



CELEBRATING
YEARS OF WISDOM

Honouring His Eminence Yongdzin
Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche's 100th Birthday

Edited by
Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche
Charles Ramble

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

One of the first books published by our press, an interview with a Bon master, was *The Healthy Mind Interviews: Khenpo Nyima Wangyal* by Henry M. Vyner, M.D., in 2004. The following year, we published *The Oral Tradition from Zhang-Zhung* by John Myrdhin Reynolds, with a foreword by Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, and I accompanied the author to Triten Norbutse to present the book. Receiving a blessing from such an extraordinary and compassionate master was an immense honor and a humbling experience. This encounter marked the beginning of our profound connection with the Bon tradition and with Yongdzin Rinpoche. Since that time, we have had the honor of publishing numerous works on Bonpo practices and history, and have always made these books our top priority.

It is with the utmost respect and gratitude that we present this festschrift, dedicated to honoring the 100th birthday of the revered master.

– Bidur Dangol

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INTRODUCTION

This collection is intended to honour one of the most remarkable people any of us is ever likely to meet. While the very fact of attaining such a venerable age places Yongdzin Lopön Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche in a small minority of the world's population – around one-tenth of one percent – there can be few people, however many years they may have behind them, who have lived such extraordinary lives of dedication to the enrichment of universal well-being and the sum of human knowledge. Yongdzin Rinpoche can look down from the lofty summit of his years and his achievements to see his extraordinary legacy flourishing on the four continents that surround him, amid the wreckage of the formidable obstacles that he overcame thanks to his single-minded determination.

There are several accounts of his life in numerous languages, ranging from short encyclopedia entries to full-length biographies,¹ but since some readers may not be familiar with them, it would be appropriate to use this introduction to set out some of the main landmarks in his long journey.

¹ For two English-language accounts, see Reynolds 2005, 367–380, and *The Life of a Great Bonpo Master*, 2020.

Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche was born in a Fire Tiger year – 1926 – in Khyungpo, part of the region of East Tibet known as Kham. His childhood name was Chime Yungdrung. His father, Paksam, belonged to a clan called Drewo, and his mother, Gachung, was from a lineage of eminent painters named Dongdo. One of her nephews, Dongdo Tsering Yangphel, a highly skilled painter of murals and thangkas, was to become an important influence in his young cousin's life. Financial difficulties and illness made life difficult for Chime Yungdrung's parents, and from the age of seven he was taken care of by a monk uncle who lived in the nearby monastery of Tengchen. It was under the tutelage of this uncle that he learned to read and write and to take part in religious activities. When Chime Yungdrung was eleven years old his uncle passed away, and he went to live with his mother's family, where he followed a painter's apprenticeship with his cousin Tsering Yangphel. In the course of his training, he accompanied his cousin and teams of painters to carry out commissions for monasteries and private patrons in Kham. These visits, as well as pilgrimages to nearby sites, brought him into contact with important religious figures and holy places in the region. Many of these places lay several days walk away from his home; but his first real break from his land came at the age of 15, when he joined his cousin and a group of painters who had been invited to decorate the walls of a new temple that had been built at Yungdrung Ling monastery near Shigatse, in West-Central Tibet. While his cousin was reluctant to let him join the group, his mother was even more staunchly opposed. But she knew her son well enough to suspect that he might run away from home after the departure of the team, and she eventually relented.

This apparent stubbornness was an early sign of the single-mindedness that would mark his pursuit of any course of action he considered to be the right one. Chime Yungdrung duly set off with the team of eight painters, a journey that took them two months on foot. The commission took two years to complete, but when the team began to make preparations to return to Kham, Chime Yungdrung decided that he would remain behind to pursue the religious studies he had begun during the course of the visit – again, in the face of strenuous opposition from his cousin Tsering Yangphel, who dreaded the

reaction he would face from the boy's mother when she learned he had left him behind.

