

Pacifying Wisdom:

Prajñāpāramita, Padampa Sangye and Zhijé

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Introduction

The Prajñāpāramita (“Perfection of Wisdom”) teachings of the Mahāyāna (“Great Vehicle”) were first introduced in Tibet by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla around 750 CE. The *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras* themselves were highly respected, translated, copied, studied, and also considered to hold magical powers. This is shown in the advice given to the great Tibetan monk and founder of the Sakya lineage, ‘Brog-mi (992-1072 CE), before traveling to India around 1010: “Listen to the Vinaya, for it is the Basis of the Doctrine. Listen to the Prajñāpāramita, for it is the Essence of the Doctrine. Listen to the Vajrayāna, for it is the Spirit of the Doctrine” (Conze, 2008, p. 25). Both Tibetan and Indian scholars often made attempts to combine the practices of Prajñāpāramita and Vajrayāna (Diamond Vehicle). In particular, Conze (2008) mentions the term, “Precepts of the Prajñāpāramita,” often used to indicate the Zhijé (Tib. *zhi byed*) “Pacification (of Suffering)” of Padampa Sangye, and the Chöd (Tib. *gcod*), “Cutting Through,” of Machig Labdrön (p. 25). This term, “Precepts of the Prajñāpāramita,” indicates that the precepts and instructions of Prajñāpāramita that came to Tibet helped to protect

practitioners from negative actions and purified their minds. In the following pages we will explore the history and teachings of the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras*, the life and teachings of the great *mahāsiddha*, “great adept” (Tib. *grub thob chen po*), Padampa Sangye, and his Zhijé teachings that are rooted in the *Prajñāpāramita* literature and which became an important element in Machig Labdrön’s later Mahāmudrā Chöd.

Prajñāpāramita

Overview

Prajñāpāramita is a vast and complex corpus of literature that initially developed in South Asian forms of Buddhism. It first arose as a genre of literature comprised namely of philosophical teachings, techniques, and practices, which later became associated with rituals and *sādhana*s (spiritual practices). Initially, *Prajñāpāramita* represented a non-conceptual, boundless, and luminous state of awareness concurrent with the feminine principle as the “mother of the Buddhas” (Skt. *sarvabuddhamātā*), later becoming a hypostatized deity with attributes. Devotees of *Prajñāpāramita* consisted of “diverse interrelated groups within Indian Buddhist traditions that cultivated this literature for over a thousand years in South Asia” (Apple, 2015, p. 1). Literature and practices related to the *Prajñāpāramita* are primarily preserved in Nepal, Tibet, and Japan.

Origins of *Prajñāpāramita*

Prajñāpāramita as a genre of literature envisions the highest metaphysical principle, namely the absolute highest form of enlightened wisdom in all its glory, to be a

feminine principle, the mother of knowledge, and the source of all Buddhas (Shaw, 2006, p. 166). This feminine principle appears first in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramita Sūtra*, or *8000-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*, which arose during the first two centuries of the Common Era and marks the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism, “although portions of the work evince earlier origins” (Shaw, 2006, p. 167). Some Buddhists believe this sūtra to be an abridgement of a much longer text revealed by Shakyamuni Buddha. The sūtra lays out a philosophical viewpoint namely of emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*, Tib. *stong pa nyid*) and the perfection of wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*, Tib. *shes rab*), and yet it also has devotional and poetic language honoring Prajñāpāramita as the goddess of wisdom.

It is widely accepted that the Prajñāpāramita literature, and possibly Mahāyāna Buddhism as well, originated in Central or Southern India. The origins of the Mahāyāna and the Prajñāpāramita are closely connected because the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras are most likely the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras*. While some posit that the Mahāyāna was born in the north, due to the belief in heavenly Bodhisattvas that was definitely northern, most scholars agree that the philosophical component of Mahāyāna and the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras* came from the south and later blended with the mythology of the north (Williams, 1994, p. 40).

The Rise of the Mahāyāna, the “Great Vehicle”

Within the Buddhist tradition, it is commonly believed that 100 years after the Buddha’s death, around the 5th century BCE, there was a council of 700 *Arhats* (Tib. *dgra*

bcom pa), literally, “Foe Destroyers,”¹ referring here to Buddhist monastics, to address lax conduct among the sangha. There were complaints that the Arhats were not living up to Buddhist ideals, and therefore people began to question their “infallibility.” It is said that around this time the Mahāyāna movement began to arise in south and central India. The Mahāyāna movement shifted away from the solitary life of celibacy and affirmed that lay people could also attain enlightenment while living in the world, as a husband, wife, cook, artist, musician, mother, etc. It is here that we see a profound paradigm shift within Buddhism evidenced in the ideal of the Bodhisattva (Tib. *byang chub sems dpa'*), literally from the Sanskrit, “one whose essence is perfect knowledge.” The Bodhisattva aspires for liberation, full Buddhahood, not only for themselves but also for all sentient beings. The *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras* set themselves apart from the earlier Buddhist ideal of the Arhat, whose goal is their own liberation alone. We see the condensation of the Bodhisattva aspiration articulated in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramita Sūtra*:

