

Atiśa's Teachings on Mahāmudrā

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Introduction

Mahāmudrā (translated as Great Seal) is an important and polysemous concept in the history of Indian and Tibetan forms of Buddhism. The term and its associated practices gain great significance in esoteric forms of Indian Buddhism from the ninth century onward. In Tibet, the theory and practice of Mahāmudrā, although known to most forms of Tibetan Buddhism, came to be predominantly practiced among bKa' brgyud (hereafter, Kagyu) affiliated lineages. Modern and traditional understanding of the history and practice of Mahāmudrā is based on Kagyu practice manuals, histories, and ritual liturgical works. In these materials, Mahāmudrā is primarily associated with Indian figures such as Saraha, Tilopa (10th c.), and Nāropa (d. 1042), and Tibetan Buddhist figures such as Mar pa lo tsā ba chos kyi blo gros (1012–97 CE), Milarepa (*mi la ras pa*, 1040–1123 CE), and Gampopa (*sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, 1079–1153 CE). This paper examines the Mahāmudrā teachings of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982-1054 CE) and his early bKa' gdams pa (hereafter, Kadampa) followers based on previously unstudied canonical documents and manuscripts recently published in Tibet.

Atiśa's teaching on Mahāmudrā is not well known in modern scholarship and only sporadically recorded in traditional Tibetan histories. When telescoping back to think about Atiśa's thought in its historical context, one must be careful not to read into his work later developments in the history of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, such as the Svātantrika/Prāsaṅgika division in

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Madhyamaka thought and practice, the *gzhan stong/rang stong* debates, Rnying ma/Gsar ma divisions of esoteric Buddhist literature,¹ and, in this instance, imputations about the classifications of Mahāmudrā, e.g., into so-called “sūtra” and “tantric” based Mahāmudrā.² Another problem with investigating the historical conditions of Atiśa’s Mahāmudrā teachings is that most, if not all, Kagyu historical records are politicized from the very beginning of Kagyu narratives of these teachings. Along these lines, a number of histories, both traditional and modern, record a narrative from Kagyu sources that Maitrīpa, a major figure in Kagyu Mahāmudrā teachings, taught Mahāmudrā to Atiśa. However, as illustrated below, Atiśa received Mahāmudrā instructions from Doṃbiheruka in a lineage stemming from Tilopa, and his exegesis of Mahāmudrā-related thought and practices reflects influence from his institutional environment of Vikramaśīla monastery.

In this article I will approach the evidence of Atiśa’s statements or teaching about Mahāmudrā, as far as possible, in a chronological fashion. The available historical and textual resources provide evidence for a general chronology of when and where Atiśa gave specific teachings related to the Great Seal. As illustrated in several sources below, Atiśa gave different instructions related to Mahāmudrā based on the cultural circumstances of where he was teaching and who was his audience. In brief, I suggest that the style and content of Atiśa’s teachings in India differ from those of the teachings he gave in Tibet, and likewise that the specificity of his teaching was directed toward the capacity or ability of his students. Although these constraints of circumstance influenced the form and content of his teachings, such conditions enabled Atiśa to adjust his teachings in a creative manner that would greatly influence the known history of thought and practice of Mahāmudrā in Tibet, particularly in Kagyu traditions after Gampopa.

Atiśa received tantric teachings as a yogin in his youth and later while an ordained scholar-monk. The Kadampa biographies of his life mention that at the age of twenty-two he received consecration into the practice of Hevajra under the master

¹ The Bka’ gdams/ Bka’ rgyud cycle of *lam rim* texts discussed below cites the *Guhya garbha tantra*, a controversial text in Tibetan history, usually associated with Rnying ma traditions.

² On so-called “sūtra” (*mdo lugs*) and “tantric” (*sngags lugs*) Mahāmudrā see Mathes 2006.

Rāhulagupta and received the secret name Jñānaguhyavajra (*ye shes gsang ba'i rdo rje*). He is said to have received instructions in all father and mother tantras (Eimer 1979: 77; Chattopadhyaya 1967: 407). As outlined in the early biographies, Atiśa held a number of tantric lineages of teachings (Eimer 1979:10-15). An early biographical poem attributed to his long-serving translator and disciple, Naktso Lotsāwa Tsültrim Gyalwa (Nag tsho lo tsā ba tshul khriṃs rgyal, 1011–1064 CE), mentions that Atiśa had visions of four tutelary deities: Hevajra, Trisamayarāja, Avalokiteśvara, and Tārā (Eimer 2003: 26). Other biographies list two additional deities, Ācāla and Cakrasaṃvara. One biography states that when asked by Rongpa Gargewa (Rong pa 'gar dge ba) who his principal deity was, Atiśa replied Cakrasaṃvara, and when asked by Nakso he replied Hevajra (Eimer 1979: 4). The biographies also record that Atiśa “received special instructions for attaining the achievement of the Great Seal through relying on the *Guhyasamāja[tantra]*.”³ The Kadampa biographical sources represent Atiśa as receiving a great number of esoteric Buddhist teachings on the Great Seal. Along these lines, historical and manuscript evidence demonstrate that while traveling in Nepal and Tibet Atiśa had with him a small collection of Sanskrit manuscripts, which included such esoteric works as the *Guhyasamājatāntra*, *Kṛṣṇayamāritāntra*, and the *Hevajrapañjikā*, among others (see van der Kuijp and McKeown 2013, Kano 2016). In brief, the historical and textual evidence indicates that Atiśa was an advanced master of esoteric Buddhist thought and practice.⁴

Atiśa's *Abhisamayavibhāṅga*

One of Atiśa's earliest discussions on the Great Seal is in his *Abhisamayavibhāṅga*. In this work Atiśa provides an analysis of

³ Eimer 1979: 41:....*gsang ba 'dus pa la brten pas phyag rgya chen po'i dngos grub thob pa'i man ngag...*

⁴ The recent careless suggestion by van der Kuijp (2013: lxxii-lxxiii) that we should be “disinclined” to regard Atiśa as “a great *paṇḍita*” based on Atiśa's haphazard listing of Yogācāra scholars in his *Ratnakaraṇḍodghātamadhyamakopadeśa* (hereafter, *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāta*) represents a creative misreading of the evidence. Atiśa's listing of scholars in this work is based on doxographic categorization and not relative chronology, as clearly indicated in the annotated translation (Apple 2010), and the Tibetan critical edition (Miyazaki 2007), both of which were overlooked by van der Kuijp.

the types of realization in the practice of Cakrasaṃvara based upon the *Cakrasaṃvarābhisamaya* attributed to the Mahāsiddha Lūipa.⁵ As Gray (2007:17) notes, Atiśa provides an exegesis on the essential points from the *Abhidānottara* (*nges brjod*), *Herukābhyudaya*, and *Vajradāka* explanatory tantras related to Cakrasaṃvara, in which he outlines the “stages of the path of the essential meaning” (D 186a4, *nges don lam gyi rim*). In outlining these stages, Atiśa mentions that a practitioner must receive the four consecrations (186b4), cultivate the four divine abodes, and focus on the nonduality of compassion and emptiness, whereby through deity yoga, “shape and awareness, means and wisdom are unified in the mind of awakening” (187b5). Atiśa then outlines meditating on all conventional dharmas as mere mind (188a7) and then realizing everything as emptiness (189a). The text then details creation stage visualization practices designed to transform one’s ordinary individual identity and reconstitute one’s identity as an esoteric Buddhist deity composed of clear light and mere appearance (D, fol. 186b-200b).⁶ The final sections of Atiśa’s work discuss the completion stage realizations with the application of objectiveless insight (*dmigs pa med pa’i shes rab*). He indicates that ultimate reality, the unconditioned, the reassurance that one is Vajradhara (*rdo rje ’chang gi dbugs dbyung*), and objectiveless insight are the objects of practice that indicate the unity of the non-dual Great Seal. Atiśa also makes an equivalence between inconceivability and clear light (D 200b2), and that clear light is the same as *nirvāṇa* (D 200b3). However, based on the *Vajradāka* (see below), Atiśa briefly suggests that one engaged in the the practice of non-duality does not merely dwell in only clear light (D 201a). Atiśa then focuses on how the cultivation of the three types of wisdom are applied in this contemplative tradition of Cakrasaṃvara (D 201b). Certainly a more complete study of this work is needed to unpack Atiśa’s exegesis on the visualizations and contemplations necessary in the practice of Cakrasaṃvara. But what is notable in this text is that the practice of Cakrasaṃvara as outlined by Atiśa is based on meditation and its correlative visualization processes in the cultivations of “deity

⁵ Atiśa was aware of three traditions (Caryāpāda, Vajraghaṇṭā, Lūipa) related to the practice of Cakrasaṃvara, as listed in his *Ratnakaraṇḍodghaṭa* (Apple 2010: 172).

⁶ See Gray 2001 and Kano and Kawasaki 2014 on the creation stage practices in the Cakrasaṃvara tradition followed by Atiśa.

purification” (*devatāvisuddhi*). In other words, in this esoteric Buddhist practice one engages in creation stage (*skyed rim, utpattikrama*) visualizations, followed by completion stage (*rdzogs rim, niṣpannakrama*) practices of dissolution, with the ultimate aim of attaining the unified state of the non-dual Great Seal (*gnyis su med pa'i phyag rgya chen po zung 'jug*). The Great Seal for Atiśa in this work is therefore a state of non-duality gradually achieved through the mainstream esoteric practice structures of the creation stage followed by the completion stage.

Texts on Vision and Meditation in the Completion Stage

Another early teaching that Atiśa composed in India related to the Great Seal, which was translated and transmitted to Tibetans before Atiśa went to Tibet, is a set of three short texts that focus upon advanced esoteric Buddhist practices of Cakrasaṃvara. These three works, entitled *Lta sgom chung ngu* (“small”), *Lta sgom 'bring po* (“middle”), and *Lta sgom chen mo* (“great”) appear to be brief lecture notes on the practice of the view (*lta*) and meditation (*sgom*) in esoteric Buddhism. The three texts have overlapping content in which points of exegesis are expanded in the longer works. The *Lta sgom chung ngu* praises Cakrasaṃvara and indicates that it is for those who wish to integrate clear light (*'od gsal, prabhāsvara*) practices with the completion stages of Cakrasaṃvara.⁷ This small text does not have a colophon. The *Lta sgom 'bring po* pays homage to Vajradāka and Ārya Tārā, and mentions that the fine points of the innermost path of the Vajra will be briefly articulated. The colophon states that it was composed by the Indian scholar Paṇḍita Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna.⁸ The *Lta sgom chen mo* has a colophon stating that Atiśa composed the teaching after many requests from the Tibetan translator Rin chen bzang po (958-1055 CE) and that it was later translated into Tibetan by Brtson 'grus seng ge.⁹ This colophon implies that the *Lta sgom*

⁷ *lta sgom chung ngu*, 619.22: *dpal 'khor lo bde mchog la gus pas phyag 'tshal lo / / 'khor lo sdom pa'i rdzogs rim nyams su len par 'dod pa'i 'od gsal zung 'jug tu shes par bya ste /*.

