

Tales of Realization – Narratives in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Revelation¹

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1. Introduction

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's anthology *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* is one of the landmarks of the fourteenth century Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) and contributed to the final consolidation of the tradition. The anthology is a treasure (*gter*) revelation that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337-1408)² is famed to have discovered in a cave at the Mountain That Resembles a Heap of Poisonous Snakes (Dug sprul spung 'dra), in the region of Byang. rGod ldem was an itinerant, married tantric yogi, whose treasure propagation started the Northern Treasures (*Byang gter*) tradition. It developed from a family centered enterprise into an influential monastic tradition based in the rDo rje brag monastery at the outskirts of Lhasa and sustaining close connections with the government of the Dalai Lamas.³

¹ The initial research for this paper was made possible by a generous fellowship from the Finnish Cultural Foundation. In particular, I am grateful to the Group in Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, for the Shinjo Ito Post-doctoral Fellowship that supported the writing process. I would also like to thank David Germano and Jacob Dalton for invaluable feedback and comments.

² For the life of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem phru can), see the main Tibetan hagiography *The Ray of Sunlight* (*Nyi ma'i od zer*) by Nyi ma bzang po and a Master's Thesis by Jurgen Herweg, *The Hagiography of Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can and Three Historic Questions Emerging from It*.

³ The Great Fifth Dalai Lama was actively involved with the Northern Treasures and received the teachings of *The Unimpeded Realization* from several Northern Treasures masters such as Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol and Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, the III incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. It was probably the Great Fifth's support that rendered rDo rje brag as one of the six main monasteries of the rNying ma tradition (Valentine, *The Lords of the Northern Treasures*, 58, 216). See also Valentine, "The Family and Legacy in the Early Northern Treasure Tradition."

The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*) is a heterogeneous compilation that contains a large variety of literary genres, topics, practices, speakers and texts attributed to various authors. However, all the disparate elements are integrated into an artfully constructed whole and the main tool of integration is narratives. How do narratives integrate the texts and topics of rGod ldem's anthology? What other goals do they accomplish? What are the major themes and gems among the narratives and how do they function in the context of the anthology? These are some of the central questions considered in this paper. The survey begins by outlining the broader context of *The Unimpeded Realization* and Tibetan treasure anthologies. Then, the inquiry focuses on the most important elements of narrative integration in rGod ldem's anthology.

This paper argues that the narrative dynamics in *The Unimpeded Realization* are guided by an overarching narrative theme, the vision of Samantabhadra, which is a compassionate plan or agenda of the primordial Buddha to benefit the world. The anthology's narratives also further the myth of Padmasambhava as the most important *rdzogs chen* master of the imperial period and create a continuum from Samantabhadra to Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. These three figures form three poles of gravity in the narrative framework of the anthology.

The bulk of the paper is devoted to analyzing two prominent narratives that describe a disciple's transformative progress on the *rdzogs chen* path. *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* relates Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha and *Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* describes Ye shes mtsho rgyal's training under Padmasambhava, including their visionary experiences and dialogues with their masters. These fascinating narratives portray a vision of how to practice the Great Perfection teachings of the anthology and illustrate several important themes such as the gradual path to enlightenment, nature of realization and guru-disciple relationships. The pressing question here is whether the visionary training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal is that of direct transcendence because it contains substantial variations from the standard presentation of the practice. This paper will compare and analyze the visionary training in the two narratives with doctrinal presentations of direct transcendence in prescriptive texts to ascertain whether the narratives might contain alternative accounts of the practice.

2. *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra and Tibetan Treasure Anthologies*

The Tibetan treasure tradition produced among its many contributions a distinctive type of literature: treasure anthologies. One of the prominent treasure anthologies is the work at hand, the four volumes of *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*. rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation also contains one more volume, *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* (*Ka dag rang byung rang shar*), that is variously considered as the fifth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization* or a separate work.⁴ Since it is part of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation, it seems reasonable to discuss it in this paper as belonging to a single, distinctively *rdzogs chen* collection.

Following Anne Ferry, this paper defines an anthology as a collection of individual texts that the compiler aims to fashion into something of a different kind.⁵ The literary format of treasure revelation entails that the 127 texts (2945 folio sides) of rGod ldem's anthology are attributed to various divine, semi-historical and historical authors so that rGod ldem is credited merely for their discovery. From the historical-critical perspective, rGod ldem can be regarded as the compiler of the anthology with probable extensive authorial contribution.

As treasure anthologies in general, the character of rGod ldem's anthology is notably heterogeneous in that it contains a variety of texts, genres, topics and voices. The impressive variety of literature in *The Unimpeded Realization* includes such texts as empowerment manuals, meditation instructions, commentaries, rituals, philosophical treatises, narratives, oral transmissions attributed to imperial period figures Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana, Buddha-

⁴ Most practice commentaries (*khrid*) on *The Unimpeded Realization* treat *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* as a separate work with the notable exception of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's *Island of Liberation* which regards them as a single anthology (see Stéphane Arguillère's paper in this same issue of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*). The *Received Teachings* of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama also discusses *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* together with *The Unimpeded Realization* undoubtedly due to the influence of Zur chen who was his teacher. It seems that there were several strands of thought regarding this matter reflected also in the modern editions of the anthology. The gNas chung block print edition by Chos rje Śākya yar 'phel (19th century) leaves out *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, while the A 'dzom chos gar blocks carved through efforts of A 'dzom 'brug pa (1842-1924) regard *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* as a cycle and fifth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization*. In the rDo rje brag monastery in exile, they were transmitted together as a single anthology by the late sTag lung rTse sprul rin po che, which is how he received them in rDo rje brag in Tibet.

⁵ Ferry, *Tradition and the Individual Poem*, 2, 31.

voiced tantras, instructions on dying and liberation through wearing texts that are said to be of divine origin. The practices range from tantric preliminaries to deity yoga, completion stage subtle body yogas, severance (*gcod*) and *rdzogs chen* contemplation, and the narratives contain biographical, transmissional, metaphorical and cosmogonic narratives. However, despite the heterogeneity, all these elements are unified into a single whole with a distinctive character and vision, which reflects a strong editorial hand in the process of creating the anthology.

This type of incorporation of such a variety of genres, practices, topics and literary agents into a single anthology is uncommon in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist literature. This is not to say that there are no anthologies in Indian and Tibetan literature, but other existing anthologies are of different character. Anthologies of poetry are unified only by virtue of belonging to the genre of poetry. Similarly, various collections on different topics such as *Kriyāsaṃgraha* (rituals), *Dhāraṇī-saṃgraha* (*dhāraṇīs*) or *Nispannayogāvalī* (instructions on making maṇḍalas) only contain a particular kind of genre of texts. Cycles of Indian tantric literature, which could also be regarded a type of anthology, are centered on a single practice system. Finally, there are the collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of prominent Tibetan authors, but they are written by a single author and are not strictly speaking anthologies as defined in this paper. Unlike all these examples, the Tibetan treasure anthologies of the rNying ma tradition are distinctly heterogeneous, containing many different genres, topics, practices and authors as well as multiple layers of voices: divine, mythical, semi-historical and historical. In the absence of a single unifying genre, practice or author, we may wonder what unifies the treasure anthologies. In the case of *The Unimpeded Realization*, it is mainly narratives that integrate the contents into a particular kind of anthology.

Why did rNying ma treasure authors produce these unique types of anthologies? Some of the reasons undoubtedly pertain to transmissional purposes. Combining all the necessary texts for the practice and study of a particular revealed Great Perfection (or Mahāyoga) system into a single package makes it easier to transmit and preserves the transmission for future generations. Secondly, such anthologies accommodate both Buddha-voiced tantras and texts grounded in the historical time by human authors, thus conveniently managing the divide between scripture and commentary. For this very reason, anthologies help to negotiate and authorize Tibetan voices. In Renaissance Tibet (11th-14th century), the standard for scriptural authenticity for Buddha-voiced texts was an Indian Buddhist origin. This is evident, for example, in the debate concerning *The Secret Nucleus Tantra* (*Guhya-garbhatantra*, *rGyud gsang ba snying*

po), which the critics considered to be an authentic Vajrayāna scripture only after the Sanskrit original was recovered in bSam yas. In this intellectual climate, treasure anthologies found a solution to legitimate the ongoing scriptural production of tantras through the mechanism of treasure revelation. The Tibetan voices are disguised as divine or Indian agents and presented in a continuum of a single transmission together with the Buddha-voiced speakers and legendary Indian masters of the imperial period. rGod ldem's anthology contains a good example of this approach in the way Samantabhadra's authority is transmitted to Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. This will be discussed below.

Anthologies of this type became popular among the Great Perfection authors from around the fourteenth century. Sangs rgyas gling pa revealed *Condensing the Realization of the Guru* (*Bla ma dgongs 'dus*) in 1364, just two years before Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelation and a couple of decades earlier Klong chen pa compiled *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNying thig ya bzhi*). The latter is only partly a treasure revelation by Tshul khrim rdo rje and partly Klong chen pa's self-declared composition, but it nevertheless illustrates the novel tendency to present Great Perfection materials in the form of an anthology.

The format of an anthology is well suited for the character of the Great Perfection, which started off largely as a metaperspective to Buddhist thought and practice. One agenda in the early Great Perfection tradition was to critique the complex sexual and violent practices of Indian Buddhist tantra, occasionally going as far as denying the idea of practice altogether as a contrivance upon the natural state, although it seems that many of the early Great Perfection authors were engaged in Mahāyoga practice.⁶ However, as all deconstructive projects, the early Great Perfection could only thrive upon the host that it criticized, and even though various practices eventually found their way into the tradition (and indeed, it became a tradition), the Great Perfection, at least to some extent, retained its character as metaperspective that frequently discussed and related to other Buddhist traditions and practices, defining itself as superior to the preceding traditions. Since the format of an anthology accommodates many heterogeneous topics, practices and approaches, it presents a fertile landscape for the *rdzogs chen* metaperspective to integrate different tantric and sūtric practices, topics and ideas under the umbrella of the Great Perfection philosophical view.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of early Great Perfection, see David Germano, "Architecture and Absence in the Great Perfection," Jacob Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions* (Chapter 2) and "The Development of Perfection" and Sam van Schaik "Early Days of the Great Perfection."

3. Narrative Integration

The multitude of texts, topics, genres and practices in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *Unimpeded Realization* gives the anthology a very heterogeneous, even scattered outlook at first glance. However, upon closer examination it becomes clear that the anthology is a skillfully integrated literary whole. Facilitated by the character of *rdzogs chen* as metaperspective, the multitude of topics and elements are integrated in the general framework of the Great Perfection and the particular vision of *The Unimpeded Realization* via unifying themes, narratives and ideas.

The main thread that weaves the disparate elements together is narratives. The narratives comprise eleven percent of the anthology (331 folio sides) and are dispersed through 35 texts. They can be divided into six categories:

(1) Cosmogonic narratives (14 folio sides) relate the origin of the universe and its two trajectories of cyclic existence and transcendence.

(2) Transmission narratives (108 folio sides) present the lineage of the teachings originating from the primordial recognition of Samantabhadra to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself.

(3) Wrathful narratives (7 folio sides) depict Padmasambhava's activities of taming demons in India.

(4) Transformation narratives (92 folio sides) portray Padmasambhava's and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's biographies in terms of their meditative and visionary experiences.

(5) Prophecies (66 folio sides) discuss rGod ldem and his time, and

(6) Metaphorical narratives (44 folio sides) present symbolic stories and decode their meaning.

The anthology also contains an overarching narrative theme that envelops all these different types of narratives. This theme is the vision of Samantabhadra, which connects all the threads of the anthology back to the Primordial Buddha and his vision to help the world.

The vision of Samantabhadra is a narrative theme distinctive to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's anthology and the foundation of the narrative integration in *The Unimpeded Realization*. After detailing the vision of Samantabhadra, this paper examines how the transmission narratives integrate the various Great Perfection teachings associated with the legendary masters of the imperial period into a framework that establishes Padmasambhava as superior. In addition to Samantabhadra and Padmasambhava, prophecies establish Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as the third pole of gravity in the narrative dynamics of the anthology, transferring Samantabhadra's vision to Tibet and his authority to rGod ldem. After discussing the narrative context of the anthology, this paper will focus on the two transformation narratives that de-

scribe the training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal under their masters. These important narratives culminate the anthology's particular take on the nature of *rdzogs chen* training and visionary experience.

3.1. The Vision of Samantabhadra

The most important unifying theme in *The Unimpeded Realization* is the vision of Samantabhadra. In general, Samantabhadra has a special relationship with the Great Perfection tradition. He is the primordial Buddha who attains enlightenment in the first instances of cosmogonic manifestation and he is the figure of uncontrived primordial wisdom standing against the principles of dry scholasticism and complicated ritualism. The vision of Samantabhadra in *The Unimpeded Realization* is a subtle, yet obvious theme that the reader may not realize at first, but when it is understood, the contents of the anthology are revealed in new light. The key is the very title of the anthology: *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*, which I have translated as *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*. *dGongs pa*, however, is an interesting word and difficult to translate. Even though in the anthology it usually refers to Samantabhadra's wisdom or *realization*, on several occasions it signifies Samantabhadra's intention, plan or *vision*.

The narrative theme of Samantabhadra's vision refers to Samantabhadra's compassionate plan to benefit the world through his emanations and teachings. One reason why it may take a long time for the reader to put the pieces of the puzzle together is that the vision of Samantabhadra is spelled out only in *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*,⁷ although its meaning envelopes the entire anthology. All the texts, agents and topics of the anthology work together: the texts are the literary heritage of Samantabhadra's intention to enlighten beings, the divine agents are integrated into Samantabhadra's maṇḍala, and history of Buddhism is reconfigured as involving the activity of Samantabhadra's emanations.

⁷ *dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud/ dGongs pa zang thal gyi sgron ma'i rtsa ba ngo bo dang dbyings bstan pa, The Unimpeded Realization* (from here on UR) III:455-475.

3.1.1. *The Vision of Samantabhadra in cosmogonic narratives*

The vision of Samantabhadra stretches back to the first moments of cosmogony, when Samantabhadra attains enlightenment merely upon recognizing the very first manifestations as self-display (*rang snang*) or his own projections inseparable from himself. The cosmogonic narratives in the anthology are related in eighteen texts and many of them depict the typical Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*) view on the manifestation of the ground (*gzhi snang*) or the emergence of first appearances from the ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.⁸ The Seminal Heart of the Pith Instruction Series (*Man ngag sde*) is the last phase of the Great Perfection tradition that was put into writing from the eleventh century onward. The descriptions of cosmogonic manifestation as well as visionary practices and death-related elements are characteristic to the Seminal Heart.⁹ In the cosmogonic narratives of rGod ldem's anthology, the first appearances arise from the universal ground (*kun gzhi*), which is the indeterminate ground of all possibilities devoid of wisdom or ignorance. The two trajectories of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra arise from the universal ground based on recognition or the lack of it. However, the two trajectories do not imply dualism, as the worlds of saṃsāra are ultimately unreal and illusory.

The typical cosmogonic narrative in the Seminal Heart is recounted in multiple texts in rGod ldem's anthology with some individual variation. *The Illuminating Lamp* describes how creative dynamism (*rtsal*) stirs a triad of subtle wind (*rlung*), space and awareness out of the ground, and these variously proliferate into manifestations of roaring sounds and brilliant lights. Samantabhadra does not react to these manifestations with desire or aversion, but recognizes them as his own projections thereby opening up the path to nirvāṇa. Saṃsāra, however, arises through a trajectory of dualism:

At that time, when the winds, awareness and space differentiated in the indeterminate ground, awareness was partial and unstable, so it generated a sense of pride. It feared the sounds, was afraid the lights and fainted due to the rays. Ignorance clouded it. Having generated pride, external objects and internal mind became dual. Just by wondering "I arose from that or that arose from me," the wind of karma stirred. The wind made the mind full-blown and the analytical mind

⁸ See for example, Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*).

⁹ For an analysis of the development of the various traditions of the Great Perfection, see David Germano, "Funerary Transformation of the Great Perfection."

examined objects.¹⁰

Not recognizing the appearances as self-display and viewing them as external sparks the downward spiral of ignorance, dualism and karma that eventually solidifies as the six realms.

In addition to the standard Seminal Heart descriptions of the manifestation of the ground, rGod Idem's anthology contains distinctive cosmogonic narratives that relate to the vision of Samantabhadrā. One of these is *The Pith Instruction of the Glorious Samantabhadrā: The Way the Liberation Through Wearing Emerges*, which describes the manifestation of the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras in the beginning of cosmogony. Upon his enlightenment, Samantabhadrā emanates the peaceful and wrathful deities, and from their divine bodies arise the syllables Om, Aḥ and Hūṃ. Other letters arise from the three syllables, and the 21 tantras of *Liberation Through Wearing* manifest from Vajradhara's enlightened mind. One hundred and one pith instructions emerge from them, and the 84,000 approaches to dharma are differentiated from these letters of self-arisen speech. Various Buddhas teach large numbers of beings and Vajradhara transmits the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras to dGa' rab rdo rje.¹¹

This cosmogonic narrative places the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras contained in rGod Idem's anthology in a unique position in Samantabhadrā's vision to benefit beings. The scriptures are manifested by Samantabhadrā's emanation as Vajradhara in the first stages of cosmogony, when letters are produced from the subtle essence of speech. Their origin is thus intimately connected to the primordial Buddha. Samantabhadrā's compassionate vision for the world is evident, because soon after the emergence of these dharma teachings, the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras and the pith instructions of the Great Perfection, which are collectively referred to as "the self-arisen letters that arose from the expanse of Samantabhadrā's enlightened mind,"¹² are transmitted to dGa' rab rdo rje, who is destined to bring them to our world. Therefore, this cosmogonic narrative in particular begins Samantabhadrā's diachronic involvement with the world and grounds his vision to enlighten sentient beings in the initial cosmic formation due to the arising of these teachings at the early stages of

¹⁰ gZhi ci yang ma yin pa la rlung rig nam mkha' gsum phye ba'i tshé rig pa ldog pas brtan pa med pas snyem byed zhugs: sgra la dngangs: 'od la skrags: zer la brgyal: ma rig par thibs kyis song: de la snyem byed zhugs nas phyi'i yul dang: nang gi sems gnyis su song: pha gi las bdag byung ngam: bdag las pha gi byung snyam pa tsam gyis las kyi rlung g.yos: rlung gis yid brtas: dpyod pa'i yid kyis yul dpyad: (Rang byung rang shar gyi rgyud las byung ba'i man ngag gsal sgron) UR III:41.

