
THE JEWEL APPEARANCE

Exemplifying Wisdom in a Tibetan Tantric Tradition

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Abstract: *While it may be tempting to assume that the preponderance of Buddhist metaphors for the deceptive nature of appearances suggests that our experiences of the phenomenal world should be dismissed, in many Buddhist traditions, understanding why things appear as they do is central to realizing how they truly are. In this article, I illuminate the unique manner in which one Tibetan author uses experience and metaphor to bridge the gap between illusory appearances and wisdom. In his root text and commentary on the teachings of the inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216) uses examples to convey key elements of the Lamdré tradition, a ritual and philosophical program based on the teachings of the Hevajra tantras. The Sakya master employs about thirty-two examples to establish the “three piths of practice”: all phenomena are mind; mind is illusion; and illusion is “natureless.” While most of these examples are familiar to Mahāyāna literature as well as in the broader pan-Indian context, Drakpa Gyeltsen taps into what it feels like to inhabit the illusion, rather than simply emphasizing its unverifiable status. Moreover, a few examples are decidedly tantric in nature. In exploring Drakpa Gyeltsen’s contemplative pedagogy, I highlight how these tantric examples embed the teachings in a broader ritual program aimed at synthesizing apparently contradictory aspects of human experience. Through transformative ritual processes of initiation and sādhana, the tantric adept is introduced to the “exemplary wisdom,” in a necessary progression toward attaining true wisdom. I argue that while examples may be instrumental rather than an end in themselves, Drakpa Gyeltsen reveals their power to illuminate.*

INTRODUCTION

“I open my eyes and a world appears.”¹ So ends Michael Pollan’s 2026 book exploring the nature of consciousness and documenting a journey propelled, on its surface, by conversations with neuroscientists on evolving research and discoveries about consciousness. However, on a deeper level, Pollan is inspired by his own paradigm-shifting experience on psychedelics (the topic of his previous book), which in his estimation “smudge the usually transparent pane of our conscious attention so that we perceive it for the first time.”² Pollan sees meditation as another means for cultivating attention to this elusive nature of consciousness. Ultimately, after a whirlwind tour of meetings with world-renowned scientists in offices and coffee shops, his “journey into consciousness” takes him to a cave outside of Santa Fe, where he experiments with Buddhist meditation as a form of first-person science.

As Pollan rightly notes, Buddhists have engaged with the nature of consciousness through a robust repertoire of techniques for centuries. Buddhist texts regularly encourage their readers to contemplate reality as being like a dream or a mirage as part of a larger exercise in destabilizing the human fixation upon a limiting and inaccurate view of things, one regarded as detrimental to



spiritual progress and predicated upon a flawed understanding of the mind. In this article, I introduce one of these contemplative techniques, drawn from thirteenth-century Tibet, in which the experience of dissonance between particular experiences and reality serves as a foundation for awakening to a more profound and accurate view of things. While Pollan is interested in the embodied quality of experience and seems convinced of its significance, he does not have much to say about it. The Tibetan text upon which my study is based contains a number of experiences that are clearly embodied in nature as tools for realizing that, ultimately, (1) all phenomena are included in our bodies and minds, and (2) ordinary reality and an enlightened reality are inseparable.

And yet, as Pollan also observes, “a world appears.” While it may be tempting to assume that the preponderance of Buddhist metaphors for the deceptive nature of appearances suggests they should be dismissed, in many Buddhist traditions, understanding why things appear as they do is central to realizing how they truly are.³ In this article, I explore the ritual and philosophical dimensions of understanding appearances as a vital step in the progress toward liberation for the Sakya tradition of Tibet.⁴ In the process, I highlight the importance of examples and metaphors—both denoted by the same term in Tibetan—as contemplative pedagogical tools with a special resonance for the tantric tradition.⁵

What does it mean for appearances to be experienced but not established? I approach the answers to this question provided by the Sakya master Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216) in his early thirteenth-century root text *The Illuminating Jewel* (*Rin chen snang ba*)—or even, more loosely, *The Jewel Appearance*—and its autocommentary, entitled *The Commentary on the View of the Inseparability of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa* (referenced throughout this article as *Inseparability*).⁶ These teachings are integral to the Lamdré or “Path and Fruit” tradition, the core tantric ritual and philosophical system embraced by the Sakyapas (Sakya adherents)—based on the visions of the mahāsiddha Virūpa and the three Hevajra tantras (the root tantra and the explanatory tantras *Samputa* and *Vajrapañjara*).

In *Inseparability*, Drakpa Gyeltsen presents a system of over thirty examples for approaching the nature of mind and appearance, demonstrating not just that we regard reality inaccurately but how and why we do so. While most of these examples—such as the dream and the mirage—are common to a broad range of Mahāyāna texts and practices, Drakpa Gyeltsen also presents a set of uncommon examples specific to the experience of the tantric adept. These exclusive examples draw upon a knowledge of tantric ritual and physiology and establish a deep connection between wisdom and exemplification. Coupled with his citations from the Hevajra tantras and Virūpa’s *Vajra Lines* (*Rdo rje’i tshig rkang*), Drakpa Gyeltsen develops a phenomenological and performative approach to appearances that plays upon but also exceeds those found in the domain of the sūtras.

Drakpa Gyeltsen’s text is a significant early milestone in a longer history of discourses about appearances in the Sakyapa tradition, revealing key ways in which the tradition uses examples drawn from texts and experiences to facilitate a deeper understanding of mind and reality. With this article, I initiate a larger project of investigating Sakyapa teachings on appearances that develop over time in the Lamdré system, one that extends to the domains of (1) *lojong* or “mental purification practice,” (2) tantric polemics concerning the relationship of Sakyapa descriptions of

mind and appearance to the Cittamātrīn perspective,⁷ and (3) discourses on valid cognition (*pramāṇa*), including tantric epistemologies.

THE LAMDRÉ LEGACY

The Sakya tradition holds that the Lamdré teachings were initially received in a vision in which the goddess Nairātmyā, consort of the tantric Buddha Hevajra, appeared to the eminent Indian tantric adept Virūpa (seventh–eighth centuries CE). Over time, these teachings were transmitted to Tibet, and during the career of the Sakyapa forefather Sachen Kūnga Nyingpo (1092–1158), they began to be recorded and explained in written form. Two of Sachen’s sons, Sönam Tsemo (1142–1182) and Drakpa Gyeltsen, were central to this process. Together, this father-son collective is regarded as three of the five venerable Sakya forefathers. The text that formed the basis of the Lamdré is Virūpa’s pithy and elusive *Vajra Lines*. In Virūpa’s text, appearances function as the springboard for introducing the Lamdré’s reckoning with the nature of experience:

For a sentient being with afflictions, impure appearance occurs.