⁸ *lta sgom 'bring po*, p. 628.5: *rgya gar gyi mkhas pa paṇḍi ta dī paṃ ka ra shrī dznyā nas mdzad pa'i lta sgom 'bring po rdzogs so /*.

⁹ Note that Rin chen bzang po composed a *Cakrasaṃvarābhisamaya* based on Atiśa's *Vibhaṅga*. See Kano and Kawasaki 2014.

chen mo, as well as the other two shorter works, were initially formulated and translated in India before ca. 1040 CE. This is because Brtson 'grus seng ge later passed away in Nepal when Atiśa was travelling to Tibet (Chattopadhyaya 1967: 302; Apple 2010). As Rin chen bzang po studied in India from 975–988 CE (Tucci 1988:3-4), Atiśa's composition of these works and their subsequent translation into Tibetan took place between 988 and 1040 CE, most likely in the 1030s, when Atiśa resided at Vikramaśīla.¹⁰ Along these lines, the Tibetan translation of the *Lta sgom chen mo* and its Indian citations do not match what is found in the Tanjur equivalents, suggesting pre-canonical early Kadampa readings in the manuscript. In brief, Atiśa's three *Lta sgom* works provide an exegesis on the view and meditation of clear light (*'od gsal*, *prabhāsvara*) to advanced students of the esoteric Buddhist path (e.g. Rinchen Zangpo) in a context centered on the Cakrasaṃvara practice tradition.

The *Lta sgom chen mo*, compared to the other two short works, expands the exegesis of the subject matter from merely focusing on the Cakrasaṃvara cycle when it states that the work contains “the condensed special instructions on the essence of all sūtras, tantras, and technical digests, like a wish-fulfilling jewel...”¹¹ However, toward the end of the *Lta sgom chen mo*, Atiśa clarifies the specific subject matter of the treatise, writing, “the four letters [i.e., śrī He Ru Ka] in the meaning of the title—applied to the generation stage, applied to the completion stage, applied to the four [Buddha] bodies of the result—indicates the great view and meditation of the completion stage.”¹² A focus on the four letters (*akṣaracatuṣṭa*) in esoteric Buddhist discourse is quite often found in works affiliated with *Hevajra* or *Cakrasaṃvara* but, as indicated in the passage translated below, Atiśa presents an eclectic esoteric exegesis that includes in his

¹⁰ As noted by Gray (2007: 21–23), a tradition of monastic exegesis on the Cakrasaṃvara existed at Vikramaśīla for several decades before Atiśa, as five Indian authors among the eleven extant Indian commentaries resided at this monastery.

¹¹ *Lta sgom chen mo*, p. 628: *mdo rgyud dang bstan chos thams cad kyi snying po bsdus pa man ngag yid bzhin nor bu lta bu ...*

¹² *Lta sgom chen mo*, p. 642: *de bzhin du mtshan don gyi yi ge bzhi po de bskyes rim du sbyar ba dang / rdzogs rim dang sbyar ba dang / 'bras bu 'i sku bzhi dang sbyar bas ni / rdzogs pa 'i rim pa lta sgom chen mo bstan no /*

discussion the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Guhyasamāja*, among other works. Atiśa's commentarial approach—to explain his view through interpreting a variety of originally independent teachings and works in a unified manner—has precedent in the tenth-century master Vajrapāṇi,¹³ who stated that “a tantra has to be understood on the basis of another tantra” (*tantram tantrāntareṇa boddhavyam*, Sferra 2000: 43-44). In relation to exegetical precedents, Atiśa's exegesis most likely represents a tradition of Cakrasaṃvara theory and practice at Vikramaśīla based on the commentarial lineage held there.

The *Lta sgom chen mo* outlines a number of cultivations and instructions that are often found in the works of Atiśa. After outlining the places to practice in solitude and when to partake of food (p. 629), the text provides instructions on cultivating extraordinary compassion for mother-like sentient beings (p. 630; Cf. *Ratnakaraṇḍodghaṭa* [Apple 2010: 123-24]), then cultivating the understanding that all things are ultimately the mind, and realizing that “the luminous suchness of the mind of all beings and one's own mind-as-such are not different, nor different from the compassionate omniscience of a Tathāgata.” This section ends with instructions on realizing that “all things are the unique Dharmakāya of great bliss.”

The *Lta sgom chen mo* then provides an exegesis on the view and meditation of clear light (*'od gsal, prabhāsvara*). Atiśa's exegesis of the view in the *Lta sgom chen mo* is the most extensive that I have found in his works on esoteric Buddhist practice. I provide a selected excerpt from this work in order to illustrate several important facets of Atiśa's view of esoteric Buddhist practice and his understanding of the Great Seal. In its section on the view in the uncommon path (633.20-635.15), the *Lta sgom chen mo* distinguishes between the view of the worldly mind (*'jig rten pa'i sems kyis lta ba*), the view with the eye of insight (*shes rab kyī mig gis lta ba*), and the view with the correct mind (*yang dag pa'i yid kyis lta ba*). In regards to the eye of insight, Atiśa states:

The view with the eye of insight has two [divisions]: seeing

¹³ Note that the tenth-century master Vajrapāṇi, author of the *Laghutantraṭīkā* (Cicuzza 2001), differs from the eleventh-century disciple of Advayavajra (Tatz 1994).

the nature of what does not exist and seeing the nature of what exists. Whatever existence of the threefold world appears in the perspective of one with narrow vision,¹⁴ that does not exist, and all the conceptualizations of graspable objects and grasping subjects, such as the appearances of the one hundred and sixty worldly minds and so forth, are seen to be not at all established, like a sky-flower and so forth. Therefore, all conceptualization without exception is a great stain to be washed. One should realize the equivalence of sky-flowers and mundane existence. Those with eye disease say they see hairs in the space [before them]. There is no difference between those with eye disease and transmigrating beings. Thus, the threefold mundane existence is equivalent to a sky-flower.¹⁵

In this section Atiśa clearly states that appearances based on conceptuality do not exist and that mundane existence is equivalent to a sky-flower. Similar statements are made in his *Caryāgīti* (Sherburne 2000: 408-409) and his *Vajrāsana-vajragīti* (D212b3–5). Atiśa also notes that these appearances are based on one hundred and sixty worldly minds (*'jig rten pa'i sems brgya drug cu*). This classification of one hundred and sixty worldly minds, and their listing, is found in the *Mahā-vairocanābhisambodhi*, which

¹⁴ The Sanskrit equivalents for *tshu rol thong ba* are *arvāgdarśana*, *arvāgdrś*, or *aparadarśana*. As noted by Keira (2004: 94), Kamalaśīla explains in his *Tattvasamgrahapañjikā* that people of narrow vision (*tshu rol thong ba*) have three types of direct perception—sense cognition (*indriyajñānam*), mental [cognition] (*mānasam*), and reflexive cognition (*ātmasamvedana*), but such people do not have *yogipratyakṣa*, which directly understands emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Atiśa repeatedly mentions in his works that the direct perception and inferences of those with narrow vision cannot understand the two realities nor cognize emptiness.

¹⁵ *Lta sgom chen mo* (p. 633.23–634): *shes rab kyis mig gis lta ba la gnyis ste / med pa'i rang bzhin mthong ba dang / yod pa'i rang bzhin mthong ba'o / / med pa'i tshul rol mthong ba'i ngo la snang ba ji srid pa gsum dang / cir snang 'jig rten pa'i sems brgya drug cu la sogs pa bzung ba na dang / 'dzin [633.25] [634.1] pa'i rnam par rtog pa thams cad nam mkha'i me tog la sogs pa ltar / gang yang ma grub par mthong ba'o / de phyir ma lus rnam par rtog pa yi / / dri ma chen po 'khru ba ni / / nam mkha' dang ni me tog dang / / srid pa mnyam par rtogs pa'o / / zhes dang / rab rib can gyis nam kha' la / / skra shad zla ba mthong ba dang / / rab rib dang ni 'gro ba kun / khyad par yod pa ma yin no / / zhes srid pa gsum po nam mkha'i me tog dang / mnyam zhes pa dang /...*

Atiśa cites below.¹⁶ This points toward an exegesis stemming from Buddhajñāna, a major commentator on this text and the first preceptor of Vajrayāna at Vikramaśīla (Sanderson 2009: 93). The ocular analogy, likening “diseased eyes seeing hair” to how mundane reality is perceived from the perspective of ignorance, is found throughout Atiśa’s works on Madhyamaka.¹⁷

Atiśa then states that what exists is the nature of the co-emergent mind (*lhan cig skyes pa'i sems kyi rang bzhin*), which is clear light, suchness, and known as the Great Seal:

Seeing the nature of what exists has three [divisions]: seeing the original nature of the basis, seeing the virtuous qualities of the supported, and seeing those two in union.¹⁸ When construed through seeing the original nature of the basis, it is the nature that is the co-emergent mind. It is luminous, without appearance, a pure appearance, like the center of pure space. There is not any inherent nature whatsoever. Specifically because of that, it is unconditioned, clear, transparent, and pure. Furthermore, the clarity is like a lamp, the transparency is like calm water, and the purity is like the center of pure space. Moreover, the character of the mind is unutterable, inconceivable, inexpressible, unproduced, unceasing, the character of the essence of space, the character to be known by oneself and an object of superior gnosis. Therefore, “it is not the object of speculative logic. This gnosis is individually known self-cognizing awareness.”¹⁹

Just that is also stated in the *Vairocanābhisambodhitāntra*:

“What is the mind of awakening? That mind is naturally pure. It is not observable internally, externally or in between. It does not have color, shape, appearance, or

¹⁶ Note that another esoteric Buddhist system utilizing one hundred and sixty are the prototypes (*prakṛti*) of the subtle mind that cover the clear light of the mind found in the *Guhyasamāja* tradition of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva.

¹⁷ See Apple (2013, 2015, 2016, *forthcoming*).

¹⁸ The *Vajrāsanavajragīvṛtti* (D 212b4) clarifies that the basis is clear light and that the support of the basis is uncontaminated virtuous qualities: *yod pa'i rang bzhin mthong ba la gnyis te rten 'od gsal dang / brten pa zag med kyi yon tan mthong ba'o /*.

¹⁹ *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* 10.163ab (Nanjio 1923): *pratyātmavedyayānaṃ me tārikāṅāmagocaram /*. The *Shes bya kun khyab mdzod* states: *lang gshegs las / / so so rang rig ye shes ni / / rtog ge rnams kyi spyod yul min /*.

darkness. It is not male or female. It is neither neuter nor androgynous. That mind does not reside in the three realms. It does not reside in the aggregates, elements, or sense media. Why is that? That mind has the characteristic of space. Therefore, it is bereft of all conceptualization and non-conceptualization. In this way, that which is the nature of space is the nature of the mind. That which is the nature of mind is the mind of awakening. Therefore, mind, space, realms, and the mind of awakening are without duality and not divided” (*Mahāvairocanābhisambodhitantra* (Hodge 2003: 57).