They make up their minds that ‘one single self we shall tame,
...one single self we shall lead to final Nirvana.’ A Bodhisattva
should certainly not in such a way train himself. On the contrary,
he should train himself thus: ‘My own self I will place in Suchness
[the true way of things], and, so that all the world might be helped,
I will place all beings into Suchness, and I will lead to Nirvana the
whole immeasurable world of beings.’

(*Aṣṭa*, Conze 1973, p. 163,
from Williams, p. 50)

¹ Arhat is a name given to those who have achieved the ultimate goal of the Shravaka Yana and Pratyekabuddha Yana. An Arhat is one who has completely overcome the “foe” of the destructive emotions (Skt. *kleśa*; Tib. *nyon mongs*). Arhat is also an epithet given to the Buddha.

Enlightenment was not just for oneself as was the norm in the earlier path of the Arhats. The Mahāyāna, while rooted in the teachings of the historical Buddha, shifted emphasis toward the Bodhisattva ideal and the capacity of all beings to be awakened. The Mahāyāna is also characterized by the upsurge of the emphasis on compassion (Skt. *karuṇā*, Tib. *rnying rje*) and emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*, Tib. *stong pa nyid*), as we will see below.

Nāgārjuna, the Second Buddha

Around the second century CE, in the Andhra region of South India, there lived a man who was to play a principle role in the reinterpretation and expansion of the Buddha's teachings. His name was Nāgārjuna (c.150-250)² and he was the first great figure after the Buddha; thus, he is sometimes referred to as the second Buddha. As a young boy he was placed into the monastery in order to escape an astrological prediction of an early death. He mastered Buddhist doctrine, medicine, and alchemy and due to his erudition and special talents was invited by female *nāgas* (under-water serpents) to visit their kingdom. They gave him the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras*, which are said to have been taught by the Buddha but lost until that time. After 50 years of study in the *nāga* realm he returned to the world to teach what he had found.

² Nāgārjuna (Tib. *kLu sgrub*), or the “White Naga,” is one of the six great commentators on the Buddha's teachings. His teachings provide the foundation for the Mādhyamaka (Tib. *dbu ma pa*), the “Middle Way” philosophy, accepted as the highest teaching of the Sūtrayāna. In addition to being the revealer of the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras*, he is also considered to be one of the 84 *mahāsiddhas* (Skt. *caturaśītisiddha*; Tib. *grub thob brgyad cu rtsa bzhi*) and among the eight vidyadhāras (Tib. *rig 'dzin brgyad*): Vimalamitra, Humkara, Mañjushrimitra, Nāgārjuna, Prabhāhasti, Dhanasamskrita, Rambuguhya-Devachandra, and Shantigarbha.

The teachings Nāgārjuna discovered are referred to as the Madhyamaka or “Middle Way” school of Buddhism. His disciple Āryadeva is also credited with helping to further establish the Middle Way school through his writings, mostly commentaries on Nāgārjuna’s works. Madhyamaka is called the Middle Way because it teaches the middle approach between the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

There are four main phases in the development of the Prajñāpāramita literature spanning over the period of a thousand years. The original text, the *Aṣṭasāhastrikā Prajñāpāramita Sūtra*, is believed to have appeared between 100 BCE and 100 CE. The subsequent 200 years saw an expansion on the original text. From about 300 - 500 CE we see the restatement of fundamental ideas in short sūtras and also summaries. Then in the tantric era, from about 600-1200 CE, we see elements of magic and alchemy.

The following is a breakdown of the four main phases of the Prajñāpāramita teachings and literature:

- **100 BCE - 100 CE:** *8000-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* – philosophical and poetic;
- **300-500 CE:** *10,000 to 100,000- Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* - all taught the same thing but with more metaphors;
- **500-800 CE:** *Heart Sūtra* - condensation back down to the essence of the teachings. Just a couple of pages used for meditation and recitation, recited as a blessing;

- **800-1200 CE:** Tantric period when Prajñāpāramita was embodied as a goddess. However, from the very beginning Prajñāpāramita was always referred to in the feminine.

