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The Heart Drops of Samantabhadra (*Kun bzang snying tig*) as revealed by mNga' ris paṅ chen (Padma dbang rgyal, 1487–1542)*

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Together with the systems of the Eight Pronouncements (*bKa' brgyad*), of Anuyoga, and Phurpa cycles, the teachings of the Great Perfection (rDzogs chen) occupy a central place within the tradition of the Northern Treasures (*Byang gter*). In general, when one discusses Dzogchen in the context of these Treasures, one immediately thinks of the *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra* (*Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*) or its complementary cycle, the *Natural Emergence of the Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* (*Ka dag rang byung rang shar*), both revealed by the founder of the Northern Treasures, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–1409). In the present paper, I will briefly describe another Dzogchen cycle of this tradition, entitled *The Heart Drops of Samantabhadra* (*Kun bzang snying thig*). Several cycles of teachings share a similar title, for instance the *Kun bzang snying thig* revealed by Rva ston sTobs ldan rdo rje (17-18th c.), the one revealed by bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535), or that discovered by Gro shul Las 'phro gling pa (15th c.). There even exists a late Bon work of the same title that was authored in the 20th century by the 'ja' lus pa Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan (1859–1934).¹

The cycle which is the object of the present study was revealed by the famed mNga' ris paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542), during his stay in bSam yas monastery. To my knowledge it has never been studied or translated in any Western language so far.

* This paper is a short introductory study adapted from the prefatory material to the ongoing French translation of the *Kun bzang snying thig* text to appear in the near future. I want to express my deep appreciation to Marianne Ginalski and Jay Valentine for their kind suggestions and corrections on earlier drafts of this article.

¹ See the abridged translation of this text in Lopön Tenzin Namdak, *Heart Drops of Dharmakaya*.

1. *The life of mNga' ris paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal*1-1. *Early life and education*

According to the *History known as the Torch of Primordial Wisdom (Lo rgyus ye shes sgron me)* by the Vth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin chen mo,² mNga' ris paṅ chen was born in the Glo bo county (Mustang, Nepal). His father, named Rin chen rgyal mtshan, was a tantric yogi belonging to a clan of practitioners originating from the gods (*lha babs*).³ Padma dbang rgyal himself was the eldest of six sons, his youngest brother being Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1580).⁴ During his early years, he practiced various tantric cycles, such as those of Yang dag Heruka, Phur pa, the *Web of Illusion (sGyu 'phrul drwa ba)*, the *Assemblage of Sugatas (bDe gshegs 'dus pa)*,⁵ as well as various other tantric teachings from the rNying ma and gSar ma schools. Then, he took full ordination vows (*bsnyen par rdzogs*) from Glo bo mKhan chen (bSod nams lhun grub, 1456–1532)⁶ who gave him the name Paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal. After that, he travelled with his younger brother, through dBus, gTsang, Lho brag, Dwags po, Kong po, and so forth, visiting numerous rNying ma masters from whom he received extensive teachings.

After that, he journeyed to O rgyan chos rdzong in Phreng po, where he met Kong chen Nam mkha' dpal ldan rgya mtsho (15th c.) from whom he received the transmission of the *Contemplative Fusion of the Master (Bla ma dgongs 'dus)* and the *Thirteen Heart*

² sKal bzang padma dbang phyug: *Lo rgyus ye shes sgron me, sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, volume 54, pp. 285-289.

³ And not *lha bab*, which refers to divine possession. In Dūdjom Rinpoche's *Melody of Devendra's Great Drum* (p. 593, trans. *The Nyingma School*, p. 805), his clan is styled as *lha rigs*, a clan of divine descent in the scheme of the "three clans" (*rigs gsum*, i.e., *lha rigs*, *mi rigs*, and *klu rigs*).

⁴ Samten Chhospheḷ erroneously considers him as the older brother of mNga' ris paṅ chen (see <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Second-Dorje-Drak-Rigdzin-Lekden-Dorje/3010>) while the *Lo rgyus ye shes sgron me* describes him as a younger brother (*gcung*, p. 285.-5-6, p. 287.3, and p. 289.5) and mNga' ris paṅ chen as the eldest among the siblings (*che ba*).

⁵ These cycles of practice all belong to the Mahāyoga class. On this category of teachings, see N. DeWitt Garson, *Penetrating the Secret Essence Tantra, passim*. See also the fascinating study by K. Eastman, *Mahāyoga Texts at Tun Huang*.

⁶ Or 1441-1525 (see TBRC Resource ID P782), a very famous master belonging to the Sa skya school.

*Drops of the Great Perfection (rDzogs chen snying thig bcu gsum).*⁷

Next, he travelled down to Lho brag and arrived in sMra bo lcog, a famed monastery following the tradition of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192). There, he met a descendant of Nyang ral himself, in the person of Nam mkha'i rnal 'byor⁸ and received from him numerous transmission, starting with the Treasure revelations of Nyang ral such as the *Assembly of the Sugatas (bDe gshegs 'dus pa)*, and the *Bi ma snying thig*, including its *One-Hundred and Nineteen Precepts (Man ngag brgya bcu dgu)*.⁹

Following his stay in Lho brag, he moved north and visited countless temples in dBus and gTsang where he listened to teachings and reflected on their meaning. He also visited bSam yas, Brag kha and 'On smon thang (where he would eventually

⁷ The *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* is a revelation by Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396), containing highly advanced tantric and rdzogs chen teachings. The corpus of the *rDzogs chen snying thig bcu gsum* refers to a set of teachings of which I have not been able to locate a complete list. The longest I have found is in Guru bKra shis' Chos 'byung (p. 428) where he lists the following nine cycles: 1. *The Heart Drops of Samantabhadra (Kun bzang snying thig)*, 2. *The Heart Drops of Vajrasattva (rDo rje sems dpa'i snying thig)*, 3. *The Heart Drops of Mañjuśrī ('Jam pa'i [= dpal] snying thig)*, 4. *The Heart Drops of Padmasambhava (Padma'i snying thig)*, 5. *The Heart Drops of Vairocana (Bee ro'i snying thig)*, 6. *The Heart Drops of the Quintessential Elixir (bCud phur snying thig)*, 7. *The Heart Drops of the Hūm Cycle (Hūm skor snying thig)*, 8. *The Heart Drops of the Quintessence (sNying po snying thig)*, and 9. *The Heart Drops of the Svāstika (g.Yung drung snying thig)*. Note though that, in the very same context and instead of the *Thirteen Heart Drops*, the *sKu gsum brgyud pa drug ldan gter ston bkra shis grangs kyi gsol 'debs kyi 'grel pa* by Brag dkar ba Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775–1837) mentions (p. 639) the *rDzogs chen snying thig bcu drug*, a collective appellation unknown to me. According to Kong sprul's *Abridged Methods for Explaining the Instructions of the Heart Drops of the Hūm Cycle of the Great Perfection (rDzogs pa chen po hūm skor snying thig gi khrid rnam kyi 'chad thabs mdor bsdus, Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 56, pp. 781–786), the *Thirteen Heart Drops* are actually a collection of texts (including the nine listed above) revealed by rDo rje gling pa (1346–1405). The collection of the *Thirteen Heart Drops* should not be mistaken for the eponymous *sNying thig bcu gsum* revealed by mkha' 'gro bDe chen dbang mo in the early 20th century.

⁸ Styled (p. 286) as *rje rigs*, i.e., belonging to the rJe clan (*rigs*). This clan is named *rJe'u* in other sources such as Dūdjom Rinpoche's *Melody of Devendra's Great Drum* (p. 596). Some regard it as a sub-branch of the lDong clan but I am inclined to think that, given the fact that Nam mkha'i rnal 'byor is a descendant of "Lord" (*rje*) Nyang ral and that he therefore belonged to his clan (*rigs*), *rje rigs* should be understood as referring to an aristocratic clan (of royal descent, as Nyang ral was a "Lord" [*rje*] in his fief) rather than anything else (in particular since, in classical literature, *rje'u rigs* points to the vaiśya [merchant] caste which makes strictly no sense in the present context).

⁹ The *Bi ma snying thig* is a revelation of lCe btsun Seng ge dbang phyug (11th century) which was later on re-discovered by Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje (1097–1167). On the latter, see Achard, "Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje (1097–1167) et la continuation des *Essences Perlées (sNying thig)* de la Grande Perfection."

pass away in 1542).

