Contemplative Principles of a Non-dual Praxis:
the Unmediated Practices of the Tibetan
‘Heart Essence’ (sNying thig) Tradition

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ABSTRACT
This article focuses on the main contemplative principles of the
‘Heart Essence’ (sNying thig), a Tibetan Buddhist tradition that is
characterized by a vision of non-duality and primordial wholeness.
Due to this vision, which asserts an original reality that is not di-
vided into perceiving subject and perceived object, the ‘Heart Es-
sence’ advocates a contemplative practice that undermines the
usual intuitions of temporality and enclosed selfhood. Hence, un-
like the common principles of intentional praxis, such as deliberate
concentration and gradual purification, the ‘Heart Essence’ affirms
four contemplative principles of non-objectiveness, openness, spon-
taneity and singleness. As these principles transcend intentionality,
temporality, and multiplicity, they are seen to directly disclose the
nature of primordial awareness, in which the meanings of know-
ing and being are radically transformed. Therefore, the article will
also consider the role of these non-dual contemplative principles in
deeply changing our understanding of being and knowing alike.

Keywords
rDzogs chen, ‘The Great Perfection’, contemplative practices,
non-duality, phenomenology

The essential role of contemplative practices in facilitating a liberating transfor-
mation of consciousness is well evidenced in a variety of Buddhist traditions.¹

¹. The intimate relation between contemplative practice and lived experience is evident from
one of the Tibetan terms that signify the former — nyams su len pa (‘to take into lived experi-
According to those, the contemplative practices enable the practitioner to realize an unconditioned state that is not subject to the recurring becoming of cyclic existence. However, due to the transcendent nature of this state with regard to temporality and causality, we are faced with a fundamental difficulty when trying to account for the rationale and efficacy of these practice. On the one hand, if these practices reflect a process of cultivation and development, how can they culminate in a trans-temporal state that is beyond causal production? On the other hand, if the practices are aligned with the unconditioned state in terms of transcending temporality and causality, then how could they account for the common experience of gradual refinement and purification, which characterizes much of the contemplative discourse? That is to say, the tension between the phenomenological account of gradual practice and the final state of unconditioned awareness reveals a basic conundrum in the relations between praxis and actual realization.

An attempt to align the contemplative practices with the unconditioned state of liberated awareness was offered by multiple Buddhist traditions that emphasized a vision of non-duality, in its various forms. Owing to their non-dual orientation, these traditions challenged certain fundamental divisions concerning (human) existence, including those of causality, temporality and enclosed subjectivity. These presumed divisions were perceived as deluded modes of knowing the rich variety of experiential phenomena, without recognizing their authentic nature. Instead of those divisions, the non-dual visions presented a reality that is not split by temporal and spatial distinctions, even when these are present in the context of worldly experience. Therefore, those visions asserted a primordial reality that is beyond the common distinctions of dualistic consciousness while still being accessible to (human) awareness. The realization of this reality was enabled by actualizing certain contemplative principles that challenged the common structures of consciousness, most notably the intuitive relation of perceiving agent and perceived phenomena. Due to the basic role of these structures in constituting a mode of being that is based on temporal and spatial distinctions, the shift into non-dual reality addressed the very fabric of worldly existence as given in consciousness. Thus, the contemplative principles associated with the non-dual visions were directed to the general patterns/structures of (human) consciousness, irrespective of the distinct contents of any particular experience.

Among the non-dual traditions found in the Buddhist milieu, one of the most elaborated and refined is ‘The Great Perfection’ (rDzoqs pa chen po), which was taught and practised by numerous generations of Tibetan yogis. Under the general rubric of this tradition we find a rich array of different lineages and textual sources, which are similar in their non-dual orientation while distinct to a certain extent in their theoretical and contemplative key points. Among these lineages, the tradition of ‘The Heart Essence’ (sNying thig) gained special prominence, partly owing to its systemized presentation by Klong chen rab ‘byams pa

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1. As it emphasizes the role of praxis in actualizing authentic reality within experience. According to the etymology of this term, the culmination of praxis necessarily occurs within the realm of lived experience, in which the openness, luminosity and compassionate response of awareness are disclosed in their direct presence.

2. For comprehensive accounts concerning the early phases of this tradition, see Karmay 1988; Van Schaik 2004.
(1308–1363), who is considered to be the main doctrinal authority of the rNy- ing ma school in general, and the rDzogs chen tradition in particular. In many of his works, most notably ‘The Seven Treasures’ (mDzod bdun) and ‘The Four Volumes of the Heart Essence’ (sNyig thig ya bzhi) Klong chen pa explicated the various facets of this lineage, which were initially introduced in such canonical treatises as ‘The Seventeen Tantras’ (rGyud bcu bdun) and ‘The Heart Essence of Vimalamitra’ (Bi ma snying thig). By delineating the different aspects of this lineage, Klong chen pa presented an intricate vision of a non-dual reality that is spontaneously present through diverse experiential actualities. As such, this vision brought together an antinomian approach that rejected the very notions of conceptual view and constructed praxis and an attitude inclined towards traditional tantric discourse, which emphasized the gradual unfolding of phenomenal reality and the role of structured practices for realizing the unbounded nature of the liberated state. Consequently, the contemplative practices of this lineage range from structured forms of intentional cultivation to immediate abiding within the natural state of awareness. Moreover, the co-presence of intentional and non-intentional approaches was evident even in some of the unmediated practices that were meant to directly realize the non-dual reality of original awareness.

The various practices of the sNying thig lineage form together a comprehensive attitude to the diverse dimensions of awareness. Not only that these practices encompass the multiple fields of immanent experience, being those of body (lus), speech (ngag) and mind (sems), but they also address the transcendental ground of awareness, which is regarded as ever-present. Furthermore, the non-dual orientation of the main practices undermines the distinction between contemplative praxis and actual awareness, since the former is aimed to enable the latter to arise without any modification. That is to say, the contemplative actualization of original awareness in this attitude.

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4. In this context, the term ‘Transcendental’ is utilized in order to denote the essential dimension of awareness, without which no experience is given. This meaning is reminiscent of the sense given to it in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant as the a priori patterns of consciousness. For example, in his first introduction to the Critique of Pure Reason Kant stated that ‘I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general.’ (Kant 1998, 133). However, unlike Kant who analyzed the fundamental patterns that constitute the spatio-temporal way of being, Klong chen pa mainly discussed the intuitive characteristics of ‘Mind-itself’, which form the ever-present actuality (dam pa’i don; paramārtha) of awareness. The distinction between these two modes of inquiry is somewhat reflected in J.N. Mohanty’s classification of transcendental philosophies as belonging to two different kinds, a prinzipen-theoretisch and an evidenz-theoretisch. While the former is concerned with discovering the general patterns of knowledge through a set of principles and derivative arguments, the latter reflectively inquires the general forms of lived experience (Mohanty 1985, 214–215). Yet, although Mohanty identified the first kind with the critical thought of Kant and the second kind with the phenomenological method of Husserl, he also admitted that the Kantian critique returned to the actual structure of subjectivity as evident in experience (Mohanty 1985, 216). Hence, both attitudes can be seen as grounded in lived experience, even if one of those turns to an argumentative mode of investigation. The distinction between the two attitudes is also well-evidenced in the Buddhist context and, in some cases, even within a single Buddhist treatise. However, in this article we will claim, in accordance with Mohanty, that the attitude of evidenz-theoretisch has a phenomenological and epistemological priority over the attitude of prinzipen-theoretisch.
of the non-dual vision calls into question the very notion of praxis as a distinct activity that is intended to alter certain experiences. Instead, the praxis, which is characterized by a non-dual orientation, directly actualizes a primordial state of being-aware that precedes all intentional relations. In this sense, the non-dual praxis is guided by an implicit recognition of primordial awareness, and not by an intentional stance that cannot transcend its own fractured boundaries.

In what follows we will first introduce the essential characteristics of the primordial non-dual state, which is considered to be the Ground of all phenomena. Later, we will turn to the salient practices of the sNying thig tradition and their guiding principles. By discussing those practices we will aim to elucidate the meaning of non-dual practice and its intimate relation with the primordial state of liberated awareness. Put differently, through discussion on the non-dual practices we will assert that they can be considered as the culminating phase of contemplative praxis due to their unmediated presencing of an authentic mode of being, which in its own turn validates the efficacy of these practices. Finally, we will conclude by claiming that only the inheritance of an authentic state of awareness within intentional consciousness, as affirmed by the non-dual visions, enables the mere possibility of unmediated practices that transcend intentionality and division. Hence, these practices are not mere pragmatic means of purifying the mind, but rather the manner through which awareness recognizes its own primordial nature and expresses it via its numerous emanations.