Understanding Prajñā

Prajñā is often translated as "wisdom," but is closer in meaning to "insight," "discriminating knowledge," or even "intuitive understanding." Etymologically it is broken down as *pra*, "deep" or "profound," and *jnā*, "wisdom" or "knowledge." It is interesting to note that the verbal root *jnā* is connected to the *gn* in *gnosis* and *cognition* and our *kn* in *know*. In the Indo-Tibetan context, on a basic level, the term *prajñā* refers to a state of consciousness that results from investigation; it functions to exclude doubt. But on a broader level, it refers to the wisdom or insight birthed through direct perception into the true nature of reality. In particular this refers to insight into the empty (Skt. *śūnya*, Tib. *ston pa*) nature of oneself and all phenomena. Nāgārjuna proposed that on the basis of the Buddha's view that all experienced phenomena (Skt. *dharma*, Tib. *chos*) are "dependently arisen" (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*, Tib. *rtan 'brel*) they therefore are empty of intrinsic existence. In Madhyamaka, to say that an object is "empty" is synonymous with saying that it is dependently arisen. This does not mean that all phenomena do not exist, rather that they are devoid of permanent and eternal existence (Skt. *svabhava*). In his seminal text, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna equates emptiness with dependent origination:

Whatever arises dependently is explained as empty.

Thus dependent attribution is the middle way.

Since there is nothing whatever that is not dependently existent,

For that reason there is nothing whatsoever that is not empty.

- Verse 24:18

In Buddhism there are three main levels or aspects of *prajñā*. Each aspect takes us deeper and deeper into the direct insight into the nature of *śūnyatā* (emptiness), the way things truly exist:

1. Conventional level *prajñā* – this is the understanding gained through analysis, and is not necessarily religious;
2. Absolute level *prajñā* – this is the wisdom that arises from investigation into the way things really are, the understanding of emptiness of all dharmas or *śūnyatā*. It is a metaphysical understanding coming from deep contemplation (Buddhist and non-Buddhist contemplation alike);
3. Perfection of *prajñā* level - this is the profound wisdom gained through meditative absorption (Skt. *samādhi*) the content of which is ultimate truth. This is completely non-conceptual or non-dual awareness. This level of *prajñā* is the consciousness that results from analysis (the first two levels) and is then refined through deeper states of *samādhi*. *Prajñā* and its perfection refer to interconnected forms of conceptual and non-conceptual understanding.

It is interesting to note that this third aspect led Chan (in China) and Zen (in Japan) to conclude that *prajñā* actually *cannot* result from analysis, but rather that it is a natural

response to cutting all analytic and conceptual thought. There is some basis for this in the Indian Buddhist tradition, but most scholars believe that this belief may be a result of the co-mingling of Mahāyāna and Taoist thought. For example, in the first line of the *Tao Te Ching* we see this famous phrase: “The Tao that can be known is not the eternal Tao.”

Mother of Wisdom

The Prajñāpāramita teachings mark the first upsurge of the enlightened feminine in Buddhism. As the enlightened feminine principle, she is the mother of all buddhas, the genetrix of awakening, but not like the earth mother of the indigenous Indian Dravidian tradition. Rather she is the experience of wisdom that all must pass through to become buddhas, thus, she is called the mother of all buddhas. Other epithets are the “source of all wisdom,” “womb of reality,” and the “embodiment of non-dual wisdom” that guides us away from material things and towards luminous wisdom. In her book *Women of Wisdom*, Tsultrim Allione states,

The Great Mother principle is the space that gives birth to the phenomenal world...[and the perfection of wisdom] is the quality of sharp perception which comes with the relaxation of the ego. Meditation, because it slows down the confused grasping aspect of the mind, allows the natural luminous clarity of the mind, prajñā, to come forth. This faculty of profound cognition is the source of, or the womb for the Buddhas to grow in and is therefore called ‘the womb of the Buddhas’ (p. 101-102).

Although Prajñāpāramita is the first philosophical feminine principle in Buddhism, there is another earlier female historical figure worth mentioning. Māyādevī (“Goddess of Magical Creation” or “Goddess of Mother Love”)³ was the mother of Shakyamuni Buddha and thus in some sense considered the mother of Buddhism. Shaw states that Māyādevī is an early “prototype of the first full-fledged cosmic goddess of Buddhism, Prajñāpāramitā, the embodiment of transcendent wisdom and ‘Mother of All Buddhas,’ the goddess who arose out of the realization that, in order for there to be Buddhas, there must be mothers” (p. 61). During the Mahāyāna era we see the beginning of a doctrinal and practical inclusion of women within the spiritual landscape. In the early sutras, it was said that a woman had to be reborn as a man in order to reach full buddhahood. Now this begins to shift as women are included and respected, namely through this emergence of the Prajñāpāramitā teachings. But it is not until the Tantric era, the Vajrayāna, that we see a complete shift and elevation of women as embodiments of wisdom (prajñā). In this way, women are able to pursue their spiritual training and become realized masters and teachers in their own right.

