

# The Origins of the *Dzogchen Eleven Words and Meanings*: Comparing Nyima Bum, Longchenpa, and Rikzin Gödemchen

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is threefold: to provide a historical overview of Dzogpa Chenpo (*rdzogs pa chen po*), commonly referred to as the Great Perfection; to translate and interpret Nyima Bum's (Nyi ma 'bum, 1158-1213) seminal work, his "Introduction" to the *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings* (*rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*); and to analyze its impact on later Dzogchen thinkers like Longchen Rabjam (Klong chen rab 'byams, 1308-1364) and Rikzin Gödemchen (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, 1337-1408). This paper aims to contribute to the broader understanding of Buddhist literature, with a specific focus on the Dzogchen Nyingthik (Heart Essence) tradition. Dzogchen remains a relatively untapped field of academic study, and this paper aims to illuminate its early development, enriching contemporary understanding among both scholars and practitioners.

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review the history of the Dzogpa Chenpo (*rdzogs pa chen po*) known as the Great Perfection, and to translate and analyze Nyima Bum's (Nyi ma 'bum, 1158–1213) "Introduction" to the *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings* (*Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*). I hope it will shed some light on general Buddhist literature, as well as the Nyingthik (*snying thig*, Heart Essence) literature in particular, and highlight Nyima Bum's importance as a Tibetan scholar and historian of the history of Dzogchen. Though Dzogchen has roots in eighth-century India, and possibly China, it is largely a native Tibetan development. Its most creative years were the eleventh through fourteenth centuries, though it continues to be highly popular today among both Tibetans and Western students of Buddhism alike. The most famous figure in the

history of Dzogchen is Longchen Rabjam (Klong chen rab 'byams, 1308–1364). Longchenpa (as he is also known) codified the tradition in a series of major works, today collectively referred to as the *Fourfold Nyingthik* (*Snying thig ya bzhi*), the *Seven Treasuries* (*Mdzod bdun*), and others. Another Dzogchen master, Rikzin Gödemchen (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, 1337–1408), was a key figure in the Dzogchen Nyingthik tradition, known for his reinterpretation of the tradition and his Northern treasure revelations. About 150 years prior to the advent of Longchenpa and Rikzin Gödemchen, another Dzogchen master and scholar called Nyima Bum first systemized the Dzogchen doctrine through his *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings* on which Longchenpa then based his own writings, in particular his *magnum opus*, *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*). Furthermore, Rikzin Gödemchen's work, *The Great Aural Transmission of Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma mi tra'i rnyan brgyud chen mo*), mirrored Nyima Bum's text but had significant alterations to emphasize its mystical nature and visionary origins.

The Dzogchen history and Dzogchen Nyingthik literature have always been of particular interest to me. I first studied a few of Longchenpa's texts, including *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*, as a monk while teaching in a monastery in Nepal more than a decade ago. Later, when I was searching for a topic for my master's thesis relating to the early development of Dzogchen, I was directed toward a newly discovered manuscript of Nyima Bum's *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*. Regarding this manuscript, in 2001, Alak Zenkar Rinpoché (A lags Gzan dkar Rin po che) secured access to Palpung's famous monastery library by financing new bookshelves. A year later, Karma Delek (Karma bde legs) discovered a long-lost manuscript there, titled the *Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, and published it in 2008. This text is naturally fascinating to me for two primary reasons: First, as already explained, it exerted such a strong influence over Longchenpa and Rikzin Gödem's thinking, despite never being mentioned or credited by the latter two masters. Secondly, Dzogchen is still a relatively unexplored frontier for research, and I want to get a better insight into early development of Dzogchen and how it shapes today's Dzogchen world of scholars and practitioners.

## I. Historical Overview of Dzogchen

### A. Early Dzogchen

A brief overview of the historical background of Dzogchen should be presented, mapping first the history of early Dzogchen, followed by the development of early Nyingthik up to Longchenpa. Although it remains a challenge for modern scholars to establish how and when Dzogchen first emerged in Tibet, we still can ask some questions that might shed some light. What really does the word Dzogchen—the Great Perfection—mean? And where did it come from? How does a term

found in the *sūtras* and *tantras* become a movement and ultimately the summit of the Nyingma (“Ancient”) School’s system of nine vehicles?

Dzogchen, often equated with Atiyoga, has long been shrouded in mystery due to its secrecy of one-to-one transmission. It has also been surrounded with controversies ever since its introduction into Tibet around the eighth century. Dzogchen is the highest class of tantric teachings belonging to the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. The origins of Dzogchen have not been established with any certainty; almost all modern scholars, however, dismiss the traditional Tibetan historicity claiming a mystical non-human source. Scholars including Samten Karmay, Sam van Schaik, David Germano, and Jacob Dalton see Dzogchen emerging with tracks leading back to Mahāyoga or Chan influences. In terms of establishing a time frame for the earliest dateable Dzogchen texts, Karmay observes that the Indic word for Dzogchen was also found in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century *Guhyagarbha Tantra*,<sup>1</sup> where it relates to “the immediate presence of enlightenment.”<sup>2</sup> Germano dates certain extant short texts that later would be classed as belonging to the Mind Series (*sems sde*) category of Dzogchen texts to around the late 8th century.<sup>3</sup> Van Schaik highlights one such example as *The Meditation on the Awakened Mind* by Mañjuśrīmitra, which is listed in the early 9<sup>th</sup>-century *Denkarma (Ldan dkar ma)* library catalog.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Dalton cites portions of Nubchen Sangyé Yeshi’s (Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, b. 844?) late ninth-century writings, such as the *Armor against Darkness (Mun pa’i go cha)* and the *Lamp for the Eye in Contemplation (Bsam gtan mig sgron)*, as clearer examples of writings that treat Dzogchen as a distinct vehicle.<sup>5</sup> David Germano believes that Dzogchen Nyingthik literature represents a Nyingma response to the new eleventh-century reformation movement known as the Sarma (*gsar ma*), a movement that brought in a wealth of new Indic Buddhist literatures and established several new schools.<sup>6</sup> Yet Christopher Hatchell reminds his readers in his *Naked Seeing* that one should not overlook Dzogchen’s deep intellectual roots in India, given the Indian ideology of Buddha-nature and the gnostic elements of Buddhist completion-stage practice.<sup>7</sup>

In discussing the Dzogchen corpus, traditional Tibetan scholars since around the thirteenth century have divided the teachings into three “series:” the Mind Series (*sems sde*), the Space Series (*klong sde*), and the Pith Instruction Series (*man ngag sde*). The earliest Dzogchen writings generally fall under the Mind Series division, while the Nyingthik belongs to the Pith Instruction Series, later categorized as the highest class of Dzogchen teachings.

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1. Karmay 2007, 10–11.

2. Van Schaik 2004, 166.

3. Germano 1994, 31.

4. See: Van Schaik 2008. The question of whether Mañjuśrīmitra’s text and similar early works should be classed as Dzogchen or Mahāyoga remains open.

5. Dalton 2016, 35–36.

6. Germano 2005, 2.

7. Hatchell 2014, 52.

The historical transformation of Dzogchen becomes evident when one reads its texts from different historical moments. The earliest Mind Series writings put less emphasis on tantric elements, in contrast to the later literature of the Pith Instruction Series (*man ngag sde* or *snying thig*), which are rich in tantric rituals. A representative Mind Series-style Dzogchen text can be found in the six-line verse of the *Cuckoo of Intellect* (*Rig pa'i khu byug*), a Dunhuang manuscript (IOL 647) first identified in 1980 by Samten Karmay, who gave a detailed explanation and analysis in his *Great Perfection*. A translation, under the title *Cuckoo of Awareness*, appears in van Schaik's *Tibet: A History* as follows:

The various appearances are non-dual by nature—  
Without even the slightest bit of elaboration,  
The way of things is free from conceptualization  
But manifests in different forms: it's all good.  
Since everything is done, give up the malady of seeking  
And stay where you are without effort.<sup>8</sup>

Such verses are poetically evocative, but precisely how they were used remains unclear.

Here I quote from Dalton's book, which makes this point:

Analyses of the earliest materials reveal a variety of approaches. Some have suggested that the Great Perfection referred to 'a kind of technique-free natural immersion in a non-conceptual state.' For others, it provided an interpretive 'framework' within which tantric deity yoga was to be performed as usual. For still others, it may have described the non-conceptual state engendered through ingesting a sacramental drop of sexual fluids that was administered at the culmination of the perfection stage. In fact, the early Great Perfection was probably understood in all of these ways, and still others, by various people in different contexts. Right from its earliest days, the Great Perfection appears to have inspired a broad range of interpretations and practices.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, one of the earliest texts that systematizes Dzogchen as a vehicle is the *Lamp for the Eye in Contemplation*<sup>10</sup> by the Tibetan tantric exegete, Nubchen Sangyé Yeshe. Nubchen's doxography of simultaneous and gradualist approaches offers an early perspective on the relationship

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8. Van Schaik 2011, 66.

9. Dalton 2016, 41–42.

10. See the new comprehensive translation of the *Bsam gtan mig sgron* by Dylan Esler (2022).

between Chan and Dzogchen. Nubchen insists that Chan and Dzogchen be firmly distinguished; he ranks Chan doctrines higher than the gradualists but lower than Dzogchen. Nubchen's late ninth-century perspective dates from over a century after the Samyé debates (792–794). Much recent scholarly ink has been spilled over the question of Dzogchen's possible inspiration from Chinese Chan, with some suggesting that it may have represented a mix of Tibetized Chan with popular tantric elements.<sup>11</sup>

According to traditional accounts, the source of the Dzogchen lineage is the self-emanating Primordial Buddha Kuntu Sangpo (Tib. Kun tu gzung po, Skt. Samantabhadra). It is said that the first human individual who received the transmission is Garab Dorjé (Tib. Dga' rab rdo rje, Skt. Prahevajra) from Dhanakośa in the country of Oḍḍiyāna, who passed on the transmission to Mañjuśrimitra, from west of Bodh Gayā in central India. He in turn passed the transmission to Śrī Siṃha (fl. 8th century),<sup>12</sup> from whom the transmission disseminated via three lineages in Tibet (i.e., the Vairo Nyingthik, Vima Nyingthik, and Khandro Nyingthik).

Nyima Bum's newly recovered text sheds light on his role in the early historical development of Dzogchen. Most contemporary scholars give credit to Longchenpa's fourteenth century *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*) as the most important systematization of Dzogchen Nyingthik thought. With the recent discovery of Nyima Bum's text, however, the timeline for this development must be moved a hundred years earlier.

In Nyima Bum's first chapter, he describes his eleven topics as a "history of buddhahood" (*sangs rgyas nyid kyi lo rgyus*). The eleven topics constitute a comprehensive roadmap to enlightenment that begins with the primordial ground and traces its history through the separation of this ground into nirvana and samsara, the subsequent contemplative practices required to return thereto, and the final rejoining of the fully awakened state. Nyima Bum's eleven topics thus created a structure for Dzogchen thought and practice which Longchenpa and later Dzogchen masters drew upon, making it one of the earliest comprehensive codifications of Nyingthik cosmology, philosophy, doctrine, and practice.<sup>13</sup>

Nyima Bum's eleven topics start with a fundamental metaphysical question that, for its day, was quite unusual within Buddhist literature: What was there before the existence of our world system, before the separation of enlightened beings (buddhas) and sentient beings? This type of

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11. See discussion in Tanaka and Robertson 1992, 72, as well as van Schaik and Dalton 2004, 63–71, and Meinert 2007, 239–301.

12. Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 1572–73. According to some Tibetan accounts, he was born in China, although other sources identify his birthplace as Khotan or Kinnaur.

13. At the end of his discussion of the seventh topic, Nyima Bum summarizes the elevenfold scheme. The first seven topics, he writes, pertain to the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*); the first topic and the first part of the second examine the abiding reality of the Ground; from the second part of the second topic through the seventh, the abiding reality of the person who supports [the visions] (*rten gyi gang zag gi gnas lugs*) is taught. The eighth to the tenth chapters discuss the methods of realization, and the final chapter, the eleventh, is about the liberation of final fruition. See Nyima Bum 2008, 54.

exploration of origins is an age-old question for many religions other than Buddhism. In the realm of classical Buddhist thought, the Buddha notably refrained from addressing metaphysical questions concerning origins or the creation of the universe. This is a distinctive trait of Buddhism, contrasting sharply with many other religious traditions that delve deeply into cosmogony. The Buddha's primary concern was the human experience of suffering and the journey to liberate oneself from it, choosing to circumvent abstract metaphysical inquiries which he deemed tangential to the path of liberation.

