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### Translating Vajrayana Commentarial Materials

with Elizabeth Callahan, Jake Dalton, Lama Chönam



# Elizabeth Callahan (Tsadra Foundation Fellow)

Elizabeth has been engaged in contemplative training and Tibetan Buddhist studies for more than 35 years. A Tsadra Fellow since 2002, she has engaged in both written translation and oral interpretation including working closely with Khenpo Tsültrum Gyamtso, as well as completing three-year retreats at Kagyu Thubten Chöling, New York. Elizabeth specializes in translating texts related to esoteric tantric commentaries and has published the Ninth Karmapa's Mahāmudrā: Ocean of Definitive Meaning, Jamgön Kongtrül's The Treasury of Knowledge Book 6, Part 3, and the soon to appear Profound Inner Principles by Karmapa Rangjung Dorjé (with Kongtrül's commentary). She is currently working on Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's nges don phyag rgya chen po'i sgom rim and several short mahāmudrā texts by the Ninth Karmapa. Elizabeth is also the Director of Advanced Study Scholarships at Tsadra Foundation and is the executive director of Marpa Foundation.

# Elizabeth Callahan's Presentation

### Readings in the commentarial literature for

# ग्रेदेर्इहेल्यन्य स्त्राची स्त्राची स्त्राची

Where is *lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' ba?* and When does *dal ba* mean *brtan pa?* 

~ Elizabeth Callahan

Here are two instances in the *Hevajra Tantra* (HT) where the commentarial literature provides different insights or views on the root verses. The questions we'll discuss include: What do we do when the commentarial literature does not agree? Do we present *all* the options? Choose one? Or choose the reading favored by the majority? Does reconciling these differences matter?

- The first concerns the sequence of the four joys (dga' ba bzhi): Is lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' ba the third or fourth joy? Does the HT present two sequences or one? Or should the question be when is dga' bral not dga' bral gyi dga' ba?
- The second focuses on a word: *dal ba.* Is it "leisure," "freedom," or is it a synonym for "stability"?

## ञ्जूब देवा क्षेत्रेश पति द्वाद वा

The Hevajra Tantra states in its opening chapter that "everything comes in fours": there are four forms of Hevajra, four chakras, four moments, four abhiṣhekas, and four joys. Their sequence and correlations are laid out in many chapters. There are however three verses that could call the stated sequence into question. Are there two instances in the sequence of the four joys when *lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' ba* arises? Or are there two uses of the term *dga' bral*: one for *khu ba 'phos nas bde ba nyams pa* and the other for *dga' bral gyi dga' ba*?

### Sequencing<sup>2</sup>

Part I, chapter 1, verse 28:

द्वायः वः विद्वो । द्वायः वः द्वाः वे वाः तः द्वायः वः विद्वाः विद्वा

The four joys are joy, supreme joy, joy-without-joy, and connate joy. (28)

Part I, chapter 10, verse 13:

The first is simply joy. What is considered second is supreme joy. The third is said to be without-joy. The fourth is connate joy. (13)

However, when it comes to stating when *lhan skye dga' ba* is realized or revealed a different sequence is implied. Part I, chapter 10, verse 18:

[The connate] is the nature of all and yet it is also free of all.

It is revealed at the beginning of without-joy,
but it is devoid of the three joys. (18)

Part II, chapter 2, verse 40:

स्व देवा सुर्व प्राप्त क्षेत्र क्षेत्

I am the nature of connate joy,
[arising] at supreme's end and the start of
without-joy,
like a candle in darkness.
Children: have confidence, that's the way it is. (40)

Part II, chapter 5, verses 66 and 70:

नेत्यः नेष्ठेन् नक्ष्र्यः यः वी। न्यायः चत्यः न्दः संस्थाः स्थाः बस्रयः क्ष्र्नः सुन्तः सुन्तः स्थाः स्थायः स्थाः स्थाः स्थाः। स्थायः स्थाः स्थाः स्थाः।

Teach them about suchness: what is at the start of without-joy and the end of supreme.

This is hidden in all tantras. It is revealed at the end of ends. (66)

देवशयोः वेशः श्चेष्टियः वश्चिम्।

inen w

सर्केना नी सम्मन्दर द्वार द्वार द्वार प्रमा १००

Then wisdom arises.