Now we will turn to an important historical figure who was one of the major Indian Tantric siddhas of the late 11th and early 12th centuries responsible for bringing the teachings of Prajñāpāramita to Tibet from India. His name is Padampa Sangye and his influence on Tibetan Buddhism is not to be underestimated, for it is said that he was the most influential Indian yogin teaching in Tibet during his lifetime.

³ In her book *Buddhist Goddesses*, Shaw (2006) notes that the Sanskrit term *Māyā* more generally means “illusion in the sense of creative power, miracle, and magic; its positive connotation is seen in its reference to the binding force of mother love” (p. 462).

Padampa Sangye

In the *Treasury of Knowledge: Esoteric Instructions* by Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé, Padampa Sangye (Tib. *padam pa sangs rgyas*), "Father Excellent Buddha"⁴ (d.1117) is included in the list of the eight adepts who founded the Eight Great Chariots,⁵ or practice lineages, in the Land of Snows (Tibet) (Kongtrül, 2007, p. 27). His teachings became known as Zhijé (Tib. *zhi byed*), "Pacification (of Suffering)." He was the most influential Indian yogin of late 11th and early 12th century Tibet, for his teachings show, as Davidson (2005) points out, that his willingness to bring the process of creative scripture to Tibet "contributed an accelerating sense of openness to the religious zeitgeist" there (pg. 246).

Padampa Sangye's Early Life

It is difficult to pin down for certain the dates and events of Padampa Sangye's life in a way that would satisfy modern Western scholastic standards. According to his biography written by Chokyi Senge called *The Story of the Liberated Life of the Great Lord of Siddhas, Venerable Padampa Sangye: A Sun Ablaze with Thousandfold Rays of Attainment* and oral tradition, he was born around 545 CE and died 572 years later in 1117 CE. As Davidson (2005) suggests, "Padampa's hagiography is a wonderland of

⁴ In Sanskrit his name is *Buddha Paramapitri* "Buddha Excellent Father."

⁵ The Eight Great Chariots are the Nyingma, Sakya, Khadampa, Marpa Kagyu, Zhijé, Jonangpa, Shangpa Kagyu, and The Three Vajras.

improbabilities,”⁶ (p. 246) for it states that he traveled to Tibet seven times over the course of several centuries. It is generally accepted that he did make more than one trip to Tibet (and to China, where he is known as Bodhidharma, founder of Chan or Zen) and that he had a strong Kashmir connection, shown by one of his lineages. The most notable trip to Tibet was his final one, when he settled in Dingri, at Dingri Langkor, between 1097 and his death in 1117. The teachings he established in Dingri during those 20 years are his most significant and well-known. We will explore these teachings in more depth below.

According to his biography, in a prior life as the Bodhisattva Aparajita he received a prophesy from Buddha Shakyamuni that he would spread the teachings of the *Prajñāpāramita* in the north. Legend states that the Buddha threw a stone to the north to indicate where this would occur in the future. Six rebirths later, around 545 CE, he was born into a Brahmin family in Bedha, Tsara Singha, South India, a town connected to the Sandalwood Forest of the Sage Arya Tara. The story goes that his father mined resources from the sea, and while he was away on a trip his mother miraculously conceived. She feared that her husband would be angry so she drank poison and jumped into the river in an attempt to abort the child. But she didn’t succeed and later gave birth to a beautiful son who immediately offered her praises in the form of the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtra* and put his footprint in a rock in gratitude for her hardships (Molk, 2008, p. 14).

⁶ As Davidson states (2005), “According to some claims, he made the first of these visits when the land was still covered by water, as it certainly was by the Neo-Tethys Sea, but it disappeared from Tibet some 40 million years ago...” (p. 246).

While young, Padampa Sangye studied and mastered Sanskrit, logic, astrology, crafts, and archery. When he turned 15 he took the novice monk's vow at Vikramashila Monastic University and was given the ordination name Kamalaśīla.⁷ Later he took his Bodhisattva vows in the presence of his master Aryadeva the Brahmin. After some time, he became disillusioned with the monastic institution and began to train with various tantric masters and meditated at sites in India and Nepal. It is said that after practicing strict austerities for a period of time he achieved all the "common" *siddhis* (spiritual powers) such as knowledge of others' minds, life-extension, fast-walking, and the ability to transform base minerals into gold. He also attained the "supreme" *siddhi* of complete awakening when he was 290 years old, which would have been around the year 835.

