

VAJRAYĀNA BUDDHISM IN TIBETAN PERSPECTIVE
A Spiritual Science of Civilized Happiness

by

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I. SCIENCE & RELIGION IN BUDDHISM: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introductory Comments

With their literature encoded in symbolism and their practice veiled in secrecy, India's diverse Tantric traditions have provoked an array of speculative readings by modern Indian and Western scholars. This is an ideal time to explore the philosophy of the Buddhist Tantras, since the last decade has witnessed a renaissance in Tantric scholarship based on unprecedented access to Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions preserved in Tibet.¹ Viewed from the Tibetan perspective, the Tantras appear not as a fossilized curiosity but as a living paradigm of contemplative science and civilization. Since this perspective runs counter to the received Indological view of the Tantras as religious cults, I will first offer an overview based on Tibetan Indology.² My approach begins with the consilience of spirituality and science basic to all Buddhist philosophy and pedagogy, as reflected in Shakyamuni's four noble truths (*āryasatya*).

Pointed and lucid, the first and third noble truths trace the therapeutic arc of Buddha's teaching, while the second and fourth truth define his pedagogic method: a higher education (*adhiśiṣya*) integrating philosophical, scientific and spiritual disciplines aimed at wisdom (*prajñā*), contemplation (*samādhi*) and ethics (*vināya*). Given Shakyamuni's insistence that his heirs develop a scientific teaching (*abhidharma*) based on this framework, the Buddhist academy served as a catalyst in the rise of critical philosophical, scientific and religious traditions in India. This progressive tradition, most fully developed at the monastic University of Nālandā, arrays a curriculum of five arts and sciences around a core discipline I call contemplative science (*adhyātma-vidyā*).³ In the Nālandā tradition, this spiritual science developed three cumulative paradigms, in which four main schools of therapeutic philosophy (*siddhānta*)—Analyst (*Vaibhāṣika*),

Traditionist (*Sautrāntika*), Idealist (*Cittamātra*) and Centrist (*Mādhyamika*)—inform three vehicles (*triyāna*) of Buddhist practice, the Individual Vehicle (*Hinayāna/Theravāda*), Universal Vehicle (*Mahāyāna*) and Process Vehicle (*Tantrayāna*), also called the Poetic Vehicle (*Mantrayāna*) or Diamond Vehicle (*Vajrayāna*). At the heart of the Buddha’s therapeutic aims and educational methods, understanding these spiritual sciences requires an interdisciplinary approach drawing on disciplines as diverse as philosophy and linguistics, psychology and neurobiology, sociology and ethics.

Since this volume is for English speakers, this chapter must also address the cultural preconceptions and scholarly consensus assumed by readers in the Anglo-American tradition. In dialogue with students and colleagues, I have found that these pose significant blocks for understanding Buddhism and the very idea of a contemplative science. Fortunately, the biases distorting modern Western views of non-Western cultures have received much attention in post-modern scholarship.⁴ In reaction, however, the consensus has shifted towards the other extreme: that specific cultures can only be understood in isolation, without reference to humanity’s diverse cultural traditions. In contrast, Buddhist thinkers from Shakyamuni on have presented their counterculture through rigorous debate and dialogue with the religious and scientific traditions of each civilization which has hosted them. Seeing the Vajrayāna through Tibetan eyes, then, involves comparisons with the world history of spirituality and science.⁵ At the risk of inviting critiques from both my objectivist colleagues in the sciences and my deconstructionist colleagues in religious studies, I follow this tradition of comparative scholarship here.

This chapter has three parts. The introduction outlines the general form of Buddhist contemplative science and fleshes out the particulars of the Vajrayāna paradigm of

science and civilization. Part two addresses misconceptions based on the traditional map of the stages of the Tantric path drawn in the Ārya tradition of interpreting the *Esoteric Communion Process (Guhyasamaja-tantra)*. Third and finally, based on the *Wheel of Time Process (Kālachakra-tantra)*, the conclusion comments on the contribution of Vajrayāna Buddhism to the global future of philosophy, science and human civilization.

Buddhism in Context: Therapeutic Philosophy, Science and Spirituality

To begin, Tibetans often explain the four noble truth framework of Buddhist culture in terms of the transformational rubric of basis, path and fruit (*āśraya-marga-phala*).⁶ The first two truths describe the basic condition of suffering that is the common lot of all unenlightened forms of life, without reference to the spiritual healing and transformation described in the third and fourth truths. To use a traditional metaphor, the first truth of suffering and the second truth of origin offer a diagnosis and etiology for the human condition based on a philosophical investigation of everyday life and a scientific analysis of its evolution and development. Complementing them, the fourth and third truths describe a way of learning and healing meant to bring that condition to an unparalleled fruition: the optimal freedom, health and happiness of a Buddha's enlightenment. In other words, the third truth of Nirvāna and the fourth truth of the path offer a prognosis and course of treatment for what ails ordinary humans (and other life forms including gods) based on Shakyamuni's own spiritual experience and on the transformative disciplines of contemplation and ethics he prescribed to those who sought to share his experience.

Scientifically, the noble truths conjoin two causal formulas: 1) suffering is the effect of unexamined life; 2) action driven by delusion and unhealthy emotions is its cause; 3) freedom is the effect of contemplative life; 4) action guided by wisdom, mediation and

ethics is its cause. Yet while Buddhist science analyzes body, mind and world into systems, media and elements (*skandha, ayātana, dhātu*) governed only by cause and effect (*hetuphala*), it does so not with mathematical logic and mechanical experiment but based on pedagogic convention and contemplative practices informed by Shakyamuni's training, experience and empathic art (*upāya-kauśalya*) of teaching. Although Buddhist philosophy and science both require reliance on reason and evidence over scripture or authority, the third and fourth truths involve a level of knowledge beyond the scope of ordinary inference (*anumāna*) and perception (*pratyakṣa*). This is both because they are based on the Buddha's personal experience and because the nature of subtle realities like Nirvāna or *karma* can only be known when the human mind is refined into an instrument of contemplative or yogic perception (*yogī-pratyakṣa*) by self-analysis, concentration and moral stability. Hence, the two spiritual truths involve reliance on the advice (*śabda*) of an expert like Shakyamuni and on the pedagogic tradition (*āgama*) of his heirs. Buddhist philosophy and science both presuppose a spiritual perspective on life, since they are premised on a human experience that cannot be verified by ordinary means but can only be validated intersubjectively by those who replicate the Buddha's training and experience. Of course, this reliance is far from the blind faith required by some traditions, since it assumes a reasoned confidence that must eventually be tested in the laboratory of one's own mind, body and life.

To further characterize Buddhist contemplative science, it helps to locate it with reference to the mainstream traditions of science and religion in the city states of axial age India and Greece. In India, Shakyamuni set out to clear a rational, ethical middle way between the elite traditions of Vedic orthodoxy and the corrosive influence of hedonistic materialism stirred by the rise of mercantile centers. Where Vedist contemplation was

restricted to initiated elites and focused mainly on scriptural recitation and ritual performance, the Buddha created a contemplative science accessible to all and focused on rational self-knowledge, contemplative self-correction and ethical self-discipline. Critical of the creationist worldview and self-sacrificing social ethos of orthodox Brahmanism, he distilled the contemplative strains emerging in the Upaniṣads into a mainstream alternative to the heterodox extremes reflected in Jaina asceticism and Carvāka materialism. Hence his mendicant community (*bikṣusaṃgha*) gradually became India's academic mainstream, serving as the catalyst and crucible for the transformation of Upanṣadic Vedism into classical Indian science and religion.⁷

The picture of Greek thought emerging from contemporary scholarship places Socrates on his own middle way between spirituality and science, aligning his academy more closely with Shakyamuni's than we expect.⁸ Contrary to modern readings of Socrates as a secular rationalist, the founder of the Athenian academy drew inspiration from the Appolonian tradition of the Delphic Oracle, and saw himself as a reformer rather than a critic of Greek spirituality and ethics.⁹ Like the Buddha, he approached philosophy as a therapeutic art (*therapeia/psychagogia*) of self-correction (*aporia*) informed by a contemplative discipline (*sophrosyne*) involving experience of the divine genius (*daimon*) accessible to all humans, as well as an ethical discipline aimed at the civic virtues of humility (*haidos*) and piety (*eusebeia*).¹⁰ Like his Indian contemporaries and his predecessor, Empedocles and his successor Plato, Socrates saw the human mind as involved in a multi-life process of reincarnation (*metempsychosis*) in the physical world, and as a transcendent soul (*psyche*) whose journey to freedom involves understanding and mastering this natural process and its ethical laws. This centrist outlook places him midway between the metaphysical monism of Pythagoreans like

Parmenides and the reductive materialism of pre-Socratics like Democritus. With his work stopped by the Athenian elite, however, his centrism digressed in the monistic idealism of Plato and the materialist naturalism of Aristotle. This explains the Janus faces of the Western academy, based on the classical synthesis of Neoplatonism with monotheism; and the modern synthesis of Aristoteleanism with reductive materialism. It also explains the challenge modern scholarship has had locating Socrates and his Indian counterpart Shakyamuni with the binary categories of Western science and religion.

Current Comparative Analogues for Buddhist (and Socratic) Philosophy

From a Buddhist standpoint, underlying dualistic worldviews like creationism and materialism, there is a shared confusion or delusion (*avidyā*): the idea that reality can be captured in a single formulation or set of symbols. This delusion stems from a collusion between the human habit of reification (*samāropa*) reinforcing our attachment to cultural worldviews (*dṛṣṭi*), and the natural self-protective instincts (*ātmagraha-vāsanā*) that unconsciously anchor them. While most human cultural systems reinforce these self-limiting habits with worldviews that claim absolute, exclusive, self-evident or objective truth, therapeutic philosophies counter this general trend and work to free the human mind and nervous system from their habitual bondage to reified truth-habits and the egocentric instincts maintaining them. Since such philosophies are equally critical of all reified cultural views, it makes sense that they share a human family resemblance across widely divergent historical eras and traditions.