In the middle between supreme's end and without-joy

there is the Heruka, empty and not-empty. (70)

The connate state is revealed and recognized after the beginning of joy-without-joy.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Translating Vajrayāna Commentarial Materials" Workshop

Part II, chapter 2, verse 40:

देयब्रियं स्थान्य स्थान्य स्थान्त्र स्थान्य स

I am the nature of connate joy,
[arising] at supreme's end and the start of
without-joy,
like a candle in darkness.
Children: have confidence, that's the way it is.<sup>ab</sup> (40)

Jamgön Kongtrul Lodro Taye (gZhol med rdo rje'i gsang ba 'byed pa) comments<sup>3</sup>

श्चर्रिया श्चेर्या के स्वार्थ के

The nature of connate joy, stained or unstained, is not different from me, Vajradhara. This connate state occurs at the end of supreme joy (which is shown by special joy) and the start of without-joy when *shukra* is transferred, like the way that lighting a candle illuminates total darkness.

For those whose ignorance of the extremes [or ends] of passion and the lack of passion is similar to **darkness**, what [acts] **like a candle** is the stainless connate state, [whose] nature is that of illumination, or the wisdom that results from that [stainless connate state], which is the purity of joy-without-joy.

**Children**—which is to say, sons and daughters of the buddhas—and precious [jewel]-like disciples: **have confidence** that your experiences are **like that**, that is, that they correspond to the example. Thus it is said. That is the view of Nāropa and Maitrīpa, which does not contradict the root tantra or uttaratantra.<sup>c</sup>

My nature is that of Innate Joy and I come at the end of the Joy that is Perfect and at the beginning of the Joy of Cessation. So be assured, my son, it is like a lamp in darkness.

I am the nature of connate joy:

like a candle in darkness

[for] the end of supreme and the start of without-joy.

Children: have confidence, that's the way it is.

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~ Elizabeth Callahan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2010), 92:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>b</sup> An alternative translation based on Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's commentary and Jamgön Kongtrul's second gloss of the root verse might be:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>c</sup> The uttaratantra (rgyud phyi ma) is the Mahāmudrātilaka (Phyag rgya chen po'i thig le) (Toh. 420). (Jamgön Kongtrul's General Meaning of "The Hevajra Tantra," 22.)

Dakpo Tashi Namgyal (dPal kye'i rdo rje zhes bya ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po'i 'grel pa legs bshad nyi ma'i 'od zer) में ने निकार क्रिक्ट क्रिक्ट

सर्केना'सबत'न्नात'न्नात'न्दर्भर'है।

तकर्मा वे क्वीया चे राम्या के स्वीया अर्क्ष्या रामित स्वाप्त स्वापत स्वाप्त स्वापत स्वाप्त स्वापत स्वापत स्वाप्त स्वापत स्वापत स्वापत

न्दर्धरम्बाद्यचर्ष्ठ्याक्षेत्रम्।। बाक्षेत्रायदेश्चम्यात्यस्ट्रेवाः क्षेत्रायम् विद्यायम् विद्यायम् विद्यायम्

क्रवासार्याम् निर्मात्या तर्ने स्थावतः ने वाढे सामात्या स्थान्य स्थान

Dakpo Tashi Namgyal comments:

I am the nature of connate joy, the lord who pervades everything [i.e., saṃsāra and nirvāṇa]. What is that [connate joy]? Supreme joy is passion and is cyclic existence, and the extreme [or end] of that. [Connate joy] is free from that. Without-joy is without passion and is the extreme of nirvāṇa. "The start of that" means that [connate joy] does not abide there. That which is of the nature of the middle is like a candle that when lit illuminates thick darkness. In the same way, children (i.e., all those represented by the questioner): once your dark minds have been cast aside, you will know connate joy—have confidence.

Alternatively, it is suitable to explain this as follows. [The connate state] occurs at the end of supreme joy (which is shown by special joy), and the start of without-joy when *shukra* is transferred.

Here, most commentaries unjustifiably explain that "supreme's end and the start of without-joy" mean that **the end of supreme** joy and **the start of without-joy** represent [or show] the connate state. This is not the intended meaning of this tantra because it contradicts the sequence [of the four joys] stated [in part I, chapter 10, verse 13]:

The first is mere joy.
The second is supreme joy.
The third is described as without-joy.
The fourth is said to be connate joy.