1-2. Revelations of Treasures and further spiritual training

It is in Lho brag gTam shul¹⁰ that he found the list (*kha byang*) of the Treasures (*gter*) he was predestined to discover.¹¹ With this list as a guide, he journeyed with his brother up to bSam yas where, in the Upper Hall (sTeng khang), from the “brown dome of the treasure of his heart” (*snying mdzod ba sgam [=gam] smug po*),¹² he revealed the cycle of the *Complete Assembly of the Eight Pronouncements of the Master* (*Bla ma bka' brgyad yongs 'dus*),¹³ the *Supreme Light of Amitāyus' Wisdom* (*Tshe dpag med ye shes 'od mchog*),¹⁴ the cycle of the Multicolored Garuḍa, the one centered upon rDo rje go lod, and other sādhanas. He further revealed two individual works making up the *Heart Drops of Samantabhadra according to the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs chen kun bzang snying tig*)¹⁵ and the *Heart Drops of Padmasambhava* (*Padma snying thig*), together with other Treasures connected to Gu ru drag po.¹⁶

After that, he gave and received numerous transmissions of the *Heart Drops of the Ḍākinīs* (*mKha' 'gro snying thig*), as well as of the *Assembly of the Blissful Ones* (*bDe 'dus*) and of the

¹⁰ Spelt sTams shul in the text. It is of course Lho brag gTam shul, the birth place of Nyang ral.

¹¹ This happened when he was 46, in ca. 1513 according to Dūdjom Rinpoche (*op. cit.*, p. 596).

¹² This is a literary device that one encounters in the *gter ma* literature in reference to the revelation of a Treasure through visions. However, not all works “revealed” in this way are considered *gter ma*. For instance, Shardza Rinpoche revealed several texts in this way but these are not styled *gter ma* and himself is not considered as a *gter ston*.

¹³ TBRC W27871 (in two volumes). This collection also exists in one volume (TBRC W23199). According to Mengyan Li (*Origination, Transmission, and Reception of the Phur-pa Cycle*, p. 107), “[t]his is the instruction for the ripen (*sic*) and liberation related to the gSöl 'debs lde'u bdun pa.” In reality, this statement should only apply to the first volume dedicated to the practice of the *Zhi ba* (nicknamed *zhi pod*, “volume on the peaceful deities”) which is indeed associated to this prayer which has been expanded with sādhanas, as well as Perfection Stage (*rdzogs rim*) instructions. The second volume (nicknamed *khro pod*, “volume on the wrathful deities”) is connected to the cycle of teachings centered upon Gu ru drag po (*gu ru drag po'i skor*).

¹⁴ This corresponds to the *Rig 'dzin yongs 'dus kyi tshe sgrub ye shes 'od mchog* which is included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 19 (p. 593-674).

¹⁵ The spellings *snying thig* and *snying tig* alternate regularly in this title but do not change the meaning.

¹⁶ The *Padma snying thig* is a very short work that he discovered under the name of Padma rgyal po Ye shes rol pa rtsal. I will discuss this work in a forthcoming paper.

Contemplative Fusion of the Master ([*Bla ma*] *dgongs 'dus*). At that time, his main disciples were—besides his own younger brother Legs ldan rdo rje—'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1557), 'Brug pa Ngag dbang chos rgyal (1465–1540), Lha btsun Chos kyi rgyal po (16th c.), and numerous other erudite and accomplished practitioners.

In order to bring benefit to the doctrine and beings, Padma dbang rgyal invited Rin chen phun tshogs to bSam yas where, together with Legs ldan rdo rje, the three masters performed extensive rituals, ensuring thirteen years of peace and well-being throughout Tibet, after which Legs ldan went to Sikkim in order to open the doors of secret sanctuaries. At that time, Padma dbang rgyal returned to Mustang.

1-3. Influence and demise

Throughout his life, mNga' ris pan chen gave both rNying ma and gSar ma teachings, insisting greatly on maintaining the purity of one's vows. His influence on this subject was strengthened by his composition of an important work entitled *The Ascertainment of the Three Vows* (*sDom gsum rnam nges*), at a time when rNying ma tantric practitioners were not necessarily known for being preoccupied with monastic vows.¹⁷

As far as his own practice is concerned, Padma dbang rgyal protected his vows and tantric samayas without error, as they are explained in the numerous works discussing this issue. He himself intensively engaged in the practice of the Two Stages (*rim gnyis*), performing four sessions of meditations on a daily basis. His main practice remained however that of the Great Perfection (rDzogs chen): "In particular, owing to his constantly pervading Contemplation of the Great Perfection's Clear-Light, he was able to actually display the numerous signs and their measure indicating that he had ultimately reached the accomplishment of naturally liberating Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa into the Expanse of his Awareness."¹⁸ He was thus able to benefit sentient

¹⁷ See the translation of this work (together with a commentary by Dūdjom Rinpoche) in Ngari Panchen, *Perfect Conduct — Ascertaining the Three Vows*, *passim*.

¹⁸ *Lo rgyus ye shes sgron me*, p. 288: *gtso bor 'od gsal rdzogs pa chen po'i dgongs pa 'khor yug tu gdal bas 'khor 'das rig pa'i klong du rang sar grol ba'i grub pa mthar phyin pa'i rtags tshad du ma mngon sum du ston nus pa*.

beings through the performance of the four activities : appeasing, increasing, power, and violence.

Eventually, at the end of his life, as his mind was soon to dissolve into the Absolute Space (*chos dbyings*), he gathered his devotees around him and gave them his ultimate oral instructions (*zhal gdams*). To his monks, he gave the transmission of the code of conduct they should all follow, entitled *The Official Statement known as the Blazing Adamantine Splendor* (*bKa' yig rdo rje 'bar ba'i gzi byin*).

Then, as he was staying in his fief in Mustang, on the second day of the eighth month of the Tiger Year,¹⁹ he displayed his entrance into *parinirvāṇa*, passing away among wonderful signs such as rainbow lights and music filling the entire sky. The funerals and cremation were directed by his younger brother Legs ldan rdo rje himself.

2. *The Heart Drops of Samantabhadra*

This cycle is a good example of an unusual presentation of a *Man ngag sde* series of instructions. It appears unusual in terms of its structure which is organized into short individual sections (see § 3 *infra* for the actual structure) separated by colophonic mantra-like formulas, entrustment of the protection of these teachings to the Guardians of rDzogs chen, and the homage introducing the next section. As we have seen above, this *Kun bzang snying thig* was discovered in bSam yas in 1513.²⁰ An inner title given on p. 210 describes the cycle as the *Absolute Heart Drops of Samantabhadra* (*Kun bzang don gyi snying thig*).

Basically, and regardless of their actual subdivisions, the instructions given in the text are divided into: 1. the manner in which the transmission occurred (*ji ltar brgyud pa'i babs*), and 2. the instructions on the key points (*gnad kyi gdams pa*) of practice.

2-1. *The original transmission of the teachings*

The history of the lineage is described in a very cursory way,

¹⁹ This should be the Water-Tiger year (*chu mo stag*) of the 9th rabjung. According to the Phugpa calendar, it corresponds to Monday, September 11, 1452 (http://kalacakra.org/calendar/tdata/pl_1542.txt).

²⁰ See *supra* note 11.

with barely any details. It concerns the direct contemplative transmission of the Victorious Ones (*rgyal ba dgongs brgyud*) and the symbolic transmission of the Knowledge-Holders (*rig 'dzin brda brgyud*), although none of these classical expressions are used. Rather the text provides a very hasty description of the transmission, as follows:

With his great, thoroughly liberated Wisdom, the Self-Arisen Revealer (Samantabhadra) displayed his natural manifestations as the maṇḍala of Wisdom to the great Diamond-Holder (Vajradhara) symbolizing the dynamism of (his own) Awareness. The latter (revealed) it to dGa' rab rdo rje who instructed the Abbot of Oḍḍiyāna wearing a hair-knot (Padmasambhava). The latter instructed the Lord (Khri srong lde btsan), the liege (the twenty-five disciples), and the friend (Ye shes mtsho rgyal). Samayā!²¹ Na rag ṣhaṇ! Seal! Seal! Seal!²²

2-2. The actual instructions for practice

The instructions on the key points of practice are divided into three categories: 1. the oral instructions for instantaneously reaching Buddhahood, for practitioners of superior capacities (*rab skad cig ma la sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag*); 2. the oral instructions for reaching Buddhahood at the time of death, for practitioners of intermediate capacities (*'bring 'chi khar sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag*); and 3. the instructions for reaching Buddhahood during the Bardo, for those of lower capacities (*tha ma bar dor sangs rgya ba'i gdams pa*).