One mystical event that would drastically change the course of his life was to happen before his final trip to Tibet. One day he was walking with another *sādhū* (holy man) named Dampa Nagchung, "Black Dampa." They arrived at a river where an elephant had passed away. They knew that if left in the water there was danger of an epidemic breaking out in the village down river. Both of them knew how to animate a corpse by ejecting their consciousness out of their body and inhabiting another body, but neither of them wanted to do it. So Padampa Sangye agreed to do it if Dampa Nagchung agreed to keep watch over his corpse. Padampa left his body and animated the dead elephant, walking it a long distance away so that it wouldn't contaminate the water. In the meantime, Dampa Nagchung, jealous of his friend's handsome physique, broke his

⁷ It is interesting to note that it was Kamalaśīla along with Śāntarakṣita who was credited with bringing the Prajñāpāramitā teachings to Tibet in 750 CE. Padampa Sangye's hagiography claims he is this very Kamalaśīla, while others contest this assertion.

promise and entered Padampa's body. When Padampa's consciousness returned he found Dampa Nagchung's corpse but not his own. At that moment, he almost departed from this world, but it's said that Machig Labdrön in Tibet sensed that he was going to leave, so she recited praises to Dampa Nagchung's body, convincing Padampa that he could still benefit beings by entering it.

Thereafter he became known as the "Black Acharya" and it is in this form that he returned to Tibet for the final time, settling down in Dingri, western Tibet. The mystical account of his life explains that when he arrived in Dingri, he found the stone the Buddha had thrown indicating where his teachings would take root. The stone was in the middle of a field and shaped like Vajravārāhī, (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo*). Musk deer were circling the stone and then he saw them disappear into the stone. It is there in Dingri that Padampa Sangye's teachings took root.

Padampa's Revelations & his Zhijé Lineage

When asked about the meaning of ultimate reality, he bound up his mouth with a sling. To indicate that dharmata is beyond speech or expression.

- From Padampa Sangye's *Mahāmudrā Teachings in Symbols*, recorded by the heart disciple, Bodhisattva Kunga

"Dampa, what does Prajñāpāramita mean?"

"It's what is beyond speech or expression!"

- From *The Mirror of Mind Instructions*

Padampa Sangye is most well-known for establishing the Zhijé lineage with its “white instruction” in mental purification and its “red instruction” in certain forms of tantric practice. He is attributed with bringing to Tibet the lineages of 54 male and female mahāsiddhas. In the text *Nectar of the Heart*,⁸ an extensive commentary on practice that consists of three texts, he elucidates the teachings he received from these mahāsiddhas, one of which we will explore in more depth below called the *Stainless Path of the Silver Egg of Speech*. Saraha, Virupa, Nāgārjuna, Maitripada, and Naropa are just a few of the mahāsiddhas listed as his gurus. He also traveled to the mystical land of Oḍḍiyāna where he encountered more than thirty *ḍākinīs*.⁹ Even though he was born in South India there is little doubt that he was well-educated in North Indian tantric literature and practice based on the evidence of his profound and versatile writings (Davidson, 2005, p. 246).

Evidence of his creative freedom and scriptural composition is found in his own writings, namely the *Tantra on the Widespread Position of Simultaneous Awareness* and the *Tantra of Instruction on the Secret of all Ḍākinīs*. According to Kongtrül, the main source texts of Zhijé include the *Tantra of the Great River*, *The Inconceivable Secret of Vowels and Consonants*,¹⁰ and *Mahāmudrā Teachings in Symbols* (Kongtrül, trans. 2007,

⁸ Dharma Shri of Nyö. *Nectar of the Heart, A Single Compilation of the Commentaries of the Early, Middle, and Later Lineages of the Pacification of Suffering Teachings* (*Zhi byed snga phyi bar gsum gyi khrid yig rnam phyogs gchig tu bsdebs pa bdud rtsi’l nying khu zhe bya ba*). Translated by David Molk, 2005; unpublished)

⁹ Tib. *mkha’ ’gro ma*. The Tibetan term veers from the original Sanskrit, *ḍākinī*, which relates to the term for drumming. The Tibetan *mkha’ ’gro ma* or *khandroma* means “sky goer” and may have originated from the Sanskrit *khecara* from the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*.

