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Guenther's Saraha:
A Detailed Review of *Ecstatic Spontaneity*

Herbert Guenther. *Ecstatic Spontaneity: Saraha's Three Cycles of Dohā*. Nanzan Studies in Asian Religions 4. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1993. xvi + 241 pages.

Saraha and His Scholars

Saraha is one of the great figures in the history of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. As one of the earliest and certainly the most important of the eighty-four eccentric yogīs known as the “great adepts” (*mahāsiddhas*), he is as seminal and radical a figure in the tantric tradition as Nāgārjuna is in the tradition of sūtra-based Mahāyāna philosophy.¹ His corpus of what might (with a nod to Blake) be called “songs of experience,” in such forms as the *dohā*, *caryāgiti* and *vajragiti*, profoundly influenced generations of Indian, and then Tibetan, tantric practitioners and poets, above all those who concerned themselves with experience of Mahāmudrā, the “Great Seal,” or “Great Symbol,” about which Saraha wrote so much. He is reckoned as a spiritual ancestor by oral traditions in all of the “second wave,” gSar ma pa, Tibetan Buddhist schools, especially the bKa’ bryud, and his teachings were known, too, by those who transmitted and promulgated the “first wave” rNying ma pa tradition of the “Great Perfection,” rDzogs chen. And, though the Indian Buddhist culture of which Saraha was a part perished in the fourteenth century, echoes of his songs are to be found in non-Buddhist Indian traditions that survive to this day, especially those influenced by the Nāths and

1. For the traditional late Indian account of Saraha, see, e. g., Keith Dowman, *Masters of Mahāmudrā: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985) 66-72; and James B. Robinson, *Buddha's Lions: The Lives of the Eighty-Four Siddhas* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1979) 41-43.

Sants, from the Bauls of Bengal, to the Kabir Panth of the Hindi-speaking north, to the Warkari movement of Maharashtra.²

Even more than Nāgārjuna, though, Saraha is historically obscure and linguistically and philosophically elusive. We know virtually nothing with certainty about his life or times, and the vast majority of his works are available only in Tibetan translation. There is an extant Apabhraṃśa version of his best-known work, the *Dohākośagīti*, which has served as the basis of analysis and/or translation by, most notably, M. Shahidullah,³ P. C. Bagchi,⁴ D. B. Dasgupta,⁵ Rāhul Sāṃkṛtyāyan⁶ and David Snellgrove.⁷ This Apabhraṃśa version of the “People Dohās,” however, is almost certainly incomplete, and even if Apabhraṃśa is the original language in which Saraha composed, his thought cannot seriously be studied without taking into consideration the works under his name that are found only in Tibetan. Over a score of works are attributed to Saraha in the *bsTan ’gyur*,⁸ the most important of which are the so-called “People,” “Queen” and “King” *dohā*-collections that later were grouped together as the *Three Cycles of Dohā* (*Do hā skor gsum*)⁹; three collections of *vajragīti* (the “Treasures” of body, speech

2. See, e. g., June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), esp. 166-179; and Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, eds., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987); Schomer's essay, “The *Dohā* as a Vehicle of Sant Teachings” (61-90), is one of the best discussions in English of the poetic form used by Saraha.

3. *Les Chants Mystiques de Kāṇha et de Saraha: Les Dohā-kośa et les Caryā* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1928) 123-225.

4. *Dohākośa*, Calcutta Sanskrit Series 25c (Calcutta, 1938).

5. *Obscure Religious Cults*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1976 [1969]), esp. 3-109; and *An Introduction to Tāntric Buddhism*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1974).

6. *Dohā-kos* (Patnā: Bihār Rāṣṭr-bhāṣā Pariṣad, 1957).

7. Edward Conze, ed., *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954) 224-239.

8. See, e. g., James Robinson's list in *Buddha's Lions*, 291-292.

9. The “People Dohās” (S. *Dohākośa-gīti*; T. *Do hā mdzod kyi glu*) is Peking catalogue no. 3068, found in Daisetz T. Suzuki, ed., *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Peking Edition* [hereafter PTT], vol. 68 (Tokyo-Kyoto: Tibetan Tripiṭaka Research Foundation, 1957) 256/1/6-259/1/1 (= *bsTan ’gyur*, mi 74b-81b); and Tohoku [sDe dge] catalogue no. 2224, found in A. W. Barber, ed., *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Taipei Edition* [hereafter DT], vol. 28 (Taipei: SMC Publishing Co., 1991) 92/140(6)-94/153(3) (= *bsTan ’gyur*, wi 70b-77a). The “Queen Dohās” (S. *Dohākośa-upadeśagīti*; T. *Mi zad pa'i gter mdzod man ngan gyi glu*) is Peking no. 3111, found in PTT, vol. 69, 85/5/3-88/1/6 (= *tsi* 34a-39b); and Tohoku no. 2264, found in DT, vol. 28, 173/56(6)-175/66(4) (= *zhi* 28b-33b). The “King Dohās” (S. *Dohākośa-nāma-caryāgīti*,

and mind)¹⁰; and a song of instructions on Mahāmudrā, the *Dohākośa-nāma-mahāmudrā-upadeśa*.¹¹ What is more, Saraha's writings must be set in their theoretical and practical context, as an expression (and often radical condensation) of a great many strands of Indian Buddhism, from Mādhyamika and Yogācāra philosophizing, to classical meditation theory, to—most importantly—the complexities and subtleties of tantric theories, contemplations and rituals, especially those related to what came to be known as the *yoginī* tantras of the *anuttara yoga* class.

Very few scholars possess the linguistic and philosophical credentials to approach, let alone to engage and translate Saraha, but Herbert Guenther—for over forty years a pioneer in the study of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist tantra—certainly is one of them. In *Ecstatic Spontaneity* he has fulfilled a long-standing desideratum in tantric and Buddhist studies: a complete translation of Saraha's *Three Cycles of Dohā*. It undoubtedly will stand as one of the most important and challenging publications of his distinguished career. This is not, of course, Guenther's first presentation of Saraha. In 1969, he published *The Royal Song of Saraha*,¹² an annotated translation of the shortest of the *Three Cycles of Dohā*, the "King Dohās," together with the commen-

T. *Do hā mdzod ces bya ba spyod pa'i glu* is Peking no. 3110, found in PTT, vol. 69, 84/5/3-85/5/2 (= *tsi* 31b-34a); and Tohoku no. 2263, found in DT, vol. 28, 173/52(6)-173/56(6) (= *zhi* 26b-28b).

10. These are the *Kāyakośa-amṛta-vajragiti* (T. *sKu'i mdzod 'chi med rdo rje'i glu*), Peking no. 3115 and Tohoku no. 2269; the *Vāḥkośa-rucira-svara-vajragiti* (T. *gSung gi mdzod 'jam dbyangs rdo rje'i glu*), Peking no. 3116 and Tohoku no. 2270; and the *Cittakośa-aja-vajragiti* (T. *Thugs kyi mdzod skye med rdo rje'i glu*), Peking no. 3117 and Tohoku no. 2271. All three are found in vol. 69 of PTT (103/3/3-108/1/2 [= *tsi* 77b-89b) and vol. 28 of DT (196/212[4]-199/233[2] [= *zhi* 106b-117a]).

11. T. *Do hā mdzod ces bya ba phyag rgya chen po man ngag*, Peking no. 3119 (PTT vol. 69, 110/2/2-111/1/6 [= *tsi* 94b-97a) and Tohoku no. 2273 (DT vol. 68, 200/243[3]-201/247[7] [= *zhi* 122a-124a]). The authorship of this text is in some doubt. In both the sDe dge and Peking editions, the colophon states that the text was composed by *ri khrod chen po saraha*. If this is taken to mean "the great mountain hermit Saraha," then the author is our Saraha. Guenther and Barber both read it this way. If the expression is taken to refer to Mahā-Śābara Saraha, then it may point to Śābarīpa, the *mahāsiddha* who was a disciple of Saraha. The Peking follows this assignment, as do Robinson (*op. cit.*, 291) and Jampa Thaye, who has translated the text into English as "The Doha Treasure Mahamudra Instructions" (*A Garland of Gold: The Early Kagyu Masters in India and Tibet* [Bristol: Ganesha Press, 1990] 80-86).

12. *The Royal Song of Saraha: A Study in the History of Buddhist Thought* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1969).

taries of sKye med bde chen (= Bal po A su, eleventh century) and Karma 'phrin las pa (1456-1539).¹³ *The Royal Song* was both the first serious study of the historiography of Saraha and a fascinating portrait of the ways in which later thinkers understood the "King Dohās." In *The Tantric View of Life* (1972),¹⁴ perhaps his most eloquent discussion of Buddhist tantra, Guenther quoted copiously from many important Indian tantric works, including, quite prominently, all three of Saraha's *Cycles of Dohā*. Now, after nearly two decades in which his attention has been devoted primarily to translating and explaining the rDzogs chen tradition of the rNying ma school, Guenther has, with *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, returned to Saraha. The book is divided into two general sections, "Ecstatic Spontaneity," which provides historical and philosophical background for understanding Saraha's writings, and "Saraha's *Three Cycles of Dohā*," a heavily annotated translation of the Tibetan versions of the "People Dohās" (*Dohākośa-gīti*), "Queen Dohās" (*Dohākośa-upadeśagīti*) and "King Dohās" (*Dohākośa-nāma-caryā-gīti*), followed by a bibliography and trilingual index. I will discuss each of the two main sections of the book in turn.

