

# Direct Introductions into the Three Embodiments, Supreme Key-Instructions of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud Tradition<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction


*Who is the teacher making for the excellent qualities and  
Uprooting all sentient beings' entire host of flaws?  
... It is the all-good buddha nature or Vajradhara, the sixth buddha in union  
Which is continuous throughout all, the ground, the path, and the fruition.  
This teacher as such is perfect buddhahood,  
Primordially uncontaminated by all obscurations.  
As a synonym for this teacher,  
the victor Zhwa dmar pa Mkha' spyod dbang po<sup>2</sup>  
Used the term 'the primordial buddha's great utter clarity'.  
... In the unsurpassable secret tantras it is called  
'Causeless primordial buddha'.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This research was possible due to generous funding from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) for the project entitled "Buddha nature reconsidered: Mi bskyod rdo rje and the post-classical Tibetan *tathāgata* debates" (FWF Project number P28003-G24) supervised by Prof. Klaus-Dieter Mathes and hosted by the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Vienna.

<sup>2</sup> Second Zhwa dmar pa (1350–1405), an important master in the Karma Bka' brgyud tradition. Having been the student and main lineage holder of the Fourth Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340–1383), he passed on the esoteric instructions of the Karma Bka' brgyud tradition to the Fifth Karma pa De bzhin gshegs pa (1384–1415). His *Collected Works* comprise seven volumes in which he covers a broad range of subjects of the philosophical and meditative training as transmitted in the Bka' brgyud pa tradition. Unfortunately, just half of these works are extant today. At least we know about the large amount of his writings by virtue of a list of them provided by the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524). This list is contained in the latter's *Collected Works* (CY<sub>s</sub>) which were republished in 2009 in six volumes. The title of this list is *The Precious Necklace of the Complete Words of the Glorious Mkha' Spyod Dbang Po* (Tib. *Dpal ldan mkha' spyod dbang po'i bka' 'bum yongs su rdzogs pa'i dkar chag rin po che'i phreng ba*).

<sup>3</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>w</sub> vol. 1, 1<sub>s</sub>-2<sub>s</sub>: 'gro ba thams cad la legs pa'i yon tan la 'god cing nyes pa'i tshogs ma lus pa drungs 'byin par byed pa'i ston pa gang zhe na | ... thams cad kyang gzhi lam 'bras bur rgyud chags pa'i sangs rgyas kyi snying po kun tu bzang po'am | rigs drug pa rdo rje 'chang yab yum nyid gsal bar byed pa'i phyir te | ston pa 'di nyid sgrub pa thams cad kyis gdod nas ma gos par mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas pa yin | ston pa 'di'i mtshan gyi rnam grangs su | rgyal ba zhwa dmar pa

hese introductory verses in Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*<sup>4</sup> indicate the essential teaching of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition<sup>5</sup> of Tibetan Buddhism. Embedded in the view of the inseparability of emptiness and compassion, mind as such is viewed (1) not as mere emptiness but as coemergent wisdom or unchanging buddha nature endowed with qualities, yet (2) not in the sense of an eternal metaphysical essence. By making these two points Mi bskyod rdo rje steers clear from views such as maintained respectively in the Dge lugs and Jo nang systems.

Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554) was the eighth Karma pa hierarch and one of the most brilliant scholars of Tibetan Buddhism. To him, the supreme key-instructions of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition are summoned in the so-called “introduction into the three or four *kāyas* or embodiments”, allowing for the integration of all of the Buddha's teachings. Thus, having in mind the importance of this template, Mi bskyod rdo rje composed his *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*. This text, abbreviated with the Tibetan title *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* was the last elaborate treatise he authored toward the end of his life. He started writing this exposition in 1548 at the age of 42 when he was in Mtshur pu, the main monastic seat of the Karma pas in Central Tibet. He completed the text in the following year 1549 in Thob Rgyal dgra 'dul gling in Gtsang Zab phu lung,<sup>6</sup> finalizing it just five years before he passed away in 1554. It covers two complete volumes (vol. 21 and 22) in the *Collected Works* of Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje as they were newly compiled in 2004.<sup>7</sup> A recent publication from 2013 consists of a three-volume book edition.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of this extensive work, when dedicating the merit of having composed this treatise, Mi bskyod rdo rje explicitly states that

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*mkha' spyod dbang pos | gdod ma'i sangs rgyas rab gsal chen po zhes ming 'dogs par mdzad pa'i phyir te | ... gsang ba bla na med pa'i rgyud las | | dang po'i sangs rgyas rgyu med pa | | zhes sogs 'byung ba |.*

<sup>4</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*. The full title is *Sku gsum sku bzhi ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad pa mdo rgyud bstan pa mtha' dag gi e vam phyag rgya*, here abbreviated as KN. KN<sub>v</sub> specifies the 3 vol. edition published by the Vajra Vidya Institute Library in Varanasi, India, in 2013.

<sup>5</sup> The Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition goes back to Sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153), also called the physician from Dwags po (*dwags po lha rje*). By virtue of his students' broad teaching activities, this tradition branched off into a large number of sub-schools. One of them is the Karma Bka' brgyud school headed by the Karma pas.

<sup>6</sup> This place is considered an important pilgrimage site of Padmasambhava and is known for its hot springs. Dorje 1999, 251; see also Rheingans 2008, 145.

<sup>7</sup> *Dpal rgyal ba karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum* 26 vols. Published by Lho nub mi rigs par khang chen mo, Khren tu'u, Lhasa, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See note 4.

he considers it to be a comprehensive presentation of the intent of the Buddha Dharma encompassing the entire meaning of the sūtra- and tantra teachings as they were transmitted in the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition. He even remarks that future generations of practitioners should not have any regrets, thinking that they did not have the good fortune of having met him in person—studying this explanation, he says, equals with actually meeting him.<sup>9</sup> Taking into account these statements by the author himself—and given that at the time he was one of the main lineage holders of the Karma Bka' brgyud school and in his function as the Karma pa hierarch responsible for transmitting its spiritual heritage to future generations—one can justifiably assume that it contains Mi bskyod rdo rje's preferred opinions regarding the view and practice as cultivated in the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition.

However, before going into some points of this treatise, it might be helpful to look at another much earlier text in the Karma Bka' brgyud lineage which appears to be *the* referent for Mi bskyod rdo rje's comprehensive work and deals with the introduction into the three embodiments.

### **Rang byung rdo rje's short** *Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*

This text is Rang byung rdo rje's short *Sku gsum ngo sprod, The Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*, which consists of but 14 to 19 pages depending on the respective edition. One of these editions is contained in Kong sprul's *Gdams ngag mdzod, The Treasury of Key-Instructions*.<sup>10</sup> In the colophon, Rang byung rdo rje is stated as its author and thus it is usually attributed to the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), which is also confirmed by current well-

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<sup>9</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol. 3, 377<sub>a</sub>–378: “Having [the welfare of] the Buddha's teachings and of sentient beings deeply in my mind, I searched for all of the sūtra- and tantra teachings which were well transmitted in the Karma Bka' brgyud, the supreme key-instructions of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud, gathered in the “explanation of the three kāyas and the four kāyas”. In this illusory treatise [i.e., the *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*] I arranged a complex meaning in a few words. In the future, fortunate faithful beings who might think that they have not met me should absorb these *dharma* explanations. Then they should not think that they have not been in touch with me....” *dag gis sangs rgyas kyi* || *bstan dang 'gro la cher bsams nas* || *dwags po bka' brgyud man ngag mchog* || *karma bka' brgyud legs 'ongs pa'i* || *mdo dang sngags kyi gsung rab ni* || *yod do 'tshal ba ji snyed pa* || *sku gsum sku bzhi ngo sprod du* || *bsdus te sprul pa'i glegs bam 'dir* || *tshig nyung don mang ldan par bkod* || *phyin chad bdag dang ma phrad pa* || *snyam byed dad pa'i skal can rnams* || *chos tshul 'di la zhugs shig dang* || *bdag dang ma phrad ma bsam par* || ...

<sup>10</sup> *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 231–246.

known Khenpos of the Karma Bka' brgyud tradition.<sup>11</sup> The text was therefore also included in the *Collected Works* of the Third Karma pa newly compiled in 2006.<sup>12</sup>

One should, however, keep in mind that "Rang byung rdo rje" does not only name the Third Karma pa, but is also one of the common names of the Second Karma pa, Karma Pakshi (1204–1283). Moreover, as for its contents the text is certainly closely associated with the Second Karma pa. Now, either, as commonly assumed, the text was actually written by the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje who then recorded therein the teachings given by the Second Karma pa or it was authored by the Second Karma pa and signed with his name Rang byung rdo rje.<sup>13</sup> The reasons for these considerations are as follows:

[1] First of all, when Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*, the *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, was re-published in 1978,<sup>14</sup> the subtitle says that it is "a detailed exegesis of the *Sku gsum ngo sprod* instructions of Karma Pakshi". Moreover, in the introduction of this 1978 publication it is specified that the *Sku gsum ngo sprod* was "an instruction received in a vi-

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<sup>11</sup> Personal communication between Prof. Klaus-Dieter Mathes and Thrangu Rinpoche in Nepal, April 9th, 2017 (I thank K.D. Mathes for sharing this information). Khenpo Chodrag Tenphel gave this information as well on Dec. 12th 2016 in a lecture on the history of the Karma Bka' brgyud tradition during the "Second International Karma Kagyu Meeting" in Bodhgaya, Dec. 12-13, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Published in Ziling and compiled by Mtshur phu mkhan po Lo yag bkra shis in Zi ling; it consists of 16 vols.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Kapstein 1985, "Religious Syncretism in 13th century Tibet, *The Limitless Ocean Cycle*". In this article, Kapstein proves that the *Rgya mtsho mtha' yas kyi skor* which was also written by a Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje was indeed authored by the Second Karma pa. Even so, it was taken up into the *Collected Works* of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje published in Tibet in 2006. In this article (p. 361), Kapstein quotes excerpts from the *Autobiographical Writings of the Second Karma pa Karma Pakshi*, where it is evident that Karma Pakshi is also called Rang byung rdo rje: "This is the unborn, primordially pure Lion's roar proclaimed by one who is in the future to be emanated by Simhanāda, in the past Dus gsum mkhyen pa himself, at present Rang byung rdo rje." And "I am Rang byung rdo rje, the *vajra*-king, one of great might ...". These are just two examples from the autobiography of Karma Pakshi where he frequently uses the name Rang byung rdo rje for himself. Moreover, (in *ibid.* p. 362), Kapstein quotes Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba who describes O rgyan pa, the student of the Second and teacher of the Third Karma pa. When identifying the Third Karma pa, O rgyan pa is reported to have said: "As my guru's esoteric name (*gsang mtshan*) was Rang byung rdo rje, I will name you just that." Moreover, Kapstein writes (*ibid.*, 362, n. 12): "Significant in this regard is the remark made to me by the Ven. Dpa' bo Rin po che in July 1981: 'Rang byung rdo rje is the name of *all* the Karma pas'."

