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The Ever-Shifting Ground: From *Ālayavijñāna* to the Ultimate Reality  
in Yogācāra, Tantra, and Dzogchen

By

Khenpo Yeshe

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

South and Southeast Asian Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Jacob Dalton, Chair  
Professor Alexander von Rospatt  
Professor Patricia Berger  
Professor Robert Sharf

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The Ever-Shifting Ground: From *Ālayavijñāna* to the Ultimate Reality  
in Yogācāra, Tantra, and Dzogchen

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Khenpo Yeshe

## Abstract

The Ever-Shifting Ground: From *Ālayavijñāna* to the Ultimate Reality  
in Yogācāra, Tantra, and Dzogchen

by

Khenpo Yeshi

Doctor of Philosophy in South and Southeast Asian Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Jacob Dalton, Chair

This dissertation investigates the historical and philosophical formation of the Dzogchen Ground/ground (*gzhi*) in the Heart Essence (*snying thig*) tradition of Tibetan Buddhism from the ninth through the fourteenth centuries. The Dzogchen Ground/ground is inspired by Yogācāra and tantric ideas of *ālayavijñāna*, *Buddha-nature*, and the *universal ground of awakened mind*, while synthesizing Tibetan doctrinal innovations. Through constant reinterpretation, the *Ground/ground* comes to signify a distinctive nondual reality—a basis for both delusion and liberation, as well as the true nature of reality.

The study begins with an examination of Dunhuang Yogācāra manuscripts, notably Pelliot tibétain 654 and IOL Tib J 708, which preserve early Tibetan scholastic engagements with the theory of *ālayavijñāna* and demonstrate the integration of universal ground consciousness discourse into Tibet. It then analyzes the writings of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe, whose works reinterpret the universal ground within a tantric and contemplative framework that serves as the foundation for later Dzogchen formulations. Moreover, the dissertation examines the *Seventeen Tantras* of the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition, where the Ground/ground is presented as the primordial basis of both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* through the triadic structure of essence, nature, and compassion. Subsequent chapters investigate the systematic presentation of this doctrine in the writings of Nyima Bum and Longchenpa. Nyima Bum establishes the Ground/ground as a narrative device for the occurrence of both confusion and liberation. Longchenpa differentiates between the primordial ground (*ye gzhi*) and abiding reality (*gnas lugs*), resolving tensions in earlier Dzogchen cosmology by clarifying that liberation consists not in returning to an origin but in recognizing the ever-present nature of reality.

By situating the Dzogchen Ground/ground within the broader history of Tibetan Buddhism, this dissertation demonstrates how the concept emerges through centuries of transformation across multiple textual and intellectual traditions. In doing so, it shows how Tibetan Buddhist authors

adapt Yogācāra and tantric ideas into a distinctive Dzogchen discourse that would become foundational for later Heart Essence philosophy.

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                                                 |             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Abstract .....</b>                                                                                           | <b>1</b>    |
| <b>Table of Contents .....</b>                                                                                  | <b>i</b>    |
| <b>Acknowledgments .....</b>                                                                                    | <b>iv</b>   |
| <b>List of Abbreviations .....</b>                                                                              | <b>vii</b>  |
| <b>Glossary .....</b>                                                                                           | <b>viii</b> |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                                                                                       | <b>1</b>    |
| <b>A. Project Description.....</b>                                                                              | <b>1</b>    |
| <b>B. Major Challenges in Dzogchen Studies .....</b>                                                            | <b>1</b>    |
| <b>C. Methodology.....</b>                                                                                      | <b>3</b>    |
| <b>D. Literature Review .....</b>                                                                               | <b>3</b>    |
| <b>E. Key Terms .....</b>                                                                                       | <b>7</b>    |
| 1. Emptiness .....                                                                                              | 7           |
| 2. Ālayavijñāna .....                                                                                           | 7           |
| 3. The Universal Ground of Awakened Mind .....                                                                  | 8           |
| 4. The Universal Ground of Buddha-nature .....                                                                  | 8           |
| 5. Dzogchen Ground .....                                                                                        | 9           |
| <b>F. Chapter Outline .....</b>                                                                                 | <b>10</b>   |
| <b>Chapter 1 .....</b>                                                                                          | <b>13</b>   |
| <b>TWO TIBETAN YOGĀCĀRA TEXTS FROM DUNHUANG (the ninth-tenth century)..</b>                                     | <b>13</b>   |
| <b>A. Introduction .....</b>                                                                                    | <b>13</b>   |
| <b>B. The Role and Evolution of the Universal Ground Consciousness (Ālayavijñāna) in Buddhist Thought .....</b> | <b>13</b>   |
| <b>C. Historical Development and Scriptural Context.....</b>                                                    | <b>14</b>   |
| <b>D. The Dynamic Interplay of the Universal Ground Consciousness .....</b>                                     | <b>15</b>   |
| <b>E. Karma, Saṃsāra, and Nirvāṇa: The Dual Role of Universal Ground Consciousness .....</b>                    | <b>15</b>   |
| <b>F. Comparative Analysis of Universal Ground Consciousness Categories in Dunhuang Manuscripts .....</b>       | <b>16</b>   |
| 1. The First Dunhuang Manuscript: Pelliot Tibétain 654 .....                                                    | 17          |
| 2. The Second Dunhuang Manuscript: IOL Tib J 708 .....                                                          | 22          |
| <b>G. Conclusion .....</b>                                                                                      | <b>26</b>   |
| <b>Chapter 2 .....</b>                                                                                          | <b>28</b>   |
| <b>GNUPCHEN SANGYE YESHE AND THE FORMATION OF THE DZOGCHEN GROUND (late ninth-tenth century).....</b>           | <b>28</b>   |
| <b>A. Introduction .....</b>                                                                                    | <b>28</b>   |

|                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                             |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| B.                                                                                                                                               | Terminological Background .....                                                             | 30 |
| C.                                                                                                                                               | The Mind of Awakening in Early Tibetan Tantric Writings .....                               | 35 |
| D.                                                                                                                                               | The Universal Ground Consciousness of Buddha-nature.....                                    | 39 |
| 1.                                                                                                                                               | The Ghanavyūhasūtra .....                                                                   | 40 |
| 2.                                                                                                                                               | The Guhyagarbha Tantra.....                                                                 | 41 |
| E.                                                                                                                                               | The Great Conceptualization (Rnam thog chen po) .....                                       | 49 |
| F.                                                                                                                                               | Conclusion.....                                                                             | 51 |
| Chapter 3 .....                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                             | 52 |
| THE ARTICULATION OF THE DZOGCHEN GROUND IN THE HEART ESSENCE TRADITION (the eleventh-twelfth century) .....                                      |                                                                                             | 52 |
| A.                                                                                                                                               | Introduction .....                                                                          | 52 |
| B.                                                                                                                                               | Dzogchen and Tibetan Buddhism.....                                                          | 54 |
| C.                                                                                                                                               | The Dzogchen Heart Essence Ground.....                                                      | 55 |
| D.                                                                                                                                               | The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space.....                 | 57 |
| 1.                                                                                                                                               | Chapter One: The Ground's Way of Being .....                                                | 57 |
| 2.                                                                                                                                               | Chapter Two: The Teaching on the Way Confusion Arises from the Ground.....                  | 59 |
| 3.                                                                                                                                               | Chapter Three: The Teaching on the Way of Being and the Way of Appearing.....               | 60 |
| 4.                                                                                                                                               | Chapter Four: The Secret Absolute .....                                                     | 62 |
| 5.                                                                                                                                               | Chapter Five: The Teaching on the Ground for Confusion which Appears to All the Senses..... | 63 |
| E.                                                                                                                                               | Conclusion .....                                                                            | 65 |
| Chapter 4 .....                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                             | 68 |
| ZHANG NYIMA BUM'S ELEVEN TOPICS: GROUND, ĀLAYA, AND BUDDHA-NATURE IN THE DZOGCHEN HEART ESSENCE TRADITION (the twelfth-thirteenth century) ..... |                                                                                             | 68 |
| A.                                                                                                                                               | Introduction .....                                                                          | 68 |
| B.                                                                                                                                               | Nyima Bum's Selection of Quotations from the Seventeen Tantras.....                         | 70 |
| C.                                                                                                                                               | Ground, Path, and Fruition in the Eleven Topics .....                                       | 73 |
| D.                                                                                                                                               | Nyima Bum's Analysis of the Dzogchen Ground .....                                           | 75 |
| E.                                                                                                                                               | The Universal Ground (ālaya) .....                                                          | 77 |
| F.                                                                                                                                               | Buddha-Nature .....                                                                         | 79 |
| G.                                                                                                                                               | Conclusion .....                                                                            | 80 |
| Chapter 5 .....                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                             | 82 |
| THE NATURE OF LIBERATION IN LONGCHENPA'S THOUGHT: THE GROUND AND THE ABIDING REALITY (the fourteenth century).....                               |                                                                                             | 82 |
| A.                                                                                                                                               | Introduction .....                                                                          | 82 |
| B.                                                                                                                                               | The Ground vs. The Abiding Reality, or The Abiding Reality of The Ground?.....              | 84 |
| 1.                                                                                                                                               | Shared Opening Formula (Tantra → Nyima Bum → Longchenpa) .....                              | 84 |

|                                                                                         |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 2. Implicit Distinction between the Ground and Abiding Reality .....                    | 86         |
| 3. Ground as the Abiding Reality in Ground-Path-Fruition .....                          | 87         |
| 4. The Seven Assertions and Longchenpa's Critique.....                                  | 88         |
| 5. Eight Qualities of the Primordial Ground.....                                        | 96         |
| 6. Critique of Ground of Liberation (grol gzhi) vs. Place of Liberation (grol sa) ..... | 98         |
| 7. Three Functions of the Primordial Ground.....                                        | 101        |
| <b>C. Conclusion .....</b>                                                              | <b>102</b> |
| <b>Conclusion.....</b>                                                                  | <b>104</b> |
| <b>Bibliography.....</b>                                                                | <b>108</b> |
| <b>A. Primary Sources .....</b>                                                         | <b>108</b> |
| 1. Dunhuang Manuscripts .....                                                           | 108        |
| 2. Canonical Sources (Kangyur/Tengyur) .....                                            | 108        |
| 3. Nyingma Tantric Texts .....                                                          | 108        |
| 4. Tibetan Scholastic Works.....                                                        | 109        |
| <b>B. Secondary Sources .....</b>                                                       | <b>111</b> |
| <b>Appendices .....</b>                                                                 | <b>114</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX A.....</b>                                                                  | <b>114</b> |
| 1. Summary .....                                                                        | 114        |
| 2. Translation .....                                                                    | 114        |
| <b>APPENDIX B .....</b>                                                                 | <b>123</b> |
| 1. Summary .....                                                                        | 123        |
| 2. Translation.....                                                                     | 123        |
| <b>APPENDIX C .....</b>                                                                 | <b>148</b> |
| 1. Summary .....                                                                        | 148        |
| 2. Translation .....                                                                    | 148        |
| <b>APPENDIX D.....</b>                                                                  | <b>198</b> |
| 1. Summary .....                                                                        | 198        |
| 2. Translation .....                                                                    | 198        |

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## **List of Abbreviations**

Ch. — Chinese

ITJ — IOL Tib J

ITJ 708 — IOL Tib J, manuscript no. 708

PT — Pelliot Tibétain

PT 654 — Pelliot Tibétain, manuscript no. 654

Skt. — Sanskrit

Tib. — Tibetan

Tōh. — Tohoku catalog number used for texts in the Derge Kangyur and Tengyur

## Glossary

### **Ālayabodhicitta (Skt.; Tib. *kun gzhi byang chub sems*)**

A tantric reinterpretation of the universal ground: while *ālaya* is the foundation of consciousness, its nature is the awakened mind.

### **Ālayavijñāna (Skt.; Tib. *kun gzhi rnam shes / kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*)**

The Yogācāra term *universal ground consciousness*, or, literally, *all-ground consciousness*. A subliminal continuum that contains karmic seeds (Skt. *vāsanā*; Tib. *bag chags*), sustains continuity for mental processes between moments of cognition, and underlies mental states such as sleep, meditative cessation, and death. It is often abbreviated in Tibetan as the *universal ground* (Tib. *kun gzhi*), or *all-ground*.

### **Abiding Reality (Tib. *gnas lugs*)**

The true nature of reality. In Dzogchen, this is often distinguished from the primordial Ground.

### **Ignorance**

Ignorance is understood as adventitious. It arises conditionally and is not intrinsic. It is commonly described in Dzogchen literature as temporarily obscuring the primordial awareness.

### **Afflicted Mentation (Skt. *kliṣṭa-manas*; Tib. *nyon mongs pa can gyi yid*)**

A subtle mode of consciousness that appropriates the storehouse consciousness as a self and thereby generates the sense of personal identity.

### **Āśraya-parāvṛtti (Skt.; Tib. *gnas 'gyur / gnas gyur*)**

“Transformation of the basis,” the Yogācāra doctrine describing the transformation of the storehouse consciousness into awakened wisdom.

### **Bodhicitta (Skt.; Tib. *byang chub sems*)**

The awakened mind or aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Sometimes it is interpreted in Dzogchen contexts as the intrinsic nature of the mind.

### **Buddha-nature (Skt. *tathāgatagarbha*; Tib. *bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po*)**

The innate potential for awakening that is present in all sentient beings. It is often described as the intrinsic purity or luminous nature underlying conditioned existence.

### **Cittamātratā / Vijñaptimātratā (Skt.; Tib. *sems tsam / rnam par shes pa tsam*)**

“The Mind-only School,” or Yogācāra. A school of Buddhist thought that asserts that all phenomena are manifestations or representations of the mind.

### **Conjoining Genuine Universal Ground (Tib. *sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*)**

A term in Dunhuang Yogācāra materials. It highlights a function of the universal ground—connecting karmic processes with the arising of saṃsāric phenomena.

### **Cutting-Through (Tib. *khregs chod*)**

A central Dzogchen practice of directly recognizing the primordial purity through resting in awareness while conceptual elaboration is suspended.

### **Direct-Transcendence (Tib. *thod rgal*)**

An advanced Dzogchen practice in which visions unfold through the dynamic display of awareness.

### **Dharmakāya (Skt.; Tib. *Chos sku*)**

The “reality-body” of a Buddha which is the ultimate reality and the culmination of awakening.

**Dzogchen (Tib. *rdzogs chen*)**

“Great Perfection.” A contemplative and philosophical tradition of Tibetan Buddhism that emphasizes a direct recognition of the primordial nature of the mind and reality.

**Dzogchen Ground/ground (Tib. *gzhi*)**

The primordial basis of reality in Dzogchen philosophy, understood as the timeless source from which both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa arise. Sometimes, it is also treated as the true nature of reality, which means that the nature of the ground is the ultimate reality—the same as *dharmatā*.

**Eight Collections of Consciousness (Skt. *aṣṭa vijñānakāyāḥ*; Tib. *rnam shes tshogs brgyad*)**

The Yogācāra model of the mind, which consists of the five sensory consciousnesses, mental consciousness, afflicted mentation, and the storehouse consciousness.

**Eleven Topics (Tib. *tshig don bcu gcig*)**

A doctrinal framework within the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition. It offers a narrative arc that describes how sentient beings emerge from the primordial Ground through the arising of confusion. It also has a dénouement of attaining liberation through realization.

**Emptiness (Skt. *sūnyatā*; Tib. *stong pa nyid*)**

The Buddhist doctrine that describes all phenomena as lacking inherent existence. It is a philosophical foundation for liberation.

**Essence–Nature–Compassion (Tib. *ngo bo, rang bzhin, thugs rje*)**

A Dzogchen triadic framework of the Ground/ground in which essence denotes emptiness, nature denotes luminosity, and compassion denotes the dynamic manifestation of appearances.

**Fundamental Genuine Universal Ground (Tib. *gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*)**

A term in Dunhuang Yogācāra texts. It describes the universal ground as the fundamental basis underlying all phenomena.

**Great Conceptualization (Tib. *rnam rtog chen po*)**

A tantric cosmological concept. It is synonymous to the primordial Ground/ground.

**Great Expanse of Awareness**

A Dzogchen expression referring to the boundless and non-conceptual nature of primordial awareness.

**Ground–Path–Fruition (Tib. *gzhi lam ’bras bu*)**

A classical Buddhist soteriological framework describing the relationship between the primordial basis (ground), contemplative cultivation (path), and awakening (fruition).

**Ground of Delusion**

The aspect of the Ground/ground that serves as the basis for the emergence of saṃsāric confusion.

**Ground of Liberation (Tib. *grol gzhi*)**

The basis for liberation.

**Heart Essence (Tib. *snying thig*)**

A corpus of Dzogchen teachings and tantras emerged in the eleventh century. It emphasizes direct realization of the nature of the mind.

**Karmic Seeds / Habitual Tendencies (Skt. *vāsanā*; Tib. *bag chags*)**

Latent imprints that are kept in the storehouse consciousness, and mature into future experiences and rebirths.

**Mirror-like Gnosis (Skt. *ādarśa-jñāna*; Tib. *me long lta bu’i ye shes*)**

A form of enlightened wisdom traditionally understood as what the universal ground consciousness could be transformed into.

### **Mother–Son Union**

A Dzogchen description of realization in the intermediate state (Tib. *bar do*) in which the practitioner’s luminosity merges with primordial luminosity.

### **Neutral Feeling (Skt. *upekṣā* / *aduḥkhamasukha*; Tib. *btang snyoms*)**

A neutral affective state associated with the universal ground consciousness and afflicted mentation.

### **Nirvāṇa (Skt.; Tib. *mya ngan las ‘das pa*)**

Liberation from saṃsāra characterized by the cessation of suffering and the realization of the ultimate truth.

### **Nirodhasamāpatti (Skt.; Tib. *‘gogs pa snyoms par ‘jug pa*)**

A deep meditative state of cessation where the coarse aspect of the consciousness subsides in the subliminal continuity of the consciousness.

### **Primordial Purity (Tib. *ka dag*)**

A Dzogchen concept describing the intrinsic purity of the Ground/ground as being free from conceptual elaboration and defilement.

### **Recognition (Tib. *ngo shes*)**

Direct realization of the primordial nature of the mind.

### **Saṃbhogakāya (Tib. *Longs spyod rdzogs sku*)**

The “enjoyment body” of a Buddha that appears in pure realms to advanced practitioners.

### **Saṃsāra**

The cyclic existence of birth, death, and rebirth conditioned by ignorance and karma.

### **Sixfold Consciousness (Skt. *ṣaḍvijñāna*; Tib. *rnam shes tshogs drug*)**

The five sensory consciousnesses together with mental consciousness.

### **Spontaneous Presence (Tib. *lhun grub*)**

The spontaneous manifestation of enlightened qualities inherent in the Ground/ground.

### **Sugatagarbha / Tathāgatagarbha**

The Buddha-nature present in all beings that represents the potential for enlightenment.

### **Three Ignorances**

A Dzogchen explanation of the origin of delusion consisting of singular identity ignorance, co-emergent ignorance, and imputing ignorance.

### **Three Functions of the Ground**

A Dzogchen classification describing the Ground as the common basis of liberation and delusion, the ground of liberation, and the ground of delusion.

### **Universal Ground of Buddha-nature**

A doctrinal synthesis linking the Yogācāra storehouse consciousness with the Buddha-nature doctrine.

## Introduction

### A. Project Description

This project explores the concept of the ground (*gzhi*) and its history in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of the Great Perfection (Rdzogs chen), or Dzogchen. Specifically, I trace the idea's philosophical development from its origin in the Indian Yogācāra concept of the universal ground consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*; Tib. *kun gzhi rnam shes*) to its shifting interpretations within the early Tibetan Dzogchen tradition. This investigation culminates in the concept's functional role within the Great Perfection's Heart Essence (Snying thig), a tradition that took shape in Tibet between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Along the way, the project explores some little-known aspects of the relationship between the sūtric and tantric traditions, highlighting their deep entanglement since the very inception of Tibetan Buddhism.

In short, the project is at once historical and theoretical. It contributes to the understanding of Mahāyāna and Tibetan Buddhist philosophical evolutions by providing new insights into the interplay between foundational Buddhist concepts (most notably, the *universal ground consciousness* and *Buddha nature*) and their transformative interpretations within the complex religious landscapes of ninth-to-fourteenth-century Tibet. Additionally, the historical and textual developments explored here enhance our understanding of contemporary Buddhist practice and theory.

### B. Major Challenges in Dzogchen Studies

Ranging from the ninth to the fourteenth century, my main primary sources are some of the most secret writings in Tibetan Buddhism, such as ninth-to-tenth-century Dunhuang manuscripts and Nupchen Sangye Yeshe (Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes)'s *Armor against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go cha*) and *Lamp for the Eye of Meditation* (*Bsam gtan mig sgron*). The eleventh-to-twelfth-century the *Heart Essence of Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma snying thig*) and the *Seventeen Tantras* (*Rgyud bcu bdun*). The twelfth-to-thirteenth-century Nyima Bum's *Great Perfection: the Eleven Words and Meaning* (*Rdzos pa chen po tshig don gcig pa*). The fourteenth century Longchenpa's *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* (*Thig mchog mdzod*), *Treasury of Words and Meaning* (*Tshig don mdzod*), and *Illuminating the Significance of Ground, Path, and Fruition* (*Gzhi lam 'bras ba'i gnas gsal ba*).

These texts have largely been unavailable to scholars for three major reasons: archaic language, the elusiveness of key terms and phrases, and the esoteric nature of tantric and Dzogchen teachings.<sup>1</sup> As a whole, these factors have contributed to the ongoing absence of these important works in academic discourse. Additionally, while some Dzogchen materials have recently been translated and published in English, the quality of these translations varies. Furthermore, for my project, the fact that ideas and terms have gone through multiple shifts in their meanings poses another challenge. Today's interpretive approaches may not be entirely appropriate to earlier traditions. Shifting interests and orthodoxies sometimes leave out certain aspects or reinterpret key passages of earlier writings with newly developed terms. In other words, the seeming

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *tantra* and *mantra* are often used interchangeably, with *mantra* frequently linked to the concept of secrecy (as in "secret mantra"). Cf. the differentiation between paramita-naya and mantra-naya.

availability of secret texts nowadays does not always make their contents less abstruse.

Moreover, in Dzogchen practice and studies, the issue of authorship is important. Lineage transmission and personal devotion are two major components of Dzogchen practice. Divergent perspectives on the attribution of a text could greatly influence Dzogchen practices, as what is considered to be authentic Dzogchen teaching depends significantly on the author's reputation. However, it is extremely difficult to verify the authorship of early texts with philological tools. While most Dzogchen commentaries are, according to the colophon, composed by semi-legendary Indian Panditas, such as Śrī Simha, Vimalamitra, and Padmasambhava, these texts could have been written by others much later. In other words, on the one hand, the issue of authenticity seems to be very important to Buddhist practitioners; on the other hand, perhaps, the knowledge of genuine authorship is traditionally inaccessible to practitioners and scholars.

Additionally, the question of authorship is conditioned by cultural biases that differ significantly across time and space. In societies that have strong oral traditions, the idea of individual authorship, as well as its companion concerns regarding authenticity, originality, and intellectual property, holds less significance. Instead, texts written by multiple authors are often ascribed to a single timeless figure who embodies a sense of collective or hereditary authorship. As Foucault reminds us, “the fact that a number of texts were attached to a single name implies that relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilization were established among them.”<sup>2</sup> Much the same may be said of Tibetan Dzogchen writings, but in a markedly different sense that assumes alternative modes of filiation, authentication, and utilization. Thus, while the practice of communal authorship might seem messy (or even problematic) under the current rules of Western academia, it is important to remember that authorship can be a collective or anonymous *act*. Put one way, many Dzogchen teachings transcend any single historical author.

With my own fluencies in Tibetan cultures, Buddhist philosophy, and Western academic conventions, I address these challenges by creating a multimodal dissertation that involves careful translations and analysis of secret texts. Indeed, my experience of studying, practicing, and teaching Tibetan Buddhism in India, Nepal, and the U.S. has given me both access to these texts and familiarity with Western scholarship that focuses on similar topics.<sup>3</sup> In this project, I offer my close readings of the texts and the teachings of these texts that I have received from various Buddhist masters over the decades, even as I trace the evolution of the Heart Essence from the ninth to the fourteenth century by demystifying the compositional styles, as well as the technical and archaic terms of these ancient writings.

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in *Modernity and Its Discontents* (1969), 304-305.

<sup>3</sup> Earlier in my life in Tibet, I spent years studying and practicing the Heart Essence and the more extensive system within which it is embedded, namely, the Great Perfection. In India, notwithstanding the sectarian atmosphere that often prevails in Tibetan circles, I studied at Tibetan Buddhist monasteries belonging to various Buddhist traditions—Gelug, Kagyu, and Nyingma. During this time, the writings of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti—two great masters of emptiness—served as the foundation of my monastic education. Upon completion of a three-year Great Perfection retreat in Nepal, I began teaching Buddhism. In the U.S., I have written a Master's Thesis on the *Eleven Topics* by Zhang Nyi ma 'bum. In short, I am well positioned to bridge the gap between authentic instructions of Tibetan Buddhism and the modern dissemination of ancient texts. Throughout this project, I keep the integrity of these teachings intact while unpacking them with an acute sensitivity to contemporary Western contexts.

### C. Methodology

This dissertation comprises two parts: five chapters that trace the evolution of the universal ground consciousness within Buddhist thought, and appended translations of four major ancient texts reflecting these developments. I work across Tibetan, Sanskrit, and Chinese sources. This multilingual background, along with my monastic training and familiarity with early manuscripts, helps me decode passages that often involve calligraphical handwritings that are difficult to identify, phrases that carry multilayered meanings, and ideas that are inherently obscure and elusive. Also, they frequently use archaic language, which makes their meanings even more opaque. Indeed, many of the manuscripts I study are handwritten in cursive scripts and can be challenging to decipher. Scribal inconsistencies, corrections, and occasional errors further complicate the task. It is common to spend hours on a single folio.

At this pace, as the texts that I work with demand a slow and attentive mode of reading, reading becomes a practice of intertextual indexing: going over each word with cross-references among other related materials and relevant ideas. In return, this prolonged contact has trained me to notice more patterns, irregularities, connections, and subtle shifts that are often flattened in edited, digitized, or transcribed versions. Through this intertextual indexing, I have also developed a comparative approach to trace how key terms and ideas shift across historical and linguistic contexts. By reading Indian sources alongside their Tibetan reinterpretations, for instance, I examine both continuity and transformation in the transmission of doctrine, reading individual passages within a wider textual horizon. My aim is not only to interpret discrete texts, but also to follow the ways ideas are rearticulated as they move across languages, traditions, and centuries. In doing so, I clarify how Dzogchen thought emerges and takes form within a broader Buddhist intellectual landscape.

An intertextual indexing reading practice has shaped my five translations as well. Since translation is not a code-switching process between two languages, it reflects more of an interpretative process during which I make word choices based on my own understanding and analysis of the material's meanings. My understanding comes from multiple sources. First, my reading of a Tibetan term relies on my ability to cross-reference related Tibetan texts, situating its meaning, as mentioned earlier, within larger doctrinal and historical contexts. Additionally, my knowledge of Sanskrit and Chinese allows me to compare the meanings of the same term in Indic and Chinese writings and, sometimes, see the slightly different connotations and emphases across multiple Buddhist traditions. This process helps deepen and refine my understanding of the Tibetan materials. Moreover, my familiarity with both Buddhist scholarship and Dharma texts in English encourages me to think carefully about how to best introduce these multilingual nuances into English. In short, my reading practice informs both the analysis of this dissertation and my translation work.

### D. Literature Review

Contemporary scholarship on *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness or universal ground consciousness) and *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature) has revolved around several interconnected lines of inquiry, particularly concerning continuity, the nature of the mind, and the status of an underlying "ground." Foundational studies by Lambert Schmithausen and

William Waldron have been especially influential in clarifying the origins and functions of *ālayavijñāna* within the Yogācāra tradition. Schmithausen's *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*<sup>4</sup> provides a detailed historical and philological account of how this concept emerged to resolve tensions within Abhidharma models of momentariness, while accounting for karmic continuity and latent afflictions. Building on this text, Waldron's *The Buddhist Unconscious*<sup>5</sup> further interprets *ālayavijñāna* as a dynamic, subliminal process that both underlies and conditions conscious experience, functioning as a psychological basis for saṃsāric continuity through the accumulation of karmic seeds (*vāsanā*, Tib. *bag chags*).

On the other hand, a substantial body of scholarship has addressed the development and interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha* thought in Indian Buddhism. Early and influential contributions by David Seyfort Ruegg<sup>6</sup> and Jikidō Takasaki<sup>7</sup> establish the doctrinal and textual landscape of Buddha-nature literature. Ruegg, for instance, emphasizes the conceptual fluidity of *tathāgatagarbha*, demonstrating how it wrestles with a paradox between a seed that needs to be cultivated into transcendence and an inherent quality that is permanent and unchanging. Rather than positing a fixed ontological ground, Buddha-nature discourse frequently employs language that suggests an immanently enlightened quality while simultaneously avoiding reification. Takasaki similarly highlights the diversity within *tathāgatagarbha* traditions, arguing that they represent a range of doctrinal strategies aimed at articulating the possibility of awakening within *saṃsāra*, rather than a single unified theory.

Subsequent scholarship has refined and problematized these earlier frameworks. For instance, Michael Zimmermann's philological studies of texts<sup>8</sup> such as the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, draw attention to the rhetorical and metaphorical dimensions of Buddha-nature discourse, particularly its reliance on imagery of concealment and revelation. Zimmermann complicates attempts to interpret *tathāgatagarbha* as a straightforward metaphysical entity.

Additionally, Michael Radich<sup>9</sup> argues that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* should be regarded as the earliest extant text to articulate *tathācīgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature) doctrine, challenging the prevailing scholarly view that gives priority to the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*. More importantly,

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<sup>4</sup> Lambert Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*, Part 2: (in *Notes, Bibliography and Indices*. Studia Philologica Buddhica Monograph Series 4b. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> William S. Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious: The Ālaya-Vijñāna in the Context of Indian Buddhist Thought* (in Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Jikidō Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Zimmermann, *A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatagarbhasūtra—The Earliest Exposition of the Buddha-Nature Teaching in India* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2015).

he reinterprets the meaning and origin of *tathāgatagarbha* within this text, arguing that it emerges as part of a broader pattern of “docetic Buddhology,” in which the Buddha is understood as not truly subject to ordinary human processes such as conception, gestation, and birth. Overall, his study reframes *tathāgatagarbha* not as a later metaphysical abstraction, but as a doctrinal innovation rooted in broader concerns about the Buddha’s embodiment, purity, and soteriological function within early Mahāyāna thought.

As a whole, the studies on *ālayavijñāna* and *tathāgatagarbha* show that these ideas do not function as fixed doctrinal entities, but as sites of ongoing negotiation within Buddhist intellectual history. While Indic scholarship has mostly clarified the origins of *ālayavijñāna* and *tathāgatagarbha*, their development, and the conceptual tensions between them, less attention has been paid to how these ideas have been reinterpreted and transformed in Tibetan contexts.

This dissertation bridges this gap by building upon existing scholarship on *ālayavijñāna* and *tathāgatagarbha* while focusing on Tibetan source materials across different historical periods and traditions. My project primarily focuses on Tibetan sources’ unique developments and interpretations, and particularly the teachings of the Great Perfection (Dzogchen), while leveraging Indic and Chinese sources when necessary. I examine how the notion of a “ground” is reconfigured in Tibetan intellectual and contemplative frameworks, particularly in relation to Yogācāra, tantric, and Dzogchen developments. In doing so, the project illuminates new dimensions of continuity and transformation that remain underexplored.

Among the scholarship on Tibetan materials, in *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra*, Jacob Dalton sheds light on the unique perspective offered by Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes regarding the nature of the universal ground within the early Tibetan tantric context. Dalton portrays Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes’ viewpoint, which considers the universal ground as a state of pristine consciousness, unblemished by conceptualization or delusion. Dalton further observes that Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes employs a key term of *foundational genuine universal ground* (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) also seen in the early Dunhuang manuscripts, further strengthening the connection and continuities between Gnubs chen and these ancient teachings.<sup>10</sup> My initial explorations into the available materials confirmed the striking structural connections among them. These connections extended beyond shared terms and concepts to the way their topics were systematically presented. This discovery heightened my interest in studying the early writings in greater depth.

My interests were driven in part by the inestimable significance of these early materials to the later Heart Essence teachings on the Eleven Topics (*tshig don bcu gcig*). These eleven topics are central to the Heart Essence corpus and encapsulate the entirety of its teachings. They trace a story of how beings fall from the ground (*gzhi*) into *samsāra* and eventually return to it. As such, they represent the very core practice of the Heart Essence tradition (i.e., the cutting through and the direct transcendence) and its philosophical underpinnings. Yet Western scholarship on them is minimal.

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<sup>10</sup> See *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra* (pp. 42-47) and footnote 44. Dalton’s observations are further explored by David Higgins, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2013). Both studies are rooted in early Ph.D. theses filed in 2002 and 2012, respectively.

Daniel A. Scheidegger has written an article titled “The First Four Themes of Klong chen pa’s Tshig don bcu gcig,” published in the *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* No. 16 in April 2009. As its title suggests, the paper covers the first four topics of the eleven. It is largely just a summary of the relevant sections. His dissertation is titled “Lights and Visions in Rdzogs Chen Thinking” and was completed at the University of Bristol in 2004. It focuses on Dzogchen philosophy, particularly exploring the nature of visions within this tradition.

David Germano’s Ph.D. dissertation (1992) is on Klong chen pa’s *Treasury of Topics* (*Tshig don mdzod*), entitled “Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of the Self: The Tantric Synthesis of Dzogchen in Fourteenth Century Tibet.” At this point, Nyi ma ‘bum’s earlier writings had not yet surfaced, so Germano takes Klong chen pa’s presentation of the Eleven Topics to be the earliest. While he offers an important introduction to the topics, he does not address their origins.

A more recent book, *Buddhahood in This Life: The Great Commentary by Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma mi tra’i snyan brgyud chen po rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po’i ‘grel pa ye shes rang gsal*), is an English translation of yet another Eleven Topics text. This text is a revealed treasure from the four-volume cycle called *Dgongs pa zang thal*, “discovered” in 1366 by Rig ‘dzin Rgod ldem (1337-1409) in Tsang province and translated by Malcolm Smith (2016). My Master’s thesis (2017) and my article (2023) on Nyma bum’s *Eleven Topics* also explore the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition.<sup>11</sup>

Even more so than Klong chen pa’s fourteenth-century work, Rig ‘dzin Rgod ldem’s is almost entirely a duplicate of Nyi ma ‘bum’s earlier text. Both Scheidegger’s and Smith’s studies offer translations of Tibetan texts but do not provide critical analyses of the Eleven Topics. However, these instances provide opportunities for closer examination, paving the way to explore new dimensions and uncover additional avenues for further research on the subject.

Given that current academic scholarship on the Great Perfection remains in its formative stages, a critical analysis of the Heart Essence tradition, particularly its doctrinal intricacies, is not only timely but essential. Research on the Heart Essence is thus still pioneering, and any scholarly work in this area already represents a valuable contribution to the field. The present study on the Eleven Topics, particularly their articulation through the lens of view, path, conduct, and fruition within the Heart Essence tradition, offers new perspectives on both the initial formation of the tradition and its subsequent doctrinal evolutions. While an exhaustive treatment of all Eleven Topics would exceed the scope of this dissertation, a focused analysis of two foundational Heart Essence tantras illuminates how Nyima Bum extrapolated these Eleven Topics, systematizing them into the first comprehensive treatise on the subject. Toward the end of this dissertation, I

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<sup>11</sup> See Khenpo Yeshe, “The Origins of the *Rdzogs chen Eleven Words and Meanings*: Comparing Nyi ma ‘bum, Klong chen pa, and Rig ‘dzin Rgod ldem,” MA Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2017; “The Origins of the Dzogchen Eleven Words and Meanings: Comparing Nyima Bum, Longchenpa, and Rikzin Gödemchen,” *Journal of Tiberian Literature* 2(2): (2023), 39-82; “Signification and History in Zhang Nyi ma ‘bum’s *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*.” Co-authored with Jacob Dalton. In the *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 43 (January 2018), 256-273; and “Early Developments in Snying thig Practice: The Eighth Topic of Zhang Nyi ma bum’s *Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*.” Co-authored with Jacob Dalton. In the *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 63 (April 2022), 95-130.

examine how his presentation correlates with these tantras' structural and thematic frameworks, shedding light on his interpretive strategies and his arrangement's doctrinal significance. In doing so, this study contributes to the broader understanding of the dynamic processes of textual interpretation and tradition-building in early Great Perfection.

## E. Key Terms

### 1. Emptiness

Ever since I was introduced to Buddhist philosophy, I have been deeply fascinated by the concept of *emptiness* (*śūnyatā*), as presented in various Buddhist teachings such as the *Diamond Sutra*, known in Sanskrit as *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, and the *Heart Sutra*, or *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra*, both key scriptures within the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) literature that emphasize the concept.<sup>12</sup> Together, they challenge a reader's understanding of the material world as real, body-mind experiences as actual, and one's perception as truthful. The Buddha explains that suffering is unavoidable unless one correctly understands the meaning of emptiness; thus, emptiness serves not only as the theory of liberation but also plays a crucial role in Buddhist meditation.

### 2. *Ālayavijñāna*

The Sanskrit term *ālaya* is sometimes used as an abbreviation of *ālayavijñāna*. Initially, *ālaya* is broadly understood as the “storehouse” or “underlying” consciousness. In Tibetan, it is translated as *kun gzhi*, which is often rendered as “all-ground” or “universal ground.” This translation underscores its function as its all-encompassing foundation of consciousness, highlighting the role of *ālaya* as both the basis for saṃsāric experience and the potential for liberation.

In the early Yogācāra Buddhist thought, the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) is understood as a fundamental element of all sentient beings. It serves as the seedbed for both suffering and the cause of suffering (i.e., ignorance), perpetuating the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth known as saṃsāra. In other words, this repository consciousness holds habitual tendencies such as patterns of thought, action, and sensation. Through one's attachment to these tendencies, one takes endless rebirths, as these imprints shape our perceptions and condition our ongoing construction of the world and a sense of existence within that world.

Within Dzogchen philosophical treatises, the concept of *universal ground consciousness* (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*) gave rise to other important terms: the *fundamental genuine universal ground* (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*), the *conjoining genuine universal ground* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*), the *universal ground of awakened mind* (*kun gzhi byang chub sems; ālayabodhicitta*), the *universal ground consciousness of buddha nature* (*bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po kun gzhi rnam shes; ālaya-sugatagarbha*), and the Dzogchen Ground.

The first two terms, found in the Dunhuang manuscripts and Nupchen's writings, arise from early Mahāyoga and Dzogchen interpretations of the universal ground consciousness. This

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<sup>12</sup>Additionally, the writings of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti served as foundational works in the monastic education that I received during my time at various Buddhist institutions.

ground serves as a foundation for all phenomena, earning it the title “the fundamental genuine universal ground.” When it conjoins saṃsāric phenomena, it is referred to as “the conjoining genuine universal ground.” The term *the universal ground of awakened mind* appears in a tantric context and is notably employed in Nupchen’s works. “The universal ground consciousness of *Buddha-nature*” is referenced in both *sūtras*<sup>13</sup> and *tantras*,<sup>14</sup> highlighting its broader doctrinal relevance. Lastly, the Dzogchen *Ground* encompasses all these concepts. It is highlighted by various Dzogchen *tantras*, especially the Heart Essence *tantras* and their commentaries.

The identification of these five grounds in innovative and nuanced terms is pivotal for understanding the structure of the mind’s basis, the potential for enlightenment, and the transformative nature of tantric practice. While conceptually distinct, they collectively illuminate the intricate relationship between the ordinary mind and its enlightened counterpart. Central to all these terminologies is how they all revolve around the concept of the *ground*.

### 3. The Universal Ground of Awakened Mind

The early Nyingma *tantras*<sup>15</sup> place significant emphasis on the concept of the *universal ground of the awakened mind* (*kun gzhi byang chub sems*), a cornerstone of their soteriological and philosophical framework. The concept’s influence is evident in the works of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe, particularly in *The Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pa’i go cha*) and *The Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*), which highlight the pivotal role of the awakened mind. In these texts, the awakened mind is portrayed not only as essential for liberation but also as intimately connected with the notion of the *universal ground* (*kun gzhi*), described as the foundational ground of both confusion and enlightenment. In other words, the awakened mind is believed to be responsible for both our freedom and bondage. This expansion of the *universal ground* has been influential since then.

### 4. The Universal Ground of Buddha-nature

The *Mahāyānasamgraha* and other Yogācāra texts discuss that the universal ground consciousness can be a source for more *saṃsāra* or moving toward *nirvāṇa*, as it is a storehouse that holds the non-virtuous and virtuous habitual tendencies that are results of an individual’s actions. Moreover, the *Laṅkāvatāra* already introduces the idea of transforming the universal ground consciousness. In other words, while *Mahāyānasamgraha* frames the universal ground consciousness as needing to be transformed (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*; *gnas ‘gyur ba*), the *Laṅkāvatāra* contends that it is workable and could be transformed into a pure consciousness.

Later, these ideas arrived in China and were developed into the ninth or pure consciousness.<sup>16</sup> For instance, Matteo De Micheli addresses the Chinese origins of the ninth consciousness, which

<sup>13</sup> For instance, see the *Āryaśaṅkavarāṇasūtra* (‘*phags pa rgyan stug po bkod pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*, Tōh. 110=D110), 55b.1—2

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Two in *The Guhyagarbha Tantra* (dpal gsang ba’i snying po de kho na nyid nam par nges pa, Tōh. 832=D832, vol. 103), p. 112b.2—4.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, see *A Method for Generating Special Insight* (lhag mthong skyed pa’i thabs, Tōh. 4366=D4366), 24926—249b6.

<sup>16</sup> There are multiple sources that can be found in Chinese Buddhist canonical texts, and some of these terms and concepts appear in early Nupchen Sangye Yeshe’s writings. This is most likely due to the Chinese influence.

is conceived as a pure consciousness that goes beyond the impure eighth consciousness (i.e., the universal ground consciousness).<sup>17</sup> The ninth consciousness is often linked to the concept of Buddha-nature. Additionally, as Michael Radich reminds us, while *āmóluóshí* (啊摩羅識) or *\*amalavijñāna* (“taintless consciousness”)<sup>18</sup> is often treated as a uniquely East Asian innovation or as evidence of the sinification of Buddhism, it is better understood as the product of a complex synthesis of multiple Indian doctrinal currents. Indeed, Radich demonstrates that Paramārtha’s corpus does not present a single, unified theory of *\*amalavijñāna*, but rather two distinct doctrinal strands. One presents *amalavijñāna* as a purified counterpart to *ālayavijñāna*, associating *\*amalavijñāna* with liberation and the transformation of the basis (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*). The other strand uses *\*amalavijñāna* to signify a higher, non-dual realization, aligning it with thusness (*tathatā*) and the perfected nature (*pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva*). These different formulations indicate that *\*amalavijñāna* is not a stable concept, but a composite construct shaped by diverse doctrinal pressures. Thus, Radich situates *\*amalavijñāna* within a broad spectrum of Indian philosophical and Buddhist precedents, including early Buddhist notions of consciousness as the carrier of rebirth, the ideal of purification of the mind, the Pudgalavāda theory of a persisting subject, Yogācāra tensions surrounding *ālayavijñāna*, and even parallels in Sāṅkhya thought.

In the later Yogācāra teachings, the universal ground consciousness is also regarded as the wellspring of wisdom and enlightenment. This association emphasizes the interconnected development of these two ideas: the *saṃsāric* basis of *ālayavijñāna* (universal ground consciousness) and the *nirvāṇic* seed, which is the *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature). The universal ground is the foundation for the dualistic, *saṃsāric* world—a projection of one’s own consciousness that demonstrates a conceptual world. In contrast, Buddha-nature is identified as the source of enlightened qualities that embody non-duality and ultimate reality.

Significantly, these two seemingly opposing aspects—one rooted in delusion and the other in wisdom—are reconciled as different facets of the same nature in Buddhist philosophy. Such a reconciliation reflects the nuanced understanding of consciousness in Yogācāra thought: deluded perception and undeluded awareness are not inherently different, as their arising depends on one’s perception of reality.

## 5. Dzogchen Ground

In the Tibetan context, the notion of the Ground in Dzogchen teachings took on a unique importance. With an emphasis on primordial purity, the ground is seen as the fundamental nature of mind and reality, inherently free from conceptual elaboration and dualistic projections such as subject and object, self and other. This conception of the ground builds on earlier understandings of the universal ground consciousness as more positive.

Examining how the term *ālaya* or *gzhi* evolves within Buddhist thought, it is intriguing to note its usage at different stages of doctrinal development—from initially denoting the *ālayavijñāna*,

<sup>17</sup> Matteo De Micheli, “Possible Chinese Influences on the Concept of a Ninth Consciousness in Early Dzogchen Commentaries,” (conference paper, California Buddhist Studies Graduate Student Conference, University of California, Los Angeles, October 2025).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Radich, “Pure Mind in India: Indian Background to Paramārtha’s *\*Amalavijñāna*,” in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 39, 2016, 249–308.

a foundational element in the perpetuation of *samsāra*, to later representing the awakened state achievable through Buddhist practice. This transformation highlights a fundamental question: How is the concept of the *Ground* articulated across various Buddhist traditions, such as the sūtric doctrines, the Tathāgatarbha School, and the Dzogchen teachings? Additionally, several critical inquiries emerge when discussing the Ground: Does the term *Ground* refer specifically to the Sūtra ground or the Dzogchen Ground, or does it encompass a broader, more inclusive definition? Are the concepts of *ālaya*, *tathāgatarbha*, and the Dzogchen *Ground* inherently independent, or do they emerge from an underlying source? Also, given the Heart Essence tradition's teaching that appearance emerges from the Ground, does the Dzogchen Ground undergo transformations (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*) into various forms and colors during the process of manifestation?

In short, the Dzogchen Ground is primarily conceptualized as the substratum for all phenomena, encapsulating both the potentialities and the manifested realities of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. This foundational aspect suggests that all experiential dualities and phenomenological diversities both arise from and return to the Ground without ever straying from their essential nature. Moreover, the Ground's potency to manifest myriad phenomena underlines its critical role in the continuous interplay between the potential and the actual, providing a cohesive ontological framework that integrates Buddhism's soteriological aims and metaphysical underpinnings.

#### F. Chapter Outline

The dissertation commences with the universal ground consciousness, progresses to the universal ground in early Tibetan writings, and ends with the Dzogchen Ground, exploring its ontological and philosophical implications. As a whole, its six chapters explore the historical emergence of these terms, drawing on relevant textual sources to unpack their meanings and implications to show how the universal ground consciousness became the Ground.

##### Chapter One: Two 10th-Century Tibetan Yogācāra Texts from Dunhuang

This chapter examines early Tibetan sources on the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*, *ālayavijñāna*), focusing particularly on two Dunhuang manuscripts (Pelliot Tibétain 654 and IOL Tib J 708) to provide a contextual foundation for understanding the Dzogchen *Ground* (*gzhi*). The chapter introduces the early terms and categories of the universal ground consciousness in Tibet. Collectively, they mark the early Tibetan innovation regarding the universal ground consciousness.

##### Chapter Two: Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and the Formation of the Dzogchen Ground

This chapter turns to early Dzogchen Ground Philosophy (9th Century), particularly Nupchen Sangye Yeshe's tantric interpretations, focusing on how *universal ground consciousness* (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) was integrated and transformed within early Tibetan tantric practices, as well as contributed to developing Dzogchen views. The distinct terminologies *the fundamental genuine universal ground* (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and *the conjoining genuine universal ground* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*), as demonstrated in the Dunhuang manuscripts, are also central themes in Nupchen's writings.

Expanding on these concepts, Nupchen introduces a new term, the *universal ground of awakened*

*mind* (*kun gzhi byang chub sems*; \**ālayabodhicitta*), which he describes as a purified version of the universal ground consciousness. Sometimes he also equates it with the ninth consciousness. This innovative terminology underscores the close relationship between the Dunhuang manuscripts and Nupchen's writings, both of which played a pivotal role in shaping the concept of the Dzogchen *Ground*—a view that later became dominant in the Heart Essence teachings. Appendix C provides the complete translation of the relevant, quite extensive discussion from Nupchen's *Armor against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go cha*) for further study.

### Chapter Three: The Evolution of the Universal Ground and Its Culmination in Dzogchen Heart Essence's Ground of Being (the 10th-11th century)

This chapter offers an in-depth analysis of *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space* (*Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud dpal nam mkha' med pa*). The chapter highlights the pivotal role of this text within the Heart Essence tradition, particularly in the framing of the Dzogchen *Ground* within the philosophical context of the Great Perfection. The tantra builds upon the concepts and terminologies of the *universal ground*, incorporating various terms and categorizations. Yet, Dzogchen tantra uniquely consolidates these diverse terms and ideas into a single concept: the Ground.

This simplicity, however, should not be underestimated. The single syllable Ground encapsulates the entire philosophical scope of Dzogchen, encompassing its cosmogony, ontology, and soteriology. This chapter demonstrates how the early terminologies of the *universal ground* served as a foundational basis for the development of the Dzogchen *Ground*. It further underscores how this tantra establishes the Dzogchen *Ground* as the cornerstone of the Heart Essence teachings. The complete translation of the tantra is provided in Appendix D for further exploration.

### Chapter Four: The Developments of the Eleven Topics and the Significance of the Ground, Ālaya, and Buddha-Nature in The Dzogchen Heart Essence Tradition (the 12th-13th century)

This chapter examines Zhang Nyima Bum's foundational contributions to the *Eleven Topics*, which define the Heart Essence teachings. Emphasis is placed on the first three topics, which address the origins of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and the roles of the Ground and Buddha-nature in this process. This exploration highlights the critical development of the Heart Essence tradition and its lasting impact on the broader teachings and practices of the Ancient School. Nyima Bum's narration of the cosmogonic story of how appearance emerges from the Ground, which serves as the thread connecting the entire Heart Essence teachings. A translation of these first three topics in Nyima Bum's text is included in Appendix E for further reference.

### Chapter Five: The Nature of Liberation in Longchenpa's Thought: The Ground and Abiding Reality

This chapter offers a theoretical and practical consolidation of the Dzogchen Ground by key fourteenth-century figures. The discussion traces the evolution of the Heart Essence teachings on the eleven topics, the Ground, and Buddha-nature after Zhang Nyima Bum, analyzing how successive Dzogchen masters and scholars expanded and elaborated upon his foundational framework. The chapter focuses primarily on Longchenpa's masterful synthesis and systematization of the Heart Essence teachings in the fourteenth century, a pivotal moment in the history of this tradition. I examine how Longchenpa refined and organized these teachings to

weave together earlier doctrinal elements into a cohesive and profound framework that would go on to exert a strong influence on the Dzogchen tradition. Attention is given to the contributions of Rgod ldem can (1337-1408) and Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396), whose writings represent significant milestones in the Heart Essence tradition.

This exploration underscores the dynamic interplay between doctrinal development in the fourteenth century and lived practice today, highlighting how these masters ensured the Heart Essence tradition's vitality and adaptability. Their efforts laid a robust foundation for the transmission of teachings to subsequent generations, securing the Heart Essence as a cornerstone of the Ancient School's teachings and practices. By examining this lineage of innovation and continuity, this section illustrates the enduring impact of these contributions on the broader Tibetan Buddhist landscape.

## Chapter 1

### TWO TIBETAN YOGĀCĀRA TEXTS FROM DUNHUANG (the ninth-tenth century)

#### A. Introduction

The concept of the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*; *ālayavijñāna*) has been a cornerstone of Buddhist metaphysics and practice since the advent of Yogācāra thinking. Over time, this notion has evolved significantly across different cultural and doctrinal landscapes of Buddhism, particularly within the Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan traditions. The transformation of the term, along with the evolution of its various meanings, reflects both the fluid nature of Buddhist philosophy and its history of accommodating changing contexts and needs.

In the early stages of Yogācāra, the universal ground consciousness was primarily conceived as a repository of karmic seeds—a foundation from which all conscious experiences arise. This subliminal consciousness was understood as a storehouse that holds the potential for one’s future experiences.

This chapter explores the early intellectual history of the universal ground consciousness in Tibet. By tracing the evolution of this concept, we gain deeper insights into the ways in which early Tibetan Buddhists navigated the complex terrain of the universal ground’s metaphysical and ontological nuances. This developmental process ultimately contributes to the rich tapestry of Buddhist philosophy.

The two Dunhuang manuscripts I focus on provide a distinctive portrayal of the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), which suggests that these texts are among the earliest sources influencing Tibetan engagements with Yogācāra philosophy. Many of the ideas put forward in these manuscripts mirror earlier Indian teachings (which are even quoted), but some aspects appear to be unique to Tibet. As such, I argue that the conceptual landscape of Tibetan thinking about ālaya is already well-developed in these ancient texts. The first manuscript, Pelliot Tibétain 654, presents a comprehensive framework of the ground-based models, consisting of thirteen interrelated categories. The second manuscript, IOL Tib J 708, expands this framework by introducing a new category and adding a nirvāṇic dimension to the understanding of the universal ground consciousness, thereby enriching our understanding of *ālayavijñāna*.

#### B. The Role and Evolution of the Universal Ground Consciousness (*Ālayavijñāna*) in Buddhist Thought

The idea of the universal ground consciousness is pivotal in Buddhist doctrine. The universal ground consciousness holds the various latent potentials that underlie the past, present, and future of afflicted mental consciousness and the six collections of consciousness (mental consciousness and the five sense consciousnesses of seeing, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). From a conventional perspective, the universal ground consciousness arises moment by moment. In the “*Ālayavijñāna* as Keystone Dharma: The *Ālaya* Treatise of the *Yogācārabhūmi*,” William Waldron writes “*ālayavijñāna* arises moment to moment in dependence upon the concomitance

of specific, correlative conditions, the same kind of conditions that give rise to other, more standard forms of cognitive awareness (*viññāna*).”<sup>19</sup> It is contingent upon the functionality of the sense faculties, cognitive formations, and affective states that constitute one’s ongoing feeling of existence. This complex mental apparatus simultaneously underpins and informs all instances of manifesting consciousness. Therefore, understanding the concept of the universal ground is crucial for comprehending the notion of the Ground in the Heart Essence teachings of the Great Perfection. With this in mind, this chapter explores how the terms and concepts related to universal ground consciousness appeared in early Yogācāra texts and how they evolved within the broader Buddhist tradition.

### C. Historical Development and Scriptural Context

The Sanskrit term *ālayavijñāna* is sometimes translated as “store-house consciousness”<sup>20</sup> to highlight its role as the site where one’s karmic imprints reside. This concept emerged from the Yogācāra school of Indian Buddhism between the third and fifth centuries. Schmithausen’s landmark study on *Ālayavijñāna* argues that it was originally introduced to solve a doctrinal problem, to explain how consciousness continues across moments of mental interruption—deep sleep, meditative cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), the intermediate state (Skt. *antarābhava*; Tib. *bar do*) between death and rebirth, and so on.<sup>21</sup> While such gaps posed a significant challenge to the Abhidharma emphasis on the momentary nature of mental processes, the universal ground consciousness harmonized the paradox of a kind of permanent temporariness; the essential elements of saṃsāric existence remain perpetually present, but the mind is understood to be composed solely of fleeing phenomena. This way of understanding unconscious mental processes could be found in key Yogācāra scriptures such as the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (*dgongs pa nges par ’grel ba’i mdo*)<sup>22</sup> and the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (*lang kar gshegs pa’i mdo*).<sup>23</sup> However, it is most systematically articulated in the scholastic treatises of Asaṅga (c. 315–390) and Vasubandhu (c. mid-fourth to mid-fifth centuries).

In Chapter Five on Viśālamati of *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, the continuity of the universal ground consciousness is an analogy of a river as follows:

When the conditions for the arising of one wave are present within a flowing great river, only one wave will arise, and when the conditions for the arising of two waves or many waves are present, many waves will arise. However, the river’s own continuity will not

<sup>19</sup> William S. Waldron, “*Ālayavijñāna* as Keystone Dharma: The *Ālaya* Treatise of the *Yogācārabhūmi*,” in *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, ed. Ulrich Timme Kragh, Harvard Oriental Series 75, ed. Michael Witzel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of South Asian Studies, 2013), 925.

<sup>20</sup> William S. Waldron, “*Ālayavijñāna* as Keystone Dharma: The *Ālaya* Treatise of the *Yogācārabhūmi*,” in *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, ed. Ulrich Timme Kragh, Harvard Oriental Series 75, ed. Michael Witzel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of South Asian Studies, 2013), 923.

<sup>21</sup> Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Five on Viśālamati in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* in Degé Kangyur, vol. 49 (Tōh. 106, mdo sde, ca), folios 12a.3–14a.1.

<sup>23</sup> See *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* in Degé Kangyur, vol. 49 (Tōh. 107, mdo sde, ca), ff. 56r–191v (= pp. 111–382).

be interrupted, nor will it become entirely dry.<sup>24</sup>

This analogy illustrates that the river flows constantly and undisturbedly, regardless of the waves it generates. Similarly, two ongoing processes—the universal ground consciousness and supraliminal cognitive processes—occur simultaneously, almost without interruption. Thus, the universal ground consciousness offers two crucial conditions for cognitive processes to emerge: it serves as both the seeds and the supportive condition for the seeds. In return, the emergent cognitive processes water the initial seeds and sow further seeds back into the universal ground consciousness, sustaining the cycle of saṃsāric existence.

#### D. The Dynamic Interplay of the Universal Ground Consciousness

The interaction between the universal ground consciousness and manifesting consciousness can also be likened to the dynamic relationship between a river's current and the riverbed. The constant exchange between these two shapes the direction of the river, just as consciousness (*viññāna*, *rnam shes*) and formation (*samskāra*, *'du byed*) support each other reciprocally. This interaction occurs between two dimensions of consciousness (*viññāna*): the deep-seated currents carrying all the seeds and the emerging active consciousnesses that rise like waves. These waves, inseparable from the stream itself, consistently influence each other moment by moment.<sup>25</sup>

The Pravṛtti Portion, a critical section of the *Viniścayasamgrahani*, builds on the *Samḍhinirmocanasūtra*'s river analogy, suggesting no contradiction between the simultaneous emergence of manifest consciousnesses and the universal ground consciousness. According to the *Samḍhinirmocanasūtra*, the universal ground consciousness “ripens, manifests, develops, and increases” (*smin cing 'jug la rgyas shing 'phel ba dang yangs 'gyur ro*) due to the seeds of karmic potential and predispositions of afflictions accumulated since the beginning of time.<sup>26</sup> The potential, or “seeds,” for future afflictions are “stored” in this evolving universal ground level of mind, where they enjoy a reciprocal relationship with the manifest modes of consciousness.

### E. Karma, *Samsāra*, and *Nirvāṇa*: The Dual Role of Universal Ground Consciousness

The concept of karma is intricately linked to the function of the universal ground consciousness in Buddhist philosophy. Early sūtras articulate that this consciousness serves as a repository for habitual tendencies, which, as they mature, manifest as delusion and imagination that lead to

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter Five on Viśālamati in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (*'phags pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*), in Degé Kangyur, vol. 49 (Tōh. 106=**D106**, mdo sde, ca), folios 13a.2-3: རྒྱུད་ལྷན་ཆེན་པོ་  
འབབ་པ་ལ་གལ་ཏེ་རྒྱབས་ཅིག་འབྱུང་བའི་སྐྱེན་ཉེ་བར་གནས་པར་གྱུར་ན་རྒྱབས་ཀྱང་གཅིག་ཁོན་འབྱུང་ངོ་། གལ་ཏེ་རྒྱབས་གཉིས་སམ། གལ་ཏེ་རབ་དྲུ་མང་  
པོ་དག་འབྱུང་བའི་སྐྱེན་ཉེ་བར་གནས་པར་གྱུར་ན་རྒྱབས་རབ་དྲུ་མང་པོ་དག་འབྱུང་ཞིང་རྒྱུད་དེ་རང་གི་རྒྱུན་གྱིས་རྒྱུན་འཆད་པར་ཡང་མི་འགྱུར་ལ།  
ཡོངས་སུ་ཟད་པར་ཡང་མི་འགྱུར་རོ།

<sup>25</sup> For further information, see William S. Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious: The ālaya-vijñāna in the context of India Buddhist thought*, (in Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 115-6.

<sup>26</sup> See the chapter of Viśālamati in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (*Dgongs pa nges 'grel*), Tōh. 106=D106, fol. 12b.1-2: མཚན་མ་དང་མིང་དང་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་ལ་ཐ་སྙད་འདོགས་པ་འེལ་བའི་བཀའ་ཆགས་ལོན་པ་ལ་རྟོན་ནས། ས་ཤོན་ཐམས་ཅད་པའི་སེམས་རྣམ་པར་སྒྲིན་ཅིང་འཇུག་ལ་རྒྱས་ཤིང་འཕེལ་བ་དང་ཡངས་པར་འགྱུར་རྟོ།

suffering. Without the universal ground consciousness, the continuity of habitual tendencies would be disrupted, posing a significant challenge to the coherence of Buddhist karma theory, which requires a continual flow of causes and effects. Thus, the universal ground consciousness, embodying our accumulated potentialities for karmic outcomes, functions as the support for all phenomenal experiences.

In Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are not regarded as entirely distinct realms but rather as different aspects of the same reality. The universal ground consciousness, as the fundamental substratum underlying all phenomena, is the foundation for both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Within *saṃsāra*, the universal ground is obscured by ignorance, attachment, and aversion, perpetuating the cycle of suffering. Conversely, on the path to *nirvāṇa*, these defilements are thoroughly purified, eventually revealing the intrinsic purity of the universal ground. In this sense, the purified state of the universal ground is the basis for realizing the ultimate reality. While the universal ground consciousness perpetuates *saṃsāra*, it also embodies the essential nature of *nirvāṇa*. This dual role underscores the transformative potential of the universal ground, a central tenet in Mahāyāna Buddhism, where the buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) is sometimes considered both the ultimate nature of all beings and the essence of awakening inherent within each individual.

The universal ground consciousness relies on its own subliminal cognitive object, as it apprehends the undifferentiated external world. At the same time, it is also itself considered the object of our fundamental misapprehension, as it is often mistaken for a substantive self. This ignorance, so deeply ingrained, led to the conceptualization of a distinct stratum of subliminal and karmically neutral afflictions, known as “afflictive mentation” (*kliṣṭa-manas*; *nyon mongs pa can gyi yid*).

#### F. Comparative Analysis of Universal Ground Consciousness Categories in Dunhuang Manuscripts

By the ninth to tenth centuries, the Yogācāra doctrine, with its signature conceptualization of consciousness, had gained widespread acceptance and influence across India and China. Its philosophical tenets, particularly the notion of the universal ground consciousness, found fertile ground also in Tibet and the surrounding regions. Its popularity is evidenced in several significant Dunhuang manuscripts, penned in the tenth century, including Pelliot Tibétain 654, IOL Tib J 708, and IOL Tib J 681.<sup>27</sup> Each of these texts engages deeply with the universal ground consciousness, offering unique insights and innovative interpretations of its categorization and terminology that reflect Tibetan engagements with this doctrine.

The present chapter focuses on the two complete manuscripts, Pelliot Tibétain 654 and IOL Tib J 708.<sup>28</sup> The primary aim of this chapter is to identify and clarify the categories and distinctions articulated within the two texts. Though both discuss all eight consciousnesses, I focus particularly on how they unpack the universal ground consciousness. In other words, these texts collectively illuminate the way Tibetan scholars and practitioners not only adopted but also adapted Yogācāra concepts in this early period. As I have discussed elsewhere, their adaptations

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<sup>27</sup> As dated by my advisor, Jacob Dalton, on the basis of Ground their handwriting.

<sup>28</sup> IOL Tib J 681 is an incomplete manuscript that seems to be a copy of the same text as Pelliot Tibétain 654.

are likely the results of the dynamic interactions Tibetans had with neighboring communities, which enriched the Tibetan understanding and practice of Buddhism.<sup>29</sup>

## 1. The First Dunhuang Manuscript: Pelliot Tibétain 654

Pelliot Tibétain 654 offers a crucial link between the theoretical expositions of the universal ground found in earlier Yogācāra texts and the experiential and practice-oriented instructions that characterize the later Heart Essence lineage. The text, in only six folios, offers insights into the conceptual framework of the universal ground consciousness, particularly during the early stages of Tibetan Buddhism's development. In doing so, the manuscript presents various categories and terminologies of universal ground consciousness. Thus, while this text appears to be short, its conciseness provides openings for future elaboration and expansion.

One of the most remarkable features of *Pelliot Tibétain 654* is its discussion of thirteen distinct aspects of, or topics relating to, the universal ground consciousness. These categories are not merely descriptive; they reflect sophisticated and nuanced understandings of the universal ground that suggest an evolution of thought from earlier Yogācāra interpretations to the more esoteric formulations that characterize Tantric and Dzogchen traditions. By scrutinizing these categories, we trace the developmental trajectory of key concepts within Tibetan Buddhist thought, particularly those that later influenced the Heart Essence teachings.

The manuscript begins with the question: “What are those thirteen topics regarding the teaching of universal ground consciousness?” These thirteen categories of the universal ground consciousness are listed in a single introductory paragraph, which serves as a concise overview of key terms and concepts. To provide some context, below are the thirteen topics from the original text that I translated and analyzed.<sup>30</sup>

1. The nature of the universal ground (*kun gzhi'i rang bzhin*), *Nature* – The universal ground's nature is divided into two types: the *fundamental genuine universal ground* (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and the *conjoining genuine universal ground* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*). These two terms hold significant importance and recur throughout this dissertation. They serve as an important thread that runs from these early Dunhuang texts to the Heart Essence tradition.
2. The perceptual objects of the universal ground (*kun gzhi'i dmyigs pa'i yul*), *Perceptual Objects* – This topic introduces the idea that the perceptual objects of universal ground consciousness encompass an indiscriminate and undifferentiated range of phenomena—essentially everything within the external domain, corresponding to *bhājanaloka*.

<sup>29</sup> This is discussed in my forthcoming article, "Actualizing the Sacred Ultimate in Buddhist Mysticism."

30 See Pelliot Tibétain 654, folio 1r.2-5: དེ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དོན་བཅུ་གསུམ་གྱིས་བཟུང་པ་གང་ཞེ་ན། ཀུན་གཞིའི་རང་བཞིན་དང་། ཀུན་གཞིའི་དམིགས་པའི་ལུས་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་[དྲུ]དང་ལྡན་བ་དང་། ཆོས་རྒྱལ་བཞི་ལས་ཀུན་གཞི་ཆོས་གང་ཡིན་བ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་ཅི་ཁྱེད་པ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དེེན་དུ་ཡོད་པ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཅི་ཡིན་བ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་བྱུང་བར་ཅིས་འཕགས་པ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་མྱིང་གི་རྒྱལ་གྲངས་དུ་ཡོད་པ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་མཐུན་པའི་དཔེ་དང་ཅི་ལྟར་བསྟན་བ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་བསྐྱབ་པའི་རིགས་པ་ཅི་ལྟར་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱབ་བ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་ཐོག་པའི་དུས་འཁོར་བར་ཅི་ལྟར་སྐྱེ་བ་ཁྱེ་ལོན་བ་དང་། ཀུན་གཞི་གནས་གྲུང་པའོ།།

3. The accompanying mental factors with which the universal ground is endowed (*kun gzhi 'khor sems las byung ba du dang ldan pa*),

*Accompanying Mental Factors*—These include the five ever-present companions (*pañca sarvatragāḥ*, *kun 'gro lnga*), such as contact and ideation. The text associates universal ground consciousness with these five mental factors, emphasizing its activities, particularly the causally concordant and ripened habitual tendencies.

4. Among the four dharmas, which one is the universal ground (*chos rnam bzhi las kun gzhi chos gang yin ba*)?

*Four Dharmas* – They are categorized as: (1) virtuous, (2) non-virtuous, (3) obscured-and-undetermined, and (4) unobscured-and-undetermined. Among these, the universal ground consciousness is specifically identified as unobscured and undetermined, highlighting its unique classification within this framework.

5. What kind of activity does the universal ground involve (*kun gzhi las ci byed pa*)?  
*Activities* – The activities of the universal ground are twofold: (1) causally concordant habitual tendencies (*rgu mthun pa'i bag chags*, *niṣyanda-vāsanā*) and (2) ripened habitual tendencies (*rnam par smin pa'i bag chags*, *vipāka-vāsanā*). These two modes emphasize different aspects of how the universal ground functions. The former refers to a chain of habits that are formed in previous lives and have been continuously reenacted. Such reenactment deepens karmic impressions, which in turn have the potential to generate results that reinforce the same habit in future lives. The latter highlights the maturation of the habits, which inevitably would bring major consequences to oneself. Thus, “ripened habitual tendencies” emphasize more what would happen to one in the outer world.

6. How many divisions are within the universal ground (*kun gzhi la dbye ba du yod pa*)?

*Divisions*—The universal ground may be divided into two aspects: cause and result. This classification illustrates how the universal ground consciousness functions both as the cause that gives rise to other consciousnesses and as the fruit that manifests itself.

7. What is the characteristic of the universal ground (*kun gzhi mtshan nyid ci yin ba*)?  
*Characteristics*—The universal ground is impermanent and momentary, in contrast to non-Buddhist assertions of permanence. This distinction forms a central discussion in this dissertation, underscoring the doctrinal evolution and unique interpretations of the universal ground within Buddhist thought.

8. What makes the universal ground superior (*kun gzhi khyad par cis 'phags pa*)?  
*Superiority*—The universal ground is distinguished from other consciousnesses through its capacity to hold habitual tendencies. Unlike non-Buddhist assertions of its permanence, Buddhists emphasize its impermanent and momentary nature, marking a key doctrinal difference.

9. How many different names does the universal ground have (*kun gzhi mying gi rnam grants du yod pa*)?

*Synonyms* – The universal ground is known by several other names, including “root consciousness,” “mind” (*sems*), “the consciousness that takes rebirth,” “the aggregate that endures so long as saṃsāra exists,” and “the limb of existence.” These synonyms highlight its multifaceted role and significance within Buddhist doctrinal contexts.

10. How can analogies indicate the universal ground (*kun gzhi mthun pa'i dpe dang ci ltar bstun pa*)?

*Analogies*—Similes are employed to illuminate the function and subtle nature of the universal ground, such as comparisons to nutmeg flowers in oil or silk written on with a fruit pit. These analogies clarify complex ideas through mundane items and demonstrate pedagogical methods used in these texts to convey nuanced concepts.

11. How does reasoning establish the existence of the universal ground (*kun bzhi bsgrub pa'i rigs pa ci ltar kun gzhi yod par bsgrub ba*)?

*Proofs by reasoning*—Rational and scriptural reasonings affirm the necessity of the universal ground for both rebirth and nirvāṇa. These arguments not only establish the universal ground's doctrinal significance but also highlight its essential role in transformation.

12. When the universal ground is reversed, how one does not take rebirth in saṃsāra (*kun gzhi ldog ba'i dus 'khor bar ci ltar skye ba myi len pa*), and

*Reversal* – Liberation is achieved when the habitual tendencies of karma and afflictions are fully abandoned. The reversal of the universal ground signifies the cessation of these tendencies, cutting off the stream of saṃsāra. This transformative process culminates in attaining nirvāṇa, marking the complete reversal of the universal ground.

13. The transformation of the universal ground (*kun gzhi gnas gyur pa'o*).<sup>31</sup>

*Transformation* (*āśrayaḥ parivartate, gnas 'gyur ba*)—The complete purification of the universal ground results in the attainment of mirror-like gnosis and the realization of the dharmakāya. This transformation involves abandoning and purifying the subtle habitual tendencies associated with both afflictive and cognitive obscurations. Through this process, the universal ground consciousness is transcended and transformed into the dharmakāya.

#### 1) Analysis of the Two Types of Universal ground Consciousness

As seen above and in the translation of Pelliot tibétain 654 in Appendix A, two types of universal ground consciousness are conceptualized in the first topic, “the nature of the universal ground.”

Furthermore, the universal ground also has two types. If one asks, “What are those?”

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<sup>31</sup> See Pelliot Tibétain 654, folio 1r.2-5.

They are “the fundamental genuine universal ground” (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*).<sup>32</sup>

Importantly, the distinction between “the fundamental genuine universal ground” (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*)<sup>33</sup> and “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*)<sup>34</sup> adds a layer of complexity to the concept. This could be particularly useful in contrasting how different Buddhist schools or texts approach the universal ground.

It is noteworthy that the *Mahāyānasamgraha* starts by stating that “The universal ground consciousness was presented as a subject to be understood.”<sup>35</sup> It further refers to the “ground” within the triad of ground, path, and fruition, which is also presented as a philosophical foundation. This approach is fitting, as the universal ground consciousness serves as a philosophical foundation. Additionally, the universal ground consciousness conveys the essence of reality itself, positioning it closer to ontological states. We will see more and more how the Dzogchen ground developed based on the similar idea that there is a foundational ground that functions as the ground of all *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

This section examines the various terms associated with the universal ground consciousness, focusing on the phrase *conjoining genuine universal ground* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*). This terminology may have evolved from expressions in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, which states that “If one asks, Why is it called the *universal ground consciousness*? It is so named because it conjoins all afflicted phenomena with their resultant things or links them to their causal things. Alternatively, it is called the universal ground consciousness because it conjoins sentient beings with their own identity.”<sup>36</sup> The passage suggests that the term *universal ground consciousness* is used because of its function of *conjoining* (*sbyor ba*), for which the *Mahāyānasamgraha* provides a clear explanation.

However, in the Heart Essence literature, this expression of *universal ground consciousness* developed into *conjoining genuine* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi*), which, while still rooted in its original causative meaning, gradually evolved into a fixed phrase *conjoining genuine universal ground*. I read *sbyor ba'i don gyi* as *sbyor ba'i don gyis na*.<sup>37</sup> Adding the syllable ན་ (*na*) can clarify the causative or reasoning aspect of this phrase, making the intended meaning more explicit. The

<sup>32</sup> See Pelliot Tibétain 654, (folio 1r.5: དེ་ལ་གུན་གཞི་ལ་ཡང་དབྱེ་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཏེ། དེ་ཡང་གང་ཞིན། གཞི་དོན་གྱི་གུན་གཞི་དང་། ལྷོར་བའི་དོན་གྱི་གུན་གཞི་འོ།

<sup>33</sup> See Pelliot Tibétain 654, folio 1r.5: གཞི་དོན་གྱི་གུན་གཞི་།

<sup>34</sup> See Pelliot Tibétain 654, folio 1r.5: ལྷོར་བའི་དོན་གྱི་གུན་གཞི་།

<sup>35</sup> See the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (*theg pa chen po bsdus pa*, Tōh. 4048=[D4048](#)), 2a5: གུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཤེས་བྱའི་གནས་ལྷན་བཞུག་ཏོ།

<sup>36</sup> See The *Mahāyānasamgraha* (*Theg pa chen po bsdus pa*, Tōh. 4048=[D4048](#) - *theg pa chen po bsdus pa*), 3b1-2: ཅེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་གུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་ཞེན། ལྷེ་བ་ཅན་གུན་ནས་ཉོན་མངས་པའི་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་འབྲས་བུའི་དངོས་པོ་དེར་ལྷོར་བའམ། དེ་ཡང་རྒྱུའི་དངོས་པོར་དེ་དག་ཏུ་ལྷོར་བའི་ཕྱིར་གུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་འོ། །ཡང་ན་སེམས་ཅན་དག་དེའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཏུ་ལྷོར་བས་གུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་འོ།

<sup>37</sup> Note here that the term *ālayavijñāna* (*kun gzhi rnam par she pa*) refers to the conjoining universal ground (*sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*), and one of its sources seems to be the Chapter Five of *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* in Degé Kangyur, vol. 49 (Tōh. 106, mdo sde, ca), folios 12b.3: གུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བྱེ། འདི་ལྷན་དེ་ལྷན་འདི་ལ་བྱུབ་པ་དང་བདེ་བ་གཅིག་པའི་དོན་གྱིས་གུན་ཏུ་ལྷོར་བ་དང་རབ་ཏུ་ལྷོར་བར་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

phrase (*don gyis na*) translates as “in terms of purpose” or “by means of,” while (*sbyor ba'i don gyis na*) translates as “by means of conjoining.” Here, *sbyor ba* means *conjoining*, so this phrase implies interpreting something in the context of its applied meaning or function. Recognizing this original context reveals that the term *conjoining genuine* once had a causal dimension.

The detailed breakdown of the universal ground consciousness into thirteen topics reflects a nuanced understanding and extensive categorization typical of late Yogācāra. The topics range from the nature and characteristics of the universal ground to its superiority and synonyms, offering a comprehensive view of how the universal ground has evolved in different Buddhist traditions. By detailing these thirteen areas, the Pelliot Tibétain 654 offers a nuanced understanding of how the *universal ground consciousness* operates both as a source of continuity across lifetimes and as a platform for the transformation and liberation of the mind. This model illustrates the interdependence between the universal ground consciousness and other forms of consciousness, highlighting the role of the universal ground in the genesis and cessation of *samsāric* existence.

## 2) Analysis of the Synonyms

Among others, the manuscript asks the question, “How many different names does the universal ground have (*kun gzhi mying gi rnam grants du yod pa*)? The answer discusses various synonyms and alternate names for the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), and the list of names includes:

- the universal ground (*kun gzhi*)
- The root consciousness (*rtsa ba'i rnam par shes pa*)
- the consciousness that takes [rebirth] (*len pa'i rnam par shes pa*)
- the aggregate that [endures] as long as *samsāra* exists (*'khor ba'i ci srid pa'i phung po*)
- the limb of existence (*srid pa'i yan lag*)
- mind (*sems*)<sup>38</sup>

The passage emphasizes that these terms are interchangeable and that they all refer to the same foundational concept in Buddhist philosophy/psychology. The names seem to aim at clarifying the multiple layers of meaning and associations tied to the term *ālayavijñāna*, particularly within the Tibetan tradition. Of these six terms, we can trace three of them back to Indic sources such as in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (*dgongs pa nges par 'grel ba'i mdo*), which states:

Viśālamati, this consciousness is also called “appropriating consciousness” (*len pa'i rnam par she pa*) because it grasps and appropriates the body. It is also called “universal ground consciousness” (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*) because it is entirely conjoined with and precisely conjoins with the body in the sense that it shares a common destiny: a blissful embodiment. It is also called “mind,” (*sems*) because it is entirely accumulated and closely accumulated by visual forms, sounds, smells, flavors, tangible objects, and phenomena.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See Pelliot Tibétain 654, (folio 1r):

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter Five of *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* in Degé Kangyur, vol. 49 (Tōh. 106, mdo sde, ca), folios 12b.2-4: ལྟོ

This passage describes universal ground consciousness in three ways: the “appropriating consciousness,” “universal ground consciousness,” and “mind.” It underscores that the two Dunhuang manuscripts aim to capture the terminology and ideas from this *sūtra*.

### 3) Analysis of the Transformation Theme

In the last two of the thirteen topics, the text discusses the reversal of the universal ground leading to non-rebirth in *saṃsāra*. This transformation into the *dharmakāya* aligns directly with this dissertation's focus on transformation and the Great Perfection ground. It highlights a key doctrinal shift from *saṃsāric* consciousness to enlightened awareness.<sup>40</sup>

## 2. The Second Dunhuang Manuscript: IOL Tib J 708

IOL Tib J 708 provides a similarly comprehensive doctrinal exposition on the universal ground consciousness. Together, these two texts systematically develop topics related to this foundational concept of Buddhism. In these early texts, we can see that major conceptual work on the universal ground was already done, as these texts articulate its characteristics, subdivisions, functions, and roles in the processes of rebirth, habitual tendencies, and the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

The examination of the IOL Tib J 708 manuscript, following our discussion of Pelliot tibétain 654, brings into sharper focus the nuances of doctrinal evolution in Tibetan Buddhism. While IOL Tib J 708 expands on the thirteen categories introduced in Pelliot tibétain 654 by adding a new category. "Among the three feelings, which one is endowed with the universal ground?" appears as the text's ninth topic. The manuscript also engages with these categories in a more detailed, one-by-one analysis, offering deeper explorations of each category. In other words, IOL Tib J 708 does not merely reaffirm the teachings noted in Pelliot tibétain 654; it enriches them, offering detailed expositions that bridge theoretical concepts with their practical applications.

This said, the two texts share much in common. They share several analogies, for example, such as the ocean and its waves or nutmeg flowers and their oil that elucidate the intricate relationship between universal ground consciousness and habitual tendencies. Moreover, both texts culminate in the reversal of the universal ground consciousness and transformation of the universal ground.

Given the similarities, I will not repeat the thirteen topics. Instead, I further analyze some of the key concepts to deepen our comprehension of these major ideas. Essentially, the IOL Tib J 708 manuscript advances Tibetan interpretations of Yogācāra philosophy by deepening the understanding of universal ground consciousness through systematically categorizing its nature, functions, and transformational processes.

### 1) Analysis of the Core Concepts

མོས་ཡངས་པ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དེ་ནི་ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་གྲང་བྱ་སྟེ། འདི་ལྟར་དེས་ལུས་འདི་བཟུང་ཞིང་སྒྲངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནི། ཀླན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་  
ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་གྲང་བྱ་སྟེ། འདི་ལྟར་དེ་ལུས་འདི་ལ་གྲུབ་པ་དང་བདེ་བ་གཅིག་པའི་དོན་གྱིས་ཀླན་ཏུ་སྦྱོར་བ་དང་རབ་ཏུ་སྦྱོར་བར་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནི། སེམས་ཞེས་  
གྲང་བྱ་སྟེ། འདི་ལྟར་དེ་ནི་གཟུགས་དང་སྒྲི་དང་བྲི་དང་རོ་དང་རེག་བྱ་དང་ཚས་ཀླན་ཏུ་བསྐྱགས་པ་དང་ཉེ་བར་བསྐྱགས་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནི།

<sup>40</sup> See Lambert Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*, vol. 2 (of 2). (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987), 364 and 369.

The universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) is described as the foundational layer of consciousness that underlies all phenomena. As in PT654, it is divided into two aspects: the *fundamental genuine universal ground* (the foundation for karmic imprints of all sentient beings) and the *conjoining genuine universal ground*. Also, as in PT654, however, the difference between these two is not clearly spelled out. Indeed, they seem to be more-or-less the same--both names for the all ground consciousness. We will return to this question when we turn to Gnubs chen's *Mun pa'i go cha* in chapter two.

The universal ground consciousness interacts closely with the sixfold consciousness (visual, auditory, tactile, and so forth) in a mutually reinforcing manner. The universal ground serves as the causal source, while the sixfold consciousness helps solidify the imprints or habitual tendencies stored within it. Analogies such as the mother-child explain the subtle, less perceptible nature of the universal ground compared to the vivid sixfold consciousness. For instance, the mother represents the universal ground consciousness, and the child represents the collection of six consciousnesses. While the mother gives birth to the child, the relationship between them is reciprocal. As the child grows, whatever they accumulate becomes a nutrient for the mother. Later, the child will also become a mother.

Despite being foundational, the universal ground consciousness is impermanent and continuously flowing, much like a river. This impermanence is critical for distinguishing the universal ground consciousness from the non-Buddhist idea of a permanent self (*ātman*), emphasizing instead its dynamic role as the underlying substrate for *saṃsāra*. The universal ground consciousness perceives both external objects (such as mountains or rivers) and internal phenomena (like faculties and six classes of beings). However, its perception is described as unclear or indeterminate, which sets it apart from the sixfold consciousness that vividly apprehends specific perceptual objects.

The universal ground consciousness is said to be superior to non-Buddhist doctrines and Śrāvaka views. It is a dynamic form of consciousness rather than an inert self, serving as the causal factor for the emergence of other consciousnesses and as the repository for habitual tendencies deposited by these consciousnesses. These imprinted habitual tendencies play a decisive role in determining rebirth across the six realms of *saṃsāra*, with virtuous tendencies leading to rebirth in higher realms and non-virtuous tendencies causing rebirth in lower realms.

The transformation of the universal ground takes place gradually across the stages of enlightenment (*bhūmis*), where conceptual signs and habitual tendencies are progressively eliminated. This transformation reaches its apex at the tenth *bhūmi*, where the universal ground is fully transformed into a mirror-like gnosis, signifying the completion of spiritual progress. To clarify its characteristics, the universal ground is illustrated using analogies. It is compared to a river to emphasize its impermanence, to jasmine flowers to distinguish coarse and subtle tendencies, and to the sun and stars to highlight their imperceptible yet pervasive role. Additional analogies like garlic and a bowl (for habitual imprints) and the ocean and waves (for causality) are also employed.

The existence of the universal ground is validated through scriptural authority (such as the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*), logical reasoning (e.g., explaining the re-emergence of consciousness

after a deep sleep or states of cessation), and inference. For instance, just as smoke signifies fire, the existence of the sixfold consciousness implies an underlying causal consciousness, which is the universal ground.

Finally, the universal ground is described as obscured and indeterminate because it does not clearly perceive or distinguish objects in the same manner as other consciousnesses. This quality differentiates it from the sixfold consciousness's more vivid and determinate nature.

In short, by examining these key ideas, the manuscript provides a nuanced understanding of the Yogācāra framework and the pivotal role of the universal ground consciousness in the cycle of *saṃsāra* and spiritual transformation.

## 2) The Additional Topic: “among the three feelings, which one is endowed with the universal ground”

This additional topic addresses the nature of feelings associated with the universal ground consciousness. The manuscript states:

If someone asks, “Among the three feelings, with which feelings are the [consciousnesses] endowed?” Regarding that, the universal ground and the afflictive mental consciousness are endowed with neutral feelings. The mental consciousness is endowed with [all] three feelings—pleasant, unpleasant, [and neutral].<sup>41</sup>

In summary, the universal ground and afflictive mental consciousness are associated with neutral feelings, while the mental consciousness encompasses all three types of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral.

## 3) The Idea of Buddhahood or Buddha-nature

The opening statement of the text both sets the doctrinal tone for the ensuing discourse and presents a new dimension of the universal ground consciousness that is Buddha-nature. In other words, this introduction does more than just setting the stage for the following discussion; it aligns the manuscript's thematic exploration with significant doctrinal innovations of its era.

The opening declaration explains:

In general, it is taught that all phenomena are the buddha. What is the buddha endowed with? He is endowed with three awakened bodies and four gnoses (Tib. *ye shes*; Skt. *jñāna*). The cause for the three awakened bodies is the four gnoses. Since the cause of the four gnoses is the eight collections of consciousnesses, compounded things produced by causes and conditions are subsumed in these [eight consciousnesses], and uncompounded things not produced by causes and conditions are also subsumed within them. Afflictions that successively produced *saṃsāra* are similarly subsumed. Completely pure phenomena that successively reverse are also subsumed in these.<sup>42</sup> External phenomena, all matter,

<sup>41</sup> See the IOL Tib J 708, folio. 4v. 3-4: ཚེར་བ་གསུམ་ལ་ཚེར་བ་གང་དང་ལྡན་ཞེས་བྱས་པ་ལ། ཀུན་གཞི་དང་ཉན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ནི་ཚེར་བ་བྟང་སྟོན་དང་ལྡན་ནི། ཡིད་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཚེར་བ་བདེ་སྟག་གསུམ་དང་ལྡན་ནི།

<sup>42</sup> Here I am reading this reversal in terms of the reversal of the universal ground discussed in the twelfth topic in Pelliot Tibétain 654 and below.

are also subsumed in these. Internal phenomena, i.e., conscious beings, are also subsumed in these. Therefore, now the eight collections of consciousnesses need to be explained.<sup>43</sup>

A key theme in this excerpt is the interdependency between the eight collections of consciousnesses and all phenomena. This passage vividly encapsulates the all-encompassing framework of the eight collections of consciousnesses, articulating that both saṃsāric and nirvāṇic phenomena, as well as all external and internal realities, are integrally classified within these consciousnesses.

More importantly, the manuscript strategically positions the Buddha as the epitome of enlightenment linked to these consciousnesses through the three awakened bodies and four gnoses. This linkage underscores a seamless integration of ontological and epistemological dimensions, bridging traditional Buddhist ontology with complex epistemic frameworks. These concepts are also introduced in *Cheng Wei Shi Lun* (成唯識論) by Xuan Zang (玄奘), which discusses the transformation of consciousnesses into the “Four Gnoses” 四智 (*catvāri jñānāni*). The transformation of *ālayavijñāna* into the Great Complete Mirror-like Gnosis 大圓鏡智 (*ādarśa-jñāna*). Additionally, as *ālayavijñāna* is transformable, the rest of consciousness could also be transformed into the other three gnoses.

- Equality Gnosis 平等性智 (*śamatā-jñāna*): transformed from the Mentation 末那識 (*manas*)
- Discriminating Gnosis 妙觀察智 (*pratyavekṣa-jñāna*): from the sixth Consciousness 意識 (*manovijñāna*)
- All-accomplishing Gnosis 成所作智 (*kṛtya-anusthāna-jñāna*): from the remaining five consciousnesses 五識, i.e., the five sense perceptions.<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the function of the universal ground has been understood as to perpetuate saṃsāra. This is because the universal ground serves as the foundation for all delusional notions—both positive and negative, but not transcendental, according to earlier sutras and shastras—thereby demonstrating its significance in maintaining saṃsāra. Thus, the universal ground serves as the foundation for the essence of all saṃsāric phenomena. It is the repository for our habitual tendencies. However, in the above passage, this concept appears to intersect with the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* (the buddha-nature), which describes *tathāgatagarbha* as pure and all-encompassing. At the level of appearance, it seems conflicting that the causes of saṃsāra can be traced back to *tathāgatagarbha*.

Indeed, the passage clarifies that all phenomena are perceived as manifestations of the buddhas, endowed with three awakened bodies and four gnoses that originate from the eight collections of consciousness. This elucidation necessitates a detailed exposition of the eight collections, especially the eighth consciousness, known as the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). Here we see the notion of the universal ground (*ālaya*) beginning to evolve from

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<sup>43</sup> A complete translation of this manuscript is available in Appendix B, where each folio has been carefully translated and annotated to bolster the analysis presented here.

<sup>44</sup> Dan Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogacara Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-Shih Lun*, 1st ed. (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 508–17, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315870687>.

its inception in early Yogācāra philosophy toward the foundational philosophy of Dzogchen, where it functions as both an ontological and cosmogonical core.