Despite this, certain Buddhist philosophical doctrines, such as Yogācāra and Dzogchen, ventured into the territory of these unanswered questions through their intricate theories of consciousness and reality. Yogācāra, for example, proposed the concept of the all-ground consciousness (Tib. *kun gzhi rnam shes*; Skt. *ālayavijñāna*), or “storehouse consciousness.” This samsaric-based repository for karmic imprints profoundly influences our perceptions and behaviors. Yogācāra also introduced the concept of buddha-nature, which can be interpreted as an innately present, nirvanic-based awakened quality within all beings. Within this late Yogācāra Buddhist thought, discussions of the “all-ground” (*kun gzhi*; *ālaya*) appear, and such considerations were picked up by early Dzogchen authors such as Nubchen Sangyé Yeshe, but Nyima Bum's focus and in-depth exploration of the Ground's nature was uncommon.<sup>14</sup>

Dzogchen discourse refers to a primordial ground—a foundational reality that underpins all phenomena, encompassing both samsara and nirvana. These nuanced philosophical constructs, while offering profound insights, may appear to diverge from the Buddha's original injunction to focus only on matters relevant to individual liberation from suffering rather than speculative thought about, for example, how this predicament came about. For instance, how does the individual emerge out of this foundational nature, and how, upon final liberation, does it dissolve back into it? As such, they can be viewed as somewhat at odds with more traditional Buddhist perspectives, triggering spirited discussions among scholars and practitioners.

This paper focuses on Nyima Bum's “Introduction” to the eleven topics. These topics are basic to Dzogchen doctrine yet constitute major anomalies compared to other Buddhist vehicles, as many Buddhists have expressed discomfort with Dzogchen's foundational elements and its theory of buddha-nature. There are a few pioneering scholars in the West who have done in-depth research and studies in the field of Dzogchen, improving our knowledge of its historical development, taxonomy, and architecture. Samten Karmay's *The Great Perfection* explains the importance of the Dzogchen tradition and identifies the first Tibetan Dzogchen writer as Vairocana, one of the first seven ordained monks in Tibet and an eminent translator of Sanskrit texts.<sup>15</sup> David Germano's encyclopedia-like article, “Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great

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14. On Nubchen's work in this regard, see Dalton 2016, 43–45. Nyima Bum also drew, of course, on further discussions of the ground in the earlier *Seventeen Tantras*.

15. Karmay 2007, 4.

Perfection”<sup>16</sup> gives a comprehensive sense of the early history of Dzogchen. Germano’s Ph.D. thesis<sup>17</sup> on Longchenpa’s *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* also provides many insights into eleventh to fourteenth century Dzogchen literature. In 2004, Sam van Schaik published an important paper on early Dzogchen based on Dunhuang manuscripts, and elsewhere he has brought fresh acumen to Dzogchen’s historical links to Chan and Bön.

Although Dzogchen today draws much attention from traditional Tibetans and Westerners alike, it is much less studied in academic writings due to various reasons—a lack of early documents, the fact that some Tibetans dismiss it as not belonging to the “true” Buddhist orthodoxy, and fears of breaking the traditional vows of secrecy that surround its teachings. Sectarian opposition to Dzogchen has been rather fierce. Opponents did not, and still do not, stop with mere philosophical or doctrinal disagreement; sometimes it is even a case of life and death. One clear example is found in the royal decree of the Dharma King Yeshé Ö (Ye shes ’od, 947–1019/1024) around the 10th–11th century in the Gugé kingdom in West Tibet. In one royal decree, the king proclaims that “the retinues of Ati,” along with the indigenous Bönpo, “are in discordance with the Buddhist teachings and contradict valid reasoning, ...they are inauthentic...” and that any of his subjects found to possess these teachings would be penalized and the texts confiscated and burned; all third-time offenders would have the word “wrong-doer” (*log par spyod pa*) branded on them and be exiled.<sup>18</sup> Regarding the secrecy surrounding Dzogchen, it is well known that a rhetoric of secrecy accompanies the tantras, but it is even stronger in the case of Dzogchen. The traditional ritual of bestowing Dzogchen teachings in the evening, to only a small and highly select group of disciples bound by oaths of *samaya* is still upheld to this day. Classed as the Unsurpassable, Utmost Secret (*yang gsang bla na med pa*), the Dzogchen teachings, and especially those of the Nyingthik (Heart Essence),<sup>19</sup> are carefully restricted and often not shared with uninitiated academic researchers.

Notwithstanding the taboos that have surrounded Dzogchen, its teachings spread widely through the fourteenth century, when Longchenpa wrote many texts consolidating the Dzogchen tradition. His best-known work is a collection of seven texts retrospectively called *The Seven Treasuries* (*Mdzod bdun*). Among these seven, *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* deals with the highest forms of Dzogchen. The work follows a structure of eleven topics that allow for a wide-ranging exploration of Dzogchen philosophy, cosmogony, and contemplation. It is

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16. Germano 1994.

17. Germano 1992.

18. See *Lha bla ma ye shes ’od kyi rnams thar rgyas pa*, 28a.2–28b.3.

19. To clarify the possible confusion of matching up similar terminologies due to different translations in the choice of words, Nyingthik is translated as “Seminal Heart” in all of Germano’s writings; whereas, other scholars such as Samten Karmay translate it as “Heart Drop,” and still others as “Heart Essence.” I have chosen to use “Heart Essence” for Nyingthik due to my own interpretation of its intended meaning.

widely considered Longchenpa's most systematic presentation of Dzogchen thought and practice. Despite the reputation of Longchenpa's work, however, Nyima Bum's *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*, which dates from an earlier century, is also comprised of eleven chapters bearing the same titles in the same order as Longchenpa's work. It also uses the same sources as its principal references, i.e., the *Seventeen Tantras*, which constitute the canonical core of Dzogchen's Pith Instructions Series, and in particular the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra* (*Sgra thal gyur*), which is considered the root tantra of the *Seventeen Tantras*, and the *Precious Pearl Garland* (*Mu tig phreng ba*), another of the seventeen. Based on all these similarities, it is evident that Longchenpa based his *Treasury of Words and Meanings* on Nyima Bum's *Eleven Words and Meanings* which came five generations earlier. Both Nyima Bum's and Longchenpa's eleven topics pose eleven questions that Nyima Bum extracts from the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra*, which has six chapters within which 168 philosophical and practice-related questions are posed. Thus, for example, in the first chapter of Nyima Bum's *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*, he asks how the innate nature of the Ground abides before there are any realized buddhas or non-realized beings. The same question is also found in chapter two of the *Unlocking through Sound*, along with twenty-eight other questions. The idea that Longchenpa just happened to select exactly the same eleven questions out of the 168 questions in the *Unlocking through Sound* is impossible to believe. Clearly, Longchenpa duplicated Nyima Bum's earlier work without giving due credit to the original authorship (a common practice among Tibetan authors). Similarly, Jean-Luc Achard's findings on the implicit use of sections from the Bönpo Dzogchen text, *Yang rtse klong chen*, within Longchenpa's *Bla ma yang tig*, parallel the given situation.<sup>20</sup> Given Nyima Bum's central place in the development of Dzogchen thought, the present project represents an initial study of his philosophical approach and historical influences.

## B. *The Seventeen Tantras*

Tantric Buddhism has found sustained popularity up to the present day among the Tibetan people. The tantric category of the Nyingthik is based on the collection of the *Seventeen Tantras*. The *Seventeen Tantras*, which are probably the earliest Dzogchen Nyingthik texts (along with, perhaps, the *Vima Nyingthik*), are written in the terse language of revealed literature, framed as *buddhavacana*. In the *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*, Nyima Bum cites from the *Seventeen Tantras* extensively, using them as the authoritative sources for his writing. As of now, no corresponding Sanskrit texts are linked to these *Seventeen Tantras*; furthermore, the writing style and syntax in all of the *Seventeen Tantras* suggest that they were originally composed in Tibetan. The titles of the *Seventeen Tantras* are as follows:

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20. See Achard 1999, 215–39.



1. *The Unlocking through Sound* (*Sgra thal 'gyur*)—the root tantra
2. *The Self-arising Perfection* (*Rdzogs pa rang byung*)
3. *The Self-dawning Awareness* (*Rig pa rang shar*)<sup>21</sup>
4. *The Self-liberated Awareness* (*Rig pa rang grol*)
5. *The Heart Mirror of Vajrasattva* (*Rdo rje sems dpa' snying gi me long*)
6. *The Heart Mirror of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po thugs kyi me long*)
7. *The Precious Pearl Garland* (*Mu tig rin po che'i phreng ba*)<sup>22</sup>
8. *The Perfectly Dynamic Lion* (*Seng ge rtsal rdzogs*)
9. *The Blazing Relics* (*Sku gdung 'bar ba*)
10. *The Union of the Sun and Moon* (*Nyi zla kha sbyor*)
11. *The Blazing Lamp* (*Sgron ma 'bar ba*)<sup>23</sup>
12. *The Pointing Out Introduction* (*Ngo sprod spras pa*)
13. *The Exquisite Auspiciousness* (*Bkra shis mdzes ldan*)
14. *The Six Spaces of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po klong drug*)
15. *The Devoid of Letters* (*Yi ge med pa*)<sup>24</sup>
16. *The Inlaid Jewels* (*Nor bu phra bkod*)
17. *The Mass of Jewels* (*Rin po che spung ba*)

The *Seventeen Tantras* can be located in different volumes depending on the edition. In the *Collection of the Ancient Tantras* (*Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*) of the Tsamdrak (*Mtshams brag*) manuscript, they are found in volumes ten (*Da*) and eleven (*Na*). Similarly, in the *Collection of Ancient Tantras* of the Tingkyé (*gting skyes*) edition, they can be found in volumes nine and ten. In the *Collection of Ancient Tantras* of the Degé (*Sde dge*) edition, they are present in volume *Ga* and *Nga*. It appears that the Spiti version of the *Seventeen Tantras* is a separate collection, spanning two volumes. The Adzom (*A 'dzom*) edition, on the other hand, was published in three volumes. The Druk Bumthang Tharpaling (*'Brung bum thang thar pa gling*) edition consists of volumes *e* and *wAM*. Additionally, the *Seventeen Tantras* are also included in volumes four, five, and six of the Paltsek (*Dpal brtsegs*) edition, under the title *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (*Rnga 'gyur rgyud 'bum phyogs bsgrigs*).

### C. *Vima Nyingthik*

*Vima Nyingthik* is considered the other early Nyingthik corpus. According to traditional accounts,

21. Two chapters are translated in Gunther 1994.

22. Translated by Wilkinson (2016).

23. Translated by Hatchell (2014).

24. Translated by Wilkinson (2015).

Vimalamitra was the saint who brought these teachings from India to Tibet. In *The Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*, Nyima Bum says that his *Eleven Words and Meanings* is based on Vimalamitra's writings. Later sources then said that Nyang Tingzin Sangpo (Myang ting 'dzin bzang po, 8<sup>th</sup> c.) eventually became Vimalamitra's closest disciple and received the Nyingthik teaching from him; he is also credited with preserving the *Vima Nyingthik* by concealing the texts in his Sha Lhakhang (*zhwa'i lha khang*).<sup>25</sup> In the eleventh century, these concealed Dzogchen texts are said to have been discovered by Dangma Lhungyi Gyaltzen (Ldang ma lhun gyi rgyal mtshan, 11<sup>th</sup> c.), who is considered to be the first Nyingthik treasure revealer. Though the collection thus dates to the eleventh century, a number of short texts inserted into it were attributed to several figures over the next three centuries.<sup>26</sup> Nyima Bum is the third lineage-holder after Dangma.

One of the earlier texts dedicated to the history of Dzogchen Nyingthik is *The Extensive History of the Heart Essence of the Great Perfection* (*Rdzogs pa chen po snying thig gi lo rgyus chen mo*), hereafter referred to as *The Dzogchen Nyingthik History*, which I will argue may have been written by Shangtön Tashi Dorjé (Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje, 1097–1167),<sup>27</sup> the father of Nyima Bum. The dating of the *Dzogchen Nyingthik History* places it no earlier than the eleventh to twelfth centuries because the latest datable Dzogchen master mentioned in this text is Chegom Nakpo (Lce sgom nag po, 11–12<sup>th</sup> c.). This text is important for deciphering the early history of Dzogchen.

Early Nyingthik texts such as the *Seventeen Tantras* and those found in the *Four Volumes* and *One-hundred Nineteen Esoteric Precepts* of the *Vima Nyingthik* are infused with tantric elements and rituals such as *The Bronze-faced Dark Maroon Wrathful Lady* (*Smug nag kros ma rag gdong ma*) of unknown authorship, and *The Elaborate Empowerment of the Dzogchen Nyingthik* (*Rdzogs pa chen po snying thig spros bcas kyi dbang*) by Chetsun Sengé Wangchuk (Lce btsun seng ge dbang phyug, 12<sup>th</sup> c.). The *Tantra of the Unlocking through Sound* includes elaborate alchemical practices and ways of contemplating the sounds of the elements.

