

MI LA RAS PA ON THE INTERMEDIATE STATE.
An Introduction and Translation of “Profound Instructions on
the Direct Introduction to the Intermediate State,
Using the Mind to Discriminate the Path”

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Until E. Gene Smith¹ pointed out that the well-known biography and songs of Mi la ras pa had been authored by a major figure of the late 15th century, the “Mad Yogin of gTsang” (gTsang smyon Heruka, 1452-1507), it was widely believed that an immediate disciple of Mi la ras pa composed this hagiographical classic. Recently I have published a book on the biographical tradition in a more developed form, which includes translations and discussion of early biographies and oral teachings attributed to the great rJe btsun of the 11th and 12th centuries.² The present article contributes to a further exploration of the connections between our earliest sources for the songs (*mgur*) of Mi la ras pa and the oral instructions on spiritual practice (*gdams ngag*) that continue to circulate in manuscript form among *sngags pa* yogins³ in the Himalayas to the present day.

This is not the place to go into the historical and literary details surrounding Tibetan written sources.⁴ The long-term task of establishing authentic sources requires a study of manuscripts and xylographs produced over many centuries. At times, the texts were copied by scribes who transcribed the text as it was being read aloud to them, a method that inevitably leads to errors because of the numerous homonyms in spoken Tibetan. Moreover, the tradition itself encouraged editorial transformation and creativity. In the case of Mi la ras pa, it is clear that later biographers, particularly 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392-1481) in the *Blue Annals*, and gTsang smyon Heruka, made use of literary sources. 'Gos Lo tsā ba sifted the sources critically, claiming that “many were spurious”.⁵ In my published work, I have shown how gTsang smyon edited and in many cases creatively re-wrote the songs and stories of Mi la ras pa to promote a unique program of reform in the critical period of the late

1 See Smith 2001: 59-80.

2 See Tiso 2014. Hereafter: *LL*.

3 The *sngags pa* are Buddhist and Bon po yogins, usually lay practitioners of the “peripheral” regions of Tibetan culture. They are often married while directing a village temple.

4 See *LL*: Chapters 3-6.

5 See Roerich 1979: 432. Hereafter: *BA*.

15th and early 16th centuries. One source that is particularly relevant for our task in presenting Mi la ras pa's teachings on the intermediate state (*bar do*) has received very little attention from scholars. This is the *Bu chen bcu gnyis mi la rnam thar mgur 'bum*, existing in two nearly complete manuscripts,⁶ offering a compilation of Mi la ras pa's life story along with episodes of his years as a wandering yogin, encountering disciples and manifesting his enlightened consciousness. Although the work is attributed to the twelve disciples (*bu chen bcu gnyis*) present with Mi la ras pa on retreat at the time of his death, to a great extent the bKa' brgyud pa oral tradition⁷ recognizes that this work was primarily the achievement of a nearly forgotten disciple, Ngam rdzong ras pa, heir to Mi la ras pa's formal transmission of the *bde mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud* teachings. In fact, the two more famous disciples of Mi la ras pa, Ras chung pa (1083-1161) and sGam po pa (1079-1153), were also heirs to these teachings. However, the *lHo rong* account of bKa' brgyud lineage biographies⁸ alludes to the role of Ngam rdzong ras pa as the source of Mi la ras pa's biographical tradition. This Ngam rdzong is the same person as Bodhi Radza (Rāja) who, with Zhi ba 'od, is among the closest disciples said to be present at Mi la ras pa's demise. These two disciples are enshrined in the *Songs of Mi la ras pa* as compilers of the "Rosary of Golden Pearls", chapters 29-31 of the well-known version redacted by gTsang smyon Heruka. It is important from the outset to note that, although gTsang smyon edited the songs of Mi la ras pa with great literary freedom, he did not do so with the "Rosary of Golden Pearls". On the contrary, these esoteric episodes of encounters with the five Tshe ring ma (Long-Life) goddesses have undergone little or no alteration from the nearly forgotten *Bu chen bcu gnyis* version in their far better known presentation in the *mgur 'bum* of gTsang smyon. It seems to us that the Mad Yogin was particularly persuaded that the legacy of Bodhi Radza and Shi ba 'od was an authentic transmission of Mi la ras pa's teachings.

The transformations in Tibetan Buddhism at the end of the 10th and during the first half of the 11th centuries have often been discussed,⁹ but the contradictions inherent to native accounts have not been fully elucidated. The role of local figures, particularly free-lance translators and *sngags pa* such as Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros of lHo brag (1012-1097), have been subordinated to other notables in the traditional narratives of the history of Dharma in Tibet. Nevertheless, Mar pa and his most famous disciple, Mi la ras pa, played key roles in the "later" or "second" diffusion of Vajrayāna from India to the Tibetan cultural zone, which also impacted the Himalayan Buddhist lineages present since at least the 8th century.

6 See *Bu chen bcu gnyis* (Tibetan Book Collection of the Newark Museum). Another, unfortunately incomplete, manuscript is kept in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (OX1 3BG Ms Tib. B. 2).

7 Oral comments courtesy of H. H. Chetsang Rinpoche of the Drikung Kagyu, 1997.

8 *lHo rong chos 'byung* (1446): 151-52 (The life of rJe Ngam rdzong ras pa); BA: 449-51.

9 See Tucci 1980: chapters 1 and 2; Kapstein 2006: chapters 3 and 4.

David Germano has contrasted the tantrism of the second diffusion with earlier forms of the practice known as *rDzogs chen* (*rDzogs pa chen po*), referring to the former as “funerary Buddhism” with its strong emphasis on death processes and charnel ground symbolism.¹⁰ He has shown, in ways that are partly sustained by other scholars,¹¹ that *rDzogs chen* masters gradually incorporated this “funerary” approach in the course of the 12th century. To elucidate these developments, we need a working hypothesis. To that end, I would propose a reading of Mi la ras pa’s oral teachings on the *bar do* that contextualizes the rJe btsun’s contribution to this tendency in the transformation of *sngags pa* tantric Buddhism in the Himalayas. Given Mi la ras pa’s intensive training under Bon po and rNying ma masters early in his life, his approach is of great importance for understanding the history of both the bKa’ brgyud order and of the 12th century evolution of *rDzogs chen*.

Bryan Cuevas¹² has indicated that the Mi la ras pa oral teaching on the *bar do* plays a key role in the development of distinctly Tibetan notions of the postmortem journey. Cuevas also points out the relationship between the oral teaching and the *bar do* songs in the “Rosary of Golden Pearls”, taking note of the probable antiquity of this particular literary source.¹³ Checking the standard editions¹⁴ of gTsang smyon’s chapters 29-31 of the *Songs* against the *Bu chen bcu gnyis* version of the same material, we can confirm that in this instance gTsang smyon reproduces the text of this very early literary source.