<sup>14</sup> This re-print published by Gonpo Tseten was based on a set of manuscripts in *dbu med* from Zas Chos 'khor yang rtse in Central Tibet, later on preserved at Rumtek Monastery.

sion by the Second Zhwa nag Karma Pakshi (1206–1282)".<sup>15</sup> That Karma Pakshi was the one who—in whichever way—received the *Sku gsum ngo sprod* instructions is also confirmed due to a list of writings of the Second Zhwa dmar pa mkha' spyod dbang po (1350–1405) where it is remarked that Karma Pakshi received the *Sku gsum ngo sprod* instructions from Saraha, Nāropā, and Maitrīpa.<sup>16</sup>

[2] Secondly, the main teachings of the *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, i.e., the “wheel of reality of the four core-points” (*gnad bzhi chos nyid kyi 'khor lo*) and the “introduction into the three *kāyas*” (*sku gsum ngo sprod*), do not occur in the extant writings of the Third Karma pa as teachings given by himself but clearly as instructions of the Second Karma pa.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad pa mdo rgyud bstan pa mtha dag gi e vam phyag rgya, dbu med* edition, 4 vols. (KN<sub>RM</sub>). See the introduction pages of this publication from 1978.

<sup>16</sup> On the Second Zhwa dmar pa see note 2. This remark is contained in *The Precious Necklace of the Complete Words of the Glorious Mkha' Spyod Dbang Po* (*Dpal ldan mkha' spyod dbang po'i bka' 'bum yongs su rdzogs pa'i dkar chag rin po che'i phreng ba*), in CY<sub>SM</sub> vol. 6, 926.: “As for the series of instructions which derive from the respective lineages there is [1] the path [comprising] the bliss of [the sexual] faculty, that was given to the dharma master Dus gsum mkhyen pa by the King In-drabodhi. [It is] the practice of fourfold principles, a sequence of meditation of key-instructions that liberate the mind-stream in four aspects. [2] There is the instruction of the introduction into the three *kāyas* that was given to the dharma master Karma Pakshi by Saraha, Nāropā, and Maitrīpa. It comprises the instruction manual of the introduction into the three *kāyas* which is connected with the introduction into the dharma that is to be practiced. Along with it [there are] miscellaneous writings [regarding] the introduction into the three *kāyas* ...” *brgyud pa so so las 'byung ba'i khrid kyi rim pa la | chos rje dus gsum mkhyen pa la | rgyal po in-dra budhis gñang ba rnam bzhi rgyud grol gyi man ngag gi sgom rim de nyid bzhi sbyor dbang po'i bde lam chos rje karma pag shi la sa ra ha dang nā ro mai tris gñang ba'i sku gsum ngo sprod kyi khrid la | nyams su blang bar bya ba'i chos kyi ngo sprod dang 'brel ba'i sku gsum ngo sprod kyi khrid yig dang | sku gsum ngo sprod gsung thor bu ba dang bcas pa | ...*

<sup>17</sup> In the *Collected Works* of the Third Karma pa, the term “the wheel of reality of the four core-points” occurs, outside of the text *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, just twice. One occurrence is in the text *Rlung sems gnad kyi lde mig*, authored by Chos rje rin po che karma pa (RD<sub>SM</sub> vol. 7, 264–268) who again is no other than Karma Pakshi. 268<sub>1-2</sub>: “All happiness and suffering of the world of appearances, *saṃsāra* and *nir-vāṇa*, is [a matter of] the dependent arising of *prāṇa*/mind. In that regard and so forth one should know [how] to practice the inconceivable dependent arising of *prāṇa*/mind. Supreme *gtum mo* is to be free from all mental engagements and to be connected with *prāṇa*/mind-Mahāmudrā. Therefore, meditate continuously the wheel of reality of the four core-points. In short, one expels all negative *prāṇa*/mind outwardly and summons inwardly all good ones. One abides in equanimity, in the one flavor of everything without separation.” *snang srid 'khor 'das kyi bde sduṅ thams cad rlung sems kyi rten 'brel yin | de la sogs pa rlung sems kyi rten 'brel bsam gyis mi khyab pa rnam nyams su len shes par bya'o || yid la byed pa thams cad dang bral ba dang | rlung sems phyag rgya chen po dang 'brel pa mchog gi gtum mo yin pas | gnad bzhi chos nyid kyi 'khor lo rgyun chad med par bsgom mo || mdor na rlung sems ngan pa thams cad phyir bus | bzang po thams cad nang du bsdu'o || thams cad dbyer med ro gcig du mnyam par bzhaṅ go |*. The second occurrence is

[3] Thirdly, in the part of homage in the beginning of this short *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, there is first a general homage to the Bka' brgyud masters, followed by a particular praise directed to the First Karma pa Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), and his disciple 'Gro mgon ras chen (1148–1218), i.e., the direct teacher of Karma Pakshi.<sup>18</sup> If the author were indeed the Third Karma pa, wouldn't one expect that these special praises would also be directed to Karma Pakshi and his disciple Grub thob O rgyan pa rin chen dpal (1230–1309) who was one of the main teachers of the Third Karma pa?<sup>19</sup>

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in the text *Bka' bzhi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs*, RD<sub>3</sub> vol. 5, 1-358, where the Third Karma pa speaks about the bodhisattva Rang byung rdo rje's, i.e., Karma Pakshi's advice to his students, p. 119.: "The bodhisattva Rang byung rdo rje gave [the following] advice to the great meditators who are endowed with the two types of knowledge [and were] his students: When one meditates continuously on the wheel of reality of the four core-points which are [transmitted] uninterruptedly in the tradition of the four transmissions [from] Vajradhara, Ti lo and Na ro, the power of *prāṇa* / mind is perfected and Mahāmudrā is realized. It does not even require a moment and one will become the glory of guides of all sentient beings. I [the III Karma pa] too, have meditated continuously on the wheel of reality of the four core-points and have thereby perfected my *prāṇa* / mind. Through this I became able to act for the benefit of sentient beings without weariness." *sems dpa' rang byung rdo rje | gdul byar gyur pa'i mkhyen pa gnyis dang ldan pa'i bsgom chen rnams la gdams pa | rdo rje 'chang te lo na ro bka' bzhi'i rgyud pa bar ma chad pa'i gnad bzhi chos kyi 'khor lo rgyun ma chad par bsgoms na rlung sems kyi rtsal rdzogs shing phyag rgya chen po rtogs pa la skad cig tsam yang mi 'gor zhiing sems can thams cad kyi 'dren pa'i dpal du 'gyur ro | kho bo yang gnad gzhi'i chos kyi 'khor lo rgyun par bsgoms pas rlung sems la rtsal rdzogs shing skyo dub med pas sems can gyi don nus pa byung ba yin |*. The last words "became able to act for the benefit of sentient beings" appears to be a quote of a line in the short *Direct Introduction into the Three Kāyas*: *sems can gyi don nus pa byung ba*. See *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 243.

<sup>18</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, in: *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 232: "I bow down to Dus gsum mkhyen pa and 'Gro ba'i mgon po who matured sentient beings through the actuality of the three *kāyas* and are thus masters who are fully abiding in the actuality of the four core-points of the *nirmāṇakāya*." *sku gsum don gyis 'gro bas smin mdzad de || sprul sku gnad bzhi'i don la rab gnas pa'i || dus gsum mkhyen dang 'gro ba'i mgon la bdud ||*.

<sup>19</sup> In addition, in the beginning of his *Explanation of the Direct Introduction to the Three Kāyas* Mi bskyod rdo rje describes the line of transmission for these teachings, saying that they were transmitted in the Western part of India by the Paṇḍita Vajrakumāra who was no one else but Padmasambhāva, to Tipupa and Re chung pa—all of whom were, according to Mi bskyod rdo rje, but manifestations of Karma Pakshi—and eventually to Karma Pakshi. After having put so much emphasis on Karma Pakshi Mi bskyod rdo rje continues to describe that from Karma Pakshi the transmission went to Grub thob mnyan ras pa and O rgyan pa and from them to Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje. From him to the Rtogs ldan mgon rgyal ba and Rgyal ba g.yung stong, from him to Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje, then to Zhwa dmar mkha' spyod dbang po, Karma pa De bzhin gshegs pa and Rin chen bzang po. From him to Karma pa Mthong ba don ldan, then to 'Jam dpal bzang po and Dpal 'byor don grub. From him to Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho. From his many disciples to Sangs rgyas mnyan pa grub mchog and from him to Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje himself. See *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>iv</sub> vol.1, 8<sub>22</sub>.

[4] Fourthly, the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje, in the very end of his extensive *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*, ascertains the unity of appearance and emptiness, substantiating this with a quote from the *Heart Sūtra* and saying that this is what all buddhas and bodhisattvas such as the masters 'Jig rten gsum mgon, the First Karma pa Du gsum mkhyen pa, 'Gro mgon ras chen, Karma Pakshi etc. teach.<sup>20</sup> He does not specifically refer to the Third Karma pa either, but names explicitly masters up to and including the Second Karma pa, Karma Pakshi, and names the third Karma pa just as one of those eminent masters who continued to uphold this transmission. And finally, in his concluding verses, when praising the Tibetan forefathers of the Bka' brgyud lineage, Mi bskyod rdo rje directs his prayers to the First Karma pa Dus gsum mkhyen pa, 'Gro mgon ras pa, Rgyal ba bsod nams rdo rje, and the siddha Karma Pakshi. He does at that point again not mention the

<sup>20</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>w</sub> vol. 3, 375<sub>1</sub>-376<sub>1</sub>: "Through the equality of existence and nonexistence that is free from all real existence and nonexistence, the mind which is the inseparability of emptiness and compassion free from obscurations and its appearances which do not have a different substance from that, these two—even though they are in no way established as *the* phenomena of *samsāra* and *nirvāna*, as entities and nonentities which [respectively] have obscurations and no [obscurations]—are to be understood as the sameness of the unity of male and female (*yab yum*), as the two aspects of the appearance of existence and the emptiness of nonexistence respectively with form and without form. This meaning is also [contained] in the mother of victors: 'Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not something different from form. Form is not something different from emptiness.' Thus, the ever increasing, inexhaustible great ocean of the mysterious inconceivable speech of all buddhas, bodhisattvas, viras, dakinīs and dharma protectors of all the worlds of the ten directions such as the *dharmacakra* of the ultimate single intent of sūtras and tantras that was perfectly turned by the glorious 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po, i.e., the glorious 'Bri khung pa skyob pa rin po che, as well as [the teachings] of Dus gsum mkhyen pa, the essence of the Bhagavān Simhanāda, of 'Gro mgon ras pa, father and son, and of the supreme siddha Karma Pakshi etc., I [hereby] established to be of one flavor reaching to the end of the *dharmadhātu* and the element of space." *yod med bden pa thams cad dang bral ba'i yod med mnyam pa nyid kyis sgrub bral stong pa nyid dang snying rje dbyer med kyi sems dang de'i snang ba rdzas tha dad med pa de gnyis sgrub bcas yod med kyi dngos po dang dngos po med pa'i 'khor 'das kyi chos gang du'ang ma grub kyang yod pa dang med pa'i snang ba dang stong pa'i cha gnyis so sor rnam pa dang bcas pa dang rnam pa med par yab yum zung 'jug mnyam pa nyid du gcig go bya ba'i don te | don 'di rgyal ba'i yul las kyang | gzugs stong pa'o || stong pa nyid gzugs so || gzugs las kyang stong pa nyid gzhan ma yin no || stong pa nyid kyang gzugs gzhan ma yin no || zhes mdo sngags mthar thug dgongs pa gcig pa'i chos 'khor rgyal ba 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po 'bri khung pa skyob pa ring po che dpal gyi legs par bskor pa dang | bjom ldan 'das seng ge sgra'i ngo bo dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa dang || 'gro mgon ras pa yab sras grub mchog karma pakshi la sogs te phyogs bcu'i zhing rab 'byams kyi sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' dpa' bo mkha' 'gro chos skyong srung ma thams cad kyi gsung gig sang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i ngang tshul gyi rgya mtsho chen po 'dzad du med par 'phel ba dang bcas ten am mkha'i khams dang chos kyi dbyings kyi mtha tugs par rog cig pa nyid du grub pa yin no |.*

Third Karma pa explicitly.<sup>21</sup> Thus it appears, that to the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje, the Second Karma pa Karma Pakshi was the source for the short *Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*.