The three characteristics of Mind-itself

The non-dual vision of the diverse rDzogs chen traditions in general, and the sNying thig tradition in particular, provides us with intricate descriptions about the basic characteristics of Mind-itself (sems nyid; cittatā). As such, the traditions that subscribe to this non-dual vision are concerned with those characteristics that are present in each moment of experience, even when not fully recognized in a self-aware manner. Furthermore, the basic claim of this vision is that the basic characteristics of awareness can be divided into two different groups; one that encompasses the constituting characteristics of mind, such as intentionality, temporality and objective causality, and another that includes the characteristics of primordial awareness. These characteristics are given in an intuitive manner as actual aspects of lived experience and, later on, presented in a conceptual manner. The primacy of intuitional givenness is particularly clear in the sNying thig treatises, in which the original characteristics of Mind-itself are described by addressing the fundamental-cum-immediate facets of experience, irrespective of any distinct content.

In his sNying thig oriented works, Klong chen pa explicated Mind-itself through three basic characteristics: (1) empty essence (ngo bo) that is originally pure (ka dag), (2) luminous self-nature (rang bzhin) which is spontaneously present.
(lhun grub) and (3) compassionate responsiveness (thugs rje) that is all-pervading (kun khyab):

The mind-stream of the natural Ground is the triad of essence, self-nature and compassionate responsiveness which are transcendentally known as originally pure from the beginning. Furthermore, as the essence is originally pure, the attribute of ‘dimmed transcendental awareness’ does not exist and even the mere designation of ‘delusion’ is not experienced as existent. Since the self-nature is spontaneously present, it is luminous as the light which is transcendentally known. Because the compassionate resonance is all-pervading, the act of [phenomenal] arising is unceasing. It [Mind-itself] abides as the space [from which] whatever [phenomena of] transcendent peace and cyclic existence occurs.6

Klong chen pa’s concise delineation of the three characteristics exemplifies the intimate affinity between these and the reality of immediate experience. According to the description above, the three characteristics mark the primordial elements that are necessarily present in all experiences. That is to say, these elements are intuitively given throughout experience in its various forms, dual and non-dual alike. To begin with, the essence of Mind-itself is described as originally pure and inherently open (stong pa). As such, awareness in its pristine state is without any limitations and boundaries. This pristine state serves as the fundamental condition for the mere possibility of speaking about ‘Emptiness’ in a conceptual manner, since it ensures the non-solidified nature of phenomena. In this sense, we might paraphrase the claim of Nāgārjuna concerning the essentiality of emptiness (Nāgārjuna and de La Vallée Poussin 1903, vv. 24.20),7 we could assert that without the intuitional givenness of an open and unbounded field of experience it would not be possible to perceive the numerous emanations of awareness and their ensuing objective reifications as non-substantive.

The second intuitive aspect of Mind-itself according to Klong chen pa signifies the fundamental event of shining-forth as a manifested phenomenon. This event is the basic condition for the arising of awareness, since without it there would not be any phenomenal life. At the same time, unlike the common Buddhist view that perceives this life through the temporal perspective of ‘Dependent-origination’ (rten 'brel; pratītyasamutpāda), the description above states that each phenomenal event is spontaneously present. As we will see when discussing the non-dual practices, the shift from a perspective of temporality to a perspective of spontaneity is grounded in the turn from particular phenomena to the underlying field of experience. Thus, instead of analyzing the specific contents and relating those to previous events, these practices are meant to directly perceive the intuitional givens of experience-itself.

Lastly, the third basic aspect of Mind-as-such indicates the intuitive manner through which the individual phenomena are related to one another. Since the

6. gzhi rang bzhin gyi rgyud ni thog ma’i ka dag gi rig pa nga bo rang bzhin thugs rje gsum mo/ de yang nga bo ka nas dag pas ma rig pa’i ming med de/ ’khrul pa btags pa tsam du yang yed ma myong] rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pas rig pa ‘od du gsal thugs rje kun la khyab pas’ char byed go ma ‘gaqs shing] ’khor ’das gang yang ’byung ba’i dbyings su gnas pa’o] (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009a, 17: 140–141).

7. ‘If all this were not empty, there would be neither arising nor ceasing. Then the Four Noble Truths would become nonexistent.’ (yady aśūnyam idam sarvam udayo nāsti na vyayaḥ/ caturnām āryasyatyanām abhāvas te prasajyate// Nāgārjuna and de La Vallée Poussin 1903, vv. 24. 20).
non-dual vision asserts itself as delineating the basic characteristics of Mind-itself, it also has to account for the different modes of intentional/dualistic consciousness. Such an account is provided by the third fundamental aspect that serves as the ground for temporality, inter-connectedness and alterity. Hence, although phenomena are spontaneously present in their immediate shining-forth, they are also related through their unceasing arising, which serves as the ground for an experiential sense of temporal continuity. Furthermore, this basic connectivity applies also to the synchronic dimension of present phenomena by the arising of a compassionate responsiveness, which actualizes the intuitive resonance of phenomena in awareness. This resonance, in its turn, applies also for the beings of the external world, which are actually constituted by the phenomenal elements of lived experience. Put differently, the experience and, most certainly, the ideal of compassion in the context of sentient beings become possible only through an intuition that reveals the primordial resonance between phenomenal beings in their original realm of awareness.

The non-dual mode of contemplative praxis according to the sNyin thig tradition

The contemplative path of the sNyin thig tradition is divided between two main types of praxis, one that is still intentional in nature and another that transcends the temporal duality of perceiver and perceived. The intentional practices serve as preliminary ones that are meant to prepare awareness for a direct abiding in its own nature, by weakening and purifying the various obstructions which arise in it. These practices are divided to two main groups, which overlap to a certain extent. The first group includes four continuums of Yogic practice, being those of ‘Conduct’ (spyod; caryā), ‘Cultivation’ (sgom; bhāvānā), ‘View’ (ita ba; dṛṣṭi) and ‘Fruition’ (bras bu; phala). The practices of this group in general, and those of the two first continuums in particular, are usually regarded as preliminary practices to the whole complex of main non-dual practices. Unlike those practices, the practices of the second group are primarily related to the main practice of ‘Leap Over’ (thod rgal) that is especially concerned with the aspect of clear luminosity. Yet,
although the practices of both groups are intentional in their initial orientation, their actual application is supposed to facilitate a direct encounter with various facets of natural awareness. In addition, some of these practices are already based on instructions that transcend the common motifs of deliberate effort, intentional manipulation of phenomena and directedness towards particular experiences.12

The non-deliberative instructions found in some of the intentional methods of praxis were further enriched by the unique non-dual practices of the sNying thig tradition, which shared similar contemplative principles. Like their intentional predecessors, the non-dual practices of ‘ Cutting through Solidity’ (khregs chod) and ‘Direct Crossing’/’Leap Over’ (thod rgal) addressed the three basic aspects of Mind-itself: its openness, clarity and inter-being responsiveness, in varying measures of emphasis. Nevertheless, as will become clear when discussing the individual practices, the different orientations of each non-dual practice still recognized the indivisible relation between the three aspects, since only such a recognition could ensure the authentic disclosure of reality-itself.

The numerous instructions that form the non-dual practices incorporate a rich variety of contemplative principles, which reflect the different qualities of Mind-as-such. Among those principles, Klong chen pa extensively discussed four main contemplative qualities, which were equally divided between the two non-dual practices. These four principles were the non-objectiveness (med pa) and openness (phyal ba) of the khregs chod practice and the spontaneous present-ing (lhun grub) and singleness (gcig pu) of the thod rgal practice (Longchen Rabjam 1998, xix). Additionally, each of these principles was characterized through four
consecutive phases that marked its increasing realization as a basic quality of lived experience. The four phases of increased realization were those of elucidating the key points (gnad bkrol), wrapping up the key points (’gag bsdams), binding (ching su bcings) those into lived experience and, finally, crossing to transcendental reality (la bzla’i don). Together, the four contemplative principles and their respective four phases formed an intricate map of the unfolding disclosure of authentic reality, which embraced all experiences without identifying this reality with any limited set of particular experiences.