Following Cuevas’ reading of these materials in relation to his masterful examination of the *Bar do thos grol* (the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead*),¹⁵ we may understand why Mi la ras pa became a pivotal figure in the transformation of Himalayan Vajrayāna during the twelfth century. As we know from the earliest biographical accounts of Mi la ras pa,¹⁶ having learned the arts of destructive magic from Bon po and Buddhist (rNying ma) *sngags pa* masters, the rJe btsun proceeded to destroy those members of his family who, upon the death of his father, had grievously oppressed Mila’s mother, sister, and himself. These acts of vindication gave rise to remorse. Mi la ras pa sought out a master who might be able to assure him of “*liberation in one lifetime*” so as to evade the karmic consequences of his evil

10 See Germano 2005.

11 See for example Van Schaik 2004.

12 See Cuevas 2003: 46-57. Cuevas discusses the impact of these innovations on *rDzogs chen* on pages 57-68. Hereafter: *HH*.

13 A critical comparison of the two texts would extend the length of this article beyond its assigned limits.

14 See Rus pa’i rgyan can 1989: Chapter 30, pp. 489-517.

15 Cuevas outlines the history of this text, and its reception by Western scholarship, on pages 3-24, with due caution regarding redactions that manuscript and block print editions may have undergone since their discovery by an “obscure fourteenth-century mystic named Karma Ling pa” (*HH*: 14).

16 Several of these are translated in *LL*: Chapter 24.

deeds. Mi la ras pa underwent a conversion experience, a life changing “intermediate state” by becoming painfully aware of his own inability to confront the postmortem *bar do* and the hellish rebirth that awaits those who do harmful deeds. The master he sought out, Bre ston lHa dga’,¹⁷ was a teacher of the *rDzogs chen* system, traceable to several masters going back to the late 8th century. lHa dga’s method for teaching *rDzogs chen* failed to address the karmic burden that Mi la ras pa was bearing. Instead of rapid liberation, the repentant sorcerer experienced torpor. This particular episode seems to have become a crucial feature in the way the “new tantras” being introduced into Tibet by Mar pa and other *sngags pa* masters were to be presented as “superior” to earlier systems known in Tibet. *rDzogs chen* in its earliest form sought to place the yogin in direct contact with the true nature of reality by awakening intuitive cognition in what is called a “direct introduction” in which the disciple glimpses an unconditioned state of awareness of phenomena in the presence of an accomplished master. This “introduction” serves as a point of reference for subsequent contemplative training and experience in this system. The problem with the method is that the disciple needs to be quite spiritually advanced in order to benefit from the “introduction”. There seems to have been, at least in the lineage of lHa dga’, no fully developed system of *preparation* for the direct introduction. However, the “new tantras” contain abundant methods for preparing the disciple for tantric initiation and subsequent *sādhana* practice. For this reason, Mi la ras pa adhered to Mar pa’s system of tantric transmission, reluctantly transmitted after numerous trials.¹⁸ The fact that Mi la ras pa attained liberation in one lifetime, going on to become a major influence on the development of Vajrayāna in Tibet, created a real challenge to the earlier lineages that taught “pristine” *rDzogs chen*, as was the case with lHa dga’. It was the failure of *rDzogs chen* to lead Mi la ras pa to liberation in one lifetime that may have occasioned a full fledged opening on the part of the *rDzogs chen sngag pa* yogins to new methods of tantric practice, including those meant to enhance the disciple’s ability to enter the path in the first place.¹⁹

For his part, Mi la ras pa seems to have been able to incorporate his knowledge of the earlier systems²⁰ into his own system employing the Six Yogas of Nāropa.²¹ In the

17 LL: 190-91; cf. BA: 429-30.

18 Some of which, such as the construction of a series of towers, seem to have been the literary inventions of the Mad Yogin.

19 The transformation of *rDzogs chen* in the 12th century and thereafter seems to have depended on two strategies: (1) returning to the earliest sources of *rDzogs chen* and reaffirming the lineage in its tantric ritualistic origins, compiled in a canon of rNying ma scriptures and (2) producing apocryphal works (*gter ma*) that promoted the dissemination of “new-old” ritual practices useful to yogins in enhancing *sādhana* practice and to ordinary village laity by providing for their day to day religious concerns. The *Bar do thos grol* clearly serves the latter purpose while not excluding the yogins’ virtuoso interests.

20 See Martin 1982.

21 Mullin 1997.

oral teaching translated below, there are references to the Six Yogas, which Mi la ras pa presents as ways by which all the forms of *bar do* can be encountered fruitfully by the accomplished yogin. Moreover, in Chapter 30 of the *mgur 'bum*, the “Song of Perils in the Intermediate State,” Mi la ras pa encounters the Long Life Goddesses (*tshe ring ma*) at a moment of crisis, itself a kind of *bar do* that brings them into his own circle. In fact, these *ḍākinī* deities are presented as magicians tempted to vindicate themselves, as did the rJe btsun in his early life. Transformed into disciples, the *ḍākinī* become the rJe btsun’s consorts in the practice of the Six Yogas in the Cakrasaṃvara yogic cycle.²²

The text of Mi la ras pa’s “Song of Perils”²³ presents the *bar do* teachings in narrative form. Mi la ras pa is in retreat at Chu bar in autumn of the year of the male wooden horse (1114). An epidemic breaks out among the inhabitants of Ding ma brin. The cause of the outbreak is identified as an act of retaliation by local female divinities for the pollution of the atmosphere caused by a fire set by shepherds. The deities have become ill as a result of the pollution. Mi la ras pa performs a purification ritual for the deities. Later he explains the problem to the villagers and celebrates a purification rite for them as well. Later, the five Long-Life goddesses, accompanied by their familiar spirits and guardians of the site, visit Mi la ras pa in his retreat. The goddesses are described as “*worldly magicians*”, placing them in the same state of karmic risk as Mi la ras pa before his conversion to pure Dharma. The Long-Life deities, ironically, sing a long song about their fear of the Lord of Death. They implore Mi la’s protection and ask for instructions:

- How to recognize the signs of luminosity at the time of death;
- How to identify the sublime Saṃbhogakāya among the illusory forms that manifest in the intermediate state;
- How to recognize the Nirmāṇakāya of a Buddha who is capable of choosing his own rebirth;
- How to find a place of happiness that these rather worldly deities have never known.

Mi la ras pa sings a song of encouragement, outlining the Vajrayāna path as he has received it from the lineage of Tilopa, Nāropa, Maitrīpa, and Mar pa the translator. He tells them that the path of Vajrayāna alone can guide a being securely during the intermediate state that may lead to undesirable rebirths.

The deities offer a ritual requesting initiation. Mi la ras pa sings a song on the *essential teachings on the intermediate state*, which he inherited from the lineage of Nāropa and Mar pa. Since the post-mortem journey is full of risks, one should know the six stages of the *bar do* and the six possible realms of rebirth (celestials - gods and

²² Gray 2007.

