

THE JOURNAL  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
BUDDHIST STUDIES

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*Volume 6*

1983

*Number 2*

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# An Excursus on the Subtle Body in Tantric Buddhism (Notes Contextualizing the Kālacakra)<sup>1</sup>

by Geshe Lhundup Sopa

There are two main schemes for classifying the tantras, a nine-fold and a four-fold scheme.<sup>2</sup> Within the four-fold scheme, which we are following, the highest or *anuttara*<sup>3</sup> class is further subdivided into father and mother tantra according to whether the tantric method (*upāya*) or the tantric wisdom (*prajñā*) predominates in the tantra's course of practical development,<sup>4</sup> the specifically tantric method being that of an illusory body, and the specifically tantric wisdom being that of the knowledge of emptiness inseparable from bliss. The *Kālacakra-tantra* then, is a tantra of the *anuttara* class, and is usually subdivided as a mother tantra.<sup>5</sup> However, among tantras of the *anuttara* class, whether father or mother, the Kālacakra has several unique features which are not common to the other tantras. Among these features, the most preeminent is the empty-form method of the Kālacakra, in contradistinction to the illusory-body method of the other *anuttara* tantras, like the *Guhyasamāja*. This brings us to the main subject of our paper, the idea of subtle body, which, in turn, brings us to the traditional idea of the superiority of the tantric method.

When one speaks of the superiority of the tantric method, one is following in the mainstream of later Indian Buddhism and the form in which Buddhism entered and was preserved in Tibet by such illustrious *ācāryas* as Śāntarakṣita, Padmasaṃbhava,<sup>6</sup> Sa skya Paṇḍita, Atiśa,<sup>7</sup> Tsong kha pa, and others too numerous to mention. Similarly, by "superiority" one means the advantages which the tantras themselves claim for the tantric method over the other path options offered by Buddhism.

In particular, the tantras, being a teaching of the Mahāyāna, supplement the common<sup>8</sup> path of the Mahāyāna, i.e., the Pāramitāyāna, or path laid out in the Mahāyāna sūtras, by the addition of a particular tantric method and wisdom. This is to say that the tantric method is usually held to be *in addition to* rather than *in lieu of* many of the common paths of the Mahāyāna sūtras. In the literature of the subject, the Pāramitā or sūtra paths are referred to as the vehicle of the cause, or causal vehicle,<sup>9</sup> and the tantric paths as the vehicle of the effect, or fruition vehicle,<sup>10</sup> and it is repeatedly said that the cultivation of the causal vehicle precedes somewhat the attainment of the fruition vehicle, or, in other words, that the development of the Pāramitāyāna goes before Tantrayāna, inasmuch as the Pāramitāyāna is the very matrix into which the special practices of the Tantrayāna are to be assimilated. Here, however, the words, "cause" and "effect," refer simply to meditation on the causes of enlightenment, in contradistinction to meditation on the final result or effect, which is enlightenment itself from the point of view of its qualities and realizations. Thus, the sūtra paths teach mainly the cultivation of the causes of enlightenment, i.e., the virtues of the six (and ten) perfecteds (pāramitās); charity (*dāna*), a permissible conduct (*śīla*), tolerance (*kṣānti*), and meditation (*dhyāna*) count as method (*upāya*), wisdom (*prajñā*) as wisdom (*prajñā*),<sup>11</sup> and manly effort (*vīrya*) as common to the development of both wisdom and method.<sup>12</sup> These six staples of a Bodhisattva's conduct are the causes of enlightenment according to the sūtras, but thus broken down, the practice of the method side is said to produce the corporeal aggregate (*rūpakāya*) of a Buddha, whereas the wisdom side is said to produce the realization aggregate (*dharmakāya*)<sup>13</sup> of a Buddha at the time of achieving perfect enlightenment.

However, from the tantric point of view, the sūtras do not expose altogether adequately the causes of the form-body of a Buddha, for although the virtues of those perfecteds (pāramitā) which constitute method may be the remote cause of a Buddha's form-aggregate, the proximate cause of this form-aggregate is a subtle body which needs to be first generated and subsequently ripened by practices above and beyond the six (or ten) pāramitās. Thus, according to the tantras, just the sūtra method cannot lead beyond the ten Bodhisattva stages,<sup>14</sup> and

the Bodhisattva who has obtained the tenth stage will still have to practice the tantric method in order to progress from the tenth stage to perfect enlightenment,<sup>15</sup> which is to be understood as the fulfillment not of a single but of a twofold objective, i.e., the assured well-being of oneself and of others achieved through the attainment, respectively, of the realization-body and the form-body<sup>16</sup> of a Buddha. Even more pointedly, although the generation of a subtle body is the proximate cause of the form-aggregate of perfect enlightenment, from the meditator's point of view, the direct or immediate object of its cultivation is the welfare of others.

Finally, according to the tantras, the wisdom achieved by the Pāramitāyāna is excelled by that realized through the tantric method. Here, however, the excellence of wisdom is not being measured from the point of view of the object realized, which for both *yānas* is emptiness (*śūnyatā*), but rather from the point of view of the qualities of the realizing mind or mental state, which is a particularly subtle and blissful consciousness often referred to as the "clear light" (*prabhāsvara*). The actual (tib. *don gyi*) clear light is uniquely the product of yoga, and this clear light as the realizer of emptiness is simultaneously an experiencer of great bliss,<sup>17</sup> unlike the neutral consciousness realizing emptiness at the culmination of the Pāramitāyāna paths, and therein lies the reason for the tantras' claim of bringing about a "superior" wisdom. This realization of emptiness inseparable from an experience of great bliss is often called *Mahāmudrā*. Although the actual clear light is solely the product of yoga, it has its analogue in ordinary life in another extremely subtle consciousness, which, together with its supporting material element, the tantras hold to have a close relation with the vital or biotic force itself.<sup>18</sup> By way of analogy with the actual clear light, it is named "the clear light of death," as this consciousness is ordinarily dormant, or latent, or potential, appearing as something only at the time of death. The tantric method seeks by its peculiar yoga practices to arouse this clear light of death, and once it is manifest, to transform it into a knower of emptiness and so to produce the actual clear light.

