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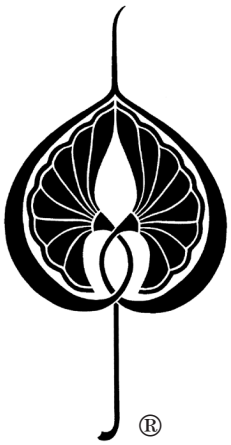

Self-transformation According to Buddhist Stages of the Path Literature[1]

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INTRODUCTION: LOCATING THE NARRATIVE SELF IN BUDDHIST PATH SCHEMAS

Transformative paths are conceptual frameworks, methods of practice, and prescribed behaviors that are thought to be efficacious in leading practitioners toward a particular goal deemed religiously significant by their tradition. Paths are not rigid structures; rather, they evolve and change over time in response to innovative practices, doctrines, goals, or ideas. Paths, too, are not singular and unilateral but complex networks of possibilities that take into account various sets of conditions and circumstances.

Taking their cue from the Buddhist concept of *mārga* (Pāli *magga*), Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello describe a "path" as "the theory according to which certain methods of practice, certain prescribed patterns of religious behavior, have transformative power and will lead, somewhat necessarily, to religious goals."[2] Buswell's and Gimello's objective is to reverse the tendency of interpreting Asian religious traditions according to Western religious categories such as "faith" or "deity," and they rightly point out that the importance of "path" across Buddhist traditions can also be used to elucidate similar paradigms in other traditions.[3]

Ann Taves further develops the idea that "paths" are central metaphors operative in religious traditions. Through the path schemas of a given tradition, goals are ascribed religious value and the practices deemed efficacious for the attainment of these goals are identified.[4] By highlighting the complex cultural mechanisms through which a particular experience becomes validated as religious, Taves argues against a *sui generis* understanding of "religious experience" in which

certain types of experience are assumed to be *necessarily* religious. Ascriptions, at the most basic level, assign qualities or characteristics—such as "sacred," "efficacious," or "religious"—to something, whether an object, a person, an experience, or a goal. She distinguishes between "*simple ascriptions*, in which an individual thing is set apart as special, and *composite ascriptions*, in which simple ascriptions are incorporated into more complex formations" such as religious traditions and path schemas.[5] Paths, therefore, allow us to identify the starting point, the goal, and the means deemed efficacious for attaining the goal as understood in any given tradition.

Due to the relative paucity of reliable first-person "reports of experience" in the historical literature of Buddhist traditions, comparing the structure and trajectory of contemplative paths reframes the discourse around "religious experiences" to an investigation instead of prescribed practices and anticipated resultant states. Just as sets of practices can be oriented toward multiple goals, so too a single goal can be attained through employing a variety of means. Taves writes,

> If we conceive of religions as paths to a goal, we then naturally find ourselves thinking in terms of sequences of actions (practices deemed efficacious) for moving from an original state to a desired state.[6]

En route, transformative paths provide signposts for successful movements from the original to the desired state, as well as cautions and guidance for when the practitioner strays from the path.

Following the idea of "path" operationalized by these scholars, my aim in this paper is to assess Buddhist path structures as "master narratives" for self-transformation. In particular, the path structures found across Buddhist traditions provide a framework for and guide to the attainment of awakening. Because the conception of the path develops and evolves in response to new philosophical, cosmological, and soteriological ideas, different Buddhist path schemas can be read as representing competing views of how awakening is attained, as well as its characteristics. Of course, it is important to recognize that a possible discrepancy exists between the ideal of a path structure and how it is experienced by individual practitioners. These maps provide the basic structure according to traditional terminology, though they necessarily oversimplify the process and belie the differences found among individual experiences. They may be *prescriptive* in that they shape and construct contemplative experience, and also *descriptive* in that they provide a means through which individual experiences can

be communicated to a community.[7] They may be *polemical* in that they set forth a structure of practices and resultant experiences considered to be ultimately efficacious and authoritative according to a particular tradition or lineage.[8] Some path schemas may also be *theoretical* to the extent that practitioners are unable to apply their structure in the context of contemplative practice.[9] While it is important that scholars do not uncritically assume that Buddhist literature outlining the stages of the path have a direct bearing on the contemplative practices or experiences of those who wrote them or read them,[10] nevertheless, these idealized presentations of the trajectory of self-transformation allow us to make some important comparisons across Buddhist lineages.

Throughout this paper, I reflect upon how Buddhist path schemas set forth a structure through which a "narrative self" is transformed into a "resultant self." By "narrative self" I have in mind the default, deluded self that operates by telling stories about the way the world and the self is.[11] According to core Buddhist doctrines, these stories are not in accordance with reality. This is the self that sees permanence in impermanence, and responds with grasping, desire, and aversion—which invariably lead to suffering. This self is to be confronted and destabilized through Buddhist contemplative practices. By contrast, the "resultant self" is the mode of being in the world that arises once the narrative self has been thoroughly deconstructed. Due to the transformative power of insight, this resultant self no longer relates to the phenomenal world through the false stories of the narrative self. Given their scope, it is impractical to address all of the states and stages of a given Buddhist path; consequently I will focus on select states and stages of the path in which particularly significant shifts in the narrative self are either prescribed (through intentional practices) or are expected to occur (as an outcome of intentional practices).

In the next two sections of this paper, I analyze some key features found in two treatises from among the much larger canon that could be called "Buddhist stages of the path literature": first, *The Path of Purification* by the fifth-century Sri Lankan author Buddhaghosa;[12] second, *The Moonlight: A Lucid Exposition that Illuminates the Stages of Meditation according to the Ultimate Mahāmudrā* by the sixteenth-century Tibetan author Dakpo Tashi Namgyal.[13] I argue that despite major differences between these two path structures (especially in terms of prescribed practices), both traditions are concerned with overcoming similar problems with the "narrative self" in the early stages of the

path. However, once the narrative self has been thoroughly deconstructed and the practitioner is aiming for the highest levels of realization, there are many significant differences between these approaches, such that we may be led to conclude that these two paths promote as ideals two very different "resultant selves."

The next section begins with a discussion of practices prescribed for deconstructing the "narrative self" in early Buddhism.[14] Along the way, I draw upon on some key passages from the Pāli Nikāyas, as some of the implicit and explicit paths found in this body of literature were systematized and organized into the path structure of Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*. Particular attention is given to the development of concentration (*samādhi*) through overcoming the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*). In this path schema, the "resultant self" arises as a result of progress through the stages of the eight insight knowledges (*vipassanā ñāṇa*) as well as through the paths and fruitions (*magga phala*).

Similarly, the section on Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's presentation of Mahāmudrā begins with a discussion of how the narrative self is deconstructed through the practices of both "ordinary" and Mahāmudrā approaches to calm abiding (Skt. *śamatha,* Tib. *zhi gnas*) and insight (Skt. *vipaśyanā*, Tib. *lhag mthong*). Because Dakpo Tashi Namgyal presented Mahāmudrā according to both exoteric and esoteric path schemas,[15] occasional reference is also made to another of his texts, *Light Rays from the Jewel of the Excellent Teaching*.[16] This text, unlike *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, explicitly presents Mahāmudrā as the culmination of the generation and completion stages trainings central to Vajrayāna Buddhism. After presenting both sutric and tantric approaches to Mahāmudrā, I investigate the latter stages of practice and realization that characterize the emergence of a "resultant self" through the recognition of increasingly subtle aspects of the nature of mind.

Given the vastly different cultural contexts in which these two path schemas were composed, it is not surprising that they differ in many ways in their approach to self-transformation. Nevertheless, I contend that taking these two treatises as a basis of comparison helps us understand how the narrative elements of Buddhist stages of the path literature operate more generally. Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate that investigating states of the path literature has broader implications for our understanding of these traditions both within and beyond the parameters of Buddhist studies. In the concluding section to this paper I offer some reflections on how the analysis of stages of

the path literature could be potentially valuable for both critiquing and advancing current research in the neuroscience of Buddhist meditation traditions.

SELF-TRANSFORMATION IN BUDDHAGHOSA'S *THE PATH OF PURIFICATION*

Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification* is generally regarded as the pinnacle of the Pāli commentarial tradition. Because so much of the content of this text is indebted to Pāli canonical literature, including the very structure of the text, it is worth calling attention to a few implicit and explicit path schemas that can be located in the Pāli Nikāyas. While there is a wide variety of possible path schemas that could be discussed, and although there are some discrepancies across their various renditions in the canonical literature, it is still possible to make some important basic observations by correlating few key sources.

One important path schema in the Nikāyas is the famous sixteen trainings in the mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*),[17] one of the most well-known sequences of practices in Buddhist meditation. It purports to facilitate the pacification of the mind, the development of concentration, and the attainment of insight. Furthermore, this training explicitly incorporates two other important path schemas within it: the seven factors of awakening (*bojjhaṅgā*) and the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), as well as the characteristics of the four states of meditative absorption (*jhāna*).[18] The training in the four foundations of mindfulness[19] is also presented as a self-contained path schema through which one's body, feelings, mind, and mental objects are to be contemplated.

In the initial stages of practice, the practitioner must be particularly attentive to the *quality* of his or her mental attention in addition to the particular *object* of investigation. Five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*)—sensual desire, ill will, dullness, restlessness, and doubt[20]—are singled out as being particularly significant obstacles. According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the practitioner is to investigate the five hindrances as a type of mental object that is either present or absent in his or her experience.[21] Subsequently, the seven factors of awakening—mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity[22]—are to be identified and cultivated in an analogous manner. A related passage from the *Bojjhaṅgāsaṃyutta* makes it clear that whereas the five hindrances are "makers of blindness, causing

lack of vision, causing lack of knowledge, detrimental to wisdom, tending to vexation, [and] leading away from Nibbāna," the seven factors of awakening are, by contrast, "makers of vision, makers of knowledge, promoting the growth of wisdom, free from vexation, leading towards Nibbāna."[23]

The progressive stages of mindfulness of breathing involve a significant retraining of the ordinary narrative self. Due to habits and karma, the practitioner is faced with a seemingly innate tendency to respond to sensory stimuli with either desire or aversion (two of the three poisons). From this initial grasping and labeling of good or bad, want or don't want, the conceptual mind begins to get involved, invoking memories or making plans, and propelling the practitioner into patterns of thinking that inevitably lead to suffering. In addition to the obvious ways in which chasing after sensory pleasures (or seeking to avoid discomfort) inhibits the successful development of meditation, the next two hindrances, dullness and restlessness, are more subtle mental qualities of the narrative self that also must be eradicated. The constant stimulation of ordinary life results in the tendency for the mind to wander from thought to thought, remaining unfocused. Similarly, a tendency to become overly lax also inhibits the ability to focus clearly on the breath. Both dullness and restlessness inevitably distract the practitioner away from awareness of the present moment that the mindfulness of breathing technique aims to cultivate. This tendency to spend much of one's time in past memories or planning for future events is another central component of the ordinary narrative self that is to be eradicated through the process of mindfulness of breathing.

