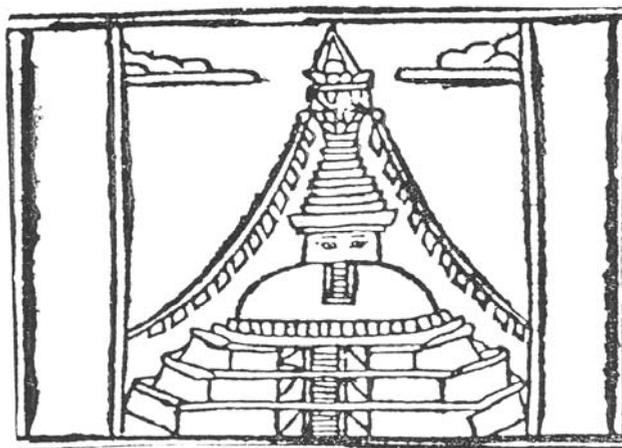


# Unearthing Himalayan Treasures

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Paracanonical Manuscript-Traditions  
of Tilopa's *Ganggā ma Mahāmudrā*:  
Translation of the Version Preserved by the  
Aural Transmission Tradition\*

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One of my earliest memories of being a young student at Hamburg University is that of an imposing figure sitting on the edge of a table, in discussion with other senior students and professors at our small institute at the Grindelallee. That person was, I learned later, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, on a brief visit from his long stretch of service as the director of the Nepal-German Preservation Project in Kathmandu, Nepal. Little did I know then about his work in Nepal, and nothing did I suspect about the importance that his ground breaking work would have for my future as a Tibetologist. Indeed, had he not, with his great skill in negotiation, opened up the “forbidden valleys of Nepal” for further expeditions of the project, the professional life of many Tibetologists would have taken a different course. Not only for that but certainly for that, in particular, do we owe him a great debt of gratitude. It is, therefore, a great pleasure for me to be able to contribute to the present congratulatory volume.

In this paper, I would like to continue the work I have started with my edition of some paracanonical versions of Tilopa's *Ganggā ma Mahāmudrā* (Sobisch 2018). Of the translations that already exist of the *Ganggā ma*, most follow the canonical versions (e. g. Trungpa 1976: 157–63; Tiso and Torricelli 1991). One of three exceptions known to me is Chang (1977: 25–30), which follows a paracanonical structure. However, it is made from a Chinese translation by Fa Tsun, whose exact basis is not known. The text is merely a loose rendering of the original text, abbreviated, and hence of little benefit. Of particular value is the translation of Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's oral teaching (1999 and 2002) since it offers an authentic introduction to the actual practice of this teaching by one of the truly outstanding Tibetan luminaries of our time. This publication shows that the *Ganggā ma* is still a core text of a living tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. An interesting case is the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa dKon mchog yan lag's (1526–1583) commentary trans-

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lated by Karl Brunnhölzl (2007). Following the paracanonical structure, the Zhwa dmar pa is prone to use the language developed in Madhyamaka philosophy. He wrote a commentary that is a curious amalgam of essentially different traditions.<sup>1</sup> The basic verses included in his commentary are incorporated in my edition of the paracanonical versions (hereafter Z; Brunnhölzl used a modern computer edition while my edition used an *dbu med* manuscript; see list of sigla below).

Brunnhölzl's translation is a competent rendering of the basic text as it is incorporated in the Zhwa dmar pa's commentary. There are, however, some peculiarities that are lost when one does not compare the Zhwa dmar pa's text with the other paracanonical versions. An interesting example of such a peculiarity is the fact that line 1 of all other versions ("Even though the Great Seal cannot be taught") appears in Z as line 4 (Sobisch 2018: 467).<sup>2</sup> It is there connected with the following lines, where Z has *bstan* in place of *brten* (ll. 5–6). Thus, instead of saying "[In] space, for instance, what is supported (*brten*) by what? One's mind, the Great Seal, has no supported objects (*brten yul*)," Z reads: "For instance space — whereby can it be shown to someone? Likewise, in the [ultimate] nature, the Great Seal, there is no object to be shown." Thus, the Zhwa dmar pa may be hinting at the title of the text ("*upadeśa*"), containing the element of "showing, pointing out" (in Sanskrit), connecting it to the statement that (actually) Mahāmudrā cannot be shown.<sup>3</sup> Brunnhölzl, curiously, translates lines 5–6 as if he reads *brten*, and thus the peculiarity of the text he translates is lost to the reader.

Another interesting case is contained in lines 22–23, where Z says that the mind's luminosity "cannot be obscured by this cyclic existence (*'khor bas*) of aeons." Other editions have the stronger expression "by the confusion (*'khrul pas*) of aeons" or "by the darkness (*mun pas*) of aeons."