Guenther's Introduction: General Reflections

The introductory section, "Ecstatic Spontaneity," is divided into four chapters: "Saraha," "Wholeness," "The Body" and "Complexity." The chapter on Saraha is, as Guenther admits, but a slightly revised republication of the first chapter of *The Royal Song of Saraha*, the reincarnation of which is justified by the fact that the earlier study has, regrettably, gone out of print. In the chapter, Guenther translates the biography of Saraha from Karma 'phrin las pa's commentary on the *Three Cycles of Dohā*, and then proceeds to argue that, the claims of previous scholarship notwithstanding, we know virtually nothing of Saraha's life, time or provenance. His arguments to this effect are convincing, as is his claim that "the Apabhraṃśa text [of the 'People Dohās'] is a bowdlerized and fragmented version of an earlier work that has been lost" (9). Guenther also analyzes Tibetan scholastic disputes about the authenticity of the "Queen" and "King" *Dohākośas*, letting Karma 'phrin las pa, in affirmation of their legitimacy, have the last word. He concludes the chapter by tracing the lineage of the *Three Cycles* from India to Tibet,

13. *Do hā skor gsum gyi tikā 'bring po sems kyi nām thar ston pa'i me long* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Druk Sherig Press, 1984).

14. Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1976 [1972].

again with considerable assistance from Karma 'phrin las pa, as well as 'Gos lo tsā ba's *Blue Annals*. Though nearly a quarter century has passed since *The Royal Song*, nothing has come to light in the intervening years that would cast serious doubt on the conclusions or details Guenther presented there. Granted, his arguments would be even more persuasive had he occasionally referred to the efforts of other scholars (there is one brief, dismissive reference to the work of Shahidullah and Snellgrove), but this objection notwithstanding, the chapter on "Saraha" in *Ecstatic Spontaneity* stands, as did its predecessor, as the most definitive and convincing available account of the historical and textual problems presented by Saraha.

The next three chapters treat, respectively, three topics crucial for understanding the *Three Cycles of Dohā*. "Wholeness" is concerned with exploring the various ways in which Saraha sings of "a wholeness whose presence we somehow sense as the driving force in our quest for its recovery" (16), via an analysis of the most important and difficult terms in the *dohās*: the four *mudrās*, especially Mahāmudrā, which Guenther explains as "a wholeness that can be experienced in the immediacy of ecstasy as a connectedness with the beingness-of-being" (19); "complementarity-in-spontaneity" (*sahaja*; *ghan skyes*); "the inmost mentor" (*bla ma*); "pristine awareness" (*gnyug ma'i sems*); "ownmostness" (*svabhāva*; *rang bzhin*); the "fourfold function of mind" as outer, inner, arcane and "holistic" (*phyi, nang, gsang* and *de kho na nyid*); and the "four dimensions of symbolic expression," i. e., memory, nonmemory, non-origin and transcendence (*dran, dran med, skye med* and *blo 'das*). In the chapter, Guenther draws primarily on other works by Saraha to support his discussion, especially the *Kāyakośā-amṛta-vajra-giti*, from which he quotes extensively. For secondary support, he draws on a number of texts from the rDzogs chen/sNying thig tradition, and the by now familiar range of modern Western writers, including Jung, Bateson, Whitehead and the physicist David Bohm. "The Body" deals primarily with what is usually called the "subtle body" (*sukṣmāśarīra*), with its interrelated systems of *cakras*, *nāḍīs*, *prāṇas* and *bindus*, which are not only descriptions, but symbols, embedded in richly evocative two- and three-fold semiotic schemes. The chapter's broader theme is the tantric view of human beings as "the outcome of numerous, hierarchically interlaced processes, not unlike a standing wave generated on a field of intersecting energies" (44), a "living and embodied . . . center of a constellation of . . . forces" (*ibid.*) that has its

roots in the “mental” dimension of the “*lumen naturale* (*’od gsal*) . . . that constitutes us in our ownmostness (*rang bzhin*).” (53) Here, Guenther bases his discussion almost entirely on literature from the rDzogs chen/sNying thig tradition. “Complexity” is an exploration of the symbolism of the five “resonance domains” (*rigs*), which are refractions of Kun tu bzang po, “the openness/nothingness (*stong pa*) of Being . . . [which is] a veritable matrix of both its own radiant intensity . . . and that of the *lumen naturale* of the human individual” (59). These resonance domains constitute a complex maṇḍala containing—as one’s perspective shifts—paired male and female “regents” (*rgyal ba/rgyal ma*), “instinctive sensibilities” (*nyon mongs*), pristine awarenesses (*ye shes*), aggregates (*phung po*), “supportive cosmic forces” (*kham*s), sensory apparatuses (*dbang po*), empowerments (*dbang bskur*) and colors (*kha dog*). Not only may each “domain” of the maṇḍala be seen in a variety of ways, but the five domains themselves may be understood as constituting a hierarchy, whether cosmogonically, as stages in a process of cosmic becoming, or soteriologically, as stages in a spiritual progression. In “Complexity,” as in “The Body,” Guenther bases his discussion primarily on the rDzogs chen/sNying thig tradition.

Taken together, these latter three chapters of the introductory section are a remarkably concise, yet comprehensive, treatment of most of the major themes of tantric Buddhism. They also serve to display both the strengths and weaknesses of Guenther’s approach to Buddhist tantra in general and Saraha in particular. It has long been Guenther’s contention that Buddhism, especially in its tantric forms, is virtually unique among pre-modern philosophical/spiritual traditions in its uncompromising espousal of precisely the kind of “holistic,” “hermeneutical,” “process” approach to reality that in one way or another informs such modern Western enterprises as the “New Physics,” existential phenomenology, process philosophy and analytical psychology. Leaving aside for the moment the possible incompatibilities among these various ways of approaching the world, or the degree to which they mirror the concerns and perspectives of first-millennium Indian Buddhists, one cannot but be impressed by the passion and erudition with which, over the years, Guenther has woven together a variety of strands, Buddhist and Western, humanistic and scientific, into a complex and apparently seamless tapestry that depicts at once the message of Buddhism, a scientific understanding of the nature of the world, and an existential assertion the possibilities for authenticity open to human beings. It may well be that,

a century from now, Guenther will be remembered as a great and visionary thinker, who more than any other scholar or philosopher of his time was able to bring Asian and Western ways of thinking together into a creative and ennobling synthesis. What is more, there undoubtedly is a good case to be made that there really are correspondences or analogies among the various approaches to the world invoked by Guenther—he is far from the only interpreter of Buddhism (though he was among the first) to notice that it may fruitfully be compared to certain modern Western perspectives on reality.

Correspondence, analogy and comparison, however, are not the same as complete identification, and if there is a crucial weakness in Guenther's approach, I think it is in his tendency not to rest content with "suggestive juxtapositions" of different world-views, but to treat them as if they are identical, or at the very least perfectly complementary. Thus, it is not sufficient to point out that a figure like Saraha may *pre-figure* one or another modern understanding of the world; for Guenther, Saraha *is* that understanding, but in a different guise. As a result, Saraha's mode of expression is perfectly interchangeable with certain modern modes of expression: his thought may be stated using modern concepts and language, and his words may be translated into the language of, e. g., contemporary hermeneutics, or cosmology, or both.¹⁵ When Saraha is seen thus, he may become a very cogent figure for suffering beings of the late twentieth-century West, but he loses his status as a historically situated figure: he takes on meaningful content at the cost of his context. If Guenther were merely asserting a *correspondence* among, say, Saraha, the New Physics and existential philosophy, then the possible differences between the two Western perspectives, or between them and Saraha, could merely be accepted as inevitable, minor flaws in a nevertheless suggestive set of analogies. When *identity* is asserted or assumed, however, we must look rather more carefully at the

15. Guenther would deny what I have just asserted. Indeed, in the introduction to *From Reductionism to Creativity: rDzogs-chen and the New Sciences of Mind* (Boston & Shaftesbury: Shambhala, 1989), he says: "My use of modern scientific terms . . . is not an attempt on my part to show that Buddhism is somehow another form of science, but is meant as a tool to bring to light that which has remained unsaid in what has been said and thereby to show that Buddhism still has 'something to say,' and that this something is significant" (6). Nevertheless, to the degree that Guenther actually gives us Buddhist thinkers *through* modern concepts, rather than simply comparing the two, he seems implicitly to treat them as if they were virtually identical.

terms and systems that are being identified, lest the importation of a term from one system seriously distort our understanding of the terms of another system. Thus, one must ask whether, in fact, the New Physics and existential philosophy even are complementary ways of approaching the world, let alone identical. For instance, is the insistence, by some existential thinkers, upon the ambiguity and absurdity of human existence compatible at all with the often strongly teleological character of some proponents of the New Physics? Maybe, maybe not; but the case for their compatibility needs to be demonstrated rather than merely asserted or assumed.

Even if one can make a case for the perfect complementarity or identity of various modern perspectives, there still remains the even more important question of whether it is legitimate to explain and translate Saraha via those perspectives. Are there differences of outlook or terminology sufficiently important that they vitiate the identification? Again, the answer is uncertain, but there are at least two areas of possible discrepancy that deserve mention: (1) "Being"-talk and (2) the language of cosmogony.