The practice of cutting through the solidity of reified phenomena

The first non-dual practice advocated by the sNying thig tradition, ‘Cutting through Solidity’, mainly addressed the transcendental aspect of spacious openness, which is peaceful and unchanging. As such, this practice can be considered as the culminating phase of the contemplative methods of šamatha (zhi gnas), because all of those concern similar qualities of awareness. However, unlike the previous methods of šamatha that are directed to discrete phenomenal objects, the practice of ‘Cutting through Solidity’ directly turns to the non-intentional space of awareness-itself. Consequently, this non-dual practice, like its fellow practice of ‘Direct Crossing’, is faced with the daunting difficulty of approaching the experiential range that transcends the intentional structure of mind without solidifying it into a distinct entity.

13. med pa phyjal pa lhun grub gcig pu stell re re’ang gnad bkrol ’gag bsdams ching su bcings|| la bzla’i don dang rnam pa bzhi bzhir gnas|| (Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009f, 339). In the ‘Treasury of Words and Meanings’ Klong chen pa utilized a slightly different model of the phases in the context of the khregs chod practice, as he enumerated the three phases of (1) crossing to the great primordial purity which exhausts intentional phenomena, (2) wrapping up the key points within the naked transparency that is free from objects and (3) binding [lived experience] in the great equality which is totally liberated (chos zad ka dag chen por la bzla ba| bya bral zang thal rjen par ’gag bsdam pa| yongs grol mnyam pa chen por chings su bcings ba’o| Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009b, 19: 202).

14. For elaborate discussions on this practice, see Karma chags med and Gyatrul Rinpoche 1998; Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol 2002; Dowman 2003; Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009g.

15. For example, in the preliminary practices of the sNying thig tradition we find a set of elaborate practices that are grouped under the general rubric of ‘Holding the Mind’ (sems ‘dzin) and meant to gradually cultivate one-pointed attentiveness that culminates in the seeing of reality-itself. The various practices were divided to three groups, each one including seven methods that utilized relatively simple means of visualization, chanting and cognitive activities for the sake of optimizing the contemplative capacity of awareness. The first group of contemplative methods was designed to enhance the capacity of mind to stay in a state of abiding without splitting attention into multiple objects (bdun tshan dang pos rang sens gnas su bzhug pa| Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009c, 18: 61). Based on the one-pointed abiding concentration cultivated in the first group of methods, the methods of the second group were aimed to sever the grasping attachment between body and mind (gnyis pa las sens ‘dzin chen dbrol ba’i gnad bdun ni| p. 62). Finally, the third group of methods was concerned with seeing the authentic reality of phenomena (gsun pas chos nyid mthong ba bstan pa’i bdun tshan ni| p. 62). For a comprehensive description of these practices by one of the most notable contemporary rdzogs chen teachers, see Namkhai 1990. At the same time, it is also important to notice that advanced stages of samatha practice are quite similar in their contemplative vision to the instructions of the khregs chod practice (For an illuminative discussion on samatha practices, see Wallace 1998). Hence, it can be argued that the difference between those advanced stages and a strict non-dual contemplation arise from the varying capacity to abide in an even and open manner within the spacious clarity of awareness.
As just mentioned, the practice of ‘Cutting through Solidity’ mainly revolves around the essence of Mind-as-such that is spaciously open and primordially pure from all restrictions and divisions. As these qualities of the essence are known only through complete restfulness and stillness, this practice is introduced as suitable for the practitioners of sharp faculties who are lazy, because such a state is most accessible to those with an innate tendency to rest. Furthermore, since this praxis aims to reveal transcendental awareness in its own naked purity, it is not concerned with individual appearances and, consequently, it does not require the practitioner to meticulously observe any particular emanation of Mind-itself. In this sense, because the open aspect of awareness is disclosed when cognitive and affective activities subside, then the practitioner suitable for realizing it should have the capacity of resting completely without being involved in any particular phenomenon. Thus, the qualities of the practitioner who is most suited for this practice already anticipate the actual character of the non-dual practice, as the latter is fashioned in accordance with the capacity of resting without being distracted.

The multiple instructions that constitute the practice of ‘Cutting through Solidity’ were grouped together by Klong chen pa under two main rubrics, being that of ‘Non-objectiveness’ and ‘Openness’. As such, these categories functioned as the two primary principles of the actual practice that was designed to allow awareness to utterly rest in its own naked nature. Therefore, although these principles were also incorporated in certain conceptual views about the nature of lived reality, they were primarily regarded as existential insights that have to be realized in lived experience and not through arguments and conceptual explanations. In other words, these principles were meant to be directly known in their primordial and immediate nature by the deepening of spacious resting that evades both agitation and sinking into dullness.

**Non-objectiveness**

The contemplative principle of non-objectiveness is quite likely the most familiar characteristic of any Buddhist view concerning the selflessness (bdag med pa; anātman) and emptiness (stong pa nyid; śūnyatā) of both subjective and objective poles of consciousness. However, in the context of the intuitive vision of ‘The Great Perfection’ this principle is not only a conceptual negation of all views concerning substantial existence but also a spontaneously present aspect of lived experience. The non-conceptual attitude of ‘Cutting through Solidity’ clearly exemplifies the primordiality of the lived aspect within the multivalent meanings of this principle, as it asserts the necessity of realizing it through direct abiding that is not mediated by conceptual expressions of any kind. Thus, the non-dual contemplative attitude that reveals an unmediated experiential reality also has profound philosophical implications. Unlike the dominant analytical/argumentative orientation of various Buddhist traditions, the non-dual approach adapts

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16. ‘Additionally, [the practice of] “Cutting through Solidity” is the path that self liberates without exertion; the lived appropriation [of] naked transcendental awareness without looking at appearances. It is the key point of [one with] sharp faculties, who is awakened without meditative cultivation, being lazy’ (de yang khregs chod ni lam ‘bad med du rang grol ba snang ba la ma ltes par rig pa rgen pa nyams su len pa le lo can ma bsgoms par ‘shang rgya ba dbang po rnon po’i gnad yin la| Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 201).
a phenomenological approach that emphasizes the primacy of lived experience in its most pristine disclosure, which is free from the intentional structure. As such, this approach does not focus on the distinct experiential elements of the intentional life but, rather, turns directly to the all-encompassing intuitional elements in their pure presence. Moreover, since the non-dual approach reveals a transcendental dimension of awareness that serves as the lived base for all conceptual designations regarding emptiness, it is asserted as primordial with relation to the philosophical attitudes that are based on arguments and analysis.

In accordance with the four phases of realizing each contemplative principle, the principle of non-objectivity begins with elucidating its key points for recognition.\footnote{17. As indicated before, the order of these phases, as well as their exact number, differs between the ‘Treasury of the Way of Abiding’ and the ‘Treasury of Words and Meanings’. In this context we will follow the order set by the ‘Treasury of the Way of Abiding’, yet also incorporate descriptions found in other treatises, as those directly refer to the khregs chod practice. In the context of the various phases this incorporation yields the result that the first phase that is designated in the ‘Treasury of Words and Meanings’ as ‘Crossing over to the great primordial purity [which] exhausts phenomenal objects’ (chos zad ka dag chen por la bzla ba| Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 202) will be presented when elucidating the key points for recognizing the non-objective essence of Mind-as-such.}

The recognition of this principle starts with identifying all phenomena as illusory in their appearance as subsisting entities and, later on, asserting their non-objective mode-of-being that is without substantive ground, free from all conceptual extremes and only present as mere appearance. Consequently, the self-occurring phenomena are not experienced through dividing categories, such as existence/non-existence and true/false. Instead, the different phenomena, being those of outer appearances or inner mind alike, are recognized as merely arising from the state of reality-itself.\footnote{18. The essential recognition of phenomena as mere luminous appearances from the state of reality-itself is reminiscent of the Yogācāra claim that all appearances are mind alone. As this kind of recognition can be considered as the axis mundi of the various rDzogs chen traditions, it is certainly possible to perceive those as continuing the phenomenological orientation of the early Yogācāra and, even, as revealing the full extent of its contemplative insights regarding the nature of non-dual reality. Thus, although Klong chen pa asserted the supremacy of the Madhyamaka, especially the Prasaṅgika method, in actuality, the non-argumentative key points of contemplative praxis are much closer to the phenomenological views of the Yogācāra. As such, looking in the actual practices themselves, and not in the doxographical classifications, contributes much more for realizing the actual non-dual methodology of the rDzogs chen traditions in general, and the sNying thig tradition in particular.}