¹¹ dPal kun tu bzang po'i man ngag/ btags grol byon tshul, UR III:205-208.

¹² Ibid. UR III:208.

cosmogonic manifestation. The tremendous blessing power attributed to the *Liberation Through Wearing* amulets (and the instantly enlightening capacity of the pith instructions of the Great Perfection) also arises from their cosmogonic origin in the subtle essence of speech, which is a form of language that precedes signification. Even though the tantras in the amulets contain words of mantras and teachings, the signification of the words is secondary compared to the direct blessings arising from their pre-signified source. This is also the reason why they are thought to liberate merely through wearing without intellectual engagement with the signified meaning of the words.

Another cosmogonic text, *The Precious Liberation upon Seeing: The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection*, which is somewhat atypical in the context of rGod ldem's anthology, emphasizes the role of sound in creation. It is written as Samantabhadra's first person account of his enlightenment, which gives it an interesting, personal character:

First, in the wide expanse of the mother universal ground, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa were equal. When the ground differentiated itself from this equality, sounds, light and rays resounded and emanated by themselves. Thus, I, the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, recognized the intrinsic creativity (*rtsal*) of the ground as awareness's own display and reached my own place. Without being afraid of the sounds, terrified of the lights or fearful of the rays, my awareness abided in its own clarity. At that point, my internal consciousness was alert without proliferation, lucid without obstructions and open without dullness. External appearances made roaring and thundering sounds, and phenomenal appearances were shaking, dark, vibrating and trembling. I embraced the essence of sound, so the self-arisen pitch of the sound dominated my hearing. When 'a a sha sa ma ha resounded, they arose and abided as a reflection of the six syllables. I heard the sounds without obstructions and my mind did not waver from the pitch of the sound.¹³

¹³ *Dang po kun gzhi ma'i klong yangs su: 'khor 'das gnyis mnyam pa las: zhi de go phye ba'i tshé sgra dang 'od dang zer gsum rang byung du grags shing rang shar du 'phros pas: thog ma'i sangs rgyas kun tu bzang po ngas: gzhi'i rang rtsal rig pa rang snang du rang ngo shes nas rang sa zin/ sgra la mi dngangs: 'od la mi 'jigs: zer la mi skrag par rig pa rang gsal du gnas pa'o: de'i tshé rang gi nang gi shes pa ni mi 'phro bar lhang nge ba: ma 'gags par sal le ba: ma rmugs par ye re ba zhig 'dug: phyi'i snang ba ni sgra u ru ru thug chom chom: snang srid 'khrug ste rum rum mer mer shig shig 'dug go: sgra'i snying po dril bas rang byung gi sgra gdangs snyan la drag pa: 'a a sha sa ma ha: zhes grags pa'i 'dus na yi ge drug gi gzugs brnyan du shar 'dug go: nga'i sgra de ma 'gags par thos: sgra'i gdangs thos kyang sgra phyir yid ma 'gyus pas: (Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po mthong grol rin po che) UR III:275-276.*

The reader is reminded of the display of sounds, lights and rays in the bardo of *dharmatā* or reality-as-it-is – the parallelism being undoubtedly intentional. The bardo of *dharmatā* is the part of the intermediate process between death and rebirth in which the deceased perceives visions of five colored lights, rays and thundering sounds as well as visions of peaceful and wrathful deities. This subtle visionary state manifests for the deceased because coarser aspects of the mind have dissolved, which is why it parallels the subtle visionary manifestations in the beginning of cosmogony before appearances became the coarse manifestations of the six realms. Similarly, to Samantabhadra's primordial recognition, the key instruction in the bardo of *dharmatā* is to recognize the visual and auditory manifestations as self-display. The text continues with Samantabhadra instructing one to practice the six primordial sounds characteristic to *rdzogs chen* meditation, 'a a sha sa ma ha, that are said to have the power to clear the mind. One should also relate to them without fear or attachment in the same way as Samantabhadra heard the sounds in the first moments of manifestations arising from the ground.

This cosmogonic narrative of primordial sounds illustrates the vision of Samantabhadra by employing Samantabhadra's vivid first person narrative and by turning the first moments of manifestation and Samantabhadra's recognition into a practice to be emulated in this life, and by obvious extension, in the bardo. Thus, the distinctive contribution of the cosmogonic narratives in rGod I dem's anthology is not so much their individual content, but the way they relate to the anthology as a whole, as the vision of Samantabhadra: in other words, the way they utilize the first moments of cosmogony to illustrate Samantabhadra's compassionate intention to urge sentient beings to follow in his footsteps to realization either by directly emulating his recognition or by following the tantras and pith instructions that sprang from his fundamental involvement with the cosmogonic manifestation.

3.1.2. *Narrativizing the Primordial Buddha*

Samantabhadra's various appearances and engagement in the cosmogonic narratives in general, and in his first person narrative in particular, highlight arguably the most important aspect of these stories: the narrativization of the primordial Buddha. Samantabhadra is the *dharmakāya* ("reality body"), the enlightened awareness beyond form, time and space. Narrativizing him normalizes him into our temporal and spatial world, and introduces a continuity of a Buddha, a pervasive quality of enlightened activity that ranges through the

spectrum of existence and the realms of the three bodies. When the *dharmakāya* is made into a part of the narrative structure, the narratives are fully divinized, and the Buddha's enlightenment is incorporated into our world, in all aspects of life and religious history.

The narrativization of Samantabhadra in the cosmogonic texts constitutes the foundation for crafting the vision of Samantabhadra. Both these themes go together and are continued in the tantras and transmission narratives of the anthology where Samantabhadra appears as the speaker of the Great Perfection teachings and source of the transmission lineages. In *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*, which is the main text to outline the vision of Samantabhadra, the narrativization and vision of Samantabhadra are crystallized, as both the history of Buddhism and Great Perfection transmission are reconfigured as involving the compassionate agency of Samantabhadra through his emanations.

In the context of Buddhism, this type of narrativization of the *dharmakāya* is quite unusual and highlights the distinctive nature of the Seminal Heart cosmogony. The standard Buddhist answer to cosmogonic origins is that *samsāra* is beginningless and several stories in the Pāli canon depict the Buddha as regarding these type of questions as futile. In *The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya*, the Buddha is asked about the origin of the universe and he chooses to remain silent. In the same *sūtra*, the Buddha compares the search for cosmogonic answers to a wish to know who made the arrow that was shot through one's leg instead of just wanting it removed, as one should wish to remove the cause of suffering in general.¹⁴ In light of these stories, we can appreciate the unique character of the detailed cosmogonic narratives in *The Unimpeded Realization* that not only relate cosmogonic beginnings, but infuse the narrative with the agency of the primordial *dharmakāya* Buddha, who opens the path to *nirvāṇa* through his recognition and produces enlightening methods recorded in scriptures through his compassion.

The narrativization of Samantabhadra is essentially a paradox because these stories talk historically about something that is beyond time and space. The *dharmakāya* Buddha relates his personal history of attaining enlightenment in the first person narrative that has a story line in time, even though it is mythical, primordial time. After attaining enlightenment, Samantabhadra is simultaneously in timeless dimension and actively involved in historical time through his emanations.

This paradox seems to be an indication of a larger role of paradoxes as creative devices in the Great Perfection. The paradox of instant

¹⁴ *Culamalunkyovadasutta*, Majjhima Nikaya, Volume II, sutta 63.

recognition and gradual practice accommodates the entire Buddhist path as the gradual build-up to the instant recognition of the Great Perfection. The question of practice and non-practice is also a kin to a paradox. Early Great Perfection authors criticized complex tantric practices and even the idea of practice altogether as a contrivance upon awakened awareness. At the same time, this non-practice itself could be regarded as a practice and some of these authors may also have been engaged in some type of non-conceptual meditation or even Mahāyoga rituals.¹⁵ Non-practice could also be understood as referring, not to a method, but to the perfect (*rdzogs*) empty nature of reality.

Arguably, one function of this seeming paradox was to shake the stiffened conceptions of reality and spiritual cultivation and facilitate the recognition of the already present Buddha Nature. The seeming paradox of practice and non-practice also became a creative filter as tantric practices were eventually adopted into the tradition. Through this filter they were transformed with the *rdzogs chen* concepts of naturalness and spontaneity, resulting for example in the visionary practice of direct transcendence that contains natural unfoldment of visions instead of scripted visualization. The creative function of the paradox of timeless *dharmakāya* active in historical time is to saturate the narratives in rGod ldem's anthology with the presence and authority of the primordial Buddha and, as we shall see in the next chapter, to incorporate other Buddhist vehicles in the agenda of the Great Perfection.

3.1.3. *Samantabhadra's Diachronic Involvement*

Samantabhadra's diachronic involvement with the worlds of *samsāra* is realized through his emanations. It begins in the cosmogonic narrative *The Pith Instruction of the Glorious Samantabhadra: The Way the Liberation Through Wearing Emerges* when Samantabhadra as Vajradhara manifests the Liberation Through Wearing tantras from the subtle essence of speech. However, most of Samantabhadra's diachronic activity is described in *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*, which is the key text to articulate Samantabhadra's vision. The text explains how Samantabhadra emanates as Vajradhara, who goes to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods. Due to the great merit of the gods, he teaches them the effortless vehicle of the Great Perfection. The text also describes how Samantabhadra emanates as the Five Buddhas, and then myriads of emanation bodies come out of the Five Buddhas

¹⁵ Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions*, 41-42.

in order to tame beings. One of these is Śākyamuni, who comes to our world, Jambudvīpa, to teach the law of cause and effect and how to be born in the higher realms. Another one of these emanations, Vajrapāṇi, goes to Lanka to the land of the ten-headed demon to teach the wrathful dharma, and a fierce young emanation goes to teach emptiness in the land of *yakṣas*. Later on, the secret mantra also spreads and flourishes in Jambudvīpa because of the merit of an unnamed king, apparently the king Dza a.k.a. Indrabhūti. dGa' rab rdo rje is presented as a second order emanation of Samantabhadra, because he emanates from the heart of Vajrasattva on the Amolika rock in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods and introduces the effortless vehicle to our world.¹⁶

Thus, we see how Samantabhadra's vision is presented as encompassing different stages of development of Buddhism, including the initial introduction of the Lesser Vehicle (Hīnayāna) by Śākyamuni, the rise of Vajrayāna and the spread of the final vehicle of the Great Perfection. In addition to Buddhist history, this narrative incorporates elements from known rNying ma mythology. The scene of Vajrapāṇi teaching the ten-headed demon Rāvana in Lanka is described in a ninth century tantra *The Gathering of Intentions* (dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo) and retold in multiple rNying ma sources. *The Gathering of Intentions* also describes how king Dza receives the transmission of the secret mantra, although this myth was already popular in the ninth century from earlier Yoga and Mahāyoga sources.¹⁷ However, in *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*, all these events get a distinctive reinterpretation as being part of Samantabhadra's vision, as the teachings are given by the emanations of the primordial Buddha.

It is also notable that unlike the Sūtrayāna teachings that stress the birth as a god as undesirable due to the lack of motivation for spiritual growth, *The Unimpeded Realization* describes dissemination of the highest Great Perfection vehicle not only to various gods, but also to *nāgas*, *yakṣas* and planetary beings. *The Gathering of Intention* again contains a precedent for this, because in addition to Rāvana, Vajrapāṇi teaches four other disciples in his sermon in Lanka: the king of serpent spirits (*nāgas*), Brahmā (gods), Ulkamukhā (*yakṣas*) and Vimalakīrti (humans). The same idea of spreading the teachings to various celestial realms is contained in *The Unimpeded Realization*, but

¹⁶ *dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud*, UR III:465-467. A similar story pertaining to Śākyamuni is told in *The Precious Lamp of the Three Roots*, in which Samantabhadra emanates as the Buddha Śākyamuni, and sends him to teach the interpretative meaning (*drang don*) of the teachings to our world (*Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i snyan rgyud sde gsum gyi rtsa ba rtsa gsum rin chen sgron me*, UR IV:489).

¹⁷ Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions*, 16-19.

the content of the teachings is now the *rdzogs chen* practices of Samantabhadra's vision. *The Tantra of the Enlightened Activity of the Precious Unborn, Unfabricated, Self-emergent and Self-arisen One* describes how the three bodhisattvas propagate Samantabhadra's vision in the realms of *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, gods and planetary beings causing hundreds of thousands of retinue members to attain enlightenment in each realm. Numerous narratives in *The Unimpeded Realization* also refer to the Amolika Rock in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods as the first place where the Great Perfection was taught outside Akaniṣṭha due to the great merit of gods.

Similarly to Samantabhadra's activity, *The Narrative Discourse of the Religious History for the Marvelous Secret* states that Prajñāpāramitā is the external emanation of Samantabhadrī,¹⁸ thus envisioning the normative canonical literature on emptiness as the work of Samantabhadrī, the female emptiness aspect of the primordial couple. The same text also credits the spread of the Yoginī Tantras to Samantabhadrī, when she emanated as the Great Mother Vajravārāhī and taught the mother tantras.¹⁹

Thus, we see how the primordial Buddha couple is envisioned as an active force in celestial and human history. Through the vision of Samantabhadra, the role of the primordial Buddha couple extends beyond the lofty heights of Akaniṣṭha. They are given an active role in the transmission through their emanations that spring from their compassion. This type of active role of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī is part of the narrativization of the primordial Buddha and seems to be distinctive to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's anthology.

3.1.4. Synchronic Relationships: The Maṇḍala of Samantabhadra

In addition to the diachronic involvement of the primordial Buddha couple, Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī are synchronically related to most of the divine agents appearing in the anthology, because they belong to the maṇḍala of the primordial Buddha couple. The maṇḍala of Samantabhadra is mentioned explicitly in *The Root Tantra of the Unimpeded Realization* as including Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī, the five Buddhas, bodhisattvas and gate keepers, all with their female counterparts (*yum*) and surrounded by inconceivably many maṇḍalas of the deities of the five Buddha families.²⁰ Saman-

¹⁸ *gSang ba rmad byung gi chos 'byung gleng gzhi*, UR IV:569.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* IV:569.

²⁰ *dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud*, UR III:456-458.

tabhadra *yab yum* is also at the center of the *maṇḍala* of the peaceful and wrathful deities described in the ritual of *The Spontaneously Present Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*²¹ and its associated literature, as well as in the texts that describe the location of these deities in the human body. For example *The Tantra of the Quintessential Realization of the Pith Instructions taught by Vajrasattva* describes Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī at the center of the peaceful *maṇḍala* located in the fabulous palace of exalted mind (*tsitta*) at the heart center (*cakra*, 'khor lo) of the subtle body.²²

Connecting the divine agents of the anthology as belonging to the *maṇḍala* of Samantabhadra creates a strong sense of unity across the anthology's different texts where these deities appear as speakers, teachers or focus of ritual practice. The diachronic identifications have a similar function. For example, due to the identification of Vajravārāhī as an emanation of Samantabhadrī in *The Narrative Discourse of the Religious History for the Marvelous Secret*, the cycle of *The Six Seals of Vajra-vārāhī* becomes closely aligned with the primordial Buddha couple and vision of Samantabhadra.

3.1.5. Didactic Vision and Its Prophetic Transmission

Besides Samantabhadra's diachronic and synchronic relationships to the divine agents, *The Root Tantra of the Unimpeded Realization* describes all the teachings of the anthology as the unimpeded vision of Samantabhadra taught to enlighten the karmically mature recipients.²³ The anthology as a didactic, enlightening plan of Samantabhadra is comprised of the different genres, topics and practices, and woven together by the narratives that describe Samantabhadra's realization as the origin of the teachings, his diachronic involvement in the spread of the teachings to the human and other realms, and the subsequent transmission of the teachings to India and Tibet.

The various narratives of the anthology also construct a powerful image of uniqueness and preciousness of the teachings. *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* discuss the position of the Great Perfection as the pinnacle of all the vehicles and stress the rarity of the teachings of the anthology, particularly the oral transmissions.²⁴ Numerous texts describe transmission scenes in the dynastic period, and relate how the teachings were concealed as treasures because suitable recip-

²¹ *rDzogs pa chen po chos nyid mngon sum zhi khro lhun grub kyi phrin las*, UR II:201-244.

²² *Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud rdo rje sems dpas gsungs pa*, UR IV:7-8.

²³ *dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud*, UR III:467.