## G. Conclusion

The notion of the universal ground (*ālaya*) has undergone significant development since its emergence in Yogācāra scholasticism. Yogācāra thought is fundamentally grounded in the principle that all phenomena arise through the mind (*cittamātratā* or *viññaptimātratā*), and thus its primary concern is to explain how the mind functions. In doing so, Yogācāra thinkers developed a sophisticated model describing how mental processes operate in relation to one's karma and experience. The foundation of this model is *ālayaviññāna* that serves as the underlying continuum of our karmic existence. This subliminal or storehouse consciousness holds habitual tendencies and allows them to mature in the future.

While closely aligned with core Yogācāra doctrines, the thirteen categories and terms such as “fundamental genuine universal ground” (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) or “conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*) found in Pelliot tibétain 654 and IOL Tib J 708 are not seen in Indic or Chinese sources and exhibit a distinctly Tibetan scholastic orientation. These features, therefore, most plausibly represent Tibetan scholastic developments rather than direct translations or inheritances from earlier Indic or Chinese exegetical traditions. They use everyday objects as analogies to enhance accessibility and doctrinal clarity. By juxtaposing Buddhist and non-Buddhist perspectives, the two texts also reaffirm Buddhist principles of impermanence and momentariness, further reinforcing their philosophical rigor. Thus, these manuscripts serve as vital links in understanding the evolution of Yogācāra thought within Tibetan Buddhism.

As shown in my next chapter, the categorization in these texts is not an isolated phenomenon unique to the Dunhuang corpus. Most significantly for our purposes, the two terms in these manuscripts: the *fundamental genuine universal ground* (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and the *conjoining genuine universal ground* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*), influenced numerous subsequent writings in Tibet. The closely related sets of terminologies are found in *The Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go cha*), a commentary by Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes on *The Sutra of the Gathering of Intentions* (*Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*). In that commentary, the universal ground consciousness is similarly classified into thirteen categories, with only minor variations from the lists found in the Dunhuang manuscripts. This alignment suggests a shared intellectual and textual tradition between these works, despite their distinct geographical and historical contexts. The cross-references between these texts show that, although geographically distant from central Tibet, Tibetan Buddhists working around Dunhuang were involved in some of the same doctrinal conversations that were going on in ninth- and tenth-century central Tibet.

As I discuss in Chapter Three, in the 11th and 13th centuries, another list from the Heart Essence *Seventeen Tantras* contains four terms: the primordial genuine universal ground (*ye don gyi kun gzhi*), the conjoining genuine universal ground (*sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*), universal ground of habitual tendencies of the body (*bag chags lus kyi kun gzhi*), and universal ground of individual elements (*'byung ba so so'i kun gzhi*). These varying lists of terms highlight the rich complexity and depth of the concept of universal ground consciousness in these ancient traditions.

The recurrence of these categories across different texts and historical periods indicates their centrality in broader doctrinal discourses within early Tibetan Buddhism. Their implications extend beyond mere terminological differences, reflecting deeper philosophical and doctrinal concerns related to the nature of consciousness, rebirth, and existence. The absence of these kinds of categorizations in well-known Indic Buddhist texts raises questions about their origins. While it is tempting to conclude that these categorizations are entirely unique to the Tibetan tradition, this does not necessarily mean that they lack Indic influences. The possibility remains that these lists may have drawn upon earlier, now lost, Indic materials, or they could represent a localized development within the Tibetan scholastic tradition.

Lastly, as one can see, while these early manuscripts establish the universal ground consciousness as the foundation of *saṃsāra*, they do not address when this cycle actually starts. They only mention that *saṃsāra* has existed since beginningless time. Within this conceptual framework, the lack of a clear starting point is like the age-old dilemma of the chicken and egg. Later, in the Dzogchen system, *saṃsāra* is conceived not as something that is *always already* here; instead, as shown in the later chapters of this dissertation, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are understood to begin after the primordial Ground.

## Chapter 2

### GNUPCHEN SANGYE YESHE AND THE FORMATION OF THE DZOGCHEN GROUND (late ninth-tenth century)

#### A. Introduction

Chapter One demonstrates the pivotal role that the categorization and terminology associated with the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*, *ālayavijñāna*) played in the evolution of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Through an examination of the PT 654 (Pelliot tibétain 654) and ITJ 708 (IOL Tib J 708), we saw that at its early developmental stage, *ālayavijñāna* was gradually conceptualized as two-fold: a karmic seeds container that binds us in *saṃsāra* and the buddhahood that guarantees our enlightenment.

This chapter further explores this *saṃsāra/nirvāṇa* non-duality by studying the treatment of the universal ground consciousness in *The Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pai go cha*) by the late ninth-century central Tibetan scholar, Nupchen Sangye Yeshe. This text is a commentary on *The Sūtra of the Gathering of Realizations* (*Dgongs pa dus pa'i mdo*), which today is considered the root text of Anuyoga tantra in the Ancient School (Rnying ma).<sup>45</sup> Nupchen Sangye Yeshe is one of the earliest Tibetan scholars to write extensive philosophical and tantric commentaries. His writings have allowed contemporary scholars to study the influence of his contributions to the formation of Tibetan Buddhist thought.

Indeed, Nupchen's theorization transcends individual teachings and traverses various timelines, geographic regions, and doctrinal lineages. Nupchen discusses the topic of universal ground consciousness in detail in his commentary on the fifty-fifth chapter of *The Armor Against Darkness*, which is titled: "Teaching on the Dark Domain through Subtle Questions and Answers" (*zhus lan phra mo gang gi mun pa'i spyod yul bstan pa*).<sup>46</sup> This text distinctly emphasizes the tantric perspectives on the universal ground consciousness, highlighting its inherently pure nature. Additionally, this chapter first introduces the "four sutras" (*mdo bzhi*), which correspond to the *kun gzhi*, *nyon yid*, *yid shes*, and *sgo lnga*. Thus, Nupchen's discussion represents the first of these discussions, which is entirely about the universal ground consciousness. For instance, Nupchen writes, "objects are not seen due to darkness . . . so the universal ground, the great root, the intrinsic essence of awakened state, is not able to be seen" (*kun pas yul mi mthong bar byed pa bzhin/...kun kun gzhi rtsa ba chen po byang chub snying po'i don mthong du mi ster ro/*)."<sup>47</sup> It seems that "darkness" refers to the universal ground consciousness, which is treated as identical with "the great root" and "the intrinsic essence of the awakened state." In other words, on the one hand, the universal ground is associated with ignorance and obscures things; on the other hand, it is the same as the awakened state. Thus, Nupchen seems to use the term "universal ground" fluidly as the basis for both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

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<sup>45</sup> On the commentary and its larger tradition, see Jacob P. Dalton, *Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> *Mun ba'i go cha* (*Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas ap*, vol. 58), 76b6–77a1.

<sup>47</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha*, (*Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 58), 44a4–5.

When comparing the section on the *universal ground consciousness* in Nupchen's *Armor Against Darkness* with the Dunhuang manuscripts discussed in the previous chapter, we can see they use similar categories and interpretations of the key concepts. Such textual overlap raises intriguing questions about the transmission and development of ideas within Tibetan scholasticism. The connections between Nupchen's writings and the Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang suggest a dynamic interchange of ideas across different Buddhist traditions. However, the mechanics of this intercultural exchange remains an open question. For instance, how was this cross-pollination of ideas facilitated? What was the direction of influence between the teachings in the Dunhuang documents and those in Nupchen's text? Additionally, this shared content suggests that the categorization of the *universal ground consciousness* was a central concern within the intellectual milieu at the time. It reflects both continuity and divergence in the interpretation of Yogācāra within Tibetan scholasticism, illustrating the complex interplay between sūtric and tantric perspectives.

Through an examination of the historical context, cultural interpretations, and doctrinal perspectives, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted relationship between sutra-based and tantra-based interpretations of the universal ground consciousness. Central to this investigation are the early terminologies and concepts associated with the *universal ground* (*kun gzhi*), which serve as a lens through which I explore the broader evolution of Tibetan Buddhist thought.

In this chapter, I examine various texts and their intertextual relationships to understand Nupchen's non-dual way of conceptualizing the *universal ground consciousness*. As shown in Chapter One, the manuscripts Pelliot tibétain 654 and IOL Tib J 708 reflect early Tibetan interests in the eight consciousnesses. The universal ground, once primarily associated with saṃsāric consciousness, was beginning to be reinterpreted in light of tantric teachings as the potential for immediate transformation and realization. Building on this earlier doctrinal developments, Chapter Two focuses on two terms: *the universal ground of the awakened mind* and *the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature*. These terms both evolved from the concept of *universal ground consciousness*.

Additionally, I study twelve sūtric and tantric texts that demonstrate the development and widespread influence of *the universal ground of the awakened mind* and *the universal ground of Buddha-nature*. While this chapter draws heavily on two Nupchen Sangye Yeshe's writings—*The Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go cha*) and *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*bsgom gtan mig sgron*), the following ten texts are also pertinent to my research:

- *A Method for Generating Special Insight* (*lhag mthong skyed pa'i thabs, vipaśyanotpādanopāya*),
- *An Extensive Explanation on the Teaching on the Suchness of the Natural State*, titled *A Song Completely Filling the Inexhaustible Treasury* (*mi zad pa'i gter mdzod yongs su gang ba'i glu zhes bya ba gnyug ma'i de nyid rab tu ston pa'i rgya cher bshad pa; dohanidhikoṣaparipūrṇagīti-nāma-nitya-tattvaparakāśatikā*) by Advayavajra,
- *All-Creating Awakened Mind* (*kun byed byang chung sems*),
- *An Extensive Commentary of the Śālistamba Sūtra* (*'phags pa sā lu ljang pa rgya cher 'grel pa*) by Kamalaśīla

- The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (*lang kar gshegs pa'i mdo*),
- the *Gaṇavyūhasūtra* (*sdong po bkod pa'i mdo*),
- The *Guhyagarbha Tantra* (*rgyud gsang ba snying po*),
- *The Secret Essence of All Tathāgatas: The General Scripture of All the Characteristics and Tantras* (*mtshan nyid dang rgyud thams cad kyi lung gi spyi de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba'i snying po*) by Dbus ston pa Ye shes rdo rje, and
- *Oral Instruction Called “The Meditation on Reality of the Two Stages”* (*rim pa gnyis pa'i de kho na nyid bsgom pa zhes bya ba'i zhal gyi lung*) by Buddhajñānapāda.

By examining these texts, this chapter uncovers how the conceptualization of the *universal ground consciousness* evolved across diverse Buddhist traditions, and how these ideas inform broader doctrinal developments.

Essentially, this chapter delves into the intricacies of the universal ground's transition from a sūtric to a tantric framework, tracing the philosophical trajectory that underpins this transformative shift. By tracing the doctrinal developments from early Yogācāra's exploration of *the universal ground consciousness* (*ālayavijñāna*) to its integration within the Buddha-nature doctrine, the chapter highlights how foundational concepts were elaborated and reinterpreted across Buddhist traditions. Specifically, this study explores how early dualistic based interpretations of the universal ground consciousness—as the basis for the saṃsāric nature of virtuous and nonvirtuous actions (karma), along with their habitual tendencies that produce the fruits of happiness and suffering—rooted in seminal sūtric texts such as the Dunhuang manuscripts, gradually evolved into a more nuanced nondual perspective, a transition that becomes particularly pronounced within the tantric traditions.

Key sūtric texts such as the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and *Gaṇavyūha Sūtra* prominently feature the concept of *ālayavijñāna* and its association with *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature). These texts lay the groundwork for what is later articulated as *ālayavijñāna-tathāgatagarbha*, a composite term that underscores the interconnection between consciousness and Buddha-nature. This foundation is further expanded in tantric contexts, as exemplified by the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, its commentaries, and *the All-Creating Awakened Mind* (*kun byed byang chung sems*), where these ideas undergo a radical transformation. In particular, the emergence of terms like *ālayabodhicitta* (*the universal ground of the awakened mind*) in the Dzogchen context reflects an intricate synthesis of sūtric and tantric thought, offering a refined lens to approach the nature of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as inherently nondual.

Drawing upon a diverse array of sūtric and tantric texts, this chapter articulates how these doctrinal shifts reflect broader philosophical transformations within Buddhist traditions. By showcasing the adaptability and depth of these evolving frameworks, my analysis underscores the sophistication with which tantric traditions not only inherited from but also innovated upon sūtric traditions. This culminates in the establishment of a profound nondual paradigm that redefines key metaphysical and practical dimensions of Buddhist thought.

## B. Terminological Background

The term *kun gzhi* appears in many compound words throughout history. This phenomenon is noticed by scholars. For example, in *Philosophical Foundations*, David Higgins writes that “the term *kun gzhi* occurs only twice in [Nupchen’s] *bSam gtan mig sgron*, once in a quotation from the *rTse mo byung rgyal* and once in the compound *kun gzhi byang chub kyi sems*.”<sup>48</sup> However, this statement is incorrect, since the term *kun gzhi* appears at least thirteen times in the text. These occurrences include not only the compound *kun gzhi byang chub sems*, but also expressions such as *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa* (universal ground consciousness), *gzhi don gyi kun gzhi* (fundamental genuine universal ground), and *sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi* (conjoining genuine universal ground).

Among these compound words of the universal ground, the term *the universal ground of awakened mind* is notably absent from the Kangyur,<sup>49</sup> which contains the canonical scriptures of Tibetan Buddhism, while it is found in two Tengyur<sup>50</sup> texts: *A Method for Generating Special Insight* (*lhag mthong skyed pa’i thabs bzhugs, vipaśyanotpādanopāya*)<sup>51</sup> and *An Extensive Explanation on the Teaching on the Suchness of the Natural State titled A Song Completely Filling the Inexhaustible Treasury* (*mi zad pa’i gter mdzod yongs su gang ba’i glu zhes bya ba gnyug ma’i de nyid rab tu ston pa’i rgya cher bshad pa; \*dohanidhikoṣaparipūrṇagīti-nāma-nitya-tattvaprakāśatikā*).<sup>52</sup>

Among these two texts, the first lacks both a Sanskrit title and a colophon, making it difficult to determine its exact date of composition. It seems to have been composed in Tibetan after the eighth century, as it frequently cites Kamalaśīla’s *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākramas*, composed in Tibet between the years 792-794 CE). Although no Tibetan authors are explicitly mentioned in the text, its references suggest a post-Kamalaśīla composition. The absence of a Sanskrit title or colophon further suggests that the text may have been composed in Tibetan.<sup>53</sup>

The second text, by contrast, includes both a Sanskrit title and a colophon, attributing its

<sup>48</sup> David Higgins, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical Rdzogs chen in Tibet: Investigating the Distinction Between Dualistic Mind (sems) and Primordial Knowing (ye shes)*, (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 2013), 190.

<sup>49</sup> The *Kangyur* (*bka’ gyur*, “Translated Words”) is the Tibetan Buddhist canon consisting of texts attributed to the Buddha (including sutras, vinaya, and tantras) that were translated from Indian languages into Tibetan.

<sup>50</sup> The *Tengyur* (*bstan gyur*, “Translated Treatises”) is the Tibetan Buddhist canon of commentarial works, including texts by Indian Buddhist scholars on philosophy, logic, epistemology, and tantric practices. These texts were translated into Tibetan to complement the *Kangyur*.

<sup>51</sup> See *A Method for Generating Special Insight* (*lhag mthong skyed pa’i thabs bzhugs*, Tōh. 4366 = [D4366](#)), 249a6: ཁ་ཅིག་ན་རེ་རང་གི་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་དྲུས་གསུམ་དུ་འདུས་མ་བྱས་པ་མི་འགྱུར་བ་དྲུག་པ་དེ་དོ་ཞེས་ན། བྱང་ཆུབ་དང་ཆོས་ཉིད་ལ་སྟོན་པ་དེ་ལ་ ཟེར་བས། དེ་ནི་པ་རོལ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པའི་ཐེག་པ་ལྷན་ཏེ་ཅང་ཆེས་གསང་ལྷགས་ཟབ་མོ་ནས་ཀྱང་མི་སྟོན་དོ། །འདི་ནི་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྒྲིང་པོ་ཡིན།.

<sup>52</sup> See *An Extensive Explanation on the Teaching on the Suchness of the Natural State called A Song Completely Filling the Inexhaustible Treasury* (མི་ཟད་པའི་གཏིར་མཛོད་ཡོངས་སུ་གང་བའི་སྒྲ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་གཏུག་མའི་དེ་ཉིད་རབ་དུ་སྟོན་པའི་བྱ་ཆེར་བཤད་ པ་, *dohanidhikoṣaparipūrṇagīti-nāma-nitya-tattvaprakāśatikā*, Tōh. 2257 = [D2257](#)), 254b4: དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་དྲུས་ན་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་ཀྱི་བྱིས་བདག་དང་ཆོས་ཉིད་མ་བཅོས་པ་རྣམས་མའི་བྱིས་བདག་མོ་གཉིས་ཡོངས་སྟོན་དེ་དེ་ཡང་འདོད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་མི་འགོག་ཅིང་རང་དགའི་ རྩལ་དུ་འོ། །.

<sup>53</sup> Martin T Adam, *Meditation and the Concept of Insight in Kamalashila’s Bhāvanākramas*. (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2002), 3.

authorship to Advayavajra (c. 1007–1085),<sup>54</sup> indicating that it was composed after Nupchen's works. In this text, he employs the term *universal ground of awakened mind* (*kun byang chub sems*). The text was composed in India, and the term *universal ground of awakened mind* appears in it. This shows that the *universal ground of awakened mind* is not unique to Tibetan materials. However, this term later became more prominent in the tantric teachings in the Nyingma tradition, particularly in the Dzogchen Mind-Series. Since Nupchen (ca. 844–10th)'s writings also employ this term as the main concept to illuminate both the storehouse consciousness and the true nature of phenomena, it is possible that *An Extensive Explanation on the Teaching on the Suchness of the Natural State titled A Song Completely Filling the Inexhaustible Treasury* is influenced by Nupchen.

The first text, *A Method for Generating Special Insight* (*lhag mthong skyed pa'i thabs*), states:

Some argue, because we say that awakening, reality, and so on are when our own universal ground of the awakened mind (*kun gzhi byang chub sems*)--which is described as permanent, unchanging, and uncompounded across the three times--is recognized, that this is not taught at all in the Perfection Vehicle nor even in the profound Secret Mantra. [They argue that] because this universal ground is the Buddha-nature, the core of the teachings, it is eternal.

In response, we reply that this will not refute those of Secret Mantra, but for gradually guiding beings, even the noble *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* teaches three vehicles while also teaching that, "As long as there is ideation, there is no end to the vehicles." Additionally, the *Gaṇḍhavyūha Sūtra* mentions fourteen vehicles [in the context of provisional meanings]. However, from a definitive perspective, there is only one vehicle because there is only one *dharmadhātu* (expanse reality).<sup>55</sup>

This passage highlights a debate regarding the presentation of *the universal ground of the mind of awakening* in sutras and tantras. The opponent claims that this concept is absent from the tantras, let alone the sutras. The author of *The Method of Generating Special Insight* (*lhag mthong skyed pa'i thabs*) counters this claim by asserting that the concept is indeed present in the sutras. More specifically, the author clarifies that his opponent does not deny the tantric teachings; instead, he argues that *the universal ground of awakened mind* is known to be

<sup>54</sup> Advayavajra (*Gnyis su med pa'i rdo rje*, c. 1007–1085, also known as Maitreyañātha, Maitrīpāda, and to Tibetans, Maitrīpa) was a prominent Indian Buddhist Mahāsiddha renowned for his contributions to the Mahāmudrā transmission in tantric Buddhism. He studied under the eminent masters Shavaripa and Naropa and taught influential figures such as Atiśa, Marpa, Vajrapāṇi, Karopa, Natekara (Sahajavajra), Devākaracandra (Śūnyatāsamādhi), and Rāmapāla. His hermitage was situated in the Mithilā region (Tirhut), encompassing parts of northern Bihar and southern Nepal.

<sup>55</sup> See *A Method for Generating Special Insight* (*lhag mthong skyed pa'i thabs bzhugs*, Tōh. 4366=D4366), 24926–24926b: ཁ་ཅིག་ན་རེ་རང་གི་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་དྲུས་གསུམ་དུ་འདུས་མ་བྱས་པ་མི་འགྱུར་བ་རྟག་པ་དེ་ངོ་ཤེས་ན། བྱང་ཆུབ་དང་ཆོས་ཉིད་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེ་ལ་ཟེར་བས། དེ་ནི་པ་རོལ་དུ་བྱེན་པའི་ཐོག་པ་ལྟར་ཏེ་ཅང་ཆོས་གསང་ལྷགས་ཟབ་མོ་ནས་ཀྱང་མི་སྦྱོན་ཏེ། །འདི་ནི་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྤྱིང་པོ་ཡིན། བསྟན་པའི་སྤྱིང་པོ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་རྟག་གོ། ཞེས་ཟེར་ཏེ། དེ་ལ་སྦྱས་པ། གསང་ལྷགས་པ་ནི་དགག་པ་མི་བྱེད་མོད་ཀྱི། འོན་ཀྱང་རིམ་གྱིས་བྱང་བའི་དབང་དུ་མཛད་ནས། འཕགས་པ་ལང་ཀར་གཤེགས་པ་ལས། ཐོག་པ་གསུམ་དུ་ཡང་གསུངས་པ། །ཇི་སྲིད་འདུ་ཤེས་ཡོད་ཀྱི་བར། ཐོག་པའི་མཐའ་ལ་ཐུག་པ་མེད། ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་གསུངས་སོ། །ཡང་སྤང་པོ་བཀོད་པའི་མདོ་ལས། ཐོག་པ་བརྩ་བཞི་གསུངས་པ་ལ། དེས་པའི་དོན་དུ་ནི་ཐོག་པ་གཅིག་ལས་མེད་པར་གསུངས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་གཅིག་ལས་མེད་པའི་བྱུང་རྒྱུ། །

mentioned in sutras as the singular definitive essence that underlies all vehicles. In this way, this text demonstrates the acceptance and presence of this term across both sutras and tantras. Indeed, it emphasizes that this concept is not unique to tantric teachings, but instead, is an integral part of the broader Buddhist doctrinal framework. The text's citations of sutras like the *Laṅkāvatāra* and the *Gaṇḍavyūha* also highlight its author's strategic effort to validate the doctrinal continuity between Yogācāra and tantric/Tathāgatagarbha teachings. By emphasizing the inclusivity of both sutra and tantra, the author seeks to promote harmony among Buddhist teachings. This effort reflects a broader hermeneutical approach that unifies definitive meanings across diverse frameworks.

Additionally, this approach of *the universal ground of awakened mind* as a foundational, universally applicable concept counters claims that it is exclusive to tantric teachings. Drawing from Kamalaśīla, the text likely emerged within a context of intense philosophical debates, as it navigates the assimilation of Indian Buddhist thought in Tibet while addressing critiques from various doctrinal perspectives. In sum, the appearance of *the universal ground of awakened mind* in the Tengyur, but not in the Kangyur, suggests an evolution of thought within Indian and Tibetan Buddhism of the eighth and ninth centuries. It represents an attempt by later tantric commentators to refine their conceptualization of the universal ground to align it with the progressive stages of realization emphasized in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions.

Other than *the universal ground of awakened mind* (*kun gzhi byang chub sems*, \*ālayabodhicitta), in the vast expanse of Buddhist philosophical treatises, another innovative and nuanced term also takes center stage: *the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature* (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po kun gzhi rnam par she pa*;<sup>56</sup> \*sugatagarbha-ālayavijñāna). Since these essentially are different forms of the same meaning, in this chapter, I mostly use *the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature* except when working with sources that involve another version of the term. Moreover, unlike the universal ground of the awakened mind that is rarely seen in Indic textual sources, the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature could be found in many Indic texts, such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (*lang kar gshegs pa'i mdo*) and the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* (*sdong po bkod pa'i mdo*).

*The universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature* emerges from a synthesis of two pivotal ideas: *the universal ground consciousness* (ālayavijñāna) and *Buddha-nature* (tathāgatagarbha). By merging these two terms, *the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature* implies that the universal ground consciousness is not merely a passive storehouse for karmic seeds but also contains the latent essence of buddhahood. The term thus suggests that the seed of enlightenment lies *within* the deluded layers of consciousness, ever present yet waiting for the appropriate conditions to sprout. Conceptualized in this way, the universal ground becomes a dual space: both a place where karmic traces accumulate, perpetuating *saṃsāra*, and a space of potential for liberation, through the revelation of Buddha-nature, can manifest.

In short, these two terms—*the universal ground of awakened mind* and *the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature*—reflect a conceptual shift from understanding the universal

<sup>56</sup> See The *Āryalaṅkāvatārasūtra* ('Phags pa lang kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo, Tōh. 107=D107), 143b2 and 144a3, and the same term also occurs more than a dozen times in 'Phags pa lang kar gshegs pa rin po che'i mdo las songs rgyas thams cad kyi gsung gi snying po zhes bya ba'i le'u (Tōh. 108=D108).

ground as a potential to a state of realization. Indeed, tantric teachings portray the universal ground not merely as a basis but as an active, transformative force embedded in the spiritual path. The two terms invite us to reconsider the very nature of consciousness and its role in the process of awakening. Both terms challenge the rigid dichotomy between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* by suggesting that the universal ground, traditionally seen as the basis for conditioned existence, can also be the basis for enlightenment.

Though conceptually distinct, these two terms emerge as one, reflecting the intricate relationship between the ordinary and enlightened mind. Thus, the tantric interpretation of these terms points to a radical reimagining of the mind's nature, highlighting the fluid and dynamic nature of the path to awakening. At the level of appearance, bridging the deluded and the realized mind seems to reflect an expansion of conceptual scope.

Importantly, this reading of a potential boundary dissolution between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is subjective and reflects my own understanding. Throughout history, scholars have continuously debated the exact meanings of these terms, and their disagreement can be found in contemporary scholarship as well. For example, Samten Gyaltsen Karmay has a different view on what *kun gzhi* refers to. In *The Great Perfection* (rDzogs Chen), he reads the *kun gzhi* in Nupchen's writing as synonymous with *kun gzhi byang chub kyi sems*. He observes:

“In [*bsam gtan mig sgron*], [*kun gzhi*] is mentioned only once, but significantly in connection with the *gzhi* appearing as *kun gzhi byang chub kyi sems*, ‘the thought of enlightenment, the basis of all’. This restricted use of the word *kun gzhi* in these works seems to indicate that the term did not, in early times, carry the full connotations of the theory of *ālayavijñāna*, but was simply used in its literal sense, *kun gzhi*, ‘the basis of all’, for to apply the term *kun gzhi rnam shes* to the Primordial Basis would be contradictory to the view according to which the *gzhi* is primordially pure (*ka dag*).”<sup>57</sup>

In other words, Karmay insists that, according to Nupchen, *kun gzhi* has little to do with the universal ground consciousness and should be understood as *gzhi*, which refers to the universal ground of awakened mind. As shown in the following section, I differ from Karmay's confinement of *kun gzhi* within the awakened mind and argue that Nupchen uses *kun gzhi* to articulate the interconnectedness between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. As mentioned earlier, the term *kun gzhi* appears multiple times in the *bsam bstan mig sgon*. Sometimes, it appears as *kun gzhi rnam shes* (the universal ground consciousness), while sometimes, it also appears as *kun gzhi byang chub sems* (the universal ground of awakened mind), *gzhi don gyi kun gzhi* (the fundamental genuine universal ground), and *sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi* (the conjoining genuine universal ground), and so forth. Thus, the term *kun gzhi* is not fixed on a single subject. When it is compounded with another term, its meaning changes.

The fluid usages of *kun gzhi* not only reflect the Tibetan tantric tradition's engagement with earlier Yogācāra and Mahāyāna frameworks but also demonstrate its unique contribution to Buddhist soteriology. Through the lens of tantra, the universal ground is no longer simply a

<sup>57</sup> Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, *The Great Perfection (rDzogs Chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, 2nd ed., Brill's Tibetan Studies Library 11, ed. Henk Blezer, Alex McKay, and Charles Ramble (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 178-9.

passive, karmic repository but a vital, transformative force at the heart of the path to liberation.

### C. The Mind of Awakening in Early Tibetan Tantric Writings

The early Nyingma School (a.k.a. the Ancient tradition of the early translation tantras) emphasizes the concept of *the awakened mind* (*byang chub sems*) as a cornerstone of their soteriological and philosophical framework.<sup>58</sup> Its prevalence in the Nyingma corpus extends into Tibetan scholars and practitioners' use of the term in connection with transforming the universal ground into the state of realization. This connection finds its clearest articulation in the works of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe, particularly in his *The Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go cha*), and to a lesser degree in his *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*). For instance, the term *the universal ground of the awakened mind* (*kun gzhi byang chub sems*) appears four times in Volume Two of *The Armor Against Darkness*.<sup>59</sup> A slight variation of this term, *kun gzhi byang chub kyi sems* has the same meaning—*the universal ground of the mind of awakening*, also occurs once.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the expression *kun gzhi byang chub kyi snying po* (*the universal ground essence of the mind of awakening* appears once within the same volume), further contributes to the nuanced discourse on the universal ground within this text.<sup>61</sup> In sum, these seminal texts of Nupchen explore the pivotal role of the awakened mind as both the pathway to liberation and the key to understanding the dynamic relationship between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

At the heart of Nupchen's thought, then, lies a dual vision of the *universal ground*—a concept shared across Buddhist traditions but uniquely interpreted in the Nyingma tantric perspective. As discussed in the previous chapter, in Pelliot tibétain 654, the *universal ground consciousness* (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) serves as the passive repository of habitual tendencies (*bag chags*) and karmic imprints; in IOL Tib J 708, the same term has taken on another meaning: Buddhahood. When it comes to Nupchen, he elevates the *universal ground* (notably, he does not use the longer term, *universal ground consciousness*, allowing for his dual interpretation of the term) to a notion of *the universal ground of awakened mind* (*kun gzhi byang chub sems*).

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<sup>58</sup> The term is found frequently in the *Collection of Ancient Tantras* (*Rnying ma rgyud bum*), associated with the earliest transmission of tantric teachings to Tibet. On the importance of *bodhicitta* in these sources, see Jacob P. Dalton, *Conjuring the Buddha*, pp. 148-168, and for a more general overview of the concept, see Dorje Wangchuk, *The Resolve to Become a Buddha: A Study of the Bodhicitta Concept in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2007. Studia Philologica Buddhica Monograph Series xxiii. 4.

<sup>59</sup> See *The Armor Against Darkness* (*mun pai go cha*), in *Rñin ma Bka ma rgyas pa*, edited by Bdud joms Jigs-bral-ye-sés-rdo-rje, Dupjung Lama edition, vol. 58 (Kalingpong, Dist. Darjeeling, W.B., 1982–1987), 73; 235.1; 594.3-4; and 605.3-4. Also, see *The Armor Against Darkness*, in *Snga gyur bka ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 89, edited by Tshe ring rgya mtso (Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa/Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khangs, 2009), 66.5; 226.1; 578.6; and 590.1: ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་.

<sup>60</sup> See *The Armor Against Darkness* (*mun pai go cha*), in *Rñin ma Bka ma rgyas pa*, edited by Bdud joms Jigs-bral-ye-sés-rdo-rje, Dupjung Lama edition, vol. 58 (Kalingpong, Dist. Darjeeling, W.B., 1982–1987), 279.4. Also, see *The Armor Against Darkness*, in *Snga gyur bka ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 89, edited by Tshe ring rgya mtso (Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa/Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khangs, 2009), 270.3: ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་.

<sup>61</sup> See *The Armor Against Darkness* (*mun pai go cha*), in *Rñin ma Bka ma rgyas pa*, edited by Bdud joms Jigs-bral-ye-sés-rdo-rje, Dupjung Lama edition, vol. 58 (Kalingpong, Dist. Darjeeling, W.B., 1982–1987), 50.6. Also, see *The Armor Against Darkness*, *Snga gyur bka ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 89, edited by Tshe ring rgya mtso (Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa/Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khangs, 2009), 44.6-45.1: ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སྤྱིང་པོ་.

Early Tibetan tantric writings articulate *the universal ground of awakened mind* as possessing an active and luminous quality. The (possibly eleventh-century) Nyingma tantra—*All Creating Awakened Mind* (*Kun byed byang chung sems*), unpacks all qualities of *bodhicitta* (i.e., the awakened mind), including its luminosity. It is this luminous dimension that transforms the universal ground consciousness from *saṃsāric* bondage into the ground of liberation. In other words, in the Nyingma teachings, *the awakened mind* becomes a transformative principle. It dissolves the dualistic misperceptions of our ordinary cognition and, at the same time, reveals the inherent purity (*ka dag*) and intrinsic luminosity (*'od gsal*) of reality.

Nupchen's perspective partakes of both this tantric perspective on the universal ground and that of the earlier Yogācāra formulations. As shown in the following passage, he situates the presentation of *kun gzhi* within a larger teaching on how *saṃsāra* is perpetuated through ignorance, which leads to a non-recognition of *bodhicitta*. This non-recognition, in turn, gives rise to all *saṃsāric* sufferings.

Due to not realizing the nature [of appearances] in that way, “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*), which is the cause of *saṃsāra* present in a continuous stream of moments, is also the cause of the seven collections [of consciousness]. Together with their potential habitual tendencies, it becomes the root of giving rise to and experiencing/happening all afflicted phenomena, which in turn becomes the root of *saṃsāra*. Therefore, this manifests as various entities of perceived objects and perceiving subjects. However, there is no intrinsic essence in what arises and appears within this scope.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, Nupchen theorizes the ontological relationship between ignorance and the universal ground in relation to the infrastructure of *saṃsāra*. The Yogācāra School, on the other hand, seems to be more concerned with the workings of ignorance. As Kamalaśīla's commentary on the *Śālistamba Sūtra* explains: “Here, since it is great darkness, it is ignorance. This and so forth teach the etymologies of ignorance. It is ignorance because it makes it seem as if there is no suchness.”<sup>63</sup> This passage emphasizes ignorance as an active misapprehension of *tathatā* (suchness), a direct denial of the ultimate reality. Indeed, Kamalaśīla's framing of “darkness” highlights the phenomenological dimension of ignorance. Within this framework, ignorance is conceived as an active mental distortion of reality.

Thus, the distinct focuses of Nupchen and Kamalaśīla reflect two complementary emphases. Kamalaśīla identifies ignorance as an active cognitive delusion. Nupchen, on the other hand, explores ignorance at the structural level, depicting it as the foundational obstruction embedded within the universal ground consciousness. In other words, according to Nupchen, darkness both defines the ground of our mundane existence and is part of that ground. By juxtaposing

<sup>62</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha*, (*Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 58), 84b2–5: ཅེས་པ་རང་བཞིན་དེ་ལྟར་མ་མཐོང་བས་སྦྱར་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་བའི་རྒྱ་སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་རྒྱ་དུ་ཡོད་པ་དེ་ནི་ཚིགས་བདུན་གྱི་འདུང་སྐྱེད་བྱེད། ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཚིགས་རྣམས་བསྐྱེད་ཅིང་འབྱུང་བའི་རྩ་བ་བག་ཆགས་སྟོབས་ཅན་དང་བཅས་པས་འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བར་གྱུར་པས་དངོས་པོ་གཟུང་འཛིན་སྒྲ་ཚིགས་སུ་སྦྱང་བ་དེ་ཉིད་དོ། །འོན་ཀྱང་དེ་ཙམ་ཉིད་ན་རང་བཞིན་གང་དུ་འདུང་ཞིང་སྦྱང་བ་ནི་ངོ་ཙམ་མེད་པ་ཁོ་ན་ལོ། །

<sup>63</sup> See *Śālistambakaṭīkā* (*'phags pa sa lu ljang pa rgya cher 'grel pa*, Tōh. 4001=D4001), 158a2: དེ་ལ་སྦྱན་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་ཕྱིར་མ་རིག་པ་ལོ། དེ་ཁོ་ན་མེད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་བྱེད་པས་ན་མ་རིག་པ་ལོ།

Nupchen’s writings with Kamalaśīla’s commentary, we gain a richer understanding of “darkness” and its doctrinal significance. Both thinkers utilize “darkness” to describe ignorance; yet, they situate it within distinct frameworks: Kamalaśīla focuses on its cognitive and phenomenological aspects, while Nupchen grounds it within the ontological substratum of the universal ground. In this way, Nupchen’s concept of the *universal ground of the awakened mind* expands upon earlier Yogācāra notions, reframing the *universal ground* as both the source of delusion and the ultimate seat of awakening. Put differently, Nupchen and Kamalaśīla collectively establish a concept of darkness or ignorance that simultaneously signifies both an obstruction to realization and, for Nupchen, the very condition that one’s liberation through the awakened mind is possible.

Moreover, Nupchen Sangye Yeshe introduces his whole magnum opus, *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*), by emphasizing the centrality of the universal ground of awakened mind:

The king of pith instructions that establishes the universal ground of awakened mind (*kung gzhi byang chub sems; ālayabodhicitta*) as the great spontaneous perfection is the meditation called the “Eyes of Yogins;” its other title is the “Boat Meditation of the Great Vehicle” because it helps [beings] cross the four rivers of *saṃsāra*.<sup>64</sup>

In this passage, Nupchen identifies the universal ground of awakened mind as the great spontaneous perfection (*lhun grub chen po*). The *universal ground of awakened mind* represents an evolved form of the *ālayavijñāna*—the universal ground consciousness—as it is transformed through the realization of the awakened state. Thus, by referring to this realization as spontaneous perfection, Nupchen suggests that enlightenment is not something that must be painstakingly created or accumulated over time, but rather something innate and effortlessly realized once obscurations are removed.

Additionally, the metaphor of yogins’ eyes evokes the notion of *pratyakṣa*, or direct perception, with which the practitioner gains a clear and unobstructed vision of reality through meditative insight. Within this context, the “Eyes of Yogins” point to a specific way of contemplation that illuminates the true nature of the mind, which is the universal ground mind of awakening. Furthermore, Nupchen refers to this practice as the “Boat Meditation of the Great Vehicle (*theg pa chen po'i sgrog ma'i ting nge 'dzin*),” a powerful metaphor suggesting that the practice is a vehicle for liberation. The four rivers of *saṃsāra* (*khos ba'i chu bzhi*)—desire, ignorance, views, and karmic formations—are strong currents that sweep beings along the cyclical flow of suffering and rebirth. By likening his meditation technique to a boat, Nupchen claims that this practice can carry beings across these treacherous currents, safely ferrying them to the shore of liberation.

In short, this passage demonstrates the importance of both a theoretical understanding of the universal ground of awakened mind and the practical application of such an understanding

<sup>64</sup> See *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*, manuscript), 2.2—4: དེ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་ལྷན་གྱིས་རྫོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་གཏན་ལ་དབབ་པའི་མན་ངག་གི་རྒྱལ་པོ། རྣལ་འབྱོར་པའི་མིག་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་བསམ་གཏན་འདིའི་མཚན་གྱི་རྣམ་གྲངས་ནི་འཁོར་བའི་རྒྱ་བོ་བཞི་ལས་སྐྱོལ་བའི་ཕྱར། ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་བྱའི་བསམ་གཏན་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

through the transformative power of meditation. Nupchen uses metaphors such as the boat and the yogins' eyes to highlight the accessibility and profound impact of these teachings, portraying the universal ground not as an abstract concept but as an essential and liberating force in the practice of the Great Vehicle.

In *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation*, Nupchen deepens this non-dual understanding of ignorance/enlightenment by portraying the universal ground as both the origin and dissolution of dualistic experiences. He writes: “since there is no phenomenon that is not pervaded by the universal ground, each and every one is experienced as the taste of great bliss.”<sup>65</sup> Nupchen conceives the awakened mind as it reveals the intrinsic blissful nature of all phenomena. In doing so, he dissolves the duality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* into a unified experience. Additionally, the above passage emphasizes the transformative capacity of the awakened mind. Instead of being a storehouse, it can transcend ignorance as well as unify all phenomena within the luminous ground of suchness.

Moreover, in *The Armor Against Darkness*, Nupchen explains that when the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) becomes reified as an object to itself, it gives rise to consciousness. Nupchen describes this process as follows:

“Through the actual confusion of the universal ground appearing as its own object, and through the doors of cognizing, apprehending, and understanding, specifically by the six collections [of consciousness], from this stream of momentary conceptual designations based on the view of a self, it becomes weak and miserable as *saṃsāric* phenomena.”<sup>66</sup>

The passage presents *saṃsāric* cognition as arising not from an autonomous consciousness but from a primary misrecognition of the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) itself. When the universal ground appears as its own object, this reflexive objectification gives rise first to consciousness as such and subsequently differentiates into the six collections of consciousnesses through the activities of cognizing, apprehending, and understanding. This cognitive stream functions through momentary conceptual designations grounded in self-grasping, resulting in the degraded phenomena of *saṃsāra*, which Nupchen characterizes as “weak and miserable.” Crucially, consciousness is thus secondary and contingent upon confusion, while the universal ground remains as a source of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. It is unclear whether he believes that the universal ground is totally pure and unconditioned. However, in the chapter commentary, he equates the universal ground with the awakened mind. Such conceptualization sharply distinguishes Nupchen's early Dzogchen model from Yogācāra accounts that posit *ālayavijñāna* as a foundational mental substrate.

Ultimately, Nupchen Sangye Yeshe's *The Armor Against Darkness* and *The Lamp for the Eye of*

<sup>65</sup> See *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*, manuscript), 465.3—465.4: ཀུན་གཞིས་མ་ཁྲུབ་པའི་ཆོས་མེད་པས། ཐམས་ཅད་ནས་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་བདེ་བ་རོ་བདེའ་བར་འགྱུར་རོ།

<sup>66</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* (*Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 58), 86.4–6: ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་འཁྲུལ་པ་དངོས་རང་ཡུལ་དུ་སྒྲུང་བ་ལ། ཆོག་གས་བྱས་གིས་བྱེ་བྲག་དུ་བཟུང་ཞིང་ཤེས་རིག་པའི་སྒོ་ནས། ནང་དུ་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཡིད་ཀྱིས་བདག་ལྷས་ཤིང་བཟུང་བའི་བརྟགས་པའི་སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་རྒྱན་དེ་ལས་འཁོར་བའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་སུ་རེད་ཅིང་ཉམ་ཐག་གོ། །

*Contemplation* exemplify the sophistication of early Nyingma thought. His nuanced articulation of the awakened mind and its relationship to the universal ground demonstrates a dynamic vision that views ignorance and realization, or *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, as not separate but intimately intertwined. Within this framework, *bodhicitta*, or the awakened mind, is the vehicle for transcendence. It can transform dark ignorance into the luminous clarity of realization. Thus, Nupchen's theory reaffirms the central role of the awakened mind in the tantric path. In sum, the shared metaphor of “darkness” is a powerful bridge that connects the Yogācāra and Dzogchen traditions; it demonstrates, at the same time, the profound integrative capacity of the awakened mind within the Buddhist vision of liberation.

#### D. The Universal Ground Consciousness of Buddha-nature

This section investigates precedents for Nupchen's conceptualization of the Dzogchen Ground found in earlier Yogācārin notions of the *universal ground consciousness* and Buddha-nature. While a significant body of Yogācāra literature establishes a pure universal ground or Buddha-nature, the meanings of these terms often overlap with that of *the universal ground consciousness*. This overlap suggests a complex interplay between these ideas. This section unpacks such interrelationality in the context of the influence of these terms on Dzogchen thought.

##### - The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*

Among the Yogācāra sutras, the *Laṅkāvatāra* is of particular significance for any study of a positive universal ground consciousness. The term *universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature* (*sugatagarbhālayvijñāna*, *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po kun gzhi rnam par she pa*),<sup>67</sup> appears more than a dozen times. For example, the text says:

O Mahāmati, if the Buddha-nature were not endowed with what is known as the *ālayavijñāna*, then, O Mahāmati, there would be no such thing as the *ālayavijñāna-tathāgatagarbha*. Consequently, there would be neither engagement nor disengagement.<sup>68</sup>

Such passages emphasize the interdependence between Buddha-nature and universal ground consciousness. They also suggest that Buddha-nature operates through universal ground consciousness, as the universal ground consciousness is the foundation for its *saṃsāric* engagements and its eventual liberation. By integrating the Yogācāra's dynamic understandings of mental processes with the ontological affirmation of Buddha-nature, the *Laṅkāvatāra* resolves a doctrinal tension between the conditioned and the unconditioned: the conditioned universal ground consciousness is the medium for both *saṃsāric* entanglement and the manifestation of the unconditioned Buddha-nature. In doing so, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* conceptualizes engagement (*saṃsāra*) and disengagement (*nirvāṇa*) as two interrelated aspects of a single continuum. Awakening thus becomes a transformation rather than a negation of *saṃsāric* existence.

<sup>67</sup> See the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (*lang kar gshegs pa'i mdo*, Tōh. 107, Sde dge, vol. 49, ca), ff. 65a—191b.

<sup>68</sup> See the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (‘*phags pa lang kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Tōh. 107=D107), 143b2—3: གློ་ཆེན་པོ་གཡ་ཏེ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བསྐྱགས་པ་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྡིང་པོ་དེ་ལ་མེད་དུ་ཟེན་ན། གློ་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྡིང་པོ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བསྐྱགས་པ་མེད་པས་འབྲུག་པའང་མེད་ལྷན་པའང་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་ན།.

Elsewhere, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* explains how deluded and undeluded beings see differently:

O Mahāmāti, this *ālayavijñāna-tathāgatagarbha* is naturally completely pure. However, due to being obscured by adventitious afflictions arising from the sudden delusions, all those with the views of the Hearers (*śrāvakas*) and the self-enlightened Buddhas (*pratyekabuddhas*) see it as impure, while the *tathāgatas* do [perceive it as pure].<sup>69</sup>

This passage highlights a central Mahāyāna theme: due to adventitious afflictions caused by deluded views, the *ālayavijñāna-tathāgatagarbha* is inherently pure but appears impure to ordinary beings. On the one hand, the passage criticizes the limited perspectives of *śrāvakas* (Hearers) and *pratyekabuddhas* (self-enlightened Buddhas). On the other hand, it acknowledges that *tathāgatas* perceive the universal truth of purity. This teaching underscores the non-duality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, emphasizing that enlightenment is not created but revealed through removing temporary obscurations. In other words, the passage bridges metaphysical insight and the soteriological path.

### 1. The *Ghanavyūhasūtra*

The *Ghanavyūhasūtra* serves as a key reference for Yogācāra concepts such as the three natures, Buddha-nature, and universal ground consciousness. In this text, the latter two concepts (i.e., *tathāgatagarbha* and *ālayavijñāna*) are frequently used interchangeably, particularly when describing their uncorrupted state. In its tainted form, universal ground consciousness is identified as the origin of all common phenomena. Though the *Ghanavyūhasūtra* does not always clearly distinguish between the universal ground consciousness and Buddha-nature, it sometimes does differentiate the stained universal ground consciousness from the stainless universal ground.<sup>70</sup> This pure universal ground is then described as being naturally luminous, the object of those skilled in yoga, and a synonym of Buddha-nature. Much more detailed research on the relationship between Buddha-nature and the universal ground consciousness is done by David Higgins.<sup>71</sup> I build on Higgins' work by focusing on the pure Ground, another major topic of this sutra.

In the *Ghanavyūhasūtra*, it is stated:

The various stages are the universal ground;  
The virtuous Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) is also that.  
Using the term “universal ground” for that nature

<sup>69</sup> See the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (‘*phags pa lang kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Tōh. 107=D107), 274b1—2: གྲོ་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྤིང་པོ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྒྱུ་པར་ཤེས་པ་འདི་ནི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོངས་སུ་དག་པ་ཡིན་ཅོད་ཀྱི། ཉན་ཐོས་དང་། རང་སངས་རྒྱས་རྟོག་པའི་ལྷ་བ་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ཉན་ཐོས་པས་བསྐྱབས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཡོངས་སུ་མ་དག་པ་མཐོང་གི། དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་རྒྱམས་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

<sup>70</sup> Blo gros bzang po, ‘*Phags pa lang kar gshegs pa'i 'grel ba* (mdo ‘grel, Tōh. 4018=D4018), 100b4—5: ཀུན་གཞི་རྒྱུ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཉིད་ནི་དྲི་མ་དང་བཅས་པ་དང་དྲི་མ་མེད་པའི་རིམ་པས་འཁོར་བ་དང་། ལྷ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པ་དང་ལྷན་པར་རྒྱུ་པར་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་གྱེ།

<sup>71</sup> Higgins illustrates the relationship between *tathāgatagarbha*, and the *ālayavijñāna* in “Buddha in the Storehouse: Mi bskyod rdo rje on the Relationship between *Tathāgatagarbha* and *Ālayavijñāna*. See David Higgins, “Buddha in the Storehouse: Mi bskyod rdo rje on the Relationship between *Tathāgatagarbha* and *Ālayavijñāna*,” (in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 42, 2019, 169—230).

Is taught by the Tathāgatas.  
Although that nature is proclaimed as the universal ground,  
Others with different intellects do not understand it.<sup>72</sup>

This passage offers a nuanced perspective on the *universal ground* (*ālaya*), particularly in its relationship to the stages of realization (*bhūmis*) and Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*). It begins by equating the *universal ground* with the *bhūmis*. Such an equation suggests that the *universal ground* is conceived as the foundational basis for the stages of realization. In the Yogācāra and Dzogchen contexts, this universal ground consciousness is seen as the repository of karmic imprints, which undergoes purification and transformation as one progresses on the spiritual path. Additionally, the text further emphasizes this connection by explaining that the Tathāgata uses the term *universal ground* to describe the intrinsic purity and potential for awakening inherent in all beings. In doing so, the text establishes an alignment between the *universal ground* and *Buddha-nature*.

This alignment is significant as it reflects the *ālayatathāgatagarbha* perspective, where the *universal ground* transcends its mundane role as a repository consciousness and becomes the luminous clarity underlying all phenomena. Furthermore, the identification of *tathāgatagarbha* as the *universal ground* elevates the status of the universal ground consciousness to that of a sacred and pure ground of being. Afterward, the passage concludes that this profound teaching remains inaccessible to those of lesser spiritual capacity, which highlights the need for skillful means (*upāya*) and progressive instruction in Buddhist pedagogy.

In sum, the passage bridges the ontological and soteriological dimensions of the *universal ground*, portraying it as both the basis for saṃsāric experiences and the pure essence pointing to liberation. Buddha-nature is regarded not only as the origin of *saṃsāra* but also as the ultimate destiny of every individual. Namely, Buddha-nature encapsulates the full spectrum of existence and spiritual journey. Within this framework, the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature signifies that the universal ground itself, the substratum of all experience, is inherently endowed with the qualities of buddhahood — perfect wisdom, compassion, and the capacity for liberation. It suggests that an undisturbed, ever-present potential for enlightenment exists beneath the layers of habitual tendencies and karmic imprints. The universal ground, in this sense, is not merely the basis for conditioned existence but is itself the womb (*garbha*) of buddhahood.

## 2. The *Guhyagarbha Tantra*

This section explores how the relationship between the *universal ground* and *Buddha-nature* is articulated differently in four early texts of the Ancient School. The first text is the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* (*rgyud gsang ba snying po*), which is a key Mahāyoga tantra. The other three texts are commentaries on this tantra: *rgya cher 'grel pa*, *Spar khab*, and *The Secret Essence of All Tathāgatas: The General Scripture of All the Characteristics and Tantras* (*mtshan nyid dang rgyud thams cad kyi lung gi spyi/ de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba'i snying po*), which

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<sup>72</sup>See the *Āryaśaṅkavarāṇasūtra* (*'phags pa rgyan stug po bkod pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Tōh. 110=D110), 55b.1—2: ས་རྣམས་སྣ་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་གཞི་སྟེ། བདེ་གཤེགས་སྟོང་པོ་དགེ་བའང་དེ། སྟོང་པོ་དེ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་སྟེ། དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་སྟོན་པ་མཛད། སྟོང་པོ་ཀུན་གཞིར་བསྟུགས་པར་ཡང་། ཁྲོ་གཞན་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་མི་ཤེས་སོ།།

is attributed to Dbus ston pa Ye shes rdo rje (also known as Rta ston Jo bo Ye shes), who lived from 1163 to 1230.<sup>73</sup>

In the tantra, it is unclear whether Buddha-nature is conceptualized as the universal ground, the nature of the universal ground, or both. In the commentaries, however, the universal ground sometimes refers to the awakened mind; Buddha-nature sometimes refers to the twofold nature of the universal ground, while other times refers to one of the natures of the universal ground. As a whole, these four texts help us understand the fluid treatments of Buddha-nature in early tantras as the basis of all in *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

Dating back to the second half of the eighth century, the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* was particularly influential in early Great Perfection (rdzogs chen) circles, which is the focus of Chapter Three of this dissertation. For now, I examine how the tantra helps us further understand the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature. The following verses from the *Guhyagarbha* reflect an early tantric understanding of Buddha-nature, as they emphasize that Buddha-nature is spontaneously present in all beings, even as karmic imprints continue to drive us through the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Additionally, these verses capture a significant tantric insight: the essence of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* originates from the same source—Buddha-nature.

Émaho! Through Sugatagarbha,  
One's thoughts emanate from one's own karma.  
Various bodies, wealth,  
Places, sufferings, and so forth,  
Are grasped by individuals as me and mine.  
[Sugatagarbha] has never been bound by anyone whatsoever and is boundless.  
There is nothing to be bound  
Through the conceptual thinking of self-clinging,  
It is like a knot tied persistently in the sky.  
It is boundless, and nothing to be liberated.  
It is a primordially and spontaneously perfect quality of Buddhas.<sup>74</sup>

This passage unpacks *ālayasugatagarbha/tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature) and its relation to karmic causality. It suggests that one's thoughts and life circumstances are direct consequences of karma, accumulated over lifetimes. The tendency to grasp objects, relationships, and experiences as me and mine is the core delusion that perpetuates bondage. However, the passage makes a key point: while this grasping may give rise to a sense of being bound, Buddha-nature itself is unbound. Indeed, Buddha-nature is neither constrained by karma nor liberated from it, as it transcends the dualities of bondage and freedom. This inherent Buddha-nature is primordially and spontaneously perfected in all Buddhas, and by extension, in all sentient beings, regardless

<sup>73</sup> Ye shes rdo rje, *Mtshan nyid dang rgyud thams cad kyi lung gi spyi/ de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba'i snying po*, vol. 69, (Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa / Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter Two in *The Guhyagarbha Tantra* of *dpal gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid rnam par nges pa* (Tōh. 832=D832, vol. 103), p. 112b.2—4: མེ་མ་རྟོ་བདེ་གཤེགས་སྤྱིང་པོ་ལས། རང་གི་རྣམ་རྟོག་ལས་ཀྱིས་སྤྲུལ། ལྷ་ཚོགས་ལུས་དང་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་དང་། གནས་དང་སྤྲུག་བསྐལ་ལ་སོགས་པ། བདག་དང་བདག་གིར་སོ་སོར་འཛིན། སྤྲུལ་ཀྱང་མ་བཅིངས་བཅིངས་མེད་དེ། བཅིང་བར་བྱ་བ་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། རྣམ་རྟོག་བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་པ་ཡིས། རྣམ་གྱིས་མཁའ་ལ་མདུད་པ་དོར། བཅིངས་མེད་རྣམ་པར་གྲོལ་མེད་པའི། ཡེ་ནས་སྤྱན་རློགས་སངས་རྒྱས་ཚོས། བཟུན་ཕྱིར་སྤྲོ་བ་ལྷ་ཚོགས་མཛད། །.

of their karmic afflictions.

The great influence of the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* on Dzogchen thought led to a proliferation of commentaries, especially within the Ancient Tradition (Rnying ma). One that is most relevant to a study on Buddha-nature is *The Secret Essence of All Tathāgatas: The General Scripture of All the Characteristics and Tantras* (*mtshan nyid dang rgyud thams cad kyi lung gi spyi/ de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba'i snying po*), which is attributed to Dbus ston pa Ye shes rdo rje.<sup>75</sup> This text offers an intricate exploration of early terminologies, particularly in relation to Buddha-nature.

a. *Rgya cher 'grel pa*

In the extensive commentary of *Guhyagarbha* (*Śrī-guhyagarbha-vipula-ṭīkā-nāma, dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgya cher 'grel pa*)<sup>76</sup> by Ācārya Sūryaprabhasimha, the universal ground is treated as the awakened mind. In the section where he comments on “Everything ceases from non-cessation; while ceasing, there is no cessation” (*'gag pa med las thams cad 'gag/ 'gag pa nyid na 'gag pa med*) from the root tantra, he writes:

Regarding “non-cessation,” it represents the naturally luminous universal ground of awakened mind. As for the term “from”(*las*), it is a connective particle which indicates that [non-cessation] is connected with a remainder, [which is “Everything ceases”]. Why is this so? “Everything ceases” refers to the state of death, which refers to when the six sense faculties are separated from their objects and consciousness. One might wonder: if that is the case, is it something that will never arise again? It is said that “while ceasing, there is no cessation.” [This means that] even if the sense faculties cease, the universal ground of awakened mind does not cease.

Thus, it is stated in the scriptures of the Great Vehicle: “Although in certain instances and at certain times the continuity of form and mind appears to be severed, the universal ground, which contains all seeds, cannot be observed by means of its nature. This is not, however, like a permanent, unchanging entity asserted by the non-Buddhists. Thus, realizing the non-duality of the cessation and the non-cessation of the universal ground consciousness is what generates the mirror-like gnosis—the awakened mind in which the ultimate reality of emptiness and the relative truth are indivisible.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Mtshan nyid dang rgyud thams cad kyi lung gi spyi / De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba'i snying po*, in *Rnying ma bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 69, (Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa / Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Slob dpon Nyi ma'i Seng ge'i 'Od, *Dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgya cher 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur (Dpe bsdur ma)*, (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 1990–2008), vol. 43).

<sup>77</sup> Slob dpon Nyi ma'i Seng ge'i 'Od, *Dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgya cher 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur (Dpe bsdur ma)*, vol. 43 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 1990–2008), 531–532: འགག་པ་མེད་ཞེས་པ་ནི། ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་འོད་གསལ་བའི་གཟུང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ལས་ཞེས་པ་ཡང་སྟག་མ་དང་བཅས་པའི་འབྲེལ་བ་སྟེ། ཅིའི་བྱིར་ཞེ་ན། ཐམས་ཅད་འགག་པ་ནི་འཆི་བའི་སྲིད་པ་སྟེ། དབང་པོ་དྲུག་ཡུལ་དང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་བྲལ་བ་ལ་བྱེད། །ཅི་དེ་ལྟ་ན་ནི་གཏན་དུ་མི་འབྱུང་བའི་ཆོས་ཅན་ཡིན་ནམ་ཞེ་ན། འགག་པ་ཉིད་ན་འགག་པ་མེད། ཅས་ཏེ། དབང་པོ་འགག་ན་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་ནི་མི་འགག་སྟེ། དེ་ལྟར་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་གཞུང་དག་ལས་ཀྱང་འདི་སྐད་དུ། ལ་ལར་རེ་འགའ་གཟུགས་དང་སེམས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་རྒྱན་བཅད་པ་ལྟར་སྤང་ཡང་། ཀུན་གཞི་ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་པ་ནི། རང་བཞིན་གྱི་སྟོན་ནས་མི་དམིགས་པ་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་

This passage demonstrates that, on the one hand, the universal ground and awakened mind are interchangeable. On the other hand, it frames the function of universal ground as the container of the seeds, which shows that it is the basis of *samsāra*. It further goes on to say that the nature of the universal ground consciousness is the object of realization. Here, it seems that Ācārya Sūryaprabhasimha separates the awakened mind from the universal ground consciousness. These efforts show how early authors experimented terms such as the universal ground and awakened mind to fit the evolving doctrinal ideas. Indeed, marrying these two terms seems to give room for the further development of a single ground that can be as the ground for both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

Furthermore, Ācārya Sūryaprabhasimha explains that the universal ground of awakened mind is beyond arising and ceasing. He relates to the title *Secret Essence* (*Gsang ba'i snying po*), saying, “as for the expression of that *Secret Essence*: one should understand the universal ground of awakened mind as being an essence free from arising and cessation.”<sup>78</sup> This shows that this early *Guhyagarbha* commentarial tradition, by emphasizing the nature or the quality of the universal ground as “free from arising and cessation,” no longer conceptualizes the universal ground as a samsāric basis. In other words, now the essence of the universal ground is beyond conditions. This concept is further developed in the Great Perfection and becomes the primordial Ground.

#### b. *Spar khab*

The *Spar khab* is one of the earliest commentaries on the *Guhyagarbhatantra*. According to most academics and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, this is an Indic source, but I argue that this might not be the case. First, the *Spar khab* does not seem to be an Indian commentary, as the text employs two terms to describe the universal ground (*kun gzhi*): the *fundamental* and the *conjoining*. I read these terms as they refer to the *fundamental genuine universal ground* (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and the *conjoining genuine universal ground* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*) that appear frequently in early Tibetan writings, including Dunhuang manuscripts and Nupchen's writings. Based on my knowledge, these terms do not appear in other Indian sources. Therefore, I believe the *Spar khab* is most likely composed by a Tibetan.

Moreover, the *Spar khab* frequently uses the term, *ril* (རིལ་), which is a lexical signature of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe's corpus. Thus, I argue that *Spar khab* is probably authored by Nupchen Sangye Yeshe or, at least, composed by someone who was influenced by Nupchen.

The following passage captures the terms, the *fundamental*, and the *conjoining*:

Regarding the expression, “How marvelous! From the Buddha-nature (*bde gshegs snying po*, *sugatarbha*):” the mistaking of the one as two and so forth is indeed wondrous. As

ཐུ་སྒྲུག་གི་རྟག་པ་ཐེར་ཟུག་པ་ལྟ་བུ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ་ཞེས་པ་ལོ། །དེ་ལྟར་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་འགགས་པ་དང་། འགག་པ་མེད་པ་གཉིས་མེད་པར་རྟོགས་པ་ནི།  
སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཚེས་ཉིད་དོན་དམ་པ་དང་ཀུན་རྫོབ་བདེན་པ་གཉིས་དབྱེར་མེད་པའི་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་མེ་ལོང་ལྟ་བུའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །

<sup>78</sup> Slob dpon Nyi ma'i Seng ge'i 'Od, *Dpal gsang ba snying po'i rgya cher 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (*Dpe bsdur ma*), vol. 43 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 1990–2008), 680: གསང་བ་དེའི་སྟོང་པར་བརྟུན་པ་ནི། ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་

ཆུབ་སེམས་སྐྱེ་འགག་མེད་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་སྟེ།

previously explained, since suchness (*tathatā*) is free from the thorns of conceptual elaboration, it is bliss. The nature (*snying po*, *garbha*) is twofold: the two universal grounds (*ālaya*, *gzhi*): (1) It is “conjuring” (*sbyor ba*, *prayoga*) because it opens the possibility for appearances to arise; and (2) It is “fundamental” (*gzhi*) because all results are spontaneously present within it, and it constitutes the very nature of all the dharmas of the *tathāgatas*. Failure to recognize those [dharmas] as one’s very own nature constitutes co-emergent ignorance (*lhan cig skyes pa’i ma rig pa*).<sup>79</sup> It is said, “it becomes the ground from [which beings emerge].” When it is said that “one’s own thoughts are projections of karma,” it means that, because of that, there is clinging to the conjuring [ground, i.e., the *ālayavijñāna*], so there come one’s conceptualizations, that is, from that [conjuring ground], there arise the afflictions of imputed [ignorance] (*kun tu brtags pa’i nyon mongs pa*).<sup>80</sup> And thereby, having engaged in various actions, appearances suddenly manifest; therefore, they are [nothing but illusory] projections.”<sup>81</sup>

This passage makes explicit what remains only implicit in many early commentaries: *sugatagarbha* does not stand alongside the two aspects of universal ground’s nature but constitutes both of them. The *conjuring* aspect of the ground’s nature supplies the dynamic potential through which appearances arise, and this term could be used for the pure aspect of *nirvāṇa* and the impure aspect of *samsāra*. On the other hand, the fundamental aspect of the ground’s nature embodies the spontaneously present qualities of the *tathāgatas*. By locating both within a single *nature* (*snying po*, *garbha*) that is *sugatagarbha*, the *Spar khab* presents a doctrinal architecture in which the very principle that enables *samsāra*—the conjuring ground—is inseparable from the principle that enables liberation—the fundamental ground.

In this framework, Buddha-nature becomes the ontological and hermeneutical bridge that connects these two dimensions. Confusion (*ma rig pa*) and awakening (*ye shes*) emerge not from different substrates but through different modes of recognition. On the one hand, failure to

<sup>79</sup> Thus, *lhan cig skyes pa’i ma rig pa* gives rise to the *kun gzhi’i rnam par shes pa*.

<sup>80</sup> Thus, *kun tu brtags pa’i ma rig pa* gives rise to the *nyon mongs pa can gyi yid*.

<sup>81</sup> *Rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po dpal gsang ba’i snying po’i ‘grel pa* (*Rin po che spar khab*), in *Bstan ‘gyur* (*Dpe bsdur ma*), Rgyud, vol. 83 (Ju) (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 1990–2008), 297–298. ཨ་མ་བདེར་

གཤེགས་སྒྲིང་པོ་ལས། ཁེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། གཅིག་ལ་གཉིས་ལ་སྐྱེས་པར་འཁྲུལ་བ་ནི་ངོ་མཚར་རྟེ། དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ལ་སྒྲོས་པའི་ཟུག་རྩ་མེད་པས་བདེ་བ་སྟེ་བཤད་ཟིན་  
 ཏོ། སྒྲིང་པོ་ནི་གཉིས་རྟེ། ཀུན་གཞི་གཉིས་སོ། རྟེན་སྒྲུབ་བ་ནི་སྒྲིང་བར་བྱེད་པའི་གོ་འབྱེད་པས་སོ། གཞི་ནི་འབྲས་བུ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྱུ་ཁྱིམ་གྱུ་བའི་ཕྱིར། དེ་  
 བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་ཚོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེ་དག་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་སྒྱུ་ཅིག་སྒྲུས་པའི་མ་རིག་པ་སྟེ། དེ་གཞིར་གྱུར་པ་ལས་  
 ཤེའོ། རང་གི་རྣམ་རྟོག་ལས་ཀྱིས་སྒྲུལ་ཁེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། རྒྱ་དེས་སྒྲུབ་བ་ལ་བདག་ཏུ་གཟུང་བའི་[བས་]ནི་རང་གི་རྟོག་པ་སྟེ། དེ་ལས་ཀུན་ཏུ་བརྟགས་པའི་ཉོན་མོངས་  
 བ་སྟེ་པས། དེ་ལ་ལས་སྒྲ་ཚོགས་སྒྲུང་པས་སྒྲོ་བུར་དུ་སྒྲུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་སྒྲུལ་པའོ། །. Also see *Rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po dpal gsang ba’i*  
*snying po’i ‘grel pa* (*Rin po che spar khab*), in *sNga ‘gyur bka’ ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 74 (of 133) (Chengdu: Si  
 khron dpe skrun tshogs pa / Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009), 70b1–5: ཨ་མ་རྟོ་བདེ་གཤེགས་སྒྲིང་པོ་ལས། ཁེས་བྱ་བ་ནི།  
 གཅིག་ལ་གཉིས་ལ་སྐྱེས་པར་འཁྲུལ་བ་ནི་ངོ་མཚར་རྟེ། དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ལ་སྒྲོས་པའི་ཟུག་རྩ་མེད་པས་བདེ་བ་སྟེ་བཤད་ཟིན་ཏོ། སྒྲིང་པོ་ནི་གཉིས་རྟེ། ཀུན་གཞི་  
 གཉིས་སོ། རྟེན་སྒྲུབ་བ་ནི་སྒྲིང་བར་བྱེད་པའི་གོ་འབྱེད་པས་སོ། གཞི་ནི་འབྲས་བུ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྒྱུ་ཁྱིམ་གྱུ་བའི་ཕྱིར། དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་ཚོས་ཐམས་ཅད་  
 ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཕྱིར་རོ། རྟེན་སྒྲུབ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་མ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་སྒྱུ་ཅིག་སྒྲུས་པའི་མ་རིག་པ་སྟེ། དེ་གཞིར་གྱུར་པ་ལས་ཤེའོ། རང་གི་རྣམ་རྟོག་ལས་ཀྱིས་སྒྲུལ་  
 ཁེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། རྒྱ་དེས་སྒྲུབ་བ་ལ་བདག་ཏུ་གཟུང་བས་ནི་རང་གི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་སྟེ། དེ་ལ་ཀུན་ཏུ་བརྟགས་པའི་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྟེ་པས། དེ་ལ་ལས་སྒྲ་ཚོགས་སྒྲུང་  
 པས་སྒྲོ་བུར་དུ་སྒྲུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་སྒྲུལ་པའོ། །.

recognize the fundamental ground as one's own essence is co-emergent ignorance. On the other hand, recognition of the fundamental ground initiates liberation. Thus, the *Spar khab* presents Buddha-nature as the single abiding reality, and its dual modalities account for both delusion and awakening.

Moreover, the commentary on the phrase “How marvelous! From the Buddha-nature (bde gshegs snying po, *sugatagarbha*)” identifies the precise moment when nondual reality is mistaken as dual. Since suchness (*tathatā*) is free from conceptual elaboration, it is described as bliss. The term ལྷོང་ལྷོང་ (nature) is then defined in terms of two modalities of the universal ground (*kun gzhi*, *ālaya*):

- Conjoining (*sbyor ba*)—the dynamic interface that allows appearances to arise;
- Fundamental (*gzhi*)—the fundamental locus, in which all results are spontaneously present, that constitutes the very essence of the tathāgatas' dharmas.

Crucially, the commentary does not posit these as two distinct substrates; instead, they are two functional aspects of a single nondual ground. Mistaking this unity as dual—“the one as two”—is the primal cleavage that generates confusion. Failing to recognize these two modalities as one's own intrinsic nature is co-emergent ignorance (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa*), as ignorance is not a secondary cognitive error but arises at the most basic level of perception.

The statement that “one's own thoughts are projections of karma” identifies a further disorientation, as the appropriation of the conjoining aspect of the universal ground becomes a personal locus of selfhood. Through grasping on a self, the afflictions of imputed ignorance (*kun tu brtags pa'i nyon mongs pa*) arise. From these, actions proliferate, while appearances suddenly manifest as illusory displays (*sprul pa*), which are conditioned by the qualities of the universal ground.

### c. *Ye shes rdo rje*

Ye shes rdo rje's commentary is notable for its unique integration of *the universal ground* (*kun gzhi*) with *Buddha-nature*, leading to the formulation of *the universal ground consciousness of Buddha nature*. His interpretation not only deepens the understanding of these terms but also highlights their significance within the broader scope of tantric teachings. His use of terminology closely aligns with terms found in the two Dunhuang manuscripts that I have explored in Chapter One, as well as Nupchen Sangye Yeshe's *The Armor Against Darkness*. Specifically, these texts share several key phrases, such as *the fundamental genuine universal ground* (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and *the conjoining genuine universal ground* (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*). As a whole, these concepts draw a bridge between Yogācāra philosophy and early Dzogchen, providing insight into the evolving tantric interpretations of the universal ground and Buddha-nature.

As discussed in Chapter One, the term *fundamental genuine universal ground* refers to the pure, untainted essence of natural purity that serves as the cause of enlightenment. In contrast, the *conjoining genuine universal ground* relates to the repository of accumulated habitual tendencies that perpetuate *samsāra*. *Sugatagarbha*, or Buddha-nature, when aligned with the fundamental genuine universal ground, becomes the cause for liberation and transcends the pain of mental proliferation. However, through the interplay of karma, this same *sugatagarbha* can also become

the seed of delusion, driving the cycle of rebirth. This subtle interplay between causes and conditions—both in terms of enlightenment and delusion—is further elaborated in the interpretation of *kyis*. As an agential particle, it denotes that an effect, which previously did not exist, arises suddenly through the convergence of causes and conditions.

For instance, Ye shes rdo rje writes:

The phrase “Émaho! Through *sugatagarbha*” is the previously explained mode of delusion: “Ema!” expresses astonishment. While there is ultimately only one true appearance, there is amazement at the manifestation of many delusions. As for “*sugatagarbha*,” it appears in two [aspects] within the nature of the mind.

*The fundamental genuine universal ground (gzhi don gyi kun gzhi)* refers to the essence of natural purity, serving as the causal essence for generating the transcendent state. [On the other hand,] the conjoining genuine universal ground (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*) is the repository for accumulated habitual tendencies and is the cause that generates *saṃsāra*.

Of these two, *sugatagarbha* [here] refers [specifically] to the foundational genuine universal ground, which is the cause of the transcendent state that transcends the pain of conceptual proliferation. However, it also becomes the cause of delusion through the [works of] karma.

As for the statement, one’s thoughts emanate from one’s own karma, what is the cause [of this]? The cause lies in the fact that all sentient beings possess the essence of Buddha. And what are the conditions? The conditions arise from one’s concepts, which are [tied to] the five afflictions and the three types of karma.

The word *kyis* functions as an instrumental particle, indicating action. It implies that an effect that previously did not exist in the natural state of things suddenly manifests through the two causes and conditions.<sup>82</sup>

This passage explores profound metaphysical and philosophical themes central to early Tibetan Buddhist thought. The fusion of the universal ground consciousness with Buddha-nature signals a deepening understanding of the non-duality between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, a cornerstone in tantric interpretations.

<sup>82</sup> See *The Secret Essence of All Tathāgatas: The General Scripture of All the Characteristics and Tantras* (མཆན་ཉིད་དང་རྒྱུད་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལུང་གི་སྤྱི་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གསང་བའི་སྒྲིང་པོ།), (Km.Tg.1049, vol. 69, pp. 1.1-659.5), 126–7: གང་གི་དོན་དུ་བཤད་པའི་འབྲུལ་ཚུལ་བསྟན་པ་ནི། མེ་མའོ་བདེ་གཤེགས་སྤྱིང་པོ་ལས། ཞེས། མེ་མའོ་ནི་ངོམ་པ་སྟེ། ལྷང་བ་མཐར་ཐུག་ཅིག་ལས་མྱེད་པ་ལས་དུ་མར་འབྲུལ་བ་ལ་ངར་(ངོམ་)པའོ། །བདེ་གཤེགས་སྤྱིང་པོ་ནི། སེམས་ཉིད་ལ་གཉིས་སུ་སྤང་བ་སྟེ། གཞི་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ནི་རང་བཞིན་རྣམ་དག་གི་ངོ་བོ་སྟེ། འདས་པ་བསྐྱེད་པར་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱུ་སྤྱིང་པོའོ། །སྤྱོད་པ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ནི། བག་ཆགས་སོག་པའི་གནས་ཏེ། འཁོར་བ་སྐྱེད་པར་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཏེ། དེ་ལྟར་གཉིས་ལས། འདིར་བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པའི་སྤྱིང་པོ་ནི། གཞི་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བྱ་སྟེ། སྤྱོད་པའི་ཐུག་ཏུ་དང་བལ་བ་འདས་པའི་རྒྱུ་དེ་ལས། དེ་ཉིད་འབྲུལ་གཞིར་གྱུར་པ་དེ་ལས་སོ། །རང་གི་རྣམ་རྟོག་ལས་ཀྱིས་སྤྱུལ། ཞེས་པ་རྒྱ་གང་ལས་ན། སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་ཅན་ལས་སོ། །རྒྱུན་གང་ལས་ན། རང་གི་རྣམ་རྟོག་གི་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ལྡང་དང་། ལས་གསུམ་ལས་སོ། །ཀྱིས་ཅས་པ་བྱེད་པའི་ཚོག་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྒྱ་རྒྱུན་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་འབས་བྱ་དངོས་པོ་བཤེས་ལ་མྱེད་པ་གཅིག་སྟོབས་དུ་སྤྱུལ་ཞེས་སོ། །

Nupchen addresses the foundational genuine universal ground in his *Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* as follows:

Regarding the eight consciousnesses and five gnoses as being equal, the genuine foundation of the ground is the suchness of all phenomena, which is luminous yet nonconceptual. Thus, it is the gnosis of suchness. The [sGyu 'phrul] Le lag states:

It is not a conceptual *ālaya*.  
Lacking its own nature, a genuine ground,  
Which is called *dharmadhātu*,  
It is the gnosis of suchness.<sup>83</sup>

The passage describes the foundational genuine universal ground as the luminous yet nonconceptual suchness of all phenomena. It is the gnosis of suchness and not a conceptual *ālaya*. The passage also references the *sGyu phrul Le lag*, an authoritative Mahāyoga subsidiary text to the Guhyagarbha Tantra, which emphasizes samaya (*dam tshig*) and presents the genuine ground or *dharmadhātu* as empty of intrinsic nature and identical with the gnosis of suchness, foreshadowing later Dzogchen-style readings without being a Dzogchen text itself. Additionally, the passage unpacks *the foundational genuine universal ground* as encompassing the essence of all phenomena and being characterized by its luminosity and nonconceptual nature. *The foundational genuine universal ground*,<sup>84</sup> that is, represents the gnosis or direct experiential understanding of suchness; therefore, it should not be mistaken for a conceptualized form of the *ālaya*.

As mentioned earlier, Nupchen argues that not realizing the nature of the universal ground as “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*) causes *saṃsāra* to arise. This process occurs through the actual confusion of the universal ground appearing as its own object by the six collections of consciousness. From this stream of momentary conceptual designations, “weak and miserable saṃsāric phenomena”<sup>85</sup> emerge. Nupchen emphasizes the universal ground of awakened mind (*kung gzhi byang chub sems; ālayabodhicitta*), which is the philosophical cornerstone of Dzogchen Mind Series (*Sems sde*) and the progenitor of the “Ground” of the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition.

Additionally, the passage from the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* is particularly rich, emphasizing the boundless, unconditioned nature of *tathāgatagarbha*, which remains unaffected by the karmic

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<sup>83</sup> See Nupchen mentioned the source of this verse is from *sGyu pprul le lag* in the *Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*, manuscript), pp. 213. This verse appears in the *gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa*, (Tōh.834=D834), 294b4-5: རྣམ་ཤྲོག་ཀྱང་གཞི་མ་ཡིན་པ། རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་དོན་གྱི་གཞི། །འདི་ཉིད་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཞེས་བྱ། །དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཞེས་སོ།། Thus, *sGyu phrul le lag* seems to refer to *gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa*.

<sup>84</sup> See *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra* (pp. 42-47) and footnote 44: Jacob Dalton studies Nupchen's treatment of the nature of *ālaya* within the tantric context. Dalton clarifies Nupchen's viewpoint, which considers *ālaya* as a state of pristine consciousness, unblemished by conceptualization or delusion. Moreover, Dalton observes that Nupchen employs the same term *the foundational genuine universal ground* found in the early Dunhuang manuscripts, discovering the connection and continuity between these ancient teachings.

<sup>85</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* (*Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 51), 41b6: འཁོར་བའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་སུ་རེད་ཅིང་ཉམ་ཐག་གོ།

flux of *samsāra*, yet exists as the source for all sentient beings' eventual liberation. Thus, Ye shes rdo rje's commentary is a key link between traditional Yogācāra doctrines and tantric developments in the Ancient School. His use of specific terms like *the fundamental genuine universal ground* and *the conjoining genuine universal ground* situates his work within an ongoing dialogue between different philosophical schools, while also laying the groundwork for later Dzogchen developments.

#### E. The Great Conceptualization (*Rnam thog chen po*)

In the 'Oral Instruction called "The Meditation on Reality of the Two Stages"' (*rim pa gnyis pa'i de kho na nyid bsgom pa zhes bya ba'i zhal gyi lung*), Sangye Yeshe Zhabs, also known as Buddhajñānapāda,<sup>86</sup> elaborates on a pivotal concept known as *the great conceptualization* (*rnam rtog chen po*). Because this term hints at the innate nature of the mind, it plays a major role in highlighting a common source of misperception. In other words, through this concept, Sangye Yeshe Zhabs addresses the intricate layers of confusion that obscure the true, undifferentiated nature of existence, thereby guiding practitioners in their understanding and meditation practices. For instance, he states:

The dhātu of the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*,  
the manifest enlightenment of the unborn vajra,  
the supreme essence of all the sugatas,  
the great meaning of nondual freedom from concepts,  
is fully explained in the second stage.  
That such an entity pervades  
and is present in all things,  
from beginningless time,  
the mode of great conceptualization (*rnam rtog chen po*) has arisen from it,  
and from that, the great elements  
have arisen as the maṇḍala of wind,  
and from that, the great element of fire  
has arisen and pervaded,  
and from that, the great element of water  
has arisen and pervaded, and from that,  
the earth has arisen, from the essence of the gathering four elements,  
such as mountains and all sentient beings,  
the various subtle and coarse,  
males, females, and neuters,  
the young, the old,  
the gods, nāgas, yakṣas,  
bhūtas, stars, Yama,

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<sup>86</sup> Buddhajñānapāda (c. 8th century CE) is a pivotal figure in the Indian Buddhist tantric tradition, renowned for his role in the development and systematization of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and its exegetical tradition. He is recognized as one of the seminal Indian commentators and practitioners who established the foundational principles of tantric philosophy and meditation. His legacy gave rise to the "Tradition of Buddhapada" (*sangs rgyas zhabs lugs*), which became one of the two main lineages of the *Guhyasamāja* tradition, alongside the Ārya School which is followed by Nāgārjuna.

the lord of the waters, Śakra, the hells,  
 pretas, and animals [have arisen], and since all of those  
 are relying on mere awakening and knowing,  
 It is present pervasively in all beings.  
 Thus, the higher than nondual, free from conceptualization,  
 Should be well focused on,  
 Because of not realizing it, all beings  
 Are revolving in *samsāra*.  
 The great suffering of *samsāra*  
 is established like a snake in a rope,  
 through delusion, like poisoned water,  
 and it appears without existing.<sup>87</sup>

This passage encapsulates a profound teaching that is both metaphysical and practical, offering a roadmap for practitioners toward enlightenment. The verses begin by presenting the expanse (*dhātu*) of the Buddha’s enlightenment as a primordial, inherently pure state described as the manifest enlightenment of the unborn vajra, emphasizing the uncreated and undifferentiated nature of ultimate reality as the foundation of all phenomena. From this pure and singular state arises a cascading process of cosmogonic emanation, originating with *the great conceptualization*, which unfolds into the universe’s diversity. This progression follows a symbolic sequence through the elements—from the subtle (wind) to fire, water, and earth—representing the increasing materiality and complexity of forms.

Additionally, the verses highlight the existential interconnectedness of all entities, showing how mountains, rivers, and beings across genders and species emerge from this elemental interplay. The text concludes with a metaphor likening the misperception of reality—mistaking *samsāra* as real and persistent—to the classic Indian philosophical analogy of mistaking a snake for a rope. This delusion, described as “poisoned water,” causes beings to react to illusory phenomena, perpetuating suffering. The analysis reveals a thematic journey from the cosmological origins of existential phenomena, grounded in the great conceptualization, to practical guidance on recognizing the nondual nature of reality as the path to transcend *samsāric* suffering. This nondual vision connects the undifferentiated primordial foundation with the intricate multiplicity of existence, presenting reality as both unified and diversified, where the pure serves as the source of all differentiation and interdependence.

<sup>87</sup> See རིམ་པ་གཉིས་པའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་བསྐྱེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་ཞལ་གྱི་ལྷ་དཔྱད་ (Tōh. 1853=D1853), p. 3b2-6: སངས་རྒྱལ་མུ་དན་འདས་པའི་ལམས། སྐྱེ་མེད་རྗེ་རྗེ་མཛོན་བྱང་ཆུབ། བདེར་གཤེགས་ཀུན་གྱི་སྤྱང་པོ་མཆོག་གཉིས་མེད་རྟོག་བྱལ་དོན་ཆེན་ཏེ། རིམ་པ་གཉིས་པར་རབ་ཏུ་བཤད། དེ་འདྲའི་དོན་དེས་དངོས་པོ་ཀུན། རྣམ་པར་བྱུང་སྟེ་རྣམ་གནས་ཀྱང་། ཐོག་མེད་དུས་ནས་དེ་ལས་ཀྱང་། རྣམ་རྟོག་ཆེན་པོ་རྒྱལ་བྱང་སྟེ། དེ་ལས་ཡང་ནི་འབྱུང་བ་ཆེ། རྒྱུད་གི་དགྲུལ་འཁོར་ཉིད་བྱུང་སྟེ། དེ་ལས་ཀྱང་ནི་མེ་ཡི་ལམས། ཆེན་པོ་བྱུང་ནས་བྱུང་མཛད་དེ། དེ་ལས་རྒྱ་ལམས་ཆེན་པོ་ཡང་། བྱུང་སྟེ་བྱུང་མཛད་དེ་ལས་ཀྱང་། ས་བྱུང་བཞི་བསྐྱེས་ངོ་བོ་ལས། རི་སྐགས་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱང་། རྣམ་རྟོགས་པ་བ་སྟོན་པོ་དང་། སྐྱེས་བ་བྱུང་མེད་མ་ནིང་དང་། གཞོན་ཏུ་དང་ནི་ཆེན་པོ་དང་། རྩ་དང་སྐྱུ་དང་གཞོན་སྐྱེན་དང་། གཞོན་དང་སྐར་མ་གཤིན་རྗེ་དང་། རྒྱ་བདག་བརྒྱ་ཕྱིན་དཔལ་བ་དང་། ཡི་དགས་དུང་འགྲོ་དང་དེ་ཀུན། ཐུངས་(སངས་)དང་ཤེས་ཅན་རབ་བརྟེན་པའི། འགྲོ་བ་ཀུན་དུ་རྒྱས་པར་གནས། དེ་བས་དེ་ཡི་གོང་མ་ཡི། གཉིས་མེད་རྟོག་བྱལ་རབ་བསྐྱེམས་ཏེ། རྣམ་རྟོགས་པས་ན་འགྲོ་བ་ཀུན། འཁོར་བར་རབ་ཏུ་འཁོར་བར་འབྱུར། དེ་ནི་འཁོར་བའི་སྐྱག་བཟལ་ཆེ། དུག་རྒྱ་ལྷ་བྱར་འབྱུལ་བ་ཡིས། རྣམ་བསྐྱབས་ཐག་པའི་སྐྱལ་ལྷ་བྱར། རྣམ་ཞིང་མེད་པ་ཉིད་དུ་འདོད། །. And also see Catherine Dalton’s Dissertation.

## F. Conclusion

The progression from dualistic interpretations toward a nondual paradigm marks a profound ontological and soteriological reorientation. Advanced tantric doctrines fundamentally reconfigure binaries such as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, reframing them as inseparable dimensions of awakened awareness rather than opposing states that one is better than the other. This shift entails a rethinking of liberation itself, no longer conceived as an escape from conditioned existence but as the recognition of the nondual nature of reality as it already is.

This transformation is especially illuminated in the works of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe, one of the most prolific and intellectually influential early Tibetan authors whose writings have survived in substantial quantity. For instance, Nupchen uses the universal ground of awakened mind as a reference for both the universal ground and the universal ground consciousness, which makes his writing not the most straightforward. Indeed, sometimes, he seems to conceptualize the universal ground as a *saṃsāric* ground, and sometimes it is also combined with the *nirvāṇic* pure consciousness that could be understood as the Buddha-nature or awakened mind. Specifically, *The Armor Against Darkness* and *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* mark critical stages in the maturation of tantric teachings in Tibet. His exploration of the nonconceptual and nondual *ground* highlights the transcendence of conceptual elaboration, steering Buddhist thought toward a more integrated and experiential understanding of ultimate reality.

Precisely because Nupchen stands at an early and formative moment in the transmission and systematization of tantric Buddhism in Tibet, his corpus offers a rare window into the evolving Tibetan religious landscape. His texts preserve traces of doctrinal negotiation, synthesis, and experimentation that reveal how nondual tantric frameworks were articulated, contested, and stabilized over time. Through Nupchen's works, we can thus observe not only the emergence of nondual tantric thought but also the broader historical transformation of Tibetan Buddhism, as inherited Indic categories were reinterpreted and integrated into a distinctly Tibetan religious and intellectual milieu.

In the following chapter, we will see how these cosmogonic doctrines continued to evolve, eventually culminating in the manifestation of the Ground of the Dzogchen Heart Essence. Indeed, the Dzogchen tradition synthesizes and advances these philosophical trajectories, presenting an ultimate framework that encapsulates and transcends the nondual insights of earlier tantric developments.

## Chapter 3

### THE ARTICULATION OF THE DZOGCHEN GROUND IN THE HEART ESSENCE TRADITION (the eleventh-twelfth century)

#### A. Introduction

In the previous chapters, we have observed the development of terminologies and concepts that revolve around a stable foundation capable of accommodating habitual tendencies and latent potentials. Chapter One traces the origins of *the universal ground consciousness* (*ālayavijñāna*, *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*) in the fourth–fifth centuries, when the conceptual framework of the universal ground began to take shape within the Yogācāra school. This consciousness was essential in establishing the mechanisms of karma and *kleśa*, as it was initially understood as a storehouse for karmic imprints that condition the continuity of beings across lifetimes. Subsequently, as explored in Chapter Two, this universal ground was enriched with tantric attributes, woven into its sutric base. Ninth-to-tenth-century Dunhuang manuscripts, along with the writings of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe (likely late ninth century), mark a key transition. During this time, the universal ground consciousness was reinterpreted through the lens of *luminous citta*—a mind that transcends dualistic thinking. This conceptual shift signals the early Dzogchen tradition’s emphasis on the non-duality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, such that the universal ground came to have both ordinary and awakened aspects.

The present chapter turns to the subsequent changes introduced by the early Dzogchen Heart Essence writings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The development of the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition during this time reflects a response to a highly fragmented sociopolitical and religious landscape. This period, characterized by the disintegration of centralized authority following the collapse of the Tibetan Empire, saw both challenges and opportunities for religious innovation and consolidation. Amid the turbulence, new tantric translations were actively pouring into Tibet, bringing with them transformative ideas and practices that shaped the Tibetan spiritual landscape in profound ways.

At the same time, translations and teachings from previous centuries were reinterpreted, revitalized, and integrated into emerging frameworks. Notably, this era also witnessed the rise of treasure texts (*gter ma*) as a distinctive mode of revelation and transmission. Treasure texts offered a means of reinvigorating older traditions by recontextualizing them to accommodate contemporary needs and aspirations. These revealed teachings, often linked to legendary figures and hidden lineages, opened new doors for religious and sociopolitical expression. The retrieval and dissemination of such treasures not only increased the authority of particular lineages but also created avenues for negotiating power and influence within an unstable society.

Additionally, the interplay between innovation and tradition, facilitated by the flow of new translations and the reinterpretation of past teachings, catalyzed the emergence of the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition as a vital and influential force in Tibetan Buddhism during this transformative period. Indeed, this tradition’s evolving conceptual distinctions demonstrate the interplay between theoretical precision and practical application, underscoring how these frameworks guide practitioners toward direct realization and awakening.

