize the meaning
of this.**

Therefore, **all the qualities of the causal grounds and paths and resultant meditative experiences and realizations of those yānas** are presented in accordance with the temperaments and capacities of disciples so that they may reach the ultimate path. They are each regarded as **facets**, or aspects, of the **spontaneously actualized clear light of the nature of existence, the Great Perfection**; they merely claim to be the complete path for achieving buddhahood. This is **like taking a drop of water from the ocean to slake your thirst and regarding it as the entire ocean**. Therefore, if they are evaluated by **those who truly realize the meaning of this Great Perfection**, **all the yānas** from

anuyoga on down [393] are seen to be obscured by strenuously abandoning and remedying things, due to failing to see the meaning of innate, natural liberation. So they are **seen as deficient**.

B''' Unmistaken Teachings on the Path of the Great Perfection Itself

In the absolute space of pristine awareness, which is actualized by wisdom and primordial consciousness, the Buddha Samantabhadra, who is free of relinquishment and attainment, is the Great Perfection—the essential nature of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and the path. Therefore, this is renowned as the path Great Perfection.

In the absolute space of pristine awareness, which is actualized by the essential nature, wisdom, and its creative power, great primordial consciousness, the original Buddha Samantabhadra, who is free of relinquishment of faults that were there before and of the fresh attainment of qualities that were not there before, is the unmistakable essential nature of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and the path. Since this is the authentic perception of the nature of existence of the Great Perfection, it is universally renowned as the path Great Perfection.

iii" The Fruitional Great Perfection of Actualization

This section has two parts: (A''') the actual fruition and (B''') how it is free of the two extremes.

A''' The Actual Fruition

All the causal yānas that have the pretense of being the ground of the fruition are actualized as the sugatagarbha, Samantabhadra. Appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra are naturally liberated, without abandoning them, as kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness—this is the authentic teaching of all the jinas. All pretentious claims regarding other fruitions are wearisome. Therefore, all this is the fruition of all Dharmas—the spontaneous actualization of the fruitional Great Perfection.

Although there are pretentious claims that all bodhisattvas who enter **the causal yānas** of philosophical investigation accumulate merit and knowledge and purify obscurations for three countless eons and so on, finally culminating in the fruitional achievement of omniscience, the *Cloud of Dharma of the Tenth Ground* states, “The tathāgata **ground** of total illumination is not achieved.” [394] This is because the habitual propensities of movements of the three appearances⁸⁴ have not been abandoned.

In this phase, first you identify the nature of existence of pristine awareness, **the sugatagarbha**; then you acquire confidence in this; and finally you truly **actualize** it. By so doing, either in this lifetime or in the intermediate period, the supreme state of **Samantabhadra**, the primordial protector, is achieved. This is a distinctive characteristic of this path. Like ice melting into water, **all appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra are naturally liberated, without abandoning them**, as kāyas and facets of **primordial consciousness**. This is established as **the authentic teaching of all the jinas**. **All other pretentious claims regarding beings migrating from one life to another and eventually achieving a dualistic fruition** [with something to achieve and someone who achieves it] **are wearisome**. Not only is it simply exhausting, but it is impossible for enlightenment to ever be its result. **Therefore**, pristine awareness, the sugatagarbha, **is the ultimate fruition of all the Dharmas** of the path, and for this reason it is **the spontaneous actualization and completion of the fruitional Great Perfection**.

B''' How It Is Free of the Two Extremes

**Without falling to the extremes of mundane existence or peace,
the creative power of primordial consciousness that knows
[reality as it is] and perceives [the full range of phenomena]
blazes forth.**

Apart from pristine awareness, the sugatagarbha, which is free of both kinds of obscurations⁸⁵ together with their habitual propensities, [395] any other buddhahood is impossible. **Without falling to the extreme of mundane existence**, like ordinary sentient beings, and without falling to the extreme

84. Tib. *snang gsum*. The appearances of the apprehended object, the apprehending mind, and the body of a sentient being.

85. These are afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations, the first impeding the realization of nirvāṇa and the second impeding the realization of the perfect enlightenment of a buddha.

of **peace**, like śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, **the great creative power of primordial consciousness** that **knows** reality as it is and **that perceives** the full range of phenomena **blazes forth**. Having fulfilled your own goals, it eternally, all-pervasively, and spontaneously serves the needs of sentient beings with great, objectless compassion for as long as space remains, so others' goals are fulfilled as well.

B" The Genesis of Conventional Names

**Although the genesis of names is not different,
for the sake of disciples, it is given conventional names.**

All the specific names in accordance with conventional, relative truth are none other than names for pristine awareness, the sugatagarbha, for all phenomena are not other than this, and the ultimate nature of existence transcends all expressions of speech and thought. Therefore, **although the genesis of conventional names**, the presentations of the grounds and paths, and so on, **is not** established as being **different**, **conventional names** are temporarily **given so that** [the sugatagarbha] may be indicated with names and words and **disciples** may realize it.

Here are five such designations of conventional names. First, regarding the secret mantra Vajrayāna, this path is called *secret* because it is imbued with two great secrets.⁸⁶ It is called *mantra* because it is the place of liberation of all the yānas. The dharmakāya, pristine awareness that is present in the ground, [396] is called *vajra*, for it is endowed with the seven vajra qualities. Since it is not modified or altered by saṃsāra or nirvāṇa, it is its own *yāna*.⁸⁷

Second, ultimate bodhicitta is the real *meaning*, the *sublimity* of all phenomena, *pure* of faults and stains; and since it *fully* comprehends all facets of primordial consciousness and sublime qualities and is equally liberated in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, it is the ultimate reality of the *mind*.⁸⁸

86. The first of these two secrets is that it is inconceivable, and the second is that it is the unsurpassed king of all yānas.

87. This etymologizes “secret mantra Vajrayāna” (Tib. *gsang sngags rdo rje'i theg pa*): secret (*gsang*) mantra (*sngags*) vajra (*rdo rje*) yāna (*theg pa*).

88. This etymologizes “ultimate bodhicitta” (Tib. *don dam byang chub kyi sems*): meaning (*don*) sublimity (*dam pa*), pure (*byang*), full (*chub*) mind (*sems*).

Third, the Great Perfection *perfects* the intended meanings of the nine yānas. It is the universal basis of all the yānas, so it is *great*.⁸⁹

Fourth, the sole bindu is called *bindu*, for it transcends the edges and corners of concepts, and it is called *sole*, for it is the one taste of all of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.⁹⁰

Fifth, the youthful vase kāya is called *youthful*, for it is free of birth, death, aging, and degeneration. It is called *vase*, for the periphery of spontaneous actualization is not breached. And it is called *kāya*, for it perfects the facets of primordial consciousness and sublime qualities.⁹¹ In these ways it is indicated with five names, for you must unmistakably realize that which is indicated, namely, the nature of existence of the sugatagarbha.

This concludes the summary of the fourth phase of the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*.

89. This etymologizes “Great Perfection” (Tib. *rdzogs pa chen po*): perfects (*rdzogs pa*) great (*chen po*).

90. This etymologizes “sole bindu” (Tib. *thig le nyag gcig*): bindu (*thig le*), sole (*nyag gcig*).

91. This etymologizes “youthful vase kāya” (Tib. *gzhon nu bum sku*): youthful (*gzhon nu*) vase (*bum*) kāya (*sku*).

Phase 5: Determining Secret Dualistic Grasping and Revealing the Way of Natural Liberation

C" The Process of Delusion in Impure Saṃsāra

This section has five parts: (1") inner dualistic grasping, (2") secret dualistic grasping, (3") how the three realms are not other than your own appearances, [397] (4") *rūdra*⁹² as the essential nature of dualistic grasping of saṃsāra, and (5") the wisdom of realizing the identitylessness of clinging to reality.

1" Inner Dualistic Grasping

This section has two parts: (a") the summary and (b") the elaborate explanation.

a" The Summary

**Thus, as for the emergence of impure appearances and mindsets
of saṃsāra,
from the displays of great original purity,**

In reality the delusive appearances of saṃsāra are not established in the nature of existence, so without any divergence **from the displays of the ground of being—great original purity—impure appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra** adventitiously **emerge**. The *Secret Essence Tantra* (*Guhyagarbha Tantra*) states:

Amazing! From the sugatagarbha
are emanated one's own thoughts and actions.
Various bodies and enjoyments,

92. Skt. *rūdra*. A meditator takes birth as a rūdra, a type of demon, by firmly and clearly visualizing himself or herself as a wrathful deity—while having no realization of emptiness and no motivation of compassion. It can also mean the conceptual grasping by which one reifies the distinctions of outer, inner, and secret phenomena.

places, miseries, and so on,
 are each grasped as “I” and “mine.”
 Bound by no one, there are no fetters,
 nor is there anyone who is bound.
 By grasping at thoughts as oneself,
 one’s bonds are deliberately tied in space.⁹³

b" The Elaborate Explanation

This section has three parts: (i") apprehended objects, (ii") apprehending minds, and (iii") how objects and minds transform and dissolve in an instant.

i" Apprehended Objects

subtle self-concepts obscure wisdom and primordial
 consciousness,
 and due to the subsiding of the inner glow and radiance of the
 ground into the womb,
 the luminosity of its outer radiance, the ethically neutral
 substrate of saṃsāra,
 manifests from immaterial space,
 and the consciousness of grasping at the “I” serves as the basis
 from which appearances and mindsets emerge.

In the beginning, **subtle self-concepts** adventitiously arise where there is no self, **obscuring** [398] the essential nature, **wisdom**, and its creative power, **primordial consciousness**. This causes the five kinds of **inner glow of the ground**, the five kāyas of the five **radiance**s, and the five facets of primordial consciousness to **subside into the womb**. **Due to** that, all the appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra arise like dream appearances, and the five facets of primordial consciousness are obscured by ignorance, resulting in the **outer radiance** manifesting as the five lights. By reifying and clinging to the true existence of the inner elements,⁹⁴ to the vital core of the five elements,⁹⁵ and to the great elements,⁹⁶ they appear as the impure five elements and are called

93. Lama Chönam and Sangye Khandro, trans., *The Guhyagarbha Tantra: Secret Essence Definitive Nature Just As It Is, with Commentary by Longchen Rabjam* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2011), 41.

94. The five inner elements are the mind, blood, flesh, warmth, and breath.

95. The five elements are earth, water, fire, air, and space.

96. The five great elements are the five primary colors of white, blue, yellow, red, and green.

the *outer elements*, *derivative elements*, or *residual appearances*. From the creative power of these five bases of delusion arise conditioned consciousness⁹⁷ and the assemblies of mental afflictions. The essential nature of the **substrate**, which acts as the basis of all the delusive apparitions of *saṃsāra*, is **ethically neutral**—neither good nor bad—and it is a blank, unthinking vacuity, like immaterial space. This is the actual substrate, and it is the essential nature of the mental affliction of delusion. From this, the movement of the karmic energies of an eon is the essential nature of envy, and **from the immaterial space of the substrate manifests the luminosity** that is the basis for the emergence of all thoughts. This consciousness is the substrate consciousness, and it is the essential nature of hatred. From this, **the coarse consciousness of grasping at the “I,”** thinking, “I am,” **serves as the basis [399] from which appearances and mindsets emerge.** This is afflictive mentation, and it is the essential nature of pride. As soon as it occurs, the self and all appearances emerge, and they are called *prior thoughts* and *apprehended objects*.

ii" Apprehending Minds

**With mentation alone established as the basis from which
appearances arise,
from the movements of the six kinds of conditioned
consciousness
manifest indeterminate phenomena, like hallucinations.**

As [afflictive mentation] becomes somewhat fortified, the principal mind, **mentation alone**, is aroused, and appearances emerge in the ground. With the fortification of their luminosity, it is **established as the basis from which appearances suddenly arise.** This nonconceptual mentation is the essential nature of the mental affliction of attachment. **From the** flamelike essential nature of the five poisons emerge arrays of afflictive thoughts like sparks. In dependence upon that mentation, the nature of the **six kinds of conditioned consciousness** of the five nonconceptual senses **moves**, and from the creative power of their movements **manifest indeterminate phenomena** such as visual forms, **like hallucinations** appearing to distorted vision. As conceptual mentation reifies names and their referents and closely adheres to them, they are called *subsequent thoughts* and *apprehending minds*.