(1) Guenther long has argued that, as process-oriented thought, Buddhism cannot and should not, as Eliot's Prufrock has it, be fixed in "a formulated phrase . . . formulated, sprawling on a pin . . . pinned and wriggling against the wall." In line with this belief, Guenther has modified his terminology and translation-equivalents again and again over the years, as new books passed across his desk or new perspectives opened up to him. Amidst all this change, however, there has been a constant, a sort of terminological pole star, which is Guenther's injection of the word "Being" into both discussions and translations of Buddhist texts. It is, of course, a rich and malleable word; for Guenther, it seems to suggest the source and the fundamental nature of the world and its beings, an appreciation of which will bring one into harmony with oneself and all that is. Guenther always has been careful to specify that Being's nature is "openness/nothingness" (*stong pa nyid*), and that it should not be confused with the metaphysical absolute of Western theology and philosophy. Unfortunately, "Being" (especially when it is capitalized) carries with it a great deal of precisely the sort of metaphysical baggage Guenther would like to shed. It is very difficult to read the word without hearing echoes of Parmenides, Aristotle and Aquinas, and even if the reverberations are from a more recent figure, like Heidegger, there remain difficult questions about whether *anyone* writing in the

Western tradition can escape the hypostatization the term inevitably seems to invite.

More importantly, for all his many uses of the word over the years, Guenther never has convincingly explained what term in the Indian or Tibetan Buddhist lexicon “Being” is supposed to translate. In his analyses, Guenther generally uses the term without specific justification, as if it were perfectly natural; in his translations, he usually places it in brackets. Any term that must be bracketed as often as “Being” is by Guenther will begin, to the skeptical reader, to look like a candidate for Occam’s razor. Furthermore, in those few cases where the term is translated without brackets, one still wonders what its equivalent is in the source language. For instance, Guenther translates a synonym for Mahāmudrā, namely, *gzhi rtsa med pa*, as “Being—a ground that is without a ground” (17). Lexically, at any rate, it is only when one eliminates “Being” from the translation that the Tibetan phrase is approximated. Again, he translates *de kho na nyid (tathatā)* as “Being-in-its-beingness” (26); a lexical translation yields only “thusness” or “suchness.” The point here is that Buddhist writers most often chose the words they did, and their negative and/or indirect rhetorical style, as a way of *avoiding* terms that were susceptible to essentialization or hypostatization. Certainly, early writers self-consciously eschewed terms like *brahman*, *ātman*, *jīva*, etc., precisely so the dynamic outlook of Buddhism could be mirrored in its language; and even if later writers, whether in the Sūtra- or Tantrayāna traditions, became more comfortable with “affirmative” terms and metaphors, these more often than not received carefully “negativized” interpretations. One might argue that in the Tathāgatagarbha literature, certain tantras, and the writings of the rDzogs chen and the gZhan stong traditions, affirmative language is *not* explained away. This may be, but the problem of what term “Being” is supposed to translate remains unsolved; and even if a candidate is supplied from this corpus (*kun gzhi? gshis? kun tu bzang po?*), the question remains whether (as Guenther does in his chapters on “The Body” and “Complexity”) one should read one style of Buddhist *predominantly* through the lenses of another—should Mahāmudrā really be read via rDzogs chen, or Saraha via kLong chen pa?

(2) If the language of “Being” in Saraha seems largely to be a Guentherian interpolation, so, too, do the less numerous, but nevertheless noticeable, references to what might be described as an “onto-cosmogonic vision”—a notion of Being as manifesting, concretizing, or

intensifying itself, whether synchronically or diachronically. “The idea,” says Guenther, “is that a rupture occurred within the unity and symmetry of Being, and that this rupture gave rise to the space-time continuum. This eruption of Being into space and time was accompanied by a massive wave of intense, supracognitive energy that found its way into the heart of every embodied being . . . , where it serves as the organizing principle for the bodily evolution of that being” (24, n. 25). Once again, the reader is likely to be surprised, for nearly as often as they have been depicted as avoiding language suggestive of metaphysical absolutes, Buddhist thinkers have been regarded as uninterested in issues of cosmogony, which would seem more properly to be the preoccupation of those for whom some conception of “God” (or gods) is centrally important. It is Guenther’s contention, however, that “[t]he perennial quest for origins—still present today in humanistic cosmologies—also marks the treatment of *hominization* by the thinkers of the sNying-thig tradition. For them, the ‘beginning’ contains the code for all human becoming, and decoding it gives us understanding of the human individual” (58). In a footnote, Guenther identifies “humanistic cosmologies” as those of Teilhard de Chardin and proponents of the “anthropic principle.” The former is explicitly, if unconventionally, theistic, while the latter has often been interpreted as justifying a theistic world-view. (This, in turn leads to questions about what Guenther means by “Being” that cannot be pursued here.) The hermeneutical key to the last-quoted passage is the reference to “the sNying-thig tradition.” There can be little doubt that the question of origins *has* been an important one for sNying thig, which Guenther regards as “probably the most profound examination of wholeness to be found in non-Western intellectual history” (*ibid.*); and if, as Guenther suggests earlier, “wholeness” is an appropriate translation of both *mahāmudrā* and *rdzogs pa chen po* (16-17), then isn’t it reasonable to view Saraha, for whom *Mahāmudrā* is a central theme, through sNying-thig lenses, and therefore as implying (or even stating) an onto-cosmogonic vision? I think not, unless one is willing to assume, as Guenther here appears to, a homology between *Mahāmudrā* and *rDzogs chen* so strong that obvious terminological and systemic differences may comfortably be ignored—and I do not think that differences among Buddhist traditions ought to be written off any more blithely than those among Western traditions or between (one or more) Buddhist tra-

ditions and (one or more) Western traditions.¹⁶ Again, Guenther's tendency toward "identification" creates problems.

Before passing on to the translation, I want to touch briefly on one other general issue raised by the introductory chapters: the way in which Guenther treats his philosophical or scholarly "foils." Guenther is an eloquent advocate of a "holistic," multi-dimensional approach to the world and living within it, and a tireless translator of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thinkers who seem to endorse such an approach, so one cannot but be struck by the irony that, despite his (and his sources') rejection of such intellectual bugaboos as "dichotomic thinking" and "reductionism," he seems on occasion to fall prey to just these tendencies. Thus, in the Preface to *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, he delineates a number of general oppositions that help to shape his approach: representational vs. hermeneutical thinking, speculative vs. experiential mysticism and static vs. dynamic views of reality (xiv-xv). Polarities such as these certainly have heuristic value for purposes of analysis, but they do have the disadvantage, if wielded carelessly, or taken too seriously, of imprisoning those who would use them inside a cage of, yes, dichotomic thinking, whereby any system or thinker must be placed on one or another side of a great spiritual and intellectual divide. Guenther has invoked such dichotomies often in the past, setting up oppositions between, *inter alia*, Eastern and Western philosophy,¹⁷ Hinayāna and Mahāyāna,¹⁸ Sūtra and Tantra,¹⁹ Indian and Tibetan thought,²⁰ dGe lugs and rNying ma/bKa' brgyud thought,²¹ or even all other Buddhist philosophical views and that of

16. On the question of the relationship between Mahāmudrā and rDzogs chen, see, e. g., The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *Kindness, Clarity and Insight* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1984) 200-224; Samten Gyaltzen Karmay, *The Great Perfection: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988) 197-200; and David Jackson, "Sa-skya Paṇḍita the 'Polemicist': Ancient Debates and Modern Interpretations," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (13.2: 1990), esp. n. 28, 75-78 and n. 87, 95-96.

17. See, e. g., *The Life and Teaching of Nāropa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) 124-130.

18. See, e. g., *From Reductionism to Creativity*, 125.

19. See, e. g., *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971) 169-170.

20. See, e. g., *Meditation Differently: Phenomenological-psychological Aspects of Tibetan Buddhist (Mahāmudrā and sNying-ihig) Practices from Original Tibetan Buddhist Sources* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992) xi.

21. See, e. g., *Mind in Buddhist Psychology* (with Leslie S. Kawamura; Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1975) xii.

rDzogs chen.²² The inevitable result of overvaluing this kind of dichotomy is reductionism, with its built-in tendency to overlook exceptions and nuances. In *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, for instance, Guenther deliberately sets up an opposition between Saraha, who celebrates “the immediacy of experience” and his purported disciple, Nāgārjuna, founder of the “much overvalued Madhyamaka system of philosophy,” which Saraha is said to have criticized for its “logical reductionism” (9). Saraha does make a passing, unflattering reference to Mādhyamikas in the *Kāyakośā-amṛta-vajragīti*, but his disparagement, in verse 6 of the “People Dohās,” of those who “run after the Mahāyāna” does not, Guenther’s contention notwithstanding, seem directed specifically at the Madhyamaka (see 91 and 161, n. 12). Even if it is, it is hardly proof that Saraha and Nāgārjuna stand on opposite sides of a great chasm: Madhyamaka, after all is a long and complex tradition of thought in both India and Tibet. Simply to write it off as “logical reductionism” (and I’m not convinced that *Saraha* actually does this) is to overlook the degree to which Mādhyamika thought came to be intertwined with the tantric outlook, and even the Mahāmudrā literature, to which Saraha’s work is so basic. Conversely, it also overlooks the degree to which Saraha himself is steeped in the discourses of “conventional” Sūtrayāna Buddhism, whether it is negative rhetoric of Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka, affirmation of the three or four *buddhakāyas*, or the vocabulary of meditative concentration.

This proclivity toward reductionism also is evident in Guenther’s attitude toward scholars working in his field: he tends either to ignore or dismiss them. Thus, one will hunt in vain in the bibliography to *Ecstatic Spontaneity* for references to the work of, e. g., Agehananda Bharati,²³ David Seyfort Ruegg,²⁴ Per Kvaerne,²⁵ Alex Wayman²⁶ or Michael

22. See, e. g., *From Reductionism to Creativity*, 184.

23. *The Tantric Tradition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970 [1965]).

24. E. g., “A Karma bKa’ brgyud Work on the Lineages and Traditions of the Indo-Tibetan dBu ma (Madhyamaka),” in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata* (Serie Orientale Roma, 56, 3, 1249-1280); and *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989).

