**Distribution Agreement**

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____          _____
Tenzin Bhuchung                                                                            Date

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: View, Meditation, Conduct

By

Tenzin Bhuchung
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions

_____
John Dunne
Advisor

_____
Sara McClintock
Advisor

_____
Bobbi Patterson
Committee Member

_____
Ellen Gough
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: View, Meditation, Conduct

By

Tenzin Bhuchung
Shastri (equivalent to B.A.), Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, 1997
B.A., University of Tasmania, 2002
M.A., University of California, Berkeley, 2004

Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions

Advisor: John Dunne, Ph.D.
Advisor: Sara McClintock, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions
2021

Abstract


Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: View, Meditation, Conduct

By Tenzin Bhuchung

Despite a plethora of meditative traditions and techniques, contemporary practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism are nearly unanimous that the pinnacle of meditative practice can be found in the profound yet simple instructions of the Mahāmudrā (literally, "Great Seal") lineage. Although this lineage is brought to Tibet by his lineage masters, Gampopa (1079–1153), a twelfth-century Tibetan scholar and adept, departed from the tradition of his teachers by transmitting the Mahāmudrā teachings publicly, and outside the tantric context, to such an extent that it became the most important defining feature of his Dhakpo Kagyu tradition.

This dissertation is the first book-length work on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, presenting it through the traditional rubric of view (*lta ba*), meditation (*sgom pa*) and conduct (*spyod pa*). The first chapter explores main features of Gampopa's Non-Tantric Mahāmudrā and contextualizes it within the greater Indo-Tibetan Tantra and Sūtra traditions. The second chapter expounds on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view. It demonstrates that establishing the nonduality of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances constitutes an important feature of realizing the ultimate view of Mahāmudrā. It also argues that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view amounts to a synthesis of the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka view on the ultimate. The third chapter explores Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation referred to as the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) that offers techniques to help sustain the ultimate nature of the mind nonconceptually in meditation.

Gampopa's nonconceptual approach to philosophical view and meditation raises the question of the role of ethical practices, such as compassion, that are conceptual in nature. This issue emerges as a raging debate between "sudden" (*cig car ba*) and "gradual" (*rim gyis pa*) approaches in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. The fourth chapter therefore delves into the conduct or ethical foundations that Gampopa deems necessary for Mahāmudrā practice and its realization.The fifth, concluding, chapter offers a short consideration of Gampopa's Non-Tantric Mahāmudrā view and meditation as well as their foundational ethical conduct, ending with a brief discussion on their potential contribution to future research in religious studies and phenomenology.

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: View, Meditation, Conduct

By

Tenzin Bhuchung
Shastri (equivalent to B.A.), Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, 1997
B.A., University of Tasmania, 2002
M.A., University of California, Berkeley, 2004

Advisor: John Dunne, Ph.D.
Advisor: Sara McClintock, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions
2021

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without a chain of interdependent factors involving many institutions and people. I would like to begin by offering my deep reverence and gratitude to His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet. His tireless quest to create a more harmonious world through his ecumenical and non-sectarian teachings—not just among various Buddhist traditions, but across religious traditions—has been the main source of my guidance for my life in general and for this dissertation in particular. It is mainly due to his inspiration that I ventured into studying Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition of the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism, although I was mainly trained in the Geluk School.

I am also deeply grateful to my supervisors Dr. Sara L. McClintock, Associate Professor of Religion at Emory University and Dr. John D. Dunne, formerly Associate Professor of Religion at Emory University and currently Department Chair and Distinguished Professor of Contemplative Humanities, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures and Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison, for their invaluable assistance in every stage of research project: from accepting me as a student in the beginning, to compassionately guiding me through every stage of the graduate training, through the completion of this dissertation. Professor McClintock emphasized to me early on that one of the main tasks for me in the graduate program involves "un-learning" received traditional knowledge, including the notion that ideas and texts travel through time without change and evolution. Through imparting the critical methods of western academic scholarship, Sara-la taught me to bracket what my received tradition says on Buddhist topics and closely read what the text says to understand authors in their own rights, thus making me even more ecumenical and impartial in approaching the field of Buddhist Studies. I

also benefitted greatly from the expertise of Professor Dunne in approaching and understanding Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, an area of Tibetan Buddhist contemplative tradition that he has great expertise in.  It is in his graduate seminars that I learned about the Kagyu Mahāmudrā in terms of its philosophical view and corresponding contemplative practice. With John-la, I also studied mystical tradition as taught in the academy. These seminars inspired me to undertake this current dissertation. The guidance, suggestions and edits of both the early and later drafts of this dissertation offered by both my supervisors have been invaluable in rethinking and reformulating many ideas in this dissertation.

I would also like to offer my special thanks to my other two committee members for their invaluable comments on my dissertation. Their works and areas of research inspire me: Dr. Bobbi Patterson, Professor Emeritus, Department of Religion, Emory University and Dr. Ellen Gough, Assistant Professor, Department of Religion, Emory University. I am deeply grateful to Emory University for its excellent staff and faculty members. I particular, I would like to thank Andy Boyles, Academic Programs Associate, for his kindness and timely, effective administrative assistance, as well as Professor Joel LeMon, Director of Emory's Graduate Division of Religion. Others who have rendered assistance and whom I would like to thank include Professor Vincent J. Cornell, Professor Joyce Flueckiger, Dr. Marco A. Geslani and Dr. Susan Bredlau (Department of Philosophy) under whom I took graduate seminar classes.

I would also like to gratefully thank the following for their direct and invaluable help with this dissertation: Dr. Daniel McNamara, who has helped me navigate the graduate program with guidance and friendship; Mr. Ryan Holley, who helped edit earlier versions of my dissertation; Dr. Dylan Lott for review and feedback; and Anna Dunne for kind assistance including setting up appointments with Professor Dunne.

# Table of Contents

# Chapter 1 – Introduction to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā

## 1     Situating Gampopa's Mahāmudrā Tradition

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the question of the relationship between unmediated religious experience and language is approached through discussions on the relationship between discursive philosophy and nonconceptual meditative experience. The mainstream perspective follows a progressive model—one must first gain a conceptual understanding of reality through philosophical investigation, which is then sustained in meditation in such a way as to gain a nonconceptual and embodied experience of that same reality.[1] But this model is not universal. Gampopa Sönam Rinchen (Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 1079–1153), a twelfth-century Tibetan scholar and mystic, inverts the above progression, presenting in what I will refer to as his Non-tantric Mahāmudrā tradition, a method of approaching philosophical understanding through nonconceptual meditative experience. In contrast to elucidating lengthy philosophical treatises to establish the ultimate nature of the mind, the main practice in Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā tradition is taught in pith instructions given directly by a teacher to circumvent conceptual thoughts and induce direct realization of the ultimate nondual nature of mind. This dissertation is concerned to explore and understand Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā teachings with a view to understanding it as a meditative practice, a philosophical position, and a religious path.

Frequently considered to be the pinnacle of meditative practice by contemporary practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, the various traditions of Mahāmudrā (literally, "Great Seal") promulgate a nondual theory of mind and contemplative techniques in the form of short instructions designed to

---

[1] See, for example, John D Dunne, "Realizing the Unreal: Dharmakīrti's Theory of Yogic Perception," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34, no. 6 (December 2006): 497–519, http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/10.1007/s10781-006-9008-y.

allow the practitioner to sustain that nondual mind nonconceptually in meditation. The object of

this nonconceptual meditation is not an extra-mental phenomenon but rather the mind itself. The

mind non-dualistically focuses upon itself, i.e., on present-moment awareness, which in turn is

understood as nonconceptual in nature. Like other teachers of Mahāmudrā, Gampopa valorizes

such a nonconceptual approach to reality, arguing that philosophical analysis further binds us

within an expanding net of conceptual thoughts, delaying if not preventing the direct intuitive

experience of reality.

Mahāmudrā's nonconceptual experience-based approach to reality and the fact that most

Mahāmudrā works are in the form of cryptic instructions have made it difficult for scholars to

access. This is particularly the case for the Non-tantric Mahāmudrā of Gampopa, whose teachings

have been crucial for the later construction of the Mahāmudrā tradition in Tibet. Although modern

academics have discussed some of his works,[2] an extensive study of Gampopa's many Mahāmudrā

works is yet to be undertaken either by traditional or contemporary scholars. The aim of this

dissertation is thus to elucidate Gampopa's unique Mahāmudrā in his own terms prior to its formal

systematization by later masters in his tradition.

The paradoxical relationship between language and unmediated mystical experience is a

central theme in many religious traditions. The dissertation contributes to the contemporary

---

[2] See especially David P. Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means: Tibetan Controversies on the "Self-Sufficient White Remedy"* (DKar Po Chig Thub) (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994). Roger R. Jackson, "Mahāmudrā: Natural Mind in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism," *Religion Compass* 5, no. 7 (July 1, 2011).; Ulrich Timme Kragh, *Tibetan Yoga and Mysticism: A Textual Study of the Yogas of Nāropa and Mahāmudrā Meditation in the Medieval Tradition of Dags Po* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the ICPBS, 2015). and Klaus-Dieter Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha within: Gö Lotsāwa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008).

debates on unmediated religious experience, a subject that I will address in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. The dissertation may also inform research on contemporary adaptations of Buddhist contemplative practices such as Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which adopt some attitudes and techniques from nondual Buddhist traditions such as Mahāmudrā.[3] These forms of meditation, generally referred to as "mindfulness meditation," primarily involve cultivating a present-centered awareness without getting distracted by thoughts pertaining to past and future, an important aspect of Mahāmudrā meditation that we will discuss in the course of this thesis. Yet Gampopa's Mahāmudrā contains philosophical and religious elements that are absent in most contemporary mindfulness teachings. This dissertation explores these elements of Gampopa's teaching, demonstrating that meditation, view, and conduct (to use traditional categories) can never be fully separated in Gampopa's eyes.

## 2   Gampopa's Life and Works

We begin with a brief account of Gampopa's life and works. According to Trungram Gyatrul Rinpoche, a contemporary Tibetan teacher of Mahāmudrā, Gampopa was born in Central Tibet in 1079 CE in the village of Chil Drong (*spyil grong*).[4] As a young boy he received training in Tibetan medicine, an ancestral profession, and later he perfected it studying under various teachers. Already as a teenager, he received teachings from both Nyingma (Rnying ma) and Kadampa (Bka' dams pa) masters on various tantric Buddhist practices referred to as methods of accomplishment

---

[3] John D Dunne, "Toward an Understanding of Non-Dual Mindfulness," *Contemporary Buddhism* 12, no. 1 (May 2011): 71–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564820.

[4] For this section, I refer to Gyatrul Rinpoche's unpublished doctoral thesis, "Gampopa, the Monk and the Yogi: His Life and Teachings" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004), 37–57. This work also contains a detailed description of all the available biographies.

(*sādhana*, *sgrub thabs*). The Nyingma and Kadampa practice lineages were the two earliest lineages in Tibet and the most important in Gampopa's day.

Gampopa married at a very young age and soon fathered a son and daughter. Sadly, however, his wife and both of his children died from smallpox when he was only twenty-four years old. As articulated in traditional narratives of his life, the loss of his family, demonstrating impermanence and death at a very personal level, played a major role in his quest for spiritual training and enlightenment.

After the death of his wife and children, Gampopa travelled to seek spiritual teachers. He came across various Kadampa masters and continued to study under them extensively. At the age of twenty-five, he took both novice and full ordination from the Kadampa master Maryulwa (Mar yul ba), receiving the ordination name Sönam Rinchen (Bsod nams rin chen). In addition to Maryulwa, he also studied under many other contemporary Kadampa masters in central Tibet such as Zangkarwa (Zangs kar ba), Lobpön Jangchug Sempa (Slob dpon byang chub sems dpa'), Dulwa Dzinpa ('Dul ba 'dzin pa), Nyugrumpa (Smyug rum pa), Chagri Gongkhawa (Lcags ri gong kha ba), Jayulwa (Bya yul ba), Gyayöndag (Gya yon bdag), and so forth, demonstrating the breath of education he received in the Kadampa tradition.

Gampopa not only studied the Stages of the Path (*lam rim*) teachings from these teachers. He also studied various tantras such as the Guhyasamāja Tantra and the Cakrasaṃvara Tantra. It is said that Gampopa realized and experienced an uninterrupted state of bodhicitta ("mind of awakening"), the intent to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, while studying Stages of the Path under Nyugrumpa.[5]

---

[5] Gyatrul Rinpoche, 47.

After his spiritual training under the Kadampa masters for many years, at age thirty Gampopa met the now famous yogi Milarepa (Mi la res pa, 1028/40–1111/23). Milarepa was not learned like Gampopa's previous Kadampa teachers, but rather he was a wandering yogi who achieved his spiritual realizations through the practice of esoteric Buddhism. From Milarepa, Gampopa received such tantric practices as inner heat yoga (*caṇḍālī*), yantra yoga (*rtsa rlung 'khrul 'khor*), songs of experience of Buddhist adepts (*dohā*) and the Six Yogas of Nāropa (*Naro'i chos drug*) which included Mahāmudrā.[6] He studied under Milarepa for a total of thirteen months before he left his teacher to engage in solitary practice. After three years of retreat at a place called Ölkhadé ('Ol kha bde), he realized the state of luminosity, i.e., the Mahāmudrā state.[7] In 1121, Gampopa founded the Dhakla Gampo (Dwags lha sgam po) monastery, named for the Dhakla Gampo mountain range where the monastery is located.

From this brief account of Gampopa's life and spiritual training, we can infer two things: firstly, his formal foundational training and practices were completed before he met Milarepa. As mentioned above, he had long achieved an uninterrupted experience of bodhicitta, the most important Mahāyāna realization, before he met Milarepa. Secondly, he was now blending the scholastic teachings that he received from his Kadampa teachers with the yogic teachings that he received from Milarepa. Thus, the requirement for foundational Kadampa tradition teachings for Gampopa's own Mahāmudrā teachings, which we will consider below, is not only explicit in his teachings but can be equally inferred from his life and training.

---

[6] Gyatrul Rinpoche, 54.

[7] Gyatrul Rinpoche, 61.

At the same time, however, there is no doubt that Gampopa put more emphasis on transmitting Mahāmudrā teachings than he did on foundational teachings. This is particularly the case when it comes to a particular form of Mahāmudrā that lies outside the tantric context. This form of Mahāmudrā is retrospectively referred to by the tradition as Sūtra Mahāmudrā. However, since this was not a term used by Gampopa himself, we shall mostly refer to it in this dissertation as "Non-tantric Mahāmudrā." Reportedly, Gampopa did not teach the tantric form of Mahāmudrā, but rather gave only Non-tantric Mahāmudrā teachings, which are described in his own and other's texts as the introduction to the nature of the mind (*sems ngo sprod pa*). In transmitting Mahāmudrā teachings outside the tantric context, Gampopa diverged from his teacher Milarepa. To say that he transmitted Mahāmudrā teachings outside the tantric context means that he did not require his students to undertake tantric initiations and practices before obtaining the teachings of Mahāmudrā. He further transmitted Mahāmudrā teachings publicly, a practice his teacher Milarepa (Mi la ras pa, 1028/40–1111/23) did not do.[8] Thus, with the name Sūtra Mahāmudrā or Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, we intend to signal that Gampopa is taking a practice that was normally reserved for an esoteric, secret context and moving it in to an exoteric, public space.

Thirty-nine works are attributed to Gampopa and included in the various editions of his collected works, the *Dhakpo Kabum* (*Dwags po'i bka' 'bum*). However, apart from his magnum opus, *The Ornament of Precious Liberation of the Wish-Fulfilling Dharma: Elucidation of the Stages of the Mahāyāna Path of the Union of the Two Rivers of Kadampa and Mahāmudrā* (*Theg pa chen po'i lam gyi rim pa rnam par bshad pa bka' phyag chu bo zung 'brel dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*)— known more often also simply as the *Ornament of Liberation*

---

[8] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 14.

(*Thar rgyan*)—the rest of the works in this collection are not actually written by him.[9] This seemingly strange fact is made clear by the colophons of the remaining thirty-eight texts in Gampopa's oeuvre.[10] These works can, however, be traced to Gampopa indirectly, as they may be either lecture notes taken by his direct students or teachings that were orally transmitted within the lineage and rendered in written form by later generations. Despite this unusual situation, it is important to note that the Tibetan tradition regards all these works as representing the authentic teachings of Gampopa, as indicated by the inclusion of all these texts in all available editions of his collected works. And it is the entirety of these texts which subsequently form the basis of a lineage of transmitted teachings in the Kagyu (Bka' brgyud) tradition, one of the three "New Translation Schools" (*gsar ma*) that were introduced in Tibet in what is referred to as the later dissemination (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism to Tibet from India (10th–12th century).[11] Since Gampopa's works are transmitted in a diversity of genres ranging from philosophical treatises, to oral teachings that were later transcribed by his disciples, to short pith instructions, it is difficult to analyze the style and the content of the writings to see if the attribution of these works as representing his

---

[9] See Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan (Ornament of Liberation)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 4, 4 vols. (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 185–162.

[10] Kragh, *Tibetan Yoga and Mysticism*, 165.

[11] The other two "New Translation Schools" are the Gelug (Dge lugs) tradition and the Sakya (Sa skya) tradition. The "New Translation Schools" stand in contrast to the "Old Translation School" (*rnying ma*), that is the Nyingma tradition, whose main teachings were translated and transmitted during the earlier dissemination (*snga dar*) of Buddhism to Tibet. Gampopa received teachings from both schools.

actual words could be meaningfully defended.[12] This dissertation accepts all these texts as representing Gampopa's thought, and will thus treat them accordingly.

## 3    Research Methods and Sources

The main research methods employed in this dissertation are textual and philosophical analysis. The goal of this thesis is to understand and reconstruct Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā tradition by relying on his ten explicit Mahāmudrā works and to do so without undue influence of later commentators in the Kagyu tradition which looks back to Gampopa as the founder of its monastic lineage. Although there are many possible approaches to undertake this task, I have chosen to organize my inquiry into Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā teaching tradition by focusing on Gampopa's understanding of three key elements of Mahāmudrā practice: the view, meditation, and conduct (*lta sgom spyod gsum*). This threefold classification is a well-known traditional method for the systematization of Buddhist teachings often employed by Gampopa's successors in the Kagyu tradition, as well as by other Tibetans in other schools. Gampopa himself also uses the threefold classification on occasion.[13] While this approach is helpful as an organizing rubric, the challenge is that apart from his many pith instructions alluding to his Mahāmudrā view and techniques for meditation, he does not present these by neatly

---

[12] Gampopa's collected works are divided into eight genres: Hagiographies *(rnam thar)*, Congregational Teachings (*tshogs chos*)*,* Answers to Questions (*zhus lan*), Instructions on the Six Yogas of Nāropa (*nāro'i chos drug gi khrid yig*), Mahāmudrā Instructions (*phyag chen gyi khrid yig*), Miscellaneous (*gsung thor bu*), Eulogies (*bstod tshogs*), and Stages of the Path (*lam rim*)*.* For a description of these eight genres in Gampopa's collected works, see Kragh, *Tibetan Yoga and Mysticism*, 200–690.

[13] See, for example, Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs (Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 1 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 553.

categorizing them as either the Mahāmudrā view or meditation. Nevertheless, close examination of his texts does reveal positions that we can identify as the view and meditation, which we will see are closely connected in such a way as to imply one another. As for conduct, we shall discover that we must examine texts that are not explicitly part of the Mahāmudrā corpus. Yet the explicit Mahāmudrā writings do imply the necessity for relying on non-Mahāmudrā texts and practices when it comes to conduct, and we therefore take these teachings to be implicit elements of Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā.

We begin by undertaking a close and sustained reading and analysis of Gampopa's ten explicit works of Mahāmudrā instruction. These are generally terse and cryptic, often fifteen to thirty pages in length. In examining these texts, a distinctive pattern emerges whereby Gampopa describes the ultimate nature of the mind (the view), the contemplative techniques to sustain that in meditation (the meditation), and the close relationship between these two such that one implicates the other. To explore the other necessary foundational or associated practices for Mahāmudrā (the conduct)—including whether such practices are required or not—we turn to texts that are categorized in Gampopa's collected works as Congregational Teachings (*tshogs chos*). In these teachings, which get their name from the fact that they were given publicly to the congregation of monks, Gampopa intersperses Mahāmudrā teachings with Stages of the Path (*lam rim*) teachings from the Kadampa tradition,[14] often explaining why such typical Stages of the Path teachings as

---

[14] The Kadampa tradition was brought to Tibet by the Indian master Atiśa (982–1054). Through his seminal work, *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*Bodhipathapradīpa*), he lays out the entire Buddhist path to achieve the state of enlightenment. For a Tibetan commentary on this work, see Sonam Rinchen, *Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, trans. Ruth Sonam (Ithaca, N.Y: Snow Lion, 1997).

meditation on impermanence and the generation of compassion are essential practices for Mahāmudrā realization.

There were times when I felt that the commentarial tradition could help clarify certain points in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, particularly in supporting his viewpoints. At those times, I relied on commentators who are widely respected in Gampopa's tradition. For example, I relied on the *AllPervading Knowledge* (*shes bya kun khyab*) by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé ('Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, 1813–1899), a highly esteemed figure across Tibetan Buddhist traditions who synthesized teachings in many lineages of Buddhism in Tibet, including Gampopa's Mahāmudrā lineage, and who is considered one of the founders of the Tibetan Rimé (*ris med*) or Non-sectarian movement. With regard to understanding critiques of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, I studied mainly the works of Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen (Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182–1251), known also as Sapaṇ, one of the most important and erudite scholars of the Sakya (Sa skya) school of Tibetan Buddhism and a well-known critic of Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā. I also read Gampopa's Mahāmudrā writings in light of studies by contemporary academic scholars. Although my main focus was to understand Gampopa's Mahāmudrā on its own terms, I nevertheless compared his Mahāmudrā with doctrines and terms in the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka schools, employing both traditional and modern scholarship on these subjects, as a way to gain further purchase on the nuances of his position.

Finally, I also relied on the oral teachings of contemporary masters. Like other branches of Tibetan Buddhist meditation traditions, the Mahāmudrā tradition maintains one must receive oral transmission of Mahāmudrā texts before they can be studied, and that this transmission should be

followed by transmission of unwritten meditation instructions from living teachers.[15] I received

both forms of transmission from various lamas in the Kagyu tradition, particularly through the

masters Thrangu Rinpoche ('Khra 'gu rin po che) and Nubpa Rinpoche (Nub pa rin po che Dkon

mchog bstan 'dzin). For an experience-oriented tradition like Mahāmudrā, a degree of first-person

experiential learning is considered essential to understand it. I fulfilled this requirement by

engaging in meditation based on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā instructions and with the guidance of the

masters mentioned above.

## 3.1    Primary Textual Sources

Among the thirty-nine works attributed to Gampopa and published in the various editions of

his collected works, this dissertation takes as its major sources the ten works that belong

exclusively to the genre of Mahāmudrā instructions. The primary edition of the collected works

consulted was that of Khenpo S. Tenzin and Lama T. Namgyal.[16] This latest (2000) edition is a

computerized publication in traditional Tibetan pecha format, highly legible and with few errors.

All references to works by Gampopa below are to this edition unless otherwise noted. I

occasionally used the 1975 edition published by Khedrup Gyatso Shashin (mKhas grub rgya mtsho

sha shin) due to the fact that a copy was available to me in the beginning of research. Although I

did eventually locate other extant editions, including the first printed edition of Gampopa's

collected works, compiled and printed by Gampo Sönam Lhundrup (Sgam po Bsod nams Lhun

grub, 1488–1552), the sixteenth abbot of Daglha Gompa (Dwags lha Sgom pa), an important

---

[15] On the role and nature of pith instructions, see, for example, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *Pith Instructions* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2016).

[16] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, ed. Khenpo S. Tenzin and Lama T. Namgyal, 4 vols. (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000).

monastic center for the study and practice of Mahāmudrā founded by Gampopa himself in 1121, I did not have the time to compare these various editions in detail since my work is mainly focused on the content of Gampopa's texts as opposed to producing a critical edition of his works.[17]

In the ten Mahāmudrā works where Gampopa exclusively focuses on Mahāmudrā thought and practice, he provides Mahāmudrā instructions from various angles, all geared toward realizing the nondual (*gnyis med*) and non-arising (*skye med*) luminous nature of mind—aspects of mind that I aim to elucidate in the course of this dissertation. These exclusive Mahāmudrā works belong to the genre of Mahāmudrā Instructions (*phyag chen gyi khrid yig*) known also as pith instructions (*gdams ngag* or *man ngag*), generally transmitted orally by a teacher to the students and generally not written down in order to keep them secret. This genre in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is also poetically known as the ear-whispered lineage (*snyan rgyud*) because of its oral and secret nature. As some colophons to his Mahāmudrā texts testify, Gampopa's students felt the need to write these teachings down for fear that they may otherwise be lost.[18] The genre of pith instructions or ear-whispered teachings is further seen as transmissions of living experience of teachers in contrast to mere intellectual knowledge.

I will now describe some of the main themes in each of these ten Mahāmudrā works to demonstrate how they touch on key Mahāmudrā ideas and practices. All ten works have many short sub-sections which are meant to be independent and complete Mahāmudrā instructions in

---

[17] For a detailed study of the publication and transmission of ten editions of Gampopa's collected works, see Kragh, *Tibetan Yoga and Mysticism*, 156–99.

[18] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Snying po'i ngo sprod don dam gter mdzod (Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence)," in *Collected Works (gsum 'bum) of sGam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bKra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad  Lahul (Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975), 210.

and out of themselves, although they normally emphasize a particular aspect of Mahāmudrā practice. The volume and page numbers for the 1975 and 2000 editions are given here as well.

1. *Revealing the Hidden Characteristic of the Mind* (*Sems kyi mtshan nyid gab pa mngon tu phyung ba*). 1975: vol. 2, 24–32. 2000: vol. 2, 405–422. This is an exclusive Mahāmudrā work with no reference to tantric yoga. It offers a sudden vision of enlightenment, an aspect of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā that is one of the greatest sources of criticism by his critics, as discussed by David Jackson.[19] The text, for example, points to the state of mind as primordially liberated without the need for the practitioner to do anything such as accumulate merit or other religious practices.[20] It describes an approach to meditation where the general separation between meditation and post-meditation stage collapses and blends seamlessly (*mnyam rjes res 'jog med pa*).[21]

2. *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings* (*Zhal gyi bdud rtsi thun mong ma yin pa*). 1975: vol. 2, 101–136. 2000: vol. 2, 575–644. Containing 16 separate and complete Mahāmudrā teachings, this work elucidates Mahāmudrā practice by pointing to the nature of the mind from various perspectives. The text defines essential Mahāmudrā terms such as the coemergent mind (*sems lhan cig skyes pa*), the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*), and the difference between the gradual and the sudden approaches to the Mahāmudrā practice.

---

[19] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*.

[20] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Sems kyi mtshan nyid gab pa mngon tu phyung ba (Revealing the Hidden Characteristics of the Mind)," in *Collected Works (gsum 'bum) of sGam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul, vol. 2 (Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975), 25.

[21] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 26.

3. *Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization* (*Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag thog babs dang mgur 'bum rnams*). 1975: vol. 2, 136–154. 2000: vol. 3, 1–38. This text points to the way Mahāmudrā practice approaches negative emotions through meditation on the nonduality of mind and negative emotions. Gampopa described his Mahāmudrā as the yoga of coemergence. Of the pair that coemerges, one is the innate mind (*sems yid lhan cig skyes pa*) and the other is the diverse appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*).[22] The diverse appearances include negative emotions as well. Thus, when the practitioner perceives their coemergence, which is to realize Mahāmudrā, the dualism of subject and object collapses and negative emotions are naturally liberated (*rang grol*).

4. *Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag rgya chen po gsal byed kyi man ngag*). 1975: vol. 2, 154–162. 2000: vol. 3, 39–56. Containing Mahāmudrā instructions in verse form, this text discusses the contemplative method of maintaining the nature of the mind (*sems nyid*) in an uncontrived state consistent with the view of Mahāmudrā. It also contains a succinct treatment of the nonduality of appearances (*snang ba*) and emptiness (*stong pa nyid*). In a uniquely Mahāmudrā formulation, emptiness and appearances both pertain to the mind, with the nature of the mind referring to emptiness and the mind's expressions referring to appearances. Because of this formulation, the distinction between meditative equipoise (*mnyam bzhag*) and post-meditation state (*rjes thob*), typically found in other meditation systems, is not maintained.[23]

---

[22] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag thog babs dang mgur 'bum rnams (Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization)," in *Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of sGam po pa Bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul, vol. 2 (Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975), 139.

[23] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Phyag rgya chen po gsal byed kyi man ngag (Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro*

5. *Stages of Meditation of the Inconceivable Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag rgya chen po bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i sgom rim*). 1975: vol. 2, 162–177. 2000: vol. 3, 57–88. The text offers a pith instruction whose lineage is traced from Vajrapāṇi through to Togtsewa (Tog tse ba = Kuddālin), Tilopa (988–1069), Nāropa, Marpa (Mar pa lo tsa ba, 1012–1097) and Milarepa. The text depicts how the short pith instruction referred to as "Inconceivable Instruction" (*bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i man ngag*) generated sudden Mahāmudrā realization in successive human adepts after Vajrapāṇi, a divine figure, transmitted it to Togtsewa. It not only teaches the meditation practice of non-mentation (*yid la mi byed pa*), but significantly also describes the level at which non-mentation is practiced. It states that when appearances (*snang ba*) are experienced as primordial wisdom (*ye shes*), then one experiences the equalizing taste that requires neither negation nor affirmation (*dgag sgrub med par*) through the practice of non-mentation.

6. *Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā* (*Snying po don gyi gdams pa phyag rgya chen po'i 'bum tig*). 1975: vol. 2, 177–195. 2000: vol. 3, 89–126. This text equates the so-called Self-sufficient White Remedy (*dkar po chig thub*) practice—which is seen as giving rise to sudden awakening—with the realization of the innate (*gnyug ma*) nature of the mind. This equation will further help us explore the meaning of the Self-sufficient White Remedy, as many sections of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā writings have references to the innate nature of the mind (*gnyug sems*). The innate mind is further

---

*mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 43.

identified as the coemergent mind, which in turn is described as the actual object of meditation (*don dngos*),[24] as opposed to a conceptual object.

7. *Introduction to the Root of Mahāmudrā: The Self-sufficient Realization of Carrying Appearances as the Path, the Unwavering Innate Nature of Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag rgya chen po'i rtsa ba la ngo sprod pa zhes kyang bya / snang ba lam 'khyer gyi rtogs pa cig chos ces kyang bya / phyag rgya chen po'i gnyug ma mi 'gyur ba ces kyang bya*). 1975: vol. 2, 195–209. 2000: vol. 3, 127–156. Predominantly containing Mahāmudrā instructions, this text also explains non-meditation (*sgom med*) as a key feature of Mahāmudrā meditation. The basic idea is that deliberate intention to engage in "meditation" sustains the dualistic structure of consciousness and only the approach of non-mentation frees or eliminates the dualistic mind on its own accord.[25]

8. *Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence* (*Snying po'i ngo sprod don dam gter mdzod*). 1975: vol. 2, 209–229. 2000: vol. 3, 157–196. This text contains instructions pertaining to such important Mahāmudrā themes as the three aspects of appearance of the mind (*snang tshul gsum*), the yoga of coemergence, and Gampopa's instantaneous teachings referred to as Thunder-Strike (*thog babs*) teachings. It points out that the natural

---

[24] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Snying po don gyi gdams pa phyag rgya chen po'i 'bum tig (Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 123.

[25] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Phyag rgya chen po'i rtsa ba la ngo sprod pa zhes kyang bya / snang ba lam 'khyer gyi rtogs pa cig chos ces kyang bya/ phyag rgya chen po'i gnyug ma mi 'gyur shes kyang bya (Introduction to the Root of Mahāmudrā: The Self-sufficient Realization of Carrying Appearances as the Path, the Unwavering Innate Nature of Mahāmudrā)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 130–31.

purification or liberation of negative emotions within the context of the innate mind is possible since the nature of the innate mind is emptiness.[26]

9. *Introduction to the Ultimate Reality of Thoughts* (*Rnam rtog don dam gyi ngo sprod*). 1975: vol. 2, 229–247. 2000: vol. 3, 197–234. In this text, Gampopa summarizes the three aspects of the mind—its nature, essence, and characteristics, referring respectively to the clarity, emptiness, and conceptual thoughts of the mind. The text then points to the indivisibility of these three aspects by explaining that "thoughts and mind are one, and mind in turn is without any arising."[27] The text further teaches how thoughts, however many and intense they may be, will fuel the fire of nondual wisdom by explaining that although a small fire may be extinguished by the wind, when a great forest is caught on fire, even the wind turns into a conducive factor for the fire.[28]

10. *Heart Introduction to the Practice* (*Sgrub pa snying gi ngo sprod*). 1975: vol. 2, 247–263. 2000: vol. 3, 235–268. This text offers a clear elucidation on different aspects of the Mahāmudrā such as the triad of the Mahāmudrā view, meditation, and conduct (*lta sgom spyod gsum*) as well as that of the Mahāmudrā basis, path, and result (*gzhi lam 'bras gsum*) without further elaborating on them.

---

[26] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Snying po'i ngo sprod don dam gter mdzod (Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 160.

[27] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Rnam rtog don dam gyi ngo sprod (Introduction to the Ultimate Reality of Thoughts)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 200. *rnam rtog de sems yin / sems de skye med yin /.*

[28] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 200. *nags la me shor na / me chung gis 'chi ba yin / nags chen po tshig tsam na rlung yang grogs su 'gro /.*

The above ten texts form the primary sources for our discussion of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view and meditation. For reconstructing Gampopa's Mahāmudrā conduct, the main source is another collection of relatively short teachings referred to as Congregational Teachings (*tshogs chos*). As stated earlier, these teachings, given publicly to the monastic congregation as the title suggests, combine foundational Mahāyāna practices with Mahāmudrā pith instructions. This is clear textual evidence for Gampopa's departure from his lineage teachers such as Marpa and Milarepa who seemed to have given Mahāmudrā teachings only to a select few disciples within an explicitly tantric context. Gampopa not only appears to have given Mahāmudrā teachings in a public setting, but he has done so in a non-tantric context as his Congregational Teachings clearly demonstrate. Of the five Congregational Teachings, I rely on just four of them as all of them touch on similar themes. Teachings on impermanence, renunciation, compassion and so forth are interspersed with Mahāmudrā pith instructions, often explaining or implying foundational Kadampa teachings are necessary for Mahāmudrā practices. The four Congregational Teachings texts that we discuss in this thesis are:

1. *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching* (*Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs*). 1975: vol. 1, 258–293. 2000: vol. 1, 505–576. This text explains the famed Four Dharmas of Gampopa (*Sgam po'i chos bzhi*). Gampopa demonstrates that the fourth and the pinnacle dharma of Mahāmudrā lies on the foundation of the first three dharmas that are based on Kadampa teachings, demonstrating that his Mahāmudrā tradition is a synthesis of the Kadampa and Mahāmudrā teachings.

2. *Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching* (*Tshogs chos mu tig gi phreng ba*). 1975: vol. 1, 293–326. 2000: vol. 1, 577–648. This text goes on to demonstrate the nature of

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition, arguing that foundational practices such as compassion and the accumulation of merit are essential for Mahāmudrā realization.

3. *Abundant Goodness: A Congregational Teaching* (*Tshogs chos bkra shis phun tshogs*). 1975: vol. 1, 150–171. 2000: vol. 1, 289–332. The text explicitly states the relationship between the Kadampa and Mahāmudrā teachings by describing loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta* as the substantial cause, condition, and method to realize one's coemergent mind or the Mahāmudrā state.

4. *Excellent Beauty: A Congregational Teaching* (*Tshogs chos legs mdzes ma*). 1975: vol. 1, 171–258. 2000: vol. 1, 333–504. Relative to other congregational teachings, this text offers more extensive treatment of stages of the path teachings from the Kadampa tradition. The text also contains many Mahāmudrā pith instructions. Interestingly, the text describes Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen instructions as part of completion stage yoga practices, most likely referring to the fourth empowerment instructions referred to as the Word Initiation (*tshig dbang*).

Although these are the main sources for our exploration of Gampopa's understanding of Mahāmudrā conduct, we also make occasional reference to his *Ornament of Liberation* for exploring the foundational practices. The decision not to employ this text extensively is based on the fact that the relationship between the foundational teachings derived from the Kadampa tradition and that of Mahāmudrā is not stated explicitly in that text. As the full title of the *Ornament of Liberation* clearly indicates, it is a meant to be a tradition that combines the Stages of the Path teachings that Gampopa received from his Kadampa teachers with the Mahāmudrā teachings he received from Milarepa. This is indicated by his classification of various foundational practices into those of the three persons or scopes (*skyes bu gsum*), a category that is taken directly from the

Kadampa teachings.[29] Thus, while the work does include aspects of Mahāmudrā teachings, it is not exclusively or even primarily a Mahāmudrā work. Since this dissertation is interested in exploring Gampopa's Mahāmudrā thought, we have drawn mainly from his explicitly Mahāmudrā works.

### 3.2    Secondary Sources

Beyond Gampopa's Mahāmudrā writings described above, this dissertation also relies on both indigenous Tibetan and contemporary academic secondary sources. As already mentioned, I supplemented my study of Gampopa by reading the works of two indigenous Tibetan scholars. First, for increased clarity regarding Gampopa's Mahāmudrā teachings, I read Jamgön Kongtrul's *All-Pervading Knowledge* (*Shes bya kun khyab*).[30] This text, revered by the Kagyu tradition as a definitive work on many of its thoughts and practices, not only elucidates Gampopa's Mahāmudrā. It only brings clarity to many issues within Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition such as the difference between Tantric and Non-tantric Mahāmudrā. For understanding critiques of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā works such as the doctrine of the Self-sufficient White Remedy (*dkar po chig thub*) that asserts that a single practice is self-sufficient from a salvific point of view, I studied Sapaṇ's *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* (*Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i bstan bcos*).[31] This

---

[29] For a detailed account of teachings pertaining to the three scopes or persons, see Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna Atiśa, *A Lamp for the Path and Commentary*, trans. Richard Sherburne, The Wisdom of Tibet Series 5 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1983).

[30] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun khyab (All-Pervading Knowlege)* (Pe ciṅ: Mi rigs dpe skruṅ khang, 1982).

[31] For the Tibetan, I used Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, *Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i bstan bcos*, Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus pod phreṅ 12 (New Delhi: Institute of Tibetan Classics, 2009). For an English translation, see Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltshen, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes: Essential Distinctions among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems*, trans. Jared Douglas Rhoton (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).

text is also translated into English in full under the tittle *Essential Distinctions among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems* by Jared Douglas Rhoton (2002).[32] The text is ostensibly about elucidating the three types of vows—the *prātimokṣa* vows (*so thar sdom pa*) of the individual monastic practitioner; the *bodhisattva* vows (*byang sems sdom pa*) of the Mahāyāna practitioner; and the *mantra* vows (*sngags kyi sdom pa*) of the tantric practitioner. However, despite this nominal subject matter, Sapaṇ dedicates substantial sections of the text to questioning and refuting doctrines prevailing in Tibet at the time (such as the doctrine of Self-Sufficient White Remedy practice in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā) that he saw as contravening the mainstream Indian Mahāyāna tradition. As one of the greatest scholars of his time coming about a hundred years after Gampopa, his works are crucial in understanding the reception and the critiques of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā in Tibet centuries after his passing away. Because my goal in this dissertation is to attempt to understand Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā on its own terms, I have not made extensive use of later Tibetan scholars' works on the topic of Mahāmudrā meditation. I do, however, utilize these two thinkers to help frame the issues.

In terms of contemporary scholarship, we should note that a detailed exploration of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view and meditation, including the necessary foundational practices, has not been undertaken so far by contemporary scholars. However, a growing number has written on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā works and related topics. The most extensive contemporary work on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is Ulrich Timme Kragh's *Tibetan Yoga and Mysticism: A Textual Study of the Yogas of Nāropa and Mahāmudrā Meditation in the Medieval Tradition of Dags po*. In this book, Kragh describes the history of the compilation and transmission of ten extant editions of

---

[32] Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltshen, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*.

Gampopa's works. He also undertakes an extensive textual study of all thirty-nine works attributed to Gampopa, categorizing them, following the tradition of Gampo Sönam Lhundrub, the into eight genres such as Mahāmudrā Instructions (*phyag chen gyi khrid yig*), Hagiographies (*rnam thar*), Eulogies (*bstod pa*), Stages of the Path (*lam rim*), and so on. Under the category of Mahāmudrā Instructions, Kragh lists nine works, all of which I have examined for this dissertation. In addition to Kragh's list of nine works, I added one more text: *Revealing the Hidden Characteristic of the Mind* (*Sems kyi mtshan nyid gab pa mngon tu phyung ba*)**.** This text should be included in the category of exclusive Mahāmudrā pith instructions due to its content. Kragh's work will be extremely helpful to scholars who want to work on a critical edition of Gampopa's collected works.

David P. Jackson also wrote an extensive book, *Enlightenment by a Single Means: Tibetan Controversies on the "Self-sufficient White Remedy" (dKar po chig thub)*, which deals directly with Mahāmudrā works by Gampopa and his lineage masters.[33] While referring to Gampopa's Sūtra and Tantra Mahāmudrā, it mostly explores a specific type of Mahāmudrā that is seen as being beyond sūtra and tantra, that is, the practice we have already mentioned that is referred to as the Self-Sufficient White Remedy (*dkar po chig thub*). Jackson traces the term Self-Sufficient White Remedy in the writings of Gampopa and Lama Zhang (Bla ma Zhang Tshal pa, also known as Zhang g.yu brag pa brtson 'grus grags pa, 1123–1193), a student of Gampopa's disciple Gompa Tsultrim Nyingpo (Sgom pa tshul khrims snying po, 1116–1169). The idea that a single practice could be sufficient in itself to manifest the state of complete enlightenment gave rise to many controversies and debates in the centuries after Gampopa's passing away. Jackson provides a detailed account of one the most famous critics of the doctrine of the Self-Sufficient White Remedy

---

[33] See Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*.

in the same work, that of Sapaṇ. Jackson's book, *Clarifying the Sage's Intent: Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltsen (1182–1251)*,[34] a translation of Sapaṇ's *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba* as well as his journal article, "Sa-skya Paṇḍita the 'Polemicist': Ancient Debates and Modern Interpretations" (1990), provide additional clarity to understanding Sapaṇ's critique of aspects of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā such as its origin and the role of conceptual philosophy to understand the ultimate.

Roger Jackson's article, "Mahāmudrā: Natural Mind in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism" (2011), although not a treatment of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, offers a succinct presentation of the meaning of Mahāmudrā in various contexts and the evolution of its practice from one that is strongly anchored in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tantra to increasingly pointing to the primordial nature of the mind, without tantric connotations. His "Sa skya Paṇḍita's Account of the bSam yas Debate: History as Polemic" helps us understand an issue that bears striking resemblance to a core issue in Mahāmudrā, namely the role of conceptual philosophical analysis for Buddhist salvation. Sapaṇ in fact has explicitly stated that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is none other than the system of the Chinese monk, Hvashang Mahāyāna, whose teachings were supposedly discredited by Kamalaśīla, his Indian counterpart in what is referred to as the Samyé (Bsam yas) debate.[35] His recent book,

---

[34] Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, "Clarifying the Sage's Intent: Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltsen (1182–1251)," in *Stages of the Buddha's Teachings: Three Key Texts*, trans. David P. Jackson (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2015).

[35] To explore the issues surrounding this debate, see Roger R. Jackson, "Sa Skya Paṇḍita's Account of the BSam Yas Debate: History as Polemic," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, June 30, 1982, 89–99; Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "On the Sources for Sa Skya Paṇḍita's Notes on the 'BSam Yas Debate,'" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, December 31, 1986, 147–53; David P. Jackson, "Sa-Skya Paṇḍita the 'Polemicist': Ancient Debates and Modern Interpretations," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, December 31, 1990, 17–116; Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*.

*Mind Seeing Mind: Mahāmudrā and the Geluk Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*,[36] likewise offers valuable insights into how Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition was taken up in the most politically powerful school of modern Tibet.

Although Klaus-Dieter Mathes does not directly deal with Gampopa's Mahāmudrā works, his research and publications over the years have immensely helped modern readers to appreciate the historical development, philosophy, and meditation of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā (retrospectively referred as Sūtra Mahāmudrā) in late Indian Buddhism and in its transmission into twelfth-century Tibet. For example, in his *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within: Gö Lotsāwa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga* (2008), Mathes traces the development of two different interpretations in Tibet of the important text from the Maitreya corpus known both as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and the *Uttaratantra* after the work was translated for the first time by Ngog Loden Sherab (Rngog lbo ldan shes rab, 1059–1109) with the help of Sajjana, a student of the Indian master Maitrīpāda (known also as Maitrīpa and Advayavajra, 1007–1085). Ngog Loden Sherab theorized Buddha nature to be identical with emptiness understood as a so-called non-affirming negation (*prasajya-pratiṣedha*, *med dgag*) in which a negation does not implicitly affirm the existence of something else. For example, if somebody states that there are no trees on the mountain, this statement of negation does not affirm the existence of something else on the mountain.

Based on such an understanding of negation pertaining to the Buddha nature, he started what is known as the analytical tradition (*dpyod lugs*). In contrast, Tsen Khawoche (Btsan kha bo che dri med shes rab, 1021–?) understood Buddha nature more positively, as referring to the mind's

---

[36] Roger R. Jackson, *Mind Seeing Mind: Mahāmudrā and the Geluk Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, 2019.

natural luminosity (*gsal cha* or *'od gsal*), starting what came to be known as the meditation tradition (*sgom lugs*). The discovery that a subtle nonconceptual clarity is sustained in Mahāmudrā meditation supports the assertion that it is a method of meditation sustaining a form of negation known as an implicative negation (*paryudāsa, ma yin dgag*). This form of negation corresponds to what the Tibetans indigenously termed "emptiness of the other" (*gzhan stong*), a topic Mathes further explores in his article, "The Gzhan Stong Model of Reality - Some More Material on Its Origin, Transmission, and Interpretation" (2013). Three of his articles, "Blending the Sūtras with the Tantras: The Influence of Maitrīpa and his Circle on the Formation of Sūtra Mahāmudrā in the Kagyu schools" (2006), "Can Sūtra Mahāmudrā be Justified on the Basis of Maitrīpa´s Apratiṣṭhānavāda?" (2007) and "Maitrīpa´s *Amanasikārādhāra*: A Justification of Becoming Mentally Disengaged" (2009) are also useful not only in in our understanding of Sūtra Mahāmudrā, but also in terms of tracing a similar Non-tantric Mahāmudrā in the works of the Indian adept Maitrīpāda. Mathes for example, argues that Maitrīpāda's Mahāmudrā doctrine of non-abiding nature (*apratiṣṭhāna, rab tu mi gnas pa*) which allows one to enter into nonconceptually in the corresponding meditative practice of non-mentation (*amanasikāra, yid la mi byed pa*) can give rise to the Mahāmudrā realization, which is the direct nondual insight into the nature of reality.[37] David Higgins's "On the development of the non-mentation doctrine in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism" (2006) is similarly useful in understanding non-mentation meditation in the works of Maitrīpāda and Gampopa's Mahāmudrā works. In this style of meditation, one circumvents conceptual and dualistic thoughts through the techniques taught in the non-mentation style of meditation.

---

[37] Klaus-Dieter Mathes, "Can Sūtra Mahāmudrā Be Justified on the Basis of Maitrīpa´s Apratiṣṭhānavāda?," *Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde,* 71, no. 2 (2007b).

John Dunne's book *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's philosophy* (2004) as well as his article "Realizing the Unreal: Dharmakīrti's Theory of Yogic Perception" (2006) have also been instrumental for me in understanding Gampopa's Mahāmudrā. Dunne offers a method of approaching Mahāmudrā through the concepts and doctrines of the Yogācāra school. The two traditions have many shared features, including that they both have similar ways of conceptualizing and realizing the ultimate with the nonconceptual clarity of the mind viewed as the ultimate that is sustained in nondual meditation. In his 2006 article, Dunne explores the question of how the meaning of conceptual abstracts such as impermanence and emptiness could be directly perceived according to Dharmakīrti's epistemological system. He concludes that conceptual universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa, spyi mtshan*) can be seen as directly perceived when they are understood or experienced as mental particulars (*svalakṣaṇa, rang mtshan*). This insight helps make philosophical sense of the Mahāmudrā assertion that experiencing phenomenal appearances, including thoughts, does not constitute a conceptual experience but a case of mind directly perceiving the mind. In fact, it is through Dunne's works and lectures on Dharmakīrti's philosophy that I first experienced "pith instruction" moments on Mahāmudrā and the nature of the mind. His article, "Towards an Understanding of Non-dual Mindfulness" (2011), not only clarifies the nature and the style of Mahāmudrā meditation. It also compares Mahāmudrā with other contemporary forms of meditation that can be described as nondual mindfulness.

## 4   Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā

Considered to be the pinnacle of meditative practice by most contemporary practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, Mahāmudrā promulgates a nondual theory of mind and contemplative techniques in the form of short instructions to sustain that nondual mind nonconceptually in meditation. Instead of following the progressive model of the general Mahāyāna path—that is from

philosophy to nonconceptual meditation—Mahāmudrā stresses the unity of discursive philosophical view and nonconceptual meditation right from the beginning. To this end, it utilizes specialized language and meditation techniques that help to circumvent dualistic concepts. Those who emphasize a gradual progressive model, such as we find in the Gelug (Dge lugs) tradition, are wary of such a Mahāmudrā approach, arguing that nonconceptual meditation is only suitable at a high level of spiritual development and only *after* significant work at the conceptual level. In Mahāmudrā practice, the object of meditation is not an extramental phenomenon but the mind itself. The mind nondualistically focuses upon itself, meaning that it rests naturally in present-moment awareness. Furthermore, the content of this experience, even when thoughts arise, is understood as nonconceptual in nature. Gampopa valorizes such a nonconceptual approach to reality, arguing that philosophical analysis further binds us within an expanding net of conceptual thoughts, delaying the direct intuitive experience of reality.

The Mahāmudrā lineage was brought to Tibet by Marpa, the founder of the Tibetan Kagyu tradition, who identified the Indian scholar and great yogic adept, or Mahāsiddha, Maitrīpāda (ca. 1007- ca. 1085) as his primary Mahāmudrā teacher. Yet the Mahāmudrā tradition witnessed a major shift in the Kagyu tradition with Gampopa, the founder of what came to be known as the Dhakpo Kagyu (Dwags po bka' brgyud) tradition.[38] Gampopa gave Mahāmudrā instructions outside the tantric context—that is without requiring initiations (*abhiṣeka*), complex visualizations, or the use of subtle physiological elements such as the psychic channels (*nāḍi*), subtle energy (*vāyu*), and subtle energy drops (*bindu*)—and he appears to have given these teachings publicly. These practices deviated from the tradition of his previous lineage masters such

---

[38] Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within*, 11.

his own direct teacher Milarepa, Tibet's beloved poet and yogi who was himself the student of Marpa. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā instructions became extremely popular for their accessibility, simplicity, and profundity. They subsequently came to be known collectively as Sūtra Mahāmudrā within Gampopa's lineage, although the first occurrence of this term in the Kagyu tradition is not clear. Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal ('Gos Lo tsa ba gzhon nu dpal, 1392–1481) asserts that Gampopa induced Mahāmudrā realization in those who had not received any tantric empowerment.[39] Jamgön Kongtrul also mentions that in addition to Tantric Mahāmudrā, Gampopa also taught a Mahāmudrā according to the "system of the Perfection of Wisdom" (*pha rol tu phyin pa'i lugs*).[40]

At the same time, Gampopa's unorthodox method of teaching Non-tantric Mahāmudrā techniques outside the norms of tantric tradition has engendered significant controversy and criticism ever since its emergence in twelfth-century Tibet, and this debate is still being played out in contemporary Tibetan monasteries. The notion of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, including some of its most important doctrines and practices, gave rise to fierce objections on a range of issues. For example, its emphasis on entering a nonconceptual state that purportedly does not require (and often even discourages) conceptual philosophical analysis goes against the fundamental principle of the perceived necessity of intellectual learning in general exoteric Sūtra-level teachings.

The second related issue that was debated by Tibetans pertains to the alleged lack of Indian precedence for Gampopa's so-called Sūtra Mahāmudrā. Sapaṇ, for example, argues that

---

[39] Mathes, "Can Sūtra Mahāmudrā Be Justified on the Basis of Maitrīpa´s Apratiṣṭhānavāda?," 202.

[40] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun kyab (All-Pervading Knowledge)*, 378: *dwags po rin po ches las dang po pas dbang bskur ma thob pa la'ang phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa skyed par mdzad pa ni pha rol tu phyin pa'i lugs 'di yin la /.*

"contemporary Mahāmudrā"[41]—clearly referring to Mahāmudrā teachings taught outside the tantric context in the Dhakpo Kagyu tradition—is not different from the "Chinese Dzogchen tradition," apparently seeking to associate the teachings of the Chinese monk Hvashang Mahāyāna with the Great Perfection or Dzogchen (Rdzogs chen) teachings of the controversial (from Sapaṇ's perspective) Nyingma school. According to Tibetan tradition, Hvashang Mahāyāna's teachings were banned in Tibet after he was allegedly defeated in a debate with the Indian monk Kamalaśīla in the eighth-century Tibetan court of King Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan).[42] Sapaṇ asserts that the Kagyu Mahāmudrā is nothing more than the teachings of Hvashang Mahāyāna restored based on mere words (*yi ge tsam la rten nas*)—that is, even without any living transmission—and rebranded as Mahāmudrā.[43] Although space for innovation does exist in the Tibetan Buddhist world, any philosophy or practice without an Indian origin is nonetheless seen as suspect. As we shall see, Gampopa's defenders in Tibet, such as Zhönu Pal, did regard the origin of his Non-tantric Mahāmudrā teachings to be based on the Mahāmudrā teachings of the eleventh-century Indian scholar and adept Maitrīpāda and certain Indian Mahāyāna treatises, notably the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.

