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Devotion, a Lamp That Illuminates the Ground: Non-Referential Devotional Affect in Great Completeness

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Abstract: I explore how devotion (*mos gus*) is re-interpreted as non-dual and non-conceptual through Mahāyoga tantric creation (*skyed*) and completion (*rdzogs*) stage practices as an expression of the ground (*bzhi*) for Longchenpa (*klong chen rab 'byams*, 1308–1364) and Jigme Lingpa (*'jigs med gling pa*, 1730–1785). Devotion, a felt-sense, allows for there to be something akin to a residue from these mental constructs that allows for a practitioner to carry over her experience into a later phase of meditation. Firstly, devotion, as an affect is necessarily non-dual because tantra entails pure perception (*dag snang*). Secondly, I demonstrate that for Longchenpa, tantra is a method that relies on non-conceptual frameworks. Finally, I address how devotion pivots ordinary mind (*sems*) towards recognizing this ground. Through this progression, there is a profound synchronicity between full-on openness to devotion and the infinitely spacious reality.

Keywords: Nyingma; great completeness; Tantra; Vajrayana Buddhism

1. Introduction

The Heart Essence, Vast Expanse (*klong chen snying thig*) is a Nyingma (*rnying ma*) cycle of teachings and practice, which was discovered by Jigme Lingpa (*'jig med gling pa*, 1730–1798) ([Lingpa et al. 2008](#)). This cycle of teachings adapts tantric Mahāyoga meditative practices such as guru yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) as preliminary practices for higher tantric or Great Completeness (*rdzogs pa chen po*) meditations. In this paper, I explore how the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse tradition defines devotion and uses it in guru yoga practices. Piecing together how the tradition understands guru yoga and defining devotion, I suggest that devotion functions in these practices as a non-conceptual, embodied sensation. This project began as a translation project of two texts by the Third Dodrupchen Jigme Tenpa'i Nyima (*rdo grub chen 'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 1865–1926), *The Instructions of Guru Yoga* (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor nyams len khrid yig*) and *The Staircase of Guru Yoga* (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor la nye bar mkho ba'i yi ge*). The hope was that these texts would discuss how devotion is crucial in guru yoga practices. However, there is little explanation found throughout these works. It was necessary to piece together other sources that weave components of guru yoga practice with devotion. For this reason, I turn to contemporary works such as Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher* and Longchenpa's *Seven Treasures* (*mdzod bdun*).

I would like to begin this paper with defining the categories of affect vs. emotion in the same vein that Dr. Niki Clements presented at the 2019 American Academy of Religions conference in San Diego. Dr. Clements presented various views on how emotion and affect are categorized either as synonymous or varying in differentiations throughout “affective neuroscientific research” ([Clements 2019](#)). Some researchers such as Duncan and Feldman suggest that affect and emotion are used interchangeably. While others like [Frijda \(2009\)](#) state that “emotion is feeling, and affect is the experience of pleasure or pain”. One take away from this presentation is that “affects are pre-personal but have effects on

subjectivity” (Clements 2019). For my purposes, I draw on how affect is broader than a cognitive and conceptual state and speaks to the embodiment of a felt-sense that arises for a person. Brian Massumi defines affect as “an ability to affect and be affected” (Clements 2020). We understand that there is a subjective experience that moves or empowers a practitioner. Perhaps this sense of embodiment is crying when a practitioner imagines her teacher on her head. This process may or may not include an emotion, a state of mind, a mood that may be more localized to motivation or reaction. The affect of a practitioner crying may arise prior to her thoughts that “she longs to be with her teacher”. Likewise, this affect may linger long after a practitioner imagines her teacher on her head. The embodied felt-sense may stay with her throughout the day or even longer. It is this longevity of affect in the body that I want to point out. Additionally, I want to demonstrate that performing a refuge or bodhisattva verse, or guru yoga allows a practitioner to embody an affect of devotion, faith, love, and compassion that lingers throughout the practices and prior and post-meditations. This is crucial to understanding how affect plays into how a practitioner engages in devotion that benefits her practice without conflating these embodied experiences as reactive emotional patterns.

As the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse stresses the import of devotion in guru yoga practices, there is little to no research on how devotion informs a practitioner during these meditations. Devotion also plays a significant role in informing relationships within Tibetan culture. Sarah Jacoby’s *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* highlights the relationship between a Tibetan female visionary Sera Khandro Künzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangpo (1892–1940) with her Tantric partner, Drimé Özer (1881–1924) (Jacoby 2014). Jacoby’s book highlights how this relationship is informed by Tibetan Nyingma elements such as the relationship between Yeshe Tsogyal and Padmasambhava. Both Sera Khandro and Yeshe Tsogyal’s lives incorporated an immense devotional affect for their male counterparts, again, demonstrating the significance devotion plays in Tibetan culture. Holly Gayley’s manuscript *Love Letters from Golok: A Tantric Couple in Modern Tibet* addresses the relationship of a tantric couple, Khandro Tāre Lhamo (1938–2002) and Namtrul Jigme Phuntsok (1944–2011) (Gayley 2016). Gayley investigates this relationship as a “healing power of union” and explores the role of gender and identity through translating a series of “love letters” (Gayley 2016). These two manuscripts dovetail how lives of Tibetans were influenced by Buddhist practice. Additionally, these relationships reflect notions of devotion used within guru yoga practices in daily life, outside of formal tantric practices. My work provides new perspectives of these other projects as it focuses on defining devotion. I open the ways in which devotion influences other aspects in Tibetan culture by showing how devotion functions in guru yoga practice for the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse tradition.

2. Great Completeness

Great completeness (rdzogs pa chen po) refers to atiyoga or the highest inner tantra from the Nyingma presentations of the Buddhist nine vehicles. Yet, the Great Completeness tradition incorporates various other practices such as Mahāyoga tantric guru yoga. Ati means highest, most excellent, and yoga refers to the practice or joining two things together. In this way, guru yoga practices used in the Great Completeness tradition joins together the view of its highest vehicle with other “lower” vehicles or methods. In this case, guru yoga practices are practiced in the context of the Great Completeness view.

Great Completeness is the highest view in the Nyingma tradition and classified into three categories: Mind Series (sems sde, cittavarga), Vast Expanse Series (klong sde, abhyantaravarga), and Quintessential Instructions Series (man ngag sde, upadeśavarga). These three categories ebbed and flowed in popularity throughout Dzogchen’s history. The mind series were the most popular in early Dzogchen texts, dating back to the eighth century, while the Quintessential Instructions Series gained popularity from the eleventh century onwards and continues to hold its prominence over the other two series. Each series emphasizes a different aspect of practice, which are simply different approaches to the nature of mind.

The Mind Series asserts that all appearances are the power (rtsal) of the play of the mind, meaning that the mind is the basis of all appearances, which are all phenomenal existents. Pema Ledrel Tsal (pad ma las 'brel rtsal, 1291–1315) explains that, “the meaning of power is the self-power of primordial wisdom, which is the aspect of mere awareness and mere moving”. The mind is established as the base from which all appearances arise and this base is recognized “as an empty and luminous awareness, mind itself (sems nyid)”. This series does not assert that these appearances are mind but arise from the capacity of the mind—similar to how a reflection arises in a mirror. The reflection in the mirror is not the mirror itself but appears due to the power of that mirror.

The Vast Expanse series emphasizes the empty aspect of mind in that the aspect of mind and all appearances do not ultimately exist because intrinsic awareness (rig pa) is free from divisions of mind and appearances and existing and non-existing. From this perspective, having devotion for something does not fall outside of the person expressing that devotion. I ask how does this new context broaden our understanding of devotion in Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, “the Division on Vast Expanse [the Ultimate Sphere], asserts that self-arisen primordial wisdom and phenomenal existents are self-arisen (rgyan) of the vast expanse, the ultimate nature (chos nyid)”, (Rabjam 2007).

The Quintessential Instructions Series does not use supports, such as establishing the mind as the base, in meditation but introduces mind itself directly to a practitioner. In this way, this approach does not introduce mind or appearances because that introduction necessarily entails mental analysis, which is the antithesis to liberation or realizing the primordial pure nature, which in turn is free from any conceptual construct like mind, expressions, and discriminations.