As for the teachings contained in this short *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, Kong sprul (1813–1899) says in his description of the “Eight Great Conveyances of Practice Traditions” (*sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*):

The glorious Karma pa matured and liberated beings by means of the “wheel of reality of the four points” and the “introduction into the three *kāyas*”.<sup>22</sup>

He does not specify which Karma pa he means, but when we look in the *Collected Works* of the Third Karma pa, his biography of Karma Pakshi has the title *Bla ma rin po che'i rnam thar | karma pa'i rnam thar*, which might indicate that he used the name Karma pa in particular to refer to the Second Karma pa, Karma Pakshi.

In his *Treasury of Knowledge*, Kong sprul also explains in the context of describing the path of liberation of Mahāmudrā that “the Karma pa emphasized the introduction into the three embodiments”<sup>23</sup> and he relates this to a *vajra*-song by Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1012–1097) where the latter gives a very concise introduction into the three embodiments through three analogies. Kong sprul says:

The glorious Karma pa Rang byung rol pa'i rdo rje, the future sixth Buddha Lion's Roar in person, the one who abides in a bodhisattva's conduct, has impartially turned the wheel of reality of the four core-points [and] of the enlightened body, speech, and mind and has taught uninterruptedly in the three times the magical display of practice pervading all pure realms. The root of all the gateways to dharma practice [taught thereby] is:

[1] For people of lesser aptitude the four preliminary practices by virtue of which the mind-stream is trained.

[2] For people with moderate capacity it is four[fold], (a) the core-point of the body, (b) the core-point of winds, i.e., *prāṇāyāma*, (c) the core-point of the mind through focusing, and (d) the core-point of physical training, i.e., yogic pos-

<sup>21</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>w</sub> vol. 3, 377.: *dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa dang || 'gro mgon sangs rgyas grags pa che | rgyal ba bsod nams rdo rje dang || grub thob karma pakshi sogs || bka' brgyud byin rlabs nus pa yi || rtogs ldan bla ma'i mdzad phrin yin ||*.

<sup>22</sup> *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 18, 431-432.: *dpal karma pas gnad bzhi chos nyid kyi 'khor lo dang sku gsum ngo sprod kyi gdams pas smin grol mdzad |*. See also Kapstein 2007, 117.

<sup>23</sup> *Shes bya kun khyab* vol. 3, 391.: *karma pa yis sku gsum ngo sprod ... rtsal du bton |*.



tures. The root for all four is taught to be the yoga of *gtum mo*, i.e., bliss and warmth.

[3] People with best acumen are fully guided on the instantaneous path through Mahāmudrā, the introduction into the three embodiments.

Moreover, [Mar pa,] with the analogy—“in the ground floor of Pullahari, the continuous rain of the *nirmāṇakāya* falls”—gave the introduction into the *nirmāṇakāya* connected with conventional bodhicitta. With the analogy—“in the middle story of Pullahari, the *sambhogakāya* is indicated by a symbol”—he gave the introduction into the *sambhogakāya* connected with *prāṇāyāma*. [And he] gave the introduction into Mahāmudrā, the *dharmakāya*, infinite realization, the practice of self-arisen wisdom, connected with the core-point of abiding in the innate, that which cannot be indicated with symbols and is beyond words. It is said that if this series is practiced even for just seven days prior to one’s death, it is without doubt that the level of Vajradhara will be achieved.<sup>24</sup>

Let us have a short look at the structure and content of Rang byung rdo rje’s short text *The Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments* which deals with exactly these points that, as pointed out above, Mar pa is said to have taught to his students. It consists of three parts, [1] the preliminaries, [2] the “wheel of reality of the four core-points”, and [3] the “introduction into the three embodiments”.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Shes bya kun khyab* vol. 3, 391.-392.: *ma byon sangs rgyas drug pa seng ge’i sgra nyid byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la gnas pa dpal ldan karma pa rang byung rol pa’i rdo rjes sku gsum thugs gnad bzhi chos nyid kyi ’khor lo phyogs med du bskor nas grub pa’i cho ’phrul zhing khams kun tu khyab pa dus gsum rgyun chad med par ston pa’i chos sgo thams cad kyi rtsa ba ni | gang zag blo dman pa rnams sngon du ’gro ba’i chos bzhis rgyud sbyong ba dang | dbang po ’bring rnams la bca’ ba lus kyi gnad | srog rtsol rlung gi gnad | dmigs pas sems kyi gnad | lus sbyong ’khrul ’khor gnad bzhi dang | bzhi ka’i rtsa ba bde drod gtum mo’i rnal ’byor bcas ston cing | dbang po rab tu gyur pa rnams la sku gsum ngo sprod phyag rgya chen po cig car ba’i lam la yang dag par ’khrid par mdzad do | de’ang | pulla ha ri’i ’og khang du || sprul sku thogs med char rgyun ’bebs || zhes pa’i brdas mtshon pa kun rdzob byang sems dang ’brel ba skrul sku’i ngo sprod || pulla ha ri’i bar khang du || longs spyod rdzogs sku brda yis mtshon || ces pa’i brdas mtshon pa srog rtsol dang ’brel ba longs sku’i ngo sprod | brda yis mi mtshon cing tha snyad las ’das pa gnyug ma rang bzhag gi gnad dang ’brel ba chos sku’i ngo sprod pa’i phyag rgya chen po rtoqs pa rab ’byams rang byung ye shes nyams su blangs pa’i rim pa ’di nyid ’chi kar zhag bdun tsam bsgoms pas kyang gdon mi za bar rdo rje ’chang gi sa brnyes par gsungs so |. The above-mentioned Khenpo Chodrag Tenphel also mentioned during his lecture on the history of the Karma Bka’ brgyud tradition during the “Second International Karma Kagyu Meeting” in Bodhgaya on Dec. 12th 2016 that the *Sku gsum ngo sprod* is a short commentary on this *vajra*-song by Mar pa and that Mi bskyod rdo rje’s *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* is a long commentary on it.*

<sup>25</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, in: *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 232.-233.: “Here, the [enlightened] body, speech, and mind of all Bka’ brgyud teachers, the instruction “intro-

[Ad 1] The preliminaries for adepts with lesser capacities comprising four practices, all closely connected with *guru yoga*, are:

- (1) Turning toward the attainment of awakening and developing *bodhicitta*.
- (2) Meditating on Vajrasattva for purification.
- (3) Practicing the *maṇḍala*-offerings for generating merit.
- (4) Practicing *guru yoga* for quickly receiving spiritual support.

[Ad 2] The “wheel of reality of the four core-points” for people of moderate capacity consists of:

- (1) The core-point of the body, i.e., establishing oneself in the vajra-position, leaving the speech natural without talking, and abiding naturally in mind's nature, the sphere of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*), neither rejecting nor involving oneself in the appearances of the six senses.
- (2) The core-point of devotion in the context of *guru yoga*. One imagines Vajradhara encircled by all Bka' brgyud bla mas, embodying all buddhas of the three times and requests the highest siddhis of *mahāmudrā*. Then the adept imagines that all Bka' brgyud bla mas dissolve into Vajradhara who dissolves into the meditator. It is emphasized that one should not meditate on the *bla ma* as a human person, but as Vajradhara.
- (3) The core-point of the winds associated with *prāṇāyāma*. These methods are also combined with *guru yoga* practice.
- (4) The “root” practice of the “four wheels”, i.e., the instruction on *gtum mo* based in Vajrayoginī practice.

[Ad 3] The direct “introduction into the three *kāyas*”, *nirmāṇakāya*, the *sambhogakāya*, and the *dharmakāya*.

- (1) First the text gives a meditation instruction associated with Buddha Śākyamuni meant to introduce the adept into the

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duction into the three *kāyas*”, which is fully complete with all [exercises] such as the “wheel of reality of the four core-points”, consists of three [parts]: For people of lesser aptitude the “four preparatory *dharmas*”, for people with moderate capacity the “wheel of reality of the four core-points”, and for people with highest acumen the “introduction into the three *kāyas*”, i.e., the key-instructions for those who [practice] *mahāmudrā* instantaneously. Thereby this instruction, the “introduction into the three *kāyas*” is the root of all *dharma*, the actual point of all key-instructions, the genuine teaching for individuals of highest capacity who [progress] instantaneously.” *'dir bka' brgyud bla ma thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs gnad bzhi chos nyid kyi 'khor lo la sogs pa thams cad yongs su rdzogs pa'i sku gsum ngo sprod kyi gdams ngag 'di la | gang zag blo dman pa rnams la sngon du 'gro ba'i chos bzhi dang | gang zag dbang po 'bring po la gnad bzhi chos nyid kyi 'khor lo dang | gang zag dbang po rab tu gyur pa rnams la sku gsum ngo sprod phyag rgya chen po cig char ba'i man ngag dang gsum mo | de yang sku gsum ngo sprod kyi gdams ngag 'di ni | chos thams cad kyi rtsa ba | man ngag thams cad kyi dngos gzhi | dbang po yang rab cig char ba'i dam chos yin |.*

*nirmāṇakāya*. The text relates this to Mar pa's "in the ground floor of Pullahari, the continuous rain of the *nirmāṇakāya* falls".<sup>26</sup>

- (2) The following instruction concerns a meditation associated with Avalokiteśvara, meant to introduce the adept into the *sambhogakāya*. The text relates this to "in the middle story of Pullahari, the *sambhogakāya* is indicated by a symbol".<sup>27</sup>
- (3) The last instruction regarding the *dharmakāya* is said to be for those of highest capacities; it is "the actual introduction of the core points of integrating the practice, the essence of all".<sup>28</sup> Here Mar pa's song is not explicitly referred to, meaning wise, however, they are similar.<sup>29</sup>

This overview of the short *Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments* shows that the instructions are entirely practice oriented. They are presented in a gradual series, recommending preliminary practices and in particular the meditation of *guru yoga* on Vajradhara as the basis for the more advanced stages. The practice of the Buddhist tantras, in particular of *gtum mo* in connection with Vajrayoginī practice is recommended for practitioners of moderate capacity while the direct introduction into mind's nature as the *dharmakāya* is meant for those of highest acumen thus reflecting the type of Mahāmudrā instructions as taught by Sgam po pa, one of the founding fathers of this transmission. Kong sprul later referred to this as "essence-Mahāmudrā".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, in: *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 241.-242.: "This kind of meditation [corresponds to] the meaning of 'in the ground floor of Pullahari the continuous rain of the *nirmāṇakāya* falls'" *de ltar du bsgom pa ni | pu- la ha ri'i og khang du sprul sku thogs med char rgyun 'bebs bya ba'i don do |* - text: su.

<sup>27</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, in: *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 242.-243.: "This [corresponds to] the meaning of 'in the middle story of Pullahari the *sambhogakāya* is indicated by a symbol'" *pu- la ha ri'i bar khang longs spyod rdzogs sku brda yis mtshon |* - text: su.

<sup>28</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, in: *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 243.: *thams cad kyi ngo bo nyams su len pa'i gnad gdams ngag thams cad kyi dngos gzhi*.

