

Mimesis:
Some reflections on *bodhicitta* verses
in the second chapter of the *Guhyasamājantra*

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Abstract. Although the ultimate bodhicitta functions within a non-dual model of cognition where oppositions (good and evil, pure and impure, *saṃsāra–nirvāṇa*, etc.) do not exist, it is traditionally considered to be the wisdom cognising emptiness. In this paper I will try to explore the cognitive nature of the ultimate *bodhicitta* to answer the question ‘What kind of cognition is the cognising of emptiness?’ In the paper I also will make an attempt to describe the basics of ambivalent Tantric ethics in terms of the phenomenological category of imitation or *mimesis*.

Verses on the ultimate *bodhicitta* in the second chapter of the *Guhyasamājantra* are a subject of commentaries written by various Tibetan and Indian authors. The paper is supplemented with a translation of *Bodhicittabhāvanā* written by Ācārya Kamalaśīla. This short text is a commentary on verses proclaimed by Tathagāgata Vairocana in the second chapter of *Guhyasamājantra*.

The strategy of cognition presented in Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma is pointed at the deconstruction of gnosiological determinants (*avidyā, prapañca*) that are responsible for the persistent generation of the defective and suffering world of living beings. Total cessation of these gnosiological determinants results in *nirupadhiśeṣa nirvāṇa—nirvāṇa* without residual formations of mind and body—and leads to an unconditional world that stands apart from the customary environment that is open to our mutual experience. The existence of two opposite states of being (*saṃsāra–nirvāṇa*) requires a transition associated with a system of moral renunciations and epistemological declinations.

In Prajñāpāramitā literature and later in works of Nāgārjuna, the ‘transitional model’ is overlaid by another, non-dualistic disposition of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* attended by a different paradoxical strategy of cognition.

In *Bodhicittavivarāṇa*, verse 21, Nāgārjuna says:

It’s the sameness of the object that functions, [if asserted],
Is this not like being harmed in a dream?

These notes are only an attempt to outline several, I hope important, topics that require additional investigation. I also would like to thank Prof. Deborah Sommer (Gettysburg College) who made this paper readable by thorough proofreading.

Between the dream and wakeful state there is no difference
Insofar as the functioning of things is concerned.¹

Also in *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* we read:

Existence and *nirvāṇa*: These two are not [really] to be found. [Instead,] *nirvāṇa* [may be] defined as the thorough knowledge of existence. (Lindtner 1986, 74–5)

The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrika-prajñāpāramitā* states:

Coursing in the baseless, he [*Bodhisattva*—V.K.] sees all *dharmas* as contained in this perfection of wisdom, and yet he does not apprehend those *dharmas*. And why? Because these *dharmas* on the one hand and that perfection of wisdom on the other are not two nor divided. And why? Because there is no differentiation between these *dharmas*. All *dharmas* are undifferentiated because they have been identified with the *dharmā*-element (*dharmadhātu*), with suchness (*tathatā*), with reality limit (*bhūtaakoṭi*). (Conze 1979, 628)

Though these approaches seem different, they both are ‘based on the general Buddhist notion that the actual soteriological breakthrough comes in the form of an intellectual event, gnosis, and not an emotional one’ (Wangchuk 2007, 199). In each intellectual event, consciousness (*vijñāna*) is indispensably involved, but consciousness arises dependent on *avidyā*, influenced by *prapañca* and *vikalpa*, and it is constantly changing. It must be stopped, radically transformed, or replaced by some other instrument of cognition to ensure the vision of things as they really are (*vidyā*).

In Tantric Buddhism the disposition of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is similar to the disposition given in the Pāramitāyana, but instead of the analysis of the true nature of phenomena as an instrument of cognition, Tantric Buddhism offers specific cognition techniques and specific understandings of ethical prescriptions. In the second chapter of the *Guhyasamājatantra*, this alternative instrument of cognition is introduced as ‘the secret of all Tathagāgatas, highest *bodhicitta* (*de bzhin gshegs pa kun gyi gsangs / bla named pa'i byang chub sems*)’.² In addition, the ultimate *bodhicitta* is called here the ‘true way to enlightenment’ (or ‘true method [leading towards] enlightenment’—*byang chub tshul 'di brtan pa'o*). Also, in Ācārya Kamalaśīla's *Bodhicittabhāvanā*, the ultimate *bodhicitta* is introduced as a specific cognitive factor: ‘And what is enlightenment? A total cognition of the utter openness that is consciousness’ (see Appendix).

¹ *don mchungs pa yis don byed pa /*
rmi lam gnod pa bzhin min nam /
rmi lam sad pa'i gnas skabs la /
don byed pa la khyad par med // (Ācārya Gyeltsen Namdol 1991, 18)

² ‘Not only *bodhicitta*, but also any term of Mahāyāna that is understood in a gnoseological sense can be regarded as a synonym of it [of gnosis—V.K.]. In the non-tantric Mahāyāna, as long as terms such as *bodhi*, *buddha*, *prajñāpāramitā*, and *madhyama pratīpat* imply a veritable non-conceptual gnosis that cognises true reality (i.e. *śūnyatā*, *tathatā*, etc.), they can be equated with gnoseological *bodhicitta*’ (Wangchuk 2007, 199).

Thus this paper explores the understanding of *bodhicitta* as a kind of cognitive strategy and/or a specific instrument of cognition in Tantric Buddhism that is situated and functions beyond the reach of *vijñāna*. All the attempts to describe ultimate *bodhicitta* within consciousness and with the help of consciousness are by definition unrealisable, but I assume that it is possible to grope around in the darkness of consciousness (*vijñāna*) using the stratum of definitions and assertions on ultimate *bodhicitta* given in the *Guhyasamājantra* before we find a sign of light.