25. When Trisong Detsen ascended the throne, he gave lands in Dbu ru to Nyang. It was in this land that Nyang built his Sha temple. Today, one can still see inscriptions carved on two stone pillars in the Sha temple, praised by the King describing Nyang as a humble and faithful servant who attempted to decline the gift of the land out of modesty. Even though Myang Ting nge 'dzin indeed served Khri srong lde btsan, his role was particularly crucial in securing the rise of the latter's youngest son, Khri lde srong btsan (r. ca. 802–815), who is commonly known as Sad na legs. While it is possible that Khri srong lde btsan granted him the permission to construct the Zhwa'i lha khang, the official decree that documented the privileges bestowed upon Myang Ting nge 'dzin was issued by Khri lde srong btsan; see Richardson 1985, 43–61.

26. For example, Longchenpa's *Tshig don bcu gcig pa* and the short biographies of Shangtön, Nyima Bum, and Gu ru Jo ber.

27. Karmay 2007, 209 footnote 16 says: "rDzog pa chen po (bi ma) sNying thig gi lo rgyus chen mo (from now on *Lo rgyus chen mo*) Bi ma sNying thig, sNying thig ya bzhi, Vol. 7 (Part III), text No. 1, p. 165. The author's name is not given. It is simply stated 'by me' (*bdag gis*) in an obscure passage where it is a question of the master lCe sgom nag po (p. 177). It is therefore almost certain that he is Shangtön bKra shis rdo rje (1097–1167). On him, see below, p.211." Karmay thus claims that it was written by Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje. Also see Achard 1999, 80–82.

## II. Nyima Bum and His Text

### A. Nyima Bum (1158–1213)

Nyima Bum's biography, located within the *Vima Nyingthik*,<sup>28</sup> makes no mention of his dates of birth. According to *The Blue Annals* by Go Lotsawā Zhönu Pal (Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, 1392–1481), however, he was born in the year of the Earth Male Tiger (1158).<sup>29</sup> Nyima Bum was the son of Shangtön Tashi Dorjé (Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje, 1097–1167), to whom both Karmay and Germano attribute authorship of *The Extensive History of the Heart Essence of the Great Perfection*. Nyima Bum's mother was Gyalmo Yang (Rgyal mo g.yang). It is said that when she was pregnant, she had a dream in which many suns rose simultaneously. Upon the child's birth, Shangtön then proclaimed, "You will become the rays of the sun which will dispel the darkness of ignorance of all sentient beings." Thus he gave the name Nyima Bum, meaning one-hundred-thousand suns. Shangtön performed various rituals, including *Vajrakīlaya* and *Yang dag* to remove obstacles for his son. The biography also suggests that a certain passage in the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra* offers a prophecy that considers Nyima Bum to be an emanation of Vajrapāṇi.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, it is said that Shangtön interpreted his wife's dream of many suns to mean that the "Unsurpassed Secret Teachings" (*Gsang ba bla ma med pa*) would benefit many sentient beings. According to the biography of Shangtön, he had a vision of various spiritual beings telling him that the *Unsurpassed Secret Cycle of the Great Perfection of Pith Instructions* (*Man ngag rdzogs pa chen po gsang ba bla na med pa'i skor*)<sup>31</sup> was located at a lion-like rock. "You should bring these forth to benefit beings," he was told. When Shangtön went near this rock in Oyuk (*'o yug*), he revealed 108 indexes (*kha byang brgya rtsa brgyad*).<sup>32</sup>

According to Germano, the teachings of the fourth Cycle—the Unsurpassed Secret Cycle, which is identical with the *Nyingthik* teachings— "are most likely an extraction and canonization of a selection of *tantras* out of a broader movement, which Shangtön Tashi Dorjé identified as the Unsurpassed Secret Cycle to differentiate it from earlier precedents, and presumably to distinguish himself from other redactors/codifiers in the broader movement."<sup>33</sup> The four cycles appear

28. Dri med 'od zer (*gsung 'bum*, Dpal brtsegs, vol. 4), 156–58.

29. See Roerich 1949, 194.

30. What appears to be the relevant passage in the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra* (See *Rgyud bcu bdun*, 41) actually seems to refer to an Indian master in the early Nyingthik lineage: *de 'og lag na rdo rje yi/ sprul pa badz+ra pha las 'dzin*. Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba (*Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, 560) notes the same.

31. Dri med 'od zer (*gsung 'bum*, Dpal brtsegs, vol. 4), 126–27.

32. Dri med 'od zer (*gsung 'bum*, Dpal brtsegs, vol. 4), 128. It remains unclear to me whether these are stand-alone texts or simply a collection of prophetic guides to further treasures. Their role in the lives of Shangtön and his son seems to be of considerable importance, beyond that of mere guides.

33. See Germano 2005, 18.

in the last pages of the *Great History*, which was likely written by Shangtön, where we learn the following:

In that way, thirty years after Chetsun (Lce btsun) passed away into the invisible realm, Chegom Nakpo (Lce sgom nag po) of Narda (Mnar mda') in Rong revealed the spoken transmissions of the three, Outer, Inner, and Secret and was instructed not to circulate them to others beyond himself. They were spread and promulgated in U (Dbus) and Tsang (Gtsang). Fifty years after Chegom revealed them, I [i.e., Shangtön] revealed this cycle of the Unsurpassed Secret and was instructed not to circulate them to others beyond myself.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Shangtön represents the new Unsurpassed Secret teachings that he revealed as surpassing the earlier three cycles of Dzogchen teachings (i.e., the Outer, Inner, and Secret) that had been transmitted within the Che (*lce*) clan.<sup>35</sup> Given this, when Shangtön proclaims, upon hearing his pregnant wife's dream of many suns, that sentient beings would benefit from the Unsurpassed Secret Teachings, he was establishing Nyima Bum as the heir to his Nyingthik lineage.

Between the age of five and seven or eight, Nyima Bum received from his father the complete oral transmissions of the *Seventeen Tantras* along with empowerments, teachings, and instructions of the Unsurpassable Secret Teachings. According to Nyima Bum's biography, his father passed away when the boy was nine years old.<sup>36</sup>

As a child prodigy, between the age of ten and fifteen years old, Nyima Bum studied the complete *Seventeen Tantras*. It is said that his gathered retinues were astounded when Nyima Bum taught these *tantras* and Pith Instructions at such a young age. At eighteen, he received further "higher empowerments" (*dbang gong ma*) from an unnamed vajra-master. At twenty, he studied the new translation *tantras* and pith instructions under Ngok Gyaltsa Dorseng (Rngog Rgyal tsha rdor seng, 1140–1207). At twenty-seven, he studied the *Malgyo* tradition of *Cakrasamvara* from

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34. *Lo rgyus chen mo* (in *Snga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 35), 655.1–3: *de ltar lce btsun mi snang ba'i sar gshegs nas lo sum bcu na rong gi mnar mda'i lce sgom nag pos phyi nang gsang bag sum gyi bka' brgyud rnams bton nas rang las gzhan la ma spel bar gdams pa'o/ dbus gtsang du dar zhing rgyas par mdzad do/ lce sgom gyis thon nas lo lnga bcu na bdag gis gsang bla na med pa'i skor 'di rnams bton nas rang las gzhan la ma spel bar gdams pa'o.*

35. Also see Dri med 'od zer (*gsung 'bum*, Dpal brtsegs, vol. 2) for another comparative discussion of the Four Cycles: the Outer Cycle functions like a body, the Inner Cycle functions like the eyes, the Secret Cycle functions like the heart, and the Unsurpassed Secret Cycle functions like a person who has a body, faculties, and limbs. In the *Great History*, it mentions Śrī Sīṃha already established the Four Cycles. Furthermore, in both the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra* and the *Only Son of Buddhas Tantra*, the Four Cycles are mentioned.

36. But according to Nyoshul's *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems: Biographies of Masters*, Shangtön died when Nyima Bum was twenty years old (see Nyoshul 2005, 88–89). Furthermore, *The Blue Annals* (Roerich 1949, 194) says that Nyima Bum associated with his father for eleven years and received all of his *Nyingthik* teachings.

Sakya Drakpa Gyaltzen (Sa skya Grags pa rgyal mtshan, 1147–1216) and Lama Taksowa (Bla ma Stag so ba). At thirty, he studied the Achi (*a phyi*) tradition of *Cakrasaṃvara* and other new translation tantric teachings from Lama Kyiton Drakpa (Bla ma Skyi ston grags pa, b. 13<sup>th</sup> c.).

Several sources suggest that Nyima Bum had composed a treatise expounding on the eleven topics of *Dzogchen*. According to *The Blue Annals* and Dudjom's (Bdud 'joms, 1904–1987) *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, Nyima Bum composed a treatise called *Tshig don chen mo*, which is translated by Roerich as *The Great Words and Meanings*<sup>37</sup> and by Dorje and Kapstein as *The Great Exposition of Words and Meaning*.<sup>38</sup> The biography of Nyima Bum, found in the *Vima Nyingthik* as arranged and structured by Longchen Rabjam, notably makes no mention of this treatise on the eleven topics, despite the fact that it was important for Longchenpa, who wrote a treatise with the same title and almost verbatim content.

Nyima Bum had two wives. One, he married when he was twenty-two, and the second, when he was twenty-nine. Nyima Bum passed away at the age of fifty-six, on the eighth day of the first lunar calendar month, and his biography says that relics in five colors were found among his ashes. Although Nyima Bum's biography does not give the year of death, *The Blue Annals* says that Nyima Bum passed away in the Water Female Hen year (1213).

## B. Analytical Summary of the “Introduction” to *The Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*

Next, we turn to the structure of Nyima Bum's “Introduction” to infer some of the author's interests and how they may reflect larger concerns surrounding *Dzogchen* in the twelfth and thirteen centuries. Furthermore, I will compare and contrast the structures of Longchenpa's and Nyima Bum's respective treatments of the *Eleven Words and Meanings*.

The “Introduction” is written in a style of progressive development, first by introducing four ways of teaching the Unsurpassed Secret tantras, i.e., the *Nyingthik*—the four methods that are attributed to Vimalamitra:

For those intellects that require elaboration, the tantra is explained outwardly through the mode of the excellences of the setting. For those intellects that do not require elaboration, the meaning of the scripture is explained inwardly by means of ascertaining the Pith Instructions. For those really requiring no elaboration, in order to realize that the title is the scripture itself, the title is explained in accordance with the secret. For those intellects that require absolutely no

37. See Roerich 1949, 194.

38. Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, 563.

elaboration, the distillation of the meaning is explained in accordance with the Unsurpassable Secret Great Perfection.<sup>39</sup>

These four methods appear in a more abbreviated form in the opening lines to the *Great History*, further evidence of the close ties between Nyima Bum and the writings of his father: “The explanation in accordance with the outer [level] is detailed; similarly, [the explanation] in accordance with the inner [level] is simple; the secret is very simple; the Unsurpassed is absolutely simple.”<sup>40</sup>

Though one might expect these four methods to structure the text that follows, Nyima Bum only ever discusses the first two; he does not provide any further explanations on the Secret and Unsurpassed, as the very act of elaborating on the topics is the purview of only the first and second. This seems to be Nyima Bum’s style of teaching; despite providing brief summaries of the subject-matter, he covers in detail only the parts that concern his central thesis. We will see evidence of this same tendency again below.

In turning to the first, outer method of teaching, Nyima Bum observes that in general, all tantras may be taught in terms of the five excellences of the setting, namely, the teacher, the retinue, the teaching, the place, and the time. Even though the eleven topics that are his main focus are addressed as part of the inner way of teaching, he still gives an extensive explanation of the five excellences here in his discussion of the outer method. In addressing these five excellences, he distinguishes the common and the uncommon views on them, i.e., the common view on the excellences that is explained in conformity with other vehicles (which here seem to include the non-Nyingthik cycles of Dzogchen) and the uncommon that is specific to the Nyingthik.<sup>41</sup>

Following these elaborate explanations of the five excellences of the setting, which constitute the outer method of teaching, Nyima Bum turns to the inner method and the five “significances,” which are comprised of the history, yoga, root, purpose, and word (*lo rgyus, yo ga, rtsa ba, dgos ched, tshig*), a set that he draws (though in a different order) from *The Union of Sun and Moon Tantra*.<sup>42</sup> Nyima Bum explains that the “history” significance here indicates that the eleven words

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39. (i) *gleng gzhi phun sum tshogs pa'i tshul gyis phyi ltar bshad pa*, (ii) *man ngag nges pas nang ltar bshad pa*, (iii) *mtshan rang gzhung du rtogs par bya ba'i phyir/ mtshan gsang ba ltar bshad pa*, (iv) *don bsdu pa gsang ba bla na med pa yongs su rDzogs pa chen po ltar bshad pa*. See Nyima Bum 2008, 2.19–3.6.