## 4.1   The Tantric Context of Mahāmudrā

Both traditional and contemporary scholars offer strong textual evidence that Mahāmudrā as a distinctive meditation practice originated in the Indian tantric context. Gampo Chennga Tashi Namgyal (Sgam po spyan snga Bkra shis rnam rgyal, 1513–1596?), for example, remarks that

---

[41] Sapaṇ also does not refer to Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā as Sūtra Mahāmudrā, mainly because he seems to overlook the tantric/non-tantric distinction in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā writings.

[42] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 3.

[43] Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, 33.

Gampopa departed from the Kagyu tradition, held up until the time of Milarepa, of transmitting the Mahāmudrā instructions alongside the instructions for inner heat (*gtum mo*) and luminous awareness (*'od gsal*),[44] thus suggesting a tantric connection even as the notion of the departure from that tradition is stressed. Similarly, the fifteenth-century Tibetan translator and scholar Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal ('Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, 1392–1481) explains how Gampopa gave tantric teachings to those who are suited to the Mantrayāna (literally, the Mantra Vehicle, another way of speaking of the Tantra Vehicle or Vajrayāna); and he gave Sūtra Mahāmudrā (a term he employs to refer to Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā) teachings to those suited to receiving Perfection Vehicle (Pāramitāyāna, another way of referring to Non-tantric Mahāyāna) teachings.[45]

Based on a careful historical and textual analysis of the use of the term Mahāmudrā in India and Tibet, Roger Jackson also suggests [Sūtra] Mahāmudrā's strong tantric connections. Jackson has observed that in the Yoginī Tantras such as *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Hevajra*, and *Kālacakra*, Mahāmudrā assumes a central place in philosophical and soteriological expression.[46] In the *Hevajra Tantra*, for example, the term Mahāmudrā has six referents: emptiness, a tantric consort, bliss experienced from consort practice, an initiation that generates great bliss, an eternal state, and the coemergent mind inseparable from bliss and emptiness.[47] In the *Kālacakra Tantra*, the term refers to the unchanging bliss, superior to all other seals (*mudrās*), the great empty-form into which a practitioner arises as the Buddha, and the ultimate gnosis of Buddhahood itself.[48]

---

[44] Cited in Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 12.

[45] Cited in Jackson, 10.

[46] Jackson, "Mahāmudrā," 287–92.

[47] Snellgrove (1960: part 1, pp. 116, 105, 91, 77, 116), as cited in Jackson, 288.

[48] Newman (1987: pp. 224, 225, 231), as cited Jackson, 288.

In the pith instruction teachings of the Mahāsiddhas such as Saraha (9–10th c.), Tilopa (10–11th c.) and Maitrīpāda (11th c.), we gradually see a more distinctive presentation of Mahāmudrā, one that prominently focuses on introducing and experiencing the nature of the mind itself (*sems nyid*) with few references to tantric practices. In the *Vajragīti*, for example, Saraha defines Mahāmudrā as the "mind itself" or the nature of the mind, suchness, thatness, the non-arisen, beyond mind, space-like and instantaneous full awakening.[49] In his *Mahāmudrā-gaṅgāmā*, Tilopa teaches resting in the natural state of one's mind without attempting to modify or change anything.[50] The emphasis on the mind and its ultimate nature as the focus of meditation without requiring tantric practices such as rituals and visualizations becomes a major feature of Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, as we shall see.

Tantric Mahāmudrā was introduced in various Tibetan traditions with different names and in related but different ritual contexts. In the Sakya school, it refers to the ultimate realization attained within the context of tantric initiation. Padampa Sangye (Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas, d. 1117) called it the path of pacification (*zhi byed*) and his female disciple Machig Labdrön (Ma gcig lab sgron, 1055–1149) called it the path of severance (*gcod*), referring to the practice of the severing or elimination of self-grasping and self-cherishing. Kyungpo Neljor (Khyung po rnal sbyor, 978/990–1127) the founder of the Shangpa Kagyu (Shang pa bka' rgyud) tradition, taught it as "amulet box" (*ga'u ma*).[51] This is primarily a practice of Tantric Mahāmudrā of awakening the subtle clear light of the mind, said to be located at the heart center, encased within a subtle drop formed by the red

---

[49] Braitstein (2005: 187), as cited in Jackson, 289.

[50] Jackson, 289.

[51] Jackson, 290.

and white energy drops (*thig le dkar dmar*) that are joined together edge to edge like two lids of an amulet.

From these discussions, we can see a definite connection between Tantric and Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, namely that Non-tantric Mahāmudrā arose within the context of Tantric Mahāmudrā. At the same time, as discussed above, Mahāmudrā as presented in the pith instructions of the adepts gradually present a method of sustaining the nature of the mind without much reference to tantric practices.

## 4.2    The Indian Context of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā

The evidence that Mahāmudrā originated in the Indian tantric context becomes even stronger when we consider the pith instructions of the Indian Mahāsiddhas, where we observe a gradual crystallization of the distinctive Mahāmudrā instructions concerning the nondual nature of the mind in meditation without explicit reference to tantric practices. These observations and arguments have nonetheless failed to settle the question of whether Non-tantric Mahāmudrā as a distinctive doctrine and contemplative practice has Indian precedence or whether it lacks such precedence as Sapaṇ charges. Sapaṇ, as demonstrated earlier, criticizes Gampopa's Mahāmudrā by equating it with the view of Hvashang Mahāyāna. To be branded as a Hvashang Mahāyāna teaching carries a particularly negative connotation for most Tibetans: it stands for a mistaken doctrine that asserts that a mere cessation of concepts can lead to instantaneous awakening. Sapaṇ clearly employs this label to paint an exceptionally negative picture of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition. After dismissing the Dhakpo Kagyu Mahāmudrā as essentially Chinese in origin and as mistakenly proposing that cessation of thoughts can lead to awakening, Sapaṇ goes on to elucidate that his own Mahāmudrā tradition has Indic origins in the tantric tradition of Nāropa, Maitrīpāda,

Nāgārjuna and in the general tantras and the commentarial treatises.[52] Sapaṇ emphasizes that the

tantric teachings by these masters prohibit Mahāmudrā from being taught outside the tantric

context, that is, without tantric initiations and other related practices.[53]

In contrast to Sapaṇ's critique regarding the issue of the origin of Gampopa's Non-tantric

Mahāmudrā, Zhönu Pal argues that it originated from the Mahāmudrā teachings of the eleventh-

century Indian scholar and adept Maitrīpāda.[54] Although a detailed study of Maitrīpāda's

Mahāmudrā is beyond the scope of this dissertation, his Mahāmudrā doctrine of non-abiding

(*apratiṣṭhāna, rab tu mi gnas pa*) and the meditative practice of non-mentation (*amanasikāra, yid

la mi byed pa*) are contained in his twenty-five *Amanasikāra* (non-mentation) works. Available in

both Sanskrit originals and Tibetan translations, these works provide a significant clue to the

presence of a Mahāmudrā practice outside the tantric context in India.[55]

In articulating his doctrine of non-abiding, Maitrīpāda describes it as a "middle way" or

Madhyamaka view, thus indicating a strong alignment with Nāgārjuna (2nd c. CE), the founder of

the Madhyamaka school of Indian Buddhism. Rāmapāla, one of Maitrīpāda's foremost students,

interprets his teacher's doctrine of non-abiding in a way reminiscent of Nāgārjuna's arguments,

demonstrating the lack of an essential self in any of the five psycho-physical aggregates (*skandhas*)

or other components of subjective experience:

---

[52] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 290.

[53] Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, 33: *dbang skur dag dang ma grel ba / de la phyag rgya chen po bkag /.*

[54] Klaus-Dieter Mathes, "Blending the Sūtras with the Tantras: The Influence of Maitrīpa and His Circle on the Formation of Sūtra Mahāmudrā in the Kagyu Schools," in *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis: Studies in Its Formative Period, 900-1400* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 206.

[55] To explore the works of Maitrīpāda, see Klaus-Dieter Mathes, *A Fine Blend of Mahamudra and Madhyamaka: Maitripa's Collection of Texts on Non-Conceptual Realization* (Wien: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2016).

> Not to abide 'in anything' means in the dependently arisen *skandha*s, *dhātus*, *āyatanas*, and so forth. 'Not to abide,' means not to reify, not to become mentally engaged (*amanasikāra*).[56]

The emphasis on the ontological implications of the doctrine of non-abiding is strongly resonant with Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) according to which no essential self (*ātman*) can be found in either persons or things. But, as Rāmapāla makes clear, Maitrīpāda takes Nāgārjuna's philosophical thought a step further by linking it with a particular form of meditation, *amanasikāra*, literally, "non-mentation."[57] In this form of meditation, various techniques are used to disengage from conceptual thoughts to enable the dawning of an unmediated experience of the ultimate nature of the mind. Although the description of the ultimate as "non-arising," "non-abiding," and so forth resonates with Nāgārjuna's description of emptiness, what sets Maitrīpāda's view apart is that emptiness in turn is experienced as luminous. [58] . This was of construing the ultimate as the union of emptiness and luminosity aligns with that of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition as we shall see in Chapter 3. Thus, in his *Sekanirdeśa*, Maitrīpāda referred to his doctrine of non-abiding (*apratiṣṭānavāda*) as Mahāmudrā, proclaimin that "Not to abide in anything (*apratiṣṭāna*) is Mahāmudrā."

---

[56] Cited in Mathes, "Can Sūtra Mahāmudrā Be Justified on the Basis of Maitrīpa´s Apratiṣṭhānavāda?," 555.

[57] For a clear exploration of Maitrīpāda's doctrine of non-mentation, see David O. Higgins, "On the Development of the Non-Mentation (Amanasikāra) Doctrine in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 29, no. 2 (January 1, 2008): 255–303; Cf. Mark Tatz, "The Life of the Siddha-Philosopher Maitrīgupta," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 107, no. 4 (1987).

[58] Klaus-Dieter Mathes, "Maitrīpa's Amanasikārādhāra ('A Justification of Becoming Mentally Disengaged')," *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre* XIII (2009).

In sum, if the doctrine of non-abiding is a form of Madhyamaka philosophical view as suggested earlier, what is unique about Maitrīpāda's Mahāmudrā teachings is his contemplative method of non-mentation. Jamgön Kongtrul seems to echo this point. In differentiating Sūtra Mahāmudrā from Tantra Mahāmudrā in the Dhakpo Kagyu tradition, Jamgön Kongtrul defines the former as a method of the subjective mind (*yul can*) entering into a meditative equipoise through instructions of non-mental engagement (*amanasikāra*, *yid la mi byed pa*) on the objective luminosity (*yul gyi 'od gsal*), without any elaborations (*spros bral 'od gsal gyi yul*), a method that accords with the Sūtra Vehicle.[59] Tantra Mahāmudrā is different in that it is qualified as the wisdom born from the Mahāmudrā that is the union of bliss and emptiness (*bde stong zung 'jug*), which is the yoga of coemergent mind (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) and which arises because of the completion stage yoga practices of employing the subtle vajra body (*rdo rje lus*).[60]

Thus, non-mentation, the contemplative technique of disengaging from conceptual thoughts to enable the dawning of an unmediated experience of the ultimate nature of the mind, appears to be an important factor in Non-tantric Mahāmudrā. I argue that Mahāmudrā instruction, common to both sūtra and tantra, offers a diversity of techniques to engage in non-mentation or nonconceptual meditation on the nature of the mind. This shared Mahāmudrā instruction become a significant factor by which the Non-tantric Mahāmudrā could be said to accord with tantra.

Amongst Maitrīpāda and his circles, Sahajavajra is perhaps unique in that he makes explicit reference to a doctrine and a practice that possess the features of what would later be termed as "Sūtra Mahāmudrā" even though he did not use this term. In the *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā*, a commentary

---

[59] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun kyab (All-Pervading Knowledge)*, 375.

[60] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, 375.

to his teacher Maitrīpāda's *Tattvadaśaka,* Sahajavajra comments that his Guru's purpose for writing the *Tattvadaśaka* is to "compose brief instructions (*man ngag*) on *prajñāpāramitā* that accord with the principles of Mantra."[61] As the above description indicates, it is construed as a special kind of Prajñāpāramitā or Perfection of Wisdom teaching, one that is complimented by the experiential instructions of a guru. He then goes on to elucidate how his guru's instructio*n*s on Prajñāpāramitā that accord with Mantra differ from Mantra and as well as from the perfections (*pāramitā*s). He points that it greatly differs from the former in that it does not employ the practice of the four "seals" (*mudrās*), lacks the experience and practice of great bliss and divine pride and takes a long time to achieve perfect enlightenment. He is, however, quick to point out that it is superior to the approach of the perfections in that it gives rise to the realization of the union[62] (*zung 'jug*) because of the reliance on the pith instructions of the guru.[63] Thus for Sahajavajra, the role of the pith instructions of a guru[64] who has experienced the truth of the Prajñāpāramitā teachings evidently plays a crucial role in distinguishing his guru's teachings contained in the *Tattvadaśaka* from general Prajñāpāramitā teachings.

During the time of Maitrīpāda and Sahajavajra, the term Sūtra Mahāmudrā was not employed to refer to the teaching as discussed above. However, there is strong indication that the term "Great Madhyamaka" may have been used. Thus, in discussing the paramount importance of the pith

---

[61] Karl Brunnhölzl, *Straight From the Heart: Buddhist Pith Instructions* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007), 142.

[62] The term union in this context has been employed to refer to the absence of the subject-object dualism.

[63] Brunnhölzl, *Straight From the Heart*, 183.

[64] This also explains the importance of guru devotion in this system, as will be addressed later in the dissertation.

instructions of a supreme guru (*bla ma dam pa'i man ngag*), in order to compliment Madhyamaka thought and practice, Sahajavajra refers to Maitrīpāda's verse from the *Tattvadaśaka:*

> When not adorned by the guru's instructions,
> Even the Madhyamaka is merely middling.[65]

In describing Madhyamaka that is not ornamented by a guru's pith instruction as "middling," the presence of a "Great Madhyamaka" ornamented by a guru's pith instruction is implied. According to the Tibetan translator and scholar Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal, Sahajavajra describes it as having three features: "In essence it is the *pāramitās*, it is in accordance with Mantra and its name is Mahāmudrā.[66] Although Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal's description is accurate, the term Mahāmudrā is not employed by Sahajavajra as discussed above.

Thus the [Sūtra] Mahāmudrā accords with tantra, not only because both contain pith instructions that give rise to nondual realization of the mind, but also because of the fact that it shares the pith instructions with tantra as discussed above. This integration of the tantric teachings of the Mahāsiddhas into the general Mahāyāna teachings, so characteristic of Non-tantric or Sūtra Mahāmudrā, appears to be facilitated by the highly syncretic nature of the late Indian Buddhism as observed by many scholars writing on this period, such as Mathes.[67]

In the later Dhakpo Kagyu tradition, establishing Sūtra Mahāmudrā also involves identifying certain Indian Mahāyāna Sūtra texts as the scriptural basis and identifying Indian lineages and instructions as precedence. Jamgön Kongtrul points out that Gampopa himself identifies

---

[65] Sahajavajra, *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā (De kho na nyid bcu pa'i rgya cher 'grel ba)*, rgyud (vi) (51) (Pe ciṅ: Kruṅ go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skruṅ khaṅ, 1994), 487: *bla ma'i ngag gis ma brgyan pa'i / dbu ma'ang 'bring po tsam nyid do /.*

[66] Cited in Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within*, 35.

[67] Mathes, 36.

Maitreya's *Uttaratantra* as the Sūtric text for his Sūtra Mahāmudrā and the *amanasikāra* pith instructions (*upadeśa*, *dgams ngag*) of Maitrīpāda that *accords with Tantra* (*sngags dang rjes su mthun pa*) as the Indian precedence for the practice.[68]

Maitreya's teaching on Buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*, *bde bshegs snying po*), unlike other Mahāyāna texts, addresses concepts and practices that align with Tantra and Mahāmudrā. For example, the concept of innate clear light (*gnyug ma'i 'od gsal*) and the soteriological notion that that the innate mind, present in all beings, is primordially pure is recognized is an important shared feature. Due to the innate purity of the clear light mind, a unique form of meditation consisting of remaining in that state in an uncontrived manner is also a shared feature with tantra and Mahāmudrā. Thus, we read in *Uttaratantra*:

> There is not slightest thing to be eliminated here;
> Nothing needs to be added.
> One sees correctly sees what is real;
> When the real is seen, one is liberated.[69]

Jamgön Kongtrul corroborates that this understanding of the nature of the mind is exactly the same as the one we find in Mahāmudrā teachings, namely that the mind is not only primordially pure of all stains, it is also replete with all enlightened qualities.

The above claim that the *Uttaratantra* is the textual basis for Sūtra Mahāmudrā gains further affirmation by Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal, who writes in his *Blue Annals* that Gampopa recognized

---

[68] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun kyab (All-Pervading Knowledge)*, 375–76.

[69] Cited in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, 375.

*Ratnagotravibhāga* (= *Uttaratantra*) as the text for his Mahāmudrā tradition.[70] The Mahāmudrā tradition considers *Ratnagotravibhāga* and its commentary *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* as such significant textual justifications for the Non-tantric or Sūtra Mahāmudrā that they were taken to be revived by Maitrīpāda after the Indians lost or ignored them for nearly six centuries since their composition by Asaṅga in the fourth century.[71] Thus the Kagyu tradition considers the teachings coming from Maitrīpāda and his circles in India centered on *Ratnagotravibhāga* as very important for establishing the Indian precedence for their Sūtra Mahāmudrā.

### 4.3    Common Instructions for Non-tantric and Tantric Mahāmudrā

In addition to the close connection between Tantric and Non-tantric Mahāmudrā in terms of origin and development as discussed above, there is strong textual evidence suggesting that both share the same set of pith instructions. This is despite the fact that Non-tantric Mahāmudrā does not rely on tantric initiation (*abhiṣeka*) and related practices.

First of all, Mahāmudrā works of Indian tantric adepts of the tenth and eleventh centuries as well as those of Gampopa share a common textual pattern. In their texts, little explicit reference is made to tantric practices in their essential Mahāmudrā instructions that are in the form of short songs (*dohās*) in the case of Indian Mahāsiddhas and in short instructions often termed as the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) in the case of Gampopa.

In Gampopa's *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings*, for instance, the first six instructions are straight Mahāmudrā instructions without any explicit mention of tantric practices. Then in the seventh instruction, a brief reference to the creation stage yoga (*utpattikrama, skyes rim)* and the

---

[70] Cited in Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within*, n. 155.

[71] Mathes, 2.

completion stage yoga (*saṃpannakrama, rdzogs rim*) can be found in which the former is described as a method for eliminating ordinary appearances (*tha mal snang zhen*), while the latter is taught for the purpose of channeling the psychic energy (*rlung*) into the central channel and for the dawning of clear light (*'od gsal*).[72] A brief reference to creation stage and completion stage comes again in the fifteenth instruction of the *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings*.[73] The same pattern of interspersing short tantric practices within otherwise straightforward Mahāmudrā instructions is repeated in almost all of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā works, such as in the series of instructions compiled under the name *Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā*.[74]

In the *Dohās* (Songs of Realization) of the Indian Mahāsiddhas of late Indian Buddhism, we can also observe a similar pattern. Departing from the general tantric teachings, the Mahāsiddhas impart their Mahāmudrā instructions with little or no clear-cut references to tantric teachings. In the *Mahāmudrā-gaṅgāmā* of Tilopa, for example, the entire teaching is a straightforward Mahāmudrā instruction focusing on sustaining the natural state of the mind without any modification. Yet, at the very end, a brief reference is made to the sexual yoga of relying on a physical consort (*karmamudrā*) by explaining that the wisdom of bliss and emptiness (*bde stong ye shes*) will arise by relying on a physical consort.[75] As indicated earlier, Roger Jackson (2011)

---

[72] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Zhal gyi bdud rtsi thun mong ma yin pa (Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 2 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 605.

[73] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 616.

[74] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 118.

[75] Sangyes Nyenpa, *Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha: The Gangama Instructions with Commentary*, trans. David Molk, First Edition edition (Boston: Snow Lion, 2014), 15.

reaffirms this observation by pointing out that in the pith instruction teachings of Mahāsiddhas such as Saraha, Tilopa and Maitrīpāda, we witness a more distinctive presentation of Mahāmudrā, one that prominently focuses on introducing and experiencing the nature of the mind itself with few references to tantric practices.

Little explicit reference to tantra in the Mahāmudrā instructions of the Indian Mahāsiddhas and Gampopa does not in itself prove that these instructions are free from the tantric context. However, the pattern of occasional reference to short tantric practices in the Mahāmudrā instructions of the Mahāsiddhas and Gampopa provides strong textual evidence to show that Non-tantric and Tantric Mahāmudrā may share the same pith instructions. Jamgön Kongtrul indeed confirms this point, at least with respect to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā teachings:

> According to the practice of most of the heart-disciples of Dwags po lha rje [i.e. Gampopa], Mahāmudrā instructions (*phyag chen gdams ngag*) are transmitted to those who have previously received tantric empowerment, thus upholding them as a tradition common to both Sūtrayāna [the Sūtra Vehicle] and Tantrayāna [the Tantra Vehicle].[76]

On the ground of the reasons discussed above, I maintain that shared Mahāmudrā instructions remain one of the most significant ways in which Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, which later came to be referred as Sūtra Mahāmudrā, could be said to *accord* with Tantric Mahāmudrā. That Sūtra Mahāmudrā *accords* with Tantra Mahāmudrā is due to the fact that the former has definite roots in the latter, even though they have differences. Since they both share the same pith instructions, the question of whether a Mahāmudrā pith instruction becomes a Tantric or Non-tantric

---

[76] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun kyab (All-Pervading Knowledge)*, 379. *dwags po thugs sras phal mo che rnams kyi phyag bzhes su dbang bskur sngon la song la phyag chen gyi gdams ngag bstan te mdo sngags mthun mong gi lam srol du bzhed pa yin no /.*

Mahāmudrā instruction depends on the individual practitioner. A tantric practitioner listens to these pith instructions hears and experiences them as Tantric Mahāmudrā teachings. A practitioner without tantric background, experiences them as Non-tantric Mahāmudrā instructions. Based on the understanding that Mahāmudrā pith instructions are shared between Tantric and Non-tantric Mahāmudrā practices, I have reconstructed Gampopa's Sūtra Mahāmudrā, namely by analyzing the shared or common instructions (*gdams ngag mthun mong*) as contained in his Mahāmudrā instructions, referred to as the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*).

### 4.4   Non-tantric Mahāmudrā Contrasted with Tantric Mahāmudrā

Although Non-tantric and Tantric Mahāmudrā share the same sets of pith instructions pertaining to how to sustain the mind in meditation as demonstrated above, we can observe certain distinguishing features between them in Gampopa's writings. David Jackson has observed that later Kagyu scholars such as the sixteenth-century Gampo Chennga Tashi Namgyal assert that the classification of Sūtra and Tantra Mahāmudrā was not to be found in the original teachings of Gampopa.[77] Indeed, as we have noted, the term Sūtra Mahāmudrā does not figure in Gampopa's works. However, there is strong evidence that Gampopa *is* nonetheless making a distinction between a Mahāmudrā that arises out of tantric practice and one that does not, the latter which has been retrospectively called Sūtra Mahāmudrā in his tradition.

For example, Gampopa's *Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā*, a predominantly straightforward Non-tantric Mahāmudrā teaching, suddenly refers to the tantric practice of inner heat yoga (*gtum mo*), a completion stage yoga tantra practice, as the cause of authentic nondual innate mind (*gnyug ma rnal ma*). The text further points out that since the

---

[77] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 25.

experience of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality (*bde gsal mi rtog pa'i nyams*) that the realization of innate mind produces gives rise to the three enlightened bodies (*kāya*), the inner heat becomes the indirect cause of the three *kāya*s.[78] These points suggest that Mahāmudrā practice in the absence of tantric practices such as the inner heat, fails to give rise to the experience of *authentic* nondual innate mind. More significantly, for our purpose of understanding the difference between Gampopa's Tantric and Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, the text continues by asserting that without inner heat, the Mahāmudrā meditation becomes mere wisdom (*shes rab rkyang pa)* and if accompanied by inner heat, it becomes a path where the method and wisdom (*thabs dang shes rab*) are inseparable.[79]

Textual evidence discussed above strongly suggests that Gampopa himself maintains a distinction between Tantric and Non-tantric Mahāmudrā. As such Sapaṇ's critique that Mahāmudrā may not be practiced without receiving tantric empowerment does not apply to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā at the Non-tantric level. That is, Sapaṇ argues that Mahāmudrā may not be practiced without having received the fourth empowerment, referred to as the word empowerment (*tshig dbang*), thus establishing a correspondence between a particular initiation and a particular practice. Not following this sequence, Sapaṇ argues, can lead to the downfall of both oneself and others.[80] Seen from Gampopa's perspective, Sapaṇ's critique results from his failure to appreciate Gampopa's clear stand on the distinction between Non-tantric and Tantric Mahāmudrā. Gampopa does not maintain that a person can engage in Tantric Mahāmudrā practice

---

[78] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 118.

[79] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 118. *gtum mo med na / shes rab rkyang pa yin / yod na thabs shes ya ma bral ba yin /.*

[80] Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, 36.

outside the tantric context such as receiving required initiation. Jamgön Kongtrul clarifies this point by stating that the reputation of Gampopa for giving rise to Mahāmudrā realizations even in the absence of tantric initiations refers to the Sūtra Mahāmudrā and further points out that these instructions primarily come from the Kadampa tradition of Atiśa.[81] The Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje (Mi bskyod rdo rje, 1507–1554) makes a similar point, writing that there is no genuine Mahāmudrā realization without the direct realization of clear light wisdom born out of the three higher initiations. He follows this with a cutting remark that Sūtra Mahāmudrā is nothing but a case of Gampopa and his student Pakmodrupa Dorjé Gyalpo (Phag mo gru pa rdo rje rgyal po, 1110–1170) presenting Atiśa's instructions on the cultivation of calm abiding (*śamatha*) and insight meditation (*vipaśyanā*) with the appellation of Mahāmudrā for disciples of the degenerate times who are attached to ever higher vehicles (*yāna*).[82]

Even in terms of realizations, Jamgön Kongtrul maintains a qualitative difference between Sūtra and Tantra Mahāmudrā. He points out that the realization of the four yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) within the tantric context occurs during the four moments of descending and ascending blisses (*yas 'bab mas brtan gyi dga' ba bzhi*). Within the context of Sūtra Mahāmudrā, the four kinds of bliss experienced are not actual but approximate, or bliss states that accord with the actual tantric bliss states.[83] Thus, the resulting four bliss states from the practice of Sūtra Mahāmudrā is yet another way in which it accords with tantra which indicates an inferior state of realization compared with

---

[81] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun kyab (All-Pervading Knowledge)*, 378. See also James B Apple, "Kadampa Pointing-Out Instructions," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 56 (October 2020): 171–73. on the influence of Kadampa teachings on Gampopa's development of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā.

[82] Cited in Cited in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun kyab (All-Pervading Knowledge)*, 379.

[83] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, 386.

Tantra Mahāmudrā, but a qualitatively not only different from but superior one to general Mahāyāna Sūtra as the phrase "accordant with tantra" suggests.

Supporting the above stand that Gampopa presents Mahāmudrā at both the Non-tantric and Tantric level, David Jackson[84] and Roger Jackson[85] have shown how Gampopa's transmission of Mahāmudrā instructions were given outside the tantric context and how his method is seen by later masters in his Kagyu tradition as a departure from the lineage of his teachers such as Milarepa.

## 5   Our Path Ahead

This dissertation aims to build on the works already undertaken by a number of contemporary scholars by reconstructing Gampopa's Non-tantric or Sūtra Mahāmudrā view, meditation, and conduct, where the latter refers to the contextual or associated practices seen as necessary to give rise to the Mahāmudrā realization. This reconstruction is undertaken based on the early Mahāmudrā and related texts attributed to Gampopa and included within his corpus (*gsung 'bum*) by the Tibetan tradition. The resulting description and analysis of his Non-tantric Mahāmudrā view, contemplative practice, and associated practices is this dissertation's primary contribution, since most contemporary scholars have focused mainly on exploring the historical and doctrinal contexts of Mahāmudrā. Scholars have generally not explored the specifics of Gampopa's view and particular meditation instructions as we do here.

The structure of the dissertation is organized around the traditional rubric of view, meditation, and conduct. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 presents Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view based on his original Mahāmudrā works prior to its systematization by later generations, with the goal

---

[84] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 10–12.

[85] Jackson, "Mahāmudrā," 292.

of understanding Gampopa on his own terms. This chapter is divided into two parts: 1) presentation of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view and 2) analysis of key concepts and issues arising from his Mahāmudrā view. The first part of the chapter has three subsections and discusses the key conceptual constructs that Gampopa employs in his pith instructions, leading to an eventual disclosure of his nonconceptual Mahāmudrā view. The first section explores the doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind (*sems kyi snang tshul gsum*) as the main conceptual categories that Gampopa employs to establish his Mahāmudrā view. In the second section, we examine the way Gampopa expounds the theme of nonduality (*gnyis su med pa*), an important feature of the Mahāmudrā view implicated by the doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind. The final section of part one of this chapter discusses the unity of the coemergent mind and its phenomenal appearances as representing the heart of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view.

After exploring Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā view in the first part of the chapter, the second part of Chapter 2 will analyze some of the implications of key Mahāmudrā doctrines within the context of general Madhyamaka philosophy and praxis. With five subsections, this part of the chapter addresses such issues as the correspondence between Gampopa's doctrine of the unity of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances and the doctrine of the unity of the two truths in the Madhyamaka context; the role and limits of language to express the ultimate; assessment of the Mahāmudrā ultimate view in terms of implicative and non-implicative negation; Buddha nature and Mahāmudrā view; and the syncretic nature of the Mahāmudrā view, employing theories from both the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka traditions.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, elucidates Gampopa's corresponding theory of meditation, focusing on the meditation of nonduality, which he terms as the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*). This yoga involves contemplative techniques to realize and sustain the coemergence,

or union, of the three aspects of appearance of the mind discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation or contemplative practice has four subsections. The first subsection elucidates Gampopa's meditation within the context of the broader Perfection of Wisdom or Prajñāpāramitā tradition. The second subsection explores the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) construed as the union of the coemergent mind itself (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*) and coemergent appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*) as Gampopa's main Mahāmudrā contemplative method. The third subsection explores two forms of Mahāmudrā practice that arise from discussions about the result of Mahāmudrā practice. Finally, the fourth subsection of Chapter 3 undertakes an analysis of key contemplative features that are unique to Mahāmudrā, standing in contrast the general Prajñāpāramitā tradition.

Chapter 4 next broadly treats the topic of conduct. It does so through a consideration of whether Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā requires associated or foundational practices or not. It begins with an examination of the notion of Mahāmudrā as a self-sufficient practice and the critiques of this idea. This will be followed by an elucidation of key foundational practices that Gampopa posits as necessary for Mahāmudrā practice and its realization. The chapter then explores Gampopa's own perspective on the doctrine of the Self-Sufficient White Remedy through discussions on the related notion of gradual and instantaneous Mahāmudrā practitioners. The final subsection explores the practice of guru devotion as one of the main foundational practices for all Mahāmudrā practitioners.

The dissertation concludes with Chapter 5, a short consideration of the implications of Gampopa's Non-Tantric Mahāmudrā view, meditation, and conduct and its possible application for further research in religious studies and phenomenology.

# Chapter 2 – Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: The View

## 1    Reconstructing Gampopa's Mahāmudrā View

This chapter presents Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view based on his original Mahāmudrā works with the goal of understanding Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view on its own terms prior to its systematization by later generations. One of the main challenges of presenting Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view lies in the fact that apart from offering pith instructions implying what may constitute the Mahāmudrā view, meditation, and so forth, he did not systematize the Mahāmudrā tradition into neat categories and topics, a task which was instead undertaken by holders of his lineage only in subsequent generations. One important scheme that his tradition later employed to elucidate his Mahāmudrā tradition was in terms of a tripartite division consisting of "view" (*lta ba*), "meditation" (*sgom pa*) and "conduct" (*spyod pa*). For example, this division can be seen as early as in *Mahāmudrā: The Ultimate Profound Path* (*Phyag rgya chen po zab lam mthar thug*), a Mahāmudrā work by Lama Zhang, a student of Gompa Tsultrim Nyingpo, one of Gampopa's direct disciples, both of whom we encountered already in the previous chapter.[86] Unlike in the general Sūtra Vehicle, or Sūtrayāna, view and meditation in Mahāmudrā are so inextricably linked that one immediately implicates the other so that to speak of them separately is inherently misleading. For example, the Mahāmudrā view helps to directly induce meditation by circumventing conceptual thought, resulting in a nondual cognitive state. The meditative state in turn helps to induce this view, which is understood not as a conceptual propositional cognition or statement but as a nonconceptual direct realization. In fact, as we shall see in this chapter, the

---

[86] Zhang Brtson 'grus grags, "Phyag rgya chen po lam zab mthar thug (Mahāmudrā: The Ultimate Profound Path)," in *Mnyam med bka' brgyud lugs kyi phag rgya chen po dang 'brel ba'i chos skor*, vol. 5, Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus pod phreng (Delhi: Institute of Tibetan Classics, 2008), 49–78.

Mahāmudrā view in the ultimate sense refers specifically to the view as sustained in meditative equipoise and is not to be understood as a conceptual propositional cognition or statement.

Due to the immediacy of the relationship between the view and the meditation, presenting them separately is something of an artificial construct—a fact of which Gampopa was likely keenly aware and which probably accounts for his not presenting them separately. This chapter nevertheless constitutes an attempt to reconstruct Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view based on his pith instructions, taking in to account that this view must always be understood as what is sustained in meditative practice and not as a philosophical position. In the third chapter, then, I construct Gampopa's Mahāmudrā contemplative practice based on the same pith instructions, bearing in mind again that the practice can never strictly be separated from the view.

As for conduct, it is of two types: conduct that is prescribed in the form of foundational practices so as to gain Mahāmudrā realization and conduct that is prescribed after realizing the Mahāmudrā view. The latter is closely linked with view and meditation—it refers to practices that simply enhance (*bogs 'don pa*) both view and meditation. Such practices, which often appear as outlandish to others, are undertaken while remaining in a state of nonduality in which there is no concept of self and others. [87] These practices then further enhance or stabilize one's nondual Mahāmudrā meditation. Describing such a conduct, often termed as crazy training (*smyon pa'i gtul zhugs*), Lama Zhang writes:

> These six modes of consciousness, expressing themselves freely,
> Should be conjoined with the realization of nonduality;
> Without intending to do this or not do that,

---

[87] For more on Lama Zhang and the practices of "crazy wisdom," see David M. DiValerio, *The Holy Madmen of Tibet* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). See also Carl Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence: Lama Zhang and the Politics of Charisma in Twelfth-Century Tibet*, *Vision and Violence* (Brill, 2012).

Conduct should be allowed to flow freely.[88]

The passage above thus refers to a style of often unconventional behavior that one assumes from the ground of nondual wisdom, i.e., while remaining in meditation pertaining to the ultimate nature of the mind, the Mahāmudrā state. This category of conduct will not be elucidated in this dissertation for two reasons. First, Gampopa makes few references to this type of conduct, even though his later follows like Lama Zhang become associated with it. Second, addressing this type of conduct will add further confusion to the question of whether Mahāmudrā practice requires prior training in foundational practices such as compassion, an issue that has generated heated polemical debates both among traditional and contemporary scholars. This dissertation does take up this second question in the fourth chapter, which is dedicated to exploring the associated or foundational practices such as meditation on compassion and observance of *karma* that Gampopa deems necessary for Mahāmudrā practice.

Before turning to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, let us briefly consider some of the challenges the we face, including a brief discussion of the broader Buddhist doctrinal and soteriological contexts in which Gampopa as a Mahāyāna practitioner must operate while presenting his Mahāmudrā view. In approaching Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, it is tempting to understand it within the context of traditional Indo-Tibetan doxographical classifications, particularly in terms of the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka schools to which it bears strong resemblances. Such an approach, however, is flawed for one main reason: as a tradition that claims to reveal the meaning of the ultimate reality nonconceptually, Gampopa's Mahāmudrā recognizes the limitation of

---

[88] Zhang Brtson 'grus grags, "Zab lam mthar thug (Final Profound Path)," 63–64. *tshogs drug rang spyad lhug pa 'di / gnyis med rtogs pas zin byas la / 'di bya 'di mi bya med par / spyod lam gang dgar btang bar bya /.*

language and propositional statements to describe the ultimate. Trying to understand it in terms of

philosophical positions is problematic.

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view refers to the direct realization or experience of the ultimate

nature of the mind. As such it aims to circumvent concepts to point to and bring about an

experience of ultimate reality beyond thought and language. Thus, in place of complex

propositional statements regarding the ultimate, Gampopa's presentation of the Mahāmudrā view

mainly consists of a series of pith instructions (*dgams ngag*) that directly point to the ultimate as

opposed to describing it, a pedagogical technique Gampopa and his followers term the "pointing-

out instruction" (*ngo sprod*).[89] Lama Zhang, for example, explains that this process of pointing to

the ultimate can be likened to the act of pointing one's finger to direct a viewer to see the moon:

> Even for the Buddhas, it is not possible to perceive,
> The definitive meaning of the ultimate mode of being to be "this."
> Even more so, my statement does not encompass it;
> It is realized in the same manner in which the finger points to the moon.[90]

In the passage above, Lama Zhang describes the Mahāmudrā view as beyond linguistic or

conceptual description. Although it can be pointed to through words, the words are not themselves

the ultimate. This is similar to the way in which the finger pointing to the moon is itself not the

moon. In the final analysis, the Mahāmudrā view refers to what is sustained directly in meditative

equipoise and not a conceptual propositional cognition or statement. The pith instructions are

---

[89] See Apple, "Kadampa Pointing-Out Instructions," 171–173. for the Kadampa precedents for Gampopa's tradition of non-tantric pointing-out instructions.

[90] Zhang Brtson 'grus grags, "Zab lam mthar thug (Final Profound Path)," 51: *gnas lugs nges don 'di yin zhes bya ba / thub pas kyang ni gzigs pa yod mi srid / kho bos smras pa des kyang mi dpog ste / mdzub mos zla ba mtshon pa bzhin du rtogs /.*

meant to circumvent subject/object dualism as well as conceptual thoughts so that the direct experience of the ultimate will dawn. This is the work of the pointing-out instructions.

It is perhaps for these reasons that Gampopa, in his Mahāmudrā works, refrains from the use of the classificatory system of the two truths (*satyadvaya, bden pa gnyis*), a rubric widely employed by the Madhyamaka tradition.[91] He also does not employ the category of the three natures (*trisvabhāva, rang bzhin gsum, mtshan nyid gsum*) as used by the Yogācāra tradition.[92] Due to these reasons, the first part of this chapter presents Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view using only the categories and approaches employed by Gampopa. This will be followed by a section exploring the Mahāmudrā view through the lenses of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools in an effort to see where his ideas intersect with these two well-known schools of philosophy.

Another important feature of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view that we should keep in mind at the outset is its sole focus on establishing the ultimate nature of the mind as opposed to the ultimate nature of extramental phenomena as we find in the Madhyamaka tradition. The Mahāmudrā claim is that when the ultimate nature of the mind is understood, the nature of all phenomena will also be understood, for they are nothing but phenomenal appearances (*snang ba*), manifestations (*sprul pa*), or display (*rol pa*) of the mind. Mind and its phenomenal appearances are nondifferent in the way the ocean and its waves or the sun and its radiance are nondifferent, thus pointing to nonduality (*gnyis med pa*) as the fundamental nature of the mind.

---

[91] For an overview of the two truths in Indian Madhyamaka, see Sonam Thakchoe, "The Theory of Two Truths in India," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/twotruths-india. For an investigation of later controversies in Tibet, see Sonam Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007).

[92] Cf. Mario D'Amato, "Three Natures, Three Stages: An Interpretation of the Yogācāra Trisvabhāva-Theory," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 185–207.

Yet another vital point for understanding Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view is to recognize that the classification system of the two truths is implied, even though the terms to designate the two truths themselves are different from what is found in Madhyamaka texts. For example, the description of the ultimate nature of the mind as non-arising (*skyes ba med pa*) closely mirrors the description of ultimate reality in the Madhyamaka tradition. To take just one example for now, the description of phenomenal appearances of the mind (*sems kyi snang ba*) mirrors the description of conventional reality in the Madhyamaka context, while the description of mind-itself resembles the description of ultimate reality in the Madhyamaka context. Additionally, in a manner similar to the Madhyamaka presentation of the relationship between the two truths, Gampopa maintains that although the ultimate nature of the mind, the *dharmakāya*, is without arising (*skye ba med pa*) and thus free from the extreme of eternalism (*rtag mtha'*), it is also free from the extreme of annihilation (*chad mtha'*) because its appearance (*snang ba*), manifestation (*sprul pa*), or display (*rol pa*) is unceasing. Furthermore, since phenomenal appearances are not distinct from the mind, the unity of the two truths is directly introduced in the Mahāmudrā tradition, a position that can be discovered in Nāgārjuna's writings also. And, as we shall see later in this chapter, unity (*zung 'jug*) is a key feature of the Mahāmudrā tradition.

Finally, it is also important to keep in the background the overall Mahāyāna doctrinal and soteriological contexts in which Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view and meditation operate, even though they are rarely mentioned in the Mahāmudrā pith instructions themselves. These contexts include reflections on the impermanence of life, the importance of guru devotion, and the practice of *bodhicitta*, i.e., the altruistic intention to achieve full awakening to liberate all sentient beings from their suffering. Although absent in his exclusively Mahāmudrā works, Gampopa explicitly mentions these reflections and practices in his other texts combining the Kadampa and the

Mahāmudrā traditions. For this reason, Gampopa's overall tradition came to be described as the converging of the rivers of the Kadampa and Mahāmudrā traditions (*'bka' phyag chu bo zung 'brel*). The best examples of the convergence of these two traditions are his *magnum opus*, the *Ornament of Liberation,* and his cycle of texts known as the Congregational Teachings (*tshogs chos*)*,* which are approximate transcripts of Gampopa's oral teachings composed by his disciples*.* Both these works combine Mahāmudrā pith instructions with more recognizable Mahāyāna foundational doctrines and practices.

The general Mahāyāna doctrinal and soteriological context will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. However, for the purposes of this current chapter on Mahāmudrā view, perhaps the most effective method to demonstrate the ways in which Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition incorporates Mahāyāna doctrinal and soteriological contexts, including implicit reference to the two truths and their unity, is to quote directly from his *Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching*:

> Stirred by the iron whip of being mindful that there is no time to waste in life, one has to entrust oneself to the gurus and the three jewels. Why? Life is impermanent. Even if someone occasionally lives long, there is not a lot of extra time, and without a lama, there is no guide to show the path. All the Buddhas of the three times became buddhas by relying on lamas—hence it is important to rely on a lama. It is said, "Prior to there being a lama, Buddhas do not exist even in name." Thus [Gampopa] said that it was very important to rely on and listen to a lama. He said that we also have to rely on the three jewels as objects of refuge. He said that, for us dharma practitioners, there is no refuge other than the jewels, and that if there is genuine reliance on the three jewels, there is no doubt that all the wishes of this life and next lives will be fulfilled.[93]

---

[93] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Tshogs chos mu tik phreng ba," in *Mnyam med bka' brgyud lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po dang 'brel ba'i chos skor*, vol. 5, Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus (New Delhi: Institute of Tibetan Classics, 2008), 9: *tshe la long med rgyud la dran pa'i lcag gis bskul zhing / bla ma dang dkon mchog la blo 'gel ba cig dgos / de cis shes na tshe mi rtag par 'dug / brgya la tshe ring yang sdod long chen po mi 'dug tsa na bla ma min pa lam ston mkhan mi 'dug*

Here, Gampopa explicitly mentions the importance of meditation on impermanence and death

and the necessity of relying on a qualified guru. Other foundational practices such as meditation

on suffering within *saṃsāra* and the intent to gain freedom from it, meditation on compassion and

the wisdom of emptiness are all implicit here for they come as instructions (*gdams ngag*) of the

guru as spelled out in the *Ornament of Liberation*. Reading Gampopa across his works thus

solidifies our understanding that his Mahāmudrā tradition is clearly grounded in such foundational

Mahāyāna practices as these.

After mentioning some of these important elements of the Buddhist path such as the reliance

on a guru and so forth, a couple of lines down in the same text, Gampopa points to the Mahāmudrā

view of the union of mind and phenomenal appearances.

> Looking at oneself, [one finds that] that one's mind-itself appears diversely. One's
> mind arises diversely. Appearing and arising are both conceptual thoughts of the
> mind. Those very thoughts are my mind-itself. As such, the *dharmakāya* itself,
> which arises from my mind-itself, arises as diversity.[94]

Here in this passage, we see Gampopa pointing to the Mahāmudrā view which holds that all

appearances are established as being of the nature of conceptual thought (*rtog pa*). Thoughts in

turn are not distinct from the mind-itself (*sems nyid*), which is itself the empty, luminous

---

*/ dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyang bla ma la brten nas sangs rgyas pa yin pas bla ma la bsten pa gal che / bla ma med pa'i sngon rol na / sangs rgyas bya ba'i ming yang med / ces gsungs / des na bla ma bsten cing ci gsung nyan pa 'di gal che'o gsung / skyabs gnas dkon mchog gsum la re dgos pa yin / 'o skol chos pa la dkon mchog min pa'i skyabs gnas med / dkon mchog la blo gsha' mar 'khel ba yin na / tshe 'di phyi'i dgos 'dod thams cad 'byung ba la the tshom ma mchis gsung /.*

[94] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 9: *nga nyid rang la bltas pas rang gi sems nyid sna tshogs su snang / rang sems sna tshogs su shar / snang shar gnyis ka rang gi sems kyi rtog pa yin/ rtog pa de nyid rang gi sems nyid yin / de bzhin du yin pas rang gi sems nyid las skyes pas chos nyid de nyid sna tshogs su shar ba yin /.*

*dharmakāya,* as we demonstrate in this chapter. In other words, thoughts are not distinct from the

mind-itself, or the nature of the mind, for the mind arises with diverse appearances whose nature

is conceptual thought. This thereby establishes the nonduality or union of mind-itself and

appearances. And this nonduality is the Mahāmudrā view.

The nonduality of mind and its appearances as the Mahāmudrā view is further clarified after

a few more lines in the same text. Gampopa states that although the ultimate nature of the mind is

empty, its play or display (*rol pa*)—a term that refers to the phenomenal appearances of the mind—

is unceasing. Gampopa thus implies that his Mahāmudrā view is free of both the extremes of

existence and non-existence, pointing to a unique conception of the middle way (Madhyamaka)

philosophy:

> Establish the essence (*rang bzhin*) of the mind as devoid of arising. There is no
> grasping even as a mere dream or an illusion. Since intrinsic awareness (*rig pa*)
> manifests without limitation, establish the display (*rol pa*) of the mind as unceasing.
> Regarding the nature of the mind, its non-arising [nature] and its unceasing
> [display] are not dualistic, since they exist in the manner of the ocean and its waves.
> Establish the characteristic of the mind as nondual.[95]

Although Gampopa does not use the category of the two truths in his Mahāmudrā writings,

this passage provides strong evidence to support the claim that he gestures toward an implied

understanding of the two truths in his description of the nature of the mind and the relationship

between mind and its appearances. In fact, the term appearance (*snang ba*) is employed by the

---

[95] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 10-11: *sems kyi rang bzhin ma skyes par gtan la phebs / rmi lam sgyu ma tsam du'ang 'dzin pa med / rig pa phyogs med du shar nas 'dug pas / sems kyi rol pa ma 'gags par gtan la phebs / sems kyi ngo bo la ma skyes mi 'gags par gnyis su mi 'jug ste / rgya mtsho dang rlabs lta bu 'dug pas / sems kyi mtshan nyid gnyis med du gtan la 'bebs /.*

Madhyamaka tradition to refer to conventional reality when it construes the two truths in terms of the union of emptiness and appearance (*snang stong dbyer med*).

The implication of the Mahāmudrā view of the nonduality of mind and its appearances for Buddhist meditation and soteriology deserves some brief attention. First, unlike the general Sūtra Vehicle of the Mahāyāna, where cultivation of the philosophical view or insight (*vipaśyanā, lhag mthong*) and nonconceptual calm abiding (*śamatha, zhi gnas*) are undertaken sequentially, the Mahāmudrā view is meant to cut through concepts directly to induce a nondual meditative state. Thus, Mahāmudrā meditation is nothing but a method of sustaining the view nonconceptually, that is, directly.

The Mahāmudrā view of the nonduality of the mind and its appearances additionally points to its unique method of gaining freedom from mental defilements (*kleśa, nyon mongs*). In the Sūtra Vehicle of the Mahāyāna, one applies antidotes such as loving kindness and wisdom of emptiness to eliminate mental defilements such as hatred. In the Tantra Vehicle, or Vajrayāna, one engages in the path of transformation by seeing sentient beings as divine. In contrast to these two methods of dealing with defilements, Mahāmudrā employs the very defilements so that they are taken as the path (*lam du slong ba*). This method of liberating defilements, also termed as self-liberation (*rang grol*) by Gampopa's tradition, is possible because defilements, when understood as phenomenal appearances, are not different from the mind-itself. In other words, once the nonduality of mind and its appearances is realized in experience, defilements too arise as ornaments (*rgyan*) or a conducive factors sustaining the nondual meditative state. Thus, in a different section of the *Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching*, after stressing the importance of the practice of renunciation and compassion and further warning that abandoning the welfare of sentient beings takes one away from Mahāyāna practice and the grace of gurus,

Gampopa presents the distinction between the Vajrayāna and Mahāmudrā approaches of purifying

with defilements:

> In order to engage in authentic dharma practice, it is important to turn one's mind
> away from attachments to this world and practice loving kindness, compassion, and
> *bodhicitta*… If one abandons sentient beings, one falls from the Mahāyāna path and
> the grace of spiritual friends; this is a great downfall. It is inappropriate to be selfish
> and have enemies. In terms of the Secret Mantra practice, all beings are gods and
> goddesses. How is it appropriate to generate defilements (*nyon mongs*) towards
> divine beings? In terms of the Mahāmudrā or the Great Perfection [rDzogs pa chen
> po] tradition, the appearances of one's mind are the radiance or the ornament
> (*rgyan*) or the great display of the ultimate *dharmakāya*. How is it appropriate to
> generate defilements toward the radiance or the ornament of the *dharmakāya* of
> one's own mind?[96]

The term *dharmakāya*, as will be discussed in this chapter, refers to the ultimate nature of the mind

which, according to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, is the union of emptiness and clarity of the mind.

According to Gampopa, when one realizes or experiences this ultimate state, one realizes that all

phenomenal appearances, including defilements, arise from this state and are therefore

nondifferent from it. The practice of gaining freedom from defilements simply involves realizing

them as its own radiance and hence as nondifferent from it. This passage also shows how Gampopa

understands his Mahāmudrā teachings as aligning in important respects with the Great Perfection

teachings of the Nyingma tradition.

---

[96] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 12: *chos gsha' ma cig byed pa la 'jig rten 'di las blo log nas
byams pa dang snying rje byang chub kyi sems bsgom pa gal che /...sems can blos spangs na theg
pa chen po'i chos dang dge ba'i bshes gnyen gnyis dang bral ba yin pas nyes pa che / rang 'dod
dang dgra zin du byar mi rung la / gsang sngags pa'i dbang du byas na yang sems can thams cad
lha dang lha mo'i rang bzhin yin pas / lha la nyon mongs pa skyer ga la rung / phyag rgya chen
po'am rdzogs pa chen po'i dbang du byas na yang / rang sems snang ba don dam chos sku'i 'od
dam / rgyan nam che ba'i rol pa yin pas / rang sems chos sku'i 'od dam rgyan la sogs la nyon
mongs pa skye ga na rung /.*

## 1.1    Structure of the Chapter

Having briefly summarized some of the challenges of presenting Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, including the broader doctrinal and soteriological context[97] in which we must place it for better comprehension, we will now move to the process of elucidating Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view through categories and approaches he employs. Our exploration will proceed in two stages. First, we will present Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view on its own terms. Following that, we present an analysis of key concepts and issues arising from that view.

In the first part, there are three subsections, which discuss the key conceptual constructs that Gampopa employs in his pith instructions, leading to an eventual disclosure of his Mahāmudrā view. The first subsection elucidates the doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind (*sems kyi snang tshul gsum*) as one of the main conceptual categories that Gampopa employs to point to the Mahāmudrā view. The three aspects of appearance of the mind are 1) the nature (*ngo bo*) of the mind, referring to its clarity aspect; 2) the essence (*rang bzhin*) of the mind, referring to its emptiness aspect; and 3) the characteristic (*mtshan nyid*) of the mind, referring to the diversity of the mind's appearances and/or thoughts. As the phrase "aspects of appearance of the mind" indicates, Gampopa demonstrates that although the three aspects "appear" to be distinct, they are, in the final analysis, nondifferent, pointing to their nonduality as a primordial feature the mind.