Building on the philosophical foundation established by Yogācāra, and, as I have discussed elsewhere, other Buddhist schools such as Chinese Chan, the Dzogchen Heart Essence established its practices and ultimate goals by the eleventh to twelfth centuries.<sup>88</sup> Picking up the early Dzogchen thread of non-dual thinking, this tradition seamlessly integrated the Buddha-nature theory into the Dzogchen Ground.

Early Dzogchen Heart Essence thought, nourished by the rich philosophies of many Buddhist traditions, offered a radical conceptual shift that introduced the concept of primordiality that serves as the basis for all. This new concept of Dzogchen Ground emphasized not that the Ground resides within us; rather, we reside within the Ground. This theoretical move fit with previous notions of Buddha-nature and innate primordial wisdom, which often articulate the reality (i.e., our true nature) as individualized entities residing within sentient beings. At the same time, the main message of Dzogchen is that we have never strayed (*ma gyos*) from the primordial Ground.

The Seventeen Tantras of the early Dzogchen Heart Essence also introduced a framework of Eleven Topics to capture the scope of the Dzogchen Heart Essence (as explored further in Chapter Four).<sup>89</sup> In these tantras, the Dzogchen *Ground* is presented not merely as an abstract concept but also as an experiential reality that practitioners are encouraged to recognize and realize. Similarly, Buddha-nature is understood as not just a latent potential but the dynamic and luminous essence that pervades all experience and can be actualized through Dzogchen practices. The correlation between the Ground and Buddha-nature illustrates the interconnectedness between the cosmogonic origin of the beings (i.e., where and how we come from) and the nature of reality and the path to liberation (i.e., who we are and what we are endowed with).

This chapter focuses on the conceptualization of the Ground in Dzogchen Heart Essence as represented in one of the Seventeen Tantras, *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space* (*bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud dpal nam mkha' med pa*).<sup>90</sup> This tantra, foundational to the Heart Essence tradition, introduces the Ground as an active principle—both the source of all phenomena and a reflection of the inseparability of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Each of the tantra's five chapters explores a particular theme. Collectively, they offer an understanding of the Dzogchen Ground within the Heart Essence tradition. Throughout, the

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<sup>88</sup> See my forthcoming article, “A Negotiation Analytic of the Samye Debate: Exploring the Hopes, Fears, and Responsibilities of Its Key Players.”

<sup>89</sup> Notably, the first and third topics presented in these tantras are the Dzogchen *Ground* and *Buddha-nature*, which underscores the centrality of these ideas in the Dzogchen path.

<sup>90</sup> This tantra is preserved in several major editions of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and related collections: *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag bris ma, vol. 12 (of 46), pp. 87a.3–97a.4 (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), [BDRC W21521]; *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, gTing skyes, vol. 10 (of 36), pp. 669.6–685.4 (Thimphu: Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche, 1973–1975), [BDRC W21518]. This edition bears *gter ma* signs and lacks the interlinear annotations found in some other versions. See also *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, in *Snga 'gyur rgyud 'bum phyogs bsgrigs*, eds. Gzan dkar Thub bstan nyi ma and 'Gro 'dul rdo rje, dPal brtsengs edition, vol. 5 (of 59), pp. 94b.1–103b.5 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009), [BDRC MW1KG14783\_9E4365]; and *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, in *rNying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun*, A 'dzom edition, vol. 1 (of 3), pp. 207–232 (New Delhi: Sanje Dorje, 1973–1977), [BDRC W1KG892].

Ground in Dzogchen is no longer the conventional universal ground (*kun gzhi*) but something far more profound.

This chapter investigates how the Dzogchen Ground is not merely an endpoint in the historical development of the universal ground consciousness; it is a comprehensive synthesis of, even as it transcends, previous conceptual frameworks as well. Of particular relevance to the Heart Essence interpretation of the Ground are early Yogācāra presentations of the universal foundational consciousness as a storehouse for both non-virtuous and virtuous karmic imprints, leading to *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, respectively. We have seen how the early Dzogchen Ground encompassed both unawakened and awakened aspects. Now the Heart Essence Ground is framed an all-pervasive Buddha-nature in need of recognition, a Ground representing the highest realization, seamlessly encompassing both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, appearance and emptiness, without discrimination or separation—in a sense, buddhahood before buddhahood.

## B. Dzogchen and Tibetan Buddhism

The Heart Essence tradition appears to have been established around the tenth to the twelfth century by three masters: the first treasure revealer in Tibet, Ldang ma Lhun gyi rgyal mtshan (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century), followed by another treasure revealer, Lce btsun Seng ge dbang phyug (11<sup>th</sup> century), and finally consolidated under the central Tibetan master and scholar, Zhang ston Bkra shis rdo rje (1097-1167). Subsequently, Zhang ston's son, Mkhas pa Nyima Bum (1158-1213), who is also the lineage holder, became a key contributor to the Eleven Topics. Since the 14th century, the Heart Essence has been the most widely practiced tradition among the Rying ma community.

Many of the early Heart Essence writings are considered revelations, or “treasure” texts (*gter ma*) concealed by earlier Dzogchen masters during inopportune times to be later discovered by fortunate treasure revealers (*gter ston*). Hidden treasures (mostly in the form of encrypted texts or sacred objects) could be discovered as physical entities, as well as in one's dreams, visions, or deep meditative states. The messages delivered through these treasures can be remarkably innovative and uniquely Tibetan in flavor.

Tibetan Buddhism, like other Buddhist traditions, has been shaped by the cultural and religious practices of the country in which it has flourished.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, at its inception, neighboring countries like India and China had already made significant advancements in meditation practices in accordance with tantra, Chan/Zen, and other Mahāyāna schools; Tibetan Buddhism, due to Tibet sharing borders with more than a handful of countries, became a fusion of its own innovations with assimilated ideas and technologies from other cultures.

In the tenth to eleventh centuries, a rich body of Dzogchen Nyingthig tantras and teachings emerged, offering profound insights into the nature of this ground. Throughout history, many texts were lost; the key commentaries and tantras that have survived—such as *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space* (*Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*

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<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that Tibetan Buddhism is not a separate religion; rather, it is a branch of Buddhism that has evolved from India. Also, it absorbed cultural elements from various regions. Its roots can be traced back to the seventh century, and it has undergone continuous development since then.

*dpal nam mkha' med pa zhes bya ba*)—continue to offer vital insights into the unique Dzogchen view of the Ground. Despite their importance, the tantras' authorship remains ambiguous. This may be because tantras present innovative concepts involving personal experiential technologies related to personal experiences. These teachings go beyond standard Buddhist doctrines concerning *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, offering instead a unique perspective that addresses the primordial Ground as the source of both.

### C. The Dzogchen Heart Essence Ground

The relationship among *ālayavijñāna*, *the universal ground of the awakened mind*, *the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature*, and *the Ground* is complex.<sup>92</sup> The narrative of one informs another should not be mistaken as a better/worse hierarchy between ideas. We should pay attention to how different schools of thought think *with* each other, how the concepts complement and enrich one another. The Yogācāra School elaborates on the *ālayavijñāna* as a storehouse for karmic seeds – good, bad, pleasant, and unpleasant. The Tathāgatagarbha followers place more emphasis on the *luminous citta*, an aspect of purity beyond duality. In doing so, the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine paves the way for the transition from the Yogācāra school's storehouse concept to the Dzogchen tantras' stress on one's seeds of purity. Inspired by Yogācāra philosophy, the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition carries the seed potential further by equating *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. In finding *samsāra* no different from *nirvāṇa*, Dzogchen argues that a path beyond *samsāra* is already rooted right in *samsāra* itself.<sup>93</sup>

Additionally, the realities described by *Buddha-nature* and the *Ground* are different. But, in terms of the meanings of these two terms and the purposes that they serve for Buddhist practice, they seem to be mutually complementary. Buddha-nature focuses on an inherent quality within us, while the Ground emphasizes that we are within the ultimate reality. Since Dzogchen asserts

<sup>92</sup> Moreover, in early Dzogchen literature, particularly the Mind Series, the creative aspect of the universal ground differs from the standard Buddhist emphasis on dependent origination through interrelated conditions. The Mind Series highlights the spontaneous and uncontrived emergence of appearances from the ground. This spontaneity shows the fundamental Dzogchen view of reality as inherently pure, luminous, and unobstructed. Thus, while the Dzogchen Ground is conceived within a broader cosmological and soteriological framework, its roots in the tantric notion of reality (as inherently pure, luminous, and unobstructed) reveal the continuity and evolution of the Dzogchen thought. The interplay between the enlightened aspect of the ground (the focus of *the universal ground of the awakened mind*) and its creative potential (captured by the Dzogchen Ground) remains a defining theme. The dance between these two emphases has shaped both the doctrinal and practical dimensions of Dzogchen teachings.

<sup>93</sup> Indeed, in Dzogchen, streams of thought—mainly, *ālayavijñāna*, the universal ground of awakened mind (ཀུན་གྲིང་གི་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲོད་), the universal ground consciousness of Buddha-nature, and the tripartite framework's ground—are worked through to articulate a unique understanding of the Ground. The *universal ground consciousness* provides Dzogchen with a framework for recognizing and cultivating the primordial nature of the mind. Through the understanding and direct experience of the universal ground consciousness, practitioners are able to transcend dualistic thinking and realize their true nature. Uniting *ālayavijñāna* with the ultimate reality of Dharmakāya, the Dzogchen Ground emerges as an ontological basis and cosmogonic source. In other words, the Ground is not something to be attained or realized in the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition. However, Nupchen would treat the universal ground, which has two conditions (as the ground of *samsāra* and the support of *nirvāṇa*), as needing to be realized. In contrast, according to Dzogchen Heart Essence, It only needs to be recognized because it is *always already* present. It is only temporarily obscured by our habitual patterns of thought and perception. Thus, the Ground is both the origin and the ultimate nature of all phenomena; namely, the Ground embodies the pure and uncontrived essence of reality. More see, *Mun pa'i go cha smad cha*, in *rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. Zhi, 35a3, ed. Bdud 'joms Rin po che (Kalimpong, Dist. Darjeeling, W.B.: n.p., 1974–1981), BDRC W19229.

that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are not two separate entities, it suggests that experiencing *samsāra* does not imply a disconnection from the primordial Ground, nor does it imply a connection, rather, it already is, as it is, an expression of the inherent (time-less and self-less) unity with the primordial Ground. With the belief that sentient beings are always already within the primordial Ground, the teachings on Buddha-nature help practitioners recognize and trust in their innate nature, to the point of realizing that they can drop the belief that they are practitioners and that there is a need for a smaller part of reality to trust the Larger Reality; instead all that they have to do is to realize that duality is consumed and finished. Thus, while *Buddha-nature* and the Dzogchen *Ground* represent two distinct philosophical interpretations and serve different soteriological purposes, they work hand-in-hand in enriching the meanings of each other and facilitating practices informed by a holistic view. In other words, seeing *Buddha-nature* as “small” (because it emphasizes the individual innate nature) and the *Ground* as “vast” (for it encompasses everything) is a sign of being trapped in dualistic thinking. As a whole, *ālayavijñāna*, the universal ground of the awakened mind, the universal ground consciousness of *Buddha-nature*, and the *Ground* alert us to binary frameworks such as delusion/truth, pure/impure, inner/outer, and the self/the universe. In the next chapter, I will further explore these conceptual reciprocity and entanglement.

Moreover, in Nupchen’s discussion of the *kun gzhi*, he distinguishes between the universal ground as a *support for purification*—a conditioned basis operative along the path—and its *actual nature* as the unconditioned *dharmakāya*. By contrasting those who assert the universal ground as *dharmakāya* “from the perspective of its being a support” (*rten gyi tshul nas*) with the Secret Mantra understanding of it as the *dharmakāya* itself, Nupchen reveals an incipient differentiation between the ground as it functions epistemically (as path) and the ground as it abides ontologically (as realization). This anticipates the later Heart Essence interpretation of the Ground as both the cosmogonic source and the abiding reality beyond all transformation—a tension that later authors would formalize through the explicit triad of *ground*, *path*, and *fruit*.

The Dzogchen Heart Essence Ground, or *gzhi*, is articulated as both the primordial source from which all phenomena emerge and the very locus where the final liberation is realized. The Ground thus embodies the entirety of existence, from the initial stirrings of the *samsāric* experience to the ultimate awakening and liberation. Nonetheless, throughout this history, the Ground remains empty, as it is free from all conceptual elaborations and distinctions. It is not an object of knowledge; nor is it a state to be achieved. The Ground remains reality itself. It is often likened to the sky: just as the clouds appear and disappear in the sky, the sky remains untouched. In Dzogchen, phenomena come and go; but the Ground remains unchanged.

In sum, the Dzogchen *Ground*, or the primordial ground, reflects a profound perspective on the nature of reality. It points to a state of being that is beyond conceptualization and distinction, and is the basis of all experience. Moreover, the Ground is sometimes referred to as *primordial purity* (*ka dag*). It is the original, undifferentiated state of being that is at once both empty and luminous. Recognizing and resting in this Ground is the ultimate aim of Dzogchen practice. This concept of the Ground of primordial purity is seen as central to Dzogchen philosophy and represents a further development of the concept of the *universal ground consciousness* or *kun gzhi*.

#### D. The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space

*The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space* is one of the Seventeen Tantras, which are a cornerstone of Dzogchen Heart Essence literature. As a whole, these tantras offer profound teachings on the transformative nature of the Ground. This tantra systematically explores how the Ground serves not only as the basis of ordinary experience but also as the locus of ultimate transformation.

In this section, I analyze each chapter of *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space*. The tantra has five chapters, and each chapter is dedicated to an aspect of the Dzogchen Ground. Thus, I blend my analysis with summaries of these chapters, retaining the structure and thematic essence of the original text while examining major ideas presented in the text. In doing so, I uncover the essential principles that define the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition, particularly in terms of the relationship between the Ground, and the path to enlightenment.

##### 1. Chapter One: The Ground's Way of Being

This chapter establishes the foundation of the tantra, focusing on self-appearing awareness as the unchanging and luminous Ground of all phenomena. The chapter introduces a triadic model of essence, nature, and compassion, which serves as the core framework for understanding the Ground: with the essence as its primordial purity, nature as its spontaneous luminosity, as well as compassion as its dynamic expression that gives rise to appearances. These characteristics underscore the inseparability of the three awakened bodies—*dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmanakāya*—which correspond with the triad of essence, nature, and compassion, in the Ground and its expressions. Understanding these aspects of the Ground as inseparable is significant because it highlights the integrated nature of awakening, wherein the Ground encompasses the entirety of the enlightened embodiment.

Additionally, the tantra describes the Ground as a primordial reality, unconditioned, and beyond conceptualization. A kind of *a priori* for both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, this reality remains unchanged regardless of external circumstances. Through these claims, a dilemma emerges. Since the Ground exists before *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* and is the source of everything, how should we understand Buddhahood? Is it identical with the Ground or a mere aspect of it?

This quandary may be answered philosophically or historically. Philosophically, it may be approached in terms of non-duality. Already in early Mahāyāna doctrines, *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, or buddha and sentient being, are considered non-dual; they arise interdependently (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Yet Buddha and sentient beings see this non-dual relationship differently. A Buddha sees it as non-dual, but the sentient being sees it as dual, with buddhahood only a distant promise. But for the Buddha, the sentient being does not exist, and therefore, the non-duality is also unnecessary. The Buddha, in this sense, sees non-duality and does not see it. The Ground offers a solution to this problem, allowing the Buddha to see non-duality, while the Ground does not. Again, the Ground remains ever unchanged.

Historically, we may also observe how the concept of the Ground (*gzhi*), often abbreviated from *kun gzhi* (*ālaya*), grew from that of the universal ground (*kun gzhi, ālaya*). The earlier Yogācārin notion of the universal ground could hold virtuous or non-virtuous imprints that may lead to *nirvāṇa* or *saṃsāra*, respectively. In this sense, the universal ground precedes any distinction between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, and in this sense, it encompasses the non-duality of these two states. Just so, the Ground as Buddha-nature is beyond *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The ultimate Dzogchen Ground is not seen as a passive substratum; instead, it is a dynamic and unbounded source from which all appearances arise without deviating from their pure essence, which is luminous and unconditioned potential, and thus is beyond dualistic frameworks.

The idea of the Ground thus raises profound ontological concerns, particularly regarding time, as the Ground is conceived as existing prior to, or beyond, time. Throughout history, time has been a challenging topic not only for philosophers and scientists but even more so for religious thinkers. Buddhists assert that nothing, including time, truly exists. They regard time, like everything else, as a relative and conceptual construct.

This insight into time's relativity has profound implications for understanding the Ground. In Chapter One of the Tantra, it is stated,

At the time before, when no realized buddhas and no unrealized sentient beings had emerged, awareness that is self-occurring gnosis had not strayed from the Ground and remained together with the three unconditioned appearances. ...The open matrix of the great appearance abides as an unconfused great buddha within the unmoving great *dharmakāya*.<sup>94</sup>

This passage suggests that primordial reality exceeds the scope of conceptual frameworks, including those of temporality. In other words, the Ground is not bound by the limitations of time. Instead, it is the source of both the temporal and the timeless, where dualistic constructs have no relevance.

From this perspective, time is not an inherent quality of reality but rather a product of dualistic cognition. In other words, time is understood as emerging through our mental projection that organizes experiences into a linear progression of the past, present, and future. However, when this progressive framework collapses, that is, when dualistic conceptions dissolve, one moves beyond the confines of time. Until such transcendence happens, sentient beings remain bound within the conventional perception of time as sequential, experiencing their lives in terms of the “before” and “after” dictated by the past, present, and future continuum.

Additionally, the passage argues that intrinsic awareness had not strayed from the Ground. This perspective highlights the individuality of sentient beings. By affirming that each and every one of us is endowed with Buddha-nature, the tantra emphasizes that sentient beings are the possessors, or the containers, of this intrinsic potential. This framing underscores that Buddha-nature represents not only a universal principle but also the unique potentiality inherent within

<sup>94</sup> See *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum, mTshams brag bris ma, vol. 12 (of 46), Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 87b.3-4: རྟོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཚུན་རྩིས་ན། རིག་པ་རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཉིད་གཞི་ལས་མ་གཡོས་ཏེ། རྟོན་མེད་པའི་ལྷང་བ་གསུམ་དང་ཐབས་ཅིག་ཏུ་བཞུགས་སོ།

each individual. Within this context, the Ground functions as the foundational reality in which Buddha-nature resides. It is both the source and the medium through which the latent potential for awakening is expressed. Sentient beings, as possessors of Buddha-nature, are thus deeply interconnected with the Ground; it is within this foundational reality that their potential for enlightenment is nurtured.

Moreover, the idea that Buddha-nature abides in the Ground alongside sentient beings uncovers the intimate connection between the universal and the individual. While Buddha-nature is universal in its scope, as it transcends distinctions of self and other, it is simultaneously personalized within each individual and reflects their inherent capacity for liberation. This dual emphasis reveals that the Ground is not separate from sentient beings but is intrinsically woven into their very experience and serves as the basis for both their confusion and potential awakening.

The dynamic interplay between the Ground, sentient beings, and Buddha-nature illustrates how the universal potential for enlightenment is realized individually. It also highlights the profound unity of all beings, as each of us possesses the same intrinsic Buddha-nature and is grounded in the same foundational reality. This is described as a dimension beyond time and space, to which the conventional references of time and space do not apply. The significance of this no-time and no-space lies in that the practitioners are alerted that they have never strayed from the original Ground, and that enlightenment is not in the future or anywhere else. This realization, known as recognition, forms the core practice of the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition. In this way, Buddha-nature is not an abstract principle but an ever-present reminder of the transformative potential within every sentient being, who has been abiding inseparably within the Ground of their existence.

This chapter encapsulates the fundamental Dzogchen view of the Ground as a primordial and unconditioned reality in which all phenomena manifest, while the Ground remains unaltered. The descriptions of non-dual appearances within the Ground, the seamless integration of emptiness and luminosity, and the spontaneous perfection of all phenomena reflect core Dzogchen principles. They show how Dzogchen transcends conventional Buddhist doctrines of gradual attainment and offers instead a direct and non-dual realization of the nature of mind and reality. Thus, philosophically, this chapter emphasizes the non-dual nature of reality, where all appearances are inseparable from awareness. It insists that awareness-gnosis is the ultimate reality, which is beyond language and thought. These theoretical explorations in turn inform the direction of one's practice. Indeed, from a soteriological perspective, liberation is not other than a direct recognition of the Ground's nature. By aligning with this primordial state, one transcends delusion and its manifestations.

## 2. Chapter Two: The Teaching on the Way Confusion Arises from the Ground

This chapter explores the adventitious nature of ignorance, which arises not from ignorance itself but through the dynamic interplay of compassion and unawareness. In the tantra, ignorance is likened to clouds that form in the sky. This is an apt metaphor for how delusions obscure but do not affect the Ground's nature. The Tantra states:

*Kyema!* I never have delusions, but delusions arise from my dynamism. Within the unchanging *Ground*, nature arises unceasingly. Then, within indeterminate compassion, ignorance naturally arises. For example, the sky does not have clouds, but clouds form adventitiously. Similarly, the *Ground* never has ignorance, but ignorance arises from its dawning as compassion, and the so-called “abiding reality of the spontaneously present *Ground* is formed.”<sup>95</sup>

This passage addresses that the primordial Buddha has never been deluded, yet delusions manifest through their dynamism. From the unchanging Ground, nature unfolds continuously. In the expanse of indeterminate compassion, ignorance naturally emerges. Just as the sky itself holds no clouds, yet clouds arise temporarily, the Ground lacks inherent ignorance, but ignorance arises adventitiously from the dawning of compassion. This process gives rise to what is called the *abiding reality of the spontaneously present Ground* (*gzhi lhun grub kyi gnas lugs*).<sup>96</sup>

This passage reflects a tension between the ontological and the soteriological within Dzogchen thought: the Ground’s inherent purity vs. the adventitious nature of ignorance. The metaphor of clouds arising in the sky underscores the insubstantiality and impermanence of ignorance. It emphasizes, at the same time, that ignorance, though emergent, does not taint the fundamental purity of the Ground. Thus, the dynamic interplay between compassion (as an aspect of the Ground) and the arising of ignorance reflects a nuanced relationship between innate potentiality and adventitious obscuration.

Philosophically, the text emphasizes that confusion is not intrinsic to the Ground but is instead an accidental manifestation of its dynamism. This claim clarifies the integrity of the Ground’s purity while accounting for the adventitious emergence of saṃsāric phenomena. Soteriologically, the recognition of confusion as inseparable from the Ground is pivotal because it helps us see that the purpose of Buddhist practice is not to eliminate thoughts or conceptualization. Indeed, through such realization, delusion dissolves into its natural state. Awareness is thus reestablished in its original purity.

### 3. Chapter Three: The Teaching on the Way of Being and the Way of Appearing

This chapter elaborates on the *four ways of appearing*: dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, nirmāṇakāya, and the confused appearances of *saṃsāra*. Each mode represents a specific dimension of the Ground’s expression, from the primordial purity of dharmakāya to the visible appearances of nirmāṇakāya. Moreover, the Ground is likened to a mirror that reflects all phenomena without bias or distortion, with the mirror and its reflections symbolizing the inseparability of essence and appearance. The tantra states,

<sup>95</sup> See *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag bris ma, vol. 12 (of 46), Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 89a4-7: གྲེ་མ་ང་ལ་འཁྲུལ་བ་མེད་ཀྱང་། ངའི་སྤྱལ་ལས་འཁྲུལ་བ་བྱུང་སྟེ། གཞི་མི་འགྱུར་བ་ལས། རང་བཞིན་མ་འགགས་པར་ཤར་ནས། སྤྱགས་རྗེ་མ་ངེས་པ་ལས་མ་རིག་བ་རང་བྱུང་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་ནམ་མཁའ་ལ་སྤྱན་ཡང་དག་པར་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྫོ་བར་དུ་སྤྱན་བྱུང་བ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ། གཞི་ལ་མ་རིག་པ་ཡོད་པ་ཅང་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྤྱགས་རྗེ་ཉར་ཤར་བ་ལས་མ་རིག་བ་བྱུང་སྟེ། གཞི་སྤྱན་སྐྱབ་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྷགས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཆགས་སོ། །

<sup>96</sup> See *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag bris ma, vol. 12 (of 46), Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 89a6-7: གཞི་སྤྱན་སྐྱབ་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྷགས་

O sacred appearances! Retinues of universally appearing awareness, listen! Awareness, which is a great presence of the Ground, the appearance of *dharmakāya*, is connected to *the great way of being*. Moreover, the single great way of being dawns through the four ways of appearing like this: Since the way of being of awareness and all dharmas abide like the maṇḍala of a mirror, the [Ground] is not obscured by the conditions of ignorance and is called *the great primordial purity*. It is a place where perfectly pure buddhas have not occurred and imperfect sentient beings have not occurred, and it is called *the great primordial radiance of unwavering awareness*.<sup>97</sup>

This passage shows that awareness, as the great presence of the Ground and the manifestation of dharmakāya, is inseparable from *the great way of being* (*gnas lugs chen po*) which is another way to address the Ground. Additionally, such awareness is the essence of reality. Moreover, the singular great essence way of being arises through the four distinct modes of appearance. The way of being, which is the Ground, is the nature of both awareness and all phenomena. Thus, like a maṇḍala reflected in a mirror, the Ground remains untainted by the conditions of ignorance and is known as *the great primordial purity*. The Ground is a realm where neither perfectly pure buddhas nor imperfect sentient beings have arisen, and it is referred to as the great primordial radiance of unwavering awareness.

This passage articulates the profound non-dual nature of the Dzogchen Ground, emphasizing its unchanging purity and the inseparability of awareness and appearances. The metaphor of the mirror highlights the Ground's reflective quality: untainted by conditions yet capable of displaying all phenomena. The statement that neither buddhas nor sentient beings have arisen within this primordial radiance reflects a radical non-dual perspective that transcends dichotomies of purity and impurity, and enlightenment and delusion, to point to the ultimate nature of reality. This framing challenges conceptual grasping, inviting direct experiential realization.

It goes on to define the nature of the *Ground* as follows:

It is inexpressible, inconceivable, imperceptible, immeasurable, and uncountable. It is not established by anything whatsoever. It is unrepresentable and cannot be reified as an object of consciousness. It does not see *samsāra*, and *samsāra* does not see the [Ground]. It does not practice the Dharma, and Dharma does not realize its meaning. It is not *samsāra*; it is not *nirvāṇa*. It is not the Ground; it is not an appearance. It is not darkness;

<sup>97</sup> See *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, *mTshams brag bris ma*, vol. 12 (of 46), Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 90b7-91a4: གྲེ་སྒྲུང་བ་དམ་པ། རིག་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་ [91a]སྒྲུང་བའི་འཁོར་རྣམས་ཉོན་ཅིག་གཞི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་རིག་པ། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ནི་གནས་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་གནས་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་གཅིག་ལ། སྒྲུང་ལྷགས་བཞིར་འཆར་བ་འདྲིལ་སྟེ། རིག་པ་དང་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྷགས་ནི། མ་ལོང་གི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ལྷར་གནས་པས། མ་རིག་པའི་སྐྱེན་གྱིས་མ་བསྐྱེབས་པ། ཀ་དག་ཆེན་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ཡང་དག་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་དག་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་གནས། རིག་པ་མ་གཞུངས་པའི་ཡི་གདངས་ཆེན་པོ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །

it is not a path. There is no traversing; there is no non-traversing. It is not a result. It is not abandonment, and it is not an attainment. It is called “the great expanse of awareness.”<sup>98</sup>

This passage eloquently conveys the ineffable and ungraspable nature of the ultimate reality as understood in Dzogchen. By negating all conceptual frameworks—whether saṃsāric or nirvāṇic—it emphasizes the transcendence of dualities and constructs. *The great expanse of awareness* points to an unbounded, non-conceptual state that defies all attempts at reification or practice-based attainment. This highlights Dzogchen’s radical approach, which invites direct recognition of the Ground as it is, free from effort or conceptual elaboration. It challenges practitioners to relinquish all notions of dualistic striving and rest in the immediate, luminous presence of awareness itself.

#### 4. Chapter Four: The Secret Absolute

This chapter builds upon the previous chapters’ discussion on the ultimate reality, unpacking how it abides and manifests. From the uncontrived nature of this reality, manifestations occur in a structured way as maṇḍalas that are constituted by buddha bodies and so forth. Additionally, the chapter also references the *Seventeen Secret Tantras* as the accurate and definitive expressions of Dzogchen teachings. In doing so, this chapter situates this particular tantra within a broader doctrinal framework established by the *Seventeen Tantras*. The tantra states,

Within the singular bindu of dharmakāya,  
Within the awakened body free of actions,  
The beautiful maṇḍalas are inconceivable.

Since the great ancestor of all the buddhas  
has no awakened body nor gnosis whatsoever,  
the signified gnosis is beyond words:  
The awakened body of awareness is without duality.

It is inconceivable for the minds of sentient beings.  
The self-awakened singular realization,  
which appears as fivefold within the objective realm.  
The First Lord, Amitabha,  
By means of his pure fields, manifests the three awakened bodies. [94b]

From the stainless protector,  
The colors of pure luminous appearances manifest.  
The great appearances of the awakened bodies

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<sup>98</sup> See *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, *mTshams brag bris ma*, vol. 12 (of 46), Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 91a4-91b3: དེ་ལ་ནི་བརྗོད་དུ་མེད་དོ། །དཔག་ཏུ་མེད་དོ། །དམིགས་སུ་མེད་དོ། །གཞུག་དུ་མེད་དོ། །བརྩེ་མེད་དོ། །གང་གིས་ཀྱང་གཏན་ལ་མི་ཕེབས་སོ། །མཚན་དུ་མེད་དོ། །ཤེས་པའི་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱུང་མེད་དོ། །དེས་ནི་འཁོར་བ་མི་མཐོང་། །འཁོར་བས་དེ་ཉིད་མི་མཐོང་ངོ་། །དེས་ནི་ཆོས་མི་སྤྱད་དོ། །ཆོས་ཀྱིས་དཔེ་དོན་མི་རྟོགས་སོ། །དེ་ནི་འཁོར་བ་མིན་ནོ། །ཐུང་ན་ལས་འདས་པ་མིན་ནོ། །གཞི་[91b]མིན་ནོ། །སྤང་བ་མིན་ནོ། །སྤོང་བ་མིན་ནོ། །ལམ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །བཤོད་པ་མེད་དོ། །མི་བཤོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འབྲས་བུ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །སྤངས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །ཐོབ་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ནི་རིག་པའི་དབྱིངས་ཆེན་མོ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །

Are the unceasing natural appearances.<sup>99</sup>

These verses show that the manifestations occur as the exquisite *maṇḍalas*, which are the awakened body free from actions from the singular sphere of *dharmakāya*. This great progenitor of all buddhas possesses neither an awakened body nor gnosis in any form. The gnosis it signifies transcends all expressions, pointing to the duality-free awakened body of awareness. This profound realization is utterly inconceivable to the minds of sentient beings, as the self-arising singular realization manifests in fivefold forms within the realm of appearances. The First Lord, Amitabha, through his immaculate pure realms, reveals the three awakened bodies. From the stainless protector arises radiant hues of pure luminous appearances. The vast manifestations of the awakened bodies emerge as unceasing, natural expressions of their inherent nature.

This passage encapsulates the non-dual, self-arising nature of the awakened state, where *dharmakāya* serves as the indivisible source of all enlightened manifestations. The reference to the “singular *bindu*” emphasizes the inseparability of form and formlessness, as well as action and inaction. Moreover, the imagery of Amitabha and the three awakened bodies aligns with the interdependent display of pure realms and compassionate activity. Thus, this text challenges practitioners to move beyond conceptual grasping, inviting them to directly encounter the unceasing luminous expressions of awareness as their natural state.

#### 5. Chapter Five: The Teaching on the Ground for Confusion which Appears to All the Senses

This chapter addresses the manifestation of *samsāra*, explaining how the interplay of the five elements and afflictions gives rise to deluded appearances. It ties internal psychological states to external cosmological structures (such as the six realms of beings), which are linked to specific afflictions like desire, anger, and pride. Despite the apparent solidity of *samsāra*, the text emphasizes its continuing non-duality with the Ground. The tantra states,

The perfect awakened bodies are empty of any substantial thoughts and are in themselves pure of any confusion in activities. The awakened body of awareness itself is innate within every sentient being. Since it is present in all four elements, it is active everywhere. It appears everywhere, and its aspect of clarity is everywhere unceasing. It shines everywhere in numerous ways; in doing so, it is without uniting or departing. Its light arises in the manner of a circular rainbow (*khyim gyi tshul du*), and its appearances are unceasing. O! The culmination of the secret mantra is the completely pure awakened body of one’s own awareness. The culmination of all phenomena involves the great practice of not practicing. The culmination of all views involves the great stamping of the seal on appearances without looking. The culmination of all realizations involves the

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<sup>99</sup> See *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag bris ma, vol. 12 (of 46), Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 94a5-94b1: ཆོས་སྐུ་འཇིག་ལེ་ཉག་གཅིག་ལ། བྱ་བྱེད་མེད་པའི་སྐུ་ལས་ནི། མཛོམས་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་བསམ་མི་བྱུང་། སངས་རྒྱུ་ཀུན་གྱི་མས་ཆེན་པོ། སྐུ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་འགའ་མེད་པས། མཚན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆོག་ལས་འདས། རིག་པའི་སྐུ་ལ་གཉིས་མེད་དོ། བཅས་ཅན་སྟོ་ལ་བསམ་ཡས་ཤིང་། དགོངས་པ་ཉག་གཅིག་རང་སངས་པས། བསམ་པའི་ཡུལ་ལ་ཐར་སྤང་ཞིང་། རྟོག་མཐོན་པོ་འོད་དཔག་མེད། ཞིང་ཁམས་དག་པས་སྐུ་གསུམ་[94b]གསལ། མགོན་པོ་དྲི་མེད་དག་པ་ལས། འོད་སྤང་དག་པའི་ཁ་དོག་གསལ། སྐུ་ཡི་སྤང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ནི། རང་བཞིན་སྤང་བ་མ་འགགས་པའོ། །

great self-appearance without meditation. The culmination of all practices involves non-contrivance and freedom from any action.<sup>100</sup>

This passage encapsulates the non-dual essence of Dzogchen, emphasizing the inherent presence of the awakened body of awareness within all beings and the ultimate transcendence of dualistic concepts such as practice, view, and realization (in the last three sentences). The repeated reference to clarity, light, and unceasing appearances highlights the dynamic and luminous nature of awareness as it effortlessly manifests within the phenomenal world. Moreover, the emphasis on “non-practice,” “non-contrivance,” “freedom from action,” and “without looking” reflects the radical Dzogchen approach, which invites the practitioner to relinquish all effort and simply abide in the natural state of uncontrived awareness. This teaching challenges dualistic striving and points directly to the innate perfection that is already present. It integrates the ultimate realization into every aspect of our (non)existence.

Overall, the tantra quilts an integration of cosmology, ontology, and soteriology. Its metaphors—such as the amulet box, mirror, and circular rainbow—illustrate the inseparability of essence, nature, and compassion, as well as the dynamic interplay between the Ground and its expressions. The text’s perspective on confusion as adventitious rather than intrinsic aligns with its emphasis on the immediacy of liberation through recognition. Comparative analyses with other Dzogchen texts or broader Buddhist frameworks could further illuminate this tantra’s contributions to Buddhist thought.

The fundamental philosophy of Dzogchen revolves around the concept of nonconceptual concepts. Indeed, non-conceptuality forms the core of many other Buddhist traditions. In the context of Dzogchen, the Ground is often perceived as transcending concepts altogether. Traditionally, the true nature of the Ground is expounded upon as the object of view or assertion. Thus, a proper understanding of the true nature of the Ground is essential. This understanding ultimately leads to a state of liberation or enlightenment, which is characterized as a non-conceptual or nondual state. In this state, the subject and object merge, and the ordinary functioning of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* collapses. According to Buddhist thought, the delineation between existence’s pure and impure aspects is a mere fabrication. Knowing this, one is capable of fully comprehending the profound depths of Buddhist philosophy and its implications for personal growth and transcendence.

Seeing non-conceptually, the distinction between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* becomes obscured. Their inherent natures undergo a profound transformation through which *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, instead of assuming new identities, become indistinguishable. In other words, through such non-discrimination, the Ground is seen. Accordingly, the fundamental premise of this teaching posits

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<sup>100</sup> See *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, *mTshams brag bris ma*, vol. 12 (of 46), Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 95b2-6: ཡང་དག་པའི་སྐྱེ་བསམ་པའི་དངོས་པོས་སྤྱོད་སྟེ། བྱ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་འབྱུང་པ་རང་དག་པའོ། རིག་པའི་སྐྱེ་ཉིད་མེས་ཅན་ལ་རང་ཆས་ཏེ། འབྱུང་བཞི་ཀུན་ལ་གནས་པས་ཀུན་ཏུ་སྤྱོད་དོ། ཀུན་ཏུ་སྤྱོད་ཞིང་ཀུན་ལ་གསལ་ཆ་མ་འགགས་པའོ། ཀུན་ལ་མང་པོར་འཆར་ཞིང་དེ་ལྟར་དུ་འདུ་འབྱེད་མེད་པའོ། འོད་ཀྱིས་ཀྱི་ཚུལ་དུ་འཆར་ཞིང་སྤྱང་བ་མ་འགགས་པའོ། ཀྱི་མ་གསང་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་མཐའ་རང་གི་རིག་པའི་སྐྱེ་རྣམས་པར་དག་པའོ། ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། མི་སྤྱོད་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། ལྷ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། ལྷ་རུ་མེད་པའི་སྤྱང་བ་རྒྱས་འདེབས་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། ཏཱ་ལོ་ལྷ་མོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། བསྐྱེད་དུ་མེད་པའི་རང་སྤྱང་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། སྤྱོད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། བཅོས་གཞི་བྱ་བྱེད་དང་བྱེད་པ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ།

that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* share the same intrinsic essence. When the intrinsic essence refers to the Ground's nature, it is not different from the views of the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka traditions. However, when it refers to the Ground itself, because the Ground tells the story of how *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* emerge, it does not align with Yogācāra and Madhyamaka beliefs.

Regarding the framework of the Ground and Ground's nature, this statement from the sutra could be relevant: “that mind is not the mind, because the mind's nature is luminous” (*sems de sems ma yin te/ sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba 'i phyir ro/*).<sup>101</sup> This claim encapsulates the view of the Ground and the Ground's nature. While “that mind is not the mind” means that there is no mind, “because the mind's nature is luminous” highlights that, at the same time, the nature of the mind is luminous. Moreover, this statement also shows that the empty and luminous aspects of the mind are inseparable, and that the indivisibility of these two is the true nature of reality. These ideas are further developed into the *three-kāya* in tantric teachings.

With the support of these expansive teachings, the Dzogchen Ground has unfolded its philosophical dimensions and become an all-encompassing idea that encapsulates the essence of all Buddhist views. Nevertheless, since the paradoxical nature of this thought, offering conceptual analyses even as it undercuts them, resists excessive interpretation, it has left little room for conceptual maneuverability. Thus, while the *Ground* represents a comprehensive synthesis of various philosophical perspectives and embodies a holistic understanding of existence in its entirety, it presents challenges for truth-oriented philosophical inquiry. Indeed, there is always a daunting paradox confronting whoever is thinking about the Ground, even as conceptualization remains fundamental for understanding these Buddhist teachings.

## E. Conclusion

So far, this dissertation has undertaken a detailed theoretical exploration of what I term the *ālaya ecology*. Across the first three chapters, we examined the conceptual landscape of *the universal ground* or *ālayavijñāna* (the storehouse consciousness), *the awakened mind*, *Buddha-nature*, and the Dzogchen *Ground*. These interconnected concepts illuminate the evolution of foundational Buddhist thought and lay the groundwork for understanding the dynamic systematization of Dzogchen Nyingthig teachings. We have traced a complex web of ideas that demonstrates how Buddhist traditions have continuously changed their views of existence, liberation, and ultimate reality.

Historically, the cross-pollination of ideas among Buddhist schools has enriched the theoretical discourse on the nature of reality, the living and dying conditions of sentient beings, and the path to awakening. The Yogācāra tradition's landmark doctrine of the eighth consciousness, along with the early Mahāyāna teachings on Buddhahood found in texts such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, established dialectics that have defined Buddhist theory and practice—dialectics such as *saṃsāra* versus *nirvāṇa* and sentient beings versus Buddhas. These discourses have

<sup>101</sup> आर्याष्टादशसाहस्रिकाप्रज्ञापारमितामहायानसूत्र (*ārya-aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-nāma-mahāyānasūtra*) འཕགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་ཁྱིལ་བྱ་བའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདྲ་ (*'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa khri brgyad stong pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po 'i mdo*), in Bka' 'gyur (Tōh. 10. sde dge ed.) vol. Ka (ཀ), f. 73a4: འདི་རྩེ་མཆོག་གི་སྤྱོད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདྲ་། མཆོག་གི་རང་བཞིན་འོད་གསལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

profoundly shaped subsequent traditions, including the Dzogchen Nyingthig, which has built upon this foundation to explore the interplay between temporality, causality, and the timeless realization of non-duality.

The Heart Essence branch, particularly through its focus on the Dzogchen Ground, contributes a recontextualization of these frameworks. The *universal ground* or *ālayavijñāna*, initially presented as a conditioned, karmically influenced repository of saṃsāric imprints, represents cyclical temporality and causality at their most intricate. Buddha-nature, in contrast, frames time as a process for unveiling an inherent purity that has always been present. When it comes to the Dzogchen Ground, these two frameworks—causal and acausal, temporal and atemporal—are synthesized, as the Ground posits a timeless, unconditioned reality that runs through ignorance and appearance. In terms of time, this conceptual shift is encapsulated in the Dzogchen notion of the *fourth time* (*dus bzhi*), which surpasses the past, present, and future, and points directly to the primordial Ground.

Moreover, while the essential ideas of various Buddhist schools converge in Dzogchen, the Nyingthig tradition also clarifies their divergences. The Eleven Topics, for example, delineate the Dzogchen Ground as the primordial basis, which is the source of manifestations, and its nature is an unconditioned abiding reality that is beyond dualistic elaboration. On the other hand, Buddha-nature is related to the Ground's nature and described as the luminous potential for awakening inherent within all beings. Indeed, we might even suggest that the aspects of these two ideas that distinguish them are rooted in the above-mentioned distinction between the universal ground and Buddha-nature. Here, the *universal ground* or *ālayavijñāna* is highlighted for its saṃsāric conditioning and its foundational role in dependent origination. Buddha-nature is understood to exist immanently within *saṃsāra* while remaining untainted by it. In this way, the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition emphasizes both the interrelation and distinctiveness of these key concepts, one associated more with the primordial origin, the other with the nature of the present, even as these two are ultimately inseparable. By doing so, it unveils an integrated view of the ultimate truth at the heart of the Great Perfection's Heart Essence teachings.

Crucially, theoretical development alone does not constitute the ultimate goal of any Buddhist practice, including that of the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition. This tradition emphasizes the necessity of seeing both the connection and distinction between the *universal ground* (*ālaya*, *kun gzhi*) and Buddha-nature. In the Nyingthig tradition, the *universal ground* or *ālayavijñāna* represents the conditioned repository of karmic imprints, while *dharmakāya* embodies the unconditioned ultimate reality. A similar emphasis on both inter-relationality and difference could be found in pairs such as the ultimate reality body and *dharmakāya* (*chos sku*), mind (*sems*) and awareness (*rig pa*), and consciousness (*rnam shes*) and gnosis (*ye shes*). These distinctions are not merely theoretical but serve as practical guideposts for practitioners seeking awakening.

In summary, the first three chapters of this dissertation outline the *ālaya ecology* as the theoretical foundation of the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition. This analysis highlights the centrality of *ālayavijñāna*, the awakened mind, Buddha-nature, and the Dzogchen Ground in shaping its worldview. In subsequent chapters, I focus on the integration of this theory into practice. Specifically, I examine the Eleven Topics as introduced in the *Opening of Sound Tantra*

and the *Pearl Garland Tantra*, and further developed in Nyi ma ‘bum’s Great Perfection”: The Eleven Words and Meanings. These topics set the stage for Chapter Four by elucidating the intricate reciprocity between theory and practice within the Nyingthig tradition, further demonstrating how this branch of Buddhism has systematized its profound teachings into a cohesive path of realization.

## Chapter 4

### ZHANG NYIMA BUM'S ELEVEN TOPICS: GROUND, ĀLAYA, AND BUDDHA-NATURE IN THE DZOGCHEN HEART ESSENCE TRADITION (the twelfth-thirteenth century)

#### A. Introduction

In previous chapters, I have systematically traced the evolution of the Dzogchen Ground out of *the universal ground consciousness* and other crucial Mahāyāna concepts such as *the universal ground of Buddha-nature* (*kun gzhi bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po*), *the universal ground of awakened mind* (*kun gzhi byang chum kyi sems*), and other related ideas. These explorations have uncovered the complex historical processes that shape contemporary Tibetans' comprehension of the *Ground*. The present chapter elucidates the initial development of the Eleven Topics (*tshig don bcu bcig*) within the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition, a narrative of falling from the ground and returning to it, that came to structure the early Heart Essence tradition.

The early Heart Essence corpus includes two primary collections: the *Heart Essence of Vimalamitra* and the *Seventeen Tantras*. These collections chart the journey towards ultimate liberation and the return to the original Ground, underscoring its significance as a core teaching within the Heart Essence tradition. The Eleven Topics appear in two key texts from the *Seventeen Tantras*—the *Opening of Sound Tantra* (*Sgra thal 'gyur*), and the *Pearl Garland Tantra* (*Mu tig phreng ba*). The topics were then developed into a full-blown narrative in Nyima Bum's (Nyi ma 'bum's) *Eleven Words and Meanings of the Great Perfection* (*Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*). In examining these texts, I pay special attention to the first three topics: (1) the Ground, (2) straying from the Ground, (3) Buddha-nature.

The significance of the Eleven Topics to the Heart Essence tradition cannot be overestimated. They are central to the Heart Essence, its philosophical underpinnings. Despite this, Western scholarship on them is almost nil. In his 1992 Ph.D. dissertation, David Germano assumes Klong chen pa's fourteenth-century presentation of the Eleven Topics to be the earliest, since Nyi ma 'bum's writings had not yet surfaced.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Daniel A. Scheidegger's 2009 article, titled "The First Four Themes of Klong chen pa's Tshig don bcu gcig,"<sup>103</sup> is largely a summary of the first four sections of Klong chen pa's work. The article is based on Scheidegger's 2004 dissertation, which focuses on Dzogchen philosophy, particularly exploring the nature of lights and visions within this tradition.<sup>104</sup> More recently, in 2016, Malcolm Smith published an English translation of Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem's fourteenth-century *Buddhahood in This Life: The Great Commentary by Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen po rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal*), another important eleven topics text.<sup>105</sup> Even more than Klong chen pa, Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem almost entirely duplicates

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<sup>102</sup> David Germano, "Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of the Self: The Tantric Synthesis of Dzogchen in Fourteenth Century Tibet," Ph.D. dissertation, 1992.

<sup>103</sup> Daniel A. Scheidegger, "The First Four Themes of Klong chen pa's Tshig don bcu gcig," in the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* No. 16 in April, 2009.

<sup>104</sup> Daniel A. Scheidegger, "Lights and Visions in Rdzogs chen Thinking," completed at the University of Bristol in 2004.

<sup>105</sup> This text is a revealed treasure from the four-volume cycle called *Dgongs pa zang thal*, "discovered" in 1366 by Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem (1337-1409) in Tsang province and translated by Malcolm Smith, 2016.

Nyi ma ‘bum’s earlier thirteenth-century text. Essentially, both Scheidegger and Smith translate Tibetan texts; without providing much critical analysis of the Eleven Topics.

I have already published some initial findings on Nyima Bum’s crucial work. *The Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings* is the earliest known systematic presentation of these topics. This text was rediscovered in 2002 in the Pelpung Library, Eastern Tibet. Nyima Bum inherited the nascent Heart Essence tradition from his father, Zhang ston shis rdo rje. *The Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings* is instrumental in elucidating the philosophical underpinnings of the Dzogchen view of the Ground. The text provides a rich basis for discussing how different perspectives within the tradition relate to the fundamental nature of reality, and how Nyi ma Bum’s teaching informs the practice and realization of the Dzogchen path.

In my Master’s thesis, I examined Nyi ma ‘bum’s introduction to *The Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings*.<sup>106</sup> Subsequently, Jacob Dalton and I published our 2018 “Signification and History in Zhang Nyi ma ‘bum’s rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa,”<sup>107</sup> which explores the unusual treatments of language, history, and time in Heart Essence thought as represented in Nyi ma ‘bum’s introduction. In 2022, we then published “Early Developments in Snying thig Practice: The Eighth Topic of Zhang Nyi ma ‘bum’s rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa,”<sup>108</sup> which focuses on Nyi ma ‘bum’s eighth topic, a central chapter that focuses on Heart Essence practices. As mentioned above, the present chapter focuses on Nyi ma ‘bum’s first three topics: the Ground, *alāya*, and Buddha-nature.

Given that current academic scholarship on the Great Perfection remains in its formative stages, a critical analysis of the Heart Essence tradition, particularly its doctrinal intricacies, is not only timely but essential. The present chapter on the Eleven Topics, particularly their articulation through the lens of view, path, conduct, and fruition within the Heart Essence tradition, offers new perspectives on both the initial formation of the tradition and its subsequent doctrinal evolutions. I begin by offering an analysis of the two foundational passages from the tantras to illuminate how Nyima Bum extrapolated the Eleven Topics and systematized them into a new, comprehensive treatise. Additionally, I examine how his presentation correlates with the structural and thematic frameworks of these tantras. In doing so, I uncover both the interpretive strategies that Nyima Bum employed and the doctrinal significance of his arrangement.

The Eleven Topics thus underscore the soteriological significance of returning to the Ground as the culmination of liberation, where dualistic confusion dissolves, and the true nature of reality is fully revealed. Despite being inherently connected to the Dzogchen Ground, sentient beings often deviate from this pristine state due to ignorance and delusion. *The Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings* posits that through rigorous spiritual practice, one can transcend these veils, rediscover the Ground, and realize the ultimate awakening. This journey—from

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<sup>106</sup> Khenpo Yeshe, “The Origins of the Dzogchen Eleven Words and Meanings: Comparing Nyi ma ‘bum, Longchenpa, and Rikzin Gödemchen,” in the *Journal of Tibetan Literature*, volume 2, issue 2 (2023), 39-82.

<sup>107</sup> Khenpo Yeshe and Jacob Dalton, “Signification and History in Zhang Nyi ma ‘bum’s rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa,” in the *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, issue 43 (January 2018), 256-273.

<sup>108</sup> Khenpo Yeshe and Jacob Dalton, “Early Developments in Snying thig Practice: The Eighth Topic of Zhang Nyi ma bum’s rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa,” in the *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, issue 63 (April 2022), 95-130.

recognizing the Ground to experiencing its pure nature—forms the core of the Dzogchen path, exemplifying its profound vision of liberation as both a return to and a recognition of one’s fundamental nature.

As will be seen below, the narrative of the Eleven Topics takes for granted a change in how Buddha-nature is interpreted, a change I have already introduced in Chapter Three. The Dzogchen Ground and Buddha-nature are in an entangled relationship, since both concepts affirm an intrinsic, luminous aspect of reality that underlies all phenomena. From this perspective, the Ground can be understood as an elaboration or transformation of Buddha-nature. However, sometimes the Ground and Buddha-nature are conceived as different, especially in the *Seventeen Tantras* and Nyi ma ‘bum’s Eleven Topics. Within this context, Buddha-nature emphasizes the inherent capacity for awakening within ordinary beings; the Dzogchen Ground, on the other hand, highlights the already perfected, non-dual reality that stretches far beyond any individual, an infinite reality that is ever-present and self-arising. Seen in this way, there is a key difference between the two: Buddha-nature retains a soteriological and developmental orientation, as it points to a process of uncovering or realizing our innate potential. The Dzogchen Ground is not something to be attained but is presented as the foundational reality, ever-present, and it exceeds the scope of temporal frameworks.

The Eleven Topics begin with the Dzogchen Ground as the primary subject and introduce Buddha-nature as the third topic. The resulting distinction between the Dzogchen Ground and Buddha-nature is emphasized due to their different implications for theory and practice. Where earlier schools emphasized the immanence of Buddha-nature and often tied it to sudden awakening, here, in the context of Nyima Bum’s treatment, Buddha-nature operates within a framework of gradual realization, which aligns with Mahāyāna systems that establish practice as a step-by-step process. In contrast, the Dzogchen Ground asserts a non-dual reality that is already fully present; in other words, the Ground is not something to be cultivated. It only needs to be recognized. The shift in emphasis from Buddha-nature to the Ground has significant soteriological implications; while Buddha-nature offers a pathway to uncover our intrinsic purity, the Dzogchen Ground assumes the ultimate perspective, where delusion and realization are seen as expressions of the same underlying reality.

#### B. Nyima Bum’s Selection of Quotations from the Seventeen Tantras

In *The Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*, Nyima Bum cites the *Seventeen Tantras* extensively and uses them as authoritative sources for his writing. Specifically, Nyima Bum references critical passages from two influential tantras: the *Great Tantra of Opening of Sound*, the *Pearl Garland Tantra*. Likely composed between the tenth and twelfth centuries, these two tantras employ the Eleven Topics to organize the teachings of the *Seventeen Tantras* into a cycle from the Ground (topic 1) to Final Liberation (topic 11). These two Tantras offer what seems to be our earliest documentation of the Eleven Topics and are widely considered two of the principal scriptures of the Seventeen Tantras.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Both Tantras are the focus of extensive early commentaries, which are attributed to Vimalamitra, a founding teacher of Dzogchen who lived around the late eighth to early ninth century. The commentaries are: *On the Opening of Sound*, *The Visionary Experience of the Great Pandita Vimalamitra: The Secret Tantra of the Illuminating*

Nyima Bum selects eleven questions from the *Opening of Sound Tantra* and eleven statements from the *Pearl Garland Tantra*. However, neither of these tantras explicitly frames their discussions around eleven topics. Instead, in Chapter Two of the *Opening of Sound Tantra*, there are twenty-eight questions. From these questions, Nyima Bum chooses eleven and makes minor edits in terms of wording. Additionally, instead of using the answers to these questions in the *Opening of Sound Tantra*, Nyima Bum incorporates eleven statements from the *Pearl Garland Tantra*. This is Nyima ‘bum’s presentation of eleven questions and answers:

|   | Adapted questions from <i>The Opening of Sound Tantra</i>               | Adapted statements from <i>The Pearl Garland Tantra</i>                                                                               |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | What is this crucial starting point of cyclic existence? <sup>110</sup> | Although the abiding reality is inconceivable, Five types of gnosis are mentioned. <sup>111</sup>                                     |
| 2 | From what does the mind become confused? <sup>112</sup>                 | Although the ground of confusion may be explained in many aspects, <sup>113</sup><br>It is spontaneous presence and great compassion. |
| 3 | What is the abiding reality of the gnosis of reflexive-awareness?       | Intrinsically abiding are the [buddha] body, awareness, and gnosis. <sup>114</sup>                                                    |
| 4 | Where does [this] abiding abide? <sup>115</sup>                         | Their residence is the center of the <i>citta</i> —the heart.                                                                         |
| 5 | Through which paths does this [gnosis] emerge?                          | The pathways are the four channels, and the movers are the winds.                                                                     |

*Blazing Lamp* (Pan chen dri med bshes gnyen gyi dgongs nyams sgron ma snang byed ‘bar ba’i gsang rgyud), and on the *Pearl Garland*, *Illuminating the Great Perfection Pearl Garland Tantra Tantra* (Rdzogs pa chen po mu tig phreng rgyud gsal byed). Today, these two commentaries are found within volumes 109, 110, and 111 of the *Extensive Collection of the Early Translation* (Snga ‘gyur bka’ ma shin tu rgyas pa). These works, likely penned after Nyi ma ‘bum’s era, reflect ongoing interpretative expansions.

<sup>110</sup> The received version of the *Sgra thal* ‘gyur has additional lines here, so that it reads: *sems can* ‘khor ba’i thog ma gang/ ‘das pa’i tha ma gang gis bzung/ sangs rgyas ma ‘khrul gnad ‘di ci. It seems that Nyima Bum is extracting only the first line, because only it is directly relevant to the first topic. In fact, his single line combines the first few words with the very last (gnad ‘di ci) from the tantra.

<sup>111</sup> In the *Mu tig phreng ba*, it reads: *ye shes rnam pa gsum yin no*. But when Nyima Bum quotes the same passage (p. 14), he reads five: *ye shes rnam pa lnga bshad kyang*. The Vima commentary to the *Mu tig phreng ba*, p. 532.2-3, suggests both might be right: *sku ni lnga/ rig[s] ni lnga/ ye shes ni lnga/ ‘od ni lnga/ rlung ni lnga/ shes rab ni lnga ste*.

<sup>112</sup> The tantra reads *sems can* for the first two syllables instead of Nyi ma ‘bum’s *sems ni*.

<sup>113</sup> This line is missing from Nyi ma ‘bum, but it appears to be an error of copying, because without the line, the two topics are not sufficiently covered. So here I translate from the tantra itself.

<sup>114</sup> Nyima Bum and the *A* ‘dzom version of the *Mu tig phreng ba* read *rig* (though the *Gting skyes* has *ni*!), but the latter’s Vima commentary has *rigs* (“family”).

<sup>115</sup> The tantra combines Nyi ma ‘bum’s third and fourth topic into one line: *rang rig ye shes gnas pa gang*.

|    |                                                                                        |                                                                                  |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6  | What are the gateways through which the gnosis dawns forth?                            | The four gateways <sup>116</sup> of its dawning forth are the eyes and so forth. |
| 7  | Within precisely which objective sphere does the dawning forth [occur]? <sup>117</sup> | The objective sphere is the unconditioned sky. <sup>118</sup>                    |
| 8  | How does [one] experientially integrate [this]? <sup>119</sup>                         | Experiential integration [involves] Cutting-Through and Direct-Transcendence.    |
| 9  | What are the signs and measures of that [integration] that appear?                     | The measure is the yoga of the four assurances.                                  |
| 10 | What are the experiences of the intermediate states?                                   | In the intermediate states, the mother and son join,                             |
| 11 | Into what liberation does one's mind liberate?                                         | Whereby the place of liberation is the original beginning. <sup>120</sup>        |

Moreover, the scope of the *Opening of Sound Tantra* is not limited to eleven topics. Instead, as it is considered to be the root tantra of all seven tantras, it encapsulates the entire Heart Essence teachings. On the other hand, *the Pearl Garland Tantra* distills the Heart Essence teachings into a list of statements, which Nyima Bum uses as the eleven topics. Indeed, the Eleven Topics trace a narrative arc that begins with sentient beings straying from the primordial Ground. The subsequent topics then describe how the ordinary being's very subtle body is formed, followed by the core practices of the Heart Essence system to help us return to the original Ground, with the final eleventh topic representing this return and final awakening. The resulting narrative structure offers practitioners a sense of direction for their practice.

While the topics seemingly follow a conventional linear narrative structure, their story is as much circular as it is linear. The topics move from equilibrium to disequilibrium, and then to equilibrium restored, thus collapsing linear temporal framing and pointing to the ultimate that is beyond linear time.

As mentioned earlier, since the Ground is conceived as the source of all phenomena, it remains in a temporal system that has a beginning. Along with this cosmogonic story of the emergence of *samsāra*, an endpoint inevitably arises in the form of *nirvāṇa*. But the uniqueness of the Ground's story lies in that liberation not being generated from effortful practice; rather, it is

<sup>116</sup> There may be some confusion around how to identify these four gateways. Both Nyima Bum (p. 51, l. 7) and the Vima commentary to the *Mu tig phreng ba* seem to count five—the two eyes, the two ears, and the top of the head. Perhaps significantly, Klong chen pa changed the root text to omit the number “four,” which frees him to count only two, namely the two eyes and their crystal channels. The number four is also said to be linked to the four lamps.

<sup>117</sup> Here Nyima Bum omits two questions that precede this one in the tantra.

<sup>118</sup> The root tantra (*Gting skyes* and *A 'dzom*) reads: *namkha' rkyen bral yul du 'dus*.

<sup>119</sup> Here again he omits two questions.

<sup>120</sup> Root tantra reads *grol sa nyid ni thog ma'o* (536). Note that Klong chen pa, and Jigme Lingpa following him, is careful to qualify this line. This might be part of them bringing Dzogchen into line with normative Buddhist doctrine, which requires *nirvāṇa* to be final. This is quite different from Nyi ma 'bum, who addresses this issue in the context of his discussion of the eleventh topic.

instead *always already* present. Reaching awakening in the future is equally a return to the past (“the place of liberation is the original beginning” *grol sa nyid ni thog ma ’o*). And by collapsing past and future in this way, the story of the Ground also in effect undoes any possible reference to the present, positioning true liberation in a timeless dimension.

### C. Ground, Path, and Fruition in the Eleven Topics

In Nyi ma ‘bum’s hands, these Eleven Topics trace a movement from Ground to Path to Fruition. His presentation showcases a skillful condensation of the ideas presented in the two tantras, distilling their key messages while maintaining clarity. Where the earliest Heart Essence scriptures are often marked by their length, irregularity, and circuitous style, Nyi ma ‘bum’s writing offers a clear framework for navigating the tradition. His summary of the Eleven Topics in his introduction reads:

In the system of the *tantras*, there are eleven words and meanings: [i]<sup>121</sup> teaching how, at the very beginning, the Ground—the abiding reality of phenomena’s nature—abides before, when neither realization and buddha, nor non-realization and sentient beings has emerged; [ii] establishing how the confusion emerges within that way of abiding; [iii] teaching how, even if sentient beings are confused, the fields of completely perfect buddhas and the seeds [of awakening]<sup>122</sup> still abide within them; [iv] precisely where that same abiding resides; [v] the pathways through which the gnosis that resides in that way emerges; [vi] the gates through which the gnosis of awareness that has emerged through those pathways then dawns forth; [vii] the objective sphere in which that gnosis of awareness that has dawned through the gateways now appears; [viii] how that gnosis of awareness that appears within the objective sphere is then experientially integrated by qualified beings; [ix] the signs and measures by which one can ascertain that experiential integration; [x] how all this dawns within the intermediate state (*bar do*) of ultimate reality for those who do not have time to practice because [they are] distracted by indolence, even though they have the pith instructions; and [xi] teaching the ultimate great liberation.<sup>123</sup>

Nyi ma ‘bum’s interpretation of the Eleven Topics can be further organized into four overarching categories. He writes:

Up to this point, the essential meaning, or the abiding reality to be realized, has been presented. The first [topic] and the first part of the second [topic] reveal the abiding

<sup>121</sup> I added the Roman numerals in brackets to clarify the topic numbers. These are not present in the original Tibetan text.

<sup>122</sup> Klong chen pa (a ‘dzom, p. 3a.4) uses only the word “ground” here.

<sup>123</sup> *Tshig don bcu gcig pa*, pp. 13-14: དེ་ལ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གཞུང་ཆོག་དོན་བཅུ་གཅིག་གི་འཆི་སྟེ། ཐོག་མར་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སངས་རྒྱུས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཐོན་རོལ་ན། གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྷགས་ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་པ་བསྟན་པ་[14]དང་། དེ་ལྟར་གནས་པ་དེ་ལས་འབྱུལ་པ་ཇི་ལྟར་བྱུང་ཚུལ་གཏན་ལ་དབབ་པ་དང་། འབྱུལ་ན་སེམས་ཅན་ལ་ཡང་དག་པར་རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱུས་{10a}ཀྱི་ཞིང་ཁམས་ས་སོན་ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་བསྟན་པ་དང་། དེ་ཉིད་གནས་པ་རང་གང་ན་གནས་པ་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་གནས་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་ལས་གང་ནས་བྱུང་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་ལས་ནས་འབྱུང་བའི་རིག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྟོན་གང་ན་འཆར་བ་དང་། སྟོན་ནས་ཤར་བའི་རིག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་ལྷུ་གང་ལ་སྣང་བ་དང་། ལྷུ་ལ་སྣང་བའི་རིག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་དེ་རྟེན་གྱི་གང་ཟག་གིས་ཇི་ལྟར་ཉམས་སུ་སྒངས་པ་དང་། ཉམས་སུ་ལོན་པའི་རྟགས་དང་ཆད་གང་གིས་བཟུང་བ་དང་། འདི་ཉིད་དེ་ལྟར་བཞུགས་པ་ལྟར་ཡོད་ཀྱང་ལེ་ལོ་གཡོངས་ནས་ཉམས་སུ་ལོན་ལོངས་མ་བྱུང་ན། ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་བར་དོ་ལ་ཇི་ལྟར་འཆར་བ་དང་། མཐར་ཐུག་གོལ་བ་ཆེན་པོ་གང་ཡིན་པ་བསྟན་པའོ། །.

reality of the primordial ground. [The second part] of the second [topic], [symbolized by] the lotus, along with [topics] three through seven, present the abiding reality of the person as the support. [Topics] eight, nine, and ten are for the means for realization. The final fruit of the liberation, which is the actualization of realization, is presented in the eleventh [topic].<sup>124</sup>

The above passage clarifies Nyi ma ‘bum’s method of the four categorizations: (1) the abiding reality of the primordial Ground (*thog ma’i gzhi yi gnas lugs*); (2) the abiding reality of the person as the support (*rten gyi gang zag gi gnas lugs*); (3) the means for realization (*rtogs par byed pa’i thabs*); and (4) the final fruition (*mthar phyin pa’i ’bras bu*). Furthermore, this fourfold structure also aligns with the well-known triad of ground (*gzhi*), path (*lam*), and fruition (*’bras bu*): the first two categories together elucidate the dimension of the Ground in both its primordial and personal aspects, the third delineates the means of realization that lead one from delusion to recognition, and the fourth culminates in the ultimate fruition of complete liberation.

His treatment distinguishes the primordial Ground as the initial source from Buddha-nature as the support for the individual being’s path of awakening. This distinction is particularly striking, for in many Buddhist doctrinal systems the Ground and Buddha-nature are regarded as either interchangeable or deeply intertwined. In Dzogchen, the Ground is typically described as the primordial and fundamental essence from which all phenomena arise. This characterization of the Ground closely aligns with the meaning of Buddha-nature, as it is understood as the inherent potential for enlightenment in all sentient beings. However, Nyi ma ‘bum’s differentiation of Buddha-nature from the Ground invites questions about his purpose in doing so. He emphasizes a distinction between the Ground (as a primordial state) and Buddha-nature (as a soteriological or teleological concept), which suggests that he has a nuanced understanding of the Ground as an ontological basis and Buddha-nature as the potential for awakening that unfolds through the Path and culminates in Fruition.

In this schema, Nyima Bum seems to present the Ground in a “narrower” sense, as he focuses on its aspect of unconditioned awareness; at the same time, he positions Buddha-nature within the soteriological process that leads to realization. His categorization makes more sense in the context of practice, especially in preparing one for the bardo or transitional states, where the ground light and the path light are crucial. In this interpretation, the Ground corresponds to the ground light, or mother light, while Buddha-nature is identified with the path light, or child light. One’s final liberation occurs when the child light merges with the mother light. Thus, the distinction between the Ground and Buddha-nature, while subtle, is of paramount importance for understanding and actualizing the process of liberation in practice. In what follows, I will address each of Nyi ma ‘bum’s first three topics, summarizing his treatments of them and drawing out any significant points.

<sup>124</sup> See *Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, p. 54: དེ་ཡན་ཆད་ཀྱིས་རྟོགས་པར་བྱ་བའི་དོན་དངོས་པོའམ་གནས་ལྷགས་བསྟན་ཏེ། དང་པོ་དང་གཉིས་པའི་སྟོང་ཀྱིས་ཐོག་མ་ {39b} གཞིའི་གནས་ལྷགས་སྟོན་པ་ནི། གཉིས་པའི་བརྗོད་དང་གསུམ་པ་ནས་བཟུང་ཞེ། བདུན་པའི་བར་གྱིས་རྟེན་གྱི་གང་ཟག་གི་གནས་ལྷགས་བསྟན་ནོ། །དེ་རྟོགས་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ཐབས་བརྒྱད་པ་དགུ་པ་བརྩུ་བ་གསུམ་ཡིན་ནོ། །རྟོགས་པ་མངོན་དུ་བྱུང་པ་མཐར་ཐུག་འབྲས་བུའི་ཤོལ་བ་ནི། བརྩུ་གཅིག་པར་བསྟན་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །.

#### D. Nyima Bum's Analysis of the Dzogchen *Ground*

Nyima Bum drew inspiration from the early Dzogchen Nyingthig texts and began his work by defining the *Ground* as the primordial reality that precedes both sentient beings and buddhas. This ontological framing posits the Ground as a dynamic display of intelligent emptiness, existing before time, making it a central subject of intellectual and spiritual inquiry in Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>125</sup>

A particularly unusual aspect of Dzogchen's theory of the Ground has been its story of the origins of ignorance, a subject typically avoided by traditional Buddhist teachings. Indeed, mainstream Buddhist teachings tend to describe ignorance as beginningless, rendering any search for its origin pointless. In the *Cūḷamāluṅkya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 63), when the Buddha is asked by Māluṅkyaputta to explain whether the world is eternal or not, and whether Tathāgata exists, not exists, both exists and not exists, or both not exists and not non-exists after death, the Buddha tells the story of a man who is struck by a poisoned arrow. While this man is dying, he refuses treatment until all his speculative questions are answered—who shot it, of what caste, and with what kind of bow. Before any answers are given, the man dies. The Buddha uses this parable to both illustrate the irrelevance of metaphysical speculations to one's awakening and emphasize that the urgent task should be removing the arrow. At the end, the Buddha concludes that he only says whatever can be said, and that regarding what cannot be discussed, he refrains from saying anything.<sup>126</sup>

Within this context, Dzogchen's doctrinal move of narrating the origin of ignorance is radical and has probably contributed to the controversies surrounding the *Ground* in Tibet. Since, according to the Buddha, this topic exceeds the capacity of language, any stories on this topic are bound to be incomplete. As the debates regarding the seven assertions show, such incompleteness has necessitated the inter-generational attempts to clarify and refine the definition of the Ground.

Indeed, Dzogchen first establishes the primordial Ground as the basis of everything and exists before anything happens. However, this assumption does not fit tightly with the general understanding of Buddhism that there is no beginning of either *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*. Thus, later Dzogchen teachings shift to claim that the primordial Ground is logically compatible with the message of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* being without origin. Numerous tantras and commentaries are written to make this argument. In doing so, Dzogchen scholars travel in unknowable and inexpressible territories to explore the possibilities beyond Buddhist norms. At the same time, they leverage mainstream Buddhist terms such as emptiness and luminosity to define the nature of the Ground, so that the discussion does not sound radically different from the general understanding of the Buddhist view.

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<sup>125</sup> The discourse on the Ground also involves historical perspectives. Nyima Bum outlines seven prevalent viewpoints within the Nyingma community, reflecting the rich dialogues and debates from the eighth through the fourteenth centuries. These viewpoints range from the Ground being spontaneously present, through various gradations of determinacy, to being primordially pure.

<sup>126</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* 63 (*Cūḷamāluṅkya Sutta*), in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 533–536.

Nyima Bum carefully delineates seven different viewpoints on the Ground that were popular within the Great Perfection tradition. These nuanced views address the *Ground*'s inherent characteristics and explore its profound complexity. He writes that, in general, the assertions of the Ground “do not go beyond the traditional seven viewpoints of the Great Perfection:

- [i] The tradition of asserting the ground as spontaneously present;
- [ii] The tradition of asserting the ground as indeterminate;
- [iii] The tradition of asserting the ground as definitive and determinate;
- [iv] The tradition of asserting [the ground] as malleable;
- [v] The tradition of asserting [the ground] as whatsoever is ascertained;
- [vi] The tradition of asserting the ground as manifold;
- [vii] The tradition of asserting the ground as primordially pure.”<sup>127</sup>

In the above passage, Nyima Bum highlights that each of the seven traditional perspectives on the Ground offers an aspect of its nature and manifestations. These include: (1) *Spontaneously Present*, emphasizing the Ground's inherent presence in all phenomena; (2) *Indeterminate*, signifying its state as beyond fixed characteristics, as the Ground embodies pure potentiality; (3) *Definitive and Determinate*, affirming the Ground's unchanging and specific qualities; (4) *Malleable*, underscoring its adaptability and unlimited capacity for transformation; (5) *Whatsoever is Ascertained*, suggesting that the Ground's manifestation aligns with the observer's perception; (6) *Manifold*, highlighting its ability to appear in diverse forms; and (7) *Primordially Pure*, asserting its purity from the very beginning, and that the Ground is free from any defilements.

Indeed, Nyi ma 'bum's text critically examines the first six viewpoints by analyzing their logical implications and potential contradictions. For instance, he argues that the notion that the Ground is spontaneously present raises the concern that if the fruition (result) is already fully realized, it might render efforts toward realization unnecessary, which might undermine one's motivation for engaging in the spiritual path. Moreover, Nyima Bum challenges the perspective of the Ground as indeterminate by asking whether indeterminacy can be meaningfully attributed to an entity. If it can, such a characterization might be understood as suggesting that a clear and precise understanding of phenomena is not essential to realization. In sum, the text claims that “one should understand that the *six grounds* are the dynamism of the essence of primordial purity.”<sup>128</sup> In other words, these faulty grounds are not different from the Ground itself; they are simply incomplete understandings of the Ground's unified essence. While these grounds are considered mistaken when reified individually as ultimate truths, their intrinsic nature remains faultless; they should be understood as expressions of the fundamental purity that underlies all phenomena. This distinction highlights the importance of recognizing their provisional role without conflating them with the ultimate reality.

<sup>127</sup> See Nyi ma 'bum's *Eleven Words and Meanings*, p. 15: སྤྱི་མཐོག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལྷན་གྱི་འདོད་ལྷན་བདུན་ལས་མི་གང་འདྲེ། གཞི་སྤྱན་གྱི་འདོད་པའི་ལྷན་དང་། མ་ངེས་པར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷན་དང་། ངེས་པ་དོན་གྱི་དངོས་གཞིར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷན་དང་། ཅིར་ཡང་སྒྱུར་དུ་བསྐྱབ་པར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷན་དང་། ཅིར་ཡང་ཁས་སྒྲངས་དུ་བསྐྱབ་པར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷན་དང་། གཞི་སྤྱི་མཐོག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལྷན་དང་། གཞི་ཀ་དག་དུ་འདོད་པའི་ལྷན་དང་། བདུན་ལས་མ་]འདས་སོ།

<sup>128</sup> See *Tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 16: གཞི་དྲུག་པོ་ངོ་སོ་ག་དག་གི་སྒྲུབ་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་གྱེ།

Only the assertion of the Ground as *primordially pure* is free from faults. This perspective resonates with the core Dzogchen view, which holds that the nature of reality is intrinsically pure and unblemished by conceptual elaborations or defilements. This inherent purity reflects the unconditioned essence of the Ground that serves as a foundation for realization within the Dzogchen tradition.

Nyima Bum further explains that if viewed separately, each of the first six is incorrect; only the seventh is correct in and of itself. Each of the first six assertions describes an aspect of the Ground. In other words, they are partial statements. Although Nyima Bum does not explicitly say whether the seven assertions together truthfully represent the Ground as a whole, he does insist that the first six assertions are all subsumed in the seventh one on primordial purity. As he writes, “one should understand that the six grounds are the dynamisms of the essence of primordial purity.”<sup>129</sup>

Next, the text elaborates on the nature of gnosis (*ye shes*; Skt. *jñāna*) in relation to the Ground, distinguishing three aspects of gnosis: primordial purity, spontaneous presence, and great compassion. These aspects are associated with different qualities and modes of understanding the Ground. Dzogchen teachings, thus, emphasize the inseparability of the Ground’s empty and luminous aspects. When these aspects are erroneously treated as separate, conceptual divisions arise, resulting in partial and, therefore, flawed understandings of the Ground’s true nature.

Additionally, Nyima Bum touches on the relationship between *samsāra* (cyclic existence) and *nirvāṇa* (liberation), suggesting that both are expressions of the same Ground. This aligns with the Dzogchen view that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are not fundamentally different but are different perspectives of the same reality. The concluding sections of his text discuss Buddha-nature as inherently present in all beings, using metaphors like oil in sesame seeds to illustrate this innate potential. This argument reinforces the idea that realization is not about acquiring something new but recognizing what is already present.

Nyima Bum supports his arguments by referencing two key tantras, *The Great Tantra of the Opening of Sound* and *The Tantra of Six Expanses*. These texts not only confirm Nyi ma ‘bum’s philosophical interpretations of the *Ground* but also provide more context for understanding the nature and manifestations of the Ground. With references to these authoritative works, the above passage situates its discussion within the broader Dzogchen tradition, emphasizing its alignment with established teachings.

#### E. The Universal Ground (*ālaya*)

The second topic of *The Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings* examines the emergence of confusion and its role in the separation between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Nyima Bum explains that while the Ground (*gzhi*) is inherently pure and free of confusion, sentient beings fall into delusion due to not being able to recognize their true nature. This confusion stems from the misrecognition of the Ground, which leads to the emergence of dualistic perceptions and the twelve links of dependent origination. The causal root of this confusion is ignorance, which

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<sup>129</sup> See Nyi ma ‘bum’s *Eleven Words and Meanings*, p. 16: གཞི་རྒྱལ་པོ་འོ་པོ་ཀ་དག་གི་རྩལ་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་རྒྱེ།

manifests in three forms: the ignorance of singular identity (*bdag nyid cig pa'i ma rig pa*), co-emergent ignorance (*lhan cig skyes pa'i pa rig pa*), and imputing ignorance (*kun tu btags pa'i ma rig pa*). Nyima Bum describes how these forms of ignorance arise from misapprehending the Ground's non-dual nature, which in turn causes the superimposition of conceptual constructs and dualistic grasping. This process is likened to mistaking a rope for a snake, where phenomena are misperceived due to habitual tendencies.

Additionally, Nyima Bum introduces the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) as the object of the afflicted mental consciousness (*kliṣṭamānas*). He argues that the confusion unfolds into the six mentations (*vid*), citing *The Letterlessness Tantra* that claims:

At the beginning of time, devoid of light,  
The six mentations that occur as knowers are unimpeded.

Furthermore, [there are] the all-searching mentation; the establishing mentation; the correctly settling mentation; the stirring mentation; the mentation that gathers various things; [and] the afflicted mental consciousness (*kliṣṭamānas*). From these, the afflicted [mental consciousness] becomes attached to a self (*bdag*), and apprehends the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*, *kun gzhi'i rtog pa*) as the subject.<sup>130</sup>

This passage describes the dynamics of consciousnesses, blending Yogācāra's eightfold model with a diachronic, cosmogonic Dzogchen perspective. It begins by situating ignorance (*avidyā*, *ma rig pa*) as a state “devoid of light,” marking ignorance as the origin of *saṃsāric* existence. The six sensory consciousnesses, which interact with external stimuli, operate carelessly but are conditioned by this ignorance. Having established these, the text goes on to introduce deeper layers of mentation, such as the “all-searching mentation,” which corresponds to Yogācāra's *manas*, the seventh consciousness that grasps at a self. Other mentations—such as the “establishing,” “correctly settling,” “stirring,” and “gathering” mentations—represent various ways through which the mind organizes, reinforces, and reacts to dualistic constructs. These mentations then are further culminated in the afflicted mental consciousness (*kliṣṭamānas*). As a result, this defiled mind clings to the illusion of an enduring self (*bdag*) and misidentifies the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) as a subject.

Later, Nyima Bum extends his discussion to the formation of the external world, the internal experience of sentient beings, and the three realms of existence, illustrating how ignorance and grasping perpetuate the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Through this analysis, Nyima Bum provides a detailed account of the mechanics of confusion, laying the groundwork for understanding the path to liberation. The ultimate aim of both Yogācāra and Dzogchen is to transcend this attachment, revealing the luminous, non-dual awareness that underlies all phenomena. By doing so, one moves beyond the defiled mind and realizes the true nature of reality, free from the clinging that perpetuates *saṃsāra*.

<sup>130</sup> See *Tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 32-33: ཡིད་རྩལ་དུ་འབྱུང་བ་ནི། ཡི་གེ་མེད་པ་ལས། ལྷང་བ་མེད་པ་ཐོག་མ་དུས་ཀྱི་ཆོ། གཙོད་བྱེད་ཕྱོགས་པའི་ཡིད་རྩལ་མ་འགགས་པས། ཁེས་[33]པ་དང་། ཀུན་ཏུ་འཆོལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཡིད། རྟེན་ལ་གཞི་འབེབས་པའི་ཡིད། ཇེས་པར་འཇོག་པའི་ཡིད། འབྱུ་བྱེད་འཛིན་པའི་ཡིད། ལྷ་ཆོགས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཡིད། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་དོ། རྟོ་ལས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་བདག་ཆགས་དང་ཀུན་གཞིའི་རྟོག་པ་འཛིན་པའོ། །

## F. Buddha-Nature

As mentioned earlier, Nyima Bum distinguishes the Ground from Buddha-nature. While the Dzogchen Ground functions as the substrate for both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, Buddha-nature embodies the potentiality for enlightenment inherent within all sentient beings. Here I want to argue that this difference allows for a dual perspective, where, one might say, the Ground is more closely associated with the ground and the fruition, and Buddha-nature with the path. Once recognized, this idea, which has roots in early Dzogchen thinking of Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, may be seen to be implicit in much of Nyi ma ‘bum’s exploration of the Eleven Topics.

In the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition, the primordial Ground is the basis of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and it represents the universality of the basis, from which confusion and liberation emerge. As the third topic of the eleven topics, Buddha-nature demonstrates that even though individual beings are confused and trapped in *saṃsāra*, they are endowed with an awakened quality that is called the Buddha-nature, which is also the innate nature of every being. I explore the topic of the Buddha-nature in this section, as it is meant to happen after the confusion occurs.

Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) is a multifaceted concept within Buddhist doctrine. Central to the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is the concept of the *luminous citta* (mind), which asserts that the mind, in its purest form, is already enlightened but temporarily veiled by adventitious defilements. Thus, on the one hand, Buddha-nature signifies the fully realized state (a.k.a. Buddhahood), encompassing the primordial wisdom and qualities of the Buddha. On the other hand, it refers to the inherent potential residing within all beings; thus, it is the seed of enlightenment. This potential, often obscured by defilements that are the results of one’s ignorance, is understood as an essential aspect of the mind’s continuum. This Tantric reinterpretation serves as a bridge between the Tathāgatagarbha school and Dzogchen teachings. In Dzogchen, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are not oppositional; rather, they arise from the same ultimate source: the Ground. This Ground is presented as the indivisible basis of all phenomena; in other words, it is the foundation for both cyclic existence and the attainment of liberation.

Within the Dzogchen framework, Buddha-nature is not a dormant potential waiting to be realized. It is instead an active and pervasive presence that operates within all beings. Despite the cycles of birth and death in *saṃsāra*, this Buddha-nature remains connected to and, in fact, originates from the Ground. Indeed, the Dzogchen view often emphasizes that the Ground and Buddha-nature are not separate realities but are intrinsically linked. They are two aspects of the same ultimate nature. While some interpretations within Dzogchen equate the Ground with Buddha-nature, others maintain that there is a subtle distinction between the two: the Ground is the source from which both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* emerge, whereas Buddha-nature emphasizes the potential within sentient beings for realizing the Ground and attaining enlightenment.

This distinction is crucial for understanding the unifying vision of Dzogchen, as it bridges the foundational teachings of early Buddhist doctrine, which emphasize the potentiality for liberation, with the insights of esoteric practices that highlight the non-dual nature of reality. Within this context, the Dzogchen Ground provides the ontological foundation for all phenomena, while Buddha-nature underscores the soteriological principle through which beings recognize and actualize their ultimate nature. In other words, while the Ground speaks to the

ultimate reality underlying all existence, Buddha-nature serves as the principle guiding beings toward the realization of that reality. Together, they offer a vision of enlightenment that transcends duality and affirms the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

## G. Conclusion

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries marked a period of unparalleled innovation within Tibetan Buddhism, with the Dzogchen Nyingthig emerging as a seminal contribution to the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Tibet. This chapter examines how the dynamic interplay between theory and practice during this pivotal era is embodied in the Dzogchen teachings. These teachings provide a sophisticated framework for understanding the Ground, particularly as developed in the first three chapters of *The Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings*, which focus closely on this foundational concept.

To elucidate the Ground within these writings, I have focused on the critical distinctions and inter-relationality between the Ground and Buddha-nature. Clarifying their differences and entanglement is essential for refining our comprehension of reality, which has often been misconstrued due to misinterpretations of these teachings. With an extensive theoretical framework as its backbone, the Dzogchen tradition underscores that only through dedicated practice can such misconceptions be corrected, encouraging practitioners to directly experience the truth of the Ground. As the Tibetan adage aptly states, “The view is found through practice, and practice is refined through the view” (*lta thog nas sgom pa ‘tshol ba dang sgom thog nas lta ba ‘tshol ba*). This interdependence between view and meditation underscores the inseparability of understanding and experiential realization in Dzogchen. Thus, through its exploration of these intricate yet practical teachings, the chapter provides invaluable insights into the Dzogchen path, offering a roadmap for integrating profound theoretical understanding with authentic meditative practice. This fusion not only serves to demystify the Ground but also illuminates its transformative potential as a living reality for practitioners on the path to liberation.

Additionally, this chapter synthesizes the intricate theoretical framework of *ālaya ecology*, which has now evolved to include the *Self-Illuminating Primordial Awareness*. In doing so, the chapter connects an ecosystem at once ontological and soteriological to the broader context of Dzogchen thought and practice. By focusing on the *Ground*, we have delved deeper into its multifaceted nature and its implications in the practice. Specifically, the *primordial Ground*, which is often equated with the Dzogchen *Ground*, emerges as a central focus of this research.

In short, the *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) functions as the foundation upon which ego-clinging and dualistic concepts arise, perpetuating *saṃsāra*. Conversely, *Buddha-nature* (*tathāgatagarbha*) introduces a transformative potential, providing the theoretical basis for liberation from the delusional world. In this way, the discussion of *ālaya*, Buddha-nature, and the Dzogchen Ground illustrates the dynamic interplay between theory and practice, a dance that reflects both the complexity of the Buddhist doctrinal landscape and its ultimate aim of liberation.

It is crucial to remember that Dzogchen, like all Buddhist teachings, is not merely a school of thought but a soteriological path aimed at transcending suffering. The theoretical inter-

relationality elaborated in the first three topics of the Dzogchen Nyingthig tradition—between dharmakāya and the universal ground (*ālaya*), mind (*sems*) and awareness (*rig pa*), and consciousness (*rnam shes*) and gnosis (*ye shes*)—are not directed toward advanced Buddhist dialectical thinking. Rather, these terms serve as preparatory insights for the practitioner to recognize the Dzogchen Ground and engage in transformative practice.

Indeed, their interrelational dialectics highlight the practice-oriented nature of the Dzogchen path. For instance, the universal ground (*ālaya*) is associated with the dualistic conceptual mind and the basis for saṃsāric experience, while *Buddha-nature* is presented as its antidote, an innate potential for awakening. Moreover, Nyi ma 'bum presents a refined vision of the Ground (*gzhi*) as not merely a metaphysical substrate but the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*) in which all phenomena—saṃsāric and nirvāṇic—arise and are liberated. Buddha-nature, by contrast, is the intrinsic potential through which this abiding reality is actualized within sentient beings. Thus, the Ground signifies the universal ontological basis, while Buddha-nature marks its dynamic expression as the seed of awakening in individual consciousness.

For Nyi ma 'bum, the triad of ground, path, and fruition (*gzhi lam 'bras bu*) unfolds as a process of unveiling rather than linear progression. The path does not create realization but reveals the Ground's inherent purity (*ka dag*) and spontaneous presence (*lhun grub*). Fruition, therefore, is the full recognition of what has always been. By distinguishing the primordial Ground as the source of all phenomena from its personal aspect as the support for realization, Nyi ma 'bum bridges early Yogācāra notions of the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) and the Dzogchen vision of innate enlightenment. His synthesis transforms the Ground from a static ontology into a performative recognition of reality—an insight that decisively shaped the Heart Essence (*snying thig*) tradition.

In this way, the Dzogchen theoretical framework is inextricably linked to its practical application, illustrating how Dzogchen teachings guide practitioners toward the realization of non-dual wisdom. Thus, this chapter not only deepens our understanding of the theoretical foundations of Dzogchen but also underscores their indispensable role in guiding practitioners toward liberation. By distinguishing the Dzogchen Ground from the universal ground and elucidating the role of Buddha-nature and self-illuminating awareness, we see how these concepts converge in a coherent soteriological vision—one that seamlessly integrates theory and practice.

## Chapter 5

### THE NATURE OF LIBERATION IN LONGCHENPA'S THOUGHT: THE GROUND AND THE ABIDING REALITY (the fourteenth century)

#### A. Introduction

The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation examined some early Dzogchen Heart Essence treatments of the Ground through examinations of the Seventeen Tantras, particularly *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space*, and Nyima Bum's *Eleven Words and Meanings*. This chapter explores how Longchenpa synthesizes and sharpens these insights of his predecessors. Building on Nyima Bum's text, Longchenpa extends his non-dual vision of the Ground while also articulating more carefully the distinction between its cosmogonic, ontological, and soteriological dimensions. In doing so, Longchenpa distinguishes the primordial Ground from the ground of the triadic structure (ground, path, fruition), which is also known as the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*).

In the Dzogchen tradition, the Ground (*gzhi*) serves as the fundamental basis for both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. This perspective holds that the apparent duality between the two arises from conceptual imputation, as Dzogchen regards all phenomena as mere designations—empty names devoid of inherent existence. Consequently, *nirvāṇa* is not a separate or transcendent reality but emerges from the same Ground that underlies *samsāra*. This Ground's nature is understood as the ultimate reality—primordially pure, beyond conceptual elaboration and linguistic designation. As it developed, the Dzogchen tradition absorbed influences from Madhyamaka philosophy, Buddha-nature theory, and the tantric teachings, making the notion of the Ground increasingly layered and internally complex.

