

Philosophical Contemplations in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Anthology

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Does the mind have an origin? What distinguishes mind from pristine awareness? What is the nature of the universal ground before saṃsāra and nirvāṇa manifested? These are some of the philosophical questions discussed in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection anthology, *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*). This paper argues that these philosophical reflections are employed as contemplative practices in the context of breakthrough (*khregs chod*) and rGod ldem's anthology revealed in 1366 may be one of the earliest sources to incorporate this type of analytical reflection in breakthrough. The paper will first introduce the textual source of the philosophical contemplations, which is the cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*. Then, I shall offer brief remarks on the historical context of these analytical reflections vis-à-vis breakthrough, and lastly, focus on discussing the content of these contemplations, their distinctive philosophical ideas, and how they may be applied in lived contexts of oral instruction.

The Three Oral Transmissions

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's synthesis of the Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*) is presented in the form of three oral transmissions (*snyan brgyud*) that are the core of his huge *rDzogs chen* anthology. They contain the major texts that outline the *rDzogs chen* practices and their related philosophical ideas in rGod ldem's revelation. All other practices and cycles are in a preparatory or supplementary role compared to the supreme Great Perfection practices of the oral transmissions. *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* are centered around the recognition of pristine awareness or the realization *dharmakāya*, and the cycle also contains other *rDzogs chen* practices and philosophical discussion on the nature of reality, cosmogony, and death. *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* discuss the Seminal Heart tradition's distinctive visionary practice, direct transcendence (*thod rgal*), and *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is a scholastic treatise covering a set of eleven topics of

rDzogs chen philosophy and practice. Thus, the oral transmissions present the most quintessential topics of the *rDzogs chen* tradition, especially the Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*), while many other cycles and texts of the anthology feature topics that appear also in normative tantra such as deity yoga rituals, severance (*gcod*), and essence extraction (*bcud len*).

All the oral transmissions are teachings that the three masters of awareness (*vidyādhara, rig 'dzin*), Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Vairocana, are said to have received from Śrī Siṃha in India. Śrī Siṃha is portrayed as an eclectic *rDzogs chen* figure, possessing the essential transmission of the Great Perfection teachings that dGa' rab rDo rje brought to our world from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods, where they had been transmitted by the emanations of the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra.¹ Śrī Siṃha entrusted different parts of the transmission to the three masters of awareness, who transported the teachings to Tibet and unified the transmission again by passing it to the king Khri srong lde btsan, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and other imperial period recipients, as well as concealing it as a treasure unearthed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The format of the texts as oral transmissions, or literally "aural transmission" (*snyan brgyud*), highlights their value as secret, precious teachings passed down in a direct lineage and their experiential character as contemplative instructions given directly to a student.

The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana

The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana lay the philosophical groundwork of the *rDzogs chen* view and how to realize it in contemplation. The paradigmatic topic of the cycle, as this paper suggests, is breakthrough, which is intimately linked to the correct view, hence the robust philosophical discussion. There are also many other topics and agendas such as death and bardo states, cosmogony, distinctive *rDzogs chen* empowerments called analogical introductions, narratives, doxography, and polemical discussion that establishes the Great Perfection as the supreme vehicle.

The doxographical sections of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* classify the cycle as Mind Series that teach especially the *rDzogs chen* view, while the narratives relate how Vairocana studied the teachings of the cycle under Śrī Siṃha in the Nine-Story Palace of Buddhas in India. The association of Vairocana with the Mind Series comes from traditional Nyingma historiography, and some the earliest narratives

¹ *The First Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (*Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po*), *The Unimpeded Realization* (from here on UR) II:473.

of how Vairocana received *The Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series* (*Sems sde bco brgyad*) from Śrī Siṃha are located in Nyang ral Nyi ma 'Od zer's *Religious History* (*Chos 'byung*). Nyingma historiography also associates Vimalamitra with these early Mind Series scriptures as the translator of thirteen of *The Eighteen Texts* after Vairocana had translated the first five upon his return to Tibet.²

The narrative framing in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* contains two layers. The cycle begins with a story from the imperial period Tibet. The three masters of awareness, Padmasambhava, Vairocana, and Vimalamitra, are meditating in the retreat cave of mChims phu, near bSam yas monastery. Encouraged by a vision of seven *dākinīs*, the king Khri srong lde btsan comes to ask the masters of awareness for a teaching that will enlighten a busy person such as himself without having to meditate. As a result, the three masters give him the teachings of the cycle. Embedded in this metanarrative on the Tibetan soil are stories from an earlier time in India that portray Śrī Siṃha giving the teachings to Vairocana such as a parting scene that culminates the transmission:

At that time, the Tibetan translator Vairocana had stayed in the presence of erudite Śrī Siṃha in India from the age of fifteen to fifty-five. He received all the Great Perfection teachings and assimilated their essence. When he was about to go to Tibet, he prostrated to the teacher a thousand times, circumambulated him a thousand times, and offered him five hundred units of gold. He lamented and wept profusely because he could not bear the anguish of separating from the teacher. Śrī Siṃha said: "Karmically destined son, I will entrust you the Great Perfection that I explained before and the pith instructions that have been transmitted orally like a scarf given when departing. You are inseparable from Vajrasattva and Samantabhadra, so do not feel anguish. Come out of grief for the benefit of Tibet! When you pass away, you will hold the teachings of the Buddhas for 1500 great eons." With this prophecy, he entrusted the oral transmission to him.³

² Lopez, "The 'Twenty or Eighteen' Texts of the Mind Series," 51-52. In this article, Lopez discusses the history of the Mind Series from the point of view of the different lists of *The Eighteen Texts*.