For a yogi with meditative concentration, experiential appearance occurs.

For a *sugata* with the ornamental wheel of inexhaustible enlightened body, speech, and mind, pure appearance occurs.⁸

These are the “three appearances” or “three visions.” They describe three perspectives for engaging with reality—that of ordinary beings, tantric practitioners, and buddhas. Things appear differently based on which perspective one inhabits. Sachen composed eleven commentaries on the *Vajra Lines*, and his *Explication of the Treatise for Nyag* (*Gzhung bshad gnyags ma*), written for his disciple of that name, continues to be the main resource for teaching the meaning of Virūpa’s verses.⁹ In introducing the “path of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa in common”—a phrase closely resembling the “inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa” of Drakpa Gyeltsen’s text—Sachen elucidates the three forms of appearance in terms of the corresponding support, cause, and appearance.¹⁰ These appearances are impure, experiential, or pure depending upon the kinds of beings or “supports” to whom they appear. The pure appearance of an enlightened being is defined by the realization “that there are no separate appearances of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa beyond one’s own utterly pure primordial awareness” and that cyclic existence and enlightened reality have “one taste,” as do the path and result.¹¹

DRAKPA GYELTSSEN’S *INSEPARABILITY OF SAṂSĀRA AND NIRVĀṆA*: APPEARANCES IN THE THREE PITHS OF PRACTICE

Drakpa Gyeltsen’s root text on the inseparability of enlightened and unenlightened reality is succinct and cryptic, and his autocommentary is therefore vital to unpacking its contents. Ronald Davidson describes these texts as “two of the most influential treatises among the Sakyapa.”¹² They are the first two texts in a group of seventeen works by Drakpa Gyeltsen included in the Yellow Book (*Pod ser*), a compendium of Lamdré texts by the Sakya lineage masters, including Virūpa’s *Vajra Lines* as well as treatises by Sachen and his sons.¹³ The root text of *Inseparability*

was composed in 1206 at Sakya Monastery in Tibet, while the autocommentary was completed in 1212, four years before Drakpa Gyeltsen's death.

The autocommentary on *Inseparability* is triadic in structure—setting a pattern of threefold divisions that is echoed within its subsections. The first section describes the three phenomena that are coemergent.¹⁴ These three phenomena correspond to the three continua that are the topic of the final section of the text as well: the cause, path, and result.¹⁵ In the first section, Drakpa Gyeltsen focuses on the connection between these three continua and another triad used to describe the nature of reality—the unity of clarity and emptiness.¹⁶ In the final section, he explores the three continua in more specificity, examining how the foundational causal continuum, the body-method continuum, and the Mahāmudrā resultant continuum each illustrate the main theme of the text as a whole—the inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.¹⁷

Between these two sections on the cause, path, and result in his *Inseparability* autocommentary—with one section oriented toward the union of clarity and emptiness and the other toward the inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa—the middle section of Drakpa Gyeltsen's text describes three piths of practice. The practitioner begins by regarding appearances as mind, then as illusion, and finally as “natureless,” including both its dependently arisen connections and its freedom from expression.¹⁸ Drakpa Gyeltsen invokes a host of approximately thirty-two examples to catalyze an understanding of how things are not as they appear, and yet *they do appear*, thus revealing the unobstructed nature of appearance. This section provides a vibrant ground for exploring the pedagogical use of appearance and illusion. Among the examples provided, many—though not all—are familiar from the broader Mahāyāna textual landscape. *Inseparability* therefore also provides an opportunity to contemplate how the Indian literary and philosophical world provided the raw material reworked by Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna authors.¹⁹ What is unique about Drakpa Gyeltsen's approach to these metaphors is not only the way he repurposes and adds to them, but particularly his mode of guidance in applying them to the cultivation of a deeper understanding of the experience of appearances. As experiential examples, they assume a form of immediacy in the precision with which they are deployed. Some of these examples, as I will discuss below, derive specifically from experiences rooted in tantric ritual and are connected with the attainment of a profound form of wisdom that is uniquely equipped to express or exemplify the true nature of reality.

The importance of examples to the teachings on the three piths is brought into high relief when comparing them to another teaching by Drakpa Gyeltsen, one less explicitly tantric in nature, known as “parting from the four attachments.”²⁰ The story behind this teaching involves Drakpa Gyeltsen's father, Sachen, and his frustration with some obstacles he encountered in his own inculcation of the Lamdré teachings. In his quest for answers, Sachen was visited by a form of the bodhisattva of wisdom who conveyed four key verses of instruction to him. When Sachen passed these verses on to Drakpa Gyeltsen, the latter composed a song to illuminate their meaning. Drakpa Gyeltsen's elucidation of the fourth verse, focused on eliminating grasping, closely resembles the three piths, highlighting the connection between phenomena and mind, the illusory nature of appearances and their dependent arising, as well as contemplative immersion in the ultimately inexpressible state of things.²¹ The interlinear notes to this text—likely added by the master's student, Sakya Paṇḍita (1182–1251)—connect these teachings more clearly to the piths and with the practice of tranquility (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*) meditation.²² However, examples do

not play a significant role in the treatment of appearances in Drakpa Gyeltsen's song. The absence of intensive engagement with examples in the mode of instruction on "parting from the four attachments" may be linked to their role within the larger Sakya pedagogical program as a practice of mental purification, often preparing for more esoteric teachings like those included in *Inseparability*.