40. *Lo rgyus chen mo*, vol. 35, 506.2–3; *phyi ltar bshad pa spros pa la/ nang ltar de bzhin spros pa med/ gsang ba shin tu spros med do/ bla na med pa rab spros med*.

41. Note that he thus includes a discussion of the Five Excellences of the non-Nyingthik tantras within this larger teaching on the four methods of teaching the Nyingthik, perhaps in order to draw a distinction.

42. See Nyima bum 2008, 12. And it is worth noting that these Five Significances also appear in the root tantra of the Mind Series, *The All-Creating Monarch Tantra* (*Kun byed rgyal po*), which also lists “history” as the first of the five (see Jim Valby’s “Five Principles of Dzogchen Transmission in the *Kun byed rgyal po*,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 2.4 (October, 2012), an issue edited by Jean-Luc Achard on “Studies in the Sems sde tradition of Dzogchen”: 157–163).

and meanings comprise a history of buddhas. By starting his explanation of the Five Significances with history, he thus sets up this “history” as his focus.

Nyima Bum observes that the *Union of Sun and Moon Tantra* says, “the mind is gratified by means of the significance of the history.”<sup>43</sup> He then suggests that the five afflictions provide the causes for the five significances to be taught, with ignorance addressed by the significance of history. History is thus taught to instill belief in order to counteract ignorance, and within this topic Nyima Bum distinguishes the histories of buddhas and of sentient beings. His present work addresses the former, i.e., the history of buddhas.

All of this closely matches the opening lines of the *Great History*, where we read:

Regarding that, I will explain the significance of the “history.”  
This has two aspects:  
Regarding the history specific to buddhas,  
I have taught the eleven words and meanings elsewhere;  
The history of those [lineage-holders] who cherish that [i.e., the eleven  
words and meanings] will now be explained.  
In order to act while curbing the three times,  
I will establish the three transmissions and  
Explain the great system that descended from that.<sup>44</sup>

Thus the *Great History*, which was presumably written by Nyima Bum’s father, Shangtön, covers the history of sentient beings, i.e., the history of the lineage-holders, while Nyima Bum’s text on the eleven words and meanings addresses the history of buddhas, an idea that will be addressed below. What is more, it appears that Shangtön, at the time of composing his *Great History*, had already written his own work (“elsewhere,” *gong du*) on the eleven words and meanings. This work may no longer be extant, but it is also possible that the text bearing the title, *The Eleven Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don bcu gcig pa*), that appears in the *Heart Essence of Vimalamitra*<sup>45</sup> and is attributed to Longchenpa, may in fact have been written by Shangtön. There are several clues to support this idea. Foremost is the fact that the wording at the beginning of both *The Eleven Words and Meanings* attributed to Longchenpa and Nyima Bum’s work is almost identical. Both works open with the prayer,

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43. See Nyima bum 2008, 12.

44. *Lo rgyus chen mo* (in *Snga’ gyur bka’ ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 35), 507.2–3: *de la lo rgyus don gyis bshad/ ‘di la rnam pa gnyis yin te/ sangs rgyas nyid kyi lo rgyus ni/ tshig don bcu gcig gong du bstan/ de la gces pa’i lo rgyus bshad/ dus gsum ‘dul phyir byas pa’i phyir/ brgyud pa gsum du gtan la dbab/ de las babs lugs chen po bshad.*

45. See *Bi ma snying thig* (in *Bod rig pa dpe skrun khang*, 2009), vol. 4, 86–126.

To the Glorious Mahāvajradhara,  
 The lama, the *yidam* deities, and  
 The *dākinīs* who possess bliss,  
 I prostrate with body, speech, and mind.<sup>46</sup>

While it is possible that Longchenpa copies Nyima Bum’s opening verse when composing his own shorter work on the eleven words and meanings, it may be that Nyima Bum was copying from his father’s earlier text. Perhaps also relevant is the fact that the colophon attributing the shorter work to Longchenpa appears only after an initial colophon stating that the work is “the quintessence of the heart of the scholar Vimala[mitra].”<sup>47</sup>

In any case, Nyima Bum frames his presentation of the *Eleven Words and Meanings* as a history of buddhas, a topic that comprises the first of the five significances and sets out a clear path to buddhahood.

### C. The Eleven Topics as a “History”

We have seen that Shangtön, in his *Great History*, describes the eleven topics as a history of buddhas (*sangs rgyas kyi lo rgyus*). The Tibetan word *lo rgyus*, which I am translating here as “history,” also carries the connotation of a “story” that brings the past into the present. Shangtön’s *Great History* closes with a brief explanation of the term as it is used in the Nyingthik context: “History’ means familiarity (*rgyus*) with what occurred many years (*lo*) [prior]. Because it presents [those events] as if they were being seen right now, it is called a ‘history.’”<sup>48</sup> This explanation is obviously relevant for the *Great History*, which (as we have seen) is a “history of sentient beings,” in that it brings the lineage of the Nyingthik teachings into the present experience of the reader. But the same explanation may also be understood to be pertinent to the *Eleven Words and Meanings*, which is a “history of buddhas.” The eleven topics thus tell the story of the entire arc of samsara, from beginning to end. In this sense, it is a cosmogonic history, yet it is one that brings that cosmogony of the primordial buddha Samantabhadra into the present moment—the present “seeing”—of the practitioner. It is not just an explanation of that history, according to Shangtön, but a vehicle for its appearance in the present.

46. *Dpal ldan rdo rje 'chang chen dang/ bla ma dang ni yi dam lha/ mkha' 'gro bde 'byin pa la/ lus ngag yi kyis phyag 'tshal lo*. Compare *Tshig don bcu gcig pa* and Nyima Bum 2008. Note that one word differs—Nyima Bum’s text reads *'dzin pa* instead of *'byin pa*.

47. *Tshig don bcu gcig pa*, (Dpal rtsigs, Klong chen rab 'byams kyi gsung 'bum, vol. 4, 102): *Mkhas pa bi ma la yi thugs bcud*.

48. *Lo rgyus chen mo*, (Shangtön 2009), 655.5–6. *lo rgyus zhes bhya ba la du ma long pa'i rgyus/ da lta mthong ba dang 'dra bar gtan la phebs pas nas lo rgyus zhes bya'o*.



As we have seen, the *Union of Sun and Moon*, which Nyima Bum cites as his source for the five significances, says that “history” is for the gratification of the mind. The *Union of Sun and Moon* further says it creates trust (*yid ches pa*) in the teaching:

If the significance of history is not explained,  
There may arise the error of not believing  
In this definitive utmost secret teaching.

Combining this passage with Shangtön’s above-cited etymology of *lo rgyus*, then, we might suggest that trust in the teachings is produced by bringing the past into the experience of the reader. Therefore, the necessity of having the history explained is vital, both for intellectual gratification and to avoid the error of not believing in this Definitive Utmost Secret Teaching of the Nyingthik.

Following his father’s *Great History*, Nyima Bum also distinguishes two kinds of history—of sentient beings and of buddhas.<sup>49</sup> Nyima Bum justifies the need for his history of buddhas, i.e., his elaboration of the eleven topics, by presenting them as a response to possible critics who might complain that his initial presentation of the five excellences does not offer any practices. “Some people with misconceptions,” he writes, “say that, while we may have the five excellences in this way, we lack the procedures for clear realization that is gained through experiential integration, i.e., the skillful means for achieving buddhahood.”<sup>50</sup> To answer this possible complaint, he then lists the eleven topics and begins his presentation of them.<sup>51</sup>

The idea that the buddhas have a history at all is, of course, a strange one. Normally, given that buddhas are empty and thus beyond time and language, they would not partake of history, and yet Shangtön and Nyima Bum elaborate their “history.” From the ultimate perspective, the idea that there is a history is itself mistaken. When one strays from the ground in the second topic, one slips out of timelessness and into the turmoil of history. The history then proceeds until the eleventh topic, when one returns to the ground and sees that history is an illusion. In this sense, it is significant that Nyima Bum describes this last topic of “the place of liberation” as a return to “the beginning” (*grol sa thog ma’o*). He explains this line: “‘the beginning’ is the entity of the initial ground, which is the natural way of abiding, the primordially pure gnosis, which I taught at the beginning of the eleven topics.”<sup>52</sup> The “history” of the eleven topics, then, is a spiral.<sup>53</sup>

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49. Nyima Bum 2008, 13.

50. Nyima Bum 2008, 13.

51. In the Introduction to his own *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, Longchenpa does not discuss the five excellences of the Nyingthik teachings, and he makes no attempt to describe the eleven topics as a history.

52. Nyima Bum 2008, 119.

53. See Esler 2023, 35.

#### D. A Few Differences between Nyima Bum's and Longchenpa's Treatments of the Eleven Words and Meanings

In the homage that opens his "Introduction," Nyima Bum focuses on the Glorious Mahāvajradhara, a deity commonly held to be the highest buddha in the tantric literature of the Sarma schools but rarely seen in traditional Dzogchen supplications. That said, the *Pearl Garland Tantra* precedes its canonical presentation of the eleven topics by praising "Vajradhara of the sixth family" for his teaching of all the tantras within the single condensed teaching of the eleven words and meanings.<sup>54</sup> This is the only, and possibly the earliest, presentation of the eleven topics in the eleven-fold form used by Nyima Bum to appear in the *Seventeen Tantras*. The *Unlocking through Sound Tantra* includes, in its second chapter, the eleven within a larger list of twenty-eight questions that are then answered by "the teacher Vajradhara" (*ston pa rdo rje 'chang*),<sup>55</sup> and this is one of only five occurrences of Vajradhara in that tantra. Given all this, it may be no surprise that Nyima Bum supplicates Mahāvajradhara in the opening homage to his own text on these eleven words and meanings. Furthermore, Nyima Bum explains that Mahāvajradhara is the *nirmāṇakāya* as emanated from the *dharmakāya* Samantabhadra.<sup>56</sup> Mahāvajradhara is more commonly identified as the *sambhogakāya* of Samantabhadra in present-day understandings.

Whereas Nyima Bum opens his work by supplicating Mahāvajradhara, Longchenpa focuses his own opening praises in his *Treasury of Precious Words and Meanings* on Samantabhadra. Following that, Longchenpa briefly explains that it was Samantabhadra who first became directly enlightened within the spontaneous presence of the primordial space, and first taught the Great Perfection doctrines. Longchenpa's decision in this regard may reflect his temporal distance, relative to Nyima Bum, from the *Seventeen Tantras*. By the fourteenth century, Longchenpa may have been less concerned with making the entire Nyingthik tradition cohere with the *Seventeen Tantras* and more interested in bringing the Nyingthik tradition in line with broader Nyingma norms.

Nyima Bum also states in his opening supplications that this *Eleven Words and Meanings* is based on the oral instructions of his lama (*bla ma'i zhal gyi gdams ngag*). Since he received his teachings on the *Seventeen Tantras* from his father, Shangtön Tashi Dorjé, and since Shangtön is the first person associated with the lineage of Unsurpassed Secret Teachings, i.e., the Nyingthik, one can deduce that Nyima Bum's "lama" here was probably his own father. This reliance on the oral teachings of his father is unlike Longchenpa who, one might say, relied more on his own authority as a visionary.<sup>57</sup> He does open his *Treasury of Words and Meanings* by supplicating "the

54. *Mu tig phreng ba*, 534 (*a 'dzom*, 60a.1–60b.5).

55. *Sgra thal 'gyur* (Sanje Dorje), 103.

56. Nyima Bum 2008, 1–2.

57. For an example of Longchenpa establishing his own authority through visionary encounters, see Germano and Gyatso 2000.

assemblies of lamas,” along with the *dākiṅīs*, to dwell in the lotus-lake of his mind, but this is somewhat more abstract.

Nyima Bum’s introduction also offers his readers a glimpse into the dynamic and polemical period of the twelfth and thirteen centuries. Doctrinal and philosophical views were in flux and still undergoing molding and shaping. In the supplication section of the introduction, Nyima Bum complains that “The words taught by the buddhas are corrupted by those who hope to be experts in commentaries and writings.”<sup>58</sup> Again, Longchenpa’s work is less, explicitly at least, concerned with controlling orthodoxy. One could read Nyima Bum’s comment as a reflection of the fact that the Nyingthik orthodoxy had yet to be fully established; meanwhile, Longchenpa’s role is a consolidator and systematizer.