It is not the intended meaning also because it would mean that the presentations that correlate [the four joys] with the four chakras, four moments, and so forth would have [the order] wrong, or it would mean that there are five joys since it would be necessary to state that there is a connate [joy] that arises [between] two of the earlier and latter [joys, in addition to the connate joy that is fourth in the sequence].

Therefore, since it says in part one that supreme joy is existence and passion, and that without-joy is nirvāṇa and without passion, here "end [or extreme]" is stated with the intended meaning of not abiding in either of those two. This [is supported by] many statements, such as [in part II, chapter 3, verse 8d] "It is free from passion and no-passion" and [in part II, chapter 5, verse 68b] "It is without existence and without nirvāṇa." Thus, explanations that place the timing of the fourth [joy]—connate joy—as third are very poor because they contradict this very scripture and reasoning.

"Translating Vajrayāna Commentarial Materials" Workshop

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> Part I, chapter 8, verse 32c: "Without-joy is a joy without passion;" verse 33b: "The second is a desire for bliss;" and verse 34ab: "Supreme joy refers to existence. Without-joy is nirvāṇa."

In general comments following verse 13 of part I, chapter 10, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal says:<sup>5</sup>

<u> ५वे:ब्रे५५र्मेशयरसूरर्स</u>

र्यायः चर्याः र्रम्याः स्वतः स्व र्यायः चर्याः स्वतः स्वतः

### Dakpo Tashi Namgyal states:

We may wonder what "without-joy" and "without passion" mean. "Without-joy" is used because after great passion one is without a desire for a greater degree of bliss and is without that experience of supreme joy. "Without passion" is used because once one's continuum is filled with bliss one is without the passion of desiring to obtain bliss again.

Thus the deterioration of bliss and the complete absence of joy are not the meaning of joy-without-joy because it is taught that what are called "joy-without-joy" and "special joy" are special experiences of joy. In some instances the deterioration of bliss, following the transference of *shukra*, is referred to as "without-joy." That is not the same as joy-without-joy because it is explained that the latter arises when the dhātus abide within the body, such as within the heart, and it is described as being a special experience of bliss.

The Heart of Wisdom Tantra<sup>6</sup> states:

Without-joy is the absence of joy, what has melted has been transferred and perished. Joy-without-joy is the presence of what has melted. Because it is without transference and the like, it is the essence that you experience.

Consequently, another name for joy-without-joy is special joy, and it is one of the four joys. Without-joy, which is the deterioration of bliss, is simply taught to identify the connate. It is not one of the four joys. It seems to be necessary to make such distinctions.

Nevertheless, we may wonder about the meaning of [the line in part II, chapter 5, verse 70] "In the middle between supreme's end and without-joy." It is taught that supreme joy is passion or existence and without-joy is the absence of passion or nirvāṇa. It is explained that in the middle of those two the connate state, which is not partial to either of those two, is shown. An alternative explanation would have to be that the connate state arises in the middle between supreme joy's end—special joy or joy-without-joy—and the mere without-joy, which is the transference of *shukra*. [The lines in part II, chapter 2, verse 40] "at supreme's end and the start of without-joy" and [part II, chapter 5, verse 66] "what is at the start of without-joy and the end of supreme" are explained in their respective sections.

When is dal ba not the "leisures," or "freedoms," of a precious human rebirth?

स्र-दन्द्र-स्रोत्ते स्थान्य-स्था। स्र-दन्द्र-स्रोते स्थान्द्र-स्था।

यर्न्यानीर्थायस्थित्यस्थात्मः॥ देल्यस्त्रिरायार्श्वेर्यस्थात्मः॥ वर्षान्त्राया्नायाःस्यान्तःस्य। वर्षान्त्रायांचाःस्यान्तःस्य। वर्षान्त्रायांचाःस्यान्तःस्य।

मन्त्रमन्त्रहेग्यायायते मह्यायाय स्वाधी। क्षुन्त्राचे स्वाधीय Another way is to use your own powers to attract mudrās and examine them. (20)

They could be gods, asuras, humans, or even yakṣhas or kiṃnaras.
Take them and engage in conduct in order to perfect your composure. (21)

The explanation of conduct that employs an intimidating form was not given so that you could indulge. [Its purpose is] to see if your mind is one that wavers or is stable. (22)

Jamgön Kongtrul Lodro Taye comments:7

ध्याः कुतिः यहुत्यः लुवाका नेतिः नर्वाका यन्वानीः यहिवा हे दर्किता यक्कित्य विद्या विद्या विद्या विद्या विद्या हेवाकाया यक्किन्यका नृत्या या विद्या या नेद्या विद्या निवास विद्या विद्या विद्या विद्या विद्या विद्या विद्या व

As for the purpose of that discipline with a consort: since you have freed yourself from the eight worldly values and have developed the realization of the inseparability of the two truths, [you will undertake this conduct] in order to bring meaning to your attainment of leisure<sup>a</sup> and to perfect the siddhis.