¹⁰ *Ā li kā li gsang ba bsam gyis myi khyab pa chu klung chen po’l rgyud*, found in *Dam chos snying po zhi byed las rgyud kyi snyan rgyud zab ched ma*, vol. I, pp. 6-144 (Davidson, 2005, p. 422).

p. 256).¹¹ Padampa's textual revelation was accepted and revered by authorities in the Nyingma Terma traditions. In particular, Ratna Lingpa cites Padampa's revealed text, the *Tantra of the Great River*, in defense of the Terma tradition itself.

Padampa's connection with the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras* is articulated in the name Zhijé, or "Pacification (of Suffering)" itself, for it stems from the *Heart Sūtra*'s mantra, which is said to "pacify suffering." The term is also linked to an occasion when Padampa was at a gathering of mahāsiddhas in India where each one was describing their yogic superpowers. Padampa simply sat quietly watching. When they asked what siddhis he had achieved, he said that the only siddhi that mattered was that which "brought the swiftest pacification of the suffering of sentient beings" (Molk, 2008, p. 17). The mahāsiddhas praised him as the only one who had truly realized the essence of the Buddha's main intention.

Broadly speaking, Zhijé teachings consists of five lineages, which are divided into early, intermediate, and later streams. Padampa transmitted the early teachings during his third trip to Tibet to Jñānaguhya of Kashmir and from Jñānaguhya to Önpö Pelden

¹¹ Padampa received this extraordinary initiation and practice of highest yoga tantra from the Goddess Nariatmya at the time of his enlightenment. Molk (2008) states that it

has many unusual features, such as being conferred on the basis of a volume of scripture rather than a painted mandala. When Nariatmya conferred the initiation upon Padampa, she did so on the basis of a Prajnaparamita scripture that she drew in space. When Padampa Sangye conferred it upon Kunga and thereafter, it was on the basis of a volume of the Eight-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sutra. It is conferred utilizing the vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet-- the "Ali Kali"-- and by means of "mind-to-mind" "pointing out" instructions rather than chanted liturgies. It is a Nairatmya practice that incorporates the most profound type of body mandala, in which elements of the subtle body are generated as deities. Meditation on such a body mandala helps to manifest extremely subtle consciousness with which to realize the ultimate nature of all phenomena—the perfection of wisdom from the tantric perspective (p. 19).

Molk has included a translation of the practice for those who would like to make a personal connection with this practice in Appendix 5 of the *Lion of Siddhas*.

Shérab and on to other Tibetan practitioners. On his fourth and fifth trips to Tibet, Padampa transmitted the three intermediate lineages to Magom Chökyi Shérab, to So Rigpa Cherthong, and then to Kamtön Wangchuk Lama. On his final trip to Tibet, Padampa transmitted the later Zhijé teachings to Jangsem Kunga, Padampa's greatest disciple, who stayed with Padampa until his death. Kunga was the main compiler of one of Padampa's best-known teachings, *Mahāmudrā in Symbols*, which consists of metaphoric and nonverbal teachings.

Padampa was an authentic mahāsiddha who lived as a naked yogi and acted in unconventional ways, challenging the norms of society. He challenged his disciples to abandon pretense and hypocrisy. In one instance he ordered his primary disciple, Kunga, to take off his robes in public and teased him when he hid behind a rock in embarrassment. While some couldn't understand his unconventional methods, there were many who did. It is said that some attained liberation merely by seeing his face or hearing his voice (Molk, 2008, p. 17).

Padampa Sangye also had many realized female disciples, foremost being the great Machig Labdrön, the founder of Chöd. His irreverent and fluid style of teaching shaped the nature of Zhijé as a spiritual movement. Davidson (2005) states that the “curiosity of Zhijé is not its multiple lineages but the fact that there seems to be no core teaching associated with the term Zhijé... Padampa was evidently so fluid that whatever was appropriate for him to teach a disciple became subsumed under the aegis of ‘pacification’” (p. 248). For example, the early Zhijé had five levels of instruction: a) a tantric version of the Madhyamaka, b) teachings according to the Father tantras, c)

teachings according to the Mother tantras, d) Mahāmudrā instruction, and e) teaching by the dākinī's examples. The above list constitutes a fairly straightforward late tantric approach. But the Zhijé taught to Kamtön in the middle Zhijé consisted of a series of meditations on the *Heart Sūtra* from the Prajñāpāramita teachings. The later Zhijé lineage propagated by Kunga combined many aspects of the earlier systems but also included a “five-path” instruction, which divides the Vajrayāna path according to the Mahāyāna style of a graduated path of accumulation, application, vision, meditation, and the final path of no-more-learning.