97. Tib. *rnam shes*; Skt. *vijñāna*. This term is normally translated simply as “consciousness,” but in the context of these Dzokchen teachings, it is clearly distinguished from primordial consciousness and is translated here as “conditioned consciousness,” for it is conditioned by dualistically grasping at the aspects (Tib. *rnam pa*) of subject and object.

iii" How Objects and Minds Transform and Dissolve in an Instant

**Sporadically, like hair-tips moved by the wind,
due to the five energies that emanate, vacillate, differentiate,
assemble, and transform,
the impure eon is created, abides, and is destroyed and
emptied.**

None of the objects and agents that appear like this [400] move from one place to another. **Sporadically**, with no ability to sustain themselves, **like hair-tips moved by the wind**, they are impermanent from moment to moment, with the prior moments ceasing and the latter moments emerging. So recognize them simply as transformations. Moreover, the obscuring energy veils the eye of wisdom, and it freshly **emanates** appearances that were not there before. **Vacillating** energy manifests all kinds of indeterminate appearances; differentiating energy individually **differentiates** appearances and mindsets; assembling energy **assembles** the defilements of habitual tendencies; **and** transforming energy instantly **transforms** phenomena. **Due to the** functioning of these **five energies**, or subtle and coarse thoughts, **the impure eon** that did not exist previously is instantly, freshly **created, abides, and is destroyed and emptied**. However, you must know that this just cannot be fathomed, due to its being contaminated by other delusive causes.

2" Secret Dualistic Grasping

**The five sensory consciousnesses give rise to apprehended
objects,
which are apprehended by the roving thoughts of subtle mental
consciousness.
In one day, countless subtle eons vanish.
Completely withdrawing into the domain of mentation, daytime
appearances arise,
and with their complete withdrawal into the domain of the
substrate, nighttime appearances arise.
When you fall asleep, an eon dissolves into the space
of awareness.**

This section shows that all appearances are adventitious appearances of consciousness. From visual consciousness to tactile consciousness, the nonconceptual consciousnesses of the five senses [401] give rise to apprehended objects. They are apprehended by the roving thoughts of subtle, conceptual mental consciousness, which arises as the mind, and this is closely held. The senses, including the visual sense, act as the basis for the emergence of visual forms and so on, and these arise as objects. Visual consciousness and [the other sensory consciousnesses] fully apprehend coarse forms and so on. The conceptual mind closely holds on to each subtle phenomenon and becomes deluded. Through this temporal sequence mundane existence is compounded, and through the reverse sequence there is a collapse all the way to the peak of mundane existence.

Thus, in one day, countless, or manifold, subtle eons adventitiously form corresponding to the number of thoughts, and gradually vanish. Consequently, appearing objects and the subject who perceives them completely withdraw into the domain of nonconceptual mentation, so that daytime appearances arise uninterruptedly. Finally, due to the daytime appearances of objects and the subject who perceives them completely withdrawing into the domain of the substrate, nighttime appearances arise. So when you fall asleep, an eon of daytime appearances suddenly dissolves without a trace into the vacuous space of awareness.⁹⁸ After they have dispersed into that vacuity, the substrate consciousness and [402] mentation gradually arise, giving rise to nighttime appearances, or dream phenomena. Eventually they subside into the domain of mentation, leading to the emergence of new daytime appearances. This unmistakably reveals the culmination of the circumstances of conventional reality. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* states:

The substrate consciousness is like an ocean.

The six apprehending modes of consciousness that arise from it are like waves.

In summary, to the deluded mind, the apprehender and the apprehended appear as utterly separate, but in reality they are asserted to be established

98. Tib. *dbyings*; Skt. *dhātu*. While the Tibetan term *dbyings* is sometimes an abbreviation of *chos kyi dbyings*, or the absolute “space of phenomena,” as noted previously, it sometimes refers to the relative “space of awareness,” as it does here. Throughout these translations, the term *space of awareness* may be regarded as identical to the term *element of phenomena* (Tib. *chos kyi kham*; Skt. *dharmadhātu*), which denotes the range of phenomena that can be perceived by the mind and is one of the eighteen elements (Tib. *kham*; Skt. *dhātu*) commonly cited in Buddhist phenomenology.

merely by prior thoughts that are closely held by subsequent thoughts. This is the unsurpassed position of this yāna.

3" How the Three Realms Are Not Other than Your Own Appearances

**The substrate spontaneously actualizes the formless realm;
afflictive mentation, the form realm;
and mentation, the desire realm.**

Not even an atom of the three realms possibly exists out there.

The substrate, which was explained previously, **spontaneously actualizes** the four dimensions of **the formless realm**;⁹⁹ **afflictive mentation** spontaneously actualizes the seventeen domains of **the form realm**;¹⁰⁰ and **mentation** spontaneously actualizes the six domains of existence in **the desire realm**, from the gods on down.¹⁰¹ By identifying each one and acquiring confidence in this, you authentically establish on the basis of authoritative treatises and reasoning that the phenomena of the realms of existence are merely freshly arising appearances, and **not even an atom of the three realms possibly exists out there**.

4" Rūdra as the Essential Nature of Dualistic Grasping of Saṃsāra

**The rūdra of the view of self is the matraṃkaḥ of saṃsāra,
your body is the desire realm, your speech is the form realm,
and your mind abides as the four dimensions of the formless
realm.**

**Flesh, blood, warmth, breath, the white and red bindus, the
space of awareness,
the four elements, the sun, moon, and Rāhula are [thus]
established. [403]**

The rūdra of the view of self, entailing dualistic appearances, **is the basis and essential nature of all the phenomena of saṃsāra**, so it is called *matraṃkaḥ*. In accordance with relative truth, a child who devours his or her mother's

99. The four dimensions of the formless realm are boundless space, boundless consciousness, nothingness, and neither discernment nor nondiscernment.

100. See *form realm* in glossary.

101. The desire realm comprises the six domains of the gods, asuras, humans, animals, pretas, and the hell beings.

corpse is called *matram*, but this is not to be taken literally. What is meant here is that the impure physical world and its sentient inhabitants in saṃsāra freshly emerge from adventitious self-concepts. From the time that they obscure the nature of existence of the sugatagarbha, which is like a mother, so that it is hidden, all the domains of existence of saṃsāra are dualistically established as the mere aggregates, elements, and sense bases of rūdra. So your body, rūdra, is the desire realm, your speech is the form realm, and your mind abides as the four dimensions of the formless realm. Your flesh is earth, blood is water, warmth is fire, breath is air, and mind is space. Those are the four elements. The white bindu is the moon, the red [bindu] is the sun, and the empty space of awareness is the planet Rāhula. (Here two lines are merged in the commentary, so in order to easily distinguish them, I have commented on one sequence beginning with the reference to blood.) That is the way they are established. The substrate consciousness is Maheśvara, afflictive mentation is Gaṇeśa, and mentation is Kāmarāja.¹⁰²

This indicates [404] that all the assemblies of *mattas*¹⁰³ appear in dependence upon the three secret places of rūdra. To classify them, the physical worlds throughout space are the rūdra of the outer view of the self, which is remedied in the phase of the stage of generation by purifying these worlds as buddhafi elds created from emanated light. Grasping at the inner habitations, enjoyments, and body is the rūdra of the inner view of the self, which is remedied by meditating on the palace and deities. The latent, unlimited, continuous consciousness of the appearance of the self, with the sense of “I” at all times and in every situation, is the rūdra of the secret view of the self, which is the thread running through all appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra. The remedy for this is to steadfastly maintain divine pride. If you are unaware of this essential point, however long you cultivate and recite the stage of generation, you will not become enlightened. So the worship and accomplishment¹⁰⁴ performed upon correctly realizing this point are the unmistakable tradition of the Secret Mantra[yāna].

5" The Wisdom of Realizing the Identitylessness of Clinging to Reality

**Liberated by the power and blessings of the sharp vajra
of conscious awareness of identitylessness in pure absolute space,**

102. Tib. *'dod pa'i rgyal po*. Also called Takkirāja, the “King of Desire.”

103. Tib. *dregs pa*. Haughty nonhuman beings belonging to an eightfold class.

104. Tib. *bsnyen sgrub*; Skt. *sevāsādhana*. The two aspects of sādhanā practice, particularly within the context of mahāyoga.

the quintessences manifest as the kāyas and facets of great primordial consciousness.

Without abandoning saṃsāra, you are liberated as a buddha.

Without abandoning the view of the self, it is pacified as a display of spontaneous actualization.

The power and blessings of the actual Great Glorious One, Herukapa, the sharp vajra of conscious awareness that realizes all things as being of the nature of identitylessness, liberate the rūdra of the view of the self involving dualistic grasping [405] at the nature of identitylessness; and in the pure absolute space of spontaneous actualization, the quintessences manifest as the kāyas and facets of great primordial consciousness. Without abandoning saṃsāra, which seems to appear objectively, you are liberated as a buddha. Without abandoning the view of the self, which seems to appear as a subject, it is pacified as a display of the spontaneous actualization of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness. The causal view of the self and all the appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra that it generates are nothing but concepts of a mistaken mind, like confusing a striped rope for a snake. Since they do not in fact exist, you realize that there is nothing to abandon, and you simultaneously actualize the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness that are present in the ground of being. Therefore, the accounts from the past of how the Great Glorious One liberated the rūdra are in accord with the ways of saṃsāra, such that the one who was liberated and the one who liberated are both presented as having physical form. That is merely how they appear to ordinary beings; however, from the perspective of the buddhas, you should know that it is like this.

This concludes the fifth phase of the *Sharp Vajra*, which reveals how natural liberation occurs.

Phase 6: Teachings on the Essential Points of Practice and Their Key Distinctions

*D" Prayers for Swiftly Realizing the Meaning of the Tantra and
Experiencing Liberation*

Having established as your witness the ground of being,
absolute space, as the true buddha,
by generating the power of pure prayers,
make a commitment to omniscient buddhahood. [406]

It is asserted elsewhere that all roots of virtue, great and small, that are imbued with the wisdom of realizing the absence of true existence of the three spheres of an act¹⁰⁵ are causes of buddhahood. Accordingly, in this case **the ground of being, absolute space**, the ultimate mode of existence of all phenomena, is the sugatagarbha, and this is **the actual, true buddha**. Once you have truly realized this mode of being, it is best to rest in meditative equipoise in this actualization. Those who don't know how to do that should visualize the Three Roots and assemblies of peaceful and wrathful deities in the sky in front of them and **establish them as witnesses** for their prayers of supplication. In their presence, with reverent attention to the meaning of the tantras and expressing this in words—without a selfish attitude or idle babbling—with **pure speech, generate the power of prayers** that unprecedented qualities of experience and realization may freshly arise and that those that have begun to arise may increase. This **makes a commitment**, or plants a seed, for proceeding to the state of **omniscient buddhahood**, which ensures that enlightenment will finally be realized. Between sessions, [407] you should offer this prayer uninterruptedly as you go about your affairs.

105. The three spheres of an act are the agent, action, and object of the action.

E" Devotion to the Pith Instructions for the Moment of Death and So Forth If You Have Not Earnestly Devoted Yourself to the Tenet System in This Lifetime

**At all times supremely cherish the practice of the essential points
of the pith instructions
on practicing for death and on immersion and withdrawal.**

Those who are able to become liberated through the great transference as a limpid rainbow body in this lifetime by the swift path of cutting through to original purity and direct crossing over to spontaneous actualization do not need this. However, for those who have not devoted themselves to such a system, there are instructions for the dying process on merging with the *kāyas* and facets of primordial consciousness by entering into the clear light, or purification by way of instructions for transferring your abode to a [pure] environment and dwelling.

First, while resting in the reclining lion posture,¹⁰⁶ direct your consciousness to your eyes. Direct your gaze into space and to pristine awareness, and from the nature of original purity, free of dispersal and withdrawal, by renouncing the requisites of living, you will be liberated in an instant. Second, when your final breath is expelled, imagine a white *A*, of the nature of pristine awareness, at your heart, and imagine that it ascends far above the crown of your head. In that instant, by reciting *Hig* twenty-one times in a row, you will be liberated. It is important that you start practicing this now, so that **at all times** between sessions [408] when the sky is clear you direct your awareness into space and think, “When it is certain that I am about to **die**, may I be liberated in the expanse free of conceptual elaboration!” As you do so, after you have exhaled, rest your consciousness without an object. Repeatedly **practicing** this and becoming familiar with it is a very swift path.