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Z, p. 96: *brtags shing dpyad na ... brtag mi bzod*; p. 97: *bden dngos gang du'ang ma grub pa*; on p. 98 we find an inference together with an example: ... *yin par bstan te/ gal te yin na ... 'gyur zhing/ de ltar 'gyur na ... nus par 'gyur ba las/ de ni mi 'gyur te/ dper na ... mi nus so/*. The Zhwa dmar pa also speaks of the negation of an entity without affirmation of it as a non-entity: *dngos po yin pa bkag pa ma gtogs dngos med yin par mi grub* (Z, p. 99); and so forth. Let me note here that it seems to be primarily the Karma bKa' brgyud pa tradition, and to some extent the 'Brug pa Padma dkar po (1527–1592), who seek to defend sGam po pa's way of teaching Mahāmudrā by talking about it in the language of Madhyamaka and calling it a "Sūtra-Mahāmudrā" (*mdo'i phyag rgya chen po*). I have never seen any tendency of this, for instance, in the literature of the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud pa, although that may be changing now in modern times.

<sup>2</sup> Z 93: (1) *dka' ba spyad cing bla ma la gus la//* (2) *sdug bsngal bzod ldan nā ro pa//* (3) *skal ldan khayed kyi blo la 'di ltar byos//* 94: (4) *phyag rgya chen po bstan du med kyis kyang//* (5) *dper na nam mkha' gang gis gang la bstan//* (6) *de bzhin rang bzhin phyag rgya che la bstan yul med//*. My edition of the paracanonical versions of the *Ganggā ma*, which includes the Zhwa dmar pa's text, can be downloaded at <https://rub.academia.edu/JanUlrichSobisch>.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Sonam Spitz for directing my attention to the possible wordplay between Skt. *upadeśa* and Tib. *bstan du med*.

Brunnhölzl translates line 27 as follows: “Through this expression [namely ‘luminosity’], it is not established in this way nor is there a basis for conventional labelling.”<sup>4</sup> I think it is problematic here to apply the negation (*med*) to both *grub* and *gzhi*. For this reason, obviously, the version in the *Phyag chen rgya gzhung* (henceforth G, see list of sigla below) has added another *med* before *cing* (*grub pa med cing ... gzhi med*). All other editions, however, read *ces* for *cing*: “there is no basis to impute the label ‘established’ because it is stated like that” (*brjod pa 'di 'dras grub ces tha snyad gdags gzhi med*).

Brunnhölzl's translation of line 32 puzzles me:<sup>5</sup> “... behold the dharma of the final leap (*la zla'i chos*).” The Zhwa dmar pa's commentary says (according to Brunnhölzl 2007: 109):<sup>6</sup> “Don't think anything in your mind, but take the final leap: within the stage of having resolved [your mind], behold the *dharmatā* of all *dharmas*.” However, Brunnhölzl takes the *la* of *la bzla ba* both as a *la don* particle (“but”) and as a part of what would be the technical term “to take the final leap” (*la bzla ba*). Does he, moreover, in translating this technical term, take this as the “crossing over” of the *khregs chod* practices of the Great Perfection teachings? I would rather tend to read it more generally as “to finally resolve s.th.,” which would render the Zhwa dmar pa's comments: “Resolve, finally, the not-thinking-anything-in-the-mind, i. e., behold the true reality of phenomena in a state of final resolve.” Here, the first part of the sentence repeats the basic text and the second part, after *ste*, provides the definition, glossing *la zla ba* with *thag chod pa* (“to come to a definitive decision”). Drikung Kyabgön Rinpoche (2011: 38–39), too, has defined *la bzla'i chos* in his commentary in the following way: “[To look at] the ‘resolved Dharmas’ [means that] one must look at the [vital] points about which one has come to a definitive decision” (*la bzla'i chos zhes sems su thag chod pa'i don la lta dgos*).

A corruption of the Tibetan text of Z seems to be line 68 (p. 105):<sup>7</sup> “If you become familiar with there being no object with which to become familiar (...).” Since the context is here the “king of practices” (l. 62: *sgom pa'i rgyal po*) and the absence of a path to be traversed in it, it is much more likely that this is a play with the transitive and intransitive forms *sgom pa* (“to practise”) and *goms pa* (“to familiarise with”), as we find it in all other manuscripts (except G). Hence, “if you familiarise (*goms*) yourself with that absence of objects to be practised (*bsgom*), you will obtain the highest awakening.”

<sup>4</sup> My square brackets. Z, l. 27, p. 99: *brjod pas 'di 'drar grub cing tha snyad gdags gzhi med//*.

<sup>5</sup> Z, l. 32, p. 100: *yid la ci yang ma bsam la zla'i chos la ltos//*.

<sup>6</sup> Z, p. 101: *yid la ci yang mi bsam pa la bzla ba ste thag chod kyi ngang nas chos rnams kyi chos nyid la ltos*.

<sup>7</sup> Z, p. 105: *goms pa'i yul med goms na bla med thob//*.

In line 95, Z (p. 107) has *snyems byed* (“to be self-inflated”), which is unexpected. However, all other manuscripts have *snyam byed* (“to speculate”): “Do not speculate and evaluate. Rest in the unborn essence,”<sup>8</sup> which makes good sense. Another interesting case is line 99. Here, the supreme conduct is variably described as “to be without wishes” (D and mKh: *'dod pa med*), “fully resolved and impartial” (G 89, Z, p. 108: *mtha' chod phyogs bral*),<sup>9</sup> “impartial and without grasping” (LNKU: *phyogs bral 'dzin med*), or even, in the canonical versions, “abiding naturally without acting” (Peking vol. 69, fol. 157r: *byar med rang gnas*) (see below for the list of sigla). All these versions are understandable as emphasising either the *śrāvaka* ideal of non-attachment, the *bodhisattva* ideal of impartiality, or the *siddha* ideal of non-activity. “Fully resolved” (G and Z), however, sticks out as unusual.