An example of the five paths of Tantra taught by Padampa to Kunga can be found in the *Stainless Path of the Silver Egg of Speech*. Here he explains the context for the precepts of the 54 male and female mahāsiddhas. Each of the 54 male and female mahāsiddhas is associated with a specific teaching. For example, in the First Path section, we find Nāgārjuna's teachings explained in the following way:

The First Path

1. By determining the nature of all existence to be the two truths, the mind grasping duality disintegrates right where it is.

This realization of the truthlessness of all phenomena is the essence of Nāgārjuna's instructions (Molk, 2008, p. 314).

Here Padampa Sangye pays homage to the great Nāgārjuna, the revealer of the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras* and the expounder of the two truths, namely relative and ultimate truth. Relative truth points to the way things exist conventionally, that they appear to exist independently; yet, under further investigation, on an ultimate level one finds that

all phenomena exist in dependence upon primary causes and secondary conditions. On an ultimate level, all phenomena are empty of intrinsic existence. When one realizes the insubstantiality or “truthlessness” of all phenomena, then the mind that grasps at duality collapses or dissolves “right where it is.” This profound teaching of the empty nature of all phenomena is the essence of Nāgārjuna’s teachings, which are based in the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras*.

Later in the Third Path section, Padampa points to the practice of Karma Mudra, a tantric practice where the adept engages in practice with another person in order to bring about the realization of great bliss and emptiness:

23. By inducing various realized experiences, relying upon the mudra mandala of another’s body, raising them to direct experience of emptiness. This is the instruction of Lotus-Born Vajra, Padmasambhava (Molk, 2008, p. 317).

And later in the same section of the Third Path, in statements 28 and 29, he points to the loosening of the chakras in order to give rise to the “wisdom of the four blisses” as taught by Virupa. In statement 29, he assigns Tilopa to the practice of Tummo (Inner Heat) which gives rise to the “heat of bliss” which helps to exhaust the “defilements of the elements”:

28. By loosening the sites of the chakras themselves, wisdom of the four blisses is generated, giving rise to realization of the innate born, free of projections. This is the instruction of Virupa.

29. By the blazing of the great fire of the heat of bliss, pure drops

of the five elements melt, exhausting defilements of the elements.
This is the instruction of Tilopa (Molk, 2008, p. 317)

In the Fourth Path section, he offers the following teaching of Saraha:

33. By being struck with the blessings of the lineage-holding
Guru, one realizes dharmata free of appearances and is naturally
liberated without adopting or rejecting. This is the instruction of
Saraha (Molk, 2008, p. 318).

The Mahāsiddha Saraha (circa 8th century CE) is considered one of the founders of Vajrayāna, particularly of the Mahāmudrā tradition. Saraha means "the one who has shot the arrow" in Sanskrit and has two connotations. The first is that one of his primary gurus was a ḍākinī disguised as a low caste arrow smith, and she taught him the principles of spiritual practice based on the art of arrow making. Second, it metaphorically refers to one who has "shot the arrow of nonduality into the heart of duality" (Braitstein, 2014, p. 4). Saraha was a wandering yogi, like the later Padampa Sangye, whose unconventional lifestyle challenged the social norms of his time. Two of his primary teachers and consorts were women who were considered by society to be of lower stature in terms of caste and gender. Nonetheless, Saraha had the wisdom to see them as his teachers and was able to progress down the path of realization due to their instructions.

The teachings attributed to Saraha in statement 33 above point to the importance of the "blessings of the lineage-holding Guru" in dissolving the mind's tendency to reject

some things and accept others. By being struck by the guru's blessings, the disciple is able to perceive the *dharmata* (suchness) directly and thus their mind is naturally liberated on the spot. The importance of the guru in Vajrayana is not to be underestimated, as it is through the guru's blessings that one is able to awaken to one's true nature. The 12th century *Guhyasanaya Sāadhanamala* states:

The guru is the Buddha, the guru is the Dhamma, and the
guru is the Sangha. The guru is the glorious Vajradhara,
in this life only the guru is the means [to awakening].
Therefore, someone wishing to attain the state of Buddha-
hood should please the guru. (verse 28).

(Berkwitz, 2009, p. 130)

It is interesting to note that the guru is understood in four main aspects progressing from coarse to more and more subtle expressions. The first is the individual teacher who is the holder of the lineage, the second is the teacher that is the word of the buddhas, the third is the symbolic teacher of all appearances, and the fourth is the absolute teacher, which is pristine awareness (Tib. *rig pa*), the true nature of mind. Therefore, it is taught that on an ultimate level, the true teacher is the nature of your own mind, pristine awareness that is imbued with wisdom and compassion. But one must be free of the veils of ignorance and obscurations in order to truly be able to access this pristine wisdom. Thus it is important to rely upon the first level, the teacher who holds an authentic lineage able to point the way toward uncovering our true nature, the absolute

guru. When this occurs, we no longer need an external guru and we ourselves are able to be a guide who is able to lead others out of suffering.

