

‘Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal’s Commentary on the
Dharmatā Chapter of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgakārikās*¹

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I . General Remarks

‘Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481) introduces the second chapter of his *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV) commentary by explaining the *dharmatā* chapter of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgakārikās* (DhDhVK). Given that the latter amounts to more than two thirds of the root text and that the central topic of the preceding chapter on “dualistic appearances” (i.e., *dharmas*) is also addressed, we have here a nearly complete *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* (DhDhV) commentary of utmost importance.² Technically speaking, this commentary is part of gZhon nu dpal’s long introductory explanation of the second chapter of the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* (RGVV)—that on enlightenment. The commented passage from the RGVV is as follows:

Stained suchness has been taught. Now stainless suchness must be taught. What is stainless suchness in this context? It is that which is presented as the transformation of the basis, since one has become free from all kinds of stains in the immaculate sphere of the venerable Buddhas. It should be known in brief in terms of eight points.³

In his commentary gZhon nu dpal clarifies that “basis” (*āśraya*) in the expression “transformation of the basis” (*āśrayaparivṛtti*) refers to the immaculate sphere, and “transformation” to the fact that it has been completely reversed, given that all stains or hindrances have been removed from it.⁴ Next he quotes the root text of the entire *dharmatā* section in the DhDhVK⁵ and starts his commentary on the latter by explaining why the DhDhV can be considered as a commentary on the second chapter of the RGV: suchness in the RGV corresponds to *dharmatā* in the DhDhV, and both treatises teach that the transformation of the basis corresponds to stainless suchness,⁶ and that the cause of the latter two is non-conceptual wisdom.⁷ At the end of his commentary on the DhDhV, gZhon nu dpal concludes that the distinction between an existing *dharmatā* and non-existing *dharmas* in the DhDhV accords well with the explanation in the RGV that the Buddha-element is empty of adventitious stains but not empty of Buddha-qualities.⁸ In both texts, *āśrayaparivṛtti* refers to a positively described ultimate which is revealed by removing adventitious stains. Whereas in the RGV this is the Buddha-element with its inseparable qualities, it is the *dharmatā*, suchness or natural luminosity (*prakṛtiprabhāsvaratā*) in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavyākhyā* (DhDhVV). This luminosity is compared to primordially pure space, gold

and water which must have their adventitious stains removed before they can be discovered (that is, not newly created).⁹

The way gZhon nu dpal interprets these three examples of the DhDhVV in his commentary on RGV I.12 deserves special attention: space, gold and water are taken to illustrate the natural luminosity of mind as being a “continuation in a continuum [of moments]”. In the last example, however, Vasubandhu explains that the clarity of formerly muddy water does not newly occur in the substance water, which is a “continuation in a continuum [of moments]” (Tib. *rgyun gyis 'jug pa*),¹⁰ and this predication cannot be applied automatically to all three examples, for Vasubandhu distinguishes space from gold and water:

Here, with the examples of gold and water, only a quality [of the example] was taught to be equivalent [to the transformation], [but] not [its] substance. With the example of space it (i.e., the transformation) was taught completely.¹¹

The preceding sentence, to which this remark refers, says:

Since that [change] does not exist, the true nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*) and the transformation of the basis, which is constituted by it, are permanent.¹²

One possible way of understanding DhDhVV 685-700 would be to interpret, along the lines of gZhon nu dpal, the permanence of the *dharmatā* and the transformation of the basis as an endless continuation of a continuum of moments, of which only the continuum of space is a fully valid example, as opposed to the continua of gold and water particles. That his understanding is such becomes clear when he again quotes the same passage of the DhDhVV in order to bring his exegesis of the RGV into line with the latter’s statement that the Buddha-nature is all-pervading in all three states (impure, partly pure and perfectly pure):

When the transformation of the basis is taught in the DhDhVV, using the examples of water, gold and space, in all three it is explained that there is a continuum. [...] Here—if one takes time—space at the beginning of an eon (*kalpa*) is not the space at the time of [its] destruction [and is thus in some sense momentary].¹³

In other words, for gZhon nu dpal, both the *dharmatā* and the transformation of the basis possess the nature of momentariness, and can thus be taken as the continuity of the stainless true nature of one’s mind.¹⁴ This and the fact that *dharmatā*, as natural luminosity, is apprehended after it has not been apprehended before shows to gZhon nu dpal that the DhDhVV belongs to the Madhyamaka tradition, because for him the large Yogācāra treatises do not explain that there is a naturally pure continuation within the continuum of all defilements, such as ignorance.¹⁵

Whatever gZhon nu dpal means by “large Yogācāra treatises”, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MAV) cannot have been one of them, for its explanation of emptiness in the first chapter is strikingly similar to the *dharmatā* of the DhDhV and the suchness (*tathatā*) of the RGV. The first chapter of the MAV is divided into two sections, one on false imagining (*abhūtaparikalpa*) and the other on emptiness. While the latter section is in perfect harmony with the DhDhV and the RGV, the first part, on false imagining, seems to draw on older strands of more conservative Yogācāra material. Vasubandhu (and to some extent also the author of the root text) managed to harmonize these originally unbalanced strands, while the DhDhV and its *vr̥tti*, in my opinion, represent a further development of this synthesis. Let us first have a look at the two sections in the first chapter of the MAV.

In MAV I.1 false imagining and emptiness are said to mutually exist in each other, and based on this Vasubandhu defines emptiness in his *bhāṣya* as

false imagining free from the relation of a perceived object and perceiving subject.¹⁶

Whereas emptiness is taken here simply as a property of the dominating “false imagining”, the latter hardly matters in the definition in the second part of the first chapter, where emptiness is no longer only the absence of something in false imagining, but something more positive, namely the own-being of non-duality which is also related to the natural luminosity of the mind (see MAV I.22c). The relevant passage in the MAVBh is as follows:

The non-existence of duality [and] the state (*bhāva*) of [duality’s] non-existence, are the defining characteristics of empti[ness]. (MAV I.13ab)

The non-existence of duality, namely a perceived object and a perceiving subject, and the state of its (i.e., duality’s) non-existence are the defining characteristics of emptiness. Thus the defining characteristics of emptiness have been taught in terms of the own-being of non-existence. Moreover, this own-being of its non-existence

Neither exists nor does not exist. (MAV I.13c)

How so is it non-existent? Because of the non-existence of duality. How so is it not non-existent? Because of the state (*bhāva*) of the non-existence of duality. These are the defining characteristics of emptiness.¹⁷

It is clear that false imagining has lost its central position here, being only mentioned in the context of an additional defining characteristic of emptiness, namely that of being neither identical with nor different

from false imagining. It should be noted that here, as in the DhDhV, false imagining takes the place of phenomena (*dharmā*), while its relation to emptiness (equated with *dharmatā*) is also defined as in the DhDhV. It is important to notice the different ontological status of false imagining implied by this similarity with the DhDhV. Whereas in the first section (MAVBh I.1-2) false imagining is said to exist and be left over within emptiness, it is later reduced to the status of *dharmas*, which in the DhDhV are said to be non-existent.¹⁸ And whereas dualistic appearances are said to not exist at all, the appearance as such is taken to exist as mere delusion.¹⁹ Now the MAV does not say, of course, that *dharmas* do not exist, as the DhDhV does,²⁰ but in MAV I.22 the latter are referred to as the adventitious defilements, emptiness being said to be:

Neither defiled nor not defiled, neither pure nor not pure. (MAV I.22ab)

How is it neither defiled nor not pure? This is because of the natural

Luminosity of the mind (MAV I.22c)

How is it neither not defiled nor pure?

Because of the adventitious nature of defilements.²¹

It is obvious that the natural luminosity of the mind has taken the place of false imagining here.²² That the latter cannot truly partake of the luminous nature is clear from a passage in the *Sāgaramatipariprccha* quoted in RGVV on I.68, in which the example of an ever pure *vaiḍūrya* stone drawn out from mud is taken to illustrate the relation between the luminous mind and adventitious stains:

In the same way, O Sāgaramati, the Bodhisattva knows the natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings. He also perceives that it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Then the Bodhisattva thinks as follows: These defilements would never penetrate into the natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings. These adventitious defilements have sprung from false imagining.²³

It is now luminosity which is central and occurs in two modes, one of them being stainless and thus even free from the false imagining which causes these adventitious stains. That the natural luminosity of the mind may thus refer in the MAV to an originally pure nature of the mind is made clear in stanza I.16, on the differentiation of emptiness:

How should the differentiation of emptiness be understood? **As [implying that emptiness] is both defiled and pure** (MAV I.16a). Thus is a differentiation [made] with respect to it. In what

state is it defiled and in what state is it pure? It is **both accompanied and not accompanied by stains**. (MAV I.16b) When it occurs together with stains it is defiled, and when its stains are abandoned it is pure. If, after being accompanied by stains, it becomes stainless, how is it then not impermanent, given that it has the property of change? This is because **its purity is considered to be like that of water, gold and space**. (MAV I.16cd) [A change is admitted] in view of the removal of adventitious stains, but there is no change in terms of its own-being.²⁴

It should be noted how the terms “defiled” and “pure” are explicitly equated with the terms “accompanied by stains” and “stainless”. The latter were probably imported from the RGV, where the Buddha-nature is defined as suchness accompanied by stains (*samalā tathatā*) and the transformation of the basis as stainless suchness (*nirmalā tathatā*).

As I have already noted in another paper,²⁵ the relationship between false imagining and emptiness can be variously defined along the lines of two unbalanced *trīsvabhāva* models in the MAV. The central focus of the first model, which is mainly based on the first section of the first chapter (MAV I.1-11), lies on a false imagining or dependent nature which at times is even taken to exist ultimately, though not by Vasubandhu.²⁶ Duality and emptiness are just two different aspects of false imagining, namely the way it appears and the way it really is. In the second section (MAV I.12-22) a positively understood emptiness (comparable to suchness or the Buddha-element in the RGV) replaces false imagining at the centre of the second *trīsvabhāva* model. Emptiness can exist independently because false imagining is abandoned together with the adventitious stains.

This results in two models of *trīsvabhāva* which come close to what Sponberg (1981:99) calls the pivotal and progressive exegetical models of it. The first model turns on the dependent nature, which is taken to exist ultimately. The imagined and perfect natures are respectively just the way the dependent nature appears to be and really is. The dependent is thus a receptacle of the perfect, which is understood as something abstract, like the state of suffering or impermanence. In the progressive model, the focus lies more on an emptiness which pervades or transcends all phenomena of the dependent nature. This all-pervading emptiness possesses positive qualities and can exist, contrary to the first model, in its own right. The three natures represent three levels, each revealing a progressively deeper degree of reality.

One might argue that the Yogācāra does not distinguish existence on two levels of truths, its *trīsvabhāva* theory being rather an alternative to the apparent and ultimate truth of the Madhyamaka.²⁷ Many passages in the MAV support this. This is particularly evident in the third chapter (on reality), where older concepts relating to truth/reality, such as the four noble truths of early Buddhism or the apparent and ultimate truth of the Madhyamaka, are explained in terms of the new *trīsvabhāva*. Even the noble truth of cessation is subsumed under the aspect of the imagined, dependent and perfect natures. A continuity between mainstream Buddhist thought and Yogācāra is thereby established.

It is noteworthy, however, that in the case of the ultimate truth of the Madhyamaka only the perfect nature is accepted as a fit candidate for it, the dependent nature, or false imagining, being dismissed as something to be ultimately given up. If one applies this to the definition of the *madhyamā pratipat* in MAV I.1-2, it would be safe to say that the propositions “existence of false imagining” (MAV I.1a) and “non-existence of duality” (MAV I.1b) refer to the level of apparent truth, while the mutual existence of false imagining and emptiness (MAV I.1cd) defines the relation between apparent and ultimate truth. Resorting to two levels of truth not only explains the initial stanzas in a meaningful way, but also resolves some of the tensions between the two parallel *trisvabhāva* models mentioned above. And this is exactly what Śāntarakṣita did when he explained the theory of *trisvabhāva* in terms of his favoured Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka.²⁸

In this context, gZhon nu dpal’s classification of Vasubandhu’s DhDhVV as belonging to the Madhyamaka tradition is noteworthy. If Vasubandhu really resorted to two levels of truth in order to solve the indicated problems in the MAV, and accepted the existence of false imagining only on the level of apparent truth, then a naturally pure continuation within the continuum of all defilements, gZhon nu dpal’s criterion for being Madhyamaka, would also be possible in the MAV.

gZhon nu dpal asserts that the reason why the DhDhVV was not quoted in the great Yogācāra commentaries is that it follows the Madhyamaka tradition. Following this line of thought, one could argue that from a more conservative Yogācāra perspective the DhDhV and its *vr̥tti* were too close to the RGV, and thus shared its fate of being ignored. Neither the DhDhV nor the RGV fit into any major commentarial tradition in India. The situation changed, however, when Maitrīpa (1007/10(?)-) started to integrate the *mahāmudrā* teachings of the Mahāsiddhas into mainstream Buddhism, a point we will come back to later.