²³ Newark Museum, Tibetan Book Collection, 36.280 *Biography of Mi la ras pa*, pp. 177-88. In the “standard” edition of the *Life and Songs of Mi la ras pa* (1989), Chapter 30 is found on pp. 489-517.

titans, humans, and the lower realms of animals, ghosts, and hell beings). As with earlier Buddhist teachings, there are three categories of worlds: the world of the passions, the world of pure form, and the formless world. A person should encounter the Buddha Bodies (*buddha-kāya*)²⁴ in this life. Otherwise, one risks falling into the consequences of one's deeds in the *bar do*. The *bar do* can be a “valley of fear” in which one encounters ghosts, temptations, misleading words, and deceptive pathways. After seven weeks of wandering, by the force of past deeds, the being must pass into yet another rebirth.

Mi la ras pa then recites the basic oral teachings that will later be given to Ras chung pa in the *gdams ngag* genre that we are translating below. Here, the teachings take the form of a sacred song (*mgur*), based on the “heart advice of Mar pa”. Mi la advises the Long-Life deities to:

- Meditate on *mahāmudrā* so as to recognize phenomena in their natural state;²⁵
- In the time allotted between birth and death, one should train in mental agility by meditation on the yogas of creation and completion (the two broad phases of tantric meditation practice²⁶);
- Seek to regain innate wisdom in the “open spaces” that present themselves during meditation by carefully following the oral instructions given by the guru;
- In order to transform bad habits, make use of the practice that links the material body to the clear light during sleeping and dreaming;
- At the conclusion of the intermediate state of becoming, try to reach the Pure Land²⁷ once one has seen the manifestation of the Buddha bodies;
- Should the Buddha bodies not appear during the transitional state just prior to rebirth, one should rely on the law of cause and effect. This means that one should make pure prayers now so that at that time the being will be reborn in a body endowed with the eighteen blessings that are favorable to the attainment of liberation in the next lifetime.

The Long-Life deities reply with an insistent request for entry into a “place” where the Buddha and the Guru may reside, hinting that this “place” is the central channel (*avadhūtī*) of the yogic subtle body. In a text of Vagīśvarakīrti, the *Seven Limbs* (*Saptāṅga*), written during the lifetime of Nāropa, the “place of Vajradhāra” is in fact the *avadhūtī*.²⁸ When the yogin is able to bring all the fluxes of energy in mind and body into the central channel, the state of Vajradhāra, the tantric form of the Buddha,

24 LL: 363, and Chapter 23.

25 LL: 291-92.

26 LL: Table 20.3, pp. 168-69.

27 Pure lands are created by the compassionate merits of a Buddha such as Amitābha or Amitāyus. Cf. Chang 1983: Chapter 18.

28 LL: 269-70.

is attained. This conviction is asserted in the Vajradhāra account that serves as a preface to several bKa' brgyud biographical collections. The Long-Life deities also hint at the “way of messengers” (*pho nya*²⁹), which is believed to bring on ecstasy by opening the subtle channels, so that one may abide in the contemplation of radiant voidness. This is a hint regarding the state of liberation, which unites bliss, luminosity, and voidness. The allusion (“messengers”) refers to *karmamudrā*, the sexual yoga typical of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle. Thanks to the four distinct joys of tantric practice,³⁰ the subtle energy fluxes enter the central channel to facilitate the attainment of enlightenment, in one body, in one lifetime, thus evading the perils of the *bar do*, and attaining liberation in one lifetime. Their song concludes with verses of praise alluding to their desire to practice sexual yoga with the rJe btsun.

Mi la ras pa replies to the deities' song with a description of those who are journeying in cyclic existence:

- There are those who hold and practice the instructions, finally arriving at the desired experiences;
- There are others who hold the instructions, but do not practice them, and;
- there are those who do not even have the instructions.

In order to guide the deities further, Mi la ras pa continues with his oral instructions in greater detail, “the heart marrow of Mar pa's teachings”:

- After the gradual dissolution of a sense of “inside and outside”, after the terrible transition of the time of death, the authentic nature of voidness appears to the consciousness of one who has died. In essence, this voidness is absolute openness, pacifying all doubts like a space of truth resembling the sun and moon rising in a cloudless sky, bringing about complete liberation from passionate attachments. This is the Dharmakāya, identified as the luminosity that appears at the moment of death. “Know it to be what it is”. To attain this recognition of the view of things such as they are, one must practice the clear light under the guidance of a master.³¹
- In the *bar do* of becoming, the mental body (*vid kyi gzugs*) makes one believe that once again one has a body driven by previous deeds. In fact, the body manifests the magical light of past activities. The yogin will recognize this manifestation as the Saṃbhogakāya. It is an illusion made of the fusion of voidness with appearances. “Recognize it for what it is” and practice the yoga of illusory dreaming. Visualize the body of the Buddha in the stage of creation. In effect, this method is meant to blend the perceptions of the intermediate state with the Vajrayāna training that one has perfected in retreat during the

29 Lamothe 1989: 183, n. 3.

30 *LL*: 124-27.

31 *LL*: 212, 214-15.

embodied state. The degree to which the Sambhogakāya manifests amid the fragmentary perceptions of the intermediate state depends on the extent to which the deceased has built up a supply of merit. Merit gives rise to the post-mortem perceptions, which are seen in the form of the attributes of deities and bodhisattvas.

- At the end of the journey through the post-mortem state, driven by the winds of karmic propensities, the being no longer has a choice; one is forced to take rebirth in the karma-dependent environment that presents itself to the being accompanied by its own proclivities. If one recalls the instructions, one may abide in bliss and voidness as an antidote to this final push into rebirth. This is what is termed “closing the womb door” and avoiding rebirth. In such a condition, should rebirth occur, it will be a rebirth in the manner of a Buddha’s Nirmānakāya. “Recognize it just as it is” and practice the purification of envy and jealousy, in order to attain the purpose of the third tantric initiation.³² Here one may rest within the *karmamudrā* (tantric consort, here probably blending an Abhidharma allusion to the conjugal act of one’s future parents with the icon of Cakrasaṃvara in union³³). In this way, one gives rise to the attainment of the yoga of heat (*gtum mo*), which is absolute wisdom (recognition of radical openness of all phenomena), the way of liberation.

Significantly, each chapter of the “Rosary of Golden Pearls” ends with explicit references to Mi la’s disciples Shi ba ’od and Bodhi Rādza, as compilers of this cycle of didactic songs.³⁴ In the instruction bestowed on Ras chung pa attributed to Mi la ras pa that we have translated below, it is apparent that the teachings outlined in terms related to the *Cakrasaṃvara* tantra and transmitted by Bodhi Rādza and Shi ba ’od, are developed even further by incorporating additional material from the medical traditions associated with various tantric cycles typical of the “later diffusion” period. Even more significant is the expansion of the category *bar do* to include virtually all experiences that present themselves continuously to consciousness. In this way, the post-mortem experience is taken up into a much wider perspective, one that would be familiar to a yogin who had spent many years in rigorous retreat. The perilous journey after death has its analogies in the perilous journey of this life, and indeed of the life of the entire cosmos. In this teaching, Mi la ras pa shows himself capable of assimilating the approach typical of his *rDzogs chen* teachers³⁵ to the teachings of the “new tantras” that he received from Mar pa. We find explicit allusions to the

32 Lessing & Wayman 1980: 325.

33 *LL*: 142-45, on the practice of Cakrasaṃvara.