²¹ The correct spelling should simply be *sa ma ya* but here I simply follow the reading of the text. The same remark applies to the end of the next abstract translated here

²² P. 210: *rang byung gi ston pa rnam par grol ba'i ye shes chen pos: rig pa'i rtsal rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po la rang snang ye shes kyi dkyil 'khor du bstan: des dga' rab rdo rje la: des o rgyan gyi mkhan po thor cog can la gdams: des rje 'bangs grogs gsum la gdams so: sa ma yā: na rag ṣhaṇ: rgya rgya rgya:*

2-2-1. *The instructions for practitioners of superior capacities*

[1].²³ The actual instructions open with a quotation from the *Tantra of the Three Stanzas on Contemplation* (*dGongs pa tshig gsum pa'i rgyud*),²⁴ saying:

Since one's vivid Knowing-Awareness is (already) fully enlightened,

*Buddhahood should not be searched elsewhere.*²⁵

Thus, in order to experience that Knowing-Awareness (*shes rig*), one should control the three doors and focus the eyes upon the empty blue sky. Practicing in this way for twenty-one days is said to be a method for reaching Buddhahood very swiftly. This can be done by sustaining the state of Awareness (*rig pa*) in order to avoid deviating into obstacles. On this topic, the *Tantra of the Three Stanzas on Contemplation* further says:

*Since one's vivid and lucent Awareness radiates continuously,
There is nothing to do to accomplish the Absolute Body of Buddhahood.*²⁶

When one abides in the practice in this way, one experiences the brilliant (*sal le*), naked (*rjen ne*), limpid (*seng nge*) and genuine (*yer re ba*) state of Awareness, similar to a totally pure lake upon which the reflection of stars shines naturally, and from which one should not be distracted.

[2]. To clarify this state and make sure it is correctly understood, disciples receive a direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) to it, based on the *Tantra* which states:

One's Awareness — the Absolute Body — is devoid of birth and

²³ Regarding the numbering in-between square brackets, see *infra* § “3. The structure of the Cycle.”

²⁴ On this text, see *infra* § “4. The source of the cycle.”

²⁵ P. 211: *rang gi shes rig wa le ba 'di sangs rgyas pa yin pas: sangs rgyas gzhan du rtsal (= btsal) du med do* . This quote corresponds to the text of the *Tantra* p. 268.

²⁶ P. 212: *rang gi rig wa le khyug ge ba 'di rgyun du gsal bas: sangs rgyas chos kyi sku la sgom sgrub byar med do*. For the translation, I have followed the original version of the *Tantra* (p. 268) which is: *rang gi rig pa wal le khyug ge ba 'di rgyun du gsal bas sangs rgyas chos kyi sku la bsgrub par byar med dol*, correcting *sgom sgrub byar med do* into *bsgrub par byar med do* which sounds more correct.

death;

*There is no virtue nor vice in its activity.*²⁷

In this perspective, since Awareness is like the sky, does it experience birth and death? Since the sky knows neither virtue nor vice, can Awareness be subjected to virtues or vices? What the disciples must understand at that stage is that the state of Awareness is not dependent upon karma or the latter's fruition. There is nothing to do to obtain that Awareness since it is the true nature of the Mind.²⁸ What one ultimately realizes through this investigation is the non-discursive Wisdom radiating as the Heart of the Buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi thugs*). Quoting the Tantra again, the text concludes that merely recognizing that one's luminous Awareness abides as the Buddha is sufficient in itself.²⁹

[3]. To intensify the understanding resulting from the direct introduction, one should stay in an isolate place and unblinkingly gaze at the sky in the southern direction during the morning sessions of meditation. When practicing in this way continuously, except for the four kinds of activities,³⁰ during twenty-one days, one will contemplate the arising of various luminous visions which are the inherent expression of the Spontaneity (*lhun grub*) of one's natural state. This is however not explicit *thod rgal* practice (which is briefly discussed in § 5 below) but a preliminary training aimed at deepening one's experience of the sapiential (*shes cha*) and visionary (*snang cha*) aspects of Awareness.³¹

[4]. Then, in terms of *khregs chod* practice, one should train in

²⁷ P. 213: *rang gi rig pa chos kyi sku la skye shi med do: las la dge sdig med do*. The version in the Tantra (p. 268) reads: *Since one's Awareness — the Absolute Body — is devoid of birth and death, it is not polluted by karma and by the total fruition of karma; there is therefore neither virtue nor vice in its activity (rang gi rig pa chos kyi sku la skye shi med pas las dang las kyi rnam par smin pas gos pa med pas las la dge sdig med do)*. In other words, the knowledge of the natural state is not produced by good karma or impaired by bad actions. It is beyond cause and effect, production and cessation.

²⁸ In other words, it is not to be searched for since we already possess our own Awareness.

²⁹ This means that it is sufficient for understanding the purpose of the direct introduction, not for reaching Liberation (of which there is no mention in this context). In general, unqualified vessels who receive the direct introduction prematurely deviate into nihilistic views, imagining that there is nothing to do to reach Buddhahood. This is a definite negation of the Path which propels these vessels out of the Buddha's teachings.

³⁰ *sPyod lam rnam bzhi*, i.e.: standing, walking, sitting, and sleeping. There are other lists of these four activities.

³¹ Pp. 214-215.

not altering the state of Awareness in order to remain in the virginal condition of Non-Action (*byar med*).³² By cultivating this utterly pure condition without artifices, one experiences one's true nature beyond virtues and vices, and one can cultivate this realization during the absorption (*ting 'dzin*) arising in the course of one's meditative equipoise (*mnyam bzhag*). Abiding in this immutable condition is the ultimate Contemplation of the Buddhas of the three times (*dus gsum sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa mthar thug*). At that level, the core of the practice consists in not deviating from this state while continuing in this condition without separating from it, even for a single instant.³³

[5]. As far as *thod rgal* practice is concerned,³⁴ one should sit in the ṛṣī (*drang srong*) position, gazing toward the east in the morning, with totally immobile, half-closed eyes. After some time of familiarization with this practice, one should see one's own Wisdom (*rang gi ye shes*) arise in visions having the form of the diamond chains of Awareness (*rig pa rdo rje'i lu gu rgyud*), of garlands of pearls, of vertical and horizontal undulating lines with various colors, and so forth. As one spends a long time contemplating in this way, feelings of pain may affect the lower part of the body, in which case one should resume the practice in the elephant position. If, on the contrary, pain occurs in the upper part of the body, one should use the lion position. In case, the light coming from the sun causes eye fevers, one should practice with a brown cotton cloth covering the eyes.³⁵ Special breathing techniques, combined with specific visualizations, are also discussed in the text (p. 219), explaining how to control the breath in case obstacles arise. Repeated again and again, these yogic devices are said to clear away illnesses, demons, and all kinds of nuisances. They are also described as purifying channels, winds, and seminal essences (*rtsa rlung thig le*). The dispelling of these obstacles ensures the prompt arising of the visions of Wisdom. All that is contemplated at that stage makes up what is designated as the Vision of Manifest Reality (*chos nyid mngon sum gyi*

³² This Non-Action literally means leaving the body motionless, the speech silent, and the mind in a state free from mental proliferations, visualizations, and so forth. Pp. 215-216.

³⁴ For further details regarding *thod rgal* as it is practiced in the Northern Treasure tradition, see Achard, *The Oral Transmission of Padmasambhava*.