25. *An Anthology of Buddhist Tantric Songs: A Study of the Caryāgīti* (Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1977); “On the Concept of Sahaja in Indian Buddhist Tantric Literature,” *Temenos* 11 (1975): 88-135.

26. E. g., *The Buddhist Tantras: Light on Indo-Tibetan Esoterism* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1973).

Broido.²⁷ Guenther *does* refer (8, n. 14) to earlier work on Saraha by M. Shahidullah and D. S. Snellgrove, but the former is passed over quickly, while the latter is dismissed for his “less than adequate” understanding of Apabhramṣa and Tibetan—an assessment that, whatever the defects of his translation of Saraha, hardly does justice to Snellgrove’s large and well-respected Tibetological *oeuvre*.²⁸ What is perplexing in all this is that Guenther clearly is an immensely learned and subtle scholar, capable of analyzing philological nuances or historiographical problems as adeptly as he employs Heidegger or Jung or David Bohm—yet he persists in oversimplifying complexity and “reducing reductionists.” In doing so, he threatens to undermine the very values he so eloquently defends, to belie by his style the vital and visionary content he very much wants us to take to heart. One wishes sometimes that Guenther would hearken to the words of a poet with whom he should have a great deal of sympathy, Blake, who advised his readers to embrace the complexity symbolized by “fourfold vision,” and to overcome the temptation to “single vision, and Newton’s sleep.”

The Translation: General Comments

The second part of *Ecstatic Spontaneity* features a translation of the “People,” “Queen” and “King” *Dohākośas*, organized and numbered according to the text-divisions supplied by Karma ’phrin las pa. Guenther never makes it entirely clear which version of the Tibetan translation of Saraha he is working from. His bibliography lists only the Peking *bsTan ’gyur* volume and folio numbers, yet he follows Karma ’phrin las in accepting the sDe dge arrangement of the “Queen Dohās.” I can only presume that in preparing his rendition of “the nowadays standard Tibetan translation preserved in the *bsTan-’gyur*” (159, n. 6), he probably has drawn on both the Peking and sDe dge editions (which are generally—but not always—identical in their readings). The translation of the “Queen Dohās” is, so far as I know, the first into any Western

27. E. g., “Padma dkar-po on Tantra as Ground, Path and Goal,” *The Journal of the Tibet Society* (4: 1984): 5-46; “Padma dkar-po on the Two *Satyas*,” *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (8, 2: 1985): 7-60; “Sa-skyā paṇḍita, the White Panacea and the Hva-shang Doctrine,” *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (10, 2: 1987): 27-6.

28. E. g., *Buddhist Himalaya* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1957); *The Hevajra Tantra*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); and *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors*, 2 vols. (Boston: Shambhala, 1987).

language, while the “People Dohās” is given a *complete* translation for the first time. The translation of the “King Dohās” is a lightly revised version of that published in *The Royal Song of Saraha*—almost all the emendations are for the purpose of updating translation terminology. Here, I will comment briefly on the translation’s general features, then point to some particular passages where alternative readings or renditions might be proposed.

If Guenther’s vision of Buddhism and his approach to scholarship have been—and may legitimately be—questioned, his understanding of the Tibetan language has not. Indeed, what has frustrated more than a handful of Guenther’s readers over the years was the sense that here was a Westerner who could read Tibetan as well as any non-Tibetan alive, yet whose published translations were so encoded in the author’s idiosyncratic terminology that they were virtually inaccessible to anyone who did not have before them the Tibetan original *and* all the books Guenther had ever read. Readers expecting to find Guenther’s rendition of Saraha’s *Three Cycles of Dohā* any easier than his previous translations will be disappointed. He does not, after all, see himself as in the business of providing “easy” translations. Buddhist (and especially tantric) thought, he has pointed out again and again, is *not* easy: it is richly evocative and complex, and only a suitably complex translation-scheme can begin to convey the full sense of the original. In line with his long-standing approach, therefore, Guenther translates Saraha into English that befuddles the eye and stumbles off the tongue, and is undeniably complex and evocative—though whether the complexity and evocativeness of Guenther’s Saraha are the same as the complexity and evocativeness of the original is, of course, debatable. Guenther argues that because we have lost the melodies of Saraha’s songs, and because “the natural rhythms of [his] language disappear in the Tibetan translation . . . we must rely heavily on the notions of wholeness, body and complexity to capture the flavor of Saraha’s work” (85). In other words, since the “true original” is forever beyond our ken, we may as well translate according to later commentaries or concepts that seem to capture the original’s “spirit.” The practical effect of this is that Guenther’s reading of Saraha is shaped as much by his reading of Karma ‘phrin las pa’s sixteenth-century commentary and by his own synthesis of Buddhism, hermeneutics and the New Physics, as by the Tibetan text. Thus, though the syntax, grammar and overall sense of the Tibetan are (in general) faithfully rendered, the reader must work

through one or two other layers of discourse to approach what a more “straightforward” version of the original might convey. I put “straightforward” in quotes out of deference to Guenther’s contention that the belief that there is any such thing as a “straightforward translation” is delusive. I agree, but in the same breath would argue that there are at least degrees of straightforwardness, and that when in doubt, translators ought to hew closer to literalism; add less, rather than more, to their renditions; and, as much as possible, keep commentary identifiably separate from translation.²⁹

These theoretical qualms notwithstanding, I want to emphasize that a careful comparison of his translation with the Tibetan editions of the originals available to me—those published in Taipei (sDe dge) and Tokyo-Kyoto (Peking),³⁰ respectively—convinces me that Guenther *has* construed the syntax, grammar—and sense—of Saraha with remarkable fidelity. What is more, although his translation terminology is as challenging as ever, Guenther makes a much greater effort here than in some of his earlier works to apprise the reader of what in the Tibetan original a particular word or phrase may translate, as well as his reasons for translating it thus. Indeed, the entire apparatus of notes to the translation is superb, incorporating detailed discussions of alternative readings of Saraha’s text found in various commentaries (with all of which Guenther seems familiar), and intriguing, provocative analyses of difficult and important terms. This kind of detailed annotation makes it far easier to approach the translation itself, and Guenther and/or his editors are to be congratulated for the care they have taken with this crucial aspect of the book.

It also must be said in favor of the translation that on the one *Dohākośa* for which alternative translations are available, the “People Dohās,” Guenther’s effort marks a real improvement over its predecessors. In comparison to Snellgrove’s, for instance, Guenther’s translation is more complete (since it incorporates the full Tibetan text, rather than just those verses that have been found in Apabhraṃśa), and appears to offer more accurate renditions of a number of important passages. To take just two instances, Guenther translates verse 119 (*rdo rje pa dma gnyis kyi bar gnas pa / bde ba gang gis rnam par rol pa yin / ci ste de*

29. For an articulate summary of this view, written over two decades ago, and with Guenther even then in mind, see R. A. Stein, *Vie et Chants de 'Brug-pa Kun-legs le Yogin* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1972) 29-36.

30. For bibliographical information on these editions, see above, n. 9.

bden nus pa med pas na / sa gsum re ba gang gis rdzogs par 'gyur) as: “He who enjoys the pleasure that / Resides in between the diamond and the lotus— / So what! since there is no capacity [to effect anything] in this pleasure / With what will he fulfil the expectations people have in the triple universe of theirs?” (116). Snellgrove, on the other hand (perhaps following Shahidullah), misses the irony of the original: “That blissful delight that consists between lotus and vajra, / Who does not rejoice there? / In the triple world whose hopes does it fail to fulfil?” (his verse 94, in *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* [BTTA], 237). Similarly, in translating verse 142 (*stong pa'i sdong po dam pa'i snying rje min / gang la slar yang rtsa ba me tog lo 'dab med / de la dmigs par byed pa gang yin pa / der lung bas ni yan lag med par 'gyur*), Guenther has: “If in someone this solid tree of [Being's] nothingness is such as not to show compassionate concern / It will not even have roots, leaves, and flowers. / Anyone who makes this [barren tree] the object of his concentration / Will fall into [the extreme of nihilism] and become one who is without the tools [to extricate himself from it].” This may not be mellifluous poetry, but is, overall, better attuned to the nuances of the text than Snellgrove's rendition: “So the fair tree of the Void also lacks compassion, / Without shoots or flowers or foliage, / And whoever imagines them there, falls down, / For branches there are none” (verse 109, BTTA 239). These are important examples of Guenther's improvement upon Snellgrove (and Shahidullah's) translation; there are many others that could be cited, and the overall effect is a rendition of the text that is considerably more faithful to the syntax and grammar of the original than we have had before.

Guenther's translation is a remarkable one; let nothing detract from that basic fact. There are, however, just a few passages where his rendition struck me as imprecise or potentially misleading in relation to the Tibetan of Saraha's *dohās*, and a few others that reveal apparent inconsistencies in terminology or awkwardness of grammatical construction. In addition, I have detected several instances where lines of Tibetan are not reflected in the translation, and a number of typographical errors. In what follows, I will catalogue most, but not all, of these passages. My suggestions are not to be taken as “corrections” of Guenther, but, rather, as “queries” about alternative readings of the text, about which I am quite ready to be corrected. The “People Dohās” will be abbreviated as “P,” the “Queen Dohās” as “Q,” the “King Dohās” as “K,” the Peking

edition of the *bsTan 'gyur* as “Pe,”³¹ the sDe dge edition of the *bsTan 'gyur* as “D” and Guenther as “G.” It should be noted that Guenther does not usually make it clear which version of a particular line or verse of Tibetan he is using for his translation. A comparison of his translation with the Peking and sDe dge versions available to me usually has permitted identification of the original Tibetan from which he is working, but there may be instances where Guenther and I are *not* referring to the same verse(s)—and in those cases, my comments may require revision.