Elsewhere,¹¹ Robert Thurman and I have proposed a framework for translating Buddhist philosophy by comparing it with a modern tradition of therapeutic philosophy including Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Freud and their heirs. I have extended this framework

to the self-corrective practice of Buddhist contemplative science, by comparing it with the language therapy of Wittgenstein and the psychotherapy of Freud, Jung, Reich and Lacan.¹² Like modern psychotherapy, Buddhist contemplative science adopts evolutionary theories and causal models while relying on dialogical methods of inquiry, discursive methods of analysis and formulation, and state-specific methods of self-correction and self-change. Though this comparison may seem ahistorical, both Freud and Jung saw their psychotherapies as continuing ancient therapeutic traditions that had been repressed. Moreover, the Buddhist contemplative science tradition has evolved in a cumulative fashion from the axial age up to the present. While such comparisons must be carefully qualified, comparisons with psychotherapy are less misleading than with academic philosophy or neuroscience, since they convey the way Buddhist philosophy and science array multiple disciplines around an intimate dialogue with the aim of communicating self-knowledge and self-mastery from one human being to another.¹³

The Origin and History of the Buddhist Tantras: A Tibetan Perspective

In contrast to the common view, Tibetans report that both the exoteric Mahāyāna and esoteric Vajrayāna were taught by Shakyamuni in secret to certain disciples.¹⁴ Elsewhere, Christian Wedemeyer and I have presented evidence to support this view, including references from the Pāli canon.¹⁵ The abundance of the evidence and common sense corroborate Tibetan reports that the raw materials of Tantric theory and practice were already available in Shakyamuni's day, but not systematically formulated, written or published until much later. From the Indo-Tibetan perspective, the origin of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna lay in the gradual unfolding of the Buddha's reform of Indian culture and society. Far from revisions or corruptions, these traditions extend the

progressive role of the Theravāda academy into the Indian mainstream, with rational, universal alternatives to the elite Sanskrit tradition of arts and sciences.¹⁶ The catalytic role of the Buddhist academy in this dialogue reflects in large part the complementary imperatives of the Vedist home school (*gūru-kula*) and the Buddhist monastic retreat (*arama*), college (*vihāra*) or university (*mahāvihāra*). Charged with educating large classes of students from diverse backgrounds, the Buddhist academy had to rationalize its curriculum, literature and pedagogy in systematic ways that Vedist scholars did not. This explains the inter-traditional nature of Mahāyāna institutions like Nālandā, which served as “public universities” for Buddhist and Brahmin scholars alike.¹⁷

The Theravāda and Mahāyāna Paradigms of Contemplative Science

Naturally, understanding the more complex paradigms of the Universal and Process Vehicles requires some review of the basic aims and methods of the Individual Vehicle. Like Socrates, the Buddha preferred mundane conventions of language and spiritual experience to the interpretive logic and ritual practice of his culture’s elite. Yet along with Vedic priestly traditions, he received scientific traditions of linguistic analysis (*vyākaraṇa*) and conscious self-regulation (*yoga*) that far exceeded Western analogues in scope and rigor. These were ideally suited to the needs of contemplative science. In the Buddhist case, ordinary language was honed to define a table of elements (*dharma-saṃketa*) that serves as a map to guide self-analysis, discerning realistic from unrealistic perception, healthy from unhealthy emotions and actions. Supporting this analysis, self-regulation induces states of contemplation (*dhyāna*) and absorption (*samāpatti*) used to renounce compulsive perceptions, emotions and actions and to cultivate healing alternatives. Under the guidance of a healing ally (*kalayāṇamitra*), a fivefold path of self-

healing yields a purification (*viśodhana*) of intention, motivation and action that culminates in the spiritual freedom of Nirvana and the ethical mastery of perfect conduct (*brahmacārya*).

To extend the benefits of Individualist science beyond the monastic community into the Indian mainstream, Universalist champion Nāgārjuna used more critical readings of Shakamuni's philosophy to refine more potent analytic and contemplative methods. The result was his de-reifying theory of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and his sociopolitical ethos of universal compassion (*mahākaruṇa*). The gist of Universalist science is that, to be sustained in a larger community, self-healing requires a level of self-analysis and emotional self-mastery more profound than that needed to renounce compulsive habits. The enlightened altruist (*bodhisattva*) who wants to bring freedom and peace to the mainstream enmeshed in compulsive life must not only abandon unrealistic perception and unhealthy emotions consciously but also uproot the unconscious delusion that anchors them, blocking greater wisdom and compassion.

As a linguistic philosopher and physician, Nāgārjuna diagnosed the delusion at the root of compulsive life as the instinct for reification (*samāropa-vāsanā*) underlying the self-habit and truth-habit (*satya-graha*) that anchor addictive views of self and world. Drawing on a special class of grammatical variables Paṇiṇi used to designate exceptions to expected usage, Nāgārjuna defined emptiness as a therapeutic convention or cure (*prokṣana*), and its use as a self-corrective reminder or placeholder to keep the reifying mind from fixating on its own projections of non-relative reality, identity or objectivity (*svabhāva, svalakṣaṇa, svarūpa*) in persons and things.¹⁸ His critique of Individualist science was based on the insight that reifying teachings like the four noble truths had limited their effectiveness. Given his critique, Nāgārjuna applied his insight to a

contemplative art of self-correction profound enough to fully and finally free the mind from the demon (*māra*) of reification that makes beings prone to self-limiting views and emotions. This cleared the way for Buddhist contemplatives to become great souls (*mahātma*), removing innate mental blocks to objectivity or omniscience (*sarvajñātā*) and innate emotional blocks to the liberation of universal compassion. These refined methods of analysis and self-regulation opened up the ten stage path of enlightened altruism that yields the ultimate spiritual aim of embodying immediate Nirvana (*nirvāna-dṛṣṭadharma*), and the relative ethical aim of embodying the empathic art to elevate all to a heavenly state of shared happiness and compassionate interaction.

In the wake of Nāgārjuna's profound Centrist system, Buddhist teachers found a need to evolve a companion tradition that helped foster the magnanimous spirit and art of compassionate action. The brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu evolved an Idealist reading of Universalist thought, and a contemplative science based on the theory of a subconscious mind (*ālayavijñāna*) and a deconstructive critique of dualistic perceptions of self and world. Unfortunately, given its subtle reification of mind, this alternate paradigm came under fire from both Buddhist and non-Buddhist critics, leading to efforts to synthesize the methods of cultivating wisdom and compassion into one Universalist paradigm based on Nāgārjuna's Centrism. Chandrakīrti's Consequentialist (*Prāsaṅgika*) synthesis refined Nāgārjuna's therapeutic philosophy of language, integrating the Asangan paradigm of deconstructive depth psychology into a communicative ethics of de-objectifying intuition and compassion.¹⁹

The Vajrayāna Paradigm of Contemplative Science

Chandrakṛīti's critique of Idealism was decisive in more ways than one. As Centrism emerged as definitive of Buddhist thought, it cleared the way for the Vajrayāna to emerge as the definitive paradigm of Buddhist contemplative science. The reasons for this shift help characterize the Vajrayāna as a contemplative science. As far back as the *Heart Scripture (Prajñāparāmitāhṛdayasūtra)*, the quick path of Universalist practice called the Vajrayāna has also been known as the Poetic Vehicle. More than a reference to the role of *mantric* formulas in the imaginative creation of a sacred circle (*maṇḍala*) and its divine archetypes (*devatā*), this term describes the Tantric view of life as the product of linguistic construction. According to the Tantras, beings and worlds are seen to emerge when the space of emptiness is planted with poetic seeds (*bīja-mantra*). The use of the term *bīja* is instructive, since the context of its usage here is distinct from that of Idealist psychology. In the Tantras, these seeds are planted not in the disembodied ground of a subconscious mind, but rather in the embodied soil of creative, bliss-void (*sukha-śūnya*) states of mind, supported by the vital energy (*prāna*) of a nervous system with channels (*nāḍī*), complexes (*chakra*) and drops (*bindū*). While this nervous system was mapped by contemplation rather than gross anatomy, Tantric psychology and medicine see it as made of subtle matter (*sukṣma-rūpa*) and ascribe to it all the normal mind/body functions modern science ascribes to the nervous system. In this sense, the semiotic dimension of Tantric worldview, like the scientific phonetics of Sanskrit grammar, is not abstract or idealistic but embedded in the living context of mind/body interaction.

Although modern scholars view the Indian Tantras exclusively as religious cults, this is clearly not the sole or prime way the Tantras are seen and used in the Buddhist context. In contrast to Alexis Sanderson's account of the Trika tradition as a system of "super-

ritual” meant to reproduce not just religious ceremony but religious experience and performance, the Buddhist Tantras serve primarily as a contemplative science meant to reproduce the enlightened cultural agency of Buddhahood. Of course, this science is ensconced in a system of ritual arts to which Sanderson’s term seems quite appropriate. Yet the spirit in which these arts are practiced is decidedly humanistic rather than theological. Informed by the refined aesthetics of classical Indian dramaturgy and poetics, Vajrayāna ritual is part of a sublimation practice (*rāga-dharma*) meant to purge the mind/body process of the compulsive self-state called the pride of ordinariness (*sadharana-mana*) and to evoke in its place the liberated self of selflessness (*anātamātma*) characterized by divine pride (*devamana*) or the dignity of Buddhahood. Specifically, this practice works not by invoking or encountering a theologized, cosmic Buddha, but instead by the painstakingly human process of reproducing intuitive wisdom and embodied compassion across generations through social learning or mentoring.

Reflective of this humanistic intent, the Tibetan scholar-practitioner Tsong Khapa attributed the efficacy of Vajrayāna practice not to its ritualized poetics or subtle yogic technology, but to the distinctive process of psychospiritual role-modeling known as mentor-archetype yoga (*gūru-devayoga*).²⁰ Judging from its trappings, this colorful process looks like an elaborately ritualized form of spiritual ancestor worship, aptly described by Robert Thurman as “mentor worship.”²¹ Yet judging from its psycholinguistic view of human culture and its sociobiological view of human nature, the Vajrayāna ranks among the world’s most scientific methods of cultivating enlightened cultural agency or spiritual genius. Far from a corruption of Theravāda or Mahāyāna tradition, it represents a proactive move to complement the orthodox agency of India’s

elite with a universal countercultural agency by extending the core Buddhist pedagogic method of reliance on a healing ally (*kalayānamitra-sthirakauśalya*).

As for its therapeutic philosophy, the esoteric Vajrayāna is often described as a fruitional or effectual vehicle (*phalayāna*) in contrast to the causal vehicle (*hetuyāna*) of the exoteric Mahāyāna. It approaches the path of philosophy from the standpoint of its fruit or consequence, namely, the enlightened experience of a spiritual master (*vajrācārya*). It does this by offering the disciple a master's eye view of herself as a living Buddha within a Buddha's perfected natural, social and cultural world (*maṇḍala*), as well as scripting his/her dialogue of enlightening speech (*mantra*) and repertoire of enlightening activities or gestures (*mūdra*). Creative imagery, poetic formulas and performative gestures provide a working linguistic construction and imaginative simulation of enlightened perception that serves as an alternate system of reference by which the disciple can critique his or her compulsive misperception of self and world.

Scientifically, the perfected world of the *maṇḍala* also serves as a map for the process of mind/body self-regulation that supports the process of guided self-transformation. This is especially clear in the *Communion*, where the structure of the *maṇḍala* mansion is identified with the human body, and each of its thirty-two divine inhabitants personifies one of the categories of Buddhist contemplative science, namely one of the systems, media, elements or action faculties. This mapping becomes even clearer when the mansion and its inhabitants are inscribed within the body in the subtle creation stage. This serves to correct misperception of the internal environment and causal workings of the human body-mind. Arrayed at vital points within, the key personas or their poetic seeds serve as signs to introduce the practitioner to the contemplative anatomy of the subtle body, pointing the way for the journey of energy control (*prāṇāyāma*) and sensory

withdrawal (*pratyahāra*) that will help the disciple explore and master the deepest layers of the mind/body process.

Given the neurolinguistic account of life offered by Vajrayāna philosophy and depth-psychology, the remaining disciplines of this contemplative science map out its unique, accelerated path of spiritual healing and ethical transformation. Although the spiritual path and fruit of Vajrayāna Buddhism are said to be congruent with the Mahāyāna tradition, its risks and benefits derive from its unique methodology. The accelerated change promised in this tradition is said to make it best suited to those whose concern for the world is so passionate that they find it intolerable to wait the three eons it takes to reach Buddhahood by ordinary means. Although the Vajrayāna commitment of one to sixteen lifetimes seems just as incredible to moderns, the hagiographies of its great adepts (*mahāsiddha*) recount success stories of just seven years, in range with Shakyamuni's six.²² What about Tantric methods allows them to yield not just Nirvana but the fruit of perfect, complete enlightenment (*samyaksaṃbuddhatva*) with such time compression?