Also, from a *sūtra*, “That mind is not mind, the nature of mind is clear light.”²⁰ Further, from the *Hevajra*, “Except for the purity of self-awareness, there is not release from the purity of another.”²¹

The *Śrījñānasiddhi* also states,

“Free from any shape, free from coming and going, not agitated by any wind, not burned by any fire, not fluctuating with water, not cut by a sharp weapon with great effort, just as space does not abide, is pervasive, and is free from characteristics—this ultimate, suchness is the unsurpassable diamond gnosis. It is called ‘Samantabhadra.’ It is also called ‘Mahāmudrā.’”²²

²⁰ *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, p. 3: *taccittam acittam / prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā /*. Cf. *Ratnakaraṇḍodghaṭa-madhyamakopadeśa* (Apple 2010: 128).

²¹ Cf. *Hevajra Tantra*, Part I, ch. ix, verse 3ab (Snellgrove 2011: 33): Tib. *rang rig bdag nyid dag pa nyid / / dag pa gzhan gyis rnam grol min //* Skt. *svasaṃvedyātmikā śuddhīr nānaśuddhyā vimucyate/* (Eng, p. 79): “Their purification consists in self-experience, and by not other means of purification may one be released.”

²² *Jñānasiddhi* (1987: 97): //45// *sarvajño varado vādī varṇasamsthāne(kam) vinā/ gatāgativinirmukto acālyah sarvavāyubhiḥ // 46 // dahyate nāgniskandhena plāvryate na jalena ca/ bhidyate nahi śastreṇa tūkṣṇenāpi prayatnataḥ // 47 // apratiṣṭaṃ yathākāśaṃ vyāpi lakṣaṇavarjitaṃ/ idaṃ tat paramaṃ tattvaṃ vajrajñānamanuttaram// 48 // khyātā samantabhadreti mahāmudrā ca saṃjñitā/ [dharmakāyamidaṃ jñeyamādarśajñānamityapi //]; (1987: 144) Tib. // 45 // *kun mkhyen mchog sbyin gsungs pa'o / / dbyibs kun dang ni rnam bral zhing / 'gro dang 'ong las rnam grol bdag / rlung kun gyis kyang bskyod mi nus // 46 // me yi pung pos mi tshig cing / / chu rnams kyis kyang g.yeng mi 'gyur / / rab tu 'bad pas mtshon cha ni / / chu pos kyang ni chod mi 'gyur // 47 // ji ltar mi gnas nam mkha' ni / / khyab cing mtshan nyid rnams dang bral / / 'di ni don dam de nyid de / / rdo rje ye shes bla med yin // 48 // kun tu bzang po zhes bshad cing / / phyag rgya chen**

Further, the *Cakrasaṃvara* states, “Mind, the delight of the supreme secret, is known as the Universal Nature.”²³

That which is the secret is the co-emergent clear light. Further, it is a secret, as it is an object that is not manifest and hidden; delight in the object of superior gnosis; the nature that pervades everywhere; permanently established perpetually throughout the three times. The seventeenth chapter of the *Guhyasamāja* states,

Since the inherent nature of things is clear light, pure from the beginning and non-conceptual, sentient and living beings do not exist. As Buddhahood is pure from clear light itself, that called the awakening mind does not exist.²⁴

One should look at such teachings.

Further, “wholesome in the guise of letter E and ornamented in the middle with VAM” in this way it is called abiding in the clear light nature of the mind.²⁵ It is called “the basis,” the “ultimate,” and the “realm of reality.” Therefore, whether Buddhas arise or do not arise, the real nature of things always abides.²⁶ In this way, when seeing with the eye of insight, “not seeing anything at all is seeing suchness.”²⁷

po zhes kyang bya / [’di ni chos skur shes bya ste / / me long ye shes zhes kyang bya //]. Text in brackets not cited by Atiṣa.

- ²³ Canonical *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, verse 2cd, differs (Gray 2001: 592): Tib. *gsang ba mchog gi dgyes pa na / / thams cad bdag nyid rtag tu bzhugs /*. Skt. *rahasye parame ramye sarvātmani sadā sthitāḥ //*
- ²⁴ Verses not located.
- ²⁵ *Hevajra* II, 3.4 (Snellgrove 1959: 52) slightly differs: *ekārākṛti yad divyaṃ madhye vaṃkārabhūṣitaṃ / ālayaḥ sarvasaukhyānāṃ buddharatna-karaṇḍakam /* Translation (Mathes 2008: 95): “The divine reality, which has the form of the letter *e*, and is ornamented with the letter *vaṃ* in its middle, is the basis of everything blissful, the box of the buddha-jewel.”
- ²⁶ See Apple (2016: 707) for Atiṣa’s comments on the notion that whether buddhas arise or do not arise, the true nature of dharmas (or dharma, depending on the reading of the Tibetan,) remains as suchness.
- ²⁷ *Lta sgom chen mo* (p. 634.9–635.15): */ yod pa’i rang bzhin mthong ba la gsum ste / rten rang [634.10] bzhin rnal ma mthong ba dang / brten pa de’i yon tan gyi chos mthong ba dang / de gnyis zung ’jug tu mthong ba’o / / rten rang bzhin rnal mthong ba’i dbang du byas nas / gang lhan cig skyes pa’i sems kyi rang bzhin / ’od gsal ba snang ba med cing / snang ba rnam par dag pa / nam mkha’ rnam par dag pa’i dkyil lta bu’o / / gang gi yang rang bzhin ma yin pa / / khyad par gang gis khyad par du ma byas pa / gsal ba*

In this way, in its discussion related to Mahāmudrā, the *Lta sgom chen mo* places an emphasis on the vision of clear light, with citations from a variety of sūtras and tantras. Atiśa's exegesis accentuates the importance of the co-emergent mind as the hidden

*dang / dwangs pa dang / dag pa ste / de yang / gsal ba ni mar me lta bu /
 dwangs pa / ni chu ma rnyog pa lta bu'o / / dag pa ni nam mkha' dag pa'i
 dkyil lta bu'o / / gzhan yang sems de'i mtshan nyid smrar med pa / bsam
 du med pa / brjod du med pa // ma skyes pa / ma 'gag pa / nam mkha'i ngo
 bo nyid du gyur pa'i mtshan rang gis rig par bya ba dang / ye shes dam pa'i
 yul du gyur pa'i mtshan nyid do / / de'i phyir rtog ge rnams kyis yul ma yin
 pa / so so rang rig ye shes 'di zhes pa dang / de nyid rnam par snang mdzad
 byang chub pa'i rgyud las kyang / byang chub kyi sems de gang zhe na /
 sems de ni rang bzhin yongs su dag pa yin te / de ni nang dang / phyi rol
 dang / bar du yang mi dmigs so / / sems de ni de bzhin gshegs pas kyang mi
 zgigs so / / de kha dog dang dbyibs dang / snang ba dang mun pa ma yin /
 skyes pa dang bud med ma yin / ma ning dang mtshan gnyis pa ma yin no /
 / sems de ni khams gsum la mi gnas / phung po dang / khams dang / skye
 mched la mi gnas te / de ci'i phyir zhe na / sems de nam mkha'i mtshan
 nyid de / de'i phyir rtog pa dang rnam par mi rtog pa thams cad dang bral
 ba'o / / de bas na nam mkha'i rang bzhin gang yin pa de sems kyi rang
 bzhin no / / sems kyi rang bzhin gang yin pa de byang chub kyis sems te /
 de'i phyir sems dang nam mkha' dang dbyings dang / byang chub kyi sems
 de ni gnyis su med cing gnyis su byar med do / / zhes [635.1] / gsungs pa
 dang / yang mdo las / sems de ni / sems mchis te / sems kyi rang bzhin
 ni 'od gsal ba'o / / zhes pa dang / yang he ba dzra las / rang rig dag pa ma
 gtogs pas / / dag pa gzhan gyi rnam mi grol / / zhes pa dang / dpal ye shes
 grub pa la kyang / dbyibs kun las kyang rnam grol zhing / / 'gro
 dang 'ong las rnam grol bdag / rgyud kun gyis kyang rnam mi spyod / /
 me'i phung po mi tshig bzhin / / chu rnams kyis kyang g.yo mi 'gyur / / rab
 tu 'bad pa'i mtshon chas ni / / rnon pos kyang ni chod mi 'gyur / / ci ltar
 mi rnams {em. gnas} nam mkha' ni / khyab cing mtshan nyid rnams dang
 bral / / 'di ni don dam de nyid de / / rdo rje ye shes bla med yin / / kun tu
 bzang po zhes bshad cing / / phyag rgya chen po zhes kyang bya / / zhes
 gsungs pa dang / yang dpal 'khor lo sdom pa las / sems gsang mchog gi
 dgyes pa ni / / thams cad bdag nyid zhes pa ste / gsang ba ni gang / lhan
 cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal ba ste / de yang mi mngon pa dang / sbas pa'i don
 gyis gsang ba'o / / ye shes dam pa'i yul pa las dgyes pa'o // thams cad la
 khyab pas bdag nyid do / / dus gsum du rtag pas rtag tu bzhugs pa'o //
 yang 'dus pa'i le'u bcu bdun pa las / chos rnams rang bzhin 'od gsal bas /
 bzod nas dag pas rtog pa med / / sems can med cing srog kyang med / /
 sangs rgyas 'od gsal nyid nas dag / byang chub sems med zhes bya ba la
 sogs pa gsungs pa de nyid du blta' bar bya 'o // yang e 'i cha byad bzang
 po la / / dbus su baM gyis brgyan pa 'o // zhes de bas sems gyi rang
 bzhin 'od gsal ba de la gnas zhes bya / rten zhes bya don dam pa zhes bya /
 chos kyi [635.15] dbyings zhes bya ba ste / de'i phyir sangs rgyas byung
 kyang rung / ma byung yang rung ste / chos rnams kyis chos nyid ze / rtag
 tu gnas zhes bya 'o / / de ltar shes rab mig gis bltas pas / ci yang ma
 mthong ba de nyid la mthong ba zhes bya 'o /*

nature of reality. As Gray (2005) has discussed, Atiśa has inherited a mode of exegesis that emphasizes gnostic awareness, rather than ritualized sexual intercourse, as the secret of esoteric discourse. Atiśa's emended citations of the *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra*, given above, demonstrate his emphasis on the clear light nature of the mind as the basis of his view. The text (636–37) later places emphasis on cultivating the wisdom of individual analysis (*so sor rtogs pa'i shes rab*), based on citations from the *Vajraḍāka*. The work concludes with a discussion on conduct that draws upon several excerpts from Mañjuśrīkīrti's *Vajrayānamūlāpattiḱā*.²⁸

The contemplative aspects of Atiśa's instructions on the view and meditation are substantiated based on selective citation of key explanatory tantras. Without doubt, Atiśa's system represents a fully domesticated esoteric contemplative tradition, emphasizing gnosis and vision that are internalized to an advanced degree. Atiśa's citation of the above works illustrates a sublimated contemplative tradition that he was trained in at Vikramaśīla. Atiśa must also have been aware of Jñānakīrti's discussion in the *Tattvāvatāra* of advanced students who gain the realization of Mahāmudrā through the contemplative practices of calm abiding (*śamatha*) and special insight (*vipaśyanā*), as Atiśa cited the *Tattvāvatāra* in his *Bodhipathapradīpapañjikā*. Atiśa may also been aware of his contemporary Vīravajra (fl. 1010–1020), who equated Mahāmudrā with the *dharmadhātu*, the attainment of which was realized through calm abiding (*śamatha*) and special insight (*vipaśyanā*).²⁹

²⁸ On this work see Davidson (2002: 324–27). It was translated into Tibetan by Upadhaśrīvajraśīla and Atiśa's disciple Brtson 'grus seng ge.