34 A translation and study of the *Ngam rdzong snyan brgyud kyi skor* (Tibetan collection, Lehman Library, BQ 4860.C353/N36, 1985) should illuminate our understanding of Cakrasaṃvara practice in the lineage of Mi la ras pa.

35 Perhaps anticipating the cosmological and philosophical breakthroughs associated with Klong chen Rab ’byams pa (1308-1363) and Shes rab rgyal mtshan Dol po pa (1292-1361).

Kālacakra, a “second diffusion” system, but we also see a certain degree of fidelity to *rDzogs chen*’s seeing into the natural state of all phenomena from moment to moment.³⁶ As Bryan Cuevas has observed with regard to the oral teaching on the *bar do*, “This elaborate presentation seems to be rather unprecedented in the Tibetan *bar do* traditions of this period. It appears then that by the first half of the twelfth century there had already been such a remarkable proliferation of ideas inspired by the generic notion of a period of transition between two states of consciousness that for Mi la ras pa’s generation seemingly every significant experience or phase of existence (*bhava*; *srid pa*) could be divided into a graded series of intermediate states.”³⁷

Like the Long-Life goddesses driven by fear of the *bar do* to seek out a guru who can teach the Vajrayāna method for attaining liberation in one lifetime, so too did the young Mi la ras pa first seek out the *rDzogs chen* master lHa dga’ and then Mar pa, the Tibetan lay disciple of Paṇ chen Nāropa and Maitrīpa. With the passing of time and the maturation of his own practice, Mi la ras pa attained the direct vision of the nature of reality (*Dharmatā*), also called in his lineage *mahāmudrā*. This direct experience discloses each moment as a *bar do*, a risk and an opportunity to touch the enlightened state that is always present. Beyond clinging and remembering, beyond hopes and fears, the contemplative engages dynamically with reality-as-such in a perfectly existential way of being in the world. Blending the mind with the plethora of phenomena, the yogin is to blend into the realm of contemplative awareness. Mi la ras pa’s teachings on the intermediate state are given in fulfillment of his bodhisattva vow of compassion for those who wander in distress, uncertain of their own, and humanity’s, future. Mi la ras pa guides the Long-Life goddesses’ enlightened awareness both as a way-of-being, and as a way of being-for-others, thus manifesting his own perfect attainment of *samyaksambodhi*.

Translation: *Profound instructions on the intermediate state (bar do) from the Cakrasaṃvara Instruction Lineage that explain how to use the mind to discriminate the Path.*³⁸

(F. 344):³⁹

Honor to the Guru, Deva, and *Ḍākinī*.

36 This is Mi la ras pa’s understanding of *Dharmatā*. Mar pa, too, is described in an early biography attributed to sGam po pa as always abiding in *chos nyid*, the state of absolute reality. See *LL*: 249.

37 *HH*: 53.

38 Tibetan title: *Lam blo nas gcod pa bar do ngo sprod kyi gdams ngag zab mo*. Bryan Cuevas translates this title: “Oral Precepts on Cutting off the Bardo with the Mind” (*HH*: 51.)

39 The pagination is taken from the ’Jam mgon Kong sprul’s *gDams ngag mdzod*: 344-61. See also Rin chen rgyal mtshan 1974: 47-76.

Instructions on the intermediate state: an introduction to discerning the path using the mind. There are three instructions:

1. On the “intermediate state” of the basis as related to embodied beings.
2. On the “intermediate state” of definitive knowledge in relation to signs.
3. On the “intermediate state” of the fruition related to the “pointing out”.

This is the first of the three:

When the flesh and blood of an embodied being ripen fully, there is the appearance of the intermediate state between birth-and-death. This period of time from birth up until death may even be as long as a world-aeon; it can also be so short that there is no time between birth and death. This is the “intermediate state of birth and death”. In that time period, the paths of generation and of completion⁴⁰ are practiced together.

This is the second point:

The intermediate state of dreams arises from afflictive propensities. This refers to those embodied beings whose dreams arise from disturbing propensities that are active during sleep. They may last as long as an aeon or as short as the time it takes to awaken. This is called the intermediate state of dreams. One is to practice [the yogas of] lucid dreaming and clear light at that time.⁴¹

This is the third point:

In the mental body of embodied beings, there is the intermediate state of existence in the appearance of darkness [which occurs after death]. This may last as long as an aeon, or even a moment, depending on the time between death and rebirth. This is

40 That is, the stages of *utpattikrama* and *sampannakrama* in tantric practice. The former involves generating the image of the deity within the body of the yogin and reciting the relevant mantra. The latter requires the steady “presence” of the deity body that engages in the yogic practices of energy fluxes, subtle body channels, and the movement of nuclei of consciousness, typical of the Six Yogas of Nāropa. This is called the “stage of completion with form”. Moving beyond these practices, the yogin engages in the formless meditation called *mahāmudrā*, usually translated as the “Great-Seal”. However, given the fact that the *mudrā* also refers to the female tantric consort, one might consider *mahāmudrā* as referring to the practice of taking all phenomena as manifestations of the union of Cakrasaṃvara and Vajrayoginī, the deities in union in the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala. In this sense, *mahāmudrā* could be translated as “the Great Consort” or even “the Great Union”.

41 This is the first reference in our text to two of the practices of the Six Yogas of Nāropa. One of the purposes of this teaching is to clarify the relationship between the various referents of the *bar do* or “intermediate state” and the practices of these Six Yogas, which are the practice of completion “with form”.

called the intermediate state of existence [after bodily death]. At that time, one is to try to mingle⁴² the yogas of illusory body and clear light.

Now we expound the second category, the intermediate state of definitive knowledge in relation to signs, in three parts (ff. 345-346).

The First Part:

Having purified one's mental continuum by observing the *samayas*,⁴³ someone with limited capacity is to meditate on the instructions of the intermediate state, and, either during the [post-mortem] intermediate state or in this life during a dream, is able to attain the signs of Buddhahood. In this life, as an indication or sign that he will attain Buddhahood in the intermediate state, such a practitioner is able to visit Buddha fields⁴⁴ during dreams. Moreover for such a yogin the external world will arise as dream-like illusions.

The Second Part:

For someone of moderate capacity who is practicing meditation on the continuity of one's own mind stream, the signs that such a yogin will attain Buddhahood at the point of death are that the stages of creation and completion proceed even during the practitioner's dreams. Sleep is itself replaced by the clear light. The yogin receives interior signs such as having control over the channels, energy currents, and droplets [of consciousness in the subtle body].