Table 1: Examples Used by Drakpa Gyeltsen to Teach the Three Piths of Practice

Establish Appearances as Mind	Establish Mind as Illusion	Establish Illusion as Natureless in Terms of Dependently Arisen Connections	Establish Illusion as Natureless in Terms of Freedom from Expression
Sleep/dream	Magical illusion	Recitation	Baby's laughter
Substances	Mirage	Flame	Dream of one who cannot hear/speak
Illness	Moon on water	Mirror	Scratching an itch
Demons	Lightning	Seal	(Sexual) sense pleasure
Optical illusion	Fascinating moon ²³	Fire crystal	Wisdom of the third
Eye disease	City of <i>gandharvas</i> ²⁴	Seed	Meditative absorption of the secret
Firebrand	Cloud	Sour taste	Wave of enjoyment
Spinning around	Rainbow	Echo	Maṇḍala circle

Recognizing Phenomena as Mind

The example of the dream is among the most cited examples of the illusory nature of phenomena, with a vivid presence in the literary worlds of the Prajñāpāramitā, the Vijñānavāda, and beyond.²⁵ Dreams played an especially significant role in the life experience of Drakpa Gyeltsen, providing continuity between life and death and access to the blessings and instructions of deceased masters.²⁶ The example of the dream invoked by Drakpa Gyeltsen in the passage from

Inseparability is the first of four primary examples intended to catalyze a realization that all phenomena are mind. The contemplative practitioner is instructed to prepare by cultivating the mind of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), generating devotion for the guru visualized at the crown, and cultivating the tutelary deity.²⁷ These preparations are followed by an intense recollection of the experience of a clear dream and its seeming reality. The practitioner compares the dream with appearances in general and considers how they are experienced as real. Reflecting upon the way in which the experience of the dream conflicts with its falsity, the practitioner can compare or literally “mix” that with appearance.²⁸ There is also the technique of relaxing the mind and resting in this experience of disjuncture.²⁹ Having completed this primary component of the meditation on appearances as a dream, the practitioner extends the impact of their practice by dedicating the merit generated thereby to all sentient beings’ attainment of buddhahood, cultivating compassion for beings who have not yet attained that goal, and finally, by approaching one’s own waking life as a dream, with “continuous recollection of the meaning of the thought that, ‘the site of waking appearances and friends and enjoyment, all of these are like a dream.’”³⁰

The other main examples for apprehending appearances as mind are intended to vividly conjure experiences of perceptual impairment by intoxication, feverish illness, and even demonic interventions. Among the subsidiary examples, visual distortion is especially familiar to epistemological texts, and the set as a whole also resonates with examples from non-Buddhist authors exploring the interplay of language, perception, and efficacy.³¹ Such examples take on new life in the hands of Drakpa Gyaltsen’s student Sakya Paṇḍita, whose contributions to Tibetan scholasticism and the field of epistemology in his *Treasury of Reasoning* make him one of the most renowned Tibetan scholars of all time. However, in the context of *Inseparability*, Drakpa Gyaltsen taps into what it feels like to inhabit the illusion, rather than simply emphasizing its unverifiable status. Ultimately, this leads to a reworking of traditional epistemological tools as phenomenological ones.³² The feeling that the dream seems so real proves essential to facilitating a controlled experience of uncertainty that is powerful, particularly in proceeding from one example to the next. His emphasis upon what an experience feels like is especially evident in the more clearly embodied examples. These include directly interactive forms of experiential learning in which the practitioner is prompted to press an eyelid closed to play with the appearance of double vision or, in an especially proprioceptive example, to spin around to produce the sense that the earth and sky have inverted.³³ Within the Dzogchen tradition such physical intensity is found in a set of practices directed toward “separating saṃsāra and nirvāṇa” rather than realizing the inseparability of the two.³⁴ Drakpa Gyaltsen uses the intensity of such physical experiences in a different way than his Dzogchen counterparts do, using the sense of “distortion” they catalyze as an opportunity to access a view of how the mind houses karmic residues that generate appearances, perhaps something like what Pollan could call experiencing the “smudge” on the windowpane of consciousness.³⁵

Drakpa Gyeltsen concludes the section by affirming that all phenomena are the mind’s sphere of activity, and by providing a karmic rationale—rebirth in the six destinies of beings: humans, gods, demigods, animals, hell beings, and hungry ghosts—for the importance of contemplating appearances in this way:

From the countless manifestations arisen from the virtue and sin of one's own mind, the manifold appearance of the six types emerges. Thus one should confirm all phenomena as mind.³⁶

The examples of the first pith of practice are therefore deeply phenomenological, employing experiences of distortion or disorientation to catalyze a realization embedded in karmic cosmology. They potently illustrate an interest in mind as the source of appearances, a focus which caused friction between the Sakyapas and other Tibetan traditions in later centuries.

Seeing the Illusion

The second pith of practice establishes the mind as illusion. Drakpa Gyeltsen employs examples to reconcile apparently conflicting elements and perspectives. All eight examples used in this section are optical in nature: a magical illusion, a mirage, a moon on water, lightning, a fascinating moon, a city of *gandharvas*, a cloud, and a rainbow. These examples are familiar metaphors from the Prajñāpāramitā corpus. Several examples are also introduced through tantric citations, such as the *Hevajra Tantra*'s reference to the moon on water and the *Samputa*'s discussions of illusion, mirage, and the fascinating moon.³⁷ These familiar examples are deeply intertextual and polysemic, and common to the sūtras and tantras, but Drakpa Gyeltsen utilizes them in a very distinctive way in the context of the three piths of practice. In his hands, examples are not objects of passive contemplation but rather tools for active engagement. In particular, the practitioner once again compares or mixes the appearance with the realization of its unreality and also seals the examples with the broader category of appearance.³⁸ The section concludes with the final example of using an experience of dissonance to facilitate realization:

As for the rainbow, when it rains, from a distance one observes in the sky a many-colored appearance at the convergence of sunrays and the obscuration of clouds. But if you go close, it does not appear at all. Likewise, objects appear, but knowing them to be natureless, rest the mind in that.³⁹

While the rainbow is an accessible example, the city of *gandharvas* requires some familiarity with the Indo-Tibetan context. This celestial city in the clouds is a familiar motif both from the pan-Indian philosophical landscape and the Madhyamaka context, as in Nāgārjuna's *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*):

Like a dream, like an illusion,
Like a city of *gandharvas*,
So have arising, abiding,
And ceasing been explained.⁴⁰

The examples of the illusory nature of mind and appearance therefore prioritize visual perception and perspective and draw upon a larger literary repertoire to perform the very specific Sakyapa practice of mixing and sealing metaphors.