The Translation: Analysis of Specific Passages

In considering passages where I think the translation may be either imprecise or misleading, I will *not* generally address Guenther’s systematic translation choices (“egologically predisposed awareness” for *nyid*, “complementarity-in-spontaneity” for *lhan skyes*, “the beingness-of-Being” for *de kho na nyid*, etc.), or the problems raised by his bracketed interpolations, (e. g., of “Being”-talk). I have discussed some of these issues generally above, and to examine all of them in detail would require a book—and even that probably still would fail to settle all the issues involved. Rather, I will simply point to some of those instances where I think that Guenther’s rendition may lead the reader away from a “straightforward” sense of the original verses even *within* the parameters of his own translation-scheme.

P 26d reads: *srid dang mnyam nyid tha das ma 'byed par*; G’s translation reads: “Without differentiating between samsara and nirvana” (95). “Nirvāṇa” may be a connotation of *mnyam nyid* (*samatā*), especially when it is paired with *srid [pa]* (= *bhāva*, saṃsāric becoming), but the denotation is something more like “sameness.” As in the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*, *mnyam nyid* certainly refers to the true nature of things, and by extension to the realization of that nature that a Buddha (who has, at the very least, attained nirvāṇa) enjoys, but this seems to me not completely to “translate” into the idea of nirvāṇa.

31. In sections “The Translation: Analysis of Specific Passages,” and “Some Technicalities,” I will usually cite the Peking version of Saraha, since that is the edition listed by Guenther in his bibliography; variant readings found in the sDe dge will be indicated in footnotes.

P 36ab reads: *sems ni nam mkha' 'dra bar gzung*³² *bya ste / nam mkha'i rang bzhin nyid du sems gzung*³³ *bya*; G's translation reads: "One's psychic background. . . must be understood to be like the sky. . . and /The sky must similarly be understood [to be like] one's psychic background" (97-98). The first line is unproblematic; in the second, however, it seems to me that the *du* postpositional to *rang bzhin* is likelier to make it the object rather than the subject of the sentence which, rather than reversing the sentence of the first line, intensifies it: "Mind is to be apprehended as like the sky; / As the very nature of sky is mind to be apprehended." Here, the "natural" (*rang bzhin du*) identity of mind and sky asserted by the second line is even stronger than the mere similarity asserted by the first. G's reading of P 36b is far from impossible, but it seems marginally the less likely of the two.

P 60d reads: *soms*³⁴ *so zhe na gcig gi rnam pa las*³⁵ *mi bskyod*; G's translation reads: "If you know [that sensation or thought or action] . . . / Is [your] mentation, [you will have realized that] there is nothing that has not sprung from it" (103). While I agree that Saraha's point here is that there is nothing that has not sprung from mind, the Tibetan here does not clearly justify G's double negative construction. More importantly, G (perhaps following a commentarial emendation) seems to read *bskyod* (shaken, moved) as *bskyed* (sprung, generated), and therefore the last part of the line simply as a reiteration of the first half. The second part of the line is difficult to construe, but if we accept *bskyod* as the correct form, then the whole line would be translated by something like: "When you [know] that [sensation or thought or action] is mind, you will not be shaken from that single perspective."³⁶ Alternatively, one might take sensation, etc., as the subject and translate: "When you [know] that [sensation or thought or action] is mind, [you know that] they are not shaken from that singular aspect."

P 77cd reads: *gang tshe rlung rgyu*³⁷ *de ni mi g.yo ste / 'chid*³⁸ *ba'i tshe na rnal 'byor pas ci bya*; G's translation reads: "Even while the

32. D: *bzung*.

33. D: *bzung*.

34. D: *sems*, which seems preferable.

35. D: *la*.

36. This is the sense conveyed by Snellgrove (BT TA, p. 231), though he follows Shahidullah in translating the first part of the line by "Abandon thought . . .," reflecting a translation of the Apabhraṃśa *maṇa chaḍḍu*—the latter imperative verb is not reflected in the Tibetan translation.

37. D: *rgyud*, which seems preferable.

38. This probably should be *'chi*.

biotic forces may stir, the innermost mentor remains unshakable. / At the time of your dying, what can the Lady of Enchantment (*rnal 'byor ma*) do?" (107). In line d, G (at least following Mokṣākaragupta; see 174, n. 87) reads a feminine suffix where Pe and D have the masculine; a translation based on the latter would ask what at the time of death a *yogī* (*rnal 'byor pa*) can do. Line c—following as it does two lines that describe the guru's ability to comprehend the cessation of mind (*sems*) and winds (*rlung*) without ever closing his eyes—*may* refer implicitly to the guru in the terms described by Guenther, but his reading seems to me to leave line d somewhat isolated from the rest of the verse. If one takes the last two lines as disjunctive from the first two, emphasizing the contrast between the guru and a mere *yogī*, and takes the *yogī* of line d as the subject of line c, then the lines read: "[But] when the flow of winds moves no more, / Then, at the time of death, what is a *yogī* to do?" One cannot, of course, give this translation if one follows G's reading of line d; if one does, then his translation is probably the more plausible (though I think that there is an ironic edge to the *ci bya* construction that Guenther's translation, and his note, miss).

P 106c reads: *chags dang chags bral spangs nas dbu mar zhugs*; G's translation reads: "Enter [and reside in] Being's immanent wholeness in you, once it has discarded this attachment and [its] attachment-free phase" (114). G states in a footnote that his rendering is based on a version of the *dohā* "as commentated upon by Karma 'phrin las . . . , Mokṣākaragupta, . . . and Advaya Avadhūti" (188). This leaves ambiguous whether the particular verse in question is preserved by these commentators in a different form from that of Pe and D; if not, it is difficult to see how *dbu mar zhugs* can be taken as "Enter . . . Being's immanent wholeness"—denotatively, it seems to refer to the *anuttara yoga* tantra *sampannakrama* "entry" of the *yogī*'s energies and awareness into the central "psychic channel" (*dbu ma*). The phrase may have connotations like those drawn out by G, but if it is based on the same wording as found in Pe and D, his rendering strays far enough away from a straightforward reading of the original that it obscures at least one important sense that is conveyed.

P 138b³⁹ reads: *sems ni ngo bo nyid kyis dag pa na*; G's translation reads: "Since mind's 'stuff' (*sems kyi ngo bo*) is by virtue of the 'stuff' [the universe is made of, *ngo bo nyid kyis*] pure" (121). Here, the *ngo*

39. This is actually line c in Pe, which reverses lines b and c, and gives a truncated version of (its) line b; G appears to be following D here.

bo that is implied parenthetically to modify *sems* is not present in the original: it is just “mind” (*sems*) that is the subject, and what is predicated of it is simply that it is *ngo bo nyid kyis dag pa*, “naturally” or “essentially” pure. Even if G’s interpretation in terms of the “stuff of the universe” is not grammatically unwarranted by the original, it does seem to add considerable semantic (and metaphysical!) complications to it.

P 141 reads: *stong pa’i sdong bo*⁴⁰ *dam pa me tog rgyas / snying rje dam pa sna tshogs du mar ldan / lhun gyis grub pa phyi ma’i ’bras bu ste / bde ba ’di ni gzhan pa’i sems min no*; G’s translation reads: “On the solid tree of [Being’s] nothingness a flower has opened / With many varied [petals expressive of Being’s] genuinely compassionate concern. / [Though being Being’s] complementarity-in-spontaneity it later bears fruit that is / Ecstasy. This [ecstasy] is not some other mind” (121). In line c, “complementarity-in-spontaneity” (G’s standard translation for *ghan cig skyes pa*) seems an inappropriate equivalent for *lhun gyis grub pa*, which usually has the sense of “spontaneously accomplished” or “spontaneous accomplishment.” Granted, *ghan skyes is lhun grub*, but the latter’s rendition as “complementarity-in-spontaneity” seems to me to miss the original verse’s strong use of contrast: although the tree is “nothing,” it still bears flowers of compassion; although ecstasy (or is it compassion?) is spontaneously accomplished, it bears fruit later. Line d certainly can be read the way G proposes—it helps to underscore the identity of *stong pa nyid*, *snying rje* and *bde ba*—but Snellgrove’s suggestion is possible, too: “This joy has no actual thought of others” (his verse 108, BTTA, 239).

Q 3a reads: *dpyad pas ma ’ongs de bzhin nyid kyi ye shes ni*; G’s translation (his verse 3b) reads: “Of this pristine awareness of Being’s beingness [which is this beingness] one cannot have enough, however much one may indulge in it . . .” (124). I confess I cannot understand the derivation of G’s translation of *dpyad pas ma ’ongs*, which modifies *de bzhin nyid kyi ye shes*: a more straightforward translation of this characterization of the “pristine awareness of Being’s beingness” would seem to me to be something like “which does not come about (*ma ’ongs*) through analysis (*dpyad pas*).”

Q 7 reads: *dngos por skye ba dngos po med par rab zhi zhing / de yi phyogs dang bral ba mkhas pa de nyid kyis / blon po rnams kyi blo la rang gis dpyad bya na / skad cig grol ba de la chos kyi sku zhes bya*; G’s translation reads: “What has become ‘existence’ comes to rest in

40. D: *po*.

'non-existence' and / When this very knowledge that is dissociated from either alternative / [Though already present even] in the intellect of stupid people, is investigated by itself [in its emerging], / The moment [the external and internal] dissolves [in the immediacy of Being's] dynamic freedom, is said to be Being's meaning-rich gestalt" (125). Aside from the introduction to line d of the unbracketed "dissolves," which is not reflected in the Tibetan, G's translation is certainly a possible one. It is possible, however, to construe the *mkhas pa* in line b as referring to a knowledgeable or skillful *person*, and to suggest that when such a person investigates what even fools have in (or as) their minds, the Dharmakāya ensues; the *dohā* might thus be translated: "What arises as entity comes to rest in non-entity; / When those same wise persons who are impartial about [entity and non-entity], / Themselves investigate what is in the minds of fools, / Then instantaneously they will be freed—that is called Dharmakāya."