<sup>29</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, in: *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 243.-245..

<sup>30</sup> *Shes bya kun khyab* vol. 3, 381.-389.. "In general, there are three, the system of the sūtras, of the tantras and of the essence. ... As for the third, the system of the essence: When the essential *vajra*-wisdom descends, the maturation and liberation of those of highest acumen occurs in one moment. *spyir ni mdo sngags snying po'i lugs gsum ... gsum pa snying po'i lugs ni | snying po rdo rje ye shes 'bebs pa yis | | dbang rab smin grol dus gcig 'byung ba'o | |*.

**Theg mchog rdo rje's concise *Instructions on  
the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments***

It should also be mentioned that there is yet another extant Karma Bka' brgyud work on this topic with the title *Instructions on the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments, the Profound Teaching of the Glorious Karma pa, the Perfect Buddha*. (Tib. *Rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas dpal karma pa'i zab chos sku gsum ngo sprod kyi gdams pa*). It was authored by the Fourteenth Karma pa Theg mchog rdo rje (1798–1868). Just as the short *Sku gsum ngo sprod*, it is also contained in vol. 9 of Kong sprul's *Gdams ngag mdzod*<sup>31</sup> and comprises but six folios. Very succinctly, the author explains the “wheel of reality of the four core-points” and the “introduction into the three embodiments” which are the central teachings of Rang byung rdo rje's short *Sku gsum ngo sprod*. He concludes by saying that all phenomena are but mind and that everything is the inseparability of appearance and emptiness. He says that detailed instructions on this should be obtained from the various medium, lengthy and extensive writings on this topic composed by previous Bka' brgyud masters and that he wrote this text according to a manuscript of Karma chags med rin po che (17th c.) which the latter in turn wrote based on the root text of the master Rang byung rdo rje.<sup>32</sup> With this remark it is clear, that for the Fourteenth Karma pa, the direct reference for this teaching on the three *kāyas* is Rang byung rdo rje's short *Sku gsum ngo sprod* rather than Mar pa's *vajra*-song. Moreover, it points to the existence of more commentaries on this topic within the Bka' brgyud school, which today no longer seem to be extant. At this point it should also be mentioned that the extensive *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* by the Eighth Karma pa also does not contain any direct reference to Mar pa's *vajra*-song. Let us now turn to this comprehensive treatise by Mi bskyod rdo rje.

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<sup>31</sup> *Gdams ngag mdzod* vol. 9, 247-253.

<sup>32</sup> *Rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas dpal karma pa'i zab chos sku gsum ngo sprod kyi gdams pa*, in: *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 9, (247-253), 253.: “In short all phenomena are but mind as such ... everything is the inseparability of appearance and emptiness ... details should be understood from the various medium lengthy and extensive writings of the previous Bka' brgyud pas. This was written according to the manuscript of Karma chags med rin po che on the teaching of the master Rang byung rdo rje which is the root.” *mdor na chos kun sems nyid kho na'i phyir ... thams cad snang stong dbyer med kho nar ... zhib ba ni bka' brgyud gong ma dag gi khrid yig rgyas 'bring du ma bzhugs pa rnam las rtogs par bya'o | 'di ni rtsa ba rje rang byung rdo rje'i gsung nyid la karma chags med rin po che'i zin bris bzhiin bris pa ste |*.

**Mi bskyod rdo rje's extensive *Explanation of  
the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments***

In his *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*, Mi bskyod rdo rje takes up these instructions and puts them into the context of the theory and practice of the entire Buddhist path. First, he presents the transmission lineage for these teachings, emphasizing that they were transmitted in the Western part of India by the Paṇḍita Vajrakumāra, who was no one else but Padmasambhāva, to Tipupa and Re chung pa—all of whom were, according to Mi bskyod rdo rje, but manifestations of Karma Pakshi—and eventually to Karma Pakshi himself. From Karma Pakshi the transmission went to Grub thob mnyan ras pa and O rgyan pa and from them to the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje. It continued through the Karma Bka' brgyud tradition up to Sangs rgyas mnyan pa his root-guru from whom Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje received these teachings.<sup>33</sup>

After this, Mi bskyod rdo rje proceeds to briefly discuss the so-called lower vehicle on just a few pages, followed by a more detailed presentation of the causal Pāramitāyāna and a very elaborate explanation of the resultant Tantrayāna. Thus, the emphasis clearly lies on the latter. In the three volume edition of 2013, about six pages deal with the so-called lower vehicle, 180 pages are dedicated to the explanation of the Pāramitāyāna, and about 1.250 pages describe the Tantrayāna.

In the *sūtric* section, he presents the Pāramitāyāna from the perspective of conventional and ultimate bodhicitta. While the first is discussed succinctly, ultimate bodhicitta is explained in more detail by ascertaining bondage and liberation from the perspective of the two truths presented mainly according to the teaching systems of Atiśa (982-1054) and Śavaripa. Mi bskyod rdo rje fully endorses their views and emphasizes the importance of understanding the unity of the two truths. In this regards, he explains for example:

Even though *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, thoughts and the *dharma-kāya*, kernel and the husk, are [respectively] two, they are sameness. As is said: “*saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* do not exist as two [entities]. Thus, when one perfectly knows *saṃsāra*, it is said that one knows *nirvāṇa*.”<sup>34</sup> ... From the perspective that they [i.e., the two truths / *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*] are not established, earlier masters spoke in different ways about “the sameness of the two truths”, “the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*”, “the unity of phenomena and the nature of

<sup>33</sup> See *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol.1, 8<sub>2b</sub>.

<sup>34</sup> Mahākauśalya Lakṣmī's \**Pañcakramaṭīkā-kramārtha-prakāśikā-nāma*. D 1842, vol. 37, 269b.

phenomena”, “thoughts are *dharmakāya*”, “the vivid conventional integrated as the true nature of phenomena” etc. Those [merely] famed as good Tibetan meditators did not understand this key-point. The two truths do not exist as two distinct truths in their own right. When one is not aware of one’s own [nature] this is the time of delusion, i.e., the conventional [truth]. When one is aware of one’s own [nature] this is the time of non-delusion, i.e., the ultimate [truth]. Because there is but this difference, these two are of one essence which is the unity of the two truths. The expression saying that the two truths are like the front and back of a hand [comes from] a mind affected by a huge mistaken perception and is therefore more remote from [Buddhism] than [views maintained] by non-Buddhists.<sup>35</sup>

On the question “Is the absolute mind of full awakening which realizes all phenomena to be pure, that domain of the personally realized awareness of Noble Ones, not established as ultimate truth?”,<sup>36</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje answers:

[No], because such awakening is just a convention of mere words and mere signs. [And], because when it does not even exist as conventional truth, how should it be established as ultimate truth?<sup>37</sup>

Concerning the realization of the three embodiments, Mi bskyod rdo rje points out that generally, generating conventional bodhicitta contributes to the realization of the *nirmāṇakāya* and the *sambhogakāya*, while accomplishing ultimate bodhicitta allows for the realization of the *dharmakāya*. In a later section of the text, however—stressing the

<sup>35</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>vv</sub> vol. 1, 98<sub>2</sub>-99<sub>2</sub> and 100<sub>2</sub>: ‘khor ba dang myang ‘das rnam rtog dang chos sku’i snying po dang shun pa gnyis kyang mnyam pa nyi do || ‘khor ba dang ni mya ngan ‘das || gnyis su yod pa ma yin te || ‘khor ba yongs su shes pa na || mya ngan ‘das shes brjod pa yin || zhes dang | ... bden gnyis mnyam nyid dang ‘khor ‘das dbyer med dang | chos can chos nyid zung ‘jug dang | rnam rtog chos sku dang | kun rdzob lam me ba ‘di dag chos nyid du bkrong nge ba sogs du mar sngon gyi slob dpon chen po rnam kyis gsungs pa la | bod kyi sgom bzang por grags pa rnam kyis gnad ‘di blo bar ma khums nas bden gnyis rang bden pa zhiq so sor gnyis su med par rang gis rang ma rig nas ‘khrul dus kun rdzob | rang gis rang rig nas ma ‘khrul ba’i dus don dam ste khyad par de tsam las med pa’i phyir | de gnyis ngo bo gcig pa bden gnyis zung ‘jug yin te | bden gnyis lag pa’i lto rgyab bzhin zhes smra ba de ni log pa’i shes pa chen pos rgyud bsad pa’i phyi rol pa las kyang phyi rol pa’o || |.

<sup>36</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>vv</sub> vol. 1, 104<sub>3</sub>: chos thams cad rnam dag tu rtogs pa’i mgnon par byang chub pa’i blo don dam ‘phags pa rnam kyi so so rang rig pa’i spyod yul can de nyid de ltaq don dam pa’i bden par grub bam zhe na |.

<sup>37</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>vv</sub> vol. 1, 104<sub>3</sub>: de lta bu’i byang chub de ni ming tsam brda’ tsam gyi kun rdzob nyid kyi phyir | kun rdzob bden par yang ma grub na don dam bden par lta ga la yang grub pa’i phyir |.

inseparability of the accumulations and the buddha embodiments—he specifies, how this should be understood:

The embodiment of reality (*dharmakāya*) is *primarily* attained through the accumulated virtue of the store of wisdom regarding ultimate truth, objects of knowledge as they really are. On the other hand, the form embodiments (*rūpakāya*) are attained *mainly* through the accumulation of the store of merit regarding conventional truth, objects of knowledge in all their complexity. Nevertheless, it is not the case that the *dharmakāya* is attained *only* through the store of wisdom and the form *kāyas* *only* through the store of merit. Rather, by gathering the inseparability of the two accumulations [of merit and wisdom], the inseparability of the two *kāyas* is attained.<sup>38</sup>

Along with these various view-oriented presentations, Mi bskyod rdo rje elucidates the spiritual practice that enables an adept to eventually actualize the buddha embodiments by realizing the two truths. This process requires the practice of calm abiding and deep insight. He explains both of these, *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, first in a general way and then in terms of their specific applications in the Bka' brgyud tradition. Mi bskyod rdo rje states that he presents this topic in the words of his teacher.<sup>39</sup> As this section appears to be a very important part in the sūtric instructions of this text, the following excerpts are quoted to provide some glimpses of the points Mi bskyod rdo rje makes regarding these common and uncommon ways of practicing *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*:

My [spiritual] father, the great Ras pa,<sup>40</sup> says: “with respect to the natural condition or the ground or the cause or the knowables, there is (1) the ground for perfect insight upon which superimpositions and deprecations are eliminated

<sup>38</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol. 3, 347<sub>v</sub>: *chos sku ni shes bya ji lta ba don dam bden pa la ye shes kyi tshogs sog gi dge ba bsags pas gtso cher chos sku thob la | shes bya ji snyed pa kun rdzob bden pa la bsod tshogs kyi bsags pas gtso cher gzugs sku thob la | de lta na'ang ye shes kyi tshogs kho nas chos sku dang bsod tshogs kho nas*<sup>38</sup> *gzugs sku thob pa ma yin te | tshogs gnyis ka zung 'brel du bsags pas sku gnyis po'ang zung 'brel du thob par 'gyur ba'i phyir |*.