In 1942, when he was seventeen years old, Chime Yungdrung took ordination from two senior monks of Menri – the parent monastery of Yungdrung Ling – and received the name Tenzin Namdak. Shortly after this he and two monk companions set off on a pilgrimage to the holy places of Nepal, including Mustang and Kathmandu, where, forty-five years later, he would establish the monastery of Triten Norbutse where he now resides. From Nepal they travelled on to West Tibet, where they visited Mount Kailash and other sacred sites associated with the ancient masters who are believed to have been active in this region when it was still known as Zhangzhung. Returning to Yungdrung Ling, Tenzin Namdak – the future Yongdzin Rinpoche – immersed himself in the intensive study of the different domains of Bon, supporting himself by undertaking short commissions as a *thangka* painter. But spiritual advancement was his main consideration of this time, and he accordingly undertook a four-year retreat in a cave on the shores of a lake called Gyerru, in the fastnesses of the Changthang, Tibet's Northern Plateau. He had been drawn to this location by the presence of Yongdzin Tshultrim Gyaltsen, more commonly known as Gangru Pönlop (1893–1967), who had been the senior teacher at Yungdrung Ling for eighteen years, and had withdrawn to this location to spend the next twenty years of his life in solitary meditation. At first, the hermit was reluctant to take on a new student, but the young Tenzin Namdak's entreaties prevailed, and Gangru Pönlop agreed to give teachings to the young monk who, though he did not know at the time, was to become his most illustrious disciple. Following his retreat, on Gangru Pönlop's advice, he did not go back to his family home in Khyungpo, but instead went to Menri, where he attended the dialectics school that had recently been established by Kyabje Meutön Yongdzin Sangye Tenzin (1912–1978), who was to become his main teacher.

In 1952, in his 27th year, Tenzin Namdak took his *geshe* degree and became the senior teacher (*lopön*) of Menri monastery. He also took full ordination, and was given the name Lodrö Gyaltsen, but the fact that he continued to use the name from his first ordination, and that he retained the position of senior

teacher when Menri was later reestablished in India, meant that for most of his life he has been known as Lopön Tenzin Namdak. In fact, his duties at the monastery went far beyond teaching, and owing to the inexperience of the young abbot who was appointed during his tenure, he found himself intensively engaged with seeking funding for the monastery and for taking care of its day-to-day administration.

Times were changing, and disturbing reports of the activities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the east of Tibet reached the little monastic community with increasing frequency. In May 1959 Lopön Tenzin Namdak was in Sezbig, a small Bon monastery on the shores of Dangra Lake, north of Menri, when he heard of the Lhasa uprising against the Chinese presence, the crushing response of the PLA and the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile. He understood that it would be unsafe for him to remain in Tibet in the current climate of hostility to all religious figures and institutions, but could not leave without knowing how his fellows in Menri were faring. Chinese cadres had in fact arrived at the monastery and had begun their campaign of reeducation. The abbot, Sherab Lodrö, and a group of some thirty monks decided to leave, and set off towards Sezbig one night under cover of darkness. On two occasions they ran into armed groups of Chinese soldiers who fired on them, and by the time they reached Sezbig they had lost a dozen of their number. Together with Lopön Tenzin Namdak and others, including the monks of Yungdrung Ling, the group began to make its way to the southern border of Tibet, but not far to the west of Dangra Lake their camp was attacked by a detachment of the PLA. Several members of the group were killed, while Lopön Tenzin Namdak himself was shot through the leg and left for dead. He was rescued at night by the Menri abbot Sherab Lodrö and another monk who had hidden themselves in some nearby caves, and was taken to a tent near the house of a certain Tshewang Norbu, known as Dashö Lama, who tended his wound. Lopön Tenzin Namdak and his companions had managed to rescue a number of precious relics when they left Menri, the most valuable of these being the reliquary of Nyamme Sherab Gyaltsen, the founder of the monastery. Lopön Tenzin Namdak kept the relics with him in his tent, until Sherab Lodrö and Dashö Lama were able to remove them discreetly and hide them in a cave. Here they remained, undiscovered, until the 1980s, when the relaxation of

official restrictions on religious observances made it possible for Dashö Lama to recover them and restore them to Menri.

The Chinese authorities had been informed of Lopön Tenzin Namdak's presence at Dashö Lama's house, and his companions were instructed to transfer him to a prison camp as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to travel. Knowing that this would mean – at best – a long prison sentence, as soon as he was able to walk the group set off towards the camp as a diversion and then, at night, reversed their direction to embark on a circuitous journey towards the Nepal border. Walking by night and lying low by day, after twenty-two nights the party finally crossed the Korala pass into the safety of Nepal's Mustang district.