²⁴ *Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po*, UR II:474-482.

ients could not be found at that time. The cycle of *The Six Seals of Vajravārāhī* depicts the time of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as a degenerate era, the final 500-year period of the Buddhist teachings before the disappearance of the genuine dharma.²⁵ The prophecies of rGod ldem picture him as the predestined revealer, a zealous yogi who will accomplish the practices of *The Unimpeded Realization* and struggle to uphold the authentic lamp of dharma in the face of criticism and hostility prevalent in the dark time.

In this way, the vision of Samantabhadra is depicted as unfolding in time via the predestined transmission of the rare teachings contained in the anthology. The treasure revelation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is portrayed as a particularly auspicious karmic fortune because it unifies all the strands of the Great Perfection transmitted separately by Śrī Siṃha to the three masters of awareness: Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana. The esoteric nature of the anthology is highlighted in *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava*, as they are said to be so profound and secret that they should only be transmitted to a handful a people.²⁶ Thus, the prophetic *telos* of Samantabhadra's vision culminates in the revelation of rGod ldem, because it is the cathartic end of the prophetic journey that brings the teachings to light from centuries of oblivion, and it contains the complete visionary teachings of the anthology transmitted by the three masters of awareness, accessible to a wider audience for the first time. Emphasizing the rarity and secrecy of the teachings is part of the narrative theme of Samantabhadra's vision that enhances the appeal of the anthology as a superior teaching.

The vision of Samantabhadra also includes the reader or the practitioner of the tradition in the special position of having encountered these rare and secret teachings. As Anne Monius points out, literature and community exist in a mutually constitutive relationship. The Tamil Buddhist texts, *Vīracolīyam* and *Manimekalai*, which Monius examines, enable a reader to envision himself as part of a larger collective, a religious community that is bound together by shared commitments, goals and moral sensibilities.²⁷ *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* have an even stronger sense of community, because the texts are meant only for those who have the empowerments transmitted by a master of the tradition, and this community of initiates is bound by numerous tan-

²⁵ *The Secret Pith Instructions on the Ritual Stages of the Dakinī (mKha' 'gro'i las rim gsang ba'i man ngag)*, UR I:500-502.

²⁶ *The Oral Transmission of Padmasambhava: The Ultimate Letterless within all Oral Transmissions (sNyan brgyud thams cad kyi nang na yi ge med pa mthar thug pal padma'i snyan brgyud)*, UR II:448.

²⁷ Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism*.

tric commitments (*samaya, dam tshig*).

Thus, the community of readers depicted in the anthology is that of aspiring yogis, and they are included in the vision of Samantabhadra through their karmically destined connection with the teachings. This is elucidated in *The Supporting Notes on the Liberation Through Wearing*, which states that one has to have accumulated merit for several eons to encounter the liberating teachings.²⁸ In *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by Merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to this Great Tantra*, Samantabhadra relates that his unimpeded realization (*dgongs pa zang thal*) is the supreme teaching in the world, and by encountering it, one is bound to attain enlightenment either in this or subsequent lives depending on one's acumen and practice,²⁹ thus enveloping the reader in the prophetic framework of the anthology. The inclusion of the reader in the unfoldment of karmic and gnostic forces entailing predestined revelation and prophetic vision is a tremendous inspirational force for an aspiring yogi, and thus the vision of Samantabhadra becomes a method to shatter the binding image of ordinariness and to give a greater sense of purpose and a sense of belonging to a scheme of divine forces at work in history and time.

Connecting the anthology's divine figures and teachings synchronically and diachronically under Samantabhadra is related to the overall agenda of the anthology, which is to weave the various tantric and preliminary practices into the overarching metaperspective of the Great Perfection. Many Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna practices are presented through the lens of the Great Perfection and integrated into the *rdzogs chen* framework—an approach which is part of the vision of the anthology embodied in Samantabhadra. According to Anne Ferry, compilers of anthologies seek to fashion them into something of a different kind,³⁰ and clearly the vision of Samantabhadra turns the anthology into a distinctive creation that is more than just a compilation of the particular subject matters. It is the main tool of integration that unifies the disparate genres, cycles, agents, practices and topics into a characteristic Seminal Heart system with its own powerful message.

²⁸ *Yang gsang bla na med pa'i rdzogs pa chen po'i btags grol rgyab yig gsang ba'i gnad bkrol gnad kyi yi ge'i them yig rnam*s, UR III:256.

²⁹ *rGyud chen mithong ba dang thos pa dang btags pa dang smon lam btab pa tsam gyis sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud*, UR IV:88.

³⁰ Ferry, 2001: 2, 31.

3.2. Unifying the *rDzogs chen* Transmissions and Padmasambhava Triumphalism

One of the important agendas in rGod ldem's anthology is to unify the Great Perfection transmissions attributed to the three legendary *rdzogs chen* masters of the imperial period: Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana. This is evident in the inclusion of three major cycles called oral transmissions attributed to each of the three masters. *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* focus on direct transcendence (*thod rgal*), the distinctive visionary practice of the Seminal Heart. *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* discuss mainly the practice of breakthrough (*khregs chod*) and *rdzogs chen* view, while *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is a lengthy scholastic text on the eleven topics of the Great Perfection.³¹

These transmissions are mapped onto the Three Series of the Great Perfection: Vairocana to Mind Series (*Sems sde*), Vimalamitra to Space Series (*Klong sde*) and Padmasambhava to Pith Instruction Series (*Man ngag sde*).³² The three series represent successive layers of historical development in the Great Perfection and competing types of Great Perfection philosophy and practice. By synthesizing the Three Series and the three legendary *rdzogs chen* masters within a single anthology, *The Unimpeded Realization* presents a comprehensive vision of the Great Perfection. By doing this, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem also continues the synthesizing efforts of Klong chen pa. While *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNying thig ya bzhi*), compiled and partly composed by Klong chen pa, incorporates transmissions attributed to Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava, *The Unimpeded Realization* also includes transmissions attributed to Vairocana. The crafted nature of rGod ldem's synthesis is evident in that historically it would make more sense to associate Vimalamitra with the Mind Series, because *The Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series* refer to him as one of the figures involved in the transmission, authorship and redaction of these texts.³³

Besides integrating Vairocana in the transmission scheme, *The Unimpeded Realization* furthers Klong chen pa's synthesis of the Seminal Heart tradition in its own distinctive way. The anthology incorporates Mahāyoga ritual and subtle body practices in the context of the

³¹ The eleven topics are (1) the universal ground, (2) arising of saṃsāra, (3) Buddha Nature, (4) location of wisdom in the human body, (5) subtle channels, (6) gateways of wisdom or lamps, (7) objective sphere of visions or expanse (*dbyings*), (8) *rdzogs chen* practice, (9) signs of successful practice, (10) bardo and (11) liberation.

³² *The First Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (*Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po*), UR II:473.

³³ Germano, *The Funerary Transformation of the Great Perfection (Rdzogs chen)*, 11.

Great Perfection, even as part of direct transcendence practice, thus demonstrating an unusual appreciation of these ritual and contemplative techniques. This topic will be discussed in my forthcoming book. On the other hand, rGod ldem's indebtedness to the Seminal Heart tradition is evident in his textual borrowing. Ten ritual texts in rGod ldem's anthology are directly adopted from *The Seminal Heart of the Dakinīs* revealed by Tshul khrims rdo rje and compiled into *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* by Klong chen pa.³⁴ *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*³⁵ is almost identical with *The Eleven Topics of the Great Perfection* by mKhas pa nyi 'bum (1158-1213).³⁶ This text is also the template for Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meaning*, which is an expanded version of mKhas pa nyi 'bum's work.

In addition to the simple choice of including transmissions attributed to Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana, the anthology contains numerous narratives that weave the three strands of transmission together in the form of stories. For example, *The First Oral Transmission of Vairocana* and *A Pith Instruction of the Great Perfection: The Tantra which Teaches the Wisdom of the Buddha in its own Right* relate how Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana studied under Śrī Siṃha in India receiving different parts of the Great Perfection transmission as well as outline their meetings in bSam yas where

³⁴ The ten texts are *The Elaborate Vase Empowerment* (sPros bcas bum pa'i dbang) UR I:105-156, *The Non-Elaborate Secret Empowerment* (sPros med gsang ba'i dbang) UR I:157-167, *The Exceedingly Non-Elaborate Insight Wisdom Empowerment* (Shin tu spros med shes rab ye shes kyi dbang) UR I:169-173 and *The Utterly Non-Elaborate Suchness Empowerment* (Rab tu spros med de kho na nyid kyi dbang) UR I:175-181, *The External Sādhana of the Five Families* (Rigs Inga'i phyi sgrub) UR I:332-338, *The Internal Sādhana of the Five Families: The Ocean of Accomplishments* (Rigs Inga'i nang sgrub dngos grub rgya mtsho) UR 338-340, *The Secret Actualization of the Dakinī: The Treasure Vase of Attainments* (mKha' 'gro'i gsang sgrub dngos grub gter gyi bum pa mkha' 'gro ma'i nor sgrub rin chen gter gyi bum pa) UR I:365-371, *Pinpointing the Key Points of the Time [Visualization and Mantra] of the Dakinīs, and the Topmost Key Point, the Soul Stone* (Dā ki'i dus gnad gnad 'bebs shis spyi gnad bla rdo) UR I:371-375, *The Feast Offering to the Five Families* (Rigs Inga'i tshogs mchod) UR I:407-411 and *The Garland of Offerings in the Sādhana of the Dakinī of the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i mkha' 'gro'i las byang mchod phreng) UR I:413-453. These texts are found in *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts*, X:106-182, X:317-328, X:221-261. The last text contains some differences.

³⁵ *The Great Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra Transmitted to the King: The Intrinsically Radiant Wisdom Commentary on the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (also entitled *The Great Exegesis on the Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*) (Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal/ Bi ma la'i snyan brgyud 'grel tig chen mo yang zer), UR IV:183-401.

³⁶ For mKhas pa nyi 'bum and *The Eleven Topics*, see the work of Yeshe and Dalton in this issue and the paper of Achard in the next.

they transmitted the teachings to the Tibetan recipients.³⁷

The anthology's synthesis of the transmissions of Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana contains an important agenda: to establish Padmasambhava's superiority over his peers. In general, Padmasambhava stands out in the transmission narratives that discuss receiving teachings in India from Śrī Siṃha and disseminating them in Tibet, because there are many more narratives on him and he is the recipient of the highest transmission, the Pith Instruction Series. He is also the sole recipient of *The Six Seals*, which is a cycle of texts on completion stage subtle body yogic techniques. Padmasambhava is depicted as receiving this transmission directly from Vajravārāhī in the charnel ground of So sa gling³⁸ and, unlike his peers, he also receives instructions from dGa' rab rdo rje, the first mythical human recipient of the Great Perfection who brings the teachings to our world from celestial realms.³⁹ Padmasambhava appears also in the wrathful narratives that describe his activities of killing and taming demons in India.⁴⁰ Most importantly, the transformation narratives go into great detail concerning his training under Śrī Siṃha and the way he passes the teachings onto Ye shes mtsho rgyal, presenting long dialogues between a master and student (I shall return to these below). Vairocana also has a substantial role in some of the transmission narratives that describe how he receives teachings from Śrī Siṃha, while Vimalamitra is not much more than a name in the lineage.

Across the texts of *The Unimpeded Realization*, Padmasambhava is the person who authors, teaches and conceals most of the treasure texts of the anthology. He appears as an author in as many as 28 texts, speaker in 19 texts and concealer of 28 texts, while Vimalamitra and Vairocana authored eight and six texts respectively and appear as speakers and concealers only in a couple of texts and even then together with Padmasambhava. Thus, we see that Padmasambhava is present, not only through his extensive textual contribution, but also through his direct speech, while Vairocana and Vimalamitra are distanced to the background as authors, lacking almost entirely a direct teaching voice. However, *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is a

³⁷ *Bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po*, UR II:462-465, 473 and *rDzogs pa chen po'i man ngag: sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa rang chas su bstan pa'i rgyud*, UR III:170-172.

³⁸ *The First of the Six Profound Seals: The Tantra of the Enlightened Activities of Vajravārāhī's Joy (rDo rje phag mo'i dgyes pa phrin las kyi rgyud zab rgya drug gi dang po)*, UR I:550.

³⁹ *The First Command of Padmasambhava: The Tantra of the Quintessential Realization (Padma'i bka' yig dang po snying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud)*, UR III:294-295.

⁴⁰ *The Three Lamps: The Last Testament Composed by Oddiyana Padmasambhava (O rgyan padmas mdzad pa'i zhal chems sgron ma rnam gsum)*, UR V:204-208.

monumental treatise of 218 pages augmented by 50 pages of Vimalamitra's other compositions, rendering Vimalamitra's textual involvement quite extensive, even though he lacks substantial presence as a speaker or in the stories of transmission. The texts attributed to Padmasambhava are mainly short, 10-25 pages, but the total number of pages is nevertheless 406, reiterating his preeminent role in the Seminal Heart tradition in the 14th century. It should also be noted that even though *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is attributed to Vimalamitra, it is a group of teachings that all three masters of awareness are said to have transmitted together to the king Khri srong lde btsan in the retreat cave of mChims phu in bSam yas.⁴¹

3.3. Three poles of gravity

The narrative structure of *The Unimpeded Realization* contains three poles of gravity: Samantabhadra, Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. These poles of gravity, or points of narrative significance, function to integrate and organize the contents of the anthology. Even though Samantabhadra's vision is the overarching narrative of the anthology, his presence gravitates toward the beginning of the story line, dominating the cosmogonic narratives in particular. In most other narratives, Padmasambhava is in a key role: he is the central pole of gravity that transmits the vision of Samantabhadra from India to the familiar soil of Tibet. The third pole, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, constitutes the end of the prophetic journey. The prophecies of the anthology portray rGod ldem as the destined revealer of the treasure, a fierce yogi practicing with zeal in the face of criticism. The prophecies also depict rGod ldem's time as part of a dark, degenerate period of the final 500 years when true Buddhism is about to disappear, but rGod ldem's revelation illuminates the darkness.⁴² rGod ldem's anthology is also loaded with significance because he is the single point of convergence that unearths, deciphers and transmits all the teachings coming from Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana.

The metaphysical nature of Samantabhadra shrouded in luminous wisdom, cosmogonic origins and primordial realization is contrasted to the activities of Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem situated

⁴¹ *Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal*, UR IV:183-401.

⁴² *The Key to the Precious Prophecy: The List Certificate of the Six Oral Transmissions (sNyan brgyud drug gi tho byang lung bstan rin po che'i lde'u mig)*, UR I:78-83, and *The Secret Pith Instructions on the Ritual Stages of the Dakini (mkha' 'gro'i las rim gsang ba'i man ngag)*, UR I:500-502.

historically in the world. These two narrative structures form opposite poles on many levels: light *versus* darkness, gnostic *versus* karmic, peaceful *versus* wrathful, vast dissemination *versus* concealment as treasures, flourishing, emanating and overflowing *versus* degeneration, generic *versus* specific, divine *versus* terrestrial, and metaphysical *versus* historical. Samantabhadra's vision is an entirely peaceful and positive vision, related to the prevalence of wisdom and its luminous manifestations and involving vast dissemination of *rdzogs chen* teachings in pure lands and the realms of gods, planetary beings, *yakṣas* and *nāgas*. Padmasambhava and rGod ldem instead are involved in wrathful rites of subjugation, limited secret transmission during the dark degenerate time and concealment of treasures on the terrestrial plane dominated by karma.

While Samantabhadra is connected to many of the divine and human agents through his emanations, Padmasambhava is also at the center of a web of relationships comprised of his teachers Śrī Siṃha, dGa' rab rdo rje and Vajravārāhī, his consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal, peers Vimalamitra and Vairocana, students sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms and so forth, and his king Khri srong lde btsan. In addition, Padmasambhava is very engaged with the world of spirits and demons that have a prevalent impact on Tibetan life. As a *dharmakāya* Buddha, Samantabhadra remains in the luminous realm of wisdom, so a wrathful master is needed to bring order to chaotic, hostile forces and spirits that solicit the land of Tibet. This function is fulfilled by Padmasambhava, an icon of fierce tantric power.

These three poles of gravity, Samantabhadra, Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, form a continuum of identification. Padmasambhava is presented as a second order emanation of Samantabhadra, as he arises from three seed syllables produced by Vairocana, Amitābha and Vajrasattva, who were in turn emanated by Samantabhadra.⁴³ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is an incarnation of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms, one of Padmasambhava's heart sons or direct disciples, and the anthology also contains a text, *The Three Lamps: The Last Testament Composed by Oddiyana Padmasambhava*, which conceptually identifies Rig 'dzin rGod ldem with Padmasambhava through their fierce activities and establishes rGod ldem as a wrathful heir and spiritual son of Padmasambhava.⁴⁴

Through the continuum of these figures, the transcendence of the *dharmakāya* is brought closer to Tibetans by masters that can more easily be related to in the messiness and violence of the terrestrial

⁴³ *The Tantra of the Enlightened Activity of the Precious Unborn, Unfabricated, Self-emergent and Self-arisen One* (sKye med ma bcos rang byung rang shar ba rin po che phrin las kyi rgyud), UR III:27-28.

⁴⁴ *O rgyan padmas mdzad pa'i zhal chems sgron ma rnam gsum*, UR V:201-244.

plane. Another social implication of the dialectic between Samantabhadra and Padmasambhava is a legitimation of the wrathful practices and lifestyle of a tantric yogi. Since Padmasambhava embodies Samantabhadra, his wrathful actions and practices are sanctified by this connection to the primordial Buddha.