Traditional scholarship alludes to two aspects of Vajrayāna methods that accelerate learning relative to their Mahāyāna analogues. The first is what I will call the synaesthetic or gestalt nature of those methods; the second is their state-specific nature. By coordinating discursive learning with visual imagery, poetic recitation and performative gestures, Vajrayāna practices can cultivate many faculties simultaneously that must be developed separately and then integrated in exoteric practice. When these symbolic tools are applied to the nervous system and conjoined with advanced breath-control, they help induce altered states by accessing deeper layers of consciousness and neural function. Mastering these states gives the practitioner access to normally unconscious processes as well as state-specific faculties for influencing them, allowing

her to expose and reform learned and instinctive habits of mind on their own level and providing the experiential basis for rapid maturation.

Of course, these powerful methods are only psychologically safe and spiritually reliable if they are used in the human context of a congenial mentor-disciple bond, under the guidance of someone who has already mastered them. In this sense, these two celebrated keys to Tantric method default back to one: the spiritual mentoring bond. Extending the metaphor of the loom (*tantra*), the pace and scope of the cultivation of spiritual learning can be increased only to the extent that humans craft reliable ways to convey the nuances of intuitive realization to the next generation. Bluntly put, the premise behind the “quick” methodology of the Vajrayāna is that, given the right mix of depth-psychological methods and mentoring pedagogy, even the spiritual mastery of perfect Buddhahood can be reliably mass-produced. To return to Sanderson’s formula, this would make Vajrayāna practice less a super-ritual of religious experience than a super-technology of psychological deconstruction and spiritual re-integration.

II. VAJRAYĀNA BUDDHISM: THE ART OF CULTURAL EVOLUTION

Typology, Prerequisites and Initiation: Entering the Incomparable Mansion

One of the ways Vajrayāna Buddhism evolved to meet the needs of its increasingly diverse audience was to incorporate a wide range of Tantras of different types within the mainstream consensus of the Ārya tradition. The most complete typology was incorporated into Tsong Khapa’s Ganden synthesis of Sūtra and Tantra. It distinguishes four levels of Tantra meant to meet the needs of practitioners from the most immature novice to the most mature expert. They are, respectively: the action process (*krīya-tantra*); performance process (*cārya-tantra*); integral process (*yoga-tantra*); and optimal

integral process (*anuttara-yogatantra*). Since the Vajrayāna revolves around role-modeling bonds, the first way in which each level is defined is in terms of the perceived relationship between the practitioner and her mentor and archetype of choice (*iṣṭam-devatā*). In the action process, the mentor-archetype is encountered in awe, as a refuge above and beyond the practitioner's scope, and approached as a source of protection, aid and blessing. In the performance process, the mentor-archetype is encountered in admiration, as one who represents the disciple's ideal potential, and is approached as a source of guidance, recognition and inspiration. In the integral process, the mentor-archetype is experienced in communion, as a genius innate in the practitioner's being, and is known as a source of inner transformation and realization. In the optimal integral process, the mentor-archetype is joined in intimacy, as a senior partner in the work of communal self-transformation, and is embraced as a source of inspiration, correction and validation.

Viewed in isolation, the spiritual relationships in the three lower levels are reminiscent of those associated with conventional religious worship and experience. The role of the practitioner at the action level is reminiscent of the role of the faithful in conventional worship; the more active role at the performance level is reminiscent of that played by a religious professional in conventional worship; and the relationship at the integral level is reminiscent of the immersive communion associated with mystical experience. The impression is different, however, when these levels are viewed in light of the optimal integral process towards which they progress. This final level incorporates all the others within an internalization process through which the mentor-archetype is first encountered in awe, then approached in admiration, then received in immersive communion and finally welcomed and embraced as a peer. This progressive practice

earmarks all four levels of Buddhist Tantra as stages in a process of spiritual integration quite unlike any we associate with conventional theistic worship, Asian or Western. From this vantage, the family resemblance between the lower levels of Buddhist Tantrism and the theistic practices of classical Hinduism and Vedist Tantrism figure less as signs of passive influence than as products of intentional attraction. The broad range of spiritual practice covered by these four levels attests to the intent to maintain an alternative or counterpoint to Indian Vedist culture accessible to individuals and groups at all levels of society, spiritual ambition and psychospiritual development.

While there are analogues in all eras for such a process of divinization outside the mainstream of Indo-European theism, the most instructive is with a modern revival of Greek philosophical and hermetic traditions. In modern psychotherapy, the process of internalizing an idealized other is often broken down into phases that align surprisingly well with the levels of the four Tantras. Contemporary self-psychology, for instance, describes the work of psychotherapy as a “transmuting internalization” of a larger self-construct projected on/modeled from the therapist in stages of idealization, identification, introjection and internalization. Although the aim of most psychotherapy is psychological rather than psychospiritual transformation, conventional therapy is also applied to the higher reaches of human development in humanistic, existential and transpersonal psychology, as well as Jungian, Riechian and Lacanian analysis. In this light, the unique art of identifying a human mentor with a divine archetype reflecting the student’s ideal self is a transparent way to foster a positive, idealizing transference and counter-transference, while at the same time analyzing the mutual projections as aids to keep both parties true to their congenial aim. While such comparisons may seem strained, they are not surprising in light of the fact that Buddhist contemplative science and Western

psychotherapy both seek a universal pedagogy based on a shared scientific awareness of the key role of social learning in human evolution and development.

The analogy with psychotherapy brings us to the second descriptor used to characterize the four Tantras: emotional maturity and psychosexual intimacy. This differentiates the four levels using metaphors of romantic love to gauge the practitioner's capacity for sublimating passion. The action process is geared to those who can harness and transform the level of passion stirred by voyeuristic gazing; the performance process is for those who can harness the passion aroused by flirtation; the integral process is linked with the level of passion stirred by sensual embrace; and the optimal integral process, with the most primal passion stirred by full intercourse. Like Freud's reference to Empedocles' ideal of Eros, Jung's use of the romantic imagery of Western alchemy, and Reich's focus on disarming and harnessing sexual energy, this choice of metaphors reflects a scientific insight that the higher neuropsychology of social learning and cultural development is based on the primal biology of reproduction and childrearing.²³ It also explains the use of sexual imagery, symbolism and practices in the optimal integral process. In fact, this focus on sublimating passions is further reflected in the sub-categories used to classify optimal integral Tantras in this typology. Firstly, they are divided into Father and Mother Tantras depending on whether they specialize in treating compulsive emotions or delusion. Exemplary of the latter class are *Hevajra* and *Chakrasaṃvara*, which specialize in sublimating instinctive delusion into the objective intuition of emptiness called the clear light (*prabhāsavara*). Father Tantras like *Guhyasamāja* or *Vajrabhairava* are further subdivided into those that specialize in sublimating addictive desire or compulsive anger into pure bliss-void intuition called the virtual body (*māyādeha*). While the later *Kālachakra* is often called “non-dual” because

of its scientific synthesis of both classes, all optimal integral Tantras are said to be fully equipped to enable the adept to realize and integrate both the masculine and feminine, subjective and objective aspects of spiritual mastery. In what follows, I will address the three phases of the optimal integral process: initiation (*abhiṣeka*); creation stage (*utpattikrama*); and the perfection stage (*niṣpanna-krama*).

Once a student has chosen a mentor and archetype suited to her aims and needs, it is up to the mentor to assess the student's degree of preparedness and to prescribe a preliminary course of study and practice. In the Indo-Tibetan tradition, the psychospiritual prerequisites for initiation into the optimal integral process are three: renunciation; compassion; and a correct view of emptiness. A basic ability to renounce attachments is necessary to safely practice the art of sublimating passions. A strong altruistic resolve or compassionate intention to help is necessary to protect the practitioner from reinforcing self-centeredness and to build a motivation stable enough to overcome learned and innate blocks. And at least a clear intellectual understanding of emptiness is necessary to expose and correct the reifying habits and instincts that would otherwise block the therapeutic process. In addition, a series of common preliminaries is routinely prescribed. These typically involve the repetition of performative rituals of refuge, confession, prostration, mentor-bonding and *maṇḍala* offering meant to speed the purification of obstacles and accumulation of merit that insure success. These preliminary practices, usually performed in iterations of a hundred-thousand each, serve to suppress the compulsive doubt, guilt, pride, envy and greed that might otherwise taint initiation and early practice. The biographies of Tantric adepts help flesh out this sketch, describing a wide range of dramatic encounters between masters and their would-be disciples that

often go on for years before any formal teaching or practice begin. The outcome of this spiritual courtship is initiation, the gateway to all Tantric teaching and practice.

The initiation itself is a ritual enactment of the contract between the mentor-archetype and initiate that symbolically confers the mentor's blessing and permission to practice, while also binding both parties to a set of vows and commitments meant to insure the safety and effectiveness of their collaboration. The ritual of consecration embodies the high art of Buddhist Tantric teaching, as standardized in the pedagogic conventions of Chandrakīrti's seven ornament system.²⁴ In one individual or group experience, typically lasting several days, the mentor-archetype introduces the initiate to the extraordinary universe of the Vajrayāna; imaginatively converting her misperception of self and world into the exalted vision of the archetype and *maṇḍala*; ritually consecrating her mind/body process as the holy terrain for the journey to complete spiritual mastery; symbolically mapping into that terrain the steps and stages of her spiritual individuation and integration, and fully prophesying and blessing the initiate's final attainment of perfect Buddhahood. The four initiations, vase (*kumbaka*), secret (*guhya*), intuitive-wisdom (*prajñā-jñāna*) and word (*vāg*), consecrate the practitioner's body, speech, mind and intuition as the four bases of a vajra master's body, speech, mind and intuition. Symbolically, they map the coarse, subtle and extremely subtle levels of the mind and nervous system to be accessed and transformed, as well as their final integration into the translucent mind and virtual body of a vajra master. Procedurally, they give permission to practice and symbolic hints about the various contemplative methods that access and transform these bases into their spiritual fruits at successive stages on the Tantric path. Finally, the form of the ritual, modeled on traditional Vedic rituals of coronation or enthronement, also illustrates the extraordinary cultural intention

of Vajrayāna initiation. While Theravāda and Mahāyāna ordination rituals are modeled on Vedic rites of passage into orthodox society, Vajrayāna consecration recognizes the initiate as a sovereign leader fully qualified and empowered to guide her whole society and culture. Since Vajrayāna initiation was open to both lay and monastic practitioners, it is also clear that this tradition was meant to open a network of countercultural leadership not just for the broad Mahāyāna community but for the Indian mainstream as well. It also reveals the mentor-student bond as an egalitarian alliance of peers, an extraordinary system of psychosocial checks and balances that helps both parties correct self-limiting blocks to enlightened agency and embody their god-like potential for spiritual genius.