While Lopön Tenzin Namdak's personal safety was now assured, the future of the Bon religion itself was far from certain: in the People's Republic of China the persecution of religious institutions, Buddhist and Bon alike, would soon intensify with the onset of the Cultural Revolution, while the Bonpo refugees in India were relatively few in number – just one percent of the Tibetan exile population – and scattered across several locations. Since international aid at that time was being channeled through Tibetan structures that had little regard for the Bon religion, there was a real risk that the members of the Bonpo community would be diffused into the predominantly Buddhist refugee camps and lose their religious identity altogether. While in Kathmandu, Lopön Tenzin Namdak met David Snellgrove, the future Professor of Tibetan Studies at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). At that time, most of what was known in the West about the Bon religion was filtered through the prism of Buddhist historians' writings on the subject, and by no means all of this literature was either sympathetic to Bon or factually accurate. Snellgrove, who had spent protracted periods among indigenous Bonpo communities in the remote enclave of Dolpo in Nepal, appreciated that a better understanding of the religion could be arrived at only through a study of the Bonpos' own scriptural tradition. His consultations with Lopön Tenzin Namdak led to the long-term plan to undertake a close study and translation of representative passages from the 14th-century *Ziji*, a project that, as noted earlier, culminated in the publication of *The Nine Ways of Bon* in 1967.

Thanks to financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation, David Snellgrove was able to invite Lopön Tenzin Namdak and two other monks to England for more than two years. In 1962 these two monks, Sangye Tenzin and Samten Gyaltsen, later came to be internationally known as, respectively, Menri Tridzin Lungtok Tenpai Nyima Rinpoche, the 33rd Throne Holder of Menri monastery, and Samten Karmay, one of the most highly regarded authorities on Tibetan civilization in the Western academic tradition.

Lopön Tenzin Namdak's sojourn in England gave him an opportunity to learn English, to experience the life and culture of the European university environment, and to collaborate with David Snellgrove on the translation of parts of the *Ziji*. But the welfare of the Bon community and the survival of the Bon religion remained uppermost in his thoughts, as the letters he sent to Nepal and India at that time reveal. It is clear from the following excerpts that he wished to bring comfort to his anxious followers, while at the same time offering a global perspective to reassure them that Tibetans were not the only people in the world at that time to be suffering persecution and exile.

...on 2 April I wrote to the Dalai Lama, telling him generally about how things were over here, and especially because he knows that our Eternal Bon religion is a part of the pure doctrine of the Enlightened Ones. I asked that he look with loving kindness on us, the surviving lamas and monks of Menri, who are, as he knows, the holders of the doctrine of this tradition in Nepal, and especially that he should not abandon his support for the unimpaired preservation of the transmission of the teachings of this spiritual tradition of Eternal Bon. On the 18th of this month I received a reply, in which he promised that he would never cease to look on us with loving kindness.

...these days there are a great many refugees in the world: there are around one million people who have fled China and Hong Kong as well as a very large number in Europe who, in recent times, fled into the mountains and have not dared to return – in countries such as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. The majority of these are able to survive thanks only to their own resourcefulness. In these [Western] countries the people have good food and clothing, but I haven't

seen anyone who has the time to concentrate on spiritual practice. ... These days, there are the same dangers everywhere, each greater than the next: over there between China and India, and here between the United States and Russia, and if this becomes any more serious there is a real danger that the world could be reduced to dust. In the conflict over here, all humans would be destroyed for sure without even a single thing beyond insects surviving. Do be aware that whatever blessings you may have now, you at least have them; and that whatever you have not got now, you may never have.²

Following his return to India in 1964, Lopön Tenzin Namdak's priority was to find an area of land that could become a settlement for the Bonpos in exile. This difficult task was, sadly, made even harder by opposition from influential members of the exile Tibetan community to the establishment of a haven for followers of Bon, but his trademark determination eventually won through. Thanks to funding from the Catholic Relief Services, and with the blessing of the ever supportive Dalai Lama, in March 1967 the New Thobgyal Bon settlement was founded in Dolanji, in Himachal Pradesh. The refugees began to gather at the site and to farm the land, and before long the community was self-sufficient. A school, a clinic and administrative offices were soon added. Work then began on the new Menri monastery, and in 1969 Lopön Tenzin Namdak oversaw the complex procedure that would lead to the appointment of Sangye Tenzin as its 33rd Throne-Holder, with the abbatial name of Lungtok Tenpai Nyima. The building was completed in 1972, and Lopön Tenzin Namdak divided his time between training the next generation of monks, publishing Bon scriptures, writing his own works and generally managing the monastery. He also continued to assist Western researchers: in 1969 he had been invited to the University of Munich by Helmut Hoffman, who had written a pioneering book about Bon as early as 1950,³ and helped the Western – and Japanese – scholars of Bon who were beginning to visit Dolanji in small but ever-increasing numbers. Monastic training in Tibet had been a haphazard affair, and one of Lopön Tenzin Namdak's main achievements during this period was the development of a systematic nine-year curriculum leading to

2 Letters dated 25 April and 31 October 1963. For more extensive extracts of these and other letters, see *The Life of a Great Bonpo Master*, 171–172.