Unlike the five hindrances, which are not necessarily removed in any particular order, in the context of training in concentration the seven factors of awakening are often presented as being developed in sequence. There are a number of pathways to the *jhāna*s, but most of them highlight how rapture, joy, and tranquility are the proximate causes of a concentrated mind. A state of initial tranquility arises through the pacification of the five hindrances and through restricting the inward fluctuations and the outflows of the narrative self by single-pointed focus on the breath. This process develops into the factor of concentration, which is the gateway to the four *jhāna*s. Developing right concentration through practicing the four *jhānas* is highlighted throughout the Pāli Nikāyas[24] as a fundamental stage along the path to awakening. Through the four *jhāna*s the practitioner cultivates the

seventh factor of awakening, equanimity. The path to equanimity can be pursued through practices such as the mindfulness of breathing or through other methods entirely, such as meditating on the *brahma-vihāra*s.[25]

A very interesting passage from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* details four further developments of concentration. First, concentration leads to dwelling happily in this life; second, it leads to obtaining knowledge and vision; third, it leads to mindfulness and clear comprehension of the arising and passing away of phenomena; fourth, it leads to the destructions of the taints. I want to focus in particular on the second and third of these four developments of concentration. Regarding the second, concentration leading to knowledge and vision, the *bhikkhu* here is to attend "to the perception of light . . . as by day, so at night," with the result that the *bhikkhu* cultivates "a mind that is open and uncovered, . . . a mind imbued with luminosity."[26] This quality of mind, described elsewhere in the *s*ūttas[27] as the "pure bright mind" (*pabhassara citta*), arises in the fourth *jhāna*. Here, uncovering this purity of mind is deemed useful only insofar as the practitioner can then apply this mind to the investigation of the arising and passing away of phenomena. This third development of concentration is also clearly present in the higher stages of mindfulness of breathing: once the practitioner has attained a tranquil and stable mind, he or she can then use it to investigate various dimensions of reality in order to attain liberating insight:

> A monk, having given up pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of former gladness and sadness, enters and remains in the fourth *jhāna* which is beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness. . . . And so, with mind concentrated, purified, and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, workable, established, and having gained imperturbability, he directs and inclines his mind towards knowing and seeing [the impermanence of the body]. . . , towards the production of a mind-made body . . . , to the various supernatural powers . . . , to the divine ear . . . , to the knowledge of other's minds . . . , to the knowledge of previous existences . . . , to the knowledge of the passing-away and arising of beings . . . , to the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions [in which he realizes the Four Noble Truths].[28]

In the context of the Pāli Nikāyas, the realizations that result from these investigations into the nature of mind and the nature of reality are presented through a model of a four-fold progression through the

paths (*magga*) and fruitions (*phala*). The four types of resultant self—the stream-enterer, the once-returner, the nonreturner, and the *arahant*—have progressively eliminated the various "fetters" that bind them to *saṃsāra*.[29] These core themes of removing the hindrances, cultivating the factors of awakening, attaining states of meditative absorption, and directing a concentrated mind to the investigation of reality deeply inform the content of Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*. With these basic structures from the Pāli Nikāyas in mind, I now turn to an investigation of the content of *The Path of Purification* in order to demonstrate how Buddhaghosa understood the process of deconstructing a narrative self and the arising of a resultant self.

Despite its title, *The Path of Purification* cannot be read as a strictly linear path structure that progresses from the beginning of the text to the end. Rather, the arrangement is in some instances more topical, with many chapters devoted to aspects of Buddhist philosophy that do not follow explicit path structures. Nevertheless, there are a number of important sequences of practices and realizations that can be treated as smaller path cycles within the broader structure of the text, as they are either causally related or are expected to occur in sequence.

Buddhaghosa organized *The Path of Purification* according to two general frameworks. The simpler of the two is a threefold progression from virtue (*sīla*) to concentration (*samādhi*) and then to understanding (*paññā*).[30] The second, more elaborate framework is a sevenfold progression through different "purifications," beginning again with virtue and concentration, and with the final five purifications—purification by view, purification by overcoming doubt, purification by knowledge and vision of what is and what is not the path, purification by knowledge and vision of the way, and purification by knowledge and vision—all subsumed under the broader heading of understanding.[31]

In analyzing Buddhaghosa's monumental treatise, I want to focus first on his presentation of concentration, in particular the ways in which the five hindrances, the seven factors of awakening, and the four *jhāna*s remain central frameworks for understanding the development of this critical skill. Second, I will examine his presentation of the higher stages of insight as outlined in the purification by knowledge and vision of the way and the purification by knowledge and vision.

Of course, the cultivation of virtue serves as an important prerequisite to success in training in concentration. In the chapter on virtue, Buddhaghosa periodically makes reference to how the ethical life is

cultivated in and through key factors of awakening. For instance, "as restraint of the faculties is to be undertaken by means of mindfulness, so livelihood purification is to be undertaken by means of energy."[32] However, he provides more exegesis on the relationship between the five hindrances and the seven factors of awakening in the chapters on developing concentration. In *The Path of Purification*, the primary object of concentration is any number of external supports (*kasiṇa*), although contemplating loving-kindness can also be used as a vehicle for overcoming the hindrances, attaining basic equanimity, and entering the first *jhāna*.[33]

First, the hindrances have the potential to overpower their corresponding factors of awakening, for instance, "when idleness (*kosajja*) overpowers one strong in concentration and weak in energy, since concentration favors idleness, [or when] agitation (*uddhaca*) overpowers one strong in energy and weak in concentration, since energy favors agitation."[34] In balancing the hindrances and factors of awakening, it is critical not to apply the wrong factor as an antidote. Buddhaghosa explains:

> [W]hen his mind is slack (*līna*) with over-laxness of energy, etc., then, instead of developing the three enlightenment factors beginning with tranquility (*passadhisambhojjhanga*), he should develop those beginning with investigation-of-states (*dhammavicayasambhojjhanga*). For this is said by the Blessed One: . . . "[W]hen the mind is slack, that is not the time to develop the tranquility enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because a slack mind cannot well be roused by those states. When the mind is slack, that is the time to develop the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor, the energy enlightenment factor and the happiness enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because a slack mind can well be roused by those states."[35]

Generally speaking, investigation, rapture, and energy serve as antidotes for excessive dullness or idleness, and tranquility, concentration, and equanimity counterbalance excessive restlessness or agitation. All throughout, however, mindfulness, the first factor, has an important role to play:

> Strong mindfulness, however, is needed in all instances; for mindfulness protects the mind from lapsing into agitation through faith, energy, and understanding, which favour agitation, and from lapsing into idleness through concentration, which favours idleness.[36]

Steering between the Scylla of idleness and the Charybdis of agitation is the primary task in the cultivation of "access concentration" (*upacāra samādhi*), the gateway to the four *jhāna*s. Each *jhāna* has its own configuration of mental factors that the practitioner must negotiate in order to progress through them. The first *jhāna* is characterized by two modes of cognition, applied thought (*vitakka*) and sustained thought (*vicāra*), as well as happiness or joy (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) that arise from abandoning the five hindrances.[37] The five hindrances

> are the contrary opposites of the jhana factors: what is meant is that the jhana factors are incompatible with them, eliminate them, abolish them. . . . Concentration is incompatible with lust, happiness with ill will, applied thought with stiffness and torpor, bliss with agitation and worry, and sustained thought with uncertainty.[38]

Buddhaghosa makes clear throughout this section of *The Path of Purification* that overcoming the five hindrances is what leads to the *jhāna*s, through which the practitioner then cultivates the awakening factors of concentration and equanimity.[39] To abide thoroughly in concentration also has its own distinguishing features. Perhaps most obviously, the practitioner who comes to master the *jhāna*s is no longer distracted, for

> Concentration has non-distraction as its characteristic. Its function is to eliminate distraction. It is manifested as non-wavering. . . . Its proximate cause is bliss."[40]

In addition to this basic definition of concentration and the characteristics of the states of meditative absorption, Buddhaghosa's text also identifies some other important "signs" (*nimitta*) along the path that are means of gauging one's degree of prowess in concentration.

The initial sign is the "learning sign" (*uggaha nimitta*), and it is the first to appear. In the context of concentration on an external support (*kasiṇa*), the learning sign is a mental image of the object of concentration. When this arises and is stabilized, the practitioner then begins attending to the mental image alone as a means of further suppressing the hindrances and amplifying concentration.[41] Through this process, the "counterpart sign" (*paṭibhāga nimitta*) arises:

> The difference between the earlier learning sign and the counterpart sign is this. In the learning sign any fault in the kasina is apparent. But the counterpart sign appears as if breaking out from the learning sign, and a hundred times, a thousand times more purified, like a looking-glass disk drawn from its case, like a mother-of-pearl dish

> well washed, like the moon's disk coming out from behind a cloud, like cranes against a thunder cloud. But it has neither colour nor shape; for if it had, it would be cognizable by the eye, gross, susceptible of comprehension and stamped with the three characteristics. But it is not like that. For it is born only of perception in one who has obtained concentration, being a mere mode of appearance. But as soon as it arises, the hindrances are quite suppressed, the defilements subside, and the mind becomes concentrated in access concentration.[42]

Here Buddhaghosa clarifies that the counterpart sign is a mental image, not a perception, and that it is characterized by its clarity, vividness, and by its co-arising with the suppression of the hindrances.

If the practitioner uses other meditative supports, such as light, space, or the breath, the learning sign and counterpart signs will be different and are not solely mental images of the object of concentration. Unlike concentration on external objects, which become more vivid and clear as concentration increases, the breath as object becomes increasingly more subtle over the course of training on the mindfulness of breathing.[43] In this context, the initial learning sign may arise as sensation likened to a "light touch like cotton or silk-cotton or a draught."[44] By contrast, the counterpart sign as a mental image is more visual in character:

> It appears to some like a star or a cluster of gems or a cluster of pearls, to others with a rough touch like that of silk-cotton seeds or a peg made of heartwood, to others like a long braid string or a wreath of flowers or a puff of smoke, to others like a stretched-out cobweb or a film of cloud or lotus flower or a chariot wheel or the moon's disk or the sun's disk.[45]

In this particularly interesting passage, Buddhaghosa provides a specific set of experiential criteria for the attainment of access concentration through training in mindfulness of breathing. Although this experience should not be understood as a type of insight (*paññā*), it serves as a marker that the ordinary tendencies of the narrative self are becoming attenuated—again, specifically with respect to the suppression of the five hindrances on account of which one typically carves up the world into positive and negative experiences. The purpose of developing such strong concentration, according to Buddhaghosa, is to develop equanimity, the seventh factor of awakening. Equanimity is important because "it watches [things] as they arise, . . . it sees fairly, sees without partiality."[46] This impartiality, which does not respond to phenomena with grasping or aversion, is essential for developing the

higher "knowledges" of the stages of insight, through which the narrative self is more thoroughly investigated and deconstructed.