³⁵ Usually this piece of cloth is either blue or red.

snang ba).³⁶

[6]. As one becomes gradually familiar with the practice, one enters the Vision of the Increasing Luminous Experiences (*nyams snang gong 'phel gyi snang ba*) during which the visions are becoming ever more complex until one directly sees Bodies (*sku*) within Thiglés (*thig le*) and so forth.³⁷ Then, when these Thiglés start to gather together as fivefold clusters, one reaches the Vision of the Full Measure of Awareness (*rig pa tshad phebs kyi snang ba*). Eventually, when all impure manifestations disappear, one enters the Vision of the Exhaustion of Reality (*chos nyid zad pa'i snang ba*), i.e., the stage of Buddhahood (*sangs rgyas kyi sa*).³⁸ The *Tantra of the Three Stanzas* explains this ultimate stage as follows:

*This is the Absolute Body of the Buddha. The fact that your own Awareness is the undifferentiation of Emptiness and Clarity abiding as orbs of lights and that it is devoid of birth and death, this means that it is the Buddha "Immutable Light". Recognizing this is enough.*³⁹

The detailed description of this state is rendered as follows in the original text of the *Heart Drops of Samantabhadra* quoting again the root-Tantra with its own repetitive style:

Such visions of Bodies and Wisdoms are the (signs) indicating that Authentic Buddhahood abides within oneself. On this topic, the Tantra says: " — Kye! O you, Lord of Mysteries, listen! Within the center of one's heart primordially abide the Three Bodies of Buddhahood. The Wisdom Body of Buddhahood is the luminous Essence of one's knowing Awareness. The Wisdom Body of Buddhahood, which does not experience any decrease in its clarity, is this limpid Essence of one's knowing Awareness abiding throughout the three times. Since the Body of Buddhahood

³⁶ Pp. 217-220.

³⁷ P. 221-222.

³⁸ P. 221.

³⁹ P. 222: *sangs rgyas chos kyi sku yin no: rang gi rig pa gsal stong dbyer med 'od kyi phung por bzhugs pa 'di: skye shi med pas sangs rgyas 'od mi 'gyur ba yin no: de ngo shes pas chog go.* At that stage, there is nothing to practice anymore, implying that the entire Path has been trodden. Thus, recognizing this is enough in itself for experiencing the splendors of the Fruit.

is free from decrease in its clarity, one's knowing Awareness abides as overflowing orbs of lights. Since the natural body of one's own Awareness abides as great orbs of lights, the natural light of one's own Awareness does not know any fluctuation. Since the natural light of one's own Awareness is free from fluctuation, once one's Awareness has come out of the eyes, deluded appearances arise as Wisdom. Once one has, through (direct) realization, recognized that deluded appearances (arise) as Wisdom, there is no need to purify karma and karmic traces anymore. If one recognizes one's own light, (this light) cannot be obscured by the complete fruition of karma (since) there is no karma, virtues or vices anymore. Thus, since there are neither virtues nor vices when one recognizes one's own light, the ten virtuous practices and the five inexpiable crimes with immediate retributions appear of an equal nature to the intellect endowed with realization. Kye! O Lord of Mysteries, regarding this Great Principle, even (the Buddhas) of the past and of the future have been unable to reveal it. This Great Principle cannot be meditated upon. So, recognizing this Great Principle of Non-meditation is sufficient (in itself).⁴⁰ Kye! O Great Vajra Holder! Hoping (to obtain) Buddhahood without such a recognition (is like) splitting the head of the Blissful Ones of the three times." Thus spoke the Great Buddha Immutable Light.⁴¹

⁴⁰ As shown by the next sentence of the root-Tantra, those who, within their present state in delusion, think that recognizing this principle intellectually is sufficient in itself are simply deluding themselves since the stage that is referred to here is that of the Fruit, when one becomes able to manifest Bodies and Wisdom, and to accomplish liberating activities.

⁴¹ P. 222: *de lta bu 'i sku dang ye shes kyi snang ba de ni yang dag pa 'i sangs rgyas rang la gnas pa 'i don yin te: de skad du yang rgyud las: kyi: gsang ba 'i bdag po khyod nyon cig: rang gi snying gi dkyil na sangs rgyas sku gsum ye nas bzhugs pa yin no: sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kyi sku ni rang gi shes rig gi ngo bo yang sang nge ba 'di yin no: sangs rgyas ye shes kyi sku la gsal 'grib mi mnga' bar: rang gi shes rig gi ngo bo seng (p. 223) nge ba 'di dus gsum du bzhugs pa yin no: sangs rgyas kyi sku la gsal 'grib med pas: rang gi shes rig 'od kyi phung por mer mer bzhugs pa yin no: rang gi rig pa 'i rang lus 'od kyi phung po chen por bzhugs pas: rang gi rig pa 'i rang 'od la 'char nub med pa yin no: rang gi rig pa 'i rang 'od la 'char nub med pas: rang gi rig pa mig nas thon pas 'khrul snang ye shes su 'char ba yin no: 'khrul snang ye shes su rtogs pas rang ngo shes nas las dang bag chags sbyang mi dgos pa yin no: rang 'od ngo shes na las kyi rnam par smin pas ma sgrub nas: las dang dge sdig med pa yin no: rang 'od ngo shes na dge sdig med pas chos spyod bcu dang mtshams med lnga: rtogs pa 'i blo la rang bzhin mnyam pa yin no: kye gsang ba 'i bdag po don chen po de ni 'das pa dang : ma 'ong pas kyang ston par mi nus so: don chen*

[7]. If the yogi has not been able to manifest the dissolution of his aggregates without leaving remains behind him, when death is approaching, he should sit comfortably and focus his gaze on the sky. He should then witness the visionary signs indicating the gradual dissolution of the elements after which he should contemplate the stages of white appearance, red increase, and black near-obtainment. During the arising of these visions, he should eradicate all mental proliferations until he actually experiences his own Clear-Light.⁴²

At that time, it is crucial to pay attention to the white Thiglé falling from the top of the head inside the central channel, giving rise to the experience of white light corresponding to the mind of white appearance (*snang ba dkar lam*). This is followed by the rising of the red Thiglé causing the manifestation of the red increase (*inched pa dmar lam*). Then, when the vision of the black obtainment (*thob pa nag lam*) is about to arise, the last movements of the inner winds resorb into one's consciousness which coincides with the actual, precise moment when body and mind part. At that time, the afflicted consciousness associated with the five passions (*nyon mongs pa'i lnga'i rnam shes*) dissolves into one's mental consciousness which itself dissolves into the *ālayavijñāna*. As the latter is emptied of all its traces, the five-colored radiance of one's Awareness (*rig pa*) in the heart manifests concretely in the manner of the display of Wisdom (*ye shes*) filling the entire sky. Recognizing this visionary display as being one's own manifestations implies instantaneously reaching non-regressive Buddhahood.⁴³

po 'di la sgom du med do: sgom med kyi don chen po de ngo shes pas chog go: kye rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po: de ngo ma shes par sangs rgyas re na: dus gsum gyi bde bar gshegs pas mgo 'khos: zhes sangs rgyas 'od mi 'gyur ba chen pos gsungs so:.

⁴² The stages of white appearance, red increase, etc., are discussed in Highest Tantras, and are experienced during the dissolutions of the main passions. Thus, the manifestation of the mind of white appearance arises with the dissolutions of thirty-three conceptions indicative of anger and hatred (*zhe sdang*); the mind of red increase arises with the dissolutions of forty conceptions indicative of desire and attachment (*'dod chags*); and the mind of black near-obtainment arises with the dissolutions of seven conceptions indicative of nescience (*gti mug*). The sign associated with the mind of white appearance is the vision of a cloudless autumn sky filled with moonlight. The sign associated with the mind of red increase is a vision of an utterly pure autumn sky with a blazing sun. The sign associated with the mind of black near-obtainment is a vision of a night sky without stars or any source of light.

⁴³ Pp. 224-226.

2-2-2. *The instructions for practitioners of intermediate capacities*

These instructions have the form of a direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) aimed at clarifying the natural state of the mind in order to recognize it at the time of death. It can be performed by the master or a qualified practitioner with pure samaya, and even by oneself through remembering the principles of this direct introduction or reading a text about it. Basically, this direct introduction explains that one's own Awareness (*rang gi rig pa*) abides as Bodies (*sku*) and Wisdoms (*ye shes*) which respectively correspond to the twofold aspect of this state, namely Emptiness and Clarity (*stong gsal*). When the nature of this state is not recognized, then this twofold aspect manifests as one's conditioned body (*lus*) and karmic traces (*bag chags*).