The plot of the second chapter

In the second chapter of the *Guhyasamājantra*, five Tathagāgatas (Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnaketu, Amitāyus, Amoghasiddhi)³ who previously emerged from the heart of the principal deity called Bhagavān Sarvatathāgatakāyavākciṭṭavajrādhipati ('the Blessed One, the Vajra Body, Speech and Mind of all Tathagāgatas')⁴ ask this principle deity (Vajradhara) to proclaim 'the secret of all Tathagāgatas, highest Bodhicitta'. Then Vajradhara asks the Tathagāgatas to unify their bodies, speeches, and minds, himself enters the *samādhi* called 'vajra of the perfect and complete method of enlightenment of all Tathagāgatas',⁵ and explains *bodhicitta* like this:⁶

dnos po med pas sgom pa med /
bsgom par bya ba sgom pa min /
de ltar dnos po dngos med pas /
sgom pa dmigs su med pa'o //

[When] particular existents do not exist, attention⁷ [also] does not exist,
 [and] the very act of attention is not attention;
 thus, if a particular existent does not exist,
 the attention is not referential [to anything].

³ It is necessary to note that the very plot of the Tantra takes place in the vagina (*bhaga*) of the Vajra Consort of the Essence of the Body, Speech and Mind of all Tathāgatas (*De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku dang gsung dang thugs kyi snying po rdo rje btsun ma*). We obviously can identify this place with Yum or Prajñāpāramitā as a mother of all Buddhas.

⁴ Guiseppa Tucci noticed 'that the *Guhyasamāja* admits of six and not of five supreme Buddhas; this means that there is some connection between this Tantra and the Kālacakra which, as known, postulates the existence of a first Buddha, the Ādi Buddha of which the fivefold series is the emanation' (Tucci 1934–35, 341). The principal deity in the text of the *Guhyasamājantra* has different names—Mahāvairocana, Vajradhara, Mahāvajradhara, Bodhicittavajra, or sometimes simply Bhagavān. It is possible to assume that the diversity of names of the principal deity points to the idea of the ontological indeterminacy of the state of the principal deity. The first emanation of the principal deity is Akṣobhya, and he is placed in the center of the *maṇḍala*. According to Candrakīrti, 'Vajradhara or Mahāvajradhara, as he regularly calls this supreme Buddha, is the body and the five Buddhas his five constituents or skandhas; the symbol of this body is the mandala in its entirety' (ibid., 342).

⁵ *de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa'i tshul rdo rje*.

⁶ See Tibetan and Sanskrit text in Fremantle 1971, 191–4.

⁷ The term *sgom pa* may be translated here as 'attention' or 'creative attention'.

Then other Tathagāgatas by turn enter different *samādhis*⁸ and supplement the explanation of Bodhicittavajra with their interpretations of *bodhicitta*:

Vairocana:

dnogs po thams cad dang bral ba /
phung po khams dang skye mched dang /
gzun dang 'dzin pa rnam spangs pa /
chos bdag med pa mnyams nyid pas /
rang sems gdod nas ma skyes pa /
stong pa nyid kyi rang bzhin no //

So far as *dharmas* are without any individuality of their own and are undifferentiated, the individual mind—[which] is devoid of phenomenal substantial entity, and is not related to *skandhas*, *dhātu*, or *āyatana*, [and is not related to] the apprehended object or the apprehending subject— is primordially not arising; the emptiness is its self-identity.

Akṣobhya:

dnogs po 'di nams ma skyes pa /
chos dang chos nyid med pa ste /
nam mkhā' lta bur bdag med pa /
byang chub tshul 'di brtan pa'o //

These particular existents do not arise;
 neither *dharmas* nor reality itself exist;
 the lack of individuality is like an open space;
 this is the true way to enlightenment.

Ratnaketu:

chos rnam thams cad dnogs med cing /
chos kyi mtshan nyid rnam par spangs /
bdag med chos las kun tu byung /
byang chub tshul 'di brtan pa'o //

All *dharmas* are devoid of particular existent;
 they have no individual characteristics of their own;
 everything appears from the absence of the individuality of *dharmas*;
 this is the true way to enlightenment.

⁸ The *samādhi* of each Tathagāgata has a different name. Vairocana's *samādhi* is called 'vajra of the clear understanding of all Tathagāgatas' (*de bzhin shegs pa thams cad kyi mngon par rtogs pa rdo rje*), Akṣobhya's, 'vajra of the inexhaustibility of all Tathagāgatas' (*de bzhin shegs pa thams cad kyi mi zad pa'i rdo rje*), Ratnaketu's, 'vajra of the selflessness of all Tathagāgatas' (*de bzhin shegs pa thams cad kyi bdag med pa rdo rje*), Amitayus', 'vajra light of the shining radiance' (*bd zer 'bar ba rdo rje sgron ma*), and Amoghasiddhi's, 'vajra of the insurmountability of all Tathagāgatas' (*de bzhin shegs pa thams cad kyi zil gyis gnon po rdo rje*). Each *samādhi* is called *vajra* to emphasize the indestructible nature of this state and corresponds to a definite quality of a Tathagāgata (clear understanding, inexhaustibility, etc.).

Amitayus:

*ma skyes pa yi chos rnams la /
ngo bo med de sgom pa'ang med /
nam mka'i tshul du sbyor ba yis /
dngos po dag du rab tu bsgrags //*

Since all *dharmas* do not arise,
neither entities nor attention exist.
If [you] associate [yourself] with an open space,
the perfect being will manifest [himself].