²⁹ *Yoginīsaṃcāryānibandha-padārthaprakāśa-nāma** (D 144b5-7, P 166b5-7, N 156a2-5, gser bris ma 196b6-197a3): “The term ‘mahāyāna’ is accepted here as non-conceptual gnosis. The term ‘mudrā’ signifies *dharmadhātu*, gnosis, and their non-duality which is the *dharmakāya*. By meditating on such the *dharmakāya* in the Mother tantras From the extensive explanation, first *dharmakāya* is indicated, this is indicated by *mahāmudrā* and other expressions. Mahāmudrā is the *dharmadhātu*. “All yogas” are what creates understanding, that is, calm abiding and special insight. There is not a more superior object than Mahāmudrā as the object [of calm abiding and special insight] (*theg pa chen po zhes bya ba ni rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes te 'dir 'dod pas so / phyag rgya zhes bya ba ni chos kyi dbyings dang ye shes dang / gnyis su med de chos sku'o / ^ / rnal 'byor ma'i rgyud du chos sku de lta bu bsgom pas 'bras bu chos sku'i dngos grub ster bar byed pa de bshad par bya yis nyon zhes par sbyar ro / / rgyas bshad las*

The Open Basket of Jewels

Atiśa's *Ratnakaraṇḍodghaṭamadhyamakopadeśa*,³⁰ an extensive teaching that he composed in India and that was translated in India by his Tibetan disciples, only briefly alludes to the Great Seal at the end of the work, yet provides bits of contextual evidence for his understanding of esoteric Buddhist thought and practice. In general, this work provides an early record of Atiśa's extensive instructions on the Middle Way, in which he elaborates his lineage of teachers, the importance of the "mind of awakening" (*bodhicitta*), and the scriptural sources that influence his understanding of Madhyamaka and of esoteric thought and practice. In the *Ratnakaraṇḍodghaṭa*, Atiśa places emphasis on the unity of the conventional and ultimate mind of awakening. He also discusses how the mind is without color, without form, by its own nature clear light, and unarising from the beginning. He clarifies that the wisdom of individual analysis (*so sor rtog pa'i shes rab*) itself also dissolves into clear light in meditation. He later briefly indicates that the gnosis that is achieved is great self-arisen gnosis (*rang 'byung gi ye shes, svayambhūjñāna*) that— according to the oral tradition of his teachers Guru Avadhūtipa and Guru Tāmradvīpa— is equivalent to the *dharmadhātu*. Atiśa shows familiarity with the Noble tradition (*ārya*) of the Guhyasamāja system as well, as he cites from Nāgārjuna's *Pañcakrama*, Āryadeva's *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*, and Candrakīrti's *Pradīpodyotana-tīkā* throughout the work. Atiśa therefore displays a knowledge of the primary esoteric source texts on Mahāmudrā and encourages his audience to seek out instructions on this practice, but does not provide any further information in the *Ratnakaraṇḍodghaṭa*. At the end of the text (Apple 2010: 181–82), he briefly comments on the practice of secret mantra, outlining its superiority on the grounds that one is able to rapidly acquire stores of merit and wisdom through its practices, which are based on an

dang po chos sku bstan pa ni / phyag rgya chen po zhes pa la sogs pas bstan te / phyag rgya chen po ni chos kyi dbyings so // rnal 'byor kun zhes pa ni shes byed ni zhi gnas dang lhag mthong ngo // de'i yul du phyag rgya chen po las lhag pa'i yul mchog gzhan med ces pa'o /. (1) P and N, gser bris ma reads: *phyag rgya zhes bya ba ni chos kyi dbyings dang ye shes dang / gnyis su med de chos sku'o /*; D reads: *phyag rgya zhes bya ba ni chos kyi dbyings so // de ltar na chos kyi dbyings dang ye shes pa gnyis su med de chos sku'o //*

³⁰ See Apple 2010 for an annotated English translation.

appropriate consecration (*abhiṣeka*). Here (for reasons he later outlines in his *Bodhipathapradīpa-pañjikā*) Atiśa prohibits the secret and wisdom-gnosis consecrations to celibate monks. Once a student receives consecration, they should focus on the *samādhi* of their chosen deity, mutter mantras, and keep the commitments (*samaya*). Atiśa also states that a fully accomplished layperson (*upāsaka*) is not at fault if engaging in sexual intercourse on the esoteric Buddhist path. This ambiguous dichotomy between monastic and lay-person esoteric Buddhist practice is also found in Atiśa’s *Vajrāsanavajragīti* (“The Diamond Song of the Diamond Seat”) and its commentary (*vṛtti*).

The Diamond Song of the Diamond Seat

The *Vajrāsanavajragīti* is a *diamond song* (*vajragīti*) of twenty-six verses that relates to the *diamond seat* (*vajrāsana*), ostensibly the place in India, along the Nairāñjanā river in present-day Bodh Gayā, where the Buddha attained awakening; metaphorically it is located in the individual who practices to reach union with ultimate reality. The verses of the *Vajrāsanavajragīti* play upon literal erotic sentiment and metaphoric gnostic realization, which induce the practitioner to achieve the non-dual unity of clear light and uncontaminated virtuous qualities, resulting in the Great Seal. This is well illustrated in the third verse, which states, “Endowed with the charming young woman, one quickly becomes accomplished, blissfully gathered together on the banks of the Nairāñjanā river.”³¹ The commentary explains that the “charming young woman” (*mdzes ma*) is clear light, the co-emergent (*sahaja*), and that “endowed” means possessing uncontaminated good qualities (*zag med kyi yon tan*), and quickly accomplishing the unity of the two results in the attainment of the Great Seal.³² The commentary mentions that “gathering together” signifies either achieving the non-dual state through bringing together the vajra

³¹ *Vajrāsanavajragīti*, D 208a4-5, vs. 3a: / *mdzes ma mchog ldan khyer nas rab tu myur bsgrubs pas* // *naï ranydza na’i ’gram du bde bar ’jug pas ’dus* /

³² *Vajrāsanavajragītivṛtti*, D 210a6-7: *mtshon bya’i bdag med ma de ni mdzes ma mchog ni ’od gsal dang sa ha dza’* // *ldan pa ni zag med kyi yon tan dang ldan pa’o* // *de ltar de gnyis zung ’jug tu rab tu myur du bsgrubs pas ’bras bu ma hā mu dra ’thob ces bya’o* /

and lotus, or bringing together the realm of reality and awareness.³³ In brief, the commentary often explains the state of unity advocated in the diamond song in terms of gnostic realization through the unity of selflessness and clear light, or the introduction of wind-energies into the central channel through the method of an action seal (*las kyi phyag rgya, karmamudrā*; D, 211a3). Atiśa does not explicitly state what type of method is viable for which type of practitioner, but judging from his other works, the monastic yogi aims for the gnostic realization while a lay person yogi relies on the method of an action seal. Either way, the aim is to realize the clear light co-emergent nature of the mind, which removes karma and mental afflictions that perpetuate the round of rebirth (D, 211b1-2). However, the yogi does not remain only in clear light realized by concentration and insight. To complete the stock of virtuous qualities, the maturation of sentient beings, and the purity of the buddhafield necessary in the state of Buddhahood, the yogi must engage in pure practices (D, 214b2), propelled by the mind of awakening (D, 212a7). In sum, the *Vajrāsanavajragīti* and its commentary (*vr̥tti*) outline a program of *sahajayoga* (*sa ha dza'i rnal 'byor*, D 214a2) to realize the resultant Great Seal (*'bras bu ma hā mu dra*, D 210a7). This profound teaching of Atiśa's requires further study and analysis.

Atiśa's Stages of the Path to Awakening

The final two texts that illustrate Atiśa's teaching on the Great Seal were taught in Tibet. Traditional Tibetan scholars refer to the fact that Atiśa gave Great Seal teachings to his close disciples. However, these teachings are often mentioned in passing while discussing Gampopa, a figure of great importance in the Kagyu tradition, known especially for his teaching and practice of the Great Seal. I first provide several excerpts from traditional scholars that refer to Atiśa's teachings on the Great Seal, then follow these excerpts with a discussion and translation of new textual evidence.

The great nonsectarian (*ris med pa*) master 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899), in his *Encompassment of All*

³³ *Vajrāsanavajragītivṛtti*, D 210b1-2: 'dus pa ni gnyis te / rdo rje dang padma dang dbyings dang rigs pa 'dus pa'i tshul gyis bsgrub pa'o /

Knowledge (shes bya kun khyab), mentions Atiśa's teaching in passing while discussing Gampopa:

It is said that Tagpo Rinpoche [i.e., Gampopa] gave rise to the realization of Mahāmudrā even in beginners who did not receive empowerment, which is the system of the *pāramitās*. It primarily consists of the instructions that come from the Kadampas—the pith instructions of “The Second Armor of Mahāmudrā, Union with the Connate (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*)” composed by Lord [Atiśa] and this present system are alike in all aspects and even the progression of the four yogas [of Mahāmudrā] is clearly taught there. Thus, he guided most [of his students in a given] group through the stages of the path that come from the Kadam [tradition], where he guided the extraordinary ones through the path of means that comes from Lama Mila[repa]. What is meant [here] is the former [approach].³⁴

Kong sprul follows this statement with a citation from Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), which is found in Mi bskyod rdo rje's own work:

The authentic power of mahāmudrā in the Kagyu, the lineage from the *dharmakāya* great Vajradhara to the great glorious Nāropa, is only attained by actualizing the example and authentic ultimate pristine awareness by means of the higher three supreme empowerments. The system of guidance in calm abiding and higher insight taught these days that is shared with the causal vehicle of the perfections comes from the lineage of the protector Atiśa. It is the esoteric instruction of *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, renowned as *Co-emergent Union* of the great Geshé Dromtönpa and Geshé Gönpawa. Lord Gampopa and the protector Pakmo Drupa have given this the name “The Co-emergent Yoga of Mahāmudrā” (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*) just for the sake of those disciples in the degenerate age who would like

³⁴ English translation Brunnhölzl 2011. *Shes bya kun kyab* (2002: 857.15–21):
 / dwags po rin po ches // las dang po pas dbang bskur ma thob pa la'ang
 phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa skyes par mdzad pa ni pha rol tu phyin pa'i
 lugs 'di yin la / 'di ni gtso bo bka' gdams pa las byung ba'i gdams pa ste /
 jo bos mdzad pa'i phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor go cha gnyis pa'i man
 ngag dang da lta'i lugs srol 'di rnam pa thams cad du mtshungs shing
 rnal 'byor bzhi rim yang der gsal bar bstan pa yin no // de ltar yang tshogs
 pa phal mo che rnams bka' gdams las byung ba'i lam rim gyis khrid / thun
 mong ma yin pa rnams bla ma mi la nas byung ba'i thabs lam gyis khrid par
 mdzad ces 'byung ba'i snga ma'i don no /...

a “really high” vehicle.”³⁵

Both of these citations refer to two teachings Atiśa gave on the Great Seal, one based on Atiśa’s *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam gyi sgron ma*, **bodhipatha-pradīpa*, hereafter *Lamp*) and the other mentioned by Mi bskyod rdo rje as *Co-emergent Union* (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*). In the following sections, I will discuss and translate the teachings to which I think these scholars are referring.