<sup>39</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol. 1, 187<sub>v</sub>-188: “[I’m going] to explain the key-point brought to the open by my master, my teacher, of how the yoga of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* regarding the meaning of the mode of abiding is to be done.” *bdag gi rje bla mas gnas lugs kyi don la zhi lhag rnal 'byor ji ltar bya ba'i gnad mtshang brtol bar 'dir brjod pa |*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ras pa* (lit. cotton-clad) here refers to the First Sangs rgyas mnyan pa, Grub chen bkra shis dpal 'byor (1457–1525).

and (2) the ground of natural spontaneity, the innate nature (*gshis*) of which does not abide in anything.

[Ad 1, the common practice:] The first [ground] are the outer and inner phenomena which are subsumed under the endless *skandhas*, *dhātus*, and *āyatanas* (*dharmīn*) as well as the [boundless] nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*). Following the profound scriptures, one thinks with reasonings about whether these endless [things] which appear as phenomena are real or false. When [doing so, it becomes obvious that]—without there being any reality or falsity—the nature of reality and falsity is not established as anything whatsoever: Due to the confusion of the tendencies of the manner of primordial mental clinging, there are now various appearances of reality and falsity. Whatever is there is equally false and therefore not appropriate to be true. By virtue of [properly understanding what is there,] one clears away the extreme of nihilism. [One understands that] within this mere falsity, all phenomena arise dependently. Thus one clears away the extreme of permanence. Being just false, these phenomena are not concretely established. Therefore, they are empty and this emptiness is referred to as ultimate truth. When the ultimate truth is realized by noble beings, the pollution of the two obscurations of the characters of elaborations is progressively purified and enlightenment occurs. Thereby, deep insight is the discernment of this mode of abiding, and calm abiding is to one-pointedly abide in the actuality of the unity of the two truths. Thus by way of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* one does not abide in the two huge extremes of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. This description concerns the common way of the supreme vehicle. However, it is not the manner in which those of highest acumen practice meditation. Those of highest acumen rely on the second ground instead of the first ground.

[Ad 2, the uncommon practice:] The second ground as well does not deal with something other than the former, i.e., phenomena such as the *skandhas* etc. However, while the former is a ground of conceptualization whether [phenomena] are established in any way as reality and falsity, in the [second approach] one does not conceptualize in this way at all. Therefore, the ground upon which superimposition and deprecation are engaged in, collapses on its own accord. Thus they rely on the same ground, i.e., that earlier ground which [in this second approach, however,] turns into self-liberation, genuineness, the natural condition. At that point one does not ascertain all the knowable phenomena by way of examination and analysis. Instead, [one generates] extraordinary devotion to a genuine teacher endowed with realization and thereby accrues merit through the accumulation of this merit. The effect of this is great power. Through this one settles [in meditation] without in any way



artificially spreading and summoning [one's attention] in terms of externally oriented awareness of objects, that involves mind and mental events in one's mind along with objects, and internally oriented self-awareness. Thereby, as if the commotion of everything in one's mind along with objects is entirely exhausted, elaborations cease on their own.

Query: What is this ceasing of elaborations like? Reply: All elaborations are included in two, in the elaborations of *saṃsāra* and of *nirvāṇa*; there are no other ones. ... Due to unawareness of one's mind as to its own true mode of abiding—because of this unawareness—the images of *saṃsāra* appear. In contrast to that, due to the luminous wisdom of one's own mind as to its true mode of abiding of itself—when [there is this] awareness—it appears as *nirvāṇa*. In this way, whatever appears as *saṃsāra* or as *nirvāṇa* is just the mode of conduct of unawareness and awareness in one's own mind. The *dharmadhātu*'s purity of one's own mind does not change in terms of being lower [in case of] *saṃsāra* and higher [in case of] *nirvāṇa*, because there isn't any diminishing and increasing such as loosing and thriving etc. ... One abides in the fresh nature of the luminous mind, abiding vividly, wide awake and relaxed without wavering away from there. This is called *śamatha*. When one abides in this state, to simultaneously understand and precisely see the essence of one's own mind along with its object as utterly beyond abiding and arising as mental objects that are experienced, this is called *vipaśyanā*. ... These two as a union, as luminosity, this is called the yoga of the unity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. It is said that when the experiences of the debilitating malaise<sup>41</sup> of mental engagement, which is an as-

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<sup>41</sup> See Higgins and Draszcyk 2016, vol. 1, 332 and n. 960: "Debilitating malaise" renders *gnas ngan len* (*dauṣṭulya*, *dauṣṭhulya*). See also Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 439, who translates this term as 'la Turbulence', Davidson 1988, 177, as 'hindrances' (and elsewhere 'baseness'), and Schmithausen 1987 vol. 1, 66, as 'badness'. Schmithausen discusses many connotations of the term which include badness or wickedness (*kleśa-pakṣyam*), unwieldiness (*karmanyatā*), heaviness (*\*gurutva: lci ba nyid*), stiffness (*middha-kṛtam āśrayajādyam*), incapacitation or lack of controllability (*akṣamata*), and unease or misery (*dauṣṭulya-duḥkha*). Other possible translations are "negative hindrances" or "malaise". The idea here is that unsatisfactoriness permeates human existence to such an extent that it is perceived, felt and internalized most fundamentally as a situation of affliction, suffering, degradation, malaise and powerlessness. It has the effect of hindering, physically and mentally, a yogin's ability to attain his goal. See Davidson 1988, 177. Connotations of existential unease, badness and self-recrimination are combined with moral notions of fault, failing, recrimination and hindrance in the Tibetan rendering *gnas ngan len* (lit. "identifying with (*len*) a situation (*gnas*) of baseness/badness (*ngan*)"), as explicated in the *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis*. See Mvy Gb s.v. *dauṣṭhulya*: *dauṣṭhulya zhes bya ba du ni smad pa'am ngan pa | ṣṭhā gatinivṛttau zhes bya ste gnas pa la bya | la ni ādana ste len ba'am 'dzin pa'o | | gcig tu na duṣṭu ni nyes pa'am skyon gyi ming*

pect of the experience while the mind is abiding, are cleared away, this, in the glorious Dwags po Bka' brgyud, is called "the fruition has arrived on the ground". ... My [spiritual] father, the great noble master<sup>42</sup> said, that this training of the yoga of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* which was explained in this way is the uncontaminated discourse of the unsurpassable key-instructions of the Bhagavan. The Bhagavan said: "When the mind is established, this is wisdom. Thus, familiarize yourself with the notion that buddha is not to be searched for somewhere else"<sup>43</sup>.<sup>44</sup>

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*la ni gong du bshad pa dang 'dra ste | spyir na ltung ba dang sgrib pa'i ming ste gnas ngan len du btags |.*

<sup>42</sup> Mi bskyod rdo rje regarded Sangs rgyas mnyan pa I Bkra shis dpal 'byor (1457–1525) as his root Guru (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*) and received from him various Mahāmudrā instruction, most notably the direct introduction to the nature of mind. See also Higgins and Draszczyk 2016, 247.

<sup>43</sup> *Ātyayañāna-nāma-Mahāyana-Sūtra*, AJS, H 124, vol. 54, 226a.

<sup>44</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol.1, 188.-192.: *chos thams cad kyi babs sam gzhi'am rgyu'am shes par bya ba 'di la | yang dag pa'i shes rab kyis sgro bskur ba cad pa'i gzhi dang gshis gang du'ang gnas pa med pa rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pa'i gzhi gnyis las dang po ni | phyi nang phung khams skye mched kyis bsdu pa'i chos can dang chos nyid mtha' yas pa de yin la | zab mo'i lung gi rjes su 'brangs nas rig pas 'di ltar chos su snang ba 'di mtha' dag 'di ltar bden pa zhig gam | brdzun pa zhig ces mno ba na bden rdzun gang yang ma yin par bden brdzun gyi rang bzhin cir yang ma grub pa la thog med kyi blo'i 'dzin stangs kyi bag chags 'khrul nas da lta'i bden rdzun du mar snang ba las ci thams cad rdzun par chabs gcig pas bden pa'i gnas med pas chad mtha' sel | de ltar rdzun tsam la chos thams cad stos nas byung bas rtog mtha' sel | rdzun pa nyid kyis chos de tshugs thub tu ma grub pas stong pa'i stong nyid la don dam pa'i bden pa zer bas | don dam bden pa 'phags pa dag gi mngon du byas pa na spros mtshan gyi sgrib gnyis kyi bslad pa rim gyis sangs nas 'tshang rgya bar 'gyur la | de lta'i gnas lugs 'byed pa shes rab | bden gnyis zung 'brel gyi don la rtse gcig tu gnas pa zhi gnas te | de lta'i zhi lhag gis 'khor 'das gnyis kyi mtha' chen po gnyis la mi gnas par byed do zhes pa ni theg pa mchog gi spyi lugs yin kyang ha cang dbang po rnon po dag gi rnal 'byor du bya ba'i tshul min la | dang po rnon po dag gis ni gzhi dang po de nyid las gzhi gnyis pa nyid la rten pa yin te | gzhi gnyis pa'ang snga ma'i phung sogs kyi chos las gzhan pa'i gzhi ni ma yin kyang snga ma bden rdzun gang du grub rtog pa'i gzhi yin la | phyi ma 'dir de ltar gang du'ang mi rtog pas sgro bskur 'jug pa'i gzhi rang dag du songs bas gzhi snga ma de nyid rang grol gnyug ma rang babs su song ba'i gzhi nyid la brten par byas pa'i phyir te | de'ang skabs 'dir shes ba mtha' dag rtog dpyod kyis gtan la mi dbab par | bla ma dam pa rtogs pa dang ldan pa gcig la mos gus khyad par can byas pa'i bsod tshogs kyi bsod nams kyi 'bras bu mthu che ba nyid kyis rang sems su yul bcas la sems dang sems byung gi phyi lta don rig nang lta rang rig pa'i spro bsdu gang gi'ang ma bcas par bzhags pas / rang sems yul bcas thams cad rgyug pa ga chad pa ltar spros pa rang chod du 'gro la | spros pa chos tshul de ji ltar zhe na | spros pa thams cad 'khor 'das kyi spros pa gnyis su mi 'du ba med ... rang sems kyi ma rig pas ma rig pa nyid kyis 'khor ba'i rnam par snang la | rang nyid kyi gnas tshul rang sems 'od gsal ba'i ye shes kyi rig pa na de nyid kyi myang 'das su snang la | de ltar 'khor 'das gang du snang na'ang rang sems kyi rig ma rig gnyis kyi tshul khirms tsam las ma gtogs rang sems chos kyi dbyings rnam dag de ni mar 'khor ba dang yar myang 'das gang du'ang 'pho 'gyur 'phar 'bub sogs kyi 'bri gang gang du'ang 'gyur ba med pa'i phyir | ... sems 'od gsal ba'i rang bzhin rjen pa la gnas pa de las gzhan du g.yo ba med par sal le srig ge me re gnas pa de la zhi gnas zer ba yin | de'i ngang la gnas pa na rang sems yul bcas de nyid kyi ngo bo*

The background that allows for such definitive certainty in the view that buddhahood is not to be searched for anywhere else but in one's own mind, is discussed by Mi bskyod rdo rje in another section of his text. Taking the *Ratnagotravibhāga* [RGV I.27-28] as his basis of discussion, Mi bskyod rdo rje gives an in-depth commentary on the three reasons provided therein why sentient beings are said to have buddha nature. He highlights that it is certainly right to view buddha nature as an ultimate phenomenon. However, as it also has the character of wisdom in regard to conventional transactions (*tha snyad kun rdzob*) it partakes of conventional truth as well and thus, buddha nature is precisely the inseparability of the two truths. It is in this sense that according to him, buddha nature has traditionally been identified with the substratum (*ālaya*), which, as Mi bskyod rdo rje clarifies again and again, comprises both the impure substratum of *saṃsāric* phenomena and the pure substratum of *nirvāṇic* phenomena. When obscured by adventitious defilements, buddha nature is the condition of possibility of *saṃsāra* and when free from these, it is the condition of possibility of *nirvāṇa* or, as formulated above, "whatever appears as *saṃsāra* or as *nirvāṇa*, is just the mode of conduct of unawareness and awareness in one's own mind".