3 Hoffmann 1950.

the degree of *geshe*. This curriculum was presented to the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, and was given official approval in 1977.⁴

With the graduation of the first six *geshes* in 1986, Lopön Tenzin Namdak could begin to turn his attention to other matters. The Chinese government had begun to relax its restrictions on visiting Tibet, and Lopön Tenzin Namdak took this opportunity to travel to sites within what was by now the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and culturally Tibetan areas in adjacent provinces. This was a bittersweet journey. While he was able to visit places – including Menri and Yungdrung Ling monasteries – where he had spent his formative years and to meet surviving friends and fellow monks from these early days, to see at first hand the destruction that had been wrought in the places that had meant so much to him filled him with a terrible sadness. The visit did, however, give him the opportunity to see his aging mother – the first time they had met in forty-five years.

In the knowledge that every year from then on Menri would see a new cohort of qualified *geshes*, Lopön Tenzin Namdak was reassured about future of the religion that he had done so much to preserve and cherish. He did not, however, settle into a comfortable retirement but embarked on a project to build another major monastery in Nepal, a country that hosted a sizable Bonpo refugee community and also a number of long-established Bon enclaves in the highland areas of Dolpo and Mustang. With the help of the indefatigable Paljor Norbu, an area of land was acquired in Kathmandu to the west of the sacred site of Swayambhunath, on the very edge of Nagarjun Forest. In the following year, 1987, the new monastery of Tritten Norbutse was officially founded. The monastery, which now flourishes under the guidance of its abbot Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, has been the main residence of Lopön Tenzin Namdak ever since then.

Most of the Westerners with whom Lopön Tenzin Namdak had had dealings were interested in Bon primarily from an academic perspective. From that time on, however, increasing numbers of non-Tibetans were beginning to engage with Bon not just as a cultural phenomenon but as a spiritual system,

4 Further components were added over the course of the time, and the curriculum now takes thirteen years to complete.

and in addition to receiving international visitors in search of guidance he travelled to Europe, and later to North America and Mexico, at the invitation of the small groups of followers who were beginning to emerge in these countries. Tritten Norbutse was not the last monastery that Lopön Tenzin Namdak was to establish. The political instability of Nepal during the Maoist insurgency of 1996 to 2006, combined with the growing Western interest in Bon, were major incentives for the creation of a stable base for the Bon religion in Europe. In 2001, the Shenten Dargye Ling Association, comprising a number of European followers, was registered in France, and set about the task of finding a location that might serve as a permanent centre for the international Bon community. In 2005 Loel Guinness, the founder of the Kalpa Group and a disciple of Yongdzin Rinpoche, purchased a property near the village of Blou, in France's Loire Valley, and donated it to the Association. The Château de la Modetaïs, which had previously accommodated a small community of Catholic monks, was duly consecrated as Shenten Dargye Ling Monastery in the summer of that year. In 2006 it was accorded the status of a *congrégation* by the Ministry of the Interior of the French Government, which meant that from then on it had the official status of a recognised religion in Europe. Shenten Dargye Ling became a spiritual hub for Bon followers from around the world, and Yongdzin Rinpoche would give teachings there for several months of each year. Even though Tritten Norbutse is now his permanent residence, his presence continues to be strongly felt in Shenten Dargye Ling and Menri, just as it continues to be felt by anyone who has ever had the privilege of meeting him.

Tibetans and non-Tibetans alike have turned to Yongdzin Rinpoche over the course of many decades for advice in both scholarly matters and spiritual development, and he has bestowed his help in both of these domains with the same generosity and consummate skill. The chapters in this volume reflect these two different registers of Western engagement with Bon. Some of the contributors to the present volume are professional or freelance scholars; some are Bon practitioners, and still others are both. This is not a conventional *Festschrift* – an assemblage of academic papers that a professor might be presented with by his or her students and colleagues on retirement – but a far more diverse collection, including academic investigations, personal reflections, expressions of devotion, photographic compositions and translations

of Bon scriptures. The book is a collective gesture of gratitude for – as a well-known Tibetan formulation has it – kindness so great that it can never be repaid; but the variety seen in the individual chapters reflects the uniqueness of the relationship that each author has with the teacher we are venerating in these pages, Yongdzin Lopön Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, like the colours of a rainbow.