A key turning point in this development is found in the work of Longchenpa, who offers one of the most comprehensive and systematic presentations of Dzogchen Heart Essence thought. In his synthesis, we find a clear articulation of two distinct concepts of the Ground. The first is the primordial Ground (*ye gzhi*), the timeless and unconditioned source from which both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* emerge. This Ground is beyond conceptual elaboration and represents the metaphysical basis of all phenomena, echoing the non-duality emphasized in Madhyamaka and Buddha-nature doctrines. The second is the phenomenological ground, framed within the triad of ground, path, and fruition (*gzhi lam 'bras bu*). Here, the ground is not just an ontological given but an experiential platform that supports meditative realization and the unfolding of awakened awareness.<sup>131</sup>

In other words, the distinction between the Ground and the ground lies in the fact that one is a narrative device, while the other is meant to be the ultimate truth. Indeed, the primordial Ground tells the story of where sentient beings come from; the ground, on the other hand, signifies who sentient beings truly are. This distinction, as shown in the chapter, becomes central to the Heart

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<sup>131</sup> While this distinction appears to be a unique contribution of Longchenpa, at least in terms of explicit articulation, it does not necessarily imply that such a differentiation was absent in earlier traditions. Instead, it may have been implicit or simply not emphasized before his time.

Essence reinterpretation of the *gzhi* as both the origin and abiding reality—a synthesis that transforms the earlier analytic framework into an experiential recognition of the abiding reality (ground) of the primordial Ground.

By relocating liberation within abiding reality, Longchenpa resolves a subtle doctrinal tension in earlier Dzogchen presentations of the Ground as both *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* origin. In this system, Buddha-nature operates as or supports the path that unveils the abiding reality—the timeless aspect of the Ground that has never been obscured. By clarifying the roles of the Ground and ground, Longchenpa’s intervention emphasizes that attaining buddhahood is not a return to the primordial Ground—which encompasses both confusion and realization—but rather an attainment of liberation. The status of such liberation is an irreversible fruition beyond the conditions of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, while attaining liberation means that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are subsumed into the natural flow of awareness.

Additionally, the emergence of *ālaya* as a foundational consciousness had historically attempted to explain the continuity of experience and karmic imprints within *saṃsāra*, while the Buddha-nature asserted a pure, luminous basis for awakening. Dzogchen tradition inherited both ideas and sought to reconcile the tension between them. Longchenpa’s two-tiered model of the Ground/ground can be seen as an attempt to integrate these earlier strands while preserving the radical non-duality at the heart of Dzogchen. In doing so, he helps distinguish between the Ground as a metaphysical source and the ground (interpreted from *gnas lugs* in Tibetan, which I translate as the “abiding reality”) as the way of being or abiding without a subject or an object.

Thus, Longchenpa’s contribution is especially significant in that it allows practitioners and scholars to navigate Dzogchen’s dense symbolic and philosophical terrain with greater precision. Specifically, his differentiation underscores that both the Ground and the ground are integral to the path of realization—not in a hierarchical manner where one subsumes the other, but as complementary dimensions of the Dzogchen view and practice.

#### Main Argument

This chapter mainly focuses on three Longchenpa’s texts: *the Treasury of Words and Meaning* (*Tshig don mdzod*), *the Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* (*Theg mchog mdzod*),<sup>132</sup> and *Illuminating the Significance of Ground, Path, and Fruition* (*Gzhi lam ‘bras bu gnas gsal ba*).<sup>133</sup> The two treasury texts are part of the seven treasuries collection by Longchenpa. The *Illuminating the Significance of Ground, Path, and Fruition* is a shorter text in *The Utmost Profound Essence* (*Zab mo yang tig*), which is a two-volume piece by Longchenpa and belongs to the “Four Parts of the Heart Essence” collection (*Heart Essence of Vimlamitra*, *Heart Essence of Dākinī*, *the Quintessential of the Lama*, *the Quintessential of the Dākinī*, and *the Utmost Profound Essence*).

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<sup>132</sup> This text is divided into twenty-five chapters. This structure is referred to as *rim khang*, meaning a multi-storied building.

<sup>133</sup> *Gzhi lam ‘bras ba’i gnas gsal ba* (in *zab mo yang tig*, dpal brtsegs edition), vol. 11, pp. 209-217.

I focus on these three texts, as Longchenpa expounds in them on the two G/grounds: the primordial Ground, as well as the ground within the ground-path-fruit. His differentiation is significant and raises philosophical and doctrinal questions, as both “Ground/grounds” play essential roles in the realization process, but neither is wholly subsumed by the other. But, if the ground represents ultimate nature, what does that imply about the status of the Ground? Furthermore, if buddhahood is not merely a return to the primordial Ground but rather an attainment that is rooted in the realization of the abiding reality, how does this affect the traditional understanding of ground, path, and fruition? Does this mean that realization requires a progression beyond the primordial Ground, rather than a mere recognition of it? These questions reshape how Dzogchen is positioned within Buddhist soteriology and how it relates to broader Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna doctrinal frameworks.

Before Longchenpa, the primordial Ground seems to have been understood as multifunctional and with diverse qualities. It could be a narrative tool, a pedagogical instrument, a neutral indeterminate state, a fundamental ontological principle, a portal through which the ultimate is accessed, and all or any of the above. By clarifying the Ground and the ground, Longchenpa consolidates major doctrinal ideas and streamlines the path that leads one to awakening. Thus, the ground as the fruition of the path allows one just to focus on practice rather than working out doctrinal paradoxes. As the ground/abiding reality points at one’s nature that is accessible to everyone, the practitioner is guided toward a direction to reveal that nature itself, instead of being trapped in a conceptual paradox in which a step forward on the path to *nirvāṇa* is simultaneously a move backward to the beginning of *saṃsāra*. Thus, Longchenpa draws a crucial distinction between “the Ground of liberation” (*grol gzhi*) and “the place of liberation” (*grol sa*): the former refers to the primordial Ground itself, while the latter designates the abiding reality that functions as the “ground” within the triad of ground, path, and fruition. A more detailed examination of this distinction will follow later in this chapter.

## B. The Ground vs. The Abiding Reality, or The Abiding Reality of The Ground?

### 1. Shared Opening Formula (Tantra → Nyima Bum → Longchenpa)

In this section, I examine the concepts of the Ground and abiding reality already discussed in *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space, Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings* by Nyima Bum, and Longchenpa’s *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, as these texts address these ideas in similar ways. For instance, in the following quote, Longchenpa seems to separate the abiding reality from the Ground. At the same time, he addresses the Ground in a way that is not different from what Nyima Bum already did in his *Eleven Words and Meanings*.

As shown in the Chapter Three of the dissertation, in Chapter One of *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space*, it says:

At the time before, when no realized buddha had emerged and no unrealized sentient beings had emerged, awareness, self-occurring gnosis, had not strayed from the Ground and remained together with the three unconditioned appearances.<sup>134</sup>

Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter Four of the dissertation, in Chapter One of *Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings*, Nyima Bum writes:

At the time before, when no realized buddha had emerged and no unrealized sentient beings had emerged, the abiding reality of the Ground's innate nature is going to be taught.<sup>135</sup>

Similarly, in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa describes the primordial Ground as:

At the time before, when no realized buddha had emerged and no unrealized sentient beings had emerged, the abiding reality of the Ground's innate nature is going to be taught.<sup>136</sup>

Together, these three passages demonstrate three main themes.<sup>137</sup> First, Nyima Bum and Longchenpa both retell the story of the Ground that has been told in an early Heart Essence tantra. Additionally, while Nyima Bum and Longchenpa use the same line from the tantra on the Ground abiding before the origin of both samsara and nirvana, they do not cite their source. This is perhaps due to the popularity of the first topic of the eleven topics introduced in Nyima Bum's *Eleven Words and Meanings*. It is possible that Nyima Bum selects the line from the tantra, and then Longchenpa discovers this line directly from Nyima Bum's text. Although this is hard to confirm, it is apparent that, in some way, Longchenpa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* is an expansion of Nyima Bum's text.

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<sup>134</sup> *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag bris ma, vol. 12 (of 46), [BDRC W21521.] Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), f. 87b3-4: རྟོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱུ་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིན་རྟོན་ན། རིག་པ་རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཉིད་གཞི་ལས་མ་གཡོས་ཏེ། རྟེན་མཛད་པའི་སྣང་བ་གསུམ་དང་ཐབས་ཅིག་ཏུ་བཞུགས་སོ།

<sup>135</sup> Nyi ma 'bum. *Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*. 1 vols. [TBRC W1KG1803.] (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2008), 13-14: ཐོག་མར་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སངས་རྒྱུ་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིན་རྟོན་ན། གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཞིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་པ་བསྟན་བ་དང་། See my article for another translation of this text. Early Developments in Snying thig Practice: The Eighth Topic of Zhang Nyi ma bum's *Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*.

<sup>136</sup> Klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer, *Gsang ba bla na med pa 'od gsal rdo rje snying po'i gnas gsum gsal bar byed pa'i tshig don rin po che'i mdzod*, in *Mdzod bdun* (A 'dzom par ma), [BDRC MW1PD8.] (Dkar mdzes bod rigs rang skyong khul dpal yul rdzong A 'dzom chos sgar, 1999), vol. 4 (of 7), f. 3a3-4: རྟོགས་ཏེ་སངས་རྒྱུ་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིན་རྟོན་ན། གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཞིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་བསྟན་བ་དང་། Also see two other English versions of the text: 1. Longchen Rabjam, *The Precious Treasury of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro, revised edition, (Ashland, Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020), 45; 2. David Francis Germano, "Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet," PhD diss. (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 289.

<sup>137</sup> Many more similar passages could be found in the works of other writers. For the scope of this project, I only selected these three passages. I do not mean to suggest that this kind of parallel is unique.

Moreover, Nyima Bum and Longchenpa only include one line from the tantra “At the time before, when no realized buddha had emerged, and no unrealized sentient beings had emerged” (ཐོག་མར་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཚུན་རྩིས་ན།).<sup>138</sup> Building on this line, they develop their own second line that uses the exact same phrase: “the abiding reality of the Ground’s innate nature” (གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྔགས་). In comparison to Longchenpa’s text, Nyima Bum’s second line includes an “extra” phrase: “how it abides” (ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་པ་), which could be read as more of a stylistic matter.

## 2. Implicit Distinction between the Ground and Abiding Reality

The phrase “the abiding reality of the Ground’s innate nature” (གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྔགས་)<sup>139</sup> is significant, as it demonstrates that the Ground and the Ground’s abiding reality could be read as two. In other words, it differentiates the primordial Ground from the true nature of reality.

Additionally, “the abiding reality of the Ground’s innate nature” (གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྔགས་) has three components and only one genitive particle to connect them together. Therefore, the meaning is ambiguous, as we could read the phrase in two ways at least. On the one hand, we could read the Ground (གཞི་) as one unit and the abiding reality of the innate nature (དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་) as another, meaning that these two parts are appositional. On the other hand, we could read this as a potential genitive particle “of” (ཡི་) exists after the Ground (གཞི་) but is omitted. In that case, this line would mean “the abiding reality of the innate nature of the Ground” (གཞི་ཡི་དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྔགས་). This full phrase does not appear in either Longchenpa’s or Nyima Bum’s text. Instead, omitting “of innate nature” (དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་), they frequently use “the abiding reality of the Ground” (གཞི་ཡི་གནས་ལྔགས་) to express the same thing, as *གཞི་ཡི་དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྔགས་* is hard to read in Tibetan, and that “innate nature” and “abiding reality” are synonymous.

Based on my knowledge of Longchenpa’s work, Longchenpa seems to conceptualize the Ground and the abiding reality as different. Thus, I am more inclined to understand this line as the Ground and the abiding reality are in a possessive relation, meaning that the abiding reality is an aspect of the Ground. The same wording appears in Nyima Bum’s text, as Nyima Bum also uses the abiding reality of the Ground (གཞི་ཡི་གནས་ལྔགས་).<sup>140</sup> But, I argue, it is uncertain if Nyima Bum treats these two as separate. Since Nyima Bum never explains the difference between these two, it is presumptuous to project Longchenpa’s understanding onto Nyima Bum’s writing.

<sup>138</sup> *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag bris ma, vol. 12 (of 46), [BDRC W21521.] Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), f. 87b3–4: ཐོག་མར་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཚུན་རྩིས་ན།.

<sup>139</sup> Klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer, *Gsang ba bla na med pa 'od gsal rdo rje snying po'i gnas gsum gsal bar byed pa'i tshig don rin po che'i mdzod*, in *Mdzod bdun* (A 'dzom par ma), [BDRC MW1PD8.] (Dkar mdzes bod rigs rang skyong khul dpal yul rdzong A 'dzom chos sgar, 1999), vol. 4 (of 7), f. 3a3: གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཤིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྔགས་.

<sup>140</sup> Nyima Bum's *Tshing don bcu gcig pa*, 30.

### 3. Ground as the Abiding Reality in Ground-Path-Fruition

As mentioned earlier, I read the abiding reality in Longchenpa's writings as the “ground” within the ground, path, and fruition framework. My understanding is shaped by his *Illuminating the Significance of Ground, Path, and Fruition*, where Longchenpa writes:

The ground is referring to the abiding reality of the expanse,  
While the view is the nature of realization itself.<sup>141</sup>  
Resting in the state of this realization is meditation—  
Non-conceptual, undistracted, and free from elaboration,  
Like space—utterly pure, luminous, and uncompounded (*asaṃskṛta*),  
Beyond thought, expression, or illustration, awareness of the awakened mind.  
Abiding in that very natural state is the king of all meditations.<sup>142</sup>

In this passage, Longchenpa clearly identifies the *ground* as the abiding, non-dual reality that is to be realized. It is not only the ontological basis of all phenomena but also the object of both *view* and *meditation*. Final liberation (*fruition*), then, is nothing other than the actualization of this ground. In this way, this text leaves space for deeper investigation into the nuanced relationship between the *ground*, the spiritual *path*, and ultimate *fruition*.

By clarifying the ground, Longchenpa subtly distinguishes the ground from the primordial Ground. Since the Ground is situated within the cosmological narrative of Dzogchen and is associated with the origin of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, it appears within a temporal or causal schema. Put differently, the *primordial Ground* may seem, in narrative terms, like a precondition to the arising of delusion and realization. It is not identified as the abiding, liberative reality. On the other hand, the *ground* within the framework of *ground, path, and fruition* is presented as the ever-present, uncompounded reality that is directly accessible through realization. It is not merely the mythic or metaphysical origin of things, but the central ontological and soteriological focus of the Dzogchen path. Thus, the primordial Ground is not treated as the same as the ground in the triad structure.

Longchenpa's treatment of the *ground* reveals a sophisticated distinction: while the *primordial Ground* supports the cosmological account of the arising of delusion, the *ground* in *ground, path, and fruition* functions as the living, experiential reality that leads to final liberation. The structure of the ground, path, and fruition thus encapsulates the full arc of the Dzogchen system—not just as a map of progress, but as an integrated view of reality, meditative realization, and ultimate freedom.

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<sup>141</sup> Here, “that self” refers to the ground.

<sup>142</sup> *Illuminating the Significance of Ground, Path, and Fruition* (Gzhi lam 'bras bu'i gnas gsal bar byed pa in *Zab mo yang tig*, dpal brtsegs), vol. 11, p. 213: གཞི་ནི་དབྱིངས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་དོན་ཡིན་ལ། །ཉ་བ་དེ་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ལགས། །རྟོགས་པའི་རང་ལ་འཇོག་པ་སྒྲིམ་པ་སྟེ། །རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་ཡེངས་མེད་སྒྲིམ་དང་བྲལ། །མཁའ་ལྗང་རྣམ་དག་འོད་གསལ་འདུས་མ་བྱས། །བསམ་བརྗོད་མཚོན་འདས་རིག་པ་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས། །རང་རྣལ་འབྱོར་གནས་སྒྲིམ་པའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལགས། །

Additionally, by distinguishing the ground from the primordial Ground, Longchenpa introduces a more refined and complex understanding of enlightenment. This distinction compels scholars and practitioners alike to engage in deeper philosophical and doctrinal inquiry. His work remains an invitation to investigate the precise role of the ground, not only within Dzogchen but in Buddhist thought as a whole, prompting a reconsideration of how liberation is conceived and what it truly means to awaken.

#### 4. The Seven Assertions and Longchenpa's Critique

##### a. Tshig don mdzod

As noted in the previous chapter, the Heart Essence tradition presents seven distinct assertions concerning the nature of the Ground.<sup>143</sup> So far, we have examined a few condensed discussions of the Ground/ground. In this section, we explore how Longchenpa responds to the seven assertions, which leads to more nuanced articulation of the Ground and its nature. In doing so, I study the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* in relation to the *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, tracing how he establishes the right view of these challenging subject matters.

At the outset of the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa appears to agree with Nyima Bum that the only correct assertion is that the Ground is primordially pure (*ka dag*). Yet later in the same chapter, he seems to revise this stance, arguing instead that both primordial purity and spontaneous presence (*lhun grub*) are indispensable for a complete understanding of the Ground's intrinsic nature. As Longchenpa writes:

When viewed from the perspective of two types of individuals, there are those who adhere to philosophical tenets (*grub mtha' rjes su 'dzin pa*) and those who follow the spiritual path (*lam rjes su 'dzin pa*). For those who adhere to philosophical tenets, their understanding of the Ground is said to be flawed in six ways, as their attachment to partial views leads them into extremes. This is likened to six blind men each touching a different part of an elephant with their hands to examine its shape and color. In contrast, those who follow the spiritual path uphold the faultless view of primordial purity in our tradition, which is akin to a person with clear vision who can perceive the elephant in its nature.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>143</sup> The seven assertions are: [i] the tradition of asserting the ground as spontaneously present; [ii] the tradition of asserting the ground as indeterminate; [iii] the tradition of asserting the ground as definitive and determinate; [iv] the tradition of asserting [the ground] as malleable; [v] the tradition of asserting [the ground] as whatsoever is ascertained; [vi] the tradition of asserting the ground as manifold; and [vii] the tradition of asserting the ground as primordially pure.

<sup>144</sup> *Tshig don rin po'i che'i mdzod* (klong chen rab 'byams kyi gsumg 'bum, dapl brtsegs ed.), vol. 19, pp. 5-6 (= Klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer, *Gsang ba bla na med pa 'od gsal rdo rje snying po'i gnas gsum gsal bar byed pa'i tshig don rin po che'i mdzod*, in *Mdzod bdun* (A 'dzom par ma), [BDRC MW1PD8.] (Dkar mdzes bod rigs rang skyong khul dpal yul rdzong A 'dzom chos sgar, 1999), vol. 4 (of 7), f. 5a1-4): འདི་ལ་གང་ཟག་ནས་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ནས་བྱུང་བའི་མཐའ་རྗེས་སུ་འཛིན་པ་དང་ལམ་རྗེས་སུ་འཛིན་པ་གཉིས་ལས། བྱུང་མཐའ་རྗེས་སུ་འཛིན་པས་གཞི་དུ་གསྟོན་ཅན་དུ་བསྟན་པ་ནི་ཕྱོགས་རེ་ལ་ཞེན་ནས་མཐར་འཛིན་གྱི་ལྟ་བར་སྦྱང་བ་ནི། དཔྱད་པ་ལྟར་དུ་གཞིས་སྟེན་གྱི་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཆེ་ལ་ལག་པས་ལུས་ནས་དབྱིབས་དང་ཁ་དྲོག་འཇལ་བ་འདྲ་ལ། ལམ་རྗེས་སུ་འཛིན་པས་ཀྱང་གསྟོན་ཅན་མེད་རང་གཞུང་དུ་འདྲོད་པ་མིག་དང་ལྡན་པས་སྒྲུབ་པོ་ཆེའི་རང་བཞིན་འཇལ་བ་ལྟ་བུ་སྟེ། Another two translations of this passage could be found in: 1. Longchen Ramjam, *Precious Treasure of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by Lama

In this passage, Longchenpa explains that there are two types of individuals: those who adhere to philosophical tenets (*grub mtha' rjes su 'dzin pa*) and those who follow the spiritual path (*lam rjes su 'dzin pa*). The former fall into six errors in their understanding of the Ground, because their attachment to partial views leads them into extremes. Longchenpa likens them to six blind men who, each grasping a different part of an elephant, attempt to infer its shape and color.

In contrast, those who follow the spiritual path uphold the faultless view of primordial purity central to the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition, comparable to a sighted person who perceives the elephant directly in its true form. Indeed, for Longchenpa, the decisive soteriological implication is that correct understanding does not occur within the confines of partial doctrines, but only through *the recognition of the abiding reality of the Ground as primordially pure* and beyond conceptual elaboration. Thus, while philosophical tenets fragmentize the reality into doctrinal categories, Dzogchen practice preserves wholeness by disclosing the pure nature of reality itself. In this way, Longchenpa positions Dzogchen beyond the field of intellectual systems, not as one more tenet among others, but as a path that transcends the very limitations of tenet-based thought.

Additionally, in the later part of the same chapter in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa expands on what the *actual* Ground should be, emphasizing that the spontaneously present (*lhun grub*) aspect must be included in order to understand the Ground in its complete form. Longchenpa writes the following discussion:

The primordial purity of the original Ground is the inconceivable and indescribable greatness, which transcends the extremes of existence and nonexistence. Since its essence is primordially pure, it is free from the extreme of permanence or existence, nor does it exist as phenomena of entity or characteristics. Since its nature is spontaneously present, it transcends the extremes of non-existence and nihilism. The perfectly pure *dharmatā* is luminosity and emptiness. The nature of the primordial Buddha is the unchanging realization of the *dharmakāya*. The primordially empty and self-occurring great gnosis abides from the very beginning like space, without existing in either *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*.<sup>145</sup>

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Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020): 47; 2. David Francis Germano, “Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet,” PhD diss, (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 294-295.

<sup>145</sup> *Tshig don mdzod* (A ‘dzom ed.), vol. 4, f. 8a3–5: ཡེ་ཐོག་གཞིའི་ཀླ་དག་ནི་སྣ་བསམ་བརྗོད་འདས་ཆེན་པོ་ཡོད་མེད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ལས་འདས་པ་སྟེ། རོ་བོ་ཀ་ནས་དག་པས་ཡོད་པ་རྟག་པའི་མཐའ་དང་བྲལ་ཏེ་དངོས་པོ་དང་མཚན་མའི་ཆས་སུ་མ་གྲུབ། རང་བཞིན་རྒྱན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་མེད་པ་ཆད་པའི་མཐའ་ལས་འདས་ཏེ། འོད་གསལ་སྟོང་པའི་ཆས་ཉིད་རྣམ་དག་ཤིང་བཞིན་གདོད་མའི་སངས་རྒྱས། ཆས་སྟེ་འགྱུར་མེད་ཀྱི་དགོངས་པ། འཁོར་འདས་གང་དུ་འང་མ་གྲུབ་ལ་ཡེ་སྟོང་རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆེན་པོ་ཡེ་ཐོག་ཉིད་ནས་ནམ་མཁའ་ལྷར་གནས་། Two other translations of this passage could be found in: 1. Longchen Ramjam, *Precious Treasure of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020): 52; 2. David Francis Germano, “Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet,” PhD diss, (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 309-311.

In this passage, Longchenpa argues that, since the essence (*ngo bo*) of the Ground is primordially pure, it does not fall into the extreme of permanence or substantial existence. It never becomes an “entity” (*dngos po*) nor takes on identifiable characteristics (*mtshan ma*). This framing both avoids any reification of the Ground as a metaphysical substratum and differentiates the Dzogchen view from essentialist or eternalist tendencies. The Ground does not function as an ontological foundation or an underlying substance; rather, its purity signals complete freedom from any mode of existence that could be described in finite or conceptual terms.

At the same time, Longchenpa highlights that the nature (*rang bzhin*) of the Ground is spontaneously present (*lhun grub*). Because this spontaneous presence is innate and uncontrived, the Ground also transcends the extreme of nonexistence or nihilistic negation. Although the Ground cannot be grasped as an existent entity, it is not a vacuum or a void without qualities. Instead, it is endowed with potential and intrinsic dynamism, which manifests as the various modes of awareness. This articulation of spontaneous presence serves to balance the emptiness tone of primordial purity, ensuring that the Dzogchen Heart Essence view is not (mis)understood as a totally negational doctrine.

Longchenpa then characterizes *dharmatā* as the inseparability of luminosity and emptiness, describing it as perfectly complete and pure. Indeed, for Dzogchen, emptiness (*stong pa*) is inseparable from luminosity (*'od gsal*), the natural clarity and cognizance of awareness. This inseparability is not an added feature of the Ground but its very mode of being. Longchenpa identifies the nature of the Ground as the primordial Buddha—an ever-present, unconditioned realization of the *dharmakāya*. Here, “primordial Buddha” does not denote a mythic or transcendent figure but refers to the timeless presence of awareness itself, which has never been produced, altered, or diminished.

Longchenpa also explains that the primordially empty and self-occurring great gnosis (ཡེ་ཤྲོང་རང་  
བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆེན་པོ་) does not exist within either *samsāra* or *nirvāṇa*. Rather, like space, it abides timelessly and remains unbounded from the very beginning. Although the Ground is the condition for both delusion (*samsāra*) and recognition (*nirvāṇa*), it does not belong to either state. Its timeless abiding underscores its freedom from dualistic classifications and affirms its fundamentally nondual status. Put differently, at the level of appearance, Longchenpa seems to add “spontaneous presence” to complement “primordial purity;” however, at the level of paradigm, according to the Heart Essence tradition, the “primordial purity” does not exclude and is not independent from the “spontaneous presence.” Thus, instead of reading the shift from claiming primordial purity as the only right view of the Ground’s innate nature to an emphasis on the union of primordial purity as Longchenpa expands on a previous idea, it might be more accurate to say, considering that spontaneous presence is *always* subsumed in primordial purity, that he clarifies that primordial purity should not be understood as nothingness or a void. In short, through this integration of primordial purity and spontaneous presence, Longchenpa articulates a comprehensive vision of the Ground that resists all conceptual extremes while affirming the intimate presence of awakening within the very nature of mind.

Moreover, Longchenpa summarizes the two intrinsic aspects of the Ground—namely, its essence and its nature—in the following way:

Since awareness has no entity, from the perspective of indivisible awareness-emptiness, the gnosis of primordially pure essence is free from concepts. The gnosis of the spontaneously present nature abides in a profound luminosity as primordial radiance.<sup>146</sup>

In this passage, Longchenpa offers a succinct formulation of the two intrinsic aspects of the Ground by identifying their corresponding forms of gnosis (*ye shes*). He begins by stating that awareness (*rig*) “has no entity” (*dngos po med pa*), emphasizing its lack of inherent existence. This negation functions not as a denial of awareness but as a refusal to reify it. Because awareness does not arise as a substantial or definable phenomenon, it cannot be grasped as an object within any ontological framework. This sets up Longchenpa’s central point: the inseparability of awareness and emptiness (*rig stong dbyer med*), which is the nature of the Ground.

From the perspective of this indivisibility, Longchenpa identifies the “gnosis of primordially pure essence” (*ngo bo ka dag gi ye shes*) as being free from conceptual elaboration. Indeed, he links the essence (*ngo bo*) directly to primordial purity (*ka dag*), and to a corresponding mode of awareness characterized by complete freedom from conceptuality. Because the essence is empty of any intrinsic nature, the gnosis associated with it is likewise unconfined by mental constructions, dualistic grasping, or interpretive frameworks. This aligns with the project of Dzogchen, which insists that the Ground’s essence could only be encountered through the absence of conceptual projections.

Additionally, the second part of the passage describes the “gnosis of the spontaneously present nature” (*rang bzhin lhun grub kyi ye shes*) as abiding as a profound and clear luminosity (*gting gsal ye gdangs*). This identifies nature (*rang bzhin*) with spontaneous presence (*lhun grub*), emphasizing its dynamic, expressive, and luminous qualities. While the essence of the Ground is revealed through absence (i.e., the sheer purity of emptiness), the nature is revealed through presence, the spontaneous radiance that displays itself without effort or cause. Indeed, Longchenpa’s phrase “primordial radiance” (*ye gdangs*) underscores that this luminosity is not produced but is an ever-present aspect of the Ground’s nature.

In sum, these formulations present the twofold structure of the Ground as two corresponding forms of gnosis: the gnosis of essence as nonconceptual purity and the gnosis of nature as luminous display. Longchenpa thereby integrates emptiness and appearance within a single operating framework, showing that the Ground is simultaneously beyond conceptual elaboration and vibrantly present as radiant awareness. The seven different assertions of the Ground presented in the tantras and in Nyima Bum’s text are intended to clarify the Heart Essence understanding of the Dzogchen view by demonstrating the importance of correctly discerning the

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<sup>146</sup> *Tshig don mdzod* (A ‘dzom ed.), f. 10a5-6: རིག་ལ་དངོས་པོ་མེད་པས་རིག་སྟོང་དབྱེར་མེད་ལ་སྟོན་ནས་ངོ་བོ་ཀ་དག་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་བསམ་ངོ་དང་བླ་བ་དང་། རང་བཞིན་སྟོན་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་གཏིང་གསལ་ཡེ་གདངས་སུ་གནས་། Two other translations of this passage could be found in: 1. Longchen Ramjam, *Precious Treasure of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020): 56; 2. David Francis Germano, “Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet,” PhD diss. (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 320.

nature of the Ground. In the *Treasury of Words and Meaning*, Longchenpa further refines these points by offering additional distinctions.

b. Thig mchog mdzod (The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle)

This monumental work, among other things, unpacks intricate doctrinal distinctions through discussions on complex subject matters such as the universal ground, Buddha-nature, and emptiness.<sup>147</sup> The text reflects Longchenpa's remarkable skills of processing the knowledge of others and making that knowledge approachable, as he draws from sūtra and tantra, along with teachings of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Dzogchen while remaining rooted in the Nyingthig tradition.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, the broad range of primary sources that he works with in this book demonstrates the vastness of his knowledge.<sup>149</sup>

Additionally, instead of engaging with his primary sources through literary analysis, Longchenpa seems to have a more fluid relationship with his materials. Sometimes, the passages that he quotes from the various Heart Essence tantras could be ambiguous in terms of whether they are discussing the Ground or the abiding reality. After presenting the quotations, Longchenpa might not walk us through how he reads these passages before he offers his interpretations. In a way, these lacunae highlight the significance of Longchenpa's work; if the ideas were already clearly articulated in early tantras, there might not be a need for more writings. Thus, in my examination of this text, I refrain from analyzing Longchenpa's primary sources. I focus on Longchenpa's arguments, instead, to unpack his vision of the two G/grounds.

In the *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, Longchenpa offers a detailed treatment of the seven assertions of the Ground. While in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa first claims that only primordial purity is correct, and later adds spontaneous presence, in the *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, he explicitly states that all seven assertions are faulty (not just the first six, as in his earlier *Treasury of Words and Meanings*). He introduces this discussion by outlining three components as follows:

The first part is further divided into three sections: (a) a concise explanation of the essence of the seven [assertions of] the Ground, (b) an explanation of the reason why the seven reifications of the Ground are flawed, and (c) a presentation of the Ground as the inseparability of primordial purity and spontaneous presence according to the [Nyingthig] tradition.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* begins by describing how the Buddhas and their teachings manifest in the world. Subsequent chapters explore the path to Buddhahood through various views, meditation practices, and modes of conduct. The final section culminates in the ultimate fruition—spontaneous perfection.

<sup>148</sup> It also shows how pre-existing texts have shaped Longchenpa's arguments. For instance, he adopts and expands upon the framework of the Eleven Topics that was consolidated by Nyima Bum. His *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*) and *Eleven Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don bcu gcig*) reflect Nyima Bum's deep influence on his thinking.

<sup>149</sup> To be sure, these primary sources are quoted in many other texts already.

<sup>150</sup> *Thig mchog mdzod* (A 'dzom ed.), f. 189b2-3: དང་པོ་ལ་གསུམ་སྟེ། གཞི་བདུན་གྱི་ངོ་བོ་མདོར་བསྟན་པ། མཐར་འཛིན་གྱི་གཞི་བདུན་སྟོན་ཅན་དུ་བསྟན་པ། ག་དག་ལྷན་གྱུ་དབྱེར་མེད་གྱི་གཞི་རང་གཞུང་དུ་དགོད་པའོ། །

In other words, the seven assertions are all false if viewed separately. Indeed, Longchenpa is not denying any predicate. He denies their separability, arguing that they should be taken as isolated, partial misinterpretations of both the Ground's ontology (toward nihilism or eternalism) and its soteriology (practice becomes either unnecessary or impossible). Indeed, this passage shows that those who make these assertions are attached to limited realizations of particular aspects of awareness and therefore mistake that aspect for awareness as a whole.

As, Longchenpa outlines the seven wrong assertions regarding the Ground (*gzhi*),<sup>151</sup> he presents his refutations of them in terms of *the essence of awareness (rig pa'i ngo bo)* instead of *the Ground*.<sup>152</sup> It seems that Longchenpa uses this *essence of awareness* to refer to the abiding

<sup>151</sup> Longchenpa writes: “First, there are seven assertions of the Ground that are generally taught in the Great Perfection tradition. [These assertions,] held by the proponents of philosophical tenets in their own individual systems, are as follows: [1] Asserting the Ground as *primordially pure*; [2] Asserting the Ground as *spontaneously present*; [3] Asserting the Ground as *indeterminate*; [4] Asserting the Ground as *the actual ground of the definitive meaning*; [5] Asserting the Ground as *capable of changing in any way*; [6] Asserting the Ground as *adaptable to whatever is asserted*; and [7] Asserting the Ground as *manifold or multifaceted*.” See *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, 378–379 (=A ‘dzom, ff. 189b3–190a3): དང་པོ་ནི་སྤྱིར་རྒྱུས་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་གཞིའི་འདོད་ལྷགས་བདུན་དུ་བསྟན་པ་ནི། གྲུབ་པའི་མཐའ་སྤྱོད་པའི་རང་གཞུང་སོ་སོས་འཛིན་པ་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་གཞི་ཀ་དག་ཏུ་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ལྷན་གྲུབ་ཏུ་འདོད་པ། གཞི་མ་ངེས་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ངེས་པ་དོན་གྱི་དངོས་གཞི་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ཅིར་ཡང་བསྐྱར་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ཅིར་ཡང་ཁས་སྒྲུབ་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་སྤྲུལ་ཆོག་སྤྱོད་པ་དང་བདུན་ནོ། །དེ་དག་ཀྱང་ངོ་བོ་ཀ་དག་གི་ཕྱོགས་རེ་ལ་བཏགས་ནས་སོ་སོར་ཁས་སྒྲུབ་ཏེ། རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་འདི་ལ། གང་ཡང་ཡོད་མེད་ཀྱི་ཁས་ལེན་མེད་ཅིང་། སྤྱིས་བྲལ་ཐོག་ལེ་ཆེན་པོའི་ཆ་ནས་གཞི་ཀ་དག་ཏུ་འདོད་པའོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཡོན་ཏན་རང་ཆས་སུ་ཡེ་ནས་གནས་པ་ནི་མ་དང་ཟེར་གྱི་ཚུལ་དུ་ལྟན་ཞིང་དྲི་མ་མེད་པར་འདོད་པ་ལྷན་གྲུབ་པོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་འདི་ཡིན་གཅིག་ཏུ་མ་གྲུབ་པས་ཕྱོགས་ཡན་སྤྱོད་མེད་ཆེན་པོར་འདོད་པ་མ་ངེས་པའོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་འཕྲུལ་མེད་པར་འདོད་པ་ངེས་པ་ཅན་ནོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཅིར་ཡང་འཆར་བར་འདོད་པས་ཅིར་ཡང་བསྐྱར་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པའོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་འཁོར་འདས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་འབྱུང་བར་འདོད་པས་ཅིར་ཡང་ཁས་སྒྲུབ་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པའོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་སྤྲུལ་ཚུལ་གྱི་མ་འགགས་པར་སྤྲུལ་བར་འདོད་པས་སྤྲུལ་ཆོག་སྤྱོད་པའོ། །འདི་དག་ཀྱང་རིག་པ་གཅིག་ལ་སོ་སོའི་འཐད་གཞུང་ཕྱོགས་རེ་མཐོང་ནས་བཞག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ།

\*This list is also seen in Nyi ma 'bum's *Eleven Words and Meanings*, p. 15: སྤྱིར་རྒྱུས་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་འདོད་ལྷགས་བདུན་ལས་མི་གང་འདྲེ། གཞི་ལྷན་གྲུབ་ཏུ་འདོད་པའི་ལྷགས་དང་། མ་ངེས་པར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷགས་དང་། ངེས་པ་དོན་གྱི་དངོས་གཞིར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷགས་དང་། ཅིར་ཡང་བསྐྱར་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷགས་དང་། ཅིར་ཡང་ཁས་སྒྲུབ་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པའི་ལྷགས་དང་། གཞི་སྤྲུལ་ཆོག་སྤྱོད་པའི་ལྷགས་དང་། གཞི་ཀ་དག་ཏུ་འདོད་པའི་ལྷགས་དང་། བདུན་[ལས་མ་]འདས་སོ། །However, notice here that Nyima Bum presents the spontaneous present as the first and the primordial purity as the seventh, and treats the seventh (i.e., primordial purity) as the faultless Ground.

<sup>152</sup> Longchenpa writes: [1] This self-occurring gnosis is asserted as neither something nor nothing. From the perspective of the great unelaborated sphere, the Ground is asserted as *primordial purity*; [2] The essence of awareness is primordially endowed with naturally luminous qualities, like the sun and its rays. Thus, the Ground is asserted as *spontaneously present*; [3] Since the essence of awareness is not a fixed entity, the Ground is an unelaborated and impartial expanse, and it is asserted as *indeterminate*; [4] Because the essence of awareness is unchanging, the Ground is asserted as *determinate*; [5] Since, within the essence of awareness, anything can arise in any form, the Ground is asserted as *capable of changing in any way*; [6] Because all phenomena of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* arise from the essence of awareness, the Ground is asserted as *adaptable to any assertion*; and [7] Since the essence of awareness gives rise to an unceasing display of appearances, the Ground is asserted as *manifold or multifaceted*. See *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod* (Dpal brtsegs), vol. 17, pp. 378–379 (=A ‘dzom, ff. 189b3–190a3): དང་པོ་ནི་སྤྱིར་རྒྱུས་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་གཞིའི་འདོད་ལྷགས་བདུན་དུ་བསྟན་པ་ནི། གྲུབ་པའི་མཐའ་སྤྱོད་པའི་རང་གཞུང་སོ་སོས་འཛིན་པ་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་གཞི་ཀ་དག་ཏུ་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ལྷན་གྲུབ་ཏུ་འདོད་པ། གཞི་མ་ངེས་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ངེས་པ་དོན་གྱི་དངོས་གཞི་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ཅིར་ཡང་བསྐྱར་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་ཅིར་ཡང་ཁས་སྒྲུབ་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པ། གཞི་སྤྲུལ་ཆོག་སྤྱོད་པ་དང་བདུན་ནོ། །དེ་དག་ཀྱང་ངོ་བོ་ཀ་དག་གི་ཕྱོགས་རེ་ལ་བཏགས་ནས་སོ་སོར་ཁས་སྒྲུབ་ཏེ། རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་འདི་ལ། གང་ཡང་ཡོད་མེད་ཀྱི་ཁས་ལེན་མེད་ཅིང་། སྤྱིས་བྲལ་ཐོག་ལེ་ཆེན་པོའི་ཆ་ནས་གཞི་ཀ་དག་ཏུ་འདོད་པའོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཡོན་ཏན་རང་ཆས་སུ་ཡེ་ནས་གནས་པ་ནི་མ་དང་ཟེར་གྱི་ཚུལ་དུ་ལྟན་ཞིང་དྲི་མ་མེད་པར་འདོད་པ་ལྷན་གྲུབ་པོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་འཕྲུལ་མེད་པར་འདོད་པ་དང་འདོད་པ་ཅན་ནོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་འཁོར་འདས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་འབྱུང་བར་འདོད་པས་ཅིར་ཡང་ཁས་སྒྲུབ་དུ་བཏུབ་པར་འདོད་པའོ། །རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་སྤྲུལ་ཚུལ་གྱི་མ་འགགས་པར་སྤྲུལ་བར་འདོད་པས་སྤྲུལ་ཆོག་སྤྱོད་པའོ། །འདི་དག་ཀྱང་རིག་པ་གཅིག་ལ་སོ་སོའི་འཐད་གཞུང་ཕྱོགས་རེ་མཐོང་ནས་བཞག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ།

reality of the Ground. In other words, his refutation is constructed around the Ground's innate nature rather than the Ground itself.

Furthermore, Longchenpa takes apart the seventh assertion, of primordial purity, by saying that, since the self-occurring gnosis awareness is free from the extremes of existence and nonexistence, there is not even mere gnosis; therefore, this primordial purity that is the abiding reality cannot be established whatsoever either. As Longchenpa states,

since the self-occurring gnosis awareness is free from the extremes of existence and nonexistence, there is not even mere gnosis . . . therefore, this primordial purity that is the abiding reality cannot be established whatsoever either. If there is nothing at all, it would contradict that [the Ground] is the expanse for emerging *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Furthermore, if there is no gnosis, there would be no liberation of buddhas or sentient beings; [thus,] liberation through realizing the Ground would be illogical.<sup>153</sup>

In other words, the claim that the Ground is only primordially pure unavoidably leads to the conclusion that there is nothing. If there is nothing at all, it would contradict that the Ground is the expanse for *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* to emerge. Moreover, if there is no gnosis, there would be no liberation of buddhas or sentient beings; thus, liberation through realizing the Ground would be illogical. In other words, the claim that the Ground is primordially pure unavoidably leads to the conclusion that there is nothing—so there is no Ground either. If that were the case, there would be no liberation. Thus, the view of primordial purity taken alone risks nihilism.

He also dismantles the claim that the Ground is *only* spontaneously present: if it were spontaneously present (in the sense of already complete and unchanging), the arising of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* would be illogical; anyone would already be liberated; cause and effect would collapse; and *samsāra* would be identical to *nirvāṇa*—an eternalist pitfall. As Longchenpa writes:

it is illogical to claim that the Ground of both [*samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*] is spontaneously present. For if it were spontaneously present, it would be unchanging, making the arising of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* illogical. In addition, anyone would [already] be liberated without any effort because cause and effect would have been spontaneously present [from the outset]. If that were the case, it would imply that cause and effect [arise] simultaneously. If one were to assert this, then when the cause is *samsāra*, the effect

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ལ་འདི་ཡིན་གཅིག་ཏུ་མ་གྲུབ་པས་ཕྱགས་ཡན་སྒྲིམ་མེད་ཆེན་པོར་འདོད་པ་མ་ངེས་པའོ། རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་འཕོ་འགྱུར་མེད་པར་འདོད་པ་ངེས་པ་ཅན་ནོ། རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཅིར་ཡང་འཆར་བར་འདོད་པས་ཅིར་ཡང་བསྐྱར་དུ་བརྟུབ་པར་འདོད་པའོ། རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་འཁོར་འདས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་འབྱུང་བར་འདོད་པས་ཅིར་ཡང་ཁས་ཀླང་དུ་བརྟུབ་པར་འདོད་པའོ། རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་སྤང་ཚུལ་གྱི་མ་འགགས་པར་སྤང་བར་འདོད་པས་སྤང་ཆོགས་སུ་འདོད་དེ་བྱ་བ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །འདི་དག་གྱང་རིག་པ་གཅིག་ལ་སོ་སོའི་འཐད་གཞུང་ཕྱགས་རེ་མཐོང་ནས་བཞག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ།

<sup>153</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, p. 320: རིག་པ་རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ནི་ཡོད་མེད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་དང་བྲལ་བས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཅོམ་དུ་འང་གྲུབ་པ་མེད་དེ། སྒྲིམ་བྲལ་ཐེག་ལེ་ཆེན་པོའི་ཆ་ནས་གང་དུ་འང་མ་གྲུབ་པར་འདོད་དོ། །གཉིས་པ་དེ་དགག་པ་ནི། དེ་ལྟར་ཅིར་ཡང་མ་གྲུབ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཅོམ་དུ་འང་མེད་ཀྱི་ནས་དག་པས་གང་དུ་འང་བཞག་ཏུ་མེད་པའི་གནས་ལྷགས་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་ན་འཁོར་འདས་འབྱུང་བའི་དབྱིངས་སུ་འགལ་ལ། ཡེ་ཤེས་མེད་ན་སངས་རྒྱས་དང་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་རྣམ་གྲོལ་མེད་པས་གཞི་རྟོགས་ནས་གྲོལ་བ་ཡང་མི་རིགས་ལ།

would contradict it by not being *nirvāṇa*. If these two were identical, it would follow that *saṃsāra is nirvāṇa* and *nirvāṇa is saṃsāra* because these two are identical.<sup>154</sup>

This passage shows that the emphasis on the spontaneous presence of the Ground, like the claim of primordial purity, also risks being read as if no liberation were needed. Insisting that the fruit is always already present inevitably renders Buddhist practice obsolete. Additionally, the loophole in such an *always-already* logic is that if everything has been present since the beginning, instead of one being the condition for the other, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* should have no difference. This is the danger of eternalism. Note that to say that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are identical is not the same as to say that these two share the same **essence**.

Some pages later, Longchenpa responds to a hypothetical question that someone might ask--that if all the seven assertions are flawed, then the assertion of the union of the primordial purity and spontaneous presence would be an additional assertion. In other words, should we treat the union of primordial purity and spontaneous presence as a new assertion or an eighth assertion? Although Longchenpa insists that none of the seven assertions is correct, he seems to hesitate to frame his argument as an additional assertion. As Longchenpa explains,

As for the objection, it is argued that this perspective would lead to the eighth assertion of the Ground. As for the response, we counter this by asserting that *primordial purity* and *spontaneous presence* are inseparable. Since they are included within the seven assertions of the Ground, they are not recognized as a separate, [eighth assertion]. Thus, the fault of positing eight assertions does not arise.<sup>155</sup>

Although Longchenpa disagrees with the framing of an eighth assertion, he does not give a reason for this disagreement. It seems that, on the one hand, Longchenpa does not want to go beyond the traditional seven assertions; on the other hand, he strongly rejects all seven assertions equally.

By arguing that the Ground is *both* primordially pure and spontaneously present, Longchenpa claims a mode of thinking that is different in kind from scholars who might be attached to one aspect of the Ground. As Longchenpa writes,

First, since the essence of primordial purity has the deep radiance of spontaneous presence, the essence of the inseparable aspect is the awareness of primordial purity, which does not exist as a thing or a characteristic, and the nature of spontaneous presence's subtle clear light abide as inner radiance. Thus, the essence of appearance is emptiness, the nature of emptiness is clarity, and the heart essence of clarity is awareness,

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<sup>154</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs edition) vol. 17, p. 315: དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཞི་ལྷན་གྱུ་ཡིན་མོ་ཞེས་པ་འང་མི་  
རིགས་ཏེ། ལྷན་གྱུ་ཡིན་ན་མི་འགྱུར་བས་འཁོར་འདས་འབྱུང་བར་མི་རིགས་སོ། །ཡང་ན་སྤྱི་ཡོད་འབད་མེད་དུ་གྲོལ་བར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། ལྷན་འབྲས་ཡིན་སྟེ་ལྷན་གྱུ་  
ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །དེ་ལྷན་གྱི་ལྷན་འབྲས་དུས་མཉམ་པར་ཐལ་ལ། འདོད་ན་ལྷན་འཁོར་བ་ཡིན་དུས། འབྲས་བྱ་ལྷན་འཁོར་པ་མ་ཡིན་པས་གསལ་ལ། དེ་གཉིས་  
གཅིག་ན་འཁོར་བ་ལྷན་འདས་སྤྱི་ཐལ་ལ། ལྷན་འདས་འཁོར་བར་ཐལ་ཏེ་དེ་གཉིས་གཅིག་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །

<sup>155</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod* (Dpal brtsegs ed.), vol. 17, p. 388: གཞི་བརྒྱད་དུ་ཐལ་ཅེས་པའི་ལན་ནི་ཀ་དག་དང་ལྷན་  
གྱུ་དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་འདོད་ཀྱི་དེ་ནི་གཞི་བདུན་དུ་འདུ་བས་དེ་ལས་ལྷགས་པ་མི་འདོད་པའི་ཕྱིར། གཞི་བརྒྱད་དུ་ཐལ་བའི་རྩོན་མེད་དོ། །

so the awakened body and gnosis abide without meeting or departing like the sun's center. Since the essence is primordially pure, and [its] nature is spontaneously present, they are asserted to be inseparable.<sup>156</sup>

In other words, according to Longchenpa, primordial purity and spontaneous presence are not two. The essence of one reflects the fundamental quality of the other. Thus, like Nupchen and Nyima Bum, Longchenpa clarifies the Ground's nature through a holistic way of seeing, which is a methodology at the heart of Buddhist doctrine. Here, for instance, Longchenpa unpacks spontaneous presence and primordial purity through the framework of conventional and ultimate truths:

Moreover, the aspect of appearance, from the perspective of conventional truth, is spontaneous presence. The aspect of emptiness, from the perspective of ultimate reality, is primordial purity. Since these two are not distinct entities, they do not exist independently; rather, [the distinction] is merely verbal expression.<sup>157</sup>

In other words, spontaneous presence could be understood as appearance, which represents the conventional truth. Primordial purity could be understood as emptiness, which corresponds to the ultimate truth. Importantly, neither of these two exists as a separate entity. Just as without emptiness, there is no appearance, without primordial purity, there is no spontaneous presence. The complex interdependence between these ideas is elaborated in Longchenpa's discussion on the eight qualities and three functions of the primordial Ground.

## 5. Eight Qualities of the Primordial Ground

In the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa explains the primordial Ground as being endowed with eight qualities and having three main functions. Although not explicitly said, the eight qualities of the primordial Ground, I argue, focus on the Ground's nature that is the ground of the ground, path, and fruition. In other words, the eight qualities are descriptions of the abiding reality of the Ground.

Thirdly, regarding the general presentation of the natural process of the Ground for emergence, [1] essence, [2] nature, and [3] compassion; [4] natural flow, [5] characteristic, and [6] innate nature; and the [7] primordially pure and [8] spontaneously present abide in the primordial Ground of the expanse. Although a single essence, when differentiated by its aspects, it abides in [these] eight.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>156</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod* (Dpal brtsegs ed.), vol. 17, p. 320: དང་པོ་ནི་ངོ་བོ་ཀ་དག་ལ་སྒྱུན་གྱུབ་གཏིང་གསལ་དུ་  
ཡོད་པས་དབྱེར་མེད་ཀྱི་ཆའི་ངོ་བོ་ཀ་དག་གི་རིག་པ་དངོས་པོ་དང་མཚན་མར་མ་གྱུབ་ལ། རང་བཞིན་སྒྱུན་གྱུབ་ཀྱི་འོད་གསལ་ཕྱ་བ་ནང་གསལ་དུ་གནས་པ་སྟེ།  
སྒྲུང་བའི་ངོ་བོ་སྟོང་ལ་སྟོང་པའི་རང་བཞིན་གསལ་བ་གསལ་བའི་སྟོང་པོ་རིག་པ་སྟེ་སྒྱུ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཡེ་ནས་འདུ་འབྲལ་མེད་པ་ཉི་མའི་སྟོང་པོ་སྟར་གནས་ཏེ། ངོ་  
བོ་ཀ་ནས་དག་ལ་རང་བཞིན་སྒྱུན་གྱུབ་གྱུབ་པ་དབྱེར་མེད་དུ་འདོད་དེ།

<sup>157</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod* (Dpal brtsegs ed.), vol. 17, p. 389: ཡང་སྒྲུང་ངོ་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཀྱི་ཆ་ནས་སྒྱུན་གྱུབ་ལ། སྟོང་ངོ་  
དོན་དམ་གྱི་ཆ་ནས་ཀ་དག་དུ་ཆོག་གིས་བརྗོད་པ་ཙམ་ལས། དེ་གཉིས་རྩེས་ཐ་དང་།

<sup>158</sup> *Tshig don mdzod* (A 'dzom ed.), ff. 9a5–6: གསུམ་པ་འཆར་གཞིའི་བབས་ཚུལ་བྱིར་བཏགས་པ་ལ། དབྱིངས་གདོད་མའི་ཡེ་གཞི་ལ་ངོ་བོ་རང་  
བཞིན་ཐུགས་རྗེ་གསུམ། རང་དང་རང་བཞིན་བདག་ཉིད་གསུམ། ཀྱང་གཉིད་དང་སྒྱུན་གྱུབ་སྟེ། རང་བོ་གཅིག་ལ་ཐོག་པས་བྱེ་ན་བརྒྱུད་དུ་གནས་ཤིང་། དེའི་

At first glance, this passage seems to show that Longchenpa only focuses on the Dzogchen primordial Ground. However, the idea of the abiding reality is “hidden” in his discussion on the eight qualities. Indeed, although the Ground’s nature is fundamentally unitary, its abiding reality can be described through this eight-fold scheme—essence, nature, compassion, natural flow, characteristic, innate nature, primordial purity, and spontaneous presence—as Longchenpa describes, it to “**abide** (གནས་) in the primordial Ground of the expanse.” In other words, each of these eight qualities highlights a mode through which the Ground’s emptiness and luminosity are understood, as the general Buddhist view of the ultimate reality is the union of emptiness and appearances. As mentioned earlier, primordial purity is not exclusive of the spontaneous presence aspect of the Ground’s innate nature. These two are the backbone of the Dzogchen Heart Essence.

Additionally, the eight qualities proposed by Longchenpa are not separate or different entities of the Ground’s nature. The essence, nature, compassion, primordially pure, and spontaneously present appear in the many Dzogchen texts. On the other hand, natural flow, characteristic, and innate nature are less common. Longchenpa goes on to cite this passage from the *Pearl Garland Tantra*:

It is said:

[There are] essence, nature, compassion,  
natural flow, characteristic, the great innate nature,  
primordial purity, spontaneous presence,  
the common Ground, and the Ground of delusion.

In its detailed explanation:

The primordially pure essence is free from conceptualization.  
The spontaneously present nature is perfected in all its appearances.  
The all-pervading compassion arises naturally.  
The natural flow comes into being effortlessly.  
The uncontrived characteristic appears everywhere.  
Therefore, the great innate nature is all-pervading and all-encompassing.  
Primordial purity is naturally purified of defilements.  
The spontaneously present occurs variously.<sup>159</sup>

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ངང་ལས་གཞི་སྒྲུང་དུ་ཤར་དུས་སྒོལ་འཕྲུལ་གཉིས་ཀའི་གཞི་བྱེད་པའི་ཆ་ནས་སྤྱི་གཞི་ཟེར་ལ། སྒོལ་གཞི་བྱེད་པས་སྒོལ་བའི་གཞི་དང་། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་འཕྲུལ་གཞི་བྱེད་པས་འཕྲུལ་གཞི་ཞེས། གཞི་སྒྲུང་གི་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ལ་སྒོལ་འཕྲུལ་གྱི་ཆ་དབྱེ་ན་གསུམ་དུ་གནས་པ་སྟེ། Two other translations of this passage could be found in: 1. Longchen Ramjam, *Precious Treasure of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020): 54; 2. David Francis Germano, “Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet,” PhD diss, (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 312.

<sup>159</sup> *Tshig don mdzod* (A ‘dzom ed.), f. 9b1–4: ལྷ་ཏིག་ཐེང་བ་ལས། ངོ་བོ་རང་བཞིན་ཐུགས་རྗེ་དང་། རང་དང་རང་བཞིན་བདག་ཉིད་ཆེ། ཀླ་དག་ཉིད་དང་སྤྱན་སྒྲུབ་དང་། སྤྱི་པའི་གཞི་དང་འཕྲུལ་གཞིའོ། ཞེས་པ་དང་། དེའི་རྒྱས་བཤད་དུ། ངོ་བོ་ཀ་དག་བརྗོད་གཞི་བྲལ། རང་བཞིན་སྤྱན་སྒྲུབ་ཅིང་།

In this passage, primordial purity and spontaneous presence are mapped on the first two: the essence, nature, and the union of primordial purity and spontaneous presence is compassion. Between them, in other words, primordial purity and spontaneous presence subsume the essence, nature, and compassion. Natural flow, characteristic, and innate nature make up another way of explaining the essence, nature, and compassion, respectively. Therefore, the eight-fold scheme is not suggesting that there is anything missing from understanding the Ground's nature as the essence, nature, and compassion, or, as primordial purity and spontaneous presence. Rather, it is a three-tier model that serves to clarify the nature of the Ground.

## 6. Critique of Ground of Liberation (grol gzhi) vs. Place of Liberation (grol sa)

a. *Tshig don mdzod*

Up until here, the discussion of two Ground/grounds has been entirely my interpretation, as the writing of the primary sources is ambiguous. The following passage explicitly distinguishes these two, as Longchenpa defines the “appearance of the Ground” (*gzhi snang*) as the “Ground of liberation” (*grol gzhi*), with the primordial purity (*ka dag*) of the Ground being identified with the “place of liberation” (*grol sa*). In doing so, intentionally or otherwise, he alludes to the place of liberation as the abiding reality. In the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa states:

Furthermore, this appearance of the Ground is indeed the Ground of liberation (ཐོག་གཞི་), while primordial purity is the place of liberation (ཐོག་ས་). Therefore, it is critically important to distinguish in detail between these two, yet very few accurately do so.<sup>160</sup>

In other words, the primordial purity is the unchanging ontological abiding reality (*gnas lugs*) in which recognition settles, and the fruition abides. Additionally, Longchenpa underscores the importance of differentiating the Ground of liberation and the place of liberation by noting that “very few accurately distinguish these two” (ཞིགས་པར་ཕྱེད་པ་ནིན་ཏུ་ཉུང་ངོ་), which indicates the soteriological necessity and its centrality to the Heart Essence hermeneutic.

Longchenpa's major innovation in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* is this explicit differentiation between the Ground of liberation and the place of liberation. This distinction

ལྷན་རྒྱུགས། རྒྱགས་ཇི་ཀྱང་ཁྱབ་རང་ཤར་བཤོ། །རང་ནི་ཤུགས་ལས་འབྱུང་བ་སྟེ། །རང་བཞིན་མ་བཅོས་ཀྱན་སྣང་བས། །བདག་ཉིད་ཁྱབ་གདལ་བྱབ་ཐུབ་  
བཤོ། །ཀ་དག་དྲི་མ་རང་དག་སྟེ། །ལྷན་གྲུབ་ལྷ་ཚོགས་འབྱུང་བའི་ཕྱང་། །སྟེ་བའི་གཞི་ནི་གྲུབ་པར་སྣང་། །ཞིས་གསུངས་སོ། Two other translations of  
this passage could be found in: 1. Longchen Ramjam, *Precious Treasure of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by  
Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020): 54-55; 2. David Francis Germano,  
“Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in  
Fourteenth Century Tibet,” PhD diss, (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 155.

<sup>160</sup> *Tshig don mdzod*, A 'dzom, ff. 17a7–17b1: དེ་ཡང་གཞི་རྒྱུང་འདི་སྟོས་གཞི་ཡིན་ལ། ཀ་དག་ནི་སྟོས་ས་ཡིན་པས་འདི་གཉིས་ཀྱི་བྱ་བ་ལྟར་བཤང་གིན་ཏུ་གསུང་བའི་མཁས་པར་བྱེད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཉུང་ངོ་།. Two other translations of this passage could be found in: 1. Longchen Ramjam, *Precious Treasure of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020): 68; 2. David Francis Germano, “Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet,” PhD diss. (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 367-368.

introduces a conceptual clarity not emphasized in earlier Yogācāra or tantric sources or even in the early Dzogchen Heart Essence teachings. Philosophically—at the level of cosmogony—it acknowledges that the universe is said to “begin” from a certain point, which could be conceptualized as a dynamic moment of expressive emergence. This “beginning,” however described, belongs to the domain of Ground-as-source, a narrative device that explains how delusion and saṃsāric appearances first arise. Yet soteriologically, Longchenpa insists that *when or where saṃsāra begins is irrelevant*. What matters is not the temporal origin of confusion but the *means by which such confusion is undone*. Liberation depends not on locating the primordial moment of emergence but on recognizing the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*) of primordial purity (*ka dag*).

For this reason, it is crucial to distinguish clearly between knowing the Ground as the origin of appearance and realizing the ground as the abiding reality that liberates. The Ground of liberation refers to the Ground’s expressive dynamism—the display through which delusion is eventually overturned. But the place of liberation is the Ground’s primordial purity (not the Ground itself), the ultimate ontological mode in which liberation is consummated. Put differently, the Ground of liberation provides a narrative explanation of “where we come from”; the place of liberation, on the other hand, indicates “where realization settles.” Thus, the place of liberation is not the cosmogonic Ground that accounts for the origin of delusion or liberation, but the direct recognition of the abiding ontological reality of the primordially pure that terminates delusion altogether. In Dzogchen, cosmogony may orient our understanding of appearance, but *only the recognition of the abiding reality* leads to the place of liberation.

This distinction is also demonstrated further in the *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, which develops this differentiation even more explicitly, and the subsequent section of this chapter will analyze that further elaboration in detail.

#### *b. Theg mchog mdzod*

While the presentation of the Ground in the *Tshig don mdzod* does not always align with its articulation in the *Theg mchog mdzod*, it is essential to attend carefully to Longchenpa’s nuanced treatment of this topic across his corpus. Apparent differences in vocabulary, cosmological framing, or structural emphasis have sometimes led scholars to read these two works as representing divergent positions. Yet a closer examination reveals that Longchenpa is not shifting doctrinal ground but rather employing distinct hermeneutical strategies appropriate to their respective genres: the *Tshig don mdzod* seeks to systematically unpack the semantic and exegetical architecture of Dzogchen terminology, while the *Theg mchog mdzod* foregrounds the visionary, cosmogonic, and experiential dimensions of the teachings. When read in tandem, these works illuminate a single, coherent vision of the Ground—one that simultaneously functions as the primordial source, the *abiding ontological reality*, and the basis for the unfolding of delusion and liberation. Thus, the variations between them do not signal inconsistency but instead highlight Longchenpa’s ability to articulate the same abiding reality through multiple rhetorical and contemplative registers.

Regarding the Ground of liberation, in the *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, Longchenpa cites the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra*, saying: “The *dharmatā* of the Ground of liberation is pure”

(གྲོལ་གཞིའི་ཆོས་ཉིད་དག་པའོ།).<sup>161</sup> *Dharmatā*, or suchness, refers to the abiding reality. Since it is in a possessive relation with the Ground of liberation, the Ground of liberation refers to the primordial Ground. In other words, the place of liberation refers to suchness. This is further elaborated in the following quote, where Longchenpa explains why the place of liberation should not be understood as the primordial Ground.

Indeed, the most striking argument in *The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* is, perhaps, a critique of the claim: “[Samantabhadra] is liberated right within the Ground.”<sup>162</sup> Longchenpa describes this statement as “clumsy (*rtsings*).”<sup>163</sup> And, he takes a step further and argues that “saying that he is liberated back into the Ground is also clumsy.”<sup>164</sup> These arguments indicate that Longchenpa recognizes a conceptual flaw in equating liberation (i.e., obtaining buddhahood) with the Ground itself. In other words, if realizing buddhahood were merely a return to the primordial Ground, one could relapse into *saṃsāra* at any time, because the Ground encompasses both confusion and realization. As Longchenpa states,

Saying that [Samantabhadra] is liberated right within the Ground is clumsy (*rtsings*). He is liberated when the Ground’s manifestation dawns out of the Ground. He is liberated at the moment of rising from the Ground. Where is he liberated? Saying that he is liberated back into the Ground is also clumsy. He is liberated in the place of spontaneously present completion.

If he were liberated back into the Ground, he might relapse [back into *saṃsāra*], because that Ground has been posited as that within which confusion can occur, that is, because it is the Ground of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Suppose one says, “The line, ‘**the place of liberation** itself is the beginning [Ground],’ isn’t this ground the beginning?” One can explain the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*) as the beginning,<sup>165</sup> but it is not the Ground of the first [topic]. In short, when one recognizes one’s own face (*rang ngo shes*), one completes the good qualities of the expanse, whereby one is liberated into fruition through being devoid of obscurations.<sup>166</sup>

In this passage, Longchenpa firmly asserts that buddhahood, or the place of liberation, cannot be identical to the primordial Ground. It is important to know that the “beginning” in the passage is

<sup>161</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, 403: གྲོལ་གཞིའི་ཆོས་ཉིད་དག་པའོ།.

<sup>162</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, 355: གཞི་ཐོག་ཏུ་གྲོལ་ཟེར་བ་ཡང་ཆེདས་ཏེ།.

<sup>163</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, 355: གཞི་ཐོག་ཏུ་གྲོལ་ཟེར་བ་ཡང་ཆེདས་ཏེ།.

<sup>164</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, 355: གཞི་ཐོག་ཏུ་གྲོལ་ཟེར་བ་ཡང་ཆེདས་ཏེ།.

<sup>165</sup> Dpal brtsegs mistakenly has *thog med* instead of *thog mar*, which is seen in other editions; see, for example, W22920, published in Chengdu in 1999.

<sup>166</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, 355: གཞི་ཐོག་ནས་གྲོལ་ཟེར་བ་ཆེདས་ཏེ། གཞི་ལས་གཞི་ལྔ་དུ་ཤར་དུས་གྲོལ་བས། གཞི་ལས་འཕགས་པའི་སྐད་ཅིག་ལ་གྲོལ་བའོ། གང་དུ་གྲོལ་ན། གཞི་ཐོག་ཏུ་གྲོལ་ཟེར་བ་ཡང་ཆེདས་ཏེ། མཐར་ཕྱིན་ལྷན་གྲུབ་གྱི་ས་ལ་གྲོལ་བའོ། གལ་ཏེ་གཞི་ཐོག་ཏུ་གྲོལ་ན་ཡང་ཐོག་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། གཞི་དེ་འབྲུལ་པ་འབྲུང་བྱང་གི་ཆ་ནས་གཞི་ཐོག་ཏུ་འཁོར་ཏེ། འཁོར་འདས་གྱི་གཞི་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནོ། གྲོལ་ས་ཉིད་ཐོག་མའོ་ཞེས། གཞི་ཐོག་མ་ཡིན་ན་མ་ཞེ་ན། གནས་ལྷགས་ལ་ཐོག་མེད་sic་བཤད་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། དང་པོའི་གཞི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། མདོར་ན་རང་ངོ་ཤེས་ཤེས་དུས་དབྱེདས་གྱི་ཡོན་ཏན་མཐར་ཕྱིན་ཏེ། སྒྲིབ་པ་དང་བྲལ་བས་འབྲས་བུར་གྲོལ་བ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

not referring to the beginning (or the beginningless) of time that is associated with the primordial Ground, as Longchenpa states, “the abiding reality,” not the primordial Ground, is “the beginning.”<sup>167</sup>

Moreover, this view directly challenges the popular interpretation that suggests enlightenment is simply a matter of returning to the primordial state, for that would open the possibility of falling back into ignorance, a notion that contradicts fundamental Buddhist teachings. Moreover, such a perspective would have exposed the Nyingthig tradition to criticism from other Buddhist schools, which emphasize the irreversibility of buddhahood and the complete transcendence of ignorance in the awakened state.

### 7. Three Functions of the Primordial Ground

In Longchenpa’s writings, the nature of the Ground is treated differently from the Ground itself. Also, according to Longchenpa, the Ground cannot be treated as the place of liberation, as the Ground’s nature is the abiding reality, which is the union of primordial purity and spontaneous presence. All appearances emerge through the Ground’s natural flow, which serves as the fuel for all experience. At the same time, he explains that the primordial Ground has three functions: the “common Ground” (ཐུགས་གཞི་), upon which the Ground operates as the basis for both liberation and delusion; the “Ground of liberation” (ཐོག་གཞི་), which facilitates the possibility for buddhahood to emerge; and the “Ground of delusion” (འཁྲུལ་གཞི་), arising through misrecognition of its spontaneous display.

The terminology that Longchenpa uses, especially the terms “the Ground of liberation” and “the place of liberation,” might seem confusing because they seem almost identical. It is almost impossible to define their actual meanings. The “place,” in Tibetan ས་ (*sa*), carries the meaning of destination, which might have a more goal-oriented tone that points toward the attainment of buddhahood. On the other hand, the Ground, in Tibet གཞི་ (*gzhi*), is not necessarily goal-oriented. Rather, the Ground is more function-oriented, as it is a basis that has no objectives or purposes. Since “the Ground of liberation” is not the ultimate reality, it is possible that Longchenpa chooses these two terms intentionally. For example, in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa writes,

When, through the natural flow of that [single essence], appearances of the Ground arise, due to the aspect of the Ground’s function as the Ground for both liberation and delusion, the “common Ground” is termed. Due to the aspect of the ground’s function as the ground for liberation, the “Ground of liberation” is termed; due to the aspect of the Ground’s function as Ground for delusion of sentient beings, the “Ground of delusion” is termed. When the single essence of the Ground’s appearances is differentiated into its aspects, it could be [presented] in [these] three [aspects].<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> *Tshig don mdzod* (A ‘dzom ed.), ff. 9a6–9b1: དེའི་ངང་ལས་གཞི་སྒྲུབ་དུ་ཤར་དུས་ཐོག་འཁྲུལ་གཞིས་ཀའི་གཞི་བྱེད་པའི་ཆ་ནས་ཐུགས་གཞི་  
ཟེར་ལ། ཐོག་གཞི་བྱེད་པས་ཐོག་པའི་གཞི་དང་། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་འཁྲུལ་གཞི་བྱེད་པས་འཁྲུལ་གཞི་ཞེས། གཞི་སྒྲུབ་གི་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་ལ་ཐོག་འཁྲུལ་གྱི་ཆ་དབྱེ་ན་

These three functions of the Ground operate more on a narrative basis. The “Ground of delusion” is a device for the story of samsara. The “Ground of liberation,” on the other hand, coins the nirvāṇic side of the story, as, according to general Dzogchen teachings, it is the source of nirvana. The “common Ground,” encapsulating both the Grounds of delusion and liberation, is, therefore, another instrument for storytelling. In other words, these three terms are not addressing the Ground’s innate nature that was discussed in the eight qualities section, rather they are the descriptions of how the Ground supports or facilitates all phenomena.

Together, this layered differentiation—three functional aspects—exemplifies the Dzogchen hermeneutical strategy of unfolding the single Ground into multiple explanatory frameworks without compromising its essential unity, thereby integrating cosmogonic, phenomenological, and soteriological dimensions within a single doctrinal grammar. One can read Longchenpa’s outline of the eight qualities and three functions of the Ground as an attempt to clarify the primordial Ground from its aspects and nature.

The significance of his effort is two-fold. First, in writing, it is almost impossible to delineate the Ground’s qualities from the Ground itself; therefore, oftentimes, when the Ground is addressed, the discussion also encapsulates the qualities of the Ground, and vice versa. By distinguishing the qualities of the Ground from the Ground itself, Longchenpa avoids the popular narrative of liberation taking place in the primordial Ground.

### C. Conclusion

This chapter argues that Longchenpa relocates the locus of liberation from the primordial Ground, which is the cosmogonic source, to the abiding reality. In doing so, Longchenpa clarifies terms such as the “Ground of liberation” and the “place of liberation” within the Nyingthig tradition. These distinctions are not philosophical hair-splitting; instead, they help practitioners determine what the focus of Buddhist practice is, and whether buddhahood could be understood as irreversible.

Throughout the process of writing this chapter, I have realized that Longchenpa sometimes seems to refrain from offering a systematic structure for approaching major concepts. Thus, I often have to interpret ideas by reading between the lines, articulating the interrelationships among terms through my familiarity with Longchenpa’s work and general Dzogchen teachings.

Thus, this chapter begins with broader definitions of the Ground and its nature in the *Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space*, Nyima Bum’s writing, and delves into the two canonical texts by Longchenpa. Through a review of the seven traditional assertions of the Ground, I delineate the similarities and differences in understanding doctrinal

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གཞུང་དུ་གནས་པ་སྟེ། Two other translations of this passage could be found in: 1. Longchen Ramjam, *Precious Treasure of the Genuine Meaning*, translated by Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Oregon: Berotsana Publications, 2020): 54; 2. David Francis Germano, “Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs Chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet,” PhD diss. (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1992), 313.

key points between Longchenpa and his predecessors. The eight qualities and three functions of the Ground further clarify how Longchenpa understands the Ground and its nature.

As mentioned earlier, the distinction between the “Ground of liberation” and the “place of liberation” is not always clear. Although Longchenpa emphasizes in both the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* and the *Treasury of Supreme Vehicle* that this distinction is crucial to the Dzogchen Heart Essence tradition, one needs to read these texts together to define the terms. However, based on my understanding of Longchenpa’s intention, all the careful readings and analyses are not meant to be fixated upon. As in his *Treasury of Supreme Vehicle*, Longchenpa writes:

Within the expanse of primordially pure essence, the spontaneously present primordial radiance and the subtle self-light of deep illumination, together with wisdom, are not one, not distinct, not separate.<sup>169</sup>

This passage demonstrates clearly that the primordial purity and spontaneous presence are of a single nature and “not one, not distinct, not separated.” Here, the Dzogchen Ground is meant to be treated with a philosophy that is carefree and goes beyond the extremes of fixations. The actual Ground’s nature cannot be treated conceptually, so it should not be involved in describing anything. We know that the Ground and its nature are not meant to be treated separately, but it also is important to know that defining the Ground and its nature separately helps the Dzogchen cosmogonic viewpoint and the ontological viewpoint in the Dzogchen philosophy. Thus, I argue that here the Ground being beyond one or many involves treating the Ground and its nature without their proper distinctions, because we cannot define Ground without its nature and Ground’s nature without Ground itself. It seems, therefore, that Longchenpa does not clarify whether he is talking about the Ground or its nature.

The interrelationality between primordial purity and spontaneous presence, perhaps, should be understood as without one, there is not the other. According to the Dzogchen teachings, while at the conceptual level, it is important to articulate these characteristics of the Ground, when it comes to the practice, categorization, and definition could become obstacles on the path, as one might become distracted by the elegance and beauty of a thought structure and, hence, forget that such a structure is not the moon but the finger that is pointing at the moon. After all, these terms (i.e., primordial purity, spontaneous presence, the Ground, and the abiding reality) are incorporated not only to establish a way of understanding the ultimate reality, but also to help one access that reality. Without the Ground, there cannot be the nature of the Ground. The discussion on whether the Ground and the abiding reality are in an appositional or possessive relation is helpful in establishing conceptually attaining buddhahood as irreversible. But, upon awakening, the debates on reversibility and irreversibility, along with other conceptual exercises, are probably no longer necessary.

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<sup>169</sup> *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, (Dpal brtsegs) vol. 17, 390–391: རོ་བོ་ཀ་དག་གི་མྱོང་ན་རང་བཞིན་ལྷན་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་ཡེ་གདངས་གཉིང་གསལ་ཕྱ་བའི་རང་འོད་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་བཅས་[391]པ། གཅིག་དང་། ཐ་དང་དང་། མོ་མོ་མ་ཡིན་.

## Conclusion

The historical transformation of the Dzogchen Ground/ground reflects a broader philosophical movement within Buddhist thought: the attempt to preserve ideological coherence while not falling into the trap of ontological reification. This project has demonstrated that the Ground/ground is complex, as it is a combination of many Buddhist philosophical and doctrinal ideas, such as emptiness, *ālayavijñāna*, buddha-nature, and the ultimate reality. Additionally, it involves both a cosmogonical origin and a soteriological destination. When all these notions are packed in a body of thought, they struggle, at times, to fit into one term.

Furthermore, in many Buddhist schools, ground, path, and fruition are often taught as three separate things. When it comes to Dzogchen, these ideas are folded into one: the Ground. Therefore, the Ground becomes much more difficult to define in a cohesive manner. According to Dzogchen, the ground, path, and fruition are indivisible, and this belief serves as the foundation for the guiding principle of Dzogchen practice—view, meditation, and conduct should be effortless. By framing the ground, path, and fruition as one, that is, the implication is that the fruition is always already present in the ground; and thus, a path is not needed. There is no gap between the ground and fruition, so nothing need be done. Importantly, this does not mean that a practitioner does nothing. Effortlessness, in Dzogchen, also indicates that the division between the view, meditation, and conduct is artificial, and that these three categories would collapse in actuality. The Dzogchen practice, then, is about resting in the view, which is beyond concepts. The meditation and conduct are effortless as they do not involve rejecting or accepting. Such unrestrictedness is mirrored by the all-encompassing Ground/ground.

Throughout this project, I have shown how generations of authors labored to outline the backbone of Dzogchen by interpreting and reinterpreting the Ground/ground. The first two chapters of the dissertation reveal how Tibetan thinkers experiment with the ideas of the universal ground consciousness or *ālayavijñāna* and buddha-nature found in the sūtric and tantric contexts. Such experimentation, in turn, helps establish the foundation for the Dzogchen Ground. The two Dunhuang manuscripts organize universal ground consciousness into elaborate analytical frameworks that examine its nature, associated mental factors, objects, ethical classification, causal activities, divisions, transformation, and related dimensions. These texts explore the semantic range of the universal ground beyond a strictly karmic repository model and place it as part of a larger narrative in which the mechanisms of delusion and the conditions for liberation are articulated within a single conceptual structure. Later, Nupchen brings together Yogācāra terminology, Buddha-nature discourse, and tantric nondual perspectives, transforming the universal ground from a repository of karmic seeds into the horizon within which both delusion and awakening unfold.

The subsequent three chapters uncover that while the Dzogchen Ground is being articulated and refined, it simultaneously poses challenges to the thinkers, as any attempt in trying to describe it is inevitably confronted with the Ground's indescribable nature. From the *Seventeen Tantras* to Nyima Bum and then to Longchenpa, we witness how the Ground is (re)interpreted through the seven assertions, eleven topics, as well as the Ground and ground, and the ground and the place of liberation. In the Dzogchen tradition, I argue, the language of the Ground/ground survives precisely because of the limitless reinterpretation of the Ground/ground. For instance, the

Ground/ground can be treated as a narrative origin and the ultimate reality, which sometimes is referred to as the foundationless or groundless ground. Thus, what began as a theory of the universal ground consciousness or *ālayavijñāna* gradually becomes, through centuries of doctrinal transformation, a conceptual articulation of the nondual reality itself.

This transformative process challenges a persistent portrayal of Dzogchen as purely experiential and, therefore, not philosophical or even anti-philosophical. The sources examined in this study reveal just the opposite. The sustained engagement with inherited doctrinal categories and the sophisticated attempts to articulate nondual insights without falling into the extremes of nihilism or eternalism embody an intricately made philosophical apparatus. Dzogchen thinkers did not reject philosophical reasoning; they reoriented it toward an (almost) impossible direction—how to describe the ultimate reality without reifying it.

More broadly, the materials examined here invite reconsideration of what the *Ground/ground* can signify within Buddhist thought. Across the sources studied in this dissertation, the Ground/ground shifts from serving solely as a psychological substrate explaining karmic continuity to encapsulating an ontological horizon of manifestation, and finally, embracing also a ground that is beyond conditions and causality. In a way, such an all-encompassing framework destines the *Ground/ground* to be haunted by the language of the universal ground consciousness. At the same time, Dzogchen thinkers seek to avoid any entity (including mental ones, such as mind) in conceptualizing this term. This is their unique philosophical strategy: rather than rejecting a ground that one could cling onto, Dzogchen thought redefines it as groundless.

In this redefinition, the Ground/ground is neither origin nor destination, neither a container nor the contained, neither cause nor effect. It becomes the condition under which the dualities of origin and manifestation, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, delusion and awakening lose their ground. The Ground/ground is no longer a metaphysical substrate; it is a conceptual expression of the nonduality itself.

The historical evolution traced in this dissertation, therefore, illuminates a broader pattern within Buddhist intellectual history. Concepts endure not because they remain unchanged but because they are repeatedly reengineered in response to new philosophical and soteriological challenges. The Dzogchen Ground exemplifies this process. It absorbs the explanatory reach of *ālayavijñāna*, appropriates the soteriological optimism of *tathāgatagarbha*, and ultimately recasts both within a framework that is not confined by either of these promises. As the Ground/ground lacks a commitment to ontological reification, it opens widely all possibilities of reinvention.

Recovering this layered formation reveals how Tibetan Buddhist thinkers reshape inherited conceptual tools to articulate a nondual account of the reality without recourse to substantial metaphysics. The Dzogchen Ground/ground that emerges from this lineage of thinking is therefore neither a concrete entity nor an insubstantial essence. It is where appearance and emptiness, continuity and freedom, delusion and awakening dissolve without a universal ground as a foundation.

While this dissertation focuses on the formation of the Dzogchen Ground/ground from the Dunhuang period to Longchenpa's fourteenth-century syntheses, the epistemological history of the Ground/ground does not end with the canonization of the Heart Essence corpus. Longchenpa provides the most influential formulation of the relation between the primordial Ground (*ye gzhi*) and abiding reality (*gnas lugs*), later Nyingma authors do not simply preserve his framework. Rather, the post-Longchenpa period of Dzogchen reflects an ongoing process of hermeneutical renewal through which the Ground/ground continues to be reinterpreted in response to new ritualistic, contemplative, and doctrinal contexts. These conceptual movements indicate a need for theoretical adaptations, since from the fourteenth century onward, the rise of the Treasure Revelation (*gter ma*) tradition has exponentially proliferated, and the majority of the Treasure Revelation cycles involve ritual manuals and liturgical sadhanas. Indeed, the discovery of treasure texts has changed the landscape of Tibetan Buddhism and demanded (re)appropriations that led to the innovation of the following authors, as since then, meditation and practice have been done through recitation and visualization.

Thus, one important direction for future research lies in the Treasure Revelation tradition, where engaging with the treasures functions not merely as preservation of earlier esoteric teachings but also as a major engine for doctrinal innovation. Through the activity of treasure-revealers (*gter ston*), Dzogchen remains a living and adaptive tradition capable of (re)presenting its core insights in contemporary moments while maintaining continuity with earlier lineages. The following figures are four among the hundreds of treasure revealers who came after Longchenpa. I list them here, as they each represent a trend of conceptual (re)interpretation or (re)articulation of the interrelationality between *ālayavijñāna* and the Ground/ground.

A significant figure is Padma Lingpa (1450–1521), whose revealed cycles and commentarial writings occupy a crucial place in the later Nyingma reception of Dzogchen Heart Essence thought. Specifically, his *Six Matrices of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po klong drug pa*) and its commentary are important, as he reworks a famous allegory of *ālayavijñāna* and *dharmakāya* that appears in the *Seventeen Tantras* to reintroduce *ālayavijñāna* into a tantric and Dzogchen framework in ways that complicate the more familiar presentation of *ālaya* as merely delusive. In doing so, he proposes an innovative understanding of how ordinary consciousness could participate in the transformative process that leads to a recognition of the luminous awareness.

Another major line of inquiry concerns Jigme Lingpa (1730–1798), whose visionary and scholastic writings keep Longchenpa's legacy alive and inaugurate the Longchen Nyingthig lineage. Inspired by Longchenpa's differentiation between the Ground and abiding reality, Jigme Lingpa further clarifies these two while contextualizing them through liturgy. Thus, his works preserve the theoretical precision of earlier Heart Essence thought while reframing the Ground/ground within a practice-oriented register. In texts such as the *Aspiration Prayer of the Ground, Path, and Fruition*, the Ground/ground appears as not only a philosophical idea but also a performative site for confession, reintegration, and realization. This liturgical turn offers practitioners more instruments as they travel in the vast landscape of Dzogchen theory and/as/is practice.

Moreover, the development of the Ground/ground can be seen in the writings of Mipham Rinpoche (1846–1912), whose philosophical works further synthesize the conceptual vocabulary of the Longchen Nyingthig tradition. Mipham's discussions of the ground, path, and fruition

demonstrate how Dzogchen categories are re-presented within an explicitly scholastic framework with great care. He strives for precision in his definition of terms while, at the same time, preserving their nondual orientation. Additionally, as *An Aspiration to the Ultimate Meaning of the Indivisible Ground, Path, and Fruition of Mañjuśrī's Great Perfection* shows, Mipham, leveraging his vast philosophical knowledge, continues Jigme Linpa's project on liturgy by sharpening the Dzogchen view and meditation through aspirational prayers.

Furthermore, later masters such as Adzom Drugpa (1842-1924) revisit earlier typologies of the universal ground, including classifications (such as *the conjoining universal ground* and the *fundamental genuine universal ground*) that resonate with the Dunhuang materials and Nupchen's writings examined in the first two chapters of this dissertation. In his *Essence of Gnosis of Excellent Path: A Special Guidebook on the Overall Innermost Secret of the Luminous Great Perfection*, Adzom Drugpa's reinterpretations of these terms suggest that early Tibetan vocabularies of *kun gzhi* do not disappear but continue to circulate in various contexts. Specifically, linking the earliest strata of Tibetan *ālaya* discourse with their later reinterpretations, he distinguishes *ālaya* from *dharmakāya*, which is the crucial point for the Dzogchen contemplative practice.

In short, later Dzogchen Ground/ground discourse could deepen our understanding of the Treasure Revelation tradition as a mode of doctrinal production and clarify how central categories such as *gzhi*, *kun gzhi*, *ye gzhi*, and *gnas lugs* have been continually reworked across multiple contemplative settings, bridging the artificial divide between "classical" and "modern" Dzogchen.

Thus, the history traced in this dissertation should be understood not as a closed arc ending with Longchenpa, but as the beginning of a larger inquiry. My study has shown how the Dzogchen Ground/ground emerges through the transformation of *ālayavijñāna* and *tathāgatagarbha* discourse. It is my hope that the project will serve as the ground for future work that explores how the ever-shifting Ground/ground continues to be (re)interpreted in later centuries.

Moreover, this dissertation has sought to recover a persistent philosophical conundrum—how to speak of continuity without implying substance, manifestation without foundation, and liberation without cause. Throughout history, the emergence and constant (re)interpretations of the Dzogchen Ground/ground exemplify one of the most ambitious responses to this dilemma of Buddhist thought. This intellectual trajectory also demonstrates that doctrinal continuity in Buddhism is never mere repetition. It is a process of reinvention. In this sense, the Ground/ground remains "ever-shifting" not because it struggles with coherence, but because its coherence lies precisely in its interpretive possibility to be rethought. To follow the history of the Ground/ground, therefore, is to witness Tibetan Buddhist philosophy at one of its most pivotal moments. While the language of the Ground is retained, a fixed designation is dismantled whereby the Ground is articulated as groundless.

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX A

#### 1. Summary

Pelliot Tibétain 654 preserves an early Tibetan scholastic presentation of Yogācāra consciousness theory of the eightfold model of the mind, with a focus on the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*; *ālayavijñāna*). The discussion unfolds through a structure of thirteen categories: (1) nature; (2) objects; (3) accompanying mental factors; (4) dharmic classification; (5) activity; (6) divisions; (7) characteristics; (8) superiority; (9) synonyms; (10) analogies; (11) logical proof; (12) reversal; and (13) transformation. In this way, the text presents the universal ground as the indispensable basis for karmic continuity, a storehouse of habitual tendencies, and possibilities for rebirth and liberation. Supported by scriptural citation and rigorous reasoning, it establishes the necessity of *ālayavijñāna* while affirming its impermanent nature. It argues that the reversal and transformation of *ālayavijñāna* signify the cessation of *samsāra* and the attainment of mirror-like gnosis and *dharmakāya*. In doing so, this text underscores the central soteriological role of *ālayavijñāna* in early Tibetan Yogācāra thought.

#### 2. Translation

[folio 1r] མཆོག་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱུད་རེ་རེ་ལ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་ཚོགས་བརྒྱད་ཡོད་དེ། དེ་ཡང་གང་ལགས་ཞེ་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་དང་། ཡིད་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། རྒྱལ་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་སྟོན་ཏེ་སྟོ་ལྔའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་འོ། དེ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ཡང་དོན་བཅུ་གསུམ་གྱིས་བསྟན་དོ། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ལ་དོན་རྣམ་པ་དགུས་བསྟན། ཡིད་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་དོན་དགུས་བསྟན། སྟོ་ལྔའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་དོན་བརྒྱད་གྱིས་བསྟན་དོ།

[folio 1r] Each stream of each individual being has a collection of eight consciousnesses. Again, what are those? They are the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa*; *ālayavijñāna*), afflicted mind (*nyon mongs pa can gyi yid*; *kliṣṭamānas*), the mental consciousness (*yid kyi rnam par shes pa*; *mānovijñāna*), and the eye-consciousness and so forth—the consciousnesses of the five sense-doors. Moreover, universal ground consciousness may be taught with thirteen topics, the afflicted mind may be taught with nine topics, mental consciousness may be taught with nine topics, and the consciousnesses of five sense-doors may be taught with eight topics.

དེ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དོན་བཅུ་གསུམ་གྱིས་བསྟན་པ་གང་ཞེ་ན།

༡. ཀུན་གཞིའི་རང་བཞིན་དང་།
༢. ཀུན་གཞིའི་དབྱིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་དང་།
༣. ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་དང་ལྔ་བ་དང་།

༤. ཚཱ་མ་བཞི་ལས་ཀུན་གཞི་ཚཱ་གང་ཡིན་བ་དང་།
༥. ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་ཅི་བྱེད་བ་དང་།
༦. ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དབྱེན་དུ་ཡོད་བ་དང་།
༧. ཀུན་གཞི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཅི་ཡིན་བ་དང་།
༨. ཀུན་གཞི་བྱད་བར་ཅིས་འཕགས་བ་དང་།
༩. ཀུན་གཞི་མྱེད་གི་རྣམ་གངས་དུ་ཡོད་བ་དང་།
༡༠. ཀུན་གཞི་མཐུན་བའི་དབེ་དང་ཅི་ལྟར་བསྐྱུན་བ་དང་།
༡༡. ཀུན་གཞི་བསྐྱུན་བའི་རིགས་བ་ཅི་ལྟར་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱུན་བ་དང་།
༡༢. ཀུན་གཞི་ཐོག་པའི་དུས་འཁོར་བར་ཅི་ལྟར་སྐྱེ་བ་སྐྱེ་ལེན་བ་དང་།
༡༣. ཀུན་གཞི་གནས་ཐུར་པའོ།

What are those thirteen topics regarding teaching on universal ground consciousness?