Beyond Natures

The section on the third pith explicates the illusion's "naturelessness" in terms of dependent arising and inexpressibility. Drakpa Gyeltsen employs eight examples to demonstrate each of these two principles. He gleans the first eight from Nāgārjuna's teachings on dependent arising:

Ārya Nāgārjuna said, "Through recitation, a flame, a mirror, a seal, a fire crystal, a seed, a sour taste, and an echo, the sage should realize the aggregates to be transmigrating and inexhaustible."⁴¹

All of the examples of dependently arisen connections proceed in a familiar chain of cause and effect to dismantle the coherence of isolated identities:

Because the cause of the first moment does not arise in the second moment, it is said to be devoid of origination, and since the second does not come without relying upon the previous, it is said to be unobstructed.⁴²

Some of the examples, such as the echo and the mirror's reflection, can also be found in Asaṅga's Yogācāra treatise, the *Compendium of the Mahāyāna* (*Mahāyānasamgraha*), alongside examples of illusion from Drakpa Gyeltsen's text (such as the mirage). In Asaṅga's text, the list of figures of dependent nature illustrates a diverse range of phenomena, encompassing language, understanding, and pleasant and unpleasant experiences.⁴³

Examples of dependent arising in Drakpa Gyeltsen's text, such as the seal and the mirror, bear associations with tantric ritual practice alongside their more general applications for demonstrating cause and effect in the Mahāyāna context. Drakpa Gyeltsen explains:

When stamping a physical seal made of goat or sheep [horn] and so forth, in sealing wax or clay, an image which resembles it appears. They do not transfer there, but without relying on those, there would be no manifestation. Thus, one understands the absence of going and coming.⁴⁴

The nature of the image on the seal does not move between the matrix and the material upon which it is impressed; the image only appears as a result of a conjunction of causes and conditions. Tantric connotations of the seal, such as the "great seal" or *mahāmudrā*—the very goal of the Lamdré system—as well as the sexual practice with a consort, augment the use of this example in conjunction with the many references to sealing appearances that pepper the text. For a tantric practitioner, the example of the mirror may also prompt a recollection of the mirror consecration—one of the ritual stages in Vajrayāna initiation practice—where it is used to challenge the ordinary sense of a "self" in catalyzing the realization of identity with buddhahood.⁴⁵

Drakpa Gyeltsen thereby uses exemplification to move beyond the realization that what we are experiencing is an illusion to break down the nature of mind and reality. Rather than merely attesting to the illusory nature of things, this approach involves revealing *how* the illusion comes to appear, meant to produce a state "free from the reification and repudiation of phenomena."⁴⁶ The practitioner therefore utilizes the examples to realize the "absence of going and coming" and proceeds to "mix" or evaluate it in relation to the object and is instructed to cultivate accordingly.⁴⁷

These examples provide a clue as to how appearances may be approached in order to understand all phenomena to be “devoid of arising and ceasing.”⁴⁸

The final section of the teaching on the three piths of practice completes the discussion of naturelessness with examples of inexpressibility, using four common metaphors and four uncommon ones. The common examples of inexpressibility repurpose the dream metaphor to present the dream of a person who cannot hear or speak and include additional experiences beyond language, such as the laughter of an infant, scratching an itch, and sexual pleasure. The uncommon examples employ references to Vajrayāna ritual and tantric physiology that transcend classic Mahāyāna metaphors for the limits of language. Both common and uncommon examples include intensely embodied elements—the fact that the scientific explanation for the itch has kept scientists busy into the current era attests to the confounding aspect of even the common examples.⁴⁹ Yet the juxtaposition of ordinary sexual pleasure with the bliss resulting from ritual union with a consort is a reminder of the decidedly tantric dimension of Drakpa Gyeltsen’s *Inseparability* and its attention to some more subtle aspects of embodiment. These rarefied examples are only intelligible to the tantric adept—a practitioner who has undergone the initiation process and undertaken the practice of cultivating a divine identity through the “rites of accomplishment,” or *sādhana*, under the guidance of an empowered teacher. These techniques include ways of tapping into the body’s implicit structure of channels, winds, and drops to attain awakening.⁵⁰ By incorporating such methods, the phenomenological dimension of tantric practice is prominent in this section. Initiation and *sādhana* provide the context for experiences that eventuate from practice for the adept, experiences that are considered extraordinary rather than shared.

The uncommon examples include “the wave of enjoyment,” an experience elicited by applying pressure to a specific pathway for the movement of winds; the “maṇḍala circle,” connected with the completion stage of *sādhana*, and the “meditative absorption of the secret” associated with practice with a wisdom *mudrā* or consort. In addition, the “wisdom of the third” conjures the ritual structure of the wisdom-gnosis consecration, the third of four stages of tantric initiation, and is referenced elsewhere in Drakpa Gyeltsen’s text as the “exemplary wisdom of realization” or simply “exemplary wisdom.”⁵¹ This particular form of wisdom appears in Drakpa Gyeltsen’s discussion of the ritual context of the body-method continuum, wherein tantric initiation is “the empowerment for ripening” that is vital for realizing the inseparability of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.⁵² Exemplary wisdom also plays a part in his discussion of tantric *sādhana*, referred to as the path of liberation, likewise considered essential to knowing inseparability. There, Drakpa Gyeltsen describes how this particular form of wisdom is introduced in completion stage practice to facilitate the disciple’s attainment of the “resultant wisdom of buddhahood.” This introduction is a way of “mutually sealing the cause and the fruit.”⁵³ I will return to the ritual context for exemplary wisdom at the conclusion of this article to elucidate the manner in which wisdom and exemplification are thereby deeply intertwined within the Lamdré pedagogy.

As pedagogical tools, examples function to make complex ideas more accessible, but they are only intelligible insofar as the student has a context for understanding them. Much as a city of *gandharvas* may not work for an audience that lacks grounding in the Indic literary imagination, the uncommon examples are only effective for initiates of the tantric ritual world. While the majority of examples in Drakpa Gyeltsen’s *Inseparability* appeal to the commonality of human experience and many are drawn from a broader Indo-Tibetan literary and philosophical context,

the uncommon examples of the naturelessness and ultimate inexpressibility have a narrower appeal. The intertextual dimension of Drakpa Gyeltsen's teaching on the three piths of practice, together with the polysemy of the metaphors employed, traverses the realms of the sūtras and tantras. And yet, Drakpa Gyeltsen's invocation of Nāgārjuna's teachings on dependent arising in the third section on naturelessness is both preceded and followed by a host of citations from the Hevajra tantras and the Lamdré masters in the teachings on the first two piths. The uncommon examples of inexpressibility therefore compound the decidedly tantric focus of the text suggested by its citations, while solidifying a connection between wisdom and exemplification.