After the separation of the mind from the body, if the natural lights (*rang 'od*) of one's own state are recognized, then the manifestation of delusion will cease and the pure visions of this state will manifest for five days. The mere recognition of the nature of these lights entails instantaneously reaching Buddhahood. It is so powerful that it is defined as the Secret Pathway of Buddha Vajrasattva (*sangs rgyas rdo rje sems dpa'i gsang lam*).⁴⁴ However, in general, despite the fact that such lights manifest again and again, ordinary beings do not recognize them and thus re-enter the mode of delusion.⁴⁵ Thus, those failing to recognize their own nature at the time of death are taught the instructions on the Bardos, aimed at practitioners of lower capacities.⁴⁶

2-2-3. *The instructions for practitioners of lower capacities*

[1]. At the time of death, the elements dissolve into one another until the air element dissolves into the consciousness. Then, the consciousness dissolves into Clear-Light (*'od gsal*), giving rise to

⁴⁴ This expression is sometimes spelt *rdo rje sems dpa'i gseng lam*, with the compound *gseng lam* meaning direct or short path. In classical Dzogchen jargon, this corresponds to the Lamp of the White and Smooth Channel (*dkar 'jam rtsa'i sgron ma*), i.e., the channel of light (*'od rtsa*) connecting the heart to the eyes. It is also sometimes called the Crystal Tube (*shel bug can*). See *inter alia*, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, *Bee ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud phyi ma*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ They do not recognize them as their own visions (*rang snang*) which is the cause of ignorance. This very ignorance is the reason why delusion arises.

⁴⁶ Pp. 226-227.

a vision similar to a sun shining in a cloudless sky. If one is able to recognize that vision and cultivate some familiarization with it, then one is assured to obtain Buddhahood during the Bardo of Reality (*chos nyid bar do*). This possibility occurs because, at that time, one's consciousness is not affected by karma, passions, karmic traces, and the like. On the contrary, its clarity is sustained by the discriminating Sublime Knowledge (*so sor rtogs pa'i shes rab*) which pulverizes the seeds of delusion. Consequently, the flow of Saṃsāra and of painful rebirths is eradicated and one obtains a complete certainty in the abiding mode of one's true Essence. A similar process of dissolution of the elements and of the arising of Clear-Light takes place as one falls asleep. Therefore, training into the practice of sleep and dream is a good preparation for the experience of the Bardo of Reality.⁴⁷

[2]. This is however not enough. In order to recognize the visions of Peaceful and Wrathful deities appearing during this Bardo, it is crucial to train in the yogas of the Development and Perfection Stages (*b skyed rdzogs*) during one's lifetime. The practice of virtues is also important in order to maintain the purity of one's continuum. One should thus excel in understanding what to cultivate (virtues) and what to give up (vices). This will be of a huge help when trying to cultivate Awareness during meditative equipoise. If one's stability has reached a sufficient threshold, then the manifestations appearing during the Bardo of Reality will arise as Wisdom and this state will simply be experienced as the "Bardo of Wisdom" (*ye shes bar do*).

At that time, the sounds (*sgra*) arising during the Bardo will be recognized as the empty sound of the Absolute Body; the lights (*'od*) will appear as empty yet radiating visions (that one should recognize as the natural display of one's own visions); and rays (*zer*) will arise as various kinds of empty, visionary marvels making up the dynamism of the Wisdom of one's Awareness (*rang rig ye shes kyi rtsal*). During one's lifetime, there are specific secret key points to train in, in order to recognize the display of sounds, lights, and rays, as well as the manifestations of the dissolutions of the elements and the ultimate arising of Clear-Light. This training is crucial for maintaining the recognition of Awareness and its visions during the entire Bardo process.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Pp. 228-229.

⁴⁸ Pp. 229-231.

[3]. The recognition is also possible through the direct introduction to the Body of Perfect Rapture (*longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku'i ngo sprod*) which relies on the use of a crystal. The symbolic meaning of this direct introduction is as follows:

Kye! O Son of Noble Clan, listen! The crystal is the symbol of your body. Its light is the symbol of the Wisdom of Awareness. The Bodies and Mudrās that manifest in various (modes) are the symbols of the hosts of peaceful deities (abiding) inside your heart (now) arising during the Bardo. Their wrathful aspect which manifests frightfully is the symbol of the appearance of the self-arisen Wrathful (deities abiding in) the Conch Mansion. The rays are the symbols of the Wisdom of your Awareness that manifests everywhere. The Essence of these (symbols) is empty, so do not be afraid by them! Their Nature is luminous, so do not be attached to them! Their Compassion is all-embracing, so do not long from them! Recognize this (as it is)!

In this regard, in the reliquary of the heart (within) your own body, the self-arisen Peaceful Bodies always abide according to the triple (mode) of Essence, Nature, and Compassion. Within the Citadel of the Conch Mansion (in your brain), their dynamism (in the form of) Wrathful Bodies always abides in the triple (mode) of Essence, Nature, and Compassion.⁴⁹

If one is capable of recognizing these manifestations during the Bardo, then one will undoubtedly reach Buddhahood as one contemplates the display of these very Bodies appearing within Thiglés, together with their pure realms and so forth.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ P. 232: *kye: nyon cig rigs kyi bu: shel 'di ni rang lus kyi brda'o: 'od 'di ni rigs pa ye shes kyi brda'o: sku dang phyag rgya cir yang snang ba de ni snying nang gi zhi ba'i lha tshogs bar dor 'char ba'i brda'o: khro tshul 'jigs par snang ba 'di ni dung khang rang byung khro bo (p. 233) 'char ba'i brda'o: zer ni rang rig ye shes kun du snang ba'i brda'o: 'di dag kyang ngo bo stong pa yin no: de la ma 'jigs shig: rang bzhin gsal ba yin no: de la ma chags shig: thugs rje kun la khyab pa de la rings du ma bzung shig: de ngo shes par gyis shig: de yang rang lus snying gi ga'u nas: rang byung zhi ba'i sku ngo bo rang bzhin thugs rje gsum du rtag tu gnas so: klad pa dung khang gzhal yas na: rang rtsal khro bo'i sku yang ngo bor rang bzhin thugs rje gsum du rtag tu gnas so.*

⁵⁰ P. 233.

[4]. The instructions then tackle the various Bardo states, enumerating the Bardo of the present time (*da lta bar do*), i.e., the intermediate state of the present lifetime; the Bardo of the moment of death (*'chi kha'i bar do*); and the Bardo of Reality (*chos nyid bar do*).⁵¹ The root-Tantra, which is quoted at that point, says:

*The (Bardo of) the present (time) is the Bardo of Nature. The (Bardo of) the time of death is the Bardo of suffering, i.e., the Bardo of the cessation of deluded appearances. The Bardo of Reality is the Bardo of the arising of Wisdom because (during its course) the pure visions arise once the impure appearances have ceased. Recognizing the Bardo of the arising of Wisdom is sufficient in itself.*⁵²

Each of these three Bardos has specific oral instructions (*gdams ngag*), as stated in the root-text:

*The oral instructions for (the Bardo of) the present time are like an escort. The oral instructions for (the Bardo of) the time of death are like attendants. The oral instructions of the Bardo (of Reality) are like a king coming back to his castle after (travelling) through his own country.*⁵³

The oral instructions similar to an escort (*skyel ma*) are actually illustrative examples (*dpe*), their actual meaning (*don*), and the signs (*rtags*) that are associated with the understanding of their

⁵¹ Here it does not mention the Bardo of Becoming (*srid pa'i bar do*) which is discussed in the next two sections [5] & [6].