As such, there is no phenomenon that objectively exists apart from the expanse of lived experience. Owing to the essential rootedness of phenomena in the state of reality-itself, the practitioner should not distinguish between those by actively seeking or rejecting certain phenomena.\footnote{19. ‘di ltar snang ba dang sens pa’ang chos nyid kyi ngang las shar ba tsam las gzhan du grub pa’i chos med pas snang sens la blang dor dang rtsol sgrub bya mi dgos te| (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 204).} Additionally, because all phenomena are recognized as not other than mere appearances that luminously emanate from the space of pristine awareness, they are primordially liberated from all discrete notions of objectified being that are associated with the intentional structure of consciousness. Hence, by recognizing the non-objective being of phenomena, including Mind-itself, the course of the entire non-dual practice is already set, as it is released from the fundamental distinctions between phenomena. Since all phenomena are recognized as the mere
playfulness of Mind-as-such, there is no need to prefer or resist any of those in order to realize the non-dual state of primordial awareness.

Following the elucidation of the key points for directly recognizing the non-objective being of Mind-itself and its multiple emanations, the second phase of appropriating the non-dual reality into lived experience is that of wrapping up the key points into actual practice. The gathering of key points into the context of lived practice occurs by turning to the naked transparency of reality-itself, which is ever-present and all-pervasive. For the sake of abiding in those qualities of awareness, the practitioner is instructed, first of all, to identify the dimension of reality (chos sku; dharmakāya) throughout the entire range of lived experience. However, since this dimension is nakedly transparent, it is not perceived as a distinct phenomenon that is separated from other phenomena. Rather, the transparent dimension of reality-itself is recognized as the space that surrounds and pervades all shining-forth phenomena. In this sense, this dimension can be viewed as beyond the mode of objective existence ('grub pa; niṣpatti) that arises from turning distinct phenomena into experiential centres to which cognitive and emotive acts are directed. Yet, the instruction for identifying this dimension indicates that the transparent essence of reality-itself is already experientially given in a certain sense, since without such givenness it would not be possible even to ponder upon this dimension. At the same time, this transparent dimension is not given in an immanent sense, since it is revealed only through the absence of distinct phenomena. Instead, the dimension of open essence is recognized in a transcendental manner as the engulfing expanse in which all phenomena arise, abide and subside without changing it in any way whatsoever. Consequently, through the transcendental recognition of transparent essence the practitioner is able to further rest in the basic reality of Mind-itself, without falling into partial identifications of naked awareness.

The identification of naked transparency enables the practitioner to actualize the contemplative instructions in an authentic manner that is not embedded any longer in the intentional structure of meditative agent and meditative object. The contemplative actualization occurs, first and foremost, through a complete restfulness (cog gzhag) within the own-transparency of awareness which penetrates the temporal distinctions of past, present and future. Yet, this utter restfulness is not without a quality of clarity, since without it awareness would become dull and insensitive. As such, the practitioner is instructed to relax in his own-nature without modifying it while sustaining an aspect of clarity with regard to all luminous appearances. However, owing to the realization of all phenomena as emanations of transcendental awareness, those are not approached through their distinct contents but through their shared characteristic of naked insub-

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20. The presence of the transparent dimension of reality-itself for its own pondering-upon provides a clear example for a transcendental argument, because it demonstrates the necessary being of certain experiential elements for the sake of even addressing those. For example, without a primordial spaciousness of awareness it would not be possible to form a contemplative instruction that presuppose the presence of open awareness. Nevertheless, unlike the rootedness of many Buddhist transcendental arguments in logical considerations (Arnold 2008), the necessity of open awareness is first and foremost an intuitive presence that is acknowledged by contemplative practice. In this sense, the intuitive orientation of 'The Great Perfection' indicates a primordial meaning of transcendental necessity, which arises from the ever-present aspects of lived experience and not from discursive imperatives.
stantiality that is their basic reality (Klong chen rab 'byams pa 2009b, 19: 216). As a result, the numerous key points concerning the non-objectivity of phenomena are gathered by solely turning to naked transparency, since it alone ensures the subsiding of all intentional distinctions that reify phenomenal appearances into self-existent objects.

The turning to the naked non-objective transparency of awareness culminates in its binding to the lived state of complete liberation. As its name indicates, the state of complete liberation is disclosed without being dependent on any particular act, because its mode of abiding encompasses experiences of stillness and arising alike. When still, awareness is revealed as an expansive evenness that is without a centre and background; when arising, the resting of awareness through discerning the all-pervasive quality of pure limpidity ensures the self-dissolution of all phenomena without a trace, since none of those is grasped at as a reified object. 21 Therefore, the two poles of intentional consciousness are revealed as lacking a distinct existence, because both are independently given only as abstractions of the indivisible unity of awareness and shining-forth phenomena. Put differently, by directly realizing the indivisible unity of expansiveness and luminosity, awareness is released from the intentional structure of grasper and grasped that supports the distinction into inner and outer worlds. Thus, the supposedly basic division between the knowing agent and the known world is revealed as depending on a certain structure of being-aware, which is only a derivative of the primordial state of non-dual awareness.

The dissolution of the intentional structure is facilitated by four key points, which serve as reminders for one’s own authentic nature by reflecting the experiential characteristics of liberated awareness in the context of contemplative practice. To begin with, the practitioner is initially instructed to apply the key point of seeing the naked aspect of transcendental awareness in order liberate it from falsely reifying phenomena into objective entities. 22 In addition, the practitioner should actualize the key point of resting in the single time of spontaneous presence that is without the distinctions of past and future. 23 Since phenomena primordially arise in a spontaneous manner and, only derivatively support intentional acts of temporal distinctions, then awareness is not essentially constrained by intentional divisions. Hence, the practitioner can transcend such acts, including those of memory and anticipation, through resting in the naked spontaneity of primordial awareness. 24 Following those initial points, the third

21. ngo bo ni rig pa rjen pa'i don de ngos bzang la] gnas na gnas thog tu phyam gdal ‘char na ‘char thog tu dangs phyje nas bzhag pas rang yal rjes med zang that te] (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 218).
22. de’ang rig pa rjen par mthong ba’i gnad kyis grol ba dang] (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 220).
23. snga phyi ris med gcig par dus kyis grol ba dang] (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 220).
24. The particular instruction of resting in the singular time of spontaneous presence provide a fundamental phenomenological insight concerning a double derivativeness; first from spontaneous presence to the intentional acts of temporality and, second, from these acts to the abstraction of an objectified world of past, present and future events. In this sense, a phenomenological reduction that perceives all such distinctions as given in lived experience is not sufficient for revealing the authentic nature of these experiential distinctions themselves as spontaneous emanations of awareness. Only a transcendental reduction that turns to the shared qualities of all intentional acts can disclose their authentic abiding as immediate emanations, regardless of their particular contents.
key point liberates awareness through self-resting without exertion and effort, as this utter restfulness discloses the evenness of awareness due to the lack of preferential intentions. When the three key points are integrated together awareness is released from its various extremes that are based on the division between the space of awareness and the numerous phenomena appearing in it.\(^{25}\) As such, the authentic confidence (\textit{gdeng}) that arises from this direct realization of awareness-as-such serves as the fourth key point that ensures the binding of lived experience to the open dimension of awareness, which is not sullied by any individual experience.

Finally, the lived realization of the non-objective being of awareness culminates in certain insights about the nature of liberated awareness itself. In contrast to the immanent distinctions that are the backbone for most contemplative paths, these insights undermine all the basic distinctions that serve as guiding principles for the practitioner. For example, by directly experiencing the a-temporal and non-intentional nature of phenomena, the practitioner realizes the artificial existence of cause and result, as well as its accompanying notions of virtue and vice, because those are dependent on the intentional characteristics of continued existence and temporal relations.\(^{26}\) Moreover, due to the utter spontaneity of phenomena in their primordial mode-of-abiding, they actually transcend any objective designation that is based on continuous existence. As such, all phenomena are decisively resolved as naturally pure from reifying abstractions. Thus, unlike the usual manner of evaluating experience that is based on cognitive and affective distinctions, realizing their non-objective being occurs entirely through discerning the basic distinction between the intentional structure that supports spatio-temporal relations and the immediate being-ness of natural awareness.