As for withdrawing phenomena into the vase, dividing the night into three periods, at dusk the **withdrawal** of the senses into the essential point while remaining in the *ṛṣi* posture¹⁰⁷ is as follows: Visualize at the navel a red, four-petaled lotus, upon which is a hot, red cone, with its flames extending

106. In the lion posture, lie on your right side, with your cheek resting on your right hand and the left hand resting on your thigh. Your left leg is straight, while your right leg is slightly bent.

107. In the *ṛṣi* posture, rest the soles of both feet on the ground, press your ankles together in parallel, and sit in a squatting position. Your spine is vertical and your neck is completely straight. With your hands clasped together, embrace your armpits or your knees.

upward through the avadhūti, striking a *Ham* syllable at the crown. Drops of bindus stoke the flames, which flare up, burning up karma and habitual propensities. Then rest in the nature of bliss and emptiness.

As for the **immersion** of sleep in the clear light, visualize in the center of your heart white *A*'s like a string of crystal beads.¹⁰⁸ Imagine that as a result of them dissolving into one another, the white space inside the avadhūti becomes as bright as sunlight flooding a window. **Supremely cherish the practice of the extraordinary essential points of such pith instructions.**

*F" Unique Teachings of the Great Perfection on Key Distinctions*¹⁰⁹

This section has two parts: (1") cutting through misconceptions by hearing and thinking and [409] (2") the need for practice after having cut through misconceptions.

1" Cutting Through Misconceptions by Hearing and Thinking

The manifestation of the substrate as absolute space is the dharmakāya, Samantabhadra.

The manifestation of the absolute space of mental consciousness is great wisdom.

The manifestation of the ultimate nature of the mind is the supreme path of pristine awareness.

The manifestation of conditioned consciousness blazes forth as the creative power of primordial consciousness.

The manifestation of the essential nature of sentient beings is buddhahood itself.

The extinction of impure appearances and mindsets is actual liberation.

When understanding arrives at the ultimate nature, realization is certain.

There are six distinctions to be drawn: between (a") the substrate and the dharmakāya, (b") mentation and wisdom, (c") the mind and pristine

108. You actually visualize twenty-one *A* syllables with the bottom one at your heart and the top one at your forehead as you are lying down. As you fall asleep you imagine the *A*'s dissolving one into the other from your forehead down to your heart until there is just one left in the avadhūti inside your heart.

109. Tib. *'phyongs*.

awareness, (d") conditioned consciousness and primordial consciousness, (e") liberation and delusion, and between (f") understanding and realization.

a" The Distinction between the Substrate and the Dharmakāya

The substrate is very subtle, entailing subtle grasping at the "I" that does not lend itself to analysis; and once it has arisen, it is ignorance, which is like darkness. The original, primordial ground of being is like space. When they are united, there is a blank vacuity devoid of mindfulness, like that of deep sleep and fainting. This is the actual substrate. By meditating while letting the substrate consciousness, which is temporarily luminous, vividly rest in the nature of that vacuity, the assemblies of roving thoughts cease, causing a radiant vacuity to appear.

Second, as for the dharmakāya, **the manifestation of the two types of substrate**¹¹⁰ **as absolute space**, without letting them slip into an ethically neutral state, **is the dharmakāya, Samantabhadra**. This is not a blank, immaterial void, but by naturally letting it rest without modification, you are self-liberated. It is self-illuminated by great wisdom, [410] the creative power of its radiance is unimpeded, and without entering into objects, it is the causal dharmakāya. Being unmodified, by way of its own natural limpidity as self-emergent absolute space, devoid of a center and periphery, it is uniformly pervasive as great nonduality, illuminating the depths of great primordial consciousness that knows [reality as it is] and perceives [the full range of phenomena]. This manifestation of all the qualities of enlightenment is the fruitional dharmakāya. The first [causal dharmakāya] is taken as the path by knowing the essential nature of reality, while the second [fruitional dharmakāya] incinerates them both with the great fruition,¹¹¹ so that they limitlessly pervade reality.¹¹²

b" The Distinction between Mentation and Wisdom

Mentation emerges due to the substrate's obscuration of the radiance and creative power of wisdom, and it is the grasping that is the basis for misapprehending the self-knowing existence of all appearances and mindsets. Its creative power, or conceptual mentation, is the recognition of all learned and unlearned activities and the grasping at them.

110. The two types of substrate are the actual substrate and the temporarily luminous substrate. See p. 52n63.

111. The great fruition is here said to "incinerate," in the sense of "transcend," both categories of the causal and the fruitional dharmakāya.

112. This paragraph compares with VS 564.

As for the latter, **the manifestation of the absolute space of mental consciousness is great wisdom.** In this regard there are manifest wisdom and path wisdom. The former truly knows and actualizes the nature of existence of ultimate reality, or suchness. [411] The latter rests consciousness in its own nature, wide-open and naked, and indefinable, without being modified by the intellect, mentation, or concepts. Thus, its essential nature is empty, its manifest nature is luminous, and its compassion is naturally liberated and unimpeded, without entering into objects. By becoming familiar with it, the words and meanings that flow out of this expanse are its creative expressions. If arrogance arises on that basis and clinging occurs, wisdom is obscured, turning you away from the path. This is like being on the verge of acquiring great wealth but then losing it to a thief. Therefore, when inconceivable sublime qualities flow out of the expanse, it is important to know the vital point of not going astray. Mentation is the basis of the mind, and the vital point is not to embrace modifications, rejection and acceptance, or experiences involving craving as your path. Wisdom is not doing anything at all. This is the authentic path, so it is the most important thing to know.¹¹³

c" The Distinction between the Mind and Pristine Awareness

First of all, the mind is the essential nature of saṃsāra, its cause is ignorance, its illusory apparitions are appearances, its creative expressions are thoughts, and its displays are relative truths. As for its divisions, there are two types of mind: the deluded mind and the mind that seeks the path. The first refers to the minds of all sentient beings [412] who cycle about in delusion. The second refers to the minds of all those who wish to enter the authentic path and who take the mind as their path. As for its cause, since it is generated by the ground of saṃsāra, its results are also confined solely to saṃsāra, so it is a relative truth.

The **manifestation of the absolute space of the ultimate nature of the mind by pristine awareness** is mastered by great wisdom. At this time, its ground is the dharmakāya, its radiance is wisdom, and its creative expressions are none other than the displays of primordial consciousness. Since the three kāyas are generated by the spontaneously actualized ground, all views and meditations are solely the results of omniscience, so this is **the authentic, supreme path.**

Second, there are two types of pristine awareness: causal pristine awareness and fruitional pristine awareness. The former is mastered by great, wide-open wisdom, which naturally settles and dissolves without modification into the essential nature of reality, which is all-pervasive and devoid of a

113. These two paragraphs compare with VS 564–65.

center and periphery. Its radiance consists of unimpeded creative displays that are uninfluenced by objective conditions and unmixed with objects. Although beginners may identify it, they oscillate between achieving stillness and then falling back into delusion due to forgetfulness. Their abiding in these alternating states indicates the subliminal presence of subtle grasping with effortful intellect and mentation. This shows that they have merely entered the path; however, because they have not achieved stability [413] and are inconsistent, it is the stage of having merely recognized the path.

By the power of increasing this through familiarization, during the waking state they are released into the infinite expanse of the nature of existence, without oscillating between stillness and delusion.

In the dream state, in contrast, sometimes such people are under the influence of stillness, while at other times they become lost in delusion. This is the phase when they have just reached the path, so this is pristine awareness of reaching the path.

Due to increasing familiarization with this, pristine awareness never loses its own power at any time during the dream state or the waking state, and this is called expansive pristine awareness. When at all times and in all situations there are no digressions from the great clear light of pristine awareness—like the absence of darkness once the sun has risen—pristine awareness has manifested, whereby all subtle and coarse modes of apprehension of the view and meditation dissolve right where they are, and no defilements of the mind arise. This is pristine awareness in which confidence is acquired.

The fact that the sublime qualities of the domain of the sugatagarbha have still not manifested is a sign that you have not yet transcended the obscurations of the substrate, so this is causal pristine awareness. It is analogous to the break of dawn before the sun has risen. By practicing with enormous, unflagging enthusiasm, [414] causal pristine awareness is awakened in the absolute space of the great fruition. Entering the womb of the dharmakāya, which is devoid of signs, it limitlessly manifests as displays of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness. This fruitional pristine awareness is more potent, just as the light of dawn is paled by the sunlight once the sun has risen. In the first phase, pristine awareness is identified, but you have not transcended saṃsāra by even a hair's breadth, so this is established as the cause.

In general, the reason this is called the *fruitional yāna* is that—unlike devoting yourself in the present to practicing causal virtues of the body, speech, and mind with the pretense that you will achieve the fruition of buddhahood in the future—here you take ultimate reality itself as the path, familiarize yourself with it, and thereby gain liberation right where you are.

Hence, since no fruition is achieved apart from this, it is said to be the fruitional yāna.¹¹⁴

d" The Distinction between Conditioned Consciousness and Primordial Consciousness

First, once the eye of wisdom has been veiled, [conditioned consciousness] has the nature of realizing and investigating the configurations that emerge from the substrate and proliferate as discrete entities, arising and passing away, as that which structures saṃsāra.

Second, when the absolute space of **conditioned consciousness manifests**, although it seems as if it **blazes forth as the creative power of primordial consciousness** that was not there before, in reality this simply manifests due to familiarity [415] with the realization that it was always self-appearing.

Finally, when the impurities of ignorance are cleansed in absolute space and conditioned consciousness dissolves into the ground of being, all the specific aspects of the grounds and paths up to the facets of primordial consciousness and sublime qualities of buddhahood are magnificently present as self-emergent and self-arising, unlike the transient intellect, mentation, and concepts that arise and pass one after the other. This is primordial consciousness that perceives the full range of phenomena.

Path primordial consciousness is simply the unimpeded array of appearances that arises when it is freed from the obscuring veils of the substrate. In short, when primordial consciousness subsides into its inner glow, its radiance constitutes appearances and its creative power constitutes conditioned consciousness.

e" The Distinction between Deluded Sentient Beings and Liberated Buddhas

First, deluded sentient beings perceive the physical world and its sentient inhabitants along with self and others, and then by clinging to them, wander about and cycle in the six realms of existence.

Second, buddhahood itself is the manifestation of your own face as the essential nature of sentient beings, the sugatagarbha. With the extinction of impure appearances and mindsets, together with their habitual propensities, there is actual liberation. Its nature is uniform pervasiveness, free of transition and change, without falling into any partiality, transcending all extremes, [416] limitlessly expanding as displays of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness, transcending objects, not being established as the

114. This section compares with VS 566–70.

teacher and his circle of disciples, transcending the body, and not falling to the extremes of self and others. You must know that in the nature of great bliss of the absolute space of phenomena, the actualization of the inner glow of uniformly pervasive wisdom does not fall to the extreme of bearing signs. As the *Diamond-Cutter Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā Sūtra*) states:

Those who see me as form
and who know me as sound
have entered a false path:
those people do not see me.
The buddhas view ultimate reality,
and the guides are the dharmakāya.
Ultimate reality is not an object of knowledge,
so it cannot be known with conditioned consciousness.

f" The Distinction between Understanding and Realization

First, understanding merely as intellectual investigation of the meaning of emptiness, understanding grasping at emptiness as being emptiness, and the view that actions and their consequences and so forth lack even relative existence constitute understanding that is mistaken or false. Authentic understanding determines the nature of all appearances as lacking true existence, so identitylessness is like a hallucination and the lack of true existence is like a dream. After you have utterly fathomed nonobjectivity as the panoramic sweep of space, the phase of naturally remaining at all times and in all circumstances [417] without contrivance in the nature of not grasping at true existence is merely the initial stage of understanding arising in your mindstream.

Second, **when understanding arrives at the ultimate nature, realization is certain.** This occurs when all dualistic phenomena insubstantially arise like mirages, without grasping at them, as if they were hallucinations. This is the phase of appearances arising as illusions. At all times and in all circumstances, pristine awareness remains within its own domain and is not mistaken for the mind. It is unmodified by the intellect, mentation, and concepts, so just as there is no grasping at true existence when you recognize the dream as a dream, reification dissolves right where it is. The culmination of realization and familiarization is the limitless expansion into perfect displays in an expanse that is totally subsumed within the absolute space of phenomena.¹¹⁵

To summarize the first three distinctions, when great wisdom manifests without succumbing to an ethically neutral dispersal into delusion, you see

115. This paragraph compares with VS 572–73.

that the essential nature is the dharmakāya, its radiance is wisdom, its creative expressions are the facets of primordial consciousness, and its displays are ultimate. When great wisdom is obscured by ignorance, the essential nature is the substrate, its radiance is mentation, its creative expressions are the mental factors, and its displays are relative.