In the second subsection of this first part, we demonstrate how Gampopa builds upon the theme of nonduality of the mind established through the doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind by using another related doctrine he terms the unity of the coemergent mind (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa)* and coemergent appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*). Referring to the

---

[97] This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, "Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: The Conduct."

former as the *dharmakāya* (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku*) and to the later as the light rays of the *dharmakāya* (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos ku'i 'od*), Gampopa offers a range of pith instructions to establish the nonduality of the coemergent mind—which, as we shall see, incorporates both the emptiness and clarity aspect of the mind—and phenomenal appearances (*sems dang sems kyi snang ba*). It is noteworthy that Gampopa sometimes equates phenomenal appearance with thought, implying that phenomenal appearances perceived in a dualistic structure are necessarily conceptual in nature, a position we have already encounter just above. Phenomenal appearances in turn do not refer to any extramental objects, as they are revealed to be nondifferent from the mind.

Based on the refutation of external objects, Gampopa next negates the existence of an independent subject since the two are mutually implicated, thus pointing to the existence of a mind that is nondual (*gnyis su med pa*). This discussion of the nonduality of the coemergent mind and phenomenal appearances leads to Gampopa's final disclosure that the coemergent mind (*lhan cig skyes pa'i sems*) that is the union of clarity and emptiness free from dualistic structure *is* the Mahāmudrā view. This coemergent mind in turn is variously termed the innate mind (*gnyug sems*), the truth body (*dharmakāya, chos sku*), the ordinary mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), and the mind-itself (*sems nyid*).

Having established coemergent or the innate mind as the union of clarity and emptiness of the mind, section III of Part I will provide a more detailed explanation of the unity of the coemergent mind and its phenomenal appearances through which Gampopa argues that even conceptual appearances, i.e., the characteristic of the mind, are not distinct from the innate mind. This section reaffirms that Gampopa's ultimate view of reality, i.e., Mahāmudrā, refers to one's own innate mind in which the three aspects of appearance of the mind are in unity. This section will also

discuss the manner in which Gampopa understands the innate mind as the Mahāmudrā view which refers to the direct perception of the ultimate reality of the mind. He argues that conceptual understanding of emptiness is simply a wrong understanding of the absolute, warning that such a view is nihilistic as it is a mere abstraction or a concept that negates another concept, the concept of existence.

After discussing the Mahāmudrā view in first part of this chapter, the second part will analyze some of the implications of key Mahāmudrā doctrines within the context of general Madhyamaka philosophy and praxis. Thus, section I of Part II will argue that Gampopa's doctrine of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances and their unity highly resonates with the doctrine of the two truths and their union in the Madhyamaka context. The main distinction is that in contrast to the Madhyamaka tradition, the Mahāmudrā tradition provides a unique method of simultaneously understanding and experiencing the two truths. Section II of Part II will demonstrate the syncretic nature of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition, arguing that he employs elements of both the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka tradition, such as establishing the nonduality of the mind using hermeneutical methods similar to the Yogācāra tradition, followed by establishing the nondual mind as emptiness in accordance with the Madhyamaka tradition. Section III of Part II will discuss the ontological status of the ultimate, as well as the epistemic role and limits of language to express the ultimate in the Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka traditions, arguing that neither tradition makes any ontological commitment with regard to the ultimate and both see language as insufficient to describe it. Section IV of part II will discuss the Mahāmudrā view in terms of implicative and non-implicative negation, arguing that the Mahāmudrā tradition differs from the Madhyamaka tradition as in that the negation in the description of the ultimate amounts to an implicative form of negation. Finally, section V of part II will elucidate the close relationship between the concept of Buddha

nature taught in Maitreya's *Uttaratantra* with Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view. It will also argue that the two bear striking parallels in terms of their cataphatic conception of the ultimate and its soteriological significance based on the assertion that Buddha nature or the innate mind is primordially pure, i.e. untainted by defilements.

## 2    The Three Aspects of Appearance of the Mind

One of the most fundamental ways in which Gampopa introduces the Mahāmudrā view is through his doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind (*sems kyi snang tshul gsum*): the aspect of clarity (*gsal ba*), the aspect of the non-arising of the mind (*skye ba med pa*), i.e., the emptiness of the mind, and the aspect of the characteristic of the mind (*mtshan nyid*), i.e., the phenomenal appearances (*snang ba*) of the mind. As the phrase "aspects of appearance" (*snang tshul*) implies, Gampopa employs the apparent distinction in the three aspects of the mind as a heuristic device only to point to their nonduality in the final disclosure. To identify and define the three aspects of the mind, Gampopa writes:

> Again, the Rinpoche spoke: The [three aspects of appearance of the mind] are essence (*rang bzhin*), nature (*ngo bo*), and characteristic (*mtshan nyid*). With regard to the essence, it refers to the unconditioned primordial purity that naturally pervades all *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. With regard to the nature of the mind (*ngo bo*), it refers to the unborn and unceasing awareness. With regard to the characteristic of the mind, it refers to the diversity of appearances that arise due to [karmic] imprints.[98]

---

[98] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 54: *yang rin po che'i zhal nas / sems kyi rang bzhin / ngo bo / mtshan nyid gsum yin / sems kyi rang bzhin bya ba / rang bzhin gyis dag pa / 'khor 'das thams cad la khyab pa'i 'dus ma byas de yin no / sems kyi ngo bo bya ba / rig pa skye 'gag med pa de yin no / sems kyi mtshan nyid bya ba/ bag chags kyi gzugs brnyan sna tshogs su snang ba 'di yin no /.*

In the above passage, Gampopa defines the aspects of the mind in the following manner: The essence aspect of the mind refers to its ultimate non-arising nature (*skye ba med pa*), i.e., its emptiness; the nature aspect of the mind refers to its clarity (*gsal ba*); and the characteristic aspect of the mind refers to the diverse conceptual thoughts (*gzugs brnyan sna tshogs su snang ba*) to which the mind may stray.[99] Let us look more closely at each of these aspects in turn according to the order in which Gampopa explains them in his *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings*.

## 2.1   Clarity: The Nature Aspect of the Mind

Elaborating on the nature of the mind, Gampopa states that it refers to the mind's clarity, i.e., the present moment awareness, which is lucid and limpid (*sal le sing nge ba*) and accessible in the gap when the present thought has ceased and the next thought is yet to arise. He likens this lucidity and clarity of nonconceptual awareness to the perceptual experience of gazing at a cloudless autumn sky when the wintry dust is yet to arise and the clouds and haze of the summer have passed.

> As for the nature of the mind, it is like the lucidity and limpidity (*sal le sing nge ba*) that arises when one gazes at the full autumn moon with a sky free of clouds, the storms of winter having not yet arisen, and the mists and clouds of summer having disappeared. Similarly, there is a lucidity and limpidity of one's own awareness when the past thought has ceased and the future thought has yet to arise.[100]

Gazing into the empty sky or space is often taught as a key method of Mahāmudrā meditation, where the practitioner blends (*bsre ba*) their clear, lucid internal mind with the clear, lucid external

---

[99] For a brief discussion on the three aspects of appearance of the mind, see Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Introduction to the Root of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 127–28.

[100] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings (2000, vol. 2)," 630: *de yang sems kyi ngo bo ni / dper na ston zla 'bring po nya'i nyin par / nam mkha' sprin med pa dgun gyi tshub ma ni ma langs pa / dbyar gyi na bun dang sprin yal ba la bltas pa'i dus su sal le sing nge ba zhig 'ong / de bzhin du rang gi shes pa rnam par rtog pa snga ma ni 'gags / phyi ma ni ma skyes pa'i dus der sal le sing nge ba de yin no /.*

sky to experience and sustain nondual mind (*gnyis med shes pa*) in meditation. As the above

passage makes clear, the nature of the mind refers to the basic clarity of the mind (*gsal cha*). By

emphasizing the clear and limpid (*sal le sing nge*) nature of this clarity, Gampopa indicates that

this basic clarity is also nonconceptual, since the qualities of being clear and limpid are associated

with perceptual and not conceptual cognitive states. The passage above also points to the manner

in which the meditator may experience the mind's clarity, namely in the gap between thoughts.

The passage directs the meditator to attend to present moment awareness when the past thought

has ceased and the next thought is yet to arise, indicating that this is a method for experiencing the

clarity which is the nature of the mind.

## 2.2   Diversity: The Characteristic Aspect of the Mind

Having explained the nature aspect of the mind in terms of its clarity, Gampopa now explains

that the characteristic aspect of the mind refers to the diversity of thoughts when the mind gets

distracted from its natural nonconceptual clarity or present moment awareness that can be

experienced, as explained above, in the gap between thoughts.

> The characteristic of the mind refers to the proliferation of diverse thoughts such as happiness and unhappiness, existence and non-existence, and so forth, when the [mind] does not dwell in its essence [i.e., its basic nonconceptual clarity].[101]

As this definition makes clear, Gampopa, like other Buddhist systems, considers negative emotions

to be conceptual in nature. This appears to be based on the Buddhist understanding that when we

analyze them carefully, emotions come down to be thoughts which are produced due to the force

of karmic imprints, as Gampopa mentioned earlier, Using the term "characteristic" to define

---

[101] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 630: *sems kyi tshan nyid ni / de'i ngang la mi gnas par dga' mi dga' dang yin min la sogs pa'i rnam rtog sna tshogs su 'phro ba de yin no /.*

thoughts or phenomenal appearances perhaps alludes to the fact that in situations when we are unable to access the subtle nonconceptual mind (which is most of the time) thoughts help to characterize or define the mind. In other words, thoughts help us to experience or perceive our mind if we are able to realize them as nondifferent from the natural, nonconceptual state of the mind. This is why, as we shall see, far from seeing thoughts or emotions as something to be suppressed or eliminated, Gampopa counsels meditators to actively employ them to experience the nature or the clarity of the mind.

## 2.3   Non-Arising: The Essence Aspect of the Mind

With respect to the essence aspect of the mind, Gampopa presents it as consisting in the non-arising or emptiness of the mind. Although the Mahāmudrā tradition does not prescribe extensive scholastic training in explaining the ultimate nature of the mind, it does employ brief analysis to reveal that the mind lacks inherent arising, cessation, or abiding (*skye 'gags gnas gsum*)—a process sometimes also construed as analyzing the mind in terms of its origin, abiding, and going (*'byung gnas 'gro gsum*). Thus, Gampopa explains:

> As for the essence of the mind, since it has never arisen in the first place, never abided in the middle, and never ceased in the end, it is said to be the absence of the trio of arising, cessation, and abiding.[102]

According to this analysis, performed more extensively in Madhyamaka philosophy, the mind lacks true arising (*skyes pa*). If the mind were to have true or inherent arising, it logically would amount to stating that mind arises without causes and conditions. In that case, the state of arising would be permanent, leading to the extreme of permanence. If the mind were permanent, then the

---

[102] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 630: *sems kyi rang bzhin ni / dang po skye ma myong / bar du gnas ma myong / tha mar 'gag ma myong ste / skye 'gag gnas gsum dang bral ba de yin gsung /.*

notion of its cessation (*'gags pa*) could not be sustained. If there were true or inherent cessation, then that would amount to a permanent state and hence there could be no arising, leading to an extreme nihilistic position.[103] Without arising and cessation, the notion of abiding in the middle also cannot be sustained since the notion of the "middle" requires the existence of the extremes of cessation and permanence.[104] Gampopa's use of the terms and methods to establish the ultimate nature of phenomena thus closely resembles the Madhyamaka tradition, although in his Mahāmudrā works Gampopa strictly focuses on the ultimate nature of the mind, as opposed to the ultimate nature of objects.

## 3    The Unity of the Three Aspects of Appearance of the Mind

Having discussed Gampopa's presentation of the three aspects of appearance of the mind, let us now look at how he construes them as nondual. In his *Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions on Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization*, he refers to the three different aspects of the mind collectively as coemergent mind-itself (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*):

> This coemergent mind-itself:
> It is the non-arising *dharmakāya*
> It is the unceasing clarity that is experienced;
> It is characterized by its diversity of appearances.
> These, in turn, are reflections of karmic imprints.[105]

---

[103] For a discussion on the Madhyamaka doctrine of the middle way as freedom from the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism, see David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981), 1.

[104] For Nāgārjuna's analysis on the lack of arising, abiding, and cessation, see Nāgārjuna, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: The Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, trans. Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, Classics of Indian Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013), 71-78.

[105] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag thog babs dang mgur 'bum rnams (Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi*

It is worth noting that Gampopa defines the characteristic of the mind as referring to both thoughts as well as appearances (*snang ba*). In this verse, he refers to appearances as being the characteristic of the mind, whereas in earlier verses he refers to thoughts as the characteristic of the mind. In using these two terms (thought and appearance) interchangeably, Gampopa appears to point that phenomenal appearances are necessarily conceptual in nature. Additionally, in maintaining that thoughts and appearances arise due to karmic imprints, Gampopa points to their temporary and illusory nature, thus describing them as similar to reflections. Furthermore, in construing the characteristic of the mind, the third aspect, as manifesting or arising due to the force of karmic imprints (*vāsanā, bag chags*), he is implying that the first two aspects of the mind are *not* the result of karmic imprints and are primordially pure. As we shall see, realizing the Mahāmudrā state involves realizing the clarity aspect and the emptiness aspect of the mind, both of which are primordially pure, and their union.

Further pointing out the manner in which the three aspects of the mind are nondifferent, referring to three modes or appearances of one and the same mind, Gampopa states in his *Quintessence of Mahāmudrā*:

> That Mahāmudrā, one's own mind:
> In terms of its essence, it is the primordial *dharmakāya*;
> In terms of its characteristic, it is the diversity of appearances;
> In terms of its nature, it is devoid of arising and ceasing;
> In terms of its ultimate reality, it is luminous emptiness;
> In terms of its experience, it is an unceasing continuum;
> In terms of its result, it is devoid of doubt and expectation.[106]

---

*gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 20: *sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa 'di / skye ba med pa chos kyi sku / gsal la ma 'gags nyams su myong / sna tshogs snang ba'i mtshan nyid de / de yang bag chags gzugs brnyan lags /.*

[106] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 100: *rang sems phyag rgya chen po de / rang bzhin ye nas chos sku*

Within the context of his doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind, Gampopa comes to the conclusion that the Mahāmudrā or the ultimate view refers to one's own mind in which the three aspects of appearance of the mind (nature, essence, and characteristic) are nondifferent and therefore nondual. Since one's own mind, i.e., the innate mind, is itself Mahāmudrā (*rang sems phyag rgya chen po*), this implies that the view in this context does not refer to an object of knowledge construed dualistically. Rather, to speak of the Mahāmudrā view is to refer instead to the nondual awareness in which dualistic structures have collapsed. Gampopa's use of the term luminous emptiness (*'od gsal stong pa nyid*) to refer to the ultimate reality seems to further support our claim that the view here refers to the unity of the clarity and emptiness. The term luminous emptiness, also employed in the Tantra Vehicle,[107] points to the close relationship between the two systems, perhaps underscoring the origination of Mahāmudrā within a tantric context. The passage above also reveals that the term Mahāmudrā does not only refer to the pith instructions that seek to disclose the ultimate; it is the ultimate view itself, which we have seen is the innate mind-itself.

## 3.1    The Unity of Coemergent Mind And Coemergent Appearances

Although Gampopa employs the doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind and their unity to point to the ultimate nature of the mind, he sometimes construes the unity of the ultimate nature of the mind and its appearances in terms of the unity of the coemergent mind-itself (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*) and coemergent appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*). In his *Heart Introduction to the Practice*, he succinctly states:

---

*yin / mtshan nyid sna tshogs snang ba yin / ngo bo skye 'gag med pa yin / chos nyid 'od gsal stong pa yin / nyams myong rgyun chad med pa yin / 'bras bu re dogs med pa yin /.*

[107] Jackson, "Mahāmudrā," 289.

> The coemergent mind-itself (*sems nyid*) is the *dharmakāya*; the coemergent appearances are the rays of the *dharmakāya*.[108]

The passage clearly indicates that appearances of the mind, although arising due to the force of karma as demonstrate above, are nonetheless to be seen as expressions or rays of the *dharmakāya* or the ultimate nature of the mind. This view has direct implications for Mahāmudrā meditation. Instead of seeing phenomenal appearances as something to be eliminated, they are instead to be incorporated in meditation as nondifferent from the ultimate nature of the mind. We shall see this more clearly in the following chapter on Mahāmudrā meditation.

Although Gampopa initially appears to introduces the coemergent nature of the mind (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*) and the coemergent appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*) as if they are distinct and dualistic, it is clear that his final aim is to point to their nonduality as he explicitly explains:

> Phenomena that are seen and heard and the *dharmakāya*, i.e., the mind-itself (*sems nyid*), are not distinct, like the sun and its rays.[109]

In addition to demonstrating that the term *sems nyid* (the mind-itself) is an epithet for *dharmakāya*, this passage also reveals the nonduality of the mind-itself with its phenomenal appearances. However, if we take the term mind-itself (*sems nyid*) to refer to the non-arising nature of the mind, the above passage confronts us with an apparent absence of one aspect of Gampopa's doctrine of

---

[108] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Sgrub pa snying gi ngo sprod (Heart Introduction to the Practice)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 247: *sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa zhes bya ba ni chos kyi sku dang / snang ba lhan cig skyes pa zhes bya ba ni chos sku'i 'od do /.*

[109] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Heart Introduction to the Practice (2000, vol. 3)," 253: *snang grags kyi chos dang sems nyid chos kyi sku gnyis tha mi dad de / nyi ma dang 'od zer bzhin no /.*

the three aspects of the mind—namely the nature (*ngo bo*), i.e., the clarity (*gsal cha*) aspect of the mind. However, there is strong textual evidence to suggest that the coemergent mind-itself encompasses the union of both the nature (clarity) and essence (non-arising) aspects of the mind.

This point is most evident in Gampopa's assertion that meditation on the non-arising nature of the mind, i.e., the essence aspect, necessarily entails the simultaneous experience of the clarity aspect (i.e., its nature) and the aspect of non-arising essence or emptiness of the mind. He emphasizes the need to sustain the mind's nature of clarity (*ngo bo gsal ba*) in meditative equipoise pertaining to the ultimate, arguing that mere meditation on emptiness without clarity is nihilistic (*chad mtha'*) and not a legitimate mental path (*lam*). As he says in *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings*:

> As for non-arising awareness, one decisively ascertains that all phenomena have not arisen primordially and do not arise presently. Treating it only as non-arising leads to nihilism. Rather, awareness abides within non-arising, just as, for example, butter exists within milk. As for the unceasing path, it is not a path if there is no clarity to be experienced. The nature of awareness is the clarity that is unceasing. Cultivating this is the path.[110]

This passage confirms that the ultimate which is sustained in meditative equipoise does not only contain the emptiness aspect of the mind; it also incorporates the clarity aspect of the mind. In

---

[110] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings (2000, vol. 2)," 624: *skye ba med pa'i rig pa ni / chos thams cad gdod ma nas ma skyes shing skye ba med par thag chod / skye med gcig pur byas na de ltar 'gro ste / skye med la rig pa khong skyal du gnas pa ni / dpe 'o ma la mar yod pa dang 'dra'o / 'gag pa med pa'i lam ni / gsal ba'am nyams su myong rgyu cig med na lam du mi 'gro ste / rig pa'i ngo bo ni gsal la ma'gags pa / de goms par byas na lam mo /.* Note that we follow the alternate reading found in Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Zhal gyi bdud rtsi thun mong ma yin pa (Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings)," in *Collected Works (gsum 'bum) of sGam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975), 126: … / *skye med gcig pur byas na chad ltar 'gro ste / ...*

other words, Gampopa's ultimate nature of the mind or the mind-itself, i.e., his Mahāmudrā view,

refers to the union of clarity and emptiness aspects of the mind. Gampopa asserts that in the

experience or realization of the Mahāmudrā view of emptiness, the experience of clarity is

simultaneously present in the way in which butter can be said to be present in milk.

This unity of emptiness and clarity in the innate nature of the mind is further evident when in

his *Instructions on Essential Meaning: The Quintessence of Mahāmudrā,* Gampopa expounds on

the two methods of sustaining the non-arising nature of the mind in meditation—sustaining the

concept (*don spyi*) of the non-arising nature of the mind and sustaining the actual or direct meaning

(*don dngos*) itself. Dismissing the former as a method of conceptually entertaining the notion that

things have no arising, he goes on to identify the direct meaning (*don dngos*) to be the nature (*ngo*

*bo*) or the clarity aspect of the mind, which Gampopa also describes to be empty. The passage

demonstrates that the term nature (*ngo bo*) is sometimes employed to indicate the unity of clarity

and emptiness of the mind although it is mostly retained to refer to the clarity aspect of the mind

alone.

> At the time of carrying this [non-arising nature of the mind] into practice, there are
> [two modes]: sustaining its concept (*don spyi*) and sustaining the actual meaning
> (*don dngos*) in meditation. With regard to the first, one holds in mind that all
> phenomena are empty, that they are devoid of arising, and that they are not
> established as anything at all. This is fabricated by the mind. The actual meaning is
> the coemergent mind, the luminosity which is the nature of awareness (*rig pa'i ngo*
> *bo*). This is the *dharmakāya*. Just that is the unfabricated nature of clarity, the actual
> meaning. Such a direct meaning is without any basis, unbiased, unable to be
> illustrated with an example, indescribable by any language, and not an object of
> knowledge of dialecticians.[111]

---

[111] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of
Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 123–124: *de nyams su len pa'i dus su / don spyi'i tshul du bsgom pa
dang / don dngos bsgom pa'o / dang po ni / chos thams cad stong nyid skye ba med pa / ci yang
ma yin pa blo la 'jog pa yin te / de blos byas pa yin / don dngos ni / sems lhan cig skyes pa / 'od*

Thus, according to Gampopa, the unity of clarity and emptiness present in the innate, coemergent mind is further supported by the fact that the mind is experienced as such in meditation. This is what matters since Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view claims to point to what is directly experienced in meditation as opposed to a conceptual understanding of the ultimate as mentioned in the passage above. What is encountered directly in meditative equipoise is the luminous awareness that is itself also empty and hence beyond linguistic description.

Gampopa employs a host of terms to refer to this ultimate nature of the mind that is the union of the emptiness and clarity. This mind is coemergent (*lhan cig skyes pa*), ordinary awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), and innate (*gnyug ma/gnyug sems*). It is also called the *dharmakāya* (*chos sku*) and even the Buddha (*sangs rgyas*). Summarizing these equivalencies in the same text, he writes:

> The coemergent mind is the ordinary mind; that is the unfabricated; that is the innate; that is the *dharmakāya*; that is Buddha; that is to be recognized.[112]

Although it is evident from our previous discussion, Gampopa explicitly states in the passage above that the ultimate nature of the mind, referring to the union of emptiness and clarity is variously termed as the coemergent mind, the innate mind, the ordinary mind, the *dharmakāya*, and even the Buddha.

Based on the above passages, it can be concluded that when Gampopa speaks of the ultimate nature of the mind, he refers not just to the non-arising or the emptiness aspect of the mind, but rather more specifically to the union of clarity and emptiness. Additionally, in using the term

---

*gsal ba rig pa'i ngo bo de / chos sku yin te / de nyid ma bcos pa gsal ba'i ngo bo de / don dngos so / de lta bu'i don de / rten dang bral ba / phyogs su ma lhung ba / dpes mtshon du med pa / brjod pa'i tshig gang gis kyang thog tu mi phebs pa / rtog ge ba'i spyod yul ma yin pa ste…/.*

[112] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 93. *lhan cig skyes pa ni tha mal gyi shes pa yin / de ma bcos pa yin / de gnyug ma yin / de chos sku yin / de sangs rgyas yin / de ngo shes par byed pa yin /.*

*dharmakāya* to refer to the ultimate nature of the mind, he is evidently not using it in the usual sense of the ultimate nature of the mind of a fully enlightened person. It appears that the term *dharmakāya* is employed to refer to the ultimate nature of the mind of all sentient beings as there is no distinction between the mind of enlightened beings and sentient beings with regard to their nature as non-arising or their emptiness. In one of his Mahāmudrā texts, Gampopa clarifies this by stating that the natural luminosity is itself the natural *dharmakāya* (*rang bzhin 'od gsal ba 'di rang bzhin chos sku*, 321). The usage of the term natural *dharmakāya* has resonance with the usage in general Mahāyāna literature of the phrase natural *nirvāṇa* (*rang gzhin myang 'das*), when that is employed to refer to the emptiness of all phenomena.

In stating that the coemergent mind-itself is the *dharmakāya* and that the coemergent appearances are the light rays of the *dharmakāya*, Gampopa is not only pointing to the nonduality of the ultimate nature of the mind and its phenomenal appearances; he is also indicating that the two coemerge or co-arise (*lhan cig skyes pa*). And since the coemergent mind-itself incorporates both the clarity and emptiness aspects of the mind, the doctrine of the union of the coemergent mind-self and coemergent appearances is a different way of formulating the doctrine of the union of the three aspects of appearance of the mind.

In addition to employing the metaphor of the sun and its rays to demonstrate the nonduality of the coemergent mind and its coemergent appearances, Gampopa also points to the inherent clarity that is present in all appearances as nondifferent from the basic nonconceptual clarity of the coemergent mind. In other words, all phenomenal appearances such as thoughts share the same nature (*ngo bo*) of clarity with the innate or the coemergent mind. In his *Heart Introduction to the Practice*, Gampopa says:

> The vajra wisdom abiding as the mind-itself,
> Although it appears as diverse, its nature is just that of the innate.

> Although they appear distinct as a means of classification,
> There is nothing other than the mind-itself.[113]

Gampopa points out that phenomenal appearances share the same nature of clarity as the innate mind. This view points to an important practice of incorporating all appearances, or rather the clarity inherent in all appearances, into the ground of Mahāmudrā meditation without attempting to eliminate them, a point we will discuss in Chapter 3 on Mahāmudrā meditation.

Through the doctrine of three aspects of appearance of the mind and the doctrine of the union of the coemergent mind and its coemergent appearances discussed above, Gampopa points to the ultimate as referring to the union of the three aspects of the mind—the aspects of clarity, emptiness, and characteristics.

## 4   Summarizing Gampopa's Mahāmudrā View

A close reading of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā pith instructions thus indicates that the purpose of elucidating his doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind and his discussions on the relationship with the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances is primarily meant to be a heuristic device to point to the ultimate reality. As we have seen, for Gampopa, the ultimate (*don dam*) is what is directly sustained in meditative absorption (*don dngos*) as opposed to a conceptual (*don spyi*) understanding of emptiness. The ultimate is beyond linguistic description. Gampopa calls this ultimate that is sustained in meditative absorption the innate mind, referring to one's own nondual and nonconceptual awareness in which clarity and emptiness are unified.

---

[113] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Heart Introduction to the Practice (2000, vol. 3)," 247-248: *sems nyid gnas pa rdo rje ye shes ni / sna tshogs snang yang gnyug ma'i ngo bo nyid / dbye sgo tha dad pa yi tshul snang yang / nyid kyi don las gzhan pa yod ma yin /.*

In short, Gampopa appears to identify the primordial wisdom of awareness (*ye shes*) as the ultimate, making it a subjective realization as opposed to an objective knowledge. Gampopa also points to the unity of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances as a fundamental feature of the Mahāmudrā view. This will be discussed below.

## 4.1   Direct Perception of Ultimate Reality as Natural Mahāmudrā

In order to spell out that the genuine Mahāmudrā view involves direct perception of the ultimate, Gampopa divides emptiness into two types based on whether the emptiness understood is conceptual or direct: fabricated emptiness (*bcos ma'i stong pa nyid*) and natural emptiness (*rang bzhin stong pa nyid*).[114] The former emptiness is referred to as fabricated because it is imagined or created as an object of mind (*shes bya*), i.e., as an object of language and thought. Implying that emptiness understood as an object of a dualistic consciousness is not a genuine understanding, Gampopa points out that only the realization of natural emptiness, i.e., direct, unfabricated emptiness, can lead one to the state of enlightenment. In his *Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization*, he says:

> What is called Mahāmudrā refers to emptiness. Emptiness is of two types: fabricated emptiness and natural emptiness. Regarding this, natural emptiness leads to the state of enlightenment; fabricated emptiness does not. One aspires to encounter the meaning [of emptiness] through expressing it in words and making it an object of the [dualistic] mind—this is fabricated emptiness. A fabricated entity cannot possibly lead one to enlightenment as it possesses [conceptual] signs.[115]

---

[114] When the reference is to the basis (*gzhi*), Gampopa makes it clear that Mahāmudrā refers to the emptiness nature of phenomena. The term Mahāmudrā is also used to refer the path (*lam*) as well as the result (*'bras bu*).

[115] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 12: *phyag rgya chen po zhes bya ba ni stong pa nyid la bya'o / stong pa nyid ni gnyis te / bcos ma'i stong pa nyid dang / rang bzhin gyi stong pa nyid do / de la rang bzhin gyi stong pa nyid kyis sangs rgya bar 'gyur gyis / bcos ma'i stong pa nyid kyis ni ma yin no*

Quoting Nāgārjuna from his *Fundamental Verses of the Middle*, Gampopa goes on to describe

conceptual or dualistic understanding of emptiness—in which one conceives of emptiness as an

object of knowledge or as an antidote to be applied against defilements—as an instance of those

with less mental capacity wrongly understanding and applying the wisdom of emptiness.

> Thus, it is said, "When emptiness is wrongly viewed, those with less intelligence
> are led to their downfall."[116] The precipices of emptiness are as follows: emptiness
> is mistaken as an object of knowledge; emptiness is mistaken as a seal [to affirm
> the ultimate nature of phenomena]; emptiness is mistaken as an antidote against
> defilements; and emptiness is mistaken and as the path.[117]

Gampopa's engagement with the language of the Madhyamaka tradition, including quoting

approvingly from the principal work of its originator, Nāgārjuna, clearly indicates that he sees his

Mahāmudrā view along the lines proposed by Nāgārjuna. Whether Nāgārjuna takes conceptual

understanding of emptiness as false is debatable, with Indo-Tibetan scholars of the Madhyamaka

taking divergent positions on the matter. However, the passage above makes it clear that when

Nāgārjuna warned us about the danger of wrongly perceiving emptiness, Gampopa took it mean

that it refers to a conceptual and dualistic understanding of emptiness in which emptiness is

understood as an object of knowledge.

---

*/ tshig tu brjod cing / blo yi yul du byas pas don gyi thog tu phebs par 'dod pa de byas pa'i stong
nyid yin pas / byas pa'i chos kyis sangs rgya ba mi srid do / mtshan ma'i chos yin pa'i phyir ro /.*

[116] MMK 24.11ab: *vināśayati durdṛṣṭā śūnyatā mandamedhasam /.*

[117] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs
of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 12: *des na / stong pa nyid la lta nyes na / shes rab chung rnams
phung bar 'gyur / zhes gsung pas / stong nyid kyi 'phrang ni / stong nyid shes bya'i gshis su shor
ba / stong nyid rgyas 'debs su shor ba / stong nyid nyon mongs pa'i gnyen por shor ba / stong nyid
lam du shor ba'o /.*

Due to the limitation of approaching emptiness dualistically as a concept, Gampopa urges us

to sustain natural emptiness in meditation. He further defines natural emptiness as without any

center or periphery and indescribable through language and hence not a view in the ordinary

dualistic sense.

> Thus, one such should cultivate natural emptiness. Natural emptiness is devoid of
> any innermost essence or outer delimitation. It cannot be represented by any
> example. Nothing can hit on the point with regard to its meaning. As such it cannot
> be described by any word, and hence all that is uttered [about it] is false. As such
> Mahāmudrā has no view. If there is view, it will be biased.[118]

It is evident from the passage above from the *Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and*

*Songs of Realization* that by natural emptiness Gampopa refers to the direct, nonconceptual

realization of emptiness. Since dualism, a conceptual construct, is not present in such a state of

direct realization of emptiness, it is *not* a view in the sense being an object realized by a perceiver.

Instead, as we have seen, for Gampopa Mahāmudrā as a view refers to mind-itself, also known as

the *dharmakāya*, the innate mind, luminous emptiness, and so on.

Thus, Mahāmudrā is not only a process of disclosing ultimate realty through various pith

instructions—it is the ultimate view itself, where "view" has the special meaning of the nondual

direct realization of mind-itself. Gampopa argues that only the direct realization of the innate mind

can be taken as the genuine Mahāmudrā view, pointing out that a dualistic conceptual

understanding of the view in which the Mahāmudrā view is understood as an object, far from being

---

[118] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 13: *des na / rang bzhin gyi stong pa nyid sgom par bya ste /*
*rang bzhin gyi stong pa nyid ni / phug gang yang ma thug / rgya gar yang ma chad / dpe gang gis*
*kyang mtshon du med / don gang gis kyang thog tu mi phebs / de ltar na / tshig gis cis kyang brjod*
*du mi btub ste / smras pa kun ni rdzun po yin / des na / phyag rgya chen po la lta ba med / lta ba*
*byung na phyogs ris yin /.*

authentic understanding of the view, instead falls into a nihilistic position. The way in which one cultivates natural emptiness as opposed to a conceptual understanding of emptiness is to see the Mahāmudrā pith instructions as primarily a heuristic device to point to the ultimate by circumventing thought as opposed to describing the ultimate linguistically.

For Gampopa, the significance of spelling out the view of the nonduality of the innate mind and its appearances is to directly point to a unique feature of Mahāmudrā meditation, namely the possibility for the experience of the nondual and nonconceptual ultimate nature of the mind to arise even as gross thoughts or phenomenal appearances are operating. Instead of first trying to eliminate phenomenal appearances and thoughts as done in the Sūtra Vehicle of the Mahāyāna, appearances and thoughts are utilized to access the nonconceptual innate mind. In other words, Gampopa implies that the innate mind can be experienced even as the six gross dualistic and conceptual consciousnesses are operating due to the aspect of clarity that is inherent in all of them. Since the clarity inherent in phenomenal appearances is nondifferent from the clarity of the innate mind, observing them will induce a nondual state, which in turn will induce a nonconceptual state of awareness which is the innate mind. Explaining this point, Gampopa states in his *Heart Introduction to the Practice*:

> The world of appearances and possibilities should be recognized as the innate *dharmakāya*. When familiarity with this is perfected, appearances and the objects of sense faculties dissolve into the nature of the innate mind-itself; that is, their equality in terms of their nature is realized just as it is.[119]

---

[119] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Heart Introduction to the Practice (2000, vol. 3)," 256: *snang srid chos sku gnyug ma nyid du rtogs par bya'o / de goms pa mthar phyin pa'i dus su / snang ba dbang po'i yul du gyur pa thams cad gnyug ma'i ngo bo nyid du nub par 'gyur zhing / de yang rang gi ngo bor mnyam pa ste ji lta ba bzhin par rtogs so /.*

Gampopa clearly states that the world of appearances and possibilities, that is all phenomenal appearances, should be recognized as the *dharmakāya*, which, as we know from our earlier discussions, refers to the ultimate nature of the mind.

Gampopa further emphasizes an important Mahāmudrā point of not intentionally blocking or suppressing thoughts. When thoughts are recognized as nondifferent from the innate mind, they naturally dissolve into the ground of the mind without the need to intentionally suppress or block them. When thoughts dissolve into the ground of the nondual mind their nonduality, which is a primordial state, is realized. In this sense, no intentional effort to stop thoughts is required.

> As for that [dissolution], it is not like elimination (*rnam par bcad pa/ viccheda*). Rather it ceases naturally.[120]

The Tibetan term *rnam par chad pa* in the passage above has the connotation of intentional eliminating or suppressing thoughts intentionally, which Gampopa explicitly states is not how it is done. Thoughts naturally (*shugs kyis*) cease or dissolve into the ground of the innate mind.

## 4.2   The Innate Mind as the Mahāmudrā View

Elucidating this topic in more explicit terms, Gampopa points out that the ultimate refers to the nonconceptual mind-itself, called also the innate mind, which, as we know from our earlier discussions, refers to the union of clarity and emptiness. In other words, what exists at the ultimate level is the nondual and nonconceptual mind-itself. He explains this in his *Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā* as follows:

> The song of instructions of Mahāmudrā,
> Will be written in the mode of experience and realization:
> When the viewer, one's own mind-itself

---

[120] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 264-265: *de yang / rnam par bcad pa lta bu ni ma yin te / shugs kyis 'gag pa yin pa'i phyir ro /.*

> Views the object of viewing, one's own mind-itself,
> One's own mind-itself is seen as just ordinary mind.
> The subjective mind sees the subjective [mind].
> Intrinsic awareness is seen as the nature of clarity.
> Luminosity is seen as the nature of *dharmakāya*.
> It sees the essence of *dharmakāya* as the nature.
> It sees without perceiver or perceived.[121]

Gampopa argues here that the dualism of subject and object does not pertain at the ultimate level

for one's own mind is both the perceiver and perceived and the knowing itself is non-dualistic.

This passage is helpful for showing how for Gampopa mind-itself *is* the view.

Elsewhere, he makes much the same point, indicating that the innate mind, or mind-itsel, is

the view, he describes it as free from the four extremes (existence, non-existence, both, and neither)

along the lines of the Madhyamaka tradition's description of the ultimate reality.

> Mind-itself is luminous and unconditioned:
> It is not existent, nor is it non-existent, nor is it both;
> It transcends being an object of a conceptual mind;
> If one construes a view, construe it as that![122]

Although the verse above explicitly mentions the three extremes of existing, not existing, and both,

we can infer that Gampopa implicitly includes the fourth extreme of being neither. In stating that

that the ultimate is free from these four possible proliferations, it is clear that Gampopa is operating

on the foundations of Madhyamaka philosophy. This process of rational analysis to explore the

---

[121] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 100-101: *phyag rya chen po gdams pa'i glu / nyams dang rtogs pa'i tshul du bri / blta bya rang gi sems nyid la / lta byed rang gi sems nyid des / bltas pas rang gi sems nyid de / tha mal shes pa nyid du mthong / yul can shes pas yul can mthong / rig pa gsal ba'i ngo bor mthong / 'od gsal chos sku'i ngo bo mthong / chos sku'i rang bzhin ngo bor mthong / mthong bya mthong byed med par mthong /.*

[122] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 21: *sems nyid 'od gsal 'dus ma byas / yod dang med dang gnyis ka min / rnam rtog blo yi yul las 'das / lta ba mdzad na de la mdzod /.*

self-nature of entities through four possibilities, known as the *tetralemma* (*catuṣkoṭi, mu bzhi*), has become a mainstay of Madhyamaka thought since its first formulation by Nagarjuna.[123]

As the above formulation makes evident, the view here does not refer to a philosophical view as an object of knowledge; rather the view refers to the very act of viewing or seeing in which the perceiver and the perceived both refer to the mind-itself, thus collapsing their dualism. Since the nondual mind is the view, the view must refer to the nondual wisdom itself as opposed to an objective knowledge. Indeed, Gampopa refers in the *Heart Introduction to the Practice* to this coemergent innate mind as the coemergent wisdom (*ye shes*) that exists primordially in all sentient beings.

> With regard to the coemergent innate reality[124]—alas, we eternally cry for it. [However,] it is the coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*) present in the continuum of all migratory beings. Primordially, this innate [reality] is free from apprehending as either existent or non-existent—this essential meaning (*snying po'i don*) is the ordinary mind.[125]

This passage further supports our argument that Gampopa understands the innate mind to be the view, defining it as free from the notion of both existent and non-existent, mirroring standard Madhyamaka presentation of the ultimate view of reality. The use of the term essential meaning

---

[123] For a detailed explanation of the tetralemma and its use in Buddhist philosophy, see Constance E. Kassor, "Thinking the Unthinkable / Unthinking the Thinkable: Conceptual Thought, Nonconceptuality, and Gorampa Sonam Senge's Synopsis of Madhyamaka" (PhD dissertation, Atlanta, GA, Emory University, 2014), 133–85.

[124] The use of the term *gnyug ma'i don* that I render as innate reality appears to highlight the fact the innate mind as the view is not a conceptual understanding of the view, but a direct actual object (*don dngos*).

[125] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Heart Introduction to the Practice (2000, vol. 3)," 249: *lhan cig skyes pa gnyug ma'i don ni / 'o dod rtag tu 'bod de / lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes 'gro ba thams cad kyi rgyud la yod pa'i gnyug ma de dag / thog ma nas rang bzhin gyis dngos po yod par rtogs pa dang / med par rtogs pa dang bral bas / snying po'i don 'di ni tha mal gyi shes pa yin no /.*

(*snying po'i don*)*,* sometimes actual meaning (*don dngos*), is employed, most likely to highlight

the fact the innate mind as the view does not refer to a conceptual image of the reality (*don spyi*),

but the actual, i.e., direct, nonconceptual reality itself. This point most likely formed the basis for

the description of the Mahāmudrā view by later masters in Gampopa's tradition as the definitive

reality Mahāmudrā (*nges don phyag rgya chen po*).[126]

Gampopa further claims that when the innate mind is realized, the ultimate nature of all

phenomena as devoid of self-nature (*niḥsvabhāvatā, rang bzhin med pa*) is automatically

understood.

> When the meaning of the innate is realized, all phenomena are realized as mind-
> itself and are of one taste in great bliss. Through that, one automatically engages
> with the meaning of essencelessness (*bdag med pa = nairātmya*). Others such as
> the Mādhyamikas do not realize this point, for this is free of a focal point, since one
> becomes a Buddha through realization without [requiring] meditative absorption
> (*samādhi*).[127]

This clarification is significant for two reasons: first, Gampopa rarely makes such explicit

statements in his Mahāmudrā works, indicating that the realization of the Mahāmudrā view leads

to the realization of selflessness or emptiness as asserted in the Madhyamaka tradition. Secondly,

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition does not categorize emptiness into two types as the Madhyamaka

tradition does, namely the emptiness of persons and the emptiness of phenomena. According to

---

[126] The Ninth Karmapa Wangchuk Dorjé (Dbang phyug rdo rje, 1556–1603), for example, renders
the title of his Mahāmudrā text as *Phyag chen nges don rgya mtsho* (*Mahāmudrā: the Ocean of
Definitive Meaning*). See Thrangu Rinpoche, *The Ninth Karmapa's Ocean of Definitive Meaning*
(Ithaca, NY; Boulder, Colo: Snow Lion Publications, 2003).

[127] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Heart Introduction to the Practice (2000, vol. 3)," 248-249:
*gnyug ma'i don 'di rtogs pa na / chos tham cad sems nyid du rtogs shing bde ba chen por ro gcig
pas / bdag med pa'i don la shugs kyis 'jog go / don de nyid dbu ma la sogs pa gzhan gyis rtogs pa
ma yin te / 'di ni bza' gtad dang bral ba'i phyir / bsam gtan med cing rtogs pas sangs rgya ba'i
phyir ro /.*

Gampopa, when the nature of the mind is realized as being empty, the nature of all phenomena as being empty is also realized as phenomenal appearances are nondifferent from the mind.

## 4.2.1   Nonduality of the Innate Mind and Phenomenal Appearances

As is clear from earlier discussions on the three aspects of appearance of the mind (*sems kyi snang tshul gsum*), Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view points to the union (*zung 'jug*) of the innate mind (comprising both the emptiness and clarity aspect of the mind) and its phenomenal appearances as a key feature of his Mahāmudrā doctrine. After realizing the innate mind as the ultimate, this union helps to establish the reality of all phenomenal appearances as without self-nature for they are all reflections or manifestations of the mind-itself and thus nondifferent from it. Underscoring their fundamental unity despite differences in the mode of appearance, Gampopa states in the *Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā*:

> This coemergent mind-itself:
> It is the non-arising *dharmakāya*;
> It is the unceasing clarity that is experienced;
> It is characterized by its diversity of appearances.,
> These, in turn, are reflections of karmic imprints.[128]

The passage, which is recorded also in Gampopa's *Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization* and which we have already seen earlier, makes it amply clear that the three aspects of appearance of the mind are themselves nondifferent. They are modes of appearance of one and the same mind, namely its emptiness, its clarity, and its phenomenal appearances. Thus, Gampopa establishes their unity.

---

[128] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 47: *sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa 'di / skye ba med pa chos kyi sku / gsal la ma 'gags nyams su myong / sna tshogs snang ba'i mtshan nyid yin / de yang bag chags gzugs brnyan lags /.*

Further pointing to the unity of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances, Gampopa states in *Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā*, that phenomenal appearances are not distinct from the mind for they arise from the ground of the mind. When they arise, they are not established as any extra-mental objects for they are nondifferent from the mind from which they arose.

> There are three things to be realized: It should be realized that diversity [of appearances] arises from that [mind] which does not exist as anything; although they appear in diversity, they should be realized as not being any object (*don*); they should be realized as nondual and inexpressible.[129]

Elsewhere in his Mahāmudrā instructions, Gampopa employs the analogy of the ocean and its waves or the sun and its rays to explain the nonduality or the union of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances. Although we, out of conceptual error, tend to distinguish the waves from the ocean, in reality they are nondual. The waves are part and parcel of the ocean, nondifferent from it. Similarly, even though appearances and thoughts seem to be distinct from the ground of the mind, they are not. Not only do appearances arise from the mind, they are also nondifferent from the mind in terms of their shared nature of clarity.

In another experiential presentation of the nature of the mind from the same text, *,* Gampopa summarizes the unity of the three aspects of appearance of the mind via a process he terms as introduction (*ngo sprod*):

> The Mahāmudrā pith instruction has five introductions: Appearance is introduced as the mind; the mind is introduced as emptiness; emptiness is introduced as

---

[129] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 124: *rtogs par bya ba'i chos gsum ni / ci yang ma yin pa las / sna tshogs su shar bar rtog par bya / sna tshogs su shar yang / don ci yang ma yin par rtogs par bya / gnyis med smra bar mi btub par rtogs par bya /.*

luminosity; luminosity is introduced as the union; the union is introduced as great bliss.[130]

The first four introductions are culmination of the points we have so far discussed within the context of the unity of the three aspects of the appearance of the mind. Due to the nonduality of the mind and its appearances, appearances are introduced as the mind. The mind in turn is non-arising or empty as we discussed earlier. The ultimate in the Mahāmudrā context does not entail a mere negation but also includes awareness. Hence emptiness is introduced as luminosity. Luminosity (*'od gsal*) in Mahāmudrā is introduced as the union (*zung 'jug*), that is, the union of emptiness and clarity. This is a reaffirmation of the previous point. The last introduction, namely that the union is introduced as great bliss, points to an additional feature of the Mahāmudrā view, indicating that when the union (*zung 'jug*) is realized, it also induces great bliss.

It can be argued that bliss, which is more frequently associated with the Tantra Vehicle than with the Sūtra Vehicle, is induced even through Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā. In general, there is much more emphasis in Tantra on the experience of bliss and employing it to realize emptiness. A major difference between the two vehicles is that the realization of the nature of the mind in tantra depends on the use of subtle physiology such as psychic channels (*nāḍi, rtsa*) and energy centers (*cakra, 'khor lo*), as well the practice of inner heat (*caṇḍālī, gtum mo*) and so forth—practices that are specific to tantra.[131] Thus, the uniqueness of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is the implication that the ultimate nature of the mind as the union of bliss and emptiness can be induced simply through pith instructions without having to resort to practices involving tantric physiology.

---

[130] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 194: *phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag la ngo sprod rnam pa lnga ste / snang ba sems su ngo sprad / sems stong par ngo sprad / stong pa 'od gsal du ngo sprad / 'od gsal zung 'jug tu ngo sprad / zung 'jug bde ba chen por ngo sprad pa'o /.*

[131] For a summary of Tantric Mahāmudrā, see Jackson, "Mahāmudrā," 288–89.

Having discussed Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, including the doctrines that he employs to point to that view, we will now look at some of key implications and analysis of Mahāmudrā doctrines from the perspective of the two most important Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophical schools, specifically the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka.

## 5 Key Mahāmudrā Concepts and Issues

### 5.1 The Two Truths and Their Unity: Resonance with Madhyamaka

One of main implications of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view is that it resonates with the two truths or realities (*satyadvaya*, *bden pa gnyis*) and their union (*zung 'jug*) as taught in the Madhyamaka tradition. The Madhyamaka tradition purports to maintain its middle way philosophy of avoiding the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism through its doctrine of two truths. The ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*, *don dam bden pa*), is understood as the lack of any essence (*svabhāva*, *rang bzhin*) in things, and its realization is freedom from all forms of conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*, *spros pa*). The conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*, *kun rdzob bden pa*) or worldly transactional truth (*vyavahārasatya*, *tha snyad bden pa*) refers to the world of relative existence. Nāgārjuna presents the two truths in such a way that they are understood as not only non-contradictory but mutually supportive through the doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*; *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*). It is for this reason, as Ruegg and Ames demonstrate,[132] that Nāgārjuna chose to present the teaching on the ultimate truth right in the first two stanzas of his *Fundamental Verses of the Middle* through the principle of dependent origination. This is because, on one hand, dependent origination affirms the conventional reality

---

[132] Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 43; William L. Ames, "Buddhapālita's Exposition of the Madhyamaka," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 14, no. 4 (December 1986): 313–40, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00200271.

of how things exist dependent on many factors. On the other hand, their dependent nature points to the fact that phenomena have no independent existence, essence, or self-nature, which emptiness or lack is their ultimate reality. Nāgārjuna declares (MMK 24.19):

> There being no dharma whatsoever that is not dependently originated,
> It follows that there is also no dharma whatsoever that is non-empty.[133]

Although most Indian Mādhyamikas do not speak in this when, in demonstrating that things are empty of intrinsic existence, the ultimate reality, due to the fact that they arise interdependently, the conventional reality, is to point to the unity of the two truths or realities (*bden gnyis zung 'jug*). Likewise, Gampopa does not employ the category of the two truths in his Mahāmudrā teachings. Nevertheless, Gampopa's explanation of nondual relationship between innate mind and phenomenal appearances resonates with the Madhyamaka presentation of the two truths and their unity.

In his *Instructions on Essential Meaning: The Quintessence of Mahāmudrā*, we have seen that Gampopa said:

> There are three things to be realized: It should be realized that diversity [of appearances] arises from that [mind] which does not exist as anything; although they appear in diversity, they should be realized as not being any object (*don*); they should be realized as nondual and inexpressible.[134]

---

[133]Nāgārjuna, *Nagarjuna's Middle Way*, 278.

[134] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 124: *rtogs par bya ba'i chos gsum ni / ci yang ma yin pa las / sna tshogs su shar bar rtog par bya / sna tshogs su shar yang / don ci yang ma yin par rtogs par bya / gnyis med smra bar mi btub par rtogs par bya /.*

Here, Gampopa clearly states that the innate mind is not established as anything at all, i.e., it is empty of intrinsic existence. This is similar to the way in which in which the Madhyamaka tradition defines the ultimate truth or reality. Since Gampopa establishes the innate mind to be the ultimate, we can infer that phenomenal appearances, including thoughts, constitute the conventional truth or reality. We shall see that there is sufficient textual evidence to suggest that the phenomenal appearance of the mind corresponds to the conventional reality although he did not explicitly use this term in his Mahāmudrā works.

What exists at the ultimate level is the innate mind that is the union of clarity and emptiness. Phenomenal appearances, though they phenomenally appear and could therefore said to existent at the conventional level, do not exist at the ultimate level for they expressions or magical display of the mind and have no independent existence. Thus, in relation to the innate mind as the Mahāmudrā view, which Gampopa compares to the sun, he states that the phenomenal appearances of the mind are like the rays of the sun. As rays of the sun, appearances do not exist [at the ultimate level], existing only as mere magical display (*cho 'phrul*) of the mind.

> The Mahāmudrā instruction that gives rise to the state of enlightenment in this very life has just two items: the coemergent mind-itself, the *dharmakāya,* and coemergent appearances, the rays of the *dharmakāya*. These appearances are the rays of mind-itself. For example, it is like the sun and its rays. There is no [ultimate] reality other than mind-itself. To establish the [nature] of mind-itself, one has to establish the [nature] of these appearances. These appearances have to be understood as not existing [ultimately]. These appearances are understood as magical displays of awarenesses which appear while not existing. It is not appropriate to say that one experiences them from the start. With regard to the first, if asked whether appearances are existent or non-existent, they are non-existent. If it is stated that it is contradictory for non-existent things to appear, [we respond], that's precisely why it is mistaken. This is extremely wondrous![135]

---

[135] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 9-10: *tshe gcig po 'di la sangs rgya bar byed pa'i phyag rgya chen*

This description of the appearances of innate mind-itself echoes the Madhyamaka description of conventional reality, where the world of conventional appearances is understood to be like an illusion, appearing while not existing at the ultimate level.

Additionally, the two truths in the Madhyamaka context are said to be in union due to the fact that they are of the same referential basis but conceptually different (*ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*). Similarly, the union of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances is a necessary feature of the Mahāmudrā view. Gampopa also expresses this union of the innate mind and phenomenal appearance, i.e., the union of the two truths, through the analogy of the sun and its rays. On closer analysis, the meaning of the sun and its rays is this: the rays are not different from the sun since they both the share the nature (*ngo bo*) of light and radiance. All phenomenal appearances are not distinct from the innate mind for the two share the basic nature of clarity. Thus, he gives the following instruction:

> By not losing the nature of the mind (*ngo bo*) [i.e., the clarity aspect of the mind], one must understand all proliferating thoughts to be mind.[136]

---

*po'i man ngag ni / don gnyis las med do / sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku dang / snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i 'od do / snang ba 'di sems nyid kyi 'od yin te / dper na / nyi ma dang nyi ma'i 'od lta bu'o / don sems nyid las med / sems nyid gtan la 'bebs pa la / snang ba 'di gtan la 'bebs dgos te / snang ba 'di / med par shes par bya ba dang / snang ba 'di / med bzhin du snang ba shes pa'i cho 'phrul du go ba dang / dang po nyams so myong ba smrar mi btub pa'o / dang po ni / snang ba 'di yod pa yin nam / med pa yin zer na / med pa yin / med par snang ba 'ga' zer na / de bas ni 'khrul pa yin / ngo tshar che /.*

[136] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 107: *sems kyi ngo bo de ma shor ba byas nas / rnam rtog spros pa thams cad sems su shes par bya'o /.*

For Gampopa, the nature of the innate mind, i.e., the clarity aspect of the mind, arises as different phenomenal appearances. Gampopa thus asserts that appearances are manifestations of the mind and not distinct from it.