Toward the end of Buddhaghosa's section on understanding, one highly significant section of the text is presented under the heading "Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way." This section details the progress of insight according to eight sequential "insight knowledges" (*vipassanā-ñāna*).[47] Given that Buddhaghosa's text is an attempt to synthesize and systematize a numerous implicit path schemas found in the Pāli canonical literature, it is not surprising that the higher stages of insight presented in the "Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way" bear some resemblance to the sixteen trainings in mindfulness of breathing. Here, in the eight insight knowledges, important shifts in the narrative self are anticipated. Insights into the three characteristics—especially the impermanence and selflessness of phenomena—have the ultimate result that the practitioner becomes dispassionate toward those phenomena, and instead becomes inspired to strive toward deliverance from *saṃsāra*. When there is direct realization of one's "self" as also being impermanent and lacking any essential nature, this brings forth a sequence of states of realization called "fruitions." Thus, throughout these stages of insight, the (increasingly) concentrated mind is employed to further deconstruct the narrative self.

The first stage of insight is knowledge into arising and passing away. For the untrained self, "the characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent because, when rise and fall are not given attention, it is concealed by continuity."[48] However, with a concentrated mind, it is possible for the practitioner to uncover that which is hidden, so that "when continuity is disrupted by discerning rise and fall, the characteristic of impermanence becomes apparent in its true nature."[49] In particular, the practitioner is also supposed to recognize how the other two characteristics go hand in hand with impermanence, for "what is impermanent is also painful, . . . [and] what is painful is not-self."[50] When contemplating arising and passing away in the five aggregates, the practitioner undergoes important cognitive reorientations that are identified in the next stage of insight: knowledge of dissolution.

> He contemplates as impermanent, not as permanent; he contemplates as painful, not as pleasant; he contemplates as not-self, not as self; he becomes dispassionate; he does not delight; he causes fading

> away of greed, he does not inflame it; he causes cessation, not origination; he relinquishes, he does not grasp.[51]

From these shifts away from the ordinary mode of the narrative self—which is conditioned to grasp inwardly onto the defilements and outwardly onto composite phenomena as permanent—the practitioner sees all phenomena as utterly unreliable and unsatisfactory: just as past phenomena have ceased, so too will present and future phenomena cease. This is the import of the knowledge of appearance as terror,[52] the knowledge of danger,[53] and the knowledge of dispassion. In fact, these three are stated to be "one in meaning."[54]

After the habitual tendency to respond to phenomena with desire is upset by the recognition of how unsettlingly impermanent they are, the practitioner begins to increasingly clearly see how phenomena are impermanent, are not-self, and that they lead to suffering. Discerning and reflecting upon this, the practitioner comes to respond to the arising and dissolution of phenomena with perfect equanimity, the eighth and final insight knowledge. Having reviewed the preceding eight insight knowledges in the stage of knowledge in conformity with truth,

> then his consciousness no longer enters into or settles down on or resolves upon any field of formations at all, or clings, cleaves, or clutches on to it, but retreats, retracts and recoils . . . , and every sign as object, every occurrence as object, appears as an impediment.[55]

From this, the practitioner attains the first "path moment" (*magga*) of stream-entry as "change of lineage knowledge arises in him, which takes as its object the signless, non-occurrence, non-formation, cessation, nibbana."[56]

The resultant self that arises through these insight knowledges, paths, and fruitions is thus progressively stripped of lingering aspects of the deluded narrative self. The practitioner clearly sees phenomena in terms of the three characteristics, and responds to them with neither grasping nor aversion. This advanced state of equanimity—cultivated initially through the seven factors of awakening and ultimately through the eight insight knowledges—serves as the gateway to liberation. As in the Pāli Nikāyas, *The Path of Purification* presents the progression through the four resultant paths[57] as tantamount to eradicating the ten fetters.[58] The resultant self is thus characterized primarily in terms of what it lacks: it lacks the ten fetters, it lacks the ten defilements, it lacks the eight wrongnesses, it lacks the eight worldly states, it lacks the five kinds of avarice and the three perversions, and

so forth. This path is, quite literally, one of *purification*—first through retraining the narrative self away from the hindrances through the development of concentration. Further purification requires turning the concentrated mind to investigate the three characteristics, through which the deeper tendencies of clinging to phenomena and to self are eradicated. The resultant self that remains is free of the various defilements that would otherwise bind the practitioner to *saṃsāra*.

SELF-TRANSFORMATION IN DAKPO TASHI NAMGYAL'S *MAHĀMUDRĀ: THE MOONLIGHT*

The practice tradition known as Mahāmudrā, "the Great Seal," is principally associated with the Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*) lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Its contemplative practices, stages of realization, and philosophical views are presented, alternately, as the culmination of the perfection of wisdom of the sūtra tradition, as the culmination of the esoteric trainings of Vajrayāna Buddhism, or as a sufficient "vehicle" in its own right. Consequently, across various authors, and, as we'll see through the works of Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, even across multiple texts by the same author, the Mahāmudrā teachings can be contextualized in a variety of ways.

As explained above, this section focuses on the stages of meditation (*sgom rim*) outlined in Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, although I supplement this presentation by highlighting some key features of his "Tantric Mahāmudrā" approach as presented in *Light Rays from the Jewel of the Excellent Teaching*. There are two reasons for this. First, given the emphasis Dakpo Tashi Namgyal places on the cultivation of ordinary calm abiding[59] (Skt. *śamatha,* Tib. *zhi gnas*) and insight (Skt. *vipaśyanā,* Tib. *lhag mthong*) as a preliminary to Mahāmudrā meditation proper, this facilitates comparison with similar stages of practice through which the narrative self is brought under control and investigated that are outlined in Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*. Second, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's outline of the Vajrayāna path in *Light Rays* presents some alternative approaches to concentration as well as to the higher practices and realizations of Mahāmudrā. This text also calls attention to some very interesting signs of attainment that will be fruitful to investigate, in part due to their possible similarity with the signs of attainment identified by Buddhaghosa.

It is important to acknowledge that Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's presentation of ordinary calm abiding and insight is derived neither from

the Pāli Nikāyas nor from Buddhaghosa's synthesis; rather, he explains from the outset that he is relying specifically on the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra,* the doctrines of Maitreya, other texts by Asaṅga and Śāntipa, and perhaps most notably the *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama*) of Kamalaśīla.[60] In fact, the entirety of *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* relies heavily on quotations from the scriptural and commentarial sources of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's objective here is not to compose a totally new work on Mahāmudrā but to *organize* existing sources into a stages-of-the-path model for self-transformation.

Integrating numerous quotations from Kamalaśīla's *Stages of Meditation* and various Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtras as proof texts, in the first stage of *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains how the right external and internal conditions must be in place for successful practice in ordinary calm abiding. A harmonious environment and ethical discipline are the initial prerequisites, but more emphasis is placed on recognizing and removing the hindrances (*sgrib pa*). Throughout this section, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal quotes a number of authorities that enumerate various conceptions of the hindrances and their antidotes. While the lists are not consistently identical with the classical exposition of the five hindrances discussed above, their general significance is the same. The mind of the beginning practitioner can be easily beset by restlessness (*rgod pa*) and resentment (*'gyod pa*), on the one hand, and by sluggishness (*rmugs pa*), dullness (*bying*), drowsiness (*gnyid*) and doubt (*the tshom*), on the other. Additionally, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal also references the hindering function of the binaries of desire (*'dod pa*) and ill will (*gnod sems*) and nonexertion (*mi rtsol ba*) and overexertion (*'du byed sems pa*), as well as forgetfulness (*brjed nges*), on the successful practice of calm abiding.[61] He concisely outlines the antidotes for these various hindrances:

> The remedy for [restlessness] lies in calming the mind by meditating on impermanence. As for resentment, the remedy is to avoid thinking about its object. To counter sluggishness, one perceives joyful things. Dullness is removed by [encouragement]. Drowsiness is overcome by visualizing light. Resoluteness is a remedy for doubt. Contemplation on contentment and the evil consequences of sensory pleasures is a remedy for craving. [Ill will] may be removed by engendering love and kindness for others. All these are very important.[62]

imilarly, intentionally recognizing, cultivating, and applying the various factors of awakening are important means of pacifying the hindrances. Mindfulness (*dran pa*) preserves nondistractedness. Two forms of mental functions, vigilance (*shes bzhin*) and mental exertion (*'du byed*), operate in tandem in this process. The former detects any deviation from the object of concentration or any deviation in the quality of awareness toward the hindrances of restlessness or drowsiness; the latter is an active cognitive process that applies the antidote to a hindrance in order to eliminate it. As a result of retraining the ordinary patterns of the narrative self in this way, the practitioner achieves a state of equanimity (*btang snyom*), in which the mind is free from the imbalance of any hindrances.

In the next section of the text, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal outlines the basic methods for attaining calm abiding, as well as the developmental stages leading up to it. In terms of meditation objects, ordinary calm abiding can be cultivated through concentration on the breath, on visualized symbols or points of light, on joy or bliss, or upon an external object such as a stone or a light.[63] He then summarizes a key path schema for the attainment of calm abiding from the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*: the nine stages of resting the mind (*sems gnas dgu'i rim pas 'grub tshul*).[64] In this sequence, the seventh stage, complete pacification of the mind, refers to the point at which the hindrances have been completely overcome through the proper application of the factors of awakening that serve as the antidotes for cultivating mental balance. The eighth and ninth stages, one-pointedness and resting in equanimity, respectively, are the culmination of the training; the primary difference between the two stages is whether maintaining equanimity is effortful or effortless for the practitioner.

From this basis of equanimity, the practitioner then turns his or her attention to the practice of cultivating insight through the investigation of the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. In anticipation of the distinctively Mahāmudrā approach to this practice that he presents in subsequent sections of the text, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal emphasizes here how to take *the mind* as the principle object, in relation to which the view of selflessness should be realized. He explains that

> [the mind] is neither one essential entity nor multiple entities. The mind is ephemeral. One should establish the ephemeral nature of phenomena in the same way as is done with the mind. Deep examination

> of the essence of mind through wisdom will reveal the mind in an ultimate sense to possess neither intrinsic nor extrinsic reality.[65]

Dakpo Tashi Namgyal concludes the stages of the practice of ordinary calm abiding and insight by clarifying the philosophical position of his own tradition against those of his opponents. Thus, having detailed the proper methods for developing equanimity, and with the proper view of reality that must be cultivated through the investigative work of insight, the practitioner is prepared to enter into the "uncommon practice" of Mahāmudrā meditation proper.

There are two principle distinctions between the ordinary calm abiding and insight practices that Dakpo Tashi Namgyal lays out at the beginning of his treatise and these practices in the context of Mahāmudrā. First, in contrast to the effort required to attain ordinary calm abiding, Mahāmudrā calm abiding emphasizes the effortless resting of a balanced mind in a relaxed and natural state (*sems kyi rang babs*). Second, in contrast to the dualistic investigations of ordinary insight, Mahāmudrā insight operates from a perspective of subject-object nondualism. These distinctions, which in the approach of sūtra Mahāmudrā are predicated on the proper cultivation of ordinary calm abiding and insight, mark a significant shift away from the deluded tendencies of the narrative self, and are the practical basis through which the higher realizations of the resultant self can be cultivated and integrated.