Q 34d reads: *chos rnams thams cad rkyen med par ni skye ma yin*; G's translation reads: "All these entities of your reality are in the absence of conditions [to the contrary], not [something that] is being born" (134). This is an ambiguous line, which might be taken either as negating *or* asserting the arising of the sense-objects on which, in the previous line, one has been advised to depend. It may, with equal grammatical plausibility, be translated: "No dharma lacking conditions arises" or "All dharmas, lacking conditions, do not arise." Given the general tenor of Saraha's rhetoric, one would be inclined toward the latter. This seems to be the direction of Guenther's translation, but his bracketed interpolation of "to the contrary" confuses me: wouldn't the absence of conditions *to the contrary* assure that something *would* be born, while the absence of conditions assure that it *wouldn't*?

Q 41ab reads: *ye shes skyes pa'i rnal 'byor gang la'ang dogs med pas / dbang phyug rtags [D: thabs] dang ldan par⁴¹ mthar skyes gtsal bar bya*; G's translation reads: "A [Śaivite] yogi in whom a [pseudoexistential] pristine awareness [allegedly imparted to him by Śiva himself] has come about, [and hence] in whom there is no fear, / Will, whilst wearing the insignia of Śiva [as a charm] look for a woman born in the outskirts. / [Or, a Buddhist yogi in whom the pristine awareness of the unity of masculine and feminine forces (that are working in and through him) has come about, should look for an anima-figure (*rig ma*) born in the border region (of his consciousness and the uncon-

41. D: *pas*.

scious) who will impart lasting bliss and who has the excellent indications of inner spiritual wealth.]” (135-136). It is evident from G’s note (204, n. 51) that he has drawn his reading from Karma ’phrin las pa, who takes the two verses in question as referring critically to a Śaiva yogi’s search for a consort in *external* border-regions, and then interpolates a contrasting description of a Buddhist yogi’s *inner* search. The mooted term here is *dbang phyug (iśvara)*, which often has Śaiva connotations. This undoubtedly posed a problem for Saraha’s Buddhist commentators, but may not have much preoccupied Saraha himself: he might have found it perfectly conceivable for a Buddhist yogi to wear Śaiva insignia, especially if Bharati is right that Saraha and the other *mahāsiddhas* originated in a rustic, mixed (or proto-) Buddhist-Hindu milieu, and were considerably less doctrinaire than their commentators.⁴² A second solution is provided by the fact that *dbang phyug* need not invariably have Śaiva connotations: it may simply refer to something or someone powerful. Either reading frees us to give a more straightforward reading to line a, whose subject now can be taken as a *Buddhist yogi*, whose *ye shes* need not be bracketed away as G (and apparently Karma ’phrin las pa) have insisted it be. The passage thus would read: “A fearless yogi in whom gnosis has arisen / Should, with powerful [or: Śiva’s] insignia [or—if we accept D—with powerful methods], seek [a woman] born on the outskirts.”

Q 45cd reads: *yon tan bzung nas*⁴³ *rang gis rig pa’i ye shes sbyin / skabs su ro snyoms gnyug ma’i phyag rgya bzung*; G’s translation reads: “Taking in her qualities he will [reciprocate by] offering his pristine awareness, / Reverberating with the intensity of [their] immediate experience, and, / For the time being, he will take this pristine awareness—heightened in its sensibility through Being’s genuineness [operating in it], approximating in flavor [Being’s nothingness replete with everything in highest perfection]—as the Mahāmudrā experience” (137). G’s translation adds a full line of English (“Reverberating . . .”) that is neither found in Pe or D, nor noted by G to occur in any other recension of the *dohā*. Also, his rendition of line d distinguishes less clearly than usual what material is in the Tibetan and what is not; a more

42. *The Tantric Tradition*, 29-30. It must be noted, however, that the preponderance of Buddhist technical terminology in Saraha’s works leave little doubt that he was, in fact, an educated Buddhist—regardless of whether all the ideas imputed to him by later commentators were actually intended by him.

43. D: *na*.

streamlined version of his own translation would read: “For the time being, he will take Being’s genuineness, approximating in flavor [Being’s nothingness . . .] as the [*mahā*]mudrā.” One might also translate the two lines in a way that brings out the language of “give-and-take” more strongly; hence: “Having taken on her qualities [faith, etc.], he gives her the gnosis he himself knows; / At that time, he takes the seal of the original single flavor.” Granted, the seal referred to is probably Mahāmudrā, and the “original single flavor” needs to be filled out—perhaps along the lines suggested by G—to be comprehensible, but any expansion of the material ought to indicate clearly what is in the original and what is not, and in this case, G has failed to do so.

Q 62ab reads: *dngos grub kun gyi rtsa ba rdo rje slob dpon te*⁴⁴ / *legs par sbyangs pa'i*⁴⁵ *rgyu nyid 'bras bu kun kyi lus*; G’s translation reads: “The root of all achievements is the *rdo-rje slob-dpon*, who / From [the perspective of] our thoroughly cleansed [disposition to wholeness] is the cause-factor of why all realizations as its fruition occur in our bodily existence.” (143) The translation of the first line is unproblematic. G’s version of line b, however, does not seem justified by the syntax: if *rgyu nyid* were modifying *'bras bu kun gyi lus*, it would probably be found at the end of the line; furthermore, if fruitions were to occur “in” bodily existence, one would expect the last phrase to read, e. g., *lus su 'bras bu kun*. My own reading of line b is: “[The *rdo-rje slob-dpon*] is the very cause of [our] thorough purification, the body [sic.] of all results.” I confess that I do not know quite how to take *lus* here, except perhaps in the metaphorical sense of a structure, or support, in the sense that the tantric master is both the source and support of our achievement of spiritual results.

Q 63-65a reads: *chos dang longs spyod rdzogs dang sprul pa'i sku*⁴⁶ / *ngo bo nyid kyi sku ni rgyu 'bras rab shes bya / sgro bskur gnyis kyis stong pa gnyis med chos yin te / ngo bo nyid kyi bde ba de nyid*⁴⁷ *longs spyod che ll sna tshogs pa yi 'gro ba thams cad sprul pa yang*⁴⁸ / *dbyer med ye shes ngo bo*⁴⁹ *nyid ni kun gyi bdag / skye bar byed dang bya ba'i*⁵⁰ *rang bzhin mi dmigs kyang / goms pa'i mthu yis dogs pa thams*

44. D: *yin*.

45. D: *pa*.

46. D: *chos kyi sku dang longs spyod rdzogs dang sprul pa'i sku*.

47. D: *ni*, which seems preferable.

48. D: *las*.

49. *ngo bo* missing from D.

50. D: *skyed par bya dang byed pa'i*.

*cad zil mnan nas / 'bras bu nyid ni rang dang gzhan gyi*⁵¹ *phun tshogs yin*. G's translation reads: "*chos-sku, longs-sku, sprul-sku, ngo-bo-nyid-sku* [and by implication *bde ba chen po'i sku*] are to be known as standing in a cause-effect relationship. / [The pristine awareness in which] there is no duality, devoid of positive and negative imputations, is the *chos-sku*, / [Its open-dimensional field-character is] the *ngo-bo-nyid sku*, [its feeling-tone of ecstasy] is the *bde-ba chen-po'i sku*, [its spanning the individual's spiritual dimension] is the *longs-sku*, / And [its self-manifestation in concrete guiding images] according to the varied inclinations of all living beings is the *sprul-sku*. / The pristine awareness modes of [these five gestalts in their] indivisibility is the 'authentic Self' [hidden] in [and being] the whole [of Being]. / Although in these pristine awareness modes] nothing whatsoever of something to be created and someone creating is to be observed, / It is through the power of your having become accustomed to [the working of your dichotomizing mind that this duality with its apprehensions and] fears [has come about], but once these have been overcome [by these pristine awareness modes] / A double repercussion [is intimately felt and brought to life]: invaluable self-fulfillment and other-enrichment." (143-144) This important and difficult passage contains one of Saraha's few explicit references to the *buddhakāyas*. The greatest difficulty posed by G's translation—and in this I take him to be following Karma 'phrin las pa—is its introduction of a "tantric" fifth *kāya* (the *bde ba chen po'i sku*) into a passage that, on the surface, appears to mention only the four *kāyas* of later Sūtrayāna Mahāyāna—though Saraha's account of the four certainly does not lack tantric referents. An alternative translation might read: "The Dharmakāya, perfect Sambhogakāya, Nirmāṇakāya / And Svabhāvakāya are clearly known as cause and result: / Nonduality void of both eternalism and nihilism is the Dharmakāya, / [One's] natural bliss is the Sambhogakāya, / Manifestation for all the various sentient beings [is the Nirmāṇakāya], / And the Svabhāvakāya, the gnosis of the inseparability [of bliss and voidness?], is the lord [or self] of all. / Although [by] nature no creator or created is observed in arising, / By virtue of one's accustomation [to that fact?], one suppresses all doubt, / And the result is the exaltation of oneself and others." Again, this is a difficult passage, which could itself be the subject of a whole article (exploring, for instance, Saraha's interweaving of imagery from both the Sūtrayāna and Tantrayāna traditions). Quite apart from the question of