The Third Part:

Someone of the highest capacity is liberated in this lifetime merely by grasping the meaning [of what has been taught]. The signs of such attainment of Buddhahood are: the realization that cyclic existence and liberation are one and inseparable; perfect comprehension of the doctrine of the two truths; secret signs and even the mental impurities arise as intuitive wisdom; the clear light spreads out coincident with the self-arising Dharmakāya and all ignorance, obscurations, and veils are exhausted. Such a being arises as a teacher of Dharma, as a bodhisattva in a pure land manifesting

42 The practice of blending or mingling one's thought stream with phenomena that are manifesting moment after moment is Mi la ras pa's orientation towards the attainment of continuous *mahāmudrā*.

43 *Samaya* refers to the regulations and precepts of tantric practice. The supreme *samaya* is to remain at all times in a state of fluid awareness, blending one's perception with that which is perceived, without conceptualizing or attachment.

44 In this way, a yogin can ascend to various paradise-like Buddha fields in order to practice with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who reside there. This is the premise of gTsang smyon Heruka's description of Ras chung pa's "prologue in heaven" at the start of his late 15th century *Life and Songs of Mi la ras pa*. See Lhalungpa 1984: 9-11.

the thirty-two marks and eighty signs of the Saṃbhogakāya, arising from the yogin's meditation on compassion. Such a one's pure prayer would allow the yogin to see the arising of the Nirmāṇakāya even in the impure appearance of beings of the Six Realms.⁴⁵

The Third Topic:

An explanation of the intermediate state of fruition, in three parts:

The intermediate state is explained with reference to persons of the three capacities, in three families, and in the three times, all of which are mingled on the path (ff. 346-347).

The highest capacity refers to [attainment in] the intermediate state of birth and death. The moderate capacity refers to [attainment in] the intermediate state of sending off and welcoming.

The least capacity refers to [attainment in] the intermediate state of entering the womb.

The first, in three parts:

- The intermediate state of early and late, having knowledge of birth and death;
- The intermediate state of early and late, remembering dreams;
- The intermediate state of the time of dying and becoming.

The first in two parts:

- The intermediate state demonstrated by making an explanation through examples;
- The intermediate state explaining the actual meaning.

First, the intermediate state identified by means of metaphors:

Teacher shows the student "space" as a metaphor to exemplify the meaning of *Dharmatā*.⁴⁶ There are five meanings to "space":

1. The space of appearance, [as in the sky when] the clouds are melting away and the blue color is appearing; then again, the sky becomes cloudy, and adopts various appearances. This is not the space of reality (*Dharmatā*).
2. Shapes that have space such as rocks, caves, windows, and the like.

⁴⁵ This portion responds to one of the questions posed by the Long Life deities in Chapter 30 of the *Songs of Mi la ras pa*.

⁴⁶ *Dharmatā* means the true nature of things, recognition of which results in an experiential cognition of the unconditioned nature of ultimate reality, hence comparable to "space."

3. “Named space” as when there is a designation of male or female characteristics (as in the “space of the sexual organs”);
4. And the “space within a pierced bead” or the “space within a cross of multicolored thread”: These four are not the space of reality (*Dharmatā*);
5. But the fifth one *is* the space of reality,⁴⁷ but how could we exemplify it? If I could show the sun in mid-winter early in the morning of a full-moon day, in the span of time from its rising over the mountain tops up to noon (feeling its warmth), the appearance of the mid-heaven is bright and clean. This is an example that would be valid. In this example one sees the naturally existent presence of reality (*Dharmatā*), dependent on causes and conditions of the three times. In that way, for all the Six Families, stable self-arisen *Dharmatā* is seen. For the best yogins, on average it lasts for the duration of three meditation sessions,⁴⁸ for the yogin of moderate capacity, the duration of two sessions; for the least capable, one session. If one had not received this pointing out instruction, one would not be able to understand that *Dharmatā* is in all sentient beings experientially.

Another example is taken from the phenomenon of summer rain that washes the dust out of the air; when the sky clears of clouds, and before the winter storms come on, there is a naturally pure condition of the sky that occurs. At that time there is no [particular] appearance or non-appearance. Color, form, and measure are not co-emergent with any basis for perception. This would exemplify the intermediate state of *Dharmatā*.⁴⁹ All of this expounds the intermediate state that exemplifies the actual meaning. Thus, one is to practice the “reality” which is the meaning of things, exemplified by “space”. All of this expounds the intermediate state that explains the actual meaning [without examples].⁵⁰

The second instance:

In all the sūtras and tantras, it is said that all sentient beings have the essence of Buddhahood,⁵¹ but (ff. 347-348), but because it is naturally hidden [i.e. because it cannot be conceptualized], it does not appear as a [graspable] entity, even for those

47 That is, the *Dharmadhātu* (Tibetan: *chos 'byings*), the “open container of all that is.”

48 Approximately 3 x 24 minutes.

49 This refers to the inherent openness or “voidness” of all perceived phenomena, which is recognized in the “gap” between thoughts during meditation.

50 Mi la ras pa teaches that each moment of consciousness is a kind of micro intermediate state, with all that that implies. The intermediate state is naturally pure, spontaneous, free of characteristics, open (“empty”), and dynamic. It is also interesting that the freedom of such moments does not entail the union of perception with a mental object. Instead, consciousness is free of perception as well as conceptualization. This is what meditation instructors in this tradition call “a gap”.

51 Tathāgatagarbha, taken as a synonym for *Dharmatā* in this system of practice.

siddha whose minds are as capacious as space, so it is said. It is also said that all phenomena are like the sphere of space. Yet, buddhahood does not arise automatically. In fact, one can reflect on buddhahood in the intermediate state of *Dharmatā*, but cannot write it down. Though it is wide as the sky, once directly recognized, it can even be pointed out with a finger. The intermediate state of *Dharmatā* arises between the end point of one mental event and the start of another mental event.⁵² The previous event does not cease, for that which has been surpassed is not eradicated. The subsequent mental event does not arise, nor is it grasped. The ‘betwixt’ of both of them, previous and subsequent mental events, is [an instant] free from conceptualization. That is why it is called “an intermediate state”. It is free of beautiful words, free of examples.

Here the non-arising Dharmakāya is truly encountered. Place that within your awareness. But whether you place it or not, apart from any mental functioning, there will be a small amount of unwavering bliss-action. In the midst of that which is distinct from previous and subsequent mental events, in that essential moment of knowing, there is a mental event which, in a short session of meditation, should not be accepted time after time: it is like a demon or a child that steals [your meditative concentration].

Those distracting mental constructs do not touch upon the intermediate state, either before or after, nor do they depend on, nor are they separate from, the intermediate state, nor do they oscillate back and forth in the intermediate state.⁵³ This is why it is called the intermediate state, because mental constructs are separate from the mind itself.⁵⁴

[Third Point?]

Then there is the intermediate state of cognition. With eyes unwavering, the mind not grasping, resting such that it is distinct from cognitive acts (*shes pa bya*). Whether resting or not, its own character as mental activity apart from the intermediate state of *Dharmatā* cannot be exhausted. Its material character does not exist, nor does it possess color or shape, and the same is true of its immaterial character. Everything can appear within it, but it is not an assertion of eternally existing things. The nature of a thing is void; it is void of its own nature, but it is not non-existent because it is self-illuminated.⁵⁵ It has no self, it is not discovered to have a self upon examination. It

52 As taught in the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu, with reference to the epistemology of momentariness.