The term *rig pa gcud la bor* in line 106 is difficult (*rlung gi gnad gzung rig pa gcud la bor*), and dictionaries and commentators such as the Third Karmapa and the Drikung Kyabgön Chetsang Rinpoche offer no definition or explanation. The Zhwa dmar pa’s commentary (Z, p. 111) frames the term between two glosses, namely “not chasing after whatever might arise in awareness” (*rig pa la gang zhar gyi rjes su mi 'brang*) and “leaving alone/letting go” (*yal bar 'dor*). Since we do not have any other clues at the moment, I would suggest as a preliminary solution “leave awareness as it is,” which is perhaps what Brunnhölzl wanted to express with his choice of translation (“strip awareness bare”).

As I have argued in my edition of the Tibetan text, the versions mKhDGZ appear to be the least cross-contaminated, more ancient, and structurally more original manuscript editions, with mKh and D on the one hand, and G and Z on the other hand, being closely related. While Brunnhölzl translated Z, which is an example of the G/Z type of manuscripts, I have decided to chiefly follow the closely related manuscripts of the oral transmission (*snyan brgyud*) of Cakrasaṃvara and the Ḍākinī (D/mKh) in my translation. My aim is not to provide an ultimate translation of the *Ganggā ma*, but rather to make the many problems and variant readings of the different manuscript families visible. The *Ganggā ma* certainly is a textbook example of the necessity to compare different manuscripts of Tibetan texts whenever they are available.

## Sigla

**D** = *bDe mchog snyan brgyud nor bu skor gsum*. Collected ancient instructions for the practice of the orally transmitted teachings focussing upon Cakrasaṃvara

<sup>8</sup> L. 95: *snyam byed rtsis gdab mi bya skye med snying por bzhog/*. For *snyam byed*, see Jäschke 1871: 202: *phan snyam byed kyang* (“though one may imagine that it will help”).

<sup>9</sup> Brunnhölzl 2007: 114 translates: “freedom from the bias of decision making.”

- by various masters of the tradition. Arranged and edited by the Fourth 'Brugchen Padma dKar-po (1527-1592). Reproduced from a manuscript collection from Bhutan. Palampur: Sungrab Nyamso Gyunphel Parkhang, 1985, vol. 1. [handwritten *dbu can*] (TBRC W23155)
- G** = *Phyag chen rgya gzhung*. From an *dbu med* manuscript from 'Bri gung Thel. Bir: Tsondu Senghe, 1985. [handwritten *dbu med*] (TBRC W21554)
- K** = Khams sprul Don brgyud nyi ma (ed.). *bKa' brgyud pa Hagiographies. A Collection of rnam thar of eminent Masters of Tibetan Buddhism*. Tashijong, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh: Sungrab Nyamso Gyunphel Parkhang, 1972, vol. 1. (TBRC W20499)
- L** = manuscript from Langtang Gompa. NGMPP Reel no. L 21/48. [handwritten *dbu med*]
- mKh** = *mKha' 'gro snyan brgyud kyi yig rnying*. Vol. 1: *The ancient cycle of practice focussing upon the Cakrasamvara tantra according to an oral transmission received from Vajravarahi by Ras-chung rDo-rje-grags*. Vol. 2: *Teachings of the Drukpa Kargyu order for the practice of the spoken transmission of the Rechung Nyengyu. Compiled by Drukchen o4 Pema Karpo (1527-1592)*. Manuscript reproduced here is in Bhutanese cursive script and was copied from an earlier manuscript belonging to the Dechen Chokhor Chogon by the Bhutanese monk Monlam Rabsang. Darjeeling, W. B.: Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1982. [handwritten *dbu can*] (TBRC W21141)
- N** = manuscript from Nampa Kunden Monastery, Nepal. NGMPP Reel no. L 109/10. [handwritten *dbu can*]
- R** = Karma pa III Rang byung rdo rje. *Phyag rgya chen po ganggā ma'i 'grel pa*. In *gDams ngag mdzod*. Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimey, 1979-1981, vol. 7, pp. 36-37 (*sa bcad*), 37-47 (*'grel pa*). (TBRC W20877)
- U** = Urgyan Dorje (ed.). *Rare dKar brgyud pa Texts from Himachal Pradesh. A Collection of Biographical Works and Philosophical Treatises. Reproduced from Prints from Ancient Western Tibetan Blocks by Urgyan Dorje*. Ballimaran, Delhi: Jayyed Press, 1976. (TBRC W30121)
- Z** = Zhwa dmar pa V dKon mchog yan lag. *Phyag rgya chen po ganggā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi snying khu*. In *Selected Writings on Vajrayana Buddhist Practice by the Fifth Žwa-dmar dKon-mchog-'bangs. Reproduced from rare texts from the library of Žwa-dmar Rin-po-che*. Gangtok: Dzongsar Chhentse Labrang, 1979, vol. 1, 91-113. [handwritten *dbu med*] (TBRC W23927)

## Note

The translation follows D and mKh unless otherwise mentioned. The page breaks of D and mKh are given in round brackets. References to relevant variants of other editions are provided in the footnotes; their folio numbers are provided in the edition of the Tibetan text (Sobisch 2018; see <https://rub.academia.edu/JanUlrichSobisch>). The handwritten interlinear notes of D and mKh were not translated since they are not part of the actual text and do not add significantly to its understanding. The chapter headings in square brackets largely follow the topical outline (*sa bcad*) of R.