Amoghasiddhi:

*chos rnams rang bzhin 'od gsal ba /
gdod nas dag pa nam mkha' bzhin /
byang chub med cing mngon rtogs med /
byang chub tshul 'di brtan pa'o //*

Luminous is the nature of all *dharmas*,
primordially perfect, like an open space.
Neither enlightenment nor clear realisation exists;
this is the true way to enlightenment.⁹

Unfortunately, the Tibetan translation lost the link between *bhāva* and *bhāvana* in the Sanskrit original (in Tibetan, *dngos po* means ‘substantial entity’ and *sgom pa* means ‘concentrated attention’, ‘cultivating’, etc.). The word *bhāvana* (*sgom pa*) commonly is translated as ‘developing’, ‘producing’, ‘meditating and also ‘imagining’, ‘supposing’, etc. If we link together all the meanings of Sanskrit *bhāvana* and add the numerous meanings of Tibetan *sgom pa*, we get ‘creative attention’. In this paper I omit the adjective ‘creative’, since in Mahayana Buddhism each act of attention is at the same time the act of representing certain states of the five consciousnesses. It is attention—a state of current awareness—that gives vent to sense and intelligible perception. It is the act of attention that creates the very form of perception that is not free of conceptual contaminations in such a way that finally we perceive representations of consciousness (*vijñaptimātram*). Thereby, each act of attention is always the act of creative attention that forms discernible phenomena (*vijñeya*) for the discerning consciousness (*vijñāna*).¹⁰

If one takes into consideration the etymological correspondence of *bhāva* and *bhāvana*, then it is possible to define *bhāva* (*dngos po*) as ‘the producer of the act of

⁹ In their verses Akṣobhya, Ratnaketu and Amoghasiddhi use the same formula—*byang chub tshul 'di brtan pa'o*—‘this is the true way to enlightenment’, which may be also translated ‘this is the method (*tshul*) [to reach] enlightenment’. This may be understood as a characteristic of a special cognitive act where *bodhicitta* is presented as a core element.

¹⁰ On controversies in the philosophy of perception in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, see Dreifus 1997.

attention’, and from this follows that all of the phenomenal world exists only in the act of attention, i.e. in the mind only.

Bu ston rin chen grub ‘explicitly advocates’ the point of view that this verse belongs to the Yogācāra (*sems tsam*) school (see Bentor 2010, 94).¹¹ On the other hand, Tsongkhapa and his disciple Mkhas grub rje follow the position of Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika: this is highly predictable if we take into consideration the Tibetan translation of the verse where *dngos po* is not semantically tied to *sgom pa*. The ostensive definition of *dngos po* in the Tibetan translation of Kamalaśīla’s *Bodhicittabhāvanā* (*bdag, sems can, srog, gso ba, skye bu, gang zag, shed las skyes, shed bu, byed pa po*) also does not allow us to connect *dngos po* with *sgom pa*.

In the *Piṅḍīkṛtasādhana*, ascribed to Nāgārjuna, the first verse corresponds to the stage of dissolution and emptiness, which is only a small part of the *sādhana*. On the other hand, however, the verses of the six Tathāgatas may be understood as a successive description of the entire *sādhana*, i.e. of all the stages towards final realisation. The first verse proclaimed by Vajradhara describes *bodhicitta* as the initial state that can be brought into correlation with the generation stage (*bskyed rim*) of the five-stage practice of *Guhyasamāja*. Āryadeva in the *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* calls this stage ‘mind isolation’ (*citta-viveka*) or ‘mental purification’ (*citta-viśuddhi*). The last verse, proclaimed by Amoghasiddhi, describes *bodhicitta* as the total union, the ‘integration stage’ (*yuganaddha krama*) in Āryadeva’s terminology, where there is no difference between enlightened and unenlightened states. Thus realisation of ultimate *bodhicitta* in the beginning is tied to the total withdrawal of selective attention from perceptive, linguistic and mental phenomena. Here the grosser levels of consciousness dissolve and more subtle consciousness manifests itself.¹² Correspondingly, it is possible to understand Amitayus’ verses in correlation with the arising of the illusory body (*sgyulus*), which is the third stage of the five-stage *Guhyasamāja* completion stage (*rdzogs rim rim lnga*). Thereby, the verses of the six Tathāgatas in the second chapter of the *Guhyasamājantra* describe a specific cognitive act, the means, the very process, and the goal, which all are *bodhicitta*.

¹¹ It is interesting that ‘Butön was one of the last commentators on the *Guhyasamājantra* who actually knew Sanskrit, and who could see that the meaning of our verse [i.e. the verse proclaimed by Vajradhara—V.K.] in its Tibetan rendering was different from the meaning of the Sanskrit. He could also see that, in its most important commentary, the *Pradīpoddhyotana* in its Tibetan translation, the meaning of our verse was further altered, at least since the 14th century, if not before. But Butön does not comment on this’ (Bentor 2010, 94).

¹² According to the *Guhyasamāja* system, the gross consciousnesses are the five sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness; the subtle consciousnesses are the three levels of consciousness called the minds of vivid white, red, and black appearance; the point of destination is the very subtle level of consciousness—the mind of clear light.

Intentionality: possession and attention

A consciousness, being ‘always a consciousness of’, to put it in Husserl’s words (quoted from Smith 2006, 56), implies a presence of external continuing things (that are relatively invariable) and continuing things (which are also relatively invariable) that are presumed to be the possessors of mind (or attention), i.e. they are presumed to be living beings, conscious beings, human beings, or mind holders (*sems can*). The concept of mind holders is introduced in the *Guhyasamājantra* by the term *bhāva* (*dn̄gos po*)—‘particular existent’, or ‘substantial entity’.¹³ The existence of external things, of consciousness, and of mind holders implies a continuing. Any thing continues *per se* if it holds recollection about its state previous to the present given state. This is a trait of consciousness, or, to be more precise, a trait of *manovijñāna* (*yiḍ kyi rnam par shes pa*)—which according to *Abhidharmakośa* (I.17; in Pruden 1990) is an awareness of the ‘just-deceased consciousness that is the immediately antecedent condition for the present consciousness’. Thereby, the present moment has to contain information about the just-past moment. ‘To be’ means ‘to be continuous *per se*’, and ‘to be continuous *per se*’ means ‘to possess a consciousness’ or ‘to be the producer of attention’. But is a stone, for example, aware of its own just-past state? If it does not continue *per se*, it does not exist; if it continues *per se*, it possesses a mind. As mKhas grub dge legs dpal bzang states in *Stong Thun Chen Mo*: ‘Although the Svatantrika Madhyamakas accept that things exist from the object’s own side, they do not accept that *this is* [what it means for something] to truly exist. The Prasangikas [on the other hand] accept that if something exists in this way, [that is from its own side,] then it must truly exist’ (Cabezón 1992, 174). So true existence is existence from the thing’s own side, irrespective of the name this thing has and irrespective of how this thing is perceived by valid cognition. As we can see, the continuity of external things is a problem of consciousness, but whose consciousness is it and to what extent is this statement of a question admissible?