Similarly, Nyima Bum still had to take up a defensive position concerning whether the Nyingthik teachings were authentic Buddhist doctrines. His arguments, covering two pages in length, regarding the opening words, “Thus have I heard” and “Thus have I taught,”<sup>59</sup> seem to attest that the *Seventeen Tantras* were still being questioned. Dzogchen followers not only had to face hostile camps outside their school. They also had to contend with skeptics from within their own Nyingma tradition who must have been critical of the recently revealed *Seventeen Tantras*. Compare this to Longchenpa’s introduction to his *The Treasury of Precious Words and Meanings*, which is comprised of a lengthy supplication but lacks any defense against critics.

In his introduction, Longchenpa says that these Great Perfection teachings can be summarized into eleven topics. He points to the *Seventeen Tantras* and the *Vima Nyingthik’s Collection of One-hundred and Nineteen Esoteric Precepts* as the primary sources for his discussion of the eleven topics.<sup>60</sup> After offering three different lists of the eleven topics (i.e., his own, that found in the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra*, and that of the *Pearl Garland*), Longchenpa moves directly to the first of the eleven topics, which is the ground.

Nyima Bum and Longchenpa differ in their treatments of the larger list of twenty-eight questions that appears in the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra*. Nyima Bum’s eleven topics correspond to eleven of the first seventeen questions, excluding the following seven questions:

- 2) By what means is the first nirvana begun?<sup>61</sup>
- 3) What is the key point of the Buddha not straying?
- 8) What are the key points of the lamps?

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58. Nyima Bum 2008, 1–2.

59. Nyima Bum 2008, 11–12.

60. Longchenpa (Dri med ‘od zer) 2009, vol. 19, 2.

61. Note that *Sgra thal ‘gyur*, 102 itself reads *‘das pa’i tha ma gang gis bzung*, but both Longchenpa (Dpal brtsegs), 3, l. 5 and the Vimalamitra commentary to the *Sgra thal ‘gyur* (*sNga ‘gyur bka’ ma shin tu rgyas pa*), 47 prefer *‘das pa’i thog ma...* The meaning is basically equivalent.

- 9) How do [the lamps'] characteristics appear?
- 11) How is the distinctive support established?
- 12) What are the key points of the levels of intellects?
- 17) After liberation, how does great compassion arise?<sup>62</sup>

However, Nyima Bum adds an additional question by asking “Where does [this intrinsic awareness] abiding abide?” These seven topics are therefore not directly addressed by Nyima Bum. In his *Treasury of Precious Words and Meanings*, however, Longchenpa follows Nyima Bum’s eleven-fold list, but nonetheless is careful to discuss each of these seven omitted topics at the appropriate points in his presentation, thereby staying faithful to both the *Pearl Garland* and the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra*. Thus, for example, he addresses topics number two and three (By what means is the first nirvana begun? And what is the key point of the buddha not straying?) within his discussion of the first topic on the ground.

After citing the eleven topics from the *Pearl Garland Tantra*, Nyima Bum ends his introduction and starts on topic one, the ground. In this sense, Longchenpa’s introduction ends in a similar manner to Nyima Bum’s, by first giving his own interpretation of the eleven topics, then quoting from the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra* and the *Pearl Garland Tantra*, before moving on to the first topic of the ground.

### E. Rikzin Gödemchen’s Use of Nyima Bum’s Text

In 1337, another great systematizer of the Nyingthik was born. Rikzin Gödemchen was twenty-nine years younger than Longchenpa. Rikzin Gödem rewrote the tradition through his extensive treasure revelations, called the *Unimpeded Thought of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*). In her recent Ph.D. thesis, Katarina Turpeinen has argued that Rikzin Gödemchen’s writings exerted an even stronger influence over the Nyingthik tradition for several centuries, until Longchenpa’s work rose to the fore in the eighteenth century. Among his revelations is a text called the *Great Aural Transmission of Vimalamitra, Instructions for the King, A Commentary on the Unsurpassed Utmost Secret Great Perfection, The Self-Illuminating Gnosis* (*Vi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen po rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal*). This work is largely a copy of Nyima Bum’s *Great Perfection: The Eleven Words and Meanings*; in fact, it follows Nyima Bum’s text even more closely than does Longchenpa’s *Treasury of Words and Meanings*. Thus, for example, whereas Longchenpa, as we have seen, does not address the five excellences of the setting nor mentions the five significances, all of which

62. The situation is further complexified by the fact that Nyima Bum (and the *Mu tig phreng ba*) divides the *Sgra thal 'gyur's* fifth topic (*rang rig ye shes gnas pa gang*) into two, to make his own third and fourth topics, namely, *rang rig ye shes gnas lugs gang* and *gnas pa gang na gnas pa lags*.

are seen in Nyima Bum's text, Rikzin Gödemchen *does* include discussions of all of these, copied almost verbatim.<sup>63</sup>

Here I will review some of the main differences that Rikzin Gödemchen introduces. First, he regularly replaces the phrase “words and meanings” (*tshig don*) with other terms. This phrase does not appear in the title, and in his colophon, where he copies some of Nyima Bum's opening praises, he replaces “words and meanings” with “pith instructions” (*man ngag*) and then again with “essence” (*snying po*).<sup>64</sup> We might speculate that Rikzin Gödemchen does this in order to reduce his text's commentarial flavor in favor of a more mystical air. Perhaps related, in the same closing verses, he changes Nyima Bum's description of his text as relying “on the Conqueror's words and the lama's instructions (*bla ma'i gdams ngag*),” to a description of his own text as relying “on the Conqueror's words and the Vidyādhara's oral advice (*rig 'dzin zhal gdams*).”<sup>65</sup> Here again, Rikzin Gödemchen moves his text away from being grounded in historical teachings to being received from visionary encounters with great beings.<sup>66</sup>

The same motivation may be behind Rikzin Gödemchen's alteration of a passage in which Nyima Bum refers to his own lama's intent regarding the five excellences as the antidotes for the five *skandhas*. Thus Nyima Bum writes:

In this context, Lama Jetsun Rinpoché (Bla ma Rje btsun Rin po che) talks about the external place and so forth.<sup>67</sup> Regarding that, if one divides the excellences according to nine further subdivisions, there come to be forty-five. It is complicated to make those subdivisions. They do not apply to one's mindstream, and they may confuse one about [the differences between] common and uncommon. However, they are my lama's own words, so they are just touched upon briefly.<sup>68</sup>

In place of this same passage, Rikzin Gödemchen writes only:

If these are explained extensively, there are forty-five ways of explaining. In the context of practice, however, they are not taught apart from being merely men-

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63. See the English translation, Smith 2016, and see the Tibetan text, Rgod kyi lden 'phru can 2000, vol. 4, 187–406. It also appears in Sangs rgyas gling pa 2006, vol. 2, 413–583.

64. Compare Nyima Bum 2008, 2 with Rgod kyi lden 'phru can 2000, 400–401.

65. Compare Nyima Bum 2008, 2 with Rgod kyi lden 'phru can 2000, 401.

66. It is worth noting that within the Tibetan treasure tradition, the distinctions between mystical revelations, “archaeological” discoveries, and the “creative editing” of pre-existing texts can often become blurred and intertwined. For a clear example of this, see Cantwell 2020.

67. As opposed to the discussion above which interprets the five excellences internally, i.e., as the five *skandhas*.

68. Nyima bum 2008, 4:3–8. It should be admitted that this is a particularly difficult passage to translate.

tioned.<sup>69</sup>

Like Nyima Bum, Rikzin Gödemchen mentions these forty-five subdivisions for the sake of completeness, but he removes any mention of their origin, i.e., of Nyima Bum's own teacher.

All this makes sense given that Rikzin Gödemchen frames his text as a treasure revelation rather than a human-authored text. For the same reason, Rikzin Gödemchen peppers the ends of some sections with markers commonly used in treasure texts: “*sa ma ya: rgya rgya rgya:*,” “*sa ma ya: brda thim:*,” “*sa ma ya: rgya rgya rgya: I+thi:*,” and again, “*kA ya wAk tsi tta sa ma ya: rgya rgya rgya:*.”

Apart from these variances that are driven by the differences of genre (commentary vs. revelation), one does find other occasional differences, as when Rikzin Gödemchen inserts a brief defense of his teachings: “O Sovereign King, listen! In the future, here in Tibet, there will be those clever ones who speak in deceiving devils’ words, saying, ‘Teaching a Dharma that is neither the Buddha’s own words nor in the tantras is wrong.’ Therefore, to cut off those doubts, here, the pith instructions, which are the way of explaining the tantras taught by Buddha Vajradhara, are taught.”<sup>70</sup> Here, then, Rikzin Gödemchen describes his text as a defense against critics of the Nyingthik teachings as apocrypha.

In another portion of the text, Rikzin Gödemchen inserts a commentary two folios in length into his discussion of the five excellences, a passage that provides two additional subtopics within the discussion of the excellence of the uncommon setting. Whereas Nyima Bum discusses the uncommon setting solely as the ground, which he addresses in terms of the nature of the ground and how it resides in the body, Rikzin Gödemchen further adds two discussions of the uncommon setting as path and result, thus completing the standard triad of ground, path, and result.<sup>71</sup> It seems that Rikzin Gödemchen again may have added these two subtopics in response to critics. At a somewhat later point in his own introduction, Nyima Bum raises a possible complaint that the five excellences of the Nyingthik system may be nice in theory but lack “the procedures for clear realization that is gained through experiential integration, i.e., the skillful means for achieving buddhahood.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, the teaching is a good description of the ground but offers no path and result. In inserting his two subtopics, Rikzin Gödemchen seems to be addressing precisely such a complaint. Both this and the above-cited insertion about the Nyingthik being the words of the Buddha, then, appear to be motivated by a wish to defend these teachings against possible critics.

What motivates one final difference is harder to identify. Both Nyima Bum and Rikzin Gödemchen end with discourses on the *bhūmis*. Nyima Bum lists sixteen *bhūmis*, ending with

69. Rgod kyi lden 'phru can 2000, 189:4.

70. Rgod kyi lden 'phru can 2000, 188:1–3.

71. Rikzin Gödemchen 2000, 190.2–3 and 195.2–196.6.

72. Nyima bum 2008, 14.

the sixteenth *bhūmi* of unexcelled gnosis (*ye shes bla ma*).<sup>73</sup> Whereas, Rikzin Gödemchen lists only fifteen *bhūmis*, ending with the fifteenth *bhūmi* of Vajradhara, and he names his fourteenth *bhūmi* unexcelled gnosis.<sup>74</sup> Longchenpa and many other traditional accounts of the Nyingthik list the *bhūmi* of unexcelled gnosis as the sixteenth one. There is no clear indication why Rikzin Gödemchen lists only fifteen *bhūmis*, nor whether it is the author's intent or simply a scribal error.

## Conclusion

According to today's tradition, Longchenpa was a giant in making Great Perfection scholarship understandable to the outside world, after centuries of these secret teachings being shielded from others. Reading Longchenpa's works, it is almost as if nothing happened between the legendary eighth-century master Vimalamitra and Longchenpa himself, apart from some magical visions. Of Longchenpa's many works, *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* stands out as the zenith for its systematic and comprehensive presentation of the Great Perfection's philosophical theories, doctrines, and contemplative visionary practices. The centrality of the work to Longchenpa's thought is seen already in the fact that two texts of similar content are credited to him—the shorter *Eleven Words and Meanings* and the considerably longer *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*, which is counted, with some commentaries, among his *Seven Treasuries*.

The discovery a decade ago of Nyima Bum's text throws into question the importance of Longchenpa to the formulation of the tradition. Despite living a century and a half earlier, Nyima Bum composed his text with the same title and structure as Longchenpa's. Longchenpa's shorter version is like a copy of Nyima Bum's, though no mention is made of Nyima Bum. Longchenpa's longer *Treasury of Words and Meanings* also follows Nyima Bum's text, though it does offer some additional comments. Many of these additions are rooted in Longchenpa's use of the *Unlocking through Sound Tantra*, from which he draws seventeen questions instead of just the eleven that Nyima Bum took as his focus.

Thus, we can now see the extent of Nyima Bum's influence on Longchenpa, who casts such a giant shadow today. Nyima Bum's work was clearly in circulation during Longchenpa's fourteenth century, because another well-known and influential Great Perfection systematizer, Rikzin Gödemchen, a contemporary of Longchenpa, also lifted Nyima Bum's *Eleven Words and Meanings* into his collected works, with only a few minor changes, calling his text *A Commentary on the Unsurpassed Utmost Secret Great Perfection*.