II . *Dharmas and Dharmatā*

Even though gZhon nu dpal does not comment on the *dharma* portion of the DhDhV, his understanding of *dharmas* can be easily extracted from his explanations of *dharmatā*. Thus, the definition of *dharmatā* he quotes and explains is basically in terms of a negation of the defining characteristics of *dharmas*. The respective definitions are as follows:

As to the defining characteristics of *dharmas*, they are dualistic appearances and [that which appears] in accordance with expressions; [all of them are] false imagining.²⁹

As to the defining characteristic of *dharmatā*, it is suchness, in which there is no differentiation between a perceived object and a perceiving subject, an expressed object and expression.³⁰

gZhon nu dpal's commentary on the definition of *dharmatā* makes it clear that dualistic appearances relate to the six perceived objects (form etc.), and the subject mode to the six sense faculties. The resulting six consciousnesses are determined by these object and subject modes. Expressed objects are taken to be reflections of perceived objects in the conceptual mind; and expressions are reflections of words accompanied by imaginations. gZhon nu dpal's commentary on the definition of *dharmatā* is as follows:

Perceived objects are the six experiential objects (form etc.). Perceiving subjects are the six sense faculties (eyes etc.). The six consciousnesses, too, are determined by these two [groups]. [To sum up,] they are the experiential objects, the sense faculties, and the consciousnesses, [all three of them] without the imaginations which are accompanied by words and meanings. Expressed objects are reflections of the experiential objects which appear to a conceptual [mind]. Expressions are reflections of words accompanied by imaginations. The *dharmatā* is free from the knowledge of eyes etc. of ordinary people and even [the] support [of it], [namely] the experiential object. And since it is [also] free from the imaginations, which are accompanied by words and meanings—together with [their] modes of apprehension—the mind-stream which, like the sphere of space, is of one taste, is called *dharmatā*, for not even any phenomenon of *saṃsāra* is beyond this nature. With regard to this, some say that it is a non-affirming negation [concerning] the non-existence as perceived object and perceiving subject, and that it is even suitable as an affirming negation, in that it exists as non-duality. Such [negations] may be taken to be the *dharmatā*, but here it is not like that, since the commentary explains [the latter] only as the continuity of a stainless mind. This is because in the MSA (XIII.19), too, [*dharmatā*] has been taught as pure luminous mind:

The mind is taken to be luminous by nature; it is [only] tainted by adventitious faults. A natural luminosity of (i.e., consisting of) another [dependent] mind (*cetas*),³¹ different from the mind as true nature (*dharmatā*), is not taught.³²

And also in the commentary on the [DhDhV] (i.e., the DhDhVV 701) it has been taught as being luminosity.

Adventitious stains are the [various types of] consciousness of the non-conceptual sense faculties and [the various types of] imagination endowed with words and meanings. All defilements are subsumed under [the category of] imagination, since the *skandhas*, the result [of the defilements], are subsumed under sense faculties together with [their] experiential objects. Therefore the

nature of mind is, on the one hand, said to be empty of perceived objects, perceiving subjects and [the various types of] imagination, and on the other—based on [their] *dharmatā*—said to be [these very] phenomena (*dharmā*) of which it is empty. Thus it is not contradicted by reasoning. In *Dharmadhātustotra* [43-5], too, it has been said:

Having completely abandoned thoughts and imagined [objects],³³
 With regard to phenomena which appear to the mental [consciousness],³⁴
 One must meditate that phenomena are the *dharmadhātu*,
 Given that they lack an own-being.

[All that is] seen, heard and smelled,
 Tasted and touched, and [mental] phenomena—
 When yogins know them in such a way,
 [They have] the defining characteristics of accomplishment.

Eyes, ears and nose,
 Tongue, body and the mental faculty—
 These six sources of consciousness are pure,
 And precisely this and that are [the *dharmadhātu*'s] defining characteristics.

Thus it (i.e., the *dharmadhātu*) is [also] explained as the phenomena of which it is empty, namely the six sources of consciousness together with [their] experiential objects.³⁵

In other words, the *dharmadhātu* is, ontologically, nothing else than the phenomenal reality. For gZhon nu dpal, *dharmatā* (or *dharmadhātu* in this matter) is thus not a negation of duality or *dharmas*, be it affirmative or not (*pariyudāsa-*, *prasajya-pratiṣedha*). To be sure, *dharmatā* is taken as being neither an abstract absence of duality, nor an existence as non-duality, but simply refers to the continuity of a stainless mind which is free from the duality of ordinary or saṃsāric perceptions. Given *Dharmadhātustotra* 43-5, gZhon nu dpal does not negate the *dharmas* or the phenomenal world entirely, identifying the six pure *āyatanas* as defining characteristics of the *dharmadhātu* on the grounds that they lack an own-being. That gZhon nu dpal's understanding of *dharmas* is such is made most clear in his commentary on the seventh point of comprehending *āśrayaparivṛtti*, namely on “mental engagement.” Wherever the DhDhVV negates outright the existence of outer objects, gZhon nu dpal restricts this negation to the own-being of such objects, as, for example, in his commentary on DhDhVV 582-92: (the root text is in bold letters):

“**By apprehending in such a way**” means: although false imagining appears [as phenomena], it does not exist [in such a way] etc. “**One enters upon an apprehension that [everything] is only**

an image (*vijñaptimātra*)” means: because images appear as duality. “Through the apprehension of *vijñaptimātra* one enters into the non-apprehension of any [outer] object” means: because outer objects do not exist, for it is the image itself which appears as [such] an object. “Through [the practice of] not apprehending any object, one enters into the non-apprehension of *vijñaptimātra*.”

gZhon nu dpal comments (468.18-21):

Second, as to such an apprehension, one apprehends that false imagining lacks an own-being, even though it appears. Thus it is called the apprehension that [everything] is only an image (*vijñapti*). And from the latter results a consciousness which does not apprehend outer objects, [that is, which apprehends them] as lacking an own-being. From such a consciousness results the knowledge that even the perceiving subject called “only images” lacks an own-being.

To sum up, gZhon nu dpal does not negate the apprehension of a perceived object and a perceiving subject altogether, which means that he accepts the existence of outer objects and perceiving subjects as long as they are not taken to exist in terms of an own-being, and this is perfectly in line with the ontology of Madhyamaka.

III. The Four Abandonments of *Nimittas*

In the DhDhV the abandonment of “mentally created characteristic signs” (*nimittas*) plays a central role in the description of non-conceptual wisdom, which is taken as the cause or the foundation of *āśrayaparivṛtti*. The relevant passage in the DhDhVK (171-179) is as follows:

The abandonment of *nimittas* is also comprehended under four points, because one abandons the *nimittas* of what is opposed [to liberation], the remedy, suchness and the phenomenon of realization. Therefore the coarse, average, subtle and long-lasting *nimittas* are abandoned in corresponding order.³⁶

Vasubandhu explains:

One abandons the *nimittas* of what is opposed [to liberation] by³⁷ abandoning *nimittas* such as attachment. One abandons the *nimittas* of the remedy by abandoning the *nimittas* related to [meditation on] the repulsive and so forth. One abandons the *nimittas* of suchness by abandoning the *nimittas* related to [spiritual] effort, even the one [reflected in the statement] “This is suchness”. [Finally] one abandons the *nimittas* related to the phenomenon of realization by abandoning the *nimittas* of realization attained through meditation on the [Bodhisattva-]levels.³⁸

In this respect it should be understood that the *nimittas* of what is opposed [to liberation] are coarse in that they are a cause for distress and thus easy to identify. Being a remedy for the latter, the *nimittas* of the remedy are average. The *nimittas* of suchness are subtle, since they are a remedy of everything different from them. The *nimittas* of realization are long-lasting, since they are a fruit of meditation.³⁹

Vasubandhu's *vṛtti* is very concise here, and unfortunately we are not told how the abandonment of *nimittas* is related to non-conceptual wisdom, but since it is one of the six points specifying the means by which the latter is comprehended, it is safe to assume that the cultivation of non-conceptual wisdom removes the *nimittas*. For *gZhon nu dpal*, non-conceptual wisdom is a direct cognition free from the five negative defining characteristics⁴⁰ and a remedy for clinging to the above-mentioned *nimittas*.⁴¹

For further information on the abandoning of the four *nimittas* *gZhon nu dpal* refers to the *Nirvikalpapraśadhāraṇī* (NPD). It should be noted, however, that nowhere in the DhDhV or the commentary on it by Vasubandhu is such a reference to the NPD found, nor is there a remark such as the usual phrase "should be understood according to the sūtra". It is thus problematic to claim without any further evidence, as Matsuda does, that the DhDhV was composed after the NPD.⁴² Indeed, there are reasons for placing the NPD well after the DhDhV.

First of all, the *āśrayaparivṛtti* theory of the DhDhV is strikingly similar to the one propounded in the *bodhi* chapter of the RGVV,⁴³ and since we have the year 508 AD as a *terminus ante quem* for the latter,⁴⁴ there is no basis for placing the DhDhV during or after the time of Sthiramati from a doctrinal point of view.

Second, if the DhDhV had incorporated the content of the NPD it would not have missed the crucial notion in the NPD that the *nimittas* are abandoned by not becoming mentally engaged (*amanasikāraṭaḥ*). The latter was to become a popular concept among the circle of Maitrīpa. In the DhDhV, however, the process of abandoning is embedded in the presentation of *āśrayaparivṛtti* which is brought about by the cultivation of non-conceptual wisdom, and this cultivation is described as the exact opposite: "mental engagement" (point no. 7 of *āśrayaparivṛtti*).

Third, the four types of *nimittas* differ in the NPD, whose second set in particular is much more elaborate than in the DhDhV—a strong indication of a further development of the practice of *nimittaparivarjana* in the NPD. In the latter, the first set of *nimittas* is related to natural imagination (*prakṛtīvikalpa*), or perceived objects and perceiving subjects and the five *skandhas*. The remaining three are the interpretative imaginations (*nirūpaṇavikalpa*) of remedy (i.e., the six *pāramitās*), reality and attainment. While the second set of *nimittas* is still illustrated by the more traditional practice of meditation on the notion of ugliness in the DhDhV, the NPD explains that the Bodhisattva abandons the first set of

nimittas by not becoming mentally engaged, and as he does so the following set of imaginations relating to the practice of the six *pāramitās* is said to appear. Unfortunately, the NPD does not specify what it means by “not becoming mentally engaged”, nor are we told why the following *nimittas* occur while the previous ones are abandoned.⁴⁵ Is it that the remedy of the six *pāramitās* (including the interpretative imagination of the latter) presents itself while abandoning the natural imagination of duality as a result of not becoming mentally engaged? The traditional presentation of this point in the DhDhV is much clearer: a *nimitta* from the first set, attachment, for example, is abandoned with the aid of a *nimitta* of the second set, namely the remedy of meditation on ugliness. In other words, whereas the second set of *nimittas* is cultivated, according to the DhDhV, in order to abandon the first set, it is not clear why the second set occurs in the NPD. This apparent lack of a reason for the *pāramitās* to occur when one’s practice is merely based on *amanasikāra* is the central focus of Sa skya paṇḍita’s (1182-1251) critique of not-specifically-Tantric *mahāmudrā* which is largely a continuation of Maitrīpa’s *amanasikāra* teaching.⁴⁶

gZhon nu dpal’s extensive commentary on *nimittaparivarjana* starts by quoting the relevant passage of the NPD⁴⁷, and then contrasts Kamalaśīla’s commentary with the commentarial tradition of Maitrīpa and Sahajavajra. A brief look at Kamalaśīla’s commentary on the NPD shows that the author reinterprets *amanasikāra* by restricting its literal meaning to the fruit of one’s deep insight (*vipaśyanā*) practice, that is, the non-conceptual meditative stabilization focusing on suchness, as brought about by the logical inferences common to mainstream Madhyamaka. Analytic meditation turns into non-conceptual abiding in the same way as a fire kindled from rubbing pieces of wood burns the pieces of wood themselves.⁴⁸ Such an interpretation of *amanasikāra* is perfectly in line with a traditional gradual path, on which the six *pāramitās* must then be practised as a remedy for the first set of *nimittas*. According to gZhon nu dpal, Kamalaśīla defines *nimitta* in the sense of being a mental construct generated by one’s clinging to any of the four categories of phenomena: defilements, remedy, suchness and attainment. In other words, it is the subject which possesses or clings to *nimittas* rather than the *nimittas* themselves that is being referred to.⁴⁹