1. The nature of the universal ground (*kun gzhi'i rang bzhin*),
2. The perceptual objects of the universal ground (*kun gzhi'i dmyigs pa'i yul*),
3. The companion mental factors with which the universal ground is endowed (*kun gzhi 'khor sems las byung ba du dang ldan pa*),
4. Among the four dharmas, which one is the universal ground (*chos rnam bzhi las kun gzhi chos gang yin ba*)?
5. What kind of activity does the universal ground involve (*kun gzhi las ci byed pa*)?
6. How many divisions are within the universal ground (*kun gzhi la dbye ba du yod pa*)?
7. What is the characteristic of the universal ground (*kun gzhi mtshan nyid ci yin ba*)?
8. What makes the universal ground superior (*kun gzhi khyad par cis 'phags pa*)?
9. How many different names does the universal ground have (*kun gzhi mying gi rnam grants du yod pa*)?
10. How can analogies indicate the universal ground (*kun gzhi mthun pa'i dpe dang ci ltar bstun pa*)?
11. How does the reasoning that establishes that the universal ground exists establish that the universal ground exists (*kun bzhi bsgrub pa'i rigs pa ci ltar kun gzhi yod par bsgrub ba*)?
12. When the universal ground is reversed, how one does not take rebirth in *samsāra* (*kun gzhi dog ba'i dus 'khor bar ci ltar skye ba myi len pa*), and
13. The transformation of universal ground (*kun gzhi gnas gyur pa'o*).

དེ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་དབྱེན་བ་རྣམས་པ་གཉིས་ཏེ། གཞི་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་། སྐྱེར་བའི་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་འོ།

1. Furthermore, the universal ground has two types: “the fundamental genuine universal ground” (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*).

ཀུན་གཞི་འི་དབྱེགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཡང་གསུམ་ཏེ། གང་ཞེ་ན། བྱི་སྟོང་གྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་དང་། རང་བཟུང་གྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་དང་། ཀུན་བརྟགས་གྱི་བག་ཆགས་སོ། །

2. There are three kinds of perceptual objects of the universal ground. What are they? [1] the outer world that is the container, [2] the inner world of contained beings, and [3] the habitual tendencies of conceptual designations (*kun brtags*).

ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་འདུ་བྱེད་ཕྱ་བཅུ་ཙུག་ཅིག་ལས་ནི་ཕྱ་ཀུན་དུ་འགོ་བ་དང་ཕྱན་ཏེ། གང་ཞེ་ན། རེག་པ་དང་། ཚོར་བ་བྱང་སྟོམས་དང་། འདུ་ཤེས་དང་། ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་དང་། [འདུ་བྱེད་སེམས་པ་?]དེ་དག་དང་ལྷན་དུ་འགོགས་སོ།

3. Among the fifty-one conditional mental factors, the universal ground is endowed with the five ever-present companions. What are they? It [*ālaya*] is accompanied by [1] contact (*reg pa*), [2] sensation (*tshor ba*), [3] ideation ( 'du shes), [4] mental engagement (*vid la byed pa*), and [5] volitional intention ( 'du byed sems pa)].

ཚོས་རྣམ་བཞི་ལས་དགེ་བ་དང་མྱ་དགེ་བ་དང་། བསྐྱབས་ལ་ལྷང་དུ་མ་བསྟན་པ་དང་། མ་བསྐྱབས་ལ་ལྷང་དུ་མ་བསྟན་པ་འོ། །དེ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་མ་བསྐྱབས་[1v]ལྷང་དུ་མ་བསྟན་པ་འོ།

4. Among the four dharmas, [1] the virtuous, [2] the non-virtuous, [3] the obscured-and-undetermined, and [4] the unobscured-and-undetermined are taught. Of those, the universal ground consciousness is unobscured and undetermined [1v]

ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་ནི་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཏེ། རྒྱ་མཐུན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་དང་། རྣམ་པར་སྦྱིན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གཉིས་འཛིན་ཏོ།

5. There are two kinds of activities in the universal ground: causally concordant habitual tendencies and ripened habitual tendencies.<sup>170</sup>

ཀུན་གཞིའི་དབྱེ་བ་ནི་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཏེ། རྒྱ་ཡང་ཡིན། འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་ཡིན་ནོ།

6. The universal ground has two subdivisions: the cause and also the fruit.

ཀུན་གཞིའི་མཚན་ཉིད་ནི་མུ་སྟེགས་འདོད་པ་ལྟར་རྟག་པ་མ་ཡིན། སངས་རྒྱལ་བཞེད་པ་ལྟར་སྦྱིན་ཏེ། རེག་པའི་རང་བཞིན་སྐྱད་ཅིག་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

7. Regarding the characteristic of the universal ground, as opposed to the non-Buddhists who assert that it is permanent, Buddhists affirm that it has an impermanent nature and is momentary.

ཀུན་གཞི་ཁྱད་བར་ནི་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་དཔགས་ཏེ། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་ཚོགས་བརྒྱད་དུ་འདྲ་བ་ལས། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་ཚོགས་བདུན་གྱིས་ནི་བག་ཆགས་འཛིན་པར་བྱེ་བུས་ལ། ཀུན་གཞིས་བག་ཆགས་འཛིན་བུས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཁྱད་བར་དུ་འཕགས་སོ། ཡང་ན་མུ་སྟེགས་ཅན་གྱིས་བརྟགས་པ། རྒྱལ་དང་མུན་པ་དང་སྟེང་སྟོབས་གསུམ་ཆ་མཉམ་བ་ལས་འགོ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུར་འདོད་དེ། རེ་ཤིག་ཡིན་དུ་བརྟག་ན་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་མ་ཡིན་བས། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡིན་བས་ཁྱད་བར་དུ་འཕགས་སོ།

<sup>170</sup> See IOL Tib J 708, f. 3v.2: རྒྱ་མཐུན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་དང་རྣམ་པར་སྦྱིན་པའི་འབྲས་བུའོ། །Here, it reads 'bras bu rather than bag chags.

8. The universal ground is superior in terms of two aspects: [1] the eight collected consciousnesses are similar, but the other seven collected consciousnesses cannot perform the function of holding the habitual tendencies. Because the universal ground consciousness can hold the habitual tendencies, [it] is superior. [2] On the other hand, regarding the beliefs of non-Buddhists, [they] assert that sentient beings are created out of a balance of dust (*rdul*; *rajas*), darkness (*mun pa*; *tamas*), and courage (*snying stobs*; *sattva*).<sup>171</sup> Even if that were so, since that is not a consciousness, because the universal ground is a consciousness, it is superior.

ཀུན་གཞི་ལྷིང་གི་རྣམ་གྲངས་ནི། ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ། རྩ་བའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ། འཁོར་བའི་ཅི་སྲིད་པའི་ཕུང་པོ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ། སྲིད་པའི་ཡན་ལག་ཅེས་ཀྱང་བྱ། སེམས་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱའོ།

9. As for the synonyms of the universal ground, [it] is also called “the universal ground.” [It] is also called “the root consciousness” and “the consciousness that takes [rebirth].” It is also called “the aggregate that [endures] as long as *samsāra* exists.” It is also called “the limb of existence,” and “mind” (*sems*).

ཀུན་གཞི་མཐུན་པའི་དཔེ་ནི། བགས་ཆགས་སྒོ་བར་བྱ་བའི་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། ལྷན་ཅིག་དུ་སྐྱེ་འགག་མང་པོ་བྱས་པ་ལས། ཆོགས་དྲུག་པོ་འགགས་ནས་ལས་རྣམ་གསུམ་[གིས་] ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་བཞག་པའི་དཔེ་ནི། མེ་དྲོག་སྒྲ་མ་དང་ཉིལ་གྱིས་བསྟན། ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དུས་ནི་ཐ་དད་པར་བྱེ་མངོན་ལ། འབྲས་བུར་སྐྱེན་པའི་དུས་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་བག་ཆགས་ཐ་དད་པར་མངོན་པའི་དཔེ་ནི། དར་ཀར་ཆོ་གས་(ཅུ་)བསྟན་དྲོ། ཀུན་གཞི་དང་བག་ཆགས་གཅིག་པ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ཐ་དད་པ་ཡང་[2r]མ་ཡིན་པའི་དཔེ་དེས་ནི་སྒོག་པ་དང་ཕུར་(མོར་)བུས་བསྟན་དྲོ། ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་ཆོགས་དྲུག་པོ་བྱུང་ནས། སྐར་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་སྒོ་བའི་དཔེ་ནི་མཆོ་དང་རྒྱབས་སུ་བསྟན། ཀུན་གཞི་རྒྱ་ཡང་ཡིན་འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་ཡིན་པའི་དཔེ་ནི་ཤིང་དྲོག་ཀྱི་ཕུས་བསྟན། ཀུན་གཞི་གནས་གུར་པའི་དཔེ་ནི། སྒོང་དྲུག་དང་སྟན་གྱིས་བསྟན་དྲོ།

10. Regarding some analogies for the universal ground: During the many arisings and ceasings [of the six consciousnesses] which accompany the universal ground consciousness in which the habitual tendencies are imprinted, when the six consciousnesses cease, the habitual tendencies are imprinted in the universal ground due to the three [types of] actions.<sup>172</sup> This may be taught using the metaphor of nutmeg flowers and oil. When the habitual tendencies are within the universal ground, they do not appear separately [from that universal ground], however, when ripened into a result, the universal ground and the habitual tendencies appear separately. This may be taught using the metaphor of white silk and a [staining] fruit pit. The universal ground and the habitual tendencies are neither the same nor different. This may be taught using the metaphor of garlic and a bowl.<sup>173</sup> The six consciousnesses that emerge from the universal ground later, as the habitual tendencies, re-imprint in that ground.<sup>174</sup> This may be taught using the metaphor of the ocean and waves. The universal ground is both cause and result. This may be taught using the metaphor of an apple. The transformation of the universal ground may be taught using the metaphor of a container of poison and its medicine [being poured into it].

<sup>171</sup> These are the three *guṇas* of Sāṃkhya thought that make up the world.

<sup>172</sup> They are virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral.

<sup>173</sup> The manuscript reads *phur bu*, but ITJ708 reads *phor bu*.

<sup>174</sup> Note that the subject changes from before to after the *nas*, i.e., from *tshogs drug po* to *bag chags*, which would be poor grammar. However, these two are not ultimately different, so in a more philosophical sense the grammar is correct. This also implies that the six consciousnesses and the habitual tendencies are both identical and different.

ཀུན་གཞི་བསྐྱབ་པའི་རིགས་པ་ནི། ལྷང་དང་རིགས་པས་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ཏེ། ལྷང་ནི་བཙུག་ལྷན་འདས་ཀྱིས།

11. As for the logic proving the universal ground exists, its existence is established through the authoritative scriptures and reasoning. For an authoritative scripture, the Blessed One said:

ཐོག་མ་ཐུང་པའི་དུས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས།  
ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་གནས་ཡིན་ཏེ།  
དེ་ཡོད་པས་ན་འགྲོ་ཀུན་དང་།  
ཐུང་ན་འདས་པ་ཡང་ཐོབ་པར་འགྱུར།<sup>175</sup>

ཞེས་འགྱུར།

The expanse of beginningless time  
Is the base of all phenomena.  
Because sentient beings have it,  
All of them will attain *nirvāṇa*.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Note this verse is found in Asaṅga's commentary on the *Mahāyāna-uttaratantra-śāstra*. See སྟོབ་དཔོན་ཐོག་མ་ཐུང་གི་  
ཐོག་མ་ཐུང་པའི་དུས་ཀྱི་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་གནས་པར་བཤད་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས།, Tōh. 4025 (D4025), p. 111b.6-7): ཐོག་མ་ཐུང་དུས་ཅན་གྱི་  
ལམས། ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་གནས་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ཡོད་པས་ན་འགྲོ་ཀུན་དང་། ཐུང་ན་འདས་པ་ཡང་ཐོབ་པ་ཡིན།.

<sup>176</sup> See David Higgins, "Buddha in the Storehouse: Mi bskyod rdo rje on the Relationship between *Tathāgatagarbha* and *Ālayavijñāna*," (in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 42, 2019): 182. He translates:

The beginningless element (*dhātu*)  
Is the basis of all phenomena.  
Because it exists, [it allows for] all forms of life  
As well as the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

In its footnote 27, Higgins writes: Although no longer extant, this important *sūtra* is quoted in the RGVV. The passage in question found at RGVV 72.13–14 reads as follows: *anādikāliko dhātuḥ sarvadhar- masamāśrayaḥ / tasmin sati gatiḥ sarvā nirvāṇādhigamo 'pi ca* // See also RGVV I.155 (J I.152) and Takasaki 1966: 290–291. The *Mahāyānābhīdharmaśāstra* has also been quoted in the *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya* (tr. by Paramārtha, Taisho Edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka, XXXI, no. 1595, 157a) and the *Triṃśikābhāṣya* (TŚBh, Skt. ed. Lévi 1925: 37). The Tibetan translations of RGVV have *dbyings* instead of *kham*s (both being accepted translations of *dhātu*).

Also see Karl Brunnholzl's translation of *Compendium of the Mahāyāna*, vol. 1, p. 157:

The dhātu of beginningless time  
Is the foundation of all phenomena.  
Due to its existence, all forms of existence  
And also *nirvāṇa* are obtained.

Also see footnote 17, p 489.

རིགས་པ་ནི། ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་མེ་རུང་བའི་སྒྲོན་རྣམ་པ་བདུན་ཡོད་དོ། སྒྲོམས་པར་འབྲུག་པ་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་གྱི་དུས་དང་། ཚྲིགས་བྱུག་པོ་རྒྱན་ཆད་ནས་རིང་དུ་ཡོན་བ་དེ་བྱིས་རྒྱ་ཅི་ལས་བྱུང་། ལུས་ལས་བྱུང་ངམ་བྱ་ན་ནི། ལུས་གདོས་པ་ཅན་བཅས་པོ་ཡིན་བས། འབྲས་བུ་ཤེས་པ་འབྱུང་དུ་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ། རིགས་མེ་གཅིག་བའི་བྱིར་རོ། གཟུགས་མེད་པའི་ཁམས་སུ་ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཁམས་སུ། ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་འཁོར་དང་བཅས་ཏེ་འགགས་ནས་མེད་པ་དེ་ནི་ལུས་ཀྱང་མེད། ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་མྱོ་འདོད་ན་ཡིད་རྣམ་གཉིས་རྒྱ་གང་ལས་འབྱུང་བར་འགྱུར།

Logically, there are seven faults if [one posits] that there is no universal ground. During the time of the three aspects of deep meditative concentration, the collections of six consciousnesses are cut off for a long time. From which causes do they later re-arise? If [one] says they come from the body, since the body is physical matter, the resulting consciousness cannot come from [it] because they are not of the same order (*rigs*). Also, in the formless realm [of the meditation], which is a mental realm, the mental consciousness and the afflicted mental consciousness with its subsidiaries ceased, [so] there is no physical body. If one does not believe there is universal ground, from where do the two mental consciousnesses come? From what kind of cause?

གཞན་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་འགོ་བ་རིགས་ལྗེ་མེས་ཅན་རྣམས་རྒྱ་གང་ལས་བརྟེན་ཏེ་སྟེ་བར་འགྱུར། མེས་ཅན་སྟེ་བའི་རྒྱ་བག་ཆགས་ལས་བརྟེན་དགོས་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་བག་ཆགས་སྒྲོ་བའི་གཞི་མེད་ན། [2v]དགོ་བ་ལ་སྒྲོར་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ་དབེར་ན་སྒྲ་ཅི་དང་འདྲ། མྱོ་དགོ་བ་ལ་སྒྲོར་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ་སྒྲིག་སྒྱུ་དང་འདྲ། ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་སྒྲོར་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ། སྒྲིག་དང་འདྲ། གཟུགས་ཀྱི་ཕུང་པོ་ལ་སྒྲོར་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ། དབེར་རྟོ་བ་དང་འདྲ། ཚྲིགས་བྱུག་པོ་གཅིག་ལ་གཅིག་སྒྲོར་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ། གནས་དབང་པོ་ཐ་དད་པ་དང་། དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཐ་དད། བསམ་བ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཐ་དད། རང་ལ་རང་སྒྲོར་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ། སྒྲིག་བུ་རྩལ་ཆེ་ཡང་རང་ལ་རང་མྱོ་མཆོངས། རལ་གྱི་ཅི་ལྟར་རྣམ་པར་ལ་རང་མྱོ་ཆོད་པ་དང་། འདྲ་སྟེ། རང་ལ་བྱེད་པ་འགལ་ལོ། རྒྱ་ཅིག་མ་ལྟ་མས་མྱོ་མ་ལ་སྒྲོ་འམ་ཞེ་ན། དེ་ཡང་མྱོ་བདུབ་སྟེ། ལྟ་མ་མ་འགགས་པར་ནི་བྱི་མ་མྱོ་སྟེ་ལ། བྱི་མ་སྒྲིག་ཅོམ་ན་ནི་ལྟ་མ་འགགས་ཏེ་མྱོ་འཕྲད་པའི་བྱིར་རོ།

Moreover, if there is no universal ground, then, since beings of the five classes are all born in reliance on some causes, and those causes for beings' birth must rely on the habitual tendencies, then if there is no [neutral] universal ground that is the foundation for storing the habitual tendencies, they cannot be stored in virtue, or it would be like the example of musk [wherein the virtuous (musk-like) ground would make the unvirtuous habitual tendencies virtuous]. And they cannot be stored in non-virtue, or it would be like the example of garlic [wherein the virtuous habitual tendencies would be made unvirtuous]. They cannot be stored in the mental consciousness, because it is like lightning. They cannot be stored in the physical aggregate, because it is like a stone. They cannot be stored in any one of the six collections of consciousness, because the sense organs, the objects of perception, and the engaging thoughts are different from each other. And [the habitual tendencies of] each cannot be stored within itself, just as one cannot jump over oneself regardless of how acrobatic one is. Similarly, no matter how sharp a sword is, it cannot cut itself. It is contradictory that it is acting on itself. Suppose someone says, "the previous moment's [habitual tendencies are] stored in the subsequent moment's." That cannot be, because until the previous moment ceases, the subsequent moment cannot arise. Once the subsequent moment arises, the previous moment has ceased; therefore, they cannot meet.

དེ་ལྟར་ཅི་མཛོན་ཞེ་ན།

རྒྱལ་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་ཐུང་དེ།  
 ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་བྱིར།  
 རྒྱུ་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཐུང་བའི་བྱིར།<sup>177</sup>

Suppose someone says, “What proof do you have?” It is said:

The six [consciousnesses] are not connected  
 Because that would contradict them being different in three ways,<sup>178</sup>  
 And because their moments cannot exist together [i.e., at the same time].<sup>179</sup>  
 [If they were of the same order, they would become something other than themselves.]<sup>180</sup>

ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། དེ་ལས་མ་གཏོགས་པ་བག་ཆགས་བསྐྱོ་བའི་ཐབས་གཞན་ཐུང་བའི་བྱིར་རོ། འགོ་བ་རིགས་ལྔ་སེམས་ཅན་ཐུང་བར་  
<sup>181</sup>འགྱུར་རོ།

Apart from that, there is no other method of storing habitual tendencies. [Without the ālayavijñāna,] the five classes of sentient beings would not exist.

རྒྱུ་ཅིག་གཞན་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་ཐུང་དང་[\*ན་]། ཐུ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པ་ཡང་ཐོབ་པར་ཐུ་འགྱུར་ཏེ། སྒྲིབ་པ་རྣམ་གཉིས་སྤང་ནི་གང་ལ་  
 གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་། རྒྱུ་ཅིག་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ནི་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་གནས་སུ་ཐུ་བཟུང་བར་གོང་དུ་ཡང་བསྟན། གནས་སུ་བཟུག་ན་ཡང་ལམ་གྱི་དུས་  
 ར་འགགས་ཏེ་ཐུ་འབྱུང་། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་སྤང་བར་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་བས། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་གནས་པའི་གཞི་ཐུ་རུང་། ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་

<sup>177</sup> See IOL Tib J 708, folio 179. recto: ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་བྱིར། རྒྱལ་པོ་དག་དང་འབྲེལ་ཐུང་དེ། རྒྱུ་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཐུང་བའི་  
 བྱིར། རིགས་ལས་བསྐྱེད་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ། This manuscript cites four lines, also reversed the first two lines, and added the fourth  
 line. This citation is from རྒྱལ་པོ་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་བསྟན་པ། (DTG 134, p. 7b.1-2): རྒྱལ་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་  
 འབྲེལ་བའི་བྱིར། རྒྱུ་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་བྱིར། རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ།

<sup>178</sup> I.e., their respectively having different sense organs, objects of perception, and engaging thoughts.

<sup>179</sup> Note the difference in the second line in this verse, where the Sde dge reads: ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་བྱིར།. Our text,  
 PT654, (འགལ་བ་ instead of འབྲེལ་བ་) reads better. Our text agrees, however, with ITJ708 and the *mun pa'i go cha* on  
 the wording of line 2 (ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་བྱིར།), and note the reversed order of the first two lines. Strangely, the  
 same verse in our text follows the Sde dge order: རྒྱལ་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་ཐུང་དེ། ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་བྱིར། རྒྱུ་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཐུང་  
 བའི་བྱིར།. Also, PT654 is missing one line. The Peking edition (Q.4543, 8a.3) of Asaṅga's text reads: རྒྱལ་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་  
 མེད་དེ། ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་བྱིར། རྒྱུ་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་བྱིར། རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ།, and it follows our preference for  
 འགལ་བ་.

<sup>180</sup> ITJ708 and *Mun pa'i go cha* both include the fourth line, so it is translated here. For Karl Brunnholzl's  
 translation of Asaṅga's verse, see his *Compendium of the Mahāyāna* vol. 1, 165:

The six [consciousnesses] are not connected  
 Because that would contradict their threefold difference  
 And because there are no simultaneous moments.  
 If this referred to type, something else would follow.

<sup>181</sup> Here I have corrected an error in the manuscript, from *myed bra 'igyur* to *myed bar 'gyur*. ITJ708 reads *myed pa'i skyon du 'gyur*.

པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་གཉེན་པོའི་སེམས་སུ་[3r]འགྱུར་བས། མྱེ་མཐུན་བའི་ཚུགས་ཉོན་མོངས་གནས་སུ་མྱེ་བདུབ། ལྷགས་བསྐྱེགས་པ་ལ་རྩི་  
སྒྱུར་གནས་པའི་མཐུ་མཉེད་པ་དང་འདྲ་བ། ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་གནས་སུ་མི་བདུབ་པས། མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པས(པ)། གསུམ་ཆར་ཐོབ་  
པར་མྱེ་འགྱུར་རོ།

There is also another fault. If the universal ground (*ālaya*) did not exist, then *nirvāṇa* would not be attainable. In abandoning the two kinds of obscurations, where would those reside to be abandoned? It has already been taught above that afflictive emotions can not reside in the consciousnesses of the five sense doors. Even if they could reside [there], during the paths [of seeing and meditation], they would cease, no longer arising. Since the afflictive mental consciousness is to be abandoned, it is not suitable as a basis where the afflictive emotions could reside. Since the mental consciousness will become the antidote mind,<sup>182</sup> the afflictive emotion that is opposed to [the antidote] will not be able to reside in [it], just as a beetle has no power to stay on a piece of burning iron. Since [none of these] can be where the afflictive emotions reside, [without the universal ground,] the three *nirvāṇas* can not be attained.

ཀུན་གཞི་ཐོག་པའི་དུས་ནི། ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་མ་ལུས་པ་སྤངས་ནས། འཁོར་བའི་རྒྱན་བཅད་དེ། དག་བཅོམ་པའི་  
འབྲས་བུ་ཐོབ་པའི་དུས་སུ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལྷག་པ་ཡིན་རོ། །

12. When universal ground has reversed, all habitual tendencies of karma and afflictions are abandoned, whereupon the stream of *samsāra* is cut off. When the fruit of *nirvāṇa* is attained, this is the reversal of the universal ground.

གནས་གྱུར་པ་ནི་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཤེས་བྱའི་སྒྲིབ་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཆ་སྤྲོ་མ་ཡན་ཅད་སྤངས་ནས། གནས་གྱུར་ཏེ་མྱེ་ལོང་ལྷ་བྱའི་ཡེ་  
ཤེས་ཐོབ་ནས། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྱུར་གྱུར་པས་གནས་གྱུར་བ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །

13. Regarding the transformation [of the universal ground], the subtle habitual tendencies of [both] obscurations—of the afflictions and the knowable—are abandoned and transformed, respectively. Then mirror-like gnosis is attained, and [the universal ground consciousness] transforms into *dharmakāya*.<sup>183</sup>

ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་ཆོགས་དྲུག་ལ། འོན་དགུས་བསྟན་ཏེ། གནས་དང་། དཔྱེགས་པའི་ཡུལ་དང་། འཁོར་དང་། ལས་  
དང་། ཆོས་དང་། རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་དང་། འཇུག་པ་དང་། ཐོག་པ་དང་། གནས་གྱུར་པའོ།

The six sense consciousnesses including the mental consciousness have nine categories: [1] the place, [2] the perceptual object, [3] the companions, [4] the actions, [5] dharmas, [6] their natures, [7] the engaging, [8] the reversing, and [9] the transformation.

[3v] ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ལ་ཡང་འོན་དགུས་བསྟན་ཏེ། གནས་དང་། དཔྱེགས་པའི་ཡུལ་དང་། རེས་ཆོག་དང་། འཁོར་  
དང་། ལས་དང་། ཆོས་དང་། བསྐྱབ་པའི་རིགས་པ་དང་། ཐོག་པ་དང་། གནས་གྱུར་པའོ།

<sup>182</sup> Mun pa'i go cha has *gnyen po lam gyi ye shes* ("gnosis of the antidote path"). ITJ708, 7v.7 has *gnyen po ye shes*.

<sup>183</sup> Despite all the similarities between this system and that of the later Nyingtik tradition, this seems to be a point of difference, where the *dharmakāya* is not clearly distinguished from the ultimate Ground.

The afflictive mental consciousness also has nine categories: [1] the place, [2] the perceptual object, [3] its etymology, [4] the companions, [5] the actions, [6] dharmas, [7] the reason for its establishment, [8] the reversing, and [9] the transformation.

## APPENDIX B

### 1. Summary

IOL Tib J 708 preserves an early Tibetan scholastic exposition of Yogācāra consciousness theory that frames *ālayavijñāna* as the path to Buddhahood. It describes the eight collections of consciousness as the causal basis of three awakened bodies and four gnoses. Additionally, the text claims that compounded and un-compounded phenomena, saṃsāric afflictive processes and their pure reversal, as well as external matters and internal mental activities are all subsumed within the eightfold consciousness system. The universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*; *ālayavijñāna*) is treated in a similar manner as Pelliot Tibétain 654, but with one more topic. In other words, the discussion is structured into fourteen categories: (1) nature; (2) objects; (3) accompanying mental factors; (4) superiority; (5) activity; (6) divisions; (7) characteristic; (8) dharmic classification; (9) feelings; (10) synonyms; (11) analogies; (12) logical proof (including scripture, reasoning, and inference); (13) reversal; and (14) transformation, culminating in mirror-like gnosis. In doing so, the manuscript presents *ālayavijñāna* as the necessary ground for storing habitual tendencies and explaining continuity across meditative cessations and unconscious states. It also articulates the reversal and transformation of *ālayavijñāna* as the decisive mechanism by which *saṃsāra* is exhausted and awakening becomes possible.

### 2. Translation

[1.r] སྤྱིར་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་སངས་རྒྱས་པར་བསྟན། སངས་རྒྱས་ལ་ཅི་མངའ་ཞེས་བྱས་ན། སྤྱི་གསུམ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་བཞི་མངའ། སྤྱི་གསུམ་གི་རྒྱ་ནི་ཡེ་ཤེས་བཞི་ཡིན། ཡེ་ཤེས་བཞིའི་རྒྱ་ནི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་ཆོག་པ་བརྒྱད་ཡིན་པས། འོན་དང་འདུས་བྱས་གི་ཆོས་རྒྱ་དང་རྒྱུན་གིས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡང་འདྲིན་འདུས། འདུས་མ་བྱས་གི་ཆོས་རྒྱ་དང་རྒྱུན་གིས་མ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡང་འདྲིན་འདུས། ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཆོས་འཁོར་བ་ལུགས་ནས་འབྱུང་བ་ཡང་འདྲིན་འདུས། རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བའི་ཆོས་འཁོར་བ་ལུགས་ལས་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡང་འདྲིན་འདུས། སྤྱིར་ཆོས་བཅས་པོ་ཡང་འདྲིན་འདུས། རྣམ་གི་ཆོས་ཤེས་པ་ཅན་ཡང་འདྲིན་འདུས་པ་ཡིན་པས། ད་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་ཆོག་པ་བརྒྱད་བཤད་དགོས་པ་ལ། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དོན་བརྩམས་བཞིས་བཤད་ལས།

[1.r] In general, it is taught that all phenomena are the buddha. What is the buddha endowed with? He is endowed with three awakened bodies and four gnoses. The cause for the three awakened bodies is the four gnoses. Since the cause of the four gnoses is the eight collections of consciousnesses, compounded things produced by causes and conditions are subsumed in these [eight consciousnesses], and un-compounded things not produced by causes and conditions are also subsumed in these. The afflicted dharmas that progressively produce (*anulomah*) *saṃsāra* are also subsumed in these. Completely pure phenomena that progressively reverse saṃsāra are also subsumed in these. External phenomena, all matters, are also subsumed in these. Internal phenomena, i.e. conscious beings, are also subsumed in these. Therefore, now the eight collections of consciousnesses need to be explained. The fourteen categories of the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) are as follows:

[དང་པོ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་རང་བཞིན་]

ཀུན་གཞི་རང་བཞིན་ཞེས་བྱ་ལ། རང་བཞིན་གོང་དུ་བཤད། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་འོག་དུ་བཤད། རང་བཞིན་ལ་ཡང་། འོན་གཉིས་  
ཏེ། གཞི་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་། སྦྱར་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལོ།

Regarding “the universal ground,” its nature will be explained first, and then the consciousness will be explained later. Its nature has two categories: “the fundamental genuine universal ground” (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*) and “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba’i don gyi kun gzhi*).

གཞི་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་འཁམས་གསུམ་ས་དགུས་བསྐྱས་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་རྒྱ་ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པས་ནི་  
བྱས། འབས་བྱ་སྦྱོར་བ་རྣམ་པ་བཞིར་ནི་སྦྱོས། ཟས་བཞི་ལ་ནི་རྟེན། སྤང་པོ་ལྔ་ནི་སྦྱོན། ལམ་རྒྱུད་ལྔ་ནི་འཁོར། འགོ་བ་རིས་དྲག་དུ་  
སྤང་། དེ་རེ་རེ་ལ་སྤང་པོ་ལྔ་ཡོད། སྦྱོར་མཆོད་བརྒྱ་གཉིས་ཡོད། འཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་ཡོད། འཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་དུ་ནི་སྦྱོས། སྦྱོར་མཆོད་  
བརྒྱ་གཉིས་ལ་ནི་དམིགས། སྤང་པོ་ལྔ་ལ་རྟེན་བཅས་ནས་རྒྱ་དགེ་པ་དང་སྦྱོར་དགེ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་བསགས་པའི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པས། གཞི་  
དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

Regarding what is called “the fundamental genuine universal ground,” all sentient beings who are the gathered within the nine *bhūmis* and the three realms,<sup>184</sup> who are created by their causes—karmas and afflictions—are born into the four types of birth as a result. They rely on the four types of foods, ripen into the five aggregates, wander in the five streams of the path,<sup>185</sup> and appear as the six classes of beings. Each of those beings has five aggregates, twelve *āyatanas*, and eighteen elements. They are born with eighteen elements, perceive the twelve *āyatanas*, and rely on the five aggregates. Because it has become a ground for storing the habitual tendencies of the virtuous and non-virtuous causes, [it is] called “the genuine foundation of the ground.”

སྦྱར་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཤེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། རྒྱ་གར་སྤང་དུ་ཨ་ལ་ཡ་ན་དབྱིག་ཡ་ན་ཞེས་བྱ། བོ་སྤང་དུ་སྦྱར་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་  
བྱའོ།<sup>186</sup> དེ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། འཇུག་པའི་[1.v]ཚུགས་དྲག་གཉིས་མ་དང་བའི་ཚུལ་དུ་སྦྱར་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན་མ་ན་  
རེ་བྱ་ཁྱོད་མ་ང་ལས་བྱུང་བེར་བའམ། བྱ་ན་རེ་མ་ཁྱོད་ལས་བྱུང་བྱུང་བེར་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་ཀྱང་ཚུགས་དྲག་  
བྱུང་། ཚུགས་དྲག་ལས་ཀྱང་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱུང་དེ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་རྒྱར་གྱུར་པའི་དུས་ན་ནི། ཀུན་གཞི་མ་འདྲ། ཚུགས་དྲག་བྱུང་། ཚུགས་  
དྲག་རྒྱར་གྱུར་པའི་དུས་ན་ཡང་དེ་དང་འདྲ། དེ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་འཇུག་པའི་ཚུགས་དྲག་གཉིས་འཁོར་བ་ཐོག་མ་  
ཁྱོད་པའི་དུས་ནས། ཤེས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་རྒྱ་གཅིག་པ་ལས། ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་ཚུགས་དྲག་བྱུང་། ཚུགས་དྲག་སྦྱོར་ཡུལ་ལ་རེགས་པར་  
བཅད་ནས། ཡུལ་དང་ཤེས་པ་གཉི་གའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བསྐྱོས་པས། ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་སྦྱོར་དུ་ཐོགས་ཤིང་། ལུས་མཐུ་བྱུང་བར་  
ཅན་བསྐྱབ་པར་བྱ་བའི་རྒྱ་ཡང་ཚུགས་དྲག་པོ་ཡིན་ལ། བག་ཆགས་དེ་ལས་བརྟེན་ཏེ་བྱིས་ཚུགས་དྲག་པོ་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་  
ཡིན་པས། སྦྱར་བའི་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

<sup>184</sup> The first saṃsāric bhūmi is the desire realm, bhumis 2-5 are the four form realms, and bhumis 6-9 are the four formless realms.

<sup>185</sup> The five realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and gods.

<sup>186</sup> Note here that the term *ālayavjñāna* (*kun gzhi rnam par she pa*) refers to the conjoining universal ground (*sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*), and one of its sources seems to be the Chapter Five of *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* in Degé Kangyur, vol. 49 (Tōh. 106, mdo sde, ca), folios 12b.3: ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ་གྱེ། འདི་ལྟར་དེ་ལས་འདི་ལ་བྱུབ་པ་དང་  
བདེ་བ་གཅིག་པའི་དོན་གྱིས་ཀུན་དུ་སྦྱར་བ་དང་རབ་དུ་སྦྱར་བར་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

Regarding “the conjoining genuine universal ground,” or *ālayavijñāna* as it is called in Sanskrit, in Tibetan, it is called *sbyor ba don gi kun gzhi*. As for that, the universal ground consciousnesses of all and the engaging [1.v] six collections [of consciousness] are analogized in the mode of a mother and child’s [relationship]. For example, it is like [the mother] says, “you, a child, come from me,” and the child says, “I come from you, mother.”<sup>187</sup> The six collections [of consciousness] arise from the universal ground, and the universal ground also arises from the six collections.<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, when the universal ground serves as the cause, the universal ground is like a mother, and the six collections are like children. When the six collections serve as the cause, it is also like that. Moreover, the universal ground consciousness and the engaging six collections of [consciousness] have both been in the same entity of the cognitive nature from the beginningless time of cyclic existence. The six collections of [consciousness] arise from the universal ground and come into contact with objects and comprehend [them]. Since the habitual tendencies of both consciousness and object imprint on the universal ground, the term “universal ground” is applied. The causes that establish [the universal ground’s] particular powers are also the six-fold collection, and the universal ground is also the cause of the subsequent arising of the six-fold collection by means of those habitual tendencies. Thus, it is named “the genuine foundation of unification.”

རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ཡང་རྒྱ་གར་སྐད་དུ་སླེ་ཤྱི་ཏ་ཞེས་བྲ། བོད་སྐད་དུ་ཆོག་མཚན་ལྷན་གཉིས་པ་ཞེས་བྲ། ཀུན་གཞི་ཡང་ཡིན། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་ཡིན། དེ་ཡང་འཁོར་བ་ཐོག་མ་ཟུང་བ་ནས་ཤེས་པའི་རང་གཞིན་ཅན་ཡིན་ཞིང་ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་ལས་མི་འདའ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྲ། ཡུལ་རིག་ཅིང་རྟོགས་པའི་ངོ་བོར་འབྱུང་དུ་བརྟུབ་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྲ། ཆོག་མཚན་གྱི་པོའི་རྒྱུར་གྱུར་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྲ། རྣམ་པ་ནི་ཡུལ་གི་བྱེ་བྲག་མང་པོ་ལ་བྱ་ལ། ཤེས་པ་ནི་དེ་རྣམས་སོ་སོར་མ་འདྲེས་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་བྲ། མཐུན་བའི་དཔེ་ནི་ཁྱེ་དང་མར་དུ་བསྟན། འབར་བར་བྱེད་པ་ནི་མར་ཡིན། གསལ་བར་བྱེད་པ་ནི་ཁྱེ་ཡིན་བས། སྤྱི་བྱུང་གིས་བསྐྱེད་ན་ཁྱེ་མར་ཟེར་བ་དང་[2.r]འདྲ་བར་ན། ཡུལ་དང་ཤེས་པ་གཉི་གའི་ཁྱེད་མ་བཞག་པ་ལ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྲ།

The [eighth] consciousness is also called *śleṣokti* (*sle shwa gi ta*) in Sanskrit. In Tibetan, it is called *Tshigs zur gnyis pa* [having two parts]. It is the universal ground and also a consciousness. Furthermore, it has had a nature of consciousness throughout the beginningless time of cyclic existence and has not gone beyond the classes of consciousness, so it is called consciousness. Also because it can become an entity that is aware of objects and understands, it is called consciousness. And because it is the cause of the six-fold collection [of consciousnesses], it is called consciousness. The aspects (*rnam pa*) refer to the various particulars of objects. The mind (*shes pa*) refers to understanding those [objects] distinctly. Taking a butter lamp (lit. “butter-fire”) as an analogy, the butter is that which burns and the fire is what illuminates. So those are put together and called a “butter lamp.” [2.r] Similarly, without excluding either of the names of object and subject, it is called “consciousness” (*rnam par shes pa*).

<sup>187</sup> This seems to be a mistake. The child, who is the six consciousnesses, should be saying, “you, the mother, come from me,” as is explained below.

<sup>188</sup> This idea of alaya and latent tendencies being in a mutual cause and result relationship is clearly expressed in *Mahāyānasamgraha* I.14 – I.17. See Karl Brunnhölzl, *Compendium of the Mahāyāna*, pp. 162-163 I.14. Also, I.19 identifies this as the subtle and profound dependent origination of the Mahayana in contradistinction to the 12 links of dependent origination of the Hinayana.

[གཞིས་པ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་]

དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ལ་ཡང་། འོན་ཏང་སེམས་ཅན་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ། ཀུན་བརྟགས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ། འོན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། བྱི་ཚྭ་གྲིས་བཟུས་པའི་འཛིག་རྟེན་རི་རབས་དང་སྒྲིང་འཁམས་སུ་བཅས་པ། ངམ་གྲོག་དང་ཆུ་སུལ་དུ་བཅས་པ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཡིན་ལ། ཡང་ན་ས་ཆ་མཉམ་འབྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་བཞི་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཡིན་ལ། སེམས་ཅན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་ནང་བཅུད་གིས་བཟུས་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་འགྲོ་བ་རིས་དྲུག་དུ་བཟུས་པ་བདག་དང་གཞན་གི་རྒྱུད་ལ་ཡོད་པ་དབང་པོ་དང་ལྷས་སུ་བཅས་པར་སྣང་བ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཡིན།

[Second, regarding the perceptual objects of the universal ground:] The perceptual objects are also called “objective domain (*don*) and sentient beings.” It also refers to the habitual tendencies of conceptual designation (*kun brtags*). What is called “objective domain” refers to the world that consists of the outer container, with Mount Meru, the islands, spheres, and so forth, including valleys and rivers, which are the perceptual objects of the universal ground. In other words, the four great elements that appear as earth, water, fire, and wind are the perceptual objects of the ground. What is called “sentient beings,” which consists of the six classes of beings which comprise the inner world of contained beings, includes the appearances of bodies and sense faculties which exist within the streams of self and other. Such are the perceptual objects of the universal ground.

ཀུན་བརྟགས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། བདག་གི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་རྒྱུ་དགེ་བ་དང་མྱེ་དགེ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་བསགས་པ་དེ་གངས་གི་རིམ་པ་འཇམ། ཟངས་གི་དྲག་པ་འཇམ། མྱེ་ལོང་གི་གཡའ་བཞིན་དུ། ཀློས་འཐས་ནས་འདུག་པ་དེ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཡིན། ཀུན་གཞིས་ནི་བག་ཆགས་དེ་རྣམས་རྟོགས་ཤིང་ཉམས་སུ་མྱོང་བར་བྱེད་ལ། རྟོགས་དྲུག་པོ་གཞན་མས་ནི་རྟོགས་ཤིང་ཉམས་སུ་མྱོང་བར་བྱི་བྱས་བྱས་པ་ལ། ལྷང་འབུལ་གི་གཡ་བྱང་གི་ནང་ནས་དགོལ་བ་བདག་ཉིད་པོ་ན་རེ། བྱོད་ཀྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་རང་བཞིན་ཡང་ཡིན་ལ། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་ལ། དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཡང་ཡོད་པར་གྱུར་ན། བྱོད་ཀྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་འདིས་རྟོགས་དྲུག་པོ་གཞན་མ་ཀུན་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་གསལ་བར་ཉམས་སུ་མ་མྱོང་བ་འདི་ཅི་ཡིན་ཞེས་བྱས་པ་ལ།

Regarding what is called habitual tendencies of conceptual designation, the habitual tendencies which are the virtuous and non-virtuous causes are deposited in one’s universal ground. It is like the strata of a glacier, the patina of copperware, or dirt encrusted on a mirror. That which solidifies is the perceptual object of the universal ground. The universal ground apprehends and experiences those habitual tendencies. The other six-fold collections [of consciousness] cannot apprehend and experience them. Among the important writings of the community (*ltang ‘bul*),<sup>189</sup> one opponent argues: “If your universal ground, which has a nature and is also a consciousness, also has perceptual objects, then why doesn’t your universal ground vividly experience perceptual objects of the six-fold collections?”

སྐར་ལན་དུ་བརྒྱལ་ཆོག་ཁོ་ནས་དབྱུང་ལན་ད་ལྟས་གིས་གདབ་པ་ལ། ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་མྱོང་བ་མ་ཡིན་ན་ཡང་། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལས་འབྱུག་པའི་རྟོགས་དྲུག་བྱང་ནས། རྟོགས་དྲུག་གིས་མྱིན་ཅུ་ལྟག་ལ་རྟོག་[2.v]རྟོག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གིས་བསྐྱེད་པས་ནས། དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་གསལ་བར་ཉམས་སུ་མ་མྱོང་བ་གཅིག་དུ་ཟད་མོད། ད་བྱོད་གི་རྒྱལ་པོའི་རྒྱལ་ནན་གི་ཁ་ན་ནི་མྱོང་ན། འཛིག་རྟེན་གྲས་པ་དང་མྱེ་འགལ་ན་མཐུན་བའི་དཔེ་ཅི་ཡོད། མཐུན་པའི་དཔེ་ཉི་མ་དང་སྐར་མ་ཡོད། དཔེར་ན་ཉིན་པར་སྐར་མ་

<sup>189</sup> On this term being associated with a Buddhist community, or saṅgha, see Bianca Horlemann, “Early Tibetan Toponyms: An Attempt to Identify ‘Byi lig of P.T. 116 and P.T. 996,” pp. 123-24.

ཐུང་པ་མ་ཡིན་ན་ཡང་། ཉི་མའི་འོད་ཟེར་གསལ་བ་འཇ་རགས་པའི་དབང་གིས་སྐར་མ་ཁྱེ་མངོན་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར། ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་ཡང་  
དབྱིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཐུང་པ་མ་ཡིན་ན་ཡང་། ཀུན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལས་འཇུག་པའི་ཚྭ་སྒྲིག་བྱུང་ནས། ཚྭ་སྒྲིག་བྱེད་ཅུ་  
ལོག་ལ་རྟོག་རྟོག་པའི་བག་ཆགས་གིས་བསྐྱབས་ནས། ཀུན་གཞི་དབྱིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་གསལ་བར་ཉམས་སུ་མ་ཐུང་བ་ཅིག་ཏུ་བྱུང་།

In response, the answer to this logical argument follows immediately: It is not that the universal ground does not have perceptual objects, but, after the engaging sixfold collections have arisen from the universal ground consciousness, it is obscured by the habitual tendencies that come from mistaken [2.v] conceptualizations by those six-fold collection [consciousnesses]. Therefore [the universal ground] does not clearly experience [the six collections] as perceptual objects. But someone might respond further: “Without an edict from your king, what appropriate analogy do you have that does not contradict common knowledge?”<sup>190</sup> There is the appropriate analogy of the sun and stars. In the daytime, it is not that the stars are non-existent but, due to the strong power of the sun’s light rays, the stars are not visible. Similarly, it is not that the universal ground does not have perceptual objects, but, after the engaging sixfold collections have arisen from the universal ground consciousness, it is obscured by the habitual tendencies that come from mistaken conceptualizations by those six-fold collection [consciousnesses]. Therefore [the universal ground] does not clearly experience [the six collections] as perceptual objects. So there it is.

དཔེར་ན་ལྷའི་བྱ་མོ་ཐུང་མ་ཤིང་ཐུང་མ་ཡང་། རྩོལ་ཐུང་པ་མ་ཡིན་ན་ཡང་། རྩོལ་ཐུང་བ་དང་། ཤིང་པ་ཕྲ་བ་ཙམ་ལ་གདགས་པས་  
དཔེ་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དབྱིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཐུང་པ་མ་ཡིན་ན་ཡང་། དབྱིགས་པ་ཕྲ་བ་ཙམ་ལ་གདགས་པས་ དབྱིགས་པ་  
ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཆད་པ་དང་། རྣམ་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཆད་པ་ཡོད། ཚྭ་སྒྲིག་བྱུག་པོས་ནི་ཡུལ་ལ་དབྱིགས་ཡུལ་ལ་ཁྱེ་དབྱིགས་པ་ལྟ་བུ་མ་  
ཡིན། ཀུན་གཞིས་ནི་རྩོད་བརྟུང་གིས་བསྐྱབས་པའི་ཚོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་དབྱིགས་རྣམ་པས་ནི་དབྱིགས་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཆད་པ་ཞེས་  
བྱའོ། ཚྭ་སྒྲིག་གིས་ནི་ཐུང་ཡུལ་ལ་རིས་སུ་གཙོད། ཀུན་གཞིས་ནི་ཐུང་ཡུལ་རིས་སུ་ཁྱེ་གཙོད་པས་ན་རྣམ་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཆད་པ་  
ཞེས་བྱའོ།

For example, it is not that a slender (lit. “with no waist”) goddess has no belly, but she is called that because her belly is small and her waist is thin. Similarly, it is not that the universal ground does not have perceptual objects, but that its perceptual [objects] are subtle. It does not clearly distinguish perceptual objects (*dmigs pa*; Skt. *ālambana*), nor does it clearly distinguish their aspects (*rnam pa*; Skt. *ākara*). The six-fold collections [of consciousnesses] perceive their objects; it is not as if they do not perceive objects. The universal ground is capable of perceiving all dharmas that are gathered within the container (i.e. the universe) and its contents, but it is said not to *clearly distinguish* (*yongs su ma chad pa*) perceptual objects. The universal ground does not differentiate external objects [like] the sixfold collection differentiates external objects, so [the universal ground] is [also] said not to clearly distinguish the aspects.

[གསུམ་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་དུ་དང་ལྡན་པ་]

<sup>190</sup> This is a difficult passage to make sense of, but it is possible the edict is a metaphor for an authoritative scriptural source that might support the claim at stake. Such a source is missing, the passage seems to suggest. However, as Nupchen shows, there is a passage from the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* that does support the idea: ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཆད་ཀུན་  
ཡུལ་ལ། ཤེས་པ་མི་གསལ་ལྷན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་།, so maybe the edict means something else.

ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་དུ་དང་ཕྱན་ཞེས་བྱས་པ་ལ། ཐུན་མོང་གི་འཁོར་ཕྱ་ཀུན་དུ་འགོ་བ་དང་ཕྱན། ཐུན་མོང་གི་འཁོར་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་  
ནི། ཚླགས་བརྒྱད་ཀུན་གི་འཁོར་དུ་ཐུར་པའི་དུས་ན་ནི། རྒྱ་དགེ་བ་དང་མི་དགེ་བ་ཀུན་ལ་འགོ་བས་ནི་ཀུན་དུ་[3.r]འགོ་ཞེ་བྱ། དེ་  
ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་སྒོ་ལྡེ་འཁོར་དུ་ཐུར་ཅམ་ན་ནི། དཔེར་ན་གཙོ་བོ་སྤྲུལ་ན་འཁོར་ཡང་སྤྲུལ་ཟེར་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། འཁོར་ཡང་  
སྤྲུལ་པོར་གནས་སོ། ཉིང་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་དམ། ཡིད་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་འཁོར་དུ་ཐུར་ཅམ་ན་ནི། དཔེར་ན་གཙོ་བོ་སྤྲུལ་ན་  
འཁོར་ཡང་སྤྲུལ་ཟེར་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། འཁོར་ཡང་སྤྲུལ་པོར་གནས་སོ། དེ་དངོས་གང་ལ་བྱ་ཞེས་ན། ལུང་ལས་ཀྱང་

རྟག་ཏུ་རེག་དང་ཡིད་བྱེད་དང་།  
རེག་དང་འདུ་ཤེས་སེམས་པར་ཕྱན།

Regarding the universal ground’s companions, it is endowed with the five ever-present common companions. As for these so-called common companions, when they become the companions of the eightfold collection of [consciousnesses], they become present within all virtuous and non-virtuous causes, [3.r] so it is called “ever-present.” Furthermore, when [they] accompany the universal ground and the five-sense doors, it is like saying, “if the leader is foolish, the companions will also be foolish.” When [they] accompany the afflicted mental consciousness or the mental consciousness, it is like saying, “if the leader is clever, the companions will also be clever.” What is the actual reference? In scripture says:

All the time, [universal ground consciousness] is endowed with contact and mental engagement,<sup>191</sup>  
Awareness, ideation, and attention.<sup>192</sup>

འདུ་ཤེས་(བྱེད་)སེམས་པས་ནི་བསྐྱོད། ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པས་ནི་ཡུལ་གང་ཡིན་བ་ལ་སེམས་གཏད། རེག་པས་ཡུལ་གི་རྣམ་པ་བཅད། ཚེར་  
བས་བདེ་ལྷག་ཉམས་སུ་ཁྱོང་། འདུ་ཤེས་གིས་མཚན་མ་དང་དན་(དོན་)རྟགས་སུ་བཟུང་།

[The universal ground] is moved by volitional intention (*'du byed kyi sems pa*), focuses on whatever object through mental engagement (*yid la byed pa*), distinguishes the aspects of the objects through contact (*reg pa*), experiences good or bad [feelings] through sensation (*tshor ba*), and apprehends signs and meanings through ideation (*'dus shes*).

[བཞི་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱད་པར་ཅིས་འཕགས་པ་]

ཀུན་ཞི་(གཞི་)བྱད་པར་ཅིས་འཕགས་པ་ཞེས་བྱས་པ་ལ། བྱད་པར་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་གིས་འཕགས། ཐུ་སྟགས་ན་རེ་ངའི་ཁོང་པའི་ནང་  
སྟོང་གི་ནི་དཀྱིལ་ན། ལུས་ཅན་གྱི་དབང་ལྷག་སེམས་ཅན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་རེག་བྱེད་གི་སྦྱང་(སྦྱ་བ་)འདོན་བ། ཆེན་ཐེབ་དོག་ཅམ་རྒྱུད་ན་  
ཡུངས་འབྱུ་ཅམ། སྦྱོམ་ན་མདའ་སྟུག་ཅམ་པ་ན་རྟ་རྩ་ཅམ། རྒྱུ་གོ་མི་འདོར་བ་ཤེས་བྱེད་དན་བྱེད་རེག་བྱེད་བྱ་བའི་རྟག་པ་མི་འཁྱུར་  
བ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་དེས་རྟུལ་དང་ཐུན་པ་དང་སྟོང་སྟོབས་དང་དེ་གསུམ་ཆ་མཉམ་བས་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་དེ་ལས་སྦྱེས་ཟེར། དེ་ལྟར་  
བསྐྱེད་དུ་བྱུང་ན་ཡང་ཐུ་སྟགས་(སྟེགས་)ལ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་བྱེད་པས། ཐུ་སྟགས་(སྟེགས་)ལས་ནི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པས་འཕགས་སོ།

<sup>191</sup> Note that here *tshor ba* and *rig pa* are being used interchangeably (and *rig pa* also appears in the *Sde dge bstan 'gyur* of the *Triṃśika*), even though *tshor ba* (= Skt. *vedanā*; “feeling”) is used in Pelliot Tibétain 654. On early Tibetans using *tshor ba* to translate the Chinese character *jue* 覺, see van Schaik’s blog entry at: <https://earlytibet.com/2011/11/22/tibetan-chan-v/>.

<sup>192</sup> See Vasubandhu’s *Triṃśika-kārikas* (སུམ་བླ་པའི་ཚླག་ལའུར་བྱས་པ། དབྱིག་གཉེན། Tōh. D4055 = DTG137, p. 2).

If someone asks, “What makes the universal ground superior?” The universal ground is superior in terms of three aspects: (1) The non-Buddhists assert that at the center of the heart, within the interior of the body, the Īśvara of an embodied individual is called the “sentient being” (Skt. *sattva*) who recites the *Vedas*. [That *sattva*] is as big as the size of a thumb, [or for creature of different sizes it may be] as small as the size of a sesame seed, as thick as the size of an arrow, or as thin as the size of a single hair of a horse tail. It is a sphere of unrealized potentiality, a permanent and unchanging cognizer, thinker, and knower. It balances the dust (*rdul*; *rajas*), darkness (*mun pa*; *tamas*), and courage (*snying stobs*; *sattva*), whereby all sentient beings are born from it. Although [that balance of the *guṇas*] is able to create [sentient beings] in that way, for the non-Buddhists, it does not have a consciousness. Therefore, our [universal ground] is superior to the non-Buddhist because it is a consciousness.

ཉན་ཐོས་ན་རེ་ངའི་སྒོ་ལྷའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཟེར་ན་ཡང་། ཉན་ཐོས་ལ་རྒྱ་ཁྱེད་པས་ཉན་ཐོས་ལས་ནི་རྒྱས་དཔགས་སོ། རྣམ་པར་  
ཤེས་པའི་ཆོགས་བརྒྱད་ཅིག་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ཆོགས་བདུན་གིས་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་པར་སྒོ་བ་འམ་འདེབས་པ་ཙམ་ལས་[3.v]མི་  
ལུས། ཀུན་གཞིས་ནི་ཆོགས་བདུན་པོ་དེའི་བག་ཆགས་བསོག་པའི་གནས་སམ་གཞིར་གྱུར་པས་ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་བར་གསུམ་གིས་  
དཔགས་སོ།

(2) Śrāvakas refer to, “our consciousnesses of the five sense doors,” but those Śrāvakas do not have a causal [consciousness], so [the universal ground] is superior to Śrāvakas because it is a cause. (3) Among the eightfold collection of consciousnesses, only the collection of seven [consciousnesses] can imprint (*phar sgo ba*) or deposit the habitual tendencies into the universal ground. [3.v] The universal ground is the abode or ground of the deposited habitual tendencies of the seven consciousnesses; therefore, [it] is superior because of these three distinct characteristics.

[ལྷ་པ་ཀུན་གཞིས་ལས་ཅི་བྱེད་པ་]

ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་ཅི་བྱེད་བྱས་པ་ལ། དགེ་ཕྱིག་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཤིག་བྱེད། དེ་ཡང་རྒྱ་མཐུན་བའི་བག་ཆགས་དང་རྣམ་པར་རྟོན་པའི་  
འབྲས་བུའོ། རྒྱ་མཐུན་བའི་བག་ཆགས་ནི་ཆོ་སྒྲོན་མ་ལ་བདག་ཀྱང་དགེ་བ་སྦྱོང་གཞན་ཡང་སྦྱོང་དུ་འཛད། གཞན་སྦྱོང་པ་ལ་ཡང་  
དགའ། དེའི་རྒྱ་མཐུན་བའི་བག་ཆགས་གིས། ཆོ་འདེལ་བདག་ཀྱང་དགེ་བ་སྦྱོང་གཞན་ཡང་སྦྱོང་དུ་འཛད། སྦྱོང་པ་དེ་ལ་ཡང་  
དགའ། དེའི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོན་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་ནི། ཆོ་སྒྲུབ་མ་ལ་ལྷ་དང་ལྷའི་གོ་འཕང་ནི་ཐོབ། བྱང་ཆུབ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གི་འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་ཐོབ་  
པར་འགྱུར་རོ། ལས་ལྷེ་དགེ་བའི་རྒྱ་མཐུན་བའི་བག་ཆགས་གིས་ནི། ཆོ་སྒྲོན་མ་ལ་བདག་ཀྱང་ཕྱིག་པ་སྦྱོང། གཞན་ཡང་སྦྱོང་དུ་  
འཛད། སྦྱོང་པ་དེ་ལ་ཡང་དགའ། དེ་རྒྱ་མཐུན་བའི་བག་ཆགས་གིས། བདག་ཀྱང་ཕྱིག་པ་སྦྱོང། གཞན་ཡང་སྦྱོང་དུ་འཛད། སྦྱོང་པ་དེ་  
ལ་ཡང་དགའ། དེའི་རྣམ་པར་རྟོན་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་དན་སྤང་གསུམ་སུ་སྦྱེའོ།

If someone asks, “What does the universal-ground do?” [The universal ground] involves two aspects: virtue and non-virtue. Moreover, they are both the causally concordant habitual tendencies (*rgyu mthun pa'i bag chags*) and the ripened fruits (*rnam par smyin pa'i 'bras bu*).<sup>193</sup> Regarding the concordant habitual tendencies, in previous lifetimes, oneself engaged in virtuous deeds, caused others to engage in virtuous deeds, and rejoiced for others engaged in [virtuous deeds]. Because of those concordant habitual tendencies, in this lifetime one again engages in

<sup>193</sup> See Pelliot Tibetain 654, f. 1v.1: རྣམ་པར་རྟོན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་. Here, it reads *bag chags* rather than *'bras bu*.

virtuous deeds, causes others also to engage in [virtuous deeds], and rejoices in others engaging in [virtuous deeds]. Regarding the fully ripened fruit of those [deeds], in future lifetimes, one will be born in the god and the human realms and [eventually] attain the fruits of the three kinds of awakening (i.e., *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas*). Due to concordant habitual tendencies of negative actions, in previous lifetimes, one may have engaged in negativities, caused others also to engage in [such negativities], and took delight in others engaging in [negativities]. Through those concordant habitual tendencies, [in this lifetime,] one again engages in negativities, steers others to engage in [negativities], and takes delight in engaging in [negativities]. The fully ripened fruit of those [deeds] is that one will be born in the three lower realms.

[བྱག་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དབྱེ་ན་དུ་ཡོད་པ་]

ཀུན་གཞི་དབྱེ་བ་ནི་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་གཉིས་སུ་དབྱེ། ཀུན་གཞི་ནི་རྒྱ་ཡང་ཡིན་འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་ཡིན། དཔེ་ནི་ཤིང་རྟོག་ཁམ་བུ་དང་འདྲ། ཤིང་རྟོག་ཁམ་བུ་སྦྱིན་ནས་ཟར་ཡོད་པ་ནི་འབྲས་བུ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡང་ཡིན་ལ། དེའི་སྦྱིང་པོ་ལེག་པ་ས་ལ་བརྟགས་ནས་ནམ་ནམ་ཞིག་ན་ཤིང་སྤྱང་པོ་ཅིག་སྦྱེ་བའི་རྒྱ་བྱེད་པ་ནི་རྒྱ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡང་ཡིན། དཔེ་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། ཆོ་སྦྱོར་མ་ལ་བདག་གི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་འཇུག་པའི་ཆོགས་བྱག་བྱུང་ནས། བྱི་ཡུལ་ལ་རགས་པར་བཅད་ནས། བག་ཆགས་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བསགས་ནས། ད་ལྟར་དབང་པོ་དང་ལྷས་སུ་བཅས་པའི་སྦྱེ་བ་སྒངས་པ་དེ་ནི་འབྲས་བུ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཆོ་སྦྱི་མ་ལ་རྒྱ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡང་ཡིན་ནོ།

As for the subdivisions of the ground, there are the cause and the result. The universal ground is not only the cause but also the fruit. Taking a peach as an analogy for the fruit, a peach, when ripened, becomes edible. Its fertile pit is then put in a field, and after some time, it grows into a tree which is concordant with the cause [i.e., the peach pit]. Similarly, in previous lives, the sixfold collection of [consciousnesses] emerged from one's universal ground and coarsely discriminated external objects. Then, the habitual tendencies [from that] having been gathered within the universal ground, in the present, taking a rebirth endowed with a physical body and faculties is like the fruit [of habitual tendencies of past lives] and serves as a cause for the next life.

[བདུན་པ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་མཚན་ཉིད་]

ཀུན་གཞི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཅེས་[4.r]བྱ་བ་ནི། སྟོན་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་བཞེད་པ་ལྟ་བུ་མི་རྟག་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ནམ་ནི། ལྟ་བུ་སྟགས་བཞེད་པ་ལྟ་བུ་རྟག་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་བྱས་པ་ལ། སྟོན་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་བཞེད་པ་ལྟ་བུ་སྦྱི་རྟག་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ཏེ། ལྷང་ལས་ཀྱང་

དེ་ལས་རྒྱན་འབབ་ཆུ་བོ་བཞིན།

As for the characteristic of the universal ground, [4.r] if someone asks, “is it impermanent like the Blessed Teacher Buddha asserted, or permanent like non-Buddhists asserted?” “It is impermanent like the Blessed Teacher Buddha asserted.” Thus, in the authoritative scripture, it says:

It [i.e., the universal ground] is always flowing like a river.<sup>194</sup>

དཔེར་ན་རྩ་ཐོ་རྩུ་ལྷང་དུ་འབབ་པ་ལ། རྩ་མ་ནི་འགག་རྩུ་མེད་ཕྱི་མ་ནི་མྱོང་རྩུ་མེད། གཅིག་རྩུ་ཡང་མེད། ཟླ་གཅིག་རྩུ་ཡང་  
མེད། དེའི་ཡང་མེད་མེད། བར་ཡང་ཅིས་ཀྱང་མ་ཚད་པར་ཐེང་ངེ་འགོ་བས་ཀྱང་ཟླ་རྩུ། དཔེ་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་བདག་གི་སེམས་  
དུས་གསུམ་གི་ཆས་རྩུ་བ་ལ་ཡང་། རྩ་མ་ནི་མྱོང་རྩུ་མེད་ཕྱི་མ་ནི་འགག་རྩུ་མེད། གཅིག་རྩུ་ཡང་མེད་ཟླ་གཅིག་རྩུ་ཡང་མེད། བར་ཡང་  
ཅིས་ཀྱང་མ་ཚད་པར་ཐེང་ངེ་འབྱུང་བས་ཀྱང་ཟླ་རྩུ་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། ཡང་ན་མ་གཅིག་དུ་ན་དཔེར་ན་ས་མཐོ་ཕྱོགས་ནས་རྩུ་  
ནས། ས་དམའ་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་རྩུ་དང་ཉལ་ཉལ་བདས་ཏེ་འགོ་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། བདག་གི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་ཡང་བསོད་ནམས་གི་ལས་  
དང་། བསོད་ནམས་མ་ཡིན་བའི་ལས་དང་། ཟླ་གཡོ་བའི་ལས་དང་ལས་ནས་གསུམ་གི་བག་ཆགས་བསགས་པ་དེ། རྩ་ཀུན་དུ་འགོ་བ་  
དང་འགོགས་ཏེ། འཁོར་བའི་རྩུ་ཕྱོགས་སུ་སྐད་ཅིག་ཀྱང་མི་མྱོང་པར་སྐྱེ་བ་སྣ་ཚོགས་པར་ལེན་བས་ན། མཚན་ཉིད་ཟླ་རྩུ་པ་ཞེས་  
བྱའོ།

In the example of flowing water moving as a river, in the previous [parts] it never stops and in the later [parts] it never rests. It is neither one [river] nor many. Since it is not separable, without gaps, and flowing continuously, it is called impermanent. Similarly, one's mind [stream] traverses continuously through the three times. In the previous [moment] it never rests; in the later [moment] it never stops. It is neither one [mind] nor many. Since it is not separable, without gaps, and arising continuously, it is called impermanent. Put another way, a stream, for example, comes down from the highlands and follows down to the lowland, passing through grasses and bushes. Similarly, the three types of habitual tendencies—virtuous deeds, non-virtuous deeds, and non-transferring deeds (*myi g.yo ba'i las*)—are deposited in one's universal ground, which is accompanied by the five ever-present [mental factors] and flows uninterruptedly toward the ocean of *samsāra*, such that beings take various rebirths. Therefore, its characteristic is said to be impermanence.

[བརྩུད་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཆོས་གང་ཡིན་པ་]  
ཀུན་གཞི་ཆོས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། དགེ་བར་ཡང་ལུང་དུ་མ་བསྟན། མི་དགེ་བར་ཡང་ལུང་དུ་མ་བསྟན། དགེ་བར་ལུང་དུ་བསྟན་དུ་[བསྟན་  
ན་]ནི་ཟླ་དགེ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་བསགས་པའི་གཞི་ཡང་མེད། ཟླ་དགེ་བར་ལུང་དུ་བསྟན་དུ་[བསྟན་ན་]ནི། དགེ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་  
བསགས་པའི་གཞི་ཡང་མེད་རྩུ་ཡིན།

Regarding what is called the phenomenon of the universal ground, it is neither determined as virtuous nor as unvirtuous. If it were determined as virtuous, it would offer no ground for depositing any unvirtuous habitual tendencies. If it were determined as unvirtuous, it would offer no ground for depositing any virtuous habitual tendencies.

ཡང་ན་བསྐྱབས་ལ་ཡང་ལུང་དུ་མ་བསྟན། ལུང་ལས་ཀྱང་

བསྐྱབས་ལ་ལུང་དུ་མ་བསྟན་ན།  
ཉོན་མོངས་བཞི་དང་རྟག་དུ་འགོགས།

<sup>194</sup> See Vasubandhu's *Triṃśika-kārikas* (སུམ་རྩུ་པའི་ཚིག་ལེའུར་བྱས་པ། དབྱིག་གཞིན།, Tōh. D4055, DTG137, p. 2). དེ་ནི་རྩུ་  
འབབ་རྩུ་པ་བཞིན། | Here, it appears *le ni* rather than *de las*.

Furthermore, [the afflictive mental consciousness] is obscured and also indeterminate. The authoritative scripture says:

It is obscured and indeterminate,  
Ever accompanied by the four afflictions.<sup>195</sup>

ཉོན་མོངས་པ་[4.v]བཞི་ནི། ཕྱིན་ཅུ་ལོག་པ་བཞི་ལ་བྱའོ། ལྷང་ལས་ཀྱང་

བདག་དུ་ཉ་དང་བདག་དུ་ཚྡོངས།  
བདག་རྒྱལ་བདག་ཆགས་འདུ་ཤེས་པའོ།

ཐུ་སྟགས་གིས་ནི་བདག་རྟག་པར་འདོད་པ་ལ་ནི་བདག་དུ་ཉ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། བདག་བྱེད་པའི་ཚེས་ལ་བྱེད་པར་མ་ཤེས་པ་ལ་ནི་བདག་དུ་  
ཚྡོངས་ཞེས་བྱའོ། བདག་གྱོང་འཁེངས་པ་ལ་ནི་བདག་རྒྱལ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། གཟུགས་གྱི་ཕྱང་པོ་དང་ནམ་དུ་ཡང་མི་འབྲལ་བར་འདོད་པ་ལ་  
ནི་བདག་དུ་ཆགས་ཞེས་བྱའོ། ཕྱི་ཅུ་ལོག་བཞི་པོ་དེས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ལ་ནི་བསྐྱབས་ལ་ལྷང་དུ་མ་བསྟན།

The four afflictions [4.v] may be taken to be the four wrong views. The authoritative scripture says:

[The afflictive mental consciousness] is conceived of as a view of self, a delusion about self,  
Pride of self, and clinging to self.<sup>196</sup>

“View of self” refers to the non-Buddhist assertion of the self as permanent. “Delusion about self” refers to not understanding selfless dharmas as non-existent. “Pride of self” refers to being filled with headstrong pride. “Clinging to the self” refers to wanting never to lose one’s physical image. The afflictive mental consciousness is obscured by these four wrong views and is indeterminate.

ཀྱན་གཞི་ལ་བསྐྱབས་ཀྱང་མ་བསྐྱབས། ལྷང་དུ་ཡང་མ་བསྟན། ལྷང་ལས་ཀྱང་

དེ་ལ་ཀྱན་གཞི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ནི།  
རྣམ་སྦྱོན་ས་པོན་ཐམས་ཅད་དེ།  
མ་བསྐྱབས་དེ་ནི་ལྷང་མ་བསྟན།

<sup>195</sup> Our text reads བསྐྱབས་ལ་ལྷང་དུ་མ་བསྟན་ན། ཉོན་མོངས་བཞི་དང་རྟག་དུ་འགྲོགས།. This citation is from Vasubandhu’s *Triṃśika-kārikas* and it reads བསྐྱབས་ལ་ལྷང་དུ་མ་བསྟན་པའི། ཉོན་མོངས་བཞི་དང་རྟག་དུ་འགྲོགས། ། (སུམ་ཅུ་པའི་ཚོག་ལེའུར་བྱས་པ། དབྱིག་གཉེན།, Tōh. D4055, DTG137, pp. 2-3). There is a minor difference in the texts such as *ma bstan na* in our text and the other reads *ma bstan pa i* in the first line.

<sup>196</sup> This citation is from Vasubandhu’s *Triṃśika-kārikas* (སུམ་ཅུ་པའི་ཚོག་ལེའུར་བྱས་པ། དབྱིག་གཉེན།, Tōh. D4055, DTG137, p. 3), and it reads བདག་དུ་ཉ་དང་བདག་དུ་ཚྡོངས། བདག་རྒྱལ་བདག་ཆགས་འདུ་ཤེས་པ། །. Here, it appears correct grammatical particles such *tu* rather than *du* after suffix *ga*, and the ‘*dus she me pa* rather than ‘*du shes med pa*’o.

The universal ground is not at all obscured, and it is indeterminate. The authoritative scripture also states:

As for that, the universal ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*)  
Which [holds] all the ripening seeds  
Is obscured and indeterminate.<sup>197</sup>

[དགྲ་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་ཚར་བ་གང་དང་ལྷན་པ་]  
ཚར་བ་གསུམ་ལ་ཚར་བ་གང་དང་ལྷན་ཞེས་བྱས་པ་ལ། ཀུན་གཞི་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ནི་ཚར་བ་བཏང་སྟོམས་དང་ལྷན་  
ན། ཡིད་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཚར་བ་བདེ་ལྷག་གསུམ་དང་ལྷན་ནོ།

If someone asks, “Among the three feelings, with which feelings are the [consciousnesses] endowed?” Regarding that, the universal ground and the afflictive mental consciousness are endowed with neutral feelings. The mental consciousness is endowed with [all] three feelings—pleasant, unpleasant, [and neutral].

[བརྩ་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་མིང་གི་རྣམ་གྲངས་]  
ཀུན་གཞི་མྱིང་གི་རྣམ་གྲངས་ནི། ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་བསོགས་པའི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པས་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་བྱའོ། གནས་  
འཁམས་གསུམ་དང་ས་དགྲར་དབང་པོ་དང་ལྷས་སུ་བཅས་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ལེན་པས་ན་ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། འཁམས་  
བཅོ་བརྒྱད་དམ་སྐྱེ་མཆེད་བརྩ་གཉིས་སམ། འཁོར་འདུ་བྱེད་ལྷ་བརྩ་ཙུག་གཅིག་གས། བྱི་མའི་ཚྭ་གས་བདུན་པོ་འི་གཞི་འམ་ཙུ་བར་གྱུར་  
པས་ན། ཙུ་བའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

Regarding the synonyms for the universal ground, since it is the storage ground (storehouse) for the habitual tendencies of karma and the afflictions, it is called “the universal ground” (*kun gzhi; ālaya*). Since beings take rebirth with bodies and faculties in the nine levels of the three realms, it is called “the appropriating consciousness.” Since it becomes the foundation or the root of the eighteen *dhātus*, the twelve *āyatana*s, the retinue of the compounded fifty-one [mental factors], and the further seven [consciousnesses], it is called “the root consciousness.”

འཁོར་བ་ཐོག་མ་མྱེད་པའི་དུས་ནས་ཤེས་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་ཡིན་ཞིང་ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་ལས་མྱེ་འདའ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཡང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་  
པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། མཐོ་རིས་དང་ངན་སོང་གར་འགོ་ཡང་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པའི་སྤང་པོ་ལྷར་མྱེ་སྐྱེན་མྱེ་སྤིད་པ་ནི། རྣམ་པར་སྐྱེན་པ་ཞེས་  
བྱའོ། སེམས་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ་སྟེ། རྩ་གར་སྐད་དུ་[5.1]ཙོ་ཏ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱའོ། བོད་སྐད་དུ་སྣ་ཚྭ་གས་པར་སྤང་བ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། འཁོར་བ་ཐོག་མ་

<sup>197</sup> This citation is from Vasubandhu’s *Triṃśika-kārikas* (སུས་ཏུ་པའི་ཚྭ་ལེའུར་བྱས་པ། དབྱིག་གཞེན།, Tōh. D4055, DTG137, p. 2). Here, the first two lines appear together and then it skips five more lines to cite the third line. The spellings are matched except *smyin* which appears in the Dunhuang manuscript and is an old Tibetan term. See David Choephel’s translation of the first two lines in *The Thirtry Verses* (Vasubandhu’s *Triṃśika-kārikas*). It follows:

Of them, the consciousness called ground,  
With all the seeds, is ripening. (p. 2)

མྱེད་པའི་དུས་ནས་སྤྱིད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུར་གྱུར་བས་ནི་འཁོར་བ་ཅི་སྤྱིད་ཀྱི་ཕུང་པོ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱའོ། སྤྱིད་དོ་ཚྭ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱན་གཞི་ལས་སྤྱིད་པས་སྤྱིད་པའི་ཡན་ལག་ཅས་ཀྱང་བྱའོ།

Since, throughout the beginningless time of *samsāra*, it has had the nature of knowing and has never been separated from the mode of knowing, it is called “the consciousness.” Whether wandering in the higher realms or the lower realms, since it is impossible for it not to ripen as the perpetuating five aggregates (*nye bar len pa'i phung po lnga*), it is called the “ripening fruit” (*rnam par smyin pa*). It is also called “mind” (*sems*). In Sanskrit, it is called [5.r] “mind” (*tsi ta; citta*). In Tibetan, it is called “the variously appearing” (*sna tshogs par snang ba*). Throughout the beginningless time of *samsāra*, since it has been the cause of all existing things, it is called “the aggregate for *samsāra* as long as it endures” (*'khor ba ci srid kyi phung po*). Since it is possible for all existences [to arise] from the universal ground, it is called “the factor of existence” (*srid pa'i yan lag*).

[བརྩ་གཅིག་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་མཐུན་པའི་དབེ་]

མཐུན་པའི་དབེ་ལ་དོན་བརྩ་གཅིག་གིས་བསྟན་པ་ལ། མེ་ཏྲག་ལྷ་མ་དང་ཏིལ་དུ་བསྟན་བ་ནི། མེ་ཏྲག་ལྷ་མ་ནི་ཟར་མའི་མེ་ཏྲག་ལ་བྱ། ཟར་མའི་མེ་ཏྲག་བདོ་བའི་དུས་ན་མེ་ཏྲག་ལ་ཡུ་ག་དྲི་སྤང་གིས་སྒོ་སྤོང་ང་ལྷ་བུ་ལ་དྲི་བྱེད། དབེ་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན་ཆེ་ལྷ་མ་ལ་བདག་གི་ཀྱན་གཞི་ལས་འཐུག་པའི་ཚྭས་བྱུང་ནས། ཕྱིའི་ཡུལ་ལ་རགས་པར་བཅད་ནས་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱན་གཞི་ལ་བསགས་པས། བར་དུ་སྐྱེ་འགག་མང་པོ་ཞིག་བྱས་ནས། ཕྱིས་སྤྱིད་པ་བར་མ་དོར་དྲི་བ་ཉེ་བར་འཁོར་བའི་གནས་སྐབས་སུ། ཀྱན་གཞིས་སྐྱེ་བ་ཅིག། དྲག་གིས་སྤངས་ནས། ཚྭས་བྱུང་ཕྱིའི་ཡུལ་ལ་རྟོད་གིས་བྱུང་བ་ནི། མེ་ཏྲག་ལྷ་མ་དང་ཏིལ་དུ་བསྟན་བ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

There are eleven exemplifying analogies: As for the analogy of the jasmine (or nutmeg?) flower and oil, the jasmine flower refers to the *zar ma* flower. When the jasmine flowers bloom, the flower pistils have a fragrant smell. [But] the egg-like [flower bud, i.e., while still closed,] has no fragrant smell. Similarly, the sixfold collection emerges from the universal ground of one's past life, then apprehends external objects as coarse [things], whereupon their habitual tendencies are deposited in the universal ground. In the meantime [i.e., throughout one's present life], there is a series of arisings and cessations. Then later, on the occasion of the scent-eater (Skt. *gandharva*) wandering close [to the parents] in the intermediate state (*srid pa bar ma do*), the universal ground suddenly (*twag gis*) takes rebirth, after which the sixfold collection arises through its being tethered to external objects. This is demonstrated by the [analogy] of jasmine flowers and oil.<sup>198</sup>

ཀྱན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་བསྐྱར་བའུ་བའི་དབེ། སྒོག་པ་དང་ཕོར་བྱར་བསྟན། ཀྱན་གཞི་དང་ཚྭས་བྱུག་པོ་གཉིས་གཅིག་ལ་གཅིག་རྟེན་བའི་[དབེ་]མཐུང་བྱིམ་དུ་བསྟན། དཔྱེགས་པ་ཕྱ་བའི་དབེ་ཉེན་པར་གཉེ་མ་དང་སྐར་མར་བསྟན། རྒྱ་འབྲས་གཉི་ག་ཡིན་བའི་དབེ་ཤིང་ཐོག་ཁམ་འབྲས་བསྟན། ཀྱན་གཞི་མཚན་ཉིད་ལྷ་ཏྲག་པའི་དབེ་ཆུ་བོ་རྒྱན་ལྷར་བསྟན། ཀྱན་གཞི་ཟབ་པའི་དབེ་མཚོ་དང་སྐབས་གིས་བསྟན། ཆོ་འདི་ལ་དགེ་སྤྱིག་ཅི་སྤྱང་ཀྱང་ཕྱི་མཛོན་བའི་དབེ་དར་དཀར་ཅོཌ་(ཆོ་གུས་)ལྷར་བསྟན། དགེ་སྤྱིག་ཤས་བྱིས་དཔྱེར་བའུ་བའི་དབེ་བྱ་ངང་བ་ཆུ་འབྱེད་ལྷར་བསྟན།

<sup>198</sup> Note there's no actual role for the sesame oil in the analogy, suggesting this text is based on another. Nupchen's treatment is about the oil holding the smell of the flowers even after they have been removed.

Garlic and a bowl are taught as an analogy for the habitual tendencies imprinting in the universal ground. The conch mollusk and its shell are an analogy for the universal ground and the sixfold collection depending on each other. The sun and stars in the daytime are an analogy for the subtle referential object [of the universal ground]. A peach is an analogy for [the universal ground] that serves as both cause and fruit. The stream of a river is an analogy for the characteristic of the universal ground as impermanent. The ocean and waves are taught as an analogy for the universal ground being profound. White silk and fruit pits are taught as an analogy for how whatever virtues and non-virtues done in this life may not ripen [immediately]. A swan separating [milk] from water is taught as an analogy for distinguishing virtue from non-virtue.

དགེ་མེད་གང་སྤྱད་ཀྱང་འབྲུག་པའི་དཔེ་སྒྲིམ་བྱ་ལག་པ་དང་ཡི་གེར་བསྟན། ཀྱན་གཞི་གནས་འབྱུར་དུ་[5.v]བདུབ་པའི་དཔེ་དུག་  
དང་རྩུ་(སྟོང་?)དུ་བསྟན། དཔེར་ན་དུག་རྩུ་གང་གི་ནང་དུ་སྟན་ཅི་ནད་ཐུང་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་གཅིག་བསྐྱར་གཉིས་བསྐྱར་བ་དང་། དུག་  
རྩུ་གང་སྟན་ནད་ཐུང་དུ་འབྱུར་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར། ཀྱན་གཞི་རྩུ་དང་འདྲ་བའི་ནང་དུ་ལས་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་དུག་  
དང་འདྲ་བ་དེ། ཤེས་རབ་རྣམ་གསུམ་ཅི་ནད་ཐུང་དང་འདྲ་བ་དེས། མཉན་བསམས་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་བྱས་པའི་དུས་ན་ཀྱན་གཞི་གནས་  
ཀྱར་ནས། ལྷ་དང་མེད་གོམ་པར་ནི་ཐོབ། བྱང་ཆུབ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གི་འབྲས་བུ་ཐོབ་པར་འབྱུར་རོ།

A person's hand and the letters [they write] are taught as an analogy for how actions, virtuous or non-virtuous, come to be established. Poison and a container (*rdze'u*) are taught as an analogy for the universal ground can [5.v] transform (*gnas'gyur*) [into gnosis]. For example, having put what is called a “curative medicinal enzyme” (*sman rtsi nad myed*) into a container filled with poison once and twice, the container filled with poison will transform into a curative medicine. Just so, the universal ground is like the container, the habitual tendencies of karmas and afflictions are like the poison, the three aspects of wisdom are like the medicinal enzyme. Through the three—studying, thinking, and [meditating]—the universal ground transforms [into gnosis], and one will attain the status of gods and humans and[, finally,] the three awakened fruits.

[བསྐྱར་གཉིས་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་སྐྱབ་པའི་རིགས་པ་]  
ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱབས་པའི་རིགས་པ་ནི། ཉན་ཐོས་པ་འཇ། ཐེག་པ་འདོག་མ་པ་རྣམས་ནི། ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་ཡང་ཆ་ཐུང་། ཡོད་  
པར་བསྟན་ཡང་མ་བསྟན། ཀྱན་གཞི་ཐུང་ན་ནི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་རིགས་ཅན་དུ་ཡང་བྱི་སྟེ། བྱང་ཆུབ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གི་འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་བྱི་  
ཐོབ་པོ། འོན་དང་ད་ལྱང་དང་རིགས་པ་དང་རྩེ་སྤྱད་པ་དང་འཁོར་བ་འབྱུག་ཐོག་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་གི་སྟོན་པ་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་  
དགོས་སོ།

As for the reasoning that proves the existence of the universal ground, Śrāvakas or those of the lower vehicles have no clue that the universal ground exists, so they do not teach its existence. If there is no universal ground, one cannot be born into the Mahāyāna lineage and will not attain the fruits of the three awakenings [of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas]. Furthermore, the existence of the universal ground is established through the authoritative scriptures, reasoning, inference, and the two aspects of entering and reversing of *samsāra* [for which the universal ground is required as an explanation].<sup>199</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Note this is possibly an important point, with the universal ground being used to explain the origin of samsara, an idea that is elaborated in later Snying thig writings.

ཐོག་མ་ཟེའད་པའི་དུས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས།  
 ཚེས་རྒྱུ་མཉམ་ཀྱང་ཀྱི་གནས་ཡིན་བས།  
 དེ་ཡོད་པས་ན་འཕྲོ་ཀྱན་དང་།  
 ཟླ་ངན་འདས་པ་ཐོབ་པ་འཁྱུར།

This element, which is without beginning,  
Is the basis of all phenomena.  
Because it exists, there come to be sentient beings  
And the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.<sup>200</sup>

ཐོག་མ་མེད་པའི་དུས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ནས་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་པ་[མ་]ཡིན་ནོ། ཀུན་གཞི་དེ་ཡོད་[པ་]དང་འགྲོ་བ་རིས་བྱུག་གི་སེམས་ཅན་  
 ཡང་ཡོད། དེ་ཡང་ཀུན་ནས་ཉན་མོངས་པའི་གཞི་ཡིན་བས་ནི། [6.r] འགྲོ་བ་རིས་བྱུག་གི་སེམས་ཅན་ཡང་ཡོད་ལ། རྣམ་པར་བྱད་  
 [བྱང་]བའི་རྟེན་ཡིན་བས་མེད་ལས་འདས་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་ཐོབ་ཤོ། ཡང་ལྷང་གྲང་དགོངས་པ་ངེས་པར་འགྲེལ་པའི་མདོ་ལས་  
 ཀུང་།

ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཟབ་ཅིག་སྟེ།  
 ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཟུ་བོ་རྒྱན་བཞིན་འབབ།  
 བདག་ཏུ་རྟོག་པར་གྱུར་ན་སྤྱི་རུང་ཞེས།  
 བྱིས་བ་རྣམས་ལ་དོན་དེ་ངས་མ་བསྟན།

It is not that the universal ground does not exist since beginningless space. The universal ground exists, so the sentient beings of the six transmigrations also exist. Since it is the ground of the afflictions, [6.r] there are the sentient beings of the six-transmigrations. Since [the universal ground] is a support for purification, one can attain the result of *nirvāṇa*. Furthermore, in the scripture, the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, it says:

The appropriating consciousness is profound and subtle.  
 All the seeds flow [through it] like a stream.  
 It is not appropriate to be conceptualized as a self,

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carry a deeper connotation relating to ultimate reality. See David Higgins, "Buddha in the Storehouse: Mi bskyod rdo rje on the Relationship between *Tathāgatagarbha* and *Ālayavijñāna*," (in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 42, 2019): 182. He translates:

The beginningless element (*dhātu*)  
 Is the basis of all phenomena.  
 Because it exists, [it allows for] all forms of life  
 As well as the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

And in its footnote 27, Higgins writes: Although no longer extant, this important *sūtra* [i.e. the *Mahāyānābhīdharmasūtra*] is quoted in the RGVV. The passage in question found at RGVV 72.13–14 reads as follows: *anādikāliko dhātuḥ sarvadhar- masamāśrayaḥ / tasmin sati gatiḥ sarvā nirvāṇādhigamo 'pi ca //* See also RGVV I.155 (J I.152) and Takasaki 1966: 290–291. The *Mahāyānābhīdharmasūtra* has also been quoted in the *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya* (tr. by Paramārtha, Taisho Edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka, XXXI, no. 1595, 157a) and the *Triṃśikābhāṣya* (TŚBh, Skt. ed. Lévi 1925: 37). The Tibetan translations of RGVV have *dbyings* instead of *kham*s (both being accepted translations of *dhātu*).

Also see Karl Brunnholzl's translation of *Compendium of the Mahāyāna*, vol. 1, p. 157:

The dhātu of beginningless time  
 Is the foundation of all phenomena.  
 Due to its existence, all forms of existence  
 And also nirvāṇa are obtained.

Also see footnote 17, p 489.

So I did not teach its meaning to childish beings.<sup>201</sup>

ལེན་པ་ནི་གནས་འཁམས་གསུམ་དང་ས་དགུར་དབང་པོ་དང་ལྷས་སུ་བཅས་པར་སྐྱེ་བ་ལེན་པས་ནི་ལེན་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཟབ་པས་ནི། ལྷ་ཆོངས་པ་དང་བརྒྱུན་གས་ཀྱང་ཉི་ཤུ་ལྟ་བུ་པས་ནི་ཉན་ཐོས་འཕྲུལ་གི་སྤྱན་ཅན་གས་ཀྱང་ཉི་ཤུ་ལྟ་བུ་གཞིགས། ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་མུ་བོ་རྒྱན་བཞིན་འབབ་པ་ནི། ཀུན་གཞིས་ཆོ་ཕྱི་མ་སྐྱེ་བ་ལེན་པ་ནི་མུ་བོ་རྒྱན་བཞིན་རྒྱ་བ་དང་འདྲ། བདག་དུ་རྟོག་པ་ནི། ཉན་ཐོས་བྱིས་བ་དང་འདྲ་བ། ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་ལ་ཤེད་མ་བྱེ་བ་ལ། ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་ཡང་མ་བསྟན་ཡོད་པར་བསྟན་ན་ང་དང་བདག་དུ་རྟོག་གིས་དོགས་ནས། བདག་དུ་རྟོག་པར་གྱུར་ན་ཕྱི་རུང་ངོ་། ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་རིགས་ཅན་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ཤེས་རབ་ཟབ་མོའི་སློང་དང་ལྷན་བ་དེ་ལ་ནི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་བསྟན་ནོ། ལྷང་གིས་དེ་ལྟར་ཡོད་དོ།

Regarding the term “appropriating,” since it takes rebirth accompanied by the body and faculties in the three realms and nine levels, it is called “appropriating.” Since the consciousness is “profound,” not even the gods such as Brahmā and Viṣṇu understand it. Since it is “subtle,” even Śrāvakas with miraculous eyes do not see it.<sup>202</sup> Regarding all the seeds flowing like a stream, the universal ground takes rebirth, which is like the constantly flowing stream. As for its being conceptualized as a self, the existence of the universal ground is not taught to Śrāvakas, who are like children and undeveloped in the correct meaning. The concern was that, if its existence were taught to them, it would be conceptualized as a self and “I,” and it would not be appropriate if it were conceptualized as a self. It is taught to the bodhisattvas, who are endowed with the profound intelligence of wisdom. There are authoritative scriptures [that teach] it to be like this.

ད་རིགས་པས་ཀྱང་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་སྟོན་རྣམ་པ་བདུན་ཅིག་ཡོད་དེ། འདྲུ་ཤེས་མེད་པའི་སྟོམས་པར་འཇུག་པ་དང་། འགོག་པའི་སྟོམས་པར་འཇུག་པ་དང་། འདྲུ་ཤེས་མེད་པ་པོ་དང་། གཉིད་སྤྱག་པོས་འོན་པ་དང་། [6.v] ར་རོ་བ་དང་། བརྒྱལ་བ་དང་། འབོག་པའི་དུས་སུ་ཆོགས་བྱུག་དང་བདུན་འགགས་ཉེ་སོང་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་དང་པོ་འགགས་ནི་གར་འགགས། ཕྱིས་བྱང་ནི་ག་ལས་བྱང་། ལྷས་ལ་འགགས་སམ་བྱས་ན། ལྷང་ལས་ཀྱང་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལྷས་ལ་བྱི་འདའ་བྱི་ཟེར་རམ།

Now, also according to reason, if [one posits] that the universal ground does not exist, there are the seven faults. During the times of (1) the deep meditative concentration without ideation, (2) the deep meditative concentration of cessation, (3) people without ideation, (4) one is pressed by deep sleep, [6.v] (5) intoxication, (6) black out, and (7) seizure, the collections of six or seven consciousnesses cease. If there were no universal ground, [then, in these states] where [the consciousnesses] have ceased, later from where could they re-emerge? If [someone] suggests they might cease into the body, then why does authoritative scripture not say that consciousness is inseparable from the body?