Lastly, the final statement found in the Fifth Path points to this very direct experience of rigpa:

54. Bringing out intensity of rigpa awareness, thought disintegrates, released on its own, and one abides in naked awareness. This is the instruction of Sukha Mahasiddhi (Molk, 2008, p. 320)

Sukha Mahāsiddhi, aka Sukhasiddhi, (circa 10th century CE) was a Vajrayāna master and teacher who was born in west Kashmir. She was born into a poor family and later became a wife and mother of three sons and three daughters. It is said that she was kicked out of her home after giving a beggar the only food in the house. She traveled to Oḍḍiyana where she was able to beg for rice and brew beer. Each day a woman would come to buy beer and eventually Sukhasiddhi asked her who she was buying beer for. The woman replied that it was for her guru Virupa who lived in the forest. Sukhasiddhi then offered her best beer and refused to accept payment for it. When Virupa learned of this he sent for her and gave her empowerments for yogic practices and secret practices for the generation- and completion-stage meditations. It is said that she became a wisdom ḍākinī immediately upon receiving empowerment and that her body became purified and transformed into a body of rainbow light. Sukhasiddhi is one of the root teachers for the Tibetan Khyungpo Naljor (circa 11th & 12th centuries CE), who founded the Shangpa Kagyu lineage.

Conclusion

The teachings of Prajñāpāramita are like the breath that brings life to so many of the Buddhist teachings that traveled to the Land of Snows. Specifically, the Prajñāpāramita (Perfection of Wisdom) was Padampa Sangye's primary teaching and he often transmitted it to his students mind-to-mind, using only a gesture, a symbol, or a single word. For example, it is said that when he was asked the meaning of ultimate reality he tied a gag over his mouth. On another occasion he hung his sheepskin robe up in space. He claimed that people would attain realization merely by meeting him.

At Padampa Sangye's main monastery, Dingri Langkor, there were once numerous handwritten volumes of the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtra* in 100,000, 20,000, and 8,000 verses filling the walls of the monastery. In the monastery, there were also many of Padampa Sangye's teachings meticulously recorded by hand in ink often mixed with powdered gold, silver, and turquoise. Unfortunately all the texts were burned during the Cultural Revolution in bonfires that lasted for many days (Molk, 2008, p. 330, endnote 23).

Even though Zhijé is one of the Eight Great Chariots in Tibet, it did not flourish as well as it could have if Padampa's unorthodox style had been more conventional. Even Padampa, quoted in the Blue Annals, said that because everyone left in their several directions, there was no single famous lineage holder. Zhijé was absorbed into many teachers' repertoires, but it did not "maintain a strong stable environment, a common

occurrence among yogic traditions in late-eleventh-century Tibet” (Davidson, 2005, p. 249). This was most likely due to the fact that those attracted to such an eccentric teacher tended to emulate his behavior and were not inclined to establish monasteries and other long-lived institutions. However, there are those who do still practice the Zhijé teachings, such as Lama Tsering Wangdu, born in 1935 in the Langkor Valley in West Tingri, Tibet and considered a reincarnation of Padampa Sangye. He is a lineage holder of Zhijé, numerous Chöd lineages of Machig Labdrön, and the Longchen Nyingthig (Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse) lineage of Jigme Linpga. His life and teachings can be found in the wonderful biography, *Hundred Thousand Rays of the Sun*.¹² Lama Tsering Wangdu is devoted to keeping these traditions alive in his monastery in Nepal and his centers in the West.

In closing, I’d like to share the following dialogue that took place near the end of Padampa Sangye’s life between himself and Kunga, his primary Tibetan disciple, to further illustrate and appreciate Padampa’s unconventional profound methods. He was a great master who held the vast view of wisdom and compassion for all beings, and yet he was free of any illusions regarding his activities in the world:

“I’ve come here to Tibet several times but there has not been much benefit for beings! Now, the Acharya will be leaving!”

Kunga asked, “How many has Dampa liberated?”

Dampa threw up a double handful of sand into the air, “About

¹² *Hundred Thousand Rays of the Sun: The Sublime Life and Teachings of a Chöd Master H.E. Lama Tsering Wangdu*, translated and edited by Joshua Waldman and Lama Jinpa, 2008.

that many!”

Kunga remarked, “Then it was indeed many!”

Dampa retorted, “Like the water in a hoof-print compared to
that in the ocean!” (Molk, 2008, p. 260)

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