Synthesizing the Three Piths of Practice

In this culminating section of his teachings on the piths, Drakpa Gyeltsen displays a performative approach to exemplification in which no example is absolute but is only valuable insofar as it can be applied. Drakpa Gyeltsen synthesizes the teachings on the three piths of practice by selecting one example from each and showing how each can be used to teach all stages of the practice of realizing appearances as mind, illusion, dependently arisen, and inexpressible (and thereby natureless). From among the examples of dependent arising, he selects the seed:

Since externally there is no other creator, it is mind. And since many fruits are produced because of having relied upon many causes, such as a flawless seed and so forth, the mind is an illusion. And without relying upon the seed, the sprout does not arise. However, the seed does not become a sprout; therefore, it is unobstructed. Because it is free of arising and ceasing, it is dependently arisen. And because it is not possible to express that as it is experienced, it is free from expression.⁵⁴

In this passage, Drakpa Gyeltsen builds upon the disciple's familiarity with one connection between the nature of mind and an example to reveal a host of connections between the realizations of the piths of practice.⁵⁵ He also conveys the interchangeability of examples in a similar way to Sakyapa descriptions of the relationality of the three continua of cause, path, and fruit as fluid.

In summarizing his teaching of the three piths, Drakpa Gyeltsen tailors the use of examples to accord with different levels of Buddhist practitioners and presents the resulting forms of wisdom. He describes individuals who are reliant upon the common examples as possessing a view endowed with poison, whereas those who effectively employ the uncommon examples are described as possessing a view that is "exemplary wisdom devoid of poison."⁵⁶ The aptitude of these practitioners, for whom the uncommon examples are accessible means of attaining coemergence—evocative of the coemergent wisdom of the *Hevajra Tantra*—varies based upon their mastery of winds, energies characterized by their movement through the body's gross and—in this context especially—subtle aspects. If they have cultivated these winds, the practitioners may realize coemergent wisdom by using the third empowerment, the maṇḍala, or the meditative absorption of the secret, esoteric examples connected with the experiences derived from the ritual processes of initiation and sādhana. Such practitioners are classified by Drakpa Gyeltsen as advanced. Intermediate practitioners lack such mastery of the winds and therefore rely instead upon the wave of enjoyment. For both intermediate and superior practitioners, a single example may suffice to realize inexpressibility.

Moreover, the author parses the forms of wisdom as an exemplary wisdom of the view of the time of the path—the duration of tantric practice conceived in terms of the schema of four consecrations and typically linked to the ritual cycles of Hevajra—and true wisdom, which occurs on the path of seeing and above.⁵⁷ Examples are not absolutes in this pedagogy, but rather tools deployed with attention to the experience of the practitioner, who ultimately moves beyond them.

Recollecting the Moon on Water

In our conversations regarding exemplary wisdom and its place within the broader schema of possible levels of realization, my mentor Drakpa Gyatso, a scholar-monk at the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu, frequently invoked the example of the moon’s reflection on water. This metaphor foregrounds the representational aspect of exemplary wisdom together with the role of representation in providing a glimpse of the true nature of reality. In comparing the sūtra and tantra paths in terms of this exemplary wisdom, Drakpa Gyatso correlated it to the level of the categorized ultimate truth in both the sūtras and tantras.⁵⁸

Table 2: Internal Organization of Two Truths According to the Sūtras and Tantras

Perspectives on Reality	Sūtra	Tantra
False conventional truth	“I am a rabbit with horns.”	“I am Rae Dachille.”
Correct conventional truth	“I am Rae Dachille.”	“I am Vajrasattva.”
Categorized ultimate truth	Imagination of the ultimate truth still impeded by conceptuality; occurs on the path of application	Realization like a moon on water; occurs on the path of application
Ultimate truth	True realization beginning at the first of ten grounds (<i>bhūmi</i>) of a bodhisattva	True realization beginning at the first of ten grounds of a bodhisattva

The categorized and conceptual nature of this approximation of ultimate truth also refers to its figurative and metaphorical nature. The exemplary wisdom therefore indicates the way in which examples are implemented in tantric ritual contexts to facilitate a unique experience, one that, in Drakpa Gyatso’s estimation, offers a more intense and vivid approximation of ultimate truth than is possible through the sūtras. While the terminology of the categorized ultimate truth does not appear in Drakpa Gyeltsen’s text and Sakyapa articulations of the two truths are a rich topic of

scholarly discussion that exceeds the scope of this article, both explanatory frameworks rely on a distinction between actual truth and wisdom from their metaphorical or exemplary counterparts.⁵⁹

On the Ritual Context for Exemplary Wisdom

To better understand the relationship between wisdom and exemplification in Drakpa Gyeltsen's text and to consider the vividness of tantric experience described by my mentor, I conclude my investigation of appearances in *Inseparability* by contextualizing exemplary wisdom within the sphere of tantric ritual.

As briefly mentioned above, Drakpa Gyeltsen addresses the ritual backdrop for attaining exemplary wisdom in the greatest detail in his discussion of the three continua, the section following the account of the three piths of practice upon which most of this article has been focused. Moreover, the empowerment activities that ripen the practitioner as well as the completion stage practices of *sādhana* that liberate—both tied to the body-method continuum, also referred to as the path continuum—are of primary interest for understanding how exemplary wisdom is both generated and surpassed. In the first of the four consecration stages of empowerment, the vase consecration, all aspects of personhood are purified and transformed into the “three seats” of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and wrathful deities. The goal is to progress toward the realization of the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* through equating the purifier and the purified as well as the cause and the fruit. Then, in the secret consecration, a deeper level of transformation is achieved, with the channels and syllables—subtle aspects of embodied potentiality referred to collectively as the “vajra body”—serving as the abode or seat for divine identities. Even the drop of the “mind of enlightenment,” or *bodhicitta*—a term that contains multiple meanings with both literal and figurative dimensions such as altruistic intention, the seminal component in tantric yoga, and subtle aspects of tantric physiology—bestowed by the guru is understood to contain the most subtle and refined components of the aspects of personhood—aggregates, elements, sense spheres, and joints—as seats for buddhas and their goddess consorts, bodhisattvas, goddesses, and wrathful deities. With the conferral of nectar and wisdom, the disciple's body becomes the abode of wisdom, completing a more profound level of actualizing inseparability.