In his presentation of Mahāmudrā calm abiding, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal refers his reader back to the foundational practices of eliminating the various hindrances through effortful concentration on a meditation object. While in the initial stages of Mahāmudrā calm abiding the practitioner can employ a visualized object or the breath to attain equanimity, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal makes clear that the main practice in this context is, rather, that "the mind should be settled in its natural, relaxed state."[66] The practitioner should not intentionally modify the mind through effortful practice or fabricate a particular mental state.[67] If the natural state can be maintained, the practitioner is instructed neither to follow after thoughts nor to suppress or reject them. By contrast, the practitioner is instructed to maintain the integrity of this state without wavering from the mind's natural and relaxed equanimity and alert mindfulness. In this stage of the practice, mindfulness and vigilance are of utmost importance. Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains how "the former averts mental distraction from a visualized

image while the latter detects dullness or the flow of thoughts."[68] But once the practitioner attains to the mental equanimity of the ninth stage of calm abiding, there is no longer any need to engage these two faculties in the same intentional, effortful way. Rather,

> Having intensified one's resolve not to be distracted, even for a moment, from the visualization, and having continuously maintained the settled state, one vivifies mindfulness. Being in such tranquility, one should simply observe while remaining alert, without specifically examining whether the mind is affected by dullness or thoughts, by mindfulness or forgetfulness.[69]

Moment by moment, the practitioner continues to rest in the natural state in such a way that regardless of whether hindrances or thoughts are present, "one simply watches the vigor of definite awareness that passes undiminished through every moment."[70]

Insight practice in the context of Mahāmudrā proceeds in a manner analogous to resting unwaveringly in the equanimity of the natural state. Just as the hindrances of dullness or restlessness are allowed to arise co-emergent with the natural state, so too in the insight practice of Mahāmudrā all thoughts are investigated from the perspective of the mind's natural state and not from a dualistic and strictly conceptual perspective. The main objective of insight is not to investigate the emptiness of phenomena and persons as meditation objects; rather, the purpose is to realize that the duality of subject and object, mind and appearances, is mistaken from the beginning. On account of the fundamental confusion that conditions samsaric existence, the mind's tendency is to grasp onto and reify appearances into substantially existent external objects. While ordinary insight practice brings the philosophical view of emptiness to bear on phenomena, in this stage this sūtra view must be unified with the Mahāmudrā view of the co-emergence of mind and appearances.[71]

The meditator should be aware of the indivisibility of the mind and thoughts, which are like water and its waves. The waves are not different from the water—the water itself appears as waves, which retain their nature as water. Similarly, diverse thoughts—from the moment of their emergence—are inseparable from the mind's intrinsic lucidity and emptiness, because the mind—as unceasing movement—manifests itself in dualistic thoughts. The meditator should, therefore, resolve that diverse thoughts are the manifestations of the mind, and that they are also inseparable from the intrinsic lucidity and emptiness of the mind that is devoid of any essence or identity.[72]

Thus, Mahāmudrā calm abiding and insight practices aim to guide the practitioner to the realization that the mind is ultimately co-emergent with the phenomena that seem to appear to it as its thoughts, emotions, and objects. Insight, here, is to recognize how mind and thoughts, emotions, and appearances are naturally united. This resolves in the practitioner's experience that "appearance and mind are a non-dual phenomenon, without bifurcating the diverse external appearances and the internal movements of the mind."[73] Some of the nuances of this realization will be discussed below in the context of describing the resultant self that emerges through training in Mahāmudrā. But first, it is important to see how the tantric approach to Mahāmudrā employs some unique strategies for arriving at analogous ultimate realizations.

A number of Tibetan authors writing about Vajrayāna practice employ the terms "path" (*lam*) and "stages" (*rim*) to organize their practices, and there are a few general or overarching path schemas that shape the trajectory of Vajrayāna practice for different lineages. For instance, the progression through the nine-vehicle (*theg pa rim dgu*) system of the Nyingma (*rnying ma*) lineage is an ascent in complexity of practice and potential depth of realization. The Sakya (*sa skya*) lineage presents its tantric instructions, derived from the *Hevajra Tantra*, within the framework of "path and result" (*lam 'bras*). The gradual Vajrayāna paths that shape the trajectory of tantric practice in the Gelug (*dge lugs*) are derived from Indian commentaries on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra,* especially the *Five Stages* (*Pañcakrama*) attributed to Nāgārjuna.[74] This highly technical approach to completion-stage (*rdzogs rim*) tantric practices presents a sequence of five techniques: body isolation, speech isolation, mind isolation, relative illusory body, and ultimate luminosity. Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's presentation of the stages of the Vajrayāna path incorporates some of the other path schemas mentioned above, including terminology shared with the nine vehicles, the five practices from the *Pañcakrama*, as well as the six *dharma*s of Nāropa (*nā ro chos drug*) that are one of the hallmarks of the Kagyu lineage.

Despite the general assumption that Vajrayāna practice is a higher development beyond Mahāyāna approaches to calm abiding and insight, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's presentation of the tantric path makes it clear that in this context the practitioner still needs to apply the factors of awakening to remain vigilant against the hindrances. The primary distinction between Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna approaches is therefore found in the *means* used in the development of these skills. After the practitioner has attained the requisite initiation and has

pledged to keep the tantric vows, the early stages of tantric discipline involve the cultivation of concentration through visualizations and mantra recitations, or through both in the more complex practices of the generation stage. Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains how the purpose of these practices is to tame "the crazed elephant of the mind" through tying it "to the post of focus, by using the rope of mindfulness."[75]

As we saw above, it is common for the practitioner to err in one state of mental imbalance or another: "When there is a predominance of *śamatha,* dullness causes distraction. When there is a predominance of *vipaśyanā*, agitation causes distraction."[76] However, in tantric practices, it is not sufficient to simply use visualizations or mantra recitations as techniques for eliminating the hindrances and defilements. One must also receive various empowerments

> because they wash away the particular stains that will be hindrances and defects in your meditation on the liberating yoga of the two stages [the generation and completion stages], and they bestow the power to accomplish that particular goal.[77]

Despite the overall rhetoric of Vajrayāna Buddhism, which tends to emphasize the innate purity of the individual, there are many ways in which the untrained, ordinary narrative self nevertheless presents particular obstacles to the training.

Ultimately, concentration and insight are significant components to generation-stage tantric practice. Visualization practices have to be balanced with the insight that all phenomena (whether visualized or appearing as internal and external objects) have no essential nature. Before commencing the visualization of the deity, the practitioner is directed to meditate upon emptiness, fully recognizing that "all phenomena are primordially without essence, nature, or selfhood."[78] The actual visualization practices of the generation stage are highly complex, and discussing them in detail is beyond the scope of this paper. Interestingly, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains how it is possible to become distracted by other appearances that arise while engaged in visualization, and he exhorts the reader to employ mindfulness to remain concentrated on visualizing even a small portion of the deity clearly.[79] In time, as one develops one's concentration through an increased capacity for visualization, the insight practices of meditating on emptiness and visualizing the deity in front of oneself, or visualizing oneself as the deity, have a greater transformative impact on undermining the false assumption of the narrative self.

In his presentation of the initial stages of the Kagyu Vajrayāna path, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal draws upon an array of tantric techniques for facilitating the process of self-transformation. While these techniques suggest that the ordinary narrative self does indeed need to be purified of hindrances and defilements, there is also a very strong emphasis from the outset that all phenomena are intrinsically pure by virtue of their being empty. Through the continual effort to identify with the deity, the narrative self undergoes the most significant transformations in the initial stages of Vajrayāna practice. The process of self-transformation in these initial stages of tantric practice develops the mind in concentration and insight, so that the completion-stage practices can serve as catalysts for the recognition of the mind's pure, blissful, and luminous nature.

Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's presentation of Vajrayāna completion-stage practices is, like other presentations, focused on how to manipulate the energies of the subtle body for the purpose of generating inner heat, bliss, and various "signs of attainment" (*rtags*). In this stage of the practice, the tantric practitioner aims to move beyond ordinary conceptions of the gross body to experience and control a "subtle body" of channels, energies, and drops. In order to cultivate inner heat, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal advocates a visualization practice through which mantric seed syllables are associated with the four main *cakra*s: navel, heart, throat, and crown. Two main changes in the practitioner's experience arise through directing the various energies of the subtle body into the central channel. First, the inner heat generated through drawing the energies into the central channel causes a flow of blissful nectar to descend from the crown *cakra* in a process called "blazing and dripping."[80] Through the discipline of inner heat, the practitioner aims to purify his or her body, speech, and mind of habitual patterns and defilements. Second, the withdrawal of the energies into the central channel of the subtle body also results in the appearance of various visual signs, which Dakpo Tashi Namgyal presents by quoting a tantra called the *Vajra Tent:*[81]

> First, there is the appearance of clouds; second, something like smoke; third, the appearance of fireflies; fourth, the burning of lamp flames; fifth, a continuous radiance that is like a cloudless sky.[82]

While the "blazing and dripping" practices of inner heat introduce the practitioner to the blissful aspect of conscious experience, these initial light forms, which take on different characteristics as the

practice progresses, introduce the practitioner to the mind's intrinsic luminosity (*gsal ba, 'od gsal*).

These qualities of mind must then be conjoined with the realizations that are cultivated through the practice called illusory body (*sgyu lus*). Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains this practice as follows: "You must train in seeing the entire outer environment of the world, the beings that inhabit it, and all other objects as being like illusions."[83] Through controlling the body's subtle energies, the practitioner dissolves his or her ordinary mind into luminosity and bliss and emerges in the illusory body of the tantric deity. Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains how the primary context for practicing this training is in the dream state, through which one learns to see all dream phenomena as ultimately mind-made. Clearly, this particular practice aims to radically destabilize the ordinary narrative self, which tends to reify objects and appearances as truly existing in an external environment. Just as the external environment is a mind-made illusion, so too is one's own body, as well as the body of one's personal tantric deity.

Dakpo Tashi Namgyal points out that once the practitioner has cultivated bliss and luminosity and has recognized the illusory nature of appearances, further refinements are still necessary in order to fully realize the mind's true nature. The deepest sign of luminosity mentioned previously, the continuous radiance like a cloudless sky, is first recognized within the framework of subject-object duality—it arises to an observer who fails to recognize it as his own true nature. Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains how the "ultimate luminosity" is "the manifestation of the nonconceptual wisdom that realizes the true nature; this wisdom is like a stainless sky and is without even the subtlest duality."[84] After recognizing the luminous nature of mind through manipulating the energies of the subtle body, the practitioner continues to cultivate the nondual realizations that are central to the Mahāmudrā tradition. As in the sūtra Mahāmudrā approach outlined above, this practice is directed at realizing how all phenomena are empty appearances that are co-emergent with the nature of mind.

In *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal thoroughly explains various subtle gradations through which the practitioner first recognizes and then familiarizes him- or herself with the nature of mind. These states and stages are predicated on the successful accomplishment of the previous stages by which the narrative self has been deconstructed through either the sutra-based approach to calm

abiding and insight or through the tantric path of generation- and completion-stage practices. The transformation from narrative self to resultant self is predicated on the practitioner having first realized the co-emergence of mind, the co-emergence of thought, and the co-emergence of appearances and then further developing this realization through the ultimate stages of Mahāmudrā training known as the four yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*).