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CHAPTER 23

THE LIGHT THAT ILLUMINATES THE ORAL TEACHING ON THE UNIVERSAL BASIS (*KUN GZHI*)

GIACOMELLA OROFINO

It is a great honour for me to contribute to this volume in celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Yongdzin Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche. Meeting him in Dolanji when I was in my early twenties was one of the most significant moments of my life, likely marking the beginning of my love for Tibet's rich cultural and spiritual heritage.

I accepted the invitation from Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche and Charles Ramble to contribute with the translation of a short text, and I chose the *Kun gzhi'i zhal shes gsal ba'i sgron ma*, from the *Rdzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan rgyud*, one of the first texts I read with Yongdzin Rinpoche at his home in the distant February of 1981. At the time, although I recognized his vast knowledge, I did not fully grasp the significance of reading Rdzogs chen texts with him. However, over time, I came to realize the immense privilege I had been given.

We read together every afternoon, and our sessions were always enriched by his erudite digressions on various aspects of the culture and religion of that mysterious world, which gradually revealed itself to me and would later become the focus of my studies.

He was always cheerful, his explanations often accompanied by jokes and witticisms, yet there were moments when he grew very serious to ensure his teachings were thoroughly understood by his listeners. I believe it is now clear to all that Yongdzin Rinpoche is one of the greatest Tibetan masters of our time, and those who have had the opportunity to meet and learn from him are indeed very fortunate.

“The Light that Illuminates the Oral Teaching on the Universal Basis (*kun gzhi*)” from the *Rdzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan rgyud* is a very important text for understanding the philosophical thought of the Rdzogs chen tradition of the Bon po school in the broader context of Tibetan scholarly tradition.

In the Rdzogs chen tradition, both within the Rnying ma pa school and the Bon po, speculation on the true nature of the mind (*sems nyid* or *sems kyi rang bzhin*) occupies a central role. This has been confirmed by the earliest texts found in Dunhuang, dating back to the 9th century, such as the *Rig pa'i khu byug* and the *Sbas pa'i rgum chung*, as well as in the *Bsam gtan mig sgron* and the *Mdo 'grel mun pa'i go cha* by Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas Ye shes from the 10th century.

This true nature of the mind, pure from the very beginning (*ka dag*), spontaneously perfected (*lhun grub*), and luminous (*'od gsal ba*), manifests in a primordial dimension referred to as *gzhi* (basis) or *gdod ma'i zhi* (primordial basis). If not deeply understood, it appears dualistic, but in reality, it is completely perfect and pure, and is designated as the awakened mind (*byang chub sems*), the universal basis (*kun gzhi*). The union of the yogin with this dimension is compared to the union of the mother wisdom with the son wisdom (*ma bu 'phrad pa*).

It should be noted that at least since the 10th century, in Rdzogs chen texts, the term *kun gzhi* has been used to define the primordial dimension (*gzhi* or *gdod ma'i gzhi*). For example, in the sixth chapter of the *Bsam gtan mig sgron*, we find:

The essential nature of all phenomena (*de bzhin nyid*), the universal basis as absolute basis (*gzhi don gyi kun gzhi*), is luminously clear and non-discursive; it is the wisdom of the essential nature.¹

¹ Cf. *Gzhi don gyi kun gzhi (kun gyi dngos gzhi pa) chos thams cad kyi de bzhin nyid ni gsal la mi rtog pas de bzhin nyid kyi ye shes so*, Cf. SM: f. 153a; refer also to Esler 2022, 255.

During this period, it does not seem that the term *kun gzhi* in Rdzogs chen literature was associated with the doctrine of *ālayavijñāna* (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*) of the Yogācāra school.² It is not until the time of Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (second half of the 11th century) that we encounter a thorough discussion on whether the Yogācāra doctrine of *ālayavijñāna* aligns with the Rdzogs chen interpretation. The great Tibetan scholar addresses this issue by assigning the concept of *ālayavijñāna*, understood as the consciousness that retains *vāsanās* and is thus impure, to the Lower Vehicles, while reserving a more transcendent interpretation for the Higher Vehicles.³

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* explores the relationship between *ālayavijñāna* and *tathāgatagarbha*, suggesting their connection.⁴ However, in Rdzogs chen texts, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* is never mentioned as a source for a transcendent, non-samsaric interpretation of *kun gzhi*.