³ *Dus der bod kyi lo tsa wa bai ro tsa na lo bco lnga nas lnga bcu rtsa lnga ma lon gyi bar du rgya gar gyi yul du mkhas pa shrI sing+ha'i spyang sngar bsdad nas rdzogs pa chen po'i chos thams cad zhus te zhun thar bcad: slar bod kyi yul du byon khar: slob dpon kyi drung du phyag stong bskor ba stong gser gyi pa tra lnga brgya phul te: slob dpon dang 'bral mi phod pa'i gdung ba'i smre sngags bcu gsum zhus: spyang chab mang du btang bas: shrI sing+ha'i zhal nas: las can gyi bu: sngar bshad pa'i rdzogs pa chen po dang: skyel dar gyi tshul du snyan brgyud kyi man ngag 'di gtad pas khyod kun tu bzang po rdo rje sems dpa' dang dbyer med kyi: yid gdung bar ma byed cig: bod kyi don la songs shig: khyod kyi tshe 'phos nas bskal pa chen po stong lnga brgyar sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa 'dzin par 'gyur ro: zhes lung bstan te snyan brgyud gtad pa'o: The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle*

The narrative contextualization of Vairocana receiving the teachings from Śrī Siṃha is elemental in establishing the Indian origin of the cycle and the character of the teachings as oral transmission. Much of the cycle is presented as dialogues between Vairocana and Śrī Siṃha, which emphasizes the character of the teachings as oral transmissions given directly to the disciple. The narrative introduction of the king requesting for the teachings ties the cycle to Tibet, the familiar ground of the audience. It also sets the stage to anticipate a rare, precious teaching that can engender awakening without extended practices.

Although not named in the text, this paper proposes that the precious teaching resulting in swift awakening is the contemplative practice of breakthrough, which aims at the direct recognition of one's pristine Buddha awareness. Breakthrough is a characteristic meditation of the *rDzogs chen* tradition, originating from the Mind Series.⁴ The negation of practice in the early Great Perfection resulted in the simplest method to enlightenment: recognition of one's pristine, already awakened awareness (*rig pa*). This is the heart of breakthrough, and as the name indicates, it is about breaking through confusion to the recognition of one's enlightened nature.

Instead of outlining practices, the Mind Series literature contains philosophical reflections on the nature of reality together with poetic descriptions and aphorisms. Sometimes the method of recognition is accompanied with instructions on a seated, cross-legged meditation posture, typically the seven-point posture of Vairocana. Other times even the fixed, cross-legged posture is condemned as artificial fabrication upon the natural state.⁵ However, the question remains as to what extent these negations of practice were meant to be taken literally, and to what extent they were a heuristic device to shock a committed practitioner to loosen his fixated grip toward formal practice. Certainly, the later tradition views breakthrough and direct transcendence as the peak of the nine vehicles, suitable for advanced practitioners prepared by years of rigorous practice. However, it seems that the boundaries were more fluid in the early Tibetan Renaissance period and *rDzogs chen* practices were available to yogis without extensive background in sūtric and tantric contemplative training.

Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma), UR II:486-488.

⁴ In *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*, Germano discusses the origin of breakthrough in the Mind Series: "[M]ind series discourse and praxis was transformed in its assimilation by the Seminal Heart under the rubric of breakthrough contemplation" (120), and "The direct transcendence incorporates most of what is unique to the Seminal Heart, while the breakthrough serves as rubric for those older elements of the Great Perfection continuing to play an important role in its new formulations." (146)

⁵ Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*, 69.

The method of negation and deconstruction has a long history in Buddhism, originating with the Sākyamuni Buddha's negation of brahmanic rituals, caste system, and the Upaniṣadic doctrine of the self (*ātman*). Nāgārjuna's Middle Way philosophy and the Perfection of Insight (*prajñāpāramitā*) literature are the most notorious examples of the philosophy of deconstruction within Buddhism. David Germano points out that this deconstructive approach thrives only upon a host it criticizes, and it fulfills an important function of shaking and shattering established structures, thus making room for playfulness, transformation, and generation of new ideas and practices.⁶

This development is evident in the Mind Series' negation of normative tantric practice, which created the space for innovative developments in the subsequent Space Series and especially Pith Instruction Series, culminating in the Seminal Heart and its creative appropriation of tantric philosophy and practice. Thus, we have tantric meditations of generating divine *maṇḍala* worlds reconfigured in the Seminal Heart practice of direct transcendence, the world-creating Mahāyāna Buddhas re-envisioned in the Seminal Heart cosmogony, and the Madhyamaka emptiness reinterpreted as a fertile source of manifestation in the *rDzogs chen* view on the universal ground. Breakthrough, on the other hand, is a more direct descendant of the quest for instant enlightenment through non-conceptual meditation in the Mind Series. By the time of the 14th century, breakthrough had become paired with direct transcendence (*thod rgal*), the latter being ranked as superior. However, the breakthrough recognition of pristine awareness was thought to be necessary for the successful practice of the visionary techniques of direct transcendence. This view is clear also in rGod ldem's anthology, which frequently contains instructions on letting the mind be, so that the pristine awareness can manifest before engaging in the practice of direct transcendence. For example, *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* discusses three non-conceptual letting-be meditations of breakthrough to be performed before direct transcendence.⁷

It is interesting to note that *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is the only source in the anthology that uses the terms breakthrough and direct transcendence.⁸ However, *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* contains the same kind of structuring of *rDzogs chen* practices without the explicit application of this terminology. The text discusses the nature of mind and teaches various types of letting-be meditation that are clearly breakthrough immediately before explaining

⁶ Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*, 69-70.

⁷ For the section on breakthrough, see UR IV:325-336, and direct transcendence UR IV:336-349.