\textit{Openness}

Once the non-objective nature of phenomena is realized, awareness is released from the intentional relation between the knowing and known aspects and is able to directly perceive its own-quality of openness. This basic quality is disclosed as the spacious-cum-luminous expanse that surrounds and pervades each moment of lived experience, without being divided into a centre and periphery in terms of attention. Moreover, since awareness is vastly open and without an exclusive centre of attention, it is also beyond the common structure of reifying intentionality and all linguistic descriptions that are based on identity and difference.

\(^{25}\) \textit{rang gzhag ‘bad rtsol med par grol ba gsum ni mtha’ grol gyi don yin la} (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 220).

\(^{26}\) In his discussion on transcending the belief in karmic fruition of virtue and vice, Klong chen pa explicitly asserted the affinity of such a transcendence with the discarded views of Ha shang, the Chan patriarch who supposedly lost in the \textit{bSam yas} debate (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009f, 414). This explicit remark indicates the close relation between these two non-dual traditions, as both emphasize the transcendence of intentional distinctions that support the usual moral and epistemological distinctions. However, unlike the accepted view of Tibetan traditions on the instantaneous (\textit{cig car}; yugapad) approach of Ha shang and its all-encompassing application, Klong chen pa reserves his antimonian insights to those of highest realization. As such, he can accommodate both gradual and non-dual attitudes in a complex scheme of contemplative principles that acknowledges the differing capacities for existential disclosure.
between discrete objects. Therefore, the basic openness of awareness undermines the common perception of it as oriented towards particular phenomenal centres in an intentional and excluding manner. Instead of this restricted vision of lived experience, the realization of basic openness discloses an authentic vision of unbounded awareness, which no longer supports the reifying acts that turn any spontaneously present phenomenon into a self-subsisting object.

The contemplative disclosure of openness begins with the elucidation of the experiential key points that are essential for an authentic recognition of luminous openness. The main point, which appears in several variations throughout Klong chen pa’s descriptions, is concerned with the state of awareness that transcends all intentional acts of cognition and affection, as those are in themselves restrictions of spontaneous openness. In order to recognize this state, the key points of openness challenge the supposedly fundamental notions of intentionality, temporality and causality. In contrast to the usual mode of consciousness that is constituted by the two poles of grasper and grasped, those key points address awareness as a non-partial expanse, in which all phenomena self-arise in a natural manner. Consequently, the temporal and causal relations, which are supported by the intentional structure and its reifying effects, are repeatedly negated as they disappear in the immediate presence of awareness and its phenomenal emanations. Furthermore, the contemplative methods involving effort and transformation, including tantric empowerment, *mandala*, mantra and vows, become obsolete according to these key points, since they do not influence the open quality of awareness that is primordially given without any intentional effort (Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009f, 423).

The repeated motif of an open state that is free from the intentional structure and its objectifying derivatives is applied into contemplative praxis through a set of instructions that emphasize the transcendence of deliberate acts of grasping. Unlike the intentional methods that try to attain this kind of transcendence by applying designed acts, as in the case of tantric practices from the creation (*bskyed rim*; *utpattikrama*) and completion (*rdzogs rim*; *sampānarakrama*) stages, these instructions affirm a natural attitude of relaxing into spacious awareness without directing it to any particular phenomenon. Thus, when applying those instructions the practitioner is expected to be in a state of loose awareness that does not try to stop any experience in an effortful manner. Nevertheless, although loose in the context of allowing the self-arising of phenomena, awareness should also be vivid and clear, as only the integrated abiding in openness and clarity enables an authentic recognition of primordial indivisibility. By keeping this indivisible abiding without straying into conceptual acts, awareness is released from the constituting relation of intentionality that serves as the all-pervading condition for all forms of dualistic consciousness and objectified existence.

27. *Rig pa stong gsal mt’ha’ dbus med pa nil* phyal ba bar med kyi chos sku a ti yo ga kun bzang yangs pa’i thugs nam mkha’ ltar rgya chad phyogs lhung med pa brjod med blo ‘das chen po zhes bya stel (Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009f, 420).

28. For example, the summary of these instructions states that ‘In brief, when sense consciousness arises on that basis of an apparent sense object, maintain without straying the limpid state of self-clarity, an expansive bliss not being bound by deliberate grasping. [This state is] called “Gathering [the key points] into Openness”, since one is liberated from restrictive grasping [that occurs] through deliberate intentionality’ (*mdor na yul snang thog der dbang shes shar dus ched du ‘dzin pas ma bcings par bde yangs rang gsal ngang dwangs ma yeangs par bskyangs*.
The contemplative gathering of the key points concerning openness into the state of relaxed yet vivid awareness allows the practitioner to directly perceive the nature of reality that is beyond the intentional structure of consciousness. To begin with, the disclosure of basic openness reveals awareness as embracing all phenomena without exception. As such, the entire range of lived experience is realized as the playful display of transcendental awareness.\(^{29}\) In other words, the authentic comprehension of phenomena is attained only when those are reduced to the dimension of self-aware emanations, since this dimension serves as the transcendental support for all objective characterizations and affective relations. Additionally, because all phenomena are embraced within awareness due to its pristine openness, they are comprehended in their insubstantial being that lacks any independent ground other than awareness itself. Not only that, as the quality of being-aware is also embraced within the unbounded openness of its own-nature, which is the reality that transcends conceptual representations and expression, both poles of knowing and known are recognized as naturally pure from any form of substantial existence.\(^{30}\)

The lived comprehension of the all-embracing range of open awareness culminates in realizing the transcendental reality that is shared by all phenomena and their overarching awareness. This reality surpasses the intentional patterns of consciousness, since its spontaneous openness dissolves the status of phenomena as continuous objects that are the foci of emotions, volitions and conceptions. Therefore, the common distinction into outer and inner phenomena loses its fundamental ground, because all phenomena are resolved as a-temporal luminous emanations without independent existence. Furthermore, this kind of transcendental resolve points to a primordial sense of being that signifies the mere spontaneous act of shining-forth in a self-aware manner. Since this act is primordially grounded in the nature of awareness-itself and not in any prior event, it surpasses the relations of causal production and its possible implications in terms of moral consequences. As such, reality in general and the contemplative life in particular are released from all divisive evaluations and categorical classifications, as they are known in their authentic nature that is open, spontaneous and ever-flowing.

The various key points and instructions associated with the practice of ‘Cutting through Solidity’ reveal a radical attitude of contemplation that is not based on predetermined schemes. In contrast to the contrived instructions of analytic and tantric practices, the contemplative principles of this practice exemplify an attitude of natural and open awareness to all phenomena, especially to the primordial phenomenon of awareness itself. Since this phenomenon is not restricted to any particular experience but rather stands as the intuitional background for all experiences, an authentic contemplation of it is not limited to any fixed range of distinct phenomena. Moreover, the attitude of natural and non-modified awareness discloses the basic transparency of awareness in which the supposedly basic distinction between knower and known is dissolved. Consequently, the entire

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\(^{29}\) snod bcud ‘khor ‘das su snang ba’i chos thams cad rig pa byang chub kyi sems kyis bcings shing sems su snang bas med pa gsal snang rig pa’i rol bar shes par bya ste (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009f, 430).

\(^{30}\) chos dang rig pa yang mtshon brjod ‘das pa’i chos nyid phyil bas bcings pas rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa nyid de (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009f, 433).
scope of phenomena is revealed as indivisible from the expanse of awareness. As such, the authentic mode-of-being is grounded in the spontaneous act of self-awareness that integrates the aspects of shining-forth and being-aware.