One key interchange in the rite makes this intent explicit. At the threshold of the consecration, the initiate stands at the eastern gate of the palace seeking admission and knocks. From within, an agent of the mentor-archetype responds, “Who are you and what do you want?” The initiate then replies, “I am the fortunate one, and I want great bliss!” But the portal does not open yet. Instead, the divine gatekeeper questions the aspirant’s true intent, “Why do you want it?” Here the one and only reply that will grant entry into the world of the Tantras insures the initiate’s ethos of sublimation, to be spelled out later in the rite’s vows: “To keep the commitments of the Buddhas!” This ethos is also reinforced in the common dictum that the one and only true aim of initiation is the extraordinary attainment (*asadharanasiddhi*) of full enlightenment, whereas mastering the ordinary attainments, psychic powers like the higher intuitions (*abhijñā*), is valid only insofar as they facilitate a Buddha’s empathic art.

Of course, the initiation only sets the stage for a long apprenticeship in which the master and disciple must collaborate closely and consistently, guided by their vows and commitments, to insure that their shared work comes to full fruition. The best way to

unpack the nature and scope of this collaboration is to review the complex psychospiritual pedagogy of the seven ornaments. The first ornament, preliminaries (*upadota*), locates the study of the Tantras in the interface between two human contexts—the source context of its original composition (title, author, intent and scope) and the target context of its current reading (use)—thus contextualizing that study as a human communication stretched across a lineage of oral transmission *via* the artifact of a text. The second ornament of procedure (*naya*) specifies the use to which the Tantra should be put: the reproduction of the process by which the Buddha came to embody enlightenment. In particular, it juxtaposes the narrative development of Shakyamuni's exoteric biography (from incarnation and renunciation to determination and practice) with the narrative analogue of the practitioner's esoteric enlightenment biography (from consecration and self-creation to commitment and performance), thus constructing the dispassionate practice (*virāgadharma*) of the enlightened altruist (*bodhisattva*) and the passionate, sublimation practice (*rāgadharma*) of the creative altruist (*vajrasattva*) as complementary procedures of cultivating enlightened cultural agency. The third ornament, explanation (*upadeśa*), specifies the mode of exposition (ambiguous/unambiguous, interpretable/definitive, explicit/cryptic) most likely to allow a given student at a given developmental stage to de-reify her ordinary constructed life-world and enter the extraordinary life-world of the mentor. The fourth ornament, interpretation (*vyākhyā*), systematizes the gradual decoding of successively more profound levels of meaning encoded in the text (literal, symbolic, implicit, ultimate) only when and if appropriate to the needs of students at progressively more advanced stages of practice (non-practicing initiates, exoteric-creation stage practitioners, perfection stage 1-2

practitioners, perfection stage 3-5 practitioners). Note that this system serves to decode each new level of sense in an analogue mode relative to the next, eg. the literal is fully encrypted, the symbolic decoded to accord with exoteric Mahāyāna/esoteric creation stage practice but no further, etc., so that meanings which may be misleading if revealed prematurely can be left encoded, safeguarding the student's development. The fifth ornament, instruction (*vakta*), specifies which modes of exposition and levels of interpretation are appropriate to public versus private instruction, helping to safeguard spiritual development and insure the complementarity of exoteric/esoteric traditions by limiting teaching in perfection stage practices to confidential relationships where individual receptiveness can be assessed and potential misunderstandings averted. Together with the typology of students to be discussed next under ornament six, this pedagogic ornament plays a crucial role. It contextualizes the use of the hermeneutic ornaments (three and four: explanation and interpretation) within the confidential mentor-student relationship, thus insuring that entry into the world of the text is based on competent informed consent to the methods and aims defined by the therapeutic ornaments (two and seven: procedure and objective), and so truly congenial with the family (*kula*) and lineage (*parampara*). The sixth, pedagogic (*śiṣya*) ornament, involves a typology of progressively more competent students (sandalwood, blue lotus, white lotus, red lotus, gem-like) that further codifies the restrictions placed by ornament five on live teaching relationships. Together, ornaments five and six serve to insure the complementarity of esoteric teaching within a cumulative exo-esoteric consensus, by restricting the four less competent types of student to group instruction on creation stage practices while reserving private instruction on perfection stage practices for the most

competent (gem-like) individuals. This corrects the misconception that esoteric practices are meant for students incapable of dispassionate practice. Instead, the corrupt student is restricted to public teaching as “unfit to care for beings,”²⁵ while the gem-like is taught privately because her “excellent conduct, mature wisdom, pure and single-pointed mind” make her “able to learn and teach perfectly.”²⁶ Ornaments five and six once again reflect the *Lamp's* opening announcement that the sole aim of the system is to help practitioners “care for living beings.”²⁷ And this in turn brings us to the seventh and final ornament, the performance (*sādhana*) of the perfection stage, the living jewel at the heart of the *Communion* and all Vajrayāna Buddhism, that complete integration (*yuganaddha*) of the two realities, translucent mind and virtual body, which crowns the other ornaments, as the unexcelled aim does the means to its realization.

This extraordinary system helps further elucidate the nature and scope of Tantric teaching and practice. Its elegant synthesis of therapeutic philosophy, depth-psychology and spiritual-ethical pedagogy reveals the interpersonal world of Tantric instruction as a psychotherapeutic-psychospiritual art with no clear parallel in any tradition, ancient or modern, Eastern or Western. Its’ unique hermeneutic is meant less for reading arcane texts than for unlocking the living text of the human mind and body, with the aim of revealing the wish-fulfilling gems of the creative human spirit within. In India, it may be best compared with the ultimate hermeneutic refinement of Upaniṣadic pedagogy found in the Vedānta systems of Barṭhāri and Śāṅkara as well as the sublime psychospiritual poetics of Abhinavagupta. In the West, it may be compared with the Sūfī pedagogy of Ibn Arabi or the Kabbala teachings of Abulafia. In its humanism, it may be compared with the modern therapeutic philosophy stemming from Nietzsche and Freud, including the esoteric hermeneutics of Jung and Lacan. In contrast to all these analogues, however,

Vajrayāna pedagogy is uniquely adapted to the needs of a mainstream academic tradition covering the whole range of teaching contexts from large scale public lectures and complex class curricula to the most intimate tutorial and mentoring bonds. In this, it is faithful to the blend of group and individual instruction, discursive and contemplative learning, that characterized the Buddhist academy from its inception and was refined at Mahāyāna universities like Nālandā.²⁸

The Creation Stage: Reenvisioning Life as a Culture Medium for Spiritual Genius

Having entered the universe of the mentor, the optimal integral path begins with a creative process of reenvisioning self and world that challenges many preconceptions about spiritual experience in general and the Buddhist tradition in particular. Although visual imagery is a consistent feature of shamanistic traditions around the world, it is not common in the literate religious traditions of India or the West. Even esoteric Vedist traditions like the Hindu Tantras focus mainly on the auditory imagery of recitation rather than visualization. Likewise, Western mysticism tends to privilege prayer or contentless absorption over visual imagery or visions. Hence, while elaborate ritual and colorful art is widely associated with Vajrayāna Buddhism, this has obscured the fact that these are traditionally seen as mere aids to the mental imagery that plays the main role in introductory Tantric meditation and worship. A second, related preconception shared in both Western and Indian contexts, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, is that such an active use of fabrications of the discursive mind is inimical to spiritual experience, especially of the esoteric or mystic variety. Third is the widespread misconception that Buddhism is atheistic, or aims not at an active, personally engaged way of being in the world but at an impersonal or literally selfless state, aloof or detached from the world of appearance,

agency or passion. Fourth and finally is the prejudice that Buddhism takes a fundamentally negative stance towards the human body in general, as well as towards physical bliss, romantic love and sexuality in particular.

Far from a mere ritual, the mental imagery of the creation stage is seen as the extraordinary preliminary (*asadharana-purvayoga**) for the transformative work of the optimal integral process. Understanding the logic behind this unusual practice is key to understanding the methodology of the creation stage. While Vajrayāna Buddhism is clearly psycholinguistic in outlook, perhaps the best way to understand its logic is to consider two aspects of contemplative science in non-Tantric Buddhism that have received little attention. In the table of elements basic to all Buddhist schools, the discursive system (*samjñā-skandha*) is classed as one of the omnipresent (*sarvatraga*) factors of the mind. Since this table applies to all states of mind, including all eight levels of contemplation and two forms of cessation, the implication is that all possible or conceivable states or forms of experience, no matter how seemingly inconceivable or inexpressible, are under the influence of discursive thinking. Nāgārjuna affirms this in his statement, “The range of mind ends where the expressible ends.”²⁹ Āryadeva and Chandrakīrti both explain the distinctive therapeutics that follows from this Centrist reading of basic Buddhism. The more complete cure of compulsions required on the path of the enlightened altruist demands a more radical cure of delusion, because compulsive emotions and actions are conditioned and reinforced by false views as well as the perceptual errors they rationalize. In short, there is no way to ascend to the altruist’s god-like social agency without turning the delusional self and world into transparent constructions that reflect the healing wisdom and empathic art of enlightenment for the variety of individuals in need. Far from abandoning language and linguistic constructs,

the healing art of Buddhahood requires a mastery of transformational narrative, dialogue and gestures that can help any individual climb out of their cell of delusion up to the incomparable mansions of enlightenment.

In line with this psycholinguistic analysis, the creation stage works allopathically to replace the practitioner's neurotic life narrative with a heroic vision of life that models the perceptual reconstruction of her ordinary self and world into the creative agency and community of a mentor-archetype. It does this by an imaginative conversion (*nayana**) of the dramatic nodes of an unenlightened life narrative—traumatic death, aimless afterlife and compulsive rebirth—into the heroic modes of an enlightened, archetypal life: the embodiment of ultimate truth, sublime beauty and creative emanation (*dharma-, sambhoga-, nirmāṇa-kāya*). This conversion has two aims: to de-center the practitioner's mental life from the materialistic perspective (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) which reifies and appropriates the human body and its environment as “I” and “mine,” and to re-center that life around the divine pride of the emptiness intuition and the void appearance (*śūnya-bimba*) of the *maṇḍala*'s visual, auditory and dramatic imagery. This process begins with rehearsing death through a sequence of dissolutions that primes the practitioner to de-reify and renounce all levels of the ordinary mind-body, preparing awareness to recognize and merge with its purified, primal source, the clear light of death. It then proceeds to convert the whole spectrum of perception as the stuff of enlightenment, envisioning the formless imagery of astrophysics as a virtual truth body, the elemental morphology of evolution and development as a virtual beatific body and the natural, social and cultural gestalt of a human form of life as a virtual creative emanation of Buddhahood. Finally, the creation stage depicts the inner transformation of passion and intuition in the perfection stage, using alchemical imagery to symbolize the path to

spiritual integration. Extending the iconography of the five Buddha clans, this imagery arrays five kinds of flesh and five bodily fluids in a skull cup crucible (*kapala*) where they melt and transform into the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*). This symbolizes the process of sublimation, in which the five systems and five compulsions of neurotic life, purified by blissful realization of emptiness, become the five euphoric energies and five ecstatic intuitions of a spiritual master. Thus, the mental imagery of the creation stage is needed to empower the practitioner to see herself as a divinely creative agent able to turn the vicious cycle of compulsive life centered on one mortal body into the progressive process of cultivating enlightened self-mastery and sublime integration over infinite lives.