The Quintessential Instructions Series is heralded by the Nyingma tradition as the superior method to the Mind Series and Vast Expanse Series. This is not surprising due in part to how the Nyingma tradition adopted and incorporated particular texts, which stem from The Seventeen Tantras (rdzogs chen rgyud bcu bdun), which are adopted into the Bima Nyingthig, accredited to Vimalamitra. Eventually, the Bima Nyingthig would be incorporated into one cycle of teachings with the Khandro Nyingthig and renamed as the Heart Essence Series (snying thig).

The Heart Essence grew in popularity and number of texts from the eleventh to fourteenth century due to two contributors, Pema Ledreltsal and Longchen Rabjam (klong chen rab 'byams, 1308–1363). Pema Ledreltsal was a treasure revealer who discovered the Khandro Nyingthig (mkha' 'gro snying thig). The Khandro Nyingthig or The Heart Essence of the Dākinīs are considered as the collection of teachings that Padmasambhava gave Princess Pema Sel after he revived her from death. Princess Pema Sel was to reveal these teachings in a later life, which was through her rebirth as Pema Ledrel Tsal.

Longchen Rabjam, a scholar and most well-known Nyingma lineage holders brought together the Bima Nyingthig and Khandro Nyingthig and wrote commentaries on each collection of texts, Bima Yangtig and Khandro Yangtig, respectively. Additionally, he wrote a third collection called the Zabmo Yangtig. These five texts collectively are called the Nyingthig Yabzhi.

2.1. Heart Essence, Vast Expanse

The Heart Essence, Vast Expanse (klong chen snying thig) is a collection of teachings revealed by Jigme Lingpa ('jigs med gling pa, 1730–1798). These teachings are a distillation of the Nyingthig teachings of Longchenpa. Jigme Lingpa's secret biography describes that Jigme Lingpa received these teachings through a series of visions of Longchenpa. The Heart Essence, Vast Expanse is a collection of eleven texts, which include instructions and commentaries on the Heart Essence collection.

More broadly, the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse collections contain various types of tantric practices such as foundational (sngon 'dro) and main tantric practices, creation (skyed rim) and completion stages (rdzogs rim), and dzogchen practices. The combination of these practices are reminiscent to how the overall Nyingma tradition came into contact with tantric practices and created innovative interpretations of these practices. Overall, the Nyingma tradition adapted and integrated both Mahāyoga and Dzogchen practices in a way that leads to new interpretations and uses of both traditions that are primarily used even in commentary practices (Germano 1994).

David Germano's quote above demonstrates that the Great Completeness tradition incorporates tantra, specifically Mahāyoga tantra into the Great Completeness fold. Within this, we understand that guru yoga, guru devotion, and creation and completion stage practices have an innovative context by being practiced within a different view.

2.2. Mahāyoga Tantra: Nyingma Adaption and Usage for Great Completeness

Tantra (rgyud) means “continuum”. The term, “Mantrayana” is a synonym for tantra. One commentary on Jigme Lingpa's Treasury of Precious Qualities: Book Two explains the etymology of the term mantrayana.

In Sanskrit, “mantra” is a conflation of the elements “manas”, which means “mind”, and “traya”, which means “to protect”. In other words, mantra is a protection for the mind. This mind is also described as awareness (rig pa) or, speaking in terms of the result, as self-cognizing primordial wisdom (rig pa'i ye shes) (Lingpa 2010).

This quote correlates how tantra, whether being a text or practice, refers to the mind. This mind is not a dualistic or ordinary mind but as stated above, an awareness that is self-cognizing wisdom that has always been present. Tantras are a means to uncover this mind for a practitioner when she has not already done so.

Transmissions of tantra are understood to occur through blessings (byin kyi brlabs), which are a source of power that grants a practitioner the ability to transform. Tantra is not conceptualized as a separate object from a teacher who offers teachings to a student. Even the separation of student and teacher is a misnomer for how tantra and Tibetan tantric Buddhism understand the relationship between tantra and the lineage from which the teachings permeate.

Throughout beginningless and endless time, countless manifestations of Vajradhara have successively appeared, abide at present, and will appear in the future, all giving innumerable variations of teachings to those of extremely keen acumen who are to be guided. They were spoken by those manifestations of Vajradhara who have appeared in the past, throughout beginningless time. Vajrapāṇi and others—immeasurable hosts of bodhisattvas—preserved these categories of unsurpassable teachings, the inconceivable tantras (Rabjam 2007).

Vajradhara refers to the primordial Buddha or Dorje Chang (rdo rje 'chang). The hagiographical descriptions of transmission explain that tantra, as writings and teachings, precede Buddhism and the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, making the texts and practices emanations from reality.

Vajrapāṇi (phag pa rdo rje), one of the eight great bodhisattvas, is attributed to introducing the tantras to the human realm. Tulku Thondup tells this story of transmission:

As the Buddha prophesied, because of the power of blessing of the tantric discourses of Vajrapāṇi to the five excellent beings, King Ja, Vyākaraṇavajra, who was practicing the outer tantras, had seven dreams. Thereafter, many tantric texts written on gold paper in malachite ink and an image of Vajrapāṇi two feet high and fashioned out of precious jewels descended from the sky onto the roof of his palace ... This awakened his karma of previous experience of tantra, and he understood the meaning of the chapter entitled Dorje Sempa Zhalthong (Seeing the Face of Vajrasattva). (Lingpa et al. 2008)

The human dissemination of tantra occurred throughout India, which Longchenpa states as “Sahora, Sri Lanka, and Oddiyana”, and eventually into Tibet.

The Nyingma tradition or “Old Translation School” really refers to the set of tantras that were “translated into Tibetan during the period beginning with Bairotsana (8–9th cent., bai ro tsa na) and others of the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet (9th cen.) (Eimer and Germano 2002). These texts include “some of the tantras of the three inner tantras (mahā, anu, and ati) are included in the Kanjur collection, but there is a separate collection of the three inner tantras known as the Nyingma Gyübum in twenty-five (or thirty-one) volumes” (Thondup 2014). The three inner tantras, therefore, are the focus of the Nyingma tradition.

The Nyingma tradition divides tantra into six classes, which are divided in the way that they relate to how a practitioner relates to phenomena in relation to ultimate truth (Thondup 2014). These six classes are (1) kriyāyoga (bya rgyud), (2) upayoga (spyod rgyud), (3) yogatantra (rnal 'byor rgyud), (4) mahāyoga (rnal 'byor chen po), (5) anuyoga (rjes su rnal 'byor), and (6) atiyoga (shin tu rnal 'byor). The first three are considered the “outer” tantras, while the last three are called the “inner” tantras. While all these classes of tantra hold various views, practices, and results, Tulku Thondup states that each one of them incorporates the same two stages of practice called creation stage (Skt. utpatti, Tib. bskyed rim) and completion stage (Skt. niṣpanna, Tib. rdzogs rim) (Thondup 2014).

Creation stage practice, in general, is when a practitioner imagines a deity or being a deity. Jamgön Kongtrul describes the process as:

To remedy this disturbance, we use a method of practice in which we consider our body and the bodies of all beings as being the deity's body. When we practice this way, we don't see the deity's body as made of matter, but as empty yet appearing, appearing yet empty. Form and emptiness are one, like a reflection in a mirror or an appearance in a dream. (Kongtrul 2008)

The imagination is used to transform a practitioner's ordinary perception of seeing subject–object. The creation stage allows a practitioner to envision her form and environment in an alternate way that points towards what Kongtrul says, seeing emptiness and appearing. Empty in that something is empty of an inherent nature but also appears. This transformation for a practitioner to see her appearance in an alternative way, allows her to approach the Nyingma view that her body does not inherently exist, which allows a practitioner to cut her attachment and aversion to her body and other external objects.