Due to the unity of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances, Gampopa points out that when the reality of the mind is understood, the reality of all phenomena is understood.

> Since all phenomena are of the nature (*svabhāva*, *rang bzhin*) of mind, when the intrinsic nature (*dharmatā*, *chos nyid*) of the mind is realized, the accordant reality (*tathātā*, *de bzhin nyid*) of all phenomena is realized. Therefore, the nature of the mind, i.e., the *dharmakāya* free from the dualism of subject and object, is referred to as permanent since it abides irrespective of whether Buddhas appear or not.[137]

In addition to describing the secondary status of phenomenal appearances as nothing but manifestations of the innate mind, Gampopa also construes the innate mind-itself as abiding permanently in contrast to the temporary nature of phenomenal appearances. Of course, we should bear in mind that the mind-itself does not ultimately exist as anything at all, and therefore Gampopa's assertion of permanence here does not amount to positing an absolute or enduring entity. Instead, the idea is that mind-itself is always present regardless of what kinds of diverse appearances may manifest.

Due to the unity of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances, Gampopa points out that when the ultimate reality or the innate mind is known, the nature of the phenomenal appearances

---

[137] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Mdo sngags kyi sgom don bsdus pa (Summary of Sūtra and Tantra Meditation)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 3 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 302-303: *des bas na / chos thams cad sems kyi rang bzhin yin pas / sems kyi chos nyid rtogs na chos thams cad kyi de bzhin nyid rtogs pa yin no / des na / sems kyi rang bzhin gzung 'dzin gnyis dang bral ba'i chos sku'i ngo bo de / rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas byon yang rung / ma byon yang rung ste / gnas pa na rtag ces bya'o /.*

is also known. This corresponds with the Madhyamaka assertion that the doctrine of dependent

origination gives rise to the understanding of the ultimate and the conventional reality. Gampopa

states that when the innate mind is realized, all phenomena whether of *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa* are

understood for they are manifestations of the mind and hence not distinct from it.

> Apart from the mind, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* do not exist. This is because all
> phenomena that are seen and heard (*snang grags kyi chos*) are not distinct from the
> mind-itself, the *dharmakāya*, like the sun and its rays.[138]

It is important to qualify it is from the ground of the innate mind that there is no distinction

between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* for both are manifestations of the mind. This means that from the

perspective of emptiness, both are the same in that they lack inherent existence since they are both

manifestations of the innate mind.

Despite these similarities between the Mahāmudrā and the Madhyamaka tradition, there are

differences as well. One of the major differences is in terms of approaching reality. Whereas the

Madhyamaka tradition applies its doctrine of two truths to both mental and extramental

phenomena, Mahāmudrā tradition applies its mainly to the mind, accepting phenomenal

appearances as nondifferent from the mind, in a fashion somewhat similar to the Yogācāra

tradition. As such, the Mahāmudrā view can best be described as a synthesis of the Yogācāra and

the Madhyamaka tradition as well be explained in the next section.

---

[138] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Heart Introduction to the Practice (2000, vol. 3)," 253: *sems gcig pu las gzhan 'khor 'das gnyis med de / snang grags kyi chos dang sems nyid chos kyi sku gnyis tha mi thad de / nyi ma dang 'od zer bzhin no /.*

**5.2    Mahāmudrā As a Synthesis of the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka Schools**

The sequence we see in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā of first establishing the absence of dualism with regard to the nature or clarity of the mind and then establishing that clarity itself as non-arising in essence (i.e., emptiness) points to a synthesis of the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka tradition. While the adherence to the existence of a nondual mind at the ultimate level mirrors the Yogācāra tradition, positing nondual mind as without any arising in turn closely resembles the Madhyamaka tradition of establishing every phenomenon, including awareness, as empty of inherent existence.

Additionally, the Mahāmudrā tradition's presentation of the view in terms of three aspects of appearance of the mind highly resonates with the Yogācāra tradition's presentation of the view in terms of the three natures (*trisvabhāva, rang bzhin gsum* or *mtshan nyid gsum*). The two schema resemble each other not only in their pedagogical method of searching for the ultimate reality by employing three dimensions of the mind, but also in terms of the eventual result of that search in the discovery of the nature of the mind as free from all dualistic structures.

The three natures are the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva, kun brtags mtshan nyid*), the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva, gzhan dbang mtshan nyid*), and the perfected nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva, yongs grub mtshan nyid*). In his *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*), one of the most important Indian Yogācāra texts, Maitreya provides a succinct description of the relationship among these three natures in the very first verse:

> [1.1]There is unreal imagination. Duality does not exist there, but emptiness does.
> That [unreal imagination] exists in [emptiness] as well.[139]

---

[139] Mario D'Amato, Maitreyanātha, and Vasubandhu, *Maitreya's Distinguishing the Middle From the Extremes (*Madhyāntavibhāga*) Along with Vasubandhu's Commentary (*Madhyāntavibhāga-

The term unreal imagination (*abhūtaparikalpa*) refers to the dependent nature because Vasubandhu's commentary on the verse defines referential objects as the imagined nature, the unreal imagination as the dependent nature, and the absence of the subject and object as the perfected nature.[140] Shortly after this, in verse 1.8ab, the unreal imagination is subdivided into mind and mental factors.[141] From this we can deduce that the dependent nature is the causal process and the casual process is understood strictly in mental terms.

Verse [1.6] then goes on to describe the soteriological or the epistemological process of coming to the understanding of the perfected nature which can be summarized as follows: through the perception that the phenomenal appearances are representation-only (*vijñaptimātra*), one comes to the nonperception of external objects. And through the nonperception of objects, perception of representation-only also ceases. Verse 1.12 further makes this point very clear by defining emptiness or the perfected nature as the absence of duality in the dependent nature.[142]

Since the dependent nature refers to the causal process and this turn is strictly defined in terms of a mental process, the Yogācāra tradition comes to assert the continuum of the mind devoid of the subject-object dualistic structure as the ultimate reality. This understanding thus aligns closely with the Mahāmudrā understanding of the ultimate reality, i.e. the innate mind, as awareness or clarity devoid of the dualistic structure. The Yogācāra tradition therefore asserts a form of implicative negation when it comes to establishing the view of the ultimate. In pointing the to the absence of the subject/object duality and the non-existence of extramental objects, it implies the

---

bhāṣya*): A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2012), 117.

[140] D'Amato, Maitreyanātha, and Vasubandhu, 120.

[141] D'Amato, Maitreyanātha, and Vasubandhu, 121.

[142] D'Amato, Maitreyanātha, and Vasubandhu, 121–25.

existence of nondual awareness, which it calls the perfected nature. Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view of the ultimate also entails a form of implicative negation as we have noted. In establishing phenomenal appearances as devoid of intrinsic reality (for they are dynamic display of the mind) and in establishing the absence of subject/object duality, the Mahāmudrā view implies the existence of the nondual innate mind. Despite such close affinity between the Yogācāra and the Mahāmudrā view, Mahāmudrā goes a step further. Whereas for the Yogācāra tradition the ultimate reality is the absence of dualism in the dependent nature, Gampopa's Mahāmudrā explicitly states that the ultimate reality consists not only of awareness or clarity that is free from the dualistic structure. It also consists of the emptiness or the non-arising nature of that clarity and hence the ultimate is the union of both clarity and emptiness, a point we discussed earlier.

Interestingly, a similar method of incorporating features of both Yogācāra and Madhyamaka tradition with respect to the ultimate was taught by Śāntarakṣita (725–788 CE century), four centuries before Gampopa. Similar to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition, Śāntarakṣita, in his text *Ornament of the Middle* (*Madhyamakālaṃkāra*) and its auto-commentary, synthesized Yogācāra tradition with the Madhyamaka tradition, leading to the description of his innovative school as the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka (*rnal sbyor spyod pa'i dbu ma*).[143] He first establishes doctrine of mind-only free from the dualistic structure based on the Yogācāra tradition at the conventional level and then goes on to establish emptiness of the mind as maintained by the Madhyamaka tradition. Thus, he writes in *Ornament of the Middle*:

---

[143] Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 89–90.

> By relying on the Mind-Only (*cittamātra, sems tsam pa*) system, know that external entities do not exist. And by relying on this [Madhyamaka] system, know that no self at all exists, even in that [mind].[144]

As Blumenthal notes, Śāntarakṣita considered the synthesis of the two traditions to be extremely important for all his overall presentation of the Madhyamaka view. As Śāntarakṣita wrote:

> Therefore, due to the holding of reigns of logic as one rides the chariots of the two systems, [Yogācāra and Madhyamaka], one attains the path of the actual Mahāyānist.[145]

In addition to finding a textual basis to argue for a synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka doctrines in his Mahāmudrā works, Gampopa himself explicitly talks about such a synthesis. Thus, in summarizing the relationship between the view of the tantra (which is not distinct from the Mahāmudrā view although the method of inducing the view differs) and the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra views, Gampopa argues that although there are aspects of the Mahāmudrā view that accords with both schools, what sets it apart is its ability to introduce the unity (*zung 'jug*), particularly the unity of emptiness and bliss.

> As for the Tantra view, it partially accords with the Mahāyāna Madhyamak and Cittamātra [views] though there are differences. [Tantra view] accords with the Madhyamaka in [ascertaining] emptiness as the ultimate reality. If one asks whether there is therefore no difference, [the answer is that tantra] is qualified by bliss such that emptiness arises as bliss. [The aspect of] self-awareness and self-clarity accords with the Cittamātra. If it is asked whether there is therefore no difference,

---

[144] James Blumenthal, "Dynamic and Syncretic Dimensions to Śāntarakṣita's Presentation of the Two Truths," *Asian Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (March 2009): 58, https://doi.org/10.1080/09552360802673898.

[145] Quoted in and translated by James Blumenthal, *The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Śāntarakṣita: Including Translations of Śāntarakṣita's* Madhyamakālaṃkāra *(The Ornament of the Middle Way) and Gyel-Tsab's* Dbu Ma Rgyan Gyi Brjed Byang *(Remembering "The Ornament of the Middle Way")* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2004), 41.

[the answer is] it is mere clarity. The experience [of clarity] arises as bliss. Thus, clarity itself is emptiness and emptiness itself is clarity. The union is the tantric [view].[146]

Gampopa is quite explicit in the way in which the tantric or the Mahāmudrā view accords with the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra as well as the way in which it differs from them. He states that both tantra and Madhyamaka *a*grees that all phenomena are empty by nature. The difference between them is that the realization of the tantric view is also accompanied by the experience of bliss. The view of tantra and that of Cittamātra accords with each other due to the description or the experience of self-awareness and clarity. However, tantra and Mahāmudrā differs from the Cittamātra school on two accounts: the lack of understanding emptiness of clarity and the experience of bliss in the case of Cittamātra.

Despite these similarities, according to Gampopa and his followers, a major difference between the Mahāmudrā tradition and philosophical schools such as Madhyamaka and the Cittamātra is that the former is an experiential description of the ultimate while the later schools are conceptual, philosophical formulation of the ultimate. As we saw in earlier sections, the Mahāmudrā view refers to the direct nonconceptual realization of the ultimate. More specifically, it refers to the nondual wisdom itself which is termed as the innate mind.

---

[146] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Introduction to the Ultimate Reality of Thoughts (2000, vol. 3)," 221-222: *gsang snags kyi lta ba ni / theg pa chen po dbu ma sems tsam las cha mthun khyad par du gyur ba ste / chos nyid stong pa dbu ma dang mthun / 'o na khyad med dam zhe na / bde bas khyad par du byas pa ste / stong pa'i bde bar shar ba'o / rang rig rang gsal ba sems tsam dang mthun / 'o na khyad med dam zhe na / gsal tsam ma yin te / ro bde bar shar ba'o / des na gsal ba nyid stong pa / stong pa nyid gsal bar shar ba'o / zung 'jug de gsang sngags so /.*

However, both the nonconceptual Mahāmudrā tradition and the conceptual philosophical traditions agree in their assertion that the ultimate cannot be expressed with conceptual language, a point we will explore in the next section.

## 5.3   The Ultimate and the Limits of Language to Express the Ultimate

Both Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition and the Madhyamaka tradition agree in that they make no ontological commitment with regard to the ultimate. Since the ultimate is beyond conceptual proliferations, it cannot be adequately described with language. That language is insufficient to describe the ultimate is not only maintained by linguistically conservative Mādhyamikas such as Nāgārjuna,[147] Buddhapālita (fl. 500 AD),[148] and Candrakīrti (c. 570–d. c. 650), but also by Bhāviveka (c.500-c. 570), who advocated the validity and the use of inference on the basis of the Buddhist epistemological tradition started by Dharmakīrti (fl. c. 6th or 7th century) and his teacher Dignāga (fl. 5th century).[149] Bhāviveka maintains that inference is employed only in the domain of the conventional to point to what the ultimate is not, and that the ultimate itself cannot be described with language.

It is also evident that Gampopa's pith instructions and the doctrines contained in them such as the three aspects of appearance of the mind are only meant to be pointers to the ultimate, not its actual description. As we saw earlier, even the terms that he employs to refer to the ultimate such

---

[147] Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 4.

[148] Ruegg, 60; Ames, "Buddhapālita's Exposition of the Madhyamaka," 313.

[149] For a concise description of this Buddhist epistemological school started by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, see Tom Tillemans, "Dharmakīrti," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/dharmakiirti/; see also John D Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004).

as luminosity (*'od gsal*), the union of awareness and emptiness (*rig stong zung 'jug*) and the union

of appearance and emptiness (*snang stong zung 'jug*) are simply a means of pointing to the ultimate

in terms of conventional language, even though the ultimate itself is beyond conceptual

proliferations or linguistic description. With such understanding in mind, Gampopa argues:

> Self aware, self clear, it abides in itself.
> It is like the lamp inside a vase.
> The mind abides in mere self-clarity.
> If it were to be expressed in terms of conventional language,
> It is termed as luminosity;
> It is termed as [the union of] bliss and emptiness;
> It is termed as [the union of] awareness and emptiness;
> It is termed as [the union of] of appearance and emptiness.[150]

This passage explicitly elucidates that even the terms employed to refer to the ultimate nature of

the mind such as luminosity (*'od gsal*), the union of bliss and emptiness (*bde stong zung 'jug*), the

union of awareness and emptiness (*rig stong zung 'jug*) and the union of appearance and emptiness

(*snang stong zung 'jug*) are linguistic conventions to point to the ultimate, with the implication

that ultimate cannot be expressed in words.

The limit of language to describe the ultimate is also a key concern of the Mādhyamikas

starting with Nāgārjuna. He asserted that the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya, don dam bden pa*)

lacks any essential self-nature (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*), and is free from all forms of conceptual

elaborations (*prapañca, spros pa*). As such, in establishing the emptiness of all phenomena,

Nāgārjuna employs a distinctive form of argument, similar to a *reductio ad absurdum*, that

---

[150] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 44-45: *rang rig rang gsal rang la gnas / bum pa nang gi mar med bzhin / shes pa rang gsal tsam du gnas / tha snyad tshig tu brjod tsam na / 'od gsal bya bar ming du btags / bde stong bya bar ming du btags / rig stong bya bar ming du btags / snang stong bya bar ming du btags /.*

involves demonstrating the logical absurdity (*prasaṅga, thal ba*) of all the possible propositions put forward by the opponent, without positing any proposition on one's own side.

This approach of Nāgārjuna—later followed faithfully by Buddhapālita and defended by Candrakīrti—entails that the Mādhyamikas do not put forward any positive proposition of their own after deconstructing the opponent's view point through the *prasaṅga* method.[151] In his interpretation of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka tradition, Buddhapālita takes a conservative stance in terms of whether the ultimate truth could be expressed in formal propositions. This could be discerned from his understanding of the role of concepts in expressing the ultimate, maintaining that emptiness is just an expression to refer to the cessation of views, which is the cessation of conceptual and linguistic proliferations. In fact, he suggests that when it comes to the ultimate reality, we must remain silent and the only proper role language has in the conventional domain is to reject false conceptualizations about emptiness.[152]

The questions of whether a *prasaṅga* method of argument is sufficient and whether valid independent inference (*svatantrānumāna*) consisting of a positive proposition should also be employed were later viewed as so significant that they led to a drastic transformation and subsequent reclassification of the school. In raising this methodological and epistemological issue in his *Light of Wisdom* (*Prajñāpradīpa*), Bhāviveka thought that it was not sufficient for Mādhyamikas to restrict themselves to showing the logical absurdity of an opponent's position through a *prasaṅga*; he felt that it was necessary to restate Madhyamaka views on emptiness in the form of valid independent inferences containing an independent thesis (*pratijñā*) backed by

---

[151] Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 36.

[152] Ames, "Buddhapālita's Exposition of the Madhyamaka," 323.

reasons and examples. He also maintained that a valid inference is implicit in Nāgārjuna's opening verse to the *Fundamental Verses of the Middle* (MMK 1.1) and requires only a restatement. [153]

Bhāviveka criticizes Buddhapālita by pointing out that his explanation of the first verse of Nāgārjuna's text is not a valid inference acceptable across traditions since it lacks a reason (*hetu, rtags*) and an example (*dṛṣṭānta, dpe*). In other words, all the features of a valid inference developed by Indian philosophers and understood across "party-lines," to use a term from Dan Arnold's book, are not present.[154] Sufficient evidence exists to suggest that Bhāviveka's use of valid independent inferences marks a departure from the linguistic conservatism of Nāgārjuna and Buddhapālita. But to what extent does it indicate a shift in Madhyamaka ontology? Bhāvaviveka himself seems to be clear in maintaining that the ultimate reality is beyond verbal proliferation and that his usage of inference is only in the conventional domain. The role of inference for him is to point to what the ultimate is not; it does not allow us directly to know the ultimate.[155]

However, other prominent Madhyamaka scholars such as Candrakīrti would later charge that Bhāviveka's move is a tacit acknowledgement of the real existence of entities at the conventional level. According to his critics, if the words refer to objects in a valid inference, they must designate objects, even if conventionally, with real existence.[156] Such a position is seen as untenable for Mādhyamikas who maintain that all phenomena lack intrinsic nature, even conventionally. It is

---

[153] Malcolm David Eckel, *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents: Chapters 4 and 5 of Bhāviveka's Madhyamakahṛdayakārikāḥ with Tarkajvāla Commentary* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 49–52.

[154] For the role of inference in inter-traditional debate in India around Dharmakīrti's time, see Daniel A Arnold, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 1–9.

[155] Eckel, *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents*, 75.

[156] Eckel, 50.

based on such a reading that twelfth-century Tibetans would retrospectively consider Bhāviveka to be the originator of the sub-school of Madhyamaka they termed Svātantrika-Madhyamaka (*dbu ma rang rgyud pa*) in contrast to the "more accurate" Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka (*dbu ma thal 'gyur ba*).[157] The debate on the validity of human cognition and the role of inference in realizing the ultimate waged by twelfth-century Tibetans thus led to the classification of Indian Madhyamaka into the two sub-schools mentioned above.[158]

It can be argued that no explicit evidence could be found in his writings to charge that that Bhāvaviveka reified the intrinsic existence of phenomena at the conventional level in the process of employing valid inferences. However, there is enough evidence to maintain that his decision was based on the intellectual climate of the time when the influence of the Buddhist epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti was felt across traditions.[159] In such a climate, his use of valid inferences could be argued as a case of his skillful means to engage the Buddhist and non-Buddhist epistemologists at their own level without making any ontological commitment himself. With respect to the use of inference by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, Sara McClintock argues along the same line stating that both of them should not be understood as

---

[157] For more on this issue, see Georges B. J Dreyfus and Sara L McClintock, *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What Difference Does a Difference Make?* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003).

[158] Kevin Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan Creation of Prāsaṅgika*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 53.

[159] Regarding the influence of debate and its rules on his use of inference, see Eckel, *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents*, 50–51.

making any ontological commitment due to their use of inference since they operate at different

levels of analysis and since they reject any "given" substratum at the ultimate level.[160]

### 5.4 The Mahāmudrā View of Ultimate Reality in Relation to Implicative or Non-Implicative Negation

Discussions of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view of the ultimate also raise the question of what is

negated or absent at the ultimate level. Although both the Mahāmudrā and the Madhyamaka

traditions agree in their apophatic characterization of the ultimate, describing it in negative terms,

they differ in terms of the nature of that negation. Related to the *prasaṅga* form of argument to

negate the self-nature of all phenomena, Nāgārjuna and his Mādhyamika followers employ a

particular form of negation that was retrospectively termed by the tradition as a non-implicative

negation (*prasajyapratiṣedha, med dgag*), meaning that such a negation does not imply the

existence of something else in the wake of the negation.[161] This is contrasted with the other form

of negation termed as an implicative negation (*paryudāsa, ma yin dgag*) which does imply the

existence of something else in the wake of the negation of something. In contrast to the

Madhyamaka tradition, strong evidence exists to argue that the negation present in Gampopa's

Mahāmudrā conception of the ultimate points to a form of implicative negation.

As we have demonstrated earlier, the ultimate in the Mahāmudrā context, variously called the

innate mind, coemergent mind, ordinary mind, mind-itself, *dharmakāya*, and so forth, refers not

only to the emptiness or non-arising aspect of the mind; it also refers to the union of emptiness

aspect and the subtle nonconceptual clarity aspect of the mind termed as nature (*gsal stong zung*

---

[160] Sara McClintock, "The Role of the 'given' in the Classification of Śāntarakṣīta and Kamalaśīla as Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas," in *Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What Difference Does a Difference Make?* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 139.

[161] Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 37.

*’jug*). As we have seen*,* Gampopa is emphatic that the ultimate or the innate mind that is sustained in meditative equipoise necessarily contains the aspect of clarity, arguing that the lack of clarity will amount to maintaining a nihilistic position.[162] When nonconceptual clarity of awareness is sustained in meditative equipoise, it implies that certain things are eliminated from this state such as the presence of conceptual thoughts, including the dualism of subject and object. To put it differently, the absence of conceptual thoughts and dualism implies the presence of a subtle nonconceptual clarity, thus making the Mahāmudrā view as sustained in meditative equipoise an instantiation of an implicative negation.

It is not only within the context of meditative equipoise that Gampopa points to the existence of the union of emptiness and nonconceptual clarity. Gampopa ultimately extends this union to incorporate all phenomenal appearances by arguing that no phenomenal appearance is ever distinct from the innate mind. Both share basic clarity as their nature since the clarity present in phenomenal appearances is a manifestation of the clarity inherent in the innate mind. In other words, Gampopa maintains that the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances are nondual. This nonduality of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances points to a unique Mahāmudrā contemplative technique in which there is no separation between the meditation and post-meditation state (*mnyam rjes dbyer med*). This technique will be discussed in detail in in the following chapter.

When the ultimate reality is eventually revealed as a state in which the innate mind and phenomenal appearances are nondifferent, Gampopa further reinforces our understanding that

---

[162] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings (2000, vol. 2)," 126.

clarity is sustained in meditation pertaining to the ultimate. The two are nondifferent just like the

ocean and its waves. In *Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā* we read:

> Awareness with its nature of clarity,
> Has no separation, no distraction, and no cessation.
> Within it, whatever thoughts
> May arise in their diversity—
> All are its nature.
> When the ordinary mind is not distracted,
> All memory and thoughts are awareness;
> One does not need to view them as faults;
> At the time of distraction, it is thought;
> By looking at itself,
> Thoughts that arise one after another
> Are recognized as the mind;
> They become like the water and its waves.[163]

In this way, Gampopa presents a vision of the ultimate in which emptiness and appearances

are united and nondual. Such a conception of the ultimate in which emptiness and appearances are

united also points to an implicative negation because although dualism is absent, clarity is still

present at the ultimate level. The passage above also elucidates that Gampopa establishes the

nonduality of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances through the concept of co-

emergence, the doctrine that maintains that the innate or the coemergent mind co-arises with the

phenomenal appearance. This co-emergence implies that there is no subjective mind and a

corresponding objective phenomenon at the ultimate level as they are conceptually labeled and

---

[163] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 99-100: *rig pa gsal ba'i ngo bo de / 'bral med yengs med rgyun chad med / de yi ngang la dran rtog ni / sna tshogs gang dang gang byung ba / thams cad de yi ngo bo yin / tha mal shes pa ma yengs na / dran rtog thams cad rig pa yin / de la skyon du blta mi dgos / yengs pa'i dus rtog pa yin te / de nyid rang la bltas pas su / rtog pa gcig byung gnyis byung rnam s/ thams cad sems su shes pa ni / chu dang chu yi rlabs ltar 'gyur /.*

mutually implicated in the act of labeling, thus proving that the dualistic structure exists only as a conceptual imputation.

## 5.5   Buddha nature and Mahāmudrā Ultimate Reality

The question of whether the ultimate reality is an implicative or non-implicative negation is also closely tied to how Buddha nature came to be understood in Tibet.

According to Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal ('Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, 1392–1481), Maitreya's *Ratnagotravibhāga*, known also as the *Uttaratantra,* and its commentary were first translated into Tibetan by Ngog Loden Sherab (Rngog lbo ldan shes rab, 1059–1109) with the help of Sajjana, a student of Maitrīpāda. However, after the initial introduction of these texts, two distinct commentarial lineages developed in Tibet: a so-called analytical tradition (*dpyod lugs*) that was transmitted by Ngog Loden Sherab, and a meditation tradition (*sgom lugs*) that was transmitted by Tsen Khawoche (Brtsan kha bo che dri med shes rab, 1021–?), who is reported to have received it from Sajjana.[164] Mathes has noted that one of the reasons for their differing interpretation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* concerns their understanding of Buddha nature. Ngog Loden Sherab understood it as identical with emptiness understood as a non-affirming negation (*med dgag*). In contrast, Tsen Khawoche understood it more positively, as referring to the mind's natural luminosity (*gsal cha* or *'od gsal*),[165] which can be described as a form of affirming negation (*ma yin dgag*). The above difference in conceptualization of the Buddha nature also points to a significant difference in meditation, namely in terms of what is actually sustained in nondual

---

[164] Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within*, 105, 147.

[165] For a detailed discussion on these two traditions based on Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal's description, see Mathes, 25–34.

meditation. As we have seen earlier, Gampopa stresses that mind's nature of clear light (*'od gsal*) should be sustained in Mahāmudrā meditation and that without clarity, the spiritual path comes to an end. This is due to the fact that Buddha nature is identified as clear light. On this ground, after discussing these two traditions of interpretation of Buddha nature, Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal concludes that the meditation tradition of Tsen Khawoche is intimately linked with the Mahāmudrā pith instructions of Maitrīpāda and his students.

Also, according to Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal, the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is identified by Gampopa himself as a key Indian precedent for his Non-tantric Mahāmudrā.[166] Textual evidence also demonstrates that Maitreya's description of Buddha nature clearly resonates with Gampopa's understanding of the ultimate in ways beyond the fact that they both entail implicative negation. That is, both point to the primordial purity of the mind and how seeing it leads to liberation. In his *Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā*, Gampopa refers to the primordial purity of the mind and how seeing it leads to liberation.

> To look at one's own mind,
> Is to look perfectly at the perfect itself.
> If one's mind sees itself,
> One becomes thoroughly liberated on seeing the perfect.[167]

Gampopa confirms our earlier assessment of his Mahāmudrā view in which the absence of dualism is a key feature. He states that the mind is both the perceiver and the perceived, and that when this is thoroughly recognized, one will be liberated.

---

[166] Mathes, 155.

[167] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 101: *rang gi sems la blta ba ni / yang dag nyid la yang dag bta / rang sems rang gis mthong ba ni / yang dag mthong nas rnam par grol /*.

Similar to Gampopa's description of the innate mind as innately pure and free from the dualistic

structure, Maitreya points to the primordial purity of the Buddha nature and how seeing it leads to

the state of liberation.

> There is not the slightest thing to be eliminated here;
> Nothing needs to be added.
> One sees correctly sees what is real;
> When the real is seen, one is liberated.[168]

From context we know that "here" in the passage above refers to the Buddha nature. Gampopa

goes on to point out that Buddha nature is primordially pure and free, and that one need do nothing

other than realize or see it for what it is.

In addition to describing the primordial purity of Buddha nature or *dharmakāya*, *Uttaratantra*

explains the emptiness aspect of the *dharmakāya* or Buddha nature along the lines of Gampopa's

presentation of the emptiness aspect of the innate mind, construing it terms of having no arising,

abiding or cessation. This further validates that Gampopa's innate mind or *dharmakāya*

corresponds to *Uttaratantra*'s conception of the Buddha nature.

> The essence of mind is like the space element:
> It has neither causes, nor conditions,
> Nor any of these in combination;
> It has no arising, no abiding, and no destruction.[169]

---

[168] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, Tsultrim Gyamtso, and Maitreya, *Buddha Nature: The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra*, trans. Rosemarie Fuchs (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000), 27.

[169] Maitreya and Dzongsar Jamyang Khentse Rinpoche, *Buddha-Nature: Mahayana-Uttaratantra-Shastra by Maitreya With Commentary by Dzongasar Jamyang Khentse Rinpoche*, ed. Alex Trisonglio (Canada: Kyentse Foundation, 2007), 58.

As these passages indicate, there is strong evidence that both Gampopa's understanding of the innate mind as the Mahāmudrā view and Buddha nature as presented in *Uttaratantra* refer to the ultimate nature of the mind that is the union of clarity and emptiness.

## 6   Conclusion

This chapter on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view presented some of the key doctrines that Gampopa employs in order to point to his Mahāmudrā view. Termed variously as innate mind, ordinary mind, the *dharmakāya*, and so forth, Gampopa understands his Mahāmudrā view as not a conceptual doctrine, but the nondual awareness that is directly encountered in meditative experience. After discussing Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view in detail, including the doctrines and categories that he employs in establishing that view, the second part of the chapter articulated some of the key implications and issues that arise out of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view when considered in the context of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra philosophy.

Part I of the chapter discussed some of the key concepts employed by Gampopa in presenting his Mahāmudrā view, which ultimately refers to the union of nonconceptual clarity and the emptiness aspect of the mind. Gampopa employs the doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind to establish that the mind or awareness is devoid of the dualistic structure. In addition, he employs a related doctrine he termed as the unity of the coemergent mind and coemergent appearances to establish how the coemergent mind and its coemergent phenomenal appearances co-arise. Gampopa is thus implicitly elucidating that both are empty of true existence since they mutually are implicated.

The first part of this chapter, based on the discussion of these two doctrines, argues that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view of the ultimate refers to the nondual and nonconceptual mind that is directly sustained in meditative equipoise, with the clarity aspect of the mind being an important

aspect of that ultimate reality. With this clarity aspect, Gampopa argues that without this clarity aspect, emptiness would refer to a mere conceptual abstract that would lead us into a nihilistic state. In the final analysis, Gampopa understands the ultimate to be the nondual and nonconceptual wisdom itself as indicated by his description of it as the coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i yes shes*).

The second part of the chapter begins by demonstrating that Gampopa's doctrine of the unity of innate mind and its phenomenal appearances resonates with the union of the two truths in the Madhyamaka context. The chapter then goes to discuss the way in which the *Mahāmudrā* view ultimately resembles a synthesis of Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka tradition's presentation of the view, a process that is strikingly similar to the one that is followed by Śāntarakṣita in the eighth century. It then goes on argue how both traditions do not make any ontological commitment with regard to the ultimate and see language as limited in describing something that is seen as beyond concept. The chapter continues by arguing that the Mahāmudrā tradition differs from the Madhyamaka tradition in terms of its understanding of the negation associated with the ultimate, describing it as involving an implicative form of negation. The chapter then compares the concept of Buddha nature taught in Maitreya's *Uttaratantra* with Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, demonstrating that the two bear striking parallels in terms of their cataphatic conception of the ultimate, including the implicative negation that is involved in both, and the soteriological significance based on the assertion that Buddha nature or the innate mind is primordially pure, untainted by defilements.

In Gampopa's presentation of the Mahāmudrā view, we observe a close connection between the Mahāmudrā view and meditation such that the view necessarily implicates the meditation. This is evident not only in the suggestion that when the view or the ground is realized, it is primordially

free from any distraction. It is also present in the doctrine of the nonduality of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances. When phenomenal appearances are not seen as distinct from the mind, their arising does not distract one from the meditative state focusing on the clarity of the innate mind and instead helps to enhance it. The detailed presentation of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation, including its close relationship with the view, will be discussed in the next chapter.

# Chapter 3 – Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: The Meditation

## 1   Introduction

In the preceding chapter on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, we saw how Gampopa had initially presented mind as having three aspects of appearance (*sems kyi snang tshul gsum*):

1.  the nature (*ngo bo*) of the mind: the nonconceptual luminous clarity aspect

2.  the essence (*rang bzhin*) of the mind: the non-arising or emptiness aspect

3.  the characteristic (*mtshan nyid*) of the mind: the diversity or appearance aspect

Gampopa then argues that such a division of mind into three aspects is a heuristic device designed to point to the ultimate nondual nature of all three aspects. The result is an understanding of the innate mind-itself as the nondual union of clarity and emptiness, a union which is further understood to be nondifferent from its diverse phenomenal appearances.

In this chapter, we will explore Gampopa's corresponding meditation of nonduality, which he calls the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*). This yoga involves contemplative techniques to realize and sustain the coemergence, or union, of these three aspects of the mind. Our analysis of Gampopa's yoga is presented in four main parts. The chapter opens by situating Gampopa's meditation as it is understood and practiced in the broader Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) or Sūtra Vehicle tradition and contains three subsections. The first subsection defines meditation and its two broad categories of calm abiding (*śamatha, zhi gnas*) and insight meditation (*vipaśyanā, lhag mthong*). The second subsection discusses meditation within the context of the three types of wisdom and continues by explaining the epistemological possibility of moving from conceptual realization to nonconceptual realization of the ultimate through the union of calm abiding and insight as understood in the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition. Following this explanation of the move from conceptuality to nonconceptuality, the third subsection considers

Gampopa's unique nonconceptual and nondual approach to meditation and briefly examines one of the main features of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation—the use of mind as the ground of meditation.

With this background in place, we move on to present Gampopa's instructions for Mahāmudrā meditation, which as we have previously noted is not fully separable for his understanding of the view. We begin with a presentation of Gampopa's contemplative method of the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) construed as the union of the coemergent innate mind (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*) and coemergent appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*). We consider how the yoga of coemergence is employed to realize the co-arising (*lhan cig tu skyes pa*), and hence the nonduality, of the three aspects of appearance of the mind which are only apparently distinct: the nature of the mind (*sems kyi ngo bo*), the essence of the mind (*sems kyi rang bzhin*), and the characteristic of the mind (*sems kyi mtshan nyid*). As we have seen, these respectively refer to the clarity, emptiness, and phenomenal appearance of the mind. This section includes a presentation of the contemplative method of identifying and sustaining the nonconceptual present-moment awareness, or "the nature of the mind," in meditation. We also define nonconceptual clarity and its role in mediation by expounding on contemplative techniques designed to induce such a nonconceptual state. Following this, we examine Gampopa's contemplative technique for realizing the union of nonconceptual clarity and the emptiness aspect of the mind. This subsection includes a description of the method to induce the realization of the emptiness of the mind, the method for sustaining the nonconceptual state of the mind, and the method for sustaining the certainty of the emptiness of the mind within a nonconceptual state. The final section of the chapter reviews Gampopa's method of integrating thoughts in a meditative state, sustaining the union of clarity and emptiness of the mind.

Although this chapter primarily examines Gampopa's unique Mahāmudrā meditation, a brief account of the result (*'bras bu*) of meditation deserves our attention. This is due to the inextricable interrelationship between the meditation and its result, such that one implicates the other. Thus, in the next part I explore the result of Mahāmudrā, focusing particularly on the self-liberation (*rang grol*) of thoughts (*vikalpa*, *rnam rtog*) and defilements (*kleśa*, *nyon mongs*). I begin in the first subsection by identifying two forms of Mahāmudrā meditation: one undertaken to realize the Mahāmudrā state and the other undertaken after realizing the Mahāmudrā state. The next subsection examines the notion of self-liberation while the final subsection describes the actual meditative process of self-liberation of thoughts and defilements.

Finally, in the fourth part, I offer an analysis of some of the key features of meditation that are unique to the Mahāmudrā tradition and stand in contrast to the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition. The first subsection considers Gampopa's contemplative method of mind focusing on the mind to establish calm abiding and insight. In the next subsection, Gampopa's meditation is explained as a system of developing insight based on calm abiding, construed as finding the view on the ground of mediation, which will be elucidated later in this section. This part ends with a subsection that examines Gampopa's meditation as offering a unique and authentic method to practice the union of the two truths. In this way, Gampopa's method implicitly suggests the existence of a genuine union of method and wisdom.

## 2 Contextualizing Gampopa's Mahāmudrā Meditation Within The Perfection of Wisdom Tradition

### 2.1 Meditation, Its Meaning, and Two Broad Types

The primary goal of Buddhist meditation is to induce a direct and nonconceptual experience of ultimate reality. Although the practice of meditation eventually leads to a nonconceptual state, meditation itself includes both conceptual and nonconceptual processes and states. For example,

in some types of meditation, one may seek to familiarize oneself with a particular object of meditation conceptually so that it can be ultimately experienced directly without the intermediary of a concept. The practice of developing familiarity of both conceptual and nonconceptual states of meditation is conveyed by the Sanskrit term *bhāvanā* and its Tibetan translation, *sgom*.[170]

One of the primary ways to categorize meditation is to divide it in terms of calm abiding (*śamatha, zhi gnas*) and insight (*vipaśyanā, lhag mthong*).[171] Calm abiding can be described both as the process that results in a state of single-pointed nonconceptual concentration, and it can also refer to that state itself. Likewise, insight refers to the process that gives rise to the wisdom realizing ultimate reality (*paramārthasatya, don dam bden pa*), and it too can refer to that state itself.[172] In the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition, insight initially requires a form of conceptual analytical meditation, seen as necessary to give rise to wisdom. Once wisdom or insight into the ultimate is generated through analytical meditation, it is sustained in calm abiding practice so to as to give rise to a direct and nonconceptual realization of the ultimate. After one develops a conceptual understanding of the ultimate through reflection, the two types of meditation are practiced sequentially. First the state of calm abiding is cultivated, and then it is employed to sustain the meaning of the ultimate that was ascertained through prior reflection. The combined practice of these two types of meditation is said to give rise to the union of calm abiding and insight

---

[170] For an excellent analysis of different forms of meditation within the Buddhist tradition, including the choice of the term "meditation" to translate the Sanskrit term *bhāvanā*, see Martin T Adam, "Two Concepts of Meditation and Three Kinds of Wisdom in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama*s: A Problem of Translation," *Buddhist Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2006): 71–92.

[171] See, for example, Adam, 80.

[172] For a discussion on meditation as a process and a state, see Martin T Adam, "Meditation and the Concept of Insight in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākramas*" (Doctoral Dissertation, Montreal, Canada, McGill University, 2003), 80.

(*zhi lhag zung 'brel*), which leads to a direct and nonconceptual realization of ultimate reality. Although Gampopa rarely utilizes the terms "calm abiding" and "insight" when discussing his meditation, these two forms of meditation are implicit in his contemplative practices, a point that will become clear over the course of this chapter. For example, in Gampopa's meditation there is clearly a method of cultivating single-pointed concentration by focusing on the mind, a practice that arguably comes under the rubric of calm abiding meditation. There is also a method of cultivating the realization of the emptiness of the mind, an insight practice.

It is possible that Gampopa's refraining from deploying these meditative terms could be deliberate, likely because these terms would have been known to his students and laden with connotations from the mainstream Perfection of Wisdom tradition, thus hindering them from fully appreciating the uniqueness of Mahāmudrā meditation. Alternatively, he may not have used these terms because he would have assumed that his students were already well-versed in these two forms of meditation, as is evidenced by this passing reference to calm abiding in one of his texts:

> There are four causes for the generation of calm abiding (*zhi gnas*): generation due to the blessings of a guru; generation due to the power of auspicious connections (*rten 'brel*); generation due to the accumulation of merit; and generation due to the purification of negative karma.[173]

It is interesting that Gampopa here links calm abiding meditation with such causal factors as the guru's blessings, the power of auspicious connections, the accumulation of merit and the

---

[173] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 103-104: *zhi gnas skye ba'i rgyu ni bzhi ste / bla ma'i byin rlabs kyis skye ba dang / rten 'brel las skye ba dang / tshogs bsags pa las skye ba dang / sdig pa sbyangs pa las skye ba dang bzhi yin gsung /.*

purification of misdeeds, as this points implicitly to his recognition of an ethical foundation for success in meditation practice.

## 2.2    From Conceptual to Nonconceptual Understanding of Reality Through the Union of Calm Abiding and Insight and the Three Types of Wisdom

In Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation, the relationship between conceptual philosophy and nonconceptual meditative experience is posited in a unique way. All Buddhist traditions agree that the final nonconceptual realization of the ultimate nature of reality is direct and unmediated by concepts. However, the process of getting to such a nonconceptual realization of the ultimate differs in each tradition. One of the standard schemes through which the role of meditation in the Buddhist tradition can be presented is in terms of three types of wisdom (*shes rab gsum*). Within the context of the Sūtra Vehicle or Perfection of Wisdom tradition, the three types of wisdom are perhaps best described by the Indian master Kamalaśīla (740–795) who played a key role in the transmission of Buddhism into Tibet.[174] The three types of wisdom, which are cultivated sequentially, are as follows: the wisdom originating from study (*śrutamayī prajñā, thos byung gi shes rab*), the wisdom originating from reflection (*cintāmayī prajñā, bsam byung gi shes rab*), and the wisdom originating from meditation (*bhāvanāmayī prajñā, sgom byung gi shes rab*).

To briefly summarize: the wisdom originating from study refers to the understanding one gains from reading or listening to teachings; the wisdom originating from reflection results in a decisive conviction about reality and is the understanding obtained from rigorous and critical analysis of oral or written teachings; and the wisdom originating from meditation is cultivated by sustaining the decisive conviction about reality through single-pointed concentration. This

---

[174] For a detailed explanation of these three types of wisdom as described by Kamalaśīla in his *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama*), see Adam, "Meditation and the Concept of Insight in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama*s," 23–29.

ultimately leads to a direct and nonconceptual realization of the ultimate. Gampopa does not explicitly present his Mahāmudrā tradition within the context of the three types of wisdom discussed above. Instead, his tradition focuses almost exclusively on inducing a direct, nonconceptual wisdom arising out of meditation, thus circumventing the first two types of wisdom achieved via study and reflection. Gampopa's tendency to bypass the first two types of wisdom, I will argue, comes from his nonconceptual approach to meditation.

As described previously, in the Sūtra Vehicle or Perfection of Wisdom tradition one first gains a conceptual understanding of reality through philosophical investigation (*dpyad pa*), which is then sustained in meditation (*sgom pa*) in such a way as to gain a nonconceptual and direct experience of that reality. In order to form a conceptual (*don spyi*) understanding of reality, a practitioner undertakes years of philosophical study and training, deemed necessary for one to formally realize (albeit conceptually in the beginning) the nature of reality that is eventually sustained in meditation. Additionally, years of formal study are necessary to generate certainty (*nges shes*) regarding the nature of reality that one sustains nonconceptually in meditation. Study (*thos pa*) and reflection (*bsam pa*) are the first two stages of training in wisdom, the practice of understanding the nature of reality conceptually through rigorous analysis. The conceptual certainty regarding the nature of reality is then sustained single-pointedly in meditation to give rise to the direct nonconceptual realization of the ultimate, the third wisdom—the wisdom born out of meditation.

Kamalaśīla argues for the need to start with conceptual philosophical training in order to develop nonconceptual meditation in his three books on meditation titled *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama, sgom pa'i rim pa*). Kamalaśīla bases his framework on the cognitive model presented by Dharmakīrti (fl.ca.7th century C.E.), the Indian Buddhist epistemologist who heavily

influenced later generations of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist scholars and practitioners.[175] The premise that one needs to understand the nature of reality conceptually before developing nonconceptual realization of the ultimate is linked to whether the union of calm abiding, a nonconceptual state, and insight, a form of propositional knowledge, is possible. For example, Adam Martin posits that insight (*vipaśyanā*) meditation necessarily contains a subtle thought (*vicāra*) that is needed for the analytical process of generating wisdom. He argues that the nature of *vipaśyanā* is such that the persistent analytical conceptual component (*vicāra*), though subtle, cannot co-exist with a nonconceptual concentrative component.[176]

The need to first develop a conceptual understanding of the ultimate reality of emptiness in order to subsequently cultivate a nonconceptual understanding also poses a major ontological and epistemological problem which is difficult to reconcile. In Dharmakīrti's model, the ultimate reality of emptiness is a universal (*sāmānya, spyi mtshan*) that does not actually exist as a particular. Yet it is only particulars that can be the objects of direct perception (*pratyakṣa, mngon gsum*). This raises the question of how the ultimate reality of emptiness as an absence of self-nature (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*), can become an object of direct cognition, since it is also a universal and therefore also a concept. Navigating this difficult point through the works of Dharmakīrti, John Dunne proceeds by first explaining the movement from nonconceptual to conceptual cognition. With nonconceptual cognition, an image (*ākāra/rnam pa*) is generated when senses encounter an object. The image, i.e., a mental aspect of the object, is actually the consciousness

---

[175] For a clear description of these three forms of wisdom in Dharmakīrti's thought, see, for example, Dunne, "Realizing the Unreal," 499.

[176] Adam, "Two Concepts of Meditation and Three Kinds of Wisdom in Kamalaśīla's Bhāvanākramas," 82.

itself expressed as the image. In the subsequent moment, the same image is experienced as a concept through a cognitive process of exclusion (*apoha*).[177]

When moving from a conceptual to a nonconceptual cognition, Dharmakīrti notes two epistemological criteria that apply when concepts such impermanence and emptiness are known directly: (a) the vividness of experience from a first person phenomenological point of view, and (b) the taking of the concept of emptiness as a mental particular. Dharmakīrti notes that the former can occur even without an actual sense-object, as in the case of a dream or the visions of a deranged lover. Although the objects in both cases do not exist as real particulars, i.e., as objects of direct perception, they nevertheless are experienced as phenomenologically vivid in a manner that is akin to perceiving an object directly with sensory organs. With regard to the second point, the concept of impermanence or emptiness becomes an object of direct perception if it is taken as a mental particular from a first person phenomenological point of view. In explaining this point and the role reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*) plays in such a model of cognition, John Dunne writes:

> …. And as a mental event, that phenomenal content is a real mental particular that can be known in its nature as a mental event through reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti, rang rig*). In relation to that reflexive awareness, however, the content no longer appears to stand for something else; that is, it is no longer conceptual. In other words, as that which is known through reflexive awareness, every cognition— even every conception cognition—is a mental particular.[178]

As Dunne points out, on Dharmakīrti's view every cognition has a reflexive awareness, an aspect of awareness that is reflexively aware of itself. Furthermore, reflexive awareness experiences all types of cognition, including the conceptual ones directly and nonconceptually.

---

[177] Dunne, "Realizing the Unreal," 503.

[178] Dunne, 512–13.

This model of reflexive knowing is helpful for thinking about Gampopa's Mahāmudrā in which mind and its objects are nondual.

Now that we have discussed the movement from a conceptual to a nonconceptual realization as understood in the Buddhist epistemological tradition generally, we will explore Gampopa's position on the topic

## 2.3   Gampopa's Nonconceptual and Nondual Approach to Meditation

At the heart of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation lies an intimate, implicit relationship between nonduality and nonconceptuality. Gampopa appears to argue that our habitual tendency to divide the world dualistically into subject and object gives rise to all sorts of conceptual thoughts. Ordinarily we view phenomenal appearances, including thoughts, as distinct from the mind. As such, when we engage in meditation, we inadvertently see thoughts and appearances as distractions to be eliminated with counteractive measures or antidotes (*gnyen po*). However, when we realize that phenomenal appearances, including thoughts, are nondifferent from the mind—that is, when we understand the nonduality of mind and phenomenal appearances—then we begin to experience the natural pacification of phenomenal appearances without applying counteractive antidotes. In other words, nonduality helps to induce nonconceptuality in Gampopa's tradition.[179]

Although Gampopa does not present his meditation theory in terms of Dharmakīrtian epistemology, Gampopa's meditation clearly involves taking thoughts or concepts as mental particulars. Gampopa explains that phenomenal appearances, including thoughts, are not distinct from the mind, a position that is only tenable if we understand phenomenal appearances to be

---

[179] John Dunne argues that the development of the Yogācāra tradition and the related Buddhist epistemological tradition in India paved the way for a nondual style of mindfulness and meditation practices such as the Mahāmudrā. See Dunne, "Toward an Understanding of Non-Dual Mindfulness," 73–74.

mental particulars. A mental particular is a mental image and a mental image in turn is consciousness expressing itself in the form of the image. It is in this sense that phenomenal appearances are not distinct from the mind.

Finally, Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation is not limited to experiencing the nonduality of the mind and its phenomenal appearances. An important aspect of the meditation is also to realize the non-arising essence of this nonconceptual mind.[180]

## 3 The Yoga of Coemergence: The Contemplative Technique of Integrating the Three Aspects of Appearance of the Mind

In Gampopa's deeply experiential Mahāmudrā tradition the distinction between the view (*lta ba*) and the meditation (*sgom pa*) is somewhat artificial, as the view directly influences meditation. Primarily, this is because Gampopa understands that the view is not an object of knowledge, but is instead the ultimate nature of mind, which is itself nondual. In turn, meditation on the ultimate consists simply in sustaining the nondual mind without the distinction between the observer and the observed. In Gampopa's Mahāmudrā the link between the view and meditation is evidently so strong that their indivisibility is often suggested. In one of his texts, for example, Gampopa defines the view as the "uncontrived innate mind" (*lta ba ma bcos gnyug ma'i shes pa*) and defines meditation as "the nonconceptual ordinary mind" (*sgom pa mi rtog tha mal gyi shes pa*).[181]

---

[180] In order to understand how some scholars move from a Yogācāra to a Madhyamaka position by denying ultimate existence to mental images *(ākāra)*, see, for example, Shinya Moriyama, "Ratnākaraśānti's Theory of Cognition with False Mental Images (*alīkākāravāda) and the Neither-One-Nor-Many Argument," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, no. 2–3 (June 2014): 339–51, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-013-9200-9.

[181] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 124.

In the previous chapter, we explored one of fundamental ways in which Gampopa introduces the mind, that is, through the elucidation of the three aspects of the mind, described as three aspects of appearance (*snang tshul gsum*) of the identical nondual mind. His doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind bears directly on the corresponding contemplative technique he termed the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*). According to Gampopa's view, the three aspects of appearances—the nature, essence, and characteristic—are always in a state of unity (*zung 'jug*), as we have seen. Hence the three co-arise naturally at the level of reality. The purpose of meditation is to realize and sustain their unity through the practice of integrating or unifying the three modes of appearance of the mind through the practice of coemergent yoga (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*).

Gampopa begins by demonstrating a method of experiencing the nonconceptual clarity of the mind. Once introduced and experienced, the essence or the emptiness aspect of the mind will dawn automatically. In this way, one realizes the coemergence of the nonconceptual clarity of the mind and its emptiness. After the unity of nonconceptual clarity and emptiness are experienced (and thus integrated), Gampopa elucidates the method of experiencing the coemergent arising of thoughts and appearances (the third aspect of the mind), by pointing out that the clarity inherent in thoughts is not distinct from the fundamental clarity of the nonconceptual innate mind.[182] In this method, appearances (*snang ba*) and/or thoughts (*rtog pa*) are not deliberately suppressed, but are rather circumvented by recognizing them as manifestations of the nondual clarity of the mind.

Gampopa's contemplative technique, the yoga of coemergence, begins in meditative experience by finding this fundamental aspect of the mind, namely its nonconceptual clarity

---

[182] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Rnam rtog don dam gyi ngo sprod (Introduction of the Ultimate Reality of Thought)," in *Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of sGam po pa Bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul, vol. 2 (Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975), 230.

termed as the nature (*ngo bo*) of the mind. In what follows, I will explore what nonconceptual

clarity means, its role and significance, as well as Gampopa's contemplative method of inducing

or experiencing it in meditation.

## 3.1  Inducing a Nonconceptual Mental State by Focusing on the Nature of the Mind.

### 3.1.1  Nonconceptual Clarity and Its Significance for Meditation

Gampopa's yoga of coemergence begins by finding the first mode of mind, its nature (*ngo bo*)

during the meditative experience. As discussed in chapter 2, the nature refers to the nonconceptual

clarity of the mind. Importantly, this clarity aspect is inherent in every moment of cognition or

consciousness, even the purely conceptual ones. The quality of clarity of awareness is what defines

consciousness. A mind, in becoming aware of any external or internal object, by definition

experiences the clarity of awareness. On the other hand, no clarity is experienced when we place

two non-sentient entities such as two tables next to each other.