In the third and fourth consecrations, the link between wisdom and exemplification is most pronounced. In the wisdom-gnosis consecration, the disciple works with the consort to realize the exemplary wisdom through manipulating the mind of enlightenment: “By increasing through descending, retaining, reversing, pervading, and maintaining without decline, the exemplary wisdom of realization is generated.”⁶⁰ Finally, concerning the realization of the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* in the culminating ritual phase of initiation, Drakpa Gyeltsen writes, “At the time of the cause, through the fourth empowerment, the exemplary wisdom, which is superior to the third, is produced.”⁶¹ Having undergone all of these steps, the disciple is prepared to engage in the generation and completion stages of *sādhana*, the topic of the ensuing section of Drakpa Gyeltsen's text.

What role do the complex ritual acts of imagination in the generation stage play in realizing the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*? According to Drakpa Gyeltsen, when the wisdom of buddhahood manifests outwardly—literally “appears” as other than itself—it appears as the celestial palace.⁶² Moreover, the symbolic power of the qualities and attributes of the deities

inhabiting that palace—such as their colors—exerts an overall purificatory effect, consecrating the afflictions as wisdom.⁶³ The revelatory potential of illustrating deeper realities through symbols indicated by this schema—in which the symbolic postures of deities are equated with saṃsāra and their symbolic referent with nirvāṇa—accords with the power of exemplification so vividly attested by the thirty examples within the teachings on the three piths of practice that were the primary focus of this article.⁶⁴ As in the case of the three piths, Drakpa Gyeltsen encourages the practitioner to “mix” the generation stage with the inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

As for the completion stage, Drakpa Gyeltsen describes a process of producing wisdom via either self-consecration or cultivating the maṇḍala deities, a process in which “sealing” is essential to liberation.⁶⁵ For example, one “seals” one’s gross and subtle corporeal aspects with the buddhas and their attendant wisdoms, and thereby makes it “possible to illustrate the true wisdom of the path of seeing.”⁶⁶ On this basis, Drakpa Gyeltsen calls for the introduction of exemplary wisdom.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

In these teachings on the inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, Drakpa Gyeltsen explains the connection between wisdom and exemplification, outlines a ritual program for introducing exemplary wisdom, and qualifies the limits of this glimpse of true wisdom. Despite this caveat, the overall effect of the text celebrates the power to symbolize the wisdom of buddhahood through exemplification and metaphorical thinking.

The explanation of the three piths of practice illuminates the boldly phenomenological use of examples in Drakpa Gyeltsen’s text. I have explained how some of these examples or metaphors are familiar from the pan-Indian context as well as the broader Mahāyāna tradition, while others appeal exclusively to the experience of adepts steeped in tantric ritual and physiology. Moreover, Drakpa Gyeltsen demonstrates the potential of examples to “mix” and “seal” apparent rifts in experience. He skillfully mixes and matches examples to synthesize realizations of the piths of practice and illustrates their interchangeability for teaching appearances as mind, illusion, and naturelessness. Likewise, he tailors examples to the varied aptitudes of students, stratifying the experiences and attainment available to each.

Perspective is consequential both for how appearances are perceived and how they are used. The term for “appearance” in Drakpa Gyeltsen’s text also corresponds to “vision,” as in the case of the three visions. There are also instances in the text in which “appearance” indicates experience more generally. Appearances can be both the unintentional manifestations of karma as well as the glimpses of reality witnessed by the adept in tantric initiation and in daily sādha practice. The connection between appearance and experience is especially strong in the case of the experiential appearance of the tantric adept, based upon their cultivation of these ritual processes. Even the experience of the three buddha bodies attained by the adept who has perfected these practices is taught to be “not an actual buddha” but rather the “experiential appearance.”⁶⁸ In the space between the glimpse of buddhahood and buddhahood itself, the practitioner experiences conviction, joy, and delight.⁶⁹

For the Sakyapa, making sense of appearances lays the groundwork for profound transformation in the moments free of appearance, in the gap between one thought and the next. Ritual, philosophy, and experience converge in Drakpa Gyeltsen’s use of examples. As he tells us in the colophon to his root text about the teachings on the inseparability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa:

When heard, one is fascinated as though by celestial music.
When contemplated, one is satisfied as by tasting nectar.
When cultivated, one comes to attain the elixir of immortality.
That which is endowed with the three examples is bestowed upon you.⁷⁰

Fascination and satisfaction are clues as to what it feels like to encounter these teachings and to meditate upon them; with the “elixir of immortality,” Drakpa Gyeltsen even provides a glimpse of the reward to be gained from diligently applying their meaning. As pedagogical tools linking theory and practice, facilitating an intensified experience of the gap between how things truly are and how they appear, and simulating the enlightened state, examples thereby illuminate meanings and fulfill desires, as Drakpa Gyeltsen’s text itself—the *Jewel Appearance* or *Illuminating Jewel*—claims to do.⁷¹

NOTES

* I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Drakpa Gyatso of the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu for his mentorship in studying the texts of the Sakya tradition. I claim any errors in translation or interpretation as my own.

¹ Pollan, *A World Appears*, 239.

² Pollan, *A World Appears*, 50.

³ For example, Sur's translation and study of the work of the Tibetan Dzogchen master Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (mid-eleventh to early twelfth century) provides a key instance in which appearances are central to an overarching approach to Buddhist philosophy. Rongzom ranks philosophical views according to the degree of attachment they exhibit toward appearances and celebrates the Dzogchen view as unique in its ability to demonstrate the equality of phenomena through their illusory nature. Sur also examines the complexities of translating *snang ba* as "appearance" in light of its subjective and objective components. The text that serves as the focus of the present article likewise varies in its use of the term, an issue to which I return at the article's conclusion. See Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo, *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*. For an exploration of the relationship between metaphor (*upacāra*) and appearance (*ākṛti*) in the Indian Buddhist context of Vasubandhu's thought, see Gold, "Yogācāra Strategies against Realism."

⁴ Appearances (*snang ba*).

⁵ Examples and metaphors (*dpe*).

⁶ For the root text, see Rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan, '*Khor 'das dbyer med rtsa ba*. For the autocommentary, see Mkhan po a pad, '*Khor 'das dbyer med kyi lta ba'i 'grel pa*.

⁷ "Cittamātrin" refers to the "Mind Only" tradition (*sems tsam pa*) of Mahāyāna thought and more specifically the Yogācāra tradition. This focus upon consciousness suggests that "the sensible world depends for its nature and existence on being cognised by the mind" (Szanyi, "Yogācāra"). Many Tibetan authors refer fluidly to Cittamātrin, Vijñāptimātrin, and Yogācārin proponents and views and, in many cases, contest their suggestion that the mind itself is "real."