The creation stage process incorporates conceptual methods. Jamön Kongtrul explains:

In the beginning, this form of meditation is a conceptual notion. Imagining our body as the deity's body, as Avalokiteshvara for example, is only a mental production. But it is still useful. As long as we are thinking, “I am Avalokiteshvara; I am not this ordinary body of matter”, the turbulence of attachment and aversion subsides. As our ability in meditation is refined, the deity in our meditation appears naturally, through the inherent power of the mind. It is no longer a mental production but is the experience of appearance and emptiness arising as one, like an enchantment. (Kongtrul 2008)

The creation stage allows a practitioner to incorporate conceptual methods so she transforms her ordinary identity that causes attachment and aversion into being an entity that expresses the ultimate nature of mind. Through consistent familiarization with this image, a practitioner uses less and less conceptual thought to be a deity thereby being what that deity represents. Creation stage requires effort and thought for a practitioner to transform into a deity.

In the context of Jigme Lingpa guru yoga practice, completion stage is the non-conceptual stage that follows creation stage. The Sanskrit term, niṣpanna, Jamön Kongtrul explains, means “that which is ultimately true, the natural state, or the true nature” (Kongtrul 2008). This stage of practice allows a practitioner to rest within that ultimately true natural state. A practitioner familiarizes with this state through creation stage practice but incorporates conceptual thought and effort to do so, therefore, the completion stage practice drops away that effort and thoughts so a practitioner rests in that state, which is conjured through the creation stage practice. The Treasury of Knowledge also describes the completion stage as “the nonconceptual yoga or the yoga of the natural state” (Kongtrul 2008).

These two phases of practice are incorporated throughout tantra because a practitioner is unable to go from being an “ordinary” being to rest in the nature of mind without some support.

Kongtrul points out that an ordinary person “entangled in the net of discursive thinking” would not be able to train in the completion phase, since it does not involve thoughts. Therefore, one first purifies the ordinary thought process by means of the yoga of creation, which entails the imagination of the deity and the mandala. Then, when one has

understood the nature of thought, one embarks on the cultivation of the phase of completion. (Kongtrul 2008)

For similar reasons, Great Completeness uses these two stages in tantra so that a practitioner familiarizes with the nature of mind through using conceptual methods that also allow her to rest in a non-conceptual state.

Tantric practices engage in embodied practices, which for Longchenpa do not rely upon mental constructs. Guru yoga is a common tantric practice used throughout this particular tradition. The basic structure of guru yoga instructs a practitioner to visualize her teacher as a specific deity such as Padmasambhava, while the practitioner imagines herself as another deity like Vajrayoginī. Here we begin to see how guru yoga engages and relies upon the student-teacher relationship, which itself suggests a dualistic and hierarchical structure. The practitioner who is Vajrayoginī gazes at her teacher as Padmasambhava with intense devotion.

The success of the practice depends upon a practitioner's devotional affect already in place for her teacher. This dualistic devotional affect then is superimposed upon the already understood relationship between Padmasambhava and Vajrayoginī. There is a "student" who is devoted (*mos gus*), towards another "person". Initially, this relationship is mentally constructed but being a tantric practice, the emphasis is placed upon the embodied sensation of devotional affect rather than thinking, "I have devotion for my teacher".

Creation phase practice inculcates and strengthens a practitioner's devotional affect through specific devices while completion phase practice provides space where a practitioner senses the effects of this devotion. These two phases of guru yoga are also set within the context of a specific view, pure perception for the Great Completeness tradition. Pure perception is the process whereby a practitioner begins to perceive that everything is what Great Completeness understands to be pure nature and empty of an essence. Visually, these appearances are described as being Buddhas, *ḍākinis*, and *yidams*, which are embodiments of that nature. Practitioners who see with "pure perception" are undercutting their "ordinary" sense of seeing subject and object with a different perspective. This is one bridge that is used within tantric practices that aids a practitioner to "open up" to Great Completeness's understanding of the ground. This view provides the overall framework that transcends a dualistic or referential devotional affect that is described through the creation and completion phases.

Tantric practices use physical modalities with devotional affect so that a practitioner re-orientes how she engages in her world. These practices, especially guru yoga practices, have two phases. Creation stage allows a practitioner to forcefully imagine that her world is full of Buddhas and other emanations of pure perception. During this phase, a practitioner effortfully and purposefully thinks of her devotion for her teacher and other objects of refuge to conjure up a particular affective state. The completion stage follows the creation stage and allows a practitioner to "let go" of engaging in effortful practice. No longer does a practitioner imagine that her teacher is on her head as Padmasambhava but instead "rests" in a state of openness. This openness, I suggest, occurs because a practitioner uses her relationship and devotion to her teacher to experience a sense of connection, which occurs by re-imagining that her world is not constrained by subject-object boundaries that are typically constructed.

3. Devotion

Devotion is a key emphasis throughout every section in guru yoga practice. Commentaries on Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga reiterate that a practitioner is to recite and embody "a sense of devotion" when doing this practice. This sense of devotion embeds itself in the practice through the physical senses. A practitioner engages her imagination and "sees" her teacher, repetitively recites syllables to reinforce her visualization, and feels devotion for her teacher. While the visualization and recitation changes, devotion permeates throughout the entire practice. There are moments in the instructions when a practitioner is reminded to cultivate devotion but as I show throughout this paper, devotion is the capability to stay focused on an object while also having an ability to merge with or be that object. Devotion for the teacher is reflected in the verses, prayers, and instructions, and combined with other

physical modalities throughout the instructions, this devotion enhances in a practitioner and is the vehicle that connects a practitioner with her teacher. This connecting with the teacher then allows a practitioner to sense a process of dissolving ideas of self and other, which is the main objective for guru yoga.

Guru devotion is a term that refers to this student-teacher connection. This cultivated relationship is a hinge upon which tantra operates because it links together how a practitioner perceives her teacher as Buddha with eventually perceiving herself as a Buddha. More broadly, a practitioner begins to dissolve conceptual barriers that are considered obstacles to liberation. Therefore, a practitioner's devotion to her teacher operates locally and universally in that devotion dissolves a feeling of separation of self and other or student and teacher, as practiced and cultivated through guru yoga practices, and then dissolves the same sense of self and other with all beings and even objects and experience.

Devotion (*mos gus*) is one method that engages with a relational interaction such between a student and teacher. We see this context within guru devotion, when a student commits to a specific teacher. The Great Completeness tradition uses guru devotion and the relationship between student and teacher in another context. In this context, the boundaries between student and teacher or self and other dissolve. This dissolution process occurs especially in guru yoga practices when a practitioner engages in this devotional relationship in creation and completion stage practices. There is a transition from dualistic to non-dualistic experiences.

I also suggest that devotion is affective. It is affective in that practitioners incorporate their sensitivity for their teacher into guru yoga. At the time of practice, practitioners may not experience an emotion for their teacher but do sense, physically, some sensitivity for that teacher as they see that teacher as Padmasambhava. Patrul Rinpoche explains that practitioners should gaze "'longingly' at the heart of the teacher" in the same way that Vajrayoginī stares at Padmasambhava (Rinpoche 1998). Here, longingly is also described as a sense of "impatience to be with the teacher, this being the only source of joy" (Rinpoche 1998). Practitioners arouse a particular sensitivity when practicing creation stage.

Overall, there are some paths, like *sūtra*, that emphasize adopting particular ways of thinking through reasoning and logic, while other paths, such as tantra, incorporate other methodologies that are less conceptual. By this, I mean that rather than thinking, "all phenomena are impermanent", tantra introduces and implements methods that are more akin to incorporating the five sense faculties through imagination, reciting syllables, or even moving winds or air throughout the body. By using these embodied ritualized practices, tantra infuses the body with a specific disposition that is re-enforced through practice. In the context of guru yoga, this disposition is devotion, which develops through specific bodily practices like (1) embodied imagery, (2) mantra recitation, (3) light, and (4) specific locations of the body.

3.1. Interest

The Tibetan term *mos gus* is translated as devotion, yet this Tibetan term is a compound of two other words, *mos pa* and *gus pa*. Jamgön Mipham (1846–1912), defines *mos pas* as "interest means holding on to the certain form of a determined object. Its function is to not lose the object" (Mipham 1997). The Great Treasury of Tibetan Word defines *mos pa* in several ways: (1) Non-intentional verb equivalent to confidence or a mind that aspires, and (2) one of the subdivisions of the five object-determining mental factors; (a) as possessing knowledge, (b) which apprehends only an actual thing, and is not distracted by another object (Mipham 1997). I choose to translate *mos pa* as "interest" to reflect that the mind has a liking and focus on an object, like a teacher who will definitely bring results that a subject delineates. The first definition equates interest with confidence (*yid ches pa*), which is one of the three types of faith (*dad pa*) mentioned above that is also to be cultivated through guru yoga practices.