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73. Nyima bum 2008, 129.

74. Rikzin Gödemchen 2000, 400:2.

In this paper, I have reviewed in brief the historical development of the Great Perfection tradition, confining my focus to the Nyingthik lineage, which belongs to the Pith Instruction Series, the highest class of Great Perfection teachings. Some scholars, including David Germano, believe that the Nyingthik class may be traced to Shangtön Tashi Dorjé, the father of Nyima Bum, instead of the generally accepted first Nyingthik treasure-revealer, Dangma Lhungyi Gyaltzen. Both Kar-may and Germano believe that it was Shangtön Tashi Dorjé who wrote *The Great History*. From my own reading of Nyima Bum's introduction of his *Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings*, and also *The Great History*, I would concur with this hypothesis.

Below I have translated Nyima Bum's "Introduction," which provides some important context for how he understood his *Eleven Words and Meanings*. Still today, many Buddhist teachings are framed by presentations of the five excellences in setting. Similarly, Nyima Bum presents the four methods of teaching the tantras according to Vimalamitra and gives an extensive discourse on the outer teaching of the five excellences in setting according to the tantric and Great Perfection traditions. He also describes the inner teaching of the five significances, and connects the significance of history, in particular, to his eleven topics (i.e., *Eleven Words and Meanings*), which he presents as a "history of buddhas."

At several points, Nyima Bum takes up a defensive position, fending off opponents from both within and without the Great Perfection community. One can surmise that the Great Perfection tradition still faced non-recognition or dismissal by orthodox Buddhist communities, in 12<sup>th</sup> century Tibet. This makes Nyima Bum's text all the more significant. *The Eleven Words and Meanings* is indeed a profound and influential work, which, we have seen, great Buddhist scholars and masters, including Longchenpa and Rikzin Gödemchen, reproduced or reworked for their own purposes. Even today, the authoritative text for Great Perfection studies and practices is the *Eleven Words and Meanings*. From Nyima Bum's text, we know the term *Eleven Words and Meanings* existed before Longchenpa's time and is even mentioned in Shangtön's *Great History*. But until some hypothetical future time, when and if another buried treasure is unveiled to disclose an even earlier version of *Eleven Words and Meaning*, we can say that Nyima Bum authored such a comprehensive Great Perfection text that one could go to this little book to find all the Nyingthik (Heart Essence) philosophy and practice integrated into one package.



## Translation of Nyima Bum’s “Introduction”

*Note: the numbers in square brackets refer to the 2008 edition and those in angle brackets refer to the manuscript folios.*

### [1] Great Perfection: Eleven Words and Meanings

Written by the great scholar of the Shang, Nyima Bum <1a><sup>75</sup>

To the Glorious Mahāvajradhara,  
The lama, the *yidam* deities, and  
The *dākinīs* who possess bliss,  
I prostrate with body, speech, and mind.

To the lama who is equal to the buddhas,  
I supplicate, then write this expressive symbol,  
This secret verbal essence of the Great Perfection.  
On the basis of the *Seventeen Tantras*,

For the purpose of realization, I write this structure of the tantras,  
Arranged as a garland of words on the basis  
Of the oral instructions of the lama,  
With a mind that has abandoned ignorance.

The words taught by the buddhas [2]  
Are corrupted by those who hope to be experts in commentaries and writings.  
This definitive commentary on the tantras, *āgamas*, and pith instructions,  
Which do not contradict [the buddhas’] words and which elucidate the steps of  
the scriptures,  
Is the non-conceptual point of the three realms, the source of all good qualities  
Which are like wishfulfilling jewels from islands in the ocean; <1b>

Relying on an unerring and unmistaken mind, and  
On the Conqueror’s words and the lama’s instructions,  
I lucidly distinguish the meaning of the words,

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75. This line is added in red ink beneath the title on the front page.

The meaning of the direct perception of reality, the elucidation of [all] the words and meanings.

In this regard, the complete and perfect Buddha, the *dharmakāya* Bhagavān Glorious Samantabhadra, having given rise to the faces and arms of the five families of the *sambhogakāya*, spread forth as the *nirmāṇakāya* Glorious Mahāvajradhara endowed with great compassion and skillful means. Perceiving the inconceivably diverse minds (*blo rigs*)<sup>76</sup> of tamable beings (*gdul bya*), he taught the doors of the dharma that tames and the vehicles' inconceivable modes of taming. Among those is the natural Great Perfection for those of the most excellent faculties. Among those is the king of the tantras of the Unsurpassed Secret, where it is said that in the assertions of Paṇḍita Vimalamitra, there are four ways of explaining: For those intellects that require elaboration, [3] the tantra is explained outwardly through the mode of the excellences of the setting. For those intellects that do not require elaboration, the meaning of the scripture is explained inwardly through the mode of ascertaining the pith instructions. <2b> For those really requiring no elaboration, in order to realize that the title is the scripture itself, the title is explained in accordance with the secret. For those intellects that require absolutely no elaboration, the distillation of the meaning is explained in accordance with the Unsurpassable Secret Great Perfection.<sup>77</sup>

[I.] Thus, first, for those whose intellects require elaboration, the genuine tantra is explained outwardly through the topics of the excellences of the setting:<sup>78</sup> In general, all the tantras are taught by means of the five excellences of the setting: the excellence of place, the excellence of teacher, the excellence of retinues, the excellence of time, and the excellence of dharma. When these five are assembled, the dharma will emerge.

Furthermore, in [*The Tantra of*] *Unlocking through Sound*, it states:

The topic of the setting in which the *tantra* arose,  
Is contained within these five seeds.<sup>79</sup>

And it is also said:

76. See page 2a.4 of the *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa* manuscript, where it reads *blo rigs*.

77. (i) *gleng gzhi phun sum tshogs pa'i tshul gyis phyi ltar bshad pa*, (ii) *man ngag nges pas nang ltar bshad pa*, (iii) *mtshan rang gzhung du rtogs par bya ba'i phyir/mtshan gsang ba ltar bshad pa*, (iv) *don bsdus pa gsang ba bla na med pa yongs su rdzogs pa chen po ltar bshad pa* (2.19–3.6).

78. Here I corrected the genitive *gyi* to the agentive *gyis* on the basis of the earlier line.

79. See *Sgra thal 'gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 4.

The background is of five types.<sup>80</sup>

In *The Union of Sun and Moon*, it is said:

The great secret tantras  
Possess the five excellences.<sup>81</sup>

Regarding the reason or the intention behind determining them as five in that way, within the continuums of the persons who are disciples, there abide the five *skandhas* that are the fields for taming. Therefore, the antidotes or tamers are the five excellences: (i) the excellence of place is for [taming] the completely pure aggregate of form; <3a> (ii) the excellence of teacher is for the completely pure aggregate of consciousness; (iii) the excellence of time is for the completely pure aggregate of conception.

[4] (iv) [There seems to be something lost, because the excellence of retinue and dharma for the completely pure feeling and formation are missing.<sup>82</sup>]

In the *Unlocking through Sound*, it is also said:

For each tamed individually,  
The taming basis<sup>83</sup> is the five aggregates.<sup>84</sup>

In this context, Lama Jetsun Rinpoché (Bla ma Rje btsun Rin po che) talks about the external place and so forth.<sup>85</sup> Regarding that, if one divides the excellences according to nine further subdivisions, there come to be forty-five. It is complicated to make those subdivisions. They do not apply to one's mindstream, and they may confuse one about [the differences between] common and uncommon. However, they are my lama's own words, so they are just touched upon briefly.<sup>86</sup>

The setting of the five excellences may be divided into two: (i) the uncommon setting, that is, the secret that is taught [only] in our own scriptures; and (ii) the common setting that is taught in

80. See *Sgra thal 'gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 31.

81. See *Nyi zla kha sbyor*, vol. 3 (Sanje Dorje), 166.

82. The publisher of the 2008 edition added these comments regarding possible missing lines.

83. *gdul bzhi* → *gdul gzhi*.

84. See *Sgra thal 'gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 30.

85. As opposed to the discussion above which interprets the Five Excellences internally, i.e., as the five skandhas.

86. *brda sprod la reg shig bzhag la bshad do* (4.7–8)

conformity with other [systems]. The admissible will thus be taught together with abandoning what is contradictory.

In the same *tantra*, it is said:

The two kinds of settings of the scripture (*lung*);<sup>87</sup>  
Is the mark of its superiority to others.<sup>88</sup>

And in *The Union of Sun and Moon*, it is said:

[They are] common and uncommon.<sup>89</sup>

<3b> For the purpose of realizing the signified, that is, the uncommon setting, there are taught (i) how the innate abiding nature of the entity of the Ground abides, and (ii) its arrangement, that is, how it resides in the body.

First, there are five excellences of the innateness of the main topic: (i) The excellence of place which is the reality free of elaborations, with no characteristics established whatsoever, beyond the scope of words and letters. (ii) Regarding the teacher who is the primal mode of existence, since it lacks even a word that could be a basis for elaborating, not even the name for elaboration can be established. Thus there is nothing to establish as [the teacher]’s face or hands. [5] (iii) The excellence of the retinues of the teacher who is like that is the self-arising, self-dawning play of reality. (iv) The excellence of the teaching for the retinues who are like that is the genuine teaching, which is one’s own awareness, ever-self-arising;<sup>90</sup> ever-self-dawning, it is unproduced by any causes or conditions and free of birth and destruction, being all-pervading. It is the very non-realization of characteristics by anyone. (v) Because the foursome of place, teacher, retinues, and dharma that is to be explained is gathered within the innateness of the topic, there is said to be no beginning and no end, there is the excellence of the time.

<4a> Again in [*The Tantra of*] *Jewel Mound*, it is said:

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87. *lung gi* reads as *lus ni* in the tantra itself, and *rtags* reads as *don du* (see Sanje Dorje edition, vol. 1, 16–17). This seems like it may not be a mistake but Nyima Bum simply making minor adjustments so that the quotation functions more clearly within his text.

88. *Sgra thal ’gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 16–17.

89. Compare Sanje Dorje edition, vol. 3, 166.1–2.

90. Here I am following the modern published edition by excluding the apparently repeated phrase, “*don gyi stan pa phun sum tshogs pa ni*.” I have parted with the modern editors, however, by taking *stan* and *bstan* and *brtan* as *bstan*. Also, note that I am translating *rang gi rig pa* as “one’s own awareness,” but it could also be “intrinsic awareness.”

Within the non-existent empty source of phenomena (*dharmodaya*),  
 Out of the difference between (or “the distinctive features of”) awareness and  
 gnosis  
 Of the very first primordial buddha,  
 The self-resounding of the emptiness of reality  
 Is the turning of the primordial wheel of dharma;  
 It is without beginning, middle, or end.<sup>91</sup>

And in [*The Tantra*] *without Letters*, it is said:

E ma! Listen! For the retinues of sublime manifestation, the awareness of the  
 abiding nature uninterruptedly illuminates the awareness of manifesting means.  
 That is expressed as, “From the abode of awareness...”<sup>92</sup>

91. With only minor differences, these lines all appear in the *Rin chen spungs pa*, but Nyima Bum draws them from various places. Most are from chapter two, pages 84–85, but one line is from chapter one, page 78. Whereas Nyima Bum quotes these lines in the context of time, the tantra itself uses them in discussing the retinues. Thus we read the core of the passage in the tantra as follows:

Regarding that, there are no appearances as retinues.  
 From the pure aspect of the grasping eyes (*snang byed*),  
 The outer objects appear like the retinues.  
 [And yet,] because there are no forms of gathered elements  
 Around which both body and mind gather,  
 There is not even the slightest appearance of a retinue.  
 Because of the distinctive features of awareness and gnosis,  
 Through the display of purity’s own face (*rang ngo*),  
 The skandhas of coarse appearances  
 Take on the manner of the retinues of the grasping eyes.  
 This is the supreme of secret yogas.

Note that Longchenpa quotes Nyima Bum’s version of the lines in the context of the excellence of time in his *Theg mchog mdzod*.

92. Here again, Nyima Bum’s quotation does not quite match the received version of the tantra in question; compare *Yi ge med pa’i rgyud chen po*, vol. 2, 216.2–3, which I read as something like, “E ma ho! Listen! Regarding the retinues of sublime manifestation, the awareness of abiding nature is uninterruptedly illuminated as the retinues of manifesting means” (*e ma ho/ nyon cig snang ba dam pa’i ‘khor rnams/ snang ba thabs kyi ‘khor la gnas lugs kyi rig pa ma ‘gags par gsal lo/ de skad ces rig pa’i gnas nas sngar ma gsungs so*). My own translation assumes that in reworking the passage, Nyima Bum intended to distinguish a third element of the teaching (*snang ba thabs kyi rig pa*) in addition to the two of teacher and retinues. This allows the passage to parallel the quotation from the *Mu ti phreng ba* that follows, though there, I should admit, my translation follows the tantra, as I can make no sense of Nyima Bum’s rendition of those two lines. This practice is commonly observed on a broader scale in traditional Indic and Tibetan Buddhist literature; see Freschi 2012.