In epistemological terms, the Karma pa argues that buddha nature is considered conventional from the perspective of not yet being free from efforts involving conceptual signs (*mtshan rtsol*) bound up with act, object and agent, but is considered ultimate from the perspective of the unfindability of such objectifying deliberations:

Such a quintessence [buddha nature] is designated as conventional from the perspective of there still being efforts involving conceptual signs (*mtshan rtsol*) based on the triad of object, agent and act. But, it is designated as ultimate from the perspective of not being established in terms of efforts involving conceptual signs. Although those who desire liberation on the basis of the two truths [as understood] in this way engage in acceptance and rejection, there is no reason to do anything at all in terms of accepting or rejecting the two truths as inherently existent [phenomena]. Consequently, it is said that the entire range of view, meditation, conduct, and fruition, are spontaneously present, being devoid of acceptance and rejection, uncontrived, and effortless.

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*grub myong blo'i yul du gtan pa dang 'char ba las 'das par khong du chub par lhaq mthong ba de la lhaq mthong zer te | ... gnyis zung du 'jug par 'od gsal bar zhi lhaq zung 'jug gi rnal 'byor bya ste | gnas bzhi pa'i myong cha'i yid byed kyi gnas ngan len gyi nyams dag pa na 'bras bu gzhi thog na phebs pa zhes dpal dwags po bka' bryud pa dag tha snyad mdzad pa yin zhes gsungs so | ... yab rje rje btsun chen po des ji ltar bka' sstal ba'i zhi lhaq gi rnal 'byor skyong tshul de nyid bcom ldan 'das kyi man ngag bla ma bryud pa'i zhal mchid dri ma dang bral ba yin te | bcoms ldan 'das kyi | sems rtogs na ye shes yin pas sangs rgyas gzhan du mi 'tshol ba'i 'du shes sgom par bya |.*

[Thus,] all mental engagements are perfectly ascertained as being [already] abandoned.<sup>45</sup>

This latter standpoint supports Mi bskyod rdo rje's contention that buddha nature is in no sense an established basis (*gzhi grub*), even if it serves as the basis of all human experience from bondage to liberation. Moreover, he explains:

This [buddha nature] is steadily continuous (*rgyun brtan pa*). Since it neither waxes nor wanes from sentient being up to buddha, it was posited as the ground of all phenomena comprising bondage and freedom, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, the innate and adventitious, and the two truths. It was said to be non-momentary by virtue of its not being newly produced by causes from beginningless time to the future, but this does not mean that *conventionally* there is no momentariness [in the sense of phenomena being] produced by causes and conditions.

The ground of all phenomena prevails all-pervasively and impartially in buddhas and sentient beings. Yet, there is no need to [make it] an established basis because if there were something established in this way, the fallacy would absurdly follow that this factor and all persons individually endowed with it are selves and truly established.<sup>46</sup>

After the explanations in the sūtric context, Mi bskyod rdo rje proceeds with his very extensive explanations on the Tantrayāna which makes the fruition the path. He does so from two perspectives. First he ascertains the three continua, i.e., the causal continuum, the path continuum and the resultant continuum:

<sup>45</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol 1, 121.<sub>13</sub>: *de lta'i snying po de nyid la ji srid bya byed las gsum gyi mtshan rtsol yod pa de srid kyi cha nas kun rdzob bden pa dang mtshan rtsol ji tsam du yod kyang mtshan rtsol du ma grub pa'i cha nas don dam bden pa zhes btags te | de lta'i bden gnyis tsam la rten nas thar 'dod dag blang dor byed kyang | bden pa gnyis la rang bzhin gyis grub pa'i blang dor ni 'gar yang bya rgyu med pas lta sgom spyod 'bras thams cad la blang dor med pa ma bcos rtsol bral lhun grub chen por yid byed thams cad la dor du gtan la 'bebs par bya ba yin no zhes legs par bshad do |.*

<sup>46</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol. 1, 118.<sub>13</sub>: *sems can nas sangs rgyas kyi bar bri gang med pas rgyun brtan med<sup>46</sup> pa'i phyir 'ching grol 'khor 'das gnyugs ma glo bur bden gnyis kyi chos thams cad kyi gzhir yang 'di nyid 'jog la 'di thog ma med pa nas ma 'ongs pa las gsar du rgyus ma bskyed pas skad gcig ma yin par gsungs kyang tha snyad du rgyu rkyen gyis skyes pa'i skad gcig ma yin pa'i don ni ma yin la | 'o na chos thams cad kyi gzhi sangs rgyas dang sems can ris med pa'i kun khyab tu bzhugs na'ang gzhi grub dgos pa ni ma yin te | | de ltar grub pa'i chos shig yod na chos de dang de gang la ldan pa'i gang zag thams cad bdag dang bden grub par thal ba'i skyon du gyur ro | | . yin, according to the correction of the text in the edition of the *Collected Works of Mi bskyod rdo rje* (KN<sub>mk</sub>). KN<sub>v</sub> and KN<sub>mk</sub> both have *min* which, however, seems to be a mistake.*

The causal continuum is the continuum of the nature. The path continuum is the continuum of the ground or the means. The fruition continuum is inalienableness. Therefore, it is the continuum of nonregression, of no-more-learning. The first continuum is the substantial cause. The second is the co-operating cause. When these two causes unequivocally combine, the third continuum infallibly occurs as the result of this combination.<sup>47</sup>

Then he goes into the tantric practice in the context of these three continua. The causal continuum—in other words, buddha nature—is distinguished into the causal continuum of the mind and of the body. Here, the focus of his explanations lies on the first. He explains the causal continuum of the mind, i.e., buddha nature, mainly according to the teaching system of the Kālacakra tantra called the “king of tantras”. He also discusses some other tantras, yet emphasizes that the Kālacakra tantra conveys the final intent of all other tantras and shows how based on this tantra the entire manifestations of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* can be understood.

Mi bskyod rdo rje emphasizes that while the sūtric accounts do not fully reveal the defining conditions (*mtshan nyid*) or specify the illustrative instances (*mtshan gzhi*) of buddha nature as it operates in the life of an individual, the tantric accounts of the causal continuum treat buddha nature directly. They do so not as a hidden potential that is only vaguely alluded to by using metaphoric language but as an actual phenomenon to be concretely realized by way of tantric methods of “taking the goal as the path”. In the context of the causal continuum he goes in great detail into the causal continuum of the body, i.e., the channels, currents, and potencies. First he provides a general outline of these three and how the currents and potencies move within the structure of the channels. Then he describes the difference between karmic currents and wisdom-currents as well as between karmic potencies and wisdom potencies.

On the basis of Tibetan Kālacakra hermeneutics, Mi bskyod rdo rje also challenges different views regarding the three continua held by influential Tibetan scholars of the classical period, such as Tsong kha pa (1357–1419), Rgyal tshab dar ma (1364–1432), Red mda’ ba (1349–1412), and ‘Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481). His concern is to show that any one-sided speculative account of the causal

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<sup>47</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>sv</sub>, vol. 1, 212<sub>sv</sub>: *de'i rgyu rgyud la rang bzhin gyi rgyud dang | lam rgyud la gzhi 'am thabs kyi rgyud dang | 'bras rgyud la mi 'phrog pa'i phyir mi ldog pa mi slob pa'i rgyud de | rgyud dang po ni nyer len gyi rgyu dang | rgyud gnyis pa ni lhan cig byed pa'i rgyu ste | rgyu de gnyis gdon mi za bar tshogs pa'i tshogs 'bras las rgyud gsum pa mi bslu bar 'byung ba yin no |*. Here, Mi bskyod rdo rje comments on a quote from the supplemental tantra of the *Guhyasamāja* (the eighteenth chapter appended to the root text). See Higgins 2013, 166, n. 413.

continuum or buddha nature—equating it with sheer emptiness, attributing some kind of self-identity to it, or discussing it in the framework of a clear-cut dichotomy between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—misses the point completely. For Mi bskyod rdo rje, it is essential to point out that buddha nature is beyond the discursive elaborations of existence and non-existence, being and non-being which are grounded in eternalistic and nihilistic viewpoints. To him, buddha nature is ever-present as great primordial perfect buddhahood which merely needs to be liberated from adventitious defilements to be recognized as it is. The discussion of the causal continuum makes up approx. fifteen percent of the explanation on the tantras.

The path continuum is introduced by pointing to the tantric path as being superior to the sūtric one. Based on that, Mi bskyod rdo rje guides the reader through different levels of tantra. He shortly mentions the *kriyatantra* and *yogatantra* and goes into great detail in the *yoganiruttaratantra* (*rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud*). He presents this with explanations regarding the gate of accessing tantric practice, i.e., the empowerment, along with discussing the associated *samayās* and commitments. He also goes into the qualifications of and requirements from both, teacher and disciple, and continues with elucidating the Creation and Completion Stages and the various ways of conduct. Mi bskyod rdo rje explains this topic in terms of the systems of the three *yoganiruttaratantras*, the *mahāyogatantra* Guhyasamāja, the *yoginītantra* Hevajra, and finally Kālacakra. In Tibetan these were called respectively “father-tantra” (*pha rgyud*)<sup>48</sup>, “mother-tantra” (*ma rgyud*)<sup>49</sup>, and “advaya-tantra” (*gnyis med rgyud*).<sup>50</sup> In the course of these explanations, he provides a detailed introduction into the realization of the three or rather four embodiments, i.e., the *nirmāṇakāya*, the *sambhogakāya*, the *dharmakāya*, and the *svābhāvikakāya* which he refers to respectively as “Mahāmudrā, the practice of coemergence” (*phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor*) in terms of the body, the speech, the mind,

<sup>48</sup> “The Tibetan *pha'i rgyud* or *pha rgyud* is an abbreviated or elliptical expression for *rnal 'byor pha'i rgyud* and is actually a rendering of *yogatantra*.” See Blog, posted 18th May 2013 by Dorji Wangchuk.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid: “The Tibetan *ma'i rgyud* or *ma rgyud* is an abbreviated or elliptical expression for *rnal 'byor ma'i rgyud* and is actually a rendering of *yoginītantra*.”

<sup>50</sup> While the short *Introduction into the Three Embodiments* focusses on meditation instructions in the context of Vajrayoginī, Mi bskyod rdo rje, in his long *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments* emphasizes Kālacakra as the most sublime practice. It is good to remember that Mar pa received this transmission also from Maitrīpa. In one of his famous songs contained in his biography, a passage that Mi bskyod rdo rje explicitly puts into the context of a Kālacakra empowerment, he says, *Rain of Wisdom*, 151-153, *Bka' brgyud mgur mdzod*, 64a.: Even if you summoned forth the minds of the buddhas of the three times ... There is nothing more ultimate than this.” *theg pa'i mthar thug snying po'i don* || *chos phyag rgya che la ngo sprod bgyis* || ... 64b.: *dus gsum sangs rgyas thugs phyung yang* || *mthar thug de las med do gsungs* ||. See also Sherpa 2004, 166-167.

and wisdom (*ye shes*). In this section the correlation with Rang byung rdo rje's short *Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments* is very obvious. Mi bskyod rdo rje, when presenting the empowerment which matures and the path that liberates uses the latter template to first present the four preliminaries of (1) refuge and bodhicitta, (2) purification through the practice of Vajrasattva, (3) generating merit through the practice of *maṇḍala* offerings and (4) *guru yoga*. He then proceeds with very detailed instructions regarding the direct introduction into the four embodiments, the *nirmāṇakāya*, the *sambhogakāya*, the *dharmakāya*, and the *svabhāvikakāya*.