Through these three poles of gravity the agency of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is positioned in the psychological continuum from Samantabhadra to Padmasambhava and himself, temporal continuum from timelessness to the mythical life span of Padmasambhava and the present time of rGod ldem, and the spatial continuum from Akaniṣṭha to India and Tibet. One of the important outcomes of this narrative scheme is the legitimation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his revelation. Via this continuum, the power of Samantabhadra is invested in rGod ldem, the historical person closest to the audience carrying on the gnostic and wrathful legacies.

4. Narratives of Transformation Through *rDzogs chen* Practice

In the narrative dynamics of rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation, two texts stand out as particularly interesting as they present unusual narratives of visionary practice. *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* relates how Padmasambhava trained in Great Perfection meditation under Śrī Siṃha and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* depicts Ye shes mtsho rgyal's meditative training under Padmasambhava. These texts are located toward the end of *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, which in the Northern Treasures tradition is variously considered as the fifth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization* or a separate anthology (see footnote four). In any case, *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* is clearly a Great Perfection collection and together with *The Unimpeded Realization* forms a distinctive *rdzogs chen* part of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's massive treasure revelation.

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* portray the disciples' transformative experiences resulting from *rdzogs chen* practice, which is why these texts bring to life and culminate the message and teachings of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation. Following numerous doctrinal explanations of *rdzogs chen* contemplation, these two texts offer a model of how they are applied in practice. Instead of focusing on Samantabhadra and transmission in the celestial realms, these narratives describe teaching scenarios in the human realm. The reader gets a sense of direction from macro to micro environment, from deities to humans and from celestial realms to India and Tibet. The texts dis-

cuss the same kind of *rdzogs chen* training given in India by Śrī Siṃha and in Tibet by Padmasambhava, thus pointing to authentic lineage that was brought from India to Tibet by the Lotus-Born Guru.

The narrative format of *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* is distinctive in the context of rGod ldem's anthology. The texts are presented as dialogues (*zhus len*) between a master and disciple, but unlike many dialogue texts in Buddhist literature, these two texts describe journeys of inner transformation in the manner of biographical literature, but embedded in lively dialogical encounters, even debates, between a guru and disciple. This being said, they differ from Tibetan biographical literature in their exclusive focus on meditation experiences. They are also not like the transmission narratives in rGod ldem's anthology that present merely bits and pieces of biographical information, because these narratives contain actual life stories of how to travel on the *rdzogs chen* path. Therefore, in the context of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation these two transformation narratives constitute a distinctive type of narrative literature that bridge and intermingle various domains: *rdzogs chen* meditation instructions and biographical narrative, presentation of doctrine and descriptions of experience, philosophy and contemplation, and dialogical and narrative presentation.

These narratives are significant also because they make several important philosophical, doctrinal and social points through the format of narrative. (1) Implicitly, the texts make a strong argument for the gradual path and progressively increasing wisdom awareness, as opposed to instant enlightenment. (2) Another prominent theme is the subtlety of enlightenment: there is considerably more to realize than even an advanced yogi can conceive. Without these two texts, rGod ldem's presentation of the final stages of *rdzogs chen* practice would be scanty, as they are the only texts in *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* that elaborate on the last stages of the path before attaining enlightenment. (3) Perhaps the most interesting question is whether the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal in these narratives are the visions of direct transcendence, because they are considerably different from the standard descriptions. If they are, they make a point for the fluid nature of these visionary experiences. If they are not, it is curious that the visionary *rdzogs chen* training of these iconic figures does not entail direct transcendence. (4) Additionally, the two narratives present a model of ideal guru-disciple relationship and how to follow a master. These four topics will be analyzed after introducing the two narratives. In conjunction with describing the two narratives, this paper will also discuss other notable themes, such as

the nature of mind and the need to transcend visionary experiences for the final realization of non-dual wisdom, for these topics feature prominently in the texts' conception of the *rdzogs chen* path.

4.1. Padmasambhava's *rdzogs chen* Training

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction, A Dialogue with Padmasambhava is presented in the form of first person narrative by Padmasambhava who relates his meditation experiences and discussions with Śrī Siṃha in the final stages of his journey to enlightenment. The text opens with brief instructions on breakthrough meditation, a simple method to "let your body, speech and mind be naturally without fabricating in a solitary place," upon which the four visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*) arise. However, upon seeing the visionary manifestations, Padmasambhava has to transcend them in order to realize the non-duality of enlightenment, which is one of the central themes in the transformation narratives. The text makes this point already on the second page with Śrī Siṃha's startling question:

At that point, the guru Śrī Siṃha said to me: "Being satisfied with the four visions is a childish view. You have to be unattached to these visions and emptiness. Do you have that? By equalizing the Buddhas and sentient beings as inseparable, you must respect all sentient beings just like you respect the Buddhas. Can you do that? ---"

Then, I, Padmasambhava, settled in the three methods of letting be, and generated the eight experiences. There was an experience of clarity devoid of outside and inside. Whether I had my eyes open or closed, it arose as clarity and emptiness. The experience of emptiness was pervasive everywhere without attachment. In the experience of bliss, the body and mind were the same, like melting butter, vivid and vibrating. The consciousness was in self-display, clear and free from attachment toward multiplicity, like the rising sun. The body was like mist, so it was free from dualistic activity and there was recognition devoid of the self and other. I thought: "It makes sense that all sentient beings can understand the meaning of the nature of mind like I have understood it."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *De'i skabs su gu ru shrī singhas bdag la gsungs pa: nyams kyi snang ba bzhi chog shes su bzung ba ni byis pa'i lta ba yin no: snang ba dang stong pa 'di la ma chags pa zhig dgos te: khyod la 'dug gam: --- de nas padma 'byung gnas bdag gis bzhag thabs gsum la bzhag pa'i dus su nyams brgyad skyes te: gsal nyams phyi dang nang med par song ste: mig phyed btsun khyad med par gsal stong du shar: stong nyams gang la yang zhen pa med par stong pa cham cham du song: bde nyams su lus sems gnyis mnyam par mar zhu ba ltar lhan lhan phril phril ba dang: sna tshogs su gsal la zhen pa med par shes pa rang snang la nyi ma shar ba lta bu: lus na bun lta bus spyod rgyu gnyis su med pas: bdag gzhan gnyis ngo mi shes pa dang: sems nyid kyi don 'di bdag gi go bzhin du sems can*

The realization of non-duality, which Padmasambhava is gradually approaching, entails a complete renunciation and freedom from attachments, hopes, fears and the eight worldly concerns. It is the realization of oneness of all phenomena: even Buddhas and sentient beings are equal. It is also a realization that entails one's mind transcending all limitations and becoming pervasive like the sky. Thus, in the next stage Padmasambhava is instructed to expand his mind. The text highlights the processual nature of *rdzogs chen* training, because even Padmasambhava is presented as needing to progress through several stages of training.

[Śrī Siṃha]: Your awareness is narrow, so without having attachment to the visions, expand your mind."

I asked: "How should I expand the mind?"

Śrī Siṃha said: "There is no difference between Buddhas and sentient beings, excepting the extent of their awareness. The mind of a sentient being is small and scattered, while the enlightened mind of a Buddha is completely pervasive. Therefore, expand your mind to be like the sky. Whichever direction you look at the sky – east, south, west or north - there is no limit."

Then, I went to a solitary place. I expanded [my mind], and thus generated many experiences. I let my mind be without proliferating and dissolving thoughts, so it became empty, clear and immaculate. I thought that this is one-pointedness, and I was not attached to any objects. My mind did not abide in anything and it became like waves. I thought that this indeed is the activity free from elaborations. Wherever I looked, it appeared as one, so there was nothing to abandon or accomplish. This indeed is what is called one taste. --- I thought there could not be anything higher than this. --- Without fabricating, the creative displays arose variously. It was unchanging like the essence of space. I thought that this indeed is when the cognition of dual appearing is not generated. It was a lucid great experience that was limpid, open, shining, vibrating and shimmering. It was a clear experience like the sun rising, empty experience like the expanse of the sky, a blissful experience like the depth of the ocean.⁴⁶

thams cad kyis kyang 'di ltar go bar rigs so snyam pa byung ste (Ngo sprod rang rig rang gsal padma'i zhus lan) UR V:153-154.

⁴⁶ *Rig pa col chung ba yin pas: nyams snang la ma zhen par sems rgya bskyed cig gsungs pas: bdag gis sems ji ltar rgya bskyed zhus pas: shrī singha'i zhal nas: sangs rgyas dang sems can gnyis kyis khyad par rig pa'i rgya che chung gnyis las med: sems can gyi sems dum bur gnas: sangs rgyas kyi thugs khyab bdal du gnas pas: de'i phyir rang sems nam mkha' lta bur rgya skyed cig: nam mkha' la shar lho nub byang sogs phyog gang du bltas kyang mtha' med do: zhes gsungs so: de nas bdag gi dben par song ste: rgya bskyed pas nyams mang po skyed do: sems la spro bsdu med par bzhas pas gsal stong du yer yer byung: rtse gcig bya ba 'di yin snyam pa dang: dngos po gang la yang ma zhen: blo gang la yang mi gnas par chal chal ba byung: spros bral bya ba 'di rang yin snyam pa dang:*

In this passage, Padmasambhava thinks that he has attained enlightenment and “there could not be anything higher than this”, but Śrī Siṃha points out to him that all visionary content of experience still has to be transcended:

I asked about [my experience], so Śrī Siṃha said: “The actual abiding reality is devoid of visions. Padmasambhava, whatever you experience, whoever experiences and whatever you delight in, it is the mind. When there is no content of experience at all, not even a little bit, will you find something that surpasses that? The experiences that you experienced cannot be found even by the Buddhas of the three times, so if you grasp at these experiences as experiences, you will surely be deceived by demons. If you have grasping and attachment, and you do, your experiences will manifest with fabrications. You still have obscurations of conditions. You do not have forbearance. Your realization is good, but it is like a net and you have not unraveled the knot of conceptuality, so it is like having a sickness within. At this point, bliss is of no benefit. You still have not reached the exalted position, so the smothered flame of confusion breaks out again.”⁴⁷

Upon further instructions not to grasp at the visions, not to desire, not to practice nor do anything at all, but just let be, Padmasambhava makes progress:

Then, I practiced in a solitary place just as [he had instructed], so all the earlier experiences were purified as husks of the intellect. Suffering exhausted and the basic wakefulness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) was not obscured by any fault or virtue at all. It was free from both the result and something to meditate on. Even if one meditated, there was nothing whatsoever to generate, and even if one did not meditate, there was nothing to be confused about. The basic wakefulness was naked, bare and serene without accepting or rejecting. I realized all the contrived and nakedly free phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as subsumed in

gang la ltas kyang gcig tu 'dus pas spangs bya dang bsgub bya mi 'dug pas ro gcig bya ba 'di rang yin par 'dug: --- de bas lhag pa yod mi srid snyam pa dang: --- ma byas par rtsal sna tshogs su shar ba: nam mkha'i ngo bo ltar mi 'gyur ba dang: gnyis snang gi shes pa mi skye ba dang: 'di rang yin snyam pa'i nyams chen po sal sal pa dang: seng seng ba dang: phyal phyal pa: lhag lhag pa: phril phril pa: mer mer pa: gsal nyams nyi ma shar ba lta bu: Ibid. V:155-156.

⁴⁷ *Zhus pas: shri singha'i zhal nas: dngos po'i gnas lugs nyams snang dang bral ba yin: padma 'byung gnas gar myong gang gis myong gang la dga' bde sems yin: myong ba cung cad kyang med na: de bas lhag pa zhig rnyed dam: khyod kyi myong ba de ni dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas kyis kyang mi rnyed pas: 'di nyams su myong ba la myong bar 'dzin na: bdud kyis bslus par nges so: 'dzin zhen yod na de kun byas pa las byung ba bcos pa'i nyams so: da dung rkyen sgrib yod: rkyen mi thub: bzang rtogs kyi drwa ba yin: rnam rtoḡ gi mdud pa mi khrol bas khong na nad yod pa dang 'dra: da res tsam bde bas mi phan: da dung btsan sa mi zin pas 'khrul ba'i rme ro ldang yong: Ibid.V:156-157.*

one essence.⁴⁸

However, Padmasambhava is not enlightened yet, but still has attachment such as the desire to be with his teacher. This desire has to be transcended through the final stage of practice: non-dual yogic discipline.

Then, I went to the presence of the guru Śrī Siṃha, and asked about [my experience], so he said: "That which is called the uncompounded dharmakāya, the primordially abiding reality, is indeed the naked clear basic wakefulness devoid of something to meditate on and something to be confused about. Now, do not be obscured by desire! Through eradicating desire, you will traverse to the place of no desire. Do not meditate nor be separate from [negativities]. By maintaining just that non-meditation and non-separation, you will obtain the supreme and ordinary *siddhis* (miraculous abilities). At this point, you and I will not meet."

"Can I still meet you and ask for teachings?" I asked.

He said: "If we meet, will you be happy, and if we do not meet, will you be unhappy?"

I said: "If we meet, I will be very happy."

Śrī Siṃha said: "If you are unhappy, you have hopes. If you are happy, fears will come. If you have hopes and fears, you have dualistic grasping. For the stainless non-dual wisdom of great bliss, you have to cut across in between [happiness and unhappiness]. Seeing many faults in this [way of happiness and unhappiness], engage in the non-dual yogic discipline! Now, without even looking at me, go!"⁴⁹

The way the text presents the final process of transcending desire is almost heartbreaking in its powerful simplicity. The master sends

⁴⁸ *De nas dben par de kho na bzhin nyams su blangs pas: nyams snga ma thams cad blo'i shun par dag ste: sdug zad nas tha mal gyi shes pa skyon dang yon tan gang gis kyang mi sgrib pa: de la bsgom rgyu dang 'bras bu gnyis ka bral te: sgom kyang ci yang skye rgyu med pa la: ma sgom kyang 'khrul rgyu med pa tha mal gyi shes pa gcer bu blang dor med pa: a' thas se: rjen lhan ne: 'khor 'das kyi chos thams cad ngo bo gcig tu 'dus par rtogs so: Ibid.V:158-159.*

⁴⁹ *De nas guru shri singha'i spyen sngar phyin te zhus pas: guru shri singha'i zhal nas: ye gnas kyi gnas lugs 'dus ma byas kyi chos sku bya ba: sgom rgyu 'khrul rgyu gnyis ka med pa'i tha mal gyi shes pa gcer bu lhang pa de rang yin no: da 'dod pas ma sgrib cig: 'dod 'dod pa zhig gis mi 'dod pa'i sar skyel yong: sgom ma myong dang 'bral ma myong: mi sgom don dang mi 'bral ba: de nyid rang skyong bas mchog dang thun mong gi dngos grub thob zin gyis: da khyod dang nga mi 'phrad do: gsung ngo: da dung zhal mjal lam chos zhu zhes zhus pas: da dung mjal na dga' 'am: ma mjal na mi dga' 'am gsung ngo: bdag ni da dung mjal ba la shin tu dga' lags zhus pas: shri singha'i zhal nas: mi dga' ba yod na re ba yod pa yin: dga' ba yod na dogs pa yod pa yin: re dogs dang bcas na gnyis 'dzin yod pa yin: bde ba chen po gnyis su med pa'i ye shes dri ma dang bral ba la bar du gcod do: de la skyon du ma blta bar gnyis med kyi brtul zhugs gyis shig: da bdag la yang ma blta bar song zhig gsung ngo: Ibid.V:159-160.*

Padmasambhava off to practice non-dual conduct with the notion that they will not meet again and he must not be unhappy about it in the face of non-dual nature of reality. However, the master and disciple meet one more time when Śrī Siṃha comes to check Padmasambhava's realization:

[Padmasambhava] practiced in a big city in the land of Orgyen. He did not generate virtue or non-virtue, good or bad. Whatever appearances arose and however they manifested, he did not reckon that "this is" and "this is not", but abided like a corpse discarded on a charnel ground. Then, Śrī Siṃha came to him for the benefit of beings.

"A son of the noble family, show your realization!" he said.

I said: "Oh, precious guru! I do not have any realization to show not even as much as a tip of a hair. I am like a trail of a bird flying in the sky."

Śrī Siṃha said: "Do not lose that realization! Without being separate from the realization, go wherever you please. Practice conduct like in the [Three] Baskets. Practice meditation like in the Secret Mantra. Make you view like in the Great Perfection. Benefit sentient beings like a jewel. Take care of many fortunate disciples. Always make offerings to the lamas and ḍākinīs. You will have the power to make the eight classes of gods and demons as your servants." Having said this, he went.

Then, [Padmasambhava] realized in his continuum that phenomena are like dreams and illusions and the nature of the mind is devoid of birth and death. The great accomplished one (*mahāsiddha*) saw the Eight Heruka deities. He made the eight classes of gods and demons as his servants.⁵⁰

As we see here, Śrī Siṃha finally approves Padmasambhava's realization, which amounts to realizing that there is nothing to realize. Everything is of the single nature of emptiness and primordially pure awareness. Saṃsāra is nirvāṇa. One's spontaneous conduct is free from the shackles of desire and leaves no karmic traces like a bird

⁵⁰ *De nas o rgyan gyi yul grong khyer chen por spyod pa byas pas: dge ba dang mi dge ba: legs pa dang mi legs pa ma skyes te: ji ltar snang ba gang ltar shar yang: 'di yin dang 'din min gyi rtsis gdab med par mi ro dur khrod du bor ba lta bu'i ngang du gnas skabs 'gro don du shrī singha byon nas: rigs kyi bu rtogs pa phul cig gsungs so: bdag gis 'di skad zhush so: kye bla ma rin po che: rtogs pa phul rgyu skra rtse tsam gcig kyang med par nam mkha' la bya 'phur ba'i rjes bzhin tu gda' lags so: zhes zhush pas: shrī singha'i zhal nas: rtogs pa de ma stor bar gyis: rtogs pa dang ma bral bar gang dgar song zhig: spyod pa de snod ltar gyis: sgom pa sang sngags ltar gyis: lta ba rdzogs chen ltar gyis: sems can gyi don nor bu ltar gyis: skal ldan gyi slob ma mang du skyongs: bla ma dang mkha' 'gro rtag tu mchod dang: lha srin sde brgyad bran tu khol nus pa cig 'ong gsung nas gshags so: de nas chos rmi lam sgyu ma lta bu sems nyid la skye shi med par rgyud la khol nas: sgrub pa chen po bka' brgyad kyi lha tshogs rnams kyi zhal mthong: lha srin sde brgyad bran bzhin bkol: Ibid.V:160-161.*

leaves no trails in the sky.