Additionally, a mind that aspires implies that the mind is oriented in a very precise way, for example, "a mind that aspires or has confidence for ultimate truth (*bden don la mos pa*)" (Tibetan Dictionary). Here, interest is understood to be quality of mind that is interested in something. In guru

yoga, a practitioner aspires to mix her mind with that of, for example, Guru Rinpoche in the Nyingma school, or a deity and her root teacher (rtsa ba'i bla ma), who are embodiments of wisdom. This particular practice is necessary because texts such as Longchenpa's commentary on the All-Creating Majesty (kun byed rgyal po) suggests, a practitioner is unable to transition straight from delusion to wisdom (ye shes). In commenting on this work, Lama Tenzin Samphel, trained since childhood in Nyingma traditions, said:

If we were to try in a normal way to go from our ordinary existence where we are belabored by attachment, resentment, and delusion right into a straight identification of the Dzogchen view, we would not be able to. The means for stilling and calming attachment and delusion is the practice of guru yoga. This minimizes the power of attachment and delusion which would otherwise interfere with the ability to receive the blessing and identification. (Samphel 2013)

Therefore, Dzogchen incorporates guru yoga practice and a practitioner's aspiration to identify wisdom onto a path.

It is still clear that this intention is not all that occurs. Devotion also has the function of focusing the mind. This is reflected in its second definition: Interest is a simple process where the mind is not distracted by other objects. In other words, interest strengthens the mind. As one of the five determining mental factors (yul nges lnga), interest plays a significant role in keeping the mind on its object. Interest then operates with other determining mental factors to intensify concentration on an object.

In the context of guru yoga, this means that a mind, which possesses interest, is undistracted, or at least less distracted while in meditation. It can stay the course. It is reliable. This non-distraction permeates non-meditation practices when the mind is oriented to the same object in various activities. The focus of meditation in Jigme Lingpa's foundational practice guru yoga is on a deity, Padmasambhava, a living teacher and that oneself is Vajrayoginī. The quality that these two figures represent is wisdom. Therefore, interest means that the mind is oriented towards or focused on those specific objects and the qualities that are infused with those objects, and also suggests that one in fact feels so, or is willing to believe that this is so. In this way, interest is the mind not wavering from these objects similar to how a violinist does not allow her mind to sway from the music that she plays during a concert.

Interest also arouses affect. As practitioners keep their interest on an object, they develop an affect or affinity for it. Descriptions in Jigme Lingpa's practice are beautifully pleasing to the eye as a way to arouse a deep interest and liking for the visualization. Other guru yoga practices such as The Great Bliss Queen ritual discussed in Klein's *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, and the Art of the Self* purpose "is to become the Great Bliss Queen by enhancing the mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom that have prepared one to become her" (Klein 1995). In becoming the Great Bliss Queen, a practitioner imagines that she is red with a "desirous expression on her face," indicating the force of her compassion to help all beings" (Klein 1995). Being the Great Bliss Queen or Yeshe Tsogyal in Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga implies that a practitioner has an affective disposition. There is longing devotion. There is ceaseless compassion. A practitioner in having interest also has affect.

Dissolving a sense of self and other occurs through guru yoga practice because this practice creates space for a practitioner to be the meditational object, such as Padmasambhava. Guru yoga practices also encourage these types of moments when a practitioner does not meditate on an object but simply is the object or embodies the object. At this moment of meditation, a practitioner's interest is on being the object so there is no separation. This allows for a practitioner then to move on to engaging how Dzogchen uses an identification of the view as the actual meditation.

3.2. Respect

Gus pa, the second half of mos gus, is defined as: (1) A non-intentional verb, to pay respect with a clear mind (2) a word, which places oneself in an lower (dma') position, or (3) reverence, respect (Tibetan Dictionary). The example in *The Great Treasury of Tibetan Words* is gus pa nam rgyal nas

ched du zhu snying or “from respecting the victorious one, I offer my heart”. The positioning between oneself and another does not connote that there is a power difference. There is more a sense that one person has something to offer the other in the “lower” position but both individuals have the same potential. I translate this term as “respect”. Respect too suggests that there is a connection between a subject and her object. Respect or offering from a place of respect allows a subject to receive something such as realizing wisdom. This respect, I suggest, strengthens a sense of trust and connection between two individuals. Respecting in that practitioners know and trust that they will receive something beneficial from this relationship.

From a philosophical viewpoint, Buddhist paths and practices are described as methods that dissolve a sense of self (bdag 'dzin) and purify afflictive obstructions and obstructions to omniscience. Guru yoga practices cultivate a specific relationship between a practitioner and the awakened qualities of teacher or iconic deity. In this way, respect is important in helping a student savor a sense of letting go of her mistaken sense of self, defined as a cause of suffering, and allows her to familiarize and notice qualities, such as ease, connection, confidence, etc. and ultimately, especially wisdom. In this way, a practitioner does not subjugate herself in an inferior position to the deity or teacher but recognizes that she (a subject) possesses the same qualities as these objects that are being venerated. As Nagarjūna's *In Praise of the Dharmadhatū* states, “I bow to you, the dharmadhātu, who resides in every sentient being. But if they aren't aware of you, they circle through this triple being” (Nagārjūna). Devotion, in this context, is actually the equalizer not the status differentiator.

Reassembling these two pieces back into devotion, we understand that this term suggests an interest, which also indicates a specific relationship between the student practitioner's mind and the guru on which her mind is focused. Moreover, the guru, imaged clearly in one's mind, which strengthens through repeated visualization practices, is a particular figure who represents particular qualities, and cultivates a relationship to that object, finally a one-to-one “relationship” with that guru nature—experiencing it as one's own. This interest that was once perceived toward an external object becomes an interest of being that object, so that a practitioner is the object. There is no longer an interest “in” but an interest and focus to “be”. As is seen in Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga:

I visualize myself clearly as Vajrayoginī. From the heart-centre of the lama a beam of light, red and warm, suddenly bursts out and touches my heart. Instantaneously I am transformed into a sphere of red light the size of a pea, which shoots up towards Padmasambhava, like a spark that spits from the fire. It dissolves into Guru Rinpoche's heart, merges and becomes one with him: One taste. (Rinpoche 1998)

Devotion allows for a sense of dissolution. The dissolution of subject and object is of significant importance for Buddhist traditions. Guru yoga practices allow practitioners to engage in this dissolution experience in a way that eventually does not involve extraneous methods, even visualizations. What is unique with devotion is that there can be a residue that lingers in the body even when all thoughts and imagery are completed or exhausted. Devotion in Mahāyoga tantric practices may be what Longchenpa also alludes to when he heralds tantra over sūtra.

Sūtra constitutes the perfection vehicle, emphasizing the adoption of particular ways of thinking through reasoning and logic, while other paths, such as tantra, incorporate other methodologies that are less conceptual.

As for the profundity of the mantra approach, without relying on logical argumentation, one simply focuses on the key points of the body, speech, subtle channels, energies, and bindu. In this way, one comes to a definitive understanding of the essence of dharmakaya—which is non-conceptual timeless awareness, rather than some mental construct—as the ground of being. (Rabjam 2007)

By this, I mean that rather than thinking, “all phenomena are impermanent”, tantra introduces and implements methods that are more akin to incorporating the five sense faculties through imagination, reciting syllables, or even moving winds or air throughout the body.

One imagines oneself as Vajrayoginī, gazing as if with great desire at Padmasambhava. She wears eight adornments carved from bone and holds a skull cup in her left hand and a curved knife in her right. She stands poised in action in the motion posture. Her body is bright red and non-obstructive; like a rainbow in the sky it appears yet is empty. (Sangpo 1996)

This description of Vajrayoginī includes a felt-sense of deep devotion for someone, imagery of what she is wearing and holding, and there is a sense of movement to her body that also arouses a particular disposition. A practitioner performs to be these qualities and feel that she is in the same posture as Vajrayoginī. While there is a conceptual description that invokes being Vajrayoginī, the emphasis is on being rather than thinking about Vajrayoginī. This transition is crucial.