2" The Need for Practice after Having Cut Through Misconceptions

**After making such distinctions, so that you are not confused
regarding the essential points,
it is supremely important to focus your practice on these
essential points. [418]**

The importance of first cutting through misconceptions by means of hearing and thinking and then gaining **unconfused knowledge regarding the essential points of the distinctions** is stated in the *Sublime Continuum* (*Uttaratantra*):

Wisdom is supreme and its basis
is hearing, so hearing is also supreme.

Mere intellectual knowledge is not enough, so until liberation is actualized, without letting your recognition slip into an ethically neutral state, **it is supremely important to practice and focus on these essential points** day and night, without falling into lassitude. This was emphasized by the Omniscient Lord of Dharma:

Although you have recognized your own nature, if you do not
familiarize yourself with it,
you will be carried away by conceptual enemies, and you will be
like a child caught up in battle.

Maitreya, Regent of the Jina, stated, “If one could realize the meaning without hearing teachings, the teachings by the buddhas would be pointless. If one could realize the meaning without meditating, the meditations by yogins would be pointless.” In accordance with these words, the union of realization and familiarization is the defining characteristic of the authentic path.

This concludes the sixth phase of the *Sharp Vajra*. Up to this point, [419] I have elaborately explained the path of cutting through to original purity.

The Closing Summary of Those Explanations

**Thus, with the wisdom of truly realizing the nature of being of the Great Perfection through actualizing the nature of existence,
focus on unifying your view, meditation, and conduct.**

Thus, with the wisdom of truly realizing the nature of being of the Great Perfection of the path by directly perceiving the nature of existence of the original ground, come to the culmination of the investigation of reality. Direct perception by means of all-seeing great wisdom is the **view**. Never parting from the self-mastery of the great natural liberation of pristine awareness is **meditation**. And the essential points regarding conduct are first not to let your **conduct** fall into error due to the view. Abandon inappropriate, nonvirtuous thoughts and deeds as if they were poison, and behave in a calm, subdued, and conscientious manner, as if you had come into the presence of a judge of the highest court. Additionally, do not let your view fall into error due to your conduct. That is, by unmistakably recognizing that abiding in the ultimate, effortless nature of existence is the path of the perfectly awakened buddhas, do not let this be overshadowed by any relative, effortful virtues. You must be like a lion posing majestically in the snow.

By **focusing on** the practice of this view, meditation, and conduct in a **unified** way, without letting them become disconnected from each other, three levels of dreams will arise. [420] The highest level occurs when your dreams are purified in the clear light, merging with their surroundings, whereby enlightenment is achieved as the dharmakāya. The middling level occurs once you have recognized dreams as dreams and are able to emanate and transform them, whereby the relief [of liberation] is achieved as a nirmāṇakāya. The lowest level occurs when evil dreams resulting from negative habitual propensities cease, and you have only good dreams. When this occurs, it is certain you will achieve the relief [of liberation] as a living-being nirmāṇakāya.¹¹⁶ Moreover, a sign of such conduct is that you abide solely in inactivity, without engaging in any activities pertaining to the eight mundane concerns.

116. Tib. *skye ba sprul pa'i sku*. This is one of four kinds of nirmāṇakāyas, the other three being teacher nirmāṇakāyas, created nirmāṇakāyas, and material nirmāṇakāyas. See GD 217–18.

Phase 7: How to Follow the Path of the Great Clear Light, Direct Crossing Over

b. The Path of Direct Crossing Over to Spontaneous Actualization

THIS SECTION has two parts: (i) the summary and (ii) the elaborate explanation.

i. The Summary

Liberation is swiftly achieved by devoting yourself to the
pinnacle of paths,
the swift path, the essential Dharma,
filled with blessings of clairvoyance, extrasensory perception,
and miraculous power,
the path of direct crossing over to the city of the great transference.

The pinnacle of all the paths of the nine stages, superior even to the path of cutting through, the swift path, the vajra essence Dharma, filled with blessings of clairvoyance, extrasensory perception, and miraculous power, is the path of the clear light, direct crossing over to the city of the great transference rainbow body. In the phase of cutting through, by identifying pristine awareness, the dharmakāya that is present in the ground, and devoting yourself to achieving some stability in it, you will certainly achieve supreme liberation swiftly, which is to say either in this life or in the intermediate period.

ii. The Elaborate Explanation

This section has two parts: [421] (A') the general meaning and (B') the meaning of the text.

A' The General Meaning

This section has two parts: (1') the special preliminary practices and (2') how to engage in the main practice.

1' *The Special Preliminary Practices*

If you do not practice the profound preliminary rituals, when you engage in the main practice there will be a great many obstacles and pitfalls, so first of all diligently apply yourself to differentiating saṃsāra and nirvāṇa¹¹⁷ with respect to your body, speech, and mind. The ways of differentiating them in terms of outer, inner, and secret are to be understood from the meditation manuals (such as the *Vajra Essence*),¹¹⁸ and they should be practiced accordingly.

2' *How to Engage in the Main Practice*

This section has seven parts: (a') a general synthesis of direct crossing over and so forth, (b') recognizing the principal points of this specific phase, (c') the vital points of the body, speech, and mind, (d') the three vital points for viewing the clear light, (e') a presentation of the lamps, (f') establishing the basis with the three kinds of stillness, and (g') how to put the stages into practice.¹¹⁹

a' *A General Synthesis of Direct Crossing Over and So Forth*

In this yāna our own explanation of the channels and bindus is called *ati anu*. To summarize it, the aperture for the manifest movements of the impure energy-mind is the mouth, and the apertures for the subtle energy-mind [422] are the nostrils. As for how they move, in the lungs, channels the width of a wheat straw are filled with the exhaled and inhaled energy. If they increase excessively, heat disorders arise; if they decrease, cold disorders occur; and if the energy flows straight, there is a balance of the heat and cold elements of the body. In one day there are 21,600 breaths, which serve as the mounts for the mind's discursive thoughts. Therefore, the strenuous control of the channels and vital energies is a profound method for forcefully binding the energy-mind, but there are great obstacles and ways to go astray.

The mouth is the aperture for the movements of coarse mental afflictions,

117. Tib. 'khor 'das ru shan.

118. See VE 395–418.

119. This outline differs from the actual structure of the text that follows, which gives these headings: (a') a general synthesis of direct crossing over and so forth, (b') recognizing the principal points of this specific phase, (c') identifying the most important thing to know in this phase, (d') the vital points of the body, speech, and mind, (e') the three vital points for viewing the clear light, (f') establishing the basis with the three kinds of stillness, and (g') how to put the stages into practice. The presentation of the lamps occurs within section (b').

while subtle, hidden afflictions move by way of the nostrils. The six lamps of the ground of the nature of existence are the avenues for the arising of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness, and they are also the apertures through which primordial consciousness manifests. The two ears are the pathways by which consciousness masters appearances, and they are also the apertures of subtle and hidden primordial consciousness. In dependence upon them, sounds are purified. Through the apertures by which primordial consciousness manifests, the clear light that illuminates darkness is purified. The eyes are the entrances through which stainless appearances manifest, and the purification of dreams is the gateway for dreams. By familiarizing yourself with the clear light, emanation, and transformation, [423] the appearances in the transitional phase of becoming can be emanated and transformed. From that you can emanate a pristine nirmāṇakāya buddhafield and familiarize yourself with transforming the appearances of the intermediate period.¹²⁰

b' Recognizing the Principal Points of This Specific Phase

Now I shall describe the specific points in the explanations of the types of apertures. With respect to the gateways through which the visions of kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness manifest, there are (i') the lamps of the ground of the nature of existence, and (ii') the lamps of the yogic path.

i' The Lamps of the Ground of the Nature of Existence

As for the three kinds of lamps of the vessel, the quintessence of the body is the *citta lamp of the flesh*, and inside it is the quintessence of the channels, the *hollow crystal kati channel*. It is one-eighth the width of a horsehair, with two branches that stem from inside the heart like the horns of a wild ox. These curve around the back of the ears and come to the pupils of the eyes. Their root is the heart, their trunk is the channels, and their fruit is the eyes. The quintessence of the apertures is called the *fluid distant lasso lamp*. Although these are said to have three names, they are united as one entity with mere distinctions of being the root, trunk, and fruit. Thus, in the context of the path, they are simply called the *fluid distant lasso lamp*.¹²¹

As for the ways in which the visions are perceived, the *pure fluid distant lasso lamp* is so called because it enables you to see the luminous visions of the root of light. The *impure fluid distant lasso lamp* is so called because delusive appearances are seen due to the basis of the sensory faculty. [424] As for its

120. This section compares with VE 423–24.

121. This paragraph compares with VE 424–25.

etymology, it is called *distant* because it enables you to see and apprehend from a distance forms, colors, and kāyas of pristine awareness, and because if you do realize the quintessential clear light, it propels you far from saṃsāra, while if you do not realize this, it propels you far from nirvāṇa. It is called a *lasso* because it snares you if you identify with the appearances of saṃsāra, such as forms and sensory objects, and it also holds you to prevent your falling into distraction regarding the visions of light. It is called *fluid* because it separates the quintessence from the residue of appearances, and because it is free of self-grasping regarding appearances. It is called a *lamp* because it illuminates the delusive appearances to the sense doors, and it illuminates primordial consciousness, pristine awareness.¹²²

Among the three kinds of lamps of the vital essence, here is the nature of being of the first, called the *lamp of the pristine space of awareness*: The five lights result from the transmutation of the residues of the five elements into quintessences. The quintessence that appears as space is indigo or light blue; the quintessence that appears as water is white or gray; the quintessence that appears as fire is red or brown; the quintessence that appears as earth is yellow, pale yellow, or dark yellow; and the quintessence that appears as air is green, tan, or light green. [425] In whatever color the impure visions initially appear, when they shift to the space of awareness, they continue to appear in that same color.

Here is how the visions in the space of awareness are seen by individuals who are on the path: By forcefully directing your attention to the eyes and your eyes to a sky free of [contaminating] influences, you see vague, bluish visions in the space of awareness. If you intensely engage with this mode of appearance, you recognize that space is unrelated to any individual, but the lamp consistently emerges or recedes according to the presence or absence of the individual. So external, cloudless space is just the basis for appearances to arise, but it is not the actual space of awareness. The space of awareness is an inner space that illuminates the pavilions of rainbow lights. While it seems as if they emerge from it, they are not really different.

Such visions in the space of awareness are initially of the nature of the sun, the moon, a flame, and so on, complete with the five colors and filled with rainbow patterns, like brilliant, unfurled brocade. This rainbow weave appears in the aspect of vertical and horizontal visions. For just a month, beginners should gaze through a crystal [in the direction of] the sun during the daytime, at the moon during the nighttime, and gaze at a flame in the

122. This etymologizes “fluid distant lasso lamp” (Tib. *rgyang zhags chu'i sgron ma*): distant (*rgyang*) lasso (*zhags*) fluid (*chu*) lamp (*sgron ma*).

morning and evening. This veils the basis of appearances, so [the visions] appear. At first [426] they arise as shifting, quivering images, after a while they become more stable, and finally they remain motionless. At that time, look out a window into the clear sky and settle on these visions of light, whether they appear to be good or bad, and disengage from the flaws of enjoying or not enjoying their beauty or lack of beauty. Then a whitish blue emerges that is not of the external empty sky. Even so, know that it is important to rest in this state without attraction or aversion to its qualities. As for its etymology, it is called the *space of awareness* because the space of awareness of the quintessences of the five elements appears as the five lights. Because it purifies reification, it is called *pristine*, and in dependence upon this, the visions of the vajra strands¹²³ are illuminated, so it is called a *lamp*.¹²⁴

As for the nature of being of the *lamp of empty bindus*, the five inner elements are transmuted into quintessences and thereby become the five quintessences. The quintessence of the mind is transformed into indigo and appears as such. The quintessence of blood transforms into the color red and appears as such. Likewise, the quintessence of flesh is yellow, the quintessence of warmth is white, and that of the breath appears green.¹²⁵ The five quintessences appear to be round, so they are called *bindus*. In reality, they are spherical, without corners. They appear like concentric circles rippling from a stone thrown into a pond.¹²⁶ [427] As for its etymology, the *Pearl Garland* states:

“*Thig*” refers to immutability;
 “*le*” refers to pervasiveness and the appearance as objects.
Empty and devoid of signs of substantiality,
 this *lamp* illuminates by dispelling darkness.¹²⁷

123. Tib. *rdo rje lu gu rgyud*. Lit. “vajra lamb-strings,” alluding to the appearances of grazing sheep.

124. This etymologizes “lamp of the pristine space of awareness” (Tib. *dbyings rnam par dag pa'i sgron ma*): space of awareness (*dbyings*) pristine (*rnam par dag pa*) lamp (*sgron ma*).