This passage also illustrates another important feature that appears multiple times in *The Unimpeded Realization*: the importance of ethics and ritual. Upon the peak of non-dual conduct when Padmasambhava has abandoned all practice and is just letting spontaneous action unfold, he is now instructed to embody the best of both the sūtric and tantric vehicles and exhibit the exemplary ethics of the Vinaya and ritual practices of Vajrayāna. rGod ldem's anthology makes a point to emphasize the importance of conscientious moral conduct on numerous occasions. It seems that the motivation is to counteract possible misunderstanding of the radical *rdzogs chen* statements that exhort one to discard all meditation practice and do as one pleases. In the context of rGod ldem's anthology, including the narrative discussed above, this type of non-meditation and non-dual conduct are presented as one of the final stages of training on the *rdzogs chen* path. However, when a yogi has realized non-duality and is free from grasping, he has completed the practice of non-dual conduct and should again embody the conduct of an exemplary practitioner of sūtra and tantra.

4.2. Ye shes mtsho rgyal investigates the mind

The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points (from here onward *The Ten Steps*) follows the same format as *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* but is much longer and more detailed. In *The Ten Steps*, Padmasambhava teaches Ye shes mtsho rgyal and the text begins from an earlier point in Great Perfection training: investigating the origin, dwelling and destination of the mind (*byung gnas 'gro*), which is part of the breakthrough practice (*khregs chod*):

[Padmasambhava] said: "mTsho rgyal, by taking up many difficult topics, you will not obtain the result, so remove the tie to the body, speech and mind. That is called viewing the meaning of the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*). Think: 'From where has the substance of my nature of mind appeared initially?' Investigate as to where it abides in the middle. Look as to where it goes in the end. Do not come here until you find it."

[After seven days] the lady said: "I thought about the initial place of arising for seven days, but I do not know it. I looked for where it abides in the middle, but I did not find it. I did not see where it goes in the end, and I am suffering."

The great guru said: "mTsho rgyal, did you see the meaning of abiding reality?"

She said: "I did not see anything at all and I am suffering."

He said: "mTsho rgyal, the very not seeing anything at all is the inexpressible meaning of abiding reality. It is like the sky. Similarly, the sky does not first arise from somewhere. In between, it does not abide even for a moment. In the end, it does not get emptied out from somewhere. As for that suffering that arose from the absence of suffering without abiding in the universal ground, you are obscured by co-emergent ignorance and have slipped onto the path of confusion. [The appearing of ignorance and suffering from the ground] is like stars [appearing] in the sky at dusk even though there is no radiance of light [in the sky itself]. Their own form is precisely clear, and there are many of them and they change. First, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa separated in this kind of dividing point [of recognition and lack of it].⁵¹

This excerpt from the dialogue between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal is not only a narrative of mTsho rgyal's struggles in meditation but is also a pith instruction and philosophical explanation of the Seminal Heart view on the nature of the mind. In the Seminal Heart philosophy, the word mind (*sems*) is used to refer to conceptual, superficial mental aspects that are to be differentiated from the deep, underlying recesses of pristine awareness (*rig pa*), which is also, somewhat confusingly, referred to as the nature of mind (*sems nyid*). When the yogi becomes familiar with investigating the origin, dwelling and disappearance of the mind, it transforms into the practice of differentiating mind from awareness, which is very similar to the practice of differentiating the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa from the enlightened wisdom of *dharmakāya* (reality body, *chos sku*). Both these practices entail differentiating unawakened aspects (mind and universal ground) from awakened ones (awareness and *dharmakāya*), but while the universal ground is the indeterminate ground devoid of wisdom and ignorance, mind is the

⁵¹ *Bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal: rgyu dka' ba dang du ma blangs par 'bras bu mi thob pas lus ngag yid gsum 'brel ba spangs la: gnas lugs kyi don lta ba zhes bya ba ste: rang gi sems nyid kyi rgyu de dang po gang nas byung bsam mno thong: bar du gang na gnas tshol: tha ma gang gu 'gro ltos de ma rnyed bar du 'dir ma byon gsung ngo: jo mo nyid kyis zhag bdun du dang po byung sa bsam pas ma shes: bar du gang na gnas btsal bas ma rnyed: tha ma gang du 'gro ma mthong ste: sdug bsngal zhing 'dug pa la: ma hā gu rus bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal gnas lugs kyi don mthong ngam gsungs: bdag ni ci yang ma mthong bar sdug bsngal lags so ces zhus so: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal ci yang ma mthon ba de nyid rang smra brjod bral ba: gnas lugs kyi don lags: dper na nam mkha' lta bu ste: nam mkha' yang dang po 'di nas byung med: bar du 'di tsam sdod med: tha ma 'di nas stong med do: gzhi gnas las de'i ngang las mi gnas par: sdug bsngal med pa'i ngang las sdug bsngal byung ba de ni: lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pas bsgrub nas 'khrul pa'i lam la shor ba'o: dper na sa sros kha'i nam mkha' la dwangs ba ci yang mi gnas pa de nas skar ma lta bu: rang gzugs gsal ba tsam de yang grangs mang ba la 'pho 'gyur che ba'i: dang po 'khor 'das gnyis kyi mtshams de lta bu la gyes pa yin no gsungs so: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:324-325.*

apparatus of saṃsāric existence ingrained in ignorance and enmeshed in conceptuality.⁵²

In *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*, it is explained that the mind arises from the universal ground, abides in the six realms and dissipates into the ground upon attaining enlightenment:

As for the dharma teaching of the common vehicles, they look for the origin of mind. They do not find it, so it is introduced as unborn. They look for the dwelling place and do not find it, so it is introduced as non-dual union. In the end, they look for the place it disappears to and do not find it, so it is introduced as non-ceasing. The followers of *The Unimpeded Realization* of the Great Perfection are completely certain that all the activities of the mind are mistaken. They assert that initially its origin arose from the indeterminate universal ground, so identify the ground. In between, its dwelling place is in the six realms. It is confused, but as soon as the excellent spiritual teacher teaches the pith instructions in this life, you should abandon the activities of the mind as you abandon poison or like a visitor turns back from a mistaken path. Identify the awareness devoid of the mind. In the end, the place of disappearance, called the body of essence, is the ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, so when the realization becomes actual, you will become enlightened.⁵³

In addition to describing the mind, this passage illustrates the agenda of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, which is to establish the superiority of the Great Perfection over other vehicles. However, we are compelled to ask: isn't the above mentioned view of the common vehicles that defines mind as lacking the place of origin and disappearance similar to Padmasambhava's explanation in *The Ten Steps*

⁵² It seems that the fourteenth century is the time when the philosophical topics of differentiating the mind from awareness and the universal ground from *dharma-kāya* were first applied as contemplative practices as part of breakthrough and *The Unimpeded Realization* may be the first source where this shift is taking place. Later on these type of analytical meditations became codified as practices of distinguishing (*shan 'byed*) found for example in Jigs med gling pa's *Seminal Heart of Klong chen pa* (*Klong chen snying thig*). For more on the philosophy of mind and wisdom/awareness, see David Higgins' dissertation, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet*.

⁵³ *Theg pa spyi'i chos ni: sems kyi byung sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de skyed med du ngo sprod pa yod: gnas sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de gnyis med zung 'jug tu ngo sprod pa yod: tha ma 'gro sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de 'gag med du ngo sprod pa yod do: rdzogs pa chen po dzongs pa zang thal bas: sems kyi byas pa thams cad 'khrul par thag rbad kyi bca'd do: dang po byung sa yang kun gzhi bar ma do nas byung bas gzhi ngos zin: bar du gnas sa rigs drug tu gnas nas 'khrul kyang: da lta bla ma dam pas man ngag gsungs ma thag tu: mgron po lam nor log pa bzhin tu sems kyi bya ba dug bzhin tu dor nas: sems med kyi rig pa ngos 'dzin: tha ma 'gro sa ngo nyid kyi sku bya ba 'khor 'das gnyis ka'i gzhi de rtogs pa mngon du gyur na sangs rgya par 'dod do: (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma) UR II:500.*

that compares abiding reality to the sky devoid of arising, abiding and disappearing? The question is pressing and not sufficiently resolved in the anthology. It seems that in the passage above from *The Ten Steps* there is no contradiction, because Padmasambhava is describing the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*) or the way things really are, which in the Great Perfection refers to the union of emptiness and awareness (not mere emptiness), personified as the primordial Buddha couple Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri in union. However, later in *The Ten Steps* Padmasambhava describes the mind as not arising or disappearing anywhere along the lines of the common vehicles criticized in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*:

The great guru said: "mTsho rgyal, abandon ties to the three doors, and whatever coarse conceptuality you have in the mind, think as to from where it initially arose. Investigate where it abides in the middle. Look where it goes in the end. Make effort until you find it."

[After seven days] the lady said: "For seven days, I had intense conceptuality of wanting to be free from saṃsāra. I examined where it arose from, and I thought it arose from this form aggregate. I examined where the form arose from, and I thought it was generated by my parents. I examined how they were generated, but I did not know it, so I did not find the place of arising. I examined again where the body goes in the end, so I saw that it dies. Well then, I examined where the conceptuality goes to, but I did not find a destination."

The great guru said: "mTsho rgyal, did you cut off the root of confusion?"

She answered as before, so he said: "mTsho rgyal, the confused mind is clouded by the co-emergent ignorance. Initially, there is no origin. In the end, there is no place it goes to. In between it binds itself and does and experiences all kinds of things. For example, even though clouds, thunder and lightning appear in the empty sky like great magical apparitions, in the end, the place where they go is the sky itself, so there is no [other place for them to go] on the side. The general confused conceptuality of the six classes of beings also arises initially in this way.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ mTsho rgyal sgo gsum brel ba spong la: yid la gang hrag pa'i rtog pa de: dang po gang nas byung bsam mmo thong: bar du gang na gnas tshol: tha ma gang du 'gro ltos: de ma rnyed bar du rtsol ba bskyed gsung ngo: jo mo nyid kyis zag bdun du 'khor ba nas thar bar 'dod pa'i rtog pa hrag par 'dug nas: de ci las byung bltas pas gzugs kyi phung po 'di las byung 'dug: gzugs gang nas byung bltas pas pha ma gnyis kyis bskyed par 'dug: de ji ltar bskyed bltas pas ma shes te byung sa ma rnyed: yang gzugs tha ma gar 'gro bltas pas 'chi: o na rnam rtog gar 'gro bltas pas 'gro sa ma rnyed pa las: ma hā gu rus bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal 'khrul pa'i rtsa ba chod dam gsungs: gong ltar zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal 'khrul pa'i sems 'di lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pas bsgrub nas: dang po byung sa med pa tha ma 'gro sa med pa la bar skabs 'dir kho rang gis kho rang bcings nas: ci yang byed la gang yang myong ba gcig yin: dper na nam mkha' stong pa la 'brin dang 'brug dang glog 'gyu ba cho 'phrul che ba ltar snang yang: tha ma 'gro sa nam mkha'

While *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* specifies the universal ground as the origin of the mind, the six realms as the dwelling and the body of essence as the destination, in the passage above Padmasambhava states that the confused mind lacks a place of origin and destination. A skillful commentator might attempt to explain this contradiction away by saying that the six realms are an illusion and the universal ground is indeterminate and cannot be pinpointed to be anything particular, which is why they do not constitute real places of arising or dwelling. We may also choose to view this as another example of how paradoxes are utilized in the Great Perfection. However, the two explanations are different, and this suggests heterogeneous sources and multiple editors at work in the compilation of *The Unimpeded Realization*. Moreover, in the light of these passages from *The Ten Steps*, the criticism leveled to the common vehicles in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* becomes rather mute and mainly illustrates the polemical agenda to establish the Great Perfection as a superior Buddhist path.

4.3. mTsho rgyal's visionary journey

After struggling with the question of identifying the origin, dwelling and destination of the mind for a long time, Ye shes mtsho rgyal practices a simple breakthrough meditation of just letting the mind be naturally without fabrications for seven months in the cave of mChims phu in bSam yas. As a result, she experiences the first one of the four visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*) in the form of a long visionary journey. As she realizes the emptiness of phenomenal objects, she is able to pass through them as if they were holograms. She comes through the wall of her cave unimpededly and flies to India. After settling a group of 500 elephants in meditative equipoise and sitting on a bridge as a royal procession of tigers, leopards and elephants passes through her, she arrives at Bodh Gaya, penetrates the Bodhi tree and meditates inside it for seven days. She tries to pass through the vajra seat, but to her surprise, is unable to penetrate it. In dismay, she decides to take it with her, ties her belt around it and flies up in the air. The entire Bodh Gaya lifts up with the vajra seat, but she lets go of it shortly after being urged by five hundred young boys that appear from the sky wearing white robes. Then, the five hundred boys take her to Joyous Heaven (dGa' ldan) and she passes through

rang yin pas zur na med: dang po 'gro drug spyi'i 'khrul rtog yang de lta bu la byung ba yin no gsungs so: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:328-329.

all the palaces there. Upon a short visit to Mt. Meru, Ye shes mtsho rgyal flies for ten days and arrives at Akaniṣṭha, the supreme pure land or Buddha paradise of Samantabhadra. She discovers that it is another place she cannot pass through.

I came to a dwelling in space, the ground of which looked like it was filled with five kinds of jewels. There was nowhere to go. I thought to pass through it, but I went on the side like sweeping a hand along a silk curtain. I looked, and upon five lights, there were figures in equipoise approaching enlightenment. They were uninterruptedly confident among melodious sounds. Their eyes were like the rays of the sun and were unbearable to look at. A white Buddha above me without ornaments said: "Yoginī, yet again your yogic discipline is great. This is the expanse of reality (*dharmadhātu*) of Akaniṣṭha. You do not conceptualize empty appearances, but you should still generate diligence in concentration. After three instances of the dharmakāya, 25 years of the nirmāṇakāya and 1800 human years from now, you will come to this place with a noble retinue of 600 000 beings."⁵⁵

Ye shes mtsho rgyal's journey continues with a visit to the pure land of the Buddha Akṣobhya. With her mind, she constitutes a long stairway in the sky, but every time she arrives at the top there are more steps to climb. Eventually she arrives, meets Akṣobhya surrounded by limitless bodhisattvas and asks for teachings. She perceives herself as being simultaneously in Akṣobhya's pure land and on top of Mt. Meru, which engenders a resolution that appearances indeed are empty.

After this lengthy visionary experience and ensuing realizations, Ye shes mtsho rgyal goes to Padmasambhava to tell him about her experience. Padmasambhava explains the symbolic meaning of the various parts of her experience, ranks it and asks her to demonstrate her realization:

[Padmasambhava] said: "mTsho rgyal, listen! The confused appearances of sentient beings, the appearances of suffering and dualistic grasping, are called linked chains (*lu gu rgyud*). When a yogi releases

⁵⁵ *Rin po che lnga sbrag gi sa gzhi lta bu bar snang khang song nas 'gro sa mi 'dug: de gsheg snyom pas yol ba lag pas phul ba ltar 'gro yin 'dug: mig gis bltas pas 'od lnga phrag de'i snang na mnyam bzhas mdzad pa'i sangs rgyas su khad de 'dug: sgra snyan la gdeng che ba rgyun mi chad par 'dug: nyi ma'i 'od zer lta bu mig gis mi bzod par 'dug: bdag gi steng na sangs rgyas gyi sku: sku mdog dkar po rgyan cha khrol le 'dug pa na re rnal 'byor ma da rung brtul zhugs ches: 'di ni 'og min chos kyi dbyings yin: khyod kyi snang ba stong pa las rtog pa la med pas: da rung bsam gtan la nan tan bskyed: da lta chos sku skad cig ma gsum: sprul sku'i lo gnyis bcu rtsa lnga: sems can mi'i lo stong brgyad brgya nas rigs ldan 'khor drug 'bum dang bcas te: guas 'dir 'byon par 'gyur gyi gsungs: Ibid. V:347-348.*

his mind and lets it be without grasping, he cuts off the root of confusion completely, so the manifestations of awareness and emptiness are unobstructedly clear. Compassion to the karmic retribution in the six destinies is generated upon that. Upon that generation, she can issue forth emanations of compassion. Suffering in the six destinies is continuous, so the realization of compassion is continuous. mTsho rgyal, your experience is called the first experience of *samādhi*⁵⁶ and the former sign of *dharmatā* (reality-as-it-is). If it arises in a dream, it is the experience of inferior yogis. If the vision arises without fixation, it is the experience of middling yogis. If one can establish this kind of cognition the moment one recollects it, it is the experience of superior yogis. The 500 elephants that arose in your first experience in eastern India mean that as soon as the abiding reality is introduced to you, your awareness will transfer to a thoroughly pure land. The aggregate of your body will be still like an abandoned stone. The king with a large retinue means that you will go to Akaniṣṭha after seven births. --- Concerning the way it arose, your experience is that of superior yogis. Concerning the time of arising, it is the experience of middling yogis. You are a *ḍākinī* of the vajra family, so connect appearance and emptiness now in this moment!"