The practice of direct crossing to the transcendental ground of phenomena

The natural and effortless attitude of ‘Cutting through Solidity’ revealed the non-dual reality of awareness and phenomena. However, according to the sNying thig tradition this authentic comprehension of reality is not yet complete, since it still lacks the thorough unfolding of luminous emanations. Thus, in accordance with the general scheme of ‘Calm Abiding’ as the practice that addresses the aspect of stillness, and ‘Penetrative Seeing’ as the practice that is directed to the aspect of clarity (Dge dun blo gros 1998, 12; Klong chen rab’byams pa 2009h, 21: 359–361), the sNying thig approach does not include the khregs chod practice alone, because this practice is mainly concerned with the qualities of spaciousness, openness and non-objective being. For the sake of addressing the qualities associated with the aspect of clarity, this tradition introduces a complementary non-dual practice that relies on the same contemplative principles of khregs chod while incorporating certain deliberate exercises for the sake of disclosing the basic patterns of luminous being.31 As a result, unlike the effortless orientation of ‘Cutting through Solidity’, the complementary practice of ‘Direct Crossing’ involves to a certain extent deliberate practice and, even, a developmental perspective. Yet, owing to its fundamental non-dual approach this practice culminates in the re-turn of awareness to its primordial liberated ground after fully revealing the most refined texture of luminous radiance (Third Dzogchen Rinpoche 2008, 4).

In a similar fashion to the common assertion about the superiority of vipaśyanā practice over śamatha practice, the practice of thod rgal is introduced as superior to the practice of khregs chod due to seven special differences (khyad par; viśeṣa).32

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31. Due to the different phenomenological concerns of the two non-dual practices, it can be claimed that the practice of ‘Cutting through Solidity’ is closely related to themes found in sūtric oriented non-dual traditions, such as Chan and the sūtric branch of Mahāmudrā, while the practice of ‘Direct Crossing’ mainly approach themes prevalent in tantric traditions. Moreover, the relatively late arising of the sNying thig tradition with comparison to other rDzogs chen traditions perhaps indicates that this dual scheme of practices was meant, on the one side, to address the growing popularity of the new tantric lineages and, on the other side, to appropriate and subordinate other rDzogs chen traditions that were more antinomian in their relation to deliberate practice.

32. In his ‘Treasury of Supreme Vehicle’ Klong chen pa enumerated these seven differences in the following manner: ‘The difference of the luminosity that is apparent, the difference of connecting with practices, the difference of manifestly seeing the self-visions, the difference of the channels [that are] the key points of the body, the difference of the [sense] door that causes [perceptual] visions, the difference of the sense faculty that sees, the difference of appearing [through] the increase of experience, and [these are the] seven’ (snang ba ‘od kyi khyad par| nyams len lag len dang ’brel ba’i khyad par| rang snang mgon sum du gzigs pa’i khyad par| lus gnad rtsa’i khyad par| snang byed sgo’i khyad par| mthong ba dbang po’i khyad par| nyams myong ’phel snang gi khyad par dang bdun no| Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009c, 18: 230). In his ‘Treasury of Words and Meanings’ Klong chen pa introduced a slightly different version of these special characteristics in the following words: ‘The difference of connecting with practices, the difference of the channels [that are] the key points of the body, the difference of the [sense] door that causes [perceptual] visions, the difference of the sense faculty that sees, the difference of the manifested self key-points, the difference of the luminosity that is apparent, the differ-
These differences arise from the basic shift of practice from disclosing the spacious and insubstantial essence of Mind-itself to enhancing the luminosity of perceptual experience. As such, the practice of 'Direct Crossing' enables awareness to see its own self-manifestations, including the lived body, in a lucid manner that is not stained by cognitive and affective distortions. Thus, unlike the practice of 'Cutting through Solidity' that liberates phenomena by dissolving their solid independent existence in the open space of awareness, this practice begins with directly enhancing their lived vitality, since this in itself naturally eradicates the perceptual deficiencies and restrictions. This process enables awareness to directly recognize the inherent relation between the perceiving body and the perceived world, which form a single wholeness of experiential reality. Therefore, the indivisibility of awareness and phenomena is realized in a transcendental and immanent manner alike, since phenomena are known in their richness and transparency alike.

**Key points for practice**

As already seen in the context of the khregs chod practice, the contemplative key points hold a special significance for the realization of one’s own authentic nature. Similarly, the thod rgal practice is based on various key points, some of which concern the position of the body and the eyes in a detailed manner and some of which address the gradual unfolding of undivided reality. Owing to their varying foci, these key points bring together an intentional mode of deliberate practice and a natural mode of undirected awareness to whatever arises. In this sense, the culminating practice of the sNyin thig tradition signifies a novel integration between structured practices of a noticeable tantric character and contemplative principles associated with the iconoclastic attitude of earlier rDzogs chen traditions. Furthermore, the application of specific postures and gazes indicates a close relation between the various constituents of the lived body and the numerous states of awareness that disclose different aspects of reality-itself. As such, although luminous awareness is already all-pervading in the mere arising of lived experience, it still needs specific somatic patterns in order to fully actualize its several levels of vitality and sensuality, whether those manifest in the lived body or perceived world.

The structured key points for contemplation prescribe for the practitioner certain bodily postures, ways of looking (gzigs stangs) and breathing methods for the sake of revealing the three main aspects of awareness-itself, which are its non-objective openness, luminous clarity and uninterrupted responsiveness. Ence in the increase of experiential visions’ (nyams len lag len dang ‘bre la ’i khyad par| lus gnad rtsa ’i khyad par| snang byed sgo ’i khyad par| mthong ba dbang po ’i khyad par| rang gnad mngon sum gyi khyad par| snang ba ’od kyi khyad par| nyams snang gong ’phel gyi khyad par ro) Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009b, 19: 231).

33. For a discussion on the unique approach of the thod rgal practice, see Guenther 1992; Karma chags med and Gyatrul Rinpoche 2000.

34. The structured postures enumerated by Klong chen pa are those of the ‘lion’ (seng ge) for the dimension of reality, the ‘elephant’ (glang chen) for the dimension of perfect rapture and the ‘sage’ (drang srong) for the dimension of lived emanations (Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009b, 19: 243). For a graphic illustration of these postures as recorded in Tibetan wall-paintings, see Baker 2000, 110–157. The deliberate gazes are those of looking upwards (gyen) for directly
However, unlike the naked recognition of these aspects in the *khregs chod* practice, the introduction of those in the *thod rgal* practice is intertwined with distinct perceptual and somatic phenomena. As such, the application of the key points is associated with the indivisible dimensions of spacious expansiveness (*dbyings*) and transcendental awareness (*rig pa*) as revealed in the actual perception of the lived body and the surrounding visual environment. Consequently, the lived identification of the indivisible dimensions occurs through the intensification of unique perceptual phenomena along with the self-aware disclosure of the underlying matrix of perception, which encompasses both body and world.

The unique perceptual phenomena of ‘Direct Crossing’ initially appear as minute *vajra* chains that move in the space in front of the eyes. The appearance of those chains is initiated by directing the visual gaze to particular luminous objects, such as the sun, moon and butter lamps, or by pressing on the eyeballs, and this in contrast to the non-deliberate open gaze of ‘Cutting through Solidity’. Through such methods the luminous chains arise without being co-extensive with any distinct object that is supposedly independent and self-existent. Hence, the chains are known from their very arising as self-radiations of the primordially open-cum-clear pure awareness that is seen in a penetrative manner. As such, the *vajra* chains are a clear example for the creative power of awareness in the domain of perceptual reality, since they are not identified with any concrete object. Moreover, when perceiving those chains without grasping they begin to increase in their multitude and intensify in their complexity. Due to that intensification, the assumed distinction between the expanse of aware-

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35. For example, when describing the key points of the perceived object (*yul gyi gnad*) Klong chen pa connected between specific ways of looking into the spacious world surrounding the body and certain basic aspects of awareness, being its open expanse and luminous awareness: ‘The key point of the perceived object [is as follows]: The look in which the eye is directed to the space between the eyebrows without any straying of cognitions is called the way of looking of the expanse and transcendental awareness. Moreover, the space is the ground in which the lamps of totally pure expanse arise. Therefore, when looking in that [space], it is called the way of looking of the expanse. Since cognitions are the creative vitality of transcendental awareness, then when not straying from that [expanse] there arises its radiation, the appearances of the [*vajra*] chains. Consequently, it is called the way of looking of transcendental awareness’ (*yul gyi gnad smin mtshams kyi nam mkha’ la mig gtad de shes pa ma yengs par blta ba ni dbyings dang rig pa’i lta stangs zhes bya’o| de’ang nam mkha’ ni dbyings rnam dag gi sgron ma ‘char ba’i gzhi yin pas der blta ba la dbyings kyi lta stangs zhes bya’o| shes pa ni rig pa’i rtsal yin pas de ma yengs na gdangs lu gu rgyud kyi snang ba ‘char bas rig pa’i lta stangs zhes bya’o| Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 249).