125. The *Vajra Essence* states instead that the quintessence of blood is white and that the quintessence of warmth is red (VE 426–27).

126. These four paragraphs compare with VE 425–27.

127. This etymologizes “lamp of the empty bindus” (Tib. *thig le stong pa'i sgron ma*): bindus (*thig le*), empty (*stong pa*), lamp (*sgron ma*).

In the center of the heart is the *hollow crystal kati channel*, and inside it is the bindu of the internal space of awareness. By being held in your gaze, it appears externally as the bindu of the radiance of the space of awareness, so it is said to be twofold.

As for the nature of being of the *lamp of self-emergent wisdom*, it is pristine awareness, characterized by its empty essential nature, its luminous manifest nature, and its unimpeded compassion. This is primordial consciousness, the essential nature of the mind, which eternally abides inseparably from the sugatagarbha. As for its way of appearing, due to being held by the gaze of the distant lasso, inner pristine awareness is experienced as being very limpid and nonobjective. From this arises sharp and swift wisdom that knows objects and the meanings of words, arising as a flowing forth into the expanse, constituting its creative expressions. From them, *vajra strands* of the pristine awareness of vipaśyanā appear in the expanse of the pristine space of awareness, like pearls strung on a string or like floating threads of gold, and they are called the *radiance of wisdom*.

As a sign of liberation due to the vital points of the channels, [428] [the vajra strands] become fine and curly. As a sign of liberation due to the vital points of the vital energies, they appear to be coming and going. As a sign of liberation due to the vital points of the bindus, the bindus are present among the curls. By applying the name of the cause to their effect, they are also called *vajra strands*. In the initial phase and during the interval thereafter they are like pearls strung together, and finally they emerge in the form of latticework and pendants.¹²⁸ They are of the same essential nature but are nominally classified as threefold. As for the etymology, the *Pearl Garland* states:

Consciousness simultaneously realizes phenomena,
the primary among them being the pinnacle of everything.
It is devoid of characteristics that can be viewed as other,
and it arises continuously and appears naturally.
This lamp unimpededly illuminates appearances.¹²⁹

ii' The Lamps of the Yogic Path

The four lamps of the path of appearances are the fluid distant lasso lamp, the lamp of the pristine space of awareness, the lamp of the empty bindus, and

128. These three paragraphs compare with VE 427–28.

129. This etymologizes “lamp of self-emergent wisdom” (Tib. *shes rab rang byung gi sgron ma*). The component terms in Tibetan do not correspond directly to the English terms here.

the lamp of self-emergent wisdom. These four lamps are united as one during the phase of the yogic path. Know that unifying them and then applying yourself to practice is of the utmost importance.¹³⁰

c' Identifying the Most Important Thing to Know in This Phase

Previously, when determining [429] the nature of the ground during the phase of cutting through, an initial, impure consciousness gives rise to objective appearances, which are taken up by subsequent thoughts, resulting in delusion. Once you have correctly recognized how that occurs, now during the phase of practicing the direct crossing over, your initial consciousness shifts to appearances of clear light, and consciousness actualizes itself. Impure appearances dissolve into the space of awareness, and even though they disappear without a trace, the consciousness of afflictive mentation holds on to them as being existent. But the impure eon has been destroyed, and the consciousness of their disappearance is an indispensable, sublime aspect of the direct crossing over.

d' The Vital Points of the Body, Speech, and Mind

Unlike nebulous, obscure meditations and constructs of the intellect and mentation, the eye of wisdom enables you to directly see the ultimate reality of the clear light. At the outset you must bind your posture, for if this is not done, the space of awareness, bindus, and vital energies will be dispersed in the channels and elements of the body, and they will not manifest, just as the limbs of a snake will not appear unless he is squeezed.¹³¹ The posture is therefore very important.

First, the dharmakāya posture is like a lion. The physical posture of a lion entails joining the soles of your feet in front of you. [430] Plant your vajra fists on the ground between your legs and look up into the sky. This is the dharmakāya posture and gaze. The soles of your feet are joined in order to keep the afflictive vital energies in their own place. Your vajra fists are placed on the ground to cut off the pathways of the mental afflictions. The purpose of directing your gaze upward is to open the vision of primordial consciousness.

The sambhogakāya posture, which is like a reclining elephant, entails planting your knees and elbows on the ground and supporting your cheeks with your palms. Point the soles of your feet outward and gaze directly in front of you. Pointing your soles outward causes the vital energies to flow

130. This paragraph compares with VE 428.

131. Tibetan lore considered a male snake's hemipenes, which can be everted by applying pressure, to be his "limbs."

easily. Pressing your knees against your chest equalizes the heat and cold elements of the body. Pointing your knees and elbows at the ground blocks the impure apertures. Supporting your cheeks with your palms equalizes bliss and emptiness. The purpose of directing your gaze straight in front of you is to realize the self-illumination of primordial consciousness.

The *nirmāṇakāya* posture, which is like a squatting *ṛṣi*, entails planting the soles of your feet on the ground, pressing your knees against your chest, and clasping your knees with both hands while interlacing your fingers. Straighten your spine and gaze downward. [431] The soles of your feet press on the air maṇḍala in order to suppress the power of the karmic vital energies. By pressing together the fire maṇḍala of the thighs and the fire maṇḍala of the belly, the impure vital energies of saṃsāra are extinguished in their own place. By pressing together the water maṇḍala of the knees and the fire maṇḍala of the palms, the heat and cold elements of the body are equalized. By pressing together the fire maṇḍala of the palms and the fire maṇḍala of the armpits, cold disorders are dispelled.¹³² Nothing more is said except that by gazing downward, the eye of omniscience is opened. Nevertheless, if you look straight ahead, the eye of omniscience still opens. Moreover, even if you look upward, the eye of omniscience still opens, so it is said that this makes no difference.¹³³

e' The Three Vital Points for Viewing the Clear Light

The vital point regarding the sense doors is that you look with your eyes partially open, without suddenly opening them wide, for the sharpness of your vision will decline, and the visions of the clear light will not manifest. So do not rigidly fix your gaze. The vital point regarding the vital energies is that you practice breathing gently through your mouth, via a small opening between your lips and teeth, and practice breathing in and out slowly, pausing for a moment once the breath has been exhaled. As for the vital point regarding the object of your gaze, in the beginning, for just a month, during the daytime direct your gaze one cubit [a forearm's length] away from the sun. [432] Then practice during the night to clear away any problems of heat increasing in the eyes from the sun.¹³⁴ In order to achieve stability in the clear light,

132. This line refers to an alternate form of the *nirmāṇakāya* posture in which the arms are crossed over the knees with the palms at the armpits. The *Vajra Essence* adds this point: "By pressing together the water maṇḍala of the backs of the hands and the water maṇḍala of the throat, heat disorders are dispelled."

133. This section compares with VE 419–21.

134. Although the improper daytime practice of gazing near the sun may impair your vision, it is said that the nighttime practice of gazing at the moon may actually enhance

gaze at the moon in the same way. At night if you gaze at a flame, by looking above it with your eyes half open, at first you will see only something like an orange haystack. After a while, visions will appear in the space of awareness and bindus will arise in the form of quivering lines. Finally beautiful, limpid, clear, vast visions will appear in the space of awareness.

f' Establishing the Basis with the Three Kinds of Stillness

When you practice like this, rest with your body unmoving, like a corpse in a charnel ground; let your voice be still, avoiding all speech and recitation; and do not exhale through your nose but slowly breathe through your mouth, without impeding or forcing the respiration. This is the reliance upon the vital point of freeing the channels and vital energies from control and effort. Abide motionlessly in a state in which consciousness experientially emerges as the clear light, without the mind being modified in any way. In general, wherever you are, by keeping the body straight, all the channels and vital energies will be straight, and once the mind has dissolved into empty pristine awareness, you will be stabilized in that state.¹³⁵

g' How to Practice

In general, in some other tantric commentaries [433] there are references to various other postures in addition to these three. In particular, until the five lights appear in the space of awareness it is said that you should meditate with various gazes and you should contain the vajra strands within the enclosure of the space of awareness and the bindus. But in [other] meditation manuals on this phase, no such specific points are mentioned. In general, you should remain in whatever way best facilitates the luminosity and appearance of the clear light. Similarly, regarding your posture, practice whichever posture is most comfortable, beneficial, and suitable, for there is no need to practice all three. Statements that various pleasant and rough experiences occur in the phase of progress in meditative experience should be understood as merely referring to these differences. Moreover, if you are drawn to more elaborate practices, you may alternate among the postures and intermittently apply yourself to other practices. If you practice without elaboration, dispense with the nine kinds of activity and apply yourself to meditation continuously, day and night. Those who can meditate only during the daytime should do so continuously throughout the day. There are three special sessions during the

your vision. Most important is to carefully monitor and adjust your practice to avoid damaging your eyesight.

135. These two sections compare with VE 422–23.

early and later periods of the night. Sometimes, as the five vital energies are purified in their own places, [434] visualize a stack of five-colored *A* syllables to bring about a state of nonconceptuality. You should also know the methods for purifying death and apply yourself to them.

B' The Meaning of the Text

This section has five parts: (1') how direct crossing over is superior even to cutting through, (2') how the four visions gradually arise, (3') how those of superior faculties achieve liberation in this lifetime, (4') the specifics of progress in meditative experience, and (5') how those of middling and inferior faculties are liberated in the transitional phases of ultimate reality and of becoming.

1' How Direct Crossing Over Is Superior Even to Cutting Through

**These are practical instructions on forcefully transferring
the residual appearances
of the emergence of objects to the initial consciousness
to the space of awareness of the quintessences.**

As explained previously, in general all the various modes of appearances to sentient beings during the daytime, nighttime, and intermediate period arise as **objects to the initial consciousness** of the mindstream of each sentient being. In this phase, those impure, **residual appearances of the emergence of the physical world, its sentient inhabitants, and sensory objects** are **forcefully transferred to the space of awareness of the quintessences** of the clear light, by way of a path of skillful means. **These practical instructions** for doing so are therefore superior. Moreover, all the appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra are transferred to the absolute space of ultimate reality. So this is superior to the ordinary transference involving three attitudes, the visualization of consciousness as having shape and color, and its projection in certain directions. [435] This enables you to achieve stability in the great actualization of the displays of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness, and these are practical instructions on gaining liberation within yourself as the actual three kāyas. So this is superior to meditations such as the stage of generation, in which you strenuously use the intellect to visualize autonomous deities in human-like forms. Since the ultimate reality of the clear light directly appears to your senses, this is superior to obscure meditations, such as cutting through. The seven ways in which this is superior, as taught by

the omniscient guru [Longchenpa], should be known from the meditation manual the *Guru of Primordial Consciousness*.¹³⁶

2' How the Four Visions Gradually Arise

This section has four parts: (a') the vision of the direct perception of ultimate reality, (b') the vision of progress in meditative experience, (c') the vision of reaching consummate awareness, and (d') the vision of the extinction into ultimate reality.¹³⁷

a' The Vision of the Direct Perception of Ultimate Reality

The initial consciousness emerges as a vision of the clear light, manifesting as a sight for the eye of wisdom.

The emergence of the initial consciousness as a vision of the clear light is not due to an ordinary sensory faculty, but rather **manifests as a sight for the eye of wisdom**. Therefore it is a direct perception of ultimate reality. As an outer sign of this, like opening a curtain, the visions in the space of awareness arise majestically and firmly, and the bindus range in size from fish eyes to thumb rings. As an inner sign, the potency of the vase empowerment enters the material constituents of your body, [436] so that you have no wish to move your body, you remain without any desire to speak, and your attention remains wherever you place it. At this point, even if there are obstacles, you will find the relief [of liberation] as a nature *nirmāṇakāya*.¹³⁸ This is not merely due to your initial perception of the signs of the outer visions in the space of awareness, but is rather due to seeing reality, whereby the dust on your inner eye of wisdom has been removed. The *Clear Expanse* states:

With the direct perception of pristine awareness,
there is no returning to the three realms,
for one has seen reality.