⁸ Stearns, *Taking the Result as the Path*, 25. The term *sugata* (literally one who is "well-gone") refers to a buddha.

⁹ Nyag refers to Nyag Wangchuk Gyeltsen. Stearns, *Taking the Result as the Path*, 2. See Stearns's translation of Sachen's treatise (*Taking the Result as the Path*, 23–128), especially the brief section on the three appearances (25–27), followed by the section on the three continua (27–47). Stearns does not include a translation of Drakpa Gyeltsen's interlinear notes on this text.

¹⁰ Note that Virūpa refers explicitly to the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* ('*khor 'das dbyer med*) only one time in his *Vajra Lines*, where it appears in a crucial moment leading up to the attainment of the path of seeing in which the disciple realizes the content of the lama's teaching that he received earlier, during the process of tantric initiation; see Virūpa, *Vajra Lines* (*Rdo rje'i tshig rkang*), 15.6. For Stearns's translation of the text, see Stearns, *Taking the Result as the Path*, 25–27. Davidson observes that commentaries on the three visions typically employ this format of support (*rten*), cause (*rgyu*), and appearance (*snang ba*). Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, appendix 2, 493n1; for Davidson's translation of the *Vajra Lines*, see 477–488. For the reference to the path of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* in common ('*khor 'das thun mong gi lam*) in Sachen's *Explication of the Treatise for Nyag*, see 23.2.

¹¹ Stearns, *Taking the Result as the Path*, 26.

¹² Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 358.

¹³ Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 357–358.

¹⁴ For discussions on how the term "coemergent" (*lhan gcig skyes pa*) transgresses the boundaries of the sūtras and tantras, see Broido, "Padma dKar-po on the Two *Satyas*"; Davidson, "Reframing *Sahaja*"; and Kvaerne, "On the Concept of *Sahaja*."

¹⁵ Three continua (*rgyud gsum*).

¹⁶ Unity of clarity and emptiness (*gsal stong zung 'jug*).

¹⁷ Drakpa Gyeltsen also wrote on the theme of the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* in his *Jeweled Tree for the Realization of Tantra* (*Rgyud kyi mngon par rtogs pa rin po che'i ljon shing*), completed by 1196. That text is regarded as a continuation of Sönam Tsemo's incomplete *General Principles of the Tantric Canon* (*Rgyud*

sde spyi'i rnam par gzhas pa) and provides a promising source of comparison with Drakpa Gyeltsen's later presentation of the theme of inseparability in terms of three continua in the root text and autocommentary discussed in the present study. See Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 347, 444n81, and 364. *kun gzhi rgyu rgyud; lus thabs rgyud; phyag rgya chen po 'bras bu'i rgyud*. Foundational causal continuum (*kun gzhi rgyu rgyud*); body-method continuum (*lus thabs rgyud*); and Mahāmudrā resultant continuum (*phyag rgya chen po 'bras bu'i rgyud*).

¹⁸ Natureless (*rang bzhin med pa*).

¹⁹ Tzohar describes the manner in which Yogācāra authors repeated and repurposed the metaphors from Indian philosophical traditions, with attention to the influence of non-Buddhist authors developing a philosophy of language, such as Bhartṛhari. Tzohar's approach to polysemy and the performative uses of language by Buddhist authors is especially relevant to the present study. See Tzohar, *Yogācāra Buddhist Theory of Metaphor*, chaps. 2–3.

²⁰ Parting from the four attachments (*zhen pa bzhi bral*).

²¹ See especially Rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshen, *Zhen pa bzhi bral gyi gdams pa*, 597.3–597.6.

²² For the attribution of the interlinear to Sakya Paṇḍita, see the commentary by Chogye Trichen Rinpoche (1920–2007), Chogye Trichen, *Parting from the Four Attachments*, 74.

²³ I have provisionally translated *'phrogs pa'i zla ba* as “fascinating moon” in the sense of *yid 'phrog*, as suggested by my mentor Drakpa Gyatso of the International Buddhist Academy. “Vanishing moon” would be another option. For Drakpa Gyeltsen's discussion of this phenomenon in the southeastern land of Harikela, see Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 215.6–216.2. It is possible that the illusion is produced by brackish water or by a salt lake.

²⁴ These refer to a type of celestial being.

²⁵ I am grateful to Daisy Cheung for sharing references from the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī/Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*, as well as for suggesting further resources for investigating the examples of illusion. For a study of the use of dreams and illusions within the *Prajñāpāramitā*, see Huifeng, “Illusion.” On the Vijñānavāda context, in addition to Tzohar's work, see Hattori, “The Dream Simile.” In Tibet, the dream is among the eight examples of illusion employed by the fourteenth-century Dzogchen master Longchenpa (1308–1364) as well. See Sheehy, “Cognitive Illusion, Lucid Dreaming, and the Psychology of Metaphor.”

²⁶ Lindsay examines the role of dreams in the life of Drakpa Gyeltsen through an autobiographical text. Lindsay, “Death for a Buddhist Dreamer,” 938. For more on Drakpa Gyeltsen's relationship to dreams, see Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 350–352.

²⁷ Tutelary deity (*yi dam*).

²⁸ Mix with appearance (*snang ba sres*). The language of “mixing” is also found in Nāropa's teachings on appearances. See Torricelli, “Tibetan Text of Tilopa's Śaḍdharmopadeśa,” 155n31.

²⁹ “Having relaxed awareness for a moment within that exceptional certainty, as for settling the mind, rest in that state” (Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 210.6).

³⁰ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 211.2–211.3. See section 211.1–211.3 on the subsequent practices.

³¹ Many of these examples of perceptual distortion are invoked in the commentary to the *Vākyapadīya* of Bhartṛhari (450–510 CE). See the interpretation on *Vākyapadīya* 2.289: “Whatever discrepancy is noticed due to certain visible circumstances that bring about the aberration of the actual object, that discrepancy is termed untruth.” Cited in Tzohar, *Yogācāra Buddhist Theory of Metaphor*, 54.

³² On Drakpa Gyeltsen's description of four alternative and experientially-rooted *pramāṇas*, see Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 243.1–243.4. For an initial exploration of these, see Sobisch, “Tibetan Interpretations of Authenticity.”

³³ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 213.3–213.4.