What Dakpo Tashi Namgyal calls the co-emergence of mind (*sems nyid lhan skyes ngo sprod pa*) is the first realization in which calm abiding and insight practice are entirely unified. Through allowing the mind to rest in its natural state, "as the mind observes its own intrinsic nature or mode of existence, all discriminatory thoughts in their forceful or feeble forms dissolve or pacify themselves without suppression."[85] The practitioner then continues to develop the realization of the co-emergence of the natural state of mind with all mental qualities and phenomenal appearances. At this point, no distinction between *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* can be maintained:

> Although [calm abiding] and insight are treated as separate aspects, they are in fact inseparable. [Calm abiding] is inherent in the insight of self-awareness and self-crystallization, while insight is inherent in the quiet nature of the mind. [Calm abiding] and insight are therefore a coemergent state, concentrating one-pointedly and indivisibly, because insight by itself comprehends and crystallizes a state of [calm abiding] unstained by any perceptive marks.[86]

It is important to note that the fusion of calm abiding and insight is, for Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, nothing less than the co-emergence of the ultimate mind, the *dharmakāya*. This unified state of complete resting in the equanimity of the nature of mind, coupled with insight into the mind's vivid awareness, serves as the basis for the next two stages of realization.

To attain the second stage, identifying co-emergence of thought (*rnam rtog lhan skyes ngo sprod pa*), Dakpo Tashi Namgyal prescribes a particular practice that can be employed only from the perspective of resting in the mind's natural state. The practitioner is instructed to intentionally generate an emotional state—delight, desire, or ill will. But, as with the previous practice, the objective is not to be carried away by the thought; the intentional generation of an emotional state facilitates disassociation from it, and this inhibits the ordinary tendency toward grasping. The practitioner instead recognizes that the emotion

is like any other mental content: it co-emerges with mind, and it is ultimately not distinguishable from mind. Realizing this,

> the mind should then perceive the emotion as being empty of any identifiable essence or self-entity. Furthermore, the mind perceives the coemergent union of the intrinsic lucidity of thought and its undefinable emptiness, the inseparability of emptiness from the thought stream, as well as the inseparability of the thought stream from its intrinsic emptiness.[87]

Finally, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains the third stage: identifying the co-emergence of appearance (*snang ba lhan skyes ngo sprod pa*). This stage is treated as the ultimate realization of co-emergence because through it the practitioner resolves the apparent boundary between internal and external phenomena, subject and object, realizing that "the appearances that emerge before the mind due to psychic imprints of the past are not different from the coemergent appearances of dualistic mind."[88] Here Dakpo Tashi Namgyal prescribes a practice of gazing at external forms until the form, its emptiness, and its inseparability with awareness are all perceived simultaneously.[89]

> Having discovered the intrinsic nature of ordinary mind, the meditator remains aware of it without getting distracted, and at the same time remains unmodulated whatever immediate mode of mind or thought arises. . . . If in order to meditate, the meditator withdraws from maintaining the mind's natural state through being mindful of its identity, and alters it or adds a new element, he will be contradicting the meaning of unmodulated mind. . . . He must not allow himself to be distracted—not even for a moment—by his deluded awareness with its ingrained clinging to duality.[90]

Mindfulness remains highly significant in these penultimate stages of the Mahāmudrā path as well. Once the practitioner has identified the nature of mind and its co-emergence as thought and appearances, this state of recognition is to be maintained whether in a "meditation" session or in "post-meditation." Mindfulness is the critical faculty that allows the practitioner to maintain this state without deviating from it.[91] At this point all experiences become "meditation." All experiences are now part of the path.

As this realization is perfected in the four yogas (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) of Mahāmudrā,[92] the practitioner isolates a few other central characteristics that are cultivated in the ultimate stages of the path. In the first yoga of one-pointedness, "the mind rests firmly, serenely, lucidly in

clear and empty awareness. . . . This is the fusion of the dynamic and stable aspects of the mind."[93] In the second yoga of nondiscrimination, the practitioner recognizes that "all subject-object dualities are but nonarising [emptiness]" and is then "free from any view of absolute arising, dwelling, or dissolving."[94] In the third yoga of one-flavor, the mind is "settled evenly in its primal purity, without affirming or rejecting the concepts of whether all things of samsara and nirvana are empty or not empty."[95] Finally, in the fourth yoga of nonmeditation, the mind

> is completely detached from the duality of absorption and postabsorption, mindfulness and distraction [and] by transcending the duality of meditation and meditator, external and internal realities, the meditating awareness dissolves itself into its luminous clarity.[96]

In *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal further differentiates each of these yogas into lower, average, and great levels, for a total of twelve degrees of final realization. He goes on to explain, however, that the twelve will not necessarily arise in sequential order "like the steps of stairs."[97] Unlike the more sequential practices that involve deconstructing the narrative self, the emergence of the resultant self through the four yogas is an unfolding process in which different valences of the nature of mind become recognized in the practitioner's experience. The three degrees in each the four yogas are differentiated primarily in terms of the depth and stability of the realization.

These views about the ways in which the four yogas come to be realized informs the penultimate section of Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's text, in which he interrogates possible correlations between the four yogas of Mahāmudrā and the paths and grounds (*sa lam*) of Mahāyāna Buddhism. This section, while very scholastic in nature, has far-reaching implications, as here Dakpo Tashi Namgyal grapples with various claims about whether the stages of awakening in one path schema can be coherently mapped onto those of another system. Because the resultant self in the Mahāmudrā system is realized in a multifaceted manner but not necessarily in a linear progression of steps, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal is quite skeptical of any attempts to clearly correlate Mahāmudrā ultimate realizations with gradual Mahāyāna path schemas. He explains how "the essence of reality being nondifferentiable, its division into the grounds and paths cannot be acceptable from the ultimate standpoint."[98] Despite this cautionary preamble, he ends up entering into the debates on their correlation as a conventional

skillful means to assist meditators in understanding their own experience.[99] Even though Dakpo Tashi Namgyal clearly has reservations about differentiating the ultimate realization of Mahāmudrā into discrete states, he seems unable at the end of his text to escape the need to present this tradition in terms of a path structure.[100] Having elucidated the practice of ordinary calm abiding and insight as well as the practice of Mahāmudrā according to their stages of meditation (*sgom rim*), he makes his best effort at mapping the paths and grounds of the Mahāyāna onto the final realizations as presented in the Mahāmudrā system.[101]

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO BUDDHIST PATH SCHEMAS

In this section, I want to recapitulate the ground covered thus far and also establish some specific comparisons between these two path schemas. While some of the earlier stages of deconstructing and reorienting the narrative self are unambiguously similar, some additional critical reflection is warranted on whether or not (or the degree to which) the higher stages of concentration, the various signs of attainment, and most importantly the progressive stages of insight and realization are analogous.

Although they could be easily overlooked in a study on paths of contemplative development, it is significant that both Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification* and Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* do not neglect to mention the importance of ethical discipline and a harmonious practice environment as important initial stages of the path. This is not difficult to understand, given how environmental factors can condition the mental and emotional states of the narrative self, and those states are reflected back out into the world through habitual behaviors and involuntary responses to stimuli. The initial stages of retraining the narrative self require an increased awareness of these dimensions of being in the world, first of all, and then the intentional removal and replacement of unwholesome states and behaviors with their wholesome counterparts. Adhering to the ethical principles prescribed in Buddhist traditions, as well as so-called preliminary practices such as faith and devotion, set up the essential conditions for making progress in the cognitive trainings of concentration and insight.

In both path schemas, ample attention is given to attending to and eliminating various hindrances as the first step toward greater mental

equilibrium. *The Path of Purification* largely follows the canonical enumeration of five hindrances, two of which are coarse states of agitation that can be retrained through adhering to ethical discipline, and three of which are more subtle qualities of awareness that interfere with the development of tranquility and eventually concentration. Perhaps because it incorporates a much wider variety of Buddhist literature as proof texts, *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* identifies additional hindrances, although the principle binaries of sensory desire and restlessness on the one hand, and ill will and laxity on the other, demonstrate that both systems consistently identify the same fundamental problems as being posed by the ordinary tendencies of the narrative self.

In both path schemas, as well, the practitioner is advised to overcome various hindrances through attending to and cultivating their counterparts—the various factors of awakening. Mindfulness and effortful vigilance are essential strategies that the practitioner has at his or her disposal for retraining the narrative self away from the habitual tendency to see the world in terms of desire and aversion. These two factors in particular lead to the development of the initial tranquility that serves as the basis for more advanced practice in concentration.

The Path of Purification and *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* both offer a variety of strategies for developing mental concentration—a trajectory of practice that takes place through various stages and culminates in the attainment of equanimity. Recognizing perhaps that different practitioners have different dispositions and proclivities, both Buddhaghosa and Dakpo Tashi Namgyal identify a number of possible meditation objects or supports as vehicles for the development of concentration. These supports can be external visible objects, visualized mental objects, the breath, or particular qualities of awareness. External objects range from simple and solid objects, such as the earth *kasiṇa* or a stone, to more subtle objects like light or space. Similarly, visualized objects range in complexity, especially when we take into consideration Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's *Light Rays,* which presents generation-stage practice as a means of developing positive mental factors and concentration. As explained above, these stages are predicated on a significant suspension of the ordinary tendencies of the narrative self to be oriented toward a world of external objects on the one hand, and distracting thoughts, stories, and mental fantasies on the other, both of which threaten the vigilant present-moment awareness needed to make progress in concentration.

Correlating the two principal models for sequential stages of concentration is a difficult task, further complicated if one takes into account the various ways the four *jhāna*s and the nine stages of *śamatha* have been interpreted in different places and times. Buddhaghosa's presentation of the four *jhāna*s is already somewhat inconsistent with the presentation of the four *jhāna*s in the canonical literature.[102] Similarly, the depth and duration of concentration associated with the higher stages of *śamatha* is not necessarily consistent across interpreters of this fundamental Mahāyāna path schema. If we adhere closely to the brief descriptions offered in *The Path of Purification* and the sources quoted in *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, it seems plausible that the "one-pointedness" associated with the eighth stage of *śamatha* is on par with the "unification of mind" that is a key feature of the first *jhāna*. Along the way, similar factors of awakening, especially vigor and joy, are anticipated as a result of successfully suppressing the hindrances. It is also apparent that both the four *jhāna*s and the nine stages of *śamatha* culminate in the seventh factor of awakening, equanimity. Much more difficult to discern is whether this equanimity has identical phenomenological characteristics in the experience of Buddhist meditators practicing within the context of these two path schemas.[103]

Through the cultivation of these increasingly subtle states of awareness, practitioners in both systems are also given feedback in the form of various signs of attainment. Dakpo Tashi Namgyal has much more to say about this topic in his overview of generation- and contemplation-state practice in *Light Rays* than in *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*. Despite their radically different methods of practice, there are some very interesting resonances between his presentation of signs of attainment and those found in Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*. One point of possible convergence across these two path schemas is the arising of bliss as a result of practice. In *The Path of Purification*, bliss is a sign of attainment for the first two *jhāna*s. In Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's *Light Rays*, bliss is generated through manipulating the energies of the subtle body, especially through intentionally directing them into the central channel. Closely related to the arising of bliss in both contexts is the arising of different types of luminosity as another noteworthy sign of attainment.