36. ‘Furthermore, [concerning] the key point of the expanse, it is conducted by looking in all [directions], right, left, up and down, from the corners [of the eye] that are directed to the appearances of sun, moon and butter lamps. Within that abiding [place] of transcendental awareness, the *vajra* chains are placed in an unwavering manner’ (*de yang dbyings kyi gnad nyi zla dang mar me’i snang ba la gtad pa’i zur nas gyas gyon dang steng og thams cad ‘khrid cing blta la| rig pa’i gnas de’i nang du lu gu rgyud ma ‘gul bar ‘jog pa’o| Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 253).

37. *dang po ni me long du bzhin gyi gzugs brnyan shar ba ltar ka dag gi rig pa stong gsal lhag mthong gi rang gdangs rdo rje lu gu rgyud du snang ba ste|* (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009b, 19: 247).
ness and the outer perceptual world gradually dissolves, as the objects of the latter are gradually known as emanations of the former in an immediate manner.

The increase of the vajra chains and their subsequent appearances is enriched and complemented by the disclosure of the luminous blueprint of perceiver and perceived, which is introduced in the terminology of ‘Direct Crossing’ as a set of interlocking lamps.38 These lamps signify the luminous constituents of the complete matrix of perceiving body and perceived world, with special emphasis given to their visual aspects. As such, the various lamps constitute together the lived reality of perception, which is initiated in the heart, goes through the eyes and culminate in the space of the unlimited visual field. Hence, by realizing the holistic manifestation of the lamps the overarching aspects of open expanse and transcendental awareness are immanently known through the fundamental dyad of body and world. In this sense, the intensification of the radiating appearances and the lived disclosure of the luminous channels concretely disclose the immanent abiding of the basic aspects of awareness. Finally, the abiding of these aspects is revealed through the two qualities of spontaneous presence and singleness, which signify the most authentic manner of being.

Spontaneous presence

The disclosure of spacious openness through khregs chod practice also revealed the spontaneous presence of awareness, as the unchanging nature of spacious openness dissolved all temporal distinctions and causal relations. Nevertheless, since the realization of spontaneous presence was mainly based on the qualities of stillness and unchanging openness, it did not thoroughly address the dynamic nature of distinct phenomena in their actual occurrence. Unlike the realization based on stillness, the practice of ‘Direct Crossing’ emphasized the playful arising of phenomenal appearances while asserting their spontaneous nature that transcends temporal distinctions of the three times, past, present, and future. The spontaneous presence of phenomena was explained through the key point that advocated them as the creative vitality of awareness, which concretely manifested the transcendental aspects of Mind-itself. Therefore, the various phenomena were no longer to be perceived as distinct entities that undergo change, since they were expressions of an immediate creativity that is the self-nature of awareness. Furthermore, as all phenomena arose from a unitary source, their assumed distinctions, such as moral and quantitative ones, were revealed as lacking a substantial ground. Instead, all phenomena were found to abide in a single spontaneous expanse in which temporal change is only derived from the ever-creative affluence of awareness. Finally, by emphasizing the arising of phenomena as creative expressions of awareness, its three basic aspects were revealed as form-

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38. In the ‘Treasury of Words and Meanings’, Klong chen pa enumerated four main lamps: (1) the lamp of the far reaching watery lasso (rgyang zhags chu’i sgron ma), (2) the lamp of self-arising discriminating wisdom (shes rab rang byiug gi sgron ma) from the right eye, (3) the lamp of the empty vital essence (thig le stong pa’i sgron ma) and (4) the lamp of the totally pure expanse (dbyings rnam dag gi sgron ma) from the left eye (Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009b, 19: 115). As the names of the lamps already indicate, these refer to the basic aspects of the lived body, the perceived world and the capacity that knows being as it is. As such, the direct perception of those is actually the perception of authentic reality in its various dimensions of spontaneous presence. For a further discussion on the lamps and their relation to the unique appearances of the thod rgal practice and their existential implications, see Scheidegger 2004; Scheidegger 2005.
ing the indivisible reality of the lived world thanks to the fundamental abiding of it in the space of awareness. Thus, these aspects can be described through phenomenological and ontological terms alike, because the different facets of being are essentially embedded in the lived actuality of awareness, whether non-dual when authentically self-recognizing itself or divided when misrecognizing its expressions as independent entities.

Although the thod rgel practice is partly based on applying certain intentional key points, it is also characterized by contemplative key points that emphasize an unmodified resting within the incessant arising of luminous appearances. Therefore, although the arising of appearances serves as the base from which temporality is derived, the simple resting of awareness without attempting to achieve a certain goal enables it to remain in its pristine immediacy. However, owing to the arousal of luminous appearances by the structured key points, the unfolding of creative vitality is continuously self-occurring, yet without the grasping that transforms it into a series of reified changes. Consequently, the basic mode of spontaneous presence of all phenomena can be recognized, since the affluent arising of those is not accompanied by deliberate efforts and solidifying objectifications.

The application of key points concerning spontaneous presence through the simple resting with the immediate being of phenomena leads to the binding of awareness to its own spontaneous nature as revealed in lived experience. The binding occurs by directly realizing all phenomena as the self-appearances of awareness that is primordially known in its own spontaneity. Furthermore, since all phenomena are, in a strict phenomenological sense, mere expressions of the creative vitality of awareness, then they also necessarily disclose its transcendental characteristics that are always embedded in the arising of a world. As such, both the transcendental characteristics and the immanent phenomena of the world are spontaneously present, owing to their primordial and indivisible abiding in the expanse of awareness. Once this mode of abiding is realized, the urge to act for the sake of establishing certain experiences or worldly states dissolves, due to the immediacy that characterizes lived experience. As a result, both the objective mode of phenomena and the intentional acts of consciousness are exhausted in the space-like awareness, since all notions of temporal sequence and entitative divisions subside into the natural spontaneity of phenomena.

The fruition of the key points through lived experience culminates in certain realizations about the authentic mode of being of all phenomena and the nature of the primordial ground to which they inevitably subside. First, the intimate relation between being spontaneously present (lhun grub) and being substantially established (’grub pa), which is already evident from their etymology, is directly

39. de la snod bcud snang srid thams cad kyi rang snang du lhun gyis grub pa | (Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009f, 451).

40. For example, in his ‘Treasury of the Way of Abiding’ Klong chen pa stated that: ‘All phenomena of [inner] appearance and [outer-objective] existence, [whether those] of cyclic existence or transcendent peace, do not stray from the state of the great spontaneous presence of the three enlightened dimensions, [being] transcendental awareness. Therefore, [this state] is called “The spontaneously present expanse of me, the totally positive, which is free from [intentional] acts”’ (rig pa sku gsum lhun grub chen po ngang las snang srid ’khor ’das kyi chos thams cad ma g.yos pas nga kun tu bzang po’i bya bral lhun gyis grub pa’i dbyings zhes bya ste| Klong chen rab ’byams pa 2009f, 453).
comprehended when disclosing the full measure of the immediate presence of phenomena. Although our usual notion of existence is that of independent entities, their reduction to the lived presence of experiential appearances enables us to recognize them as self-appearances of awareness, from which the world of objects is abstracted through reifying processes.41 Moreover, since the appearances are known in their spontaneous abiding nature, then an authentic comprehension of their primordial being surpasses the usual distinction between existence and non-existence, which is based on temporal presence that may or may not be. Yet, unlike the mode of temporal being the mode of spontaneous presence is not subject to the division between objectified presence and absence, as it is in an immediate and a-temporal manner by its very nature. Hence, the disclosure of spontaneous presence resolves the question about primordial being by revealing its immediate abiding in open awareness, which is without a beginning in a temporal sense.

The realization of spontaneous presence manifests through the dissolving of all intentional acts that are directed to past memories and future expectations, as those are possible only when awareness is divided within itself. However, when awareness is spontaneously aware of its own-manifestations it is immediately present without deviating to temporal distinctions. By resting in this state of utter immediacy the restricting boundaries of embodied existence in an independent world are reversed and subside into open awareness, since their sustaining acts of intentional efforts no longer function. Thus, the dissolving of boundaries concretely reveals the primordial state of spacious being, in which the outer space of the world, the inner space of the body and the secret space of awareness-itself are no longer separated. Owing to that state, all phenomenal appearances are revealed in their single taste of a-temporal spacious being that reveals by its very nature the indivisibility of openness and luminosity.