As for the *nirmāṇakāya* or the embodiment of manifestation, the Creation and Completion Stages as well as the enlightened activities of the respective deity are presented, respectively the enlightened activity of the ornamental wheel of the inexhaustible body, speech, and mind. This is followed by a detailed introduction into the *sambhogakāya* or the embodiment of enjoyment. In this context, the various yogic practices included in the "four wheels" are presented, in particular the practice of *gtum mo*. This is then followed by two shorter sections regarding the introduction into the *dharmakāya* or the embodiment of reality, and the *svabhāvikakāya* or the embodiment of the nature as such. The presentation of the path continuum covers the bulk portion of the explanation on the tantras, approx. eighty percent of it.

Mi bskyod rdo rje's concern is to highlight that once the tantric Creation Stages (*utpattikrama* : *bskyed rim*) and Completion Stages (*niṣpānakrama* : *rdzogs rim*) have cleared away adventitious defilements, buddhahood replete with all qualities of a buddha's body, speech and mind—the perfect deity, which is ever-present also during the phase of the causal continuum—is fully revealed, thus again pointing out that these qualities are in no way newly produced. This process of "making the goal the path" is tantamount to "the emergence of Mahāmudrā realization". In regard to this principle view of the Dwags po traditions he explains:

The deity of the causal continuum and buddhahood itself are present in the primordially present great Completion Stage. In this regard, when a fortunate disciple of highest capacity and a qualified teacher come together in auspicious circumstances, then by the teacher simply making a connection (*mtshams sbyar ba*) using mere symbolic indications or words, the wisdom of self-arisen Mahāmudrā or the face of the primordially present buddha is encountered directly. Among the Bka' bryud pas this is known as "the emergence of Mahāmudrā realization". Therefore, the buddha of the causal continuum or the perfect deity itself are present

as primordial buddha[hood] even during the obscured phase of impure sentient beings.<sup>51</sup>...

Though the buddha or the deity of the primordial Completion Stage are present without defilements even in the causal continuum, [when] connected with adventitious defilements, it is labelled as sentient being, when [partly] cleansed from defilements, it is labelled as bodhisattva, and when purified from defilements it is labelled as buddha.<sup>52</sup> But [such] labels are mere postulates for relational factors (*ltos chos*). By contrast, when [buddha nature] was imputed as “ever-present” (*ye bzhugs*), [this means] the buddha and the deity of the thoroughly pure Completion Stage, which are free from conceptualization and non-conceptualization, are not newly arisen and are not newly attained.<sup>53</sup>

The last approx. five percent of the text is dedicated to explaining the resultant continuum. Here, Mi bskyod rdo rje presents buddhahood first by going into the explanations common to the sūtras and the tantras and then specifies the tantric perspective on the fruition. Mi bskyod rdo rje also considers the tantric fruition continuum (*'bras rgyud*) in light of rival Tibetan views of ultimate reality. Specifically, he contrasts the two diametrically opposed views of the ultimate that had come to prominence during the classical period: the Jo nang conception of the ultimate as a permanent metaphysical essence (immutable buddhahood) that is beyond dependent arising and the Dge lugs pa conception of the ultimate as sheer emptiness in the sense of a nonaffirming negation.

In this context, he criticizes views which either collapse conventional reality into the ultimate or impose a separation between them, and instead opts for a view of the inseparability of the two truths which holds them to be neither the same (monism) nor fundamentally different (dualism). Mi bskyod rdo rje's careful consideration of

<sup>51</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>w</sub> vol. 2, 335<sub>nis</sub>: *rgyu rgyud kyi lha dang | sangs rgyas de nyid ye bzhugs kyi rdzogs rim chen por bzhugs pa yin la | 'di nyid dbang po yang rab skal ldan gyi slob ma dang mtshan ldan gyi bla ma'i rten 'brel 'dzoms nas bla mas brda tsam dang tshig gis mtshams sbyar ba tsam gyis rang byung phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes sam | sangs rgyas ye bzhugs kyi zhal mngon sum du 'jal ba la phyag rgya chen po'i rtags pa skyes pa zhes bka' brgyud 'di'i phyogs la grags shing | des na rgyu rgyud kyi sangs rgyas sam yang dag pa'i lha de nyid ma dag sems can gyi gnas skabs sgrib bcas kyi dus nas kyang ye sangs rgyas su bzhugs pa yin te |*

<sup>52</sup> See RGV I.47 (ed. by Johnston 1950, 40): *aśuddho 'śuddhaśuddho 'tha suviśuddho yathākramam | sattvadhātūrīti prokto bodhisattvastathagataḥ | |*

<sup>53</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>w</sub> vol. 2, 338<sub>is</sub>: *gdod ma'i rdzogs rim gyi lha'am sangs rgyas rgyu rgyud du'ang dri med du gnas kyang | glo bur gyi dri ma dang 'brel ba'i sems can du gdags shing | dri ma sbyang ba'i tshes byang sems su gdags la | dri mas dag pa'i tshes sangs rgyas su gdags kyang gdags pa ni ltos chos kyi btags pa tsam las ye bzhugs su btags nas rtog mi rtog las grol ba'i shin tu rnam par dag pa'i rdzogs rim gyi lha dang sangs rgyas ni gsar skyes dang gsar thob ma yin te |*



such rival perspectives allows him to highlight the problems of opposing eternalistic and nihilistic, monistic and dualistic, interpretations of the ultimate, while emphasizing the virtues of viewing the two truths as conventionally discernable but ultimately indistinguishable cognitive domains. Rejecting both the typical Jo nang view of an immutable buddhahood *qua* buddha nature as a metaphysical permanent phenomenon and the mere negation theory often found in the works of Dge lugs authors, Mi bskyod rdo rje concludes that the ultimate truth, the fruition continuum in the tantric system, consists in the inseparability of the two truths and two embodiments (*dharmakāya* : *chos sku*; *rūpakāya* : *gzugs sku*), of emptiness and appearance. In this context, the following excerpt points to his main position regarding the buddha embodiments:

Most of those who purport to be scholars and *siddhas* in India and Tibet as well as many exceedingly foolish people propound [the following:] Among the two [aspects of] a buddha's embodiments (*kāya*) and wisdoms—[1] the self-beneficial ultimate embodiment and wisdom and [2] the other-beneficial conventional embodiments and wisdoms—the former is emptiness, the *dharmakāya*, the naturally pure *dharmadhātu* which is empty of all limitations of discursive elaborations, whereas the latter is the form *kāyas* which manifest as the variety of the conventional endowed with discursive elaborations. This is proclaimed on the basis of the statement [from RGV III.1]:

Self-benefit and other-benefit are the ultimate embodiment  
 And the state of conventional embodiments depending on it.  
 Because of its state of emancipation and maturation  
 The fruit is divided into sixty-four qualities.<sup>54</sup>

But this [above mentioned interpretation] is not at all acceptable, because, to posit self-benefit as the ultimate and other-benefit as the conventional and to thereby explain the two embodiments, the two truths and two benefits as separate from each other (*ya bral ba*) turns out to be a wrong explanation. The reason is that it [implicitly] asserts that the self-beneficial, ultimate truth, the *dharmakāya*, would not function for the benefit of others but [only be] one's own benefit and that such an ultimate truth would be different from the conventional. Also, such a *dharmakāya* [would

<sup>54</sup> RGV III.1 (ed. by Johnston 1950, 91): *svārthaḥ parārthaḥ paramārthakāyas tadāśrita samvrtikāyatā ca | phalaṃ viśamyogavipākabhāvād etac catuḥṣaṣṭigunaprabhedam | |*. Tib. D 4024, vol. 123, 65b..

thus] be postulated to be truly established in its own right as a substance different from the form embodiments. [Conversely,] the other-beneficial, conventional truth and the form embodiments would not function for one's own benefit and the like, being the opposite of the above. If one wonders what's wrong with this claim, [the answer is] what could be a greater blunder than that?

The reason [for this allegation is that] when it comes to the two truths, whereby all phenomena are described in terms of two truths, if they are not [even] *conventionally* established as being the same or different, let alone *ultimately*, then what could be more mistaken than to proclaim that we must posit the two truths as different on the level of buddhahood? That is not all. [In terms of] your pet idea of emptiness—namely, something like a nonaffirming negation which negates [all] conceptually-constructed extremes—it is not possible that such an emptiness could function for one's own benefit and exist as the *dharmakāya* because functioning for one's own benefit requires the existence of a beneficiary and a benefactor, and existing as *dharmakāya* requires that it exists as an ensemble which is of the nature of embodiment (*lus kyi bdag nyid can*). But such is not possible for your nonaffirming emptiness which is the mere purity [i.e., the sheer absence] aspect of natural purity.

Further, some unwise people maintain that the aspect of emptiness consisting in the natural purity of all phenomena at the time of the ground when it is free from all obscurations at the time of fruition, is posited as the *svabhāvikakāya*. Likewise, natural emptiness, which is the true nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*) at the time of the ground, is, from the perspective of the aspect of freedom from all obscurations, posited as the *dharmakāya*. Therefore, ultimate truth alone is posited as the *dharmakāya*. If one wonders what is wrong with [this view, the answer is] what could be more noxious than saying this! The *svabhāvikakāya* is explained as the support for the entire range of uncontaminated qualities of buddhahood and as the embodiment that makes the attainment of all uncontaminated qualities possible. But, conversely, the single sheer emptiness as a nonaffirming negation was not claimed to be *svabhāvikakāya* by the victor and his sons. Therefore, what would be more inappropriate than to make up theories of the embodiments and wisdoms that were never accepted by the victor and his sons?

In fact, the *svabhāvikakāya* was not posited based on emptiness as sheer negation. It was rather posited from the perspective that the expanse and wisdom are an assembly that cannot be split apart. As it is taught by the victor Ajita [AA VIII.1]:

The *svabhāvikakāya* of the sage  
Has as its defining characteristic  
the nature of the undefiled dharmas  
That are obtained in utter purity.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, in the classification of four *kāyas*, where the *svabhāvikakāya* is differentiated from the *dharmakāya*, the *svabhāvikakāya* is posited from the perspective of luminosity which is free from the host of obscurations in which the expanse and wisdom are not separate things. However, according to the classification of three *kāyas*, the *dharmakāya* and the *svabhāvikakāya* are posited as the *dharmakāya* where phenomena (*dharmīn*) and the nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*) are not split apart. As the victor Ajita says [RGV II.30]:

The *vimuktikāya* and the *dharmakāya*  
Are explained to be of benefit to oneself and others.  
These [*kāyas*] being the support of self-benefit and other-benefit  
Are endowed with qualities such as being inconceivable.<sup>56, 57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, AA VIII.1, *sarvākārāṇi viśuddhiṃ ye dharmāḥ prāptā nirāsravāḥ* | *svabhāviko muneh kāyas teṣāṃ prakṛtilakṣaṇāḥ* | | Tib. D 3786, vol. 80, 11a–11b.