51. D: *don*.

the number of *kāyas* asserted, there is the problem of the nature of the “cause-result” relationship that obtains among the *kāyas* that are asserted. G maintains (209, n. 86) that the Dharmakāya, Svabhāvakāya and Mahāsukhakāya (*bde ba chen po'i sku*) are the causes, and the Sambhogakāya and Nirmāṇakāya the results. My own interpretation suggests that the Mahāsukhakāya is *not* mentioned, and that there are two possible readings of the relationship among the remaining four. In reading (a), the Svabhāvakāya is asserted as the “cause” (*kun gyi bdag*) of the Dharmakāya, Sambhogakāya and Nirmāṇakāya, and although it is their “cause,” there is nothing in it related to creator or creation, while at the same time one’s familiarity with it will lead to all good results for oneself and others. This would seem justified by the placement of statements regarding the non-existence of creator and created immediately after the definition of Svabhāvakāya—language relating to causation follows logically on mention of a “lord of all.” This, however raises the difficult doctrinal issue of how the nondual voidness that is the Dharmakāya could be a *result*. Therefore, I would be somewhat more inclined to an alternative reading, (b), in which the Dharmakāya stands in causal relation to the Sambhogakāya, Nirmāṇakāya and Svabhāvakāya. In a series of verses that is based strongly on structural parallelisms, this would allow the cause-result ordering of the *kāyas* to mirror the order in which they first are asserted (63b: *rgyu 'bras*), and, by making the “lord of all” subordinate to pure voidness, it also would eliminate the doctrinal inconsistency that reading (a) seems to entail—it must be admitted, however, that where tantric terminology is invoked, the “classic” patterns of Sūtrayāna traditions are not always respected!

K 5 reads: *ji ltar chu*⁵² *'dzin gyis ni rgya mtsho las / chu blang nas ni sa gzhi gang byas kyang / de nyid*⁵³ *ma nyams nam mkha' dag dang mnyam / 'phel ba med cing 'grib pa dag kyang med*; G’s translation reads: “As a cloud that rises from the sea / Absorbing rain the earth embraces, / So, like the sky, the sea remains / Without increasing or decreasing” (151). Line b here is not entirely clear; exactly what is the earth “embracing”? Is it the cloud or the rain? For that matter, where in the original is the word for “embracing”? An alternative translation, which might clarify these issues, is: “A cloud absorbs water / From the sea, [or] the earth may [absorb rain], yet / [The sea] does not shrink; it is the same as the sky: / It does not increase, nor does it decrease.” My

52. D: *chu'i*.

53. D: *ni*.

translation of lines a and b is not much more literal than G's—a literal rendition would read: “[When] a cloud absorbs water / From the sea, whatever the earth may do, yet . . .” This literal version fails fully to bring out the point that the verse seems (if we believe the commentators⁵⁴) to be making, namely, that even when ocean water evaporates into clouds, or the rain from the clouds is absorbed by the earth, the ocean does not increase or decrease, any more than the sky grows when it is clear or shrinks when it is clouded—the implication being that the same may be said of the mind of *sahaja*.

K10cd reads: *phun tshogs ma yin phun tshogs brtan pa'i sems / yang ni*⁵⁵ *phun sum tshogs pa skam par 'gyur*; G's translation reads: “. . . [in] a mind that is firm / But full of qualities that are not perfect; / These imperfections will in time dry up” (152). At issue here is the translation of *phun sum tshogs pa* in line d as if it had a negative prefix, hence “imperfections.” This leaves it unclear whether Saraha is suggesting that what will “dry up” are qualities that are useless to enlightenment (underdeveloped *phun tshogs*) or qualities that are hindrances to it (non- or anti-*phun tshogs*, such as *kleśas*). If we leave out the negative prefix, however, the line straightforwardly makes the former point: “[In] a mind based on perfections that are not perfect, / Those ‘perfections’ will dry up.”

K 13ab reads: *dang po tha ma de bzhin gzhana med / thog ma tha ma bar du gnas pa med*; G's translation reads: “It is in the beginning, the middle and / The end; yet end and beginning are nowhere else” (152). If the problem in the previous stanza was the interpolation of a negative prefix not in the original, here it is in the omission of a negative that is there. The second line (= G's first) clearly states that “It is *not* in the beginning, end or middle.”⁵⁶ The first line is rather more difficult: we may follow G in taking it disjunctively (“But beginning and end are nowhere else”), or we may follow the syntax more closely and, taking “it” as the subject of both lines, read them as in apposition: “It is not first or last or otherwise; / It abides not in the beginning, end or middle.”

K 19ab reads: *gti mug gsal bas ye shes mi gsal te / gti mug gsal bas sdug bsngal gsal ba*⁵⁷ *bzhin*; G's translation reads: “Knowledge shines

54. RSS, 99-101.

55. D: *na*.

56. Of the commentators cited by G in RSS, Karma 'phrin las pa seems to support this reading (126), while sKye med bde chen seems inclined toward the interpretation reflected in G's translation (124).

57. D: *pa*.

not in the dark, but when the darkness / Is illumined, suffering disappears [at once]" (153). Given the ambiguity and richness of the term *gsal*—which may mean, *inter alia*, “shine,” “appear,” “illuminate” or “be illumined”—G’s translation is by no means implausible. It is based on seeing a shift in the meaning of *gsal* from the first line to the second, such that in line a it simply means “appear,” while in line b it means “is illumined”—in effect, “lit up and seen for what it is.” If, on the other hand the *gsal ba* is read similarly in all four instances, the result is: “When darkness shines, gnosis does not shine; / When darkness shines, suffering shines.” The second half of the *dohā* goes on to cite the familiar example of cause-and-effect, seeds producing shoots producing leaves, but I do not think that this points decisively toward one reading or the other, as “causation” may be invoked in support of either.⁵⁸

K 21cd reads: *gang zhig khyim nas byung nas sgo drung du / kā ma rū pa’i gtam ni ’dri bar byed*; G’s translation reads: “Like a man who leaves his house and standing at the door / Asks [a woman] for reports of sensual delights” (153). It may well be that *kā ma rū pa* has connotations of “woman,” or, more specifically, the *karmamudrā*.⁵⁹ *Kā ma rū pa*, however, also may refer to Assam, and it is possible to read the verse—whose first two stanzas criticize those who take “the delights of kissing” (*kha sbyor bde ba*) as an ultimate (*don dam*)—as saying that such people are like a man who stands in his doorway and “asks for news of Assam,” i. e., concerns himself with distant externals when all he needs is right before him, that is, in his own body (for which, of course, the house is frequently a metaphor in Buddhist writings).

K 24c reads: *’ching bar byed pa shin tu dkrungs byed*⁶⁰ *de*; G’s translation reads: “[Those who are attached to certain inner yoga practices] confuse / That which fetters with that which gives release” (154). The implication of the verse is certainly that expressed by G, but there is no mention of “release” in the original, which simply asserts that these misguided “yogis” “bind themselves, utterly confused.”

58. Of the commentaries quoted by G in RSS, that by sKye med bde chen seems to support G’s reading, that of Karma ’phrin las pa my own (140-142).

59. This seems to be the view of both commentators cited in RSS (146-152); I can only presume that they are interpreting the same Tibetan word, rather than one that more overtly denotes a woman.

60. D: *byas*.

K 29ab reads *kun rdzob bden pa dran pa med pa ste / sems gang*⁶¹ *sems ni med par 'gyur ba'o*⁶²; G's translation reads: "Convention's truth is 'memory' that [on closer inspection] turns out to be 'nonmemory' / And [thus a] mind that has become no-mind" (155). This important and difficult passage is taken by G, following sKye med bde chen and Karma 'phrin las pa (RSS, 169-173), to refer to Saraha's views of conventional and ultimate truth, in terms of the "four dimensions of symbolic expression" (*dran, dran med, skye med* and *blo 'das*). G's translation here captures the full sense of the commentarial view, but is somewhat misleading about what is and is not in the original, which makes no explicit mention of "memory"; in fact, G's earlier translation seems more closely to reflect Saraha's verses: "Nonmemory is convention's truth, / And mind which has become no-mind [is ultimate truth]" (RSS, 69). In light of the "four dimensions," it may well be that the conventional truth expressed as "nonmemory" is "memory" that has been rightly understood, but G's indication of this would have been clarified had he moved his bracket to left of "memory." The second line makes no explicit reference to ultimate truth, and it is possible that the "mind that has become no-mind" is simply a further description of the process involved in the conventional recognition of "nonmemory"—although the next line's characterization of "that" (no-mind, presumably) as "utterly pure, the highest of the high" (*yongs su dag par mchog gi mchog*)⁶³ does give it the unmistakable ring of "ultimacy."

In D,⁶⁴ K 39ab reads: *gang gis gang du gang*⁶⁵ *la de dag med / de yis*⁶⁶ *de ru de la dgos pa byas*; G's translation reads: "What has been done and where and what in itself it will become / Is nothing: yet thereby it has been useful for this and that" (157). This is a difficult verse, susceptible of more than one reading. G's translation is quite plausible, and seems to me to capture the overall sense of the original. He has, however, added verbiage to lines that are quite concise: neither "will become," "has been done," nor "nothing" is clearly indicated in the

61. D: *dang*.

62. D: *gyur pa'o*. This appears to be the reading followed by G.

63. Or, as G, seeming to follow D (*yongs su gyur pa mchog gi mchog*), has it: "This is fulfilment, this is the highest good."