The lady of mKhar chen pulled a boulder at bSam yas with her right hand. She pulled the empty sky with her left hand and made three intricate knots, so the guru said:

"mTsho rgyal, you encountered emptiness and appearance inseparably for the benefit of sentient beings: that is the generation of the first experience of *dharmatā*. Do not be separate from that experience!"⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Samādhi* refers to various types of profound meditative states resulting from one-pointed concentration.

⁵⁷ mTsho rgyal nyon cig: *sems can pa'i 'khrul snang gnyis 'dzin sdug bsngal kyi snang ba lu gu rgyud bya ba yin: rnal 'byor pa sems 'dzin med du klod bzhag pa'i dus na: phu 'khrul pa'i rtsa ba chod pas stong la rig pa'i 'char sgo ma 'gags par gsal ba: de la 'gro drug gi las la snying rje skyes: skyes pa la thug rje'i sprul pa 'gyed nus: thugs rje rgyun chad med pa de rigs drug gi sdug bsngal rgyun chad med pas dgongs pa yin: mtsho rgyal khyod kyi nyams de ting nge 'dzin gyi nyams dang po bya ba yin: chos nyid kyi rtags sngon ma bya ba yin: de rmi lam du byung na rnal 'byor pa tha ma'i nyams yin: nyams snang gtad med la byung na rnal 'byor pa 'bring gi nyams yin: da ltar gyi shes pa skad cig dran ma thag gtad la phebs na: rnal 'byor pa rab kyi nyams yin: khyod kyi nyams snang dang po la shar ba'i rgya gar shar phyogs na glang po che lnga brgya 'dug pa de khyod kyi gnas lugs ngo sprod ma thag: rig pa rnam par dag pa'i zhing du 'phos: gzugs kyi phung po rdo bor ba bzhin rong nge 'dug: rgyal po 'khor mang po dang bcas pa de skye ba bdun gyi khongs su 'og min gyi gnas su phyin par 'gyur: --- khyod kyi 'char lugs de rnal 'byor pa rab kyi nyams yin: 'char dus de rnal 'byor pa 'bring gi nyams yin: khyod rdo rje rigs kyi mkha' 'gro ma yin pas da lta skad cig ma la snang stong gnyis la mtshams sbyor gyis gsungs so: mkhar chen bzas phyag g.yas kiyis bsam yas kyi brag 'then: g.yon gyis nam mkha' stong pa 'then te rgya midud gsum rgyab pas: gu ru'i zhal nas: mtsho rgyal khyod kiyis sems can gyi don snang stong zung du 'phrod chos nyid kyi nyams dang po skyes 'dus pas: de nyams de dang ma bral gyis shig gsungs: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:352-355.*

4.4. The Eight Experiences

As the text points out, mTsho rgyal's profound experience is only the first stage of a long process of solitary practice of refining and expanding her realization. Even though she realizes that form is emptiness and could demonstrate it by tying a boulder into a knot with the sky, there is much more to attain. Similar to Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha, mTsho rgyal has to transcend attachment to the visions, expand awareness and attain complete renunciation and non-duality, but in *The Ten Steps* the explanations and dialogues are much more substantial than in *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction*. mTsho rgyal's realization is presented as growing through eight stages or eight experiences of *dharmatā*, and in each stage she receives instructions on how to enhance (*bogs 'don*) or transcend her realization. The first experience is her visionary journey related above. In the second experience, she perceives the appearances of the world clearly through her cave wall and they are infused with luminosity, emptiness, clarity and bliss. The text describes her vision, which is called the second experiential vision of *dharmatā* (*chos nyid nyams kyi snang gnyis pa*):

The cave became unimpededly transparent without inside and outside. The world and its people were lucidly clear without obstructions, lucidly clear whether she had her eyes open or closed. She thought: "This is the experience of clarity. Without attachment to any experience of emptiness whatsoever, emptiness and appearance have become one. In the experience of bliss, the body and mind are inseparable and the naked awareness is clear, vivid and vibrating. The appearances in their multitude are luminous in the absence of attachment. The self-arisen self-display of cognition is like the rising sun."⁵⁸

In the third vision or experience, Padmasambhava instructs mTsho rgyal to expand her awareness and she practices accordingly:

mTsho rgyal, the lady of mKhar chen, expanded her awareness in the cave in mChims phu for three months, so she generated many experiences. Wherever she rested her mind, there arose a lucid openness as one-pointed emptiness and clarity. She thought: "This is what is called the yoga of one-pointedness." She was not attached to any appearances whatsoever as having substance. Her mind did not abide in

⁵⁸ *Brag phug phyi nang med par zang thal le: snod bcud sgrib pa med par sal le: mig phye btsun med par sal le: de gsal ba'i nyams yin stong pa'i nyam gang la yan shen pa med par snang stong phyal phyal 'gro ba: bde ba'i nyam lus sems dbyar med par: rig pa rjen pa lhan lhan phril phril 'gro ba: snang ba sna tshogs su gsal ba shen pa med pa: shes pa rang snang rang shar nyi ma shar ba lta bu: Ibid. V:358.*

any particular point, and her awareness became pervasive. She thought: "This indeed is what is called the yoga devoid of elaborations." However she looked, it was as one, so there was nothing whatsoever to abandon or accomplish. She thought: "This is the yoga of one taste. Now, even if I meditate, there is nothing [higher] than this. There is indeed primordially nothing to practice, nothing to meditate on, so this very state is what is called non-meditation." --- The visions were not of one kind, but arose variously like waves on water or like magical apparitions in the sky.⁵⁹

The fourth stage entails a complete transcendence of visions and a return to pure awareness:

Then, mTsho rgyal, the lady of mKhar chen asked the great master Padmasambhava: "Great master, how should I enhance the *samādhi* now?"

He said: "You do not need to enhance the *samādhi*. Make your initial cognition uncontrived."

She asked: "Well then, what is the meaning of all the meditations?"

He said: "mTsho rgyal, listen! If you do not enhance the meditation experiences with *samādhi*, you will not recognize the uncontrived cognition and the visions of realization that are just dust particles flying on sun beams will become obstacles. When the three levels of visions have arisen, making effort in meditation and all kind of exertion is pointless. These are called visions. mTsho rgyal, do not regard the situational visions as supreme. Do not look at external appearances of objects. Do not look at the internal mind. Do not do any activities at all. Do not engage in any hatred or desire whatsoever. Do not have any doubts or fears, but release your cognition as you please. Let the essence of your mind, your awareness, be like the sky."

The lady of mKhar chen took those very instructions into her experience in the cave of mChims phu for one month, so all the visions generated earlier became like husks of the intellect. Suffering was exhausted, so the basic temporal wakefulness was not obscured by any faults or virtues whatsoever. She realized awareness as single, devoid of the result and something to meditate on. She realized that even if one meditates, there was nothing to generate, and even if one does not meditate, there was nothing to be confused about. Realizing the nakedly relaxed basic wakefulness as one, she realized that all the contrived

⁵⁹ mKhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal mchims phu dge'u ru zla ba gsum du rig pa rgya bskyed pas nyams mang po skyes so: sems gang bzhas par gsal stong rtse gcig tu ye re ba byung: rtse gcig gi rnal 'byor bya ba 'di yin snyams pa skyes: dngos po'i snang ba gang la yang mi shen: blo gang la yang mi gnas la rig pa phyal phyal ba byung: spros bral gyi rnal 'byor bya ba 'di rang yin bsam pa byung: gang ltar bltas kyang gcig tu 'dug pas spang bya sgrub rgyu rtsa ba nas mi 'dug: 'di ro gcig gi rnal 'byor yin bsam pa byung: da sgom kyang 'di las mi 'dug: nyams su blangs rgyu bsgom rgyu rang ye mi 'dug pas: sgom med bya ba 'di rang yin bsam pa byung: --- nyams snang rigs mi gcig pa chu'i gnyer ma lta bu nam mkha'i cho 'phrul lta bu sna tshogs byung ngo: Ibid. V:360-362.

and nakedly free phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa were of one essence.⁶⁰

In the fifth stage, Ye shes mtsho rgyal practices non-dual yogic discipline letting her cognition manifest naturally and wandering around like a bird in the sky. Then, she returns to Padmasambhava and in the sixth stage she receives instructions on how to cut off the eight elaborations or “ropes of fondness” pertaining to saṃsāra and nirvāṇa (*dmar thag brgyad gcad*), which are further investigations on the nature of awareness. The first four elaborations conducive to saṃsāra are the elaborations of causes, conditions, substance and the three times. mTsho rgyal has to examine whether awareness relates to any of these concepts: whether it arises from causes, is destroyed by conditions, has a substance, or arises, abides and disappears in the three times. The four elaborations conducive to nirvāṇa entail cutting through the conceptual constructs of (1) eternalism and nihilism, (2) hopes and fears, (3) listening, reflecting and meditating, and (4) a meditator and object of meditation.

In the seventh stage, mTsho rgyal has to cut off various superimpositions elaborated upon empty *dharmatā* awareness, such as the superimpositions of the world and its beings, their birth, flourishing and decline, and even the concept of the three times as such. All these are like dreams or magical projections of the mind that need to be cleared away by looking at non-dual pure awareness lucid in the gaps in between superimpositions.

It is interesting that in these higher stages of Ye shes mtsho rgyal's Great Perfection training when she has already transcended the perception of visions and has practiced non-dual conduct, the topics to contemplate are similar to the *sūtra* vehicles but they are related to

⁶⁰ *De nas mkhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal gyis: slob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas la zhus pa: slob dpon chen po: da bdag gis ting nge 'dzin la bogs ji ltar 'don zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: da ting nge 'dzin gyi bogs 'don mi dgos kyis: khyod rang gi dang po'i shes pa de bcos med du khyer la gsungs so: o na sgom pa thams cad kyi don gang lags zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal nyon cig: sgom pa'i nyams ting nge 'dzin gyi bogs ma thon no: shes pa ma bcos pa ngo mi shes te: rtogs pa'i snang ba nyi zer gyi rdul tsaṃ gyis bar du gcod yod: nyams kyi snang ba rim pa gsum shar nas: sgom pa'i rtsol ba byas nas: thams cad 'bad pa don med: nyams kyi snang ba bya ba yin: mtsho rgyal gnas skabs kyi nyams snang la mchog tu ma 'dzin: phyi's yul snang la ma blta: nang gi sems la ma blta: bya ba ci yang ma byed: zhe 'dod gang la yang ma byed: dogs pa ma bca' nyam nga ma byed shes pa ci dgar thong: sems kyi ngo bo rig pa nam mkha' ltar zhog gsungs so: mkhar chen bza'i mchims phu dge'u ru de kho na bzhin nyams su blangs pas: gong du skyes pa'i nyams snang thams cad blo yi spun par song ste: sdug zad pas tha mal dus kyi shes pa: skyon dang yon tan gang gis ma sgrub pa: rig pa gcig pu ru rtogs: de la sgom rgyu dang 'bras bu gnyis gnyis mi 'dug ste: sgom kyan ci yang skye rgyu med ma sgom kyang 'khrul rgyu med par rtogs so: tha mal gyi shes pa gcer bur lhang pa gcig tu rtogs te: a byas se: rjen khres se: 'khor 'das gyi chos thams cad ngo bo gcig tu rtogs so: Ibid. V:364-366.*

the distinctive *rdzogs chen* concept of pristine wisdom awareness (*rig pa*). Like a student of Madhyamaka philosophy, she has to contemplate the illusory nature of causes and conditions, and cut through eternalism and nihilism, agent and object and hopes and fears. The important difference, however, is that the nature of reality is described as a union of emptiness and awareness instead of mere emptiness.

In the eighth and final stage of training, Padmasambhava instructs Ye shes mtsho rgyal to just let be or let the mind abide. This is done with four skilled methods described in terse, somewhat cryptic verses that point to the single empty nature of all phenomena and amount to resting in equipoise in the ultimate reality free from the false identification with the self. Various analogies are also employed to illustrate the point.

The master Padma said: "Lady of mKhar chen, you have to abide in the peaceful innate nature. To expand on that, you have to let be through four skilled methods. Let the knowable, knower and method be peaceful and empty by themselves. It is like extracting the heart of a wise person. Let everything be in the state of great stainless clear light. Like the clear sky that is naturally luminous, let whatever arises be as the great self-arisen self-display. Another analogy is the sun rising in the sky. Without conceptuality, let the six consciousnesses be at ease. It is like a skillful person training an ox. Then, you have to abide through the four skilled abidings:

- (1) Empty, absent and unmanifest. When you have defeated yourself naturally, abide.
- (2) Forgotten, is not mindful and unmindful. When you have cut off your own life force naturally, abide.
- (3) Was not born, is not born and unborn. When you have delighted in one taste, abide.
- (4) Undone, is not done and cannot be done. When you have destroyed yourself, abide.⁶¹

The eighth stage also entails training on conduct. mTsho rgyal has to take to the path all her fears, adverse conditions and problems by

⁶¹ *sLob dpon padma'i zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' gnyug ma'i rang bzhin zhi bar gnas dgos te: de yang bzhag thabs la mkhas pa bzhis bzhag dgos te: shes bya shes byed thabs gsum rang zhi rang stong du zhog: dper na skyes bu rig pa can gyi snying bton pa lta bu'o: gang yang dri med 'od gsal chen po'i ngang la zhog: dper na nam mkha' dag pa rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal ba lta bu cir snang rang byung rang snang chen por zhog: dper na bar snang la nyi ma shar ba lta bu'o: rtog med tshogs drug rgya yan du zhog: dper na mkhas pas ba lang skyong ba bzhin no: de nas gnas pa la mkhas pa bzhi yis gnas dgos te: stong dang med dang ma grub gsum: rang phung rang gis sgrub nas gnas: rjed dang ma dran dran med gsum: rang srog rang gis bcad nas gnas: ma skyes mi skye skye med gsum: gcig ro gcig la 'kal nas gnas: ma byas mi byed mi gtub gsum: gcig shig gcig gis bdur nas gnas: Ibid. V:391-392.*

seizing them with mindfulness and welcoming them as friends “like a peacock delights in deadly poison.”⁶² The text describes the final stages of a yogi perfecting their conduct:

One lives alone like a lion, has no weaknesses like an ox, is free from attachment like a small child, has no concern of pure and impure like a dog or pig, is not fixated on concepts like a mad person and destroys that which is unsuitable like a sword.⁶³

After the fabulous narrative of mTsho rgyal’s experiences, the text concludes with a terse notion that she became inseparable from Samantabhadrī. The future generations are urged to practice these instructions and Padmasambhava is said to have hidden the text as a treasure in Copper Colored Divine Rock with a prophecy that a dark-skinned, vulture-feathered revealer will unearth it in a degenerate, strife-filled future time.

4.5. Gradual path

Let us now turn our attention to some important topics that are highlighted by the dynamics of these narratives. Firstly, how does the text construct a vision of the gradual path to enlightenment? This paper already pointed out the polemical agenda to establish the Great Perfection as the highest vehicle. The polemics of rGod ldem’s anthology do not denigrate other vehicles, but view them as important steps that prepare one for the superior Great Perfection view and practice. This view on other vehicles is part of the text’s conception of gradual path, and the gradual nature of refining one’s realization continues in the Great Perfection. In the narratives above, it is clear that Padmasambhava progresses gradually on the *rdzogs chen* path and his realization increases in stages. Ye shes mtsho rgyal goes through eight experiences or eight stages of Great Perfection training, each having their specific goals and pith instructions. She realizes emptiness already in her first experience of *dharmatā*, the elaborate visionary journey, but her realization still has to grow and she has to expand her awareness, transcend the realm of alluring visions, refine her view and eradicate all traces of attachment.

The Great Perfection is sometimes understood as a kin to the ways of instantaneous enlightenment common in Chan and Zen Bud-

⁶² Ibid. V:393.

⁶³ *Seng nge bzhin du gcig pur tshugs: glang chen bzhin du nyams nga med: bu chung bzhin du 'dzin chags bral: khyi phag bzhin du gtsang rtsog med: smyon pa bzhin du gza' gtad med: mtshon cha bzhin du ma rung 'joms: Ibid. V:395.*

dhism, and rGod Idem's anthology also contains statements that support this aspect of the Great Perfection. For example, *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* reiterates the famous *rdzogs chen* idea that if a yogi realizes the nature of reality in the morning, he will get enlightened in that very morning.⁶⁴ Moreover, Samantabhadra attained enlightenment merely upon recognizing phenomena as self-display, and the possibility of following in his footsteps is mentioned numerous times in the anthology.

How are we to understand these conflicting models of liberation? Looking at the narratives of the anthology, we see that instant enlightenment only takes place in celestial realms, where gods and other divine beings are described as attaining liberation merely upon hearing a *rdzogs chen* teaching. On the terrestrial plane, instant enlightenment seems possible only in theory, and in practice, rGod Idem's anthology makes a strong case for a gradual path. Even Padmasambhava is presented as going through several stages of training, in which he experiences the luminous manifestations of the four visions, has to transcend them, expands his awareness and practices non-dual yogic discipline. These two narratives are particularly suited to articulate the vision of the gradual path, because they portray the liberating journey of two iconic figures in the tradition. If even Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal have to progress through gradual stages, how could a practitioner of lesser stature realize complete enlightenment in one instant?