<sup>201</sup> See *Samdhanirmocanasūtra* (འཕགས་པ་དགོངས་པ་ངེས་འབྲེལ་ལས། སློ་བྱོས་ཡངས་པའི་ལེའུ་ལྷེ་ལ། Tōh. 106, DKG049, p. 26) ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཟབ་ཅིང་ཤ། ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་མུ་བོའི་སྤྱང་ལྟར་འབབ། ། བདག་དུ་རྟོག་པར་གྱུར་ན་མི་རུང་ཞེས། བྱིས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ངས་ནི་དེ་མ་བསྟན། །. Our text reads མུ་བོའི་རྒྱན་, but the *Samdhanirmocanasūtra* reads མུ་བོའི་སྤྱང་།. However, the meanings are similar.

<sup>202</sup> On Pelliot tibétain 699, 2r.1, the same scribe uses the same phrase, “śrāvakas with miraculous eyes” (ཉན་ཐོས་འཕྲུལ་གི་སྤྱན་ཅན་), to describe the realization of arhats. That manuscript is probably written in the same hand as ITJ708.

རིགས་པས་ཀྱང་ལུས་བཅས་པོ་གདོས་པ་ཅན་ལ་འབྲས་བུ་ལུས་ཟེད་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ཅན་དྲན་ཞིང་ཡུལ་རིག་ཅིང་རྟོགས་པའི་ངོ་བོར་  
འབྱུང་དུ་མྱེ་བདུབ་བ་འདི། རྒྱ་འབྲས་རིགས་མྱེ་གཅིག་ན། ད་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཟེད་ན་ད་ག་ལས་བྱུང་། སྐར་ལན་དུ་དེ་དང་པོ་བྱུང་ཡང་ཀྱན་  
གཞི་ལས་བྱུང་། ཕྱིས་འགགས་ཀྱང་ཀྱན་གཞི་ལ་འགགས། རིགས་པས་ཀྱང་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ།།

Also according to reason, since the physical body is inert matter, the resulting non-physical consciousness cannot emerge as [something that has] a nature of remembering, cognizing, and understanding. Since the cause [of the physical body] and result [of consciousness] are not of the same nature, if there is no universal ground, from where does this [consciousness] emerge? Once again, the answer is that initially they emerge from the universal ground and later, when they cease again, they cease into the universal ground. [Therefore], the existence of the universal ground is established through reason.

ད་རྗེས་སུ་དཔག་པས་ཀྱང་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་དགོས། དཔེར་ན་རྒྱ་མཐོང་ན་ཡང་འབྲས་བུ་དུ་བ་མཐོང་བའི་སྒོ་ནས་དེའི་ཅ་ན་མྱེ་  
ཡོད་པར་ཡིད་ཆེས་ལ། རྗེས་སུ་དཔག་གོ། དཔེ་དེ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། རྒྱ་ཀྱན་གཞི་མ་མཐོང་ན་ཡང་འབྲས་བུ་ཆོགས་དྲུག་པོ་རགས་པར་  
མཐོང་བའི་སྒོ་ནས། ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་ཡིད་ཆེས་ལ་རྗེས་སུ་དཔགས་སོ། འཁོར་བ་ལྷགས་སུ་འབྱུང་བའི་གནས་སྐབས་སུ་ཡང་། སེམས་  
ཅན་ནི་བག་ཆགས་ལས་སྐྱེས་པར་ངེས་ན། བག་ཆགས་ལས་སྐྱེས་པའི་རྟོགས་ཅི་ཡོད་བྱས་ན། དཔེར་ན་བྱ་བུ་ཅིག་བྱུང་ན་ཁྱ་ང་ཟེར་བ་  
དང་། ཅུ་བ་དེ་པ་མ་ལ་སྟོ་མཐོ་བྱེད་པ་ལས་བསོགས་པ་སུས་ཀྱང་བཟུན་མྱེ་དགོས། ཆོ་སྒྲོན་མའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་དེ་ལྟར་སྐྱེས་སོ།

Now, according to inference too, the universal ground must exist. For example, one can be confident and infer there is fire in the vicinity by seeing its result, smoke, even if the cause [of that smoke], fire, is not seen. Similarly, one can be confident and infer there is a universal ground by seeing its result, the sixfold collection, as substantive, even though the cause, the universal ground, is not seen. Also, at the occasion of the progressive production of *samsāra* (Skt. *anulomah*), it is certain that sentient beings are born from their habitual tendencies. Suppose someone asks, “What signs are there to indicate that beings are born from habitual tendencies?” For example, when a child is born, they say “oh, little me” and cry, indicating to the parents that they need food and so forth. No one needs to teach them that [because] they are born with the habitual tendencies of past lives.

ཉན་ཐོས་སམ་ཐེག་པ་འོག་མ་བ་རྒྱམས་ནི། སེམས་ཅན་ནི་བག་ཆགས་ལས་སྐྱེས་པར་འདོད། ཀྱན་གཞི་ནི་ཡོད་པར་མྱེ་འདོད། ད་ཀྱན་  
གཞི་མྱེ་འདོད་ན། [7.r] བག་ཆགས་གང་ལ་བསྟོ། རྒྱ་དགེ་བ་ལ་བསྟོ་འམ་བྱས་ན། སྐ་ཅི་དང་འདྲ། རྒྱ་དགེ་བ་ལ་བསྟོ་འམ་བྱས་  
ན། སྟོག་སྐྱེད་དང་འདྲ། རང་གི་དྲི་ཆེ་གཞན་གི་དྲི་འགག་གཟུགས་ལ་བསྟོ་འམ་བྱས་ན་རྟོ་རིལ་དང་འདྲ། བག་ཆགས་བསྟོ་བའི་གཞི་  
ཟེད། ཡིད་གི་རྒྱམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་བསྟོ་འམ་བྱས་ན། ཉུར་ཉེ་སྟོག་དང་འདྲ། དཔེར་ན་རྒྱ་མཐུག་ལ་ཕྱེ་ཕུར་ཡང་མ་ཐོད་ཟེར་བ་དང་འདྲ་  
བར་ན། ཆོགས་དྲུག་པོ་གཅིག་ལ་གཅིག་བསྟོ་འམ་བྱས་ན། ལུང་ལས་ཀྱང་།

ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར།  
དྲུག་པོ་དག་དང་འབྲེལ་ཟེད་དེ།  
སྐད་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཟེད་པའི་ཕྱིར།  
རིགས་ལས་བཟུས་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ།

Śrāvakas and the lower vehicles assert that sentient beings are born from habitual tendencies but do not assert there is a universal ground. Now, if they do not assert a universal ground, [7.r] where are the habitual tendencies imprinted? If they say they imprint on virtuous causes, then [those virtuous causes] are like musk. If they say they imprint on non-virtuous causes, those are like garlic. Its own smell is so strong that it stops the other's smell.<sup>203</sup> If they say they imprint on the physical body, [the body] is like a piece of rock; there is no basis for imprinting the habitual tendencies. If they say, they imprint on mental consciousness, [that consciousness] is fleeting (*myur*) like lightning. It is like the proverb that barley powder cannot stay on a rudder (*rkya mjug*). If someone says they imprint in the sixfold-collection, authoritative scripture states:

Because that would contradict them being different in three ways,  
The six [consciousnesses] are not connected.  
And because their moments cannot exist together [i.e., at the same time].  
If viewed in terms of type, they would become something other than themselves.<sup>204</sup>

གནས་དབང་པོ་ཐ་དང། བསམ་བ་ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཐ་དང། ལྷན་ཅིག་འདུག་པར་འདྲ་ན་ཡང་། ཉེ་བའི་སྐལ་པས་ཆོད་ནས་འཕྲད་པའི་  
དུས་མེད། ཤེས་པ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྒོམ་འཇུག་ན། སྤྱི་མ་ནི་ཐལ་ཏེ་སོང་། སྤྱི་མ་ནི་འགགས་ཏེ་སོང་། ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་གཅིག་པ་ལ་བསྒོམ་  
འཇུག་ན། དག་བཅོམ་བའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་བག་ཆགས་བསྒོམ་བའི་སྒྲིན་དུ་འགྱུར་ན། སྒྲིན་རང་ལ་རང་བསྒོམ་འཇུག་ན། སྒྲིས་བྱ་ཅི་ལྟར་ཅལ་  
ཆེ་ཡང་རང་ལ་རང་སྒྲིའོད། རལ་གྱི་ཅི་ཏྲ་ལྟ་ཡང་རང་ལ་རང་སྒྲིའོད།

<sup>203</sup> Asvabhāva's commentary on *Mahāyānasamgraha* explains this as follows (I.23): "[An odor] will be impregnated into something that is not only stable but also neutral—something of even odor. It is not [impregnated] into something of pleasant odor (like musk), or into something of unpleasant odor (like garlic)." See Karl Brunnholzl's translation of *Compendium of the Mahayana*, vol. 2, p. 623. Note that Asvabhāva also then says that stones cannot take the imprints of the habitual tendencies, though he does not mention the stones being a metaphor for the form *skandha*.

<sup>204</sup> Tib: ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། སྤྱག་པོ་དག་དང་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། སྐད་ཅིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། རིགས་ལས་བསྐྱས་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ། This verse comes from Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha*, reads: སྤྱག་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། སྐད་ཅིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ། (ཐོགས་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་བསྐྱས་པ།, Tōh. 3720, 7b.1-2). Note the difference in the second line in this verse, where the Sde dge reads: ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར།. The Dunhuang (འགལ་བ་ instead of འབྲེལ་བ་) reads better. Also note the reversed order of the first two lines. Strangely, the same verse in Pelliot tibetan 654, 2v.3, follows the Sde dge order: སྤྱག་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། སྐད་ཅིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར།. PT654 agrees, however, with ITJ708 and the *Mun pa'i go cha* on the wording of line 2 (ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར།). Also, PT654 is missing one line. The Peking edition (Q.4543, 8a.3) of Asaṅga's text reads: སྤྱག་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། སྐད་ཅིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ།, and it also follows our preference for འགལ་བ་. For Karl Brunnholzl's translation of Asaṅga's verse, see his *Compendium of the Mahāyāna* vol. 1, p.165:

The six [consciousnesses] are not connected  
Because that would contradict their threefold difference  
And because there are no simultaneous moments.  
If this referred to type, something else would follow.

Even though the different objects and sense faculties and the different thoughts or mental engagements<sup>205</sup> seem to exist together, because they are separated by small gaps, they never contact each other. Suppose someone says, “do [the habitual tendencies from] the previous [moment] of consciousness imprint on the subsequent [moment]?” Because the previous moment has passed away and gone, in the subsequent moment, it has ceased and is gone.<sup>206</sup> Suppose someone says, “maybe [the habitual tendencies] imprint in the same consciousness [from which they come].” Then there would be the fault of an Arhat’s consciousness being a basis for imprinting the habitual tendencies.<sup>207</sup> Suppose someone says, “[the habitual tendencies] imprint in the five sense consciousnesses themselves,” [it is impossible] for one to sit on one’s [own shoulders] regardless of how acrobatic one is, [and] no matter how sharp a sword is, it cannot cut itself.

འོན་དང་བག་ཆགས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་གཞི་བོ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཅིག་ཡོད་དགོས། ཀུན་གཞི་ཟུང་ན་འགྲོ་བ་རིས་དྲུག་གི་སེམས་ཅན་ཡང་ཟུང་བའི་སྒྲིན་དུ་འགྱུར་ན། འོང་དང་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡང་ཡོད་དགོས། བག་ཆགས་ཀྱང་དེ་ལ་བསྒྲིན་དགོས། བསྐྱེད་ན་ཐབས་ཅི་ལྟར་བསྐྱེད་བྱས་པ་ལ། དང་པོ་མ་རིག་པས་མ་རིག་ནས་ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་ལ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན། ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་དངོས་པོར་བལྟས། དངོས་པོ་དེ་ལ་ཆགས་སྣང་སྒྲུབ། ལུས་ཡིད་དུ་འོང་བ་ལ་འདོད་ཆགས། ཡིད་དུ་ཟུང་བ་ལ་ཞུས་པ། འཕྲད་ཅིང་བལྟ་བའི་ལས་བྱས། [7.v] ལས་གི་བག་ཆགས་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བསྒྲིན་ནས། ཆོ་ཕྱི་མ་ལ་སྒྲིབ་ནས་བཞེས་སྒྲིབ་ཅིང་། འགྲོ་བ་རིས་དྲུག་སོ་སོ་སྒྲིབ་ཅིང་རྒྱུར་གྱུར་པས་ཀྱང་། ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ།

Therefore, for the basis of storing habitual tendencies, there must be the universal ground. If there were no universal ground, there would be no sentient beings of the six realms, so there must be the universal ground.<sup>208</sup> The habitual tendencies must imprint in it. If one asks, “given that [the habitual tendencies] are stored [in the universal ground], how are they stored?” First, ignorance, being aware, was confused about the ultimate reality. It views all phenomena as entities, and desire and hatred toward those entities arise—desire toward attractive objects and hatred toward unpleasant objects. One engages in the karmic activities of meeting and separation. [7.v] The habitual tendencies of those karmic activities imprint in the universal ground, whereupon one will be reborn, being born in one of the four births. Because those habitual tendencies are the cause for the migration through the six realms, it is clear there must be a universal ground.

<sup>205</sup> Gnubs chen explains these three as referring གནས་, དབང་པོ་, and ལུས་, which might (?) be translated as sensory domain (གནས་), sense faculty (དབང་པོ་), and object (ལུས་). Our own text seems to treat them differently, perhaps making more sense.

<sup>206</sup> For this sentence, ITJ654 (2v.3-4) is clearer: སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ཐུ་མས་ཕྱི་མ་ལ་སྒྲིབ་ཞེ་ན། དེ་ཡང་ཟུང་བཟུང་བྱེ། ཐུ་མ་མ་འགགས་པར་ནི་ཕྱི་མ་ཟུང་བྱེ། ཕྱི་མ་སྒྲིབ་ཅིང་ན་ནི་ཐུ་མ་འགགས་ཏེ་ཕྱི་འཕྲད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །.

<sup>207</sup> Compare ཟུན་པའི་གོ་ཆ་, p. 73: ཤེས་པ་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ཐུ་ཕྱི་ལ་བསྒྲིབ་ཞེ་ན། ལྷན་ཅིག་མི་གནས་པའི་འགལ་བ་ཡོད་པས་མི་བཟུང་བྱེ། ཟུང་བྱེ་བྱེད་ཐུ་མི་འཕྲད་པ་དང་འདྲའོ། །འོ་ན་ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་གང་དང་གང་ལ་བསྒྲིབ་ཞེ་ན། ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་མང་པོ་ཐ་དང་པས་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ལ་འང་བསྒྲིབ་པའི་སྒྲིན་དུ་ <74>འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་བས་ན་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་དགོས་སོ། Note how Gnubs chen refers to ཤེས་པ་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་, whereas ITJ654 reads སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ and ITJ708 reads ཤེས་པ་, perhaps suggesting the author of the two Dunhuang documents is reading either Gnubs chen or another text like his. This at least suggests both were written based on some third text, not from one another.

<sup>208</sup> This seems tautological.

འཁོར་བ་ལུགས་ནས་བསྒྲིག་པའི་གནས་སྐབས་སུ་ཀུན་ཞི་མེད་ན་བག་ཆགས་གང་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་། མཐོང་བ་སྤང་བར་བྱ་བ་བརྟུ་  
 ཅུ་ཅུ་གཅིག་གི་གནས་སྐབས་སུ་བདེན་བ་བཞིའི་དོན་མཐོང་བ་གཅིག་གིས་མངོན་དུ་རྟུ་བ་སྤང་དགོས། བསྒྲིག་བ་སྤང་བར་བྱ་བའི་  
 གནས་སྐབས་སུ་བདེན་བ་བཞིའི་དོན་ཡང་ནས་ཡང་དུ་བསྒྲིམས་པ་གཅིག་གིས་བག་ལ་ཉལ་བའི་ཆ་སྤྱོད་མ་གཅིག་སྤང་དགོས།

During reversing *samsāra* (Skt. *pratilomaḥ*), if the universal ground (*ālaya*) did not exist, how could one abandon afflictions? During the eighty-one abandonments of [the path] of seeing,<sup>209</sup> one who sees the meaning of the four noble truths needs to abandon obviously fluctuating [afflictions]. During the time for abandoning in [the path] of meditation, one who meditates on the meaning of the four truths again and again needs to abandon the subtle aspects that are latent.

སྒོ་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་བར་བྱས་ན། ཕྱིར་ལྟས་ན་ནི་འཕྲོས་ཏེ་སོང་། རྟེན་དུ་ལྟས་ན་ནི་འགག་དེ་སོང་། ཉན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ལ་  
 གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་བར་བྱས་ན། ཁོ་བདག་ཀྱང་འཕགས་པའི་ལམ་གི་གནས་སྐབས་ན། སྤང་བར་བྱ་བའི་ཆོས་ཅན་ཡིན་ན། དཔེར་ན་བག་  
 ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བག་ཆགས་ཟྱེ་སྤང་ལ། གྲི་མས་གྲི་མ་ཟྱེ་འབྲུ་ཟྱེ་བེར་རམ།

Suppose someone says, “[During meditation,] are [the habitual tendencies] abandoned while they abide in [the consciousnesses of] the five sense doors?” [The refutation is:] if [the consciousness] looks outwardly, [the habitual tendencies] will only proliferate. And if it looks inwardly, they will simply cease. Suppose someone says, “Are [the habitual tendencies] abandoned while they abide in the afflictive mental consciousness?” [The refutation is:] the self also must be abandoned during the path of noble ones (*ārya*), so what about the sayings that a habitual tendency can not abandon itself and a stain can not clean itself?

ཡིད་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་བར་བྱས་པ་ལ། སྤང་བར་བྱ་བའི་གཉེན་པོ་ཡང་ཡིན། སྤང་བར་བྱེད་པའི་གཞི་པོ་ཡང་  
 ཡིན། དཔེར་ན་ལྷགས་ཚན་ལ་ཆེ་སྒྲུར་ཟྱེ་ཆགས་བེར་བ་འམ། ཟྱེ་ལྷེ་ལ་སྤང་བྱ་ཟྱེ་ཆགས་བེར་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ན། གཉེན་པོ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ་  
 བག་ཆགས་གནས་པའི་མཐུ་ཟེད། ཀུན་གཞི་ཟེད་ན་བག་ཆགས་གང་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་། འོན་དང་ད་བག་ཆགས་སོག་པའི་གཞི་པོ་  
 ཅིག་ཡོད་དགོས། ཀུན་གཞི་ནི་བག་ཆགས་སོག་པའི་གཞི་པོར་ཁས་སྤངས། ཉན་མོངས་པའ་ཅན་ཡིད་གིས་ནི། བག་ཆགས་སུ་ཁས་  
 སྤངས། ཡིད་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པས་ནི་བག་ཆགས་སྤང་བའི་གཉེན་པོ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་ཁས་སྤངས། བག་ཆགས་ཁད་ནས་ཁད་ཀྱིས་མ་ལུས་  
 པར་སྤངས་ནས། ལྷ་དང་ཟྱེ་འི་གོ་འཕང་ [8.r] ཐོབ། བྱང་རྟུབ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གི་འབྲས་བུ་ཡང་ཐོབ་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། བྱང་རྟུབ་རྣམ་  
 གསུམ་གི་འབྲས་བུ་ལ་བསྒྲོས་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ།

Suppose someone says, “are [the habitual tendencies] abandoned while they abide in the mental consciousness?” [The refutation is:] [the mental consciousness] is also the antidote for what is to be abandoned. It is also the basis for the abandonment. It would be like a piece of dried grass being unable to stay on a piece of burning iron, or an insect being unable to fly into a flame. Similarly, habitual tendencies have no power to abide in the antidote, gnosis. If there is no universal ground, where would the habitual tendencies abide so that they can be abandoned? Therefore, it is necessary to have a basis where the habitual tendencies can accumulate, so it is asserted that the universal ground is the basis for accumulating the habitual tendencies, and it is asserted that the habitual tendencies [accumulate] because of the afflictive mental consciousness, and it is asserted that gnosis, which is the antidote for abandoning the habitual tendencies, comes

<sup>209</sup> Some texts talk about eight-one things to be abandoned in the path of meditation, but not the path of seeing—may be an error here.

about by means of the mental consciousness. While one is bit-by-bit abandoning all the habitual tendencies [on the path of meditation], one will attain the state of [i.e., be reborn as] gods and humans. [8.r] Finally, one will attain the fruits of the three awakened states. Based on the fruits of the three awakened states, it is obvious that the universal ground exists.

[བརྩ་གསུམ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཚྭ་པའི་དུས་]

ཚྭ་པའི་དུས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི། ཟད་པ་ཤེ་(ཤེས་)་དང་། ཟེ་སྐྱེས་བ་ཐོབ་པ་འོ། ཟད་པ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་ཉོང་མོངས་པ་ཟད་པ་ལ་བྱ། ཟེ་སྐྱེ་བ་ཐོབ་པ་ནི་འཁོར་བར་ཟེ་སྐྱེ་བ་ལ་བྱ།

What is called the time of reversing is when one realizes exhaustion and attains non-rebirth.<sup>210</sup> Realizing exhaustion refers to the exhaustion of afflictions. Attaining non-rebirth refers to not taking rebirth in *samsāra*.

[བརྩ་བཞི་ཀུན་གཞི་གནས་ཀྱང་པ་]

གནས་ཀྱང་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་ནི། མོས་པར་སྦྱོད་པའི་ས་པ་མན་ཅད་དུ། གཟུང་འཛིན་གི་སྐྱིབ་པ་རགས་པ་སྤངས་ནས། ས་དང་པོ་རབ་དུ་དགའ་བའི་བདེན་བ་ལྷག་གིས་མཐོང་བའི་དུས་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་འོར་ཅིག་གནས་འགྱུར། ས་བདུན་པ་མཚན་མ་ལས་རིང་དུ་གྱུར་བའི་དུས་ན། མཚན་མའི་རྟོག་པ་དང་བྲལ། བརྒྱད་པ་ཟེ་གཡོ་བ་ལ་ཀུན་གཞི་འོར་ཅིག་གནས་ཀྱང་། ས་བརྩ་མཐར་ཟུང་། ཤེས་བྱའི་སྐྱིབ་པ་བག་ལ་ཉལ་བའི་ཆ་ཕྱ་མོ་ཡང་། རྟོ་རྟེ་ལྟ་བུ་ཉིང་ངེ་འཛིན་གིས་སྤངས་ནས། ཡིད་འཕགས་པའི་ལམ་ལ་དབྱིགས། ཀུན་གཞི་གནས་ཀྱང་། ཟེ་མོངས་ལྟ་བུ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་གྱུར་རོ།

Regarding the characteristic of the transformation [of the universal ground], up until the stage of devoted conduct,<sup>211</sup> the grasped (object) and grasping (subject) are abandoned from coarse to [subtle]. Then, on the first *bhūmi* of Complete Joy, when the truth is seen clearly, the universal ground is transformed (འོར་ཅིག་; partially or temporarily?).<sup>212</sup> At the time of the seventh *bhūmi*, when one becomes distanced from signs, one is free of conceptual signs. On the eighth *bhūmi* of Unmoving, the universal ground is transformed temporarily(?). [When] the tenth *bhūmi* is complete, even the subtle latencies of the obscurations of knowledge are abandoned by the vajra-like *samādhi*. The mind (*vid*) focuses on the noble path, and the universal ground transforms into mirror-like gnosis.<sup>213</sup>

[ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་]

ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་གནས་དབང་པོ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་གནས།

Regarding the place of the afflictive mental consciousness, its faculty also resides in the universal ground.

<sup>210</sup> Gnubs chen does not have this thirteenth topic. He does, however, discuss the “time of reversing” for the mental consciousness (*vid kyi rnam par shes pa*), which constitutes the third of his four “sutras” (see *Bka ma rgyas pa*, p. 102).

<sup>211</sup> I.e., prior to the path of seeing.

<sup>212</sup> Dan Martin suggests for འོར་ཅིག་: *lan cig* or *thengs cig*, which would give “temporarily,” but this seems a strange idea.

<sup>213</sup> This fits with the view expressed above that the mental consciousness provides the antidote to ignorance.

དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དམིགས། ལྷང་ལས་ཀྱང་

དེ་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་རབ་བྱུང་བ།  
དེ་ལ་དམིགས་པ་ཡིད་ཅེས་བྱ།  
རྣམ་སེམས་ངར་སེམས་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན།

Regarding its referential object, it perceives the universal ground. The authoritative scripture [*Trimśika*] states:

Emerging in dependence on that [universal ground consciousness],  
That which perceives that [universal ground] is called a mental [consciousness].  
It is a consciousness that has a nature of thinking about self.<sup>214</sup>

ངེས་པའི་ཚིག་ཨང་མ་ན་ཞེས་བྱ། ང་དང་བདག་དུ་རྣམ་སེམས་པའོ། ཀུན་གྱི་ཏ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ངན་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ཡིད་ཅེས་བྱའོ།

Regarding the etymology, it is called “*atmana*” (*sic* for *-manas*). It is egoistic, [conceptualizes] self, and conceited. The term *ke’u kri ta* (*kliṣṭa-*) means it is a mind that creates negativity.

འཁོར་ནི་སྤྱན་མོང་གི་འཁོར་ལཱའི་ཐོག་དུ་ཕྱིན་ཅུ་ལྟག་གི་འཁོར་བཞི་བཞག་སྟེ། དགུ་དང་ལྔ་ནོ།

Regarding its companions, it is endowed with nine, including the five common companions and adding the four erroneous ones.<sup>215</sup>

ལས་ནི་རྩ་མཐུན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ནི་སོག་རྣམ། རྣམ་པར་སྦྱིན་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་ནི་སྦྱོང་ཕྱི་རྣམ། ཚས་ནི་ལྷང་དུ་མ་བཞུན། མཚན་ཉིད་ཕྱི་  
རྟག་པར་བཤད། ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱབ་པའི་རིགས་པ་ནི། ལྷང་ལས་ཀྱང་

ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ཕྱིད་ན།  
གཞིས་ཕྱིད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བ་འོ།

<sup>214</sup> These three lines are cites from Vasubandhu’s *Trimśika-kārikas* (སུམ་ཅུ་པའི་ཚིག་ལེན་པ་བྱས་པ། དབྱིག་གཉེན།, Tōh. 4055, pp.1-2), and it reads དེ་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་རབ་འབྱུང་ཞིང་། དེ་ལ་དམིགས་པ་ཡིད་ཅེས་བྱ། །རྣམ་སེམས་ངར་སེམས་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན། །. These three lines more or less match. See David Choephel’s translation of the first two lines in *The Thirty Verses* (Vasubandhu’s *Trimśika-kārikas*). It follows:

That which arises based on it  
And focuses on it which is called  
Egoism, a consciousness  
With egoism as its nature. (p. 3)

<sup>215</sup> The five are common to the universal ground consciousness, as discussed in the *Trimśika* and in the companions section above: i.e., contact, mental engagement, awareness, ideation, and attention. The four seem to be the four errors that appear in the *Trimśika*’s discussion of afflicted mental consciousness, i.e., self-view, self-infatuation, self-pride, and self-love.

Regarding its deeds: It can accumulate the concordant habitual tendencies, [but] it cannot produce their ripened results. Regarding its dharma, it is indeterminate. Regarding its characteristic, it is explained to be impermanent. Regarding the logic establishing its existence, the authoritative scripture says:

If the afflictive mental consciousness did not exist,  
The two do not exist and the three would be contradictory.<sup>216</sup>

[8.v] གཉིས་མེད་པ་ནི་མ་འདྲིས་པའི་མ་རིག་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། དེས་པའི་ཚིག་མེད་པ། མ་འདྲིས་པ་ནི་ཉན་མོངས་པར་རིགས་གཅིག་ན་ཡང་། ཚ་བའི་ཉན་མོངས་པ་བྱུག་དང་། ཉེ་བའི་ཉན་མོངས་པ་ཉི་ཤུ་དེ་དང་ནི་མ་འདྲིས་པར། བཅུ་གཅིག་དགེ་བའི་གནས་སྐབས་སུ་བྱུང་ནས། དགེ་བ་ལ་སྒྲུབ་སེམས་མེད་པ་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ལ་མ་རིག་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། སྒྲུབ་སེམས་དེ་ཡོད་པས་ཀྱང་ཉན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ། ཡང་ན་དེས་པའི་ཚིག་ནི་ཨང་མ་ན་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ང་དང་བདག་དུ་སྒྲུབ་སེམས་པའོ། སྒྲུབ་སེམས་པ་དེ་ཡོད་པས་ཀྱང་། ཉན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ། ད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བ་ནི། སྒྲུབ་དང་འདྲ་བ་མེད་པའི་འགལ་བ་དང་། ཡིད་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལ་གནས་དབང་པོ་མེད་པའི་འགལ་བ་དང་། སྒྲུབ་པར་འཇུག་པ་རྣམ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་བྱེད་བྱ་མེད་པའི་འགལ་བ་འོ།

[8.v] “The two do not exist” means: There would be no distinctive ignorance and its etymology. Since the distinctive ignorance has the same nature of afflictions, it is not mingled with the six root afflictions and its twenty branches. It occurs at the time of the virtue of the eleventh. It is called “ignorance” based on being proud of only the virtuous [deeds]. Since it has that pride, there is also obviously the afflictive mental consciousness. Or, its etymology is *ad ma na* (\**ātman*), being proud of self and ego. Since it has that pride, there is also obviously the afflictive mental consciousness. Now, regarding “the three contradictions,” there are: (1) the contradiction that [the mental consciousness] would not be similar to the five sense doors, (2) it contradicts that there is a place or faculty for the mental consciousness, and (3) it contradicts that there are no differences between the two aspects in meditative absorptions.

སྒྲུབ་དང་འདྲ་བ་མེད་པའི་འགལ་བ་ནི། སྒྲུབ་ཡང་རྒྱུན་བཞིན་སྟེ། ཉན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ཀྱང་རྒྱུན་པའི་སྒྲུབ་པ་ལ་བྱ། མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱུན་པའི་སྒྲུབ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་ཡིད་ཀྱིས་གོ་བྱེད་པ་ལ་བྱ། སྒྲུབ་པར་འཇུག་པ་རྣམ་གཉིས་ནི། འདུ་ཤེས་མེད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་པར་འཇུག་པ་ལ་གང་ཟག་གང་འཇུག་ཟུ་སྟགས་འཇུག་གནས་གང་ནས་འཇུག་དགེ་རྒྱས་འདོག་ཆགས་དང་བལ་བའི་གནས་དེ་ནས་འཇུག་གནས་གང་དུ་འཇུག་གཟུགས་འཁམས་གི་ཡ་ཉླ་འབྲས་བྱ་ཆེ་ནམ་གི་གནས་དེ་ནས་འཇུག་སེམས་གང་འགག་ཚིགས་བྱུག་ག་འགག་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་གང་ལ་སྒྱུན་དུ་བཞི། [9.r] འདུ་ཤེས་ལ་སྒྱུན་དུ་བཞི། ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཅི་ལྟ། དགེ་རྒྱས་འདོད་

<sup>216</sup> Note it is also cited in Gnubs chen’s *Mun pa’i go cha*, see Mahāyānasamgraha, [D4048](#) - *theg pa chen po bsdus pa*, 4a6-7: ཉན་མོངས་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་མེད་ན། གཉིས་མེད་གསུམ་པོ་འགལ་བར་འགྱུར། ། The first two flaws of affiliated mental consciousness not existing are explained as (1) unique ignorance (i.e., not mixed with the other afflictions) would not exist either, and (2) the mental consciousness would be different from the five sense consciousnesses: The three are དེས་པའི་ཚིག་མེད་པའི་སྒྱུན་དུ་ཡང་འགྱུར་རོ། །འདུ་ཤེས་མེད་པ་དང་། འཁོག་པའི་སྒྲུབ་པར་འཇུག་པ་བྱེད་མེད་པའི་སྒྱུན་དུ་ཡང་འགྱུར་ཏེ།...ངོ་སྟོན་པའི་ང་རྒྱལ་མེད་ན་འདུ་ཤེས་མེད་པར་སྟེ་བ་ཐོག་ཐག་དུ་ཉན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སྒྱུན་དུ་ཡང་འགྱུར་རོ།. Also see its commentary: [D4052](#) - *don gsang ba rnam par phye ba bsdus te bshad pa* (*Vivrtagūḍhārthapīṇḍavyākhyā*, attributed to Vasubandhu?), 322b.2-4, which explains these flaws that would result from the lack of an afflicted mental consciousness. See also Brunnhölzl 2018, vol. 1, pdf pp 200-201.

ཆགས་དང་བླ་པ་པའི་གནས་དེ་ནི། ལྷ་བ་འཕེལ་གཡན་བ་ཅམ་དུ་སྒྲིག་གཟུགས་འཕམས་གི་ཡ་ཏྲིག་འབྲས་བུ་ཆེ་ནམ་གི་གནས་དེ་  
ནི། གཏན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་ན་ལས་འདས་པའི་གནས་སམ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་གནས་སུ་སྒྲིག་

(1) Regarding the contradiction that [the mental consciousness] would not be similar to the five sense doors: the five sense doors are born due to four kinds of conditions. For the mental consciousness too, the [perceiving object] condition should be taken to be the objects of the five sense doors.<sup>217</sup> (2) Regarding the concomitant immediate condition (*mtshungs pa de ma thag pa'i rkyen*), [the afflicted mental consciousness] is activated by the mental [consciousness] which immediately follows the five sense doors. (3) As for the two meditative absorptions, what kind of person engages in the meditative absorption without ideation (*'dus shes myed pa'i snyom par 'jug pa*)? The non-Buddhists (*tirthikas*) engage in [it]. From which realm do they engage in it? [They] engage in it from the [third form *dhyāna*] of Full Virtue (*dge rgyas*) which is in the realm free from desire. Within which realm does their engagement occur? They engage within the space realm of the [fourth form *dhyāna*] of Great Result (*'bras bu che*) which is at the top of the form realm. What types of minds cease? All the six consciousnesses cease. What mental factor is reckoned to be its fault? [9.r] Ideation is reckoned to be the fault [it treats]. What mental engagement (*vid la byed pa*) does it see [as the fault]? The [third *dhyāna*] of Full Virtue (*dge rgyas*) which is in the realm free from desire is reckoned [to have faults] that are like slight sores or itches.<sup>218</sup> They [i.e. the non-Buddhists] consider the space realm of the Great Result (*'bras bu che*) at the top of the form realm to be the ever-lasting realm of *nirvāṇa* or a realm of buddhas.

འགོག་པའི་སྒྲུབས་པ་གང་ལ་འཇུག་དག་བཅོམ་བ་དང་ཕྱིར་ཕྱི་ཐོག་པ་ལ་འཇུག་གནས་གང་ནས་འཇུག་ཅི་ཡང་སྤྱད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་མཆོད་  
ནས་འཇུག་གནས་གང་དུ་འཇུག་ཡོད་མེན་སྤྱད་མེན་སྒྲུབ་མཆོད་ནས་འཇུག་སེམས་གང་འགག་ཆོགས་བདུན་འགག་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་  
བ་གང་ལ་སྒྲུབ་དུ་བསྒྲིག་ཆོར་བ་ལ་སྒྲུབ་དུ་བསྒྲིག་ཡོད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་ཅི་ལྟར་སྟེ། ཡོད་མེན་སྤྱད་མེན་སྒྲུབ་མཆོད་དམ་ཅི་ཡང་སྤྱད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་  
མཆོད་གི་གནས་དེ་ཀྱན་ཡང་། གཏན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་ན་ལས་འདས་པའི་གནས་སུ་སྒྲིག་བར་གི་བཙུག་གནས་སམ་ལམ་སྟགས་ཅམ་དུ་མཐོང་  
ངོ།

Within which [realm] does the meditative absorption of cessation occur? It occurs within [the realm of] *arhats* and non-returners. From which realm is it engaged? It is entered into from [the third formless realm] the Sense Base of Nothingness (*ci yang myed pa'i skye mched*). Within which realm does their engagement occur? It is engaged within [fourth formless *dhyāna*] of the Sense Base of Neither Presence Nor Absence (*yod men myed men skye mched*). What types of minds cease? The seven-fold collected [consciousnesses] cease. What mental factor is reckoned to be its fault? “Feeling” is reckoned to be the fault [it treats]. How does it see mental engagement? Neither [the third and fourth formless *dhyānas* of] the Sense Base of Neither Presence Nor Absence and the Sense Base of Nothingness are seen as the ever-lasting realm of *nirvāṇa*, rather they are seen just as intermediary places or signs on the path.

<sup>217</sup> Here we have changed the subject of the sentence from the afflicted mental consciousness to the mental consciousness to make better sense. Our translation here relies on the *Vivṛtagūḍhārthapiṇḍavyākhyā*, I.7, as translated by Brünholzl, vol. 2, = pdf pp. 660-61), which says the issue is that the mental consciousness must be similar to the five sense consciousnesses in sharing the afflicted mental consciousness as their dominant cause (*bdag rkyen*). It is unclear what our author is doing here.

<sup>218</sup> Just as itchy skin is a minor surface issue.

སྟོམས་པར་འབྱུག་པ་རྣམ་གཉིས་པོ་དེ་ལ་བྱེ་བྲག་ཅི་ཡོད་བྱས་པ་ལ། འདྲ་ཤེས་མེད་པའི་སྟོམས་པར་འབྱུག་པ་ནི་སྟོ་ལྡོ་ཡིད་དང་རྒྱག་  
བཀག་ནས། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ངོས་མ་ཟེན་བས་འཁོར་བའི་རྒྱར་སོང་ངོ་། འགོག་པའི་སྟོམས་པར་འབྱུག་པས་ནི་སྟོ་ལྡོ་ཡིད་  
དང་རྒྱག་བཀག་པའི་སྟེང་དུ་ཡང་། བརྟན་བ་ལས་ཁ་ཅིག་འགག་ཅེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ངོས་བཟུང་བས། དག་བཅོམ་  
བའི་འབྲས་བུ་ཐོབ་བོ། དེས་ཀྱང་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ།

Suppose someone asks what are the differences between these two meditative absorptions: The “meditative absorption without ideation,” having stopped the five sense doors and mental consciousness, the afflictive mental consciousness is not recognized [as a problem], so it becomes the cause of *samsāra*. The meditative concentration of cessation stops the five sense doors and mental consciousness, and additionally, it is said that some among the continuities are stopped.<sup>219</sup> The afflictive mental consciousness is recognized [as a problem], so the result of arhatship is attained. For that reason, there is obviously the afflictive mental consciousness.

འོན་དང་ད་ཡིད་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་རྒྱུན་ཚང་། སྐད་ཅིག་མ་དང་མ་ལ་ས་མན་ད་ར་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་ཡིད་གིས་གོ་  
བྱེ། སྐད་ཅིག་མ་གཉིས་པ་ལ་ཨང་མ་ན་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གི་ཡིད་ལ་བརྟེན་དེ་བུང་། ད་ཡིད་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་  
རྒྱུན་ཚང་། དེ་དག་བཅོམ་ཉིད་ན་མེད། འགོག་པའི་སྟོམས་པར་འབྱུག་ལ་མེད། [9.v] [འདི་ཡི་རྒྱུ་ཤོག་སྟོང་པ་རེད་འདུག]

Moreover, here, regarding the complete conditions for the mental consciousness: The first moment is called the *sa man da ra* (\**samanantara*, *de ma thag rkyen*, immediately preceding condition). The second moment is called the *ad ma na* (\**ātman*), which emerges in dependence on the afflictive mental consciousness. Here the conditions for the mental consciousness are complete. It does not exist for arhats, and it does not exist in the meditative absorption of cessation. [9.v]

<sup>219</sup> In the *Pañcaskandhabhāṣya* (*phung po lnga'i bshad pa*, Tōh. 4068= [D4068](#)) attributed to \*Prthivībandhu, we read a possibly related passage: བརྟན་པ་རྣམས་ལས་ཀྱང་ཁ་ཅིག་གང་འགོག་པའི་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་སྟོས་ཏེ། སེམས་དང་སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་གནས་པ་ལ་  
རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཏེ། ཀྱན་གཞི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཡིད་གཉིས་ལ་བརྟེན་པ་གཅིག་འཁོར་དང་བཅས་ཏེ་འགགས་སོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་དོན་ནོ། (p. 84b5-6). On the attribution of this text to \*Prthivībandhu (sa'i rtsa lag), see Brunnhölzl, pp. 434-45.

## APPENDIX C

### 1. Summary

*The Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go cha*),<sup>220</sup> attributed to Nubchen Sangyé Yeshé, is among the earliest commentaries on *The Gathering of Realizations* (*Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*),<sup>221</sup> which is a foundational Anuyoga tantra of the Nyingma tradition. The text is particularly significant for its systematic treatment of the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam par shes; ālayavijñāna*). It reframes themes found in the Dunhuang manuscripts Pelliot tibétain 654 and IOL Tib J 708 through a tantric perspective that emphasizes the ground's primordially pure nature.

The present translation focuses on Chapter Fifty-Five, which organizes its analysis into thirteen topics: (1) nature, (2) perceptual objects, (3) characteristics, (4) accompanying mental factors, (5) feelings, (6) phenomenological status, (7) activity, (8) divisions, (9) synonyms, (10) transformation, (11) logical proof, (12) essence, and (13) analogies. The chapter also distinguishes between a “conjoining genuine universal ground,” associated with karmic continuity, and a “fundamental genuine universal ground,” described as unborn, luminous, and uncompounded, which can be transformed into mirror-like gnosis.

Regarding textual presentation, the *Rnga 'gyur bka' ma shin rgyas pa* edition marks page numbers with angle brackets (< >), whereas the edition by bDud 'joms Rinpoché uses square brackets ([ ]). Interlinear annotations, which sometimes disrupt the flow of the text, are difficult to distinguish from the original writing in digital formats. In this translation, I use curly brackets ({ }) to separate such annotations from Nubchen's original text and minimize their use in order to present a clearer and more faithful rendition of his arguments.

### 2. Translation

<51.4> = [57.4] ལང་ཀའི་བདག་པོ། མདོ་བཞི་གང་ཞེ་ན། ཞེས་པ་བོས་ནས་མདོ་བཞི་ཉེ་བར་བསྟན་པ་ནི། གུན་གཞི་དང་། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་དང་། ཡིད་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་དང་། སྒྲོ་ལུང་རྣམ་ཤེས་སོ། །དེའང་འདི་ལྟར།

མདོ་བཞི་གཞི་དང་དམིགས་པ་དང་། །

<sup>220</sup> Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, Sangs rgyas thams cad kyi dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo yi dka' 'grel mun pa'i go cha lde mig gsal byed rnal 'byor nyi ma, in *Rnga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 89 (sMad cha), ed. Tshe ring rgya mtsho (Chengdu: Si khro dpe skrun tshogs pa / Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009), 51.4–90.2, BDRC: W1PD100944; cf. Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, *Sangs rgyas thams cad kyi dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo yi dka' 'grel mun pa'i go cha lde mig gsal byed rnal 'byor nyi ma* (hereafter *Mun pa'i go cha*), in *Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 51, ed. Bdud 'joms 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje (Kalimpong, Dist. Darjeeling, W.B., 1982–1987), 57.4–97.3, BDRC: 82900981.

<sup>221</sup> *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi thugs gsang ba'i ye shes don gyi snying po rdo rje bkod pa'i rgyud rnal 'byor grub pa'i lung kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo theg pa chen po mngon par rtogs pa chos kyi rnam grangs rnam par bkod pa zhes bya ba'i mdo* (hereafter *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*; Skt. *Sarvatathāgatacittajñānaguhyārthagarbhaveyūhavajratantrasiddhiyogāgamasamājasarvavidyāsūtra-mahāyānābhisamayadharmaparyāyavyūha-nāma-sūtra*), Tōh. 829, in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, BDRC: WAORK0823.

སྒྲུང་དང་འབྲུག་པ་ལྟགས་བཞིན་བཤད། །

ཅེས་གསུངས་སོ། །

<51.4> = [57.4] Then [Vajrapāṇi] said, “O, Lord of Laṅka, if you ask what these four *sūtras* are,...” Then he taught in detail the four *sūtras* as the universal ground, the afflicted mental consciousness, the mental consciousness, and the consciousnesses of the five sense doors. They are also taught [in *The Gathering of Realization*],<sup>222</sup> to be like this:

The four *sūtras* are taught in accordance with tradition:  
the ground, perceptible objects, appearance, and engaging.<sup>223</sup>

དེ་ལ་སྒྲུན་པའི་བྲིས་[58]ལན་སོ་སོའི་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་བྱེ་ནས་མདོ་དང་པོ་བསྟན་པའི་བྱིར། ལང་ཀའི་བདག་པོ། དེ་ལ་གཞིའི་མདོ་ནི་འདི་  
ལྟ་སྟེ། ཞེས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བོས་ནས་ཉེ་བར་སྟོན་པའོ། །

གཞི་ནི་བྱིས་པ་འདི་<52>ལྟར་འདོད། །  
གཟུགས་མེད་མིང་ལ་མངོན་ཞེན་པ། །

Having distinguished [the four sutras] individually into a series of questions and answers about the darkness, [58] in order to teach the first sutra, [Vajrapāṇi], saying: “O, Lord of Laṅka, regarding the *sūtra* on the ground, it is like this,” and so forth, explained in detail:

The childish one asserts the ground <52> to be “like this.”  
They are attached to it as a name for the formless realm.<sup>224</sup>

ཞེས་པ་འཆད་པའི་དོན་གྱི་ནམ་གངས་ཀྱིས་བཙུགས་མ་དུ་འགྱུར་བའི་བྱིར།

Now, there are thirteen explanatory topics:

[དང་པོ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་རང་བཞིན་]

ཁྱད་པར་དུ་སྒྲུན་པའི་རང་བཞིན་{གཞི་ནི་}འཆད་དེ། དེ་ཡང་དོན་ཤེད་མ་བྱེ་བ་{བྱིས་པ་}ནམ་རིག་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་  
རང་བཞིན་འདི་ལྟར་འཐད་པར་{འདོད་པ་}སྟུབ་སྟེ། {གཟུགས་མེད་པའི་ཁམས་ལ་གནས་ཤིང་}རང་བཞིན་ཆ་སྤྲ་བས་དངོས་སུ་མི་  
སྒྲུང་བའི་{གཟུགས་མེད་}མཚན་ཉིད་བརྟགས་པའི་མཚན་མའི་མིང་{ལ་}ཐ་སྟངས་ཙམ་ལ་{མིང་བཞིའི་ཕུང་པོ་ལ་ཞེན་}ཆ་སྤྲ་བར་  
{མངོན་}ཞེན་ཅིང་རྟོག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་གསལ་བར་མེད་པ་དེ་ནི། གཟུགས་མེད་པའི་ཁམས་དང་ཆ་མཐུན་པས་{གཟུགས་མེད་པས་

<sup>222</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur.

<sup>223</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a2. Here and below, Nupchen cites his root text, the *Sangs rgyas thams chad dgongs pa 'dus pa*, one of the four root tantras of Anuyoga. These four presumably correspond with the previously mentioned foursome of the ground (“universal ground”), afflicted mental consciousness (“perceptible objects”), mental consciousness (“appearance”), and the five sense consciousnesses (“engaging”). Here, the afflicted mental consciousness takes the ground as its perceived object, mental consciousness has the appearances of mental images/concepts, and the five sense consciousnesses engage in external objects.

<sup>224</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a3.

དེར་མ་མོས་ཏེ། ལས་ཀྱི་ཁྱད་པར་གྱི་ཤེས་པ་ {དུག་དང་བརྒྱུད་སེམས་བྱུང་ཐམས་ཅད་} ཀྱན་ {གྱི་ངོ་བོར་གྱུར་} རྣང་བའོ།

[1. The Nature of the universal ground]

In particular, the nature of darkness will be explained. The undeveloped—the Vijñānavādins and so forth—affirm that the nature of the universal ground is reasonable to be “like this.” Because its nature is so subtle, it has the characteristic of being invisible. They are subtly attached to mere conventional designations, names that are imputed signs, and the essence of conceptuality remains unclear. Because it is similar to the formless realm, they call it that, whereupon, due to the particulars of karma, all the consciousnesses [then] appear.<sup>225</sup>

ཤེས་བྱ་ཉིད་དེ་ཡུལ་དུ་རྣང་།།  
ཐམས་ཅད་འབྱུང་བར་བྱེད་པའི་རྒྱ།།

ཞེས་པ་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཀྱན་གཞི་དེ། དཔེར་དག་སྤོང་མི་གཙང་བ་བསྐྱེམས་པས། [59] སྤྱོད་ཡུལ་ཅུས་པའི་ཕུང་པོར་རྣང་བ་ལྟ་བུར། ཡུལ་ {ཤེས་བྱ་ཉིད་དེ་} ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཡང་ཙ་བ་ཀྱན་གཞི་འབྱུལ་པས་སྤྱི་རྩལ་གྱི་ཡུལ་རྣ་ཆོགས་ {སྤྱི་} པར་རྣང་ཞིང་། ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་ པ་ཡིན་པས་ཀྱན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་རྣང་བར་བྱེད་པའི་<53>རྒྱ་རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བའི་རྟེན་སྦྱར་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀྱན་གཞིའོ།

When it appears as an object that can be known,  
it is the cause that makes everything arise.<sup>226</sup>

Regarding the universal ground that is like this, for example, when a monk meditates on impurity (*aśubhabhāvana*), [59] his sphere of experience will seem like heaps of skeletons. Similarly, by mistaking the universal ground, which is the root of all objects, it appears as various external objects. Moreover, because it contains all the seeds, it becomes either a cause that makes defiled phenomena appear, or <53> a basis for purification. Such is “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*).

ཡེ་ནས་ངང་གིས་མ་སྐྱེས་ལ།།  
མ་བཅོས་ཡོངས་ཀྱིས་འོད་གསལ་བ།།  
རྒྱ་རྟེན་མེད་པར་འདུས་མ་བྱས།།

ཞེས་པ་གཞི་དོན་གྱི་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་རང་བཞིན་ནི། སྦྱར་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀྱན་གཞི་རྟེན་བཞིས་འབྱུལ་བདོ་ཙམ་ན། སྤྱིལ་པོའམ་ཁང་པ་ལྟ་བུར་ རང་རེ་རྣམ་པ་གཅོས་པས་སྤྱི་འདུས་བདོ་བ་ཙམ་མེད་དེ། ཐོག་མ་ནས་རང་བཞིན་ {ངང་གིས་} ཀྱིས་ངོ་བོ་ {མ་སྐྱེས་} མ་བྱུང་བ། བྱེད་ པ་པོས་ {མ་བཅོས་པར་} མ་བྱས་པར་ཡོང་གི་འོད་ {རང་} གསལ་བ། རྒྱ་རྟེན་བྲལ་བའི་ཆོས་ཉིད་སྐྱེ་བ་མེད་ {འདུས་མ་བྱས་ པའི་} རང་དེའོ།

It is naturally unborn from beginningless time.  
It is completely luminous without fabrication.

<sup>225</sup> Note that here Nupchen says misrecognition of the universal ground leads to the emergence of the eight consciousnesses, implying correct recognition of the universal ground severs that saṃsāric development.

<sup>226</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a.3.

It is uncompounded without causes and conditions.<sup>227</sup>

Regarding the nature of “the fundamental genuine universal ground” (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*), [even] at the moment when “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*) arises into confusion due to the four conditions, it is not like a hut or a house that is some conglomeration [built for protection] because we are each being tormented. Its essence has naturally never occurred from the very beginning; it is utterly luminous without being created by a creator; it is the unborn reality free of causes and conditions. That state [is the fundamental genuine universal ground].

[གཉིས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་]

## [2. The Perceptual Objects of the universal ground]

དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་སྟེ་མ་པ་ལ།

To whomever wonders what the perceptible objects of [the universal ground] would be?

ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཆད་ཀུན་ཡུལ་ལ།  
ཤེས་པ་མི་གསལ་སྟོན་ཅིག་འབྱུང་།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་དམིགས་པ་དང་། རྣམ་པར་ཡོངས་སུ་མ་ཆད་པས། ལྷང་དོན་དང་སེམས་ཅན་དང་ཀུན་བརྟགས་[60]པའི་བག་  
ཆགས་ {ཐོག་མ་ནས་བསགས་} དང་རིལ་ལ་གཙོད་པའང་། ཡུལ་གྱི་རྣམ་པ་ {ཁྱབ་འཇུག་} ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་ཤེས་པ་ཚོགས་བྱུག་གི་རྟོག་པ་  
{ཕྱིན་ཅི་ལྟ་གི་རྟོག་པ་} རགས་པས་བསྐྱབས་པས་གསལ་བར་མི་མངོན་ཏེ། བཤད་པ་ {ཚོགས་བྱུག་བཞིན་ཡུལ་རིལ་སུ་ཆད་པ་མ་  
ཡིན་} བཞིན་ཡུལ་ལ་དམིགས་པ་ {རྣམ་པ་} རྟུན་མ་ཆད་པས། <54>ཚོགས་བྱུག་སྐྱེ་བ་དང་ཡང་སྟོན་ཅིག་པར་འབྱུང་ངོ་།

Arising co-emergently, there is a vague consciousness  
of all objects without discrimination.<sup>228</sup>

Since the universal ground does not clearly discriminate its perceptible objects and aspects, the appearing objects, sentient beings, and the habitual tendencies of conceptual designations (*kun brtags*) [60] are distinguished (*gcod*) as a whole. <54> Furthermore, the aspects of the objects are known just as they are, but they are not clearly apparent because they are obscured by the coarse conceptualizations of the six collections [of consciousness].

ཁྱབ་འཇུག་བཏང་སྟོམས་དངོས་མེད་ཉིད།

ཅས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡུལ་རིལ་ལ་གཙོད་པས་ཡུལ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་རིལ་མེད་པ་དེ་ཚར་བ་བཏང་སྟོམས་དང་ལྡན་ཞིང་། {འཁོར་ལྔའི་  
ཚར་བ་ལ་བདེ་སྐྱུག་བཏང་སྟོམས་གསུམ་ཡོད་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་གང་དང་ལྡན་ཞིན། བཏང་སྟོམས་དང་ལྡན་ཏེ་བདེ་སྐྱུག་གཉིས་དམིགས་  
པ་དང་རྣམ་པ་ཆད་པས་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་མི་ལྡན་ལ་བཏང་སྟོམས་ཚས་ཉིད་མ་ཆད་པས་དེ་དང་ལྡན་ནོ། །} རང་གི་ངོ་བོ་རགས་པ་མེད་

<sup>227</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a.3-4.

<sup>228</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a4.

པ་ {དངོས་མེད་ཉིད་} དེས་ཡུལ་ལ་ཚྲགས་སྤྱད་ལྟར་ {རྣམ་པར་} གསལ་བར་མི་རྟོག་སྟེ། ཡུལ་ཅིག་ལ་འང་རགས་པའི་རྟོག་དཔྱོད་  
{སྤང་བ་ལ་} མེད་པར་གནས་སོ།

[The root tantra] says,

“It is pervasive, engaging, indifferent, with no entities,...” and so on.<sup>229</sup>

Since [the universal ground] distinguishes the whole of the objective domain, it does not differentiate objects like the five sense doors. It is endowed with a feeling of indifference (*tshor ba btang snyoms*). Being devoid of any coarse essence, it does not clearly conceptualize objects, like the six collections, so it remains without any coarse conceptual analysis of any object whatsoever.

[གསུམ་པ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་མཚན་ཉིད་]  
ཀུན་གཞིའི་མཚན་ཉིད་ནི་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞེ་ན།

མི་རྟོག་དེ་ཡི་ངང་ཉིད་ལ།  
སྐད་ཅིག་ལྟ་བུ་ཇི་སྟེད་པ།

ཞེས་པ་དག་ཀུན་གཞི་བཤད་པ་ལྟར། ཅིར་ཡང་ {མི་རྟོག་དེ་ཡི་ངང་ཉིད་ལ་} མ་དམིགས་པ་[61]ལས། ཤེས་པ་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ལྟར་ཕྱིར་རྒྱ་  
བའི་གངས་ {ཇི་སྟེད་པ་} མང་པོ་བར་མ་ཆད་པར་ {རྒྱན་དང་བཅས་པ་} འབྱུང་བ་ཡང་དཔེར་རྒྱ་བའི་རྒྱན་ལྟ་བུའོ། །དེ་ཡང་སྐད་  
ཅིག་མའི་རྒྱན་ལྟ་བུ་ཕྱི་གཅིག་གིས་འབྱུང་བས་ནས་ཕྱི་མ་སྐྱེས་ཙམ་ན་ལྟ་བུ་འགགས་ཏེ། སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་མི་རྟོག་པ་དང་། རྒྱན་གྱི་རྟོག་  
པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་དེ་ཡང་ཡུལ་ནི།

[3. What is the characteristic of the universal ground]

If one asks “What is the characteristic of the universal ground”? [The root tantra] says:

“In the state of nonconceptuality,  
all the earlier and later moments,” and the next lines.<sup>230</sup>

Within the universal ground which, as explained, does not perceive anything at all, [61] there unceasingly arise many earlier and later moments, like the flow of a stream. Furthermore, a continuum of moments occurs one after another, so that as soon as the next one has arisen, the preceding one ceases. It has the characteristics of momentary impermanence and continuous permanence.

Moreover, its objects are as follows:

གཅིག་ཏུ་<55>ཆད་པ་མེད་པ་ཡི།  
སོ་སོ་རིས་ལྟར་མི་སྤང་བ།

<sup>229</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a4.

<sup>230</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a4–5.

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ཡུལ་མ་ཡིན་པ་མེད་པས་ཡུལ་ལྟ་མ་ཆད་{གཅིག་ཏུ་ཆད་པ་མེད་པའི་}དེ། {སོ་སོ་རིས་ལྟར་མི་སྤང་བ་}ཚྭ་གས་  
བྱུག་དང་མི་མཚུངས་པའོ།

[The stream] is not divided <55> into parts;  
it does not appear in individual portions.<sup>231</sup>

Since there is nothing that is not an object of the universal ground, the object is not restricted; it is not the same as the six collections.

བྱེ་བྲག་རྣམ་པར་འབྱེད་པ་ནི།  
འདི་དང་འདི་ཞེས་ག་ལ་ཡོད།

ཅས་པ་སྤྱི་ཞེས་འདི་ནི་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ཡུལ་ལོ། འདི་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ན་ཞེས་སྒྲིམ་པས་བྱེ་བྲག་དབྱེར་མེད་པའོ།

Regarding distinguishing particulars,  
how can there be this and that?<sup>232</sup>

Who could say, “This is the object of the universal ground,” or, “this is not the case”? The specifics cannot be distinguished by a coarse intellect.

ཐ་སྟངས་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱུས་པའི་ཚོས།  
ཐམས་ཅད་ཐམས་ཅད་པ་ཉིད་དེ།

ཞེས་པ། དེ་ཅིའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེ་ན། ཡུལ་{གྲི་འཛིན་པ་}རིས་དང་བལ་བས་དགེ་ལྷན་དང་སྟོང་བཅུད་དང་གཉིས་པར་གྲགས་པ་རིལ་ཡིན་ཏེ།  
སྟོང་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བཅུད་ཐམས་ཅད་ཅས་པ་ལྟ་བུར་ཀུན་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

All phenomena that are subsumed within any two categories  
are the entirety of everything.<sup>233</sup>

If one asks why, it is because, being free from the partiality of objects, the whole is known in dualities such as “virtuous and unvirtuous,” or “the environment and its inhabitants,” because it includes all of them, just like referencing “the entire environment and all its inhabitants.”

ཀུན་འགོ་ཀུན་འཇུག་ཀུན་ལ་སྤྱོད། [62]  
དངོས་རིག་སྤྱི་ཚྭ་གས་དབྱེར་མི་རིག།

ཅས་པ་འཆད་པའི་འཁོར་ལྗེ་ཀུན་ཏུ་འགོ་བ་དང་། འཇུག་པ་བདུན་དང་། མཚུངས་པར་ཡུལ་རིལ་ལ་དམིགས་པ་མ་ཆད་པར་གཙོད་  
ཀྱང་དངོས་པོ་རིགས་ཐ་དད་པ་འདི་ནི་འདིའོ་ཞེས་དབྱེ་བར་ཀུན་གཞིས་མི་བྱས་སོ།

<sup>231</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a5.

<sup>232</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a5.

<sup>233</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a5–6.

It is ever present, all-engaging, and all-inclusive. [62]  
It is aware of entities, but it is not distinctly aware of various things.<sup>234</sup>

As mentioned above, the universal ground distinguishes objects indistinctly as a whole, in the same way as the five ever-present companions and the seven engagements, but [it] cannot differentiate things, saying, “these are different types of entities.”

[བཞི་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་དུ་དང་ཟུན་པ་]  
ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་དུ་དང་ཟུན་ཞེ་ན།

གཡོ་བ་ཉིད་དང་རྣམ་པར་བཞོད། །  
ཡོངས་ཁྱོད་གཅོད་དང་དེར་འཛིན་བྱེད། །<56>

ཅེས་པ་ཐུན་མིང་གི་འཁོར་ནི། {སེམས་ཡུལ་ལ་གཡོ་ཞིང་བསྐྱོད་པར་བྱེད་} འདུ་བྱེད་སེམས་པ་དང་། {སེམས་ཡུལ་གང་ཡིན་པ་ལ་  
འདོད་པར་བྱེད་} ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ་དང་། {ཚོར་བ་བཟང་ངན་ཉམས་སུ་ཁྱོད་} ཚོར་བ་དང་། {ཡུལ་ཀུན་རྣམ་པར་གཅད་} རེག་པ་  
དང་། འདུ་ཤེས་{གྲི་མཚན་མར་བཟུང་} རྣམས་སོ། །

[4. The accompanying mental factors with which the universal ground is endowed]  
If someone asks, “How many companions does the universal ground have?” [The root tantra]  
says:

“Movement and arrangement,  
Experiencing, distinguishing, and grasping.”<sup>235</sup><56>

[These map on to] the common (*thun mong*) companions to [the universal ground], which are:  
[1] volitional intention (*'du byed sems pa*), [2] mental engagement (*yid la byed pa*), [3] feeling (*tshor ba*), [4] contact (*reg pa*), [5] ideation (*'du shes*).<sup>236</sup>

ཁྱད་པར་གྱི་འཁོར་ནི།

ཐུན་པར་བཟུན་དུ་ཟུན་པ་ལ། །

ཞེས་པ། {ཐུ་ཀུན་དུ་འགོ་བ་ལྟེ་མཚུངས་པར་ཟུན་ནོ། །ཁམས་གསུམ་གྱི་སེམས་ཡོད་དོ་ཅོག་གི་འཁོར་དུ་འབྱུང་བ་དང་། ལམ་གསུམ་གྱི་  
སྐབས་སུ་འབྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །རྣམ་ཤེས་བརྒྱད་ཆར་ལའང་རྫོགས་པས་སོ། །} ཐུ་ནི་ཐུན་མིང་ལྟེ།

<sup>234</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a6.

<sup>235</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a6.

<sup>236</sup> The order in which these are listed is formulated to match the tantra verse's order, but it is not that of the *Triṃśika*, which starts with contact (*sparśa*; *reg pa*) (see quoted passage below). Note that ITJ708 includes a list of these five that likewise moves contact to a later point, though with contact and feeling reversed. Its discussion does, however, resemble Nupchen's by characterizing each of the five companions as: moving (*bskyod*), mentally focusing (*sems gtad*), distinguishing (*rnam pa gcad*) for contact, experiencing (*nyams su myong*) for feeling, and grasping (*bzung*). Unless ITJ708 is following another source, it may be loosely based on (possibly via an intermediary text or different translation) the root tantra's verse above, which lists them as moving (*g.yo ba*), arranging (*rnam par bkod*), experiencing (*yongs myong*), distinguishing (*gcod*), and grasping (*'dzin*)."

[ཞེས་པ། ལྷ་ནི་སྤྱན་མོང་སྟེ།]

Regarding the particular companions:

[The universal ground] is endowed with the fivefold and the sevenfold.<sup>237</sup>

The fivefold are the common [companions], which are taught in the *Trimśika* as:

རྟག་ཏུ་རྟོག་དང་ཡིད་བྱེད་དང་།  
རྟོགས་[=རྟོག་] དང་འདུ་ཤེས་སེམས་པ་ལྟན།

ཞེས་སྤྱུལ་སྤྱུ་པ་ལས་གསུངས་སོ།

At all times, [the universal ground consciousness] is endowed with contact and mental engagement,

Awareness, ideation, and attention.<sup>238</sup>

ཀྱན་གཞི་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་པའི་སེམས་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཚྭགས་བདུན་[63]དང་བྱད་པར་ལྟན་པའོ།

[The universal ground consciousness is also] accompanied by the particular [companions], which are the seven collected consciousnesses, [63] that is, the minds that are not the universal ground itself.

[ལྷ་པ་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཚར་བ་གང་དང་ལྟན་པ་]

ཀྱན་གཞི་ཚར་བ་གང་དང་ལྟན་ཞེན།

དེ་ནི་ཀྱན་ལ་སྟོམས་པ་ཡིན།  
གང་ཞེན་དེ་འཛིན་ཀྱན་མི་གཏོང་།

ཞེས་པ་རྩ་བའི་ཤེས་པ་དེ་ནི་བདེ་བ་དང་། སྤྱུག་བསྐྱེད་དང་མི་ལྟན་ཏེ་བྱང་སྟོམས་དང་ལྟན་ནོ། །འདྲིས་པའི་ལས་ཀྱི་བག་ཆགས་  
{དགོ་ཐེག་ལུང་མ་བསྟན་}གང་ཡང་རུང་བ་མི་གཏོང་བས་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་རིས་སུ་མི་འབྱེད་དོ།

[5. Among the three feelings, which does the [universal ground] have?]  
If someone asks, “Which feeling is the universal ground endowed with?”

It is equal regarding everything,

Apprehending whatever, it holds it and never lets go.<sup>239</sup>

<sup>237</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa 'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a6.

<sup>238</sup> Compare the canonical Tibetan see of Vasubandhu's *Trimśika-kārikas* (*Sum cu pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa*, Tōh. 4055, 1b3): རྟག་ཏུ་རྟོག་དང་ཡིད་བྱེད་དང་། རྟོག་དང་འདུ་ཤེས་སེམས་པར་ལྟན།, and the Sanskrit verse:

*asaṃvidītakopādisthānavijñāptikam+ca tat/ sadā sparśamanaskāravitsaṃjñācetanānvitam//.*

<sup>239</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa 'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 277a6-7.

That root consciousness is not endowed with happiness or suffering but is endowed with neutrality. Because it does not let go of any of the habitual tendencies of habituated karma, the objects of those habitual tendencies are not discriminated.

[དུག་པ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ཚེས་གང་ཡིན་པ་]  
ཀུན་གཞིའི་ཚེས་ནི་གང་ཞེ་ན།

གོ་སྐབས་ཡོད་པའི་ནམ་<57>མཁའ་ལྗང་།  
ཚེས་ཀུན་འབྱུང་གནས་གོ་ཡོད་པ། །

ཞེས་པ་དཔེ་ནམ་མཁའ་ལས་ཀུན་འབྱུང་ཞིང་གོ་འབྱེད་པས་སྤང་བ་ལྟར། ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་འཁོར་བ་དང་སྤྱོད་ལས་འདས་པ་གཉིས་  
ཀ་འབྱུང་ཞིང་སྤང་བར་བྱེད་པའོ། །

[6. What kind of phenomenon is the ground?]  
If someone asks, “What kind of phenomenon is the universal ground?”

Like space, <57> which makes room for any possibility,  
It is the source of possibility for all phenomena.<sup>240</sup>

Just as everything arises from space and appears through its opening up possibility, both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* arise from the universal ground and are made to appear [by it].

[བདུན་པ་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ལས་རིམ་བྱ་བ་སྟན་པ་]  
ཀུན་གཞིའི་ལས་རིམ་བྱ་བ་ཞེ་ན།

སྐྱེད་སླིན་སོགས་དང་ལེན་པ་ཡིན། །

ཞེས་པ་ཤེས་པ་བདུན་གྱི་རྒྱ་ཀུན་གཞི་{སྐྱེད་}བག་ཆགས་དང་མཚུངས་པར་བྱེད་པ་དང་། ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་དང་ནམ་པར་  
བྱང་བའི་ཡང་གཞི་རྟེན་གྱི་ཕྱིར་དང་། རྟེན་པར་སླིན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་རྣམས་{སླིན་}མཐུ་བརྟས་པས་སྟོབས་ཅན་དུ་བྱེད་པ་དང་། རྒྱ་  
མཐུན་པ་དང་ནམ་པར་སླིན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་སོགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱོད་ལྟ་བུར་བྱུར་བ་དང་། སྐྱེ་བ་ལྔ་ཕྱེ་{ལེན་}མཚམས་[64]སྐྱོར་བར་བྱེད་  
པས་ལས་ནི་བཞིའོ། །

[7. Teaching what kind activities the universal ground involves:]  
If someone asks, “What does the universal ground do?”

Generating, ripening, collecting, and taking [rebirth] are [done by the universal ground].<sup>241</sup>

<sup>240</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 277a7.

<sup>241</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a7.

[Regarding it generating:] the universal ground with its habitual tendencies makes compatible the causes for the seven consciousnesses. [Regarding it ripening:] because it can be a support for either affliction or purification, it strengthens the habitual tendencies, whereby it makes them more efficacious.<sup>242</sup> [Regarding it collecting:] it serves as a vessel for the causally concordant and the ripening habitual tendencies to collect. [Regarding it taking rebirth:] it connects [64] our previous and subsequent rebirths. These are these four activities [of the universal ground].

རྒྱུ་ནི་གཉིས་དང་མི་ལྡན་ཏེ།  
མ་ངེས་དེ་ཉིད་ཁོ་ན་ལ།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ནི་ལྷ་དུ་མ་བསྟན་པ་ཡིན་པས། དགེ་ཕྱིག་གཉིས་དང་མངོན་དུ་མི་ལྡན་ནོ། དེ་ཅིའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེ་ན། {རྒྱུ་ནི་གཉིས་དང་མི་ལྡན་ཏེ་} མཐོ་རིས་ངན་སོང་གཉིས་ཀར་འགྱུར་བས་རིགས་{དེ་ཉིད་ཁོ་ན་ལ་} མ་ངེས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་{དུ་ནི་གནས་པ་ཡིན་} པ་ལ། འཕྲལ་ལ་རྒྱུ་{ཉིད་གང་འཕྲད་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་འོ་} གང་གིས་<58>བསྐྱལ་བས་ས་བོན་བརྟན་པ་སང་པའི་དབང་དུ་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

It is not endowed with the two conditions.  
It is indeterminate regarding any one thing.<sup>243</sup>

Since the universal ground is indeterminate, it is not really endowed with virtue and nonvirtue. Why is that? Because it can be reborn in either the upper or the lower realms, so that the type of rebirth is not fixed, it contains all the seeds. <58> Because it may be moved by any circumstantial condition, it develops under the influence of whichever seeds are growing and manifesting.

[བརྒྱད་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་དབྱེ་བ་དང་བྱད་པར་ཅི་ལྟ་བུ་ཡོད་པ་]  
དབྱེ་བ་དང་བྱད་པར་ཅི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིག་ཞེ་ན།

ཆོས་རྣམས་རྩ་བར་གཅིག་པ་ལ།  
དེ་རྒྱུ་དབང་གིས་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་དང་། རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བའི་ཆོས་ཀུན་ཀུན་གཞིར་དབྱེར་མེད་པ་ལ། ཀུན་གཞི་རིག་མ་རིག་གི་སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་བཟང་ངན་གྱི་བྱད་པར་དབྱེ་བའི་གངས་གཉིས་སུ་སྒྲུང་བ་གང་སྟམ་པ་ལ།

[8. How many divisions are within the universal ground]  
If someone asks, “What are the subdivisions and distinctions of the universal ground?”

[Although] all phenomena share a single root,  
It [becomes] two aspects through the influence of its continuity.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>242</sup> My translation follows Nus ldan (Bka’ ma rgyas pa, vol. 55), 197.2, who gets rid of Nupchen’s *dang* which follows the *phyir* in the second action discussed here.

<sup>243</sup> *Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka’ ’gyur, 227a7.

<sup>244</sup> *Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka’ ’gyur, 227b1; and *Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud ‘bum, sde dge), 251b.1.

All afflictive and completely pure phenomena are indivisible in the universal ground, yet one might wonder how the universal ground appears as the two distinct types of experience—good and bad—through the continuity of instants with recognition or without recognition [of the universal ground’s true nature].

གཞི་དང་རྟོག་ཞེས་གྲགས་པ་ལ།  
 མྱོངས་དང་ཤེས་པའི་བྱུང་པར་སྣང་།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པས་མྱོངས་པ་དང་། རྟོག་པར་བྱང་བའི་རྟོག་དུ་གྱུར་པས་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་ལྡན་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་  
 བྱུང་པར་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་ཀུན་གཞིས་དངོས་པོ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་གཟུང་ནས་བསྐྱེད་པས་ཚྲིགས་[65]དང་། ལས་སུ་རུང་བ་སྦྱོར་བའི་  
 གནས་དང་། ལྷན་གྱིས་བྱུང་བ་མཉམ་པའི་གནས་སོ། །མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་དང་། {ལྷགས་སུ་ཞུགས་}ལས་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་དང་། {བསྐྱེད་  
 པའི་}སྦྱོར་བ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་དང་། {བདེན་པ་}མཐོང་བ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་དང་། {ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་ལ་}གོམས་པ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་དང་།  
 {འབྲས་བུ་}བྱུང་བ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་སྟེ། རྟོག་སྐབས་སུ་སྐྱེད་དུ་བྱ་བ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་མེད་ངེས་པར་འབྲུབ་སྟེ་<59>བཤད་པ་ལའང་  
 སྐར་རོ།

Known as ground and support,  
 It appears as the distinctions of delusion and knowing.<sup>245</sup>

When it becomes the ground of afflictions, it is distinguished as delusion, and when it becomes the support of complete purity, it is distinguished as endowed with gnosis.<sup>246</sup> Thus, the universal ground, holding the seeds of these two qualities (*dnegos po*), generates [*samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*], [65] and so it is both a place for [habitual tendencies] to gather and the workable [tendencies] to conjoin, and a place for spontaneously present equalness. Its final accomplishments are: the final accomplishment of action, the final accomplishment of application, the final accomplishment of seeing, the final accomplishment of familiarization, and the final accomplishment of achievement. Once it is in this state of being a support for complete purity, because there is nothing more to be generated, its name is definitely established <59> and a teaching on it may also be applied.

འདིར་དབྱེ་བ་ལས་ལྷ་བཅུ་དྲུག་།  
 ཚྲིགས་པར་སྣང་བ་བཤད་པ་ཡིན།

ཞེས་པ་རྣམས་གངས་དང་བཅུ་ཕྲག་དྲུག་ལ་ནི་དྲུག་ཅུ་ཙ་ལྟེ། ལྷ་ཕྲག་བཅུ་གསུམ་གྱི་ས་ལས་ཚྲིགས་པས། ལྷ་བ་ལྷ་རུ་བསྐྱེད་ཏེ་རིམ་  
 པར་སྐྱར་{བཤད་དོ་}རོ། །འདི་དག་ཀྱང་སྦྱ་འབྲས་སྐྱན་མོང་བའི་ལས་དང་། འབྲས་བུ་སྐྱན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལས་ལྷན་ཅི་  
 རིགས་པར་སྐྱར་རོ། །བཤད་པའི་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་ལྷ་དང་། ལྷས་ལྷ་དང་། དབང་ལྷ་དང་། སེམས་ལྷ་དང་། ལྷ་ཕྲག་སྦྱོར་བཅུ་བདུན་དུ་  
 འབྱུར་ལ། དུ་མའི་གངས་སུ་འདྲན་པ་དེས་སྐྱན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་ལས་ཡིན་པར་ཡང་གསལ་ལོ།

<sup>245</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b1; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), 251b.1.

<sup>246</sup> Note how Nupchen is careful here to say the basis of complete purity is not gnosis itself but is “endowed with gnosis,” implying it is still only a “support” for awakening and not awakening itself.

<sup>247</sup>Here, when it is divided, there are sixty-five:  
Its complete [range of] appearances are explained.<sup>248</sup>

The [five] divisions and another sixty, making sixty-five [in total], complete the levels (*bhūmi*) and paths in thirteen times five[, making sixty-five, divisions]. Thus they can be summarized as five roots and applied in stages. These [include] the five common paths of cause and result or the five uncommon paths of result, which may be applied as appropriate,<sup>249</sup> as well as the five lists that have been explained [above]: the five *samādhis*, five signs, five faculties, and five minds, making seventeen [fives]. Since there are so many enumerations, it is clear this is the uncommon path [of Secret Mantra].<sup>250</sup>

ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པ།  
ནོར་བའི་རྒྱ་[66]གྱིས་འཁོར་བར་སྤང་།

ཞེས་པ་དངོས་པོ་བཟང་ངན་གཉིས་ཀའི་རྩ་བ་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡིན་པས། མ་རྟོགས་པས་ཀྱན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པར་སྤང་བའི་གཞིའོ།

Being the ground of all things,  
It appears as *samsāra* due to [66] erroneous conditions.<sup>251</sup>

Since the universal ground is the root of both positive and negative entities, it is [also] the ground which appears as the afflictions due to a lack of realization.

རང་བཞིན་ཇི་ལྟར་ཡིན་པའི་དོན།  
ངས་པར་མཐོང་ན་མྱ་ངན་འདས།

ཞེས་པ་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་རང་བཞིན་ཇི་ལྟར་རྟོགས་ན། སྤྱི་རྣམ་འཆི་ལས་ཐར་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་ཐོབ་པས་རྟོན་དུ་གྱུར་ཏོ།

When its truth, which is its intrinsic nature just as it is,  
Is definitively seen, one goes beyond sorrow.<sup>252</sup>

When the nature of the universal ground is realized as it is, the result—freedom from birth, aging, sickness, and death—is attained, so it has become the basis [for liberation].

[དགུ་པ་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་མང་གི་རྣམ་གངས་དུ་ཡོད་པ་]

<sup>247</sup> Before this point, Nupchen skips 14 lines that are found at 227b.1-3 (གཞི་ལ་ཀྱན་འོ་ཀྱན་ལ་རྫོངས་... གནས་ལྡན་མཐར་ཕྱིན་རྣམ་པ་ལྟེ་).

<sup>248</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b3; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), p. 251b.3.

<sup>249</sup> Nus ldan (205.3) explains the uncommon paths are those specific to Anuyoga.

<sup>250</sup> Mkhan po Nus ldan (201.5-207.3), in discussing how the ground can be the basis of purification, lists the thirteen lists of five, quoting from *Kun tu rig pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 831, 25b.6ff). To these thirteen lists, Nupchen then adds four more to make seventeen lists in all.

<sup>251</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b3-4; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), 251b.3-4.

<sup>252</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b4; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), 251b.4.

ཀུན་གཞི་ལས་མིང་གི་རྣམ་གྲངས་ཐ་དད་དུ་གྲགས་པ་ལའང་གཉིས་ལས། འཁོར་<60>བར་གྲགས་པའི་མིང་གི་རྣམ་གྲངས་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་  
སྟམ་པ་ལ།

[9. How many different names does the universal ground have]

Of the two well-known different categories of names for the universal ground, <60> supposing one wonders what are the well-known names for *samsāric* [ground]:

ཀུན་གྱི་གཞི་དང་གང་དེ་ཤེས།  
ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤང་པོ་སྤྱིད་གསུམ་འབྱུང་།  
དེ་བྱུང་ཙ་བ་སྣ་ཆོགས་ལེན།  
དབྱིངས་དང་འབྱུང་གནས་རྒྱ་ཞེས་གྲགས།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ཙ་བའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ཇི་སྤྱིད་ཀྱི་སྤང་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། སྤྱིད་པའི་ཡན་ལག་  
ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ཙ་བའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ཐམས་ཅད་ཐམས་ཅད་བསྐྱེད་  
པའི་དབྱིངས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ཀུན་གྱི་འབྱུང་བ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གནས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ཐམས་ཅད་{རྒྱ}བསྐྱེད་པ་  
ཞེས་[67]བདུན་ཉིད་ལས་{ཁྱད་པར་}ཀྱང་འཕགས་སོ། །ས་བོན་ཅན་གྱི་ཕྱིར་ཀུན་གཞི་ནི་རྒྱ། དེ་ལས་ལས་དང་མཐུན་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་  
རྒྱུད་དུ་སྣང་བས་རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བར་ཡང་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་རེ་རེ་ནས་བསྟན་པའི་ཕྱིར།

The universal ground, knower of things,  
The aggregate of [all] phenomena, the origin of the three existences,  
The root of [the three existences] arising, that which takes the various [rebirths],  
The expanse, the source, and the cause are its names.<sup>253</sup>

It is called “the universal ground,” and “the root consciousness [or knower].” It is also called “the aggregate that [endures] as long as *samsāra* exists,” “the trunk of existence,” “the root consciousness.” It is called “the consciousness that takes [rebirth],” and “the expanse from which each and everything originates.” It is called “the source of everything,” and “the place for everything.” It is called “the [ground] from which everything arises.” [67] They are superior to the seven [collections of consciousness]. The universal ground is a cause because it contains the seeds. From it, the results that accord with one’s karma appear as a continuum, so the differentiation of causes and result is established.

དེ་རེ་རེ་ནས་བསྟན་པའི་ཕྱིར།

གཞི་ལ་ཀུན་འགོ་ཀུན་ལ་ཚོངས།  
རྣམ་པར་ཞེན་པ་བསྟོ་གནས་མེད།

ཅས་པ་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པ་ལ། རྒྱག་{ཀུན་འགོ་}གི་གནས་རིས་ཀུན་ཏུ་སྐྱེ་ཤིང་ཤེས་བྱ་ལ་{ཀུན་ལ་  
ཚོངས་}མདོངས་པས། ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་{རྣམ་པར་ཞེན་པའི་}བག་ཆགས་དང་མི<61>འབྲས་ཏེ། ས་བོན་དན་པས་ནོན་  
ཅིང་བསྟོས་པས། རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པའི་ལས་རྣམས་དང་{བསྟོ་གནས་མེད་}བྲལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

<sup>253</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b4.

In order to teach each of them [in one four-line verse, it first says]:

It is the ground, all-pervading, totally deluded,  
Fixated, and without foundation.<sup>254</sup>

It is a ground for the afflictions. It takes rebirth in any of the six [realms] and is blinded regarding all objects of knowledge. Thus, it is not free from the habitual tendencies of the afflictions. <61> It is oppressed and imprinted by negative seeds, so it is apart from the karma [that produces] liberation.

རྟེན་ནི་གཞི་སྒྲོར་སྒྲུབ་བ་དང་། །  
འགྱུར་མེད་རྣམ་དག་བཅའ་མེད་གནས། །

ཞེས་པ་རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བའི་རྟེན་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་ཚུལ་ནི། གཞི་ནི་དེ་རྒྱ་ཡི་ཀུན་གཞི་འདུན་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པའི་དུས་དང་། སྒྲོར་བ་འདུན་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་རིགས་ཆེན་འབྱེད་པ་བ་དང་། སྒྲུབ་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་དབུགས་ཆེན་ཕྱིན་པ་བ་དང་། འགྱུར་མེད་གནས་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལྷང་ཆེན་ཐོབ་པ་བ་དང་། བཅའ་མེད་གནས་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་ཚུལ་ཆེན་རྫོགས་པ་བའོ། ཀུན་གཞི་ལྡན་ཅེ་ཅེ་[68]ལ་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་གཉིས་ཡོད་པ་ནི། སལ་པའི་སེམས་བརྒྱད་སྟེ་བའི་འགྱུར་དབང་མ་ངེས་པ་ཡན་ཆད་ལམ་སྤྲུལ་མ་དག་ནི་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ལ། ལམ་སྤྲུལ་མ་ནི་འབྲས་བུ་བས་རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་པ་ཡོད་པར་བསྟན་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། {དེ་བཞིན་ཀུན་ཏུ་འཁོར་བར་འབྱུང་}ལམ་ཀུན་ལའང་རྒྱ་འབྲས་གཉིས་སུ་འབྱུང་ངོ་། །

Regarding the support of [complete purity], it is the ground, application, appearance, unchanging purity, and the unsought dwelling place.<sup>255</sup>

As for how [the ground] becomes a support for complete purity, the ground itself becomes the universal ground that is the cause [for awakening], during the yoga of aspiration. It becomes the universal ground of the aspiration that is applied [during the yoga of] opening the great lineage. It becomes the universal ground of true appearance [during the yoga of] great confirmation. It becomes the universal ground of resting unchangingly [during the yoga of] attaining the great prophecy. It becomes the universal ground of resting with no need to seek [during the yoga of] the perfection of the great dynamic energy. Each of the five universal grounds [68] has both cause and result. Through the arising of the eight ordinary minds [i.e. consciousnesses], the sense faculties are changeable and uncertain. Beyond that, the earlier paths become the causes, and the later paths become the result [for each stage]. Thus it is taught that there is a relationship between each cause and result. All the paths have both a cause and a result.

དེ་བས་ན། རྩ་བའི་རྒྱུད་ལས་ཀྱང་།

ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀུན་གཞི་[གཞིར་]གཅིག་པ་ལ།<sup>256</sup>

<sup>254</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b1; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), p. 251b.1.

<sup>255</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b1–2; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), 251b.1–2.

<sup>256</sup> *gzhi* corrected to *gzhir* on the basis of Tōh. 831, 25b.6.

ཀུན་གཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་ལྔས།  
 བྱེ་བྲག་ལམ་གྱི་ཆོས་སུ་སྤང་།  
 གཞི་ཉིད་རྒྱ་བའི་[ཡི་]ཀུན་གཞི་དང་།<sup>257</sup>  
 སྒྱུར་བ་འདུན་པའི་<62>ཀུན་གཞི་དང་།  
 སྤང་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་།  
 འགྱུར་བ་མེད་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་།  
 བཅའ་མེད་གནས་པའི་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ།  
 སྐབས་ལྔ་དག་ཏུ་གནས་ཀྱི་པས།  
 ས་ཡི་བྱང་པར་བཞོད་པ་ཡིན།  
 དེ་ཡང་གཞིས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་འདི་དག།  
 ཀུན་ཀྱང་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དང་།  
 འགོ་དོན་གསུམ་གྱིས་འགོ་བ་སྟེ།  
 དག་དོན་དང་ནི་བསྐྱབ་པ་དོ།  
 རིག་འཛིན་ཞེས་ནི་རྫོགས་པ་ཡིན།<sup>258</sup>

ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།

Therefore, in the root tantra, it is said:

Although all phenomena are one in the universal ground,  
 through the five transformations (*gnas gyur*; Skt. *āśrayaparāvṛtti*) of the universal  
 ground,  
 it particularly appears as a *dharma* for each path.  
 The ground itself becomes five: the universal ground that is the cause [for  
 awakening],  
 the universal ground the aspiration that is applied <62>,  
 the universal ground of true appearance,  
 the universal ground of resting unchangingly,  
 and the universal ground of resting with no need to seek.  
 Through its transformations in those five aspects,  
 it traverses through the specific *bhūmis*.  
 Furthermore, all these *dharma*s which are twofold  
 are moved by the universal yogas  
 and the three aims of beings.<sup>259</sup>  
 One who has virtuous aims and accomplishes them

<sup>257</sup> *rgyu ba'i* corrected to *rgyu yi* on the basis of Tōh. 831, 25b.6 (and Gnubs chen just above).

<sup>258</sup> See *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi thugs gsang ba'i ye shes don gyi snying po khro bo rdo rje'i rigs kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo rnal 'byor grub pa'i rgyud ces bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, (in *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, [Gpb009.019](#)), 325b3-5.

<sup>259</sup> Might these three be body, speech, and mind?

རྟེན་ལྔ་དེ་རྒྱན་དེ་དབང་གིས།  
རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལྔར་སྒྲུང་གཉེན་པོ་ལྔ།

Regarding the example of ripening on the *bhūmi*, they are like a seed, a sprout, a leaf, a flower, and a fruit. Likewise, applying to the *bhūmi* has the same enumeration as the previous one, such as cotton, wool, washing, garnishing, and dyeing. These ten occur on the five stages.

སྐབས་ལྔ་ལམ་ལྔ་དེ་བཞིན་ས། །

ཞེས་པ་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་སྐབས་དང་། འཕགས་པའི་སྐབས་དང་། ས་ཐོབ་[70]པའི་སྐབས་དང་། རིག་འཛིན་བྱང་ཆུབ་ཐོབ་པའི་སྐབས་དང་། འབྲས་བྱ་ཐོབ་པའི་སྐབས་སོ། །ལམ་ནི། ཆོགས་ལམ་དང་། སྦྱར་ལམ་དང་། མཐོང་ལམ་དང་། བསྐྱོམ་ལམ་དང་། མཐར་ཕྱིན་པའི་ལམ་སོ། །ས་ནི་འགྱུར་དབང་མ་ངེས་པའི་ས་དང་། བསོད་ནམས་གཏེར་གྱི་ས་དང་། རྟེན་པས་ཁྱད་པར་འགྲོ་བའི་ས་དང་། དམིགས་པས་འབྲས་བྱ་ཐོབ་པའི་ས་དང་། གནས་པས་མི་འགྱུར་བའི་ས་འོ། །

There are the five stages, five paths, and also [five] *bhūmis*.<sup>263</sup>

[The five stages] are the stage of sentient beings, the stage of noble ones, the stage of [70] reaching the *bhūmis*, the stage of obtaining awakening of awareness-holders, and the stage of obtaining fruition. The [five] paths are the path of accumulation, the path of the application, the path of seeing, the path of meditation and the path of consummation. The [five *bhūmis*] are the *bhūmi* that is indeterminate due to the power of change, the *bhūmi* that is a treasury of merit, the *bhūmi* of special progressing due to supports, the *bhūmi* of fruition attained through focus, and the *bhūmi* of unchanging through persistence.