Another pivotal figure in the discourse on *kun gzhi* within Rdzogs chen is Klong chen pa (1308-1363). In his analysis, Klong chen pa delineates two distinct interpretations of *kun gzhi*: one as the fundamental basis (*gzhi*), which corresponds to *dharmatā*, and the other as *kun gzhi* in alignment with the *ālayavijñāna* of the Vijñānavādin tradition. He observes that in certain *sūtras* and *tantras*, the fundamental basis (*gzhi*) is referred to as *kun gzhi*, a nomenclature that has led to considerable misunderstanding and confusion, including the erroneous notion that *kun gzhi* and *chos sku* are identical. Klong chen pa critiques this view as a philosophical mistake, arguing that equating the foundational basis with *ālayavijñāna*, where samsaric traces (*bag chags*) are stored, would imply that the *dharmakāya* itself harbors *bag chags*, which is an untenable position.⁵

The discourse on the definitions of *gzhi* and *kun gzhi* and their potential correlation with the doctrine of *ālayavijñāna* has been deeply embedded in Tibetan thought. Among Rdzogs chen scholars, this debate has been characterised by

2 For an in-depth study on *Ālayavijñāna* in Yogācāra philosophy, see Schmithausen 1987.

3 On the thought of Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, and other Tibetan thinkers regarding the conception of *kun gzhi* in Rdzogs chen, see the seminal work by Samten Karmay 2007, 178–184. Refer also to van Schaick 2018.

4 Cf. Suzuki 1999, 64–68.

5 Cf. Karmay 2007, 180. See also Germano, Waldron 2006.

rigorous and nuanced engagement, reflecting an enduring tradition of philosophical reflection and inquiry.

The Bon po text from the *Rdzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan rgyud* tradition, which is translated here,⁶ holds particular significance as it engages with this longstanding debate, offering a response that resonates deeply with the Rdzogs chen interpretations found in the earliest scriptures. By addressing this enduring ontological issue – central to centuries of Tibetan philosophical discourse – with a non-dualistic and yet rigorously logical resolution, it establishes its essential place within the wider landscape of Tibetan intellectual history.

THE LIGHT THAT ILLUMINATES THE ORAL TEACHING ON THE UNIVERSAL BASIS FROM THE *RDZOGS PA CHEN PO ZHANG ZHUNG SNYAN RGYUD*

[f.1 p. 486] The oral teaching that dispels doubts about the fundamental nature (*gnas lugs*) of the Universal Basis (*kun gzhi*) is thus:

THE METAPHOR OF SPACE BEING DIVIDED INTO EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL

Some with limited minds hold doubts and question whether it is true that the awakened mind (*byang chub kyi sems*) pervades their own inner awareness but does not extend to external objects.

Let us consider, for example, space: it pervades both external and internal phenomenal existences totally and deeply. Nevertheless, when a house appears, space seems divided into exterior and interior. Furthermore, space will take on the shape of the house, whether it is square, triangular, oval, or round.

Similarly, the awakened mind totally and deeply pervades both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* without distinction between external and internal. Nevertheless, due to the ordinary minds (*blo*) of different beings, it appears divided into external and internal. Thus, let this inner awareness (*rnam shes rig pa*) be realized as

6 For the translation, I have relied on the two editions cited in the references.

awakened mind and through a spiritual experience (*nyams*), everything can be perceived as being pervaded by the awakened mind.

All the appearances of external objects, being inanimate and lacking the basis from which the signs of the awakened mind arise, always appear not to be pervaded by it. For example, as regards a house, due to its appearance, space appears divided into exterior and interior, but since space itself has no interior or exterior, this distinction does not exist. [f.2, 487] Just as it pervades the interior, it also pervades the exterior. Similarly, the mind of sentient beings perceives the awakened mind dualistically as external and internal, but since there is neither external nor internal, this distinction is non-existent.

In the same way that it permeates inner awareness, it also pervades the appearance of external objects and the external world, entirely embracing all directions without center, periphery, external, or internal distinctions.