4.6. Subtlety of enlightenment

The training of Padmasambhava and especially Ye shes mtsho rgyal through various stages of realizations also emphasizes subtlety and profundity of complete enlightenment. After realizing emptiness, perceiving visions of *dharmatā* reality and gaining different miraculous abilities, there is still more to attain. The sovereignty of these lofty *rdzogs chen* realizations is portrayed as deceptive in the sense that one may think that one has attained complete enlightenment due to the power and extent of one's awareness. The possibility of this type of misjudgment is depicted as rather pressing in *The Ten Steps*, for the text presents Ye shes mtsho rgyal as thinking that she is a Buddha three times: in the beginning of the sixth, seventh and eighth stage of her training. Excerpts are cited below from her dialogue with Padmasambhava taking place before he imparts her the corrective pith instructions on the eighth stage.

⁶⁴ *Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma*, UR II:502.

At that time, the master Padmasambhava said: "Lady of mKhar chen, would you estimate your continuum as high or low? Are you a sentient being or a Buddha?"

The lady of mKhar chen said: "I am an authentically perfected Buddha. I have realized the four innate (*sahaja*) experiences without experiencing them as primordially separate." ---

The master Padmasambhava said: "mTsho rgyal, lady of mKhar chen, your realization is like that, but you do not abide at the peak of realization, so the latent tendencies of earlier attachments have carried you into confusion. ---

Until you have cut off the latent tendencies of earlier attachments from the root, you do not have the power and you are like a crazy person. The extent of your wisdom of knowing is still small."

The lady of mKhar chen said: "Nirmāṇakāya guru! I have thirty-two special insights, so do not disparage the extent my wisdom of knowing as small. The two obscurations have been exhausted, so do not claim that I have latent tendencies."

The master Padma said again: "Lady of mKhar chen, you still have not perfected the wisdom of knowing, so do not claim that you have the wisdom of omniscience. When you still have latent tendencies of earlier attachments, do not disparage yourself by saying that you do not have them. ---"

The lady of mKhar chen asked: "Since I realized the abiding reality of objects of knowledge, how come I cannot have transcended saṃsāra yet?"

He said: "There is a dagger of self-grasping in the great primordially empty ground that has not been taken out. --- There is an intricate knot of subject and object in the naturally character-free mindfulness that has not been untied.---"

The lady of mKhar chen knew she had these faults and she said: "Nirmāṇakāya guru, I ask for an authentic pith instruction."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *De'i dus su slob dpon padma 'byung gnas kyi zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' khyod kyi rgyud tshod mtho dman gang tsam du phyin: khyod sems can yin nam sangs rgyas yin ces gsungs pas mkhar chen bza' yis zhus pa: bdag yang dang par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas yin te: lhan cig skyes pa'i nyams bzhi dang ye nas 'bral ma myong bar rtogs: --- slob dpon padma 'byung gnas kyi zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal khyod kyi rtogs pa de ltar yin te: khyod rtogs pa'i thog tu mi gnas pas: sngar shen gyi bag chags 'khrul par khyer nas --- da rung sngar shen gyi bag chags rtsad nas ma chod gyi bar du khyod rang la dbang med do: smyon pa dang dra'o: da rung mkhyen pa'i ye shes rgya chung ngo: zhes gsungs pas: mkhar chen bzas zhus pa: gu ru sprul pa'i sku bdag la lhag mthong gsun bcu gnyis yod pas: mkhyen pa'i ye shes rgya chung zhes skur pa ma 'debs: sgrib pa gnyis zad pas bag chags yod ces sgro ma 'dogs: ces zhus pas: yang slob dpon padma'i zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' khyod da rung mkhyen pa'i ye shes ma rdzogs pas thams cas mkhyen pa'i ye shes rang la yod ces sgro ma 'dog: da rung sngar zhen gyi bad chags yod pa la: med ces rang la skur pa ma 'debs: --- mkhar chen bzas zhus pas: bdag shes bya'i dngos po la gnas lugs rtogs pas: 'khor ba la 'da' mi nus pa ji ltar lags zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: gzhi ye stong chen po la bdag 'dzin kyi phur ba ma thon par 'dug: --- dran pa tshan ma rang grol la gzung 'dzin gyi rgya mdud ma 'grol par 'dug: --- mkhar chen bza'i rang la de ltar*

It is interesting that in this passage Ye shes mtsho rgyal insists that she is a Buddha and even debates her guru about it. In Tibetan literature, this type of defiance of one's guru is rather unusual in an exemplary guru-disciple relationship, like that of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal. Reading this dialogue certainly had and still has a startling effect on the *rdzogs chen* audience. Why is Ye shes mtsho rgyal presented as challenging Padmasambhava? One reason for this is the emphasis on the subtlety of enlightenment. The heights of all-pervading awareness are unfathomable even to an advanced practitioner. It is a reminder of humility for everyone who might want to claim enlightenment or high realization, and it sets an example to transcend one's present experiences instead of settling with or clinging to them.

4.7. Are the experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal the visions of direct transcendence?

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction and *The Ten Steps of Profound Key Points* describe the *rdzogs chen* training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal. Upon practicing breakthrough meditation, they have three stages of visionary experiences. In the fourth stage, they go beyond seeing visions and attain non-dual realization of empty wisdom awareness. Upon continued practice through various stages, they both attain enlightenment. The readers are bound to ask, are the experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal the four visions of direct transcendence? The visions in these narratives are considerably different compared to the standard doctrinal presentations of direct transcendence in *The Unimpeded Realization* and Seminal Heart literature in general, yet they are called the four experiential visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*) and are part of *rdzogs chen* training occurring in between breakthrough and eventual transcendence of visionary manifestations and enlightenment, just like the visions of direct transcendence in the prescriptive texts. Could this be an alternative account of direct transcendence? Can direct transcendence be this type of natural, technique-free visionary unfolding, or does it have to be a formal practice that employs the postures and gazes of direct transcendence? Do these narratives argue for the primacy of vision over cultivated visionary experiences?

First, we have to compare the *rdzogs chen* path in *The Intrinsically*

yod pa'i mtshang shes nas zhus pa: gu ru sprul pa'i sku: bdag la yang dag pa'i man ngag cig zhu 'tshal ces zhus pas: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:383-391.

Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction and *The Ten Steps* to ascertain whether the two narratives are sufficiently similar to conclude that they describe the same kind of training, experiences and realizations. On this basis, we can discuss the four visions of direct transcendence in the prescriptive texts and compare them with the experiences outlined in the two narratives.

4.7.1. Comparing Padmasambhava's and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's visionary training

Both *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* refer to the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal as the four experiential visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*). The texts also employ an alternative framework to categorize the path: the eight experiences. While *The Ten Steps* outline the eight experiences clearly in separate chapters, *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* does not identify the eight stages, but merely states that Padmasambhava attained the eight experiences. However, several stages or experiences can be discerned from the narrative, especially with the outline provided by *The Ten Steps*. The eight experiences in both *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* are presented in Table One.

Table 1.

Eight Experiences	<i>The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction</i>	<i>The Ten Steps of Profound Key Points</i>
First	Not described: only referred to as union of emptiness and appearance	Visionary journey to Bodh Gaya and pure lands
Second	Luminous visions of emptiness, clarity and bliss like the rising sun, clear whether the eyes were open or closed	Luminous visions of emptiness, clarity and bliss like the rising sun, clear whether the eyes were open or closed
Third	Expanded awareness and multiplicity of luminous visions that are one	Expanded awareness and multiplicity of luminous visions that are one
Fourth	Visions dissolve	Visions dissolve
Fifth	Non-dual yogic discipline (includes transcending desire, hopes and fears as Padmasambhava has to accept that he will not meet Śrī Simha)	Non-dual yogic discipline
Sixth	Natural enlightened activity	Cutting off the eight ropes of fondness to saṃsāra and nirvāna
Seventh		Eradicating superimpositions elaborated upon empty awareness
Eighth		Letting be

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction does not describe

Padmasambhava's first experience of the four visions, but merely states that the four visions arise upon letting the mind abide naturally at ease, i.e. breakthrough contemplation, and the initial experience entails the union of emptiness and appearance. Ye shes mtsho rgyal's first visionary experience in *The Ten Steps* is her long visionary journey. Her experience is also described as arising from her realization of emptiness of all appearances, although the text refers to her vision as containing an element of confusion and conceptuality.⁶⁶

The descriptions of the second and third visions in these two narratives are very similar accounts of seeing luminous visions of bliss, clarity and emptiness. In the second stage, both Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal see the visions whether their eyes are open or closed. The topic of expanding the mind is central in the third vision in both narratives and the visions manifest as multiple, but are realized as being one. The fourth vision in both narratives entails transcending all visionary manifestations, and in the fifth stage both Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal train in non-dual yogic discipline. However, while *The Ten Steps* clearly outlines the sixth, seventh and eighth stages, *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* only discusses one more stage of training after non-dual yogic discipline. This is labeled "natural enlightened activity" because it entails maintaining the realization of non-dual yogic discipline with the Great Perfection view, meditation as in the Secret Mantra and conduct like in the Vinaya. This difference in the final stages of the two narratives highlights Padmasambhava superiority: he is presented as needing less training and progressing more swiftly to enlightenment through the final three stages as they are collapsed into one.

The path structures in *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* are very similar. Frequently, the texts even employ the same phrases to express the disciples' realizations, such as in the fourth experience the visionary manifestations are purified as if they were "husks of intellect" and Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal realize that "all the contrived and nakedly free phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa were of one essence."⁶⁷ Thus, the texts clearly discuss the same Great Perfection training and realizations, even though there is definite individual variation, the most notable differences being Ye shes mtsho rgyal's visionary journey and the additional reflections she needs to apply in the last three stages.

⁶⁶ *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu*, UR V:344-345.

⁶⁷ *Ngo sprod rang rig rang gsal padma'i zhus lan*, UR V:158, *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu*, UR V:365.

4.7.2. *The visionary training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal vis-à-vis direct transcendence*

So, how do the descriptions of the four experiential visions and eight experiences in these narratives compare to the doctrinal presentations of direct transcendence? The four visions (*snang ba bzhi*) of direct transcendence are outlined in several texts in rGod ldem's anthology, such as the cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava*,⁶⁸ *The Secret Lamp*⁶⁹ and *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*. The description below is from *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* in the fourth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization*. The account is virtually identical to the descriptions of the four visions in the Seminal Heart literature in general. The basis of the practice is undistracted focus and unmoving eyes attained as a result of the breakthrough (*khregs chod*) contemplation. The yogi also applies particular bodily postures and gazes, in particular the postures of the lion, elephant and rishi and the upward, sideways and downward gazes. Upon gazing at natural light sources such as the sun, moon or a flame, the yogi perceives the first vision, the Direct Perception of *Dharmatā* (*chos nyid mngon sum*). Circular manifestations of light or *bindus* (*thig le*) begin to connect and form chain-like patterns together with the five colors of the five kinds of wisdom.

In the second vision of Experience's Increase (*nyams gong 'phel*), the light patterns take various, progressively complex shapes, such as vertical patterns of five-colored light, wheel spokes, square patterns, *stūpas*, thousand-petalled lotuses, luminous nets and increasingly huge manifestations of light. In the third vision of Optimizing Awareness (*rig pa tshad phebs*), images of peaceful and wrathful deities dawn in each *bindu*. Lastly, the fourth vision of Cessation of *Dharmatā* (*chos nyid zad pa*) entails all visionary manifestations subsiding within emptiness.⁷⁰

As we can see, this brief description of the four visions is different from the experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal. The first vision of the Direct Perception of *Dharmatā* does not bear much resemblance to Ye shes mtsho rgyal's first vision in *The Ten Steps*. mTsho rgyal does not see *bindus* linked into chains or turning into various luminous shapes, but her experience is a visionary journey with a storyline that lasts several weeks and includes visiting

⁶⁸ The cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* UR II:393-459.

⁶⁹ *The Secret Lamp: A Text on the Key points of the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i gnad yig gsang ba'i sgron ma) UR III:141-162.

⁷⁰ *Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal*, UR IV:346-348.

places on earth and meeting animals and people. Similarly, there are notable differences in the other stages of visions.

So, do these two narratives themselves regard the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal as direct transcendence? First, this paper will examine the terminology employed in the texts and then analyze the content. Both *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* refer to the first four experiences as the four experiential visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*),⁷¹ a phrase similar to the four visions (*snang ba bzhi*).

Can we equate the four experiential visions with the four visions or could these refer to something else? First of all, two relevant concepts have to be introduced: visionary experiences (*snang ba'i nyams*) and mental experiences (*shes pa'i nyams*). These are two kinds of visions or experiences that a yogi can have as part of the second vision, Experience's Increase. Visionary experiences (*snang ba'i nyams*) are the visions of the five colors of wisdom and various shapes, in other words, genuine direct transcendence visions, while the mental experiences (*shes pa'i nyams*) are other, lesser, but still valued type of visions, such as smoke, mirage and butter lamp. They also include experiences of meditative absorption (*samādhi*), such as emptiness and compassion.⁷² The terminology used in the two narratives aligns the visions of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal with the more profound type, the visionary experiences (*snang ba'i nyams*).

What about the phrase "experiential vision" (*nyams kyi snang ba*)? Does it appear elsewhere in Seminal Heart literature? "Experiential vision" does not appear in other texts of *The Unimpeded Realization* that discuss direct transcendence visions. However, in Klong chen pa's *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*, we have three occurrences of "experiential vision." All of them appear in citations from The Seventeen Tantras (*Unimpeded Sound* and *Garland of Pearls*), not in Klong chen pa's writing. Two of them likely refer to the second vision of direct transcendence, the Vision of Experience's Increase (*nyams gong 'phel kyi snang ba*),⁷³ but the third citation is clearly referring to direct transcendence visions in general, because the "experiential visions" are said to be emptied out in the fourth vision, Cessation of Dharmatā:

In the Vision of Cessation of Dharmatā,
Experiential visions are emptied out,
The body ceases and sensory objects cease too.
Having become liberated from the host of conceptuality,

⁷¹ *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu*, UR V:152, 352, 356.

⁷² *The Secret Lamp*, UR III:156.

⁷³ *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* 264, 390.

You are free from words as a basis of expression.⁷⁴

In addition, *The Illuminating Lamp* (*sGron ma snang byed*), which is Vimalamitra's commentary on *The Tantra of Unimpeded Sound*, contains numerous references to "experiential visions" in the context of direct transcendence visions. The text states:

Now, the second topic, the teaching on the experiential visions of the training that involves an object of focus. To expand on that, the external appearances become primordial wisdom. The various internal flickering conceptual thoughts and the intellect that thinks "this is" or "this is not" cease, and the visions of the colors, shapes and measures of the five kinds of wisdom arise.⁷⁵

This passage describes the experiential visions that arise when one trains with an object of focus, probably referring to a light source such as the sun or a flame. The visions that arise are clearly visions of direct transcendence, as they are said to be visions of the five kinds of wisdom. *The Illuminating Lamp* also refers to the experiential visions as subsiding before the vision of the Cessation of Dharmatā:

When the experiential visions have ceased naturally, there is the Cessation of Dharmatā.⁷⁶

It seems clear that even though the four visions in *The Ten Steps* have the qualifying word "experiential" (*nyams*), from the point of view of this terminological label, the text could be referring to the four direct transcendence visions. However, the individual visions in the two narratives are not called with the names used in the prescriptive texts. The terms Direct Perception of *Dharmatā*, Experience's Increase and Awareness's Optimization are conspicuously absent in the two narratives. Instead, Ye shes mtsho rgyal's visions are called the first experience of *dharmatā* (*chos nyid kyi nyams dang po*), the second experiential vision of *dharmatā* (*chos nyid nyams kyi snang ba gnyis pa*) and the third experiential vision (*nyams snang gsum pa*). Padmasambha-

⁷⁴ *Chod nyid zad pa'i snang ba ni// nyams kyi snang ba stongs nas ni// lus zad dbang po'i yul zad nas// rtog tshogs 'khrul pa las khrol nas// brjod gzhi'i tshig dang bral ba'o//* Citation from *The Tantra of Unimpeded Sound* in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*, 399.

⁷⁵ *Da ni gnyis pa dmigs rten la bslabs pa'i nyams kyi snang ba bstan pa ni/ de yang phyi snang ba ye shes su 'gyur/ nang 'gyu ba shes pa'i rtog pa sna tshogs pa'i nyams yin snyam pa dang/ min snyam snyom byed kyi blo zad pa'i snang ba/ ye shes lnga'i kha dog dang/ dbyibs dang tshad kyi snang ba shar te/* (*The Illuminating Lamp*, II:411). For more references to *nyams kyi snang ba*, see Ibid. I:32, I:73, II:471, II:506 and II:576.

⁷⁶ *Nyams kyi snang ba rang zad nas/ chos nyid zad par 'gyur ba ni/* (*The Illuminating Lamp*, I:32).

va's individual visions are not given any names, but they are just collectively referred to as the four experiential visions and the eight experiences.

What about the context and content of the visions? Do they suggest that these are the four visions of direct transcendence or something else? These are more difficult questions to answer conclusively at this point, but this paper shall compare and analyze the model of visionary *rdzogs chen* training in the two narratives vis-à-vis a standard description in the prescriptive texts and present a tentative view. The stages of training and experiences are summarized in Table Two.

Table 2.