## Translation of the Paracanonical Text-Tradition

(D 8, mKh 10)

In Sanskrit: Mahāmudrā Upadeśa

In Tibetan: Pith Instruction of the Great Seal<sup>10</sup>

I pay homage to Glorious Great Bliss!<sup>11</sup>

[Advice to listen]<sup>12</sup>

- 1 Even though the Great Seal cannot be taught,
- 3 pain bearing, intelligent<sup>13</sup> Nāropa,
- 2 who is practising trials and revering the guru,
- 4 possessor of fortune, impress it upon your mind<sup>14</sup> like [the following]!

[Introduction to the nature of the mind]

[The mind is unobscured: The example of space]

- 5 [In] space,<sup>15</sup> for instance, what is supported by what?
- 6 One's mind, the Great Seal, has no supported objects.<sup>16</sup>
- 7 Relax [the mind] and rest within an unfabricated, absolute nature.<sup>17</sup> (D 9)

<sup>10</sup> G: om. *u pa de śa*; om. *'i man ngag*; KU: om. Skt. and Tib. title.

<sup>11</sup> LN: ... to Glorious Vajrasattva; GKU: om. whole line; R: ... to Glorious Vajradākinī; the canonical versions have: ... to the Glorious Inborn (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa*; Skt. *sahaja*).

<sup>12</sup> The line numbers refer to the Tibetan text. Lines 2 and 3 are translated in reverse order.

<sup>13</sup> KU: "worthy receptacle" (*snod ldan*).

<sup>14</sup> Tib. *snying*, which can mean "heart" or "mind." GLNKU have the non-ambiguous term "mind" (*blo*).

<sup>15</sup> KU: "nature of space" (*nam mkha'i rang bzhin*).

<sup>16</sup> Understanding *brten* [*pa'i*] *yul*. GDLN have "supporting object" (*rten* [*pa'i*] *yul*).

<sup>17</sup> KU: ll. 7-8 are in reverse order.

- 8 When the fetters are loosened, there is no doubt that they will come off.  
 (mKh 11)  
 9 For instance, looking [at] the centre of the space, [seeing] will cease by seeing.  
 10 Likewise, if you look with the mind at the mind,<sup>18</sup>  
 11 the accumulations of thoughts cease and highest awakening is obtained.<sup>19</sup>

[The mind is unobscured: The example of clouds]

- 12 For instance, the clouds of ground mist that vanish into the expanse<sup>20</sup> of  
 space<sup>21</sup>  
 13 are not going anywhere and not abiding anywhere.  
 14 Likewise, the mass of thoughts that arise from mind  
 15 are waves of thoughts that disappear because one has seen one's mind.<sup>22</sup>  
 (D 10)  
 16 For instance, the nature of space is beyond colour and shape.  
 17 It does not become obscured through various conditions.<sup>23</sup> (mKh 12)  
 18 Likewise, the essence of one's mind<sup>24</sup> is beyond colour and shape.  
 19 It is unobscured by virtuous, evil, white, and black phenomena.

[The mind is unobscured: The example of the sun]

- 20 For instance, the essence<sup>25</sup> of the luminous, brilliant<sup>26</sup> sun  
 21 will not be<sup>27</sup> veiled by the darkness of a thousand aeons.  
 22 Likewise, the luminosity of the essence of the mind<sup>28</sup>

<sup>18</sup> KU: ll. 11-12 are replaced by a single additional line, which has to be construed together with ll. 10 and 13: "Likewise, by knowing [how to] look [at] the mind, [thoughts like] the various clouds in the sky are not going anywhere and are not abiding anywhere" (*de bzhin sems lta ba yang shes par gyis// nam mkha'i ngang las(!) sprin ni sna tshogs pa// gar yang song med gang du'ang gnas med 'gyur//*).

<sup>19</sup> KU: om. whole line.

<sup>20</sup> LN: *dbyings*, synonymous with *kham*s of the other editions.

<sup>21</sup> KU: om. whole line.

<sup>22</sup> KU: "The waves of thoughts that are an unceasing natural expression (*'gag med rang rtsal*) disappear." LN: "[They] disappear within one's empty mind" (*rang sems stong pa'i nang du dengs par 'gyur//*).

<sup>23</sup> G: "It does not become obscured through [neither] white [nor] black [clouds]" (*dkar nag dag gis gos par gyur pa min//*). LNKU: *dkar nag sogs kyis gos par mi 'gyur ltar//*.

<sup>24</sup> LN: "nature of the mind" (*sems kyis(!) rang bzhin*); KU: "essence (*ngo bo*) of the mind"; G: "essence (*snying po*) of the mind, [i. e.] luminosity" (*'od gsal*).

<sup>25</sup> KU: "nature of the essence" (*snying po'i rang bzhin*).

<sup>26</sup> Following GLNKU: *dangs*.

<sup>27</sup> GLNKU: "cannot" (*mi nus*).