By using these embodied ritualized practices, tantra infuses the body with a specific disposition that is re-enforced through practice. In the context of guru yoga, this disposition is devotion, which develops through specific bodily practices like (1) embodied imagery, (2) mantra recitation, (3) light, and (4) specific locations of the body.

Devotion is a key emphasis throughout every section in guru yoga practice: (1) Unification with the spiritual master, (1.a) visualization, (1.b) invocation and invitation, (1.c) the seven aspects of devotion for the accumulation of merit, (1.d) invocation, (1.e) mantra recitation, (2) prayers to the Lamas of the lineage, (3) receiving the four empowerments, (4) dedication (Thondup 2014). Commentaries on Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga reiterate that a practitioner is to recite and embody "a sense of devotion" when doing this practice. This sense of devotion embeds itself in the practice through the physical senses. A practitioner engages her imagination and "sees" her teacher, repetitively recites syllables to reinforce her visualization, and feels devotion for her teacher. While the visualization and recitation change, devotion permeates throughout the entire practice, which begins when a practitioner becomes Vajrayoginī and stares longingly at her teacher. There are moments in the instructions when a practitioner is reminded—when a practitioner begins to recite the Seven Line Supplication to Padmasambhava—to cultivate devotion but as I show throughout this paper, devotion, like wisdom, like meditative concentration, has the capability to stay focused on an object while also having an ability to merge with or be that object.

Devotion for the teacher is expressed in the verses, prayers, and instructions, and combined with other physical modalities throughout the instructions. As we see in the Lineage Prayer, and Prayer for this Life, this devotion is enhanced in a practitioner and connects a practitioner with her teacher. This connection is in effect a kind of pipeline through which flow the energies that can transform experience, including the experience of dissolving even a deeply rooted sense of self and other, which is the main objective for guru yoga. In this way, we understand how guru yoga exemplifies all stages of the path, sutra, tantra, and Dzogchen and thereby being a Dzogchen practice (Samphel 2013).

Guru devotion is a term that refers to this student-teacher connection. This cultivated relationship is a hinge upon which tantra operates because it links together how a practitioner perceives her teacher as Buddha with eventually perceiving herself as a Buddha. More broadly, a practitioner begins to dissolve conceptual barriers that are considered obstacles to liberation. Obstacles to liberation are deeply rooted from a strong sense of self and other. All thoughts stem from this sense of mistaken identity and are removed in order to be a Buddha. Therefore, a practitioner's devotion to her teacher operates locally and universally in that devotion, which begins with a kind of celebration of the relationship between self and other, ultimately dissolves all separation.

4. Guru Yoga

Guru yoga practices (sādhana) are widespread throughout Tibetan Buddhism and one of the primary practices in preparation for Great Completeness. Robert Mayer enumerates a few found throughout the various Tibetan Buddhist lineages, such as Tsongkhapa's guru yoga called the dGa' ldan lha brgya ma or the "Hundred Deities of the Land of Joy" or the Sa skya pa master g.Yag ston sangs rgyas dpal (1348–1414), in which the Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) is identified with the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Additionally, the bka' brgyud pa also have several guru yogas. Mayer describes one as "the

Karmapa school have the “Four Session Guru Yoga” (Thun bzhi bla ma’i rnal ’byor) written by the 8th Karmapa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), in which he is visualized surrounded by ḍākinīs in several colours, and which includes numerous prayers, offerings, empowerments, and the famous mantra karma pa mkhyen no”. For the Nyingma tradition, Jigme Lingpa mirrors earlier guru yoga sādhanas found throughout the Nyingma lineage in that he emphasizes the role of Padmasambhava, the Seven Line Prayer to Padmasambhava, and his Vajra Guru mantra.

Even though guru yoga stands alone as a practice throughout Tibetan Buddhism, so far, no earlier sources are found of a similar practice throughout India or elsewhere. Robert Mayer expresses his lack of findings of guru yoga in Indic sources, “I am not aware of any comparable guru yogas of Indian origins for Vimalamitra, Hūṃkāra, or Mañjuśrīmitra, for Saraha, for Tilopa, Naropa, or Maitrīpa. There are none even for Āryadeva or Jñānapāda, founding masters of India’s immensely well-documented Guhyasamāja lineages” (Mayer 2013). Guru yoga practices as formulated in Tibet are unique to the region.

Guru devotion does pre-date Tibetan-created guru yoga practices. One Indic source of guru devotion is found in the Śvetāśvatara Upanisad, verse 6.23, “only in a man who has the deepest love of for God (deva), and who shows the same love toward his teacher as God, do these points declare that the Noble One shines forth”. In the same vein, guru devotion in India also understands that gurus are embodiments of enlightened beings and possess enlightened qualities, all of which were commonly visualized. However, this was not an isolated practiced as it is found throughout Nyingma guru yoga practices.

Nyingma guru yoga practices, overall, focus on the Padmasambhava historical narrative and weave it throughout ritual practices. As Mayer describes:

They do something which the Sa skya and bKa’ brgyud guru yogas do not attempt. Nyang ral and Chowang and, according to Dan (Martin), Zhang G.yu brag pa as well, seek to embed the entire rNying ma ritual path within a particular Tibetan historical narrative centered on Padmasambhava. All its treasures and treasure discoverers, all its yidams and protectors, are inextricably woven together with the narratives of hagiographies and dharma histories. Central to all of this is the person of Padmasambhava and his place in Tibetan history. (Mayer 2013)

The use of this historical narrative allows a practitioner to associate imagery that is perpetuated throughout the lineage. Therefore, not only does a practitioner superimpose her teacher onto an image of a Buddha but incorporates other historical figures into that matrix so that a student-teacher relationship is further strengthened through historical narrative relationship along with perhaps initially an abstract idea of an embodiment of primordial wisdom. In this way, the innovative way that the Nyingma lineage incorporates Padmasambhava creates new relationships for a practitioner so she is able to achieve her goal of experiencing wisdom.

Jigme Lingpa’s Guru Yoga

Jigme Lingpa’s guru yoga begins with a practitioner imagining that the space in front of her is the pure-land of Copper-Colored Mountain. A practitioner sees herself in the middle of this space as the nature of Yeshe Tsogyal (ye shes mtsho rgyal, a ḍākinī) and in the form of Vajrayoginī, who has one face, two hands, three eyes, and luminously red in color. There is a small skull-drum in the right hand, and a curved knife in her left, which sits at her hip. Her feet are in a dancing pose. As Vajrayoginī, a practitioner imagines that she is naked except for the bone ornament and flower necklaces. Rather than having a solid form body, the visualized form appears but is insubstantial, similar to a rainbow in the sky.

On top of her head, on a thousand-petalled lotus, sun, and moon, which are stacked on top of one another, sits a practitioner’s root teacher/lama in the form of Padmasambhava. He embodies a shining white complexion with a red hue and youthful appearance. With one face, two arms, and two legs, his

body sits in a royal posture, wearing a brocade cape, a monk's robe, a long-sleeved blue gown and a lotus hat. In the crook of his left arm, he holds a three-pointed staff, which represents the "supreme mother-consort of bliss and emptiness". In that left hand, he holds a skull-cup, and his right hand holds a golden vajra. The skull-cup holds "wisdom nectar of immortality and contains a long-life vase topped with a sprig from the wish-granting tree".

Rainbows, rays of light, and luminous bright orbs surround Guru Rinpoche. Not only these but also emanations of lords, his disciples, Indian and Tibetan scholars, awareness-holders, personal deities, *ḍākinīs*, dharma protectors—all such viewed ones surround him like clouds in space. Patrul Rinpoche comments that these beings "should have such a presence that your ordinary thoughts automatically cease".