⁵² P. 234: *da lta ni rang bzhin gyi bar do yin no: 'chi kha sdug bsnal gyi bar do ni: 'khrul snang 'gags pa'i bar do yin no: chos nyid kyi bar do de ni 'khrul snang 'gags nas: dag snang 'char bas ye shes 'char ba'i bar do yin no: ye shes 'char ba'i bar do ni ngo shes pas chog go:*

⁵³ P. 234: *da lta'i gdams ngag 'di skyel ma dang 'dra'o: 'chi kha'i gdams ngag sun ma dang 'dra'o: bar do'i gdams ngag rang gi yul nas btsan po'i mkhar du chud pa dang 'dra'o:* The instructions like an escort are associated here with examples, meaning and signs (*dpe don rtags gsum*). Those which are like attendants refer to the sounds, lights and rays (*sgra 'od zer gsum*) appearing at the time of death. Those of the king coming back to his castle are not mentioned in the text *per se* but actually correspond to the teachings centered around the recognition of the nature of the visions appearing during the Bardo of Reality. Other teachings on Bardo may use these specific expressions—escort, attendants, and lord or king—with a different meaning in a slightly different context. See rGod ldem, *Bee ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud phyi ma, pas-sim*, which gives a detailed account of these teachings (except those associated with the king).

meaning. The order in which these are discussed in the text is that of examples, signs, and meaning. The three examples (*dpe*) that help illustrate the instructions for the Bardo of the present time are a crystal (*shel*), the sun (*nyi ma*), and a mask (*'dra 'bag*). The crystal symbolizes here the Essence of the natural state experienced during the lifetime; the sun, symbolizes its spontaneous radiating Nature, while the mask is contemplated as a reflection in a mirror in order to illustrate its unceasing dynamic mode of arising.⁵⁴

The signs (*rtags*) refer to the Absolute Body residing within one's heart; to the Body of Perfect Rapture that one sees while gazing at the sky, contemplating the pure realms of the Buddhas; and to the Emanation Body which appears symbolically in the form of pure visions arising after the interruption of deluded appearances.⁵⁵

The meaning (*don*) of these examples and signs is the following one: one's vivid Awareness is nothing other than the Absolute Body of the Buddha. Its Sublime Knowledge (*rig pa*) is the Body of Perfect Rapture, while the fact that the Wisdom of one's Awareness abides within the aggregates corresponds to the Emanation Body of the Buddha. In reverse order, the text further adds that the five lights of Wisdom abiding within one's heart are the Emanation Body; the five Bodies blazing within these five lights make up the Body of Perfect Rapture, while the Absolute Body abides as one's Awareness free from concept and expressed in both Bodies (*sku*) and lights (*'od*).⁵⁶

At the time of death, the fivefold lights associated with the elements divide into a set of impure lights resorbing within the aggregates, and pure lights manifesting as the five lights of Wisdom arising in the sky of Reality (*chos nyid kyi nam mkha'*).⁵⁷

[5]. Individuals who have a weak familiarization with all these principles and who are still attached to the appearances of this world will not recognize the Bardo of the Body of Perfect Rapture (*longs sku'i bar do*) and will in consequence experience the Bardo of Becoming (*srid pa'i bar do*). The following advice clarifies the nature of the three attendants (*bsun ma gsum*) that

⁵⁴ Pp. 234-235.

⁵⁵ P. 235.

⁵⁶ Pp. 235-236.

⁵⁷ P. 236.

were mentioned above (p. 234):

*O son of noble clan! As soon as the breath stops, the pure visions (of the natural state) arise. At that time, the three attendants will come, namely lights, sounds, and rays. The lights are the natural light of the Blissful Ones. They are subtle and wide, luminous and radiant. Their nature is resplendent and equal, like a mirage pulsating on a summer prairie, filling all world-systems to the brim. Do not be afraid by them! The sounds will come from within all these lights, as the sounds of Reality rattling in the manner violent and booming sounds, like the roar of one thousand dragons. Do not be terrified by them! Within the lights will come rays, falling like a shower of blades, streaming up in multiple forms of weapons. Do not fear them! Do not be afraid and terrified by these three (attendants)! Do not fear them!*⁵⁸

Furthermore, the text explains that the visions of the master, of the Yidam and of the Ḍākinīs indeed appear during the Bardo. One should therefore not be afraid by them since they are one's own natural manifestations. It is also important to understand at that stage that all that appears is merely the display of the lights of one's own Awareness. If one fails to recognize that, then one will err in the six destinies of transmigration.⁵⁹

[6]. If one fails to recognize the nature of the lights and Wisdom that appear during the Bardo, then one will powerlessly be drawn by one's own karma to a rebirth in the six destinies. This is the reason why it is crucial to train in the practice of *thod rgal* during one's lifetime, in order to generate a sufficient form of familiarization which will be the actual cause of one's recognition of the nature of the vision arising after death. When this is

⁵⁸ P. 237: rigs kyi bu dbugs chad pa dang dag pa'i snang ba 'char ro: de'i dus su bsun ma gsum 'ong ngo : 'od dang sgra dang zer dang gsum mo: 'od ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i rang 'od do: phra la gdangs pa gsal la 'tsher ba: rang bzhin bkra la mnyam pa sos ga'i thang la mig sgyu 'gyu ba bzhin du 'jig rten gyi khams thams cad khengs nas mer mer 'ong ngo : de la ma 'jigs shig: sgra ni 'od kyi nang thams cad nas chos nyid kyi sgra 'brug stong ldir ba tsam drag la sgra che ba dir ri 'ong ngo: de la ma dngangs shig: 'od la zer mtshon cha'i char 'babs pa ltar mtshon cha rnam pa sna tshogs gzengs nas 'ong ngo : de la ma skrag cig: de gsum la mi 'jigs mi dngangs ngo : mi skrag go:.

⁵⁹ P. 237.

not recognized, then the manifestations of the six destinies appear naturally and for five days one wanders in the path of the five poisons. Visions of gods, semi-gods, humans, animal, hungry ghosts and denizens of hells arise and if one's consciousness engages in one of these, one will assuredly take rebirth accordingly.⁶⁰

While still in the Bardo, one will enter a state similar to a land without sun or moon, where tempests and storms rage constantly. After seven days, one will be carried by one's simultaneously-born deity and one's simultaneously-born demon in front of Yamantaka where one's karma will be examined. Even at that stage, if one recognizes that all this is merely the display of one's own light, it is possible to reach Buddhahood. One should thus train throughout one's life to recognize that all manifested existence is the expression of the dynamism of one's mind (*sems kyi rtsal*). The fact that it appears in this way is merely an illusion which is not established in reality.⁶¹

The last part of the text deals with individual sections containing complementary teachings associated with the Bardo of Becoming. Interestingly enough, these instructions explain that in order to recognize one's errancy in the Bardo, one needs to have beforehand performed some practices during one's lifetime, starting with taking Refuge (*skyabs 'gro*), generating *bodhicitta* (*sems bskyed*), collecting the two accumulations (*tshogs bsags*), performing the meditation of the guru-yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*), and then engaging in the Development Stage (*bskyed rim*) before training in the yogas of the Perfection Stage (*rdzogs rim*). [7-9, 11]. Further instructions deal with initiations (*dbang*), secret key points on the three channels (*rtsa*), samayas, and presenting offerings to the Protectors (*bka' srung*) of Dzogchen.⁶²

[10]. The section on samayas (*dam tshig*) is supposed to explain the Dzogchen samayas which are traditionally explained as

⁶⁰ Pp. 238-239.

⁶¹ Pp. 239-240.

⁶² Pp. 240-249. The instructions on Refuge, *bodhicitta*, and so forth, help in purifying the three doors and are therefore crucial for crossing the Bardo states with a purified mind unlikely to be carried away by its own proliferations, in particular during the Bardo of Becoming. Without such preparations and purification, the deceased is generally swept away by his mental projections running amok, to such an extent that he can't even remember the instructions he received during his lifetime and potentially perform a *post mortem* transference (*'pho ba*).

forming a set of 31 (= 27+4) samayas, composed of 27 samayas which are common with Tantras, and four specific Dzogchen samayas known as: 1. absence or non-existence (*med pa*), 2. unicity (*gcig pu*), 3. immensity (*phyal ba*), and 4. spontaneity (*lhun grub*).⁶³ Rather, the text introduces the following advice (pp. 247-248):

Homage to the Primordial Protector, the Victorious One "Great Orbs of Light"! As to the samayas of the Great Perfection, there are none for the access-to-equality and subsequent-obtainment.⁶⁴ (The only requirement is that) you always contemplate (the visions of) the Wisdom of Awareness and that you recognize that they are not manifestations of delusion. This is the samaya of Passing-over-the-Crest (thod rgal).⁶⁵ Moreover, if one does not practice any virtue, (at least) one should not engage into any evil deed. There is nothing whatsoever to protect or to transgress. If there is a transgression (of a samaya) to protect, then practice virtues.⁶⁶ There is (in reality) neither karma nor fruition of karma. If there is fruition of some karma, then give up the ten evil deeds.⁶⁷ Throughout the three times, there is neither birth or death. If there is birth or death, integrate and contemplate them. There is strictly nothing to meditate upon. If you have to have something to meditate upon, meditate upon the master. There is strictly nothing to be distracted by. If there is distraction, observe the agent that is being distracted. There is strictly nothing to enjoy. If you have to

⁶³ On these four samayas, see Longchenpa, *gNas lugs mdzod*, *passim*. See the English translation of this work in R. Barron, *The Treasury of the Way of Abiding*, Dharma Publishing.