64. I opt for D's reading here because it appears to be the one followed by G, and because it is more symmetrical than Pe's. Though we cannot, of course, be certain that this symmetry was present in the original, it is not an atypical structure in the Buddhist poetic tradition.

65. Pe: *de*.

66. Pe: *yi*

original, nor, for that matter, is a subject, "it." Also, he does not reflect as closely as he might have the parallel structures found in the Tibetan; he chooses to read the *de yis* at the beginning of line b as providing an instrumental ("thereby") that links the clauses, but he sacrifices thereby any real play with the parallelisms of the Tibetan: *gang gis / de yis, gang du / de ru* and *gang la / de la*. An alternative reading might be: "There is no 'by what,' or 'for what' or 'in what'; / 'By that,' and 'for that' and 'in that' are entailed." The disadvantage of this reading is that it leaves lines a and b somewhat unconnected, and it is surely the intent of the original to assert that negation not only does not contradict affirmation, but may be its very basis. The Tibetan of line a lacks the final *kyang* or *pas* that would establish a connection while preserving the parallel structures, so G's solution is a possible one; I would opt for preserving the parallels and adding a bracketed "yet" or "so" at the end of line a. Alternatively, one might accept an unspoken "That" as the subject, and translate: "[That] has no 'by what,' or 'for what' or 'in what,' [yet/thus] / By that, for that and in that [all things] are entailed."

The reader who has followed the rather detailed discussion in this section will recognize that in most cases where I have suggested alternative translations, G's version is certainly a plausible one—the more so when the commentaries on which he relies are taken into account. I have simply sought to draw attention to those passages where my own reading convinces me that he has *significantly* added to or subtracted from what is in the original Tibetan verses. Here, I have attempted to supply "straightforward," non-commentary based readings of these passages, while acknowledging (a) that wholly "straightforward" readings are in principle impossible, and especially problematic when the texts are tantric, and (b) that the debate over the degree to which commentarial perspectives—whether from later Buddhist tradition or modern Western philosophy and science—ought to be incorporated into translation, is far from settled. Still, as must be clear, my own inclination is to argue (a) that there really *are* (relatively) more and less straightforward readings of texts, and (b) that the less encumbered by extrinsic perspectives a reading is, the better.

Some Technicalities

In this section, I will note a number of rather more minor technical points where corrections might be proposed: (a) some instances where

G seems to have missed a line of Tibetan, (b) some awkward constructions or phrases, (c) some informational and terminological inconsistencies or overlaps and (d) some typographical errors.

(a) G's translation of P 94 reads: "In each and every house, people talk about it, / But the abidingness of ecstasy is not at all known. / Saraha says: All living beings are confused about it" (111). Both Pe and D, as well as the Apabhraṃśa,⁶⁷ there is fourth line, the Tibetan of which is *de ni bsam med sus kyang rtogs ma yin*: "That non-thought is understood by no one." Guenther's translation of P 131 reads: "Imagination [that pertains to one's egologically predisposed awareness] operates with having an objective reference and without having an objective reference, / [In either case] it is an aspect of ecstasy" (119). In both Pe and D, there is a line in between the two translated by G, which reads: *sgom dang mi sgom tha snyad med*: "there is no designation: 'imagination' or 'non-imagination.'" In Q, each set of ten verses is preceded by *e ma mkha' 'gro gsang ba'i skad*; G translates this, appropriately, as "E-ma—The mystical language of the Ḍāka / Ḍākinīs" each time it occurs, but it is unclear from his placement of this refrain—italized along with Karma 'phrin las pa's section titles—that it is, in fact, found in the Tibetan text.

(b) P 60 (103) would read more clearly if line a ran: "If you know *that* what has become seeing . . . Is [your] mentation, [you will have realized that] there is nothing that has not sprung from it." K 12 (152) would be less ambiguous if line a read "Though *it is* ineffable, never is one unsatisfied." K 23 (154) would seem less like a fragmentary sentence if line a read: "*It is* as *when* a brahmin, who with rice and butter . . ."

(c) On two different occasions (P 113b and Q 79d), Saraha refers to the *bcu bzhi pa'i sa*, which G renders, appropriately, as "the fourteenth level" (115, 149). His notes on the two occurrences, however give differing, if not necessarily contradictory, accounts of what the "fourteenth level" denotes: on 190 (n. 134), it is identified as the "detection threshold" that is the last of the levels numbered by adding the six levels of the world of desire to the four levels each of the worlds of form and formlessness; on 210 (n. 98), it is said to be the experience of ecstasy (*bde ba*), a "supraordinate level" above the traditional ten bodhisattva levels and the superadded *tshogs lam*, *sbyor lam* and "Buddha'-experience." Is Saraha using the term differently in the two different cases? G does

67. See Shahidullah, 154, and his translation on 178; cf. Snellgrove's in BTTA, 234.

not indicate. I would be more inclined to follow the second reading, since the first would seem to place one within *samsāra*, in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non perception, and the condition *Saraha* is describing hardly seems *samsāric*.⁶⁸ G generally is consistent in translating one Tibetan term by one English expression, but there are at least two instances in which the same English phrase reflects different Tibetan originals: “Being-in-its-beingness,” the usual translation for *de [kho na] nyid* (see 26 and, e. g., P 1a, 89) is used to translate *rang bzhin nyid* from P 20d (93)—the latter is more often taken by G to refer to Being’s “ownmostness”(see 28-30); while (as noted above) “complementarity-in-spontaneity,” the usual translation for *lhan cig skyes pa* (see 21-23 and, e. g., P 7b) is used to translate *lhun [gyis] grub [pa]* in P 141c—the latter is more often translated by, e. g., “pure spontaneity” (see 59). Finally, G refers often in his notes to P (e. g., 159, 171, 173, 181, 183) to the “original” Apabhraṃśa of the text, in spite of having argued earlier (9) that the Apabhraṃśa version we have is “bowdlerized and fragmented version of an earlier work that has been lost”; only once (182) does G refer to the text to which he is referring as the “standard” version, which would seem to be closer to his view of it.

(d) On 11, line 7, for: *Dohā*” read: *Dohā*. On 12, line 13, for: ‘Gos read: ‘Gos. On 42, n. 72, line 5, for: ‘Phrin-la’s read ‘Phrin-las’. On 94, verse 21, line 2, for: (*nam-rtog*) read: (*nam-rtog*)]. On 94, verse 21, line 3, for: (*sems*), evolving read: (*sems*), [evolving. On 142, verse 61, line 8, for: complementarity-in-spontaneity read: Complementarity-in-spontaneity. On 143, verse 63, line 2, for: *sku*) read *sku*]. On 169, n. 54, line 3, for: Avayavajra read: Advayavajra.

Concluding Remarks

Let me summarize my main points:

(1) The worlds of Indology, Tibetology and Buddhology are greatly in Herbert Guenther’s debt for this careful and erudite, yet immensely

68. An alternative explanation of the fourteen stages may be arrived at by adding to the basic ten bodhisattva levels the traditional three *kāyas* of Mahāyāna buddhology, with the fourteenth level then being, e. g., the Mahāsukhākāya. In still another version (listed in both the *Kalavira Tantra* and the *Dharmasamgraha*), the three *bhūmis* beyond the traditional ten are called *samantaprabhā*, *nirupamā* and *jñānavatī*; the fourteenth would presumably transcend even these (see Gustav Roth, “The Symbolism of the Buddhist Stūpa,” in Anna Libera Dallapiccola, ed., *The Stūpa: Its Religious, Historical and Architectural Significance* [Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980] 196).

stimulating study and translation of the three most important works of one of India's greatest poet-yogī-philosophers, the *mahāsiddha* Saraha. As he consistently has over the years, Guenther provides learned historical and philological analyses of the subject-matter, suggestive comparisons between the world views of pre-modern Buddhists and contemporary Western thinkers in both the humanities and sciences, and annotated translations of Buddhist texts that closely reflect the grammar and syntax of the original, while offering terminological equivalents that incorporate Guenther's own distinctive and challenging ancient-cum-modern idiom.

(2) Neither Guenther's general approach to Saraha nor his translation is beyond reproach. Questions may legitimately be raised about his tendency to, e. g., uncritically conflate ancient Buddhist and modern Western views, adopt suspiciously reductive views of "reductionists," ignore or dismiss most other scholars in his field, and overburden his translations with "commentarial" interpolations that both reflect eras and ontologies different from Saraha's and drain nearly all "poetry" from the original. Further—though this may safely be said of *any* translator—he provides some readings of the original for which alternatives might be proposed.

(3) Guenther is not about to apologize for his approach, let alone change it. He has argued for decades now that "objective," "representationalist" translations of Buddhist texts are based on a misunderstanding both of the "dynamic" and "processive" nature of the world and the way Buddhists, realizing this, use language. And, for decades, he has struggled to find a lexicon that could capture what is essentially elusive and no-thing at all, utilizing terminology and perspectives from any thinker or field that seemed to offer some approximation. The result has been a body of work that is always difficult, occasionally frustrating—but which is based on a coherent, consistent and hermeneutically sophisticated vision that has irreversibly affected the way in which scholars think about Buddhism and the translation of Buddhist texts.

(4) The Saraha we meet in *Ecstatic Spontaneity* is unmistakably Guenther's Saraha: philosopher more than poet, an ancient voice speaking in modern words. Guenther certainly has left room for other translators who might give us a more poetic, more "traditional" or more historically situated Saraha; and, in any case, any figure as great and complex as Saraha deserves—indeed requires—more than a single translation. It is probably safe to say, though, that we will wait a very long time before

we see a translation as philosophically challenging as Guenther's or one whose vision resonates so suggestively backwards and forwards across eras, cultures and disciplines.