Thus, the tantras profess not only to complete the paths of the sūtras by providing them with an adequate material cause, but also by the same methods to expedite and greatly speed up

the attainment of the final goal of the Mahāyāna. As the vehicle of the fruition, the tantric method of cultivation does not *per se* focus on the slow, patient accumulation of virtuous causes, but, rather, focuses directly on the final result, the form and realization aggregates, by emulating them here and now after the fashion of a simulated<sup>19</sup> performance, or a dress rehearsal, or a dry run, and by so meditating continuously, it seeks to move more rapidly from mere simulation to the actual reality of its accomplishment. Thus, what is first pretended for the purpose of its being later obtained is divine mind-body, and the method of its attainment is the deity yoga of the *anuttara* tantras, with their two sets of steps or stages, i.e., the steps of generation and the steps of completion.<sup>20</sup> The path system of the *anuttara* tantras might profitably be called a Buddhist path of apotheosis,<sup>21</sup> of which the *anuttara* tantras offer two main types. The *Guhyasamāja* and its cognate tantras, like *Yamāntaka*, *Śrīcakrasaṃvara*, *Vajrayoginī*, etc., represent one such type and the *Kālacakra* the other.

In the path of apotheosis of the *Guhyasamāja* type, the basis to be purified is threefold: death, the intermediate state (*anantarabhāva*), and birth; the path itself is the development of the union of the illusory body (*maya-deha*) and clear light (*prabhāsvara*); and the final result is the three pure aggregates (*trikāya*):<sup>22</sup> the aggregate of realization (dharmakāya), the aggregate of enjoyment (sambhogakāya), and the aggregate of magical appearance (nirmāṇakāya), or, in other words, realization body, enjoyment body, and docetic<sup>23</sup> body. In this sense, death is said to be purified by the attainment of the realization body, the intermediate state by the attainment of the enjoyment body, and birth by the attainment of the docetic body, and the means of transition from birth, death, and the intermediate state to the respective three pure aggregates is the path of cultivating the union of the illusory body and the actual<sup>21</sup> clear light. The preceding is in the overall or general sense, but in a more specific sense, death may be said to be purified as the actual clear light replaces the ordinary clear light of death, which is to say, when the process and subtle mechanism of ordinary death and dying serves as the *locus* for the deepest realization of emptiness; and just as in the process of ordinary death and dying, the kind of subtle body known as the interme-

diate-state body (or *bardo* body) arises from the pneumatic element of the clear light of death, the intermediate state becomes eventually purified when in lieu of the subtle *bardo* body an illusory body (*māyā-deha*) is produced from the material substance of the actual clear light. "Eventually purified" is said because the illusory body first generated from an exemplary clear light is initially impure, later purified, and at length perfected as a Buddha's enjoyment body. Finally, birth is said to be purified when the emergence of the gross body, which is ordinarily brought about by the power of karma and *kleśa*, gives way to the special appearances of such a body produced for the sake of others by the perfected union of the pure illusory body and the immediate knowledge of emptiness inseparable from great bliss, which constitutes the mind-body of an enlightened Buddha.

Thus, in the sequence of path stages (*sa lam*)<sup>26</sup> of cultivation or yoga of the *Guhyasamāja*, the steps of generation mainly ripen the meditator for the practice of the steps of completion, which they anticipate<sup>27</sup> through the use of symbolism and imagination, and they correspond roughly to the first, or path of preparation (*sambhāra mārga*) subdivision in the fivefold division<sup>28</sup> of the path of the Pāramitāyāna. They commence with the meditator's imagining himself arising from emptiness, passing through a set of transformations, and being generated as the deity<sup>29</sup> together with the deity's maṇḍala (symbolic of his abode) and circle of attendant gods. Here the *iṣṭadevatā*, maṇḍala, and entourage of gods represent the *nirmāṇakāya*. The steps of generation are said to be concluded when the meditator can visualize lucidly, in every detail, and for as long as he likes, the deity, maṇḍala, and circle of gods together in a space the size of a mustard seed. From here begin the steps of completion<sup>30</sup> and the nonimaginary process of development leading to the abandonment of the passion and knowledge obscurations (*kleśa* and *jñeya āvaraṇa*); in the tantras the knowledge obscurations are understood to be the ordinary, everyday appearances of things, and the passion obscurations are understood to be the apprehension of these ordinary appearances as such.