⁸ See UR IV:325.

the key points of direct transcendence such as the three postures.⁹

Similarly to *The Guide Text*, *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* do not employ the term breakthrough, and even classify the cycle as belonging to the Mind Series. Nevertheless, looking at the larger context of the cycle and the anthology itself, it is reasonable to view the teachings of the cycle as breakthrough. Firstly, the cycle contains many Seminal Heart topics, such as death, visionary bardo states, subtle physiology, and analogical introductions (*dpe'i ngo sprod*). Thus, the association with the Mind Series is not to be taken literally but it functions as a tribute to this earlier strand of the Great Perfection and serves the agenda of the anthology to integrate the Three Series in its synthesizing framework. Secondly, *The Unimpeded Realization* is a Seminal Heart anthology that teaches breakthrough and direct transcendence, even though the terms are employed only once. Thirdly, the teachings of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* sound like breakthrough. For example, *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* states:

The followers of the unimpeded Great Perfection assert that the nature of the mind is clear light. Moreover, they say that the appearances of confused mind are blindly swirling. By letting the mind be in the natural state, that which is called the nature of the mind becomes clear. ---

The meaning of self-display is clear within you. Your own light blazes inside yourself. The self-awareness abides in the natural state.¹⁰

The Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana also teaches a letting-be meditation that sounds like breakthrough:

If you wonder “well then, how is the clinging cut, and how does one meditate on it?”, release both the body of confused appearances and the notion of an intellect that meditates, and let your cognition be in the state of *dharmakāya*'s profound clarity without any grasping at all.¹¹

⁹ The section on breakthrough is in UR IV:369-379 and direct transcendence in UR IV:379-384.

¹⁰ *rdzogs chen zang thal bas ni: sems gyi rang bzhin 'od gsal du 'dod te: de yang sems 'khrul pa'i snang ba bun long long ba de la zer ba yin te: sems rang lugs su bzhag pas: sems kyi rang bzhin bya ba de sa ler 'ong: rab 'byor sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba'o: --- don rang snang rang la gsal: rang 'od rang la 'bar: rang rig rang sor gnas pa yin no: The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma), UR II:506.*

¹¹ *'o na 'khrub ji ltar gcod: ji ltar sgom snyam na: snyems byed kyi lus dang: sgom blo'i shes pa gnyis ka phyal gis btang la: chos sku gting gsal gyi ngang la shes pa 'dzin med du tsan gyis zhog cig: dpe rat+na man shel lta bu: don rang lus chos kyi skur yod pas : lus rdos pa can ma yin no: stong pa zang thal du sgom: chos sku gsal ba'i sbubs su sgom: The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud phyi ma) UR II:544.*

Therefore, considering the Seminal Heart character of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, as well as the general context of *The Unimpeded Realization*, it is reasonable to view the breakthrough-like instructions of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* as breakthrough.

Besides Seminal Heart topics, *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* contextualize breakthrough in polemical discussions that aim to establish the Great Perfection as the supreme Buddhist vehicle. The narrative aspect of the argument is crystallized in a fascinating story that describes the conversion of Mañjuśrīmitra, who represents normative Buddhism, by dGa' rab rDo rje, who is a *rDzogs chen* figure. The specific plot of this narrative may be distinctive to rGod ldem: at least *The Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra (Bi ma snying thig)* belonging to *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts (sNying thig ya bzhi)* contains a different version of the meeting of dGa' rab rDo rje and Mañjuśrīmitra. In this version, Mañjuśrīmitra has a vision of Mañjuśrī, who tells him to go to the charnel ground of Cool Grove, if he wishes to attain enlightenment in this life. Mañjuśrīmitra does as instructed and studies there with dGa' rab rDo rje for 75 years.¹²

In *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, Mañjuśrīmitra resides in Bodh Gaya, India, as the leader of 500 Buddhist *paṇḍitas*, or learned scholars, who all resent dGa' rab rDo rje, a new spiritual teacher that had arrived in their domain, because they view his *rDzogs chen* teachings as heretical. After the other *paṇḍitas* have unsuccessfully debated dGa' rab rDo rje, Mañjuśrīmitra agrees to debate him and says: "If I will be victorious in the debate, [dGa' rab rDo rje] is an emanation of a demon, so pierce his tongue and exile him!" Mañjuśrīmitra then loses the debate to dGa' rab rDo rje. The scene culminates in a graphic detail of Mañjuśrīmitra attempting to cut off his own tongue, because he realizes he had slandered the unsurpassable teaching of a Buddha:

[Mañjuśrīmitra] put his tongue on the edge of the knife. dGa' rab rDo rje grabbed the knife, threw it away, and said: "Mañjuśrīmitra, do not cut off your tongue! Accept my teaching! Having differentiated the view, there is nothing to debate in the meaning of the Great Perfection. From now on, meditate on the meaning of the Great Perfection and free yourself from the faults and downfalls of karmic retribution."¹³

¹² *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts (Snying thig ya bzhi)*, V:529-30.

¹³ *lCe spu khri'i kha la blangs pas: dga' rab rdo rje'i phyag gis spu khri blangs te 'phang nas 'di skad gsungs so: 'jam dpal bshes gnyen lce ma gcod: nga yi bstan pa khyed gyis zungs: lta ba la shan phyed pa las: rdzogs chen don la rtsod pa min: phyin chad rdzogs chen don sgoms dang: rnam par smin pa'i nyes ltung bral: The First Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan bryud dang po)*, UR II:468.