THE METAPHOR OF THE MOON AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE WATER

When the moon rises in the sky, its light shines, suffusing the surface of the earth. Its reflection appears clear and bright in rivers, oceans, and ponds because in their water there exists the basis for the reflection to appear. Since the earth, stones, and rocks are opaque, they do not possess the basis needed for the moon's reflection to appear. Even though the moonlight pervades them, the reflection does not appear.

In the same way, the dimension of the very nature of reality (*bon nyid*) or awakened mind is akin to the lunar orb: it wholly pervades both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Within the inner awareness of the individual exists the basis for the arising of the very nature of reality, and thereby for profound insight. Since inner awareness experiences this, it is like water reflecting the moon.

The appearances of the external world, though permeated by the very nature of reality and the very nature of mind (*sems nyid*), are inanimate and mindless [f.2b, 488,] and thus lack the basis from which they can manifest. Consequently, they have neither understanding nor experience. The lunar orb suffuses both the waters and the stones indiscriminately; similarly, the

very nature of reality and the very nature of mind pervade equally both the inner awareness (*nang rig pa*) and the appearances of external objects, as well as the external world.

THE ORAL TEACHING THAT ALLAYS DOUBTS
REGARDING HOW THE AWARENESS WISDOM ARISES
IN THE MENTAL CONTINUUM OF INDIVIDUALS

Some believe that if the self-awareness wisdom (*rang rig pa'i ye shes*) is a single sphere (*thig le nyag gcig*), it is inadmissible for it to manifest individually in the mental continuum of sentient beings. They harbor doubts, thinking it impossible for a single sphere to arise in every individual.

Let us consider the example of the moon and its reflection in the water. In the sky, there is no more than one moon, but through the auxiliary causes provided by countless rivers and pools of water, innumerable reflections of the moon appear. The King of Awareness (*shes rig gi rgyal po*) likewise is a single sphere, yet it manifests in the mental continuum of each individual consciousness. Thus, the awareness wisdom appears in multiple individuals, just as many reflections of the moon appear in the water. Countless reflections of the moon appear in rivers and pools of water, yet they are all completely and indistinguishably perfected (*yongs su rdzogs pa*) in the single lunar disc. Correspondingly, in the mental continuum of every individual, countless awareness wisdoms manifest, but they are all completely and indistinguishably perfected in the single King of Awareness.

THE METAPHOR OF THE CASTLE AND ITS GATES

The king's castle (f.3, p.489) has a hundred thousand gates, but they all lead to the same castle. Similarly, the Universal Basis is like the king's castle, and the awareness wisdoms are like the gates that appear in various forms. Although they manifest in many different forms, they all converge on the one king's castle, which is similar to the Universal Basis and the very nature of reality. Even though the castle has many gates, they all lead to the same destination. Entering through any of these open gates, one will reach the castle. If the gates are closed, however, and there is no way to enter, one will never reach

the royal castle. Similarly, since the awareness wisdom manifests in the various mental continuums of the individual, these are all like the gateways to the nature of reality.

Whoever has a direct experience of the awareness wisdom is like an open gate to the castle. If the gates of the castle are not open, one will not see the treasure of the Universal Basis nor encounter the mother wisdom.

THE ORAL TEACHING THAT ALLAYS DOUBTS REGARDING THE ACCUMULATION OF LATENT PREDISPOSITIONS (*VASANĀ*)

Some retain doubts, reasoning that if the Universal Basis is pure from the origin, it cannot logically be the basis for the accumulation of *vasanās*; conversely, if it is the basis for accumulating *vasanās*, it cannot logically be considered pure since the origin.

The essence of the Universal Basis, however, has never been sullied by the impurities of *vasanās* in the three times, therefore, it is pure. In that case one might think that it cannot be the basis for storing the *vasanās*. The *vasanās*, however, are accumulated there only latently, in union with the aggregates of the eight consciousnesses. Thus, this Universal Basis is merely the basis for the accumulation of latencies, akin to a warehouse. The mental consciousness (*yiḍ kyi rnam par shes pa*) acts as the gatherer (f. 3b, p. 490) of the *vasanās*, much like a husband, while the consciousnesses of the five gates function as the doors and the paths, akin to the doors of houses or the roads used by travellers. The five external objects of the senses are the causes of the actions of the accumulation of *vasanās*, similar to countries, lands, wealth, and food. The mind of disturbing emotions (*nyon mongs pa can gyi yiḍ*) is that which does not cast away the latencies, that which clings, akin to a wife. Furthermore, without the Universal Basis, there would be no basis for the accumulation of *vasanās*. If there were no supporting surface, it would be impossible to draw figures. Similarly, if there were no mental consciousness, there would be no means to gather latencies, just as if there were no person to accumulate wealth. Without the consciousnesses of the five gates, it would be like having no roads or doorways to accumulate riches, akin to a house without a door or a traveler whose paths are cut off.