ལྔ་ལྔ་བསྟི་གནས་དུས་ལྔ་དང་། །

ཞེས་པ་ལམ་པ་ལྔ་གཉིས་དང་། ལམ་སྦྱོང་བའི་བསྟི་གནས་དང་། བསྐྱོབ་པ་སྦྱོང་བའི་བསྟི་<64>གནས་དང་། མཚན་མའི་རྒྱད་{གལ་ཆེན་}སྦྱོང་བའི་བསྟི་གནས་དང་། སྦྱ་{མི་ཚྭ་གནས་པའི་}མ་སྦྱོང་བའི་བསྟི་གནས་དང་། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྩལ་གྱི་{རྩལ་ཆེན་རྫོགས་}བསྟི་གནས་སོ། །དུས་ནི། དྲན་པ་ཐོབ་པའི་དུས་དང་། སྦྱོང་པ་ཐོབ་པའི་དུས་དང་། རྟོགས་པ་ཐོབ་པའི་དུས་དང་། གོམས་པ་ཐོབ་པའི་དུས་དང་། ངེས་པ་ཐོབ་པའི་དུས་སོ། །

There are two sets of five [*bhūmis*], and there are five domains and times.<sup>264</sup>

These are two sets of five [*bhūmis* corresponding with the five] paths.<sup>265</sup> There are five domains: the domain of purifying the path, the domain of purifying the trainings, <64> the domain of purifying the continuum of signs, the domain of purifying illusion, and the domain of the dynamism of gnosis. The [five] times are the time of attaining mindfulness, the time of attaining conduct, the time of attaining realization, the time of attaining familiarity, and the time of consummation.

<sup>263</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b3; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), p. 251b.3.

<sup>264</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b3; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), p. 251b.3.

<sup>265</sup> This reading follows Mkhan po Nus ldan's commentary (see 205.1-4). Without Nus ldan, Nupchen's comments are difficult to understand.

གནས་པ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་ནས་པ་ལ།

ཞེས་པ་འདྲི་བ་ཐུབ་པ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པའི་གནས་དང་། བཟོད་པ་ཐུབ་པ་འཕགས་པའི་གནས་དང་། བདེན་པ་ཐུབ་པ་དག་པའི་གནས་  
[71]འཇིག་རྟེན་པ་ལ་གྲགས་སོ། །དེ་ཅིའི་ཕྱིར་ཞེ་ན། །ཀྱན་ཉོན་པོ་བཀ་ཆགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་ཐུག་པའི་གནས་དང་། ཡུལ་རིག་པ་  
དང་། སྤྱིང་པའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་བའི་ཐ་མ་སྤྱིང་གྱིས་བར་དུ་ཕྱང་པོ་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱིས་སྤྱང་བ་རིལ་སྟོན་པའི་གནས་དང་། གནས་བརྟེན་པའི་  
ཀྱན་གཞིའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཐ་དང་དུ་སྤྱང་བ་དང་། ཆོག་པ་འབྱུང་ཆ་བ་པོ་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་ཤིང་སྟོན་པ་བཞིན་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཆ་  
བ་ཡིན་ལ་རྣམ་ཤེས་གཞན་ཡན་ལག་གོ་པ་ལ་ཆེན་པོ་དང་། སྐྱེ་བ་མང་པོ་སྤྱོད་ཆོག་པའི་ལེན་པོ་དགོངས་པ་དེས་པར་འབྲེལ་བ་ལས་  
གསུངས་པས་ཁམས་གསུམ་དུ་ལྷན་ཐམས་ཅད་ལེན་པས་སོ། །གཟུགས་མེད་དུ་མིང་བཞི་ཕྱང་པོ་ལེན། གནས་སྤྱིང་པའི་དང་གཟུགས་  
གནས་ལེན་པའོ་པ་དང་། སྤྱིང་པའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་མཐའ་མེ་རྟེན་པར་ཀྱན་འབྱུང་<65>བ་དང་། དངོས་པོ་འབྱུང་པའི་ཕྱི་ནང་དུ་སྤྱང་བ་  
དང་། ཀྱན་གྱི་རྟེན་པོ་ལེན་པ་དང་། ཆོག་པ་འབྱུང་པའི་ལེན་པོ་ལ་བརྟེན་པའི་ཤིང་སྟོན་པ་བཞིན་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཆ་  
ཆོག་པའི་ཀྱན་དུ་བསགས་པའི་ཕྱིར་བཤད་པའི་གཞི་ལ་ཁམས་པའི་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱུང་།

There are five places and five types of fulfillments.<sup>266</sup>

Thus, the place of fulfillment which accomplishes the wishes, the noble place which accomplishes patience, the pure place which accomplishes the truth[, the application place which is adaptable, the equality place which is spontaneously accomplished. The five fulfillments are: fulfillment of the activities of one who enters into Mantra, the fulfillment of the applications of training, the fulfillment of seeing the truth, the fulfillment of familiarization with the *samādhi*, and the fulfillment of accomplishing the result.]<sup>267</sup> These are [71] well-known throughout the world. Because it is the ground of habitual tendencies, knowing objects, the ground of existent phenomena appearing in diversity, the root of the seven collections, that which takes many rebirths, the source of all without limitations, <65> appearing as internal and external entities, the support of everything, and the producer of the sevenfold accumulation, [for those reasons,] it is called “mind.”

རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བ་ལ་གྲགས་པའི་མཚན་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་གང་སྟམ་པ་ལ།

སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་དང་མཚན་ཉིད་མེད། །  
དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་དེ་མ་ལོར་བ། །

མ་བཅོས་གཞན་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཉིད། །  
ཉིང་འཛིན་རྟོག་པ་སྟོང་ཉིད་གྲགས། །

<sup>266</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b3; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), p. 251b.3.

<sup>267</sup> A folio (probably one) is missing from Nupchen's commentary here, as his list is cut off midstream and does not include the last two places and all five of the fulfillments. The missing places and fulfillments have been added here on the basis of Nus ldan, 206.2. Also missing are his comments on the root verses that follow which Nus ldan (206.4-210.4) explains. It seems likely, then, that Nus ldan had the missing folio when he composed his sub-commentary. Note that for this ninth topic, Nupchen reorders many of the verses to suit his purposes. Because it is unclear which parts of Nus ldan's sub-commentary are Nupchen's, I have not translated it.

To whomever wonders what is the nature of the well-known names for the completely pure, it says:

It is emptiness and without characteristics,  
Suchness, and the unmistakable...<sup>268</sup>

It is [also] said:

It is called unaltered, not other, suchness,  
*samādhi*, [without] conceptualization, and Emptiness.<sup>269</sup>

and so forth.

ཞེས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ། ཀུན་གཞི་རང་བཞིན་མཐའ་གཉིས་མ་གྲུབ་པའི་ཕྱིར་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། ངོ་བོ་འདི་[72]འདྲར་མི་  
ཟེན་པས་མཚན་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། བྱེད་པ་པོ་མེད་པའི་ངོ་བོ་{དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་}དེ་ཡང་བདེན་པའི་དོན་ཉིད་མ་ནོར་བ་  
ཞེས་བྱ་བ་སྟེ། དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་དགོངས་པ་ཉིད་ཡིན་པ་དང་། ཡེ་{མ་བཙུགས་}མ་བསྐྱེད་པས་དོན་ལོགས་ན་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་  
གཞན་མ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། རང་བཞིན་གསལ་ལ་མི་གཡོ་བས་ཉིང་དེ་འཛིན་དང་། རྟོག་པ་རགས་པའི་བྱེ་བྲག་  
མེད་པས་སྟོང་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། །

Because the nature of the universal ground does not exist in terms of the two extremes, it is called “emptiness.” Since its essence [72] cannot be held to be “like this,” it is called “without characteristics.” Since it is an essence which is not an agent, it is also called “the unerring true meaning itself.”

Since it is the realization of the *tathāgatas* and primordially unfabricated, it has no separate meaning, so it is called “not other” (*gzhan ma yin pa*) which is suchness. Because it does not waver from its luminous nature, it is a *samādhi*. Because it is devoid of any coarse conceptual distinctions, it is called “emptiness.”

ཡེ་ཉིད་ཀུན་གཞི་རང་བཞིན་{ལྷག་མཐོང་}མ་བསྐྱེད་པས་བྱ་བ་དང་། སྟོན་པ་{ཞི་གནས་}ནུས་<66>བྲལ་བ་དང་། ཡེ་ནས་འཆིང་བ་  
མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ལྷག་མཐོང་དང་ཞི་གནས་དང་ནུས་པར་ཐར་པ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །དེ་བཞིན་ཀུན་གཞི་རང་བཞིན་ལ་དབུ་མ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་  
དང་། མཐའ་དང་བྲལ་བ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། གཟུང་བ་མེད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དང་། འཛིན་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། ཆད་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། རྟོག་པ་  
མེད་པ་དང་། རྟེན་འགག་མེད་པ་དང་། གཅིག་{སྤྱིའི་}ཏུ་རྟོག་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། བྱེ་བྲག་གིས་ནུས་པར་རྟོག་པ་མེད་པ་དང་། མཚན་མ་  
མེད་པ་དང་། བདག་གཞན་མེད་པ་དང་། འགྲོ་འོང་མེད་[73]པ་དང་། གྲི་མ་མེད་པ་དང་། འདྲུ་འབྲལ་མེད་པ་དང་། སྤང་པོ་མེད་པ་  
ཁམས་མེད་པ་སྟེ་མཆོད་མེད་པ་དང་། ཡུལ་མེད་པ་དང་། ལས་བྱུང་མེད་པ་དང་། རླུ་འབྲས་མེད་པ་དང་། མ་སྐྱེས་པས་སྤོང་པོ་བྱང་  
ཆུབ་པའང་མེད་པ་དང་། བརྩ་གསུམ་བཞི་ལ་སོགས་པར་གྲགས་སོ། །

<sup>268</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b5; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), p. 251b.5.

<sup>269</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b5; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud 'bum, sde dge), p. 251b.5. Note that we have moved these two lines up, so that they come before Nupchen's comments on them.

<sup>270</sup>Because the nature of the universal ground is originally unobscured, free from elaborations, <66> and primordially without bondage, it is called special insight, calm abiding, and liberation. Similarly, the nature of the universal ground is called the middle way, without extremes, without apprehended objects, without apprehending subject, unceasing but impermanent, without birth and cessation, without any conceptualization, without specific conceptualization, without signs, without self and other, without coming and going, [73] stainless, without meeting and parting, without aggregates, without elements, without sense bases, without objects, without any karma to be enacted, without causality, and unborn. Therefore, it is without essence and even awakening. So, there are thirty or forty named.

སངས་རྒྱས་ཆོས་དང་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས། །

ཞེས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ། ཀུན་གཞི་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་ནི་ཡེ་ནས་དགོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་དང་། {བྱང་ཆུབ་}སེམས་རྣམ་གསུམ་གྱི་ངོ་བོར་གནས་པས་ངོ་བོ་ཡེ་མ་གྲུབ་པ་ལ་འཇིག་{པ་མེད་}པས་ནམ་མཁའ་དང་འདྲའོ། །

It is Buddha, dharma, and mind of awakening.<sup>271</sup>

The universal ground which is the mind of awakening abides timelessly as the essence of the Three Jewels and the three aspects of the mind [of awakening], so its essence never has existed and is never destroyed—it is like space.

འོན་ཀྱང་ཀུན་གཞི་དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་དོན་དམ་པ་མི་འགྱུར་བ་ཡོངས་སུ་གྲགས་པ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་<67>དབྱིངས་དེ་ནི། ཉེན་གྱི་ཚུལ་ནས་དབྱིངས་ལ་ཆོས་སྐར་ཤེད་མ་བྱེ་བ་དག་འདོད་དོ། །དེ་ནི་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་འདོད་པའོ། །ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་གསང་སྤྲུལ་ཉིང་ནི། ཀུན་གཞི་ལྷན་མཐའ་བྲལ་བའི་ཆོས་སྐྱེ་ཉིང་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆེན་པོར་བཞེད་དོ། །གཞི་རིམ་ལྟ་བུའི་ངོ་བོར་{མ་བྱུང་}ཡང་མི་སྣང་བར་{ཡེ་ནས་}རང་བཞིན་གསལ་བའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཉིང་ཅེས་གསུངས་པའོ། །བཤད་པའི་

གཞི་ནི་བྱིས་པ་འདི་ལྟར་འདོད། །

ཅེས་པ་དང་།

<sup>270</sup> The next verses are commented on by Nupchen though he does not provide them, so we provide them here: “Special insight, calm-abiding, liberation, / The middle way, without extremes, without apprehended objects / without apprehending subjects, unceasing but impermanent / without birth, without cessation, without concepts, / without conceptualization, without signs. / Similarly, without self and without other, / without going and without coming, / stainless, without meeting and parting, / without aggregates, without elements, without sense bases, / without objects, without karma, without causality, / and unborn, it is] without essence and even awakening.” (ལྷག་མཐོང་ཞིག་ནས་རྣམ་པར་ཐར། །དབྱུ་མ་མཐའ་བྲལ་གཟུང་བ་མེད། །འཛིན་མེད་ཆད་མེད་རྟོག་པ་མེད། །སྐྱེ་མེད་འགག་མེད་རྟོག་པ་མེད། །རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་མེད་མཆོན་མ་མེད། །དེ་བཞིན་བདག་མེད་གཞན་མེད་པ། །འགྲོ་བ་མེད་ཅིང་འོང་བ་མེད། །དྲི་མེད་འདུ་བ་འབྲལ་བ་མེད། །ཡུང་མེད་ཁམས་མེད་སྐྱེ་མཆེད་མེད། །ཡུལ་མེད་ལས་མེད་རྒྱ་འབྲས་མེད། །མ་སྐྱེས་སྐྱིང་པོ་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས། །; Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo, p. 227b.5-277b7). Note I have translated the last line in accordance with Nupchen’s commentary (སྐྱིང་པོ་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་མེད་པ་) rather than the wording here.

<sup>271</sup> *Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka’ ’gyur, 227b7; and *Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo*, (Rning ma rgyud ‘bum, sde dge), 251b.7.

However, regarding the universal ground, which in this way is the ultimate, unchanging, well-known *dharmadhātu*, <67> the undeveloped assert that [*dharmā*]*dhātu*, in its aspect of its being a support [for purification], is the *dharmakāya*. They assert it to be the nature of nonconceptual primordial wisdom.

Those of the secret mantra of the great vehicle, affirm the universal ground, free from the extremes, as the actual *dharmakāya* itself, great primordial wisdom. Not appearing whatsoever as any kind of essence, it is called the naturally illuminated *dharmadhātu*.<sup>272</sup>

So it is said:

Childish ones assert the ground [that can be explained] to be "like this."<sup>273</sup>

སྒྲིབ་ཀྱི་ཀྱན་པ་ལ་འདི་བཟོད་གྱིས།  
སྒྲིབ་པའི་ཆེད་དུ་ཤེས་པར་གྱིས།

ཞེས་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པའི་དག་ཐེག་པ་དམན་པའི་གཞུང་ཁོ་ནར་ངེས་པའོ། །སྐབས་སུ་རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བའི་རྟེན་བཤད་པའི་ལམ་རིམ་གྱིས་  
ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོར་འཐད་དེ། སྒྲིབ་མང་བས་མ་ངེས་པར་འཇུག་པས་གཉིས་ཀར་ཇི་རིགས་སུ་བཤད་དོ། །དེ་ལྟར་གཞུང་གང་གིས་རྟོགས་  
པ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ་ནི། ཀྱན་གཞི་མ་ལང་ལྟ་བུའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་གནས་ཀྱང་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ་གཏན་དུ་བར་གྱུར་པའོ། །

This is taught [74] to all intelligent ones,  
but it is to be understood it is only for the benefit of fools.<sup>274</sup>

These lines should be ascertained as unique to the Hīnayāna system. [But] in this context, in terms of a gradual path that teaches [the ground] as a support for purification, it is suitable for the Mahāyāna. Because these are ordinary grounds, they are indeterminate, and therefore for both [Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna,] they may be taught either way. Regarding the consummation of realization by means of such a system [of Secret Mantra], that is called “the transformation of the universal ground into mirror-like gnosis,” whereby it is permanently transformed.

[བརྩ་བ་ཀྱན་གཞི་གནས་ཀྱང་པ་]  
དེ་ལ་གནས་ཀྱང་པའི་དུས་སུ་སྒྲིབ་སྐབས་གང་སྟམ་པ་ལ།

ཇི་སྟེད་ལེན་པའི་སྟེད་པ་དག།

<sup>272</sup> The foregoing few sentences are some of the most difficult in this discussion. It seems that all the positive names for the universal ground that are discussed above are, as stated at the outset, names for it from the perspective of its being a support for purification. In other words, they are names for it as a support for the path to awakening. They are not, however, the ground itself, which provides no such support, neither for purification nor for *samsāra*. The genuine, primordial ground is *dharmakāya*, not as support for the path.

<sup>273</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227b3; and *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, (Rnying rgyud, sde dge), 251a3. Note Nupchen cited this line from earlier in the tantra at the very beginning of its discussion of the universal ground, and he brings it in again here.

<sup>274</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 226b7–227a1. Here again Nupchen is bringing in lines from earlier in the tantra, these from just before the tantra's discussion of the ground (see 226b.7–227a.1), apparently because they are so relevant here.

ཅེས་པ་དག་ཏུས་ཀྱི་མི་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་འཁོར་བ་ཐོག་མ་དང་ཐ་མ་མེད་པར་སྐྱེ་བ་ལོན་པའི་ཐ་<68>དང་པ་སྤངས་ཤིང་། ལམས་གསུམ་གྱི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ཀྱན་གཞི་ལ་ཡོད་པ་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་དག་ཀྱི་ནམས་སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ལྟ་མའི་བག་ཆགས་ལྟ་མ་ཡོངས་སུ་རྒྱུགས་པའི་ཡན་ལག་དང་འཕེན་པའི་ཡན་ལག་གིས་འབྲས་བུར་སྒྲིན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ལས་དུ་སྤངས་པས་ས་བོན་ཟད་པ་དང་། སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ལྟ་མའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་བྱུང་བས་ལྟ་མ་འགགས་ཏེ། སྐད་ཅིག་མ་ལྟ་མའི་བྱུང་བའི་བག་ཆགས་མཐུ་བརྟས་པས།

[10. The transformation of the universal ground]  
At the occasion of the transformation [of the universal ground], what happens to the cause?

The existences that exist as long as [the universal ground] takes [rebirth]  
[are gradually cleansed and purified, whereby they cease].<sup>275</sup>

Regarding the duration, it continues for as long as one takes different rebirths <68> throughout *samsāra* without beginning or end and the seeds of the habitual tendencies of the three realms are present within the universal ground. The habitual tendencies from the previous moments are ripened into their results by the links of the earlier [lifetime] being completed and the propelling links [that follow]. [Those habitual tendencies] are purified on the path, whereby the seeds are exhausted. Once the entity of the habitual tendencies of the next moment arises, the previous one will have ceased, and the [positive] habitual tendencies that continuously arise in each moment are strengthened. Therefore, it says:

སྤྱི་བཟུལ་དེ་རྒྱུན་ཟད་བཟེགས་[75]པས། །  
འགྱུར་བའི་སྐབས་ལྟ་མ་འགྱུར་། །

ཞེས་པ་རྒྱུད་དེ་ནི་སྤྱི་བཟུལ་གསུང་བར་སྒྲིན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ཁོ་ན་སྟེ། དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ཀྱན་གཞི་སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་རྒྱུན་ལ་ཡོད་པ་གཉེན་པོ་ལས་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་གཏན་ནས་སྤངས་ཀྱི་ཟད་བཟེགས་ཀྱི་པས་མེ་ལོང་ལྟ་བུའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་གྱུར་པ་ཡང་། གནས་འགྱུར་བའི་དུས་རྒྱུ་འབྱོར་ལྟའི་སྐབས་སུ་བོགས་རེ་འགྱུར་པས་ཀྱན་ཉོན་ལས་མཐར་འབྲིན་པར་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ངེས་པར་འབྱུང་ཀྱི་པའོ། །

When the continuity of suffering is exhausted and burnt away, [75]  
The five aspects of the transformation will definitely occur.<sup>276</sup>

This continuum refers only to what ripens as the torments of suffering, The universal ground which is like and exists as a momentary continuum is permanently purified by the antidote of the path gnosis, whereby it transforms into mirror-like gnosis. During the transformation, one progresses through each of the five yogas, whereby one finally emerges [from *samsāra*].

[བརྒྱུ་གཅིག་ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱབ་པའི་གཏན་ཆོགས་]  
ཀྱན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱབ་པའི་གཏན་ཆོགས་ནི།

<sup>275</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 227a7–228a1: Here we have included the second line (གང་སངས་གང་དག་བྱུང་འགགས་པས།), which Nupchen does not cite, even though he explains most of it.

<sup>276</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a1. On the five contexts and the five aspects of the universal ground they transform, see above on the སྐབས་ལྟ་དག་ཏུ་གནས་གྱུར་པ་.

གཟུགས་མེད་མཐོང་མེད་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན། །  
ཡོད་པས་མཐོང་བའི་ཡུལ་དུ་གྱུར། །

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་ {གཟུགས་མེད་} དབྱིབས་ལ་དོག་བྲལ་བས། བརྟག་དུ་མི་བདུབ་པས་ {མཐོང་} མེད་ {ཡོད་མ་ཡིན་} <69> ཅེས་  
ཀྱང་བྱའོ། ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པས་དེ་སྤང་བའི་དངོས་ཡུལ་ཐ་དད་ཡོད་པས་ {མཐོང་བའི་ཡུལ་དུ་གྱུར་} ཡོད་པ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་བྱ་སྟེ། ཡོད་  
མེད་ལས་གྲོལ་རྟོ། །

[11. How does the reasoning that establishes that the universal ground exists]  
Regarding the reasoning that proves the existence of the universal ground, it is said:

It is not form, not visible, and not existent.  
Insofar as it exists, it becomes objective entities that are observable.<sup>277</sup>

Since the universal ground lacks shape and color, it cannot be examined and is therefore also said to be nonexistent. <69> Insofar as the universal ground does exist, the various objective entities of its appearance exist, so it may also be said to exist. Therefore, it is beyond existence and nonexistence.

དེ་བས་ན།

མཐོང་མེད་ཡུལ་དུ་མ་གྱུར་བ། །  
ཡོད་ཅེས་བྱ་བར་གཤམ་རེགས། །

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་མཐོང་བ་མེད་པས་མ་གྲུབ་པ་ཞིག་ཡུལ་དུ་མ་གྱུར་པའི་ཕྱིར། དེ་ལ་ཡོད་པར་གདགས་པར་ {ཞེས་བྱ་བར་གཤམ་}   
རེགས་[76]པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། ། {མེད་དོན་ནི་ན་} ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པས་ཀུན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་དོ། །

Therefore it says:

Since it is not visible, it cannot be an object.  
[So,] how can it be right to say that it exists?<sup>278</sup>

Since the universal ground is not visible, it is nonexistent and cannot be an object, so it is not right to call it existent. [76] Insofar as the universal ground exists, it causes everything.

སུ་མཐའ་མེད་པར་འབྱུང་བའི་སྐྱེ། །  
དངོས་མེད་གཞི་རྟེན་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད། །  
དེ་བས་ཐ་དད་སྤང་ཆོགས་སྤང་། །

<sup>277</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a1.

<sup>278</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a1-228a2.

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ངོ་བོ་མཐའ་མེད་པར་སྒྲིམ་དཔག་དུ་མེད་པར་དངོས་པོ་གཉིས་པ་རིལ་དུ་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་ཞིང་སྤྱོད་  
 པའོ། །དེ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་ངོ་བོས་བཟང་ངན་ཐ་དང་དུ་གྱུར་པ་མེད་དེ་དངོས་མེད་གཞི་རྟེན་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་གཅིག་ནའང་། དེ་བས་ཀྱི་  
 རྟེན་དང་འཕྲད་པས་འགྱུར་བ་ནི། རྟེན་ངན་པས་ཐ་དང་ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་གཞིར་འགྱུར་ལ། བཟང་པོས་རྣམ་པར་བྱང་  
 བའི་རྟེན་དུ་འགྱུར་བས་གཉིས་ཀའི་ངོ་བོ་ཡིན་པའི་གཏན་ཆོག་གིས་དངོས་པོ་གཉིས་པ་བཟང་ངན་མི་མཐུན་པ་མང་པོར་སྒྲིམ་  
 ཆོག་སྒྲིམ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ། །

The cause of infinite arising,  
 a non-entity whose essence is the ground or support.  
 Therefore, it appears variously.<sup>279</sup>

The essential universal ground is inconceivable yet arises as and generates all secondary entities. Furthermore, the essential universal ground does not change into something else that is good or bad; it is the same [all the time], but it may be transformed when it meets with the right conditions. Through negative conditions, it becomes the ground for affliction, and through positive conditions, it becomes the support for complete purity. Thus, by reason of being the essence of both, it appears as many secondary entities that may be incompatible, such as good and bad. Therefore, it is evident that the universal ground exists.

དེ་བས་ན་<70>ལྟར་ལས།

ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་དུས་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས། །  
 ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་གནས་ཡིན་ཏེ། །  
 དེ་ཡོད་པས་ན་འགྲོ་ཀུན་དང་། །  
 ལྷ་ངན་འདས་པ་ཐོབ་པར་འགྱུར། །

ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། །

Thus, <70> in the authoritative scripture it is said:

This element, which is without beginning,  
 Is the basis of all phenomena.  
 Because it exists, there come to be sentient beings  
 And the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.<sup>280</sup>

དབྱིངས་འདི་མེད་ན་ཀུན་དང་འགལ། །  
 གལ་ཏེ་མེད་པ་གཅིག་ཡོད་ན། །

<sup>279</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa 'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a2.

<sup>280</sup> Note this verse is found in Asanga's commentary on the *Mahāyāna-uttaratantra-śāstra*. See ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་དུས་ཅན་གྱི་  
 ཐོག་མ་ཆེན་པོ་རྒྱུད་ཐུགས་མའི་བསྟན་བཅོས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་བཤད་པའི་འགྲེལ་པ་ལས། (Tōh. D4055, DTG 123, p. 111b.6-7): ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ཅན་གྱི་  
 ལས་ས། ཆོས་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་གནས་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ཡོད་པས་ན་འགྲོ་ཀུན་དང་། ལྷ་ངན་འདས་པ་ཐོབ་པ་ཡིན།. The same lines appear in IOL Tib J  
 708, also in that text's section on proof of existence.

འཛིན་པའི་སྟོགས་ཀྱང་དེ་ལྟ་བུ།  
ནམ་ཡང་གྲོལ་བར་མི་[77]འགྱུར་ཏེ།  
འཆིང་བའི་མདུད་པ་དེ་ན་ཡོད།

ཅེས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་ཁྱུ་གཞི་མེད་ན་འཆད་པ་རིལ་དང་འགལ་ཏེ། རྒྱ་མ་ངེས་པའི་འགལ་བར་འགྱུར་རྒྱུ་ཅི་ལྟར་ཞེ་ན། ཀྱུ་གཞི་མེད་པར་སྒྲུང་བའི་ཡུལ་ཡོད་དོ་ཞེ་ན། ལྷན་དང་གྲིབ་མ་སྒྲུར་འཛིན་པའི་ཤེས་པ་ཡང་ཡོད་དེ། གཟུང་འཛིན་གཉིས་ལ་ཞེན་པས་ {ནམ་ཡང་གྲོལ་བར་མི་འགྱུར་ཏེ་འཆིང་བའི་} མི་ཐར་པའི་མདུད་པ་ཉིད་དུ་འགྱུར་བའི་སྟོན་ {དེ་ན་} ཡོད་དོ།

[Next the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* says:]

If there were no element, everything would be contradicted.  
If there were [appearances] without the existence [of a universal ground],  
then there would also be an apprehending aspect [i.e. a subject that is independent],  
and therefore, one could never be liberated, [77]  
because one would be stuck in a binding knot [of duality].<sup>281</sup>

Thus, if there were no universal ground that is the cause of everything, all the teachings would be contradicted, because there would be the problem of a cause being impossible. Why is that? [If someone] were to say there could be appearing objects without a universal ground, then there must also be a consciousness that apprehends them, [since there must be subject and object,] like a body and its shadow. Then there would be the fault of being bound in a knot from which there is no release due to clinging to [the independent natures of] subject and object.

གང་ཞིག་སྤྱད་འཛིན་མཐར་ལྟ་བུ།  
དེས་ནི་སྤྱ་མེད་དོན་མ་མཐོང་།  
སྤྱར་འཛིན་མཁའ་ལ་མཐོས་འཇལ་འདྲ།  
སྤྱ་མེད་ཉིད་ན་གྲོལ་བར་བཤད།  
སྤྱར་འཛིན་གྲོལ་འདོད་གྲོལ་མ་ཡིན།

ཞེས་པ་སྤྱ་སྟོགས་ལ་སྟོགས་པ་སྤྱ་ཞིག་གིས། ཀྱུ་གཞི་ལ་སྤྱ་མཐའ་བཙལ་ཏེ། ཤེས་པ་སྒྲུབ་ཅིག་མ་ཙམ་དང་རྟག་པའམ་ཆད་པར་འདོད་པ་དེས། ཀྱུ་གཞི་ {སྤྱ་མེད་དོན་མ་མཐོང་} མ་<71>རྟོགས་ཏེ་དཔེར་ན་མཁའ་ལ་མཐོ་ཆད་བགྲངས་པ་དང་འདྲ་ལོ། ཀྱུ་གཞི་ལ་སྤྱ་མཐའ་མི་ཆོལ་བ་གང་ཞིག་ནི་མཐས་མ་བཅིངས་ {སྤྱ་མེད་ཉིད་ན་གྲོལ་བར་བཤད་} པའོ། དེས་ན་རྟག་ཆད་ཆེད་དུ་ཞེན་པས་ཐར་པར་འདོད་པ་ནི་ནམ་ཡང་ {སྤྱར་འཛིན་གྲོལ་} ཐར་བར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ།

Whoever grasps at extremes and holds extreme views  
does not see the meaning which is without extremes.  
Grasping at extremes is like measuring the sky with a handspan.  
Whenever there is an absence of extremes, that is taught to be liberation.  
One who clings to extremes and wants liberation will never be liberated.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>281</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a2-3.

<sup>282</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a3

Those who seek extremes with regard to the universal ground, as do heretics and so forth, and those who assert that consciousness is merely momentary, permanent, or annihilated, do not understand the universal ground, <71> just as, for example, one cannot measure the sky with a handspan. One who does not seek for the extremes with regard to the universal ground is not bound by extremes. Therefore, one who is completely attached to eternalism and nihilism and who wants liberation will never be liberated.

[78]དེའི་ཕྱིར་དགོངས་པ་ངེས་པར་འགྲེལ་བ་ལས།

ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཟབ་ཅིང་སྤ།  
 ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཕྱི་ལྷན་བཞིན་འབབ།  
 བདག་ཏུ་རྟོགས་པར་གྱུར་ན་མི་རུང་ཞེས།  
 དེ་ནི་{ཉན་ཐོས་}གྱིས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ངས་མ་བཟླན།

[78] Thus, in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, it is said:

The appropriating consciousness is profound and subtle.  
 All the seeds flow [through it] like a stream.  
 It would be a mistake to conceptualize it as a self,  
 So I did not teach its meaning to childish beings.<sup>283</sup>

ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། དེས་མི་འགྲུབ་པའི་དཔེ་ནི།

བྱེ་མ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱང་འབྱར་མི་སྤྲིན།  
 ཤེལ་སྒོང་བསྐྱར་ཡང་གཏིང་མི་འགྱུར།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་མ་མཐོང་མེད་པར་ཐར་པར་འདོད་ཅིང་འཁོར་བ་སྤོང་བ་དེ་དག་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་མ་བརྟེན་ན་དགེ་བའི་བག་ཆགས་  
 བདག་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་ཉག་པ་པོ་དེ་ལ་བསྒྲོས་ནས་ཐར་པར་འདོད་པ་ནི། དཔེར་བྱེ་མ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱང་འབྱར་བྱར་མི་སྤྲིན་པ་དང་འདྲའོ། །འོན་  
 ཏེ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་སྤྲུལ་ཐུང་མེད་པར་ཐུང་ཡང་ཐུང་མི་འགྱུར་བ་ནི། ཤེལ་སྒོང་ཚོན་གྱིས་བསྐྱར་ཡང་མི་འགྱུར་བ་དང་འདྲ་ལ།  
 དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཐར་པར་མི་<72>འགྱུར་བའང་དེ་བཞིན་པས་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ། །

An example that this cannot be proven is:

Even if one tries to grow a grain of sand, it will not ripen into grain.  
 Even if one tries to change a crystal ball, its depth will not change.<sup>284</sup>

<sup>283</sup> See *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (འཕགས་པ་དགོངས་པ་ངེས་པར་འགྲེལ་བ་ལས། སྒོ་གྲོས་ཡངས་པའི་ལུ་སྤྲེ་ལྟ་བུ། Tōh. 106, p. 26) ལེན་པའི་རྣམ་  
 པར་ཤེས་པ་ཟབ་ཅིང་སྤ། ས་བོན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཕྱི་ལྷན་བཞིན་འབབ། ། བདག་ཏུ་རྟོག་པར་གྱུར་ན་མི་རུང་ཞེས། བྱིས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ངས་ནི་དེ་མ་བཟླན། །. Our  
 text reads ཕྱི་ལྷན་བཞིན་འབབ།, but the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* reads ཕྱི་ལྷན་བཞིན་འབབ།. However, the meanings are similar. Note that  
 this passage also appears in IOL Tib J 708. There, it immediately follows the passage from the  
*Mahāyanābhidharma-sūtra*, but here those same two passages are separated by the above passage from the *Dgongs*  
*'dus*.

<sup>284</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a3-4.

Those who want to attain liberation without seeing the universal ground or with a non-existent [universal ground], and so renounce *samsāra*, want liberation without relying on the universal ground, [believing that] the virtuous habitual tendencies are imprinted in what they call the self, which is permanent. This is like, for example, the fact that although one plants a grain of sand, it will not ripen into a harvest. However, the universal ground which is without extremes does not change into an extreme even if it is held to be an extreme, just as a crystal ball will not [permanently] change even if its color is [temporarily] changed [e.g., by placing it on a colored cloth]. Similarly, one will not become liberated by relying on that [permanent self], <72> so it is clear that there must be a universal ground.<sup>285</sup>

འཆིང་བྱ་བསྐྱར་ཡང་རིན་ཆེན་མིན། །

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྤང་བ་གང་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་བར་བྱ་སྟེ། སྒོ་ཕྲ་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་བྱ་ནི་བསྒོམ་ལས་གྱིས་[གྱི་]  
དུས་སྟེན་ནི་འགགས། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡིད་ལ་གནས་ཏེ་སྤང་ངོ་[79]ཞེན་དྲི་མའི་ངོ་བོ་བས་སྤང་བའི་གཞིར་མི་བདུབ་པས་  
འཆིང་བྱ་རིན་ཆེན་དུ་མི་འགྱུར་བ་དང་འདྲའོ། །

Although one tries to turn a cobblestone into [jewel], it will not become a jewel.<sup>286</sup>

If there is no universal ground, where could abandoning the afflictions occur, so how could they be abandoned? If [one posits] that the abandoning occurs in [the consciousnesses of] the five sense doors, [the refutation would be] that then they would cease during the path of meditation. If one says the abandoning occurs while in the afflicted mental consciousness, [79] [the refutation would be that] because [the afflicted consciousness] is itself inherently impure, it cannot be the ground for abandonment, just as a cobblestone cannot become a jewel.

ས་དོ་བསེས་ཀྱང་འདྲེས་མི་རུང་། །

ཞེས་པ་འཁོར་བ་ལྷགས་སུ་འབྱུང་བ་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་གང་ལ་བསྒོ་སྟེ། སེམས་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་དགེ་བ་ལ་  
བསྒོ་ན་སྒྲ་ཅི་དང་འདྲ་ལ། མི་དགེ་བ་ལ་བསྒོ་ན་སྒོག་སྐྱུ་དང་འདྲ། ཡིད་ལ་བསྒོ་ན་སྒོག་དང་འདྲ་སྟེ་སྐྱར་ལ་དྲག་ཏེ་ན་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་  
ཕུང་པོ་ལ་བསྒོའོ་ཞེན། ས་དོ་འདྲེས་མི་བདུབ་པ་སྐྱར་བག་ཆགས་འདྲེས་མི་བདུབ་བོ། །

As much as one mixed earth and stones, they will not merge.<sup>287</sup>

Furthermore, regarding the progressive production (Skt. *anulomaḥ*) of *samsāra*, if there were no universal ground, where would the seeds of the habitual tendencies be imprinted? If they imprinted on virtue, which arises from mind, then [they] would be [imprinting on something pleasant] like musk.<sup>288</sup> If they imprinted on non-virtue, they would be [imprinting on something unpleasant] like garlic. If they imprinted on the mental consciousness, they would be like

<sup>285</sup> Note that IOL Tib J 708 discusses the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* passage similarly but in terms of Brahṃā, Viṣṇu, and *śrāvakas* reifying the universal ground as a self.

<sup>286</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a4.

<sup>287</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a4.

<sup>288</sup> As noted in my translation of ITJ708, Asvabhāva explains the meaning of these metaphors.

lightning, swift and sudden.<sup>289</sup> If one says they imprinted on the *skandha* of form, then just as earth and stones cannot be mixed, so the habitual tendencies cannot be merged.<sup>290</sup>

འཁོར་བ་ལྷགས་ནས་བསྐྱོག་པ་ཡང་མི་བདུབ་སྟེ།

སྐྱོག་འགྲུས་གཞི་ལ་སྦྱར་བ་མེད། །

ཅེས་པ་མཐོང་བསྐྱོར་གྱི་[གྲིས་]ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྤངས་པ་འདྲ་། ཉོན་མོངས་ཡིད་དང་སྒོ་ལ་གནས་པ་སྤང་དུ་ནི་གོང་དུ་བཤད་པ་  
དང་འདྲ། ཡིད་ལ་གནས་པ་ལ་སྤང་དུ་ནི་ལམ་གྱི་དུས་ན་ཡིད་གཉེན་པོ་ལམ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་གྱུར་<73>པས་གཉེན་པོ་ལ་ཉོན་མོངས་  
པ་གནས་སུ་མི་རུང་སྟེ། དཔེར་གཏར་ཚན་ལ་ཅི་སྦྱར་མི་གནས་པ་དང་། སྐྱོག་ལས་སྦྱར་བ་མེད་པ་དང་འདྲ་སྟེ། དེ་བས་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་  
དོ། །

Reversing the order (Skt. *pratilomah*) of *samsāra* is not possible. As it is said:

On a basis that is a lightning bolt, there can be no darkness.<sup>291</sup>

The abandoning of the afflictions during [the paths of] seeing and meditation, as well as abandoning within the afflicted mental consciousness or the five sense consciousnesses, are the same as explained above. As for the abandoning occurring within the mental consciousness, during the path the mental consciousness becomes <73> the antidote—the gnosis of the path—so it is not suitable for the afflictions to abide in the antidote, just as, for example, flies cannot stand on a hot iron and there is no darkness in lightning. Therefore, the universal ground [must] exist.

འཁོར་བ་ལྷགས་སུ་འབྱུང་བའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱང་མི་རུང་སྟེ།

མཚལ་ཟེལ་གསེར་ལྷན་གཅིག་མི་སྟོང་། །[80]

སྐྱེས་བུ་ཉིད་ལ་མཚོང་མི་སྟོང་། །

ཁུ་བོ་ལྷ་ཕྱི་ཁུན་མི་འཕྲད། །

ཆོས་མཐུན་པས་ན་རིགས་མཐའ་ཡས། །

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་འཁོར་བའི་བག་ཆགས་ཚྭས་དྲུག་གཅིག་ལ་གཅིག་བསྐྱོར་ནི། གནས་དང་། དབང་པོ་དང་། ལྷལ་ཐ་དང་  
པས་པན་ཚུན་སྤངས་ཏེ་གནས་པའི་འགལ་བ་ཡོད་པས་མི་བདུབ་སྟེ། མཚལ་བ་ལྷ་བའི་ཟེལ་པ་དང་། གསེར་ལྷན་མི་གཅིག་པ་དང་  
འདྲའོ། །ཆོགས་དྲུག་རང་རེའི་བག་ཆགས་རང་རེ་ལ་བསྐྱོར་ཞེ་ན། སྐྱེས་བུ་ཇི་ལྟར་མཚོང་བ་ཆེ་ཡང་རང་ལ་མི་མཚོངས་པ་དང་  
འདྲའོ། །ཤེས་པ་སྤང་ཅིག་མ་ལྷ་ཕྱི་ལ་བསྐྱོར་ཞེ་ན། ལྷན་ཅིག་མི་གནས་པའི་འགལ་བ་ཡོད་པས་མི་བདུབ་སྟེ། ཁུ་བོ་ལྷ་ཕྱི་ཁུན་མི་  
འཕྲད་པ་དང་འདྲའོ། །འོ་ན་ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་གང་དང་གང་ལ་བསྐྱོར་ཞེ་ན། ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་མང་པོ་ཐ་དང་པས་དག་བཅོམ་པའི་  
ཤེས་པ་ལའང་བསྐྱོར་བའི་སྐྱོན་དུ་<74>འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་བས་ན་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་དགོས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་།

<sup>289</sup> These three metaphors—of musk, garlic, and lightning—all appear in ITJ708, 7r, in the same context.

<sup>290</sup> Here Nupchen seems primarily interested in reading the root verse in terms of the standard argument about stones not being suitable for imprints, as seen in Asvabhāva, even though the root verse pretty clearly intends for the earth and stones to refer to the universal ground and the habitual tendencies. Note too that ITJ708, like Nupchen here, also reads the stones as a metaphor for the form *skandha*, even though Asvabhāva does not.

<sup>291</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa 'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a4.

[Without the universal ground,] the habitual tendencies of progressive production of *samsāra* would be impossible:

A vermillion droplet and a gold nugget are not the same. [80]

A person cannot jump on oneself.

An upper part and a lower part of a stream never meet.

Were [moments of consciousness all] of a single nature, there would be endless types.<sup>292</sup>

If there were no universal ground, then the six collections of [consciousness] would imprint the habitual tendencies of *samsāra* on each other; since the place, sense-faculties, and objects [of the six consciousnesses] are [all] different, there would be a contradiction in their existing in mutual exclusion. So, they cannot [imprint on each other, and therefore there must be a universal consciousness]. They are different, like a droplet of melted vermillion and melted gold. Suppose someone says maybe the habitual tendencies of each of the six collections of consciousness can imprint on themselves. This is like a person who, no matter how high they jump, cannot jump onto themselves. Suppose someone says maybe the earlier moment of consciousness imprints [the habitual tendencies] on the subsequent moment. This has the contradiction of them never existing simultaneously. This is like the upper and lower parts of a stream never meeting. Well then, maybe any type of consciousness can imprint on any other one [because they are all of a single type]. This would have the fault of there being too many different types of consciousnesses, and thus that [habitual tendencies] could imprint even on the consciousness of an arhat.<sup>293</sup> <74> Therefore, there must be a universal ground.

ཐ་དད་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། །  
བྱུག་པོ་དག་ནི་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། །  
སྐད་ཅིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། །  
རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ། །[81]

ཞེས་གསུངས་པའི་དོན་ནོ། །

Because that would contradict them being different in three ways,<sup>294</sup>

The six [consciousnesses] are not connected,

And because their moments cannot exist together [i.e., at the same time],

If taken in terms of type, they would become something other than themselves.<sup>295</sup> [81]

<sup>292</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a4–5.

<sup>293</sup> Here Nupchen's opponent suggests treating all consciousnesses as the same, i.e., of a single type, which then imprints on the next singular consciousness, so that consciousnesses become infinite without any categories. Nupchen replies that a finite typology is necessary, and it must be one that differentiates the consciousness of an arhat. Nus ldan, 225.3–4 confirms this reading.

<sup>294</sup> I.e., their respectively having different sense organs, objects of perception, and engaging thoughts.

<sup>295</sup> Tib: ཐ་དད་དག་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། །བྱུག་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། །སྐད་ཅིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། །རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ། །. This verse comes from Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha*, reads: ཐ་དད་དག་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། །སྐད་ཅིག་ལྷན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། །རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ། (ཐོགས་མེད་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་བསྟུས་པ།, Tōh. 3720, 7b.1-2). Note the difference in

This is the meaning of this teaching.

དེས་ན་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ཅེས་བཟགས།  
དེ་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ།  
གལ་ཏེ་ལེན་ཡོད་ག་ལ་སྤྲོད།

ཅེས་པ་གཏན་ཚིགས་ལ་སྟེགས་པས་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པར་བཟགས་ཏེ། ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་དུས་གསུམ་དུ་འཁོར་བ་ལྷགས་ནས་འབྱུང་བའི་  
སྐྱེ་བ་ལེན་པ་དང་། འཁོར་བ་སྤང་དུ་མི་བདུབ་པའོ།

Therefore, it is praised as “suchness.”  
If that very [the universal ground] did not exist,  
How could it be possible to take rebirth anywhere?<sup>296</sup>

By following such an argument, the universal ground is praised as existent. If there were no universal ground, consecutive rebirths in *samsāra* and *samsāra* could not appear.

དེ་ཉིད་མེད་ན་རྒྱུན་བཀག་ན།  
ཇི་སྤྲོད་ཅི་གནས་[ཅིག་ན་]སྤྲོད་ལྡང་བ།  
གང་ལས་བྱུང་སྟེ་གང་ལས་མིན།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་དེ་ཉིད་མེད་ན་ཉན་ཐོས་འགོག་པ་ལ་ {རྒྱུན་བཀག་ནས་} ལྟོམས་པར་ཞུགས་པས་ཚིགས་དུག་གི་རྒྱ་བ་བཀགས་ནས་  
བསྟོམས་ཏེ། {ཇི་སྤྲོད་གཅིག་ན་} བྱམས་པའི་བསྟན་པ་ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སྦྱེན་གྱིས་བསྐྱེད་ནས་སྤྲོད་ལྡང་བའང་། རྒྱ་ཅི་ལས་བྱུང་སྟེ་ཀུན་གཞི་མ་  
ཡིན་པ་གང་ནས་ཀྱང་མ་བྱུང་བས་ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ལོ།

If that same [universal ground] did not exist, then the mental stream would be interrupted,  
In which case, reawakening after some period [of unconsciousness or meditation]

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the second line in this verse, where the Sde dge reads: ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར།. The Dunhuang (འགལ་བ་ instead of  
འབྲེལ་བ་) reads better. Also note the reversed order of the first two lines. Strangely, the same verse in Pelliot tibetan  
654, 2v.3, follows the Sde dge order: རྒྱག་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་ཞེད་དེ། ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། རྒྱ་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་ཞེད་པའི་ཕྱིར།, but  
it is missing the last line. PT654 agrees, however, with our text, *mun pa'i go ch*, and ITJ708 on the wording of line  
2 (ཐ་དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར།). The Peking edition (Q.4543, 8a.3) of Asaṅga's text reads: རྒྱག་པོ་དག་ལ་འབྲེལ་མེད་དེ། ཐ་  
དང་གསུམ་དང་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། རྒྱ་ཅིག་ལྟན་ཅིག་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། རིགས་ལ་བྱ་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཐལ།, and it also follows our preference for འགལ་  
བ་. For Karl Brunnholzl's translation of Asaṅga's verse, see his *Compendium of the Mahayana* vol. 1, 165:

The six [consciousnesses] are not connected  
Because that would contradict their threefold difference  
And because there are no simultaneous moments.  
If this referred to type, something else would follow.

<sup>296</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a5. While the root tantra and Nupchen seem happy to identify the universal ground as suchness (*tathathā*), Nus ldan, 225.6, waters down the identification by referencing only “the suchness of the universal ground” (ཀུན་གཞིའི་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་).

would come from what? There is nothing else it could come from.<sup>297</sup>

The Śrāvakas, by entering the absorption of cessation, stop the movements of the six sense consciousnesses and meditate. Then, having been moved by conditions such as when Maitreya teaches, they rearise. If the universal ground did not exist, what could be the cause of this revival? It could not arise from anything other than the universal ground, so it is evident it exists.

གང་མེད་དེ་ཉིད་[དེ་མེད་]གཉིས་མེད་ན།  
གང་ལས་ལྷང་སྟེ་གང་མི་འགྱུར།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་ན་རྟེན་མེད་པས་འདུ་ཤེས་མེད་པ་དང་འདུ་ཤེས་<75>མེད་པའི་སྟོམས་པར་འཇུག་པ་གཉིས་ཆོགས་དུག་  
འགག་པ་ལས་ཕྱིས་སྤང་བའང་ཚུལ་ཅི་ལས་བྱུང་སྟེ། ཀུན་གཞི་[82]མ་ཡིན་པ་གཞན་གང་ལས་ཀྱང་འབྱུང་བར་མི་འགྱུར་རོ།

Without the universal ground, that too would not exist, nor would the two  
[non-ideations].

From what would one reawaken? It does not originate from anything else.<sup>298</sup>

If there were no universal ground, there would be no basis, and thus too the two [states] of no ideation (འདུ་ཤེས་མེད་པ་) and the absorption of no ideation <75> From such cessations of the six collections [of consciousnesses], by what means would any subsequent appearance occur? [82] They could not arise from anything other than the universal ground.

དེ་བཞིན་གང་གིས་འགག་འགྱུར་ན།  
སྐད་ཅིག་ཇི་སྲིད་དེ་ནས་ལྷང་།  
དེས་ན་དེ་ཉིད་ཀུན་གྱི་གཞི།  
ལུས་དང་དུག་སྦྲན་ཇི་བཞིན་ནོ།

ཞེས་པ་ལྷ་མ་ལྟར་འགག་པའང་། ཡང་རྟེན་གང་ཞིག་གིས་བརྒྱལ་ལམ་[འ]བྱོམས་སམ་སྟོས་པའི་དུས་ན་ཆོགས་དུག་འགག་པས། ཡུན་  
ཇི་སྲིད་ཀྱི་རིང་བྱུང་ལོན་པ་ལྷང་བའང་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡོད་པས་ལྷང་ངོ་། །དེ་ལྟར་གསུམ་གྱི་དུས་འགག་པ་ལྷང་བའི་གཏན་ཆོགས་ཀྱིས།  
ཀུན་གཞི་ནི་སྤང་ཤེས་པ་ཉམས་པ་གསོ་བ། ལུས་དུག་གིས་སྟོས་པ་སྦྲན་གྱིས་གསོ་བ་དང་འདྲའོ། །དེ་ལྟར་གཏན་ཆོགས་ཀྱི་ཙྰ་བ་བཞིས་  
ཡོད་པར་མངོན་ནོ།

Similarly, when [consciousness] ceases for some reason,  
it reawakens after some period.

Hence, that same [reawakening] is [due to] the universal ground,  
just like a body with poison and its remedy.<sup>299</sup>

As before, regarding their cessation, when there is a fainting, a seizure, or being intoxicated, the six collections [of consciousnesses] cease. By what conditions is there reawakening after some

<sup>297</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a5.

<sup>298</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a5-6.

<sup>299</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a6.

duration of time—meaning the reawakening from the universal ground? In those three cases, due to the argument of reawakening from cessation, the universal ground once more restores the consciousness that has declined, like medicine restores the body intoxicated by poison. Thus, its existence is evident from the [above] four root [verses'] arguments.

འཇུག་པ་ལྟ་ནི་མི་ལམ་འདྲ།  
 དེ་ལྟ་ན་འདི་གཅིག་པ་འཇུག།  
 འོན་ཏེ་ཐ་དང་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན།  
 གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དང་ངོ་བོ་ལས།  
 གྲོལ་ཏེ་དབྱིབས་སམ་ཁ་འོག་གམ།  
 ལྟག་ཆུ་འོ་མ་ཇི་འོ་མ་འོ་ཆུ་བཞིན་ནོ།

ཞེས་པ་སྒྲོ་ལྟེ་ནམ་ཤེས་དཔེ་མི་ལམ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡིན་པའི་ཆུལ་དེ་བཞིན་ཡིན་ན། ཀུན་གཞི་དང་སྒྲོ་ལྟེ་གཉིས་གཅིག་གམ་ཐ་དང་ཞེ་ན།  
 <76>ལས་ཀྱིས་སོ་སོར་སྣང་ལ་ཤེས་པའི་རིགས་སུ་གཅིག་པས་གཅིག་དང་དུ་[83]མ་ལས་གྲོལ་བའི་དཔེ། དབྱིབས་དང་ཁ་འོག་གམ་  
 ལྟག་མ་དང་ཆུ་བཞིན་ནོ།

The five engaging [sense consciousnesses] are like a dream.  
 Thus, are they the same  
 Or different?  
 In essence, they are free from being the same or different,  
 Like shape and color,  
 Or a blend of water and milk.<sup>300</sup>

If someone asks, “For example, if it is the case that the consciousnesses of the five sense doors are like a dream, then are the universal ground and the five sense doors the same or different?” They are the same in being types of consciousness appearing individually through karma, <76> so they are an example of being free from being one or many, [83] like a shape and color, or the adulteration and the water [in a blend of milk and water].

དེ་ན་དེ་ཉིད་དེ་བཅན་ནམ།  
 གཤམ་ཏེ་དེ་ཡི་གཞི་ཉིད་བཅན།

ཞེས་པ་གཅིག་དང་ཐ་དང་གྲོལ་བའི་ཆུལ་དེ་བཞིན་ན། སྒྲོ་ལྟེ་ཡུལ་བཅད་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་རྒྱས་པ་དང་བཅས་པ་དེ་བཅན་  
 ནམ། ཀུན་གཞི་བཅན་ངོས་པ་ལྟ་བུའོ།

In that case, are those [five sense consciousnesses] more powerful,  
 Or is their ground more powerful?<sup>301</sup>

If their way of being free from sameness or difference is like that, one might ask: “Is the essence of the habitual tendencies of the five senses apprehending objects together with the potency [of

<sup>300</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a6-7.

<sup>301</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a7.

those habitual tendencies to create future moments] more powerful, or is the universal ground more powerful?"

དེ་ནི།

མི་གཡོ་མི་འགྱུར་གཡོ་དང་འགྱུར། །  
མ་བྱུང་བ་དང་དེ་བཞིན་འབྱུང་། །  
ནམ་མཁའ་འབྱུང་བ་ཇི་བཞིན་ནི། །

ཞེས་པ་ལན་དུ་ཀུན་གཞི་བཅན་པས་གང་ཡང་མི་གཡོ་མི་འགྱུར་མ་བྱུང་ངོ་། །སྒོ་ལྷ་བག་ཆགས་ནི་གཡོ་ཞིང་འགྱུར་བས་ཅིར་ཡང་  
འབྱུང་སྟེ། དཔེ་ནམ་མཁའ་དང་འཇའ་རྒྱན་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལྟ་བུའོ། །

Regarding that, it is said:

Neither changing nor moving, there is changing and moving;  
likewise without emergence, there is emerging,  
just like space and the emergence [of appearances].<sup>302</sup>

The answer is that the universal ground is more powerful in that it does not move, change, nor emerge, while the habitual tendencies of the five senses doors move and change so that they can emerge as anything, as in the example of the sky and its moisture, rainbows, and so on.

[བརྩ་གཉིས་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ངོ་བོ་]  
དེ་བས་ན་ཀུན་གཞིའི་ངོ་བོ་ནི།

ཐོག་མ་ཐ་མ་དུས་མི་དམིགས། །  
མ་ནོར་མ་བཅོས་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད། །  
རང་བྱུང་ཀུན་ཏུ་སྣང་བའི་དབྱིངས། །  
མ་བྱུང་རང་བཞིན་ཡེ་ནས་གསལ། །

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་སྒྲིའི་དུས་བྲལ་བས་འབྱུང་སངས་མེད་དེ་ཡེ་ཉིད་ནས་ཡང་དག་པ་མ་བྱས་མ་བསྐྱད་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ལ། དུས་  
བཞིར་མ་བསྐྱེབས་པར་གསལ་བ་ནི་ཐུ་མཐའ་མེད་པའོ། །དེའི་[84]ངོ་བོ་མཐའ་གང་<77>དུའང་མི་སྣང་སྟེ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆེན་པོའི་རང་  
བཞིན་དུ་གདོད་ནས་གསལ་ལོ། །

[12. The Essence of the universal ground]

Therefore, the essence of the universal ground is:

Without conceptions of time—beginning or end—  
Unmistaken, uncontrived suchness.  
Self-arisen, it is the all-appearing expanse;

<sup>302</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228a7–228b1.

Unarisen, its nature is primordially illuminating.<sup>303</sup>

The universal ground is free of any time frames of earlier and later, so there is no arising and awakening, its nature completely pure, uncreated, and unadulterated from the very beginning. Its illuminations, unobscured throughout the four times, are boundless. [84] Its essence <77> does not appear as anything whatsoever, yet it is primordially luminous as the nature of great gnosis.

འོ་ན་འཁོར་བའི་ཆོས་ཇི་སྟེང་པར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཅི་ཉེས་ཞེ་ན།

གཞིའམ་དེ་རྒྱན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ། །  
ཤེས་འབྱུང་ཐམས་ཅད་སྐྱེ་འབྱུང་བའི། །  
རྩ་བ་མཐུ་ཅན་གཞིར་བཞག་ན[བ]། །  
སྒྲ་ཆོགས་འབྱུང་རྒྱ་དེ་ཉིད་དོ། །

One might ask, “Well then, what is the problem with all the phenomena of *samsāra* appearing?” It is said:

If the so-called ground or its continuum,  
is posited as the root ground of potentiality,  
which arises as consciousness and emerges as everything,  
then that indeed is the cause for variety to emerge.<sup>304</sup>

ཅེས་པ་རང་བཞིན་དེ་ལྟར་མ་མཐོང་བས་སྒྱུར་བ་དོན་གྱི་ཀུན་གཞི་འཁོར་བའི་རྒྱ་སྒྲ་ཅིག་མའི་རྒྱན་དུ་ཡོད་པ་དེ་ནི་ཆོགས་བདུན་གྱི་འབྱུང་བྱེད། ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཆོས་རྣམས་བསྐྱེད་ཅིང་འབྱུང་བའི་རྩ་བ་བག་ཆགས་སྟོབས་ཅན་དང་བཅས་པས་འཁོར་བའི་རྩ་བར་གྱུར་པས་དངོས་པོ་གཟུང་འཛིན་སྒྲ་ཆོགས་སུ་སྒྲུང་བ་དེ་ཉིད་དོ། །འོ་ན་གྲུང་དེ་ཅམ་ཉིད་ན་རང་བཞིན་གང་དུ་འང་འབྱུང་ཞིང་སྒྲུང་བ་ནི་ངོ་བོ་ལ་མེད་པ་ཁོ་ན་ལོ། །

Due to not seeing the nature [of the universal ground] in that way, “the conjoining genuine universal ground” (*sbyor ba'i don gyi kun gzhi*), which is the cause of *samsāra* present as a continuous stream of moments, further gives rise to the other seven collections [of consciousness]. Due to the powerful habitual tendencies, which are the roots which generate and arise as afflicted phenomena, it [i.e., the conjoining genuine universal ground] becomes the root of *samsāra*. Therefore, it appears as various objective and subjective entities. However, within just that same [universal ground], while its nature can arise or appear as anything, in its essence nothing exists at all.<sup>305</sup>

[13. How can analogies indicate the universal ground]

If one wonders what the analogies would be for the universal ground, it is said:

<sup>303</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b1.

<sup>304</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b1–2.

<sup>305</sup> Note that Nupchen here distinguishes the universal ground's essence and nature as non-existent and all-appearing, respectively, foreshadowing the later tradition's distinction of essence, nature, and compassion (*ngo bo rang bzhin thugs rje*).

Regarding the clouds that move in the clear sky,  
As soon as the slightest golden vapors begin to appear,  
they are referred to as the gathering of mists and cloud masses.<sup>306</sup>

Regarding the size of clouds that move in a clear sky, even the smallest clouds as soon as there are golden vapors are categorized as mists and cloud masses. This is saying that the sky is the cause for those [clouds]. [85]

འབྱུང་བ་<78>སྐད་ཅིག་དེ་སྒྲོན་ཆད། །  
དང་བའི་མཐའ་ཉིད་སྒྲུང་ཞེས་བྱ། །  
དེ་བཞིན་དེ་ཉིད་དེ་གཞིར་གཞག།  
མཚུངས་པ་ཡིན་ཕྱིར་དེར་སྒྲུང་སྟེ། །  
སོ་སོའི་བྱེ་བྲག་དེ་ཙམ་སྟོ། །

Before the moment of arising, <78>  
[There is only] that very limit of purity, which then is said to “appear,”  
[Whereupon] precisely that [limit] is posited as a ground.  
Because [the limit and that ground] resemble each other, they appear as something.  
The distinction between them is nothing but that [positing].<sup>307</sup>

ཞེས་པ་དེ་ལྟར་སྒྲིན་དཔུང་འབྱུང་བའི་ཡུན་སྐད་ཅིག་ཙམ་དུ་སྒྲུང་བ་དེ་པན་ཆད་ནས་ཡུན་རིང་པོར་སྒྲིན་དཔུང་སྒྲུང་བ་གཉིས་  
ཀུན་དང་པོའི་ནམ་མཐའི་ཆོ་འཕྲུལ་ཉིད་སྒྲུང་བ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། རྣམ་མཁའ་རྒྱ་ཡིན་པ་ལྟར་ཀུན་གཞི་ཉིད་བག་ཆགས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་  
གཞིར་གཞག་པ་འདྲ་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་བག་ཆགས་ལམ་པ་ལ་སྒྲིག་པའི་ཐ་དད་ཡོད་ཀྱང་། ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་དུས་ན་སོ་སོར་མི་  
བྱེད་པས་མཚུངས་པའི་གཏན་ཆོག་ཞེས་བྱེད་ཀུན་གཞི་ཉིད་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོར་སྒྲུང་བས་ཀུན་གཞི་དང་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བའི་  
ཆ་དེ་ལས་བཏགས་ཏེ། ཀུན་གཞི་མེད་པར་བག་ཆགས་ཡོད་པར་མི་རུང་བས་རྒྱུའི་དཔེ་{ནམ་མཁའ་}དོན་{ཀུན་གཞི་}བསྟན་པའོ། །

In that way, both the [initial] momentary arising of heaping clouds and the subsequent long-term appearance of heaping clouds are said to be “the appearance of the magical display of the original space.” Just as space seems to be the cause, the universal ground is posited as the ground for all the habitual tendencies [i.e., the clouds]. Although for individuals [studying] on the path, the universal ground and the habitual tendencies are [treated as] different in terms of their conceptual isolates, at the time of the afflicted [mind consciousness],<sup>308</sup> they are not distinguished, by reason of their being so alike. Since the universal ground itself appears as the nature of the habitual tendencies, they are designated based on the aspects of the division into the universal ground and habitual tendencies. Since without the universal ground, habitual tendencies cannot exist, an analogy for [its role as a] cause teaches the meaning [of the universal ground’s role as cause].<sup>309</sup>

<sup>306</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b2.

<sup>307</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b2–3.

<sup>308</sup> Note Nupchen’s use of time here, which reflects his practice of reading the consciousnesses diachronically rather than synchronically, as they were read by earlier Yogācāra thinkers such as, for example, Vasubandhu.

<sup>309</sup> Nupchen’s discussion here seems closely related to the verse he began with in topic #1: “When it [i.e., the universal ground] appears as an object that can be known, / it is the cause that makes everything arise.”

དེ་ཉིད་དེ་ཡི་རྒྱ་བ་ལས། །  
འཇུག་པའི་ཚོགས་རྣམས་རྩལ་དུ་སྤང་། །

The way the six collections of *samsāra* appear from the universal ground is as follows:

From a continuous stream of moments of the universal ground along with its habitual tendencies, [86] the engaging six collections [of consciousness] appear like waves on the ocean.<sup>310</sup>

ཅེས་པ་ཚོགས་དྲུག་སྣང་བས་ཡུལ་བཅད་པས། གུན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་ཡིད་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱོས་པས། གུན་གཞི་བག་ཆགས་འཁོར་བའི་ས་  
བོན་རྒྱས་ཤིང་རྒྱས་པ་ཅན་དུ་སྤྱང་པས་གནས་ཀྱི་དངོས་པོ་མཐོང་མཇན་དུ་འཛོལ་ཅིང་ཉམ་ཐག་པ་དང་། ཡུལ་ཐ་དད་པར་སྤང་ཞིང་  
དེ་ལ་ཚོགས་དྲུག་གི་ཞེན་པས་འགྲོ་དྲུག་དུ་འཁོར་ཞིང་སྤང་རོ། །དེ་ནས་གུན་གཞི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་དུ་འདང་འཁྱུར་རོ། །

Due to the appearances of the six collections [of consciousness], objects are distinguished, whereby the habitual tendencies are imprinted on the universal ground by the [afflicted] mind. Through that, the habitual tendencies of the universal ground develop and strengthen as the seeds of *samsāra*, causing one to cling to the entities of the higher and lower realms and to feel miserable. The objects appear variously, and because of the fixations of those six collections [of consciousness] on those [objects], one wanders and falls into the six migrations. Then the universal ground also becomes the causal condition.

<sup>310</sup> In IOL Tib J 708, there are eleven analogies listed for the relationships between the universal ground and other collections of consciousnesses. The analogy of the ocean and waves is listed as number seven in ITJ 708, and it reads: “The ocean and waves are taught as an analogy for the universal ground being profound” (ཀླུ་གཞི་ཟབ་པའི་དཔེ་མཛོ་ངང་རྒྱབས་གིས་བསྟན།; folio 177r.6).

183

གང་དུ་ཉ་དང་གང་འཛིན་པའི།  
དེ་རྒྱན་དེ་ལས་དེར་འདི་འབྱུང་།།

Whatever self-appearances there may be become clear and known.  
Viewing as whatever and fixating upon whatever,  
From that stream, this arises as that.<sup>312</sup>

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་འབྲུལ་པ་དངོས་རང་ཡུལ་དུ་སྒྲུང་བ་ལ། ཚླགས་དྲུག་གིས་བྱེ་བྲག་ཏུ་བབྱང་ཞིང་{དེ་གསལ་}ཤེས་རིག་པའི་སྒོ་ནས།  
{གང་}ནང་དུ་ཉ་ན་མོངས་པའི་ཡིད་ཀྱིས་བདག་ལྟས་{དངས་}ཤིང་{གང་འཛིན་}བབྱང་བའི་བརྟགས་པའི་སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་རྒྱན་དེ་  
ལས་{དེར་}འཁོར་བའི་ཚས་རྣམས་སུ་རིད་ཅིང་ཉམ་ཐག་{འདི་འབྱུང་}གོ།

The actual confusion of the universal ground appears as its own objects, and those are distinctly fixated upon by the six collections [of consciousness]. Through cognizing and knowing, inwardly, the afflicted mind views the self, and from this stream of momentary conceptual designations, one becomes weak and miserable in *samsāric* phenomena.

གར་ཚལ་གང་ཤེས་གང་དེ་ཤེས།  
སྒྲག་ཅིང་མྱངས་འཛིགས་དངོས་པོ་ཉིད།།

ཅེས་པ་གཟུང་འཛིན་གྱིས་{གང་}འཁོར་[87]{བར་}སྒྲུང་བའི་བདེ་སྤྱད་ཚར་བ་དང་། གང་{ཤེས་}<80>མཚན་མར་བབྱང་བ་  
དང་། {གང་དེ་ཤེས་}བྱེ་བྲག་ཤེས་པས་འདུ་བྱེད་ལངས་ཤིང་ལས་སྒྲ་ཚླགས་སྤྱད་པས། ཡུལ་{སྒྲགས་ཤིང་མྱངས་}འཛིགས་ཤིང་ཡང་  
བའི་དངོས་པོ་ཅན་དུ་བྱུར་པའོ།

Whatever one feels, whatever one cognizes, and the objects one cognizes  
Become frightful and terrifying realities.<sup>313</sup>

Through (i) the various pleasant and unpleasant feelings that are *samsāric* appearances due to grasped and grasper, [87] (ii) whatever is fixated upon as signs, <80> and (iii) the cognizing specifically, the formations that rise up and various activities that are engaged in, so they become frightful objects and terrifying realities.

བག་ཆགས་རྒྱན་གྱིས་སྒྲོང་ངོ་ཞེས་པའི་ཚུལ་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞེ་ན།

མེ་ལོང་མེ་ཤེལ་མེ་བྱུང་གསུམ།  
གང་དག་འཕྲད་ན་དེ་བཞིན་འབྱུང་།།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་ན་མེ་ཤེལ་བཙའ་ཇོ་གསུམ་ལ། གཡའ་དང་མེ་རང་རྒྱད་ཡོད་པ། ཇི་སྤྱམས་དང་ཉི་མ་དང་སྒྲེས་བུའི་ཚུལ་བས་བདེ་བས་  
པ་ལས་སྒྲུང་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར། བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བོན་ཀུན་སྒོ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་རྒྱན་གང་གིས་བསྐྱར་བ་དེ་སྒྲོང་ཞིང་སད་པར་བྱེད་དོ།

<sup>312</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b4.

<sup>313</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b4. It reads: གར་ཚལ་གང་ཤེས་གང་དེ་  
ཤེས། སྒྲག་ཅིང་མྱངས་འཛིགས་དངོས་པོ་ཉིད། །

Suppose one asks by what means, as it is said, are “the habitual tendencies activated by conditions”?

The triad of the mirror, fire crystal,<sup>314</sup> and flintstone  
produce [results] that happen because of contact with particular things.<sup>315</sup>

For example, just as a mirror, a fire crystal, and a flintstone have rust [on the mirror] and a nature of fire [for the crystal and flintstone], respectively, which give appearances when [polished with] scented oils, [exposed to] sunlight, and effortfully struck [with steel] by someone, just so, all the seeds of habitual tendencies are activated and awakened when transformed by any condition of adventitious karma.

ཇི་ལྟར་བསྐྱང་བས་ལྷང་བའི་ཚུལ་དཔེ་གང་གིས་མཚན་ཞིན།

མེ་ལྔ་མཚོ་རྒྱབས་ས་རྒྱངས་གསུམ།  
ཇི་སྲིད་དེ་རྒྱན་བྱང་ཚོར་ནམས།  
དེ་ཉིད་རྒྱ་ཡིས་རང་བཞིན་ལྷང་།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེ་མེ་ལྔ་ལས་གཡའ་ལྷང་བ་དང་། མཚོ་ལས་ཡར་རྒྱབས་མོ་ལྷང་བ་དང་། ས་ལས་རྒྱངས་བྱང་བ་ལྟར་ཡུན་{ཇི་}སྲིད་ཐོག་  
མཐའ་མེད་པར་བག་ཆགས་བསགས་པའི་སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་དེ་རྒྱན་གྱི་བྱང་ཚོར་ཀུན་རྒྱུན་གྱིས་མ་བསྐྱང་ཡང་། ལྷར་{དེ་ཉིད་}གོམས་  
[88]བརྟན་པའི་རྒྱས་རང་བཞིན་དུའང་ལྷང་ངོ་། །དཔེ་གསུམ་ནི་ནམ་པར་སློན་<81>པའི་བག་ཆགས་གཉིས་དང་། རྒྱ་མཐུན་པའི་  
བག་ཆགས་གསུམ་གྱི་ཕྱིར་དང་། ཤེས་པ་ཐ་དད་དཔེ་མོས་ཚྭགས་ནས་ཤེས་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་དེ། བཤད་པ་དང་འཆད་པའང་སྒྱུར་རོ།

Suppose one asks, with what analogies might one illustrate how [appearances] arise through some kind of raising [influence]? It is said:

[Just like] the three [analogies of tarnish on] a mirror, waves on an ocean, and vapors  
from the earth,  
The sensations, in a continuous stream for however long [as there is existence],  
themselves arise naturally through causes.<sup>316</sup>

Just as tarnish arises from a mirror, waves rise up from the ocean, and vapor occurs from the ground, just so all the sensations (*byung tshor*) of the stream of moments of habitual tendencies accumulated throughout time without beginning or end are not brought about by conditions [in general], but naturally arise due to the causes of [88] previous habituations and their maturation. Regarding the three analogies: the first two illustrate <81> the ripening habitual tendencies (*rnam par smin pa'i bag chags*), while the third illustrates the causally concordant habitual tendencies (*rgyu mthun pa'i bag chags*). They are for understanding the different

<sup>314</sup> མེ་ལྔ་ལྔ་: Also translates “magnifying glass,” which can be used to make fires.

<sup>315</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b4–5.

<sup>316</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b5.

consciousnesses [i.e. the universal ground and the sensations that arise from it] according to one's analogous perspective. In this way, they may be applied to what has been explained and what will be explained.<sup>317</sup>

ཀུན་གཞི་བག་ཆགས་འཛིན་པའི་ཐབས་དཔེ་གང་གིས་མཆོན་ཞེ་ན།

མེ་འཛིན་དེ་འཛིན་འདབ་འཛིན་ལྟར།  
 དེ་ཉིད་དེ་ཡིས་དེ་རྒྱན་ལ།  
 གང་ཞེན་དེ་འཛིན་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན།

ཞེས་པ་བཅའ་དང་། མངལ་དང་། སྤང་རྒྱས། མེ་དང་། སྤོང་ས་བོན་དང་། སྤང་མ་འཛིན་པ་ལྟར་བག་ཆགས་དེ་ཉིད་ཡང་ཀུན་གཞིས་  
 {དེ་ཡིས་}ཤེས་པ་སྐད་ཅིག་མའི་དེ་རྒྱན་ལ་ཡུལ་མང་དུ་བཅད་པས་གང་ཞེན་པ་དེ་མི་གཏོང་{བར་འཛིན་}བྱེད་{ཡིན་}པ་ལོ།

Suppose one asks what analogy illustrates the universal ground holding the habitual tendencies?

Like a fire-holder, a seed-holder, and a bee-holder,  
 those very [habitual tendencies] allow that [universal ground]  
 to hold whatever is fixated upon within the stream [of consciousness].<sup>318</sup>

Just as a fire crystal, a womb, and honeycomb hold fire, the male seed, and bees, similarly, the habitual tendencies allow the universal ground to hold without letting go to whatever results from dividing the stream of momentary consciousnesses into many [discrete] objects.

བག་ཆགས་བསྐྱོ་བའི་ཐབས་ཀྱི་དཔེ་གང་ཞེ་ན།

རས་དཀར་ལ་སྟགས་དེ་དག་ནི།  
 གང་བསྐྱོའི་དབང་དུ་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་ལོ།  
 དེ་ཉིད་དེ་ལ་དེ་རྒྱན་དག།  
 གང་ཉིད་བསྐྱོས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་ལོ།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་རས་སྟགས་དཀར་པོ་དང་། དར་དཀར་{སྟགས་}དང་། ལྷམ་བུ་{དེ་དག་ལ་}ཆོན་དང་ཆོས་གང་གིས་{བཀོ་བའི་  
 དབང་}བསྐྱར་བར་སྟགས་བུ་{དེ་ཉིད་}ཡང་དངོས་པོའི་ཁ་དྲག་དེར་{འདྲ་}འཇུག་པ་ལྟར། ཀུན་གཞི་[89]དེ་ཉིད་ཡེ་ངེ་མ་མེད་པའི་  
 ལྷམ་བུ་དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ལ། བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱན་ལས་གང་<82>ཉིད་སྤྱད་ཅིང་གོམས་པས་བསྐྱོས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་ཀུན་གཞི་ཡང་འཇུག་རོ།

Suppose one asks what is an analogy for the means by which the habitual tendencies are imprinted?

The white cotton cloth and so forth,  
 Based on whatever imprinted, will become just the same.

<sup>317</sup> This passage's interpretations of the three analogies are quite difficult to understand. It may be that Nupchen too is somewhat unclear.

<sup>318</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b5.

[Similarly,] that same [universal ground] is imprinted  
with whatever [comes from] the stream of those [habitual tendencies]  
and their continuities [and thus become] the same.<sup>319</sup>

Just as, for example, when a white cotton cloth or a white silk or a woolen cloth is colored by paint or dye, the cloth becomes the same color as the pigment, in the same way, that very universal ground, which [89] is like a primordially stainless woolen cloth, <82> is imprinted with whatever actions and habituations come from the stream of habitual tendencies, whereby universal ground also becomes the same as those.

ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བག་ཆགས་སོགས་པའི་དཔེ་ནི།

གངས་རྒྱུ་ལ་སོགས་དེ་དག་ནི།  
སོགས་པས་དེ་དག་ཉིད་དུ་སྒྲུང་།  
དེ་རྒྱན་འབྱུང་གང་དེ་དག་ནི།  
དེ་ཡང་དེ་དག་ཉིད་དུ་འོ།

ཞེས་དཔེར་གངས་རྒྱུ་དང་། ཐེར་སྒང་ {སྒང་དུ་} གི་རྒྱུ་པ་དང་། {སོགས་} དངོས་པོ་གཞན་བསྐྱུ་བ་ནི་སྤྱ་ཟངས་ལ་སོགས་པ་  
དང་། རྒྱ་མཐི་ནང་དུ་བྱི་མ་ {སོགས་པས་} བསྐྱུ་བ་སྒྲུང་མཐུན་པར་འཕེལ་ཞིང་ {དེ་དག་ཉིད་དུ་སྒྲུང་} འཐུག་པར་གྱུར་བ་དེ་  
ཏྲར། ཀུན་གཞི་སྒྲིབ་ཅིག་མཐི་རྒྱན་ལ་བྱིས་འབྱུང་བའི་རྒྱ་བག་ཆགས་སྟེང་ཟུག་ཡོད་པས་ {དེ་དག་རྣམས་ལ་} བྱི་མཐི་ལས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱོས་  
པས་ {དེ་ཡང་} རྒྱུ་ {དེ་དག་} མཐུན་པར་གྱུར་པས་འཕེལ་ཞིང་འཐུག་པར་གྱུར་བ་ {དེ་ཉིད་དུ་} འོ།

The analogy for habitual tendencies accumulating in the universal ground is as follows:

The dirt on the snow and so forth,  
Through their accumulation, appear [blended together] as themselves.  
Whatever [habitual tendencies] arise from that continuum [of the universal ground],  
They also [imprint blended together] as themselves.<sup>320</sup>

For example, consider dirt on the snow, layered residue on a pan, and other gathered substances: These accumulate on a copper pot, with later [residues] added to earlier ones, whereby they build up and thicken into a blend (*rgyud mthun pa*). In the same way, the habitual tendencies, which are the causes for future events and are within the momentary continuum of the universal ground, propel your life, whereby they imprint [the universal ground] with karma for the future, and thus they become a blend, building up and thickening.

བག་ཆགས་བརྟན་པའི་དཔེ་རི་ལྟ་བུ་ནི།

འོ་མ་རྒྱ་དང་ས་བོན་ལས།  
དེ་མི་འབྲུ་བས་དེ་བརྟན་ཡིན།

<sup>319</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b6.

<sup>320</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b6.

དེ་ཉིད་དེ་ཡི་རྒྱན་དེ་ལས།  
 དེ་ཡང་དེ་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ཡིན།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེ་འོ་མ་ལས་ཞོར་གྱུར་བ་དང་། རྒྱ་ལས་ཆབ་རོམ་དང་། ས་བོན་གཉིས་ལས་ལྷས་སུ་འགྱུར་བ་འང་འོ་མ་རྒྱ་དང་ས་བོན་  
 [90]ཡང་བརྟན་པའི་དངོས་པོ་དེ་{མི་འདྲ་བར་}གསུམ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལས། སྤྱི་མ་{ཞོ་དང་གང་བ་ཆབ་<83>རོམ་དང་}འབྱུང་  
 {ལྷས་པ་}བཞིའི་རྒྱན་གྱིས་{དེ་}བརྟན་པ་{ཡིན་}བཞིན། བག་ཆགས་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་དེའི་རྒྱན་ལ་དེ་ཡོད་པ་ལས། བརྟན་པ་མ་  
 གྱུར་བ་དེ་{ཡང་}སྒོ་བྱར་གྱི་ལས་མང་དུ་སྦྱང་བས། འདྲིས་གོམས་སུ་བརྟན་པས་མཐུ་ཅན་དུ་{དེ་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ཡིན་}གྱུར་པའོ།

What are the examples for the development of habitual tendencies?

From milk, water, and seeds,  
 through other dissimilar [conditions], [yogurt, ice, and bodies] will develop.  
 From those [habitual tendencies] within the continuum of that [universal ground],  
 Those further appear in a similar way.<sup>321</sup>

The analogies are of milk turning into yogurt, water turning into ice, or the two seeds turning into a body. Furthermore, cream develops in dependence on the conditions of the four elements, which are [necessary] beyond just the three entities themselves [90] which do the developing, i.e., the milk, water, and seeds. <83> Similarly, through the habitual tendencies which are present in the continuum of the universal ground, those unstable [tendencies] are involved in many incidental activities, whereby they accumulate intense habituation and experience and thus gain strength.

བག་ཆགས་འབྱུང་བའི་དཔེ་ནི།

གནས་པ་དེ་དག་གང་ཡིན་པ།  
 དེར་འབྱུང་བ་དེ་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་འོ།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་ན་རྫོག་རྒྱ་མ་བསྐལ་ན་རྒྱ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་དྲངས་པ་ལྟར། ཀྱན་གཞི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེབས་པ་འང་། རྣལ་འབྱོར་  
 བསྐྱེམ་ན་{དེར་འབྱུང་}རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་འབྱུང་{དེ་ཉིད་དུ་འོ་}ངོ།

An analogy for the purification of habitual tendencies is as follows:

Whatever is left to rest,  
 Occurring however, [is purified] in itself.<sup>322</sup>

Just as muddy water becomes naturally clear if it is not stirred, the universal ground obscured by habitual tendencies will also be naturally purified when one meditates on the yoga.

བག་ཆགས་སྒྲིན་པའི་དུས་ཉིད་ནི།

<sup>321</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b6–7.

<sup>322</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b7.

ལྷན་སྒྲིལ་དུས་སྒྲིལ་དུས་གཉིས་སྒྲིལ། །

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་འབྲུ་དུས་གཅིག་ལ་ {ལྷན་} སྒྲིལ་པ་དང་། གཉིས་ {དུས་} ལ་སྒྲིལ་པ་དང་། འབྲུ་དུས་ {གཉིས་} ལ་སྒྲིལ་པ་དང་། ཤིང་  
ཐོག་པ་ན་སེ་ལྷ་བྱར་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཆེ་འདི་ལ་སྒྲིལ་པ་དང་། བྱི་མ་ལ་སྒྲིལ་པ་དང་། ལན་གྲངས་གཞན་ལ་སྒྲིལ་པ་དང་། སྒྲིལ་  
པར་མ་ངེས་པ་དང་བཞིན། །

Regarding the time when habitual tendencies ripen, it is said:

It ripens quickly; it ripens on time; it ripens twice.<sup>323</sup>

For the analogy of a grain that ripens once [per year], or twice, or in [post-fallow] seasons, it is like the jackfruit (*panasa*): the fruit of habitual tendencies may ripen in this life, in the next life, in some other life, or indefinitely.

ས་བོན་ཆེ་ཆུང་འཕེལ་འགྲིབ་དེས། །

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་ས་བོན་སྟོན་མེད་པ་མང་ཉུང་[91]དུས་[དུ་]{ཆུང་}བཏབས་པ་ལས། འབྲས་བྱ་{ཆེ་}མང་ཉུང་དུ་འགྱུར་བ་ལྟར།  
བག་ཆགས་ལྷན་མེད་ས་<84>བོན་ཆེ་ཆུང་ལ་བྱི་མའི་སྒྲིལ་ཆེ་ཆུང་གིས་འཕེལ་འགྲིབ་དུ་འགྱུར་རོ། །

Based on the proportions of the seeds, [the fruit] increases or decreases.<sup>324</sup>

When varying amounts of healthy seeds are planted, [91] the amount of fruit will [likewise] vary. So too, based on the magnitude of the seeds of initial habitual tendencies, <84> [the results] will increase or decrease in accord with the magnitude of the subsequent conditions.

བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་ཡང་དག་པའི་དོན་མཐོང་དུ་མི་སྟེར་བར་སྒྲིབ་པའི་དཔེ་རིམ་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིན།

སྒྲིལ་དང་ལིང་ཐོག་སྒྲིལ་པའི་ཁམས། །  
རྩིས་ལྷལ་མི་མཐོང་བསྒྲིབས་པ་ལྟར། །  
དེའི་རྒྱན་འབྲིགས་པའི་སྒྲིལ་པ་ཡིས། །  
བཟླ་བྱ་དེ་ཉིད་མཐོང་མ་ཡིན། །

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་ན་སྒྲིལ་གྱིས་ནམ་མཁའ་མི་མཐོང་བ་དང་། ལིང་ཐོག་གིས་ {རྩིས་} མི་མཐོང་བ་དང་། སྒྲིལ་པས་རྩིས་ལྷལ་མི་མཐོང་  
བར་བྱེད་པ་ {བསྒྲིབས་པ་ལྟར་} བཞིན། བག་ཆགས་དེའི་ཆོགས་སྒྲིག་པོས་ཤེས་པའི་རྒྱན་བསྒྲིགས་པས་ {འབྲིགས་སྒྲིལ་པ་ཡིས་} ཀྱན་  
གཞི་ {བཟླ་བྱ་དེ་ཉིད་} རྩིས་ཆེན་པོ་བྱང་ཆུབ་སྟོང་པའི་དོན་མཐོང་ {མ་ཡིན་} དུ་མི་སྟེར་རོ། །

Suppose some asks, “What is the analogy for illustrating how the habitual tendencies conceal and prevent one from seeing the genuine meaning?”

Just as clouds, cataract, and darkness

<sup>323</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b7.

<sup>324</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b7.

Obscure substantial objects so that they cannot be seen,  
 Due to the gathering darkness [of the habitual tendencies] in the continuum of that  
 [universal ground],  
 The objects of sight are not seen.<sup>325</sup>

Just as the sky can not be seen due to clouds or due to cataracts, and substantial objects can not be seen due to darkness, just so, the condensed collection of habitual tendencies obscures the continuum of consciousness, so as to prevent one from seeing the universal ground, the great root, the intrinsic essence of awakening.

ཚུགས་བྱུག་བར་མ་དོར་འགགས་པ་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱིས་ཕྱིས་སྤང་དུ་འདོད་པའི་དཔེ་ནི།

དང་པོ་གཉིས་དང་ཕྱི་མ་ལ།  
 གསལ་དང་འགགས་དང་ཐ་དད་སྤང་།།

ཅེས་པ་དཔེར་གྱིས་དང་མེ་ཏྲོག་སྤྲུལ་ཡུན་རིང་དུ་བཞག་པས་ཉིལ་མར་ལ་སྤྲུལ་མའི་བྱི་འབྱུང་བ་བཞིན། ཚུགས་བྱུག་{དང་པོ་}ཆེ་འདི་  
 ལ་གསལ་[92]བ་བར་མ་{འགགས་དང་}ཉམས་པ་ཡང་། སྤྲུལ་མར་ཞེན་པའི་མཐུས་ཆེ་ཕྱི་མ་ལ་མངོན་དུ་སྤང་བར་{ཐ་དད་}འབྱུང་  
 པའོ།

Regarding the analogy for the assertion that the six collections [of consciousness] cease in the intermediary state and [later] reappear due to habitual tendencies, it says:

In the beginning, middle, and end  
 They manifest, cease, then reappear differently.<sup>326</sup>

Just as when nutmeg flowers are left in sesame oil for a long time, a fragrance of nutmeg will arise in the sesame oil, just so, the six collections [of consciousnesses] manifest in this life [92] and become dormant in the intermediate but will manifest in the next life through the power of the previous attachments.

བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་འབྲས་བྱ་ཐ་དད་ལེན་པའི་དཔེ་ནི་<85>གང་ཞེ་ན།

དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱན་ལ་འགྲོ་བའི་ཕྱིར།  
 གཅིག་གིས་སྤྲུལ་ཆུང་ཐ་དད་ལེན།།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་ལག་པས་ཡི་གེ་བྲིས་པའི་སྒྲ་ཐ་དད་པ་ལྟར། བག་ཆགས་{དེ་ཉིད་}ནི་དགེ་ཕྱིག་ལུང་དུ་མ་བཞུན་པའི་ཡུལ་ཀྱན་{ལ་  
 འགྲོ་བའི་ཕྱིར་}ཆང་བའི་གཏན་ཆུང་ཆུང་གིས། {གཅིག་གིས་སྤྲུལ་ཆུང་}འབྲས་བྱ་མཐོ་རིས་ངན་སོང་ཐ་དད་པའི་སྐྱེ་གནས་ལེན་པའོ།

Suppose someone asks, “what is an analogy for how the results of the habitual tendencies are taken up differently?” <85>

<sup>325</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 228b7–229a1.

<sup>326</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a1.

Because those same [habitual tendencies] pervade everything,  
They alone take various different [rebirths].<sup>327</sup>

For example, just as the sound of handwritten words may be [pronounced] differently, similarly, because the habitual tendencies encompass all virtuous, nonvirtuous, and indeterminate objects, they take rebirths in different resulting higher or lower realms.

བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་ཡི་དཔེ་ནི།

དེ་ཉིད་རྩ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་དུག །  
སྤར་འཇུག་པའང་དེ་ཉིད་ལས། །  
ཆར་རྒྱུན་སྒྲིག་རྒྱ་ཇི་བཞིན་ནོ། །

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་{དེ་ཉིད་རྩ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་}ལ་ཆོགས་དུག་བྱང་ནས་ཡུལ་བཅད་དེ། མགོན་མཉམ་དུ་ཡུལ་དང་ཞེས་པ་གཉིས་ཀ་  
ཀུན་གཞི་ལ་བསྐྱོས་ཏེ་དུས་ཤིང་། {སྤར་འཇུག་པའང་དེ་ཉིད་དོ།}དེ་ལས་སྤར་བྱང་བའི་དཔེ་ཆར་གྱི་རྒྱུན་དང་སྒྲིག་རྒྱ་ལྟ་བུའོ།

Regarding an analogy for the cause of the habitual tendencies, it says:

Six engaging [consciousnesses arise] as the dynamism of that same [universal ground].  
The subsequent engagements [of the six consciousnesses arise] again from those same  
[earlier engagements],  
Like a stream of rain and a mirage.<sup>328</sup>

The six consciousnesses arise from the universal ground and then cognize their objects, so both consciousness and the object are equally imprinted and gather in the universal ground. An analogy for reemerging from that is like the stream of rain or a mirage.