The act of attention: the observer and the thing to be observed

The presence of attention turns the external world into a complex of intentional variable elements inasmuch as the external things always refer to particular meanings,

¹³ The ostensive definition of *dn̄gos po* is given by Ācārya Kamalaśīla in *Bodhicittabhāvanā* (see Appendix). From this definition it follows that *dn̄gos po* describes the quality of a physical entity to be existent. The translation of *dn̄gos po* as ‘particular existent’ was introduced by Herbert V. Guenther. He wrote: ‘I deliberately avoid the term “substance” in this connection because this term is exceedingly ambiguous even in Western philosophies and its unqualified (or unqualifiable) use with reference to Eastern ways of thinking would only add to confusion’ (Guenther 1966, 297).

involve particular meanings, or impart specific states, deploying the attention in such a way that the external world itself falls apart into intentionally significant elements. Both observer and things to be observed have to be continuing entities; thereby continuity is a necessary condition of acts of attention. On the one hand, we can see that continuity from a thing's own side is a level where thinking (i.e. consciousness) begins. On the other hand, the beginning of consciousness is tied to the delusion that external things are continuous from their own side and are intrinsically observer-independent. Strictly speaking, this delusion has no beginning since it is the condition that assigns a vantage (access) point from which the whole world of observed things derives. The absence of this vantage point makes it impossible to be *in* the world with its familiar semantic content and, respectively, makes it impossible to make any assertion about the beginning of the delusion. Thereby, existence in the world of intrinsically observer-independent entities begins with a delusion (*avidyā*) and this delusion may be removed only within *saṃsāra*.

***Bodhicitta* as a strategy of cognition**

With the end of delusion (*avidyā*), *vijñāna* also stops: 'Since *vijñāna* is one of the terms of the classical *pratītyasamutpāda* series and arises dependent on ignorance (*avidyā*), it stands to reason that when *avidyā* is uprooted *vijñāna* will come to an end. However, and this is a very important point, it should not be assumed that such an event signals the total extinction of mental processes' (Harris 1991, 50). After cessation of *vijñāna*, another mental activity comes to the scene. As is stated in the *śloka* proclaimed by Amitayus: 'If [you] associate [yourself] with an open space, / the perfect being would manifest [itself]'.¹⁴ Harris writes: 'while *vijñāna* refers to a conditioned surface state of consciousness only available to the unenlightened, *prajñā/jñāna* refers to the unconditioned vision of reality (ibid., 55). We can see that several terms are used to describe enlightened cognition. Harris notes that '*jñāna* may designate the end process in the development of *prajñā*' (ibid.). In the *Guhyasamājantra* the term *bodhicitta* is used to designate an enlightened state of cognition. I have already noted that acts of cognition—not belief or emotional events—play a major role in Buddhist soteriology. The terms *prajñā* and *jñāna* (*wisdom* and *gnosis*, respectively) refer to the semantic field of epistemology, whereas the concept of *bodhicitta* unifies epistemology and ontology in a single stratum. There is no differentiation between knower and known in this stratum. In addition, *bodhicitta*, together with its cognitive components, contains an element of natural responsiveness (*thugs rje*) and refers to a state where knower (observer) and known (phenomenon) are unified in a seamless single psychic event. This natural responsiveness (*thugs rje*) epistemologically opens

¹⁴ Or 'particular existent will manifest itself in purity' (*dag du*).

a phenomenon (an external thing) for the observer, a state of affinity appears between the external thing and the observer, the phenomenon becomes a part of the observer (the observer becomes a part of the phenomenon), and great compassion (= total complicity = omniscience, *snying rje chen po*) arises naturally.

This act of unifying the apprehended object and apprehending subject (*gzung / 'dzin*) becomes possible on the condition that all 'dharmas are without individuality of their own (*bdag med*) and undifferentiated (*mnyam nyid pa*)'.

I would like to emphasise that the strategy of cognition described above essentially differs from what we commonly call 'cognition', but it is obviously cognition in the sense that the practitioner himself perceives the innate essence of all things, and thereby there is no need to 'believe impossible things'. *Bodhicitta* as a strategy of cognition implies a process of transformation of the mind itself; it is not a search for a convenient corner from which to observe objects. This process of transformation, in turn, implies the successive converging of 'the Same' and 'the Other' to a final integration. Let us see then how this transformation is possible.

Discreteness and composition

Famous verses on *bodhicitta* proclaimed by Tathagāgata Vairocana are the subject of many Indian and Tibetan commentaries. Among them is the *Bodhicittavivarāṇa* attributed to Nāgārjuna and the *Bodhicittabhāvanā* written by Ācārya Kamalaśīla (a translation of this text is presented in the appendix).¹⁵

In Vairocana verses, *dharmas* are introduced as being without self-sufficiency and as being undifferentiated.¹⁶ *Dharmas* are isomorphous, but even the multiplicity and spatial characteristics of *dharmas* are open to question.

Two types of successive reduction are peculiar to Buddhist philosophy. Ontic representation of reality in general (as existence or as being *in abstracto*) is reduced

¹⁵ If one compares these two texts, Kamalaśīla's text corresponds much more closely to the genre of commentary than Nāgārjuna's *Byang chub sems 'grel*. The latter is more of a writing on a given thesis. Tibetan scholar Ngag dbang grags pa (16th century), on the basis of Indian commentary written by Smṛtijñānakīrti, created an eight-point outline for the proper understanding of Vairocana's lines:

- 1) Extensive definition of ultimate *bodhicitta*;
- 2) Meaning of the expression "devoid of particular existents";
- 3) Meaning of "not related to *skandhas*", etc;
- 4) Meaning of self-sufficientless and undifferentiated [state of *dharmas*];
- 5) Meaning of not arising of individual consciousness, etc;
- 6) Extensive definition of conventional *bodhicitta*;
- 7) Explanation of the meaning of so called "cutting of the four uncuttable";
- 8) Explanation of benefits of [generation] of twofold *bodhicitta* (Ācārya Gyeltsen Namdol 1991, 61–2)'.