Atiśa’s *Lamp* is a work of sixty-eight verses outlining the intergration of three forms of discipline, including the vows of the *pratimokṣa*, bodhisattva precepts, and precepts of the way of mantras, within Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna practices and cultivations. Written in response to questions from king Byang chub ’od in west Tibet around 1042 CE, Atiśa’s *Lamp* became “one of the most influential of Indian texts received by Tibetans” and was “the model for mainstream Tibetan monastic Buddhist for the next nine hundred years” (Davidson 1995: 293). Atiśa does not ostensibly mention in the verses of this text any instruction related to the Great Seal or co-emergent wisdom. His commentary (*pañjikā*) on the *Lamp for the Path to Awakening* does briefly name a co-emergent type of wisdom at the beginning of his comments on the section regarding wisdom, but Atiśa does not provide any further details on the topic in this work.

The key to Mi bskyod rdo rje’s reference, and to a lesser extent Kong sprul’s, is the phrase “esoteric instruction” (*man ngag*). The teaching referred to here is not Atiśa’s *Lamp*, but rather Atiśa’s *Stages of the Path to Awakening* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*, **bodhipathakrama*; hereafter, *Stages*), a previously unstudied but important work found among the recently published manuscript

³⁵ Translation modified based on Harding 2009. Mi skyod rdo rje *Gdams khrid man ngag gi rim pa 'chi med bdud rtsi'i ljon bzang*, p. 279a2–5: / *chos sku rdo rje 'chang chen nas brgyud pa'i dpal nā ro pa chen po'i bka' brgyud kyi phyag rgya chen po'i dngos grub mtshan nyid pa ni mchog dbang gong ma gsum gyis dpe don gyi ye shes mtshan nyid pa mngon sum du ma gyur pa yod pa ma yin la / deng sang rgyu phar phyin theg pa dang thun mong ba'i zhi lhag gi khrid srol mgon po a ti sha nas brgyud pa byang chub lam gyi sgron ma'i man ngag [/] / dge ba'i bshes gnyen ston pa chen po dang / dge bshes dgon pa pa rnams kyi lhan cig skyes sbyor du grags pa / rje btsun sgam po pa dang / mgon po phag mo gru pas / snyigs ma'i gdul bya theg pa mtho mtho ma la dga' ba'i ngor / phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor du ming btags par mdzad la /....*

facsimiles of the *Collected Works of the Kadampas* (*bka' gdams pa gsung 'bum*, 2006–2015).³⁶ Atiśa's *Stages* is virtually unknown to traditional and modern scholarship. The twenty-two folio work is contained within a larger one-hundred folio cursive script manuscript of twenty-six other minor works all devoted to aspects of the stages of the path (*lam gyi rim*) teachings. An annotation found on the first folio of Atiśa's *Stages* mentions that the work was composed by Atiśa for the benefit of his student Dromtönpa. Atiśa's *Lamp* is around three folios in length, but the *Stages* is almost seven times as long. I am preparing a full annotated translation of the work, but for our purposes here, a verse summary of the subject matter of the *Stages* is outlined in an accompanying minor work entitled *Condensed Summary of the Stages of the Path* (*Lam rim mdor bsdus pa*). The *Condensed Summary of the Stages of the Path* states:

With a basis in conduct, an [individual of small capacity] understands the difficulty of finding freedoms and favorable conditions, reflects upon death and impermanence, abandons laziness, eliminates wrong-doing, and practices virtue with effort. [The middling individual] recollects the sufferings of cyclic existence, eliminates the cause of that, afflictions and wrong-doing, observes subtle cause and effect for any activity, and concentrates upon the reality of selflessness. [The supreme individual] trains in love, compassion, and the mind of awakening, reflects that things are like illusion, and is mindful to recognize all entities as lacking inherent existence. When they practice the indivisibility of appearance and emptiness, marvelous and excellent results occur. Nourishing that aim, in solitude one gives up preoccupation with the notions of this life; when an individual in possession of four qualities practices, they attain the result.³⁷

³⁶ Note that another copy of the manuscript was published in the PL480 Library of Congress program in 1973 as *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa, Writings of Lord Atiśa on the theory and practice of the Graduated Path*. Leh, Ladakh: Thupten Tsering. See Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC): W1KG506.

³⁷ *Lam rim mdor bsdus pa*: [63.7/ 22a7] ...*spyi'i* tshul khrim ci nus gzhis byas nas / *skye bu chung ba'i* dal 'byor rnyed dka' chud mi gsan / mi rtag 'chi bsam le lo spang / sdig spang dge [64.12/ 22b1] la 'bad pas bsgrub / *skye bu 'bring* 'khor ba'i sdug bsngal dran byas te / de rgyu nyon mongs sdig pa spang / rgyu 'bras phra la spyod sgrub ci / bdag med

As this outline reveals, Atiśa's *Stages* instructs on subject matter found in later Kadampa texts and is clearly familiar to anyone with knowledge of the Gelukpa (*dge lugs pa*) stages of the path literature. What is important to note for our purposes here is the phrase "...practicing the indivisibility of appearance and emptiness..." The *Condensed Summary* is referring to the concluding section in Atiśa's *Stages*, where verse instructions on the practice of quiescence (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*) are located. Rather than discussing Tantra as found in the *Lamp*, the instructions on insight in Atiśa's *Stages* focus on pointing out a non-conceptual direct vision of the emptiness of one's own mind, the type of instruction that later Kagyupa scholars such as Gampopa and Pakmo Drupa will describe as Great Seal teachings. The following selection of excerpts from this section of Atiśa's *Stages* illustrates the guidance he gave to disciples of advanced spiritual capacity. Atiśa's *Stages* gives the following instructions on insight:

All things of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are one's own mind. For example, they are like a mirror, reflection, or echo. All is unmixed, the union of all transcends limited views. The essence [of one's own mind] is luminous and naturally empty.³⁸

It is from the beginning, innately pure, unconditioned, free from extremes, sameness, without acceptance or rejection of views. In this way, [55.3] the mind itself is established as the way of things, mind-as-such is pure like the sky. Whether the Victorious Ones of the three times teach it or not, whether sentient beings realize it or not, from the beginning [55.4] perfect gnosis is the *dharmakāya*, unfabricated, not taken up;

*don la mnyam par bzhag / *skye bu mchog* byams dang snying rje byang
sems sbyang / chos rnam sgyu ma lta bur bsam / dngos kun rang bzhin med
[64.2/ 22b1] shes dran / snang stong dbyer med nyams blangs na / 'bras bu
phun sum tshogs pa 'byung / de don bskyang phyir tshe 'di yi / 'du shes blos
btang dben pa ru / chos bzhi ldan pa'i gang zag gis / nyams su blangs
na 'bras bu thob / ...* Text between asterisks represents below line
annotations. Interestingly, Gampopa has a text under this exact title in his
collected works based on Kadampa teachings (see Jackson 1992: 101;
Kragh 2015: 471, 473).

³⁸ *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa (*bodhipathakrama): [55.1] : / 'khor 'das chos
kun rang gi sems yin te / dper na me long gzugs brnyan brag cha ltar /
thams (ca) d ma 'dres kun 'dus phyogs mtha' bral / ngo bo gsal zhing rang
bzhin stong pa nyid /*

from the beginning it is the mind of awakening. From the beginning it is stainless and pure; the afflictions and sufferings of cyclic existence are not at all established.³⁹

Mind itself, from the beginning innately established, cannot be realized by the many [55.5] who deliberately seek out signs of it. Meditating without a view and free of activity, the result, not to be sought elsewhere, is established from the beginning. Whether through the condition of the spiritual teacher's teaching or not, whether a yogi meditates or not, whether wise ones realize or not, the unconditioned mind-as-such is free from causal conditions.⁴⁰

It is not permanent, and is free from the extremes of nihilism; it is without arising, cessation, sameness, difference, coming, or going. Pacified of the eight extremes of elaboration, is has the characteristic of the self-arisen mind of awakening.⁴¹

The union of the basis, the path, and the result is self-arisen, emptiness, the realm of reality, pure, unconditioned, naturally free from elaborations, with nothing at all established, as in empty space. The signs of entities are not established in that. It is the co-emergent way of things, the essence, the factor of clarity, without object, without conceptual thought, inherent translucent radiance, unceasing, appearing like the sun in a cloudless sky, the union of the unelaborated character of co-emergence, self-illuminating,

³⁹ *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa (*bodhipathakrama): ye nas rnam dag lhun grub 'dus ma byas / mtha' bral mnyam nyid lta ba'i zhe 'dod med / de ltar [55.3] rang sems gnas lugs don la gzhas / sems nyid rnam dag nam mkha' lta bu la / dus gsum rgyal bas gsung rung ma gsung rung / sems can rnam gyis rtogs rung ma rtogs rung / gdod [55.4] nas yang dag ye shes chos kyi sku *yin* / ma bcos ma bslang ye nas byang chub sems *yin* / 'dod nas dri med rnam dag 'khor ba yi / sdug bsngal nyon mongs cir yang grub pa med / :*

⁴⁰ *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa (*bodhipathakrama): sems nyid ye nas lhun gyis grub pa la / mtshan ma'i bya btsal mang [55.5] pos bsgrub tu med / lta ba med cing bsgom dang spyod pa bral / 'bras bu gzhan nas mi btsal ye nas grub / :/ bla ma'i rkyen gyis bstan rung ma bstan rung / rnal 'byor can gyis bsgom rung ma bsgom rung / shes rab ldan pas rtogs rung ma [55.6] rtogs rung / rgyu rkyen bral ba'i sems nyid 'dus ma byas *yin* / :*

⁴¹ *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa (*bodhipathakrama): rtag pa ma yin chad pa'i mtha' las grol / skye 'gag tha dad don gcig 'gro 'ong med / spro'd pa'i mtha' brgyad nye bar zhi ba ni / rang byung byang chub sems gyi mtshan nyid yin [55.7] :*

the unceasing appearance of lucidity and awareness⁴²

The mind itself, pure from the beginning, is the realm of reality (*dharmadhātu*), pervading whatever entities appear. Even if, due to delusion, it does not directly appear, it is all-pervading like sesame oil in sesames.⁴³

As this excerpt from the *Stages* illustrates, Atiśa's instructions in private to his advanced students on quiescence (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*) focus on pointing out the co-emergent nature of one's own mind, a nature equivalent to the realm of reality (*dharmakāya*). These instructions significantly differ from the analytical insight utilizing reasoning found in the *Lamp for the Path to Awakening*. Notable, as well, is the fact that in the *Stages* Atiśa instructs the follower to maintain an undistracted mind (*sems ma yengs*) through cultivating mindfulness (*dran pa*) until one is established in the natural disposition of emptiness. A discussion of non-mentation (*amanasikāra*, *yid la mi byed pa*), practices affiliated with Atiśa's junior contemporary Maitripa (ca.1007–ca.1085), are not found in this work, nor in any of the works discussed in this article. The above reference by Mi bskyod rdo rje to esoteric instructions on the stages of the path must be a reference to Atiśa's *Stages* and its instructions pointing out the nature of the mind.