What makes gZhon nu dpal’s elaborate explanations on *nimittaparivarjana* so important is that he contrasts Kamalaśīla’s commentarial tradition with the one going back to Maitrīpa. The latter propagates a direct, non-conceptual approach to reality right from the outset, in that the abandonment of *nimittas* amounts to the realization of their luminous nature. This description of reality and the associated practice of direct realization was called *mahāmudrā* by Maitrīpa’s disciple Sahajavajra, and gZhon nu dpal claims that this latter interpretation is the original intention of the DhDhV:

As to what has thus been taught in the DhDhV, it is the meaning of entering the non-conceptual that has been established [here]. There are obviously two traditions[, however,] of how to comprehend the meaning of this *sūtra*:⁵⁰ Kamalaśīla maintains that the [interpretative] imaginations that must be given up can be only given up on the basis of the insight resulting

from thorough investigation. It is maintained in the commentary on Maitrīpa’s *Tattvadaśaka*, by contrast, that they are not given up as a result of thorough investigation, but of a “meditative stabilization which [experiences] reality exactly as it is” (Skt. *yathābhūtasamādhi*). The latter knows the own-being of [even] that which must be given up as luminosity. Here it is reasonable to follow Maitrīpa, who [re]discovered this treatise.⁵¹

In other words, the *mahāmudrā* way of *nimittaparivarjana* is based on Maitrīpa’s *Tattvadaśaka*, or more accurately, the commentary on it by Maitrīpa’s disciple Sahajavajra. A brief glance at these “Ten Verses on Reality”⁵² reveals a wide range of approaches to reality, or suchness, as it is referred to in the first three verses. Maitrīpa starts by defining suchness along the lines of Madhyamaka as neither existent nor non-existent, and then equates, probably under the influence of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*,⁵³ stainless suchness with enlightenment. In the second verse, we are warned not to follow lower philosophical tenets; we should seek rather to grasp suchness with the help of Madhyamaka teachings, which become supreme once enhanced by the words of a guru. In verse 4, the logical subject then switches to reality, which is taken as the nature of things—on the basis of and in allusion to the famous statement “Form is emptiness and emptiness is form” (TD 4)—and subsequently as the one taste of all phenomena, that is, luminosity. This is how it is experienced in *yathābhūtasamādhi*. The latter is cultivated through engaged *bodhicitta* (TD 5-6). Helpful concepts on the path, such as that the world is beyond duality, are also realized to be luminous by nature (TD 7), and it is in the commentary on this verse that Sahajavajra elaborates his *mahāmudrā* approach of *nimittaparivarjana*.

Sahajavajra identifies in the *Tattvadaśaka* a yoga tradition aiming at the direct realization of reality through pith-instructions and calls it *Yuganaddhavāda, a path clearly distinguished from both Pāramitāyāna and Mantrayāna.⁵⁴ In his explanation of TD 7, in which these pith-instructions and the reality they reveal are called *mahāmudrā*, Sahajavajra starts by defining non-duality in terms of his so-called Yuganaddha-Madhyamaka, as being “*bodhicitta*, or the reality of non-dual knowledge, whose nature is skillful means and insight.”⁵⁵ In his introduction to the second part of the verse (TD 7cd), the following objection is addressed: To define reality in the above-mentioned way has the fault of involving the *nimitta* of an interpretative imagination of reality, in the same way as the practice of *yathābhūtasamādhi* is accompanied by the *nimitta* of an interpretative imagination of the remedy, and such *nimittas* must be abandoned by not becoming mentally engaged, as taught in the *Nirvikalpapraśādhāraṇī*. TD 7cd is then taken as Maitrīpa’s answer to such a possible objection. It asserts that nothing, not even the *nimittas* of attainment etc., is really abandoned, but everything is simply realized as natural luminosity.⁵⁶ In other words, Sahajavajra takes the abandoning of all *nimittas*, the central tenet of the NPD, as having a provisional meaning. The motive (*dgos pa*) is to make one realize reality, or *mahāmudrā*, and this involves not really abandoning the *nimittas*, but simply realizing their luminous nature without becoming attached to them. This is made clear in the following part of Sahajavajra’s commentary:

Here *mahāmudrā* [refers to] the pith-instruction on the reality of *mahāmudrā*, and there is no contradiction [with the NPD], because [the interpretative imaginations of the remedy etc.] do not have to be given up in terms of the reality [of their luminous nature]. [...] As to being free from duality, even the vain adherence to non-duality, that is, the interpretative imagination of reality, is luminous, for it lacks an own-being and is pure by nature. Likewise the vain adherence to what must be accomplished and that which accomplishes must be realized as being luminous. Well then, as to [the phrase] “completely abandoning these *nimittas* by not becoming mentally engaged”, here, not to become mentally engaged does not mean that one does not become mentally engaged [at all]—for example, not seeing objects such as a vase by closing one’s eyes. Not to focus on the own-being of entities as a result of a precise analysis or the pith-instructions of the guru is [what is meant by] not becoming mentally engaged.⁵⁷

It should be noted that the inclusion of “precise analysis” allows for the intellectual approach of Kamalaśīla. But with the help of pith-instructions, analysis can be performed by direct observations, which later *mahāmudrā* masters such as Dvags po bKra shis rnam rgyal (1512-1587) described as a kind of naked (*rjen lhang gis*) seeing or gazing.⁵⁸ The point here is that even initial *vipaśyanā* sessions can be performed by resorting to direct cognitions on the basis of pith-instructions.⁵⁹ This is clear from the following passage of the TDT where Sahajavajra explains a *vipaśyanā* that differs from what Kamalaśīla propounds:

[As to the expression] “realization” among the thousands of collections of teachings, its meaning in “realization of emptiness” is to analyze [emptiness]. [Realization resulting from the pith-instructions of] the right guru is not analytical.⁶⁰

In other words, Sahajavajra prefers a *mahāmudrā* path of meditation that works with direct perceptions and with a non-analytical mind.

Coming back to the DhDhV: This obviously means that the phenomenal reality of *dharma*s does not need to be abandoned, but simply realized by non-conceptual wisdom as what it really is, *dharmatā* or the luminous nature of the mind—an interpretation not altogether impossible, given that *dharma*s, which are defined as false imagining, are taken to be non-existent in the first place,⁶¹ but not in the sense that the negation of a duality entails a complete non-existence of perceived objects. It is only an existence independent of a perceived subject or anything else which is negated.

It is clear now why, after centuries of oblivion, the DhDhV and RGV became so important again for Maitrīpa. What had been problematic for mainstream Buddhism in India, namely a *dharmatā* or Buddha-element of luminous nature covered by a phenomenal world which consists of merely adventitious stains, proved to be the perfect doctrinal foundation for the new Yuganaddhavāda, or *sūtra mahāmudrā*, as it

was also referred to later. Thus Sahajavajra explicitly refers to the RGV I.154ab (“There is nothing to be removed from it and nothing to be added”⁶²) when explaining with regard to TD 3d (“Confusion is taken to be without a basis”)⁶³ that confusion does not need to be removed like thorns. The RGV also endorses a non-intellectual approach to the luminous nature behind everything adventitious. In the introduction to RGVV on I.153-5 this approach is defined as *dharmatāyukti*:

Everywhere it is precisely the true nature of phenomena which is what is relied on—the reasoning for an “accurate realization” (*nges par rtogs pa*) of the mind [and] for a “correct knowledge” (*yang dag par shes pa*) of it. The true nature of phenomena is inconceivable and unthinkable; it must [rather] be believed in.⁶⁴

One could object, however, that the *mahāmudrā* approach would require that the direct perceptions of a beginner yield a realization of the Buddha-element, whereas in RGVV on I.154 the latter is said to be difficult to apprehend and not a fully experiential object for even the highest saints.⁶⁵

It was probably in view of this, but of course also the fact that direct perceptions of emptiness usually start from the first Bodhisattva-level onwards, that gZhon nu dpal had recourse to the *Vairocanābhī-sambodhitāntra*, and claimed, based on it, that there is a set of provisional Bodhisattva-levels already on the path of preparation.⁶⁶ But much more important than this, gZhon nu dpal tries to show that the four yogas of *mahāmudrā* are in accordance with the four *prayogas* of the DhDhV.

IV. The Four *Prayogas*

The practice of the four *prayogas* is at the heart of the cultivation of non-conceptual wisdom which in turn is the basis of *āśrayaparivṛtti*. Now if it can be shown that the four *prayogas* are in accordance with the four yogas of *mahāmudrā*, direct perceptions of natural luminosity must be accepted at the beginning of one’s practice. The relevant passage in the DhDhVV is as follows:

Correct practice (*prayoga*) is comprehended under four points, namely,

because of the practice of apprehending means: because one apprehends [the fact that everything is] a mere image (*viññapti*);

the practice of not apprehending means: because one does not apprehend [external] objects;

the practice of not apprehending apprehending means: because the mere image of an [external] object is not apprehended in its absence, because[, that is to say,] an image is not admissible in the absence of the object of an image;

the practice of apprehending by way of not apprehending means: because non-duality is apprehended by way of not apprehending duality.⁶⁷

gZhon nu dpal's commentary starts with a paraphrase of the four *prayogas* in the DhDhV and then goes on to quote similar passages in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*.⁶⁸

Again, thirdly, the comprehension of correct [meditational] practice, which is the cause [of non-conceptual wisdom], should be understood under four points:

- The practice of apprehending [the fact that everything is] merely an image (*vijñaptimātra*)
- The practice of not apprehending external objects
- The practice of realizing that even the apprehension of *vijñaptimātra* is not apprehended when there are no external [objects]
- The practice of not apprehending either external [objects] or mere images.⁶⁹

This sequence of four *yogas* of this kind is also taught in the *Laṅkāvatāra[sūtra]* [X.256ab]:

When one has relied on [the notion of] mind only, external objects should not be imagined.

etc.⁷⁰ Also in the *[Mahāyāna]sūtrālaṅkāra* [on VI.8] it is said:

Having understood with intelligence that there is nothing apart from the mind, one realizes that even the mind does not exist.

Thus the wise understand that duality does not exist, and abide in the *dharmadhātu*, in which this [duality] is not contained.⁷¹

And the very same thing is also said in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* [I.6-7b]:

From the apprehension [that everything is mere perception] arises the non-apprehension [of external objects].

From [this] non-apprehension arises the non-apprehension [of mere perception]. (MAV I.6)

Therefore it is established that apprehension is of the nature of non-apprehension, [inasmuch as an apprehension does not make sense without an apprehended object].⁷² (MAV I.7ab)

Next, gZhon nu dpal relates the four *prayogas* of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* to the four *mahāmudrā yogas*⁷³ in the following way:⁷⁴

- The first [*mahāmudrā* yoga] is to look inside, and to apprehend that [everything] is one’s own mind.
- As for the explanation in the second [*prayoga*], that there is nothing outside, it is the [*mahāmudrā* yoga of] freedom from mental fabrication, in which one realizes that all phenomena which have become the object of mind lack any basis.
- The realization that outside appearances and the inner mind are free from mental fabrications and of one taste (i.e., of the same nature) is the *prayoga* of the non-apprehension of apprehension (i.e., the apprehension of mind only is not apprehended)
- Perceiving again in a special way that neither the perceived object nor the perceiving subject exists, one does not meditate, and this is called non-meditation, the fourth [*mahāmudrā*] yoga.

The four passages (in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and the three Maitreya works) have in common the fact that one’s meditational practice is started by recalling that everything is mind only. This involves, according to the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavṛtti*, recognizing that one’s mind does not know suchness, or its reality, and, as a consequence, creates the entire world of perceived objects and perceiving subjects in a process of false imagining.⁷⁵ For gZhon nu dpal, “mind only” does not mean, however, that there are no external objects at all, but that these lack an own-being.⁷⁶ Likewise, it is not the objective of the first *mahāmudrā* yoga to establish that everything is mind or perception only. It is rather to get one’s investigative attention directed inside, as described in *mahāmudrā* pith-instructions, and only deals with what appears in the mind.

The next stage in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* is to realize that external objects do not exist.⁷⁷ It is only by understanding this second *prayoga* as meaning that this non-existence only refers to the lack of an own-being that it can be brought into line with the second *mahāmudrā* yoga, “freedom from mental fabrications”.