Stage of visionary/ contemplative experience	Prescriptive texts such as <i>The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra</i>	<i>Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction</i>	<i>The Ten Steps of Profound Key Points</i>
First	Direct Perception of <i>Dharmatā</i> : <i>bindus</i> link together forming vajra chains and colors of five wisdoms manifest	Not described: referred to as the union of appearance and emptiness	Visionary journey to Bodh Gaya and pure lands
Second	Experience's Increase: visions take specific shapes	Luminous visions of bliss, clarity and emptiness	
Third	Awareness's Optimization: visions of deities	Expanded awareness and multiplicity of luminous visions	
Fourth	Cessation of <i>Dharmatā</i> : visions dissolve	Visions dissolve	
Fifth		Non-dual yogic discipline	
Sixth		Natural enlightened activity	Cutting off the eight ropes of fondness to <i>samsāra</i> and <i>nirvāṇa</i>
Seventh			Eradicating superimpositions elaborated upon empty awareness
Eighth			Letting be

Comparing the first visionary experience in the prescriptive texts and the two narratives, we see that the content is rather different. mTsho rgyal's first vision is a visionary journey, as opposed to seeing *bindus* connecting into chains, and the visual content of Padmasambhava's first experience is not described. However, there is one important indication that there may be a connection between the linked chains (*lu gu rgyud*) of *bindus* and mTsho rgyal's visionary journey, because, as we have seen above, after mTsho rgyal relates her visionary journey to Padmasambhava, he begins his analysis of her experience by equating appearances with the linked chains (see the section 4.3 mTsho rgyal's visionary journey). It seems that Padmasambhava is

referring to mTsho rgyal's experience as a purified experience of the linked chains, which themselves are said to be visual manifestations of dualistic perception. This reference connects mTsho rgyal's first vision to the framework of direct transcendence, because *bindus* connecting into linked chains dominates the first vision of direct transcendence.

The second vision in the two narratives is quite similar to the vision of Experience's Increase in the prescriptive texts, because it entails seeing luminous manifestations, although Padmasambhava and mTsho rgyal are not said to see specific shapes such as wheel spokes or lotuses. The third vision in the narratives and prescriptive texts is generally different, as Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal do not see the visions of deities that characterize Awareness's Optimization. Instead, mTsho rgyal sees visions of deities (Buddha Samantabhadra and Akṣobhya) during her first vision, i.e. her visionary journey, and Padmasambhava is briefly mentioned to have visions of the Eight Herukas in the very end of his training. However, the third vision in the two narratives and prescriptive texts contains an interesting parallel. Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal aim at expanding awareness on the third stage and their increasingly refined visionary experiences arise from the successful expansion of awareness. A notion similar to expansion is also there in the Optimization of Awareness, because the visionary manifestations reach the fullest expression in the maṇḍalas of the deities. It is also notable that in the prescriptive texts the goal of the practice is to realize that awareness (*rig pa*) is inseparable from space or expanse (*dbyings*) – a concept that is a kin to expansive awareness. Klong chen pa states in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*:

Looking at one's own condition in direct immediacy, the target aimed at in the Great Perfection tradition is held to be that which is termed "the realization of the non-duality of the expanse and awareness."⁷⁷

The fourth experience in the two narratives seems identical to the vision of Cessation of Dharmatā in the prescriptive texts, because in all these accounts the fourth stage entails the dissolution of all visionary manifestations within the empty nature of reality. However, the classificatory scheme of eight experiences in the two narratives still contains further stages of training before attaining enlightenment, such as the non-dual yogic discipline and meditations to refine the

⁷⁷ *rDzogs pa chen po 'di'i lugs kyi gtad so'i 'bem mngon sum rang ngo la blta ba dbying rig gnyis su med pa'i dgongs pa zhes bya bar 'dod de/ (The Treasury of Words and Meanings, 282).*

view and eradicate last traces of attachment.

The fifth experience, the non-dual yogic discipline, introduces an element of conduct as a higher training after the visionary practices. This emphasizes the importance of action and lifestyle, or the way one's realization manifests in the daily life and the way one's conduct engenders realization. The notion of conduct is present also in Padmasambhava's sixth and last training that includes the ethical conduct of the Vinaya and the meditation of the Secret Mantra. Notably, Ye shes mtsho rgyal's sixth and seventh stages of practice include an element of analytical reflection and refinement of the view, as she is instructed to examine various topics, such as the nature of awareness, hopes, fears, agent and object. Only mTsho rgyal's eighth and last stage of training does not contain any analytical elements, but evokes the pristine realization of the vision of Cessation of Dharmatā in its various instructions to simply let be or abide in the ultimate realization.

How should we understand the last stages of training in the two narratives after the visions dissolve? Could these be seen as elaborations on the vision of Cessation of Dharmatā? Is this a different view on Great Perfection training that considers further practice as necessary after the visions dissolve? Or does this demonstrate that the visions in the two narratives are not the visions of direct transcendence? The answer depends on whether we choose to view the visionary experiences and their dissolution in the two narratives as direct transcendence. There are certainly sufficient differences to discredit such identification. Perhaps the texts could be discussing a less known rubric, the four visions of breakthrough, described for example by Klong chen pa in *The Naturally Liberated Nature of the Mind (Sems nyid rang grol)*.⁷⁸ This would fit with the general outlook of *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, which is closely aligned with breakthrough and its key concept of primordial purity (*ka dag*). However, the description of the four visions of breakthrough by Klong chen pa does not contain discernible visionary content, not to mention a visionary journey, nor the idea of expanding awareness. Moreover, the concept of the four visions of breakthrough does not appear in *The Unimpeded Realization* or *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*.

In the context of the 14th century Great Perfection tradition in general and *The Unimpeded Realization* in particular, Padmasambhava is the figure that is associated with the transmission of the Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*) of the Pith Instruction Series (*Man ngag sde*) and its distinctive practice: direct transcendence. The transmission narra-

⁷⁸ Thondup, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 376-377.

tives describe briefly how he receives these teachings from Śrī Siṃha in India and transmits them to Tibet, especially to Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Khri srong lde btsan. *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* is the only text in *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* that describes Padmasambhava's Great Perfection training and his visionary experiences in detail. In the context of rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation, it would be appropriate if this detailed narrative of Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha was that of direct transcendence.

Despite the contextual appeal to regard these visions as direct transcendence, their content remains rather different. Even though we might expect some fluidity from a fourteenth century description of the practice, the depictions of the four visions were already relatively standard in the early Seminal Heart prescriptive literature. Thus, it seems that the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal are closer to tantric pure visions (*dag snang*) even though they contain notable parallels to direct transcendence.

The visions of direct transcendence are cultivated experiences that rely on specific key points and techniques, while the visions in the two narratives are presented as a natural unfoldment of experiences that contain notable individual variation and a somewhat different template of training compared to direct transcendence. While Klong chen pa notes that individual variation does occur in the four visions, the degree of variation presented in the two narratives seems too great to conclude that the texts discuss direct transcendence. However, more research on visionary *rdzogs chen* experiences in pre-fourteenth century sources, especially in narrative literature, is necessary to ascertain whether this type of fluidity could have been associated with direct transcendence experiences early on when the creativity of the Tibetan Renaissance was still affecting literary production.

4.8. Guru-disciple relationships

The narratives of both Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's training under their masters portray a model of guru-disciple relationships. They outline a vision of ideal social exchanges in Great Perfection training: how to follow a master and how to teach a disciple. They also highlight a central concept in Tibetan Buddhism: the importance of having a master and receiving personal guidance. This type of one-on-one dialogical guidance is still the way the Great Perfection transmission is passed on in the Northern Treasures and many other Tibetan traditions. These narratives also create a sense of lineage, because Padmasambhava passes Śrī Siṃha's teachings on to

Ye shes mtsho rgyal, using the same format and sequence of training and occasionally even the same phrases and instructions as Śrī Siṃha employed.

The Ten Steps contains abundant additional richness in its vision of guru-disciple relationships compared to the narrative of Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha. Padmasambhava is such a perfect disciple that it is hard to identify with him, but Ye shes mtsho rgyal is presented as struggling, making effort and failing to understand for a long time despite repeated attempts. The humanness of mTsho rgyal enables a yogi to identify with her, bringing the inspiration that the struggles will in the end lead to attainments.

Ye shes mtsho rgyal is also presented in *The Ten Steps* as a generally humble disciple, but with a definite bit of resistance and critical questioning of her guru's views. This aspect of her portrayal challenges the prevalent view in Tantric Buddhism that a disciple should follow a master obediently and uncritically. mTsho rgyal obeys the master only after she has come to the same understanding. She needs to resolve her doubts about the guru's judgment when he says that she is not enlightened but she thinks she is (see the citation above in the section on Eight Experiences). She is presented as true to herself and authentic in the sense that she cannot simply accept the guru's word, but has to realize its meaning first, even if it means that she has to debate and defy the master. Unlike the model of Tantric Buddhist submission, the text's vision is that one should be committed to realization, not to blind obedience. The guru's role is to help, but the disciples have to travel the journey, resolve their doubts and come to realizations by themselves.

5. Conclusion

Tibetan treasure anthologies have a uniquely heterogeneous character that accommodates many types of innovative literature. Undoubtedly this is one reason why we find such creative narratives in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation as the stories of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's Great Perfection training. By synthesizing doctrine and narrative, pith instructions and hagiography, philosophy and contemplation, *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* fit well in the integrative agenda of rGod ldem's anthology. In the context of *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, these transformation narratives bring to life the instructions on *rdzogs chen* meditation by portraying how the teachings are received and practiced by the iconic figures of the tradition.

These two narratives on Great Perfection training also present an interesting account of visionary experiences that seem to be pure visions (*dag snang*), though they contain notable similarities to visions of direct transcendence. The visions of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal have a four-fold structure including their eventual dissolution in the fourth stage and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's first vision contains a reference to the linked chains (*lu gu rgyud*). The contemplative context of the visions is also similar to direct transcendence as they result in enlightenment and are preceded by breakthrough meditations of letting the mind be at ease and investigating the origin, dwelling and destination of the mind. The narrative context of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation also begs the question whether these visions are direct transcendence, because Padmasambhava is the figure that presides over the transmission of the Seminal Heart and direct transcendence taught in the cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* and these two narratives are the only detailed depictions of his visionary *rdzogs chen* training under Śrī Śiṃha and his passing on the transmission to Ye shes mtsho rgyal.

Even though the context of rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation suggests that the visions of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal might be direct transcendence, the differences are too pronounced to make such an identification. The names of the visions are not those of direct transcendence, and even though they contain a four-fold structure with increasing visionary profundity and eventual dissolution, they do not feature the particular luminous shapes or mandalas of deities described in Seminal Heart literature on direct transcendence. The two narratives also present the visionary training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal with the rubric of eight experiences, adding further stages of training after the visions dissolve such as non-dual conduct and analytical reflections on the nature of reality. Thus, it seems that *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* describe visionary experiences that are closer to pure visions than direct transcendence. If this is the case, it points to a narrative discrepancy in rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation, because while direct transcendence is the trademark of Padmasambhava in rGod ldem's revelation, he is portrayed as attaining enlightenment via an alternative visionary *rdzogs chen* training that is not explained in the anthology. The puzzling character of visionary training in these two narratives presents another indication of the heterogeneous nature of rGod ldem's anthology despite his notable editorial hand and unifying themes.

The narratives on the transformative training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal are part of the conceptual framework of the vision of Samantabhadra, the main narrative theme that integrates

the texts and topics of the anthology into a literary whole. The two transformation narratives bring the vision of Samantabhadra to Tibet, the familiar place of traditional audiences, better than any other narrative in rGod ldem's anthology due to their detailed, rich examples of how to practice the Great Perfection teachings, the didactic vision of the primordial Buddha.

Padmasambhava is in a key role in the anthology in general and in the transformation narratives in particular, and he is intimately connected to Samantabhadra's vision. As Samantabhadra's second order emanation, Padmasambhava is a prime example of Samantabhadra's diachronic involvement with the world. By presenting Padmasambhava as Śrī Siṃha's disciple in India receiving *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* and then teaching it to Ye shes mtsho rgyal in Tibet, the transformation narratives depict Samantabhadra's presence in the formative moments of transmitting the lineage of these *rdzogs chen* teachings to Tibet. It is also notable that *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* conclude by stating that Ye shes mtsho rgyal became inseparable from Samantabhadrī, which evokes the idea that Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal became the human representatives of the primordial Buddha couple on earth. The continuum of authority extends also to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, who is a heart son and speech emanation of Padmasambhava.

As part of Samantabhadra's didactic vision, the transformation narratives map the *rdzogs chen* path to the audience in practical terms. Samantabhadra's vision encompasses the audience in its prophetic conception that all readers and recipients of the anthology are karmically destined to encounter *The Unimpeded Realization*. In accordance with this, *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* presents the entire text as a set of instructions given for the sake of future generations, especially people of low intelligence, which emphasizes the idea that these teachings are not just for the outstanding genii, but for a wide range of practitioners. The narrative discourse of *The Ten Steps* states:

When the great master Padmasambhava was residing again in the solitary place of mChims phu in bSam yas, mTsho rgyal, the lady of mKhar chen, asked him: "O great master! You are an emanation body, a blissful Buddha. You see the three times clearly without obstructions. Sentient beings like me who have low intelligence know the five poisons of afflictions very well. Whatever we do, we slip into the path of confusion. It is very difficult to progress on the path to enlightenment. For the sake of myself and those who will come later, I ask for a pith instruction that teaches the path free from confusion, a teaching that accords with our low intelligence, a key point that tames the afflictions difficult to tame."

He said: "mTsho rgyal, listen! It is very good that you asked for a

profound teaching for the sake of future people of low intelligence."⁷⁹

An important point highlighted by the transformation narratives is the need to transcend the visions to a complete realization of empty, non-dual wisdom devoid of visionary content. The intricate descriptions of how this is actually accomplished in the context of practice augment the Great Perfection instructions outlined in rGod ldem's anthology. Whether we regard the visionary experiences portrayed in the narratives as direct transcendence, these depictions bring richness to our understanding of visionary training contained in *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava*, *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* and other texts on direct transcendence in *The Unimpeded Realization*. While these doctrinal texts give robust descriptions on the formation of the direct transcendence visions in the first three phases, they do not offer much concerning the last vision apart from stating that in the end all the visions are dissolved within emptiness and the yogi attains enlightenment. The transformation narratives instead elaborate on how to transcend the visions, practice non-dual conduct and eradicate final traces of attachment. Thus, the alternative framework of visionary training in the transformation narratives expands the anthology's overall presentation of the final stages of *rdzogs chen* training.

The vision of the Buddhist path in the transformation narratives is clearly that of gradual cultivation, which is in contrast with many other statements and approaches favoring instant enlightenment both in rGod ldem's anthology and Great Perfection literature in general. Samantabhadra's awakening is instant upon his recognition of the first manifestations as self-display, but Padmasambhava and Yeshe mtsho rgyal attain awakening in stages. Their realization grows gradually and becomes so glorious and powerful during the higher stages that they even think of having attained enlightenment prematurely.

In the larger context of *The Unimpeded Realization*, the instant approach is integrated in the artful synthesis of the anthology – a synthesis that encompasses many vital aspects in the Great Perfection tradition: the Three Series, transmissions from the three prominent

⁷⁹ *sLob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas mchims phu'i yang dben na bzhugs pa'i dus su: mkhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal gyis zhus pa: kye slob dpon chen po lags: nyid ni bde gshegs sprul pa'i sku: dus gsum ma 'gag sa ler gzigs: bdag 'dra blo dman sems can rnam: nyon mongs dug lnga shes ches pas: ci byas 'khrul pa'i lam du shor: thar lam bkrod pa shin tu dka': bdag dang phyis 'byung don ched du: gang zag blo dang mthun pa'i chos: nyon mongs 'dul dka' 'dul ba'i gnad: mi 'khrul lam ston man ngag zhu: ces zhus so: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal nyon cig: ma 'ongs pa'i gang zag blo dman rnam kyi don du zab mo'i chos zhus pa shin tu legs so: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:322-323.*

masters, Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana, as well as the spontaneous, natural approach of instant recognition and the gradual path appreciative of ethics and meditation practices. The instant path is possible for Samantabhadra and celestial beings, but everyone on earth, even Padmasambhava, is presented as having to go through gradual training. The transformation narratives discuss only Great Perfection training, but in general rGod ldem's anthology values the practices of both sūtric and tantric vehicles. They are all assimilated in the metaperspective of the Great Perfection with the *rdzogs chen* view and practices ranked as superior. The appreciation of sūtric and tantric vehicles in rGod ldem's anthology is supported by the vision of Samantabhadra, because the primordial Buddha couple is credited for the spread of these earlier vehicles through their emanations as Śākyamuni, Vajrapāṇi and Vajravārāhī.

The extensive involvement of Samantabhadra in the history of the world is one aspect of narrativizing the primordial Buddha – the paradox of the timeless *dharmakāya* Buddha narrated into the finite structures of history and time. Samantabhadra's enlightenment unfolds in the mythical time of the early stages of cosmogony and his vision spans all across history. Through the paradox of narrativizing the primordial Buddha and ascribing him a unique agency and vision, the narratives of rGod ldem's anthology are truly divinized. The precursor of this idea is the Mahāyāna notion that the three bodies of a Buddha are one in essence. In rGod ldem's anthology, this Mahāyāna notion is developed into the distinctive narrative theme, the vision of Samantabhadra, that forms a unique, gnostic space, in which all the practices and doctrines are situated and gain a deeper, interrelated meaning. Samantabhadra's compassionate presence extends from cosmic origins through mythical transmission to predestined revelation and beyond, pointing to the ultimate non-duality of history and timeless wisdom, form and empty awareness, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

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