Incorporating Analytical Contemplation in Breakthrough

In the narrative of Mañjuśrīmitra's conversion, dGa' rab rDo rje urges Mañjuśrīmitra to “differentiate the view” (*lta ba la shan phyed*), which is a crucial point in the philosophical contemplations. At the time of rGod ldem, breakthrough is not only about letting go of conceptual constructs and recognizing the pristine awareness as in the early Mind Series, but it augments this type of non-conceptual practice with the philosophical contemplations, in which you differentiate (*shan phyed*) the correct view (*lta ba*). In *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, this is done through three types of analytical reflection: (1) investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind (*sems kyi byung gnas 'gro*), (2) distinguishing mind from wisdom (*ye shes*) or awareness (*rig pa*) — wisdom and awareness being synonymous in this context — and (3) differentiating the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) from the reality body (*dharmakāya, chos sku*). While these are common philosophical topics in the *rDzogs chen* literature from early on, some authors such as rGod ldem also discuss them as analytical reflections to be applied in contemplation. The aspirant contemplates these three topics as part of breakthrough, aiming to realize and experience the correct view both through the meditation of letting the mind be and by reflecting analytically on these profound subjects. It is also notable that the view on the mind and universal ground in rGod ldem's anthology contains some distinctive elements, for example, the mind is said to have an origin, dwelling, and destination, and the universal ground is discussed as synonymous with the common ground (*gzhi*) of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

*Is rGod ldem the First Author to Incorporate
the Three Philosophical Contemplations in Breakthrough?*

Seminal Heart works contain different approaches to discussing these three types of analytical reflection. It seems that investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind was the first one of these philosophical topics to be applied as a contemplative practice. This is how it is treated in Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*) that briefly lists it as a preliminary, not of breakthrough, but direct transcendence.¹⁴ As for differentiating mind from wisdom and universal ground from the *dharmakāya*, the same work does not discuss them anywhere in the eighth chapter on *rDzogs chen* practice, but presents them as part of the philosophical discussion on human psychology in the fourth chapter, thus indicating that Klong

¹⁴ *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*), 374.

chen pa did not view them as contemplative practices.¹⁵

In *The Clouds of the Ocean of Profound Meaning* (*Zab don rgya mtho'i sprin*), Klongchenpa presents breakthrough as containing more philosophical reflection than in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*. He discusses investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind both as a preliminary of breakthrough and as part of the actual practice. In addition, this version of breakthrough contains an analytical inquiry into the agent who transmigrates in samsara and into the faulty nature of ordinary mind. After these analytical reflections, the second part of breakthrough contains non-conceptual letting-be meditations.¹⁶ Despite the presence of these analytical reflections, *The Clouds of the Ocean of Profound Meaning* contains neither the meditation to distinguish mind from wisdom nor the differentiation of the universal ground from the *dharmakāya*.

However, an earlier work, *The Blazing Illuminating Lamp*, which is a commentary to *The Tantra of Unimpeded Sound* and attributed to Vimalamitra, mentions the differentiation of mind from wisdom as an idea to be realized in contemplation. The text does not discuss it as part of the pith instructions on breakthrough, but the section on differentiating mind from wisdom contains a brief reference that suggests this differentiation is actualized upon successfully practicing direct transcendence. The text states that the method of differentiation is to meditate in a place where the mind is not distracted and relying on seeing the lamps, which are the result of wisdom manifesting in direct perception.¹⁷

rGod ldem's anthology may be one of the earliest sources where all these three philosophical reflections are applied as part of the breakthrough practice, but more research is needed to ascertain the history of these reflections vis-à-vis breakthrough. In later *rDzogs chen* literature, these reflections are commonly applied as contemplative practices and the number of conceptual pairs to differentiate increases. For example, Jigs med Gling pa's (1730-1798) *Seminal Heart of Klong chen pa* (*Klong chen snying thig*), not only contains the mind-wisdom and universal ground-*dharmakāya* differentiations, but also adds seven more pairs to distinguish, making a total of ten practices that are all to be applied in *rDzogs chen* contemplation.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 229-250.

¹⁶ *The Clouds of the Ocean of Profound Meaning*, Pt. 7, 428-435.

¹⁷ *The Blazing Illuminating Lamp* (*Sgron ma snang byed 'bar ba*), for the method of differentiating universal ground and *dharmakāya*, see II:270-271, and the method of differentiating mind and awareness, see II:272-273.

¹⁸ The ten differentiation practices are (1) mind and awareness (*sems/rig pa*), (2) stability and essence (*gnas pa/ngo bo*), (3) proliferation and dynamic energy (*'phro ba/rtsal*), (4) mode of liberation and key points (*gröl tshull/gnad*), (5) universal ground and *dharmakāya* (*kun gzhi/chos sku*), (6) occasion of confusion and liberation

As for rGod Idem's anthology, we should note that the connection of breakthrough and the three analytical reflections is not spelled out explicitly in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, for the cycle does not clearly state that these philosophical reflections should be meditated on in breakthrough. However, the anthology contains sufficient indications to conclude that these reflections were intended to be employed as contemplative practices. This is also how they were understood in two later commentaries on *The Unimpeded Realization*.

The first indication that these philosophical reflections are to be applied as contemplative practices is that they occupy a central place in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, which is a cycle on breakthrough. Secondly, the discussion is often akin to a contemplative instruction, because the text gives direct advice, such as "identify pristine awareness devoid of the mind."¹⁹ The main indications come from two texts that outline practice programs. *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* lists various preliminary practices for rDzogs chen contemplation, such as the *ru shan* practice²⁰ and exercises involving a Hūṃ syllable. The last preliminary practice is called investigating the mind, and it contains the analysis of the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind. The subsequent actual practice of breakthrough involves looking at the mind with the mind, in order to clear away the movements of the illusion-like ordinary mind (*sems*) so that one can realize the unborn nature of the mind itself (*sems nyid*), i.e. pristine awareness.²¹ Thus, this text approaches the practice of the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind as a preliminary that is practiced just before breakthrough, and the subsequent breakthrough contains the practice akin to differentiating mind and awareness.