In the third stage of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, even mind only is no longer apprehended, which in all passages is explained as no longer apprehending a perceiving subject—without a perceived object it simply does not make sense. The fact that everything, outside and inside, is no longer apprehended, amounts for gZhon nu dpal to the same thing as realizing that both lack an own-being. In other words, both outside and inside are free from mental fabrication, and it is in this sense that everything is of one taste.

The fourth stage of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* reflects the common Yogācāra practice of referring to the absence of duality as something positive as well. Thus the non-apprehension of a perceived object and perceiving subject leads to the apprehension of non-duality. In the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* it is taken to be wisdom seeing the most excellent, in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* as the abiding in *dharmadhātu*. This fourth *prayoga* has no equivalent in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*.⁷⁸ Since gZhon nu dpal does not want to see

an affirming negation being implied by the absence of duality, he explains that on the level of this *prayoga* one simply perceives again in some special way that object and subject do not exist, and calls this the yoga of non-meditation.

To sum up, to read the four yogas of *mahāmudrā* into the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and the Maitreya works requires a particular interpretation of the latter, and one not always evident. It should be noted, however, that such a *mahāmudrā* interpretation already existed in India, as can be seen from Jñānakīrti's 10th/11th-century⁷⁹ *Tattvāvatāra*, in which a not-specifically-Tantric form of *mahāmudrā* practice is related with the traditional fourfold Mahāyāna meditation by equating "Mahāyāna" in LAS X.257d with *mahāmudrā*. The *pādas* X.257cd "A yogin who is established in a state without appearances sees Mahāyāna" thus mean that one finally sees or realizes *mahāmudrā*.⁸⁰

V. Conclusion

It could be shown that the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* plays an important role in providing gZhon nu dpal's *mahāmudrā* tradition with a canonical basis. The key to such an enterprise is the crucial paragraph on *nimittaparivarjana*, which can be interpreted in terms of a direct and non-conceptual approach to reality or one's luminous nature of mind. As we have seen, such a hermeneutical strategy can be reasonably justified on the basis of Sahajavajra's *Tattvadaśakaṭikā* and Jñānakīrti's *Tattvāvatāra*. By showing that the *dharmatā* portion of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* is a commentary on the second chapter of the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, gZhon nu dpal skillfully links his *mahāmudrā* interpretation to the standard Indian work on Buddha-nature, and thus to a concept which considerably facilitated the bridging of the Sūtras with the Tantras.

Appendix: Translation of gZhon nu dpal's Commentary on *Nimittaparivarjana*

[459.13-6]⁸¹ As to the abandonment of *nimittas* which fully arise when one becomes involved in practice, it is the second of the six points of comprehending [non-conceptual wisdom]. The comprehension of it involves four points, [namely] the abandonment of (1) the *nimittas* of what is opposed [to liberation], (2) the *nimittas* of their remedy, such as the meditation on the repulsive, (3) the *nimittas* of the experiential object [or] suchness, and (4) the *nimittas* of realization [or] the attainment of the fruit. These can be learned from the sūtra (i.e., the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*):

[459.16-24] Sons of a noble family! Here, the Bodhisattva and great being hears the teaching relating to the non-conceptual, directs his thought to it, and completely abandons all *nimittas* of imagination. He completely abandons, as the first [among] them, all *nimittas* of natural imagination (*praktivikalpa*), that is to say, [any] perceived [object] or perceiving [subject]. This *nimitta* of natural imagination is here a *nimitta* with regard to a contaminated entity, and such a contaminated entity is [any of] the five *skandhas* of appropriation,⁸² that is to say, the *skandhas*

of form, feeling, notion, conditioned [formative forces] and consciousness. How are [these] *nimittas* of natural imagination abandoned? What becomes manifest by becoming an appearance is completely abandoned when one does not become mentally engaged (*amanasikārataḥ*).

[459.24 - 460.4] While [the Bodhisattva] completely abandons these *nimittas* of [natural] imagination in a gradual way, the *nimittas* of the interpretative⁸³ imagination (Skt. *nirūpaṇavikalpa*) relating to the remedy, which are different from these [previous ones], occur—that is, become manifest—by becoming appearances. They are as follows: the *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to generosity, discipline, patience, endurance, meditation and insight, that is to say, [a form of imagination that arises from] interpretations involving either an own-being (*svabhāva*), qualities or an essence. These *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to the remedy he (i.e., the Bodhisattva) also completely abandons, by not becoming mentally engaged.

[460.4-9] While [the Bodhisattva] completely abandons these [*nimittas* relating to the remedy], the *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to reality which are different from these [previous ones] occur—that is, become manifest—by becoming appearances. They are as follows: the *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to emptiness, suchness, the extreme of reality, signlessness, the ultimate and the *dharmadhātu*, that is to say, [a form of imagination that arises from] an interpretation involving either specifically characterized phenomena (*svalakṣaṇa*), qualities or an essence. These *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to reality he (i.e., the Bodhisattva) also completely abandons, by not becoming mentally engaged.

[460.9-17] While [the Bodhisattva] completely abandons these [*nimittas* relating to reality], the *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to attainment which are different from these [previous ones], occur—that is, become manifest—by becoming appearances. They are as follows: the *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to the attainment from the first up to the tenth level, [including] the *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to the attainments of being able to endure the fact that phenomena do not arise; prophecy; completely pure Buddha-fields; causing sentient beings to mature; initiation; all the way up to omniscience, that is to say, [a form of imagination that arises from] an interpretation involving either specifically characterized phenomena, qualities or an essence. These *nimittas* of the interpretative imagination relating to attainment he (i.e., the Bodhisattva) also completely abandons, by not becoming mentally engaged.

[460.17-9] There are two traditions [of exegesis]. What are these two? The tradition of the great master Kamalaśīla and the tradition of Maitrīpa, the father[, and his spiritual] son [Sahajavajra]. As to the first,

in the following I will summarize the extensive commentary by the [great] master on the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* and write a little about its meaning.

[460.19-461.2] In this respect, the four *nimittas* [under discussion] here are those of natural interpretation and the interpretations relating to the remedy, reality and attainment. As to natural [interpretation] from among those [four], it refers to all defilements. Since it occurs under the sway of ignorance without depending on a “mental effort” (such as the conscious wish to acquire s.th.),⁸⁴ it is called natural. “Remedy” refers to the six perfections starting with generosity. “Reality” is emptiness or the ultimate. “Attainment” is the eleven [Bodhisattva] levels starting with the joyful one. *Nimitta* is the notion of clinging to these four phenomena as being specifically characterized. It is the essence of what must be abandoned. Here the subject [possessing] a *nimitta* is called *nimitta*, since phenomena which possess some specifically characterized feature are called *nimitta*, and this is what one clings to. By what [means] are these four *nimittas* abandoned? They are abandoned by not becoming mentally engaged. When? Having first achieved calm abiding, one subsequently performs the meditation of deep insight [which is practiced alternately with calm abiding] all along the levels of the nine [stabilities of] the mind starting with “settling [the mind]”.⁸⁵ It is at this moment that they are abandoned (i.e., during periods of deep insight). When are they abandoned? It is when the [Bodhisattva] levels are attained, [that is,] by touching suchness, at this moment one should call them abandoned.

[461.2-9] As to [the meaning of] “non-conceptual” in this [NPDT], in view of [the phrase] “that in which nothing is conceptualized” even suchness as a [referential] object is called non-conceptual; and in view of [the phrase] “that through which nothing is conceptualized” the meditative stabilization is called non-conceptual.⁸⁶ As for the opposite of “not becoming mentally engaged”, that is, mental engagement, it is an imagination accompanied by words and meanings, or an imagination [influenced by one’s] clinging to the particular [features] of these [words and meanings] as [something pertaining to a real] entity. Thus what is really meant by “not becoming mentally engaged” is a non-conceptual meditative stabilization focused on suchness. As for its cause, it is called an inference or the insight of a precise investigation which realizes that entities lack an own-being.⁸⁷ This is based on reasonings such as dependent arising, being without going or coming, or refuting the arising of the four extremes (i.e., from existence, non-existence etc.). As [the mind] cultivates in such a way this precise investigation, it becomes calm by itself, and turns into non-conceptual abiding in the same way as a fire kindled from rubbing pieces of wood burns these same pieces. Therefore the cause, [namely] the insight of precise investigation, is labelled by the name of [its] fruit, [namely] not becoming mentally engaged.

[461.9-12] In what way is it this fruit? It is as taught in this commentary (i.e., the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīkā*):

In this way a yogin should abandon, through the faculty of devotion and insight, all nets of *nimittas* relating to the imagination of existence and so forth, have devotion towards reality itself with a non-conceptual and non-analytical mind of one taste, and abide in meditation without performance and with enhanced clarity.⁸⁸

[461.12-5] This also [holds true] in the case of settling [the mind] which is the first⁸⁹ of the nine [stabilities of] mind. After attaining this [initial state] one subsequently meditates by settling [the mind] continuously⁹⁰ and so on. In this [*Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭikā*] it has been further said in detail:

The mental continuum which rests in this [enhanced clarity] should not be distracted. When one does become distracted from time to time, one [must] calm down and completely direct [one's] mind [again] to this [clarity].⁹¹ And so on.

[461.15-7] It has been said with regard to the four *nimittas* that the subsequent ones ripen each time the preceding ones have been abandoned, so that it is a gradual meditation. As for the ways in which these *nimittas* arise, they are the imagining of the *nimittas* as relating to an own-being (*svabhāva*), qualities, an essence etc. It has been said that the second and the following [sets of *nimittas*] must be referred to [these] three.

[461.17-20] As for the own-being of the second [set], it is the generosity [of providing] material goods, fearlessness and Dharma. The own-being of discipline is the opposite of bad conduct and the practice of the Dharma. The own-being of patience is threefold: not to suffer⁹² [through the harm of others], not to retaliate and to understand. The own-being of diligence is delight in the virtues. The own-being of meditation is a one-pointed mind. The own-being of insight is the correct analysis of entities.

[461.20-2] As to qualities, they are: [attaining] wealth through generosity, higher realms through discipline, a comely bodily form through patience, a united retinue and uninterrupted wealth through diligence, health through meditation, and a sharp intellect, joy, a most joyful mind and control over most groups of sentient beings through insight.

[461.22-3] As to essence, since it is a synonym of cause, it becomes the cause of great enlightenment through dedication.

[461.23-6] As to the types of the own-being of reality, they are emptiness, in view of its being the selflessness of persons and phenomena; suchness, in view of its being nothing other than this very [reality]; the extreme of reality, in view of its being the unmistakable object; signlessness, in view of its being freedom from all *nimittas*; the ultimate, in view of its being the experiential object of supreme wisdom; and the *dharmadhātu*, in view of its being the cause of all properties of a Buddha.

[461.26-462.1] As to quality [in terms of reality], when one meditates on these [types of own-being], all the properties of a Buddha emerge.

[462.1] As to the essence [in terms of reality], it is a synonym of nature, and well grounded in valid cognition.

[462.1-3] As to the own-being of the levels [in terms of attainment], it starts with being joyous (*pramuditā*). They are well known. The three, attainment of enduring phenomena which do not arise, prophecy, and pure fields are on the eighth level. [Causing] sentient beings to mature [happens] on the ninth level, and the attainment of initiation on the tenth level.

[462.3-4] As to the quality [in terms of attainment], it is the continuous increment of the number of qualities such as seeing a hundred Buddhas in one moment.

[462.4-6] As to the essence [in terms of attainment], it is a synonym of “very important” (or “essential”), because the level of a Buddha is unsurpassable among all transmudane properties. And being also the basis of emanation, it is the essence, since all the benefit for oneself and others arises from it.