¹⁶ The latter characteristic is similar to Parmenides' ontic assertion about the non-existence of the diversity of things. Cf. 'It is also indivisible. This is because it is completely homogeneous, its continuity not disrupted by varying degrees of being' (8.22–5 in Diels, Kranz 1952).

to the present spacing of diverse things. Later this disposition of present things is reduced to a homogeneous, quantum field of *dharmas*—*dharmadhātu* (*chos dbyings*). Any elementary event is a combination of at least three quanta: one of six internal powers (*adhyātma-āyatana*), corresponding to one of six external bases (*bhāya-āyatana*) and one of six consciousnesses (*vijñāna*). These quanta really become *dharmas* (carriers of quality) only after being involved in a composition. In other words, elements that are neutral and devoid of any characteristics become something (eye consciousness, for example) when they keep a definite ‘place’ or ‘stand’, i.e. they are topologically conditioned. I want to say that a quantum (*dharma*) possesses a definite quality, becomes differentiating consciousness, and becomes an external product of perception or sense abilities only within a temporal (strictly speaking, a momentary) composition. The composition itself is only a conventionality; the very existence of any composition may be established only from within the composition, because an agent (*kartr*) and enjoyer (*bhoktr*) appears only within the composition, mistakingly establishing himself as an external observer although he is always a participant. Accurately speaking, an observer as a person or ‘I’ (*gang zag, bdag*) corresponds to the imaginary nature of reality (*kun brtags, parikalpita*), the interdependence of dharmas in composition corresponds to the dependent nature of reality (*gzhan dbang, paratantra*), and the grained field of uncombined *dharmas*-quanta corresponds to the essential nature of reality (*yongs grub, pariniṣpanna*).¹⁷ What is at issue is not three different realities, but three strata of a single fundamental reality as it is described in the third chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. We can see that the appearance of subject-object duality is not a construction of *citta* (*sems*). An element that is playing a role of *citta* in the structure of temporal dharmic composition undoubtedly is of great importance, but it is only a role (or a topological function); besides, this ‘role’ would hardly be possible without the other elements of the composition on their own. *Citta* or mentality being active (*sems pa, cetanā*) provides awareness and discrimination (*rnam par shes pa, vijñāna*) and continuity (*vid, manas*). Discrimination and continuity together with other elements in composition generate an event with a conditional ‘centre’ mistakingly taken for ‘I’. Bodhicitta, being a strategy of cognition, in turn, emphasises a fundamental role of joint participation,

¹⁷ In this connection it looks unreasonable to accuse Yogācāra of being an idealistic philosophy. Like Mādhyamaka, Yogācāra reveals the true nature of reality. Following a doctrine of dependent arising, Yogācāra philosophers simply could not emphasise only one topological constituent of a compound event; they just emphasised the multilayer nature of reality and expansive role (*prapañca, spros pa*) of discriminative thought (*vikalpa, rtog pa*). ‘The statement that the tripe world is mind-only (*cittamātra*) simply means that for the unenlightened person what he or she takes to be reality is in fact nothing but mind and its concomitants (*cittacaitta*). The enlightened being on the other hand sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*)’ (Harris 1991, 82).

removing ‘topological’ deformation of the quantum field of dharmas caused by ‘I’. In this world filled with intentional phenomena, consciousness is always trying to make its way towards something that is not itself. It follows from understanding that each act of perception is not an act of passively accessing data, but rather is a masked question aimed at something that maybe belongs to a reality other than the reality of consciousness itself. This question is based on a distrust of the reality of the world of phenomena. Eliminating this distrust is proved by cultivating total acceptance of the Other in all its manifestations. The series of these acceptances are called *pāramitās*: the acceptance in the form of giving of oneself (*dāna pāramitā*), the acceptance in the form of discipline and proper conduct (*śīla pāramitā*), the acceptance in the form of patience (*kṣānti pāramitā*), the acceptance in the form of effort and vigor (*vīrya pāramitā*), the acceptance in the form of meditation (*dhyāna pāramitā*), and finally *prajñā pāramitā*—an established acceptance in the form of identity. Thus *bodhicitta* is the subsurface work of the consciousness pointed at eliminating the distrust of reality of the locus of the Other. The five worldly *pāramitās* are strategies for approaching the Other, and the sixth *pāramitā* is the complete consentaneity of the subject of apprehension and the object of apprehension.

It is necessary to note that each of the activities presented by *pāramitās* has its own recipient, or receiver (i.e. multiple forms of the Other). The question is to whom or to where the activity of the sixth *pāramitā* is addressed. This tricky *pāramitā* has no receiver or recipient. The absence of recipient has a justifiable reason: it simply does not exist. Final direct perceiving of this fact shatters consciousness; individuality disappears and becomes all phenomena at the same time.