In order that one's body with its leisures and opportunities truly becomes Hevajra, one must engage in conduct.

This line was translated into Tibetan in some of the bsTan 'gyur commentaries as bdag nyid brtan pa'i rkyen du'o (Saroruha, dKa' 'grel padma can, 1:1182); and bdag gi brtan pa rtogs pa las (Dhaṃkadāsha, Dri ma med pa, 2:494). In Kṛiṣhṇāchārya's Rin po che'i phreng ba (2:88) and Ratnākarashānti's Mu tig phreng ba (2:1435) the word glossed is brtan pa (not dal ba). On the other hand, Vajragarbha's commentary (1:988) has bdag gi dal ba mngon du byas; Bhavabhadra (rNam bshad rnam par 'grel pa, 1:1393) has bdag gi dal ba mngon du bya ba and later dal ba'am brtan pa'o; and Kāyasthā (Rab tu gsal ba'i kha sbyor gyi rgya cher 'grel pa, 3:350) has bdag gi dal ba mngon du phyir.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> "Leisure" or "composure" (*dhairya*, *dal ba*): The Tibetan *dal ba* is usually translated as "leisure" in the technical sense of "the eight leisures" (as in "the leisures and opportunities of a precious human rebirth"), or in a general sense as "slowness, ease, gentleness." The Sanskrit *dhairya* means "firmness, constancy, calmness, patience, gravity, fortitude, courage …" (Monier-Williams). *Dhairya* was usually translated into Tibetan as *brtan pa or brtan po*, meaning "stability, steadfastness, firm." The English translation of the root text reflects more the sense of the Sanskrit, while the translation in Jamgön Kongtrul's commentary reflects the Tibetan understanding of *dal ba* as "leisure." Ngok Shedang Dorje (240.1) says:

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#### **ENDNOTES**

स्वास्यस्यते वहेवाः स्त्रीकः न्वादः हेन्॥ ३२ स्वादः च्यादः न्वादः चः स्वावः च्यादः स्वी। स्वादः च्यादः चः स्वावः च्यादः स्वी। स्वादः च्यादः चः स्वावः स्वी।

The bliss of joy is slight. Supreme joy exceeds it. Joy-without-joy is without passion. What remains is connate joy. (32)

र्नस्येर्ग्यम् व्यवस्यत्रेत्यः र्नः॥ मानुभायः वर्तेन्यस्यतेत्यः र्नः॥ मानुभायः वर्तेन्यस्यतेत्यः र्वेन॥ र्वेश्वस्यः वर्तेन्यस्य स्थाः व्यवस्य स्थाः

The first is the desire for contact.
The second is the desire for bliss.
The third is the collapse of your passion.
Thus, the fourth is to be meditated upon. (33)

Correspondence between the four joys and the four moments and four abhishekas is found in part II, chapter 3, verses 9 and 10:

स्यः क्षेत्रः न्याः स्वारं न्याः क्षेत्रः। इसः क्षेत्रः न्याः द्याः न्याः क्षेत्रः। इसः क्षेत्रः न्याः न्याः क्षेत्रः। सस्यः क्षेत्रः न्याः न्याः क्षेत्रः। सस्यः क्षेत्रः न्याः स्वारं क्षेत्रः। सस्यः क्षेत्रः न्याः स्वारं क्षेत्रः।

Manifold is the first joy. Maturing is supreme joy. Polishing is joy-without-joy. Featureless is connate joy. (9)

The stages of joy and the others are known through the sequence of the four abhishekas: āchārya, secret, prajñā, and the fourth. (10)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Part I, chapter 1, verse 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Similar sequencing is found in part I, chapter 8, verses 32 and 33:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Nītārtha international edition, 520.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 399-400.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid., 332-34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jñānagarbha, Ye shes snying po. Toh. 421; Lhasa (H) 381. H 381: vol. 79, folio/line 474a.3-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Nītārtha international edition, 505-6.