136. Tib. *Khrid yig ye shes bla ma*. Vidyādhara Jigmed Lingpa, *Yeshe Lama*, trans. Lama Chönam and Sangye Khandro (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008), 65.

137. This introduction was missing and has been added here for clarity.

138. Tib. *rang bzhin sprul pa*. The term “nature” refers to the manifest nature, which is the second quality of pristine awareness, and this is the path form of the *saṃbhogakāya*, so this kind of *nirmāṇakāya* is a reflection of the *saṃbhogakāya*.

b' The Vision of Progress in Meditative Experience

Visions emerge and progress as the great clear light.

Unlike the conscious experiences of the ten signs of purification generated by the convergence of the energy-mind [in the avadhūti], by inwardly perceiving the essential nature of ultimate reality as empty, its radiance, as primordial consciousness of the nature of clear light, does not flow outward. Rather, by the power of familiarization with the **great** appearance of clear light, such **visions emerge and progress**, higher and higher, so this is called *progress in meditative experience*. As outer signs of this, visions of **the clear light** increase in magnitude, and the pristine awareness of the space of awareness separates from the point between the eyes. The five lights indeterminately appear horizontally, vertically, [437] and spherically, like stūpas, empty lotuses, castles, and arrows, like spear-tips, latticework, and pendants, in checkered designs, and so forth. The lamps of empty bindus increase from the size of thumb rings up to that of rhinoceros-hide shields. Pristine awareness moves slowly, like a winged creature gliding aloft, like a deer gamboling across a mountain-side, like a creeping serpent,¹³⁹ and like a bee hovering over a flower. These are conventional descriptions for those who are somewhat or moderately familiar with the practice. The measure of perfect familiarization is that wherever you look, the domain of empty space is pervaded by visions of clear light, and they remain without fluctuating.

As for the inner signs of appearances to your body, speech, and mind, as an indication that the potency of the secret empowerment has impacted your channels and vital energies, at first various uncomfortable illnesses, such as those related to the wind and phlegm humors, may arise inwardly, from your heart up to your throat. The occurrence of such meditative experiences is indeterminate. Physically, you may act coquettishly or shamelessly, as if you were intoxicated, and you may behave in various drunken ways, unable to stay put. Verbally, like the babbling of a fool, words may flow forth spontaneously, [438] and you may sing various songs and melodies and so on. Mentally, your attention may wander aimlessly, as if your mind were insanely agitated.¹⁴⁰

In this phase, even if you are interrupted by death, you will achieve liberation in the transitional phase of ultimate reality as a saṃbhogakāya.

139. Skt. *śara*.

140. This paragraph compares with VS 593–94.

c' The Vision of Reaching Consummate Awareness

Take satisfaction in the mudrā of pristine awareness ripening as the vital essence.

To take satisfaction in the ripening of pristine awareness as the vital essence in the **mudrā** of the primordial consciousness deities is called *reaching consummate awareness*. The outer signs of the visions in the space of awareness are spheres, lotuses, wheels, and so forth. In a palace-like expanse, at first the upper portions of the kāyas of the five families of jinas appear in the midst of fivefold aggregates of bindus; later the single kāyas appear completely; and finally the deities and their consorts arise in union, together with their retinues of four male bodhisattvas and four female bodhisattvas.¹⁴¹ By the power of increasing familiarity, in the expanse of the outer palace and the inner blazing volcano palace constructed of three tiers of skulls appear maṇḍalas of wrathful herukas with deities and consorts embracing in union, and single male deities bearing great weapons are dressed in fresh elephant skins tied with belts of human skin, with lower garments of tiger skins. [439] They indeterminately appear in various sizes, the larger ones as vast as the sky and the smaller ones as tiny as peas. All phenomenal worlds appear to be filled and totally pervaded with rainbow light and blazing fire. Objects as small as the head of a pin are filled and illuminated with kāyas and all their ornaments. This marks the perfection of the potency of reaching consummate awareness.

As for the inner signs of this, due to the potency of the wisdom empowerment coming to your mind and bindus, you gain mastery over your energy-mind, and you acquire the eight siddhis.¹⁴² As your body ripens into the clear light, you can move freely through all solid objects such as mountains and rocks. As your voice ripens and is purified as displays of vajra speech, everything you say sounds pleasant to others' ears and benefits their mindstreams. Without reliance on causes and conditions, all Dharma words of authentic tantras, oral transmissions, and pith instructions flow forth naturally. Your mind is liberated as pristine awareness. Pristine awareness awakens within itself, and due to your eye of primordial consciousness penetrating wisdom, you perceive all the appearing phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa with unobscured extrasensory perception, like bright reflections of planets and stars in the great ocean, [440] free of grasping and reifying them.

141. These two sentences compare with VS 598–99.

142. See *siddhis*, *eight* in glossary.

At this time you gain mastery over pristine awareness. Therefore, without reliance on objects or contributing conditions, you do not encounter situations that throw you off course, but you avoid them by your own power. Having gained mastery over appearances, you can transform even the phenomenal world into a treasure. Having gained mastery over birth, by focusing your awareness on three thousand sentient beings, three thousand *nirmāṇakāyas* arise to serve the needs of sentient beings. Having gained mastery over liberation, simply by directing your awareness to the great evils of the five deeds of immediate retribution,¹⁴³ you can be liberated from them. Having gained mastery over the outer elements, you can transform them in any way you desire. Having gained mastery over the inner elements, your body becomes free of wrinkles and clear like a reflection in a mirror. Your white hair becomes dark, and new teeth grow. *Mudrās* of the five buddha families and radiant syllables appear on your body. Your hair and nails stop growing. As a sign of being free of all outer and inner parasites, lice and nits disappear from your body. Your body becomes light like cotton, and your respiration becomes imperceptible. These are definite signs that you have come to the culmination of the authentic path.¹⁴⁴ In this phase of reaching consummate awareness, [441] you are naturally liberated without undergoing the intermediate period.

d' The Vision of the Extinction into Ultimate Reality

**With the extinction of appearances and the mind, you cross over
into the absolute space of ultimate reality,
and you awaken as the great transference youthful vase kāya.**

With the extinction of the outer delusive appearances and all inner delusive habitual propensities of **the** concepts of the **mind** and of the mental factors, and with the extinction of all the secret visions of the clear light, **you cross over into the absolute space of ineffable ultimate reality.** So this is called the *extinction into ultimate reality*. There are two ways in which such extinction occurs: extinction occurs gradually for anyone who has come to the culmination of the four visions, and simultaneously for those rare individuals of supreme wisdom who achieve extinction by familiarizing themselves with seeing the visions of the direct perception [of ultimate reality] without reli-

143. See *deeds of immediate retribution*, five in glossary.

144. These two paragraphs compare with VS 597–98.

ance on the stages of progressive meditative experience and reaching consummate awareness.

Here are the outer signs that precede the extinction of the bindus in the space of awareness: In the indigo expanse of visions in the space of awareness, inside an indigo bindu the size of a rhinoceros-hide shield appears a fivefold assembly of indigo [deities] with Akṣobhya in the center.¹⁴⁵ In the intervals between them appear blue-black vajra strands, like blue beryl¹⁴⁶ garlands. From the hearts of these deities emerge threads of indigo light rays, [442] striking your heart, upon which appear the ornaments of stacked indigo bindus like upside-down lapis lazuli bowls.

When that is complete, in the white, luminous expanse in the space of awareness, inside a white bindu the size of a rhinoceros-hide shield appears a fivefold assembly of white [deities] including Vairocana and his retinue. In the intervals between them appear strings of vajra strands like crystal garlands. From the hearts of these deities emerge threads of light, white like the moon, striking your heart, upon which appear the ornaments of stacked bindus like upside-down conch bowls.

After that is complete, in the yellow, luminous expanse of visions in the space of awareness, inside a yellow bindu the size of a rhinoceros-hide shield appears a fivefold assembly of yellow [deities] including Ratnaśāmbhava and his retinue. In the intervals between them appear strings of vajra strands like golden garlands, large and luminous. From the hearts of these deities emerge threads of yellow light rays, striking your heart, upon which appear the ornaments of stacked bindus like upside-down golden bowls.

After that, in the red expanse in the space of awareness, inside a red bindu the size of a rhinoceros-hide shield appears a fivefold assembly of red [deities] including Amitābha with his consort [443] in the midst of his retinue. In the intervals between them appear strings of encircling and intertwining vajra strands like before. From the hearts of these deities emerge threads of red light, striking your heart, upon which appear the ornaments of stacked bindus like upside-down coral bowls.

After that process is complete, in the green expanse of visions in the space

145. In each of the five visions described here, beginning with this one, with Akṣobhya in the center, the principal deity is in union with his consort, and they are surrounded by four male and four female bodhisattvas in union. They constitute a “fivefold assembly.”

146. Tib. *mu men*; Skt. *vairāṭa*. This is a dark-blue gemstone that is astringent in taste. Its post-digestive effects are cooling, and in terms of its healing effects, it benefits illnesses from poisoning, leprosy, lymph disorders, and skin disorders. Blue beryl may match this description, but this requires further research.

of awareness, inside a green bindu the size of a rhinoceros-hide shield appear Amoghasiddhi and his consort, together with their retinue of four pairs of male and female bodhisattvas. In the intervals between them appear encircling and intertwining vajra strands like turquoise necklaces. From the hearts of these deities emerge green light rays, striking your heart, upon which appear stacked bindus like upside-down turquoise bowls.

As soon as those lights appear, you receive the empowerment of great light rays, which causes your body to diminish in an expanse of light to the size of a finger and then to vanish into clear light. All appearances of the outer physical world and its inner sentient inhabitants dissolve into clear light, leaving no trace of impure appearances. When all the maṇḍalas of herukas in the bone palace appear to you in the sky above, [444] your own body vanishes into light, like salt dissolving into water. In that instant, your consciousness moves like a shooting star and is just the differentiation of appearances and mindsets.

Then the gradual extinction is like this: All the visions of clear light as kāyas and bindus gradually vanish, like masses of clouds disappearing into the sky, and all pure and impure appearances are extinguished. The inner sign of this is that the obscurations of the substrate dissolve into absolute space, and ignorance is dispelled in the ground of being. The self-grasping of afflictive mentation is calmed right where it is, and you are liberated from the bonds of dualistic grasping. Consciousness that grasps at objects is released into the essential nature, so the objects grasped by the intellect are extinguished.

The eight groups of conceptualizations¹⁴⁷ are transmuted into primordial consciousness, and the concepts of the mind and of the mental factors are extinguished. With the extinction of the mind and thoughts that are the basis of emergences, those emergences disappear right where they are. With the extinction of the consciousness that apprehends objects, apprehended objects are extinguished. The net of self-grasping is released, so the defiled aggregates are extinguished.

At this point your body becomes like a mindless corpse in a charnel ground, and even if you were surrounded by a thousand assassins, you would

147. The eight groups of conceptualizations (Tib. *tshegs brgyad kyi rtog pa*) are (1) conceptualizations of signs, involving grasping at objects, (2) conceptualizations to which the signs of the six kinds of consciousness appear, (3) conceptualizations that change in accordance with the signs of pleasure, pain, and so on, (4) conceptualizations to which appear signs emerging from changes among the six kinds of consciousness, (5) conceptualizations that are revealed by others involving the evaluation of what one has heard regarding virtue and nonvirtue, (6) authentic conceptualizations concerning impermanence and so on, (7) conceptualizations involving fixation on false views, and (8) inauthentic conceptualizations concerning the view of the self and so on.

not have the slightest bit of fear. Your speech becomes like an echo, reverberating all other sounds. Like mist dissolving into the sky, your mind attains nirvāṇa in the absolute space of the [445] primordial protector, pristine awareness, so it can never be deluded again. At this time your own pristine awareness actualizes the state of the primordial protector. Since this does not depend on objective conditions, even if you were to have visions of three thousand buddhas, you would have such confidence that you would not feel the slightest faith in them. Since your own pristine awareness has evenly expanded into the absolute space of the dharmakāya, devoid of signs, even if you were surrounded by a hundred thousand māras and murderers, you would have such confidence that you wouldn't feel even a trace of fear. By reaching your own inner depths for yourself, you come upon the reality that there is no substantially existent nirvāṇa, so you acquire the confidence of having no hope for the maturation of cause and effect. By being liberated in the reality of never having been deluded with regard to your own essential nature, you acquire the confidence of fearlessness regarding saṃsāra and the miserable states of existence. These are the four kinds of great confidence that are acquired.¹⁴⁸

The subtlest of latent cognitive obscurations still arise, and like a flash of lightning that brightens the sky, occasionally your body dissolves into an expanse of light, such that only a body of light the size of a finger appears. Know that this is the differentiation of appearances and mindsets, and there are occasions when your speech and the utterance of words of Dharma occur like before. In that way, after ten days, or five or ten months, the subtle cognitive obscurations vanish into absolute space, [446] and the power of primordial consciousness that knows reality as it is and perceives the full range of phenomena is perfected. Having gained mastery over the originally pure ground dharmakāya, the spontaneously actualized kāyas, and the displays of primordial consciousness, **you awaken as the great transference youthful vase kāya**, with nine characteristics. The *Treatise on Practical Guidance* explains:

O assembled disciples, including Vajra of Pristine Awareness,
listen and pay attention!