Singleness

The unceasing arising of phenomenal appearances in general, and within the practice of ‘Direct Crossing’ in particular, poses a fundamental question about the relation between those and the knowing quality of awareness; are appearances and knowing awareness essentially distinct or do they converge in their most basic ground? As already indicated, the phenomenological perspective that was advocated by the sNyid thig tradition perceived the two poles of dualistic consciousness – the intentional poles of dualistic consciousness – was not only an analytical insight based on argumentative procedures, but also a lived event of deep existential significance that radically transformed the very notions of being-aware and being-known. This radical vision of reality found a clear expression in the key points concerning singleness, as these asserted the single root of all

41. This shift is reminiscent of the distinct types of reduction described by Edmund Husserl. According to him, it is imperative to distinguish between a phenomenological reduction that still assumes in an implicit manner the existence of an external world (Fink 1995, 101; Husserl 1997, 163) and a transcendental reduction that overcomes this implicit assumption by admitting the complete abiding of phenomena in transcendental subjectivity (Husserl 1997, 172).
phenomena in primordial awareness.\textsuperscript{42} In addition, these key points addressed the recurring question about the occurrence of two distinct existential modes of cyclic existence (\textit{khor ba; samsāra}) and transcendent peace (\textit{nya ngen las 'das pa; nirvāṇa}) as they affirmed a difference between a state of realizing the basic singleness of all phenomena and a state of not recognizing the all-encompassing transcendental awareness.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, even though phenomena were most often perceived as independent objects when reified through evaluations and affections, their basic mode-of-being did not stray from the state of single awareness. Thus, they could be realized as having a single taste once their groundless being was lively comprehended.

The key points concerning the singleness of phenomena and awareness were contemplatively actualized by resting in a state of self-lucidity, in which the luminous appearances arise unceasingly without being grasped at.\textsuperscript{44} Hence, although appearances still remain in their dynamic nature, open awareness is not affected by perceptual distinctions and changes, because it does not grasp any appearance in a manner that will reify it. In this manner, the spacious resting in open awareness dissolves the intentional constraints on awareness and nurtures the comprehension of uniform singleness, which is naturally revealed once the cognitive and affective obscurations subside into the space-like awareness. Since all phenomena are perceived without dividing obscurations, then none of those is any longer experienced as essentially distinct from the single awareness that is open and luminous alike. Consequently, the entire range of phenomenal appearances, regardless of their specific content, is realized as being embraced by the expanse of awareness in a primordial manner.

The lived comprehension of the single taste of all phenomena results in certain decisive realizations with regard to the authentic nature of awareness and phenomena. Since all phenomena are comprehended as vital expressions of awareness, then the latter is resolved as being without the intentional structure of perceiver and perceived that is based on the misrecognition of phenomena as distinct entities. In addition, because awareness and its radiating phenomena are of a single root that is spontaneously present, any temporal distinction into a beginning and an ending cannot be applied to those due to their primordial immediacy. Therefore, the primordial mode-of-being actually transcends all conceptual propositions and categorical distinctions by undermining the fundamental mechanisms of knowledge that relies on differentiating between discrete objects. Instead, awareness is decisively realized as the luminous expanse that is the ground for the entire display of personal life. Finally, this ground is already

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} ‘Although appearing as the five elements (that constitute the objective world), [they] arise from the state of primordial awareness, appear in [that] state and liberated in it’ (\textit{byung lngar snang ba yang rig pa’i ngen las shar ngen la snang ngen la grol| Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009f, 466}).
\item \textsuperscript{43} rig pa nam mkha’ita bu byang chub kyi sems ma rtsogs pas ‘khor ba byas| snod bcud du snang| rtsogs pas myang ‘das byas| sku da’ang ye shes su snang ste (Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009f, 470).
\item \textsuperscript{44} ‘When anything whatsoever appears, rest in the self-clarity of awareness that is supreme without grasping, unceasing in [its] luminosity. By [that resting] there arise the own-reality of luminous-openness, which is free from elaborations’ (\textit{gang snang dus na gsal la ma ‘gags’ stzin med chen por rig pa rang dangs su bzhag pas stong gsal spros pa dang bral ba’i chos nyid’ char te} Klong chen rab ‘byams pa 2009f, 473).
\end{itemize}
capable of transcending its divided modes of appearing through the recognition of its unbounded openness.

**Conclusion**

The non-dual vision of ‘The Great Perfection’ in general, and the ‘Heart Essence’ tradition in particular, provide us with a clear answer to several pertinent questions regarding the very possibility of an unconditional reality and the way through which this reality is present in actual experience. As a conclusion to the discussion on the contemplative principles of non-dual practice, we will consider two main questions among these. First, the non-dual identification of an unconditional reality with the ever-present dimension of transcendental awareness explains the recurring assertion of such a reality in various religious, mystical and philosophical contexts. Unlike a view that establishes this reality as an independent substratum that is separated from worldly consciousness, the non-dual vision asserts its presence at the very core of (human) awareness. Yet, this presence transcends the worldly intuitions of intentionality, temporality and causality and, as such, it is destined by its own-nature to be described in a paradoxical manner. Moreover, since the nature of this reality includes the aspect of being-aware and the aspect of shining-forth in a simultaneous manner, it cannot be authentically known through a fragmented frame of distinct perceiver and perceived. Thus, the contemplative practice that enables us to recognize this reality should undergo a radical transformation, because it cannot rely any longer on the principles of intentional effort and temporal change of the meditative object. The radical transformation is evident in the four contemplative principles that were just described, as those actualized the natural qualities of primordial awareness in the experiential attitude of the practitioner. Therefore, these principles disclosed the presence of one’s own natural qualities, rather than creating/developing novel ones.

Second, the primacy of intuitive experience in the description of non-dual reality indicates its pertinent role in determining the different meaning of being and knowing alike. In contrast to a view that perceives intentional knowing as directed to independent objects, the non-dual vision asserted the arising of both intentional knowing and individual phenomena from a primordial dimension of

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45. The primordial presence of an unconditioned reality was already asserted in a famous saying attributed to the Buddha himself: ‘There is the Unborn, Uncreated, Unconditioned and Unformed. If there were not, there would be no escape discerned from that which is born, created, conditioned and formed. But, since there is this Unborn, Uncreated, Unconditioned and Unformed, escape is therefore discerned from that which is born, created, conditioned and formed.’ ([Udāna 8.3](https://www.accesstothepali.com/udana-8-3-ajahn-pasanno-and-ajahn-amaro-2009-156-157)). In this sense, we can view the various Buddhist traditions which affirmed such a primordial reality as systemized attempts to further explain the basic necessity of this reality for the mere possibility of conceiving it and knowing it in a direct manner. Moreover, it is worthwhile to mention the similarity of this view to the claim made by Martin Heidegger regarding the necessary pre-givenness of Being for the sake of pondering the question concerning its distinct modes ([Heidegger 1996](https://archive.org/details/ontologyandthehumanquestion)), 4. In both cases we are faced with a transcendent condition for the very possibility of questions regarding (human) existence. As such, we can perceive the transcendental being not only as the being to be inquired, but also as the driving force behind the inquiry.

46. For example, see the discussions of David Loy ([1988](https://www.accesstothepali.com/udana-8-3-ajahn-pasanno-and-ajahn-amaro-2009-156-157)) and Michael Sells ([1994](https://www.accesstothepali.com/udana-8-3-ajahn-pasanno-and-ajahn-amaro-2009-156-157)) for the ways through which this present-cum-absent reality was described in various mystical traditions.
undivided awareness. However, due to its own-nature this dimension could be directly known only when re-turning to awareness-itself, without focusing on any distinct phenomenon. The re-turn to primordial awareness through the non-dual practice revealed the inadequacy of intentionality and objectifying perception in accounting for the open-cum-spontaneous presence of it. Instead, the actual disclosure of natural awareness uncovered a mode of being that is self-aware to its own authentic nature, even though this nature can never be known in exhaustive manner as a well discriminated entity. In this sense, the contemplative praxis enabled awareness to re-cognize its innate non-dual being, which is at the same time the ever-renewing origin for the occurring of worldly life.

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