The second text that outlines a practice program is *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to this Great Tantra*. The text discusses the topic of distinguishing the mind from awareness in the chapter on rDzogs chen practice just before explaining direct transcendence. This indicates that these reflections on

(*'khrul/grol skabs*), (7) spontaneity as ground and result (*gzhi/ 'bras lhun grub*), (8) original purity as path and result (*lam/ 'bras ka dag*), (9) intermediate state and deities (*bar do/ lha*), and (10) encouragement and pure land (*dbugs 'byin/ zhing*). For a translation of an excerpt from Jikmé Lingpa's *Treasury of Good Qualities* that discusses the distinction between mind and wisdom, see Higgings, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet*, 327-334.

¹⁹ *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*, UR II:500.

²⁰ The term *ru shan* refers to differentiating the domains of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. The practice in this text entails imitating the behaviors of the various inhabitants of six realms as well as deities in pure lands for the purpose of distinguishing the experience of these domains and severing future rebirth in saṃsāra.

²¹ *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* (*Chos nyid mngon sum kyī khrid yig*), UR II:366-370.

the mind and awareness are part of the text's conception of the breakthrough practice.²² It is also interesting that upon differentiating mind from awareness, one practices direct transcendence, which is referred to as "the practice for perceiving awareness directly." It is said to be awareness that dawns from the heart onto the sky, *binḍus* are the essence of awareness, and the appearances of *maṇḍala* deities are the visions of awareness. Thus, after the recognition of awareness in breakthrough, one learns to perceive the visionary dimension of awareness in direct transcendence.

It is interesting to note that two later practice commentaries on *The Unimpeded Realization* include some of these philosophical reflections as part of the breakthrough practice. *The Island of Liberation* by Zur chen Chos dbyings Rang grol (1604-1669) describes breakthrough as centered around the reflection on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind, thus presenting this analytical meditation as elemental in breakthrough. *Fulfilling the Hopes of the Fortunate Ones* by Sprul sku Tshul khrims bZang po (20th century) presents the reflection on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind as a preliminary of breakthrough, while differentiating mind and awareness is part of the actual practice of breakthrough. We should note that the inclusion of these reflections as part of breakthrough indicates only that this is the way they were practiced at the time of composing the commentaries, not at the time of rGod ldem. However, the absence of topics in a commentary does not mean those practices were not taught by the teachers transmitting them, because additional topics and sections may be added in the context of oral transmission. For example, sTag lung rTse 'phrul Rin po che (1926-2015) included these three philosophical contemplations from *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* in the way he transmitted breakthrough in the rDo rje brag monastery in exile in Shimla, India, even though only the investigation of the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind is described in *The Island of Liberation*, which is the main commentary rTse 'phrul Rin po che employed to transmit the practice.

Thus, we see that the later Northern Treasures tradition explicitly regards some of these analytical reflections as belonging to breakthrough contemplation, and the latest commentary by Tshul khrims bZang po is the most detailed and includes the largest variety of philosophical topics. One reason for the less detailed and less explicit presentation of the analytical side of breakthrough in the anthology itself may be the general style of the anthology, which is more archaic and poetic, lacking the clarity of commentarial literature. Another

²² *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to this Great Tantra* (rGyud chen mthong ba dang thos pa dang btags pa dang smon lam btab pa tsam gyis sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud), UR IV:117-118.

reason may be that this analytical approach to breakthrough was only taking shape at this period: the anthology may be one of the earliest sources, where these philosophical reflections are connected to breakthrough.

*The Content of the Philosophical Contemplations:
The Origin, Dwelling, and Destination of the Mind*

The chapter on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the ordinary mind (*sems*) of a sentient being contains rigorous reflection on the questions: Where does the mind initially arise from? Where does it abide in between? Where does it disappear in the end when one attains enlightenment? As a philosophical topic, this investigation is a common subject in *rDzogs chen* literature and appears also in many Mahāmudra works, but the view in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* is distinctive because, surprisingly to a *rDzogs chen* text, the mind is said to have an origin, dwelling, and destination.

The investigation on the origin of the mind reaches all the way to the beginning of time. *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* presents a detailed discussion on the cosmogonic manifestation or “ground-presencing” (*gzhi snang*) and the arising of ignorance in the first moments of manifestation due to the lack of recognition, resulting in a downward spiral of increasingly coarse saṃsāric existence, which is the path of sentient beings. The mind arises from the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) due to this very ignorance and lack of recognition of one’s true nature, so the mind’s origin is the universal ground. As opposed to sentient beings, the nirvāṇic trajectory of Samantabhadra begins when he recognizes the self and other as one, and sees the other, the phenomena that is seemingly out there, as a display or projection of his own self (*rang snang*). As for the mind’s dwelling and destination, in the succession of innumerable lifetimes in saṃsāra, the mind is said to dwell in a body, and in the end, when one attains enlightenment, it dissolves into the body of essence (*ngo bo nyid kyi sku*), which in this context refers to the universal ground.²³

This discussion is utilized to establish the superiority of the Great Perfection over other vehicles, because the other vehicles are said to assert that the mind does not arise from, abide, or disappear anywhere. *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* states:

As for the dharma teaching of the common vehicles, they look for the origin of the mind, and by not finding it, it is introduced as unborn. Looking for the dwelling place and not finding it, it is introduced as

²³ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na’i snyan brgyud bar ma)*, UR II:500.

non-dual union. In the end, they look for the place it disappears to, and by not finding it, it is introduced as non-ceasing. The followers of the unimpeded Great Perfection are completely sure that all the activities of the mind are mistaken. They assert that first, the origin is the intermediate state of the universal ground, so you should identify the ground. In the middle, its dwelling place is in the six realms, and it is confused. However, as soon as the excellent lama teaches the pith instructions in this life, you should abandon the activities of the mind as you abandon poison or like a visitor turns back from a mistaken path. Identify the pristine awareness devoid of the mind! In the end, the place of disappearance called the body of essence is the ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. When the realization thus becomes actual, you will become enlightened.²⁴

It is curious that the view on the mind lacking origin, dwelling, and destination is ascribed to “common vehicles,” while it is actually a typical view in the Great Perfection literature and *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* are distinctive in describing the mind as having an actual source, dwelling, and place of cessation.