བག་ཆགས་མི་གསལ་བ་རྒྱ་བའི་དཔེ་ནི།

མིག་ནད་དབང་གིས་ཡུལ་དག་ལ། །  
ཐ་དད་མ་ཡིན་ངོ་བོ་ཙམ། །

ཞེས་པ་དཔེ་རབ་རིབ་ཅན་དང་མིག་ནད་དབང་གིས་[གིས་]ཡུལ་མཐོང་ཡང་མི་གསལ་བ་[93]ལྟར། ཀུན་གཞི་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱང་རྒྱ་བ་  
ཕྱ་བ་ལ། ཆོགས་དུག་གིས་བསྐྱོབས་པས་རིས་སུ་{ཐ་དད་མ་ཡིན་ངོ་བོ་ཙམ་}བརྟགས་དཀའ་བའོ།

Regarding an analogy for the movements of the habitual tendencies being obscure, it says:

<sup>327</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a1–2.

<sup>328</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a2. Nus ldan, 251.4–6, explains this analogy by adding that the habitual tendencies of the six consciousnesses are imprinted in the universal consciousness, like waves returning to the ocean. He then explains the analogies of rain and mirage from the root verse by saying the rain seems like a stream but is actually made of drops, while the mirage emerges shimmering from heat and wind, then returns into the sky.

Because of various eye diseases, objects  
Are seen as an undifferentiated nature.<sup>329</sup>

Just as the objects are not seen clearly due to cataracts and other eye diseases, [93] similarly, the universal ground and the habitual tendencies which are so subtle in their movements are obscured by the [coarse engagements of the] six collections [of consciousnesses], so they are difficult to discern in their particulars.

ཀུན་གཞི་རྒྱུ་ཉི་དྲུག་གི་བག་ཆགས་ངན་པ་<86>ལྷངས་ནས་འབྲས་བུའི་བག་ཆགས་བཟང་པོ་ལེན་པའི་དཔེ་རིམ་གྱི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིན།

གང་དེར་འདིར་གཅིག་འདྲེས་པ་ལས།  
སྒྱུ་རྩལ་དེ་འབྲེད་དེ་དག་ལེན།

ཞེས་པ་ཀུན་གཞི་{གང་དེར་འདིར་གཅིག་ལ་}དགེ་སྤྱི་གི་བག་ཆགས་ཚེ་འདིར་བསགས་པ་མཐུ་བརྟས་པ་དེས་འདྲེས་ཏེ་གཅིག་པ་  
ལྟ་བུར་སྤང་བ་ལས། ཀུན་ནས་ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་བག་ཆགས་སྤང་ལ། རྣམ་པར་བྱང་བའི་བག་ཆགས་དང་དུ་ལེན་པ་ནི། དཔེར་ན་ངང་  
པའི་མཆུའི་སྒྱུ་རྩལ་གྱིས་ཆུ་དང་འོ་མ་འདྲེས་པ་ལས་དེ་གཉིས། {འབྲེད་}ཉི་དྲུག་ཆུ་བཞག་སྟེ་འོ་མ་{དེ་དག་}ལེན་པ་བཞིན། ཀུན་  
གཞི་དེ་ཉིད་ལ་བག་ཆགས་གཉིས་{ལས་བྱུང་}གནས་པས་གནས་མཐོ་དམན་དུ་{དེ་རྣམས་}སྤང་བར་བྱེད་པ་འང་སྤང་ལེན་བྱེད་  
པའོ།

Suppose someone asks, “What is an analogy for how the universal ground, abandoning the negative habitual tendencies <86> from the causal period [when the habitual tendencies were imprinted], takes up the positive habitual tendencies as the result?” It says:

From where they are mixed together as one,  
[The universal ground’s] dynamism separates out [different types] and takes them [as  
the corresponding rebirths].<sup>330</sup>

The habitual tendencies of the virtuous and nonvirtuous that have been accumulated in this life, having grown in strength, seem to be mixed and the same, but the universal ground abandons the thoroughly afflicted habitual tendencies and adopts the completely pure habitual tendencies. It is like the following analogy: From water mixed with milk, the skillful goose’s beak separates these two, extracting milk and leaving behind water. Similarly, the two [types of positive and negative] habitual tendencies reside in the universal ground, whereupon they are made to appear as higher and lower realms, as they are abandoned and adopted.

ཀུན་གཞིའི་བག་ཆགས་རྒྱུ་ཉི་དྲུག་ན་མི་མངོན་པ་ལས། འབྲས་བུའི་དྲུག་ན་མངོན་པའི་དཔེ་གང་ཞིན།

གང་འདིར་སྦྱར་ཞིང་མི་སྤང་ཡང་།  
གང་གི་དབང་གིས་ཐ་དད་སྤང་།  
དེ་ལས་དེ་བྱུང་དེ་ཉིད་ལས། [94]

<sup>329</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a2.

<sup>330</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a2–3.

དེ་བཞིན་དེ་དག་འབྱུང་བའོ།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་ན་དར་ནུ་ཚིག་གཏེ་དངོས་པོ་རྒྱུ་དུས་ན་དེ་དེ་གི་ཚིན་ལ་སྒྱུར་ཞིང་དུ་དངོས་སུ་མི་གསལ་ཡང་། ཚིན་དང་རྒྱུ་  
མཚུར་{གང་གིས་དབང་གིས་}དང་ཐུང་དེ་ཡང་ནས་ཡང་དུ་ཞེན་པའི་<87>སྟོབས་ཀྱིས། ལྷའི་རི་མོ་དང་བཅས་པ་{ཐ་དད་སྒྲུང་  
{ཤིན་ཏུ་གསལ་བར་མངོན་པ་ལྟར། ཀུན་གཞི་{དེ་}ལ་ནམ་པར་སྒྲིན་པའི་བག་ཆགས་ཇི་སྟེད་{དེ་བྱུང་}བསགས་པའང་མངོན་དུ་  
གསལ་བ་མེད་ཀྱང་། དེ་ཉིད་རྒྱུ་གྱིས་སང་པར་སྟོབས་ཅན་དུ་སྒྱུར་པ་ལས། དཔེ་ཇི་ལྟ་བར་{དེ་བཞིན་}འབྱས་བུ་{དེ་དག་}མཐོ་  
རིས་ངན་སྤང་ཐ་དད་{འབྱུང་བར་}སྒྲུང་བ་ལ་དབགས་ན། རྒྱ་ལོ་བོ་ཤེས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

Suppose someone asks, “What is an analogy for the habitual tendencies of the universal ground not being clear at the time of the cause but becoming clear at the time of the result?” It says:

Although they are applied and invisible,  
Due to some power, they appear distinctly.  
From that, that arises; from that, [94]  
Those arise in the same way.<sup>331</sup>

For example, when a drawing (*hwa*<畫>) is applied on silk as an [initial] line sketch with a substance from a fruit pit at the time of the cause, the drawing is not easily visible, but when the paint and pigments are applied again and again, <87> through that power, the pattern of the drawing becomes clearly apparent. Likewise, although the ripening habitual tendencies, as many as there are, accumulate in the universal ground, they are not visibly clear, but they are activated and become powerful due to conditions. As in this analogy, when one considers the different results of higher and lower realms appearing, then the cause [i.e., the sketch] will be understood in its essence.

བག་ཆགས་བསྐྱེ་བུ་བརྟུབ་པའི་དཔེ་ནི།

དྲི་ངའི་དྲི་འབྱུང་གང་གི་དྲི།  
གང་མེད་གང་ལ་ཞེན་པ་ནི།  
མི་འདྲ་མི་གཅིག་དེ་ཉིད་ལ།  
དེ་ཉིད་གཞན་ལ་དེ་རྒྱ་གཞན།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་སྟོན་པའི་དྲི་ང་བ་དེ་ཕོར་བུ་ལ་སྟོན་ཆད་མེད་ཀྱང་། སྟོན་པ་ཡུན་རིང་དུ་བརྟུངས་ན་ཕོར་བུ་ལ་ཞེན་ནས། འབྲུག་{གང་  
{སྟོན་པ་མེད་ཀྱང་ཕོར་བུ་{གང་}ལ་བྱོ་ཞིང་{ཞེན་པ་}མནམ་པ་དེ། སྟོན་ཕོར་གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་{མི་འདྲ་}ཡང་མི་མཐུན་ཐ་དད་ལ་རྒྱ་  
ཡང་{མི་གཅིག་}སྤོ་སྤོ་ཐ་དད་ཀྱང་ཡུན་རིང་ན་{དེ་ཉིད་ལ་}འགོས་པ་ལྟར། ཀུན་གཞི་{དེ་ཉིད་[95]དང་དེ་རྒྱུན་}བག་ཆགས་  
ཀྱང་དེ་ལྟ་བུ་ལ་ཚིགས་བྱུག་གི་ལས་མང་པོ་སྤྱད་པས་བསྐྱེ་ལོ།

An analogy for the imprintability of the habitual tendencies is as follows:

Like whatever smell comes from the smell of a smelly thing,

<sup>331</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a3.

It attaches to whatever did not have it.  
 They are dissimilar and different, and  
 They are discrete and have distinct causes.<sup>332</sup>

For example, although the smell of garlic may not have been present in the bowl before, when the garlic is mashed in a bowl for a long time, later, even after the garlic is gone, the taste and smell will remain present in the bowl. Just as both the garlic and the bowl have dissimilar natures and the causes too are different, if they stay together for a long time, [the garlic] perfumes [the bowl]. Similarly, it is the same with the habitual tendencies and the universal ground; [95] when the many activities of the six collections interact [with them], they will become imprinted.

ཀུན་གཞི་རྒྱ་འབྲས་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡིན་པའི་དབེ་ནི་གང་ཞེ་ན།

གང་གི་ངོ་བོ་དེ་གཅིག་ལ།  
 དེ་ཡང་གནས་དང་<88>སྐབས་ཀྱིས་འགྱུར།

ཞེས་པ་དཔེར་ {གང་གི་ངོ་བོ་དེ་གཅིག་ལ} ཤིང་ཐོག་སྒྲིན་པ་གཅིག་ལ་ {དེ་ཡང་} གནས་ {དང་} སྐབས་ཀྱི་ཚེས་སྒྲ་མའི་འབྲས་བྱ་བྱི་  
 མའི་རྒྱར་འབྱུང་བ་ལྟར། ཀུན་གཞི་བག་ཆགས་དང་བཅས་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཡང་། {དེ་ཡང་གནས་དང་སྐབས་ཀྱིས་འགྱུར་} སྐད་ཅིག་མ་སྒྲ་  
 མའི་འབྲས་བྱ་བྱི་མའི་རྒྱར་འགྱུར་བའོ།

Suppose someone asks, “What is an analogy for the universal ground being both a cause and a result?” It says:

The essence of that [universal ground] is singular,  
 Yet, it also changes according to location and context.<sup>333</sup> <88>

Just as for a single ripened fruit, a previous fruit becomes the cause for a later one, due to factors of location and context. Similarly, the [single] essence of the universal ground along with the habitual tendencies also becomes the result of the previous moment and the cause of the later.

བག་ཆགས་བྱང་བའི་དབེ་ནི།

གང་ལ་བག་ཆགས་རྣམ་དག་པ།  
 དྲངས་པས་ཐམས་ཅད་གསལ་བ་བཞིན།

ཞེས་པ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་སྤྱི་ཞིག་གི་རིག་པ་ {གང་ལ་} བག་ཆགས་གཏན་ནས་སྤྱངས་པའི་ {རྣམ་དག་པ་} ཡེ་ཤེས་ཤར་བ་ནི། དབེ་ནས་  
 མཁའ་དྲངས་པ་ལ་ཉི་མ་ཤར་བ་ {ཐམས་ཅད་གསལ་བཞིན་} དང་འབྲེལ།

Regarding an analogy for the habitual tendencies being purified:

When the habitual tendencies in someone are purified,

<sup>332</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a3–4.

<sup>333</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a4.

Through that clarity, everything is like luminosity.<sup>334</sup>

Within the awareness of a yogin, the shining of the gnosis of the complete purification of habitual tendencies is like the shining sun in a clear sky.

གང་གིས་རྒྱས་[གི་རྒྱན་]སངས་ཀྱན་ཁྱབ་རྒྱས། །  
དབྱ་མ་ནམ་དག་[དེ་ཉིད་ཅས།]

ཅས་པ་དག །རྣལ་འབྱོར་གང་ཞིག་གི་རྒྱུད་ལ་བག་ཆགས་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་ཡོད་པར་སྤངས་པས་དག་པས་ཆོགས་གཉིས་རྫོགས་པར་གྲུབ་པ་  
ནི། {ཁྱབ་རྒྱས་}ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་རྣམ་པར་{དབྱ་མ་}དག་པ་ཡིན་པ་[96]ཞི་བས་འདོད་པ་ནི་མདོ་ལྡན་པ་སྟེ། གསང་སྤྲུལ་ལས་སྟོན་པའི་  
སྤྱན་པའོ། །དེས་ན་བྱང་ཐས་འཛང་རྒྱ་བར་འདོད་པ་ནི་རྒྱ་ལས་སྐྱབ་པ་བྱང་བའོ། །

The mental stream that awakens, pervades, and expands,  
That is called the pure middle.<sup>335</sup>

These two [passages] mean: Through the cleansing and purification of the seeds of habitual tendencies present in the mental stream of a yogin, the complete accomplishment of the two accumulations is the completely pure *dharmakāya*. This is desired by those into pacification [96] such as the Sautrāntika, but this is darkness compared to Secret Mantra. Therefore, the desire to become a Buddha after having been cleansed is an obscuration that comes from [needing] causes.<sup>336</sup>

[Summary:]

སྤྱན་པ་དྲིས་པའི་ལན་བྱང་པར་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་སྐབས་སུ་གསལ་བར་བསྟན་པའི་བྱིར།<89>

སྤྱན་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ངོ་བོ་དང་། །  
མཚན་ཉིད་ཡན་ལག་རྩ་བ་དང་། །  
གནས་དང་སྐྱབ་པ་བྱེ་བྲག་ཆོས། །

ཞེས་པ་རང་བཞིན་ནི་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་རང་བཞིན་བསྟན་པའོ། །ངོ་བོ་ནི་ཆོར་བ་བྱང་སྟོམས་དང་ལྡན་པ་མི་གསལ་བའོ། །མཚན་ཉིད་ནི་  
སྐད་ཅིག་མར་བསྟན་པའོ། །ཡན་ལག་གི་འཁོར་དུ་དང་ལྡན་པའོ། །རྩ་བ་ནི་ཡོད་པར་བསྐྱབ་པའོ། །གནས་ནི་དབྱེ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བག་  
ཆགས་ཀྱི་གཞིར་གཞག་པའོ། །སྐྱབ་པ་ནི་སྤྱན་དང་ལིང་ཏྱག་ལྟར་བསྟན་པ་སྟེ་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་ལས་སོ། །བྱེ་བྲག་ནི་མིང་གི་རྣམ་གྲངས་དང་  
བྱང་པར་གཉིས་བསྟན་པའོ། །ཆོས་ནི་ཀྱན་གཞིའི་ཆོས་བསྟན་པ་ཉིད་དོ། །

<sup>334</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a4.

<sup>335</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a4. གང་གི་རྒྱན་སངས་ཀྱན་ཁྱབ་རྒྱས། །དབྱ་  
མ་ནམ་དག་དེ་ཉིད་ཅས། །.

<sup>336</sup> Here, at the conclusion to his discussion of the analogies, Nupchen reminds his reader that none of them get at the genuine universal ground which cannot serve as a support for purification, as stated above at the end of the ninth topic on the names for the universal ground (see n. 267).

In order to teach clearly the answer to the questions about darkness in this special context of the universal ground, <89> it says:

Of the darkness, there are its nature, essence,  
characteristic, branches, roots,  
place, obscurations, particulars, and phenomenality.<sup>337</sup>

Regarding “nature,” the nature of the universal ground is taught; its “essence” is its having indifferent sensations and being indistinct; its “characteristic” is to be momentary; its “branches” is its having many companions; its “root” is to be established as existing; its “place” its being a ground for the habitual tendencies, as established by means of analogies; and its “obscurations” are to be taught as being like clouds and cataracts—the activities of the universal ground. The “particulars” are taught in the two types of terminological categories. Its “phenomenality” is taught as the phenomenon of the universal ground.

གང་དུ་གང་གིས་གང་བྱེད་གང་།  
དེ་དག་ངེས་པར་དབྱེ་བར་བྱའོ།

ཞེས་པ་གང་དུ་བསྐྱབ་ན་ས་ལྗེ་སྐབས་སྐབས་སུ་ཕྱ་རགས་ཀྱིས་མཐོང་དུ་མི་སྟེར་བའོ། །གཞིན་པོ་གང་གིས་སེལ་ན་ས་ལྗེ་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་  
ཀྱིས་སྣང་ངོ་། །དེ་ཅིའི་[97]ཕྱིར་ཞེ་ན། རྟོན་མཐོང་དུ་མི་སྟེར་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཏེ། དམིགས་པའི་ཡུལ་དང་གནས་འགྱུར་གྱི་སྐབས་ལས་ཤེས་  
པར་བྱའོ། །ཙུ་བ་གང་དུ་འདུས་ན། གཞི་ཙུ་མེད་པའི་ཚས་ཉིད་ཡེ་དག་པར་འདུས་སོ། །དེ་ལྟར་བཤད་པ་{དེ་དག་ངེས་པར་}ནས་  
དབྱེ་བ་རྣམས་གསུམ་<90>གྱིས་དབྱེ་བའོ། །

ལང་ཀའི་བདག་པོ། དེ་དག་ནི་གཞིའི་མདོ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། གང་སྟན་པའི་སྟོང་ཡུལ་བ་ལས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱངས་[བསྐྱངས་]པ་རྣམས་  
ལ་དགོངས་ཏེ། སྟན་པའི་ཚས་རྣམས་གསུངས་པའོ། །

ཞེས་པ་བོས་ནས་ངོ་བོ་བསྟན་པ་ནི། གང་ཟག་གི་དངོས་པོ་སྟོང་བའི་སྟོང་ཡུལ་དུ་གྱུར་པས། རང་གི་ལས་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་པ་དག་  
འདུལ་བ་ལ་དགོངས་ནས་བཀའ་རྒྱལ་པའོ། ། <90.2> = [97.4]

Where, by what, for what, and what?  
Those should be clearly distinguished.<sup>338</sup>

Wherever it obscures, it prevents seeing by means of the subtle and coarse [obscurations] on each of the five levels (*bhūmi*). The gnosis of the fifth level, which is the antidote that dispels, will shine forth. [97] Suppose someone asks why? It is because it prevents seeing the actual objects, so this should be understood from the topics on the perceivable object and its transformation. The root where it gathers is primordially pure reality, which has no basis or origin. In this way, the teachings on the three divisions<sup>339</sup> is done. <90>

<sup>337</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a5.

<sup>338</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a5.

<sup>339</sup> Given what is discussed in the eighth topic on the divisions, we take these three to be the universal ground as (1) the ground of afflictions, (2) the support for purification, and (3) the single essence of the ultimate universal ground.

O Lord of Lanka, these constitute the so-called *sūtra* on the ground, which is a teaching on the dharmas of darkness intended for those who experience darkness and are impelled by karma,<sup>340</sup>

Having called out in this way, the essence is taught: it is granted with the intention of taming those persons who are categorized as having small intelligence, who are therefore tormented by their own karma. <90.2> = [97.4]

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<sup>340</sup> *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (Tōh. 829), in *Rnying rgyud*, sDe dge Bka' 'gyur, 229a5–6.

## 1. Summary

*The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space (Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po 'i rgyud dpal nam mkha' med pa)* is a Dzogchen Heart Essence scripture of the Nyingma tradition preserved in several recensions, including the Mtshams brag manuscript,<sup>341</sup> the Gting skyes copy,<sup>342</sup> the *Snga 'gyur rgyud 'bum phyogs bsgrigs*,<sup>343</sup> and the A 'dzom edition,<sup>344</sup> upon which the present translation is based. Structured in five chapters, the tantra presents a visionary exposition of the Dzogchen Ground (*gzhi*) as primordially pure, self-arising awareness characterized by the triad of essence, nature, and compassion, and explains how both awakened display and *samsāric* confusion arise from its spontaneous dynamism. It distinguishes between the way of abiding (*gnas lugs*) and the way of appearing (*snang lugs*), describes how the three awakened bodies (*dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*) unfold, and portrays delusion as adventitious like clouds forming in the sky rather than inherent to the Ground itself. Speaking in a revelatory voice attributed to awareness, the text employs rich symbolic imagery and tantric enumerations (five families, five gnoses, five lights, and related structures) to articulate a non-dual vision in which the three awakened bodies are already perfected within awareness. Liberation, therefore, is not achieved through fabrication or abandonment, but through direct recognition of the self-appearing Ground.

[87a.2] རྩུག་རྒྱུ་ལྟར་དུ། མ་རྒྱ་སྟེ་སྟེ་བྱ་ལྟར་ཨ་མ་ལྟེ་སྟེ། ཉན་ཏེ་རྒྱ་མ། བོད་རྒྱུ་དུ། བཟ་ཤིས་མཛེས་ལྟར་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱུ།  
དབལ་ནམ་མཁའ་མེད་པ་ཞིས་བྱ་བ།

[87a.2] In English, *The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space*

Om! Homage to the Blessed One, The Self-Appearing Awareness, and to the foremost protector, Amitabha.

<sup>344</sup> *Bkra shis mdzes ldan chen po'i rgyud*, (in *rNying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun*, A 'dzom, vol. 1 (of 3) (New Delhi: Sanje Dorje, 1973-1977), 207-232, BDRC W1KG892.

## Chapter One from The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness: “The Ground’s Way of Being”

འདི་སྐད་བདག་གིས་བསྟན་པའི་དུས་གཅིག་ན། རིག་པ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་ཆེན་པོར་རང་སྣང་བའི་དུས་ན། སྣང་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་སྐྱེ་  
དང་བཅས་པ། སྣང་བའི་རང་བཞིན་མ་འགག་པ་ནས། རིག་པའི་སྐྱེ་ནུས་པར་དག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ཉིད་དོ། །ཞེ་མ་རྟོ་རིག་པའི་ཡེ་  
[87b]ཤེས་ཆེན་པོ་ཡུལ་མེད་པ་སྣང་བའི་སྟོང་ནས། ངོ་བོ་རིག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་སོ། །ངས་རིག་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་བསྟན་ཏོ། །ཡངས་པ་ཀུན་  
ཀྱི་བདག་ཉིད་སྣང་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་སྣང་ཐབས་ནི། རང་ཡངས་པའོ། །དེས་སྤྲུམ་ཤིང་རང་སྣང་གི་གཞུང་ཡས་ཁང་དང་བཅས་པའོ། །རང་  
གི་འོད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་དང་བཅས་པའོ། །ཐོག་མ་མེད་པའི་སྤྲུམ་རྗེ་དང་བཅས་པའོ། །

Thus have I taught these words at one time: When awareness naturally appears as the great appearances of gnosis, the essence of the great appearance takes on an [awakened] body; from the unimpeded nature [appears] the immaculate great awareness body itself. Émaho! When the great awareness-gnosis [87b] remains within the matrix of objectless appearance, it is the awareness-gnosis of the essence. I am going to teach the meaning of this same awareness. The mode of appearing, which is open and the great appearance of the identity of all, is natural openness. That [mode of appearing] expressed the meaning], taking on a self-appearing immeasurable palace, taking on a naturally radiant objective field, taking on a beginningless great compassion.<sup>345</sup>

འདི་སྐད་བདག་གིས་ཐོས་པའི་དུས་གཅིག་ན། རྟོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཐོན་རོལ་ན།  
རིག་པ་རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཉིད་གཞི་ལས་མ་གཡོས་ཏེ། རྟེན་མེད་པའི་སྣང་བ་གསུམ་དང་ཐབས་ཅིག་ཏུ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Thus have I heard these words at one time. At the time before, when no realized buddha had emerged and no unrealized sentient beings had emerged, awareness, self-occurring gnosis, had not strayed from the Ground and remained together with the three unconditioned appearances.<sup>346</sup>

དེ་ནས་ཡང་རིག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཉིད་ཀྱིས། རང་རང་གི་འདུག་ཚུལ་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་འདི་གསུངས་སོ། །ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ཡངས་པའི་  
སྟོང་དེ་ནི། མ་གཡོས་པ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་ཆེན་པོ་ལས། མ་འབྱུང་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཆེན་པོར་བཞུགས་སོ། །ངོ་བོའི་སྐྱེ་མ་འགགས་པར་གནས་ཏེ།  
ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མི་འགྱུར། ཐབས་གསང་བ། མ་གཡོས། མི་གཡོ། མ་བསྟོད་པ། སྣང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་དུས་གཅིག་ལ་རྟོགས་པ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཐམས་  
ཅད་སྐད་ཅིག་ལ་རྟོགས་པ། སྐྱེ་ཐམས་ཅད་སྟེན་པས་གནས་པ། འོད་ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་མ་བསྐྱབས་[88a]བར་གསལ་བ། གནས་  
ལུགས་ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་ལ། སྣང་བ་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་མ་བསྐྱབས་པ། ངོ་བོ་རང་བཞིན་སྤྲུམ་རྗེ་གསུམ། རྒྱ་མ་ཆད་པར་ཡངས་སུ་རྟོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

Then again, awareness-gnosis itself taught the ways of being (*gnas lug*) of each of their modes of presence: Kye! The open matrix of the great appearance abides as an unconfused great buddha

<sup>345</sup> Note that the text used *dang bcas pa* (“takes on”) rather than *gyur* (“becomes”), probably in order to maintain the distinction between *rig pa* and its manifestations. The paragraph as a whole is struggling with how this tantra will demonstrate the ground, which is beyond demonstration or appearance.

<sup>346</sup> Nyi ma ’bum (p. 13-14) uses similar language in describing the ground: ཐོག་མར་རྟོགས་ཏེ་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་རྟོགས་ཏེ་  
སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་ཐོན་རོལ་ན། གཞི་དངོས་པོ་གཤེས་ཀྱི་གནས་ལུགས་ཇི་ལྟར་གནས་པ་བསྟན་པ་དང་།

within the unmoving great dharmakāya. Since the essence body abides unceasingly, the essence itself does not change, the methods are secret, it does not waver, will not waver, and did not move; all appearances are perfected in a single instant. All gnoses are perfected in a single instant. All awakened bodies remain through ripening. All appearances of luminosity shine without obscuration. [88a] In the appearance of the way of being, appearances are not obscured by any method. The triad of essence, nature, and compassion is completely Great Perfection without any partiality.

ངོ་བོའི་གནས་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་ཡང་། སྐྱུ་ལྷ་གནས་པ་ལ་ཁ་མིག་ན་བར་དོད་པ་ནི་ཅང་མི་བཞུགས། སྟོང་པ་ལྷ་གནས་པ་ལ། བེམ་སྟོང་ལྷ་ཅང་མི་བཞུགས། འོད་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ལ། ཁ་དོག་ཏུ་བྱེ་བ་ནི་ཅང་མི་བཞུགས། རྒྱ་མ་ཆད་པ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ། འབྲེལ་བ་ལྷ་ཅང་མི་བཞུགས། མཐའ་དབྱས་མེད་པ་ལྷ་སྟངས་ལ། རྩོགས་སུ་དམིགས་པ་ནི་ཅང་མི་བཞུགས། ཆ་མ་གོས་པ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ། རིས་སུ་བྱེ་བ་ནི་ཅང་མི་བཞུགས། རྒྱ་མ་འགགས་པ་ལྷ་སྟངས་ཞིང་། དཔངས་མཐོ་བ་ལ་སྟངས་འོག་ཏུ་སྟངས་བ་ནི་གང་ཡང་མེད་དོ། །

[1] The great way of being of the essence, furthermore, exists as if an awakened body, without any manifest mouth, eyes, or ears whatsoever. It exists as if empty, without being a blank emptiness whatsoever. In the great appearance in the likeness of five lights, it abides without any division into colors whatsoever. In appearing as if all-encompassing, it abides without joining. In appearing as without center or edges, it abides without any perceivable directions whatsoever. In appearing as if partless, it abides without any distinctions. In appearing as if unceasingly ornamented and appears high without any above or below at all.

རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་སྟངས་བ་ནི། ཡངས་པ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་རྩོགས་སུ་མེད་པ། གསལ་བ་[88b]ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་དངོས་པོ་མེད་པ། མཐིང་ག་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་ཆ་མ་བྱེ་བ། དཀར་བ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་རིགས་མི་འཛིན་པ། སེར་བ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་ཡོན་ཏན་རྒྱུགས་པ། དམར་བ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་གོ་མ་འགགས་པ། ལྗང་ཁུ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་མ་བཅོལ་བར་བྱུབ་པ། སྟངས་བ་ལ་ཉིད་ཏུ་གནས་པ་ལ་ཁ་དོག་མི་འཛིན་པ་ཆེན་པོ། རྒྱུ་པ་ལ་དབྱིབས་མེད་པ། མ་འགགས་པ་ལ་རྒྱུན་མེད་པ། ཁྱབ་པ་མེད་པ་ལ་རང་གཏངས་ཆེན་པོ། རང་གསལ་བ་ལ་བྱི་ནང་དང་བཅས་པ། ཚྱུ་སྐྱབ་མེད་པ་ལ་བབ་ཀྱིས་བྱུབ་པ་འོ། །

[2] The natural appearance manifests as if open, without falling into any sides. It appears as if luminous, [88b] yet it is entityless. It appears as if blue, without dividing into aspects. It appears as if white, without belonging to any category (*rigs*). It appears as if yellow, with qualities perfected. It appears as if red, with opportunities unceasing. It appears as if green, with effortless accomplishments. It abides as five appearances, without holding onto any color. It is round, without any shape. It is unceasing, but unconditioned. There is nothing for it to pervade, yet it is a great self-radiance. Naturally luminous, it has interiority and exteriority. Without effortful accomplishment, it is automatically accomplished.

ཐུགས་རྗེའི་སྟངས་བ་ནི། སྟོང་པ་ལྷ་སྟངས་བ་ལ་གསལ་བ་མ་འགགས་པ། སྟོས་པ་མེད་པ་ལ་སྟོས་པ་ཆེན་པོ། རང་བཞིན་མ་འགགས་པ་ལ་སྐྱ་ཆོགས་མ་ངེས་པ་ཆེན་པོ། གསལ་བ་ལ་སྐྱན་པ་མེད་པ། མ་འགགས་པས་མེད་པ་ཆེན་པོ། བགས་ཀྱིས་སྟོང་པ་ལ་ཀུན་ཏུ་འཆར་བ་ཆེན་པོ། མ་འདྲེས་པ་ལ་ཡོངས་སུ་སྟངས་བ་ཆེན་པོ། ཀུན་ལ་ཁྱབ་པ་ལ་གཅིག་ཏུ་འདུས་པ་ཆེན་པོ། དག་པ་ལ་འབྲུལ་པ་མ་འགགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ། རྒྱུགས་པ་ལ་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྟངས་བ་ཆེན་པོ། ཐུགས་རྗེ་གོ་མ་འགགས་པར་བཞུགས་སོ། །[89a]

[3] The appearance of compassion appears as if empty, yet with unceasing luminosity. Without elaboration, it is a great elaboration. Its nature unceasing, it is a great indeterminate diversity.

Luminous yet without darkness. As it is unceasing, it is a great absence. It is principally empty, a great dawning everywhere. It is unmixed, a great entire dawning. It is all-pervading, a great collection of oneness. It is pure, with great unceasing delusions. It is perfection, with a great appearance of unity. It remains as unceasing opportunities of compassion. [89a]

ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིའི་སྒྲུང་བ་མི་འགྱུར་བ་ལ། འབྲུལ་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡུལ་ལྟར་སྒྲུང་བའི་དུས་མ་ངེས་ཏེ་གཞི་ལས་འབྲུལ་པའི་གོ་བྱུང་སྟེ། ངོ་བོ་མི་  
འགྱུར་བ་ལས་རང་བཞིན་མ་འགགས་པར་གསལ་བ་སྟེ། སྤྱགས་རྗེ་མ་ངེས་པ་ལས། མ་རིག་པ་ལྟར་སྒྲུང་བ་བྱུང་སྟེ། དེ་ལྟར་འབྲུལ་པའི་  
ཡུལ་ཙམ་སྟོ། །གསང་བའི་སྤྱགས་ལ། ཡེ་ནས་གནས་པའི་མཚན་གཞི་མཚན་པའོ། །ཞེས་བགྲ་ཤིས་མཛེས་ལྡན་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱུད་ལས། གཞི་  
གནས་ལྟགས་ཀྱི་ལེའུ་སྟེ་དང་པོའོ། །

Within the unchanging appearance of dharmakāya, the time for deluded appearances to appear as if objects is still not ascertained, that is, the [mere] potentiality for delusion occurs within the ground. From that unchanging essence, the nature is illuminated unceasingly. From indeterminate compassion, an appearance of ignorance arises; that is all delusional objects are. In the secret mantra, the primordially abiding expressed ground is expressed.

## Chapter Two from The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness: “The Teaching on the Way Confusion Arises from the Ground.”

དེ་ནས་ཡང་རིག་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས། རང་གི་འབྲུལ་ཚུལ་སྒྲུང་བ་འདི་གསུངས་སོ། །ཀྱེ་མ་ང་ལ་འབྲུལ་པ་མེད་ཀྱང་། ངའི་རྩལ་ལས་  
འབྲུལ་པ་བྱུང་སྟེ། གཞི་མི་འགྱུར་བ་ལས། རང་བཞིན་མ་འགགས་པར་ཤར་ནས། སྤྱགས་རྗེ་མ་ངེས་པ་ལས་མ་རིག་པ་རང་བྱུང་སྟེ།  
དཔེར་ན་ནམ་མཁའ་ལ་སྤྱོད་ཡང་དག་པར་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། རྫོ་བྱར་དུ་སྤྱོད་བྱུང་བ་དང་འདྲ་བར། གཞི་ལ་མ་རིག་པ་ཡོད་པ་ཅད་  
མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྤྱགས་རྗེ་ལྟར་ཤར་བ་ལས་མ་རིག་པ་བྱུང་སྟེ། གཞི་སྤྱན་གྱུ་བ་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྟགས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཆགས་སོ། །

Then again, the appearance of awareness itself teaches on how one’s delusion appears: Kyema! I never have delusions, but delusions arise from my dynamism. Within the unchanging ground, the nature arises unceasingly. Then within the indeterminate compassion, ignorance naturally arises. For example, the sky does not actually have clouds, but clouds formed adventitiously. Similarly, the ground never has ignorance, but ignorance arises from its dawning as compassion, and the so-called “way of being of the spontaneously present ground” is formed.<sup>347</sup>

དེ་ཡང་མ་ངེས་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ཞིག་ཏུ་གནས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་འཆར་[89b]ལྟགས་ནམ་པ་བརྒྱུད་དང་ལྡན་པ། རིན་པོ་ཆེ་གཞུང་འི་  
གནས་ལྟགས་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། འདྲོད་ཡོན་གྱི་གོ་མ་འགགས་པའོ། །མ་གྲུབ་པའི་གྲུབ་པ་ཆེན་པོར་གནས་པ། སྤྱགས་རྗེ་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་སྒྲོ་མ་  
འགགས་པ། འདྲོད་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་སྒྲུང་བ་མ་འགགས་པ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་མ་འགགས་པ། སྐྱེ་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་ངོ་བོ་  
མ་འགགས་པ། གཉིས་མེད་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་ལྟ་བ་མ་ངེས་པ་ན། མཐའ་གྲོལ་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་ཐབས་མ་འགགས་པའོ། །དག་པ་ཡེ་ཤེས་  
ཀྱི་འཕྲུག་སྒྲོ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་པ། མ་དག་པ་ལྟར་འཆར་བའི་སྒྲིའི་སྤྱགས་རྗེ་མ་འགགས་པ།

[The spontaneously present ground] also abides as an indeterminate great appearance. It is also [89b] endowed with the eight modes of dawning. It is called “the way of being of the precious amulet box,” and its potentiality for desirable objects is unceasing. It abides as a great existence

<sup>347</sup> This seems to imply that chapter one was all about the ཀ་དག་གཞི་. Note that both Nyi ma ‘bum and the *Sgra thal gyur* list seven grounds.

without existing. The door for its dawning in the likeness of compassion is unceasing. The appearance of its dawning in the likeness of light rays is unceasing. The enjoyment of its dawning in the likeness of gnosis is unceasing. The nature of its dawning in the likeness of awakened bodies is unceasing. The view of its dawning in the likeness of being non-dual is indeterminate. Therefore the method for its dawning in the likeness of being free from extremes is unceasing. The entry door of pure gnosis is ever perfected. And the compassion, which is the doors of its dawning in the likeness of being impure, is unceasing.<sup>348</sup>

འདོད་དོན་གྱི་ཅོར་བྱ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལྟ་བུ་སྟེ། དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་སྤང་བ་བདེ་སྐྱེ་མ་ཆགས་ཏེ། རང་གཞོན་ལྷ་བྱམ་པའི་སྐྱའི་ཤེས་བྱ་རྒྱ་རལ་ཏེ། ལྷ་རྒྱ་བྱ་གནས་ལྷགས་སུ་གནས་སོ། །དུས་དེ་ཙམ་ན་བདེ་སྤང་བ་བྱེར་རལ་ཏེ། སང་མ་སིང་མ། ཤག་མ་ཤིག་མ། ཁྲལ་མ་ཁྲོལ་མ། ལང་མ་ལིང་མ། འགྲལ་བ། འཕྲིག་བ། སྒྲ་ཆོགས་སུ་འཕྲོ་བ་བྱུང་ངོ་། །

It is like a wish-fulfilling precious gem. For those kinds of appearances, my body becomes unformed. The inner youthful vase body's shell of knowable objects is rent open, and it abides in the outer way of being of spontaneous presence. At this very moment, my appearance burst outward. [They] appear light and airy, fragile and shaky, evanescent and wandering, swaying and drifting, moving, gathering, and manifesting in various ways.

དེ་ནས་སྐྱེ་བྱ་བྱ་གནས་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་ཆགས་སོ། །དེའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་གོ་མ་འགགས་པ་ལས་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་རྫོགས་པའི་སྤང་བྱུགས་ཆགས་སོ། །ཡོན་ཏན་གྱི་གོ་མ་འགགས་པ་ལས། རང་བཞིན་སྐྱེ་སྐྱའི་[90a]སྤང་བྱུགས་སུ་སླིད་ངོ་། །དེའི་སྤྱགས་རྗེ་གོ་མ་འགགས་པ་ལས། མ་དག་པའི་སྤང་བྱུགས་བྱུང་ངོ་། །དེ་ལས་སྤང་བའི་འབྲུལ་ཚུལ་དུ་མར་ཆགས་ཏེ། འཁོར་བ་བྱུང་བོ། །

Then the great way of being of spontaneous presence formed. Through its unceasing doors of gnoses, the way of the appearance of perfect enjoyment formed. Through unceasing doors of good qualities, the way of appearing of [90a] the natural emanation body (nirmāṇakāya) occurred. Through unceasing doors of compassion, the impure ways of appearing occurred. Through that, the modes of the delusions of appearances form downward, and samsara was established.

དེ་ཡང་གནས་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་གཅིག་ལ། སྤང་བྱུགས་བཞི་ལྟར་སྤང་སྟེ། སྐྱའི་རོལ་པ་སྒྲ་ཆོགས་སུ་ཤར་ནས། སེམས་ཅན་བྱན་མོང་གི་ལས་ལྟར་སྤང་བའོ། །དེ་ཡང་རྒྱུན་བཞིའི་[བཞིས་]འབྲུལ་ཏེ། ཐ་མ་ཡང་རྒྱུན་བཞི་ལ་སྤྱག་གོ། །རྒྱ་དམིགས་པ་ཅན་དུ་འཛིན་པའི་རྒྱུན་ལས། འབྲས་བུ་སྒྲ་ཆོགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱར་འབྲུལ། བདག་པོ་ཡུལ་ཅན་དུ་འཛིན་པའི་རྒྱུན་ལས། མིང་སྒྲ་ཆོགས་སུ་འབྲུལ། དམིགས་པ་སྒྲོ་ཅན་དུ་འཛིན་པའི་རྒྱུན་ལས། འབྲས་བུ་སྤྱག་པ་མེད་པར་འབྲུལ་ལོ། །དེ་མ་ཐག་པ་འཛིན་པ་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱུན་ལས། སྤང་བ་སྒྲ་ཆོགས་སུ་འབྲུལ་ལོ། །དེ་ནི་གསང་སྤྱགས་གཞིའི་འབྲུལ་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོའོ། །

Furthermore, the great way of being is singular, but its way of appearing is to appear in four ways. The displays of awakened bodies dawn variously and appear as the karmas of ordinary sentient beings. Moreover, they are confused due to the four conditions, and right to the end, they

<sup>348</sup> Compare *Nyi zla kha sbyor*, 224-225; Nyi ma 'bum, 108, who cites the *Nyi zla kha sbyor*. These, as well as *Tshig don mdzod*, 346, all have the *ma dag pa* ('*khor ba*) before the *dag pa ye shes*. Otherwise there are the same, though with different wording, and they identify this list as the eight ways of drawing (*shar lugs brgyad*). Perhaps the difference might be explained by our tantra's present interest in the unfolding of the ground into impurity, whereas the *Nyi zla kha sbyor* is interested in the return from impurity into the pure ground.

[must] rely on the four conditions. Through the condition of grasping at causes as referential objects, one confuses them for causes of various results. Through the condition of grasping at oneself as a subject, one is confused about [applying] various names. Through the condition of grasping at reference points as objects (*blo can*), one becomes confused with endless results. Through the condition of grasping at momentariness, one becomes confused about appearances being various. This is the great way of confusion that comes from Secret Mantra's ground.

དེ་ཡང་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་ལ་མ་རིག་པའི་རྒྱན་རང་ག་མ་དང་བཅས་ཏེ་སྒྲུབ་ངོ་། །མ་རིག་པ་དེ་ཡང་རྩ་བའི་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ལྔ་དང་བཅས་ཏེ།  
 རྟོག་ཆོགས་དུ་མ་སྤྱད་པའོ། །རྒྱན་སྟོང་ཕྱག་དུ་མ་དང་བཅས་པ། སྒྲུབ་ཚུལ་དུ་མ་དང་བཅས་པ། སྒྲུབ་ཚུལ་གྱིས་འབྱམས་པའོ། །དེ་ཡང་  
 ལྷན་གྲུབ་རིན་པོ་ཆའི་གཏུའི་གནས་[90b]ལྷགས་ལས། སྒྲུབ་བ་མ་འགགས་པ་ལས། གཞི་མ་འགྱུར་བར་སྒྲུབ་བ་འགྱུར་ཏེ། ཡུལ་དུ་  
 མའི་རྗེས་སུ་འབྱངས་ཏེ། ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་རྟོག་པའོ། །ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་སྒྲུབ་བ་མ་འགྱུར་ཡང་། འབྲུལ་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བ་ལ་འགྱུར་འགྱུར་ལྟར་བྱུང་  
 ངོ་། །དོན་རྗེ་སེམས་དཔའ་ལ་འབྲུལ་པ་མི་མངའ་ཡང་། སེམས་ཅན་ལ་འབྲུལ་པའི་ཚུལ་བསྟན་པའོ། །ཐ་མ་རང་གི་སྒྲུབ་བ་རང་རྒྱན་གྱིས་  
 གཞི་ལས་ཐོག་པའོ། །

Moreover, regarding the method of appearing, it appears together with the condition of ignorance itself. Ignorance is further constituted as various thoughts together with the five root afflictions. Together with many thousands of conditions, and appearing in many ways, the modes of appearance proliferate. Likewise, through the way of being of the precious amulet box of spontaneous presence, [90b] there are unceasing appearances, whereby the ground appears without changing. By following various objects, everything becomes conceptualized. Although the appearance of the dharmakāya has not changed, because of the appearance of confusion, it seems as if [the ground] is constantly changing. Vajrasattva has no confusion, but [he] displays a manner of confusion for sentient beings. In the end, one's own appearance returns to the ground through its own conditions.

གཉིས་སུ་མེད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བ་རང་ཤར་བར་མ་ཤེས་ཏེ། འབྲུལ་པ་ལ་བདག་པོར་བཟུང་བས་བདག་པོའི་རྒྱན། རང་རིག་པའི་འབྲས་བུ་  
 རང་ཤར་བར་མ་ཤེས། རྒྱ་ཉིད་སྟོན་པ་ཅན་བཟུང་བ་(བས་)རྒྱུའི་རྒྱན་ལོ། །ཡུལ་དང་ཤེས་པ་སྟོང་པར་ནི་མ་ཤེས། དམིགས་པ་ལ་ཡུལ་  
 དུ་བཟུང་བས། དམིགས་པ་རང་ངོ་བོའི་རྒྱན། དུས་ལ་སྟོན་ནས་འོད་རང་བྱུང་བར་མ་ཤེས། དེ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་དེར་འཛིན་པའི་ཤེས་པ་  
 བྱུང་བས་མཚུངས་པ་དེ་མ་ཐག་པའི་རྒྱན་ཞེས། བཟླ་ཤིས་མཛེས་ལྡན་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱུད་ལས། གཞི་ལས་འབྲུལ་པ་བྱུང་ཚུལ་བསྟན་པའི་  
 ལེན་སྟེ་གཉིས་པའོ། །

Without understanding that nondual appearance is the dawning of itself, that confusion is apprehended as a subject, so there is the condition of subjectivity. Without understanding that the result of self-awareness is the dawning of itself, the cause itself is apprehended in dependence [on that], so there is the condition of causality. Without understanding that objects and consciousness are empty, the referential focus is apprehended as an object, so the condition of reification. Without understanding, because of time, that the luminosity is self-arising, there arises an understanding that clings to that which is no longer as still there, so there is the condition of the preceding moment.

### Chapter Three—"The Teaching on the Way of Being and the Way of Appearing"

དེ་ནས་ཡང་སྒྲུང་བ་དམ་པའི་འཁོར་ལ། རིག་པ་ཆོས་འབྱུང་སྐྱེས་བཀའ་སྡུལ་པ། གྲེ་སྒྲུང་བ་དམ་པ། རིག་པ་ཡོངས་སུ་[91a]སྒྲུང་བའི་  
འཁོར་རྣམས་ཉོན་ཅིག་གཞི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་རིག་པ། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ནི་གནས་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་གནས་  
ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་གཅིག་ལ། སྒྲུང་ལྷགས་བཞིར་འཆར་བ་འདི་ལྟ་སྟེ། རིག་པ་དང་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གནས་ལྷགས་ནི། མེ་ལོང་གི་དཀྱིལ་  
འཁོར་ལྟར་གནས་པས། མ་རིག་པའི་རྒྱུན་གྱིས་མ་བསྐྱབས་པ། ཀ་དག་ཆེན་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ཡང་དག་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་བྱུང་། མ་དག་  
པའི་སེམས་ཅན་མ་བྱུང་བའི་གནས། རིག་པ་མ་གཏོས་པའི་ཡེ་གདངས་ཆེན་པོ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

Then again, the awakened body of awareness which is the source of dharma spoke to the retinue of sacred appearances: “O sacred appearances! Retinue of universally appearing awareness, listen! [91a] Awareness which is a great presencing of the ground, the appearance of dharmakāya, is connected to the great way of being. Moreover, the single great way of being dawns through four ways of appearing like this: Since the way of being of awareness and all dharmas abides like the mandala of a mirror, it is not obscured by the conditions of ignorance and is called the “great primordial purity.” It is a place where perfectly pure buddhas have not occurred and imperfect sentient beings have not occurred, called “the great primordial radiance of unwavering awareness.”

དེ་ལ་ནི་བརྗོད་དུ་མེད་དོ། །དཔག་དུ་མེད་དོ། །དམིགས་སུ་མེད་དོ། །གཞུང་དུ་མེད་དོ། །བརྗེད་མེད་དོ། །གང་གིས་ཀྱང་གཏན་ལ་མི་  
ཐེབས་སོ། །མཚན་དུ་མེད་དོ། །ཤེས་པའི་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱར་མེད་དོ། །དེས་ནི་འཁོར་བ་མི་མཐོང་། འཁོར་བས་དེ་ཉིད་མི་མཐོང་ངོ། །དེས་ནི་  
ཆོས་མི་སྤྱད་དོ། །ཆོས་ཀྱིས་དེའི་དོན་མི་རྟོགས་སོ། །དེ་ནི་འཁོར་བ་མིན་ནོ། །ཟུང་ན་ལས་འདས་པ་མིན་ནོ། །གཞི་[91b]མིན་ནོ། །སྒྲུང་  
བ་མིན་ནོ། །ཐུན་པ་མིན་ནོ། །ལམ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །བགྲོད་པ་མེད་དོ། །མི་བགྲོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འབྲས་བུ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །སྤངས་པ་མ་ཡིན་  
ནོ། །ཐོབ་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །དེ་ནི་རིག་པའི་དབྱིངས་ཆེན་མོ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

It is inexpressible, inconceivable, imperceptible, immeasurable, and uncountable. It is not established by anything whatsoever. It is unrepresentable and cannot be reified as an object of consciousness. It does not see samsara, and samsara does not see that [ground]. It does not practice the Dharma, and Dharma does not realize its meaning. It is not samsara; it is not nirvana. It is not the ground; [91b] it is not an appearance. It is not darkness; it is not a path. There is no traversing; there is no non-traversing. It is not a result. It is not abandonment, and it is not an attainment, called “the great expanse of awareness.”

དེ་ལས་སྐྱུན་གྲུབ་རིན་པོ་ཆའི་སྒྲུང་ལྷགས་བྱུང་སྟེ། དེ་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་པས། ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་འབྱུང་བའི་གཞི་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །དེ་ལས་ནི་  
སངས་རྒྱས་བྱུང་ངོ། །སེམས་ཅན་བྱུང་ངོ། །ཡེ་ཤེས་བྱུང་ངོ། །འོད་བྱུང་ངོ། །རིག་པ་བྱུང་ངོ། །མ་རིག་པ་བྱུང་ངོ། །ལས་ཐམས་ཅད་  
བྱུང་ངོ། །ཐུགས་རྗེ་བྱུང་ངོ། །ཡོད་པ་ལྟར་སྒྲུང་བ་བྱུང་ངོ། །དེ་ལ་ནི་ངོ་བོ་ཡོད་དོ། །རང་བཞིན་ལྟར་སྒྲུང་བ་ཡོད་དོ། །ཐུགས་རྗེ་ལྟར་  
སྒྲུང་བ་ཡོད་དོ། །རྩལ་ཡོད་དོ། །སྒྲུང་བ་ཡོད་དོ། །སེམས་ཡོད་དོ། །ཡིད་ཡོད་དོ། །འབྲུལ་པ་ཡོད་དོ། །མ་འབྲུལ་པ་ཡང་ཡོད་དོ། །ཐམས་  
ཅད་འབྱུང་བ་ཆེན་པོའོ། །དེ་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་དང་། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་དབྱིངས་ཆེན་པོ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

From that, the way of appearing of the precious spontaneous presence occurs. Since it is buddha, it is called “the ground for everything to occur.” From that, buddhas emerge, sentient beings emerge, gnoses emerge, light rays emerge, awareness emerges, ignorance emerges, all karmas emerge, and compassion emerges. Appearances emerge as if existent. It has an essence. It has the appearance of having a nature. It has an appearance of compassion. It has dynamism,

appearance, mind, mentality, confusion and also non-confusion. It is the great emergence of all, called “the great expanse of buddhas and sentient beings.”

དེ་ལས་ལོངས་སྐྱེའི་སྣང་ལྷགས་བྱུང་སྟེ། དེ་ནི་ལམ་མངོན་པར་སྣང་བའི་[92a]གཞི་ཞེས་བྱའོ། རྟེན་ཡང་གསལ་བ། རྩ་བ། བསེལ་བ། ཡང་བ། གཡོ་བའི་བདག་ཉིད་འཛིན་པ། སྐྱ་ལྡ་དང་ལྡན་པ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྡ་དང་ལྡན་པ། རིགས་ལྡ་དང་། ཁ་དྲིག་ལྡ་དང་། འོད་ལྡ་དང་། ཡལ་ལྡ་དང་། ལྷུ་ལྡ་དང་། གཟུགས་ལྡ་དང་། སྐྱ་ལྡ་དང་། ཇི་ལྡ་དང་། རོ་ལྡ་དང་། རིག་བྱ་ལྡ་དང་། ཆོས་ལྡ་དང་། སྣང་བ་ལྡ་དང་། གཙོ་བོ་ལྡ་དང་། འཁོར་ལྡ་དང་ལྡན་པའོ། རྟེན་ཡང་མཚན་བཟང་པོ་སྤྲུལ་ཅུ་ཅ་གཉིས་དང་ལྡན་པ། དཔེ་བྱད་བཟང་པོ་བརྒྱད་ཅུ་དང་ལྡན་པ། སྤངས་པའི་ཆོས་རྒྱག་དང་ལྡན་པའོ། རྟེན་ལོངས་སྐྱེའི་སྣང་ལྷགས་ དེ་དང་དེ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་འབྲེལ་བའོ། །

From that, the way of appearing of the sambhogakāya emerges. That is called “the ground of the directly appearing path.” [92a] It is also clear, warm, cool, and light, and holds to an identity of movement. It is endowed with five awakened bodies, five noses, five families, five colors, five lights, five fathers, five mothers, five forms, five sounds, five smells, five tastes, five touches, five dharmas, five appearances, and five principal deities together with their five retinues. Moreover, it is endowed with the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks. It is endowed with six dharmas of abandonment. This is the way of appearing of sambhogakāya. It is the connection of one coming from the other.

དེའི་སྣང་བ་ལས་རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུལ་བ་སྐྱེའི་སྣང་བ་དང་། འགྲོ་བ་འདུལ་བ་སྤྱུལ་བ་སྐྱེའི་སྣང་བ་དང་། མ་དག་པ་སྤྱུལ་བ་སྐྱེའི་ཆ་ལྷགས་སོ། རྟེན་ཡང་རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུལ་པའི་སྐྱ་ནི། རོ་བོ་སྤྲུལ་བྱུང་ལས་ཤར་བའོ། རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུལ་པའི་སྐྱ་དེའི་སྣང་ལྷགས་ནི། ལོངས་སྐྱེད་མི་ཟད་པ། འཁོར་མི་ཟད་པ། ཡོན་ཏན་ཟད་མི་ཤེས་པ། སྟོབས་ཟད་མི་ཤེས་པ། རྩལ་ཟད་མི་ཤེས་པ། ཆོ་འཕྱུལ་ཟད་མི་ཤེས་པ། ཆའི་ཆད་གངས་མེད་པ། རྟན་གྱི་སྤྱུག་བསྐྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བྲལ་བ། [92b]གཞུལ་ཡས་ཁང་བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྱུང་བ། ཆོས་བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྱུང་བ་སྐྱོགས་པའོ། རྟེན་རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུལ་བ་སྐྱེའི་སྣང་ལྷགས་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །

From that appearance, there [comes] the appearance of a natural nirmaṇakāya, an appearance of a nirmaṇakāya that tames beings, and the attributes of an impure nirmaṇakāya. Moreover, the natural nirmaṇakāya arises from the spontaneously present essence. The mode of appearing of the natural nirmaṇakāya is inexhaustible wealth, inexhaustible retinues, with no knowledge of exhaustible good qualities, no knowledge of exhaustible power, no knowledge of exhaustible dynamism, and no knowledge of exhaustible miracles. Its lifespan is incalculable. It is free from all the sorrows of diseases. [92b] An immeasurable palace, it is inconceivable. It proclaims inconceivable dharmas. It is called: “the mode of appearing of the natural nirmaṇakāya.”

དེ་ལས་འགྲོ་བ་འདུལ་བའི་སྤྱུལ་པའི་སྐྱ་བྱུང་ངོ་། རྟེན་ཡང་སྣ་ཆོགས་སྣང་བ། སྣ་ཆོགས་གྱི་དོན་ཤེས་པའོ། རྣང་ཡང་རྩེས་སུ་མ་ཆད་[ཆགས་]པའི་[བ]། རྣང་ཡང་རྩེས་སུ་མི་ཞེན་པ། མིག་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མངའ་བ། སྟན་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མངའ་བ། ཤངས་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མངའ་བ། ལྷགས་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མངའ་བ། སྐྱ་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མངའ་བ། གསུང་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མངའ་བ། ཐུགས་རྣམ་པར་དག་པ་མངའ་བ། ཐུགས་རྩེའི་མཛད་པ་སྣ་ཆོགས་སྟོན་པ། ཡེ་ཤེས་བྱད་པར་ཅན་མངའ་བ། མཁྱིན་པ་མ་འགགས་པར་ཀུན་རྩ་སྣང་བའོ། རྟེན་འགྲོ་བ་འདུལ་བའི་སྤྱུལ་པའི་སྐྱའོ། །

From that, there emerges the nirmaṇakāya that tames beings. Moreover, it appears variously and knows various purposes. Though it appears, it is without desire. Though it appears, it is without attachment. Having pure eyes, having pure ears, having a pure nose, having a pure tongue, having pure body, having pure speech, having pure mind, displaying diverse compassionate

activities, and having extraordinary gnosis, its unceasing knowledge appears ubiquitously. That is the nirmaṇakāya that tames beings.

དེ་ནས་མ་དག་པའི་འཛིན་རྟེན་གྱི་ཁམས་ཆགས་སོ། །དེ་ཡང་འདི་ལྟར་སྣང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་སྟེ། ཕྱི་སྣང་འབྱུང་བ་ལྔའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཆགས་  
 པ་ལས། ས་དང་། རྩ་དང་། མེ་དང་། རླུང་དང་། འབྱུང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ནམ་མཁའ་སྤྱི་དོ། །དེ་ལ་འཛིན་པའི་བསམ་པ་བརྗོད་ཀྱིས་མི་  
 ལངས་པ། འདྲོད་ཆགས་དང་། ཞེ་སྤང་དང་། གཏི་ལྷག་དང་། ང་རྒྱལ་དང་། སྤྲུག་དོག་དང་། ཁོང་ཁྱོད་བ་དང་རྒྱག་གོ། དེ་ལས་འགྲོ་བ་  
 རིགས་རྒྱག་བྱུང་ངོ་། །སྤྲུག་དོག་ལས་མི་[93a]རྩ་ཆགས་སོ། །ཁོང་ཁྱོད་ལས་རྩ་རྩ་ཆགས་སོ། །ང་རྒྱལ་ལས་རྩ་མ་ཡིན་དུ་ཆགས་  
 སོ། །འདྲོད་ཆགས་ལས་ཡི་དྲགས་སུ་ཆགས་སོ། །གཏི་ལྷག་ལས་བྱོལ་སོང་དུ་ཆགས་སོ། །ཞེ་སྤང་ལས་དམྱལ་བར་ཆགས་སོ། །དེ་བཞིན་དུ་  
 རིགས་རྒྱག་གིས་སྣང་བར་ཆགས་སོ། །དེ་ནི་འཁོར་བའི་གནས་སོ། །

After that, there forms the realms of the impure worldly realms. Moreover, in this way, the great appearance is like this: through the formation of the mandala of the five elements, which are the external vessel, the earth, the water, the fire, the wind, and the great element of space come into existence. Thoughts of holding onto those are beyond expression. Desire, hatred, stupidity, pride, envy, and anger are the six. The six classes of living beings emerge from these. Humans are born [93a] through envy. Gods are born through anger. The demigods are born through pride. Hungry ghosts are born through desire. Animals are born through stupidity. Hell beings are born through hatred. In that way the appearances of the six classes of beings are formed. That is the realm of samsara.

དེ་ཡང་གནས་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་གཅིག་ལ་སྣང་ལྷགས་ཆེན་པོ་བཞི་ལྟར་བྱུང་ངོ་། །གནས་[སྣང་]ལྷགས་བཞི་ལ་སྣང་ཐབས་བཞི་ལྟར་ཤར་  
 རོ། །དེ་ནས་མ་བྱས་པའི་སྣང་བའི་འཁོར་གྱིས། མ་བརྟུན་པའི་རིག་པ་ལ་ཁྱེས་པ། གྱེ་སྣང་བའི་ཐབས་རྣམས་གསུང་དུ་གསོལ། །ཞེས་  
 ཁྱེས་སོ། །བཀའ་སྩལ་པ། སྣང་ཐབས་ཆེན་པོ་བཞི་ནི། ལྷན་གྲུབ་ལས་རྩ་ཆེགས་སུ་སྣང་བའོ། །ཁོངས་སྤྱུ་ལ་ཁ་མིག་རྩ་བ་ཅན་འོད་ཀྱི་  
 རང་བཞིན་སྤྱུ་མའི་སྤྱར་གནས་པའོ། །སྤྱུ་ལ་གཟུགས་ལྟར་སྣང་བའོ། །ཁམས་ཅན་ལ་སྣང་བ་ཐ་དད་དུ་སྣང་བའོ། །དེ་ཡང་སེམས་  
 ཅན་ལ་སྣང་བ་སྣང་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱེད་པའོ། །ཞེས་བཀའ་ཤིས་མཛོས་ལྷན་དཔལ་ནམ་མཁའ་མེད་པའི་རྒྱུད་ལས། གནས་ལྷགས་དང་  
 སྣང་ལྷགས་བརྟན་པའི་ལེའུ་སྟེ་གསུམ་པའོ། །

Moreover, the single great way of being appears as if having four great ways of appearing. The four ways of [appearing] emerge according to four methods of appearing.<sup>349</sup> Then, the retinue of uncreated appearance asked unmoving awareness: “O, please teach the methods of appearing!”

There came the reply: “Regarding the four great ways of appearing: From spontaneous presence, there are various appearances. For the saṃbhogakāya, [the way of appearing] abides as an illusory body with a luminous nature endowed with a mouth, eyes, and ears. For the nirmaṇakāya, [the way of appearing] appears in the likeness of a body. For sentient beings, [the way of appearing] appears as distinct appearances. Moreover, for sentient beings, appearances are obscured by their way of appearing.”

## Chapter Four—"The Secret Absolute"

<sup>349</sup> While there do seem to be four གནས་ལྷགས་བཞི་ named above, i.e. ngo bo, gzhi lhun grub, rin po che ga'u, and phyi lhun grub, it seems to make better sense to read this as *snang lugs bzhi*.

དེ་ནས་ཡང་བཙུག་པོ་ལ་འདས་པའི་ཆོས་སྤྱི་ཆེན་པོ་ལ། ལྷན་བཟུངས་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་ཆེན་ཅེས་གསལ་དོ། །[93b] ཀྱི་མ་རིག་པའི་ཡེ་  
ཤེས་སྤྱི། མཐར་ཐུག་ལྟ་བུ་གསུང་དུ་གསལ། །ཞེས་ཞུས་སོ། །དེ་ནས་ཡང་རིག་པ་ཆོས་འབྱུང་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་བཀའ་ལྷུས་པ།

ཀྱི་མ་ཉོན་ཅིག་ཡང་དག་གསང་བའི་ཡུམ། །  
དོན་གྱི་ཐུགས་[རྩི]ཆེན་པོ་རྣམས།  
ཡང་དག་སངས་རྒྱས་མཐར་ཐུག་དང་།  
དགོས་པའི་དོན་ལ་མཐར་ཐུག་དང་།  
ཡང་དག་ལྟ་བུའི་མཐར་ཐུག་དང་།  
མཚན་མ་ཆོག་གི་མཐར་ཐུག་གོ། །

Then again, the [awakened] body of the mother of appearance asked the Blessed One, the Great Dharmakāya of Awareness, with these words: [93b] “O, Awakened Body of Awareness Gnosis, please explain the absolute view.” Then again, the Awareness that is the Wisdom-Source of Dharma gave this instruction:

“Listen, O Mother of the Holy Secret!  
The ultimate great compassions are:  
the absolute perfect buddha,  
the absolute in the aim of purposes,  
the absolute perfect view,  
and the absolute signifying words.

ཨ་མ་ཉོ།  
ཡང་དག་མཐར་ཐུག་ངས་བཤད་ཀྱིས། །  
ལྷན་བཟུངས་པའི་འཁོར་རྣམས་ཉོན། །  
སངས་རྒྱས་དགོངས་པ་མཐར་ཐུག་ནི། །  
རིག་པའི་བཞག་ཐབས་ཉིད་ལ་ཐུག།  
དགོས་པའི་དོན་ལ་མཐར་ཐུག་ནི། །  
དབྱིངས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་མ་ཉིད་ལ་ཐུག།  
ཡང་དག་ལྟ་བུའི་མཐར་ཐུག་ནི། །  
ལུ་གུ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་སྤྱུ་ལ་ཐུག།  
མཚན་མ་ཆོག་གི་མཐར་ཐུག་ནི། །  
རང་ཤར་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱུད་ལ་ཐུག།  
རྒྱུད་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་མཐར་ཐུག་ནི། །  
སང་གི་རྩལ་རྩོགས་ཆེན་པོ་དང་། །  
ཡི་གེ་མེད་པའི་རྒྱུད་ལ་ཐུག།  
ལྷན་རྣམས་ཀུན་གྱི་མཐར་ཐུག་ནི། །  
བདུད་ཅི་ཐལ་སྤྱོད་ལྷན་ཆེན་དང་། །  
གསང་བ་དབང་རྩོགས་ལྷན་ལ་ཐུག།  
ཡང་གསང་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ནས། །

ནོར་བུ་དྲི་མ་མེད་པའི་སྒྲུ།  
ཡང་དག་མཐར་ཐུག་རྫོགས་པའོ།

“Émaho!

I explain the perfect absolute,  
so listen, retinues of holy appearance!

The absolute realization of buddhas  
culminates in the method of settling awareness.

The absolute in the aim of purposes  
culminates in the lamp of the expanse.

The absolute perfect view  
culminates in the awakened bodies of the chains.

The absolute signifying words  
culminate in the Tantra of Great Self-Arising.

The absolute of all the tantras  
culminates in the Great Perfection of a Dynamic Lion  
and the Tantra Devoid of Letters.

The absolute of all the scriptures  
culminates in the Great Scripture of the Swirl of Nectar,<sup>350</sup>  
and the Scripture of the Perfected Secret Empowerment.

And within the mandala of the most secret heart,  
the stainless jewel [buddha-]bodies  
are perfectly and finally complete.

ཀྱེ་མ་སྒྲུང་མཛད་ཡུལ་གྱི་རྟོག་མེད་ན།  
གསང་སྒྲགས་བདག་པོ་ལྷ་ལི་ཀླ།  
ཆོས་[94a]གྱི་སྒྲུ་ནི་གཉིས་མེད་པས།  
སེམས་ཅན་སྒོ་ལ་བསམ་མི་བྱེད།  
གསང་སྒྲགས་ངེས་དོན་བསྐྱེད་པ་ནི།  
གསང་བ་བརྩ་བདུན་ཉིད་དུ་བཞུགས།  
ལྷ་བ་གསང་རྫོགས་ཆེན་པོ་ལས།  
གཉིས་མེད་དག་པའི་མཁའ་སྒྲོང་དུ།  
ཡང་དག་གཏེར་ཆེན་འདི་གསུངས་པས།  
ཆོས་གྱི་སྒྲུ་དང་མཉམ་པར་སྦྱོར།

<sup>350</sup> Maybe see chapter 12 in the *Rdzogs pa rang byung*, and see Kragh 2015, 128 n. 333, where he argues *thal sbyor* should be corrected to *thab sbyor*.

གསང་བ་རིག་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བཞུག་པས། །  
 ཀ་དག་ཉིད་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྒྲུབ། །  
 སངས་བླ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཉ་སྒྲངས་ནི། །  
 ཅོག་བཞག་བཞི་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྒྲུབ། །  
 ཡང་གསང་བྱགས་ཀྱི་མེ་ལོང་ནི། །  
 སྒྲོན་མ་ཉིད་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྒྲུབ། །  
 སངས་བླ་སྒྲུ་ཡི་བླ་ཉིད་དང་། །  
 ཆེན་པོ་ལྷ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་སྒྲུབ། །

O!

In the non-conceptuality of the realm of Illuminator (Snang mdzad),  
 The Lord of Secret Mantra's *ālikā*[*li*], [94a]  
 which are the sounds of the dharma, are non-dual,  
 and therefore inconceivable for the minds of sentient beings.

The condensation of the definitive meanings of secret mantra  
 is taught as the Secret Seventeen [Tantras].  
 Through the view of the secret great perfection,  
 within the matrix of pure space of non-duality,  
 this great holy treasure has been spoken,  
 so it is united equally with the dharmakāya.

The teaching of the secret as the body of awareness,  
 is always already united with primordial purity.  
 The gazes of buddhas themselves  
 are always already united with the four immediate settlements (*cog bzhaḡ bzhi*).  
 The mirror of the most secret heart  
 is always already united with the lamps themselves.  
 The physical ornaments of the buddhas  
 are always already united with the Five Great Ones.

རང་བཞིན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དབྱིངས་ཉིད་ལས། །  
 ཉོག་[ཉོགས་?]པའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་བསམ་མི་བྱུང། །  
 སྒྲུ་གསུམ་གསང་ཐུགས་ཨ་ཉིད་ལས། །  
 ཆོས་སྒྲུའི་ཐིག་ལེ་ཉག་གཅིག་ལ། །  
 བྱ་བྱེད་མེད་པའི་སྒྲུ་ལས་ནི། །  
 མཛོས་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་བསམ་མི་བྱུང། །  
 སངས་བླ་ཀུན་གྱི་མེས་ཆེན་པོ། །  
 སྒྲུ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་འགའ་མེད་པས། །  
 མཆོན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆོག་ལས་འདས། །  
 རིག་པའི་སྒྲུ་ལ་གཉིས་མེད་དོ། །  
 སེམས་ཅན་སྒོ་ལ་བསམ་ཡས་ཤིང་། །

དགོངས་པ་ཉག་གཅིག་རང་སངས་པས། །  
 བསམ་བཞི་ཡུལ་ལ་ལྷན་སྒྲུང་ཞིང་། །  
 ཐོག་མའི་མགོན་པོ་འོད་དཔག་མེད། །  
 ཞིང་ཁམས་དག་པས་སྐྱ་གསུམ་[94b]གསལ། །  
 མགོན་པོ་དྲི་མེད་དག་པ་ལས། །  
 འོད་སྒྲུང་དག་པའི་ཁ་དོག་གསལ། །  
 སྐྱ་ཡི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ནི། །  
 རང་བཞིན་སྒྲུང་བ་མ་འགགས་པའོ། །

Within the expanse of the true nature,  
 the king of thoughts (or realization?) is inconceivable.  
 Within the Ah syllable that is the secret mantra of the three awakened bodies,  
 Within the singular *bindu* of dharmakāya,  
 Within the awakened body free of actions,  
 The beautiful *maṇḍalas* are inconceivable.

Since the great ancestor of all the buddhas  
 has no awakened body nor gnosis whatsoever,  
 the signified gnosis is beyond words:  
 The awakened body of awareness is without duality.

It is inconceivable for the minds of sentient beings.  
 The self-awakened singular realization,  
 which appears as fivefold within the objective realm.  
 The First Lord, Amitabha,  
 By means of his pure fields, manifests the three awakened bodies. [94b]

From the stainless protector,  
 The colors of pure luminous appearances manifest.  
 The great appearances of the awakened bodies  
 Are the unceasing natural appearances.

གསང་སྤྱན་ལྷུང་ཚོར་མ་འགགས་པས། །  
 མགོན་པོ་རྣམས་འོད་དཔག་མེད། །  
 ཐོག་མའི་ལུས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུང་བ་ལ། །  
 འབྲུལ་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་བསམ་ལས་འདས། །  
 དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཚོས་ཉིད་བསམ་ཡས་ལ། །  
 འདྲ་འཕྲིའི་སྒྲུང་བ་བསམ་ཡས་སོ། །

Since the experiences (*byung tshor*) of the secret mantra are unceasing,  
 Lord Vajra Amitabha  
 is an appearance of the original form,  
 yet regarding that, the appearances of confusion are beyond conception.

The reality of the mandala is inconceivable,  
And the oscillating (‘du ‘phro) activities are inconceivable.

དེ་ནས་ཡང་སྒྲུང་བའི་འཁོར་འབྱུང་བའི་ཡུམ་དང་བཅས་པས། འདི་སྐད་ཅེས་གསལ་དོ། །ཀྱེ་མ་གསང་བ་རིག་པའི་མངའ་བདག་ཆེན་  
པོ། བདག་ཅག་སྒྲུང་བ་དམ་པའི་རིགས་ནམས་ལ། ཡང་དག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་གསང་བ་དམ་པ་ནམས་གསུངས་ཤིག །ཡང་བཀའ་སྒྲུལ་པ།  
རིག་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་འདི་ལ། རེ་དོགས་བཅས་ན་མི་མཐོང་ངོ་། །སྤང་ཐོབ་བཅས་ན་མི་མཐོང་ངོ་། །ཡིད་དུ་བབྱུང་ན་མི་མཐོང་  
ངོ་། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་ན་ཡང་དག་པའི་ཆོས་ཉིད་ལ་ཚློལ་བ་སྦྱབ་ཀྱིས་མཐའ་དང་བྲལ་བར་བསྟན་པའོ། །ཞེས་བཀྲ་ཤིས་མཛེས་ལྡན་ཆེན་པོ།  
དཔལ་ནམ་མཁའ་མེད་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཆེན་པོ་ལས། མཐའ་གསང་བའི་ལེབ་སྟེ་བཞི་པའོ། །

Then again, the retinue of appearances together with the mother of elements ask these words: “O Great Lord of Secret Awareness, please explain to us, this family of sacred appearances, the sacred secret of perfect gnosis!”

Again, he gave these instructions: “If you have hopes and fears regarding this great appearance of awareness, you will not see it. If you engage in abandonment and adoption, you will not see it. You will not see it if you grasp [it] in mind. Thus, without striving for or accomplishing the perfect *dharmatā*, it is taught without extremes.

[This is] “Chapter Four: The Secret Absolute” from The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space.

### Chapter Five— “The Teaching on the Ground for Confusion which Appears to All the Senses”

དེ་ནས་ཡང་རིག་པའི་སྒྲུང་བ་དམ་པ་ཉིད། མ་བཞུགས་པའི་གདན་ལས་བཞེངས་ནས། རང་གི་སྒྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་འདི་[95a]སྒྲུས་སོ། །ཀྱེ་  
སྒྲུང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་འདུས་པའི་འཁོར་ལྷན་ཉོན་ཅིག །ཡང་དག་རྣམས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ། གསལ་འགྲེལ་མེད་པར་བྱང་  
ཞིག །སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུ་ལ་ཆེ་ཆུང་མེད་པར་བྱང་ཞིག །སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་གསུང་ལ་བདེན་རྩུན་མེད་པར་བྱང་ཞིག །སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་  
ལ་རྟོག་པ་མེད་ཅིང་དྲན་བྱེད་མེད་པར་བྱང་ཞིག །ཀྱེ་རང་བཞིན་གྱི་སྒྲུང་བ་བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྱུང་སྟེ། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྐུའི་སྒྲུང་བ་ལ་བསྦྱབ་དུ་  
མེད་དོ། །འོངས་སྐུའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལ་དཔག་དུ་མེད་དོ། །སྒྲུལ་སྐུའི་ཤེས་རབ་ལ་བརྟོན་དུ་མེད་དོ། །དེའི་ཕྱིར་ན་སྒྲུ་གསུམ་རང་ལ་རྣམས་པའི་  
འབྲས་བུ་ཞེས་བྱའོ། །

Then again, that holy appearance of awareness rose from the throne where nothing sits and expressed this great self-appearance: [95a] O! Retinues who are a gathering of great appearances, listen! Apprehend the gnosises of the completely perfect buddhas as free from any brightness or obscurity. Apprehend the bodies of buddhas as free from being large or small. Apprehend the speech of buddhas as free from any truth or falsity. Apprehend the minds of buddhas as free of thoughts or memories. O! The natural appearances are inconceivable: The appearance of *dharmakāya* is not to be accomplished. The gnosises of *saṃbhogakāya* is immeasurable. The wisdoms of *nirmāṇakāya* is inexpressible. Therefore, it is called “The result of the three awakened bodies are perfected within themselves.”

ཨེ་མ་དོ། རྟོ་རྩེ་སེམས་དཔའ་ཉིད་ལ་འབྲུལ་པ་མེད་ཀྱང་། སེམས་ཅན་ལ་འབྲུལ་པ་བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྱུང་སྟེ། རིག་པ་ཉིད་ལ་འབྲུལ་པ་  
རང་གིས་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། །འབྲུལ་པ་མེད་ཀྱང་འབྲུལ་བྱེད་མ་འགགས་པས། འབྲུལ་པ་སྟར་སྒྲུང་བའོ། །གསང་བའི་དོན་ལ་ཆོས་མེད་

ཀྱང་། སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་སྒོ་ལ་ཆོས་སྒྲུབ་སྒྲུབ་པའོ། རིག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཉིད་ལ་འབྱུང་རྟོག་དུ་མར་སྒྲུབ་བས། ཆོས་ལ་སྟོང་ཅིང་ཆོས་སྒྲུབ་སྒྲུབ་པའོ། ཡང་དག་པའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲུབ་བ་ཉིད་ལས། མ་གཡོས་བཞིན་དུ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་བ་རྣམས། མཐའ་མ་འགགས་པའི་སྟོང་ཡུལ་དུ་མར་སྒྲུབ་[95b]པའོ། ཡང་དག་པའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་བསམ་བ་ལས་འདས་ཀྱང་། སེམས་ཅན་སྒྲིབ་ཀྱི་མ་བསམ་བ་དང་བཅས་བས། བསམ་བ་རང་ཀ་མར་སྟོང་ཅིང་། བསམ་པའི་རྗེས་སུ་འབྱངས་པའོ། །

Émaho! Vajrasattva himself has no confusion, but sentient beings have inconceivable confusions. Awareness itself does not have confusion innately. There is no confusion, but the creation of confusion is unceasing, so it appears in the likeness of confusion. There are no phenomena in the secret nature, but [they] appear in the minds of sentient beings in the likeness of phenomena. Within the gnosis of awareness itself, confused thoughts appear to be many, whereby they interact with phenomena and appear in the likeness of phenomena. Without moving from the appearance of the perfect dharmakāya, the appearances of dharmakāya's gnosis appear in multiple limitless domains. [95b] Although the perfect dharmakāya is beyond thought, since the defilements of sentient beings' intellects are associated with thought, so they interact with thoughts randomly and follow after thoughts.

ཡང་དག་པའི་སྒྲིབ་བསམ་པའི་དངོས་པོས་སྟོང་སྟེ། བྱ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་འབྱུང་བ་རང་དག་པའོ། རིག་པའི་སྒྲིབ་སེམས་ཅན་ལ་རང་ཆས་ཏེ། འབྱུང་བཞི་ཀུན་ལ་གནས་པས་ཀུན་དུ་སྟོང་དོ། ཀུན་དུ་སྒྲུབ་ཞིང་ཀུན་ལ་གསལ་ཆ་མ་འགགས་པའོ། ཀུན་ལ་མང་པོར་འཆར་ཞིང་དེ་སྒྲུབ་དུ་འདུ་འབྱུང་མེད་པའོ། འོད་ཀྱིས་ཀྱི་ཚུལ་དུ་འཆར་ཞིང་སྒྲུབ་བ་མ་འགགས་པའོ། ཀྱི་མ་གསང་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་མཐའ་རང་གི་རིག་པའི་སྒྲིབ་རྣམས་པར་དག་པའོ། ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། མི་སྟོང་པའི་སྟོང་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། ལྷ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། ལྷ་རུ་མེད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་བ་རྒྱས་འདེབས་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། དགོངས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། བསྒྲོམ་དུ་མེད་པའི་རང་སྒྲུབ་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། སྟོང་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། བཅོས་གཞི་བྱ་བྱེད་དང་བལ་བ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ།

The perfect awakened bodies are empty of any substantial thoughts and are in themselves pure of any confusion of activities. The awakened body of awareness itself is innate within every sentient being. Since it is present in all the four elements, it is active everywhere. It appears everywhere, and its aspect of clarity is everywhere unceasing. It shines everywhere in numerous ways, and in this way, it is without uniting or departing. Its light arises in the manner of a circular rainbow (*khyim gyi tshul du*), and its appearances are unceasing. O! The culmination of the secret mantra is the completely pure awakened body of one's own awareness. The culmination of all phenomena involves the great practice of not practicing. The culmination of all views involves the great stamping of the seal of appearing without looking. The culmination of all realizations involves the great self-appearance without meditation. The culmination of all practices involves non-contrivance and freedom from any action.<sup>351</sup>

སྒྲིབ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། ལུ་གུ་རྒྱུད་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། སྒྲུབ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། ཡུལ་མེད་པའི་གདངས་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། དམ་ཆོག་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། བསྐྱུང་དུ་མེད་པ་བསྐྱུང་མཆོམས་དང་བལ་བ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། བྲིན་ལས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་[96a]ནི། བསྐྱུང་དུ་མེད་པའི་བྲུབ་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། རྒྱལ་རྒྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི་མ་བསྐྱུར་བར་ཡེ་ནས་རྫོགས་པ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། རྩ་བ་དབྱིངས་ཀྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། ཡིག་འབྱུང་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། མ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རང་བྱུང་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། ལྷ་མི་སྒྲིབ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་མཐའ་ནི། ཡངས་པ་ཉིད་ལ་རང་བྱུང་བ་ལ་ཐུག་གོ། ཆོས་སྒྲིབ་མཐའ་ནི་བསམ་བ་མེད་ཅིང་རང་

<sup>351</sup> Reading *ma bcos shing bya byed dang bral ba* instead (see Sangs rgyas rdo rje).

རྫོགས་པ་ལ་བྱག་གོ་ལོངས་སྤྱི་མཐའ་ནི། རང་གི་སྣང་བའི་ཚྭ་གས་སང་པ་ལ་བྱག་གོ་སྤྱི་མཐའ་ནི་བྱགས་རྗེའི་གོ་མ་འགགས་  
པ་ལ་བྱག་གོ།

The culmination of all awakened bodies involves the [vajra] chains. The culmination of all appearances involves the great radiance without objectification. The culmination of all samayas involves being without protection, beyond the boundary of protection. The culmination of all activities [96a] involves the great accomplishment without accomplishing. The culmination of all *mudrās* involves primordial perfection without movement. The culmination of all *maṇḍalas* involves the basic lamp of the expanse. The culmination of all syllables involves the great self-origination without generation. The culmination of all deity bodies involves self-origination within spaciousness itself. The culmination of dharmakāya involves being without thought and self-perfecting. The culmination of saṃbhogakāya involves awakening the aspect of own-appearance. The culmination of nirmāṇakāya involves unceasing opportunities for great compassion.

ཀྱེ་མ་སྤྱི་ཤི་མེད་པར་སྟོན་འཛིན་པར་འདོད་ན། མི་འགྱུར་བ་རྩི་རྗེའི་སྤྱི་མཐའ་ནི། འགགས་པ་མེད་པར་རང་གོ་ལ་བར་འདོད་ན།  
རང་སྣང་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་ལ་སྟོན་ཤིག། སྤྱི་འགྲིབ་མེད་པའི་དགོངས་པ་ལ་གནས་པར་འདོད་ན། དབྱིངས་རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་སྟོན་མ་  
ལ་སྟོན་ཤིག། རྩི་རྗེ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱི་ལ་བརྟ་བར་འདོད་ན། རིག་པ་ལྷ་གྲུ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་བྱང་ཞིག། ཡངས་པ་སྣང་བ་ཀུན་ཏུ་འཆར་ཞིང་  
ཀུན་ལ་སྣང་བའོ།།

O! If one wishes to hold onto the life force without birth or death, take the awakened body of the unchanging vajra. If one wants to be unceasingly self-liberated, look at the self-appearing objective sphere of reality. If one wants to abide within the realization without increase or decrease, look at the lamp of completely pure expanse. If one wants to look at Vajrasattva's body, apprehend the body of awareness' [vajra] chains. Open appearances dawn everywhere and appear in everything.

གསང་བའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀུན་ཏུ་སྣང་བ་ལ་མཁས་པ། ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་རོ་བོ་ཟང་ཐལ། ལོངས་སྤྱི་རོ་བོ་གསལ་དུངས། སྤྱི་མཐའ་རོ་བོ་མངོན་  
པར་སྣང་བ། རོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་རང་བྱུང་བ། སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྩི་རྗེ་དྲིལ་བ། སྤྱི་[96b]རོ་བོ་དང་བཅས་པས། རང་གིས་[གི་]སྣང་  
བ་སྤྱི་ཆོག་དང་བཅས་པ་འདི་གསུངས་སོ།།

One who is skilled in the secret gnosis appearing everywhere, whose essence of dharmakāya is unimpeded, whose essence of saṃbhogakāya is radiant clarity, whose essence of nirmāṇakāya manifests directly, whose svabhāvakāya is self-originating, and who possesses [96b] the essence of the awakened body that holds the vajra and bell of all the buddhas, such a one taught the appearances with these melodic words:

དེ་ཡང་ཐབས་ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་དུས་གཅིག་ལ་རྫོགས་པས། ཡང་དག་པར་རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱལ་རྫོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་འདིར། རིག་པ་མངོན་  
སུམ་ལ་གཟིགས་པའོ། རིག་ལེ་ཉག་གཅིག་ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་རང་ལས་མ་གཡོས་ཤིང་། དེའི་སྣང་བ་ལས་ཀུན་གསལ་བའོ། བྱགས་རྗེས་  
ཐམས་ཅད་འཛིན་ཅིང་། དབྱིངས་སུ་སྟོན་པར་བྱེད་པའོ། སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་འོད་ཟེར་གྱིས་འགོ་བ་པལ་བ་བརྒྱལ་ཏེ། སྣང་མི་རུས་པའོ།།

Moreover,<sup>352</sup> the appearances of means are perfected in a single moment, so direct awareness is seen in this Great Perfection of completely perfect buddhas. The single *bindu* does not move from the state of dharmakāya, and everything is illuminated through its appearance. Great compassion embraces everything and displays it within the expanse. Most sentient beings faint at the light rays of buddhas, so they cannot [see] the appearances.

ཨེ་མ་ཏོ། རྩོན་བྱུང་གི་དྲུས་ན་སངས་རྒྱལ་འོད་སྤངས་ཆེན་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཞིག་ལ་སྣང་བ་ཆེན་པོ་བརྒྱ་ལྷོད་དང་ལྷན་པའི་མཚན་རྟེན།  
 ཤེན་ཏུ་བརྟེན་ལེགས་པ་གསལ་བ། མཐོ་བ་ལ་སྤྲོད་པའི་ཅེ་མོར་སྟེན་པ་ལ། རྒྱ་ལྷོད་གསུམ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་སྦྱེ་འགྲོ་ཡོངས་ལ་བྱབ་པ།  
 ཅུ་བ་ནི་ན་རག་ཆེན་པོའི་དམུལ་བར་བྱག་པ། རྒྱུང་བའི་ཚད་ནི་ཉི་ལ་འབྱུང་བརྒྱུ་བསྟོན་པའི་ཚད་ཅུ། ཡངས་པའི་མཐའ་ནི། རྣམ་  
 མཁས་གང་དུ་བྱབ་པ་ཅུ། གསལ་བའི་ཚད་ནི་ཉི་ཟླ་སྤྱིན་གྱིས་མ་བསྟོན་པ་ལྟ་བུ། ཐོགས་པ་མེད་པ་རྒྱུང་ལྟ་བུ་གཅིག་ཡོད་པས། དེ་  
 ལ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱིས་མཚན་པའི་འོས་སུ་མཐོང་ཞིང། ལས་སྣ་ཚོགས་ཀྱིས་སྟོན་མཚན་པ་ཆེར་བྱས་པས། གང་ལ་ཡང་དངོས་གྲུབ་མ་  
 བྱུང་ཞྭ། དེའི་ཆེ་རང་སྣང་གི་བྱ་མོ་[97a]དང་། གསལ་བར་རང་སྣང་གི་བྱེད་གཉིས་འདུས་ནས། མཚན་པའི་ལས་གཅིག་གིས་སྟང་  
 ཅིག་མ་ལ་སངས་རྒྱལ་སོ། །ཞེས་བྲག་ཤིས་མཛོས་ལྷན་དཔལ་ནམ་མཁའ་མེད་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཆེན་པོ་ལས། དབང་པོ་ཀུན་སྣང་གི་འབྱུལ་  
 གཞི་བཟུན་པའི་ལུ་སྟེ་ཐུ་པའོ། །

Émaho! In times past, there was a buddha called the “Great Protector of Light” who had a stupa with hundreds and thousands of great appearances, extremely well-built and luminous, its height reaching the summit of the world and its vastness pervading the entirety of living beings throughout the 3,000-fold universe, its foundation reaching down to the hell of the Great Narag, at its smallest, the size of one 1/100th of a sesame seed, at its most spaciousness, encompassing the entirety of space, its brightness like the sun and moon unobstructed by clouds, unimpeded like the wind. Everyone saw it as worthy of worship, yet when it was worshiped by means of various rites, no siddhi was attained by anyone. At that time, the self-appearing daughter [97a] and the luminously self-appearing son came together and, through a single rite of worship, became buddhas in an instant.

[This is] “Chapter Five: The Teaching on the Ground for Confusion which Appears to All the Senses” from The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness beyond Glorious Space.

བྲག་ཤིས་མཛོས་ལྷན་དཔལ་ནམ་མཁའ་མེད་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རྣམས་སོ། །རྒྱ་རྒྱ་རྒྱ་རྒྱ་ཟབ་རྒྱ། ཐུས་རྒྱ། གཏེར་རྒྱ། དཔལ་ཐུགས་  
 རྒྱུང་གི་རྒྱལ་མོ་ཨེ་ཀ་ཅ་ཉིས་སྤངས་ཤིག། །འབྲེལ་པ་སྟོན་མ་འདུས་པ་བྱ་བ་ཡོད་དོ། །བྲག་ཤིས་མཛོས་ལྷན་ཉིད་ལ་མ་བྱ་དགུ། །

The Great Tantra on the Exquisite Auspiciousness Beyond Glorious Space is completed. Sealed. Sealed. Sealed. Sealed. Profoundly sealed. Hidden sealed. Treasure sealed. Ekajaṭī, the glorious queen who guards the mantras, may protect this.

The Exquisite Auspiciousness has a commentary titled The Compendium of Lamps, and it has a total of nine texts with divisions of mother and children.

<sup>352</sup> The next few lines (until e ma ho) seem to be interpolated, perhaps from an old interlinear note explaining the song that follows.