⁶⁴ This means that for the periods of meditation and periods subsequent to meditation sessions, there are no samayas to keep or cultivate.

⁶⁵ There is no explicit mention of those of *khregs chod*, although one may suggest that some of the advice that follow are associated with it.

⁶⁶ I.e., if one experiences the fruition of what is identified as a samaya that has not been protected, then, in order to correct that transgression, one should engage in the practice of virtues.

⁶⁷ *sDig bcu*, i.e.: 1. to kill, 2. to steal, 3. to engage in sexual misconduct (these are the three misdeeds of the body); 4. to lie, 5. to slander, 6. to use harsh words, 7. to gossip (these are the four misdeeds of speech); 8. to harbor covetousness, 9. to generate ill-will, and 10. to cultivate wrong views (these are the three misdeeds of the mind). Engaging in these non-virtuous activities will lead to rebirth among the three lower realms (animals, hungry ghosts, and denizens of hells).

*have something to enjoy, enjoy your mind. Such are the samayas themselves. Samayā!*⁶⁸ Seal! Seal! Seal! Khatham!⁶⁹

The last section of the text is also worth translating in full:

Emaho! How marvelous! Here is the redaction of the Secret Guide, extracted from the Heart Drops of Samantabhadra, according to the Great Perfection. Samaya! “ — In order to point out the essential key points of the Heart Drops of Samantabhadra, its basic source is the Three Stanzas on Contemplation (dGongs pa tshig gsum pa). Its essential instructions are the following two (sets of teachings): the flow of the transmission and the guidance for higher, medium and lower (practitioners). Each has key points (revealing) instructions for practice, and together with the direct introduction, this makes up sixteen mother and sons (texts). Its objects of meditation are the Refuge, the generating of bodhicitta, collecting the accumulations, conferring initiations, the yogas of the Development and Completion (Stages), the samayas, the torma (offering) to the Dākinīs, together with their hundred stages, (making up) twenty-four (sections) and counting twenty-five with the root-Tantra.

For the period of the last five hundred years, when, about to reach the other shore, you are unable to be inspired by the Sūtras, Tantras, and Precepts, and to meditate on the teachings, the Refuge against deluded manifestations, painful sufferings and going unprotected is (made of) these very instructions on the key points (of practice) so melt them into your heart! Whoever encounters them will hold Buddhahood in his hands! Those who shall not encounter them will be like thieves in an empty house. You should not be

⁶⁸ See *supra* note 21.

⁶⁹ P. 247: thog ma'i mgon po rgyal ba 'od phung chen po la phyag 'tshal lo: rdzogs pa chen po'i dam tshig la: mnyam bzhag rjes thob med pa ste: rtag tu rig pa'i ye shes blta: 'khrul snang med par ngo shes so: de ni thod rgal dam tshig yin: gzhan yang dge ba ma grub na: sdig pa ci yang spyad du med: (p. 248) bsrung dang nyams pa gang yang med: bsrung nyams yod na dge ba spyad: las dang las kyi rnam smin med: rnam smin yod na sdig bcu spongs: dus gsum skye 'gag med pa la: skye 'gag 'dug na blang bzhin blta: sgom du ci yang med pa la: sgom du 'dug na bla ma sgom: yengs su ci yang med pa la: yengs su 'dug na yengs mkhan blta: spyad du ci yang med pa la: spyod byar 'dug na sems su spyad: de dag dam tshig nyid yin no: sa ma yā: rgya rgya rgya: khatham:.

*separated, even for a single instant, from these Three Stanzas on the Contemplation of the Buddha. Hold this refined heart-nectar of the Victorious Ones of the three times! Grasp it! Read it! Comprehend it entirely!" The redaction of the Secret Guide is (hereby) completed. Samayā! Seal! Seal! Seal!*⁷⁰

3. The structure of the cycle

The numerals organizing the structure of the cycle have been added for sake of clarity. They do not appear in the original, except for the occasional numbering (*dang po*, *gnyis pa*) without however any aim at being systematic or regular.

The Cycles of Teachings of the Heart Drops of Samantabhadra
(*rDzogs pa chen po kun bzang snying tig gi chos skor rnams*)

[sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs,
vol. 30, pp. 209-250]

1. The manner in which the transmission occurred (*ji ltar brgyud pa'i babs*): 210

2. The instructions on the key points (*gnad kyi gdams pa*) of practice: 210-249

2-1. The oral instructions for instantaneously reaching Buddhahood, for practitioners of superior capacities (*rab skad cig ma*)

⁷⁰ P. 249: *e ma ho: rdzogs pa chen po kun bzang snying tig las: gsang ba'i them s kyi yi ge: sa ma ya: kun bzang snying tig gnad don mdzud btsugs la: rtsa ba'i mdo ni dgongs pa tshig gsum pa: de yi dmar khrid dag la gnyis yin te: brgyud pa'i babs dang rab 'bring tha ma'i khrid: re re lag len gdams pa'i gnad dang ni: ngo sprod bcas pas ma bu bcu drug dang : de yi dmigs bya skyabs 'gro sems bskyed dang : tshogs bsags dbang bskur bskyed rdzogs rnal 'byor dang : dam tshig dam can mkha' (p. 250) 'gro'i gtor ma ste: rim pa brgya dang bcas pa nyi shu bzhi: rtsa ba'i rgyu dang nyi shu rtsa lnga'o: de ni lnga brgya tha mar gyur pa'i dus: mdo rgyud man ngag nyan bshad bsgom pa yi: spros pa mi nus pha rol 'gro ba'i tsho: 'khrul snang dos drag sdug bsngal mgon med skyabs: gnad kyi gdams pa yin no snying la bstims: 'di dang su 'phrad sangs rgyas lag bcang yin: 'di dang ma 'phrad khang stong rkun ma 'dra: sangs rgyas dgongs pa tshig gsum 'di nyid dang : skad cig tsam du'ang 'bral ba'i skabs ma mchis: dus gsum rgyal ba'i thugs bcud dwangs ma 'di: zungs shig chongs shig klog cig kun chub kyiis: zhes gsang them s kyi yi ger bris pa rdzogs so: sa ma yā: rgya rgya:*

la sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag): 211-226

- 2-1-1. Instructions sufficient in themselves (*gcig chod kyi gdams pa*): 211-212.
- 2-1-2. The direct introduction to one's Primordial Wisdom arising as being rootless (*rang gi ye shes rtsa bral du shar ba ngo sprod pa*): 212-214
- 2-1-3. The instructions on the self-sufficient practice training in the innate radiance of Self-Arisen Wisdom (*rang byung ye shes kyi ngang dwangs sbyong ba'i lag khrid chig chod du gdams pa*): 214-215
- 2-1-4. The Guidance explaining how to strike the key-points of the instructions on Cutting-through-Rigidity (*khregs chod kyi gdams pa gnad rdeg tu bstan pa'i khrid*): 215-216
- 2-1-5. The instructions for integrating the Wisdom of (one's) Manifest Reality to the Path (*chos nyid mngon sum gyi ye shes lam du khyer ba'i gdams pa*): 217-220
- 2-1-6. The secret commentary known as the Absolute Quintessence (*gsang ba'i ti ka don gyi snying po zhes bya ba*): 221-223
- 2-1-7. Instructions for reaching Buddhahood without passing through the Bardo (*bar do med par sangs rgya ba'i gdams pa*): 224-226

2-2. The oral instructions for reaching Buddhahood at the time of death, for practitioners of intermediate capacities (*'bring 'chi khar sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag*): 226-227

- 2-2-1. The essential teaching clarifying the direct introduction (*ngo sprod gsal ba'i gal mdo*): 226-227⁷¹

2-3. The instructions for reaching Buddhahood during the Bardo, for those of lower capacities (*tha ma bar dor sangs rgya ba'i gdams pa*): 227-249

- 2-3-1. The secret Path of the Bardo of Reality (*chos nyid bar do'i gsang lam*): 227-229
- 2-3-2. The instructions on the key points of the Bardo (*bar do gnad kyi gdams pa*): 229-232
- 2-3-3. The direct introduction to the Bardo of the Peaceful and

⁷¹ There are no other subdivisions in this section of the cycle.