Unlike bliss, which to my knowledge is not so clearly differentiated into degrees, luminosity arises in different forms and with different qualities as practice develops. Through the practitioner's

concentration on the breath as a meditative support, Buddhaghosa describes the arising counterpart sign as appearing

> to some like a star or a cluster of gems or a cluster of pearls, to others with a rough touch like that of silk-cotton seeds or a peg made of heartwood, to others like a long braid string or a wreath of flowers or a puff of smoke, to others like a stretched-out cobweb or a film of cloud or lotus flower or a chariot wheel or the moon's disk or the sun's disk.[104]

Quoting one of the many tantric proof texts that details a sequence of luminous signs of attainment, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's text identifies the result of completion-stage practice as

> First, there is the appearance of clouds; second, something like smoke; third, the appearance of fireflies; fourth, the burning of lamp flames; fifth, a continuous radiance that is like a cloudless sky.[105]

While again it is difficult to come to strong conclusions about the nature of contemplative experience from disparate textual sources composed in differing Buddhist cultural contexts and in different languages, the parallels between these two discussions of various luminous signs of attainment are nevertheless striking. The consistency between the two on diffuse smoke and cloud-like luminosities as well as more discrete star-like and firefly-like points of light suggests that the concentration developed in each of these practice traditions may have similar effects on the quality of the practitioner's awareness.[106] Furthermore, the sky-like radiance presented in various tantras as the most developed sign of attainment bears some resemblance to the pure bright mind associated with the attainment of the fourth *jhāna* in both Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification* and in the Pāli Nikāyas.[107]

These various signs of attainment are interpreted as indications that the ordinary habitual tendencies of the narrative self have been superseded by a mind that is concentrated, pliable, and balanced in equanimity. However, these signs of attainment are in no instances taken to be identical with the end goal of the path. Without the cognitive insights that come through investigative processes, the fundamental delusion of the narrative self will not be undermined, and the resultant self will remain unmanifested.

As is the case across Buddhist traditions, these two path schemas contextualize prowess in concentration as being ultimately significant only insofar as it facilitates mastery in discerning the nature of reality.

The stages outlined in *The Path of Purification* and *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* begin to diverge in significant ways at this critical juncture.

As a general observation, *The Path of Purification* presents a much more sequential progress of insight through which the narrative self is deconstructed. The eight insight knowledges that begin with the recognition of the arising and passing away of phenomena progressively unfold into additional realizations of the three characteristics. According to Buddhaghosa's presentation, these realizations destabilize the narrative self in ways that undermine the habitual tendency to relate to objects (whether external or mental phenomena) in terms of grasping, desire, and aversion. As it matures in the latter stages of the insight knowledges, the experiential realization of the three characteristics stabilizes into a mental equanimity born of insight. The paths and fruitions that are the culmination of the stage of insight are presented in terms of a purification of mental defilements, following the paradigm of eradicating the ten fetters first put forth in the Pāli Nikāyas. Thus, according to Buddhaghosa's model, the resultant self arises only through a radical destabilization of the narrative self and a progress of insight that clears away the various fetters that bind the practitioner to *saṃsāra*.

In comparison with this fairly linear and even causal model of progression through stages of insight, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's presentation of insight suggests that insights into the nature of mind deepen as the practitioner realizes increasingly subtle gradations of how mind and appearances are co-emergent. The progression through the co-emergence of mind, the co-emergence of thought, and the co-emergence of appearances is less explicitly causal and linear than Buddhaghosa's stages of the eight insight knowledges. Rather, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal advocates specific insight practices for attaining each of these realizations, all three of which are variations on the theme of recognizing the nonduality of the nature of mind with the various phenomena that the narrative self mistakenly reifies into "internal" and "external" objects. Similarly, though for pedagogical purposes he is willing to present the four yogas of Mahāmudrā as having twelve stages, he also insists that many of these realizations do not necessarily arise in sequential order; rather, they are different facets of a single realization that are discerned as the practitioner becomes increasingly familiar with the nature of mind.

Furthermore, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's views on the resultant self that emerges through these realizations reflects both Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna path schemas and their unique doctrinal presentations of buddha-nature and ultimate reality. Although the shift from a narrative self to a resultant self could also be read as requiring a purification of defilements, the penultimate stages of the Mahāmudrā path do not explicitly reference the falling away of the fetters so much as they emphasize the practitioner's familiarization with the awakened qualities of awareness that are always already present.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: PATH SCHEMAS AND THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION TRADITIONS

The comparison of path schemas across Buddhist lineages allows us to raise—and, in some instances, begin to answer—a number of important questions: What are the various trajectories of contemplative development set forth in Buddhist literature? Where are the main points of convergence and divergence? What temporary experiential states are deemed valuable to cultivate? What enduring perceptual, cognitive, or affective shifts are anticipated? How is the relationship between practice and realization understood? And how is the final state of realization characterized across traditions?

It is all too easy for scholars (whether intentionally or not) to replicate the polemical biases of Buddhist traditions in their own work. If we uncritically assume, for instance, that Vajrayāna path schemas both incorporate but also transcend the path schemas of Mahāyāna and especially early Indian Pāli traditions, any study of these traditions will already be hierarchized in a way that potentially distorts the path schemas on their own terms. This is particularly problematic for comparative work between the canonical and commentarial Pāli literature of early Buddhism and relatively late Tibetan sources that privilege Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna perspectives.

As argued above, comparing path schemas from disparate Buddhist lineages potentially has a great deal to tell us about the key stages of contemplative practices, anticipated resultant experiences, as well as how practices and realizations are ascribed particular efficacy and value in the process of self-transformation. Because path schemas present both practice instructions as well as a phenomenology of signs

of attainment and resultant experiences, investigating them is a very useful point of departure for determining what constitutes efficacious practice for a given tradition and for constructing a picture of how a given tradition understands the nature of proximate and ultimate experiential goals.

In this last section I would also like to suggest that investigating path schemas is a valuable strategy for advancing the scientific study of Buddhist meditation traditions—an enterprise that remains fraught with methodological problems. Despite some initial moves toward greater interdisciplinary collaboration between scientists and humanists, we still have a long way to go in creating a dialogue and partnership that reflects the best of what these two approaches have to offer. Neuroscientists are faced with a number of important decisions when studying religious practices like Buddhist meditation. They need to consider which practices and experiences to study, which human subjects to study, what to measure biologically, how to make measurements, when to make measurements, and, finally, how to interpret the data.[108] Close collaboration between scientists and humanists is essential for making these decisions.

Neuroscientific inquiry into Buddhist meditation presents us with a great opportunity to demonstrate why interdisciplinary collaboration matters, and how both scientists and humanists need to work together in order to advance this field of study. The literature on the neuroscience of meditation is truly vast, and I do not attempt to provide a comprehensive review of the literature here. Rather, my objective is to isolate a couple of key problems in order to suggest what light might be shed on them through the careful study of traditional Buddhist path schemas.

Engaging Buddhist path schemas is potentially quite valuable for scientific researchers of meditation for two main reasons. First, much of the scientific research on "meditation" takes as its premise an overly simplistic notion of meditation that insufficiently attends to the diversity of Buddhist approaches across lineages and traditions. Comparative work across path schemas makes clear that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to generalize about "Buddhist meditation," especially if a study incorporates data from practitioners of multiple traditions. Second, the study of path schemas demonstrates that "meditation" is in fact a composite system built up from multiple smaller practices. In other words, meditators are not engaging in a

single cognitive task but instead in a highly complex set of interrelated tasks that, depending upon the tradition in which they are practicing and their level of expertise, will almost certainly vary considerably from practitioner to practitioner. Thus, engaging in interdisciplinary research in such a way to allow for the comparative study of Buddhist path structures to inform experimental research design in the science of meditation traditions could potentially alleviate problems arising from overly generalized conceptions of both the nature and trajectory of contemplative practices.

Even within scientific studies of *Buddhist* meditation traditions, there is no consistent definition of the term "meditation." It has been defined in recent literature as "an ancient spiritual practice which aims to still the fluctuations of the mind";[109] as "a set of diverse and specific methods of distinct attentional engagement";[110] and as "a physiological state of demonstrated reduced metabolic activity that elicits physical and mental relaxation and is reported to enhance psychological balance and emotional stability."[111] With a few exceptions,[112] however, most neuroscientific studies of Buddhist meditation traditions are no longer attempting to study "meditation" as such. Instead, in the wake of some critical interdisciplinary scholarship,[113] experimental research is now focused more specifically on investigating specific *types* of meditation. These studies often distinguish among two or more still generalized practice types, the most common being "focused-attention," "open-monitoring," and "compassion-based" practices. One recent study suggests how each of these three types of meditation diminishes the prominence of the "narrative self" by engaging a specific neural network. In comparison with controls, experienced meditators practicing all three types of meditation showed decreased activity in the Default Mode Network, which is associated with both self-referential processing and mind-wandering.[114] Although the point that "meditation" is not a single category needed to be made at the onset of this type of research, it is important to continue to bear in mind that even a tripartite division into focused-attention, open-monitoring, and compassion- based practices is also limited and potentially misleading.

The comparative study of Buddhist path schemas could potentially illuminate some of the problems with the supposedly distinct categories of focused-attention and open-monitoring meditations, especially given the tendency for researchers to uncritically identify open-monitoring practices with "mindfulness." Scientific investigations of

"mindfulness" are far and away the most numerous among the various empirical approaches to Buddhist meditation traditions. However, as a number of critical studies have recently pointed out,[115] the term "mindfulness" is used in a variety of ways in Buddhist literature, and, to further complicate matters, the clinical application of mindfulness—the so-called Mindfulness-Based Interventions pioneered by Jon Kabat-Zinn—employ an operationalized definition of mindfulness that is in some ways at odds with traditional understandings.[116]

Some studies suggest that focused attention and open-monitoring practices lie on a spectrum, even asserting that these are at "opposite" ends of a "continuum."[117] While the language of "continuum" rightly suggests that these practices are intertwined, it obscures the fact that in practice the techniques cannot even be clearly separated.[118] This is a significant problem in the neuroscience of meditation, because the two primary categories used to delineate supposedly different meditation practices are in actual practice quite entangled.

Neither *The Path of Purification* nor *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* treat "mindfulness" solely as a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. In addition to serving as the basis of developing concentration through remaining attentive to the in-breath and out-breath, "mindfulness" also has a meta-cognitive role as a monitor of deficient qualities that inhibit one's progress in meditation.[119] Buddhist Studies scholar Georges Dreyfus rightly suggests that for mindfulness

> to distinguish wholesome from unwholesome mental states, it must be explicitly cognitive and evaluative, in contrast with the idea of mindfulness as non-judgmental acceptance of whatever arises within the stream of consciousness.[120]

In particular, the path schemas discussed above demonstrate how one of the primary roles of this monitoring of awareness is the elimination of the five hindrances. Laxity and restlessness in particular are serious obstacles to the establishment of even a basic mental tranquility, and for that reason "mindfulness"—both in the sense of remembering to remain attentive to the object and in the sense of monitoring for defective qualities of awareness—is the first and most fundamental of the seven factors of awakening.