The steps of completion are sometimes grouped into five, sometimes into six steps. When grouped into six, the first three are the three withdrawals or isolations, i.e., of the body, the



speech, and the mind, followed by the steps of illusory body, clear light, and union.<sup>31</sup> The three withdrawals of the body, speech, and mind comprise a set of steps recapitulating the stages of dying. Through the first, the pneumatic elements or winds which are the support or vehicle of consciousness are successively withdrawn from their ordinary activities and made to enter the median channel<sup>32</sup> (*avadhūti*), then to abide there and finally to be dissolved there. Through the second, various knots which constrict the movement of wind through the median channel are loosened sufficiently to permit the winds to enter, abide, and be dissolved in the heart area of the median channel. By the third, the final knots are loosened, and the winds are made to enter, abide, and be dissolved into a point, little larger than a mustard seed, in the heart region, which is the seat of the vital force itself. The dissolution of all the pneumatic elements into this "indestructable drop"<sup>33</sup> completes the recapitulation of the act of dying, and there arises a manifestation of the clear light, called the "exemplary clear light."<sup>34</sup> This exemplary clear light, having been produced by yoga, is more refined than the ordinary clear light of death, but is not yet the actual clear light. This corresponds roughly to the path of reaching (*prayoga mārga*) of the fivefold path system of the Pāramitāyāna, wherein an approximate but not a final direct understanding of emptiness is achieved. Here, the clear light of death has no understanding of emptiness, whereas the exemplary clear light closely approaches but does not quite reach the final direct knowing of emptiness. The production of this exemplary clear light marks the climax of the three withdrawals and serves as the material cause for the cultivation of the next step, the production of the impure illusory body.

To summarize very briefly the remaining steps: before the stage of union, the clear light and illusory body exist alternately, and not at the same time. Here, then, at the stage of union, the meditator utilizes the impure illusory body as a basis for bringing about a new manifestation of the clear light, this time the actual clear light which directly perceives emptiness. This production corresponds to the Pāramitāyāna's path of seeing (*darśana mārga*), on which those obscurations abandonable by seeing reality are got rid of. Here, on the tantric path, all the remaining obscurations are relinquished through the final

steps of the path, and again, these correspond to the Pāramitāyāna's path of cultivation (*bhavanā mārga*), on which the most subtle knowledge obscurations are got rid of. On the tantric path, this is accomplished through still another production of illusory body, this time the pure illusory body which stays conjoined with the actual clear light, and this is the union (*yuganaddha*) of clear light and illusory body. Through the utilization of this union, the final stages of purification of the obscurations are accomplished, and these in turn are climaxed by a path of no more training (*aśaikṣa mārga*), which is the realization of enlightenment itself through the attainment of the three bodies (*trikāya*).

The above has necessarily been a highly abbreviated sketch of the sequence of path stages of the *Guhyasamāja*, with minimal elaboration and without discussion of the various meditation techniques utilized in the development of a path of this sort, as each of these topics is large in itself and all together quite voluminous, and this is to say nothing of the many specific philosophical, scientific, etc., types of problems which a subject matter of this sort will pose for this or that particular reader. In general, the *anuttara* tantras (with some exceptions on the side of the *Kālacakra*) teach the development of a path system of the above kind. Some, like *Yamāntaka*, etc., give a greater emphasis and expatiation to the generation and development of illusory body; others, like the *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Vajrayoginī*, etc., to the generation and development of clear light; and of course, there are a great many specific differences in the details of the forms of the *vidam* to be visualized, the particulars of the maṇḍalas, and numerous other such characteristics. However, the fundamental basis of purification (i.e., death, intermediate state, and birth), the path (i.e., the cultivation of the union of illusory body and clear light), and the final result (i.e., the three bodies), remain a constant in the many *anuttara* tantras (excepting the *Kālacakra*). Still another important feature shared by all of the above (again excepting the *Kālacakra*) is the teaching that enlightenment is often achieved not in the current life but in the intermediate state. Thus, without passing straight on to the *Kālacakra*, the writer would like to digress for a moment to the subject of the attainment of the final goal in the intermediate state (Tib. *bardo*, Skt. *antarabhāva*).

The notion of an intermediate state and its subtle *bardo*

body is not peculiar to the tantras, but is common to all of Buddhism,<sup>35</sup> both the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna sūtras and their commentaries. Principal commentarial sources for the Hīnayāna may be found in Book III of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, and like sources for the Mahāyāna are Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and the *Bhūmivastu* section of his *Yogacaryābhūmi*. Similarly, the teaching that many who are proceeding on the path achieve the final goal in the *bardo* is shared as well by the Hīnayāna and the common Mahāyāna. For instance, Vasubandhu says in Book VI of the *Kośa*, "non-returners, by the exhaustion of these nine, are (obtainers of) nirvāṇa in the intermediate (state, or the next) life, (and then) with difficulty, or without difficulty."<sup>36</sup> These two lines occur in a longer passage discussing twenty Saṅghas<sup>37</sup> (i.e., twenty kinds of āryan individuals proceeding on the āryan paths<sup>38</sup>). The twenty is from the point of view of two subdivisions (i.e., entry and abiding) in the four fruitions (i.e., stream winner, once returner, non-returner, and arhant), making eight, together with variable subdivisions within this resultant eight. These two lines state that some who have become non-returners on account of their having exhausted nine *kleśas* (passions) belonging to the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*) achieve arhantship (1) either in the intermediate state or (2) in the next life, and if the latter, either (3) with difficulty, or (4) easily in that next life. The longer passage continues that those who do not realize nirvāṇa by one of the above four proceed to yet another birth, but in a higher region of the form realm (*rūpadhātu*), etc. Likewise, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, touching on the topic of the same twenty Saṅghas, says in Book I, in similar language, "In the intermediate (state, or the next) life, hard, (or) easily. . . ."<sup>39</sup> The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, being a Mahāyāna work and a commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, is referring the twenty Saṅghas analogically to the paths of Bodhisattvas also. Thus, for both the Hīnayāna and the common Mahāyāna, one of the modes of achieving the final goal is in the intermediate state, just as for the uncommon Mahāyāna (i.e., tantric). There is, however, this difference, that for the Hīnayāna and common Mahāyāna, the one attaining the final goal in the intermediate state possesses a *bardo* body at the time of his attainment, whereas for the tantric Mahāyāna, such an attainer no longer is experiencing a *bardo* body, since such a body has previously already given way to an illusory

body, and it is through the illusory body that the final goal is attained by the adept in tantra, whether in the *bardo* or in life.