Although *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* teach that the mind has origin, dwelling, and destination, *The Unimpeded Realization* contains other texts that present the standard *rDzogs chen* view on the topic. *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* states:

That which is called the mind is merely your own continuum of confused appearances of dualistic grasping originating from ignorance. It is like a cloud or mist covering the empty sky, [or] like clouds obstructing the sky when a hurricane arises. Even if you look for the source, dwelling, and destination, you will not find them.²⁵

The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points also propounds a similar view:

The confused mind is clouded by the co-emergent ignorance. Upon

²⁴ *Theg pa spyi'i chos ni: sems kyi byung sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de skye med du ngo sprod pa yod: gnas sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de gnyis me zung 'jug tu ngo sprod pa yod: tha ma 'gro sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de 'gag med du ngo sprod pa yod: rdzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal bas: sems kyi byas pa thams cad 'khrul par thag rbad kyi bcad do: dang po byung sa yang kun gzhi bar ma do nas byung bas gzhi ngos zin: bar du gnas sa rigs drug tu gnas nas 'khrul kyang: da lta bla ma dam pas man ngag gsungs ma thag tu: mgron po lam nor log pa bzhi tu sems kyi bya ba dug bzhin 'dor nas: sems med kyi rig pa ngos 'dzin: tha ma 'gro sa ngo bo nyid kyi sku bya ba 'khor 'das gnyis ka'i gzhi de rtogs pa mngon du gyur na sangs rgyas par 'dod do: Ibid., UR II:500.*

²⁵ *Sems zhes bya ba ni: ma rig pa las byung ba'i gnyis 'dzin kyi snang ba 'khul pa rang rgyud kho na zhig yin te: nam mkha' stong pa la sprin dang na bun 'thibs pa dang 'dra: sa gzhi la rlung 'tshubs lang te bar snang sgrib pa dang 'dra: byung sa dang gnas sa 'gro sa btsal yang mi rnyed do: The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā (Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig), UR II:366.*

the lack of the source in the beginning and the lack of destination in the end, in the middle it binds itself.²⁶

While *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* specifies the universal ground as the origin of the mind, the six realms as the dwelling, and the body of essence as the destination, the passages above describe the mind as lacking a source, dwelling, and destination. A skillful commentator might attempt to explain this contradiction away by saying that from the point of view of the conventional truth the mind can be said to have a source, dwelling, and destination, while ultimately no such thing can be pinpointed. We may also choose to view this as another example of how paradoxes are utilized in the Great Perfection. However, the most obvious reason for these different explanations is heterogeneous sources, multiple authors, and even multiple editors at work in the compilation of *The Unimpeded Realization*.

Differentiating Mind from Awareness

This investigation on the source, dwelling, and destination of the mind is related to discerning the ordinary mind (*sems*) from the pristine awareness (*rig pa*) or wisdom (*ye shes*). Some texts in *The Unimpeded Realization* speak about differentiating mind and awareness, while others discuss differentiating mind and wisdom. In either case, the content of the discussions is almost identical, indicating that the terms are understood as synonyms in this context. *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* contains a chapter on distinguishing mind and wisdom, both of which are viewed as possible paradigms in terms of human conscious ability, perception, and experience. The mind comprises the ordinary scattered thought processes and perceptions mediated by conceptuality and operating in terms of subject and object. Wisdom awareness refers to the quality of being aware itself, and to the raw, direct perception before the mind steps in and labels the content in conceptual categories.

The discussion on distinguishing mind from wisdom awareness is centered around examining their different abodes, pathways, gateways, essences, creativity (*rtsal*), activities, and results. The abode of the mind is said to be in the lungs, its pathway is the respiratory passage, and gateway is the nose and mouth. Awareness resides in the heart center, flows out via the luminous channel that connects the heart to the eyes, and comes out from the watery lamp of the eyes. It is interesting that the mind is related to the respiratory system and

²⁶ 'Khrul pa'i sems 'di lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pas bsgrub nas: dang po byung sa med pa tha ma 'gro sa med pa la bar skabs 'dir kho rang gis kho rang bcings nas: *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu)*, UR V:329.

breath, as breathing is directly affected by mental states and vice versa. The creativity of the mind is said to be connected to the five poisons, such as desire and hatred that conspicuously influence the breath. It is not surprising that wisdom awareness is connected to the subtle body and its luminous network of channels and *cakras*, as in the Seminal Heart literature the Buddha Nature is typically described as residing at the heart and brain in the form of the peaceful and wrathful deities. The creativity of awareness entails the manifestation of the form bodies: the visionary dimension of the deities' enjoyment bodies or *sambhogakāyas* and fleshly emanation bodies or *nirmāṇakāyas*.