The visualization transforms everything for a practitioner in that she no longer affiliates as her ordinary body but as Vajrayoginī in the nature of Yeshe Tsogyal. As Yeshe Tsogyal, a practitioner then puts herself into a relationship with her teacher as Padmasambhava. Jigme Lingpa's practice instructions only mention that as Vajrayoginī, a practitioner imagines that her three eyes gaze at the sky. However, Patrul Rinpoche's commentary describes that a practitioner, as Yeshe Tsogyal/Vajrayoginī, "gazes longingly at the heart of the teacher—'longingly' here expressing a sense of impatience to be with the teacher, this being the only source of joy". Jigme Lingpa incorporates the significant Yeshe Tsogyal and Padmasambhava relationship trope into guru yoga to spurn a practitioner's sense of devotion for her teacher.

Yeshe Tsogyal and Padmasambhava are key figures in the burgeoning development of Buddhism in Tibet. The tripartite relationship of King Trisong Detseun in the eighth to ninth centuries sits at the core of the Nyingma lineage. Padmasambhava imparted the Nyingthig teachings to King Trisong Detseun and Yeshe Tsogyal, who in turn protected the teachings as treasures (*gter*) for future lineage masters such as Pema Ledrel Tsal and Longchenpa. Narratives about Yeshe Tsogyal and Padmasambhava emphasize Yeshe Tsogyal's faith. Her faith leads her to be a consort of Padmasambhava, which then she receives multiple transmissions of teachings, one of which being the Heart Drop of the *Ḍākinī* (*mkha' 'dro shyig thig*).

Yeshe Tsogyal's biography implies that she is able to receive these teachings through her faith and devotion to the master Padmasambhava. Three particular circumstances were present: (1) Yeshe Tsogyal was practicing with her teacher, as a consort, (2) she prays and makes offerings to receive the Nyingthig teachings, and (3) she made prostrations and circumambulations. The first circumstance causes for the "*ḍākinīs* of timeless awareness exhorted the noble Tsogyal saying, 'this great master ... holds in his mind the profound transmission'. Hearing this Tsogyal prays and makes offerings to receive the teachings, which were followed by prostrations and circumambulations. Yeshe Tsogyal's experience reinforces that having faith and performing that faith through actions such as prayers and offerings allows for teachings to be received. In a similar vein, a student aims to cultivate devotion with the same force as Yeshe Tsogyal.

Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga instructs a student to mimic Yeshe Tsogyal's devotion for Padmasambhava through creating a visual overlay between a student and teacher as visualized as Yeshe Tsogyal and Padmasambhava. In this way, a student touches into Yeshe Tsogyal's devotion and makes it her own. This process begins with a superficial level of thinking of the instructions but eventually, a student not only feels that she is Yeshe Tsogyal and her teacher is Padmasambhava but also cultivates a level of devotion that is equal to Yeshe Tsogyal's devotion.

A practitioner incorporates her physical body into this transition, as she 'sees' herself as Vajrayoginī, her teacher as Padmasambhava, and her environment as the Copper-Colored Mountain. This visualization would stagnate itself as something 'other' like watching television if the instructions did not indicate that a student also cultivates devotion for her teacher as Yeshe Tsogyal 'looks longingly up to Padmasambhava.' Similar to Yeshe Tsogyal's experience when she received the Nyingthig teachings through her strong sense of faith, which was cultivated through offering, prostrations, and

circumambulations, a student who mimics Yeshe Tsogyal's devotion eventually becomes a suitable vessel to experience what the rest of guru yoga meditation entails.

The dissolution phase occurs in the text when a practitioner declares that at the end of her life, she, as Vajrayoginī, transforms into a sphere of light and becomes inseparable with Padmasambhava. From this state, a practitioner recognizes that she is vast primordial wisdom and then becomes a guide, a Buddha, for all other sentient beings. The final lines of the prayer include a practitioner's heart-felt request that Guru Rinpoche grant blessings that cause for these aspirations to be fulfilled.

A practitioner imagines that Guru Rinpoche smiles at her with compassion, while rays of red light shine out from his heart. When this light touches a practitioner, she transforms herself into a pea-size sphere of red light and shoots up towards Guru Rinpoche and dissolves in his heart, finally resting in that state.

This imagery incorporated with the prayer and mantra recitation invokes a merging with Guru Rinpoche so that a practitioner connects or deepens the relationship to the point where there is no sense of separateness. As earlier noted, experiencing a non-dual relationship between subject and object, here is practitioner and teacher, expresses the tradition's understanding of liberation from suffering. The repetitive action of reciting these prayers along with mantra instills and strengthens that sense of non-duality and sense of devotion.

Each section of Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga is recited in an affective manner, specifically with a heart-felt sense of devotion. As the lines and instructions invoke a sense of merging between a practitioner and teacher, devotion reinforces this coming together. Guru yoga provides a medium for a practitioner to transition between perceiving an ordinary world that causes suffering towards perceiving that world as she does in creation stage practice. Cultivating devotion during creation stage allows a practitioner to touch into her relationship with a teacher, whom she trusts and perceives to be a Buddha. Once this affect and pure perception is invoked, a practitioner transitions to becoming her teacher who is infused with Padmasambhava. Now, in completion stage, a practitioner understands that she is a Buddha and rests in that sensation, which is closer to the Great Completeness view.

5. View: The Aim of Guru Yoga

Guru yoga practices and inculcating devotion in these practices are all set within a specific perspective on how a practitioner is to understand reality. This perspective or view (*lta ba*) is one of three components in traditional Buddhist categories: View, meditation (*sgom pa*), and conduct (*spyod pa*), and refers to a particular perspective. View is categorized or defined as two, ultimate and relative truths throughout various Buddhist traditions. Ultimate truth (*don dam bden pa*) refers to how a perspective understands the way phenomena (*chos*) actually abide, whereas relative truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*) is an expression of how phenomena appear. The conflict between these two truths addresses the issue of how can a person experience suffering and confusion if she possesses qualities of a Buddha. For Great Completeness, the ultimate truth expresses how phenomena actually abide (*gnas lugs*) and manifest from the ground, whereas relative truth is understood as a "mis-recognition" of phenomena. This mis-recognition is that a confused individual perceives that these appearances are separate and dualistic from the awareness that perceives these appearances. The goal of Great Completeness practices is to recognize that appearances are not separate from awareness that perceives them. This view does not assert that mind is the only reality but is a gnostic orientation, which is further understood by looking at definitions and descriptions of ultimate truth in Great Completeness literature.

Longchenpa defines ultimate truth for the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse literature as:

As to the primordial ground of being—naturally occurring timeless awareness itself, not subject to restrictions or extremes—its essence is empty, like space; its nature is lucid, like the sun and moon; its responsiveness is pervasive, like their light. These three aspects are essentially inseparable, abiding constantly as the nature of the three Kayas and timeless awareness within basic space, which is without transition or change. This primordial ground, embodying the very heart of dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya—in

that its essence is empty, its nature lucid, and its responsiveness pervasive—is not anything whatsoever that pertains to either samsara or nirvana. Yet from the standpoint of its providing an open dimension in which these can occur, it is referred to as “basic space, supremely and completely pure by its very nature. (Rabjam 2007)

Longchenpa equates several descriptors of ultimate truth within this passage. For one, he defines that the ground (bzhi) is the basis of everything else and brings together elements that define that it. It is crucial to note that the ground is a particular type of awareness, and a primordial wisdom. Primordial wisdom is understood by Longchenpa to be free of characteristics such as “existence” and “non-existence”. Secondly, this ground has specific qualities that exempt it from being a void or ‘something.’ Lastly, this ground also embodies the three bodies (sku gsum): dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya, which extend into other frameworks that are often implemented throughout Great Completeness philosophy and literature.

The Tibetan Treasury Dictionary defines ground as, “the cause or seed of everything else (rgyu dang sa bon)”. In his commentary on The Treasury of Precious Qualities, the First Dodrupchen describes that this ground transcends all limits of existence and non-existence. Even though the term translates as ground, which conjures a thought of place in space and time, the First Dodrupchen’s explanation of ground in this context goes beyond positing whether or not ‘it’ exists. From this context, ground must be understood as something that cannot be pinpointed as being something or not being something.

The First Dodrupchen and other definitions of the ground in Heart Essence, Vast Expanse literatures locates ground as being non-referential so that a practitioner orients her experience away from a particular reference point. Even though the ground is described as transcending existence and non-existence, there are descriptors of this ground.