Regarding the *Kālacakra*, then, one of the features of its method which sharply distinguishes it from the other *anuttara* tantras is the absence of *bardo* as one of the bases of purification, and with the absence of *bardo* there is an absence of illusory body in the above sense as well. Notwithstanding, the *Kālacakra* does develop another kind of subtle body (*śukṣma-deha*), usually referred to as “empty form” (Tib. *stong gzugs*). Consequently, in the *Kālacakra* the “immediate realization of emptiness inseparable from bliss” is held to have a sense slightly different from its meaning in the other *anuttara* tantras.<sup>40</sup> In the *Kālacakra*, the “empty” in emptiness refers to empty form, and “bliss” to the experience of the mind directly knowing emptiness.<sup>41</sup>

The *Kālacakra-tantra* itself, together with its great commentary, the *Vimalaprabhā*,<sup>12</sup> and subsequent commentarial literature, cover extensively and in detail a wide ranging subject matter, all of which may be grouped under three topics: an outer *Kālacakra* (or wheel of time), an inner *Kālacakra*, and an *alter-Kālacakra*. The outer *Kālacakra* deals with the universe conventionalized<sup>43</sup> into a system of cosmology, the inner *Kālacakra* with the structures and meta-structures and functions of the human body (most notably the channels, winds, and seminal drops), and the *alter-Kālacakra* with the path of the generation and completion stages and its final result.

In the path of the *Kālacakra*, just as in the path of the *Guhyasamāja* type, the bases of purification are the same for both the steps of generation and the steps of completion. Here, however, the *alter-Kālacakra* takes as the bases of purification the outer and inner wheels of time, that is the outer and inner worlds as conventionalized and set forth in the *Kālacakra tantras*. Among the various meta-structures of the inner *Kālacakra*, four in particular serve as special bases for the path. These are four seminal drops or germs which are identified as the “germs of the four kinds of states,” and are located in the head, throat, heart, and navel regions of the medial channel. Together, they are said to be the roots of all the obscurations.<sup>44</sup> Hence, by purifying these, all the obscurations can be got rid of. The above four states, of which these are the seed, are four states of

consciousness, namely the waking state, the dreaming state, the deep sleep state, and the fourth state. In ordinary life, the first of these functions to produce the appearances of the various objects of the five senses and of the mental consciousness; the second to produce syllables, terms, and language etc.; the third, a diffuse and vague awareness; and the fourth, orgasm. When completely purified, they result in four *vajras*<sup>15</sup> (or four sovereigns), namely, *vajra*-body, *vajra*-speech, *vajra*-mind, and *vajra*-bliss, and as the path of purification, the first is the empty forms which will ripen as *vajra*-body, the second the subtle mantric sounds which will ripen as *vajra*-speech, the third the nondiscursive wisdom of realization which will ripen as *vajra*-mind, and the fourth the wisdom of great bliss which will ripen as *vajra*-bliss. These four vajras may also be understood as coextensive with the three bodies, *vajra*-body being the *nirmāṇakāya*, *vajra*-speech being the *sambhogakāya*,<sup>16</sup> and *vajra*-mind together with *vajra*-bliss being the *dharmakāya*.<sup>17</sup>

As for the path of the steps of completion, these are coextensive with the famous six part yoga (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) of the *Kālacakra*, a set of six sequential stages. The six are: collection, absorption, wind control, retention, mindfulness, and enrapture.<sup>48</sup> For the purpose of understanding the path, these may be arranged in three pairs, each pair laying the groundwork for the attainment of one of the three bodies (*trikāya*). The former of each pair is like an entry into a new phase or process and the latter like its strengthening or confirmation. Thus, collection/absorption are for realizing the *nirmāṇakāya*, wind control/retention for realizing the *sambhogakāya*, and mindfulness/enrapture for realizing the *dharmakāya*. Quite briefly, then, collection/absorption gather together the winds and make them manageable for use. Wind control/retention make them enter into the medial channel and penetrate the "germs of the four kinds of states." Mindfulness/enrapture bring about union<sup>49</sup> and through union the entry into and accomplishment of the *āryan* path. Here, however, the majority of the salient features of the steps of this path do not require mention in a paper dealing mainly with the subject of subtle body, for, as said above, the *Kālacakra* is a mother tantra, and consequently its completion stages mainly emphasize the path of integration of emptiness and great bliss. Thus, passing over these many, al-

though important, details, we may hasten to refer to the corporeal side of this path (i.e., the body of empty form).

Although the empty form of the Kālacakra deity is generated at the very beginning of the completion stages,<sup>50</sup> it remains little more than an extension of the imaginary form produced from the samādhi which seals the climax of the steps of generation,<sup>51</sup> and it is not until the time of the union<sup>52</sup> which is achieved by the practice of the limb of mindfulness (i.e., the fifth part or limb of the six part yoga) that this empty form comes into its own, for it is the union achieved by this practice which becomes the proximate cause of the mind/body of perfect enlightenment. This union thus achieved, the entire remaining path may be quite rapidly obtained by the sixth or final part, the limb of enrapture.<sup>53</sup> Through it all, the winds which are the support of saṃsāric consciousness are checked. According to the Kālacakra there are 21,600 such karmic winds which course through the body in a daily circuit. All these winds are to be withdrawn and the circuit stopped. With the cessation of this daily circuit, saṃsāric consciousness likewise ceases. Here, the chief method of realizing this cessation is through the cultivation of a sufficiently powerful antidote. Such an antidote is the yogic realization of emptiness inseparable from unchanging bliss, and the production and fortification of a sufficiency of such a realization is the function of the final limb or part of the six-part yoga, called “enrapture.”