<sup>28</sup> GLNKU: "one's mind" (*rang sems*).

23 cannot be veiled despite<sup>29</sup> aeons of confusion.<sup>30</sup>

[The mind is inexpressible: The example of space]

24 For instance, however much space is labelled “empty,”<sup>31</sup>

25 space cannot be expressed like that.

26 Likewise, even though one’s mind is labelled “luminosity,”

27 there is no basis to impute the label “established” because it is stated<sup>32</sup> like that.<sup>33</sup> (D 11)

[Summary: The nature of mind]

28 Accordingly, the nature of the mind is from the beginning like space.

29 All phenomena [are such that] there is none that is not included in the mind.<sup>34</sup>

[The actual text]

[View and conduct]

30 There are not many<sup>35</sup> efforts to be made of the body. Dwell in the natural state.<sup>36</sup> (mKh 13)

31 Do not make many speech utterances. [They] are empty sounds, like an echo.<sup>37</sup>

[Meditative practice]

32 Not thinking in the mind, look at resolved dharmas!<sup>38</sup>

33 Since the body is without an essence, it is like a bamboo stalk.<sup>39</sup>

34 Mind is like the centre of space, beyond objects of thoughts.

<sup>29</sup> GLNKU: “by” (*pas*).

<sup>30</sup> Following LNKU: *’khrul*; G: “darkness” (*mun*); DmKh: “disorder” (*’khrugs*).

<sup>31</sup> KU: “Even though labels such as ‘praise’ and ‘blame’ are attached,” (*bstod dang smad sogs tha snyad btags gyur kyang*).

<sup>32</sup> Following KU: *brjod pa*.

<sup>33</sup> LN: “It is not demonstrable by stating ‘it is established like this’” (*’di ltar grub ces brjod pas mtshon du med*).

<sup>34</sup> LNKU: “One looks [at] all phenomena accordingly” (*chos rnams ma lus pa yang de ltar lta*).

<sup>35</sup> LNKU: “abandon!” (*thong la*).

<sup>36</sup> G: “Abandon completely bodily activities and dwell at ease in the natural state” (*lus kyi bya ba yongs thong gnal ma dal bar gdod*); read *rnal* and *sdod*.

<sup>37</sup> LNKU: “[They] are to be known to be like pleasing sounds” (*sgra snyan ltar shes bya*).

<sup>38</sup> See my introduction for the term “resolved dharmas” (*bzla’i chos*).

<sup>39</sup> LN: “like a water bubble” (*chu sbur ’dra*, read: *bur* or *lbu*). KU: “[the body] is a victorious support” (*rgyal ba’i rten*).

- 35 Rest [your mind] loosely in that state, neither releasing nor placing it.  
 36 If the mind is without a point of fixation, that is the Great Seal.  
 37 If you habituate to that and familiarise yourself with that, you will obtain unsurpassable awakening.<sup>40</sup>

## [Pledges]

- 38 Through<sup>41</sup> that which is taught as Mantra, the baskets of the Perfections,  
 39 the Vinaya, the Sūtra, etc.,  
 40 their respective scriptures, and the [philosophical] tenets, (D 12)  
 41 luminosity, [i. e.] Mahāmudrā, will not be seen.  
 42 Without mental engagement and free from all desires  
 43 [thoughts] are self-arising and self-subsiding, [and they will] subside like ripples on the water.<sup>42</sup>  
 44 If wishes arise,<sup>43</sup> luminosity is not perceived [and is] veiled.<sup>44</sup>  
 45 Maintaining<sup>45</sup> [luminosity] conceptually, the vows and pledges degenerate regarding their [true] meaning.<sup>46</sup> (mKh 14)  
 46 If you are not dwelling [artificially], not objectifying [luminosity], and not straying from the [true] meaning,  
 47 you are without degeneration regarding the [true] meaning,<sup>47</sup> a light in the darkness.<sup>48</sup>

## [Benefit]

- 48 If you are free from all wishes [and] do not dwell in the extremes,<sup>49</sup>  
 49 you will see all dharmas [of the scriptural] baskets.

<sup>40</sup> NKU: "the result" (*'bras bu*).

<sup>41</sup> Following GLKUZ: *yis* (the syllable occurs in the Tibetan text in l. 40).

<sup>42</sup> LN: "water bubbles" (*sbu ba*, read: *lbu ba*); KU: (*chu bur*).

<sup>43</sup> LNKU: "are grasped" (*'dzin*).

<sup>44</sup> LN: "is not realised" (*rtogs mi 'gyur*, N: *rtog*); KU: "is not perceived" (*mthong mi 'gyur*).

<sup>45</sup> mKh: *rtogs*; N: *brtogs*.

<sup>46</sup> A translation of the term *don* is often unsatisfactory. The term occurs eight times (ll. 45, 46, 47, 50, 51, 53, 87, 105). It seems to refer on the one hand to the realisation of "true reality" (*de bzhin nyid*), luminosity, etc., and on the other hand to the "vital point" of the means of realisation, i. e. not straying from mental non-engagement (*yid la mi byed*, as is suggested by the *mchan* in l. 53), etc. I have rendered it here ambiguously as "[true] meaning," which may cover both aspects.