53 This would be the case of having a thought that one has in some way “captured” such a state, and can return to it at will. This mistake would amount to fixating on a meditation experience as having been “perfect” and spending one’s time trying to recover, time after time, that same perfect moment.

54 This is Mi la ras pa’s way of distinguishing ordinary thought processes from direct awareness of the true nature of reality.

55 This is an example of a yogic teaching by Mi la ras pa that shows affinity to the views later developed by Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, the “*gzhan stong*” view of Buddhahood.

is not without a self, because it is of a nature free of elaboration (ff. 348-349). It does not acquire extremes and it is free from grasping. It has no center.⁵⁶ Since it relies on something, it lacks something. There is nothing that can represent it, and no examples exemplify it, except such examples as the sky! It is free of aesthetic verbal formulations and metaphors, but it is not free from words, being the cause of all verbal formulations. The sky is void without awareness; mind is a void with awareness. Meditate on it as various signs void of substance, but manifesting various characteristics. Meditate on it continuously, making use of six methods:

1. As space, whose appearance is not dependent on a basis;
2. As a river flowing continuously;
3. As a sky flower, which has no real existence;
4. As the clarity of the heart of the sun;
5. As a lotus unstained by contaminations;
6. As a mist that is disappearing.

Thus conceptualization disappears as we contemplate *Dharmatā*. Coming forth as various reflections, one can acquire knowledge through skillful awareness. The essential expanse of the clear light, the mind in its own nature being clear light without the darkness of signs, unites non-dualistically with the awareness of voidness.⁵⁷ Like the sky, the intermediate state is distinct from the mind “before and after” [mental events]. Of all phenomena, it is the root of awareness. The Dharmakāya is the non-embodied state face-to-face with *suchness*. All needs and desires thus become the precious jewel of perfect renunciation. This is the awareness inseparable from intermediate state of knowledge, subtle experience arising in the realm of eagles! If subtle experience and lofty realization thus appear in the mind, one obtains freedom and independence inseparable from the essence of knowledge in the intermediate state of *Dharmatā*.

The Second Section (?)

In three subsections, before and after the intermediate state of remembering dreams:

1. Memory passing away like a butter lamp in the way it is put out;
2. The way it arises like becoming aware of future kindness;
3. The way the recollection of Śākyamuni⁵⁸ arises (f. 350).

56 Compare Mi la ras pa's oral teaching on *mahāmudrā*, translated in *LL*: Chapter 24.4.

57 This section is a pithy summary of contemplative epistemology.

58 This is probably a reference to the tantric form of Buddha as Vajradhara, as in the *rdo rje 'chang rnam thar*, translated in *LL*: Chapter 23.

One considers [this recollection] both before and after, as distinct from mind [itself]. It is in essence non-dual intuitive gnosis. Thus the intermediate state of midday becomes one in existential flavor with what is grasped in the intermediate state of nocturnal dreams. In fact, in the contemplative absorption of the Clear Light, all ignorance is conquered and the thought processes of sleep cease. In this way, the unchanging Dharmakāya is gained. In this very body, one attains the supreme state. One has done the deed. One has laid down the burden⁵⁹ [of the constituent components of a self]⁶⁰ (f. 350.2). In this way, the contemplative absorption of Great Bliss spontaneously accomplishes this in the Clear Light, which is the real meaning [which is also the “real thing”]. By not encountering the time of death and by avoiding the intermediate state of becoming, [one realizes] the contemplative absorption of Great Bliss accomplished spontaneously, [which is] the Clear Light [i.e., one becomes enlightened without dying].

The Third Part

In three subsections: the intermediate state of the moment of death and existence:

1. For the best of persons, the intermediate state of Clear Light;
2. For those of middling ability, the intermediate state of Meeting at the Time of Birth;
3. For those of ordinary ability, the intermediate state of Entering the Womb.

The First, in two sections:

1. The way to stop the appearance of the path [to rebirth];
2. The way the state of the Clear Light arises.

The first explanation, in two parts:

1. The coarse dissolution, and;
2. The subtle dissolution.

The First:⁶¹

Dissolving into both earth and water elements; the body weakens as the earth element

⁵⁹ An interesting allusion to the early Buddhist sūtra, “The Bearer of the Burden”, from the Puḍgalavāda tradition.

⁶⁰ Sanskrit: *upagatabhara*.

⁶¹ What follows is a description of the processes of bodily death, dependent on tantric anthropology and Indian medical traditions, including material from the earliest Upaniṣads. According to *HH*: 53, this teaching by Mi la ras pa may be the oldest known presentation of a *bar do* system of this kind in Tibet.

dissolves into the water element. The person tries to support himself on the ground on all four limbs. Dirt forms on the teeth, fluid exudes from the mouth, nose, and other orifices. When the water element dissolves into fire, the mouth and nose are dry. The person forgets how to contract the limbs. Earlier in the process, heat arises and feverish sweat occurs. When the fire element dissolves into the wind element, the texture of the skin deteriorates and the nostrils split and crack. Bodily heat gathers in one part of the body. If one is to be born in the higher realms, you lose heat in the feet, and retain it in the head; if into the lower realms, you lose heat in the head, and retain it in the feet. The dying person is no longer able to recognize anyone. The wind element in the consciousness constituent dissolves and sends forth a ferociously strong sound. The final breaths are like gasps. A film spreads over the eyes, which roll upwards. There are gesticulations of the hands. At that time, the mind becomes clear from within while a sob occurs in the duct from the eye to the nose. The four dissolutions occur in this way simultaneously: place, form, sound, etc. condense and unite together.

The Second: The Subtle Dissolution.

The consciousness constituent⁶² dissolves into appearances (*snang ba*).

Its inner sign appears like smoke. Its outer sign is like the rising of the moon (end of folio 350). (F. 351.1) Then, the forty conceptualizations that arise from desire and attachment cease. Even when near to a lovely divine woman, desire and attachment do not arise. Then the mind is somewhat clear, somewhat unclear. When appearance dissolves into “increase”, then the inner sign⁶³ is like a firefly, and the outer sign is like the rising sun. The thirty-three conceptualizations arising from hatred cease. Even if one were to encounter one’s worst enemy, hatred would not arise. Consciousness becomes clearer than before. In the next attainment, which is called mind of black near attainment (*nyer thob*),⁶⁴ the inner sign is like the light of a butter lamp; the outer sign is darkness. The seven conceptualizations arising from ignorance cease, and ignorance do not occur.