[462.6-10] [The second commentarial tradition] is by Maitrīpa, the father[, and his spiritual] son [Sahajavajra]. It is explained in detail [in the *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā*]:

[The latter, that is, *bodhicitta*,] is these two (i.e., means and insight).⁹³ [The sentence] “The suchness of the non-dual world is *bodhicitta*” is the *nimitta* of an interpretative imagination of reality. Likewise, the expression “The meditative stabilization which [experiences] reality exactly as it is” is the *nimitta* of an interpretative imagination of the remedy,⁹⁴ [and the sentence] “When realized, it has the nature of enlightenment” is the *nimitta* of an interpretative imagination of attainment. Somebody may [then] object: “If the Illustrious One [repeatedly] taught in the *Nirvikalpapraveśa[dhāraṇī]* that even the *nimittas* [of the remedy etc.], [namely] those which become appearances and manifest, are completely abandoned by not becoming mentally engaged, how do these [sentences] then not contradict [what has been taught] here [in the *Tattvadaśaka*]?” [The possible answers are as follows:]

[462.11-5] First of all, some say in this respect: With regard to apparent entities, the reality of what must be accomplished and what accomplishes must be expressed first, since otherwise it would follow that the teaching has no fruit. It has been taught[, though,] that later, after one has become familiar [with the fruit],⁹⁵ the *nimittas* of what must be accomplished etc., will be abandoned. [This follows] from the practice of the abandonment of even knowledge which is

without *nimittas*. If [inferential] knowledge is taken first, how is there a contradiction? This is not a superior answer, for it has no power. Therefore another answer has been taught [in *Tattvadaśaka* 7cd]:

[The world itself, which is free from knowledge and knowable objects, is taken to be non-duality; (TD 7ab)]

And [even] the vain adherence to a state free from duality is taken, in like manner, to be luminous.⁹⁶ (TD 7cd)

[462.16-8] The underlying intention here is as follows: In order that those who do not know reality thoroughly realize [that] reality, it was taught that one [must] give up the three interpretative [imaginings] as in the case of the complete abandonment of the four extremes. This is because it has been said:

He who does not abide in the domain of the remedy and is not attached to reality,
And who does not desire the fruit of anything, knows *mahāmudrā*.

[462.18-21] Here *mahāmudrā* [refers to] the pith-instruction [on the reality] of *mahāmudrā*, and there is no contradiction [with the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*], because [the interpretative imaginings of the remedy etc.] do not have to be abandoned in terms of the reality [of their luminous nature], as has been said with regard to those who thoroughly know the reality of entities:

In order to purify the four extremes
In any of the three interpretative [forms of imagination],
He abides evenly in these four extremes.

[462.21-3] As to being free from duality, even the vain adherence to non-duality, namely the interpretative imagination of reality, is luminous, because it lacks an own-being and is pure by nature. Likewise, the vain adherence to what must be accomplished and that which accomplishes must be realized as being luminous.

[462.23-463.1] Well then, as to [the phrase] “completely abandoning these *nimittas* by not becoming mentally engaged”, here, not to become mentally engaged does not mean that one does not become mentally engaged [at all], as when closing one’s eyes [results in] not seeing objects such as a vase. What is meant by not becoming mentally engaged rather is—through precise analysis or the pith-instructions of the guru—not to focus on the own-being of entities. It has been said:

In brief, [when] walking or sitting,
Sleeping or resting in equipoise,
I look, listen and smell,
Touch and experience,
And even though I see [through] eyes of insight
That, based on analysis and pith-instructions,
All phenomena do not arise,
I have not seen.

[463.2-4] Therefore, what is meant by not becoming mentally engaged with *nimittas* is merely the thorough knowledge that [phenomena] are without *nimittas*. Well then, *nimittas* [here] are interpretative imaginations, [that is to say,] verbal notions, for it has been said: “Notions have the nature of taking [phenomena] as *nimittas*”. Moreover, the Illustrious One said: “Non-arising is purity.” Where? In the *Samādhirājasūtra* it has been said:

[463.4-10] A notion is characterized by a noted object [and the act of its] apprehension.⁹⁷ Still, a notion is [normally] taught as not involving [the act of] apprehension, [while at the same time] involving an object which is independent [of it].⁹⁸ (SRS XXXII.92)

[What is separate [in such a sense] is [usually taken to be] a notion, and it is a separate [notion] which has been taught.]⁹⁹

[Such] a notion has not arisen in terms of its own-being, nor will it [ever] arise in such a way.¹⁰⁰ (SRS XXXII.93)

Whoever rejoices in [such a] notion¹⁰¹—[to him this] notion occurs,
And he finds delight in the fabrication of notions; he is said to have formed a
notion^{102 103} (SRS XXXII.94)

No matter for whom a notion has arisen or by whom a notion has arisen,
By whom a notion is experienced¹⁰⁴ or by whom it is blocked—¹⁰⁵ (SRS XXXII.95)

By the Buddha have no phenomena been found with regard to which a notion would occur.

Think about this meaning here,¹⁰⁶ and henceforth no notion will occur [anymore].¹⁰⁷
(SRS XXXII.96)

When notions have not arisen, whose notion will be blocked?¹⁰⁸ (SRS XXXII.97ab)

[463.10-1] Likewise, [even] the thought of [reality] being inconceivable and non-conceptual is a concept of the mind. “Lacking an own-being” is not a “non-notion”.¹⁰⁹ In the *Yuganaddha-Madhyamaka it has been said:

[463.11-6] And during the yoga of a non-conceptual mind,
One does not even imagine that [this state is] without thought.
It has [neither] supreme modes nor modes [of perception].
Nothing pertaining to the faculties of the mind
Has the nature of being either existent or non-existent.
[Notions of] existence and non-existence have been completely abandoned.
[Thus] it is free from the four extremes.
[Still,] even the four extremes are endowed with “excellence” (*yang dag*).
Variety has been [wrongly] imputed [to it], and also not.
It cannot be analyzed according to an interpretative [type of imagination such as]
“The fruit is the reality (i.e., the true nature) of what is opposed [to liberation].”
It has arisen based on this and that;
It has not arisen in terms of own-being.
It is self-awareness, for it is not something material.
There is neither knower nor an object to be seen.
Lacking an own-being, it is not eternal.
[Still,] not undergoing change, it is permanent.

[463.16-8] Moreover, the guru [Maitrīpa?] said:

The thought which has arisen in dependence,
is not ascertained in terms of connection [with anything identical].
This [thought] already being in the state of *nirvāṇa*,
Do not delude your mind with confusion!

Moreover [Maitrīpa?] said:

Remain at ease just [as you are],
Not afraid of any thought!

[463.18-24] Likewise, even the Buddha taught [in SRS XXXII.98-105]:

When reality¹¹⁰ is experienced, it cannot be conceived of by any thought.¹¹¹

When it is conceived as being inconceivable, then one does not think: “Reality can be conceptualized.”¹¹² (SRS XXXII.98)

(Stanzas 99 and 100 are not quoted in the *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā*)

As sentient beings are, so is [their] mind.¹¹³ As [their] mind is, so are the Victorious Ones.

The inconceivable Buddha explained [all] this as being mind.¹¹⁴ (SRS XXXII.101)

Whoever thinks this marvellous—[to him] a thought¹¹⁵ will never occur [again].

For those who do not think thoughts, all thoughts disappear.¹¹⁶ (SRS XXXII.102)

(Stanzas 103 and 104 are not quoted in the *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā*)

One may think many times of [one’s true nature] as being inconceivable. When one has thought [this] even for a long time,

Thoughts will [still] arise incessantly. When one has created it as a thought, this is not correct.¹¹⁷

This thought is a great thought. [This] Dharma-thought is unsurpassable.

By the latter one proceeds towards the right thought^{118, 119} (SRS XXXII.105)

[463.24-6] With this in mind, the *vajra*-teachers said:

Spontaneously present wisdom

Should not be fathomed by thought.

Whoever, after considering this, is without thought [about wisdom]

Does not become [entirely] devoid of thought.

And much more in detail.¹²⁰

[463.26-464.4] What we have here is the raising of an objection with respect to [*nimittaparivarjana*] and the two treatises¹²¹ answering it. As to the first, [the objection has been presented in the passage] from “[The latter, that is, *bodhicitta*,] is these two (i.e., means and insight)” up to “How does [the latter] not contradict [what has been said here in the *Tattvadaśaka*]?” In this [passage] it is noted that [according to the *Tattvadaśaka*] the *nimittas* of the various types of interpretative [imagination] with regard to reality, remedy and attainment are not abandoned. Then it is asked how this does not contradict the

Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī,¹²² which states that the three *nimittas* are [indeed] abandoned. While the abandoning of four *nimittas* [including that of natural imagination] has been taught in the *dhāraṇī*, it has not been asked here (i.e., in the commentary on TD 7) how the *nimitta* of natural [imagination] is to be taken, it having been already taught, for example, [in TD 3b]:

In terms of its own-being, [the state of] having abandoned attachment.¹²³

[464.4-11] With regard to the answers, there is one according to the others and one from our own [tradition]. The first is [presented] in the passage from “First of all, some say in this respect” up to “how is there a contradiction?” [Its] meaning is that, in terms of apparent “phenomena” (*dharmīn*), properties to be accomplished do not exist as something specifically characterized, while the four *nimittas*, which are based on that which accomplishes, namely reasoning such as [that relating to] dependent arising, are abandoned. If an [inferential] valid cognition did not arise [in the first place, however], the teaching that [*nimittas*] must be abandoned would be without fruit, because there would be no other [means of] abandoning the four *nimittas*. Later on, having familiarized oneself [with this cognition] in meditation, one abandons even the *nimittas* relating to what must be accomplished and so forth. Thus it has been said. Since inferences are a remedy for *nimittas*, they are called “without *nimittas*”. This [follows], among other things, from the yoga of abandonment. If one takes [such inferential] knowledge which lacks *nimittas* [in the above-mentioned sense] as the beginning of meditation, how does it contradict the *dhāraṇī*? *Nimittas* are abandoned by way of inferences. As for the fact that *nimittas* are not [taught] as being abandoned deliberately, there is no contradiction, since this occurs during meditation.

[464.11-6] Even though this first reply reflects the position of Kamalaśīla, it is not meant for those with sharp faculties. Therefore, as for my own tradition: Even though one vainly adheres to the non-existence of duality, such as knowledge and knowable objects, [the mental event which is this adhering] is not [really] different from luminosity. Thus, after becoming acquainted with it in the form of luminosity, one meditates [on it]. Since one meditates [on the fact] that even the imagination of what must be accomplished and what accomplishes [it] is luminosity, one knows that the own-being of [their] corresponding appearances is luminosity and [automatically] abandons the *nimittas*. This is the tradition for those with sharp faculties. It is said that those with inferior capacities need Kamalaśīla’s tradition. The remaining explanations, with the help of the Sūtras and the pith-instructions of the guru, are on the nature of *Yuganaddha-Madhyamaka meditation. I do not elaborate in detail.

[464.17-22] Here [in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭīkā*] Master Kamalaśīla taught the four *nimittas* as being four forms of obstinate adherence to entities but nothing else. Still, since it has been said in the *dhāraṇī*: “... [*nimittas*] become manifest by becoming appearances”, [I add the following]: As [various] imaginations, [such as] a vase, arise, one is forced by them to adhere obstinately to an outer vase. Therefore the cause, namely the very form of a vase, is called *nimitta*. Such [forms] are gross and

abandoned from the first [Bodhisattva] level onwards. The appearance of imagination is reversed from the seventh level onward. Subtle non-conceptual appearances remain connected [with one's mindstream] until the tenth level. They are called the hindrances of knowable objects, and are completely reversed upon [one's] attaining the enlightenment of a Buddha. Therefore any appearance of non-conceptual forms of knowledge pertaining to *samsāra* must be abandoned. This has been explained many times before.

[464.22-465.1] As for this rock [in front of us], which can unanimously be called heavy and solid, the word [used for it] is an expression referring both to the completely defiled aspect of a conditioned factor and to duality. In other words, after being called completely defiled, it is [also] expressed as duality. Moreover, it has ever been so: it could have been either a perceived object or a perceiving subject. Since its particular feature of appearing as a perceived object and a perceiving subject has thus been stated separately, two parts are distinguished here: [its] appearance as a perceived object or a perceiving subject, and [its being constituted by] expressions. One [should] realize that [this distinction] also [conforms with] the meaning of this same *sūtra* (i.e., the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*), because the commentary on it also [explains] it this way.

[465.1-4] By [teaching] these four *niṃttas* which must be abandoned the following goal [is intended]: The four [must be abandoned] in sequential order: first, the coarse ones; second, the average ones; third, the fine ones; and fourth, those persisting for a long time. As for the very subtle ones, they must be abandoned even by those who are [already] abiding on the [Bodhisattva] levels. These *niṃttas* are completely abandoned with the help of non-conceptual wisdom.

NOTES

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² The DhDhV commentary is on pp. 455-70 in my edition of gZhon nu dpal's *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary (ZhP).