Intimacy and cognition

As we know, compassion (*karuṇā*), an altruistic attitude, forms the root of *bodhicitta*, and *bodhicitta* becomes a guiding principle for *bodhisattvas* in Mahāyāna Buddhism. But why in a system substantially rooted in epistemology did compassion become so important? Is it simply connected to the traditionally built framework of ethical-moral discipline (*śīla*) or is there another explanation? The very act of knowing and acts of behaviour presuppose the availability of the Other (other entities, other phenomena, other minds). What is ‘the Other’¹⁸ from the point of view of the union of knower and known? Nagarjuna stated in *Catuḥstava*: ‘When (someone) cognizes (something) as born

¹⁸ Different considerations on ‘Same’ and ‘the Other’ may be found in works of Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Lévinas, Slavoj Žižek, and other modern thinkers. Lacan, for instance, poses a Tantric question: ‘A geometry implies the heterogeneity of locus, namely that there is a locus of the Other. Regarding this locus of the Other, of one sex as Other, as absolute Other, what does the most recent development in topology allow us to posit?’

or unborn, present or gone, bound or liberated (then) he maintains duality (*dvaya*) (and consequently) does not know the truth (*tattva*)' (Lindtner 1986, 148–49). Commenting on Vairocana's verses, Kamalaśīla writes this: 'since *skandhas*, *dhātu* and *āyatana* are devoid of their self-identity, then mind is totally free from being an apprehended object or being an apprehending subject. If mind does not exist like an object of apprehension, then it also does not exist like a subject of apprehension' (see Appendix).

In the act of cognition, this ultimate reality appears as conventional reality, which presumes the existence of the Other. It is important to note that the ultimate reality is not derivable from the conventional, for the circle of *saṃsāra* is endless and closed. There is no transition or passage from conventional to ultimate reality. This is why the way of Tantra, if compared with the Pāramitāyana, is conceded to be easier: it is for the nonobscured, and it has many skilful methods, etc.¹⁹ The Pāramitāyana is a strategy of approaching ultimate reality, but this approaching may be dragged out to infinity, because the movement from *saṃsāra* to ultimate reality is crowded by a multitude of phenomena and events that require permanent and careful analytical examination. Thereby, it is very difficult to reach ultimate reality in any other way than to reproduce or copy an ultimate reality that is a unity of emptiness and compassion within conventional existence. But how exactly may ultimate reality be reproduced within *saṃsāra*? I assert that there is only one way to reproduce it: to imitate it (mimesis) within conventional reality.

As I see it, the imitation may be established 1) by content and 2) by form. The ultimate union by content corresponds to the five worldly *pāramitās*, where conventional *bodhicitta* (*saṃvṛtibodhicitta*, *kun rdzob kyi byang chub kyi sems*), which is compassion for the Other and the intention to liberate others from suffering, is a model of ultimate *bodhicitta* (*pāramāṛthikabodhicitta*, *don dam pa'i byang chub kyi sems*), which is nonduality (*śūnyatā*) and gnosis (*ye shes*). The five worldly *pāramitās* are five different forms of acceptance of the Other, that is, they compose the very essence of compassion.

The ultimate union by form corresponds to the deity yoga (*lha'i mgnong rtogs*, literally, 'realization of deity'). The very act of imitation has no moral colouring, just as a mirror reflects without any moral content. Only the precise reproduction of a given model by the individual totality—body, speech and mind—is of great importance here.

Thereby, indivisible union, being out of reach of cognition, is a prototype for the combination of ethics and ritual in Tantric Buddhism. In this case, *bodhicitta* as a strategy of cognition may be understood to be a mimesis or imitation (passion for

¹⁹ About the superiority of *mantra* over *sūtra*, see the chapter 'The Difference Between Sūtra and Mantra' in Hopkins 2008.

imitation) of ultimate union in *saṃsāra* by different means. *Bodhicitta* is here something that is impossible to understand or reach epistemologically but is possible to re-present. Sophisticated techniques and the rules of this re-presentation or mimesis of *bodhicitta* within different levels of human existence (spiritual and ritual) are described in detail in different *sādhana*s. In the root tantra and its *vyākhyā*s and in the *bodhicitta* verses of the second chapter, particularly, these rules of re-presentation are described in general terms.²⁰ Different commentaries by the Ārya and Jñānapāda traditions of the *Guhyasamāja* cycle as well as the *Bodhicittabhāvanā* by Ācārya Kamalaśīla explain in detail the most difficult points of this mimetic strategy of cognition. Kamalaśīla's analysis of the path of realisation of ultimate *bodhicitta* based on Vairocana's verse does not provide us with any new knowledge; it describes a succession of matrix elements that are patterns for organising one's consciousness. The very title of Kamalaśīla's work translated in the appendix—*Bodhicittabhāvanā*—may be interpreted as a method for reorganising the structure of attention to gain *bodhicitta*.

Thereby, the *bodhicitta* in Mantrayāna is a strategy of cognition, but this type of cognition is based on the will to imitate ultimate reality. It may be called a strategy of mimesis, where all acts of perceiving result in a new being rather than in new knowledge.

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²⁰ In this way the root 'tantra' serves as a generating matrix for all the *sādhana*s of the corresponding root text.

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Appendix

Ācārya Kamalaśīla

Bodhicittabhāvanā (byang chub kyi sems bsgom pa)

Homage to the Buddha!

Here I will present an exhaustive explanation of *bodhicitta*.

Bhagavan said: 'All dharmas are established by the mind'. So [Bhagavan] himself said, that is why the detailed analysis of the mind must be done.

So far as *dharmas* are without any individuality of their own²¹ and are undifferentiated,²² the individual mind—[which] is devoid of phenomenal substantial entity,²³ and is not related to *skandhas*, *dhātu*, or *āyatana*, [and is not related to] the apprehended object or the apprehending subject—is primordially not arising; the emptiness is its self-identity.

What is the meaning of these words? The term 'phenomenal substantial entity' in the formulation 'devoid of phenomenal substantial entity' is described [in terms] of self-existent individuality.²⁴ Correspondingly, the exposition [of the term] is as follows: individuality of its own, possessor of the mind, leaving being, mothered one, individual, person, individual human being, son of Manu, functioning one, experiencing one. [None of] these are [endowed with] the nature of mind. And why? Because none of these possess characteristics of self-sufficient, independently acting agents.

²¹ *bdag med*.

²² *mnyam nyid pa*.

²³ *dnegos po* = phenomenal substantial existence = being.

²⁴ *bdag*.