Furthermore, if the five external objects did not exist, it would be as if the causes for the accumulation of latencies did not exist. Just as a thief would find nothing to steal in the house of a man devoid of wealth and food, without the mind of disturbing emotions, the *vasanās*, once accumulated, would dissipate, like riches without an owner.

From the dimension of the Universal Basis, mental consciousness arises unobstructed. Due to ignorance, the consciousness of afflictive emotions emerges resulting in clinging to the concept of self and other. The mind of afflictive emotions, akin to a wife, urges the mental consciousness, akin to a husband. The latter, through the consciousness of the five sense organs – akin to the doors of a house or the paths used by merchants – experiences the five external objects, akin to countries, fields, food, and wealth. [f.4, 491] When objects are perceived as attractive, desire arises; when they are considered unattractive, anger arises; when they are regarded as neither one nor the other, ignorance arises. Focusing on oneself gives rise to pride, while focusing on others gives rise to jealousy. In this manner, *vasanās* are generated by one's actions and afflictions – this is the mind of disturbing emotions, which, akin to a wife, clings to, and does not relinquish, the latent traces of the Universal Basis. Just as they are guarded by servants, accumulated by a husband, and given to the wife, they are amassed like a treasure. If they are accumulated latently, in union with the eight aggregates, one might think this contradicts the fact that the Universal Basis is pure. But there is no contradiction. In the dimension of the space of the sky, all phenomenal existences form and dwell, yet the essential nature of space is not even in the slightest contaminated by their impurities.

THE ORAL TEACHING THAT REMOVES DOUBTS ABOUT THE RECOGNITION OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIS

The Universal Basis is like a mirror in which the five external sense objects are reflected very clearly. However, certain people with very limited minds think it is impossible for these to arise from the Universal Basis and manifest to the eyes and the five bodily organs. The five organs are merely the gates through which the five sense objects arise. The five sense objects arise from the Universal Basis, the King of Awareness.

Consider the example of the moon and its reflection in water: The moon shines in the sky, but the earth, stones, mountains, and rocks do not have the basis from which the reflection can arise, and therefore it is impossible for the reflection of the moon to appear. Water, however, has the basis for the reflection to appear, and thus the image of the moon does so. As is the case with the five external objects, the King of Awareness possesses the basis for reflection. Exactly as the reflection of the moon arises in water, [f.4b, 492] the five sense objects arise in it without any obstruction. If the five sense organs were inanimate and devoid of sensitivity, there would be no basis for the manifestation of the five objects. If it were possible for the five objects to manifest through inanimate senses, the five objects would also manifest to the dead, for the dead also possess sense organs. If this is accepted, one can firmly establish that the five sense objects do not manifest to the bodies of the dead.

Consider the example of latencies from the past, present, and future in dreams. When one sleeps, perception through the sensory organs is interrupted, and reflections of the present, past, and future manifest in the dream consciousness. In dreams, places visited in the past, actions performed, and joys and sorrows experienced appear without obstruction. Additionally, reflections of traces from past lives also appear. In dreams, places one will visit in a month or a year, actions to be undertaken, and future positive and negative circumstances appear without hindrance. Moreover, reflections of future lives also arise. In the present, all actions and events experienced during the day appear in the dreams of the evening. Thus, in dreams, the objects [perceived] across the three times manifest: they arise from the Universal Basis, not from the five sensory organs, and this can be directly established.

Consider the example of the intermediate state following death (*bar do*). When the visions of the intermediate state arise, one does not possess the sense organs, yet it is taught that in an instant, the six sense objects manifest. Furthermore, it is taught that all previous and future lives, the causes and results of karma, and the higher and lower realms arise and manifest within the Universal Basis. Some realized yogins, moreover, assert that past and future lives manifest without hindrance and appear in the Universal Basis. Consequently, the five sense objects also manifest in the Universal Basis. Therefore, since the five objects arise in the Universal Basis, this awareness of

clarity and emptiness, free from obscuration and covering, in which the five sense objects vividly appear, should be known as the Universal Basis, the King of Awareness.

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