But this is not the only conception of mindfulness found across Buddhist traditions. In his article on nondual approaches to mindfulness, John Dunne rightly points out that unlike the Abhidharma approach to mindfulness and insight, which "assumes that meditative

states are structured by subject-object duality," Mahāmudrā traditions employ the term mindfulness (*dran pa*) both in reference to a dualistic type of monitoring awareness discussed above and in reference to a nondualistic resting undistracted in the natural state.[121] In Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, the difference between these two types of mindfulness is correlated with the distinction between ordinary and Mahāmudrā approaches to calm abiding and insight. I agree with Dunne when he suggests that there are more similarities between the rhetoric of mindfulness in Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and the nondual Mahāmudrā approach to mindfulness as mere nondistraction than the dualistic approaches found either in Mahāyāna Abhidharma literature or in Pāli commentarial literature.[122] However, it is important to bear in mind that in Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's system, nondual approaches to mindfulness are predicated on the practitioner's recognition of the nature of mind and insight into the co-emergence of mind, the co-emergence of thought, and the co-emergence of appearance.

The comparative investigation of Buddhist path schemas demonstrates that the practices of concentration, insight, and especially mindfulness are much more complex and in many ways quite different from the operationalized understandings promoted in scientific literature. To alleviate this confusion and advance the neuroscientific study of Buddhist meditation, I think it is important that we move away from broad categories of meditation types, whether three or five, and aim to directly target, through experimental research, the various components that comprise a meditative discipline. In so doing, researchers will need to keep in mind that novice practitioners are not likely to be at the same stages or engaging in the same level of practice as advanced practitioners. If a researcher instructs novices and experts to do the same practice—say "concentration"—in order to compare their brain activity, he or she should not assume that the two meditators are engaging in the same cognitive processes only to different degrees; rather, the novice is likely to be involved with negotiating obstacles that may not be present at all for the more advanced practitioner. Similarly, practitioners who employ "mindfulness" as a dualistic and evaluative monitoring awareness may not be engaged in the same cognitive task as those who understand "mindfulness" as a non-dual and undistracted resting in the nature of mind.[123]

To clarify what I am suggesting here, I think that breaking down the trajectory of "Buddhist meditation" into various sub-practices will ultimately give us a much clearer picture of what is going on in the brain. Most scientific studies of Buddhist meditation have investigated the initial stages (especially when studying novices), and probably some of the results with expert practitioners are indicative of states attained after the union of concentration and insight. Experts may not simply be doing the same practices only with more skill or to a deeper degree; rather, having overcome the hindrances and unified concentration and insight, their practice can take on a different character altogether. In this respect, scientists have as much to learn about contemplative practices from beginners who struggle to identify and overcome the five hindrances as they do from advanced practitioners, for whom negotiating some of the basic stages may have become so automatic that they become difficult to detect. By starting with more modest claims and building up a picture of the various processes involved in meditation, important cognitive processes such as the removal of the five hindrances will not be overlooked.

To my knowledge, no studies have attempted to investigate what overcoming laxity or restlessness looks like in the brain, because these states are not understood to be the goal of meditation—despite the fact that they are central to the process of meditating. And herein lies the central problem: So long as researchers are investigating "meditation" in the abstract, they will miss out on the *process* by focusing too much on the goals. They will assume that the "goal" is a particular state that can be attained and stabilized, and will fail to understand the various techniques that are required for getting there in the first place.

There are many obstacles and many twists and turns along the various path schemas found across Buddhist traditions, and our understanding of these traditions and their cognitive effects will remain vague and incomplete unless researchers specifically recognize their various stages and investigate the subroutines that comprise a larger contemplative discipline. At this point, experimental research on Buddhist meditation remains insufficiently precise when compared with a phenomenology of those traditions derived from historical data. Most of the problems in the neuroscience of contemplative traditions derive from faulty research design or conceptions about meditation that insufficiently attend to the diversity of practices and approaches within a contemplative path. For this reason, I also think that many of

these problems can ultimately be resolved through greater collaboration between scientists and humanists.

This research has a number of valuable applications beyond increasing our knowledge of how different meditative practices affect the brain. If the neuroscience of Buddhist meditation traditions advances to the extent that we are able to correlate particular first-person reports of discrete stages of the path with consistent third-person brain-imaging data (admittedly, a big "if"), it might also be possible to begin exploring the degree to which certain states and stages that seem similar based upon textual data and first-person reports are still seen to be similar when investigated through third-person scientific methodologies. This could potentially shed light on the question raised above about whether or not the one-pointed concentration attained in the first *jhāna* is analogous with that of the eighth stage of *śamatha.* Ultimately, such comparisons could be made to address stages of practice across other contemplative traditions as well.

In addition, precise research into the stages of meditation could also be used to explain the sequences of practices and experiences found across Buddhist meditation traditions. This type of analysis could be quite valuable to scholars in the humanities, who have traditionally had to rely upon historical and sociocultural arguments in order to explain similarities and differences. It is possible that future neuroscientific research could illuminate more fundamental, biological reasons why the stages of concentration and insight follow the trajectory they do. If this is the case, then experimental research into these practices could potentially open up further avenues for understanding the relationship between religious practices and religious experiences.

NOTES

1 A more concise and preliminary version of this paper was presented at the conference "The Storied Self: Buddhist Narrativity in Comparative Context," hosted by Prof. Mark Unno at the University of Oregon, Eugene, October 19–21, 2012. I would like to extend special thanks to Prof. Unno for inviting me to the conference and to Prof. Richard Payne both for his reflections on my paper during the conference and for encouraging me to compose this revised version for *Pacific World*.

2 Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello, eds., *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), pp. 2–3.

3 Buswell and Gimello, eds., *Paths to Liberation*, p. 2.

4 Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 47.

5 Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, p. 9, original emphasis.

6 Ann Taves, "No Field Is an Island: Fostering Collaboration Between the Academic Study of Religion and the Sciences," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22/3 (2010): 181.

7 Buswell and Gimello, eds., *Paths to Liberation*, p. 11.

8 Buswell and Gimello, eds., *Paths to Liberation*, p. 20.

9 Georges Dreyfus, in *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 172–176, explains how the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, attributed to Maitreya, is a good example of a text in the stages of the path genre that is studied scholastically but is not taken as a guide for practice.

10 On this important issue, see Robert Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42 (1995): 228–283.

11 Drawing upon contemporary philosophy of mind and cognitive neuroscience, Shaun Gallagher has also employed the term "narrative self" in contrast to "minimal self," wherein the principle distinction is that the former is autobiographical and extended in time. Although his conception of the "narrative self" does in some respects line up with Buddhist theories about the constructed nature of self-identity, in Buddhist traditions the "narrative self" is additionally problematic because it also reifies the phenomenal content of experience. See Shaun Gallagher, "Philosophical Conceptions of the Self: Implications for Cognitive Science," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 4/1 (2000): 14–21.

12 Quotations from *The Path of Purification* (Pāli *Visuddhimagga*) are from the following edition: Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Onalaska, WA: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999). References to the Pāli original are derived from C. A. F. Rhys Davids, ed. *The Visuddhi-magga of Buddhaghosa* (London: Pali Text Society, 1975).

13 Throughout this paper I follow the conventions of the principal translation and refer to this text as *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*; quotations from this text are from the following edition: Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight: Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, second ed., Lobsang P. Lhalungpa, trans. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006). References to the Tibetan original are derived from Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal, *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i sgom rim gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad zla ba'i 'od zer* (Varanasi, India: Vajra Vidya Institute, 2005).

14 Given the recent scholarship on the origins of the term "Theravāda," I refer to the path set forth by Buddhaghosa as an instance of "early Buddhism" rather than Theravāda Buddhism. On the issue of Buddhaghosa's relationship to "Theravāda Buddhism," see Rupert Gethin, "Was Buddhaghosa a Therāvadin?: Buddhist Identity in the Pali Commentaries and Chronicles," in Peter Skilling, Jason A. Carabine, Claudio Cicuzza, and Santi Pakdeekham, eds., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?: Exploring Buddhist Identities* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2012), pp. 1–66.

15 This distinction is sometimes characterized as one between "sūtra Mahāmudrā" and "tantra Mahāmudrā."

16 Excerpts from this text can be found in Peter Alan Roberts, trans., *Mahāmudrā and Related Instructions: Core Teachings of the Kagyu Schools* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011), pp. 401–620. The full title in Tibetan is *Gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa'i spyi don mdor bsdus pa legs bshad nor bu'i 'od zer* (TBRC W29340).

17 MN III.79; SN V.312.

18 The main section of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* opens with the following statement: "Bhikkhus, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated, they fulfill the seven enlightenment factors. When the seven enlightenment factors are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and deliverance" (MN III.82). The four *jhāna*s are mentioned more explicitly in the subsequent *sutta* on mindfulness of the body (MN III.92).

19 MN I.56.

20 E.g., MN I.60, SN V.92, AN III.63. These are *kāmacchanda*, *vyāpāda, thīnamiddha, uddhacca-kukkucca,* and *vicikicchā*, respectively.

21 MN I.60–62.

22 E.g., MN I.62, SN V.80. These are *sati, dhamma vicaya, viritya, pīti*, *passaddhi, samādhi,* and *upekkha*, respectively.

23 SN V.97-98.

24 E.g., DN I.84, AN II.45, MN III.252.

25 MN I.38, SN V.116.

26 AN II.46

27 MN I.277.

28 DN I.75–84.

29 MN I.34. The ten fetters are discussed below.

30 Cf. MN I.301.

31 Cf. MN I.147.

32 *The Path of Purification* I.111.

33 *The Path of Purification* IX.43.

34 *The Path of Purification* IV.47.

35 *The Path of Purification*, IV.51, quoting SN V.112.

36 *The Path of Purification* IV.49.

37 See *The Path of Purification* IV.79ff. On the differences between Buddhaghosa's criteria for the *jhāna*s and those found in the Pāli Nikāyas, see Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samādhi: An In-Depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2008), pp. 32–76.

38 *The Path of Purification* IV.86 (*samādhi kāmacchandassa paṭipakkho, pīti vyāpādassa, vitakko thīnamiddhassa, sukkhaṃ uddhaca-kukkuccassa, vicāro vicikichhāyā*).

39 "For although other unprofitable things too are abandoned at the moment of jhana, still only these [five hindrances] are specifically obstructive to jhana" (*The Path of Purification* IV.104).

40 *The Path of Purification* III.4.

41 *The Path of Purification* IV.31.

42 *The Path of Purification* IV.31.

43 *The Path of Purification* VIII.208.

44 *The Path of Purification* VIII.214.

45 *The Path of Purification* VIII.215.

46 *The Path of Purification* IV.156.