To identify this nonconceptual clarity through meditation, Gampopa instructs one to cultivate

an awareness of the gap between when the thought of the previous moment has passed and when

the next thought has yet to arise. In that gap, though no thought is present, one experiences a lucid

awareness that is to be identified as the nature, or the basic nonconceptual clarity, of the mind.

Previously, we cited the following quote from Gampopa's *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teaching*:

> As for the nature of the mind, it is like the lucidity and limpidity (*sal le sing nge ba*) that arises when one gazes at the full autumn moon with a sky free of clouds, the storms of winter having not yet arisen, and the mists and clouds of summer having disappeared. Similarly, there is a lucidity and limpidity of one's own awareness when the past thought has ceased and the future thought has yet to arise.[183]

---

[183] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings (2000, vol. 2)," 630: *de yang sems kyi ngo bo ni / dper na ston zla 'bring po nya'i nyin par / nam mkha' sprin med pa*

This nonconceptual clarity plays a major role in meditation. It becomes the ground or basis for one to actualize in meditation both a state of calm abiding and the insight or wisdom that realizes the non-arising nature of the mind. Gampopa indicates that sustaining the clarity aspect of the mind serves several purposes: to identify the mind or awareness in one's meditative experience as the ground of meditation; to achieve the state of calm abiding by employing nonconceptual awareness as the basis of one's meditation (a technique in which the mind focuses in a nondual way on itself); and to realize the non-arising essence or emptiness of the mind.

### 3.1.2   Contemplative Techniques for Inducing Nonconceptual Clarity

The ability to sustain the gap between thoughts plays a fundamental role in experientially identifying nonconceptual clarity as the ground of meditation. Thus, Gampopa offers various contemplative techniques to identify this clarity in the gap, essentially directing us to the present moment as a way of not getting distracted by thoughts pertaining to the past and future. In addition to presenting methods by which one can experience nonconceptual clarity in the gap between thoughts, Gampopa also offers instructions to avoid getting distracted with thoughts pertaining the three times, the past, the present and the future.

Once one is able to experience nonconceptual awareness and utilize it as the ground for her or his meditation, Gampopa asserts that one will never again be distracted as one's mind, or the clarity, is always present in all states of consciousness. For Gampopa, an important feature of this nonconceptual awareness is its vibrant knowingness (*nges shes*), a term that we elsewhere translate as "certainty" but which here indicates a kind of unshakable vibrancy. Nonconceptual awareness

---

*dgun gyi tshub ma ni ma langs pa / dbyar gyi na bun dang sprin yal ba la bltas pa'i dus su sal le sing nge ba zhig 'ong / de bzhin du rang gi shes pa rnam par rtog pa snga ma ni 'gags / phyi ma ni ma skyes pa'i dus der sal le sing nge ba de yin no /.*

is not a dull state; it possesses an inner noetic quality arising out of an experience of the absence

of any subject/object duality.

### 3.1.2.1 *Method of Sustaining the Nonconceptual Awareness Experienced in the Gap Between Thoughts*

As the passage above indicates, Gampopa argues that nonconceptual clarity or awareness is

accessible in the gap between the cessation of a past thought and the arising of the immediate

future thought. This gap signifies a state that is free from thoughts and distractions and is described

as lucid and limpid (*sal le sing nge ba*). In Gampopa's analogy, this gap is symbolized by a

cloudless autumn sky that is free from both the wintry dust of past thoughts and the clouds and

haze of a future summer sky. If we fail to sustain this gap, we fail to experience nonconceptual

clarity, only to be carried away by thoughts of the three times.

Having introduced nonconceptual awareness as the ground of meditation, Gampopa offers a

unique technique by which to experience and sustain it.

> It is said that the mind becomes clear if not modified and that water becomes pure
> if not muddied.[184]

Gampopa offers interrelated techniques, starting with the important step of letting the mind abide

without making any effort to modify (*ma bcos pa*) it. Non-modification of the mind in meditation

in turn is achieved by letting the mind settle on its own ground *(rang sar)* in whatever form it

expresses (*rang dgar*).

Gampopa stresses that the technique of not applying any effort (*rtsol ba*) – lest one contrive

or modify the mental state – is important because it is the effort itself that tends to reinforce the

---

[184] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence (2000, vol. 3)," 180.: *sems ma bcos na gsal / chu ma rnyogs na dvangs bya ba yin pas…/*

experience of subject-object dualism. Dualistic grasping in turn obscures or pollutes (*slad pa*) the nonconceptual clarity aspect of the mind by giving rise to conceptual thoughts. It is in this vein that John Dunne, for example, argues that the significance of not applying cognitive effort (*ābhoga, rtsol ba*) in meditation is that effortlessness releases the structures that give rise to thoughts.[185]

Although the essence (*rang bzhin*) aspect of the mind will be discussed in the next section, it is important to note the intimate relationship between sustaining the nonconceptual clarity of mind and realizing the essence or emptiness of mind as indicated in the passage above. Gampopa makes an explicit claim that one must first sustain the nonconceptual clarity (nature) aspect of the mind, in order to develop the state of calm abiding. Additionally, he argues that sustaining the clarity of the mind will automatically induce a realization of the essence (*rang bzhin*) or ultimate non-arising nature of the mind.

### 3.1.2.2   *Eliminating Time Travelling: Preventing Distraction by the Thoughts Pertaining to the Three Times*

A significant obstacle to sustaining the nonconceptual clarity aspect of the mind is our deeply ingrained mental habit of clinging to a subjective self as rooted in the three times. Cognitive scientists describe this phenomenon as "time travelling" because the subject projects itself into the past or future,[186] thereby distracting us from being mindful of nonconceptual, present-moment awareness.

In a section of the *Instructions of Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā* knowns as the *Instructions on the Indivisibility of the Three Times*, Gampopa provides a practical

---

[185] Dunne, "Toward an Understanding of Non-Dual Mindfulness," 78.

[186] Dunne, 77.

contemplative method to ensure that our mind is able to focus on its own clarity without getting

distracted with thoughts pertaining to the three times. First, he offers the doctrinal justification for

not chasing after thoughts in the three times by pointing out that these thoughts are

indistinguishable from one's own mind just as a lamp and its rays are not distinct. He asserts that

our dualistic tendency to see thoughts as separate from the mind leads to the conceptual projection

(*sgro btags*) that appearances have inherent existence independent of the mind. Once this dualism

collapses and we realize that thoughts are indistinct from the mind, we are able to stay in present-

moment, nonconceptual awareness, without being enticed by dualistic thoughts. Pointing to the

lack of dualism between mind and thoughts, he writes:

> Coemergent mind is the *dharmakāya*.
> Coemergent appearances are the rays of the *dharmakāya*.
> Coemergent thoughts are the waves of the *dharmakāya*.
> Indivisible coemergence is the meaning of the *dharmakāya*.[187]

 After offering the doctrinal basis for not chasing after thoughts, Gampopa urges that the way to

dwell in the momentary clarity of the mind without getting lost in thoughts of the three times is to

avoid chasing after past thoughts, to avoid anticipating future thoughts, and to avoid mentally

engaging (*yid la byed pa*) with present appearances. Gampopa maintains that although one may

initially be able to sustain such a nonconceptual clarity for only a moment or two, this

contemplative technique will eventually lead to a lasting state of tranquility which he likened to a

continuum of a river. In the *Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence*, Gampopa

explains:

---

[187] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 93: *rang sems lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku / snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i 'od / rnam rtog lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i rlabs / dbyer med lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i don /.*

How is it done at the time of practice? Do not trace past thoughts. Do not anticipate future thoughts. Do not mentally engage with present appearances. Let the mind settle in an uncontrived manner, naturally, as it is, within one's awareness that is clear but nonconceptual, as if in the middle of sky that is utterly pure. At that time the mind may abide for a moment or two. One should neither see longer duration [of concentration] as positive nor shorter duration as negative. At a certain time, after meditating in this way, the mind will merge [in a state of single-pointedness] like the tip of flames of a lamp or like the flow of a river. At that time, it is referred to as the yoga of the flow of a river.[188]

The above passage explains how to deal with past and future thoughts. The key is to refrain from chasing after thoughts, knowing that they are not distinct from the mind. As pointed out in earlier discussions, to refrain from mentally engaging with present appearances results in not objectifying them, seeing them as indistinct from the mind, and thus collapsing the dualistic structure.

### 3.1.3   Undistracted Continuity and the Noetic Quality of a Meditation that Sustains the Clarity of the Mind

Two qualities or features of meditation that sustain the nature (*ngo bo*), or nonconceptual clarity aspect of the mind deserve mention here, for they help us define its uniqueness. Firstly, Gampopa asserts that if we are able to successfully sustain the nature of the mind in meditation, we will never be distracted from such a state, a feature of meditation that is not present in meditation practices undertaken in a dualistic structure. Once one identifies the nature of the mind

---

[188] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence (2000, vol. 3)," 178–79. *de nyams su len pa'i dus su 'di tsug yin / 'das pa'i rnam par rtog pa'i rjes mi bcad / ma 'ongs pa'i rnam par rtog pa sngon mi bsu / da ltar ba'i snang ba yid la mi bya bar / shes pa gsal la rtog pa med pa / nam mkha' rnam par dag pa'i dkyil lta bu'i ngang du / sems ma bcos par rang gar tsen gyis bzhag / de'i dus su shes pa skad cig ma gcig tsam mam / skad cig gnyis pa tsam gnas pa 'ong / de yun ring ba la yon tan du mi lta / thung ba la skyon du mi lta ba yin / de ltar bsgoms pas dus ci zhig tsa na / shes pa de mar me'i rtse mo'am / chu bo'i rgyun bzhin du phril gyis 'gro ba 'ong ba yin / de'i dus chu bo rgyun gyi rnal 'byor bya ba yin /.*

and is able use it as the basis of meditation, one can never be distracted as there is no instance when the clarity or awareness is absent in any mental state:

> Meditation with a [dualistic] mind and mental engagement is lost; but a meditation that sustains only the [mind's] nature (*ngo bo*) is never lost.[189]

Secondly, Gampopa asserts that there is an important feature of inner knowingness in this state of nonconceptual clarity and that it is not simply a mere absence of thoughts. As will be discussed in the fourth chapter, one of the main critiques of Gampopa's meditation is that it is devoid of conceptual, analytical meditation, deemed necessary by the mainstream Perfection of Wisdom tradition to give rise to certainty regarding knowledge before it transforms into nonconceptual meditative experience.

Gampopa's meditation nonetheless claims to induce inner certainty (*nges shes*) within a nonconceptual state. That is, in addition to being a lucid nonconceptual awareness, the state also has an inner noetic quality that comes from ascertaining the nonduality of subject and object. Warning against sustaining a blank nonconceptual state without any quality of alert awareness, Gampopa states in *Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization*:

> A dull nonconceptuality is a demon of meditation;
> As long as certainty does not dawn from deep within,
> Do not describe it terms of good or bad experience,
> As there is the danger of falling into the domain of ignorance.[190]

---

[189] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 102: *sems dang yid la byas pa'i sgom ni 'chor 'bral byed / ngo bo rang bsgom pa'i sgom la 'chor 'bral med /.*

[190] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 23. *mi rtog lteng po sgom pa'i bdud / nges shes gting nas ma skyes par / nyams myong bzang ngan mi brjod do / gti mug phyogs su 'gro nyen gda'o /.*

### 3.2    Coemergence of Nonconceptual Clarity and its Non-Arising Essence

As was elucidated in the previous chapter, sustaining the clarity aspect of awareness, although

an important component of meditation, does not in itself constitute meditation on the ultimate

nature of the mind in Gampopa's system. Since the ultimate nature of the mind, referred to as the

innate mind or the ordinary mind, consists of the union of the clarity and the emptiness aspects of

the mind (*gsal stong zung 'jug),* the corresponding meditation in turn consists of sustaining their

coemergence or nonduality within a single meditative state. Highlighting this point in a passage

we also saw when considering the view, Gampopa states in *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings*:

> As for non-arising awareness, one decisively ascertains that all phenomena have
> not arisen primordially and do not arise presently. Treating it only as non-arising
> leads to nihilism. Rather, awareness abides within non-arising, just as, for example,
> butter exists within milk. As for the unceasing path, it is not a path if there is no
> clarity to be experienced. The nature of awareness is the clarity that is unceasing.
> Cultivating this is the path.[191]

In the passage above, Gampopa stresses the unity of clarity and emptiness when meditating on the

ultimate nature of the mind. Additionally, he argues that that mere meditation on emptiness,

without clarity in the meditative state amounts to nihilism (*chad lta*) and therefore such a state

cannot become a spiritual or mental path or state (*lam*). In other words, sustaining the ultimate

---

[191] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings (2000, vol. 2)," 624: *skye ba med pa'i rig pa ni / chos thams cad gdod ma nas ma skyes shing skye ba med par thag chod / skye med gcig pur byas na de ltar 'gro ste / skye med la rig pa khong skyal du gnas pa ni/ dpe 'o ma la mar yod pa dang 'dra'o / 'gag pa med pa'i lam ni / gsal ba'am nyams su myong rgyu cig med na lam du mi 'gro ste / rig pa'i ngo bo ni gsal la ma'gags pa / de goms par byas na lam mo /.* Note that we follow the alternate reading found in Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Zhal gyi bdud rtsi thun mong ma yin pa (Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings)," in *Collected Works (gsum 'bum) of sGam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975), 126: … / *skye med gcig pur byas na chad ltar 'gro ste / ...*

nature of the mind or the innate mind necessarily entails experiencing the coemergence of the nonconceptual clarity of the mind and its emptiness. Gampopa employs only a brief analysis to conceptually ascertain the non-arising essence of the mind. His primary method for inducing a direct realization of the ultimate entails maintaining a nonconceptual state, as will be explained in the next section.

### 3.2.1 Nonconceptual Meditation as the Main Method for Inducing Direct Realization of the Emptiness of the Mind and Its Phenomenal Appearances

In Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition sustaining a nonconceptual state of mind becomes the primary method for inducing direct realization of the emptiness of the mind and its phenomenal appearances, though textual evidence suggests that Gampopa's system requires prior conceptual analysis (*dpyad pa sngon song*). However, it does not involve undertaking extensive analytical philosophy such as in the Madhyamaka tradition. Instead, it consists of analytically establishing that the mind has no inherent arising, abiding, or cessation (*skye 'gags gnas gsum*). This form of analysis is not only brief, but is also meant to collapse dualistic and conceptual thinking immediately. The result of such an analysis is often conveyed in terms of the non-arising essence of the mind (*skye ba med pa),* indicating that its abiding and cessation are simultaneously negated.

Gampopa prescribes sustaining nonconceptual awareness itself as the principal method that gives rise to a direct, nonconceptual realization of the ultimate nature of both the mind and its phenomenal appearances. As is argued in the previous chapter, such an experiential approach to the realization of the mind's non-arisen essence is necessary because the view realizing the emptiness of the mind in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition refers to a direct nonconceptual realization, not a conceptual understanding. Yet, the question remains: How can sustaining a nonconceptual state induce the realization of the ultimate nature of the mind? Gampopa addresses this at two levels. First, one establishes analytically that the mind has no inherent existence.

Following that, one enters into a state of meditative equipoise, sustaining nonconceptual clarity

and directly realizing the emptiness of the mind due to the force of prior analysis.

In terms of realizing the ultimate on the basis of this nonconceptual meditation, Gampopa

instructs that all phenomenal appearances are nondifferent from the mind and are hence devoid of

inherent existence. Mind in turn is realized as empty, due in part to the force of prior analysis. In

other words, appearances lack inherent existence because the mind, the source of appearances from

which they are not distinct, also lacks inherent existence. In *Instructions on Essential Meaning:*

*Quintessence of Mahāmudrā* we read:

> Whatever appearance arises, it is mind because it is clear. On the basis of the
> experience of clarity, mind should be recognized because it is awareness.
> Awareness is by nature empty. This is realization. Sustaining the continuum of that
> [empty nature of awareness] and stabilizing its experience is referred to as
> meditation.[192]

Here, Gampopa offers two ways of conceptualizing the inherent emptiness of mind. First,

Gampopa justifies that phenomenal appearances have the nature of clarity, because they are not

different from the mind itself. From there, he goes on to show that appearances have no inherent

reality because they are not different from the mind. Next, Gampopa points out that the mind itself

is empty of inherent existence, further substantiating that whatever appears within a mind that has

no true existence could not have any real existence. Reiterating this point, the same text states:

> These are the three things to be realized: realize that from that [innate mind] that
> does not exist as anything, a diversity [of appearances] arises. Realize that although

---

[192] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of
Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 109: *snang ba cir snang yang sems yin te / gsal ba'i phyir ro / gsal
bar nyams su myong bas sems shes bya ste / rig pa yin pa'i phyir ro / rig pa rang bzhin gyis grub
pa stong pa ste / rtogs pa'o / de rgyun bsring zhing de'i nyams brtan pa la bsgom pa zhes bya'o /.*

a diversity [of appearances] arises, they are not any [externally existent] object (*don*). Realize that they are nondual and beyond expression.[193]

In establishing that phenomenal appearances have no inherent existence because they are manifestations of the mind and then subsequently establishing that mind has no inherent existence, Gampopa moves from a Yogācāra to a Madhyamaka level of discourse, a point we also discussed when describing the view in Chapter 2.

### 3.2.2   Unique Method of Sustaining Certainty of the Emptiness of the Mind Within a Nonconceptual State

Although Gampopa undertakes a brief analysis regarding the ultimate nature of the mind, the question still remains as to how Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation is able to generate the conviction (*nges shes*) regarding emptiness of the mind while the practitioner is within a nonconceptual state of meditation. By the very definition of nonconceptuality, no analysis can be performed within such a state. On the other hand, in the typical approach of the Madhyamaka tradition, conviction regarding the ultimate nature of mind is generated and maintained by alternating between calm abiding and insight meditation practices: one first sustains the experience of the nature of emptiness with the power of calm abiding, and then one returns to analytical insight meditation whenever the conviction pertaining to the reality of emptiness diminishes. Demonstrating the importance of alternating between calm abiding and insight, Kamalaśīla writes in his *Stages of Meditation*:

> So, when the mind becomes dull, apply effort and when in absorption effort should be relaxed. When by meditation on special insight, excessive wisdom is generated and calm abiding is weak, the mind will waver like a butter lamp in the wind and

---

[193] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 124: *rtogs par bya ba'i chos gsum ni / ci yang ma yin pa las / sna tshogs su shar bar rtogs par bya / sna tshogs su shar yang / don ci yang ma yin par rtogs par bya / gnyis med smra bar mi btub par rtogs par bya'o /.*

you will not perceive suchness very clearly. Therefore, at that time, meditate on calm abiding. When calm abiding meditation becomes excessive, meditate on wisdom.[194]

In contrast to Kamalaśīla, Gampopa does not offer a method of alternating between nonconceptual meditation that sustains the nature aspect of the mind and analytical meditation that is undertaken when the certainty of the emptiness aspect of the mind vanishes. Instead Gampopa teaches meditation on the nonconceptual clarity of the mind as the principal method for giving rise to the realization of the emptiness of the mind. Additionally, when he posits that sustaining the nonconceptual clarity of the mind itself induces the realization of its non-arising nature, Gampopa hints that by sustaining nonconceptual awareness one may also sustain certainty (*nges shes*) regarding the emptiness of mind without having to perform periodic analysis. In other words, the sheer force of the experience of the subtlety of the mind, induced by maintaining nonconceptual awareness, in and of itself may evoke the certainty (*nges shes*) of the emptiness of the mind without having to perform periodic analysis.

### 3.2.3   Sustaining the Union of Nonconceptual Clarity and its Emptiness is Sustaining the Mahāmudrā State

Gampopa refers to the union of nonconceptual awareness and its emptiness as the Mahāmudrā state. As elucidated in detail in Chapter 2, the union of the clarity and emptiness of the mind, variously termed as the innate mind, the coemergent mind, the *dharmakāya* and so forth is the Mahāmudrā state, the ground of meditation. Merely sustaining a nonconceptual state, although

---

[194] Dalai Lama XIV Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho and Kamalaśīla, *Stages of Meditation*, trans. Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Lobsang Choephel Ganchenpa, and Jeremy Russell (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2001), 138–39.

undertaken for cultivating single-pointed concentration, does not in itself amounts to sustaining the Mahāmudrā state. With such an understanding in mind, Gampopa writes:

> This nature that is primordially pure:
> It is seen as having an unchanging nature;
> It is seen as having a nature that is neither clarified nor obscured;
> It is seen as having an unceasing nature;
> It is seen as having a nature devoid of expectation or doubt;
> It is seen as one's own coemergent mind.
> It is seen as the innate Mahāmudrā;
> The wisdom eye sees one's mind.
> It is seen without the seer or the seen.[195]

Thus, Gampopa's approach of sustaining the nonconceptual clarity of mind results in realizing the coemergence of the nonconceptual clarity and emptiness of mind which is the nature (*ngo bo*) and non-arising essence (*rang bzhin*) of the mind. As stated above, realizing this union or innate mind is the Mahāmudrā state, mind arises simultaneously both in the aspects of clarity and emptiness.

On the basis of the union of nonconceptual clarity and its non-arising essence, collectively termed as the innate mind, Gampopa presents pith instructions to integrate the third aspect of the mind, namely thoughts or phenomenal appearances, what he refers to as the characteristics of the mind.

## 3.3 The Coemergence of the Coemergent Innate Mind and Coemergent Phenomenal Appearances

In the previous section, we discussed the method whereby one sustains or experiences the union of nonconceptual clarity and its emptiness. In addition to experiencing the unity of these two

---

[195] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 101. *gdod nas dag pa'i ngo bo de / 'pho 'gyur med pa'i ngo bor mthong / gsal 'grib med pa'i ngo bor mthong / rgyun chad med pa'i ngo bor mthong / re dwogs med pa'i ngo bor mthong / rang sems lhan cig skyes par mthong / gnyug ma phyag rgya chen por mthong / shes rab gyi mig gis rang sems mthong / blta bya lta byed med par mthong /.*

aspects of the appearance of mind, termed as the coemergent innate mind (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*), Gampopa offers various pith instructions to view phenomenal appearances—the third aspect of appearance of the mind—dawning indistinctly from the mind. This contemplative technique is described as the coemergence (i.e., co-arising) of the coemergent mind (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*) and the coemergent appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*).

> With regard to pith instructions to achieve the state of enlightenment in this one lifetime, there are not more than two things: the coemergent mind, the *dharmakāya*, and the coemergent appearance, the rays of the *dharmakāya*. For example, it is like the sun and its rays.[196]

Thus, the coemergence of the coemergent mind (*sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa*) and the coemergent appearances (*snang ba lhan cig skyes pa*), actually refers to the coemergence of all three aspects of appearance of the mind.

Further elucidating their nondual nature, Gampopa points out that the very distinction of the Mahāmudrā into the coemergent innate mind and coemergent phenomenal appearances is meant to be a heuristic device employed so that people who have not understood Mahāmudrā may be able to do so. To illustrate this nonduality, he employs various analogies such as the ocean and the waves, the sun and its rays, and sandalwood and its fragrance. For example, although one can conceptually see waves as distinct from the ocean, the waves are essentially not distinct from the ocean in that they refer to the same body of water.

---

[196] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 9: *tshe gcig po 'di nyid la sangs rgya bar byed pa'i phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag ni / don gnyis las med do / sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku dang / snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i 'od / snang ba 'di sems nyid kyi 'od yin te / dper na / nyi ma dang / nyi ma'i 'od lta bu'o /.*

> Although Mahāmudrā has generally no division, in order that yogis may realize the meaning of it, it is [divided into] two: the coemergent mind and coemergent appearances. The former is *dharmakāya* and the latter is the rays of *dharmakāya*. The coemergent mind-itself, the uncontrived essence (*rang bzhin*) of *dharmakāya*: Its nature is devoid of any identification—it is, for example, like space. The coemergent appearances, the rays of the *dharmakāya*, are the diversity of thoughts that are either wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral. If it is asked whether these are identical or distinct, they appear to be distinct for those who have no realization; they are, [however], identical for those who have realization. For example, it is the like sandalwood and its fragrance, the sun and its rays, or the water and its waves.[197]

As we will explore in the next section, Gampopa's various contemplative techniques to support the meditative practice of the yoga of coemergence are based on this main method of experiencing the union of the coemergent innate and coemergent phenomenal appearances.

## 3.3.1   Sustaining the Clarity Inherent in all States of Consciousness

Once we understand that the innate mind and thoughts are not distinct, one practical contemplative technique designed to sustain their unity is to observe the clarity inherent in every thought. Clarity, the ground of meditation, continues to be present when the mind expresses itself in the form of conceptual thoughts. This phenomenon is also likened to how the waves are not distinct from the ocean although they appear that way. It is actually the same body of water in states of stillness and movement.

---

[197] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence (2000, vol. 3)," 173-174: *spyir phyag rya chen po la dbye ba med kyang / rnal 'byor pa rnams kyi phyag rgya chen po'i don khong du chud par bya ba'i phyir na gnyis ste / sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa dang / snang ba lhan cig skyes pa'o / dang po ni chos sku yin la / gnyis pa ni chos sku'i 'od yin no / sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku'i rang bzhin ma bcos pa yin / ngo bo ngos bzung dang bral ba yin te / dper na nam mkha' lta bu'o / snang ba lhan cig skyes pa chos sku'i 'od ni / dge mi dge lung ma bstan rnam par rtog pa du ma dang bcas pa yin no / de nyid gcig gam tha dad ce na / ma rtogs pa rnams la tha dad pa ltar snang la / rtogs pa rnams la gcig ste / dper na / tsan dan dang tsan dan gyi dri bzhin nam / nyi ma dang nyi ma'i zer bzhin nam / chu dang chu'i rlabs bzhin no /.*

Thus, as long as we are able to continue to sustain the clarity of the mind, any thought that arises from this ground is not experienced as distraction; it is the clarity of the mind expressing as thought. Gampopa asserts that such meditation is beyond distraction and interruption:

> Intrinsic awareness with clarity as its nature:
> It has no separation, no distraction, and no interruption.
> From this state, whatever thoughts
> Arise in its diversity:
> They are all its nature.
> When the ordinary mind is not distracted,
> All thoughts are intrinsic awareness.
> One does not need to view them as faults.
> When it [ordinary mind] is distracted, it is thought.
> When we observe thoughts themselves,
> Arising one after another,
> They are all recognized as the mind,
> It is like water and its waves.[198]

### 3.3.2   Settling Phenomenal Appearances in the Form of the Six Modes of Consciousness in a Relaxed Manner

One of the main contemplative techniques that Gampopa offers to experience the union of the innate mind and thoughts (that is, the union of the coemergent innate mind and the coemergent phenomenal appearances) is to allow phenomenal appearances in the form of the six modes of consciousness to settle in a relaxed manner (*tshogs drug lhug par bzhag*), without attempting to modify them. This practice in turn is based on an understanding of the nonduality of the innate and phenomenal appearances. Meditative efforts which require one to block or modify appearances merely perpetuate dualism with respect to mind and appearances. As such, we should let awareness

---

[198] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 99: *rig pa gsal ba'i ngo bo de / 'bral med yengs med rgyun chad med / de yin ngang la dran rtog ni / sna tshogs gang dang gang byung ba / thams cad de yi ngo bo yin / tha mal shes pa ma yengs na / dran rtog thams cad rig pa yin / de la skyon du blta mi dgos / yengs pa'i dus rtog pa yin te / de nyid rang la bltas pas su / rtog pa gcig byung gnyis byung rnams / thams cad shes su shes pa ni / chu dang chu yi rlabs ltar 'gyur /.*

through the six modes of consciousness (*rnam shes tshogs drug*)[199] abide in a relaxed manner, as

all appearances are thoughts, and thoughts in turn are *dharmakāya*—the innate mind itself.

> By having faith in the oral transmissions of an authentic teacher, do not pen up
> awareness and settle the six modes of consciousness in a relaxed manner. Whatever
> appears must be understood as thoughts, and thoughts in turn must be understood
> as *dharmakāya*.[200]

In the passage above Gampopa asserts that whatever appears (*gang snang ba*) must be understood

as thought (*rtog pa*), here using "phenomenal appearance" interchangeably with "thoughts."

Gampopa suggests here that treating them interchangeably is perhaps due to our tendency to

immediately give a conceptual interpretation to a perceptual experience, delineating it as an

external "object."

The passage above establishes that the nonduality of the *dharmakāya* (the innate mind-itself)

and thoughts is the doctrinal basis for the necessity of settling the six modes of consciousness. For

our tendency to react to thoughts with either rejection or acceptance will naturally subside if

thoughts are experienced as something nondifferent from the mind.

### 3.3.3   Not Modifying Phenomenal Appearances in Meditation

An important contemplative technique which helps to settle the activity of phenomenal

appearances in a relaxed manner is to refrain from trying to modify appearances through either

---

[199] The six modes of consciousness (*vijñāna, rnam shes*) are: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mental consciousness.

[200] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 11: *bla ma dam pa'i lung la yid ches par byas la / rig pa sna ma bskyil bar tshogs drug lhug par bzhag go / cir snang thams cad rnam rtog tu shes par bya'o / rnam rtog chos sku shes par bya'o /.*

rejection or acceptance. As we have seen, efforts to modify thoughts through rejection or acceptance reinforce the false view of dualism, of separation between subject and object.

Gampopa points out that this technique of non-modification (*ma bcos pa*) in turn can be achieved by establishing the non-existence or emptiness of phenomenal appearances. This can be achieved by demonstrating that phenomenal appearances are nothing but a magical display (*cho 'phrul*) of the mind, appearing while lacking true existence. The implication is that when we realize the emptiness of phenomenal appearances, our grasping towards them as negative or positive will be eliminated. This in turn will eliminate our tendency to make any cognitive effort to accept or reject them.

> There is no other reality other than the mind-itself. In order to establish this innate mind, the [reality] of this appearance needs to be established. This appearance has to be understood as nonexistent; this appearance has to be understood as a magical display of the mind, appearing while not existing. When experienced for the first time, it cannot be expressed. First, if asked whether this appearance is existent or not, it is nonexistent, if [someone] says it's a contradiction for a nonexistent thing to appear, [we reply that] it is hence an illusion—this is wondrous! If it is asked from what cause it arises, [we reply that] it is the magical display of the mind-itself. As such, appearances that do not inherently exist are not modified in meditation. Meditate on the mind-itself.[201]

### 3.3.4   Thoughts Experienced as Clarifying the Meditative State, Not as Distractions

Gampopa points out that when one develops realization, thoughts which may arise can help clarify or enhance the meditative state because one recognizes the natural indivisibility of innate

---

[201] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 9-10: *don sems nyid las med / sems nyid gtan la 'bebs pa la / snang ba 'di gtan la 'bebs dgos te / snang ba 'di / med par shes par bya ba dang / snang ba 'di / med bzhin du snang ba shes pa'i cho 'phrul du go ba dang / dang po nyams su myong ba smrar mi btub pa'o / dang po ni / snang ba 'di yod pa yin nam / med pa yin zer na / med pa yin / med par snang ba 'gal zer na / de bas ni / 'khrul ba yin / ngo mtshar che / 'o na 'di rgyu ci las byung zer na / sems nyid kyi cho 'phrul yin no / des snang ba rang bzhin med pa sgom du ma bcos pa'o / sems nyid sgoms shig /.*

mind and thoughts. In this way, thoughts are not distractions but rather are aids in meditation. This technique sets Mahāmudrā meditation apart from other contemplative traditions that view thoughts as distractions to be eliminated with appropriate antidotes. In *Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings*, Gampopa analogizes this technique to a forest fire during which everything becomes a conducive factor for fire, including water and wet trees which would normally impede the spread of a small fire.

> When settling one's mind in its innate state (*gnyug mar*), one should not be distracted from the mind whatever thoughts may arise. One should view that apart from the mind, there are no thoughts. For example, when a forest catches on fire everything such as grass become conducive factors. [Likewise,] when one's mind is realized, all phenomenal appearances become conducive factors.[202]

The purpose of this analogy is to compare an entire forest on fire to the wisdom of the fire of nonduality where all appearances are experienced as nondifferent from the mind, just as in a forest fire each of the trees in the forest fire is not different from the flaming forest. In a small fire of a single tree, winds and wet trees impede the fire from spreading, just as when one clings to dualistic thoughts, it acts as an impediment to meditation. But when the entire forest is on fire, winds and wet trees do not impede the first from spreading. Likewise, when one's mind is settle in its innate state, appearances do not impede the meditation. Reiterating this point, Gampopa argues in his *Ultimate Nature of Thoughts*:

---

[202] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings (2000, vol. 2)," 590: *rang gi sems rnal ma la bzhag pa'i dus su / rnam rtog ci byung yang rang gi sems las ma yengs par blta'o / sems las logs na rtog pa med par blta'o / dper na nags la me shor na rtswa la sogs pa thams cad grogs su 'gro ba bzhin du / rang gi sems rtogs na snang ba thams cad grogs su 'gro /.*

> When a forest catches on fire, a small fire is extinguished by the wind. When the
> fire rages extensively, even the wind becomes a conducive factor.[203]

Gampopa not only argues that thoughts bring clarity to the meditative state and dawn as wisdom, but that they are also indispensable because they cannot be stopped. Thus, he implies that any meditation which aims to stop or suppress thoughts is bound to be counter-productive. Instead of suppressing thoughts, Gampopa suggests integrating them into meditation by not engaging in accepting them or rejecting them. When one deals with thoughts in this way, the thoughts transform into the fuel that stokes the fire of nondual wisdom, and thus thoughts and defilements are naturally liberated without having to apply antidotes.[204] The following teaching by Gampopa as narrated by one of his students illustrates this:

> One evening, when he was traveling from Gampo monastery to the upper part of
> Dhakpo, he told the monks who had all congregated there: "Great meditators want
> to be free from thoughts. [They also] maintain that thoughts cannot be stopped. It
> is said that great meditators grow weary. However, the more the wood, the more
> the fire burns; similarly, the more the thoughts, the more the wisdom of nonduality
> increases. Therefore, it is all right to allow the five poisons and thoughts to simply
> arise as they are. If uncontrived without rejecting or accepting, [they] are the
> primordial wisdom of all the enlightened beings of the three times."[205]

---

[203] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Introduction to the Ultimate Reality of Thoughts (2000, vol. 3)," 200. *nags la me shor na / me chung ngu rlung gis 'chi ba yin / nags tshal chen po tshig tsam na / rlung yang grogs su 'gro /* .

[204] This technique of not suppressing thoughts but integrating them is significant point for it proves that one of the main criticisms of Gampopa's tradition does not apply to him. According this criticism, Gampopa's tradition is said to resemble the teachings of the Chinese monk Hashang Mahāyāna who was alleged to have taught that mere suppression and cessation of thoughts leads to instantaneous awakening. See, for, example, Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*.

[205] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Introduction to the Root of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 132-133: *sgam po nas dwags po stod du dgong mo gcig byon dus grwa pa thams cad tshogs tsa na / sgom chen pa ni rnam rtog med pa gcig 'dod / rnam rtog ni 'gag tu mi btub par 'dod / sgom chen pa 'o brgyal te 'gro gsung skad / 'o na'ang shing ji ltar mang ba ltar me che ba yin / rnam rtog ji*

At this point, although this dissertation is primarily focused on Gampopa's view and his technique of meditation, a brief discussion of the intended result of the meditation is necessary. This is because in Gampopa's tradition there is an extremely close relationship between the view, the meditation and the result. Discussions on the view necessarily implicate meditation; discourse on meditation is interwoven with the result. Explicating the result in turn enhances the understanding of the view and meditation. The next section will briefly explore some important features pertaining to the result of Mahāmudrā meditation.

## 4    Results of Mahāmudrā Meditation

### 4.1    Meditation to Realize Mahāmudrā and Meditation After Realization of Mahāmudrā

Gampopa differentiates between two types of meditation practice: one undertaken to realize the Mahāmudrā state and another to sustain the Mahāmudrā state after realization.[206] To be precise, he regards conceptual Mahāmudrā meditation as a method to realize Mahāmudrā, not a method to sustain the Mahāmudrā state after realization. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gampopa considers a merely conceptual understanding of the view to be a mistaken form of understanding, though it does help to give rise to its direct realization.

The result of being able to sustain the Mahāmudrā state is the self-liberation (*rang grol*) from thoughts and defilements. Although Gampopa mentions self-liberation of thoughts and emotions in his pith instructions, he suggests that their self-liberation is only possible when the Mahāmudrā

---

*ltar mang ba ltar gnyis med kyi ye shes rgyas pa yin pas / dug lnga dang rnam rtog de ka ltar skyer bcug pas chog gsung / dgag sgrub med par ma bcos pa ni dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyi thugs ye shes 'di rang yin no /.*

[206] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 109: *de yang / rtogs par bya ba'i phyir bsgom pa dang / rtogs nas bsgom pa'o /.*

state is directly realized. Dismissing conceptual meditation as a method to realize Mahāmudrā, in

*Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā*, Gampopa explains the

meditation appropriate to sustain the Mahāmudrā state after realization has been achieved:

> All appearances are [seen as] the mind, free from elaborations and without any
> identification. It is like the middle of the sky, utterly empty without any basis. This
> is meditating after realizing.[207]

In order to further elucidate what direct realization of Mahāmudrā involves, in the *Treasury of the*

*Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence*, Gampopa offers an etymological definition of *phyag*

*rgya chen po*, the Tibetan term for Mahāmudrā.

> *Phyag* is the realization that the world of appearance and possibilities, of both
> *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, does not transcend the bond of the state of the non-arising
> *dharmatā*. Since the world of appearance and existence does not transcend the
> reality of the innate mind, it is *rgya*. Since the natural self-liberation of *dharmatā*
> is realized, it is *chen po*.[208]

In the above passage, Gampopa essentially refers to three types of interrelated meditative

realizations. The first realization, "*phyag*," is that no phenomenal appearances transcend the non-

arising essence, i.e., all phenomenal appearances are empty of inherent existence. This realization

refers to the wisdom realizing the emptiness of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances.

The second realization, "*rgya*," is the wisdom of realizing the nonduality of the innate mind and

phenomenal appearances. It is in this sense also that phenomenal appearances cannot be said to

---

[207] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 110: *snang ba thams cad la / sems spros bral ngos bzung dang
bral ba / nam mkha'i dkyil ltar stong sang nge ba'i rten med pa ni / rtogs nas sgom pa yin no /.*

[208] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence
(2000, vol. 3)," 159-160: *de la phyag ni / snang srid 'khor 'das tsam chos nyid skye ba med pa'i
ngang las mi 'da' bar rtogs pa ni phyag go / cir snang cir srid thams cad gnyug ma'i don las mi
'da' bas rgya'o / chos nyid rang grol du rtogs pas na chen po'o /.*

transcend the innate mind. The third realization, "*chen po*," is the realization of the natural self-liberation from thoughts and defilements within the state of the ultimate reality.

## 4.2    Method of Realizing Self-Liberation

Gampopa provides an explanation of the first meditation method that produces the realization of the Mahāmudrā state and, consequently, the experience of the self-liberation from thoughts and emotions. This method entails establishing the nonconceptual innate mind in one's meditation and recognizing thoughts and emotions as movements of that very same clarity of innate mind and not as something from which it could ever be distinct. When thoughts themselves are experienced as expressions of the innate mind, the thoughts are realized as *dharmakāya*; it no longer matters whether thoughts or phenomenal appearances are said to belong to *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*. In *Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā* he states:

> Homage to those gurus with realization!
> Those who aspire to realize the Mahāmudrā,
> Must settle [their mind] like the ocean, stirred by nothing.
> Since defilements are free from obstruction, allow them to abide like the wind.
> Since *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are indivisible, let them settle within the state of
> *dharmatā*.
> Since the three poisons are the natural *dharmakāya*,
> Know them to be the co-arising mind-itself.
> Since all sights and sounds [appear] within the state of the innate mind,
> Know that they are primordially free from any effort.
> Since unsuppressed thoughts are *dharmatā* in essence,
> Know that, without contriving, they are liberated on their own ground.[209]

---

[209] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 45: *rtogs ldan bla ma rnams la phyag 'tshal lo / phyag rgya chen po rtogs par 'dod pa rnams kyis / gang gis mi bskyod rgya mtsho lta bur gzhag / nyon mongs pa la thog rdugs med pas skyi ser lta bur gzhag / 'khor 'das dbyer med yin pas chos nyid ngang du gzhag / dug gsum rang bzhin chos kyi sku yin te / sems nyid lhan cig skyes par mkhyen par mdzod / snang grags thams cad gnyug ma'i ngang yin te / gdod nas rtsol sgrub bral bar mkhyen par mdzod / rnam rtog ma spangs chos nyid rang bzhin te / ma bcos rang sar grol bar mkhyen par mdzod /.*

In the passage above, Gampopa instructs his students to settle one's mind in the manner of the ocean, not disturbed by the waves of thoughts. All thoughts, whether of *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa,* that arise from this state are to be experienced as indivisible from the *dharmakāya* or the innate mind. In stating this, he fundamentally summarizes the coemergence of the three aspects of the mind: its clarity, its emptiness, and its phenomenal appearances. The poison of defilements, including thoughts, are natural *dharmakāya* when experienced nondualistically from the innate mind and as such they are self-liberated. It is similar to the way in which the waves of ocean are not distinct from the ocean in that they arise from the ocean and dissolve back into it. Just as there is an illusion that waves are distinct from the ocean, thoughts appear to be distinct from the innate mind. However, when it is understood that the thoughts are instead a manifestation of the innate mind, they are self-liberated within the state of the experience of the innate mind.

## 4.3    The Actual Process of Self-liberation of Negative Emotions Within a Meditative State

Once the Mahāmudrā state is realized, the self-liberation of thoughts and emotions becomes spontaneous and nonconceptual. Gampopa thus asserts that all defilements, such as desire and anger, can also be self-liberated in the Mahāmudrā state. He argues that once the Mahāmudrā state is realized one sustains the nature (*ngo bo*) of the innate mind, which is the clarity aspect of the mind. If anger arises from this state of meditation, it is an expression or movement of the clarity of the innate mind, not distinct from the innate mind. The clarity of the innate mind is additionally empty, thus proving that anger, an aspect of clarity of the mind, is also empty.

In this case, meditation is the mindful awareness of anger when it arises, knowing that the anger is not distinct from the innate mind and that it is also empty of inherent existence. In the Mahāmudrā state one experiences the self-liberation of anger as it merges with the ground of the innate mind itself. In *Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence*, Gampopa says:

>Observe the nature of the innate, however it manifests;
>Anger arises from the state of the innate;
>The nature of the innate is empty;
>Anger is thus purified on its own ground. [210]

As explained above, self-liberation of defilements occurs only within a nonconceptual meditative state, when one realizes that defilements are not distinct from the innate mind. Self-liberation of defilements cannot occur simply with a conceptual understanding. The above quote clearly justifies that it is not simply the realization of the impermanent or momentary nature of defilements that results in their self-liberation. While the momentariness of defilements helps, the actual experience of their self-liberation is a result of the realization that defilements are nondifferent from the innate mind and are empty of inherent existence.

This discussion of the contemplative practice of the yoga of coemergence points to features that are unique to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation. The next section will analyze and explore some of the features that distinguish Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation from the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition.

## 5   Analysis: Uniqueness of Meditation

### 5.1   Mind Focusing on Mind to Achieve Calm Abiding and Insight

In Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation the practice of "mind focusing on the nature of the mind" to achieve both calm abiding and insight is one of its primary unique features. The yoga of coemergence employs the nonconceptual clarity of the mind to cultivate both calm abiding and

---

[210] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence (2000, vol. 3)," 160. *gnyug ma'i ngo bo gang shar ltos / gnyug ma'i ngang la zhe sdang shar/ gnyug ma'i ngo bo stong pa yin / des na zhe sdang rang sar dag /.*

insight. Gampopa suggests that the use of nonconceptual clarity of the mind to cultivate both calm

abiding and insight makes it easier to accomplish the union of calm abiding and insight:

> The nature of the mind is like the middle of an autumn sky, free from expectation
> and doubt, unchanging and at all times unceasing. To cultivate this, cultivate the
> clarity of the awareness without distraction. When you gain familiarity with this,
> you gain certainty. Without losing that nature of the mind, understand all
> conceptual elaborations to be mind.[211]

As the passage above indicates, the uniqueness of the tradition lies in the fact that a single

meditation technique accomplishes both calm abiding and insight. Sustaining nonconceptual

clarity, a calm abiding practice, gives rise to insight that realizes that all phenomenal appearances

as nothing but conceptual projections of the mind.

## 5.2    A Method of Finding the View on the Basis of Meditation: Developing Insight Based on Calm Abiding

Broadly speaking, within most Tibetan meditative traditions, there are two approaches to

cultivating calm abiding and insight. In the first approach, insight (or a conceptual understanding

of emptiness) is initially cultivated. Meditating on this emptiness helps to induce the meditative

state known as calm abiding. Thus, calm abiding meditation is developed on the basis of the view

(*lta thog nas sgom pa 'tshol ba*). In the second approach, one cultivates calm abiding from which

insight is developed. The view of emptiness arises from the ground of meditation (*sgom thog nas*

*lta ba 'tshol ba*). Referring to these two sequences of meditation, Jamgön Kongtrul states:

---

[211] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 106-107: *sems kyi ngo bo ni ston ka'i nam mkha'i dkyil lta bu / re dwogs med pa / mi 'gyur ba / dus thams cad du rgyun chad med pa de yin / de la slob pa'i dus su / rig pa gsal la ma yengs par bslab / de la goms tsa na / rang la nges shes skyes ba yin / sems kyi ngo bo de ma shor bar byas nas / rnam rtog spros pa thams cad sems su shes par bya'o /.*

> Generally speaking, there is what is termed as "finding meditation on the ground of the view." This involves first establishing the view. Once the view is ascertained, one enters into meditative equipoise pertaining to that. Although such [a sequence] exists, it takes longer for a novice to master and is hence a little less profound. In our Dhakpo Kagyu tradition, we follow what is termed as "finding the view on the ground of meditation." This does not involve extensive analysis through study and reflection. Through sustained meditation on the ground of the mind, the view is automatically realized. As it can be practiced by all practitioners whether of superior or inferior intellect, this is a more profound form of meditation.[212]

Jamgön Kongtrul suggests that the former is more difficult, particularly for the novice. Inverting the definition of profundity, he states that the latter is a more profound form of meditation because it is easier to practice for practitioners of various mental capacities. Gampopa's tradition generally follows the second approach of finding the view on the ground of meditation outlined by Jamgön Kongtrul. One first uses meditation to sustain the nonconceptual clarity of the mind, a calm-abiding practice. The mind becomes more subtle due this single-pointed concentration and, eventually, the realization of the view of emptiness will naturally dawn. Although similar to the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition in that they both establish insight based on calm abiding, Gampopa's method is unique in that the view and meditation implicate one another.

Gampopa generally follows a sequence of cultivating calm abiding before insight, but at times he implies that the reverse sequence is also possible. As discussed previously, he provides a unique perspective that if the ultimate nature of the mind is realized (an insight practice), it is primordially

---

[212] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Phyag chen nges don sgron me (The Definitive Lamp of Mahāmudrā)*, 3rd ed. (Kathmandu: Leksheyling Publications, 2013), 79. *spyir lta thog nas sgom pa tshol ba zhes sngon la thos bsam gyis gtan la phab / lta ba la nges pa rnyed pa'i tshe de'i ngang du mnyam par 'jog pa zhig yod kyang las dang po pa la kha thag ring ba'i sgom cung mi zab pa yin / rang re'i dwags po bka' brgyud pa'i lugs la sgom thog nas lta ba 'tshol ba zhes pa thos bsam gyis dpyad pa mang po mi byed pa sems thog tu gdar sha dpyad pas lta ba rang shugs kyis rtogs par 'gyur bas dbang po mchog dman thams cad kyi lag tu lon nges zab pa'i sgom yin /.*

in a state free from interruption, a natural state of unceasing tranquility or calm abiding. It is in this vein that he states:

> A meditation with mental engagement can be lost; but a meditation that only sustains its own nature (*ngo bo*) can never be lost.[213]

## 5.3   Authentic Union of the Two Truths and the Union of Method and Wisdom

We have seen that the general Madhyamaka tradition approaches reality through the rubric of the two truths: the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya, kun rdzob bden pa*) and the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya, don dam bden pa*). The ultimate truth refers to the lack of self-nature (*svabhāva*) in all phenomena.[214] This tradition uses a particular type of negation, a non-implicative negation (*prasajyapratiṣedha, med dgag*), to establish the lack of self-nature (i.e., the emptiness) of all phenomena. The negation of self-nature does not establish the existence of something else.[215] With such a negative conception of the absolute reality combined with an apophatic epistemological approach to understand it, it is no wonder that Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka tradition courted endless controversy as a nihilistic philosophy, both by traditional and modern scholars.

In the previous chapter, we considered how Nāgārjuna presents the doctrine of the ultimate truth in terms of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*; *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*). In doing so, he points to a degree of unity of the two truths in that the two are not seen as contradictory. However, the Madhyamaka tradition does not possess a method of realizing their unity authentically within meditation. When the mind sustains the ultimate truth (*chos nyid la*

---

[213] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 102: *sems dang yid la byas pa'i sgom ni 'chor 'bral byed / ngo bo rang bsgom pa'i sgom la 'chor 'bral med/.*

[214] Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 6.

[215] Ruegg, 37.

*mnyam par bzhag skabs),* all phenomenal appearances (*chos can gyi snang ba*) dissolve. On the other hand, when phenomenal appearances arise, one loses one's meditation on the ultimate reality of the mind.

In contrast to the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition, Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation brings about an authentic union of the two truths and the corresponding union of the method and wisdom (*thabs shes zung 'jug*). The union of the two truths can be inferred from his presentation of the union of the innate mind (the ultimate truth) and phenomenal appearances (the conventional truth). In fact, Gampopa employs the language of two truths and points to their union only on rare occasions. One example is in the *Thunder Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization*, where he says:

> The conventional and the ultimate are not dual;
> They are the characteristic of the *dharmakāya*.[216]

In the passage above, Gampopa describes the conventional and the ultimate as features of the *dharmakāya*, wherein is found the union of the two truths. He expounds on this in some of his longer presentations on the union of the innate mind and phenomenal appearances.

In one of his detailed instructions on meditation, Gampopa explains that one first sustains the state of the innate mind in meditation. When thoughts or phenomenal appearances arise from this state of the innate mind, they are experienced as not distinct from the ultimate. Two analogies emphasize the unity of the conventional and ultimate in meditative experience. First, it is compared to meeting a friend—the recognition is effortless and non-analytical. Second, it is said to be like

---

[216] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 44: *kun rdzob don dam gnyis med de / chos kyi sku yi mtshan nyid do /.*

snowflakes instantly dissolving and transforming into water as soon as they touch the ocean—

thoughts also naturally dissolve into the state of the innate mind, thereby resulting in the experience

of their unity. In the same instruction text, Gampopa teaches:

> In this way, these appearing phenomena, (due to familiarity with the coemergent),
> And the realization of their emptiness,
> Is asserted to be simultaneous,
> It is like how a familiar person
> Is recognized as soon as the individual is seen;
> The diversity of appearances of the mind,
> Although they arise as manifold,
> Are realized as emptiness;
> For example, it is like how all snowflakes
> Transform into water as they soon as they fall on the ocean;
> Similarly, one should understand all appearances,
> To be without arising.[217]

In further elaborating on the union of two truths, Gampopa states that appearances are an

aspect of intrinsic awareness, meaning that they are mental in nature. Appearances are also empty

in nature like a reflection of the moon on the ocean of the innate mind. Thus, meditation involves

cultivating the non-arising innate mind. From the ground of the innate mind, one will realize the

emptiness of phenomenal appearances. As Gampopa explains:

> Appearances are entities of intrinsic awareness,
> Their nature is emptiness,
> Similar to the moon's reflection in the ocean;
> If the non-arising nature of the mind is cultivated,

---

[217] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 41-42: *'di ltar snang ba'i dngos po dang / stong pa nyid du rtogs pa ni / dus mnyam dag tu 'dod pa yin / dper na sngar 'dris pa yi mi / mthong ma thag tu / ngo shes bzhin / sems kyi snang ba sna tshogs kun / mang po dag tu 'char ba yang / stong pa nyid du rtogs pa ni / dper na rgya mtshor kha ba ni / babs tshad chu ru 'gro ba bzhin / de bzhin snang ba thams cad ni / skye ba med par rtogs par bya /.*

It is meditation.[218]

The Perfection of Wisdom tradition emphasizes that the conventional and the ultimate truth and their union are related respectively to the practice and union of method and wisdom (*thabs dang shes rab*). In his *Lamp for the Path* (*byang chub lam sgron*), a seminal work that offers a complete model of Buddhist religious training followed by all the Tibetan Buddhist schools, the Indian master Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982–1054 AD) states:

> Hence to remove all obscuration
> Of his affliction and his knowledge,
> The yogi must continually cultivate
> The perfection of insight together with means. [Stanza 42][219]

There is a slight disagreement about what constitutes the practice of means (*upāya*). Some maintain that of the six perfections of a bodhisattva's training, the first five (the perfection of generosity, moral ethics, patience, joyous effort and concentration) belong to the method side of the training and exclude the perfection of wisdom. Atiśa himself subscribes to this position and defends it by citing Jñānakīrti:

> One [then] truly progresses in the essence of Perfection of Insight and in Means
> which are the Giving and the rest [of the Perfections].[220]

Sometimes "means" refers to the great compassion a bodhisattva must cultivate for all sentient beings. Atiśa cites an unknown text to establish this point:

---

[218] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 42: *rig pa'i dngos po snang ba nyid / ngo bo stong pa nyid yin te / rgya mtshor zla ba'i gzugs brnyan bzhin / sems kyi rang bzhin skye med du / goms par byas nas bsgoms pa yin /.*

[219] Atiśa, *The Lamp for the Path*, 130.