Longchenpa’s earlier quote does include a description of the ground as being timeless awareness. Timeless awareness or self-arising wisdom (rang ‘byung kyi ye shes), as described by Longchenpa in his Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems:

The basis of the classification is simply the timeless awareness of Buddhahood. What I am classifying is, in essence, the knowledge of reality just as it is and the knowledge of things in their multiplicity ... In some source texts, this knowledge is termed “timeless awareness as the basic space of phenomena. (Rabjam 2007)

Timeless awareness refers to the way in which a Buddha or awakened-one engages in, experiences, and knows her reality. This way of knowing is in accord with the way that phenomena abide, as understood by Buddhist epistemological frameworks, and references back to ultimate truth. A Buddha knows ultimate truth, the way phenomena abide, through perceiving this reality directly.

The Nyingma tradition follows the philosophical discourse of one of the two primary Indian Mahāyāna traditions, the Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka, which Dorji Wangchuk designates as the Mañjusrīmītra and Nagārguna, ‘negative-intellectual’ school. The Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka view is that phenomena do not inherently exist. This means that there is no actual object that substantially exists. The breakdown of objects involves ‘self of persons’ and ‘self of phenomena.’ Jeffrey Hopkins explains, “the subtle self that is negated in the Prāsaṅgika view of selflessness implies an independent entity; thus, all these terms are opposites of dependent-arising”. Dependent-arising refers to that all phenomena, for Prāsaṅgika, arise in dependence of one another. For example, the color of a table arises in dependence upon an eye consciousness that perceives it. The eye consciousness and the color of the table do not substantially exist. In this way, phenomena are empty of a self, which then the Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka coins the term, ‘emptiness’ (Skt. śūnyatā, Tib. stong pa nyid).

Emptiness of phenomena is an absence for the Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka tradition. In this way, followers do not assert any description of that absence but prove emptiness of phenomena through non-affirming negations. Non-affirming negations are syllogistic statements that deny an opponent’s position but also do not assert another point in its place. For example, “the self of person does not exist”.

Here, the ‘self’ is negated as an existent and nothing is implied to replace that self. Non-affirming negation is crucial for the Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka tradition because it is the method by which a meditator advances towards liberation.

The emptiness of self is something that is anticipated to be realized and not just conceptually understood for the Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka. Emptiness realized in meditative equipoise (ting gnas ‘dzin) is when a meditator sits in the union of calm abiding (zhi gnas) and special insight (lha thong) and is in a non-conceptual, non-dualist state. Longchenpa explains that, “in the state of meditative equipoise experienced by one who has attained a spiritual level or on the level of Buddhahood, no dualistic manifestation whatsoever of the knowable can be established—no dualism of object and perceiver of the object (that is, what is known and what knows it) ... The realization that the true nature of phenomena is timeless awareness, which is indescribable, inconceivable, and inexpressible, is termed by the Prāsaṅgikas ‘the unconfused and authentic state of mind’”. This non-conceptual, non-dualistic state does not have a description for this particular tradition, whereas the Nyingma tradition describes it differently.

So while the Nyingma Great Completeness tradition is similar to Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka, the tradition incorporates its own interpretations of Prasangika-Madhyamaka or Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka. Longchen Rabjam explains:

Dzogpa Chenpo’s view of freedom from extremes is similar to Prasangika-Madhyamaka’s for the most part. [The main difference is that] the important basic view of Madhyamaka is of a space-like empty aspect, while the principal basic view [of Great Completeness Chenpo] is of primordially pure and naked intrinsic awareness, which is ineffable and unceasing. According to Dzogpa Chenpo, intrinsic awareness and everything that arises within it are free from all extremes like the [nonexistence of] limits to space. (Rabjam 2007)

Simply, both Great Completeness and Prasangika-Madhyamaka understand that phenomena are empty of inherent existence but Great Completeness’s view describes that phenomena abide within “basic space of phenomena”. Longchenpa’s interpretation of meditative equipoise demonstrates the differences between Prasangika and Great Completeness views, “and for someone who has attained a spiritual level, there is timeless awareness as the state of meditative equipoise, as well as those post meditation experiences of profound insight that are essentially identical to that state”. Here we see that Longchenpa describes the spiritual level of meditative equipoise as timeless awareness whereas Prasangika describes that state as perceiving emptiness.

While Prasangika focuses on the empty aspect, Great Completeness emphasizes that while appearances are empty, they also appear. The Third Dodrupchen (1865–1926) states:

Chöying Dzöd and other [Dzogpa Chenpo] sources praise the view of Prasangika-Madhyamaka. So [Dzogpa Chenpo] is in accord with Prasangika regarding the definition of the limits to the object-of-negation (dgag bay’s mtshams ‘dzin). (Rabjam 2001a)

However, in Prasangika—having separated the aspects (ldog cha’) of appearances and emptiness by distinguishing the particularities (spu ris) of each or by separating the emptiness aspect [from the apparent aspect]—one apprehends the aspect of emptiness that is a non-affirming negation (med dgag). This is a method of maintaining [the view] using concepts. It also asserts that after conceptually distinguishing between them and gaining experiences [of it] in meditation, one attains what is called ‘the fruition of the blissful, clear, and non-conceptual intellect.’

Dzogpa Chenpo, on the other hand, solely maintains intrinsic awareness (rig pa) [the true nature of mind] and uses it as the path. It does not employ concepts (rtog pa), since concepts [are the province of] mind (sems), and Dzogpa Chenpo involves meditation [on intrinsic awareness after] distinguishing mind from intrinsic awareness. (TBRC.org. n.d.)

In the broader context, tantra’s incorporation of pure appearance especially regarding the teacher works with the Prasangika-Madhyamaka’s view that all phenomena, including persons, are empty

of inherent existence. The physical teacher is a meditative object, which the student focuses on and integrates various meditational methods to eventually realize pure appearance of all objects.

Those of the mantra approach realize the indivisible truth that abides primordially as the nature of deity and mantra. They train in experiencing the innate purity of things on the relative level—being mere emanations, apparent yet nonexistent—as the deity. In addition, they realize that this relative level and ultimate reality—the timeless non-duality of basic space and timeless awareness—are primordially inseparable in the context in which they have no finite essence (Rabjam 2007).

Guru yoga is a medium whereby a practitioner perceives her teacher as a deity, such as Padmasambhava, Yeshe Tsogyal, Green Tara, or Vajrasattva, as a way to practicing perceiving pure appearance, which is then transposed and integrated in perceiving all phenomena, including oneself, as pure appearances.

Longchenpa also describes the ground and timeless awareness as the basic space of phenomena (chos dbyings). Basic space of phenomena is defined as “emptiness or the nature of the five aggregates such as the form aggregate is emptiness”. In Treasury Trove of Scriptural Transmission, a commentary on Longchenpa’s Treasury of Basic Space, he writes, “the basic space of phenomena—naturally occurring timeless awareness, totally pure by nature—is mind itself” (Rabjam 2001b). Longchenpa equates ultimate truth with the basic space of phenomena in Treasury of Philosophical Systems:

Ultimate truth, the basic space of phenomena . . . is freedom from conceptual elaboration, because it is not the province of ordinary consciousness, which entail conceptual frameworks. Furthermore, it is realized through timeless awareness, in a way that involves no such elaboration (Rabjam 2007).

Basic space of phenomena describes the way phenomena really are or abide for Longchenpa and the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse tradition. This basic space, ultimate truth, is also known by a Buddha, yet this knowing is free from dualistic, subject–object, perception. Finally, basic space incorporates a knowing as it is primordial wisdom. These descriptions of basic space illuminate that for Longchenpa and Great Completeness, there is no separation within basic space.