³ RGVV 79.2-4: *uktā samalā tathatā / nirmalā tathatedānīṃ vaktavyā / tatra katamā nirmalā tathatā yāsau buddhānām bhagavatām anāsravadhātau sarvākāramalavigamād āśrayaparivṛttir vyavasīhāpyate / sā punar aṣṭau padārthān adhikṛtya samāsato vedīavyā /*

⁴ ZhP 453.11-2: *zag pa med pa'i dbyings ni gnas yin la / yongs su gyur pa'i don ni yongs su log pa yin te....* See also gZhon nu dpal's commentary on RGVV on II.1 (ZhP 471.24-472.2): "The element, or cause, which is termed 'Buddha-nature' when not freed from the sheath of defilements, that is, when it has become the basis (*āśraya*) bringing forth defilements, is the basis (*āśraya*) [in the expression "transformation of the basis"] providing the support of all defilements. When it is irreversibly purified from its stains, including the mental imprints, it does not function as a basis of defilements [anymore], and has therefore been reversed from [its] former state. And since it only provides the support of purification, one should know it to be the own-being of the transformation of the basis. The two, the

element and the transformation of the basis, are only differentiated according to whether they possess stains or not, [for their] own-being is very suchness.”

⁵ DhDhVK 94-307.

⁶ See DhDhVV 12: “One comprehends the own-being [of *āśrayaparivṛtti*] [when it is known as] the stainlessness of suchness....” (*svabhāvapraveśas tathatāvaimalyam*); and RGVV 79.2-5, the introduction to the second chapter (see above).

⁷ See DhDhVV 54-6 (*tatrāśrayaparivṛtter āśrayo nirvikalpajñānam*), where non-conceptual wisdom is introduced as the basis of *āśrayaparivṛtti*; and RGVV on II.1 (79.13-4): “The twofold wisdom—the transmudane, non-conceptual one, and the wisdom attained after it, which is simultaneously mundane and transmudane—is the cause of the transformation of the basis” (*dvividham jñānam lokottaram avikalpaṃ tatpr̥ṣṭhalabdham ca / laukikalokottarajñānam āśrayaparivṛtitihetuḥ*).

⁸ ZhP 470.15-6.

⁹ DhDhVV 685-703; for a German translation see Mathes 1996:153.

¹⁰ ZhP 120.15 – 121.5.

¹¹ See DhDhVV 707-8: ‘dir gser dang chu’i dpes ni rdzas la ma ltos par yon tan tsam chos mthun par bstan pa yin la / nam mkha’i dpes ni thams cad bstan pa yin no /.

¹² DhDhVV 706-7: / de med pas ni chos nyid dang / des rab tu phyed ba’i gnas yongs su gyur pa rtag pa yin no /.

¹³ ZhP 339.6-9. For the quoted passages from gZhon nu dpal’s RGVV commentary see Mathes 2003.

¹⁴ This is clear from his explanation of *dharmatā* with reference to MSA XIII.19, which states that the luminous nature of mind is not different from one’s mind in terms of its true nature (see below).

¹⁵ See ZhP 470.12-5. What gZhon nu dpal had in mind here were probably Yogācāra works such as Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānaśaṃgraha*, where a clear line is drawn between an impure *ālayavijñāna* and a pure transmudane mind, or pure *dharmadhātu* (MS, vol. 1, 19-20).

¹⁶ MAVBh 18.2-3: *śūnyatā tasyābhūtaparikalpasya grāhyagrāhakabhāvena virahitā*.

¹⁷ MAVBh 22.23 – 23.5: *dvayābhāvo hy abhāvasya bhāvaḥ śūnyasya lakṣaṇam / dvayagrāhya-grāhakasyābhāvaḥ / tasya cābhāvasya bhāvaḥ śūnyatāyā lakṣaṇam ity abhāvasvabhāvalakṣaṇatvaṃ śūnyatāyāḥ paridīpitam bhavati / yaś cāsau tadabhāvasvabhāvaḥ sa / na bhāvo nāpi cābhāvaḥ / katham na bhāvo yasmāi dvayasyābhāvaḥ / katham nābhāvo yasmāi dvayābhāvasya bhāvaḥ / etac ca śūnyatāyā lakṣaṇam /*

¹⁸ See MAVBh 23.5-11 & DhDhVK 19-22: “As to the defining characteristics of phenomena (*dharmā*), they are dualistic appearances and [that which appears] in accordance with expressions, [all of them are] false imagining.” (/ de la chos kyi mtshan nyid ni // gnyis dang ji ltar mngon par brjod par // snang ba yang dag ma yin pa’i // kun rtog pa ste...) & DhDhVK 38-41: “The two (i.e., *dharmā* and *dharmatā*) are neither identical nor different, because there is both a difference and not a difference between the existing (*dharmatā*) and the non-existing (*dharmas*).” (/ gnyis po dag ni gcig nyid dang / / so so ba yang ma yin te // yod pa dang ni med pa dag // khyad par yod dang med phyir ro /).

¹⁹ DhDhVV 73-4: / rtog pa tsam nyid ni snang ba ’khrul pa tsam du yod pa’i phyir /.

²⁰ To be precise, it is only with regard to the fact that false imagining and emptiness are not different that the two are compared respectively to *dharmā* and *dharmatā*: “[Emptiness has further] the defining characteristic of being neither different from nor identical with false imagining. If they were different, *dharmatā* would be something other than phenomena (*dharmas*), which is not acceptable, just as in the case [of their] impermanence and state of suffering. If they were identical, [emptiness] would not be an experiential object conducive to purification, nor would it be a general characteristic.” (MAVBh 23.5-11: *tasmād abhūtaparikalpān na pr̥thaktvaikalakṣaṇam // pr̥thakte saty dharmād anyā dharmateti na yujyate / anityatādūḥkhatāvat / ekatve sati viśuddhyālamabanam [om. jñānam in accordance with MAVT 48.23)] na syāt sāmānyalakṣaṇaṃ ca /*).

²¹ MAVBh 27.5-9: *na kliṣṭā nāpi vākliṣṭā śuddhā ’śuddhā na caiva sā / katham na kliṣṭā nāpi cāśuddhā / prakṛtyaiva / prabhāsvaratvāc cittasya / katham nākliṣṭā na śuddhā / kleśasyāgantukatvataḥ /*

- ²² Defined as all defilements (*saṃkleśa*) in MAV I.10-1, false imagining can only be the adventitious defilements here.
- ²³ RGVV 49.9-12: *evam eva sāgaramate bodhisattvaḥ sattvānām prakṛtiprabhāsvaratām cittasya prajānāti / tām punar āgantukopakleśopakliṣṭām paśyati / tatra bodhisattvasyaivaṃ bhavati / naite kleśāḥ sattvānām cittaprakṛtiprabhāsvaratāyām praviṣṭāḥ / āgantukā ete kleśā abhūtaparikalpasam-utthitāḥ /*
- ²⁴ MAVBh 24.4-13: *katham śūnyatāyāḥ prabhedo jñeyāḥ / saṃkliṣṭā ca viśuddhā ca / ity asyāḥ prabhedaḥ / kasyām avasthāyām saṃkliṣṭā kasyām viśuddhā / samalā nirmalā ca sā / yadā saha male-na vartate tadā saṃkliṣṭā / yadā prahīṇamalā tadā viśuddhā / yadi samalā bhūtvā nirmalā bhavati ka-tham vikāradharmiṇītvād anityā na bhavati / yasmād asyāḥ abdhātukanakākāśasuddhivac chuddir iṣyate // āgantukamalāpagamān na tu tasyāḥ svabhāvānyatvaṃ bhavati /*
- ²⁵ Mathes 2000:195-223.
- ²⁶ Cf. MAVT on I.1 (10.17-9), where the verse *abhūtaparikalpo 'sti* is glossed as *svabhāvataḥ*. A little further down Sthiramati does not object to an opponent's claim of its ultimate existence: "[Opp.:] If thus duality was entirely non-existent, like a hare's horn, and false imagining existed ultimately in its own right...." (Sanskrit in brackets reconstructed: *[yadi evaṃ dva]yam śaśaviṣṇāvat sarvathā nāsti / abhūtaparikalpaś ca paramārthataḥ svabhāvato 'sty...*).
- ²⁷ See Boquist 1993:17-22.
- ²⁸ Against this background, Lindtner's (1997:193) statement that Śāntarākṣita "re-interpret[s] the Yogācāra concept of *paratantrasvabhāva* in terms of the Madhyamaka concept of relative truth, i.e., *tathyasamvṛtisatya*", seems problematic to me.
- ²⁹ DhDhVK 19-22: */ de la chos kyi mtshan nyid ni // gnyis dang ji ltar mngon par brjod par // snang ba yang dag ma yin pa 'i // kun rtog pa ste....*
- ³⁰ DhDhVK 26-9: */ gzhan yang chos nyid mtshan nyid ni // gzung ba dang ni 'dzin pa dang // brjod par bya dang rjod par byed // khyad med de bzhin nyid yin no /*
- ³¹ Vasubandhu explains (MSABh 88.17): "of another mind whose defining characteristic is the dependent [nature]" (*'nyasya cetasaḥ paratantralakṣaṇasya*).
- ³² My translation follows the Sanskrit (MSABh 88.9-10): *matam ca cittaṃ prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ sadā tadāgantukadośādūṣitam / na dharmatācittam ṛte 'nyacetasaḥ prabhāsvaratvaṃ prakṛtyā (text: prakṛtau) vidhīyate //*
- ³³ Read *brtags* or *btags* instead of *brtag*? (Cf. Rang byung rdo rje: *dBu ma chos dbyings bstod pa 'i rnam par bshad pa*, 25a1-3).
- ³⁴ Śākya mchog ldan (*Chos kyi dbyings su bstod pa zhes bya ba 'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa*, 319, l. 1) explains: "On the level of apparent truth it is on the basis of the mental faculty and phenomena that [the mind] has mainly become the mental consciousness" (*kun rdzob tu yid dang chos la brten nas yid kyi rnam par shes pa gtso bor gyur pa ste*).
- ³⁵ The translated passage is from p. 456, l. 11 to p. 457, l. 4.
- ³⁶ DhDhVK 171-9: */ gnyis pa mtshan ma spangs pa la // 'jug pa yang ni rnam bzhi ste // mi mthun pa dang gnyen po dang // de bzhin nyid dang rtogs pa yi // mtshan ma dag ni spangs pas so // 'dis ni rim pa ji lta bzhin // rags dang 'bring dang phra mo dang // ring du rjes su 'brel ba yi // mtshan ma yongs su spangs pa yin /*
- ³⁷ Lit. "because of".
- ³⁸ DhDhVV 73-6: *vipakṣanimittaparivarjanam rāgādinimittaparivarjanāt / pratipakṣanimittaparivarjanam aśubhādinimittaparivarjanāt / tathatānimittaparivarjanam tathateyam ity apy ābhoganimittaparivarjanāt / adhigamadharmanimittaparivarjanam pratilabdhabhāvanādadhigamanimittaparivarjanād bhūmiṣu /*
- ³⁹ DhDhVV 79-81: *tatra vipakṣanimittam dauṣṭhulyahetuvāt sulakṣyatvāc caudārikam / tatpratipakṣatvāt pratipakṣanimittam madhyam / tadanyasarvapatipakṣatvāt tathatānimittam sūkṣmam / bhāvanāphalatvād adhigamanimittam dūrānugataṃ veditavyam /*