Within this final part, the main procedure for effecting this might be translated as “piling up” (*brtsegs pa*). Here, the reader must backtrack for a moment. Through collection and absorption, the winds are made more and more manageable. Then, through wind control they are made to enter the medial channel. Then, on account of their being held in the medial channel through retention, a subtle psychic heat (*gtum mo*) is generated in the lower region. Then, the union achieved through mindfulness intensifies the psychic heat, making it blaze upward through the medial channel, causing the *bodhicitta* (or white *thig le*)<sup>54</sup> in the head region of the medial channel to melt. Finally, through enrapture, the molten seminal drops of the white bodhicitta begin to pile up or become stacked from the bottom<sup>55</sup> of the medial channel, and with each increase a higher and higher level of yogic realization is attained, and with these attainments there is a cutting off of an increasing number

of karmic winds.<sup>56</sup> Thereby, the āryan path is entered upon and completed.

In this final part of the six-part yoga, the path is divided into twelve. The first section corresponds to the *prayoga mārga*; the second to the first of the ten levels (*daśabhūmi*) and is co-extensive with the path of seeing (*darśana mārga*); the third through the eleventh to the path of cultivation (*bhāvanā mārga*) and is coextensive with the second through the tenth of the ten levels; and finally, the twelfth to the path of no further training (*aśaikṣa mārga*) or enlightenment itself. Thus, with the accumulation of the white and red bodhicitta in each of the twelve regions of the medial channel, a sufficiency of yogic realization is generated to bring about a rapid traversal of the path to the final goal of the attainment of the three perfect bodies of final enlightenment. Here, the *Kālacakra* teaches that with each piling up of the *bodhicitta*, the gross physical body is progressively consumed leaving in the end the pure body of the *Kālacakra* deity of empty form, like the elixir which dissolves iron, transforming it into pure gold. With the disappearance of the gross body, the piled up *bodhicitta* vanishes as well. Thus, the *Kālacakra* path becomes in the end like a kind of alchemy.

With this, we are brought back to the topic with which we began this discussion, that the *Kālacakra* does not utilize the *bardo* as a basis of purification. Relations between the gross and subtle bodies being such as they are in the *Kālacakra*, the subtle body of the *bardo*, or “illusory” type, cannot support the development of the *Kālacakra* path, for only the gross physical body is provided with the meta-structuring necessary to do this. This difference, and others such as we have noted above, have given rise to a great deal of discussion, sometimes controversy, within native Tibetan scholarship, discussions<sup>57</sup> which are way beyond the scope of this paper.

Thus, we conclude by noting that the *Kālacakra* path does not particularly lend itself to such brief treatment. The reason for this has already been given previously, that the *Kālacakra* path takes as its basis of purification the multifarious conventions of the inner and outer *Kālacakra*, i.e., its intricate systems of cosmology and meta-physiology. Notwithstanding these difficulties, we have tried somewhat to delineate the *Kālacakra* path against the background of the other *anuttara* tantras, especially with respect to its treatment of subtle body.

## Notes

1. This paper had its origin as a rather long footnote to a larger paper, "Some Notes Contextualizing the Kālacakra," which was prepared for delivery at the sixth IABS Conference in Tokyo, Japan, in September of 1983. I would like to thank Elvin W. Jones for his editorial and literary assistance in the preparation of this paper.

2. According to the ninefold classification: three Sūtrayāna, i.e., Śrāvaka, Pratyekabuddha, and Bodhisattva; three outer Mantrayāna, i.e., *Kriyā*, *Caryā*, and Yoga; and three inner unsurpassable, i.e., *Mahāyoga*, *Anuyoga*, and *Atiyoga*. Vid. Nyingma section, page 7 of 'Thu'u khan chos kyi nyi ma's History of the Tibetan Sects, *Legs bshad shel gyi me long*.

According to the fourfold classification: *Kriyā*, *Caryā*, Yoga, and *Anuttara*, *Kriyā* emphasizes mainly outer action, *Caryā* half outer half inner action, Yoga inner action, *Anuttara* highest inner action.

3. *anuttara* = *anuttarayoga*

4. In addition to the subdivision of father and mother tantra, *anuttara* tantras are often classified as nondual. Here, however, "nondual" does not refer to the nonduality of method and wisdom, but to the nonduality of emptiness and bliss. In this sense, all *anuttara* tantras are nondual. However, a great deal of discussion on such points has arisen on account of such terms and expressions, which are to be found in the tantras themselves.

5. The *Kālacakra-tantra* is frequently also called a nondual tantra. For the sense of this, see note 4 above.

6. Tucci's speculation in *Minor Buddhist Texts* that history has perhaps overestimated the concord between the followers of Sāntarakṣita and Padmasāmbhava is maybe too gratuitous. While pointing to no evidence in particular it ignores the fact that Sāntarakṣita, aside from being the great systematizer of the Yogācārasvāntarika-mādhyamika, is often counted as one of the principal ācāryas of *Kriyātantra*.

7. By the time of Atīśa's coming to Tibet in the eleventh century, Buddhism in Tibet had become badly fragmented, due to gLang dar ma's persecution of Buddhism and the disruption following his assassination and the breakdown of the old kingship. Some, for example, following the Vinaya, despised the tantras, and many following the tantras ignored and neglected the Vinaya, etc. Consequently, a large part of Atīśa's work in Tibet was the reintegration of Buddhism. In this work of reintegration, Atīśa taught the superiority of the tantras, and in this he was followed later by Tsong kha pa.