The view in the guru yoga instructions found in Jigme Lingpa’s Heart Essence, the Vast Expanse Foundational practices (sngon ‘dro) begin with “endless land, pure self-risen vision” (rang snang lhun grub dag pa rab ‘byams zhing), which references how Jigme Lingpa and Longchenpa describe the ground in their Treasury of Precious Qualities and Treasury of Philosophical Systems, respectively. As Jigme Lingpa describes the ground as “regarding the indivisibility of samsara and nirvana, when the ground of the Natural Great Perfection is established, it is understood that the phenomena of samsara and nirvana do not stir from the ultimate expanse” (Klein 2009). Right away, Jigme Lingpa establishes the view of the ground, non-conceptual, non-dual, in his guru yoga practice as a means to familiarize the meditator with how to apply the senses into how she will move forward.

Within this self-arisen, spontaneous pure realm, there is a transformation of experiencing how a meditator relates to herself, her teacher, and the space surrounding her in guru yoga practice. The meditator transforms herself as Vajrayoginī (rang nyid gzhi lus rdo rje rnal ‘byor ma) meaning that a meditator does not practice seeing herself as an ordinary human body but as an embodiment of Vajrayoginī, incorporating the matrix of the ground as part of this new self-perception perceiving herself. This new perception deconstructs the duality that is ordinarily experienced outside of guru yoga practice. Furthermore, the meditator, as Vajrayoginī, sees her teacher as Padmasambhava, which creates the same sense as the student’s body being Vajrayoginī. Finally, the dichotomy of ordinary dualistic student-teacher sense is broken with the final line of Jigme Lingpa’s guru yoga, “Shining in one empty clarity” (gsal stong mnyam gnas chen po’i ngang du gsal) (Klein 2009). Again, Jigme Lingpa aligns his descriptions of the ground into the matrix of guru yoga practice so that a meditator re-orientes how she engages with devotion.

Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga instructions above reflect Longchenpa's philosophical tenet on tantra as it is an appropriate means that allows a practitioner to access primordial wisdom, which for Longchenpa is "primordially inseparable (from basic space) in the context in which they have no finite essence". Longchenpa heralds tantra as a superior method to sūtra because without relying on logical argumentation, one simply focuses on the key points of the body, speech, subtle channels, energies, and bindu. In this way, one comes to a definitive understanding of the essence of dharmakaya—which is non-conceptual timeless awareness, rather than some mental construct—as the ground of being (Rabjam 2007).

One other aspect of the view that is pertinent here is that the ground of being also consists of two other characteristics: (1) It is luminous and (2) it is ceaseless compassion (ma gags thugs rje). It is this third characteristic of the ground, which refers to how the ground has movement or energy. This energy, what I am calling compassionate responsiveness, is ceaseless in that it continuously radiates outwards as compassion. The ground is a ceaseless radiation of compassion.

Longchen Rabjam explains that compassionate responsiveness differs from dualistic concepts in his Treasure Trove of Scriptural Transmission:

Awareness expresses itself through its dynamic energy as consciousness that involves conceptual elaboration, marked by the myriad dualistic habitual patterns that such consciousness generates. Since what are not objects are misconstrued as objects, there are the five kinds of sense objects, and since what has no identity is invested with identity, there are the five afflictive emotions. (Rabjam 2001a)

Here, as dynamic energy in this passage, compassionate responsiveness is understood to be constant and always present but is not recognized through a consciousness that engages in conceptual thought. Longchenpa later explains:

When sense objects manifest in light of awareness, like reflections in a mirror, the knowing quality in all its pristine nakedness, which does not proliferate as ordinary thinking, is called, "dynamic energy as the ground for the arising of responsiveness". (Rabjam 2001a)

The transformation occurs when this particular awareness is recognized. Otherwise, dualistic subject-object engagement, which leads to afflictive emotions and karma, ensues. On one hand, this switch is perceptual meaning that a mind that rests in a non-dual state may experience this awareness and dynamic energy. On the other hand, there is also an affective quality to this shift. This affective quality is non-referential because there is no object for compassion.

6. Conclusions

As we see in Longchenpa's tenet systems and Jigme Lingpa's guru yoga, Mahāyoga tantra works upon a practitioner through non-conceptual means, primarily a devotional affect as a device that offers a meditator the means to connect through the instructions. Devotion does not require logical argumentation but connects a student with her teacher through devices like visualization and subtle body practices.

Guru yoga is a Mahāyoga tantric meditation, which, here, is set within the view of the Great Completeness tradition. Longchenpa also describes the process of creation and completion stages to include non-conceptual techniques, which implies that devotional affect necessarily is non-conceptual in the context of tantra. As this realization of non-conceptual is not unique, this context is different in that here is a Great Completeness perspective. Longchenpa does state that the creation stages involves mental constructs but cease and are followed by completion stage practice that does not involve those constructs. "The mantra approach is superior, for in the stage of development [creation] (which involves mental constructs) the mind's conceptual elaborations are calmed, and in the stage of completion (which involves no such constructs) timeless awareness is experienced simply by intent focus on the key points of the subtle channels and energies" (Rabjam 2007). In this way, devotional

affect as a felt-sense maintains its presence even though mental constructions fall away. Firstly, a practitioner develops devotional affect through creation and completion stage practices as she mentally construes devotion in creation stage. However, the practitioner no longer purposely cultivates devotion in completion stage practice but there is a felt-sense of that affect that permeates during this part of the meditation practice. Devotional affect allows a practitioner to move from relating to a teacher who embodies wisdom towards dissolving boundaries of self and other to recognize that she also embodies that same wisdom.

Eventually, a practitioner is able to conduct herself in a way that is continuous to this felt-sense of devotion throughout her entire day, which is encouraged through instructions found in other Nyingma Buddhist masters like Patrul Rinpoche's Words of My Perfect Teacher, "in short, arouse your devotion all the time, in every situation...purify everything you perceive by seeing it as the teacher's form" (Rinpoche 1998). In returning to the context of Longchenpa's description of tantra, we see that these instructions follow the perspective that this devotion is non-conceptual because one's thought is to see everything as pure as one sees it in the context of tantra's creation and completion stages. Moreover, one's capacity to arouse devotion all the time also aligns with Longchenpa's statement that, "they realize that this relative level and ultimate reality—the timeless non-duality of basic space and timeless awareness—are primordially inseparable in the context in which they have no finite essence".

Devotional affect is the mechanism that allows for tantric practices in this particular context to be successful. Tantric practices like guru yoga incorporate a relationship between students and teachers in that these relationships cultivate devotion because they point the practitioner towards something, that something being a Buddha. A practitioner inculcates and strengthens her devotion to these objects and more importantly what they point to through practice. Guru yoga practice establishes the teacher as Padmasambhava as the happy object, which points to the recognition of wisdom. A practitioner cultivates and strengthens her own devotion toward her teacher through imagination, chanting, and prayer, all of which develop more devotion. All of this intentional cultivation of devotional affect occurs during the creation phase practice.

Completion phase practice then is the devotional affect that was cultivated during the first period of guru yoga, and which now leaves a residue or lasting impression that produces particular kinds of bodily capacities. The practitioner no longer relies upon mental engagement to cultivate her devotional affect but that sensation of being devoted, having faith and confidence, and taking interest in the experience remains.

These two phases of guru yoga are situated within the context of the Great Completeness view where non-referentiality is stressed and considered as the basis of reality. A practitioner does not orient herself to this non-referentiality through conceptual analytical meditations but through embodied practices that emphasize the need for devotional affect. This is a crucial step for the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse tradition because the final goal of practice is to break free of non-dual ordinary experience or ground, which is also described as being luminous and ceaselessly compassion (*ma gags med thugs rje*).

Non-referential devotional affect where there is no object of devotion may be similar to this expression of ceaseless compassion for Great Completeness. A practitioner necessarily inculcates a particular affect that points her towards the actual goal, the ground. Therefore, meditation practices that are devoid of this devotional affect do not accomplish this goal because there is only a cognitive process whereas descriptions of the ground suggest that the view and ground consists more than a void of concepts. Devotional affect, however, creates a particular embodied sensation that is sustained in a practitioner whether or not the actual devotional object appears. Eventually, a practitioner is able to 'touch' into this devotional affect without an object so that the sensation is non-referential and constant. This process may be why devotional affect is stressed throughout Great Completeness literature. One is unable to access the goal without engaging in affective methods that allow a practitioner to cultivate a specific embodied affective disposition that emulates the spacious reality that is described throughout the Heart Essence, Vast Expanse tradition.

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