<sup>56</sup> RGV II.30 (ed. by Johnston 1950, 84): *vimuktidharmakāyābhyāṃ svaparārtho nīdarśitah* | *svaparārthāśraye tasmīn yogo 'cintyādibhirguṇaiḥ* | | Tib. D 4024, vol. 123, 63b.

<sup>57</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>w</sub> vol. 3, 344–346.: *yang rgya bod kyi mkhas grub du khas 'che ba phal cher dang* | *blun po ches mang bas kyang* | *sangs rgyas kyi sku dang ye shes la rang don don dam pa'i sku dang ye shes dang* | *gzhan don kun rdzob pa'i sku dang ye shes gnyis las snga ma stong pa nyid spros mtha' thams cad kyis stong pa'i rang bzhin rnam dag gi chos dbyings chos sku yin la* | *phyi ma ni spros bcas kun rdzob sna tshogs su snang ba gzugs sku yin te* | *ji skad du* | *rang don gzhan don don dam sku dang ni* | | *de la brten pa'i kun rdzob sku nyid de* | | *bral dang rnam par smin pa'i 'bras bu ni* | | *yon tan bye ba drug cu 'di dag go* | | *ces 'byung ba'i phyir* | *zhes smra bar byed do* | | *de yang ches mi 'thad de* | *rang don la don dam dang gzhan don la kun rdzob tu bzhag pa ni sku gnyis dang bden gnyis dang don gnyis ya bral ba de 'drar 'chad nas log pa'i bshad par 'gyur ba'i phyir te* | *rang don dang don dam bden pa dang chos skus rang don las gzhan don mi byed pa dang* | *de lta'i don dam bden pa de kun rdzob las gzhan yin pa dang* | *de lta'i chos sku de gzugs sku las gzhan gyi rdzas rang bden par grub par 'dod pa dang gzhan don dang kun rdzob bden pa dang gzugs skus kyang rang don mi byed pa sogs snga ma las bzlog ste smras ba'i phyir te* | *de ltar 'dod pa la skyon ci yod na* | *de las skyon che ba ci zhis yo de* | *chos thams cad la bden pa gnyis su brjod pa'i bden pa gnyis ni don dam par ma zad tha snyad du gcig pa dang tha dad du ma grub na* | *sangs rgyas kyi sar bden gnyis tha dad du 'jog dgos zhes smra ba las phyin ci log ci zhis yod pa'i phyir* | *der ma zad khyed kyi zhen don stong pa nyid spros mtha' bkag pa'i med par dgag pa'i stong pa nyid de 'dra ni rang gi don byed pa dang chos kyi skur yang mi rung ste* | *rang don byed pa la phan gdags bya 'dogs byed du yod dgos pa dang* | *chos skur yod pa la lus kyi bdag nyid can gyi tshogs par yod dgos pa la* | *khyed cag gi stong nyid med dgag rang bzhin rnam dag gi dag rkyang gi cha la de ltar mi rung ba'i phyir* | *yang mi mkhas pa kha cig* | *gzhi dus kyi chos thams cad rang bzhin rnam par dag pa'i stong nyid kyi cha de 'bras bu'i dus sgrib pa thams cad dang bral ba na ngo bo nyid skur*

## Conclusion

When looking at Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments*, it is evident that the main view which thus runs like a thread throughout the entire treatise—whether it is in the context of the sūtric or tantric aspects of view and meditation—is the unity of the two truths, the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. To him, this is precisely the intent of the sūtras of the Perfection of Wisdom famously pointed to in the so-called *Heart Sūtra* through the words 'form is empty, emptiness is form':

Through the equality of existence and nonexistence that is free from all real existence and nonexistence, the mind, which is the inseparability of emptiness and compassion free from obscurations, and its appearances, which do not have a different substance from that, these two—even though they are in no way established as *the* phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, as entities and nonentities which [respectively] have obscurations and no [obscurations]—are to be understood as the sameness of the unity of male and female (*yab yum*), as the two aspects of the appearance of existence and the emptiness of nonexistence respectively with form and without form. This meaning is also [contained] in the mother of victors: 'Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not something different from form. Form is not something different from emptiness.'

Thus, the ever increasing, inexhaustible great ocean of the mysterious inconceivable speech of all buddhas, bodhisattvas, viras, dakinīs and dharmaprotectors of all the worlds of the ten directions such as the *dharmacakra* of the ultimate single intent of sūtras and tantras that was perfect-

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'jog pa bzhin | gzhi dus kyi chos kyi chos nyid rang bzhin gyi stong nyid de sgrib pa thams cad dang bral cha nas chos kyi skur 'jog pas don dam bden pa kho na la chos skur 'jog pa ci nyes snyam na | de skad zer ba de las nyes pa che ba ci zhig yod de | ngo bo nyid sku ni sangs rgyas kyi zag pa med pa'i chos mtha' dag gi rten dang zag med kyi chos thams cad sku de nyid la thob par byar rung ba'i sku zhig la bshad pa yin la | de las gzhan stong rkyang med dgag gcig la ngo bo nyid skur rgyal ba sras bcas mi bzhed la | rgyal ba sras bcas kyi mi bzhed pa'i sku dang ye shes kyi rnam gzhas byas na de las mi rung ba ci zhig yod pa'i phyir | des na ngo bo nyid sku stong nyid dgag rkyang gi steng nas bzhag pa ma yin te | dbyings dang ye shes so sor bcad du med pa'i tshogs cha nas der bzhag pa'i phyir | rgyal ba ma pham pas | thub pa'i ngo bo nyid sku ni || zag pa med pa'i chos gang dag || thob gyur rnam kun rnam dag pas || de dag rang bzhin mtshan nyid can || zhes 'byung ngo || des na sku bzhir dbye ba dag gi chos sku las ngo bo nyid sku zur du dbye bar byed pa'i ngo bo nyid sku ni dbyings dang ye shes ya bral ba ma yin pa'i sgrib tshogs dang bral ba'i 'od gsal ba'i cha nas bzhag la sku gsum du dbye ba ltar na ngo bo nyid kyi sku dang chos sku dag chos can dang chos nyid so sor bcad du med pa'i chos kyi skur 'jog pa yin te | rgyal ba ma pham pas | rnam grol chos kyi sku dag gis || rang dang gzhan kyi don bstan te || rang gzhan don bstan de la ni || bsam mi khyab sogs yon tan ldan ||.

ly turned by the glorious 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po, i.e., the glorious 'Bri khung pa skyob pa rin po che, as well as [the teachings] of Dus gsum mkhyen pa, the essence of the Bhagavān Simhanāda, of 'Gro mgon ras pa, father and son, and of the supreme siddha Karma Pakshi etc., I [hereby] established to be of one flavor reaching to the end of the *dhar-madhātu* and the element of space."<sup>58</sup>

In voicing his favored views, Mi bskyod rdo rje remains fully in line with Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153), the founding father of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud traditions as well as with the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339) who decisively shaped the view and meditation tradition of the Karma Bka' brgyud school. This is obvious from the many references found in the text regarding these two masters. The challenge for Mi bskyod rdo rje was certainly to defend this system against currents of views that, starting in the 14th century, continued to dominate the philosophical landscape of Tibetan Buddhism, foremost among them the views of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and his students. Moreover, he clearly and repeatedly demarcates himself from the view of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) and the Jo nang tradition which—as far as explanations of the conventional and the ultimate truth are concerned—forms the extreme counterpart to the Dge lugs pa's system.

Considering the length of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Explanation of the Direct Introduction into the Three Embodiments* and the complexity of its topics, it is, in fact, impossible to summarize its meaning and to provide a digest which is truthful to the various subtleties pointed out by the author. Thus it is hoped that this short outline—of what doubtlessly can be counted as one of the most fascinating accounts of Tibetan Buddhist view and meditation practice—inspires more in-

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<sup>58</sup> *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, KN<sub>v</sub> vol. 3, 375<sub>v</sub>–376<sub>v</sub>: *yod med bden pa thams cad dang bral ba'i yod med mnyam pa nyid kyis sgrub bral stong pa nyid dang snying rje dbyer med kyi sems dang de'i snang ba rdzas tha dad med pa de gnyis sgrub bcas yod med kyi dngos po dang dngos po med pa'i 'khor 'das kyi chos gang du'ang ma grub kyang yod pa dang med pa'i snang ba dang stong pa'i cha gnyis so sor rnam pa dang bcas pa dang rnam pa med par yab yum zung 'jug mnyam pa nyid du gcig go bya ba'i don te | don 'di rgyal ba'i yul las kyang | gzugs stong pa'o || stong pa nyid gzugs so || gzugs las kyang stong pa nyid gzhan ma yin no || stong pa nyid kyang gzugs gzhan ma yin no || zhes mdo sngags mthar thug dgongs pa gcig pa'i chos 'khor rgyal ba 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po 'bri khung pa skyob pa ring po che dpal gyi legs par bskor pa dang | bjom ldan 'das seng ge sgra'i ngo bo dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa dang || 'gro mgon ras pa yab sras grub mchog karma pakshi la sogs te phyogs bcu'i zhing rab 'byams kyi sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' dpa' bo mkha' 'gro chos skyong srung ma thams cad kyi gsung gig sang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i ngang tshul gyi rgya mtsho chen po 'dzad du med par 'phel ba dang bcas ten am mkha'i khams dang chos kyi dbyings kyi mtha gtugs par rog cig pa nyid du grub pa yin no |.*

depth research of this text which has, at least to my knowledge, so far not received much attention in academic Buddhist studies.

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### 1. Abbreviations

- AA *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. Maitreya (ascribed). Ed. Ramshankar Tripathi (together with the *Abhisamayālaṅkāravṛttiḥ Sphuṭārthā*) Bibliotheca Indo-Tibetica Series 2. Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1993.
- AJS *Ātyayajñāna-nāma-Mahāyāna-Sūtra*, H 124, vol. 54, 225b-226b
- CY<sub>sb</sub> *Chos grags ye shes gsung 'bum*. Full title: *Thams cad mkhyen pa zhwa dmar bzhi pa spyan snga chos kyi grags pa'i gsung 'bum*, 6 vols. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009.
- D Derge edition of Bka' 'gyur and Bstan 'gyur. *The Tibetan Tripitaka*, Taipei Edition. Taipei, Taiwan: SMC Publishing, 1991.
- H Lhasa edition of the Bstan 'gyur. Lhasa: Zhol par khang, 1934.
- MD<sub>sb</sub> *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*. Full title: *Dpal rgyal ba karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*, 26 vols. Lhasa, 2004.
- RD<sub>sb</sub> *Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje gsung 'bum*. 16 vols. Ziling: mTshur phu mkhan po lo yag bkra shis, 2006.
- RGV: *Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*. Maitreya (ascribed). Ed. Edward H. Johnston. Patna: Bihar Research Society, 1950. (Includes the *Ratnagotra-vibhāgavyākhyā*)
- RGVV *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*. Asaṅga. See RGV [The manuscripts A and B on which Johnston's edition is based are described in Johnston 1950, vi–vii. See also Bandurski et al. 1994, 12–13].

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\_\_\_\_\_ *Bka' bzhi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs*, RD<sub>sb</sub> vol. 5, 1-358.

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\_\_\_\_\_ *Rlung sems gnad kyi lde mig*, by Chos rje rin po che karma pa. In: RD<sub>sb</sub> vol. 7, 264-268.

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