8. The Mahāyāna, being both the vehicle of the sūtras (Sūtrayāna = Pāramitāyāna) and the vehicle of the tantras (Tantrayāna = Mantrayāna), the common path means the path common to or shared by both systems of the Mahāyāna, for many principal elements of the Mahāyāna *qua* Mahāyāna are taught mainly in the sūtras rather than in the tantras, elements like details of the Bodhisattva vows, the practice of the pāramitās, many of the salient features of understanding emptiness, or of the development of *bodhicitta*, etc. Such features represent the common path, i.e., common to the pāramitā and tantric paths.



9. *rgyu'i theg pa*

10. *bras bu'i theg pa*

11. "wisdom (prajñā) as wisdom (prajñā)," i.e., wisdom, or *prajñāpāramitā*, which constitutes one of the six perfecteds, as the wisdom which is one of the contrasting pair of wisdom and method (prajñā and upāya).

12. Meditation (samādhi) is sometimes counted together with wisdom (prajñā) on the wisdom side.

13. Body (*Kāya*) does not mean "corporeity" but, rather, "an aggregate of qualities." Consequently, as we are not translating, we will often refer to *kāya* by way of its paraphrase as "aggregate."

14. *Sa bchu (daśabhūmi)*.

15. i.e., Buddhahood itself, the level immediately following the ten stages and the fulfillment of the entire Mahāyāna path.

16. In the Mahāyāna, the form body (*rūpakāya*) may be subdivided into a sambhogakāya and a nirmānakāya, the former being the natural or own form (*svarūpakāya*) belonging to a Buddha, and the latter being any number of corporeal manifestations presented by a Buddha to others for the purposes of leading or instructing them. Other than to the Buddhas themselves, the sambhogakāya is said to be visible only to Bodhisattvas of the ten stages.

17. When one speaks of a realization of emptiness inseparable from great bliss, one is referring to a *cognitum-cognizer (viśaya-viśayin)* relation. This is to say that emptiness itself is the direct object, or *cognitum*, of a mind cognizing it, whereas bliss is a mental quality belonging to the cognizing mind itself.

18. This biotic force is envisaged as the subtlest pneumatic element, which is inseparable from the subtlest consciousness. According to the tantras, there is no moment of consciousness or mind which is not associated with some sort of corporeal element that serves as its vehicle. Thus, the tantras will not admit to a realm of disembodied consciousness such as the Hinayāna holds the formless realm (*arūpaloka*), with its four subdivisions, to be. Even here, the tantras maintain the existence of a kind of subtle form, for wherever there is mind, they say there is also a corporeity on which, in a manner of speaking, it may be said to ride. These mounts of the mind are held to be the pneumatic element or winds (*gzhon pa'i rlung*) of the other elements. Of these winds, the most subtle is the life force itself (*srog rlung = gnyug ma'i rlung*), the vehicle of the most subtle consciousness (*gnyug ma'i sems*). During life, this pair of subtlest wind and consciousness are said to reside together in a point often called the "indestructible drop" (*mi shigs pa'i thig le*) which persists through the course of an entire life in the area of the heart. The consciousness associated with this pair becomes apparent in death itself as a vacuous, contentless lucidity, i.e., the clear light of death. Subsequently, the material side of this pair serves as a seed for the generation of a subtle body form in the intermediate state, a form called the "intermediate state body" (*bar do'i lus*). Similarly, it is the same subtle wind which provides the base for the production of an illusory body (*rgyu ma'i lus*) through the cultivation of *anuttara yoga*.

For further details concerning the ideas of death and dying to be found in the *anuttara* tantras see *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Bud-*

*dhism*, by Lati Rinbochay and Jeffrey Hopkins, London, Rider and Company, 1979.

19. Development of superior qualities and behavior through a mode of esoteric imitation or simulation (*rnam pa mthun par*) is one of the salient features of tantric yoga.

20. *utpattikrama* & *sampannakrama*

21. i.e., apotheosis in its simple literal sense of transformation or metamorphosis from a human into a divine being.

22. Re: three pure aggregates (*trikāya*), see notes 13 and 16 above.

23. In contradistinction to the Buddha's sambhogakāya, his actual or own body apparent to himself, the apparitional or docetic body (*nirmāṇakāya*) is a Buddha's heuristic projection of a seeming or appearance of body to another. Thus, by a kind of Mahāyāna docetism, Śākyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism, is just one such *nirmāṇakāya*, albeit a very special one called *paramanirmāṇakāya*, the most excellent docetic body.

24. In the body of this paper, three things are being designated as "clear light" and are distinguished as: clear light of death (*'chi ba'i 'od gsal*), exemplarily clear light (*dpe'i 'od gsal*), and actual clear light (*don gyi 'od gsal*).

25. For explanation of this exemplary clear light, see page 53 in text.

26. There are numerous commentaries on the path stages of the *Guhyasamāja*. Here, we are following mainly *gSang chen rgyud sde bzhi'i sa lam gyi rnam gzhag rgyud gzhung gsal byed*, by Ngag dbang dpal ldan, and *dPal gsang ba 'dus pa 'phags lugs dang mthun pa'i sngags kyi sa lam rnam gzhag legs bshad skal bzang 'jug ngogs*, by dByangs can dga' ba'i blo gros.

27. They anticipate inasmuch as the bases of purification, i.e., death, the intermediate, and birth, are the same for both the stages of generation and of completion, the former being mainly imaginary and the latter actual.