- ⁴⁰ According to DhDhVK 223-7 they are: (1) not to become mentally engaged, (2) to go beyond [imagination], (3) complete pacification, (4) [the non-conceptual] in itself, (5) clinging to an image [of the non-conceptual].
- ⁴¹ ZhP 114.4-6.
- ⁴² Matsuda (1996:88) observes that the NPD was first quoted in Sthiramati's commentary on Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, and infers from this that the DhDhV must have been composed much later.
- ⁴³ I pointed out these similarities even before my discovery of gZhon nu dpal's *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary (see Mathes 1996:19-23).
- ⁴⁴ Ratnamati, the translator of the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* into Chinese, arrived from Madhyadeśa (India) to China in the year 508 (see Ui 1959:17).
- ⁴⁵ See ZhP 459.16-460.14 & Matsuda 1996:94-5.
- ⁴⁶ See Mathes: *in print*.
- ⁴⁷ Since it was a canonical text, it is out of the question for gZhon nu dpal that the NPD was composed after the DhDhV.
- ⁴⁸ NPDT 157b5-6: "It is the *nimitta* of precise investigation which has been thought of when [using the expression]: 'not to become mentally engaged'. It has the nature of being conceptual, but it is burnt by the wisdom-fire arising from it, in the same way as a fire kindled from rubbing two pieces of wood burns these very pieces." (*yang dag par so sor rtog pa'i mtshan ma ni 'dir yid la mi byed par dgongs so // de ni rnam par rtog pa'i ngo bo nyid yin mod kyi / 'on kyang de nyid las byung ba yang dag pa'i ye shes kyi mes de bsregs par 'gyur te / shing gnyis drud las byung ba'i mes shing de gnyis sreg par byed pa bzhin no / .*)
- ⁴⁹ See ZhP 460.23-5.
- ⁵⁰ In the colophon of the prose version, the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* is called a *sūtra* (see Mathes 1996: 67).
- ⁵¹ ZhP 114.8-12.
- ⁵² For a translation and discussion of the *Tattvadaśaka* see Mathes: *in print*.
- ⁵³ See RGVV I.25, where stainless suchness is taken as the transformation of the basis on the level of a Buddha (RGVV 21.9-10).
- ⁵⁴ TDT 192a5-8: "If you wonder, 'In that case, what are the differences [between this and] a yogin of the way of Mantrayāna?' [The answer is:] There are great differences with regard to what is to be accomplished and that which accomplishes, given that [the yogin's practice] is not linked with the four *mudrās*, and given that complete enlightenment by way of equanimity, [that is,] without the taste of the great bliss resulting from the pride of being a deity, takes a long time. On the other hand, it differs from the yogin of the way of Pāramitāyāna, because it is especially superior by virtue of accurately realizing the suchness of the union into a pair, [the latter being] emptiness which is analyzed on the basis of the instructions of the right guru. (*'o na gsang sngags kyi tshul gyi rnal 'byor pa dang bye brag ci yod ce na // phyag rgya bzhi'i rjes su 'gro ba med pa'i phyir dang / lha'i nga rgyal gyi bde ba chen po'i ro med pas // btang snyoms kyi rnam pas mngon par byang chub pa dus ring pos rdzogs pa'i phyir / bsgrub par bya ba dang sgrub par byed pa nyid kyi rnam pas (text: pa) bye brag nyid shin tu che 'o // gzhan gyis (text: gyi) pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul gyi rnal 'byor pa las 'di khyad par yod de / bla ma dam pa'i man ngag gis dpyad pa'i stong pa nyid zung du 'jug pa'i de bzhin nyid nges par rtogs pas shin tu khyad par 'phags pa'i phyir ro / .*)
- ⁵⁵ TDT 189b6: *thabs dang shes rab bdag nyid kyi shes pa gnyis med pa'i de kho na nyid byang chub kyi sems so / .*
- ⁵⁶ This is clear from the passage of the TDT quoted by gZhon nu dpal (see below).
- ⁵⁷ Translated as quoted in ZhP 462.18-25.
- ⁵⁸ See Dvags po bKra shis rnam rgyal: *Phyag rgya chen po'i khrid yig chen mo gnyug ma'i de nyid gsal ba*, 27, ll. 3-6.

- ⁵⁹ According to Thrangu Rinpoche, it is possible to ascertain phenomena (such as mental events) as being neither one nor many by investigating their colour, shape etc. with the help of the direct cognitions of one's introverted mental consciousness during *vipaśyanā*. See also gZhon nu dpal's *Ratnagotravibhāga* commentary, where such a pith-instruction is described (ZhP 16.24 – 17.7).
- ⁶⁰ TDṬ 189a5-6: / *chos kyi phung po stong phrag rnam* // *rtogs pa zhes bya stong pa nyid* // *rtogs pa'i don ni dpyad pa yin* // *bla ma dam pa'i dpyad pa med* [//].
- ⁶¹ DhDhVK 38-41 (see above).
- ⁶² RGVV 76.1: *nāpaneyam atah kiṃcid upaneyam na kiṃcana* /
- ⁶³ TD 92.6: *bhrāntir asthānikā matā*.
- ⁶⁴ RGVV 73.14-6: *sarvatra dharmataiva pratiśaraṇam / dharmataiva yuktiś cittanidhyāpanāya citta-samjñāpanāya / sā na cintayitavyā na vikalpayitavyādhimoktavyeti* /.
- ⁶⁵ RGVV 77.9-10: “[Somebody] says: If the [Buddha]-element is thus so difficult to apprehend, given that it is not a fully experiential object for even the highest saints who abide on the final level of non-attachment, what is gained then by having it taught to foolish and ordinary people?” (*āha^a yady evam asaṅganiṣṭhābhūmipratiṣṭhitānām api paramāryāṇām asarvaviṣaya eṣa durdrśo dhātuh / tat kim anena bāla^b janam ārabhya deśiteneti* /).
- ^a According to both manuscripts (A 19b2; B 40b5). Johnston's omission of *āha* is probably only an oversight.
- ^b Johnston inserts between *bāla-* and *-janam*, against both manuscripts (A 19b2; B 40a5), *-prthag-*.
- ⁶⁶ ZhP 42.24-5 & 73.2-74.26.
- ⁶⁷ DhDhVV 83-94: *samyakprayogapraveśaś caturbhir ākārāis tadyathopalambhprayogato vijñaptimātropalambhāt anupalambhprayogato 'rthānupalambhāt / upalambhānupalambhprayogato 'rthābhāve vijñaptimātrānupalambhād vijñaptiyarthābhāve vijñaptiyogāt / nopalambhopalambhprayogataś ca dvayānupalambhenādvayopalambhāt* / (the root text is in bold letters).
- ⁶⁸ The quoted passage from gZhon nu dpal's commentary is on p. 465, ll. 4-11.
- ⁶⁹ The last practice is a little different in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavṛtti*. In fact, gZhon nu dpal's paraphrase does not convey the sense of an apprehension of non-duality.
- ⁷⁰ The remaining passage in the *Lankāvatārasūtra* is as follows: “Based on the apprehension of suchness, one should pass beyond [even] mind only. (X.256cd) Having passed beyond mind only, one should pass beyond a state which is without appearances. A yogin who is established in a state without appearances sees the Mahāyāna. (X.257). The state of effortlessness is quiescent and purified by [one's previous] aspirations; and, being in a state without appearances, wisdom sees the most excellent, which lacks a self.” (LAS 298.15 - 299.1: *cittamātram samāruhya bāhyam arihaṃ na kalpayet / tathatālabane sthivā cittamātram atikramet* // (X.256) *cittamātram atikramya nirābhāsam atikramet / nirābhāsaṣṭhito yogī mahāyānaṃ sa paśyati* // (X.257) *anābhogagatiḥ śāntā prañidhānair viśodhitā / jñānam anātmakaṃ śreṣṭhaṃ nirābhāsenā^a paśyati* // (X.258).
- ^a Nanjio proposes reading *nirābhāse na*, but this does not yield a satisfying meaning.
- ⁷¹ MSABh 24.3-4: *nāstīti cītāt param etya buddhyā cītasya nāstītvam upaiti tasmāt / dvayasya nāstītvam upetya dhūmān samtiṣṭhate 'tadva(text: -ga-)ti dharmadhātau* // VI.8.
- ⁷² The second part of MAV I.7 is as follows: “Therefore one should know this as the sameness of apprehension and non-apprehension. [Since apprehension is not established as such, it is called apprehension in view of false appearances, but it has the nature of non-apprehension.]” The addition in brackets is according to Vasubandhu's *bhāṣya* (MAVBh 20.1-10): *upalabdhiṃ samāśrītya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate / nopalabdhiṃ samāśrītya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate* // (MAV I.6) *vijñaptimātropalabdhiṃ niśrītyārthānupalabdhir jāyate / arthānupalabdhiṃ niśrītya vijñaptimātrasyāpy anupalabdhir jāyate / evam asallakṣaṇam grāhyagrāhakaayoḥ praviśati / upalabdhes tataḥ siddhā nopalabdhisvabhāvātā / (MAV I.7ab) upalabhyārthābhāve upalabdhyayogāt / tasmāc ca samatā jñeyā nopalambhopalambhayoḥ*

// (MAV I.7cd) *upalabdher upalabdhitvenāsiddhatvād abhūtārthapratibhāsatayā tūpalabdhir ity ucyate 'nupalabdhisvabhāvāpi satī* (The root text is in bold letters).

- ⁷³ The four yogas of *mahāmudrā* are: 1. “one-pointedness” (*rtse gcig*); 2. “freedom from mental fabrication (*spros bral*); 3. “one taste” (*ro gcig*); 4. “non-meditation” (*sgom med*). For a good explanation of these four yogas see Dan Martin’s (1992:278-80) translation of the relevant passage in Lama Zhang’s *Phyag rgya chen po lam zab mthar thug zhang gi man ngag* (89-92). This text is referred to by gZhon nu dpal when he reads the *mahāmudrā* yogas into another passage of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (see ZhP 61.22 – 67.3).
- ⁷⁴ The quoted passage from gZhon nu dpal’s commentary is on p. 465, ll. 13 – 6.
- ⁷⁵ This is explained in the seventh point of the *āśrayaparivṛtti* (DhDhVV 555-86). See Mathes 1996: 146-8.
- ⁷⁶ See ZhP 468.18-21.
- ⁷⁷ The passage in the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* differs slightly from the other ones, in that the first two stages are taken together as: “The wise understand that there is nothing apart from mind...”
- ⁷⁸ Probably because the levels of meditational practice are presented in the first paragraph of the first chapter, in which emptiness is only taken as the absence of duality in *abhūtaparikalpa*.
- ⁷⁹ According to the colophon, the *Tattvāvatāra* was translated by Rin chen bzang po (958-1055).
- ⁸⁰ Cf. TA 71b8-72a1: ... *theg pa chen po zhes bya ba la / mtshan gyi rnam pa gzhan du na phyag rgya chen po zhes bya ba ste / de mthong bar 'gyur ro zhes gsungs pa ni / snang med gnas pa 'i rnal 'byor pa / de yis theg pa chen po mthong*.
- ⁸¹ The number in brackets refers to the page and line numbers of my edition (Mathes 2003).
- ⁸² My translation follows the Sanskrit here (NPD 94.18-21): *sa tatprathamataḥ prakṛtivilkalpanimittāni parivarjayati sarvāṇi / yad uta grāhyaṃ vā grāhakaṃ vā / tatredaṃ prakṛtivilkalpanimittam yat sāsrave vastuni nimittam / sāsravaṃ punar vastu pañcopādānaskandhaḥ /*
- ⁸³ Skt. *nirūpaṇa* has not been translated into Tibetan.
- ⁸⁴ Skt. *abhisamkāra*.
- ⁸⁵ The “nine stabilities of the mind” (Tib. *sems [gnas] dgu*) correspond to what is called *navākārā cittasthitiḥ* in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* (see ŚBh 363.17-364.1).
- ⁸⁶ gZhon nu dpal’s explanation refers to the following passage in the NPDT (155b7): “That in which and through which nothing is conceptualized, is the non-conceptual. [This refers to] suchness and non-conceptual wisdom.” (*'di la 'dis rnam par mi rtog (text: rtogs) pa [text: pas] rnam par mi rtog pa ste / de bzhin nyid dang / rnam par mi rtog pa 'i ye shes so*).
- ⁸⁷ Kamalaśīla (NPDT 156b7-8) explains that “without a precise investigation it is not possible not to become mentally engaged with *nimittas*—forms which have become manifest etc.” (*yang dag par so sor rtog pa med par ni snang bar gyur ba 'i zgugs la sogs pa 'i mtshan ma rnams yid la mi byed par mi nus pa 'i phyir ro /*).
- ⁸⁸ NPDT 162b1-3.
- ⁸⁹ Lit. “the beginning”.
- ⁹⁰ Tib. *rgyun du 'jog pa* is the second of the nine stabilities of the mind (see *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, s.v.).
- ⁹¹ NPDT 162b3-4.
- ⁹² Read *mjed* instead of *'jed*.
- ⁹³ The quoted text starts with *'di dag tu 'gyur te*, which is difficult to construe. The additions in brackets are in accordance with the preceding sentence of the TDT (Peking Tanjur, *rgyud 'grel*, vol. *mi*, fol. 189b6).
- ⁹⁴ The text in the Peking Tanjur (TDT 190a5) has *gnyen po 'i phyogs*, not *snying po*, and gZhon nu dpal also has in his commentary on this quotation (ZhP 464.1) the syllable *gnyen*.
- ⁹⁵ I follow the reading of TDT (190a3) here, which has *phyi nas goms par gyur nas ni* instead of *physis goms pa las ni*.