The essence of the mind is said to be ignorance, while the essence of wisdom is the clear, non-conceptual, blissful, empty awareness. The activities of the mind are all dualistically based actions involving a subject and object, self-grasping, and mental poisons, while the activities of wisdom awareness are the feats of the emanation bodies. The results of the mind stem from the dysfunctional character of the mind, illustrated by the simile that the mind is like a crippled rider mounted on the breath and subtle winds (*rlung*) that are like a wild, uncontrolled, blind horse. This leads to thickening veils of conceptuality, latent tendencies, karma, and suffering in the cyclic existence. Wisdom awareness is not connected to breath or conceptuality, and is thus lucid, unimpeded, blissful, and free from birth and death. The recognition of its self-display results in enlightenment.²⁷

Differentiating the Universal Ground from the Dharmakāya

Differentiating mind and awareness is closely connected to distinguishing the universal ground from the *dharmakāya*, which is a prominent topic in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*. Both topics involve discerning patterns and frameworks of unawareness (the mind and universal ground) from those of awakened reality (awareness and *dharmakāya*), and the process of discerning involves increasing reflexive awareness. However, the discussion on the mind and awareness operates more on the level of individual existence as it contains the analysis on their location and pathways in the body, while the distinction between the universal ground and *dharmakāya* is discussed in more impersonal terms, including narratives of creation, Samantabhadra's recognition, and the origin of saṃsāra's confusion. Another difference is that between the mind and the universal ground. The mind, although akin to the ground, functions in the realm of delusion and saṃsāric existence, but the ground is the basis of both saṃsāra and

²⁷ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma)*, UR II:492-494.

nirvāṇa. It has neither ignorance nor wisdom but is indeterminate. The *dharmakāya*, on the other hand, cannot be distinguished from awareness in any ontological sense.

The universal ground (*kun gzhi*) is not one of the easiest topics in *rDzogs chen* philosophy, especially because many prominent Tibetan authors have different views on its nature, attributes, and classifications and how it relates to the primordial ground before the bifurcation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, referred to as the original ground (*thog ma'i gzhi*) or simply the ground (*gzhi*). In general, fourteenth century Seminal Heart authors such as Klong chen pa in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* describe the universal ground in individual terms: it is the receptacle of all the latent tendencies and karma of a living being, and thus closely related to the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*), which is the collection of those latent tendencies themselves and notably similar to its precursor, the *ālayavijñāna* of the Yogācāra philosophy. Klong chen pa's universal ground is very different from the ground, which he depicts as the primordial, cosmogonic, impersonal ground before the trajectories of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa manifest.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, however, uses the terms ground and universal ground interchangeably when referring to the primordial ground of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. This usage reflects the way the terms were employed in the early Great Perfection before the individual universal ground was increasingly differentiated from the primordial ground by the emerging Seminal Heart traditions.²⁸ However, rGod ldem's view is different from the early Great Perfection in the sense that the universal ground is not identified with the Buddha Nature or the nature of reality as it is in the early Great Perfection, but it is neutral and devoid of awakened qualities. It is interesting that a late twelfth century Seminal Heart author, mKhas pa Nyi 'bum identifies the primordial ground not only with the Buddha Nature but also with the result of enlightenment, but the terminology he uses for the primordial ground does not include the word universal ground.²⁹

In *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* in rGod ldem's anthology, the reflections on distinguishing the universal ground from the *dharmakāya* are also employed as a polemical tool to highlight the superiority of the Great Perfection over other vehicles. The common vehicles are said to mistake the ground for the *dharmakāya* due to viewing

²⁸ For a discussion on the ground in the early Great Perfection and the increasing trend to differentiate the universal ground and primordial ground with the rise of the Seminal Heart, see Higgings, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet*, 167-175, 184-188.

²⁹ For Nyibum's view on the ground, see Dalton and Yeshe, "Signification and History in Zhang Nyi ma 'bum."

ultimate reality as emptiness, instead of emptiness and awareness.³⁰ In the Great Perfection, it is understood that both the ground and the *dharmakāya* are empty, non-conceptual, all-pervading, and free from suffering, but the ground lacks the illuminating clarity, wisdom and dynamism of awareness present in the realization of the *dharmakāya*. The Tibetan word for a Buddha, *sangs rgyas* is made up of two words: *sangs* "to be pure" and *rgyas* "expanded". By using a citation from *The Golden Seal Tantra, The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* explain the difference of the universal ground and *dharmakāya* by saying that the ground is pure (*sangs*) because all the afflictions of desire, hatred and so forth have been cleared away, but wisdom has not expanded (*rgyas*). Instead, the *dharmakāya* of a Buddha has both these aspects of purity and expanded wisdom.³¹ To further highlight the difference between the *dharmakāya* and the universal ground, the text contains a long discussion on the *dharmakāya*'s five wisdoms and creative manifestations in the visionary dimension of the enjoyment body, which are aspects not shared by the universal ground.

Tying this back to the first philosophical contemplation, the investigation of the source, dwelling, and destination of the mind, we may raise a question that since the universal ground is said to be the destination of the mind in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, does this jeopardize differentiating the *dharmakāya* from the universal ground? Since the ground is devoid of illuminating awareness and hence different from the *dharmakāya*, why, in the final levels of enlightening realization, does the mind dissipate in the ground and not in the *dharmakāya*?

This question is not addressed in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, but we may speculate that since the ordinary mind is an instrument of confusion that does not ultimately exist, it is ontologically different from the enlightened awareness of the *dharmakāya*, which thereby cannot be the mind's destination. However, the indeterminate universal ground that is devoid of luminous awareness and the ground of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, is an appropriate destination for the mind to dissipate in. The mind arose from the ground due to the lack of recognizing the nature of appearances as self-display, and it dissipates in the ground upon this realization. As this happens, the mind's confusion-creating functions that obscured the *dharmakāya* cease to operate, and the ever-present luminous clarity of the awakened awareness is perceived.

³⁰ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan bryud bar ma)*, UR II:503-504.

³¹ *Ibid.*, UR II:504.