28. fivefold subdivision of the path (= fivefold path) of the Pāramitāyāna, i.e., *sambhāra mārga*, *prayoga mārga*, *darśana mārga*, *bhāvana mārga*, and *aśaikṣa mārga*, respectively the preparatory path, path of reaching, path of seeing, path of cultivation, path of no further training. Here, the path of seeing is coextensive with the first of the ten stages, and the path of cultivation with the remaining nine of the ten stages, and the path of no further training with enlightenment itself.

29. Deity = the *yidam* (Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*). The *anuttara* tantras center on various such deities, and here in the *Guhyasamāja* the deity, of course, is *Guhyasamāja* himself.

30. Here, in his *Sa lam* (op. cit.) dByangs can dga' ba'i blo gros characterizes the steps of completion as completing because they are steps of meditation which do not have recourse to the imagination but rather target actual *loci* of the human body, the channels, wind, and drops. "*Blos blags pa la ma ltos par rang grub tsam nas rdzogs pa'i lus kyi rtsa rlung thig le la gnad du bsnun nas bsgom par bya ba'i rim pa yin pas de ltar brjod pa'i phyir.*"

31. When classified into five steps, the first two steps, i.e., body and speech, of the sixfold classification are subsumed by a single withdrawal of speech, the following four, withdrawal of mind to union, remaining the same. The fivefold classification is particularly venerable as based on the system of Nāgārjuna.

32. In the metaphysiology of the tantras, there are three principal elements which are objects of the meditation that aims at effecting the psychophysical developments achieved on the tantric paths. These are the channels or veins (*rtsa*), wind or pneumatic element (*rlung*), and seminal drops or germ (*thig le*). These three elements for the most part occupy a level of subtlety intermediate between the gross body of flesh and bone and the finest corporeal essence represented by the "indestructible germ" which the tantras hold to be the root of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Of these, the veins form a quasi-anatomical network of seventy-two thousand channels through which course the winds. This ramous structure branches off from a relatively few chief ramiform channels, the principal of which are the medial channel and two channels to the right and left of it, respectively *rkyang ma* and *ro ma*, these three along with two others being the first to form in the ontogeny of the individual. These three intertwine in numerous places, thereby creating strictures or knots which ordinarily prevent the movement of the winds through the medial channel, whereas juncture points of other channels create various *nexi* often called "wheels" or "cakra," which are of considerable importance in the process of yoga. In ordinary life, the winds do not deeply penetrate and abide in the medial channel except through the action of death, and thus the deep penetration of this channel and the loosening of the knots is one of the principal jobs of the initial stages of the steps of completion. The winds have been briefly discussed above in note 18, but while they have numerous other functions in growth, bodily processes, etc., we have been able to mention only their importance for the tantras as vehicles of consciousness. Finally, the third of the above elements, the drops or germ (*thig le*) are seminal somatic essences both male and female, respectively white and red, which eventuate in multi-form structures like flesh, blood, bone, etc.

Additional information may be found in *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (op. cit.).

33. "Indestructible germ" or "drop" has two referents, i.e., the inseparable union of the subtlest mind/wind like kernel, and the red and white *thig le*, which, like the husk, encloses them in the region of the heart, the latter *thig le* being indestructible only during the duration of a present lifetime.

34. i.e., *dpe'i 'od gsal*. See note 24.

35. i.e., Buddhism as it developed in India and wherever such developments are preserved elsewhere.

36. *de dgu zad bas phyir mi'ong/ de ni bar skyes 'du byed dang/ 'du byed med yongs mya ngan 'da'*

37. In the Vinaya, a Śaṅgha will ordinarily consist minimally of four fully ordained bhikṣus. However, a bhikṣu who has obtained the āryan path and thus become an āryan may perform all the functions of a Śaṅgha in his own person. Consequently, here, the twenty Śaṅghas refer to twenty kinds of āryan individuals.

38. In the fivefold division of the path (See note 28 above) the first two divisions are the path of ordinary individuals (*prithagjana*), whereas the remaining three divisions are the path of the āryans or āryan individual. The point of entry into the āryan path is the first moment of the *darśana mārga*, or direct (i.e., nonconceptual, like sense perception) and unerroneous realiza-

tion of ultimate reality, for only with this kind of realization of truth does every type of purification become attainable.

39. . . . *Bar skyes nas dang/ byed dang byed min.* . . .

40. *sku dag pa sgyu ma'i sku dang thugs dag pa bde stong dbyer med kyi ye shes gnyis gzung du 'jug pa.* = *gzung 'jug gi sku* in *Guhyasamāja*.

*sku dag pa stong gzugs phyag rgya chen po dang thugs dag pa 'gyur med kyi bde ba chen po'i ye shes.* = *gzung 'jug gi sku* in *Kālacakra*.

41. Here a reader should not confuse "empty" in "empty form" and "empty" in "emptiness." The former refers only to a special kind of subtle body, and the latter refers to ultimate reality.

42. The *Vimalaprabhā* consists of five books, respectively devoted to elucidation of the topics of: Cosmology, Meta-physiology, Initiation, Sādhana, and Yogic realization (*jñāna*).

43. "Conventionalized into a system of cosmology. . . ." because commentaries dealing with the subject of the *Kālacakra*, like Bu ston Rimpoche's commentary on the *Vimalaprabhā*, often state that its cosmology is not to be taken as of direct meaning (*nges don*, Skt. *nūārtha*), i.e., as literally true, but rather that its cosmology represents an accommodation to the views of the persons to whom the Buddha taught this particular path to enlightenment. Buddhism in India had two principal systems of cosmology, that of the Abhidharma and that of the *Kālacakra*, with many differences between them.