<sup>47</sup> G: "without degeneration regarding the pledges" (*dam*); LN: ditto (*dam tshig*); KU: "without fault" (*nyes pa med*).

<sup>48</sup> LN: "eliminating darkness" (*mun sel*).

<sup>49</sup> LN: "if you dwell" (!) (*gnas pa na*); KU: "if you are beyond" (*'das pa na*).

- 50 If you endeavour in this [true] meaning, you will become free from the prison  
of *samsāra*.<sup>50</sup>
- 51 Remaining in meditative balance with regard to this [true] meaning, all evil  
and veils will be burned.<sup>51</sup>
- 52 [This] is explained to be the light [of] the essence of the teaching.

## [Defects]

- 53 The foolish beings [who] have no interest in this [true] meaning  
54 are only continuously swept away by the river of *samsāra*. (D 13)  
55 The suffering of the lower realms is unbearable.<sup>52</sup> Oh, fools! What a pity!

## [The practice]

## [Preparations]

## [Cultivating renunciation relying on the guru]

- 56 [If] you wish to be free from endless<sup>53</sup> suffering, rely on the skilled guru.  
57 Your mind will be liberated through the infusion of the blessings to the mind.<sup>54</sup>  
58 Therefore, through efforts, make the guru your path!<sup>55</sup>

## [Ascertaining the result of view, practice, and conduct]

- 59 Oh no! These phenomena of *samsāra* are meaningless, the cause of suffering!  
60 Since created phenomena are without essence, look at the essence of that  
which is meaningful.<sup>56</sup> (mKh 15)

<sup>50</sup> LN: “By endeavoring in this [true] meaning, you will realise [that] *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are non-dual” (*‘di don gzhof bas ‘khor ‘das gnyis med rtogs*; N: *‘di don rtog*). KU: om. whole line.

<sup>51</sup> KU: “*samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* will be non-dual” (*‘khor ‘das gnyis su med*); LN: om. whole line.

<sup>52</sup> GKU: “never ending” (*mi zad*; L: *mi bzad*).

<sup>53</sup> D: “unbearable” (*mi bzod*).

<sup>54</sup> G: “heart/mind” (*snying*); LNKU: om. *sems/snying*.

<sup>55</sup> G: om. whole line.

<sup>56</sup> LNKU: instead of ll. 59–60: “Oh no! Since the created phenomena of *samsāra* are without essence, take out the essence of the meaningful created phenomena and hold it dear!” (*kye ho/ ‘khor ba’i bya(!) chos snying po med pa’i phyir// bya(!) chos don ldan snying po len pa bces/*). Drikung Kyabgön Rinpoche explains the term *byas chos* in his commentary in the following way (pp. 48–49): “You may perform any number of the roots of virtue of means, but if they are not touched by the elixir of discriminating knowledge, they do not go beyond *samsāra*” (*thabs kyi dge ba’i rtsa ba ji snyed cig mchis kyang/ de shes rab kyi rtsis ma zin na/ ‘khor ba las ma ‘das*). Thus, these “created dharmas” are factors or phenomena created by a mind lacking discriminating knowledge. Such factors only lead to further temporary happiness or suffering within cyclic existence. Z (p. 105) points out that duality is the cause that produces (*byas*) the suffering of cyclic existence of causes and results, whose

- 61 If you transcend<sup>57</sup> subject and object completely, [that] is the king<sup>58</sup> of views.  
 62 If you are without distraction,<sup>59</sup> [that] is the king of practices.  
 63 If you are without<sup>60</sup> deliberate effort, [that] is the king of conducts.<sup>61</sup>  
 64 If you are without<sup>62</sup> hope and fear, the result will become manifest.  
 65 Beyond the object of observation, the nature of the mind will be visible, (D  
 14)  
 66 the precious [jewel of] compassion and resolve for awakening.<sup>63</sup>  
 67 A path [to be] traversed does not exist. [This is] the threshold [of] Buddha-  
 hood.  
 68 If you familiarise yourself with that absence of objects<sup>64</sup> to be practised, you  
 will obtain the highest awakening.<sup>65</sup>  
 69 Without a basis for [anything] to be done, dwell in the state of the fundamen-  
 tal nature.<sup>66</sup>

[How to abandon distractions and practise in solitude]

- 70 Oh no! Even though you have thoroughly realised the mundane dharmas,  
 71 they cannot persist; they are like a dream or an illusion.  
 72 Dreams [and] illusions do not exist in truth.  
 73 Therefore, cultivate repulsion and abandon mundane activities!<sup>67</sup>  
 74 Cut off<sup>68</sup> all connections [of] attachment and aversion [to] companions and  
 homeland.  
 75 Practise alone in the solitude at the edge of a forest and in the wilderness of  
 mountains.<sup>69</sup> (mKh 16)

phenomena are all empty. KU: om. *bya chos* of l. 60; KU: “hold dear what must be familiarised” *gom par bya ba gces*.

<sup>57</sup> LNKU: “being free from” (*bral*).

<sup>58</sup> G: “supreme king” (*rgyal po mchog*).

<sup>59</sup> LN: “without abandoning, accepting, and distraction” (*spang blang yengs med*, N: *spangs blangs yeng med*); KU: “without abandoning and accepting” (*spang blang med par*).