Application of the Philosophical Contemplations

Since it is argued that these sophisticated philosophical reflections in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* were applied as contemplative practices in the context of the breakthrough, it begs the question of how exactly they were applied. The texts provide detailed descriptions, including polemical discussion, but we do not know if this type of scripted reflection was applied to contemplative practice as such. These analytical contemplations may have been more fluid and personal in the lived contexts of private reflection and dialogues between a spiritual teacher and student.

This type of fluidity is indicated by some of the narratives of the anthology, such as *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* that is found in the fifth volume, *The Self Emergent, Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* and describes Ye shes mtsho rgyal's training under Padmasambhava. In this text, the above-mentioned philosophical contemplations are merged under the rubric of investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind. This investigation involves discerning the ordinary mind from the deeper presence of awareness, but without the details of the different locations, pathways, functions and so forth of the mind and awareness. The investigation on the mind also examines the nature of the universal ground as the origin of bifurcation into the trajectories of confusion and awakened awareness. The format is dialogical. Padmasambhava asks Ye shes mtsho rgyal such questions as: "Where does the mind arise from?" or "What is the cause of saṃsāra?" If her reply does not reveal realization, Padmasambhava sends her off to further meditate on the question. The text contains no polemical references, and in addition to the analytical reflections, Padmasambhava instructs Ye shes mtsho rgyal to practice non-conceptual letting-be meditation, or to simply let the mind be, so that the pristine awareness can manifest. When she perceives visions of awareness, Padmasambhava instructs her not to grasp at them, as this would lead to proliferation of conceptuality. Instead, she must apply the watchman of mindfulness and let go of the brief experiences, so that eventually the realization of reality-as-it-is or *dharmatā* will become actual.³²

Another way to apply the philosophical contemplations is indicated in *The Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana*. The text contains a discussion on the presence of the *dharmakāya* in the body as five kinds of vibrant energy (*dwangs ma*) or luminous appearances in the fabulous palace of the exalted mind (*tsitta*) at the heart center of the subtle body, but then instructs the practitioner not to meditate on the *dharmakāya* in this manner, because "you will generate attachment to your body, fall

³² *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points (Zab mo gnad kyī them bcu)*, UR V:324-337.

in the extreme of permanence, and go astray into meditating on conceptual fantasies."³³ Instead, the text gives a simple letting-be meditation that is colored by the philosophical idea of the *dharmakāya* being present in the body:

Release both the body of confused appearances and the notion of an intellect that meditates, and let your cognition be in the state of *dharmakāya*'s profound clarity without any grasping at all. The analogy is that of a jeweled crystal. The meaning is that your own body exists as the *dharmakāya*, so it is not the corporeal body. Meditate on it as empty and unimpeded. Meditate on it as the sphere of clarity of the *dharmakāya*.³⁴

Based on *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* we can speculate that there may be three possible ways that the analytical reflections can be employed in the breakthrough practice. Some of the reflections may be applied more or less as described in the passages of analytical contemplation in *The Middle oral Transmission of Vairocana*. Secondly, as in the dialogues between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal, the analytical reflections can be applied in more fluid ways, assimilating the ideas creatively. The third way of employing the reflections is to create simple, uncontrived meditations based on the philosophical ideas, as we can see above in *The Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana*. In the rDo rje brag monastery in Shimla, India, the analytical reflections are applied as part of breakthrough in a dialogical format that progresses in fluid ways based on the individual needs of a student. Thus, anecdotal ethnographic evidence supports the application of the philosophical contemplations much like in the dialogues between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal.

Conclusion

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's distinctive take on the *rDzogs chen* view and practice is evident in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*. In addition to teaching a simple, non-conceptual meditation of letting the mind just be, the cycle incorporates philosophical contemplation in breakthrough. The contemplations to be pondered upon are the investigation on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind,

³³ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na 'i snyan brgyud phyi ma) UR II:544.

³⁴ *snyems byed kyi lus dang: sgom blo 'i shes pa gnyis ka phyal gis btang la: chos sku gting gsal gyi ngang la shes pa 'dzin med du tsan gyis zhog cig: dpe rat+na man shel lta bu: don rang lus chos kyi skur yod pas: lus rdos pa can ma yin no: stong pa zang thal du sgom: chos sku gsal ba 'i sbubs su sgom: Ibid., UR II:544.*

differentiating mind from awareness, and differentiating the universal ground from the *dharmakāya*. While these topics appear in earlier *rDzogs chen* literature, rGod ldem's anthology may be one of the first sources where these three appear together, not as general philosophical discussion, but as contemplative practices in the context of breakthrough.

Contrary to the *rDzogs chen* literature in general, *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* teach that mind does have an origin, dwelling, and destination. Its source is the universal ground, it resides in bodies in the six realms and finally dissipates in the universal ground. rGod ldem's use of the word "universal ground" is different compared to other Seminal Heart authors and resembles the way it is understood in the early Great Perfection literature. The universal ground has much more personal connotations to Seminal Heart authors such as Klong chen pa, as it usually refers to the receptacle of latent tendencies and karma of a sentient being. However, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem uses the term universal ground to refer to the primordial ground before the separation of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and it is the primordial ground that is to be differentiated from the *dharmakāya*.

Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points, a prominent narrative in *The Unimpeded Realization*, suggests that the way these philosophical contemplations were applied was not rigid but could change depending on the capacity of the student. The narrative presents an example of fluid application of the philosophical contemplations, as it depicts Padmasambhava teaching breakthrough to Ye shes mtsho rgyal by means of both non-conceptual letting-be meditation and spontaneous, situational dialogues inspired by the philosophical contemplations. This type of application is also supported by contemporary ethnographic evidence from the rDo rje brag monastery.

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