44. "Roots of all the obscurations," words which occur in the tantra itself, is actually being said of the potencies of the mind/wind union which each of these seminal drops incorporates. This is also a sharp contrast to the concentration of the *Guhyasamāja* type yoga on the "indestructible drop" which it utilizes as the psychic and material base for transformations into the perfect mind/body of enlightenment.

45. *Vajra* is sometimes translated as "diamond," that is, the lord of stone which can cut all other substances, and sometimes as "thunderbolt," referring to the scepter of authority of Indra, the king of the gods. In either instance, there is a strong sense of the sovereignty which rules over all others of its kind.

46. Not only for the *Kālacakra*, but for all the other *anuttara-yoga* tantras as well, the special or uncommon (that is unshared by the *Pāramitāyāna*) attainment of the sambhogakāya is its aggregation of vocalizations. For the tantras, the speech element predominates in the sambhogakāya, whereas the form, or corporeal element, predominates in the *nirmāpakāya*.

47. In the tantras, sometimes four bodies are counted. The four bodies are just the three bodies (*trikāya*) plus a *svabhāvakāya* (*ngo bo nyid sku*). Here, the *svabhāvakāya* represents the cessations (*nirodha*) achieved by the Buddha and also his realization of emptiness. As in the tantras, realization of emptiness is inseparable from the experience of great bliss; *vajra*-bliss assimilates to the *svabhāvakāya* in the four *kāya* system, and to the *dharmakāya* in the three *kāya* system.

48. 1. *so sor bsadud pa*, 2. *bsam rtan*, 3. *srog rtsol*, 4. *'dzin pa*, 5. *rjes dran*, and 6. *ling 'dzin*.

49. i.e., union of the *Kālacakra* deity and his consort, each generated as a body of empty form in the navel area. See note 52.

50. This empty form of the Kālacakra deity is produced from a substance (there is a great deal of controversy on this point) which appears at the climax of a series of withdrawals and dissolutions of the consciousness-supporting winds. In the Kālacakra, the series is tenfold: four appearances associated with the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air, called night appearances; and six associated with particular forms of consciousness, called day appearances. The day appearances are said to be much harder to realize. The four night appearances are smoke, mirage, sparks, and flame of a butter lamp followed by the six day appearances, i.e., sun (like at the end of a great eon), moon, sun, *rāhula* (eclipse), lightning, and a blue *thig le*. In the center of this blue seminal drop is a speck of black substance in which appears the Kālacakra deity. This substance is taken as a basis for the production of empty form, and from it the body of the Kālacakra deity is generated. This leads us to note similarities and differences to a like series of eight appearances utilized in the *Guhyasamāja* when the consciousness-supporting winds are withdrawn. This eightfold series ends in the appearance of the clear light. An effort to elucidate this subject further would require the introduction of several additional topics too large for this small paper.

51. As above, the steps of generation of the Kālacakra are said to end when the meditator can visualize clearly, in every detail, and for as long as he likes, the deity with his maṇḍala and entourage of gods in a space the size of a mustard seed. This is a specifically tantric development of the meditative fixation (*samatha*) which is developed on all the Buddhist paths. The production of the form of the Kālacakra deity at the earlier stages is little more than an extension of this imaginative power of visualization.

52. In the initial stages of this union developed during the practice of mindfulness, there is not yet a direct yogic realization of emptiness. At this time, i.e., during the steps of mindfulness, one generates oneself as the Kālacakra deity and his consort as a body of empty form in union in the navel area for the first time. Through this union great bliss is realized. Subsequently, this realization of great bliss is made also to become a realizer of emptiness. This full realization of emptiness arises later, during the early stages of the practice of enrapture, specifically, with the "piling up" of the first 1800 seminal drops in the medial channel, an action which immobilizes an equal number of the 21,600 karmic winds. This also brings about the completion of the path of reaching (*prayoga mārga*) and entry into the path of seeing (*darśana mārga*), the beginning of the āryan path.

53. One of the features of the *śaḍaṅgayoga* worth noting is its enormous preparation of a technical yogic kind, extending through all the first five of the six parts, at length to be followed on the sixth by a rapid completion of the entire Mahāyāna path, beginning from the upper level of the path of preparation (*sambhāra mārga*) all the way to the attainment of the final goal.

54. The uncommon *bodhicitta* of the tantras are the white and red *thig le*. The white descending and the red ascending meet in the heart just before death. Accordingly, death is considered complete when each exits from the body at the opposite ends of the medial channel from which it began its movement. These white and red seminal drops are also utilized in tantric

yoga for the production of subtle states of consciousness, and as the material cause for subtle kinds of body.

55. With the piling up of the white *bodhicitta* from the bottom of the medial channel, there is also an inverse and commensurate piling up of the red *bodhicitta* from the top.

56. For the purposes of this yoga, the medial channel must be divided into seven key points and their six interstices and twelve semi-interstices, and the entire 21,600 karmic winds are grouped into twelve sets of 1800. Thus, with the accumulation of 1800 *thig le* in each of these twelve divisions of the medial channel (that is in the twelve semi-interstices), a sufficiency of yogic realization is generated to annihilate a comparable area of karmic winds.

57. Here, for instance, the reader who can read Tibetan might refer to the questions and answers concerning the Kālacakra to be found in *dPal dus kyi 'khor lo i sa lam gyi gnos 'dzin rag rim 'phros dang bcas pa mkhas grub smru ba'i nyi ma'i zhal lung*, by "Jam dbyangs dgyes pa'i bshes gnyen.