These are the extraordinary characteristics
of the spontaneously actualized youthful vase kāya:

The obscurations of ignorance are dispelled in absolute space,
so the dharmakāya surpasses the substrate.

148. These nine paragraphs compare with VS 600–604.

The primordial consciousness of the inner glow manifests,
 and it surpasses the brilliance of the outer radiance.
 Great identitylessness manifests,
 and it surpasses the appearances of the self.
 The kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness manifest,
 and they surpass appearances.
 The perceptions of the full range of phenomena manifest,
 and this primordial consciousness surpasses the mind.
 You are awakened within yourself,
 and this surpasses going to buddhahelds.
 You are freed from all extremes of conceptual elaboration,
 and this surpasses the causation of dependent origination.
 You are endowed with the eight freedoms,¹⁴⁹
 and this surpasses all the paths and fruitions.
 You uniformly pervade absolute space and primordial consciousness,
 and this surpasses mundane existence. [447]
 These nine great, exceptional characteristics
 are highly praised by all the jinas
 in truly perfected buddhas.¹⁵⁰

*3' How Those of Superior Faculties Achieve Liberation in
 This Lifetime*

**The signs of this, like space dissolving into space,
 are that there are no limits to your lifespan, duration, and
 dimensions,
 and three kinds of liberation occur as the quintessence
 of the rainbow body.**

By actualizing the original, pure dharmakāya in this way, **the signs of truly perfect buddhahood** are that, like water dissolving into water or **like space dissolving into space**, your quintessential body has **no limits** with regard to its **lifespan, duration, and dimensions**. Without such limitations, you awaken as the great transference youthful vase kāya in the absolute space of phenomena, free of conceptual elaboration.

149. See *freedoms, eight* in glossary.

150. Tib. *khrid gzhung*. This refers to the *Vajra Essence* (VE 465–66).

The bodies of some people become enveloped in light and disappear into the nature of light. This is called the *mass of light*. The bodies of others are encompassed by a shroud of light that covers the sky with rainbows and clouds, and they disappear into rainbow colors. This is called the *great rainbow body*. In these two cases, when you come to the end of your life, you awaken without any separation of your body and mind. Other people, after their bodies and minds have separated, dissolve into the nature of rainbows and light without leaving behind any trace of their aggregates. This is called the *small rainbow body*. For some people, when the ground clear light arises, [448] within seven days the material elements of the body become smaller and smaller, until finally only the residues of their hair and nails remain. This dissolution of the body into elementary particles is called the *small transference*. It also occurs in cutting through, for those of exceptionally superior faculties.

Thus, there is first the mass of light, second the great rainbow body, and [third] the small rainbow body and small transference, or the dissolution into elementary particles, which are counted as one, making three. So **three kinds of liberation occur as the quintessence of the rainbow body**. The former two are the ways those of middling faculties are liberated, and the latter two are the ways those of inferior faculties are liberated. The first great transference is the way those of superior faculties are liberated.

Although some people wish for the rainbow body with no final testament, they are liberated in the great transference as described previously. Others who aspire for the rainbow body with no physical pain achieve it as a mass of light and a great rainbow body. Yet others who wish to transfer to the rainbow body achieve the small rainbow body and disappear into minute particles. So the first is the dharmakāya of entering the womb of natural liberation, the second two are the dharmakāya of nondual union, and the final two are the dharmakāya of transference to primordial consciousness. [449] However you are liberated among these three ways, the unwavering dharmakāya manifests limitlessly as displays of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness.¹⁵¹

In this phase, here is the meaning of the fluctuations of the four visions: As an analogy, although there are no fluctuations from the perspective of the moon, there are appearances of increases and decreases in terms of the lunar cycles. Likewise, while there are no fluctuations from the perspective of the visions of the clear light, all the sublime qualities of the saṃbhogakāya without exception are complete in the nature of pristine awareness. By the power

151. These three paragraphs compare with VS 604–5.

of familiarization, they are seen as visions of the path, and their creative power is perfected. Even though they appear like this, they are merely reflections of the outer radiance of pristine awareness, but not its essential nature. Therefore, the outer appearances of the natural radiance of the sugatagarbha must be extinguished. For this reason, the pinnacle of ultimate truth is said to be utterly pure pristine awareness, together with its subtle, vacillating energies, abiding in its place of power in primordial absolute space in which there is the vision of the extinction of the intellect and of phenomena.

4' The Specifics of Progress in Meditative Experience

Due to various, indeterminate good and bad visionary experiences,
joys and sorrows arise over the course of time.
Without hope or fear, transfer them all into absolute space.

Regarding the phase of progress in meditative experience explained earlier, this is the point at which all the coarse visions, channels, and energies merge into [450] the absolute space of the subtle, great clear light of ultimate reality. Therefore, **due to the various, indeterminate** ways in which both **good and bad visionary experiences** occur, sometimes the body feels good and the mind feels joy, and at other times illnesses arise in the body, and **sorrow** and so on **arise** in the mind, **over the course of time**. Visions of gods and demons and various kinds of extrasensory perception may arise, and on occasion you may experience an unbearably strong sense of faith, devotion, and renunciation. Sometimes strong arrogance may fill your mind such that you exalt your own view.

Moreover, you may be led astray by false appearances of regional *ḍākinīs* and local *ḍākinīs*.¹⁵² Regional *ḍākinīs* are *ḍākinīs* of areas who deceptively call themselves *ḍākinīs* of the absolute space of primordial consciousness, masquerading as such and making prophecies. By taking them to be true and practicing in accordance with what they say, you come under the domination of such *ḍākinīs*, resulting in endless delusion in the realms of *saṃsāra*. Local *ḍākinīs* are mundane *ḍākinīs* who enter the hearts of women of an area and by various means deceive others. If you fall under their influence, you will be thrown back into endless *saṃsāra*. [451]

At such times, by truly recognizing *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as being nothing other than your own appearances, unreal like illusions and dreams, you come to rest in a state free of reification and clinging. As a result, the *ḍākinīs* come

152. Tib. *zhang gi mkha' 'gro; gnas kyi mkha' 'gro*.

under your power, and you spontaneously achieve the secret supreme siddhi without seeking it.

At such times, you may also be deceived by obstructing māras. Unstable meditative experiences and realizations may suddenly arise, you may think you know the minds of others, you may have the sense that you can emanate various bodies and colors, and you may cast two shadows and reflect two images in a mirror. These are sure signs that you are in danger of falling under the domination of māras. When this happens, offer the smoke of frankincense, bathe yourself with the water of large and small ambrosia pills, rub the clay of an old statue onto your limbs, and recite mantras for dispelling obstacles. In so doing, they will be dispelled.

You may be deceived and led astray by beings appearing as gods, when obstructive beings deceptively take on the form of your personal deity, proudly showing their faces and granting prophecies. These are definitely the deceptions of māras. So if this happens, know that everything in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is nothing but your own appearances, and all forms, gods, and buddhas that are held to be substantially existent [452] are simply delusive. In this way, **without** indulging in clinging or **hope**, recognize that all harms by demons, malevolent spirits, and obstructive beings, as well as ominous portents and bad omens and so on that seem to be harmful, are all utterly deceptive meditative appearances. In that way rest **in the absolute space** of equality of ultimate reality, free of **fear** and aversion. In so doing, adversities will arise as the path and misfortunes will arise as aids, so that they become meditative experiences and realizations that enhance your practice. Thus they **transfer**, or propel, you to the culmination of the path.¹⁵³

5' How People of Middling and Inferior Faculties Who Do Not Reach the Culmination of the Path in This Lifetime Are Liberated in the Transitional Phases of Ultimate Reality and of Becoming

Individuals who do not reach the culmination of the path like
that
realize the vital points of the view and meditation, like a swallow
entering its nest;
identify the transitional phase of dying, like a lovely young
woman gazing at her reflection;
recognize the nature of existence, like meeting someone you have
known before;

153. These five paragraphs compare with VS 594–96.

merge the clear light into absolute space, like a child crawling
 onto its mother's lap;
 practice continuously, like repairing a broken irrigation canal;
 block the entrance to the womb, like being released from a foul
 prison; and so on.

Recognize the supreme importance of these six analogies and
 their vital points.

By this it is possible that you will be liberated or find relief.

The presentation of the ways in which **individuals** of middling and inferior faculties **who do not reach the culmination of the path like that** in this lifetime are liberated in the intermediate period has three parts: (a') the essential nature, (b') divisions, and (c') individual ways of transforming the transitional phases into the path.

a' The Essential Nature

Everything that appears to be other than the originally pure ground constitutes processes of the transitional phases. The phenomena that arise as appearances to the ground primordial consciousness constitute the transitional phase of ultimate reality. All phenomena included among the delusive appearances of the six realms of existence constitute impure, delusive transitional phases. Volitions together with their seeds constitute the transitional phases from the time they arise from the space of awareness until they are extinguished in absolute space. [453]

b' Divisions

This section has four parts: the transitional phase of living, or of nature; the transitional phase of dying; the transitional phase of ultimate reality; and the transitional phase of becoming. The first occurs from the time you are conceived in your mother's womb until you are struck by a mortal disease. The second takes place from the time you approach death until your breath ceases. The third lasts from the moment your breath stops until the visions of the clear light arise and the spontaneously actualized visions dissolve. The fourth occurs from the moment the spontaneously actualized visions dissolve until your next birth takes place.

c' Individual Ways of Transforming the Transitional Phases into the Path

The four kinds of transitional phases are taught in six ways in terms of pairs of analogies and their referents. First, during the transitional phase of liv-

ing you cut through misconceptions by hearing, thinking, and **realizing the vital points of the view and meditation, like a swallow entering its nest**. Second, in the transitional phase on the verge of death you **identify the transitional phase of dying** and vividly bring to mind the teachings on which you have meditated previously, **like a lovely young woman gazing at her reflection** in a mirror. Third, you gain conviction by **recognizing the originally pure nature of existence** in the transitional phase of ultimate reality, **like meeting someone you have known before**. Recognizing the spontaneously actualized visions of **the clear light** as your own appearances [454] and then **merging**, or releasing, them **into absolute space is like a child crawling onto its mother's lap**. Fourth, in the transitional phase of becoming, recognizing the signs of taking birth in any of the six realms and maintaining **the continuity of the practice** you have learned previously gives rise again to the ground clear light, the originally pure dharmakāya. Achieving liberation in this way **is like repairing a broken irrigation canal**. Alternatively, to **block the dreadful entrance to birth** from an impure **womb**, bring to mind any pristine buddhafeld that provides great relief. By doing so, you will proceed there, which will be **like being released from a foul prison**.

The other kinds of transitional phases taught in authoritative sources include the transitional phase of the cultivation of meditation and the delusive transitional phase of dreaming. It is crucial that you **recognize the supreme importance of these vital points of practice**, illustrated by **the six analogies**,¹⁵⁴ and diligently apply yourself to them. **By the power of practicing like this, it is possible that you will be liberated** in the transitional phase of ultimate reality or else **find relief** in a pure buddhafeld in the transitional phase of becoming. These points should be fathomed in greater detail on the basis of commentarial treatises.

This concludes the seventh phase revealed in the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*.

154. Regarding the other analogies not explicitly mentioned here, the transitional phase of living is likened to a little bird on a treetop; the transitional phase of dreaming is likened to a lamp held aloft in a dark room; the transitional phase of meditation is likened to an exhausted person taking a rest or to an orphan encountering its mother; the transitional phase of dying is likened to falling into the hands of an evil assassin or to dispatching the sealed commands of the king.