As for the second point, while the tradition accepts the elaborate imagery of the creation stage as a mere fabrication, it is nonetheless viewed as an essential preliminary to the genuine spiritual experience of the perfection stage. In fact, in the divine pride and void appearance of this stage one can easily recognize the two holy intuitions (*āryajñāna*) that make up the Mahāyāna practice of transcendent insight (*vipaśyana*). In particular, the formless imagery which is the basis of divine pride is congruent with the holy spacious equipoise intuition (*akaśopama-samāhitajñāna*), while the formal imagery which is the basis of void appearance is congruent with the holy illusory aftermath intuition (*māyopama-prṣṭalabdhajñāna*). While in Mahāyāna practice, they are cultivated separately and later combined into the truth body and form body of Buddhahood, in the Vajrayāna they are cultivated simultaneously beginning with the conversions of the creation stage, and culminate in the poetic body (*mantra-kāya*) that serves as raw material for the perfection stage. This simultaneous practice is more efficient both because it cultivates the mental and physical aspects of enlightenment at once, but also because it fosters from the start the non-dual integration of de-reifying wisdom and de-objectifying

compassion. This integrated practice is possible because the Tantric practitioner has the presence to join in a single experience the profound intuition of emptiness with an inspiring simulation of compassionate action. One traditional simile for this practice is that creation stage contemplation is like painting single-mindedly with the brush of unconditional compassion on the canvas of the realization of emptiness.

The third misconception is that Buddhist practice seeks an end to intentionality and social agency. Here too the intent of creation stage practice aligns with Centrist views of the Mahāyāna path of the enlightened altruist. In his classic on ethics, *The Jewel Garland (Ratnāvalī)*, Nāgārjuna describes the Centrist practice of non-duality as culminating in “the profound, awe-inspiring performance of enlightenment, whose essence is emptiness and compassion.”³⁰ Later in that work, he maps the path to that performance as a gradual accumulation of wisdom and compassion by means of the two insight modes described above as the spacious and illusory intuitions. Viewed in light of Chandrakīrti’s Consensualist account of self as a mere designation (*prajñāptimātra*) made in reference to life systems and of the world as a void or false appearance based on unexamined social consensus (*lokaprasiddhi*), Nāgārjuna’s performance effectively entails shifting the reference of “I” and “mine” from deluded percepts of self and world to the corrected perception of these twin intuitions. Likewise, the intent of the creation stage is to rapidly cultivate this enlightened agency by conjoining both aspects of this reconstruction in a single practice that aims at developing a “self of selflessness.” This reconstruction is guided by poetic formulas like: “I am the self whose nature is the diamond intuition of emptiness;” and “I am the purity whose nature is the natural purity of all things.”³¹ Central to the *Communion*, such formulas appear as the warp and woof of all optimal

integral practice traditions. They reflect the logic of cognitive-perceptual self-transformation that is the work of the creation stage.

Finally, the imagery of the subtle creation stage corrects the misconception that the kind of spiritual agency cultivated in Vajrayāna Buddhism involves a withdrawal (*nivṛtti*) from the world, the body, and/or physical pleasures like sexuality. The iconography of the creation stage celebrates the aesthetic riches and sensual pleasures of life, placing its heroic archetypes in regal garb and palatial surroundings and, more importantly, in full sexual embrace with an intimate partner. The fact that the imagery of sexual union is used to symbolize the union of compassion and wisdom, blissful subjectivity and ecstatic objectivity, dispels any doubt that sensual passion is central to this contemplative process. In the *Communion*, for instance, the feminine archetype is specifically identified as the realization of the blissful emptiness of touch (*śparsavajra*). On the subtle creation stage, the central role of sexual imagery and arousal in this process is further revealed. This involves the contemplative art of sublimation whose stages are defined in terms of three seals or partners (*mūdra*). Typically, the creation stage practice of sublimation involves meditation on an imaginary or ideal partner (*jñāna-mūdra*); ordinary perfection stage (1-2) practice, at least for lay practitioners, involves meditation with a real human or evolutionary partner (*karma-mūdra*); while great perfection stage (3-5) involves embracing the emptiness of all things as a universal partner (*mahāmūdra*).

Creation stage meditation on an ideal partner begins in earnest in the subtle creation stage, where it serves to arouse sexual bliss as a basis for contemplating the emptiness of touch in the so-called vajra offering. The explicitly sexual nature of this practice is clear in its five steps: 1) envisioning a seminal drop at the tip of the male partner's vajra or phallus, dwelling within the lotus or vagina (*bhaga*) of the female; 2) imagining sexual

intercourse and drawing the orgasmic energy released into the whole body to “satisfy” all the archetypes of the body *maṇḍala*; 3) inscribing a microcosmic *maṇḍala* complete with all 32 archetypes within the drop that has been released into the partner’s womb; 4) withdrawing those archetypes, one by one, up the vajra through the central channel to the heart, from where they emanate, one by one, in all directions, benefiting all living beings then returning to the heart; and 5) converting those archetypes into seed mantras that circle the heart, then reciting them while envisioning that they radiate archetypes that travel out on exhalation, benefit beings, and coalesce back into the mantra circle at the heart on inspiration.

Despite the faith that Buddhism must be either world-negating or corrupt, the sublimation practice in the creation stage serves to sacralize the male and female body, physical bliss and sexuality at the same time as it ethicizes them by harnessing bliss to inspire compassionate action in the world. While it introduces the practitioner to the human body and nervous system, it maps them not as a prison of compulsion and death, but as a living mansion of embodied bliss, divine ecstasy and infinite cultural agency. In this sense, the so-called triumph of the *maṇḍala* (*maṇḍala-vijaya*) that marks the culmination of this stage reflects more than just the contemplative feat of experiencing the whole world, inside and out, as a sacred circle or culture medium of enlightenment. It represents the first step towards embodying the culture conquest (*dharma-vijaya*) the Buddhist emperor Aśoka proclaimed as the true work of civilization.³² That is, transforming the human body-mind from its natural, compulsive state into a triumphant, cultivated form fully adapted to a life of spiritual self-mastery and cultural creativity.

In comparative terms, the imagery of the creation stage most closely resembles that of the Śaivite Tantras in India and the Christian hermetic tradition in the West, as

exemplified in the *Rosarium Philosophorum* studied by Jung.³³ In both traditions, however, the adept envisions his transformation in the context of a mystical theism rather than an evolutionary humanism. Hence, the agency of the adept in these traditions is not constructed in the naturalistic mode of the Buddhist Tantras, and while countercultural in intent, it does not share the progressive, utopian aim of transforming the world through spiritual self-mastery. Also, the connection of romantic imagery to the neuropsychology of sublimation is not as clear in Western alchemy as it is in the Indian context. Even Jung's alchemical imagery, despite its reference to romantic archetypes and sexual energy, is closer to a transcendental idealism than the evolutionary neuropsychology of love Freud and Reich share with the Buddhist Tantras. And while modern science has confirmed Tantric views of the mind's god-like construction of perception, as well as the central role of human body images in organizing perception, there is no current analogue of the creation stage's radical project of fully reconstructing perception of self and world.

The Perfection Stage: Embodying Objectivity and Spiritual Integration

Like the creation stage, the perfection stage challenges widely held preconceptions about the nature of human development and spirituality. First, its precise mapping of the process of psychospiritual healing and experience in terms of conscious self-regulation of the nervous system challenges theistic concepts of spirituality as a supernatural process somehow beyond human understanding or causal control. Second, it challenges modern materialist preconceptions of human nature and the nervous system as fixed and determined by biological forces beyond the influence of the human mind. Thirdly it contradicts widely held views that higher human capacities like creativity and spirituality exist in opposition to primitive forces of nature like sex and death. Finally, it challenges

common views that the highest achievements of spiritual realization are either beyond language or else mere social constructions or cultural artifacts.

Picking up where the subtle creation stage left off, this advanced practice is an internal odyssey of sorts, one that takes the practitioner to the deepest, most primal layers of the mind and nervous system, far removed from ordinary experience or awareness, and then brings her back through the full spectrum of embodied life, only now as an integrated being in total mastery of the sources of human creativity and spiritual genius. According to the Ārya tradition, this is a journey of five steps, mapped according to these two legs: the first, from steps 1 to 2, called the ordinary perfection stage; the second, from 3 to 5, called the great perfection stage. These steps or sub-stages are mapped both in terms of their respective contemplative methods and experiential fruits, and in terms of the successive stages of mastery of the central nervous system that supports progress along the way. The systematic nature of this neural mapping of spiritual development makes clear that Vajrayāna Buddhism approaches even the highest stages of spiritual experience as the effects of methods grounded in the natural, causal workings of the human mind and body.

On the other hand, the depth-psychology of the Buddhist Tantras involves a profound therapeutic optimism based in a contemplative science and technology which permits conscious access and control of the deepest, instinctive processes of the mind and nervous system. According to the *Five Stages* system, the ordinary perfection stage entails a progressive separation or isolation (*viveka*) from compulsive perception, conception and consciousness, accomplished by means of progressive access to the ecstatic intuition, energy and chemistry of the extremely subtle mind and nervous system. This process is typically understood as a therapeutic working through of the creation

stage analysis of conscious misperceptions and compulsions that constitute the learned or acquired blocks to enlightenment. The perfection stage may be seen as extending the analysis into the normally unconscious layers of mind and body to uproot the instinctive perceptual and emotional patterns that anchor neurotic consciousness and block intuitive enlightenment. The embodied nature of this journey is clear in the way Tantric depth-psychology maps those instinctive patterns and their analysis.

Unlike the creation stage, whose mastery of discursive and perceptual processing is mapped onto the coarse nervous system, the perfection stage and its work relates to the subtle and subtlest neural levels. These are mapped onto the central channel (*avadhūti*), constricted at six or more points called complexes (*chakras*) by the entanglement of two polar side channels. The two side channels embody a natural polarity of neural energy and chemistry that, along with the blissful energy and chemistry of the central channel, supports the functions of the subtle nervous system. Their impingement on the central channel graphically represents a neural disorder caused by the developmental effect of conflicting compulsions on the mind and nervous system. The subtle material structure of this disorder acts to block the natural flow of neural energy and the natural balance of neural chemistry, obstructing access to the core nervous system in which the instincts for these conflicting compulsions are rooted. By consciously fusing the polar energies of the side channels and directing them into the central channel, the practitioner gains full access to the deepest sources of blissful energy and chemistry, mapped onto the indestructible drop (*akṣara-bindū*) in the very center of the neural complex at the heart. Embedded within this extremely subtle, core level of the mind and nervous system, are the instincts of eighty natural constructions (*svabhāva-vikalpa*) that drive compulsive life. These instinctive patterns, like sexual attraction, malevolence and confusion, are grouped

into three classes—33 desire-oriented, 40 anger-oriented and 7 delusion-oriented—and mapped onto successively deeper layers of the subtlest mind. Since these anchor the innate and learned habits of compulsive life, progress on the perfection stage is defined by the gradual separation of perception, conception and consciousness from those patterns, achieved by progressive mastery of the subtle and subtlest nervous system.

Although this map of the central nervous system does not directly overlap that of modern science, it does offer a model of neural processes that includes all the basic explanatory elements of current neuroscience—energetic, biochemical and structural—as well as a threefold hierarchy of structure and function that roughly corresponds to modern triune brain models.³⁴ This correspondence makes all the more challenging the claim of the perfection stage that the human nervous system can be fully regulated and transformed.

Thirdly, the perfection stage challenges the dualistic sense of a real opposition between spirit and flesh, divine transcendence and human nature. Although the eighty instincts may be mapped onto the extremely subtle nervous system, another way to view the separations is in terms of the process of sublimation that makes them possible.