<sup>60</sup> LNKU: “beyond” (*las 'das*).

<sup>61</sup> KU: “great conduct” (*spyod pa chen po*). LN: “supreme conduct” (*spyod pa mchog*).

<sup>62</sup> KU: “if you are free from” (*bral na*). LN: “free from all” (*kun bral*, without *na*).

<sup>63</sup> This line appears only in mKhD.

<sup>64</sup> KU: “path” (*lam*).

<sup>65</sup> LNKU: “you will be realised” (*mngon du 'gyur||*).

<sup>66</sup> GZ: om. whole line.

<sup>67</sup> LN: “If you understand that accordingly, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are non-dual” (*de ltar shes na 'khor 'das gnyis su med//*). KU: “Having understood that accordingly, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are without abandoning and accepting” (*de ltar shes nas 'khor 'das spang blang bral//*). Additional line in LN: “To realise that, abandon mundane activities!”

<sup>68</sup> LN: “having abandoned” (*spangs nas*).

<sup>69</sup> LNKU: “on forest paths and mountain clefts” (*nags kyi bseb dang ri sul du*).

- 77 Dwell in the state that cannot be practised  
 76 [that arises] from emptiness [and] compassion endowed with the essence.<sup>70</sup>  
 78 If you obtain [that which is] without obtainment, you obtain Mahāmudrā.<sup>71</sup>  
 79 The trunk of a tree, for instance, grows branches and leaves.  
 80 Cutting a single root causes a million branches to wither. (D 15)  
 81 Likewise, the thoughts [and their] accumulations [are] the causes and [their]  
 various results,  
 82 [which are such that] by cutting the root, the leaves of *samsāra* wither.<sup>72</sup>

[Showing the benefits of practising in that way]

- 83 For instance, the darkness accumulated in a thousand aeons, too,  
 84 [is such that] the [whole] mass of darkness is removed<sup>73</sup> by a single lamp.  
 85 Likewise, through a single moment<sup>74</sup> of one's mind's luminosity,<sup>75</sup>  
 86 the evil and veils of the darkness<sup>76</sup> accumulated for aeons are removed.

[The actual practice]

- 87 Oh my! Through mentally fabricated dharma one does not see the [true] mean-  
 ing that is beyond the [proliferating] mind.  
 88 One does not realise<sup>77</sup> the unfabricated meaning through<sup>78</sup> created phenom-  
 ena.  
 89 If you want to obtain<sup>79</sup> the unfabricated meaning<sup>80</sup> beyond the [proliferating]  
 mind,  
 90 get at the root of the mind and rest in naked awareness! (mKh 17)

<sup>70</sup> This line appears only in mKhD. A note says that “the essence” with which emptiness and compassion are endowed is luminosity.

<sup>71</sup> LNKU: “Obtain the unobtainable Mahāmudrā!” (*thob med phyag rgya chen po thob par byos*; KU: *mdzod*).

<sup>72</sup> LNKU (disregarding orthographical variants): “Likewise, if you cut one root of the mind, a million branches and leaves such as ‘subject and object’ wither” (*de bzhin sems kyi rtsa ba gcig bcad na// gzung 'dzin la sogs yal 'dab khri 'bum skam//*). These lines are condensed to a single line in G: “Likewise, if you cut the root of the mind, the leaves and petals of *samsāra* wither” (*de bzhin sems kyi rtsa ba bcad na 'khor ba'i lo 'dab skam//*).

<sup>73</sup> LNKU: “is removed in a single instant” (*skad cig nyid la sel//*).

<sup>74</sup> LNKU: “in a single moment of realisation” (*rtogs pa'i skad cig la*).

<sup>75</sup> LNKU: “of awareness-luminosity” (*rang rig 'od gsal*).

<sup>76</sup> GLNKU: “cognitive misorientation” (*ma rig*).

<sup>77</sup> GD: “arrive [at]” (*slebs*).

<sup>78</sup> KU: “arrive at the stage of the unfabricatedness of” (*kyi byar med sar mi sleb*).

<sup>79</sup> L: “realise” (*rtogs*).

<sup>80</sup> Following GLNKUZ: “the meaning” (*don de*). DmKh: *chos 'di*.

- 91 Allow the river of the stains of thoughts<sup>81</sup> to clear.  
 92 Do not interrupt or establish appearances. Leave them as they are.<sup>82</sup> (D 16)  
 93 Your mind is released within the seal without<sup>83</sup> abandoning and accepting.  
 94 Since the basic consciousness is unborn, the covering [through] the veil of latencies is abandoned.  
 95 Do not speculate<sup>84</sup> and evaluate. Rest<sup>85</sup> in the unborn essence.<sup>86</sup>  
 96 Appearances are self-appearing, and the phenomena of the [proliferating] mind are [self]-exhausting.<sup>87</sup>  
 97 Completely released<sup>88</sup> from extremes is the supreme king of views.  
 98 Boundless, deep, and vast is the supreme king of practices.<sup>89</sup>  
 99 If one is without any wishes, that is the supreme king of conducts.<sup>90</sup>  
 100 Without hopes, the self-appearing<sup>91</sup> is the supreme king of results.

[Illustrating the three types of persons through examples]

- 101 First, [mental] activity is like a river [running in] a gorge.<sup>92</sup>  
 102 In the middle, [it is like] the river Ganges, flowing gently.