Thereby, as far as in this case there is no self-identical²⁵ [substantial] existence; how can we say that it is [endowed with] the nature of mind? Because of the reason in the phrase ‘devoid of phenomenal substantial entity and not related to *skandhas*, *dhātu*, or *āyatana*’ there appears [a notion of] the absence of the nature of the mind. In this way [the phrase] ‘not related to *skandhas*, *dhātu*, or *āyatana*, [and not related to] the apprehended object or the apprehending subject...’ [exposes that] *skandhas*, etc. per se do not represent themselves in the ultimate sense; then how can we say that they are [endowed with] the nature of mind?

Skandhas are not self-identical, and that being the case, then each [*skandha*], from [the *skandha*] of form, etc. to all *skandhas* [together], are devoid of self-identity.

The *skandha* of form [consists of] the self-identity of substantiality-producing forces (elements) and of the self-identity of derived substantive functions. Substantiality-producing elements are fields²⁶ of earth, water, fire and wind. Derived substantive functions are visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible forms. Both earth and the other substantiality-producing forces (elements), as well as the derived substantive functions all together and one by one, are devoid²⁷ of phenomenal substantial existence.²⁸

They are, so to speak, ‘birds of a feather’,²⁹ and in the same manner the [*skandha* of] form, since Bhagavan said, ‘Monks, the *skandha* of form is an emptiness [tainted] by the *skandha* of form’, just as in the absence of a tree there is no shade. That being so, [the *skandha* of] form does not truly exist.

In the same way the *skandha* of sensation does not truly exist. Sensation has three forms: [feelings of] pleasure, [feelings of] suffering, and [neutral feelings] of neither pleasure nor suffering. Because of interdependency, a pleasurable [feeling] receives a meaning that is subject to the [feeling of] suffering. None [of the forms of the *skandha* of sensation] can be brought into an object; just like the son of a barren woman, it is devoid of substantiality.³⁰ What is long and what is short is apprehended in usage. In addition, *skandha* of sensation has two components—body and consciousness. Since a body is composed of the elements of *skandha* of form, it cannot be brought into an object. For this reason, if the body is absent, the sensations related to it also do not exist. Since Bhagavan said, ‘Consciousness after all is without location; it is inexpressible, with no abiding realm, unapproachable for investigation, indiscernible, with no appearance, totally not cognisable’, then what kind of sensation [is there to speak about]? In this case, if consciousness is absent, then the sensations arising from consciousness do not exist. Since it is said, ‘Monks, the *skandha* of sensation is emptiness [tainted] by the *skandha* of sensation’, then the *skandha* of sensation also does not truly exist.

So long as ‘*skandha* of discernment’ is just a name, it doesn’t exist. *Skandha* of discernment performs a marking of self-identical existence,³¹ but if no independent phenomenon exists,³²

²⁵ *bdag*.

²⁶ *kham*s.

²⁷ *mi dmigs*, or maybe ‘does not come in sight, or cannot be brought into an object’.

²⁸ Or they are not beings.

²⁹ *Gang na gchig yod pa de na cig shos kyang*.

³⁰ *rdzas su med pa*.

³¹ *bdag*.

³² *dnegos po* = here objects of consciousness.

then with respect to what may signification be done? Therefore, it is said: 'If the designatum³³ does not exist, then the signifier³⁴ does not exist either. Monks, the *skandha* of discernment is emptiness [tainted] by the *skandha* of discernment'; then the *skandha* of sensation does not truly exist either.

In the same way, the *skandha* of formative patterns is devoid of essence.³⁵ And why does [it] not have essence? Because it is simply a composite.³⁶ The *skandha* of formative patterns is asserted to be the so called 'mental [factors] derived from consciousness':³⁷ sensation, discernment, intention,³⁸ resolution, contact, discriminating intellect, recollection, attention and conviction, none of [which] are endowed with an arising.³⁹ The mental factors derived from consciousness all together and one by one are devoid of the characteristics of an arising [phenomenon], and they do not exist by virtue of the characteristics of the action of the formative patterns *skandha*. Hence, it is said: 'If there is no agent, then action also does not exist. Monks, the *skandha* of formative patterns is emptiness [tainted] by the *skandha* of formative patterns'. Hence the *skandha* of formative patterns does not truly exist either.

Visual [consciousness], auditory [consciousness], olfactory [consciousness], gustatory [consciousness], tactile [consciousness], and mental consciousness [compose] the *skandha* of consciousness. Neither visual consciousness nor the other consciousnesses all together nor one by one can be brought into an object on their own account. Consciousness may arise depending on vision and due to forms if the *skandha* of form exists and also under the assumption that vision and form have already arisen. [As soon as] neither vision nor form exists, from whence may consciousness appear? That being so, visual consciousness does not arise. One should understand that visual [consciousness], auditory [consciousness], olfactory [consciousness], gustatory [consciousness], tactile [consciousness], and mental consciousness are of the same range.

[Concerning] mental consciousness:

Mental consciousness arises depending on a given moment of consciousness⁴⁰ and with respect to *dharmas*, but [as soon as] the given moment of consciousness passes away, then how may consciousness arise without any grounds? Thus, past consciousness has ceased, future [consciousness] is unapproachable, and current [consciousness] does not last. For this reason the *dharmas* of the three times do not bring [their] self-identities into an object. This is similar to disintegration. Hence, it is said: 'Monks, the *skandha* of consciousness is emptiness [tainted] by the *skandha* of consciousness'; hence, the *skandha* of consciousness does not truly exist. By

³³ *rgyu mtshan*.

³⁴ *rgyu mtshan can*.

³⁵ *snying po*.

³⁶ *tshogs pa*.

³⁷ *sems las byung ba*.

³⁸ *sems pa*.

³⁹ *skye ba*.

⁴⁰ *yid*.

the same true method, as shown above, *skandhas*, as well as different *dhātu* and *āyatana*, may be eliminated.

By the absence of *skandhas*, the self-identity of *dhātu* and *āyatana* do not exist either. Consequently, since *skandhas*, *dhātu*, and *āyatana* are devoid of self-identity, then the mind is totally free from being an apprehended object or being an apprehending subject. If the mind does not exist as an object of apprehension, then it also does not exist as a subject of apprehension. And why does the mind not exist as an object of apprehension?