Technically, the importance of mastering the deepest sources of blissful energy and chemistry stems from the power they have to support the intuitive analysis and artful transformation of instinctive habits. In effect, the bliss within the central channel and heart drop is the strong force that reinforces conditioning or learning of any kind, traumatic or therapeutic. So anyone who masters the energy and chemistry of bliss holds the vajra or indestructible force that shapes the direction and culmination of any life.

This therapeutic reading of the separations as forms of pure bliss is clear in the language used to describe sublimation practice on the perfection stage. Here, the creation stage symbolism of the skull cup crucible directly translates into the contemplative

practice of sublimating the central neurochemistry of blissful states. Gathering the energies from the side channels and inserting them into the central channel at any point along the neuraxis arouses warmth and stirs the flow of sexual neurochemistry, releasing a cascade of energy and drops that induces a progression of four euphoric states or blisses (*ānanda*). The four blisses become ecstasies when enhanced by contemplating their emptiness. They also induce an internal dissolution of mind/body processes of the same kind as naturally occurs unnoticed in the state transitions of sexual orgasm, the sleep cycle or dying. Analyzed into eight stages, this begins with the fourfold dissolution of coarse into subtle mind/body processes and ends in a sequence of four lucid intuitions (*āloka-jñāna*) or voids (*śūnya*), reflecting the subtlest mind's progressive separation from the three classes of natural constructions. The release of desire-oriented instincts by luminence intuition (*pratibhāsa-jñāna*), of anger-oriented instincts by radiance intuition (*vṛddhiprāpta-jñāna*), and of delusion-oriented instincts by immanence intuition (*ālokasyopalabdhiśa-jñāna*) culminates in the realization of the perfect clarity or lucidity of the clear light intuition (*prabhāsvara-jñāna*). Based on this clarity, when subtle and coarse mind/body processes gradually reemerge in the reverse sequence, the practitioner cultivates a way of being in mind/body systems that is separated from the instincts and habits of compulsive life. Rather than a single sequence of events, the perfection stage involves a process of repeated dissolution and emergence through which the raw material of the human body-mind is gradually purified of its contaminating instincts and refined into the euphoric body and ecstatic mind of a master. The most direct path to this purification is by tapping and harnessing the primordial physiology of sex.

This becomes clearer in the specific sequence of practices and achievements that constitute the perfection stage. First, the imaginative construction of a poetic body or

inspired agency in the creation stage was based on the partial withdrawal of sexual energy into the central channel. By continuing the process of gathering, channeling, radiating and coalescing blissful energy through envisioning *maṇḍalas* and reciting *mantras* placed in a subtle drop, eventually all the energies normally flowing in the side channels—known as female and male, solar and lunar—are gathered and drawn inside the central channel, inducing a deeper, more balanced euphoric-ecstatic state. As a result of this state, in the aftermath of the clear light intuition, when the mind/body process begins to dawn with its object world, all people appear as archetypes and all things appear as the *maṇḍala*, sealed by the experience of bliss and emptiness. Called body isolation or as I like to say ecstatic body, this endpoint involves separating perception from compulsive images of self and world. Here begins the first perfection stage, which further concentrates the blissful energies gathered into the central channel at the heart, using a practice called vajra recitation (*vajrajāpa*). Enhancing the inspiration stirred by radiating and coalescing the blissful energy gathered within a mantra circle at the heart, vajra recitation is the contemplative art of hearing the physical resonance of inhaled, stopped and exhaled breath as the resounding of the vajra syllables OM, AH and HŪM. Coalescing the body-speech-mind of all the enlightened, this art serves to fuse poetic speech and rhythmic breathing into a natural synergy of inspiration warm enough to resolve conflicting compulsions and release the side channels knotting the heart, granting access to the deeper euphoric states supported by the subtlest heart drop. In Mother Tantras like *Hevajra*, the rush of inspiration is called psychic heat (*candali*) and aroused with the help of an abdominal breath-holding art called pot-like (*kumbaka*) or pot-belly breathing. Optimal integral systems of both classes incorporated this art to prime and enhance the work of vajra recitation in gathering and applying blissful energies to unlock

the heart. Although different systems start the practice at different points along the central channel, the Ganden tradition is to start at the heart where they all culminate. When the coalescence of blissful energies at the heart finally touches the indestructible drop and the four blisses induce the dissolution process, the attainment of the lucid intuitions marks the endpoint of ecstatic speech—the separation of thought and speech from uninspired habit-energies—and begins the second stage leading to ecstatic mind.

While vajra recitation, with or without pot-belly breathing, continues on in some form through the second perfection stage, further progress towards full sublimation generally involves additional methods to deepen and enhance access to euphoric states. These take two main routes that may converge or diverge. One route involves enhancing vajra recitation with sublimation practice, recruiting more blissful energy from sexual arousal with the help of an imaginary partner or real partner. The other involves enhancing vajra recitation with the so-called immersion (*miśrana**) practice, recruiting the blissful energy induced by other natural state transitions including the sleep cycle and the death process. As for the first route, vajra recitation may be enhanced by envisioning a substantial drop of male and female sexual fluids commingling where the sexual organs touch in imaginary union. The energy of sexual arousal is then withdrawn *via* the central channel to the heart, permitting vajra recitation to absorb more of the body's ten energies into the indestructible drop, eliciting a more profound euphoria. Alternately, the internal condition of vajra recitation enhanced by a visualized sexual drop may be combined with the external condition of sublimated intercourse with a real partner. Such a partner must also be fully initiated and practicing at least at the level of the creation stage, and union may involve ritual dress and/or scripted dialogue. In either case, the sublimated intercourse involves control of the normal sexual response and withdrawal of orgasmic

energy up to the heart. The alternate route involves deepening the combined effect of vajra recitation and sublimation practice with an imaginary partner by recruiting the normally unconscious euphoria of the dreamless sleep state or the clear light of death. This route is mapped by a system of nine immersions comparable to the conversions of the creation stage. The first three reframe the internal art of sublimation practice employed thus far as merging the waking experience of orgasm, aftermath, and return to normal waking with the embodiment of truth, beauty and emanation. The effect of these mergers may be further deepened in the second and third sets of three, by sublimation which merges deep sleep, dreaming and reawakening with the three bodies, or, finally, by sublimation which merges death, afterlife and rebirth with the three bodies. This mapping of sublimation practice makes clear that the perfection stage treats sexuality not as an end in itself, but rather as one of two natural ways into the subtlest sources of blissful intuition within the human body-mind. Neither promoting nor reviling normal sexuality, the optimal integral process involves a mind/body science and art of harnessing the sexual response to speed psychospiritual healing, maturation and communion with the world at large. In this, it represents a rare cultural system of know-how to facilitate the cultivation of Eros in the service of helping humanity adapt more quickly and fully to the unnatural condition of civilization.

This brings us to the final preconception related to the perfection stage: that spiritual experience is either beyond language entirely or else a mere cultural construction. The aim of all ordinary perfection stage practices is the complete coalescence of all ten mind/body energies into the indestructible drop at the heart, a feat which induces the four blisses and deepens the dissolution process to a level normally experienced only at death. This profound dissolution culminates in four genuine intuitions in which consciousness is

fully separated from ordinary mental constructions and attains an approximate clarity sealed by indivisible bliss and emptiness, called the ecstatic mind. The consensus is that this endpoint can only be reached with the support of either a real partner or the death process, although the Kālachakra tradition reports that the sleep mergers alone will do for some. In either case, this is the gateway to the third stage called self-empowerment, and to the practice of the great perfection. Although the description of this attainment as purifying constructed consciousness would seem to suggest that what follows is somehow beyond the scope of language and culture, the fact is that the work of the great perfection stages are anything but divorced from words and concepts. In fact, the fourth and final initiation that unlocks them is explicitly called the “word” initiation. The remainder of the perfection stage involves practicing analytic insight into emptiness with the blissful subjectivity of the ecstatic mind. Moreover, the clear description of the radical therapeutic gains and profound transformation of mind/body agency achieved in these final stages should dispel any notion that their end products are mere social constructions.

The final leg of the odyssey of complete spiritual mastery begins with reemergence from the approximate clear light of the ecstatic mind. Freed of negative self-concepts by that clear light mind, the practitioner artfully embodies the profound blissful energy released in the aftermath of that realization, which spontaneously appears in the self-image of an archetype. At this point, the source consciousness and neural energy of the extremely subtle level have been accessed for the first time, and their union, supporting the mirage-like self-image of the practitioner’s archetype, is called the virtual body. Because the extremely subtle mind and energy body are still tainted by subtle residues of the eighty natural constructions, this new spiritual agency is the raw material to be

refined on this stage, the so-called impure virtual body. In terms of the contemplative science of this tradition, this nascent agency reflects a capacity to fully separate one's self-image or self-sense from the coarse physical body and to identify it with the subtle, euphoric body born of sublimation. Like the mind-made body withdrawn from the inmost layers of the body-mind described in the Upaniśads and the Pāli canon,³⁵ this impure virtual body acts as the basis for the final purification of instinctive blocks to enlightenment as well as the agent who cultivates the spiritual integration and pedagogic arts of vajra mastery. It is for this reason that Ārya Nāgārjuna calls this stage self-empowerment. This purification and cultivation progresses using the same arts practiced on the second stage, by refining the virtual body through repeated experience of dissolution and reemergence. As a result, sublimation practice finally fully releases the innate great bliss of the heart drop which naturally facilitates the non-constructed, non-dual realization of emptiness. Based on the subtle subjectivity of this orgasmic bliss, this stage yields the actual lucid intuitions: direct, perceptual realizations of the emptiness of the three kinds of instincts culminating in the actual or objective clear light. This is the translucent bliss-void intuition in which the mind is finally purged of the instincts for compulsive emotions or blocks to liberation (*kleśāvaraṇa*). As in the exoteric Centrist system, this realization is non-conceptual in the sense that it involves a pure negation which conclusively dispels any reified sense of reality, identity or objectivity anchoring those instincts. Far from a leap beyond language, this realization is guided and validated by the use of conventions of language, although its logic eventually becomes a rational intuition (*yuki-jñāna*) validating their emptiness as a direct mental perception (*manasa-pratyakṣa*) of reality. Finally, the fact that gradually integrating this realization is no mere

construct but has objective therapeutic and psychophysical effects should be equally evident from a brief description of the final two perfection stages.

Attaining the actual clear light is the doorway to the fourth perfection stage, called clear light or illumination. This stage begins with the emergence out of the clear light of a pure form of the virtual body purged of compulsive emotions and their subtlest instincts. On this penultimate stretch of the perfection stage, the practice involves repeatedly contemplating the objective reality of emptiness with the ecstatic subjectivity of the very subtlest body-mind. Called the universal seal, sublimation practice on this and the last stage shifts its focus from the external condition of a real partner to the objective condition of all things. In other words, the partner known by great bliss expands from the emptiness of a single mental image or real individual to embrace the universal emptiness of all persons and things. In a sense, the practitioner's ultimate partner in evolution now is nothing other than the universe itself. Even given the blissful subjectivity of the pure virtual body and the lucid objectivity of the actual clear light, however, practice communing with the universe at this stage is still hindered by the fact that these two attainments have not been integrated with one another. This residual dualism is removed at the end of this stage by immersing a more refined form of the pure virtual body into the actual clear light. Once the pure virtual body has undergone the final dissolution process on this stage and knows the actual clear light, it reemerges as the apprentice's integration, that is, a personification of the primal energy of great bliss which simultaneously embodies the translucency of actual clear light. With this achievement, the final sublimation practice of embracing universal emptiness as a partner gradually eliminates the subtlest instincts for reification that anchor the blocks to perfect objectivity or omniscience (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). This final purification yields the master's integration of

translucent mind and virtual body that is the Vajrayāna form of perfect Buddhahood. According to Tantric contemplative science, the subtlest lucid intuition or clear light mind is the actuality of the vajra master's truth body; the pure ecstasy of the indestructible drop personified as the virtual body is the vajra master's beatific body; and the voluntary return to the coarse physical body with this integrated spiritual agency is the vajra master's emanation body.