[220] Atiśa, 131.

> The Means is the bodhisattva's
> Great compassion for creatures.[221]

These two definitions of "means" are not contradictory. The bodhisattvas' dominant motivation which runs through all the first five perfections (excluding the perfection of wisdom) is great compassion. Additionally, the first five perfections as well as the practice of great compassion all pertain to conventional reality.

In the mainstream Perfection of Wisdom tradition, the "union" of method and wisdom is practiced in the following manner. One first meditates on compassion and, without losing the force of that compassion, one then enters into meditation on emptiness. Alternatively, one first meditates on emptiness and without losing the force of the understanding of emptiness, one then begins to meditate on compassion and so forth. In both the cases, there is no genuine union of method and wisdom since one mind does not sustain both of these practices simultaneously.

Although it is not explicitly stated in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, there is ample implicit textual evidence to establish that method and wisdom are practiced concurrently in accordance with the authentic union of the two truths at the level of reality. Practices traditionally viewed as method, such as compassion, are conceptual in nature. But according to Gampopa's meditation, concepts are indistinct from the innate mind, the wisdom aspect of the mind. Thus, there is a genuine unity of method and wisdom in Mahāmudrā.

## 5.4    Inseparability of Meditation and Post Meditation Stage

Distinctive to Gampopa's contemplative style, the two truths (the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances) are simultaneously sustained in union during meditation. In contrast to

---

[221] Atiśa, 133.

the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition which engages in meditation with a clear division between meditative equipoise (*mnyam bzhag*) and post-meditation (*rjes thob*), textual evidence establishes that this meditation blends meditative equipoise and post-meditation without any separation (*mnyam rjes dbyer med*).

Gampopa explains that this blending is possible because the clarity aspect of the mind is present in all states of awareness (viz., nonconceptual innate mind and of conceptual phenomenal appearances) and is sustained in meditation. Thus, meditation and post-meditation blend seamlessly without interruption. In other words, phenomenal appearances that arise in the post-meditation stage in general Perfection of Wisdom meditation are integrated into the ground of meditation that sustains the innate mind in the Mahāmudrā system. Again, in the *Thunder Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization*, he says:

> The concept of meditation is a convention.
> Convention, by nature, has no arising.
> There isn't anything to be meditated with a focal object.
> There isn't anything to be meditated with division into sessions.
> Whatever appears is carried into meditation.[222]

As this passage clarifies, the dawning of phenomenal appearances in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition is not seen as falling into a post-meditative state. Instead, all phenomenal appearances are integrated into the ground meditation.

---

[222] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization (2000, vol. 3)," 42-43: *sgom pa zhes pa tha snyad de / tha snyad rang bzhin skye med do / tshad du gtad la sgom rgyu med / thun du bcad la sgom rgyu med / gang ltar snang ba bsgom pa yin /.*

## 5.5    A Unique Method of Dealing with Distractions

Because Gampopa posits that all conceptual elaborations are nondifferent from the innate mind, his unique meditation technique has the ability to pacify conceptual distractions of ordinary thoughts without using antidotes, as would be a standard practice in Perfection of Wisdom traditions. Instead, in Mahāmudrā, thoughts, including meditative experiences (*sgom gyi nyams*), are observed without modification, understanding the clarity inherent in them and as not distinct from the mind, as was explored earlier.

However, in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, thoughts are pacified not simply because of the wisdom of impermanence cultivated when watching the momentary nature of rising thoughts. Ultimately, thoughts are pacified into the expanse of the innate mind—the union of clarity and emptiness, by sustaining the innate mind in meditation and seeing thoughts or appearances as nothing but expressions of the innate mind. Gampopa thus says:

> Thoughts are pacified within the state of the mind-itself.
> If thoughts are pacified, there is supreme bliss.[223]

Both calm abiding and insight involve sustaining the innate mind and seeing thoughts or appearances as nondifferent from the mind. In both, a method of dealing with distractions is applied. In calm abiding practice, thoughts are integrated into the natural state of clarity. With insight practice, thoughts or appearances are experienced as magical displays or projections of the mind so that they are experienced as empty of inherent existence.

The meditative experiences (*sgom gyi nyams*) of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality (*bde gsal mi rtog pa'i nyams*) are said to arise as a sign of success in meditation. Gampopa nonetheless

---

[223] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 22: *rnam rtog sems nyid nang du zhi / rnam rtog zhi na bde ba chog /.*

cautions against generating attachment to meditative experiences, which would constitute a

distraction and a loss of the ground of meditation. The contemplative technique that is applied to

deal with thoughts is also employed to handle the distraction of meditative experiences. Meditative

experiences are self-liberated without applying counteractive antidotes when the clarity inherent

in the experience is observed. In other words, the meditative experiences become simply an

appearance of the innate mind, indistinct from it. Gampopa further warns that failing to recognize

this point of meditation will lead one astray and bind the practitioner within the three realms of

*saṃsāra*.

> There are two [modes of appearing]: ascertaining while appearing (*snang la nges pa*) and non-ascertaining while appearing (*snang la ma nges pa*). Appearance refers to bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality. They are the nature of the mind and are referred to as appearance. When these [appearances] are realized as the unceasing nature of the mind, it is [referred to as] "ascertaining while appearing." When bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality appear as not understood as being the nature of the mind, it is [referred to as] "appearing but not ascertaining." Non-ascertainment [of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality] is the ultimate worldly view. When this view is held as supreme, one goes astray in the three realms.[224]

Gampopa explains that when the three meditative experiences are understood as an aspect of the

nature of the mind, dualism is extinguished and attachment to experiences is released. Attachment

to these experiences would lead one astray from the ground of meditation.

---

[224] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā (2000, vol. 3)," 107-108: *snang la nges pa dang / ma nges pa gnyis / snang ba ni bde gsal mi rtog pa ni sems kyi ngo bo ste / snang ba zhes bya / de nyid sems kyi ngo bor rgyun chad med par shes pa ni snang la nges pa'o / bde sgal mi rtog par snang yang sems ngo ma shes pa ni / snang la ma nges pa'o / ma nges pa ni 'jig rten pa'i lta ba'i mthar thug yin / de la mchog 'dzin du byas na / khams gsum du gol /.*

## 6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the yoga of coemergence (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) as the corresponding contemplative that Gampopa employs to realize and sustain the view discussed in Chapter 2. Gampopa construes his meditation technique in terms of understanding and experiencing the coemergence or co-arising of the coemergent mind and coemergent appearances. However, as discussed earlier, the meditation technique does not simply involve experiencing the co-arising of the nonconceptual clarity of the mind and its phenomenal appearances. Such an understanding would only ensure an understanding of their nonduality but not necessarily the emptiness of the innate mind. His meditation also involves integrating the emptiness aspect of the mind because the innate mind refers to the union of the nonconceptual clarity and emptiness.

Thus, when thoughts arise from the ground of meditation, they are not merely understood as nondual but also as empty, for they arise from the innate mind which is itself empty. In the *Introduction to the Ultimate Reality of Thoughts*, Gampopa summarizes the integration and hence the indivisibility of the three aspects of the mind—its nature, essence, and characteristic—by explaining that "thoughts are mind and mind in turn is without any arising."[225]

Although Gampopa does not employ the language of the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition, there is no doubt that his Mahāmudrā meditation offers a method of cultivating both calm abiding and insight, employing mind as the ground of meditation for both. Although Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation offers methods to accomplish both calm abiding and insight just as the general Perfection of Wisdom tradition does, the unique feature that we have explored in this chapter is his yoga of coemergence, the Mahāmudrā contemplative technique. One way in which

---

[225] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Rnam rtog don dam (Ultimate Reality of Thought)," 230: *rnam rtog de sems yin / sems de skye med yin / .*

this technique is unique is its nonconceptual and nondual approach to meditation. This approach in turn is based on the corresponding view that establishes the nondual and nonconceptual innate mind-itself as the ultimate reality, with phenomenal appearances and thoughts understood as nothing but manifestations not different from the innate mind.

In order to experience such a nondual and nonconceptual state of the ultimate in meditation, however, Gampopa skillfully employs the world of dualistic appearances (or rather the clarity inherent in them) as indicated by his doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind. However, he stresses that this distinction of the mind into three aspects of appearance is nothing but a heuristic device, arguing that the only reality is the innate mind that is itself always nondual and nonconceptual. It is also clear that he is implicitly employing the category of two truths, the conventional and the ultimate, although he rarely uses these terms. In his doctrine of the three aspects of appearance of the mind, the third aspect of phenomenal appearances refers to the conventional reality, although the conventional here strictly pertains to the mind. Gampopa's use of the three aspects of appearance of the mind to understand the ultimate reality of the innate mind also resembles the Madhyamaka tradition. Just as the convention is employed to understand the ultimate in the Madhyamaka system, Gampopa's employs dualistic appearances of the mind to actualize the ultimate, which is nondual. A key feature of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition is thus the presence of a genuine unity of the two truths at the level of meditative experience. In its ability to incorporate conventional phenomenal appearances into a single meditation technique centered on the innate mind such that the two are experienced without duality, Gampopa gives us a practice through which the distinction between the two truths dissolves, paving way to their authentic union.

As is evident from our discussions on Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view in chapter 2 and his meditation or contemplative technique in this chapter, Gampopa's exclusive Mahāmudrā works, often in the form of pith instructions, do not explore foundational or associated practices that may be required for Mahāmudrā practices to be efficient from a salvific point of view. This issue will be addressed in the next chapter detailing the "conduct" (*spyod pa*) aspect of Mahāmudrā practices that can be clearly discerned from a different genre of his works, namely, the Congregational Teachings (*tshogs chos*).

# Chapter 4 – Gampopa's Mahāmudrā: The Conduct

## 1   Introduction: Merging the Kadampa and the Mahāmudrā Traditions

In the previous two chapters, we discussed respectively Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view and meditation. We observed that in his exclusively Mahāmudrā texts Gampopa does not explicitly discuss the broader context or underlying foundational practices which ground his Mahāmudrā meditation. Coupled with the fact that Mahāmudrā has often been glorified as a practice that is sufficient in itself to lead to the final Mahāyāna soteriological goal of complete enlightenment, this lack of explicit teachings on preparatory or foundational practices seems to have led to the notion that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā was understood as a self-sufficient practice in and of itself. Our purpose in this chapter is to show that the limits of this claim.

In order to explore the question of whether Gampopa's Mahāmudrā requires other associated practices we will rely on two important sources in Gampopa's collected works: his seminal work, *Ornament of Precious Liberation of Wishful-filling Dharma: Elucidation of the Stages of the Mahāyāna Path of the Union of the Two Rivers of Kadampa and Mahāmudrā*—also popularly known as the *Ornament of Liberation of Dhakpo* (*dwags po thar gyan*), simply referred to as the *Ornament of Liberation* (*thar gyan*) and his Congregational Teachings (*tshogs chos*). With regard to the former, as the title clearly indicates, it is meant to be a tradition that combines the stages of the path teachings (*lam rim*) that he received from his Kadampa teachers with the Mahāmudrā teachings he received from Milarepa. To be sure, Gampopa does not necessarily have to rely on the Kadampa tradition to present foundational practices such as meditation on renunciation and *bodhicitta*. But the fact that he does so—as is evident in his classification of various foundational practices into those appropriate to the three persons or scopes (*skyes bu gsum*)—is perhaps a

testament to his recognition of the efficiency of the Kadampa tradition in presenting a systematic and complete path for the Mahāyāna tradition.

As for the second source, his Congregational Teachings, the name points to the fact that these teachings were given publicly to the monastic congregation and were not given in secret as part of the ear-whispered (*snyan rgyud*) lineage. Like the Mahāmudrā texts we considered in Chapters 2 and 3, the Congregational Teachings were not written down by Gampopa himself. Rather, they were notes taken by his students and attributed to him by adding them to his Collected Works (*dwags po'i bka' 'bum*). What is significant about these works is that in addition to presenting Kadampa teachings on the various stages of spiritual path, they also contain many Mahāmudrā teachings that were supposedly given secretly to a single or few mature students during the time of his lineage teachers Marpa and Mila. So while ostensibly they are public teachings, they also pay testimony to the ways in which Gampopa was mixing Mahāmudrā teachings with more mainstream Perfection of Wisdom or Sūtra Vehicle foundational teachings on renunciation, the accumulation of merit, development of the perfections, the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, and so on.

Of the two sources, we will favor the Congregational Teachings in this chapter and will spend comparatively less time engaging with Gampopa's *Ornament of Liberation*. This is because it is more difficult to decipher the relationship between foundational Mahāyāna paths of the Kadampa tradition and Mahāmudrā practice in the *Ornament of Liberation* than in the Congregational Teachings. While Gampopa presents the stages of the path teachings in a straightforward manner in his *Ornament of Liberation*, his Congregational Teachings are more subtle and nuanced, pointing to the significance of meditating on a particular spiritual path and its relationship to Mahāmudrā practice and realization. However, in both cases there is no doubt that Gampopa is merging or synthesizing the two traditions that he received from his Kadampa teachers and from

Milarepa. With regard to his *Ornament of Liberation*, this intent is clearly conveyed in its subtitle, *The Merging of the Two Rivers of Kadampa and Mahāmudrā*. In a broad sense, the merging of the two traditions in this text means presenting the Mahāmudrā view and meditation after all the foundational practices have been presented in accordance with the Kadampa tradition.

The first section of this chapter will briefly explore the notion of Mahāmudrā as a self-sufficient practice and its critiques from the perspective of both traditional and contemporary scholars. This will help us to specify more clearly what is at stake if we accept Mahāmudrā as a self-sufficient practice. The second section will present the key foundational practices that Gampopa deems necessary for Mahāmudrā practice and realization. This will be followed by a third section exploring the doctrine of the Self-Sufficient White Remedy in Gampopa's Congregational Teachings and the related notion of instantaneous practitioners (*cig char ba*) of Mahāmudrā, with the goal of exploring whether or not foundational practices are required in these situations. This is a significant issue in Buddhist thought and practice. For example, if someone engages in Mahāmudrā practice without generating renunciation (*nges 'byung*), a state of mind that sees *saṃsāra* as filled with suffering and thereby generates the intent to gain liberation from it, how does it become a dharma practice? Similarly, without practicing loving kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta (the intent to achieve complete Buddhahood in order to benefit suffering sentient beings), how does Mahāmudrā practice even become a Mahāyāna practice? In the fourth and final section we will look at the theory and practice of guru devotion, which Gampopa emphasizes as one of the most important practices for Mahāmudrā realization irrespective of whether one is an instantaneous or a gradual practitioner.

## 2 The Necessity of Foundational Practices for Mahāmudrā Meditation

In his Congregational Teachings, Gampopa provides pith instructions on key meditation practices that he deems as foundational to Mahāmudrā meditation. He does so by pointing to their psychological and soteriological significance on the various stages of the path (*lam rim*) leading to complete enlightenment, indicating how they become foundational to Mahāmudrā practices. Some of the main practices include meditations on impermanence and death (*'chi ba mi rtag pa*), the faults of *saṃsāra* (*'khor ba'i nyes dmigs*) leading to renunciation (*nges 'byung*), the observance of karma (*las 'bras*), the practice of seeking refuge in the three jewels (*skyabs 'gro*), and the cultivation of compassion (*snying rje*) and *bodhicitta* (enlightened intent, *byang chub sems*).

In these teachings, he argues for the necessity of meditative instructions that are complete, without abandoning any of the key practices. For example, if one neglects the practice of observing moral ethics inspired by the Buddhist notion of karma, we will take rebirth in lower realms even if we are undertaking high meditational practices such as Mahāmudrā. Likewise, if we do not practice compassion, the nature of our entire spiritual practice will turn into that of a disciple (*śrāvaka*, *nyan thos*) practice that results not in complete enlightenment but individual liberation or *nirvāṇa*. Underscoring the importance of practicing Mahāmudrā on the foundation of *bodhicitta* which in turn rests on the practice of loving kindness and compassion, Gampopa in *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching* argues:

> Absence of compassion leads to a *śrāvaka* practice. Abandoning the observance of karma leads to lower realms. As such, endowed with loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*, it is important to meditate on one's mind [alternating between] a gradualist and instantaneous practice.[226]

---

[226] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 551: *snying rje dang bral bas nyan thos su 'gro / las 'bras spangs na ngan song na 'gro bas /*

We will discuss the notion of gradualist and instantaneous practice in Mahāmudrā meditation extensively later in the chapter. For now, however, it is important to note that Gampopa here spells out key foundational practices that are necessary prior to engaging in Mahāmudrā practice. Without compassion, for example, Mahāmudrā practice will not be complete since it is considered a Mahāyāna practice. Without observing karma, the law of cause and effect, one will fall into lower realms even though one may claim to engage in Mahāmudrā practice. In addition to these foundational practices, one must also train in *bodhicitta*, the intent to gain the state of enlightenment for all sentient beings, in order for Mahāmudrā to become a genuine Mahāyāna dharma practice. Thus, in the passage above, Gampopa states that both gradual and instantaneous practice require a foundation of loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*.

Gampopa goes on to argue that without these foundational practices, our spiritual practice will be insufficient even if we engage in higher practices such as tantra. Additionally, he emphasizes that all the various stages of the path have to be understood to be practiced by one individual, thereby negating the misconception that some of these practices can be discarded as being inferior or too basic for those who engage in higher practices.

> In this way, if all the practices, from meditation on clear light at the summit, all the way to the common meditation of seeking refuge at the base, cannot be understood as one circle of interdependent practices for a single person, the path is incomplete and hence dharma [practice] is not understood. If this is not known accordingly, the instruction is incomplete even if one may be endowed with secret tantric [teachings]; hence the path is incomplete. Thus, it is important to be endowed with

---

*byams pa dang snying rje byang chub kyi sems dang ldan pas / rang gi sems la rim gyis pa dang / cig car du bsgom pa gal che'o /.*

teaching of the secret mantra as well as having instructions that are not incomplete.[227]

Although Mahāmudrā practice is not explicitly mentioned in the citation above, the implication is very clear. Mahāmudrā meditation—often seen as the very cream of tantric practices if its Tantric Mahāmudrā, or inspired by it in the case of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā—is understood as the pinnacle of practice and would also be incomplete without the foundational practices.

## 2.1    The Union of Method and Wisdom

A key method of classifying Buddhist philosophy and practice is to conceive of it in terms of two realities at the level of basis (*gzhi bden gnyis*), which correspond to the two truths, the ultimate and conventional. The two levels of basis correspond, in turn, to the two practices of method and wisdom at the level of the path (*lam thabs shes gnyis*), which in turn lead to two enlightened bodies at the level of result (*'bras bu sku gnyis*). Further, in this system, it is understood to be imperative to practice method and wisdom in union without discarding either. This is seen as a natural outcome of the fact there are two realities at the level of basis, with conventional reality related to the method side of the path and ultimate reality related to the wisdom side of the path. The practice of method and wisdom are, in their turn, seen as respectively resulting in a Buddha's enlightened body and enlightened mind. Referred to as the two bodies or *kāyas,* the form body (*rūpakāya, gzugs sku*) and truth body (*dharmakāya, chos sku*), the former is an aspect of the conventional

---

[227] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 551-552: *de yang ya ki'i 'od gsal gyi ting nge 'dzin man chod nas / ma ki'i skyabs su 'gro ba thun mong pa'i sdom pa yan chad nas bzung nas / thams cas ma lus par gang zag gcig gi rgyud la rten 'brel skor cig byed ma shes na lam ma tshang bas chos ma go ba yin / de ltar ma shes na rgyud kyis phyug pa yod kyang gdams ngag kha ma tshang ba yin pas lam ma tshang ba yin no / des na gsang sngags kyi rgyud kyis phyug pa dang / gdams ngag ma tshang ba med pa gal che'o/.*

reality, while the latter is an aspect of the ultimate reality. The form body is then further divided into a divine body (*saṃbhogakāya, longs sku*) and an emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya, sprul sku*). Conveying this notion of the unity of method and wisdom (the two accumulations) and the unity of the resulting two corresponding enlightened bodies, Gampopa states:

> At the time of realizing the [nature] of the mind, the *dharmatā* manifests; from that the two [enlightened] form bodies arise. If it is asked from what causes they arise, they arise due to the gathering of inconceivable accumulations [of merit and wisdom]; and during their final lifetime in existence as a *bodhisattva*, they make prayers for sentient beings; as a result, the two [enlightened] form bodies arise.[228]

Gampopa contextualizes the practice of loving kindness, compassion and *bodhicitta* within such a schema, arguing that they belong to conventional reality within the context of two truths at the level of the basis (*gzhi bden pa gnyis*), and to the method aspect in terms of the method and wisdom at the level of the path (*lam thabs shes gnyis*). Elsewhere in his *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, Gampopa states:

> One must meditate on loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*. Of the two types of *bodhicitta*, these [practices] are conventional *bodhicitta*; of the pair method and wisdom, they belong to method; of the two of realities, they belong to conventional reality. Of the two calm-abiding (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*), they belong to calm-abiding.[229]

---

[228] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 511. *sems rtogs pa'i dus su chos nyid mngon du grub / de las gzugs sku gnyis 'byung ba ste rgyu ci las byung ba yin na / rgyu tshogs dpag tu med pa bsags nas / srid pa tha ma'i byang chub sems dpa'i dus su / sems can gyi don du smon lam btab pas 'bras bu gzugs sku gnyis 'byung /.*

[229] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 572: *byams dang snying rje byang chub kyi sems bsgom ste / byang chub kyi sems gnyis las kun rdzob byang chub kyi sems / thabs shes rab gnyis las thabs / bden pa gnyis las kun rdzob kyi bden pa / zhi gnas dang lhag mthong rnam pa gnyis las zhi gnas yin gsung /.*

Classifying the practices of loving kindness, compassion and *bodhicitta* as belonging to calm-abiding in the passage above is interesting. It makes perfect sense from the point of view of meditation. Many of the disturbing thoughts and emotions that destroy one's calm-abiding practice will be automatically pacified when one practices loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*. Gampopa continues by arguing that one's obscurations (*sgrib pa*) will be automatically purified through these conventional practices, leading to the realization of the ultimate view of emptiness:

> By practicing in this way, one's [mental] continuum will be cleansed and one's obscurations will be automatically purified. All phenomena will be naturally realized as being like an illusion, a dream, or a reflection.[230]

In the passage above, Gampopa points to the power of compassion to eliminate obscurations of the mind so that it indirectly leads to the realization of the ultimate even though it is an affective state. Gampopa further asserts that the meaning of compassion is not different from the meaning of emptiness: they are one and the same thing.

> Train the mind in loving kindness and compassion. Since the meaning of emptiness and compassion are one, the meaning of the non-arising nature [emptiness] will be realized as well.[231]

How can we understand this statement that the meaning of compassion and emptiness are one and the same thing and that the cultivation of compassion leads to the realization of emptiness? Similar to Gampopa, Garchen Rinpoche, a contemporary Mahāmudrā teacher, often gives lengthy

---

[230] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 572: *de ltar nyams su blangs pas rang rgyud 'byongs shing sgrib pa shugs kyis 'dag / chos thams cad sgyu ma rmi lam gzugs brnyan lta bur shugs kyis go nas 'ong /.*

[231] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 571: *byams snying rje la blo sbyongs / stong pa dang snying rje don gcig yin pas / skye med kyi don rtogs nas 'ong ba yin/.*

discourses on compassion in his supposedly "Mahāmudrā" teachings, claiming that compassion

practice is itself Mahāmudrā practice.

One way to understand Garchen Rinpoche's statement from the perspective of Mahāmudrā

practice is to recognize its perspective that compassion, like all phenomenal appearances, is not

distinct from one's intrinsic awareness (*rig pa*), i.e., one's innate mind of clear light. Compassion

is the energetic expression of intrinsic awareness. With such a position in mind, Gampopa states:

> When we first meditated on compassion and in its wake we meditated on emptiness,
> did we not leave behind [the practice of] compassion? The answer is no, we did not
> leave it behind. This is because, on the one hand, compassion and *bodhicitta* are
> intrinsic awareness; on the other hand, that which is empty is also intrinsic
> awareness; they are not distinct.[232]

Sometimes Gampopa appears to state that the sequential practice of compassion and emptiness,

that is of method and wisdom, does not seem to matter at a certain stage. The point to understand

is that they are both practiced to give rise to their union.

> If one fist meditates on compassion and then on emptiness, it is compassion that
> has the essential nature of emptiness (*snying rje stong pa'i snying po can*). If one
> first meditates on emptiness and then on compassion, it is emptiness that has the
> essential nature of compassion (*stong pa snying rje'i snying po can*). There is no
> separation there.[233]

Gampopa seems to argue that the practice of sustaining nonduality (*gnyis med*), i.e., the

Mahāmudrā state, requires such a practice of the union of method and wisdom. Due to this, once

---

[232] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 569-570: *sngon la snying rje bsgoms la / de'i 'phro la stong pa nyid bsgoms pas / snying rje phyir ma lus sam zhe na ma lus te / snying rje byang chub sems kyang rig pa yin pa la / stong mkhan yang rig pa yin pas / tha dad med do /.*

[233] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 570: *dang po snying rje bsgoms phyi nas stong pa sgoms na / snying rje stong pa'i snying po can yin / dang po stong pa bsgoms phyi nas snying rje bsgoms na / stong nyid snying rje'i snying po can yin pas / de la tha dad med pa yin gsung /.*

the Mahāmudrā state is realized, compassion is inherently present in such a state, clearly suggesting that that the Mahāmudrā state consists of both method and wisdom.

> When the meaning of nonduality is realized with certainty, even though there is no concept of sentient beings [in such a state], one will naturally generate compassion for suffering beings.[234]

Gampopa goes on to argue that once the genuine non-arising nature (*skye med rnal ma*), i.e., the genuine Mahāmudrā state, is realized, it is a state in which method and wisdom are thoroughly perfected. Their perfection is also called "the perfection of the two accumulations": the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Gampopa thus states in his *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, "When genuine non-arising nature is realized, the two accumulations are perfected."[235] Thus, it is evident that the highest, nondual Mahāmudrā state (*zung 'jug phyag rgya chen po*), an epithet for complete and perfect state of enlightenment, is a state in which the union of method and wisdom is perfected—that is, it is a state in which the two accumulations are perfected. For Gampopa, these method aspects of the path are not only necessary practices, they are required until one gains the state of enlightenment. For example, in *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, he makes it very clear that the conventional practices of refraining from negative karma and engaging in wholesome karma must be carried out by a single individual until the stage of enlightenment.

> All phenomena arise due to the gathering of causes and conditions. In this regard, abandoning all negative actions and engaging in all wholesome actions constitutes

---

[234] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 574: *gnyis med kyi don nges par rtogs na sems can gyi 'du shes med kyang / sdug bsngal can la snying rje ngang gis skye /.*

[235] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 576: *skye med rnal mar rtogs na / tshogs gnyis rdzogs pa yin gsung /.*

the gathering of causes and conditions. As such we should not be separated from this [practice] until obtaining the unsurpassable state of enlightenment.[236]

## 2.2    Gampopa's Four Dharmas

Another concise way in which Gampopa presents the necessary contextual practices for his Mahāmudrā meditation is through what came to be popularly known as the four dharmas, here understood as "teaching," of Gampopa (*sgam po'i chos bzhi*). It is arguably a very succinct summary of the Stages of the Path (*lam rim*) teachings leading to the Mahāmudrā practice, something that is akin to the three principal aspects of the path (*lam gtso rnam gsum*) of Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, 1357–1419).[237] As will be demonstrated, it is evident that the four dharmas are not four alternative practices; rather, they are four interrelated levels of practice such that the accomplishment or realization of the higher practices are dependent on the accomplishment or realization of the lower ones. Before we establish this, however, let us identify the four dharmas and what each entails. The following passages are drawn from Gampopa's *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*.

The first dharma is characterized as "dharma dawning as dharma" (*chos chos su 'gro ba*). This means that our dharma practice must become genuine dharma practice. For the dharma to become genuine dharma practice, Gampopa asserts that we must be able to turn our mind away from attachment to this life. Instead, we must engage in practices that will ensure our wellbeing not just

---

[236] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 572-573: *chos thams cad rgyu rkyen tshogs pa las 'byung pa yin gsung / de yang mi dge ba mtha' dag ni spangs / dge ba ma lus pa nyams su len pa de rgyu rkyen phun sum tshogs pa yin pas / bla na med pa'i byang chub ma thob kyi bar du de dang mi 'bral bar bya /.*

[237] The three principle aspects of the path are renunciation, *bodhicitta*, and the wisdom of emptiness. For a detailed elucidation on the topic, see Sonam Rinchen, *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path: An Oral Teaching* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1999).

in this life, but most importantly in our future lives. This is possible from a Buddhist soteriological

point of view if we observe the moral ethics of 1) refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions (*mi*

*dge bcu*) such as killing, stealing, and so on; and 2) engaging in the corresponding ten virtuous

actions (*dge ba bcu*) such as saving lives, practicing generosity, and so on. Without such a mental

state characterized by abandonment of attachment to the pleasures of life, our dharma practice gets

preoccupied with concerns of or attachment to this life such that dharma fails to dawn as dharma.

> One requirement is the turning away of one's mind from [the concerns of] this life
> in order to refrain from the subtlest of negative actions and to practice the ten
> virtuous actions. If this happens, our dharma has dawned as dharma.[238]

Gampopa's second dharma is construed as "dharma progressing on the path" (*chos lam du*

*'gro ba*). The path here refers to the Mahāyāna path as Gampopa underscores the importance of

loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*. Without these practices, our practice will fall into

the path of a *śrāvaka* or a *pratyekabuddha,* and in this sense our dharma practices will not progress

on the path, i.e., the Mahāyāna path.

> If, motivated by loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*, whatever we do
> becomes beneficial for sentient beings, [and] dharma functions as a spiritual path.
> In contrast, if we engage in dharma practice for our own sake, then it amounts to
> training on the path of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.[239]

---

[238] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 522: *tshe 'di la blo ldog dgos te / sdig pa phra zhing phra ba la 'dzem zhing / chos spyod dge bcu nyams su len pa zhig byung na / 'o skol gyi chos de chos su song ba yin no /.*

[239] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 523: *byams pa dang snying rje byang chub sems kyis kun nas bslangs te / ci byed sems can gyi don du 'gro ba gcig byung na chos de lam du 'gro ba yin no / de ltar ma yin par rang don du byed na / nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas kyi lam sbyong bar 'gro ba yin /.*

The third dharma is presented as "dispelling confusion through the path" (*lam gyis 'khrul pa sel ba*). This third dharma has four levels of successive practices that we train in a sequential manner which Gampopa terms stages of the teachings (*bstan pa'i rim pa*), a practice also referred to as stages of the path (*lam rim*) in the Kadampa tradition. Within the context of this third dharma, Gampopa presents four levels of practices or teachings: teachings on impermanence and death, teachings on renunciation (*nges byung*), teachings on bodhicitta, and teachings on the emptiness of all phenomena. These teachings are given to apply as direct antidotes to four corresponding but inter-related confusions.

Let us now discuss the four teachings which together comprise of Gampopa's third dharma. First, to dispel the confusion of attachment to this life as permanent, one has to meditate on impermanence until the thought dawns that we have no time to waste on mundane things.

> The dispelling of confusion by the paths belongs to the Stages of Doctrines (*bstan rim*) [genre of teachings]. If it is asked how confusions are dispelled, they are dispelled directly [as they arise]; grasping at this life as permanent is a confusion; its antidote is to meditate on impermanence and death. Due to this, if the thought of not engaging in any [mundane] activities arise, then the path has eliminated the confusion.[240]

Secondly, to dispel the confusion of attachment to the pleasures of *saṃsāra*, one has to meditate on the faults of *saṃsāra*.

---

[240] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 523: *lam gyis 'khrul pa sel ba ni bstan pa'i rim pa yin te / ji ltar sel na 'khrul pa thams cad thad kar thad kar sel te / tshe 'di la rtag par 'dzin pa'i blo ste 'khrul pa yin / de'i gnyen por 'chi ba mi rtag pa bsgom pas / cis kyang byar med kyi blo gcig skyes na lam des 'khrul pa sel /.*

Perceiving this *saṃsāra* as pleasurable and happy is confusion. Having meditated on the faults of *saṃsāra* as its antidote, when one's mind does not grasp or get attached to anything at all, the confusion on that path is dispelled.[241]

Thirdly, to dispel the confusion of wanting liberation for only oneself, we meditate on loving kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta.

The mind that seeks peace, happiness, and liberation for only oneself is confusion. Having meditated on loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta* as its antidote, when the thought of treating others as more precious than oneself arises, the confusion on that path is dispelled.[242]

Fourthly, to dispel the confusion of grasping at things as having true existence, one meditates on emptiness.

This mind that grasps at existence and characteristics is confusion. Having meditated on emptiness, the mode of being of all phenomena, as its antidote, when one understands all phenomena as being empty and devoid of self like the middle of space, the confusion on that path is dispelled.[243]

This completes the four levels of Gampopa's third dharma.

Having thus engaged in the first three foundational dharmas, namely, "dharma dawning as dharma" (*chos chos su 'gro ba*), "dharma progressing on the path" (*chos lam du 'gro ba*), and "dispelling confusion through the path" (*lam gyis 'khrul pa sel ba*), Gampopa now presents his

---

[241] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 523-524: *'khor ba 'di la bde zhing skyid par mthong ba'i blo de 'khrul pa yin / de'i gnyen por 'khor ba'i nyes dmigs bsgoms pas / gang la yang ma zhen cing ma chags pa'i blo zhig skyes pas lam de'i 'khrul pa sel/.*

[242] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 524: *rang gcig pu zhi bde thar pa 'dod pa'i blo de 'khrul pa yin / de'i gnyen por byams pa dang snying rje byang chub kyi sems bsgoms pas / rang las gzhan gces par 'dod pa'i blo'ang 'byung bas / lam des 'khrul pa sel /.*

[243] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 524: *dngos po dang mtshan mar 'dzin pa'i blo de 'khrul pa yin / dei gnyen por chos thams cad kyi gnas lugs stong pa nyid bsgoms pas / chos thams cad stong zhing bdag med pa nam mkha'i dkyil lta bur rtogs pas / lam des 'khrul pa sel ba yin no /.*

fourth dharma that is construed as "confusion dawning as wisdom" (*'khrul pa ye shes su 'char ba*). This dharma evidently refers to Mahāmudrā practice, judging by the way in which Gampopa presents it. He first establishes the mode of being of one's mind as not being anything whatsoever (*ci yang ma yin pa*), which, as we have explained in Chapter 2, refers to the experiential realization of emptiness through Mahāmudrā meditation. From such a ground of the mind, there arises the diversity of appearances. However, these appearances are not distinct from the mind and hence do not exist as any extramental object, thereby establishing the nonduality of mind and appearances.

   With respect to confusion dawning as wisdom, we first establish the emptiness of the mind. From the state of the emptiness of the mind, we see all phenomena that appear as nondifferent from it, thereby understanding the nonduality of mind and its appearances. When we experience such a nondual state, all appearances, including all confusions, are not seen as something outside the mind to be abandoned. To the contrary, they help to enhance the clarity of the nondual state. This is what Gampopa means by confusion dawning as wisdom.

> With regard to confusion dawning as wisdom, from one's mind whose mode of abiding does not exist as anything whatever, diversity [of phenomenal appearances] appears. At the very time of the appearance of diversity, [the appearances] do not transcend not existing as anything whatever. At the time when that is experienced, the state of nonduality is beyond expression. When that is realized, there is no separate confusion to be dispelled. Since the dispeller does not exist, confusion dawns as wisdom.[244]

---

[244] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 524-525: *'khrul pa ye shes su 'char ba ni / rang gi sems kyi gnas lugs ci yang ma yin pa las sna tshogs su shar / sna tshogs su shar ba'i dus nyid na / don ci yang ma yin pa las ma 'das te / de nyid nyams su myong ba'i dus su gnyis med kyi don la smrar med / de rtogs pa'i dus su 'khrul pa logs su bsal rgyu med de / sel mkhan ma grub pas 'khrul pa de nyid ye shes su 'char ba yin gsung /.*

It is evident that the sequence that Gampopa follows in presenting the four dharmas is meant to be a progressive one, with the higher practices dependent on the lower practices. The first dharma of realizing impermanence and death is meant to be the foundation of all dharma practices: if we cannot sever attachment to this life by means of the realization of its momentary nature and our eventual demise, we do not generate an urgency to dedicate our life to dharma practice. We fail to engage in genuine dharma practice, carried away by concerns of this life such as name and fame.

The second dharma becomes a foundation for all Mahāyāna practices. Mahāmudrā and the entire teachings presented in Gampopa's *Ornament of Liberation,* as well as the Congregational Teachings, are meant to be Mahāyāna teachings with the goal of attaining complete Buddhahood for all sentient beings. Without the practice of loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*, no practice can become a Mahāyāna practice. Therefore, it seems evident that Gampopa places a strong emphasis for the first two dharmas, respectively as the foundation of dharma in general and the foundation of Mahāyāna in particular.

With these two important foundations in place, Gampopa's third dharma offers a concise summary of four important, interrelated, and progressive practices: impermanence and death, the faults of *saṃsāra*, loving kindness and compassion leading to *bodhicitta*, and the wisdom of emptiness. The first and the third practices pertaining to the third dharma are apparently repetitions of the first and second dharmas. However, it appears that there are important reasons for this. The first two are meant to establish the right kind of motivation or mental orientation before engaging in any Mahāyāna practices. Once proper motivation is established, Gampopa explains the first two dharmas in a slightly different context in the third dharma.

 In the third dharma, meditation on impermanence and death is related to the cultivation of renunciation, particularly as it pertains to this life. Without generating renunciation pertaining to

this life through realizing impermanence and death, it will logically be impossible to generate renunciation pertaining to all forms of existence at all times within *saṃsāra* through meditating on the faults of *saṃsāra*, which is the second of the four practices belonging to the third dharma. Likewise, without generating a wish to achieve the state of liberation from the sufferings of oneself, one cannot genuinely generate the intent to liberate all other beings from *saṃsāra*, the third-level practice of the third dharma. On the basis of renunciation developed through the first two practices of the third dharma and loving kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta* developed through the third practice of the third dharma, Gampopa presents the fourth-level practice of the third dharma: the practice of meditation on emptiness. This progressive sequence is important. Without genuine renunciation, a practitioner will not engage in emptiness practice to gain freedom from *saṃsāra*. Such a practitioner may practice emptiness only to gain some psychological benefit in this life such as temporary mental peace. And without meditation on *bodhicitta*, the practice of emptiness may be inspired only to achieve individual liberation for oneself, not complete Buddhahood for all sentient beings.

It is evident that Gampopa has a great reason to present Mahāmudrā practice as the fourth and final dharma. Since it is primarily a nonconceptual practice, the question of whether it becomes a genuine dharma practice inspired by renunciation and a Mahāyāna practice inspired by *bodhicitta* is determined by the prior conceptual practices of renunciation and *bodhicitta*. Furthermore, since Mahāmudrā is primarily a nonconceptual experience of emptiness, Gampopa indicates that a prior conceptual analysis regarding emptiness is required before engaging in nonconceptual and non-dualistic Mahāmudrā practice. As such it is presented as the pinnacle of the four dharmas.

**2.3    Scopes or Persons as an Essential Foundation for Mahāmudrā Meditation**

Another way to organize Gampopa's teachings to establish that foundational practices are required for Mahāmudrā practice is through the teachings pertaining to the three scopes or persons: the small scope, the middle scope, and the great scope. In one of his public teachings entitled *Abundance of Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, Gampopa offers pith instructions on key foundational practices of meditation such as impermanence, leading to the practice of Mahāmudrā. He argues that the entire teachings of the Buddha contained in what is termed the collections of scriptural teachings (*sde snod gsum*) are to be carried into practice by a single individual in a systematic manner, thereby clearly indicating that they are not something that you can pick and choose from on the path of one's spiritual journey towards enlightenment.[245] He continues by touching a significant point, namely that the entire teachings of the Buddha as contained in the three collections can dawn as pith instructions for meditation practice by incorporating them into the systematic stages of the practice of the three persons or scopes (*skyes bu gsum gyi chos*), a method of classification taught by Atiśa, the founder of the Kadampa tradition.[246] These three levels of meditation practices belonging to the three scopes are: meditation on impermanence and death, meditation on faults of *saṃsāra,* and meditation on compassion, leading to *bodhicitta*.

With regard to meditation on impermanence and death, Gampopa urges us to contemplate various factors such the fragility of life, the many conditions for death, and so forth. The goal of such a meditation, he points out, is to eliminate excessive attachment to the pleasures of this world.

---

[245] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 564-565: *yang rje dwags po rin po che'i zhal nas / sangs rgyas kyis gsungs pa'i chos sde snod gsum gyi don / sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa'i rim pa mtha' dag gang zag gcig gis nyams su len pa'i dus su.../.*

[246] For a translation of the text from English into Tibetan and a commentary by a contemporary Tibetan scholar, see Sonam Rinchen, *Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.

Furthermore, in this life we have no time as we die quickly. As such, one of the requirements is to not get attached to the entirety of this world.[247]

Gampopa further points out that attachment to this world as being permanent prevents us from inducing a sense of urgency that is required for spiritual practice such as diligently observing the law of karma. He argues that such a reflection on impermanence and death should encourage us to observe the law of karma, refraining from negative actions and engaging in wholesome actions, which is responsible for higher rebirth and happiness in the next life according to Buddhist soteriology. Gampopa asserts that this in turn constitutes the stages of spiritual practices of a person of small scope.

As such, without attachment to this life, one must guard the law of cause and effect like one's own eyeballs. This is the mind [intention] of a person of small scope.[248]

Although eliminating attachment to this life helps us to observe the law of cause and effect, thereby obtaining higher rebirths in the next life, this mental path state (*lam, mngon rtogs*) is not sufficient to lead to an intent to seek freedom from all forms of lives within *saṃsāra* or existence. Thus, at the second level of teachings, Gampopa continues by explaining that the next stage of the practice is meditation on the faults of or suffering within *saṃsāra* in general to generate the intention to gain freedom from it.

---

[247] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 565: *de yang tshe 'di la long med myur du 'chi bas / 'jig rten mtha' dag la ma chags pa cig dgos /.*

[248] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 566: *de bas na tshe 'di la ma chags par byas nas / las rgyu 'bras la mig gi 'bras bu bzhin 'dzem dgos / de skye bu chung ngu'i blo yin /.*

> Wherever one takes rebirth in the six realms, there is no happiness. It is a mere heap of great suffering. As such, one requirement is not to get attached to the entirety of *saṃsāra*.[249]

He then instructs that the method to gain freedom from *saṃsāra* lies in the practice of seeking refuge in the three jewels (*skyabs ’gro*) based on which we train in moral ethics (*tshul khrims*) and the four noble truths which lead to the attainment of *nirvāṇa* (*myang ’das*). This, he says is the dharma of the person of middle scope.

> The method of gaining liberation from that [*saṃsāra*] lies in the practice of relying on the three jewels, based on which one trains in the foundation of moral ethics and the path of the four noble truths thereby attaining the state of *nirvāṇa* without remainder (*lhag med myang ’das*). This is the dharma of the person of middle scope; it is extremely important.[250]

After gaining experience on the importance of achieving liberation or *nirvāṇa* from *saṃsāra* for oneself, Gampopa implies that it is not sufficient to seek liberation only for oneself and that one must wish the same for all other sentient beings. To this end he underscores the importance of compassionate practice (*karuṇā, snying rje*) as the foundation of Mahāyāna practice.

> The foundation of all Mahāyāna teachings is compassion. As such one requirement is to never mentally forsake sentient beings at any time.[251]

---

[249] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 566: *’gro ba rigs drug gar skyes kyang bde skyid med / sdug bsngal gyi phung po chen po ’ba’ zhig yin pas / ’khor ba mtha’ dag la ma chags pa cig dgos /.*

[250] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 566: *de las thar par byed pa’i thabs dkon mchog gsum la brten nas gzhi tshul khrims kyi bslab pa / lam bden pa bzhi / ’bras bu lhag med kyi mya ngan las ‘das pa thob par byed pa ’di / skyes bu ’bring gi chos yin te shin tu gal che /.*

[251] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 566-567: *theg pa chen po’i chos thams cad kyi rtsa ba snying rje yin pas / dus thams cad du sems can blos mi spong ba cig dgos /.*

Gampopa next offers a brief instruction on how to generate *bodhicitta* (the enlightened intent, *byang chub sems*), i.e., the intent to achieve the state of complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. He points to one of the two traditions of developing *bodhicitta* taught by Atiśa, often termed "the seven-point cause and effect instruction" (*rgyu 'bras man ngag bdun*). This involves realizing all beings as having been one's own mothers at the beginning of practice (*mar shes*)*,* then remembering their kindness as mothers (*drin dran*), generating the intent to payback their kindness (*drin gzo*), generating loving kindness (*byams pa*) based on that, followed by generating compassion (*snying rje*)*,* which in turn leads to the determination to achieve the statement of complete enlightenment for all sentient beings, leading to the seventh factor, which is the effect, *bodhicitta* (*byang chub sems*).

> These sentient beings, equal to the extent of space, are my mothers. When they had been my mothers, they gazed at me with loving eyes, sustained me with compassionate mind, never stopping the intent to bring me wellbeing and happiness. As such they are extremely kind. Since we need to repay their kindness, we must always regard all sentient beings like a mother would her only child by generating loving kindness that wishes to lead them to the state of happiness, the compassion that wishes to free them from suffering and the *bodhicitta* that wishes to lead them to the unsurpassable state of enlightenment. This is the path of the person of great scope; it is extremely important.[252]

It is on the foundation of these teachings pertaining to the persons of three scopes that Gampopa finally presents the meditation on the view of emptiness, explaining it in terms of his

---

[252] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 567: *nam mkha' dang mnyam pa'i sems can 'di rnams bdag gi ma yin pas / ma byas pa'i tshe na byams pa'i mig gis bltas / brtse ba'i sems kyis bskyangs / phan pa dang bde bar 'dod pa'i blo rgyun ma bcad pas / shin tu drin che / drin la lan gyis ldon dgos pas / ma rnams bde la 'god bar bya snyam pa'i byams pa dang / sdug bsngal dang bral bar 'dod pa'i snying rje dang / bla na med pa'i byang chub la 'god par bya snyam pa'i byang chub kyi sems kyis dus rtag tu sems can la bu gcig pa'i ma bhzin du blos 'dzin pa ni / skyes bu mchog gi lam yin pas shin tu gal che gsung /.*

Mahāmudrā tradition by establishing all phenomenal appearances as mind, and mind in turn as

devoid of any intrinsic reality.

> It is essential not to cling to anything as existent (*dngos po*) or having characteristics
> (*mtshan ma*) due to realizing that all phenomena have no arising [in the past] and
> do not arise [in the present]. As such, all these phenomena that are seen and heard
> are mind. Mind [in turn] does not arise from anywhere in the beginning, does not
> abide anywhere in the middle, and does not cease anywhere in the end.[253]

This approach of presenting key practices of the three scopes culminating in the Mahāmudrā

meditation clearly demonstrates that for Mahāmudrā to become a dharma practice in general and

Mahāyāna practice in particular, we must first practice and have a degree of experiential grounding

in the teachings of the persons of the three scopes.

## 3   The Self-Sufficient White Remedy, Instantaneous Practitioners, and the Question of Foundational Practices

### 3.1   Mahāmudrā as a Self-Sufficient Practice and Its Critics

Having discussed the importance of foundational practices for Mahāmudrā practice, let us

now explore whether there are instances in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā teachings when such

associated practices can be dispensed with. One topic that has generated a great degree of debate

and controversy, both in the traditional Tibetan Buddhist setting and in modern academia, is the

doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy (*dkar po chig thub*). This doctrine refers to the notion

that a certain aspect of Mahāmudrā practice does not require other associated practices and is

therefore sufficient in itself from a soteriological point of view.

---

[253] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 567-568: *chos thams cad ma skyes shing skye ba med par shes pas / gang la'ang dngos po dang mtshan mar mi 'dzin pa cig dgos pas / 'di ltar snang zhing grags pa'i chos thams cad rang gi sems yin pas / sems 'di dang po gang nas kyang ma skyes / bar du gang du yang mi gnas / tha ma gar yang mi 'gag /.*

Before continuing to explore Gampopa's own view on the notion of a Mahāmudrā practice that is self-sufficient from a salvific point of view, let us look at this doctrine and its critiques from the perspectives of traditional and modern scholars. Many scholars, both in traditional Tibet and modern academia, have understood certain aspects of Mahāmudrā teachings to establish that Mahāmudrā is a self-sufficient practice from a salvific point of view. The doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy (*dkar po chig thub*), as referenced by Gampopa and by others, refers to the notion that Mahāmudrā itself has the capacity to lead one to the complete state of enlightenment without requiring other associated or foundational practices. Although Gampopa does explicitly mention the term self-sufficient white remedy in some of his other writings,[254] he does not employ the term in his Congregational Teachings where, however, he describes a similar notion of Mahāmudrā practice being self-sufficient without mentioning this term. Yet, the notion of a self-sufficient practice comes for Gorampa with many qualifications, as we shall see.

The doctrine of Mahāmudrā as a self-sufficient practice is employed in its most extreme sense by Lama Zhang. According to David Jackson, he was one of the most controversial figures, even to his co-religionists, who, based on his claim that he has realized the Mahāmudrā state, engaged in many violent activities contravening conventionally accepted morality.[255] The Gelug scholar Sumpa Khenpo Yeshé Paljor (Sum pa mkhan po ye-shes dpal 'byor, 1704–1776) also identifies Lama Zhang as the main target of the Sakya scholar Sapaṇ's rejection of the doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy.[256] David Jackson further points out that Lama Zhang describes a Mahāmudrā practice that is self-sufficient in a soteriological sense, without requiring associated

---

[254] See Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 149–53.

[255] Jackson, 61.

[256] Jackson, 133.

or foundation practices and referred to it as the self-sufficient white remedy.[257] To be self-sufficient from a Mahāyāna soteriological point of view means that this practice alone has the capacity to obtain the complete state of enlightenment which is considered to consist of the three enlightened bodies (*trikāya*): *dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya,* and *nirmāṇakāya,* with the latter two collectively referred to as the form body (*rūpakāya*) when the enlightened state is divided into two *kāyas*. Refuting such a position, Sapaṇ writes:

> Some claim that the self-sufficient white remedy
> Gives rise to the three *kāya*s,
> A singe [cause] cannot give rise to [such] effect;
> Even if a result arises from a single cause,
> It would be like the cessation of a disciple (*śrāvaka*).[258] [verse: 347]

In the passage above, Sapaṇ argues that even if such a single cause gives rise to a result, the result will also be singular like the *nirvāṇa* of the *śrāvakas*, that is, those who only obtain individual liberation or the state of being an *arhat* without attaining complete enlightenment due to their lack of the "method" aspect of the path such as *bodhicitta* grounded in love and compassion.

From the writings of contemporary academic scholars, it becomes clear that Sapaṇ has been the main critic of Mahāmudrā in general, and of this question of its self-sufficiency in particular.[259] Sapaṇ's critique of the Mahāmudrā tradition becomes a crucial moment in understanding the reception of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition in Tibet, with many scholars responding to his

---

[257] For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Jackson, 155–88.

[258] Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, 44. *kha cig dkar po chig thub las / 'bras bu sku gsum 'byung zhes zer / gcig las 'bras bu 'byung mi nus / gal teg cig las 'bras bu zhig / byung yang nyan thos 'gog pa bzhin /.*

[259] See Jackson, *Mind Seeing Mind*, 105–7. for a summary of Sapaṇ's major criticisms.

critiques either to support or to refute them.[260] Due to this, Sapaṇ also plays an important role for

contemporary academic scholars approaching the key issues of contention in the Mahāmudrā

tradition. David Jackson points out Sapaṇ is mainly critiquing three issues related to the doctrine

of the self-sufficient white remedy: a) that a single method or factor, i.e., the self-sufficient white

remedy, is sufficient from a soteriological point of view to lead one to the state of enlightenment;

b) that the gnosis (*jñāna*, *ye shes*) of Mahāmudrā could be generated only through a nonconceptual

approach to meditation; and c) and that Mahāmudrā could be taught outside the tantric context.[261]

The first issue is directly related to this chapter's exploration of whether other associated practices

are required or not. When a single practice, namely a nonconceptual approach to meditation, is

deemed as self-sufficient, it means that other associated practices are not required to achieve the

Mahāyāna salvific goal of complete enlightenment. As pointed out earlier, Sapaṇ refutes such a

position, arguing that through a single factor of the self-sufficient white remedy devoid of great

compassion, one cannot achieve the state of complete enlightenment.

The second issue, namely that the wisdom of Mahāmudrā can be generated only through a

nonconceptual approach is also relevant for this chapter. One of the main reasons why Mahāmudrā

is understood to be a self-sufficient practice from a soteriological point of view is its nonconceptual

approach to meditation that aims to discourage and even circumvent conceptual forms of

meditation, including undertaking philosophical analysis. This discouraging of conceptual forms

---

[260] For a summary of the life and works of Sapaṇ, including some of his main critiques of the Mahāmudrā tradition, see Jonathan C Gold, "Sakya Paṇḍita [Sa Skya Paṇ Ḍi Ta]," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=sakya-pandita.

[261] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 72; see also Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, *The Great Perfection (RDzogs Chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, 2nd edition, Brill's Tibetan Studies Library 11 (Boston: Brill, 2007).

of meditation further raises the question of the role of ethics such as compassion in Mahāmudrā

practice since they are conceptual in nature.