It has been said: ‘Bhagavan said: O, Master of Secrets, tathagatas, arhats, and completely enlightened buddhas did not perceive, are not perceiving, and will not perceive the mind. O, Master of Secrets! This mind is not [something] of a black colour, is not [something] of a yellow colour, is not [something] of a red colour, is not [something] of a magenta colour, and is not [something] of a crystal-like colour. It is neither long nor short, neither round nor square. It is neither apparent nor hidden; it is not a woman, not a man, and not a hermaphrodite. O, Master of Secrets! This mind is not the self-nature of the realm of desire, is not the self-nature of the realm of forms, and is not the self-nature of the formless realm. It is not the self-identity of *devas*, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kinnaras*⁴¹ and *mahoragas*.⁴² Since all human and non human creatures are devoid of self-identity, inasmuch as we look for it everywhere, nothing appears to be observable’.⁴³ Hence the mind does not exist as an object of apprehension.

And why does [the mind] not exist as a subject of apprehension? Since Bhagavan said: ‘O, Master of Secrets, if the mind does not arise inside, does not arise outside, and does not arise in between, by what [means] may [objects] be apprehended? That is why [the mind] is devoid of being a subject or an object. How it is so? O, Master of Secrets, it is because the mind by its nature is entirely permeable’.⁴⁴ And that is why, since we look for it everywhere,⁴⁵ but nothing appears to be observable; how then may apprehension arise?

That is why the mind is free from being a subject or an object.

[The line says] ‘As far as *dharmas* are without any individuality of their own and are undifferentiated’. Like all *dharmas*, the mind also is devoid of self-identity. Since Bhagavan said: ‘All *dharmas* are empty. The mind possesses the sign of emptiness. All *dharmas* are solitary’. From this it follows that ‘As far as *dharmas* are without any individuality of their own and undifferentiated, individual mind is primordially not arising’. [Since] what primordially does not arise is non-arising, then what kind of self-identity [can we speak about]? As it is said, ‘emptiness is its self-identity’.

⁴¹ *mī'am ci*.

⁴² *lto 'phye chen po*.

⁴³ Citation from the *Mahāvairochanābhisambodhi* tantra (*rnam par snang mdzad chen po mngon par rdzogs par byang chub rnam par sprul pa byin gyis rlobs pa shin tu rgyas pa mdo sde'i dbang po'i rgyal po*) (T 494).

⁴⁴ Citation from the *Mahāvairochanābhisambodhi* tantra (*rnam par snang mdzad chen po mngon par rdzogs par byang chub rnam par sprul pa byin gyis rlobs pa shin tu rgyas pa mdo sde'i dbang po'i rgyal po*) (T 494). *yongs su dag pa*—I translated as ‘entirely opened’, trying to replace a quality indicator (pure, purity) with a spatial one.

⁴⁵ Literally ‘amidst different types of *dharmas*'.

What is ‘emptiness of the [mind’s] self-identity’ like? It is like the sign of an open space. Since Bhagavan also said: ‘Emptiness is open space. The mind is equal to space. The self-identity [of the mind] is enlightenment’.⁴⁶ Then, just as an open space is not self-identical and arises only nominally,⁴⁷ the mind is not self-identical either and arises only nominally. Therefore we must learn that the mind is devoid of arising and cessation. This is what is called the highest entirely permeable and perfect enlightenment.

In this way Bhagavan said: ‘And what is enlightenment? Complete cognition of the totally⁴⁸ opened mind, as it is, is the highest entirely permeable and perfect enlightenment. In this regard, o Master of Secrets, since all *dharmas* do not exist and cannot be brought into the object,⁴⁹ it is called ‘the highest entirely permeable and perfect enlightenment’. And why is that so? [Because] the sign of open space is enlightenment, [since] nowhere [in open space] is there any discrimination or any other objects to be discriminated against. And why is this so? Because enlightenment is a sign of open space.

Later on this utter openness of the individual mind becomes distorted by semblance⁵⁰ and in the minds of sentient beings there appear epistemological constructs. Oh, [poor are] these sentient beings who do not understand their self-identity, whose unopened discursive consciousness falls under the influence of negative forces,⁵¹ who experience all the manifold types of suffering in *samsāra*: suffering is [their destiny]. These sentient beings ought to think: ‘It follows that I have to strive to understand and look for the real nature of the ultimate mind’. This perfect individual mind arises in all sentient beings wholly dependent on great compassion. In this way *bodhicitta* should be explained:

‘When cognition [becomes] similar to open space,
the element of *bodhicitta* arises.
Simultaneously there appears a mind
devoted solely to the benefit of others’.

This kind of contemplation is the contemplation of *bodhicitta*. Bhagavan also said:
‘If the merits [resulting from generation of] *bodhicitta*
would appear in visible forms,
they would totally fill
all celestial space’.

Thus this practice of the highest enlightenment is essential; it is a source of magical formulas (*dhāraṇī*), of correct analytical cognition, and of the signs, marks, and all [other] qualities of the Buddha. Bhagavan said: ‘Monks, if this [teaching about] the qualities of *bodhicitta*, which I glorify, are put into action and are transmitted, it will not disappear ever to the end of the

⁴⁶ *byang chub*.

⁴⁷ *ming tsam du*.

⁴⁸ *yang dag ba*.

⁴⁹ *mi dmigs*.

⁵⁰ *mthong ba'i rjes su thabs kyis*.

⁵¹ *gdon gyis zin pa*.

kalpa'. Thus, this generation of *bodhicitta* becomes the basis for the practice of bodhisattvas seeking to attain omniscience. And this requires immersion in yogic practice.

[Colophon]

Here *Bodhicittabhāvanā* written by Ācārya Kamalaśīla comes to an end.

Translated by gelong Dharmapālabhadra from the Zha Lu Monastery.

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