- ⁹⁶ TD 94.3-4: *jñānajñeyavihīnaṃ^a tu^b jagad evādvayaṃ matam / dvayahīnābhiropā^cś ca tathaiva hi prabhāsvaraḥ //*.
- ^a The manuscript from the National Archives in Kathmandu (NGMPP reel no. B 22/25, fol. 36b, l. 3) reads *-ne* instead of *-naṃ*. Based on the Tibetan, I take the compound *jñānajñeyavihīnaṃ* as an attribute qualifying *jagad*, and so follow Bhattacharya's edition.
- ^b Inserted *metri causa*. The Japanese study group (Mikkyō-seiten kenkyūkai 1991:94) suggests *ca* rather than *tu*.
- ^c The manuscript reads *-noya-*, not Bhattacharya's *-ropa-*. The Tibetan *rlom pa*, which means "to glory in" or "to adhere", suggests a form of *abhi-√ruc*. The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v.) gives the example: *mi shes shes rlom* "to adhere to knowingless knowing", which fits the context well here: one wrongly adheres to knowing non-duality, but even this mental event is in reality nothing other than luminosity. The Japanese study group suggests *dvayahīnābhīmāna-*.
- ⁹⁷ The demonstrative pronoun *de* has no equivalent in Sanskrit.
- ⁹⁸ SRS 201.15-6: *saṃjñā saṃjānanārthena^a udgrahaṇa nidarśitā / anudgrahaś ca sā saṃjñā viviktārthena deśitā /*
- ^a Sandhi not observed.
- My translation of the third and fourth *pādas* follows the Sanskrit. The Tibetan reads: "And this notion is taught as being independent of [the act of] taking in."
- ⁹⁹ These two *pādas* are missing in the Tibetan (see ZhP 463.5-6).
- ¹⁰⁰ SRS 201.17-8: *yac ca viviktaṃ sā saṃjñā yā viviktā sa deśanā^a / ^bsaṃjñā svabhāvājatā^b ca^c evaṃ saṃjñā na bheṣyati //*
- ^a Read *deśitā*?
- ^b Corrected according to the Tibetan. Vaidya reads: *saṃjñāsvabhāvo jñātaś*.
- ^c Sandhi not observed.
- ¹⁰¹ According to the Skt: We should laugh at this notion (TDṬ (190b6) has *sdang*: "grow angry with" instead of *dga*).
- ¹⁰² gZhon dpal's reading probably goes back to something like **saṃjñātam ucyate* (not *saṃjñātu* (*sic*) *mucyate*). Vaidya reads: "He who is engaged in the fabrication of notions, is not liberated for being the creator of notions." TDṬ reads: "... is not liberated from notions."
- ¹⁰³ SRS 201.19-20: *prahāsyāma imāṃ saṃjñāṃ yasya saṃjñā pravartate / saṃjñāprapañce carati na sa saṃjñātu[r] mucyate //*
- TDṬ 190b6-7: *mtshan ma 'di ni sdang bar bya / mtshan ma med mthong la 'jug 'gyur // mtshan ma spros pa la spyod pas // mtshan ma las ni grol ba med /*
- ZhP 463.6-7: *'du shes 'di la gang dga' ba / 'du shes rab tu 'jug par 'gyur // 'du shes spros pa la dga' ba // de ni 'du shes su brjod de /*
- My translation follows ZhP.
- ¹⁰⁴ Lit. "touched".
- ¹⁰⁵ SRS 201.21-2: *kasyeyaṃ saṃjñā utpannā kena saṃjñā utpāditā / kena sā sparśitā saṃjñā kena saṃjñā nirodhitā //*
- ¹⁰⁶ My translation of this *pāda* follows the Sanskrit. TDṬ (190b8) reads: *sems 'di yis ni de bzhin sems*.
- ¹⁰⁷ SRS 201.23-4: *dharmo na labdho buddhena yasya saṃjñā utpadyate / iha cintetha taṃ arthaṃ tataḥ saṃjñā na bheṣyati //*
- ¹⁰⁸ SRS 201.25: *kadā saṃjñā anutpannā kasya saṃjñā virudhyate /*
- ¹⁰⁹ Read *'du shes* instead of *du shes* in ZhP 463.11?
- ¹¹⁰ According to the Sanskrit: "liberation".
- ¹¹¹ The instrumental *bsam pa kun kyis* is not backed by the Sanskrit.

- ¹¹² SRS 201.27-8: *yadā vimokṣaṃ spr̥ṣati sarvacintā acintiyā / acintiyā yadā cintā tadā bhoṭi acintiyāḥ //*.
“When liberation is experienced, all thoughts [of it] are inconceivable. In this case [reality itself] is inconceivable.”
- ¹¹³ Skt. “thought” (*cintā*).
- ¹¹⁴ SRS 202.3-4: *yathā sattvās tathā cintā yathā cintā tathā jināḥ / acintiyena buddhena iyaṃ cintā prakāśitā //*.
- ¹¹⁵ Tib. *sems*, which is normally rendered as “mind”.
- ¹¹⁶ SRS 202.5-6: *yo raho eku cinteti kadā cintā na bheṣyati / na cintāṃ cintayantasya sarvacintā vigacchati //*.
- ¹¹⁷ This verse is not found in the SRS, but the version in the Peking Tanjur (TDT 191a8-b1) also has an extra verse: */ seṃs pa nyid ni bkug nas seṃs // ring po 'i dus su nam seṃs na // seṃs pa nyid ni yid byed pas // seṃs pa zad par 'gyur ba med /*.
- ¹¹⁸ According to the Sanskrit: “the right thought occurs.”
- ¹¹⁹ SRS 202.11-12: *iyaṃ cintā mahācintā dharmacintā niruttarā / anayā dharmacintayā (text: -āya) bhūtacintā pravartate //*.
- ¹²⁰ This is the end of gZhon nu dpal’s quote from the *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā*.
- ¹²¹ I.e., Kamalaśīla’s *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭīkā* and Maitrīpa’s *Tattvadaśaka*.
- ¹²² gZhon nu dpal reads *-sūtra* instead of *-dhāraṇī*. For a better understanding of the entire line of thought, I render Tib. *mdo* in the following as *dhāraṇī*.
- ¹²³ TD 92.5-6 (stanza 3): “This true state [of the *skandhas*] is enlightenment—in terms of its own-being, [the state of] having abandoned attachment; attachment is born from confusion, and confusion is taken to be without a basis.” (*bodhir asau bhaved bhāvaḥ saṅgaṃ tyaktvā svabhāvataḥ / āsaṅgo bhrāntito jāto bhrāntir asthānikā matā //*).

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TD: *Tattvadaśaka*

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- See also NGMPP reel no. B 22/25.

TDT: *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā* (Tibetan translation)

- “De kho na nyid bcu pa zhes bya ba’i rgya cher bshad pa”. Peking Tanjur no. 3099, *rgyud 'grel*, vol. *mi*, fols. 176a2-195a3.
- See also *Nges don phyag chen mdzod*, vol. *ā*, 1-53. Ed. by Zhva dmar pa Mi pham chos kyi blo gros. New Delhi: 1998.

TA: *Tattvāvatāra* (Tibetan translation)

“De kho na nyid la ‘jug pa zhes bya ba bde bar gshegs pa’i bka’ ma lus pa mdor bsdus bshad pa’i rab tu byed pa”. Peking Tanjur no. 4532, *rgyud ‘grel*, vol. *nu*, 42b2-84b2.

DhDhV: *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*

Ed. by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. See Mathes 1996:61-8.

DhDhVK: *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgakārikā*

Ed. by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. See Mathes 1996:104-14.

DhDhVV: *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavṛtti*

Ed. by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. See Mathes 1996:69-98; Sanskrit fragment of the DhDhVV: 99-103.

[The numbers following the acronyms DhDhV, DhDhVK and DhDhVV in the footnotes refer to the line numbers of my edition.]

NPD: *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*

Ed. by Kazunobu Matsuda. See Matsuda 1996:93-9.

NPDṬ: *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭkā* (Tibetan translation)

“Phags pa mnam par mi rtog par ‘jug pa’i gzungs kyi rgya cher ‘grel pa”. Peking Tanjur no. 5501, *mdo sna tshogs ‘grel pa*, vol. *ji*, fols. 146a6 - 174b1.

MAV: *Madhyāntavibhāga* (contained in MAVBh)

MAVBh: *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*

Ed. by Gadjin M. Nagao. Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1964.

MAVṬ: *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭkā*

Ed. by S. Yamaguchi. Nagoya: Librairie Hajinkaku, 1934.

MS: *Mahāyānasamgraha*

Ed. by Étienne Lamotte. Vol. 1: Versions Tibétaine et Chinoise (Hiuan-tsang). Louvain (Belgium): Bureaux du Muséon, 1938.

MSA: *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* (contained in MSABh)

MSABh: *Mahāyānasūtrālamkārabhāṣya*

Ed. by Sylvain Lévi (Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études, Sciences historiques et philologiques 159). Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1907.

RGV: *Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*

Ed. by Edward H. Johnston. Patna: Bihar Research Society, 1950. (Includes the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*)

RGVV: *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*. See *Ratnagotravibhāga*

[The manuscripts A and B on which Johnston’s edition is based are described in Johnston 1950:vi-vii. See also Bandurski et al. 1994:12-3].

LAS: *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*

Ed. by Bunyiu Nanjio (Bibliotheca Otaniensis 1). Kyoto: Otani University Press, 1923.

ŚBh: Śrāvākabhūmi

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SRS: Samādhirājasūtra

Ed. by P. L. Vaidya (Buddhist Sanskrit Texts 2). Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute 1961.

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‘Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal’ s Commentary
on the *Dharmatā* Chapter of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgakārikās*

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‘Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal’ s (1392-1481) commentary on the second chapter of the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* (RGVV) is introduced by a detailed explanation of the *dharmatā* chapter in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgakārikās* (DhDhVK). This is, according to gZhon nu dpal, because the detailed presentation of *āśrayaparivṛtti* in the DhDhV is a commentary on the *bodhi* chapter of the RGV. In both texts, *āśrayaparivṛtti* refers to a positively described ultimate which is revealed by removing adventitious stains. Whereas in the RGV this is the Buddha-element (or *tathāgatagarbha*) with its inseparable qualities, it is the *dharmatā*, suchness or natural luminosity (*prakṛtiprabhāsvaratā*) in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavṛtti* (DhDhVV). This luminosity is compared to primordially pure space, gold and water which must have their adventitious stains removed before they can be discovered. From this gZhon nu dpal concludes that the DhDhVV belongs to the Madhyamaka tradition. Consequently, the typical Yogācāra negation of external objects is taken as referring to the latter’s non-existence in terms of *svabhāva*.

What makes gZhon nu dpal’s DhDhV-commentary so interesting is his *mahāmudrā* interpretation of a central topic in the DhDhV, i.e., the abandonment of all “mentally created characteristic signs” (*nimittas*). The latter practice plays a crucial role in the cultivation of non-conceptual wisdom, which is taken as the cause or the foundation of *āśrayaparivṛtti* in the DhDhV. Based on Sahajavajra’s (11th century) *Tattvadaśakaṭīkā* gZhon nu dpal explains that the *nimittas* are abandoned by directly realizing their natural luminosity which amounts to a direct or non-conceptual experience of their true nature. To be sure, while the usual Mahāyāna approach involves an initial analysis of the *nimittas*, namely, an analytic meditation which eventually turns into non-conceptual abiding in the same way as a fire kindled from rubbing pieces of wood burns the pieces of wood themselves (gZhon nu dpal explains this on the basis of Kamalaśīla’s commentary on the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*), *mahāmudrā* pith-instructions enable a meditation of direct perceptions right from the beginning. In view of the fact that such direct perceptions of emptiness (or *dharmatā* in this context here) usually start from the first Bodhisattva-level onwards, gZhon nu dpal also tries to show that the four yogas of *mahāmudrā* are in accordance with the four *prayogas* of the DhDhV. It should be noted that such a *mahāmudrā* interpretation must have already existed in India, as can be seen from Jñānakīrti’s (10th/11th-century) *Tattvāvatāra*, in which a not-specifically-Tantric form of *mahāmudrā* practice is related with the traditional fourfold Mahāyāna meditation by equating “Mahāyāna” in *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* X.257d with *mahāmudrā*. The *pādas* X.257cd “A yogin who is established in a state without appearances sees Mahāyāna” thus mean that one finally sees or realizes *mahāmudrā*.

To sum up, the DhDhV plays an important role for gZhon nu dpal in that it provides a canonical basis for his *mahāmudrā* tradition, and by showing that the *dharmatā* portion of the DhDhV is a commentary on the second chapter of the RGV, gZhon nu dpal skillfully links his *mahāmudrā* interpretation to the standard Indian work on Buddha-nature, and thus to a concept which considerably facilitated the bridging of the Sūtras with the Tantras.