Roger Jackson sums up the issues raised by the doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy in

the following manner:

> Discourse on Mahāmudrā in India and Tibet raises a number of important issues
> for Buddhist thought and practice, such as the soteriological sufficiency of a single,
> sudden insight; the place of reason and ethics in contemplative traditions; and the
> unity or diversity of meditative realizations.[262]

David Jackson, moreover, maintains that not only did Gampopa employ the notion and the

metaphor of the self-sufficient white remedy in his works,[263] he also appears to identify the wisdom

of emptiness as the self-sufficient practice.

> If one possesses insight into emptiness, there is not a single thing that is not
> included in this factor.[264]

According to David Jackson, Gampopa goes on to assert that all other factors of enlightenment

such as the six types of perfections are included in this practice of insight into emptiness.[265] For

now, we will bracket whether this is Gampopa's final stand[266] and will explore the context of such

statements. We can, however note that there is a great degree of evidence, as we shall see, that

---

[262] Jackson, "Mahāmudrā," 286.

[263] For a discussion on this topic in Gampopa's writings, including translation of texts where the term Self-Sufficient White Remedy occurs in his texts, see Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 147–54.

[264] Cited in Jackson, 5.

[265] See Jackson, 6.

[266] See Jackson, *Mind Seeing Mind*, 88–90. for a discussion of the difficulty of pinning down Gampopa to a single view or definition of Mahāmudrā.

Gampopa does refer to a certain Mahāmudrā state which, when realized, does not require other conventional practices. Such practices, according to Gampopa, are mentally fabricated (*blos byas*) and take us away from the Mahāmudrā state.

Sapaṇ's critique of the Mahāmudrā tradition is mainly contained in two of his works: *Discriminating the Three Vows* (*Sdom gsum rab dbye*) and *Elucidation of the Sages Intent* (*Thub pa'i dgongs gsal*).[267] In the *Three Vows* Sapaṇ argues, for example, that as a Mahāyāna practice with the goal of achieving complete Buddhahood, Mahāmudrā must incorporate the practice of conventional *bodhicitta* generated based on the practice of kindness and compassion.

> The root of all dharma is emptiness [wisdom], that has compassion as its essence
> The union of method and wisdom
> Is taught by the victor in all the tantras and sūtras [verse: 446].
> Some claim that mere absence of elaboration (*niṣprapañca*)
> Is the self-sufficient white [remedy] [verse: 447].[268]

In the *Three Vows*, Sapaṇ also argues that a single practice cannot be causally efficient and that enlightenment depends on many causes. He then questions the logic of calling a practice self-sufficient when other practices such as compassion are also necessary.[269] According to Sapaṇ, realizing the nature of the mind (*sems kyi ngo bo*) alone is not sufficient to lead one to the state of Buddhahood. If *bodhicitta* as an associated practice is present, it can lead to complete enlightenment. If bodhicitta is not present, it can lead one to the *nirvāṇa* of a *śrāvaka*, or worse

---

[267] For a concise summary of these two works, see Gold, "Sakya Paṇḍita."

[268] Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, 51. *chos rnams kun gyi tsa ba ni / stong nyid snying rje'i snying po can / thabs dang shes rab zung 'jug tu / mdo rgyud kun las rgyal bas gsung / la la spros bral rkyang pa ni / dkar po chig thub yin zhes zer /.*

[269] Jackson, "Sa-Skya Paṇḍita the 'Polemicist,'" 37.

still, to lower rebirths.[270] For Sapaṇ, the timing or the level at which direct recognition of the nature

of the mind happens is therefore extremely important—a point with which Gampopa will readily

agree, as we shall see.

In his *Sage's Intent*, Sapaṇ critiques the Mahāmudrā practice of cultivating nonconceptuality

right in the beginning without prior training in the method aspects of the path such as compassion

and discerning wisdom which is conceptual in the beginning.[271] Sapaṇ also agrees that the final

direct realization of the nature of the mind is nonconceptual. However, by itself, without prior

conceptual analysis, one cannot realize the nonduality of the subject and object (*gzung 'dzin gnyis*

*med pa*) nor attain the direct realization of selflessness. Both of these direct realizations first require

their conceptual understanding for which scriptural knowledge and reasoning is essential.[272] Other

Tibetan scholars followed in Sapaṇ's footstep. For example, the Sakya scholar Gorampa (Go rams

pa bsod nams seng ge, 1429–1489) also argued that Mahāmudrā practice requires other associated

practices such as compassion.[273]

Another related critique levied by Sapaṇ against the Dhakpo Kagyu Mahāmudrā tradition

pertains to the question of its origin, as we briefly discussed previously in Chapter 1. Sapaṇ

criticized Kagyu Mahāmudrā teachings as based on "Chinese-style Great Perfection" teachings[274]

that were supposedly discredited in the eighth century during the so-called Samyé debate that

allegedly took place between the Indian Master Kamalaśīla and the Chinese Chan master

---

[270] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 76.

[271] Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan, "Sage's Intent," 492.

[272] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 75–76.

[273] Jackson, 5.

[274] Jackson, 68.

Hvashang Mahāyāna.[275] Although the question of origin may not be relevant here since the Dhakpo

Kagyu tradition itself traces the origin of its Mahāmudrā tradition in India to the person of

Maitrīpāda,[276] it must be acknowledged that some aspects of the teachings of Hvashang Mahāyāna

do bear a striking resemblance to the teachings of the doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy.

These include the question of sudden versus gradual enlightenment, with Hvashang endorsing the

first and Kamalaśīla, representing the mainstream Perfection of Wisdom tradition, holding the

latter. Hvashang also taught nonconceptuality as the only means to enlightenment, denying the

value of conceptual practices such as ethics.[277] Due to such similarities in themes, Sapaṇ must have

thought that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is based on the Chan teachings of the Hvashang Mahāyāna.

In his article "On the Sources of Sa-skya Paṇḍita's Notes on the Bsam-yas Debate," Leonard van

der Kuijp demonstrates that Sapaṇ's assertion regarding the Dzogchen style teachings of Hvashang

Mahāyāna did not originate with Sapaṇ himself and has a basis in writings of earlier Tibetan

scholars such as Nyangrel Nyimé Özer (Myang ral nyi ma'i 'od-zer, 1124–1192 or 1136–1204).[278]

But in any case, it is clear that Sapaṇ became the most famous critic of Mahāmudrā in Tibet.

Thus far, we have discussed the doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy in Gampopa's

Mahāmudrā tradition and its traditional and modern critics. We also elucidated in detail

Gampopa's arguments for the need for associated or foundational practices for Mahāmudrā

meditation. We will now explore whether there are exceptions to the rule in Gampopa's own

---

[275] For details on the Bsam-yas debate, see Jackson, "Sa Skya Paṇḍita's Account of the BSam Yas Debate."

[276] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 82–83.

[277] Joseph F Roccasalvo, "The Debate at Bsam Yas: Religious Contrast and Correspondence," *Philosophy East and West* 30 (October 1, 1980): 505.

[278] van der Kuijp, "On the Sources for Sa Skya Paṇḍita's Notes on the 'BSam Yas Debate,'" 148.

Congregational Teachings—namely, whether certain aspects of teachings when given to certain individuals are self-sufficient as a process to give rise to the direct realization of the Mahāmudrā state. Specifically, we will explore this question within the context of Gampopa's notion of an instantaneous practitioner, a category that he employs in his Congregational Teachings.

### 3.1.1   Direct Realization of Mahāmudrā State as the Self-Sufficient White Remedy

Although Gampopa does not employ the term self-sufficient white remedy in the Congregational Teachings, there is no doubt that he refers to a notion that is almost exactly the same. In one of his Congregational Teachings, he argues that when the innate (*gnyug ma*) is directly realized, there is no need to again follow a gradualist program, meditating on kindness, compassion, and so forth before undertaking Mahāmudrā or clear light meditation.

> In this way, having definitely generated the view, the meditation, and the conduct within one's mind, when one sustains innate mind in meditation, if one then meditates on clear light [only] after meditating on kindness, compassion, and *bodhicitta*, one loses one's own essence. It is, for example, like a person who, forsaking one's own nature, imitates others, impersonating as a stupid person, as a scholar, as a famous person, and as a lowly person. Since he has lost his own essence, these imitations are not going to benefit him.[279]

From our earlier explorations of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, we know that the realization of the innate mind corresponds to the realization of the Mahāmudrā state for the first time, which in turn coincides with realizing the first bodhisattva stage (*bhūmi*). Thus, in the passage above, Gampopa is arguing that once the Mahāmudrā state is realized, we don't have to undertake a gradualist

---

[279] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 553-554: *de ltar lta ba dang sgom pa spyod pa gsum nges par blo la skyes nas / gnyug ma'i shes pa bsgoms na / dang po byams pa dang snying rje byang chub kyi sems bsgoms la / de nas 'od gsal bsgoms na / dper na mi gcig gis kho rang gi rang bzhin bor nas / mi gzhan gyi mi mkhas pa dang / mkhas pa dang / mi chen po byed pa dang / chung ngu byed pa cig gi lad mo zlos na / kho rang gi rang bzhin shor ba des mi phan no /.*

approach in our practice, starting every meditation session with foundational practices such as

kindness, compassion, and love before proceeding to engage in Mahāmudrā meditation. And even

engaging in such foundational practices when we have realized the Mahāmudrā state amounts to

losing or getting distracted from one's natural or innate state. As Gampopa states, engaging in such

foundational practices does not benefit the goal of sustaining the natural innate state once it is

realized.

Gampopa continues by arguing that once the innate mind is realized, one has realized the

unfabricated or uncontrived (*ma bcos pa*) nature of the mind. Once this uncontrived nature of the

mind is directly realized, it is the clear light state, a primordial state requiring no modification.

Gampopa thus argues that conceptualizing whether one's mind is in a virtuous or non-virtuous

state, whether the mind is clear or not clear, and so on, are all engaging in mental fabrication (*bcos*

*ma*), which, is not required and is even detrimental at this stage. Gampopa argues that even the

Perfection of Wisdom doctrine of finding the ultimate view of emptiness through the reasoning of

things being "neither one, nor many" (*cig du bral gyi gtan tshigs*) is not required at this stage.

> If one realizes that [essence] as the essence, it is clear light. The uncontrived is the
> ordinary mind. If we interpret the mind as virtuous or non-virtuous, clear or unclear,
> it is contrived. All the doctrines of the Perfection of Wisdom such as the reason of
> being neither one nor many are conceptually created emptiness.[280]

The above passage, apart from showing that conceptual practices whether conventional or ultimate

are not required once the ordinary mind, i.e., the Mahāmudrā state, is realized, demonstrates an

---

[280] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 555: *de rang bzhin yin pa la yin par shes na 'od gsal yin no /*
*ma bcos pa ni tha mal gyi shes pa zhes bya / dge mi dge dang gsal mi gsal du byed na / bcos ma*
*yin / pha rol tu phyin pa'i gcig dang du bral la sogs pa'i grub mtha' thams cad kyi blos byas kyi*
*stong pa bya ba yin /.*

important distinction between the Perfection of Wisdom approach and the Mahāmudrā approach to realizing the ultimate. Whereas the former employs concepts and language to get to the ultimate, Mahāmudrā offers a direct, nonconceptual approach to inducing direct realization of the ultimate. Gampopa is thus affirming that the state of the innate mind, i.e., the Mahāmudrā state, is self-sufficient in itself from a salvific point of view since, at this stage, there is no need to engage in conceptual practices such as compassion once one is already sustaining the Mahāmudrā state.

That Mahāmudrā, when genuinely realized, is self-sufficient in a soteriological sense is also conveyed within the context of Gampopa's four dharmas. Among the four dharmas, the last dharma pertains to the Mahāmudrā realization wherein even confusions dawn as wisdom, a point we discussed above within the context of the four dharmas. When confusions such as negative emotions dawn as wisdom, there is no confusion to be eliminated by applying antidotes. However, as we also discussed within the context of the four dharmas of Gampopa above, achieving the state of Mahāmudrā in which confusions dawn as wisdom requires many foundational practices, including in the form of the first three dharmas of Gampopa. This is certainly the case with respect to the gradualist who has no prior training. Even with respect to the instantaneous practitioner, there is a strong implication that many of these foundational practices need to have been perfected previously, either in former lives or earlier in the present life, as the qualification of having to have prior training (*sbyang pa can*) suggests. This point will be discussed in detail in the next section.

As Gampopa states, we might not follow a gradualist program once the Mahāmudrā state is realized. However, there is strong evidence suggesting that the Mahāmudrā state itself is infused with positive qualities such as *bodhicitta*. For example, Gampopa argues that the yoga or the state of non-meditation (*sgom med*), a state equivalent to the Mahāmudrā itself, does not mean that it is devoid of compassion and two gatherings of accumulations (*tshogs gnyis*), merit and wisdom.

Non-meditation is employed to convey that within the Mahāmudrā state, the notion of the object

of meditation as well as the clinging to a notion of non-meditation are absent. As we read in the

*Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching*:

> Concerning non-meditation as such, there is a meditation that is devoid of compassion and the two accumulations. This is not [the meaning of non-meditation here]. Non-meditation here refers to [a meditation in which], having blended as one with the [doctrine] of "neither coming nor going," is devoid of realizing the object of meditation as well as the clinging to a notion of non-meditation. This is the meaning of non-meditation here. This is also the Mahāmudrā meditation itself. This is because the object of grasping, attachment, reification, and craving are liberated on their own ground, such that the mind-itself, the actual mode of being, operates as it is without contriving.[281]

In the passage above, we can argue that Gampopa is implying that the state of non-meditation

clearly contains conventional qualities such as compassion and the accumulation of merit, although

there is no need to engage in conventional and conceptual practices in order to generate

compassion and so forth in that state.

This point, namely that the Mahāmudrā state is fused with compassion and bodhicitta, in

addition to realizing the ultimate nature of the mind, becomes clear when Gampopa discusses the

union of emptiness and compassion. Gampopa asserts that when the nature of the mind is realized,

the nature of concepts is also realized since the two are indivisible like the water and its waves. By

---

[281] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Tshogs chos mu tig gi phreng ba (Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching)," in *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, vol. 1 (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000), 645: *bsgom med rang la snying rje dang tshogs gnyis bral ba'i bsgom med cig yod de 'di min / 'di yi bsgom med 'gro 'ong med pa dang rigs gcig tu bsres pas bsgom bya rtogs pa dang / bsgom med 'dzin pa med pa la zer ba yin / phyag rgya chen po bsgom pa yang de rang yin te / 'dzin pa dang zhen pa dang bden 'dzin dang / zhe 'dod kyi dmigs gtad thams cad rang sar grol nas sems nyid yin lugs de rang ma bcos par 'jog pa de rang yin gsung /.*

establishing such a nondual relationship between the mind and its appearances, Gampopa is

certainly hinting that when the nature of the mind is realized, compassion as its appearances or

dynamic display is nonconceptually and nondualistically present in the Mahāmudrā state. Indeed,

Gampopa asserts as much in the following sentence when he argues that even though there is no

concept (*'du shes*) or notion of a sentient being in the Mahāmudrā state, compassion is nonetheless

spontaneously present in it.

> Realizing one's own mind is sufficient. The mind and thoughts are not distinct; they
> abide as in the manner of water and its waves. When the meaning of nonduality is
> definitely realized, compassion towards suffering beings spontaneously arises
> within even though there is no concept of sentient beings in such a state.[282]

In this passage Gampopa clearly argues that once the nature of one's own mind is realized, the

state naturally consists of compassion even though no thought of sentient beings is entertained. To

put it in other words, when the Mahāmudrā state is realized, we do not engage in conceptualizing

practices such as compassion. Nonetheless, compassion and, by extension, *bodhicitta* and so forth

are naturally and nondualistically present in such a state. Based on these discussions regarding the

relationship between foundational practices such as *bodhicitta* and the realization of Mahāmudrā

in Gampopa's writings, we can establish two things: prior to the realization of the Mahāmudrā

state, conceptual practices such as compassion are necessary. Once Mahāmudrā is realized,

compassion flows from it non-dualistically and indivisibly as an appearance of the mind just like

the ocean and its waves.

---

[282] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 574: *rang sems rtogs pa gcig pus chog / sems dang rtog pa tha dad du med de / chu dang rlabs lta bur gnas / gnyis med kyi don nges par rtogs na sems can gyi 'du shes med kyang / sdug bsngal can la snying rje ngang gis skye /.*

Based on these arguments and assertations, we can establish few points. The realization of the innate nature of the mind, which corresponds to the doctrine of self-sufficient white remedy, corresponds to the direct realization of the innate mind, i.e., the Mahāmudrā state. It refers to the state of realization of Mahāmudrā, not a method or process of realizing it. This is also the case when Gampopa explicitly mentions the term self-sufficient white remedy three times in his *Replies to Questions* (*zhus lan*) teachings, once to Pakmodrupa Dorjé Gyalpo (Phag mo gru pa rdo rje rgyal po, 1110–1170) and twice to the first Karmapa, Düsum Khyenpa (Dus gsum mkhyen pa, 1110–1193).[283] For example, let us examine Gampopa's reply to Pakmodrupa by employing David Jackson's translation:

> When it is arisen, since it this has become a Self-Sufficient White [Remedy], [ i.e.
> full liberation through knowing one thing, Buddha[hood] is acquired in oneself.[284]

Gampopa's reply clearly speaks of an arisen state that is self-sufficient to lead oneself to Buddhahood. This state replies to the state of Mahāmudrā realization, as I have demonstrated.

Additionally, Gampopa is clearly stating that once the innate mind or Mahāmudrā is directly realized, there is no need to engage in conceptual meditations such as compassion prior to entering into a Mahāmudrā state. At the same time, Gampopa is nonetheless also suggesting that the Mahāmudrā state is infused with positive qualities such as compassion. In other words, for someone who is sustaining the Mahāmudrā state directly, qualities such as compassion arise naturally and nondualistically although such a practitioner does not entertain the concept of suffering beings and so forth in such a state.

---

[283] Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 149–54.

[284] Cited in Jackson, 150.

**3.2    Instantaneous Practitioners and the Question of Foundational Practices**

The question of whether Mahāmudrā practices require foundational practices or not can best be explored through Gampopa's notion of the two types of practitioners—instantaneous and gradualist. Since his exclusive Mahāmudrā teachings are meant for both gradualist and instantaneous practitioners, he does not discuss instantaneous practitioners in particular. In his Congregational Teachings, however, he occasionally touches on the theme of instantaneous practitioners even though he mainly discusses the need of foundational Kadampa teachings for a gradualist Mahāmudrā practitioner. This section attempts to reconstruct Gampopa's notion of an instantaneous practitioner and whether such a person requires foundational practices or not.

The idea that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā does not require foundational practices often stems from the fact that it becomes associated as an instantaneous practice requiring no other foundational practices. It is important in the beginning to dispel the illusion that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is only for instantaneous practitioners who require no foundational practices. This is evident from our previous discussions in this chapter in which Gampopa's argues for the necessity of other associated practices such as meditations on impermanence and death, the faults of *saṃsāra*, loving kindness, compassion and *bodhicitta* and so forth.

In one of *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, Gampopa explicitly mentions that his Mahāmudrā tradition has two types of practitioners: gradualist and instantaneous. He points out that even the Perfection of Wisdom and the tantric tradition have these two types of practitioners. In establishing this point, he first describes the most essential nature of the practice pertaining to these three traditions, describing the Perfection of Wisdom as a tradition that brings inference into the path (*rjes dpag lam du byed pa, rjes dpag lam du 'khyer ba*), tantra as a tradition that brings blessings into the path (*byin rlabs lam du byed pa, byin rlabs lam du 'khyer ba),* and

Mahāmudrā as a tradition that brings direct perception into the path (*mngon sum lam du byed pa,*

*mngon sum lam du 'khyer ba*).

> Master Dhakpo Rinpoche uttered that there are three types of path. These three
> paths are those that make inference as the path, those that make blessings as the
> path and those that make direct perception as the path.[285]

He goes on to succinctly describe these three paths. For the purpose of this chapter, we will not go

into detail accounting for the first two paths. In describing the Mahāmudrā path, however,

Gampopa points out that it requires a qualified teacher introducing the innate coemergent mind,

i.e., the *dharmakāya*. When one is able to generate certainty regarding the nature of this

coemergent mind, a direct, nonconceptual experience is brought into the path in such a way that it

becomes the view, the meditation, as well as the conduct. This is, according to Gampopa, the way

of bringing direct perception into the path.

> In terms of taking direct perception as the path, a qualified lama offers a definitive
> and unmistaken instruction stating that this is the coemergent mind-itself, the
> *dharmakāya*, also known as the clear light. When one brings into the path this
> innate mind, i.e., the coemergent mind that one has ascertained, without any
> distinction between the view, the meditation, and the conduct, that is taking direct
> perception as the path.[286]

---

[285] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 556: *rje dwags po rin po che'i zhal nas / lam rnam pa gsum yin gsung / de la lam rnam pa gsum ni / rjes dpag lam du byed pa dang / byin rlabs lam du byed pa dang / mngon gsum lam du byed pa dang gsum yin gsung /.*

[286] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 557: *mngon gsum lam du byed pa ni bla ma dam pa cig gis sems nyid lhan cig skyes pa chos kyi sku 'od gsal bya ba yin gsung ba de lta bu nges pa'i don gyi gdams ngag phyin ci ma log pa cig bstan pas / rang la nges pa'i shes pa lhan cig skyes pa de la lta spyod sgom gsum ya ma bral bar gnyug ma'i shes pa lam du khyer ba ni mngon gsum lam du byed pa'o /.*

The characterization of Mahāmudrā as taking direct perception as the path can clearly lead to the misunderstanding that this practice is associated with instantaneous practitioners, requiring no associated practice, except a reliance on a qualified guru and devotion to that guru. In fact, many misunderstandings regarding Mahāmudrā in general appear to stem from studying partial teachings. However, Gampopa goes on to mention that each of the three traditions discussed above, not just the Mahāmudrā tradition, can have either instantaneous or gradualist practitioners.

> In terms of the persons entering these three paths, there are two: the gradualist and
> the instantaneous.[287]

There is no doubt that gradualists require training in foundational practices, a point that Gampopa repeatedly emphasizes in his Congregational Teachings. For the purpose of determining whether it may be possible to engage in pure Mahāmudrā meditation without foundational practices, it is paramount to understand who an instantaneous practitioner is in terms of her qualities and in terms of whether prior training is required or not. Fortunately, Gampopa goes on to describe the qualities of an instantaneous practitioner in the same section.

> An instantaneous one refers to someone whose [spiritually] incompatible
> propensities such as afflictive emotions are few and whose *dharmic* qualities are
> abundant, i.e., a person who has prior training. Such [a person] is extremely difficult
> [to find]. I consider myself a gradualist.[288]

---

[287] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 557: *lam gsum la 'jug pa'i gang zag ni gnyis te / rim gyis pa dang / cig char ba'o /.*

[288] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 557: *cig char ba ni / nyon mongs pa la sogs pa mi mthun pa'i bag chags srab pa / chos kyi bag chags mthug pa sbyangs pa can gyi gang zag la zer ba yin te / de shin tu dka' ba yin / nga ni rim gyis par 'dod pa yin gsung /.*

In this passage, Gampopa clearly asserts that an instantaneous practitioner has to have two requirements: few propensities for afflictive emotions and other incompatible factors such as negative actions, and the abundance of *dharmic*, i.e., virtuous propensities. In terms of Buddhist practice, they respectively require the purification of negative actions (*sdig pa sbyang ba*) and accumulation of merit (*tshogs bsags pa*)—two practices that are at the heart of preliminary practices to Mahāmudrā developed by Gampopa's later disciples.[289] Since the purification of negative karma and the accumulation of merit requires practice or training, Gampopa adds the explicit qualification of having to have prior training (*sbyang pa can*).

Due to such requirements in terms of foundational practices, Gampopa points out that it is extremely difficult to find an instantaneous practitioner. It is also important to note that Gampopa considers himself to be a gradualist. Perhaps Gampopa said so as a mark of humility, a common move in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. But the pedagogical significance of his statement also seems obvious. Gampopa wanted to demonstrate to his disciples the importance of foundational practices, a point that is emphasized repeatedly in his Congregational Teachings. From the definition of an instantaneous practitioner given above, we can deduce one thing. If such a practitioner did not engage in prior training in this life, then she must have engaged in such training in previous lifetimes.

In the absence of detailed exposition on this theme, it is difficult to qualify or quantify the term "having prior training" (*sbyang pa can*) in exact terms apart from the fact that it involves the

---

[289] The Nineth KarmapaWangchukk Dorjé (Dbang phyug rdo rje), for example, divides these practices into common and uncommon preliminarly practices. See Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje, "Phyag chen rgyas pa ṅes don rgya mtsho (Ocean of Definitive Meaning)," in *Phyag chen rgyas pa ṅes don rgya mtsho ; Phyag chen 'briṅ po ma rig mun sel ; Phyag chen bsdus pa chos sku mdzub tshugs bcas so* (Varanasi: Wā-ṇa Badzra Bidyā dpe mdzod khaṅ, 2006), 3–210.

purification of negative karma and the accumulation of merit. However, there is no doubt that one

of the major requirements for an instantaneous practitioner is the availability of a qualified guru

and an intense devotion toward that teacher. In further discussing the theme of an instantaneous

practitioner in *Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching*, Gampopa emphasizes that when a

qualified guru comes into contact with a disciple who is a proper vessel for the Mahāmudrā

teachings, all spiritual qualities can be achieved in an instant.

> As such, when a qualified guru and a disciple who is a proper vessel meet, all the
> spiritual qualities will be achieved in an instant; in the beginning, there will be
> pacification (*zhi ba*) and abiding (*gnas pa*); in the middle there will be clarity (*gsal
> ba*) and nonconceptuality (*mi rtog pa*); finally, there will be a [state] devoid of all
> signs of elaboration and one will be able to dwell like a continuum of a river on the
> meaning that is sky-like.[290]

In this passage, Gampopa appears to assert that when a qualified guru meets a qualified student,

spiritual qualities of calm abiding and wisdom leading to the Mahāmudrā state will be achieved in

an instant one after the other free from elaborations. While such descriptions are helpful, they still

do not allow us to fully understand or qualify who is an appropriate teacher and who is a proper

vessel or an instantaneous practitioner.

In *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, there is further clarity on the qualities of

the guru and the importance of devotion towards her. Gampopa states that the state of *dharmakāya*,

i.e., the Mahāmudrā state, is actualized only through devotion towards a qualified teacher. He

further qualifies such a guru as having realization (*rtogs pa dang ldan pa*), arguing that mere

---

[290] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol.
1)," 586-587: *des na bla ma mtshan nyid dang ldan pa dang / slob ma snod ldan gnyis 'dzom na /
skad cig ma rang la yon tan thams cad grub nas 'ong ste / dang po zhi ba dang / gnas pa / bar du
gsal ba dang / mi rtog pa / tha ma spros pa'i mtshan ma thams cad dang bral ba / nam mkha' lta
bu'i don la chu bo'i rgyun bzhin gnas pa 'ong gsung /.*

devotion towards a teacher without realization will not work for gaining the Mahāmudrā state.

Gampopa goes on to suggest that a realized guru is someone who possesses the so-called dharma-

eye (*chos kyi spyan*). This phrase often refers to the direct realization of emptiness or the

Mahāmudrā state and/or the ability to perceive the mental capacity of others in order to be able to

lead them accordingly on the path of dharma.

> As such, it [Mahāmudrā state] is realized when a disciple properly practices
> reverence toward a guru who possesses the dharma-eye, i.e., the realization [of
> ultimate reality], and has thus generated dharma within his continuum of the mind.
> If the guru has no realization, it is not going to benefit even if the student has
> reverence.[291]

Gampopa continues by stating that even if such a qualified teacher possesses instructions, it will

not be beneficial if the student has no devotion and respect.

> If the student has no devotion and respect, it will not help even if the guru has
> instructions.[292]

From these discussions, two things become clear. First, even for the instantaneous practitioner

who has prior training and hence does not currently require foundational practices, for Mahāmudrā

realization to dawn, the guru imparting the instructions has to be qualified in the sense of realizing

the Mahāmudrā state directly. Secondly, a qualified disciple must have devotion towards that

---

[291] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 532: *de bas na bla ma chos kyi spyan can / rtogs pa dang ldan pa chos rgyud la skyes pa zhig la / slob mas dad gus tshul bzhin du byas na rtogs nas 'ong ba yin / bla ma la rtogs pa med na slob mas dad gus byas kyang mi phan /.*

[292] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 532: *slob ma la dad gus med na / bla ma la gdams ngag yod kyang mi phan te /.*

teacher. Thus, even for instantaneous practitioners, there is a requirement for guru devotion practice towards a qualified guru.

### 3.2.1 Finding Meditation Within the View: A Meditation for Instantaneous Practitioners and the Significance of Guru Devotion

Another way in which Gampopa discusses the instantaneous practitioner is through the prism of two different sequences of meditation. In one sequence, which Gampopa refers to as finding the view within meditation (*sgom thog nas lta ba 'tshol ba*), one first cultivates calm abiding with mind as the basis. When calm abiding is established, one employs this state, referred to as "meditation" here, to focus on the view of the emptiness of the mind to directly realize the Mahāmudrā state. This sequence, recommended for the gradualist, is the one that is most widely taught in Gampopa's Congregational Teachings, as well as in his exclusive Mahāmudrā teachings. It also mirrors traditional Sūtra Vehicle teachings such as those found in Kamalaśīla's *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama*). In contrast to this, Gampopa describes a second sequence of realizing emptiness of the mind directly, followed by establishing calm abiding cultivated by sustaining that view of emptiness in meditation. He refers to this order as finding meditation within the view (*lta thog nas sgom pa 'tshol ba*) and notes that this is recommended for the instantaneous practitioner. In *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, Gampopa describes the two methods as follows:

> Again, Master Rinpoche spoke. If a person wants to engage in genuine dharma practice, there are two types of dharma practices: finding meditation in the view

   (*lta thog nas sgom tshol ba*) and finding the view in meditation (*sgom thog nas lta*
   *ba tshol ba*). However, [both] require prior reliance on the two accumulations.[293]

It is important to note that both of these sequences require the prior gathering of the two

accumulations of merit and wisdom. Since finding meditation within the view is prescribed for

instantaneous practitioners, one can infer that such practitioners must have gathered accumulations

previously.

  In fact, Gampopa goes to explain that the second sequence is possible only when certain

conditions are present. The first condition is that the disciple has to be of the highest mental

capacity (*dbang po rab*), which refers to someone possessing prior training (*sbyang pa can*). The

second condition is the presence of a guru who is full of blessings. The Tibetan term for blessings,

*byin rlabs*, carries the connotation of impacting a transformation in the recipient's mind. This could

be in the form of inducing a student to have devotion in dharma or become more compassionate

or so forth. In the Mahāmudrā context, there is strong evidence that the Mahāmudrā experience

that the guru possesses is transmitted to a devoted student. This blessing especially occurs during

the time when a realized guru gives Mahāmudrā instructions to her student or students. When these

two conditions are present, the Mahāmudrā view can be found in meditation only through

supplicating such a guru with devotion.

---

[293] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 542-543: *yang rje rin po che'i zhal nas / gang zag rnams chos rnal ma zhig byed na / chos kyi dbang du byed na / lta thog nas sgom tshol ba dang / sgom thog nas lta ba tshol dgos te / de yang sngon du tshogs gnyis la brten dgos /.*

> Finding meditation in view is the domain of practice of a person of highest capacity
> with prior training. …In terms of the cause of its arising, it comes from supplicating
> a blessed guru at all times with devotion and respect.[294]

In these discussions regarding instantaneous practitioners, there is no doubt that guru devotion

towards a qualified teacher by a qualified student plays one of the most important roles. Although

Gampopa clarifies what a qualified guru means, he does not clearly qualify the measure of having

obtained prior training and what kind of preliminary practices (other than guru devotion) such an

instantaneous practitioner must accomplish in this life. However, the discussions above make it

clear that even such an instantaneous practitioner requires prior training in the form of gathering

the two types of accumulations.

The question still remains, however, whether an instantaneous practitioner has to gather the

two accumulations, merit (*bsod nams*) and wisdom (*ye shes*) in this life or not, apart from the

practice of guru devotion. If such an individual of the highest mental capacity does not need to

accumulate merits in this life, then one can logically assume that they must have accumulated merit

in previous lifetimes.

Historical examples of individuals who could be identified as an instantaneous practitioner

such as Nāropa[295] do suggest that continued accumulation of merit, primarily in the form of guru

devotion, must be done even in this life. Nāropa is said to have followed his teacher Tilopa (988–

---

[294] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 543-544: *lta thog nas sgom tshol ba ni / dbang po rab sbyangs pa can gyi spyod yul yin te /….'di skye ba'i rgyu yang / bla ma dam pa byin rlabs can la mos pa dang gus pa'i sgo nas dus rtag tu gsol ba btab pa las 'byung ste /.*

[295] Herbert V. Guenther, *The Life and Teaching of Naropa*, Revised edition (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

106)[296] for twelve years. His main practice was to undergo extremely difficult penances such as jumping from a cliff and suffering broken bones, carried out as an act of guru devotion. He underwent twelve such major and minor hardships as part of his guru devotion. In fact, Gampopa himself explicitly mentions that one of the main reasons for the practice of guru devotion is its unique effectiveness in gathering accumulations. Again in *Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching*, we read:

> The Venerable Dhakpo Rinpoche spoke: What is a great enhancement practice for accumulation of merit? Serving and venerating the guru is a great enhancement practice for the accumulation of merit.[297]

Gampopa continues by recounting how his teacher Milarepa told him, by citing the *Four Seats* (*Catuḥpīṭha, Gdan bzhi*), the highest yoga tantra, that the merit of supplicating a single hair pore of one's guru is greater than supplicating all of the Buddhas of the three times. Milarepa further added that only one practice surpasses the practice of supplicating one's guru—the carrying into practice of the instructions blessed and given by that teacher.

> Therefore, I asked Lama Mila. He replied thus: "According to the *Four Seats*, compared to supplicating the Buddhas of the three times, supplicating a hair pore of one's guru is far superior in terms of merit." When I asked if there is anything that supersedes that, he replied: "There is. Practicing in accordance with the instructions blessed and given by the guru is more meritorious."[298]

---

[296] For an hagiographical account of Tilopa's life, see Marpa Chos kyi blo gros, *The Life of the Mahasiddha Tilopa* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1995).

[297] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 506: *rje dwags po rin po che'i zhal nas / bsod nams bsags pa la bogs gang che / bla ma bsnyen bkur byas pa bogs che gsung /.*

[298] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 507-508: *des na kho bos bla ma mi la la zhus pas / 'di skad gsung / gdan bzhi la / dus gsum sangs rgyas mchod pa bas / bla ma'i ba spu khung zhig mchod /*

As is clear from the passage above, when it comes to high-level practices such as Mahāmudrā and tantra, guru devotion, particularly in the form of practicing in accordance with the guru's instructions is the greatest source of accumulating merit which leads to the direct realization of the Mahāmudrā state. We can thus argue that even an instantaneous practitioner must have gathered the two accumulations of generating renunciation and bodhicitta in previous times. For without renunciation and bodhicitta, the individual's Mahāmudrā practice will not become a genuine a genuine Mahāyāna practice.

Additionally, in exploring whether such an instantaneous practitioner requires foundational practices such as accumulating merit, it is important to keep in mind the first direct realization of Mahāmudrā corresponds to realizing the Mahāyāna path of seeing (*theg chen mthong lam*), which is the first stage (*bhūmi*) on the bodhisattva path.

> In this way, when phenomenal appearances are realized as mind, followed by realizing the innate mind, then dream-like and illusion-like [appearances] and so forth will arise. If that is realized, one has planted the seed of uncontaminated [karma] within one's mental continuum. That is the nature of uncontaminated vows. This also gives rise to the qualities of the first [bodhisattva] stage (*bhūmi*).[299]

To fully appreciate the level of realization that a bodhisattva who achieves the first stage possesses, we have to refer to the doctrine of the Mahāyāna grounds and paths (*sa lam*). According this doctrine, when a practitioner achieves the first bodhisattva stage or ground, such a person is able to directly see hundreds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and receive blessings and teachings

---

*de ni bsod nams khyad par 'phags gsung / de bas che ba bdog gam zhus pas / yod de bla mas byin gyis brlabs pa'i gdams pa bka bzhin sgrub pa bsod nams che gsung /.*

[299] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 555-556: *de ltar snang ba sems su rtogs nas / sems gnyug ma de rtogs na rmi lam lta bu / sgyu ma lta bu la sogs par 'char ba yin te / de rtogs na rang gi rgyud la zag pa med pa'i sa bon thebs pa yin / zag med kyi sdom pa'i ngo bo de la 'jog pa yin / sa dang po'i yon tan yang des thob /.*

directly from them.[300] Additionally, the mainstream Indian and Tibetan Perfection of Wisdom tradition asserts that it takes about one incalculable eon (*grangs med skal ba gcig*) of accumulation of merit to achieve the Mahāyāna path of seeing. The term incalculable or countless is a number and refers to ten raised to the sixtieth power. Although, Buddhist tantra and Mahāmudrā do not take three countless eons to accumulate merit, with some such as Milarepa achieving the state of enlightenment in one lifetime, it nonetheless argues that they do have to accumulate merit equivalent to that accumulated over three incalculable eons following the sūtra tradition.

## 4    Guru Devotion

A practice that is perhaps one of the most important practices in this tradition in which the Mahāmudrā instructions are given by a realized Mahāmudrā teacher is the practice of correctly following a Mahāmudrā guru or teacher, a practice that is required both before and after realizing the Mahāmudrā state and for both gradualist and instantaneous practitioners. Although I pointed to the importance of guru devotion earlier, it merits a more detailed elucidation.

For practicing Buddhists in general, one of the most important contemplative practice to correctly perform in the beginning is to study the qualities of an authentic spiritual teacher and then to learn how to relate to such a teacher mentally and through action. This is due to the fact that one's enlightenment depends on practicing the instructions a qualified teacher. This is especially the case for Mahāmudrā practice when students have to surrender their doubting, analytical mind as they are ushered into a domain of spiritual practice that cannot be analytically examined but requires total trust and devotion in the teacher and her instructions.

---

[300] Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970).

In the *Ornament of Liberation*, Gampopa discusses this topic within six subtopics: 1) establishing the importance of following a spiritual teacher based on reasoning and 2) based on scriptures; 3) the classification of teachers (into ordinary teacher, bodhisattva teacher, and enlightened teacher); 4) the attributes of a qualified teacher; 5) the method of following a teacher; and, finally, 6) the benefits of following a teacher. Underscoring the importance of the role the guru plays for our enlightenment even from a general Mahāyāna perspective, Gampopa cites a scripture:

> Even the Buddhas of the three times originated
> From following the gurus;
> Prior to the existence of gurus,
> Even the name Buddha did not exist.[301]

The practice of following a qualified guru becomes increasingly more important when it comes to Mahāmudrā practice. This is because, unlike conceptual teachings, most of which can be learned through one's own study and analysis, Mahāmudrā teachings directly introduce a student to the nonconceptual and nondual experience of the innate mind which is not readily available to our conceptual, rational mind. As such, having trust and confidence in the teachings of a qualified Mahāmudrā master becomes the most important vehicle for the transmission of these teachings.

The first requirement is that a teacher should be qualified. For the purpose of transmitting Mahāmudrā teachings effectively, a qualified Mahāmudrā teacher is someone who has directly, i.e., nonconceptually, realized the Mahāmudrā state, a point we discussed earlier within the context of associated practices for an instantaneous person. The second requirement is that the student has

---

[301] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 626-627: *dus gsum sang rgyas thams cad kyang / bla ma dag la bsten te byung / bla ma med pa'i pha rol na / sang rgyas bya ba'i ming yang med /.*

to have devotion (*dad pa*) to the teacher and, therefore, confidence (*yid ches*) in the teacher's instructions. It is with these points in mind that Gampopa says:

> A guru who has cultivated dharma within oneself can guide a disciple with faith and respect. First, a guru's instructions are necessary. As such, venerable brothers, it is important to have faith in a qualified guru. If there is no faith, there are no blessings. For those with faith, not too many teachings are required. One meditates on specific dharma practices [transmitted by the guru] one by one, while gazing upward [to the guru with devotion].[302]

From earlier discussions, we know that the cultivation of dharma as a qualification of a Mahāmudrā teacher refers to the dharma of directly realizing the Mahāmudrā state. In addition to such a qualification of a teacher, Gampopa also underscores the importance of devotion towards a guru, stating that without devotion, blessings, i.e., the Mahāmudrā state, cannot be transmitted to a student. Thus, it is clear that faith or devotion towards a teacher can be understood as an epistemic state, facilitating the dawning of a non-conceptual Mahāmudrā realization that cannot be accessed through conceptual language.

Gampopa stresses the importance of guru devotion particularly at the time of realizing the third yoga, the yoga of non-elaboration (*spros bral gyi rnal 'byor*). Since it corresponds with realizing Mahāmudrā directly, a state in which one gains freedom from all forms of conceptual elaborations, there is danger, Gampopa warns, that we may ignore practices such as guru devotion, thinking that there is no dharma to be practiced. At this time, Gampopa advises, it is extremely important to pray fervently to the guru, extend compassion to all beings, and make offerings to the

---

[302] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 533: *bla ma rang gi rgyud la chos skyes pa cig gis slob ma dad gus can 'dren nus pa yin pas / dang po bla ma'i gdams ngag dgos / de bas na jo bo kun bla ma mtshan nyid dang ldan pa la yid ches pa gal che / yid ma ches na byin rlabs mi 'byung / yid ches pa zhig la chos mang po mi dgos / chos re re kha yar la brten nas bsgom pa yin gsung /.*

three jewels (*dkon mchog gsum*) and one's meditational deity (*yi dam*). In the *Garland of Pearls:*

*A Congregational Teaching*, we read:

> If one sustains the mind single-pointedly without any distraction, the meaning of non-elaboration will arise. …At the time of realizing such a state, one might think that now there is no dharma to be practiced; the guru, the objects of refuge, and meditation deities do not exist; there is no practice and no attainment from practice. At that time, there is the danger of losing one's devotion to the guru and encountering the demon of obstacles. [At such a time], it is important to pray fervently to the guru, make offerings to the three jewels and meditational deities, practice kindness and compassion to all without distinction, and eliminate pride.[303]

Gampopa continues by stating that if there is fluctuation or change in one's devotion to the guru,

there will also be a corresponding fluctuation to one's experience (*nyams*) and realization (*rtogs*

*pa*) since experience and realization depends devotion to the guru.

> If change happens in one's devotion and respect, change takes place in one's experience and realization; there arise obstacles for oneself as well. As such practice unceasing devotion to the guru; experience and realization depend on devotion [to the guru]. The guru causes the path, experience, and realization.[304]

In the passages above, Gampopa underscores the importance of conventional practices such

as guru devotion, especially after realizing the yoga of non-elaboration, stating that continued

experience and realization depends on the blessings of the guru. As argued earlier, Guru devotion

---

[303] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching (2000, vol. 1)," 642-643: *sems dmigs pa gcig las mi 'phro bar bsdad pa de bskyang na / spros bral gyi don 'char / ...de lta bu rtogs pa'i dus su da ni chos bya rgyu rang mi 'dug ste / bla ma dkon mchog dang yi dam yang med / bsgrub dang bsgrubs pa'i dngos grub med zer nas / dus der bla ma la mos gus 'chor ba dang / bar chod kyi bdud 'ong nyen yod pa yin / bla ma gsol ba drag tu gdab pa dang / dkon mchog yi dam mchod pa dang / byams snying rje phyogs ris med par bsgom pa dang / nga rgyal med pa zhig gal che gsung /.*

[304] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 643: *mos gus la 'gyur ldog byung na nyams la 'gyur ldog 'ong / rang la bar chad 'byung bas bla ma la mos gus rgyun chad me par bya / nyams rtogs mos gus la rag lus pas / lam dang nyams rtogs bla mas byed la /.*

functions as an epistemic state, making disciples receptive to non-conceptual teachings that are otherwise unavailable to the purely analytical, conceptual mind. Gampopa also warns that wherever there is a decrease in one's devotion to the guru, there will also be a corresponding degeneration in one's Mahāmudrā experience and realization.

## 5   Conclusion

In addressing whether Mahāmudrā practice requires associated practices or not, one issue that hinders us from giving a straightforward answer is the notion of the Self-Sufficient White Remedy. In one sense, such a notion, when understood as referring to a set of Mahāmudrā instructions that are sufficient to give rise to the Mahāmudrā state without any associated practices, is simply mistaken. However, the notion of the self-sufficient white remedy is somewhat accurate when understood, as Gampopa does, to refer to the Mahāmudrā *s*tate itself. However, Gampopa makes it amply clear that realizing the Mahāmudrā state requires associated practices. Gampopa clearly states that once the innate mind, i.e., the Mahāmudrā state, is realized, then there is no need to undertake a gradualist approach, meditating on renunciation, compassion and so forth before undertaking Mahāmudrā meditation. This assertion, when combined with his notion of an instantaneous practitioner, provides us sufficient ground for the doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy even though the term is not explicitly mentioned in Congregational Teachings and the *Ornament of Liberation*. This is because an instantaneous practitioner, by virtue of having prior training, does not need to engage in the foundational practices. Thus, when a set of Mahāmudrā instructions are offered to an instantaneous practitioner, those instructions can be seen as self-sufficient for giving rise to the Mahāmudrā state. As is generally true for all Mahāyāna practices, the question of whether Mahāmudrā practice requires foundational or associated practices applies only to the post-meditation period (*rjes thob*), the period after coming out of a meditation

equipoise. In the state of meditative equipoise, all dualistic and conventional practices such as compassion are suspended, focusing only on the innate mind.

The above discussions make it amply clear that gradualist Mahāmudrā practitioners do require foundational or associated practices in the post-meditation state. Without these foundational practices, there is danger that Mahāmudrā meditation may not be inspired by renunciation or bodhicitta based on love and compassion. Gampopa clearly states that these two practices are required for Mahāmudrā practice to become respectively a dharma practice and a Mahāyāna dharma practice in particular. For the instantaneous practitioners, the answer to whether foundational practices are required or not is a little more complicated. By definition, instantaneous practitioners are those with prior training (*sbyang pa can*). This means that at the time of engaging in Mahāmudrā practice, they don't need to engage in foundational practices such as meditation on renunciation, love, compassion, and bodhicitta. However, the question of when they have engaged in prior training and became an instantaneous practitioner is not explicitly mentioned in Gampopa's writings. We can logically argue that prior training must take place in previous lifetimes. Engaging in training in foundational practices in the earlier part of this life would, by definition, put one into the category of a gradualist practitioner. Gampopa also does not explicitly mention what prior training involves. We can however infer that such prior training must consist of all the foundational practices that Gampopa describes in his *Ornament of Liberation* as well as in the Congregational Teachings such as meditation on impermanence, renunciation, love, kindness, and bodhicitta.

One associated practice that even an instantaneous practitioner must undertake, both to realize Mahāmudrā and after the realization of Mahāmudrā is guru devotion. Gampopa clearly states that the realization of Mahāmudrā depends on two factors: a qualified guru who has directly realized

Mahāmudrā and fervent devotion towards that guru from the side of the student. Gampopa warns against the mistake of thinking that guru devotion is no longer required, even after realizing the yoga of non-elaboration. In addition to guru devotion acting as an epistemic state facilitating the realization of the Mahāmudrā state, a point argued earlier, the continued need for the practice of guru devotion is due to its effectiveness in the gathering of merit. Gampopa states that practicing guru devotion to one's own guru is far more effective than paying homage to thousands of Buddhas in terms of gathering of merit. This gathering of merit is required even after realizing the Mahāmudrā state, which corresponds with the first bodhisattva stage or ground (*bhūmi*) in order to achieve the perfect state of enlightenment.

# Chapter 5 – Conclusion: The Contribution of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā

## 1  Concluding Remarks

One of the main goals of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is to induce a nondual and nonconceptual state of the mind as a way to establish both calm abiding, a state of single-pointed concentration, and insight into the ultimate nature of the mind. Gampopa employs many pith instructions from various perspectives to demonstrate at an experiential level that the nature of the mind is primordially nondual without division into an interior subjective mind and exterior objects of mind. The fact that we experience the world dualistically is due to our lack of recognition or awareness of the primordial nondual nature of the mind. This nondual nature of the mind, once experientially introduced, is employed to bring about a nonconceptual state of the mind to establish calm abiding as well as insight pertaining to the ultimate nature of the mind. The techniques of establishing stability or calm abiding as well as insight in the Mahāmudrā tradition appear vastly distinct from the mainstream Perfection of Wisdom tradition because this nondual mind, which is a much subtler form of mind than our gross dualistic mind, is employed to achieve both.

Employing a nondual and nonconceptual mind to cultivate calm abiding and insight did raise a lot of polemical issues, issues that are still debated within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. One set of related questions pertains to the origin of the Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, and how it is related to but different from Tantric Mahāmudrā. The first chapter has been dedicated to answering these questions. The other significant issue is the question of whether spiritual training undertaken through our gross dualistic mind has any role at all in Mahāmudrā practice. After all, practices such as meditation on impermanence and death, karma, and compassion that are seen as necessary foundations for higher practices such as Mahāmudrā are undertaken with the gross dualistic mind. The fourth chapter has responded to this question from Gampopa's own perspective. The two

middle chapters, Chapter 2 and 3, respectively deal Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view and the corresponding contemplative practice or meditation.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is sufficient textual evidence to suggest that Non-tantric Mahāmudrā has its origins in Buddhist tantra. One of the main practices in Buddhist tantra, specifically the Highest Yoga Tantra, is the inducing of a nondual (and hence subtle) state of the mind referred to as luminosity or clear light, a spiritual goal it shares with Non-tantric Mahāmudrā. In contrast to Non-tantric Mahāmudrā, Tantric Mahāmudrā utilizes the subtle body such as the *cakra*s and the three main energy channels to direct the flow of energy (*vāyu, rlung*) into the central channel. Tantra understands that when the energy flows through the two side channels, we experience duality and conceptuality. Whereas when the energy flows through the central channel, all discursive thoughts get pacified, leading to an experience of nondual and nonconceptual state. Tantric adepts such as Saraha, Tilopa and Maitrīpāda offer pith instructions from this state of nonduality, often referred to as the fourth empowerment, the word empowerment (*dbang bzhi pa tshig dbang*). These pith instructions become an important source for Non-tantric Mahāmudrā practices. These pith instructions themselves have the capacity to induce a nondual state of the mind without having to rely to physical tantric practices such as directing the flow of energy into the central channel.

In addition to these tantric origins and influences, the first chapter also discussed how Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā also has Indian precedence in certain non-tantric texts such as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* or *Uttaratantra* as well the twenty-five *amanasikāra* works of Maitrīpāda. Textual evidence suggests that Non-tantric Mahāmudrā is considered inferior to tantric Mahāmudrā but superior to the Perfection of Wisdom tradition. As we discussed in Chapter 1, Gampopa defines Mahāmudrā without tantric practices as "mere wisdom" (*shes rab rkyang pa*)

without method (*thabs*), ostensibly referring to tantric practices. Similarly, Maitrīpāda's student Sahajavajra describes his teacher's *amanasikāra* teachings as inferior to tantra but superior to the approach of the Perfection of Wisdom tradition. The description of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā as "inferior" suggests that the state of nondual awareness experienced through its practice is less profound and subtle than the one induced through tantric Mahāmudrā practice. It is in recognition of such a difference that Gampopa refers to Mahāmudrā without the tantric practice of Inner Heat as "mere wisdom" (*shes rab rkyang pa*), denoting an inferior status in terms of the profundity of the realization. The status of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā as "inferior" also suggests that a Non-tantric Mahāmudrā practitioner may eventually transition to the practice of tantric Mahāmudrā after experiencing the spiritual benefits of Non-tantric Mahāmudrā.

In addition to discussing the Indian roots of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, the first chapter also argued that Gampopa's Non-tantric Mahāmudrā shares its pith instructions with tantric Mahāmudrā. Thus, whether these Mahāmudrā pith instructions become a Tantric or Non-tantric Mahāmudrā practice entirely depends on the background of the practitioners themselves and the contexts in which the teachings are given.

Chapter 2 explored Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view. The "view," as demonstrated in Chapter 2, does not refer to an ontological reality of an objective world as understood by a subjective mind. It refers to the nature of the awareness or mind itself that is free from dualistic structure and cannot therefore strictly be called a "subjective" mind. Gampopa argues that this nondual awareness is the coemergent wisdom itself, thus suggesting that the Mahāmudrā view is an epistemic state— the very act of knowing nondualistically.

Gampopa employs various terms to refer to this nondual nature of the mind such as the innate mind, the coemergent mind, the *dharmakāya*, the ordinary mind and so forth. One of the main

categories that Gampopa employs to introduce the nondual mind at an experiential is the "three aspects of appearance of the mind," referring respectively to the clarity or luminous aspect of the mind (termed as the nature); the emptiness aspect the clarity of the mind (termed as the essence); and the diversity of uninterrupted conceptual thoughts that we ordinarily experience (termed as the characteristics). These three aspects of the mind, although experienced dualistically, are primordially indistinct and nondual at the level of ultimate reality. It is only due to our lack of recognition that the three aspects of appearance of the mind are experienced dualistically. Gampopa initially employs the three aspects of the mind as if they are distinct as a heuristic device only to lead to the eventual disclosure of their nonduality.