³⁴ Separating *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* (*'khor 'das ru shan*). Acts such as jumping, spinning, and dancing are the crux of these bodily practices, followed by complementary activities of speech and mind. See especially 308.5–309.3 in Vimalamitra's text, *Shin tu spros med kyi gdab 'khor 'das ru shan dbye ba'i lag len bra khrid*. I am grateful to Jacob Dalton, James Gentry, and Khenpo Yeshe for directing me to consider this comparison.

³⁵ This sense conveyed by the repetition of the language of being distorted by (*kyis bslad*), which also bears the sense of contamination.

³⁶ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 213.3 (on all phenomena as the mind's sphere of activity) and 213.5–213.6 (quotation).

³⁷ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 213.6–214.2. The *Saṃpuṭa* citation also mentions the dream.

³⁸ The language of mixing and sealing includes terms such as *bsres* and *rgya bcad*. Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 214.5–215.6. The translation of *rgya bcad* merits further examination.

³⁹ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 216.4–216.6.

⁴⁰ See translation of 8.34 in rJe Tsong khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 217–218.

⁴¹ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 217.2–217.3. For these examples in Nāgārjuna's *Pratītyasamutpādhādayakārikā*, see Adam Pearcey, "The Heart of Dependent Origination," Lotsawa House, 2008, <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/indian-masters/nagarjuna/heart-dependent-origination>.

⁴² Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 217.1–217.2.

⁴³ Tzohar discusses Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha* 2.26, 27, in his study of metaphor, remarking upon the wide range of sometimes contradictory meanings of the figures and their exegetical potential: "Formulaic, repetitive, and replicated across various Mahāyāna texts with little variation, they possess, first, a certain 'givenness.'" Tzohar, *Yogācāra Buddhist Theory of Metaphor*, 209–212. Tzohar references Keenan's study of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (*Summary of the Great Vehicle*, 51–52).

⁴⁴ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 218.5–218.6. I have emended *lugs* to *lug* in consultation with Drakpa Gyatso and read *la ca* in accord with the more typical spelling as *la cha*. I would tentatively suggest that horn is the type of animal material used to create the seal.

⁴⁵ In his commentary on Drakpa Gyeltsen's song on "parting from the four attachments," Chogye Trichen Rinpoche describes how the reflection of a conch shell in the mirror and the ringing of a bell are incorporated in tantric initiation to use the principle of causality to lead practitioners towards the realization of things as they truly are (*dharmatā*). Chogye Trichen, *Parting from the Four Attachments*, 169.

⁴⁶ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 218.1.

⁴⁷ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 218.4–218.5.

⁴⁸ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 220.3.

⁴⁹ "Itch and the Brain," Harvard Medical School, effective August 23, 2011, <https://hms.harvard.edu/news/itch-brain>.

⁵⁰ Channels, winds, and drops (*rtsa rlung thig le*).

⁵¹ The four extraordinary examples are the following: wisdom of the third (*gsum pa'i ye shes*), referred to as the "exemplary wisdom of realization" (*rtogs pa dpe'i ye shes*) or simply "exemplary wisdom" (*dpe'i ye shes*); meditative absorption of the secret (*gsang ba'i snyoms 'jug*); wave of enjoyment (*longs spyod rlabs*); maṇḍala circle (*dkyil 'khor 'khor lo*). See 221.1–221.2 and 222.4–223.1.

⁵² Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 228.3–231.4.

⁵³ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 237.3–239.2.

⁵⁴ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 223.6–224.2.

⁵⁵ In his mixing and matching of metaphors here, Drakpa Gyeltsen demonstrates the kind of "hermeneutical flexibility" described by Tzohar in his study of the use of metaphor by Yogācāra authors. Tzohar considers such lists of examples to invite the inventive approach to exegesis found in the use of Buddhist lists more broadly, referring to Gethin's seminal work on the latter. Tzohar, *Yogācāra Buddhist Theory of Metaphor*, 212.

⁵⁶ See Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 225.1–225.2. Exemplary wisdom devoid of poison (*dug med dpe'i ye shes*).

⁵⁷ See Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 224.4–225.1. Kapstein compares the parsing of these two forms of wisdom to the distinction between the varieties of self-awareness (*rang rig*) in the writings of Mipham: "The relationship, for Mi-pham, between *rang rig* at the moment of the introduction and the *so so rang rig* of enlightenment is precisely similar to that which obtains between *dpe'i ye shes* (*jñāna* as exemplified [in an initiatory context]) and the *don gyi ye shes* (genuine *jñāna*) [as realized following the cultivation of the path]) in the new tantric schools, including the Dge-lugs-pa." Kapstein, "We Are All Gzhan stong pas," 117. True wisdom (*don gyi ye shes*).

⁵⁸ Komarovski describes the differing approaches to this bifurcation of ultimate truth into categorized and uncategorized varieties in the thought of the Indian Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika traditions, as understood by the fifteenth-century Sakyapa thinker Gorampa (Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge, 1429–1489). For Gorampa,

“although a provisional distinction is made into two types of the ultimate—the metaphorical ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) and concordant ultimate (*don dam rjes mthun pa*) and the nonmetaphorical ultimate (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*) or real ultimate (*don dam mtshan nyid pa*)—only this latter type of emptiness is the ultimate reality.” Komarovski, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 216–218. For an exploration of the implications of this categorization of ultimate truth for thinkers from the Geluk and Nyingma traditions, see Garfield, “Thinking Beyond Thought,” especially 338–339.

Gorampa's influence endures within Sakyapa tradition today. In his commentary on Sakya Paṇḍita's renowned treatise on the three vows, he highlights exemplary wisdom as a marker of the tantric path's superiority. Komarovski, “If Apprehending Occurs,” 157–158.

⁵⁹ For analyses of the Sakyapa approach to the two truths, see Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom from Extremes*; Kassor, “Gorampa [go rams pa]”; and Thakchoe, *Two Truths Debate*.

⁶⁰ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 231.1.

⁶¹ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 231.3.

⁶² Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 232.5–232.6.

⁶³ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 234.5.

⁶⁴ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 236.6.

⁶⁵ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 238.5.

⁶⁶ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 239.1.

⁶⁷ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 239.1.

⁶⁸ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 242.6.

⁶⁹ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 242.6–243.1.

⁷⁰ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 247.2–247.3. See also Rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan, *'Khor 'das dbyer med*, 2a.7–2a.8.

⁷¹ Drakpa Gyeltsen, *Inseparability* autocommentary, 248.1–248.2.

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