And in [*The Tantra of Pearl Garland*], it is said:

The teacher and the teacher's retinues  
I gather as my own retinue.<sup>93</sup>

Regarding the bodily arrangement of the five excellences,<sup>94</sup> **the excellence of place** is the center of one's own body, the wheel where the channels join together, the celestial palace of the precious *citta*. Since that is the place, [the heart] is the source of all good qualities. Moreover, since that is the excellence, it is meant to have countless accumulations of awakened bodies and wisdoms in the body of a person with pure leisure and endowments. It liberates the form (*gzugs*) from the fetters of coarse and subtle sufferings. [6] In this way, by knowing one's own body as the place, elaborations about other [places] are cut, <4b> whereby, because of this important point that is beyond any deliberate effort, there is the Great Perfection.

Regarding **the excellence of the teacher**, the king of self-cognizant awareness, the Ground Samantabhadra—who resides all-pervasively in that place [i.e., the heart]—is the teacher. Therefore, he exists in the aspect of knowing all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana, so he is called “he who exists in the identity of knowing gnosis.” Since that is the excellence, it unceasingly understands cognizant awareness to be self-arising and liberates immediately in their various [objects]. Thus it liberates consciousness (*rnam shes*) from the fetters of objects and comprehension. Because the teacher self-arises to himself like this, he is the Great Perfection, which is the important point of being beyond deliberate effort.

Suppose one asks, “Who are **the retinues** of such a teacher?” He is surrounded by sets of five, such as the five bodies, the five gnoses, the five-colored lights, the five wisdoms, and the five winds, as is explained below. Furthermore, because they are the retinues, they are gathered within that same [teacher], and because [that] is the excellence of the retinues, they appear as the various utterly pure displays. Because they also emerge from themselves, they are termed “intrinsic gnosis.”<sup>95</sup> That liberates ideation (*'du shes*) from the fetters of the outer and the inner.

Suppose one asks, “What is **the dharma** that is taught to the retinues who are like that?” <5a> [It is] the bliss of non-conceptual gnosis that is dependent upon the channels and the non-con-

93. As mentioned in the preceding note, my translation here follows the tantra; see *Mu tig phreng ba*, vol. 2, 482.1–2: *ston pa 'khor dang bstan pa nga/ rang gi 'khor sdud sdud pa nga*.

94. This references the twofold distinction he made at the top of folio 4a, i.e., (i) how the innate abiding nature of the entity of the Ground abides, and (ii) its arrangement, that is, how it resides in the body.

95. There may be a syllable missing here (e.g., *rang rig ye shes* or *rang byung gi ye shes*).

ceptual bliss that is dependent upon the winds and drops. Moreover, because that is the support, through depending upon that, there is the excellence of the buddha. Hence, having practiced by depending upon whichever of those is appropriate, [one] completely accomplishes the qualities of the buddha. That liberates the feelings (*tshor ba*) from the fetters of pleasure and pain. [7] Since that emerges from itself and is self-arising, it is the Great Perfection, which is the important point of being free of other efforts.

The place that is like that [i.e., the heart], the awareness which is the teacher of the precept, the awakened bodies and gnoses that are the retinues, and the pith instructions on the methods of channels and winds that are the teaching [all] meet together in the present body, so **this is the time**. If the fruition of buddhahood is not achieved right now, it will be more difficult later, so perseverance is produced. Thus [the present time] is the excellence, and because of (i) the sacred dharma, (ii) the pure realm of (iii) the superior teacher, and (iv) those who possess the right karma and good fortune and have gathered the accumulations, awakening is unimpeded, so that the formations (*'du byed*) fettered by karma, the afflictions, the subsidiary afflictions, and so forth are severed right now. So it is.

At present, the Ground is your unfabricated mind that occurs as the essence of a single abiding nature. <5b> Therefore, the “place” and so forth do not need to be sought elsewhere; that is termed the “self-originating gnosis.”

Again in *The [Tantra of] Unlocking through Sound*, it is said:

At the very beginning of samsara and nirvana,  
Out of self-originating actionlessness,  
Arises the aggregates that embody the elements.  
Earth, water, fire, and wind are the four precious gems.  
At the center, the winds and consciousness are the causes and conditions.  
In the palace in which ideation is generated,  
Is the unfabricated self-originating awareness,  
Completely pure of confusion,  
Around whom are the gathered great blisses, the retinues of means,  
Who are the body, the gnoses, and the wisdom wind,  
Not differentiating and not observing diversity.  
The dharma of the great bliss of the methods of channels and winds  
Is taught in accordance with each individual's experience.  
Without past, future, and present,

Completely without differentiating between past and future,  
All is self-originating gnosis.<sup>96</sup>

That teaches the setting for the signified meaning.

[8] Now the setting will be taught in conformity with the common vehicles and mere *āgamas*. The signified and the signifying words may be realized by relying on the Buddha's teachings, which are free from the stains of exaggeration and denigration. That is expressed by the speaker, the teachers of the three bodies. It is expressed by means of the blessings of the *dharmakāya*. It is expressed by means of the *sambhogakāya*'s own essence. <6a> The *nirmāṅkāya* expresses the sixty limbs of melodious speech by means of beautifully composed words.

In which **places** do they teach? The *dharmakāya*'s place is the *dharmadhātu*; the *sambhogakāya*'s place is the completely pure *Ghanavyūha*; the *nirmāṅkāya*'s places are the Braided (\*Alakāvati), the Pure Edifice (Rnam dag brtsegs pa), and so forth. By what kind of **teachers** is it taught? The *dharmakāya* is Samantabhadra; the *sambhogakāya* is Vairocana; and the *nirmāṅkāya* is Vajrasattva.

To what kind of **retinues** do they teach? The *dharmakāya* [teaches] to inexpressible buddhafi elds. The *sambhogakāya* [Vairocana teaches] to those who are not separate from himself and are inconceivable: the fathers and mothers of the five families—the immeasurable retinues of means such as [the heads of] the five buddha-families and Ākāśadhatviśvarī and so forth—as well as the male bodhisattvas such as Kṣitigarbha and the female bodhisattvas such as Lāsyā. The *nirmāṅkāya* teaches the world-transcending (*'jig rten las 'das pa*) buddhas surrounded by an immeasurable number of bodhisattvas, *śrāvakas*, and so forth.<sup>97</sup> Outside of that, he teaches the worldly (*'jig rten pa'i*) retinues—the immeasurable numbers of beings who take the worldly forms of the eight great gods and so forth, the guardians of the directions, [9] the planets, the constellations, and so forth, <6b> together with the gods, *nāgas*, *asuras*, and *gandharvas*. These are shown in the setting of *The Pearl Garland*.<sup>98</sup>

What is the excellence of **dharma** that is taught to such retinues? The inexpressible *dharmakāya*'s

96. See *Sgra thal 'gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 3–4.

97. These two lines are mistakenly repeated so not translated here.

98. The first chapter of the *Mu tig phreng ba* includes many further aspects in its list of the retinues. Here we can see that Nyima Bum labels this setting “common” (*thun mong pa'i*) setting not in the sense that it is not taught in the Nyingthik tantras but that, when it is, it is taught in conformity with other systems.



teaching [is] self-originating and wordless.<sup>99</sup> The *nirmāṇakāya*'s teachings [are] the inconceivable *sūtras* and *tantras*.

At what **time** is that taught? It is when the *dharmakāya* self-appears as realization. It is when the *sambhogakāya* appears vividly as reality. The *nirmāṇakāya* [teaches] from when *bodhicitta* is generated until samsara is emptied or from when people's lifespan is immeasurably long until it is one-hundred years. In the context of being taught like that, it is termed, "the excellence of time."

[*The Tantra of*] *Unlocking through Sound* says things like:

The setting has five aspects;  
The place is asserted to be threefold,<sup>100</sup>

which explains that the excellences of the three bodies are buddhahood.

Furthermore, in [*The Tantra of*] *Jewel Mound*, it is also said:

By the *dharmakāya* of grasping purifying itself,  
In the immeasurable palace of no elaboration,  
To the retinues of appearances which are inseparable from oneself,  
By means of speaking without signs,  
The unelaborated dharmas,  
Which arise from mind that is non-abiding and self-exhausting,  
Are taught within the state of great equality,  
Which has never been spoken at all.

<7a> By the *sambhogakāya* that is intrinsically luminous and pure,  
Within the immeasurable palace of pure five-colored lights,  
By means of the speech that is unelaborated and great bliss,  
To the retinues of the families of the five bodies,  
The entityless and pure dharmas,  
Which arise from mind that is a gathering of the five gnoses,  
Displayed on a tongue of completely pure light-rays,  
Are also taught without speaking as a great self-arising,  
As the self-arising six syllables.

99. Here, "the *Sambhogakāya*'s teaching" could be missing from the text.

100. See *Sgra thal 'gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 31.

[By the *nirmāṇakāya* that is unattached to things,  
Within the dark realm of the disciples who are the source of dharma,]<sup>101</sup>  
[10] Within the six realms, to those with the karma and good fortune,  
By means of speech in elaborated words,  
The dharmas that accord with whatever faculties and wishes there may be,  
Which [arise] from a mindful and intrinsically luminous mind,  
Displayed on a tongue that is a sense faculty without desire,  
Are taught as the dharma of innumerable vehicles.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, by each of the three bodies explaining in its own way,  
The minds of sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and  
All the buddhas are satisfied,  
And the wishes of beings are likewise fulfilled.<sup>103</sup>

That teaches the common setting.

As for the underlying reason of teaching the two settings in this way,<sup>104</sup> regarding the uncommon setting, it is said, “I taught these words” in order to show that [our teaching] is not [the same as that] taught by others, that it is a profound meaning uniquely characteristic of ourselves.

Thus again, in [*The Tantra of*] *Unlocking through Sound*, it is said:

For the purposes of [teachings that are] superior to others,  
[The setting] takes place within the uncommon body;  
<7b> It distills the contents into their essence.<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, it is said:

For the purposes [of teachings that are] concordant with other vehicles,  
The common settings are taught.<sup>106</sup>

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101. Two lines added from the tantra itself; see *Rin chen spungs pa*, 102.

102. After this line, one line that appears in the tantra is missing: *e ma ho gsung gi rdo rje sNying*.

103. See *Rin chen spungs pa*, vol. 3 (Sanje Dorje), 101–102.

104. The two settings refer to the two phrases that open most Buddhist *sūtras* and *tantras*, namely the common opening, “Thus have I heard at one time,” and the uncommon opening found in some Dzogchen and other tantras, “Thus have I taught at one time.”

105. See *Sgra thal 'gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 16–17 and 31.

106. See *Sgra thal 'gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 17.

In response to someone asking why such a setting is taught, [it is said,] “Thus have I taught,” because [the teaching in question] is taught to the retinues through the teacher’s [i.e., the buddha’s] words themselves. In order to demonstrate the proximity of its lineage and its superiority, and in order for the teacher to create faith in the compiler [i.e., the original audience], he says, “I have taught this secret tantra to other retinues in buddhafi elds other than this one, whereby those other beings were awakened.” These are words that say [in effect], you should listen with faith!

Again, the same *tantra* says:

The retinues are taught by the teacher’s speech;  
This amazing supreme meeting is the principal teaching.<sup>107</sup>

[11] [Common setting:] Regarding the “Thus, have I heard,” [it] is the compiler’s words; the compiler, concerned that his retinues might not believe in it, is saying there is no other lineage between him and the teacher. Thus “I myself heard these words” cuts through any uncertainties. Therefore, it is taught in order to generate belief in his own retinues.

This is also expressed in these words:

Within the common setting,  
The compiler teaches the retinues  
In order to create belief.  
<8a> Arising out of the Ground of the disciple as instructions,  
The teachings remain.<sup>108</sup>

Regarding dispelling errors, suppose someone says teaching in these two ways is wrong: Are you saying that [writing either] “I taught” and “I heard” is contradictory, or that counting them as two is wrong? Regarding [the former, i.e.,] someone saying that [saying] “have I taught” is contradictory, [then you would be saying that] the \**Gubhyagarbha*, which says, “Thus have I explained at one time,” is wrong.<sup>109</sup> Suppose someone says that, while it may say, “Thus have I explained,” it does not

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107. Here Nyima Bum may have altered the *Thal gyur’s* passage (32), which reads, *ston pas gsung gis*, to *ston pa’i gsung gis* in order to deemphasize the agency of the buddha/teacher and to emphasize the agency of the speech. Note that above he wrote that the retinues are taught “through the teacher’s words themselves” (*ston pa’i bka’ nyid kyis*). Thus it is not that the teacher is doing anything, but that the teaching emerges spontaneously when his speech and the retinues meet.