<sup>81</sup> LNKU: “let the waves [of thoughts] subside within themselves” (*rba rlabs rang sar dangs su chug*).

<sup>82</sup> LN: “Even though / Although / Whatever [thoughts / appearances] appear, abandon abandoning and accepting and interrupting and establishing” (*ji ltar snang yang spong len dgag bsgrub spang// N: spongs and spangs*); KU: “... do not interrupt, establish, [or] abandon [them]” (*ji ltar snang yang dgag sgrub spong mi bya//*). Grammatically possible would also be “do not abandon interrupting and establishing,” but that seems unlikely.

<sup>83</sup> G: “if they are without (*med na*) ... they are the Great Seal,” LNKU: “all possible appearances that are without ... are the Great Seal” (*med pa'i snang srid phyag rgya che*).

<sup>84</sup> D: *mnyam rjes!*

<sup>85</sup> GLNKU: “[you are] released” (*grol*).

<sup>86</sup> LNKU: “self-arisen essence” (*rang byung snying po / por*).

<sup>87</sup> The line is heavily annotated in DmKh. Between “self-arising” (*rang snang*) and mind (*blo*) mKh has the note *la dbang bsgyur bar*. See in this context LN: *dbang gyur blo yis* and KU: *sgyur byed blo'i*. They all seem to express the idea that the proliferating mind (*blo*) somehow manipulates self-arising appearances. The notes in D make no sense to me.

<sup>88</sup> Following GLNKU: *grol*.

<sup>89</sup> KU: “Boundless, deep, profound, and self-arisen is the practice” (*mu med gting zab rang byung bsgom pa yin*).

<sup>90</sup> GZ: “Fully resolved and impartial is the supreme king of conducts” (*mtha' chod phyogs bral spyod pa'i rgyal po mchog*); LNKU: “Impartial and without grasping is the king of conducts” (*phyogs bral 'dzin med spyod pa'i rgyal po ste*). KU: “... is the cutting off of the deviations / errors of conduct” (*spyod pa'i gol sa chod*).

<sup>91</sup> GLNKUZ: “self-abiding” (*rang gnas*).

<sup>92</sup> L: “like a waterfall” (*'bab chu 'dra*).

103 Finally, it is like [an ocean where] the rivers meet [like] mother and son.<sup>93</sup>  
 104 Because true reality [is] the meeting of mother and son, dwell in that state.<sup>94</sup>  
 105 If an individual of a lesser mind [can]not dwell in the [true] meaning (mKh  
 18; D 17)  
 106 he should seize the vital points of wind and leave awareness as it is.<sup>95</sup>  
 107 Through many branches of gazing and focusing the mind,  
 108 he should control [the mind] until he dwells in the state of true reality.<sup>96</sup>

[How a person of lower capacity practises]

109 If one relies on a Karmamudrā, the gnosis of bliss and emptiness arises<sup>97</sup>  
 110 and one enters into the union [through] the blessing [of] method and discrim-  
 inating knowledge.  
 111 [The drop] is to be slowly brought down, retained, reversed, drawn up,  
 112 conveyed to its abodes, and spread throughout the body.  
 113 If one is without desire and not clinging to that, the gnosis arises by itself.<sup>98</sup>

[The result of the practice]<sup>99</sup>

114 [One will have] a long life, [be] without white hair, and [one's vitality] will  
 increase like the moon.  
 115 [One will have] a radiant complexion and strength like a lion.  
 116 The common siddhis are quickly obtained, and one will make efforts with  
 regard to the supreme [ones].

[Dedication]

117 May this pith instruction of the vital points of the Great Seal  
 118 exist in the hearts of all beings endowed with fortune! (D 18)

<sup>93</sup> LNKU: "The final one is like the ocean where [all] the rivers have a single taste" (*tha ma chu rnams rgya mtshor ro gcig ltar*). Z (commentary, p. 110) explicitly mentions 'od gsal ma bu 'dres, as do the text and notes in DmKh.

<sup>94</sup> GZ: om. whole line.

<sup>95</sup> See my remarks on *gcud la bor* in the introduction.

<sup>96</sup> GLN: "awareness" (*rig pa*).

<sup>97</sup> KU: om. whole line.

<sup>98</sup> G: "bliss and emptiness gnosis" (*bde stong ye shes*). LN: om. whole line. KU: "Supported on the seal, bliss-and-emptiness arises by itself" (*phyag rgya la rten bde stong ngang gis 'char*).

<sup>99</sup> Additional line in LNKU: "Long life is quickly [obtained and] all the defects are removed."

## [Colophon]

This scripture, “Pith Instruction of the Vital Points of the Great Seal,” was taught by the Lord Tilopa to Guru Nāropa at the banks of the river Ganges as a Doha-song. It is [now] complete.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> G adds: “Bestowed by him on Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros” (*des mar pa chos kyi blo gros la gnang pa'o*). LNKU: “Lord of Yogis Tilopa” and “Glorious Nāropa,” and: “[Called]: ‘Self-arisen, inconceivable,’ and very profound” (*rang byung bsam gyis mi khyab pa zhes bya ba shin tu zab iti*). The colophons of Z and R mention Mar pa as the translator of the work.