Another important category that Gampopa uses to establish the Mahāmudrā view is the union of the coemergent mind and coemergent appearances. This is a different way of formulating the earlier category of the three aspects of appearance of the mind. The coemergent mind refers to the nonconceptual clarity and emptiness aspects of the mind, which are completely inseparable and termed as the *dharmakāya* or the innate mind. The coemergent appearance refers to the characteristics of the mind encompassing appearances and thoughts. Gampopa points to their ultimate nonduality by demonstrating that appearances are not extra-mental objects and are indistinguishable from the coemergent mind. They are likened to the sun and the rays of the sun, the ocean and its waves, and so forth. In the absence of wisdom and recognition, the rays are experienced as distinct from the sun just as the waves are seen as separate from the ocean. With recognition, however, the sun and the rays of the sun are seen as nondual. The waves of the ocean are not distinct from the ocean.

This lack of duality between the innate mind and phenomenal appearances—the lack of duality between the conventional and the ultimate truth—is due to the fact that all appearances,

whether of *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*, are manifestations of the mind. And this fact, in turn, points to a unique method of dealing with negative thoughts and emotions such as anger or hatred. Instead of applying an antidote, such as patience or loving-kindness, this technique involves looking at the nature of the negative thoughts and emotions as non-different from the mind itself. Through recognizing their nature as non-different from the mind, negative thoughts and emotions are purified on their own accord, i.e., they are self-liberated (*rang grol*). This happens because one has recognized that the mind itself, with its innate nature of clarity and emptiness, is also inherently pure and therefore also self-liberated. It is with such a technique of the self-liberation of thoughts and emotions in mind that Gampopa states:

> Watch how the nature of the innate [mind] manifests.
> From within the innate, an aversion arises;
> The nature of the innate is emptiness;
> Hence the aversion is purified on its own accord.[305]

When the practitioner has learned to recognize the luminous emptiness of the innate mind, then she will easily recognize that the thoughts and emotions that manifest are of the same nature. In this way, thoughts and emotions will be liberated as they arise.

After elucidating Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view, Chapter 2 undertook an analysis of this view by comparing it with the typical views of the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra traditions. It argued that the Mahāmudrā formulation of the unity of the coemergent mind and coemergent appearances resonates with the Madhyamaka doctrine of the inseparability of the two truths. Just as Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view understands the notion of phenomenal appearances as extra-mental objects to be

---

[305] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence (2000, vol. 3)," 160: *gnyug ma'i ngo bo gang shar ltos / gnyug ma'i ngang la zhed sdang shar / gnyug ma'i ngo bo stong pa yin / des na zhe sdang rang sar dag /.*

an illusion, Madhyamaka views conventional truth as illusion-like in nature. Additionally, just as the Mahāmudrā tradition ultimately sees phenomenal appearances as indistinct from the mind, the Madhyamaka tradition also asserts the unity of the two truths, with the conventional truths of the interdependent arising of phenomena simultaneously implying their ultimate nature of emptiness.

Although Gampopa's Mahāmudrā resonates with the Madhyamaka tradition in terms of the view, it has greater resemblance with the Yogācāra tradition in other respects. That is, from a pedagogical or heuristic point of view, Mahāmudrā utilizes the category of the "three aspects of appearance of the mind" to establish the Mahāmudrā view. His way of utilizing this scheme has strong correspondence to the Yogācāra tradition's use of the doctrine of the three natures to establish their philosophical view of ultimate reality referred to as the "thoroughly accomplished nature" (*yongs grub*). As a reminder, the three aspects of appearance of the mind are 1) the mind's nature as clarity; 2) its essence as emptiness; and 3) its characteristics as the diversity of phenomena. In comparing this to the Yogācāra tradition's doctrine of the three natures, we can see that the clarity aspect of the mind (i.e., the mind's nature) resembles the dependent nature, which refers ultimately to the causal continuum of the mind and its appearances. The emptiness aspect of the mind (i.e., the mind's essence), which refers to the emptiness of the mind, resembles the "thoroughly accomplished nature," which refers to the absence of duality in the dependent nature. Finally, the third aspect of the mind (i.e., its characteristics), which refers to the mind's diverse phenomenal appearances resembles the third nature, the imputed nature consisting of unreal, dualistic appearances. Chapter 2 argued that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā view resembles a synthesis of the Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka traditions.[306] In the Yogācāra tradition, the ultimate truth

---

[306] For a discussion of this synthesis, see Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, 90.

refers to the clarity of the mind itself that is free from the dualistic structure. Similarly, an important

aspect of the ultimate truth in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is the aspect of nondual clarity of the mind.

However, in accordance with the Madhyamaka tradition, which expounds the emptiness of all

phenomena, the clarity aspect of the mind in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition is understood to be

empty of inherent existence.

In the previous chapter, Gampopa employs the doctrine of the "three aspects of appearance of

the mind" (the clarity, emptiness and appearances of the mind) to point to the nondual innate mind

as the Mahāmudrā view. The third chapter described the manner in which his corresponding

Mahāmudrā practice, termed as the "yoga of co-emergence," functions to induce the nonduality of

these three aspects of appearances of the mind in a meditative state. In terms of the actual

technique, the chapter demonstrated how one is first introduced to the identity of the nonconceptual

clarity, followed by techniques to sustain that clarity in single-pointed nonconceptual clarity. Once

a degree of concentration sustaining the nonconceptual mind is achieved, one is experientially

introduced to the emptiness of the nonconceptual mind. However, no conceptual analysis

pertaining to the ultimate nature of the mind is performed at this stage. Due to the force of prior

analysis (*dpyad pa sngon song*) and due to the subtlety of the mind, one gains a direct,

nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of the mind. As Gampopa points outs:

> As for the method of realizing this [ordinary mind], one relies on the instructions
> of a qualified teacher and lets this ordinary mind abide without contriving it (*ma
> cos par*), without polluting (*ma slad par*) it, as it is (*rang sar*) and as it pleases (*rang
> dgar*). Letting the mind abide in that way, one realizes the mind-itself (*sems nyid*)
> as non-arising (*skye ba med par*), unceasing (*'gag pa med par*), non-abiding (*gnas
> pa med par*) and non-substantial (*dngos po med par*).[307]

---

[307] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings (2000, vol. 2)," 587–
588. *de ngo shes par byed pa'i thabs la / bla ma dam pa'i dgams ngag cig la brten nas / tha mal*

Essentially, both the clarity aspect of the mind as well as its emptiness are sustained

simultaneously in meditation, leading to their unity in meditative experience. Once the union of

clarity and emptiness, referred to collectively as the co-innate mind, is experienced in meditation,

one is given instructions to integrate gross conceptual thoughts, referred to as the appearances, into

the ground of this nonconceptual state. In other words, one is given instructions to see their unity,

to see how appearances are not distinct from the innate mind. Thus, Gampopa states:

> Like water poured into water, place appearances onto the [ground] of mind and
> know them as nondual. The object of meditation and the meditator should not be
> construed as two. The actual [innate mind] is not found by confused [conceptual
> mind].[308]

The most important technique is to realize the way in which the mind and appearances co-

emerge or co-arise thereby confirming that they are not distinct. To elucidate, when phenomenal

appearances appear or emerge, they coemerge with the innate mind. This in turn proves that

appearances are nothing but expressions of the innate mind. Although we ordinarily experience

them to be distinct, they are indistinct like the sun and its rays or the ocean and its waves. This

method of inducing the nonduality of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances based on

the fact that they co-emerge is therefore termed as the "yoga of co-emergence," i.e., the co-

emergence of the coemergent innate mind and the coemergent appearances. One of the main

benefits or results of such an approach to meditation is that thoughts and emotions (as appearances)

---

*gyi shes pa 'di nyid ma bcos par gzhag / ma bslad par gzhag / rang sor rang dgar gzhag / de ltar
gzhag pas rang gyi sems nyid skye ba med par rtogs / 'gag pa med par rtogs / gnas pa med par
rtogs / dngos po med par rtogs /.*

[308] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Heart Introduction to the Practice (2000, vol. 3)," 257: *chu
la chu bzhag pa bzhin du sems la snang ba bzhag ste / gnyis su med par shes par gyis shig / bsgom
bya sgom byed gnyis su mi bya ste / dngos gzhi 'khrul pas mi rnyed do /.*

are self-liberated due to mere recognition of them as expressions or manifestations of the mind itself. Since the two are not dualistically experienced, no antidote to eliminate disturbing thoughts or emotions are applied as argued in section 3.

Chapter 3 also discussed the some of the unique features of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation. First of all, it employs mind itself as the ground of meditation. In this regard it differs from the Perfection of Wisdom tradition and accords with that of tantra. Secondly, it is predominantly an approach to meditation in which one first establishes calm abiding, based on which one gains direct insight into the ultimate reality. This process is termed "finding the view on the basis of meditation." However, Gampopa occasionally indicates that for those of higher mental capacity, referred to as the "instantaneous practitioners" (*cig char ba*), the reverse can also happen. For these practitioners, it is possible to enter into deep meditative state of calm abiding simply by being introduced to the Mahāmudrā view, which, once realized, is a primordially nondual and nonconceptual state. This is evident not only in the suggestion that when the view or the ground is realized, it is primordially free from any distraction. It is also present in the doctrine of the nonduality of the innate mind and its phenomenal appearances. When phenomenal appearances are not seen as distinct from the mind, their arising does not distract one from the meditative state experiencing the clarity of the innate mind and instead helps to enhance it.

Additionally, Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation points to a genuine unity of the two truths and hence of the practice of method and wisdom in meditation. Since phenomenal appearances, the conventional truth aspect, are not distinct from the innate mind, the aspect of the ultimate truth, one experiences their union in such a contemplative approach. As a result of the experience of the unity of the conventional and the ultimate truth, one also respectively practices method and wisdom in unison. After all, practices belonging to the method aspect, such as compassion, belong

to the conventional truth while practices belonging to wisdom aspect, such as the sustaining of the innate mind in meditation, belong to the ultimate truth. Lastly, the chapter argued that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā meditation points to a contemplative method in which the post-meditation stage seamlessly merges with the meditation stage such that there is no separation between them. The focus of the meditation is clarity of the mind which is also present in the phenomenal appearances belonging to the post-meditation stage. There thus is no distraction from the natural state of the mind whatsoever, whether one is sitting in meditation or engaging in the activities of daily life.

Chapter 4 explored the question of whether foundational or other associated practices are required in Gampopa's Mahāmudrā practice. This question has become a major polemical issue in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition for two main reasons. First of all, Mahāmudrā in general is considered a pinnacle vehicle with the implication that its practice does not require foundational practices. This is especially the case for the instantaneous practitioners for whom Mahāmudrā instructions alone are sufficient from a salvific point of view, as demonstrated in our discussions on the doctrine of the self-sufficient white remedy. Secondly, the idea that Mahāmudrā practice does not require foundational practices must have arisen from the fact that Gampopa's exclusive Mahāmudrā works do not discuss them except in some occasional passing references.

However, there is strong textual evidence, particularly in his Congregational Teachings, that his Mahāmudrā as a pinnacle practice rests on the foundation of other associated practices such as meditation on the following topics: impermanence and death leading to the practice of refuge in the three jewels and the observance of karma; knowledge of the faults of *saṃsāra* leading to the development of renunciation; and compassion leading to the generation of bodhicitta, the intent to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings. In these works, Gampopa demonstrates that without these foundational practices such as renunciation and refuge, his Mahāmudrā practice will not

become a genuine dharma practice. Similarly, without the practice of compassion and bodhicitta, his Mahāmudrā practice will not become a Mahāyāna practice.

Gampopa conveys the importance of integrating foundational Kadampa teachings with Mahāmudrā practice through various doctrinal lenses. One such lens is the doctrine of the "union of method and wisdom." Gampopa argues for the necessity of practices belonging to the method side, such as compassion, for Mahāmudrā practice. He also elucidates a method of practicing compassion in union with the Mahāmudrā practice by pointing out that compassion is nothing but the energetic expression of the innate mind, which is the Mahāmudrā view. Underscoring the importance of the unity of method and wisdom, Gampopa argues that the practice of compassion leads to the realization of the Mahāmudrā state and vice-versa.

The necessity of foundational practices for realizing the Mahāmudrā state is also evident in "four dharmas." He clearly demonstrates that his fourth or the pinnacle dharma, "confusion dawning as wisdom" (*'khrul pa ye shes su 'char ba),* which refers to Mahāmudrā practice, clearly sits on the top of the foundation of the three other dharmas, which are conceptual in nature. The same argument for the necessity of foundational practices is also evident in his presentation of the teachings on the three scopes or persons. For Mahāmudrā to become a genuine dharma practice in general and particularly a Mahāyāna practice, it must be inspired by teachings on death and impermanence, renunciation and compassion, practices that are respectively central to the first of small, middling and great scope.

The fourth chapter also considered whether there may be certain exceptional situations in which Mahāmudrā practice does not require foundational practices. It discussed the doctrine of the "self-sufficient white remedy" and argued that it actually refers to the Mahāmudrā state itself as opposed to a set of pith instructions that are self-sufficient from a salvific point of view. The

realization of the Mahāmudrā state presupposes the need for foundational practices as we discussed before. At the same time, Gampopa does consider the category of gradual versus instantaneous practitioner and how the later may not require foundational practices. Nevertheless, the chapter demonstrated that for Gampopa, even the instantaneous practitioners require prior training, although in their cases that training may occur in previous lifetimes.

Finally, the chapter argued that the practice of guru devotion is something that Gampopa deems essential both for gradual and instantaneous practitioners to realize the Mahāmudrā state. Devotion to a qualified teacher, i.e., someone who has realized the Mahāmudrā state, is considered so essential that, according to Gampopa, fluctuation in one's devotion will lead to fluctuation in one's experience of Mahāmudrā. Demonstrating the importance of these foundational practices, including the practice of guru devotion, even after realizing the Mahāmudrā state, Gampopa states:

> Even though you have no doubt regarding saṃsāra, you should still abandon even minor negative actions. Even though you realize your mind to be the Buddha, you must honor your teacher on the crown of your head. Even though there is no distinction between self and other, do not cut the continuum of compassion.[309]

## 2   Gampopa's Mahāmudrā Tradition's Contribution to the Contemporary Conversation on Mystical Experience

The significance of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition for the study of mystical experience in the academic study of religion has been hinted at the beginning of this dissertation. We are now going to explore in brief the ways in which Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition may enter into a

---

[309] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence (2000, vol. 3)," 193: *'khor ba la dogs pa med kyang / sdig pa phra mo nas spang par bya'o/ rang sems sang ryags su rtogs kyang / bla ma spyi bor khur ro / rang dang gzhan tha mi thad pas [kyang] / snying rje'i rgyun mi bcad do /.*

conversation with and contribute to the academic study of mystical experience. We will first begin by elucidating the category of mystical experience in the academic study of religion.

Scholars of religion employ the notion of unmediated religious experience to mean experience that is not mediated or conditioned by language, concepts, ideology or culture. The paradigmatic example of such an unmediated experience is what is referred to as mystical experience. Contemporary scholars of religion broadly fall into two camps: those who argue that unmediated religious experience is possible and those who argue against it. Those who argue that unmediated religious experience is possible can also be divided into sub-groups: perennialists and essentialists.[310] On the one hand, essentialists, such as William James claim that unmediated mystical experience happens within specific cultures and traditions although they all bear commonalities. On the other hand, perennialists, such as Robert Foreman, argue that is a common core of unmediated religious experiences across religious traditions. In explaining their difference, Steve Taylor states:

> …Essentialists emphasizes the commonalities among mystical and spiritual experiences in different traditions whereas perennialists refer to the claim that there is a common core of basic teachings across religious traditions.[311]

Steve Taylor further describes perennialists as having a more philosophical stance in contrast to essentialists who adopt a more phenomenological position.

---

[310] Steve Taylor also points out that some scholars use these two categories interchangeably. See, Steve Taylor, "The Return of Perennial Perspectives? Why Transpersonal Psychology Should Remain Open to Essentialism," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 36, no. 2 (September 1, 2017): 77, https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.75.

[311] Taylor, "The Return of Perennial Perspectives?" 77.

These scholars argue that the core of all mystical experience in major religious traditions—for example, the consciousness of God's presence in Christianity, the union of the soul with the Brahman in Hinduism, or meditative absorption into emptiness in Buddhism—is unmediated by concept, language or culture. Constructivist scholars, such as Wayne Proudfoot (1985), Daniel Dennett (1992) and Steven Katz (1978), argue that such unmediated religious experience is not possible. They can be referred to as "constructivists" in that they argue that mystical experience and the understanding and report of that experience are necessarily shaped or constructed by the language and culture of the mystic.

## 2.1   Unmediated Account of Mystical Experience

William James describes mystical experience as having four features: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity; he then characterizes the first two as the two most significant features that could define any experience as mystical.[312] The quality of ineffability is linked to James's description of religious experience in terms of subjective feelings and the perspective that it is not mediated. He thus argues that knowledge of God—which he distinguishes from theology—is not discursive; it is a feeling or intuition rather than conceptual or propositional.[313] For James, feelings are independent of beliefs and concepts and as a result deep religious experiences are understood as free from conceptual propositions. In summarizing James' position on religious experience, Proudfoot argues that James considers religious experience to be affective rather than

---

[312] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Vintage Books/Library of America, 1990), 294–95.

[313] James, 314.

cognitive. And the principal feeling or affective state for religious experience is what James termed a "faith-state," which is seen as immediate and not a result of conceptual thinking or inference.[314]

Robert Sharf agrees that although the perennial philosophers have divergent views, they roughly agree that the core of the mystical experience is not affected by language, culture or history, although these factors may affect an individual's conceptual understanding and expression of that core. Furthermore, such a view argues that since mystical experiences are pre-linguistic and trans-cultural, they can be separated from expressions of that core that are culturally conditioned.[315] As we shall see through the lens of its critics, such a notion of religious experience unmediated by language or culture has been used by scholars and theologians to support religion as *sui generis* and to obtain immunity from the critiques of the social sciences.

The second important feature of unmediated mystical experience that James described is its noetic quality. It refers to the notion that although religious experience is not conceptual in nature, it has both a cognitive and an affective component. The cognitive component has an epistemic quality, which offers deep insight into the nature of reality that cannot be penetrated by the conceptual intellect.[316] For James, experience is thus a deeper source of religion and gives rise to religious convictions or beliefs. He points out that that the subject "understands the interaction between beliefs and mystical experience"[317] and that "mystical states point to definite philosophical directions."[318] Religious experiences are further understood as more authoritative

---

[314] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 158.

[315] Robert H Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 97.

[316] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 295.

[317] James, 294–95.

[318] James, 322.

than intellectual propositions and thus they, for James, are the object of the scientific study of religion. In this way, James believes that the experience has a noetic quality because it generates conviction in the subject with respect to religious beliefs.

## 2.2    Mystical Experience Through the Perspective of the Constructivists

Proudfoot argues that religious experiences that are claimed to be unmediated are actually mediated by the mystic's language and culture. As such they should be studied through the social sciences. The refusal to acknowledge this, so he argues, is a strategy to protect religion from the reductionism and critique of social sciences and thus to maintain it as *sui generis*. Proudfoot is thus a constructivist and argues that religious languages that are supposed to objectively describe religious experience are actually shaping or constituting those very experiences: "The terms in which the subject understands what is happening to him are constitutive of that experience".[319] He further argues that such religious categories are also evocative in that they set the expectations of the subject.[320] Reflecting on the placeholder function in religious language, he argues that terms such as ineffable, similar to the Buddhist concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) or the apophatic description of God, are problematic as descriptors because they function to create and sustain the sense of ineffability or mystery itself.[321] Thus, the term ineffable, instead of pointing to an innate quality of mystical experience, actually helps to create it.

While James himself did not explicitly address the role of th social sciences in the study of religion, his writings form the basis for scholars who privilege religious experience as *sui generis*

---

[319] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 121.

[320] Proudfoot, 128.

[321] Proudfoot, 128.

to embrace religion and block it from social scientific criticism.[322] This is the reason that Proudfoot goes to some lengths to critique James. Although William James describes religious experiences as entirely sensational or feeling, Proudfoot argues that mystical experiences are not just sensations or affective states free from concepts. The key issue here is that even if one were to follow W.T. Stace, the influential perennialist of the mid-twentieth century, in acknowledging that experiences are shaped by pre-existing factors, Proudfoot's position goes even farther and rejects claims made by Stace and others that a mystical core of the experience can be differentiated from its interpretations.[323] Proudfoot is thus not against mystical experience per se; rather, he rejects one that is construed as free from its interpretation.

One move that Proudfoot explicitly addresses is the attempt to construe religious experience as inherently "emotional" in a way that understands "emotions" to be separable from their cognitive features. Thus, for him, to appeal to emotion, and by implication to religious experience, to establish an unmediated nature of mystical experience is wrong-headed, since he sees a direct link between language or thought and emotions. He argues that language or thought not only produces or evokes emotions; emotions and experience make sense only in the public domain of conceptual and linguistic culture.[324] Proudfoot thus argues against any method that defines emotions or feelings in vague terms without any determinate reference as separable from beliefs that are describable in concrete terms because they do have referents. This is the move that

---

[322] Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 5.

[323] Walter T Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960).

[324] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 90–91.

Proudfoot sees as an attempt to protect religious experience from social scientific critique and thus maintain its autonomy.[325]

Proudfoot also argues that perceptual experience, usually used as an example of immediacy to support the unmediated feature of mystical experience, is also mediated by concepts. He argues that perceptual judgment includes an epistemic component (similar to what James calls the noetic quality). This epistemic component, such as the sense that there is a square table there, is founded on an assumed causal relationship and hence not free from pre-existing assumptions.[326] Since experiences are thus mediated by concepts and culture, Proudfoot argues that religion can and should be studied as any other cultural manifestation, whose data is available in the public domain.

Through these arguments demonstrate that there are no unmediated emotions and religious experiences, Proudfoot points out that the purpose of scholars who construe religious experience as unmediated is to maintain it as the *sui generis* core of religion. Robert Sharf further corroborates this stance when he points out that religious experience and associated categories such as Mircea Eliade's "sacred"[327] are used by both academic scholars of religions and theologians as a strategy to forestall social scientific critique and manage the challenges of cultural pluralism.[328] As indicated earlier, Sharf himself does not believe in private and subjective experience as a valid subject for scholars of religion. However, he still acknowledges the power of the "rhetoric of experience" to forestall objectification and social scientific reductionism of our private lives in

---

[325] Proudfoot, 191.

[326] Proudfoot, 154.

[327] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

[328] Sharf, "Experience," 95–96.

modernity.[329] Sharf further argues that it is misleading to conceive private subjective experience as the object of religious studies. This is because, even if one admits some type of privacy to experience (which Sharf in the end rejects), scholars would have no access to private religious experience—they only have access to things that are available publicly such as texts and narratives.[330]

Although Proudfoot does not maintain a pre-linguistic mystical core, he still believes that there are expressions and reports sufficiently similar across traditions to use the term mystical experience as a category for comparative religious studies.[331] William Barnard, in observing an inextricable link and interaction between language and religious experience in Proudfoot's conception of religious experience, defines it as an *epistemological* model of religious experience.[332] Methodologically, he critiques the assumption of perennial philosophers such as William James by arguing that their method is very anachronistic. For Proudfoot, the role of the religious scholar is to suspend such anachronistic tendencies and study religion by identifying categories known to people in their own context.[333]

Proudfoot further explains two types of reductionism related to methodology: a descriptive and an explanatory reductionism. He argues that, methodologically, we cannot engage in descriptive reductionism—that is to say that we must identify experience or emotion under the description identified by the subject. We cannot reduce the experience described or experienced

---

[329] Sharf, 111.

[330] Sharf, 111.

[331] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 123.

[332] G. William Barnard, "Explaining the Unexplainable," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LX, no. 2 (1992): 242, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/LX.2.231.

[333] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 185.

by the subject to some other description that replaces the subject's description. But undertaking explanatory reductionism—that is, explaining experience in terms that the subject may not accept—is justifiable and necessary.[334] Proudfoot additionally charges that conflating these two forms of reductionism and thereby blocking any form of reductionism is part of the strategy to protect the *sui generis* nature of religion.[335]

Steven Katz also questions the claim of mystics that the noetic quality of the experience offers objective insight into reality. This is because, according to him, the views of reality they offer are often contradictory.[336] In critiquing James, Proudfoot also points out that the noetic quality and sense of authority it is supposed to impart is limited to the subject. In other words, experience has no epistemic authority to the observer or the scientist.[337] As argued earlier, the conceptualization of experience as utterly private in its cognitive aspect and hence having no truth value for others in the public domain is also part of the strategy of perennial philosophers to protect the *sui generis* nature of religion as we saw see in the arguments of their critics.

Although constructivists thus stress the conceptual construction of mystical experience, some scholars such as Jerome Gellman further divides constructivists into two sub-groups: soft constructivist and hard constructivist. For Gellman, soft constructivists maintain that some degree of conceptual construction based on a particular culture or religion is inevitable.

---

[334] Proudfoot, 197.

[335] Proudfoot, 197.

[336] Steven T Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 50.

[337] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 169.

> Let us call 'soft constructivism' the view that there is no mystical experience without at least some concepts, provided by one's cultural conditioning, concepts being what "construct an experience.[338]

Hard constructivists, on the other hand, argue that the nature of the mystical experience is greatly conditioned by the mystic's cultural background.

> Let us call "hard constructivism" the view that a mystic's specific cultural background massively constructs—determines, shapes or influences—the nature of the mystical experience.[339]

After distinguishing soft constructivism from hard constructivism, Gellman goes on to argue that soft constructivism is combatable with perennialism.

> Soft constructivism is strictly consistent with perennialism, however, since it is consistent with there being some transcultural mystical experience involving concepts common across mystical traditions.[340]

As is evident is the passage above, Gellman argues that common mystical experiences across mystical traditions are possible because of the existence of common concepts that induce them. In the next section, will argue that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is an instantiation of soft constructivism.

## 2.3   Gampopa's Mahāmudrā State as an Instantiation of Soft Constructivism

Before comparing the notion of unmediated religious experience with Gampopa's Mahāmudrā state, I will briefly elucidate the features of Mahāmudrā's innate mind or nondual wisdom (*gnyis*

---

[338] Jerome Gellman, "Mysticism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), 19, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/mysticism/.

[339] Gellman, 19.

[340] Gellman, 19.

*su med pa'i ye shes*) and the process that is involved in realizing or experiencing it. Gampopa understood the Mahāmudrā view to be not only a nondual state; it is wisdom itself as indicated by the term "nondual wisdom." The notion of nondual wisdom has two inter-connected aspects: nonduality and wisdom. Nonduality refers to the absence of the intentional structure, that is, subject-object dualism. Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition posits a theory of mind that maintains that mind is naturally and primordially free of such dualism.[341] Further, according to his Mahāmudrā tradition, it is because of our conceptual error (*'khrul pa*) that we experience dualism. In order to eliminate this error and in order to introduce the nondual nature of the mind, Gampopa describes three aspects of the mind that are ultimately undifferentiated: nature (*ngo bo*), [ultimate] essence (*rang bzhin*) and characteristic (*mtshan nyid*). In sum, nature refers to the basic luminosity of the mind (*gsal ba*) and the characteristic refers to diverse thoughts and appearances (*snang ba*), which are introduced as inseparable from the luminous mind (like the sun and its rays). The nonduality of the mind and appearances or subject and object is thus introduced on the basis of such a model of mind.[342] Furthermore, the third aspect of the coemergent mind is its essence (*rang bzhin*), which refers nondual mind's lack of any self-nature (*svabhāva*)*,* that is, its emptiness (*śūnyatā, stong pa nyid*).

From the perspective of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition, the experience or the realization (*rtogs pa*)[343] of the Mahāmudrā state, i.e., the innate mind or the nondual wisdom, is considered

---

[341] Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, "Zhal gyi bdud rtsi (Uncommon Nectar)," 128.

[342] For a very similar account and introduction to the non-dual nature of the mind from the Yogācāra perspective, see D'Amato, Maitreyanātha, and Vasubandhu, *Distinguishing the middle from the extremes*, 125.

[343] For a discussion of how the terms *nyams* and *rtogs pa* could be translated as "experience," see Yaroslav Komarovski, *Tibetan Buddhism and Mystical Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 24–26.

unmediated. The tradition describes the nondual feature as well as the reality of emptiness of the mind as "innate." This means that the Mahāmudrā state itself is not a product of a particular history, culture or language. It is there to be realized by anyone with the right training. In this sense, it aligns with philosophers such as William James who maintain that mystical experience is not contaminated by language or concepts.

This fundamental Mahāmudrā position is also reflected it its contemplative method of abiding in the nature of the mind in an uncontrived manner (*ma bcos par*).[344] The idea is that conceptual effort to contrive or create the meditative state abiding on the nature of the mind necessarily sullies the nondual state that is beyond concept. Thus, the Mahāmudrā state could be seen as pre-linguistic and timeless since it is innate and unmediated.

The nondual wisdom also is an epistemic state in that it "knows" the ultimate reality of emptiness, nonconceptually and nondualistically. It therefore has a "noetic" quality similar to the state of unmediated mystical experience. The Mahāmudrā state as an epistemic state knows the reality of emptiness of all phenomena. However, the intentional structure is no longer present in the actual state of realization since duality has collapsed. As such, the conventional notion of knowing in an intentional sense no longer applies. From a conventional point of view, it is a paradoxical state (knowing without a subject and an object), and the Mahāmudrā literature usually describes this knowing in paradoxical terms. Tilopa, one of the Indian originators of the Mahāmudrā tradition thus sang: "When one cultivates the meditation that has no object of

---

[344] Sangyes Nyenpa, *Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha*, 7.

meditation, the unsurpassable path of enlightenment is achieved."[345] This also resonates with Stace who defines paradox as a universal feature of all forms of mysticism.[346]

However, the process leading to the experience is evidently mediated. This includes not only the pith instructions that elucidate the Mahāmudrā view and its corresponding meditation. It also includes foundational Mahāyāna Buddhist practices such as meditation on karma, renunciation, compassion, bodhicitta and so forth. Thus, although the Mahāmudrā experience itself is unmediated, the practice or the process to get there is mediated, requiring specific training in understanding and meditating on the Mahāmudrā view, the meditation and the conduct.

In a nutshell, the state of the innate mind (*gnyug sems*) is free from any form of mediation whatsoever. This is exactly why the state is described as innate and primordial. However, for Gampopa, we must go through a mediated process to get there as we argued earlier. In other words, unmediated mystical state is possible. However, it emerges in a mediated context. Gampopa's Mahāmudrā is thus an instantiation of soft constructivism. As Gellman pointed out soft constructivism argues that unmediated mystical state is possible although it is necessarily involves some conceptual mediation derived from a particular culture. We can further argue that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā state is compatible with perennialism based on the reason same reasons that Gellman earlier argued that soft constructivism is compatible with perennialism. Gampopa is thus an interesting character who argues that one can have unmediated experience on the one hand but also argues that it has emerge within a mediated context on the other hand.

---

[345] Sangyes Nyenpa, 11.

[346] Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 305.

## 3   Gampopa's Mahāmudrā and Phenomenology: Reflections on Phenomenological Reduction

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition offers an alternative way to understand mystical experience in religious studies as well as in the way we perceive the relationship between conceptual philosophy and nonconceptual meditative experience in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Additionally, it has a great potential to engage in meaningful comparative studies with the philosophical study of phenomenology. In what follows, I will first briefly discuss some of the key themes in phenomenology and Mahāmudrā that resonate with each other. I will end with brief remarks on key contributions of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā to religious studies in general and Buddhism in particular.

The process of introducing the ultimate nature of the mind in which Gampopa employs the category of three aspects of the mind (*sems kyi snang tshul gsum*), only to collapse their distinction in the final revelation also bears striking similarity to the process and the conclusion of phenomenologists, particularly Edmund Husserl.[347] Gampopa initially works within a dualistic structure, referring to the subjective clarity of the mind as nature (*ngo bo*) and distinguishing it from apparent objects which he refers to as characteristic (*mtshan nyid*) in reference to "objective" appearances. However, he eventually endeavors to reveal appearances as not distinct from the mind, but as its manifestation (*rnam 'khrul*) and likened to the sun and its rays. In an approach resonant of Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) takes us through two

---

[347] My engagement with phenomenology owes much to Jin Y. Park and Gereon Kopf, eds., *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

steps to observe the structure of the consciousness that he termed as the "natural attitude" and the

"phenomenological attitude", referred to as phenomenological reduction.[348]

First, through careful observation of consciousness within what he referred to as the "natural

attitude," i.e., within the dualistic structure in which we assume the existence of an "object"

existing independently out there, he points to the revelation of the intentional structure of all forms

of consciousness—to be conscious is always to be conscious of something. He argues that the

subject has this "directedness" to the intentional object, the cogito has, immanent within it, a

"regard-to" the object.[349] This sense of the intentional structure of the consciousness, with the

object referring to an extramental object resembles Gampopa's initial distinction of the mind as

having three aspects that can be incorporated into two, a subjective clarity and its ultimate non-

arising nature and objective appearances.

Husserl then observes that although we have noticed the intentional structure of consciousness

within the "natural attitude," we still assume consciousness relates to a physical thing existing

independently of the mind.[350] He therefore urges us to bracket this assumption and undergo a

careful phenomenological reduction by entering into the "phenomenological attitude." To justify

the bracketing of our natural assumption of consciousness coming into contact with a world out

there independent of the mind, Husserl points to the phenomenal experience of hallucinations

within the natural attitude. Within the natural attitude we assume that in perception a relationship

---

[348] On phenomenological reduction or *epoché*, also see Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 2nd ed.. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[349] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F Kersten (Dordrecht: Springer, 1983), 75.

[350] Husserl argues that within the natural attitude, the world exists independently of the subject in actuality: "the world is always there as an actuality" (Husserl, 57.).

develops between the subject and a real physical object existing independently in the realm of spatial actuality. However, with regard to the perception of hallucinations, they do not exist out there independently of the mind. Yet the perception remains although there is nothing actual thing out there to which it is related.[351]

While performing phenomenological reduction to observe our actual experience we notice that this belief or assumption of believing in an independently existing world is a belief that comes out of one's own consciousness. After undergoing the phenomenological reduction, "…nonetheless, a relation between perceiving and perceived (a well as between liking and liked) remains left over…".[352] Thus we notice that the lived world is not of the world but is *the consciousness of the world*.[353]

Furthermore, we also notice that if one has a belief in a world independent of one's consciousness, that belief must derive from one's consciousness of the world. In other words, after performing phenomenological reduction, we noticed that in fact the natural attitude depends on certain experience of the world that comes from our consciousness of the world and not the other way round. The world we found through phenomenological reduction is not a world that exists independently of the mind out there. Instead, we found a world as it phenomenally appears to the consciousness, a world that is always in relation to the consciousness. This revelation that the "object" within the intentional structure of the consciousness does not refer to an extramental object out there but to the appearances as they phenomenally reveal to the consciousness is comparable to Gampopa's final revelation that appearances are not distinct from the mind.

---

[351] Husserl, 215.

[352] Husserl, 63.

[353] Husserl, 215.

To be sure, Husserl and Gampopa's ultimate view regarding the structure of the consciousness are of course not identical. Whereas Gampopa collapses the dualistic structure, Husserl maintains the intentional structure, albeit one in in which the phenomenal object is always an object in relation to the consciousness. However, the similarity in their approach (discussed above) and the goal of studying the structure of consciousness is striking. Gampopa's final exposition regarding the structure of the mind points to one that is innately nondual and nonconceptual, a state that is not impacted by corrupting influences of language and thought and hence potent from a soteriological point of view. Strong evidence exists to support that the quest for such an unmediated religious experience, also explored by scholars of mystical experience in academic studies, has parallels with phenomenological studies of consciousness. According to Husserlian phenomenology, the content of one's experience is immediate given to the subject. It presents itself phenomenally and immediately without requiring inference or presuppositions. In contrast, the external world, the *noumena*, does not present phenomenally to one's experience. Gampopa thus appears to be doing something very similar to Husserlian phenomenology in terms of engaging in phenomenological reduction. However, unlike Husserlian phenomenology, Gampopa provides more elaborate methods to actually undertake phenomenological reduction.

In conclusion, I argue that Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition provides an especially clear opportunity to study a mystical tradition in a way that embraces the perspectives of those who argue for the existence of mystical experience (perennialists and essentialists) and those who who argue against it (constructivists). Echoing the position of essentialists and perennialists, Gampopa understood the Mahāmudrā state itself, also referred to as the innate mind (*gnyug sems*), to be unmediated by any conceptual fabrications. That is to say that it is not conditioned by a particular culture or language. Furthermore, Gampopa points out that the Mahāmudrā state is free of any

phenomenal content and free of the intentional structure, as it is a state of mere luminosity (*gsal rig tsam*). To demonstrate the unmediated nature of the Mahāmudrā state, Gampopa refers to as the "innate mind," arguing that the nonconceptual clarity and its emptiness is a primordial feature of the mind.

In accordance with the reality of the Mahāmudrā state, Gampopa teaches a corresponding method of entering into the state of the inmate mind by focusing on mere luminosity (i.e., the nonconceptual clarity of the mind) by not engaging in conceptual mediation or fabrication (*ma bcos par bzhag pa*). Jamgön Kongtrul, for example, describes Gampopa's Sūtra Mahāmudrā meditation as a method of the subjective mind focusing on the objective luminosity through the *amanasikāra* (non-mentation) instructions.[354]

The focus on nonconceptual clarity aspect of the mind in meditation as opposed to the content of the mind further resonates with the approach of those who argue for a mystical core. In summarizing this approach, Sharf points to how they separate the knowing aspect from the content of consciousness and the contemplative absorption into that subject aspect of knowing (variously termed as the *cogito*, pre-reflective self and so forth)[355] provides the unmediated mystical experience.[356] Those who argue for unmediated religious experience and the Mahāmudrā tradition thus demonstrate a high degree of resemblance in terms of the contemplative process of focusing on the knowing aspect of the mind.

---

[354] 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun kyab (All-Pervading Knowledge)*, 375.

[355] On the category of the *cogito,* see Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6.

[356] Sharf, "Experience," 97.

Although Gampopa thus describes the Mahāmudrā state itself nonconceptual and unmediated, the process to get there is mediated. The process requires specific Mahāyāna practices such as meditation on impermanence and death, renunciation, compassion and *bodhicitta* as discussed in Chapter 4. Komarovski agrees, arguing that the realization of emptiness, although regarded as quintessentially unmediated, is accessible only for those Buddhists who undergo specific training.[357] Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition can thus be described as an instantiation of soft constructivism that asserts the existence of unmediated religious experience although a degree of conceptual mediation is unavoidable. Although Gampopa definitely asserts the Mahāmudrā state to be unmediated, it is realized within a constructivist context involving specific Buddhist thoughts and practices. Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition thus closely aligns with soft constructivism, which in turn is compatible with perennialism.

Gampopa's Mahāmudrā also offers an opportunity to explore the relationship between philosophy and nonconceptual meditation. The approach of the mainstream Mahāyāna tradition is to engage in analytical philosophy first so as to conceptually understand ultimate reality. That conceptual understanding of the ultimate is then sustained in single-pointed meditation so that a nonconceptual realization of the ultimate may dawn within us. Inverting this sequence of going from philosophy to nonconceptual realization, Gampopa's Mahāmudrā tradition teaches a method in which one first engages in nonconceptual meditation sustaining the mere luminosity of the mind. From this nonconceptual state of the mind in which the mind has become subtle and calm, devoid of all interrupting thoughts, the realization of the ultimate nature dawns without requiring lengthy philosophical analysis. After this experience, one gains greater facility at articulating it in

---

[357] Komarovski, *Tibetan Buddhism and Mystical Experience*, 31.

conceptual terms, even if those conceptualizations are always distorted and incomplete to describe the ultimate. In other words, Gampopa argues that we can do better philosophy when we first cultivate a nonconceptual state through Mahāmudrā practice. From that nonconceptual state, we are able to see reality directly as it is, without any intervening thoughts which diminishes the clarity and conviction with which we perceive it. This is because, according to Gampopa's Mahāmudrā, ultimate reality itself is nondual and nonconceptual, and undertaking conceptual philosophy without experiential grounding takes us farther away from it, caught as we are in a net of unending concepts.

# Bibliography

Adam, Martin T. "Meditation and the Concept of Insight in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama*s." Doctoral Dissertation, McGill University, 2003.

———. "Two Concepts of Meditation and Three Kinds of Wisdom in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama*s: A Problem of Translation." *Buddhist Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2006): 71–92.

Ames, William L. "Buddhapālita's Exposition of the Madhyamaka." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 14, no. 4 (December 1986): 313–40. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00200271.

Apple, James B. "Kadampa Pointing-Out Instructions." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 56 (October 2020): 170–262.

Arnold, Daniel A. *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Atiśa, Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna. *A Lamp for the Path and Commentary*. Translated by Richard Sherburne. The Wisdom of Tibet Series 5. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1983.

Barnard, G. William. "Explaining the Unexplainable." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LX, no. 2 (1992): 231–56. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/LX.2.231.

Blumenthal, James. "Dynamic and Syncretic Dimensions to Śāntarakṣita's Presentation of the Two Truths." *Asian Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (March 2009): 51–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/09552360802673898.

———. *The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Śāntarakṣita: Including Translations of Śāntarakṣita's* Madhyamakālaṃkāra *(The Ornament of the Middle Way) and Gyel-Tsab's* Dbu Ma Rgyan Gyi Brjed Byang *(Remembering "The Ornament of the Middle Way")*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2004.

Brunnhölzl, Karl. *Straight From the Heart: Buddhist Pith Instructions*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007.

Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, and Kamalaśīla. *Stages of Meditation*. Translated by Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Lobsang Choephel Ganchenpa, and Jeremy Russell. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2001.

D'Amato, Mario. "Three Natures, Three Stages: An Interpretation of the Yogācāra Trisvabhāva-Theory." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 185–207.

D'Amato, Mario, Maitreyanātha, and Vasubandhu. *Maitreya's Distinguishing the Middle From the Extremes (*Madhyāntavibhāga*) Along with Vasubandhu's Commentary (*Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya*): A Study and Annotated Translation*. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2012.

Dayal, Har. *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. *Pith Instructions*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2016.

DiValerio, David M. *The Holy Madmen of Tibet*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Dreyfus, Georges B. J, and Sara L McClintock. *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What Difference Does a Difference Make?* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003.

Dunne, John D. *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*. Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004.

———. "Realizing the Unreal: Dharmakīrti's Theory of Yogic Perception." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34, no. 6 (December 2006): 497–519. http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/10.1007/s10781-006-9008-y.

———. "Toward an Understanding of Non-Dual Mindfulness." *Contemporary Buddhism* 12, no. 1 (May 2011): 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564820.

Eckel, Malcolm David. *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents: Chapters 4 and 5 of Bhāviveka's Madhyamakahṛdayakārikāḥ with Tarkajvāla Commentary*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.

Gallagher, Shaun, and Dan Zahavi. *The Phenomenological Mind*. 2nd ed.. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Gellman, Jerome. "Mysticism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/mysticism/.

Gold, Jonathan C. "Sakya Paṇḍita [Sa Skya Paṇ Ḍi Ta]." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017. https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=sakya-pandita.

Guenther, Herbert V. *The Life and Teaching of Naropa*. Revised edition. Boston: Shambhala, 1995.

Gyatrul Rinpoche, Trungram. "Gampopa, the Monk and the Yogi: His Life and Teachings." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004.

Higgins, David O. "On the Development of the Non-Mentation (Amanasikāra) Doctrine in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 29, no. 2 (January 1, 2008): 255–303.

Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by F Kersten. Dordrecht: Springer, 1983.

Jackson, David P. *Enlightenment by a Single Means: Tibetan Controversies on the "Self-Sufficient White Remedy"* (dKar Po Chig Thub). Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994.

———. "Sa-Skya Paṇḍita the 'Polemicist': Ancient Debates and Modern Interpretations." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, December 31, 1990, 17–116.

Jackson, Roger R. "Mahāmudrā: Natural Mind in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism." *Religion Compass* 5, no. 7 (July 1, 2011).

———. *Mind Seeing Mind: Mahāmudrā and the Geluk Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, 2019.

———. "Sa Skya Paṇḍita's Account of the bSam Yas Debate: History as Polemic." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, June 30, 1982, 89–99.

'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas. *Phyag chen nges don sgron me (The Definitive Lamp of Mahāmudrā)*. 3rd ed. Kathmandu: Leksheyling Publications, 2013.

———. *Shes bya kun khyab (All-Pervading Knowlege)*. Pe ciṅ: Mi rigs dpe skruṅ khang, 1982.

'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, Tsultrim Gyamtso, and Maitreya. *Buddha Nature: The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra*. Translated by Rosemarie Fuchs. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000.

James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Vintage Books/Library of America, 1990.

Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje. "Phyag chen rgyas pa ṅes don rgya mtsho (Ocean of Definitive Meaning)." In *Phyag chen rgyas pa ṅes don rgya mtsho ; Phyag chen 'briṅ po ma rig mun sel ; Phyag chen bsdus pa chos sku mdzub tshugs bcas so*, 3–210. Varanasi: Wā-ṇa Badzra Bidyā dpe mdzod khaṅ, 2006.

Karmay, Samten Gyaltsen. *The Great Perfection (RDzogs Chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*. 2nd edition. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library 11. Boston: Brill, 2007.

Kassor, Constance E. "Thinking the Unthinkable / Unthinking the Thinkable: Conceptual Thought, Nonconceptuality, and Gorampa Sonam Senge's Synopsis of Madhyamaka." PhD dissertation, Emory University, 2014.

Katz, Steven T. "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism." In *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, 22–74. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Komarovski, Yaroslav. *Tibetan Buddhism and Mystical Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Kragh, Ulrich Timme. *Tibetan Yoga and Mysticism: A Textual Study of the Yogas of Nāropa and Mahāmudrā Meditation in the Medieval Tradition of Dags Po*. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the ICPBS, 2015.

Kuijp, Leonard W. J. van der. "On the Sources for Sa Skya Paṇḍita's Notes on the 'bSam Yas Debate.'" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, December 31, 1986, 147–53.

Maitreya, and Dzongsar Jamyang Khentse Rinpoche. *Buddha-Nature: Mahayana-Uttaratantra-Shastra by Maitreya With Commentary by Dzongasar Jamyang Khentse Rinpoche*. Edited by Alex Trisonglio. Canada: Kyentse Foundation, 2007.

Marpa Chos kyi blo gros. *The Life of the Mahasiddha Tilopa*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1995.

Mathes, Klaus-Dieter. *A Direct Path to the Buddha within: Gö Lotsāwa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga*. Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008.

———. *A Fine Blend of Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka: Maitrīpa's Collection of Texts on Non-Conceptual Realization*. Wien: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2016.

———. "Blending the Sūtras with the Tantras: The Influence of Maitrīpa and His Circle on the Formation of Sūtra Mahāmudrā in the Kagyu Schools." In *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis: Studies in Its Formative Period, 900-1400*, 201–27. Boston: Brill, 2006.

———. "Can Sūtra Mahāmudrā Be Justified on the Basis of Maitrīpa´s Apratiṣṭhānavāda?," Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, 71, no. 2 (2007b).

———. "Maitrīpa's Amanasikārādhāra ('A Justification of Becoming Mentally Disengaged')." *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre* XIII (2009).

McClintock, Sara. "The Role of the 'given' in the Classification of Śāntarakṣīta and Kamalaśīla as Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas." In *Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What Difference Does a Difference Make?*, 125–71. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003.

Moriyama, Shinya. "Ratnākaraśānti's Theory of Cognition with False Mental Images (*alīkākāravāda) and the Neither-One-Nor-Many Argument." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, no. 2–3 (June 2014): 339–51. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-013-9200-9.

Nāgārjuna. *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: The Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Translated by Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura. Classics of Indian Buddhism. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013.

Park, Jin Y., and Gereon Kopf, eds. *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

Proudfoot, Wayne. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Roccasalvo, Joseph F. "The Debate at Bsam Yas: Religious Contrast and Correspondence." *Philosophy East and West* 30 (October 1, 1980): 505–20.

Romdenh-Romluc, Komarine. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Ruegg, David Seyfort. *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981.

Sahajavajra. *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā (De kho na nyid bcu pa'i rgya cher 'grel ba)*. Rgyud (vi) (51). Pe ciṅ: Kruṅ go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skruṅ khaṅ, 1994.

Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtsan. "Clarifying the Sage's Intent: Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltsen (1182–1251)." In *Stages of the Buddha's Teachings: Three Key Texts*, translated by David P. Jackson. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2015.

———. *Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i bstan bcos*. Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus pod phreṅ 12. New Delhi: Institute of Tibetan Classics, 2009.

Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltshen. *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes: Essential Distinctions among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems*. Translated by Jared Douglas Rhoton. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002.

Sangyes Nyenpa. *Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha: The Gangama Instructions with Commentary*. Translated by David Molk. First Edition edition. Boston: Snow Lion, 2014.

Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen. "Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan (Ornament of Liberation)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 4:185–162. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*. Edited by Khenpo S. Tenzin and Lama T. Namgyal. 4 vols. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Mdo sngags kyi sgom don bsdus pa (Summary of Sūtra and Tantra Meditation)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:269–308. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Phyag rgya chen po gsal byed kyi man ngag (Pith Instructions Illuminating Mahāmudrā)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:39–56. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag thog babs dang mgur 'bum rnams (Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization)." In *Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of sGam po pa Bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul., 2:136–54. Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975.

———. "Phyag rgya chen po'i rtsa ba la ngo sprod pa zhes kyang bya / snang ba lam 'khyer gyi rtogs pa cig chos ces kyang bya/ phyag rgya chen po'i gnyug ma mi 'gyur shes kyang bya (Introduction to the Root of Mahāmudrā: The Self-sufficient Realization of Carrying Appearances as the Path, the Unwavering Innate Nature of Mahāmudrā)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:127–56. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Phyag rya chen po'i man ngag thog babs dang mgur 'bum rnams (Thunder-Strike Pith Instructions of Mahāmudrā and Songs of Realization)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:1–38. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Rnam rtog don dam gyi ngo sprod (Introduction of the Ultimate Reality of Thought)." In *Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of sGam po pa Bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul., 2:229–47. Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975.

———. "Rnam rtog don dam gyi ngo sprod (Introduction to the Ultimate Reality of Thoughts)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:197–234. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Sems kyi mtshan nyid gab pa mngon tu phyung ba (Revealing the Hidden Characteristics of the Mind)." In *Collected Works (gsum 'bum) of sGam po pa bsod nams*

*rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul., 2:24–32. Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975.

———. "Sgrub pa snying gi ngo sprod (Heart Introduction to the Practice)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:235–68. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Snying po don gyi gdams pa phyag rgya chen po'i 'bum tig (Instructions on Essential Meaning: Quintessence of Mahāmudrā)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:89–126. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Snying po'i ngo sprod don dam gter mdzod (Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence)." In *Collected Works (gsum 'bum) of sGam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bKra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul., 209–29. Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975.

———. "Snying po'i ngo sprod don dam gter mdzod (Treasury of the Ultimate: An Introduction to the Essence)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 3:157–96. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Tshogs chos mu tig gi phreng ba (Garland of Pearls: A Congregational Teaching)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 1:577–648. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Tshogs chos mu tik phreng ba." In *Mnyam med bka' brgyud lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po dang 'brel ba'i chos skor*, 5:1–30. Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus. New Delhi: Institute of Tibetan Classics, 2008.

———. "Tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs (Abundant Qualities: A Congregational Teaching)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 1:505–76. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

———. "Zhal gyi bdud rtsi thun mong ma yin pa (Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings)." In *Collected Works (gsum 'bum) of sGam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, Manuscript from the bkra shis chos rdzong monastery, Miyad Lahul., 2:101–36. Delhi: Khasdup Gyatsho Shashin, 1975.

———. "Zhal gyi bdud rtsi thun mong ma yin pa (Uncommon Nectar of Oral Teachings)." In *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal mnyam med Sgam po pa 'gro mgon Bsod nams rin chen mchog gi gsung 'bum Yid bzhin nor bu*, 2:575–644. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 2000.

Sharf, Robert H. "Experience." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark Taylor, 94–116. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Sonam Rinchen. *Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*. Translated by Ruth Sonam. Ithaca, N.Y: Snow Lion, 1997.

———. *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path: An Oral Teaching*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1999.

Stace, Walter T. *Mysticism and Philosophy*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960.

Tatz, Mark. "The Life of the Siddha-Philosopher Maitrīgupta." *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 107, no. 4 (1987).

Taves, Ann. *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Taylor, Steve. "The Return of Perennial Perspectives? Why Transpersonal Psychology Should Remain Open to Essentialism." *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 36, no. 2 (September 1, 2017). https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.75.

Thakchoe, Sonam. "The Theory of Two Truths in India." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/twotruths-india.

———. *The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007.

Thrangu Rinpoche. *The Ninth Karmapa's Ocean of Definitive Meaning*. Ithaca, NY; Boulder, Colo: Snow Lion Publications, 2003.

Tillemans, Tom. "Dharmakīrti." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/dharmakiirti/.

Vose, Kevin. *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan Creation of Prāsaṅgika*. Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009.

Yamamoto, Carl. *Vision and Violence: Lama Zhang and the Politics of Charisma in Twelfth-Century Tibet*. *Vision and Violence*. Brill, 2012. https://brill.com/view/title/20580.

Zhang Brtson 'grus grags. "Phyag rgya chen po lam zab mthar thug (Mahāmudrā: The Ultimate Profound Path)." In *Mnyam med bka' brgyud lugs kyi phag rgya chen po dang 'brel ba'i chos skor*, 5:49–78. Bod kyi gtsug lag gces btus pod phreng. Delhi: Institute of Tibetan Classics, 2008.