108. See *Sgra thal gyur*, vol. 1 (Sanje Dorje), 17.

109. Note that the \**Gubhyagarbha* uses the verb *bshad pa* (“explained”), whereas the Dzogchen tantras use *bstan pa* (“taught”). While Nyima Bum here is equating the two, we might also consider the possibility that this difference is one of “telling” vs. “showing,” with the Dzogchen tantras emphasizing the latter.

say, “heard.” Is it correct or not for it not to be there? If it is [correct for it not to be there], then those [*sūtras*] that do have “heard” would be corrupt and wrong. If it is not [correct for it not to be there], then you are directly contradicting that same [*\*Guhyagarbha-tantra*].<sup>110</sup> Suppose someone says that this [scripture should be] asserted by means of [the statement,] “I heard.” Because the tantra teaches “thus have I taught,” here is also implied [“thus have I heard”]. Also, [in order to answer the idea that] if those [*sūtras*] that have “heard” were correct, then those that do not have it would be incorrect, the following is correctly established: It is not contradictory here for the teacher who teaches also to have heard. If anyone says this is contradictory, they are clearly talking crazy-talk. Generally, if [we] speak truthfully, <8b> some *sūtras* and tantras mention both “taught” and “explained,” some mention [only] “heard,” some mention both, and some mention neither. You should understand that there is no contradiction.

[12] If you say counting them as two is wrong, then you would be contradicting the [*Prajñā pāramitā*] which teaches samsara and nirvana as two and the two truths, as well as the common Secret Mantra which teaches the title and the scripture as two, and the Secret Mantra which teaches generation and completion as two and [distinguishes] skillful means and wisdom. So [it is fine for] them to appear as two.

That concludes the explanation of the *tantra* in accordance with the outer by means of the excellences of the setting for those intellects that require elaboration.

[II.]<sup>111</sup> Now for those intellects that do not require elaboration, the meaning of the scripture is explained according to the definitive pith instructions: (i) In order to make non-believers believe, the significance of the history is taught; (ii) in order to recognize engagement in the characteristics of the vehicles in general and [of each one] specifically, the subject of yoga is taught; (iii) in order to take the cessation of effort into the interior or in-between, the intended purpose is

110. The point here seems to be that both the *sūtras* and the *\*Guhyagarbha* must be acceptable, so one simply cannot argue against their opening lines. While this may not seem a terribly convincing argument, it does indicate that Nyima Bum was assuming his audience to be Nyingma and thus followers of the *\*Guhyagarbha*, a text that was questioned by some Sarma critics. Thus he is directing his arguments against a potential Nyingmapa who accepted the *\*Guhyagarbha* but criticized the recently revealed Seventeen Tantras.

111. Here begin the second of the four teachings listed above on f. 2a–b (3), having finished the first, i.e., the discussion of the five excellences which constitutes the outer teaching. Note that this text ends after Nyima Bum’s discussion of the eleven topics, which constitute the inner teaching. It is unclear whether he originally intended to write more. (Perhaps relevant is Go Lotsawa’s mention of a *Tshig don chen mo*, which could be a longer version out of which the present *Eleven Topics* was extracted, though it could also simply be a reference to the present text; see Roerich, 1949. It is quite possible that the *mdzad byang* was written by someone else. All this said, it is also possible that Nyima Bum did not intend to write any further, since, after all, he describes the third and fourth teachings as “unelaborated.”

taught;<sup>112</sup> (iv) in order to parse the words and syllables, the meaning is taught through words that are appropriate;<sup>113</sup> (v) in order to teach that all dharmas are gathered within the state of each word's lack of any basis for elaboration, the root significance of the title is taught.

In *The Union of Sun and Moon*, this is said:

The title is recognized in terms of its root significance,  
<9a> The entrance is taught in terms of the significance of *yoga*,  
It is settled in its own place by means of the significance of the purpose,  
The context<sup>114</sup> is introduced by means of the significance of the words,  
The minds are gratified by means of the significance of the history.<sup>115</sup>

Regarding the reason for there being definitely five, because there are five afflictions, which are the basis for taming, within the mindstream of a person who is to be tamed, they are taught as antidotes for taming those [afflictions]. These are: (i) intended for the ignorant to enter [the path] and for non-fixated and unfocused cultivation; [13] (ii) intended for the angry to enter and for a non-referential view; (iii) intended for the desirous to enter and for a conduct that neither adopts nor discards; (iv) intended for the arrogant to enter and for an unerring and unobscured ground; (v) intended for the jealous to enter and for the fruition that is devoid of abandoning and of obtaining. In this way, more than five would be meaningless, and less than five would be incomplete; thus there are exactly five.

In the same text, it is said:

If the significance of the history is not explained,  
There may arise the error of not believing  
In this definitive utmost secret teaching.

If the significance of the root is not explained,  
There may arise the limitless errors  
Of not unifying phenomena within awareness.

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112. This and some of the surrounding sentences appear to be corrupted. Perhaps corrections were difficult because the text does not address these topics but ends after the first topic on the history.

113. Here we read *skabs 'jed tshig* as *skabs phyed tshig*.

114. *Skyus gnyis* reads as *dkyus nyid* in the tantra itself; see *Nyi zla kha sbyor*, 167.1.

115. See *Nyi zla kha sbyor*, vol. 3 (Sanje Dorje), 166–167.

If the significance of the *yoga* is not explained,  
<9b> The vehicles are not distinguished, whereby  
The greater and lesser levels become meaningless.

If the significance of the words is not explained,  
The words elucidating the levels of the tantras  
Will be mistaken because of not parsing the syllables.

If the significance of the purpose is not explained,  
In the Great Perfection that is without effort or exertion,  
There will be the fault of meaninglessness.<sup>116</sup>

[Of these five topics,] regarding the first, there are two subtopics within the history for belief: So that an individual who is the basis [for the stories] may gain attainment, [i] the history of buddhas and [ii] the history of sentient beings are [both] established by means of precious narratives.

First, regarding the story of an individual's attainment of buddhahood, some people with misconceptions say that, while we may have the five excellences in this way, we lack the procedures for clear realization that is gained through experiential integration, i.e., the skillful means for achieving buddhahood. For them, in the system of the *tantras*, there are eleven words and meanings: [i] teaching on how, at the very beginning, the Ground—the abiding reality of phenomena's nature—abides prior to the emergence of either realization, i.e., a buddha, or the absence of realization, i.e., a sentient being; [14] [ii] establishing how confusion emerges within that way of abiding; [iii] teaching how, even if sentient beings are confused, the fields of completely perfect buddhas and the seeds [of awakening]<sup>117</sup> still abide within them; [iv] precisely where that same abiding resides; [v] the pathways through which the gnosis that resides in that way emerges; [vi] the gates through which the gnosis of awareness that has emerged through those pathways then dawns forth; [vii] the objective sphere in which that gnosis of awareness that has dawned through the gateways now appears; [viii] how that gnosis of awareness that appears within the objective sphere is then experientially integrated by qualified beings; [ix] the signs and measures by which

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116. Here, the *Union of Sun and Moon* offers two versions of the same fivefold list, with the final element of “history” moved up to the first position in its second passage. In his presentation of the five purposes, Nyima Bum follows this second passage by putting the history first, but parts ways from both of the *Union's* versions by moving the “root,” i.e., the title, into the last position. Why he does this is unclear; perhaps he only cares about the history, which is, after all, the only one of these five topics that he addresses in what follows. Note that the first of the *Union's* two lists appears to move from those of highest ability to lowest, with history being for those of lowest ability; see *Nyi zla kha sbyor*, vol. 3 (Sanje Dorje) 67. The second passage follows the same order seen in the *Kun byed rgyal po*.

117. Longchenpa (a 'dzom, 3a.4) uses only the word “ground” here.

one can ascertain that experiential integration; [x] how all this dawns within the intermediate state of ultimate reality for those who do not have time to practice because [they are] distracted by indolence, even though they have the pith instructions; and [xi] teaching the ultimate great liberation.

Just as it is said in *The Unlocking through Sound*:

- [i] What is this crucial starting point of cyclic existence?<sup>118</sup>
- [ii] From what does the mind become confused?<sup>119</sup>
- [iii] What is the abiding reality of the gnosis of intrinsic awareness?
- [iv] Where does [this] abiding abide?<sup>120</sup>
- [v] Through which paths does this [gnosis] emerge?
- [vi] What are the gateways through which the gnosis dawns forth?
- [vii] Within precisely which objective sphere does the dawning forth [occur]?<sup>121</sup>
- [viii] How does [one] experientially integrate [this]?<sup>122</sup>
- [ix] What are the signs and measures of that [integration] that appear?
- [x] What are the experiences of the intermediate states?
- [xi] Into what liberation is one's mind liberated?<sup>123</sup>

*The Pearl Garland* also describes:

- [i] Although the abiding reality is inconceivable, five types of gnosis are mentioned.<sup>124</sup>
- [ii] Although the Ground of confusion may be explained in many aspects,<sup>125</sup> it is spontaneous presence and great compassion.

118. The received version of the *Sgra thal 'gyur* has additional lines here, so that it reads: *sems can 'khor ba'i thog ma gang/ 'das pa'i tha ma gang gis bzung/ sangs rgyas ma 'khrul gnad 'di ci*. It seems that Nyima Bum is extracting only the first line, because only it is directly relevant to the first topic. In fact, his single line combines the first few words with the very last (*gnad 'di ci*) from the tantra.

119. The tantra reads *sems can* for the first two syllables instead of Nyima Bum's *sems ni*.

120. The tantra combines Nyima Bum's third and fourth topic into one line: *rang rig ye shes gnas pa gang*.

121. Here Nyima Bum omits two questions that precede this one in the tantra.

122. Here again he omits two questions.

123. *Sgra thal 'gyur* (Sanje Dorje), 102–103.

124. In the *Mu tig phreng ba*, it reads: *ye shes rnam pa gsum yin no*. But when Nyima Bum quotes the same passage (14), he reads five: *ye shes rnam pa lnga bshad kyang*. The Vima commentary to the *Mu tig phreng ba*, 532.2–3, suggests both might be right: *sku ni lnga/ rig[s] ni lnga/ ye shes ni lnga/ 'od ni lnga/ rlung ni lnga/ shes rab ni lnga ste*.

125. This line is missing from Nyima Bum, but it appears to be an error of copying, because without the line, the two topics are not sufficiently covered. So here I translate from the tantra itself.

- [iii] Intrinsically abiding are the [buddha] body, awareness, and gnosis.<sup>126</sup>
- [iv] Their residence is the center of the *citta*—the heart.
- [v] The pathways are the four channels, and the movers are the winds.
- [vi] The four gateways<sup>127</sup> of its dawning forth are the eyes and so forth.
- [vii] The objective sphere is the unconditioned sky.<sup>128</sup> [15]
- [viii] Experiential integration [involves] Cutting Through and Direct Transcendence.
- [ix] The measure is the yoga of the four assurances.
- [x] In the intermediate states, the mother and son join,
- [xi] Whereby the place of liberation is the original beginning.<sup>129</sup>

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126. Nyima Bum and the *A 'dzom* version of the *Mu tig phreng ba* read *rig* (though the *Gting skyes* has *ni!*), but the latter's Vima commentary has *rigs* ("family").

127. There may be some confusion around how to identify these four gateways. Both Nyima Bum (51, l. 7) and the Vima commentary to the *Mu tig phreng ba* seem to count five—the two eyes, the two ears, and the top of the head. Perhaps significantly, Longchenpa changed the root text to omit the number "four," which frees him to count only two, namely the two eyes and their crystal channels. The number four is also said to be linked to the four lamps.

128. The root tantra (*Gting skyes* and *A 'dzom*) reads: *nam mkha' rkyen bral yul du 'dus*.

129. *Mu tig phreng ba*, vol. 2 (Sanje Dorje), reads *grol sa nyid ni thog ma'o* (536). Note that Longchenpa and 'Jig med gling pa following him are careful to qualify this line. This might be part of their strategy of bringing Dzogchen into line with normative Buddhist doctrine, which requires nirvana to be final. This is quite different from Nyima Bum, who addresses this issue in the context of his discussion of the eleventh topic; see Nyima Bum 2008, 119.



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