47 The eight insight knowledges are knowledge of rise and fall, knowledge of dissolution, knowledge of appearance as terror, knowledge of danger, knowledge of dispassion, knowledge of desire for deliverance, knowledge of reflection, and knowledge of equanimity about formations (*udayabbayānupassanāñāṇaṃ*, *bhangāanupassanāñāṇaṃ*, *bhayatupaṭṭhānañāṇaṃ*, *ādinavānupassanāñāṇaṃ, nibbidānupassanāñāṇaṃ*, *muccitukamyatāñāṇaṃ*, *paṭisankhānupassanāñāṇaṃ*, *sankhārupekkhāñāṇaṃ*).

48 *The Path of Purification* XXI.3.

49 *The Path of Purification* XXI.4.

50 *The Path of Purification* XXI.7–8.

51 *The Path of Purification* XXI.11.

52 Although in certain Buddhist lineages, such as the Burmese tradition of Mahāsi Sayādaw, this stage of insight is often interpreted as a necessarily

difficult stage of the progress of insight, *The Path of Purification* is less clear about this. Buddhaghosa asks, "But does the knowledge of appearance as terror itself fear or does it not fear? It does not fear. For it is simply the mere judgment that past formations have ceased, present ones are ceasing, and future ones will cease" (*The Path of Purification* XXI.32).

53 Danger is characterized in the following manner: "[W]hen all formations have appeared as a terror by contemplation of dissolution, this meditator sees them as utterly destitute of any core or any satisfaction and as nothing but danger" (*The Path of Purification* XXI.36).

54 *The Path of Purification* XXI.44.

55 *The Path of Purification* XXII.5.

56 *The Path of Purification* XXII.5.

57 MN I.34. See note 29, above.

58 These are belief in self, doubt, clinging to ritual, craving, ill will, craving for material and immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

59 Although the principal translation of *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight* translates *zhi gnas* as "tranquility," I use the alternate rendering "calm abiding" throughout this paper to avoid eliding the distinction between *śamatha* as a sequence of concentration practices and the fifth factor of awakening (*passaddhi*).

60 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 15.

61 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, pp. 19–21.

62 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 21.

63 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, pp. 43–44.

64 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, pp. 47–48. Also referred to as the *sems gnas pa'i thab dgu*, these are 1) resting the mind (*'jog pa*), 2) resting the mind longer (*rgyun du 'jog pa*), 3) continuously resettling the mind (*blan te 'jog pa*), 4) fully settling the mind (*nye bar 'jog pa*), 5) taming the mind (*dul bar byed pa*), 6) pacifying the mind (*zhi bar byed pa*), 7) completely pacifying the mind (*rnam par zhi bar byed pa*), 8) one-pointedness (*rtse gcig tu byed pa*), and 9) resting in equanimity (*mnyam par 'jog pa byed pa*).

65 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, pp. 63–64.

66 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 159.

67 "Up to this time whenever he applied exertion so as to achieve [calm abiding], he perceived that all forceful and feeble thoughts seemed to fade as if through suppression. The mind because momentarily so serene and still that the meditator was obligated to control it with one-pointed attention. It was not a very easy condition. At the present stage he finds that when the mind is relaxed it can be settled naturally and easily while not losing the vigor

of mindfulness. . . . If one knows the secret of releasing whatever inner craving has emerged, one will know how to relax the mind and still it" (*Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, pp. 163–164).

68 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 166.

69 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 166.

70 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 167.

71 "Insight, at this stage, must consist of (1) the understanding that all dualities including the mind, its manifest thoughts, and appearances are in an ultimate sense empty of any absolute mode of arising, settling, or cessation, and (2) the awareness with a deep certainty that all these dualities are empty of true essence or self-nature" (*Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 211).

72 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 204.

73 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 205.

74 Both the Nyingma nine-vehicle system and the Gelug system based on the *Five Stages* would be interesting places to investigate further implicit and explicit Vajrayāna path schemas. There are also countless ways in which these and other Vajrayāna paths are correlated with the progression through the five paths and ten grounds found in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, and Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's text is no exception. See *Light Rays*, pp. 601–606.

75 *Light Rays,* p. 458.

76 *Light Rays*, p. 459.

77 *Light Rays*, p. 491.

78 *Light Rays*, p. 512.

79 *Light Rays*, pp. 535–536.

80 *Light Rays*, p. 561.

81 According to Roberts, this quotation is from the *Ḍākinīvajrapañjarātantra* (Tib. *Mkha' 'gro ma rdo rje gur zhes bya ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po'i brtag pa*) Toh. 419, rgyud *nga*, chap. 4, 39a2. See *Mahāmudrā and Related Instructions*, p. 691, n. 1221; p. 729.

82 *Light Rays*, p. 561.

83 *Light Rays*, p. 566.

84 *Light Rays*, p. 577.

85 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 228.

86 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 229.

87 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 232.

88 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 237.

89 "What is generally known as 'nondual awareness of intrinsic reality' is inherent in every substance of reality. If one realizes the intrinsic nature of every thought or appearance, it is not different from awareness itself" (*Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 250).

90 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 252.

91 On this point, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal writes: "If the meditator maintains an unceasing mindfulness of the mind's intrinsic essence throughout the postabsorptive consciousness or the emergence of appearances, all undistracted thoughts and appearances will become the postabsorptive perception. By maintaining an unceasing awareness of the mind's intrinsic reality, one will be able to maintain every emerging perception in its natural mode during the postabsorptive state, and one will also attain the determinate awareness with respect to the abiding nature of every sensory appearance without attempting to alter it. It is of the utmost importance to continuously maintain undistracted mindfulness of the intrinsic nature [of thought or appearance]. This is why mindfulness constitutes the main meditation" (*Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 293).

92 These are one-pointedness (*rtse gcig gi rnal 'byor*), nondiscrimination (*spros bral gyi rnal 'byor*), one-flavor (*ro gcig gi rnal 'byor*), and nonmeditation (*sgom med kyi rnal 'byor*).

93 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 364.

94 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 364.

95 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 365.

96 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 366.

97 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 380.

98 *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 380.

99 A thorough analysis of the paths and grounds of Mahāyāna Buddhism is beyond the scope of this paper, so I will not rehearse in detail Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's interesting arguments and attempts at correlation here. These debates can be found in *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, pp. 408–415.

100 Dakpo Tashi Namgyal also attempts to correlate Mahāyāna paths and grounds with stages of developmental progress through completion stage practice in *Light Rays from the Jewel of the Excellent Teaching*, pp. 601–606.

101 Dakpo Tashi Namgyal seems fairly comfortable in equating the great degree of the yoga of nonmeditation with the tenth Mahāyāna ground (or eleventh in some systems) of buddhahood. He is more particular about where he situates the path of insight and the first ground, breaking with some other

Kagyu commentators by not being willing to attribute them to any stage prior to the lesser degree of the yoga of one flavor. See *Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, pp. 411–412.

102 See Shankman, *The Experience of Samādhi*, 101–104.

103 The possibility of using scientific methods of evaluating the potential similarities in states of concentration will be discussed further in the next section of this paper.

104 *The Path of Purification* VIII.215.

105 *Light Rays*, p. 561.

106 I address possible scientific explanations for this in a forthcoming article, "A Phenomenology of Meditation-Induced Light Experiences: Traditional Buddhist and Neurobiological Perspectives."

107 The *Mahā-Assapura Sutta* describes this aspect of the fourth *jhāna* as follows: "He sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind. Just as though a man were sitting covered from the head down with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of whole body unpervaded by the while cloth; so too, a bhikkhu sits pervading his body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind" (MN I.277).

108 See Andrew Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

109 Klaus Baerentsen, et al., "An Investigation of Brain Processes During Meditation," *Cognitive Processing* 11/1 (2010): 57.

110 B. Rael Cahn, Arnaud Delorme, and John Polich, "Occipital Gamma Activation during Vipassana Meditation," *Cognitive Processing* 11/1 (2010): 39.

111 Katya Rubia, "The Neurobiology of Meditation and its Clinical Effectiveness in Psychiatric Disorders," *Biological Psychology* 82/1 (2009): 2.

112 Marco Sperduti, Pénélope Martinelli, and Pascale Piolino, "A Neurocognitive Model of Meditation based on Activation Likelihood Estimation (ALE) Meta-analysis," *Consciousness and Cognition* 21 (2012): 269–276.

113 Antoine Lutz, John Dunne, and Richard Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction," in Philip David Zalazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thomson, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 499–551; Antoine Lutz, Heleen A. Slagter, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, "Attention Regulation and Monitoring in Meditation," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 12/4 (2008): 163–169.

114 Judson A. Brewer, Patrick D. Worhunsky, Jeremy R. Gray, Yi-Yuan Tang, Jochen Weber, and Hedy Kober, "Meditation Experience is Associated with

Differences in Default Mode Network Activity and Connectivity," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108/50 (2011): 20254–20259.

115 See the special issue of *Contemporary Buddhism* (12/1 [2011]) dedicated to the exploration of this topic.

116 The characteristics of a "non-judgmental" and "present moment" awareness have been associated with the scientific study of mindfulness since the influential writings of Kabat-Jon Zinn in the 1990s. See, for instance, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), p. 4.

117 Sperduti, Martinelli, and Piolino, "A Neurocognitive Model of Meditation," p. 269.

118 As Dakpo Tashi Namgyal explains in the context of the co-emergence of mind, "Although [calm abiding] and insight are treated as separate aspects, they are in fact inseparable [co-emergence]. [Calm abiding] is inherent in the insight of self-awareness and self-crystallization, while insight is inherent in the quiet nature of the mind. [Calm abiding] and insight are therefore a co-emergent state, concentrating one-pointedly and indivisibly, because insight by itself comprehends and crystallizes a state of [calm abiding] unstained by any perceptive marks" (*Mahāmudrā: The Moonlight*, p. 229). On the role of mindful discernment in navigating the *jhāna*s, see MN III.25. On how the four foundations of mindfulness lead to the development of concentration, see SN V.149.

119 See Ven. Anālayo, *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization* (Cambridge, MA: Windhorse Publications, 2003), and Bhikkhu Bodhi, "What Does Mindfulness Really Mean? A Canonical Perspective," *Contemporary Buddhism* 12/1 (2011): 19–38.

120 Georges Dreyfus, "Is Mindfulness Present-Centered and Non-Judgmental?", *Contemporary Buddhism* 12/1 (2011): 45.

121 John Dunne, "Towards an Understanding of Non-Dual Mindfulness," *Contemporary Buddhism* 12/1 (2011): 74, 84.

122 Dunne, "Towards an Understanding of Non-Dual Mindfulness," p. 75.

123 There are at present only a few experimental studies investigating the potential uniqueness of "nondual" meditation practices among Buddhist practitioners. See Zoran Josipovic, "Duality and Nonduality in Meditation Research," *Consciousness and Cognition* 19/4 (2010): 1119–1121; Zoran Josipovic, Ilan Dinstein, Jochen Weber, and David J. Heeger, "Influence of Meditation on Anti-Correlated Networks of the Brain," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 5/183 (2011): 1–11.