Phase 8: How to Dwell in the Ground of Being¹⁵⁵

c. The Manner in Which the Indivisible Nature of the Ground and the Fruition Is Actualized [455]

This section has three parts: (i) identifying the essential nature of the fruition that is to be achieved, (ii) the explanation of how to achieve it, and (iii) how to serve the needs of others after achieving this.

i. Identifying the Essential Nature of the Fruition That Is to Be Achieved

Ultimately, in the fruition of liberation,
the ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha,
is spontaneously actualized as the dharmakāya, the primordial
protector.
That which is to be achieved is the youthful vase kāya.

Due to **ultimate** familiarization with the path, you are finally **liberated** from obscurations that are to be abandoned, and you actualize the primordial consciousness that is to be realized. The essential nature of this is called the *fruition*. In accordance with the individual yānas corresponding to people's dispositions and faculties, there are different ways of achieving fruition and of purifying defilements. Among them, the fruition of this phase is the **ground dharmakāya, the sugatagarbha**. Since the nature of the vast, sublime qualities of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness is **spontaneously actualized as the dharmakāya, the primordial protector**, without reliance on causes or contributing conditions, this is the nature of primordial awakening. As for the way to purify defilements, by perfecting your familiarity with the effortless, naturally settled path of the Great Perfection, the obscurations and habitual propensities of appearances and mindsets that arise from the root of self-concepts are dispelled without

155. This heading is not included in the commentary, but it accords with the root text.

a trace, and you actualize the ultimate **achievement of the youthful vase kāya**, which is enlightenment.

The essential nature of this twofold purity [456] is empty primordial consciousness, the dharmakāya. Its manifest nature is the clear-light primordial consciousness, the saṃbhogakāya. The primordial consciousness of unimpeded compassion is the nirmāṇakāya. These are the three inwardly luminous kāyas of absolute space. The saṃbhogakāyas adorned with the signs and symbols of enlightenment manifest to pure disciples, and the supreme nirmāṇakāyas, who show the twelve deeds of a buddha and so on, manifest to impure disciples. These are the two outwardly luminous kāyas of primordial consciousness.

ii. The Explanation of How to Achieve It

**Those of superior faculties actualize this in one lifetime;
those of middling and inferior faculties find pristine relief in the
splendor of the kāyas and facets of primordial consciousness
and dwell in the grounds of the five buddhafi elds.**

Those of superior faculties with wisdom and perseverance perfect the view of cutting through to original purity and the meditation of direct crossing over to spontaneous actualization. In so doing, they achieve enlightenment as the dharmakāya by truly **actualizing** the primordial nature of existence of their own ground, **in this one lifetime** and with this one body. **Those of middling faculties** who do not have the good fortune to be liberated as the dharmakāya identify as their own appearances the peaceful and wrathful visions of the radiance of pristine awareness in the transitional phase of ultimate reality. They achieve enlightenment as saṃbhogakāyas, with their universal **splendor of the ocean of the kāyas, facets of primordial consciousness**, and sublime qualities. Due to the truth of ultimate reality and the blessings of vidyādhara gurus, those of **inferior** faculties **dwell** for 550 years **in the grounds of the five pristine buddhafi elds that provide pure relief**, including the four—Abhirati, Śrīmat, Padmakūṭa,¹⁵⁶ [457] and Karma prasiddhi—and the wrathful buddhafi eld known as the Blazing Volcano Charnel Ground, emanated in the space before them. Then they perfect the practices on the authentic path and achieve enlightenment.

The omniscient Abhyadvīpa states:

156. Tib. *pad ma brtsegs pa*. A synonym for the buddhafi eld of Sukhāvātī.

The five pristine buddhafi elds that provide pure relief are called *naturally emanated buddhafi elds*, for they are naturally displayed by the blessings of the teacher Vajradhara. As for the cause for them to directly appear to those with karmic momentum, due to the self-illumination of the four facets of primordial consciousness, including mirror-like primordial consciousness, in the all-pervasive heart of the realm of the sugatagarbha, the precious portals to the spontaneously actualized appearances of the ground primordially and naturally manifest as appearances of the path, in accordance with the directions of the saṃbhogakāyas. Do not regard them as existing in specific directions such as the east, as is commonly stated, for that is only symbolic.

If you think this contradicts statements about the number of *yojanas* of their spatial dimensions, those buddhafi elds are vaster than the nature of the three realms, so such explanations are not to be taken literally. [458] Likewise, those beings who dwell in wrathful maṇḍalas arise from the primordial aspects of the wrathful deities in the bone palace.

Know this to be so, in accordance with his explanation.

iii. How to Serve the Needs of Others after Achieving This

**You appear in all ways as the glory and protector of disciples,
like the moon and its various reflections in water.
Until the radiant circle of disciples dissolves into absolute space,
the primordial consciousness of absolute space is continuously
displayed.**

Thus, when **you** serenely abide as the one dharmakāya, the two rūpakāyas **appear** from the aspects of spontaneously actualized primordial consciousness and compassion, **in all ways** serving the temporal and ultimate needs of **disciples as the glory and protector** of living beings. From your own side, you have abandoned delusive appearances and their attributes, so while free of delusive appearances, you perceive the mere arising of nonexistent, clear appearances to others and reveal the Dharma.

Due to the buddhas' power of natural compassion, the saṃbhogakāya appears to disciples with pure karma **like the moon** in the sky, and **nirmāṇakāyas** **variously** appear to disciples with impure karma like the moon's **reflections in water**. Limitless beings fail to see their own ground

of being, the nature of existence of the sugatagarbha, and due to their tenacious habitual propensities of dualistic grasping, their own appearances [459] arise like delusive dreams. They are **the radiant circle of disciples**. **Until they dissolve into absolute space** due to realizing and familiarizing themselves with the path, the inner luminosity of **absolute space** arises as the outer luminosity of **the primordial consciousness** of the three kāyas, and the **displays** of the two rūpakāyas **continuously** arise and serve the needs of living beings. When the pools of water of disciples dry up, the nirmāṇakāya reflections of the moon, which are created by the perceptions of disciples, dissolve into the saṃbhogakāya moon in the sky. This is not really like one dissolving into the other. Rather, the radiance of the outer luminosity dissolves inwardly into the self-manifestation of the saṃbhogakāya in absolute space, free of conceptual elaboration, and this converges back into the dharmakāya, great primordial consciousness. Advocates of the Madhyamaka say that this union is sublime, serene cessation in the absolute space of phenomena, while advocates of the Great Perfection say this dissolution into inner luminosity is the youthful vase kāya of unveiled primordial consciousness.

This concludes the synthesis of this phase, revealed in the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra*.

III. The Colophon

This visionary experience arose as an illusory display of the primordial consciousness of Traktung Dūdjom Pawo. After some time it was earnestly requested by the hermetic disciples Pema Tashi, Orgyen Dorjé, Rikpé Nyugu, and Lodrö Wangpo. Since this was meaningful, may the virtue that results from it dredge the three realms of saṃsāra from their depths.

Virtue, virtue, virtue—sarva maṅgalam!

Dedication Prayer by Pema Tashi

For as long as this deluded mind identifies [460] with this
impure, illusory body, everything you do is a cause of saṃsāra,
and the results never transcend suffering.

Even though occasions of prosperity in mundane existence do
occur, it is obvious that these unreal, illusory deceptions lead
you astray.

So here is advice on the meaning of identitylessness to be
followed by those who recognize this and seek liberation.

If you do not realize that all phenomena in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa
are simply your own appearances, with no basis or root,
by merely knowing a superficial emptiness, you will not achieve
the Mahāyāna ārya grounds.

If you do not realize how to transform into the path the
spontaneously actualized appearances of the radiance of
pristine awareness of the essential nature of original purity,
you will be overcome by the dust of transmigration among
the three appearances, failing to see the original nature of
existence.

Therefore, the sole protector of all beings, which is unrivaled in
the realms of mundane existence and ultimate peace,
is this one supreme path that has been and will be followed by
all jinas.

By the power of the blessings of great compassion and the great
fortune and good deeds of disciples,
this appears only this one time, so it is difficult to find and is
even more rare than the *udumbara* flower.¹⁵⁷

If it is said that by merely hearing its name, even great sinners are
freed from the miserable realms of existence,
it is certain that those who practice by hearing, thinking, and
meditating will become bodhisattvas who reach the end of
mundane existence.

Careful examination of this reveals the great significance of
finding it, [461] which surpasses [finding] a wish-fulfilling
jewel.

157. This may refer to the flower of the blue lotus (*Nila udumbara*) or of the cluster fig tree (*Ficus racemosa*), whose flowers are hidden within the fig and hence symbolize rarity.

Those who unwaveringly devote themselves to this day and night are exalted as the foremost of all Dharma practitioners. Although there is nothing more profound than the Dharma of the Great Perfection, for those who fail to connect with it and who arrogantly denounce cause and effect, it is a cause for miserable rebirths.

Until you have reached a high level of realization, such that you experience no pain even if you are cut with a weapon, with great devotion apply yourself to the profound practical instructions on what to abandon and what to follow in terms of cause and effect.

Although the meditative equipoise of the Great Perfection is ineffable, when first entering the practice as a novice, even if you express your opinions to others as if you were accompanied by visions of texts and reasoning, it is important to gain certainty regarding explanations that do not contradict the profound nature of existence and the vast nature of appearances, so that you know how to properly teach what does and does not exist, what is and is not, and what is to be avoided and what is to be practiced.

If you are a courageous practitioner of this discipline, you will not be overcome by adversity, but immature people discriminate against others in terms of comparing their class to others’.

In a pleasant, wonderful place of solitude, which pacifies outer and inner distractions, abandon pointless and trivial concerns and activities and apply yourself to practicing the essence of that which is greatly meaningful.

Come to know [462] the ultimate nature of existence, like the space of the sky, and abide in displays of practice.

The wisdom of an ordinary person lacking inborn and cultivated virtues does not go far, like the flight of a honeybee, but once you have found delight in the garden of excellent meaning, the melodious explanation of whatever you have understood will hum forth.

Those who taste this sweet essence again and again perfect the power of blessed confidence.

Those who divulge secrets incur problems, and those who despise or disparage this path

will be tormented by *dubkha*; it is inadvisable to divulge anything even upwind of such people.
 When perceiving this path, suitable vessels feel great devotion and confidence in its explanation;
 even if they are from a low class and poor, it is said that they should be taught without reservation.
 Guardians and protective demons¹⁵⁸ of the teachings of secret mantra punish those who violate their samayas,
 and they support and befriend those who keep them;
 understand how they do so in accordance with traditional accounts.
 May the immaculate collections of virtue, dedicated following the wisdom of Mañjughoṣa, flow like the current of the Ganges.
 May the experience of the nature of existence by way of this effortless path merge with the ocean of omniscience.
 In the short term, may unfavorable circumstances throughout the world fully subside,
 and may our spiritual and mundane bounties [463] be equal to the fortune of the gods of Tuṣita.
 Through thick and thin until enlightenment, may we always be accompanied by the unfailing affection and respect of vajra siblings
 with common karma and aspirations, and may we practice the Vajrayāna.

This pure vision of the great treasure revealer Lama Düdjom Dorjé Trolö Tsal is a set of Dharma teachings that arose from the treasury of space. This commentary to the *Sharp Vajra of Conscious Awareness Tantra* was taught to a few Dharma friends near the hermitage Drak Yangzong¹⁵⁹ of the Second Buddha Orgyen [Padmasambhava]. On that occasion, the memorized oral teachings of the venerable, great treasure revealer Düdjom Dorjé were held as supreme, and Pema Manga,¹⁶⁰ with devotion for this foremost path, wrote them down so that they would not be forgotten.

158. Tib. *gnyan*.

159. Tib. *sgrags yang rdzong*. Guru Rinpoché's cave in Tibet's Sgrags Valley.

160. Pema Manga (Tib. *pad ma mang ga*) is a moniker for Düdjom Lingpa's disciple Pema Tashi, whose surname means "auspicious" (Skt. *manga*).

Virtue—*sarva maṅgalam!*

May the teachings of this profound treasure, the Great
Perfection of the Early Translation school of the tradition of
Padmasambhava,
the definitive, essential tradition of Dūdjom Lingpa,
be preserved through teaching and practice,
without declining until the end of mundane existence!

Virtue, virtue, virtue—*sarva maṅgalam!*