The reference to sesames at end of the above citation from the *Stages* may reflect an association with Tilopa (aka Tillipa, Telopa) the “sesame-pounder,” who was one of the great adepts (*mahāsiddha*) in practice lineages affiliated with Mahāmudrā among Kagyu traditions. In both the lineage lists provided among the texts within the *Stages*, as well as the lineage list for the instructions on *Co-emergent Union* given below, the primary

⁴² *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa* (*bodhipathakrama): *gnas *gzhi* mtshon *lam* 'bras bu'i *grub*zung du 'jug pa ni rang byung stong nyid chos dbyings rnam par dag / 'dus *ma* byas shing lhun grub sprod pa bral / cir yang ma grub nam mkha' stong pa 'dra / de la dngos po'i mtshan ma rgyul ce med / lhan [58.2] skyes gnas lugs ngo bo gsal ba'i cha / yul med rtogs med rang gdangs ma 'gags pa / sprin med mkha' la nyi shar ji bzhin gsal / lhan skyes mtshan nyid spros bral zung 'zug ni / gsal rig snang ba ma 'gags rang shar cir /*

⁴³ *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa* (*bodhipathakrama): [58.4] *sems nyid gdod nas dag pa chos kyi dbyings / dngos po ci snang kun la khyab pa de / rmongs pas dngos su snang bar ma gyur kyang / til dang til mar bzhin du khyab par gnas /*

figure is Tilopa. The *General Meaning of the Stages of the Path*, a brief work found in the *Stages* manuscript, provides the only lineage list found in the whole *Stages* manuscript. This lineage of blessing mentions that the teachings come from Tilopa, Nāropa, and then Atiśa. From Atiśa the teachings went to Gönpawa Wangchuk Gyaltzen (*dgon pa ba dbang phyug rgyal mtshan*, 1016–1082), Gya Chakriwa (*rgya lcags ri ba*, eleventh century), then Gampopa, and then Pakmo Drupa (*phag mo gru ba*, 1110–1170 CE).⁴⁴ This lineage closely replicates the lineage given in the final text of our survey for Atiśa's Mahāmudrā teaching, the *Essential Condensed Summary on the Special Instructions of Co-emergent Union*.

Co-emergent Union (lhan cig skyes byor)

The *Essential Condensed Summary on the Special Instructions of Co-emergent Union* (*lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi gdam ngag mdor bsdus snying po*; hereafter *Co-emergent Union*) is a brief compilation on Atiśa's oral instructions on co-emergent union (*lhan cig skyes byor*), or co-emergent yoga. The Dpal btsegs editors of Atiśa's *Collected Works* (*jo bo rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i gsung 'bum*, 2006) provide the title “Lord [Atiśa's] Great Seal bestowed to Gönpawa” (*jo bo rjes dgon pa ba la gnang phyag chen*). The editors place this text first among the Atiśa's cycle of teachings related to the light rays of secret mantra (*gsang ba sngags kyi 'od zer*). I provide a full translation and diplomatic roman transcription of this work in the appendix.

Atiśa's *Co-emergent Union* is a text that was orally transmitted among early Kadampa lineage figures and then eventually written down by Kagyupa monks. The above citation by Kong sprul mentions “The Second Armor of Mahāmudrā, Union with the Connate (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor go cha gnyis pa'i man ngag*)” as a Great Seal teaching attributed to Atiśa.

⁴⁴ *Byang chub lam rim gyi spyi don* (28b6-7): *byin rlabs til lo nas brgyud pa ni* [/] *na ra pas* [/] *rigs ngan rnal 'byor pa* [28b7] *des rje la'o* [/] *byams snying rje 'byong pa yang* [/] *gzhan gyis khyi mo la brgyab pas* [/] *jo bo yang ro tshor byung nas ltas pas skra lugs skad* [/] *bri ka ma la shi la'i paNDi ta lnga mya'i nang na mchog tu gyur pa des mdzad pa'o* [/] *des dgon pa ba 'dzed dbang phyug rgyal mtshan* la* [/] *des rgya lcags* [28b8] *ri gong kha ba la* [/] *des dgam po lha rje la* [/] *des phag mo gru ba la* [/]

Brunnhölzl (2014: 1026, n. 647) states that there is no known text composed by Atiśa under this name, although a recent conference abstract by Liu (2013) mentions that a *go cha gnyis pa* attributed to Atiśa has been published in India. Along these lines, there are texts under this title by Gampopa and Phakmo Drupa (Brunnhölzl 2014: 1026), but they are different from Atiśa's *Co-emergent Union*. Co-emergent union (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) is an expression often used by later Kagyu traditions for Gampopa's own system of Mahāmudrā (see Kragh 2015). However, Atiśa's work, translated in the appendix below, illustrates that this teaching was not created by Gampopa and a related historical anecdote supports this evidence as well. An episode in the biography of Mokchok Rinchen Tsondu (*rmog lcog rin chen brtson 'grus*, 1110-1170), a disciple of Khyung po rnal 'byor (Mei 2009), recounts how he went to request teachings on Mahāmudrā from the Kadampa Geshe 'Gar⁴⁵ (ca. 12th century), who held lineage teachings from both Atiśa and Milarepa. The biography states,

He fully received the [teachings of the] lineage from Lord [Atiśa] and those of Mila[repa]. Those teachings he requested from Geshe Gar. Then, he offered Geshe Gar some silk cloth. He requested all the teachings on [Mahā]mudrā without exception. [Gar] said, "Since you are in harmony with the dharma of Lord [Atiśa], I will give teachings to you." There was a set of nine teachings that the spiritual teacher had in the lineage of Lord [Atiśa]. [Mokchok] requested (1) The Oral Transmission of the *ḍakinīs* (*da ki ma'i snyan rgyud*), (2) the Great Vision and Meditation (*lta sgom chen mo*), (3) a set of uncommon teachings (*thun mong ma yin pa'i skor*), (4) the Precious Rosary (*nor bu phreng ba*), (5) Vārāhī (*phag mo*), (6) Solitary Hero Cakrasaṃvara (*bde mchog dpa' bo gcig pa*), (7) White Tārā (*sgrol ma dkar mo*), (8) the Co-emergent Union (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*), and (9) the Four Conditions (*rkyen bzhi*).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Lechen Kunga Gyaltsen's (*las chen kun dga' rgyal mtshan*, 1432–1506) history of the Kadampa tradition (2003: 449.17) associates Geshe 'Gar with the monastic community of Langtang Zhang (*glang thang zhang*) and within a generation of followers of the Kadampa master Langri Thangpa Dorjé Sengé (*glang ri thang pa rdo rje seng ge*, 1054–1123).

⁴⁶ *jo bo nas brgyud pa'i dang / mi la'i rnams tshar bar mdzad / dpe rnams dge bshes gar la yod kyis khong la zhus gsungs / de nas dge bshes gar la dar yug gcig phul nas / phyag dpe rnams ma lus par zhus pas / jo bo khyed chos la nan tan byed pa chos dang mthun pa gcig 'dug pas dpe rnams btang gis*

The text continues on with listing the teachings from Milarepa and the full set of Mahāmudrā teachings that Mokchokpa received. This excerpt demonstrates that a set of nine teachings on Mahāmudrā in the lineage of Atiśa circulated in the mid-twelfth century. More importantly, this anecdote proves that a *Co-emergent Union* (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) teaching was given by Atiśa, hence not invented by Gampopa.

The *Co-emergent Union*'s colophon lists the lineage of the teaching received by Atiśa as stemming from Tilopa, Nāropa, and then Ḍombiheruka. This partially matches with the claim by Dakpo Tashi Namgyel (*dvags po bkra shis rnam rgyal*, 1512–1587) that Atiśa had received mahāmudrā instructions from ḍombi-pa that traced back to Indrabhūti (1986: 143). The lineage list continues after Atiśa with the Kadampa figures Gönpawa, Geshe Tönpa (Gyalwai Jungné, i.e., *'brom ston rgyal ba'i byung gnas*, 1004–64), Sharwapa Yontendrak (*shar ba pa yon tan grags*, 1070–1141), and then ends with Tapkawa Zhangton Darma Gyaltsen (*stabs kha ba zhang ston dar ma rgyal mtshan*, 1103–1174 CE). The break in chronology between Geshe Tönpa and Sharwapa puts the lineage list in doubt. After the Kadamapa figures, the colophon lists Jamyak (*'jam nyag*) and then Lama Drakgyalwa (*grags rgyal ba*). The latter is a Kagyu figure from the fourteenth century (Chos kyi 'byung gnas 1972: 654).

The *Co-emergent Union* begins by stating that the teaching was given to Gönpawa. Gönpawa Wangchuk Gyaltsen (*dgon pa ba dbang phyug rgyal mtshan*, 1016–1082) was a close disciple of Atiśa's who was known to have travelled west from Central Tibet in his youth to study with Atiśa. Gönpawa was receptive to Atiśa's Madhyamaka teachings on the two realities (See Apple 2013), and he would later become the third abbot of Reting (*rwa sdreng*) for five

*gsungs nas / jo bo nas rgyud pa'i bla ma rnams kyi chos skor dgu dang / dā
ki ma'i snyan rgyud dang / lta sgom chen mo thun mong ma yin pa'i skor
dang / nor bu phreng ba / phag mo / bde mchog dpa' bo gcig pa sgrol ma
dkar mo / lhan cig skyes sbyor / rkyen bzhi dang de rnams zhus so / / mi la
ras pa nas brgyud pa la / thabs lam la sogs pa'i chos drug go cha
lam 'khyer / be bum sngon po / stong thun / rje btsun ma zhal gcig ma / bde
mchog lha lnga / thabs lam mi 'dra ba nyi shu tham pa / gzhan yang ngo
sprod kyi gdams pa mang du zhus so / / bla ma rang gis mdzad pa'i go cha
rnam gnyis dang / ngo sprod lnga dang / tshig rkang brgyad pa dang / sku
gsum lam 'khyer la sogs pa'i mahā mu tra'i gdams pa rnams ma lus par
gnang nas /*

or seven years, roughly from 1078 to 1082. Gönpawa was an advanced disciple among the younger generation of Atiśa's close disciples in Tibet and certainly would have been a suitable candidate to receive teachings on the nature of the co-emergent mind.