- Wrathful Deities (*zhi khro'i bar do'i ngo sprod*): 232-233
- 2-3-4. The direct introduction to the Arch-Quintessence of the Unsurpassable Tantras (*bla na med pa'i rgyud kyi yang snying ngo sprod*): 233-236
- 2-3-5. The direct introduction to the Bardo of Existence (*srid pa bar do'i ngo sprod*): 236-238
- 2-3-6. Oral instructions on the Bardo of Existence (*srid pa bar do'i gdams ngag*): 238-240
- 2-3-7. The Lock of the utterly perfect Initiations (*yongs rdzogs dbang gi tha ram*): 240-246
- 2-3-8. The secret list of the key points (*gnad kyi thems yig gsang ba*): 246-247
- 2-3-9. Untitled section about channels (*rtsa*): 247
- 2-3-10. The Samayas of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po'i dam tshig*): 247-248
- 2-3-11. The offering rite to the Protectors of the Teachings of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po'i bka' srung mchod pa'i cho ga*): 248-249

Conclusion: 249-250.

4. *The source of the cycle*

The final section of the *Heart Drops of Samantabhadra* clearly states that the actual source of the cycle is the *Tantra of the Three Stanzas on Contemplation* (*dGongs pa tshig gsum pa'i rgyud*) which is known in its full form as the *Tantra of the so-called Three Stanzas of Buddha Vajrasattva's Contemplation* (*Sangs rgyas rdo rje sems dpa'i dgongs pa tshig gsum po zhes bya ba'i rgyud*). This is a rarely quoted Tantra that was first revealed by lCe btsun Seng ge dbang phyug and then re-hidden by him in mChad pa stag can before it was eventually retrieved by lCe sgom nag po. As far as I know, it is not particularly associated with the tradition of the Northern Treasures.⁷²

⁷² For instance, it has not been included in the large *Byang gter* collection in 63 volumes compiled by Rig 'dzin chen mo and published in 2015 under the collective name of *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*. The Tantra itself exists in three different versions (at least in the material at my disposal): the first one was revealed by lCe sgom nag po; the second one was found by Padma Las 'brel rtsal (1291?-1313?); and the third was retrieved by mNga' ri pañ chen, together with the *Kun bzang snying thig* and the *Padma snying thig*.

lCe btsun himself was one of the most important lineage holders of the *sNying thig* tradition with his revelation of some of the secret precepts of the *Heart Essence of Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma snying thig*). He is supposed to have lived down to the age of 125 and to have manifested the Body of the Great Transfer (*'pho ba chen po'i sku*) at the end of his life. He then appeared in a vision to Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje (1097–1167), exhorting him to reveal the texts of the *Secret Heart Essence* (*gSang ba snying thig*) he had re-hidden since he could not find a proper vessel for his transmission.

According to Dzogchen traditional narratives, fifteen years after lDang ma Lhun rgyal had revealed the collection of the *Seventeen Tantras* (*rGyud bcu bdun*), their commentaries and related precepts, etc., from the Zhwa'i lha khang, lCe btsun was born in Myang ro, to lCe Thub pa'i dbang po and Khyung mo bza'. Then, for several years lDang ma tried to find a qualified vessel for his transmission but could not find any. Eventually, as lCe btsun had come of age and while he was in Mang yul, he met lDang ma and became the vessel of his Treasures. They agreed to meet at a later date so that lCe btsun could invite four scribes to prepare copies of the texts. After lDang ma's demise, lCe btsun moved to the valley of gNubs yul and other places where, for ten years he in his turn looked for a qualified vessel to receive his transmission. Unsuccessful, he decided to divide his teachings into four sets and hid three of them under a fountain in mChad pa stag 'dra (same as mChad pa stag can), a locality of Lang gro county. He entrusted the treasures to the *klu btsan* rDo rje bde 'bar. He then hid the rest of the secret precepts of the *gSang ba snying thig* collection in 'U yug. Thirty years after lCe btsun's Body of the Great Transfer, the yogi lCe sgom nag po retrieved a treasure that had been hidden by lCe btsun in which he found instructions that he was not to spread these teachings but that he should practice them for his own benefit. In general, lCe sgom is associated with the Secret Cycle (*gsang skor*), one of the four main subdivisions of the Precept Series (*Man ngag sde*).⁷³

The colophon of the Tantra according to the gTing skyes edition of the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* states (p. 314) that the text was, as we have seen above, hidden by lCe btsun seng ge dbang

⁷³ See Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje, *gNas 'byed bdun pa*, pp. 213-219.

phyug in mChad pa stag can, and that it was then revealed by lCe sgom nag po.⁷⁴ The version appended to the *Kun bzang snying thig* root-text is even shorter, merely saying that this is a Treasure of mNga' ris pañ chen. The text itself is composed of three chapters, namely:

1. the explanation of the secret pathway of Vajrasattva (*rdo rje sems dpa'i gseb lam bstan pa*, pp. 302-306, fol. 2a-5b),
2. the view of the escort, the oral instructions for the present (*da lta'i gdams ngag skyel ma lta ba*, pp. 306-310, fol. 5b-9a), and
3. the obtainment of Buddhahood through recognizing the importance of receiving the oral instructions (*gdams ngag can gnad ngo shes pas sangs rgya ba*, pp. 310-314, fol. 9a-13a)

Appendix — Comparative table of the contents of the electronic and the manuscript versions

In this table, the first column lists the chapter titles of the *Kun bzang snying thig*. The second one gives the page references of the 2015 edition, while the third indicates the folio numbers of the manuscript version. The contents of the electronic edition have in general more typos and errors than the contents as they appear in the manuscript version. Since it is generally the other way around, the fact is worth mentioning.

Chapter	Electronic edition	Manuscript version
1. <i>ji ltar brgyud pa'i babs</i>	210	1b
2. <i>gnad kyi gdams pa</i>	210-249	1b-32b
2-1. <i>rab skad cig ma la sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag</i>	211-226	2a-13b

⁷⁴ See also Achard, "sGang steng Catalogue" p. 55, no. 324. For the mTshams brag version, see *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag ed., vol. 13, p. 780.

2-1-1. <i>gcig chod kyi gdams pa</i>	211-212	2a-3a
2-1-2. <i>rang gi ye shes rtsa bral du shar ba ngo sprod pa</i>	212-214	3a-4b
2-1-3. <i>rang byung ye shes kyi ngang dwangs sbyong ba'i lag khrid chig chod du gdams pa</i>	214-215	4b-5a
2-1-4. <i>khregs chod kyi gdams pa gnad rdeg tu bstan pa'i khrid</i>	215-216	5a-6b
2-1-5. <i>chos nyid mngon sum gyi ye shes lam du khyer ba'i gdams pa</i>	217-220	6b-9b
2-1-6. <i>gsang ba'i ti ka don gyi snying po zhes bya ba</i>	221-223	9b-11b
2-1-7. <i>bar do med par sangs rgya ba'i gdams pa</i>	224-226	11b-13b
2-2. <i>'bring 'chi khar sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag</i>	226-227	13b-14b
2-2-1. <i>ngo sprod gsal ba'i gal mdo</i>	226-227	13b-14b
2-3. <i>tha ma bar dor sangs rgya ba'i gdams pa</i>	227-249	14b-32b

2-3-1. <i>chos nyid bar do'i gsang lam</i>	227-229	14b-15b
2-3-2. <i>bar do gnad kyi gdams pa</i>	229-232	15b-17b
2-3-3. <i>zhi khro'i bar do'i ngo sprod</i>	232-233	17b-19a
2-3-4. <i>bla na med pa'i rgyud kyi yang snying ngo sprod</i>	233-236	19a-21a
2-3-5. <i>srid pa bar do'i ngo sprod</i>	236-238	21a-22b
2-3-6. <i>srid pa bar do'i gdams ngag</i>	238-240	22b-24a
2-3-7. <i>yongs rdzogs dbang gi tha ram</i>	240-246	24a-29b
2-3-8. <i>gnad kyi thems yig gsang ba</i>	246-247	29b-30a
2-3-9. Untitled section about channels (<i>rtsa</i>)	247	30a-30b
2-3-10. <i>rdzogs pa chen po'i dam tshig</i>	247-248	30b-31a
2-3-11. <i>rdzogs pa chen po'i bka' srung mchod pa'i cho ga</i>	248-249	31a-32b
Conclusion	249-250	32b-33a

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