At this time, consciousness becomes much clearer than before. If one has not had previous meditation experience of voidness, he will be panic struck at this time. When the attainment dissolves into Clear Light, the outer sign is like the light of dawn or daybreak. The inner sign is like a sky without clouds; moral afflictions and

62 That is, the *vijñāna skandha*.

63 These inner and outer signs of the unfolding of the process are already listed in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, as is noted in Arnold 2009: 449-55, where it is also linked to the intermediate state. In tantric Buddhism, especially in the Kālacakra system, they are a key feature in discerning the degree of attainment of a yogin. See Arnold 2009: 62-63, the “dark channel” which abides in the middle and is the same as the *avadhūtī*.

64 An expression typical of the *Kālacakratantra*.

all tendencies to sleep cease. At this time, there is clear knowledge of voidness without center or edge.

[The Second Section of the First Category]

2. The way the Clear Light arises. At that time, the Dharmakāya is made manifest. The main point being that, from the top of the head the male droplet in the form of the seed syllable Hum descends to the place four finger widths below the navel, and the mother droplet in the reddish channel, visualized with a face like a crow, ascends to that place; this is the seed of yogic heat⁶⁵ (*gtum mo*), ascending a channel like a fine slash mark on the short letter ‘a’. As distinct as fire is from the surrounding darkness, consciousness rises in the empty lotus of the central channel in the heart bringing with it the essence of bliss and voidness. One sees with obscurations the unborn primordial ‘meaning’ and in that way, the Dharmakāya by nature free from conceptualization is born in one’s mental continuum (*sems rgyud*).

In virtue of previous meditation experience, one recognizes the Dharmakāya as the Dharmakāya (f. 352). It is just like when a child sees his mother; he knows who she is, even if he is told by others that she is not his mother; he is not deceived. That is how it is with the knowledge of a yogin who is free from grasping at conceptualizations even for an instant, or whose consciousness is moved by the wind of primordial wisdom. For such a yogin, in that state (*rig pa*), free from obstruction, consciousness is moved by *jñāna* and emerges from the top of the head⁶⁶ and goes to the palace of the Dharmadhātu, or to the field of the pure Saṃbhogakāya. Therefore, such a state is called either the Clear Light at the time of death or the natural (self-dependent) Clear Light or the resultant Clear Light or the ultimate Dharmakāya.

Second subsection:

The intermediate state of “accompanying and welcoming” for those of moderate capacity: If [liberation] does not occur through familiarizing oneself with the clear light, one can use *guruyoga* at the time of death. There are six types of “meeting and welcoming”:

1. The blessing of the *bla ma* who “accompanies and welcomes”;
2. The bestowal of welcome from the *deity* who grants *siddhi*;
3. The welcome by the *ḍākinī* who remove impediments;⁶⁷
4. Welcome from Dharma brothers and sisters who secure all necessary requisites;

65 Mi la ras pa makes reference to his own attainment of enlightenment through the practice of heat yoga in several traditional songs and oral teachings.

66 A valuable early reference to the practice of *’pho ba*, forceful ejection from the top of the head, one of the Six Yogas.

67 Reference to the guru, deva and *dākinī*, the “three roots” of tantric practice.

5. Welcome by the Instruction Lineage that introduces us to the “state”;⁶⁸
6. Welcome by the wish-fulfilling jewel, which is in fact the Dharma Protector.⁶⁹

The first of these is the blessing of the *bla ma*. The *bla ma* accomplishes this by his steadiness of thought during the blessing, achieved by meditative exertion in *guruyoga*, and thus he can give such a blessing. The guru of meditative contemplation accompanies one. One meditates on each of these objects now and in the future will be liberated by them: this is the “welcome”. In the intermediate state of *Dharmatā*, one realizes one’s own mind as Dharmakāya and attains buddhahood (i.e. one is liberated in the state of Reality). Likewise for the deity, the *ḍākinī*, the Dharma protectors, the *vajra* friends, the lineage of transmission, the wish fulfilling jewel, all [practiced in the same way] together.

The Third Subsection:

The Intermediate State of Entering the Womb, for yogins of ordinary capacity, in three sections.

If unable to realize liberation through the practice of *guruyoga* and the other [five above], becoming frightened by the contemplative absorption of the clear light (ff. 352-353), driven and bound by the three winds of the roots of ignorance, the deceased wanders in the intermediate state. In such a case, this is the instruction on how to enter the womb [for rebirth]. At the moment of death, luminosity like the rising moon appears. The winds that hold the vital force are gathered towards this place. Like the rising sun, it is excellent, and the causative winds of the place are gathered in the same way as fire. Like the appearance of pre-dawn light, that which has been gained⁷⁰ is gathered together by a wind of dimmed brightness. [Even] the way in which the Clear Light accumulates becomes [an object of] ignorance. Thus, having mounted the wind of karma, being bound by the roots of ignorance of the three winds, when the consciousness constituent exits by any of the nine doors, it is diminished. Except by virtue of the force of previous meditation, even great masters are powerlessly borne away to wander in the intermediate state, and so forth. So one should meditate

68 This notion of a direct introduction to a state of consciousness as a key feature of tantric initiation is already found in the eighth century *Three Statements* of dGa’ rab rdo rje (*The face of awareness is introduced directly; One thing alone is chosen and practiced; Thoughts as they arise surely liberate themselves*). The introduction allows the disciple to have confidence about the state of higher awareness, beyond ordinary mind and discursive reasoning. However, one does not try to “return” to the experience of this state. One is training to experience this state under all present circumstances.

69 This is the [usually] wrathful deity who protects the teachings and those who practice them faithfully.

70 The accumulations of merit and wisdom, indispensable for the attainment of full enlightenment.

prior to death on rebirth for re-entering the womb.⁷¹ Consciousness, meditating on a new rebirth experiences the great power of heavenly states and the like.

The Second Part:

In three subsections, the intermediate state of three families of the three times:

1. The intermediate state of perfect qualities;
2. The teaching on Buddhahood in the first intermediate state;
3. The teaching on Buddhahood in the second intermediate state;
4. The teaching on Buddhahood in a subsequent rebirth: the intermediate state of finding family harmony from the womb.

The First:

Three and one half days after death, [the consciousness constituent], as if drunk on beer, becomes feverishly delirious; try then to remember the six objects [the three jewels; discipline, renunciation, and deities]. Knowing that one is dead, having seen one's dead relatives, and so on, one thinks, "I am wandering in the intermediate state; let my knowledge of these matters come to mind." If I do not rest my awareness on unhappy thoughts, I will not be harmed. I will not go anywhere without recognizing what it is. Dark appearances, like the light of pre-dawn, will occur. At that time, by the force of karma, I will go along amid the four continents and the six realms, and so forth, feeling very sleepy and tired. I notice much suffering, quarreling, starvation, etc. (ff. 353-354) and also karma, the deity Yama, the demon gShed po, and so on. Wherever one turns, one is harmed by these entities and suffers continuously. Afflicted by the karma of habitual emotions, seeking a refuge, previously one recalls the deity of one's meditations. Like a fish leaping up from the water,⁷² one is transformed into the Saṃbhogakāya form of the deity; this is called the attainment of the Saṃbhogakāya, in the intermediate state body. This is not a meaningless boast, because this body possesses the seven limbs of the Saṃbhogakāya.⁷³ This body of manifestation is also free from moral obscurations of the mind, and from grasping, having a bright complexion and a good age, having five types of clairvoyance. Thus one knows one's own and others' mental continua, entirely knowing all the latent tendencies. One moves without obstructions anywhere because of one's miraculous power, with the exception of three places: Vajrāsana, consecrated images, and a

71 These instructions handed down from Mi la ras pa come long before the emergence of the "treasure text" (*gter ma*) known as the *Bar do thos grol*. Cf. *HH*.