Atiśa's *Co-emergent Union* instructs that the co-emergent mind is the *dharmakāya* and that any appearances that arise are derived from the *dharmakāya*. The text initially clarifies that the mind in its co-emergent essence, nature, and character is free from limitations, and is naturally clear when in a state of non-conceptuality. The text outlines a set of four yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) that gradually appear in the practice of this meditation. These four yogas are of one-pointedness (*rtse cig*), of being free from proliferations (*spros bral*), of one taste (*ro cig*), and of non-meditation (*bsgoms du med pa*). These four yogas are found in later literature on Mahāmudrā, but Atiśa's definitions for each yoga differ from those in other Indian as well as later Tibetan accounts. Along these lines, different systems of four yogas are also found in Indian Mahāmudrā related literature such as Saraha's *Kāyakośāmr̥tavajragīti*.⁴⁷ The exact canonical source for Atiśa's gradual system of four yogas is not clear at this time.⁴⁸ After discussing the four yogas, the text mentions that even though one may cognize one's own mind as the *dharmakāya*, sufferings may subsequently occur due to karmic residues related to one's physical body. The text mentions the image of a garuḍa chick and a lion cub to illustrate the condition of one's inner mind as the *dharmakāya* while the heap of the body suffers from karmic fruition. These images are employed in a similar manner by Gampopa in his Mahāmudrā system (Jackson 1992:101). *Co-emergent Union* then outlines how the practice of meditating on the clear light allows one to recognize the natural clear light at the time of death. The meeting of the natural clear light (*rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba*) and the clear light of meditation (*bsgoms pa'i 'od gsal*) is stated to be the attainment of Mahāmudrā. Then, based on this realization, one engaged in this practice is able take rebirth as a deity composed of empty clear light in the form of a illusory mental body

⁴⁷ See Braitstein (2014) for an edition and translation of this work.

⁴⁸ On the four yogas in later Tibetan literature see Cabezón, *Meditation on the Nature of Mind*, n. 277 and Takpo Tashi Namgyal 1986: 353-408. Schiller's (2014) work on the four yogas systemized under Phakmo Drupa Dorjé Gyalpo (1110–1170) is not available to me.

(*manomayakāya*) that performs uncontaminated actions (*zag med kyi las kyi yid kyi rang bzhin gyi lus sgyu ma*).

Conclusion

Atiśa's teachings on Mahāmudrā represent a teaching tradition stemming from Tilopa and supplemented with an exegesis, focused on Cakrasaṃvara and its explanatory tantras, influenced by his institutional base at Vikramaśīla monastery. His teachings consistently focus on meditating on clear light as the co-emergent nature of the mind. The teaching of clear light is often associated with instruction on Mahāmudrā and based on Yoginī tantras such as Cakrasaṃvara. Atiśa's instruction on Mahāmudrā was initially structured along mainstream esoteric models of gradual progression through the creation stage followed by completion stage practices. He adapted his Mahāmudrā teachings to the contextual circumstances of his disciples in Tibet, providing instructions on the nature of the mind either as the culmination of the stages of the path or as a technique to recognize the co-emergent mind as the *dharmakāya*. Both sets of teaching were only given to his advanced students and in private. These teachings on pointing out the nature of the mind as the apex of the stages of the path teachings, concluding with calm abiding and special insight, were adapted by subsequent Kagyu based lineages of instruction. Along these lines, the *Co-emergent Union (Ihan cig skyes sbyor)* instruction on four yogas was taught by Atiśa in Tibet, and not, as some would assume, created by Gampopa. There is no evidence that Atiśa received any teachings on Mahāmudrā from Maitrīpa, nor that Atiśa's teaching on Mahāmudrā resembles Maitrīpa's system. In sum, Atiśa taught his own Indian monastic-based form of Mahāmudrā and later adapted it to the needs and capacities of his Tibetan disciples. These teachings were disseminated among early Kadampa communities, as well as among early figures who came to be associated with Kagyu traditions. Atiśa's teachings were gradually overshadowed by lineages affiliated with Marpa Lotsāwa, Milarepa, and the Mahāmudrā lineages developed by Gampopa. Yet, as the evidence in this article has demonstrated, Atiśa's teachings on Mahāmudrā significantly influenced subsequent Tibetan esoteric Buddhist practices, affecting them to a much greater degree than commonly recognized.

Appendix: Translation of Lord [Atiśa's] Great Seal Bestowed upon Gönpawa

Namo Devaguru! The teacher previously stated: what is called co-emergent union is an extremely profound special instruction that Atiśa bestowed upon Gönpawa, to the effect that the co-emergent mind itself is the *dharmakāya* and co-emergent appearance is the light of the *dharmakāya*, and they abide like the moon and the light of the moon, or like sandalwood and the fragrance of sandalwood. Moreover, at the time of practice, the special instruction of the guru is about the essence, nature, [876.5] and character of the mind.

In this regard, the essence of the mind is free from production, perdurance, and cessation. For example, when summer clouds disappear, or when winter snow-storms do not emerge, or when one sees the pure sky of autumn, then an indescribable vivid clarity comes at once. Likewise, the concepts of one's own mind, which have previously ceased, will not be produced in the future, and does not abide at all in between, is said to be vivid, limpid clarity without intrinsic nature. The nature of the mind appears in various aspects: its nature is empty of [876.10] production, cessation, or abiding. The character of mind is that it cognizes and variously appears as happiness and suffering, white and red and joy and sadness. Accordingly, the essence, nature, and character do not exist as three separate things. The co-emergent mind is itself unfabricated, [while] it is elaborated according to its mode of its appearance. Further, the basis is unfabricated, the path is unwavering and unceasing, and the result is beyond hope and fear.

At the time of practice: [Seated] on a pleasant seat with a cross-legged posture and the other [six] of the seven qualities of Vairocana,⁴⁹ meditate on [876.15] the four immeasurables⁵⁰ for all

⁴⁹ The seven qualities of the sitting position of Vairocana (*rnam snang chos bdun*) are having: (1) the legs crossed, (2) hands on the lap, (3) back straight, (4) shoulders spread, (5) head with chin slightly lowered, (6) tip of the tongue touching the palate of the mouth, and (7) eyes gazing past the tip of the nose.

⁵⁰ The 'four immeasurables' (*catvāry apramāṇāni*, Tib. *tshad med bzhi*) also known as the four 'abodes of Brahma' (*brahmavihāra*), are the contemplations of immeasurable love (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā*). *Mahāvīyutpatti*, 1503–7.

sentient beings. Then, all things that appear and exist in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are one's own mind. Eradicate the misunderstanding that the mind truly begins, remains, or comes to an end, [recognizing] it as unfabricated, unceasing, unthinking, and unestablished. Do not examine previous thoughts afterward; do not greet later thoughts beforehand; in the present do not observe anything all. As clarity is vividly established in the state of non-conceptuality, settle into it in a relaxed and composed [manner]. When random thoughts arise, those passing thoughts [877.1] are from the outset self-originated co-emergent mind-itself. For as long as [thoughts] abide, they abide as the co-emergent mind-itself, and although in the end they dissolve, they dissolve into the co-emergent itself, and vividly release into the state of dharmakāya. For example, passing clouds that arise in the pure sky, at first arise from the sky, abide for a while in the sky itself, and dissipate in the end, dissolving into the sky itself.⁵¹

When you [877.5] understand thus that nothing surpasses the co-emergent, and meditate, then four aspects of yoga will successively appear. When, within the clear essence of mind, the vivid clarity of the lack of intrinsic nature does not diverge, this is called the yoga of one-pointedness. At the time that [yoga] arises in the [mental] continuum, and a worldly appearance is slightly apprehended as true, at times you think that a good meditation has occurred, and at times, when cognition is bereft of the moisture of dharmatā, you think you are stable, [but] thoughts undergo multiple ups and downs.

When you have apprehended the special instructions, have repeatedly and unwaveringly entered equipoise [877.10], and expanded the nature of cognition that has entered into meditation, then non-conceptuality is bereft of all extremes of proliferation, such as existence and non-existence, permanence and annihilation, coming and going, and so forth. That realization [of everything] as the *dharmakāya* is called the yoga bereft of proliferations. At the time this is generated in the continuum, all previous dharmas that have passed, conventional fabrications, are cut off.

When that [experience] arises in one's mental continuum, then all past phenomena turn into emptiness and conventional

⁵¹ For the image of clouds melting in the sky see Tilopa's *Mahāmudropadeśa*, verse 11 (Tiso and Torricelli 1991: 212).

proliferations are severed. Like an impoverished person finding a treasure, through cultivating this, all appearances of the worlds of inanimate and sentient beings are understood as one's own mind, and the nature of one's own mind is understood to be unproduced—that is the yoga of multiplicity as having one taste.

When that arises in the mental continuum, [877.15] then, through the realization that appearances that variously appear as the concepts of graspable object and grasping subject are the mind itself, co-emergent as the *dharmakāya*, purified thoughts return to their own abode. When you meditate in this way, then your own cognition is liberated from meditator and meditation object, and as equipoise and post-meditation do not exist, objects and their subjects are cognized as non-dual—that is called the yoga of non-meditation.

When that arises in the mental continuum, then, through the realization of one's own mind as *dharmakāya*, the fires of the mental afflictions disappear and are pacified. It is taught that all virtuous qualities are naturally produced. Furthermore, the radiant essence of mind is without concepts, and its inherent nature is free from production, cessation, and abiding [877.20]. Characteristics, *samsāra*, *nirvāṇa*, and so forth appear as [mere] concepts and at that time one one-pointedly realizes the mere essence.

In this way, through sequential meditation on the four yogas, one's own unarisen mind is realized as *dharmakāya*, but when pains, aches, suffering, and so forth come about, they envelop the ordinary bodily configuration. It is like the example of the king of beasts, who completes the three powers in the womb of his mother but [is still] enveloped by the mother's body; or a garuḍa who spreads his wings within an egg but [is still] enveloped in the egg.⁵² [Likewise,] one's inner mind may be realized as *dharmakāya*, but because one is not free from the bodily configuration [877.25] produced though previous karma, it is not contradictory for happiness, suffering, and so forth to arise.

Thus, through practice, at the time of death [878.1] earth dissolves into water, water dissolves into fire, fire dissolves into wind, wind dissolves into consciousness, and when both wind and the mind enter into the central channel, they naturally ascend to the

⁵² See Jackson 1992 on the image of the lion cub or garuḍa bird in Buddhist discourse.

place where gnosis is co-emergent with reality (*dharmatā*).⁵³ In this way, a person who is already familiar [with this] through the power of meditation recognizes it upon encountering it, and when the natural clear light and the clear light of meditation meet, one gains the accomplishment of the Great Seal.