In comparative terms, the spiritual journey of the perfection stage bears a clear family resemblance to those described in ecstatic mystical traditions, East and West. Indian analogues include the high tradition of Kasmiri Śaivite Tantras, as well as the popular tradition of cults of ecstatic creativity and spontaneity (*sahaja*). The explicitly sexual nature of the ecstasy it recommends is reminiscent of the experience of Western mystics like Theresa of Avila, as well as renaissance traditions like the *Fidele d'Amore* popularized in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Yet here again, these traditions are all overtly theistic, in contrast to the scientific humanism of the Buddhist Tantras. Modern analogues for the ordinary perfection stage include the psychosexual analysis of Reich, and for the great perfection stage, the de-reifying linguistic analysis of Lacan and his heirs, especially Julia Kristeva. Here too, however, the therapeutic optimism and psychospiritual ethos of the optimal integral process distinguish it from any analogues in the West.

III. CONTRIBUTIONS OF VAJRAYĀNA BUDDHISM TO GLOBAL CULTURE³⁶

Inspired by the same utopian ethos as the exoteric Mahāyāna, the esoteric Vajrayāna clearly involves a more critical contemplative science and more effective contemplative technology. This, together with a pedagogy that insures its wise use,

explains why it became the definitive practical vehicle of Buddhist philosophy in India. This fact reflects the growing consensus in the Nālandā tradition that esoteric teaching methods could serve as well or better than their exoteric analogues to advance Buddha's reform of Indian culture beyond the monastery. This consensus is clear in the historical trend towards greater reliance on Tantric forms of organizing and disseminating knowledge and expertise. Besides the integration of Tantric methods into the mainstream teaching of Indian and Tibetan masters, the two major examples of this trend are the Kālachakra tradition and Tibetan medicine. These two later systems reflect an emerging consensus that the optimal integral Tantras are preferable for the cultivation of scientific knowledge and expertise as well as spiritual wisdom and compassion. As the most modern and scientific synthesis of Vajrayāna Buddhism, the *Wheel of Time* offers invaluable perspective on the potential contributions of Buddhist Tantrism to global philosophy, science and civilization. The perspective it offers on Tantric culture is exemplified in its elegant synthesis of a multidisciplinary approach to science with a progressive, democratic approach to global civilization.

Assuming the Centrist critique of knowledge and method, the *Wheel of Time* inverts the objectivist hierarchy of sciences we have come to accept in the West. Rather than ranking sciences based on their proximity to a supposedly independent objective reality—physics first, biology second, psychology third, etc—it orders knowledge based on the theory of two realities (*dviṣatya-vāda*). Since all dualistic knowledge and expertise is relative and conventional, all ordinary science, outer (*bahya-vidyā*) and inner (*adhyātma-vidyā*), is considered provisional (*kṣara*). Only that knowledge which consists in non-dualistic, intuitive openness to the infinitely relative and ungraspable nature of things, outer and inner, is ultimately valid, pure or unchanging science (*akṣara-vidyā*).

The insight behind Kālachakra science is quintessential Centrism: no formula of knowledge or practice, however invaluable, can be objective in and of itself; because it is inexorably partial and symbolic, and so must be constantly corrected against the touchstone of purely critical reason and validating personal experience. While we in the West have spent the last century learning to tolerate this insight, Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers were ready long ago to adapt their scientific tradition to this reality. And they did so by developing scientific systems of self-correction effective and universal enough to help individuals and groups reliably cultivate the radical open-mindedness and unbiased concern for the world that make ordinary humans into extraordinary agents of science and civilization.

As for its pure, contemplative science, the *Wheel of Time* diverges from older optimal integral systems in numerous ways. Intriguingly, its contemplative innovations are based on its syncretistic, critical theories of physics and biology. They are of interest not just because they reflect the progressive nature of Buddhist thought and science, but also because they indicate the capacity of Vajrayāna Buddhism to integrate the latest developments of Western science. Behind the deceptively simple nature of Kālachakra atomism, for instance, there are several ways in which it challenges the current consensus of particle physics. By asserting that all matter emerges from space, it predicts that no irreducible substance or structure of matter will ever be found; and by asserting that all material elements are pervaded by a sixth element of information or intuition (*jñāna-dhātu*), it challenges the wisdom of a model of the physical world that accepts the objectivity of insubstantial matter while denying the objectivity of insubstantial consciousness. In terms of contemplative science, the insight that animate life and the inanimate world both emerge from a space-element pervaded by information makes it

easier to conceive of dissolving the subtle matter and energy patterns supporting the ordinary alienated life cycle (*samsāra*) and building up in their place the drops of sublimated bliss that sustain the extraordinary release (*nirvāṇa*) of enlightened engagement with the world. In terms of cosmology, the *Wheel of Time*'s alignment of the external workings of the cosmos with the inner workings of life and mind serves to challenge both theistic and modern materialist views that certain events fall outside the realm of mind/body interdependence, as determined by God (*Īśvara*), fate (*rta*), nature (*prākṛti*) or chance (*āhetuka*). This insight of omni-interconnectedness serves to orient individuals and societies to an evolutionary view of life and mind as subject to a causality that is continuous with the causality of the physical world; and also empowers them to take full responsibility for understanding and influencing the causality that shapes their lives and shared happiness. In neuroscience, the *Wheel of Time* holds distinctive views that challenge the consensus of earlier Buddhist Tantras as well as current brain science. The idea that the central channel is not normally fully blocked challenges the neuroscience of the Ārya tradition as well as the current view that core neural structures like the internal reward system are not subject to conscious self-regulation. In addition, its theory that the atomic structure of the nervous system can be changed along with its energy and chemistry challenges the Ārya consensus and anticipates the current neuroscience of neural plasticity. In addition, by including a fourth level of mind linked with orgasm, its map of the nervous system makes the key role of bliss in learning overt, preparing its practitioners from the start for the advanced arts of sublimation kept covert in earlier Tantras. Therapeutically, the *Wheel of Time* view that sexual intercourse inspired by real empathy can support sublimation challenges both Tantric tradition and current sex therapy, encouraging a mainstream audience to believe that they are capable

of profound sublimation. Taken together, these innovations show how Vajrayāna Buddhism is capable of innovations in the physical and biomedical sciences that are not only coherent in themselves but also translatable into conceptual and technical innovations that make contemplative self-change more sensible and practical for a cosmopolitan community with diverse cultural worldviews.

The extraordinary outlook and intent of the *Wheel of Time's* synthetic science is clear not just in its views of nature and the path of self-change but also in its account of the result of that path, the fourfold objectivity or omniscience of a master. Here, its new, fourfold model of mind unfolds as a more detailed map of the supreme pilgrimage through the nervous system towards the blissful, non-dual mastery of the outer and inner worlds. Objective self-knowledge and artful mastery of the waking, dream, sleep and orgasmic states transforms the practitioner's body, speech, mind and intuition from their basic conditions to the blissful, omniscient agency of a spiritual genius. Thus, the repetitive, traumatic interaction of the outer and inner worlds at these four levels is transformed by four successive stages of contemplation, each of which shifts the atomic energies (*paramaṇu-prāṇa*) of the stress instincts that act as demons (*māras*) or obscurations (*avāraṇa*), into a blissful communion of outer and inner, through the non-dual realization of the objective physicality of voidness (*śūnyatā-rūpini*) by the subjective changeless bliss (*akṣara-sukha*) at each level. This constitutes the complete correction (*sarvākārā viśuddhi*) of life in the world that is the four bodies of Buddhahood.

Complementing this complete and empowering synthesis of human science, the utopian global mission of the *Wheel of Time's* enlightened politics envisions a guiding role for spiritual wisdom and art in the history of human culture. Prophesying a perilous transition in global civilization, it offers a radically progressive alternative to the cultures

of prejudice and violence that threaten our world to this day, an alternative based on the promise that scientific education and democratic society will spread universally to all the world's diverse cultures and peoples. According to the *Wheel of Time* legend, this sustainable alternative tradition profoundly affected the mythical society or hidden kingdom of Śambhala within the span of just eight generations. By the time of Mañjuśrī Yaśas, the country's first Democratic Ruler (*Kūlika-rājā*), it is said that education and wealth had spread to the point that social and racial inequity had been abolished. Whatever historical truth there may be in such legends, one thing is clear. The *Wheel of Time* tradition is no idle prophecy, but an eminently reasoned and pragmatic plan for a sustainable global future for humanity, based on a decisive commitment to the progressive, democratic paradigm of Vajrayāna science and civilization.

While the legend and teaching of the *Wheel of Time* may seem shrouded in mystery along with all Tantric culture, it is as far from the romantic lore of myth and legend as the West's modern tradition of enlightenment. This may seem less surprising when one considers the fact that, like the Western enlightenment vision of science and democracy, the *Wheel of Time* vision is grounded in the most mainstream institution of contemplative life: the university. The fact that the emergence of this consummate optimal integral system preceded Europe's scientific enlightenment by at a millennium is not so shocking in view of the fact that the first Indian universities, Takśāśīla, Dhānyakaṭaka and Nālandā were founded a millennium or more before the first Western universities at Bologna, Paris and Oxford.

More surprising is the fact that the basic elements of the scientific worldview of the *Wheel of Time* anticipate not just the modern physics of Newton or the modern biology of Freud, but the post-modern insights of Einstein, Heisenberg, Wittgenstein and

Lacan as well. In any case, its timeless contemplative science presents all citizens of the planet earth with the futuristic promise of fully adapting their experience of self and world to the new realities of quantum physics, neural plasticity and positive psychology, of which most have not yet heard. Whether Śambhala is a still hidden utopia or a contemplative scientific community without cultural borders, it is clear that the *Wheel of Time*'s enlightened view of reality and contemplative science of self-correction are remarkably timely given the challenges facing humanity today. In view of the looming problems of terrorism, sectarian violence, ethnic cleansing, inner city violence and violence in our homes and schools, it is fortunate indeed that the once warlike peoples of Tibet and Mongolia have preserved what may be the world's most accessible and effective system of enlightened self-disarmament and non-violent social engagement.