72 This characteristic expression is Mi la ras pa's way of teaching the disciple to generate the visualization of the deity "in a flash" (*LL*: 281).

73 The *Saptāṅga* is a text in the Tibetan Tanjur attributed to Vāgīśvarakīrti, discussed in *LL*: chapters 13 and 23.

mother's womb. By emanating one billion rays of light, one's body is made of light. By possessing the *dhāraṇī* of remembrance, one knows past and future lives. This body is ornamented with the major and minor marks and is a full arm span in width. By familiarizing oneself with this in the intermediate state, whether pure or impure...⁷⁴

...(f. 359.1) The *karmamudrā* mixes in non-dualistic way with inexhaustible great bliss; the *mahāmudrā* mixes in a non-dualistic way with “uniting and entering”; the desire to attain buddhahood mixes in this way with “uniting and entering.”⁷⁵ The *karmamudrā* mixing with inexhaustible [great bliss]: in three parts:⁷⁶

1. One should practice relying on the *mudrā* of wisdom light, relying on the instructions of the mobility of the winds: from the door of complete liberation to the door of the path of liberation;
2. One should practice, relying on a *karmamudrā* having the signs of attachment, from the door of the downward going door of great bliss;
3. One should practice, relying from the start on both *mudrās* and mixing;
 - a. The instructions on the *nāḍī* of the place (*avadhūtī*) from the door of union both over and under, in a non-dualistic way.
 - b. By exhausting whatever is written.

Now: Mixing ignorance and clear light in the intermediate state of dreaming, for those who are ignorant, in four sections:

1. The least able, mixing equal taste⁷⁷ with illusory body of the deity;
2. Mixing illusion and dream in equal taste;
3. Mixing sleep and contemplative absorption, its own nature with the

Clear Light;

4. Mixing the union of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa with the taste of desire, with realization attained as equal taste.

Now: Hateful ones⁷⁸ in the intermediate state of becoming should mix fear and the illusory body. In four sections:

1. Mixing [these four] as equal taste: attachment, fear, place of birth, and *bla ma*;
2. Mixing [these three] as equal taste: the thought of fear, attachment, and the inexhaustible spiritual experience of initiation;

⁷⁴ The text may have a lacuna here.

⁷⁵ I.e. seeing a couple in sexual union and entering the embryo produced by their union.

⁷⁶ This develops the content of the third song in Chapter 30 of the *mgur 'bum*.

⁷⁷ In Sanskrit, *samarasa*; in Tibetan, *ro gcig*. All phenomena have the same “taste”, the existential flavor of voidness, interdependence, impermanence, and absence of metaphysical substratum.

⁷⁸ Such as Mi la ras pa himself when he practiced destructive magic. Also his own aunt, uncle, and mother, whom he liberated in the after death state. And also, the Long-Life goddesses of the Rosary of Golden Pearls (*mgur 'bum* chapter 30).

3. Mixing [these two] as equal taste: illusory mind of hatred and attachment with a pleasing body;
4. Mixing as equal taste: the desire to obtain something with [engagement in] sin and virtue.

This instruction on the nature of the intermediate state: don't forget its words and figures of speech, with a little bit of an experience of Clear Light. Instruction on the nature of the intermediate state is complete. E MA HO!⁷⁹

The experts of the blessing of the lineage.

The worthy receptacles of the lineage of spiritual experience.

The excellent ones with realization and devotion.

This particular holy instruction is for my one son Ras chung rdo rje grags.⁸⁰

Having received a prophecy of a *ḍākinī*, because he is a worthy receptacle full of faith and devotion.

This is just like a precious jewel reliquary filled with gold.

It is entrusted into your hands: keep it fast in your mind with great intelligence.

Don't give it to ordinary people, Mi la requests:

Rare indeed is the royal realm!

Watch out for the "true and false" thoughts that arise in the mind.

If results seem delayed, you will see them in the future.

I the yogin will ransom you: keep this in mind!

Your *bodhicitta* is not small.

In my lifetime, do not give this teaching out: this is official decree of the guru transmission, bound to [provoke] the displeasure of the gatherings of the *ḍākinī*.

Unite warmth and mind:

In the future it will spread for the benefit of beings:

One lineage knows the main point.

[This is the word] of a kind teacher:

Because of your love for a noble lady,⁸¹ you are throwing away

Food and wealth and power for fame and benefit-

As if given to a boastful actor (?);

If other women desire it,

They are purified by a *ḍākinī*'s prophecy;

Even give it to a beggar if he is a worthy vessel.

Kye ho, Ras chung rdo rje grags!

79 The traditional tantric exclamation of blissful delight.

80 See Roberts 2007.

81 See Chang 1983: 604 (*mgur 'bum*, chapter 52).

A precious jewel exemplifies:
 You may not encounter a gatherer of sufficient merit,
 But in a place of practice where you [find] one who has merit,
 If there is such a person, [give him] this oral transmission of the lineage,
 Because [such a person has employed] the medicine of merit and discipline.
 But unfortunate ones have difficulty meeting with this teaching.
 In the place of practice, there are few who possess good karma-
 Faithless, coarse people
 Unfortunate, evil minded, making up heretical doctrines;
 When they ask you to bestow the Dharma wider than space
 Because of them, this [teaching] is very secret for all.
 One must have all four empowerments, permissions and oral instructions.⁸²
 If one does not have the complete directions,
 Obtain the book and the reading permission.
 If there is a teacher of evil views, keep it out of his sight.
 If seen, this Dharma delights a playful person.
 Not making inquiries, have the explanation in mind.
 If possible, only give it to disciples with pure *samaya*;
 Otherwise, Mahākāla⁸³ will cut them off;
 The *ḍākinī* will impose punishment.
 On the other hand, this Dharma is set forth for one of these
 Excellent ones, devoted disciples with good karma.
 Please assist those with bodily defilements
 This [deed], and others, is a root of virtue: this assists the spread of the
 Buddha's teaching;
 Those who adhere to black deeds will be defeated.
 Thus say the guru *ḍākinī*.
 In the *dgon pa* of Snye nam grod Cave⁸⁴
 Vajra Banner wrote this with devotion,
 When one becomes one with bliss.

The instruction of Mi la to Ras chung is completed.

82 See a discussion of the Cakrasaṃvara initiation in *LL*: Chapter 17.

83 An important protector deity for the bKa' brgyud traditions.

84 In southern Tibet, a key location for a number of episodes in the life of Mi la ras pa.

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