Then, [878.5] having taken up a deity's body unified from within the state of empty clear light, anyone trained in this who manifests such a body produces benefit for sentient beings, and further helps others through taking up an illusion-like mental body consisting of uncontaminated karma.⁵⁴ If one does not meditate in this way, the natural clear light will not be recognized. Even if it is recognized, one will, by virtue of natural grasping at entities and signs, be terrified and afraid of that [clear light], and will [assume] a body that is comprised of grasping and craving, the causes [of *samsāra*]. When through *karma* and so forth one thusly circles uninterruptedly in the circle of cyclic existence, one must take on immeasurable [878.10] suffering. Thus, having obtained from the discourse of a holy spiritual teacher the antidote to [cyclic existence], this special instruction on co-emergent union, one should meditate unwaveringly on it. In order to enhance realization, in the times between [meditation sessions], undertake immeasurable efforts to offer maṇḍalas and so forth, make requests to the spiritual teacher and the three jewels, make tsha-tshas, circumambulate, prostrate, recite mantras, distribute gifts, and so forth. Through practicing in this way, you will produce [a result] in a month or a year. Furthermore, it is taught that in all situations post-meditative awareness should cognize [878.15] [things] as illusion-like.

This *Essential Condensed Summary of the Special Instructions on Co-emergent Union* was written down by the śākya monk Kumara. The lineage was transmitted successively from Vajradhara, Tilopa, Nāropa, Ḍombiheruka, Lord [Atiśa], Gönpawa, [Geshe] Tönpa, Sharwapa (*shar ba pa*), and Tapkhawa (*stabs kha ba*). [Later, came] the great master Jamnyak (*'jam nyag*), the spiritual teacher Drakgyalwa (*grags rgyal ba*), then myself.

⁵³ For this dissolution process see Nāgabodhi's *Karmāntavibhaṅga*, D, rgyud, Ngi, fol. 145b–147a.

⁵⁴ On the *manomayakāya* in Buddhist soteriology and cosmology see Lee 2014.

Appendix 2: Transliteration of *Jo bo rjes dgon pa ba la gnang ba'i phyag chen* (2006: 876–78)⁵⁵

na mo de wa gu ru / slob dpon pa'i zhal snga nas / lhan cig skyes sbyor bya ba jo bos dgon pa ba la gnang ba'i gdam ngag shin tu zab pa yin gsungs / de yang sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku dang / snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku'i 'od gnyis po de / nyi ma dang / nyi ma'i 'od zer ram / canda dang / canda gyi dri bzhin du gnas pa yin gsungs / de yang nyams su len pa'i dus su bla ma'i gdam ngag gis sems kyi ngo bo / rang bzhin [876.5] mtshan nyid gsum yin /

de la sems kyi ngo bo skye 'gags gnas gsum dang bral ba cig yin te / dper na nam zla dbyar gyi sprin dang na bun ni yal / dgun gyi 'tshub ma ni ma lang / ston gyi nam mkha' rnam par dag pa la / bltas pa'i dus su gsal la ngos bzung med pa'i sa le seng nge ba cig tu 'ong / de bzhin du / rang gi sems kyi rtog pa / snga ma 'gag phyi ma ma skyes / bar du ci la yang mi gnas pa / sa le seng nge ba gsal la rang bzhin med pa cig yin gsungs / sems kyi rang bzhin rnam pa sna tshogs su snang yang / rang bzhin skye 'gags gnas gsum [876.10] gyis stong ba yin / sems kyis mtshan nyid ni / bde sdug dkar dmar dga' mi dga' sna tshogs su snang zhing rtogs cig yin / de ltar ngo bo rang bzhin mtshan nyid gsum po de yang tha dad gsum du gnas pa ma yin te / sems lhan cig skyes pa spros med de nyid snang tshul de bzhin du snang ba yin / de yang gzhi ma bcos pa / lam ma yengs shing 'gag pa med pa / 'bras bu re dvogs dang bral bas nyams su blangs so /

nyams su len pa'i dus su /:⁵⁶ bde ba'i stan la rdo rje skyil mo krung la sogs pa rnam par snang mdzad kyi chos bdun dang ldan pas 'dug la / [876.15] sems can thams cad la tshad med pa bzhi sgoms / de nas snang srid 'khor 'das kyi chos thams cad rang gi sems yin / sems skye 'gag gnas gsum dang bral bar sgro 'dogs bcad la / ma bcos mi dgag / mi bsam mi bsgrubs / rtog pa snga ma'i rjes su mi dpyad / phyi ma'i ngon mi bsu / da ltar ba cir yang mi dmigs pa / gsal la mi rtog pa'i ngang du seng nge ye lhod cing bzhag de ltar bzhag pas / rtog pa 'al 'al byung na rnam par rtog

⁵⁵ The Tibetan text has been broken into paragraphs, to reflect the divisions in the translation.

⁵⁶ I have given /: for the *rin chen spung shad* punctuation throughout the text.

pa [877.1] glo bur ba de dang po yang sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa
rang las byung / bar du gnas kyang sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa
rang la gnas / tha ma thim yang lhan cig skyes pa rang la thim
zhing / chos sku'i ngang du lhan lhan gtong ba yin te / dper na nam
mkha' rnam par dag pa la glo bur dang sprin byung ba de dang po
yang nam mkha' las byung / bar du gnas kyang nam mkha' rang la
gnas / tha ma thim yang nam mkha' rang la thim pa bzhin no /

de [877.5] ltar tham cad lhan cig skyes pa las ma 'das par
shes par byas shing / bsgom pas rnal 'byor rnam pa bzhi rim
gyis 'char ba yin te / sems kyi ngo bo gsal la rang bzhin med pa sa
le seng nge ba la mi 'phro ba de la / rtse cig gi rnal 'byor zer / de
rgyud la skyes pa'i dus su 'jig rten gyi snang ba 'di bden zhen
chung du 'gro nyams la res bsgom bzang po skyes snyam pa dang /
res shes pa chos nyid kyi brlan dang bral nas 'dug snyam du mtho
dman mang po 'ongs te /

gdams ngag gis zin par byas te ma yengs par yang dang
yang du mnyam par bzhag [877.10] par bya zhing goms su gzhug
shes pa'i ngo bo gdal la rtog pa med pa yod med rtog chad
/ 'gro 'ong la sogs spros pa'i mtha' thams cad dang bral ba / chos
kyi skur rtogs pa de la spros bral gyi rnal 'byor zer ba yin /

de rgyud la skyes pa'i dus su sngar gyi chos thams cad
phyin shun du 'gro tha snyad kyis spros pa chod/ dbul pos gter
rnyed pa dang 'dra / de la goms par byas pas snod bcud du snang
ba thams cad rang gi sems su shes shing sems kyi rang bzhin skye
med du shes pa de la du ma ro cig gi rnal 'byor bya ba yin /

de rgyud la skyes pa'i dus su / [877.15] gzung 'dzin gyi
rnam rtog sna tshogs su snang ba yang sems nyid lhan cig skye pa
chos kyi skur rtogs pas / rtog pa rang sar dag nas 'gro de ltar
goms par byas pas rang gi shes pa bsgom bya dang sgom byed las
grol nas / mnyam rjes med par yul yul can gnyis med du rtogs pa
de la bsgoms du med pa'i rnal 'byor zer /

de rgyud la skyes pa'i dus su / rang sems chos skur rtogs
pas nyon mongs pa'i me 'dag zhi / yod tan thams cad shugs la skye
gsungs / de yang sems kyi ngo bo gsal la rtog pa med pa / rang
bzhin skye 'gag gnas gsum dang bral [877.20] ba /: mtshan
nyid 'khor 'das la sogs pa rtog par snang ba de dang / rtse cig gis
dus su ngo bo tsam rtogs /

de ltar rnal 'byor bzhi rim pa bzhin bsgoms pas rang gi
sems skye ba med pa chos kyi skur rtogs kyang na tsha dang sdug

bsngal sogs pa 'ong ba na tha mal pa'i lus kyi rgyar 'thum pas lan pa yin te / dper na gcan gzan gyi rgyal po ma'i khong du rtsal gsum rdzogs kyang ma'i lus kyi rgyar 'thum pa'am / khyung sgong nga'i nang du gshog gru rgyas kyang sgong nga'i rgyas 'thum pa dang 'dra ste / nang du sems chos kyi skur rtogs kyang sngar las kyis bskyed pa'i lus [877.25] kyi rgya dang ma bral bas bde sdug la sogs pa 'byung ba 'gal ba med do /

de ltar nyams su blangs pas 'chi [878.1] ba'i dus su sa chu la thim / chu me ma thim / me rlung la thim / rlung rnam par shes pa la thim / rlung sems gnyis / a wa dhu tir tshud pa'i dus su / chos nyid lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes rang bzhin gyis gnas pa'i steng du song ba dang /: de ltar bsgoms pa'i stobs kyis sngar 'dris kyi mi dang / 'phrad pa ltar ngo shes te / rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba dang / bsgoms pa'i 'od gsal gnyis phrad nas phyag rgya chen po'i dngos grub thob /

de nas 'od [878.5] gsal stong pa'i ngang las zung 'jug lha'i skur langs nas gang la cis 'dul ba de la de'i skur bstan nas / sems can gyi don byed de / de yang zag med kyi las kyi yid kyi rang bzhin gyi lus sgyu ma lta bu blangs nas gzhan don byed do // de ltar ma bsgoms na / rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal ba de ngos mi zin / zin yang dngos po dang mtshan mar 'dzin pa'i rang bzhin yin pa'i stobs kyis de la 'jigs shing skrag nas / rgyu sred len gyi mtshams sbyar nas lus yin / las sogs de ltar 'khor ba'i 'khor lo rgyun ma chad par 'khor bas / sdug bsngal dpag [878.10] tu med pa len dgos pas / de'i gnyen por lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi gdams ngag 'di bla ma dam pa'i gsung las thob par byas la ma yengs par sgoms / rtogs pa'i bogs 'don pa la / bar skabs su maṅdal sogs pa'i mchod pa phul yin bla ma dang dkon mchog la gsol ba gtab / tsha tsha 'debs pa / bskor ba / lha phyag bzlas brjod / sbyin gtong la sogs rnam la brtson 'grus dpag tu med pa brtsams / de ltar nyams su blangs pas zhag zla ba / lo'i skyed 'ong ba yin / de yang rjes shes kyis gnas skabs thams cad du sgyu ma lta bur [878.15] shes par bya gsungs /

lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi gdam ngag mdor bsdus snying po zhes bya ba shākya'i dge slong ku ma ra yis yi ger bkod pa'o // brgyud pa ni / rdo rje 'chang / te lo / nā ro / doṃ bhi he ru ka / jo bo / dgon pa ba / ston pa / po to ba / shar ba na {em. pa} / stabs kha ba nas rim par brgyud de / mkhan chen 'jam nyag / bla ma grags rgyal ba /: des bdag la'o // //

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