Faced with a time-warp in which modern science is just catching up with the wisdom of this older tradition, those in the West interested in serious study of Buddhist Tantric literature, arts and sciences, will need to practice some of the patience the *Wheel of Time* teaches. For unlike the West's main traditions of religious prophecy, the Kālacakra's scientific futurism embodies a progressive style of cultural agency in which the spirit of universal compassion is active as transcendent tolerance for the blocks that keep alienated individuals and groups attached to prejudice and the repetition of trauma. While moderns have learned to think of religions as perpetuating superstition and destructive emotions like shame, fear and hate, in order to learn from Tantras like the *Wheel of Time* the scientific community of the West must begin to face and heal its own reactive bias against things contemplative or spiritual. This, I believe, is the rate-limiting step in recognizing what may be the prime challenge facing scientific civilization today: the need to integrate the psychotherapeutic, contemplative and ethical disciplines of self-

correction modern science and civilization jettisoned along with the religious traditions and institutions from which they emerged. This philosophical obstacle relates to the lack of resolution in certain post-modern debates facing the scientific academy in the West. These include the debate between the physical and social science communities over objectivity versus cultural relativism; the debate between secularists and traditionalists over the role of science versus religion in education; and the debate between objectivists and pluralists over the possibility of multiple approaches to science and spirituality.

Let me simply say that I believe that these problems were clearly recognized in Buddhist and Vedist thought after Nāgārjuna and resolved at Nālandā by the eighth century. That resolution is reflected in the complementary Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna paradigms of embodied objectivity refined by Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti. The gist of that resolution is to confirm Shakyamuni's critique of the idea of absolute objectivity or omniscience, as well as his insistence that appropriate objectivity or embodied omniscience does insure that human knowledge and action yield personal freedom and social happiness. Since the objectivity of human knowledge and expertise is no greater than the objectivity of those who employ them, the best way to advance it should be to maximize the natural, social and cultural processes of self-transcendence by which individuals and groups become more objective over time. Viewed in this light, the enormous potential of Vajrayāna Buddhism for the future lies in the fact that it represents one of humanity's most sophisticated working paradigms of contemplative self-correction but also one ideally suited to reconciling the conflicting worldviews and values of modern materialist science and traditional theistic spirituality.

¹ Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994; Vesna Wallace, *The Inner Kālachakrantra*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Khedrup Norsang Gyatso, *Ornament of Stainless Light*, Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2004; Vesna Wallace, *Kālachakrantra: The Chapter on the Individual*, New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, AIBS/Columbia University Press, 2007; David Grey, *The Chakrasamvara Tantra* (AIBS/ Columbia University Press, 2007; Thomas Yarnell, *Tsong Khapa on the Creation Stage*, New York: AIBS/Columbia University Press, 2008; Christian Wedemeyer, *Āryadeva's Concentrated Lamp*, New York: AIBS/Columbia University Press, 2008.

² Robert Thurman, "Vajra Hermeneutics," in D. Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992; Daniel Cozort, *Highest Yoga Tantra*, Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1986; Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Clear Light of Bliss*, London: Tharpa Publications, 1982; Lati Rinpochoy and Jeffery Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1979/1980; Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Tantric Grounds and Paths*, London: Tharpa Publications, 1994; Yangchen Gawai Lodoe, *Paths and Grounds of Guhyasamaja According to Arya Nagarjuna*, Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1995.

³ Following Mathieu Ricard, "The Relevance of a Contemplative Science," in Alan Wallace, ed., *Buddhism and Science*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; and Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*, New York: Routledge Press, 1999; and Wedemeyer, *Āryadeva, op cit.*

⁵ Consider Mathieu Ricard and Trinh Xuan Thuan, *The Quantum and the Lotus*, New York: Crown Publishing, 2001; Geshe Tashi Tsering, *Buddhist Psychology*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006; The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom*, New York: Broadway Press, 2006.

⁶ Because this volume focuses on Indian philosophy, I will render technical terms in Sanskrit rather than Tibetan, denoting unattested terms reconstructed from the Tibetan with an asterisk.

⁷ Although this role was gradually forgotten in India after the destruction of its Buddhist universities (13th - 14th CE), it has recently reemerged thanks to the work of Indologists like Lalmani Joshi and Tibetologists like Ribert Thurman. See Joshi's *Studies of the Buddhist Culture of India*, Delhi: Motilal Barnarsidas, 1980; and Thurman's *Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence: Reason and Enlightenment in the Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986

⁸ Thomans McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek & Indian Philosophies*. New York: Allworth Press, 2002.

⁹ Mark McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, University Park: Penn State Press, 1996; Nicholas Smith and Paul Woodruff, *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁰ Gary Alan Scott, ed., *Does Socrates Have a Method? Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, University Park: Penn State Press, 2002.

¹¹ Joseph Loizzo, *Wittgenstein and the Mādhyamika*, Amherst: Amherst College Independent Study Thesis, 1977; Robert Thurman, *Central Philosophy, op cit.*; Joseph Loizzo, *Nāgārjuna's Reason Sixty with Chandrakīrti's Commentary*, AIBS/Columbia University Press, 2007.

¹² Joseph Loizzo, "Renewing the Nālandā Legacy: Science, Religion & Objectivity in Buddhism and the West," *Religion East and West* 6, 2006; Loizzo, *Reason Sixty, op cit.*; Joseph Loizzo, "The Optimization of Learning and Quality of Life throughout the Lifespan: A Global Framework for Research & Application," in W. Bushell, ed., *Longevity and Optimal Health*, New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 2008

¹³ Joseph Loizzo, *Renewing the Nālandā Legacy, op cit.*

Joseph Loizzo, "Kālacakra and the Nālandā Tradition: Science, Religion and Objectivity in Buddhism and the West," in R. Thurman et al. *The Kālacakra Tantra: Essays in Honor of H.H. the Dalai Lama*, Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2008.

¹⁴ Edwin Obermiller, *Buston's History of Buddhism in India*, Tokyo: Suzuki, 1975; A. Chattopadhyaya and L. Chimpa, *Taranātha's History of Buddhism*, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1970.

¹⁵ Christian Wedemeyer, *Vajrayana and its Doubles: The Tantric Works of Āryadeva*, University of Michigan: University Microfilm Services, 2000; Joseph Loizzo, *Candrakīrti and the Moon-Flower of Nālandā: Objectivity and Self-Correction in India's Central Therapeutic Philosophy of Language*, University of Michigan: University Microfilm Services, 2001.

¹⁶ Notable fruits of this reform in the Mahāyāna tradition of Sanskrit Buddhism include Nāgārjuna's reifinement of Upaniṣadic non-dualism; the Buddhist Chandra system of Paninian grammar; Bārṭhari's system of Vedist linguistic philosophy (*vyākaraṇa*); and Vagbhagta's classical Buddhist synthesis of Indian medicine.

¹⁷ Lalmani Joshi, *op cit.*

¹⁸ The *kvip* class of variables Panini used to designate exceptions (*lopa*=*adarśana*) to expected usage provide a linguistic model for the mathematical placeholder zero, well known to Indians prior to Nāgārjuna, although designated *kha* or *bindū* until after his definition of *śūnya* as a grammatical placeholder. See Joseph Loizzo, *Chandrakīrti and the Moon-Flower of Nālandā*, *op cit.*, and D.S. Ruegg, *Mathematical and Linguistic Models in Indian Thought: The Case of Zero and Śūnyatā*. *Weiner Zeitschrift fur die Kunde Sudasiens*, 22 (1978):1-71.

¹⁹ In effect, Chandrakīrti's move was to realign the interpretation of Centrism with the Buddhist tradition of linguistic philosophy (*vyākaraṇa*) that reached back to Nāgārjuna via the Buddhist (Chandra) system of grammar. A key figure in this lineage was Bārṭhari, whose linguistic depth-psychology may have provided the Centrist with a way to incorporate Idealism and whose view of philosophy as a language therapy (*vāg-cikitsa*) may also have influenced Chandrakīrti.

²⁰ Tsong Khapa. *Tantra in Tibet*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1977.

²¹ Robert Thurman, *Essential Tibetan Buddhism*, New York: Harper-Collins, 1995.

²² R. Robinson, *Buddha's Lions*, Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1979; Kieth Dowman, *Masters of Mahamudra*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1985.

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, New York: Norton & Company, 1930/1961; C.G. Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy*, Princeton: Bollingen Series XX, 16, 1954; Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis*, New York: Ferrar, Strauss & Geroux, 1945/1999.

²⁴ In contrast to the consensus of modern scholarship, I will respect the traditional assumption that the Tantric Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Chandrakīrti, etc. are identical to the Centrist philosophers of the same names.

²⁵ C. Chakravarti, ed. *Guhyasamajatanrapradīpodyotanaṭīkāśadkoṭivivākyā*. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1984, 4: / *na shakyo (skakto) 'nugrahaū kartum candanākhyātapudgalap* //.

²⁶ Chakravarti, 4: / *sushilo vishado dakūap prajñāvānekasandhikap / shrutvā prakāśayet samyak prakhyāto ratnapudgalap* //

²⁷ 1.9-10; ed. Chakravarti, 2: / *svalpagantha prabhatārthe samāje tantradukare / saptālaūkāraturbodhād vibhramanti ca sarvathā (sarvatā) // tasmād vijñāya yatnena gurupadaprasādataḥ / tadvibhāgaū kariṣyāmi sattvānugrahakāmyayā* //.

²⁸ Traditional sources for the nature and structure of the Nālandā curriculum include the records of Chinese visiting scholars Xuan-zang and Yi-jing: S. Beal, *Su-Yu-Ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London, 1884/1969; J. Takakusus, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1896.

²⁹ MMK, XVIII, 7ab, Inada, 115: // *nivṛttam-abhidhātavyaū nivṛtte cittagocare* //.

³⁰ RA, 398cd, // *gambhiram bhīrubhijaṇaṃ bodhisadhanam śūnyatākaruna-garbham* //.

³¹ *oṃ śūnyatājñāna-vajrasvabhāvātmaḥ 'ham; oṃ svabhāvaśuddha-sarvadharmasvabhāva śuddho 'ham.*

³² Stanley Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

³³ C.G. Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy*, Princeton: Bollingen Series XX, 16, 1954.

³⁴ Joseph Loizzo, "Meditation and Psychotherapy," in *Complementary Medicine and Psychiatry* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) 147-197; and "The Optimization of Learning and Quality of Life throughout the Lifespan: A Global Framework for Research & Application," in W. Bushell, ed., *Longevity and Optimal Health*, New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 2008.

³⁵ *Sutra on the Fruits of the Homeless Life (Sāmannaphalasutta)*, 2, 86-87, M. Walshe trans., *Thus Have I Heard*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1992, 104-105: "In the same way, a monk with mind concentrated directs his mind to the production of a mind-made body, he draws that [second mind-made] body out of this [first mind-made] body, having form, complete with all its limbs and faculties. This is a fruit of the homeless life more excellent and perfect than the former ones....[Then] he with mind concentrated applies and directs his mind to the various supernormal powers. He enjoys the different supernormal powers. He walks through walls. He travels to Brahma worlds...." Compare *The Kātha Upaniṣad*, R.E. Hume trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Dehli, 1921, 360-361, "When are liberated all the desires that lodge in

one's heart, then a mortal becomes immortal, therein he reaches Brahma. When are cut all the knots of the heart here on earth, then a mortal becomes immortal....A person of the measure of a thumb is the inner soul (*antarātman*), ever seated in the heart of creatures, him one should draw out from one's own body like an arrow-shaft from a reed, with firmness, him one should know as the Pure, Immortal....”

³⁶ The author acknowledges Snow Lion Press for permission to reprint in this section portions of his chapter, “Kālacakra and the Nālandā Tradition,” from Robert Thurman et al., *The Kālacakra Tantra: Essays in Honor of H.H. the Dalai Lama*, Ithaca: Snow Lion Press, 2008.